

COWES CONSERVATION AREA REVISION - NORTHWOOD PARK CHARACTER AREA

AS APPROVED BY EXECUTIVE

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

This park on the hilltop is home to an elegant but now rather 'sad' house and its recently restored church. The open space has a tired feel to it, though the quality is still evident.

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

History of development

Northwood House was built in its current form from 1837 based on an earlier house called Bellevue. St Marys church as it stands today dates from 1867 though in 1811 Nash enlarged an earlier building. The park was laid out to compliment the 1837 version of the house, and is included in the local register of important parks and gardens. It has been eroded over time by the encroachment of modern developments and the addition of leisure facilities during the period of occupation as council offices.

Archaeology

The area includes some of the oldest artifacts found on the Island including prehistoric arrowheads and Roman coins. The park itself was created in 1801, before the current Northwood House which was built in 1837.

Setting

Northwood is set on the crest of the hill above and to the west of Cowes town. It is almost entirely surrounded by 20th century residential developments though these do not impose greatly on the setting due to the landform and the mature planting within the park. Much of the old park wall remains and forms a strong edge to the character area.

Materials

The most characteristic material is the grey render used on the house, though the church is built of a warmer stone. Structures within the park tend to be rendered and reflect either the age of the house or the civic era of its use.

Height, mass & form

The house and church are the 2 main buildings within this character area and they are both large, imposing and isolated structures.

The scale of the parkland provides the setting for these buildings. The modern insertions along Castle Road do not adversely affect those settings, they are however inconsistent in style and form and do not make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

Typical details

The classical detailing of the house and its associated structures sets the style for most of the area, with the ecclesiastical / classical form of the church making a related but different statement. The 'civic' detailing of the leisure facilities within the park is relatively low key, but reflects the period in which this use developed.

Paving

Most of the paving within the park is blacktop (tarmac) and relates to the areas use by the former local council. There is little remaining visual evidence of earlier schemes though the layout of paths is likely for the most part to follow original routes.

Trees and open space

This area is typified by both trees and open space, with the 2 major buildings providing punctuation marks within that space. The combination of planting and the boundary wall provide a strong sense of enclosure in Church Lane.

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.

COWES CONSERVATION AREA REVISION – QUEENS ROAD CHARACTER AREA

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Character

This is a varied but elegant residential area which has its roots in the early days of yacht racing in the Solent. The focus of the villas is the view over the water along with the facility to see and be seen on the promenade.

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

History of development

This area of substantial villas developed from the introduction of yachting as a rich man's sport in the 19th century. Cowes Castle predates this (1530s origins), but its use by the RYS sits alongside the growth in popularity of the area to the west for residences with views of the Solent where the yachts and the racing could be viewed, and where one could promenade in fine weather.

Archaeology

This area includes the Royal Yacht Squadron which is built upon the remains of Henry VIII's artillery castle. This is one of a pair of Castles built in the 16th century to defend the Solent from attack. It was the building of these castles which led to development of small settlements nearby which grew into Cowes.

Setting

To the north, the Solent forms the setting to this part of the conservation area, and this makes for a changeable backdrop dependant upon weather conditions and the state of the tide.

To the south, the rising ground within the area continues slightly, though the higher ground does not impose itself on the perception of character. Thus this strip of land does not have a strong influence from the south.

The western boundary almost marks the extreme of development along the coast. Only a small number of late 20th century buildings continue along the road before development gives way to wild and overgrown hillside.

To the east the conservation area continues, but the character of development changes, either to the formality of Northwood Park and its environs, or the denser, smaller scale of the old town itself.

Materials

The eastern end of this character area makes use of smooth render for many of its buildings, with examples of the local sand coloured brick. Roofs are mainly of slate or red tile, and timber double hung sliding sash or casements windows were the norm.

To the west of Egypt Hill is a group of buildings of similar form to those further east, but this group are of soft red brick with tiled roofs.

Height, mass & form

Buildings are 2 or 3 stories and many are in the form of substantial villas within good-sized plots. There are also pairs and some short terraces. The roofscape is particularly varied and in some cases quite quirky, adding interest to the built form.

Where modern insertions exist they tend to be smaller single houses or larger apartment blocks but with a less generous scale within them.

The overall appearance is of well-proportioned buildings in generous grounds with the elements of their design based on a generally vertical proportion, almost all facing north addressing the promenade, which ties the area together.

Typical details

For the most part detailing in the area related to the period during which most of the houses were built. In fact there is great variety in style and detailing, though for the most part it is elegant and restrained with occasional flourishes.

Paving

The promenade itself is simple and of mass concrete, whilst many of the other footways have been finished in modern slab pavements. There is some evidence of historic survival.

Trees and open space

The area is typified by the generous plots and these plots accommodate a variety of mature trees either as specimens or in groups or bands. Space is also a feature of these generous plots and the development is at a much lower density than the adjoining town character area. Public space in the form of tree'd slope or formal lawns, along with the wide promenade itself, allow for gentle exercise and to see and be seen.

Sound and smell

The area is generally quite quiet, with the sound of the water either lapping or crashing depending on the weather conditions.

One significant exception to the quiet is when racing is being run from the RYS. Visitors are often alarmed to hear cannon fire from the start / finish line, but during the summer this sound is an integral part of the sailing scene here.

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COWES CONSERVATION AREA REVISION – TOWN CENTRE CHARACTER AREA

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Character

This is the small scale, historic and lively centre of a town which is tied strongly to its waterfront and to waterborne activity in many forms. Its steep streets leading off the High Street afforded views to the Solent and mainland.

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

History of development

Cowes has thrived as a town, port and centre for ship and boat building since the 17th century. This part of the conservation area relates generally to the core of the town which developed from that time through the 18th and 19th centuries.

Archaeology

The archaeology of the town centre is remarkable in that the old sea wall appears to follow the line of what is now the High Street. This would have been the focus for much of the activity in the 17th century when trade links with the American colonies made Cowes a prosperous centre of commerce.

Setting

The town forming this part of the conservation area is set on a northeast facing slope at the entrance to the river Medina. The waterfront and Cowes Roads form a vital part of the towns' character and thus the setting provided by the waterway is crucial.

To the southwest the town continues but the character here is of residential streets which become more modern the further out one goes from the centre.

To the southeast, along Medina Road, the historic character has been lost by clearance for boatyard use and with the construction of modern apartment blocks. Isolated early buildings remain leading to the floating bridge, but there is no consistent strength of character

remaining until one nears the floating bridge.

The conservation area continues to the northwest, but the character changes and this is recognised in the other 2 character areas forming part of the overall proposal for this conservation area revision.

Materials

There is a mix of materials used in this area, but the palette is one which relates to buildings in the wider area. The local red and sand bricks are used, along with blue/blacks, there is some use of stone and plain render, but there is little sign of timber frames as early buildings have been refronted.

Roofs are either slate or red plain tile, and timber windows are predominantly double hung sliding sashes or modern replacements.

There are exceptions to this, most notably the 'art deco' buildings with their distinctive rendered finish and metal casement windows, but these are few, as are other oddities which all add to the variety of the area.

Height, mass & form

The key features of this area are the small plots and narrow streets and the way buildings address the waterfront. From this the height, mass and form are dictated and lead to terraces of narrow buildings of 2 or 3 stories. Many have rear extensions over part of their width and to a lesser height than the frontage block. Small back yards, frequently without access to a road, exist but have often been built over, especially where the buildings are in commercial use. Where buildings back onto the water rather than a road, they often have slipways, pontoons and davits and toward the east boatsheds and piers.

Some modern insertions have spread over more than 1 plot and have failed to recognise the rhythm of the streets in their design leading to over large buildings which do not sit comfortably in the streetscape.

Typical details

Given the variety of ages and styles of buildings in the area, it is difficult to identify details which are typical.

Windows to upper levels have a mainly vertical emphasis, and were often timber double hung sliding sashes with a painted finish. Doors of accommodation above commercial premises were also painted and usually 4 or 6 panelled where early examples remain.

Surviving shopfronts have applied pilasters and some have blind boxes built in to their fascias. Stall risers are traditionally quite deep with various finishes.

Paving

A large part of the centre including Shooters Hill and High Street have been repaved in the recent past. This repaving made use of red brick pavements which have little relevance to what might have been used in the past. They are difficult to reinstate convincingly when works are carried out and do nothing to enhance the character of the area.

The remainder of the area retains a traditional footway / carriageway treatment with some natural stone kerbs and gutters and mainly blacktop surfacing with some areas of PCC slabs on the footway. On the Parade there are areas of concrete paving.

Trees and open space

This area is notably dense, with its open spaces being mainly the surface car parks and yacht haven. The Parade is an open space which is usually dominated by parked cars, but is used for displays when events such as Cowes Week happen.

There are some trees on the edges of the area, especially towards Northwood Park, but generally this is a tight town centre area with little space to spare.

Day & night / summer & winter

This area of the town does change through the day, but more in summer than winter. In winter the area is quiet, with local people going about their business during the day, and perhaps going to a pub or restaurant in the evening. The town is also affected by the closure of a number of shops completely during the winter months.

In summer the town is busier during the day with visitors, and during the sailing season with masses of yacht crews. During the day the visitors wander round the shops and restaurants, while the sailors buy provisions, frequent the breakfast and sandwich bars and look for new kit in the specialist shops before disappearing back to their boats for the day.

In the evening the town is much livelier with pubs and restaurants bursting out onto the streets until the early hours.

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