

crowstone conservation area appraisal



November 2009

This document was produced by Essex County Council for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

The appraisal was prepared by Robin Carpenter, with assistance from members of Essex County Council's Historic Buildings and Conservation Team.

The modern maps in this document are reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey® on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. ©Crown Copyright. Licence number LA100019602

© Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and Essex County Council 2009

CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **Location and Context**
 - Topography and Landscape
 - Urban Setting
 - Character Statement
3. **Planning Framework**
 - National Policies and Guidance
 - Local Planning Policies and Guidance
 - Designations
4. **Assessment of Special Interest**
 - Archaeological Interest
 - Development in Modern Times
 - Townscape and Spaces
 - Architectural materials and details
5. **Building Descriptions**
6. **Management Plan**
 - Problems and Pressures
 - Public Realm
 - Information and Advice
 - Additional Controls
 - Boundary Proposals
 - Monitoring and Review
 - Enforcement
 - Implementation

Bibliography

LIST OF FIGURES

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Figure 1 | Designation Map |
| Figure 2 | Detail of the second edition Ordnance Survey map, 1897 |
| Figure 3 | Detail of the third edition Ordnance Survey map, 1922 |
| Figure 4 | Contribution to Character made by buildings in the Conservation Area |

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 asked Essex County Council Historic Buildings and Conservation to prepare this conservation area appraisal in January 2009. The research and fieldwork were carried out in February.

2. LOCATION AND CONTEXT

2.1 Topography and Landscape

Crowstone Conservation Area is situated on a low-lying stretch of shoreline, at the bottom of a long, gentle incline on the edge of the northern shore of the Thames estuary. It is located on the north side of Chalkwell Esplanade, which runs along a foreshore consisting of a sand and mud beach with groynes. Expansive views to the south are dominated by sea and sky, with distant views of the south shore of the estuary.

2.2 Urban setting

Crowstone Conservation Area is located in Chalkwell, in an area of predominantly suburban housing and visitor accommodation which was developed when Southend-on-Sea expanded westward along the railway line, at the beginning of the 20th century. It is located a short distance from both Westcliff and Chalkwell railway stations. It is contemporary with The Leas, to the east, which is also a conservation area and generally has a similar, but not identical, architectural character.

The Conservation Area consists of a group of buildings located on either side of the junction of Crowstone Avenue and Chalkwell Esplanade.



2.3 Character statement

Crowstone Conservation Area is an extension of the Leas Conservation Area and the

original buildings that remain show the same characteristics: red brickwork, machine-made clay plain tile roofs, asymmetrical form, corner turrets, decorative gables, bay windows, grand entrances and white ornamentation. The houses within the Area had generous front gardens with boundary walls made of waste bricks from the brickmaking process.

Crowstone House and the other older properties in the Conservation Area date from the initial development of this part of Westcliff, and as such preserve its historic character which elsewhere on the seafront has been largely lost to modern development. It is Crowstone House which is the defining feature of the Conservation Area, a familiar and well-loved landmark on the esplanade because of its greater height and exuberant neo-baroque corner tower. Its distinctive character is acknowledged by the new block of flats on the opposite side of the road which have a corresponding corner tower although designed in a very different style.

3. PLANNING FRAMEWORK

3.1 National Policies and Guidance

Policies and guidance for Conservation Areas are given by the Government in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 Planning & the Historic Environment* (1994), and by English Heritage, notably in *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals*, August 2005, and *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, August 2005.

3.2 Local Planning Policies and Guidance

Local policy and guidance is to be found in the *Essex & Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan* (2001), 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:

- Planning Obligations and Vehicle Parking Standards – Guide for Developers
- Seafront Area Action Plan
- Criteria-Based Policies and Site Allocations.

The LDF will also include Supplementary Planning Documents, of which the *Southend-on-Sea Design and Townscape Guide*, adopted June 2006, is of particular relevance. 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).

In addition 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

(iii) 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 guidelines in Appendix 2 and in addition, where residential proposals are involved, Appendix 4.

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. Inclusion in this list is a material consideration in determining planning applications.

3.3 Designations

Crowstone Conservation Area is one of 14 conservation areas in the Borough of Southend-on-Sea. It is one of four seafront conservation areas.

There are no buildings within the Conservation Area on the statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. However one building is included on the Borough's Local List: Crowstone House.

No trees within the Conservation Area are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. However any trees within the Conservation Area enjoy protection inasmuch as anyone carrying out works to a tree in a Conservation Area must give written notification to the local planning department at least six weeks beforehand.



Figure 1: Designation map

4. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

4.1 Archaeological interest

There are no known archaeological sites within the Conservation Area according to the information contained in the Essex County Historic Environment Record.

4.2 Development history

The Crowstone area and Crowstone Avenue took their name from the Crowstone, a large block of stone which marked the limit of the City of London's jurisdiction in the Thames estuary. On the evidence of the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of the 1890s, which shows open fields and brickworks, and of planning applications in the Essex Record Office, this part of Westcliff began to be developed from about 1900, having previously been part of the Chalkwell Hall estate. The construction of the railway, with stations at Chalkwell and Westcliff, played a significant role in opening up the area to development, which spread down the seafront from the east.

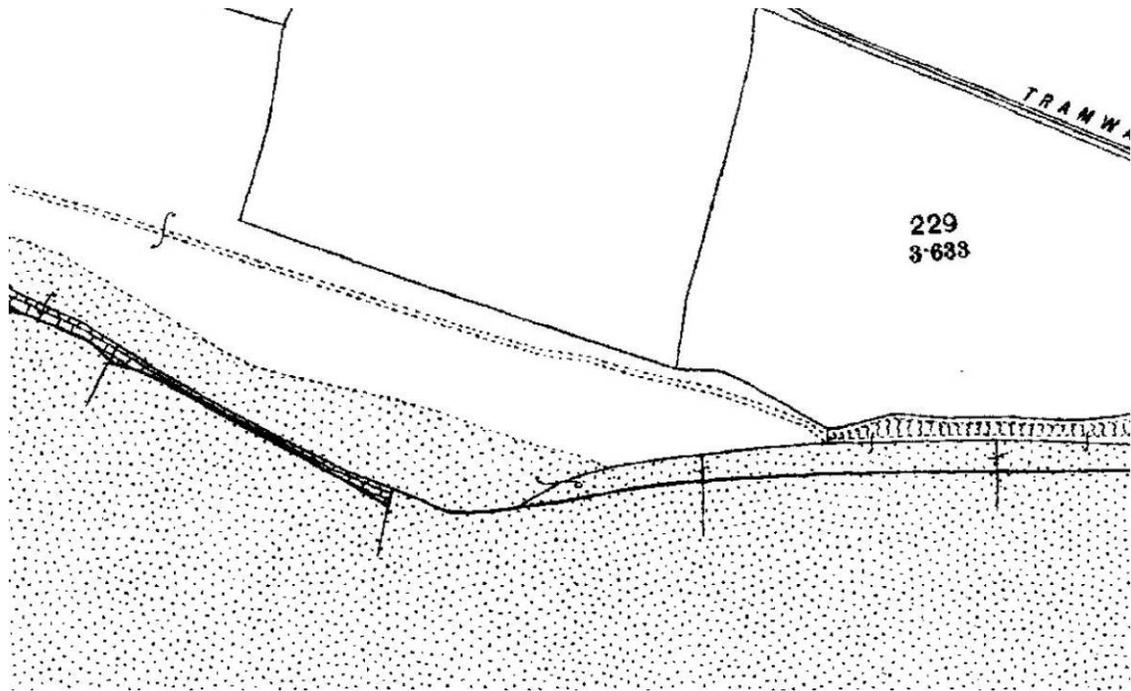


Figure 2: Detail of the second edition Ordnance Survey map, 1897.

Crowstone Avenue, originally Crowstone Road, leading from the seafront or Esplanade north to the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway line, was largely built up by the time war broke out in 1914. Crowstone House must have been one of the first properties to be built; a large residence clearly designed to benefit from the seaward views. In 1913, Miss H.M. O'Meara applied for planning permission to erect an extension in the large rear garden to provide accommodation for Southend College, a girls' school (ERO D/F 36/12/54). The architect was Charles Fleming Williams of 13 Fitzroy Square, London. Helen O' Meara had previously had a ladies school at 54-56 Avenue Road. The plans show that the new building provided a hall, gymnasium and bedrooms. O' Meara is listed at Crowstone House in the 1926

Kelly's trade directory, but not in the one for 1929. Crowstone House is currently used as a residential home.

By 1913 the pair of houses west of Crowstone House must also have been erected. Curiously, the seafront to the west of Crowstone House was slow to be developed, and it was not until after World War II that it and Second Avenue to the north was built up.

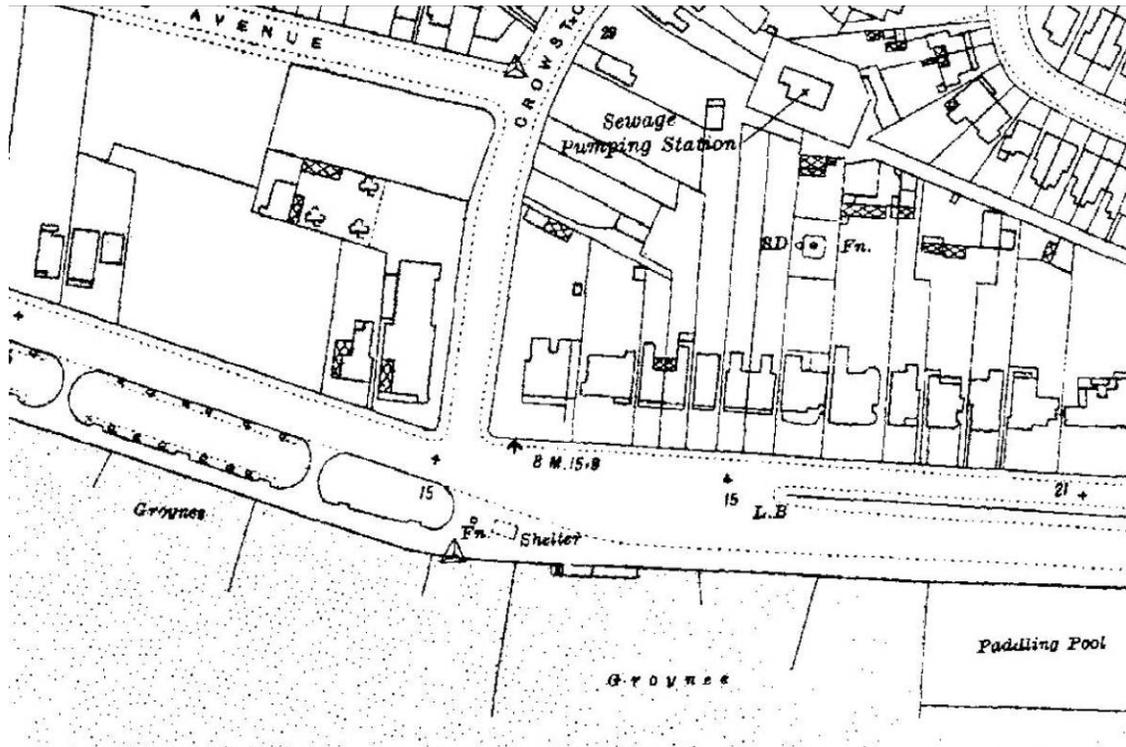


Figure 3: Detail of the third edition Ordnance Survey map, 1922

4.3 Townscape and spaces

The wide traffic-dominated Esplanade forms a rather bleak edge to the Conservation Area, severing it from the sea and the estuary views. Crowstone House and the new flats present a collision of architectural styles, in which the latter tends to dominate because of its greater scale, but the contrast is softened by the planting round Crowstone House and the trees in the Avenue.



4.4 Architecture, materials and details

The Conservation Area was built up at a time when late Victorian and Edwardian architecture was under the sway of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as being subject to other influences. Something of this eclecticism can be seen in Crowstone House in the juxtaposition of false half timbering of the gable and the baroque character of the belvedere tower. The houses also display the typical features of seaside architecture of the time, with white painted wooden balconies, verandas and corner turrets. The more formal school building added to Crowstone House is in marked contrast, but competent of its type and of historic interest.

Windows are typically sashes, with small panes in the top sash. Brickwork of the better quality is in soft reds, elsewhere of the more economic but nevertheless attractive yellow stocks. Over-fired reject stocks were used in the garden wall of Crowstone House as elsewhere in Southend. Being of relatively steep pitch, the roofs are mostly of machine-made clay tiles.

5. BUILDING DESCRIPTIONS

A map showing an assessment of the contribution of individual buildings to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area is shown below in fig. 4. Although to some extent a subjective judgment, this can be helpful to inform the planning process. Buildings have been graded on a scale of one to five according to the following criteria:

1	Negative, buildings of indifferent design or detailing, or unsuited to the character of the conservation area
2	Buildings which have a neutral presence in the conservation area, fitting satisfactorily into it
3	Positive contribution through design, age, materials or detailing, partially eroded by unsympathetic alterations
4	Very positive contribution through design, age, materials or detailing
5	Positive, listed buildings or landmark buildings.

Unsympathetic alterations or 'improvements' can have the effect of moving a building down a grade. Similarly reversal of such alterations could restore its original character and move it up a grade.



Figure 4: Contribution to Character made by buildings in the Conservation Area

7 Chalkwell Esplanade

This is an attractive two-storey building with a lively appearance, typical of its seaside location, and exhibiting many of the characteristics of the local building style of its period. It has a red brick frontage, yellow stock flank walls and a slate roof.

The front elevation is of asymmetrical design; the right hand third has a two-storey, three-sided projecting bay with a hipped roof, while the rest of the elevation is fronted by a two-storey, flat roofed bay, the ground and first floors of which have a white painted veranda and balcony with square posts, arches and railings. Vehicle access is down a drive on the west side. The front garden is intact, and enclosed with a low wall with brick piers built from over burnt and misshapen reject bricks in the 'rustic' style also used at The Leas.



Crowstone House

Crowstone House is of considerable local importance as a building of architectural interest and quality and this has been recognised by its status as a locally listed building. It is large, two storey, and of asymmetrical appearance, with flat dormers in the roof. It was built in two distinct phases; the part of the building fronting Chalkwell Esplanade was built first, in c.1905; the rear range, which runs along Crowstone Avenue, was designed in 1913 as an 'addition to Southend College', which accounts for its impressive, but rather formal institutional appearance.

The building displays many of the characteristic features of seaside buildings of the era: The front elevation is of red brick, with projecting bays and balconies with railings. The large gable on the south elevation has false timber framing in the Arts and Crafts and style. In contrast, its most significant feature, the ornate three-storey corner belvedere tower, with decorative stucco render, oval windows and lead dome, is Edwardian baroque, comparable to the tower of the Kursaal. This makes the building a prominent and well-known landmark on the Esplanade which may be

seen from some considerable distance from several directions. Its appearance is typical of the more prestigious seaside architecture of the early 1900s, and the tower is similar to, but more ornate than, that on Palmeira Mansions in the Leas Conservation Area. There is a highly ornate entrance on Crowstone Avenue. The building is surrounded by a wall of yellow stock brick with a red brick base and piers and attractive planting of shrubs and bushes.

On Crowstone Avenue, the later school building is now screened by mature trees. It is of red brick with pebbledash at the first floor. The roadside elevation is symmetrical, with gables at each end, the entrance in the left hand one.



Hamilton Grange flats

On the opposite side of Crowstone Avenue from Crowstone House is a recent, five-storey development in a distinctly contemporary style, very different in character to its immediate neighbours. It is finished in white painted render and has a low almost flat roof. Though it possesses none of the charm or decorative features of Crowstone House, an attempt has been made to relate to it, in that it also has a corner turret and balconies, albeit in a stripped-down, rather joyless style. The site is bounded by low metal railings and limited planting, which give it a somewhat exposed appearance.



Left: Hamilton Grange; right, 33 The Leas

33 The Leas

The 3rd edition OS map shows a large building on this site in the 1920s although the front elevation of the present house appears to be much more recent. However it is probable that the building has been remodelled since it retains a corner turret at the eastern end with mouldings above the windows and dentillation around a frieze above them. The building displays other typical features of local character: bays, balconies and railings; although in a simplified, modern version, and is of a scale relating to the pair of houses to its right. The front garden boundary is a low brick wall in the local manner, but the garden is given over to car parking.

31-32 The Leas

These are a very pretty pair of symmetrical houses, of the same period as Crowstone House, with corner turrets; steeply-pitched roofs with gables; two-storey bays and decorative railings.

Many features that are important to the character of the Conservation Area survive here. The orange-red plain tile roof has details typical of the Area including turret rooms and decorative gables, giving the lively appearance that is such a strong feature of The Leas. Cream render covers the walls, enlivened by white decorative mouldings around the doors and windows. There is further decoration between each storey on the double height bay windows. Other small details that add unobtrusively to the quality of the design include fine string courses and delicate mouldings beneath the windows.

Wrought iron balconies extend across half the front elevation on each dwelling, a typical detail of the Area and these are supported on slender posts that also act as the porch around the front door. The front doors survive on both properties and are an excellent example of the fine entrances that are such a feature of the conservation area. Three steps lead up to wide imposing double doors with decorative glazing set into the doors, matched by the fanlight. The joinery of the doors is closely related to the design of the glazing and the two appear to be designed to match each other.

Original fenestration only survives on 32 The Leas although some panes have clearly been lost on no. 32 as well with the disappearance of the sashes on the primary first floor windows. The original fenestration is very fine, with unusual horizontal details on the top-lights. The ground floor bay windows have narrow central French doors

that enliven the design still further and draw the eye to the centre of the bay. The building is an attractive example of the seaside style. Its front boundary is distinguished by a prominent hedge, but again the garden is used for car parking.



31-32 The Leas. Front elevation and details

30 The Leas

This house appears on the 1922 Ordnance Survey map. It has been somewhat altered although it retains an attractive tiled roof with a complete set of decorative ridge tiles and a fine ornamental tile-hung gable. The roof is finished with a tall elegant chimney. The narrow double-leafed front door has a decorative fan light. The fenestration has been replaced with ugly brown plastic windows and the glass balcony detracts somewhat, though this is mitigated by a relatively simple design. Although the front garden has been lost to car parking, the retention of a boundary wall topped with hedges combined with attractive planting at the boundary and closer to the house soften this. The building makes a positive contribution to the unity of the group of buildings and streetscape.



30 The Leas

6. MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Problems and Pressures

The attractive views and location have put the seafront under intense pressure for redevelopment. This can be seen to the east of the Conservation Area where there are modern apartment blocks. Where these adjoin older housing, they overwhelm it because of their greater scale, and the failure to evolve a sympathetic and relatively uniform architectural style means that little of this new development is visually satisfactory. The Conservation Area has already seen significant new development on the corner opposite Crowstone House. This apartment block is better than average, if out of scale with its surroundings, but in this context represents an erosion of the historic character of the Conservation Area. The Area is generally in good condition, but further development would damage its character irrevocably. The test used in appraisals of conservation areas to determine whether buildings are suitable for redevelopment is the assessment of contribution to character (Fig 4.). None of the buildings in the Conservation Area have been graded as making a negative contribution to character, which would imply that they might have redevelopment potential.

A universal threat to the character of traditional buildings is refurbishment in modern materials and adaptation to the circumstances of the modern way of living. No. 33 The Leas has been remodelled almost out of recognition, but otherwise the houses are relatively well preserved. There have, for instance, been few replacement windows. Front gardens have, however, been turned into hard standings for car parking.

6.2 Public realm

Although outside the Conservation Area, the seafront esplanade affects its setting. It is a wide straight road with prominent diagonal markings down the centre, and white and yellow lines at the side. The lamp standards are functional. It has the aspect of a major trunk road and does nothing for the Conservation Area or the promenade beyond it. More sympathetic road markings and street furniture, and some soft landscaping in the form of tree planting, could help improve the road's appearance.

6.3 Information and Advice

Guidance for residents and owners is published in leaflets, which together comprise 'Conservation: A Residents' Guide'. The relevant leaflets were distributed to each property when published in 2000 and are provided on request to new owners. The leaflets are on the council's website. They are in the process of being updated following the completion of each character appraisal and will subsequently be distributed to each property. We suggest that these should be sent out periodically to all residents to accommodate changes in ownership.

Advice on the design of proposed development in the Conservation Area continues to be available on request.

6.4 Additional controls

No additional planning controls have been imposed on this conservation area.

6.5 Boundary proposals

The existing boundary has taken account of the architecture of the buildings in the area and is logical in the course it follows. It is recommended that it remains the same in most respects. However the boundary currently cuts through the Hamilton Grange block of flats. For the sake of clarity and consistency it is proposed that the boundary should be amended to incorporate the whole block and the associated grounds.

6.6 Monitoring and review

Monitoring the Conservation Area is necessary to check on the general condition and maintenance, to ensure unauthorised development has not take place, to update photographic records and to determine whether any further measures are needed to safeguard or enhance the area. It is recommended that a programme of regular monitoring should be developed, combined with photographic surveys, to provide an early warning of management issues.

6.7 Enforcement

Active use of existing council policies will be important to ensure that the appropriate controls for conservation areas are applied and enforced. However enforcement of planning controls, should unauthorised development take place, is necessary to secure appropriate restoration or change. This should continue to be carried out as necessary.

6.8 Implementation

The Appraisal and its management proposals will be referred to the Council's Conservation Working Party. They will subsequently be subject to planning consultation, including a public meeting as required under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. Resources will be an obstacle to the implementation of the management proposals and funding will need to be identified to take them forward.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

ERO Essex Record Office



southend·on·sea

town, shore and so much more