

Heritage Impact Assessment – November 2015 Marymead, Broadwater

Introduction

As part of the evidence base to inform our emerging Local Plan, we have assessed a number of potential development sites within the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA). The SLAA identifies sites that are suitable, available and achievable for development, in simplistic terms, without taking into account other policy considerations.

The area being considered for redevelopment is known as Marymead neighbourhood centre, in Broadwater. The landowner has submitted the site to us to accommodate a mixed use scheme, but with an emphasis on maximising residential use.

The concept of neighbourhood centres was a key part of the original Masterplan for the New Town. The Masterplan divided Stevenage into distinct zones. It proposed six residential neighbourhoods based around existing hamlets and clustered around a new town centre. Broadwater was the third neighbourhood to be constructed, beginning in 1953.

Each neighbourhood was provided with a neighbourhood centre. These aimed to provide for the day-to-day needs of local residents, within walking distance of their homes. Neighbourhood centres provide a range of shops and other community facilities including churches, public houses, schools, doctor's surgeries, community centres and some small light industrial units. The centres are generally located on key transport links, with easy access to the town centre.

Many of the neighbourhood centres are now in need for regeneration. Most contain redundant retail units, likely due to changes in needs and travel arrangements over time, and many include buildings and features which are tired and in need of repair. Marymead is no exception to this.

Marymead is one of ten larger neighbourhood centres in the town and includes all the community facilities mentioned above. It provides one of the first examples of its kind for Stevenage.

The site is located within the Broadwater Conservation Area. As such, we need to ensure that any allocation in the Local Plan follows the principles of sustainable development and is acceptable and appropriate in terms of its impact on the heritage assets.

Government Guidance¹ places great importance on the preservation and enhancement of heritage assets. It requires local authorities to 'set out a positive and clear strategy for the conservation, enjoyment and enhancement of the historic environment, in which the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets should be considered' (Para.126). The associated statutory duties regarding the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area, and of preserving the setting of listed buildings, must also be considered in this regard (Sections 66 and 72, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

Both national policy, and best practice guidance published by Historic England², emphasise the importance of using an up-to-date evidence base to assess the significance of heritage assets, the

¹ The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012).

² Historic England Advice Note. The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans (Consultation Draft, June 2015); The Historic Environment in Local Plans. Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 1 (Historic England, March 2015)

contribution they make to the environment and the impact of any proposed development on these assets. Development proposals should seek to 'avoid or minimise conflict between any heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal' (NPPF, para.129).

This Assessment aims to fulfil these requirements and to determine whether the potential development sites are appropriate, and what might be done to minimise the impacts of development on the heritage assets. Any residual harm to heritage assets would need to be balanced against the public benefits of the proposed development.

The emerging advice note from Historic England³ recognises that a positive strategy for the historic environment in Local Plans can ensure that site allocations avoid harming the significance of heritage assets, which includes effects on their setting. At the same time, it also recognises the allocation of sites for development may present opportunities for the historic environment.

The advice note includes guidance specifically relating to site allocations for Local Plans. It sets out a methodology that local authorities can follow in order to ensure the historic environment is taken into account during the site selection process.

Five steps are identified, as follows:

STEP 1: Identify which heritage assets are affected by the potential site allocation

STEP 2: Understand what contribution the site (in its current form) makes to the significance of the heritage asset(s)

STEP 3: Identify what impact the allocation might have on that significance

STEP 4: Consider maximising enhancements and avoiding harm

STEP 5: Determine whether the proposed site allocation is appropriate in light of the NPPF's tests of soundness

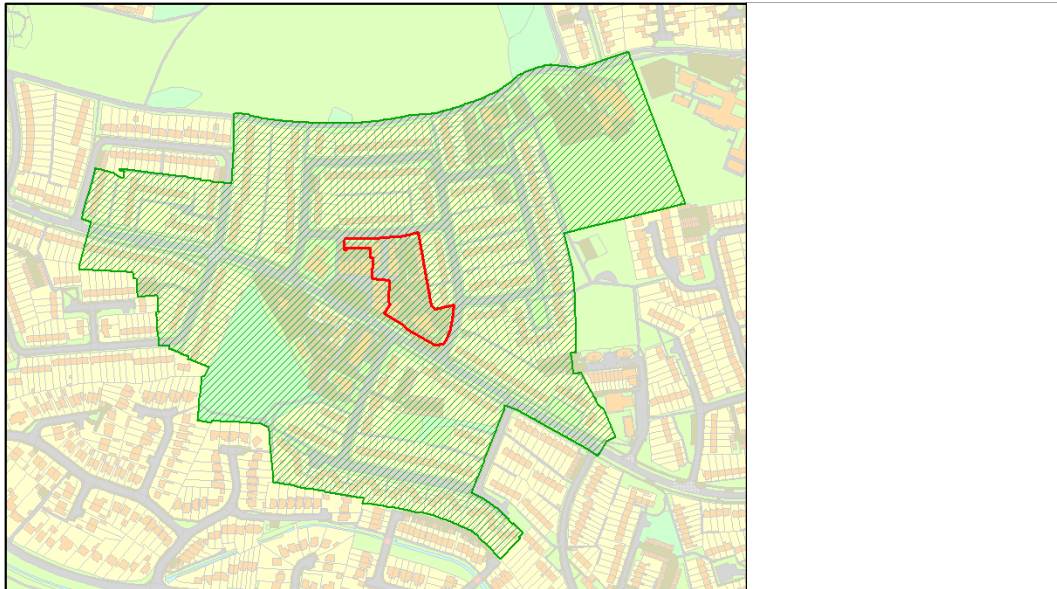
This methodology has been used as the basis for this assessment

³ Historic England Advice Note: The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans (Consultation Draft, June 2015)

STEP 1: Heritage assets affected

The potential development site at Marymead is located within the Broadwater Conservation Area.

Map 1: Conservation area boundary and the potential development area



A number of evidence studies relating to the Broadwater Conservation Area already exist, and are in use by the Borough Council. The majority of these were produced by BEAMS, a specialist consultancy offering expertise in the historic environment across Hertfordshire in particular. This includes:

- A Review of Stevenage Conservation Areas, November 2005, BEAMS
- Broadwater (Marymead) Conservation Area Appraisal, 2009, BEAMS
- Broadwater Conservation Area Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document, 2012

The Borough Council chose to formally adopt the latter as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in 2012, making its guidance a material consideration when assessing planning applications.

These studies and reviews have formed the basis for this assessment, and should be referred to for further information on these heritage assets.

The Broadwater Conservation Area was first designated in December 2007, following a review of the Stevenage Conservation Areas in 2005. As the UK's first New Town, Stevenage holds an important place in planning history. Although other parts of various New Town neighbourhoods were assessed, the Marymead quarter of Broadwater was determined to be the best surviving example of a Stevenage New Town neighbourhood which comprised all the amenities that were intended for the modern urban development of the 1950s.

The area comprises typical early Stevenage Development Corporation architecture in the form of 1950's housing, garaging, a church, a public house, a shopping precinct, accommodation for the elderly, a school and a community centre. It has relatively unaltered 1950s and 1960s buildings that are in good to fair condition, a wide selection of housing designs, and a representative range of community facilities.

The principal features of the Broadwater Conservation Area are:

- The planned layout of the area, incorporating a number of different housing designs
- The green and tree lined approach along Broadwater Crescent
- Significant landmark buildings including the church, Marymead shopping centre, Man in the Moon public house and the block of flats
- Views within and out of the Conservation Area – towards open countryside to the south and to Shephalbury Park to the north
- The retained area of old woodland at Marymead Spring
- The green spaces inside the conservation area including greens surrounded by housing, the retained hedges, grass verges and front gardens

Significant/Listed Buildings

The conservation area contains no statutory listed buildings.

Our evidence identifies one significant building of local importance, The Church of St Peter. The church was designed by N. F. Cachemaille-Day and Partners, and constructed in 1955. Before then a temporary church hall was built on site so residents could still attend a place of worship. Cachemaille-Day is identified in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as "one of the most talented church architects of the twentieth century". His work is significant for moving away from the traditional church plan with a chancel containing an altar, and instead locating the altar more centrally in the building. St Peter's is an example of his spare post-war style.

Additional buildings are identified as significant landmarks: the Man in the Moon public house, Marymead shops (two blocks), and Gladstone Court flats.

It is recognised that this collection of significant buildings, either side of Broadwater Crescent, provides the focal point for the conservation area.

Open spaces

Green spaces contribute greatly to the character of the Broadwater Conservation Area. The importance of houses set around small greens, planting trees and hedges, laying grass verges and retaining old areas of woodland was realised early on in the development of Stevenage new town, and is reflected here in Broadwater. A large number of trees (in particular maple and lime trees) were planted within Broadwater and have now matured. However, there are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) within the Conservation Area. Marymead Spring is a designated Wildlife Site whilst Shephall Lane is a protected ancient lane with associated hedgerows.

Key views and vistas

Within the Broadwater Conservation Area there are several important views or vistas. These include:

- Views along Broadwater Crescent with its avenue of trees and grass verges.
- Views along Shephall Lane with its hedgerows impart a rural and historic feel to the northern boundary of the conservation area.
- Distant views of the open countryside near Datchworth are gained when looking to the south from the top of Spring Drive.
- Views of Marymead Spring and its woodland are gained from many viewpoints and views into Marymead Spring from the north with its gnarled tree trunks give a clear indication of the ancient nature of this area of woodland.

Map 2: Broadwater Conservation Area – key features



STEP 2: The contribution of the site (in its current form) to the significance of the heritage asset(s)

The conservation area was designated as the best surviving example of a Stevenage new town neighbourhood, which comprised all the amenities that were intended for the modern urban development of the 1950s. Neighbourhood centres were a key feature of the original Masterplan concept.

Our previous work identifies the Marymead neighbourhood centre as the focal point of the conservation area, and of the Broadwater neighbourhood as a whole. Accordingly its function as a community hub forms an essential part of the conservation area's importance.

The neighbourhood centre also contains most of the significant buildings identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

However, our evidence recognises that vacant units have a negative impact on the area and that potential economic decline is a future threat.

As the exact location of any new development is yet to be determined, it is important to assess the importance of different areas within the development site. Parcels of land/groups of buildings for assessment are identified below. This will aid decision making when it comes to a scheme being developed. For completeness, the whole neighbourhood centre has been assessed at this stage.

Map 3: Land parcels for assessment



Parcel 1 - The Man in the Moon Public House

The Man in the Moon Public House was designed by Steward and Hendry Architects, London in 1956 and built soon after. It is of brick construction with some weatherboarding and a gabled clay tile roof. Whilst not of any particular architectural merit, the public house is highlighted as a landmark building within the Conservation Area Appraisal due to its location on the corner of Broadwater Crescent and The Willows. It also stands out as a substantial detached building within the street scene. It is currently operational, located in a heavily populated area and there are no other public houses in the immediate locality. The public house forms part of the original 'plan' of the neighbourhood and is in a prominent location. Consequently, its loss and redevelopment could weaken the character of the conservation area.



Parcel 2 – WHEELS community Youth Project building



The flat roofed red brick single storey building adjacent to Marymead shops and fronting Broadwater Crescent is occupied by the WHEELS Community Youth Project, it is thought to have been built later than the Marymead shops. The building has a shopfront with large metal roller shutter to the front elevation. In terms of its design and appearance the building fails to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area but its current use is likely to be considered an important asset for the local community.

Parcel 3 – Marymead Industrial Estate

The Marymead Industrial Estate is made up of a number of workshops and some garages. The premises provide valuable office and workshop accommodation for small companies and provide local employment opportunities - a key aspect of the role of



the New Town neighbourhood centres envisaged by Stevenage Development Corporation. Although the function of the area is important, the single storey buildings are not of particular architectural interest and do not make a contribution to the conservation area visually.

Parcel 4 – Willows Link

Willows Link is adjacent to the Marymead Industrial Estate and to the rear of Marymead shops. Its pedestrian path links the road named Willows Link and the Marymead shops on Broadwater Crescent.



The single storey retail units on Willows Link are of relatively poor condition and have lost their original frontages. Some shops are vacant and their frontages are covered with metal security grilles for much of the time. The area has a slightly dilapidated feel and is dominated by the large CCTV camera at its north end. The shops on Willows Link would have once been busy and in regular use. Marymead Coffee Bar and the Stevenage Furniture Recycling Centre are still active uses, which are likely to be valuable for the local community. The appearance of the properties in this part of the site does not make any particular contribution to the conservation area.

Parcel 5 – Marymead shops

The shopping centre is made up of two adjacent blocks. It was designed by Leonard Vincent as a 3-storey building, with shops on the ground floor and flats above. The shops provide convenience retail provision for the neighbourhood. They include a small food store, pharmacy and takeaway outlets. The flats incorporated balconies arranged in a chequer-like fashion. The two blocks hold a prominent position within the neighbourhood centre, and at 3-storeys, are higher than the surrounding terrace housing.



The shopping centre and flats are visually important structures; identified as landmark buildings in the conservation area.

Parcel 6 – Church of St. Peter



The Church of St. Peter is the only identified 'building of local importance' within the conservation area. It provides a focal point for the neighbourhood centre and contributes to the special interest of the area. Designed by N. F. Cachemaille-Day and Partners in 1954, it holds a prominent position on the corner of Broadwater Crescent and The Willows. It is duly noted for its attractive east elevation which makes for an interesting architectural design feature.

In summary, it is clear that there are some distinct differences between these identified areas. Parcels 2, 3 and 4 make a limited contribution to area visually. As such, these offer the greatest potential for redevelopment. The services provided in these areas form a key part of the overall function of the neighbourhood centre, but these could be reprovided as part of any development scheme.

Parcels 1, 5 and 6 are more significant in terms of their visual impact on the area. All of these areas contain buildings identified within our evidence work as being significant to the conservation area. As such, the impact of development in these areas would be much greater.

STEP 3: The impact the proposed allocation might have on that significance

Although it is at a relatively early stage, understanding the likely scope and key features of the proposed development will enable us to come to an informed view on its potential impact on the Conservation Area.

The most recent scheme submitted as part of the SLAA suggested that the site could accommodate an additional 60 homes, as part of a mixed use redevelopment.

Detailed elements of building styles and materials have not been determined at this stage, so it is the principle of development that is being considered in this assessment.

Considering the neighbourhood centre as a whole, as the focal point of the conservation area, the loss of the community function of this site would have a significant detrimental impact on the heritage asset. The loss of this focal point is recognised as a potential threat in the Conservation Area Management Plan. Notwithstanding this, it is also recognised that some commercial units are vacant, and some of the buildings are in need of regeneration. As such, development could also be beneficial in providing improved services and facilities.

The identified site area, as illustrated in Map 1, does not include the Marymead shops or The Church of St. Peter (Parcels 5 & 6). The impact of development in these two areas would be significant, as both accommodate buildings specifically recognised for their contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. As such, this is a welcome exclusion.

Parcel 1 is similar to those above; it accommodates the Man in the Moon public house, which is identified within our evidence as a landmark building. This site is included within the potential development area. Due to the significance of the property, as an original part of the neighbourhood centre, it is not considered that a replacement landmark would offer the same effect. As such, any redevelopment of this site would have a significant detrimental impact on the conservation area.

As recognised in Step 2 of this assessment, the remaining parcels (2, 3 and 4) make a more limited contribution to the heritage asset, and the neighbourhood centre, visually. This is particularly the case for parcels 3 and 4, due to their location to the rear of the neighbourhood centre and not fronting onto Broadwater Crescent. All also contain either vacant units, or buildings that would benefit from improvement. However, the significance of these parcels in terms of their community functions is recognised. Accordingly, the careful redevelopment of these parcels could be carried out without significant impact to the character and appearance of the conservation area, providing the community facilities were reprovided as part of any scheme.

STEP 4: Maximising enhancements and avoiding harm

Since the start of the Local Plan process, through the SLAA, we have investigated all of the potential sites we had submitted to us and all of those that we identified ourselves. The results of the most recent SLAA provide us with a final list of suitable, available and achievable sites which could be allocated for housing within the Local Plan. Taking other evidence and policy requirements into account, such as the need for employment and retail provision, and the results of the SHMA and the Green Belt Review, it is clear that there is a need to consider all development sites submitted to us if we are to meet our housing needs.

In accordance with the findings of stages 1 to 3 of this assessment, it is considered that some development within the Marymead neighbourhood centre could be delivered without significant negative impact to the Broadwater Conservation Area or its setting.

As well as ensuring heritage assets are protected, Historic England also recognise that the allocation of sites for development may present opportunities for the historic environment. Our evidence recognises that the neighbourhood centre provides the focal point for the conservation area, but it also acknowledges its negative features, particularly; buildings that are in need of repair or are long-term vacant, the use of CCTV cameras dominating some streets, and the loss of original frontages.

The redevelopment of Marymead (to the north and east of the shops) provides an opportunity to address these concerns and to improve the function of the neighbourhood centre overall. Development also provides us with opportunities to gain developer contributions, which could be used to enhance existing features of the Conservation Area, if required.

In terms of minimising the impacts of new development, the following general principals should ensure minimal impacts on the heritage assets:

- Redevelopment should be limited to parcels 2, 3 and 4, and the significant landmark buildings retained within the other land parcels.
- Existing community facilities should be reprovided as part of any development proposal.
- Development should be designed to respect the existing characteristics of the area, and the original New Town design. It should not over-dominate.
- Development to the rear of the existing shops should ensure appropriate access and overlooking to address safety concerns and avoid the need for CCTV or other security measures. The need to create a safe environment should be carefully considered at the initial design stage.

The draft Historic England advice note states that ‘site allocation policies are a positive feature of a Local Plan as they can highlight the specific criteria against which a development needs to be judged and thereby speed up the implementation process, providing clarity for a wider range of audiences’. The Local Plan should contain site specific considerations relating to the Marymead, which set out the mitigation measures that will be required alongside any other site specific considerations.

STEP 5: Conclusion

This assessment recognises the importance of the Broadwater Conservation Area as a significant heritage asset within the Borough. The proposed development site is identified as the focal point of this Conservation Area. The Marymead neighbourhood centre was determined to be the best surviving example of a Stevenage New Town neighbourhood.

Taking into account all of the evidence, it is considered that the development of some parts of Marymead neighbourhood centre (parcels 2, 3 and 4) could go ahead with minimal impact upon the heritage assets, providing the community functions were retained or reprovided. This would enable the objectively assessed housing needs to be met, whilst also ensuring the development is sustainable and seeks to conserve the historic environment. It also provides an opportunity to address some of the existing negative features of the heritage asset and to avoid further threats to the future of its central core.

The redevelopment of the remaining parcels should be avoided in order to protect the significant landmark buildings, which formed an original part of the neighbourhood centre.

In order to further minimise the impact of any scheme, site specific considerations in the Local Plan will be required to allocate the site, which should set out policy criteria to mitigate against the proposal and enhance the heritage asset, where possible.