



GORSTELLA

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL
JANUARY 2008



Maps can be seen on the following link: www.chester.gov.uk/conservationareareview

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DESIGNATIONS

Conservation Area	First designated in 1996
Listed Buildings	None
Scheduled Monuments	None
Registered Parks and Gardens	None
Archaeological Priority	None
SSSI	None
Article 4 directions	None
Any other designations	
Area of Special County Value (ASCV)	None
Site of Biological Interest (SBI)	None
Site of Nature Conservation Value (SNCV)	None
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Green Belt Area</i>

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Gorstella did not appear in the Domesday survey. Post Norman Conquest, it probably formed part of the estate of Earl Edwin.

Its name is derived from 'gorstig' and 'hlaw', which translates as a mound at Gorse Hill. Its name has varied in time being at times: Gorstilau, Gorstilow, Grostella, and Gorstello – this last spelling still evident in modern road atlases.

The general historical setting for Gorstella is that it has remained part of the major landholdings in this area. The Grosvenor Estate made a significant impact on the built environment during the latter half of the 19th century, and which is still visible today. The Duke of Westminster, between 1850 and 1870, built a high proportion of the properties that still exist today, although parts of Bridge Farm at the west end of the hamlet alongside the brook, date back to the late seventeenth century.

The importance of the east-west road route through Gorstella is not known but is probably of significance that prior to draining the marshes this would have been the northernmost east-west road land route from England into Wales. To this day the route is known as "Welsh Road" by local road users.

Whilst there is no known important archaeology in this area there are a significant number of marl pits just outside the conservation area, and many editions of Ordnance Survey maps still show marl pits (or ponds) in every field around Gorstella. Most of these have now been filled in, but there is still a pond in the field at the rear (south) of Tudor Farm alongside a small raised mound which once formed the base of a windmill (referred to as either Dodleston Mill or Gorstella Mill), a corn mill which served the Dodleston area.

KEY FEATURES OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

General:	strong rural and agricultural setting, important architectural and economical influence of the Grosvenor Estate
Topography:	flat
Settlement layout:	linear
Streetscape:	two roads crossing the Conservation Area, one from West to East, i.e. Welsh Road and one from South to North, i.e. Kinnerton Road, joining in front of Crossways House
Built environment:	Generally residential units and farmsteads two storeys high, slate or clay tile roofs. Several single or double hipped gables, often with the upper part white rendered, single or two-colour brick walls, white rendered brick walls, big chimney stacks with impressive ornamentation. Built between late 18 th century and 20 th century
Building setting:	detached and semi detached houses with varied set backs from the road (between 5 and 20 meters)., fields around and between houses
Boundary treatment:	no significant boundary treatment except Oaktree Farm
Historic floor surface:	no significant floor surface
Local view:	view east towards Peckforton hills and west towards Welsh Hills
Trees and hedgerows:	strong presence of medium to high hedgerows along the two main roads, plus a couple of mature oak trees along a section of Welsh Road
Open spaces:	no significant public open spaces
Change of conservation area boundaries:	none

CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Gorstella is a hamlet comprising farmsteads, houses and cottages, which face on to the east/west minor road leading from Chester through Lower Kinnerton to Hope and beyond in the west. A smaller number of properties face on to the north/south route through the hamlet from Bretton in the north to Dodleston in the south.

Gorstella is one of five settlements that together make up the parish of Dodleston. These include Dodleston village itself, Rough Hill, Balderton, Gorstella and Lower Kinnerton.

Standing some 18 metres above sea level, Gorstella is on a low ridge of compact boulder clay, and above what would have been the extensive marshes of the River Dee estuary prior to the canalisation of the Dee. Today, this can still be read in the landscape, as the land drops away to the flatlands of Saltney in the north, and the low lying marshy fields alongside Pulford Brook to the south.

A key feature of Gorstella is the scattered nature of the dwellings of modest size and surrounded by open, rural landscapes. The only exception to this is 'The Gorstella' Farm, which is a significant 19th century farmstead with associated cottages nearby which would have been farm workers tied cottages. The other farmsteads: Green Bank; Lane End; Tudor Farm, and Oak Tree, are much smaller in size. After that, all the dwellings are detached or semi-detached properties standing in their own plots with entrances onto the main road. There are no significant tracks or lanes leading to properties away from the road.

Although Gorstella comprises only seventeen properties in total, these are arranged in two groupings. The first group of nine properties cluster around the road junction by 'Crossways' house, and the second group of eight properties some five hundred metres to the east nearer to Chester. The two groups are separated by open fields, which come right up to the edges of Welsh Road.

While the Grosvenor Estate did so much to define the character of this hamlet by building 'The Gorstella' farmstead and its tied houses, it would be a mistake to think of this area as being 'John Douglas'¹ territory. This is because the area went through considerable change during the 20th century. For example, the 'New Gorstella Cottages' were built mid century with rather untypical heavy, hipped roofs and an overall appearance of suburban semi-detached houses. Older buildings such as 'Brick Bank Cottages', with their twin Dutch gabled fronts indicate a pre-existing use of the site as a brick works. Other tied cottages were sold off to become owner-occupied premises. In short, the distinctive characteristic is in the variety of pattern and style of property.

Behind and between the dwellings, the land is in agricultural use. This area has been until recently used for dairy farming and the fields are all pasture. This gives a sense of unchanging farming landscape except that vacant buildings and others that have been gentrified indicate that the dairy farming is at worst in decline and at best changing, with the formation of new agricultural businesses, not based on traditional farming practices.



1 & 2 Brick Bank Cottages, Welsh Road

¹ John Douglas, renowned local Architect who worked extensively for the Westminster Estate in the late 19th century.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

Unlisted buildings of merit

All Gorstella's farmsteads – The Gorstella, Tudor Farm, Oaktree Farm and Lane End Farm - with associated cottages are of architectural interest, with their varied layout and setting in the landscape. They enhance the diverse and strong rural character of the hamlet.

A comprehensive list of dwellings - several designed by John Douglas, contribute to the conservation area, the character and appearance of which would be significantly undermined by inappropriate alterations to these properties, particularly in respect of alterations to windows, doors, exterior hard standing and landscape in general. As such, planning control under an Article 4 Direction for those houses could be used to maintain the high quality of the built environment in Gorstella.

Local views

Local views are important and contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is essential that full consideration be given to the impact of development proposals upon these views. Important local views include those listed below;

Deleted:

- Due to frequent wide areas of agricultural land between houses, the views are often directly open to the countryside, but from certain locations to the north, the distant factories of Broughton can be seen, indicating the southern edge of industrial Deeside, mediated by open fields and green space, that helps Gorstella retain its feel of being a rural settlement, well away from urban developments.
- To the west the land gently rises towards the Welsh hills, with Hope Mountain and the Hawarden woods very apparent only three miles away. On clear days there are also distant views of the Berwyns and the Clwydian Hills.
- To the east the full range of the Peckforton Hills can easily be seen about six miles away. To the south, the roofs of Dodleston village are visible only half a mile away, beyond which the land falls away towards the Welsh border at Pulford Brook, and beyond that the land rises again with the low hills of Marford, and Gresford clearly visible.

Townscape, topography and Landscape details

The relation existing between local townscape details, landscape details and topography often contribute to the sense of local distinctiveness and often are unique to a particular conservation area. They can range from specific building detailing, characteristic building elements, boundary treatments, to the landscape qualities of the streetscape. Individually and collectively they contribute to the overall quality of Gorstella as well as enhancing individual areas of character within the settlement.

Topography

Gorstella's topography is basically flat.

Townscape details

As mentioned earlier, several strong townscape details contribute to give an unifying and particular character to this area, due to the impact of the Grosvenor Estate on this hamlet in the late 19th century, and its architect John Douglas. Two storeys houses, single or double hipped gable, roof often with the upper floor white rendered, frequent two-colour brick walls, usually orange and dark brown with its typical Westminster logos, extensive use of special bricks, slate roofs, big chimney stacks with impressive ornamentation and mullioned iron windows, but several other influences are present in the Conservation Areas: Dutch hipped gables at Brick Bank Cottages, impressive hipped roofs at the New Gorstella Cottages, characteristic of 1920's council estate houses, more conventional two storey brick cottages, i.e. Gorstella House.

Boundary treatments

Boundary treatments have a significant impact upon the setting of properties, the coherence of a group and the overall character of a conservation area. Traditional and appropriate treatments will preserve or enhance the appearance of the conservation area.

Gorstella's Conservation area has no significant boundary treatments, except a couple of properties with a medium height brick wall with round or triangular coping stone (Oaktree Farm and Crossways).

Trees and hedgerows

Trees and hedgerows have significant amenity value and are almost always a positive contributor to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Hedgerows of height between 0.8m to 2.4m are predominantly present along Gorstella's Conservation Area main roads, bordering fields or properties with varied setbacks from the road (between 0.5m and 2m). Coupled with scattered mature oak trees along Welsh Road from Lower Kinnerton until the junction with Kinnerton Road, they contribute to the particular rural character of Gorstella's Conservation Area, therefore should be preserved and maintained.



Welsh Road from Lane End Farm towards Chester

Open Spaces

The space between buildings and the landscape, within which the settlement has evolved, is as important as the built environment in defining its character. The rural character of Gorstella's Conservation Area is also established by the fields around and between the properties.

The hamlet in itself has no open public green spaces of any significance, other than the roadside verges that establish the rural appearance of Gorstella's roads.

Buildings and their setting in the landscape

Another important feature contributing to the character and appearance of Gorstella's Conservation Area is the wide range of building layouts along Welsh and Kinnerton Road; set backs varying between 5 and 20 metres.

The unifying characteristic is very possibly due also to the impact of the Grosvenor Estate in this settlement at the end of the 19th century.

Grosvenor estate cottages built in pairs, are distinctive with their emphasized symmetry and architectural details, contributing to shape Gorstella's "skyline".

Boundaries

The boundaries have been reviewed and no changes have been proposed.

NEUTRAL AND/OR NEGATIVE ELEMENTS WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA AND ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Neutral elements represent features within the conservation area that offer no strong positive or negative influence upon the character and appearance of the area. Furthermore, negative features detract from the special character of an area and present the opportunity for change, which will enhance the character and appearance of an area. Those elements considered neutral or negative features and those elements that represent enhancement opportunities within the conservation area are listed below.

Neutral elements

Fairway Cottage and New Cottage

Negative elements

The main negative element is vehicular traffic on main roads. Vehicle speeds are high, very dangerous for pedestrians security, risky for residents driving in and out of their properties, resulting in a notable noise and air pollution, seriously affecting the character of the area.

It is suggested that the Highway Authority give serious consideration to a speed limit of 30 miles per hour within the conservation area with appropriately designed traffic calming measures.

Enhancement opportunities

- Landscape improvement

The Gorstella

The Gorstella has ceased to be a working farm and outbuildings are to be converted to residential use. The present hard standing is tarmac, affecting the high quality of construction and general layout of this compound.

The present hard standing deserves careful re-design with traditional materials such as surface dressing, reclaimed sets, gravel or cobblestones, avoiding suburban appearance (i.e. imitation of late 19th C lamp posts, inappropriate flower bedding, etc.) that could damage the ambiance of this impressive farm complex.

- Building requiring attention

Lane End Farm

Lane End Farm, possibly one of John Douglas's first designs, is derelict and requires urgent attention.

It is hoped that it will be inhabited in the foreseeable future after a sensitive restoration, i.e. carefully designed with traditional materials and taking into consideration the key features that make Gorstella's Conservation Area special.

- Noise and air pollution

Abnormally high vehicle speed on the Main Road, very dangerous for pedestrians security, risky for residents driving in and out of their properties, result in notable noise and air pollution that affects seriously the character of the area.

It is recommended that the Highway Authority give consideration to a speed limit of 30 miles per hour within the conservation area.

NB: These are suggestions for improvement, but owners should note that the Planning Authority has no powers to implement those recommendations.

MANAGEMENT TOOLS

In order to maintain the character and appearance of conservation areas, Chester City Council will use the appropriate pieces of legislation relevant for this task:

- Urgent Work Notice.
This notice relates to a building which is in a very serious state of disrepair and needs basically to be water safe. It should be confirmed by the Secretary of State.

- Tidy Land Provision Notice, section 214 of the Planning Act 1990. This notice relates to a building and its curtilage that is poorly maintained. It requires a tidy up of the property.
- Dilapidated Building Notice, section 16 of the 1984 Building Act. This Notice refers to a building that is in a poor state. It implies either repairing the building or removal of the building. In a Conservation Area, such demolition would need a Conservation Area Consent.

THREAT

Increasing car traffic - mainly due to commuting - with its side effects such as street widening, road signs, tree cutting, poorly designed garages and driveways, inappropriate traffic calming measures, etc. often seriously and irreversibly affect the character of a conservation area.

It is therefore important to foresee and manage very carefully the design and material impact of traffic on new developments, in order to maintain the essential features that make a conservation area special, in accordance with the latest guidance on streets published by the Department for Transport (Manual for Streets, March 2007, www.communities.gov.uk).

SURROUNDING OF A CONSERVATION AREA

Developments on properties located in the surroundings of a conservation area should also be considered with great care, in order to maintain the essential features that make an area special.

APPENDICES

- Map of the conservation area as existing, scale 1:2,500

FURTHER READING

Chester City Council - 1997 *Living in a Conservation Area - A Guide to Householders*
Chester City Council - November 2006. *Chester District Local Plan*

Relevant Local Plan Policies

- ENV21 Protection of trees and woodland
- ENV24 Preservation of key features within the landscape and its overall character
- ENV37 Preservation or enhancement of conservation areas
- ENV38 Protection of local views
- ENV45 Preservation of the special interest of listed buildings
- ENV46 Appropriate changes of use to listed buildings
- ENV47 Protection of unlisted buildings of merit

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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