

2 - Village history & development

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. Understanding the historic character of Woodhall Spa and defining its distinctiveness is the key to the future of the village. It should inform and underpin a sustainable design ethos that can be fully supported by its residents¹.

2.1.2. The village lies at the heart of the county of Lincolnshire approximately twenty miles south east of the city of Lincoln. To the south and west of the village are the fenlands flanking the River Witham and to the north and east the Lincolnshire Wolds.



2.1. Woodhall Spa location

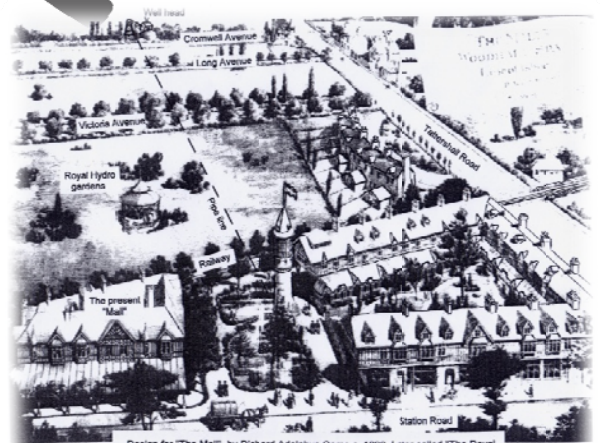
2.1.3. Woodhall Spa began as the result of one man's vision. John Parkinson's dream was to open a coal mine, plant a forest and build a new town. In the process of looking for coal in 1821 he found the Spa water and by a quirk of fate it was this that was to prove his most lasting legacy.

2.1.4. The extraordinary and colourful history of the development of the comparatively new community that is Woodhall Spa has ensured its enduring appeal as a social, recreational and leisure centre for Lincolnshire - and beyond. Each generation has stamped its own vision on the village and this VDS will hopefully help those of us who live here now to do the same.

2.1.5. To understand what makes Woodhall Spa 'tick' and define that special 'something' that has prompted East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) too describe the Spa as its 'Jewel in the Crown' it is necessary to understand more about how it was conceived and what shapes, and continues to influence, its development.

2.2. A Planned Community

2.2.1. Woodhall Spa is unique in Lincolnshire, having more in common in its history and ambience with Spa towns like Harrogate, and with the Continental spas, than with the traditional market towns and rural villages of the county. It also owes something to the influence of the garden city movement, which led to the creation of places like Port Sunlight and Letchworth. From the start, the architect commissioned to create the Spa town, Richard Adolphus Came², had a vision of his own; an elegant and spacious community in a woodland setting, with broad tree-lined avenues and large residential plots. This remains one of our greatest assets; '*the space is the place*' is an often quoted observation.



2.2. Richard Adolphus Came's vision

2.2.2. Mr Came was born in London (1847) and educated at Lancing, London University and in Germany. He was an exhibitor and student of the Royal Academy, a pupil of Sir Digby Wyatt and from 1870 he was a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He practised as an architect for many years at Gray's Inn and Mecklenburgh Square in London and designed many buildings in London and the south east; notably most of the residences facing Ascot racecourse. More locally he designed Grantham Hospital and the Roman Catholic Chapel in Skegness³.

2.2.3. To achieve his vision, Mr Came created a stringent set of design and planning guidelines, even specifying that thoroughfares in Woodhall Spa should be called roads, avenues, terraces, but not "streets"; a policy that is maintained today.

¹ English Heritage: *Understanding Place: Historic Characterisation for Planning & Development*: www.english-heritage.org.uk

² Woodhall Spa Cottage Museum website: www.woodhallspa-museum.co.uk

³ Skegness Roman Catholic Chapel is built to virtually the same design as the one in Woodhall Spa

2.2.4. At the heart of this new community were the Pinewoods and Spa Baths, the luxurious Victoria Hotel⁴ nearby (which burnt down on Easter Day 1920) and the Royal Hotel and Winter Gardens (where Royal Square is today), which was destroyed by a parachute aerial mine in 1943. There were many other smaller hotels and boarding houses to accommodate the visitors who flocked to take the waters; arriving at Woodhall Junction, which had direct links to London, and travelling into the second station in the centre of the Spa on the Horncastle branch line.

2.3. A Fashionable Spa Resort

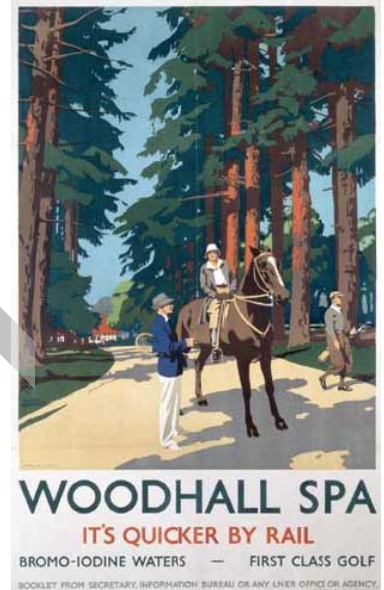
2.3.1. In its Edwardian heyday, the cream of society, including royalty, visited Woodhall Spa. Accordingly the community enjoyed many more facilities than would normally be expected in a village of its size - still the case today. Distinguished guests at the Victoria Hotel would be seen in full evening dress strolling through woods hung with Chinese lanterns before dinner, there was even a regular visitor list printed.

2.3.2. Although the Spa became a less fashionable destination after the First World War, the community continued to prosper in a quiet way as both as an elegant leisure destination and as a centre for healing. The handbook of the British Spa Federation, published in the early 1920s, describes Woodhall Spa as having "the most useful and powerful mineral waters for drinking and bathing purposes we possess". The internationally famous Golf Course was redesigned by Colonel S V Hotchkin MC and C K Hutchison in the 1920's and has since remained virtually unaltered. It is a world ranking Championship course and was recently voted the 'Best Inland Golf Course' by Golf World magazine. It was purchased by the English Golf Union In 1995, who have since built their HQ in the grounds and created a second 18-hole course.

2.3.3. The Jubilee Park and swimming pool were created in 1935 and given to Woodhall Spa by Lady Weigall in 1947, a facility as far from the municipal baths of the time as it was possible to be. She also oversaw the conversion of her concert pavilion to the famous Kinema in the Woods, opened in 1922. Visitors from all over the country came to take the waters and returned year after year. Bottles of Spa water were posted throughout the UK. Like other Spas, the village also attracted a cosmopolitan mix of ex-colonial families, writers and artists, many of whom came to live here.

2.4. Woodhall Spa at War

2.4.1. During the Second World War the Spa took on the atmosphere of a garrison town, recording more air raid warnings than Lincoln. The streets rang to the sound of marching feet as regiments from across Britain disembarked at the Junction and marched down the Witham Road to billets in empty or requisitioned houses and hotels or to the camps on Kirkby Lane. Armed guards surrounded The Pinewoods where Edwardian aristocrats used to walk and where equipment and ammunition were now stored.



2.3. Edwardian Railway Poster

2.4.2. In 1944, glider-borne troops, destined to participate in the ill-fated battle for the bridge at Arnhem, trained around the village and the fortunate survivors of the action were flown back to RAF Woodhall Spa. The RAF used the Petwood Hotel as an officers' mess, most famously for the 617 'Dambuster' Squadron. At the end of the war, as the British troops left, thousands of Polish troops arrived, continuing the cosmopolitan experience.

2.5. Village Development

2.5.1. Over the next 30 years, Woodhall Spa evolved into its current role as a conference, leisure and social centre for the county and beyond, with its range of hotels, restaurants, shops, pubs and the many sporting, and social clubs. The Woodhall Spa Agricultural Show ran for more than 50 years, in its heyday second

only to the county show in popularity. It was revived in 2006 and is growing in popularity year by year. As car use



2.4. The Victoria Hotel in its heyday

⁴ This is now the site of Coronation Hall

grew, railway lines closed and train services were cut back; the Horncastle branch line, which ran through the centre of the Spa, closing to passengers in 1954. This was followed in 1970 by the Boston to Lincoln line; the line to which it linked.

2.5.2. Until 1974, Woodhall Spa had its own Urban District Council and remained very much in control of its own fate, determining the style and type of developments, maintaining its own tree-lined avenues and developing the park and other public spaces.

2.5.3. Under local government re-organisation, the Urban District Council ceased to exist to be replaced by a Parish Council. While surrounding villages rejoiced in the new powers of parish councils, Woodhall Spa had the opposite experience. Planning control and the running of Jubilee Park, road and tree maintenance and other powers passed to the new District and County Councils, a loss keenly felt to this day. The ancient parish of Kirkstead was absorbed by Woodhall Spa in the early 1980s, bringing with it many notable buildings including the ruin of the great Cistercian Kirkstead Abbey and the 13th Century St Leonard's Church⁵.

2.5.4. When the National Health Service was founded in 1946, the Spa Baths were using the water for rheumatic treatment. The patients were brought by ambulance or stayed at the Alexander Hospital. Most of the treatments used in the 20th century relied on application of heat, either through hot water douches or massages in the various treatment rooms, or immersion in the swimming pool. Spa treatments began to go out of favour in the 1960s and by the 1980s there was declining interest, including from the National Health Service. It was generally considered that the application of radiant heat did little to promote permanent cures. Then, in 1983, the very attraction that brought the village its original success and prosperity was wrecked when the Spa well collapsed in on itself, dragging much of the infrastructure above ground with it. The frontage of the Bath House complex is still standing; however, it is under private ownership, has been unoccupied for 26 years and is in drastic need of repair and renovation.



2.5. Woodhall Spa Cottage Museum

2.5.5. It was from the early 1970s that Woodhall Spa experienced a more concerted house building programme in its woodlands; Arnhem Way and Woodland Drive were built and houses were added to infill the existing avenues and roads. As pressure built with the housing boom of the 1980's, the need to protect the remaining woods and the special character and heritage of the Spa led to the creation of the Cottage Museum⁶ in 1987, the publishing of the first Village Plan⁷ in 1988 and the designation of the central part of the village as a Conservation area in 1991⁸. A review of the detailed Conservation Area Appraisal was carried out in 2007 and the report published in 2008⁹. The Village Plan, and its successor District Plan, undoubtedly helped to ensure that many old properties were tastefully renovated and new developments in the centre of the Spa enhanced and enlivened the village. However, despite the protective measures taken there is still a very real threat to the character and heritage of the village from inappropriate development.

Development Milestones

1884-90	Victoria Avenue
1888	Tor 'O' Moor Road
1968	Maple Ave
1971 -	Woodland Drive
1971	Arnhem Way
1973	Abbey Drive
1983-86	Tower Drive
1991	Grove Drive
1995-2009	Viking Estate

2.5.6. An extensive building programme on land between Witham Road and Green Lane began in the mid 1990's. A total of 381 one and two storey houses, of varying design, were constructed. Small scale developments on former railway and industrial land close to the centre of the village, consisting mainly of flats and low cost housing, are steadily filling in the gaps. Two camping and caravanning sites currently under construction will transform two popular open spaces and the views from the north and west edges of the village.

2.5.7. WSPC is now a designated 'Quality Council'¹⁰, with the 'Power of Wellbeing'¹¹. This means that it has achieved the recognised benchmark of professionalism and now has the power to do anything it considers likely to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area unless explicitly prohibited elsewhere in legislation.

⁵ Go to Section 5 for more detailed description of Kirkstead. Also Woodhall Spa Community website: www.woodhallspa.org/heritage_kirkstead

⁶ The Cottage Museum aim is "To portray the history and the unique character of the life and culture of Woodhall Spa and its locality"

⁷ The Woodhall Spa Village Plan (1988) can be viewed in Woodhall Spa Library

⁸ A review of the Conservation Area was carried out by consultants in 2007 and the report published in 2008.

⁹ The Conservation Area Appraisal has still to be formally adopted by ELDC. Community website: www.woodhallspa.org/heritage_conservation

¹⁰ Quality Council - National Association of Local Councils: www.nalc.gov.uk

¹¹ Power of Well-being - Communities & Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

2.5.8. The ELDC LDF classes Woodhall Spa as a Level 3 Service Village. This implies that Woodhall Spa is able to provide a range of facilities to meet its own needs and for some of the needs of smaller villages within its immediate sphere of influence.¹² To fulfil its role as a service village Woodhall Spa is expected to provide at least one convenience store, a primary school, rural workshops and a range of premises for business use, a doctor and/or dentist, affordable housing to meet local needs and a range of community facilities. The LDF also places Woodhall Spa as a satellite to the 'Coningsby-Tattershall' town. This may help to limit housing development within the village, but conversely it could threaten our existing public services if rationalisation is deemed necessary or a choice of location has to be made.

2.6. Character Assessment

2.6.1. This narrative may have painted a rather negative picture of a village in continual decline since Edwardian times, but this far from the case. Visitors return to Woodhall Spa year after year; some of them having been coming since early childhood; their enjoyment apparently derived from the feeling that they have stepped back into the past and recaptured their childhood memories. Significant features of the Spa's appeal are: its uniqueness, the spa heritage, its historical and fashionable links (especially with royalty), its resort ambience (which has its roots in people coming to take the waters), the attractiveness of the gardens (a garden village), the proliferation of trees (both those which line the roads and those in woodland settings) and the fact that it is an excellent base for touring the county.

2.6.2. However, it also means that Woodhall Spa is a favourite retirement destination for people from all over the UK, and popular with the builders as they can demand high prices and still sell their properties. There is a significant mark up on property prices in the village over identical ones in other Lincolnshire villages. Developers invariably advertise their Woodhall Spa properties in the south east of England and as a consequence, the large number of dwellings built in the Spa over the past 15 years has not served a local or regional need¹³.

The following chapters of the VDS will describe what makes Woodhall Spa what it is now (2010) and outlines how residents would like to see the village developing in the future.

¹² ELDC - Core Strategy SP1 - A Sustainable Hierarchy of Places

¹³ ELDC - Woodhall Spa Character Assessment (2002)