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The Essex Design Initiative

Noak Bridge

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Basildon Council
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Cover illustration: Looking down Bridge Street at the entrance to the Conservation Area.

This document was produced by Essex County Council for Basildon Borough Council.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Noak Bridge Conservation Area was first designated in 1996 and is one of four Conservation Areas in Basildon Borough. Basildon Council commissioned Essex County Council Historic Buildings and Conservation to prepare this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan in 2009. The research and fieldwork were carried out in April and May 2010.

Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. They are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Legislation relating to conservation areas is to be found in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which says that local Authorities have a duty to designate conservation areas, to formulate policies for their preservation and enhancement, and to keep them under review (Ch VI, ss 69-80).

Unlike other forms of designation, conservation areas are concerned with the quality and condition of places and the wider built environment, rather than particular buildings or sites. Crucial to them are not just individual buildings, but the spaces between buildings, views along roads, public realm, architectural character and materials, and street frontages and shop fronts. These factors combine to endow the conservation area, or its various parts, with a distinct character, the existence of which will have been the reason for its designation. The wider setting of a conservation area, including views into and out of it, is also essential to the preservation of its character.

Designation of a Conservation Area extends planning controls over certain types of development, principally the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees, though they also limit certain side and rear extensions, and restrict the positioning of outbuildings. 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.

Conservation areas are about place-making rather than just the protection of individual buildings or features, and therefore features such as views, spaces between buildings, the historic layout of property boundaries and boundary treatments, and materials and architectural detailing, are crucial to the preservation of their character.

This appraisal provides an account of planning policies relevant to the management of conservation areas, a brief history of the development of the village, followed by a description of the Conservation Area and an assessment of its character. The contribution of different elements to its character is identified through detailed street by street analysis. The appraisal concludes with proposals for the future management of the Conservation Area.

2. PLANNING POLICIES

2.1 National policy

Government policy for conservation areas is set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the historic environment* (PPS5), supported by its *Statement on the Historic Environment 2010*, and the *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* (see Appendix 2 for further details). Conservation areas are treated as part of the wider historic environment, and are considered to be a 'heritage asset' like listed buildings and other parts of the historic environment which have some degree of statutory protection. PPS5 states that 'The Government's overarching aim is that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.' The historic environment is valued not simply for its cultural importance, but also for its contribution to the quality of life, and its potential for facilitating regeneration and economic growth, and in adapting to a more sustainable life style.

2.2 Local policy

The Basildon Borough Local Plan was adopted in March 1998, with alterations in September 1999. The 2004 Planning Act replaced Local Plans with Local Development Frameworks. To make provision for the interim period whilst work on the Local Development Framework is in progress, the Local Plan policies were saved with the approval of the Secretary of State in 2007 and are to be found in the document Basildon Borough Local Plan Saved Policies September 2007. When complete, the Local Development Framework will set out the Council's policies on land-use and development until 2021.

Of the saved Local Plan policies, those most relevant to Noak Bridge are BE12, which says permission for new residential development, and for the alteration and extension of existing dwellings, will be refused if it causes harm to the surrounding area, overlooking, overshadowing, noise or disturbance, and traffic congestion; and R1, which says 'Within the urban areas, planning permission will not be granted for development of open space which would cause significant harm to the recreational or amenity value of the open space, or to the contribution which the open space makes to the character of the area within which it is located.'

In 2006, work on the draft Replacement Local Plan was halted as it was to be superseded by the Local Development Framework. It was however agreed that the Development Control policies in the draft Replacement Local Plan should in principle be treated as a material consideration in determining planning applications. These policies are to be found in the document Draft Development Control policies. Approved 29 June 2006. This says (in para. 7.34) that conservation areas are 'worthy of protection from inappropriate development. The scale, use, materials and design of new buildings within Conservation Areas should be sympathetic to the surrounding areas and make a positive contribution to the street scene. The boundaries of the Conservation Areas have been drawn around those areas of architectural and historical significance.' The following policies were drafted for conservation areas:

BAS BE9 Conservation Areas

1. In order to preserve and enhance the Borough's Conservation Areas and their settings, planning permission will only be granted for development within or affecting them if it would be appropriate in scale, use, design and materials.
2. By the use its Development Control powers, including Tree Preservation Orders, the Council will preserve and enhance the open spaces, trees and other natural features important to the character and historic value of the Borough's Conservation Areas.

BAS BE10 Demolition of buildings in Conservation Areas

Within Conservation Areas, permission for the demolition of an unlisted building or structure will not be granted unless:
a. The building or structure to be demolished makes no positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area; and
b. Full planning permission exists for the creation of a new replacement building.

Development control in Basildon is also informed by the Supplementary Planning Guidance document Development Control Guidelines 1997 intended for new residential development, extensions, shopfronts and advertisements. Those parts of the Guidelines potentially of relevance to Noak Bridge are those dealing with infill development and extensions.

2.2.1 The Article 4 Direction

Under Article 4(1) and 4(2) of the General Permitted Development Order 1995, local authorities can make directions withdrawing permitted development rights allowed under the Order. This makes it possible to exercise control over minor works such as replacement windows and doors which can have a damaging effect on the character of a building or a conservation area.

The Noak Bridge Article 4(2) Direction introduced in 1996 covers the entire Conservation Area with the exception of: green spaces, i.e. the footpaths and green space at the edge of the village and the central village green; the buildings to south and east of the village green, comprising the school, part of Coppice Lane, and the Medical Centre; and 13 houses on Wash Road on the northern boundary of the Conservation Area (Fig. 1). The Direction removes permitted development rights and makes it necessary to obtain planning permission for the following works:

- alteration or removal of chimneys
- alterations to the front of a house, including doors and windows
- extensions and porches to the front of a property where they would face a road
- alterations to a roof which faces a road
- the construction of a pool or pool building where it would face a road;
- the construction of a hard standing to the front of a house
- the installation of a satellite dish on or to the front of a house
- the construction, alteration or demolition of gates, fences and walls fronting on to roads
- the painting of a house where it fronts the highway.

The full text of the Article 4 Direction is given in Appendix 1.

Figure. 1: Map showing the Conservation Area boundary and other designations.

3. CONSERVATION AREA AND OTHER DESIGNATIONS

The Essex Historic Environment Record shows that there are no listed buildings, scheduled areas, other heritage assets or known archaeological sites in Noak Bridge. The land to the north of Wash Road is Green Belt. The land to the west and south-west and to the south, north of the A127, is identified as existing green space under Policy R1 in the Local Plan. The tongue of green space to the south links through to the 20 acre Noak Bridge Nature Reserve, identified as a site of importance for nature conservation in the Local Plan.

About 40 trees in the Conservation Area are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. All 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 planning department at least six weeks beforehand.

There are no public rights of way in Noak Bridge. The footpaths and parking areas south of Bridge Street are maintained by Basildon Engineers and Parks Department. North of Bridge Street, the footpaths are adopted highway.

4. CHARACTER STATEMENT

Noak Bridge is a residential suburb of Basildon New Town, built on what today are recognisable as Essex Design Guide principles. An irregular street plan with many trees and hedges, and standardised house types skilfully varied through careful architectural detailing and selection from a limited palette of materials, have created a balance between unity and variety that is at once immediately attractive and suggestive of a traditional English village. The street scene is enlivened by landmark buildings, and distinctive features such as Dutch gables, barge boards, decorative brickwork, sun dials, and finger post signs. It is a highly successful exercise in place-making, very popular with residents.

5. LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Noak Bridge is a neighbourhood village forming part of Basildon New Town in southern Essex. It lies to the north of the New Town, separated from it by the A127, and just to the east of the A176, the road north to Billericay. The underlying geology is London Clay. Subsidence has been an issue in parts of Noak Bridge.

The village is enclosed by Wash Road to the north and west, Eastfield Road to the east, and the A127 to the south. These effectively form ring roads round the village with the result that within it there is virtually no through traffic. The east and west sides of the village are surrounded by woodland and hedges. Only on its north side, on Wash Road, are there houses that face the road and these generally have hedges and trees in their gardens. Here there are long views over fields and open countryside, and the spire of Great Burstead church can be seen distantly. The result is a very strong sense of enclosure, almost like a continental bastide or medieval planned walled town. The analogy is the stronger for the presence of the high bank or bund created on its south side to screen the A127. As with a well preserved walled town, there is no hint of urban sprawl or housing spreading beyond its tightly drawn boundaries. This is the result of successful Green Belt policies. In seeking to preserve the special identity of the village, it is important that this abrupt division between town and country is not blurred by creeping development.

6. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Historical development

The name Noak Bridge was taken from that of the bridge over the river Crouch a little further to the west where it is crossed by the A176 road between Billericay and Basildon. A conscious effort was made to create a 'bridge' theme in the village layout, hence the subways beneath Wash Road and Bridge Street, though these also serve to provide the village with a network of footpaths.

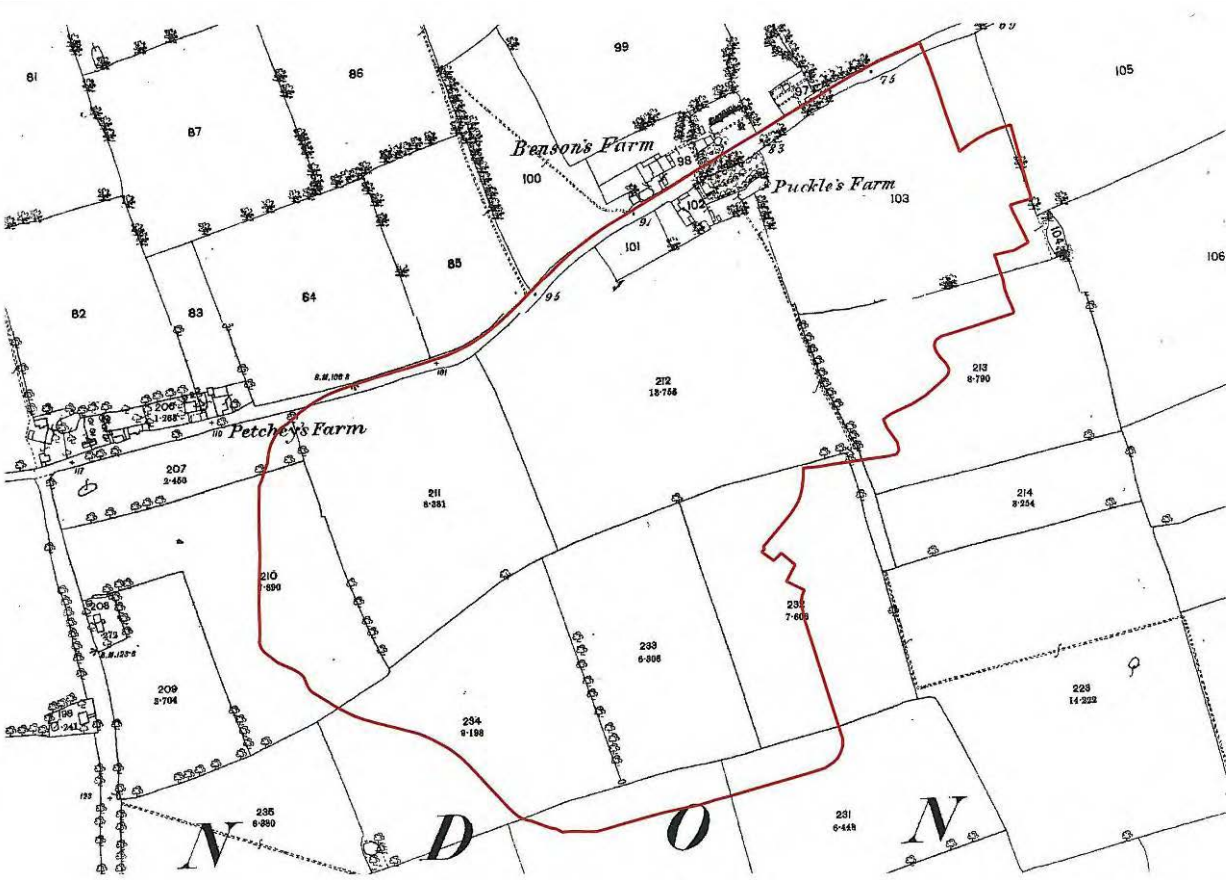

Figure 2: The 1st edition Ordnance survey map of 1881 showing the area subsequently occupied by Noak Bridge.

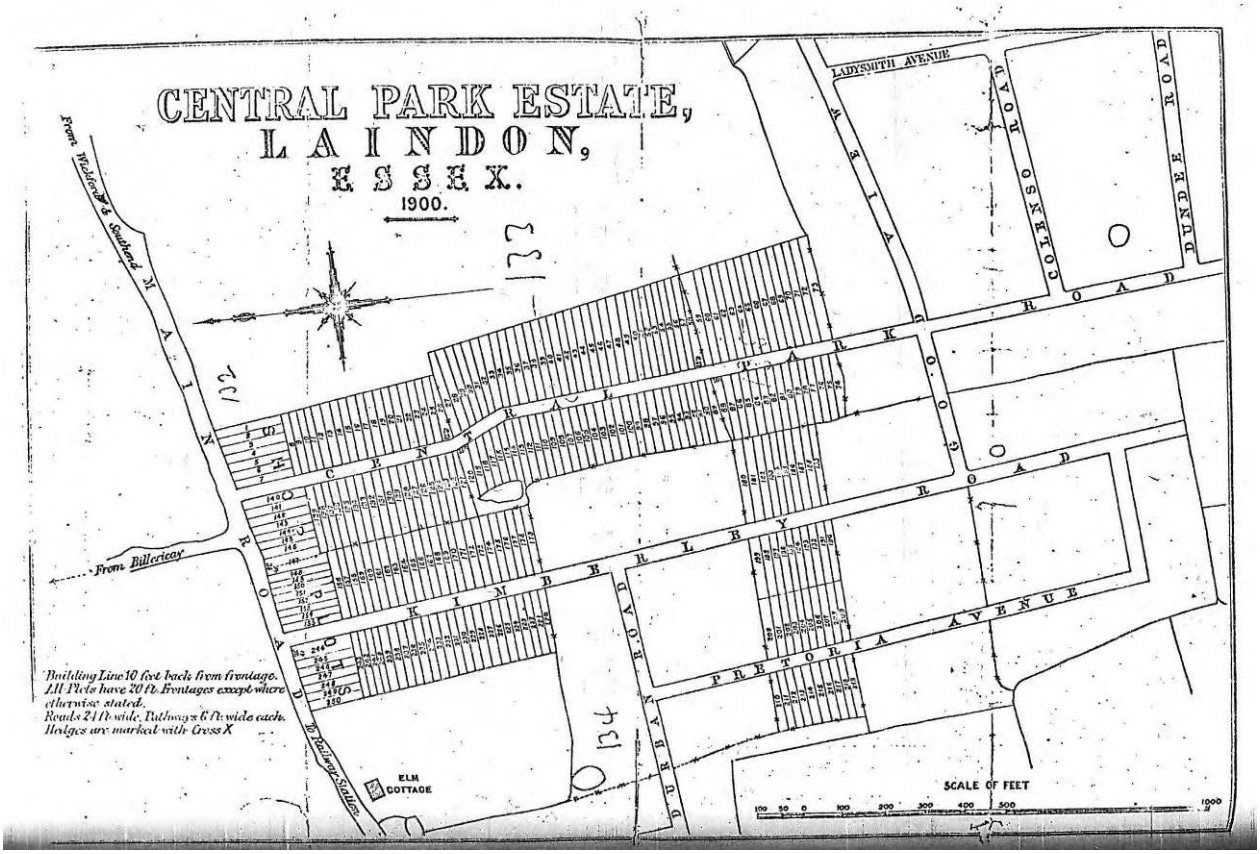

Figure 3: Plan of the proposed Central Park Estate.

Historically Noak Bridge is situated in the parish of Laindon. The Conservation Area occupies what on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881 were eight fields belonging in part to Puckles Farm, which stood where Gatelodge Way is on Wash Road (Fig. 2). Whilst this landscape is unchanged on the 2nd edition map of 1898, by 1900 plans had been drawn up for the Central Park Estate, a plotland development with a grid of 250 plots with frontages 20 feet wide located in the area around Kimberley Drive and Eastfield Road (Fig. 3). This was a response to the profound agricultural depression of the final decades of the 19th century and the abandonment of agricultural land. The 3rd edition OS map of 1921 indicates that the development was only partially successful, the roads or lanes having been marked out but the plots being larger than indicated on the 1900 plan and by no means all occupied. Roads had also been laid out further west, one of them, Waverley Road, being roughly in the same position as New Waverley Road (Fig. 4). Although the South African street names have been retained, the only road to have been fully retained in the layout of Noak Bridge is Kimberley Drive.

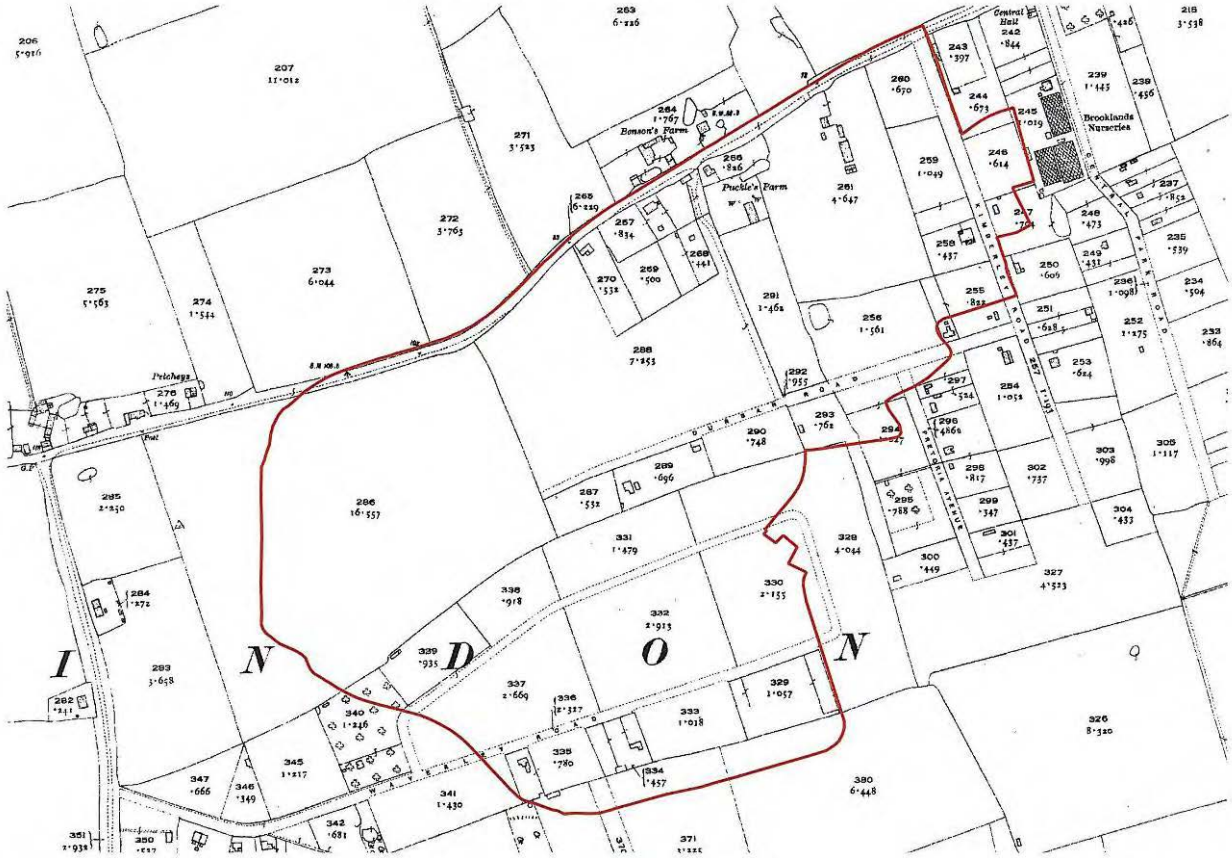

Figure 4: Plotland development of the area of Noak Bridge from the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1921.

Noak Bridge was first planned in the 1970s as part of Basildon New Town which was developed from 1951. Because it was separated from the rest of the New Town by its location north of the A127, it was decided that it should have its own identity, which was to have the character of a traditional English village, in the manner of the principles laid down in the Essex Design Guide, though at no point was reference made to the Design Guide,and only subsequently has it come to be seen as an exemplar of Design Guide practice. The first draft of a plan for the settlement was issued in 1975 (BDC 1975). Basildon Development Corporation received permission from the Secretary of State for the Environment for the new neighbourhood in 1976. Noak Bridge was to provide housing for 3-4000 people at a density of 30-40 houses per hectare, the great majority of them Corporation owned. The project architects were Maurice Naunton and George Garrard. Construction began in 1979, and proceeded from west to east. By 1982, 388 rented dwellings had been built, including bungalows, sheltered housing, the school, a surgery and shops as well as houses. This initial phase of development comprised the western end of Bridge Street, Lower Street, Crouch Street, Kenilworth Place and New Waverley Road. The area to the north, Bridgecote Lane, Fore Street, Durban Road, and Saling Green was developed subsequently and complete by 1985. The introduction of the right to buy council housing by the Thatcher government had the effect that much of this later part of Noak Bridge was developed by the private sector in collaboration with Basildon Development Corporation. These were usually larger houses at a lower density, about 12-13 houses to the acre as opposed to 19 originally.

Figure 5: Concept sketch from the original prospectus from Noak Bridge.

Development was phased, in a series of areas or neighbourhoods. Area 10, for instance, located between Kimberley Drive and Eastfield Road, was one of the last to be planned directly by the Development Corporation, and of their original plans for the first phase, dated 1984, only nos 17-23 Kimberley Drive were built. It was stated that these were to be larger houses to complement the smaller properties elsewhere in the village. They were to be fitted between the existing trees and hedges which, as is typical of Noak Bridge, were to form the framework for the development. The mature hedge on the east side of Kimberley Drive was retained and four existing gaps in it were used to provide drives to the new houses.

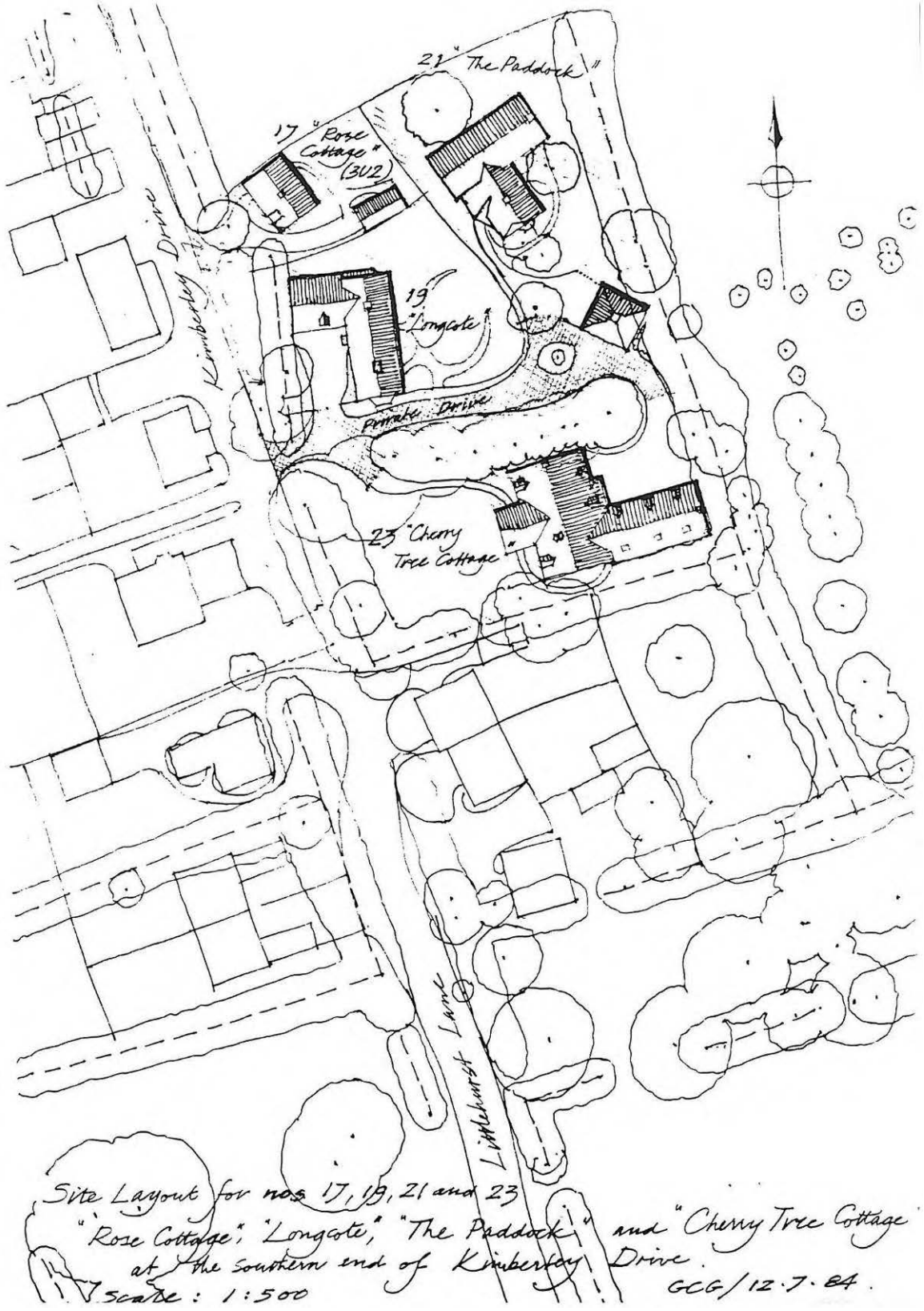

Figure 6: George Garrard's plan for nos 17-23 Kimberley Drive. Note the separation of Kimberley Drive from Littlehurst Lane to avoid a long straight road.

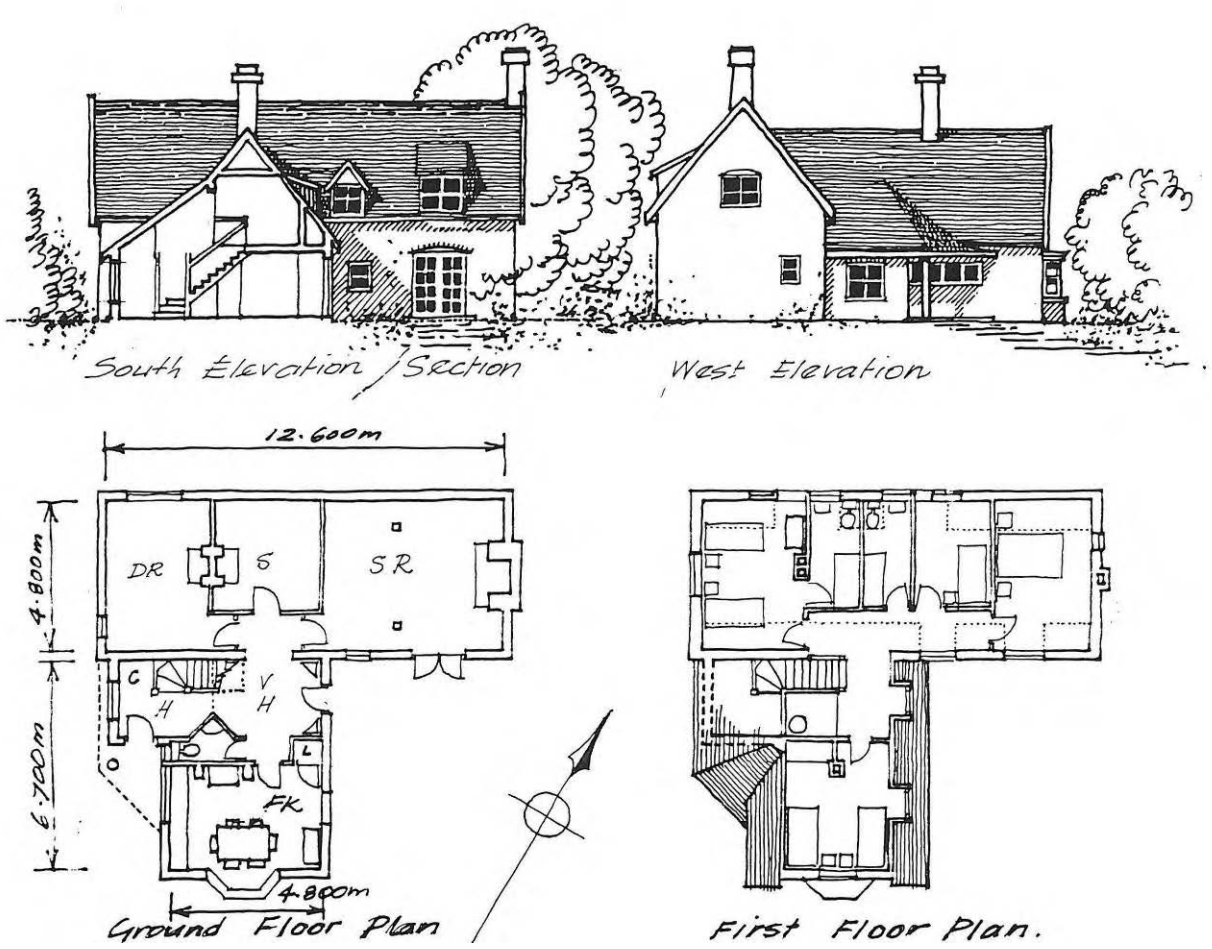

Figure 7: Plan and elevations of 21 Kimberley Drive.

The adjoining Gatelodge estate, housing area 5, was designed by Melville Dunbar Associates and built by George Martin. It was planned in 1982 and construction started in the same year, at a density of about 14 houses to the acre. The design process was closely monitored by Basildon Development Corporation. Correspondence in Melville Dunbar Associates' records reveals the Development Corporation's concern to avoid a suburban character in Noak Bridge, but instead to create a semi-rural one. To achieve this, great attention was paid to landscaping, with carefully specified planting schemes approved by the Corporation. In particular, Wash Road was perceived as at risk of looking suburban, and landscaping was proposed to counteract this. In an attempt to maintain the standard set in the earlier phases of the village, Basildon Development Corporation continually insisted on revisions to the layout of the houses and their design. In commenting on the scheme, Garrard wrote in February 1982 : 'The appearance of the houses is generally of what is becoming familiar as the "Essex Design Guide Style" but lack the quality which would be associated with a more sensitive and authentic rendering of the traditional forms on which the houses are loosely based.' This observation reveals how although today considered an outstanding example of the Essex Design Guide principles, it was not conceived as such. Despite the pressure applied, there is indeed a subtle difference in character between this part of the village and

the earlier phases, just as there is between the Conservation Area and the later development around it, despite a general similarity in style.[1]

In 1986 Basildon Development Corporation applied to the Secretary of State for the Environment to develop a further 31 acres along Bridge Street, Coppice Lane and Eastfield Road. This growth was guided by a Planning Brief which contained an appendix The Spirit of Noak Bridge, a detailed document which set out the principles behind the planning of the settlement so far. This phase was to provide 'a greater range of facilities and uses in the area'. These were to include studio workshops on the north side of Coppice Lane, a public house at the junction of Eastfield Road and Bridge Street, and up to 15 shops and offices in Bridge Street and Eastfield Road. However these mixed use elements were never built.

The easternmost part of the village (about 12 acres) was developed by the private sector from 1995. The development brief issued by the Commission for New Towns was short on detail, referring developers to Essex County Council's Design Guide Practice Note Number 2 Building Details, but it is clear that it was intended that there should be no deviation in architectural style from the precedent set in the first phases of the village.

Noak Bridge was immediately perceived as a successful exercise in place-making. In an article in Country Life in 1989, Norman Scarfe hailed it as a revival of the art of village building, and said 'Noak Bridge has managed to subordinate the motorcar to the human being.' The obvious comparisons are with other model villages such as Silver End (Essex), Thorpeness (Suffolk), and Portmerion. In the 1994 Basildon Local Plan, it was proposed that Noak Bridge be designated a Conservation Area. This was done in 1996, and at the same time an Article 4 Direction was introduced, limiting permitted development rights so as to protect the special character of the village (see Appendix 1).

6.2 The village plan

The plotlands had followed the field pattern, which like much of south Essex is rectilinear and probably of great antiquity, dating back to Roman or Iron Age times. In contrast, the street layout adopted for Noak Bridge deliberately avoids the least hint of a grid plan or any formality, and is almost entirely unrelated to the pre-existing topography. The line of Bridge Street and Lower Street follow approximately that of Durban Road, which in turn was parallel to a field boundary, but otherwise, there is no correspondence between the historic landscape and the village layout apart from Kimberley Drive, the only one of the plotland roads to have been preserved, and Eastfield Road. Although Noak Bridge has the appearance of a long established settlement, the retention of the South African street names is really the only link with the past, and they date back only 100 years.

The principles of the street plan are set out in the original development proposals (BDC 1975):

> The layout of Noak Bridge is based on a road system arranged so that pedestrian and vehicular movement will be convenient, safe, and pleasant. The form it gives to the layout helps to establish the character and sense of place in the village. It is for these reasons that a principal road, Bridge Street, from its junction with the new link road in the west, enters Noak Bridge to become the village high street. It proceeds to the centre of the village and the village green which it skirts on the northern fringe and leads to the

[1] The assistance of Melville Dunbar Associates in allowing access to their records is gratefully acknowledged.

east end of the village where by way of East Field Road it rejoins Wash Road in the north-east corner.

From Bridge Street lead most of the roads serving the houses and other buildings, joining together the various parts in the simple and straightforward manner of the village tradition. These side roads turn towards the centre and between them footpaths lead to the main north/south footpaths, Bridge Lane and School Lane which cross Bridge Street at the green. A small bridge carries Bridge Street over this path so that it is possible to walk throughout the village without crossing any roads. (It is suggested that such a bridge is likely become known as 'Noak Bridge' …).

Most of the public open space to be provided for this development is gathered together to form the village green, "The Green". It is at the heart of the village where some of the best trees are concentrated. It is large enough to be used for cricket and other games, fetes and village sports. It is reached by the village high street so that carnival processions and other gatherings dependent on a road are not excluded, and further, village activities may be more readily shared with people from outside. It is the setting for the important buildings of the village. School, shops, village hall, library, clinic, housing office, all face the green.

An essential feature of the village plan was the parking courts and courtyard developments. 'Small courts form in effect, folds in the line of the buildings along the streets, resulting in varied and intimate groups of housing which partially enclose and screen small car parking areas…Cars are confined to the street end of the courts. The inner end is landscaped and given over to pedestrians and linked to the footpaths…'.

The plans included in the prospectus do not exactly correspond with what was built. The street layout initially proposed was more regular and there was provision for parking in courts and squares which would have made cars rather prominent in the street scene.

7. ARCHITECTURE, DETAILING AND MATERIALS

The original prospectus for Noak Bridge envisaged houses generally arranged in terraces and set close to the frontage, built to a standard format. This was to be two-storey with a deep 8-9m plan beneath an asymmetric roof which was single storey at the rear, providing more light and creating a greater sense of space in the rear gardens. Thus the first-floor bedrooms faced the street, avoiding overlooking issues. The rooms were to be arranged according to aspect, such that the kitchen was always on the north or east side, and the living rooms on the south and west so enjoying the benefit of more daylight.

Between the houses there was to be a room which functioned as a store or passage. The rear gardens were to mostly back on to each other, with a minimum distance between houses of 28m. Flats were to be in terraces, preferably in corner situations so that they completed the continuity of the building line and the enclosure of public space. In form and materials flats were to resemble houses, except that some might be of three storey. Bungalows and flats were to share the same floor plan.

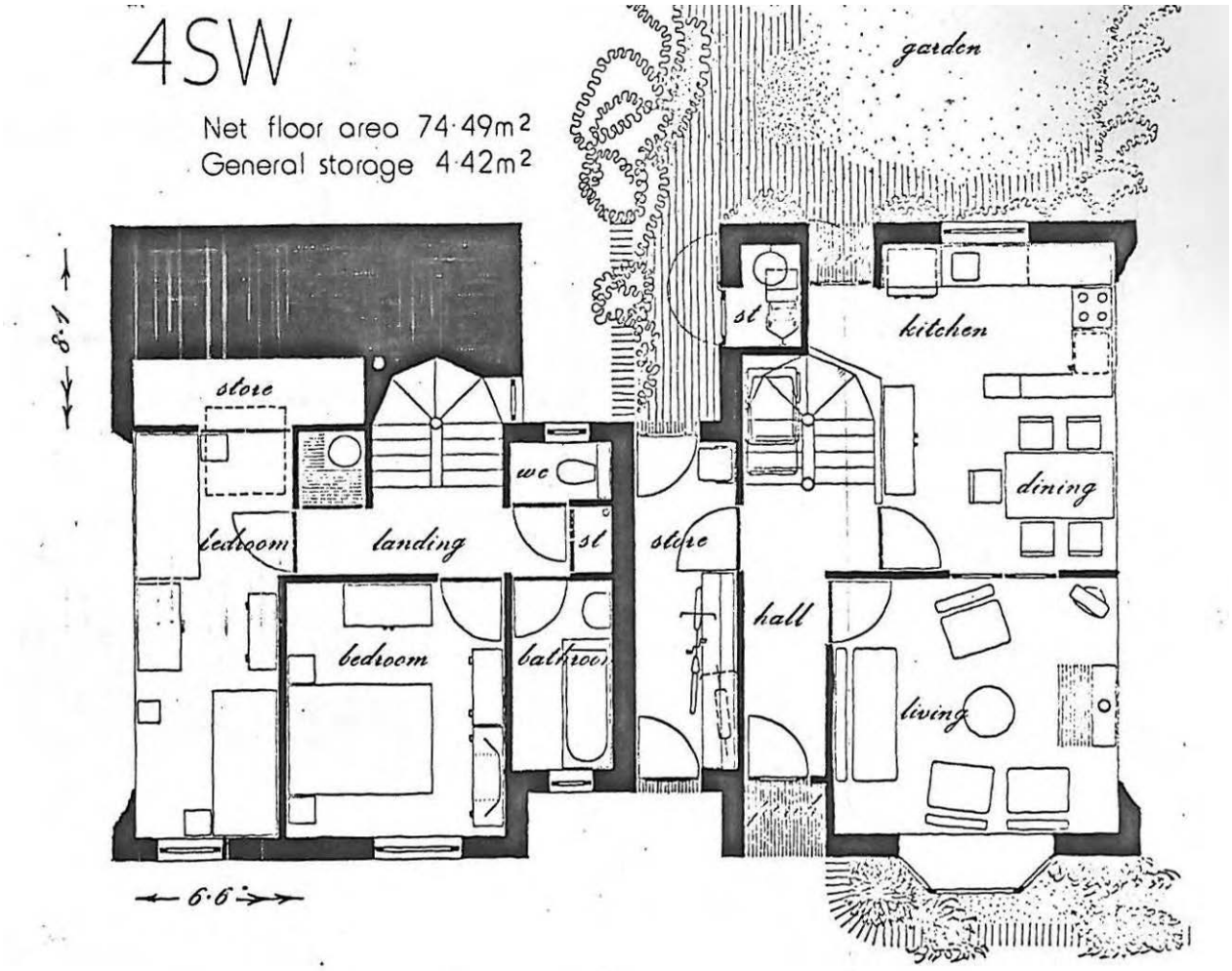

Figure 8: Plan of one of the standardised housing modules proposed in the original prospectus for Noak Bridge.

Figure 9: Housing in New Waverley Road designed to the original standardised model proposed for Noak Bridge.

Although these general principles were followed, and there are many houses in the Conservation Area, both two- and one-and-a-half storey, modelled on the standardised unit described above, there is in fact a great deal of variety of housing, mostly inspired by features of the Essex vernacular architecture of various periods. Clever use has been made of landmark buildings to break up and add incident to the ordinary housing. Typically these are of above average height, but they also include single storey houses, often polygonal in shape resembling lodges or toll cottages. Flats have been given the form of large houses, in the manner of large Georgian or Victorian houses which have been sub-divided. This confusion of identity creates a playful sense of instant history clearly intended to give a time dimension to the creation of an instant village.

Figure 10: A Georgian style house divided into flats.

The prospectus for Noak Bridge laid great emphasis on the use of local materials. Brickwork was to be the main material, with render and weatherboard used 'as accents to give variety to the appearance of the streets without incurring high maintenance costs'. Tile and slate hanging were envisaged as finishes which would be suitable, though this was not carried out. Indeed future design guidance for Noak Bridge explicitly prohibited tile hanging.

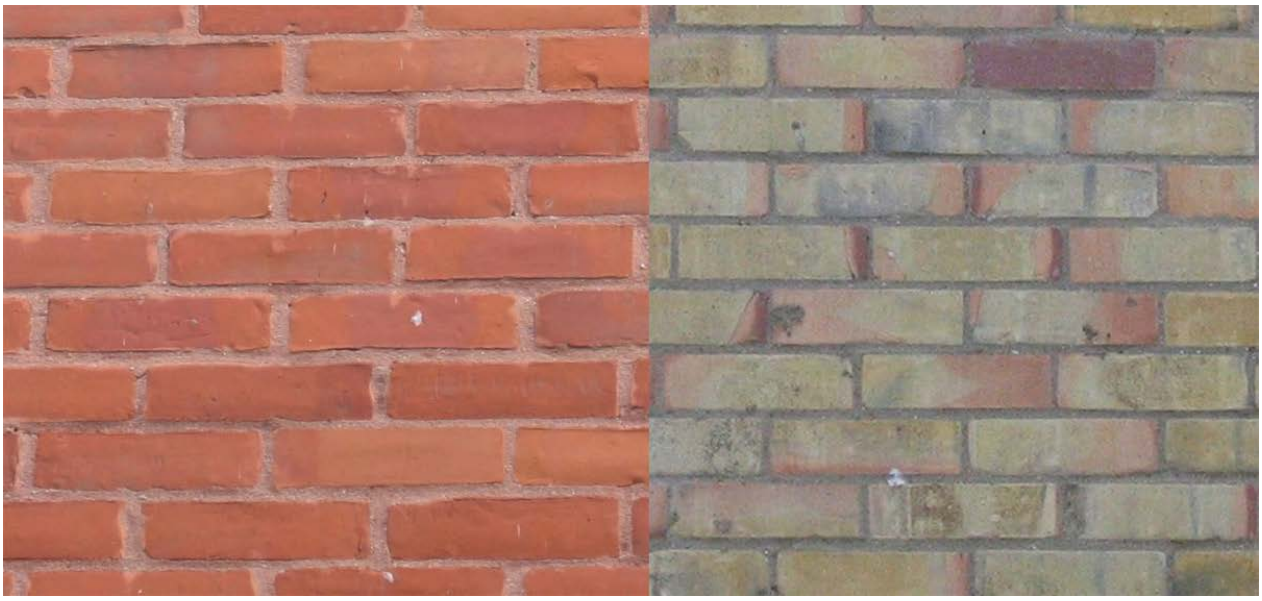

Figure 11: Typical Noak Bridge brickwork: Milton Hall reds with pigmented mortar, left; stock-type yellow bricks, right.

The carefully selected detailing and palette of materials contribute significantly to the character of Noak Bridge. Many of the red and yellow bricks came from the Milton Hall works at Rochford and Great Wakering: these were both local and the reds were, until they became unavailable in 2006, the best and most suitable for use in Essex. The two colours of brick are often used decoratively, with a different colour around openings and for corners.

The appearance of the red brickwork was improved through the use of pigmented mortar, avoiding the unsightly contrast normally presented by grey cement pointing. Segmental arches in the brickwork were typically used over windows and doors, greatly improving their appearance. Fretwork or open panels of brickwork are used decoratively in gables, or for the common parts of the flats where they also provide ventilation. Variety has been introduced into the houses through the use of colourwashed brickwork, and featheredged weatherboard.

Figure 12 (left): Pantile roof with exposed rafter feet.
Figure 13 (right): Typical timber window with top opening lights beneath a segmental arch, and with a cill made of roof tiles.

Roofs are covered with clay pantiles, not a particularly Essex material but one that avoided the blandness and uniformity of shape and colour of machine made plain tiles, though these have been used in late parts of the village. Eaves have exposed rafter feet, and verges tile undercloaks. Dormer windows typically have catslide rather than gabled roofs, making them less obtrusive. The houses all have chimneys, somewhat thin and spindly, but nevertheless very much a characteristic feature of the village.

Windows were all white painted timber, either sliding sashes, or more commonly casements with opening top lights for ventilation, but well proportioned such that the top and bottom lights were much the same size. Window cills are made of two courses of roof tile. Doors are of two main types, either stable doors, or with four glazed panes above a single wooden panel.

Figure 14: Typical glazed and panelled door.

When the housing was first built, wattle fencing was often used as a temporary screen whilst hedging behind it matured. Today typical boundary treatments are brick walls, low hedges, and picket fences, white painted or brown stained. Estate railings have also been used in the area north of Bridge Street. Field gates typically give access to the parking courts. Driveways are usually gravelled north of Bridge Street. The bridges on Bridge Street have robust brick parapets and associated revetments, which have a very solid appearance (perhaps because the brick is in reality only a cladding) and a characteristic wide triangular coping, which replicates that commonly found on old Tudor walls.

Figure 15: Typical boundary treatments: wattle fencing, picket fencing and hedges.

A leaflet *Design Guidelines for the replacement of windows in Noak Bridge* was issued in 1997. This permitted the use of UPVC replacement windows so long as the glazing pattern and opening method were replicated, and the sections and profiles were as similar as possible to the existing.

8. USES

Despite aspirations at the planning stage for a degree of mixed use, Noak Bridge is almost entirely residential, comprising flats and sheltered housing, as well as individual dwellings. The exceptions are two shops, namely the small supermarket and pharmacy, the village hall and the school at the centre of the village, and the medical centre. There is a church on Wash Road outside the Conservation Area.

9. STREETSCAPE AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The winding roads of the village as built make for excellent views and a varied street scene, with a continual sense of surprise and discovery as the roads turn corners. The use of mews courts has created interesting and surprising spaces behind the main frontages, which also serve to help keep parked cars off the roads, though this is no longer successful in many parts of the village. The style of the housing successfully combines unity of scale and materials with variety of architectural detailing and composition, making for sustained visual interest. Houses are built tight up to street frontages making for a good sense of enclosure, especially as roads are mostly only about 5m wide. Taller buildings have also been cleverly located in positions where they respond to long views.

Figure 16: Bridge Street, and attractive winding entrance to Noak Bridge, but the woodland on the village green cuts it off visually from much of the south part of the village.

However, the street plan could be regarded as excessively tortuous, making it difficult to navigate around. Contrary to the original vision, the village lacks a well defined centre. As has been seen, this was conceived as being the village green with the school and shops. The main arterial road, Bridge Street, by-passes them and has no focus to it, apart from a visual one at the junction with Bramble Tye and Durban Lane.

The school and shops, located in what is a cul-de-sac, are free of through traffic but experience a different problem, as cars continually arrive, park and then set off back again. The village green may be a central feature, but it is hardly a focal point partly because very few houses actually face on to it, and because it is now largely wooded. It may be a pleasant space, but it is not clear that it is meant to be the focus of village life, and its wooded character restricts the sense of permeability in the centre of the village, even if there are footpaths through it. Instead of linking the various parts of the village together,

the green now forms a barrier, physical and visual, between Coppice Road, Lower Street and Bridge Street. The school and shops are, for instance, quite invisible from Bridge Street.

Figure 17: Map analysing use of space and streetscape in the Conservation Area.

9.1 Green space

Trees, hedges and green space are an essential feature of Noak Bridge. It is enclosed by green space, be it farmland to the north or the wooded bank or bund on its west and south sides, and the nature reserve and hedgerow along Eastfield Road to the south-east and east. On Bridge Street, the main road into the village, there are wide verges and then the wooded edge of the village green, which extends southwards to the primary school which occupies a large site with a spacious playing field. Great care was put into the landscaping of the village at the planning stage and into the specification of what species of tree to plant, with the emphasis being on native varieties. Fragments of old hegerows have been preserved where possible at road edges, and house plots designed so that they have greenery in front of them, and not just confined to the rear gardens. However, this is truer of the roads to

the north of Bridge Street than those to the south, which are more urban in character and where hedgerows and street trees are rarer.

At the north corner of the village green, there is a children's play area. The rest of the green is wooded, and although crossed by paths, does not lend itself to recreation. For the most part the trees have grown up spontaneously (they are not shown on older maps) and there has been a failure to manage them. In the northern part of the village, there are other instances where there has been a failure to appreciate the implications of allowing large trees to grow to maturity.

Figure 18: Aerial photograph of Noak Bridge with the Conservation Area boundary, revealing the importance of trees and hedges to its character and setting.

9.2 Public realm

Highways materials and street furniture are generally consistent with its modest village character, care having been given to their specification, avoiding the most basic but also items in a 'heritage' style. Noak Bridge is possibly unique in being free of overhead wires for whatever purpose. Cable has been provided throughout the village.

Figure 19: Blockwork gutter used to divide the pavement from the highway. Note the use of granite sets to delineate the parking bay.

Roads and footpaths are of tarmac, with concrete kerbs. The tarmac in Bridge Street is reddish in colour. Pavements are mostly much patched, in particular bearing the scars resulting from the installation of cable. Granite sets are sometimes used to form features in closes and to delineate parking spaces. On the Gatelodge estate, blockwork gutters divide the footpaths from the roads, giving a sense of a shared space, one where pedestrians are able to use the road. It looks attractive and is a practical solution, given the absence of through traffic.

Figure 20: Traditional street sign and finger post.

Street signs were originally enamelled, black with white lettering, attached to walls wherever possible. These have been superseded by blue ones with white lettering, generally on poles. In some cases the two types co-exist. There are also some wooden street signs.

Signpainted finger posts used to give directions and to indicate the street numbers of mews courts are a successful and attractive feature of the village.

The Conservation Area was provided with spherical street lamps on standard metal columns. Many of these lights are now in poor condition and need renewing. In some cases they have been replaced with standard luminaires which are not worthy of the special character of the Conservation Area.

In some roads south of Bridge Street, lights were installed on house facades, making them less obtrusive features in the street scene.

Figure 21: Spherical luminaire attached to the front of a house in Lower Street, helping avoid the street being cluttered with lamp standards.

10. CHARACTER ZONES

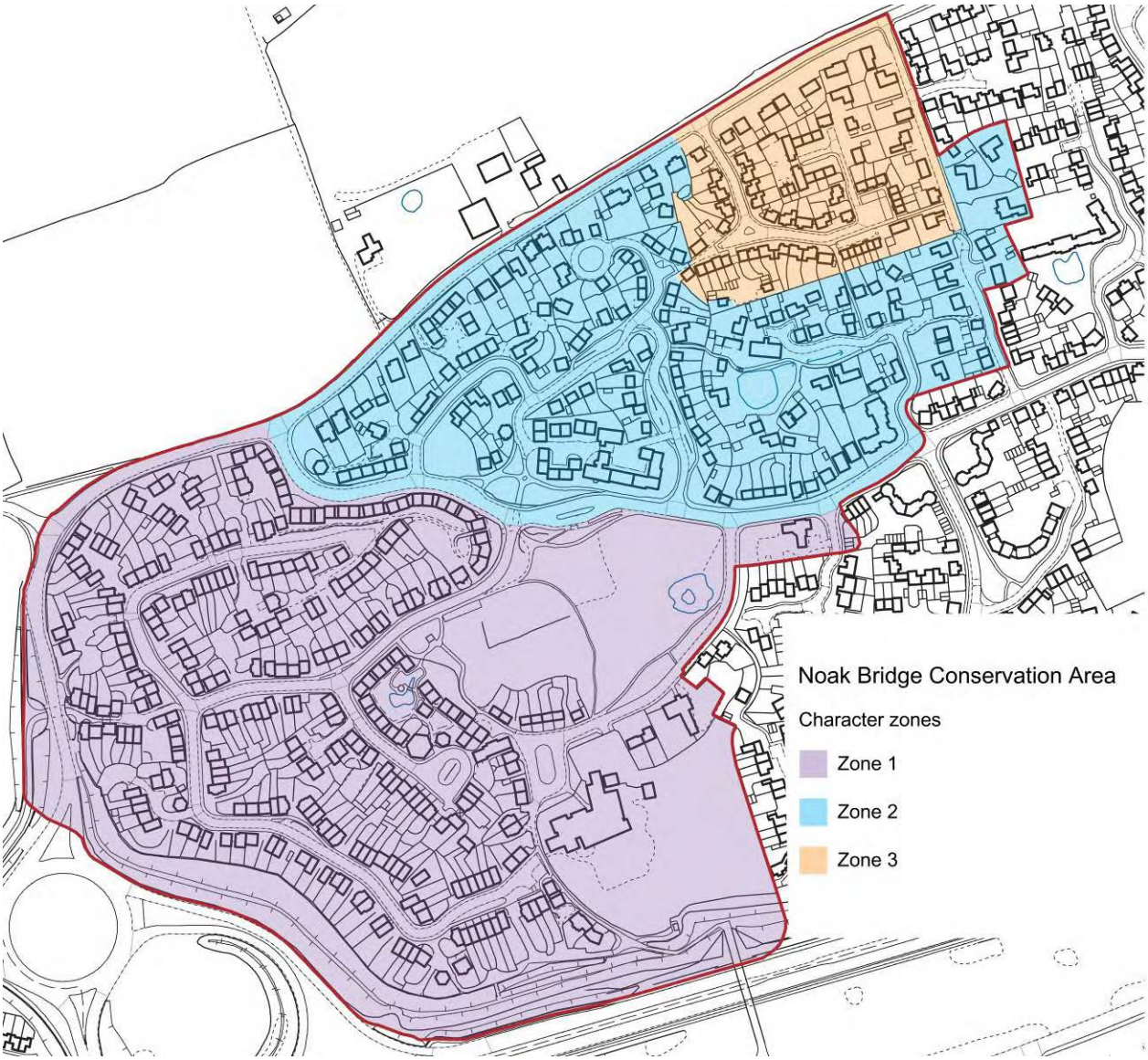

Figure 22:Character Zones identified in the Conservation Area.

Although the Noak Bridge Conservation Area is generally uniform in appearance, the result of the consistent application of design principles at all stages of the development, there are subtle differences that make it possible to identify three character zones, in the articulation of which Bridge Street has a major role as an instantly recognisable boundary:

- the older part of the village south of Bridge Street.
- the village north of Bridge Street, where the roads are often greener with more hedges and trees.
- the Gatelodge estate, where there are perceptible differences in architectural style and approach.

11. AREA ANALYSIS

11.1 Bridge Street

This is the main road through the village, and the busiest. It is wider than the other roads, at about 8m as opposed to 5m, and it lacks the generally tight sense of enclosure found elsewhere. The houses and flats have been designed so that there should no need for cars to be parked on the road, to ease traffic flow and to the benefit of views along it. At its western end, at the Wash Road junction, there is a plain wooden welcome sign with the exhortation, 'Please keep our village tidy.' The road's winding route, which initially slopes downhill, presents attractive views at what is the entrance to the village. The dominant built form here is the long terrace of two storey flats which follows the curve of the road and is sufficiently varied in its elevational detail to avoid the blandness that so often characterises blocks of flats. A string course articulates the first and second storeys, and the common parts and staircases have open fretwork brick panels at the ground floor and are jettied and weatherboarded at the first floor, resembling the lucams of watermills. At the Fore Street junction, the flats change in scale to four storey, forming a corner landmark building, distinguished also by the use of concrete lintels to the windows and by blue-painted window frames, a colour that looks out of character with the surrounding buildings. Inadequate maintenance is beginning to make the flats look shabby. The weatherboard needs decoration, and the narrow frontage along the road is overgrown with brambles. A derelict sign reads 'Caution. Drive with care. Children playing', but it must be a long time since children played here. Access to the flats is from the south in Crouch Street, avoiding parking on Bridge Street.

Figure 23: Bridge Street, the flats, and on the left, a 'lodge' or 'tollgate' cottage.

On the other side of the road, there is a hexagonal 'toll cottage', appropriate to the entrance location, its brickwork painted black, and a terrace of bungalows, their brickwork green painted, which have the appearance of almshouses. A building with a pair of large gables to

the street at the corner with Fore Street forms a visual stop or bookend to the bungalows. At the far side of the Fore Street junction, there is a large grassed area with the appearance of a green, an attractive feature that contributes to and reinforces the village character of this part of the Conservation Area.

Figure 24 (left): Bridge Street, inappropriate railings
Figure 25 (right): Bridge Street, the subway

As the road proceeds downhill, it is carried over the footpath designed to provide north-south circulation through the village. Because the road is tree-lined and wooded, the presence of the bridge is disguised, the only evidence for it being the robust parapets at the roadside with their distinctive triangular coping in a darker brick. Inappropriate galvanised railings have been erected at the end of the parapet on the south side of the road to address a possible health and safety issue at the break in slope. If indeed necessary, purpose designed railings should have been provided. The footpath under the bridge is in effect a subway, but much more attractive than normal, showing how careful detailing of the brickwork and paving can make a tight subterranean space successful. This is a focal point on the road, with the junction with Lower Street, the principal road into the older part of the village, and a pair of bus stops, and access to the village green. The bus shelter on the north side of the road is a new timber one, quite acceptable in this context. That on the south side is timber-framed and specially designed for the location. The pull-in for the bus is largely screened behind a hedge. On the north side, a row of buildings with large gables and projecting bays is set well below pavement level and partially screened by a hedge, advantage being taken of the change in level to create visual interest and reduce their scale.

Figure 26: Bridge Street, nos 25-31

Further east Bridge Street skirts the woodland of the village green, whilst on its northern side it is no longer flanked by long terraces but by blocks of buildings, including detached houses, in a variety of styles and varying also in scale. Nos 25-31 are a terrace of one-and-a-half storey cottage of the standard pattern, in colourwashed brick. Three of them still have stable doors, though none are original. The front gardens are given over to parking and are mostly surfaced with gravel. At the corner with Durban Lane is the Octagon, sheltered housing provided by the Abbeyfield Society in a complex of buildings which are distinctly Georgian not to say Palladian in style. On the south side of the road, the Conservation Area boundary encloses the Medical Centre but excludes everything beyond the junction with Ladysmith Way.

Figure 27: Bridge Street, looking east out of the Conservation Area.

In eastward views the character of Bridge Street now changes, being more open in aspect, less green with more conspicuous hard surfacing. The housing also looks subtly different: it belongs to the later part of the village which lies outside the Conservation Area, and this difference probably arises not simply because of its design, which is still in the Essex Design Guide vernacular, but because there is less unity of construction materials and the scale is more uniform.

11.2 Noak Bridge South Of Bridge Street

Lower Street is the way into the older part of Noak Bridge, leading to a network of roads (Crouch Street, New Waverley Road and Kenilworth Place) which go nowhere, terminating in dead ends, but linked through to the other parts of the village by footpaths. In particular, there is no vehicular link between them and the shops and school in Coppice Lane. These roads are all densely built up, with courtyard or mews court developments behind them which add to the irregularity and interest of the village plan and also help minimise roadside parking. Nevertheless, with increased car ownership, parked cars are now obtrusive everywhere in this part of Noak Bridge. The mews courts tend to be located off the outside of the bends in the roads, so that sight lines at the junctions are contained within the pavements, and the houses can remain close to the frontage, with no loss of rear gardens. These roads are also less green than the area north of Bridge Street, the houses generally tight to the frontage with limited scope for planting. The parking courts and service areas can become untidy, with equipment, bins, a variety of boundary treatments, often dilapidated, and sheds and garages. They are not, however, usually visible from the highway. Quite a lot of houses have satellite dishes, contrary to the Article 4 Direction introduced for the Conservation Area.

Figure 28 (left): A parking court. Figure 29 (right): A mews court off Crouch Street.

At the beginning of the road, there is a parking bay, one of the very few areas of public parking in the village, which served the former doctors' surgery on the other side of the road and also the playground area of the village green. This part of the green is an informal space, with a children's play area and a basketball and football court, both well equipped and well used. Round its boundary with the road there are mainly hawthorns and field maple, but also a good group of aspens. To the south and over towards Coppice Lane, the scattered trees become dense woodland and scrub, much of it young self seeded ash trees. The asphalt paths are cracked and would benefit from improvement. In the south-western part of the wooded area there is a large patch of asphalt where play fixtures have been

removed which is unsightly and unattractive. A footpath leads from this to the school and shops. Here there is also a vandalised and redundant horse riding sign.

Figure 30: Lower Street, pavement running behind an old hedgerow.

Figure 31: Lower Street, looking uphill to Crouch Street.

Opposite the junction of Lower Street with Kenilworth Place, there is a length of hedge and trees at the roadside, the pavement running behind them, a vestige of an old hedgerow and welcome soft landscaping. As the road ascends a hill to a T-junction with Crouch Street and New Waverley Road, there is a pair of three storey gabled houses, rather out of scale with the rest of the buildings. There is another three storey building at the junction, effectively a landmark closing the view up Lower Street.

In Crouch Street, there is a pair of three storey gables over a flat carriage arch designed to allow access for lorries, awkward looking as the over-sized gables have no visible support beneath them. More successful is the taller building in one of the many mews courts which are a feature of Crouch Street, with a sundial in its gable. At the eastern end of Crouch Street, there is a long parking bay paved with granite sets and separated from the front gardens of the houses by a brick wall covered with creeper, a visually successful way of handling on-street parking. The carved Crouch Street sign with a swan at this end of the street is in need of maintenance.

From the Lower Street and Crouch Street junction an alleyway continues the line of Lower Street westwards through a housing court to a footpath running in a subway under Wash Road.

Figure 32: Crouch Street, three storey building opposite the junction with Lower Street, and in the background, three storey gables over carriage arch

Figure 33: Parking bay at the end of Crouch Street separated from houses by a wall, now overgrown with creeper.

The housing on the south side of New Waverley Road backs on to the wooded bund or bank screening the A127. Here there are service areas for the houses and a cycle track along the bund and a footpath over the A127 giving access to the industrial areas on the other side of the arterial road.

Kenilworth Place is a short road ending in a close with an oval area paved with granite sets and planted with trees but unfortunately used for car parking. The tubular railings linking the line of bollards across this central feature are partially broken, and some of the trees have ivy growing up them. The houses here are predominantly jettied, brick at the ground floor and rendered or weatherboarded at the first. Those with front gardens have had them paved for car parking. The north side of the road is occupied by sheltered housing comprising 49 flats and bungalows run by St. George's Community Housing, its presence advertised by the distinctive community building at the entrance which is hexagonal in plan with a lead pyramidal roof. This complex generally presents two storey white painted terraces with weatherboard at the first floor to the frontages on Kenilworth Place and Lower Street. The gardens within the complex are a little untidy and would benefit from improved landscaping.

Figure 34: Kenilworth Place looking north

Figure 35: Kenilworth Place, the oval feature paved with granite sets and the entrance lodge to St George's Community Housing.

Coppice Lane leads to the Primary School and shops, following the side of the village green, such that its character initially is rural with little hint that it is the way to the focal point of the village. The woodland of the green is interrupted by a pond on the road frontage. This is well maintained (though the duck house could do with renewing) but the land around it suffers from litter, uninviting benches, railings in need of paint, and a derelict noticeboard. This important space would benefit from some improvement. On the other side of the road, a gap in the hedge forming the boundary with Ladysmith Way has been stopped with weldmesh fencing, an ugly and inappropriate repair.

For public buildings, the village hall on the south side of the road, and the primary school in the 'square' in which Coppice Lane terminates, are both quite reticent and hardly landmarks in the village scene. The hall needs better landscaping around it. The footpaths are in a mixture of materials, and from the road there are views into the large tarmac car park with a black and white painted metal barrier in front of it. The signage on the building needs rationalising, and the porch doors would look better painted a colour other than red. The recycling point on the roadside near it is an eyesore, and could be relocated in a more discreet position.

Figure 36: Coppice Lane, the village hall and recycling facility.

The school was designed in 1980 by the County Council and was to provide 360 places, but only 210 initially. Provision was made for extensions which were not all built; the relocatable classroom occupies the site of one of them. The building was to respond in form and materials to the character of the village, having brick walls and pantile roofs. It is a low building set back from the frontage with a rather complex L-shaped plan. Unlike many school buildings, it does not really respond well to its focal role in the community because it

is so unobtrusive, the more so for being surrounded by trees. Its playground and sports field are enclosed to the street by a good brick wall which screens its car park, picket fences and tall black railings. Care has been taken to ensure the retention of good quality boundary treatments in this area; only round the sports field has the more utilitarian weldmesh fencing been used, though fortunately it is screened by trees and hedges.

The square at the end of Coppice Lane is enclosed largely by cottages, which present a marked contrast with the pair of shops located in a three storey building with a huge pair of gables which close the view looking down the Lane. Like many of the three storey buildings in the village, the scale is disproportionately large and rather clumsy. The façade is untidy, with CCTV cameras and satellite dishes, and there are maintenance issues, with a contrast between the well cared for chemist's shop and the not so well looked after supermarket. The white railings in front of the shops need decorating. Because of the shops and school, the square is busy, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day. As a result, parked cars are a feature of it, on the oval-shaped space in the middle of it which is planted with three cherry trees, and also at the roadside. The central oval would look better if surfaced with granite sets like that in Kenilworth Place.

Figure 37: Coppice Lane, the square and shops at the end of it.

11.3 North of Bridge Street

Bridgecote Lane is winding and tree-lined, with white picket fences, giving a good sense of enclosure. There are wide verges with mature trees, notably hawthorns which have their origins in pre-existing hedgerows. Many trees have ivy growing up them which should be removed. Stone sets are used as rumble bars and dropped kerbs, but otherwise there are concrete kerbs. The predominant built form comprises one-and-a-half storey cottages, some of them colourwashed. One of an L-shaped pair has a Dutch gable with the date MCMLXXXII, an almost ironic post-modern touch. Nos 1-65 are sheltered housing grouped round two informal courtyards linked by an arch, one with two storey buildings with verandahs at the ground floor, and the other with groups of bungalows. A large two-and-a-half storey Georgian house is in fact divided into flats.

Figure 38: Bridgecote Lane.

Figure 39: Wickstead, a Tudor style building divided into flats in Fore Street.

The Lane turns back on itself at a sharp angle to return towards Bridge Street. Here the houses are more widely spaced, often slightly bigger, and red gives way to yellow brick. At the junction with Fore Street, there is a landmark Tudor-style three storey building with

crow-stepped gables, Wickstead, which although having the appearance of a large house is in fact divided into flats. In contrast no. 32 is a single storey hexagonal cottage, which, uniquely at Noak Bridge, preserves a wattle fence, albeit not the original but a very attractive feature. From this point Bridgecote Lane is reduced to a footpath presenting good views down to the subway under Bridge Street.

Fore Street forms a crescent in plan if not appearance, curving round on itself from Bridgecote Lane down to Bridge Street. It has a more open aspect than Bridgecote Lane, less tree-lined, with mainly single and one-and-a-half storey houses, though true to the Noak Bridge theme of variety there is also a timber-framed pair.

Saling Green leads off the acute bend in Bridgecote Lane and winds round to terminate in a circular 'green' with a multi-stemmed willow tree in the middle of it. It is lined with cottages of the standard Noak Bridge type, except round the green itself where there is a wider variety of house types.

Figure 40: Saling Green.

Durban Lane is sinuous and tree-lined, disdaining any regular layout or straight lines. The view in from Bridge Street is enticing. The houses here are often larger and detached, and vary in style from the standard cottage to Tudor and Georgian. Where it turns through an approximate right angle to run east-west, there are on the north side two courtyards which although informal in their layout are spaces in which the car dominates. On the south side, the footpath follows a stream bed to a pond with a scatter of houses around it. The retention of the stream as an open feature rather than running it through a conduit does much to add character to the street scene.

Figure 41: Durban Lane features buildings in a variety of styles.

Figure 42: Gatelodge Way, as seen from the footpath from Saling Green.

The Gatelodge estate in the north-east part of the village was built by a separate developer to designs by Melville Dunbar Associates. A footpath leads into Gatelodge Way from Saling Green, giving a delightful view into a triangular space tightly enclosed by housing with planting in front of it, and a central informal parking area delineated by granite sets and block paving. The only vehicular way into the estate is from Wash Road, where the entrance is flanked by two square 'lodge' houses with pyramidal roofs, in the manner of the approach to a country house and its grounds. The housing in the estate is subtly different from that elsewhere in the village. The properties are bigger, and there is a greater sense of formality. The houses beyond the 'lodges', for instance, look detached, but in fact are not. Extensive use is made of white-painted render, rather stark in colour, and false timber-framing. Roof materials are more varied. Some detailing is different. Windows have soldier courses over them, not segmental arches. Highways treatment is also different. Block paving is used, and the distinction between road and footpath is blurred by forming the gutters with shallow blockwork channels, creating a sense of shared space.

Figure 43:Gatelodge Square.

Gatelodge Way leads to Gatelodge Square, a quadrilateral with parking in the graveled gardens of the houses and cottages around it. The Square is block paved; although laid herringbone-wise, this is too large an extent of a uniform material and could do with being broken up visually. In the middle of the square there is a circular feature with planting, a tree, now dead, and a viburnum growing eccentrically to one side of it. This space would look better with a good specimen tree in the middle of it.

To the north of Gatelodge Square is Tudor Court. Subtle variation of the frontage layout, and closing of the view with a cottage set slightly to one side, disguises the essentially rectilinear layout. At the end, a partially half timbered building resembles a medieval lodgings range; a rather too wide carriage arch leads through to a parking court with a pair of houses at one end.

Figure 44: Tudor Court

A footpath leads from Gatelodge Square to Kimberley Drive. The only vehicular entrance is from Wash Road. Inherited from the early 20th-century plotland layout, this is the only straight road in the village. Although Littlehurst Lane continues its line, there is only footpath access between them. This separation is intended to avoid the creation of an excessively long straight axis, alien in spirit to Noak Bridge, and the housing has been contrived to avoid any sense of regularity or uniformity.

The houses on the west side are predominantly half timbered or part weatherboarded. Those on the east are quite different, being part of a later phase of development and outside the Conservation Area, apart from nos 17-23 which were designed by Naunton and Garrard in 1984. The way these houses are informally grouped behind hedges and trees looks like a conscious reaction to the straightness of Kimberley Drive. Like Kimberley Drive, only the west side of Littlehurst Lane is in the Conservation Area. The houses are larger, at a lower density, and similarly avoid any sense of regularity or conformity.

Figure 45: Kimberley Drive looking south

12. EVALUATION OF CONTRIBUTION TO CHARACTER

It is customary when appraising conservation areas to assess the whether individual buildings make a positive or negative contribution to their character. Buildings graded negative are in effect identified as has having scope for improvement, whether by better detailing, finishes or materials, or through total redevelopment. In the case of Noak Bridge, where housing was all built at much the same time to uniform design principles, and was soon after protected by an Article 4 Direction limiting permitted development rights, there is little to choose between individual buildings, none of them can be said to have a negative effect on the Conservation Area, and this approach has therefore been considered inappropriate.

13. MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Noak Bridge is an unusual and special place, with a unique character which has made it very popular with residents. If that special character is to be protected and conserved, then management principles for the Conservation Area need to be identified and implemented through a partnership of the local population, the Parish Council, and the local planning and highways authorities.

In general, the Conservation Area is in fair to good condition. Its problems are typical ones: 'improvements' which do not take account of the predominant architectural style, the increasing obtrusiveness of the motor car, and poor maintenance and neglect, both to housing and the public realm. Since the village is all of one piece, any alterations that are not in keeping, or any buildings allowed to become dilapidated, are immediately conspicuous, and cumulatively have an erosive effect on its appearance and character.

13.1 The setting of the Conservation Area and its boundaries

The total enclosure of Noak Bridge within a framework of encircling roads, hedges and woodland is important to preserving its separate identity and attractive setting. These environs are at present in part protected by Green Belt policies and by the Nature Reserve.

The Conservation Area does not, of course, include the whole village, as the more recent developments lie outside it. Yet these too have been carried out to a high standard, emulating the 'Spirit of Noak Bridge', even if they are subtly and perceptibly different to the original parts of the village. To date, these areas have not experienced much in the way of alterations and improvements, though a loft conversion at one point with an excessively large dormer window is a reminder of how damaging these can be. Extending the Conservation Area boundaries, together with the Article 4 Direction, would ensure that its setting is protected and that the newer developments are spared the worst excesses of modern improvements. However, there would be resource implications to doing this, and there would be no point in enlarging the Area if it could not be looked after effectively.

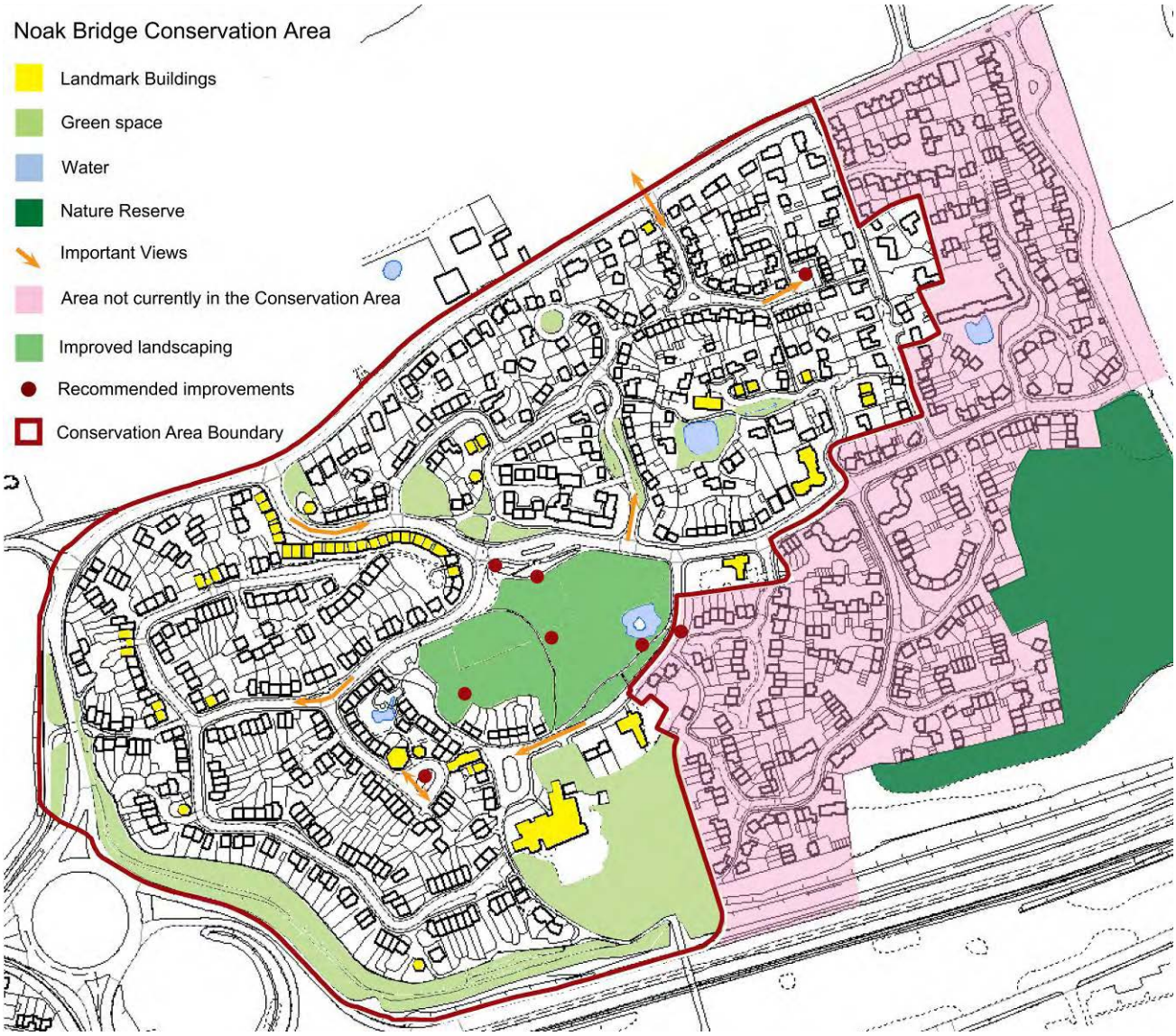

Figure 46: Map to illustrate management proposals. Sites identified for improvement are:

- railings in Bridge Street
- fencing in Coppice Lane
- landscaping round the pond on the village green
- the landscaping of the village green in general
- removal of redundant asphalt surfacing on the green
- soft landscaping in Gatelodge Square
- railings and trees in the close at the end of Kenilworth Road

13.2 Planning controls and policies

Conservation Area status confers only a limited degree of protection, and it is normal to recommend the introduction of an Article 4 Direction to limit permitted development rights. Noak Bridge has had an Article 4 since 1996, and this has had a crucial role in preserving its special character. The direction is adequately drafted for its purpose. The only omission from it is micro-generation measures such as turbines and photovoltaic cells which could affect the appearance of the Conservation Area. Although these are not an issue yet in the

village, consideration should be given to adding these to the list of works which require planning permission.

Windows and doors are covered by the Article 4 Direction. Since 1997, the use of UPVC replacement windows has been permitted so long as the glazing pattern, and the sections and profiles, are as close as possible to the existing timber ones. UPVC replacements have proved popular, partly because original windows were single glazed and partly because of contemporary reluctance to carry out routine maintenance. This policy is probably unique amongst conservation areas in England, as the use of UPVC is generally considered unacceptable in them. Timber windows are now probably in the minority. They certainly will be after the completion of a current large scale replacement programme by St. George's Housing Association. The arguments put forward by the local housing associations that UPVC replaced on a 20-30 year cycle is more sustainable than the use of timber is not convincing, and it is unfortunate that with climate change at the top of the national agenda they are setting such an example. This approach, it should be noted, is not adopted by all housing associations.

Of the replacement windows which have been installed, by no means all match the appearance of the original. Variants with different glazing patterns, mahogany coloured frames and leaded lights are not uncommon. They all look instantly out of place. It is unclear whether this situation is the result of a failure to monitor the policy adequately, or whether they have been put in without permission.

Figure 47: Replacement windows which look quite out of character with the Conservation Area because of the glazing pattern and the leaded lights.

As well as windows, there are replacement doors of inappropriate design. Doors are probably the single most conspicuous feature in an elevation, and if poorly designed, they can be very disfiguring. Unlike windows, no design guidance has been provided for doors. Some will have been put in without permission. The satellite dishes which occur on the front of some properties have certainly been installed without permission, and the same is probably true of the front gardens which have been converted to hard standing for car parking.

To address this situation, it is important that the Article 4 Direction is effectively implemented, and if necessary, enforcement action is taken.

13.3 Monitoring and enforcement

To ensure that the Article 4 Direction is working successfully, and that the quality of the built environment and public realm is being preserved, a photographic survey of street frontages would be very useful. This should be monitored on an annual basis, and renewed at regular intervals, dependent on the degree of change in the village. Unauthorised works should be targeted by swift enforcement action, and poor maintenance in the public realm addressed promptly.

13.4 Architectural design and materials

The housing at Noak Bridge was built with carefully selected and specified materials, and with well designed architectural detailing New work should reflect a similar concern for specification and detailing so that it matches the original work in quality and appearance. This applies equally to relatively routine tasks such as repainting and reroofing and to new building such as extensions

Boundaries characteristic of Noak Bridge are walls, hedges, hurdle and picket fences, estate railings, and field gates. Modern fencing designs generally look alien, particularly if stained a bright colour. Strong paint colours on brick and render can look out of place. The surface finish most consistent with the informal village character of Noak Bridge is gravel. Block paving has been used in some driveways and parking courts, and can look too formal and bland. Tumbled concrete sets could be more suitable, particularly as they resemble the granite sets which occur in places in the village. Pattern impressed concrete which can be seen in some drives is quite inappropriate.

There is considerable demand on the part of residents to create more accommodation in their properties. Extensions should be in scale with and subordinate to the original building, avoiding any adverse impact on its character, and observing the use of materials and design features typical of the village. But because Noak Bridge was built at a relatively high density, there is little scope for enlarging the houses, and extensions mainly take the form of conservatories and single storey garden rooms. These too should be proportionate in size to the houses and gardens, and of a simple straightforward design. Another way of providing space has been to erect garages and outbuildings in rear gardens, often at the edge of parking courts. Prefabricated buildings are not suitable. Instead these should be of materials consistent with the character of the village, good quality brick, or rendered blockwork, or weatherboard, with roofing materials to match.

13.5 Guidance leaflets

There are currently no leaflets or advice available to residents about the status of the Conservation Area and the planning policies which apply to it. A new series of leaflets, explaining its significance and relevant policies, reproducing much of the 1997 leaflet on 0windows and including the design principles outlined above, should be drawn up and delivered to householders, and put on Basildon Borough's website.

13.6 Conservation Area advisory committee

It is essential to the success of good conservation that the local community and planners work in partnership. It is recommended that a Conservation Area advisory committee be set up to involve the community in recognising what needs to be done to protect the special character of the Conservation Area.

13.7 Maintenance

Maintenance is often an issue in both housing and the public realm, invariably with an adverse effect on the appearance of the Conservation Area. In the former, it has been largely addressed by the use of UPVC instead of redecoration. Where this quick fix is not available, buildings often look shabby. This is particularly true of the flats on Bridge Street at the entrance to the Conservation Area, where the weatherboarded elements need repainting. The planting in front of them is also very overgrown, and should be tidied up. Another landmark building in need of repair and redecoration is the hexagonal lodge at the entrance to the St. George's Community Housing in Kenilworth Place.

Figure 48: Lack of maintenance, both to the buildings and the soft landscaping around them, is having an adverse effect on the appearance of the flats, which are a prominent feature of Bridge Street at the entrance to the Conservation Area.

13.8 Public realm

The tradition of distinctive street signage should be maintained. Old street signs should be replaced when necessary with similar ones rather than the blue and white ones. The fingerposts, and the Crouch Street sign, should be properly maintained. Noticeboards on the village green and by the shops explaining the history of Noak Bridge might help create a greater sense of awareness of its special qualities and character amongst residents and visitors.

The pavements and footpaths in the village are generally in a very patched condition. When renewed, consideration should be given to surfacing them with bound gravel. Gravel is very much in character with the village, and the success of its use north of Bridge Street is striking when compared with the large bland expanses of asphalt elsewhere. Gravel surface dressing would improve the appearance of the parking courts, and of unattractive car parks such as that by the village hall.

Figure 49: Gravel surfacing softens the appearance of a parking court, and looks better than plain tarmac.

There are relatively few yellow lines in the Conservation Area, but where they are used, as at the junction of Fore Street and Bridge Street, they should be the less obtrusive narrow 2 inch ones allowed in conservation areas.

The spherical luminaires of the street lights are one of the distinctive features of Noak Bridge. Now that many of them are in poor condition, some have been replaced with unsuitable standard luminaires unworthy of the Conservation Area. This is unsatisfactory, and agreement has now been obtained for their replacement where necessary with new spherical ones from the selected list of approved luminaires in the Essex County Council draft Street Lighting Operational Manual.

Figure 50: Two types of luminaire, the traditional spherical one in the foreground.

There are public places on the highway where railings could be improved. On Bridge Street, some very functional galvanised tubular railings have been used to protect a break in slope at the edge of the parapet on the south side of the bridge. The railings enclosing the bus stop area on the same side of the road need redecoration and some repair. In Coppice Lane, the weldmesh fencing at the boundary with Ladysmith Way should be replaced with a more fitting material such as plain vertical railings. The railings round the pond in the same road could do with repainting, and the area around it improved with better benches, and the derelict notice-board removed or replaced.

13.9 Green space and soft landscaping

Trees are an intrinsic feature of Noak Bridge. They have not always, however, been well managed, and there has perhaps been a failure to recognise the implications of allowing trees to grow to maturity. In some places, such as Kenilworth Place and Bridgecote Lane, there are street trees with ivy growing up them that should be removed. In Gatelodge Square, the circular central feature has a dead tree and a viburnum growing eccentrically to one side. This should be replanted with a good specimen tree.

The central village green is today largely wooded. As has been observed above, it should be a permeable landscape feature linking, not dividing, the surrounding parts of the village. Much of the woodland is young, mainly self sown ash trees. Although it would be controversial, these should be removed and thinned out, leaving selected young oak trees to grow on as standards. This could create open views across the green, establishing a degree of connection between Bridge Street, Coppice Lane and Lower Street. This could create a parkland setting with enhanced amenity value. At the edge, areas of coppice and thick

woodland could remain in places. Another improvement to the village green would be to remove the old redundant asphalt base at the south-west corner. It is recommended that a landscape plan be drawn up for the green, and an arboricultural survey carried out, both for it and indeed the rest of the village.

13.10 Development and redevelopment

Noak Bridge was built as an instant mature settlement. There are no places where the Conservation Area would obviously benefit from the removal of buildings and their redevelopment. Development could only take place with the loss of green space, which would be damaging to the Conservation Area. Although outside the Conservation Area, an application to build 10 houses on the east side of Eastfield Road was rejected by the Council in 2009, but has been allowed at appeal. It has been argued above that the existing hedgerows and woodland form part of the natural boundaries of the village and that their loss would be prejudicial to its setting.

13.11 Climate change

Sustainability in building construction, including reduced carbon emissions and measures to save energy, are high on the agenda of national and local government. New buildings will have to be carbon neutral by 2016. At the same time there will be increasing pressure to improve the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock. This has the potential for having an adverse impact on the appearance and character of historic buildings and places such as conservation areas. Planning Policy Statement 5 *Planning for the Historic Environment* recommends that 'Where conflict between climate change objectives and the conservation of heritage assets is unavoidable, the public benefit of mitigating the effects of climate change should be weighed against any harm to the significance of heritage assets in accordance with the development management principles in this PPS and national planning policy on climate change) (policy HE1.3). Basildon Council is committed to energy conservation within its buildings and promotes energy awareness throughout the district. In furthering such policies in Noak Bridge and its conservation areas, the Council should strive to achieve the balance recommended by PPS5.

13.12 Summary of recommendations

1. Preserve the green and undeveloped setting of the village, ensuring that it does not become absorbed in suburban sprawl.
2. Consider extending the Conservation Area boundaries, backed up by an Article 4 Direction, to the newer parts of the village.
3. Ensure that the existing Article 4 Direction is properly implemented, and that unsuitable windows, doors, fences, satellite dishes etc are not installed without permission or effective monitoring of the application.
4. Carry out a photographic survey of the village to assist with development control and a policy of proactive monitoring of change in the village, backed up by active enforcement action when unauthorised works have been carried out.
5. A new guidance document about the village and the Article 4 Direction, and setting out design principles for new works to the housing, should be produced, distributed and put on Basildon Borough's website.
6. A Conservation Area advisory committee, or a mechanism for a more participatory approach between the Parish Council, Borough Council and County Council, should be set up to ensure community involvement and partnership working in looking after the Conservation Area.

7. Improved maintenance on the part of Essex County Council Highways, Basildon Borough, the housing associations, and individual householders and landlords.
8. Public realm improvements, in particular the use of surface dressing, or bound gravel, for footpaths and parking courts, and more careful specification of highways works, including appropriate replacement luminaires to the street lights.
9. Better management of trees in the Conservation Area, in particular of those on the village green. A landscape plan should be drawn up for the green, including the pond on Coppice Lane.

APPENDIX 1. The Article 4 Direction

Schedule

Development not permitted unless planning permission granted.

1. The erection, alteration or removal of a chimney on a dwellinghouse, being development comprised within Class A of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

2. The enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a dwellinghouse where any part of the enlargement, improvement or other alteration would front a relevant location, being development comprised within Class A of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

3. Alterations to the roof of dwellinghouse, where the alteration would be to a roof slope which fronts a relevant location, being development comprised within Class C of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

4. The erection or construction of a porch outside any external door of a dwellinghouse where the external door in question fronts a relevant location, being development comprised within Class D of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

5. The provision within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse, of a building, enclosure, swimming or other pool required for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse as such, or the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of such a building or enclosure where the building or enclosure, swimming or other pool to be provided would front a relevant location or where the part of the building or enclosure maintained improved or altered would front a relevant location, being development comprised within Class E of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

6. The provision within a the curtilage of a dwellinghouse of a hard surface for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of a dwellinghouse where the hard surface would front a relevant location, being development comprised within Class F of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

7. The installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna on a dwellinghouse or within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse where the part of the building or other structure on which the satellite antenna is to be installed altered or replaced fronts a relevant location, being development comprised within Class H of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

8. The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure where the gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure would be within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse and would front a relevant location, being development comprised within Class A of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

9. The painting of the exterior of any building or work, consisting of the painting of the exterior of any part which fronts a relevant location of a dwellinghouse or any building or enclosure within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse, being development comprised within Class C of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

10. Any building operation consisting in the demolition of the whole or any part of any gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure, where the gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure is within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse and fronts a relevant location, being development comprised within Class B of Part 31 of Schedule 2 to the said Order and not being development comprised within any other Class.

In the above items 2 to 10, ‘relevant location’, means a highway waterway or open space.

APPENDIX 2. Government guidance on heritage and conservation

Department for Communities and Local Government 2010 *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the historic environment*, TSO.

Department for Communities and Local Government, English Heritage and Department of Culture Media and Sport 2010 *PPS5 Planning for the historic environment: Historic environment planning practice guide*.

Department for Culture Media and Sport 2010 *The Government's statement on the historic environment for England* 2010.

English Heritage 2008 *Conservation principles, policies and guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment*, London: English Heritage.

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Commission for the New Towns 1986 *Noak Bridge planning brief* (unpublished guidance document).

Commission for the New Towns 1995 *Noak Bridge development brief* (unpublished guidance document).

Department for Communities and Local Government 2010 *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*, TSO.

Department for Communities and Local Government, English Heritage and the Department of Culture Media and Sport 2010 *PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic environment planning practice guide*.

Essex County Council and Essex Planning Officers Association 2005 *The Essex Design Guide for residential and mixed use areas*, Chelmsford: Essex County Council (3rd edition).

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