



CONCLUSIONS

SOUTHEND'S KEY CHARACTERISTICS

During the course of the project a number of key themes and issues have emerged which particularly define the character of Southend. These are important to the ongoing development of the character of the Borough in terms of protecting key features which make the borough special. They also may provide helpful guidance in terms of guiding future policy and design considerations, ensuring that new development proceeds in a way which is consistent with the core character of the Borough and makes a positive contribution to the existing built form.

This section describes the key characteristics and highlights the key issues for further consideration.



URBAN AND ARCADIAN STYLES

Key characteristics

The urban forms and architectural styles in Southend can be divided into two characteristic types - the urban and the arcadian. Whilst these exist within a continuum of varied styles rather than as polar opposites they have clear distinguishing features.

Urban - The urban elements of the Borough are most likely to be around the historic centres and are characterised by relatively dense development. The key defining feature however is the degree of consistency between plots, defining a rhythm and homogeneity which speaks of pride and identification with the whole rather than the preeminence of the individual plot.

The proportions of the buildings are most likely to be vertical, featuring taller floor to ceiling heights, sash windows and elements such as fanlights above doors. Front gardens are likely to be modest and parking on street.

Areas which fall into this category are most likely to be Georgian and Victorian. Edwardian buildings are also likely to be defined as predominantly urban in character although they hold the origins of much of the arcadian approach at the start of a gradual move towards styles influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement.

Arcadian - The garden city movement pioneered a more open and arcadian form of development influenced by the romantic notion of life in the country combined with the best elements of urban life. Although the First World War interrupted the flow of development the spirit of the garden city was taken up with enthusiasm in the following years, clearly influencing the Homes for Heroes movement

and the large areas of public and private housing which followed.

Although many areas which could be included in this category are still based on a regular planned block structure they have many features which demonstrate a return to the rural arcadian approach. These include the use of more complex forms to create individual buildings, the use of weather-boarding, tile hanging and other rural construction techniques, a move to a generally more horizontal proportion of building and a generally lower density of building creating a more open feel and a more generous approach to individual house plots, including significant private and public planting.

Some of the post-war suburban areas conform only loosely to the Arcadian principles, and so do not provide clear precedent or context in this regard.

Key issues

The balance between urban and arcadian influences in the style and form of an area is a helpful one to understand when considering the appropriateness of any proposals for new buildings. It encapsulates an approach to design, layout and landscape which can inform every aspect of a design and provides an approach which is not explicitly linked to period or style, but rather to origin and philosophy. An understanding of this should assist in the delivery of appropriate modern contextual development without necessarily falling back on simple pastiche which can often create an unsympathetic building that is a poor replica of the traditional form.



URBAN STRUCTURE

Key characteristics

The major urban structure of the Borough has developed over a long period of time, but in a few clearly distinguishable ways.

Firstly, the main network of principal routes is largely inherited from the historic network of roads and lanes which existed prior to the urbanisation of the Borough. These linked the existing settlements of Prittlewell, Leigh, Southend and Shoebury, and in the case of examples such as London Road continue to provide a significant link.

With few major settlements to the north of the Borough the principal movement structure has always been east-west, following the landscape.

As development areas were planned out in the Victorian and Edwardian periods the first major phases of development were laid out as regular grids, running north-south between these routes. As later phases of development were planned there was a gradual move away from very regular grids towards more organic and irregular layouts. However, the north-south grid remains a strong defining feature of much of the Borough.

Later development, including the cul-de-sac plans of North Shoebury and Eastwood and the open plan high rise and low rise forms break with this approach and as a result feel less place specific to Southend and more generic in their approach.

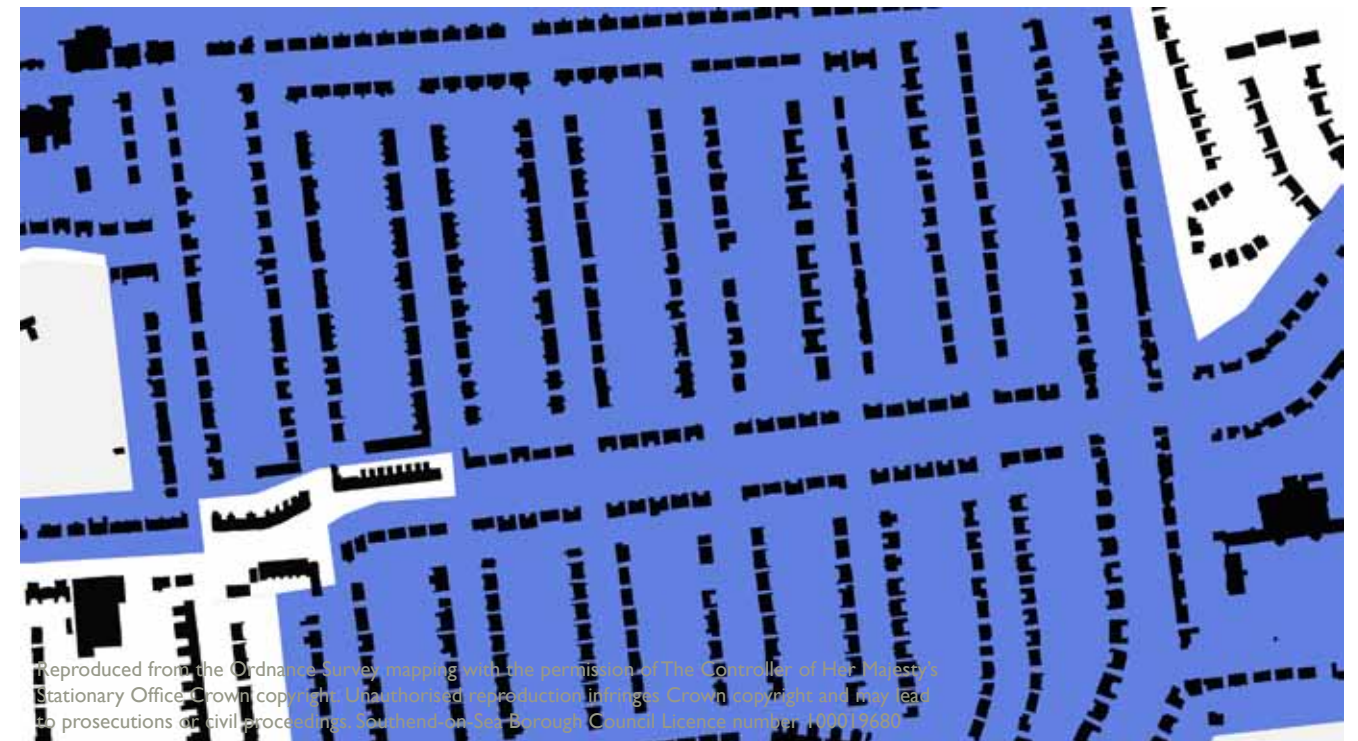
Key issues

The perimeter block form is an integral part of many areas of the Borough, ranging from tight and regular grid blocks through to more organic structures. They provide an environment which

is generally easy to navigate and which provides a high degree of permeability, promoting greater use of sustainable transport modes. It is also a very flexible form, able to accommodate a wide range of building formats and dwelling sizes.

The nature of the perimeter block is also to make connections with the surrounding urban area wherever possible. This promotes integration between new and existing development rather than the creation of insular pockets of development.

This approach of using perimeter block structures should be advocated in new developments, establishing a clear sense of continuity and integration with the existing Borough character and street network. The scale and grain of the grid used should reflect that found in the immediate context, along with an appropriate approach to plot scale and format.



VARIETY

Key characteristics

As has been noted early in this study, one of the key distinguishing features of the development of large areas of Southend is the high degree of variation found from plot to plot. This is a feature which has arisen as a direct result of the way in which streets were laid out and then individual plots or small groups of plots were developed by different builders. These would either be developed on a speculative basis or to the requirements of a particular purchaser.

This approach is clearly visible in the historic maps of the time which capture moments at which a patchwork of plots was developed, but before everything in the area had been built out (see plans on page 39).

Areas developed in this way contain a wide range of building types including terraces, semis and detached houses and a huge mix of dwelling formats including deeply stepped front elevations and a mix of bungalows in amongst the two and sometimes three storey houses.

A number of common features do bind these areas together to create a cohesive sense of place. Firstly, they tend to be built with a reasonably consistent approach to the building line, creating a unified elevation to the street. Secondly, the prevailing fashions of the time mean that although buildings may have a very different underlying form they are often finished in similar materials and with similar details and motifs. Finally, although plot widths do vary, they tend to be reasonably consistent, given a steady rhythm to the street in terms of front doors and roof line.

Key issues

The nature of these streets and the variety they embody is a distinctive feature of Southend, unlike many of the more planned and homogenous areas of development found in the London suburbs for example. The variety means that they are generally able to accommodate gradual change over time, including the additional relatively strong contemporary architecture providing the overall sense of scale and grain remains.

Some concern has been expressed at the loss of bungalows in the Borough, redeveloped as larger houses to take full advantage of the development potential of a site. Some areas of the Borough have areas which comprise large areas of bungalows, creating a consistent scale and defined character which might be easily broken through insensitive redevelopment. However, in more mixed areas where a bungalow is clearly part of a varied scale it may be possible in some cases to consider redevelopment to a larger house which respects the character and scale of the area.



THE SEAFRONT

Key characteristics

The seafront plays defining role in the character of Southend, but has several distinct facets:

Leigh Port and Old Town - Old Leigh is an example of an historic estuary town which has largely weathered the impact of modern development. This is perhaps due to the arrival of the railway line in the nineteenth century which isolated it from the rest of the town, effectively quarantining it from intensive development, and the strength of the local fishing industry. It remains an attractive village, with a significant body of historic buildings and a strong relationship to the waterfront. It benefits from the comprehensive coverage of the conservation area designation and now combines its role as a working harbour with local tourism.

Pleasure and leisure - The central part of Southend is characterised by Adventure Island and a surrounding cluster of leisure buildings, most notably the listed Kursaal, the location of the first ever theme park, predating Coney Island in America. Along with Clifftown this area is described as the Central Seafront Area in the Southend LDF.

The Golden Mile is particularly recognisable for its garish architecture, gaudy signage and dense concentration of leisure uses, although this masks a good deal of valuable historic fabric. Interestingly, both the neon and the underlying historic fabric have substantial elements which would merit some form of conservation protection in order to maintain the grain and character of the area. The public space along the seafront has recently been the subject of major streetscape investment.

Hotels and larger buildings - in the areas of the seafront around the central sea front (Chalkwell Station to Palmeira Avenue and Jetty to Thorpe Hall Avenue) there is a varied scale and pattern of use. This includes the presence of numerous guest houses and small hotels. More recently the development of larger hotel buildings and the development of retirement flats and apartment buildings has had a noticeable impact on these areas, resulting in a general increase in building scale and the loss of historic character and urban grain.



Residential - at the extremities of the Borough, the sea front reverts to a largely residential character, with large individual houses facing onto the water. Of particular note is Thorpe Esplanade (from Thorpe Hall Avenue to Ness Road) where the houses are set back some distance from the beach head, behind gardens and tennis courts. Here the buildings are typically very large, reflecting the premium commanded by such an attractive location and its views.

Cliff Parade and Marine Parade in Leigh-on-Sea also feature houses facing towards the estuary across large areas of green space. However, here the steep gradient of the cliffs gives a much more elevated position.

There is continued pressure for bulkier and taller development in these areas.



Cliffs - Whilst the eastern half of the Borough is largely flat the western half has a heavily modelled topography, resulting in a very distinctive landscape of steep escarpments. In some instances, such as Cliffs Gardens these are landscaped and provide a pleasure garden as a local amenity. In other instances, such as the eastern approach to Leigh-on-Sea, the steep landscape has been developed with bespoke houses configured to be accessed from the top of the hill and taking advantage of the unusual but attractive setting.



Key issues

The main concern for the character of the seafront is the gradual increase in scale of new buildings and the loss of historic grain as a result of pressure for hotels, flats and retirement development. Whilst this may be appropriate in more central locations, provided the design is of high quality and sympathetically relates to the historic grain, it is seen as having a generally detrimental effect on the integrity and character of the Borough.

Many recent developments have been based on amalgamated sites. This has allowed the creation of buildings with a strongly horizontal emphasis and often considerable bulk in place of original buildings which were based on regular, relatively narrow, plots and were generally limited in overall height.



As a consequence the council may wish to consider introducing design guidelines which limit the potential for large format buildings, controlling height and restricting the opportunity for plots to be amalgamated to create bulky forms of development that don't reflect the fine grain character of the Borough.

TALL BUILDINGS

Key characteristics

Southend has a number of tall buildings. These are found in small numbers throughout the Borough, but with a clear focus on the central urban area and along the seafront. With tall buildings context is particularly important - a six storey building will feel tall in a low-rise suburban area or on the sea-front but will feel relatively standard in the main urban centre. They can be described in the following categories:

Central area - The centre of southend is the focus for a significant cluster of tall buildings, both in the core of the town centre but also Along Victoria Avenue to the north of Victoria Station. These buildings provide civic and office accommodation, along with elements including hotel and residential accommodation. The defined cluster reinforces the importance of the central urban area and aids legibility in the wider area. However, in some areas, such as Victoria Avenue the predominance of tall buildings contributes to a somewhat hostile environment for pedestrians due to the lack of activity at ground level.

Sea front - A number of tall and bulky buildings have been developed along the seafront, particularly in recent years. Whilst some of these, such as the more historic Palace Hotel, have graduated to the point of general local affection, many of the more recent examples are regarded as having a detrimental effect on the character of the seafront. This is based on a number of issues including:

- Loss of historic grain and character;
- Potential for tall and bulky buildings to affect views and daylight of properties in land; and
- Tall buildings being constructed in locations which neither require a significant landmark,

nor offer the services and transport infrastructure to be classed as sustainable.

Residential towers - A number of residential towers exist dotted around the Borough, mainly in the central and eastern half. These are typically the product of public sector housing development in the 1960s and are located amongst conventional low rise development. A further detailed description of these buildings is included in the preceding typology section of this report.

Key issues

Tall buildings can play an important role in the character of an urban area. They speak of an intensity of function, creating a sense of importance and dominance. They also act as a physical landmark, aiding legibility and wayfinding. However, this suggests that tall buildings should be located in areas which warrant definition in this way and hence some locations will be better suited to landmark structures of this nature than others.

As is noted in the previous section, the council may also wish to consider defining a policy approach to the issue of tall buildings along the seafront outside the central area, particularly considering their appropriateness as landmarks or otherwise.

Finally, many of the public sector residential buildings in other parts of the Borough are expected to have a limited life span before either major refurbishment or redevelopment is required. In these instances, consideration may be given to whether they should be replaced by new buildings more in keeping with the wider character of the area.



PARKING

Key characteristics

Although the forms of parking vary considerably across the borough there are few areas which not significantly affected by it.

It has a major visual impact on the streets, spaces and gardens with large areas being taken up by cars but also has a noticeable impact on the design of the environment itself.

In higher residential areas it is very common for the main form of parking to be on-street, as gardens are too small to provide space for a car. However, moving to larger plots it is very common to see some or all of the garden laid out as hard standing for parking. It is only with the largest of plots where there is sufficient space to restore a balance of green space to hard surface.

The inclusion of parking in gardens not only reduces the amount of greenery, affecting biodiversity and water run-off, it also changes the relationship between the private and public realm as gates are rarely used and so the delineation of a front boundary hedge, wall or fence is lost. This can noticeably change the character of streets, making them feel much wider and more barren than previously.

Street greenery is also significantly affected by parking, with verges, verge hedges and street trees all potentially lost to either create on-street parking bays or even simply to provide cross-overs to enable people to access on-plot parking.

Later, post-war, developments have sought different ways to address the issue of parking in suburban areas. For housing built by the private sector this has often resulted in cul-de-sac development dominated by hard standing

and garage doors. Public sector housing has often grouped garages together into parking courts away from main routes and overlooking. Whilst both solutions have their problems, most modern developments in suburban areas continue to feature integrated garages as the principal solution.

Key issues

Given that cars, or personal transport of some form, are likely to be a feature of our streets for some time to come, ways need to be established to minimise their impact on the design of the streets and spaces. This may involve guidance firstly to discourage or limit the conversion of gardens to parking and then perhaps to demonstrate how it can be done with minimal hard standing so as to retain as much greenery as possible.

Loss of street greenery to parking should be resisted and opportunities sought to re-introduce trees and greenery into spaces wherever possible.

For future development, the visual impact of parking should be a key concern, particularly the effect of including integrated garages within the ground floor of modern 'town-houses'. These deaden the ground floor, removing active frontage and diminishing the quality of the relationship between the public and private space.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Key characteristics

Southend is an extremely green Borough and benefits from both good quality street greenery and excellent parks. The key features include:

- Verge hedges, typically used in early inter-war areas, giving the street and exceptionally green feel;
- Grass verges, widely used in other areas of the Borough, although not commonly found in higher density areas due to pressure on street space;
- Street trees, found across the borough and ranging from large broad-leaf trees such as London Planes to smaller ornamental species;
- Large central reservations exist in a number of key routes through the borough as a legacy of former tram routes which were planted up when the tram lines were removed;
- Parks and gardens, including excellent award winning gardens;
- Escarpments in the western part of the Borough which feature a range of formal and semi-natural spaces and which boast an attractive range of trees; and
- Planting in private plots, particularly front gardens which has a very significant beneficial effect on the greening of the public realm.

Key issues

As with any area, a key issue for the green infrastructure of Southend is the burden of upkeep and ongoing renewal. As a Borough which draws a significant part of its economy from being a visitor destination Southend has

been more willing than some boroughs to invest in parks and gardens and they continue to present a real asset. Away from the main public spaces the high levels of maintenance associated with verges, hedges and trees might seem harder to justify but is an integral part of the character of these areas.

The greenery within the public realm also plays a wider role in terms of adaptation to climate change and biodiversity and so has a much wider role in terms of the sustainability of the Borough. Large trees provide shade whilst verge hedges provide habitat and food supplies for wildlife and an element of sustainable urban drainage.

These hedges, like grass verges, are under threat of removal to free up space which can be used for parking. This approach should be strongly resisted and every opportunity sought to reinstate verges, hedges and street trees where they have been lost to ensure that the streets of the Borough are as well suited as possible in the face of climate change.

A notable distinction between the areas of private housing and those built by the public sector is also the lush quality of the front gardens in the private areas. As with street trees and verges, efforts could be made to assist communities to reintroduce greenery to their gardens, restoring the appearance and making gains in terms of climate change and habitat adaptation.







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