

Urban Conservation and Design Avenues/Pearson Park Conservation Area Character Statement for the Avenues part of the above area

Summary

The Conservation Area consists of two distinct parts - Pearson Park and The Avenues. This statement relates solely to The Avenues part.

The Avenues is a predominantly residential area dating from the late 19th Century whose special character arises from the long straight tree-lined roads, a great variety of house styles within an overall unity of building line and plot layout, interesting details on individual houses, and the contrast between the formality of the fronts and the informality of the rear 'ten foot' access roads. A predominantly green setting created by the trees, verges, long gardens and incidental open spaces is part of the area's special character. Plaques to famous local residents add interest for visitors.

It also has unique Listed fountains forming focal points at two junctions, a group of Listed houses (the 'Gilbert Scott' houses) of national importance and several other individual buildings of architectural interest.

Problems of traffic generation and noise have not seriously eroded the character of the area, nor have some inappropriate forms of housing development and under-maintenance of buildings. Measures currently being planned to repair the damaged fountains and the two derelict 'Gilbert Scott' houses should remedy major elements which currently detract from the appearance of the area.

A traffic management scheme proposed to start shortly should reduce the detrimental effects of fast-moving vehicles and bring about some incidental environmental improvements. It has been designed to have the minimum detrimental effect on the visual appearance of the area whilst complying with highway regulations.

Historical Background

The area now known as The Avenues was, like most of Hull, low lying marshland drained by the Lords of the Manors of Sculcoates and Cottingham in the 12th Century. The former drain, the Setting Dyke, is now culverted under the grassed strip of land next to the ten foot between Ella Street and Victoria Avenue, and is the area's oldest recognisable feature.

David Parkinson Garbutt formally opened his 230 acre 'Princess Bank Estate' in 1875. It was intended to provide healthy suburban living for the rapidly expanding middle-classes. Proximity to Pearson Park (opened in 1860) and the fact that prevailing easterly winds carried smoke away from the area were quoted as selling points. So were the commuting possibilities by train from Botanic Gardens Station or tram from the terminus, both of which were near the Princes Avenue/Spring Bank junction.

Generously wide roads were laid out (Westbourne Avenue, the grandest, was 80 feet wide - 24 metres, Park Avenue 60 feet - 18 metres), drainage provided, trees planted in the grass verges and ornate fountains provided at focal points. Princes Avenue, which had been the subject of complaints about its condition since the park opened, was made up. A water supply was provided from Newington Waterworks (on the site now occupied by Albert Avenue Baths). Peck's map of 1875 shows the road lay outstretching to the West, beyond Richmond Street. (Chanterlands Avenue did not reach as far north as the Avenues until about 1908). There was therefore considerable investment in infrastructure before the plots were sold or leased, generally to small-scale speculative developers.

Development appears to have taken place in a random way. The houses designed by George Gilbert Scott the Younger on Salisbury Street and round the corners into Park and Westbourne Avenues were some of the earliest to be built (1877-9). The Princes Avenue frontage was also completed at an early stage; apart from these, development was scattered throughout the area, predominantly in short terraces but also some rows of semi-detached and detached houses. The main period of development was from the turn of the century until the First World War, with development west of Richmond Street tending to be later, but infill development has taken place ever since. The result is the great variety of styles of houses, which is a positive characteristic of the area.

The area was declared a Conservation Area in 1974.

Streetscape

The Avenues is characterised by long straight, wide, tree-lined roads. Apart from Princes Avenue whose alignment follows a former drain, the four principal streets (Marlborough, Westbourne, Park and Victoria Avenues) are aligned east - west with two cross-streets, Salisbury Street and Richmond Street intersecting at right angles.

The junctions of Salisbury Street with Victoria Avenue, Park Avenue and Westbourne Avenue, and the equivalent position in Marlborough Avenue, are all in the form of a "circus", or circular form and all originally had an ornate fountain in the centre. Those at the junctions of Westbourne and Park Avenues survived until 1996 when both were damaged in traffic accidents. They are listed Grade II and it is the City Council's intention to repair the Westbourne Avenue one and replace the Park Avenue one with a replica.

The special visual character arises from very long straight views, the eye being arrested only by the designed focal points created by the fountains.

The width of the roads vary in each avenue, although all have hard York stone kerbs, grass verges and street trees. The verges vary in width between the different avenues, with the widest being Westbourne Avenue and the narrowest on Marlborough Avenue. In some places verges have been eroded where the kerbs have dropped and parking has overrun onto the edge of the grassed area.

The name "Avenue" implies a formal double row of trees, and the street trees in The Avenues are indeed one of the strongest elements in the area's character. Particularly in summer, the foliage of these trees can dominate the street, masking the elevations of the houses. Whilst felling and replacement planting has taken place, the regular spacing of the trees remains a characteristic feature.

The original street trees were of species which grow to a large size such as; Plane, Sycamore, Lime and Horse Chestnut. A programme of replacement is in progress which has a policy of substituting smaller species appropriate to the scale of the streets, such as Silver Birch, Field Maple, Red Horse Chestnut, Wild Cherry etc.

Road surfaces are tarmac, and generally the footpaths are similar but some are paved. There are, every so often, narrow cross-paths across the verges to the street. These are in tarmac or paving slabs though frequently the top surface has eroded and been largely covered by invasion by the adjoining verge grass.

Where original vehicular accesses cross the footpath and verge, there is traditionally a dropped crossing paved in granite or sandstone setts. The crossing of the footpath itself is usually level, the fall to the road level being taken up within the width of the verge. New accesses are generally in tarmac or concrete.

Generally, there is little street furniture to distract the eye, though some posts and bollards are in inappropriate materials or in poor condition.

The general form of plot layout is fences, walls or railings (originally most were railings) to back of pavement; short front gardens; houses conforming to a general building line at the front with rear projecting off-shoots and long back gardens; and rear access roads known as 'tenfoots' with outhouses, coach-houses or garages taking access from them.

The uses in the area

The use of the area is predominantly residential. The main exceptions are the former Industrial School for Girls (1888) on Park Avenue with attractive rubbed-brick details which is now an education centre; the bakery on Park Avenue, the area's only industrial building the original part of which is in an attractive 'Arts and Crafts' style; a private hospital in a converted large house; St. Cuthbert's Church, a post-war modest brick building on Marlborough Avenue; a vehicle repair business between Westbourne Avenue and Marlborough Avenue; a school on Marlborough Avenue; and a number of commercial uses on Princes Avenue.

Some of the larger houses have been converted to institutional and hotel uses, other have been converted to flats or houses in multiple occupation.

In general the non-residential uses have not had such an impact as to erode the residential character of the area, but some have caused problems for their immediate neighbours especially with traffic generation, parking and noise disturbance.

People, as well as infrastructure, contribute to the character of an area and the Avenues over the years has attracted a number of residents who have become famous at local or national level. Some of these are commemorated on plaques which add to the interest of the area for visitors.

Positive Aspects; Buildings

The characteristic quality represented by the housing in The Avenues is variety, both in design and detail. This discontinuity in style and age within a small stretch of road results from the piecemeal method of development, and is a positive contribution to the character of the area; to get such variety in a small area is relatively unusual in an urban context.

Despite the great variety of house styles, unity is provided by a generally uniform building line the largely uniform colours of the building materials used and by all being of two to three storey height. The importance of Princes Avenue is emphasised by the greater height and scale of its houses.

Whilst some houses in The Avenues were individually designed and built, most were parts of terraces or rows of from between two and twelve houses each group being designed and/or built by a single builder and being consistent in terms of style. Whilst there is a great variety of architectural form within The Avenues, certain principles were usually adhered to during the main period of development and have helped to create the character of the area. These can be summarised as the use of vertical proportions for the building and the elements within it; the architectural detailing; and the use of traditional materials.

If there is a 'typical' house it would have Welsh blue-slate roof, timber gutters, brick front elevation with stone lintels, cills and string courses, double height canted bay windows with timber sliding sashes and a recessed tiled porch. Even within this type there are however many variations: clay flat tiles instead of slate, red or yellow bricks, brick lintels and strings instead of stone, single height bays, square instead of canted bays, projecting door canopies.

Then there are, as has been said, many completely contrasting styles, too many to list individually. Perhaps almost all the main styles of suburban housing between 1875 and 1920 are represented. Worth drawing attention to are the lofty scale bays and massive timber porches found on the early Princes Avenue houses and those at the east end of Park Avenue, the round-headed windows and decorative stucco festoons on the early houses at

the east end of Marlborough Avenue and on Westbourne Avenue, the 'gothic' style with pointed window-heads of early houses on Salisbury Street between Victoria and Park Avenues, the 'castle' style of some large houses on Park and Westbourne Avenues and the 'mock-Tudor' style with projecting upper floors on Victoria and Park Avenues.

Most important are the only Listed houses in the Avenues, designed by George Gilbert Scott and Younger in a 'Queen Anne' style. Well thought of in its time and credited with having pioneered a new style, he died young and these are his best remaining residential works nationally.

After about 1920 styles changed considerably. Casement windows, often with leaded lights and in rounded bays tended to replace sliding sashes, though not in all houses. The emphasis was less vertical; houses, especially west of Richmond Street, tended to be smaller, cast-iron gutters were often used, sometimes on exaggeratedly over-hanging eaves.

In the 1960s/70s there has been a tendency to depart from the traditional plot form and building line, and it is this, more than the change in style, which makes Parkside Close and Muirfield Park different from the general character of the Avenues.

More recently still, since the area was designated a Conservation Area in 1974, the trend has been to imitate some of the characteristics of earlier styles in infill developments and even to build replica elevations where buildings have been demolished for structural reasons, and rebuilding has been undertaken to create accommodation more appropriate for today's requirements.

It is in the wealth of architectural features of the houses in The Avenues that much of the character of the area is expressed. Features represented in the variety of houses in The Avenues in addition to those mentioned above are: ornate dormers; decorative barge-boarding and gable decoration; half timbering; ornate finials and ridge tiles; cast iron balconies; carved timber and stone, including stone heads over windows and doors; leaded windows and stained glass; curved metal gutter supports; ornate cast iron fallpipes, hopper heads and ventilators; ornate tiled porches; [the Avenues has some particularly fine tiles] contrasting brick string-courses and decorative patterns, extensive use of brick "specials" to create ornate profiles, string courses, window arches, garden walls, etc; black and white mosaic front paths.

Positive Aspects: Gardens and Open Spaces

All houses have short front gardens, most originally with stone plinths and iron railings, with hedges behind. This helps to form the character of the area in that the front elevations of the houses are particularly prominent when viewed from the street.

The rear gardens originally had brick walls, many of which have been replaced with fencing of various descriptions.

Many of the rear gardens have mature trees dating from the time the roads were first laid out and, in some cases, before (i.e., they were part of the original hedgerows that pre-dated the buildings). These species include hawthorn, ash and black poplar.

The rear gardens are mostly long and narrow in proportion, and often terminated at a rear access way, or "ten foot", which provided access to coach houses and for tradesmen, etc. A ten foot therefore ran equidistant between most of the main avenues, with access off on both sides. As the name suggests, these were about ten feet wide (or slightly wider in some places) and probably originally unsurfaced. Ash and cinders were probably deposited over the years to build up a surface that was usable in most weather conditions. They have now largely been surfaced in concrete or tarmac, although some are still unsurfaced and have almost the character of a country lane. Tenfoots are generally straight with right-angled corners reflecting the rectilinear nature of the roads and plot boundaries. The tenfoots to the

rear of the Princes Avenue properties run between the other avenues and provide views across the gardens to the rear.

There is a welcome absence of backland housing development within these large rear garden areas as well as an absence of extensive hard paved parking areas. Some side gardens on the street frontage still remain. Whilst these may have originally been undeveloped plots, they have become over time very much a part of The Avenue and, because of their natural contribution, they add to the variety and interest of the area. It is clear from the design of some houses that the side elevation, with perhaps a first floor or double-height bay, was intended to be seen and in such a case the side garden is an integral part of the dwelling. In most cases mature trees and shrubs continue the appearance of a solid frontage whilst providing a soft contrast with the hard built form, which increases both variety and character.

There are also some side drives, beside the end house in a terrace for example, providing vehicular access to a coach house or garage adjacent to the house. There are also pedestrian side passage ways adjacent to some houses.

The generous dimensions of the roads, verges, houses and gardens was emphasised in the original design and layout by the presence of various plots of land which were in broadly communal use, providing facilities for the residents. These included allotments, a market garden, a playing field, tennis courts, a boating lake and areas of communal garden. Where these still remain they contribute positively providing welcome open space and havens for wildlife.

Neutral Elements

The characteristic nature of the typical Avenues ten foot is that it is a quiet area protected from traffic noise by the terraces of houses and long gardens. Where gardens back onto a ten foot, there may be original outhouses, stables or coach houses, some of which are two storey. In many other cases, later garages have been built. Some of these buildings are of interest in themselves, and all, together with walls and fencing create a feeling of enclosure. Whilst domestic gardens are frequently set back behind forecourts for ease of manoeuvring, the presence of even a few back garden walls and fences abutting the ten foot gives it a more enclosed feel, emphasised by overhanging mature trees which add to both the sense of enclosure and the distinctive character. This enclosure, together with its distance from the houses and its resultant privacy, however creates hidden areas with their attendant problems.

There are also some workshops set up to serve local needs. While they would nowadays often be considered 'non-conforming uses' their distance from houses and their small scale generally means they do not cause significant disturbance. They provide useful local facilities.

Negative Aspects

A relatively small number of newer houses have been constructed in ways which do not follow the principles referred to above. For example in the 1960's, Parkside Close was built on a former market garden on land between Park Avenue and Victoria Avenue. In the 1970s, Muirfield Park was built on land between Westbourne Avenue and Marlborough Avenue which had formerly been playing fields.

Whilst the layout of these does not conform to the rectilinear layout of the Avenues, their impact is small because they do not front onto the main public routes. Both developments are different from the general character of The Avenues because they are infilling backland which did not front onto the original avenues. The road layout is not rectilinear with terraced development fronting the road and gardens behind. It is rather the reverse - the filling up of an available piece of land with development, a central branching road with detached and semi-detached houses in irregular shaped plots being served from it. Their impact, however, is not sufficient to seriously erode the overall character of the area.

The individual character and appearance of some buildings has been eroded by inappropriate alterations, especially by the removal or alteration of bay windows, and to a lesser extent by substitution of modern window and door designs. Most houses still have their original roofing materials, which vary appropriately to the design of the house between slates or plain tiles. Where these have been replaced by modern materials, especially with concrete tiles and with roof ventilators, these detract from the appearance of the terrace as a whole, particularly as steep roof pitches are a feature of many of the house styles. However, most of these alterations are classed as maintenance and do not need planning permission.

Lack of maintenance detracts from the appearance of some houses, especially where features such as decorative bargeboards are missing. There is a tendency for large houses which have been split into flats to be less well maintained, especially the gardens both front and rear. The storage of dustbins at the front of some buildings and on the verges is particularly unsightly, and some rear gardens are unkempt.

Parked cars to some extent detract from the long vistas which are such a strong characteristic of the area. Where parking takes place in front gardens or on run-ins across verges it can also detract, though it clearly responds to a need.

The use of inappropriate street furniture and highway signage needs to be kept under control.

However, overall these negative aspects are not sufficient to strongly erode the special character of this area. Many residents take a great pride in the area, as is illustrated by the annual Open Gardens event.

Summary of Positive, Neutral and Negative Elements

Positive

- i. Long straight tree-lined vistas.
- ii. Variety of house styles within a unity provided by building line, 2-3 storey height, vertical emphasis, and the consistency of colour of the main building materials.
- iii. Contrast between formality of frontages and informality of rear tenfoots and outbuildings.
- iv. Interest provided by rich variety of details - finials, bargeboards, tiled porches, etc.
- v. Unique fountains, the Gilbert Scott houses of national importance, and other individual buildings of architectural interest.
- vi. Undeveloped rear gardens and green spaces creating 130 to 170 feet (40 to 60 metres) between houses.

Neutral

- i. Tenfoots with some original outhouses, a variety of later garages of little design merit and problems created by their hidden location distant from the houses.

Negative:

- i. Some modern housing developments which ignore the characteristic formal layout.
- ii. Lack of maintenance and untidiness of a new houses and gardens especially in multi-occupation.
- iii. Inappropriate alterations especially loss of bay windows, substitution of modern for traditional materials, e.g. concrete roof tiles, uPVC window frames of inappropriate design, etc., in a minority of houses.
- iv. Localised problems of traffic generation and noise caused by some non-residential uses.
- v. The present condition of the fountains and two of the Listed Gilbert Scott houses.
- vi. Crime associated with the hidden nature of the tenfoots.

Conclusion

The Avenues still fulfils the role envisaged by its founder as an attractive residential area. Its special character comes from long straight views down tree lined roads, the great variety and interesting details of the houses within a unity of building line and height, unique features especially the Listed features of the fountains and the group of large villas designed by George Gilbert Scott, and the contrast between the formality of the frontages and informal character of the rear 'tenfoots'.

Recent alterations and new developments have not, overall, eroded this attractive character, though some groups and individual buildings have suffered from inappropriate change.

Generally there is a strong awareness by many residents of the attractiveness of the area which should help to ensure its future preservation. However it is nevertheless owners of properties who carry out non-traditional maintenance where this does occur.

Approved by the Planning & Design Committee, 21st January, 1998