



CALIFORNIA CHARACTER AREA

IPSWICH URBAN CHARACTERISATION STUDY



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INTRODUCTION

The California character area is a late 19th century residential suburb on the east side of Ipswich. It occupies level ground and its regular grid of streets is bisected by the Felixstowe branch railway line, which runs in a cutting, and important east-west road connections such as the Felixstowe and Woodbridge Roads.

The main roads are busy thoroughfares. Leading off from them at regular intervals are straight residential streets lined with late 19th century housing, an attractive mix of red brick terraces and detached houses, most with front gardens.

Many houses still have original features - slate and clay tiled roofs, sash windows and decorative detailing in the brickwork and lintels over doors and windows.

The orderly streetscene is interrupted by regular intersections and corner shops. Other buildings provide focal points - Victorian churches, schools and pubs, and small industrial sites tucked into backland plots.

As with other 19th century suburbs there is a relative lack of open greenspace or street tree planting, but the garden plots are generous and there are mature trees in both front and back gardens which help soften streetscapes. A number of public open spaces are located close to the edge of the character area.



Pictures:

Top: Murray Road and the Racecourse Recreation Ground

Bottom: Clifford Road School and housing

Aerial photo (Imagery copyright Getmapping PLC)





The California area in 1926 (Ordnance Survey map)

History

California is one of the best examples in Ipswich of a planned suburb and it remains a popular residential area over 150 years after the first plans were laid.

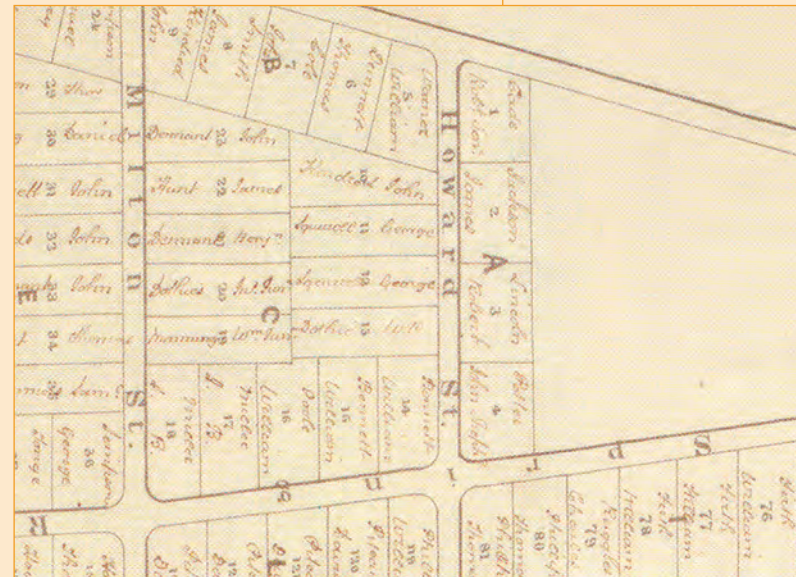
In 1849 the Freehold Land Society (now Ipswich Building Society) was set up in order to help address the problem of poor housing in the town and support the cause of further social and political reform.

The Society acquired the 98 acre Cauldwell Hall estate, between Foxhall and Woodbridge Roads, in 1849. It was criticised at the time for buying land too far from the centre of Ipswich; in the mid 19th century its site must have looked remote and rural. Over time, Ipswich expanded to absorb the estate and by the 1870s it was

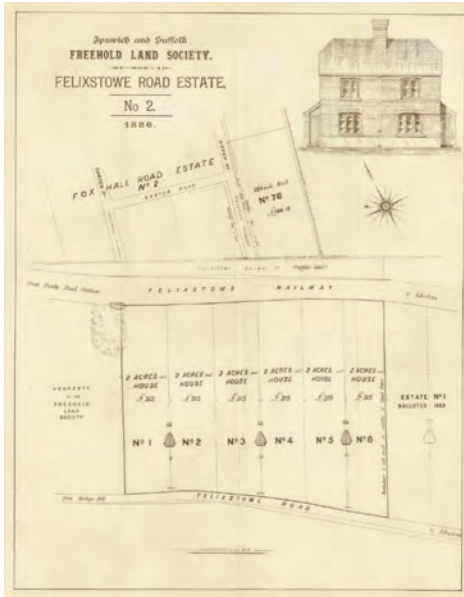
significant enough to be provided with its own station on the new Felixstowe branch line.

At this early stage in their history the Society were not builders. Instead, they acquired land, divided it into plots and laid out roads (hence the area's regular street grid). The plots were allotted to Society members who had to pay for the construction of property on their land.

This helps explain one of the areas distinctive features - the mix of individual house types. A typical California street has conventional terraced housing alongside detached villas of various types, including some quite substantial houses. The variety of sizes and styles was governed by personal preference and market demand - several early subscribers were local builders who saw a good long term investment prospect.



Extract from the original Cauldwell Hall Estate Plan showing the layout of new streets and plots.



Above: The 'Garden Farms' were houses built within two acre plots facing Foxhall Road. The plots have long since been redeveloped, but a handful of the semi-detached houses survive.



Above: St John the Baptist, Cauldwell Hall Road. Architect, Sir Arthur Blomfield. Schools and churches are landmarks in the California area, built to serve the growing suburb in the late Victorian period. St Johns would have been even more conspicuous if a planned spire had been built. Another large church nearby, St Bartholomews in Newton Road, was intended to have a tower but this also was never built.



Above: Clifford Road housing and school



Left: The Asylum Hotel, Foxhall Road. Now a Tesco Express. Families visiting patients at the nearby St Clements hospital would have used the hotel.



The earliest houses on the Cauldwell Estate, such as these examples on Freehold Road, have flint walling. Bricks were expensive in the mid 19th century, even though there were several brickworks in Ipswich.

The success of the Cauldwell Hall estate laid the foundations for the Society's future as a local supporter of housing projects and home ownership - the initials 'FLS' can be seen on properties all over Ipswich. It also helps explain the area's name - the rush to invest in 1849 became associated in the popular imagination with the California gold rush of that year.

Archaeology

This area is characterised generally by lighter heathland soils. It was built-up prior to any requirements for archaeological investigation. Occasional, sparse finds from all periods are recorded but it may have been more generally open land.

A major Palaeolithic site was excavated in 1902-5 at Old Valley Brick Pit on Foxhall Road (TM 1856 2439, IPS 056, IPS 524)*

Handaxes were found relating to activity on a former stream, feeding an ancient lake that was then in-filled with brick earth.

*Historic environment reference (HER) number. For further information about archaeological sites, visit <http://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/>



Many of California's streets retain their original appearance



The well preserved scale and detail of street corners is an important aspect of the character area.

Transport and access

Although the street grid was laid out for horses and pedestrians, it still functions as a permeable route network for local traffic and on the main roads for heavier through traffic.

The straight residential roads are wide enough for on-street parking on both sides, and this is also an effective speed control measure (without having to resort to speed humps).

The adaptability of the street grid has helped compensate for the relative lack of marked cycle ways or pedestrian footpaths - most residential streets are pleasant to walk and cycle along, and provide practical through routes.

The lack of road widening or enlargement is an important aspect of traffic management in the area, helping maintain the appearance of streets and junctions.



Racecourse Recreation Ground and houses on Murray Road

No public open space was planned by the Freehold Land Society, apart from the grid of streets. The 282 private plots on the Cauldwell Hall estate, however, were large enough for owners to grow their own produce and these have survived as mature front and rear gardens, which contribute to the streetscape. The loss of front gardens to paved parking areas is a significant threat to the quality of the local environment.

New development should provide for maintainable, defensible garden space towards the street, and for street tree planting where possible. Although mature trees are not a conspicuous part of the existing streetscape, their planting should be encouraged.

The focal space between the Railway Hotel and the station is poorly laid out and deserves a more masterplanned approach to paving, street furniture and street tree planting.

Biodiversity

The California area is notable for its lack of open spaces. Those which do exist do not contain high quality habitat, such as Racecourse Recreation Ground. This makes gardens critically important for biodiversity in this area. Canopy cover is relatively low at 6.8% and the gardens are not particularly big, but they are nevertheless important in the absence of other habitat. The area is traversed by the Felixstowe railway line, which will be an important corridor for wildlife movement, linking this area into habitats elsewhere. The St Clements Hospital site is adjacent to California and Rushmere Heath SSSI is a short distance to the east so there are valuable habitats nearby.

Swifts nest in this area and should be accommodated in new development through the installation of swift bricks.



Above right:
Gardens are an important habitat

Right:
Pollarded trees, Marlborough Road



Landform and views

The street grid, laid out in the 19th century on level ground, is the dominant feature. Although the site overlooks the town centre to the west, there are few views beyond the area's distinctive perimeter blocks.

Landmarks also tend to be local - pubs and churches for instance - and there are no really prominent buildings visible across the area. The main roads and the railway cutting provide the major points of orientation for visitors - away from these features it is easy to get lost.

Views

- a** Gordon Road – view of St John the Baptist
- b** View down St Johns Road from Cauldwell Hall Road / Freehold Road junction
- c** View along Marlborough Road
- d** Derby Road – view of The Railway Hotel

- 1 St Marys RC Church
- 2 The Case is Altered (public house)
- 3 Golden Key (former public house – now a Sainsburys Local)
- 4 Barclays Bank
- 5 St John the Baptist (Listed Grade II)
- 6 Old Times (public house)
- 7 Ipswich Cooperative Society, Stables and Confectionary Bakery (former)
- 8 The Lions Head (public house)
- 9 Clifford Road School and Air Raid Museum
- 10 The Railway (public house)
- 11 The Heathlands, formerly The Asylum Hotel (public house)
- 12 St Clements Hospital
- 13 Alan Road Methodist Church
- 14 St Bartholomews Church (Listed Grade II)
- 15 The Royal Oak (public house)



Top: Alan Road Methodist Church

Left: The Railway. This former hotel was built at the same time as the Derby Road station. The site was also used for stabling for the horse drawn trams and later garaging for the electric trams



California's urban character reflects its 19th century origins as a speculative development. The area has a dense grid of streets with active frontages and a minimum of blank or inactive sites. The large number of junctions and intersections with major through routes has enabled the development of successful local centres with a range of shops and services.

There is a lack of urban masterplanning, noticeable in the area's relatively poor legibility; there is very little hierarchy of building form, or landmark buildings, to signify where the focus of the community is or the relationship to the town centre. This is particularly noticeable in the area between the railway station and the Railway Hotel, a natural focal space which lacks any sense of coherence and is dominated by traffic and traffic engineering.

New development should follow the established perimeter block form, with active frontage facing the street. It should also (where appropriate) contribute to placemaking, for instance through the creation of new local landmarks and an emphasis on urban focal points.



Left: Traditional shopfront, corner of Woodbridge Road and Schreiber Road

Below: Typical residential street, well defined frontage although lacking focal features



Character area description

The development pattern established by the Freehold Land Society, of straight residential roads running north-south between existing thoroughfares, was continued by other developers. The urban character across the whole area is consistent, so no sub areas have been identified and California will be described as a single unit.

The typical California residential property is a solid red brick two storey 19th century house. Terraced, semi or detached - and all three types can be found in a typical street - the houses are invariably set back behind a wall and garden, sometimes with its original decorative iron railings. The terraces form elongated perimeter blocks, enclosing the long narrow back gardens which cannot be seen from the street.

New development should take this context into account; each street has an established pattern of scale and form which depends upon building and eaves height and position of frontage and front door in relation to the street. Garden type is also important, and architectural detail which in some cases is quite ornate. Front doors, for instance, are often paired under an ornamental stone hood and bay windows sometimes have decorative mullions. Window proportions and details are particularly significant.

Infill development which is aiming to reproduce vernacular detail should do so with reference to surrounding designs - the depth of reveal of windows for instance, and the proportions of window openings. The distinctive pattern of individual plot development allows for some flexibility in the design of individual houses, provided the scale is appropriate and the quality of the detailing is good.



Rosehill Road . Individually developed plots, mid-late Victorian



Bristol Road. More regular development pattern, typical of the Edwardian period



1 Rosehill Library. The locally listed 1895 building is a typical 'village' scale landmark

2 Hatfield Road Congregational Church. An example of a modern building (1957) successfully designed into a traditional streetscape



3 Parkside School, Spring Road. Modern materials are used successfully alongside the decorative brickwork of a 19th century school building

New development which has a contrasting style is also acceptable provided it maintains the typical active and overlooked street frontage and reflects the contribution made by front gardens to the streetscape. The mixed architectural character of California allows for innovation, and contextual modern design is welcome.

Building projects which contribute new landmarks and improve the legibility of the streetscape are welcome, provided they follow the established pattern of good active frontage and avoidance of dead space - eg carparking areas - at the back of pavements. Developments on street corners make a particular contribution to the area, and their design should reflect the building line and proportions of the junction.

The Derby Road junction between the station and the Railway Hotel is a poorly defined area at the heart of California. New build and landscape tree planting in this area should emphasise its focal role and improve its placemaking qualities.

Backland plots have already been redeveloped in a number of places, though several modern housing developments lack the permeability and distinctiveness of the surrounding area. Future development should aim either to integrate with the surrounding streetgrid, or create an alternative, more imaginative layout that provides a different kind of streetspace. Avoid standardised solutions, eg culs de sac.

The thoroughfares which bisect the California area tend to be busier and are fronted with larger commercial buildings. They are also part of the dense street grid, however, and commercial and other development types should reflect the street frontage and corner plot pattern in the residential side streets. Lower density modern retail units which are set back from the road behind carparking and create inactive gaps on the road frontage should be avoided.



California streetscape materials. Red brick predominates, often in combination with decorative materials such as carved stonework. Other building materials include flint, Suffolk white brick and painted render; the typical streetscape is colourful and there is scope for additional finishes, eg timber cladding



Traditional shopfront, Felixstowe Road. These should be retained and restored wherever possible



Marlborough Road. A particularly well preserved street of early 20th century housing. The distinctive semi detached villas were built by a local developer and have decorative porches and individual name plates



Decorative cast iron front garden railings. These examples were cast at the Crown Street Ironworks in Ipswich



1



2



3



4

Typical mixed California streetscapes.

- 1 Cauldwell Hall Road
- 2 Alan Road
- 3 Hatfield Road
- 4 Murray Road



5

5 Felixstowe Road. Mature trees are relatively rare in this area, and worthy of special protection for their streetscape value.



6

6 Marlborough Bowling Club. A rare example of green space within the character area. Its retention would be desirable.



7

7 Cauldwell Hall Road. Housing adapted to form shopfronts. This kind of flexibility is typical of the 19th century suburbs in Ipswich; modern development should also be capable of being adapted to different uses.



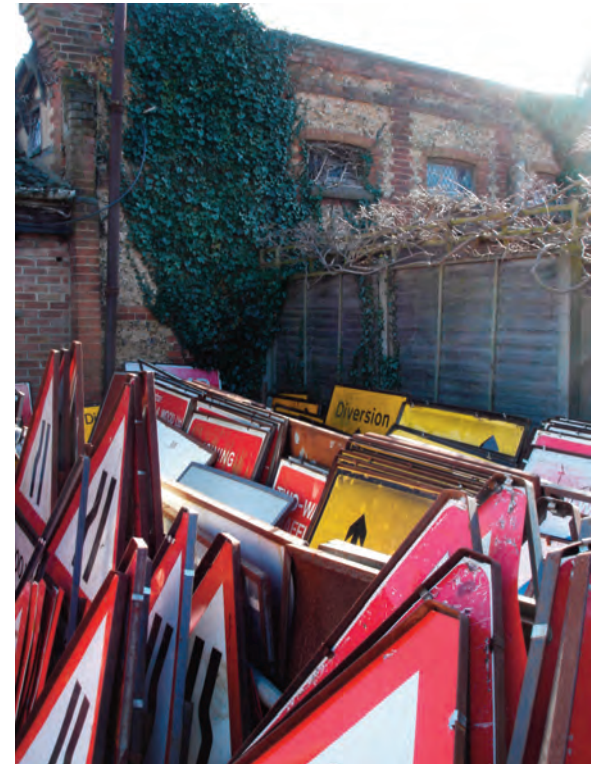
1



2



5



1 and 2 Some modern development lacks the streetscape quality and legibility typical of the California area.

3 The Felixstowe Branch Line, opened by the Felixstowe Railway and Pier Company in 1877, runs in a cutting through California. It provides a valuable wildlife corridor through the urban area

4 Some backland areas contain long established businesses. The traditional yard and outbuildings arrangement works well in the residential setting.

SUMMARY

- Make use of the perimeter blocks and existing buildings, adapting where possible rather than replacing.
- Maintain the existing building line and active frontages to junctions and streets. Avoid junction enlargement.
- New development should reflect the predominant 2 storey domestic scale. Contrast should be justified in terms of its impact on its streetscape surroundings.
- Create new landmarks where they can be justified in terms of sightlines, function and quality of architectural design.
- Retain where possible the detail of existing frontages, including window and door lintels, garden railings and decorative footpath tiling. The distinctive appearance of individual streets should be taken into account when planning new development.
- Complementary or contrasting materials and architectural styles are welcome and should be justified in terms of their impact on the surrounding streetscape.
- Where new development aims to reproduce historic forms, the detail should accurately reflect the choice of materials and features such as the proportion of window openings, the depth of reveals and the design of chimneys.
- Avoid the paving of front gardens for vehicle hardstanding or the creation of street edge carparking or other hard surfaced areas to the back of pavements.
- Create maintainable, defensible garden space towards the street, and space for street tree planting where possible.
- Enhance the biodiversity of the area through the protection of front and rear gardens and street trees, and the creation of new features and habitat where possible.
- Enhance the urban space between the Railway Hotel and the station where possible; better pedestrian access, improved public realm and buildings which define the space would be welcome here.
- Backland plots should be redeveloped imaginatively rather than for conventional culs de sac. Contrasting forms and materials are possible in these enclosed sites.