



Daws Hill Neighbourhood Area

Character Assessment
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Introduction

Purpose of the Character Assessment

Character assessments record the special qualities that give an area its sense of place and unique identity. They are widely recognised as useful tools, helping to aid the planning, design and management of future development in a particular locality.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the value of local distinctiveness and supports the use of characterisation studies, such as character assessments, to underpin and inform planning policy. Specifically, paragraph 58 of the NPPF states that:

‘Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments: respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation’.

This Character Assessment provides an overview of the key qualities and characteristics that define the Daws Hill area of High Wycombe. It has been prepared in support of a larger project – the production of the Daws Hill Neighbourhood Plan. Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will be used by Wycombe District Council when considering planning applications for development within the neighbourhood plan area.

The key role neighbourhood planning has in achieving high quality places and the importance of understanding local character and context to inform such plans is acknowledged in the government’s planning practice guidance (Reference ID: 20-030-20140306), which states that:

‘A Local or Neighbourhood plan is essential to achieving high quality places. A key part of any plan is understanding and appreciating the context of an area, so that proposals can then be developed to respect it. Good design interprets and builds on historic character, natural resources and the aspirations of local communities’.

This Character Assessment supports the design and character policies progressed within the Daws Hill Neighbourhood Plan. It is intended to be used by developers, architects, designers, planners, and the local community to help to ensure that all future development and change in Daws Hill is not only of high design quality, but is also appropriate and complementary to the distinct and special character of the neighbourhood.

Assessment methodology

Recognising that the character of any neighbourhood is formed by more than just the appearance of the buildings which occupy it, this Character Assessment considers a broad range of influences, including:

- Structure, spacing and layout;
- Vegetation and planting;
- Townscape and built form;
- Landmarks;
- Views and vistas; and
- Street-scape.

While the primary objective of this assessment is to identify the qualities and positive characteristics of Daws Hill, where appropriate, existing development which fails to contribute positively to the character of the area is also highlighted. The identification of negative forms of development ensures that a holistic assessment of the locality is presented and that all key aspects of local character are considered. In addition, this approach can also help to identify

opportunities where local character might be reinforced and enhanced.

Prior to preparing this Character Assessment, a detailed on-site survey of the area was undertaken, during which photographic and written records of key characteristics and features were compiled. These photographic and written records, coupled with desktop research and a review of local maps, have formed the basis for the character descriptions and commentary set out within the remainder of this report.

Neighbourhood Area & Character Zones

Neighbourhood area overview

The Daws Hill Neighbourhood Area, outlined in red, is bounded by the M40 to South, Marlow Hill (A404) to West, Woodland and fields to the North, while RAF Daws Hill and more recent residential development lie to the East. There are frequent bus connections to High Wycombe.

The area is semi-rural, and formed predominantly private-residential, with a number of complementary leisure and education uses. The suburban structure is landscape-led and strongly characterised by its wooded setting.

Daws Hill Lane is a primary country road connecting the M40 and the A404. This heavily wooded route creates a strong, central core, from which secondary residential roads and private dwellings are accessed. This area is specifically referred to as Character Zone A (CZ A) within this document.

Central to the NA (Neighbourhood Area) is a generous recreation green field, which adjoins St. Michael's Catholic School.

The South-West boundary is mainly residential, with a cluster of light industrial buildings bordering the new Handy Cross Sports Centre and mixed use development at the South corner.

The South boundary is a densely wooded and is formed by the noisy, heavily trafficked M40.

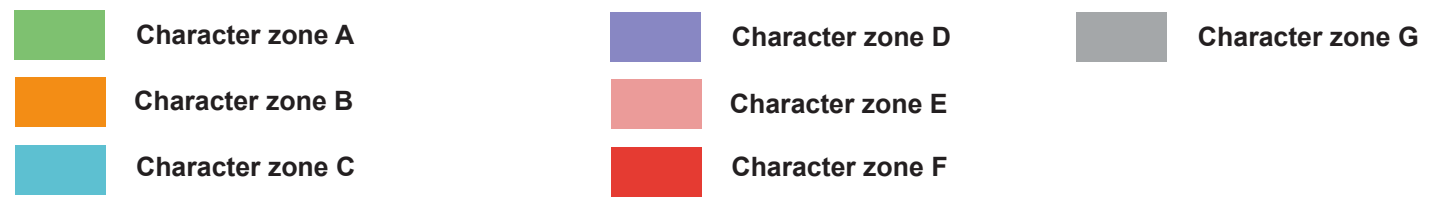
The Eastern boundary along Daws Hill Lane sits alongside a recent residential development, Pine Trees, which is of higher density and more post-modern, suburban in character.

Across the following pages more detailed descriptions of the Neighbourhood Area townscape is provided. For the purpose of a more detailed assessment of the individual areas which comprise the Neighbourhood Area, this study divides Daws Hill into a number of distinct character areas, each of which are defined by a collection of similar features and characteristics. 7 different character areas are identified in total, and their distinct street layouts, architectural languages, and landscape features are communicated through a combination of written descriptions, photographs and maps.

Though the principal characteristics for all areas have been summarised, it has not been possible to illustrate each individual feature and consequently the absence of a specific feature or building from this document does not necessarily mean that it is unimportant to the character of the local area.



Aerial photographs (Google / Bing maps) prior (top) and post (bottom) recent development to the former RAF land to the East



Map drawing showing the Neighbourhood Area red-line boundary and Character Zones A-G

Character Zone A

Character Zone A (CZ A) is defined by the primary vehicular and pedestrian country road and wooded residential 'spine' that is Daws Hill Lane. It has a series of secondary streets branching off it and leading to 60's and 70's residential, detached housing developments

The dwellings are private, predominantly 1-2 storeys, low density, pre-war, individual villa-style buildings which differ in architectural expression. They are unified by their relationship to the road, all having generous drive-in front gardens and large back gardens featuring mature trees and woodland aspect, many of which are protected by Tree Preservation Order's.

These 'wood-land villas' have elements dating from the Arts and Crafts period as well as some more contemporary 60s additions. They are predominately made of solid, high quality materials such as local red brick, steep pitched tiled roofs and timber detailing to windows and doors.

The buildings coming off Daws Hill Lane and facing the St. Michael's Catholic school, have significantly smaller back gardens but are included in CZ A because of their architectural character and massing, woodland aspect and less suburban layout to that of zones B, C, D and E.



Figureground map, Google aerial map and street view image showing Character Zone A



Example of generous front garden, drive-way and 2-storey private dwelling within the Woodlands



Example of front garden to road relationship and woodland setting



Woodland landscape seen towards the North side of Daws Hill Lane



Example of 1-storey brick and pitched roof forester Villa with generous front garden drive way

Character Zone B

Character Zone B forms an organically structured, suburban, green and landscape-led streetscape of meandering routes and cul-de-sacs that have clusters of individual 1-2 storey private residential dwellings with integrated garages.

The building plots are spatially laid out with densely hedged private front gardens and largely grassed, unenclosed areas presenting high quality shrubs and mature trees. The rear gardens are arranged as back-to-back mid-size gardens at the centre of the CZ B and larger gardens towards the NA boundaries facing school sport courts, the Daws Hill Lane and the RAF residential development to the East.

The architecture is varied in style and period dating from the 60s and 70s, where many properties have been sympathetically extended over time, to have rear conservatories, roof dormers, porches and additional garages.

The unifying character is brought together through the massing and use of high quality red brick, pitched tiled roofs and predominately white, contrasting window and door detailing.

Uncharacteristic of the wider CZ is a cluster of buildings within the central cul-de-sac which have Tudorian-style influences and hence differ largely in facade proportions, colour and material.



Figureground map, Google aerial map and street view image showing Character Zone B



Typical pavement to road and hedged boundary



Red brick wall and dense hedge boundary treatment



Example of 2-storey detached suburban, red brick, pitch roof villas with porches and integrated garages



High quality landscape 'soft' thresholds and visual amenity created by dense, low-level hedges and mature decorative trees



Example of typical 1-storey detached suburban, red brick, high pitch roof villas with and without dormers



Example of mock Tudor architectural types within CZ B



Example of 2 storey brick and tile dwelling with integrated garage and large grassed front garden



Example of dense hedge boundary and garage frontage with back gardens towards Daws Hill Lane



Example of 1-storey suburban villa with dormer extensions



Example of 2-storey porched villa with integrated garage and surrounded by mature trees

Character Zone C

Character Zone C is accessed off Daws Hills Lane via two secondary residential streets circulating a central, back-to-back garden plot with detached dwellings. The layout is sloping and landscape-led with a clear separation of pedestrian pathways, edged by tall hedges or brick walls and vehicular routes with some on-street parking. The wider wooded setting provides an attractive green backdrop to views throughout the area.

The architectural language is more modest than CZ B, with 1-2 storey red brick, simple volume buildings with less material and detail variation.

CZ C has a cluster of buildings of somewhat irregular layout of 'back-land' to the north bounding onto CZ B. There is also an uncharacteristic series of buildings accessed off one South-Western plot, essentially forming a row of retirement homes.

The Southern part of CZ C suffers from noise polluted by the M40 and would benefit from an appropriate and sensitively manifested noise-mitigation structure along its souther wooded boundary.



Distinct view from Daws Hill Lane towards hedged residential street within CZ C



Figureground map of Character Zone C



Character Zone C Aerial view (Google maps)



Sloped residential streets with townscape elements such as lamp posts and on-street car parking



Example of pavement-to-vehicular-road relationship with fence-less front gardens



Photo showing typical building proportions and street width



Typical red-brick building type with integrated garages and white window and door details



Example showing variety of hard and soft boundary details including decorative brick walls and tall hedges



2 storey red brick villa with central balcony and tall boundary hedge



2 storey red brick villa with central protruding entrance and paved front garden



Decorative brick wall and extended entrance volume



Elderly People's Home back-land 2-storey development with dormer roofs

Character Zone D

Character Zone D is defined by a long, straight, tree-lined residential street edged with hedges and a parade of 2-storey villas. The linear nature of this route allows for long continuous views straight ahead and all the way to the end of the road, which have a strong symmetrical composition, which is reinforced by the roadside planting and grass verges.

This street presents the most diverse example of architectural style, period and detail expression within the NA and is unified by a very clear building line and grassed frontage.

The street is car-orientated with no defined footpath. The grass verge and asphalt boundary serves as an informal pedestrian route. This simple streetscape has a pleasingly informal character, with the absence of road markings and signage helping to achieve a particularly uncluttered street with a rural feel.

Front gardens are in some cases open and generous to allow drive-in access and parking, though other plots are enclosed by walls or hedgerows.

Back gardens are large and bound with other back gardens to CZ A and CZ E/F

The street ends in a Cul-de-Sac with a more organic building line and disposition of dwellings.



Tree-lined residential parade to CZ D



Figureground map showing CZ D



Character Zone D Aerial view (Google maps)



2-storey red-brick with steep pitched roof with fence-less drive way front garden



Open front garden to 2-storey brick villa with steep pitch roof and integrated garage



Low wall and open aspect to 2-storey steep-pitched, red brick dwelling with hedged thresholds



Low wall and open aspect to 2-storey steep-pitched, red brick dwelling with extended garage volume



Distinct hedged pedestrian access off the central street



Front driveway set behind grassed lawn



Post-modern expression of area character building type expressed through contemporary, high quality materials



Example of adjacent rich diversity of architectural style, period and detail expression

Character Zone E&F

Character Zone E&F comprises a comparatively tight network of residential streets and is of an overall higher density than elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Area, and is somewhat uncharacteristic of the wider area.

CZ F contains more recent, taller development of 3-4 storey buildings with post-modern character and is accessed off shared parking courts as opposed to the street. Apartments are the main housing typology here, which again, is a deviation from the primarily semi-detached and detached dwellings seen throughout the remainder of the Neighbourhood Area.

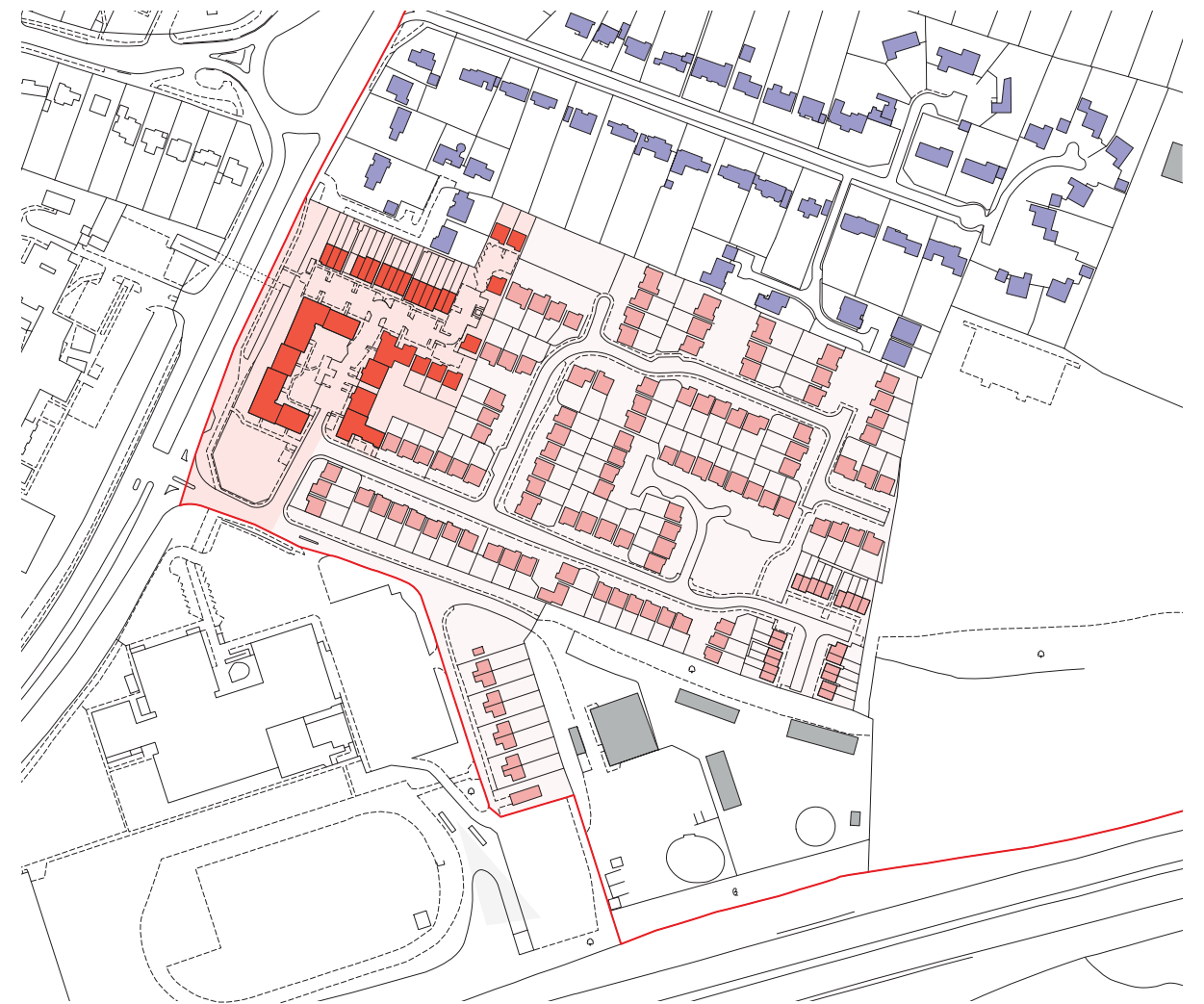
CZ E has a mix of architectural style expressed within a seemingly uniform 2-storey massing and building line. All plots have front patios with some open aspect and pedestrian pathways towards the central recreation green fields. This consistency of approach to building massing and positioning creates well-defined streets with strong frontages.

Parking is integrated both on-plot and on-street which gives an overall denser and more urban character, which again is in contrast to the wider semi-rural in character seen throughout the previously described zones.

This tighter, denser arrangement also means that front and back gardens are significantly smaller than elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Area.



Street view to CZ E from CZ F showing change in building scale and material



Figureground map showing CZ E&F



Character Zones E and F (Google maps)



Row of post-modern semi-detached houses with integrated garages



Timber-fence boundary treatment creates an unsatisfactory edge to the street



Typical street width and soft-edge boundary treatment



Pedestrian footpath to central recreation fields



Consistent approaches to facade treatment and proportions create a uniform townscape



Parking is accommodated with the building plot



Spacing between dwellings is minimal, making for a dense and urban piece of townscape



Frontages are dominated by hardstanding and on-plot parking leaving minimal space for lawns or planting

Character Zone G

Character Zone G accommodates a large central recreation field and dense wedge of woodland planting along its. It contains a mix of non-residential uses in southern edge. It also hosts a number of non-residential uses, including St. Michael's Catholic School as well as some light industrial buildings towards the south west corner.

The green and open playing fields are a crucial feature of this CA, with its spacious character and heavily planted edges providing local residents with a space that provides an escape from built development and the surrounding road network. Its sheer openness and heavily wooded edge create a space which is of both a high visual quality, offering long views towards the woodlands, and also of great amenity and recreational value to the community.



St. Michael's Catholic School



Figureground map showing of CZ G



Aerial view of CZ G

Conclusion

To conclude, the Neighbourhood Area has an overall richness in character containing diverse residential building types and styles which are unified through an exceptionally high quality landscape and street-scene; mainly through its natural woodland setting and topography but also largely through the careful layout, spacious setting-out of dwellings and well maintained soft thresholds such as hedges, shrubs, grassed areas and mature trees.

In addition, the Neighbourhood Area buildings are mostly uniform in their massing and display a simple, yet high quality, material palettes of local brick roof tiles and timber detailing to doors and windows.

Private amenity is overall generous with sizeable gardens front gardens and large back gardens. These are typically enclosed by hedgerows or remain open.

Some less characteristics aspects of the Neighbourhood Area are a handful of taller buildings and denser plots towards the south west of the area, which reference a number of different styles and many materials, and sometimes lack the build quality seen elsewhere in Daws Hill.

A large challenge to the Neighbourhood Area and CZ C in particular, is the heavy noise pollution from the M40 which is not sufficiently mitigated by the stretch of tall trees. Any future infrastructure or built development within this area should carefully consider and address this issue to maintain and improve the quality of private amenity and semi-rural street feel.

Within the individual CZ's, properties typically adhere to consistent plot sizes, regular spacing, and buildings are of similar sizes and massing, which helps create a coherent and unified piece of townscape. Future development should seek to respect and respond to these established design and layout principles to ensure that the local character is not eroded.

Another crucial consideration for any future development, be it large-scale building or modest infill, is the need to maintain and enhance the green appearance and wooded character of the area, which is vital to the quality of Daws Hill's townscape. This character stems from the combined influence of both on-street trees and grass verges, private planting within individual properties, and the wider woodland that wraps around the Neighbourhood Area. These features together ensure that both short and long views within and across the Neighbourhood Area have a pleasingly soft and green character.



Aerial bird's view (Bing Maps) of the Neighbourhood Area highlights the rich, wooded character which is a common quality throughout Daws Hill

