

Loughborough Road Conservation Area Character Statement

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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CONTENTS

- 1.0** Introduction
- 2.0** Location and landform
- 3.0** Archaeology, history and development
- 4.0** Prevailing and former uses
- 5.0** Architectural character
- 6.0** Key unlisted buildings
- 7.0** Townscape
- 8.0** Building materials
- 9.0** Open spaces and trees
- 10.0** Lighting and street furniture
- 11.0** Loss of character
- 12.0** Preserving the character
- 13.0** Conservation Area boundary

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of buildings in the conservation area

Appendix 2 List of Tree Preservation Orders

Appendix 3 Glossary of architectural terms

List of Maps

Map 1 City of Leicester Conservation Areas

Map 2: Boundary of Loughborough Road Conservation Area

Map 3: Map of 1887

Map 4: Map of 1904

Map 5: Map of 1938

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 (map 1) which contain the best of the older parts of the city but which also serve 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 distinctive and contains qualities that 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 the Loughborough Road Conservation 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, on its part, 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 Loughborough Road Conservation Area was designated in March 1983 (Map 2).

2. Location and Landform

The Conservation Area is sited on a low plateau, 58 metres above sea level, and about 3 kilometres north of the Clock Tower. The site is on the margin between the glacial sand and gravel river terraces on the east-side of the River Soar flood plain and the underlying red marls. It covers an area of approximately 3 hectares.

3. Archaeology, History and Development

- 3.1 By the nineteenth century, Belgrave village had grown to be the largest of the satellite villages around the former Borough of Leicester. This growth was largely the result of the excellent communications provided by the

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

main Leicester to Loughborough turnpike road, which ran through the village.

- 3.2 Loughborough Road developed in the early nineteenth century as an exclusive area to the south of Belgrave village, with substantial detached villas for wealthy professional and businessmen from Leicester. The new residences were sited on the flatter, eastern side of the road set well back within large gardens, giving them a sunny western aspect overlooking the river valley. The earliest surviving house in the Conservation Area is Penn House (previously known as 'The Beeches') at 119 Loughborough Road. Over the next 50 years or so more large detached and semi-detached houses and villas were built and, in keeping, with their important size and exteriors, sported names such as 'The Hollies', 'The Grange', 'Acacia Villas', 'Albert House', 'Norman Villa', 'The Ferns' and 'Prospect House'.
- 3.2 The significant increase in Leicester's population in the middle years of the nineteenth century (a 40% rise was recorded between 1861 and 1871) was largely contained within the boundaries of the Borough and expansion outside of the Borough was generally restricted to large detached residences for the well-off families of Leicester². However, the role of Loughborough Road as an exclusive suburb outside of Leicester ended in 1892 when the boundaries of the Borough were extended to take in the Parish of Belgrave. As the demand for housing rose and when horse (and later electric) tram services began in 1874, development of the outer suburbs such as Loughborough Road became increasingly attractive. Thus, streets of terraced houses were built on the west side of Loughborough Road in the late 1880s or early 1890s, while the house and grounds of 'The Hollies' were sold and a new street of speculative middle-class terraced housing built (Shaftesbury Avenue). Public buildings such as a church and a police station were built to cater for the needs of the growing local population (Map 3).
- 3.3 By 1904, the large grounds, tree-lined drive and entrance lodge of 'The Grange' had also disappeared to be replaced with more speculative housing plots on the newly created Windsor Avenue (Map 4). ('The Grange' itself was not demolished until the 1930s.
- 3.4 By 1938 development in the Conservation Area was effectively complete (Map 5). Since then, the terrace of large houses on the opposite corner of Windsor Avenue were demolished in the 1970s and replaced by offices (now used as part of a school).
- 3.5 Between 1990 and 1991, Shaftesbury Avenue was included in a repair programme under the City Council's Housing Renewal Strategy. Care was taken to ensure that much of the existing good quality joinery was left intact and repaired as necessary. The programme also provided funding for a front wall re-building scheme at 93 to 109 Loughborough Road.

² Simons, J., *Leicester Past & Present Vol. 2 The Modern City*, London 1974

4. Prevailing and former uses

- 4.1 Until about the middle of the twentieth century, the larger houses facing Loughborough Road remained in residential use. However, as the occupiers moved out and because the houses were expensive to maintain, large houses such as these became less attractive as family homes. From about the 1940s, therefore, most of the properties between 123 and 141 Loughborough Road have been converted to other uses, primarily offices. The large front gardens have been laid out for car parking. More recently, two former houses have become places of worship (a Hindu Temple and a Mosque), reflecting the changes in cultural identity that have taken place in the area, and one has been converted for use as a school.
- 4.2 Most of the properties in the southern half of the Conservation Area remain in residential use but some of the larger ones have also become offices or, more recently, an Islamic educational institution. The former police station, after many years in use as warehousing, has recently been acquired as an extension to the education institute opposite.

5. Architectural character

- 5.1 *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.*
- 5.1 The northern and southern halves of the Conservation Area express different architectural characters reflecting the different periods of their development.
- 5.2 Apart from the few inter-war houses on Windsor Avenue, the northern part is dominated by large, two storey Victorian houses built in red or cream brick with slate roofs and stone detailing. Canted bay windows feature prominently and ornamentation is restrained and mainly in the Classical style. Stone window surrounds, string courses, simple porches with Tuscan or Ionic columns (at **131 and 133 Loughborough Road** respectively), eaves brackets and stone quoins are common themes. The paired wrought iron eaves brackets at **129 Loughborough Road** are particularly noteworthy, as is the design of its ground floor bay windows with their curved leaded roofs. At **135-137 Loughborough Road** there is more detail - moulded stone lintels supported by curved brackets, quatrefoil pierced parapets and shouldered window openings to the ground floor bays. Nearby, the pale brickwork, large wide bay windows and timber balustrading at **133 Loughborough Road** create a heavier, more robust appearance. However, its fine Ionic column porch and Georgian style fanlight offset this. In complete contrast to its neighbours the original façade at **139 Loughborough Road** has been replaced completely by the sikhara, domes and ornately carved and painted porch of the Hindu

temple. On the opposite side of Roughton Street there is a very fine carved brick floral panel on the side wall of **143 Loughborough Road**, dating that building to 1883.

- 5.3 South of Windsor Avenue the buildings and plots are smaller but there is generally increased use of ornamentation, reflecting the changing architectural tastes and fashions towards the end of the 19th century. The exception to this is **119 Loughborough Road**, a very plain symmetrical early 19th century house of two storeys with original six-pane sliding sash windows and moulded timber doorcase. The front wall to the Loughborough Road contains panels of the original cast iron railings. The building also still retains its original wooden sun-blind fascias. However the modern extensions to this building are of no architectural value either to the original house or to the conservation area generally.
- 5.4 The houses in **Shaftesbury Avenue** were constructed in the 1880s in the Domestic (or Vernacular) Revival style with big gables and prominent and simply decorated chimneys, tile-hanging, double height bay windows and decorative timberwork. Red brick is combined with roughcast render on upper storeys, and clay tiles for roofs. The houses are also linked together by a continuous red clay tiled canopy between the ground and first floors. In most cases, the original sliding sash windows and front doors remain intact. The side elevation of number **2 Shaftesbury Avenue** is given further importance in keeping with its prominent site by the addition of more detailing in a mix of styles typical of the late Victorian era. In this case it takes the form of projecting brick string courses, a projecting chimney with a fine corbelled base and a 'Romanesque' style arch over the front door with 'Early English' style lancet windows on either side. House names are also important in this group and are provided as either carved lettering in stone lintels or in carving in the brick arch spandrels over the front doors.
- 5.5 There is an interesting pair of red brick houses at numbers **115-117 Loughborough Road**, probably dating from around the 1870s. These have matching Dutch-style gables complete with a ball finial at number 115. Both have double height stone bay windows with shouldered window heads and pierced parapets. The round arched doorcases have ornate carved keystones and the pilasters have been decorated with simplified 'Jacobean' strapwork, a design reflected in the decoration above the second floor windows. The first floor windows also have a touch of the Gothic Revival style in their use of pilasters and stiff-leaf carved capitals.
- 5.6 On the west-side of Loughborough Road, the former Belgrave **Police Station** stands on the corner of Holden Street. Its pleasing form derives from its symmetrical design consisting of a single storey central section with a pedimented gable over the main entrance door and two storey 'wings' at each end, each having a pavilion-style slate roof and four-pane sash windows. The chimney-stacks are particularly prominent and attractive. There is a very poorly designed extension along the Holden Street frontage but otherwise the building facades remain in almost their

original condition. Designed in a simple style, it is an attractive building on a prominent corner.

- 5.7 Next to the former police station are the **Freemens' Cottages**. These are pleasant two storey flats in the Arts and Crafts style featuring white rendered walls, multi-paned windows and a hipped Swithland slate roof. The principal elevation to Loughborough Road is decorated with a pedimented gable containing Leicester's coat of arms and on the front wall a commemorative plaque dates the building to '1900'.

6. Key unlisted buildings

- 6.1 There are no buildings within the Conservation Area that are statutorily listed as being of architectural or historical importance. However, there are a number of buildings which, although unlisted, make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- 6.2 The following buildings are of particular value:

Nos.105,107,109,111,113,115,117,119,123,125,129,131,133,135,137&
43 Loughborough Road;
Freemens' Cottages, 174 Loughborough Road;
Former police station, 176-180 Loughborough Road;
1-29 and 2-32 Shaftesbury Avenue.

7. Townscape

- 7.1 The term *townscape* refers to the ways in which views open and close through an area, to changes in level, visual contrasts and linkages, to the textural qualities of a space or a location, and to the rhythms and pattern in the street scene. These elements give an area its individuality and character.

- 7.2 The Loughborough Road Conservation Area has a distinctly 'linear' composition reflecting its historical development. The quality of the townscape is significantly enhanced by the size and position of the many trees that line Loughborough Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. These serve to soften the hard urban space by enclosing and reducing the scale of this busy highway. At the northern end of the conservation area buildings are seen through trees and trees create a feeling of shadowed seclusion on Shaftesbury Avenue.

- 7.3 Although on plan Loughborough Road appears straight a subtle change of direction can be discerned on the ground. This leads the eye through the conservation area and increases the visual significance of the trees. A fine mature copper beech tree is both a focal point and a visual stop at the north end of Loughborough Road. Looking south towards the city a distant view of the Humberstone Road telephone exchange tower is surprisingly

revealed and views west along Holden Street offer glimpses of the rocket tower of the National Space Centre.

- 7.4 The buildings of the Conservation Area add other qualities to the townscape, not least the patterns and rhythms created by triangular and curved gables and the outlines of chimneys along the skyline. Front garden walls form a continuous building line, defining the public and private spaces. However, the lack of a solid edge to the petrol filling station has a negative effect on the corner of Windsor Avenue.
- 7.5 Shaftesbury Avenue has its own particular identity, being a quiet enclave sheltered from the noise and busyness of Loughborough Road. It is also of particular townscape merit, being an attractive architectural set piece with matching terraces on either side of the road. Bay windows and their fenestration create regular vertical rhythms while a strong horizontal is formed by the canopy which connects all the houses in a continuous line. The first floor gables and chimneys add interest to the skyline and the mouldings on window frames, doors and canopy brackets provide visual interest at the smaller scale. The decorative pierced wrought iron screens above the passageway gates reinforce the patterns made by the fish-scale tiling and the mock half-timbering on the upper floors and gables.

8. Building materials

- 8.1 As with much of Leicester the dominant material used in the Conservation Area is orange/red brick, although some cream bricks are used on the larger buildings. Roofs tend to be of Welsh slate with red clay used to some effect on the canopy roofs in Shaftesbury Avenue and for the ridge tiles at 93-103 Loughborough Road where they are of a pierced pattern. Swithland slate appears on the earliest building (119 Loughborough Road). Some brickwork has been painted or rendered, generally to the detriment of a building's appearance.
- 8.2 Bay windows on the grander properties are made of stone while those on terraced houses are generally timber. The usual windows are sliding sash. A few original doors remain on Loughborough Road but the majority are to be found on Shaftesbury Avenue. These have five fielded panels and have been well copied where replacements were made during the 1991 envelope scheme. Many original number-plates and name plaques also remain. Where they are not missing altogether, garden gates come in a variety of styles and materials, from traditional timber gates to decorative wrought iron.
- 8.3 In the northern part of Loughborough Road, most of the front garden walls have been lost. A short section remains at numbers 123 and 125 and a number of brick piers with decorative limestone caps survive, such as at number 133. Cast iron decorative panels have been incorporated into the rebuilt front boundary wall 119 Loughborough Road. South of Windsor Avenue, many of the residential garden walls and railings have been rebuilt. Elsewhere there is a mix of concrete blocks and rendered bricks

that are generally out of character with the area. Road surfaces are of black tarmac with a red tarmac bus lane on the southbound carriageway. Pavements are of concrete slabs with granite kerbs. Grey and red clay paviors have been used for speed humps in Shaftesbury Avenue and Windsor Avenue.

9. Open spaces and trees

- 9.1 There are no formal open spaces in this small conservation area, green space being entirely provided by private gardens. Unfortunately, virtually all of the original landscaped domestic gardens in the northern part of the conservation area have been replaced with the tarmac surfaces of car parks. These car parks are extremely prominent in the street scene and there is a need to encourage landscaping of the front of these properties to screen the car parking areas. Some informally planted beds have been made along the front boundaries or close to buildings but generally all that remains of the original gardens are the trees along the front and side boundaries. Parts of the original front boundary wall and garden remain at 123-5 Loughborough Road in the form of an oval driveway around a large central bed planted with hedging and trees, but this is not readily visible from the street. In Shaftesbury Avenue, front gardens are little more than 1.5m deep forecourts behind 1m high walls and few are cultivated, being generally concreted over and used as dustbin storage areas.
- 9.2 Therefore, the contribution made to the quality and character of the Conservation Area by its many mature trees (both on private land and on the street) is not to be underestimated. These are significant amenity features, a fact recognised by the designation of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) which cover most of the trees along Loughborough Road (see Appendix 2). Almost all the trees are broadleaf species such as lime, horse chestnut, copper beech and birch. The leaf colour (particularly that of the copper beeches) is also an important amenity feature and complements the building materials used in the area as well as contrasting with the green of other trees.
- 9.3 Since the first TPO was made in the late 1970s, some trees have died or become diseased or, as at 139 Loughborough Road, been removed as a result of approved building works. Some other trees have been subject to unauthorised pruning or lopping. The few English elms in the area when the Conservation Area was declared have been lost to Dutch Elm disease. The street trees have been crown-lifted.
- 9.4 The trees in private car parks are under considerable pressure from parked cars and impermeable surfaces, suggesting the need for better design and layout of these parking areas to protect the existing trees. The close proximity of trees to one another and the narrow planting spaces which they occupy means that there is little opportunity to plant new trees.
- 9.5 Responsibility for street trees lies with the City Council and 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 street trees are kept in good condition and any diseased or dying trees are replaced at the earliest opportunity. Until such plans are completed the Council will carry out all works to street trees on the basis of its EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) policies.

10. Lighting and street furniture

10.1 The street lighting is carried on modern steel columns. A traffic light-controlled junction with pedestrian crossing facilities was recently installed at Loughborough Road/ Holden Street/Windsor Avenue while, just outside the Conservation Area boundary, a prominent and intrusive traffic camera, mounted on a large column, has been erected on the corner of Holden Street. A modern cantilever bus shelter is located outside 129 Loughborough Road.

11. Loss of character

11.1 Before the Conservation Area was declared, the demolition of the terrace of houses at the corner of Loughborough Road and Windsor Avenue in the 1970s and their replacement with a flat-roofed office block had a seriously detrimental effect on the appearance and character of the area. The open aspect of the petrol filling station on the opposite corner has a further negative effect on a prominent location within the Conservation Area.

11.2 Although not widespread, there has been some loss of original features such as timber sash windows and doors. This has damaged the character of the conservation area because the replacements generally do not reflect the fine detail and proportions of the originals (see paragraph 12.4). Where brickwork has been painted or rendered, this has obscured the attractive brick colour as well as incurring higher maintenance costs.

11.3 The greatest loss of character has been the removal of front boundary walls and gardens, particularly on Loughborough Road. However, lack of boundary wall maintenance on Shaftesbury Avenue has led to these formerly matching features displaying a mixed variety of heights, designs and colours to the detriment of the street scene.

11.4 High levels of traffic and associated noise, pollution and roadside equipment are an unfortunate feature of Loughborough Road and are detrimental to both the visual and aural qualities of the Conservation Area.

12. Preserving the character

12.1 The previous sections have described how the setting, the relationship of buildings and open spaces and architectural details have contributed to the special character and appearance of the Loughborough Road Conservation Area. It is important that these qualities are preserved and

policies in the City of Leicester Local Plan (currently under review) are 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.

- 12.2 Conservation Area Consent must be obtained for the demolition of all but the smallest buildings (such as outbuildings) within the area. There are also tighter restrictions on advertisements and on the installation of satellite dishes than elsewhere. The Council accepts, however, that it would be unreasonable to oppose the installation of satellite dishes altogether, but normally requires that dishes and antennae are placed on the rear of buildings so as to have the least possible effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 12.3 The details of individual properties are also important in forming the character of the area, for example, the decorative use of timber for windows, porches and doors and the external detailing of houses built in the 19th century.
- 12.4 Repair and restoration work should always try to retain the original appearance of the building and be in materials to match the originals. In particular, the use of upvc to replace original timber windows is not normally acceptable, particularly on elevations facing the street. Not only is upvc an alien material in the area, but the proportion, detail and thickness of glazing bars seldom replicate the intricacy and fine detail of the original windows. Similarly, the use of outward opening "mock-sash" windows, even when made of timber, are rarely a satisfactory substitute for sash windows. Not only are the traditional sash boxes lost, but the outward-opening of the window, can visually disrupt the rhythm of a terrace. Wherever possible, therefore, existing window frames should be repaired rather than replaced.
- 12.5 Equally important is the retention of original roofing materials, such as Welsh slates and tiles. Wherever possible, original slates should be re-used, supplemented if necessary with second-hand ones, rather than be replaced with alternative types. Artificial slates, in particular, have a shiny, regular appearance not in keeping with the appearance of a natural slate roof. Cast-iron gutters and down pipes are also important. Chimney-stacks are important to the appearance of a property and contribute skyline interest and should be retained and, if necessary re-built or re-pointed, rather than capped.
- 12.6 Conservation area designation alone does not prevent minor alterations to houses which could spoil the character and appearance of the whole area. For instance, original timber sash windows and doors can be replaced in upvc and houses can be rendered and re-roofed in modern materials without the need for planning permission. Alterations such as these are "permitted development" under the Town and Country Planning General Development Order.

- 12.7 In order to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the City Council is to declare an Article 4(2) Direction on Nos. 1-29 and 4-32 Shaftesbury Avenue. This will remove permitted development rights so that planning permission will be required for any external alterations likely to affect the appearance of the property when viewed from the street, such as:
- extensions
 - replacement windows and doors
 - re-roofing or alterations to chimneys and ridge tiles
 - erection of porches
 - removal of front garden walls or fences
 - erection of gates, walls or fences
 - covering walls by rendering, painting the brickwork or cladding walls in stone, artificial stone, timber, plastic or tiles.
- 12.8 The Direction will not apply to properties in use as flats in the Conservation Area since flats do not enjoy permitted development rights and planning permission is already required for the types of alterations listed above.
- 12.9 Trees in conservation areas, with a few exceptions, are protected by law and anyone intending to carry out works to a tree must give the City Council notice of their intentions. The Council then has six weeks to consider the proposal.
- 12.10 Some trees in the area are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (see Appendix 2), which makes it an offence to cut-down, top, lop, uproot or wilfully destroy a protected tree without the City Council's permission. Any such proposal must be submitted as a formal application and include details of, and justification for, the work proposed.

13. Conservation Area boundary

- 13.1 The Council is required to periodically review the boundaries of conservation areas and to consider cancellation of designation where part of an area is no longer considered to possess the special interest which justified the original designation.
- 13.2 As part of this assessment, the boundaries of the Loughborough Road Conservation Area have been re-assessed. It is proposed to revise the boundaries by removing 89 Loughborough Road and the land to the front of the Royal Mail sorting office from the Conservation Area (Map 1). Other than this minor change, it is considered that the special architectural and historic interest of the remainder of the area continues to justify its special status.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

List of Buildings within the Loughborough Road Conservation Area

Loughborough Road	Nos. 93-117 (odd), 117 ½, 119, 121-141 (odd), 174 (Freemens' Cottages), 176-180 (even) (No. 89 to be removed from the Conservation Area)
Shaftesbury Avenue	Nos. 1-29 (odd), 2-32 (even)
Windsor Avenue	Nos. 1, 12-14, 20

There are no listed buildings in the Conservation Area.

Appendix 2

Tree Preservation Orders (see map 2)

111-143 Loughborough Road

123 Loughborough Road

Appendix 3

Glossary of architectural terms

bracket	a small supporting piece of stone or other material to carry a supporting weight
canted	having splayed sides
capital	the head or crowning feature of a column
corbelled dentil	courses of bricks each built out slightly above the one below a small square block, usually one of a series, creating a tooth-like pattern
doorcase	decorative timber or stone framing a doorway
Early English	one of the historical divisions of English architecture of the period 1190 -1250 and characterised by the use of the simple pointed arch
fanlight	a window over a door

finial	a formal ornament at the top of a gable or pinnacle
fishscale	the pattern created by overlapping the semi-circular edges of decorative slates or tiles
fluted	shallow concave groove pattern which runs vertically down a column shaft
hipped roof	a roof which has sloped instead of vertical ends
Ionic	used to describe a column with a fluted shaft and a capital formed by a double scroll
Jacobean	one of the historical divisions of English architecture of the period 1603-25
keystone	the central wedge-shaped stone at the top of an arch
lintel	a horizontal beam bridging an opening
moulding	a continuous groove or projection used decoratively to throw shadow on, or water away from, a wall
parapet	a low wall along the outer edge of a roof
pavilion roof	a roof where each of the four sides slopes equally
pediment pilaster	a low pitched gable shape over a door or window a shallow rectangular column which projects only slightly from a wall
quatrefoil	a decoration formed by combining parts of four circles to create a flower shape
quoin	dressed stones laid at the corners of buildings, usually in alternating large and small sizes
Romanesque	used to describe buildings or architectural features in the 'Roman' style (such as round arches etc)
shouldered	a method of decorating the top corners of a door or window frame by curving the vertical member before continuing it vertically to meet the lintel
sikhara	the spire or tower of a Hindu temple, over the sanctuary
spandrel	the triangular space which is created between a horizontal line from the apex of an arch and a vertical line from the point from which the arch springs

strapwork	ornamentation consisting of interlaced flat bands which look like straps
string course	a continuous decorative horizontal band projecting from a wall and usually moulded
tile-hanging	a covering of over-lapping rows of tiles on a vertical surface
Tuscan	used to describe a column with a plain shaft and simple cushion-like capital