

Urban Conservation and Design

Garden Village Conservation Area Character Statement

Summary

The main character of the Garden Village Conservation Area is as a planned early 20th Century 'model village' for the employees of Reckitts manufacturing firm.

Rationale

The existence and character of Garden Village stems from the desires of James Reckitt (1833-1924) to provide a good quality living environment for his firm's employees. In this, he was following the example of benevolent manufacturers from Robert Owen onwards. He also had the examples of Lever's Port Sunlight and Cadbury's Bournville to emulate, as well as the recently started Letchworth Garden City, based on the principles of the Garden City movement, as advocated by Ebenezer Howard.

He had as a vision the idea of the "Village in the Town", providing not just homes for the workers but also shops, community facilities and "Havens" for pensioners. The main features of Garden Village stem from the aims of achieving a good standard of housing and environment for Reckitt's employees. His object was to provide his employees with a house and garden for the same rent as for existing inferior housing which in general consisted of long terraces with back yards at a much greater density. Garden Village represented an early example of Garden City planning and an enormous advance in housing layout in Hull compared to that of nineteenth century workers dwellings.

Historical Development

The oldest building within the Conservation Area is Holderness House. It dates from 1838 and is an impressive building in the Elizabethan Revival style, in yellow brick with ashlar dressings and steep-pitched slate roofs. Associated outhouses include stables and a lodge house on Holderness Road, and, together with a surviving carriage drive, indicate the original importance of the house and its occupants.

There are large wooded grounds, offering only glimpses of the House from Holderness Road in the summer, with many individual trees of merit, including a yew. The grounds are surrounded with oak boundary fencing, which includes a decorative pattern along the Holderness Road frontage, although this is now in poor repair.

The 130-acre site on which Garden Village was to be built was purchased in 1907. It was the northern part of the estate of Holderness House (the Jalland estate). Because of this, Holderness House and grounds are still the main experience of the Conservation Area for those passing along Holderness Road. This location necessitated an access road from Garden Village to the nearest point on Holderness Road. This became known as Village Road and initially was not built up apart from four houses at the junction with Holderness Road, which, together with a statue to James Stuart, J.P. and the mature trees nearby, serve eloquently to announce the main entrance to Garden Village.

The low density of the development, hedges and trees as well as the architecture of the houses in Garden Village (by local architects Percy Runton and William Barry) are undoubtedly the most important factor in determining the character of the area. There is a remarkable uniformity in the overall design of the housing. There are approximately 600 Garden Village Estate houses in 12 different styles and five grades, averaging 12 houses to the acre.

The development of Garden Village itself took place in two distinct phases, starting in 1908 and 1923, although most of the major buildings were completed in the earlier phase.

All the houses were a great improvement on the existing housing available for Reckitt's workers in Hull, but the five grades reflected the position of the occupants in the firm. Whilst these differed in the extent of the accommodation, they have many features in common, which are detailed below. They were all designed by the same architects, which emphasises the way in which each house forms part of and contributes to the character of the whole. This variation in size of houses relating to the position of the occupants was a feature of housing built specifically for workers in one firm and is seen in the earlier Model Villages, such as Saltaire.

Of particular note, because many of them are now listed as being of architectural or historic interest, are the first grade, basically the Managers' houses, which include the detached and semi-detached houses on The Oval and Village Road.

In the 1920's, however, there were some semi-detached houses built along the western side of Village Road. These were not in the same style as the rest of the houses in Garden Village in that, for example, they had shallower-pitched slate roofs. There was also development on part of the east side of Village Road in the 1960s (see below).

The Character of Garden Village

The character of Garden Village consists of the following elements:

USES AND ACTIVITIES

Garden Village is almost totally residential, overwhelmingly single private dwellinghouses, apart from a few purpose-built flats (107-121 James Reckitt Avenue, 2-16 Chamberlain Road, and those within the Shopping Centre).

Arising out of the principles on which Garden Village was founded, community facilities were considered important and were provided as an integral part of the development - the Shopping Centre (which also incorporated a library), Village Hall and Club House. These facilities have progressively disappeared, as changes in lifestyle and mobility affect where people shop and spend their leisure time. Virtually all the facilities in the Shopping Centre have now closed apart from the Library and a ladies hairdressers. The Village Hall was bombed during the war and subsequently demolished, and the Club House is occupied by the Police Boys' Club.

TREE-LINED AVENUES

Some of these are straight and some sinuous. The structure of Garden Village is formed by the roads and the open spaces especially The Oval, which acts as a Village Green. These are laid out to some extent following the shape of the land, which was purchased for the purpose, i.e. following a north-west/south-east orientation at right-angles to Holderness Road. Elm Avenue is aligned along an old track, which originally led north-westwards from Holderness House. The house recently constructed between 2 Maple Grove and 81 Village Road lies on this track. Village Road, Laburnum Avenue, Yew Tree Avenue, Cherry Tree Avenue and Beech Avenue are parallel with each other and follow this orientation.

Others are at right angles to this orientation, e.g. Holly Grove and part of Chestnut Grove, or follow other sections of the boundary, e.g. the rest of Chestnut Grove.

The western boundary of the purchased land is the former Hull-Hornsea branch railway line, which at this point is gently curved. The roads towards the western end of Garden Village, i.e. James Reckitt Avenue and Lilac Avenue, have their lines generally determined by this curve.

Other roads are superimposed on to this basic pattern and are either gently curved, e.g. Maple Grove, or cut across at an angle, such as Lime Tree Avenue.

Trees make a vital contribution to the appearance of Garden Village. The general effect of the whole area is a wooded one, with many trees in private gardens, although the most prominent ones are to be found lining the public streets. These are mostly called 'avenues' and are named after individual types of tree. There are several species, including those after which the individual avenues are named, such as lime, beech and maple. There is, however, no perceptible correlation between the species present in a particular avenue and its name.

The roads and footpaths are mostly narrow, largely in tarmac with granite and York stone kerbs. Some footpaths, particularly in Village Road, are in York Stone flags. The street trees were planted within the footpaths and many have now grown to such an extent that pedestrians are unable to get past without walking on the road.

Road junctions mostly occur at right-angles, with radii of about 20 feet (6 metres), somewhat greater than the street corners in older developments, which existed in the City at that time. Where the roads meet at other angles there is often created a large and irregular space, for example at the junction of Cherry Tree Avenue and Lime Tree Avenue, or at the upper (north-western) end of Village Road. This, together with the trees, hedges and gardens gave a very new character to the development at the time it was built and still contrasts strongly with adjacent housing to the north east and south west.

Roads vary in width. Village Road, being the main entrance to the estate, has a 25-foot (7.5 metres) carriageway with grass verges and 8 foot (2.5 metres) wide footpaths, whereas Beech Avenue, for example, has a carriageway only 18 feet (5.5 metres) wide, no verges, and footpaths only 4 feet (1.2 metres) wide at their narrowest.

The focus, or heart, of the estate is the area which extends from The Oval to the junction of Village Road and Elm Avenue. This is where the largest and most elaborate houses are situated and has a sense of being at the heart of the community by virtue of this.

A secondary focus is provided by the Shopping Centre which, however, is not centrally placed or obviously located, and a casual visitor to the estate may miss it altogether.

HOUSES

The form of many of the houses is with the gable ends facing the road and in the semi-detached form consisting of two joined gables with a valley between.

Where houses have side gables there are often large dormers on the front roof slope with large pitched roofs with the gable end fronting the road.

Like those in many "garden villages" and "garden suburbs" of the time, Runton and Barry's designs are strongly influenced by vernacular housing [that, which had been built for generations, mostly in rural areas].

Whilst the various grades of house do differ from each other, not just in size and elaboration of design but also in materials, decoration etc., there are certain features which are common to most of the houses and could therefore be said to be characteristic of the areas as a whole.

Roofs

Because they are steeply pitched, the roofs are a very prominent feature in the street scene. They consist of small plain clay tiles (these were often manufactured by the Rosemary Company, although other similar tiles, often generically referred to as "Rosemary", were also used), with semi-circular terracotta ridge tiles. The roofs have wide overhanging eaves and sweep low to encompass the porches and other elements in the building. The proportion of the ground-eaves distance to eaves-ridge distance in most of the Garden Village houses is much lower than average, with the result that the roofs are a dominant element.

Dormers

These vary according to their location on the building and its relative importance. On the larger buildings, such as those at the northern end of Village Road, they have hipped tiled roofs. On the smaller buildings, where they are in less prominent positions, the dormers are themselves smaller and have flat roofs, originally leaded and with overhanging eaves.

Gables

Most of the houses have their main ridge parallel to the road, with front projecting gables. These gables are usually pebble-dashed or smooth-rendered, but some are tile-hung or half-timbered. The pebble-dashed gables frequently have some decoration in the form of a terracotta diamond or pattern of diamonds, or a circular pattern in the same materials. While most gables are triangular in form, some are semi-circular, echoing the 'Dutch' gables seen in other parts of the city.

Walls

The walls are mostly pebble-dash with some red brick detailing, many having distinctive corner buttresses. The pebble-dash remains largely unpainted. Some of the grander houses have smooth-rendered walls with brick quoins. Some also have rendered sloping buttresses at ground floor level, forming a characteristic element reminiscent of some of the designs of the architect, C.F.A. Voysey, whose "arts and crafts" style influenced many during this period. Pebble-dashed walls sometimes have brick relieving arches and infill above windows.

Gutters and Fallpipes

The houses have either timber or cast iron gutters, and cast iron fallpipes, sometimes with ornate hopper-heads, sometimes including metal straps above for additional decoration and protection.

Porches

Porches are usually open but contained within the main wall of the house. Some are on the side elevation within double sloping buttresses. Some are formed by an open veranda on the front of the house with a sloping tiled roof projecting out from the main wall of the building.

Doors

Recessed porches are a strong positive feature in Garden Village, creating a shady retreat in contrast to the brightness of the main walls.

The doorway or porch surround is often a brick arch, sometimes incorporating keystone and impost moulding details, sometimes a rectangular surround.

The doors themselves were designed as an integral part of the house, not as an afterthought. They therefore strengthen the character of the building and area rather than detract from it. They were individually designed to be in keeping with the type of house in which they were situated. They are mostly timber with a relatively small amount of glazing - this is at the top, subdivided with glazing bars. Those in arches are often round-headed rather than the opening incorporating a fanlight, which is rare in Garden Village.

Windows

These are almost universally timber casement windows. The larger window openings in the Garden Village houses have a predominantly horizontal emphasis, but they are subdivided

into mullions with a vertical emphasis, and further subdivided by glazing bars into panes with the same vertical proportions.

Bays

Many of the houses have front and/or side bays, either two storey or single storey. Characteristic is the two-storey bay with angled sides, incorporating a pebble-dashed panel between the ground and first floors, often with a bell mouth at its base. Many two-storey bays are under a gable construction. Many bays have a flat roof, with projecting eaves: others have a separate tiled roof, with curved sectors ending at a point.

Chimneys

The houses in Garden Village were built with chimneys and, such was the fashion of the time, these were often prominent and an important feature in the appearance of the buildings, often tall stacks, some with elaborate detailing at the top.

Relationship of houses to the streets

The houses are either detached, semi-detached or in terraces. The characteristic form is for the houses to be arranged parallel to the street frontage, with short front gardens and longer back gardens, frequently with tenfoot access to the rear. The spaces between houses is a crucial element in the character of the area in relation to overall density and immediate visual impact. The integrity of these spaces should be respected.

There are, however, some groups of terraces which are at right-angles to the road, such as The Grove, off Laburnum Avenue, and 25-47 Lilac Avenue, and which have footpath access to the front - an adaptation of a characteristic Hull form.

Although some terraces and semi-detached pairs are set at 45 degrees to a street corner, this is the exception. In most cases there is no attempt to relate to the streets which form the junctions - it is only the size of the gardens and the present of hedges, trees and other planting that softens what would otherwise be an unsatisfactory relationship between house and street on such corners, with what would be very visible side and rear elevations and gardens.

Many houses have original rear extensions. Their design echoes that of the main building, and is characterised by steeply pitched roofs and small plain tiles. While rear extensions are not normally visible from the main streets, their design forms a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area.

GARDENS, CURTILAGES AND ANCILLARY STRUCTURES

Whilst the Garden Cities were given that name because they were intended to be in a garden, i.e. related to the agricultural and horticultural production of the surrounding area, Reckitt's Garden Village was so named because each house had a garden (in contrast to the usual workers' housing of that period).

The impact of gardens on the character of the area is an important one, particularly as the area has matured. It was an original requirement of the estate that every house should have a privet hedge between 2ft 6ins and 4ft in height. Whilst these requirements are probably no longer enforceable, they are still largely adhered to, and thus have a real effect on the character of the area.

The presence of hedges as a boundary treatment softens the lines of the streets and house walls and, combined with the canopies of the street trees, the set-back of the front walls of the houses behind the hedge and the clay tiled steep-sloping roofs, provides the characteristic

views of Garden Village. Hedges are therefore a very important feature in the Conservation Area.

The presence of rear gardens was one of the principles upon which the construction of Garden Village was based. Whilst not prominent when viewed from the street, the presence of rear gardens helps to create the spaciousness which is a vital part of the character of Garden Village.

Timber gates and solid gateposts are also characteristic of the area, clearly designed to be in harmony with the architectural style of the houses themselves.

Similarly with outhouses. Where these exist, they are single-storey and designed to be in the same style as the house to which they relates.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

Garden Village contains several buildings which were originally intended to be of a communal or public nature.

Prominent here is the Shopping Centre on Beech Avenue (Listed Grade II), which was intended to provide a variety of services for the residents. It is two storey, in the Georgian Classical Revival style, stucco and brick with red brick and ashlar dressings and plain tile roofs. It is arranged around three sides of a landscaped courtyard, which opens onto Beech Avenues.

The Club House, Elm Avenue [Listed Grade II] is also in the Georgian Classical Revival style. It is single storey in stucco with red brick and ashlar dressings, a plain tile roof and a central square domed cupola.

Pashby House, 69 James Reckitt Avenue, was built, probably about 1913, as a hostel for girls working at Reckitts. It is a large 3 storey building, with brick, pebble-dash and with a plain tile roof. Whilst in keeping with the style of the domestic buildings in Garden Village, it is an impressive "gateway" building at the edge of the Conservation Area when seen approaching from the south along James Reckitt Avenue.

An important element in the rationale behind Garden Village was the provision for retired employees of the company. This was in the form of three groups of almshouses - Juliet Reckitt Havens [Listed Grade II] and Frederick Reckitt Havens [Listed Grade II] on Laburnum Avenue and Sir James Reckitt Village Havens on Village Road. Each group of almshouses is arranged around two or three sides of a green, open onto the adjacent road. Characteristically single-storey, their form and materials of construction, being brick with plain tile roofs and rendered and timber gables, are harmonious with the other properties in Garden Village.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, REAR COMMUNAL SPACE AND TENFOOTS

It was a basic principle in the design of the Garden Village estate that all houses of whatever grade, would have gardens.

This was, however, intended to be complementary to the provision of public open space, which had its own specific function.

The largest area of open space is The Oval, a grassed area, oval in shape, centrally placed within Garden Village, and is seen in the context of some of the largest houses in the estate, which front onto it.

There is also a related area of public open space which forms the central reservation of Elm Avenue, which is a dual carriageway. It has a central footpath between a double avenue of trees.

There is a formal square surrounded on three sides by the Shopping Centre, intended to form the focus of the activities generated there.

Grass verges between the footpath and the road is not a characteristic feature of Garden Village. Only Garden Village Road and James Reckitt Avenue (i.e. the main public approaches to Garden Village) have them.

Other open spaces in Garden Village are only semi-public in that they are located behind private gardens with very limited access.

There is a triangular area behind properties fronting onto Elm Avenue, Lilac Avenue and Lime Tree Avenue. This was originally intended as a children's play area, and still performs that function, as well as providing a bonfire site.

There is also a small area of land behind the properties fronting onto Lilac Avenue, Lime Tree Avenue and Chestnut Grove, which had access only from the rear gardens of the 16 properties concerned, which was originally a clothes drying area for the residents.

Rear "tenfoot" access ways are a particular characteristic of the Hull environment, and concreted tenfoots have been incorporated into the Garden Village layout to serve most of the properties where this was at all feasible. Their original function was, at least partly, to allow access for carts of manure. They now provide access to garages which have been built in rear gardens. Garden Village represents a very early application of tenfoots in workers housing.

Detrimental Elements

Garden Village was developed within a relatively short time period and, as detailed above, the buildings have a unity of design which contributes positively to the character of the Conservation Area.

Following the second phase of building in the mid-1920's there was a halt in any new development until the 1960s, when three separate areas of house-building took place, each of which, because of its design, massing or layout, detracts from the character of the area. These are:

1. 44-82 Village Road
a group of ten semi-detached buildings in typical 1960s' design - yellow brick, low pitched concrete tiled roofs, horizontal emphasis windows and a general lack of detailing.
2. 17-21 The Oval, 21 Elm Avenue and 24 May Tree Avenue
These are a group of seven 1960s bungalows, three detached and four semi-detached, in buff brick with concrete tiled roofs. These are built on the site of the former Village Hall. They are the only bungalows in Garden Village and, in contrast to the Village Hall, they provide a weak focus at a prominent position at the north-western end of The Oval open space by reason of their height, form and lack of detailing.
3. Acacia Drive
This is a development of 41 houses, also constructed in the late 1960s before the declaration of the Conservation Area, out of the northern part of the surviving grounds to Holderness House, on land previously used for prefabs following the Second World War. These are in terraces, and their arrangement, style and materials are alien to that in the rest of Garden Village.

Other features which are detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area include:

- a. The roadside trees, originally planted adjacent to the kerb edge of the footpaths, having grown in girth to the extent that many are now blocking the footpaths, forcing pedestrians out into the road.
- b. the Shopping Centre now only has one shop - a ladies' hairdressers. This results in a desolate appearance to the area and a lack of people milling round because there is a lack of facilities.
- c. Garages

Whilst the inventor of the first commercially successful internal combustion engine (William Dent Priestman) was a resident of Garden Village, the estate was laid out before the motor car became a prominent feature of our daily life.

There has therefore been a demand for the erection of garages. Where possible, these have been built adjacent to tenfoots at the bottom of residents' gardens. Most of these garages are of inappropriate design.

With the semi-detached houses, however, garages have been built which take access via a side drive and these are often clearly visible from the street.

It is often clear (from their design and materials of construction) that these are additions rather than original features, many having been erected without the need for planning consent.

- d. Through Traffic

Garden Village was originally designed to be reasonably self-contained, some distance from the main Holderness Road. The growth in motor traffic together with better links to other parts of the City has encouraged through traffic, which has had a detrimental effect on the character of at least part of the area.

- e. House Extensions

All Garden Village houses were provided with bathrooms and indoor toilets, so there has been no need to erect extensions to provide basic amenities, but, particularly in recent years, with changes in activities carried on in the home, rising expectations of privacy and the financial and other difficulties involved in moving house, the erection of an extension has been an option considered by many.

In an area like Garden Village, which has a range of carefully designed dwellings, the standard of design required to incorporate a substantial extension successfully has not always been achieved. Extensions have been constructed (not always of a size or position to require planning permission) which, by reason of materials, shape and position, do not relate well to the house concerned and thus detract from the character of the Conservation Area.

- f. House Alterations

The strong character of the houses in Garden Village is such that inappropriate alterations tend to be noticeable and detrimental to the appearance of the area, not least because most house owners have kept the original features or replaced them to match.

The most noticeable alterations are to windows, where the originals (usually subdivided by mullions and glazing bars, resulting in vertically proportioned frames) have been replaced by large single panes, often of horizontal proportions and

subdivided asymmetrically. New materials such as uPVC have also been used, which are detrimental because of their reflective quality and their inability to reproduce existing patterns.

Some doors have also been replaced by those of unsympathetic materials and design. The practice of putting doors on the porch entrances has affected the appearance of some houses adversely, including the symmetry of semi-detached properties. Because of their position these can be particularly prominent in the scheme.

Rooflights in highly visible roof slopes tend to break up the unifying effect that the small clay-tiled roofs produce.

g. Weathering

Buildings weather with age, and this generally adds to their attraction. Two elements in Garden Village do, however, detract to some extent from the appearance of the Conservation Area. Firstly, some of the pebble dash has become very grimy with pollution and staining over the years to the extent of becoming visually unattractive. Secondly, many of the roofing tiles have become almost black from a similar cause. In addition, many roofs which are north facing have a considerable growth of moss, presumably caused by lack of sunlight.

h. Street Furniture

This has accumulated in an 'ad hoc' way over the years, and the street lights, concrete and metal bollards, postal pouches and telephone kiosks, for example, are in no integrated style, nor do they relate to the character of Garden Village in any way.

Approved by the Planning & Design Committee, 22nd January, 1997