

Grove Mill Lane



Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Adopted – January 2012



Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area Appraisal

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1.0 Introduction

The Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area Appraisal aims to set out the area's special character and appearance, to help inform its conservation and to ensure that any future development preserves or enhances this. The appraisal includes a definition of the special interest of the area via spatial and character analysis, historical development and important features.

2.0 Background

The Conservation Area straddles the administrative boundary between Watford Borough and Three Rivers District which is formed here by the River Gade. Much the greater part of the Conservation Area is located within Watford Borough.

3.0 Designation

The Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area was designated on 25th June 1973 by Hertfordshire County Council after a request in 1971 to do so under the Civic Amenities Act 1967 from the Town Planning Committee of the Borough of Watford and after consultation with the then Watford Rural District Council and other organisations (1).

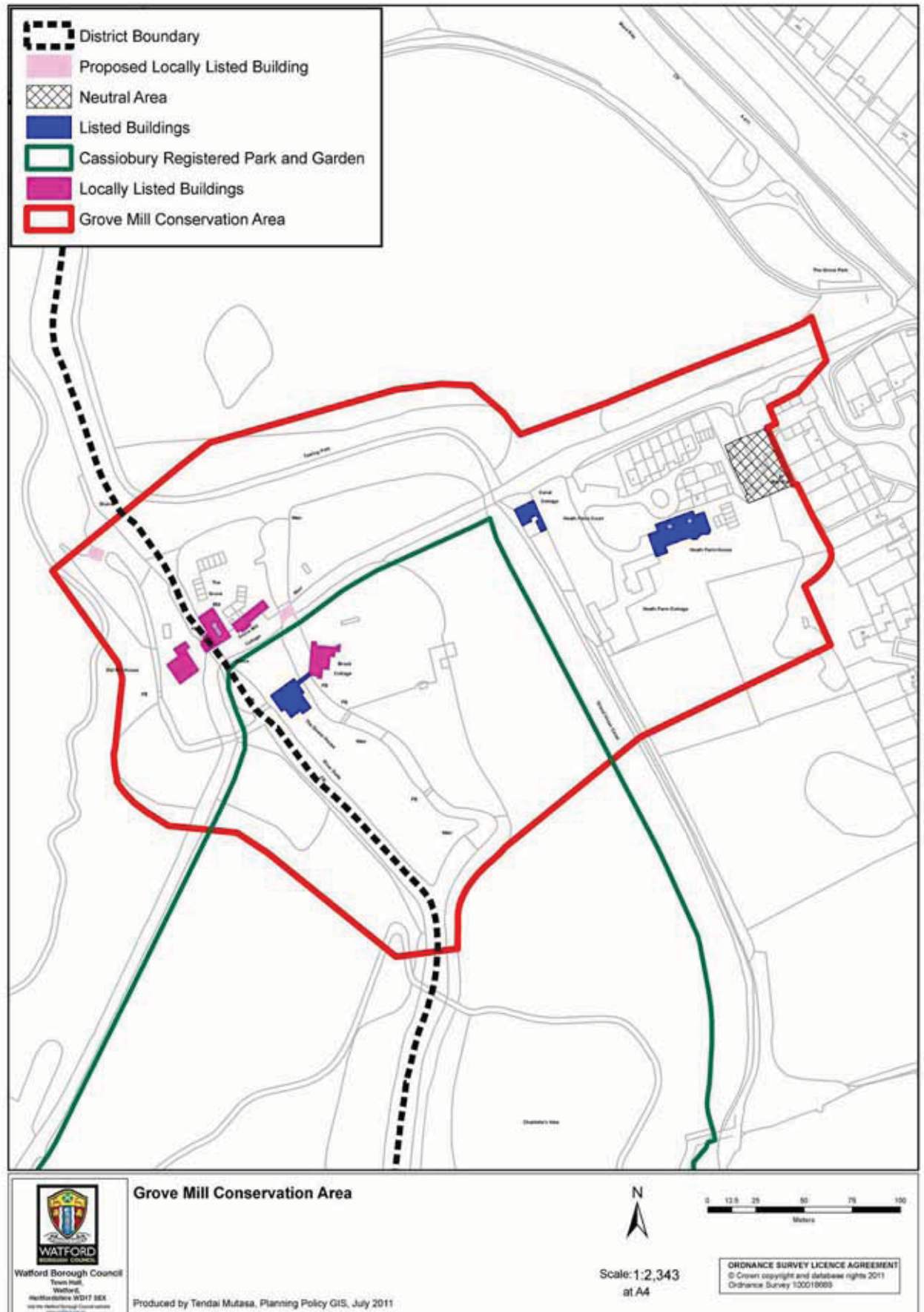
4.0 Definition / Summary of Special Interest

The area has the Grand Union Canal and River Gade at its core with a main building group based around the former mill. It is surrounded by open land with a second group of buildings based on the former Heath Farm House. Historically, it is closely connected with the adjoining Grove Estate.

5.0 Location and Setting

To the north-west of the centre of Watford, the Conservation Area lies in a valley along which the Grand Union Canal and the River Gade run. Grove Mill Lane runs westwards from the Hempstead Road, with a significant part of the length of the Lane included in the Conservation Area. After crossing bridges over the canal and river, Grove Mill Lane leaves the Conservation Area on ground rising towards Chandlers Cross. Much of the setting is provided by the

sweeping landscape of the historic Grove Estate, which is now a hotel and golf course.



6.0 Archaeology and Historic Development

6.1 Archaeology

Excavations in 2000 at The Grove Estate, located beside the Conservation Area to its north, revealed a significant amount of archaeology. This has since been represented on the Historic Environment Record (refs 11387 & 114992-7), which is a register of local heritage assets administered by Hertfordshire County Council.

Early Occupation

- Early occupation may have been restricted to the valley bottom whereas by the Iron Age period, the higher ground had been occupied.
- Along the edge of the river floodplain, probable Mesolithic occupation was found consisting of flintwork and a possible hearth, and a series of shallow pits and postholes.
- Evidently, there was greater activity from the late Bronze Age including ditched boundaries containing pottery and a late Bronze Age double ditched enclosure to the west of the site. A shard of late Bronze Age collared urn was found.
- On the higher plateau area of the grounds, part of an Iron Age defensive ditch was located. In the late Iron Age it was extended into a group of rectangular enclosures and occupied into the 2nd century AD. A major feature was a pottery kiln operating in the period AD 50-80. Unusually, the kiln made native late Iron Age wares - other known kilns of the early Roman period were making Roman types of pottery.

Saxon and Medieval Occupation

- Twelve possible Saxon buildings were orientated along earlier Iron Age field divisions. Five buildings were sunken floored (Grubenhauser) and seven were rectangular post built structures. Two Saxon burials were found - one male and one female, which appear to be centred on an adjacent post hole.
- Medieval occupation was also concentrated on the plateau where the existing mansion stands. Evidence suggests a modest manorial farming settlement. South of the house was a post-built rectangular structure associated with 12th/13th century pottery on the site of an

earlier, similar structure. Later medieval material (14th/15th centuries) was found, mainly beside the house.

There are no scheduled monuments in the Conservation Area or within 1km.

6.2 Historical Development

Historically, the area lay on the edge of the Grove and Cassiobury Estates. Although the current mill dates back to the 19th century, a mill is believed to have been in operation at the time of the Domesday Book, one of four watermills in the manor of Cassio. The manor of Grove had a mill in 1294-5; in 1631-2 there were two mills here under one roof (2).

The Grove Estate was previously part of the lands of St Albans Abbey in Cassio Hundred and seems to have become a separate manor during the 13th century. The earliest reference (1294-95) is to John and Sarah Britwell leaving a portion of the estate, *including a mill*, to their children. The existing Grove mansion has late 16th century origins but was substantially rebuilt circa 1720 and altered later. It remained home of the Earls of Clarendon to 1922 when they sold they estate. (HER ref: 11506 *The Grove - Manorial Site*)



1766 Dury and Andrews Map

The Grove was acquired by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company around the outbreak of World War II. After the war it became the British Rail Management Training Centre and the surrounding land was leased for farming. It has subsequently become a hotel and much of the parkland has been developed as a golf course.



1842 Tithe Map

The Grand Union Canal linked the Oxford Canal at Braunston with the River Thames at Brentford was authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1793 and so was originally called the Grand Junction Canal. It was incorporated into the Grand Union Canal in 1929, which formed a continuous waterway between Birmingham and London.

The Tithe Map indicates the three main houses within what is now the Conservation Area. In addition, the mill itself appears to have been connected to the Mill House. There is a long, presumably agricultural, building north of Heath Farm House and there is a large range of buildings south-west of the

Old Mill House between the road and the small watercourse. These are all also evident on the 1871 OS map, although it is notable that the building now called Old Mill House is shown as 'Grove Mill' and what is now called The Dower House is 'Grovemill House'.

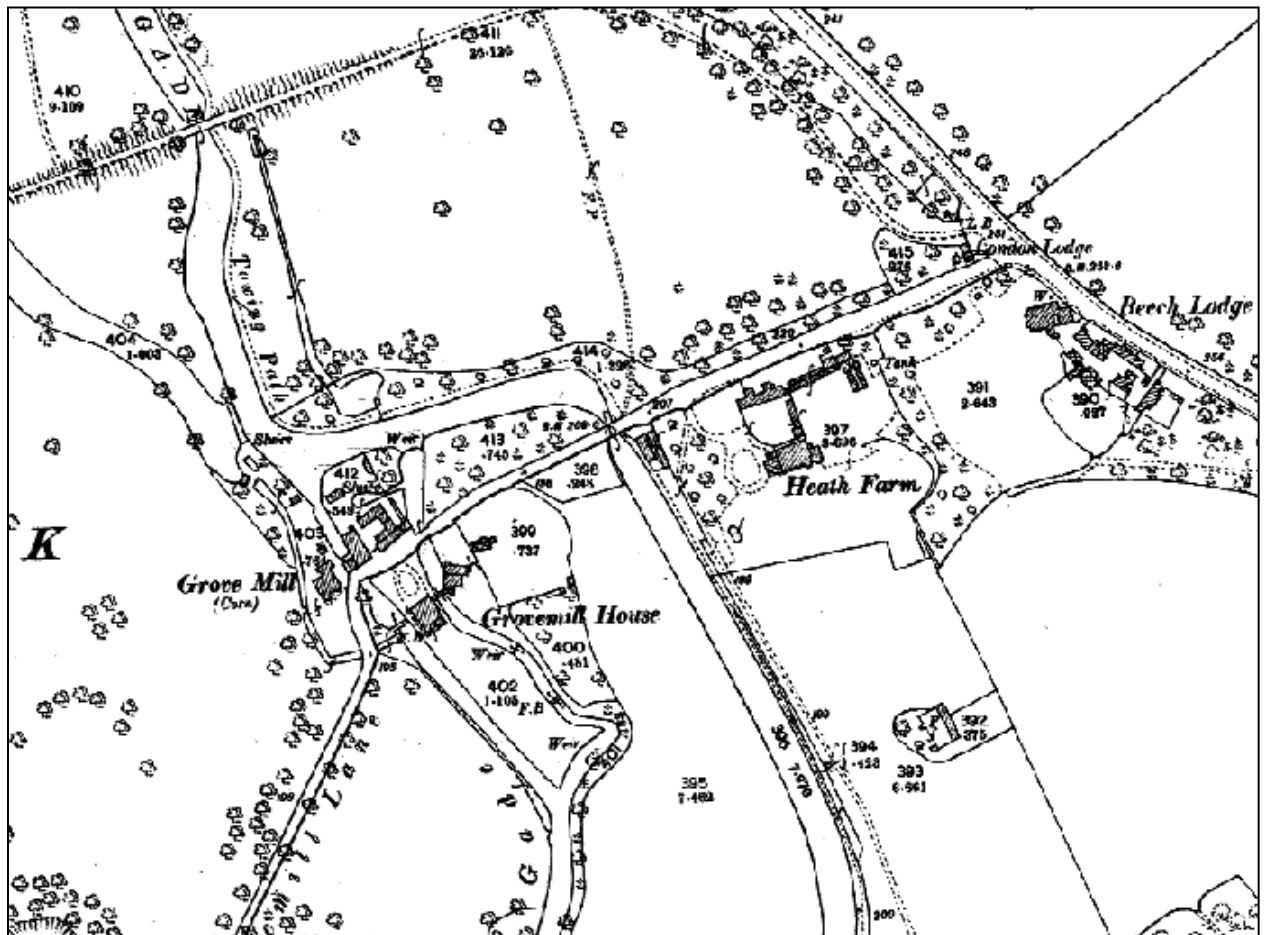


1871 OS Map

There is considerable difference between the 1871 and 1896 maps. The mill house (i.e. Old Mill House) had been rebuilt or drastically altered, and the mill buildings changed. The range of buildings south of Old Mill House had evidently been demolished by this time.

According to Henry Williams, History of Watford 1884, p.34, "The old mill, which was a picturesque building, was destroyed by fire with all its machinery a few years ago, and the present substantial buildings were erected on the site soon after". At this time, the flour mill was leased to a miller called Mr Weston. By 1896 the OS map certainly indicates the mill had been rebuilt from the shape shown on the earlier maps to its current shape. Ancillary

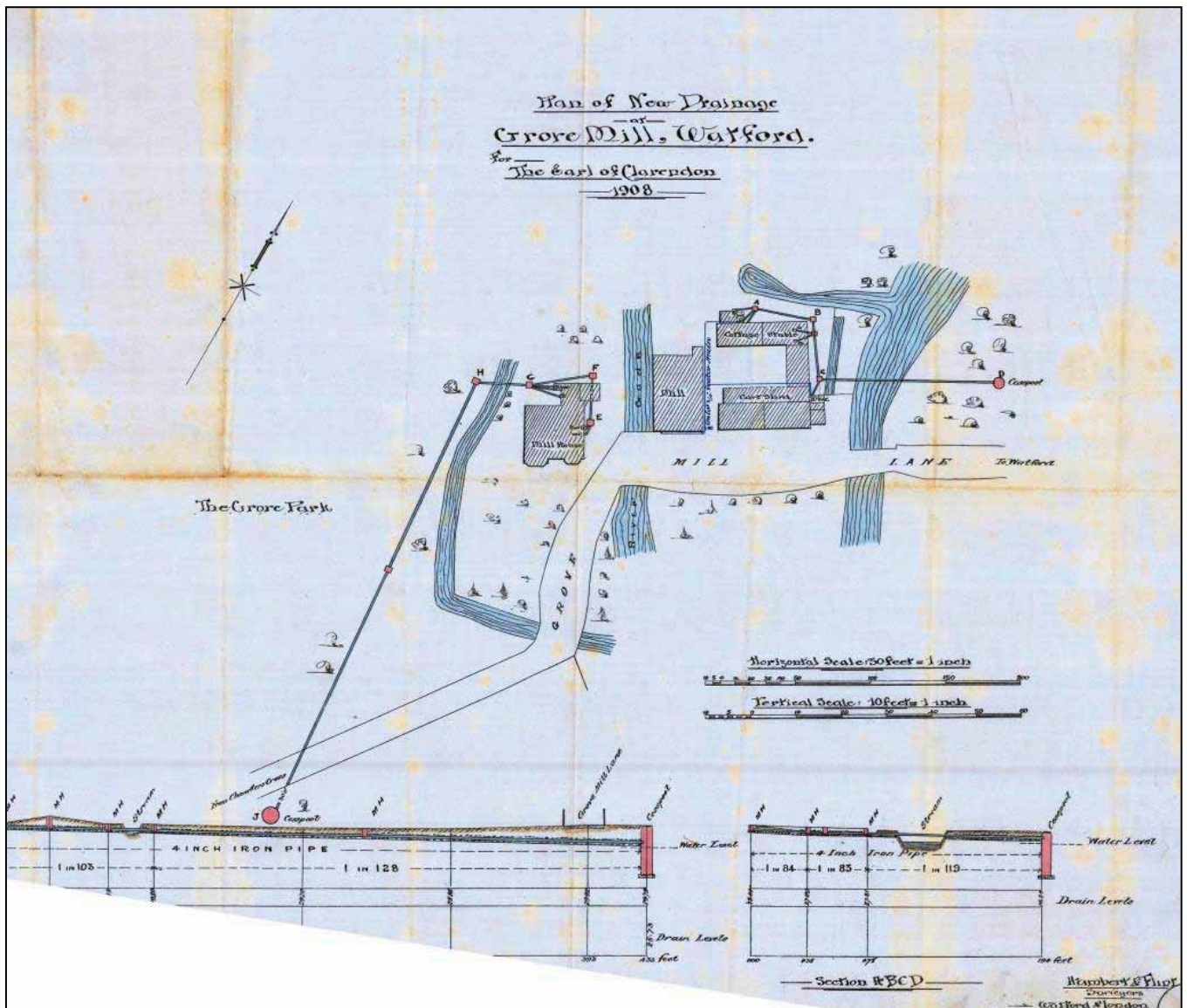
buildings had been added behind what is now Mill Cottage. These are also shown on a 1908 drainage plan.



1896 OS Map



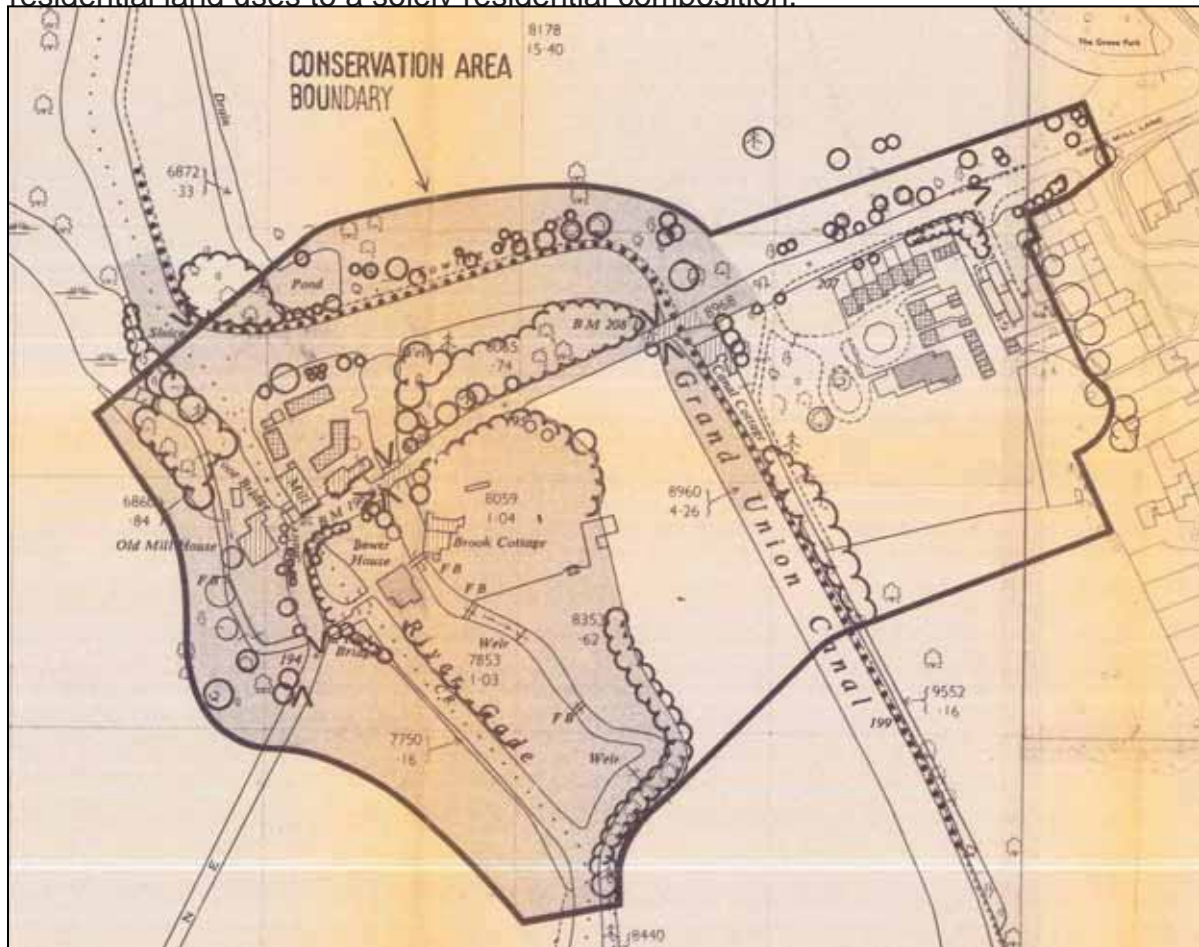
Early 20th century views of Grove Mill Lane. View towards the Mill (left). View of the Old Mill House (right).



Grove Mill, Watford. “Plan of New Drainage” for The Earl of Clarendon 1908. Showing the arrangement of buildings at that time. Source: WBC/HALS plans from Darvills.

Considerable development has occurred at Heath Farm House since the 1970s as farming ceased there and the house itself fell into disrepair. This is explained in greater detail later in this document. An outcome was the terrace of recent houses (Heath Court) replacing the agricultural building north of Heath Farm House and which is parallel with Grove Mill Lane. The Electricity Sub Station, which is located further to the east on Grove Mill Lane, was developed during the 1960s, while the adjacent housing development at Beechpark Way was also developed during the 1960s. The Mill itself was extended and converted to residential use in 1974, which marked the final

stage in the transformation of this area from a mixture of employment and residential land uses to a solely residential composition.



Conservation Area plan from 1977

7.0 Spatial Analysis

This section considers the morphology of the area, key spaces, and important views and vistas into and out of the area.

7.1 Character and Interrelationships of Spaces

The structure of the Conservation Area is provided by the canal and river and by Grove Mill Lane. Green space surrounding them is extensive and part of wider landscapes. Private gardens around the Mill/Old Mill House/Dower House/Brook Cottage cluster are effectively part of the landscape. The field (shown as divided into two on OS maps) south of Heath Farm House is, however, more contained.

The canal and river are intimately linked with the buildings and setting of the Conservation Area. There are secondary channels, some of which act as millraces, and a number of weirs and locks. A channel to the former mill leaves the canal at the bend just north of the mill and passes beside the mill. Another channel of the river leaves the canal and passes through weirs and then between The Dower House and Brook Cottage. A large old power wheel stands at the northern end of a smaller former channel west of Old Mill House. Canal Cottage occupies a canal-side position next to Grove Mill Lane.

Landscape Characterisation

The Conservation Area is within the Lower Gade Valley Landscape Character Area (HCC 2000-05). This area follows the Gade Valley and its side slopes from Hunton Bridge into Watford. It includes Whippendell Wood and Cassiobury Park.

Key characteristics include

- narrow valley floor with wide canal and wetland habitats;
- historic parkland landscapes;
- historic houses set on the plateau edge looking over the valley.

Distinctive features include:

- canal locks and bridges;
- Grove Mill and mill race by canal;
- former watercress beds at Cassiobury Park.

7.2 Key Views and Vistas

Characteristic of the area are sweeping views down or along Grove Mill Lane. Equally, the character of the area results in various vistas that take in open land. These include views from south and west of Old Mill House and from the Registered parkland extending north across The Grove Park.

There is considerable public access from nearby rights of way and the canal. For instance, there are views across the canal from the towpath, e.g. from the north to the weir and back of the mill.

	
<p>View towards The Grove.</p>	<p>From north-east boundary looking west along Grove Mill Lane.</p>
	
<p>Field and towpath treeline from north of the canal.</p>	<p>Field south of Heath Farm House (south-east boundary of Conservation Area) looking to rear of Hempstead Road.</p>

8.0 Character Analysis

8.1 Character Zones

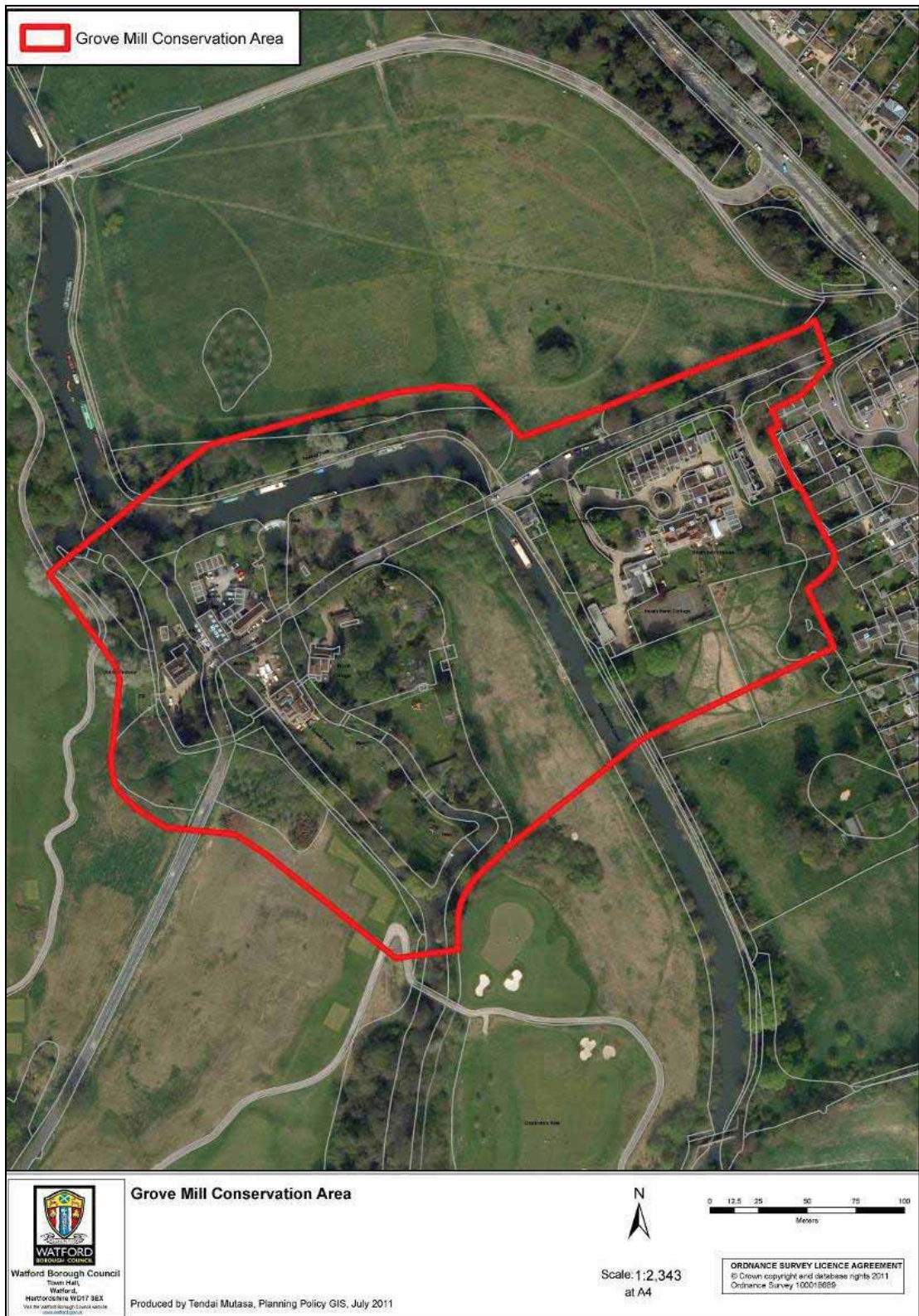
The Conservation Area has two main building clusters: one east of the canal – the Heath Farm House group - and that to the west of the canal being the Grove Mill group. There are more limited views of the eastern group (apart from Canal Cottage), whereas the mill, Old Mill House and Dower House are close to the road and also visible from surrounding open land.



Heath Farm House group



Grove Mill group



8.2 Activity

The predominant land use of buildings within the Conservation Area is now residential but there is much traffic through the area at a greater or lesser speed - whether vehicles using Grove Mill Lane, narrow boats on the canal, or people using the towpath. Vehicular traffic notwithstanding, this is a largely tranquil locality.

8.3 The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

There are hierarchies and former functional relationships between the small number of buildings that exist in the Conservation Area, such as house/mill/store, canal/canal cottage, farmhouse/barns/cottages. They have a historic reason for being there which is related to the river, canal or farm.

In the Hertfordshire volume of his Buildings of England series, Nikolaus Pevsner notes that down Grove Mill Lane is:

“HEATH FARM HOUSE, brick and weatherboarded, then a nice group by the river with GROVE MILL, rebuilt c.1875 (converted into flats by James A. Caldwell, 1974), and opposite, the DOWER HOUSE, MOSTLY c18 BRICK.”

8.4 Listed Buildings

The following buildings are included on the "List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest," issued by the Department of the Environment under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

All are Grade II listed buildings.

- The Dower House- *(or Grove Mill House)*
- Heath Farm House (11,12 and 13 Heath Farm Court)
- Canal Cottage

The Dower House

The Dower House (of The Grove mansion) is mostly 18th century brick. It is listed as late 17th - early 18th century, in red brick, with plain tile roofs. The west front facing the river is early 18th century. Attached at the south-west angle is a mid-late 18th century corner block and at the south-east angle is another 19th century range. Beyond the stream to the north-east were the landscaped grounds, with greenhouses within a kitchen garden, shrubberies, and walks on each side of the stream. Elements of this landscape survive. The house was called Grove Mill House until its sale in 1922 after which it became known as the Dower House. Around 1840/50 the occupier was the Honourable Mrs Villiers. Villiers was the family name of the Earls of

Clarendon. About 1900 it was owned or occupied by a Mr Bickersteth. In the 1970s, the house was occupied by Major & Mrs JF Craddock. Mrs Craddock was a notable cook of her period. It was extensively refurbished in 2009/10.



Heath Farm House

A 1967 planning permission had allowed the division of the property into eight units. By the early 1970s, Heath Farm House had come to suffer from neglect. Stephen Castle made a note of some interior features in his 1977 book, *Timber-framed buildings in Watford*. Before the war it had been in single occupation with a well tended garden that included 7 heated green houses and involved the employment of 10 gardeners.

Several planning applications were made for its demolition, but were strongly rejected by the local Councils. A 1976 permission allowed the separation of the farmhouse into three self contained units, but also the building of houses in the former farm yard (Heath Farm Court). Proposals to convert the Grove Mill buildings to a restaurant and to offices were also resisted at this time.



Heath Farm House in 1974



Heath Farm House in 2011

The house is listed as an 18th -19th century building with a late 17th century core. There are two parallel ranges. The north range is the earlier, of brick below and weatherboarding above. The south range dates to the early 19th century and is of painted brick. The house was lived in by W B Brett, 1st Viscount Esher, and Master of the Rolls 1883.



Nos.1-7 Heath Farm Court viewed from the north

Canal Cottage

According to British Waterways records (3) this building was built by the Grand Junction Canal Company circa 1800 as accommodation for an employee whose job was to ensure the maintenance of an adequate water supply both to Grove Mill and the canal, and also to collect tolls from passing boat traffic. Together with the bridge over the Grand Union Canal, it forms a notable canal side composition. The eastern, gabled part of the cottage was added later in the 19th century.



8.5 Locally Listed Buildings

The following buildings are “Locally Listed” by the respective Councils as being of local importance:

Building Name	District
Grove Mill	Watford
Mill Cottage	Watford
Brook Cottage	Watford
Old Mill House	Three Rivers

See sections 8.6 /10.0 for proposed additions to the register of locally listed buildings.

Grove Mill

This former water powered corn mill dominates the streetscape in the Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area and provides a clear local landmark. It has three and a half storeys in old London yellow stock bricks with an overhanging element on the southern elevation. A mill has existed on this site for centuries, using the flow of the River Gade that passes south at this point. The building that currently occupies the site was constructed in 1875 and operated as a mill until 1922. Conversion of the building into flats was approved in 1971 and carried out in 1973/4 including changes to fenestration, new balconies, lift tower, access platforms and ancillary buildings to rear. Various pieces of the former plant mechanism remain adjacent to the western elevation of the building.



Picture of the former mill in 1971



Interior while the mill was in use from:
Watford Observer Centenary publication



Former mill workings



Turbine remains in a wheel house

Mill Cottage

Now a single cottage, this building is thought to date to the 18th century and is located on the northern side of Grove Mill Lane. It had been converted into two dwellings before 1920, but was previously a coach house (western end) and stables. Around the late 19th century - early 20th century it was part of a larger, 'U' shaped group which included further stables and (on the western end of the other, now missing, arm) a cottage.



View of the building before (right) and after (left) conversion to residential use.



Brook Cottage

The Cottage is located on the southern side of Grove Mill Lane and is physically connected by a corridor bridge with the Statutory Listed Dower

House to the east. It was previously servants quarters for the Dower House. Notable in its own right as a mid-19th century cottage, it also has group value as part of the mill related group of buildings. Although the current building was built during the middle of the 19th century, a previous structure existed in this location (see Tithe Map). It has been a self-contained dwelling since approximately 1942.

Old Mill House

This building appears to date to the late 19th Century and has three storeys. The house is built of yellow stock brick, with pitched tiled roofs. Unusual detailing includes a string course and console supports to first floor window cills in “Della Robbia” faience-ware¹.

Along with the mill it was owned by British Rail (as part of their ownership of the Grove Estate) at the time the Conservation Area was designated. For some time prior to 1947 it was used as offices and a restaurant. When the railways were nationalised in 1948 it was converted into two flats and used by employees of British Rail. It is the only building located within the part of the Conservation Area administered by Three Rivers District Council.



Brook Cottage



Old Mill House

¹According to MK Miller. HCC Local List 1973 for Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area.

8.6 Proposed additions to register of Locally Listed Buildings

Road Bridge over the River Gade

The structure is an early 19th century bridge located to the north of Brook Cottage. It is an essential part of the group with the mill, weir and cottages. It is a small single arch bridge, brick built with yellow and red brick parapets and semi-circular red brick coping. A stone tablet on the southern parapet reads: 'This bridge erected at the expense of the parish of Watford'; while an additional stone tablet on the northern parapet reads: 'Fred...Surveyor...Cashio Hamlet'. HER Ref 5971.



Road Bridge over River Gade



Stone tablet on Road Bridge

Water wheel and pump

A mill wheel and engine stand in the open to the north-west of the old Mill House at the head of a channel running to the River Gade. It may have previously been enclosed within a small building. HER number (17208).



The water wheel viewed from the towpath

8.7 Other Significant Buildings/Structures

Bridge N°. 165

This was altered in the early 19th century. It is a bridge over the Grand Union Canal. It has brick abutments and cast-iron girders carrying the roadway. The iron railings are of a simple design. HER number (5256).



Bridge N°. 165

8.8 Prevalent Local and Traditional Building Materials

The cottages are all built with brick and date back to the 19th century. The Old Mill House has three storeys of yellow stock brick, and unusual detailing to consoles supporting first floor window sills. The Mill has yellow stock brick with red brick banding and arches. The Mill Cottages are red brick with modern garage fronts. Brook Cottage is two storeys high with a single storey weatherboarded out-building.

8.9 Contribution of Trees and Green Spaces

The Conservation Area is well treed with limited open areas within the Conservation Area boundary. The two main open parts are the northern end of Charlottes Vale, between the canal and Brook Cottage, and the paddocks to the south of Heath Farm Court. However, neither of these areas give the external impression of openness due to boundary trees blocking views from outside the Conservation Area boundary. To the north is open parkland that forms part of the Grove Estate, while there is a golf course to the west, which is also within the Grove Estate.

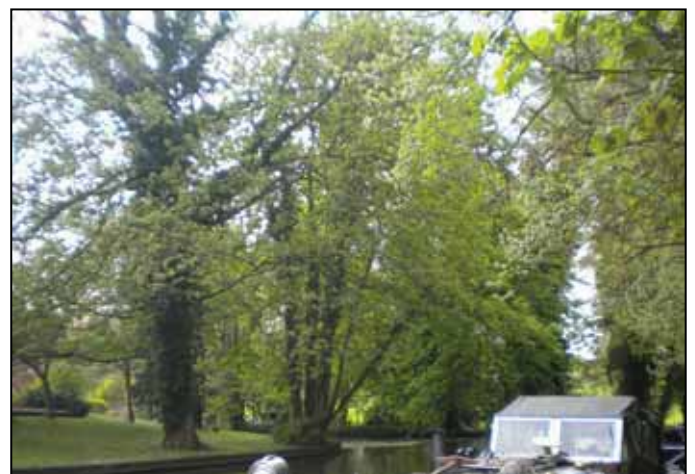
There is a mixture of trees within the Conservation Area, with the majority being deciduous varieties. These comprise sycamore, beech, ash, poplar, lime, hazel, alder, oak, sweet chestnut and fruit trees. There have also been significant areas of willow planted on the edge of the golf course. The evergreen elements comprise yew, cypress, spruce, cedar and a sequoia. Within the garden areas there is a range of ornamental trees including purple leaved cherry, ginkgo and false acacia.

There is a wide range of tree ages, from young to mature, although there are no ancient or veteran trees within the Conservation Area boundary.

There is one Tree Preservation Order within the Conservation Area, which is Order number 215 (described as the Old Orchard). This was made in 2005 and originally covered eight trees, but one poplar has since been lost. Tree Preservation Order 9, which was made in 1965, and Tree Preservation Order 21, which was made in 1974, abut the Conservation Area boundary to the west and south respectively.

The tree cover, especially in summer months, screens most external views of the buildings, both in the Heath Farm and Grove Mill clusters, although the Mill and Mill House can be seen from the canal towpath north of Bridge N^o. 165.

The Conservation Area is entirely within the Metropolitan Green Belt.



View from Grove Mill Lane (looking north-east) View from canal towpath looking south

Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest

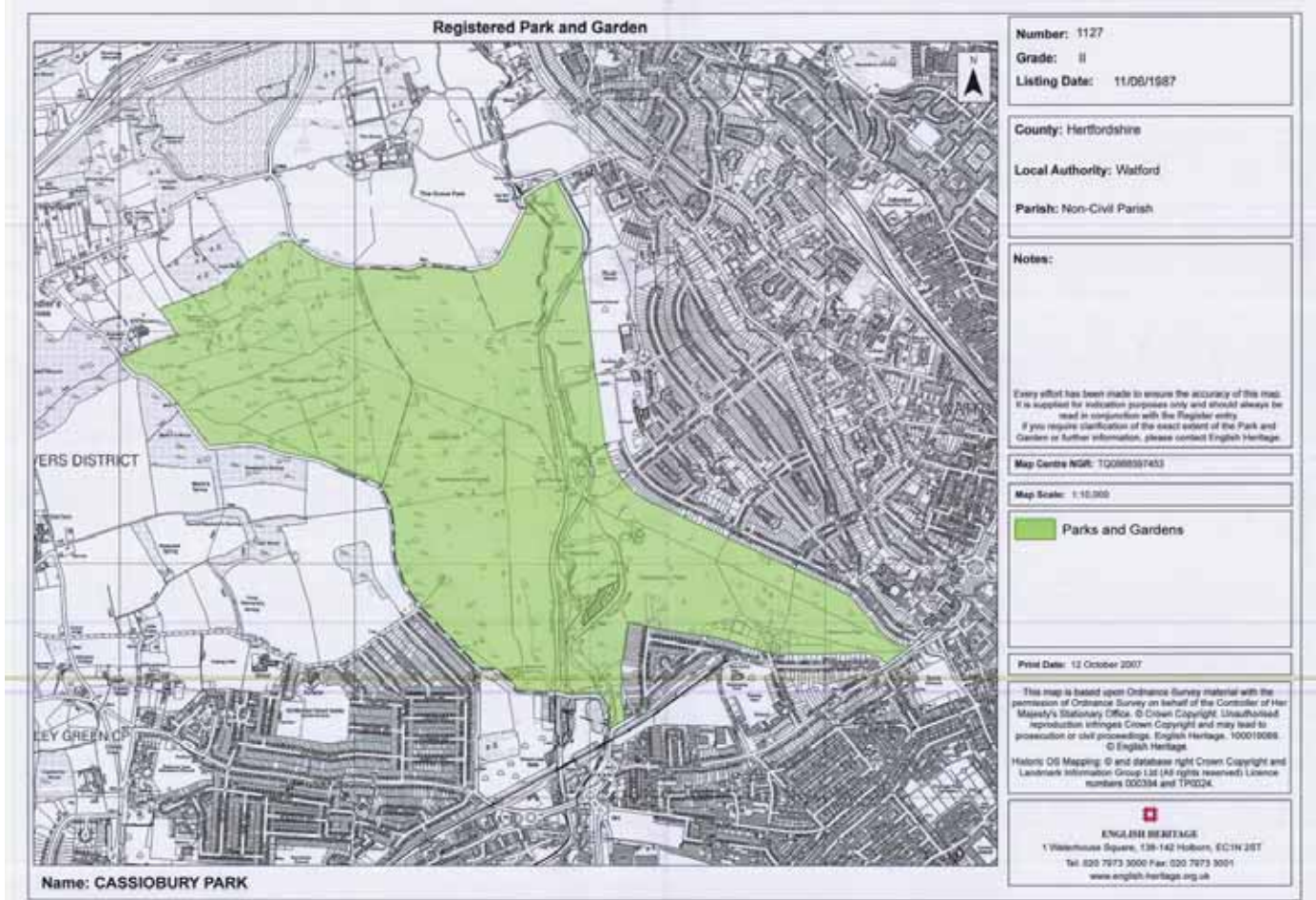
Part of the Conservation Area is located within the Cassiobury Park entry on the Register of Park and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

Summary extract:

“CASSIOBURY PARK - Grade II. Site Reference Number:1127

C20 public park, woodland and golf course incorporating remaining elements from a C16, C17 and C18 park related to Cassiobury House and gardens, demolished 1927. The landscape around the house, possibly including elements of the remaining park, was worked upon successively by Moses Cook (1672), George London (c 1697), Charles Bridgeman (1720s), Thomas Wright (1739) and Humphry Repton (1801(2).”

The registered site bounds the western edge of Watford. The northern boundary of the 300ha site is Grove Mill Lane beyond which is the Grove Park parkland.



8.10 The Extent of Intrusion or Damage (Negative Factors)

Since the designation of the Conservation Area, new buildings have only been erected at Heath Farm Court. The stair tower serving the mill (part of its conversion to flats) might also be regarded as intrusive.

Traffic and Pedestrian Management

Grove Mill Lane is a relatively small scale road, which does not include pavements in certain areas. Accommodating fast moving vehicular traffic in such a way that it does not damage the character of the area remains an ongoing challenge.



Grove Mill Lane



Stair tower serving the former mill

8.11 Capacity for Change

Due to its largely open and rural character, within the designated Green Belt, additional buildings are likely to be intrusive and damage the character of the area. The hierarchy and former functional relationships between the small number of buildings that do already exist, such as house/mill/store, canal/canal cottage, farmhouse/barns/cottages, also serve to constrain the capacity for new development in the area.

8.12 Neutral Areas

The Conservation Area boundary was drawn in such a way as to largely avoid including extensive areas which would have diluted its character. The only area that can be described as being neutral is the Electricity Sub Station

compound, which is adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area and is accessed off Grove Mill Lane.

9.0 The Conservation Area Boundary

The existing (original) boundary of the designated area does not appear to follow either exact historic or topographical features in places. The northern boundary is accordingly ill-defined on the ground. However, it follows the northern edge of a tree belt alongside Grove Mill Lane and the canal (shown for instance on the 1871 OS map) and so includes the tree backdrop within the Conservation Area, which is a beneficial principal. There is no obvious realignment that could better represent this feature.

Similarly, the western and southern boundaries do not follow any recognisable line to or across Charlottes Vale, or over the canal, or onwards across the fields behind Heath Farm Court. The latter stretch, behind Heath Farm, could be altered to run along the existing fields' southern boundaries, which is apparent both on the ground and on OS mapping. However, such a change would be of limited practical benefit. On the eastern side, the boundary follows the garden plots of houses on Beechpark Way.

The original approach appears to have been to encompass tree belts and hedgerows and to provide some landscape setting for the waterways.

From the original 1973 designation advertisement in the London Gazette, the boundary is given as at certain distances from given points. The boundary has not been changed to date and there does not appear to be a strong imperative to do so.

Designation advertisement extract from *The London Gazette*

TE, 27 TH JULY 1973	8941
Divisional Planning Office, Civic Centre, St. Albans and at the County Planning Office, County Hall, Hertford where they may be inspected during normal office hours from Mondays to Fridays inclusive.	
THE SCHEDULE	
<i>Watford Municipal Borough and Watford Rural District Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area</i>	
The Conservation Area includes the Grove Mill, sections of the adjacent Grand Union Canal and River Gade and Heath Farm House and grounds.	
The boundary commences 100 feet west of the junction of Grove Mill Lane and Hempstead Road and follows a line westward approximately 50 feet north of the northern boundary of Grove Mill Lane to a point about 75 feet east of the Grand Union Canal. It then runs parallel with the canal on its northern side for 600 feet and proceeds south-westward, crossing the canal near its junction with the River Gade. The River Gade forms the boundary between Watford Municipal Borough on the east side and Watford Rural District on the west side. At a point 100 feet west of the canal the boundary turns south-east and follows a line parallel to and approximately 75 feet from the Mill Race. It crosses Grove Mill Lane and continues for 400 feet in a south-easterly direction and then turns and runs eastward to re-cross the River Gade. It returns north-eastward following the southern boundary of the grounds of the Grove Mill House crossing the Grand Union Canal 450 feet south of the Grove Mill Lane Bridge and then runs eastward about 75 feet south of the grounds of Heath Farm House to the western limits of the gardens of the housing in Beech Park Way. From this point it returns northwards to Grove Mill Lane and finally runs north-east to include the hedgerows.	
County Hall, Hertford. 27th July 1973.	Peter Boyce, Clerk of the County Council. (809)

10.0 Changes to Locally Listed Buildings

The following buildings were added to the respective Council's lists of locally important buildings, as a part of this consultation process, due to their compliance with the criteria set out for local listing designation:

- Road Bridge over the River Gade (Watford Borough Council);
- Water wheel and pump (Three Rivers District Council).

11.0 Management Proposals

The earlier draft of this document, which was published for consultation in autumn 2011, contained a section entitled Management Proposals. That was included in order to obtain comments and suggestions from the public that can be used in a subsequent document. The section has been removed from

this final version because the Character Appraisal is intended as a descriptive document, rather than one that includes statements of new policy. A separate Management Proposals document for the area will be produced at a later date.

12.0 Local Consultation

An earlier draft of this Character Appraisal document was published for public consultation from 19 October to 18 November 2011. This final version has been produced with the benefit of the comments received during that consultation. The Council intend to produce a further document containing management proposals for the area; a public meeting will be arranged to inform the preparation of that document.

Acknowledgements

The supply of Heritage Environment Records (HERs) information from Hertfordshire County Council is gratefully acknowledged.

Bibliography: Books & Reports etc

- (1) Source: contemporary letters on Watford Borough Council. WBC files.
- (2) Source: Victoria County History: Hertfordshire. vol.2 (1908). p452, 462.
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HALS. 1908. Plan of New Drainage, Grove Mill Watford, for The Earl of Clarendon.

Hertfordshire County Council. 1977. Grove Mill Lane Conservation Area Plan.

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