

Planning and Regulation

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Our Ref: NHDC CONSULT – CHESFIELD CA
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Date: 1 September 2023

Dear Debbie,

Proposal: Chesfield Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Thank you for consulting Stevenage Borough Council on the proposed designation of the Chesfield Conservation Area. It is noted that the proposed Conservation is to cover an area of Chesfield, which is an area to the north of Stevenage and east Graveley. There conservation area appears to be divided into two 'character areas which are as follows:

Character Area 1 – Including the Manor Farmhouse (grade II listed), boundary walls and gate piers to the south and south-west of Manor Farmhouse along with the Church of St. Ethelreda (grade II* listed and a Monument). It also includes farm buildings to the north of Manor Farmhouse and extends out to the surrounding woodland and its uneven southern boundary is the road – Back Lane.

Character Area 2 – Comprises Chesfield Park, which includes the mid-20th century property (Chesfield Park), a rebuilding of an earlier house, walls to its walled garden, and an area of parkland which extends to the south, down to the northern boundary of the St. Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area including the Park Plantation (within SBC boundary).

Looking at the character areas individually, whilst Character Area 1 covers a small area and includes buildings that are already protected by listing / scheduling, the creation of a Conservation Area in which covers this character area appears to be appropriated. With regards to Character Area 2, it is appreciated there is the quality of parkland which appears to be high, with the exception of the pylons. In addition, it is noted the area is of historic interest as Chesfield. However, we consider there is little architectural merit within this character area (with the exception of the boundary walls). Further to this, how much of the historic character of Chesfield Park has been retained due to the level of management of maintenance of the park. It is also noted its immediate setting has been eroded through the presence of modern development within Great Ashby along with the presence of the electricity pylons. So the reason for designating Chesfield Park as a conservation area needs to be sound.

From a policy / strategy perspective, the form and position of the Conservation Area (CA) would be advantageous for green infrastructure links and encouraging walking and cycling. The cycle networks are already in place within Stevenage with more improvements underway (North Road). The potential links through North Stevenage and the Country Park, will also provide good linkages within old and new housing. Route 2 in the Stevenage LCWIP currently states improvements to

areas of connectivity for Back Lane as well as Weston Road, which will link close to the proposed Chelsfield CA. Again, the North Herts sites, GA1 and GA2 will hopefully help connectivity in this part of the town and encourage new residents to explore the heritage of the area on foot or by bicycle. There are also publicly accessible routes through the proposed CA, such as Graveley 101, 009 and 008 bridleways, which can link up with the cycle networks.

Therefore, the proposed CA could assist with a wider strategic vision to improve connectivity, heritage and conservation within new housing sites and potentially help with green infrastructure links in the future. This could also help encourage use of the new country park, through new heritage trails to the new CA.

With regards to the proposed boundary of the Conservation Area, it appears that it would cover the Park Plantation which falls within the administrative boundary of Stevenage Borough Council (see figure 1).

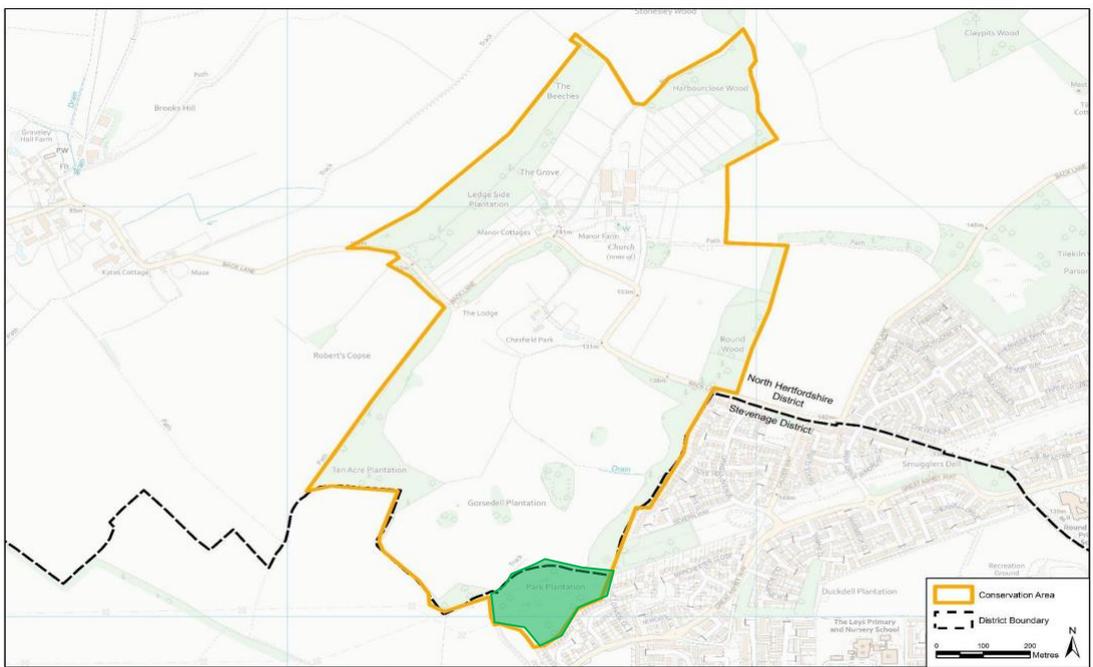


Figure 1: Location Plan showing proposed Chesfield Conservation Area boundary and district boundary

Figure 1: Snapshot of Location Plan with the plantation shown in green which falls within the boundary of Stevenage.

Taking the above into consideration, it needs to be flagged that this area is not identified as a Conservation Area in either the Proposals Map associated with the Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031 (adopted May 2019) or the plan contained within the St. Nicholas / Rectory Lane Conservation Area Management Plan SPD (2012). Therefore, this part of the proposed Chesfield Park Conservation Area will be offered no weight when it comes to assessing applications which fall within the district boundary of Stevenage. Consequently, we strongly recommend the boundary plan is amended so it completely falls within the administrative boundary of North Herts Council.

With regards to the Plant Plantation area itself which falls within the administrative boundary of Stevenage, it is noted that this small area sits just to the north of the St. Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area. Therefore, if the need and evidence suggest (subject to us going through the relevant statutory processes) this area requires protection on an historical basis, then this could potentially be incorporated and form part of the St. Nicholas and Rectory Lane Conservation Area. This, as set out above, could help to improve green infrastructure links between the two authorities

and help to enhance wider connectivity for walking and cycling through the historic areas of St. Nicholas and Rectory Lane through to Chesfield.

Separately, North Herts Council are aware that Stevenage Borough Council granted outline permission in 2022 for North Stevenage. Taking this into consideration, if the conservation area is formally adopted, we do have some concerns that this could be used as a tool to frustrate the current reserved matters application relating to the Country Park (as it will border the southern boundary of the proposed conservation area / it is a highly contentious aspect of the North Stevenage development scheme) and this has been the subject of lengthy negotiations by officers.

Further to the above, we have already had extensive negotiations with the consortium in relation to Phase 2 which covers the north parcels of the development site. Therefore, our concern is that North Herts could potentially object to the plans on the basis of impact on the setting of the Conservation Area which was not in place when the outline application was first determined by Stevenage Borough Council. Therefore, we want to ensure there is a continued collaborative approach between both authorities and appreciation of the advanced position of the North Stevenage development.

Thank you for taking the time for taking our comments into consideration, however, please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of the points raised in my letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Zayd Al-Jawad', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Zayd Al-Jawad MRTPI
Assistant Director of Planning and Regulation