Supplementary Planning Guidance







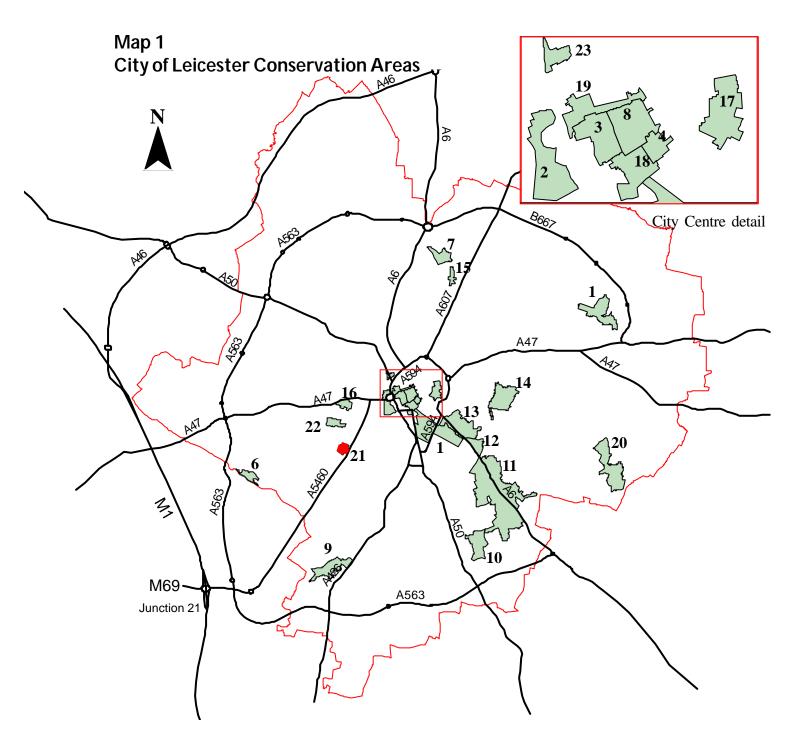
Ashleigh Road Conservation Area



Urban Design Group



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- 1 New Walk
- 2 Castle Gardens
- 3 Cathedral /Guildhall
- 4 Town Hall Square
- **5** Old Humberstone
- 6 Braunstone Village
- 7 Belgrave Hall
- 8 Market Place

- 9 Aylestone Village
- 10 Knighton Village
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- 13 South Highfields
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- 15 Loughborough Road
- 16 Daneshill

- 17 St George's
- 18 Market Street
- 19 High Street
- 20 Evington Village
- 21 Ashleigh Road
- **22** Westcotes Drive
- 23 All Saints'

(Listed chronologically)

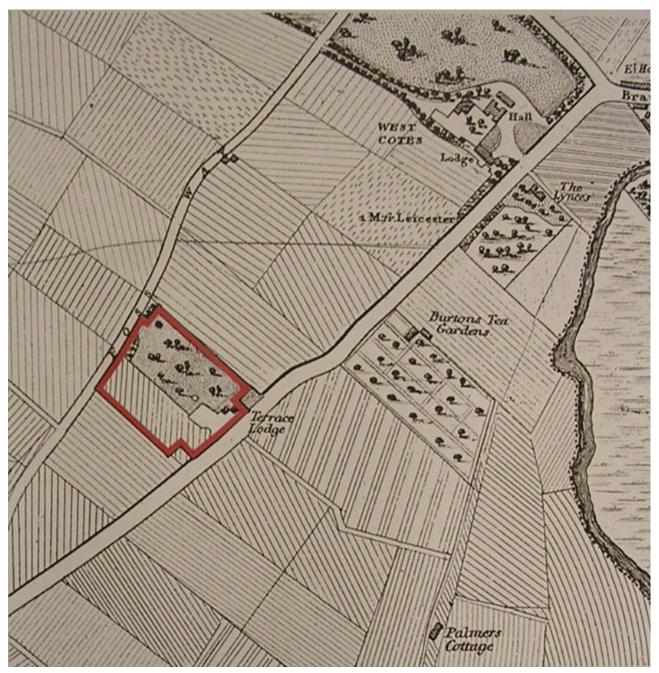


ASHLEIGH ROAD CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT



Map 2.

Boundary of conservation area ———— and trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders



ASHLEIGH ROAD CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT



Map 3. Location of Conservation Area superimposed on the 1828 map.

Boundary of conservation area _____



ASHLEIGH ROAD CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT

Map 4. Location of Conservation Area superimposed on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1886

Boundary of conservation area

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A conservation area is defined as an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance¹. Leicester's twenty three conservation areas (map 1) contain the best of the older parts of the city as well as serving the needs of the city today. Each conservation area is distinctive and contains qualities that help to give the city an overall character of its own. The City Council designates conservation areas, after consulting local people, under powers contained in the national planning legislation and in accordance with advice from central government.
- 1.2 The City Council has a duty to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas and has special legal powers to do this. It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in the light of the existing character of the area. When the City Council is considering a planning application for a site within a conservation area it must ensure that the development applied for would help to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. To do this it must

be clear as to what the character of the area is and this document is intended as the framework for such consideration.

1.3 Looking after and improving the qualities of conservation areas can bring real benefits to the people who live and work there. An attractive environment also helps to maintain property values. However, for a conservation area to be successful, both residents and property owners must play their part. The City Council will continue to strive to improve the environment of conservation areas whenever the opportunity presents itself and when resources are available and will encourage others to do likewise.



Cast metal signs advertise the Conservation Area as well as adding texture and visual interest



Narborough Road front wall scheme completed in 1991was almost entirely paid for by the City Council.

1.4 The Ashleigh Road Conservation Area was designated in November 1989 (map 2).

2.0 Location, area and landform

2.1 The Ashleigh Road Conservation Area is located on the west side of Leicester just under 2 kilometres south-west of the Clock Tower. It lies across a long low ridge of sandstone with a capping of gravels and boulder clays, making it ideal as building land. The conservation area covers an area of 3.8 hectares and encloses about 76 buildings including 4 blocks of flats.

3.0 Archaeology, history and development

- 3.1 Since Roman times the Fosse Way has provided the approach to Leicester from the south west and Narborough Road runs along the approximate line of this major Roman highway. The City Council's Sites & Monuments Record indicates that only one isolated burial probably of Roman date has been identified on Stuart Street on the eastern side of Narborough Road. No other archaeological finds have yet come to light within the Conservation Area boundaries.
- 3.2 It was only in the first half of the 19th century that urban development of any significance began along Narborough Road. The reason for this was that steam power had made it possible to mechanise the hosiery industry and Leicester, a centre for hosiery manufacture, was expanding rapidly. Up until the nineteenth century two large estates (Dannett's Hall and West Cotes) had prevented the city's westward expansion. This is shown clearly on the 1828 map. However, their sale between 1840 and 1860 allowed development to take place for the first time and by 1867 the house and grounds known as 'West Leigh' at the north east corner of Ashleigh Road had been built for Archibald Turner, a wealthy elastic web manufacturer. But development was fairly slow and twenty years later there were still only about 20 other houses. Jack Simmons notes that during the 1860s the Westcotes estate " is being whittled away".2 However, by 1910 development on Ashleigh Road, Westleigh Road and Narborough Road was effectively complete.
- 3.3 It is clear from their size and detailing (in comparison with the terraced houses just to the north) that the houses in the conservation area were built for the rising middle classes of the period. The buildings are larger and the robustly detailed facades

reflect their owners' relative wealth and aspirations. This is also reflected in the provision of some coach houses and stables served directly off the road or from the service access behind Westleigh Road.

3.4 There has, unfortunately, been one major loss to the townscape. The demolition of 'West Leigh' in the 1960s resulted, not only in the loss of the first house to be built in the area and therefore one of some historical importance, but also the loss of a building of substantial size with large grounds containing several large trees. Its replacement by three storey flats and a petrol filling



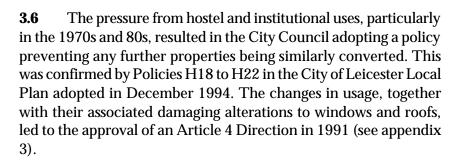
Aerial view taken just after the Second World War showing West Leigh and its tree filled grounds

² Jack Simmons *Leicester Past and Present Vol 2 Modern City* Eyre Methuen 1974

station in the 1970s has therefore significantly altered the north-east corner and the approach to the Conservation Area. The south west corner is occupied by a single storey portal frame building, the Christadelphian Hall. Elsewhere a few large extensions and garage courts have been built in large back gardens and many single garages have been built off the rear service road between Westleigh Road and Ashleigh Road.

3.5 The most significant change in the area has been the subdivision of the large three storey dwellings into flats, bedsits, hostels and other institutional uses. Evidence from the electoral register suggests that, from the 70 households

likely to have lived in and around the area in around 1930, the population may well have increased to over 240 households today.



3.7 However, because of its proximity to the De Montfort University, the area remains subject to pressure for change to provide student accommodation. This is a source of some local conflict because of the differing lifestyles between students and local families and minimal maintenance by some absentee landlords.

4.0 Homogeneity

4.1 Although small, the Conservation Area contains sub-areas of differing character. The large houses fronting Narborough Road form a distinct dominant group along the eastern edge, the Ashleigh Court flats create a small modern enclave, while the Christadelphian Hall in the south west corner stands alone on its large plot unrelated in scale or design to the rest of the area. The small group of twentieth century two storey dwellings along the Fosse Road South boundary forms a further group. Ashleigh Road is comprised primarily of large three storey terraces with semi-detached villas here and there. Westleigh Road is much more mixed in styles and sizes and so both streets form small separate groups.

5.0 Layout

5.1 The layout of the Conservation Area is a simple grid formed by Narborough Road on the eastern side, Fosse Road South on the west side with two cross streets joining these and forming Ashleigh Road to the north and Westleigh Road to the south. The building plots are generally long and narrow, reflecting the property sub-



Ashleigh Gardens flats built on the site of West Leigh



Replacement windows such as these in the upper floors began to eat away at the special character of the area and created the need for the Article 4 Direction



Fosse Road South. This small group of early twentieth century houses forms one of the distinctive groups within the area

divisions when the land was sold for building in the last half of the 19th century. Between Ashleigh Road and Westleigh Road a service road gives vehicular access to the rear gardens. The construction of the large detached and semi-detached houses along Fosse Road South created larger, wider plots along the west side, reflecting their squarer plan form.

6.0 Townscape

- 6.1 The term *townscape* refers to the ways in which views open and close as the observer moves through a city, to changes in level, visual contrasts and linkages, textural qualities, and the rhythms and patterns in the street scene: elements which give the environment of an area individuality and character.
- **6.2** The formal grid layout of the Conservation Area means that there is no one feature which acts as a focus or key element in the townscape. However, there is much in the way of pattern and rhythm. The vertical rhythms of gables, finials and bay windows, the regularity of the building lines and the patterns of varied rooflines and in tiling and decoration create much visual interest.

6.3 The straight roads which bisect the area from east to west lead the eye through the Conservation Area and out into the streets beyond. To the east the view down Ashleigh Road leads into Stuart

Street with its closely packed small bayfronted houses and street trees which create interesting visual rhythms and contrasts. Westwards beyond the Conservation Area the street approaches a curve at the top of a low hill leading the eye past a fine Lebanon cedar in Westcotes Gardens and towards other garden trees at the top of the rise. The scale, colour and texture of these trees create much interest along the skyline. The view south along Fosse Road South contrasts again with the introduction of the solid form of a steelpanelled railway bridge which forces the road to dip underneath it. From there it curves upwards and off to the right out of sight. In the other direction Fosse Road South stretches off into the distance.

6.4 Within the Conservation Area, townscape is defined by the large scale of the buildings and their proximity to the street. This creates a sense of enclosure (particularly along Westleigh Road where the front yards



The rhythm of planned terraces displaying identical features and proportions is the key feature in the townscape and architectural quality of the area



The view looking west along Ashleigh Road showing the huge cedar that dominates the roof line.

are shallow and the buildings are built very close together) and the gables, chimneys and bay windows add important visual rhythm. The varied rooflines and chimneys create interest along the skyline, as do the patterns formed by the overhead telephone wires.

6.5 There are some trees worthy of note within the Conservation Area, for example the ash and the large copper beech in the grounds of 35 Westleigh Road. These stand out as important visual foci. The imposing terrace formed by 169-195 Narborough Road, with its mature red chestnut and lime trees along the front boundary, is also an important landmark on the approach to the area from north and south.



Trees along Narborough Road, protected by a Tree Preservation Order, in front of the imposing terrace of 169-195

7.0 Architectural character

The inclusion of buildings in this

section is selective and is intended to illustrate the range of building types, styles and materials in the Conservation Area. If a building is not included this should not be taken to indicate that it does not make a significant contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

- 7.1 Surrounded by small terraced houses on three sides and inter-war housing to the west the contrast in scale and decoration in the Conservation Area is evident. The common theme across the whole area is the use of local Leicester red brick, with stone and timber used abundantly for both for structure and decoration. Bay windows are a dominant feature. Some buildings also have pargetting or moulded brickwork. Ornamentation, using carved timber or mock half-timbering, is common. Roofs are mainly of Welsh slate or red clay tiles, although some properties have been reroofed in modern materials. A few facades have also been rendered or painted and some windows have been replaced with modern double-glazed units in either stained timber or uPVC.
- 7.2 The main cross streets, Ashleigh Road and Westleigh Road, are slightly different in architectural character, although both display rich detailing and high quality. Houses on Westleigh Road are constructed mainly as large three storey terraced houses built within 2.5m of the footpaths. Ashleigh Road has several pairs of semidetached villas and is of a more open character. At the eastern end, the Ashleigh Court flats are built 8m back from the footway in two staggered groups. This creates a sense of greater space at the entrance to the Conservation Area, a perception which is continued along the street by the wider plots on the north side of the road. Between these two streets is a long narrow communal space providing access to a variety of garages and outbuildings, some of which are original, but most of which are modern and in a variety of different materials and standards of construction. Fosse Road South has large mainly detached houses on large plots with deep front gardens, while those on Narborough Road form a continuous



Distinctive Welsh slate roof with bands of fish scale and red clay ridge tiles with terracotta finials are relatively common features within the area and used throughout the 169-195 Narborough Road terrace.



Pargeting on the gable of the nursing home, 19 Ashleigh Road

terrace of grand three storey buildings set well back from this busy traffic artery.

7.3 Ashleigh Road is dominated by ornament. Built mainly in the 1880s and 1890s the houses have projecting bays in timber and stone, big barge-boarded gables and timber framing to the upper floors. Some houses have decorative castiron detailing to cills and bays. Number 28 is built in the 'Arts and Crafts' style with interesting pargetting details and a date roundel. Number 17 is a fine example of turn of the century style



Large terraces on Westleigh Road

with deep, finely bracketed overhanging eaves. The three storey terrace on Narborough Road, continues the brick and timber theme but adds pargetting infill, turned timber balustrades and ornate timber porches. Westleigh Road shows more diverse styling but still displays the high quality construction evident in the rest of the area. The overall effect is very robust with much interest in the form of stained glass window panels, ornamental features such as moulded brick name plaques, decorative patterns in woodwork, carved stonework and tile-hanging to catch the eye. Fosse Road South has a mix of two and three storey buildings from the late 19th century and the 1930s. The latter are very much plainer than those elsewhere in the Conservation Area, reflecting the architectural fashion of the period and are set back on deep front gardens. Despite their 'plainness', however, they nevertheless exhibit some of the Conservation Area's familiar features - brick construction, big gables, bay windows and timber porches - and therefore complement rather than detract from the qualities of the area. The Christadelphian Hall displays an unfortunate lack of architectural character both in terms of its design as well as its relationship to its plot and its neighbours.

7.4 Overall, however, the value of the area lies in the scale of its large confident buildings and the way these are embellished with small scale, well-crafted detailing. From the complex mouldings on a timber window-frame or cornice to the well laid Leicester red bricks in the facade, the visual quality of the area stands out.

8.0 Ancillary buildings

8.1 Mention has been made in the preceding text of the service access road between Ashleigh Road and Westleigh Road and the ancillary buildings associated with it. Whilst not being a major visual element of the 'public' parts of the Conservation Area, this service road is an important feature for residents of the houses which back onto it. Originally, the roadway would have been surfaced, at least in part, in granite setts and would have led to some small coach



Above and below. Eclectic styles and ornamentation in Ashleigh Road



houses or garages built in brick to match the houses. There are five of these remaining - at 195 and 185-187 Narborough Road and 2, 6 and 14 Ashleigh Road. The latter two are two storeys in height and of simple but pleasing design. The rest of the garages are built in a jumbled mix of modern brickwork or pre-cast concrete panels, in various states of repair and with at least one unit being used as a car repair business. The lack of control over who has access to the area as well as poor lighting has also rendered the roadway susceptible to flytipping, thus worsening the visual impact. The multitude of ownerships and rights of way seems to have resulted in problems of overall responsibility for maintenance and general care. Thus, the tenants and owners of the adjoining houses not only have a slowly deteriorating access to their parking spaces and an outlook made less attractive by the poor quality of the outbuildings but also potentially have the added problems of lower personal and property security.

8.2 Elsewhere in the Conservation Area there are several 'garage courts', notably behind 9 Westleigh Road and 20 and 24-26 Ashleigh Road. The courts off Ashleigh Road appear to be in industrial use. None of these areas are attractive, although the garages off Westleigh Road appear to be well used and therefore serve a useful function in an area otherwise devoid of sufficient space to provide secure parking.

9.0 Boundary treatments

- 9.1 The boundaries of the Conservation Area are entirely manmade and comprise highways on the east and west sides with a railway embankment along the south boundary. The north edge is formed by brick garden walls.
- 9.2 Where houses are still in single family occupation, front garden walls remain and create a strong edge and definition between 'public' and 'private' space. However, where houses have been converted for multiple occupation, many front garden walls have been removed or allowed to fall into disrepair. Where they have been removed they have, in most cases, been replaced in other materials. Front yards are also generally paved or concreted over and are used for the storage of 'wheelie bins'. This has all resulted in a major loss of street character. The loss of a well-defined boundary at 35 Westleigh Road is particularly regrettable when viewed in the context of its prominent corner location and the scale of the car park that has been created from the old front garden.
- 9.3 Materials for front boundaries are varied, ranging from original brick walls with or without privet hedges behind to modern brick and concrete structures of poorer visual quality. Timber fences are common and come in various styles horizontal 'hit and miss boards', vertical picket-style, feather-edged boarding and post and chain. The low timber fencing around the Christdelphian Hall has recently been replaced with a neater version but this prominent



Two views of the service road running between Ashleigh & Westleigh Roads and some of its outbuildings





Surviving boundary walls and piers along Ashleigh Road

corner remains very weak. The lack of a defined edge around the Ashleigh Court flats is similarly weak, particularly as this is one of the main entrances to the Conservation Area. The railway embankment, however, is a very attractive edge with many mature trees of various species that form a green barrier to the south.

9.4 To counteract some of the damage resulting from the loss of front boundary walls, the City Council took the opportunity in 1991 to fund the restoration of the garden walls along the most prominent boundary, Narborough Road. This has restored the integrity of this edge and re-created the original harmony of the eastern boundary.

10.0 Parks, gardens and trees

10.1 The layout and high density of development in the Conservation Area mean that there is little in the way of green space. The contribution made by the few trees and gardens which do remain are therefore very important to the appearance and character of the area. As there are no street trees, the Conservation Area relies entirely on the trees and shrubs in private front gardens, both within and beyond the Conservation Area, for visual interest and richness. The contribution that such trees, hedges and shrubs make to the vistas along the streets cannot be underestimated and they are important assets in this high-density urban environment. Where front gardens have been destroyed and paved over, the result has been a diminution in the townscape quality.

10.2 For this reason, and because they represent the largest area of 'green' along this busy main road, the trees along the Narborough Road boundary have been protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The copper beech tree at 35 Westleigh Road is also an important townscape feature, as is the ash on the southwest corner and the horse chestnut and limes along the northern boundary of the property. The young lime, copper beech, sycamore and purple cherry trees in front of the Ashleigh Garden flats also play a vital part in sustaining visual quality and character. Similarly, the more mature sycamore and copper beech trees along the boundary between Ashleigh Road and the petrol filling station on Narborough Road are important visual elements.

11.0 Paving and ground surfaces

11.1 Most of the hard surfaces in the area have been replaced by modern materials, although many granite kerbstones remain. In addition to tarmac road surfaces, grey pavers have been used in both Ashleigh Road and Westleigh Road to provide traffic calming humps. In many places, however, footpaths are uneven and footway crossings are cracked and badly maintained.

11.2 It is only in the private areas such as alleys and service access roads where some of the original paving materials can be found. The alleyway between Ashleigh and Westleigh Roads retains most of its diamond-patterned blue brick surface and the service road



Varied front garden walls and boundary treatments add to the domestic character of the area



Loss of front garden walls and storage of wheelie bins in front gardens have eroded the character of the area.



The large copper beech at 35 Westleigh Road dominates this view of Fosse Road South

off the north side of Westleigh Road has most of its original granite setts (although these are uneven, potholed or overgrown).

12.0 Lighting and street furniture

12.1 Following requests from local residents to improve the design of street lights to reflect the Conservation Area's character, street lighting columns in the area were replaced in two different styles - 'Victorian' swan -neck style lanterns on Westleigh Road and a modern 'flat' profiled lantern with finials on Ashleigh Road. Painted black and gold instead of the standard municipal grey these new lamps blend into the streetscape. Further visual interest is also added by the telephone poles and wiring which serve individual houses.

13.0 Land use and social factors

- 13.1 The predominant land use in the Conservation Area remains residential although this ranges from single family dwellings to purpose-built flats and houses converted into flats or bedsits. There is also a nursing home, a care home, and a community care hostel. Minor commercial uses have intruded onto Westleigh Road in the form of a hotel and some offices that have been created by the conversion of number 35. The Christadelphian Hall and a children's day nursery are other non-residential uses. A small car repair business has been established in a garage court off the south side of Ashleigh Road.
- 13.2 The many houses in multiple occupation or other institutional residential uses has affected the street scene in many ways. There are many more dustbins left on forecourts and lack of regular maintenance of gardens and buildings has resulted in pockets of neglect. Many houses have had replacement windows in inappropriate materials and styles. Increased occupation levels and lack of storage space is seen in the on-street storage of refuse bins. Untidy forecourts create visual clutter. The high proportion of nonfamily occupiers has also been the source of local complaints about noise and unsocial activities. In addition, the rear service road tends to suffer from sporadic rubbish dumping and general neglect and, because of its secluded nature and lack of lighting, feels somewhat threatening.
- 13.3 At the eastern end of Westleigh Road, a new frozen food store and car park adjoining the edge of the Conservation Area creates more traffic movements than would normally be associated with a residential area. The nearby children's day nursery is a busy magnet in the morning and afternoon.

14.0 Loss of character

14.1 Whilst the Conservation Area still retains much of what makes it special, it is also clear that there have been problems associated with its changing role and the way it responds to pressure



Granite setts between Ashleigh and Westleigh Roads, reflect the historic surfaces that would have been common place in the earlier part of the 20th century



Victorian swan-neck style lanterns on Westleigh Road

from the modern city.

- 14.2 In relation to buildings, the major contributor to loss of character is the alteration of important architectural features such as sash windows and the use of non-traditional materials (uPVC, concrete roof tiles, render). The removal or neglect of front boundary walls and gardens (particularly associated with houses in multiple occupation) also diminishes the quality of the environment as does the clutter of refuse bins and general litter. The Christadelphian Hall, on one of the main corners of the Conservation Area, is a particularly weak point in the townscape because of its design, scale and siting.
- 14.3 In terms of the general environment, the lack of maintenance of common areas such as the rear service road off Westleigh Road not only makes the area look unsightly but also makes access more difficult for both pedestrians and vehicles. The loss of rear boundary walls off the service road reduces security at the backs of the houses, removes residents' amenity space and weakens built edges. The poor quality of design and construction of garages in the off-street garage courts damages the rear outlook from many properties.
- 14.4 Traffic within the Conservation Area is not heavy, although there is a high demand for on-street parking. The east and west boundaries, however, suffer from heavy traffic, which erodes the character of the Conservation Area and contrasts greatly with the otherwise quiet daytime atmosphere. The heavy traffic is also a major barrier to pedestrian movements, which have to be accommodated by the provision of (fairly widely spaced) pedestrian crossing points.

15.0 Preserving the character

- 15.1 The previous sections have described the Ashleigh Road area, why it is important and how the setting, relationship of buildings and details have combined to create a unique character worthy of special care and protection. It was the recognition of the area's quality and variety that led to its declaration as a Conservation Area in 1989. The City of Leicester Local Plan (currently under review) also contains policies designed to protect the area's character, for example by ensuring that new development takes account of the scale, form, materials and details of its surroundings.
- 15.2 Conservation Area Consent must be obtained for demolition of all but the smallest buildings (such as outbuildings) and may also be needed for demolishing parts of buildings, like chimney stacks or front boundary walls. There are also restrictions on installing satellite dishes and these controls are tighter in conservation areas than elsewhere. The City Council is keen to see that satellite dishes and antennas are placed on buildings so as to have the least possible effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area; it is not seen as realistic to resist the siting of such plant in conservation

Although only a small alteration this rather insensitive replacement has thrown off the whole balance of the window.



areas altogether. Listed building consent is required to attach a satellite dish to a listed building.

- 15.3 The details of individual buildings are also important in forming the character of the area and range from the decorative use of timber for windows, porches and doors and the external detailing of houses built in the 19th century. Equally important is the retention of original roofing materials mainly Welsh slate, but also plain clay tiles. In general, repair and restoration work should always keep to the original appearance of the building as closely as possible and be done in materials to match the originals.
- 15.4 However, conservation area designation alone does not prevent alterations to houses which could spoil the character and appearance of the area. Original timber windows and doors, for instance, could be replaced in uPVC, whilst houses could be rendered or re-roofed in modern materials without planning permission being required. Alterations such as these to houses are allowed as "permitted development" under the Town & Country Planning General Development Order.
- 15.5 In order to safeguard the character and appearance of houses within the Conservation Area, the City Council served an Article 4 Direction³ on all of the houses within the area (see appendix 3). Such a direction removes permitted development rights, so that planning permission is required for **any external alterations to houses**. This measure would not apply to flats or commercial properties, as these do not have permitted development rights.
- 15.6 Plants and trees in private gardens are equally important to the character of the area and provide homes and food for a variety of birds and wildlife. Loss of such greenery on a wide scale would have a serious effect on the appearance and attractiveness of the area as well as on urban wildlife. Care should always therefore be taken to ensure that when gardens are being changed any new surface treatments are porous and laid as far from roots and branches as possible to minimise damage.









Some of the wonderful archictural ornamentation that makes the Conservation Area special

³Article 4.2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Tree Preservation Orders

169-195 Narborough Road (ref. no. N4.091), Rear of 171 Narborough Road (ref. no. N4.281)

Appendix 2

List of Buildings within the Ashleigh Road Conservation Area

Ashleigh Road - 1-13 (Ashleigh Gardens flats 1-36), 15-27, 2-28 Fosse Road South - 220-226, Christadelphian Hall Narborough Road - 169-195 (odd) Westleigh Road - 1-35, 6-40

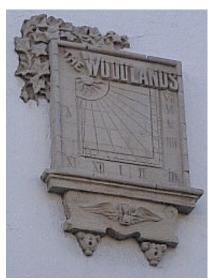
Appendix 3

List of Buildings covered by Article 4 Direction

Ashleigh Road - 15,17,19,23,25,27,2-28 (even)
Fosse Road South - 220-228 (even)
Narborough Road - 169-195 (odd)
Westleigh Road - 1-11 and 15-35 (odd), 6-14 and 22-40 (even)









More of the wonderful archictural ornamentation that makes the Conservation Area special