



Corporation Street Flats Conservation Area

July 2014

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1. Introduction

1.1. Definition

1.1.1. A Conservation Area is defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Section 69 (1) of the Act imposes a duty on the local planning authority to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, and to designate those places as conservation areas. Designation helps to ensure that an area identified for its architectural and historic significance is managed and protected appropriately.

1.2. Purpose of Appraisal

1.2.1. Conservation area appraisal is a means of identifying and assessing the special architectural and historic character of a place. The St George's Conservation Area was designated by Staffordshire County Council in 1998, and Foregate Street Conservation Area was designated by Staffordshire County Council in 1996.

1.2.2. This proposed conservation area (Corporation Street Flats) previously formed part of the St George's Hospital Conservation Area. Following review, it is proposed to amalgamate Foregate Street and St George's Hospital conservation areas to form one conservation area, the Foregate and St George's Conservation Area. It is proposed to create a separate conservation area that focuses on Corporation Street flats, based on the surviving architectural and historical interest they possess. This is discussed under Proposed Boundary Revisions.

1.2.3. Under section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is a requirement of the local planning authority to update conservation area appraisals regularly, and designate further areas as necessary. The purpose of this appraisal is to assess and define the special character and appearance of these areas as they stand today, and identify any threats or future threats to the area's character and integrity.

- 1.2.4. Appraisal ensures that the local authority, developers, property owners and the local community are aware of the area's special character when drawing up and assessing proposals for change.

1.3. Effects of Conservation Area Designation

- 1.3.1. The conservation area appraisal will be adopted as a "material consideration" in the planning process and will be used by the local planning authority when considering the effects of any proposed development affecting the conservation area, including its setting.

1.4. Certain Works in a Conservation Area require consent:

- 1.4.1. Planning Permission is required for the demolition or substantial demolition of an unlisted building within a conservation area.
- 1.4.2. Works to trees: Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, even if the tree is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), must notify the local planning authority and allow six weeks before commencing work. This gives the local planning authority the opportunity to make a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) if the tree is considered to be important.
- 1.4.3. Permitted Development Rights, i.e. those works of alteration or extension that can be carried out without planning permission, are slightly different in conservation areas. Some conservation areas are covered by Article 4 Directions, which restrict certain Permitted Development Rights, for example the installation of uPVC windows or satellite dishes. These are specific to each conservation area, and are in place to ensure the special historic and architectural character is protected.

1.5. Community Involvement

- 1.5.1. Stafford Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement sets out to ensure that all sections of the community and interested parties have a reasonable opportunity to engage with plan-making and planning application processes. A public consultation took place between 18 March and 29 April 2014, when interested parties were invited to comment on the draft appraisal.

- 2.1. Planning Policy Context: The Plan for Stafford 2014 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - 2.1.1. The Plan for Stafford policies of particular relevance to the conservation area are: Policies N1 Design, N4 The Natural Environment & Green Infrastructure, N8 Landscape Character, and N9 Historic Environment.
 - 2.1.2. National planning policies applicable to conservation areas are contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraphs 127 through to 141. National conservation guidance to support the NPPF policies is currently in preparation by national government.

2. Summary of Special Interest, Corporation Street Flats Conservation Area

2.1. Conservation Areas are designated by the Local Authority as a means of preserving and enhancing the special architectural and historic interest that has been retained in an area. The key elements of special character are summarised as follows:

- The earliest purpose-built council flats in the Borough
- A well-preserved, attractive setting including a bowling green for residents, echoing a Modernist approach to municipal housing design
- A rich collection of trees including horse chestnut and copper beech which visually shield the flats from the road and create a sense of enclosure
- Grouped balconies, semi-circular motifs and horizontal window openings influenced by European Modernist design and 1930s British municipal housing
- Attractive, well-preserved facades with striking geometry, employing a contrast between straight lines and curves and vertical and horizontal emphasis
- Contrasting Pennycroft Bungalows with curved brick columns, their siting framing Corporation Street flats



Figure 1 Corporation Street flats

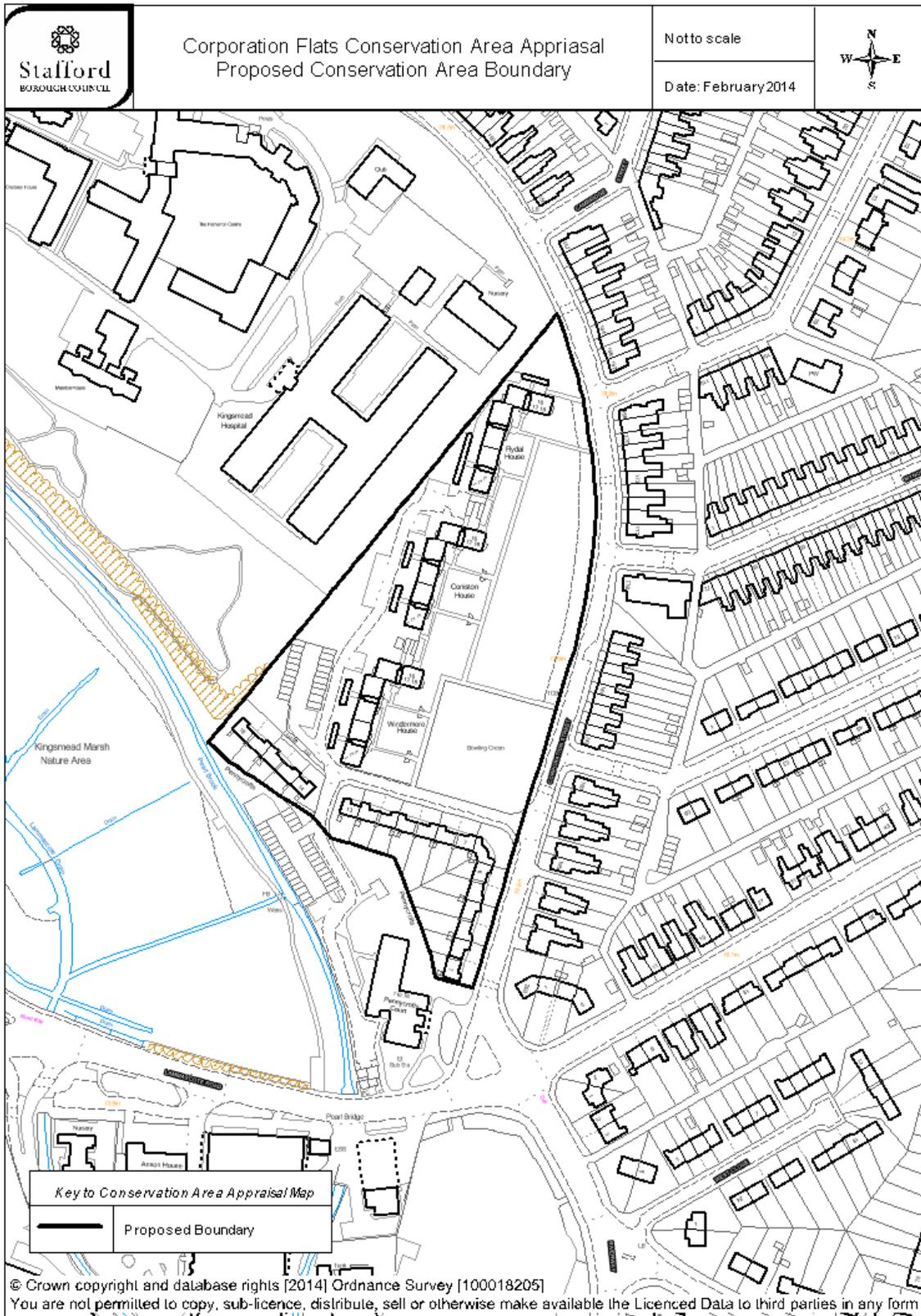


Figure 2 Corporation Street Flats Conservation Area

2.2. Location

- 2.3. Corporation Street Flats are sited to the east of Stafford town centre facing Corporation Street. To the south is Lammascote Road, and to the northwest is the St George's Hospital site.

2.4. Archaeological Interest

- 2.4.1. Horovitz (2005, pp39-40) suggests the *ford* element of Stafford is derived from *crossing point*; the *staff* element may translate as *foundation, base or support*, denoting a paved causeway across a marshy area of town. Archaeological evidence suggests a causeway existed on the site of the current Lammascote Road, possibly constructed during the Iron Age.

2.5. History of the Site

- 2.5.1. Up to the late 19th century, the centre of Stafford was surrounded by common fields owned by the major landowners of the area, and included Coton Field, The Crofts, and Foregate Field. Coton Field ran from the location of Corporation Street flats at the south, towards Oxford Gardens at the northeast of Stafford. The Coton Field allotments to the north of Corporation Street are the last remaining portions of this former common field.
- 2.5.2. The Municipal Corporations Reform Act of 1835 created corporations for each local area and made them accountable for the provision of public services. Each corporation was in effect an early Borough Council, and gradually their civic duties were expanded (English Heritage, 2011b, p3). The role of Stafford's corporation is evident in the road name of Corporation Street, built in the 1890s. The Corporation Street flats (Rydal, Coniston and Windermere) were among the first council homes to be built in Stafford, between 1951-52.
- 2.5.3. The flats were built as a result of The Housing (Financial and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1946, which gave subsidies to local authorities to provide social housing. The expansion of the Borough Council's civic duties included the employment of County Architects, in this case CM Coombes FRIBA, to whom these flats are attributed. 54 flats were built in total, to a distinctly Modernist design, and their appearance and setting are very well preserved.

2.6. Context with National and International Examples

2.7. Liverpool and Leeds in particular provided the blueprint for British municipal housing design, influenced by European Modernist housing in the 1920s and 30s (Whitfield, 2008, pp39,49). Similarities are observed between Corporation Street flats and Quarry Hill flats, Leeds, and St Andrews and Gerard Gardens, Liverpool.

2.7.1. Quarry Hill flats, Leeds (1933), by R.A.H. Livett (Director of Housing and later City Architect for Leeds) employ a semi-circular archway motif and windows with distinct horizontal emphasis. The design for Quarry Hill flats, now demolished, was heavily influenced by Karl Marx Hof, Vienna, built by Karl Ehn between 1927-30 (Whitfield, 2008, p45). Here the semicircular motif is employed, along with grouped balconies.

2.7.2. A principle of Modernist housing design is the provision of access to open or outdoor space, at Karl Marx Hof this principle is realised through the provision of green open space and balconies. Karl Marx Hof is regarded as one of the most influential buildings in municipal housing design of the Modernist era.



Figure 3 Karl Marx Hof. Photo: Dreizung. Source: Wikimedia Commons



Quarry Hill, Leeds, 1947. From the collections of the Imperial War Museum, reference D15678. Source: Wikimedia Commons

- 2.7.3. Karl Marx Hof also inspired St Andrew's Gardens (Grade II listed) and Gerard Gardens (demolished) in Liverpool, built from 1935 by Corporation Director of Housing Lancelot Keay. 'Sun balconies' were employed at St Andrew's Gardens by cantilevering the building's concrete floor slabs outwards with a brick balustrade, as at Corporation Street flats.
- 2.7.4. Keay and later John Hughes (appointed by Keay) were also influenced by Bruno Taut's Hufeisensiedlung (Horseshoe), built in 1925 in Berlin. This municipal housing scheme is regarded as a landmark in urban housing and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its' innovative, striking design, characterised by its curved horseshoe shape focused around a communal garden and pond is complemented by the social aspect of providing space for outdoor recreation.



Figure 4 Bruno Taut's Hufeisen-Siedlung (Horseshoe) Britz, Berlin (1925-1930).
Photo: Hermann Günther (2000). Source: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 5 St Andrews Gardens, Liverpool. Photo: Matej Bat'ha. Source: Wikimedia Commons

- 2.7.5. The horizontal treatment of fenestration in Modernist municipal housing was borne out of Le Corbusier's *Five Points of Architecture* (Whitfield, 2008, p44) in which Le Corbusier states that employing horizontally- shaped window openings brings more light into each room than the traditional sash arrangement. This horizontal treatment is observed at Corporation Street flats.
- 2.7.6. Although there is a 20 year time lapse between the construction of the former and Corporation Street flats, the similarities between Quarry Hill, St Andrew's and Gerrard Gardens and Corporation Street flats appear to be the result of Modernist design and principles filtering through British municipal housing. It is possible that CM Coombes wished to emulate the principles and design motifs laid out at earlier municipal housing schemes, by providing large open space for recreation (including the bowling green), horizontal fenestration and balconies.



Figure 6 Corporation Street flats employ the semi-circular archway motif, grouped balconies and horizontal fenestration employed in Modernist European municipal housing and later early British examples

2.8. Design and Plan Form, Corporation Street Flats

- 2.8.1. The three blocks are L-shaped on plan, and sited in a staggered arrangement with the northernmost block being closest to Corporation Street.
- 2.8.2. The simple design and rhythmical curves of the balconies and connecting walls form an attractive introduction to Corporation Street. The flats are three-storey, with projecting bays holding balconies each side of a two-storey window and a canopied central doorway below. This is framed by concrete rusticated columns on either side. The side bays help to frame the central projecting bays, which add interest to the frontages. A balance of vertical and horizontal emphasis is observed between the two-storey window and balconies either side.
- 2.8.3. There are similarities between the entrances to Hufeisensiedlung (horseshoe) and the entrances to Corporation Street flats. In both cases the emphasis on the vertical is exaggerated by the two-storey central windows.



Figure 7 Left: Entrances, Hufeisensiedlung (Horseshoe). Source: Wikimedia Commons. Right: Corporation Street flats. Vertical emphasis is created by the central elongated windows above the door



Figure 8 Corporation Street flats from Corporation Street



Figure 9 The green space and trees create an inviting setting for the flats and reflect Modernist municipal housing principles



Figure 10 Trees to the east of the flats

2.9. The windows at Corporation Street flats have been replaced wholesale, and although some architectural character has been eroded through the loss of the original metal Crittall's window frames, their uniform replacement has meant the retention of the horizontal emphasis, and the reference to Modernism remains.

3. Pennycroft Bungalows

3.1. Pennycroft bungalows to the west (built circa 1952) add further variety to Corporation Street. Those to the south of the conservation area curve around the corner at the southern edge of Corporation Street, forming a welcoming frontage. The facades are complemented by the circular brick columns and recessed bays, creating a colonnade before the gardens to the front. Gardens are to the front and rear. The low, deep eaves add character to the bungalows, and the roof is covered in Staffordshire blue tiles, reflecting vernacular materials.

3.2. The bungalows add a contrast in scale and frame views towards Corporation Street flats, but retain special and interesting character in their own right.



Figure 11 Pennycroft bungalows

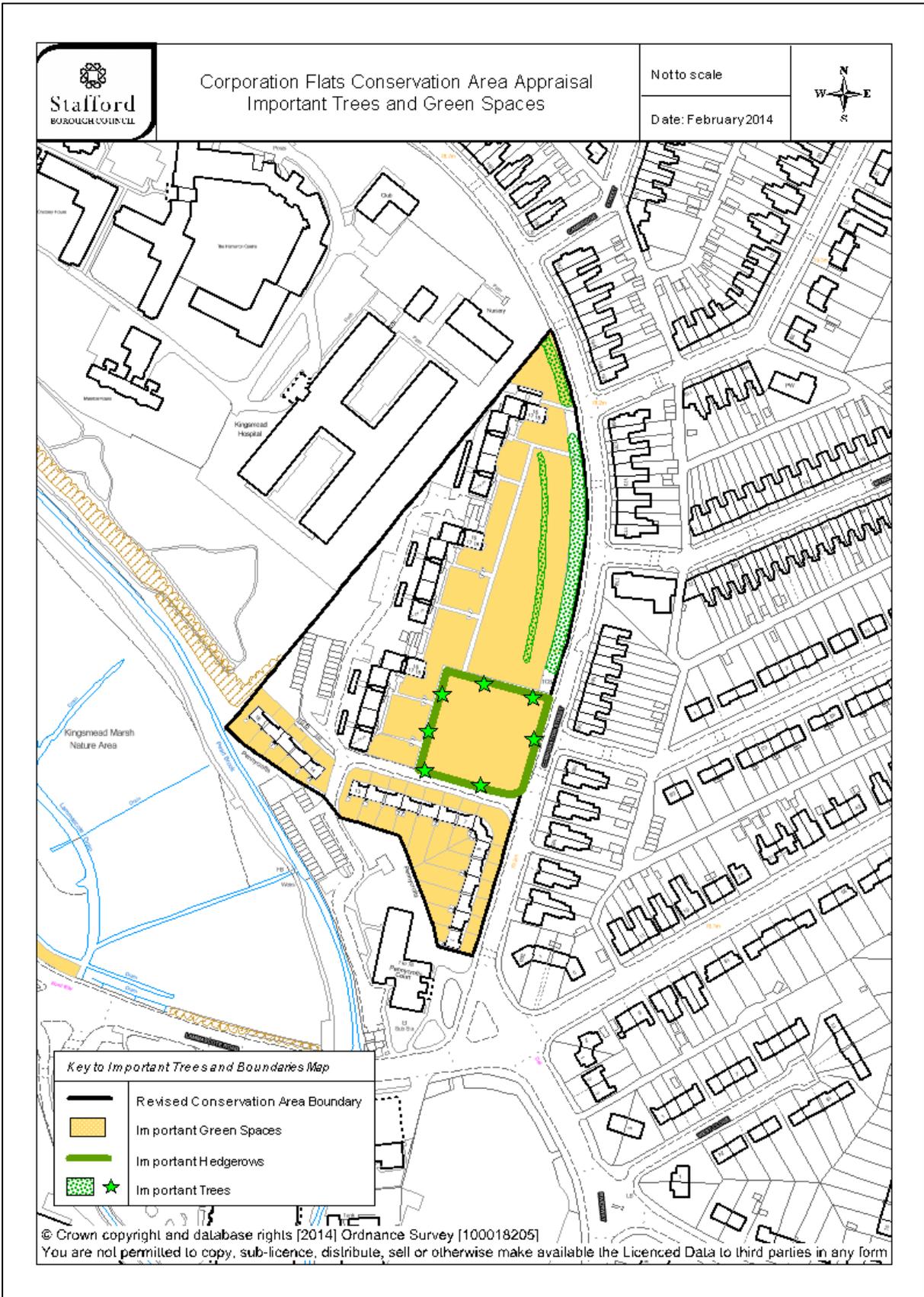


Figure 12 Important Trees and green space, Corporation Flats

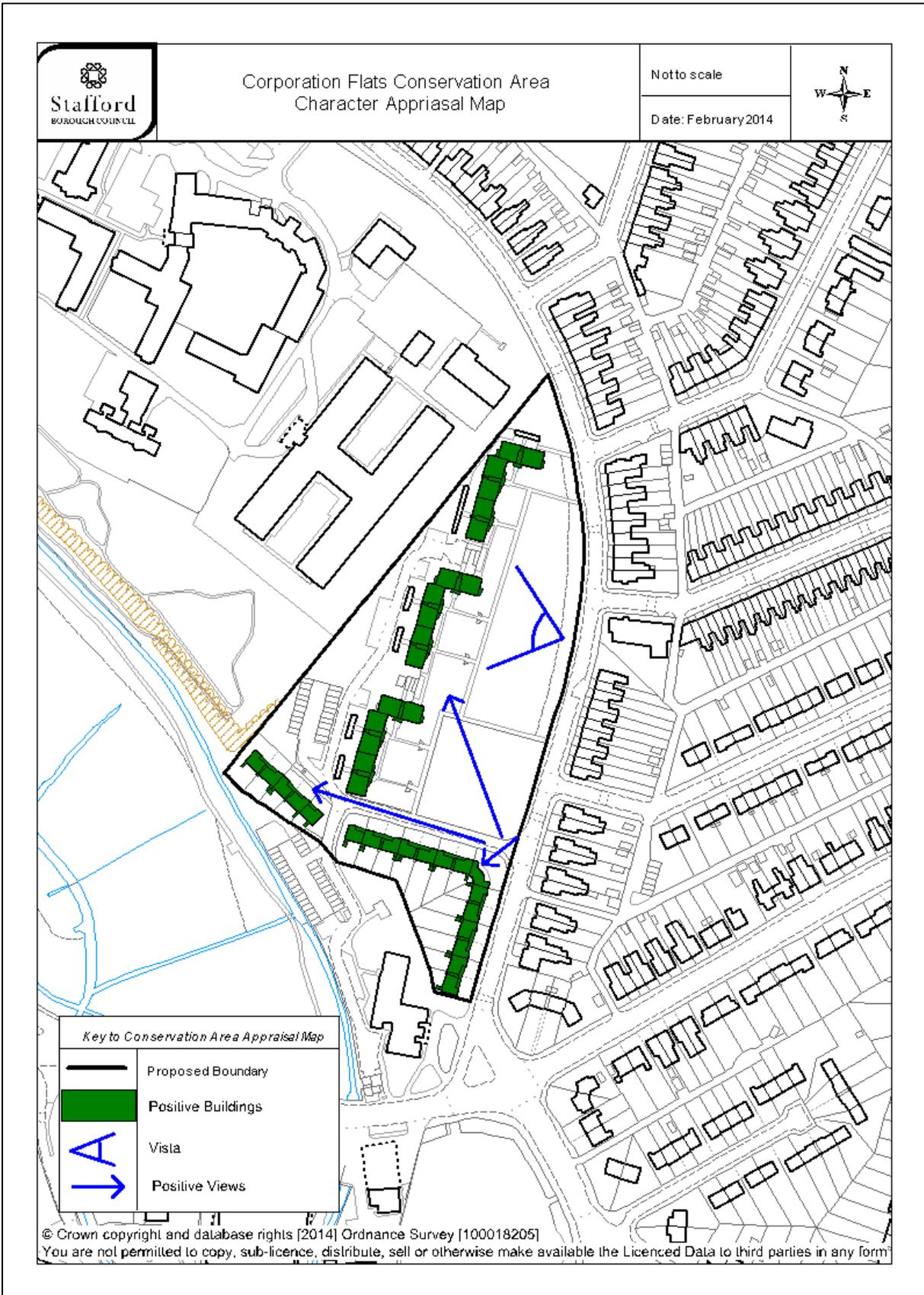


Figure 13 Positive Buildings and views, Corporation Street Flats

4. Setting

- 4.1. The setting of the flats is intrinsic to their character. The vast open space, including the bowling green, references the Modernist principle of providing outdoor space for recreation.
- 4.2. Visually, the setting creates a fine introduction to the flats. The grassed area to the east gives the buildings space to be appreciated and allows uninterrupted views of Rydale, Coniston and Windermere. The trees to the east, including more recent planting, shield the flats from the busy Corporation Street and lend status to the flats.
- 4.3. The lack of boundaries, minimal planting and the uncluttered appearance of the grassed area mean attention is drawn to the design form of the flats. The only boundary is the well-maintained hedge surrounding the bowling green, which is currently underused as such.
- 4.4. The gardens to Pennycrofts help provide a welcoming introduction to the bungalows. The boundary walls create a contrast to the open space before Rydale, Coniston and Windermere.

5. Important Views

- 5.1. Facing the flats from Corporation Street, the low canopies of the trees give a sense of enclosure but allow views of the flats travelling north and south along Corporation Street.
- 5.2. Facing west a vista encompasses Coniston, Windermere and Rydale.
- 5.3. Facing south towards Pennycroft bungalows the pleasing curve of the houses forms a visual introduction to the group.
- 5.4. Facing north views encompass the connecting walls and canopied entrance ways, mirrored by the balconies above, creating a strong horizontal emphasis.

6. Key Positive Characteristics to be considered during any Proposal for Change

Scale, Plot Size and Plan Form

- L-shaped, three-storey flats sited in a staggered arrangement with large open green space and bowling green to the east
- Rectilinear Pennycroft bungalows sited at right angles to the flats, curving around the corner at Corporation Street, and framing views to Corporation Street flats

Architectural styles and features

- Modernist motifs of semi-circular archways, balconies and horizontal fenestration
- Striking design employing a balance of vertical and horizontal emphasis, and curves and straight lines
- Collonades and deep eaves at Pennycroft Bungalows creating attractive, welcoming facades

Building Materials

- Brick for main facades at Corporation Street flats and Pennycroft Bungalows
- Concrete cantilevered balconies at Corporation Street Flats
- Staffordshire blue clay tiles at Pennycroft bungalows referencing vernacular architecture

Colour Palette

- Mid-orange brick with cream painted concrete at Corporation Street flats
- Mid-orange brick with blue roof tiles at Penny croft bungalows

Setting

- An abundance of trees including copper beech and horse chestnut
- Open green space and a bowling green
- Gardens to the front and rear at Pennycroft bungalows

Boundary types

- Hedgerow surrounding the bowling green
- Trees to the east of the flats at the edge of Corporation Street providing screening from the main road and an attractive setting

Important views

- From Corporation Street from the southeast and northeast looking towards the flats
- a vista facing west towards the flats
- Facing south towards Pennycroft Bungalows
- Facing north from Pennycroft bungalows towards the flats



Figure 14 The connecting walls and balconies create a strong horizontal emphasis viewed from north and south

7. Negative Aspects that Impact on the Character of the Conservation Area

- 7.1. There are few negative aspects to the character and appearance of the flats. The most damaging alteration has been the loss of the original metal Crittall windows which possessed slender and elegant glazing bars. The replacement uPVC windows have marred the grace and elegance of the elevations facing Corporation Street.

8. Protecting the Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

- Policies for the protection and management of the historic environment through the development management process are set out within NPPF Paragraphs 127 through to 141, and in the Plan for Stafford Policies N1 Design, N4 The Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure, N8 Landscape Character, and N9 Historic Environment.
- These policies should be used in conjunction with this appraisal to guide or assess any future development within the Eccleshall conservation area.
- Other organisations, such as the County Council Highways Authority, and statutory undertakers also have their own commitments to protect the character and appearance of the conservation area in the exercise of their duties.
- To manage and protect the special historic character and appearance of the conservation area:
- The existing special historic character and appearance of the conservation area and all features identified as Positive should be retained and reinforced.
- Further works that harm the significance of the area, identified in this appraisal, should be avoided.
- *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* (Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, English Heritage, 2010) or its successor should be used for guidance.
- Existing and emerging design or conservation guidance published by Stafford Borough Council and English Heritage guidance should be consulted where relevant, such as *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape* (English Heritage, 2006), *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage, 2008), *Streets for All* (English Heritage, 2004), *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (English Heritage, 2011).

- Some works that could harm the character or appearance of the conservation area can be carried out under “permitted development rights”, which means that home owners do not need to apply for planning permission. Owners are nevertheless encouraged to take heed of the special historic character and appearance of the area when carrying out these works.

9. Recommendations for Future Management

- 9.1. Generally the conservation area is well-maintained and retains much of its architectural character. The site is currently in single ownership so works are carried out at one time, resulting in the retention of the uniform appearance. It is recommended that if the flats are sold individually or to multiple owners at any point, an Article 4 direction is made to protect the uniformity of the flats, introducing a need for planning permission for replacing windows or the installation of satellite dishes for example. It is also recommended that if the flats are sold individually an agreement is drawn up between residents that allows for the carrying out of certain works at the same time to avoid piecemeal repair having a negative effect on the front elevations by spoiling the uniformity of the principal facades.
- 9.2. The bowling green is currently underused and would benefit from maintenance of the grassed area.

10. Proposed Boundary Revisions

- 10.1. Originally part of the St George’s Hospital Conservation Area, it is proposed to change the existing St George’s conservation area to include Foregate Street, initially Foregate conservation area, and the connecting streets between the Infirmary on Foregate Street and the prison site, and the St George’s Hospital site. It is proposed that this forms Foregate and St George’s Conservation Area.
- 10.2. Between Corporation Street flats and the St George’s hospital site, the character of the conservation area has been lost, and there is little historic or architectural interest to connect Corporation Street flats to the St George’s Conservation Area. It is therefore proposed to create a new conservation area, Corporation Street Flats conservation area, in recognition of their continuing special historical and architectural interest.



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Corporation Street Flats Conservation Area Appraisal Proposed Boundary Changes

Not to scale

Date: March 2014

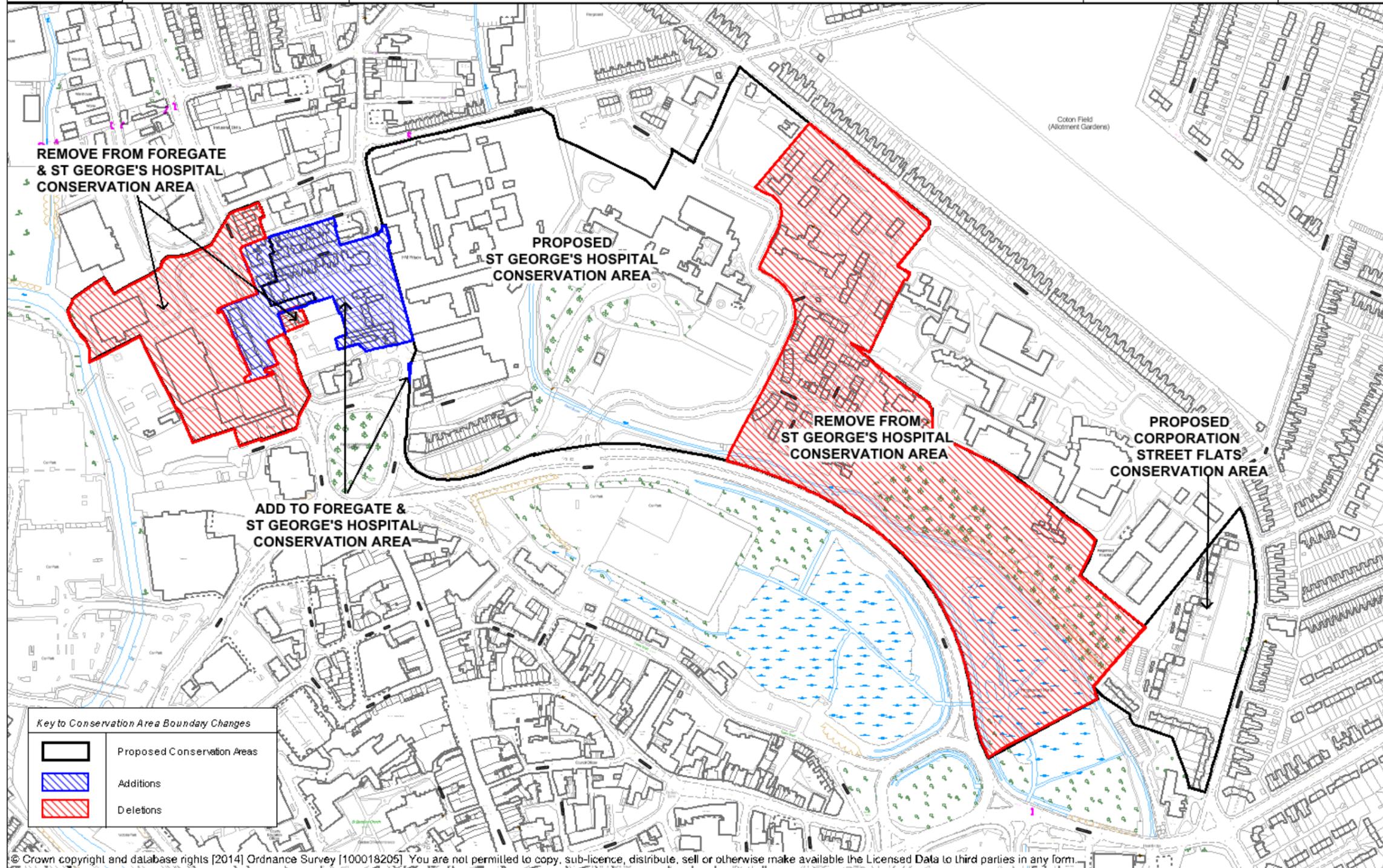


Figure 15 Proposed Boundary revisions map

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Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Conservation Area

Conservation Areas are defined in Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as “*areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.*”

Positive Building

A building identified as a contributor to the special character of the conservation area by way of its architectural and/or historical qualities.

Positive Space

An area identified as a contributor to the special character of the conservation area.

Negative Building

A building identified as detrimental to the special character or appearance of the conservation area, and would warrant enhancement or replacement in any future proposals involving this building. The negative effect may be derived from, for example, its siting, plan form, scale, height, massing or materials, and could not be readily reversed by minor alterations.

Negative Space

A space identified as detrimental to the special character and appearance of the conservation area, and would warrant enhancement in any future proposals involving this space.

Neutral Building

A building that does not contribute to, or harm, the special character and appearance of the conservation area. It does not possess qualities that contribute to the architectural or historical character of the conservation area, but does not visually intrude or cause a jarring effect by way of its of its siting, plan form, scale, height, massing, materials or colour palette, for example. The building may warrant enhancement in future proposals.

Neutral Space

A space that does not contribute to, or harm, the special character of the conservation area. It does not possess qualities that contribute to the architectural or historical character of the conservation area, but does not affect the character negatively.

Setting

Setting is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework as “*The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the*

asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.”