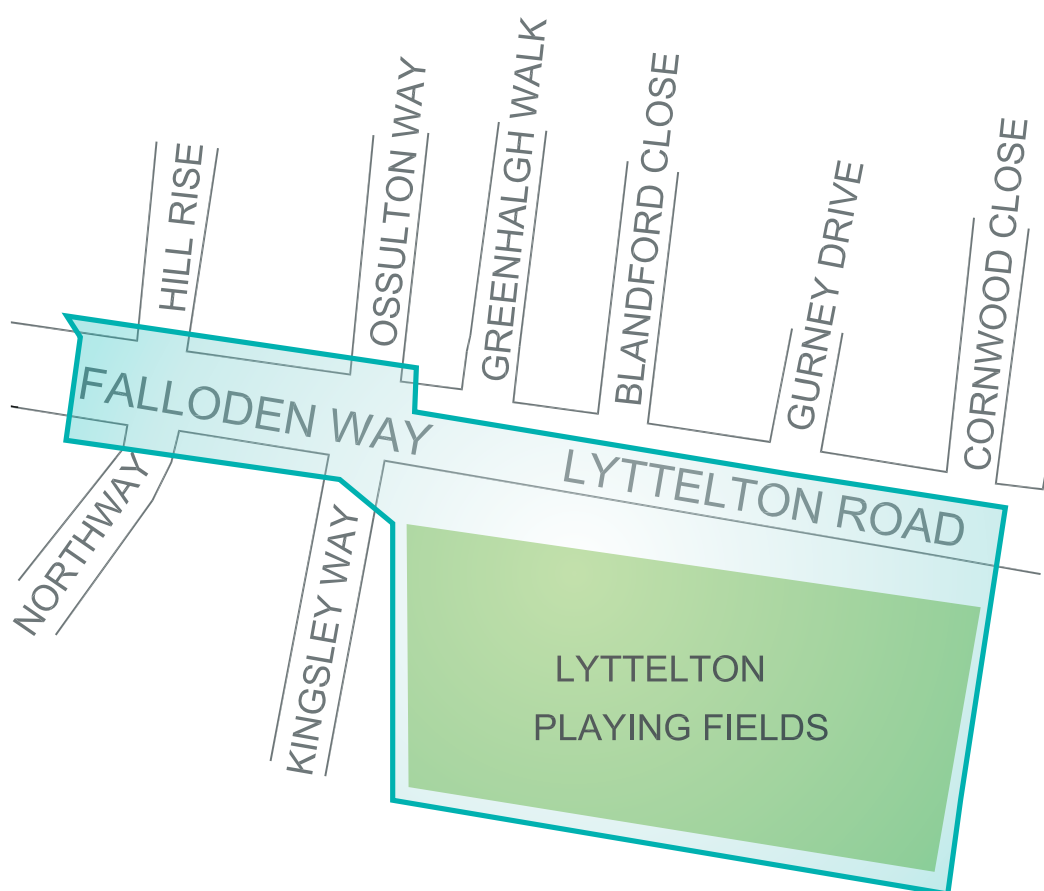


Hampstead Garden Suburb

Market Place and Lyttelton Road – Area 9

Character Appraisal



BARNET
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Map of area		

Character appraisal

Section 1 Background historical and architectural information

1.1 Location and topography

Market Place is a shopping area built on the flat land near to Mutton Brook. It has an east-west axis and extends eastwards to form Lyttelton Road. Behind the flats that line Lyttelton Road lies Lyttelton Playing Fields, 24 acres of open land with the remains of Watery Wood, an ancient woodland. Market Place itself marks the cross roads where Hill Rise to the north and Northway to the south meet the east-west route.

1.2 Development dates

Market Place and Lyttelton Road formed part of Unwin's 1911-12 plan for the 'New Suburb' and survived later post war revisions. However, Lyttelton Road was never intended as a main road and its transformation into an arterial road as part of the Barnet bypass in 1926 -1928 and its designation as the A1 in 1983 irretrievably altered the character of the area. The first block of shops with flats above, which occupies the southwest corner of Market Place, was designed by J.C.S. Soutar and built in 1922. Development appears to have proceeded slowly by Suburb standards with the northwest block by Butler being constructed in 1928, the southeast corner in 1932 and the final corner by Marshall and Tweedy in 1933. Parallel shopping blocks followed on either side of the road between 1933 and 1936.

Along Lyttelton Road itself, three developments of blocks of flats were built, between 1929 and 1936. A dispute between Finchley Urban District Council (UDC) and the Co-partners about whether the Lyttelton Playing Fields were to be exempt from building was settled by a Public Enquiry in 1931 and the lands conveyed to Finchley UDC in 1933. From this time onwards the area was developed and managed by the local authority as a public park, playing fields and open space.

1.3 Originating architect(s) and planners

Soutar and Butler are the most well known architects whose work is represented here. Other architects involved in the developments, such as Marshall and Tweedy, were from practices specialising in the standard designs for London shopping parades and flats in the 1930s.

1.4 Intended purpose of original development

Market Place was intended as a neighbourhood shopping centre serving the daily needs of the houses to the north and the south. The inclusion of a petrol station and garage here (recently demolished and redeveloped) indicated the new focus on the car and the expectation that this area would serve a prosperous middle class nearby. The flats above the shops, and on Lyttelton Road, continued the tradition of mixed housing which had characterised the developments prior to the First World War. Fronting onto the busy main road, they were built for rent and aimed at people of more modest income than the buyers of the larger houses planned on the other side of Lyttelton Playing Fields. Lyttelton Playing Fields were intended as open spaces, part of the provision of recreational and green areas built into the original design of the Suburb.

1.5 Density and nature of the buildings

Apart from the Playing Fields, the shops and flats result in the housing density being one of the highest in the Suburb.

Section 2 Overall character of the area

There is no consistent character to this area. Each of its three component areas has a very different ambiance and faces different challenges.

The dual carriageway of Lyttelton Road dominates Market Place shopping parades. There is heavy traffic at all times and the essential central reservation and safety railings create a barrier that visually emphasises the separation of the two sides of the road ([Photograph 1](#)). The proliferation of road signs, road markings and large scale street lighting mark the arterial nature of the road, absolutely at odds with the quiet residential streets which surround it. This environment has undermined the role of Market Place as a neighbourhood shopping centre. Some local provisions and service shops survive but estate agents and specialist retailers dominate a difficult retail environment. Many of the buildings are in need of maintenance but they remain good examples of 1930s commercial architecture. The 'to let' and 'for sale' signs contribute to the street clutter and run down look of the shopping parades particularly on the northern side of the road. However, in the context of similar commercial centres on main roads, Market Place is relatively successful and its appearance has been improved by recent environmental work including parking bays and tree planting.



Moving eastwards along Lyttelton Road the character changes at the end of the shopping parades. The transition is marked by Heathfield, a seven storey block of flats built in the 1960s. The flats sit on a podium occupied by medical practices. There are wide grass verges and mature, large trees that provide a greener and a more pleasant road environment ([Photograph 2 - see overleaf](#)). Three developments of flats form a barrier between the A1 and the open space and residential streets behind. Here the

atmosphere is much calmer. The flats are set back from the main road on private roads behind trees and hedges which both soften the appearance of the main road and provide a modest reduction in noise



and pollution levels to the flats. The three blocks of Lyttelton Court by Butler are Arts and Crafts-influenced and bring an element of quality to this section of the road.

The flats back onto Lyttelton Playing Fields which are a major recreational resource for the Suburb and the Borough in general. The leisure facilities are generally well maintained and surrounded by established trees. Mutton Brook flows through the park and there are the remains of ancient woodland near the brook. To the west there are views to the

spire of St Jude's and the Free Church dome. The sports pavilion in the park is a strong example of 1930s modernism.

2.1 Principal positive features

Layout and public realm

- the flats along Lyttelton Road provide a barrier between the main road and the parkland behind it
- the stepped-back layout of the blocks on their private access roads provides space and enhances the sweep of the road
- easy pedestrian access to the playing fields and parkland via footpaths from Lyttelton Road and the surrounding streets
- the playing fields and Northway Gardens create a green corridor running behind the shops and flats all the way along Lyttelton Road from Norrice Lea to Henley's Corner
- wide pavements improve the shopping experience, in Market Place, despite the heavy traffic.

Landscape and trees

- broad grass verges and mature trees on Lyttelton Road
- extensive and well kept green open spaces of Lyttelton Playing Fields
- remains of ancient woodland (Watery Wood) in Lyttelton Playing Fields
- new Millennium Wood planted by local residents and the Borough of Barnet.

Building type and design

- the diagonal corners of the Market Place junctions with 'Rothenburg' hipped roofs on projecting turrets and a Dutch gable on the north-east corner
- Lyttelton Court is a particularly good example of Arts and Crafts style flats built on an ambitious scale
- good examples of 1930s commercial designs for North London shopping parades

- the new block of shops, offices and flats on the old garage site at the corner of Kingsley Way fits in well.

Materials and detailing

- decorative brickwork above shops and around doors of shopping parades particularly on the south side of the road
- chimneys and windows form an important aspect in the buildings designed by Butler, for example, the gable end of the south shopping parade overlooking Northway Gardens Putting Green section and the diagonally set chimneys of Lyttelton Court
- individual examples of shop fronts and signage which relate to the architecture of the parade blocks lift the area
- recessed balconies with stone pillars, stone doorcase of main entrance at Lyttelton Court, excellent decorative brickwork throughout the front elevation of Lyttelton Court.

2.2 Principal negative features

Layout and public realm

- heavy traffic, noise and pollution on A1 dual carriageway
- for safety reasons central railings separate the two sides of the shopping area but this undermines its unity and viability
- excess of street furniture on the main road and multiple estate agent signs for single properties adds to street clutter
- proliferation of notices within the parkland area with no uniformity of presentation
- damage from vandalism to the pavilion in Lyttelton Playing Fields and to the boundary hedge and fence of the children's playground.

Building type and design

- the standard shopping parade design needs good maintenance to underpin its modest architectural quality; when neglected, as seen at Market Place, it looks particularly drab and run down
- many shop fronts are of poor quality and inappropriate in design. The detailing and materials bear no relation to the design and materials of the parade in which they are located, for example plastic fascias, lurid neon colours
- Heathfield detracts from the general streetscape by being different in material, architectural style and scale.

Materials and detailing

- there are too many UPVC windows.

Section 3 The different parts of the main area in greater detail

Market Place and Lyttelton Road can be divided into three sections;

- 3.1 Market Place.
- 3.2 The south side of Lyttelton Road.
- 3.3 Lyttelton Playing Fields.

3.1 Market Place

Character and landscape

The character and problems of this location have already been described. The practical obstacles associated with a neighbourhood shopping centre straddling one of the main routes from London to the North of England, are hard to overcome. The necessary safety railings all down the centre of the dual carriageway physically and visually separate the two sides of the shopping centre. Staggered pedestrian crossings leave people waiting on the central reservation for the pedestrian green light to be able to cross. Mature trees, including many in poor condition, were removed and have been replaced by young trees. Parking is limited to a small number of bays in front the shops on each side of the road. The noise and pollution from traffic add to the unfriendly shopping experience. The fact that Market Place has problems as a retail environment has many knock-on effects in terms of poor maintenance, empty properties and visual clutter especially from fly posting. However, some businesses are flourishing and there are new shop fronts that have benefited the visual landscape. There are now cafes at the junctions of Northway and Kingsley Way with Market Place which also serve people using the open spaces of Northway Gardens and Lyttelton Playing Fields.

Architecture

The Market Place junction with Northway is marked by the chamfered ends of the shopping parades, designed to enclose the space. They were built at different times, by different architects and are not



matched. The southwest block was built in 1922, designed by Soutar with continuous shop fronts at street level. The roofline has small 'Rothenburg' hipped roofs over projecting turrets and flat dormer windows in the steep roof ([Photograph 3](#)). This is echoed in the Butler blocks on the northwest and southeast corners whereas the last corner to be built (Marshall

and Tweedie 1935) has a Dutch gable with decorative brickwork (Photograph 4). These gables are continued as a feature along the front façade of the block.



4.



5.

The block on the south side by Butler (Nos. 14-56) is a good example of a shopping parade with decorative brickwork around and above doors and Art Deco metal balconies. No. 14 turns the corner to overlook Northway Gardens and this shaped gable end features a French window onto a balcony. The lintel to the opening is formed from the pantiles laid on the end (Photograph 5). Bute Mews, the service road behind this block is particularly poorly maintained and there are opportunities for improvement here.

These shopping blocks are good examples from the 1930s of this utilitarian and under-rated genre. They mostly retain their original windows and decorative features above ground floor level but now many are in a poor state of repair, which detracts from the character of both the buildings and the Market Place. At street level, multiple signs from different agents for the letting of properties clutter the façades (Photograph 6) and many of the modern shop fronts are inappropriate in design and materials or are in a run down state (Photograph 7). There are examples of UPVC windows in the upper floor flats and these detract from the unity of the blocks.



6.



7.

On the south side opposite the last shopping block, the large former garage site is under development and there is a 1960s modernist health centre and apartment building which reflects architecture of its time in a rigorous way.

3.2 Lyttelton Road

Character and landscape

Beyond Market Place, heavy traffic continues to separate the two sides of the dual carriage way and there is no architectural resonance between them. However, the trees and green verges do bring some sense of unity. The buildings are all set back from Lyttelton Road on private access roads behind a screen of shrubs and trees. A pathway between Brownlow Court and Monarch Court gives access directly to Lyttelton Playing Fields. The backs of all the flats overlook this green, open space.

Architecture

Lyttelton Court (1929-1930) comprises two large blocks of flats flanking a third, central block which is stepped forward. The Butler design is striking; three floors sit below a steep hipped roof with dormer windows indicating the fourth floor.



There are recessed balconies with stone pillars, decorative Art Deco doorcases and the Arts and Crafts influence shows particularly in the brick arches at basement level and the diagonal placing of the tall chimneys for decorative effect ([Photographs 8, 9, 10](#)). The pedestrian entrance to the flats from Lyttelton Road was carefully designed in the same style and has decorative brickwork that matches that on the flats. These buildings are a very impressive group by Butler at the height of his powers and make a positive contribution to the character of the area.



Brownlow Court and Monarch Court are slightly later versions of suburban flats. They are brick built in a plain style and retain their period detail without damaging alterations. Neither makes such a strong statement as Lyttelton Court. Monarch Court has a white rendered top floor above two brick floors and shallow projecting bays enclosing the front doors and flanking windows. The bays are topped with balconies with wrought iron railings.

3.3 Lyttelton Playing Fields

Character and landscape

Lyttelton Playing Fields constitutes the largest section of the green corridor which lies either side of Mutton Brook from Norrice Lea to Henley's Corner. Here the narrow strip of parkland widens out to enclose 24 acres of park and playing fields. The space is surrounded by boundaries of hedge and trees, and the greenery in the large gardens that back onto the space to the west, south and east. A thick belt of trees (the remains of ancient woodland, Watery Wood) provides a barrier to the north. The oaks in front of the tennis courts and pavilion are also part of this wood. There is also a 900-year old hedgerow running diagonally northwards across the field containing over 9 species including oak, field maple, wild cherry, hornbeam and hawthorn. The ambiance is sheltered and tranquil.



The area is enhanced by the variety of recreational facilities it has. There are tennis courts, playing fields, a children's playground, a recently planted Millennium Wood and meadowland, and attractive walks beside the brook and through the old woodland ([Photograph 11](#)). The Millennium Wood is planted with species such as alder, willow and birch which grow well on the wet land of this site. The parkland is well maintained and there are plans to enhance the entrances by replanting the shrub beds with low growing perennials.

Negative aspects include an accumulation of ugly signs, particularly at the Kingsley Way entrance, which are intrusive and could be rationalised in number and style. The fence and hedge surrounding the children's playground has been broken down in two places ([Photograph 12 - see previous page](#)).

Architecture

Two plain brick pillars and a low concrete-topped wall mark the Kingsley Way entrance. The wall clearly once had decorative railings but these have been removed. The pavilion is the only building within the park. This is not used for its original purpose (sports changing rooms) but is currently used by a children's playgroup.



The building is two-storey and angular with a balcony at first floor level and two side extensions at ground floor level ([Photograph 13](#)). It is an austere building showing modernist influences in the horizontal lines and corner windows, but sadly the strong architectural effect is undermined by its poor state of repair and damage by vandals.



