

Oxton Conservation Area

The Oxton Society's policies and code of practice

Dated: December 2002

When The Society considers and comments on planning applications, it has to work within Wirral Borough Council's planning framework.

This planning framework is mainly embodied in two planning policy documents namely the:

1. Unitary Development Plan for the Wirral
2. Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 21 - Oxton Village Conservation Area

This document describes these two planning policy documents and outlines the Society's role and its approach to planning applications.

1. The Unitary Development Plan (UDP)

This is the strategic planning framework for the whole of the Wirral area. Within it, however, there are a number of strategic and specific policies which apply to the Oxton Village Conservation Area. There are two such policies in the UDP:

Policy CH2

Development within a Conservation Area will be permitted where the visual and operational aspects of the proposals can be demonstrated to preserve or enhance:

- (i) the distinctive characteristics of the Area, including important views into and out of;
- (ii) the general layout and design of the Area, including the relationship between the buildings, structures, trees and characteristic open spaces; and
- (iii) the character and settings of period buildings and other elements which make a positive contribution to the appearance and special character of the Area.

Policy CH7

In relation to the Oxton Village Conservation Area the principal planning objectives for the Area will be to:

- (i) retain the character of the early Victorian settlement; and
- (ii) preserve the sense of contrast between houses in spacious grounds and cottage scale groups of dwellings.

Clearly, policies written in these rather general terms are open to different interpretations. The Wirral Council has therefore approved a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 21 that puts some "flesh" on these general policy statements.

2. Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 21

This is specifically about the Oxton Village Conservation Area. It sets out a range of planning policies as follows:

- (i) **new development** must respect Oxton's historic context in volume, scale, form, materials, and quality, as should proposals for development adjacent to or affecting the setting of the Conservation Area. In considering applications for development within garden areas, particular regard will be given to the setting of the parent building and adjacent dwellings, and to the density of surrounding dwellings;
- (ii) proposals for new **development for commercial, office or industrial use** will not normally be acceptable outside the area of existing shops along Rose Mount, Christchurch Road or Claughton

Firs. Development will not be permitted if it would generate levels of traffic, parking, noise, or environmental problems which would be detrimental to the character or appearance of the Area;

- (iii) **new shop fronts** should conform to the Local Planning Authority's Shop Front Design Guide. In particular, advertisements on fascia boards should be painted, and should not consist of individual acrylic lettering. Internally illuminated signs, and externally mounted, solid roller shutters will not normally be permitted;
- (iv) **the demolition of period buildings** within the Conservation Area will not normally be permitted. This includes buildings such as coach houses, lodges or conservatories, which help to give a historic context to some older properties. Similarly, the demolition or partial; demolition of stone walls will be resisted. In order to promote their long term preservation, the Conservation Officer has produced a re-pointing guide, which also relates to the maintenance of other stone buildings; and
- (v) due to the sensitive nature of the Conservation Area, **outline planning applications** will not normally be accepted.

The Role of the Oxton Society

Planning applications are referred to the Society for comments by the Wirral Council. The Society is an Advisory Body in this regard and any comments it makes are taken account of, but do not have to be endorsed. Ultimately decisions on planning applications are the responsibility of the Wirral Council's Planning Committee.

In commenting on planning applications the Society has to interpret how any application relates to the planning framework outlined above.

Above all the Society is concerned with the external appearance of the development.

The degree of judgment that has to be exercised clearly varies with the nature and scale of the development proposed. The great majority of the applications seen by the Society are endorsed as acceptable and do not require any substantial comment. Where applications do give rise to concern the Society tries to apply a basic set of principles when responding. These principles can be summarized by the following questions:

1. would the application preserve or enhance the distinctive characteristics of the Conservation Area, especially in relation to its scale, form, design details and use of materials? ;
2. would the application, if approved, create a precedent which could prejudice the ability of the Society to resist similar applications in the future?;
3. has the application been submitted in a form which the Society feels accurately represents the location and setting of the development proposal?;
4. does the application provide sufficient information on other aspects of the proposal to allow an informed judgment to be made about its desirability?;
5. would the application despite being acceptable in itself, create undesirable effects beyond the site in question, in relation to the construction process, generation of traffic, noise and environmental problems etc?;
6. have similar applications been submitted previously and is the Society's response consistent?

At all times the Society tries to make its judgments in an impartial and informed manner in line with the above planning framework and principles. Inevitably, however, when judgments are being made there will be differences of opinion between the Society and local applicants, and with the planning officers responsible for advising the Wirral Council's Planning Committee. Indeed, at the time of drafting this document the Society is concerned about the degree to which the interpretation of their planning framework is diverging from that of the Society.

As can be seen from the above, the Society does not attempt to act as an arbitrator between individual applicants and the Council. Neither does it wish to enter into negotiations on behalf of either party – although it can offer views from the perspective of a Conservation Society. Thus it may be necessary for the Society's Planning Group to undertake a 'site visit' so that it can make informed comments. In doing this the Society will:

- conduct the visit with decorum and in small numbers;
- not enter private property unless invited to do so.

The Society is thus acting on behalf of its members and in the role agreed with the Council. These are not 'personal' matters but matters of "impersonal" judgment by the Society acting, at all times, to try to ensure the Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced.