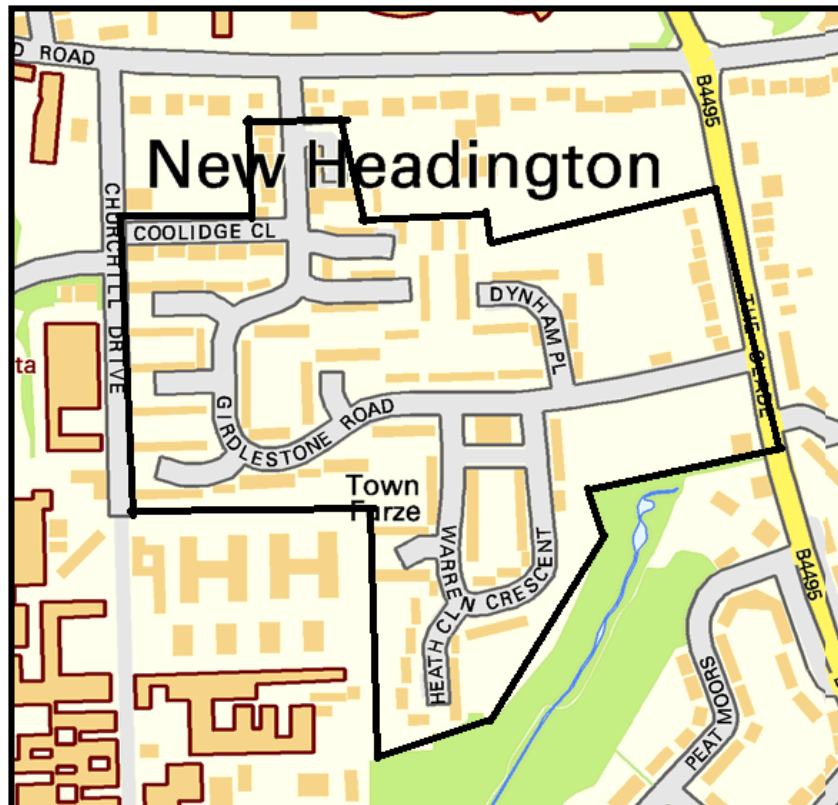


CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

AREA 19: GIRDLESTONE ROAD ESTATE



GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The area is a residential estate of mixed private and public sector housing located at the base of Shotover Hill on the Eastern extremity of Headington. The area is bounded by two major hospitals (Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre and Churchill Hospital), a nature conservation area (Lye Valley) and the Wood Farm Estate. It approximates to an area of around 350 square metres which slopes gently north/south towards Lye Valley. The residential units comprise small terraces of two storey houses and large three storey rectangular blocks of flats. There are blocks of garages ranging from 4 to 12 units located at intervals around the estate. The main thoroughfare is Girdlestone Road, which follows a sickle shaped route through the estate. A series of short cul-de-sacs and a crescent lead off from the main road, connected by several paved paths which act as shortcuts. Apart from a pedestrian access into the Churchill Hospital site and an informal path to the Lye Valley the only access is via Girdlestone Road. The amenities comprise a small group of shops at the centre, two children's play areas and a regular bus service along Girdlestone Road.



HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The present Girdlestone Road (named after a famous orthopaedic surgeon) was originally a country lane running along the eastern side of The Grey Cottage (now 62 Old Road) down to allotments. After running southwards from Old Road, this new road then turned east to join the Slade. The original intention was to meet the post war housing shortage, providing homes for the workers at the nearby car plant. Most development took place at a time when there was less pressure to maximise the density of development (c.1955-65) though the flats at Girdlestone Close were built during the early 1970s. The Town Furze allotments off Girdlestone Road and the Slade, which follow the original contours of the Lye Brook, are the last survival of the allotments which formerly covered the entire area.



The Grey Cottage, 62 Old Road, is the house in the foreground with the pointed roof. It still survives, but the lane to the east is now Girdlestone Road, and the two adjoining houses on the other side of the lane have been demolished.

POSITIVE USE OF SPACE

- The built layout is spacious with a wide spine road and blocks of flats set well apart with grassed areas between and around the blocks of flats. This contrasts with the intimacy of the cul-de-sacs where houses are grouped closely together towards the edges of the site. The contrast produces a pleasing spatial tension which offsets the uniformity of the buildings.
- The limited vistas along the curved part of the spine road contrast with the open vistas along the straight section. As noted above, this layout produces a pleasing spatial tension, and contributes to the impression of a calm and quiet environment.



GOOD EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL GREEN SETTING

- The site is edged by trees and gardens to the north west and east and by the Lye Valley nature reserve to the south. The vista looking west from the centre of the estate is of the tree covered Shotover Hill.
- Within the site the houses have gardens front and rear of varying sizes. The flats are set within grassed areas and there are many grassy verges of varying size throughout. There are mature trees both in gardens and along the streets. All these features contribute to a pleasant green setting.



HARMONY OF SCALE AND HEIGHT

- The two- tiered structure of the street layout (thoroughfare/cul-de-sacs) is carried through in the building styles. The larger three storey blocks of flats are located along the thoroughfare with one set at a visually pleasing angle to another and the two storey houses are within the cul-de-sacs. This creates an overall sense of harmony of scale.
- The limited height of the buildings (three storeys maximum) contributes to the overall harmony and sense of openness.



GOOD EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

- Girdlestone Road is on a major bus route so that the estate is well connected to Headington, Wood Farm, Oxford city centre, and Abingdon.

LOCAL AMENITIES

- The estate is relatively quiet and screened from the main external road network by mature trees and houses.
- There is a small block of shops including a restaurant and laundrette towards the centre. There are two well maintained children's play areas.
- The estate is located close to Rock Edge and Lye Valley with its network of footpaths. There is a small set of allotments below Warren Crescent.



LACK OF IDENTITY

- The estate is a discrete development which is cut off from neighbouring estates in Headington by the two hospitals and the busy route along Old Road. It is also set apart from the main Wood Farm estate on the other side of the Slade.
- Overall there seems little 'spirit of place', to which the wide road and physical distance between dwellings may have contributed.

GREEN SPACES ARE EXCESSIVELY UNIFORM

- Many of the smaller green spaces are sectioned off with low barriers to prevent car parking. This makes them unwelcoming for informal use. There is a lack of green space for play, with "No ball games" notices prominent.
- Most of the green spaces are grassed with few shrubs or flowers to create interest.



LACK OF COMMUNITY MEETING FACILITIES

- There is a lack of places for the community to gather/meet up. There is no public seating within the larger green areas to encourage their use.

IMPACT ON LYE VALLEY

- This area is within the rainwater catchment zone of the springs and peaty wetlands in the Lye Valley. Development in this area, including on the grassy area adjacent to Warren Crescent, could have a catastrophic impact on the flora of Lye Valley (see character assessment of Lye Valley).

EXCESSIVE THROUGH TRAFFIC

- Girdlestone provides a shortcut for traffic to avoid the traffic lights at the Old Road/Slade junction. As a consequence although designed as an estate road it carries substantial volumes of through traffic. It is a wide road with no physical restrictions so that traffic speeds frequently exceed the 20mph speed limit.

- To retain the open nature of the estate and its overall harmony of design and attractive vistas developments should not exceed three storeys in height.
- The internal green setting is a distinguishing feature of the estate. The existing green spaces should not be developed.
- There is a small undeveloped plot in the north east corner of Dynham Place which may be suitable for a small development of houses/flats.
- To protect the Lye Valley catchment measures to encourage infiltration (e.g. removal of concrete and impervious tarmac and its replacement with green planted permeable areas) together with other appropriate measures should be promoted. Soakaways should be encouraged or mandatory, and no additional runoff water to be directed to road surface drains which may end up in the Lye Valley via the Thames water outfall and exacerbate the already serious erosion.

Heritage Assets

- The prefabricated buildings may be regarded as historical artefacts signifying the estate's role in the reconstruction of Britain following the Second World War.



Community Assets

- Notice boards adjacent to shops
- Open grassed areas in the centre which offer potential for community activities and communication
- Children's play areas

Ecological Assets

- The adjacent Lye Valley and the nearby Rock Edge are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The green spaces within the estate are part of the network of green corridors linking the ecologically significant sites of Boundary Brook, Lye Valley and Rock Edge.