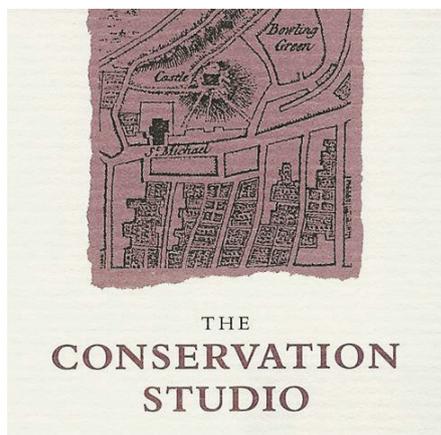




OLD KNEBWORTH

CONSERVATION AREA: CHARACTER STATEMENT 27 SEPTEMBER 2011

Old Knebworth Conservation Area was designated on 6 October 1969 and first amended on 5 July 1990. This document forms part of a comprehensive review for Old Knebworth and should be read in conjunction with the conservation area map. A register of Buildings of Local Interest for Knebworth Parish also exists and was adopted on 8 April 2008.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Old Knebworth Conservation Area was designated on 6th October 1969 and first amended on 5th July 1990. This document assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area. Areas where improvement opportunities exist are also identified.



Knebworth House



Manor Gardens Cottage, Park Lane

2 SUMMARY

The special interest that justifies designation of the Old Knebworth Conservation Area derives from a number of architectural, historic and environmental factors, including:

- Small settlement, with Saxon origins, comprising large country house and grounds, including parish church within its parkland; Old Knebworth village; and the tiny hamlet of Nup End;
- Knebworth House (grade II*) and part of a grade II* registered park and gardens (landscaped parkland, woodland and garden remodelled by Lutyens in 1908);
- Parish Church of St Mary & St Thomas of Canterbury (grade I);
- Linear village settlement with buildings well set back from the thoroughfare;
- An area containing many buildings with architectural and historic quality, 27 of which are listed (one grade I, one grade II*, 25 grade II), 4 are Buildings of Local Interest and a number of other buildings are considered to make a positive contribution to the area's historic character and appearance;
- Good examples of building from the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries;
- Individual trees, tree groups and woods;
- Wide grass verges and three village 'greens';
- Network of public footpaths link the village to surrounding settlements;
- Nup End, a tiny historic settlement containing four listed buildings around one of the 'greens';
- Prevalent use of timber framing, local red brick, clay tile and weatherboarding.

3 LOCATION AND SETTING

Location, landscape setting and geology

The historic village of Old Knebworth is separated from Knebworth Village by the A1 (M) but a road over the motorway maintains close connection between both settlements. Old Knebworth lies 3km south-west of the centre of Stevenage and 15km north west of the county town of Hertford. London is only 40 km away.

Geologically, Knebworth lies on chalk with flints. Over most of the parish the chalk is covered with clay with flints deposited by glacial action. The flints vary in size and have been used as a building material, most notably in the walls of the former school where it is used with brick quoins. A band of clay has been used for brick making - an estate map of 1731 shows the positions of brick kilns in Knebworth Park. The conservation area includes the village of Old Knebworth, Knebworth House & gardens, the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury, part of the historic Knebworth Park and Nup End (excluding most of the Nup End Business Park).

In 2005, The Hertfordshire Gardens Trust (2005) published 'A History of Knebworth's Parks' in which the component parts are illustrated. The conservation area includes The Little Park (medieval), part of the 17th century park and the grounds of Park Gate House.

The Little Park covers an area, which today, is formed by a significant part of what is currently known as Jubilee Park and a wooded area to the north-east. Jubilee Park is an important and integral part of the village's character and together with the wooded area, form a landscape link between the important building group in The Park and the village.

The present day Knebworth Park is a grade II* registered park and gardens and that part to the north and west of the House and situated beyond the conservation area boundary contributes positively to the setting of the conservation area as do the open agricultural fields to the south and east. Avenues and other trees make a significant and positive contribution to the setting of the conservation area. Other trees and landscape areas within the conservation area are mentioned later on in this appraisal.



Important View 5 – North-east into the Park from Park Lane



Looking south to Knebworth House from the western edge of Knebworth Park

Old Knebworth Conservation Area, the Registered Park and Gardens and Listed Buildings are all Designated Heritage Assets (PPS5 : Planning for the Historic Environment). The impact of any planning proposal on any Designated Heritage Asset and indeed any Non-designated Heritage Asset will be a material consideration that should be assessed against relevant policies in PPS5.

4 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

History of the conservation area

There is evidence of habitation in the Bronze Age, although little to support any Roman occupation. A small Saxon community may have been started at Knebworth between the 5th and 7th centuries.

The first written evidence of occupation is in the Domesday Book when the settlement was called 'Chenepworde', meaning the farm belonging to Cnebba. Various families held the manor from 1346 until 1492 when Thomas Bourghchier sold the reversion to Robert Lytton. Knebworth House and its grounds have been the home of the Lytton family ever since. Its history is well documented elsewhere.



Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury *Mulberry Cottages by Sir Edwin Lutyens*

The Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury stands in Knebworth Park and archaeological investigations have identified traces of an early settlement between the church and house, believed to have been abandoned when emparkment took place in c. 1300. It is thought that there was probably a church on the site before the present one was built in the mid 12th century.

As a result of emparkment, the village lies outside the boundary of Knebworth House's formal parkland, mostly on the east side of Park Lane. The village, which remains small, is remarkable for containing good examples of building from the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries including both vernacular cottages built with local expertise and local building materials, e.g. Crom Cottage, and architect designed houses such as Knebworth House (with its fantasy Gothic appearance designed by H E Kendall) and Mulberry Cottages (designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, a notable 20th century architect).

With the decline in agriculture in the 20th century, the village has lost its working farms and is now primarily residential. Nup End Farm is now mainly a Business Centre with the house and adjacent outbuilding in the conservation area, but much of the farmyard is now excluded. To the east of Old Knebworth lies Knebworth Village which grew amidst former farmland in the late 19th century as a result of the proximity of the Great North Road and the opening of a railway station in 1884.

Development of street pattern

The first maps of the area appeared in the 18th century. Andrews and Drury's Map of 1766 identifies by name: 'Mrs Lytton Knebworth & Place' as well as 'Knebworth Green' and 'Nape End'. The Andrews and Drury map also shows what was probably the earliest entrance to Knebworth House and Park leading from Park Gate House northwards.

Today's road layout is very similar to that illustrated on the 18th century map. 'Knebworth Green' was then a much larger space, now encroached upon by the Victorian school thereby reducing the original green to today's small triangular grassed area.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey (O.S.) map of 1884 shows the village as a small linear settlement of a few buildings dispersed unevenly on the east side of Park Lane between the school and the almshouses. Only Manor House and a complex of buildings at Manor Farm (formerly Home Farm) were on the west side. Two barns, previously located at Manor Farm were relocated within Knebworth Park in the 1970's; one was dismantled whilst the other was physically moved. Subsequently, a remaining barn and the stables at Manor Farm were converted to residential and additional barn-like dwellings were erected to form the development known as 'Manor Farm Stables'. Further development of the west side of Park Lane took place in Queen Victoria's jubilee year (1897) when Jubilee Lodges were built on either side of a new eastern entrance to the Park.

Small scale infill continued in the first decades of the 20th century, including cottages designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, since when there was little expansion of the village until the last quarter of the 20th century when Manor Farm was redeveloped and properties at The Green were built. Both developments contrast with the historic linear form of the village and are distinctly different both in terms of materials used, building orientation and overall character of the development. The Green makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area in its own right. The layout of Manor Farm Stables reflects the farm group that previously occupied the site and whilst making a positive contribution to the conservation area, exceptional circumstances will need to be fully justified to allow further developments that contrast with the village's historic, predominantly linear street pattern.

Historic development of Knebworth Park and Gardens

A park has existed at Knebworth since at least the 14th century. The gardens and those parts of the park included in the conservation area are referred to in Section 3 of this Statement.



Andrews and Drury's Map of 1766

The Park remained largely unaltered until the 1850s when Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton laid out formal gardens with ornate flower beds, fountains, statues and shrubbery walks. The gardens were widely featured in the horticultural press of the mid to late 19th century. In the 1890s an extension to the park to the north-east was created incorporating former farmland, this being part of the works during the formation of the north-east drive and North Lodge (outside of the conservation area). In 1908 Sir Edwin Lutyens simplified the garden design. A herb garden designed for Knebworth by Gertrude Jekyll in 1907 was laid out in 1982.



O.S Second Edition 1898

5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Relationship of buildings to spaces

On plan, the initial perception may be that the conservation area has a very spacious character and this is true of the northern part of the conservation area where Knebworth House and the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury stand in open parkland, albeit wooded to the south east. Both buildings are surrounded by a formally enclosed area. Knebworth House is set amidst a formal garden and lawns enclosed by walls in the Tudor style of the house on the east side and a wall and haha on the west side. The Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury is surrounded by a graveyard bounded by a fence. Beyond these boundaries stretches the open space of Knebworth Park.

The character of the village is different in that whilst the density of development is low, the soft landscaped edges to the highway restrict more open views. However, at various points when travelling through the conservation area, where buildings, trees and hedgerows do not curtail the view, more open views of the open countryside are realised.

When entering Old Knebworth from the north along Old Knebworth Lane, the lane turns sharply to the west. At this point stands a group of buildings comprising two listed buildings, a Building of Local Interest and two positive buildings. It is the weatherboarded grade II barns at Glebe House and the adjacent flint and brick boundary wall that mark this entrance into the conservation area. There is a distinct lack of openness at this point.



Brick gables of part of the Manor Farm Stables development



Wide grass verge at the centre of the village

The southern part of the conservation area is characterised by two storey buildings, mostly dwellings, well set back from the road in plots of land that stretch back to field boundaries. Development fronts the thoroughfare and is primarily on the east side of Park Lane where the varying width of the grass verge and the absence of a strong building line attests to the haphazard growth of the village and is one of the defining features of the conservation area. Plot widths vary according to building type with the most prestigious houses standing in large plots.

With the exception of Lytton Almshouses and Nos. 1-4 Mulberry Cottages, dwellings are detached or semi-detached and the conservation area has a low density.

Front boundaries are usually formed by hedges or other greenery although modern timber vertical close-boarded fences are becoming more common. Whilst close-boarded fences may provide more privacy, mature hedges of native species may, in some cases, provide more security. The loss of greenery in the conservation area is regrettable and the retention of existing hedgerows forming front boundaries to residential properties is positively encouraged. The frontage brick walls of the Manor Farm Stables development contrasts with the predominantly verdant character of Park Lane.

6 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Present character: activities and uses

The conservation area can be divided into three areas of distinct character: that part of Knebworth Park that includes Knebworth House and the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury; the core of the village on either side of Park Lane and which also includes that part of Knebworth Park known as Jubilee Park; and Nup End, a hamlet at the southern end of the conservation area which lies within Codicote parish. Apart from the close relationship between Knebworth House, the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury and the Park, visual connection between each distinct area is limited or indeed non-existent.

Buildings in the conservation area today are almost exclusively in residential use, the only obvious exceptions being the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury, The Lytton Arms public house and a local radio station which broadcasts from the old pump house (which used to provide water for the whole village). The former school, post office and smithy are now converted to dwellings.



The Lytton Arms



Traffic calming in Park Lane

Knebworth House and its grounds are a popular summer visitor attraction that includes a festival site and music venue, adventure playground and miniature railway. Access to the house and grounds is from the north via a spur off the A1 (M) junction and the thousands of annual visitors to the site do not disturb the tranquility of the residential village.

The immediate environs of Knebworth House include Edwardian formal gardens with sunken lawn, rose gardens, pets' cemetery and avenues of limes as well as a maze and a walled kitchen garden. From here one can walk through the seven acre 'Wilderness Garden', an area of mature woodland within which is an assortment of life size dinosaur sculptures.

The village has a generally quiet atmosphere disturbed only by traffic. Traffic calming measures attempt to reduce and control the speed of traffic through the village by narrowing the road. There is a pavement on one or both sides of the road through the village and pedestrian access to surrounding countryside is made easy by a number of public footpaths.

Nup End is a tiny hamlet of less than a dozen houses separated from the main settlement of Old Knebworth by a green wedge of field and parkland. It has an even quieter and more rural atmosphere than Old Knebworth except for the incongruous presence of much-altered buildings at Nup End Business Park which is consequently now outside the conservation area. In a similar way to the barns at Glebe House to the north, the red brick, single-storey building to the south west of Nup End Farmhouse marks the southern entrance into the conservation area.

Architectural and historic character

The two most architecturally significant historic buildings in the conservation area are Knebworth House (grade II*) and the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury (grade I). Knebworth House was described in 1700 as ‘a large pile of brick with a fair quadrangle in the middle of it’. This house remained unaltered until (according to the book entitled ‘Knebworth House’) in 1813, ‘Mrs Elizabeth Bulwer Lytton, finding the building ‘old fashioned and too large’, demolished three sides of the quadrangle’. This left the west wing which was transformed as a Tudor-style stuccoed mansion c.1815-1820 by John Biagio Rebecca. The House was modified in a more lavish Tudor style by H E Kendall for Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton soon after in 1843 and included the addition of domes, turrets and gargoyles to create the gothic fantasy house that we see today. Alterations including a library were carried out by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1907.



St Mary's churchyard



Knebworth estate offices

In the vicinity of the house are ancillary buildings, some of which are listed, such as a Tudor style early 19th century stable block (now the estate office) and walled garden, mid 19th century boundary walls, gates and gate piers, a picturesque lodge and an old pump house.

The Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury has a 12th century nave and chancel with a 15th century tower. The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner describes the exterior of the church as “*architecturally insignificant*” but goes on to say that the Lytton Chapel “*contains the most remarkable display of family pride in the country*”. Six tombs in the churchyard are grade II listed including several attributed to Sir Edwin Lutyens.

The country house and its ancillary buildings together with the parish church form an exceptional architectural ensemble that cannot be seen from the village itself but this does not diminish their importance to the built character of Old Knebworth Conservation Area.

Elsewhere in the conservation area are a variety of building types dating from the 17th to the 20th centuries. Of note from the 17th century, and as befits a rural village, are timber-framed barns such as those at Glebe House (grade II) and the Gardeners Lodge (grade II). Timber framing is also to be found in 17th century vernacular cottages and houses in the village notably Crom Cottage, Manor Farm Cottage, Manor Gardens Cottage and Inn Cottage.

In contrast, Manor House and Park Gate House are two prestigious houses built with red brick, an introduction of the 18th century. Few dwellings were built in the village in the 19th century. Instead, the period is marked by buildings with a specific social purpose i.e. almshouses, school, public house. Lytton Almshouses were erected in 1836 by Elizabeth Bulwer Lytton. They are, unusually, built with a yellow gault brick and provided five tenements in a single storey range with gabled projecting centre. Old Knebworth School was erected in 1870 and by 1889 there was room for 81 pupils. The building is constructed with faced flintwork with red brick quoins and a clay tile roof. The Lytton Arms was built c. 1887 before which Inn Cottage, the building next door, was the village's main inn.



Nup End Farm Cottages



Jubilee Lodge East beside War Memorial

A remarkable element of the architectural character of the conservation area is the presence of buildings by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944). Lutyens is considered to be one of the leading British architects of the 20th century and is well known for his designs of English country houses. In 1897 he married Lady Emily Lytton, hence his connection with Knebworth. Nos. 1-4 Mulberry Cottages (1900) and Mulberry Tree Cottage (1910) were designed by Lutyens and nos.188 and 190 Park Lane have also been attributed to him. He also designed a number of items in the Parish Church of St Mary and St Thomas of Canterbury and churchyard and Knebworth House.

Buildings of Local Interest (BLIs) and Positive Buildings

A number of unlisted buildings have been identified as being BLIs or ‘positive’ buildings and these are marked on the accompanying map. The criteria for selecting BLIs is given in the parish-wide Register of Buildings of Local Interest.

The criteria for the selection of ‘positive’ buildings is that they are buildings of townscape merit which are considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provide the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, both BLIs and ‘positive’ buildings contribute to the special interest of the conservation area and both categories of building are regarded as Non-designated Heritage Assets with regard to PPS5 : Planning for the Historic Environment. Policies HE2, HE7 and HE8 of PPS5 are of particular relevance as are paragraphs 15 and 83 of the accompanying Practice Guide.

Prevalent and traditional building materials and the public realm

Whilst the prevalent historic building materials are timber-framing (not always visible externally) and red brick under roofs of plain clay tile, the most common external finishes are weatherboarding and white painted render. This is most apparent at the centre of the village where the weatherboarding and brick of Manor Farm Stables is juxtaposed with the predominance of white render on the opposite side of the road. The white render brings a sense of harmony and unity to the streetscene, which may be harmed should different colours be introduced. In addition, there are some examples of flint with brick dressings (e.g. the former school, barns at Glebe House and some boundary walls).



Window detail at former school, Park Lane



Chimney detail, Jubilee Lodge

Items in the public realm i.e. street furniture, lighting columns and pavements are invariably modern. There are list entries for a mid 19th century cast iron milepost in Nup End (grade II) and the wooden gates and gate posts of King George V Playing Fields (also listed grade II) but works are needed for their repair and reinstatement. Iron estate railings can be found in the hedgerow on the west side of Park Lane north of Park Gate House.

Pavements are dressed in tarmac and have either concrete or stone kerbs. The southern approach to the village through Nup End has a very rural character due to hedgerows, overhanging trees and eccentric curves in the road which narrows to a

pinchpoint just where the built environment of the village begins at Mulberry Tree Cottages. The historic character between The Lytton Arms and Jubilee Lodges is denoted by a wider, straighter section of road, however, traffic calming measures more recently introduced have narrowed the road which is at variance with the street and different from the narrow lanes when approaching from Nup End and Old Knebworth Lane, the latter being much more characteristic of a historic rural village.

Open spaces, green areas and trees

To the south east of the House lie formal gardens and pleasure grounds which include a sunken lawn, rose garden, pets' cemetery, Victorian maze (re-instated 1995), wildflower meadow, ponds, herbaceous border and wilderness and woodland areas. There are three mounds made from the spoil from the sunken garden, 'Green Hill' provides an excellent viewing point of the House and rose garden. Just south of the House is a rectangular kitchen garden bounded on the north west side by the stable block and service buildings and on the other sides by brick walls.

There are three particular open spaces in Old Knebworth village forming nodal points along the highway through the village: the old village green (now an informal triangular grassed area at the intersection of Park Lane and Old Knebworth Lane on which stands a signpost and a large lime tree); the new 'village green' (a more formal area of mown grass on either side of Park Lane north of The Lytton Arms); and a gravelled area between Jubilee Lodges that includes the war memorial and which marks the start of an avenue of oaks along a little-used eastern entrance to Knebworth Park.



Large trees add to the area's rural character



The new village green

The open space in the vicinity of Jubilee Lodges is complemented by the green open space on the opposite side of the road (shown on the O.S. map of 1884 as the site of a pond). At the southern end of the conservation area, Nup End also has a village green at the meeting of country lanes.

Trees are a particular and important characteristic of the conservation area. Woodland, mature and growing hedgerow trees (e.g. west side of Park Lane), parkland trees and large specimen trees in private gardens are a vital part of the area's character and add to its rural charm. Viewed from the footpaths around the village the houses are sheltered and belittled by surrounding tall trees. Garden hedges and field hedges further enhance the area's rural ambience. In summary, from Glebe House in the north through to Nup End Farmhouse in the south, the 'greens' are linked by lengths of grass verge, hedgerows, trees and well tended

private gardens which, together, make a positive contribution to the verdant appearance of this conservation area. Significant trees or tree groups are marked on the conservation area map. Lack of a specific reference does not imply that a tree or group is not of value.

Opportunities for enhancement

Whilst the general condition of the conservation area is good, there are a number of buildings or other elements which detract from the area's special character. These opportunities for enhancement are as follows:

- Lytton Almshouses and the associated front boundary walls;
- The reflective plastic 'bollards' in front of the War Memorial, though presumably necessary for road safety reasons, spoil the memorial's settings and intrude upon picturesque views of the memorial and adjacent cottages;
- Close-boarded timber fences are out of character with the prevalent 'green' means of enclosure of front gardens whilst the high evergreen hedges (e.g. leylandii) are considered to be an inappropriate substitute for native hedgerow species;
- Traffic calming measures intrude upon the otherwise historic streetscene;
- Signage and street furniture at Nup End Green;
- There are four listed buildings included in North Hertfordshire District Council's Register of Listed Buildings at Risk: Knebworth House and three tombstones in the churchyard.



Signage and street furniture at Nup End Green



Lytton Almshouses and the associated front boundary walls

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PLANNING GUIDANCE - APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION AND PROCESS

3 November 2007	Exhibition launch to 1st round of Public Consultation
14 December 2007	End of 1st round of public consultation
20 February 2008	Southern Rural Committee
3 April 2008	Southern Rural Committee
8 April 2008	Cabinet Meeting
22 January 2009	Southern Rural Committee
4 February 2011	Start of 2nd round of public consultation (no exhibition)
4 March 2011	End of 2nd round of public consultation
24 March 2011	Southern Rural Committee
27 September 2011	Cabinet Meeting

In addition, there was local publicity, entry on the District Council's website and letters were sent to various stakeholders, details of which are available from the address below.



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