

Conservation area
character appraisal

Status:
Consultation Draft

Design and conservation
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Springfield Green, Conservation Area



1.0 Introduction

Springfield Green is a small village green, which formed the historic centre of the medieval parish of Springfield. It includes a medieval church, some exceptionally high quality eighteenth century houses and significant open spaces and trees.

It is located north of the London-Norwich railway line, approximately 1.4km north-east of Chelmsford town centre. The history of the area is intimately linked with the medieval parish of Springfield. Today the area is absorbed within the Chelmsford urban area.

The Springfield Green conservation area boundary is loosely drawn around the historic core of the settlement, including the green, principal historic buildings and their setting.

1.2 Purpose of Conservation Areas

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). Central Government Planning Policy Statement 5, Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5), emphasises that the character of conservation areas derives not 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 space between buildings.

Designation of a conservation area extends planning controls over certain types of development, including extensions, alteration to roofs, the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees. While designation does not preclude any change, it necessitates careful scrutiny of proposals and the area may be subject to pressures that harm or enhance its character and appearance.

1.3 Character of Springfield Green

Springfield Green derives much of its special character from its historic buildings, open spaces and trees. There have been large areas of new development within the adjacent area in the late twentieth century, but the area retains an attractive village character with the green and historic buildings as a focus.

1.4 Conservation Area Appraisals

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty upon local planning authorities to review its conservation areas (section 69) and formulate proposals for enhancement (section 71), whilst PPS5 emphasises the importance of understanding what is significant about a place to inform decisions about future change.

This conservation area appraisal was prepared by Chelmsford Borough Council. The research and fieldwork were carried out in November and December 2009.

The appraisal provides a brief development history of the current settlement, followed by a description and assessment of character. The contribution of different individual elements to the overall character is identified. Any issues which may affect the protection of character will be highlighted and opportunities for enhancement identified.

2.0 Statutory Protection (Figure 1)

The conservation area was designated by Chelmsford Borough Council on the 7th September 1982 (figure 1).

There are six listed buildings within the area. These are All Saints Church and The Old Rectory, both grade II*, Dukes Priory, Springfield Dukes Cottages, Springfield Place and Springfield Place Coach House, all grade II.

There is a cycle way and public footpath which runs along the southern boundary of the conservation area and follows the railway line towards Chelmsford town centre.

There are Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) covering trees at the Old Rectory (TPO/86/036), Church Lane (TPO/80/002, TPO/82/0117, TPO/71/002), Lawn Lane (TPO/85/043, TPO/01/077), Springfield Place (TPO/82/0117, PO/71/002) and Springfield Green (TPO/85/034). In addition, any other tree within the conservation area is protected by the requirement to give written notification of proposed works to a tree in a conservation area to the local planning authority at least six weeks before it is intended to carry out those works.

3.0 Location and Setting

Springfield Green is located within the urban area of Chelmsford, approximately 1.4km northeast of the town centre (figure 2). The London to Norwich railway line is immediately to the south. To the north and east there is 1970s estate housing.

The main approaches are from Springfield Road, either from the south along Stump Lane, the southeast along Springfield Green or the west via Arbour Lane. Lawn Lane provides a north-south route linking with the Chelmer Valley Way, Broomfield and Little Waltham.

The site is on the edge of the valley where the rivers Chelmer and Wid meet in Chelmsford town centre, with the north Essex boulder clay plateau beyond.

4.0 Origins and Development

There is archaeological evidence of human habitation in the wider area from the prehistoric period, when the fertile valleys of the rivers Chelmer and Wid provided a scene for hunter gatherers.

Two significant Neolithic (c.4,000 BC) sites have been found in the vicinity of Chelmsford, thought to be part of a sophisticated social and economic system operating in the Chelmer Valley and Blackwater Estuary. Springfield Cursus, a kind of processional way with a large ditch and internal bank, was located close to the flood plain. A causewayed enclosure has also been found at Springfield Lyons. A Bronze Age (c.2,000 BC) ring ditch enclosure was later constructed at Springfield Lyons.

A Roman settlement existed nearby at Moulsham. Springfield Road is itself the London-Colchester Roman Road. The re-use of Roman brick in the construction of All Saints Church suggests there may have been Roman buildings in the vicinity of Springfield Green.

The first firm evidence of buildings at Springfield Green is the extant All Saints Church originating from the early twelfth century. A map by John Walker of c.1615 shows buildings on the sites of the present Springfield Place and Dukes, for the latter a mansion house is recorded on the site in 1361.

Figure 1 Key features

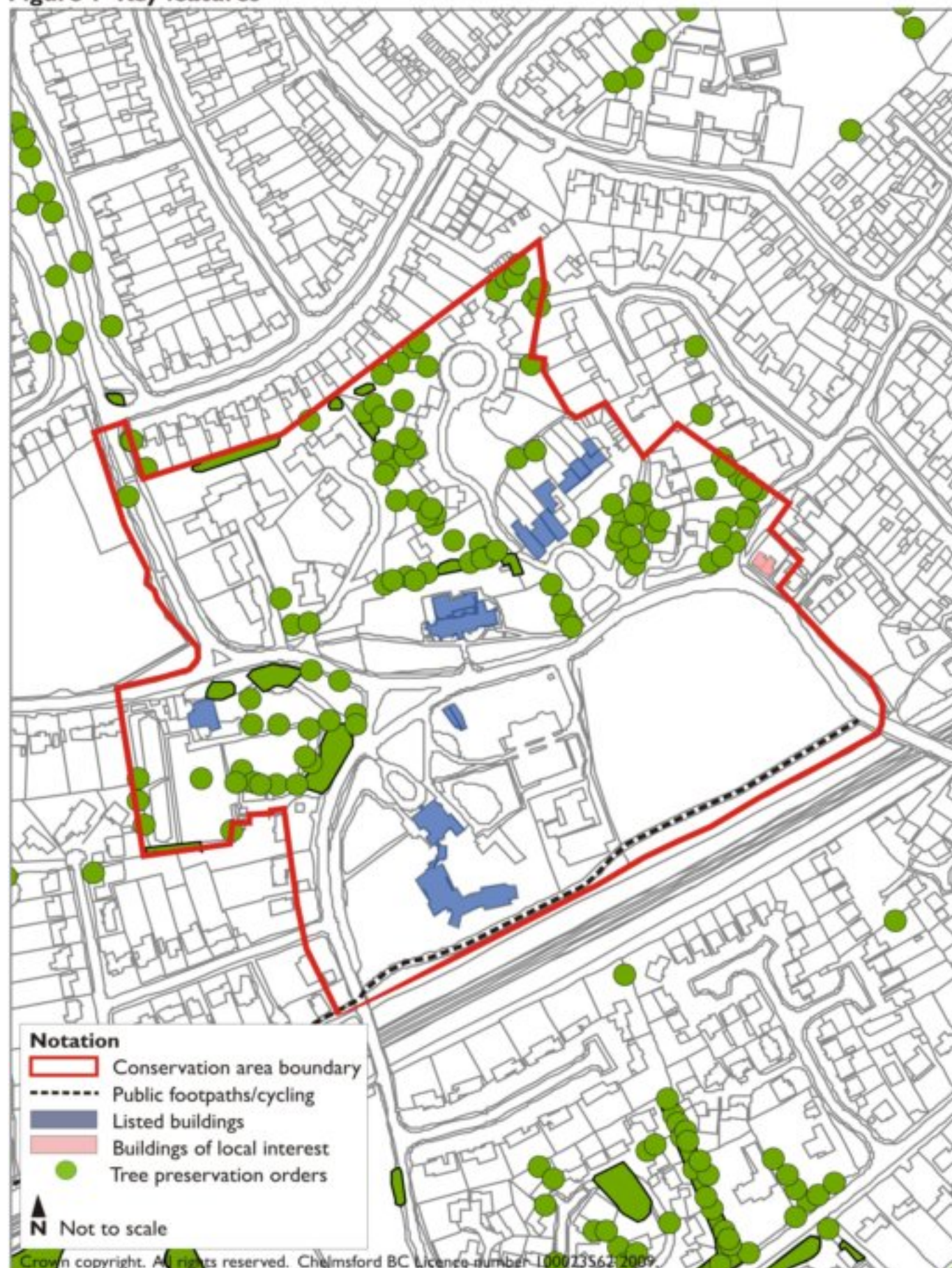


Figure 2 Location of Springfield Green



It is likely the church was built to serve a dispersed agricultural community and the historic core of the parish developed around it.

During the eighteenth century The Old Rectory, Springfield Place and Dukes were constructed. These three buildings are identified on the Chapman and Andre map of 1777 (figure 3). The four main routes to the green, Arbour Lane, Lawn Lane, Stump Lane and Springfield Green, also exist at this time. A number of other buildings are also shown around the green and at the junction with Springfield Road. A formal landscape is indicated to the north of Springfield Place.

The pre-railway settlement is further shown in the tithe map of 1842 (figure 4). This clearly shows the layout of the key historic buildings which remain today and indicates a pattern of early field boundaries to the surrounding area.

The first edition ordnance survey map of 1878 (figure 5) shows the railway line (completed in 1843) and depicts the area in great detail, including a parkland setting to the north of Springfield Place and ponds on the edge of the green, adjacent to Dukes and at the Rectory.

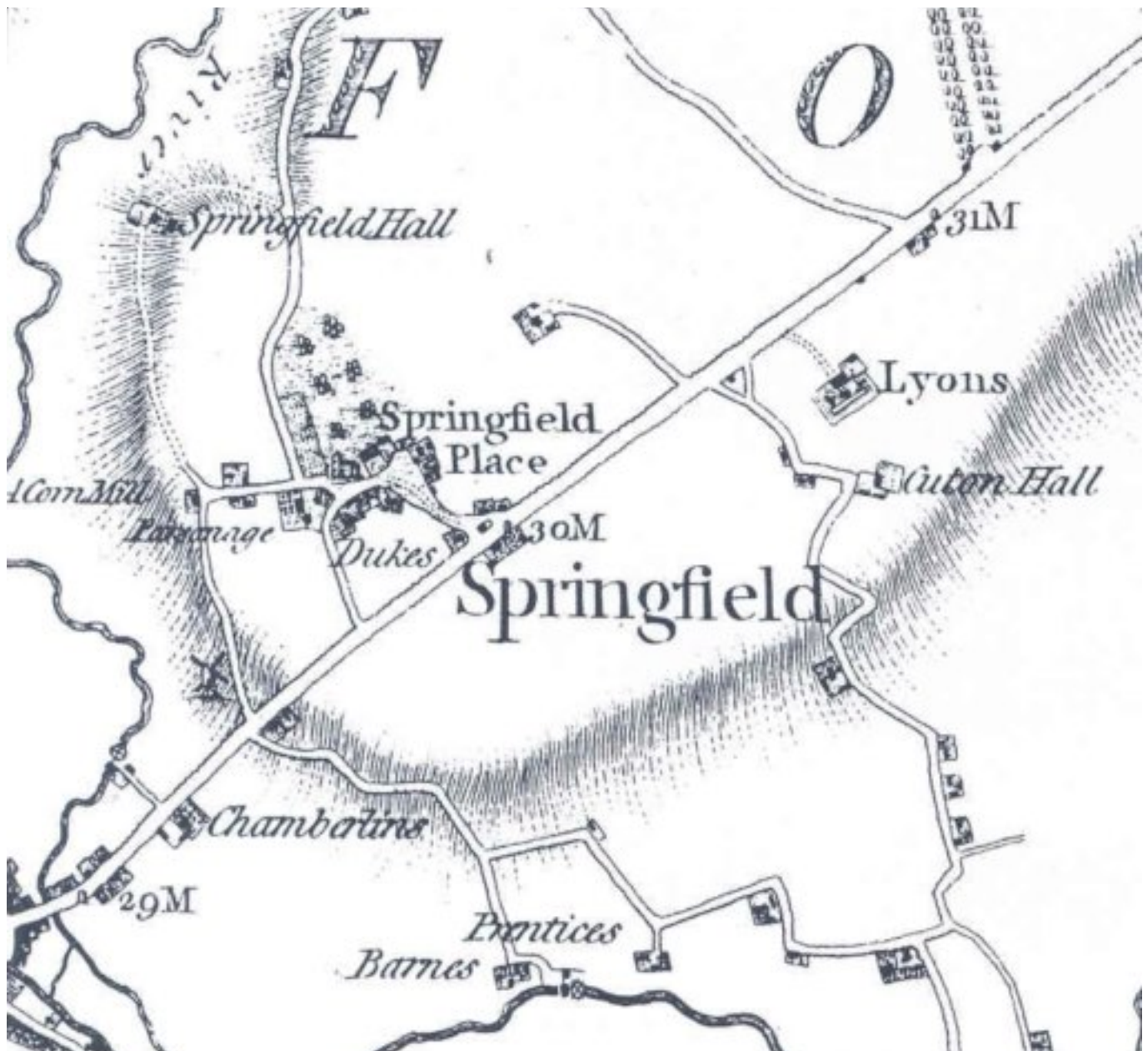


Figure 3 Chapman and Andre map 1777

The parish boundary was redrawn in the nineteenth century, so that Springfield Green forms part of the Chelmsford urban area and the parish of Springfield therefore no longer has a physical historic core within its boundaries.

By 1942 (Figure 6) there is little change, although ribbon development along Springfield Road is apparent.

The modern day settlement is set within the urban expansion of Chelmsford, surrounded by estate housing, mostly dating from the 1970s. All Saints Church retains its strong links with the community.



Figure 4 Tithe map 1842



Figure 5 First edition ordnance survey map 1878



Figure 6 Fourth edition ordnance survey map 1942

5.0 Character Appraisal

The conservation area boundary is clearly defined to the south by the railway line. To the west the boundary includes the Old Rectory and Stump Lane, the front gardens of the houses on the west side of Stump Lane are also included as the open setting and trees contribute to the rural character of the lane. To the east the boundary follows the outside of the green and includes historic buildings at the corner of Exeter Road. To the north the boundary is defined by modern estate housing. The late twentieth century housing within the immediate setting of Springfield Place and the edge of Lawn Lane is included because of its open, low density layout, and its historic association with Springfield Place and its trees all contribute to local character.

The area substantially retains its village green character, focused on All Saints Church and large houses set in substantial grounds, surrounded by mature trees and open spaces, including the green itself.

The contribution of individual buildings and townscape analysis plans are shown as figures 7 and 8. Contribution to character is based on English Heritage assessment criteria, as set out in Appendix A.

5.1 Spatial Analysis

The green is a significant open space at the centre of the area. To the south the cycle/footpath provides an important link with the town centre. The railway line within a deep cutting is barely visually discernable, although the industrial style galvanised boundary fence stands out as an incongruous feature. On the approach from Springfield Road the hump back bridge over the railway line frames a view towards the green, with Springfield Place as the main focus and All Saints Church beyond (figure 9). The clump of trees to the eastern edge of the green helps to define its edge and focus views. Dense planting encloses the green on the north and east sides, framing views of Springfield Place (figure 10). The former route of the track toward All Saints Church remains as an indentation running across the green.

The semi detached almshouses (figure 11) are included within the conservation area and are also of local interest. They were designed by *J. Clarke*, are constructed of red brick and flint, with decorative timber gables. The inscribed tie beams read 'These almshouses were erected 1878' and 'In memoriam M S Orbit 1875'. An unsympathetic flat roofed extension has been added to number 40 (the right hand side), however they remain an important feature on the edge of the green. Number 42, a red brick late nineteenth century house, is also included within the conservation area due to its historic character and group value with the almshouses.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

Figure 7 Contribution of individual buildings to character



Figure 8 Town scape analysis



The modern estate housing adjacent to Exeter Road is beyond the conservation area. Number 44-50 (even) Springfield Green are late twentieth century houses, but have an informal layout, open setting and extensive mature treed gardens (figure 12) and form part of the conservation area's character.



Figure 12

The grass verge to the front of 2 and 4 Exeter Road is included within the conservation area as a part of the open setting to the green. From Exeter Road the mature trees to the former grounds of Springfield Place and on the green are a significant feature (figure 13).



Figure 13

Springfield Place is one of three exceptionally fine red brick eighteenth century houses within the area. It dates from early in the century and has a nine bay front with two projecting wings incorporating diocletion windows to the top floor. Substantial elements of the walled garden to the rear and boundary treatments to the front remain, which contribute to its setting and status.

From within the grounds to the front of Springfield Place there is a strong visual relationship with All Saints Church. Views south across the green are enclosed by mature tree planting.

The house and coach house were each converted into three houses in 1982 and further development followed to the north. Despite this the appearance from the green remains as a fine mansion in open grounds.



Figure 14

The coach house is set back from the green, but from within the grounds has a strong visual relationship with Springfield Place (figure 14).

The housing to the north is informally laid out, of modest scale, within a landscape setting and with significant tree planting.

All Saints Church (figure 15) is the most significant building within the area and is the focus of views on approaching from all directions, although its modest height, enclosed surrounding (both built and treed) and topography mean that it is not visible in any long views from the surrounding area.



Figure 15

The churchyard provides a tranquil setting at the centre of the area, with many mature fine trees to its perimeter.

The church itself originates from the early twelfth century, the flint rubble nave includes a round headed Norman window formed with a Roman brick surround. The chancel and tower were added in the early fourteenth century, following collapse the tower was partly rebuilt using red brick, which is dated to 1586 by the inscription in the south elevation. The whole church was restored in 1867 by *J. Clarke*, who added the south porch. During the restoration a number of monuments were moved to the base of the tower, including that of *Richard Coates*, the engineer to the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation who died in 1822. A stair turret was added to the northwest side of the tower by *Frederick Chancellor* in 1887, who also extended the vestry. There is a large brick meeting room to the north added in 1979 and further extended in 1988.

To the southwest of All Saints the small triangular green has a massive mature London Plane (figure 16). The green is simply defined by timber posts. Parking is visually intrusive around the green and to this part of Church Lane. To the west the low density bungalows are unobtrusive and include many significant trees and hedges. The entrance and boundary treatments are important aspects of the understated appearance of the building group.



Figure 16

Further west, Lawn Lane is significant for its tree lined approach to the area, with gardens to the east and Pollards Meadow recreation ground to the west. At the junction of Lawn Lane and Church Lane The Old Rectory is a key feature (figure 17). The grounds include many fine trees and provide an important open setting to the house. To the west is a long linear pond, a miniature version of the grand canal at Boreham House, probably dug when the Old Rectory was built. The building itself is a fine mid eighteenth century house, dated by a lead hopper head to the north front, containing the date 1752 and the initials CG, for Charles Grettan (inducted 1746). The roof has two ranges, with dormers and two gables on the north front facing Lawn Lane. The boundary to Lawn Lane has a high red brick eighteenth century wall, beyond which there is a close boarded fence to the corner of Stump Lane, which appears incongruous.



Figure 17

Opposite, Springfield Dukes (now the Priory Hospital) is an early eighteenth century mansion sitting within substantial well treed grounds. The east front has seven bays with blue bricks and red brick window surrounds and a central segmental pediment (figure 18). To the rear the building was considerably remodelled by *Arthur Needham Wilson* c.1906 in the Arts and Crafts style with plain tile hanging and casement windows. Beyond are further late twentieth century hospital buildings, which although of considerable size, manage to preserve the important open setting to the group.



Figure 18

To the east, there is a large pond, then extensive areas of surface parking, which although intrusive within the site, are screened from public view. The flat roofed 1960s clinic building to the southeast corner of the site is bland and detracts from the character of the area. On the northern boundary Springfield Dukes Cottages (figure 19) are modest eighteenth century timber framed buildings, which are prominent from Church Lane. *Oliver Goldsmith* is reputed to have lived in one of the cottages and written his poem 'The Deserted Village' there.



Figure 19



Figure 20

Stump Lane opens out at its junction with Church Lane and provides a fine view of All Saints Church, little changed since the early twentieth century (figure 20). To the south the well treed grounds to Springfield Dukes flank the lane to the east with houses to the west. The spacing of the houses, open front gardens and hedges and trees helps to provide a soft edge and add to the rural character of the lane (figure 21), although recent garage blocks, hard standings and boundary treatments give an overly suburban appearance.



Figure 21

The railway embankment is well screened by mature trees on both sides. The footpath/cycleway adjacent to the railway line provides a route back to the green. This path is enclosed by trees and hedges and meanders lightly, giving visual interest (figure 22). At the eastern end the unattractive clinic building is glimpsed, then on reaching the green, views open up across the green and towards Springfield Place.



Figure 22

6.0 Management Proposals

6.1 Street Furniture

At present there is a mixture of street furniture, including traditional street lamps to the cycle/footpath and other utilitarian units elsewhere throughout the public realm (figure 23, A). A co-ordinated range of high quality street furniture, including street lighting, bins, benches, signs etc. in a traditional or contemporary style would enhance the public realm of the area.

6.2 Road Markings and Signs

Church Lane suffers from considerable visual intrusion by parked cars and highways markings. As part of any proposals to address these issues, visually intrusive signs should be avoided in the most sensitive areas to the front of All Saints Church and Springfield Place (figure 23, B). Any road markings should be the minimum required and yellow lines in the narrow primrose format. Signs should be of minimum size and carefully positioned, where possible using existing walls, posts or lampposts, or where necessary on new black posts.

6.3 Boundary Treatments.

Boundary treatments can have a significant impact on the character of the area, both positive and negative.

Important brick boundary walls survive at the Old Rectory, All Saints Church and Springfield Place, including elements of the former walled garden to the northeast. In the past, unsympathetic repairs have been carried out to the walls using poorly matching materials and hard cement based mortar. The walls were built in lime mortar which is more flexible, compatible with the soft red bricks and visually attractive. Historic boundary walls should be retained and where necessary repaired using matching traditional materials.

The fence which follows the railway line between Springfield Green Bridge and the enclosed footway (figure 24) to the south of Springfield Dukes, and at the edge of Stump Lane (figure 23, C), is a utilitarian structure which is visually intrusive on the edge of the green. Replacement or painting the existing fence would enhance this area.

There are a few areas where inappropriate boundary treatments, such as close boarded fences or overly ornate railings detract from the village character of the area (figure 23, C). Where the opportunity arises boundary treatments appropriate to their context should be provided, which depending on their location should range from a selection of native hedges, bricks walls or simple railings.

6.4 Tree Planting and Management

There are trees within the conservation area which make a significant contribution to the character of the area and are also beneficial for screening and biodiversity. In order to ensure continuity of tree planting, a tree management plan could be prepared and a phased scheme of replacement planting and management of existing trees prepared.



Figure 24

Figure 23 Enhancement Opportunities



There are a few areas where additional tree planting could be used to reinforce the character of the area. Possible locations are identified on figure 23, D.

Bibliography

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Buildings of England: Essex. Bettley, J and Pevsner, N. 1999