

*Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council
Planning Services*

Burton Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Preface

The Planning Committee of Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council approved this document for publication, on 8th October 2002. Its publication followed an extensive public consultation exercise carried out in August, September and October 2002.

As part of the consultation exercise, letters were sent out to local ward members (county and district), Burton Residents Association, Burton and Neston Local History Society, the County Planning Officer and the 14 planning agents responsible for submitting over 25% of the planning applications in the Borough. Burton Residents Association delivered a copy of the draft appraisal to every house in the village, while owners, whose properties were included in the proposed extension to the Conservation Area, were written to directly by the authority. Copies of the draft appraisal were also left in the Planning Department reception, Neston Library and Neston Town Hall. The draft appraisal has proven to be very popular. Over 300 copies of the draft appraisals have been distributed with Neston Library and Neston Town Hall requesting additional copies. A press release was also issued and articles appeared in local newspapers including the Daily Post and the Messenger.

The authority received six responses to its consultation exercise. No negative comments about the appraisal were received. The appraisal was amended in the light of the responses received.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document aims to provide an assessment of the special architectural and historic interest of Burton Conservation Area. It forms supplementary planning guidance to the adopted Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Local Plan and Policy ENV13 in particular. It will help to guide decisions on planning applications in the Conservation Area, and assist applicants in drawing up schemes. It will also be used to formulate proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area. The Local Plan has been prepared having regard to the County Structure Plan Policy R1, National planning Guidance such as that issued by English Heritage.
- 1.2 The appraisal is not intended to be a comprehensive plot by plot survey and omission of any particular building; feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.
- 1.3 This document will hopefully raise awareness of the special qualities of the Conservation Area, so that as Burton continues to evolve, it does so in a sympathetic way and the pleasing character of the conservation area is maintained for future generations.

2 Physical Setting

- 2.1 The village of Burton is located near the south-western shore of the Wirral Peninsular, with views over the Dee Estuary towards North Wales. The village lies on the south-western side of a sandstone hill known, at its peak, as Burton Wood.
- 2.2 The underlying rock is red Triassic sandstone, which outcrops throughout the village. It is typical of the majority of the old villages of the borough, that they are located where sandstone protrudes through the boulder clay. Burton is one of the best examples of this feature. The north side of the main street is on the relatively steep side of Burton Wood. The land to the south west of the main street gently falls way to the river and is covered by undulating boulder clay.

3 Settlement Development

- 3.1 Burton was first recorded in the Domesday Book although, nearby, there was an earlier, possibly Iron Age, coastal fort and indeed the name Burton derives from farm or enclosure at a fortification.
- 3.2 The Domesday Book recorded the presence of a priest. If there was a church in early medieval Burton the most likely site would be the present church. Indeed the tithe map of 1847 depicts the churchyard as being sub circular in shape, a common early medieval form which may indicate the extent of the early medieval churchyard. It is thought likely that the early medieval settlement was located close to the church although there is no evidence to confirm the location or extent of this. The current church was rebuilt in 1721.
- 3.3 By the thirteenth century Burton had become the most important town in Wirral. It was a small but prosperous town and port, with 50 timber framed, thatched cottages dotted along the main road. The reason for its growth was its pivotal position on the communication network. Several important routes crossed Burton. The main route from Lancashire to North Wales crossed the Dee by ferry here and two roads, from north-west Wirral to Chester, passed through Burton.
- 3.4 In medieval times Burton became an important port. Ships from Ireland and Gascony could off load onto smaller vessels or packhorses to Chester. At Denhall, on the coast, was St Andrew's Hospital, founded in 1231-4, by the village landlord, the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, to help the poor, the shipwrecked and travellers to Ireland. It also served as a fishing port hence the dedication to St Andrew, the patron saint of fishermen.
- 3.5 The medieval village was also an agricultural community, surrounded by strip fields and common pasture, which supported a community of small independent farmers. The village was owned by the Bishop of Lichfield, Burton's absentee landlord, who collected tithes but otherwise allowed the town to govern itself. A sign of Burton's increasing importance occurred in 1299 when Edward I granted a charter for a weekly market and a three-day fair, held in July.

- 3.6 Burton's heyday was short lived. Decline occurred in the fourteenth century when a series of poor harvests followed by the Black Death resulted in the death of a third of the national population. Burton's market function never recovered and its relative importance as a maritime centre declined. The village returned to being primarily an agricultural settlement.
- 3.7 Maritime activities were eventually superseded by Neston and later Parkgate, although it was only in the 18th Century, when the River Dee was canalised, that the main river channel moved from the English to the Welsh sides. As a result the English side of the River Dee silted up and is now occupied by flat grazing land. The River, which in medieval times was 1.5kms away, is now 4kms away from the village centre.
- 3.8 The village remained in church ownership until 1806 when Richard Congreve, purchased the estate from the Bishop of Lichfield. Congreve set about dismantling the medieval system of strip farming and sought an act of Parliament to enclose the strip fields and common land, creating the landscape of fields and hedgerows seen today. This was also the first time that the landlord had been resident in the village and Richard Congreve set about the building of Burton Hall (later to be known as Burton Manor) on former tenements on the south side of the main street.
- 3.9 The Congreve's remained as landlords until 1902 when they sold the estate and village to Neville Gladstone, third son of the Prime Minister. Gladstone set about making improvements to Burton Hall (renamed Manor) as well as the village providing drainage, estate houses and the Gladstone (village) Hall.
- 3.10 In 1924, Gladstone sold Burton to live in the family's ancestral home at Hawarden. The village was sold to tenants and property speculators. In 1939, the Manor was requisitioned, by the War Office, becoming, after the war, a college of further education, a role it retains to this day.

4 Townscape

- 4.2 There is an informal feel to much of the village. The street and general layout of the village has altered little since medieval times. The main street known as The Village, provides the spine of the village. Pevsner described it as pleasant and varied, winding through the village with no paved footpath and sandstone outcrops to the side of the road. The length of The Village, from the Smithy in the east to Greenwood Farm in the west, indicates the extent of the medieval settlement. Either side of The Village was divided into regular plots (tenements) running at right angles to the street frontage with buildings fronting closely onto the street. Many of the tenement boundaries can still be identified today. The Rake was a back lane that would have provided access to the common pasture to the north of the village. To the immediate north of The Rake may have been small enclosures attached to the rear of the tenements. Tenements were also found to the south of the main road and would have featured a common northern and southerly boundary before the construction of Burton Hall (later Manor) disturbed the earlier pattern.

The conservation area can be split into six townscape character zones.

- 4.3 Zone A: Church Compound: The Parish Church of St Nicholas occupies an elevated position to the north of The Village. The parish church is a modest sandstone structure of various dates, the oldest parts from the C12 and C14 but largely from the C18 and C19. The square church tower, with its single finger clock, is the tallest building in the village. The church is located within a large and verdant graveyard. To the north the graveyard is bordered by mixed woodland while to the south the churchyard provides panoramic views across the village and over to the Cheshire Plain and north-east Wales. Within the churchyard there are a large number of ancient gravestones including chest tombs and raised grave slabs constructed from local red sandstone. It is unclear why the church is set back from the road. This may be a reflection of it once being within a larger circular enclosure that was encroached upon. Alternatively the space between the church and the road may have previously been the market place. Being close to the churchyard is a common feature of medieval markets. However there are also good reasons for believing the market may have existed on The Village.
- 4.4 Zone B: The Village: The core of the medieval village was located along The Village. This area is characterised by low-rise cottages and houses, tightly packed along the street. The buildings are located within the regular boundaries of the medieval tenements (plots) and tend to be irregularly placed on the street end of the plots, some abutting closely onto the highway while others have a small set back. There is a clear cigar shaped widening of the central part of the main road, which would have made it a favourable location for a market. Within the central area can also be found farm buildings such as barns, dairies, cow-houses and stables. A large proportion of the buildings in this area are ancient and have been included on the statutory list of historic or architecturally important buildings. It is typical of the old buildings in this area that whilst the houses front onto the street, the old farm outbuildings behind are at right angles to the street i.e. aligned down the tenements boundaries.
- 4.5 Zone C: Burton Manor is the largest building in the village built for Richard Congreve c1805 and substantially remodelled by Sir Charles Nicholson for Henry Neville Gladstone (third son of the Prime Minister) in 1904. The house is a substantial property clad in local sandstone with a hipped and sprocketed roof of green slate. Burton Manor became the pivotal building in the village, it being occupied by the most important landowner, and the centre of a substantial estate. The house is set within a large area of planned landscape. The house is separated from the road behind a high wall and kitchen garden. The farmland to the south of the village was turned into picturesque parkland, which is now included on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The Hall and its associated lodges, home farm, gardens, landscaping and ancillary buildings dominate the south west of the village.
- 4.6 Zone D: North East of the Village At the eastern end of Burton, The Village turns to the north east, and rises in altitude. This part of the village was largely developed during the C20. Gladstone was responsible for the village hall and four pairs of handsome estate cottages, built in Arts and Crafts style by the notable architect, H.S. Goodhart-Rendel. Opposite the Goodhart-Rendel cottages can be

found three, single storey, whitewashed cottages, possibly of considerable age. These are set above The Village on a steep cliffed eminence – an important feature in this part of the village. The other notable building in this area is The Vicarage designed by Nicholson, architect of Burton Manor. On the junction of The Village and Vicarage Lane can be found the sandstone Commemorative Cross for Holy Cross Day, marking a gateway into the village.

- 4.7 Zone E: Hinterland to the North West: This area was developed outside the medieval village in the C18. The principle buildings in this area include Bishop Wilson's School, with attached schoolmaster's cottage, and Bank House, a dower house built by the Congreves. Both properties are built in isolated positions from local sandstone within mature gardens and trees. This area also contains remains of a windmill and Mill Cottage
- 4.8 Zone F To the north of The Village, either side of The Rake, has been a considerable amount of modern infill. This development is modern and is of no particular historic character. However due to the low profile of the buildings and the use of muted traditional materials the intrusive damage that could have occurred has been minimised. This part of the village is in an elevated position and care should be taken to reduce visual intrusion from this area.

General

- 4.9 Building materials Burton buildings tend to be constructed of local red Triassic sandstone, local dark red bricks, Welsh slate, and render or pebble dash generally painted off white. The village is also notable for its timber-framed buildings of which there are numerous examples (although, many have since been clad with brick or stone), and for thatch roofs of which two highly visible examples remain. Other imported materials i.e. red rosemary tiles, have been used in the conservation area, with various degrees of success. However these materials do not generally contribute to the character of the conservation area which is largely brick, sandstone, timber framing and slate. The possible exceptions to this are the buildings associated with Burton Manor. On the roof of Manor itself can be found green Westmoreland slates and the Goodhart-Rendel cottages feature clay pantiles. Neither of these materials are local or can be found elsewhere in the village, however they make an important contribution to the village because of outstanding nature of the buildings and the important social record they contain.
- 4.10 Early Burton was probably built exclusively from timber framed buildings, with wattle and daub and thatched roofs. Some of these buildings, such as Barn End and Church House, can still be clearly seen. Other buildings of the period remain, but were re-clad during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was during that period that increasing wealth, combined with a shortage of timber, encouraged the upgrading of existing buildings and the building of new ones. New buildings were still built from locally available materials, but now used the more durable and comparatively fireproof sandstone or brick. Early examples of masonry buildings include Church Farm. Local sandstone and brick continued to be the building material of choice until the estate was disbanded in the 1920's. It

is, in part, this continuity of materials that contributes towards the character of the village.

- 4.11 Style One of the noticeable features of buildings in Burton is the variety of styles and ages of buildings. Most houses are free standing, low rise and individually designed. Few buildings are built as groups. However the buildings work well as a group because of the common use of local materials and vernacular styles, albeit over a long period of time, as well as the picturesque groupings of buildings, defined by the medieval layout of the village.
- 4.12 Most buildings in the village are vernacular, that is to say of the local style, evolved over time and best suited to local conditions and materials. There are exceptions to this, notably Burton Manor and other building relating to Burton Manor Estate, such as Bank House, the remains of the Home Farm (now Manor Farm) and the estate cottages.
- 4.13 Of the buildings designed by professional architects the most important is Burton Manor remodelled by Sir Charles Nicholson, of Nicholson and Corlett Architects (renowned church architects). Nicholson also designed The Vicarage on Vicarage Lane. The other notable architects to work in the village included HS Goodhart-Rendel who designed the estate cottages to the east of the village and Arthur Beresford Pite who designed the Orangery at Burton Manor. All were architects of national importance who worked in the village during the Gladstone era.
- 4.14 After the departure of Gladstone, in 1924, the estate was sold off as development land. This was before the introduction of effective planning controls and resulted in the building, in the 1930's, of modern bungalows and houses on the approaches to the village.
- 4.15 Density By modern urban standards the overall density of development, in Burton, is low, however as most properties tend to jostle along The Village the atmosphere here can feel quite enclosed. Away from Village Street densities tend to be much lower and the village has an arcadian feel.
- 4.16 Building Heights Building heights tend to be quite low with most building being only one or two storeys in height and no building in the village, except the church tower, being over three storeys high.
- 4.17 Urban Spaces There are a number of open spaces that make a valuable contribution to the character of the village. This includes The Village itself, particularly where the road widens and creates a linear open space, tightly enclosed by cottages fronting directly onto the street. This is thought to have been the site of the medieval market. The space widens further where The Rake sweeps in, behind a tongue of grass to meet The Village.
- 4.18 Other significant spaces, within the village, include the churchyard, slightly raised and recessed to the north of The Village, and Burton Manor. Although the Manor is now used as a college of further education, the grounds are open to the public and include extensive gardens designed by the landscape architect Thomas Mawson. Soon after, Beresford Pite designed the south-facing terrace, which

overlooked the adjacent parkland, which was also designed by Mawson to provide views from the Manor. The walled garden at Burton Manor is not generally open to members of the public but does provide local residents with allotment space.

- 4.19 To the north of the village can be found the National Trust owned Burton Woods which occupy the hill top, from where panoramic views of the village can be enjoyed.
- 4.20 Views into and out of the area The views out of the village to the south and west can be quite extensive because of Burton's elevated position looking across the Cheshire plain towards the high moorland of north-east Wales.
- 4.21 Because of the muted colours of the village and the low profile of buildings views into Burton are limited although a splendid aerial view of the village can be enjoyed from Burton Wood. Longer views from the north and east are impossible because of higher land. Limited views from the south and west can be seen however this is largely of the tower of the parish church, the tallest building in the village.

5 Landscape

- 5.1 Burton is built on the south-western side of a sandstone escarpment. The top of the hill is occupied by mature woodland, a mixture of Scots pine and deciduous trees, including sweet chestnut and English oak, as well as other species such as horse chestnut, rowan and hawthorn. This woodland was used, by the Gladstone's, for pheasant shooting.
- 5.2 To the south of the village can be found Burton Manor Park. This is included on the Register of Historic Park and Gardens. The park is largely outside the conservation area although a significant part can be found adjacent to the Manor and behind and including properties on the south side of the village.
- 5.3 The park appears to have been created about the time that Burton Hall was built in 1805 and extended westwards when the parish was enclosed in 1817. The park is largely permanent pasture with large numbers of mature parkland trees, many grouped in clumps. There is a belt of woodland, including Bath Wood, arcing around the south side of the park, within which is a 200m long lake. The park was improved by Gladstone who added trees and created the lake to the south of Burton Manor. Extensive views of the park can be enjoyed from the Terrace of Burton Manor and from properties to the south of the village.
- 5.4 Within the village can be found large numbers of mature trees and hedges, which help to maintain the rural atmosphere.

6 Historic Interest

- 6.1 Burton's principal historic interest lies in its medieval street plan and large stock of historic buildings, illustrating building styles from late medieval through to the early C20.

- 6.2 Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, was Burton's most famous son. He was born in Burton and founded a school for the poor of the village, that can still be found, as well as his birthplace.
- 6.3 Most of the buildings of the village are vernacular with the exception of the buildings associated with Burton Manor. Neville Gladstone, owner of Burton Manor, was responsible for employing several architects of note. The remodelling of Burton Manor was carried out by Sir Charles Nicholson who also designed the stable block now called Squirrel Lodge and the Vicarage. The Orangery was designed by Arthur Beresford Pite who also worked on the gardens after Thomas Mawson. Mawson was a leading garden designer in the early 20th Century who was also responsible for landscaping at Thornton Hall and Rivington Pike. Gladstone employed HS Goodhart-Rendel to design several cottages on The Village.

7 The Local Economy

- 7.1 Agriculture remained the major source of employment in the village into the 20th Century. Around 1800, the agriculture changed from mixed arable to pastoral with an emphasis on the production of cheese. At the same time the medieval system of communal strip farming and common grazing land ceased and the land around the village was enclosed. Other employment was associated with servicing a small agricultural community, with activities such as milling, blacksmiths, butchers and schoolteachers although cottage industries such as cloth making were also being carried out.
- 7.2 During the 20th Century, farming and related trades declined in importance. From once employing nearly all the working population, farming now accounts for few jobs and only two working farms remain in the village. The population has increased, and prosperous commuters from Liverpool and other nearby towns occupy many of the houses. Burton Manor is now a residential college of adult education.

Sources

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