

Urban Conservation and Design Spring Bank West Conservation Area Character Statement

Summary

Spring Bank West Conservation Area is a predominantly 'green' area, with two large stretches of well-treed open space and a small group of houses between. It is an inner suburb, with some notable buildings and monuments, but with a run-down appearance to some of its houses fronting a heavily - trafficked main road.

Location

The Spring Bank West Conservation Area lies to the north west of Hull City Centre at the beginning of the suburbs. It is defined by the Hull - Scarborough Railway Line (1846) to the south and west, Chanterlands Avenue, the northern and eastern boundaries of the cemeteries, the Spring Bank - Princes Avenue junction, and the line of the former Hull-Hornsea Railway (1864 - 1964).

Topography and History

In common with most of Hull the natural topography is flat marshland only made habitable by drainage schemes, which were first begun in the Middle Ages. The line of Spring Bank West marks the southern boundary of the ancient parish of Cottingham.

There may be natural springs in the area; one was discovered in the 1960s when extensions to Hymers College were being built. The name Spring Bank, however, is generally considered to refer to the fresh water supply brought in along the route of the present Spring Bank West and Spring Bank in an open ditch from Springhead near Anlaby to the Old Town; - a vital commodity that enabled the development of the Town. The ditch was covered over in 1864.

On Goodwill and Lawson's plan of 1869 Spring Bank West is named Derringham Bank with the line of the Spring Dyke running immediately along its southern side. Between 1830 and 1850 a waterworks had existed at the junction with Spring Bank on the site now occupied by Jacksons Bakery and the former railway line.

The same map shows that by this time the only development along Derringham Bank had been the Hull General Cemetery on the north side adjacent to Newland Tofts Lane (later Princes Avenue). When the cemetery opened in 1847 it was on the north western edge of the town and must have been a much needed facility, as the town's churchyards were becoming full. It would have only just been laid out when the cholera epidemic of 1847-8 must have greatly increased activity there.

In 1877 the Botanic Gardens were laid out on 55 acres of land north of the Hull - Scarborough railway and south of Spring Bank West an indication of the role of the western suburbs as somewhere for pleasure trips out of town. (See also the Zoological Gardens north of Spring Bank). The site was presumably preferable to the previous gardens in Linnaeus Street as that area was becoming increasingly industrialised. Perhaps Botanic Gardens were already going out of fashion, as they only lasted here

ten years, - long enough, however, to have a railway station, level crossing and pub named after them.

By 1887 the Botanic Gardens Company had gone into receivership. The land on the main road frontage and on the approach road to the gardens was sold off for development and is now the site of houses on Spring Bank West, Sunny Bank and Hymers Avenue. The rest of the land was offered to the City Council as open space. The City did not need another park in the area, having laid out Pearson and West Parks. However, it had recently been offered a generous legacy by Dr. John Hymers to establish a Grammar School. This site was felt to be well located to serve the rapidly expanding western suburbs.

Hymers College opened in 1893. Residential development took place gradually from just before this date to the First World War. In the 1920s shops were built on the Princes Avenue frontage of the cemetery, creating the pleasing curved corner with Spring Bank West. By the 1930's the area looked much as it does today.

Character and Appearance

General

The character of the Conservation Area can be defined in three distinct areas: two predominantly 'green' areas at the cemeteries north of Spring Bank West and Hymers College and grounds, and an area of large terraced houses in between. East of Hymers Avenue a strip of overgrown allotments provides another green area. The road of Spring Bank West itself forms a physical and visual barrier between the residential area and the cemeteries.

The Approach from the East

Approaching Spring Bank West from the east there is a distinct change in character from the urban, built up and commercial character of Spring Bank to the greener and more residential character of Spring Bank West.

An attractive curve of three-storey buildings on the corner with Princes Avenue sweep the eye round into Spring Bank West. These shops and offices are the only commercial buildings in the Conservation Area. A clock at first floor on one of the building is a useful local landmark.

On the south side of the junction an area of trees and dense vegetation on the site of the former allotments (and the former railway sidings outside the area) makes a valuable green wedge between industrial land off Spring Bank and residential Hymers Avenue. There is also a public urinal on the corner. It has cream and grey tiles and an iron lamp bracket and is a good example of a type of building which is gradually disappearing from the City.

Spring Bank West

Entering Spring Bank West itself the overall first impression is of greenery. Mature trees line both sides of the road at this eastern end. Dense vegetation and fine trees

almost completely screen the view of houses north of the cemetery. Further west the trees on the south side are less mature and the houses become the dominant feature. The trees will eventually grow to increase the avenue effect. However, the busy traffic intrudes and forces the eye onward and out of the area to the busy junction with Chanterlands Avenue and the railway crossing.

The Approach from the West

This is a weak entrance to the area, new houses on the south side at the junction providing insufficient sense of enclosure. The altered house on the end of the terrace on the south side is an unfortunate first feature to meet the eye on entering. Mature trees in the Cemetery help to offset this negative impression, but the overwhelming impact is made by intrusive vehicle traffic at the busy Chanterlands Avenue/Spring Bank West junction.

The Cemeteries

Entering the General Cemetery from Spring Bank West one experiences immediately a sense of welcome relief from the main road traffic. By the 1970s the General Cemetery had become very overgrown and almost impenetrable. The City Council took over the land, opened up and reconstructed the paths and cleared much of the undergrowth, but left enough dense shrubbery and trees to maintain a sense of enclosure and provide habitat for wildlife. Walking into the area, the sound of traffic is soon muffled, while trees and shrubs screen the rear view of houses on Welbeck Street and shops on Princes Avenue. The feeling is of a series of clearings in a wood.

Many gravestones were removed or moved to the edge to create more spaces, but many were also left. Two monuments and a gateway are listed buildings, all Grade II:

1. A gothic iron monument in the form of an Eleanor Cross (1868). The iron tracery would originally have been partly glazed and contained a funeral urn. Two of these monuments are almost identical but only the easternmost one with which part of the grave wall remains is listed. Both were repaired in 1996, when a newspaper dated 1868 was found inside the listed one.
2. The Cholera Memorial (C.1850) By contrast this is a plain stone obelisk, a stark monument to the many people who died in the cholera epidemic of 1847-8. It loses much of its significance by plaques on all four sides being missing, but still contributes to the character of the cemetery.
3. The Gateway and boundary walls at the General Cemetery (1847 Grade II) on the Spring Bank frontage. These three stone piers and cast iron gates appear to be all that remains of a five pired gateway which originally fronted onto Princes Avenue. It seems that the entrance was relocated when shops were built on the Princes Avenue. They are early works by Cuthbert Brodrick who went on to design Hull Town Hall, Leeds Town Hall and other notable buildings. Few of his works remain in this his native city and unfortunately the lodge and chapel he also designed in the cemetery have been demolished. The gates are flanked by yellow brick walls presumably dating from the relocation, but would look better with the railings or fence which would have originally bounded the cemetery on the south side.

Many of the unlisted monuments and gravestones are of considerable interest. Some are works of art in themselves; - there are several carved figures with a 'Pre-Raphaelite' look, for instance, and remains of a stone cross with intricate carved Celtic knot design. Others are of interest for what the inscription tell us about social conditions, - the high incidence of deaths in infancy in the 19th century, for instance, or inscriptions in foreign languages telling of Hull's trading links. Names remind one of notable local figures, artist Henry Redmore for instance, or the Blundell, Reckitt and Priestman families. These last two are within an enclave surrounded by a wooden palisade fence set aside for the Society of Friends (Quakers) where there are very simple stone memorials set among yew trees.

Sadly there are a number of memorials which have been badly vandalised, broken or tipped over.

The General Cemetery occupies only part of the land north of the road. In 1862 the Board of Health opened a municipal cemetery on the land to the west, the Western Cemetery. Only a slight mound exists on the ground to show where one cemetery ends and the other begins, but there is a distinct change of character, the Western Cemetery being much more open in character, with graves and grass dominating rather than trees and vegetation and with an open aspect to the rear of houses on Wharnccliffe Street. Burials continue up to the present day and the graves continue to be a record of artistic, social and political history. Interesting unlisted features include the four 'gothic' stone piers and cast iron gates at the Chanterlands Avenue entrance and a timber and glass shelter. There is a 3ft boundary wall of stone along both the Chanterlands Avenue and Spring Bank West frontages of this cemetery, a notable feature in this predominantly brick city.

Hymers College and Grounds

The other major green enclave in the area can only be appreciated by most of the general public from outside the site. On the north side of the site a double row of mature trees provide an attractive outlook for houses on Sunnybank while at the same time providing a pleasant walk for the pupils of the school. Passengers on the Hull to Scarborough railway line are treated to a pleasant view of the College grounds through the row of birch and beech trees along the south west boundary of the college grounds.

The focal point of the view down Hymers Avenue is the main entrance to the school site, with its splendid black and gold and crested wrought iron gates, and some fine mature trees on each side. A banded pattern of stone setts forms a pleasing vehicular crossing into the entrance. Just inside the gates is a cottage-style lodge in attractive mellow red brick with tile-hung gables and steep plain tiled roof.

The main west facing college building (1889, Listed Grade II) is characterised by a mellow red brick with contrasting sandstone bands, pinnacles and other features, and gothic window tracery, steep clay tile roofs and a clock tower. Larger extensions and annexes were designed to continue this character except for some less sympathetic buildings of the 1960's and 1970's. All, including the attractive brick and timber cricket pavilion, are treated as Listed by virtue of being within the curtilage.

The remains of a pond and some of the surrounding vegetation are thought to be remaining features from the Botanical Gardens. Most of the rest of the site is laid out as sports pitches.

The Residential Area

The residential streets of Sunny Bank, Hymers Avenue and Spring Bank West are characterised by long terraces of mostly large two storey, or two storey and attic, houses built to uniform building lines, set behind front gardens in the case of Hymers Avenue and Sunny Bank and much smaller front gardens or yards in the case of Spring Bank West. Ridge lines and eaves lines are also generally continuous.

Within this uniformity, however, are an enormous variety of design styles, materials and detailed features. Barge-boarded gables and parapets, oriel windows, round bay windows, square bays and canted bays, ground floor only bays and 2-storey bays, sash windows and casement windows, porches and recessed doorways, yellow bricks, red bricks and patterned brickwork, carved timber and stone features, stained glass decorative ironwork and tiles are all represented.

Generally there is a row of between two and fifteen houses of similar design before a change of style, usually without any gap in the frontage. This appearance reflects the way development took place at this time. Roads were laid out first, then groups of plots were sold to builders or landlords who would build a small row of houses, usually for rent. Old maps show that plots sold were scattered within the development, rather than working systematically along the street, though the oldest houses tend to be near where Brandesburton Street links Spring Bank West and Sunny Bank and the newest at the west end of Sunny Bank. Development took place from about 1880 to 1930. Therefore the variety of styles reflects both changes in architectural fashions and the varying tastes of the developers.

Roofs were slate, the usual material for better quality houses of this period, but there have been some inappropriate re-roofings in concrete tiles and artificial slates. Some inappropriate PVC and stained timber windows and doors have also been introduced though not sufficient, yet, to detract from the overall appearance of the area. Where large houses, or two or three houses combined internally, have been converted to hotels, nursing homes, old people's homes or flats external alterations have generally been minor and in keeping.

Particularly pleasing features include the way the house on the west corner of Hymers Avenue with Spring Bank West turns the corner, the octagonal turret on 375 Spring Bank West with wind vane on top which draws the eye when viewed looking west along the street and railings of an attractive circular design found on the corner of Spring Bank West and Hymers Avenue and in front of several houses on Sunny Bank.

Properties in Hymers Avenue and Sunny Bank are generally well maintained, but there is a sufficient proportion of poorly maintained houses in Spring Bank to give an overall run-down appearance to this street. Dustbins stored at the front, broken down or missing front walls and fences, boarded up or broken windows and peeling paintwork are frequent negative features.

The former allotments to the east of Hymers Avenue provides a valuable green wedge part of which is identified as urban greenspace in the Local Plan. It is of wildlife conservation value, and the area of regenerated woodland east of Hymers College grounds is particularly interesting. Some derelict remains of sheds detract but overall it is a valuable buffer zone between industrial and residential uses.

The street paving materials are asphalt in Spring Bank West and Sunny Bank and concrete pavers in Hymers Avenue. Generally they neither enhance nor detract, but former verges in Hymers Avenue are a mixture of hard materials, gravel and grass in poor condition. Haphazardly parked vehicles on the former verges of Hymers Avenue detract from the street scene.

Conclusion

Spring Bank West is an unusually green area to find so near to a City Centre and this gives it a character worthy of being preserved and enhanced.

Its main positive features can be summarised as;

1. Many mature trees.
2. Areas of green open space of different characters: the cemeteries, the grounds of Hymers College, and the overgrown former allotments east of Hymers Avenue.
3. Houses in a rich variety of styles and details within a coherent overall form.
4. Individual and groups of buildings and monuments of merit: within Hymers College, within the cemeteries, and on the corner of Princes Avenue and Spring Bank West.

Its main negative features can be summarised as:

1. The high volume of traffic on Spring Bank West.
2. Some poorly maintained houses on the south side of Spring Bank West.
3. Vandalised monuments within the cemeteries.
4. Some inappropriate replacements of traditional materials and features on some house.

Approved by the Planning & Design Committee, 16th April, 1997

Addendum

03.08.2001

Monument to Captain John Gravill, General Cemetery, Spring Bank West - Added by the Secretary of State to the 'List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest' at Grade II.