

Ask the Character Appraisal volunteers

To be able to understand and protect the special character of a conservation area English Heritage recommends that Character Appraisal studies are carried out. An appraisal of the Suburb is currently being undertaken by the Trust. This appraisal has been done almost entirely by volunteer Suburb residents. We asked some of the volunteers about their experiences.

How did you come to be involved?

I read about the appraisal in the Trust Gazette and volunteered.

I saw the article in Suburb News.

Did anything surprise you as you were doing the observations?

Generally how well maintained the houses were and how relatively few examples of detrimental development there are.

On the plus side, the astounding attention to detail. So many of the houses are truly yet quietly beautiful, handsome and gracefully proportioned yet unshowy and unfussy. It was a

real pleasure to take time to drink it all in. I also like the way some streets and groups of houses give an impression of cohesion and harmony while actually having interesting differences so they don't look too contrived or Lego-land like.

A less positive surprise is the number of 1970s up-and-over or, more bizarrely, sort of faux Georgian-style panelled garage doors in the Suburb.

Did anything change your views about the Suburb?

No, it just reaffirmed my view that its a very special environment that must be looked after. It confirmed the fact that I love the Suburb and that it is worthwhile spending time walking around it. I always notice something new.

What do you think is at greatest risk? What, in your view, are the main things that detract from the Character of the Suburb?

The Suburb is at risk of unseemly development, especially on the fringes,

as well as overdevelopment of the spaces between houses.

I feel that grass verges, especially near corners or in narrow streets are particularly at risk.

Some personal pet hates are: Inappropriate replacement windows (rare in the Suburb) and front doors (quite common), usually from a misplaced desire to make something look fancier or grander.

The single biggest thing that detracts from the character of the Suburb has to be cars, but I don't expect that's going to change. I would love to see it somehow geared a little more in favour of pedestrians and probably cyclists. I am a car driver myself but I think it's a shame that everywhere you go there are endless cars.

What do you think are the main things to celebrate?

The wonderful balance between housing and green spaces; beautiful street trees and hedgerows; the fact

Volunteers at work

