CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT FOR CUNNINGHAM AVENUE NOVEMBER 2014

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# 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Civic Amenities Act 1967 empowered local planning authorities to make provision for the preservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest by designating them as conservation areas.

1.2 Conservation should not be thought of solely as a process of preservation and an impediment to change. The designation of a conservation area represents an opportunity to formulate positive policies to improve and enhance its environmental quality and to ensure the successful integration of any development or redevelopment necessary for its continued success as a living and working community. The St. Albans District Local Plan Review (adopted November 1994) sets out the general principles which will be observed when dealing with applications for new development and redevelopment.

1.3 The aims of this character statement are to show the way in which the form of the area has evolved and to assess its present character.

# 2.0 Designations

2.1 CONSERVATION AREA – Cunningham Avenue was designated as a conservation area on 28th

2.2 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION - As the special interest of the area is due in no small part to the quality and consistency of architectural detail, an Article 4 Direction designation was applied to the conservation area on the  $3^d$  November 2014. Details of the Article 4 Direction can be found on the Council's website.

2.3 LOCAL LISTING - These are buildings which the Council feels make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of this conservation area. All of the buildings (apart from number 2a which is neutral in contribution) are locally listed as they all contribute positively to the character of the area.

2.4 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments or listed buildings near to or in Cunningham Avenue. It is not considered that any of the buildings on Cunningham Avenue would be worthy of statutory listing.

# 3.0 Location and Setting

3.1 Cunningham Avenue is located to the south-east of the main town centre and the St Albans Conservation Area (see attached map).

3.2 Cunningham Avenue is accessed off London Road, just east of the Railway Bridge and associated industrial units which sit on the south side of London Road near to the bridge. It is a cul-de-sac which terminates in a recreation area and some allotments. One of the main accesses to the recreation space and particularly the allotments is from Cunningham Avenue. Some of the parked cars along the road are from people using these facilities, as well as those using the station and the nearby offices.



Left: Railway Bridge and entrance to small industrial estate; Cunningham Avenue is located beyond this bridge. Right: Recreation area showing main access and Park View Close in distance.

2.3 In terms of setting, whilst the open space of the recreation area contributes positively to the setting at the north-east end of Cunningham Avenue, the south-west entrance is somewhat marred by its proximity to the commercial and light industrial area, as well as the transport noise of this part of London Road. However, this does not impact when one is actually within the road, which is predominantly a quiet residential cul-de-sac.

2.4 No other buildings from adjacent roads can be seen from within Cunningham Avenue; however the 1990s development of Park View Close, on the site of the former rubber factory, forms a distant backdrop to the recreation space at the end of the avenue. The allotments situated in the south-east corner of the recreation area are only apparent at closer views from within the open space.



Allotments from the recreation ground.

2.5 All 42 houses are set within their own gardens. On the east side of the street these are consistent in terms of size, being rectangular plots, whilst those on the west are generally more generous but less consistent, for example those of numbers 2a, 2, 4, 6, 12, 16, 18 and 38 are smaller than the neighbouring plots. The shape of the original plot enabled numbers 1 and 43 on the east side of the road and number 43 on the west to have slightly larger gardens. The development of the plot size at the properties at the southern end of the west side (numbers 2, 2a, 4 and 6) is interesting. The original layout (as shown on the 1940's OS map) shows that number 2 and 4 had plots sizes as can be seen today; although the plot of number 6 was originally larger and later reduced when Colindale Avenue was constructed to the rear.

# 3.0 Origins and Development of the Settlement

3.1 Prior to the development of houses, the land was in agricultural use as part of Cunningham Hill Farm, situated to the north east. The land was owned on trust, along with Cell Barnes, for the First Earl of Verulam. The farmhouse still exists, although the surrounding land has also been developed to create Cunningham Hill Road and Barncroft Way.

3.2 There was a clay pit (shown on the 1880's map) in the south west corner of the current recreation area.

3.3 The railway which runs close to Cunningham Avenue was built in 1868; this initiated much development within this area, mostly earlier than the development of Cunningham Avenue.



Watercolour by Buckingham, described as: "Road to Cunningham Hill from the London Road St Albans". The picture shows the agricultural origins of the area.'



1880's OS map showing farm location to the north and field (south west corner) to south of clay pit where Cunningham Avenue was later developed.

3.4 The development of Cunningham Avenue began on 21 November 1922 when the Third Earl of Verulam sold 9 acres to William Bennett, a local builder, for £3,000. In the same year William Bennett applied for a new street to be cut. Following this various applications from the period of 1922-1927 were made by William Bennett for houses; those applications made at the end of 1925 until 1927 were made by William Bennett Ltd.

3.5 Restrictive covenants were attached to the sale by the Earl of Verulam to ensure the quality of the development. These included conditions that William Bennett would build no more than 40 houses<sup>1</sup>, which would only be detached or semi detached and be built along a certain building line with a minimum frontage of 30 feet and that the street would be tree lined. Also that a minimum of £500 would be spent on each house, that each building would have a certain number and type of rooms (entrance passage or hall, dining room, sitting room, kitchen, scullery, pantry, w.c, bathroom and three or more bedrooms), that each building would only be used as a dwelling house and crucially that the Earl of Verulam had to approve the plans<sup>2</sup>.

3.6 William George Bennett was born in Kent in 1850 and married in Kent in 1877. In 1876 he came to St Albans as a Coal Merchant and was listed in the Post Office Directory under 7 Verulam Street and Midland Station. In the 1881 census he and his wife Ellen are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 41 houses were built during this period, although perhaps as number 1 faces London Road this clause was met.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Information from the conveyance of number 18 Cunningham Avenue, courtesy of the owner.

listed still in Verulam Street and living with their two year old son, William's sister in law and a servant. In the 1890 Kelly's Directory and the 1901 census he is listed as living in Victoria Road and was a coal and coke merchant<sup>3</sup>. As well as being an obviously successful business man, William Bennett was a member of the St Albans City Council and served as Mayor of St Albans in 1891<sup>4</sup>.

3.7 The 1903 St Albans Directory lists William George Bennett as a brick maker in Sandpit Lane, possibly taking over the brickworks of W.A Dixon and in 1906 and 1907 as the owner of brickworks to the east of Lancaster Road. In 1913/14 he was listed as living at Wakefield, York Road while the company was described as coal, coke, gravel and brick merchants on 77 Victoria Street, Midland Railway depot and Cape Road. The 1921 railway advert refers to 'special handmade sand faced reds', bricks perhaps later used in the building of Cunningham Avenue. It is believed that William Bennett died in 1934. In 1937 the company was described as builders' merchants & coal merchants: the firm was also listed under the "Brick & Tile Makers" heading in the trade section. The company was listed in 1946, but not by 1966, meaning that it had disbanded sometime before 1966.



William Bennett as Mayor, 189f

3.8 The adverts and listings of the time seem to vary throughout the period in terms of describing a coal merchant, brickworks or builders' merchant; it is probable that after 1901 the term builders' merchant would be the most accurate description, which would of course link the development of Cunningham Avenue to William Bennett's business, which presumably would have supplied the materials.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Information from Genealogy in Hertfordshire:

http://www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> There was another mayor called William Bennett who served in 1851 who was incidentally also a brick maker

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Genealogy in Hertfordshire, Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Image from Museum of St Albans



3.9 Applications for houses on Cunningham Avenue normally consisted of one or two dwellings at a time, mostly detached with a few pairs of semi-detached dwellings (numbers 2/4, 13/15, 25/27, 34/36 and 37/39). The one exception was an application in 1924 for 9 houses, although it is believed that only 5 of these houses were built. The road was more or less developed in sequence from its southern to its northern end.



Typical plan submitted, this plan is for number 1 Cunningham Avenue, note the signature with the words 'designed by' on the top right hand corner.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Images from Genealogy in Hertfordshire, Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Images from Genealogy in Hertfordshire, Ibid

3.10 Most of the drawings are signed by William Bennett, however, from the style of the drawings, the handwriting of the annotations and the title on most of the drawings of 'house for William Bennett' they seem to have been drawn by a variety of unnamed draftsmen for Bennett following his design. The conveyance for number 18 is signed by Alfred Lee who is named as a Director of William Bennett Ltd, perhaps indicating that William Bennett was in partnership for the development of Cunningham Avenue.

3.11 The design of the houses, their location near to the railway and the provision of garages on some of the later houses, as well as many applications within the period for the addition of garages, would indicate that this was built as a development aimed at the middle class, particularly suburban commuters, which link it with some of the other nearby roads, for example Lemsford Road.

3.12 There has been one modern in-fill development of number 2a Cunningham Avenue which was given approval in 1984. Although it lacks the detail displayed elsewhere along the road, its red brick fits in with the rest of the avenue and its position means it is well hidden on the street. Otherwise, modern development consists of some side extensions to the houses and some changes to finishes and materials as outlined below.



Modern infill of number 2a.

# 4.0 Architectural Character and Historic Quality of Buildings

4.1 Given that all the houses were built by William Bennett, it is no surprise that the houses display certain common themes in terms of their architectural design.

4.2 Most notably, consistent features of gabled roofs, timber framed porches often with fret work, decorative timber windows, facades with various combinations of mock timber framing, tile hanging or pebble dashing, set off against red brick and clay tiled roofs are evident.



Typical open porch with fret work detail and unusual triangular window which appears on several of the houses.

4.3 There is no consistency in terms of form, although the sizes of the dwellings are similar and bay windows, some circular and some square, are a common feature. Often houses were built at the same time and the designs were mirror images of one another, one being located to the west of the street and the other to the east.



Typical round and square bays, both with mock timber framing and tile hanging in a variety of combinations.

4.4 These features are typical of the period, when the Arts and Crafts style was a strong influence in post-war housing, although these features and the scale of the buildings also hark back to an Edwardian aesthetic.

4.5 One house (number 29) was built with a garage but many of the other houses had separate applications for garages in the 1930s, also under the name William Bennett. These were most commonly in a lean-to form with similar features and materials to the main house, such as mock timber framing and pebbledash.



Typical contemporary garage addition, this one dates from 1931, after the main house was built in 1924.

4.6 The original drawings and applications for all but numbers, 34, 36 and 38, are retained in the Council's records. These show that whilst planning drawings showed detail such as the pattern and location of timber framing, often changes were made in terms of the detail whilst the houses were being built. This was quite a common practice at the time, and was possibly a result of the input of the initial purchaser.



Difference between plans submitted and final house, these are the plans for number 5, note the different mock timber framing pattern, window design and door detail.

#### 5.0 Materials and Street Furniture

5.1 Most of the houses, apart from the modern dwelling of number 2a, have clay tile roofs with common facade materials being red brick and pebbledash. There are some instances of later painting of pebbledash, extending of pebbledash and painted render. Windows were originally timber and fortunately very few have been replaced with modern materials on the front elevation. Porches and detailing such as mock framing were also originally timber, again a few porches have had materials altered.

5.2 Street furniture is limited to lampposts, which, although not historic, are of a historic style and are quite common elsewhere in St Albans, including in the Conservation Area.

5.3 There is concrete paving to either side of the tarmac road but granite setts border the road, which are a positive feature and common in St Albans.



Historic Style Lampposts



Paving and road materials

### 7.0 Trees and Landscape Characteristics

7.1 The street is pleasantly lined with trees on the pavement. These, along with the wide street, make a striking vista, which culminates in the open space of the recreation area. The allotments situated on the eastern side of the recreation space do not interrupt these views.



Typical landscape views showing wide tree lined street and soft landscape from front gardens, recreation ground (bottom right) and entry/exit into avenue (top right).

7.2 In addition, all of the houses are set back behind front gardens. These front gardens give additional landscape quality in the variety of planting and hedges visible along the street, which in the spring and summer are in bloom and add to this pleasant quality. There are no Tree Preservation Orders in the area, although trees are protected by the conservation area designation.



Planting in front gardens.

7.3 All of the houses had original provision for a driveway; on a few of the houses this hard landscaped area has been extended. This is unfortunate as it does not sit as comfortably with the architecture as soft landscaping but adds a harsh quality; for those that have also lost soft landscaping along the boundary the effect is more profound. Despite the driveways which all the houses have, the street is used for parking which somewhat mars the setting of the houses and the road, although, as the street is wide, the impact is limited.

7.4 There is a variety of boundary treatments along the street, including brick walls, timber fencing, and metal railings, often combined with hedges. However, there is consistency in that the boundary treatments are low, which allows appreciation of the buildings behind. The recreation area, including the allotments, has 1930s iron fencing.









Typical boundary treatments including hedging, brick walls, railings and timber fencing which are often combined with planting.

# 8.0 **Proposals for enhancement**

8.1 There could be greater consistency in terms of boundary treatment including, where it is lacking, the addition of soft landscaping.

#### 9.0 Summary

9.1 It is the Council's policy to encourage the retention of those features which make the conservation area special; including historic buildings, trees, hedges, walls, fences etc. In addition the Council demands a high standard of design and materials for any new development in the Conservation Area.

#### LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

#### Cunningham Avenue

Numbers 2-43 (inclusive), excluding number 2a

#### **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

National Planning Policy Framework March 2012

St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994

English Heritage's guidance leaflet 'Understanding Place: Conservation Area designation, appraisal and management' 2011.

### STATUS OF THE DOCUMENT

This document should be read together with saved Policy 85 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan Review 1994. It has been produced as part of DPR Project 9: Policy Statements – Conservation Areas.

A public consultation took place on this document, along with the then proposed designation of the area, between 15th May 2012 and 29th June 2012 with the following: local residents, Ward Councillors, Planning (South) Committee, English Heritage, the Civic Society, the Arc and Arc, the Resident's Association, Hertfordshire Highways, Leisure and Planning and Building Control.

As a result of this consultation comments and queries were received and addressed. Some alterations were made to the text as agreed by the Planning and Conservation Portfolio holder on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014. This amended version forms the Cunningham Avenue Conservation Area Character Statement.

If further advice or guidance is required please contact the Department of Planning and Building Control, St Albans City and District Council, Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Albans. Herts. AL13JE. Tel. St Albans (01727) 866100



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If you require this information in another format e.g. in large print, Braille, audio or in a language other than English, please contact the Conservation and Design Team on 01727 866100 or e-mail planning@stalbans.gov.uk

