

RESPONSE TO BOROUGH CHARACTER STUDY

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GENERAL POINTS

It is a detailed piece of research, clearly produced with lots of good illustrations. Although key features of interest are mentioned, there isn't a general overview of all the buildings in the area.

Has it been widely publicised enough? Do those who live in the areas studied know of the Borough Character Study so that they can comment on what is said about their locality.

The study focuses on the appearance of the streets and open spaces but ignores the views that residents experience from their properties, including views onto neighbouring green spaces.

Comments in the Guidance sections, such as "*Avoid total infilling of entrance canopies*" may not be popular with residents who want to make alterations to their properties, like their neighbours have done. Does the council have any powers to prevent residents from making such changes where planning permission is not required?

GRAND DRIVE LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

Grand Drive has been divided into two parts, but this has meant that some sections where enhanced is needed have not been mentioned at all.

a) GRAND DRIVE NORTH CHARACTER STUDY

No mention has been made of the Bushey Mansions flats at junction of Grand Drive with Bushey Rd, which has many period feature.

Perhaps the less attractive buildings, eg flats such as Sterling Court, and houses like 69 and 71 should be mentioned to show the range of architectural styles in the area.

b) BLENHEIM ROAD CHARACTER AREA

The enhancement project GD1 mentions additional street tree planting at the eastern end of the road. For generations, there has been an avenue of mature oak trees along Blenheim Rd. Many are now in the front gardens of the properties. These remaining trees should be listed as a significant landscape feature.

Protection, in the form of TPOs with proper enforcement, needs to be given to the remaining oak trees. Some residents have told us of their dismay when one of the oaks in a front garden was felled recently; this was allowed despite the tree have a TPO; permission to fell it was given, we understand, because of fears its roots were damaging the house – were alternative preventative measures investigated to avoid the felling? The trees planted in GD1 should be oaks which will maintain the current prospect.

Residents in Blenheim Road and Blenheim Close (not mentioned in the Study) have lost valuable views over the former LESSA field, due to the positions of the new residential buildings on this site.

c) LINKWAY CHARACTER AREA

The assessment to the properties in good but refers only to the street scene; most residents value the views from the rear of their properties highly. Many residents were dismayed at the loss of the poplars along the Bushey Rd boundary of the sports field behind the Linkway properties (odd numbered houses). These trees provided valuable screening from traffic noise, dust and light.

It is odd that the Linkway Character Area omits part of Linkway. Some Linkway residents have told us they are unhappy with the neglect of the garages behind Westway Close which can be seen from Linkway.

d) WESTWAY CHARACTER AREA

Westway Close residents are most concerned that the garages behind their properties are neglected and very dilapidated and the area is used regularly by fly-tippers. The garages are owned by Merton Priory Homes, and MPH staff tell us that they hope to clean up the area and improve security.

Many Westway Close residents were dismayed at the loss of the poplars along the Bushey Rd boundary of the sports field. These trees provided valuable screening from traffic noise, dust and light.

There is also concern at the poor state of the road surface at the turning circle and in Barnscroft. The level of street lighting on the footpath to the footbridge over the railway is a matter of concern.

Residents with properties bordering the LESSA field (Westway, Greenway, Elm and Orchard Closes are concerned about the future of the green part of this site, since there is still uncertainty about whether an organisation is going to take responsibility for its maintenance. The opening of the footway across the field between Westway and Grand Drive offers new views to walkers but may compromise security for the properties bordering the field. Residents have expressed concerns about the removal of some trees by the developers.

Parts of Grand Drive seem to be part of the Westway area according to the plans but no mention is made of them. Residents have told us that the garages on Grand Drive, in the area between Crossway and Elm Walk are an eye-sore. They appear not to be in use; some have graffiti on them and there are weeds growing in front of many of them.

e) GRAND DRIVE SOUTH CHARACTER AREA

We are unclear what is meant by "rationalising street parking" and would welcome further explanation.

The position of GD3 on the plan suggests that only a limited part of grand Drive requires improvements to the green verges, with additional trees. We suggest that the whole of Grand Drive South (and the parts that seem to have been included in the Westway area) need to be viewed as a whole when improvements are being considered.

While the views over the sports fields from Bijou villas and neighbouring properties is mentioned (see photo), the downside is that there is considerable light pollution from the playing fields in the evenings. This could be mitigated by a) modernising the lights, so there is less spillage and b) planting trees along the boundary, by the brook.

Residents regularly complain about the appearance of the footway in Grand Drive (mainly from Elm walk southwards). Many paving slabs are cracked giving an unattractive look

although they are not hazardous and therefore do not fit the criteria for replacement .

f) HEATH DRIVE CHARACTER AREA

It is a pity that no mention was made of any properties other than those in Heath Drive itself. The houses in Parkway and other neighbouring streets deserved a mention and maybe a photo. Householders in Parkway have enhanced their street by planting bulbs around the street trees.

g) PRINCE GEORGES PLAYING FIELD CHARACTER AREA

It is surprising that the Study omits to state that the fields are a SINC, due to its botany. It is also an important site for other species, eg little owls nest regularly in the oaks near the Messine field; bats hunt over the whole area; common lizard are also seen on the field. Over recent years, residents have expressed concerns that the field's status as a SINC is being compromised by events such as the car boot sales in summer which cause compaction of the soil and may result in a loss of biodiversity. In addition events cause noise and visual disruption to those whose properties overlooks the field. The number and type of event continues to need careful monitoring, and enforcement when necessary.

GD4 refers to improving the entrance from Grand Drive but it is to be hoped that this entrance will only be used by those involved in sports. (there were problems a few years ago when a "one-way system" was in operation for the boot sales with vehicles entering from the Bushey Rd but being driven across the grass and then exiting onto Grand Drive; this was rightly stopped). The need to keep the gate locked when the field is not in use is vital to avoid fly-tipping and the dumping of vehicles (a car was burnt out last summer)

Quite rightly, the Study refers to the high amenity value with large open views. The new enclosed tennis court (in an "illuminated bubble structure") has not improved the views. Tree planting along the David Lloyd boundary would mitigate its impact. The increased amount of light may also have a negative impact on wildlife, but without research data form before its installation it would not be possible to confirm this.

The eye-sore of graffiti on the changing room blocks is a regular problem, but it is difficult to see how this can be avoided; lots of paint seems to be the only solution.

Residents who use the footpath from Grand Drive to Whatley Avenue often complain to us about the amount of litter bordering the path. Such day to day maintenance is an important part of the fields' amenity value.