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1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this conservation area appraisal is to provide a good basis for development control and for developing proposals and initiatives for the area in the future. The appraisal should inform, through a consultation process, the production of a management plan for the area and help to inform the future of the conservation area. In addition, the appraisal will be used to help develop locally distinctive policies within the Local Development Framework and to update Lichfield District Council's historic resource.

1.2 In accordance with the English Heritage document 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals', it is important to note that no appraisal can ever be completely comprehensive. If a building, feature or space is not mentioned this should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

1.3 Additional, more detailed historic and archaeological information on the area can be obtained from the Historic Environment Record (HER) held at Staffordshire County Council.

2 Location & Historical Context

2.1 Little Aston is a large village situated within Lichfield District, 11 miles north of Birmingham City Centre. It is an affluent area of Lichfield, which has close association with Sutton Coldfield and direct links to Birmingham, and is part of the West Midlands conurbation. It is adjacent to Four Oaks, Streetly, Aldridge and Mere Green.

2.2 Little Aston was designated as a conservation area due to its high quality environment, remnant parkland estate and good examples of incremental individual development during the 20th Century. Of immense importance was the quality of landscape, a heathland mix of landscaped and secondary woodland, with individually designed houses interspersed through the area. The many examples of outstanding trees, including Scots pine, Corsican pine, sweet and horse chestnut, silver birch, oak and sycamore, the great expanses of rhododendron, the impressive vistas along tree and rhododendron lined lanes were justification for the preservation and enhancement of Little Aston, as were the excellent examples of high quality 1920s, 1930s, 1950s and 1960s housing, ranging from the modern movement to mock Tudor and vernacular revival.



Picture 2.1 Little Aston Hall

2.3 Little Aston has developed from Little Aston Park, which was the recreational grounds of Little Aston Hall estate. The old village of Little Aston lies adjacent to the northern boundary of the conservation area and evidence of farming within this area, both past and present, is still visible. Little Aston Hall has had many uses and owners since the sale of its grounds in 1907 when the park was sold off in plots with the restriction that no house of less than £1000 in value should be built on it. The Hall fell into disrepair during the early 20th Century and in 1954 Esso Midland moved in, and office blocks were built between the Hall and the coach houses on Aldridge Road, which were demolished in 1983. In 1977, the Hall was acquired by K B Jackson and Son and was converted into seven luxury apartments.

2.4 The architectural interest in the area is principally derived from the site of Little Aston Hall landscape park which is now mainly covered in a golf course and housing. Archaeological remains include the course of a Roman road and some archaeological finds, including a Neolithic arrowhead and mediaeval pottery.

3 The Conservation Area Boundary

3.1 The conservation area was designated on the 26th October 1999 to cover an area of 130.6 hectares and includes Little Aston Hall and Little Aston Park and is bounded by Rosemary Hill Road, extending to Walsall Road. The boundary also follows the line of a number of properties along Hardwick Road, Little Aston Park Road and Roman Road (see map). At present the boundary includes most of the remnant estate and distinctive individual development carried out through the 20th Century.

3.2 The boundary will be amended in a number of locations as described below and as marked on the attached map.

1. The northern boundary will be extended to include parts of the old village including parts of Forge Lane and Aldridge Road.
 2. The boundary at the far south-west will be extended to include 36 and 37 Hardwick Road and the properties on the west side of Little Aston Park Road up to and including.
 3. The western boundary will be extended to include some properties on Newick Avenue.
 4. The boundary will be amended so that it runs along Roman Road between the junctions with Claverdon Drive and Endwood Drive.
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4 Spatial Character & Townscape Quality

4.1 Little Aston's physical character is derived from its origins as the wooded parkland of the Little Aston estate. The streetscape of the area is characterised by great expanses of rhododendron trees lining Roman Road and its arterial lanes. This planting forms a barrier between the lane and the diverse mix of 19th and 20th Century architectural styles which underpins the impressive landscape provided by Little Aston.



Picture 4.1 Wayside Drive showing vegetation forming a barrier and screening properties from the road



Picture 4.2 Roman Road showing the importance of trees in the street scene

4.2 Where there are breaks in the planting, vistas are revealed of buildings, predominantly large two-storey houses, lining both sides of the lanes and getting grander in scale the closer they are to Beech Gate (the former entrance to Little Aston Hall). The predominant spatial character of Little Aston is the individual, detached buildings set in large, green plots.



Picture 4.3 Roman Road showing a substantial property set in a large plot, glimpsed from the road which is so characteristic of the area.



Picture 4.4 Roman Road showing a substantial property set in a large plot and glimpsed from the road which is so characteristic of the area.

4.3 Indeed, the landscape setting is one of the predominant characteristics of the area. Little Aston has an leafy ambiance which is an attraction to many prospective house buyers and contributes towards the extraordinary and striking landscape of the area. Visitors can be discouraged from entering Little Aston due to the numerous private property signs can be seen to imply separation and difference. This sentiment may not be intentional, but it is being enhanced as a safety measure and crime deterrent aimed at keeping out unwanted visitors and undesired intruders.



Picture 4.5 Rosemary Hill Road. An example of some typical boundary treatments



Picture 4.6 Hardwick Road. An example of some typical boundary treatments

4.4 The exclusivity of Little Aston is enhanced by the varying plot boundaries and markings which are clearly influenced by taste and owner preference. Each plot is marked out by either posts or stumps on the verges, cobbled or paved verges, high rhododendron planting or gates. Various closes and cul-de-sacs are gated off which further increases the privacy of plots and gated communities within Little Aston.

4.5 Permanently opened metal gates are positioned at the entry into the area's lanes from the surrounding main roads. They convey a sense of private parklands and there are prominent private property warning signs which are used to deter trespassers and add to the prestige of Little Aston. These entries also help to restrict traffic movement through the area and it is characteristic of the area that there is very little traffic.

4.6 Lacking a single, obvious focus, the centre of the conservation area could be considered to be one of three places: the golf course club house, 'Beech Gate' or the small green space at the junction of Keepers Road and Roman Road. Beech Gate is a grand entrance onto the ground of Little Aston Hall and the gate has become a symbol of the area, as a means of separating and guarding this part of the estate as well as a statement of grandeur. The small green space in front of the gate is open for the whole area to use and could provide a logical focal point within the conservation area.



Picture 4.7 Beech Gates

4.7 The northern part of the conservation area covers some of the remnants of the historic village that includes some 18th century properties including the Grade II listed The Cottage, 1 Walsall Road. The architecture of this area is very different from that elsewhere in the conservation area, being a more traditional vernacular style and in comparison to the later properties in Little Aston are smaller in size and situated on smaller plots to give a denser grain of development which follows the lines of the roads.

5 Quality & Character of Buildings

5.1 Architectural examples include 1920s, 1930s, 1950s and 1960s housing, with styles ranging from the modern movement to mock Tudor and vernacular revival. Little Aston is also home to a rare listed example of an art deco house. There is an eclectic mix with the value arising from the individuality and the definable areas and periods of development and the examples of 20th Century design. The architecture is by no means the only defining characteristic of Little Aston. The tree lined lanes and parkland vistas define Little Aston as a rural village within an urban context (potentially rural) – a countryside ‘haven’ set within an urban environment.



Picture 5.1 Park Drive. An example of the variety of 20th century architecture



Picture 5.2 Hardwick Road. An example of the variety of 20th century architecture



Picture 5.3 Longacres. An example of the variety of 20th century architecture

5.2 A more traditional Staffordshire vernacular architecture is seen in the buildings in the north of the conservation area, in what was the old village. Brickwork, some painted is the predominant material with clay tile roofs and casement windows. These properties are clearly domestic in scale and design with the exception of the Old Forge which retains an industrial feel.

6 Natural Elements

6.1 As has been highlighted in preceding sections, one of the principal reasons for designating the conservation area within Little Aston is the mature woodland setting of the area, enhanced by many years of landscaping and the planting of many additional specimen trees and shrubs.

6.2 The remnant woodland setting is a survival of the parkland of the Little Aston estate. Part of this history would have been the use of the woodlands as a sporting reserve and, indeed, as working woods, providing an income from timber. It can be seen from the form of many of the oaks and beeches that these were grown as timber 'crops' – i.e. they have long clean straight stems with even crowns. In addition the relics of plantation Scots pine are prominent, particularly in the Hardwick Road/Talbot Avenue area of Little Aston where it is estimated that the age of the Scots pine is in excess of 100 years old.



Picture 6.1 An example of the important contribution of mature trees to the character of the area



Picture 6.2 An example of the important contribution of mature trees to the character of the area

6.3 Trees are under pressure over the whole of the area due to the high demand for building plots and their high cost in relation to size. Therefore space is at a premium and areas occupied by trees are a major constraint on many development sites. Dwellings have previously been built in what would today be considered unsustainable locations in close proximity to retained trees. This has led to a number of scenarios, the most common being the slow demise of the tree or continual requests for pruning which have been hard to refuse.

6.4 The situation with regard to trees on development sites is now more clearly understood. Knowledge of trees and their relationships with buildings and development has improved dramatically over recent years. These advances have been incorporated into a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – Trees and Development – which gives guidance to developers on the standards of information and practice required by Lichfield District Council where trees are present within a development. In addition, the effective interpretation by qualified arboriculturalists of BS 5837 2005 (Recommendations for Trees in relation to Construction), allied with the application of other industry best practice, ensures that sustainable relationships are attained.

6.5 Many Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) - around 60 - are in force within Little Aston, the vast majority being within the conservation area. Both TPOs and the conservation area are robustly administered and enforced with several prosecutions for contraventions having been taken forward in recent years. The greatest threat to the continuation of Little Aston's

wooded character is the loss of trees (through development pressure, old age or other biological factors such as mammal damage – i.e. squirrels) and the lack of replacement planting or recruitment through natural selection.

6.6 The age/class distribution of trees within the area is heavily skewed towards mature or over-mature trees with few in the young or semi mature bands.

6.7 An effective programme for the replanting or regeneration of young trees within the area is essential, but it is highly problematic to ensure or enforce if, for instance, there is a statutory duty to replant, as when a protected tree is removed.



Picture 6.3 Important landscape views within the conservation area - view of St Peter's Church from the junction of Walsall Road and Roman Road



Picture 6.4 Important landscape views within the conservation area - view up Roman Road from the traffic island



Picture 6.5 Important landscape views within the conservation area - view of St Peter's Church from Walsall Road

6.8 Views both within the conservation area and from outside the conservation looking into it are a key component of the character of the conservation area. Of particular note are the views of St Peter's Church and the views along the long, straight, tree lined roads.

7 Opportunities & Constraints

7.1 The area is under pressure from back land development, infill development and amalgamation of plots. Pressure to build additional housing on the existing large plots of land allocated to each dwelling is growing. Each proposal should be carefully considered on its own merits and future developments must seek to preserve the pattern and appearance of dwellings and to enhance the character and quality of the conservation area and continue the tradition of good examples of varying architectural styles.

7.2 Consideration has been given to amendments to the boundary of the conservation area, and these are detailed in paragraph 3.2 and are marked on the map.

7.3 Appropriate, high quality materials should be used when extending / developing within the conservation area, such as, but not exclusively, clay tiles rather than concrete, painted timber windows rather than plastic, metal or resin rainwater goods and appropriate types of local brick.

7.4 Important individual trees, groups of trees and open green spaces should be retained.

7.5 Attention should be paid to individual design quality, which is the strength and purpose of the conservation area, and the context of new development, not least when proposing to extend or alter an existing dwelling.

7.6 Boundary treatment of plots and the conservation area boundary should include the protection of the old Victorian estate fencing.

8 Effects of Conservation Area Designation

8.1 The important, overriding policy regarding a conservation area is that new development should pay special regard to the character or appearance of the conservation area; additional controls also exist to protect existing buildings and features from adverse change.

1. It is necessary to obtain Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of all but very small structures.
 2. There are stricter controls on permitted development - that is minor works that are normally automatically permitted
 3. Notice has to be given to the Council before works to trees are carried out.
 4. Special consideration is given to maintaining the qualities which give the area its particular character by;
 - a. carefully considering new development proposals;
 - b. permitting the demolition of buildings or the removal of trees only in fully justified circumstances and where appropriate redevelopment is proposed;
 - c. advising owners, occupiers and other interested individuals and organisations on the care and maintenance of trees and property (including alterations to doors, windows, providing advice on the siting of satellite dishes and other antennae apparatus, boundary and other walls, as well as gateways), however minor in nature;
 - d. where appropriate, preparing proposals for enhancement of the conservation area;
 - e. co-operating with other authorities and conservation organisations in activities designed to promote conservation generally or to assist conservation projects within the Borough, for example through exhibitions, town schemes or facelift proposals;
 - f. respecting the aims of conservation within the Local Authority's own activities and development projects; and
 - g. through monitoring change and developments assess how best to retain the special character of conservation areas for the future.
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9 Maps



Picture 9.1 Little Aston Conservation Area Map

Road Name	Properties
Aldridge Road (north side)	Numbers 4, 6 and 8
Aldridge Road (south side)	Little Aston Hall
Beech Gate (both sides)	All properties
Beechwood Croft (both sides)	All properties
Burnett Road (north side)	Number 30
Cherrywood Way (both sides)	All properties
Endwood Drive (both sides)	All properties
Forge Lane (east side)	Numbers 2,4 and 6
Hardwick Road (north side)	Hardwick Lodge and numbers 2-36
Hardwick Road (south side)	Numbers 5-37 (odd inclusive)
Hornton Close (south side)	Numbers 1,3 and 5
Jervis Park (both sides)	All properties
Keepers Road (both sides)	All properties
Lakeside (south side)	Numbers 1-12 and 15-20 inclusive
Leslie Road (east side)	Numbers 1,3 and 5
Little Aston Park Road (west side)	Numbers 2 and 4, Silverwood, Silver Korner, Cherry Trees, Lynwood and Priors
Longacres (both Sides)	All properties
Longfield Drive (west side)	Numbers 1,3 and 5
Newick Avenue (west side)	Numbers 1,3 and 5
Newick Avenue (east side)	Numbers 2,4,6 and 8
Park Drive (both sides)	All properties
Roman Grange (both sides)	All properties
Roman Lane (south side)	Number 1
Roman Road (both sides)	All properties
Rosemary Drive (both sides)	All properties
Rosemary Hill Road (west side)	Hornton Manor, The Lodge, Hornton Manor, Numbers 15-79 (odd inclusive) and 89
Rosewood Close (both sides)	All properties
Selwyn Walk (both sides)	All properties

Road Name	Properties
Squirrel Walk (both sides)	All properties
Stonehouse Drive (west side)	Number 1
Talbot Avenue (both sides)	All properties
Thornhill Road (west side)	Streetly Methodist Church, numbers 6,8 and 8a
Walsall Road (north side)	Number 1
Walsall Road (east side)	Numbers 47-77 (odd inclusive), 107 and 113-119 (odd inclusive)
Walsall Road (west side)	Numbers 76, 90-98 (even inclusive), 106, 108, 114
Wayside Drive (both sides)	All properties
Woodside Drive (both sides)	All properties

Table 9.1 Little Aston Conservation Area-schedule of properties