

Proposed Conservation Area for Hampton Street and Warwick Common, Warwick

Extent of Proposed Conservation Area

The area of Warwick under consideration for conservation area status includes Hampton Street and parts of Crompton Street and Stand Street, together with the majority of the area known as Warwick Common, which is largely also occupied by Warwick Racecourse and a number of other activities. The area is hatched on the accompanying plan and would link into the existing Warwick Conservation Area at Hill Close Gardens.

Historical Background

The area known as St Marys Lands, forming Warwick Common, is a significant area of land to the west of Warwick with a long history associated with the development of Warwick. The original West Street Common was granted by Countess Margery of Warwick in the mid-thirteenth century to the townspeople of Warwick. Following the fire of Warwick and loss of documentation, the right to graze animals was vested in certain houses in the parish of Warwick in 1698. The enforcement of the customs and general administration of the common land was vested in four chamberlains elected annually by the Court Leet. During the early 19th century, the chamberlains rented parts of the common for racing which led to the establishment of the Warwick Racecourse, together with other events such as military reviews and subsequently golf and other sports and entertainments. Racing could not be resumed economically after the second world war unless the course could be legally closed on race days (which had been a problem in the past); the Warwick Corporation therefore was empowered by an act of 1948 to acquire the rights, both of the commoners and Race Club. The common lands thereafter became municipal property, which they are today. This is a very brief resume of the complex history of the Warwick Common lands which has been documented in detail by historian Dr Christine Hodgetts in "St Marys Lands: The Race Common" a copy of which is available for public inspection at the Warwickshire County Records Office. This recent study highlights the importance of this area as common land which controlled any development on it, and subsequently acted as a green barrier to any form of urban expansion on this western side of Warwick.

In terms of the early 19th century developments which boarder the Common, these need to be considered in the context of period of relative manufacturing growth in Warwick at the turn of the 19th century, which lasted only for a short period of time and led to the establishment of a number of manufacturers in the Saltisford area of Warwick.

Recent research carried out by Mr Nigel Hamilton from sources at the Warwickshire County Records Office, have indicated that land between West Street and what is now known as Hampton Street was owned by Messrs Crompton and Parkes who were originally cotton and worsted spinning manufacturers. According to conveyance documents held at the County Records Office, this area of land was sold off in plots by Crompton and Parkes from 1827. Many plots were developed by the 1830s and according to the 1841 census, nearly all occupied as houses. These are therefore clearly early 19th century houses, rather than originally thought to be mid to later developments. Hampton Street, Stand Street, Crompton Street, Woodhouse Street and Monk Street all appear to have formed a speculative 19th century development to the west of Warwick, contained from any further expansion by the racecourse and common to the west and existing developments of West Street to the east. Woodhouse Street, Monks Street and parts of Stand Street and Compton Street were demolished in the 1960s, but leaving a substantial part of the original development in Hampton Street.

From the 1841 census, it would appear that the residence of the area were from a mixed background being tradesmen, craftsmen, and builders, which may account for the relatively mixed designs of these fairly modest houses.

Since the 1960s, parts of this area have been re-developed, new developments have taken place, associated with the racecourse on the Common and other leisure uses have been introduced within the Common. The historical significance of certain buildings in the area was recognised in the early 1970s by the listing of a number of houses in Hampton Street and in the 1990s by the listing of the main racecourse stand.

Character of the Area

Warwick Common and racecourse are today the interface between the urban development to the west of Warwick town centre and the open countryside, clearly controlled by the lack of development on the common lands and much enjoyed as a sporting venue with the racecourse and other facilities, together with an area of public open space for the use of residents and visitors to Warwick. Recently, new areas of parking have been created for the use of the various activities, both within the common and bordering the common (for example the recently restored Hill Close Gardens). Hampton Street, which remains as the principle example of the early 19th century speculative development contains a variety of houses, largely of brick, originally all with sash windows (which was controlled by the deeds of sale), with a variety of roofs and ridge heights. A number of the properties do take advantage of the views that would have existed over the common and the racecourse by being set up on basements giving a clear view from the first floor windows across the common, now in some cases no longer visible due to the extension and expansion of the racecourse stands. One property does still retain a cast iron balcony. Of the grade II listed properties, number 6 is a double fronted house of a slightly grander design than its neighbours. Nos. 20, 21, 22, 23, 26 and 27 Hampton Street which are rendered buildings, are reminiscent of the type of early 19th century development that would have been taking place in neighbouring Leamington at the same time.

When this area was considered as part of the wider review of Warwick Conservation Area in 2005/6, it was felt, by using the 60% minimum rate of retention of original features such as doors and windows (an accredited methodology approved by English Heritage) that the area had been too altered and therefore did not warrant a designation as a conservation area at that stage. There is however clearly an interesting variety of buildings which, given the **historical significance of the development of the area, as proved by the recent research**, does warrant further consideration as set out below.

Consideration for Conservation Area Status

The criteria within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for conservation area designation is: "An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which is desirable to preserve or enhance".

Warwick Common and racecourse is clearly of historical significance, the development of which has been highlighted in the recent research carried out by Dr Christine Hodgetts, indicating an area of open land, which the residents of Warwick have benefitted from for several centuries, which has remained undeveloped and also contained development on the west side of Warwick. Similar features on the south side of Warwick which have contained development are the Warwick Castle Park and St Nicholas Park, both of which were taken into the Warwick Conservation Area some years ago. The historical context of Hampton Street, and parts of Crompton Street and Stand Street, although architecturally have suffered from window and door replacement, have an interesting history of plots being sold off as speculative development in the early 19th century, which has influenced the architectural character of this area.

The historical significance highlighted by the areas of recent research do offer new insight into this part of Warwick, and, set against the national criteria for conservation area designation, do now make it worthy of current consideration for conservation area status.

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