



SAUGHALL MASSIE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd 2007 – Wirral Council 2009

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PREFACE

Background to the Study

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. Its purpose is to clarify the designation of the Conservation Area, which will protect and enhance the character of the historic core of the village of Saughall Massie.

Scope and Structure of the Study

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage ('Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality which should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has declared 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the regions environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features.

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.

- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.
- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the areas protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the areas overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded, the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1.0 LOCATION

1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

1.1.1 Saughall Massie is located towards the northern tip of the Wirral Peninsular, between the large settlements of Birkenhead and West Kirby. Originally an isolated rural village, it sits at the junction of an area of a largely undeveloped agricultural land and Upton, a straggling suburb area around an old village core separated from Birkenhead by the M53.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

1.2.1 Saughall Massie lies on flat, low lying land around 2.5km from the north Wirral coast.

1.2.2 The geology of the area is of boulder clay lying over Keuper red marl sandstone. The settlement sits beside the Arrowe Brook where alluvial deposits are found.

1.3 GENERAL USAGE

1.3.1 There are two working farms in the village, Diamond Farm and Prospect Farm, and one public house, The Saughall. A small former outbuilding on Prospect Farm houses a small craft business. The remainder of the properties are residential.

1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

1.4.1 Saughall Massie was designated as a Conservation Area in January 1974. The boundary incorporates the village core and parts of the surrounding field system. To the east the boundary follows the old course of the Arrowe Brook. To the west the boundary mainly follows field boundaries (to encompass an area where the mediaeval field pattern is still evident), the edge of Barnacre Lane and the property boundary of The Flayes, 124 Garden Hey Road. The conservation area boundary to the north is a straight line running east-west across fields to the north of Diamond Farm and 137 Garden Hey Road, providing a strip of land buffering the village core. To the south the boundary is also a straight line which cuts across the recently constructed by-pass and incorporates parts of adjacent fields

1.4.2 There are six grade II listed buildings / groups of buildings within the village: Ivy Cottage; Poplar Farmhouse; outbuildings to the East of Poplar

Farmhouse (now a private dwelling, “The Stables”); Diamond Farmhouse and barn; The Elms; and Saughall Massie Bridge.

2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1.1 The place name Saughall comes from *sall hah*, meaning the hall where sallows (or willows) grow. It might also be interpreted as willow nook. Spellings have varied over the centuries: Saligh (1249); Salghale (1309); Salgham (1385); and Saughoghe (1546). This element of the place name is thought to be of Anglo Saxon origin. Massie refers to the land owner Hamo de Mascy, whose family came from Mascey in Normandy, following the Norman conquest.
- 2.1.2 Saughall Massie is one of four ancient townships in the parish of Bidston, along with Moreton and Claughton, none of which receives mention in the Doomsday survey. It is likely that Saughall Massie was part of the land owned by Hamo de Mascy within the manor of Eastham as described in the Doomsday Book.
- 2.1.3 The manor and parish of Bidston was part of the barony of Dunham Massey, which is found in north east Cheshire. The third baron, Hamon de Massie founded Birkenhead Priory in the 1150s. The land continued in the possession of the barons of Dunham until the sixth baron sold it. The sale was disputed by his family and the land was eventually bought by the Duke of Lancaster. He exchanged it with Roger le Strange, Lord of Knocking, for land in Lincolnshire. Saughall Massie ultimately passed to the Earls of Derby, the Stanley family, where it remained until 1653.
- 2.1.3 Two houses of medieval origins are known to have existed in the village. The White House, dating from 1323 (formerly known as the Hall) and rebuilt in 1590, was demolished and rebuilt in the mid 20th century. Mud Hall, located on Barnacre Lane was known to exist in 1665 but was demolished in the mid 19th century. There has never been a church, any institutional or industrial building at Saughall Massie and it seems that the settlement has always been primarily agricultural. A timber peg mill dating from the 16th century formerly stood about a mile to the north of the settlement. This was demolished in 1875.

2.2 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- 2.2.1 Four surviving houses in the settlement date from this period. The Elms and Ivy Cottage are late 17th century houses of vernacular design (a date of 1665 is attributed to the latter, ref.MSMR2588/7). The farmhouses of Diamond Farm and Poplar Farm are early 18th century and show the strong influence

of Queen Anne and Georgian domestic architecture even in this relatively remote location.



Ivy Cottage dates from the mid- late C17th or earlier and is probably the oldest house in the village. Its design is entirely derived from local traditions and influences. The house at Diamond Farm is dated 1728. Its design uses local materials but shows the growing influence of Classical design concepts.

2.3 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

- 2.3.1 Saughall Massie township was 860 acres in extent. In 1801 its population was 98, in 1842 the population was 152 and by 1901 had risen to just 186. Writing in 1889 Sulley describes Saughall Massie in his *Hundred of Wirral* as “in every respect worse than the adjacent township of Moreton”, which he had typified as “in every point of view an extremely poor village”.
- 2.3.2 Throughout the 19th century the village remained a small settlement based on agriculture. A number of agricultural buildings, the house at 136 Garden Hey Road (Beaconsfield Cottage) and the pub were constructed in the second half of the 19th century and early C20th.
- 2.3.3 This humble picture is contrasted by the presence in the village of the first bridge constructed by eminent 19th century engineer and contractor Thomas Brassey. The purpose of the bridge, built in 1829, was to improve access to the village and the area beyond. The north Wirral coast and the marshy hinterland had a reputation for wrecking, smuggling and general lawlessness.



The simple but elegant Georgian bridge over the Arrowe Brook at Saughall Massie was the first bridge contract undertaken by Thomas Brassey.

2.3.4 Although less well known than his contemporaries Brunel and Stephenson, Brassey was responsible for the construction of much of the world's railways in the 19th century, especially in France, Canada, Australia, South America and India. By 1847, at the height of 'railway mania', he had built one third of Britain's railways.

2.4 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY CHANGES

- 2.4.1 In the interwar period the village remained agricultural with five working farms and a number of small nurseries with glass houses.
- 2.4.2 The Gardens were built in the late C19th and extended at a later date by a Mr Stanley. Soon after the Second World War the ancient White House Farm Brookfield Farm (adjacent to the bridge) and several other farm buildings in the village were demolished and three new houses built. These were The Flayes (124 Garden Hey Road), The White House on Saughall Road and Mañana on West Kirby Road. In the later 20th century many areas formerly occupied by orchards, nurseries and farm yards were subject to infill development (Applegarth and Poplar Farm Close). Also during this period the suburbs of Upton and Moreton spread over the land to the north and east.
- 2.4.3 In 2005 a new road connecting Upton to the west of the Wirral and bypassing Saughall Massie was constructed. The name of the section of road leading from the pub to the bridge changed from Saughall Massie Road to become part of Saughall Road.

2.5 ARCHAEOLOGY

2.5.1 The Merseyside Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record holds accounts of sites of interest in and around the Saughall Massie Conservation Area. Finds / records include:

- The six listed buildings, described in detail below.
- Medieval ridge and furrow remains to the west of the settlement core.
- Areas of long narrow field strips were recorded in the northwest of the settlement on the 1842 Tythe map, some of which are still clearly extant in present field boundaries.
- Evidence for an earlier bridge over the brook, identified during the construction of the by-pass.

3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS

3.1 SETTING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA

- 3.1.1 The settlement sits on the north bank of the Arrowe Brook and gently rising ground, within a largely flat landscape.
- 3.1.2 Saughall Massie sits close to the edge of the suburban areas of Greasby, Upton and Moreton, but within the open agricultural landscape separating these suburbs from the settlements of Hoylake and West Kirby.
- 3.1.3 Despite the proximity of large housing estates the village retains its rural character. Views out from the edge of the village to the west are of flattish open fields. To the south the eye passes over a foreground of fields, skims the roofs of Greasby and Newton and terminates on a skyline of trees formed by Caldy Hill, Thurstanston Hill and Arrowe Park. To the north and most especially to the east views out of Saughall Massie are to a backdrop of housing estates. Views north from Barnacre Lane are obstructed by a small depot and storage facility.
- 3.1.4 The curving form of the roads and gently sloping ground within Saughall Massie mean those views out are not experienced from the village centre.
- 3.1.5 Until the construction of the bypass much local traffic between Upton, Moreton and West Kirby passed through the village centre. However, the volume and speed of traffic flowing through the village continues to impinge upon its rural character.
- 3.1.6 Approaches to the village from the south east, west and north-west are masked by clumps of trees and the high hedges of narrow lanes. Approached from the north however, via Saughall Road as it crosses open fields on the plateau above the Arrowe brook, the settlement is clearly visible, with Diamond Farm being especially prominent. A view into the heart of the village nestled between groups of trees is obtained from the new bridge on the by-pass.

3.2 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

- 3.2.1 The character of Saughall Massie is distinctly of a small rural village that has gradually grown up over a number of centuries. Views outwards are limited and the street scene is one of constant change. The surviving historic buildings and farm building groups mainly face onto the east west route formed by Saughall Road and West Kirby Road, making a predominantly linear form. Some buildings such as the pub and Diamond Farm front directly onto the road. Others such as Prospect Farm and Ash Tree Cottage are set well back. Behind the main frontage courts and farmyards are found

surrounded by subsidiary buildings. Many of the buildings sit at different angles and there is no distinct building line.



The relationship of buildings to the road varies. Diamond Farm sits at the back of pavement while Ash Tree Cottage is set behind gardens.

- 3.2.2 The pub and Prospect Farm terminate the view up the sunken part of Saughall Road as it rises from the bridge. Together with Ivy Cottage they provide a semi enclosed space and form a distinct heart to the settlement.
- 3.2.3 As a settlement developed from a cluster of farms, there were originally small fields, farm yards and orchards between the buildings in Saughall Massie, resulting in the loose form of the settlement seen today. Some of these spaces and the sites of lost agricultural buildings have been developed with recent housing. Some of these, such as Poplar Farm Close, cluster in an informal layout reminiscent of the historic form of development. The remaining such open space is utilised as the pub car park.
- 3.2.4 The two working farms, Diamond Farm and Prospect Farm have yards behind the historic farm buildings, surrounded by modern agricultural buildings. Views into these enclosed working spaces are glimpsed from the public realm.



An enclosed working farmyard to the rear of Diamond Farm has existed since at least 1870.

3.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS WITHIN THE AREA

- 3.3.1 Views within the village are generally typified by a gradually unfolding scene rather than key views, largely due to its meandering roads, loose linear

form and irregular spacing of buildings. It is the very simplicity and informality of the village which form part of its character.

- 3.3.3 The dramatically larger scale and slightly elevated position of the pub make it the sole focal point. It terminates important views from and towards the junction of Saughall Road and West Kirby Road.



The larger scale of The Saughall contrasts with the other buildings in the village and creates a focal point.

- 3.3.3 To the west there are views across the open countryside from Barnacre Lane where the foreground is formed by fields within the conservation area boundary.

3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

- 3.4.1 There are 4 distinct types of green space and planting within Saughall Massie:

- 3.4.2 **Agricultural land and related features** are seen throughout the conservation area and are important in distinguishing Saughall Massie from the many suburbanised historic villages in Wirral. Hedges, consisting of mixed and largely native species, are seen along all the approach roads to the village and around the boundaries of many individual properties. The open fields around the village form an attractive setting for the conservation area and are critical to its continued agricultural use and character. There are many hedgerows and trees within and adjacent to fields, which are important both visually and ecologically. The agricultural land outside the conservation area is also critical to its setting and visual character.

- 3.4.3 **Domestic planting and landscaping** is seen around most houses. Although not of an agricultural character, many of the gardens are attractive and appropriate within a rural setting. Gardens that contribute to the character of the conservation area are typically informal. Native and traditional species of boundary planting such as privet and hawthorn are regularly seen and are visually appropriate. Mature native trees within gardens such as yew and sycamore maintain the rural character of the village and provide vertical punctuation in an otherwise low lying landscape and urban form. The use of native species also helps promote wildlife, even within domesticated areas of

land. Unsightly conifer planting, especially along boundaries and allowed to grow unchecked is seen within Saughall Massie, as are a few incongruous exotic species such as eucalyptus (in Poplar Close) and palms (at Prospect Farm).

- 3.4.4 **The Arrowe Brook** runs along the east side of the settlement and has been straightened since the boundary of the conservation area was drawn. It runs through fields to the north and south and adjacent to the village is flanked by rear garden boundaries and public open space. The wildlife potential of the brook is significant. Its visual interest and ecological diversity is rather limited where it runs through the linear park which is partially within the conservation area. The mowed uniform grass here contrasts with the texture of the pasture in surrounding fields and, along with the isolated trees sited away from hedges, is of less value to wildlife than either gardens or agricultural land.



The Arrowe Brook forms the eastern boundary of the conservation area.

- 3.4.5 **Scrub and woodland** appears in a number of locations around the edge of the village. In some instances, such as the steep bank above the Arrowe Brook to the rear of Ivy Cottage the trees are mature and form a major feature in the setting of the village. Other areas are abandoned small fields or sites of orchards, tracks and yards that have developed a natural vegetation of native plants, shrubs and trees. As with individual trees in the village, clumps of mature trees are important in providing both enclosure and vertical emphasis in an otherwise rather flat landscape.

4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY

- 4.1.1 As with most agricultural villages that have gradually grown over a long period, Saughall Massie has an irregular grain. The limited range of repeated building types, forms, scale and materials give a high degree of cohesion to the settlement.
- 4.1.2 None of the buildings are of greater than 2 storeys in height. The only building of a different scale is the pub with its large floor to ceiling heights.

4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES

- 4.2.1 The following buildings or structures have a higher status either historically, socially or architecturally or are of particular importance as being landmarks:
- Prospect Farm and former outbuildings (19th century and earlier, stone and brick farm buildings)
 - Poplar Farm and former outbuilding, The Stables (early 18th century, brick farmhouse and later stone built farm building)
 - Ivy Cottage (17th century or earlier, thatched cottage)
 - Diamond Farm and outbuildings (early 18th century, brick farmhouse and barn)
 - The Elms (17th century house, now rendered)
 - Saughall Massie Bridge (early 19th century, stone bridge)
 - The Saughall public house.

4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES

- 4.3.1 The principal adopted roads (Saughall Road, West Kirby Road and Garden Hey Road) are of a modern construction with a tarmac surface. Pavements exist only on Saughall Road and a short stretch of West Kirby Road. This short length of pavement is in stone flags. The other roads within the conservation area have no pavements. West Kirby Road and Garden Hey Road are country lanes in character, bounded by native hedging, narrow grass verges and ditches.
- 4.3.2 Off the public adopted roads three surface treatments predominate: Barnacre Lane is an unmade track; the pub car park and some drives are tarmac; and many driveways to individual houses are gravel. Small areas of new stone flagging and stone setts have also been used around Prospect Farm.
- 4.3.3 Stone boundary walls within the conservation area are a key part of its visual character. Most walls are constructed of local buff sandstone. These low walls are used around both agricultural and domestic properties. There are

some variations in construction and design, but all are of roughly coursed sandstone, with some simple form of capping.

- 4.3.4 In many instances the boundary wall is backed by a hedge. Field boundaries are of mixed hedging with hawthorn predominating.



Stone boundary walls backed by a traditional clipped privet hedge and an informal mixed hedge of native species.



- 4.3.5 A number of stone gateposts, some tooled and others rough hewn, are present. The majority of gates are timber, either five-bar gates for wide openings or vertical rails for garden gates. Field and farm track gates are generally metal with widely spaced horizontal bars.



A typical timber gate and gravelled drive maintain the rural character of the conservation area.

5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

- 5.1.1 The vast majority of buildings in Saughall Massie are vernacular. This includes both the houses and the agricultural buildings. Most of the houses built in the 20th century within the village have adopted the forms and materials of the local vernacular.
- 5.1.2 Agricultural buildings and the older historic houses are constructed from locally sourced materials. Forms are simple and rectilinear and the buildings typically have relatively low, dual pitched roofs. Openings are typically small and the buildings generally have a ‘robust’ character. Many of these simple vernacular buildings have evolved over a long period of time. Prospect Farm for example shows numerous phases of building development in the variety of size, colour and jointing of its masonry. There is evidence that the roof of The Elms was originally steeper in pitch and that the eaves have been raised above the original corbelled kneelers. The current slate roof is low pitched. These changes are a key part of the buildings’ character and essential to their historic interest.



Former barns and other farm buildings, now houses, at Prospect Farm and The Elms illustrate common aspects of the local vernacular. These characteristics are shared by buildings of high and low status, originating from the 17th century (or earlier) to the 19th century: low pitched slate roofs, simple rectilinear forms and small openings.

- 5.1.3 The three high status houses built in the 18th and 19th centuries have developed this vernacular tradition with the influence of Classically inspired Queen Anne and Georgian domestic architecture. The palette of materials used in these buildings is the same but a degree of symmetry and more generous proportions in the fenestration are seen.



These three buildings dating from the early 18th to the late 19th century all use the same materials and have a broadly symmetrical composition. They have architectural pretensions but still form part of the local tradition, sitting comfortably alongside their more humble neighbours and ancillary buildings.

- 5.1.4 The Saughall public house is influenced by the Italianate revival of the later 19th century. While still using materials seen in local vernacular buildings they are used in a manner more urban and sophisticated in execution and detail.

- 5.1.5 Three houses from the immediate post war period show the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Flayes, 124 Garden Hey Road, is rendered with a tile roof and small paned windows arranged in a well balanced asymmetrical design. The bungalow adjacent to the former White House Farm barn on West Kirby Road (Mañana) uses the same palette of materials but in a bold design with strong geometric forms, influenced by Art Deco or Moderne architecture. The White House on Saughall Road uses painted brick. Its elevation to the south is pleasant and fits well in the local context but its side elevation has an awkward unbalanced design.

- 5.1.6 Much of the later 20th century infill has followed the key vernacular themes of simple rectilinear form, modest dual pitched roof, small openings and very simple detailing. Some of this infill has also picked up on the historic grouping of farm buildings in courtyards and boundary treatments such as stone walling and native hedging. Other housing of the same era however uses more complex footprints, larger openings, obtrusive detailing and open plan gardens which set it apart from the local vernacular.



Late 20th century houses which use the language of the local vernacular.

- 5.1.7 The changes in agricultural practice brought about since the Second World War has necessitated the construction of large agricultural buildings. These are not only essential to the operation of a modern farm but have become part of the accepted rural scene.

5.2 KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS

- 5.2.1 No information concerning the architects of any of the houses, agricultural buildings or the pub within the conservation area was available at the time of writing this report.
- 5.2.2 Brassey, the designer of Saughall Massie bridge was born in 1805 and educated at home in Burton near Chester, then in his teens at a boarding school in Chester. At age 16 he was articled to a land surveyor and agent Mr Lawton, then at 21 entered into a partnership to form Lawton and Brassey, based in Birkenhead, undertaking land surveying, quarrying and brick production. In 1829 Lawton and Brassey won the contract from the County of Chester (now Cheshire) to construct a road bridge over the Arrowe Brook, and a Watering Road adjacent to the Brook (for horses) at Saughall Massie. This was to a design and specifications of the County and overseen by the County Surveyor of the City of Chester.
- 5.2.3 Around this time Brassey met George Stephenson who required stone from his Storeton quarry. Stephenson encouraged him to bid for railway construction contracts. In 1835 Brassey won the contract for the Penkridge viaduct and associated track, between Stafford and Wolverhampton, designed by Stephenson and his pupil Joseph Locke for the Grand Junction Railway. The viaduct still carries the West Coast main line today. This was the first of the countless railway projects undertaken across the world which were the mainstay of his career. By the time of his death in 1870 he had built three quarters of the French rail network.
- 5.2.4 As well as railway engineering Brassey was active in the development of steamships, mines, factories, dock construction, marine telegraphy, water supply and sewerage systems. He constructed parts of Joseph Bazalgette's London sewerage system where he pioneered the use of steam cranes, and the Thames Embankment. Brassey was a major shareholder in Brunel's

Leviathan, better known by its later name The Great Eastern. After Brunel's death he bought the ship, along with Gooch and Barber, to lay the first Transatlantic telegraph cable in 1864. Brassey is commemorated by a plaque on the bridge and an information board beside the bridge, owing to the efforts of the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society.



An information board adjacent to the bridge commemorates the life and work of Thomas Brassey.

5.3 MATERIALS

- 5.3.1 The principal materials employed in the historic buildings of Saughall Massie are soft red brick, roughly coursed local buff or red sandstone for external walls and Welsh slate for the roofs. Boundary walls are almost exclusively constructed from the same buff stone.
- 5.3.2 A few of the older buildings have painted render. One of the oldest buildings in the settlement, Ivy Cottage has a thatched roof, reflecting a tradition of thatching in the area that largely died out once transport links improved and the import of Welsh slate became practical.
- 5.3.3 More modern domestic buildings mainly have painted render walls and slate roofs. A smaller number have clay or concrete tile roofs. Just two are built of brick.
- 5.3.4 The contemporary agricultural buildings are clad in profiled metal sheeting, generally of a neutral pale green or buff colour.
- 5.3.5 Saughall Massie bridge is built of local buff sandstone. The parapets are built from large ashlar blocks of Bunter sandstone. The dressed arch and keystone and more roughly dressed spandrels are from Kueper sandstone sourced from a local quarry in Bidston, as specified in the contract.

5.4 TYPICAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

- 5.4.1 **Windows** within the Saughall Massie conservation area that enhance its character are principally traditional timber windows. These are of three main types: small paned horizontal sliding sashes (or Yorkshire lights); small

paned side hung casements; and vertical sliding sashes, either small paned with no horns (typical in buildings up to the mid 19th century) or large paned with horns (mid to late 19th century). Traditionally these timber windows are painted and are most usually found in domestic buildings. Some historic agricultural buildings may have had casements.

- 5.4.2 Window openings to the lower status historic houses and former agricultural buildings are typically small and have little or no decoration to their surrounds. Some larger windows and door screens have been inserted into original larger openings in former agricultural buildings. Where new openings have been made in former agricultural buildings the smallest openings and simplest details have been most successful in retaining the original character.
- 5.4.3 The two oldest houses, Ivy Cottage and the Elms have chamfered surrounds to their original window openings. The Elms retains some chamfered stone mullions. Some of these early but high status window openings have a horizontal emphasis in their proportions, subdivided into vertical elements by stone or timber mullions. Poplar Farm's original window frames would have followed this pattern.
- 5.4.4 Both gauged brick arches and stone lintels are used to form window heads. Most window openings have no projecting cill.



Small window openings with chamfered reveals are seen in these two 17th century houses. The window frames at Ivy Cottage are replica horizontal sliding sashes in line with professional advice.

- 5.4.5 Later historic buildings influenced by Queen Ann and Georgian design, such as Diamond Farm, Beaconsfield Cottage (136 Garden Hey Road) and The Saughall pub have large window openings of vertical proportion. These are fitted with vertical sliding sash windows with frames appropriate to the date of the buildings.
- 5.4.6 **Roof details** to almost all buildings within the conservation area are very simple. The roof pitches are quite low. Ridges run parallel to the front of the building and end gables are simply treated. Barge boards or parapets on

gables are not generally seen. Eaves have little in the way of an overhang. Corbelled kneelers are seen on the Elms and Poplar Farm house.

- 5.4.7 The thatched roof to Ivy Cottage is steeply pitched, reflecting its early date and the need for thatch to shed water quickly. The Saughall public house has a projecting dentilled cornice in keeping with its Italianate design and prominent status.
- 5.4.8 **Chimneys** play a part in the visual composition of most buildings, although they are typically of a simple rectilinear design, with little in the way of projections. Terracotta or buff clay pots are generally seen on top of most stacks. Agricultural buildings are distinguished by the absence of chimneys.
- 5.4.9 **Date stones** are found on several of the historic buildings. Some historic buildings have date stones showing early dates but which were clearly added at a recent time, perhaps based on research into earlier buildings on the site or fragments of older buildings incorporated into the current structure. Some modern houses have also continued the tradition of date stones.



One of the many historic date stones on houses in Saughall Massie. These may relate to original construction, major alterations or an event such as a marriage.

- 5.4.10 **Doors and entrances** are not given prominence in any of the historic buildings in the conservation area. Traditionally doors would have been simple boarded or panelled timber, without decoration or glazing.



Pitching eyes and ventilation holes are typical features of traditional agricultural buildings.

- 5.4.11 **Old agricultural buildings** typically have a range of features relating to their original use, such as ventilation holes, external stairs, pitching eyes and cart doors.

6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS

6.1 OVERVIEW

6.1.1 A study of this nature cannot attempt to highlight every part of the built environment that has a detrimental impact on the character or setting of the conservation area; instead this report summarises the most apparent of examples and key problems within the conservation area as a way of encouraging an understanding and awareness of these issues.

6.1.2 Appended to this document is a plan showing the contribution of buildings to the character of the conservation area. The plan was produced as a tool to gain an understanding of the significance of different parts of the village and to inform as to the appropriateness of the boundary. This plan categorizes each building, or group of buildings into the following groupings:

A: (Red) – Buildings that are critical to the character of the area: typically these may be landmark buildings and / or buildings with most of their original character retained

B: (Orange) – Buildings that make a major positive contribution to the character of the conservation area: buildings may have some alterations but original character is still prominent

C: (Yellow) – Buildings that contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. These may be modern buildings that have been designed with sensitivity to their context and have some features of architectural merit, or historic buildings that have had extensive alterations but their original character is still evident.

D: (Green) – Neutral - Either modern buildings of little interest or buildings where character has been lost beyond redemption.

E: (Blue) – Working farm buildings. Modern agricultural buildings are considered to be an additional neutral category. They are essential to the operation of the working farms which are an important element of the village's rural character. They are not however of any intrinsic architectural merit and also fall outside usual planning restrictions.

F: (Purple) – Buildings that detract from the significance or character of the area.

6.2 RECENT DEVELOPMENT

- 6.2.1 The second half of the 20th century has seen a significant amount of development in Saughall Massie, as traditional small farms have closed and pressure for housing has grown. This has led to the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use and infilling of former farm yards, orchards and nurseries with new housing. Much of this development has been carried out with sensitivity to the rural character and vernacular appearance of the village.
- 6.2.2 A number of the newer houses however have not reflected this character and appearance and four substantial buildings / groups have been demolished within living memory. In some developments from the later 20th century over elaborate building forms have been used, along with detailing inappropriate to the conservation area.



Houses of suburban character which appear out of context in a historic environment.

- 6.2.3 Between the pub and Prospect Farm is a small substation. This has been built of local sandstone with a flat roof. On its own it is of little consequence, but its relationship to the unattractive boundary wall and delivery gates of the pub together create an incongruous element in the street scene.

6.2.4 It is development outside the village that has brought the biggest change to Saughall Massie. The rapid expansion of the suburbs to the north and, most especially, the east has fundamentally altered the setting of the conservation area. Views out of the village to the east are of dense suburbs indistinguishable from suburbs almost anywhere in Britain and with no local or regional identity.



Pleasant but anonymous suburban housing immediately to the east of Saughall Massie village.

6.3 UNSYMPATHETIC ALTERATIONS

6.3.1 There have been many changes to the historic buildings within the conservation area. Some of these changes are detrimental to the architectural character of the building and adversely affect the quality of the area as a whole. These changes include:

- Replacing original windows, with unsuitable modern designs and materials such as UPVC
- The insertion of new, or alteration to existing, openings, particularly to agricultural buildings during conversion
- Poor quality repairs, such as cement based pointing spreading over the face of stone or brick.
- Rendering / painting over originally exposed brick or stone..

6.3.2 The foremost alteration to historic fabric within the conservation area is the replacement of original windows and insertion of new windows in agricultural buildings. These alterations are often well intentioned. They may be required due to a change of use, to improve the thermal or acoustic performance or to reduce maintenance requirements for instance. The visual effect, particularly on the architecturally simple buildings, is immense. The authenticity of the building is undermined.

6.3.3 The original sash and casement windows would have had very slim profiles and were usually slightly recessed from the wall face. In contrast a UPVC window or modern timber window, particularly when holding a thick double glazed unit, has considerably thicker framing elements of very different appearance. Flush fitted windows give the building a flat and lifeless appearance. Double glazed windows with large panes or sandwich construction fake glazing bars have a blank, mirror-like appearance. These

differences are visually intrusive and alter the character and appearance of the building.



UPVC windows in historic buildings detract from their true character and make them less visually attractive than they might be.

6.3.4 The reconfiguration of opening panes also dramatically changes the architectural character of the building. Where windows are replaced in timber, these can also adversely affect the appearance of the building where the original detailing is not followed and often the quality of the timber is far substandard to the original, giving it a short lifespan. Secondary glazing can be used as an alternative and will always produce a more satisfactory visual result than a double glazed equivalent.

6.3.5 Barns and many other former agricultural buildings by their nature have few window openings and their conversion to residential use can compromise their appearance. Too many new window openings and openings of large size can result in a loss of character. Where new windows have been created in former agricultural buildings it is small openings that have least impact on the building's original character. Sometimes single paned windows are more successful than multi-paned windows, being simpler and less "domestic" in appearance.



Large inserted openings drastically alter the appearance of former agricultural buildings.

6.4 UNSYMPATHETIC EXTENSIONS

- 6.4.1 There are few recent extensions of any significant size to residential buildings within the conservation area. A number of buildings have had porches added, most of these have been designed in a simple lean-to form in matching materials. Such extensions must be carefully sited to avoid confusing or detracting from the simple form of these vernacular buildings.
- 6.4.2 The large flat roofed extension to The Saughall public house is not a visual success. Its prominent location at the heart of the village only serves to emphasise its ungainly appearance. Boundary walls to the pub are also unfortunate, being constructed in a modern brick, different in colour, form and texture to other materials in the village.



Poorly chosen materials and an ungainly design make the extension and boundary treatment of The Saughall an unfortunate feature in the heart of the conservation area.

6.5 CONDITION, LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES

- 6.5.1 As noted above there has been physical and social change in the village of Saughall Massie, especially in the last 50 years or so. The most significant changes are as follows:
- The demolition and rebuilding of the ancient White House in the centre of the village.
 - The closure of White House Farm and the loss of many buildings (the barn remains).
 - The closure of Poplar Farm and the loss of its barns and some outbuildings (the farm house and stone outbuilding remain).
 - Infill development around Poplar Farm.
 - The loss of Brookfield Cottage, from the east bank of the Arrowe Brook close to the bridge.
 - The construction of modern agricultural buildings to the rear of Prospect Farm and Diamond Farm.
 - The extension of The Saughall public house and its large car park.

- 6.5.2 At present there seems to be little development pressure in Saughall Massie. However, one site currently under development for a large domestic garage is sited off Applegarth. There are also underused or redundant historic farm

buildings in very poor condition at Diamond Farm and to the rear of The Elms, which may come under pressure for conversion. The area lies within the Green Belt. Under Wirral's Unitary Development Plan it is stated that Planning permission will not be granted for residential development within the greenbelt with the exception of the limited infilling in existing villages, including limited affordable housing subject to local community needs.

- 6.5.3 The poor condition of the attractive brick farm buildings at Diamond Farm and The Elms detracts from the appearance of the village. The farmhouse at Diamond Farm is also in need of some repair and maintenance. Most other buildings appear to be in fair condition and fully occupied.
- 6.5.4 Like many agricultural areas close to the urban fringe, traditional farming is under pressure and uses such as riding stables and secure caravan storage facilities are in demand. At present the presence of these within and adjacent to the conservation area has not had a detrimental effect on the setting of its historic buildings although the setting of the conservation area has suffered. Further expansion of these or similar activities may compromise the appearance of the village centre.

6.6 CHANGES TO PUBLIC REALM AND OPEN SPACE

- 6.6.1 Saughall Massie has seen a significant reduction in through traffic since the construction of the bypass. The presence of traffic signage, lighting columns, road markings and bollards however intrude on the streetscape and detract from the setting of buildings in the centre of the village.



The junction of Saughall Road and West Kirby Road is marred by a poor quality public realm.

- 6.6.2 The largest open space within the village is the car park to The Saughall public house. It has a low modern brick boundary wall, large expanses of tarmac and the planting is municipal rather than rural in character.
- 6.6.3 The design and condition of the pub's service yard and gates also detract from the character and appearance of the West Kirby Road / Saughall Road junction. Signage on the pub is also visually intrusive and gives the building a cluttered appearance.

- 6.6.4 Barnacre Lane effectively forms an extension to the farmyard at Prospect Farm. It has been used for the storage of redundant farm equipment, unused building materials and other items often associated with agricultural activity. While a gently rusting tractor in the corner of a field is an acceptable, even an attractive and rather romantic sight, the clutter on Barnacre Lane is in parts unsightly.



The bland rather municipal appearance of the pub car park could be improved by landscaping more in keeping with the rural character of the village. Agricultural detritus can have a certain charm, but vast quantities of waste material can only encourage fly tipping.

- 6.6.5 The potential for fly-tipping is uncertain, though measures may need to be taken to reduce its impact.

7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

7.1 The following is a list of features and information that are part of Saughall Massie Conservation Area's special character:

- Historic village of Anglo Saxon or earlier origins.
- The village has grown up gradually over time, with no one historical period dominating. The majority of buildings are vernacular.
- The historic village has retained a degree of separation from neighbouring suburban settlement and is unusual within the context of Wirral, for having retained both agricultural use and rural character.
- Roads are slightly winding, following a presumably medieval street pattern.
- Buildings are generally simple in character, with considerable repetition of building forms and materials.
- Locally made soft textured red / brown brick and local sandstone are the most prominent building materials in the village. The majority of roofs with historic coverings are slated.
- Openings and features such as chimneys are generally simple in character.
- Traditional small paned timber windows, horizontal sashes, casements or vertical sliding sashes according to the age and status of the building are important to such simple buildings.
- Sandstone boundary walls and native hedging are important features within the area and along the roads leading to it.
- The presence of a thatched building in the heart of the village is an important element of Wirral's regional and historic identity.
- Recent developments in the village have generally respected its character.
- The bridge was the first known work of the pre-eminent 19th century engineer and railway contractor Thomas Brassey.