

BONCHURCH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



The legal background

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Section 69 also requires authorities to review their areas from time to time to see if further designation or alteration to existing designations is necessary.

Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15) deals in some detail with the assessment and designation of conservation areas in section 4, and the adopted planning policy documents for the Island contain sections relating to development within such areas.

Character

Thanks to its topography this area is one of secret places which surprise and delight. The delight comes from the fantasy and fun of the Victorian architecture which isn't immediately visible but which is found around corners and down lanes. The steep green banks and large trees are mysterious and concealing, and along with the stone walls make this a village which has hidden treasures around each corner.

NB this expression of 'character' is derived from the study below.

History of development

There is evidence of early settlement in this area with the old road and in particular the Norman church dating from the eleventh century. The pond formed from a swamp, supplied the reeds and withies for making lobster pots for the generations of fishermen of the village, who until later years were its only residents. The Victorian movement in tourism and the realisation of the beneficial properties for health from the favourable climate and "sea air", fuelled the development

boom of the time, resulting in the commission of substantial villas in both upper and lower Bonchurch. Most of the property present today is attributed to the early to mid Victorian period with some notable examples such as St Boniface Church, its rectory and East Dene. The coastal settlement is of similar date but is more austere.

Archaeology

Evidence suggests there was settlement at Bonchurch in the Middle Ages, with its parish church and various manorial holdings.

Setting

The area is mainly set on the steep south facing slope, and in the valley bottom. St Boniface Down provides the distinctive northern backdrop, with views of the steeply inclining hillside covered with scrub and wind swept trees. Looking southward, the English Channel forms the dominant background to the lower parts of the village, contrasting sharply with the green and wooded elements. Within these powerful surroundings there are three distinct areas, Bonchurch Village Road, Upper Bonchurch and Lower Bonchurch. The Village Road area has varying glimpses of the Downs, visible between the groups of trees in the foreground and the cliff outcrops in the background. While Upper Bonchurch is set in front of the main road (including a strip of twentieth century ribbon development) with the Downs behind and high level views of the sea looking southwards. Lower Bonchurch area is dominated by the sea views, providing a stunning backdrop to this almost isolated part of the hamlet.

Materials

The dominant material is the local stone which, besides being used for buildings and walls, occurs in natural outcrops at various points within the area. In its weathered form the stone appears as a greyed honey colour with a sandy texture and is used in both rubble and dressed form. Flint is also

used, but mainly for detailing, and roofs are generally of natural slate.

Height, mass & form

There is no dominant height or mass in the area as typical buildings range from modest two-storey cottages to tall and turreted mansions. Form is equally diverse and ranges from simple rectangular cottages and villas to mansions with all manner of flamboyant extras.

Typical details

The emphasis locally is vertical, with reference to classical proportions. The smaller properties in the centre of the village are quite simple and undecorated, but others are quirkier, following the lead of the larger houses set to the north and south of the village road. These larger houses (many of which are now subdivided) have examples of Victorian decorative expression at its best. There are many turrets, towers, and all manner of complicated roofs, and chimneys, with details to match. Window and door treatment differ widely and there are gate piers, grottoes and walls to keep interest going.

Paving

The narrow, steep and winding roads are of simple blacktop, but there is still evidence of stone sett gutters and crossovers. For the most part curbstones are of natural stone.

Trees and open space

The area has significant tree cover both on the steep slopes and in the valley bottom, including some fine specimens of unusual species which thrive in the benign micro-climate. Many of these are large, mature specimens and make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

The open spaces are generally private as they form the grounds to the large properties. In many cases they are

hidden from public view but open out once within the sites. The grassed common land at the beginning of Bonchurch Village Road and the pond and its surroundings in the centre of the village are areas of “space”, which can be appreciated from the public realm.

Sound and smell

Bonchurch village road and Upper Bonchurch are tranquil places, with a notable sound of bird song. Vehicles are sporadic and traffic noise only becomes apparent nearer the higher part of Upper Bonchurch. Moving towards Lower Bonchurch the distinctive sound of the sea becomes ever more apparent. The water crashing upon the rocks and the prevalent odour of the sea imparts the feeling of an unspoilt traditional seaside experience.

Day and night

During the evening the area becomes ever quieter, with just the occasional pub and restaurant trickling people onto the streets. The seasonal loss of leaves reveals properties normally screened by trees and mitigating the feeling of enclosure along the treed lanes. The rougher weather associated with winter results in a more isolated feel in Lower Bonchurch as the tourists retreat to fairer places.

Positive elements

- Large buildings in large plots
- Stone walls and retaining walls including those bounding the roads and rock outcrops within walls and sites
- Victorian architectural form and detailing (including chimneys and decorated barge boards)
- Consistency of materials
- Concealment and surprise
- Presence of trees and vegetation
- Retention of historic network of passageways (paths and stone steps)
- Natural stone curbing

Negative elements

- Inappropriate modern insertions
- Loss of traditional details such as windows, doors, cast rainwater goods, original street furniture i.e. lights
- Loss of stone walls
- Vehicles parking adjacent the pond
- Highway furniture, i.e. road narrowing along Bonchurch Village Road

Potential for enhancement

- Coordinated and sympathetic approach to the public realm.
- Encourage sensitive repair and restoration of buildings. This could be linked with an Article 4 (2) Direction to improve control of alterations to dwellings.

Further information please contact

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For detailed information on policies, legal background and national advice, please refer to

The Isle of Wight Unitary Development Plan

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Planning policy guidance 15 – Planning and the historic environment.

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