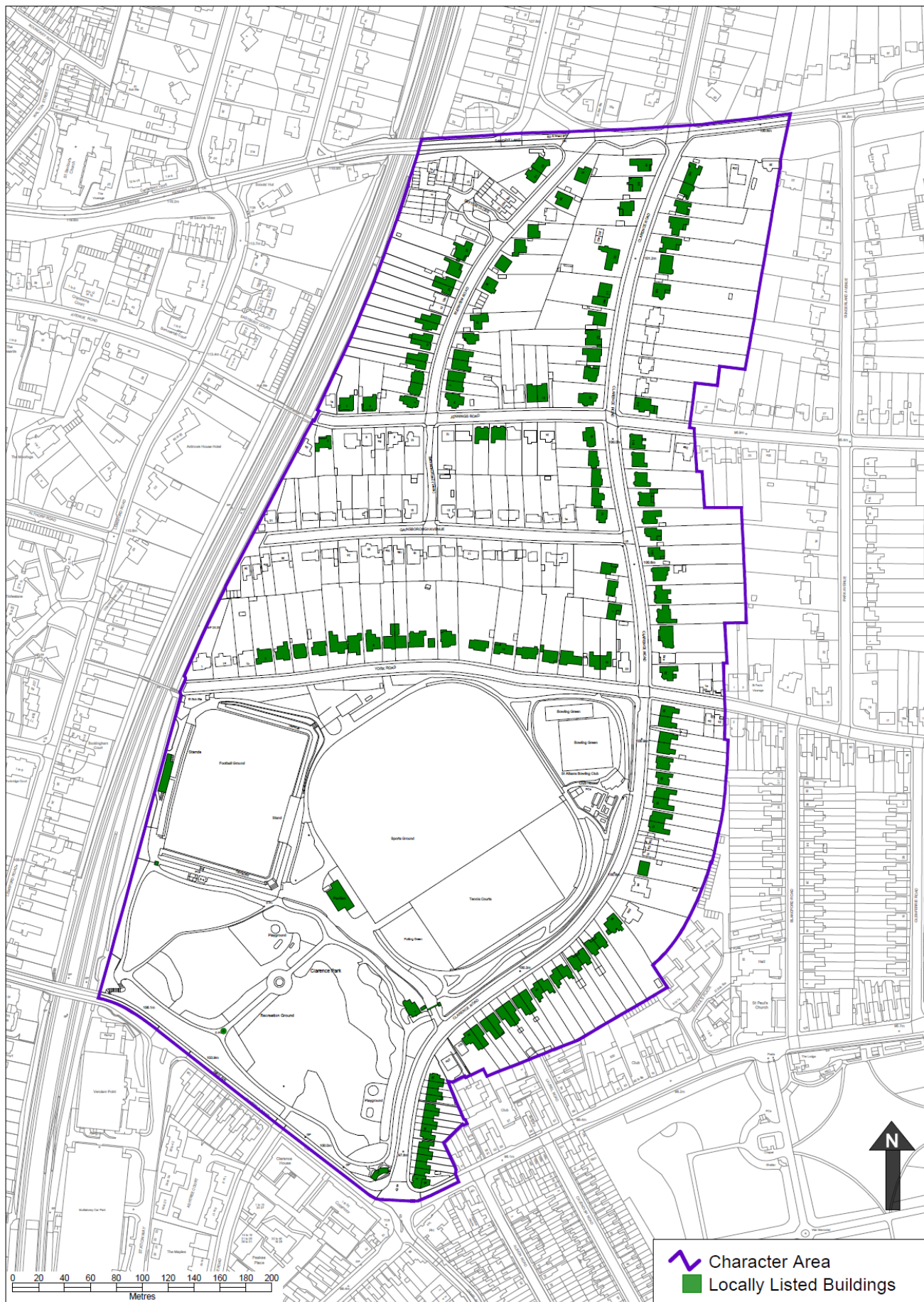


Character Area 7i

Clarence Park





AREA 71: CLARENCE PARK

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Area 7i: Clarence Park

Blenheim Road, Clarence Road, Gainsborough Avenue, Hatfield Road (part), Jennings Road (part), Sandpit Lane (part), Sefton Close, York Road.

Scheduled Monuments

None.

Listed Buildings

None.

Locally Listed Buildings

Blenheim Road

Odds: 3 – 17 (incl.), 21 – 27 (incl.), 31 and 33.

Clarence Road

Odds: Clarence Park lodge house and gates, Clarence Park Pavilion, Football clubhouse r/o main stand, kiosks at Clarence Road entrance at S W of football ground and turnstiles, Memorial fountain, Midland Railway marker posts, 1a (Verdi's Café), 3 – 7 (incl.), 11 – 19 (incl.), 21, 23 – 31, 33 (excludes 33e and 33f), 37, 39 and 41.
Evens: 2 – 30 (incl.), 30c (see 57 Hatfield road), 32 – 62, 64, 72 – 90 (incl.), 92, 94 – 116 (incl.), 122 – 140 (incl.).

Hatfield Road

Odds: Verdi's Café (corner of Clarence Road, see above), 39, (in Area 7j 57 Club and rear building (through to 30c) Clarence Road).

Jennings Road

Odds: 1 – 5 (incl.), 11 and 13.

Evens: 2, 16 & 18.

Sandpit Lane

Odds: 1 – 11 (incl.), 13, 15, 17, 19 and 21.

Evens: 2 – 6 (incl.), 10, 16, 18.

York Road

Consec: 2-19.



Verdi's Café at no. 1a Clarence Road (locally listed)



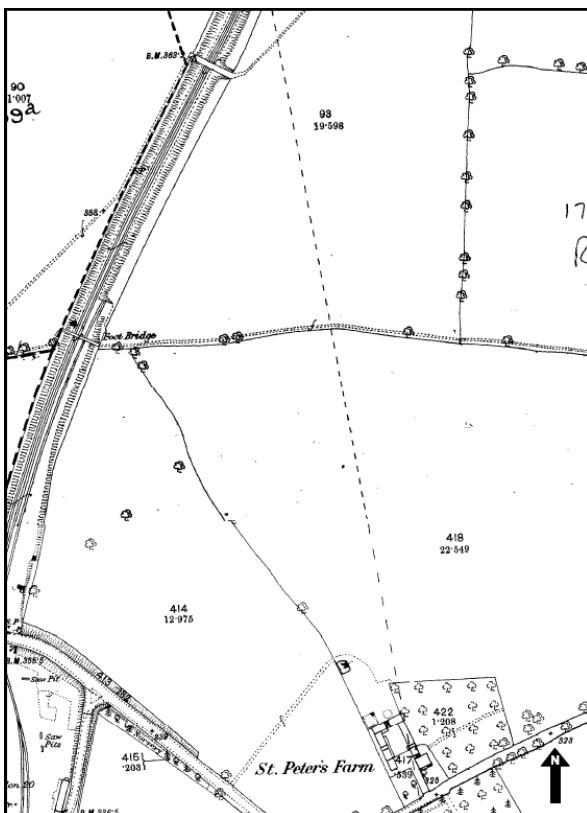
No. 30 Clarence Road (locally listed).

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Character Summary

The special character of the area is essentially residential reflecting its relatively late development on fields associated with St Peter's Farm which formed part of the larger Earl Spencer's Estate. The southern end of the roughly rectangular area is dominated by Clarence Park, a fine example of a Victorian suburban park dating from 1880¹. The area is bounded by the railway line to the west, Hatfield Road to the south and Sandpit Lane to the north. These routes predated the

development of the area in the 1880s and dictated the limits of the area. The east side of the area comprises houses in Clarence Road, the southern half of which face onto Clarence Park. Development largely took place between the 1880s and 1920s, a relatively short period of time giving a strong sense of uniformity, although there has been a limited amount of more recent post-war infilling.



The area prior to development shown on the 1880s OS map with St Peter's Farm in the south.



An aerial view of the area showing the park and the Victorian and Edwardian residential development.



Clarence Park itself is the dominant feature of this area.



The short period of development has created uniformity.

¹ Hertfordshire Gardens Trust; Local List; St Albans, Clarence Park

Area 7i: Clarence Park

History

This character area, in the mid C19, was located just outside the town boundary and formed part of the larger Earl Spencer Estate. The area was farmland belonging to St Peter's Farm. The former Victorian farmhouse and outbuildings still exist in Hatfield Road (Character 7j). The fields lay to the east of the railway line and between Sandpit Lane and Hatfield Road. Part of this land was subsequently acquired for a public park for St Albans. Clarence Park was laid out in the early 1890s; it was to comprise a municipal sports ground of sixteen acres, and a nine acre public park and pleasure ground. The land donation, the laying out, planting and construction of buildings was paid for by Sir John Blundell Maple MP, founder of Maple's furniture store, who lived at Childwickbury, following the request of St Albans Cricket Club for a permanent ground. A later document refers to "Clarence Park, containing 8 a. 3 r. 10 p., and the Clarence Park Recreation Ground adjoining, containing 16 a. 1 r. 10 p., the gift in 1894 of the late Sir John Blundell Maple, the desire of the donor being to encourage cricket and other manly sports, the Herts County Cricket Club to have priority of use of the latter ground"².

The layout of the park was designed by the City Surveyor Mr. G Ford. The park was opened on 23 July 1894 by the Duke of Cambridge, accompanied by great celebrations in the City. Lady Maple wanted to make her own contribution to the project, and donated a striking water fountain which can still be seen today. The fountain was restored as part of a recent major refurbishment programme, which was made possible after the award of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1997. This made it possible to restore many of the original features of the park including the replacement of the only significant item that had been lost, the bandstand. The works included improvements to the car park, the children's play area and new seating.

The turn of the century brought a great increase in the number of professional class citizens commuting into London. After the park was opened, the remaining fields were parcelled into lots and

sold to speculative builders. Clarence and Blenheim Roads began to be developed from 1898 and building continued until the First World War. Local architect H.E. Hansell produced a variety of designs in an Edwardian Free Style, drawing on traditional styles. The new roads on the estate were linked to the old town by the two existing footbridges crossing the railway line linked to former footpaths across the fields.

Gainsborough Avenue was not completed on the south side until the 1960s, but otherwise this character area is one of the best preserved late Victorian and Edwardian residential areas surviving in St Albans. A few post-war infill developments do not follow this style, although in general most new buildings have neutral rather than negative impact.



A Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 1997 enabled the replacement of the lost bandstand along with other improvements.



The striking water fountain that was donated by Lady Maple.

²The City of St Albans: Advowson and charities', A History of the County of Hertford: volume 2 (1908).

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Buildings

Clarence Park today has matured since its opening with an abundance of attractive trees and shrubs. It was laid out in a picturesque style with meandering paths and the layout remains virtually unchanged. The original Park Keeper's Lodge, the Cricket Pavilion and the three timber built entrance kiosks all survive. They are all attractively detailed late Victorian buildings. The Cricket Pavilion in particular has attractive moulded brick detailing. More recent features added to the park include a popular children's playground and an artificial sports surface which accommodates hockey in the winter and a public tennis courts in the summer. In the south corner, a former park building has been converted into a restaurant.

The Cricket Pavilion, built for the opening of the park in 1894, overlooks the cricket ground and is used by both the Hockey and Cricket Clubs. Adjacent to the cricket area is a bowls green with its own clubhouse, and located nearby is a well used croquet lawn, and a nine hole putting green. By the 1920s the grounds of St. Albans Football Club were located in the park and are now enclosed within the park boundary.

Residential development of the area followed the opening of the park within a few years. The character area, which formed part of the much larger Earl Spencer's Estate, was divided into plots and offered for development. An undated estate map shows the roads marked out into 50 foot (15 metres) wide plots. The resulting character of the area is spacious and houses are, in the main, substantial and detached. This plot size was not consistently adhered to however with some narrower and a few wider plots. Most roads had a ten foot (three metre) building line giving a front garden to all the properties.



The original Cricket Pavilion is still in existence. It overlooks the cricket ground and is used by both the Cricket and Hockey clubs. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



The Park Keeper's Lodge has also survived and faces out onto the park.



Three timber kiosks mark entrances to the park.

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Buildings (contd.)

Clarence Road and Blenheim Road were the first roads to be developed after the opening of Clarence Park. Plans exist for a group of cottages which returned into Hatfield Road (nos. 4-30 Clarence Road dating from 1897). Unlike other terraced cottages of this date, they are attractively detailed with tile hanging and bay windows and set back from the frontage. The submitted plans do not exactly correspond to the existing buildings and the corner building adjacent to Hatfield Road (which has a shop front) may be a later addition. The adjacent group to the north is slightly more typical, similar in detailing to the larger Edwardian houses which followed. They comprise three groups of terraced houses, still relatively modest in scale, backing onto buildings which still survive from St Peter's Farm. Later development was piecemeal, although within similar architectural styles. The remaining houses facing Clarence Park consist of substantial semi-detached houses. These are good examples of late Victorian architecture in a Queen Anne/Domestic Revival style with white painted timber balconies and sash windows and tile hanging. In style they are similar to the houses in Bedford Park, London, designed by Norman Shaw in c1880. Two typical pairs of larger semi-detached houses in this style are nos. 48-54 Clarence Road, designed by local architect Percival Blow. Development further north of the junction with York Road took place on both sides of the road but here they are predominantly detached houses with good Domestic Revival detailing.

Despite the piecemeal development of the area, most of the pre-1914 houses utilise similar materials and some have the Queen Anne detailing with tile hanging, white painted balconies and sash or casement windows. Most were designed by a handful of local St Albans architects. No. 31 is a typical house and appears to have been designed together with no. 29 to the north for one client by Henry Hansell in 1899/1900. The houses are plain, but large and imposing; double-fronted with a prominent full height bay to one side, and built of red brick with plain clay tiled roofs and sash windows. The adjacent

house to the south is large but of a different, more ornamented style, designed in 1909 by another local architect, Mence. A more unusual house design is no.130 which has a neo-Georgian front elevation with attractive brick detailing. It is set back behind a high wall with decorative iron gates.

Blenheim Road was also developed at an early period, with houses designed in similar styles, although here the road is narrower with buildings closer to the pavements giving a more compact character than in Clarence Road. However, the gentle curve of the road, different house designs and the mature planting in the front gardens give the road considerable charm. The earliest development at the southern end was predominantly in semi-detached pairs.

York Road is similar to Clarence Road. Development here was also piecemeal with the first houses, designed by Kinnear Tarte, dating from 1901. Development continued slowly up to the First World War with some later infill in the 1920s.



Nos. 4-30 Clarence Road are unusually detailed terraces with tile-hanging and bay windows.

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Buildings (contd.)

The central section of the area was the last to be developed and comprises Gainsborough Avenue and Jennings Road. The reason for the delay in developing this part of the estate plan is unclear, but the fall in demand from the period of the 1914 war through to the 1930s almost certainly contributed to the slowdown. Equally, during this period, St Albans was also expanding further to the east and north.

The north side of Jennings Road (together with a pair of houses on the south side) was the first part of this central section to be developed, and this part of Jennings Road had been built out by the 1930s.

Gainsborough Avenue, originally named Wormleighton Road, is shown on the Earl Spencer estate plan laid out in regular fifty foot wide plots on the north side, backing onto similar sized plots on the south side of Jennings Road. In reality, this later phase of development (from the 1930s onwards) was not of the same scale as the Edwardian development. These are smaller plot sizes and smaller scale properties were erected. Although they are smaller in scale than the grander Edwardian houses, they are attractively detailed cottage style houses in red brick.

Gainsborough Avenue was also developed in two distinct phases. The north side dates from the period 1930-35 and comprises mainly small detached houses in a variety of cottage styles. Materials reflect those in the earlier development of the area and include brick or white painted render elevations or a mixture of the two. The south side is very different and was not developed until after the war in a variety of piecemeal styles, including bungalows and larger detached houses. Frontages are generally more open and relatively bland compared to Clarence Road. However, the road has a few trees on the frontage and even the more recent infill developments are beginning to blend in to the streetscene. It is still slightly more suburban than the older areas however.

Apart from Gainsborough Avenue, which was completed on the south side in the 1960s, the area is one of the best preserved late Victorian and Edwardian areas surviving in St Albans. It is therefore important to retain or restore the existing attractive detailing and repeat this in new extensions or infill development. A few post war infill developments do not follow this style, although in general most new buildings have neutral rather than negative impact.

Further post-war infilling occurred at the north end of Blenheim Road where one substantial house was demolished to give access to a cul-de-sac back land development (Sefton Close). This development is designed with relatively neutral brick houses with slightly classical detailing, and benefits from the retained mature trees especially at the entrance.



The north side of Gainsborough Avenue was built up in 1930-35.



The south side of Gainsborough Avenue was built up in 1960s.

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Public Realm

Clarence Road remains an attractive mature environment benefiting from a large number of attractive Edwardian houses in a range of styles. It still retains attractive front gardens with mature trees, despite the introduction of off street parking. In addition, the area benefits from the mature planting in Clarence Park.

Boundary treatments should continue to respect this garden city character with preferably low walls or close boarded fences. A few stretches of railings exist but generally the area benefits from simpler treatments. Historic street furniture is limited to a few street lights. Most roads retain a gutter formed from the characteristic glazed blue paviours, a valuable feature which should be retained. The pavements in York Road and on the park side of Clarence Road also benefit in appearance from their traditional blue paving blocks.



The park side of Clarence Road retains its blue brick paviours along with some other streets, and most of the roads in the area still have gutters formed from the characteristic glazed blue paviours.



Many of the houses have attractive front gardens with mature trees, which add to the streetscene.



The mature planting in Clarence Park makes a positive contribution to the area.



Most of the houses utilise simple boundary treatments, such as low walls or close boarded fences, which respect the garden city character of the area.

Area 7i: Clarence Park

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ Views of Clarence Park.
- ✓ Pleasantly laid out roads providing interesting streetscenes.
- ✓ Locally listed residential buildings exhibit similar features and give a strong sense of cohesiveness.
- ✓ Proximity to Public Open Space at Clarence Park.
- ✓ Surviving and legible historic boundaries.
- ✓ Mature trees and hedges especially on retained “wastes” in Sandpit Lane.
- ✓ Some historic paving and street furniture.

Neutral

- Some areas of post-war housing not of special character.

Negative

- ✗ Through traffic in Clarence Road and a good deal of on street parking in side roads.

Scope for Change

- Creation of a City Green Ring of path networks which can include this area.
- A few modern buildings in the area would benefit from redevelopment or enhancement.
- Any development or redevelopment in the area must take account of the need to enhance the appearance and character of the area. The retention and enhancement of landscaping and the height and positioning of any new buildings within the area are key points in avoiding adverse effects and preserving the setting of the historic assets.
- Opportunities should be taken to enhance the appearance of the area during any programmed highway works.