

Matlock Bank

Conservation Area Appraisal

8. Negative Factors



NEGATIVE FACTORS

There has been gradual erosion of the character of the conservation area, most noticeably through building alterations and development dating from the mid to late twentieth century, which do not reflect local building traditions. The following sets of circumstances in particular have, and continue to, threaten the character of the conservation area:

- ... twentieth century development located on prominent junctions
- ... twentieth century development blocking important views
- ... alterations resulting in the loss of original historic details, materials and forms
- ... development resulting in the loss of tree cover and garden settings
- ... development detracting from landmark buildings or key views within the conservation area

Mid to late Twentieth Century Development

In general, much of the mid to late twentieth century development has a neutral effect on the character of the area, but there are a few cases where individual buildings are very conspicuous, jarring visually with the surrounding context. One of the clearest examples of this is the High Court residential development off Smith Road. When viewed from the junction of Jackson Road and Jackson Tor Road above the massing of the building is a barrier, blocking the views across the valley. From a little further up the hillside, it stands out distracting the eye from more pleasing landmarks such as Riber Castle and Smedley's 'crown' to County Hall. The building is a wide, expansive, flat-roofed block, with horizontal bands of white "ship-lap" cladding and vertical piers of blue brick, all features that do not sit comfortably with the soft tones of the surrounding stone and



View of High Court from Jackson Tor Road



Prefabricated hall, Jackson Road

slate, and the smaller scale buildings which characterise the immediate area. The nearby prefabricated hall on Jackson Road similarly stands out for its choice of inappropriate materials.

The Victoria Court development and adjacent Laser Rail buildings lie outside the conservation area boundary, although they affect its setting. The form of these buildings, and the way that materials are used, contrasts with the distinctive character of the conservation area. For example, the curtain glazing to Laser Rail, and the large unbroken mass of Victoria Court, with detailing such as low pitched roofs and "picture" windows, is very different from the tight grain of stone cottages and terraces with steeply pitched roofs, chimneys and the wealth of craftsmanship and detailing that is typically found within the conservation area. In this prominent location, off a major through-route, near the Smedley Street East and Chesterfield Road junction, one of the main entrances into the historic heart of the conservation area, the impact on the setting is a negative one.



Above: Victoria Court

Below: Laser Rail



Two commercial properties on the north side of Smedley Street are particularly damaging to the views of All Saints Church above (right). Built from unsympathetic materials, they introduce distracting garage paraphernalia, large signs and unsympathetic boundaries.



28 Wellington Street incorporates an undercover carport at ground level. The lack of an active frontage and interest at pedestrian level, coupled with the appearance of top-heavy development, is inappropriate streetscape in any area, not just in an historic setting.



28 Wellington Street



Development on a minor scale can also have a visual impact. The freestanding tower in the garden of 6 Jackson Tor Road is prominent from the public footpath between Cobden Road & Jackson Tor Road, as well as from Jackson Road below (left). Its unusual slender and tall proportions, and concrete blockwork construction draw attention, although once the blockwork is clad in stone its prominence will be reduced.

The way in which materials are used is as important as the material itself and traditional building techniques are part of the character of the settlement. For example, a recent extension to a 19th century building on Wellington Street (pictured below) has failed to match the original stonework (on the right hand side of this image), as the stone selected for the upper walls is quarry-dressed, squared ashlar, laid as broken courses, rather than random rubble stone.



Development in Former Hydro grounds

County Hall (former Smedley's Hydro), has several outlying buildings on the site which do not relate well to the original block, but are at least masked by the tree canopy in distant views. This is not the case, however, with later blocks clearly visible from Wellington Street on the Chatsworth Hall (former hydro) site.



Above: two images of blocks obscuring the west wing of County Hall

Below: mid twentieth century block on the Chatsworth Hall site



County Hall's car parks cover most of the grounds, resulting in the loss of extensive landscaped lawns. Upper Greenhill Gardens has been developed on land which was previously the grounds to Matlock House Hydro, giving the former hydro, (now Rutland Court) an urban setting unlike its original landscaped surrounds. Elsewhere the grounds of other large hydros may be at risk from development. These large gardens are very important to the character of the former hydros and the conservation area as a whole, providing a rich tree canopy. Pressure to subdivide large gardens for development should be resisted.

Highways and traffic management

Car parking is scarce in Matlock Bank, particularly in the southern areas closest to the town centre. Further up the hill, tight, steep roads with little turning space, present just as much difficulty. Whilst the character of the enclosed streets, lined by buildings and boundary walls, is one of the strongest characteristics of the conservation area, it has led to a continual on-street car parking presence and pressure for off-street parking. Occasionally, the original boundary walls have been removed to provide off-street car parking. This breaks up the continuity of the streetscape and has a negative visual effect.



The lack of boundary wall to the street frontage of this late twentieth century house on Cavendish Road does not follow the character of the conservation area

Public Realm and Open Spaces

The slope of the hill and the nature of the road layout have resulted in a number of wide, expansive road junctions, often with little focus. The junction between Chesterfield Road and Smedley Street East is an important gateway into the conservation area. Unlike most other junctions, this one has a traffic island presenting a platform which could be used to create a focal point, but in this case is a missed opportunity with a street lamp cluttered with signs and a relatively small rectangular planter.



Traffic island at the junction between Chesterfield Road and Smedley Street East

Other examples of neglected road junctions include the corner of Smith Road and Jackson Road and the corner of Jackson Road & Wellington Street. Concrete kerbs and large expanses of tarmac dominate these junctions.



Corner of Jackson Road and Wellington Street

The former car park to Tinker Wright's Ironmongers at the corner of Smedley Street West and Wellington Street is another neglected open space, although largely on private land.

Whilst most public spaces and parks are very well maintained, the open space adjacent to Chesterfield Road, which leads towards the allotments, appears to be a neglected wasteland with an accumulation of fly tipping visible from the roadside, creating a negative impression (below).



Alterations to historic buildings

Unsympathetic alterations to historic buildings can have a detrimental effect on the character of the wider area as well as the building itself. The cumulative effect of alterations to traditional shopfronts, particularly along the east side of Bank Road lowers the historic quality of this stretch of road. Alterations to Jackson Tor House, most notably the lapped timber fascia and thin posts to the verandah are visually jarring on such a building of such importance historically, as well as architecturally and with significant street presence.

With the exception of a few Arts and Crafts properties, render is not generally a common feature within the conservation area. Where render has been used, the bright, white-painted finishes and the uniform cementitious materials stand out uncharacteristically within the conservation area. The neutral and ochre-coloured traditional “wet-dash” and “wood-float” renders of properties, such as No. 6 Cobden Road and 15 Jackson Road, are less noticeable and less garish.



The neutral colour to render in the foreground is less visually obtrusive than the white render in the distance



Above left: Features such as blinds, signs and light fittings, intended as ornamentation to facades, can become visual ‘clutter’ when used to excess.

Above right: In the case of Chatsworth Hall, measures to counter structural defects detract from the building

Loss of historic building details and materials

There is clearly an increasing pressure for change particularly with a number of larger properties being converted into apartments, resulting in complete refurbishment of the building. Rockside Hydro has recently been converted into apartments, and as a listed building there are high standards required for alterations to respect the architectural integrity. However elsewhere, such as at the top of Steep Turnpike, the same high standards have not been followed. The recent conversion of Turnpike Lodge, 42 Steep Turnpike into apartments has windows in uPVC (right). Many individual houses also have plastic replacement windows. Alterations such as this can make a significant impact on the overall visual character of the conservation area, as plastic windows have more heavy dimensions than the original timber profiles. They are often located flush with the masonry face or with only a small reveal, unlike traditional windows, where typically sash windows were set behind 4 inch reveals. This created shadows and increased the depth and interest in the building. Many new windows do not follow the original patterns; for example, where sliding sash windows divided into two equal panes have been replaced with a less balanced division, with a smaller opening pane at the top. The alteration of a whole row of houses each with different window and door patterns would erode the visual rhythm of a terraced block.



Prominent chimneys to hydros and associated buildings are landmark features as well as being of historical interest. Some have now been reduced in height, and there may be others where they have been removed altogether and there is no obvious evidence of where they once were. The Matlock Green Garage, the former Tram Depot is an example where the chimney has been lowered.

The unusual circumstances where pedestrians look down onto roofs in the streets below makes changes in roof coverings all the more noticeable. There are instances where concrete roof tiles have replaced both Welsh slate and Derbyshire stone slate and these detract from the character of the conservation area.



The contrast between roof materials can be seen clearly here. The older Welsh slate roofs with a natural variation in colour are on the right and the later concrete tiles on the left are larger and thicker and more regular in colour and profile

Condition

The overall condition of buildings and open spaces in the conservation area is generally very good. In order to ensure retention of historic fabric, 'prevention is better than cure' and maintenance is very important. There are examples where lack of maintenance threatens loss of historic fabric within the conservation area, such as the stone slate roof at 6 Cobden Road, now in very poor condition (below).



The arched wrought iron lantern holder at Chatsworth Hall (former hydro) adds great interest to the entrance. Features like this are worth keeping in good repair to avoid corrosion of the metal-work



Sadly the covered seating areas in the gardens at County Hall are one of the few surviving remnants of Smedley's hydro grounds, and are deteriorating rapidly



This timber cill has been allowed to rot to the point where a substantial amount would need to be replaced to obtain a good repair. Original joinery is well worth maintaining as it is likely to be of a higher quality than the timber available for windows today

Surviving stone flagged and setted surfaces are at risk from patch repairs in tarmac

