

INITIAL APPRAISAL FOR PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION AT LOWER SUMMERLANDS

History

The area consists of 5 - 37 Heavitree Road, Lower Summerlands, St Matthew's Church and Church Hall and the Almshouses and flats between and Newtown School.

Newtown was largely rural up until the 19th century. A workhouse had been built in 1671 on the site of the Triangle car park, but this was replaced in around 1700 by a new workhouse on what is now the site of Heavitree Hospital. The original workhouse was converted to the City Hospital but closed when the new Devon and Exeter Hospital opened at Dean Clarke House in Southernhay in 1745. The land surrounding the workhouse was developed with housing in the early 1800's; Lower Summerlands, Higher Summerlands (demolished following the blitz) and Eaton Place on Heavitree Road (numbers 5 – 21).

Newtown School was built as a result of the 1870 Education Act and was opened in June 1874 and the Church and Frances Gardens Almshouses were built in the 1880's to serve the expanding working class population of the new suburb.



Newtown School

The original Church Hall was built after the construction of St Matthew's Church itself and the foundation stone dates from 1933. It was badly damaged during the bombing of 1942 and eventually rebuilt in 1954 to the same plan.

Townscape

The area is in a natural dip in the land and this, together with being set away from the main road and the mature trees in the vicinity, makes it relatively peaceful despite its

proximity to the city centre. The mix of uses in the area; church, church hall, shops, school, offices and residential, give a strong sense of place.

The layout of buildings demonstrates the different stages of development, with the terrace of Lower Summerlands acting as a strong visual feature.

The grain of development varies from the back of pavement commercial terraces along Heavitree Road, the domestic terraces at Lower Summerlands, set back from the road, to the more open public space around the church and school. This variety in grain gives the overall impression of low density relative to the surrounding area and creates the feeling of a leafy suburb rather than a city centre location.

The church hall and its adjacent trees are a central focal point for the townscape. The lime trees on its western boundary are protected by a Tree Preservation Order, made as the trees have a high amenity value that add to the overall character of the area.

Apart from the modern flats at St Matthew's Court, the other buildings are all 19th century and offer a glimpse of typical building types from that age; the road front tall 3 storey townhouses with shops at ground floor, the two storey Georgian terrace of Lower Summerlands, the typical Victorian massing and detailing of the school and the solid Victorian Church.

The impact of the Triangle car park is mitigated somewhat by the tree planting.



The area as viewed from the Triangle car park; screened by mature trees

Architecture

5 – 13 (odd) Heavitree Road, 1 – 4 and 7 – 9 Lower Summerlands are all grade II listed buildings. 15 – 37 (odd) Heavitree Road are locally listed. This range of

protected buildings adds quality to the area and demonstrates the early stages of development.

The School, Church, Church Hall and Almshouses are historic buildings whose presence in the area add to the character and appearance, offering an insight into the development of a 19th century suburb.

The terrace at Lower Summerlands was damaged during the blitz and as a consequence numbers 5 and 6 had to be demolished. However, they were re-built in facsimile, making the front of the terrace complete in its appearance. This is a good example of where a pastiche approach to infill development is appropriate.



Lower Summerlands Terrace

Apart from the stucco terraces on Heavitree Road, the other buildings within the area are all red brick, with the terrace at Lower Summerlands being of a slightly darker, older variety. The school, church and church hall have some stone detailing around the windows and a theme of pointed arches that ties them together as a group.

Frances Gardens Almshouses have lighter brick banding and deeply pointed projecting porches that relate well to the surrounding buildings. However, they are currently undergoing refurbishment that is outside current planning control and the loss of original windows to replacement UPVC equivalents is unfortunate and a clear example of the incremental erosion of historic details that cumulatively harm the city's historic architectural interest.



Frances Gardens Almshouses

St Matthew's Court is a small residential development dating from 2003. It's scale, massing, materials and design are simple and in keeping with the surrounding buildings.

Conclusion

The Lower Summerlands area represents a mixed suburban area close to the city centre that contains some important listed buildings and many other unlisted buildings that are of historic and architectural worthy of conservation area designation.