

# Environmental Character Study Final Report





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- ◆ Epsom & Ewell History & Archaeology Society;
- ◆ The Epsom Protection Society;
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# 1. Preface

- 1.1 The Borough of Epsom and Ewell is located in north-west Surrey, covering 3,411 hectares, nearly half of which is Green Belt. The combination of scenic landscapes, established neighbourhoods, attractive town/village centres; and a well connected transport network make the Borough a much valued place to live for its 70,000 residents. In fact, the Borough is regularly featured near the top of surveys for the best places to live in the UK.
- 1.2 The Borough adjoins Greater London (to the north), with its northern half and central spine forming a series of urban and suburban areas, most of which developed from the 1930's onwards as rail connections improved and as suburban development became a popular option. Towards the south, and along its western and eastern sides, the Borough is primarily green in character, with a strong definition between built and rural areas at the Green Belt boundary.
- 1.3 Epsom and Ewell's history can be traced back to Saxon origins, and includes existing parks or buildings which outline the Borough's long history. Epsom's history as a spa town, and as a world class venue for horse racing are strong cultural influences on the Borough. In terms of residential areas – which are the primary focus of this study – the vast majority have emerged from the 1930's onwards. Whilst localised pockets of older built form exists (mainly around town and village centres, or in isolated rural locations), the Borough's neighbourhoods have evolved in a series of well defined building periods, culminating in a rich and varied built form.
- 1.4 Given its location and popularity, development pressure in the Borough is strong, and a potential challenge to the local distinctiveness and established character of the area. The Borough is required to accommodate around 200 new dwellings per annum over the next twenty years. The adopted Core Strategy directs future development to within the built up areas and encourages the recycling of urban land. This can have a variety of impacts on local environmental quality, including: loss of street scale, neighbourhood distinctiveness, good buildings, gardens and significant trees and green landscape. The increase in parking associated with new development can also affect the overall quality of an area. Opportunity exists through good design to avoid these pitfalls and deliver well conceived contemporary design which also includes the locally distinctive aspects of the residential areas in Epsom and Ewell which currently work well.
- 1.5 This study aims to identify the distinct characteristics which combine to make up Epsom and Ewell in terms of built features or elements of the layout. It reviews the pattern of development through the Borough's history to understand how unique features have grown and changed over time. It looks at each residential area within the Borough and assesses its special characteristics. And lastly, the study provides recommendations about how Epsom and Ewell's key features might be preserved and enhanced.



**Fig. 1:** Large residential areas to the north of the Borough around Stoneleigh are characterised by streets of semi-detached properties with double height bay windows, render and brickwork facades and hipped roofs. (Character Area 3)



**Fig.2:** Distinctive architectural detailing and original features mark out several areas of the Borough, such as sub-area 21a



## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 In February 2008, Atkins was asked to prepare an Environmental Character Study of the Borough, on behalf of Epsom and Ewell Council. It forms an important piece of research in helping the Council and the public to understand the character of the Borough. The Council are preparing a number of studies which will help to guide future planning. These include separate studies of Epsom Town Centre and of the Borough's Conservation Areas.
- 2.2 This Environmental Character Study comprises an assessment of the existing townscape character, together with policy recommendations targeted at preserving and enhancing character.
- 2.3 The evidence gathering for the study involved two stages. Firstly, desk-based research was conducted to review the planning context and the historical development of the Borough. Secondly, a site-based, neighbourhood-level survey was conducted to verify the desktop research, and to gather a much finer grain of character information. An exhibition of the study's findings was run during May and June 2008 in order to inform the public and to ask for comments.
- 2.4 This report includes the findings from both the desktop and field survey stages, and the responses from the public consultation. It then goes on to look at the planning policy applications of the study. It represents the final stage in the character study, and a working tool for practitioners.

## 3. Purpose and Scope

### *Purpose of the Study*

- 3.1 Local distinctiveness and environmental character are central considerations when developing policies and making planning decisions. The Environmental Character Study was commissioned to produce the evidence base from which these elements can be discerned.
- 3.2 The key objectives of the study:
- ◆ Cover all of the Borough, except for the Epsom Town Centre, designated Conservation Areas and those open Green Belt lands where there is not a prospect of any significant change;
  - ◆ Define and identify the elements of environmental character that make the various parts of the Borough distinctive. It is likely that these will range from the individual elements in a locality through to the broad character of an area;
  - ◆ Identify and suggest the planning policies needed to retain and protect good local character, and maintain and improve environmental quality;
  - ◆ Involve non-expert public groups, at defined stages in the project; and,
  - ◆ Are in a form that can be used and added to in the future, and be a working tool for practitioners and those with an interest in the local environment.

### *Planning Context*

- 3.3 The Environmental Character Study is intended to be used as a working tool in planning for current and future development within the Borough, and to ensure that the aspects of positive local distinctiveness are protected and enhanced. In particular, the Study will form part of the evidence base which the Council is compiling in preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF).
- 3.4 The Core Strategy (which forms a key part of the LDF, and which was adopted in July 2007) identifies the need to protect the high quality of the local environment in an area which faces strong development pressures. Creating a quality environment and special places is one of the Strategy's four broad aims, while ensuring all aspects of new development accord with the principles of good design, create safe and inclusive places, and contribute positively towards local distinctiveness a key objective.
- 3.5 Policy CS5 sets out the policy for conserving and enhancing the quality of the built environment. It states that *"High quality and inclusive design will be required for all developments. Development should:*
- *Create attractive, functional and safe public and private environments;*
  - *Reinforce local distinctiveness and complement the attractive characteristics of the Borough;*
  - *Make efficient use of land and have regard to the need to develop land in a comprehensive way."*
- 3.6 The Strategy explains that good design is a key part of sustainable development, and that new development should enhance and complement local character, and be capable of integrating well into existing neighbourhoods.
- 3.7 The Strategy also refers to established residential neighbourhoods which have a special character, and states that the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) will consider whether these areas should be defined (paragraph 3.7.2). A fuller consideration of the planning context and application of this study can be found at Section 6.

**Scope of the Study**

*Study Area*

- 3.8 A number of studies have been completed, or are ongoing, which will inform the LDF. These include a series of Conservation Area Assessments and a Town Centre Action Plan. Those areas are well understood, and therefore not covered by the Environmental Character Study. Instead, the Study looks at the residential areas of the Borough outside of Conservation Areas and the Town Centres, to complete the picture of the Borough's built area. Its focus is on the subtleties and distinctiveness of the Borough's suburban neighbourhoods: areas which account for the majority of the Borough's residential development and which make up a very large part of the overall townscape character. The coverage of the study can be seen on Map 1a 1b on pages 13 and 14.
- 3.9 The study is focused on built areas: the streets and buildings of residential neighbourhoods. However, green spaces play a significant part in defining Epsom and Ewell's character; whether they are the open landscape of the Downs or Commons around the Borough's extents, or whether they are one of the many local parks located within residential areas. While this Study is not primarily aimed at assessing green spaces, their influence on built areas is described and assessed where significant to an area's character.



**Fig. 3:** Terraced rows from the Victorian or Edwardian era, such as this one in sub area 13a are found relatively rarely in the Borough. Most development occurred later.



**Fig. 4:** The combination of an avenue of mature beech trees, woodland planting to front gardens and large properties provides a unique gateway to the Borough in character area 38.



## 4. Methodology

### Overall Approach

- 4.1 The assessment of the character of the Borough's built areas follows current best industry practice.<sup>1</sup> This guidance, the principles of which form the basis for all character assessment (whether landscape or townscape), includes the following definition of character, and a concise summary of what the study aims to identify:

#### Character:

"A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the [town]scape that makes one [town]scape different from another, rather than better or worse."

- 4.2 This study additionally incorporated methodologies used to assess urban and suburban areas in particular (such as Conservation Area Appraisals and urban design surveys), in order to fully address the specific issues found in built areas.
- 4.3 The study was implemented in two stages: desktop research followed by verification by on-site surveys. The approach for each stage is outlined below.

### Desktop Stage Methodology

- 4.4 The desktop stage formed the background work which enabled an understanding of the key characteristics of the Borough's neighbourhoods, and how those features had developed. The following sources of information were reviewed in order to form a planning and historical context for the Borough's development:

#### Planning

- ◆ Local Development Framework: Core Strategy, 2007;
- ◆ Local Plan Proposals Map, 2000;
- ◆ Supplementary Planning Guidance (including Householder Applications Guidance, Single Plot and Infill Development Guidance);
- ◆ The West Park Brief, 2003; and,
- ◆ Conservation Areas Planning Guidance Notes.

#### History and Development

- ◆ A range of local history books and research documents;
  - ◆ Discussion with local historians;
  - ◆ A series of historical maps of the Borough, ranging from Pre-Victorian to contemporary; and,
  - ◆ Aerial photographs of the Borough.
- 4.5 By identifying the historical trends and building periods of the Borough, together with the vast range of other elements (such as natural features, topography, the local planning context), the

broad outline of the whole Borough's character took shape at the desktop stage. It was also possible to define (indicatively at least) the character types and character areas which form the building blocks of the Borough's character. The indicative boundaries for character types and areas were defined, primarily from aerial photographs and street-level maps. A full explanation of character types and character areas can be found at Section 5.

### Survey Stage Methodology

- 4.6 The on-site survey stage was carried out to verify the findings of the desktop stage, and to refine/amend the information.
- 4.7 The survey was conducted by two teams who visited every character area and visually identified the key features which serve to make the area distinct. The teams used hand-held Geographical Information System (GIS) map and database systems to record information on site, which was regularly checked for consistency of approach and analysis. At the field survey stage, the character areas previously identified at the desktop stage are re-assessed at a much finer level of detail. Additionally, the boundaries to character areas were verified, and where required, amended.
- 4.8 The elements recorded in the database are categorised below:
- ◆ Area information – the geography of the area and how it relates to surrounding locations. This information relates to the broadest level assessment of an area, focussing on the large scale features of a place that help to define it. Specific features recorded include topography; views; relationship to internal green space and/or the urban fringe; and the overall street layout pattern.
  - ◆ Built form information – the predominant scale, height, building line, plot size and the form (e.g. detached) of the built environment and to what degree these elements work well together.
  - ◆ Street features – the predominant elements common to the street, both in terms of public and private space. This includes vegetation (both on street and in front gardens), plot boundaries, street furniture, and the predominant parking arrangements.
  - ◆ Property features – the predominant elements of property form, style and materials which summarise the area's residential architecture. This includes façade width, roof form/materials, elevation form/materials and window form/materials.
- 4.9 For each of the above categories information was collected (using a standard proforma) and described in a value-free approach. The aim of this element of the study was to produce a descriptive character assessment, based on the predominant elements which make an area distinct. By using a standard proforma, the site surveys aimed to record the same information for each area in a systematic approach, ensuring that comparisons and judgements can be made on a standard set of data.
- #### Townscape Judgements
- 4.10 Following the value-free descriptive assessment, a series of judgments were drawn relating to the area's character. Three separate judgments were made:
- ◆ Townscape Quality. This assessment relates to the condition and quality of the built form and vegetation of the public space and private space features within a character area. In terms of the built elements, the condition and quality of architectural elements on properties,

<sup>1</sup> Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency, 2002

together with plot boundaries and streetscape materials are assessed. For vegetation, the assessment includes coverage, condition and quality of both on-street vegetation and that found in front gardens. An additional judgement on the overall intactness of built and vegetation features is also drawn, assessing to what degree the coherence of the area has been maintained, or whether infill or replacement development affords the area a less intact built/vegetation quality.

- ◆ Townscape Value. Four individual indicators of townscape value were assessed.
  - ◆ Firstly, an ecological/biodiversity value – related to the size of plots and vegetation quality in front and rear gardens, especially where green corridors between green spaces exist. This also assesses any public areas of green space/woodland.
  - ◆ Secondly the frequency of townscape/landscape planning designations and to what degree the character positively relates to those designations. So, for example, to what degree the character area provides a positive setting for an adjacent Conservation Area.
  - ◆ Thirdly, an assessment is made on the recreability of an area. Areas which have a very established character, or include individually designed properties (rather than mass produced or commonly found types) have a higher recreability value, as do areas which include properties with a high degree of original materials.
  - ◆ Lastly, the intervisibility of the area is valued. Areas which are visible from surrounding areas (and probably, conversely, have extensive views out) have a high degree of intervisibility. Where they are of a good built/vegetation quality, a high value of intervisibility is afforded. Lower values are attributed to either enclosed/secluded areas or where they are visible, but of a low built quality (and thus may be considered a detracting feature in views).
- ◆ Sensitivity to change. This judgment combines the assessments from townscape quality and townscape value to attribute a sensitivity to change value. In essence, areas of higher townscape value and/or townscape quality have a higher sensitivity to change. This means that, if development takes place within an area with a higher sensitivity to change, it should be designed with a very high degree of care and detail, so as not to detract from the area's character.

- 4.11 The judgements drawn from the character assessment are a subjective and vital element of the process. Without judgements on quality, value and sensitivity, character assessment is a practice limited to descriptive information gathering, and does not allow the interpretation which is necessary in basing decisions on its findings. Similarly to the evidence gathering stage, a systematic approach was used in making judgements to ensure that the same information from each area was assessed. The aims in the judgement process are to limit, as far as possible, the subjectivity involved in ascribing qualities and values to a place; and secondly to make transparent what factors the judgements are based on.

### Public Consultation

- 4.12 On May 31 2008, a public exhibition was held of the findings from the combined desktop and survey stages. Two separate venues were selected for the event: the Ebbisham Centre in Epsom and Bourne Hall in Ewell. This provided the opportunity for people to view and discuss the study's findings with representatives from both Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and Atkins. The display boards and reports were then displayed for a further three weeks in the atrium at Epsom Town Hall.

- 4.13 Simultaneously, an electronic version of the same information was available for the same duration on the Council's internet site. Local councillors and Residents Associations were contacted directly about the consultation.
- 4.14 A number of responses were received, both on the day of the event and throughout the consultation period. These have been reflected in this report, and in many cases have helped to add a level of detail to character areas.



**Fig. 5:** The exhibition boards from the public consultation, here at the Ebbisham Centre



## 5. The Character of Epsom and Ewell

5.1 This section includes the findings from the desktop and survey stages.

### *Historical Development of Epsom and Ewell's Residential Areas*

- 5.2 Epsom and Ewell is a compact Borough which has the highest ratio of urbanisation within Surrey. The Borough falls approximately into two halves: a central spine stretching from its northern half is formed of a network of well established neighbourhoods. Conversely, its southern, eastern and western areas are formed of open Green Belt land. For the most part, there is a clear distinction between the two.
- 5.3 Although the Borough itself includes historical connections stretching back many centuries, the development of the vast majority of the Borough's urban areas is relatively recent. Prior to the First World War, the built areas of the Borough were almost wholly restricted to the town and village centres of Epsom and Ewell respectively, with isolated houses and farms set within the Borough's wider landscape. The exception to this is the development (during the Edwardian era) of a series of hospital sites in the Borough's west which, collectively, formed large-scale institutional developments.
- 5.4 The Borough's largely rural character was to change massively between the First and Second World Wars. During the 1930's in particular, a period of large-scale house building took place in conjunction with improved rail links. A network of large residential estates was constructed – with the area of Stoneleigh a particular focus for development. Subsequent distinctive periods of development followed, although never on the same scale as during the 1930's. The 1940's and 1950's witnessed further periods of building (both war-damaged and new housing), mostly on infill sites amongst or adjacent to the large 1930's estates.
- 5.5 Infill development during the 1940's-1950's was, in turn, succeeded by a fresh round of infill estates during the 1960's and 1970's; again mostly within the parameters of the Borough's settlement edge. Even smaller scale infill or replacement development occurred from 1980's onwards, with the only sizable recent developments occurring (or planned) at the redeveloped Edwardian hospital sites to the west.
- 5.6 For the most part, the Borough's built area is dominated by residential streets. Other land uses, such as industry and large-scale commercial are limited in location, mostly at the Longmead Estate north of Epsom town centre.
- 5.7 The successive periods of development in Epsom and Ewell have each made their mark on the built character of the Borough. The features which are typical of each building era (layout, relationship between properties and the street, vegetative coverage, architectural style etc.) are considered to be the dominant elements when defining the character of individual areas. This measure was chosen as the basis on which to base the character types within the Borough (see below).

### *Part 1 - Character Types*

- 5.8 The first stage of character assessment identified the character types within the Borough. Character types are the preliminary phase in delineating how the Borough's character is made up from a set of constituent parts; they allow the Borough's residential areas to be understood strategically. By mapping and defining character types, it is possible to compare and contrast different areas of the Borough, and to obtain a clearer picture of exactly how the Borough's residential areas have developed over time.

#### *Character types vs. character areas*

- 5.9 Character types are different from character areas and the distinction between the two is subtle but important to understand.
- 5.10 Character type refers to a townscape type which has broadly similar patterns of built form, layout, and landscape elements as other townscapes within the study area: in essence they are generic within the Borough and not restricted to a particular location. Character areas, on the other hand, are the unique individual geographical locations in which character types occur. So, for example, a character type may be residential estates built in the 1930's (which will have a pattern of features found in many locations within the Borough). But a character area may be the 1930's estate at Hookfield – a unique geographical location.

#### *Character types within the Borough*

- 5.11 The study identified seven different character types within the Borough. Their dispersal is illustrated on Map 2, Character Types, Appendix 3, and each type is described below:

### *Type A: Victorian/Edwardian terraces and villas*

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.12 This townscape type was developed between the 1840's and 1920's. It is typically found around the earliest settled parts of the Borough such as the edge of town/village centres, and in a close proximity to railway stations. Distinctively for the Borough, this type has a very small coverage of the overall built area; an indication that the vast majority of the Borough's residential development took place after this period. The amount of this character type occurring within the study area is further reduced due to much of it falling within Conservation Areas.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.13 Typically formed of flat-fronted or bay-windowed terraces, or semi-detached villas. Small front plots with larger rear gardens tends to be common. The layout of this character type is often linear, following a ribbon development character. Mature planting is often a feature, due the period's age, although smaller plot sizes limit its volume. Density is medium-high, or high.
- 5.14 Partly due to driveways being less common for this type, and partly due to the location of this type along some of the Borough's busier through routes for traffic, on street parking and traffic are frequently issues.

### **Type B: Edwardian former-hospital sites**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.15 A series of large individual sites exist within the Borough's western Green Belt area. Their size, age and detached location make them a very distinctive character type within the Borough.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.16 The built form includes a variety of period hospital buildings (larger in scale, institutional in character and likely to be local landmarks) together with recently built residential development (mainly detached or semi detached often in a 'heritage style', but visually exhibiting a 'new' characteristic). Internal landscape schemes derived from a unified masterplan form the external spaces of the sites, with a varied density of development apparent (with higher density often associated with converted hospital buildings and a lower density in new-build properties).
- 5.17 The individual sites are at different phases of redevelopment with a ratio of original hospital buildings and new residential development varying accordingly. Indeed some remain either undeveloped or functioning still as healthcare institutions. The sites' 'island' location within the surrounding Horton Country Park is a distinctive feature found infrequently within the Borough's built-up areas.

### **Type C: 1920's-1930's Estates**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.18 As the pre-dominant period of building within the Borough, this character type has a wide-ranging coverage and has a strong impact on the overall character of the Borough's townscape. The majority of Stoneleigh (up to Worcester Park), West Ewell, around Nonsuch Park, east and west of Epsom, Woodcote, the Wells and Langley Vale exhibit characteristics of this type, with the majority of built development occurring during the 1930's.
- 5.19 Being built prior to Green Belt legislation, these estates were constructed on large tracts of farmland and effectively conglomerated the previously separate towns and villages within the Borough, and merged with neighbouring Borough's built areas. The development of 1920's and 1930's estates was often connected to improved rail links to afford commuter housing in more distant locations from London.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.20 With such a widespread type, some variety of character, size of property and street width is apparent – often a legacy of the different tastes of multiple developers or of their perceived markets. However, the majority of this type has a strong uniformity, with variation in styles or materials for individual estates falling within controlled parameters by the original developers. The layout, which followed the period's current thinking on urban planning, began with the road layout: frequently long and sweeping or geometric. The building line is predominantly strong, and relates to the road layout. Properties tend to be detached or semi-detached, with small front gardens and medium-sized rear gardens. Driveways (considered part of the original design) are common, supporting off-street parking.

- 5.21 The original developments frequently paid little attention to topography in deriving the street layout, particularly apparent in the northern Borough's long straight/sweeping streets which traverse the undulating terrain and maintain direction regardless of topography. Street layouts often include original streetscape features such as grass verges/islands or tree planting which serve to soften the built form, but which are occasionally out of scale or have been minimised – resulting in less visually substantial elements and a starker appearance to the street.

### **Type D: 1940's-1950's Infill Development and Closes.**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.22 This character type is well dispersed throughout the Borough's built-up area, but covers only a fraction of the area of 1920's-1930's estates. In most instances, this type was constructed in the 1950's, and formed infill development between and around the edges of larger 1920's-1930's estates. A pattern of closes and cul-de-sac layouts which neighbour, or sit within 1930's estates is common, as is the relationship between the two types. This type also includes the sporadic replacement of war-damaged properties.
- 5.23 This character type can be found in most parts of the Borough's suburban areas, with particular clusters around Ruxley, and around the outskirts of Epsom town centre.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.24 As already mentioned, the layout of this type is formed around cul-de-sac layouts with variations in how strongly continuous the building line is formed. They are frequently small in terms of area, often no more than three streets. Driveways are a very common feature, and being largely set on cul-de-sac layouts, through traffic and pedestrian permeability is restricted in this type. Architecturally, hipped roofs are common for this type, and properties have many of the same features as 1930's properties – especially semi detached houses. A plainer level of architectural detail and reversion to wholly brickwork finishes to facades are common features of publicly-built 1950's properties. The 'landscaped' elements common in 1930's streets (verges, street trees etc.) are also found within this character type, and have frequently been minimised over time.

### **Type E: 1960's and 1970's Infill Development and Closes**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.25 This character type is similarly dispersed through the Borough as the 1940's-1950's type. It is formed of a patchwork of small, localised infill development which typically neighbours earlier 1930's estates or 1950's infill.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.26 Similar to its preceding type, it is frequently formed of closes and cul-de-sac layouts – with similar characteristics in terms of a lack of through routes and pedestrian permeability. A common feature of this character type is the treatment of external space, which is often formed of amenity grassed areas, frequently not delineated from the private space of front gardens. The building line is often not continuous, and may be broken by garages to the front of



properties. Taken together with the amenity grass areas, the effect can be non-traditional street layouts with a varied visual dynamic.

- 5.27 Plot sizes tend to include larger front gardens than other character types within the Borough, but proportionately smaller rear gardens. Off street parking is a common feature.
- 5.28 Property types include detached (infrequently), semi detached and flatted blocks – the latter often sited in open amenity grassland.

### **Type F: 1980's to Present Infill Development**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.29 The amount of development which falls into this character type is less than the two preceding character types within the Borough's built area. Small pockets of infill and replacement development exist around the edges of the Borough's established residential estates in Stoneleigh and around the outskirts of Epsom town centre. This does not include the recent developments within the Edwardian hospitals type, which due to their location, are considered to be of a distinctive type of their own (see above).

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.30 1980's-Present Infill Development type shares some layout characteristics as the two preceding types, with properties fairly tightly arranged around the cul-de-sac road layout. Open amenity space is less predominant than in Type E (1960-1970's), with front and rear gardens (often much smaller in size) delineated by a wall or fence. Architecturally, this type covers a variety of styles – a reflection of the period's approach to incorporate heritage features into its built styles.

### **Type G: Industrial/Commercial Estates**

#### *Location and coverage*

- 5.31 A localised type, adhering to land use designations. Although a number of relatively small scale developments exist around the Borough (particularly in its northern region), the Longmead Industrial Estate and Nonsuch Industrial Estate located to the north of Epsom Town Centre forms the only large scale example.

#### *Built form characteristics*

- 5.32 This type has distinctive characteristics when compared to all the previous types due to its use. It is formed primarily of large scale, industrial or utilitarian development within open spaces (car parks, depots) which mirror the scale of development. The edges to the type may exhibit more commercial uses and characteristics, forming a transition between the utilitarian area and nearby mixed residential/commercial areas.



**Fig. 6:** The topography of an area can play an important role in shaping its character, such as here in character area 18. Long straight or sweeping streets are laid out over an undulating terrain. It can add legibility to an area, particularly where the built form is of uniform appearance.



**Fig. 7:** Varied built form, comprising different periods of development is a common feature of the Borough's settlement edges (such as here in sub area 43b). Variety in building forms, building lines and styles, with replacement development add visual interest to the line of property facades.

## Part 2 - Character Areas

- 5.33 Having established the types of built form found within the Borough's residential neighbourhoods, distinct geographical units which combine a repeated pattern of characteristics were identified. These form the character areas within the Borough. These were indicatively identified at the desktop stage of the Study, and were verified by the site-based survey.
- 5.34 The summarised information recorded for each character area includes:
- ◆ a photographic record of the typical features within the area;
  - ◆ a location map;
  - ◆ a written description of the key characteristics (including area information, built form information, street features and property features); and,
  - ◆ a series of judgements based on the character of the area (including pressures, townscape quality, townscape value, and townscape sensitivity).
- 5.35 Sub areas, generally being smaller in size, have a concise set of written information (general description and built form information) together with the same set of judgements as a character area.
- 5.36 The definition and description of character areas is central to the study. It allows the Borough to be understood at a very local level – often at neighbourhood level. It also permits patterns to be drawn of key features within a group of streets or neighbourhoods which are distinctive from both other parts of the Borough, and other parts of the UK. From a planning perspective, identifying information at character area level allows a more targeted approach to decision-making, based on a finer grain of detailed evidence.

### Predominant Character

- 5.37 Within every character area, a very wide range of individual distinction can be found. Individual streets vary from one to the next. And each street will include a variety of properties from different eras, of different forms, or including alterations and material changes. In short, areas which include a really strong coherence of property features and streetscape elements are few and far between – even in overwhelmingly suburban residential areas such as Epsom and Ewell.
- 5.38 As such, descriptions of character and the judgements on which they are based, are informed by the predominant features in an area. Where notable exceptions to the predominant character are found, these are described within the main body of descriptive text, or have been identified as sub areas (see below).

### Character Area boundaries

- 5.39 Defining character area boundaries is a subjective process, to a large degree. The initial definition is prepared at the desktop stage, and is based on the character types within the area identified. So, for example, it is possible to accurately map the boundary to estates, neighbourhoods and areas which have been built at a particular time: where previous farmland has been converted into a residential estate, or where localised infill development has occurred. Other features can also be used to define boundaries. Railway lines, embankments, main

roads, or natural features such as watercourses all tend to define an edge to built areas: often because they form a barrier to movement.

- 5.40 However, the boundary between two character areas usually equates to the meeting of two (or possibly more) types of development. Where this occurs, some degree of crossover in character is common. It may be difficult to define exactly where one character area starts and another finishes. At these locations it can be frequently inferred that the area includes a combination of characters.

### Character areas and sub-areas: the difference between them

- 5.41 Within each character area, it is possible that a smaller area is considered to have a different set of characteristics, but that it is linked to the larger character area. These have been identified as sub-areas. A separate description and suite of judgements has been made for each sub area, and they are identified on the Character Areas Map.

### Character of the Borough - General Findings

- 5.42 A number of key findings emerged from the site-based survey stage that relate to either the Borough as a whole, or to multiple character areas.
- 5.43 Firstly, the dispersal and size of character areas forms a recognisable pattern. The north of the Borough tends to include character areas which are much larger in area, and thus fewer in number than the south of the Borough. To the north, the large estates around Stoneleigh, West Ewell and Ruxley which were built during the 1930's-1970's were mostly constructed en masse and include networks of streets which have a strong visual and physical unity, i.e. street layouts and property types which look similar over the span of several streets. In many cases, but particularly so to the north east corner of the Borough where it borders Sutton, the Borough's boundary does not coincide with the edge of the character area. Instead, the streets in neighbouring Sutton, or around Worcester Park are often the continuation of an estate or development and include the same characteristics as those within Epsom and Ewell.
- 5.44 To the south of the Borough a much more fragmented pattern of character areas is evident. Development here has tended to have been on smaller sized estates, and is characteristic of an area where layers of successive development have occurred over time, continually renewing and rebuilding the built area. The pattern is also reflective of the area's proximity to Epsom town centre, with a variety of land uses accommodated within a compact area in a way that the overwhelmingly residential north of the Borough does not share.
- 5.45 Secondly, the tenure of built areas across the Borough is relatively recent, in spite of the variety described above, and taking into account the study area's exclusion of the oldest parts of the Borough (Conservation Areas and town/village centres). The building expansion which occurred from the 1930's onwards and which accounts for the vast majority of the residential areas, explains the cohesiveness in form and appearance of street features and properties which are apparent across the Borough. Conversely, it adds extra weight to the significance of built form prior to that period, which is found in localised and small scale areas.
- 5.46 Thirdly, pressure on the character of areas is evident in a number of forms: replacement development of distinctly different appearance; intensification of built development; reduction in the quality of either built features or landscape; pressure on greenspace – to name but a few. These are considered in more detail in the Planning Policy Application section of this study.



However, almost universally across the Borough, the pressure from traffic and parking is notable. Most areas are constrained in the available amount of parking, and the rise in car ownership has resulted frequently in street scenes and residential areas dominated by parking. This is most acute in residential areas where a school, hospital or other competing land use occurs. Where parking pressure has resulted in forecourt conversions in large numbers within a street or area, the distinction between street and home is eroded: a loss of the softening effect that front garden planting and a plot boundary has on a built area. The result is a starker visual appearance to the street which can detract from the residential character of an area.

- 5.47 Similarly, the pressure from traffic on residential character is highlighted in areas where this is a notable issue. However, the effects from traffic are usually not dissipated evenly across an area but more likely to be focused on key thoroughfares within the Borough such as East Street or Chessington Road. A pattern is evident where traffic volume and restrictions on on-street parking often leads to these thoroughfares losing many of their original residential qualities and taking on a mixed visual appearance; and the environmental quality of the streetscape being eroded. The effect on the perception of the local area is exacerbated as, by their nature, these thoroughfares are seen and used by a high volume of local residents and passers by.

**Character of the Borough – Individual character areas**

- 5.48 The following pages provide a summary description, judgements on, and illustrations of each character area and sub area within the Borough.
- 5.49 At the end of the judgements section for each area, a list of the key characteristics which should be protected and enhanced is included.



**Fig. 8:** An example of where forecourt conversion lessens the valuable softening effect which front gardens provide, here in sub area 27a.



**Fig. 9:** Character area 47, the former Horton Hospital site, exhibits the features found in the cluster of character areas to the west of the Borough where new build properties are laid out alongside the landmark Edwardian structures which survive from the site's former use