

## **AREA OF SPECIAL TOWNSCAPE CHARACTER**

### **Guidance for New Development at Thornhill Road/ Middleton Road/ Foley Road East, Streetly**

#### **Introduction**

Appeal decisions from the Planning Inspectorate have stated that there is only a limited capacity for the accommodation of apartment developments in this part of Streetly without adversely affecting the overall character of the wider area. In response to this advice, Walsall MBC has considered appropriate mechanisms for protecting the character and appearance of the area bounded by Thornhill Road, Middleton Road and Foley Road East, Streetly, the extent of which is indicated on the attached plan.

It is therefore proposed to create an 'area of special townscape character' and put forward policies specific to this area that will address issues of most concern, in order to manage change more effectively. It is intended that these new policies will provide local interpretation of the relevant policies and statements contained within the Council's Unitary development Plan Review. In particular, they relate to the Borough-wide context set by Policy ENV34: Design and Development Proposals.

#### **Historical Description**

Settlement growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century took a linear form along Thornhill Road and Foley Road East, defining the edge of Sutton Park and providing ribbon development on the direct route towards Walsall town centre, respectively. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Middleton Road was introduced, apparently as a 'planned' residential street. This initial expansion of development, which took place around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/ 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, undoubtedly relied upon the establishment and growth of the railway, providing houses to appeal to the 'professional', upper-middle classes. It is a good example of early suburban living.

The original properties along Middleton Road go a long way to reflect the established architectural styles displayed on Thornhill Road and Foley Road East. However, more recent development, such as Redland Way and Astor Road, has 'filled in' the street pattern and the introduction of flatted development at Links View and Oakdale has further eroded the 'turn of the century' residential feel.

## **Proposed Policies for the Area of Special Townscape Character**

### **Boundary treatment**

The appearance and character of the area is greatly influenced by the choice of boundary treatment used to define front gardens. There are a variety of treatments used for front and other 'public' boundaries in the area. No one type is completely dominant, although hedges are a characteristic feature. There are also low walls, composed of a variety of materials, as well as high fences where rear and side boundaries abut the roadway. 'Open plan' frontages are the exception rather than the rule, as some form of definable boundary treatment to individual properties is preferred.

The Council wishes to accommodate residents' desires to provide or maintain security and privacy. Existing hedge planting should normally be retained, and new boundary planting is encouraged. Where additional security is necessary, plain railings may be used in combination with planting. Walls should be kept to a minimum, in terms of both height and extent. Where walls are introduced, they shall be of a maximum of 1 metre in height, but generally lower, be constructed of brick and designed in combination with adjacent planting. Railings may also be considered in certain, vulnerable circumstances.

### **Trees and planting**

Trees form a valuable and integral component of the established townscape character. With the exception of Middleton Road, many of these trees are planted in the rear gardens of private properties. The majority are 'ornamental' varieties, including copper beech, Norway maple, conifers and evergreens. Few of the native trees, such as oak and birch, originally found in this area of Streetly, remain. Whilst back gardens contain many trees, they can be largely hidden from public view by the many substantial properties. It is the front garden trees, particularly where they overhang the highway, which are the most prominent. As might be expected in an established residential area, many of the trees are now mature and prominent features.

A number of the private trees are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), designated in the past in response to individual planning proposals and perceived threats. The preference is for existing trees to be retained and the Council will look carefully at proposals where trees are to be removed. The Council will consider the option of further TPOs, where appropriate, in accordance with nationally defined criteria, and will usually require replacement planting for visually significant trees that are removed to allow development.

By contrast, Middleton Road possesses an almost continuous *avenue* of trees, with a row on either side of the street. They are mainly lime trees, together with the occasional sycamore, and in places their canopies meet over the roadway. As a result, trees dominate the streetscene of Middleton Road for much of its length.

The trees along Middleton Road are a strong visual feature but all are of aging stock. The Council will seek to retain, manage and replant these in conjunction with maintaining the highway pavement. Retaining existing street trees in a safe condition will remain a high Council priority.

Planting, paving and other hard surfacing in front gardens should be integrated with their boundary treatments (above). In order to maintain the character of the area, planting should be the dominant visual element of any proposal, and should incorporate tree, shrub and herbaceous species, the exact plants being determined by individual site conditions and immediate surroundings.

### **Building : plot ratio**

The area is characterised by substantial detached and semi-detached residential properties. The majority are set within generous grounds, typified by wide plots and, by current standards, long rear gardens. For houses of this size and status, few of the early homes have separate coach houses or associated out buildings (reinforcing the perceived reliance on walking to the local railway station for transport). Some properties appear to have had motor garages added at a later date.

Infill development should reflect the density of the existing development along the particular street or near area of townscape within which the proposed development site lies. As an absolute maximum, the 'footprint', or ground area, of a new building or buildings should not exceed 25% of the total area of the plot within which it is to be set. This figure can exclude hard surfaces normally associated with residential development, such as driveways, turning areas and patios, providing the type and extent of boundary treatments and landscape planting is acceptable. All details of infill development must be justified through a design statement, to accompany any planning application.

### **Building design**

For the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the style of the houses along Thornhill Road and Foley Road East would have been quite different and contemporary, displaying several of the traits of *Domestic Revival* architecture and strong design associations with the *Arts and Crafts* movement. The emphasis was on high quality 'workmanship', whereby the art and craft are an integral part of the structure and design, rather than 'add on' decoration.

The *mass* of a building is its overall, three-dimensional volume. The majority of the dwellings in this area are 2 storey and, although there are occasional 1 and 2½ storey buildings, these tend to read, visually, as 2 storey. For instance, there are a couple of early bungalows that possess a certain 'colonial' styling, with porches and verandas. The height of a new building should respect the heights of the existing buildings. Likewise, the bulk should not greatly exceed or be significantly less than that of adjoining dwellings. The roofscape is articulated by chimney stacks, with the ridge of the majority of roofs running parallel to the street, although – again – there are occasional gable features, which act as points of punctuation. On a new building, such features should be used to break the silhouette.

The *scale* of a building should take into account the dimensions of a building relative to other, neighbouring buildings. Thus, the scale of a building is measurable and a matter of fact. The facades of the dwellings are expressed with projections, such as bay windows and occasional balconies, as well as porches or door entrances. Furthermore, the existing buildings in this area are inherently domestic, relating to the dimensions of a human being and, consequently, are of 'human scale'.

Closely related to this is the notion of *proportion*. There should be visual comfort between one part of the building and another, and between any one part of the building and the whole, overall design. Therefore, proportion is also measurable and includes the solid to void ratio; that is, the way in which the window openings punctuate the walls of the dwellings.

### **Building materials**

The general, architectural designs provide brick dwellings that incorporate terracotta mouldings, decorative arches and lintels, white-painted rough-finished render and mock half-timbering, as well as rather fanciful, individual features such as corner door entrances, buttressed walls, bay windows and first floor balconies. The vast majority of roof coverings are plain clay tile, although some slate roofs are notable. The original windows have wooden and/ or metal frames, often with leaded subdivisions and coloured glass contained within the transom lights.

It would be wrong to suggest that new buildings should merely copy existing designs, whose value is derived from their individuality. However, proposals should complement and provide a contemporary reflection of these elements.

### **Extensions to existing dwellings**

Additions to dwellings should respect and be subservient to the mass of the original building. The scale of the extension should complement that of the existing property.

The Council is in the process of adopting supplementary planning guidance entitled 'Residential Development Design Guide', which should be consulted before formulating proposals for extending a dwelling.

### **Conclusion**

These guidelines are not intended to rigidly dictate future development, but can be used as a 'toolkit' to stimulate good quality, modern design solutions. They certainly should not be used as a 'set of rules', to be ticked off in an attempt to ensure that a planning application gains approval.

Just as when this area of townscape was first developed, the social implications of new housing design must be addressed. For this to be responsive, it must take cues from these special surroundings.