

Appendix 1

Boot and shoe conservation area – consultation document

Introduction

Northamptonshire has long been famous for its boot and shoe industry and Northampton illustrates the greatest concentration and survival of the remains of the industry throughout the county. The industry was based in the county's towns and villages and has had a huge impact on their history and development.

Northampton's boots and shoes were being exported across the country from as early as the 17th century. The industry was originally a home based craft from individuals homes, but during the mid 19th century became mechanised and industrialised .

The rapid development of the boot and shoe industry, within Northampton, in the mid 19th century created a very distinctive urban environment. In a period of 30-years between 1850 and 1880 a transformation took place in the north of the town which changed from open countryside into a thriving industrial area with tightly packed houses, workshops and factories. The boot and shoe industry employed many local people for a period of just over 100 years. Although the fortunes of the boot and shoe industry have been in decline since the late 20th century it remains an important part of the town's identity.

The importance of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe industry was recognised in 1999 when English Heritage undertook a survey of all the remaining buildings associated with the industry. Over 450 individual industrial buildings, including factories, workshops, tanneries and leather works were identified and surveyed. The survey resulted in a publication called 'Built to Last? The buildings of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Industry' (English Heritage, 1999) and a number of representative buildings being listed for protection. Northampton Borough Council now proposes to designate a Boot and Shoe Conservation Area to protect and enhance the area made up by this distinctive mix of factories, workshops, housing and associated shops, pubs, schools and chapels in these built up urban areas.

Importance of a boot and shoe conservation area

In Northampton, as elsewhere, conservation areas have typically covered attractive, rural villages such as Hardingstone, Collingtree and Great Billing; important civic centres such as Northampton town centre's including buildings such as All Saints, County Hall and the Guildhall or the large majestic houses surrounding Abington Park and the Racecourse.

The Victorian terraced backstreets of the town have been considered commonplace and ordinary. It is only in recent years that the significance and unique character offered by these areas have been understood. There are a number of distinctive features, which are considered important and worthy of preserving:

- Houses and industrial buildings sitting side-by-side.

- A range of social, religious, educational and commercial buildings intermixed with the housing and industrial buildings to provide for all of the communities needs.
- A range of factories, specialist industrial buildings and workshops of different sizes and types.
- Long straight streets with regimented layout and roofscapes (rooflines).
- Houses usually two-storey; factories typically no higher than three-storey.
- Houses facing immediately onto the street with no front gardens.
- Factory buildings with elaborate designs to illustrate their importance in the community.
- Chapels and churches in key locations dominating views in the area.
- Important corner buildings including shops, pubs and factory entrances.
- Almost no trees or public green / open space.

What are Conservation areas?

Conservation Areas were first introduced in 1967 in the Civil Amenities Act and were later defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning and the Historic Environment (2010) sets out government policy on conservation areas. They are defined as 'designated heritage assets' and there is an emphasis on enhancing or better revealing the significance of conservation areas.

The objectives of conservation area designation are:

- To give effect to conservation policies for a particular neighbourhood or area.
- To introduce a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and structures within the area.
- To introduce a general control over the removal of important trees.
- To provide the basis for policies designated to preserve or enhance all aspects of the character or appearance that define an area's special interest. This will necessarily include the identification of buildings and structures, open spaces views, trees and areas of the public realm, which make positive contributions to the area.

Implications

The designation of a Conservation Area has some implications for householders and involves the removal of some permitted development rights enjoyed by single residential properties. These will include:

- Cladding of any part of the exterior of the building
- Alterations to the roof including the insertion of dormer windows
- Installation, alteration, replacement of a chimney, flue, soil vent pipe.
- Installation, alteration, replacement of satellite dish / antenna.

Specific issue of concern in a boot and shoe conservation area

The aim of establishing a boot and shoe conservation area is to ensure that the special character of the area can be protected for the future. The appraisal will aim to:

- Identify the special interest of the boot and shoe area so that historically important elements may be recognised and protected.
- Provide guidance on how new building and other works can enhance the established character and sense of place within the conservation area.

- Identify and put in place policies to seek to improve those elements which are considered to have a negative impact on the built environment of the area.

Particular issues which are likely to be of concern are:

- Unsympathetic change of use of former factories
- Traffic management
- Parking
- Loss of historic building materials
- Loss of industrial workshops
- Loss of characteristic features of the area such as chimneys
- Introduction of unsympathetic roof alterations
- Loss or inappropriate alteration of corner sites

Which area?

The economic development of Northampton town was heavily influenced by the boot and shoe industry. Therefore the majority of 19th century development in the town has some association with the industry.

The area to the north of The Mounts is considered to have the greatest density of boot and shoe factories and the best survival of buildings associated with the industry and the widest range of building types in Northampton.

The large area identified has approximately 70% of the surviving boot and shoe buildings in the town and is considered to capture the complete character of the industry from its origins as a craft industry through to the development of single large factories employing teams of workers. The regimented street pattern and close association of industrial and domestic buildings is an important characteristic of the area. The oldest surviving buildings are grouped around the area to the west of Overstone Road and the area to the south of Abington Square.

Three potential solutions for a boundary to the boot and shoe conservation area have been identified:

History and development of the area

The proposed conservation area covers just one phase of the development of the boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire; arguably the most important, intense and rapid period of change for the industry.

The area was remarkable in being transformed from a landscape of open fields on the edge of Northampton town to a thriving industrialised, urban environment within thirty years. A map produced in 1847 by Wood and Law that shows the area as almost entirely agricultural fields with two exceptions – there is some small-scale development of the area to the north of Abington Square and a single street Great Russell Street (now the location of the Chronicle and Echo offices) branching out to the north of the Upper Mounts. The Ordnance Survey map of 1880s shows the area as almost fully developed with the streets laid out and many of the terraced houses, churches, chapels, schools and social clubs built. A number of factories had been erected at that time, but others (including some of the larger buildings along St Michael's Road and Dunster Street) are not shown until the Ordnance Survey map 1900.

There was little large-scale development of the area after 1900 with the exception of the construction of the former Cannon Cinema (now Jesus Army Centre) on the corner of Lower Mounts and Abington Square. The period 1900 to 1950 was one of stability, good trade and growth with Northampton boot and shoe firms producing a significant proportion of the country's footwear.

The boot and shoe industry went through a significant decline in the late 20th century – in 1958 there were 48 boot and shoe manufacturers in the area, but this had reduced to six by 2001. The decline in the industry particularly since the 1970s has led to a change in the character of the area. Many of the medium sized boot and shoe factories were found to be unsuitable for modern working practices and were thus abandoned. At first the factory buildings were left empty, but many have since been converted to other uses including up-market flats and apartments. In contrast the surrounding houses and associated churches, chapels and shops have largely remained in their original uses.

The structure and layout of this area largely remains intact, however over time there have been small changes which affect its historic appearance.

Characteristics of the area

Building materials

The building material for the area was universally brick; which would have been made locally. Bricks with different colours were used for decorative effect and different bonds or patterns of brickwork were experimented with.

Roofs would have been covered in Welsh slate – brought by canal along the Northampton Arm of the Grand Junction Canal, but many of the roofs have now been replaced with concrete tile.

Windows throughout the area would have originally been sash windows with four main panes due to the introduction of cheaper glass in the mid 19th century and the requirement for the windows of all homes to open in the upper half from 1858.. Some of these windows have remained intact, but many more have been replaced with windows of a wide range of designs and materials (aluminium, timber, upvc)

Green spaces

One of the key features of the conservation area is the almost total lack of green space and trees. The only public green, open space in the area is around churches and chapels (including the former St Edmunds Church – now demolished) and there are very few trees other than those planted as part of traffic management systems.

Buildings

Industrial buildings

There are a wide range of industrial buildings located throughout the area with variation in size, plan form, location and historic and present day uses. Factories are variously placed alongside terraced houses, on corner plots, gable end on to the street, in courtyards and to the rear of houses. The buildings are not spaced in a regular or logical pattern throughout the area. The only similarity between all of the industrial buildings within the area is that the front building line respects the line of buildings they sit within, for example, they do not protrude forward of the terraced houses.

There is no clear physical distinction between factories and workshops. Factories are understood to mean buildings occupied by larger firms where all the stages of the footwear manufacture process were controlled within the building. Factories became more standard following the invention of the sewing machine in the 1850s. Workshops tend to be much smaller operations and are responsible for just one aspect of the process – they vary from small individual workshops often associated with individual homes (of which there are very few examples in Northampton) to larger specialist enterprises employing a number of people. It is not always possible to determine whether an individual building would have been operating as a factory or a workshop.

There is no physical distinction between buildings producing boots and shoes and those related to the associated trades such as the making and grinding of knives or shaped stamps for cutting of leather, cardboard box manufacturers and the producers of specific parts of the shoe such as eyelets and laces. There are no surviving buildings for tanneries, heel makers or last makers in the area and only 2 leather dressers and carriers buildings both of which are in Dunster Street.

The most common form of industrial building (up until 1900) was the three-storey factory - sometimes with a basement. The buildings were usually of a simple, narrow rectangular plan, but often with additions such as a corner ornamentation or protruding wing to the rear.

Houses

The housing in the area is almost exclusively small scale terraced housing, two-storey in height, facing directly on to the road with no front gardens. The only distinctions between the houses lies in the level and type of ornamentation and architectural embellishment. Many of the houses have lost their original historic features such as doors and windows and original roofing materials, but have tended to retain their basic form with few alterations and extensions and very little interference with the roofscape (roofline) of the building.

Corner buildings

Corner buildings are of significance throughout the area and tend to be elaborately decorated. Shops and pubs are often located on street corners. In some instances factories have their entrances on the corner of two streets, which would have given them a greater presence in the surrounding area, but also provided additional light into the working areas.

Churches and chapels

Churches and chapels are important buildings within the boot and shoe area and are usually in prominent locations and form the basis of significant views. The buildings are relatively plain, constructed of brick in a simple gothic style.

The designation of a Boot and Shoe Conservation Area in Northampton will allow the physical remains of the industry to be preserved and enhanced and the town's rich heritage to be celebrated. A more detailed Conservation Area Appraisal will be produced once the area proposed for designation has been finalised.

Boundary Options

Option 1 – designate one large conservation area.

Advantages

- Includes approximately 70% of the surviving boot and shoe buildings, including the oldest surviving buildings
- Covers an area which fully demonstrates the development of the boot and shoe industry from its home based craft origins through to large-scale mechanised production
- Clearly demonstrates the regimented street pattern or layout
- Clearly demonstrates the relationship between the industrial and domestic buildings

Disadvantages

- Covers an area of 63.72 hectares and therefore captures buildings, which are not associated with the industry
- Covers many buildings, both industrial and domestic, which have already experienced significant change

Option 2 – designate a single smaller area

Advantages

- Reduces the number of non-boot and shoe buildings included within the designation
- Covers an area which demonstrates the regimented street pattern or layout
- Incorporates the most significant buildings

Disadvantages

- Includes a smaller percentage of surviving boot and shoe buildings which may then be at risk of loss or unsympathetic alteration
- Poorer understanding of the character of the area and how it was moulded by the development of the industry

Option 3 – designate a family of small but related conservation areas

Advantages

- Minimises the impact on non-boot and shoe related buildings
- Retains the opportunity of including the oldest surviving boot & shoe buildings

Disadvantages

- Inclusion of the regimented street pattern is hampered
- Disjointed understanding of the development of the industry and the relationship of surviving buildings
- May present difficulties in 'selling' the idea to other professionals and the local community

In all cases, it is the importance of the character of the area as a whole which needs to be encompassed by the designation. The designation must recognise the significance of the industry to Northampton and the rapid development of the area as one of the principle characteristics of the conservation area.

