

# ROSS-ON-WYE CHARACTER AREA SURVEY

<b>The Character Area surveyed (its number):</b>	8
<b>The survey team included:</b>	Melvin Reynolds
<b>Date of survey:</b>	2016-12-22

- This survey is designed to help you examine and record key aspects of the character of one part of the built environment of Ross – a 'Character Area'.
- The evidence and understanding provided by your work will enable the distinctive local character of the various areas of Ross to be retained, perhaps enhanced.
- It will also help to ensure that the designs of any new developments, conversions etc. respect and enhance that character.
- The Character Areas we are suggesting are all very much 'first stab', done mainly to make the tasks easily manageable for you in a short time (we hope!).
- Each basic area may be broadly right but that doesn't mean they are all different. Nor does it mean that the boundaries are right.
- Live with all that for now and we'll come back to you later with how it all fits together.

## **We are giving you:**

- *This introduction and form.*
- *A map of all the Character Areas, including 'yours'.*
- *A map of your specific Area.*

## **Getting the survey done:**

- *Even if you (think you) know the area, walk up and down, look all around and only then start filling in the form.*
- *For most of the form just add notes in boxes in response to the questions. There are some hints in brackets.*
- *Don't get too hung up on our terms, feel free to add others or 'not sure' if that helps.*
- *As you go round, take some photos (maybe 10 or so) of the Character Area to show what seems to be typical of the character of that area (and any oddities or really interesting things).*
- *If possible please mark on the map wherever you take any photos from, and in what direction (use a dot and a little arrow).*

## **When you have finished:**

- *Return the completed form and annotated map to school.*
- *We also need your photos so please either:*
  - *Get them into a single folder at school or*
  - *Send them to [jeff@placestudio.com](mailto:jeff@placestudio.com)*

**Thanks a lot: Jeff Bishop: Place Studio**



## General

**1. What's the general pattern of the roads and 'blocks of buildings? If there are a few, can you show the different ones on the map?** (Regular, irregular, straight, curved, small blocks, large blocks, narrow, wide open, contained, spacious etc.)

The road pattern is structured off three ancient routes radiating from the south of the town. The main route, Walford Roa, is, for Ross, reasonably wide, spacious in feel and largely straight with smaller roads accessing infill blocks of development. The smaller roads are for the most part enclosed but, except for Ashfield Crescent, retain a spacious feel. There are one or two striking middle distance views which provide a surprise element. Most minor/infill roads follow old field boundaries.

**2. What's the general mix of buildings?** (All residential, some mixed, commercial, industrial, other? If you can, mark any non-residential uses on the map.)

The buildings are almost entirely residential with just six exceptions; The catholic Church, The Price of Wales pub, Pendeen GP Surgery, The Conservative Club, unidentifiable office use of Green Heys as a company HQ and St. Joseph's Primary School (constructed adjacent to the Convent that formerly occupied Green Heys). There are three extant care homes within the area centred on reuse of former private dwellings.

## Houses

**3. Are they all on one building line or does that vary?** (On pavement, with small front gardens, with large front gardens, well set back etc.?)

There are perceptible but variable building lines. Pre-1920's housing is generally set back from the roads with moderate front gardens, the later developments have smaller front gardens except where infill has created closes with very small front gardens off the original entrance drives. The exceptions are Ashfield Crescent and Palmerston Road where C19 building is close to the road and Eastfield Road where all dwellings are set well back.

**4. Can you guess when all (or different ones) were built?** (Try: medieval, 19<sup>th</sup> century, inter-war -1918-1839, post war - 50s/60s, later 20<sup>th</sup> century - 70s/80s, more recent - 90s to today.)

Just one building pre-dates 1823 - Chevenhall, Walford Road. The main development structure is defined by C19 building with most infill from 1920/30, 1950/60s and 2000/10s

**5. What heights are they?** (All one height on each house or varying per house or in stretches, or are there extensions etc. that are different?)

With three groups of exceptions the buildings are two storeys of generous height under pitched roofs. The C19 houses developed by Thomas Blake tend to have substantial roof rooms and high roofs; there are two C19 buildings with viewing towers, chalet bungalows on Eastfield Road and The Avenue - which also has a 2015 3-storey infill development.

**6. Would you call the houses very small, small, medium-sized, large, very large (or a mixture)?** (Your guess!)

The older houses are generally large or very large with the size generally reducing over time so that the modern infills (with the exception of the 2015 development on The Avenue) being smaller, explicitly, retirement, dwellings.

**7. What are the main building materials used?** *(On walls, roofs, chimneys, windows etc.)*

The C19 buildings are generally of local sandstone and rubble but some are lime rendered for durability - the Thomas Blake developments and The Graig are high quality sandstone masonry - mostly with contrasting limestone quoins. 1920/30s buildings tend to be of Little Mill brick - some with some render or pebbledash. Later developments are generally in fletton brick with some rendered elements. Roofs tend to be of Welsh slate (C19) often adorned with finials, clay or concrete tiles (1920-50s), or more recently slate-look-alikes. Until 2000s all houses have had substantial chimneys.

**8. Are front gardens open or closed in?** *(If open, just grass or bushes etc.? If closed, low walls, high walls, hedges, full of greenery, paved etc.? Well maintained?)*

Until the 2000s infill developments, all houses have had a strong sense of walled or hedged enclosure but with open driveways or modest gates; there's a strong trend to overscale and/or remote control gates (some of which appear to contravene highways requirements) in 2000s developments and in 'improvement' projects. There is a mix of paved areas and soft landscaping in general, with large mature trees and mature shrubs being a strong feature. Maintenance standards have generally declined in the last 20 years, but most premises are superficially well-presented.

**9. Any idea about back gardens (if you can see them)?** *(Big, small, fenced, with walls - low/high, heavily 'greened' or just grass, paving, decking? Well maintained?)*

Until the 2000s infill developments most back gardens were either large or very large and dominated by soft landscaping with mature trees, shrubs and lawns. The recent infill developments have very small gardens consisting of little more than a patio.

**10. What are the parking arrangements?** *(On the street, pull-off spaces, single garages, double garages - some of each? Any way to tell if the garages are actually used for cars - most aren't?)*

With the exception of the multiple-occupancy homes in the northern part of Walford Road and the cottage-style C19 homes in Ashfield Crescent all homes have some off-street parking. Some garages are used for cars, but many cars are parked on driveways. In a few instances the presence of motor homes dominates the street scene either by the bulk on a driveway or by displacement of other vehicles onto the roadway.

**11. Are there major trees in front or back gardens?** *(On their own or in lines? Do those lines of trees go off into the surrounding areas? If so, try to show those on the map.)*

This area of town is, above all others except the churchyard and Prospect, dominated by large mature trees that form part of the distinctive profile of Ross when viewed from a distance. A number of the largest specimens are C19 exotic conifers but are becoming over mature and when these, and others felled, are generally not being replaced.

## **Roads and Public Areas**

**12. What are the roads like?** (*Wide, narrow, about right? Is there on-street parking? Does that limit access/movement? Well maintained?*)

Ashfield Crescent, with Kent & Sussex Avenues are the narrowest roads in the Character Area; but the impression is reinforced in Ashfield Crescent by cars parked outside dwellings, and in Kent & Sussex Avenues by commuters avoiding parking charges. The Avenue & Palmerston Roads are affected by inconsiderate parking of traffic for the nearby schools but, like other most other roads in the area, are otherwise adequately wide. The area has both the best and worst surfacing in town. Walford Road has excessive speeds; Kent Avenue & Eastfield Road are a rat-runs at all times.

**13. Are there always pavements to walk along? Well maintained?**

Pavements are generally reasonable even though with variable surface quality, and overhanging front hedges are a real danger in some places. There are a number of places where the pavement width is inadequate, and corners where low kerbs allow vehicles to overrun the footway dangerously.

**14. Are there other footpaths that link through the area or into other areas?** (*Try to use the map to show where.*)

An underused safe route to schools from Merrivale runs generally E-W and terminates at the junction of Kent Avenue with Walford Road; it is not signed and the surface varies from poor to impassable. At the NE of the area another unmarked path links the dangerous brow of Alton Street (no pavements) to the E-W path. The remains of an ancient (iron age?) track linking Chase Hill Fort passes through and behind properties on the SW edge of the area.

**15. Are there street signs?** (*Lots? Just a few? Necessary? Too many?*)

There are street signs in generally poor repair. There are a number of redundant signs and instances of unnecessary post-planting creating visual clutter. The side roads have an abundance of road name signs; the main roads have none - a cause of confusion for many non-local drivers using sat-nav systems.

**16. Is there street lighting? Is it obtrusive or low key?**

LED luminaires have recently (2015) been fitted to old standards; this has generally resulted in inadequate light distribution for vehicle and pedestrian traffic, though much better for viewing the night sky. With the exception of one small LED luminaire at the northern end of Eastfield Road the footpaths are unlit.

**17. Do you think it is entirely safe here? At night? Would children feel/be safe?**

The main dangers are very high speeds on Walford Road (40 < 70 mph) and to a lesser extent on Eastfield Road. Pavements are unsafe in some places but there is a lights-controlled crossing at the 'Prince of Wales' junction and a patrol for Archenfield Road at Palmerston Road. The unlit (off-road) footpaths are unusable after dark.

## **Now some Broader Judgements!**

**18. Are there any features, additions, oddities (from any covered above or others) that detract from or damage the character of the area?**

In Kent and Sussex Avenues cars dominate the street scene; in The Avenue the overscale glazing and fortress-style automated gates of the (otherwise sensitive) infill development are a visual intrusion into an otherwise elegant road.  
The light-controlled pedestrian crossing is visually intrusive/dominant because of the large amount of hardware involved.  
For pedestrians, the number of redundant scraps of temporary signage are frustrating.

**19. Are there any features, additions, oddities (from any covered above or others) that help to create a clear and positive character for the area?**

There are three distinct sub areas: 1, Kent & Sussex Avenues - where Dean Hill Park is a positive feature; 2, The Avenue and Eastfield Road - with broad verges and where spacious properties face 1950s chalet bungalows - giving an open aspect toward Penyard Hill; and 3, Walford Road with Palmerston Road and Ashfield Crescent - all of which has developed piecemeal around Chevenhall since 1823 - but, with the hedges, trees and some substantial buildings, has a sense of timeless maturity.

**20. If you had to pick just one or a few of all the aspects above that most help to shape the character of the area, what would they be?**

The Dean Hill Park in the north; the broad verges and spacious properties in the east and the substantial Victorian Villas with viewing towers and cupolas, set amongst mature trees and hedges in the west.

**21. Any other comments, things we and the form have missed?**

Almost all development in this area has been speculative - the structure having been defined by some C19 'self-build' of Italianate or romantic villas. Given that, the area is remarkably cohesive - in part because the predominant materials have been relatively locally-sourced. Recent use of unrelieved hard white render with strongly contrasting glazing and/or roof colour strikes a somewhat discordant note; use of chimney-style vents & /or quoins could serve to moderate that fashion into something reflecting the genius loci.

**22. Is this a distinct area? Are the boundaries sensible? Looking at the overall map, should it be combined with others? Should it be sub-divided?**

There are three distinct sub areas:  
1, Kent & Sussex Avenues - which faces onto the different character of Alton Street to the north;  
2, The Avenue and Eastfield Road - which faces onto the different character of 1950s Merrivale to the east; and,  
3, Walford Road with Palmerston Road and Ashfield Crescent - all of which is bounded by the slightly more recent (1900s) streetplan to the west of Archenfield Road.  
However, and despite recurrence of elements of this area's character in other areas, it is difficult to propose a more cohesive area.

**AND THANKS AGAIN!**