



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL

White House Way

Conservation Area Appraisal



July 2007

White House Way Conservation Area Appraisal

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Based on a character analysis undertaken for
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council by

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White House Way Conservation Area Appraisal

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PREFACE

At the Decision Session of 6th December 2006, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration approved a draft version of this document for consultation. The consultation was carried out during March/April 2007 and a summary of the consultation undertaken is provided at Appendix 2.

The results of the consultation were reported back to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration on 5th July 2007 where this appraisal document was formally approved and subsequently adopted on 13th July 2007.

White House Way Conservation Area Appraisal

1. INTRODUCTION



Fig 1: Location map

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The White House Way Conservation Area was designated by Solihull Metropolitan Council in November 1999 and includes an area of approximately 4.3 hectares located approximately one mile from Solihull town centre off Blossomfield Road as shown in Fig.1.

It is unusual in that it encompasses the initial phase of a private housing development that dates from the 1960s, rather than a more historic group of buildings. This particular part of the development was deemed worthy of protection as a particularly good example of its type, retaining much of its original character and integrity, and also incorporating several landscape features of special interest.

Despite its relatively recent date, the Area does have some interesting historical associations. It was built on land formerly owned by Sir Robert Bland Bird, the grandson of Alfred Bird, the founder of the Birmingham-based Bird's Custard firm. Sir Robert and his wife lived at The White House, which they built within the grounds of the substantial Victorian family home, Tudor Grange, in Blossomfield Road. They designed attractive gardens around The White House, which included many mature trees and other features and these were retained within the White House Way development.

2. PURPOSE OF THE APPRAISAL

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

Conservation Area designation dates back to 1967. They were originally intended to cover wide areas of towns, villages and countryside, but their application quickly became limited to built-up areas where they might vary from an historic street plan or entire town centre to a much smaller group of buildings, a street, a village green or similar open space.

There are many factors that give an area its own special interest and these will inevitably vary according to its type and location, but its architecture and history will always be key considerations within any designation.

The preservation or enhancement of a conservation area requires continual contribution to, and reinforcement of, the existing character or appearance of the area. This must be allied with constant efforts to prevent any harm being caused to this existing character or appearance.

The primary sources of guidance that relate to conservation areas are published by central government and English Heritage. The government's advice is given in its Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 15 entitled *Planning and the Historic Environment*, otherwise known as PPG15. English Heritage has released various publications specifically relating to conservation area appraisals, most recently *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2006)*. All of these documents, both individually and collectively, provide extensive guidance to those who wish to carry out development within or in the setting of conservation areas, whether it involves an extension or alterations to a house or the redevelopment of a derelict industrial site.

A conservation area appraisal is an important tool in helping a local planning authority to discharge its duties towards conservation areas. It will define and analyse the special architectural and historic interest that justifies designation, and thus provide a sound basis for development plan policies, development control decisions, and for the formulation of proposals and positive initiatives for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area. Furthermore, an appraisal also guides householders and landowners in matters of maintenance and alterations. Given that the appraisal is a snapshot in time, it cannot expect to be fully comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

3. POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Section 2 above demonstrates that the approach of the Council in formulating this document is consistent with national policy and guidance as expressed in PPG15. This character appraisal is also in accordance with Policy ENV5 (Conservation Areas) of the adopted Solihull Unitary Development Plan (2006) and reaffirms the Council's commitment to safeguarding and enhancing conservation areas, and the Council's intention to prepare and review appraisal documents. This is in accordance with Policy QE5, Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands relating to the protection and enhancement of the historic environment.

4. SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST



Fig 2: Boundary of the White House Way Conservation Area

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4.1 Significance

As a housing estate built in the 1960s, the White House Way Conservation Area is a particularly unusual designation for its date and type. It is of special interest as an architectural concept that has maintained much of its original integrity, with a distinctive form, open layout and character and a style and pattern of building that has influenced subsequent residential development within the Borough.

4.2 Origins and Historical Development

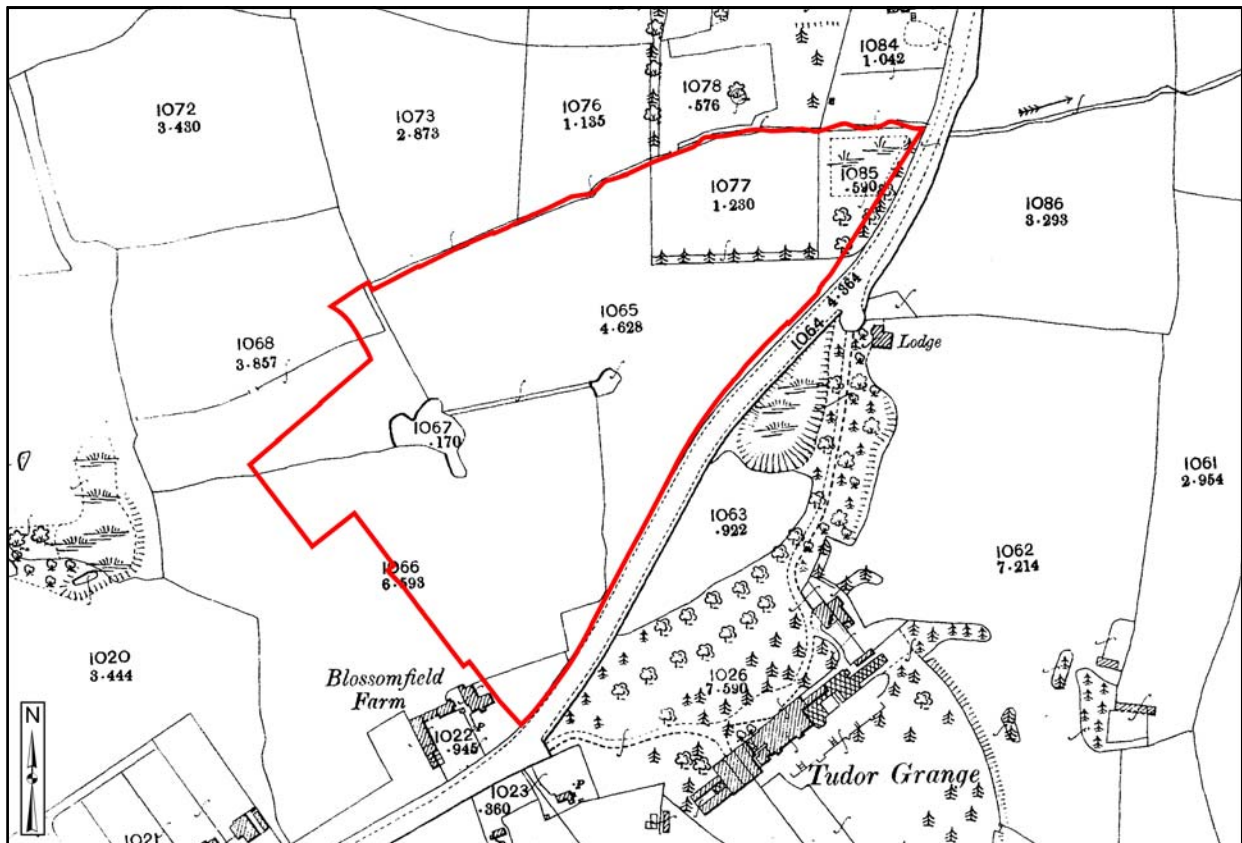


Fig 3: OS Map 1902- The boundary in red is the approximately the existing Conservation Area © Crown copyright

Due to its specific date and special character, the Area includes no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, no Listed Buildings, and no buildings identified as being of Local Interest by the Planning Authority. However, the site itself has interesting historical associations that link it with the locality and which has contributed much to its distinctive form, layout and character

During the 20th century, the area around Solihull developed rapidly as an affluent commuter suburb. The 1902 OS map shows that much of the Blossomfield Road was essentially rural in character at this time, with woodland and meadowland flanking the Alder Brook and a large farmstead, Blossomfield Farm, located at the south-west corner of the present Conservation Area. The pond that now forms a central feature of the Area can be clearly identified on this map. However, already there were signs of the residential development that was to cover much of the outskirts of Solihull by the end of the century. Some Victorian housing had been built on regular plots along Blossomfield Road, Alderbrook Road had been partly constructed, and the eastern side of Blossomfield Road was dominated by the ornate gabled profile of Tudor Grange, a substantial Victorian country house standing within ornate gardens and parkland. Various publications and local history sources can be referred to for a full account of the historical development of the borough.



Fig 4: Tudor Grange

Tudor Grange belonged to the Bird family, the Birmingham custard manufacturers. Alfred Bird was an analytical and pharmaceutical chemist, who had devised his cornflour-based custard, and later also invented baking powder, for the benefit of his wife, Elisabeth Ragg, who was allergic to eggs and yeast. Such was the commercial success of his inventions that he founded Alfred Bird & Sons Ltd of Birmingham. The business flourished, boosted by the demand for baking powder during the Crimean War. After Alfred Bird died in 1878, the company continued to prosper under his son, Sir Alfred Frederick Bird (1849-1922), a famous cyclist, pioneer motorist, art collector and politician. Sir Alfred was killed in a motor accident in 1922, but his sons, Robert Bland and Geoffrey, remained with the business until it was eventually purchased by the General Foods Corporation in 1947. Despite subsequent acquisitions of the brand, it has retained its success and identity to this day.

Bird's Custard Powder

*Richest Custard! Without Eggs!!
Half the Cost and Trouble!!!
Choice—Delicious—a Great Luxury.
See that you get BIRD'S.*

6d.
Boxes.

Custard

1s.
Boxes.

Powder

POST FREE,
"PASTRY & SWEETS,"
Containing Practical Hints and
Recipes for Tasty Dishes for the
Dinner and supper Table.

Address:—ALFRED BIRD & SONS, Devonshire Works, BIRMINGHAM.

Fig 5: 19th century advertisement for Bird's Custard Powder

Alfred Bird had acquired Tudor Grange from Alfred Lovekin, a Birmingham businessman. The house included a lavish interior and a large and ornate garden filled with statuary, formal planting, topiary and a lake, much of which has now disappeared. After Sir Alfred's death, his wife continued to live at Tudor Grange till her death in 1943, and the house and much of the estate were sold a few years later to Solihull UDC and Warwick County Council for educational purposes and to benefit the local people.

Between the Wars, the elder son, Sir Robert Bland Bird, had built a substantial house on the land on the opposite side of Blossomfield Road that now lies within the White House Way Conservation Area and from which its name derives. He and his wife laid out an elaborate garden that rivalled that at Tudor Grange and included the existing pond, a maze, topiary, a swimming pool, tennis court and a croquet lawn. In 1960 Sir Robert died and, after the death of his wife the following year, his executors sold the site to the Council for residential development

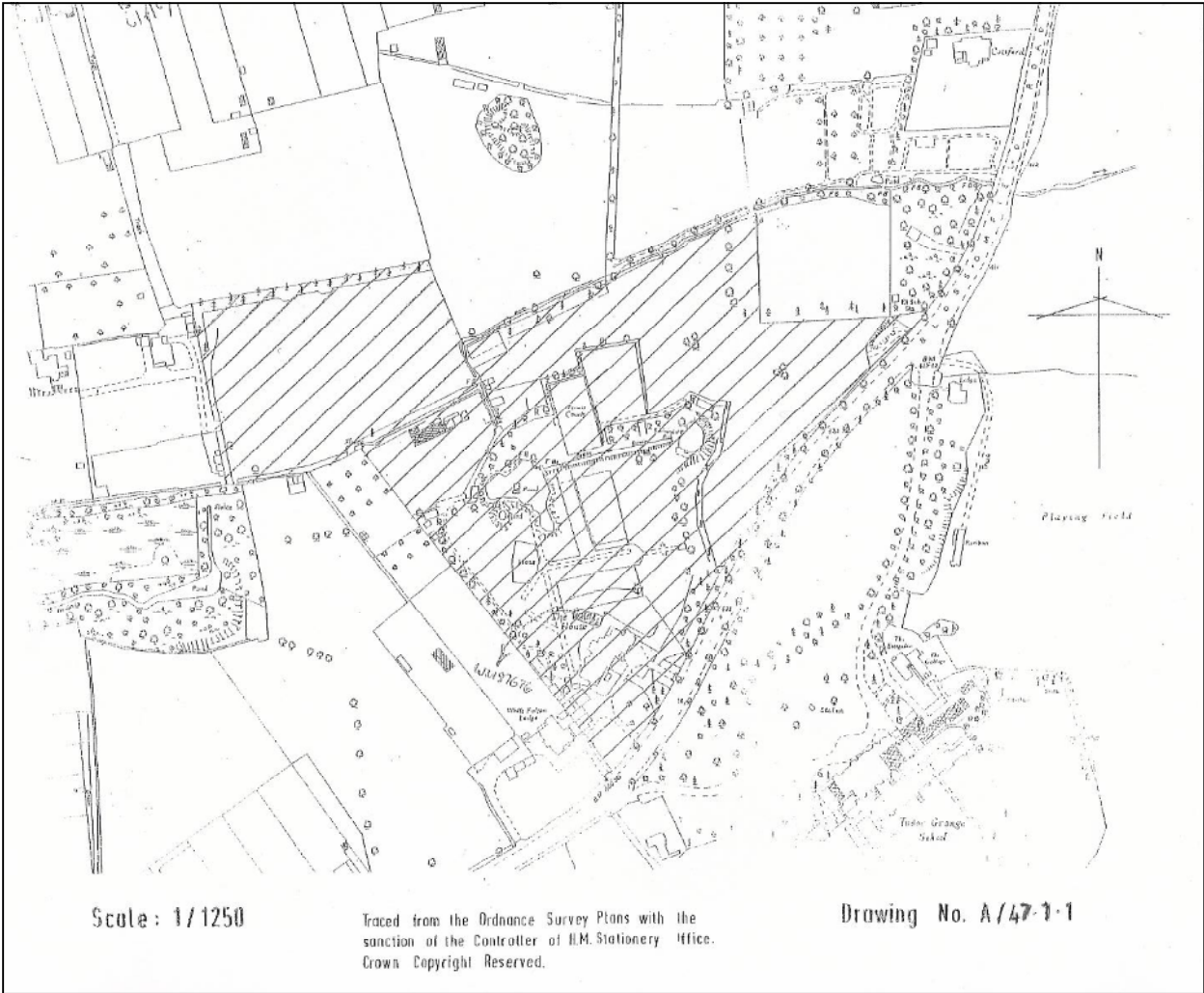


Fig 6: Copy of the original plan of the White House and garden made when they were sold in 1961

It appears from the site plan, which accompanied the conveyance, that remarkably little new building had occurred in the immediate vicinity since 1902, with the exception of the new houses along Alderbrook Road. However, by the early 1960s, as demand within the private housing sector increased, the sale of the site presented an ideal opportunity. In 1963, the developers, C. Bryant & Son, commissioned James A Roberts and Associates to design a small private housing scheme that would incorporate many of the mature trees and garden features within its layout. It was intended that this would serve as a pilot scheme for later mass development within the borough.

The original design included five basic house types, including bungalows, which were grouped at the entrance from Blossomfield Road as show homes. These house types were strategically located within the general layout to reduce regimentation and relate to changes in level and direction within the overall design. There were 26 houses, 6 bungalows and 4 blocks of three-storey flats within this original phase of the scheme, the properties being sold leasehold initially.

This original phase was extended in a somewhat piecemeal fashion as adjacent parcels of land were acquired, and the later houses were built in progressively higher densities. The result was that the integrity evident in the initial scheme was compromised as pressures for development increased.

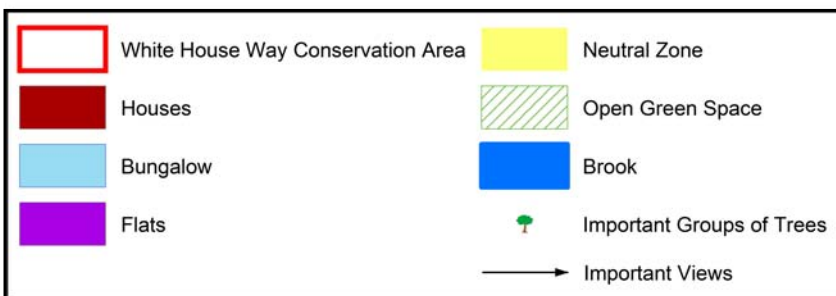


Fig 7: Character Appraisal map

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4.2 Character Analysis

Common Attributes

The character and appearance of any conservation area will depend upon the combination and collective effect of many different attributes, such as topography, setting, patterns of development and movement, building type, style and materials etc, which will be applicable to the entire area (the common attributes).

However, there may also be parts of the conservation area which vary in their character or appearance but which are still mutually supportive due to their interaction with the common attributes.

4.2.1 Topography, Setting and Land Uses Within and Around the Area

The White House Way Conservation Area is roughly triangular in shape. And covers an area measuring 4.3 hectares. The longest boundary runs in a south-west/north-east direction along the western side of Blossomfield Road. When it meets the Alder Brook, the boundary runs due west from Blossomfield Road following the course of the brook until it reaches White House Close. From there it traces an irregular path south-east along the rear plot boundaries to adjoin the Blossomfield Road once more at the southern angle of the Area.

The land falls away gently from the south-east towards the brook along the north-west boundary, before rising gently again northwards beyond the boundary. The highest point within the Area is thus at its south-eastern corner, and the lowest point is also within the eastern half of the Area around the pond where the land drops quite sharply to form fairly steep-sided banks.

Land use within the Area is residential, as is all the surrounding land on the western side of Blossomfield Road. The latter includes the Edwardian, inter-war and 1960s housing and later infill built along the Alderbrook Road, the 1960s and later housing built between the Alder Brook and the plots along Alderbrook Road at the northern end of White House Way, and in Cotsford and Poolfield Drive, and the 1960s houses and flats in Alder Park Road to the west of the Area. The exception is the land on the eastern side of Blossomfield Road, opposite the Area, which is almost entirely in educational use and is occupied by Solihull College. Tudor Grange has been incorporated within the campus but the house and the remnants of its formal gardens continue to dominate that part of the site opposite the Conservation Area. Beyond the College, the open fields and parkland that surrounded the house have been largely maintained or are in use as playing fields and sports grounds. This large area of green open space and mature trees makes a particularly welcome contribution to the environmental quality of the surrounding suburban area.

Biodiversity Value

A wildlife corridor extends along the north-west boundary of the Conservation Area that follows the course of the Alder Brook. This is part of a green network of natural corridors that run across the Borough. They link different habitat types allowing for the movement and mix of plants and animals within urban areas. It is part of the Council's Environment and Nature Conservation Strategy to identify protect and enhance these sites and promote biodiversity within the Borough.



Fig 8: View out of the area towards White House Close



Fig 9: View north from White House Green



Fig 10: The Alder Brook

4.2.2 Character of spaces within the area

One of the key characteristics of the Area is its uniformity of design in terms of its land use, use of space, landscaping, scale, building design, building materials and also its overall ambience. It is evidently a place that was conceived as a single entity, each part reinforcing the total effect. It is also a place that was planned with a particular way of life in mind: a modern, comfortable model of suburban living, with a range of houses that would appeal to different age groups and needs, but where convenience could be combined with semi-rural surroundings and where car ownership was assumed to be an essential element of that lifestyle.



Fig 11: Open space and formal planting adjacent to flats

The land use within the Area is residential, all of it occupied by private housing, with the exception of the amenity space at its south-west end known as White House Green. This includes the former pond or small lake at the southern end of the estate, a small part of the original pond that extended west across White House Green. The natural area around the pond contrasts with the adjacent remnant of the formal gardens to The White House. These formal gardens are intended for the private use of the occupants of the flats.



Fig 12: Houses near entrance from Blossomfield Rd

The sense of space within the Area may be attributed in part to the incorporation of the pond area, the formal garden features and the generous communal gardens that surround the flats. The open-plan front gardens also play a valuable role in this respect as they create a continuous green linear space that flanks the access roads and gives an appealing breadth between opposing houses across the street. The depth of most of the plots and the staggered layout also helps to conceal the narrow space between them, and it helps to lead the eye through the estate from the main road towards the pond and communal garden areas, the sudden informality and change in layout giving the illusion of space and inviting further exploration.

The landscaping within the Area has been designed to enhance the natural advantages of the pond and the generous use of space. The mature trees, notably the oaks that surround the pond and the tall stand of pines adjacent to the flats, have been retained and these have been supplemented by new trees and shrubs that are now reaching maturity in the spacious front gardens of most of the houses. The areas of lawn and shrubs around the flats extend visually the areas of public open space and create additional interest. Elsewhere on the estate, notably flanking the entrance from the main road and at the minor road junctions, there are small groups of trees to add further to the overall impression of greenery and also perhaps as a reminder of the large garden on which the present estate now stands. Above all, it is the continuity and flow of the landscaping that makes such a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the Area.

There are three different types of residential buildings: two-storey houses, bungalows and flats set within four three-storey blocks. All are of spacious proportions and the variety in the type and height of the buildings avoids a sense of monotony, particularly as all are of a contemporary date and relate to each other in terms of their general design and materials. The variety in type and height also enabled different buildings to be located to work best with the layout and topography of the site.

The building materials and design were an excellent example of 1960s residential development. Machine-made, single-lap clay or concrete tiles on 35 or 25 degree pitched roofs, mainly light orange/buff facing bricks, white-painted weatherboarding, metal casement windows including large 'picture' windows, plastic rainwater goods and integral or adjacent double garages. The buildings are roughly rectangular in plan, some with gabled wings and bays, and most have large flat-roofed integral garages, the large areas of glazing and asymmetry of design being a feature of the main frontages.

The development set an enviable but affordable standard for executive 1960s housing with its spacious plots, attractive landscaping, mature trees and imaginative layout. The buildings combined modern comforts and all the convenience of suburban living with a pleasing sense of seclusion and views of green open spaces and mature trees. Despite subsequent change, the Area has retained its appealing ambience, and its well-maintained homes, gardens and amenity areas suggest that these qualities are still much appreciated by local residents.

4.2.3. Street Pattern and Grain

The street layout within the Area was devised deliberately to avoid any straight lines or enforced regularity to ensure that the full extent of the development could not be seen at a glance, to allow for the staggered alignment of plots for greater privacy and variation, and to create a pleasing informal appearance. The layout also had to take into account the location of the pond, the existing mature trees and the garden features and exploit their potential. An additional benefit of the meandering route of the roads was to reduce the speed of the traffic, although as the roads only provide access to the houses in the immediate vicinity there is no problem of through traffic.

To take full advantage of the existing features and provide maximum seclusion from the main road, the road layout was planned as a semi-circle leading off Blossomfield Road at the northern end of the Area and curving round to the south to encircle the pond on White House Green. From this road a cul-de-sac leads off to the north within the Area, and a series of cul-de-sacs lead out of the Area to subsequent developments in White House Close, the northern end of White House Way, and Poolfield Drive. White House Way continues north out of the Area to link with Cotsford and the Alder Brook Road. This semi-circular layout enabled much of the development to be set some distance from Blossomfield Road and for the latter to be screened from view by garaging for the flats, gardens and fencing.



Fig 13: Looking west along White House Way

The dwelling plots follow the layout of the streets and are of roughly similar width. Some have good-sized rear gardens, although these vary considerably in size and shape due to the curvature of the road layout. A few of the rear gardens can be three or even four times the footprint of the dwelling itself while other houses on corner sites may have much smaller triangular-shaped rear gardens. On the northern side of the Area, the gardens overlook the Alder Brook. The open plan frontages and reasonably generous gardens are a characteristic feature of the Area and are of considerable amenity value.

The informality of the layout is more pronounced in White House Green where the road ends in a private access route to the garages built alongside Blossomfield Road. Two paired blocks of flats form an L-plan and terminate the row of dwellings on the western side of White House Green. The other two blocks are aligned north/south and are located alongside the croquet lawn facing west across the green. This arrangement ensures that the two blocks do not overlook each other or any of the houses and that they both have good views towards the pond and yew gardens.

It is a well-devised and ingenious layout that makes excellent use of the topography and retained features, carefully screened from the busy main road and devised to make the estate appear much larger than it actually is by its use of curving lines and partially-obscured views.

4.2.4. Tree Cover and Vegetation

Although the tree cover is not dense, it includes several significant groups of mature trees and is at a sufficiently high level to provide excellent screening, colour and interest throughout the year, softening the outlines of the buildings and providing changing views and focal points within the Area.

There are several outstanding groups and rows of mature trees and these have a particularly prominent role in defining the character of the Area, serving as key accents and subdivisions. These include:

- the mature trees, principally oaks that encircle the pond
- the row of tall conifers that run along the east side of the croquet lawn
- the tall conifers that run along the eastern side of Blossomfield Road and the mature deciduous trees on the western and eastern sides of Blossomfield Road

Apart from these specific groups, the tree cover elsewhere in the Area includes:

- the mature conifers and deciduous trees that lie along the Alder Brook boundary
- the mature deciduous and specimen trees within the front and rear gardens
- the small specimen trees planted in groups at junctions or the entrance to the estate as part of the original landscaping
- hedging found near the brook, in rear gardens along plot boundaries, and along the Blossomfield Road boundary and including yew, holly and laurel varieties.

4.2.5. Colours In and Around the Area

The principal source of colour with the Area arises from the combination of the building materials, the natural vegetation and the road and pavement surfaces.

The colours of the building materials have been deliberately limited to a restricted palette of pale orange/buff or greyish-buff brickwork, mainly dark brown and some red tiles, some purplish-red tile-hanging, white weatherboarding, bargeboards, windows and doorframes. The front doors and garage doors provide a greater opportunity for personal expression and present a range of colours of different paintwork and timber stains.

The vegetation offers a good contrast between the dark green pines and the seasonal display of lime and bright greens, yellows, reds, russets and browns of the deciduous trees. These are usually set against a complementary backdrop of green lawns and flowerbeds, pot plants, and flowering shrubs add additional changing accents.



Fig 14: Trees around the pond



Fig 15: Trees along Blossomfield Rd



Fig 16: Trees in front gardens

The road and pavement surfaces are predominantly of grey tarmac, which serves as a neutral background to the buildings and vegetation rather than making a positive contribution of its own. Parked cars also introduce a range of changing colour into the Area.

4.2.6 Micro-climate

There are no indications of the Area having been laid out in any way to respond to local micro-climatic conditions. The layout of the development has not been orientated so the buildings gain maximum benefit from the sun. The buildings are not arranged to avoid risks of flooding from the brook, nor does there appear to be any risk from consistently high winds.

4.2.7. Patterns of Movement

Vehicular

As all the roads through the Area serve only to provide access to the residential development in the immediate vicinity, there is a very low level of traffic and this is principally made up of private cars and not heavy commercial vehicles. There is no significant increase in traffic at particular times of day, and cars move through the Area generally well below the minimum speed limit due to the curvature of the roads, to the numerous junctions and as the roads only serve as access routes and most of them terminate in cul-de-sacs.

Pedestrian

Pedestrian activity is very low, and primarily occurs for short journeys within the estate or to the bus stop on the main road. Most local residents appear to rely on their private cars for transport into and out of the Area.

4.2.8. Night-time Appearance

At night, the appearance of the Area is typical of most suburban areas with low levels of light coming from four main sources:

- Concrete street lamps. These date from the 1960s, are of medium height and octagonal in section with roughly conical lamps and broad circular shades to deflect the light down onto the street. They are spaced at quite large intervals to provide a low and non-intrusive level of light that is adequate for safety and security.
- Light visible from the interiors of the buildings
- Security lights in the garage area next to the flats
- Borrowed light from the street lamps in Blossomfield Road and the town centre where the level of illumination is more intense.



Fig 17: Concrete street light

4.2.9. Key views

Views into the Area

From most road approaches into the Area the views are restricted and defined by the house frontages and the open plan front gardens. Mature trees located in front and rear gardens or on the boundary and visible above the roof ridges form a backdrop to these views. As the roads are constantly curving and there is much vegetation, during the summer months the outlines of the buildings are softened and views become more restricted affording a greater sense of privacy and seclusion. The most attractive view into the area is from White House Close as this looks directly across White House Green towards the pond.



Fig 18: Looking into the area from Blossomfield Rd

Views out of the Area

Again due to the enclosed and introverted nature of the development, the views out of the Area are confined to looking along the outward routes i.e. along White House Close, White House Way and the access road to the development off Blossomfield Road. The view along White House Close is very similar to the general views into the Area as it looks towards other houses of similar date and type with well-planted front and rear gardens. The main difference is that the slight incline in the land affords views of the housing beyond the boundary, the outlines of these buildings also being softened by trees and other vegetation.



Fig 19 Looking out of the area towards Solihull College

The view out of the area onto the Blossomfield Road is altogether different. It looks across the row of tall Scots Pines that line the east side of the road and onto the college campus. There is a wide area of car parking in the foreground and beyond this rises the angular profiles of the modern high-rise college buildings and also that of the large sports hall. There are also glimpses beyond these large buildings of the areas of green open space and mature planting that survives in Tudor Grange Park.

Views Within and Across the Area

Throughout much of the Area the views are linear in character and contained by the house frontages. The eye is drawn along these frontages and their open-plan gardens with only individual or small groups of trees providing obstacles to these long vistas and creating variety and interest. The exception is at the western end of White House Green where the linear space opens up to form a large circular area around the pond. The impact of this broad open space is enhanced considerably by the striking contrast between the natural and informal character of the pond area and the formal geometry of the yew hedging, croquet lawn, and the row of tall Scots Pines, which flank the croquet lawn. This contrast creates a dramatic tension and heightens the element of surprise.



Fig 20: View along White House Way cul-de-sac

It is this element of surprise and contrast at the heart of the Area that is among its most admirable characteristics and which contributes to its special identity.

4.2.10. Pattern and Density of Buildings

Throughout the Area the buildings occupy fairly generous plots, although the open plan front gardens appear to reduce the plot sizes visually and form part of the public open space even though they are in private use and ownership. The plots vary considerably in size and shape largely to accommodate the curvature of the roads and irregularities in the boundary and some are markedly deeper than others. Some of the rear plots are defined by the course of the Alder Brook and some by the western side of Blossomfield Road, while most of the remainder back onto the rear plots of contemporary housing in the immediate vicinity of the Area.

In general, there is an established building line, which follows the road layout, but the houses and bungalows have been slightly staggered and this, together with their variety of plan and form, avoids any sense of monotony. The houses and bungalows are generally set towards the front of the plots, with the exception of the smallest plots where the buildings are located centrally to ensure that they conform with the overall depth of the open plan front gardens.

The houses and bungalows are all detached but they have been built very close together, usually across almost the entire width of the plot to maximise available space. However the size, different heights and designs of the buildings ensures that they still appear as individual units rather than as terraced housing. This close proximity to one another also creates the false impression that the Area has a high density of buildings.

The only exception to this general rule is the four blocks of flats that are grouped to form an L-plan at the end of White House Green. Open plan communal gardens surround the blocks of flats entirely and these private gardens merge with the public open space around the pond.

4.2.11. Type and Style of Buildings

The buildings within the Area are all private dwellings, and they are either of two storeys, one storey, or flats built in two paired blocks, each of four storeys. All are spacious with ample gardens appropriate to the affluent leafy suburbs of Solihull.

The style of the dwellings reflects the 1960's ideal of comfortable modern living:

- facing bricks and tiled roofs giving a sense of solidity and tradition, with weatherboarding to brighten the facades and introduce an element of modernity,
- generous proportions,
- large picture windows to ensure the interiors are light and airy,
- large garages for two cars, in the houses these are an integral feature of each design,
- relatively large gardens to provide each dwelling with a setting and some private space.

Within this general format there were minor variations in the design, layout and outlook of each dwelling to give a sense of individuality that would appeal to the occupants.



Fig 21: House type



Fig 22: Bungalow type

4.2.12. Morphology of Buildings

There is one principal access route into the Area, White House Way, which continues north through the Area to link with Alder Brook Road. From White House Way, White House Green continues westwards through the Area and terminates in a cul-de-sac. Near its western end it adjoins the southern end of White House Close, which leads north out of the Area and also terminates in a cul-de-sac.

All these roads are lined with dwellings with the exception of the very western end of White House Green, which encircles the pond. The building line is slightly staggered, particularly at the road junctions where the gable ends of the buildings are exposed. At the western end of White House Green and White House Way the buildings are set at increasingly high levels to follow the gentle rise in the land towards the main road.

There is a deliberate strong visual unity between all the dwellings due to their contemporary date and shared materials, design features and details. The chief distinction is between the type of dwellings, i.e. the houses, bungalows and flats

Houses

- a) These are all of two-storey construction.
- b) Roofs are all pitched, and are built at a shallow angle of 35 degrees
- c) Roofs form a significant but not dominant element within the elevations
- d) Small brick chimneystacks are offset from the main ridge. These add vertical emphasis and punctuate the roof profile but are not dominant features of the design.
- e) Plan forms are basically rectangular with minor variations
- f) Some of the houses have shallow two-storey gabled projections to the front elevations with pitched roofs subservient in height to the main ridge
- g) Windows have a horizontal emphasis.

Within this basic format minor variations include

- a) Single-storey rear additions
- b) Pitched roofed single-storey side projections
- c) Flat-roofed single-storey garages projecting from front elevations
- d) Open and glazed porches with either flat or lean-to roofs. These may link with the garage roof or incorporate an extension.

Bungalows

- a) Roofs are all pitched and are built at a very shallow angle of 25 degrees
- b) Roof forms are dominant but not significant
- c) T-plan bungalows have chimneystacks offset from the main roof ridge which give vertical emphasis and punctuate the roof profile
- d) Plan forms are T shaped. with the main range aligned with the road and the subsidiary range breaking forward slightly to front and rear. An alternative L-plan bungalow was used in later phases of the development.
- e) All have flat-roofed detached double garages that may be linked to the dwelling by a porch or covered walkway.
- f) Windows have a horizontal emphasis

Flats

- a) Flat-roofed
- b) Four storeys
- c) Two blocks of flats form an L-plan with the blocks set at right angles
The other pair are aligned roughly north/south but the blocks are staggered so that they can be read as two separate entities.

Despite minor alterations and extensions, the form and overall design of the houses and bungalows remains predominant and in some cases fully intact and can still be clearly appreciated.



Fig 23: Looking west across the pond

4.2.13. Building Materials and Details

The general sense of coherence and uniformity of the design of the estate was reinforced by the materials used to construct the buildings. The walls were built of either pale orange/buff or greyish-beige coloured brick in stretcher bond, which contrasted well with the weatherboarded panels and gables and white paintwork. Both the blocks of flats had bands of purplish tile-hanging beneath the windows on each floor and white rendered or boarded panels between the windows.

The roofs of the houses were covered with dark-brown clay tiles, although a few have since been re-roofed with red or dark purple tiles. The roofs of the bungalows were covered with dark brown concrete tiles. Windows were all metal casements of varied size and design but all had a horizontal emphasis, and the doors were all fully glazed. Garages had 'up and over' painted metal doors. Plastic rainwater goods were employed throughout.

The detailing of the buildings was thereby kept to a minimum and they relied on their overall form and proportions, the horizontal emphasis within the design and the striking contrast between brickwork and paintwork for their effect. It was a simple, modern style with clean and well-defined lines and large areas of glass that was suggestive of the light and spacious interiors within.

Garden walling used similar bricks to the main buildings, and at the road junctions it was patterned with blue header bricks. Blue engineering bricks were also used in the stepped retaining wall adjacent to the flats.



Fig 24: Facing bricks



Fig 25: Roof tiles

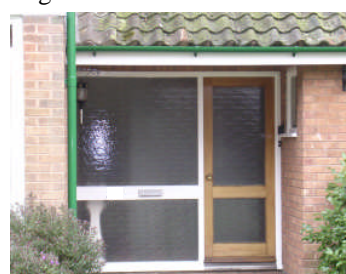


Fig 26: Glazed entrance door



Fig 27: Detail of garden wall

4.2.14. Survival of Building Features

In general the development has withstood the current trend for home alterations and improvements remarkably well. Residents have respected the architectural integrity of their homes and the development remains much as it was originally designed in the 1960s. It is of particular benefit that the brickwork has not been rendered, the roof profiles have maintained their simple form, and openings have not been altered significantly.

The most significant change has been the introduction of Upvc double-glazed windows and doors. These replacement windows and doors have had a subtle but regrettable impact on the proportions and overall design of many of the buildings as they are of bulkier section and appear less refined in detail than the original metal window frames and glazed timber doors. Of greater concern are the few instances where small-paned windows, windows with 'leaded' lights, bow windows and 'Georgian-style' gabled

porches have been introduced. These appear particularly incongruous and disproportionate and are quite contrary to the 1960s design ethos. Another important change has been the replacement of the original weatherboarding with Upvc cladding or, in some cases, with substitute tile-hanging which fails to provide the intended contrast with the brickwork.

4.2.15. Landmarks, Focal Points and Special Features.

None of the buildings within the Area make a significant individual contribution to the visual quality of the Area, with the possible exception of the four blocks of flats. These are striking not merely due to their height and scale but because they are located on relatively higher ground than the rest of the development, and their prominent horizontal profiles stand out among the pitched roofs elsewhere in the Area. They also have an aesthetic function in that they terminate White House Green, screening it from the road to form a backdrop and give a sense of enclosure around the pond and green.

The groups and rows of mature trees that are found within and outside the boundary of the Area are important natural features and landmarks. These are identified in Section 4, and include the following:

- the mature trees that encircle the pond;
- the row of tall conifers on the east side of the croquet lawn;
- the tall conifers and mature deciduous trees that line Blossomfield Road.

However the most outstanding feature and landmark is the green open space that includes the pond and the adjacent formal yew hedging, lawns and topiary located to the west of the Area. These key elements determined the overall design and layout of the development make an important contribution to its special character.



Fig 28: The pond



Fig 29: Topiary



Fig 30: The archery alley adjoining the croquet lawn

4.2.16. Open Spaces and Ground Surfaces

Open Space

Open space is provided by the open-plan front gardens that line the roads. These give breadth to the development and create appealing views through it and across it, so that the overall layout appears more generous than it actually is. Although this is not space that is accessible to the public, it can be appreciated as much by the general public as local residents.

This is also true of the communal gardens that surround the flats, which have an additional benefit in that they serve to extend visually the principal open space around the pond and yew gardens. (Fig 31)

The pond area is the only open space in the Area that is accessible by the public. It is currently being cleared and tidied by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers with the support of local residents associations and with Lottery funding.

Ground Surfaces

Ground surfaces visible to the public within the Area are either grassed, including the lawns in the front gardens and the formal gardens and green open space around the pond, or they have tarmac finishes, including the road, pavements and most of the driveways. There are concrete kerbs to the sides of the road. (Fig 32)

4.2.17. Boundary Treatments

These make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Area. To the north and west, the rear gardens of the houses and of the facing plots adjoin the boundary and mature trees, shrubs, hedges and close-lap fencing is the principal boundary treatment. Along the northern boundary, the rear gardens abut the Alder Brook, which is a wildlife corridor (See Section 2) and they benefit from its visual and natural assets.

The eastern boundary along the Blossomfield Road is quite different in character (Fig 33). This is a busy main road into the town centre and the boundary treatment is intended to serve as a screen and barrier for reasons of noise, privacy and security as well as for enhancement purposes. This is achieved primarily by intensive planting and also by some close-lap fencing. The planting takes the form of dense holly, laurel, and yew hedging, which is supplemented by shrubs and trees. This hedging is around two metres in height and between a half and a metre deep so fulfils its purpose reasonably effectively.



Fig 31: Gardens adjacent to the flats



Fig 32: Pavement Surface



Fig 33: Hedge along Blossomfield Road

4.2.18. Tranquil and Active Areas

As the Area is all in residential use, it is notably tranquil. This is mainly because the roads are only used for access by local residents and so there is a very limited and occasional amount of vehicular and pedestrian activity. The seclusion and tranquillity the Area provides from the adjacent commercial and educational facilities is part of its appeal and a key feature of its intended design.

4.2.19. Noise and Smells

Noise

As noted above, vehicular activity in the Area is minimal, but there is some background traffic noise from Blossomfield Road, which can become intrusive at busy times. Human noise is also at a fairly low level and intermittent, caused by local residents, pedestrians and also sometimes from the students from the nearby college.

Birdsong makes a welcome background noise throughout the Area, and in the vicinity of the Alder Brook there is the pleasant sound of running water.

Smells

Traffic fumes are present but only at busy times in the immediate vicinity of the Blossomfield Road. There are also some more welcome smells from plants and vegetation, particularly near the brook and around the pond.

4.2.20. Extent of intrusion or damage

The Area is admirably free of many common alien features. This is due largely to the fact it consists entirely of private residential housing that is well-maintained by the local residents and the only through road provides access to similar residential areas. Consequently there are no intrusive features such as advertisements, car parks or excessive signage or street furniture that could create visual clutter. Neither is there any derelict land or buildings that might encourage vandalism or litter. Road markings and road signs are confined to the areas adjacent to the access off Blossomfield Road where there are double and single yellow lines to restrict parking here at certain times of day. Street furniture or similar appears only in the form of the streetlights and the few benches located in the area around the pond.

The only significant alien feature within the Area is the unsympathetic alterations carried out on some of the buildings. These may appear modest in themselves but they have a cumulative effect, which can insidiously erode the special 1960s character of the development and its unity of design. Such alterations include minor additions that may disregard the form and massing of the buildings, different coloured materials, such as red roof tiles or tarmac drives, plastic replacement windows, boarding and doors, and, in particular, inappropriate traditional or reproduction period features such as leaded lights, Georgian bay windows and porches, or the introduction of block paving to replace tarmac drives.

Apart from the frequent use of plastic substitutes, it should be emphasised that the alterations referred to above are still the exception rather than the rule. Consequently the architectural integrity of the development remains for the most part unimpaired, and legislature to help control such anomalies is already in place (See Section 7)

The only other discordant feature within the Area is the patched tarmac on the pavements and also the condition of the road surface in White House Way cul-de-sac. Again this does not pose a significant threat to the character of the Area but it is an issue that may require some attention in the medium term

5. SUB-AREAS AND NEUTRAL ZONES

Sub-Areas

As the White House Way development was conceived and built as a single entity the issue of sub-areas does not arise. Consequently the entire Area is of a similar character and appearance, its dwellings are of a similar type, date, style, design and materials and together with the overall layout all contribute to the whole.

Neutral Zones

These are sites that would benefit from enhancement so that they can make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Area.

One part of the Area that has not been referred to in detail would probably fall within this category. This is the garaging located to the rear of the flats and accessed off the end of White House Green. It is largely concealed from public view on the eastern boundary of the development, well-screened by planting, and occupying the least desirable part of the site flanking the main road. These flat-roofed buildings, with their metal 'up and over' garage doors, form a roughly crescent shape that encloses a tarmac yard and are slightly staggered in height and layout due to the gentle incline and shape of the site.

Many of the garages appear shabby and this is made all the more apparent by the high standard of maintenance elsewhere on the development. Despite their discreet location, the garages lie within the Conservation Area and so they are subject to all the same policies and legislation and should not be regarded as a 'soft' area but rather, as recognised by PPG 15 (parag. 4.17), as an opportunity for enhancement. In this particular instance, a modest refurbishment would bring this part of the Area up to the standard evident elsewhere so that it need no longer make a negative contribution to the whole.



Fig 34: Garages adjacent to flats

6. INDIVIDUAL BUILDINGS

The White House Way Conservation Area is unusual in that it includes no individual buildings that make a special contribution to its character and appearance. Neither does it include any Listed Buildings of special architectural or historic interest or any buildings identified by the Planning Authority as being of Local Interest.

This is because the Area's special character and appearance derives from its overall design and layout, as a pioneering example of private housing undertaken in the 1960s. Consequently every part and every building makes a significant contribution to the whole effect but is not of individual distinction.

The most important differences that currently exists between the buildings is:

- Type of dwelling –house, bungalow or flats
- Design-the differences in the original designs of houses and bungalows
- Degree of Alteration

7. THE FUTURE OF WHITE HOUSE WAY CONSERVATION AREA

7.1 Management Proposals

Once in place as an adopted character appraisal document, the White House Way Conservation Area Appraisal will enable the Planning Authority to respond fully to its duty under Section 72 of The Act to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Area. It will allow a far greater scrutiny of development proposals, thereby ensuring that the "special attention" required by the Section 72 duty can be implemented effectively. This duty applies to all forms of development, whether new build, extensions or alterations.

Developers and householders are encouraged to use this Appraisal document in order to guide them in the preparation of their proposals and thereby avoid lengthy and unnecessarily protracted negotiations after submission or rejection of their schemes. They will be able to address and reflect upon the fundamental principles and details, which, together, give the Area its special architectural and historic interest.

Where applications demonstrate a lack of observance of the factors identified in the Analysis, the Planning Authority will adopt a robust line to ensure that submitted schemes are improved accordingly. The existence of this Conservation Area Appraisal will strengthen the Planning Authority's position considerably at appeal by under-pinning the case.

This Appraisal re-affirms the Planning Authority's high level of commitment to the preservation and enhancement of the Area. It will demonstrate this through all stages of the planning process. This will start with a consistent and unequivocal requirement for high quality plans and elevations for all forms of development proposals submitted for consideration. An essential component will be street elevations to indicate how the proposal will integrate into the local scene.

The Planning Authority is empowered to attach conditions, as deemed appropriate, to the granting of permission for any proposals. It will do this in all cases, even when the submitted documents indicate conformity with policies and standards that have been adopted for the Area. There are legal reasons for doing this as well as to provide a safeguard against permissions that might be transferred to new owners who may not have the will to uphold the efforts of the Planning Authority and their committed neighbours in securing sympathetic development.

The Planning Authority will expect proposals for development to included designs in appropriate styles, and completed to levels of detailing to the same standard which has created the underlying character and appearance of the Area.

7.2 Local Plan Policies

Although this will be adopted as a character appraisal document, this document will also stand as part of the Development Plan in accordance with Policy ENV5 of the UDP, as is consistent with national policy and guidance expressed in PPG15. Any future review of the Development Plan will be regarded as an opportunity to incorporate and consolidate its fundamental principles into headline policies in the new Plan.

The local planning authority will, therefore, endeavour to:

- a) preserve the grain of plot layouts especially by rejecting proposals which involve the assembly of rear gardens to form development opportunities
- b) protect buildings from demolition unless it can be demonstrated that they are structurally unsound and beyond the scope of economic repair, or that previous alteration and/or extension has resulted in a substantial or irreplaceable loss of their individual character
- c) ensure that any replacement buildings should be designed with their style, scale, siting, orientation, elevational articulation, materials and detailing to perpetuate those same attributes contained within the architectural language of their immediate surroundings
- d) ensure appropriately-designed signs, street lights and any other street furniture or forms of traffic management

Materials and detailing are of critical importance within this particular conservation area as it is the overall coherence and homogeneity of the design of this development that defines its special character. This is demonstrated by this analysis and justifies the rigorous requirements outlined above. However architectural details in particular are under increasing threat from unsympathetic alterations and additions that are often carried out with deemed consent. To address this problem, the local authority has introduced Article 4 (2) Directions which will, where necessary, control development with regard to:

- a) the enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwelling e.g. doors, windows etc
- b) the alteration of a roof of a dwelling
- c) the erection or construction of a porch outside any external door of a dwelling
- d) the provision within the curtilage of a dwelling, building, enclosure, swimming or other pool required for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling as such, or the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of such a building or enclosure
- e) the provision within the curtilage of the dwelling of a hard surface for any purpose incidental to enjoyment of the dwelling as such

- f) the installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna on a dwelling or within its curtilage
- g) the erection or demolition of a gate, wall, fence or other means of enclosure within the curtilage of a dwelling
- h) the painting of a dwelling or building or enclosure within the curtilage of a dwelling

7.3 Issues requiring further pro-active policy consideration

The contribution of the local residents in maintaining the Area is considerable. Apart from the policy issues referred to above, the following measures are worthy of detailed consideration for the long-term benefit of the Conservation Area:

- although trees within conservation areas are protected by existing planning policy, the establishment of an overall tree audit to identify specimens that are nearing the end of their natural lives, and the preparation of a long-term scheme for their replacement would help protect these key features within the Area.
- the establishment of a long-term management scheme for the pond. The current restoration work by the BTCV suggests that no such scheme has existed to date and it would be beneficial to gain maximum benefit from this restoration in the future.

7.4 Alteration or Extension to Boundary

A character appraisal of a conservation area presents an opportunity to recommend extensions or alterations to the conservation area boundary if this is deemed necessary.

At the time of designation, the possibility of including White House Close within the Area was considered, but it was decided to confine the Area to the original phase of the development. The preparation of this document represents an appropriate opportunity to reconsider this decision.

There would certainly appear to be a case for including White House Close within the Conservation Area. This is because:

- it shares many common attributes
- it is accessible only from the Area
- No.1 White House Close is actually aligned with the rest of the houses on the west side of White House Green
- part of the Close is clearly visible from and adjacent to the pond and area of green public space around it, the focal point of the development.

However these arguments still do not justify extending the boundary for the following reasons:

- the general ambience is subtly different in White House Close
- the extent of the alterations appears more pronounced
- the sense of green open space is less apparent
- but most importantly in the case of a pioneering designation of this type it is most logical to restrict the Area to its initial phase of development.

This is a complex issue, and in view of the unusual nature of the designation, it is recommended that the extension of the boundary is reviewed at regular intervals, possibly on a five-year cycle.

Summary of Issues

The designation of the White House Way housing estate as a Conservation Area was a bold and pioneering decision but, as this Appraisal has shown, it was a decision justified by the special attributes of the estate, its architectural integrity, sense of seclusion, well-devised layout, green open spaces, mature trees, wildlife pool and historical associations. Furthermore it represents the embodiment of a 1960s design concept for modern suburban housing that has had repercussions for later residential development within the borough.

The retention of its special attributes is vital if its character and appearance are to be maintained, and the loss of any key features, open spaces or original architectural materials and details represents an unacceptable loss to the entire area. Every effort will be made by the local planning authority to prevent such a loss occurring and the contribution of local residents in this respect is considerable. The extension of the existing boundary to incorporate later phases of the development remains open to review and should be reassessed at regular intervals to ensure this estate receives the protection it deserves in the future.

APPENDIX I

Examples of two house types and a bungalow within the White House Way development redrawn from the original plans.

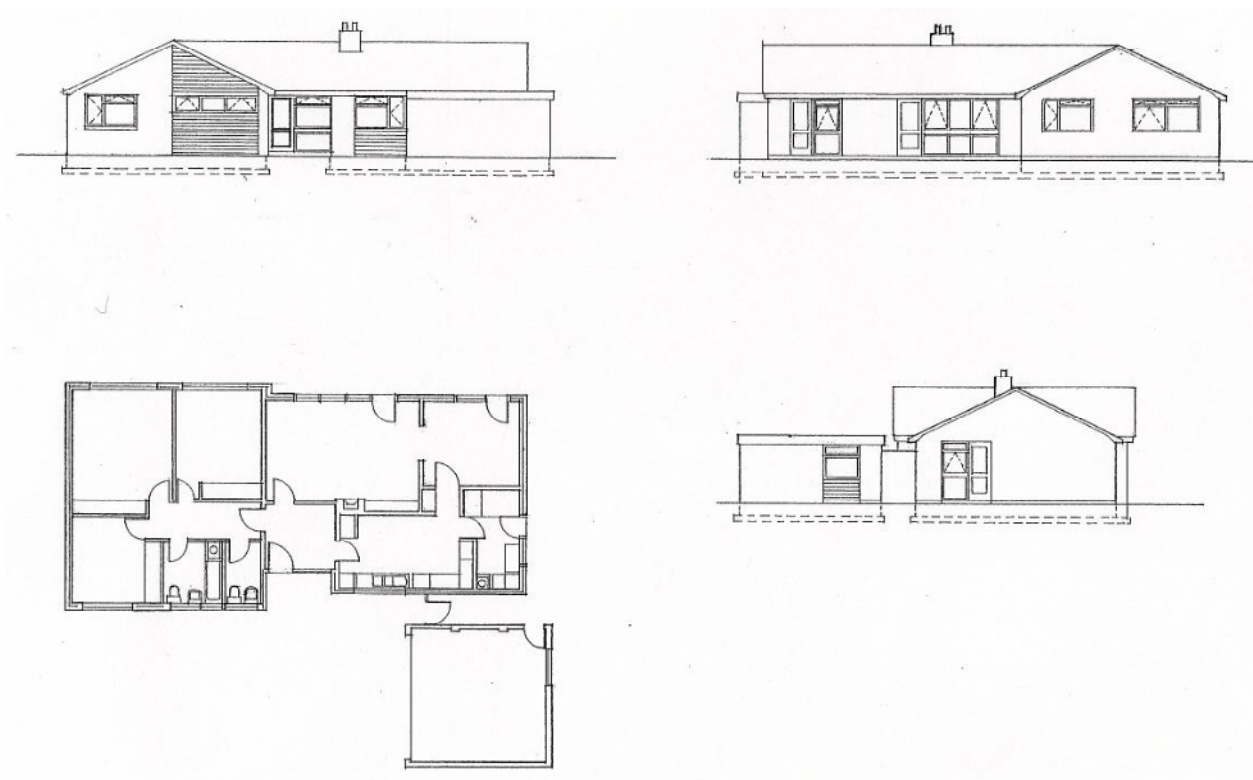


Fig 35: Redrawn from original plan of bungalow type

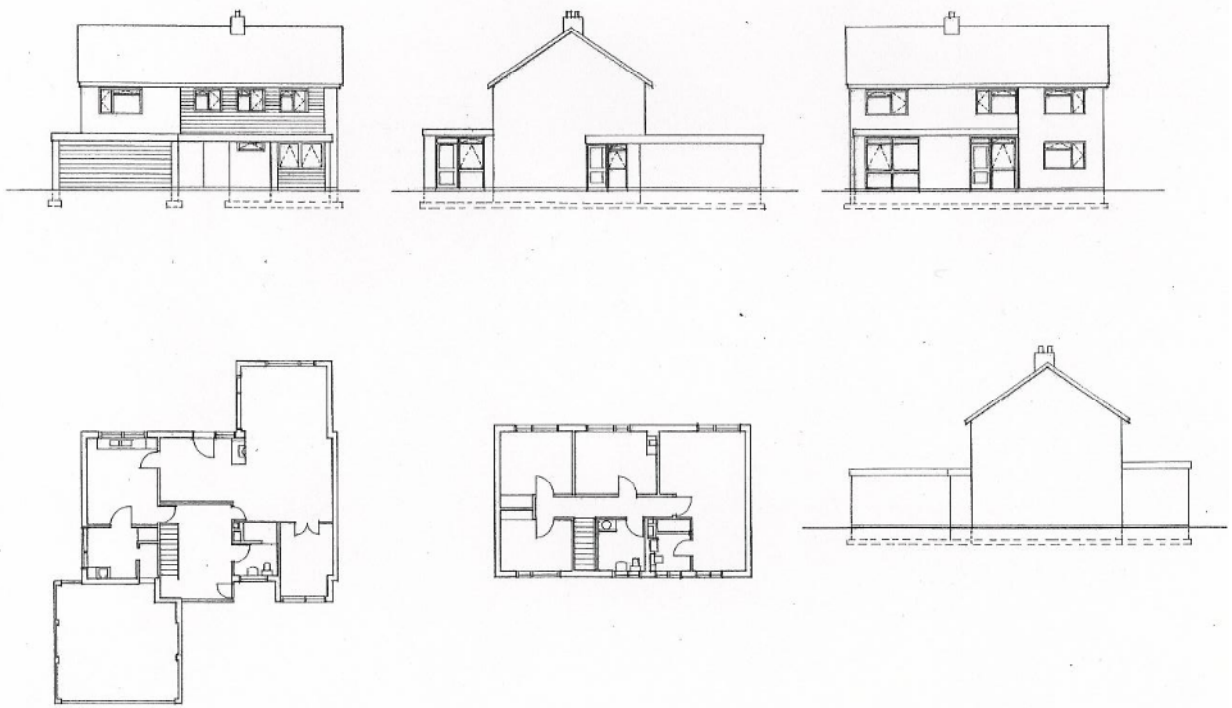


Fig 36: Redrawn from original plan of house type 1



Fig 37: Redrawn from original plan of house type 2

APPENDIX 2

Consultation Statement

Formal consultation on this statement was carried out in March and April 2007 by individual letter to every property in the conservation area, plus every property in the adjoining White House Close.

In addition to the above, the following organisations were also consulted:

The White House Residents Association
The Twentieth Century Society
Solihull residents Association
Ancient Monument Society
Society for the protection of Ancient Buildings
The Georgian Society
Victorian Society
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
Council for British Archaeology
English Heritage
Solihull Archaeological Group
National Housing Federation, Central Region
GVA Grimley
Stansgate Planning Consultants
Cala Homes (Midlands) Ltd
Oakmoor Estates Ltd
Chase Homes
Miller Homes
Tyler-Parkes Partnership
RPS
Taylor Woodrow
The Lapworth Partnership
Countrywide Homes
Pegasus Planning Group
Bloor Homes
Warwickshire Museum, Field Services
Barton Hasker Ltd
David Sage
Creative property Design Ltd
Cross & Craig Associates
Design Logic
Dilworth Design
Drawing & Contract Management
Hampton Architecture
Martyn Bramich Associates
Plan AM
Planaconstruct
David Vincent
Ward Councillors

Furthermore, two drop-in sessions were held for the public staffed by Council officers, on 14th and 17th March 2007.

The consultation period ended on 18th April 2007.


List of Respondents

Council for British Archaeology
Resident of 5 White House Close
Resident of 18 White House Way

Summary and changes requested	Our response/action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Environment record should be checked for any known archaeological record. 	<p>Done - nothing identified at this time.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White House Close should be included as an addition to conservation area. 	<p>Arguments in favour noted, but no new material considerations raised. It is considered that the balance remains in favour of <u>not</u> extending the conservation area at this time for the reasons set out at section 7.4.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary to have a construction policy towards the management of trees on the Estate. 	<p>This is dealt with at section 7.3 of the document and would also be the subject of any future management plan and enhancement proposals.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 7 - the houses were initially sold leasehold, not freehold. 	<p>Text amended accordingly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested minor amendment to first sentence if page7, second para. 	<p>Noted, but amendment not considered necessary, and could create further confusion.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested correction to line of Alder brook on map on page 8. 	<p>Noted and amended accordingly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested additions to 'important group of trees'. 	<p>Noted, but these are already set out at section 4.2.4.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested correction to para 4.2.13 is not all doors were originally softwood. 	<p>Text amended accordingly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 20, figure 30 is not the croquet lawn but the 'archery alley' 	<p>Annotation changed accordingly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 4.2.20 - red tarmac drives are not necessarily an alteration as some were original to the estate 	<p>Text amended accordingly.</p>

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