



DELAPRE PARK

CONSERVATION AREA

ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN



Planning Policy & Conservation Section
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Introduction

Delapre Park Conservation Area was formally designated on the 9th July 2007, covering Delapre Abbey and its surrounding service buildings and gardens.

This appraisal is intended to provide guidance as to how the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the conservation area can be achieved. It is also design to provide a sound basis for the assessment of planning applications in and near the conservation area. In addition, it identifies proposals for preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

Conservation areas were first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas "areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance", and to review their conservation areas from time to time.

Section 71 of the 1990 Act also places on local planning authorities a further duty to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their conservation areas.

The primary objectives of conservation area designation are:

- to preserve worth buildings and prevent their demolition unless it is shown to be the only suitable action;
- to ensure that redevelopment, renovation or the extension of existing buildings will harmonise with other buildings in the area;
- to preserve and enhance the setting of the area; and
- to encourage positive schemes for the restoration of buildings within the area.

Planning Policy Framework

Government Advice

The current primary Government advice relating to Conservation Areas is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment". It provides clear advice on the designation of conservation areas and the importance of assessing appropriately the special interest of each one.

This document has been prepared in accordance with English Heritage's latest advice on undertaking conservation area appraisals.

Local Plan Policy

The Northampton Local Plan was adopted in June 1997. The plan sets out the Council's aspirations for protecting and enhancing the Borough's historic assets and states how applications affecting conservation areas will be assessed. These policies will be strengthened by this character appraisal, which will offer greater detail regarding those elements that give the area its distinctiveness.

The designation of a conservation area is not intended to prevent change. It is, however, important that new work in conservation areas either preserves or enhances the quality of the area. Further advice will be set out in separate Supplementary Planning Documents relating to development and the preservation of existing buildings in conservation areas.

Summary of Special Interest

Delapre Park Conservation Area shows the development of a unique property and its surrounding landscape over nearly 900 years. While the majority of buildings within the conservation area are listed, the grounds, planting and surrounding buildings currently have no statutory protection. The conservation area is intended to provide a degree of protection to the historic landscape that provides a setting for the house.

Character Analysis

Location and context

Delapre Abbey is located to the south of the town centre of Northampton and the River Nene and close to the main road to London. Until recently, it was surrounded by farmland. In the early part of the twentieth century, housing was built on western side of London Road, while more recently the golf course and the A45 were built to the south and east.

General character and plan

The character of the conservation area is that of a country house set in informal parkland, with ancillary buildings and a formal garden attached to the main building. Delapre Abbey is built around a central courtyard with an attached walled garden, with service buildings predominately located to the north of the house. The area has a green and open feel, with formal and informal gardens surrounding the Abbey.

Landscape setting

The conservation area is on the edge of the flood plain of the river Nene where it rises towards Hardingstone.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map for the area shows the abbey surrounded by farmland. Since then, housing was built to the west in the 1930s, the railway yards to the north have expanded, and to the south the A45 and the golf course have all changed the setting of Delapre Abbey. Recently, Charterwood was planted to the east of the Abbey to mark the anniversary of Northampton's charter.

The Abbey and its grounds are located alongside London Road to the south of the town centre, and are separated from the historic town by the river and then later on the London & North Western Railway. It is on the opposite side of the river from Medieval Northampton – a fairly common location for abbeys, monasteries and nunneries.



Still a footpath today, the original trackway from Northampton town centre to Hardingstone is located to the east of the abbey.

At present views to and from London road are hampered by the bunding, which has recently received planning permission to be removed. The golf course and Delapre Wood block much of the visual impact of the A45 from the Abbey and its grounds, although the noise of traffic is noticeable across much of the site.

Historic development and archaeology

Land at Hardingstone, 'De la Pre', was granted in 1145 to Simon de Senlis II, Earl of Northampton, for the construction of one of the three Cluniac nunneries built in England. The funeral cortege of Eleanor of Castille (wife to Edward I) rested overnight at the nunnery, on its way from Lincoln to Westminster in December 1290. The Eleanor Cross memorial, at the top of London Road, commemorates this event and was erected in 1291-3.

In July 1460, the Yorkists beat the Lancastrians at the Battle of Northampton. This battle was notable as the only defended battle position during the War of the Roses to be lost. Subsequently, King Henry VI was captured and held within the nunnery. The battlefield site is on English Heritage's Register of Historic Battlefields.

In 1538 the abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII and in 1543 the land and the

abbey was sold to John Mershe, a property speculator. After the dissolution, the abbey was converted to residential use and has been extensively altered and extended from the 16th to the 19th centuries. In 1548 the property was sold to the Tate family, who owned it until 1764. The last family to live here was the Bouverie family, Miss Mary Bouverie dying in 1943. The abbey and the surrounding 586 acres were sold to Northampton Corporation in 1946.

Since then, the Abbey buildings were until recently used by the County Record Office and the grounds have been open to the public. Recent alterations include the demolition in 1956 of the conservatory on the southern side of the abbey and the construction of the controversial bunding on the western boundary of the grounds alongside London Road.

Spatial Analysis

Character Areas

The Abbey

The abbey building is Grade II* listed. The abbey has developed over time, and is a predominately two-storey building around a central courtyard. The western front principally dates from the 16th and 17th centuries with an impressive 17th century porch, and is noticeable for its crenulations.

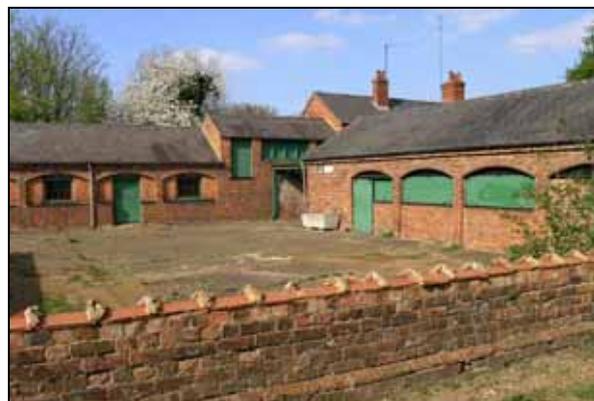


The southern front is mainly 18th century and is made up of ten classical bays. In the 19th century the construction of the rendered library altered this elevation. The northern and eastern elevations are predominately 16th and 17th century. The courtyard is considered to be the last surviving remnant of the nunnery's plan.

The orangery was originally attached to the main house by the now-demolished conservatory and is grade II listed. In the 19th century it was converted to a billiard room.



The service buildings are mainly located on the northern side of the abbey. The stable block and coach house are both Grade II listed and date to the 18th century. To the north of the coach house are the brick built nineteenth century stables. Although they are unlisted, they make a positive contribution to the area. The three former gardeners' cottages also located here.



The formal abbey gardens

The central focus of the formal gardens is the walled garden, formerly the nunnery's graveyard. It became the formal garden for the house in 16th century, and converted to a kitchen garden in 19th century as fashions changed and the eastern informal garden was constructed. The recently restored greenhouses date from the same period. Park House/Abbey Cottage dates probably from the seventeenth or eighteenth century. It was altered in the nineteenth century. The thatched game larder located in the kitchen garden is also Grade II listed.



Several modern sculptures have been located in the gardens. The Woman with Fish sculpture is Grade II listed. It was shown at the second Battersea Park Sculpture Exhibition in 1951 by Frank Dobson then bought to Northampton. It was moved to its current setting in 1978. 2 brick reliefs of a couple embracing and woman with three cats are post-war.

The designed landscape

To the east of the walled garden is a nineteenth century garden. This is laid out in a picturesque style, with large trees, shrubberies and a complex of water features that are no longer working. To the north and east of this garden is Charterwood, which is outside the boundaries of the proposed conservation area. According to the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of the area, an ice house was located by the path marking the boundary of the picturesque garden. This is not marked on later maps and is not present on the property.



The wider landscape

To the south and west of the Abbey is open parkland. To the south of the abbey is a lawn, separated by a ha-ha from the rest of the park. On the western side of the park is the driveway leading from London Road to the Abbey, which is lined with mature trees and traditionally styled modern fencing.

Beyond the surviving parkland is the golf course. Through the creation of the course in the 1970s the topography and planting of area have been greatly altered. Much of the historic value of the landscape has now been lost and consequently is not of a high enough standard to be included in a conservation area. Further away is the Eleanor Cross to the south west, and the sunken lane between Hardingstone and the town centre.

Materials, public realm and planting

The majority of the Abbey is built in the local ironstone. The nineteenth century buildings such as the stables and the gardeners' cottages are brick built. Most of the pathways and drives are in black tarmac, but the surfacing to the drive immediately surrounding the Abbey is in brown gravel. The tarmac is not in keeping with the character of the area, while the loose gravel creates access difficulties.



Despite its location within the inner suburbs of Northampton, much of the character of the area is provided by the extensive tree coverage on and around the site. Within the conservation area, the avenue leading to London Road from the Abbey is one of the most important features of the western side of the conservation area. The planting around the east of the garden in the formal and informal gardens are diverse and vary from traditional municipal bedding planting in the walled garden to Victorian specimen trees and shrubs to the east of the Abbey.



To the south of the proposed conservation area, is the large spinney called the Rookery. This has been a feature of the landscape since the first edition Ordnance Survey maps, and while it has been located outside the proposed conservation area it is a major feature of views to the south west. The boundary of the abbey grounds with London Road is marked by a row of mature trees, as is the northwest corner of the grounds which now borders industrial units.

Further research is necessary to determine the trees worthy of retention and to discover more about the historical planting designs.

Boundaries

The character of the area is that of a historic house with associated formal and informal gardens, and secondary buildings such as the gatehouse and the stable block. To ensure that the character of the conservation area as a whole is of a consistent high standard that justifies its designation, the boundary needs to be carefully drawn.

To the east of the walled garden is the nineteenth century informal garden, containing water features and original trees. Beyond this lies part of Charterwood. It is recommended that the eastern boundary of the conservation area is drawn between the Victorian features and the modern planting.

To the south of the surviving parkland is the golf course. The landscape here has been altered through the construction of bunkers, fairways and new tree planting. It has lost its much of its historic significance compared to when it was recognisably part of the grounds of the Abbey. The boundary is therefore proposed to be the northern edge of the golf course.

The western boundary of the parkland is London Road, where the border is marked by trees and the recent bunding. The houses beyond date from the interwar period and are of a different character than the park. London Road therefore should be used as the western border of the conservation area.

It is proposed to draw the northern boundary of the site along the edge of the original parkland while encompassing the various outbuildings to north of the listed abbey complex. In order to draw up a realistic boundary, part of north-western Charterwood will be included in this.

Northampton battlefield is located partly within the Conservation Area. The battlefield is recorded on English Heritage's Register of Battlefields. Historic Battlefields have two different

management issues- the archaeological deposits which can often be thinly scattered and difficult to identify, and the preservation of the wider historic landscape in which the battle was held.

The archaeological remains of a historic battle are unlikely to be disturbed at this location without prior archaeological investigation, as this can be conditioned when planning permission is granted.

The boundary of the Registered Battlefield is significantly larger than that proposed for a conservation area. The setting of a Registered Battlefield is a material consideration for planning decisions similar to that of listed buildings and conservation areas, and so has an adequate level of protection for the moment.

The boundary of the registered battlefield was drawn up to a different set of criteria than that used for the designation of conservation areas. It is therefore considered that while a large part of the battlefield would be within the proposed conservation area, the boundaries should not be the same.

The Queen Eleanor Cross has a historical connection with Delapre Abbey and is both Grade I listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. As it is geographically isolated from the rest of the proposed conservation area by the golf course, its inclusion would be to the detriment of the rest of the conservation area. In addition, its existing levels of statutory protection mean that any controls introduced by its inclusion in a conservation area would be unnecessary.

Management

There are three main aims of the management plan for the conservation area. While the abbey itself has been the subject of much research over many years, its grounds have not received much attention. The first key aim is to resolve this by carrying out some detailed research into key historic features of the historic landscape.

A detailed investigation of the history of the park and gardens is urgently needed. This should provide further information that can be fed into the conservation area character assessment and management plans, and should also be used to put the area forward for inclusion on English Heritage's list of parks and gardens of special historic importance. As part of this investigation, non-invasive archaeological methods should be used such as geophysical survey of the formal gardens and the abbey's surroundings to build up a more detailed picture of any surviving archaeological remains.

As part of a long term strategy involving other stakeholder groups for the wider future of the area, the battlefield should also be investigated using a wide range of non-intrusive techniques initially.

Due to the high impact of the green environment in the area, a tree survey should also be commissioned in order to select the highest quality trees worthy of the additional protection provided by a Tree Preservation Order. This should be carried out in conjunction with the Parks Department of the Borough Council, who currently manage the parkland. Many trees within the proposed conservation area have a high landscape amenity value including the Avenue, isolated small groups of trees in the parkland and the trees within the formal and informal gardens.

Further research such as the above projects will feed into our understanding of the site and help target practical measures to maintain and enhance the

character and appearance of the conservation area.

The current threats to the historic character and appearance of the site are predominately from anti-social behaviour, and the inappropriate methods taken in the past to limit it. In order to keep motor vehicles off the parkland, both railings and bunding have been used in the path. Currently, the driveway from London Road to the Abbey has recently been lined with high-quality heritage design railings which have been successful in stopping entry from this route. The bunding currently in place on the eastern side of London Road has been recently granted planning permission for its removal. Funding for this should be sought and replacement railings should be installed to protect the parkland from illegal access.

There are several areas where the character and appearance of the proposed conservation area could be enhanced. Currently, the interpretation of the area is limited and focused primarily on the Abbey itself. Based on the additional research proposed, a more comprehensive scheme of signs and informative boards could be installed.

There have been plans made in the past to revitalise the planting in the walled garden which have not been enacted. In addition, the informal eastern garden is in a state of disrepair and its water features are no longer working. Based on additional research into the history of the gardens, restoration of key features and the recreation of historic planting schemes will improve the character of the gardens. Currently, much of the conservation area's paths and drives are gravelled or tarmacked. As part of the improvements to the gardens and parkland, improvements to the surfacing should also be considered in order to ensure access is possible across the community. An access appraisal should therefore be carried out.

