

Watford Heath



Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Adopted – July 2013



Watford Heath Conservation Area Appraisal

Contents

1.0	Introduction	page 3
2.0	Background, Scope and Structure	page 3
3.0	Designation	page 3
4.0	Definition/Summary of Special Interest	page 3
5.0	Location and Setting	page 4
6.0	Archaeology and Historic Development	page 4
6.1	Archaeology	page 4
6.2	Historic development.....	page 4
7.0	Spatial Analysis	page 7
7.1	Character and Interrelationships of Spaces	page 7
7.2	Key Views and Vistas.....	page 8
8.0	Character Analysis	page 9
8.1	Activity	page 9
8.2	Quality of the Buildings and their Contributions to the Area.....	page 9
8.3	Public Houses	page 11
8.4	Listed Buildings.....	page 12
8.5	Locally Listed Buildings.....	page 12
8.6	Other Significant Buildings/Structures.....	page 14
8.7	Prevalent Local and Traditional Building materials	page 14
8.8	The Contribution made by Trees & Green Spaces	page 14
8.9	The Extent of Intrusion or Damage (Negative Factors).....	page 15
8.10	Capacity for Change	page 15
8.11	Neutral Areas	page 15
9.0	Article 4 Directions	page 16
10.0	Suggested Boundary Changes	page 16
11.0	Local Consultation	page 16
12.0	Management Proposals	page 16
	Bibliography	page 17
	Map of Conservation Area	page 18

1.0 Introduction

The Watford Heath Conservation Area Character Appraisal aims to set out the area's special character and appearance and how it can be preserved or enhanced.

This appraisal will be used to help inform the design of any future development proposals so that they preserve or enhance the area and acknowledge its features.

It is important to note that no appraisal can ever be completely comprehensive and that the omission of a particular feature, building or open space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

2.0 Background, Scope and Structure

The borough of Watford contains nine other conservation areas, the oldest of which were designated in 1973 and 1975. The Urban Conservation Strategy produced during 2001 designated a further five conservation areas - including Watford Heath. The High Street/King Street Conservation Area was designated in 2006, while the Watford Heath Conservation Area and Estcourt Conservation Area were extended in 2008 and 2010 respectively. More recently, Macdonnell Gardens was designated as a conservation area in 2012 and Oxhey was designated as a conservation area in 2013.

This appraisal is structured to include:

- summary of designation
- policy background
- definition of the special interest of the area via spatial and character analysis, historical development and important features.

3.0 Designation

Watford Heath Conservation Area was designated on the 22 January 2001 under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The main aims stated within the original designation report for the Conservation Area (Watford Borough Council, 2001) were:

- to maintain the character and openness of the Heath around which the buildings stand;
- to retain the appearance of buildings surrounding the Heath;
- to protect the Heath from proposals which could dominate or harm its character or appearance.

The Conservation Area was extended on the 26 September 2006 to include 31 – 33 Sherwoods Road and 184 – 186 Pinner Road.

4.0 Definition/Summary of Special Interest

This is an area of the Borough which retains its historic character as a small settlement outside the larger town of Watford. The open grassland heath has significant visual value and the buildings around it have a strong relationship to it. The resulting urban form has the character of a village green.

The most significant building period, which makes the area special, is the Arts and Crafts and Domestic Revival period (1900-1930). Many of the buildings constructed during this period were built as part of the Oxhey Grange Estate and sold off to private individuals in the early 1930s. There are also a number of buildings from the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries which add to the local character.

The other key feature of the area is the presence of mature trees and hedges. The trees are primarily positioned around the edge of the heath, and act as a foil to the buildings. Many of the properties have well established hedges along boundaries, which add to the semi-rural character of this area.

5.0 Location and Setting

The Conservation Area lies at the south-eastern edge of the Borough, adjacent to Three Rivers District. The original Conservation Area boundary enclosed the heath itself, including 1 – 37 Watford Heath and 201 – 207 Pinner Road. The boundary was extended in September 2006 to include 184, 184a, 186 Pinner Road and 31, 33 Sherwoods Road. The western boundary of the Conservation Area is marked by the railway cutting of the West Coast Mainline, the banks of which have extensive tree cover, although this may be subject to periodic felling. The boundary to the south follows the rear boundaries of houses on the southern side of the heath, with parkland, woodland and garden space beyond. To the east is open countryside and a small number of properties with extensive grounds in Three Rivers District. The northern boundary is marked by the transition to more uniform streets of inter-war housing and some flatted development from the later twentieth century.

6.0 Archaeology and Historic Development

6.1 Archaeology

In the absence of detailed survey work into the archaeological potential of the area covered by the Conservation Area, it is difficult to make any conclusive comments on this topic. There are no recorded archaeological finds for the area on the County Council's Historic Environment Record, while the Extensive Urban Survey Project Assessment (Hunns, 2000) focused on developments in the area from the Victorian period onward.

There are no scheduled monuments in the Conservation Area.

6.2 Historical Development

Early Development

Watford Heath predates much of the town of Watford's development, with evidence of a settlement around a turn in the road to the town in 1749, a time when Watford was a linear settlement based on the High Street or 'Watford Street'. From the 17th century to the 19th century, settlement around the Heath consisted largely of cottages related to the farms, brickworks and limekilns in the area (Cooling and Mackay, 2000). Bray (1979) notes that a 1797 reference to the area occurs in a copyhold relating to land containing 'one cottage with the appurtenances, near Watford Heath'. The 1766 Dury and Andrews map shows a number of buildings located on all sides of the Heath.



1766 Dury and Andrews Map

19th Century Development

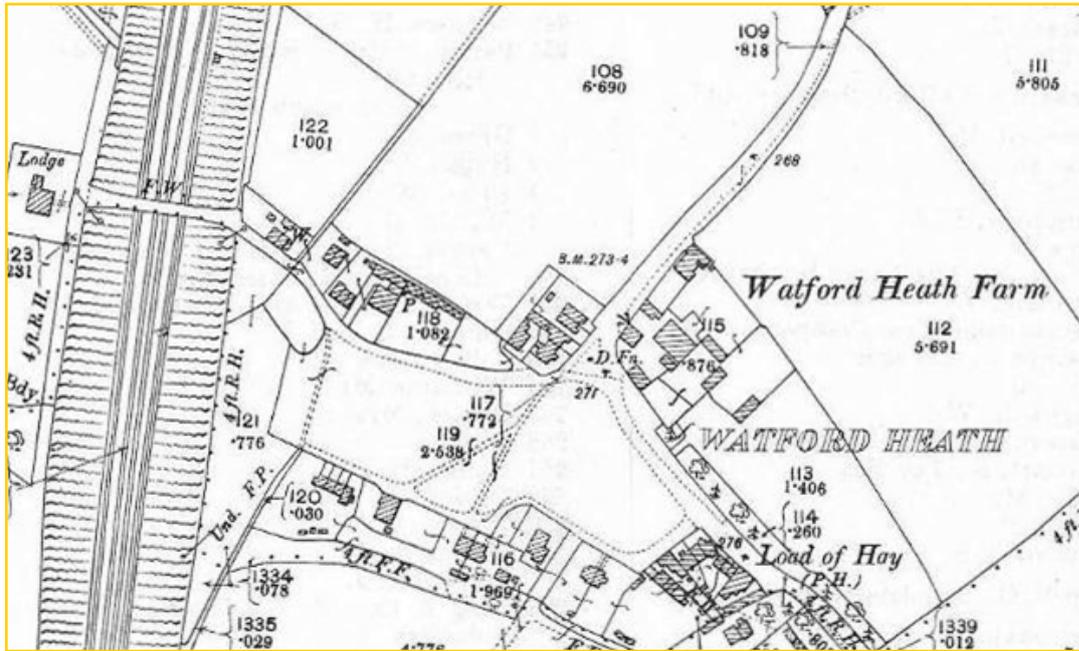
With the arrival of the railway in Watford in 1837 and the growth of Watford as an industrial area, the town of Watford expanded significantly during the Victorian era. The development of Oxhey southwards towards the existing settlement around Watford Heath mirrors this growth with the construction of Victorian and Edwardian buildings following the opening of Bushey and Oxhey railway station in 1841 (Bray, 1979). During the 19th century Watford Heath remained a separate entity, with the heath appearing on maps as a discrete area of development at the southern end of Pinner Road. By this point, in addition to development at Heath Cottage and Heath Farm, Nos. 1-5 Watford Heath, the Load of Hay public house and adjoining cottages and a range of other buildings were clustered around the heath. Nos. 1-5 Watford Heath, the Load of Hay, cottages at Nos. 201, 203 and 205 Pinner Road and Nos. 24 – 28 Watford Heath are still present from that time. Whilst the five buildings of Nos. 1-5 Watford Heath are now residential in nature, a number of the buildings formerly housed the Watford Heath National School from 1854 onwards. In 1873, the then Chaplain of Oxhey Chapel, Reverend Newton Price, introduced the teaching of cookery to girls at Watford Heath National School. One of the earliest examples of a cookery school, Nos. 3 and 4 Watford Heath are said to have housed the main school for sixty pupils, whilst No. 5 Watford Heath was purpose-built for practical cookery lessons (Bray, 1979; Cooling & Mackay, 2000).



1841 Tithe Map

20th Century Development

By the early 20th century houses had been constructed along most of Oxhey Avenue and parts of Pinner Road and Heath Road. With the steady expansion of residential development, Watford Heath ceased to be a discrete settlement, having been consumed by the wider development of Oxhey or New Bushey. In terms of the development around the heath itself, many of the buildings on the northern, southern and eastern edges of the heath existed in a similar form and layout to the present day. The western side of the Heath was allocated as allotment gardens adjoining the railway cutting, whilst the north-eastern side of the heath was undeveloped apart from the farm buildings on the corner of Pinner Road and Oxhey Lane.



1896 OS Map

Oxhey Grange was built for the Eley family in 1866/67 and is located outside the borough boundary, off Oxhey Lane in Three Rivers District. Historically, the settlement at Watford Heath has been linked with Oxhey Grange with a number of the houses surrounding and adjoining the heath built by the owners of Oxhey Grange or constructed on land formerly owned by Oxhey Grange. Williams (1884, p. 40 - 41) asserts that Watford Heath at this time was a 'picturesque and very healthy part of the parish of Watford' and that 'during the lifetime of the late Mr. W. T. Eley much was done by that gentleman to improve the dwellings of cottage residents.' Census data also show that many of the people residing around the heath worked at either the Grange or on the railway. The Oxhey Grange Estate was purchased by the Doyle Penrose family (a prominent local Quaker family) from the Eley family after the turn of the 20th century. Subsequently, the Absalom family purchased the estate from the Doyle Penroses in 1932 and later went on to build the Carpenders Park Estate on part of the land. At the time when Oxhey Grange itself was sold, many other parts of the estate around Watford Heath were split and sold off.



1939 OS Map

The 1939 Ordnance Survey map of the area indicates that further development had taken place by this point in the 20th century. A number of cottages on the southern side of the heath had been demolished and replaced by the existing detached and semidetached houses at 20 – 23 and 29 – 30 Watford Heath. The dwellings at 14 – 18, 20 – 23 and 29 – 30 Watford Heath were built by different builders between 1916 and the end of the 1920s, including the Doyle Penrose family who built a pair of three-bedroom houses at 29 – 30 Watford Heath, in addition to houses at the corner of Sherwoods Road and Pinner Road. A sales catalogue from the early 1930s stated that many of these houses “were erected by the late owner of the Oxhey Grange Estate with a view to preserving the old-world features of the English Countryside in the Tudor style” (Watney, 1932).



Circa 1900s postcard image of 1-5 Watford Heath & later image of 20-28 Watford Heath

21st Century Development

A pair of houses were built at the junction of Oxhey Avenue and Watford Heath in 2006. The massing of the development is such that the impact on the Conservation Area is not a positive one. Three new houses were constructed in 2012 in the south-western corner of the Heath. The development at Eley Place has integrated with existing built form more successfully.

7.0 Spatial Analysis

This section considers the morphology of the area, key spaces, and important views and vistas into and out of the area.

7.1 Character and Interrelationships of Spaces

The physical character of the area is derived from its topography on the southern side of the valley of the river Colne. Geologically, the area is formed from London clay, chalk and gravel outcrops (Nunn, 1996). The higher ground at Watford Heath apparently results from the gravel or pebble beds, which are more resistant to erosion than the chalk or clay (Cooling and Mackay, 2000). Pinner Road bends around the hillside from Bushey Station, rising up towards Watford Heath. As the road reaches Watford Heath, the terrain opens out with sweeping panoramic views of the green space. The deep cutting of the railway line skirts the rear boundaries of 14 - 19 Watford Heath, providing a clearly defined edge to the conservation area.

The Heath

The heath is apparently a survivor of the common pasture, a feature of the open field system of agriculture (Saunders, 1931). Until 1880, the heath was owned by the Lord of the Manor of Wiggshall, also known as ‘Oxhey Walrond’. After this date, it is not possible to trace the ownership of the heath until the area of land was purchased by the Council in 1932 under the Open Spaces Act 1906 (Nunn, 1996). The heath was later registered as common land on 31 July 1973 under the Commons Registration Act 1965. According to letters exchanged during this registration

process, the heath once had two ponds (Nunn, 1996). In terms of the use and amenity value of the space, it is a valuable resource for leisure and outlook. The boundary treatments for the heath include post and chain fencing on the northern side and blocks of stone on the southern side. Historical pictures show that the heath was previously open, before it was fenced off using horizontal metal bars between concrete posts.

The Heath also contains a Memorial Cross, situated between 27 and 28 Watford Heath. This cross is dedicated to those local residents who died in the First World War. After the original cross collapsed in 1951, a new cross was dedicated in 1994 (Cooling and Mackay, 2000). In terms of other features and street furniture on the heath, there was a fountain which was formerly positioned in front of the buildings at 1 – 4 Watford Heath. The polished granite drinking fountain, erected in memory of W.T. Eley of Oxhey Grange by his sisters in 1883 (Williams, 1884), was removed from the site in the 1950s and was not replaced.



Memorial Cross



Former drinking fountain

7.2 Key Views and Vistas

There are a number of important views into and out of the Conservation Area, mainly from the junctions of streets. The presence of mature trees surrounding the heath forms an essential part of the character of the Conservation Area. Their greater height relative to surrounding rooflines assists in framing distant views of the heath and surrounding buildings. If approaching the area from the north, along Pinner Road, the first view in a south-westerly direction along Pinner Road shows the terrace of cottages at Nos. 1 – 4 Watford Heath, the heath itself and glimpses of a number of the buildings on the south-western edge of the heath. The view unfolds upon reaching the bend in Pinner Road at which point the majority of the heath and its surrounding buildings and landscape are visible.



View south-west from Pinner Road



View south over the heath

The approach to Watford Heath from the south-east is heralded by the dwellinghouse 'Pinehurst' at No. 186 Pinner Road on the north-eastern side of the road and the Load of Hay public house and adjoining 18th Century cottages on the south-western side of the road.

Upon crossing the railway bridge or emerging from Oxhey Avenue, expansive views across the heath are obtained, providing a sense of openness in contrast to the narrow nature of the railway bridge and the adjoining suburban streetscene.

Within the Conservation Area itself there are long views across the heath. Views across the heath are characteristically terminated by the buildings which sit on the edge of the open area. The long views into and within the Conservation Area are particularly important, allowing a sense of openness and space within what has largely become a built-up area.

Limited views of the rear of buildings within the conservation area are obtained from the bowling green and playing fields to the rear of Nos. 26 – 29 Watford Heath. These views are more intimate, highlighting the importance of some rear elevations within the Conservation Area.



Pinner Road looking north-west



Oxhey Grange Playing Fields looking north

8.0 Character Analysis

8.1 Activity

While the location of Watford Heath and the dominance of low density residential land uses help serve to limit levels of pedestrian activity, there are factors which impact on the tranquil character of this area. Significant levels of traffic pass through the Conservation Area along Pinner Road and the northern stretch of Watford Heath, while the two public houses and the leisure activities associated with the various areas of public space are notable.

8.2 The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

The heath is predominantly surrounded by residential buildings. These consist of a range of architectural styles from simple Victorian cottages to the more elaborately styled Arts & Crafts and Domestic Revival houses of the early 1920s. These different groups of houses were built under the patronage of the Eleys and latterly the Doyle Penroses of Oxhey Grange.

The Conservation Area is, on the whole, visually rich and complex. There are both unifying elements, in terms of slate roofs, red clay hung tiles, unpainted pebbledash render, two-storey scale properties and the green spaces between many of the buildings as well as variety in the form of gentle changes in rooflines and variation in detailing

to ridges of roofs, frontages, chimney stacks and finials. A particularly distinctive feature of the townscape is the open and green spaces between many properties around the heath, which is relatively rare within the Borough. The boundary walls and hedges are also significant in demarcating the difference between the openness of the heath and the more private areas around the dwellings themselves. Maintenance of these features is of importance, as the loss of traditional boundary treatments has a detrimental impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

Nineteenth Century Residential Buildings

Numbers 1 – 5 Watford Heath are relatively humble in scale and retain some of their original Victorian charm. Approaching the Conservation Area from the north, past standard inter-war suburban housing on Pinner Road, the buildings occupy a prominent location at the turn in the road and mark the pronounced change in urban character. In comparison, number 6 Watford Heath is of a neo-Georgian style that suggests the building is older than its actual construction in the later nineteenth century. The red-brick, double-bay fronted building is set back behind walls and vegetation, but still makes a valuable and striking contribution to the townscape of the Conservation Area when viewed from the south.

Around the eastern and southern edges of the Heath, there are a number of attractive Victorian houses with Arts and Crafts detailing. Their architectural style presents a more rural appearance than the 20th century suburban development nearby. The buildings consist of various types of stock brick with contrasting brick banding. Number 28 is asymmetrical and has a steeply pitched roof, whilst numbers 26 and 27 are semi-detached, with red clay tile hanging. Number 27 has a particularly attractive outbuilding with kite-hipped roof and pleasant fenestration.



3 – 4 Watford Heath



201 – 207 Pinner Road

Twentieth Century Residential Buildings

The Domestic Revival style characterises a number of residential developments along Pinner Road and around Watford Heath. These houses constitute an attractive feature, which complements the rest of the Conservation Area. Having retained most of their original features, the houses are typical examples of the Tudorbeathan style of inter-war architecture. The predominant materials of these buildings are brick, render, timber and slate. In the main, the majority of these houses have retained their 'natural coloured' roughcast. This is a positive feature of the houses, which would become too dominant were it to be overpainted in white. Other positive features of the buildings include original front doors and windows as well as the timber detailing at first floor level.

Notable buildings from this period include 186 Pinner Road, 34 Watford Heath, 29 – 30 Watford Heath and 31 – 33 Sherwoods Road. The timber detailing and other materials on the latter two properties may have originated from the sale of the Cassiobury Estate during the 1920s (Watney, 1932).



29 – 30 Watford Heath



186 Pinner Road

8.3 Public Houses

The Load of Hay Public House and The Royal Oak Public House were established in the 19th century on land that it is thought was manorial waste. The Royal Oak enjoys a position overlooking the Heath, whilst the Load of Hay fronts onto Pinner Road. The Load of Hay is present on the Tithe Map of 1842, while there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there was previously a cottage on the site of The Royal Oak (Bray, 1979), which was subsequently replaced by a beerhouse by 1819 (Cooling and Mackay, 2000).



The Load of Hay



The Royal Oak

In addition, number 34 Watford Heath was formerly known as Rose Tea Gardens. Although the building dates back to the 19th century, it was substantially altered in 1913 for the owner James Penrose, who resided at Oxhey Grange. The work at this time included an extension to the building for a new tea room. The business operated until the late 1950s, when the building was converted to a general store. It subsequently reverted back to being a solely residential property during the late 1960s.



Image of Rose Tea Gardens from postcard circa 1914

8.4 Listed Buildings

There are no Nationally Listed Buildings located within or adjacent to the Conservation Area.

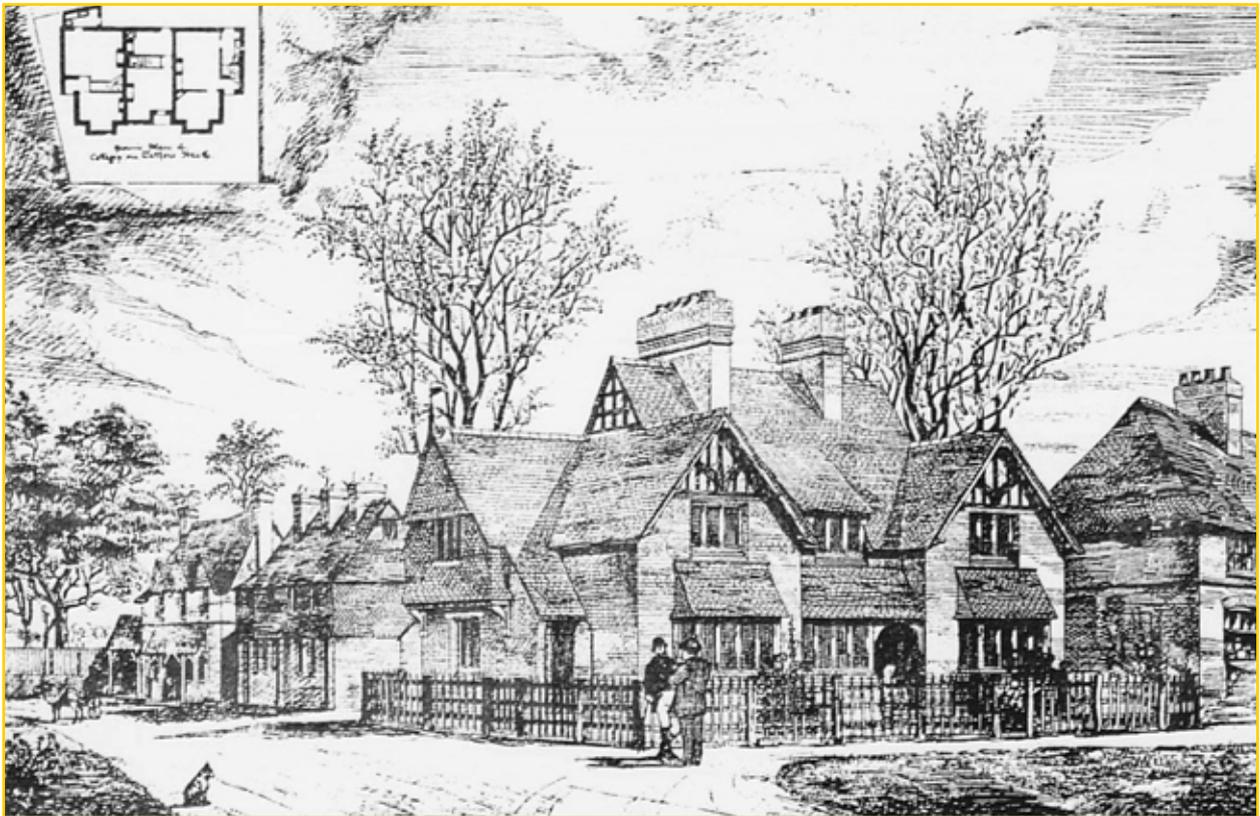
8.5 Locally Listed Buildings

As part of the Council's Urban Conservation Strategy, a register of Locally Listed Buildings was compiled within the Watford District Plan 2000 (2003). Following extensive public consultation, the register was revised in 2012. The following buildings were included in the revised list due to their importance in terms of: architectural interest, function, historical interest, landmark quality and streetscape quality.

Building Name	Construction Date
186 Pinner Road	1923
201 – 205 Pinner Road	18th – 19th century
The Load of Hay PH, 207 Pinner Road	Early 19th century
31 – 33 Sherwoods Road	1927
1 – 4 Watford Heath	1850s
5 Watford Heath	1875
6 Watford Heath	1871-1896
The Royal Oak PH, 25 Watford Heath	Mid 19th century
26 – 27 Watford Heath	1875
31 – 33 Watford Heath	18th – 19th century
34 Watford Heath	1842-1871 & 1913
35 – 37 Watford Heath	1879



1875 Image of 26-27 Watford Heath



1879 Image of 36-37 Watford Heath

8.6 Other Significant Buildings/Structures

A number of unlisted buildings in Watford Heath Conservation Area contribute positively to the character of the area despite not meeting the criteria for statutory or local listing. The following are notable for their age, style and/or historic uses. They are also a reminder of the gradual development of the town:

- 28 Watford Heath;
- 29 – 30 Watford Heath.

8.7 Prevalent Local and Traditional Building materials

Facing Materials

There is a wide variety of building materials within the Conservation Area. This includes London stock brick, local stock brick, red brick, render and timber beams. There are some examples of tile hanging and ornate timber or render detailing. The dominant roof material is clay tiles, but a number of the later buildings have slates on the pitched roofs. The design of windows is highly varied and features a mixture of timber casement types and timber framed sliding sash types – some of which have been replaced by plastic versions.



Detailing on 27 Watford Heath



Detailing on 186 Pinner Road

Floorscape Materials

There is little evidence of original historic fabric in the floorscape of the Conservation Area. The carriageways have been resurfaced with asphalt, while the footways and the path across the Heath have been laid with dense bitumen macadam.

8.8 Contribution of Trees and Green Spaces

The public open space is surrounded by tall mature lime trees forming an essential characteristic of this Conservation Area, framing the heath and its surrounding buildings. There are many significant trees within the Conservation Area, including oak, cherry, willow, pine and the limes. Although the trees on the public land are not protected by a Tree Preservation Order, they have an important amenity value and should be properly maintained. There is also a considerable amount of hedging, tree and shrub planting within both front and rear gardens of many of the properties. Many of the gaps between the buildings are filled with or afford views of vegetation within and outside the Conservation Area. This provides a sense of enclosure within the Conservation Area and enhances its semi-rural aspect.

There are two Tree Preservation Orders within the Conservation Area. Order number 220 which covers trees within 184, 184a & 186 Pinner Road and 33 Sherwoods Road was made in 2006. This provides a protected tree link

between the heath and open countryside at the borough boundary. The trees include pine, oak, beech and yew. Order number 234 protects a willow in the garden of 26 Watford Heath and was made in 2009.



Lime trees on southern side of the heath



Trees to front of 184 Pinner Road

8.9 The Extent of Intrusion or Damage (Negative Factors)

Loss of building features

Within the Conservation Area there are examples of unsympathetic alterations to the external elevations of buildings. This includes the removal of original windows, doors and other detailing, as well as the addition of render and satellite dishes.

Traffic and Pedestrian Management

Signage and road markings relating to traffic management in the area has an intrusive effect. Elements of the existing signage and street furniture create a sense of street clutter, while some of the road markings could be applied in a more appropriate style.

8.10 Capacity for Change

The designation of a conservation area does not provide a block on any development within its boundaries. The area has changed considerably since the first buildings were constructed and the renovation of properties by new owners and businesses is to be welcomed as a means for ensuring the continued vitality of the public houses and stability of the residential properties. Change must not come at the expense of degrading the character and scale that makes the area special and alterations to properties need to be sympathetic to their context.

The protected status of the Heath and the existing structure of built form dictate that there are limited opportunities for new development in the area.

8.11 Neutral Areas

The Conservation Area boundary was drawn in such a way as to largely avoid including extensive areas which dilute its character. Nevertheless, the residential block at number 7 Watford Heath does not have a positive impact on the wider area due to its scale and roof form.

9.0 Article 4 Direction

An Article 4(1) Direction was served on the following properties on the 4th April 2013: 186, 201, 203, 205 Pinner Road; 31, 33 Sherwoods Road; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37 Watford Heath.

This Direction restricts permitted development rights with regards to:

- Development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse comprised within the following classes of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the said Order:

Class A – enlargement, improvement or other alteration;

Class C – any other alteration to the section of the roof that faces the street;

Class D – the erection or construction of a porch outside any external door;

- Development within the area defined by the attached map comprised within the following classes of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the said Order:

Class A – the erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure.

- Development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse comprised within the following classes of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the said Order:

Class C – the painting of the exterior of any building or work.

An Article 4(1) Direction was served on the following properties on the 4th April 2013: Load of Hay, 207 Pinner Road; 6 Watford Heath; Royal Oak, 25 Watford Heath.

This Direction restricts permitted development rights with regards to:

- Development within the curtilage of a property comprised within the following classes of Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the said Order:

Class C – the painting of the exterior of any building or work.

10.0 Suggested Boundary Changes

It is not considered that there are material reasons for making any alterations to the boundary of the Conservation Area.

11.0 Local Consultation

An earlier draft of this Character Appraisal document was published for public consultation from 3 April to 15 May 2013. This final version has been produced with the benefit of the comments received during that consultation.

12.0 Management Proposals (for issues identified in section 8.9)

A separate Conservation Areas Management Plan is due to be adopted in July 2013. This is available to view at; www.watford.gov.uk/conservationareas

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Maps & Plans

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Ordnance Survey, 1871.
Ordnance Survey, 1898.
Ordnance Survey, 1914.
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