

All Saints Conservation Area Study

Proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the area



Directorate of Development Services

Forward

This report is one of two documents produced by the All Saints Conservation Area Working Party. The group was convened by the Director of Development Services, Trevor Gasson, in June 2000 with the task of preparing a conservation area enhancement scheme for the All Saints Conservation Area. The brief for the group was:

To prepare a conservation area enhancement scheme for the All Saints Conservation Area to guide proposals for the improvement of the area as whole, enhancement of the All Saints Church Yard, and to provide a context for possible enhancement and grant aiding of the restoration of the individual buildings and structures within the area. The scheme should take into account the current status of the Maidstone Millennium River park proposals, the potential construction of the All Saints Link Road and the possibility of the Carriage Museum being relocated to Mote Park.

The Working Party was drawn mainly from staff in Maidstone Borough Council, but also included help from English Heritage. The members of the team were:

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The group has produced two reports: an Appraisal and a Study of the Conservation Area. The appraisal is concerned with analysing the character and appearance of the area, whereas the study develops proposals for its preservation and enhancement. It is hoped that these two documents will provide an informed framework within which to consider any future proposals for this important area and act as a catalyst to bring about some of these changes.

FRONT PICTURE: View of the conservation area taken 2001

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Conservation Areas were first introduced under the provisions of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 [now superseded by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990]. Section 69 of the 1990 Act requires local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".
- 1.2 Such designation brings control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees as well as some additional control over minor developments to single dwelling houses. The 1990 Act also places duties on local authorities:
 1. to review the extent of designation from time to time;
 2. to designate further areas if appropriate;
 3. to formulate proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (with public consultation); and
 4. to pay special attention to the character and appearance of conservation areas when exercising their planning powers.
- 1.3 The relevant development plan needs to include firm conservation area policies. These need to be based on a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest of conservation area in order to provide an effective tool for planning decisions. The relevant development plans at the time of writing this report are the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and the approved Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000.
- 1.4 There are over 40 conservation areas in the Borough, and given that they are all of varying character, it would be unwieldy to include specific policies for individual conservation areas within the bodies of the development plans. Central Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 15 (PPG15) urges local planning authorities to assess the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in their districts in the form of written appraisals which will provide a sound basis for the more general policies included in development plans, will inform development control decisions and provide additional assistance at planning appeals. They can also act as the first step towards a subsequent Conservation Area Study which would contain specific policies and proposals for the preservation or enhancement of the area which can be treated as supplementary planning guidance to the Local Plan.
- 1.5 This document takes the analysis of the character and appearance of the area that was undertaken in the All Saints Conservation Area Appraisal, and produces an urban design analysis of the area to look in more detail at its character, functioning and potential. The range of pressures that might bring about changes are examined and an enhancement and management plan is developed. This adopts two approaches; short term proposals for the enhancement of buildings and spaces in the area; and longer term scenarios to look at what should be done if the Link Road is or is not built. A review of the Conservation Area boundary is also proposed.
- 1.6 This Study will be subject to public consultation before being adopted by Maidstone Borough Council.

2 Urban Design Analysis

- 2.1 This urban design analysis is based upon a set of "prompts to thinking" identified in the document entitled "By Design" which was published in mid 2000 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. The purpose of the analysis is to study the Conservation Area beyond its visual components and into such areas as function and use.
- 2.2 The analysis is set out under six main headings: Character, Continuity and Enclosure, Quality of the Public Realm, Ease of Movement, Legibility and Adaptability. For ease of interpretation, the main elements of the analysis are illustrated by a series of maps. ***References to the Maps are shown in bold Italics.***

Character

Level Changes

- 2.3 The location of the Conservation Area adjacent to the river provides context, not only in visual terms, but also in a topographical sense. The buildings are positioned above the level of the river which explains the expanses of ragstone retaining walls supporting the Palace and its gardens, the "Dungeons", the western extent of All Saints' churchyard and parts of the College. The natural contours of the river valley are more apparent up stream of horseway, where the gardens at the rear of the College and the Cutbush Almshouses slope steeply up to the backs of the buildings. ***Map 1 indicates the general location and direction of level changes in the Conservation Area.***

Tree Cover

- 2.4 Trees play a vital role in providing a setting for the buildings and spaces that make up the All Saints' Conservation Area. Trees also help to screen some of the less attractive features, such as the major roads running through the area, and the backs of buildings beyond the limits of the Conservation Area.
- 2.5 Of particular importance in this regard, are the trees on the north eastern boundary of the Palace Gardens, and the eastern boundary of All Saint's church yard, which form a very effective screen between the main pedestrian routes and the heavily trafficked vehicular corridor. In contrast to these areas, the main precinct of the Archbishop's Palace where tree cover adjacent to the highway is sparse, the negative impacts of the highway are more noticeable and obtrusive. Tree screening in this area would however reduce the contrast between the Palace and the Stables. ***Map 1 shows the main areas of tree cover within the Conservation Area.***
- 2.6 There is, however, a degree of conflict with the Church authorities over the protection of the existing tree cover in the Churchyard. The Church believes the tree cover is too dense, has a detrimental effect on the condition of the stonework and generally restricts views of the church building. If the trees continue to be managed properly then the two interests can exist in harmony. There is a similar management issue in relation to the mature trees growing between the Millennium Bridge and the Amphitheatre whereby the trees are causing damage to the ragstone wall. One of the purposes of the recent tree survey has been to pinpoint a number of necessary remedial works which, if the management is appropriately phased, will tie in with work necessary to address the main concerns. ***A tree survey is set out at Appendix A.***

Building Materials

- 2.7 One of the main unifying features which contributes to the character and identity of the Conservation Area is the consistency of building materials. Apart from the modern "Carriage House" office building and the extensions to the Baptists church on the corner of Knightrider Street and Mill Street, the remaining buildings are of local ragstone construction UNDER clay tiled roofs. Such consistency of materials, coupled with the maturity of the buildings and their associated tree plantings, give an identity which is quite unique and separate from the adjoining town centre. ***Map 1 indicates building materials in the Conservation Area.***

Landmarks and Views In

- 2.8 The River Medway is probably the most important feature in terms of providing a visual setting for the Conservation Area. It is from the river and it's bridges that the best views of the area can be enjoyed, and not surprisingly, it is with the river in the foreground, that most of the pictures and postcards of the Palace and All Saints' are taken. However, there is one particular element of the river that causes visual harm to views into the Conservation Area from the north and west, and that is the Kentish Lady pleasure boat which is moored in front of Palace Gate. Painted bright yellow and green, together with its mooring station and other paraphernalia, the boat creates an inappropriate and unattractive focal point in the foreground of the Conservation Area.
- 2.9 The church tower of All Saint's provides the main landmark in the Conservation Area. Not only is the tower the main focal point for views into the area from the river and it's bridges, but it also forms an effective end to the vista when viewed from Mill Street and Knightrider Street. ***Map 2 identifies the principal and secondary views into the Conservation Area, and shows the importance of the Church Tower as a landmark from both the river and the surrounding town centre streets.***

Night-time Character

- 2.10 The character, appearance and functioning of the Conservation Area has a totally different feel during the hours of darkness. Visually, this part of Maidstone's townscape changes completely from being an oasis of maturity and importance, to a dark and almost sinister backwater. The mature plantings and landscaping which by day create the perfect foil for historic buildings and screen the negative sights and sounds of traffic, have the effect of enclosing the space and discouraging pedestrian activity.
- 2.11 The night time environment of the Conservation Area can be assessed under two main headings; first is the visual environment which deals with such issues as architectural and amenity lighting, and second is the functioning of the Conservation Area after dark with particular reference to issues of security and safety. These two broad categories are not mutually exclusive in that there is a need to reconcile the conflict between aesthetics and particularly the desire to reduce the amount of street furniture, and the obvious importance that must be attached to safety and security measures.

Visual environment

- 2.12 As far as architectural and amenity lighting is concerned the conservation area is quite poorly illuminated. Only the Archbishop's Palace is lit with any kind of imagination and this is confined to the façade fronting Mill Street. The Stables and All saint's Church are illuminated but this is very basic and is again confined to the Mill Street frontages. Some lighting has been installed on the new Lockmeadow footbridge although it is not nearly as spectacular as it could be. From outside the Conservation Area, looking in from the river and from the main transportation routes, the buildings and trees are nothing more than a collection of silhouettes against the sky glow of the surrounding townscape.
- 2.13 The opportunities for architectural lighting here area almost limitless. The Conservation Area is rich in buildings, structures and natural features that would benefit greatly from imaginative lighting. In considering the different affects that can be created by using light, the objective should not be to floodlight entire facades and spaces which merely replicates daylight conditions, but more to select features and objects of particular interest which when illuminated create a very special appearance. An example of this would be the tower of All Saint's Church which if illumination would provide a visible landmark in the night time sky and, because of the texture and relief of the ragstone, create interest from closer to. To complement the illumination of buildings within the Conservation Area, the up lighting of some of the larger trees would add to the visual scene. The illumination of trees whatever the season can create a spectacular setting and as the wind moves the leaves and branches, this creates a dynamic of its own. The design of lighting schemes and particularly the knowledge of what products are available is a specialist activity. There is no doubt that the Conservation Area should be properly lit and specialist advice must be sought to take this forward.

Functioning

- 2.14 In terms of functional lighting, this is essential in order to maintain security and safety after dark. During the night hours the Conservation Area remains open and although footfall is much less, pedestrians do however use the many thoroughfares that pass through it. Also during the winter months when darkness falls earlier, town life is very much active with workers and even school children using the footpaths and the Lockmeadow footbridge. Functional lighting is currently provided by four-meter high "Victorian" lamp columns. These lamps provide a low level of light and in some instances are not working at all. This situation must not be allowed to continue and regular checks must be carried out to ensure that what lighting is available does work properly. Whist in general the main public areas throughout the conservation do have some form of lighting, there are instances for example the footpath from College Avenue to the recently completed amphitheatre, and the new burial ground to the rear of the Stables, which are not currently provided for.
- 2.15 Lighting is not the only concern when considering the safety and security of the area. The mature trees which by day create a welcome screen from traffic, act as an enclosure by night. Not only does this reduce dramatically the level of natural surveillance available from car users, but this screening effect also cuts out borrowed light from adjoining town centre activities. The solution to these safety and security concerns is not easy. On the one hand it is obviously desirable to retain trees for their contribution to the area, but issues of safety and security are also important. Consideration could be given to increasing light levels from the existing columns and possibly introducing low-level bollard lighting. However this in itself would compromise the character and appearance of the Conservation Area by adding further street furniture. Additional CCTV cameras could be introduced but again this would add to the level of clutter and because of the number and maturity of trees would be of limited value.

- 2.16 There are measures which can be implemented, namely ensuring that all street lighting is working properly and investigating the possibility of increasing light levels from these existing sources. Also there are pockets of darkness (mentioned above) where clearly it would be desirable to introduce lighting. However beyond these measures it is primarily the lack of natural surveillance from adjoining uses and not necessarily the lack of lighting which creates the feeling of unease.
- 2.17 This section concludes by recognising that night time safety and security concerns do exist within the Conservation Area. Clearly there are many exciting opportunities to illuminate buildings and features for their visual contribution after dark, but functionally it is difficult to see how further illumination could be provided for pedestrians without compromising the whole daytime character of the area. It is also vital to recognise that without natural surveillance from adjoining twenty-four hour uses, many parts of the conservation are extremely isolated after dark and no amount of lighting would allay concerns over security and safety.

Continuity and Enclosure

Arrangement of Spaces

- 2.18 The arrangement of space within the Conservation Area is very different to the traditional street pattern usually found in a town centre location. The Conservation Area is divided into a series of linked courtyards, which follow very closely the historical layout of the area. Indeed, many of the historic boundaries remain. These boundaries, coupled with their associated mature tree plantings, serve to reinforce the sense of enclosure, and provide a definite separation of space. **Map 3 shows how the space is divided into a series of courtyards surrounding the major buildings and groups of buildings.** A network of pathways running generally north/south links these courtyards. Along the western boundary of the Conservation Area, adjacent to the river, a continuous pathway provides links to the various spaces throughout the Conservation Area. This pathway is identified as a separate space in its own right. **The main spaces shown on Map 3 are as follows:**

1. The Archbishop's Palace Courtyard and Palace Gardens
2. All Saints Churchyard
3. The College Courtyard
4. The Cutbush Almshouses Courtyard
5. The Southern Gateway and Garden
6. The Riverside
7. The New Burial Ground behind the Stables

- 2.19 **Map 3 also identifies the various links between the spaces, together with primary and secondary entrances into the Conservation Area.**

Surfaces

- 2.20 **Map 4 shows the range and distribution of surface treatments throughout the Conservation Area.** From this map the large areas of grass and plantings are immediately apparent. Apart from the forecourt to the College, much of the surface treatment between Mill Street/College Road and the River Medway, is either grassed or planted. Added to the significant tree cover in this location, and the softness of the river corridor itself, the extent of grass and plantings add significantly to character and charm of the area.

- 2.21 In the vicinity of All Saints Church particularly, but also in some areas around the Archbishops Palace, much of the stone flags and cobble surfacing remains. The textures and randomness of these original surfaces add greatly to the character of the Conservation Area. Also worthy of note is the use of the bonded gravel surface in front of the Palace and throughout the Palace Gardens. This surface provides a very appropriate foreground to the historic buildings. Also the soft textures of the grass and plantings provide a calm setting.
- 2.22 Most of the riverside path has a red or black tarmac finish. Although not entirely appropriate, the scale of the pathway is so overwhelmed by the surrounding buildings, trees and the river, that its surface treatment does not impact significantly on the overall scene. Having said this, if the path were to be resurfaced using the bonded gravel mentioned earlier, this would be a welcome improvement.
- 2.23 The other area that would benefit from a more appropriate surface treatment, is the car park in front of the College. Currently the car park has an uneven black tarmac surface which, as a foreground to the historic College complex, is completely inappropriate. Once again a bonded gravel surface would be much softer in appearance, and more appropriate in this historic context. A full landscaping scheme would be required to soften the area to provide a suitable setting.

Quality of the Public Realm

Highway Intrusion

- 2.24 *Map 5 shows the extent to which the main vehicular traffic routes running through and adjacent to the Conservation area, impact upon the quality of the environment.* As well as the usual highway intrusions of carriageways, associated street furniture and signage, noise, pollution and fumes, and of course the vehicles themselves, Mill Street, which completely severs the Stables from the remaining Archbishop's Palace complex, is by far the single most detracting feature in the Conservation Area. As mentioned earlier, the benefits of landscaping and tree planting have, to a certain extent, succeeded in mitigating the negative highway impacts. However, it is difficult to see how additional tree planting could be incorporated without further destroying the spatial links between the Palace and the Stables.

Views Out and Within of the Conservation Area

- 2.25 As well as providing an attractive visual setting for the Conservation Area from the outside looking in, the river Medway also forms an important foreground to views looking out of the Conservation Area. In particular, the river provides a soft foreground and acts as a barrier to the change of scale of the large imposing County Court buildings and the new Lockmeadow leisure complex on the west bank. More generally, the river contributes to the overall sense of place by providing a context within which all views out of the western side of the Conservation Area are framed. The character of the river along the relatively short stretch where it adjoins the Conservation Area is quite changeable. At the north western end, the river is almost canalised which together with the pedestrian subway, raised walkways, standard highway guard railing and concrete surfacing, creates an engineered and municipal appearance. In contrast, the stretch of river upstream of the Lockmeadow footbridge has a soft almost rural character created by the mature trees and natural riverbanks with the sounds of geese and ducks. This change in character is not abrupt and indeed the area roughly from the Palace Gate to the Lockmeadow footbridge acts as a transitional zone, where hard urban character gives way gradually to a soft Arcadian setting. *Map 6 shows the importance of the river as a foreground to views out of the Conservation Area.*

- 2.26 Other views of particular importance within the Conservation Area include the buildings and tree plantings, which surround the Archbishop's Palace Courtyard (excluding of course the negative highway impact imposed by Mill Street). At this location the full extent of the Archbishop's Palace complex can be appreciated.
- 2.27 Also of significance is the view at Horseway, where the tower of All Saints on the one side is balanced by the tower over the College gatehouse on the other side, creating a dramatic vista down to the river. This is the last of the slipway river approaches left in the town. **Map 6 identifies these important views.**
- 2.28 Negative views out of the Conservation Area can be classified into two general areas, firstly the harmful visual impacts of highways passing through, and adjacent to the Conservation Area, and secondly, views into the back of buildings outside of the Conservation Area. Within the Conservation Area itself, car parking and the placement of refuse collection facilities are the main detracting features. **Map 6 identifies a number of specific detracting features as follows:**
1. Car parking at Lockmeadow
 2. Car parking in front of the College complex
 3. Car parking in front of the Southern Gateway
 4. Car parking, backs of buildings and general clutter in Knightrider Street
 5. Modern high rise offices and backs of buildings in Lower Stone Street
 6. The Chequers Centre and backs of buildings in Palace Avenue
 7. Car parking and storage of litter bins at the Archbishop's Palace
 8. Car parking and storage of litter bins at the Tourist Information Centre
 9. Car Parking, storage of litter bins, kiosk and general clutter associated with the Kentish Lady pleasure boat
 10. College Gate
 11. Underpass and associated railings and engineering at Bishops Way
 12. Extensions to the Baptist Church

Ease of Movement

Vehicle and Pedestrian Movement

- 2.29 A network of pedestrian routes cross the Conservation Area. The principal routes run generally north south, from Bishops Way and Mill Street through to College Road, and east west, from the new Lockmeadow footbridge to Knightrider Street. **Map 7 shows the principal and secondary pedestrian routes.** The main vehicular route running north south creates a barrier to pedestrian movement, although there are two controlled crossing points at the Mill Street/Palace Avenue and College Road/ Knightrider Street junctions. At the southern end of The Stables on the eastern side of Mill Street, there is one area of particular concern where the footway is almost non-existent, **and this is identified as an area of danger on Map 7.**
- 2.30 Generally the pedestrian routes which cross the Conservation Area are well used and provide useful and convenient through-routes. However, there are two areas where clear pedestrian desire lines have emerged: at Horseway and across the College Green to the rear of the Cutbush Almshouses. At Horseway, the most direct route from the new Lockmeadow footbridge up to Knightrider Street is across a grassed area. This desire line is clearly evident on the ground where the grass is worn and becomes muddy during the winter months. The desire line across the College Green is again across an area of grass, although this is soon to change with the forthcoming development of an amphitheatre that will form part of the Millennium River Park scheme. The amphitheatre has been designed to incorporate the desire line. **Map7 shows these two pedestrian desire lines.**

Legibility

Landmarks, Gateways, Focal Points and Surfaces

- 2.31 Landmarks, gateways and focal points help people find their way about, and create a familiarity, making a place feel safe and unthreatening. The choice of pedestrian routes crossing All Saints Conservation Area, together with the landmarks, gateways and focal points, provides a sense of familiarity and understanding. In particular, the open aspect of the river Medway corridor and its associated topography has a strong influence on the sense of place. This understanding of orientation is enhanced by the central landmark of All Saints church tower providing a focal point. The consistency of building materials and the maturity of the landscaping particularly around the Archbishop's Palace and All Saints Church area, creates a sense of timeless charm. In the vicinity of the Lockmeadow footbridge, away from the traffic noise and activity, there is a pleasant tranquillity which itself, adds to the legibility of the area.
- 2.32 Although not key to the legibility of the Conservation Area, a consistency of surfaces, signs and street furniture would certainly add to the sense of recognition and understanding. Although having said this, a completely unified approach would spoil the individual charm of certain areas, for example the churchyard.
- 2.33 *The main elements that contribute to the legibility of the Conservation Area are shown on Maps 1,2,4,6 and 7.*

Adaptability

- 2.34 Apart from changes brought about by the introduction of modern road building and in particular, the intrusiveness of Mill Street, the historic buildings and layout of spaces in the Conservation Area have remained largely in tact in recent centuries. Many of the buildings have been adapted to accommodate new uses, and this has been contributory to their existing pleasing character and appearance.
- 2.35 As far as road building is concerned, changes to the scale and alignment of Mill Street in the first decade of the 20th century, coupled with the development of Bishops Way in the late 1960's, have impacted significantly on the historic fabric of the area. This is clearly an instance where the Conservation Area has not adapted well to change, a point that is borne out by the *negative impacts identified on Maps 5, 6 and 7.*
- 2.36 Another area of physical change, which has damaged the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is the impact of car parking. This is particularly apparent at the forecourt in front of the College complex, where poor design has caused the views of the buildings to become almost secondary to the sea of car parking and parking related paraphernalia that make up the foreground. A similar situation exists in front of the College Gate, and indeed the incidence of car parking in and around the Archbishop's Palace has recently begun to rise, much to the detriment of the area. *Map 6 shows the principal areas of concern with regard to car parking.*
- 2.37 Apart from these areas of transport related change; the Conservation Area has adapted well to new uses and activities, and this is demonstrated by the continuing recognition that the area remains one of the most important and respected parts of the town.

3 Analysis of potential impacts

Developments, Changes and Pressures

Road Proposals

- 3.1 Currently the All Saints Conservation Area is divided by excessively heavy traffic flows which pass along Mill Street (three lanes wide at this point) from the south to the Town Centre. This northbound flow is balanced by the southbound flow utilising Palace Avenue and Stone Street, the whole providing a very large gyratory system which dominates this largely residential area to the south of Maidstone Town Centre.
- 3.2 It has long been recognised that this gyratory system is highly damaging to the local environment and only partially effective in coping with the very heavy volumes of usage which occur. There have, for many years, been proposals to modify arrangements by the introduction of additional highway infrastructure. The nature of these proposals has varied over time. The Borough Council's current preferred solution is to widen Upper Stone Street to make it a two-way route, connecting to a short length of new carriageway running from Knightrider Street to Bishops Way passing to the East of the Archbishops Stables. This would have the highly desirable effect of removing through traffic from the vast majority of the All Saints Conservation Area, and allowing the environs of the ecclesiastical structures to be reunified by a new town square.
- 3.3 At the recent local plan inquiry, the inspector determined that the line of the All Saints Link Road should be protected to allow the possibility of improved highway infrastructure to be constructed. The detail of the scheme has been revisited with the intention of reducing its overall scale and impact. This has produced a modest revision to the alignment and scale of the highway, which is nevertheless following approximately the same route as previous proposals.
- 3.4 Currently, there is no funding in place to allow the construction of the All Saints Link Road and this continues to be a matter of discussion with Kent County Council through the Urban Transportation Strategy. It is prudent, however, to have regard to the ultimate construction of this new highway in planning for the future of the Conservation Area.

Carriage Museum

- 3.5 The Archbishops' Stables is a large mediaeval structure located opposite the Archbishops' Palace and divided from it by the heavily trafficked Mill Street.
- 3.6 The Archbishops' Stables currently accommodate the Tyrwhitt-Drake Museum of Carriages – the finest collection of horse-drawn carriage vehicles in public hands in the country. It is hoped to develop a purpose-built home for the carriage collection.

