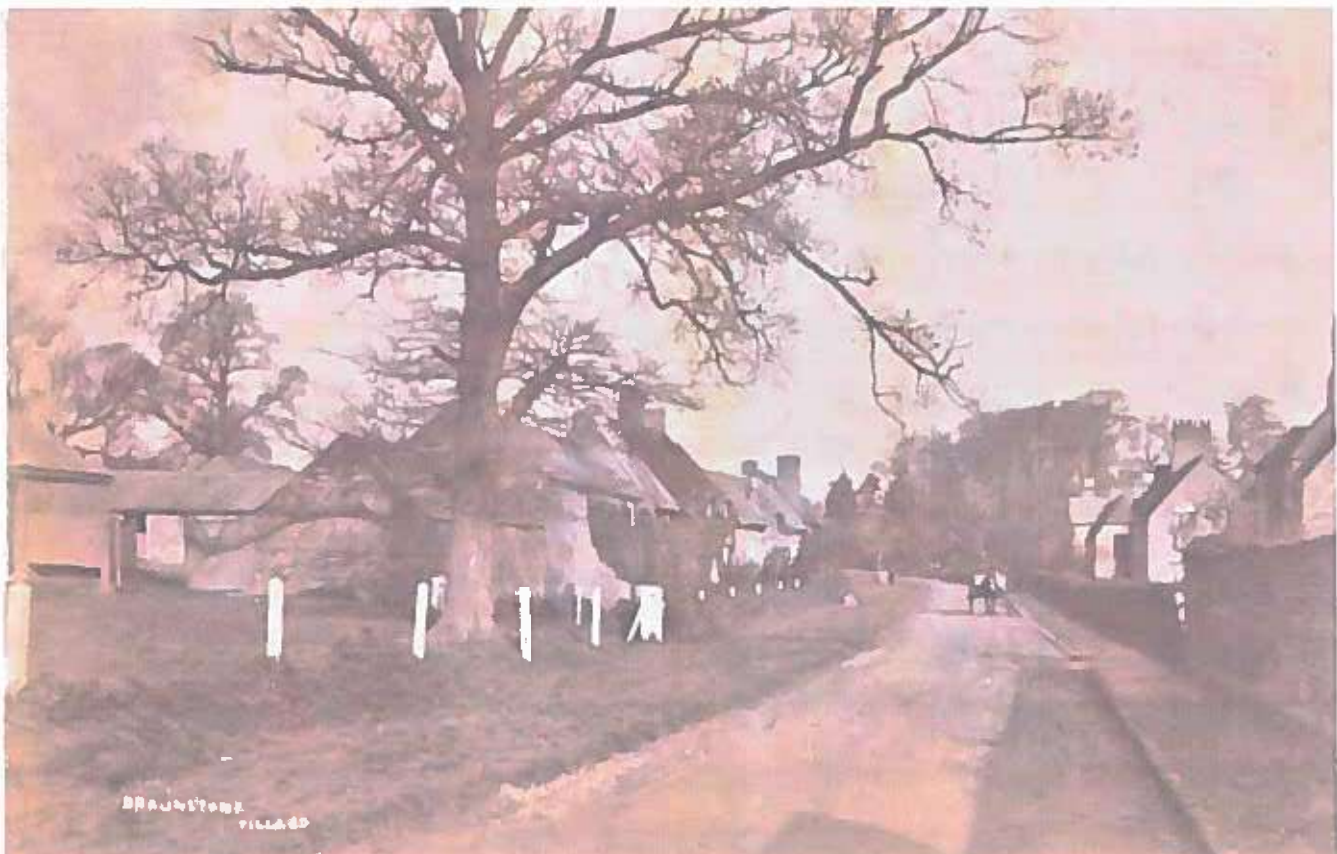




Photograph of Leicester City's Information Board on Main Street, 2021

Proposed Extension to Braunstone Village Conservation Area. Character Assessment October 2021

Copy of Postcard of Main Street, Looking North, 1900



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1. INTRODUCTION.

This assessment is being made to bring some conformity to the overall conservation of Braunstone village.

This appraisal, albeit nearly 50 years later, will be used to help inform the design of any future development proposals so that they preserve or enhance the area and acknowledge its distinctiveness. Conservation character appraisals are the first step in getting an area designated. It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in ways that maintain and strengthen an area's special qualities.

2. Background and Scope

For nearly fifty years the Old Village of Braunstone has suffered from a 'split personality' with the Leicester City Council administered North side of Braunstone Lane protected by a Conservation order and the Leicestershire County Council side left without any similar provision.

On 15th September 1972, Braunstone Parish Councillor J.K. Clarke and a prominent local historian, proposed that the Parish Council should ask the Minister of the Environment for a Preservation Order with a designated area "*On both side of Braunstone Lane between Shakespeare Drive and Braunstone Avenue to Evelyn Road, including Cressida Place and Roadside Spinney at junction of Woodshawe Rise and Braunstone Lane*".

The Minister's response was that he only held 'reserve powers' and that the initiative had to be taken by the local authority concerned.



Following approval by the Parish Council and Blaby Rural District Council, application was made to the two authorities concerned, Leicestershire County Council and the Leicester Corporation.

The Leicester Mercury (2nd November 1973) reported a packed meeting of Villagers at Ravenhurst Junior School, was informed by a Ministry Official that the plan for the north side of Braunstone Lane was being sent to the City Council for final approval. This was followed by an announcement that Leicestershire County Council had declined to make a conservation order in respect of Braunstone land in the County area, "***because it is not considered of sufficient architectural merit to warrant preservation***".

A new Local Government Act 1974 which resulted in the amalgamation of Leicester and Leicestershire Councils, came into force on the 1st April 1974. It is highly

significant that Leicester City Council gave approval to a Braunstone Conservation Order on 29.1.1974, only two months before this April date

The result was that the area North of Braunstone Lane from the Braunstone Lane and Braunstone Avenue junction to Woodshawe Rise was given heritage preservation.

The Leicestershire County Council decision created a legacy of a divided Old Village that has persisted to this day. The approval of the provision of a Conservation area on the South side of Braunstone Lane would have a unifying effect on the community and provide much needed protection to heritage buildings, the environment and safeguard its distinctiveness.

This designation if approved by Blaby District Council, will support the special interest of the area via spatial and character analysis, historical development and important features which will prevent the visual impact being destroyed.

The scope and arrangement of this document is based on the guidance issued by English Heritage: Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, published in March 2011.

3. Planning Policy Framework

The Civic Amenities Act (1967) introduced the concept of conservation areas after several cases nationwide of historic buildings and locations which were replaced by new roads and house/office buildings, causing local vociferous objections.

The current legislation maintains and improves the 1967 act, as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Act places duties on local planning authorities:

- To identify those parts of their area that are of special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas;
- To review past designations from time to time;
- To prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas;
- To pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas when determining planning applications for sites within such areas.

Government policy is provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It requires the significance of heritage assets – both its historic buildings and historic areas – to be understood by local authorities and by those who propose change. Changes that cause harm to significance will only be permitted where the harm is outweighed by public benefits.

Further guidance on the use of the NPPF is provided in the National Planning Practice Guidance and in guidance published by Historic England.

4. Summary of Special Interest.



Above photographs from Leicester City's 2021 Draft Character Assessment

The City's existing conservation area contains three significant items, the unique group of estate cottages, 1-9 Main Street and the group of cottages called Cressida Court both designed by Butterfield in the 1860's and, of course St Peter's Church, the oldest building in Braunstone.

Meanwhile on the Blaby District Council's side of Main Street (Now Braunstone Lane) there are at least 5 dwellings dated to the 17th Century, all originally timber framed, three of these are Grade II listed buildings providing some sort of protection but their settings are not.

Up until the 1930's the Main Street had no kerb, but the carriageway was bounded by lateral mounds (Bunds) some of which still exist today opposite the old village shop.

The Ashleigh Farm building, now "The Shakespeare" a private dwelling, has a distinctive diamond shaped dovecote brickwork holes in a gable end. This shape was copied in dark brick ends when the Butterfield houses were constructed opposite. Many artist paintings, in the 1800's have noted this feature in their paintings and sketches.

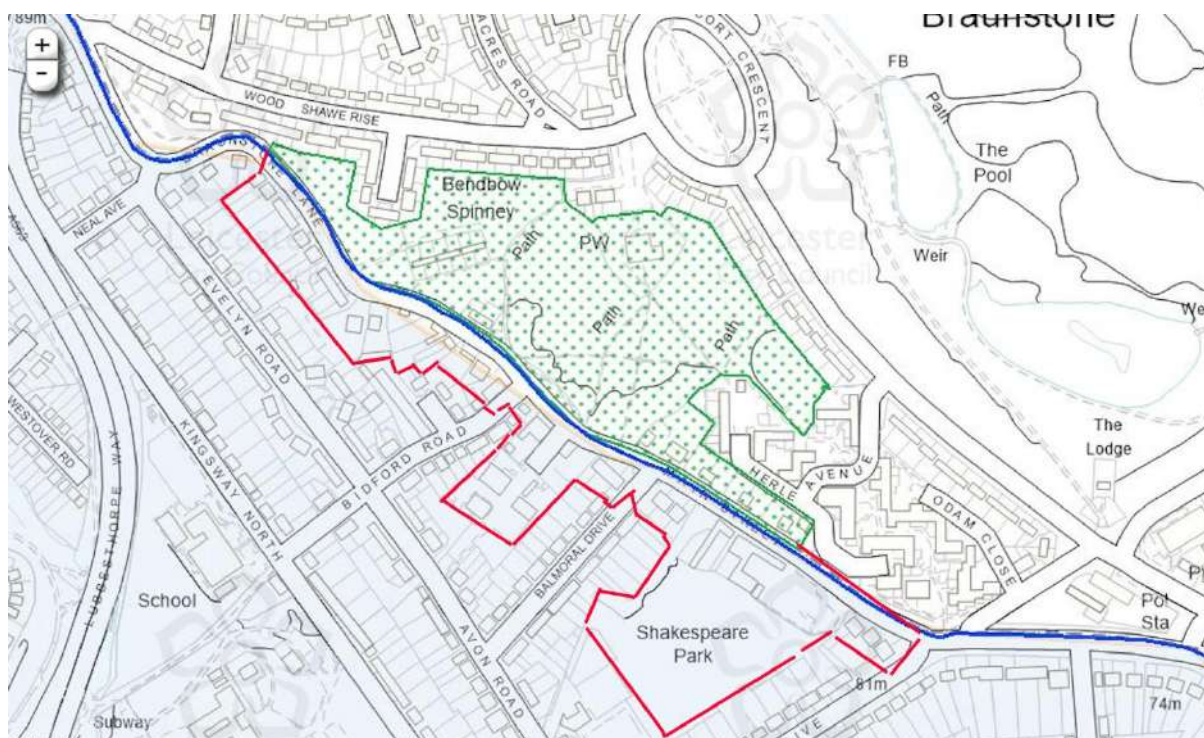


Many of the old existing chimney stacks have a distinctive construction and again reflected in the artist paintings and sketches.



5. Location and Setting

This proposed conservation area will join and fully compliment the Leicester City's conservation area.



The green shaded area is the Leicester City's existing conservation area, and the red line and City/County Boundary is the proposed area, approximately 3.4 hectares.

The existing and proposed Conservation Area is located south-west of the city centre, approximately 2.25 miles from the Memorial Clock Tower.

Historically, it formed part of the larger development of Braunstone, initially located outside of the city's boundaries. In 1935 part of Braunstone was incorporated into Leicester, with the exception of the south-west of the original core medieval 'village' settlement, now within the Blaby District Council. The area was historically associated with the sizeable Braunstone Park and Braunstone Hall, located to the immediate north-east, albeit now physically divided by modern development, to the south-east, south-west and immediate north, the area is bounded by mainly post-war housing estates.

6. Historic Development

The settlement of Braunstone is most likely Saxon in origin, established around the late 8th or early 9th century AD, as a 'daughter' settlement of Glenfield. It was first mentioned in the Domesday Survey, where it was referred to as Brantestone meaning the place where Brant settled. It comprised eight households and was worth 60 shillings. The contemporary tenant in chief at the time was Hugh de Grandmesnil, a great landowner in England. The presence of socmen indicates that Scandinavians settled in the village.

The village sat on the edge of what was once the ancient Leicester Forest, extending to the north and west of the Conservation Area. Timber from the area was a valuable resource, and the primary construction material for the local building stock. However, woodlands were gradually converted to pastures, with the Leicester Forest fully enclosed by 1628. Benbow and Highway Spinney remains the only surviving remnant of this former natural asset.

From the 13th to the 16th century the Harcourt, or Horecut, family held an over-riding interest in the estate. A survey taken in 1299 documented 24 households in the village, then centred around the open land to the immediate south of St Peter's Church, now Church Fields, which has yielded archaeological evidence of an early medieval settlement site. A Manor House, first mentioned in documentary sources the same year, and defined as "*the capital messuage with herbage and fruit garden*" is thought to have originally stood between the Church and Braunstone Lane. It was demolished around the 16th century. Around the turn of the 17th century, a new Manor House was built by Henry Hastings on Coalpit Lane, now Braunstone Lane, in close proximity to the Old Hall Farm, now under the area of Bowder House.

What is now the Church of St Peter was purpose-built as a private chapel for The Lord of the Manor and referred to as the Chapel of Ease for the Manor and Parish of Glenfield. The close physical connection of the ecclesiastical facility to the Manor House physically demonstrated its 'private' function.

As you approach the village from the junction of Braunstone Lane and Shakespeare Drive, the first distinctive building is a former farm house dating from 1655 and appears to have been built, under instruction, by James Winstanley, Lord of the Manor of Braunstone as an investment,

The Winstanley Papers in the Record Office reveal that it was "*all that new built messuage with yard backside and homestead*" which was leased in 1656 to Henry Freeman and Edward Andrew with "*Little Meere Close (excepting the Cony Burrows and Stock of conies in the field) and also the little Close adjoining The Hades, and also Little Grove Close and Masons Close....for the term of 3 years at an annual rent of £68*"



Photo 1 Ashleigh Farm Around 1900

From the late 19th Century and the following Century, it was known as Ashleigh Farm and continued to be known by that name after the Manorial Estate was acquired by Leicester Corporation in 1924/5.



Photo 2 Ashleigh Farm 1953 A sympathetic upgrade to form Everard's Shakespeare Inn

It was first Grade II listed in 1952 (updated in 1987) and in 1952-3 it was purchased by Everards Breweries and renamed as the Shakespeare Inn. During their ownership it escaped near destruction by two separate fires and was then sold in 2015 to Paul Pender & Son, Funeral Directors. It has since been sensitively restored to a high standard, retaining all the original features, and is a prominent example of a proud heritage building to passing traffic along Braunstone Lane.

Another building that deserves mention is the barn building used by the 4th Leicester Scout Group adjacent to Shakespeare House. The appearance and construction of the building is very similar in appearance and age to one of the barns in the old farmyard behind Manor Farm. The building is associated with a now demolished (1966) thatched farm building. This barn is also a candidate for protection by a conservation order.

Opposite are the 1860's Butterfield estate houses mentioned above and in the Leicester City's conservation document.



Photo 3 1974 Estate Cottages Main Street (Butterfield Design)

The next Grade II 1987 listed building is Manor Farm which dates from 1653 and was occupied by Walter Parsons Yeoman and Grazier. He died in 1697 and it remained in the Parsons family until the death of his widow in 1711.



Photo 4 2021 Manor Farm

It continued as a working farm into the late 20th Century during which time the main dwelling and farmyard underwent some change. Several sketches made in the early 1800's show annexes to the main house and outbuildings that were later moved or modified without affecting the integrity of the Manor Farm and former farmyard which still contains two early 19th century barns which are covered under the Grade II listed building's curtilage.

The character of Manor Farm is enhanced by its position on Braunstone Lane directly across from the traditional pathway leading across Church Field to St Peter's Church. It's frontage housed one of the two village pumps.

Mains water was not laid on in Old Braunstone until 1927. Until then the villagers relied on the Pump for drinking water and used the nearby Well for washing water

but after 1927, the Pump water was condemned as unfit to drink and it ceased to be maintained and became overgrown with weeds and grass

Manor Farm has been featured in numberless paintings, photographs, postcards through the years, including artists such as C.J Adams, George S. Ramsay. William Knight, Fred Dearden and many others..



Photo 5 1890-1900 Manor Farm

Just across the road junction of the modern Bideford Close is a Grade II listed survivor of the Village Shop which is the remaining half of a 17th Century Cottage and whose upper section still retains the original timber framework. It was brutally treated following the construction of Bideford Road, overshadowed by the addition of a 1960's modern house. A visible example of a building that lacked the protection that a Conservation Order would have afforded it from such unthinking vandalism.



Photo 6 1974 view of the Village Shop now linked with the 1966 dwelling

As Braunstone Lane bends towards the northwest there are two more examples of 17th Century farm buildings in April Cottage and Holly Tree Cottage. To the southwest of April Cottage there is a dwelling which is known by the owner as the Cowsheds which could have been part of a farm complex. April Cottage and Holly Tree Cottage are not listed because they have both been modified on the external faces but do retain timber framing on the inside, similar in style and construction as Manor Farm.

All three deserve protection as they combined with Cressida Court opposite, form the northern portal of the early village.



Photo 72017 April and Holy Tree Cottages

7. Special Architectural Features

The main impact is of two major construction methods, the Leicester City part is dominated by the red brick, dormer style windows to the upper floor and tiled roof of the Butterfield estate houses. Whilst on the Blaby District side the main visual impact is the timber framed slated roofs of Holly Tree Cottage, April Cottage, Village Shop, Manor Farm and the thatched building with dormer (Eyebrow) windows of the Shakespeare. All the walls of which are now infilled with various styles of brickwork. It is also notable that the Manor Farm and Shakespeare are the only buildings with cellars.

The front garden stone wall of Manor Farm has the “shadow” in its infill of the first Victorian wall type letterbox in the village.

Several of the buildings, now sadly demolished, had the same style chimney stacks as depicted in the various paintings/drawings of the artists mentioned above. Fortunately, two examples remain at Manor Farm and the single stack at the “Cowsheds” next to April Cottage.

The buildings erected during the 19th and 20th centuries along the Blaby DC side of Braunstone Lane tended to acknowledge the style of the estate cottages opposite with one major exception, the construction of Bideford Road in the early 1960's. The dwellings, flats and shops paid no heed to the then existing village setting.



Village Shop Setting in

2021

and

1930

8. Building Materials

Some of the older buildings mentioned show evidence of earlier roof covering of some sort of thatch which in the 18th to 19th centuries has been replaced with Swithland or Welsh slates. The later 20th century buildings have had either slates or tiled roofs.

Brickwork has various types from the narrow bricks of the 16th & 17th centuries to the modern styles of today. In general, the bricks have been of red clay but the 1960's have used a different lighter buff clay.

Cruck frame timber construction can be seen in all the older buildings mentioned which would have had a wattle and daub infill when built but replaced later with the more insulation efficient brickwork, the introduction of brickwork led to a local characteristic use of an innovative herringbone design.

9. Open Spaces

There is only one public park on the Blaby side of Braunstone Lane, Shakespeare Park. The grassed area of the park still retains evidence of the original field

boundaries worked by the various owners of Ashleigh Farm. The Park was given to the local council by Everards Brewery after the conversion of Ashleigh Farm to The Shakespeare Inn in the 1950's/60's

10. Ancient Ways and footpaths.

A 1682 Sketch Map of Braunstone shows an ancient way connecting St Peter's Church to the Chapel at Lubbesthorpe. It was probably drawn up by the Parish Surveyor to define Parish Boundaries and includes the term 'perambulation', usually linked to Rogation Sunday events.



Photo 8 1682 Sketch Map. One of the oldest surviving map of Aylestone and Braunstone

The track of that ancient 'Way' has survived as a designated footpath that starts on Braunstone Lane between the 'Scout building and a private property and can be traced through Shakespeare Park and from Avon Road, via a footpath stretch on to the former bridle path through Mossdale Meadows. Onwards across Lubbesthorpe Way and a re-route zigzag through the Meridian Industrial Estate to 'White Road', ending at Abbey Farm.

All the Footpath sections are part of our heritage and should be signposted as such, especially the initial section at Braunstone Lane which would fall within the proposed Conservation Area.

11. Street Furniture and Lighting

There was no street lighting on Main Street until the early 20th century with small electric lamp posts. In the mid 1920's Braunstone village got its first mains water and gas supplies. However, the village pump was still used up to the 1930's.

The Victorian wall letter box at Manor Farm was replaced in 1922 by a "normal" round street letter box sited outside the Village Shop which became the village Post Office. Between the two world wars many changes were made to Main Street, new sewers, and drains were installed but the vista of the buildings remained unchanged.

12. Negative Factors

The most significant negative factor of the village scene has been the area around the junction of Main Street with Bideford Road.



Modern contemporary street furniture, like lamp posts, advertising boards and signage official and unofficial, detract the setting of the heritage assets.

The increase in road traffic has highlighted the narrow footpaths on the city side of Main Street, this coupled with the bends has made it hazardous to cross over from one side to the other.

13. Capacity for Change

This proposed area in addition to the existing Leicester City Braunstone Conservation Area has escaped any large-scale redevelopment since the construction of the Butterfield designed estate cottages in the 19th century and the 1960's Bideford Road junction. However, the overall view along Main Street is dominated by the designated heritage assets. Although expensive undeveloped areas survive within both areas, Bendbow Spinney and Church Fields in the City part and the farmyard of Manor Farm in Blaby's part. These areas are of historic,

archaeological and ecological importance. Thus, there is limited scope for new development.

Change must not come at the expense of degrading the character and scale that makes the area special, and alterations to properties need to be sympathetic to their context. Any new development should aim to preserve or enhance the character and street scene of the locality, be compatible with the existing building stock, the local townscape and provide opportunities for further archaeological investigation

14. Local Consultation

This draft Character Appraisal document will be published for public consultation. The final version will be produced with the benefit of the comments received during that consultation.

15. Management Proposals

The Management Plan, prepared by Blaby District Council will set out proposals and actions to preserve and enhance the special character of this joint conservation area. Blaby District Council are required by law to review/assess their conservation areas on a regular basis.

16. Blaby District Conservation Areas

Currently Blaby District Council has 11 conservation Areas:

Conservation Area	Date Designated	Reviewed
Aston Flamville	9 th April 1976	No
Blaby	22 nd October 1976	No
Cosby	15 th August 1972	No
Countesthorpe	14 th June 2002	No
Croft	29 th September 2016	No
Enderby	20 th May 2004	No
Glenfield	22 nd July 2014	No
Grand Union Canal	2 nd October 2000	No
Kirby Fields	2 nd October 1990	No
Narborough	2 nd August 2002	No
Wigston Parva	9 th April 1976	No

17. Leicester City's Draft Character Assessment

It is very important that the whole of the Braunstone Village Core is subject to a comprehensive assessment to enable councillors to come to a proper united decision with Leicester City Council.

The latest Leicester City's draft character assessment is shown in the Appendix and should be consulted when making the decision on this designation.

18. Contacts

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