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THE MESNES

CONSERVATION

AREA APPRAISAL





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Introduction and background

Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. They are defined as "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas.

The special interest of an area may derive from the grouping or arrangement of buildings of similar or varied ages or architectural character and their relationship to spaces, for example streets, squares, parks, trees and greenery. The use of particular types of materials or locally distinctive styles of building and details such as paving, walls, railings, forming part of the public realm may also contribute to an area's special interest. Generally it will be the age and character of the area as a whole and the relationship between buildings and spaces which in combination may justify conservation area status.

There are over 9000 conservation areas in England. The borough of Wigan has 22 such areas varying in size from 1.59 hectares (ha) Railway Road Leigh; to 33.45 ha Wigan Lane CA, Wigan. Wigan's Conservation Areas occupy a total area of 231.25 ha. Wigan's first conservation areas Haigh Village and Standish were designated in April 1976 and the latest, Bridgewater canal Leigh designated 25 May 1994.

The Mesnes Conservation Area, the subject of this appraisal, was designated 25 August 1980 and extended 21 November 1984. It occupies an area of some 18.48 hectares (46.66 acres), the bulk of which is occupied by Mesnes Park.

The legal framework relating to conservation areas is currently provided by the 1990, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act. Government Policy for the implementation of conservation in England is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, Planning and the Historic Environment *. Also relevant is PPG16 Archaeology and Planning *. *(Until these are rewritten as new Planning Policy Statements).

Within Conservation areas Local Planning Authorities have stronger powers to control new development and the alteration or demolition of unlisted buildings than elsewhere. Trees within conservation areas are also given greater protection. Wider publicity must be given to planning applications, which are likely to have an impact upon the character or appearance of conservation areas. Certain types of alterations to dwelling houses which would normally be exempt from the need for planning permission such as external cladding, require consent within conservation areas.

It is not the purpose of conservation area designation to prevent all new development, rather to ensure that changes necessary to meet evolving social and economic conditions are managed in such a way as to ensure the survival of the local distinctiveness and sense of place which warranted designation in the first place. Similarly, works involving the public realm should aim to preserve or enhance the area's special qualities, not detract from them.

The local Planning Authority has the means to achieve these objectives through the Development Control process by the application of the relevant policies of its Unitary Development Plan. Conservation Area Appraisals can usefully inform the development control process by identifying the features of the area which it is desirable to preserve and enhance and opportunities for positive change.







The relevant policies for Wigan are contained in the Wigan Unitary Development Plan, Proposed Modifications to the Replacement Plan, January 2006, as summarised in Appendix 1.

Councils can also seek to preserve or improve the character and appearance of their conservation areas by the careful design and implementation of works that are within its corporate control, for example the positioning and design of street furniture, specifications for paving and traffic management schemes, or by its briefing and commissioning role in regeneration projects.

Local planning authorities have a duty not only to select suitable parts of their district for designation as conservation areas, but also to keep them under review and if appropriate to designate further such areas. Designation also requires local planning authorities:




-  To formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and submit them to a public meeting in the area to which they relate.
-  In exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area.

The overall policy and legal framework applicable within conservation areas is given effect locally by the relevant policies contained within the Development Plans prepared by Local Planning Authorities.

Often such policies are supported by additional supplementary planning guidance.

Conservation Area Appraisals

In 1997, English Heritage published guidance relating to the preparation of conservation area appraisals. With the increasing number of designated conservation areas over the years, it was considered that there would be value in the preparation of up to date assessments of the character of conservation areas. The broad purpose of such assessments or appraisals would be:

-  to identify and describe the character and appearance of the conservation area and the significance of its special architectural or historic features;
-  to provide an understanding of current issues and challenges particularly those relating to the vulnerability of the special qualities of the conservation area; and
-  to provide a basis for the formulation of proposals for enhancement and the sustainable management of the area and for consultation relating thereto.

The guidelines were revised and updated in June 2005 to reflect recent changes in planning legislation including the new Development plans processes and consultation procedures. In February 2006 English Heritage published their guidance in booklet form, 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals'.

This appraisal is generally framed within the English Heritage guidance. It should be noted that whilst this appraisal aims to provide an overview of the historic development of the conservation area and its present day character and appearance, the analysis inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity. In the interests of succinctness, it cannot be totally comprehensive. Because a particular building or feature or aspect of the area's historic development is not mentioned, it does not imply that it is unimportant. Additional



matters may arise as a result of consultation and publicity which may need to be taken into account in subsequent reviews of the appraisal or the management strategy.

Appraisals should not therefore be just an academic exercise. By identifying key issues and priorities, the appraisal can be used as a practical management tool to ensure the continued preservation and enhancement of the area's special qualities.

Given the time which has elapsed since their designation, a number of Wigan's conservation areas are in need of up to date appraisals. Inevitably such work must be prioritised. Further momentum has been given to the need for Conservation Area Appraisals in that they are now one of the Council's Best Value indicators for performance of the planning service.

The need for an appraisal of the Mesnes CA is all the more pressing as the Park itself is now to be the subject of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a major revitalisation programme. HLF rules require that the bid is formulated within the context of relevant and up to date assessment of the area's special architectural and historic character and appearance and moreover takes into account the aspirations of stakeholders and the local community for the particular conservation area.

Mesnes Conservation Area

Location, boundaries and land form

The Conservation Area is centred upon Mesnes Park a public park located to the north of the town centre, within the Central Ward of the borough of Wigan, (formerly Swinley Ward).

The Designated Area is approximately pentagonal in shape and lies on a south-easterly to north-westerly alignment, some 700m long on its principal axis and about 430m at its maximum width.

Its southern edge extends 150 m along New Market Street which forms the northern boundary of the town centre and the principal shopping area as defined on the Wigan Unitary Development Plan. Premises 4-6, 8-10 New Market Street and the adjoining Rushton Building, occupied by the Council's Civic Offices, are included.

In a clockwise direction, the Conservation Area's perimeter continues along Parson's Walk taking in the Drumcroon Arts Centre, the Thomas Linacre Outpatients Centre, (former High School), and west side frontage properties numbered 1-49 Parson's Walk. It continues as Park Road including frontages numbered 1-14 and includes two short culs-de-sac, Park Crescent and Park Crescent West and the premises of the Wigan Subscription Bowling Club.

The western perimeters of the Conservation area and Mesnes Park coincide, following the embankment of the main 'west coast' railway line. The boundary returns along the northern edge of the park, (excluding the park depot), taking in part of the Pagefield Annex of Wigan and Leigh College,



(formerly Rylands Gidlow Mill). The perimeter continues along the north eastern side of the park, including the frontage properties Nos 1-29 Bridgeman Terrace inclusive, Bridgeman House, Nos 38-46 Bridgeman Terrace and Nos 5-7 Kenyon Road. The boundary continues along Mesnes Street including Claremont, to its junction with New Market Street.

The conservation area includes Mesnes Park Terrace, which links Bridgeman Terrace with Parson's Walk separating the public park from an area of mainly open land known as the Mesnes Field. Premises numbered 1-5 Mesnes Park Terrace are included. The conservation area includes some 93 properties of a domestic scale and character of which slightly over half remain in residential use. (Ref Plan 1)

The land level drops from 39m. Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), at its south western corner, to a low point of 34.7m. AOD mid -way along Parson's Walk, then rises gradually to 37.36m. AOD at the railway bridge. Along its eastern perimeter, the levels rise gradually northwards, from approx. 39m. AOD at the south eastern corner, to 39.9m. AOD mid way along Bridgeman Terrace, rising more sharply to over 46m. AOD on the northern edge of the park.





An outline of the geology and land form of the Wigan area with particular reference to the historic importance of coal mining is given in Appendix 2.

Character Areas - an aid to appraisal

English Heritage suggest that larger conservation areas can often be conveniently analysed in terms of sub-areas, for example, which contain buildings of a distinctive period or style or which can be defined by natural or man made features such as watercourses, main roads or areas of open space. This approach can conveniently be applied to the Mesnes Conservation Area appraisal as the area

naturally divides into several distinct sub areas. The appraisal will however consider the contribution of the various character areas to the conservation area as a whole.

The various character areas within the Mesnes Conservation area can be described as follows:

-  Mesnes Park itself
-  The Mesnes Field area
-  The south western perimeter of Parson's Walk/ Park Road and the former high school
-  The north eastern perimeter comprising Bridgeman Terrace and the Pagefield College Building

These are illustrated on Diagram 1.



Character Area 1 Mesnes Park

The Park - a brief introduction

Mesnes Park, the focus of the Mesnes Conservation Area, is an area of urban parkland of some 12 hectares (29.65 acres), laid out in Victorian times. It extends about 0.5 km in a northwesterly direction from Mesnes Park Terrace. Its main entrance is located at its south-eastern corner at the junction of Bridgeman Terrace and Mesnes Park Terrace, within 200m of the town centre shopping area. The Mesnes Field is an area of mainly open land situated between the park and the town centre.

From its inception up to modern times, Mesnes Park has provided the principal area of open space for the inner town. It is juxtaposed with nearby residential areas of medium density including many semi-detached and terraced houses with small private garden space. Neighbouring the park is the substantial campus of the Wigan and Leigh College, comprising the main buildings off Parson's Walk and the Pagefield Annex located adjacent the northern area of the park. The two sites together have some 6,600 enrolled students including full time, part time and evening learners.

Historical context

The development of Mesnes Park is inextricably linked with the history and development of the town and particularly its period of rapid growth and expansion during the industrial revolution. The history of Wigan as a settlement can however be traced back to at least Roman times, being identified with the name of Coccium. (A review of the principal archaeological findings within the Conservation Area is contained in Appendix 3).

"Wigan is not a parvenu of the
Industrial Revolution. The Parish

Church is first mentioned in 1199, the town received a charter in 1246 and the grant of a market in 1258 and there are minimal features of the 13th Century in the Parish Church. Leland mentions sea-coules at Wigan in 1538, and by 1784 a cloth hall was opened, i.e. the town manufactured textiles".*

*N Pevsner, Buildings of England,
South Lancashire

The early town grew up on rising ground above the River Douglas, a tributary of the Ribble and situated on the alignment of the Roman Road between Preston and Warrington. The name Wigan is probably Saxon in origin.

In 1538 Leland described Wigan as paved, "as big as Warrington" - also a town with 13th Century Market charters - "but better built". He recorded that Mr Bradshaw at Haigh, just outside Wigan "hath found much cannel like sea-coules in the ground, very profitable to him".

(Cannel is a form of coal formed under special conditions when plants decay under water. It is high in impurities and contains large amounts of fish scales, oil and gas. It will burn in a candle flame producing a smoky candle light effect - hence the name. Large seams of cannel were mined in Wigan. Cannel was especially suited to gas production. Source: Wigan History Shop).

By the mid 18th Century the town was known for its brass, copper, bedding, rugs and cannel coal products. Its main industry was coal mining aided by the development of canal connections initially by a link to the River Douglas, 1742 using coastal shipping from the Ribble to Liverpool. A direct



canal link to Liverpool was opened in 1772 later becoming part of the Leeds and Liverpool canal, opened throughout in 1816. The introduction of steam engines and innovations in textile machinery led to the growth of the textile industry away from mainly domestic woollen production into the large cotton mills. In 1829 there were 32 steam engines at work in Wigan's mills.

(Source - History Shop).

The town's principal industries, coal and cotton, flourished during the 19th Century aided by the coming of the railway, initially in 1832, via a link to the Liverpool and Manchester. By 1838 the line to Preston was complete.

The Preston Chronicle of the day described the great embankment north of Wigan station as "almost a fortification round the sides of the town". (Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Volume 10 G O Holt).

The development of ironworks followed the coalfield expansion. A number of independent coal owners were replaced by the Wigan Coal and Iron Company formed in 1865.

The town's population of 10,989 in 1801 had risen to 31,941 by 1851 and to 48,194 in 1881. (Source - Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540, Phillips and Smith).

The mid to late 19th Century was a prosperous time for Wigan, a factor reflected in the rebuilding and development of fine social, commercial and civic buildings in and around the town centre during this period, for example, the new market hall, opened in 1877. (This was in turn replaced in 1987 by the present market hall as part of the Galleries shopping centre).

"The change which has taken place in the borough within but a recent

period might almost be described as a transformation.

Gradually though perceptibly it has cast off its more antique habiliments, dilapidated structures of obsolete styles of architecture have disappeared giving place to buildings massive and imposing and adapted to the requirements of this advanced age".

The Wigan Examiner, 9th August 1878, from its extensive coverage of the formal opening of the park.

Wigan town centre's pattern of development since medieval times had been characterised by development in depth of narrow plots of land fronting its historic main streets, Standishgate, Millgate, Hallgate and Wallgate. These plots known as burgage plots, held by the town's burgesses, gradually became intensively infilled particularly during the town's expansion as an industrial and commercial centre during the 19th Century. The pressure of commercial growth left little opportunity for the provision of open space or greenery. The Mesnes held by the Rector, had remained open land used as pasture and for informal recreation by local people but during the 19th Century there was increasing pressure to exploit it for commercial purposes.

The word 'Mesnes' is an historical term being a shortened version of 'demesnes', which is land retained by the Lord of the Manor for his own use and not let to tenants. In Wigan the Rector held the title of Lord of the Manor and the demesne formed part of the Wigan Rectory Glebe estate. The Manorial seat and Rectory was Wigan Hall situated, as it remains today, some 150m to the south west of the present park.



The so called Mesnes was a large tract of land extending northwards and eastwards from the grounds of Wigan Hall and including the present day Mesnes Field and the park itself. The Mesnes land was contained between two lanes or paths, on the alignments of present day Parson's Walk and Bridgeman Terrace.

Pressures to develop the Mesnes

In 1837 there was an attempt to enclose the land by Act of Parliament so that it could be developed but the Members for Wigan opposed the move arguing that the land was used by local people and crossed by footpaths. The bill was amended to allow a portion to be retained as open land for recreational use.

The 1848 OS shows the Mesnes land as an open area crossed diagonally by footpaths but that two collieries and their tramroads were present as well as marl pits and sand quarries. Mesnes Colliery No 1 was located just north of the Rectory (Hall) grounds. No 2 described as a cannel pit, was situated more or less near the present park main gate; Mesnes Colliery. No 3 was located in the northern area of the present park.

By the mid 19th Century, commerce in the form of collieries and sand pits, had clearly established a foothold in the Mesnes although the land was evidently still being used for recreational purposes in December 1863 when work was progressing with the Rector's agreement on the construction of a new walk on the north west side of the Mesnes, "for the convenience and recreation of persons visiting the Mesnes".

(Wigan Observer and Advertiser
18 December 1863).

Pressure to develop the land nonetheless continued and in 1871 a private Bill called the Wigan Rectory

Glebe Act was introduced with the intention of revoking earlier legislation in order to allow further building and mining on the Mesnes. The Wigan Examiner refers to the protracted debate surrounding the possible acquisition of part of the Mesnes for a public park.

"This important work has not been thus consummated without having to undergo many precarious vicissitudes". ... "However after much practical eloquence had been devoted in the ventilation of the subject without any appreciable result, it found a sturdy champion in the person of the present High Sheriff of Lancashire, Nathaniel Eckersley Esq".

Rescue by the Mayor!

During the consideration of the 1871 bill in Parliament it was proposed that the town should purchase 16 acres of the Mesnes land for the purpose of a public park at a cost of £2,000. Mr Eckersley as Mayor of Wigan and who was a local mill owner undertook to pay the cost of the land. The Council proceeded to secure possession and in due course secured the remainder of the land which constitutes the present park from a Mr Hodge.

Provision was made concurrently for a grammar school to be built on part of the Mesnes adjacent to the site of the park.

In 1877 Wigan Corporation held a competition for the design of the park. Twenty one designs were submitted and put on display in the Council Chamber. The designs evidently adopted similar approaches but varied in detail with costs ranging from £1,300 to £18,000. The Wigan Examiner



records that the winning design was that submitted by Mr J McLean of Castle Donnington who was awarded a prize of £50 and the contract to oversee the construction of the park, his estimated cost for the work being £2,250, and this included:

"the necessary accommodation for croquet, archery, cricket, lawn tennis, bowling and recreation; also a fountain, a pavilion and a pretty sheet of ornamental water broken up with two islets which might be utilised as an abode for water fowls."

Wigan Examiner 9/8/1878.

The Wigan Examiner of August 9th 1878 carried a lengthy and informative article on the Park and its formal opening. The article graphically described the urban context of the park in the Wigan of the latter 19th Century.

"Wigan is a grim emporium of labour and industry; it is devoid of natural beauties and the atmosphere is polluted by the serpentine and cloud like columns of smoke which are vomited from the huge chimneys by which we are surrounded. Hence it is all the more necessary that the town should be provided with a public place of resort."

WE 9 August 1878.

Prior to the park landscape works the condition of the Mesnes was described as a largely uncultivated waste of barren appearance, "although the surface of the land has never been carefully cultivated much arduous toil has been undergone below ground. In every direction it has been literally riddled". (Ref above).

The extent of mine workings in the locality indeed gave cause for concern that the massive Gidlow Mill erected 1864 on the edge of the Mesnes would cause the ground to collapse.

The article gave a full description of the park layout and the proposed buildings, which were not complete at the time of its formal opening. The design was considered to make good use of the site and its levels. Much was made of the potential health benefits of the site's elevation and openness to breezes from the Irish Sea, which it was considered would provide an antidote to the polluted atmosphere. It would appear that the main works were focussed upon the southern part of the park and that the area north of the pavilion was a later stage, which included an intention to provide another lake and open areas for recreation. It was noted that this 'lower' end of the park was as yet in a rough and unfinished state.

The total cost of the park including the erection of the pavilion and all its fixtures and other elements was later estimated to be £12,000.

The Park was formally opened on Monday 6th August 1878 by Nathaniel Eckersley, who was then High Sheriff of Lancashire. Although construction work was as yet incomplete the date was chosen to honour Nathaniel Eckersley as benefactor during his tenure as High Sheriff and to permit a celebratory public holiday during the summer.

The development of the park was therefore a laudable civic response to the social and environmental conditions of the day in providing the inner town with much needed open space for the recreation and well being of the local population many of whom were exposed to dirt and pollution in their everyday working lives.



The Park today

When first opened, the green wedge of Mesnes Park, penetrating almost into the town centre must have provided a welcome contrast with the densely built inner town. Today, though the smoky industries are gone, the park continues to provide a valuable recreational and amenity space, its mature trees and greenery being readily visible from the heart of the town centre. Mesnes Park remains true to its image of a typical Victorian town park with its formal compositions of paths flanked by lawns and flower beds offering vistas to planned focal points together with areas of informal character, including a duck pond and perambulatory paths flanked by trees and shrubbery. The park also contains a range of recreational facilities, including bowling greens, tennis courts, children's play areas and sports pitches. The recreational areas represent progressive stages in the park's development, catering for evolving leisure requirements.

Pevsner thought the park was 'on the small side', yet it contained a serpentine lake. He mentions the pavilion and stone terracing and the Powell statue.

The historic interest of the park has been recognised by its inclusion in 1996 in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, described thus:

"Mesnes Park opened 1878 and designed by John McClean, Grade II on the English Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Notable features include its topography and duck pond; the survival of the historic layout and planting structure and early buildings including the lodge, pavilion and bandstand which are listed buildings. The park with its

many mature trees forms a major element in the Mesnes Conservation Area." (Appendix 4).

There are seven individually Listed Buildings within the park:

-  The Bandstand; c1880.
-  The Powell Monument; a monumental statue in bronze on granite plinth dated 1910.
-  The Pavilion; c1880.
-  Double flight of steps to west of pavilion.
-  Double flight of steps to south of pavilion, both c1880.
-  Entrance gateway to Mesnes Park from Mesnes Park Terrace, 1878.
-  Entrance Lodge, 1878 vernacular revival style, enlarged and altered; 2 storey portion added set back (c1928).

Recent reports by specialist consultants have evaluated the condition of the Park's buildings and structures in some detail and have considered the overall landscape and amenity character of the park and its strengths and weaknesses. It is not the purpose of this appraisal to reiterate these findings in detail, as they will in due course be incorporated in the HLF bid. However, reference is made in this appraisal where appropriate, to some of the principal findings of previous specialist research.

Unsurprisingly, over a period of some 127 years, the park has undergone a number of changes though these are mostly confined to elements of detail and decoration rather than its underlying structure.