leigh conservation area appraisal

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1. INTRODUCTION

Conservation areas are ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’, (Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). They were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967.

Designation of a conservation area extends planning controls over certain types of development, principally the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees. Local authorities will also formulate policies in their local plans or local development frameworks to preserve the character of their conservation areas. However, designation does not prevent any change within conservation areas, and they will be subject to many different pressures (good and bad) that will affect their character and appearance.

Government Planning Policy Guidance 15, Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG 15), emphasises that the character of Conservation Areas derives not simply from the quality of individual buildings, but also depends on ‘the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular “mix” of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of space between buildings’ (para. 4.2). Thus it is ordinary buildings, and the spaces between them, which it is important to preserve and enhance if conservation areas are to retain their special character.

Local authorities have a duty to designate conservation areas, to formulate policies for their preservation and enhancement. They are advised to review each conservation area from time to time, to ensure that it has an up-to-date character appraisal which sets out its special architectural or historic interest and that its boundaries are appropriate. The character appraisal will be the basis for the management of the area, including development control and the preparation of enhancement proposals. Management proposals for the conservation area should be published in conjunction with the character appraisal.

All the Borough’s conservation areas are being reviewed in order to produce up-to-date character appraisals and management proposals in accordance with national guidance. Other areas which might be suitable for designation are also being assessed. In each case the character appraisal will:

- identify the area’s special interest
- review existing conservation area boundaries
- assist preparation of the Local Development Framework and form part of its evidence base
- provide a basis for implementing policies, making informed development control decisions and preparing management proposals for the area.

The character appraisal will lead to the management proposals which will:

- assess the need for enhancements to public spaces, highways and private property
- review the need for Article 4 Directions to limit permitted development rights
- assess buildings at risk
- assess the need for enforcement action
- establish a programme and procedures for implementing and monitoring proposals.
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council commissioned Essex County Council to prepare this conservation area appraisal and review in February 2008. The research and fieldwork were carried out in October and November 2008.
2. LOCATION AND CONTEXT

2.1 Topography and Landscape

There were two original centres to the settlement at Leigh, the fishing village by the sea and marsh at the foot of the cliff, and the manorial establishment on the cliff top represented by St. Clement’s church and the manor house at Leigh Hall. In the latter area there were also smaller farms and woodland. This was the situation by the time of Domesday Book (1086) and it remained so until the 19th century.

From the middle of that century there were rapid and complex topographical changes as the railway arrived, the road layout was altered and the population expanded. The Leigh Conservation Area encompasses the hillside directly above the fishing village, and what might be termed the ecclesiastical part of the settlement, the area around the church and former rectory (now the library). The manor house, Leigh Hall (now demolished), stood to the east set back from what is now Broadway in the Leigh Cliff Conservation Area.

![View from the top of Hadleigh Road looking out to the estuary](image)

The defining feature of this Conservation Area is the cliff, which rises steeply about 25m above the level of New Road. Consisting of London Clay, it is unstable and inclined to slumping, leading to structural instability in some buildings. Steep residential roads wind down it. Yet steeper paths, in part flights of steps reminiscent of European hill towns, climb up it. The more precipitous parts of it are undeveloped and are in use as public gardens. Because it has not lent itself naturally to regular development, the road layout is intricate and unpredictable. There are houses in infill situations that are almost completely landlocked with no obvious access to them. The cliff means too that all south facing views take in the wonderful expanse of the estuary, alternately sea and mudflats with the changing tides. Balconies have been constructed to exploit this natural advantage, which has been one of the principal ingredients of the success of Leigh as a residential location. To the north, on the more level ground at the top of the cliff, there has been more recent suburban development on a more regular street plan, but this lies outside the Conservation Area.
2.2 Urban Setting

Leigh’s rapid growth has led to considerable changes to the road layout and the loss of many of its older buildings. The town owes its expansion largely to the arrival of the railway in 1854 which had the unfortunate effect of severing the old town from the cliff and the northern part of the parish, and destroying a number of buildings on the north side of the High Street. (New Road was formed to provide access on the north side of the railway line; originally it was little more than a back lane, terminating to the west by Billet Lane). The latter was one of several footpaths up the cliff. The others were blocked when the rectory was built in 1838, when Church Hill was realigned to the east to its present position to provide more direct access to the church. Rectory Grove was laid out to the north of the rectory in compensation for an east-west lane to the south of it which was incorporated into its grounds.

By 1922, Leigh Park Road had been constructed, curving along and down the hillside to join New Road by the Ship Hotel. In 1927, Leigh House, a substantial property to the west of the church, was demolished, and Broadway West was created running through its gardens and the site of the outbuildings and stables to the north of the rectory which now became the library. In the 1960s, New Road was extended westwards to join up with Leigh Station and Belton Way.

The Second World War brought bomb damage, with part of New Road in particular being affected. Belton Bridge over the railway was built in the 1950s. A plan for a seafront road from Chalkwell to Benfleet, which had long been under consideration was finally dropped in 1972, but a cycle route is being created as part of the Sustrans programme.
There are generous open spaces in the Area, including those to the west of Billet Lane, around the library and Leigh house, north of Leigh Park road, north of The Terrace and around The Gardens. These combine with the views of the estuary to create a feeling of open space despite the built up urban nature of much of the Conservation Area.

2.3 Character Statement

Leigh has been a small fishing village from earliest times, although there is little evidence of this now within Leigh Conservation Area, as this activity became concentrated within the Old Town after the arrival of the railway. The cliff, and the way the settlement has accommodated itself to it, with winding roads and a network of steep paths, giving impressive seaward views, is the defining feature of the Leigh Conservation Area. Residential development spread along the cliff side mainly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the Conservation Area is now primarily residential. In contrast, the medieval church on the hilltop is a rather separate focal point located at a major road junction where there are shopping parades along Broadway and Broadway West, streets that superseded the High Street in the Old Town as Leigh’s main shopping area.
3. PLANNING FRAMEWORK

3.1 National Policies and Guidance


3.2 Local Planning Policies and Guidance

Local policy and guidance is to be found in the Southend-on-Sea Borough Local Plan (1994), and the series of conservation leaflets Conservation: A Residents’ Guide, (2000).

The Southend-on-Sea Local Development Framework (LDF) is under preparation and will gradually supersede the Replacement Structure Plan and the Local Plan. The Core Strategy (adopted December 2007) is a Development Plan Document (DPD) that forms part of the LDF and sets out the objectives and strategy for the Borough’s development and key policies against which planning policies will be assessed. In addition to the Core Strategy the LDF will include a number of other DPDs of particular relevance to the Conservation Area, planned for adoption in the near future. These will include:

8. Development Management DPD and Proposals Map
9. Seafront Area Action Plan and Proposals Map
10. Southend Central Area Action Plan and Proposals Map
11. Criteria-Based Policies and Site Allocations.

The LDF will also include Supplementary Planning Documents:

13. Planning Obligations Guide SPD
14.

Some saved policies in the Local Plan remain relevant for the time being. These include a comprehensive set of policies to protect and enhance the historic character and townscape of the Borough (Policies (C1-C20).

Policy C4 (Conservation Areas) sets out the principles for development in conservation areas to ensure it is sympathetic and to a high standard of design as follows.

**Policy C4 - Conservation Areas**

All buildings, open spaces, gardens, trees, views from public places and other aspects of the environment which contribute to the character of Conservation Areas will be protected and enhanced. Proposals for demolition and development will normally be permitted only where they would not be detrimental to the local scene and the character of the area. All development affecting Conservation Areas should meet the following requirements:

(i) The position and design of new buildings should respect the general pattern of development of the area, and should preserve or enhance as appropriate its townscape character.

(ii) The mass of extensions and new buildings should be in scale and harmony with the existing and neighbouring buildings and with the area as a whole.
The proportions, detailing and materials of extensions, alterations and new buildings should be appropriate to the area and sympathetic to the existing and neighbouring buildings. All development in Conservation Areas will be expected to comply with the Council’s Design and Townscape Guide.

The Council will prepare enhancement schemes for Conservation Areas as resources permit.

To this end, the Borough Council carries out Conservation Area character appraisals to clearly assess and define their character, allowing informed planning decisions and identification of what should be preserved and enhanced. Policies C2 and C3 are concerned with the preservation of the character, historic interest and setting of historic buildings. The Borough supplements the statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest by a local list of buildings of local or historic interest worthy of preservation.

3.3 Designations

Leigh is currently one of fourteen Conservation Areas in the Borough of Southend-on-Sea.

There are six buildings within the Conservation Area on the statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, namely Leigh Library, St Clement’s Church, 28 Leigh Hill, Old Bank House (42 Leigh Hill), Prospect House (85 Leigh Hill) and Herschell House (formerly Ivy Cottage 87 Leigh Hill). These are all grade II listed.

Five additional individual buildings and three terraces are included on the Borough’s Local List. These are: Billet Cottage, Billet Lane; 60-62, 82 and 98-108 Leigh Hill; 1-7 Norman Place; 1-8 Pleasant Terrace; Castle Cottage and the Old School House, Church Hill. The Platelayers Hut, adjacent to 13 The Gardens, Leigh Hill was just outside of the Conservation Area but has now been demolished.

A large part, but not all, of the Conservation Area is covered by an Article 4 Direction, which withdraws certain permitted development rights from residents. The Direction covers the following:

65-77 (odd) Leigh Hill only:
   Constructing an access to the Highway
   Hardstandings for vehicles

All other properties:

Dwellinghouses:
   The alteration of any window
   The rendering of brickwork of any dwellinghouse (other forms of cladding already need planning permission).
   Re-roofing with different materials
   Hardstandings for vehicles
   (Similar alterations to other non-residential properties already need planning permission from the council).

All Buildings
   The painting over of facing brickwork on any part of a building.
Several trees in the Conservation Area are subject to Tree Preservation Orders including two blanket orders covering the grounds of 33 Hadleigh Road and the area directly to the north of The Terrace. Individual Tree Preservation Orders are mapped on the Designation Map below.
4. HISTORIC CONTEXT

4.1 Archaeological Interest

There are no known archaeological sites in the Conservation Area, but there are a number of finds recorded in the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER) which indicate Roman occupation above the cliff:

- Nine Roman coins found in the garden of Hillside House, Leigh Hill (EHER 9615).
- A copper coin of Constantine II found in the Rectory garden (EHER 9618).
- Coin of Valentinian found in Broadway in 1962 (EHER 9801).
- Coin of Magnentius found in 1936 (EHER 9802).
- Roman coins (EHER 17607).
- Roman pottery found in St. Clement’s churchyard (EHER 17974).
- Roman rubbish tips found at junction of Sea Reach and Leigh Hill.
- Roman arches and artefacts found to east of 60-62 Leigh Hill. Roman funeral urns and cellars beneath rear bakery extension. Arches now below road.

4.2 First Settlement

Leigh is first recorded in Domesday Book (1086), where it is entered as a manor with the name Legra. Its principal inhabitants are listed as two villeins and two smallholders, together with five smallholders “above the water who do not hold land”. Domesday also records pasture for 100 sheep. Its importance as a place for trade is attested by references to Godfrey the Merchant, resident there in 1206, and to the death of a ‘merchant stranger’ killed there in 1255.1

By the 16th century Leigh port was becoming a place of some significance as “the principal port between Gravesend and Harwich and … the landing place for merchandise destined for south-east Essex”2 (Further details on the history and significance of Leigh as a port and fishing village can be found in the Leigh Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal.)

The Domesday entry implies that there were already two parts to the manor, the port by the sea, and the church, manor and small farms at the top of the cliff. This is in effect how Leigh is represented on the Chapman and André Essex map of 1777, reflecting a situation which had probably changed little in 700 years. The old town is clustered along the High Street, by the sea; Leigh Hill winds up the cliff from it to the church, from which roads lead east to the manor at Leigh Hall and north to the London Road. The point at which these two worlds met was the bottom of Leigh Hill at what was called the market place. Although Leigh had no recorded market, the widening in the road by The Ship is typical of the imprint left by a former marketplace.

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1 The historical summary presented here derives from Bride 1994, upon whom later historians such as Williams (2002) are heavily dependent.
2 Bride, 1994, p6
Whilst the port flourished in the late Middle Ages and the 16th and 17th centuries, the agricultural part of the parish would have been more static, linked to a different economic cycle. By the end of the 16th century, much of the woodland in the north of the parish had probably been cleared. The manor house is said to have been rebuilt by Richard Lord Rich in 1561. Photographs of it before it was demolished in 1907 show it to have been a substantial building with prominent gables which were a fashionable feature of Tudor architecture. Its loss is to be regretted. Lack of space in the High Street led to more successful merchant and seafaring families building houses up Billet Lane and Leigh Hill, or in the vicinity of the church. Any expansion would have been checked as the port silted up and decayed in the 18th century, reducing 'a once flourished town to a small ruinous village', as Wesley put it in 1748. There would have been a contrast between the impoverished cottages along the High Street and the more prosperous houses and farms in the higher part of the parish.

**St. Clements Church**

The most prominent historic building in the Conservation Area is St Clements church which dates from the mid 15th century with Tudor and Victorian additions, although the earliest recorded Rector for Leigh is Andrew, in 1248 which suggests and earlier church in Leigh than the present building although no physical evidence has survived. The Domesday Book of 1086 records Leigh (‘Legra’) as a small fishing hamlet at the foot of the hill slope, but no church. So Leigh’s first church may have originated between these dates.

As Leigh began to expand at the end of the 19th Century the church was enlarged. First the east end of the Chancel was extended in 1872, then the south aisle was built in 1897 and the Lady Chapel added in 1913.

Many of its features and churchyard monuments demonstrate St. Clement’s close connection with the local fishing community which it served for well over 500 years and numerous memorials within the building speak of this heritage. It was also closely associated with the formation of Trinity House when the two Guilds of Pilots at Deptford and Leigh were combined. A brass table in the Resurrection Chapel lists many past members of the Guild, including naval notaries from the Haddock, Salmon, Bundock and Goodlad families of Leigh. The Church tower is also documented as a navigational reference point for shipping in the estuary.

Outside in the Graveyard the ‘Cutlass Stone’ altar tomb is inscribed to the memory
of Mary Ellis who died in 1609 at the reputed age of 119! The top of the tomb is
deeply worn, it is said, by members of press gangs who sharpened their cutlasses
upon it. The graveyard also includes a Dunkirk memorial which commemorates the
involvement of the fishermen of Leigh who risked, and in a number of instances,
sacrificed their lives in the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940.

4.3 Development in Modern Times

The 19th century brought a return of prosperity, in part the result of the changing
fortunes of the fishing industry, and in part because of the railway. The Rector and
the Lady of the Manor (Lady Olivia Sparrow) initiated improvements to the town
and alterations to its layout. The National School on Church Hill was built in 1847.
The church was enlarged and a Methodist church built. By the end of the century,
Leigh was becoming popular as a resort and the settlement began to expand. The
population, 570 in 1801, was 2667 by 1901. Housing grew up along Broadway,
originally a lane from the church to the manor.

In 1897, Leigh became an Urban District, only to be absorbed into Southend in
1913. To the north, developers acquired land from farmers affected by the
agricultural depression and houses were built on a grid plan. The Grand Hotel was
built in 1899, and in 1900 six, acres of land were acquired to create Cliff Gardens.
The newer parts of the town were exclusively residential with the result that Leigh
became a commuter town, serviced by the construction in 1934 of the existing
station to the west of the original one. But it has also developed its own flourishing
retail centre along Broadway, the western end of which lies within this Conservation
Area.

4.4 Cartographic Evidence

The unusual development of the Conservation Area is clear from looking at
evidence from old maps. Many roads simply did not exist at the time of the first
edition Ordnance Survey map of Leigh published in 1875, and several roads shown
in that map have now disappeared.
The thoroughfares that appear on all maps are the eastern part of New Road, Billet Lane, Leigh Hill, formerly known as Horse Hill and before that Turnpike Hill, Church Hill and Broadway, known at the time as Leigh Hall Road. New Road was a small lane that ended at the Methodist Chapel, a long way from being the busy fast road it is now.

Hadleigh Road had appeared by the second edition map of 1897, as had a tiny branch from it, which eventually formed the northern end of Leigh Park Road, although the new road was still quite sparsely occupied. The village had become considerably more built up in the twenty-two years since the last map, with Norman Field replaced by three terraces: Norman Terrace, Norman Place and Pleasant Terrace. In addition the branch of Leigh Hill leading up to the east side of the Church had gained houses along its eastern side, including the attractive group with covered first floor balconies at nos 96-106 Leigh Hill.
By the third edition map in 1922 Leigh Park Road had appeared and Leigh Hall Road was now known as Broadway. Again much development had occurred in the intervening years. Apart from the houses lining the north side of Leigh Park Road, Uttons Avenue had appeared and most of Hadleigh road was lined with housing. Broadway had, by this time, acquired its present character and was lined with shops. However Broadway West did not appear until the 1939 map, after the demolition of Leigh House.
Figure 7: Fourth edition Ordnance Survey map, 1939
5. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

5.1 Character of townscape

The railway divides the old town from the Leigh Conservation Area, a boundary followed by New Road, a busy through route in which traffic is the dominant feature. Residential development spreads up the cliff, the roads either making a direct ascent at right angles to the slope or winding up it in an attempt to reduce the gradient. The difficulty of imposing a regular street plan on the hillside has led to it being the last part of the Conservation Area to be built up, leaving undeveloped areas and large garden plots, some of which have been gradually infilled in more recent times and some of which remain, providing the Area with a generous amount of open space.

With the exception of Broadway, the Conservation Area is predominantly residential, the streets presenting terraces of housing or else houses tightly grouped together. Broadway was originally a residential road, but rapidly assumed a retail aspect in the early 20th century, and is now a busy shopping high street. The same is true of the south end of Elm Road. The church stands at a junction where different uses and character zones collide. The Library (once The Rectory) and the former National School (now the Old Rectory) are vestiges of a lost age, they and the nearby buildings standing in wide grounds which reflect the layout of more spacious times, as well as the steepness of the cliff. Broadway West is later still, built after 1928, its north side a shopping parade from the first, in contrast to the widely spaced buildings on its south side. The only pubs are The Ship and The Carlton, both modern buildings on historic sites. Offices and business premises are few. Food outlets, cafes and bars have, as elsewhere, proliferated in recent years, with shops being changed to this use.

Figure 8: Uses of Buildings in the Conservation Area
Most of the Conservation Area assumed its present appearance in a short period of time, c.1850-1930. The older properties are to be found on New Road and Leigh Hill, and few of them pre-date the 19th century. This rapid development has given it, or its character zones, a general uniformity of appearance. If there is no lack of variety, in part attributable to the way buildings have been altered in more recent times, the buildings in individual streets are generally similar in style, closely built up in terraces along the frontages, and of two storeys, rarely higher. This has created streetscapes with a regular rhythm of well detailed and well articulated facades. With the exception of Broadway, they are suburban in character, yet the irregular street pattern and presence of alleyways and unexpected pockets of land and groups of houses avoid the blandness that so often detracts from suburban development. Late 20th-century housing, such as Laurel Close, Leigh Hill Close and Sea Reach, tend to have followed this pattern and are restrained, and consequently have not had a disruptive effect on the Conservation Area. The exception is the Sans Souci block of flats in Hadleigh and Leigh Park Roads. Apart from its design, which is boxy and lacking in any subtlety, its scale, at four storeys, is excessive and damaging when seen from lower down Hadleigh Road. Leigh Park Court is equally boxy and unattractive, although its location reduces its impact. Similar in their impact are St. Clement’s Court and St. Clement’s Court East, which although outside the Conservation Area loom over it. The former, traditionally built and smaller in terms of height and footprint, is more readily assimilated than the latter which is twelve storeys high and overshadows the grade II listed Library, having a detrimental effect on the appearance of the Conservation Area.

As well as the views seaward which are always uplifting, good views abound in the Conservation Area. The church and the evergreen trees in the graveyard provide relief to the busy traffic dominated Broadway and Broadway West. Views up the roads flanked with terraces of late Victorian houses are invariably good. The same is true of the footpaths, though the handrails are of poor quality and often in poor
condition, and the road markings at the bottom of Church Hill are an eyesore. The western approach to the Conservation Area is attractive, with the green space of the hillside and views of the church tower and Creek Cottage. However, New Road suffers from being the neighbour of the railway, having a poor chain link fence along its south side, and also from its function as a busy through route. It resembles a motorway more than a residential road. At the east end of New Road, the street scene is marred by the derelict Bell Hotel and adjacent buildings. Their condition is quite out of character with the rest of the Conservation Area, for standards of maintenance are generally high and it is clear that residents take a pride in their houses and the place where they live.

Gardens too are usually well presented. Where houses are built along the slope, they often have long gardens terraced down the hill, which because of their prominence have a significant impact on the appearance of the Conservation Area. Laurel Close, for instance, a post-War housing development, is greatly enhanced by its front gardens. Relatively few front gardens have been paved over for car parking, reflecting the success of the Article 4 Direction restricting permitted development rights. Boundary treatments are usually walls, often white painted, and hedges. Old photographs of Leigh show that picket fences were once popular although few remain. In recent years, there has been a trend to put up railings in front gardens; these have usually been of good quality and are now something of a feature in parts of the Area. Similarly, driveways have often been paved with granite sets, continuing the use of a traditional material which is to be found in the Old Town.
5.2 Age of buildings

Few pre-17th century buildings survive in the Area, apart from Billet Cottage and the medieval church, with its 15th century tower. There are a few mid to late 18th century buildings, such as the building which housed Leigh’s first bank at 42 Leigh Hill, 85 Leigh Hill, the home of Leigh’s surgeon in the 18th century, and 28 Leigh hill, which is a traditional fisherman’s house of the time.

The 19th century saw an explosion in building, as many old farms were built over with houses. The arrival of the railway prompted more construction as the loss of housing in its path encouraged house building further up the hill and also the reconstruction of buildings, such as the Wesleyan chapel in 1879, which was demolished to make space for the tracks.

The Conservation Area did not take its eventual form until into the 20th century, when Leigh Park Road and Broadway West were constructed. The influence of the Arts and Crafts movement is evident on many of these later buildings, for example on The Terrace, on some of the large detached properties at the top of Hadleigh Road, and on the buildings that line Leigh Park Road.

Development after 1939 has not altered the form of the Area greatly apart from Laurel Close, which has added a new network of streets and paths going up the hill east of Billet Lane. Most infill has closed gaps relatively unobtrusively, for example the seaside inspired Leigh Hill Close, and Sea Reach.

5.3 Architecture and materials

The 19th-century housing ranges from terraces of cottages to more substantial villas, again terraced or semi-detached pairs or occasionally detached, but of whatever type, the architectural language is much the same. Roofs are low
pitched, slate covered, and windows are sliding sashes, symmetrically arranged. Featheredged weatherboard was very common in Leigh as a cladding on late timber frames, but is a feature of relatively few buildings today, notably the very picturesque Prospect Villas and the house opposite (nos 60-62) in Leigh Hill, as well as Norman Place and Pleasant Terrace off Church Hill.

Timber came to be superseded by yellow stock brick, the most characteristic building material of south-east Essex. These were cheap bricks, but their colour, and the variety of texture and colouring in their surface, makes them very attractive. They have the virtue of being robust enough to withstand careful cleaning and the potentially damaging repointing with cement (as opposed to the original lime) mortar to which they have invariably been subjected. More expensive than stocks, red bricks were used for detailing and facades. In the 20th century, they gradually superseded the stocks which were only made in limited quantities after the Second World War. St. Clements Court is a late example of their use on a large scale. Bay windows, usually single storey, are typical of late Victorian houses. These are usually stuccoed, but may also be of red brick. They and indeed the entire house have often been painted, or rendered and painted. Although the covering of good brickwork with render or paint is always to be regretted, in this seaside location it often seems appropriate. There are places in the Conservation Area which are characterised by white painted walls and black joinery.
Sash windows have large panes, sometimes divided by a single vertical glazing bar. The upper sashes have ‘horns’, a feature to be found from c.1875. From about 1900, the upper sashes were often divided into small panes. These can be seen in the houses on the north-east side of Leigh Park Road, where some also have stained glass, and in nos. 90-96 Leigh Hill.

From about the same time, false half-timbering, reflecting the influence of Arts and Crafts architecture, became fashionable, typically being used in gables which became a prominent feature of house design. Not an accurate reflection of medieval Essex timber-framing, it is nevertheless picturesque, though unfortunately often not well preserved today. Terraced houses in Hadleigh Road have timber-framed gables, but the best examples of this style of architecture are the detached houses on the north-east side of Hadleigh Road and at the top of the same road by Billet Lane.
Arts and Crafts influenced houses along Leigh Park road.

Roofs also changed, the low Victorian ones being replaced by ones of steeper pitch, covered with machine-made tiles. The houses on the north-east side of Hadleigh Road had roofs made with a type of interlocking tile, probably imported from northern Europe. These houses were also provided with wooden balconies, which are very much a feature of Leigh and Southend in general. Here the balconies were integral to the design of the houses, as were the cast iron ones at nos 98-108 Leigh Hill, but such is the desire to enjoy the sea view that many houses have had balconies added to them, not always successfully in terms of their design.

As Broadway was transformed from a residential to a retail street, so it acquired buildings of civic character reflecting its commercial aspirations. Within the Conservation Area, Clements Arcade and nos 21-23a Broadway combine fine red brick with classical detailing in stone. Barclays Bank has a completely stone façade, but the flank wall betrays a hierarchy of materials, being of red brick and then later extended to the rear in stock brick. The stone in these buildings is an oolitic limestone, probably Bath, in contrast with the Kentish Ragstone in St. Clements church and the graveyard walls, this being the traditional building stone of south Essex from Roman times through to the 19th century.

Some of the shops in Broadway are in origin houses which have been adapted by having a shop front built out in front of them at the ground floor, a typical feature of old high streets. Traditionally the shops had relatively narrow fascias set at a slight angle with consoles at their ends. Many of these are now disguised by modern signs which are excessively large and of inappropriate materials. At the corner of Elm Road and Broadway West, there is a block of shops in the Modern Movement style, flat roofed with white painted render and large metal windows dating from the 1930s. Modern Movement buildings are relatively common in Southend, but these are is the only ones in the Conservation Area.

The late 20th century has not really left its mark on the Conservation Area, except for misguided improvements to the housing stock in the form of the replacement of slates with concrete tiles, and the painting and rendering of brickwork. There has
been some loss of traditional sash windows, but there are not many uPVC windows, again reflecting the success of the Article 4 Direction. New building since the Second World War comprises a few infill detached houses, the Sea Reach development replacing an early 20th-century house, two blocks of flats in Leigh Park Road, neither very successful, and the houses in Laurel Close. The latter, forming three parallel terraces, are a large development with a uniform style and coherent layout which works well, but like other parts of the Conservation Area, they are a rather private space and cannot be seen from the main through roads.

Attractive planting on Laurel Close

5.4 Character and Interrelationship of spaces

Reflecting its largely residential character, much of the Conservation Area comprises quiet roads, their frontages tightly built up with houses. Although cars are parked along most of the streets, traffic generally does not intrude as they do not function as through routes, except for Broadway, New Road and the lower end of Leigh Hill. Since the latter are at the edge of the Conservation Area, there is generally good separation between the residential areas and the busier streets. Similarly, shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants are to be found in Broadway, and only rarely in the residential areas on the hillside.

The Conservation Area is well provided with green space, both large private gardens and the public ones at the Library, Cliff Gardens and the churchyard. Again, these tend to be discrete areas, except in Broadway where the churchyard interrupts the frontage and along Broadway West where Leigh House and the two former vicarages are widely spaced detached buildings surrounded by the public gardens.

The houses built along the hillside, only or mainly accessed from footpaths, are a distinctive feature of the Conservation Area. These are secluded private spaces, the
discovery of which comes as a surprise. Views into such areas are generally good, as are those towards the sea. The only bad views are in areas where traffic dominates, or where a combination of parked cars, bad road markings and neglected public realm adversely affect the street scene.

The sloping nature of the Conservation Area has resulted in a rather erratic distribution of buildings, particularly in the steepest areas. This has resulted in some open spaces that seem to exist more by accident than design. To the west of Billet lane is a large open area of scrubland, designated a local nature reserve. It is mostly beyond the Area’s boundary but is influential on its character. This sprawls up the hillside and is covered with patches of elm scrub, saplings which are killed by disease long before maturity. There are several informal desire paths across it, but it is principally an area given over to wildlife.

Between Leigh Park Road and Broadway West is an area of gardens popular with dog walkers. This area is laid to gardens with paths and many mature trees. The paths lead to entrances on Leigh Park Road, Broadway West and Church Hill, opposite St Clements Church. The churchyard provides an additional area of open space that acts as an extension to the gardens.

At the south-eastern corner tip of the Conservation Area are Cliff Gardens which run above the railway track to the south of Leigh Hill and then, to the east, beyond the Conservation Area boundary below Cliff Parade. The Area boundary seems to have been drawn rather arbitrarily in a rough curve through these gardens.

Most other open space in the Area is taken up by private gardens, many of which are unusually large for an urban location. These large gardens are an important characteristic of the parts of the Conservation Area where they exist and contrast sharply with the very tight areas of backland development such as Ray Cottages and 11a and 11b New Road. Because of this where they do exist the large gardens
should be retained and future over-development resisted, to preserve the various contrasting character zones. The various character zones are described and mapped below in section 5.4.

Several small vacant plots exist in the Area, generally used for car parking or laid to grass. In most cases the space created is an asset to the area and to infill them would not be beneficial.

Backland areas are almost non-existent, confined to the former stable yard of The Carlton, the little arcade at Clements Court, and the derelict land to the south of the dilapidated Bell Hotel. Both of the former are attractive spaces, though the yard at The Carlton would benefit from more sensitive landscaping.
6. CHARACTER ZONES AND STREET DESCRIPTIONS

The Conservation Area can be divided into five character zones, the essential features of which are described below.

6.1 Main shopping area

The main shopping area of Leigh is now centred around Broadway, Broadway West and Elm Road. Only a small part of this retail area is included in the Conservation Area. It has a busy lively character at odds with the quiet domesticity of the rest of the Area, with numerous essential shops such as a butcher, baker and greengrocer, as well as cafes and restaurants, a bank, a pub and various small boutiques.

Broadway

This road has been improved with good quality street lamps, and the pavements surfaced with small concrete slabs, measures which successfully underline its importance as a main thoroughfare and shopping area, although this does not extend to Broadway West. The west end of the road is interrupted by the junctions with Elm Road and Leigh Hill and the churchyard, but to the east it is a busy high street with parades of shops. A group of three storey commercial buildings with facades partly in stone and the Carlton Hotel are landmarks at this end of the road, and contribute to giving it a sense of dignity.

The backland areas in this zone are occupied by a series of businesses, lending an interesting depth to the shopping area. An alleyway formed between the two main shop-fronts at Clements Arcade is lined with small shops making a total of ten units, extending out to the rear, a lively and pleasant space. To the east a cobbled
lane, a rare and attractive survival, leads into the backlands where there is a large 19th century stock brick warehouse or factory. Behind the Carlton Hotel there is a former stable yard, occupied by Leigh Sanctuary. It is an interesting and attractive backland space let down by garish yellow road markings and advertising at the entrance on Broadway, as well as blue and red skips, umbrellas, palm trees and parked cars within the yard itself. The stable itself is now a business premises.

**Broadway West**

This is an extension to Broadway that was created in the late 1920s, running to the north of the former rectory, now the Library, and removing its stable yard and outbuildings, with the result that the building is now effectively re-orientated and
entered from its rear elevation. Today this edge of the Conservation Area is overshadowed by the two blocks of St. Clements Court, and more particularly by the later St. Clements Court East which rises to 12 storeys and is less architecturally prepossessing than the earlier building. To the north side of Broadway West there is a parade of shops between Rectory Grove and Elm Road, given a lively and attractive appearance by striped awnings over several shop-fronts.

There is a complicated three-way junction between Elm Road and Broadway, with a triangular traffic island in the middle populated by a forest of belisha beacons, lamp standards and a cast iron finger post. The island is surfaced with red clay pavers, granite sets and tactile pavers, and two areas of token planting. All these combine to be excessive for so small a space. The railings are insubstantial, need painting, and the wire guards make them look unattractive.

6.2 Green heart of the Area

An elongated zone of open green space stretches east-west from St. Clement’s churchyard to the west, to Leigh Library, then below St. Clement’s Court and St. Clement’s Court East down to the houses on the north side of Leigh Park Road. It also includes two privately owned areas: the large area of green space owned by a private trust and accessed via Hillside Road, and the large gardens surrounding The Old School House.

The south side of Broadway West has a spacious suburban feel, with three houses set in the public gardens. These are popular, reasonably well maintained, and attractively laid out with many mature trees, including unusual species, and some herbaceous borders. They descend the cliff in a series of terraces; at the bottom there is footpath access to Leigh Park Road. The tarmac footpaths in the public gardens are very cracked and in need of repair.
6.3 Arts and Crafts suburban

The northern end of Hadleigh Road and Leigh Park Road is an area of larger, mainly detached residential houses, many of which have some Arts and Crafts inspiration in their architecture. This zone is leafy and spacious in character, with excellent views of the estuary. The houses at the top of Hadleigh Road in particular enjoy large gardens, an important aspect of the character of the Conservation Area in general and this zone in particular.

At the bend in the road where it branches with Leigh Park Road there are tubular Pipe Clamp railings and an unplanted patch of ground which appears rather forlorn.
Although the semi-detached houses at the lower end of Leigh Park road are smaller and more modest than the others in the character zone, their casement windows, many with black painted frames, arranged in wide curved bays. The generous red tiled window-cills and the tiled roofs all contribute to the architectural coherence of the area.

Old photographs, such as the one in section 5.3, above, show this street lined with newly planted small trees in gardens with attractive low picket fences running along their boundaries, as well as with what appears to be an ancient elm protruding from the wide pavement. From Leigh Park Road a footpath climbs up steps to the public gardens below St. Clements Court.

6.4 Urban residential

This zone makes up the bulk of the Conservation Area extending its full length, primarily along the southern half of the Area, only excluding the small neglected area around the former Bell Hotel.

New Road

This road makes up the southern boundary of the Area. New Road was built after the construction of the railway in 1854. Originally it came to an end at the edge of the modern Conservation Area. It has been extended westwards to join up with Belton Way, a new road constructed to provide access to the new Leigh station which opened in 1933 (the road opened in 1961). In the process several buildings at the end of it were demolished.

As New Road winds down into the western edge of the Conservation Area, there is a contrast between the weary grey concrete Belton Bridge to the south and the grassy and wooded cliff side to the north. In long views on the approach to the Conservation Area, Creek Cottage and the tower of St. Clements church are conspicuous, as are St. Clements Court and St. Clements Court East.

Benches along the road provide an opportunity to enjoy the panoramic estuary views, but along the entire southern edge of the Conservation Area, the functional boundary treatment to the railway, and its associated weed growth and detritus, is an eyesore, compounded by the crash barrier at the edge of the road. Double yellow lines are also prominent and unsightly. Because of these features, and because this part of it is straight and follows the railway, New Road here has lost any domestic scale and has the feel of a motorway, accentuated by the tall concrete lamp posts and, curiously, by the absence of any parked cars. The pavement along the north side of the road is of concrete slabs.
In long views to the west, the Methodist church is something of a landmark, partially closing the view as the road bends to go up the hill. The houses on its north side of the road originally had long front gardens but these were truncated when the road was widened, and today are narrow with brick boundary walls often rendered and white painted. The gardens tend to be tidy but sadly devoid of much planting.

The corner plot at the junction of New Road and Billet Lane is laid to grass with a small shrubbery to the rear. It is public open space and although relatively tidy would benefit from enhancement, including more careful landscaping and some tree planting. The parking lots at the junction of New Road with Hadleigh Road and Uttons Avenue were once occupied by housing. Although the parking areas are undoubtedly very necessary, they could be improved in appearance by soft landscaping.

**Laurel Close**

Laurel Close leads north from New Road, adjacent to the start of Billet Lane. The properties are set above their excellently maintained terraced gardens which create a rather special setting for this development.

The estate is generally well presented and the high red brick retaining walls for the gardens gives a sense of drama, though the concrete road, the block of garages, and car park area are bleak in contrast. A flight of steps leads down to New Road; the retaining wall on the east side is collapsing because of ground movement. The concrete slope to the west end of Clarendon Place provides an ineffective resistance to the ground movement, as evidenced by the extensive cracking. This results in an unattractive, cracked and weed-grown space in need of improvement.
**Uttons Avenue**

In the Conservation Area, this street is probably the most urban in character, with two rows of terraced houses facing one another across the street. The properties do not have front gardens, opening directly onto the pavement, an unusual feature for the Area. The houses are generally well presented although some have suffered from misguided attempts at improvement. Ray Cottages is concealed behind 25 Uttons Avenue and accessed only by a path at their rear.
Hadleigh Road

The southern end of Hadleigh Road is also relatively urban in appearance, despite its steepness. A number of the older properties on the hill leading down to New Road have been refurbished and redecorated, greatly enhancing the appearance of the street. On the east side, the pavement is part asphalted, part concrete slabs with granite kerbs. The asphalt has been much patched but the granite kerbs are a positive feature. A narrow passage through to Uttons Avenue between nos 4 and 6 adds pedestrian interest. There are no parking restrictions and the road is lined with cars. There are lime trees opposite nos 8 and 2 on the east side.

Views up the hill are dominated by Sans Souci which is out of scale with its context, being excessively bulky, especially when seen from lower down the hill. It has high intimidating brick walls around it which could be softened by planting.
Leigh Hill

Leigh Hill meets New Road at the bottom of Leigh Park Road. One of the oldest roads in the Conservation Area, it initially runs east before turning abruptly north towards the church.

East of The Ship and in front of nos 1-7 there is a parking bay separated from the main road by a pavement island, representing the old road line before New Road was created. The asphalt road and pavement here is heavily patched, and there are ugly galvanised bollards and an old lamp post with a modern top on the pavement island. The buildings grouped around this remnant of the old road are attractive, but are let down by the public realm. Similarly, on the opposite side of the road, adjacent to the elegant but dilapidated former Bell hotel, there is a Council owned car park with a dilapidated tubular fence at the back of it. On the west side of it, adjacent to where the ramped part of the concrete footbridge over the railway comes down, there is a triangular space defined by concrete bollards and planted with a neglected rose garden. An ash tree and elder trees overgrown with ivy are presumably self-sown. The chain link fence along the railway is unsightly although the profusion of ivy and clematis help to conceal it in places.
From the former Bell hotel the narrow road climbs uphill flanked for the most part by terraces set tight to the frontage, though Norman Terrace is an exception. There is a good view up the hill, but overhead wires are prominent to the east of The Ship and up Leigh Park Road, and there is an excessive amount of white lines giving warning of the traffic light controlled crossing opposite Norman Terrace. The railings by it are galvanised and very functional in appearance. The pavements are asphalted with stone kerbs.

Not far beyond this junction, Church Hill leads north to the church, presenting an attractive view that it is tempting to follow. A little further on the same side, there is a turning into Leigh Hill Close, an attractive terrace of tall modern houses that is let down by its prominent row of ‘up and over’ garage doors and rather bleak public realm that lacks any opportunity for planting.

On its south side Leigh Hill now hugs the cliff edge and open space and gardens take the place of housing, with the exception of no. 60. At the bottom of the slope, below greensward with mature trees and a Ragstone retaining wall, are nos 1-15 The Gardens. Most prominent here are the busy rear gardens, some tidy, some less
so, with a variety of boundary treatments, which with the roofscape and chimneys make for visual interest. The KeeKlamp railings to the steps down through the open space could be improved. A ramp down from the road has had its handrail removed, which should be reinstated. At the roadside there are low plain green-painted railings which extend to the east enclosing the rest of the gardens.

Beyond no. 60, The Cliff Gardens slope down in a series of terraces to the railway and the sea. They are laid to grass with no formal planting scheme, apart from a scatter of young trees. A new path has been laid. The western boundary is overgrown but the buddleia and sorbus provide interest. A forlorn bench on a subsiding concrete slab, enclosed by a partly collapsed fence, is eloquent of inadequate maintenance.

After following the edge of the cliff and gradually gaining height, Leigh Hill turns through ninety degrees and directly climbs the hillside to the church. It is a road of mainly 19th-century houses, all substantial and well maintained, making for an attractive streetscape given drama by the steepness of the slope. The east side is fairly continuously built up with terraces or semi-detached pairs; the west side is more open, punctuated by detached properties, the drive to the Old School House and the churchyard. The houses are enhanced by a generally high standard of maintenance and also landscaping around them. The quality of the streetscape has been acknowledged by the provision of Victorian style heritage lamp posts, but there are conspicuous double yellow lines, and the asphalt of the pavements and road is much patched. Parking is permitted on the east side of the road, but the effect of this is less detrimental than the hard surfacing of some front gardens which occasionally interrupts otherwise well presented frontages.
Church Hill

Just east of the junction between New Road and Leigh Hill, Church Hill forms a steep path between the almost vertically stacked Norman Place, Pleasant Terrace and The Terrace to the west and the more sparsely occupied east side with only Castle Cottage, Leigh Hill Close, The Old School House and the Church. The path is formed by a combination of steps and sloping path, making it easier to negotiate than in the past. The double yellow lines at the lower end blight an otherwise attractive and well used thoroughfare. At the top end, where generous planting overhangs it on both sides, it is very picturesque.

At the corner of Leigh Hill, where it meets Cliff Parade running to the east, is Sea Reach, a modern development of large detached houses whose quirky design and clever use of balconies ensure it blends well into the street-scene.
Left: Castle Cottage. Right: Norman Place

Left: View down Church Hill showing the best hand-rail in the Conservation Area. Right: Rear of Norman Place.
6.5 Neglected and run down

The only run down part of the Conservation Area is the former Bell Hotel and the neighbouring shops on the same side of the road. Between these shops and the former Bell, there is a gated access to an extensive backland area, now derelict but which has been, and possibly is, used for parking and includes a row of concrete tin-roofed garages. This space, and the backs of the buildings facing on to it, is in a very sorry state. That the rest of the Conservation Area is well maintained and flourishing suggests that there is a problem related to its ownership rather than to local economic conditions.
This site has been subject of a number of applications and appeals over recent years for the renovation of the hotel and erection of flats to the rear of the site facing the railway. The number of flats has been revised down in discussion with English Heritage and the latest application for the erection of 3 blocks (two part 3/part 4 and one 3 storey blocks totalling 15 flats) and the renovation of the Hotel is currently delegated for S106 approval.