

# MILL FIELD ESTATE CONSERVATION AREA



Colchester

## Mill Field Estate

## Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals

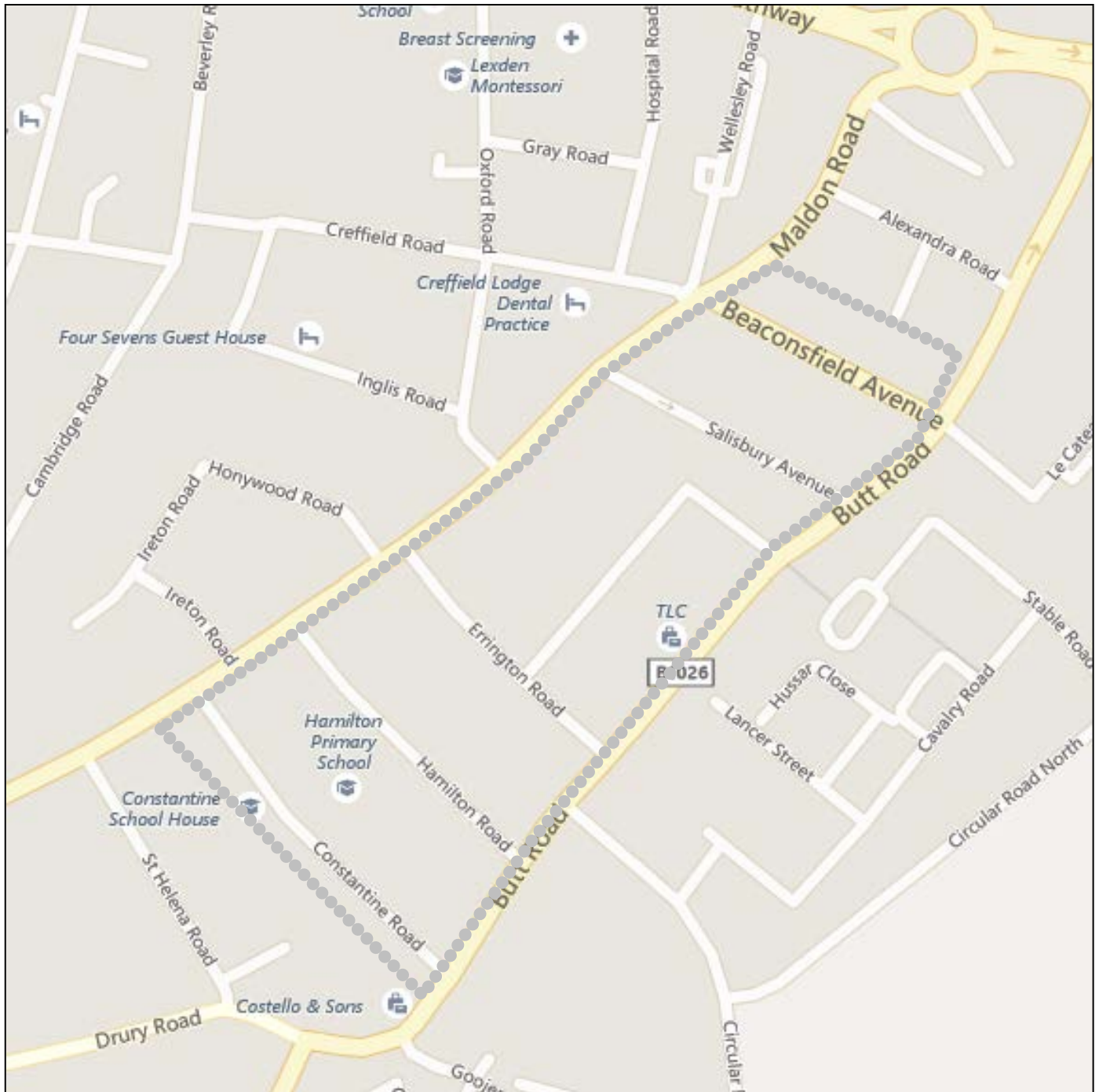
# CONSULTATION DRAFT



# **Mill Field Estate Conservation Area**

## **CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT & MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS**

Front Cover photograph: VE Day celebrations, 1945. Wickham Road facing south west, towards Errington Road



General location

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## Part A - Character Statement

### Introduction: Statutory basis & guidance aims

Conservation areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance', (Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (section 69.1). They were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act, 1967.

Designation of a conservation area extends planning controls over certain types of development, principally the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees. Local Authorities will also formulate policies to preserve the character of their conservation areas. However designation does not prevent any change within conservation areas, and they will be subject to many different pressures, both good and bad, that will affect their character and appearance.

The character of conservation areas does not derive simply from the quality of individual buildings, but also depends on the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular 'mix' of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture; and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Thus it is ordinary buildings, and the spaces between them, which it is important to preserve and enhance if conservation areas are to retain their special character.

Local Authorities have a duty to designate conservation areas and to formulate policies for their preservation and enhancement. They are advised to review each conservation area from time to time, to ensure it has an up-to-date character appraisal which sets out its special architectural or historic interest and that its boundaries are appropriate. The character appraisal will be the basis for the management of the area, including development control and the preparation of enhancement proposals. Management proposals for the conservation area should be published in conjunction with the character appraisal.

The purpose of this conservation area appraisal is to assess the streets between Maldon Road and Butt Road from Beaconsfield Avenue to Constantine Road for possible designation as a newly designated conservation area. In doing this it will:

- Identify the area's special interest
- Suggest conservation area boundaries
- Consider strategies for management of the area, forming part of the evidence base for the council's Local Plan in the form of a supplementary planning document
- Provide a basis for implementing policies and for making informed development control decisions.

The character appraisal will lead to the management proposals, which will

- Assess the need for enhancement to public spaces, highways and private property
- Consider the need for article 4 directions to limit permitted development rights
- Assess buildings at risk
- Assess the need for enforcement action
- Establish procedures for implementing and monitoring proposals

## **1.0 Designation, location and boundaries**

### **1.1 Designation**

It is proposed that this neighbourhood should be designated as a conservation area. There is one statutorily listed building in the proposed conservation area and three locally listed buildings. Most of the buildings in the proposed conservation area were nominated for local listing by the Colchester Historic Buildings Forum for their local interest and architectural quality. The conservation area is proposed as a more robust alternative, as it is a means of protecting the buildings within it as well as the spaces between them.

Four trees are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. There are no scheduled ancient monuments within the boundary of the proposed conservation area.

### **1.2 Location**

The character area lies to the south of the town centre, divided from the town centre by Southway and the large roundabout at the top of Balkerne Hill. It is bounded by Maldon Road to the west and Butt Road to the East. Its most southern street is Constantine Road, its most northern is Beaconsfield Avenue.

The Colchester Borough Historic Environment characterisation Project 2009 placed the character area into Historic Environment Character Area 5 (Modern Colchester). It states:

Following the arrival of the railway in the 19th century to the north of the town, and the subsequent development of an engineering industry, terraced housing for factory workers spread out from the medieval and post medieval suburbs, taking over land to the south of the town that was previously occupied by the original garrison in New Town and around Old Heath Road and also along Maldon Road. These Victorian suburbs are characterised by regular block and street patterns and terraced housing interspersed with the occasional 'villa-style' house (p 49).

The area sits between the Garrison Conservation Area, which is to the east of Butt Road, and the southern boundary of the Colchester Conservation Area 2.

### **1.3 Boundaries**

The boundaries of the conservation area are drawn to recognise the strong cohesion of the architecture of the streets. For this reason the more varied villa type housing along both sides of Maldon Road are excluded. This is not to deny their architectural merits; many of the buildings along Maldon Road display an exuberant character that gives a pleasant and lively effect. Their individuality however is at odds with the character of the buildings within the proposed conservation area. It is likely that on review of Colchester Conservation Area 2 these buildings could be incorporated in an extension of the boundaries. Their character is undoubtedly more related to the villa-type of housing more commonly seen within that conservation area. However the houses at the corners of Maldon Road have an immediate impact on the character of the conservation area, particularly because of their long rear gardens, the boundary treatments of which affect the character of the conservation area as well as views in and out of it. For this reason these buildings are included in the area.

The eastern boundary of the conservation area runs down the middle of Butt Road. Usually this would be considered bad practice, but the other side of the road is within the Garrison Conservation Area. In contrast to Maldon Road the houses on the west

side of Butt Road are similar in character to those within the proposed conservation area, and their inclusion is therefore logical.

The southern boundary is drawn at the back of the gardens on the south side of Constantine Road. St Helena Road has a quite different character with buildings of a much later type. The northern boundary is drawn at the back of the gardens on the north side of Beaconsfield Avenue. The inclusion of Alexandra Road and Alexandra Terrace was considered but their character is too different and the architecture too varied to relate well to the proposed conservation area. Both include some distinctive buildings of architectural merit and their inclusion on the local list should be reconsidered.

Some areas and buildings in need of enhancement through sympathetic redevelopment have been included within the conservation area in the interests of securing enhancement in the long-term.

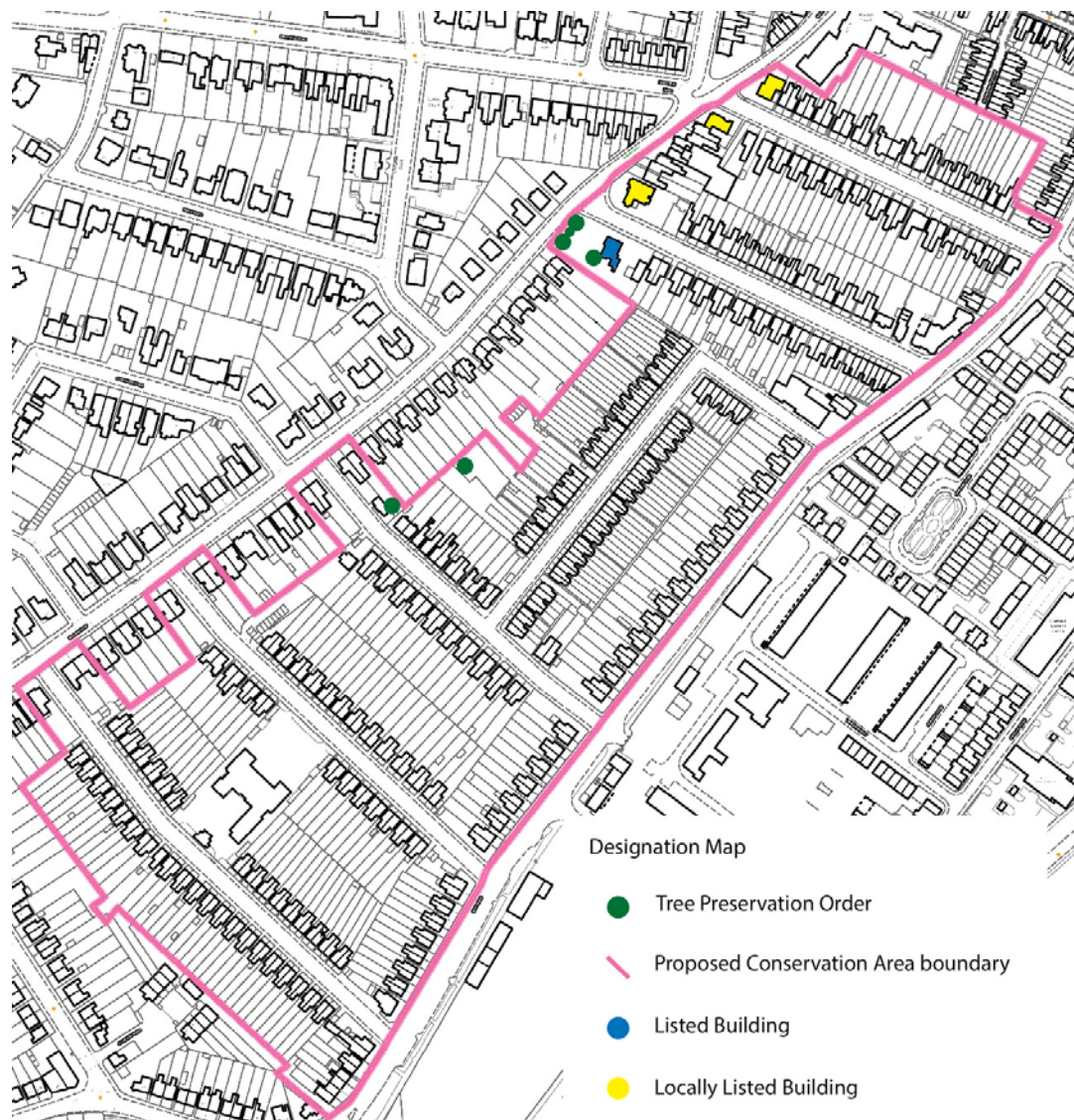


Figure 1: Designation Map

## **2.0 Geology and topography**

The topography rises eastwards from Maldon Road to Butt Road and more gently upwards from north to south. This gives an interest to vistas along the roads, and a variety to views within the area. The impact of the sloping ground on the terraced streets within the conservation area is differing eaves heights, stepping up gradually along the street with resulting interesting articulation in views along the street.

The 2009 Colchester Historic Environment Characterisation Project identifies the geology of the area to be Kesgrave Sands and Gravels. In Palaeolithic times the area was within the area of the river Kesgrave and the sands and gravels were deposited along its course at that time<sup>1</sup>.

## **3.0 Archaeology**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD there were extra mural settlements outside the main gates into the town and large cemeteries are known in Lexden and to the south at Butt Road and in Abbey Fields, where a Circus was also located. The Colchester Historic Environment Characterisation project identified limited potential for below-ground remains beyond a few stray finds, mainly of Roman coins and ephemera. Any future finds in the neighbourhood are likely to be restricted to remaining areas of open space, none of which fall inside the conservation area boundaries<sup>2</sup>.

The former Colchester Borough Council archaeologist, Martin Winter, has explained “The character area is rather a blank in the archaeological record with limited survival of below ground remains. The only finds have been a handful of Roman coins and about five burials. There are a number of possible reasons why this may be so, including lack of antiquarian interest at the time the area was developed, although this is unlikely because finds were recorded in the 1840s at the Butt Road sand pit, which is approximately the site of the present day police station, and during the development of the cavalry barracks at the garrison in the 1870s. The area has not been subject to systematic archaeological investigation. Although in the last thirty years a few watching briefs have been undertaken, nothing has been found. The re-development of the Salisbury Hotel also produced nothing. Perhaps most persuasively the location was always regarded as valuable farming land, being reasonably close to the town, and was preserved as such. We know from excavation at the Garrison that cemetery areas were rigidly delineated from non-cemetery areas by large ditches. The same situation occurs on the east side of town where very few archaeological finds are recorded”.

The Victoria County History observes that Maldon Road, once Maldon Lane, is probably of Roman origin, whereas Butt Road is probably medieval, and presumably named as the route to the ‘butts’: the public archery practice area.

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<sup>1</sup> (p.156)

<sup>2</sup> P157



## 4.0 Development history



Figure 2: Detail of the 1777 Chapman and Andre map of Colchester showing Maldon Lane (later Maldon Road) and Butt Road. Note the Butt Windmill shown just to the west of Butt Road.

The 1882 Ordnance survey map still shows the Butt mill, on the west side of Butt Road, which was built between 1660 and 1662 when it was conveyed to John Gibson, miller of Middle mill. The mill was rebuilt soon after 1779, and again, after a fire, in 1787. In 1824 it was a post mill with three pairs of stones over a brick roundhouse. It was repaired after storm damage in 1852 but was demolished in 1881, so its appearance on the 1882 map probably indicates the elapse of time between the survey and the publication of the map.

Comparison between the 1882 map and the 1896 map shows the speed of development in a relatively short length of time from fields and scattered cottages to the straight regimented streets we associate with Victorian suburbs. Note also the development of the adjacent garrison buildings to the south east of the area.

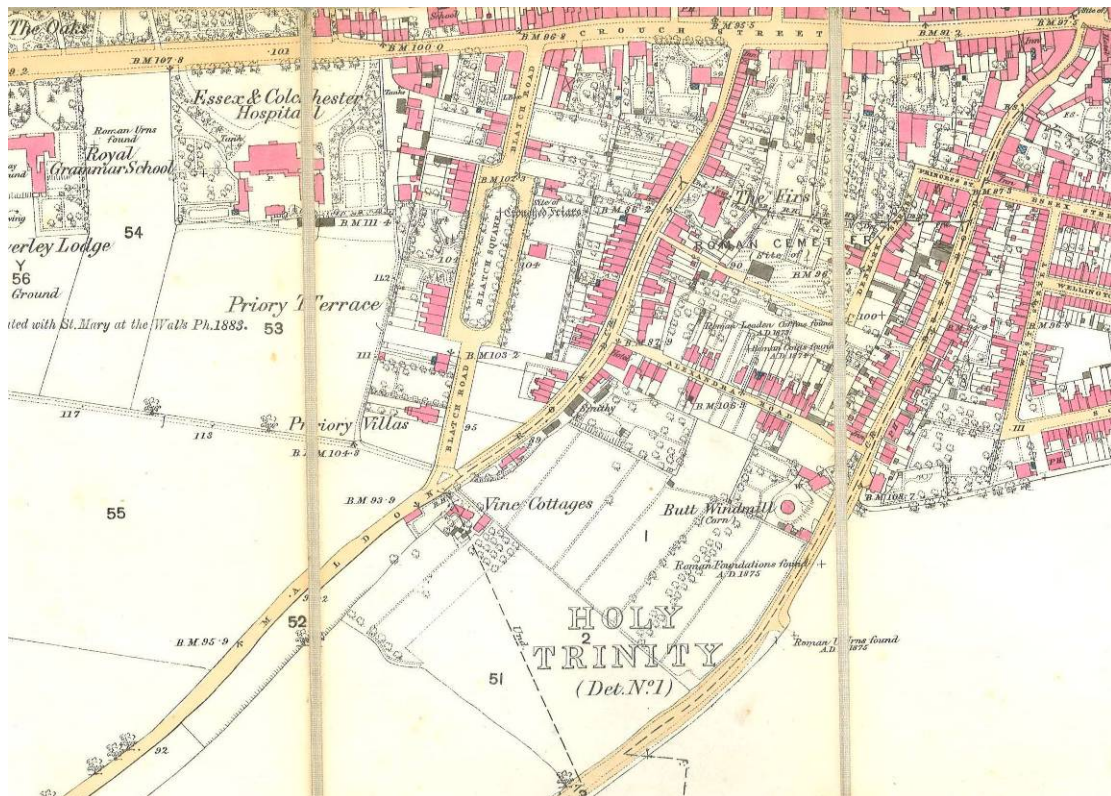


Figure 3: Second Edition Ordnance Survey map 1882



Figure 4: Third Edition Ordnance survey map, 1896

#### 4.1 Historical development

Until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the town of Colchester was largely contained within the town walls with villages surrounding the urban area. The conservation area represents an early phase of development outside the walls, dating to a similar time to New Town. From 1879 Beaconsfield Avenue and Salisbury Road were laid out on



the Mill Field Estate by Henry Jones, who was a local lawyer and businessman<sup>3</sup>. These were the first to be built followed in order going south by the streets down to Constantine Road, which was fully developed by 1914<sup>4</sup>. The rapid development of the streets resulted in the strong architectural coherence of the area.

Each street seems to have been laid out as the first initial step by an 'entrepreneur' out to make a nice profit and then the buildings appear over a number of years as the plots are bought and built on by different builders each with their own slightly different designs which is why somewhere like Beaconsfield Avenue has got such an interesting mix of much the same kind of buildings along its length<sup>5</sup>.

Phillip Crummy, director of the Colchester Archaeological Trust has concluded that the streets were built within the following dates: Beaconsfield Avenue (1890-1894+), Salisbury Avenue (1891-95), Wickham Road (1899-1902+), Errington Road (1901-5+), Hamilton Road (1902-3+), and Constantine Road (1905-6+).



Figure 5: Pre-Second World War Beaconsfield Avenue, note the design of the railings and young street-trees

## 5.0 Townscape character:

### 5.1 Overview

The area is to the south of the town centre between Maldon Road and Butt Road. The streets have a largely cohesive character, dominated by semi-detached and terraced two-storey houses that are typical of the late Victorian period. The plots tend to be long and narrow, resulting in a fine urban grain and high building density through the closely spaced houses. The streets, while cohesive in their architectural language, all show sufficient variation in their detailing to make it clear that they were sold as small groups of plots for development to different people.

<sup>3</sup> VCH. From: 'Stanway: Introduction', A History of the County of Essex: Volume 10: Lexden Hundred (Part) including Dedham, Earls Colne and Wivenhoe (2001), pp. 259-263. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15273&strquery=henry> Date accessed: 21 January 2014.

<sup>4</sup> From: 'Modern Colchester: Town development', A History of the County of Essex: Volume 9: The Borough of Colchester (1994), pp. 199-208. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=21988> Date accessed: 20 January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> E-mail from Phillip Crummy 2 December 2013

They are of middling status; two storeys high and narrow in relation to their depth. Their scale is modest, domestic and human. Generally the buildings are faced in red or yellow stock brick with slate roofs and some enrichment around windows, doors and at the eaves and verges. String courses and decorative brickwork influence the character as do the ubiquitous vertical sliding sash windows and the ground and two-storey bay windows. Corner buildings are unusual but where they occur, while they are somewhat grander than others on the streets, they are not noticeably taller.

Most of the streets were occupied by people whose occupations might be considered lower-middle class. The Kelly's Directory of 1906 lists among others an insurance clerk a builder, bailiff, commercial traveller, an agent for a firm of furniture dealers, a boot and shoe repairer, dressmakers, shopkeepers and, perhaps unsurprisingly for streets so close to the barracks several sergeant majors. Beaconsfield Avenue and Salisbury Road have many people simply listed as 'householder'.



Figure 6: A view looking west down Beaconsfield Avenue towards Maldon Road.

The rows of terraces and closely spaced semi-detached houses form a horizontal rhythm of strongly vertical building elements, and the regular building line, set back from the pavement, provides a palpable sense of enclosure along the streets. Where front boundaries survive the feeling of enclosure is emphasised; the boundaries clearly defining public and private spaces. In common with many streets the railings were removed in the 1940s as part of the war effort and have not been replaced. The dwarf walls can look rather odd without railings, although many people have grown hedges in their place and this softens the effect. Where close boarded fences have been erected their impact is jarring and detrimental, particularly where they are combined with concrete posts.

## **5.2 Urban form, street pattern and street-scape.**

The streets create a linear grid pattern, with only Wickham Road not running in a straight line, aligned approximately north west to south east. The streets are closely built up with houses on both sides and with few spaces between them. The roads are in one or two places punctuated by marginally more elaborate corner buildings with slightly richer detailing, a good example is the one on the south side of the road on the corner of Beaconsfield Avenue and Butt Road. However in most cases there are no bespoke designed corner buildings and thus the buildings at the ends of most streets squarely address one road or another. The result of this in most cases is an undeveloped gap between buildings occupied by private rear gardens. There is no



green open space or amenity space, although many roads retain some of their street-trees, and where this is the case the greenness adds a welcome sense of the changing seasons and a sense of life and movement to the generally quiet streets.

Although the houses stand close shoulder to shoulder, the streets are quite generous in their width, and rear gardens tend to be relatively long. In addition, even the most modest houses in the area have at least some garden to the front and the pavement widths are ample. The pedestrian therefore feels a pleasant feeling of enclosure without the sense of crowding experienced in the narrower streets of neighbourhoods originally built for the working classes.

While the roads are generally straight the sloping topography lends unexpected visual interest as views change and evolve along the street. The gentle topography means walls, pavements, windows and eaves have an interesting stepped appearance in response to the ground levels.



Figure 7: Townscape analysis map

Gardens, where they survive, give the houses a strong sense of privacy and clearly delineate public and private space. Where gardens and boundaries have been lost the feeling of enclosure and separation between the street and private land is



disrupted, harming the character of the area. The larger the front garden the more defensive the front garden is and this could be seen as an indicator of the original social status of the individual streets. Larger front gardens afford greater privacy and are usually indicative of the higher status homes. As the gardens provide a primary buffer from the street, the pavements provide a secondary one, and would particularly have done so in the past when the street trees were more frequent and in better condition. The result would have been a quiet 'respectable' atmosphere despite the high density of residents.



Figure 8: The street trees make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area.



Figure 9: The sloping topography gives additional interest to the already lively architectural language of the houses.





Figures 10 and 11: Boundary walls and street trees define the separation between public and private spaces.

### 5.3 Views, landmarks, buildings of townscape merit

The area is reasonably visually enclosed and there are few notable views out of the area. The most significant view is looking north along Butt Road, although this one is somewhat negative, dominated by large scale mid-twentieth century buildings whose character is at odds with the conservation area in terms of scale, massing, size and detailing. Views along the streets are given additional interest by the sloping ground and are frequently attractive and evocative of their period.



Figure 12: The view north up Butt Road is dominated by large modern buildings that relate poorly to the character of the conservation area



Figure 13: Generally it is the repetition of architectural closely related elements that defines the character of the area. Here the garage inserted into a front elevation, the occasional roof light and satellite dish and the one building with grey painted joinery are the alien elements that catch the eye and detract from the visual unity.

The cohesive and consistent architecture means that there are few landmarks within the conservation area. The most distinctive buildings tend to be the negative ones, notable for their jarring visual impact. The obvious exception to this is Hamilton School, larger both in size and scale, but whose architectural features and character are closely aligned to the locality and which constitutes a positive landmark building.



Figure 14: Hamilton School, while much larger than other buildings nearby shares its architectural language with the area and this combined with its location, set back far behind the building line ensures it contributes positively to local character.

There are several buildings included on the local list, as indicated in figure 1 (page 3). There are one or two buildings of architectural merit that do not relate closely to the character of the area but are considered positive because of their intrinsic merits and quality.





Figure 15: St Runwalds is the only statutorily listed building in the proposed conservation area.



Figure 16: The Cloisters, 84 Maldon Road, is a locally listed building, of similar date to the houses in the proposed conservation area, but the use of rubble-stone for the walls, with brick quoins gives it a distinctly different character from most buildings nearby.

Views are frequently marred by the inevitable rows of parked cars, and by the telegraph poles with their myriad wires to each property. The latter, at least, is theoretically resolvable.



#### 5.4 Open space and flora

There is little public greenery other than the street trees, which are sparsely distributed and usually quite young, they look little older than those in photographs taken not long after the buildings were constructed and must have been replaced relatively recently.

A relatively high proportion of street trees survive in Errington and Hamilton Roads. In the other streets they are somewhat sporadic and the character of the streets suffers for this.



Figure 17: The impact of the lack of street trees can be better experienced by comparison with another view of Wickham road below. Note the 'pock-marking' effect of randomly placed satellite dishes.



Figure 18: The street trees seen here make a positive contribution to character, distracting the eye from other unwelcome intrusions, such as the inappropriate streetlight and telegraph cables.



## 5.5 Paving and street furniture

There are some flagstones but in general concrete flags are in evidence. These replicate the flagstones and contribute to the character of the area. The kerbs are also concrete with no granite or Pennant sandstone kerbstones in evidence.

There are many old streetlamps remaining, which have been converted to electric with conversion boxes mounted high on the standard. The conversion boxes are somewhat inelegant but are a considerably better option than the ugly standard galvanised ones that have been installed in some places and have the character of motorway lighting rather than street-lights intended for use within a residential area.



Figures 19 and 20: The older street lights are elegant despite their ugly conversion boxes, whereas the modern over-sized galvanised streetlight has little to redeem it.



Figure 21, left: Unwelcome street clutter is accumulating. Note the patchy tarmac on the pavement.  
Figure 22, right: An old street name plate mounted on a house



Figure 23: Street name plates make a positive contribution with their discreet appearance and quality materials.

Historic street nameplates survive alongside the modern ones, and contribute positively to the character of the area. Inevitably modern street clutter is accumulating, with green telecoms boxes, grey posts for traffic signs, including some that have the sign missing, and other paraphernalia. In some places multiple telecoms boxes are situated together and it must be questioned whether all are still in use or whether some are redundant. In general later additions tend to be insensitive. While the railings outside Hamilton School are clearly a sensible safety precaution their unpainted state presents a poor comparison to the tall black gates at the school entrance directly adjacent.



Figure 24: The galvanised safety rail compares poorly to the school railings and gates, and would be somewhat improved by painting them black to match.

## 5.6 Movement and tranquillity

Beaconsfield Road is a B road and consequently can be busy with cars cutting across from Maldon Road to Butt Road. At school opening and closing times both Hamilton Road and Constantine Road become busy with cars and pedestrians but for the remainder of the day the street is tranquil, as might be expected in a residential area.

## 5.7 Table of contributing and detracting features

Features that contribute to character	Features that erode character
Boundary walls and gardens Trees and shrubs in gardens Street Trees Tiled front paths Timber doors with decorative glazed panels Inset doorways Vertical sliding sash windows Bay windows Slate pitched roofs Decorative stonework around windows and doors Polychromatic brickwork used for decoration String courses Decorative eaves and verges Chimneys Cast iron rainwater goods Uniformity within the street Flagstones for pavements Historic street nameplates	Loss of definition between public and private spaces Hard-standings and Forecourts; cars parked in front gardens Missing boundary walls Garages Close boarded fences Unnecessary street clutter Concrete tiles on roofs Tarmac paths Plastic windows, especially when flush set or top-hung Plastic doors Rendered or painted brickwork Porches Satellite dishes Photovoltaic and solar panels Roof lights and dormers Buildings that do not reflect the uniformity of the area in their designs or alterations

## 6.0 Character areas

While there are no distinct character areas within the conservation area because of its architectural consistency and compact development period there are subtle variations in character. At the northernmost and southernmost ends the buildings are usually on larger plots and are usually semi-detached. At the heart of the area the grain is tighter with more terraced houses and smaller gardens. This might reflect the general social hierarchy of the streets.

The difference between the earlier and later streets in terms of the enrichment and decorative features on the facades of the buildings is discreet but in general the older streets have buildings that are more exuberant in their design, with timber fretwork including 'gingerbread' gables facing the street, decorative eaves, grander, more generous entrances and greater use of terracotta decorative panels.

The later streets employ more standard decorative elements in a more modest combination with less architectural variety, but their uniformity often results in harmonious and neat groups of houses.





Figure 25: An example of architectural exuberance derived from the combination of polychrome brickwork around windows and doors; white painted enrichment at eaves, gables, string courses, cills, windows and boundary walls; varied roof forms; large elegant bay windows, inset porches and the use of traditional scale and materials.

## 7.0 Significance of the conservation area and elements within it

The area is, primarily, significant because it is a cohesive area of turn of the century housing with surviving architectural character. This character contains evidence of Victorian ideals of status and home-life, privacy and respectability. It also gives evidence of the changing social and economic and political climate of the time.

Unlike New Town, the development of which was clearly affiliated to the Liberal party, any political affiliation associated with this development is unclear. It has been argued that the area was associated with the Conservative party, and the first two streets, Beaconsfield and Salisbury appear to have been named after the Conservative Prime ministers Benjamin Disraeli, later Lord Beaconsfield; and Lord Salisbury. However after this the association becomes less obvious. Sir George Errington was High Steward of Colchester and appears to have been a local landowner of Lexden Park, on whose land part of the area was built: the Essex Record Office holds a building plan of Hamilton Road belonging to "Errington's Trustees: owner"<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps he was also a banker; one of the two private banks in Colchester was Mills, Bawtree, Errington, Bawtree, & Haddock<sup>7</sup>. Wickham and Hamilton appear more obscure, neither appears in the Victoria County History of Colchester. Constantine Road was probably named after Constantine I the Roman Emperor who is popularly thought to be the son of St Helena, the patron saint of Colchester and the grandson of King Coel. This hypothesis is supported by the next (somewhat later) street to the south, which is St Helena Road.

<sup>6</sup> D/B 6 Pb/1681 Building Plan of Hamilton Road 1902, Essex Record Office

<sup>7</sup> From: 'Modern Colchester: Economic development', A History of the County of Essex: Volume 9: The Borough of Colchester (1994), pp. 179-198. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=21987&strquery=errington> Date accessed: 24 January 2014

The area was clearly built-up in a series of small developments by different builders who must have bought pockets of land and developed them speculatively for profit. In contrast to the working class streets to the south including Wellington Road and South Street the buildings appear mostly to have been intended for the lower middle classes and it appears that this is an example of more affluent extra mural living. The grain of the housing becomes tighter in the heart of the conservation area and this probably reflects variation in social status of the different streets.

The grain is looser at the northern and southern ends of the conservation area although later streets Constantine Road and Hamilton Road show more restrained enrichment than Beaconsfield Avenue and Salisbury Road. This is likely to reflect changes in economic climate rather than social status.

## **8.0 Economy: land uses & values, vacant sites, future uses**

The neighbourhood is sought after and popular, with few houses for sale, and a generally high standard of repair. Hamilton School may contribute to this popularity. The area seems comfortable and reasonably affluent.

The vast majority of the buildings are brick built houses with little variation in this apart from Hamilton School. Nearly all the buildings are still used as dwellinghouses. The buildings in other uses are usually houses that have been converted and can still be identified as of the domestic type. Apart from the school there are two garages, a military tailors' shop, a small convenience store, a nursery, a hairdresser's and various other uses such as the Youth Service for Colchester Mind. Where new buildings designed for other uses have been built they tend to have a detrimental impact, particularly given the general uniformity of the area. However the military tailors' shop and convenience store at the eastern end of Constantine Road are of appropriate scale and have a generally positive impact: the traditional shop front of the former suits the character of the area and the latter is an appropriate use and is the last fragment, in this neighbourhood at least, of a necessary, and once ubiquitous, amenity.



Figure 26: this corner shop makes a positive visual contribution with its traditional shop front and signage; the newsagents provides a traditional and necessary amenity for the neighbourhood.





Figures 27 and 28: Purpose built commercial buildings do not usually contribute to the character of the area, and cumulatively they can seriously detract as a result of their alien design and signage, large hardstandings and visual blurring of the boundaries between public and private spaces.

There are no obvious vacant sites. The layout of the buildings has resulted in long rear gardens at either end of most of the streets, which have been subject to erosion of character with inappropriate garages and long close-boarded that are alien to the character of the conservation area. It might be tempting to use these rear gardens for further development but in most cases this would rob the original buildings of almost all private amenity space while artificially tightening the grain of the buildings. This would be alien to the neighbourhood which is characterised by the close proximity of the buildings on either side compared with the relatively long distances between buildings opposite and to the rear.

At the north end of Wickham Road the large garage buildings are an alien feature that erode the character of the area, and the neighbouring group of private garages at the ends of the gardens belonging to Salisbury Road, while a practical solution to vehicle parking, have a haphazard appearance that conflicts with the ordered character of the streets. This is probably the part of the proposed conservation area that would most benefit from redevelopment. It is likely that this has always been an uncharacteristic part of the street because it is unusual to have more than one garden adjoining the street in this way.



Figure 29: This private parking area harms the character of the area with its lack of boundaries, inappropriate materials and visual inconsistency.

The neatest resolution might be the construction of a long brick wall with gates to allow parking behind. This would be a characteristic boundary treatment used in an ordered way to provide a cohesive appearance in keeping with the character of the conservation area.





Figure 31: Uses of Buildings in the Conservation Area

## 9.0 Loss, attrition and intrusion

The condition of the area's fabric is reasonably good, both in terms of the buildings and the townscape. Most houses have survived with a small minority having been demolished and replaced with inappropriate new buildings. Some of these might in fact have been undeveloped gaps. Buildings that are taller than usual and employ uncharacteristic details, such as the block of flats at the corner of Salisbury Road, which uses a squat corner tower, balconies and excessive detail at roof level, as well as being uncharacteristically tall and bulky, harm the conservation area despite using an approximation of traditional design.



Figure 32, left: Despite an attempt at traditional design the size of this development, its unconvincing detailing and alien architectural features including applied balconies, undersized windows, bulky dormers and corner tower, combine to create a building clearly out of place in this location. Its closeness to the edge of the site and weak front boundary treatment exacerbate the building's faults.

Figure 33, right: The mid-twentieth century design of this building is softened by its position set back behind the building line. Introduction of a hedge at the front boundary would reduce its impact further by creating a stronger delineation between the public street and the private garden.

There is a very small minority of older buildings that do not share the general character of the area, but which have architectural merit of their own. These merit retention for their own sake even where they do not display the same characteristics. They are an interesting reminder of other architectural styles popular at the time the streets were built, including the Arts and Crafts movement, followed by Art Nouveau and the Mock Tudor aesthetic that appears to have been derived from Arts and Crafts.



Figures 34, left and 35, right: These two buildings differ from the majority of the buildings in the area but still have a positive impact because of their pleasant and traditional appearance.

The area has suffered, to a lesser extent than many other streets, from the popularity of modern alterations including plastic windows, concrete roofs and replacement doors. However a surprising number of original or replica sash windows remain as well as a high proportion of front doors. The doors may have survived because of the attractive decorative glass incorporated into them. Where replacement windows make no attempt to replicate the originals they are very harmful to the coherence of the streets, and in summer even some of those that attempt to mimic sash windows cause harm, in cases, for example, where the sashes are top-hung instead of vertically sliding.





Figure 36, left: Modern front doors look weak and flimsy in comparison to the remaining historic ones

Figure 37, right: The combination of top-hung plastic 'sash' windows, painted brickwork and satellite dishes has a most unfortunate appearance, masking the buildings' originally good design.



Figures 38, 39 and 40: These later alterations all cause harm to the conservation area and to the appearance of the individual buildings, but they could all be reversed to create a positive contribution.

In Wickham Road there are some inappropriate porches, which have a disproportionately harmful impact, perhaps owing to the way they project forward of the strong building line combined with unusually small front gardens meaning they are not disguised by the large shrubs that are seen in other streets.

The cumulative impact of roof lights, dormers, solar panels and photovoltaic panels is harming the character of the area. The roofs are generally designed to be discreet, with slack pitches and plain slate, in contrast to the relatively decorative parts of the buildings, which tend to be confined to eaves level and below. Uncharacteristic accretions at roof level attract too much prominence to the roof, exacerbated by the slack pitches of most roofs which mean that dormer windows tend to become visually dominant where they are inserted. Satellite dishes on front elevations and chimneys are similarly harmful, distracting from the architectural quality of the buildings to which they are fixed.



Figures 41 and 42: Occasional buildings have second floor rooms that have left the roofs unharmed and thus have avoided harm.

In several streets with longer front gardens the boundary walls have been removed, hard standing created and they have become used for car-parking. The Victorian emphasis on privacy, and the distinction between public and private life is fundamental to understanding the time and by extension to understanding the buildings in which people lived and wanted to live. The loss of front boundary walls and gardens, which provided a buffer between the street and the home, blurs the distinction between public and private space, which is a fundamental part of the character of the conservation area. At present in general the effect is piecemeal but without control loss of front boundaries and gardens could dominate the street-scene and badly erode the character of the area.



Figure 43: Where hedges have replaced railings above boundary walls their appearance is enhanced, making a positive contribution to the area.





Figures 44, left and 45, right: Hard-standings in front of houses and in positions where gardens should be harm the area by blurring the distinction between public and private spaces, contrary to the ideal of their original design.



Figures 46 and 47: Modern garages and close boarded fences detract from the general air of quality in the area.

Unfortunately it is at the ends of streets, at the gateways to the conservation area where most harmful alteration has been concentrated. This is owing to the lack of buildings formally designed to address corners, so rear gardens run along the street. This has resulted in poor quality garage buildings in back gardens and close boarded fences around them. Both these harm the street-scene and erode the character of the conservation area.



Figures 48 and 49: Walls reinforce the character and quality of the streets.

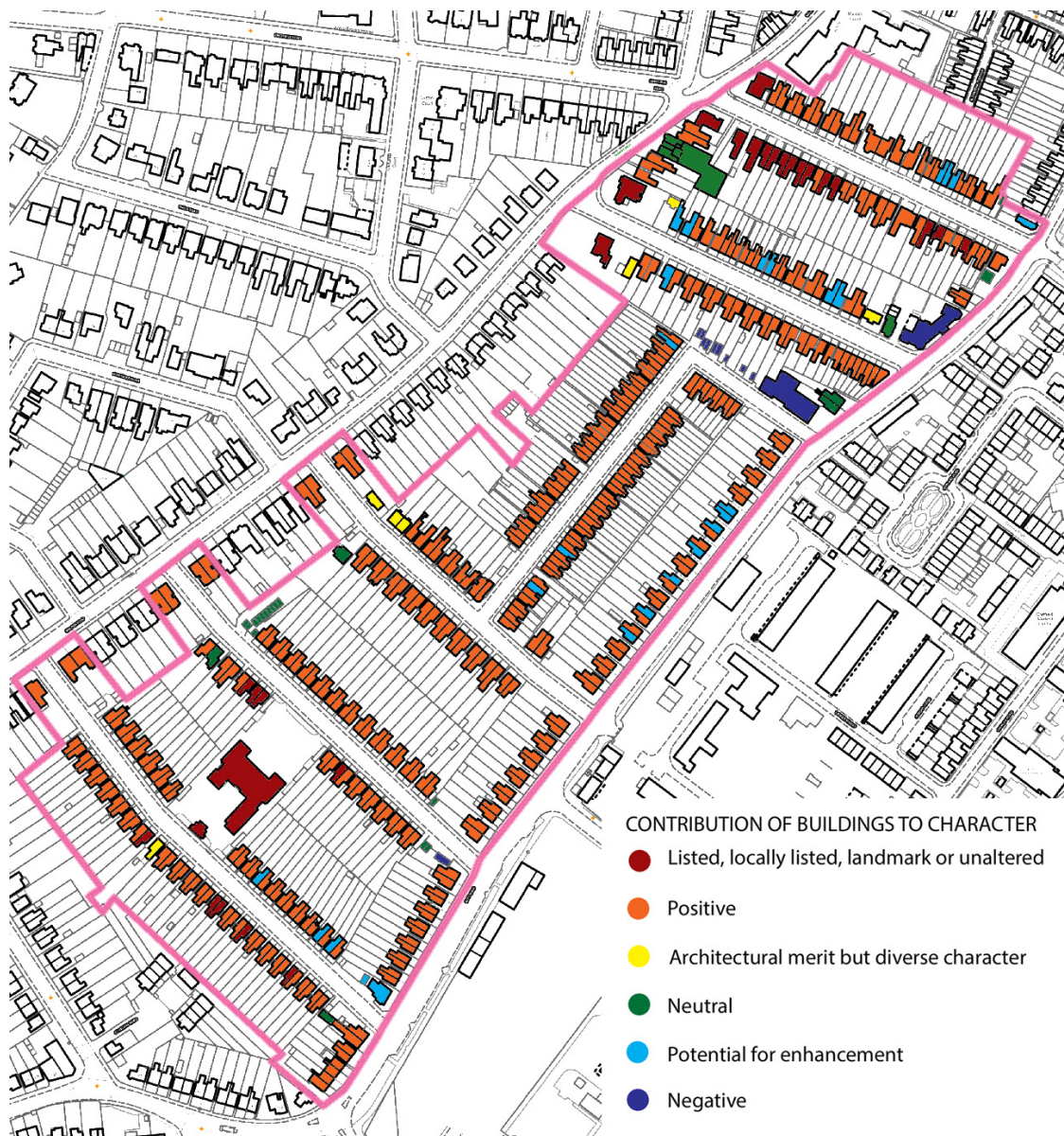








Figure 50: Contribution Map

### Explanation of Contribution Key

	Listed building, landmark building, locally listed or substantially unchanged
	Positive building, few changes. Alterations that have occurred are relatively straightforward to reverse and therefore do not represent permanent harm to character – eg new windows in unaltered window openings, new roof covering, loss of front boundary
	Building of architectural merit but different character from the predominant character of the conservation area
	Neutral – Buildings that have neither a positive nor a negative impact on the character of the conservation area
	Scope for enhancement. Buildings that have undergone more radical changes that would be harder to reverse – alterations to window openings, painted or rendered brickwork, porches, inserted bays
	Negative – Buildings whose appearance erodes the character of the conservation area



## **Part B - Supplementary planning policies (management proposals)**

### **Introduction: the need for policy guidance**

*Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Hereafter known as 'The Act') places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. It is important that designation is not seen as an end in itself: policies will almost always need to be developed which clearly identify what it is about the character or appearance of the area which should be preserved or enhanced, and set out the means by which that objective is to be pursued. Clear assessment and definition of an area's special interest and the action needed to protect it will help to generate awareness and encourage local property owners to take the right sort of action for themselves.*

The management of the Mill Field Estate conservation area requires a careful approach that facilitates enjoyment of modern life while protecting the aspects of the area that contribute to its character and significance, features that attract people to live here and make it a desirable neighbourhood. In most cases this balance should not cause conflict because with some consideration most alterations could be accommodated in a way that will not harm the character of the street. High quality replacement materials, including replica sash windows, are now readily available; micro-generation equipment and satellite dishes can usually be located discreetly. The pressure on parking is controlled by residents' only on-street parking, so parking in front gardens is not necessary, even if some find it desirable.

Some guidance and control therefore should enable this balance to be successfully achieved without loss of enjoyment for residents. The conservation area appraisal will take the form of adopted planning guidance and the recommendations within it will become a material consideration for future planning applications.

### **1.0 Protecting the historic environment**

*Section 72 of the Act requires that special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This requirement extends to all powers under the Planning Acts, not only those which relate directly to historic buildings. The desirability of preserving or enhancing the area should also, in the Secretary of State's view, be a material consideration in the planning authority's handling of development proposals which are outside the conservation area but would affect its setting, or views into or out of the area. Local planning authorities are required by section 73 to publish a notice of planning applications for development which would in their opinion affect the character or appearance of a conservation area.*

#### **1.1 Article 4 direction**

The uniformity of buildings within each small development within the conservation area makes inappropriate changes more harmful in this conservation area than in those which have a more diverse character. For this reason character can readily be eroded by poorly conceived alterations. It is proposed that an Article 4 Direction should be imposed to withdraw certain permitted development rights so that planning permission would be required for these works. This would enable the council to control alterations that erode the character of the conservation area.

It is recommended that this would include:

- The alteration of any window, door, window opening or doorway visible from public vantage points
- The rendering or painting of the brickwork of any part of a dwellinghouse
- The cleaning of any brickwork
- Re-roofing with different materials
- Installation of a roof light to any part of the roof
- The erection, extension or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure to any part of the property facing the highway;; including the formation of any access
- The installation of micro-generation equipment including photovoltaic or solar water generation panels
- The alteration of entrance paths
- The erection of garages and car-ports
- Porches
- Removal of chimneys
- Two storey rear extensions

Under Part 1, Schedule 2 of the order including classes A-F inclusive (GPDO 1995 as Amended) refer to Plan ref:

## **1.2 Additions & alterations**

It is suggested that the area indicated on the map in figure 1 is designated as a new conservation area. It is furthermore recommended that this area is protected by an Article 4 direction to control future development and to ensure that in the future all development will enhance or preserve the character of the conservation area.

Where planning applications are submitted that relate to existing inappropriate features that erode the character of the conservation area it is expected that these alterations will be reversed and such features replaced with positive ones. Therefore like-for-like replacement of inappropriate features will not normally be permitted

## **1.3 Demolition and planning permission**

By designation of the conservation area all demolition over 115 cubic metres will be subject to planning permission. Works to trees will be subject to notification to the council.

When considering applications for demolition of buildings within the conservation area the general presumption will be for retention of buildings that contribute to the character of the conservation area or those that have architectural merit. When considering applications for alterations to buildings the council will normally support applications which will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. Development that would be harmful to the character or appearance of the conservation area will be refused unless overriding public benefits that outweigh the harm can be demonstrated to arise from the development.

## **1.4 Recording**

In certain cases where a demolition is approved that will harm the character of the conservation area the council may require developers to carry out recording to an agreed standard before the alterations can be made. Such records shall be offered to the Essex Record Office, the Local Studies section at Colchester Library and the

Essex Historic Environment Record at Essex County Council to enable it to be made available for the public.

### **1.5 Changes of use**

The majority of buildings are in use as single dwellinghouses. Where possible this should continue. Where other uses exist the council will support change of use back to domestic use, particularly if this entails the removal of a negative building or feature and associated enhancement of the conservation area.

### **1.6 Signage**

Signage associated with alternative uses within the conservation area is likely to be alien to its character. Where this is required it should be small and discreet, for example brass nameplates beside the doors. Large plastic signs, advertisement banners and other intrusive modern signage, especially where this incorporates illumination, will generally be resisted by the council.

Street signage set within the footway is currently not inappropriate for the area, being of small scale and simple. Historic street signs made from tiles are attractive and an interesting link to Colchester's past. Where they are damaged they should be repaired. Their removal should be resisted.



Figure 51: Where street nameplates are damaged they deserve repair.

### **1.7 Repair & maintenance**

- Some old tiled street nameplates need repair
- Where galvanised handrails exist (for example outside Hamilton School) they should be painted.
- Some old lamp standards need maintenance and repair to avoid risk of their loss
- Street trees need to be cared for to ensure they thrive, or replaced where missing
- Where boundary walls are becoming damaged they should be repaired to ensure their survival.
- Where close-boarded fences need replacement this should be with appropriate features, such as brick walls or hedges. Rendered blockwork is not appropriate.
- Where garages are to be redeveloped they should be hidden behind brick walls with side-hung doors for access.

## **1.8 New uses for vacant buildings**

Vacant buildings are not a significant problem within the area. Where buildings in other uses become vacant their change of use to dwellinghouses should generally be supported unless there are overriding reasons not to do so.

## **1.9 Proposals for monitoring and review of the Conservation Area**

It is suggested that the conservation area appraisal and management plan should be adopted by the council as supplementary planning documents (SPD) and from that time its recommendations should become a material consideration. The conservation area should be reviewed regularly.

The imposition of an Article 4 Direction will have resource implications, as it is likely to attract an increase in the number of planning applications that need to be submitted without a fee. However in this instance, because one of the most significant characteristics of the conservation area is the uniformity and coherence of the architecture, in this instance its imposition is justified.

It is suggested that where resources permit the conservation area should be periodically re-surveyed (perhaps biennially) for unauthorised alterations and to monitor its general condition. At this time a photographic record will be made for reference by the council when considering proposals for development in the area and for potential planning enforcement purposes.

## **2.0 New development in the historic environment**

There are no obvious vacant sites with potential for infill at present, but the features with scope for enhancement include the few negative buildings and areas dominated by garages and parking, which would benefit from enhancement. With little scope for redevelopment it is likely that the majority of development will take the form of extensions and alterations. The guidelines below are intended to assist with this.

### **2.1 The design of new development**

New development should reflect the features within the conservation area that contribute to its character. This is not intended to suggest that future development should necessarily take the form of a pastiche of the historic buildings but instead that the features that contribute to character should be used to inform design. This is a particularly cohesive area and failure to respond to the existing character of the buildings within it is likely to cause more harm than in other places.

### **2.2 Key design principles**

#### **2.2.1 Form**

The majority of buildings take a terraced form even where they are semi-detached or detached. Their plan tends to be longer than their width with a narrower projection to the rear. They are arranged facing the street conforming to a regular building line. Most buildings are two storeys high with a relatively shallow pitched, discreet roof. Most frequently the pitch is from front to back. Buildings are usually arranged symmetrically whether this is as taken within the terrace or semi-detached pair or otherwise as viewed individually. There is some variation between streets, with some containing predominantly flat fronted houses and some containing a high proportion of houses with single or two storey bays.





Figures 52 and 53: Architectural unity derived from repetition of similar elements



Figures 54 and 55: Solid respectability and anonymity.

### 2.2.2 Scale

Most buildings are built on a domestic scale, only two storeys in height with no or minimal accommodation within the roof; where this is occasionally found the best examples have small window openings in the gables.

### 2.2.3 Details

Details on buildings are more idiosyncratic in the older streets than the later ones. They include one and two-storey bay windows, both canted and square sided; decorative lintels, door cases, open canopies, string courses and eaves details. Doorways are frequently inset. Front walls used to have wrought iron railings and decorative tiled paths were common. Decorative features are often white although polychromatic brickwork is used for string-courses and corner details and some buildings have terracotta lozenges. In some cases more expensive brick is used for the front elevation and cheaper bricks on the sides and rear. Coloured glass is used in doors but does not appear to have been widely used for windows, probably because this feature is more often a feature of casement rather than sliding sash windows.



Figure 56: Decorative features can include terracotta lozenges, fretwork on eaves and verges, bays and chimneys



Figure 57: Quirky features such as the huge canopy over these first floor windows and the slate roofed porch/loggia feature all contribute to character.



Figure 58: Polychrome brickwork and paired chimneys used to enliven a plain end wall.



Figure 59, left: Terracotta used at eaves to create the effect of an architrave and on the bay to enrich an area of plain brickwork between ground and first floor windows



Figure 60, right: Beautiful tiles on a front doorstep.





Figure 61, left: note the little white modillions under the eills and the decoration around the inset porches and first floor window arch.  
Figure 62, right: tiles used simply but effectively to decorate the front path. The decoration emphasises the transition from the pavement onto private property.



Figures 63, left and 64, right: Some examples of beautiful original doors and the coloured glass insets.





Figure 65: The round-topped doorways echo the inset porches in a more modest way and the red brickwork decorates the yellow London stock bricks simply but effectively. Note the mock half-timbering and decorative fretwork of the bargeboards. The survival of front boundaries and the well-planted gardens define the private spaces despite their diminutive size.

#### **2.2.4 Materials**

The materials chosen for development in the area should be inspired by those already commonly found there.

Roof coverings are almost always mid-grey Welsh slate. Walls are usually brickwork, both red bricks and yellow stock bricks are commonly found. Painted or rendered brickwork is not appropriate. Windows are usually white painted sliding sash timber windows, most frequently they are in a four pane arrangement. Occasionally small paned windows are found, where they occur it is usually confined to the upper sash. Doors are timber and sometimes have attractive stained glass panels. Rainwater goods are usually cast metal. Boundary walls are usually made of brick matching the house.

#### **2.2.5 Spaces**

Reinstatement of railings/boundary walls and gardens to delineate public and private space is to be encouraged. Spaces between buildings along streets are often not generous, but their existence, along with long back gardens and wide roads, is another important feature of the Victorian and Edwardian appetite for privacy.

### **3.0 The public realm**

#### **3.1 Groundscape**

Where works in the pavements are carried out it is important that the flagstones are reinstated. Tarmac on pavements should be avoided where flagstones exist; whether stone or concrete. Where tarmac already exists its impact is usually regrettable: repairs look untidy and the surface lacks the feeling of quality that contributes to the character of the area elsewhere.

### **3.2 Street furniture**

Where old lamp-standards become beyond repair they should be replaced with alternatives that are as close as possible to the existing design. Where modern utilitarian standards are to be replaced the replacement should be with replicas of the historic lamp-standards, not with more utilitarian standards.

Waste bins, telecoms boxes and similar items shall not be used for advertising and should be sited sensitively to avoid harming the public realm

### **3.3 Clutter**

Where possible the clutter of signage and street furniture should be minimised. Signs should be grouped onto poles where possible. Disused signage poles should be removed.

### **3.4 Planting**

The street trees within the conservation area are owned and maintained by the council. They need to be maintained to ensure their growth and survival. Where trees are missing, where possible, the council should seek to replace them with appropriate small species. This may be a target for expenditure of any developers' contributions received.

### **3.5 Developers' contributions**

These could be directed towards improvements in the public realm, for example, replacement of inappropriate lamp standards with ones more suited to the character of the area, reinstatement of paving slabs where they have been lost, planting and maintenance of street trees or replacement of inappropriate street furniture (railings for example) with more good quality alternatives.

## **4.0 Opportunities for new development**

The areas used for forecourt car-parking are a regrettable feature of the area and this is a problem that needs to be addressed. Similarly, where close-boarded fences line the street frontage they blight its appearance. Where garages exist it might be possible to site them behind boundaries (walls and gates) to retain the distinction between public and private space using features that are appropriate for the character of the conservation area.

The few negative buildings within the conservation area appear to be in use and are unlikely to present immediate opportunities for redevelopment but in the event that they become redundant the council would encourage their replacement with new buildings that would enhance the character of the conservation area.

## **5.0 Implementation**

A report on this appraisal and its management proposals will be submitted to the portfolio holder for approval. After this the document will be subject to a 28 day public consultation period, during which time a public exhibition will be held, and a public meeting as required by section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. After this the appraisal and management proposals will be referred to the Council's Local Plan Committee. With the committee's approval the conservation area will be formally designated and the appraisal and management proposals will be adopted as a SPD in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

proposed  
**Mill Field Estate**  
**Colchester Conservation Area**

**a character appraisal & management proposals**