Urban Conservation and Design
Princes Avenue Conservation Area Character Statement

Summary

Despite a number of recent new developments and the earlier removal of Victorian fountains, Princes Avenue retains much of its essential nineteenth century character as a handsome tree-lined boulevard. Laid out as part of the Westbourne estate and as the principal access to it, Princes Avenue remains a busy thoroughfare. Its focus is the Princes Avenue Methodist Church spire and the mature trees which draw attention to it and provide a setting. Its special identity is also marked by a variety of predominantly three storey terraces which have high level of original architectural detailing and at ground level a substantial number of original shop frontage details. Developed as a shopping area for the Avenues, this use is still important to the area although shops are now more specialist and increasingly interspersed with leisure uses such as public houses, restaurants and food outlets. The mixture of leisure, retail and residential uses combine to give the area a well used feel, generating a high level of activity during the day and in the evening.

Location

Princes Avenue Conservation Area extends form Marlborough Avenue to Spring Bank West and covers the southern half of Princes Avenue. In character it is separate and distinct from the adjoining Avenues and Pearson Park Conservation Area (which includes the northern section of Princes Avenue) due to its later development largely for retail rather than residential uses.

Historical Development

The land on which Princes Avenue now stands, and the surrounding area, was originally known as Cottingham Marsh and recorded as a low lying tract of land prone to flooding. Between 1170 and 1180 the waters of the marsh were drained into the River Hull via a complex of intersecting dykes including a dyke laid out along the line of Princes Avenue (known as Hundolfgote). The dyke formed the boundary, in medieval times, between the ancient parishes of Sculcoates and Cottingham.

A country lane subsequently developed along the bank of the dyke and had a succession of names over the years including the Kings Banks, Mucky Peg Lane and Newland Tofts Lane, while the area on either side remained largely rural until the mid nineteenth century. In 1845 Hull General Cemetery was opened on the corner of this lane and Derringham Bank (later Spring Bank West), with a grand entrance and lodge facing the country lane which subsequently became Princes Avenue. A plan to develop a grand promenade along the line of Princes Avenue to link up with the Boulevard was abandoned due to the expansion of the railway. The Victoria Branchline was constructed in 1852/53 along the eastern boundary of the area and the Cemetery Gates Station opened (later known as the Botanic Station) near the present Spring Bank/Princes Avenue junction in 1864.

At around the same time Pearson Park was laid out on what was to be the north eastern flank of Princes Avenue and the laying out and subsequent development of the

Westbourne Park Estate (now known as the Avenues) followed. Princes Avenue as it is known today, was laid out as part of this estate and to give access to it and opened in 1875. The northern section of Princes Avenue overlooking Pearson Park developed first with housing as part of the Avenues estate. The southern section of Princes Avenue, which now forms the Conservation area, developed later in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Initially housing developed and then increasingly shops to cater for the expanding number of residents in the Avenues and surrounding area. By 1910 Princes Avenue had developed as a thriving local shopping centre. In the 1920s the cemetery company allowed shops to be built along their Princes Avenue frontage and round the corner into Spring Bank West, in conjunction with a road-widening scheme, at the same time moving the entrance into the cemetery to Spring Bank West.

Since the 1950's Princes Avenue has diversified and acquired a reputation for a combination of specialist shops and services with leisure activities.

The closure of the Botanic Station in 1964, the need to adapt to the changing needs of local residents and necessary refurbishment work have combined to bring many changes to Princes Avenue in recent times. In the 1970's and 80's two new shopping parades were constructed on the east side (2-8 Princes Avenue) and a terrace infil on the west side (43-47 Princes Avenue). In the 1990's two new public houses have been added and the Princes Avenue Methodist Church has been partially demolished and rebuilt, preserving the original tower, following structural damage as a result of ground movement. Princes Avenue Conservation Area was designated in 1993.

Streetscape

Princes Avenue is a long wide handsome boulevard which is straight for most of the way, well built up along its length particularly on the western edge and lined with imposing mature London Plane trees on wide pavements. The majority of the buildings which front it form distinctive and definable terraces of two and three storeys in height intersected at fairly regular intervals by the streets which join it at an acute angle, creating some interestingly shaped corner buildings. Many of these buildings have frontages to both streets and have interesting corner features. Most of the terraces have a pleasing variety of front facing gables or dormers and other features such as bay windows at first floor level.

The contrast between the narrow treeless side streets and this wide boulevard contribute to the grandeur and importance of this stretch of Princes Avenue. Despite its width however, the street also has a strong sense of enclosure due to the size of its buildings, the mostly common building line and the mature street trees which visually reduce the width of the street and help to mask occasional set backs and gaps in the frontage.

At the northern end of the conservation area, the character of the townscape is dominated by the tower and spire of Princes Avenue Methodist Church and the turret of the City Temple. These features, especially the Methodist Church, form prominent landmarks by punctuating the skyline and also help to create a distinctive sense of place which is reinforced by their location on prominent street corners, their size, fine detailing and the tree lined character of the street which focuses attention on them.

The focus of the street, however, would once have been a fountain at the Park Grove/Blenheim Street junction (one of six throughout the Westbourne Estate) which no longer survives having been removed in order to avoid traffic congestion. A further fountain on Princes Avenue, which was located just outside the Conservation Area at the entrance to Pearson Park, has also been removed.

The curved frontage of the shops on the north west corner of this junction reflect what would have been the circular road alignment. The effect on the corresponding south east side is eroded by advert hoardings fronting a bombed site.

Views into the conservation area from various vantage points are also of considerable importance to the character of the townscape. Views from some of the side streets give positive impressions of the area especially from Clumber Street and Park Grove which terminate exceptionally on the rich frontages of City Temple and Princes Avenue Methodist Church respectively. From Spring Bank West the vista focuses on the new public house designed in a sympathetic style on the corner of Princes Avenue - and aptly named The Zoological. From Spring Bank the curved three storey frontage of 3 Princes Avenue - 254 Spring Bank West terminated the vista well and also serves to enclose the open space of the general cemetery as well as helping preserve this space as a tranquil haven away from traffic noise. Of greatest importance, however, is the view of Princes Avenue from the Spring Bank West junction which gives a delightful treelined vista punctuated by the tower of Princes Avenue Methodist Church.

The trees which line Princes Avenue are a major asset to the character of the area due to their height, maturity and number. As well as their importance to the character of the townscape they combine with the wide pavements to create a pleasant pedestrian and shopping environment despite the heavy flows of traffic along this busy thoroughfare. They dominate the street scene during the summer months creating a park-like quality and providing a strong green link with the two major urban green spaces at either end of the conservation area - Pearson Park and the General Cemetery.

Mature trees within the curtilage of buildings such as Princes Avenue Methodist Church and Nos. 10-12 Princes Avenue also contribute positively to the street scene giving a softening effect. Trees and dense undergrowth at the Spring Bank/Spring Bank West junction on land left when the railway closed forms a satisfactory visual closure to the southern end of the avenue.

Uses and Activities

In use as a popular local shopping centre in the early twentieth century for groceries and everyday necessities, Princes Avenue is still a shopping street with many premises occupied by shopkeepers on the ground floor. However, adapting to todays demands it now offers a much wider selection of goods with many specialist shops and services as well as groceries. In addition the interspersal with leisure activities such as public houses, restaurants and food outlets is increasing. This mixture is important to the continued success of the shopping centre.

Many of the upper floors of properties appear to be in use as residential accommodation which combined with the many food outlets, restaurants and pubs combines to create a lively atmosphere well into the evening as well as during the day. The two public houses and a café have also utilised forecourt space for outdoor seating which has a positive effect on the street-life of Princes Avenue.

Always important for access to the Avenues, the use of Princes Avenue as a major thoroughfare remains more important than ever with peak traffic flows during the rush hours. However, the traffic has a detrimental effect for pedestrians in increasing the separation of the two sides of the street.

Positive Buildings and Groups of Buildings

The majority of the terrace groups are late Victorian and Edwardian and have a certain uniformity due to their age, materials used, their vertical proportions and their high level of detailing. As such they have group value. However, one long terrace in particular (7-39 Princes Avenue), a three storey red brick purpose built parade of shops, can be distinguished from the rest because of its distinctive features. These include Dutch style front facing gables with plaques for receiving shop adverts and vertical pilasters which divide the frontage into a rhythm of separate and largely original shop frontages beneath.

Also of importance to the character of the street is the quality and type of detailing found on many of the terraces which includes:-

- decorative timber barge boards
- original timber bay windows at first floor level
- ornate entrance lobbies with tiled wall or threshold and arched lintels in carved stone or brick
- original front facing gables and dormers in the roof slope
- decorative timber fascia boards and ridge tiles
- original or substantially 'original' shop frontages

There are many surviving shop frontages with a high degree of original detail such as timber pilasters, capitals, cornices and doorways. They have a particularly strong positive impact where a whole terrace of original shop frontages has substantially been retained or sensitively refurbished. This occurs along two terraces in particular, Nos 7-39 and 12a-28 Princes Avenue. These frontages are important to the character of the area. Their group effect gives uniformity to the street scene and the fine and high degree of detailing of their original features as well as the traditional proportions and materials used, which respect and complement the upper floors of individual buildings within a terrace, add to the quality of the pedestrian experience. There are also other individual shop-fronts dotted throughout the Conservation Area which for similar reasons also make a positive contribution to preserving the character of the area. A particularly fine example is 80 Princes Avenue, HollyHocks the Florist.

The few individual buildings which because of their location, unique features, materials and high level of detail or historical significance are of particular importance to the character of the area include:-

- Princes Avenue Methodist Church
- The City Temple
- The Yorkshire Bank (nos 38-40)
- 10-12 Princes Avenue

As already discussed the tower and spire of the two churches are important as landmarks in the street scene. These two grade II listed building with their corner positions set back from the street, the high level of detail (which includes the use of distinctive yellow stone banking on the Methodist Church spire) and imposing size contributes to their presence giving the area a strong sense of place.

Built in the 1930's the Yorkshire Bank at the corner of Duesbery Street is significant because of its fine corner treatment. The building turns the corner so that both street frontages are addressed.

Two semi-detached residences 10-12 Princes Avenue are important because of their historical significance to the development of the street. They are the oldest properties within the Conservation Area dating back to 1860 (before the street was formally laid out) and were originally built for nurserymen before they were occupied by railway workers. In predating the rest of the area's development they are separate from the rest of its fabric and set back from the street frontage.

Of lesser importance but still worthy of note is the Jacksons building (83-85 Princes Avenue) opposite the Yorkshire Bank which is distinctive due to the extensive use of faience at first floor level and the chamfered junction with Belvoir Street. The level of detail at first floor level is also fine and includes integral tiled advertisement panels, moulded parapet and a coat of arms and rose window on the corner elevation.

Materials

The predominant building material is red brick but the cream/yellow brick (more expensive at the time) is also in evidence mostly as a decorative contrast on some buildings.

Two notable departures from these commonly used materials on prominent buildings are:-

- the use of white faience at first floor level on the Jacksons building
- the use of concrete decorative contrast on the Yorkshire Bank building

While there is evidence that some of the buildings in the street were originally roofed with Welsh slate there are also significant examples of the locally made clay tiles on some terraces including nos 7-39 and on the Yorkshire Bank and the terrace group abutting it.

Timber is the characteristic material used in the street for fascia boards, barge boards, shop frontages, window frames and some bay windows (others being constructed with stone supports).

There is no real evidence to suggest what the original paving material was but it is likely to have been paved with York Stone flags like other traditional streets within the City. Today the paths are paved with tarmac with an assortment of paving on the adjacent shop forecourts including in situ concrete and concrete or clay paving units.

Neutral Elements

The shopping parade built in the 1980's between the recent Zoological public house and the garage can be described as a neutral element in the street. Like the pub it reinforces the common building line on a site which was previously open. Its success in respecting the character of the conservation area is also due to its apparent three storey height which complements the three storey traditional parade of shops opposite.

Negative Elements

Some gaps and setback along Princes Avenue have a particularly adverse effect on the character of the area because they weaken the enclosure of the street. They offer unattractive views of backland, car parking and the backs of properties, and they are dead frontages which do not generate activity. However, whilst not being traditional visual elements in the street scene, they are a necessary part of the 20th Century living patterns. Examples are as follows:-

- The petrol filling station on the east side of Princes Avenue
- The Zoological car park on the east side of Princes Avenue
- Advertisement display on 3 hoardings at the corner of Park Grove

The vacant shops have a detrimental effect both on the condition of buildings and on the level of pedestrian activity in the street - a row of empty shops becoming in effect a dead frontage. A flexible approach to finding new uses for them is likely to be needed to overcome this problem.

In a few places the street has a run down appearance due to the poor repair of some for the buildings including settlement damage and occasional examples of missing details such as decorative ridge tiles. The worst cases of neglect are often found where the upper floors of properties are not in use or are under used.

Although in general the traditional buildings which front Princes Avenue have retained a high level of original details such as windows, dormers in the roof slope bay windows as well as ridge tiles and barge boards, there are occasional examples where these have been removed as part of a refurbishment or maintenance programme to the detriment of the quality of individual buildings and the collective character of the street.

Similarly, the occasional replacement of traditional shop frontages with frontages of an inappropriate design weakens the character of the area and they are particularly incongruous given the substantial level of original shop front detail in this street. Usually, inappropriate designs are those which are clearly constructed from non-traditional materials, have modern features and proportions such as box fascias, have poorly designed roller shutters and do not relate well to the upper floors of a building.

However, well designed modern solutions should not be dismissed simply because they are not traditional.

The street has also maintained a high proportion of original windows and original window openings. However, there are occasional examples of modern replacement windows and shutters which are inappropriate to the character of the area.

A few properties within the street have been rendered or painted which weakens the unifying effect of the traditional materials within terraces and within the street.

Approved by the Planning & Design Committee, 3rd December, 1997

Addendum

11.02.2008	**No.63 Former Butcher's Shop, Prince's Avenue** - Added by the Secretary of State to the 'List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest' at Grade II.