

South Highfields Conservation Area Character Statement

CONSULTATION DRAFT

This is a consultation draft of the character statement for South Highfields Conservation Area. Comments are welcome and should be sent to David Trubshaw, Building Conservation Officer, Urban Design Group, Environment, Regeneration & Development Department, Leicester City Council, Welford Place, Leicester, LE1 6ZG, Telephone 0116 252 7217 or e-mail trubd001@leicester.gov.uk

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1. Introduction

1.1 A conservation area is defined as *an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*¹. Leicester has 23 conservation areas, which contain the best of the older parts of the city as well as serving the needs of the city today. However, it is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in the light of the existing character of the area. Each conservation area is distinct and contains qualities which help to give the city an overall character of its own. The City Council designates conservation areas, after consulting local people, under powers contained in national planning legislation and in accordance with advice from central government.

1.2 The Council has a duty to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas and the purpose of this statement is to identify the factors which make South Highfields an area of special architectural and historic interest. The statement will enable the planning authority to ensure that, when considering planning applications within the conservation area, the development will help to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

1.3 Looking after and improving the quality of conservation areas can bring real benefits to the people who live and work there. An attractive environment also helps to maintain property values. However, for a conservation area to be successful, both residents and property owners must play their part. The Council will continue to strive to improve the environment of conservation areas whenever the opportunity presents itself and when resources are available and will encourage others to do likewise.

1.4 The South Highfields Conservation Area was designated in April 1981 and its boundaries are shown on Map 1. A list of buildings within the Conservation Area is included as Appendix 1. In order to protect the special character of the area, an Article 4 Direction was declared in May 1981. This means that planning permission is required to make alterations that affect the external appearance of houses in the area.

2.0 Location, area and landform

2.1 South Highfields Conservation Area is located to the south-east of the city centre, approximately 2 kilometres from the Clock Tower and covers an area of 22 hectares.

2.2 The Conservation Area lies across the rise of a long, low ridge of sandstone overlaid with a capping of clay and is about 69 metres above sea level at Conduit Street, rising to 87 metres at the top of the hill on London Road. The change in level is significant since it provides a number of important views out of the Conservation Area.

3.0 Archaeology, history and development

¹Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 section 69

3.1 Before 1820, South Highfields was farmland reached by short lanes off London Road; these are shown on the 1828 map (Map 2). Mill Hill Lane has survived in almost its original form, whilst two of the other lanes were widened to 'bye-law' standard when the area was developed for housing and now form Prebend Street and Saxby Street. The 1828 map also shows a 'conduit' or water-pipe on the north side of the present-day Conduit Street; this led from a spring on the Eastfields to the Market Place. The Eastfields were enclosed in 1764, making development possible².

3.2 The first streets in the area were Glebe Street, Conduit Street and Prebend Street, laid out early in the 19th century. No. 20 Glebe Street (c1820) is one of the earliest surviving houses. London Road already existed and a few substantial villas, such as 78-82 London Road, were constructed at this time. Collegiate School on College Street was built in 1835. The first terraced houses were built in Lincoln Street, Hobart Street and Seymour Street in the 1860s. By the 1870s, although much of the area east of London Road was still open fields, a large house (Highfields House) had been built and the area between Highfield Street and Mill Hill Lane had been developed (Maps 3 and 4). Houses facing London Road were mainly built between the mid-1850s and the late 1860s and most still remain, although all have been converted to commercial uses.

3.3 Substantial houses continued to be built as the area expanded southwards until the 1880s. Several streets were named after Prince Albert, the Prince Consort's family, but were re-named during the 1st World War; Saxe Coburg (now Saxby) Street was built between 1872 and 1881, Gotha (now Gotham) Street between 1877 and 1887 and Mecklenburg (now Severn) Street between 1875 and 1888. Places of worship were also built to cater for the growing population. The Society of Friends opened a Meeting House at the corner of Glebe Street and Prebend Street in 1876 and, by 1886, several more places of worship had been built - a Congregational Chapel on London Road, a Wesleyan Church and Sunday school on the corner of Saxby Street and Sparkenhoe Street and the Victoria Road Baptist (now Seventh Day Adventist) Church and Sunday school at the corner of London Road and Victoria (now University) Road. In 1898, the respected local architect Arthur Wakerley designed the Highfield Street synagogue.

3.4 By the 1880s, land prices were high and small residential enclaves such as Woodbine and Gordon Avenues were built in 1884 with only footpath access to make the maximum profitable use of the land. This also occurred between Prebend Street and College Street, creating College Avenue in 1886 and Brookhouse Avenue in 1888 and between Gotham Street and London Road, creating Victoria Avenue (1889), on part of the site of an earlier large villa and garden ('The Chestnuts'). However, the development of Stoneygate began to attract the middle classes away from Highfields and demand for larger houses declined. Development was completed by the construction of smaller terraced houses on Churchill, Connaught and Hamilton Streets (1886 -1888).

² 'The Growth of Leicester', Malcolm Elliott

3.5 Since completion of the Victorian suburb, there has been no wholesale redevelopment. The main changes have been the loss of front gardens on the west side of London Road (and most of those on the east side) for highway use and the wholesale conversion of buildings on both sides of London Road into shops and offices. Most of the original houses between Conduit Street and Prebend Street, including the Congregational chapel, gave way to 3 and 4 storey offices and showrooms between the 1930s and 1960s. Further along London Road, Nos. 132 to 140 were replaced by offices with a large setback from the street frontage to accommodate road-widening which never took place. On Nelson Street, offices and business premises were built in the 1920s and 30s and shops and offices in Art-deco style were built at 55 to 57 London Road in 1935.

3.6 There was considerable bomb damage in Highfields during the 2nd World War, the worst being on November 19th 1940 when several buildings at the corner of Highfield Street and Tichborne Street were destroyed and 41 people killed. The sites are now occupied by a community hall and a garage. More recently, some infill development has taken place, such as De Montfort Mews behind 5 to 19 De Montfort Street, Andrew Court and Tichborne Court flats (late 1970s) and the bank at 121 to 123 London Road (1973/4). In 1999, a bank was built to replace a 1960s office block on the corner of Saxby Street and London Road.

4.0 Layout

4.1 The layout of the Conservation Area is based on a grid, pivoted around Highfield Street. West of Highfield Street, the roads run north-west to south-east with the cross streets at right angles, while on the east side they run west-east and north-south.

4.2 The grid layout means that the Conservation Area is divided into small rectangular parcels of land, with the effect that houses along each short length of street create small individual local 'spaces' set apart from those on the next street, even where the houses are of similar design. This is particularly reinforced where the view at each end is closed by houses on the cross-streets.

4.2 Across the Conservation Area, house plots vary in width but are generally short. The varying size of house reflects the social strata for which they were built - those at the northern (earlier) end have wider plots than those at the southern end. In addition, the earlier houses have front gardens, although these tend to be very shallow (between 1.3 and 2m). London Road, from the earliest development, had important buildings in the form of either large villas or substantial semi-detached dwellings and this is reflected in the size of the plots.

5.0 Townscape

5.1 *Townscape* is the feature which distinguishes the special interest of a conservation area from the intrinsic merit of individual buildings within it; it refers to the ways in which views open and close through an area, to changes in level, visual contrasts and linkages, texture and the rhythms and patterns in the street scene: elements which give the environment of an area individuality and character.

5.2 In South Highfields, the formal grid layout is an important factor in the townscape. Views along, into and deflected down streets give a feeling of enclosure or invitation. Alternatively the eye can be led off into the farther distance. The contrast between the views from London Road into St Albans Road (the views are deflected by the bend in the road) and Highfield Street (where the brow of the hill extends the view upwards) illustrates this well. Vistas and viewpoints also serve to define an area's townscape by linking it to its surroundings. The view from the top of the London Road hill towards the north-west provides sight not only of the city centre in the bottom of the valley but also the much wider and distant view of the hills of Charnwood Forest; this visual link to both city and countryside is an important feature of Highfields' townscape.

5.3 Throughout the Conservation Area, pattern and rhythm continually assert themselves. From the regularity of garden walls and railings on Lincoln Street to the rhythm of bay windows, eaves, chimneys and dormers at 2 to 24 Saxby Street, the townscape has much visual quality and interest. This is further enhanced by the proximity of buildings to streets and by the continuous building lines of the terraces, both of which serve to create enclosed spaces and views. The way houses were built on sloping streets has resulted in varying rooflines within terraces and creates an interesting skyline, such as can be seen at 75 to 99 London Road or 1 to 15 Hobart Street.

5.4 South Highfields has several important landmarks within and beyond its boundaries. The first to be seen from London Road is the white brick gable of the former Collegiate School at the end of Prebend Street. The view of its 'Gothic' windows in Perpendicular style, its statuary in niches and its moulded stone copings and pinnacles is a high point of South Highfields' townscape and effectively and attractively stops the view into the Conservation Area at that point. Further on, the spire of the church at University Road punctuates the skyline. The eye is then drawn along Highfield Street to the copper dome and profiled brick parapet of the Synagogue, whilst from the brow of the hill on Highfield Street, the eastward view is stopped by the hall and tower of St Peter's Community Centre.

5.5 From within the Conservation Area, the view of more modern landmarks, notably Goscote House tower block and St Peter's estate, dominate and contrast with the Victorian terraces.

5.6 The importance of another feature of Highfields' townscape has already been mentioned; the individuality of the five 'avenues' is a source of local pride and reputation. Glimpses into these small enclaves down narrow alleyways is one of the area's particular visual qualities.

6.0 Building materials

6.1 The texture and colour of building materials is also important. In South Highfields, the unifying feature is the use of local red brick and dark grey Welsh slate roofs. The use of stone for bay windows, window surrounds and string-courses adds more colour

and contrast in texture. In some cases, the stonework of window heads and sills have been painted, often to the detriment of the appearance of the building. Tile hanging, carved brickwork and pargetting add interest to the streetscape, and in places, the original granite setts remain. Along London Road, there is more variety in the use of colour and materials, including the use of painted stucco; pre-cast concrete and marble facings are used on modern buildings and grey-brown brickwork has replaced original front boundary walls. The use of building materials sympathetic to the area for any new development or alterations is an important way in which the character and appearance of the area can be preserved.

6.2 Windows throughout the Conservation Area are predominantly timber, either in the form of casements or, more commonly, sliding sash. The larger houses frequently have elaborate stone or brick bay windows at ground floor level. The detail and quality of the original timber windows is an important feature in defining the attractive appearance of the area.

7.0 Architectural character and key unlisted buildings

Appendix 4 contains a list of the more interesting buildings in the conservation area. The purpose of this section is to define the individual character of the various parts of the conservation area.

7.1 South Highfields exhibits many of the popular domestic styles of the Victorian period and the mix of types, sizes and styles creates a character of high quality and great diversity. The changes in style throughout the 19th and 20th centuries can be traced across the Conservation Area from north to south. From the relatively plain houses in 19th century Classical style in the Lincoln Street area, through the more exuberant examples of Gothic styles on Tichborne Street to the simplicity of the small artisan houses of Hamilton Street, South Highfields reflects the changes in fashion throughout the 40 or so years during which the area developed. Its character is defined not only by the variety of style but also by the predominant use of red brick, stone, carved timber and dark grey Welsh slate. Overall, however, the unifying feature is the quality of construction and attention to decorative detail. The visual interest, which results from the combination of styles within a short distance, is one of Highfields' most enduring characteristics.

7.2 **Glebe Street** contains the earliest building remaining in the Conservation Area (No. 20) and a former school at No. 13. However, the character of the street is adversely affected by several vacant plots at the northern end used for car parking. Good quality redevelopment would be beneficial on these sites.

7.3 **Prebend Street** shows many of the popular decorative design motifs of the 1880s - bay windows, tilehanging, gabled dormers, corbelled eaves, plasterwork and mock-half timbering and high quality carving on door and window heads. Date and name plaques feature highly. Dominating the street is the former Collegiate school, acting as a visual block.

7.4 **Lincoln Street** has a continuous two-storey terrace on the north side with a shorter three-storey block dating from 1892 in Domestic Revival style opposite. The unifying

feature is the quality of decoration, although some of this quality has been lost by the replacement of original features such as timber sash windows. The boundary wall to a car park at the west-end encloses the street.

7.5 **Hobart Street** contains uniform terraces on either side. Segmental brick arches with carved keystones on stone window and doorheads and eaves decoration of coupled brackets with ceramic tiles are key features in the quality of the street.

7.6 **College Street** is dominated by the former Collegiate school and headmaster's house. On the south side, however, is a terrace of three storey houses where the unifying feature is the scale and decorative detailing.

7.7 **College** and **Brookhouse Avenues**, together with **Victoria, Gordon and Woodbine Avenues** are distinctive by virtue of being accessed by footpath only and form small enclaves with their own identity and character. Whilst there was backland development in other parts of the city, the 'courts' created were small and mean. The Highfields 'avenues', by contrast, were built to the same size and style as the surrounding houses and are a unique feature of domestic layout in Leicester. On College Avenue, the style is mainly Gothic. Notable features are paired front doors and the level of decoration of stone columns with carved Corinthian capitals and corbelled eaves with basketwork and terracotta panels.

7.8 **Saxby Street** differs in character by being a busy thoroughfare. Not only is the street slightly wider and the buildings mostly 3-storey, but the street also contains several commercial uses. The buildings are relatively plainly adorned, with double height bays and carved stone window heads and sills being the predominant features, although the height is visually impressive. A new office development at 1-3 Saxby Street respects the scale and appearance of the area by having a quality brick finish and through attention being paid to detail. At the Sparkenhoe Street end, a former chapel has been successfully combined with an attractive 1970s extension to form the local primary school and community centre.

7.9 The area between Saxby Street and Highfield Street displays the mix of styles and massing typical of Highfields. Although terraced, this part of the Conservation Area developed at a lower density than between Saxby Street and Prebend Street. **Severn Street** contains particularly fine groups of 3 storey Queen Anne style houses at 1 to 7 and 17 to 23, while opposite is an interesting blend of two and three storey buildings of the late 1870s to 1893; the combination is a street of much visual interest. The houses on **Gotham Street** are plainer but nevertheless possess some interesting details.

7.10 **Highfield Street**, like Saxby Street, is an important east-west route. Beyond Gotham Street, the domestic properties are three storeys high and have mostly been converted to flats. The majority were built in the 1870s and 80s in classical, Gothic and Queen Anne styles and a number have retained decorative features, notably timber sash windows. The character and quality of the street is adversely affected, however, by the 1950s redevelopment of the site at the corner of Tichborne Street for a garage. The key visual feature of the street is the synagogue at the corner of Tichborne Street. Its simplicity of design acts as a visual foil to its more ornate Victorian neighbours.

7.11 Beyond Highfield Street are the eastern ends of **Severn Street and Tichborne Street**. These are also grand in size and detailing, reflecting a continuation of the popularity of Highfields well into the 1880s as a place for the middle classes. The size, quality and detailing of the houses are important. Notable on Severn Street is the moulded brick decoration and cast iron balustrading at 51 to 57, the Italianate styling at 47 and 49 and the carved and balustraded timber bays at 38 and 40.

7.12 **Upper Tichborne Street** is dominated by the highly decorated 3-storey terrace at 28 to 38. The big stone semi-circular bays with pierced balustrades and round arched windows and double or triple Venetian, Gothic-style windows at first floor level, were the height of 1870s style. They contrast with the houses opposite (Nos. 51 to 57) which contain various elements of the Domestic Revival style popular in the 1890s - mock Tudor dormers, 16-pane toplights and square bays under a continuous slate canopy. This style can also be found in Victoria Avenue. At 40 Upper Tichborne Street there is a fine example of the Queen Anne style with a classical pedimented doorcase with Ionic capitols to the pilasters. No. 44 is of the same style but decoration is limited to bracketted eaves, fielded brick panels to the bay window and simple carving on the stone window heads. Nos. 63 and 65 return to the Domestic Revival style.

7.13 **Mill Hill Lane** is an interesting, winding narrow street that follows the line of one of the original farm tracks. The former school at no. 8 is a particularly important building that has recently been converted into flats.

7.14 **St Albans Road** is an interesting mix of Classical, Gothic and Domestic Revival styles. The properties display unusual details, such as the complex double square motif carved into the bay parapets at Nos. 16 to 30, the intricate moulded brick eaves at Nos. 32 to 38 and a dormer gable at No. 5, with its spirals and floral swags and tails. A unifying feature, however, is the quality of the timber detailing of the gables and windows.

7.15 Finally, **London Road** has the widest range of architectural styles and materials because it has been subject to the greatest commercial pressure. Most of the west-side remains identifiably mid-19th century with stone bays, bracketted eaves, trefoil pattern windows and carved capitols. The partially restored group of buildings at 113 to 119 (Top Hat Terrace) is an outstanding example of mid-1860s style and is an interesting visual contrast with its near neighbours (125 London Road and 2-6 University Road) which have a mix of Classical, Italianate and Gothic motifs. The relatively undamaged 1877-built Italianate semi-detached offices at 167 to 169 London Road and the Gothic styled Seventh Day Adventist Church on University Road corner are notable buildings. The decorated leadwork on the Marquis Wellington public house is particularly attractive.

7.16 The Art- Deco style block at 55-57 London Road is particularly notable since the exterior has remained unaltered. A similarly high quality example of 1930s architecture is the former Goddards' silver plate factory nearby on Nelson Street, now in use as offices.

7.17 The east-side of London Road is more diverse. Many different building materials can be seen - Victorian bricks of the smooth red Leicester type or polychromatic

brickwork in buff and red, modern dark red-brown wire-cut bricks or smooth red or blue engineering bricks. Stucco, polished marble or granite and reinforced concrete can also be found. From the bottom of London Road hill, the architectural character moves from a 4-storey 1930s office (Lillie House) to the 1850s at Nos. 54 and 56, then a 1920s facade (Cecil Jacobs) to a 1960s commercial development and then back to the 1870s at Hyde's Herbal Clinic. The block between Prebend and Saxby Street is more restrained, most of the buildings being 19th century and including three fine listed buildings at 78 to 82 London Road in stucco and brick.

7.18 The section of London Road between Saxby and Highfield Street is visually interesting. From a recently completed (1999) bank on the corner of Saxby Street, the themes of Highfields' architectural character can be followed. The restrained classical style of the 1860s can be seen at Nos. 94 and 96, while next door (98 to 104) is a group of four Italianate buildings in polychrome brickwork with pointed arches and columns. Most of the facade of No.104 has been obscured by an extension built in the 1920s, although this in itself is not unattractive at first floor level. Nos. 108 to 114 is an attractive three-storey terrace with gabled dormers built in 1907 in a Domestic Revival style to the design of H L Goddard; this group remains virtually unchanged. Beyond that, the townscape value and architectural quality of Nos. 122 to 128 (1888, by Arthur Wakerley) is reflected by their recent Grade II listing; the highly unusual Queen Anne style with its 'teardrop' window, oval toplights and carved stonework typifies the high quality work evident throughout Highfields. Other examples of high quality buildings on London Road include the Art Nouveau-style green faience tiled shopfront at No.142, the Arts and Crafts style of No. 146 and mock Tudor detailing on the upper floors of 1 St Albans Road.

8.0 Boundary treatments

8.1 The characteristic front boundary to properties in the Conservation Area is a low brick wall and railings. Although many of the original walls have been damaged or removed, environmental improvement grants have permitted the almost complete rebuilding of the walls with a range of simple railing designs - flat-topped, bowtop, pointed arch top and some with integral motifs in the form of stylised flowers, hearts and scrolls. The local bowtopped railing design is also included along the street frontages to Prebend Street Gardens, which also has a well designed gate.

8.2 Since the end of the 19th century, virtually all the properties along London Road have lost their front boundary walls with the change from residential to commercial use and to accommodate pavement and road widening. The exceptions are numbers 78 to 86 and 94 to 98 London Road, which have kept their private front yards, albeit behind modern grey brick walls of varying heights. Along the side streets, the boundaries of commercial uses tend to be open; for example the forecourts of the hotels on Saxby Street are now undefined and used for car parking.

8.3 Original boundary walls remain at the Seventh Day Adventist church and the synagogue. The former retains its Charnwood granite base and limestone copings and an ornate cast iron gate. The boundary of the Fraser Noble building on London Road is formed by railings with Arts and Crafts style 'nailhead' tops and an interesting gate. The

synagogue has simple square section railings with matching gates ornamented by gold-painted Stars of David. Elsewhere, the boundary of the former Collegiate school is formed by a wall with stone piers carved in Gothic style with railings between and a privet hedge behind. It also has plain 2m high brick boundary walls with oak gates.

8.4 At the northern, more commercial, end of the Conservation Area, a variety of materials is used for boundaries, notably unattractive concrete post and chain link fencing. On Glebe Street, steel beams are used and the car park on the corner with Conduit Street has a plain 1m high brick wall. Car parks on Lincoln Street and Prebend Street are hidden behind plain 2 metre brick walls.

9.0 Parks, gardens and trees

9.1 The demand for housing meant that South Highfields was built to a high density and open space was not provided. The only area of public open space in the Conservation Area is Prebend Street Gardens, which was created in the 1980s on the site of derelict lock-up garages. This has fallen victim to abuse from vandals and other anti-social users and is being considered for re-design to open-up views and to remove awkward corners.

9.2 The lack of other public green space means that street trees and hedges, trees, shrubs and flowers in private gardens are important elements of the character of the area. College Street presents a very green image thanks to the horse chestnut and lime trees at the Collegiate School, the planting in front and back gardens and on the pavement extensions at either end. Tichborne and Severn Street and St Albans Road are well endowed with a wide variety of street trees, such as limes, hornbeam, ash, yew and maple. Trees of high amenity value include a very fine maple tree outside the garage on Highfield Street and a maple and six planes in the grounds of Medway School.

9.3 Views into the five 'Avenues' reveal very green environments, which help to define their character. Particularly important are the seven limes and three hornbeams on Victoria Avenue.

9.4 Where underground services have permitted, maples have been planted at various locations along London Road to soften an otherwise hard urban environment and to reflect its original tree lined appearance.

9.5 Responsibility for street trees lies with the City Council and future management and replacement programmes are essential elements in conserving the character of the area. Strategies and management plans are being developed for street trees throughout the city and this will help to maintain the distinctive character of the area by ensuring that they are kept in good condition and any diseased or dying trees are replaced at the earliest opportunity.

9.6 Plants and trees in private gardens are important to the character of the conservation area and their loss on a wide scale would have a serious effect on the appearance and attractiveness of the area. as well as on urban wildlife. Care should always be taken to ensure that when gardens are changed, any new surface treatments

are porous and laid as far from roots and branches as possible to minimise damage.

10.0 Paving and ground surfaces

10.1 Throughout the Conservation Area, most footways are paved with concrete slabs with kerbs of Mountsorrel granite and roads have a tarmac surface. Highfield Street has been slightly re-aligned and resurfaced in red tarmac with dark grey or red paviments for the pavement. Red and grey paviments are also used for extensions to pavements and for surfacing on Mill Hill Lane. There are also some fragments of original road surface still in place, such as the red granite setts and kerbs at Victoria Avenue and the grey granite setts at College Avenue. On London Road, some glass pavement lights remain. However, London Road is most notable for the visual impact of traffic regulation markings, pedestrian crossing zig-zags and double yellow lines.

11.0 Lighting and street furniture

11.1 Within the Conservation Area, many steel and concrete lighting columns have been replaced by lamps in two mock-Victorian styles: swan-necked and lantern. These are painted black and contrast with the steel high-pressure sodium lamps on London Road.

12.2 Street furniture on London Road includes a number traffic and pelican crossing signals, telephone boxes, pedestrian barriers and traffic direction signs. Telegraph poles and wires are a prominent and unattractive feature of some streets such as Nelson, Prebend, College and Tichborne Streets. One-way systems and cul-de-sacs have been introduced within the Conservation Area and cast iron bollards are commonplace in designs such as the 'cannon' and octagonal 'nailhead' types.

12.0 General character and atmosphere

12.1 The character and atmosphere within the Conservation Area varies from the relatively quiet residential streets, particularly the pedestrian-only avenues, to the bustle, activity and high levels of traffic on London Road. The residential character of the area has been reinforced by the closure of several streets to through traffic.

12.2 The two main east-west through roads in the area, Saxby Street and Highfield Street also have a separate character due to the number of commercial businesses and higher levels of traffic. In particular, the western end of Highfield Street are a number of restaurants which create a distinct night-time environment and character.

13.0 Land use and social factors

13.1 Highfields developed as a middle-class suburb in the mid to late 19th century, but its residential character changed significantly in the 20th century. From the occupation of large terraced houses by single families (probably with servants), the houses were gradually converted into smaller units. By the mid-1970s, the environment had

deteriorated significantly due to lack of investment in maintenance and the area had a poor reputation. Highfields at that time provided many flats, hostels and bedsits for a predominantly transient population.

13.2 Decline was further accelerated by the blighting of much of the area between 1971 and 1975 by the proposed Eastern Relief Road. The line of the road became marked by increasing numbers of empty and boarded-up houses, fly tipping and vandalism, with some properties being used as temporary accommodation. The decline was a source of much concern to the permanent residents who were loyal to Highfields, not least because of its locational advantages of good access to the city centre and local schools.

13.3 However, the potential quality of the area's housing was recognised. The 1976 Housing Act provided funding for grants in 'Housing Action Areas' and the City Council's Renewal Strategy was approved in 1976. Highfields benefitted from major housing investment and improvement following the declaration of the Collegiate and St Stephen's Housing Action Areas in 1979. Controls over the conversion of houses into multiple occupation were also introduced, not only to ensure that the quality of such units was adequate but also to ensure that larger properties remained available for family occupation. The designation of Leicester as a 'Programme Authority' under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1979 and the identification of Highfields as one of the Priority Zones for investment also drew money into the area for physical and environmental improvements.

13.4 The pressure to improve housing increased and began to have a major and not always sympathetic effect on the fabric of the area's buildings. To prevent alterations which might spoil the appearance of houses, an Article 4 Direction was made in May 1981. This, together with Urban Programme funds for 'Architectural Repair Grants' and 'Environmental Improvements in Conservation Areas', did much to preserve and protect the quality and appearance of the housing in the conservation area, although it could not prevent the loss of many of the area's original windows.

13.5 A city-wide policy for flat conversions and houses in multiple occupation was adopted by the Council in 1985. Control over the conversion of houses into flats were included in the City of Leicester Local Plan, adopted in 1994 and these established minimum standards to prevent the resurgence of overcrowding which had been a feature of the area in the past.

14.0 Loss of character

14.1 Poorly designed buildings

The majority of buildings within the Conservation Area have remained unaltered. However, the 1960s extension to the Masonic Hall is unfortunate in having little relationship in terms of proportions or materials to its Classical neighbour and its position behind a 2-metre brick wall creates a large hole in the townscape. The southward extension of this bland boundary treatment at 78 to 86 and 94 to 100 is also unsightly. Nearby, the redevelopment of 132 to 140 London Road has set the 3-storey building line much further back from the street and, while this is partly offset by the

single storey front additions, this gap in the building line is visually unsatisfying. These forward extensions were once subject to temporary planning permission but the road proposals on which this consent was based have been abandoned, leaving an opportunity to restore the building line fully. The single storey buildings at the corners of Tichborne/Highfield Street and Highfield/Gotham Street are also of poor architectural quality and detract from both the styles and rhythms of the conservation area.

14.2 Alterations

The character of London Road has changed from a local shopping area serving Highfields to become an area of offices and service sector uses, bars and restaurants used by people from across the city. The commercialisation of London Road and adjacent parts of Saxby and Highfield Streets has resulted in a variety of shopfront styles that are not always sympathetic to the environment or buildings themselves. The loss of the front boundary wall outside the hotel on Saxby Street and the resulting car parking on the forecourt detracts from the appearance of the street, as does similar arrangements outside Nos. 102 and 104 London Road and at the Park Hotel and its neighbours on London Road/University Road.

14.3 The removal in the 1950s of the whole of the ground floor facade of 1 St Albans Road is one of the most unfortunate alterations. This has had a serious impact not only on the building itself (which has lost its fine ground floor bay windows) but also on the townscape at this important traffic junction. An attempt has been made by the current occupier to remedy the worst of the damage, but the scale and design of the new ground floor facade does not reflect the quality of the rest of the building. In some cases, original shopfronts remain as at 60, 108 to 112 and 126 London Road but in most cases, shopfronts have been installed with little regard for the design of the building; Nos. 77, 81, 100, 102, 115, 120 and 122 London Road are examples. In the case of Nos. 73, 75 and 119 grant aid from the City Council encouraged the replacement of inappropriate shopfronts with better designs, and in the case of 119, the restoration of one of the lost porches.

14.4 Use of inappropriate materials

The predominant building materials in the area have been described as red brick with stone detailing, slate roofs and timber windows and doors. The replacement of original features, such as windows, with other materials, such as aluminium or uPVC, is fairly limited throughout the conservation area but where it has occurred, notably on Churchill, Connaught and Hamilton Streets, it has had a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the area.

14.5 Vacant sites

There are relatively few cleared sites in the Conservation Area, the exception being sites used as car parks on Glebe Street and Andover Street. Sympathetic redevelopment of these sites, which have a negative impact on appearance of the conservation area, would be beneficial.

14.6 Visual clutter

London Road is particularly affected by visual clutter, such as excessive signs on buildings and traffic signs located within the pavements. Throughout the Conservation Area, wheelie bins left outside flats or properties with no front yards contribute to an

untidy visual aspect.

14.7 Rear of London Road

The rear of commercial properties on the west-side of London Road is generally unattractive, with boundary walls having been demolished to create car parks. However, some interesting out-buildings survive, although several flat-roofed extensions are detrimental to the appearance of the area. The rear of these properties forms an ill-defined boundary with the adjoining New Walk Conservation Area.

14.8 Footway surfaces

Some attempt has been made to add visual interest to footway surfaces, for example on Mill Hill Lane and Highfield Street. However, this has not always been successful - the colour/shape may be wrong (Mill Hill Lane) or the pavements have settled unevenly, causing pools of water in wet weather. The standard rectangular concrete paving slabs are also not of uniform colour or levels and many are cracked due to the parking of heavy vehicles; to try to prevent this, bollards have been installed in vulnerable locations, notably Highfield Street.

15.0 Conservation Area boundary

15.1 The Council is required to review conservation areas and their boundaries and cancellation of designation should be considered where an area or part of an area is no longer considered to possess the special interest which led to its original designation.³ As part of the survey for this character statement, the boundary of the South Highfields Conservation Area has been examined. It is considered that, in general, the existing boundary continues to include an area of special architectural or historic interest.

15.2 It is, however, proposed to remove Churchill Street, Connaught Street and Hamilton Street from the Conservation area And the Article 4 area. When the Conservation Area and Article 4 Direction were declared in 1981, terraced houses throughout Leicester were beginning to be altered, frequently unsympathetically, by the introduction of modern windows, doors and external cladding. At that time, the houses in Churchill Street, Connaught Street and Hamilton Street were relatively unaltered and were included within the Conservation Area as an example of how such terraces used to look and to reflect the complete range of house types, size and social fabric of the late Victorian period. Since then, a number of houses have been altered, despite the restrictions introduced by the Article 4 Direction, and it is now concluded that the particular architectural and historic interest is no greater than that of terraced houses in other parts of the city.

15.3 It is also proposed to delete Nos. 1a and 1-21 Welland Street from the area covered by the Article 4 Direction. At present, the boundary of the Conservation Area and Article 4 Direction runs down the centre of Welland Street, meaning that alterations to properties are permitted without the need for planning permission on one side of the street but not on the opposite side. Many of the properties have already been altered and, in order to overcome this iniquity, it is proposed that the west side of Welland Street be deleted from the Article 4 area. However, in order to provide a definite boundary, it is proposed that the boundary of the Conservation Area on Welland Street

³ PPG 15 "Planning Policy Guidance : Planning and the Historic Environment", DoE, 1994

be retained.

16.0 Preserving the Character

16.1 The previous sections have explained why South Highfields is important and how the details of buildings and their setting and relationship to one another have combined to create a unique character worthy of special care and protection. Recognition of the area's quality led to its declaration as a Conservation Area in 1981. The City of Leicester Local Plan (currently under review) contains policies designed to protect the area's character, for example by ensuring that new development takes account of the scale, form, materials and details of its surroundings.

16.2 The special character of South Highfields mainly derives from the quality of the individual buildings and decorative features such as timber sash windows, stained glass and timber doors. Widespread replacement or loss of such features would do great harm to the appearance and character of the area. For this reason, the City Council declared an Article 4 Direction on properties in the area in 1981, soon after the designation of the Conservation Area. The Direction means that planning permission is required for alterations which affect the external appearance of houses in the Conservation Area, such as:

- extensions;
- new windows or doors;
- re-roofing or alterations to chimneys and ridge tiles;
- erection of porches;
- covering gardens in concrete or tarmac or taking-down garden walls or fences to make car parking spaces;
- erection of gates, fences or walls;
- covering walls by rendering or painting the brickwork, cladding walls with stone, artificial stone timber, plastic or tiles.

16.3 Despite pressure to alter properties and some breaches of planning control, the Article 4 Direction has been successful in safeguarding the appearance and character of the area and it is not proposed that the Direction be revoked. The City Council has undertaken enforcement action against the more serious breaches of planning control.

16.4 Repair and restoration work should always try to retain the original appearance of the building and be in materials to match the originals. Repair and restoration work should always try to retain the original appearance of the building and be in materials to match the originals. The use of uPVC to replace original timber for windows, particularly on elevations facing the street, will not normally be permitted; upvc is an alien material and the proportion, detail and thickness of glazing bars seldom replicate the intricacy of the original windows. Similarly, the use of outward opening, "mock-sash" windows are rarely a satisfactory substitute for sliding sash windows. Not only are the traditional sash boxes lost, but the windows, when open at an angle, visually disrupt the rhythm of a terrace of properties. Wherever possible, existing window frames should therefore be repaired rather than replaced. In addition, original timber doors should be retained.

16.5 Where a roof has to be re-laid, the original slates should be re-used, supplemented with second-hand slates. Artificial slates should not be used as their shiny, regular appearance and lack of definition between courses is out of keeping with

the traditional appearance of roofs in the area. Slates should not be coated with bitumen or plastic coatings as this will not only look unattractive but can cause roof timbers to rot due to lack of ventilation and will also prevent the salvage and possible re-use of slates.

16.6 On London Road, it is particularly important that surviving original shopfronts of good quality are retained, with sympathetic repair if necessary rather than replaced with non-traditional materials such as upvc or aluminium.

16.7 Conservation Area Consent must be obtained for demolition of all but the smallest buildings (such as outbuildings) and planning permission may also be needed for demolishing parts of buildings like chimney stacks or taking down front boundary walls. Planning legislation contains restrictions on putting up satellite antennas and these controls are tighter in conservation areas than elsewhere. The City Council is keen that satellite dishes and antennas are placed on buildings so as to have the least possible effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. Listed building consent is required to attach a satellite dish to a listed building.

16.8 Trees in conservation areas, with a few exceptions, are protected by law and anyone intending to carry out any works to a tree must give the City Council notice of their intentions. The Council then has six weeks to consider the proposal and decide whether it can go ahead.

16.9 Some trees in the area are also protected by Tree Preservation Order (see Appendix 5), which makes it an offence to cut down, top, lop, uproot or wilfully destroy a tree without the City Council's permission. Any such proposal must be submitted as a formal application and must include details of, and justification for, the works proposed.

APPENDIX 1

List of buildings within South Highfields Conservation Area

Andover Street	15
Brookhouse Avenue/St	1-39 (odd) & -16 (even)
College Avenue	1-29 (odd) & 2-30 (even)
College Street	3-37 (odd) & 2-6 (even), 'Holmwood', 'Avenue House'
De Montfort Mews	1-9 consecutive
De Montfort Street	1 and 2 only
Glebe Street	20
Gordon Avenue	1-13 consecutive
Gotham Street	9-27, 29a, 29b, 4-24 (even)
Highfield Street	1-21, garage, Synagogue, 31-39, 45-63 (odd), 2-60
Hobart Street	1-15 (odd) & 2-18 (even)
Lincoln Street	13-23, 29, 31 (odd) & 2-48 (even)
London Road	The Hind Hotel, 53-125, 139-173 (odd) & 50-148 (even)
Mill Hill Lane	1-11 (odd) & 8-22, 26-32 (even)
Nelson Street	1-5 (odd) & 10-40 (even)
Prebend Street	9-19 (odd) & 2-6 (even)
Regent Street	8-10
St Albans Road	1-63 (odd) & 2-52 (even)
St Peter's Road	1-9 (odd)

Saxby Street	1-23, Andrew Court, 33-43 (odd) & 2-52 (even)
Severn Street	1-29, 33-57 (odd) & 2-46 (even)
Seymour Street	1-17 (odd) & 4-12 (even)
Tichborne Street	1-19a (even), Hall, & 2-12 (even)
University Road	1-3 (odd) & 7th Day Adventist Church
Upper Tichborne Street	33-39, Church, 51-71(odd) & Synagogue, 22-50 (even)
Victoria Avenue	1-21 consecutive
Welland Street	1-21 (odd)
Woodbine Avenue	1-36 consecutive

APPENDIX 2

Article 4 Direction

All properties marked with an asterisk * on Map 1 are covered by the South Highfields Article 4 Direction.

APPENDIX 3

Listed Buildings within the South Highfields Conservation Area

College Street	Collegiate School	Grade II
College Street	Collegiate House	Grade II
Highfield Street	Synagogue	Grade II
London Road	78	Grade II
London Road	80 (Masonic Hall)	Grade II
London Road	82	Grade II
London Road	122-128	Grade II
London Road	7th Day Adventist Church (Formerly Victoria Road Baptist Church)	Grade II

APPENDIX 4

Buildings of Interest and their Details

The inclusion of buildings in this section is selective and is intended to illustrate the range of building types, styles and materials in the conservation area. If a building is not included this should not be taken to indicate that it does not make a significant contribution to the character of the conservation area.

LOCATION	PROPERTY NO	DETAILS
Brookhouse Ave		Granite setts, ornate door and window heads, bays with fielded panels to top transom, name plaques with hood moulds;
Brookhouse St 1 (Claremont House)		tile hanging, leaded, lights and jettied 2nd floor; carved stone door and window heads and name plaques to match Brookhouse Avenue;

College Avenue all		Gothic style (1880s); paired front doors; ornate moulded brickwork to eaves in rosette pattern; columns to doors with stiffleaf capitols;
College Street, former Collegiate School		Ecclesiastical Gothic style (1835); white brick with stone dressings; five light window in Perpendicular style.
College Street, former Headmasters house		Domestic Gothic style in white brick with stone dressings.
College Street	2 -6 3 19	Group in Queen Anne style. Ornate leaded toplights. Gothic style; highly detailed with corbelled eaves with terracotta panels, 1st floor windows with carved stone heads and brick relieving arches, tiling between connecting stone banding. Ground floor bay with projecting cornice, fielded and moulded with carved Corinthian capitols. Filigree bargeboard to dormer ;
	25 (Linden House)	original leaded lights to top floor windows ;
	27 - 37	Elaborate multi-panelled doors with oval centrepiece.
Glebe Street	20	Earliest building remaining in the conservation area (1820) – two-storey house built of pale orange bricks with deeply overhanging eaves on this metal brackets; two simple classical doorcases with either fluted or elliptical pilasters; simple sash windows with fine glazing bars.
	Friends Meeting House	Red brick to a plain “Quaker” design (1876).
Gotham Street	4 - 6	Triple pointed stone arches with carved stone columns and capitols to recessed front doors.
	12-14	Stone hoods with brackets above first floor windows.
Highfield Street	Synagogue	1897, by Arthur Wakerley in a style reminiscent of the Russian Byzantine with a copper-clad onion dome and

		cupola rising above a sinuous parapet.
	13-17	Classical detailing – stone quoins, stucco window surrounds, brackets.
	24-26	Gothic styling with trefoil headed windows, carved capitols to ground floor windows and doors and pointed arches to first floor hood moulds.
Highfield Street	36-42 3-11 31 (Hamilton House)	Block of five in Queen Anne style. Mock-Tudor style. Ornate carved bay window with carved capitols to columns.
Hobart Street	2 - 8 12 - 18 1 - 15	Bracketed eaves and doorheads. Finely carved brackets to doorheads. bracketed eaves with tile course.
Lincoln Street	12 - 18 25-29 44-48 13-23	Two storey terrace in classical style (1861-62); carved stucco window surrounds, bracketed eaves and moulded doorcases with cornices supported by console brackets; Classical/Italianate style with bracketed eaves, bay and doorheads; Curved head glazing bars in upper floor windows; Lincoln Terrace - three storey terrace in Queen Anne style (1892); plain brickwork embellished to create brick pilasters, stringcourses and keystones; pedimented dormers project above wide double-height bays with Flemish style gables with stone copings.
London Road	78 80 82 98-104 108-114 122-128 55-59	Classical stuccoed front; recessed door with Tuscan columns and plain frieze. Stuccoed front with central semi-circular porch. Three storey red brick former house; Doric porch. Italianate group in polychrome brickwork pointed arches and columns with foliate capitals to windows. Domestic Revival (1907); three storey, with gabled dormers, virtually unaltered. Four shops with accommodation above; (1888). Queen Anne style with teardrop window to third floor, oval toplights and carved stonework. Grade II listed. 1930s Art Deco style with “look-out”; virtually unaltered.

113-119 (Top Hat Terrace)		1864; Three storey commercial premises in Classical style; carved heads above doorways and first floor windows, partially restored.
139-141 Marquis Wellington public house		1907 in Domestic Revival style; attractive decorated leadwork to bay window.
Prebend Street	4	Carved timber porticoes and deep metal bracketted eaves.
	9 - 11	Semi-circular parapets with ball finial to dormers.
	11 (The Cedars)	Pargetting and leaded lights.
St Albans Road	1	Very finely carved woodwork to upper floors, bargeboards.
	5	Flemish style dormer gable with spiral, floral swag and pendant decoration.
	6 - 30	Stone bays with geometric carving to parapet.
	13	Moulded brick panels to bays.
	15, 17, 31 - 35, 39, 41, 45 - 49,53	leaded lights in original stained glass. robustly carved corbelled supports to porches.
Saxby Street	2 - 8	Wrought iron decoration to tops of bays and elaborate decorated eaves with terracotta mouldings.
	10 - 12 & 30 - 36	ceramic tiles along eaves cornice.
Severn Street	1-7, 17-23	Three storey Queen Anne style.
	6	Classical detailing-deeply projecting eaves with corbelled bracket supports and over-sailing lintels.
	16 - 18	Gothic-style stone bays with carved capitols and mullions.
	38 - 40	Unusual carved and balustraded timber bays; cusped light with finely moulded w/w showing horizontal and diagonal stringing. Cusped windows to first floor.
	47 - 49	Italianate styling with attractive cusped leaded lights.;
	51 - 57	Cast iron balustrading to bays and flower motif moulded brick patterning to dormer gable.
Upper Tichborne St.	28 - 38	Highly ornate stone semi-circular bays to ground floor with cusped windowheads and pierced stone parapets; double or triple Venetian

	style window surrounds and decorated eaves cornice (1870s).
40	Finely carved classical doorway with ionic capitols, frieze and pediment; moulded brick sunflower decoration.
44	Bracketted eaves, fielded brick panels to bay window and simple carving on stone window heads.
51 – 57, 63-65	1890s Domestic Revival style – mock Tudor dormers, ornate facade with long ground floor bay and leaded lights

APPENDIX 5

Tree Preservation Orders

15 Andover Street
 Conduit Street, r/o Lincoln Street
 2a Tichborne Street (Tichborne Court)
 12 Tichborne Street

