

DRAFT APPRAISAL FOR PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION AT ROSEBARN PARK, STOKE HILL, EXETER

1. Introduction

Section 69 of the Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that every Local Planning Authority shall, from time to time, determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance and shall designate those areas as conservation areas.

Rosebarn Park is being considered for conservation area designation due to its townscape, landscape and architectural features.

Guidance offered by English Heritage, the Historic Towns Forum, Exeter Local Plan First Review (1995 – 2011) and local designation criteria has been followed in the draft appraisal process.

2. History of the Estate

The estate is located a mile north east of the city centre on a triangular site of about 2.2 hectares. It slopes to the south and is bounded to the west by Rosebarn Lane and to the east by Stoke Hill. To the north is Stoke Hill Middle School playing fields.

Reference to historic maps shows the land was previously the estate of Stoke House, a grand early 19th Century home with extensive greenhouses and wooded grounds. (see 1889 map, below).



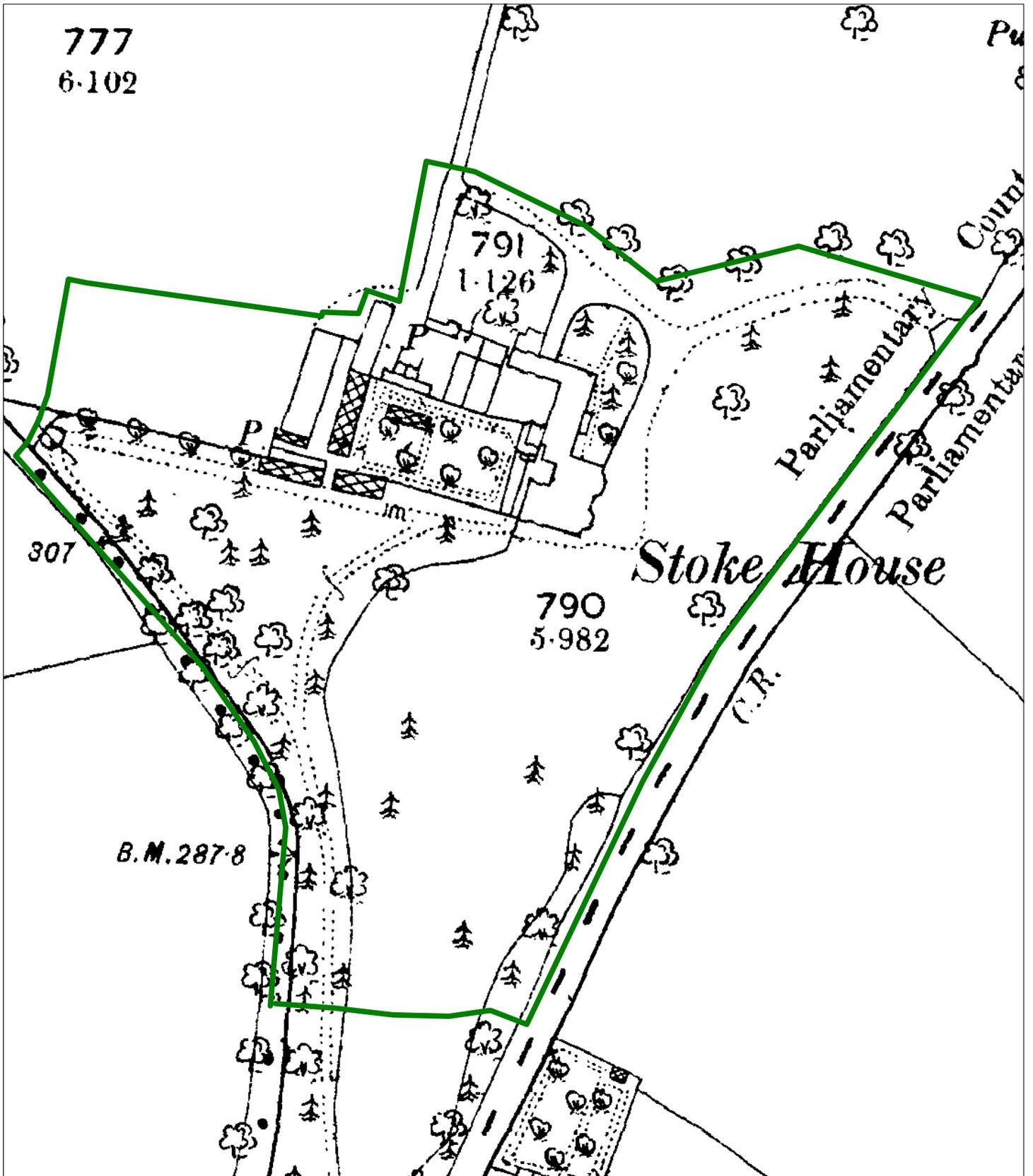
Photograph taken in February 1912. Devon local studies reference: P&D07087

The house was partially destroyed by a fire in the early 1960's and was demolished soon after, clearing the land for further development.

Queensway Housing Association obtained the land and approached Mervyn Seal Associates to design an estate that was sympathetic to the sloping nature and mature planting of the site.

It has been in single ownership since completion and this has helped it retain and improve on its special character.

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Scale 1:1250



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3. The Architects

Rosebarn Park was designed in 1965 by Neil Jackson ARIBA and Mervyn Seal ARIBA of Mervyn Seal & Associates, Brixham.

Mervyn Seal Associates had a solid reputation for producing site-specific housing schemes and prior to designing Rosebarn Park, had won two Good Design in Housing Awards; in 1961 for Broughton Close, Plymouth and in 1963 for Marina Park, Brixham, upon which aspects of the Rosebarn scheme were loosely based.

Rosebarn Park received a Civic Trust Commendation in 1969 and a Good Design in Housing Award in 1969.

The assessors for the Civic Trust Commendation noted *“In the main, the buildings are arranged in the form of three closes so that the scheme provides its own environment within the confines of the site. Care has been taken to preserve some good trees which existed on the site - previously the garden of a large private house - and to take full advantage of them in the design.”*

The assessors for the Good Design in Housing Award, who included the renowned landscape architect Geoffrey Jellicoe CBE, considered Rosebarn Park to be *“an exceptionally good example of a group of buildings in relation to the landscape. Full advantage has been taken of the contours and of existing fine trees to provide a composition that is original and gratifying. The architecture itself is very powerful but the domestic scale has been maintained by the broken silhouette.”*

Mervyn Seal Associates' development of Oakland Park in Dawlish won a Good Design in Housing Award in 1973 and the NHBC Housing Award for the Best Homes of the 1970's. Part of Oakland Park was designated conservation area in 1997. The appraisal document from Teignbridge District Council comments: *“since [the 1950's], the town has witnessed further residential expansion well beyond its east-west valley confines, including a development at Oakland Park, off the coast road to Teignmouth, built in the 1970's and designed as a model for future housing estates that might be added to small towns and villages throughout the County”*

Mervyn Seal also designed a series of distinctive individual homes in Devon that came to be known as his “Butterfly” houses, due to the angular asymmetrical roof shape. These were Parkham Wood in Brixham, Coridon in Torquay, Elbury Hall in Churston Ferrers and Kaywana in Kingswear

Renewed interest in Mervyn Seal's work culminated in 2009 by the Grade II listing of Parkham Wood.



Parkham Wood, Brixham, listed Grade II in March 2009

4. Landscape

The landscape is paramount in this development, being the vestiges of the historic parkland to Stoke House. An area Tree Preservation Order was applied to the site in 1962 prior to development, which underlines the importance given to the landscape setting at this time and the desire to protect it for the future.

The integration of the built form weaving around the grounds and mature trees of the previous house offers an arcadian setting, complemented by the lack of through traffic, making the estate a delightful pedestrian environment.



Pedestrian routes through planned and mature spaces creates a pleasant townscape

The area Tree Preservation Order was revoked in 2005 and all of the important trees in Rosebarn Park were protected by individual Orders (see plan on page 9).

The presence of mature trees in the primary spaces, added to by planned landscape design, has created intimate and special places that belie the density of development.

5. Townscape and Architecture

The layout of the Estate responds to the triangular nature of the site creating three distinct, landscaped spaces and one simple cul-de-sac at Yew Tree Close. Lyncombe Close, Yew Tree Close and Lebanon Close have vehicle access while Monterey Gardens, centrally located, is entirely pedestrian. The three roads that enter the Estate terminate in garage blocks, which, whilst less attractive elements of the overall design, allow minimum vehicle penetration and maximum open space.

Each Close forms its own distinct environment and at the centre is a focal point T shaped colonnade, made up of flats set over piers that offer routes and views through and between the spaces, allowing them to be interlinked.

All of the buildings are flat roofed, allowing the terraces to be staggered without creating multiple awkward gable ends. The staggered footprints create a distinct townscape and complement the topography and natural features of the site. The configuration also adds interest to long views as well as creating contrasting light and shadow that adds interest and depth to the appearance of the Estate. The internal drainage arrangements are integral to the original design and enhance the clean lines and simplicity of the buildings.

The architecture is clearly of its time. There are four house types and four flat types which use standard storey heights and window patterns and which are constructed using one type of brick and similar pre-cast concrete sections. The colonnaded central section is a variation on the standard design, using render, which acts as an effective focal point. Taken together these features create a homogenous appearance that strengthens the sense of place.

Whilst the original timber windows have been replaced with UPVC, and external downpipes have been installed on some properties, the essence of the original design and the overall external appearance of the estate has been retained. The coordinated management of the whole estate by one owner has helped in this regard.

Monterey Gardens

Monterey Gardens is the pedestrian-only enclave that has as its focal point in the central green the outstanding Monterey Pine. This magnificent tree affords a pleasant outlook to all of the houses and flats that surround it, whilst also creating a degree of privacy by restricting inter-visibility.



The Monterey Pine tree is the focal point of the open space in Monterey Gardens

The simple 2 storey staggered housing to the north and south of the green and the top of the central T-shaped flats to the east create an enclosed and intimate environment whilst offering maximum daylight penetration.

Lyncombe Close

Lyncombe Close is to the north east of the site and is accessed from Stoke Hill. The central landscaped area is the position of the original Stoke House. It is now well planted and contains a protected Monterey Pine as its focal point.



Lyncombe close, viewed from Stoke Road, with the Monterey Pine clearly visible.

The buildings vary in design; those to the east have integral garages and parking spaces accessed from the road. The buildings to the north and west front the green directly without vehicle access. This allows the landscape with its attractive trees to be the dominant feature.



Properties fronting directly onto the green space allowing pedestrian permeability

Lebanon Close

Lebanon Close is accessed from Rosebarn Lane and has a protected Oak at the entrance.



Lebanon Close, looking towards the Colonnade

The sweeping road and the sloping site offer interesting sequential views into the estate and the exotic and native planting on the bank to the west adds colour and interest at all times of the year.

The close here gives more prominence to vehicle access and car parking but is, nevertheless, attractively enclosed. The colonnaded central block terminates the view at the same time as allowing glimpses through to adjoining spaces. Planting and hard landscape works contribute positively to the character of the space. Townscape interest is enhanced by the mix of three storey flats at the entrance to the close, the staggered terrace running from south to north, and six dwellings with integral garages.

Yew Tree Close

Yew Tree Close consists of seven three storey townhouses facing a simple cul-de-sac and garage court. The car ports don't allow landscape to contribute to the townscape and give prominence to cars at the entrance to the houses but the continued use of brick, regular fenestration and pre-cast sections creates harmony with the other buildings.

Picture

The close ends in a garage court, which consists of two unattractive rows of garages and little softening by planting.

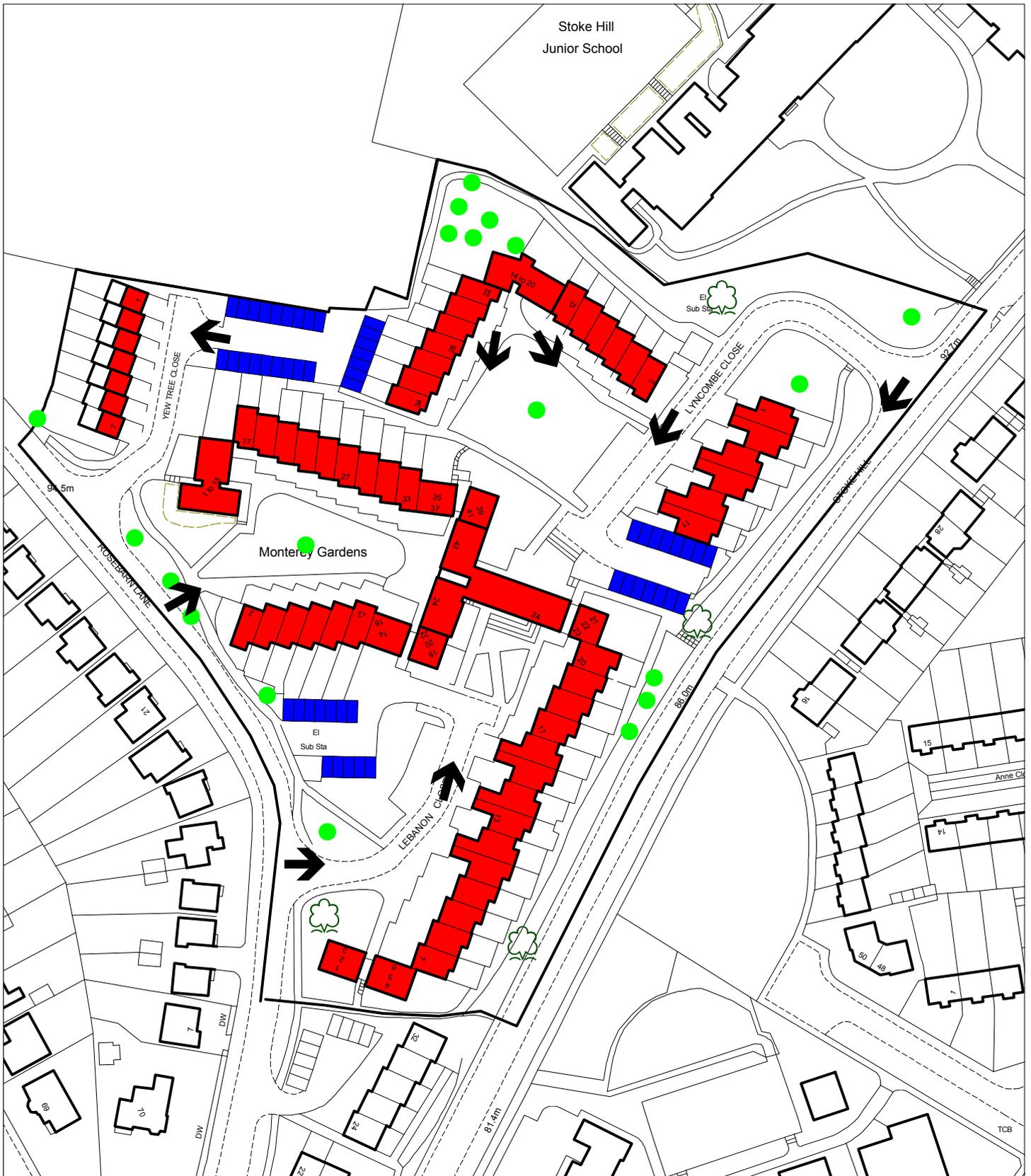
Central Area

The central colonnade offers a pedestrian link between Lyncombe Close, Lebanon Close and Monterey Gardens and is marked out by the use of render and irregular fenestration.

The rendered section above the colonnade is anchored at either end by two and three storey flats that share the same architectural language as the houses.



The rendered façade and irregular fenestration of the colonnade contrasts with and complements the brick dwellings



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Plan 2

- Buildings that make a positive contribution
- Buildings that make a negative contribution
- Important Views
- Important Treescape
- Tree protected by Tree Preservation Order (TPO)

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6. Issues

When the Estate was designed in the mid 1960's, car ownership was significantly less than today and the plan was based on the notion that those people who owned cars would use garages for parking. Increased car ownership, the inconvenience of using garages remote from the house and the use of garages for storage has resulted in more on-street parking.



On-street parking

While the garage courts are negative features on the estate they are well used as storage by residents. However, whilst the garages are currently under-used and unattractive there is potential that they could be included in a new parking strategy for the estate including demolition of garages, the provision of new parking spaces and purpose designed on-street parking enhancement if they were to be demolished and replaced with landscaped open parking courtyards.



Unattractive garage court, Yew Tree Close

7. Conclusion

Rosebarn Park is a well-planned, carefully considered housing development of the mid 1960's by an architect who did not adopt a "one size fits all" philosophy to his designs and whose recent national recognition adds status to his work and therefore this estate.

It meets the local criteria for conservation area designation because:

- it has good surviving architecture of a particular period or style;
- it was designed by an architect or practice of local or national repute;
- it has historic landscape interest;
- the special interest relates to an area, not only its buildings;
- it is considered desirable to preserve or enhance the features in the area that define the special interest.