

ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN ADOPTED 21ST SEPTEMBER 2016



1.0 Introduction

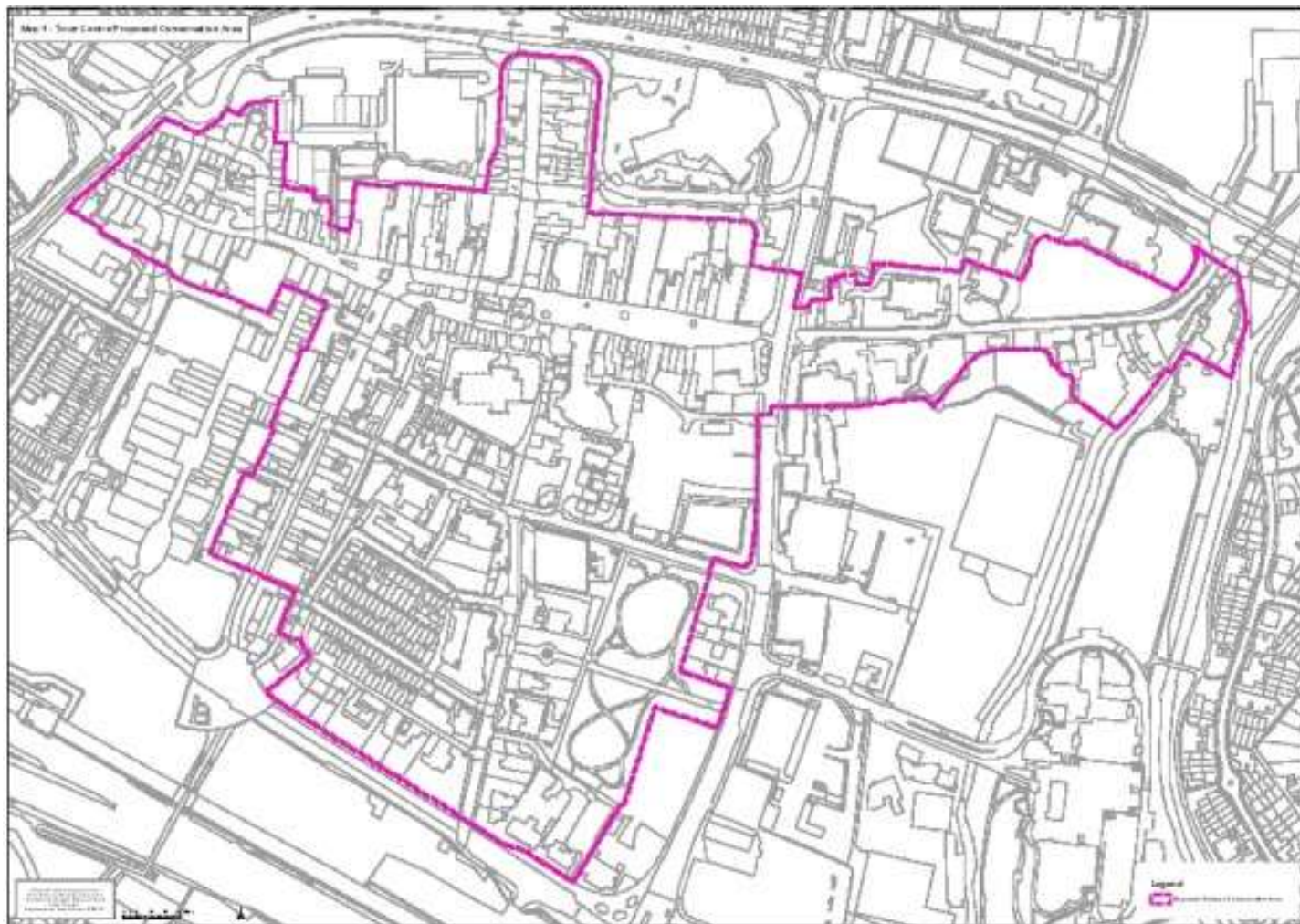
The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’. This Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is the first to be produced for the area and has been produced in collaboration with Borough Council Members and officers and representatives of the Central Ashford Community Forum. Local authorities are required by law to regularly review their conservation areas and produce Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. These explain what is important about the area and what improvements are needed.

This Appraisal and Management Plan is based on best practice contained within the Historic England guidance on Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (2011, with Revision Note June 2012).

1.1 Conservation Area Boundary

The evaluation of the Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area has involved an assessment of historic maps and documents and comprehensive site surveys including a walkabout involving a Ward Councillor; representatives of the Central Ashford Community Forum and Ashford Museum where the group observed and recorded the key positive and negative features which made up the character and appearance of the area. This extensive process has informed the proposed boundary of the Conservation Area. A review of the boundary of the Conservation Area has been conducted in preparing this Appraisal in order to establish whether the boundary remains appropriate. In general, it has been concluded that the boundary was the correct one for defining the area of special architectural or historic interest but a number of amendments were recommended and adopted as a result of this Appraisal.

Map 1 (overleaf) shows the revised Conservation Area boundary, now adopted.



MAP 1 ADOPTED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

1.2 Definition and Purpose of Conservation Areas

Designation as a Conservation Area empowers the local authority to pay particular attention to proposed development within, and affecting the setting of, a Conservation Area and gives greater control over such matters as demolition, landscaping and trees, and the display of advertisements.

Designation also raises the awareness of local residents and businesses to the quality of their surroundings and is intended to encourage an active interest in the care and maintenance of their properties and surrounding land, thereby fostering a sense of communal pride.

The purpose of designation of a conservation area is to preserve or enhance an area of special architectural or historic interest - and enhancement measures are proposed in this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAMP).

1.3 Purpose of Appraisals and Management Plans

The principal purpose of this Appraisal is to provide a firm basis on which proposals for development within and adjoining the proposed Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area can be assessed, through defining those key elements that contribute to the special historic and architectural character and which should be preserved or enhanced. The Appraisal will be a key document in maintaining character and promoting appropriate, sensitively sited and designed proposals in the Conservation Area.

The appraisal and management plan defines the key elements that together give the area its character and objectively analyses how they interact to enhance their individual impact. It then provides management suggestions for future policies and improvements based on a clear understanding of the special architectural and historic qualities that give the area its local distinctiveness.

The plan will help the Borough Council, those proposing development and the local community engage in the conservation and enhancement of the local historic environment and help secure the long-term viability of the Conservation Area as an important heritage asset.

As an adopted CAMP, the plan is a material consideration in the determination of development proposals.

2.0 Planning Context

2.1 National Guidance

Government advice concerning conservation areas and historic buildings is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. This states that one of the Government's Core Planning Principles is to conserve heritage assets, including conservation areas and listed buildings, in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations. The Government states that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.

The Government advises local planning authorities to take account of the different roles and character of different areas and always seek to secure high quality design.

In determining applications, the Government advises that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of a Conservation Area affected by a proposal (including by development affecting its setting). The Government states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a Conservation Area, great weight should be given to its conservation.

2.2 The Development Plan

The Saved Local Plan (2000) policy - Development in Conservation Areas, and Ashford Core Strategy (2008) contains the following policies which apply to Conservation Areas.

EN16: Development or redevelopment within Conservation Areas will be permitted provided

such proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Proposals must fulfil each of the following criteria:

- a) the scale and detailed design of new work has respect for the historic, architectural and landscape context of the established character of the area;
- b) the materials proposed to be used are appropriate to the locality and in sympathy with existing buildings;
- c) the following are retained – buildings and streets of townscape character, trees, open spaces, walls, fences or any other features which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area;
- d) the development does not generate levels of traffic, parking, or other environmental problems which would damage the character or appearance of the area; and
- e) the use proposed is appropriate.

POLICY CS1: Guiding Principles

Sustainable development and high quality design are at the centre of the Council's approach to plan making and deciding planning applications.

Accordingly, the Council will apply the following key planning objectives:

B. The conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and built heritage of the Borough...

POLICY CS9: Design Quality

Development proposals must be of high quality design and demonstrate a positive response to each of the following design criteria:

- a) Character, Distinctiveness and Sense of Place
- b) Permeability and Ease of Movement
- c) Legibility
- d) Mixed use and Diversity
- e) Continuity and Enclosure
- f) Quality of Public Spaces
- g) Flexibility, Adaptability and Liveability
- h) Richness in Detail
- i) Efficient use of Natural Resources

Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan (2010) contains the following policy which applies to Conservation Areas:

Policy TC1: Guiding Principles

The following key planning objectives will apply to all development proposals within the Town Centre. These objectives complement the more general objectives in the Core Strategy.

- A) Conserve and enhance the Town Centre's heritage and character, especially the two Conservation Areas and their settings, in particular by respecting the scale and bulk of existing buildings and protecting important views of the town's skyline and St. Mary's Church;
- B) Create a balance and mix of uses within sites and around the town centre as a whole that helps to generate a varied and interesting urban environment that best meets the needs of all its users;
- C) Protect existing residential environments and residents' quality of life and create new living environments of lasting quality;
- D) Deliver an attractive and safe urban environment with a strong sense of place by the high quality design of buildings and public spaces to help attract investors, residents, employees, visitors, shoppers and tourists alike;
- E) Create a network of public spaces in the town centre linked to the agreed hierarchy of streets and open spaces and built to an agreed quality standard;
- F) Create attractive and vibrant main streets by achieving appropriate building forms fronting these streets, with active ground floor frontages, proportionate heights, and uses that respond to the agreed hierarchy of streets and open spaces;
- G) Secure the inclusion of public art as an integral part of development proposals on allocated and other prominent sites;
- H) Protect and enhance the Town Centre's existing green open spaces, and the river corridors by enhancing their wildlife, biodiversity and landscape value;
- I) Where development, on sites within the 100 year undefended floodplain, is otherwise acceptable, ensure that this can be achieved without worsening flood conditions on site or elsewhere;
- J) Protect and enhance the existing cycle/pedestrian network and create additional attractive and safe routes as opportunities arise, to increase the attractiveness of the town centre and create new routes between it and the green spaces and river corridors.

The Town Centre Conservation Area is located within the Town Centre Core and the Civic Quarter areas as defined in the **Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan** where specific allocations are made for a range of town centre uses.

Policy TC4 allocates the Park Mall site where proposals will:

‘Investigate the potential to move the building line forward to front Somerset Road and create a significantly more attractive street frontage here in any event’ and ‘Provide an appropriate scale and massing of development that relates well to surrounding buildings but also helps to mark key entrances to the town centre’

Policy TC5 allocates Vicarage Lane Car Park where proposals will:

‘Make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, including providing an appropriate building form and a fine grain network of streets/ paths that helps to connect and knit this site into the historic core - providing important new and enhanced links to the Lower High Street and the Churchyard’ and ‘provide a strong street frontage to Station Road with an attractive façade and active ground floor uses’. for a range of town centre uses.

Policy TC6 allocates the corner of Elwick Road & Station Road where proposals will:

Respect and enhance Memorial Gardens through careful integration of the new built form, and creating an attractive sense of enclosure to the Gardens’ and ‘Create an especially high quality building on the corner of Elwick Road and Station Road which marks this important entrance to the town and helps create a more formal street pattern by moving the building line forwards to front the streets and improve the public realm at the junction’ and ‘Seek to retain the existing Swanton Villa buildings’.

Policy TC3 allocates the Elwick Place site immediately to the south of the Conservation Area where *‘all proposals will be designed sensitively to enhance the setting of the Conservation Area’.*

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT AT THE TIME OF ADOPTION OF THIS APPRAISAL, THE LOCAL PLAN 2030, WAS IN DRAFT FORM ONLY. UPON ADOPTION OF THE NEW LOCAL PLAN (EXPECTED IN LATE 2018) THE POLICIES LISTED ABOVE WILL BE DELETED AND REPLACED WITH NEW POLICIES. THEREFORE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO CONSIDER THE REVISED TOWN CENTRE POLICIES AND PROTECTIONS OF HERITAGE ASSETS AND CONSERVATION AREA POLICIES WITHIN THE LOCAL PLAN HERE:

www.ashford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-to-2030/

This CAMP helps define the distinctive character of the different parts of the Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area and the importance of its setting and, in turn, helps the Borough Council apply the above policies within the conservation area and its setting.

Development proposals will be judged against their overall contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the area and its setting as set out in this Appraisal. Context and quality design is vitally important in reinforcing the character of this area and the character must not be lost through undue pressure for inappropriate or poorly designed development or redevelopment of an unacceptable nature.

2.3 Special Controls in the Conservation Area

Designation of a Conservation Area does not mean that development cannot occur, but rather that any change should preserve or enhance the features which make up its special character.

Some minor development can be carried out without the need to obtain planning permission – generally referred to as ‘Permitted Development’. These are subject to the proposal meeting strict criteria, for example relating to size and detailed positioning. As the law relating to planning permission is complex, and the rules governing ‘Permitted Development’ are changing, you are strongly advised to seek advice from the Council before carrying out any development.

The Planning Portal: Information can be found under Do you need permission? section on the planning portal website (<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission>)

Nevertheless, the principles contained in this Appraisal promote good practice and should be relevant whether planning permission is required or not.

Within a Conservation Area, controls are imposed which are additional to normal planning restrictions, in order to maintain the character and appearance of the area. These are outlined here for information. However other planning controls may still apply and are not altered by conservation area status.

Houses and their alteration

The size of an extension that may be built without the need to apply for planning permission is more restricted within a conservation area. Any proposals should always be discussed with the Council at an early stage. Planning permission may be required for the erection of a building or structure within the garden of the house subject to size or siting, for example, a workshop, pavilion, greenhouse and so on.

Cladding of the exterior of a residential property with stone, artificial stone, timber, plastic or tiles will require submission of a planning application. Any enlargement of a house by way of additions to the roof, e.g. a dormer window to the front elevation, will require a planning application to be made.

A planning application is needed for a satellite antenna where it is to be installed on a chimney, wall, or a roof slope which faces onto, and is visible from, a road.

Other commercial premises and flats

Any extension or alteration to other commercial premises or residential flats, which materially affects the external appearance of the building, will require a planning application to be made. This is particularly important within conservation areas, where even small alterations can materially affect the character and appearance of the area. For instance, such alterations can include rendering brickwork, replacement of slates with concrete tiles, and replacement windows.

Demolition

Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of any building, whether in whole or in part, within a conservation area, except the following:

- any building with a total cubic content not exceeding 115m³ or any substantial part of such building
- any wall of fence (or substantial part) less than 1m high fronting onto the street or less than 2m high elsewhere
- any building subject to a formal order requiring demolition

This consent is in addition to any planning permission which you may require to replace the building.

Trees

6 weeks written notice must be given to the Council of intent to cut down, top, lop, uproot or destroy a tree within a Conservation Area. The Council will then advise if it wishes to raise an objection. If a response is not received from the Council within 6 weeks of the notice being given, work may go ahead. This requirement does not apply to trees which have a diameter less than 75mm when measured at a height of 1.5m above the ground and trees already covered by a Tree Preservation Order, in which case any works will require consent.

Unauthorised Works and development

Sometimes, landowners and others carry out works without first obtaining any necessary consent from the Borough Council. The Council does have certain legal powers to deal with such situations, but can only take enforcement action once it is aware of any alleged unauthorised works and after detailed investigation.

Maintenance and Repairs

The Council has a duty to pay special attention to the character or appearance of conservation areas, in exercising its planning powers. However, these powers are limited. The principal guardians of the character and appearance of the area are the residents and business people who live and work in the conservation area and who are responsible for maintaining their individual properties.

The character of conservation areas can be altered or lost through the use of inappropriate materials, not only on the buildings themselves but also on the ground, roads, and along boundaries. The introduction of features, such as street furniture, signs, lights, and hard surfacing, can change an area's character. Within the conservation area the buildings are part of a wider street scene, often of buildings of similar style and size. Altering the appearance, form or size of any one building can affect not only the individual building, but the whole street. Unsympathetic replacement windows (particularly where the size of the openings are changed or inappropriate materials or designs are used) can alter the appearance of a building considerably. Where a number of different designs are used along a street, the rhythm and unity of its original appearance can be spoilt.

Painting or rendering over original brickwork is another alteration which can dramatically change a property's appearance and irreparably affect the street scene. As well as covering up attractive brickwork, it can obscure original architectural and brick detailing and requires regular redecoration to maintain an attractive appearance. In older buildings paint or render can also trap moisture which may cause damage to walls.

Boundary treatments

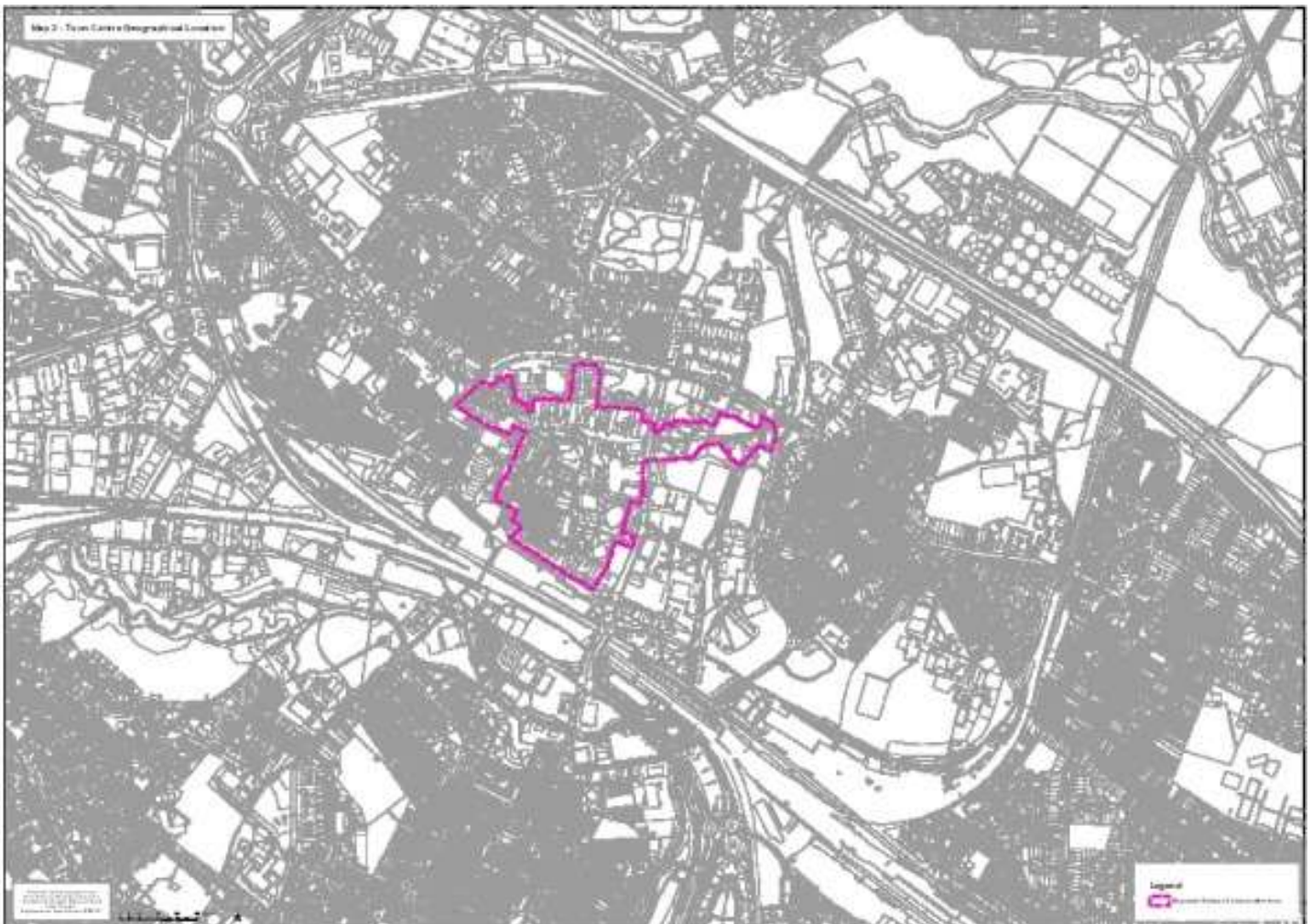
Boundary treatment, especially to the street, is an essential feature of any property. Original boundaries, whether a brick or ragstone wall, railings, white painted picket fencing, or hedge should be retained wherever possible and every effort made to reinstate missing boundary treatments with a sympathetic replacement. The particular design and the materials used should take account of the character of the property and the surrounding area.

3.0 Context and Development

3.1 General Description

The Conservation Area covers over 20 hectares of the town centre, including the Church and adjoining square, High Street, North Street, Bank Street, residential streets, Memorial and Vicarage Gardens, extending down East Hill towards the River Stour. There are many listed buildings within the Conservation Area, particularly around St Marys Church and Middle Row.

MAP 2 - GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION



3.2 Historical Development

Located strategically on a rise in the land of the Stour river valley, close to a river crossing point and on the route of an important Roman road linking Tenterden to Canterbury (along the line of the current Beaver Road and Station Road), the area has been populated in some form since the Iron Age period. Ashford town probably originates from a settlement established around 893AD. It became large enough to have a mention in the doomsday book in 1086, listed with a church and two mills under the name 'Essetesford'. The name may derive from 'Eshset', an early name proposed for the upper River Stour (on the ford of which the town is located), or from the Old English words 'aescet' or 'aescseat', meaning a collection of ash trees, or a corner angle where ash trees grow.

The settlement developed in a linear fashion along the main east-west highway, now the High Street, which linked eastwards down East Hill to an ancient bridge crossing near the confluence of the Rivers East Stour and Great Stour. North Lane, now North Street, led out of town towards Canterbury and Faversham, an important port in earlier times, and Marsh Street, now Station Road, led south across the River Stour towards Beaver and Kingsnorth. St. Mary's Church, now a grade I Listed building, which has been the town's key landmark since medieval times formed the town's southern boundary until expansion in the 18th Century. A church has probably been located on this site since the 11th century, but the current building seems to have been constructed some time in the late 14th or early 15th century. Certainly, by 1500 St Mary's had already been remodelled several times, with the nave rebuilt and a 37m high bell tower with pinnacles added in c.1475. Remnants of earlier fabric have been found in the building, including Caen stone quoins in the northeast and southeast nave, and a blocked 14th century window in the west wall of the south transept.

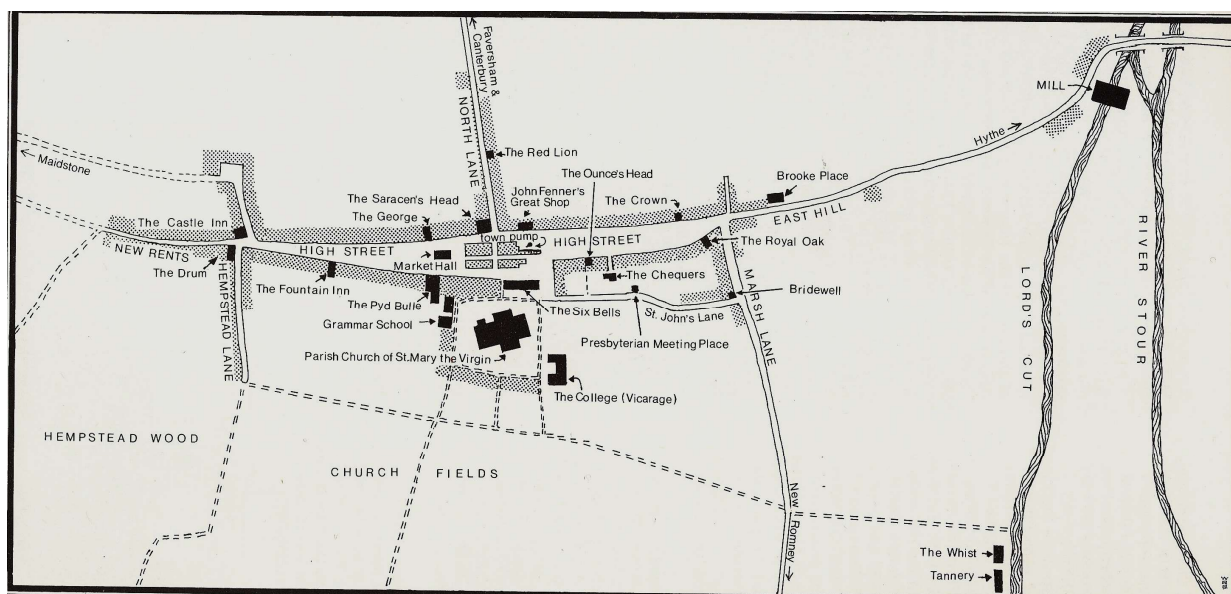
Ashford officially became a market town with a charter granted in 1243 primarily for livestock. A weekly Saturday market was held in the High Street as well as an annual fair. The market led to the further development of the east-west running High Street, known as the King's Highway at this time, with the establishment of a variety of new businesses lining the street including butchers, fishmongers and corn merchants. Carpenters, tanners and blacksmiths also serviced the needs of those living in the town or visiting from the surrounding countryside. By 1500 some permanent stalls had been established in the market and a purpose-built market hall had been constructed where North Street, the route into town from Canterbury and the High Street meet.

This area, known as Middle Row, incorporated the town cage (re-discovered in 1981), permanent shops and a meeting hall at first floor level. There were also a number of inns, such as The George on the High Street (still in use as an inn today), and several local breweries. As the primary thoroughfare of the town and the town's market place, the High Street created a predominantly linear urban form, widening out in the centre to accommodate the market buildings and spaces. High Street and North Street were lined with narrow long, 'burgage' plots (plots leased to town residents, or 'burgesses', by the local lord). The narrow street frontage would have been used for trading with residential and warehouse space located at the rear accessed via a narrow alleyway between the buildings or from a rear service lane. The plots were narrow as the frontage space onto busy streets was at a premium and therefore limited. The constraints of space on the High Street resulted in the increasing encroachment of buildings onto the Churchyard. This area had remained open land until

1464 when the College of Priests was established in the yard. By 1550 at least three sides of the churchyard were lined with buildings.

The plan of the town centre including the High Street, North Street and Middle Row still follows the medieval street pattern though the Lower High Street is probably now slightly narrower than it was in the medieval period. The long, narrow building plots that still line much of the High Street generally continue to follow the boundaries defined by the original burgage plots. Medieval buildings would have been mostly of timber-framed construction, two or three storeys high, with steep-pitched thatched roofs and large square timber panels infilled with wattle and daub or 'close studded' timber framed buildings with closely-spaced, vertical, non-structural timbers on the exterior. Other typical features include 'jettied' the building at first floor level to create extra space, and carved timber bargeboards, brackets and posts. A significant number of medieval buildings have survived in the town centre primarily located along the High Street and North Street and around the Churchyard. Fine examples of Medieval timber framed buildings can be seen at The College in the Churchyard, which was originally the three-winged College of Priests and jettied buildings can be seen at 7, 13 and 20 North Street, 63 High Street and in Middle Row. Although many medieval buildings were re-fronted in later centuries, the medieval timber frame fabric and the gabled rooflines and catslide roofs of the medieval buildings can still be seen.

During the **sixteenth and seventeenth centuries** the town expanded slowly along the existing medieval streets, with new buildings being constructed on the fringes of the High Street and North Street. Ashford was designated a 'post town' between Maidstone and Canterbury in 1675 and developed an inn and boarding house trade. The churchyard increasingly became developed with domestic buildings and a Grammar School founded by Sir Norton Knatchbull, was built in the yard (c.1635), now a Grade II* Listed Building the school was moved to another site in 1874. No maps from this time exist but the map below, based on the evidence of documents from the time, shows the approximate extent of the town (built up areas shown as hatching), and some of the key buildings.



MAP 3 ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA ILLUSTRATION C.1660 – 1700 (SOURCE: SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ASHFORD. LIFE IN THE KENTISH MARKET TOWN. RESEARCH BY MEMBERS OF THE ASHFORD LOCAL HISTORY GROUP,1980)

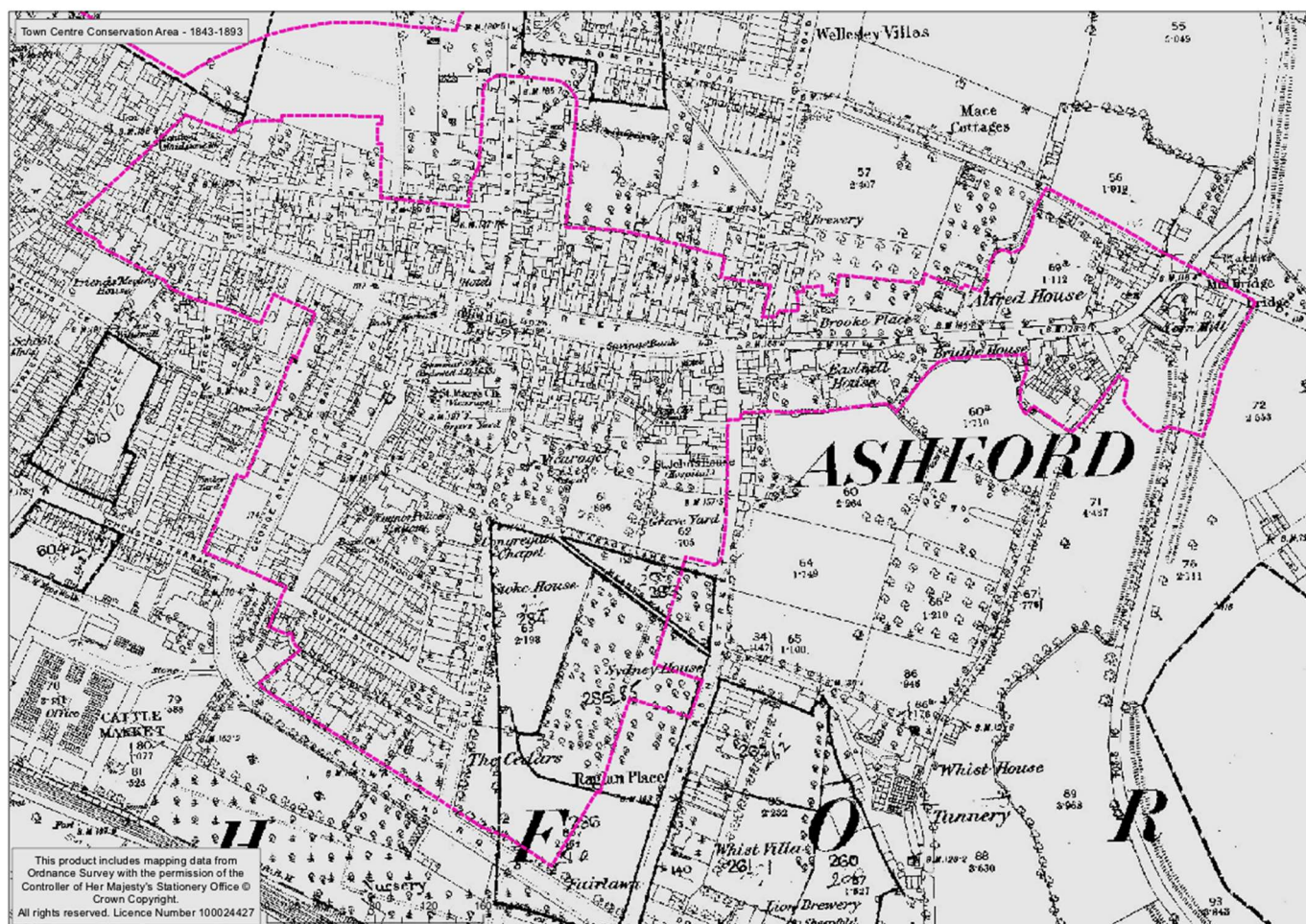
Older timber buildings began to be replaced with new timber structures or were re-fronted or modernised with more fashionable architectural features, such as dormer windows and shallow canted bays. Older features were disguised, with many jetties in particular being under-built with brick, such as at Talbot House in the Churchyard. New building types were also introduced in the town, including small chapels that catered for the tendency towards non-conformity in the Ashford during the 17th century. 17th Century building materials include Kent peg roofing tiles and orange/red Wealden clay tiles and bricks and at 1 Middle Row, a copy of the building's original 17th century 'pargetting', a decorative treatment using plaster has been recreated.

In the **eighteenth century** Ashford became a meeting point for the new turnpike roads constructed across Kent (1762-1795). Improved travelling conditions increased the number of visitors to and through the town, with markets and local businesses benefiting, particularly those related to the hospitality trade and there were over 20 inns in the town centre by the mid-18th century. This commercial success encouraged the first significant residential development outside the medieval centre, along East Hill joining the lower High Street at its eastern end. East Hill's elevated position overlooking the River Stour created an ideal site for a country style villa and a number of large Georgian villas were built by the town's wealthier residents, such as Nightingale House. Many of these large detached houses still remain, though no longer in residential use, many directly abutting the road and are notable for their plainness of style. In the rest of the town, the focus of development was on gentrification rather than new construction. The town was still relatively compact extending from New Rents in the west to the bottom of East Hill, and from the top of North Street to the south side of the churchyard with the edge of the town still adjoining open countryside. However, many buildings were re-fronted with new formal brick facades, incorporating sash windows, classical features and large cornices or parapets to disguise the steep-pitched roofs behind. These facades were concentrated on visible public elevations such as at The George Hotel and 9 North Street.

Up to the **nineteenth century**, Ashford's commerce primarily focused on the market, which had become one of the largest in southern England, and on coaching routes to Hythe, Maidstone and Canterbury. In the 1840s, however, Ashford entered a period of massive population growth when the South Eastern Railway Company opened their railway line between Ashford and London in 1842 followed by other lines. As Ashford was located at the intersection of routes the town changed rapidly from an agricultural to an industrial economy and the population grew from 3000 in 1841 to 13,000 by 1901. The impact on the size and layout of Ashford was substantial with the railway creating a new focus and town boundary to the south of the town centre. Large quantities of new housing were built for workers at the edges of the existing town, some beyond the Conservation Area boundary in Apsley Street and East Hill. Good quality terraced housing with good-sized gardens for the middle classes were laid out on church 'glebe land' (land owned by the church from which it derived an income) immediately south of the Churchyard on Tufton Street, Church Road, Norwood Street and Queen Street. Large detached and semi-detached villas were constructed further south along Elwick Road from 1865 marking the southernmost boundary of the nineteenth century residential expansion of the town.

In the town centre there was great pressure on space, as shops and services attempted to develop to meet the needs of the population. The cattle market was moved away from the centre to beyond Elwick Road in 1865. New shopping streets were laid out off the High Street, the most important being Bank Street (c.1855). The land on which Upper Bank Street was developed was originally a large open space owned by the Old Ashford Bank, who used it as a garden. Lower Bank Street, previously known as George Street, was home to the yards servicing the adjacent cattle market.

The map below shows how the town expanded between 1843 and 1893 with the Town Centre Conservation Area highlighted in pink.



MAP 4 ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA 1843 – 1893

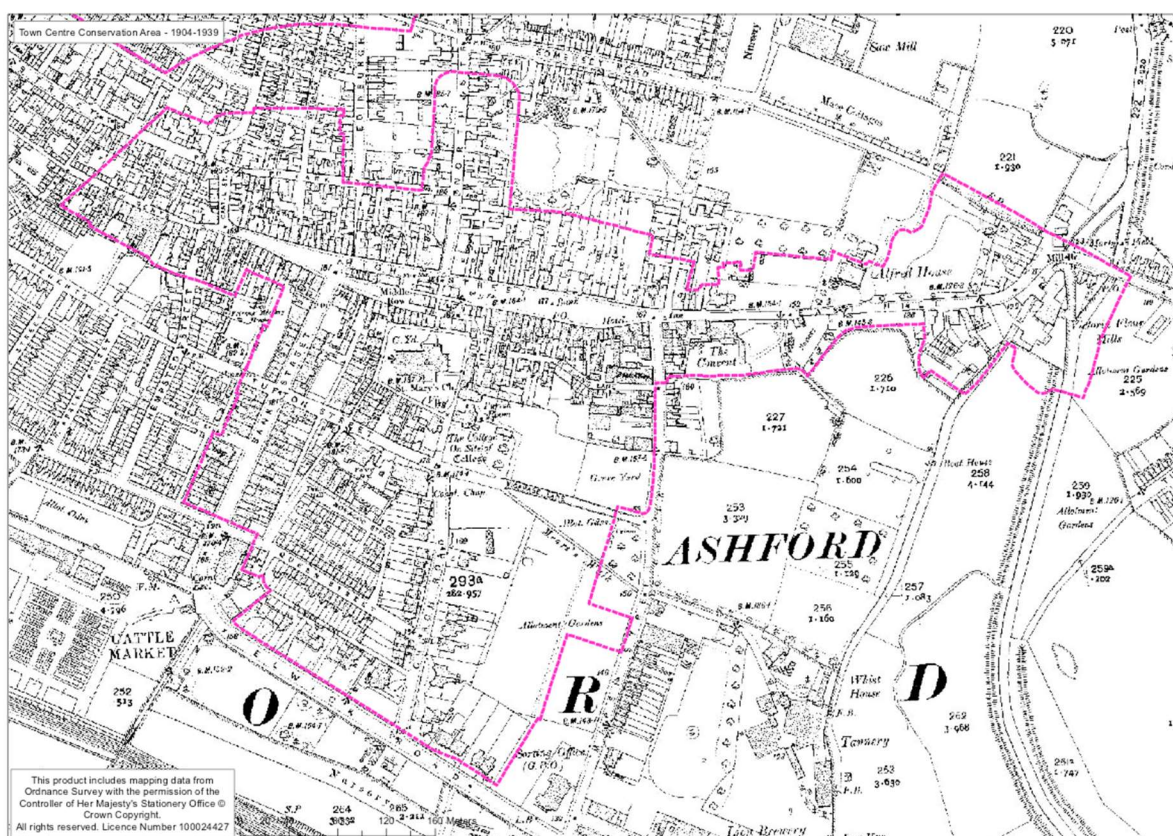
New community services were introduced to cope with the needs of the growing population and religious buildings also grew to meet the needs of the population. St. Mary's church was enlarged to accommodate the increasing congregation in 1827 when the aisles were widened, and again in 1860 when the church was lengthened to the west. Non-conformist churches were growing in popularity, and by the end of the nineteenth century the town included Baptist, Methodist and Congregational chapels, as well as a Quaker meeting hall.

During this time, large numbers of medieval buildings were again replaced or refaced. Rail transport increased the movement of materials and styles between towns and local and non-

local building materials began to be used side by side, to create typically Victorian multi coloured brickwork patterns or limestone dressed neoclassical buildings. Particularly significant facades can be seen on the Lower High Street and in New Rents, as well as on Bank Street, where the most complete nineteenth century building scheme was carried out. There were also significant public improvements starting with the town centre streets being paved between 1780 and 1800.

With the railway already at its greatest extent by 1900, Ashford's physical expansion began to slow and development in the early **twentieth century** was largely piecemeal replacement of buildings in the town centre. These were generally informed more by contemporary architectural trends such as Neo-Classicism than local vernacular traditions such as the prominent neoclassical facade at the northern end of Middle Row added in 1926 and the neo-Georgian Lloyds building on the corner of Bank Street. The Odeon cinema on the High Street amalgamated the sites of several historic buildings when constructed in 1926. A tank was presented to the town in 1919, now on display in St Georges Square.

The map below shows a similar pattern of development to the earlier 1843 – 1893 map but with the addition of villas to the east side of Church Road and Elwick Road. Bank Street was further developed and the mill building at the bottom of East Hill has been extended. Housing development also been extended north of Park Street.



MAP 5 ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA 1904 – 1939

The memorial garden became located on glebeland purchased from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1923. Nearby Vicarage Field, now a small green public square with lime trees and shrubs, formerly the graveyard of St. John's Hospital, was acquired in 1951. The adjacent remaining graveyard, a Grade II Listed building has mainly early C19 memorials including oval bodystones, table tombs and some headstones with sun-ray or urn motifs.

The construction of the ring road around the historic centre in the late 1960s/early 1970s involved the demolition of significant numbers of buildings, breaking historic street patterns and severing the centre from historic access routes and residential areas around the core. North Street and New Street were truncated to the north.

3.3 Setting and topography

As identified within the historical development section, the setting for the Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area now comprises the ring road and associated development which affected historic street patterns and severed the centre from historic access routes and residential areas around the historic core.

To the north of the Conservation Area, a concrete car park and ramp (right) present a long bland frontage facing the ring road and dominate the setting of this part of the Conservation Area. A view of the church is interrupted by the ramp.



The T-shaped Park Mall (left) comprises a narrow pedestrian thoroughfare running north from High Street leading to a wider square. The mall is a modern inward looking shopping arcade which is poorly related to the surrounding historic townscape.

Charter House is also located immediately to the north of the Conservation Area and dominates the skyline of the town centre in near and distant views.

To the east, the listed buildings (including walls) and parts of Ashford School fronting East Hill including mature tree groups are included within the Conservation Area. The modern, somewhat utilitarian buildings within the site (right) are new buildings and outdoor sports facilities which as a result of their scale and height (in relation to the boundary wall) have a neutral impact on the setting of the Conservation Area.



Although the school's boundary wall alongside the ring road (Mace Lane) is in part a remnant of boundary walls of gardens backing on to Mace Lane (see Maps 4 and 5), its relationship with the Conservation Area is tenuous at this point. The section around the junction with East Hill is newly constructed in an area previously occupied by a group of Victorian houses and the ragstone section is modern (erected following the ring road). Nevertheless the wall forms an important part of the setting of the Conservation Area and is important to the character of this part of Mace Lane (the ring road).



The trees around the River Stour and beyond extend the verdant view of East Hill looking east and form an important part of the setting of the East Hill character area.



The eastern edge of the Conservation Area fronts Station Road (ring road). The tall blocks on the eastern side are generally screened from the Conservation Area by mature trees (below left) but where they are not they tend to dominate the historic character (below right).



The domestic scale of buildings on the western side of Station Road, adjoining Memorial Park, mean that they have a neutral impact on the setting of this part of the Conservation Area.





To the west, New Rents is physically halted by the ring road but is visually linked to the large scale modern blocks arranged along a road visibility splay to New Street opposite. The development provides an unsympathetic setting for this part of the Conservation Area

To the south of the Conservation Area new development will replace the vacant sites and will provide the setting for the Conservation Area. Ashford College will be located to the south east of the Conservation Area and new development will be sited to the south off Elwick Road.



The trees around the River Great Stour and beyond are visible to the south of Bank Street and form an important part of the setting of the Bank Street character area.



4.0 Character Appraisal

Whilst Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area as a whole represents an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, for the purposes of this appraisal, the Conservation Area has been split into ten sub-areas which comprise distinctive character areas:

1 High Street/ Lower High Street and Church Yard

2 New Rents area

3 North Street

4 Bank Street

5 Church Road/ Tufton Street

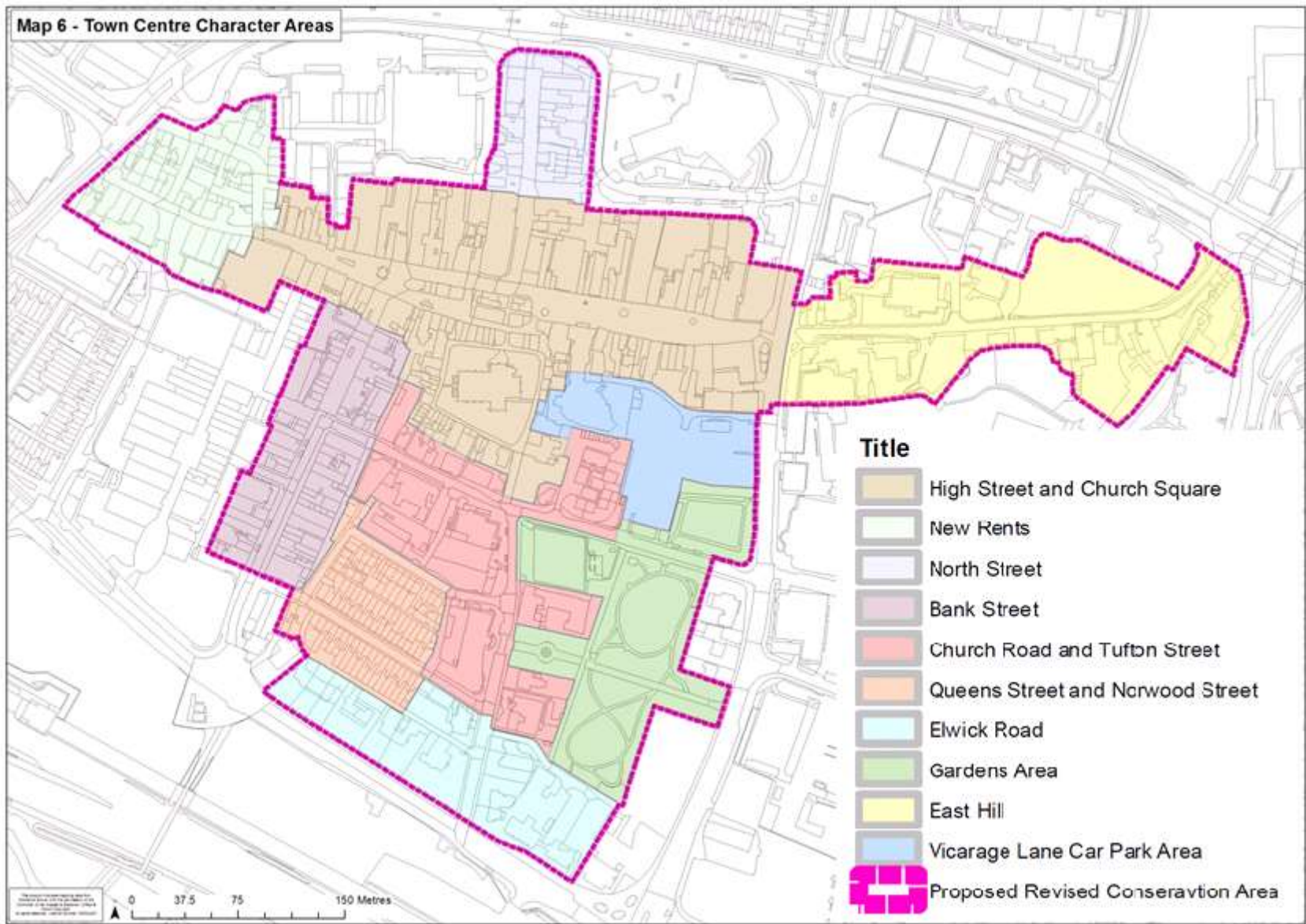
6 Queens Street/ Norwood Street

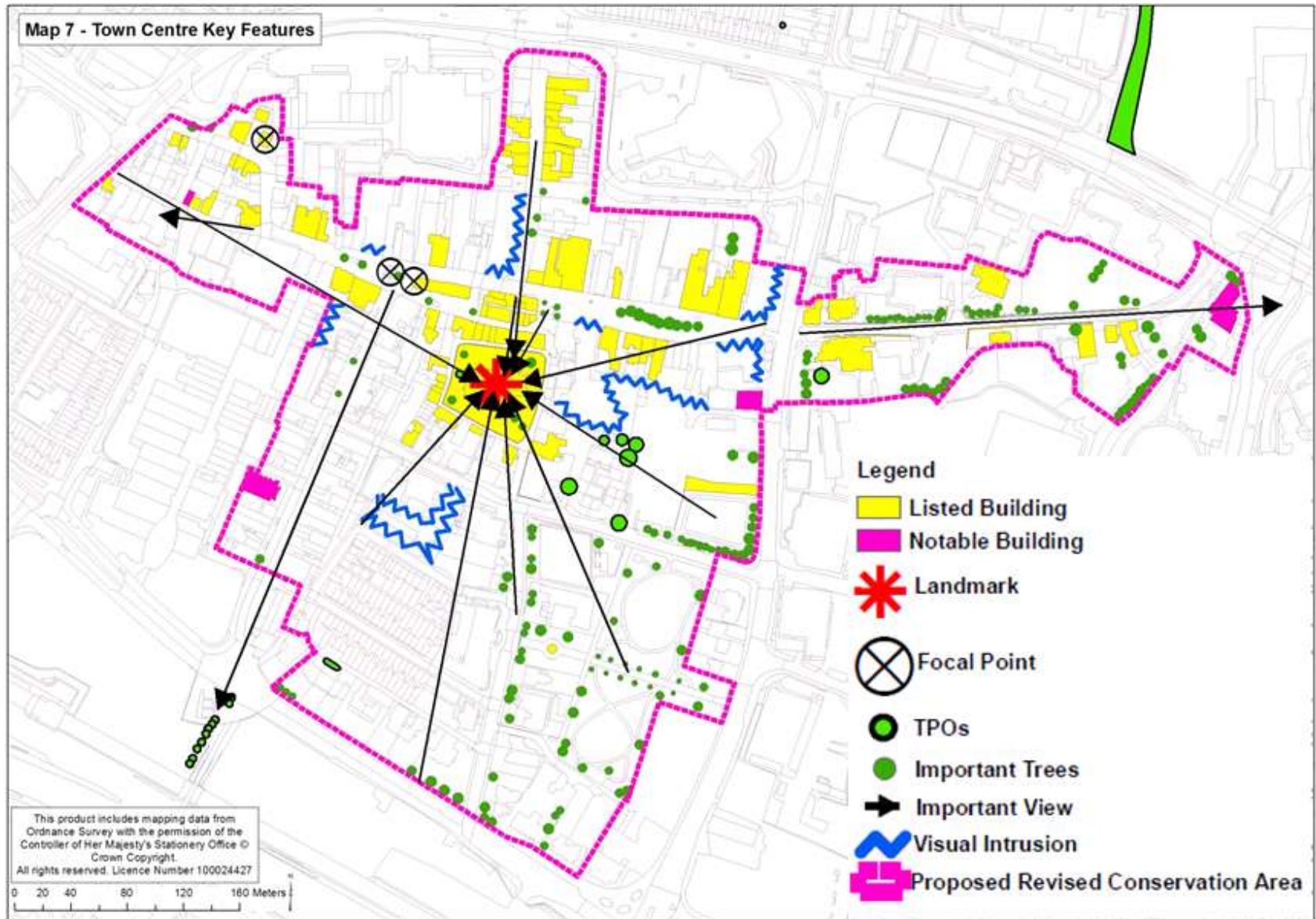
7 Elwick Road Area

8 Gardens Area

9 East Hill

10 Vicarage Lane Car Park Area





1 High Street/ Lower High Street and Church Yard

The east – west running High Street/ Lower High Street forms the heart of the original medieval town. The wide central street, the 2/3 storey buildings with steeply pitched roofs (sometimes with dormer windows or chimneys) and the narrow commercial frontages on the deep former burgage plots act as strong reminders of this period and form an important part of the historic character of this character area. The street is now pedestrianised (with the exception of limited vehicular access) with street trees, planters and a variety of surfacing. Heritage style street furniture is used in this area. Buildings are set to the back edge of the pedestrianised street along a regular building line and enclose the space. The predominant building materials within the High Street/ Lower High Street are white or cream painted render (including those associated with half-timbered buildings), red/ orange brick and plain tiled or slate roofs. The shops and other commercial uses provide active frontages on the ground floor (including cafes extending out onto paved areas) which, together with significant pedestrian movement, make this the busiest part of the Conservation Area.



High Street (left) and Lower High Street (right)

At its widest point close to the junction with North Street, the High Street is subdivided by buildings occupying the centre of the space, Middle Row, to form two narrower, more enclosed spaces



Buildings (on the left of each of the above photographs) now occupy the centre of the High Street changing the original width to two more enclosed streets. Situated on an island in the High Street, the mid 19th Century stuccoed former market building is now sub-divided into shops. This central unified group of buildings forms an important set piece within the town centre. Restrained modern shop fronts and advertising assist in retaining the group value of the buildings. The public house and street tree close the vista (above left) and from a square when viewed from the west.



The distinctive rounded façade of the former Market building with paired columns at first floor level (left) represents the start of the subdivision of the High Street, when approached from the west, and acts as a focal point within this part of the Conservation Area.

The recently erected bandstand with railway motifs (right) acts as a further visual focal point within this section of the High Street.



St. Mary's Church is tucked just behind the originally widest point of the High Street close to the junction with North Street. The original 11th Century ragstone church was extended in the 13th Century and restored with a rebuilt west tower and vestry in 1881. The church tower is a prominent landmark from many parts of the town centre acting as a marker of the historic centre and assisting orientation within the centre.

The churchyard presents a contrasting green open space with mature trees within the heart of the town centre.



The detailed leaf motif topped railings (left) surround the church yard and help unify the appearance of the square.



The constraints of space on the High Street resulted in the increasing encroachment of buildings onto the Church Yard in medieval times. Church Yard is now an enclosed, inward looking tranquil space surrounded by predominantly residential properties yet is only a short step from the bustling High Street. The generally two storey terraced buildings face directly onto the narrow adjoining footpath and the churchyard. The predominant building materials within the church square are white painted render (including those associated with half-timbered buildings), red/ orange brick and plain tiled or slate roofs. Buff coloured concrete blocks form the footway around the square.



As well as buildings of a domestic character, the College of Priests (bottom right) was established in the yard in 1464 and is set well back from the predominant building line. The bingo hall building and roof is visually intrusive within the eastern side of the square (bottom left). Ashford museum is located within the square (top right).

The eastern part of the central block of buildings at Middle Row is further sub-divided into two closely spaced blocks which, in turn, back onto buildings surrounding the north side of the church square forming a number of narrow, east – west running, enclosed lanes and north – south running passageways – in stark contrast to the wider High Street.



Narrow lanes are generally enclosed by 2 storey buildings. Jettied overhanging upper floors reduce the width of the lane further and gable ended roofs and chimneys emphasise the height adding to the sense of enclosure. Restrained shop fronts and advertising generally fit well within the historic buildings and the intimate street scene.



An important feature of the character of this part of the Conservation Area is that St Mary's church tower can be glimpsed through the north- south running passageways

A significant number of medieval buildings have survived in the High Street. The original medieval buildings, with projecting upper floors and carved timber bargeboards, brackets and posts add significantly to the historic and architectural interest of the town centre.



Although many medieval buildings were re-fronted in later centuries, the medieval timber frame fabric and the gabled rooflines and catslide roofs can still be seen.



Rear of medieval properties on the south side of the High Street (right)

Retention of, and respect for, the original character and features of these buildings particularly in terms of shop fronts and advertising has greatly added to the historic and architectural interest of this part of the Conservation Area.



As the street narrows towards New Rents, the presence of more modern development is evident with the entrances to the County Square and Park Mall shopping centres and other infill development visible in the street scene.



The fully glazed entrance to County Square and associated frontage buildings (right) follow the regular building line and height of buildings in the High Street. The height of the shop fronts aligns generally with others within this part of the Conservation Area. The projecting upper floors west of the entrance are reminiscent of the medieval built form but the significant bulk intrudes into views to and from New Rents. Though the buff coloured brick is not generally within the limited palette of materials used in the High Street, the vertical window proportions respond to the fenestration of the Georgian frontages.



The two storey entrance to Park Mall (above left) projects significantly beyond the regular building line of the High Street and interrupts the historic street form. Modern infill development (above right) follows the regular building line and the height of the shop fronts aligns with the street scene. The flat roofs, unrelated sub-division of upper floors, buff coloured brickwork and horizontal window proportions do not respond well to the character of this part of the Conservation Area.



The narrow Taylors Passage (left) follows a medieval route and now connects Park Street with High Street.

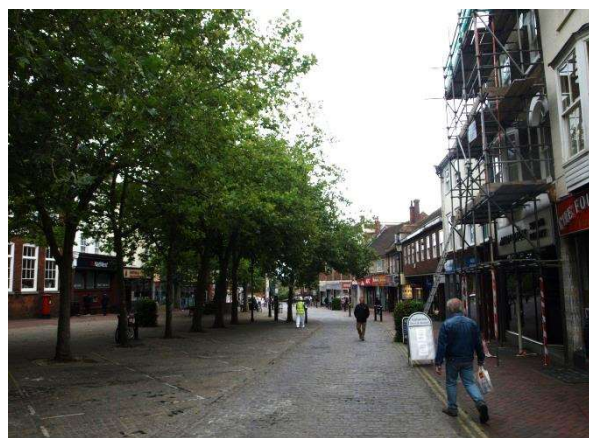


Details on upper floors at the eastern end of the island blocks at the centre of the High Street add to the richness of the buildings and the character of the Conservation Area.



The entrance to the historic North Street is marked on the western side by a modern shop unit (above left). The splayed corner of the building and stepped down scale at the corner of the street do not respond well to the building on the eastern corner (above right) or the historic pattern at street corners within the Conservation Area. The projecting canopy undermines the horizontal subdivisions attempted on upper floors and the dominant first floor sign is not typical of the scale or location of signage in the character area. The large fascia on the building marking the eastern corner is also out of scale with the listed building and its features.

The apparent width of the Lower High Street is reduced through the introduction of a row of street trees which effectively divide the space into two narrower, more enclosed spaces. Lower High Street slopes gently down towards the east where the previously continuous route into East Hill is now severed by the ring road.



The street trees visually separate the two sides of Lower High Street. The gentle curve in the street adds to a sense of enclosure.



The scale and dominant materials of buildings in the High Street continue in the Lower High Street. The projecting canopy (above left) does not fit with other restrained shop fronts.

Lower High Street is probably now slightly narrower than it was in the medieval period.



There is evidence of backland development glimpsed from Lower High Street.



The entrance to Lower High Street from the east is marred by two modern flat roofed buildings with dominant horizontal features such as fascias and windows which do not respond well to the proportions and features of the character area.

The properties in this character area are generally in good condition but parts of the public realm (street surfaces and street furniture) are in need of rationalisation and maintenance. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition.

2 New Rents area

At the western end of the High Street, New Rents narrows, curves and rises gently to give a much greater sense of enclosure. New Street runs parallel to New Rents and at St George's Square turns sharply south to form Castle Street and re-join the High Street. Gilbert Road leads north - south linking New Rents and New Street.

New Rents, New Street, Castle Street and Gilbert Road are directly fronted by buildings of 2/3 storey height with steeply pitched roofs (sometimes with dormer windows or chimneys). Narrow commercial frontages (including the appearance of the new development on the southern side of New Rents and the eastern side of St George's Square) are reminiscent of narrow medieval frontages.

The streets are now pedestrianised (with the exception of limited vehicular access) employing a variety of surfacing. There is no space for street trees in New Rents though street trees have been planted in St George's Square. Heritage style street furniture is used in this area.

The predominant building materials within this character area are white painted render or bricks, red/ orange brick and plain tiled or slate roofs. The shops and other commercial uses provide active frontages on the ground floor which forms an important part of the character of this part of the Conservation Area.



View of enclosed, curved and rising New Rents looking westwards (above). A small clock tower appears to act as a landmark within the new development to the south.



View of New Rents looking eastwards (above) shows an important glimpse of St Mary's church tower acting as a marker of the historic town centre and assisting orientation from this street.



New Street (left) has a domestic scale of generally 2 storey properties with restrained shop fronts. A gable ended building acts as a 'book end' to this part of the street. Some over-large fascias intrude into the character of the building and street scene.

Enclosure of New Rents and New Street is lost at Forge Lane (the ring road). The enclosure of New Street is also lost to the north as a result of access to the multi storey car park.



New Rents (left) and New Street (right) at the junction with the ring road.



St George's Square is surrounded by buildings with active ground floor frontages including a public house which extends seating out into the square. The focal point is the tank with covered roof. Restrained shop fronts and advertisements retain the character of this part of the Conservation Area. Planting provides a contrast to the built form and enhances the square.



Gilbert Road fronted by 2/3 storey properties with restrained shop fronts and advertising.



The tank and roofed shelter act as a focal point within St George's Square and terminate the view north along Castle Street from New Rents (left).

The hipped roofed 3 storey building with white painted quoins and restrained shop front terminates the vista of New Rents from Drum Road and is a prominent notable local building.





The wide splay of Drum Road leading south from New Rents reveals servicing areas with some blank facades and flat roofed buildings which have an adverse impact on the setting of the Conservation Area.



This character area exhibits some traditional shop fronts and restrained advertising (above) as well as some over-prominent fascias (below).



The properties in this character area are generally in good condition but parts of the public realm (street surfaces and street furniture) are in need of rationalisation and maintenance. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition.

3 North Street

North Street extends northwards at originally the widest point of the High Street. The slightly curved street is fronted directly by 2/3 storey buildings with steeply pitched roofs (sometimes with dormer windows or chimneys) which enclose the space. The generally narrow commercial buildings front shallow plots with the original deep burgage plots eroded by a multi storey car park and access road. The street is now pedestrianised (with the exception of limited vehicular access) with very few street trees and a variety of surfacing. Heritage style street furniture is used in this area. The predominant building materials within North Street are white/ cream painted render (including those associated with half-timbered buildings), red/ orange brick and plain tiled or slate roofs. The shops and other commercial uses provide active frontages on the ground floor (including cafes extending out onto paved areas) which is critical to the character of this part of the Conservation Area. Shop fronts and restrained advertising (including hanging signs) generally enhance the character of this part of the Conservation Area.



The projecting canopy of the shop building on the western side of the entrance to North Street (above) detracts from the character of this historic street. The church tower terminates the vista from the north and acts as a landmark for the historic centre of the town and assisting orientation from this street (right).



The once continuous eastern frontage of North Street is now severed in the centre.



The character of North Street is interrupted at the centre with wide openings allowing views eastwards of Charter House (left) and westwards of the Park Street service road and unsympathetic development.



A significant number of medieval buildings have survived in North Street. The original medieval buildings, with projecting upper floors, significantly add to the historic character of the town. Although many medieval buildings were re-fronted in later centuries, the medieval timber frame fabric and projecting upper floors are still visible.



The notable recessed doorway and shopfront to 11 North Street with open pediment, rectangular fanlight and 6 panelled door (right) is striking within the street scene.



The modern northern edge of North Street is today enclosed by a 3 storey building which terminates the vista from the south and screens the street from the ring road and development beyond. Whilst introducing new development across an historic route and thus affecting the historic character of the Conservation Area, this approach may have some townscape merit in enclosing the street and screening the revised urban layout to the north.



The properties in this character area are generally in good condition but parts of the public realm (street surfaces and street furniture) are in need of rationalisation and maintenance. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition.

4 Bank Street

Bank Street extends south from the High Street. The straight street was laid out in the mid 19th Century and is directly fronted by buildings of primarily 3 storeys in height with neo-Georgian and Victorian facades. The shops and other commercial uses provide active frontages on the ground floor which forms an important part of the character of this part of the Conservation Area. Some traditional shop fronts remain whilst upper storeys exhibit tall sash windows and a considerable amount of brick and other detailing.

The northern half of the street is enclosed by tall buildings and the visual width of the street is further reduced by large plane trees. The sense of enclosure is reduced south of Tufton Street with the presence of some lower scale 2 storey development, the absence of street trees and the long open views of trees to the south.



The enclosed character of the northern part of Bank Street (left) and the more open character of the southern section (above)

The street is now pedestrianised to the north (with the exception of limited vehicular access) and operates as a shared surfaced space to the south. The northern part of the street is surfaced in red pavements and granite sets with raised brick planters and contains heritage style street furniture, whilst the southern part comprises herringbone red brick in the shared surface area and granite slabs for the footways with steel street furniture of contemporary designs.

The northern part of Bank Street with street trees and heritage style street furniture contrasts with the contemporary steel furniture (right).



The predominant material within this character area is white/ cream painted render. Red/ orange or yellow stock bricks (often with contrasting detailing around windows and doors) are also present.



Light coloured render predominates within Bank Street. The ever-present Christmas lights strung across the street detract from the historic buildings and the character of this street.

The street does not have a continuous frontage as it is broken by Tufton Street and Queens Street to the east and the respective pedestrian entrances to County Square to the west.





The County Square development truncates the symmetry of the post office building



Despite the unfortunate flat roofed brick side extensions and the slight recess from the general street frontages, the contrasting scale, use of ragstone (reminiscent of St Mary's church) and prominent location set above steps at the centre of Bank Street within a wide paved apron, Centrepiece Church is a prominent notable local building.

To the western side of Bank Street, the continuous frontage is also broken by two service yards where the rear elevations of County Square are visible.



The loss of enclosure from County Square detract from

Bank Street exhibits a number of traditional shop fronts which relate well in height, scale, materials and design to the front façade of the building (right). Equally, particularly within the southern part of Bank Street, there are a number of shop fronts (including those with large fascia boards) which detract from the features of the building in which they are located as well as the character of this part of the Conservation Area (below). Contrasting details around upper floor windows are a feature of Bank Street.



Contrasting details around upper floor windows



Internally illuminated box signs, particularly if they are located on upper floors, detract from the features of the building on which they are located as well as the character of this part of the Conservation Area by virtue of their size, lack of intricacy and detail and use of unsympathetic materials.

The properties and public realm in this character area are generally in good condition but some of the shopfronts and advertising in the southern part of Bank Street are in need of enhancement. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition.

5 Church Road/ Tufton Street

Tufton Street runs east – west immediately south of the church square, leading to Vicarage Lane whilst Church Road runs north – south to join Tufton Street close to the pedestrian route to Church Yard. The character area comprises only the northern part of Church Road. The historic character is now formed by the street layout, including a narrow passage to Church Yard and a north – south running route to the rear of properties fronting Bank Street; views to the church and a small cluster of 2 storey pitched roofed historic buildings (including a listed building) in Tufton Street. In the 1960's and 1970s the terraced housing on Tufton Street and Church Road were replaced by large scale commercial, residential and community buildings of a variety of designs and materials that have little reference to the original character of this area or the wider Conservation Area. Consequently the area has a mixed character and is in need of enhancement as redevelopment opportunities come forward. The streets are of standard tarmac with red block paved footpath only on the north side of Tufton Street.

The small cluster historic buildings (including a listed building) in Tufton Street (below). On the north side of the street the public house seeks to replicate the adjoining timber framed listed building (below right). There is also an important glimpse of the church tower acting as a marker of the historic town centre and assisting orientation within this area. On the south side of the street, Compass House has an interesting octagonal roof light, though the setting for this building is currently dominated by the police station (below left).



Church Yard Passage (left) leads from between the two timber framed buildings to the church square with the church yard trees visible from Tufton Street.

The historic unadopted route to the rear of properties fronting Bank Street (right) leads from Tufton Street to the rear of High Street. The southern section of the route contains no buildings of merit.



The remainder of Tufton Street and the western end of Vicarage Lane comprises a number of buildings from the latter part of the 20th Century.



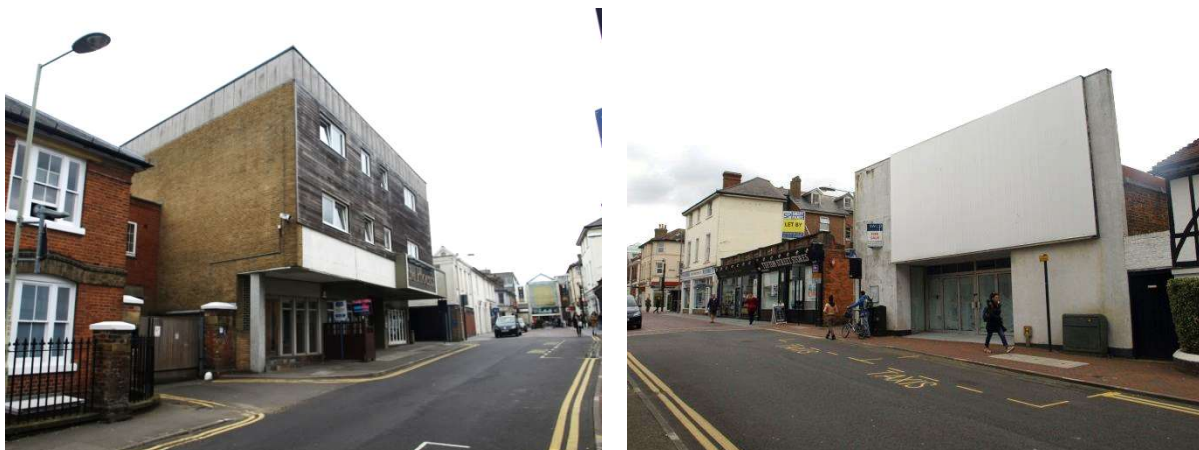
At Vicarage Lane (left) the low scale and well recessed 3 storey red brick development with pitched roof has a neutral impact on the character of this part of the Conservation Area. The layout of buildings, fenestration and roof materials do not respond positively to the character of the area. The ragstone wall is characteristic of this part of the Conservation Area.

Within the eastern end of Tufton Street (right) the scale of the buildings appears appropriate but the layout, mass, roofscape, fenestration and materials do not respond positively to the historic character of this part of the Conservation Area or to creating a unified townscape.



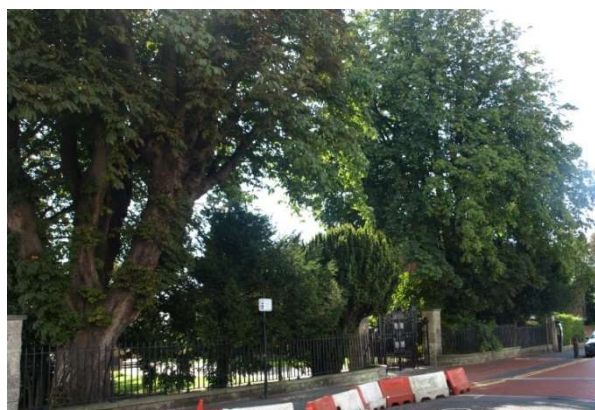
The scale, mass, roofscape, materials and design of the police station building make this a particularly intrusive development within this Character Area as well as from Character Area 7: Queens Street/ Norwood Street. The vehicular access and prominent ramp result in a loss of enclosure to this part of Tufton Street; expose the parking area and building to views from the street and mean that there is no active frontage uses overlooking the street.





At the western end of Tufton Street (above) the scale, mass, roofscape, fenestration and materials do not respond positively to the character of the cluster of adjoining historic buildings (including the setting of a listed building) or to create a unity of townscape.

The northern part of Church Road within this character area abuts the open space of the bowling green and the Memorial Gardens' western entrance – both of which are important to the character of this part of the Conservation Area. This, together with street trees, gives the street a verdant appearance, acting as a transition to the Gardens Character Area. The tower of St Mary's church is visible from Church Street acting as a marker of the historic town centre and assisting orientation within the centre





The low scale brick developments (above) have a neutral impact on the character of this part of Church Road. The layout of buildings, fenestration and roofscape do not respond positively to the character of the area.



The newly built Ashford Gateway public building (left) presents a bold feature within the street scene. The scale of the building fits well within Church Road. The concave shape and block paved footway and road respond well to the entrance to the Memorial Gardens opposite. The white rendered finish is in contrast to materials within Church Road but responds well to the predominant materials of Norwood Road. New planting will enhance the appearance of the building and the verdant character of the street.

Many of the properties in this character area built in the latter part of the 20th Century are at an age where the condition (including the suitability of internal space) may be under review with a view to redevelopment at some point in the future. The public realm is in reasonable condition, including the green spaces and trees which add significantly to the character of Church Road. The Character Area may be in a period of transition.

6 Queens Street/ Norwood Street

This character area of principally Victorian terraced housing is laid out in a grid pattern as part of a wider area which once exhibited the same characteristics including Tufton Street, Church Road, Norwood Street and Queen Street. The historic and architectural character has generally been preserved, particularly in Queens Street. The 2/3 storey terraced houses sit close to the road along a regular building line. The properties in Norwood Road and on the north side of Queens Street have shallow front gardens. Many of the original railings have been removed and replaced with a range of boundary treatments such as low walls.

The predominant building materials within Queens Street is white painted render whereas in Norwood Street it is white painted render or yellow stock brick and slate roofs.

The streets are standard tarmac, except where they abut Bank Street or at junctions where red brick pavements have been used. Red brick pavements have also been used in Norwood Road on the footway next to houses. On street parking on one side of the streets somewhat detracts from the appearance of the tight-knit area. Victorian style lighting and street furniture is appropriately used to compliment the buildings. There is no space for street trees. There are remnants of the industry and shops which would have been part of the original character of this area.



After a slight bend at the junction with Norwood Road, Queens Street is a straight road with views of County Square to the west. The terraced properties are a mix of 2 and 3 storeys with white render and pitched or hipped slate roofs – some with small dormer windows and chimneys. The appearance of the street is unified by the regular building line, the scale and white rendered materials of the buildings (with dark painted horizontal bands making the subdivision of floors) and the rhythm of Victorian window and door openings. Thick double yellow lines and poor road surfacing detract from the character of the street.



The Ashford Gateway building at the eastern end of Queens Street follows the regular building line. The scale, the white rendered materials of the buildings (and the dark painted horizontal band marking the subdivision between floors) and the pattern of regular Victorian window openings fits well with the character of this part of the Conservation Area,



Houses to the north side of Queens Street have shallow front gardens. Some basements are present with black railings protecting the change in level and forming an important feature in the street scene. Original door and window openings have generally been respected in Queens Street. Traditional window and door designs have also been retained in many properties.



Within Queens Street, the unrendered brick property (above) which appears to have had an industrial past and the ground floor laundrette (right) are reminders that there would have been a mix of uses in this area and the character of these buildings should be retained.



The tall building fronting Bank Street (left) is out of scale with Queens Street and the open car park detracts from the character of the area.



Norwood Street has more of a mixed character with commercial development more prevalent.



From the junction with Queens Street, Norwood Street proceeds north fronted by single storey buildings set back from the road behind parking areas to the west and a ground floor office; 2/3 storey housing and further parking to the east. The traditional Victorian residential buildings are important to the character of this part of the Conservation Area but there is scope for some frontage development to enhance the street scene.

A view of the church tower is important in relating this area to the town centre but the pedestrian route to the centre (left) is uninviting. The visual link with the church tower and the physical link to Tufton Street and the centre should be retained and enhanced as development opportunities arise.



The east-west running section of Norwood Street is currently dominated by the police station (left). The layout, mass, roofscape, fenestration and materials do not respond positively to the historic character of this part of the Conservation Area. The high brick wall presents a dead ground floor frontage to the street. The top of the front façade of the Centrepiece church is visible at the western end of Western Street and helps terminate this vista. Telegraph posts and overhead wires detract from the character of the street.



Unsympathetic replacement windows, doors, roof tiles and front boundaries can detract from the character of the Victorian buildings and the street scene. Chimneys are an important feature in the Victorian residential street scene.



The properties in Queens Street are generally in good condition but Norwood Street has more of a mixed character with buildings that detract from the character of the area. The public realm (street surfaces; overhead wires) is in need maintenance. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in fair condition.

7 Elwick Road Area

The area comprises a series of large semi-detached symmetrical Victorian villas with 2 or 3 storey bay windows set back from the street along a regular building line behind deep front gardens (now mostly devoted to car parking) and a ragstone wall. The former residential properties are now in commercial use. Mature trees are located at the front of the former gardens enclosing Elwick Road and providing an important reminder of the character of the front gardens before being replaced by hard surfacing for parking. The well-spaced grand properties are principally 3 storeys in height (some with basements). The villas extend round from Elwick Road into the lower part of Church Road.

The predominant building materials within the area are white painted render and slate roofs. A limited number of buildings are faced with red or yellow stock brick.



The gaps between the grand villas along Elwick Road are an important characteristic of this character area and help reveal the historic and architectural qualities of the buildings as well as highlighting the scale and symmetry of the buildings.

Without screening, car parking can dominate the setting of the villas.

The retention of trees, and the hedges which subdivide curtilages, is important in retaining part of the character of the original front gardens.

The design of the modern single storey extension (left) is not well related to the host building and the sign dominates the frontage and detracts from the character of the former residential area where there is a restraint on signage.





Gaps between the villas in Elwick Road are important for revealing glimpses of St Mary's church tower, visually connecting the area to the historic centre and assisting orientation (left).

The design of the modern flat roofed brick extension (left) is not well related to the host building and detracts from the character of the area,



Planning permission has already been granted for the demolition of the above properties on Elwick Street and new designs should respond to the strong character of properties in Elwick Road. The Swanton Villas (above right), are not the same materials, or building line as the other villas in Elwick Road, but if feasible should be retained if the consent lapses.



Ragstone walling is an important contextual feature within this character area.

Villas extend into the southern part of Church Road.



The villas on the west side of Church Road reflect the scale and symmetry of buildings in Elwick Road. Ragstone walling and a mature garden with trees and hedge also feature (above left).



The semi-detached villas on the east side of Church Road are smaller in scale. Red/orange brick and decorative tile hanging and plain clay tiles predominate. Bay windows remain a feature.

The properties and public realm in this character area are generally in good condition – Elwick Road has had significant improvements to the streetscape. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition. Nevertheless, the derelict and boarded up properties at the south eastern corner of the Conservation Area detract from the good condition of the area as this part of the character area is in a period of transition.

8 Gardens Area

This area comprises the Memorial Gardens; Vicarage Gardens (and associated listed graveyard) and the bowling green which provides a contrasting area of green spaces in the centre of town. All the green spaces are heavily managed and the two gardens are formally laid out as town parks with lawned areas, mainly peripheral trees and traditional flower beds.

The areas contribute positively to the character of the surrounding streets. The mature peripheral trees at the Church Road entrance to Memorial Gardens contribute to the verdant character of the street. Similarly, mature trees fronting Station Road (the ring road) help enclose the west side of the road and provide a contrast to the high buildings opposite. Vicarage Lane has an open character fronted by green parkland on either side: Memorial Gardens; the bowling green and Vicarage Gardens.



The square shaped bowling green (right) provides a further managed open space contributing to the open character of Vicarage Lane. The boundary chain link fence somewhat detracts from the appearance of the space.



Memorial Gardens (above left) is the largest of the open spaces. Rectangular in shape, trees on the eastern boundary partially screen the surrounding tall buildings and help enclose the space. Red pavements are used for pathways through the park.

The square shaped Vicarage Gardens (above right) contains heavily pollarded boundary trees which partially screen the surrounding buildings and help enclose the space. Tarmac footways circuit the park.



Both Memorial Gardens (above left) and Vicarage Gardens (above right) offer views of St Mary's church tower acting as a marker of the historic centre and assisting orientation within the centre.



A central avenue of trees (far left) aligns with the axis of the listed war memorial (centre left) and the fire iron entrance gates from Church Road (below).



The contrasting entrances to Memorial Gardens (above left) and Vicarage Gardens (above right) on opposite sides of Vicarage Lane. Memorial Gardens is entered through a symmetrically splayed entrance of granite sets fringed by black painted railings set on a low ragstone wall. Vicarage Gardens is entered through a macadam footway of different widths fringed by a curved low ragstone wall and a straight concrete wall with partial brick coping. There are no entrance signs to either garden from Vicarage Lane.



Vicarage Gardens provides a peaceful and well-kept setting for the adjoining listed graveyard.



The adjoining car park and distant tall buildings visually intrude onto the listed graveyard.

Overall the gardens area is well kept and in good condition.

9 East Hill

East Hill slopes steeply down to the River Stour to the east. The trees around the river corridor and beyond are important in adding to the landscape character of the street and in terminating views looking east. The elevated position overlooking the River Stour led to the development of a number of large Georgian villas close to the road. As the hill descends, high brick walls, many of which are listed, and overhanging trees on both sides of the street enclose the narrow street and dominate the character of this area. Many of the former residential properties as well as development behind the high walls now forms part of extensive school premises. Two buildings feature within the Stour valley: a public house (a listed building) and a former flour mill (1901) which relied on water power from the river. East Hill is a narrow cul de sac with limited traffic leading to a quiet ambiance in the street



Large 3 storey villas either front directly onto the back edge of the footway or are set behind shallow gardens with boundary railings. Whilst the colour of bricks employed on these individually designed buildings is varied (red brown, yellow and buff), it is the siting and scale of these buildings and the rhythm of the fenestration which unifies their character and contributes to the character of this part of the Conservation Area.

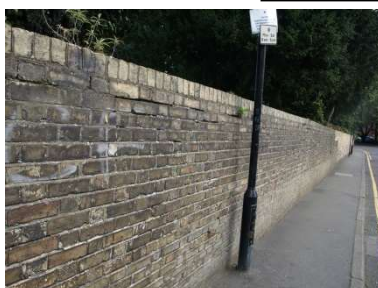


The 18th Century listed school house is visible from East Street.

Of the school site to the north of East Hill, the Conservation Area includes the listed walls, the principal trees, the listed building at the entrance to the school and the associated open space within the school; grounds immediately to the east. The remaining utilitarian buildings are generally screened by high brick walls and trees and do not have a significant impact on the character of the Conservation Area and are consequently excluded from it.



The linear character of East Hill is emphasised by the high straight walls which flank it. Most of the walls are listed buildings in their own right and for their group value. The walls are constructed mostly of red brick but with a section of yellow brick for part of its length. The walls are over-topped by some important mature specimen trees which soften their appearance, add to the verdant character of this part of the street and add to the sense of enclosure within the street.



Railings are an important boundary feature within East Hill and some are listed in their own right.

To the south side of East Hill two car parks serving the public house and school lead to a loss of enclosure within the street.



The public house car park (above left) is in poor condition and the school car park (above right) would benefit from some frontage hedge and tree planting.



The flour mill dominates the character of the eastern edge of the Conservation Area. Despite the unfortunate brick side extension, the towering scale, historic value and prominent siting within the Stour valley make the flour mill a notable local building.

The river is a key feature of the mill's setting (visually and audibly). The heritage engineering features of the mill's sluice gates add interesting richness and character.



The buildings and walls in this character area are generally in good condition but parts of the public realm (gravel dressing to the footway and guard rails) are in need of maintenance. Overall this part of the Conservation Area is in good condition.

10 Vicarage Lane Car Park Area

Vicarage Lane Car Park is currently the town centre's principal surface car park. The open area exposes the backs of properties together with associated service yards, parking and storage.

The open parking area reveals the back of properties which front onto Lower High Street and Charter House which towers over the historic adjoining streets.



The siting and mass of the bingo hall dominate the skyline in views from Station Road (the ring road) and around the car park. The building interrupts views of St Mary's church tower and does not present an active front to the space – rather a blank brick wall.



The dominant structure of the bingo hall (above and right) obstructs views of the important town centre landmark building St Mary's church tower.



St John's Passage provides a narrow unattractive link from the car park to the Lower High Street around the side of the bingo hall.



The car park immediately abuts the graveyard and provides an inappropriate setting for these listed buildings.

The side elevation of the Baptist church is also visible (left).

The Baptist church with its intricate white rendered front façade facing Station Road (the ring road) and decorative brick side elevations to the rear is a prominent notable local building of architectural and historic interest. The more recent flat roof extension to the rear is of less interest and is not prominent in the street scene.



Baptist church (left) on Station Road is a prominent notable local building.

The car park surfacing is in reasonable condition, but the surrounding service yard, backs of buildings and the juxtaposition of the car park with Vicarage Gardens and the listed graveyard make this area appear neglected and in need of redevelopment or enhancement.

5.0 Negative Features

Specific negative features have been included within each of the character areas but the broad issues raised are grouped together here for ease of reference.

Large Modern Buildings

Large, unsympathetically designed, monolithic buildings were introduced into the town centre from the 1960's, impacting negatively on the appearance and the character of the Conservation Area or its setting. Others either block or detract from views of St Mary's church tower.



Severed Streets

The introduction of the ring road resulted in a number of streets being severed – changing the historic street pattern of the town centre and consequently the character of those streets. The visual relationship between the historic core and the development outside the ring road is poor given the distance between buildings and the fact that new development has not been designed within the context of the Conservation Area. Large turning heads surrounded by bollards have been created where the streets within the Conservation Area meet the ring road – allowing views from the historic centre to leak out across the road towards development outside the area. These street edges do not provide a high quality gateway into the historic core of the town.



Gaps in Street Frontages

The introduction of shopping malls has resulted in the need for rear service yards. In addition, there are breaks in some street frontages. The loss of enclosure to the street and the exposed rear elevations detract from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Poorly maintained and underused areas

A number of sites within the Conservation Area have been identified which are poorly maintained and in some cases underutilised. Such sites do not enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.



Shopfronts and Advertisements

Whilst many buildings exhibit traditional shopfronts and restrained advertising, some shopfronts have been introduced whose designs and materials do not respond well to the design and features of the upper floors of the building in which they are situated, or the wider character of the Conservation Area. Advertisements and signs, by their very nature, need to be visible in order to attract attention and convey information. However, some insensitively designed or positioned advertisements appear as overly dominant or incongruous features within the Conservation Area. Shops with solid external security shutters which completely cover a shop front have a detrimental impact on the character of the Conservation Area and give the frontage a dead appearance.



Boundary Treatment

Traditional boundaries such as walls and railings are present in former residential areas. In some cases the removal of the boundary or an unsympathetic replacement has detracted from the character of the Victorian buildings and the street scene.

Without screening, car parking can be visually intrusive and dominate the setting of historic buildings.



Street Furniture and Surfaces

The quality and character of the public realm in different parts of the Conservation Area varies considerably with many areas are in need of renewal whilst a few areas have recently been upgraded in a contemporary style.

Much of the town centre is overly cluttered with poor quality street furniture, signage and lighting with limited coordination of style and type across the area. The presence of all year round Christmas lights strung overhead across historic streets such as North Street and Bank Street detracts from the character and appearance.



A mix of contemporary and traditional style street furniture is used within the Conservation Area.



The complex mix of natural and artificial paving materials and patterns in different streets appears uncoordinated and does not reflect the historic road layout



Overhead wires and telegraph poles are a characteristic of the Queens Street and Norwood Street Character Area and detract from the character of the buildings and the area as a whole

Street Trees

The trees in Bank Street and Lower High Street are now taller than the buildings they abut, and in some cases are touching the adjoining buildings. The impression is that the trees are now overcrowding the road space and partially obscuring the adjoining buildings.



Replacement of traditional windows, doors and roof tiles

The inappropriate replacement of traditional windows and doors with unsympathetic modern materials and designs has led to an erosion of the historic and architectural character of some properties and the integrity of groups of houses.

6.0 Management Proposals for the Conservation Area

Historic England's good practice advocates that local authorities should prepare a management plan to address the issues arising from the Conservation Area Appraisal and set out recommendations for action. Some of these actions will be applied generally to Conservation Areas in the Borough, whilst others, such as enhancement proposals, are specific to the Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area.

6.1 Management Proposals applicable to all Conservation Areas in the Borough

Application of Planning Policy

The Borough Council will consistently apply adopted and future planning policy to ensure high quality design which is appropriate to protecting and enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This will be applied to all development requiring planning or listed building consent including new development such as replacement or new buildings, small scale alterations and extensions to buildings, boundary treatment and, where applicable, surfacing front gardens. This approach will be followed for proposals both within the Conservation Area and those which affect its setting or impact on its character.

Shop Fronts and Advertisements Supplementary Planning Document

The Borough Council will bring forward a new supplementary planning document on shop fronts and advertisements which will have special consideration for Conservation Areas.

Repairs to Buildings in Conservation Areas Good Practice Guide

It would particularly assist home owners of the Borough Council's Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas if Good Practice Guides were complemented by an information leaflet on replacement doors, windows and roof materials considered to be suitable within Conservation Areas. This will have much wider application. It will recognise the need for replacement features and will also give practical guidance on design, acceptable materials and products. The Leaflet will be publicised and be available on the website.

Building Regulations

The Borough Council will continue to apply Building and Fire Regulations sensitively in Conservation Areas and to Listed Buildings to attempt to ensure that there is no conflict with the preservation of the character of the area or the building.

6.2 Management Proposals for Ashford Town Centre Conservation Area

Redevelopment of Large Modern Buildings and Poorly maintained and underused areas

Within the Conservation Area, the Borough Council allocates the Park Mall and associated access, parking and servicing areas and the Vicarage Lane Car Park site for development. There are a number of other large modern buildings and poorly maintained and underused areas mentioned in this Appraisal where the opportunity to redevelop the site into a more sensitively designed proposal which responds to the character of the Conservation Area should be encouraged.

Enclosing the Streets

As severed streets cannot be reconnected and the visual relationship between the historic core and the development outside the ring road is lost, the proposal is to reinforce the new edge of the historic centre and to close the views from the Conservation Area. There are two options: to close the space with a building (as is already the case at North Street below left) or to close the view with landscaping, in particular, tree planting. This would have the advantage of 'greening' the ring road and continuing the planting which has already taken place such as in Forge Lane (below right).



Similarly the gaps within street frontages identified in the Appraisal may wherever possible be partially closed visually by new buildings or carefully sited tree planting. The opportunities for new development and/ or planting should be investigated in all locations where the historic street is severed or broken in order that enhancement proposals may be brought forward for these key edge and town centre sites.

Greening the Ring Road

The eastern edge of the Conservation Area fronts Station Road (ring road) which, along with development alongside it, forms the setting for Memorial Gardens and Vicarage Gardens. The tall blocks on the eastern side are generally screened from the Conservation Area by mature trees but where they are not they tend to dominate the historic character



Consistent with closing the view from severed streets around the ring road with tree planting, further tree planting should be encouraged along Station Road.

Enhancing Street Furniture and Surfaces

A public realm strategy should be produced for the Conservation Area, which provides a coordinated approach to paving, structures, street furniture, signage, lighting and planting. This should distinguish between different character areas within the Conservation Area, with a different (but related) approach taken to the main shopping streets and to the residential streets for example. A simple palette of materials and consistent rationale for their use would create a high quality, appropriate context for the historic buildings and streets and result is a greatly enhanced Town Centre Conservation Area. Suitable tree species should be identified for any new or replacement trees within the strategy.

Issues with maintenance and reinstatement of paving after street works need to be addressed in the strategy to avoid the inappropriate patching of paving with tarmac. Adopting the public realm strategy as a Supplementary Planning Document and linking it to S106 and CIL payments would help develop a potential income stream for implementation.

As well as the specific enhancement proposals set out in the Appraisal, the following further enhancements are recommended on a street by street basis:

High Street and Lower High Street

Replace existing paving with a restrained palette of simple, high quality materials such as red brick pavers, granite setts and York stone flags

De-clutter the street space, removing unnecessary planters, street furniture and phone boxes

Relocate lighting and cameras where possible onto building facades

New Street and New Rents

Create a high quality gateway to the historic town centre core at the junction of New Rents, New Street and Somerset Road

Identify historic streets with name plates fixed to building facades

Bank Street

Continue streetscape improvements in Upper Bank Street, north of Tufton Street

Repave the frontage of Centrepiece church to match the quality of the adjoining improved public streetscape adjacent.

Tufton Street and Vicarage Lane

Extend streetscape improvements in Bank Street to Tufton Street and Vicarage Lane, with transition from shared surface to raised kerbs at Vicarage Lane

Introduce tree planting into Tufton Street

Replace poor quality chainlink fence to Bowling Green with railings

Churchyard

Replace existing concrete block paved footpaths with red brick paving or stone flags.

Resurface and improve quality of access lane to south from Vicarage Lane

Improve paving, planting and boundary to Listed Priests College and provide on site interpretation

East Hill

Create a high quality gateway to the historic town centre core at the junction of East Hill, Station Road and Lower High Street.

Redesign the turning head at the western end of East Hill as a shared surface, using materials appropriate to the historic character of this street.

Replace unsightly guard-rails to raised footway with railings more suitable to the heritage character of the street.

Enhancements to Vicarage Gardens and Memorial Gardens

Vicarage Gardens in particular suffers from a poor boundary with the adjacent car park and poor quality park furniture and planting which is in need of renewal. The entrance from Vicarage Lane needs improving with a welcoming name board, repaired edging and walling, and renewed plant beds. The boundary of the listed graveyard to one side of the Gardens needs improving, particularly the west side adjacent to the car park where there is no sense of enclosure. A hedge would help screen the cars or future development and enclose the historic graveyard and gardens.

The legibility and identity of Memorial Gardens would be improved with welcoming entrance signs at entrances onto both Church Road and Vicarage Lane.

Managing Street Trees

The street trees in Bank Street and Lower High Street should be managed so that they remain in scale with the buildings and the width of the space available.

Reduce the number of telegraph poles and overhead wires by placing wires underground as opportunities arise

It is recognised that the cost of replacing telegraph poles and overhead wires underground is normally high but opportunities to achieve this improvement to the appearance of the Conservation Area should be taken as they arise.

Boundary hedge and tree planting

A boundary hedge and tree planting along the front of the curtilage of car parks open to views from the street would help to enclose the street scene and reduce the dominance of the parked cars.



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