

River Severn Corridor and Underdale Road Conservation Area Assessment

14th January 2004

1. Introduction

1.1 Conservation Areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act in 1967, and within the Borough there are now 17 designated Conservation Areas.

1.2 Conservation areas are "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance" (Section 69 (1)(a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Under section 69(2) of the Act, the Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority have a statutory duty from time to time to review the extent of designation in their area and, if appropriate, to designate further areas.

1.3 Paragraph 6.54 of the Adopted Local Plan states that the Council intends to 'identify further areas, which could be considered for Conservation Area status'. This statement also sets out the Council's approach to designation, which is to consult with the residents of an area prior to making a final decision on confirmation.

1.4 Designation brings certain duties to the Local Planning Authorities: Under Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

- To formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas in their districts, and submit them to a public meeting in the area to which they relate.
- Under section 72 of the above Act, Local Planning Authorities in exercising their planning powers, should pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Designation will result in the removal of permitted development rights in relation to;

- Various types of cladding
- The insertion of dormer windows into roof slopes
- The erection of satellite dishes on walls roofs and chimneys adjacent to a highway
- The installation of radio masts with a volume greater than 2 cubic metres
- The size of extensions not requiring planning permission restricted

1.5 Conservation Area consent will be required for some demolition works, as defined in 2000 circular, under section 74 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

1.6 Under the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999 anyone proposing to cut down, uproot, top or lop a tree whose diameter exceeds 75 millimetres at a height 1.5 metres above ground level, should submit a notification form to the local authority, at least 6 weeks prior to the start of works.

2.0 Area to be Covered by Extension

2.1 The Underdale Road area consists of a triangle of land surrounded by the Shrewsbury-Wellington Railway line and a wedge of land to the north of the line,

bordered to the west by the River Severn. It is presently sandwiched between the Cherry Orchard and Castlefield Conservation Areas and if designated would serve to link the two.

3.0 Origins and Development of the Topographical Framework

3.1 In the 11th Century, the land in the Underdale Road area would have formed part of that given by Roger de Montgomery, to the Benedictine monks of Holy Cross Abbey in 1083. The monks had a fish farm at Monkmoor, situated on the way to the ferry crossing at Uffington. During the medieval period, the track to Monkmoor was an important link between Shrewsbury and Haughmond Abbey as well as providing popular access to Upton Magna, High Ercall and Newport.

3.2 On the map dated 1832, a holy well is indicated on the site of No. 85 (The Ice House) Monkmoor Street. This would be entirely consistent with the tradition surrounding St Winefride whose remains were brought to Holy Cross Abbey from Holywell, Flintshire, during the 12th Century. Miraculous springs, seemingly, welled up from the earth wherever the relics came to rest during the journey (cf. Woolston, nr. Oswestry).

3.3 The lane to Underdale was probably established c.1700 to provide access to a farm on the site of the present Underdale Hall. The lane did not exist in 1610, but on a map of 1746 the road 'to Underdale' is shown leading off Abbey Foregate. On Hitchcock's map of 1832 the course of the road was recorded precisely as it appears today.

3.4 A horse-ferry crossing was established during the 18th century at the first knee bend in Underdale Road, connecting New Park Farm with the east bank of the Severn. An Isolation Hospital was later built at this point.

3.5 The oldest surviving development in the area is Orchard House of 1819 to which the original Cherry Orchard belonged. This building predates the construction of Union Street (now Bradford St c.1855) on which it now lies, set back in its own grounds. John Beck, a banker, had built the house on land he had bought from Lord Berwick.

3.6 Several diminutive properties of the 1840's and 50's testify to the sporadic construction of houses along the Underdale Road itself, giving rise to a modest mid 19th Century ribbon development. By 1875, the estate comprised nos. 26-46 Underdale Road, Sedgford House and no. 31 as well as 1-2 Abbeyville, Holywell House, Ashley House and Avron House in Union Street. At this point, it was an island of residential development completely surrounded by fields, indeed a remnant of the cherry orchard still existed in 1902.

3.7 In 1848 Shrewsbury saw the construction of the Railway Station and a year later a bridge over the River Severn that carried lines to Wellington, initially, and later Wolverhampton and Hereford. The Rail network provides the southern boundary of the proposed conservation area and although much of the early infrastructure surrounding the network has been demolished a signal box from c. 1900 still survives in a triangular island at the heart of the network.

3.8 In order to accommodate the burgeoning population that came to Shrewsbury with the L & NW and GW railways in the early 1860's a more formal programme of residential expansion was devised. It is at this time, Union Street was renamed Bradford Street and it is here that the more ambitious residences, set in spacious plots, were erected.

3.9 Housing of a similar vein continued along Underdale Road and Monkmoor Road during the 1880s and 90s in the form of large semi-detached units, suburban villas and tall mansion flats overlooking the Severn westwards towards Castlefields and the racecourse eastwards.

3.10 The two roads linking Underdale Road with Monkmoor Street to the south of Bradford Street, Cleveland and Tankerville, were developed between 1880 and 1881 and are dominated by terraces for artisans and workers. Two further link roads were laid out in the 1890's to the north of Bradford Street. Ashley Street has mostly semi-detached housing of the 1905 era and Underdale Avenue is populated with slightly larger ones of the 1930's.

3.11 Notwithstanding Bradford Street, plots were therefore filled from the bottom up, i.e. from south to north (going away from town), so that by 1927 only Underdale Avenue, the most northerly of the five link roads, had any vacancies. An extensive stretch flanking the river corridor, along the west side of Underdale Road was left undeveloped until the 1970's and 80's, though housing dating to c. 1905 continued up the east side as far as the former Isolation Hospital. The only exception to this is the old convent of St Winefride's, a building of c. 1890, located on a prime site opposite an islet in the River Severn called France Island.

4.0 The Archaeological Potential and Significance of the Area.

4.1 The proposed area of designation is overlooked by Shrewsbury Castle, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and forms an important part of its setting. However there are currently no Scheduled Monuments within the area proposed for designation.

4.2 The earliest potential archaeological deposits in the area would relate to the activities of the Benedictine monks that owned the lands in the area and no doubt utilised the river bank. The area also abuts and probably partially contains the site known as 'soldiers piece' on which Charles I is said to have assembled his army in 1642 and which later became the Racecourse.

4.3 The primary archaeological significance of the area is in its industrial archaeology, which exists from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. This largely comprises the remains of railway related sites such as an abandoned cutting leading from Old Potts Way railway station in the direction of the weir, the site of a drop off station immediately behind Tankerville Street and the various buildings which were originally associated with the signal station now demolished.

4.4 In addition there are the steps which lead to the site of the important Horse Ferry, which was vital to the functionality of the horse drawn barges of 1800 and in the same location the remains of the 1885 isolation hospital demolished in 1936.

5.0 The Architectural and Historic Qualities of the Buildings and the Contribution they make to the special interest of the area

5.1 The Underdale Road Area, centred on Cherry Orchard, has examples of virtually every architectural style made popular during the late Victorian period, the Edwardian period and into the 1930's. Consequently, there is a great contrast between the streets themselves (no two are anything like the same) and among neighbouring houses. The most unified street is Cleveland Street, however even here 'eclectic' would still serve as an appropriate adjective.

5.2 The coherence of the area lies in its continuous rhythm of changing styles, colours and building materials. It conveys a very natural feel of architectural experimentation, never awkward, but generally polite and respectful of the building next door. That such variety is sustained throughout almost all of the area is certainly of architectural significance, not to say special interest.

5.3 Within this eclectic mix of styles and materials, the western half of Underdale Road is especially significant. Situated on the brow of the escarpment overlooking the town centre and the River Severn are a series of diverse and impressive mansions terraced into the landscape. They are all individual in design, but are largely unified in their impressive scale and augmented brick construction. All of the properties retain long, steeply terraced, and in some cases wooded, gardens, which terminate at the riverbank and provide an essential green and architecturally dignified setting to the river and the town.

5.4 Of especial interest is the railway network and Grade II listed junction signal box, which bound the southern side of the proposed extension. The Railway and its paraphernalia have served as a visual break between the Medieval suburbs of Abbey Foregate and the Victorian and later estates of Underdale since their construction in the mid-nineteenth century. The network of buildings and structures associated with the railway in Shrewsbury are identified as a group of outstanding buildings in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural Interest 1995. Part of this network includes the junction signal box within the proposed conservation area extension.

6.0 Contribution Made by Unlisted buildings

6.1 Although there is only one listed building within the proposed area of extension there are a considerable number of high quality unlisted buildings which make a significant contribution.

6.2 Probably the most significant structure within the area are the masked remains of the 1849 Railway bridge that spans the River Severn. This is a particularly early and well-preserved example of a railway bridge, which, although largely obscured by flanking 1900 extensions, lends majesty and substance to the crossing.

6.3 Bradford Street also stands out in the area as a street lined with unlisted properties of extremely high quality, comprising largely detached suburban villas and semi-detached houses primarily dating from the early-mid nineteenth century. The most notable properties within this impressive streetscape are the run of five mansion flats known as Brighton Terrace, atypically built of blue brick with yellow brick dressings, and Orchard House dated 1819, a small regency villa of painted brick and hipped slate roof, set some distance back from the road.

6.4 The Abbey Public House, formerly Ashley House, built around 1860, dominates the corner of Bradford Street and Monkmoor Road. It is set within an extensive square plot, on a raised terrace, retained by a stone garden wall. The house is of unrestrained Italianate style, stuccoed with ample painted stone dressings and a Roman Doric Porch.

6.5 Underdale Road is also lined with properties of exceptional quality and design but a number do stand out as of particular significance and interest. At the western end of Underdale Road is no. 79 known as St. Winefride's or the Old Convent. This is a large villa-type house of the 1890s in the manner of A. E. Lloyd Oswell, of Shrewsbury (cf. Girl's High School, Town Walls). However, its key impact on the area is its extensive landscaped grounds lining the Severn and its bridged connection with the densely wooded France Island.

6.6 No's 33-39 and 43-49 Underdale Road are also of key significance in their genteel contribution to the setting of the castle and river and the elaborately detailed elevations onto Underdale Road.

6.7 No 14 Underdale Road should also be mentioned as significant as it occupies a key corner position and is a good example of an Arts & Crafts villa of 1882.

6.8 From a social history point of view no. 69-70 is particularly interesting as it was the home of Wilfred Owen from about 1910 until his death in 1918.

7.0 The Character and Relationship of spaces within the area and their contribution to its character.

7.1 There are three basic forms of space within the proposed area: large open pleasure grounds, privately owned rear gardens and industrial waste ground.

7.2 In the south-west of the area, there is a large open recreation area transected by a semi-formalised tree-lined route to the river. Part of the land is used as school playing fields and the remainder parkland with a substantial number of trees of varying species lining the banks. The park is a major landscape feature, which establishes and sustains the green setting of the river and softens the essentially urban views from the castle.

7.3 There are two main areas of privately-owned rear gardens, which make a significant contribution to the proposed area. All of the properties situated on the west side of Underdale Road support extensive landscaped, terraced gardens, which border the river. The majority maintain trees and shrubs of considerable amenity value when viewed from the adjacent bank.

7.4 The second area of garden space is situated in private pockets between the streets linking Monkmoor Road and Underdale Road. A particularly good example is situated between Bradford Street, Cleveland Street and a small section of Underdale road. The quality and scale of the properties that surround this space are such that the garden plots are substantial and well stocked with a variety of mature, established trees and shrubs. The quality of this space is extremely high, augmenting all views into and out of the space.

7.5 Situated within and around the industrial landscape of the Railway network are a number of open spaces, which form areas of wasteland, embankments and a skip park for the Council. All of these open sites present opportunities for enhancement.

8.0 The Negative Factors

8.1 The major negative factors, which detract from the appearance of the proposed designated area, are

- The neglected railway embankment and wasteground
- Some neglected elements of the open recreational space;
- The new build properties at the western end of Tankerville Street;
- The setting of The Abbey Public House, which is marooned in a sea of tarmac;
- The cleared gardens of 51-77 Underdale Road which form an unsightly gap site in the river corridor;
- Pollarded trees on the river frontage; and
- Uncontrolled alterations to dwellings resulting in a visually discordant townscape

8.2 The Council's Underdale Road Depot and the adjacent land flanking the Railway have been omitted from the proposed extension as they are both new development sites, covered by development briefs and fall under policy HE8 of the adopted Local Plan which states that ' new development in or adjacent to Conservation Areas' should 'be of a high standard of design...and respect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area'.

9.0 The Contribution of Trees and other natural or cultivated elements

9.1 The trees within the area can essentially be divided into two groups, according to whether they are publicly or privately owned.

9.2 Currently there are a total of 7 Tree Preservation Orders protecting groups and isolated trees of outstanding amenity value within the area proposed for designation. The majority are situated in gardens and enclosed private spaces and cover mature, well-established trees.

9.3 A number of the privately owned trees are not being regularly managed or are subject to replanting schemes. This means that circumstances may arise in the near future whereby trees are coming to the end of their lifespan and are not being replaced. Equally, the spectacular view across the river exerts considerable pressure upon property owners to remove obstructing trees or inappropriately pollard them. The result could have a major impact on the setting of the river and character of the area.

9.4 The second category of trees are those in the public realm which are generally the responsibility of the Borough Council. These occur primarily in the recreational grounds by the river, but there are also a considerable number that line Monkmoor Road. The Borough Council continually check trees within the town to ensure that they retain their amenity value and programme work where replanting may be required.

9.5 Under section 211 of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, subject to a range of exceptions, anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a Conservation Area is required to give six weeks' notice to the Local Planning Authority. The purpose of this requirement is to give the authority the opportunity to consider bringing the tree under their control by making a Tree Preservation Order.

10.0 The Relationship of the Built Environment to the Landscape or Open Countryside, Including the Definition of Significant Landmarks, Vistas and Panoramas.

10.1 Both the Shropshire County Structure Plan and the Shrewsbury and Atcham Adopted Local Plan contain policies designed to protect views in and out of the town centre.

10.2 The key view into the Underdale area is gained from the A5 ring road, which crosses open countryside to the north-east. This view captures the skyline of the town centre to the right and the Underdale escarpment to the left, incorporating the length of the riverbed and the green bands that flank it.

10.3 A further view into the area is from Shrewsbury Castle and the railway looking north-eastwards. The combination of building materials, styles and scales with the green open and wooded spaces terraced into the escarpment create an impressive break in the town's built environment and a suitable backdrop to the setting of the river and the town centre. This view is also important in reverse, allowing the

pedestrian to view the town centre and the castle at its most prominent and impressive aspect.

10.4 Complementing these views are a number of focal points and landmarks which serve to channel and draw the viewers attention. The key landmarks in the area are the resplendent Victorian Mansions that crown the escarpment, providing a majestic backdrop to the river setting and dominating the skyline.

10.5 The primary focal point within the area is situated on the cusp of the open space and built environment on Underdale Road, where the narrow road widens and the views open up across the railway and the town.

11.0 Conclusion

11.1 Having surveyed the Underdale Road Area, various strengths and weakness have been identified. Perhaps its most positive characteristics are the inclusions of extremely high value public and private green spaces and the high quality and dominance of its unlisted buildings. The area also provides a key element to the setting and views of the town centre and River Severn Corridor. However its character is slowly becoming undermined with inappropriate tree management, modern developments and poor landuse.

11.2 The overall appraisal of the character of the River Severn corridor and Underdale Road area is that it represents a potentially attractive area, which greatly contributes to the setting of the town centre and preserves a key element of the town's historic development.