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1 Producing the Esher Settlement Area and Character Assessment

This companion guide forms an integral part of the Elmbridge Design and Character SPD. The guides provide a reference source for considering the character of an area as part of the design process for new development.

1.1 The following Character Assessment for Esher has been developed in partnership with the local community assisted by design consultants (Forum Heritage Services and Context 4D) and Elmbridge Borough Council.

Community Involvement

1.2 A community workshop was held at the Civic Centre on 18 May 2011, which allowed local people to talk about the character of their local area and suggest ways in which that character might be maintained and enhanced in light of future development.

1.3 Community participants included:

- 2 members of the Esher Residents Association
- 1 member of the Esher Conservation Area Advisory Committee
- 1 member of the Esher & District Local History Group and Esher Village Study Group
- 2 members of the Clare Hill (Esher) Association
- 1 member of the Blackhills Residents Association
- 1 member of the Milbourne Residents Group

1.4 The first half of the workshop looked at defining character. As well as providing a wealth of information about their local area, community participants were instrumental in the subdivision of character areas and the identification of key features.



On site at the Esher community workshop

1.5 The second half of the day concentrated on the design process explaining how the new SPD will work. It also included a site visit allowing community participants the chance to appraise the context and setting of a site in practice using maps and site appraisal notation charts to assist them.

1.6 A site that was located to the rear of a shopping parade was chosen to appraise. This enabled participants to think about the protection of landmarks views, the consideration of neighbouring listed buildings and achieving safe vehicular access. The site visit also included a walk around the district centre and residential roads of architectural merit located within the vicinity. Use of materials, sensitive extensions and mix of uses along the High Street were discussed.

1.7 The input from the local community has helped shape this character assessment with issues expressed at the workshop being incorporated into the assessment within text boxes.

1.8 A feedback session held on the 14 September 2011 allowed participants to check the assessment adding any additional comments and providing further information.

2 How to use the settlement and sub-area analysis

Step 1: Identify the settlement area and sub-area your development site falls within, using the character area map to help you. The maps also provide an overview of the wider context of the area.

Step 2: Read the introduction to the settlement area, which gives a brief overview and a summary of key features, providing you with a snapshot of settlement character and highlighting key issues identified from community workshops.

Step 3: Read the sub-area analysis, taking note of specific local concerns and where to find additional design guidance.

2.1 In order to inform your design proposal, it is important to evaluate and understand the key characteristics of the settlements and their sub-areas. Understanding an area's character will help to deliver high quality development that contributes to the distinctiveness of the local area and sense of place. In order to do this effectively, the Borough has been subdivided into 8 settlement areas, reflecting those in the Core Strategy. Each settlement area has been further divided into sub-areas, derived from fieldwork and group discussions at the community workshops.

2.2 The sub-area analysis describes its predominant characteristics such as building types, use, scale, grain, tree cover and any heritage assets. Reference may be made to specific design guidance you should take account of when considering your development proposal. In some instances, reference is also made to case studies that may be particularly relevant to the type of development likely to occur in the sub-area. These are contained within the main document and illustrate the process of understanding local character through context and site appraisal, which will generate a

design concept and indicative design. Each case study offers just one solution to how a site could be developed and there may be instances when other case studies are relevant, depending on the nature of the development.

2.3 Where the community workshop identified specific issues affecting a particular sub-area, a box is included to highlight these concerns. This is intended to help you carefully consider the local context and the sensitivities of the site's surroundings. It provides an opportunity to show how you might address specific concerns highlighted in relation to sub-areas. These may not be exhaustive but are provided as prompts for consideration.

2.4 For sites that fall on the edge of two sub-areas or settlement boundaries, you will need to take into account adjoining sub-areas, which may have an impact on the context of the site. In many ways the design requirements of these sites are more complex to resolve as they may be at a key transition between one type of development and another.

2.5 You should use the settlement and sub-area analysis as a starting point to develop a clear context for your proposal. This should be considered in more detail through site visits etc, taking account of the specific location of the development site.

The analysis of character and context should be an integral part of a Design and Access Statement.

3 Esher Character Assessment



Introduction

3.1 Esher lies close to the centre of the Borough and has a relatively small population. Housing predominantly consists of large detached houses set within a very high quality environment which includes village greens, the open space of Esher Common and the landscaped gardens of Claremont, a Grade I Registered Park and Garden. The combination of historically significant open spaces and gardens with heritage assets and a high degree of landscaping gives the Esher settlement area a strong sense of place particularly to the residential areas. The district centre, part of which is designated as a conservation area, is characterised by the large number of cafés and restaurants in relation to other retail uses.

3.2 Historically the parish of Esher was divided into three manors; Sandon, Esher Waterville and Esher Episcopi. The parishes included land to the Esher Place Estate and the Claremont Estate. The owners of the Claremont Estate were also Lords of the Manor of Esher. They owned the greens surrounding what is presently the town and ensured that they stayed undeveloped and as open land, giving much of the wider landscape setting to the town seen today. Through the 20th century, development has occurred in small to medium parcels of land but often with very high architectural quality and material finishes.

Summary of the key features

- Semi-private and private estates many of which are protected through covenants
- Some very high quality and historically significant landscapes and buildings, mostly within private grounds
- High quality residential housing estates; usually small scale but large houses set in generous plots
- District centre with a high proportion of restaurants, cafés, public houses and leisure uses, with a limited amount of convenience shopping
- Impressive green spaces and with much common land still separating urban areas
- Esher Conservation Area covers the western part of the town, centred around the church and green
- West End is a semi-rural village, self-contained with a historic core (designated as a conservation area) set around a large triangular green. ⁽¹⁾
- Sandown racecourse – an important and dominant use separating Esher from its train station and Lower Green
- Cluster of schools in the Milbourne Lane area
- Bordered by the River Mole to the west but almost no public access to the riverside
- Significant levels of through traffic on the Portsmouth Road (A307) and Claremont Lane.
- Wide and generally open grass verges often combined with green boundaries are a common and attractive characteristic throughout residential areas (particularly Clare Hill and Esher Place)

Issues identified from the community workshops

- **The scale and dominance of new builds impact on the established patterns of development seen on some of the older residential estates**
- **The quality of the materials being used in new development in highly sensitive areas could be improved – particularly in relation to alterations or development within the setting of the conservation area and other sensitive areas**
- **There are concerns regarding the architectural quality of replacement buildings in sensitive areas**
- **The continued infill of sites with gated housing developments increases the sense of disconnectivity between areas of Esher**
- **An increased retail provision of small to medium shops would benefit the character of the district centre**
- **Traffic along the A307 is detrimental to the cohesion and effective capacity of Esher High Street to function as a district centre**
- **New gates and the increased use of walls and close boarded fences on the boundaries of houses and flatted development are replacing softer landscaping and is changing the character of some areas**
- **Poorly defined roofscapes and the lack of chimneys on new large scale buildings, particularly flatted development, has reduced the visual quality of the townscape.**

Local Landmarks

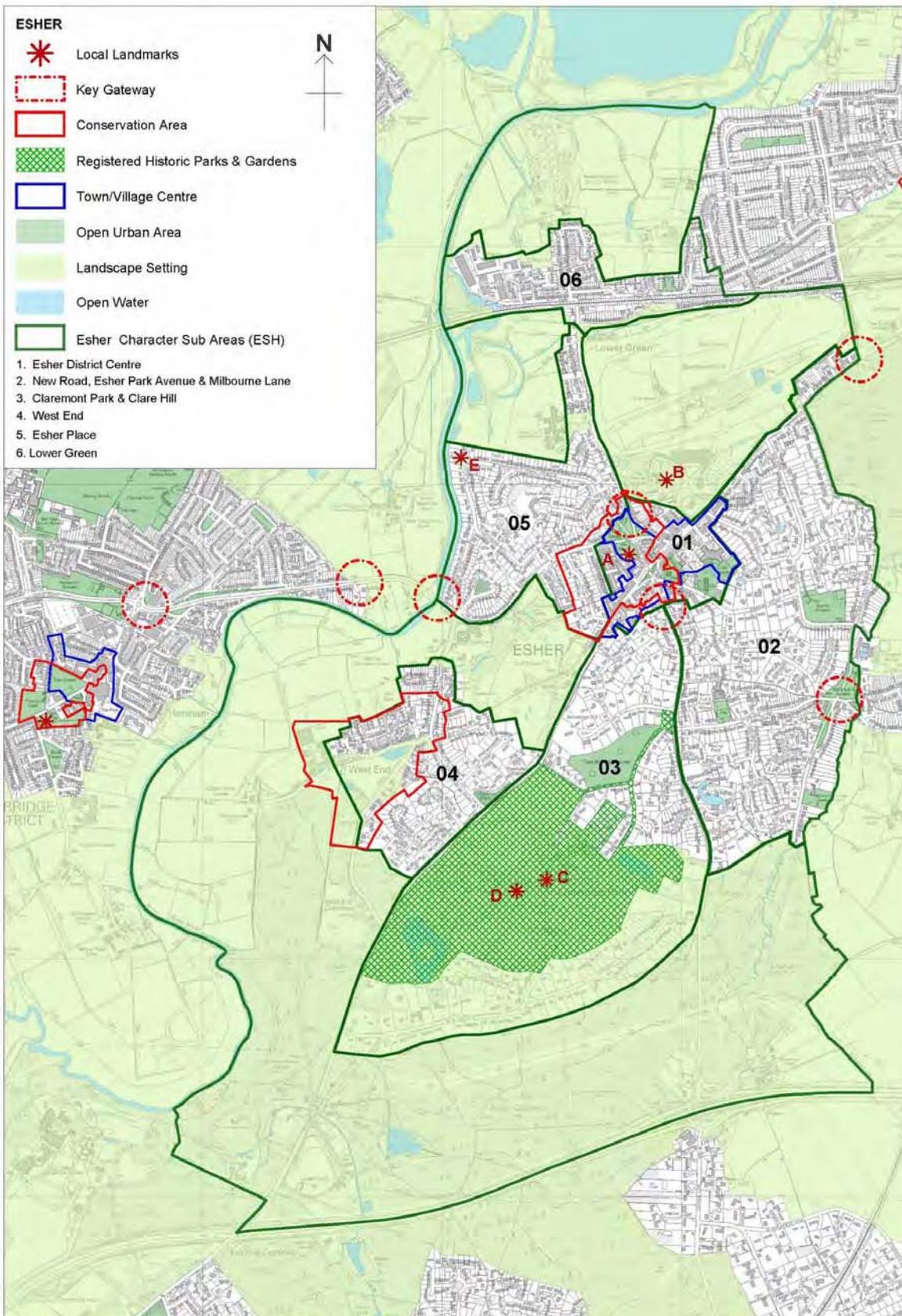
As featured on the settlement map.

- A. Spire of Christ Church, Church Street
- B. Sandown Park stand, Sandown Park
- C. Claremont House, Claremont Park
- D. Belvedere, Claremont Park
- E. Waynelete Tower, Waynelete Tower Avenue, Esher Park



Christ Church

3.3 The following map can be viewed in more detail using the Council's interactive mapping system 'My Elmbridge' which is located on the Elmbridge Borough Council homepage



The sub-areas

ESH01: Esher District Centre

Overview

3.4 The centre is laid out predominantly in a linear pattern along a principal route.

3.5 It is the only commercial centre in the character area.

3.6 Buildings are generally mixed use (some flats are found above shops) and a consistent three and four storey height. This can appear quite stark after the subtlety and low density of surrounding sub-areas.



Mixed use – north side of Portsmouth Road, Esher town centre

3.7 Residential development behind main streets is rarely higher than three storey and generally more modest in scale. This has created some areas of intimate and fine grained housing close to the district centre (particularly to the north of the main Portsmouth Road).

3.8 One of the three greens within the settlement area, Esher Green is strongly characterised by its openness but is also well-defined on its edges, or along roads across the green, by trees. This green space is of high amenity value.



Trees on Esher Green with built form defining the edges

3.9 Trees within the district centre are mostly concentrated on the green spaces to the north and at the junction of Portsmouth Road, Claremont Lane and Church Street. These trees form an important part of the character of the urban area.

3.10 The western part of Esher centre, including the church and green, are designated as a conservation area. ⁽²⁾ The spire of the Christ Church is a prominent landmark particularly in relation to views from the west.

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop:

- The district centre is too orientated towards the leisure sector with little in the way of retail and provision of local services. This is beginning to affect the character and activity patterns of the district centre.

Opportunities

3.11 The mixed character of the district centre should continue to be promoted to provide an appropriate mix of retail, leisure, employment and residential uses that support its continued use in the long term. **Case**

2 For further information on this part of the sub-area, please refer to the adopted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (<http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/heritage/ConAreas.htm>).

Studies CS1, CS5 and CS6 are relevant. Additionally, specific design advice on commercial development at **section 6** may be relevant.

ESH02: New Road, Esher Park Avenue and Milbourne Lane

Overview

3.12 This area is mostly comprised of large detached houses in generous plots.

3.13 The style of housing ranges from the early 20th century (Hillbrow Road) to post-war (Lakeside Drive) with some areas being gated, private estates.



Edwardian houses to Hillbrow Road



Houses to Lakeside Drive

3.14 Most of the larger houses in this character area are between two and three storeys, and there is often use of the attic storeys lit by dormers or rooflights.

3.15 In some older properties gables will incorporate windows to light upper storeys. However modest cottages are also found, for example two weatherboarded properties on Milbourne Lane dating from around 1810.

3.16 The area contains Hare Lane Green, one of three greens within the settlement area. This is an important open tree lined space of high amenity value forming an important transition and gateway between Esher and neighbouring Claygate.

3.17 The general pattern of development tends to be wide principal routes, sometimes tree-lined with cul-de-sac development of small clusters often leading off from the thoroughfare. Generally, the high degree of tree cover often gives a semi-rural character to those roads away from the principal routes.

3.18 The majority of the character area is residential with the notable exception of the Portsmouth Road which runs to the south of the racecourse and has a far more varied mix of use with offices, residential (both houses and flats), and retail uses all being present.



Purpose built offices to the north Portsmouth Road

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop:

- There is an increasing presence of flatted development replacing houses particularly seen along Portsmouth Road (opposite Sandown Park) and Copsem Lane.
- Close boarded fences are replacing green boundary treatments; hedges and trees and in some cases encroaching on open verges to the front of properties.

Opportunities

3.19 Any further development in this area should seek to maintain the scale and quality of the existing architecture to maintain the sub-area's strong identity. **Case Study CS1** provides guidance on replacement residential buildings.

ESH03: Claremont Park and Clare Hill

Overview

3.20 This sub-area comprises an 18th century landscape and house with early 20th century encroachment to the north and south, some of high architectural quality.

3.21 Claremont Park and Clare Hill sit on the higher slopes to the south of the district centre with the landscaping of the park taking great advantage of the level changes to provide vistas, views and glimpsed views throughout the park. This tree cover forms part of wider landscape views from the east into the sub-area.

3.22 Most of the larger houses in this character area are two storey, with the occasional use of the attic storeys lit by dormers or rooflights.

3.23 In some older properties gables will incorporate windows to light upper storeys.

3.24 Most housing is large detached private dwelling houses.

3.25 The consistency in the layout of the original estate was due to the insistence of the estate on a single architect, Blair Imrie, to design and oversee the building of most of the houses in the estate. Since then, houses have been extended, modified and in some cases replaced within the estate. However standard plot ratios, building lines and architectural styles still link the development in these roads together and create an attractive cohesion based on high quality townscape.



Houses to Clare Hill, high quality 20th century intervention into an 18th century landscape

3.26 The original architect favoured a mix of autumnal shades of tan, peach, orange and brown for bricks (with cream mortar) and tile colours in the estate. These colours of choice are characteristic of the semi-rural landscape.

3.27 In terms of heritage assets, Claremont Park comprises a series of listed buildings, including the country mansion, at Grade I set within a Grade I listed Registered park and garden which also comprises a number of historic structures (mostly follies and walls).

3.28 The area is beginning to change in character with buildings from the 1920s and 1930s gradually being replaced or heavily remodelled. A good example of this is Meadway and Blackhills to the southern edge of the sub-area.

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop:

- Remodelling and the replacement of dwellings can impact on the quality and cohesiveness of these areas.
- Replacement housing is in general considerably larger than existing housing.
- There is generally a lack of innovative or stylistically accomplished architecture.
- Increase in hard standings to the fronts of houses with a corresponding hardening of boundary treatments, including the removal of trees and hedges and replacement with brick walls and solid fencing. An increasing trend is the presence of large gates and railings to entrances.

Opportunities

3.29 Due to the sub-area's low density character (and its established covenants), new development tends to be limited to replacement dwellings and householder extensions. Where dwellings are replaced they should take into account the sensitivities of the immediate environment (for example the setting of listed buildings). See **Case Study CS1** for guidance on achieving an appropriate replacement single house.

3.30 Consulting the **Home Extensions Companion Guide** will help provide advice to homeowners wishing to extend or modify their existing property in this sub-area.

3.31 To take account of the specific issue with relation to boundary treatment, please see general design advice on boundaries (**section 5**).

3.32 Additionally, advice regarding the use of materials at **section 5** will also prove helpful when designing new development in this established estate.

ESH04: West End

Overview

3.33 West End sub-area comprises a village with mostly mid to late 20th century urban extensions in a semi-rural setting.

3.34 The core of the village has a distinct semi-rural character and is different to the rest of the settlement area.

3.35 It should be noted that the village scale of West End is modest, particularly to the Green with buildings rarely over a two and a half storeys, and often more of a cottage scale.

3.36 There is a historic core with a small number of statutory and locally listed buildings, which along with the Green, is a designated conservation area.

3.37 The enclosure of the Green with modest scaled houses is a particularly attractive and adds to the character of this settlement area. Trees are limited to this part of the sub-area and focused in groups around the Green.



Photomontage looking north across West End Green

Opportunities

3.38 There is limited potential for any major development within this sub area, however smaller infill developments and extensions/alterations to existing buildings

could be accommodated. **Case Study CS1** will be relevant to the design of any future development.

ESH05: Esher Place

Overview

3.39 Esher Place is a 1930s urban extension to the north of Esher. It comprises large houses set in generous plots generally displaying a high architectural quality.

3.40 Waynefleete's Tower to the north-west corner is the former gatehouse to Esher Place and is Grade I listed.

3.41 This sub-area also includes Clive Road which falls within the Esher Conservation Area and is of exceptional architectural quality.⁽³⁾

3.42 Most housing is large detached private dwelling houses. Predominately, houses in this character area are between two and two and a half storeys, and there is often use of the attic storeys lit by dormers or rooflights.

3.43 There is very little conversion to flats, however, More Lane to the north does feature a number of flatted developments.

3.44 The development is set on wide principal routes, sometimes tree-lined with cul-de-sac development leading off from the thoroughfare.

3.45 Principal routes are generally straight giving long views along tree lined roads with houses set back in mature gardens.

3.46 There is generally a high degree of tree cover, giving a woodland character to most roads within the sub-area and strongly defining many routes.



View looking north along Pelhams Walk

Specific issues raised at the Community Workshop:

- Replacement housing is generally larger than existing housing.
- There is an increasing presence of flatted development replacing houses particularly seen along More Lane

Opportunities

3.47 Development within this sub-area should take into account the established scale and grain of the sub-area and respect the quality of existing housing stock. Principles with regard to a replacement dwelling in **Case study CS1** will be relevant to this sub area.

3 For further detail please see the Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Proposals Document for Esher at <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/heritage/ConAreas.htm>

ESH06: Lower Green

Overview

3.48 This sub-area is to the north of Sandown Racecourse and is relatively isolated due in part to the rail line.

3.49 It contains both residential and commercial uses with an industrial park located to the west of the sub-area.

3.50 In terms of residential, the area predominately comprises two storey, inter-war or post-war housing, some terraced.

3.51 Houses immediately to the south of the railway line which front onto Lower Green Road have a 'Garden Suburb' quality to them, particularly in relation to their cottage scale, tall chimneys and eaves half-dormers.



Houses to Lower Green Road

3.52 Wide and open verges are a characteristic of the informal layout of houses around the green to the south of the railway line.

3.53 The rigid linear grid layout pattern of development seen to the north of the railway line, where roads run parallel or perpendicular to the railway, has had a significant impact on the layout and development of this part of sub-area.

3.54 The area is somewhat isolated from the district centre and as a result has less cohesion with the remaining parts of the settlement area.

Opportunities

3.55 It is expected that development in this sub-area will mostly consist of extensions and alterations. However, due to its proximity to Esher rail station, higher density development maybe appropriate should such opportunities arise as set out in **Case Study CS1**.