

Physical Fabric

The Conservation Area contains a variety of building styles reflecting changing fashions and technology. However, the use of traditional building materials – primarily bricks, half timber, slates and sandstone – creates a subtle palette of colours based around red, pale yellow, black, white and grey.

The dominant structure in the Conservation Area is the Castle which is constructed in honey coloured sandstone. Other prestigious buildings including the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Tonbridge School and a few Georgian town houses were also built of this locally quarried stone.

Medieval buildings were built by craftsmen using local materials and in this area they were timber-framed. There are several good examples of timber-framed buildings in the Conservation Area, some with overhung upper storeys supported on protruding floor joists. The Chequers Inn and Port Reeve's House are two notable examples.

In the Georgian period, brick buildings became fashionable and many of the original timber framed buildings were rebuilt in brick or refronted with elegant brick facades. This occurred particularly along the High Street, no doubt to raise the prestige of the town. These facades are frequently embellished with decorative features including wood or stone cornices, parapets, string courses, bands and pilasters and quoins. The bricks were handmade at this period and vary in size with rough textures and edges. The use of a Flemish bond contrasting blue headers and red bricks is noticeable on the Rose and Crown Inn. Some of the buildings are stuccoed to give the appearance of stone. The buildings that were not refaced in brick were sometimes clad in weatherboard or hung tiles on the upper storeys.



The Victorian properties are also predominantly red brick with occasional use of white or yellow bricks. The smaller properties are relatively simple flat or bay fronted designs but some of the larger properties, particularly in Dry Hill Park have very elaborate Gothic or Italianate designs some with ornate embellishments.



Roofs are almost exclusively traditional clay tiles or slates. On some of the bigger Victorian properties patterns have been created using different coloured and shaped tiles, topped by decorative ridge tiles. Prominent gables and dormer windows create interesting rooflines.

Turrets, spires, cupolas and elaborate tudor style chimneys act as landmarks. Parts of the Tonbridge School are roofed in blue slate.

There is a wide variety of window types but white painted wooden sash windows are the most numerous. Other buildings have casement windows, some with small square leaded panes. The Tudor buildings and more prestigious Victorian buildings feature oriel windows. There are a few 19th Century shop fronts in the Conservation Area but many buildings in the High Street have modern shop windows at the ground floor. Single and double storey bay windows can be seen in some parts of the Conservation Area. Some windows are very elaborate and the narrow arched Gothic style windows are a particular feature on the Tonbridge School buildings. Traditional front doors are also a feature of the Conservation Area with a number of the 18th Century properties having elegant semi-circular or rectangular fanlights. Door hoods and pilasters are decorative features.



Boundary treatments include red brick and sandstone walls, hedges, wooden fences and black railings. The tall brick walls bordering the Tonbridge School grounds, the Churchyard and Ferox Hall gardens are particular features. Some of the walls have decorative brickwork and are capped in stone. The larger Victorian houses are shielded from the road by walls with tall shrubs and trees behind. Many of the smaller and older properties have very narrow front gardens or front directly onto the pavement.

The decorative ironwork of the Big Bridge, River Walk and in the Churchyard are attractive features of the Conservation Area. Some shop fronts have iron brackets for hanging signs on upper storeys. The black and gold coordinated street furniture and lamp posts found in some of the Conservation Area enhances the character. However, in other parts standard grey railings and lamp posts and concrete or plastic bollards have a harmful impact. Some of the pavements have been surfaced in brick pavers or grey flagstones and combinations of different treatments, for example in Church Lane, enliven the floorscape. There are some features including the stone trough at the lower end of the High Street, the Rose and Crown tap, the replica hanging noose outside the Chequers Inn which contribute to the historical character of the Conservation Area.



Features affecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

To understand what is special about the Conservation Area it is useful to note those features that are out of character with the area. This not only emphasises the importance of the remaining special features of the area but also allows potential improvements to be identified.

- Whilst the area has a reasonable consistency of street furniture, the materials, style and colour are not consistent throughout, leading to a dilution of the special character of the area and the sense of place. The proliferation of road signs also harms the visual appearance. The poor quality and condition of surfacing following repair works is visually harmful.



Utilitarian railings



Utilitarian and poorly maintained street furniture and surfaces

- Some modern development significantly erodes the character of the area because of its bulk, materials, height, boundary treatment, detailed design or landscaping.



- A number of traditional shop fronts remain within the High Street and The Slade neighbourhood. These shop fronts are an essential part of the character of the area but insensitive shopfronts, which do not respect the traditional features or widths of upper storeys, have been introduced in places.
- The inappropriate replacement of traditional materials and features such as windows and doors with unsympathetic modern materials and designs has occurred incrementally in some areas. Concrete tiles replacing slate or clay tiles, or replacement plastic windows or modern door designs are evident particularly on traditional Victorian residential properties. Such changes can have a detrimental visual impact on the integrity of groups of buildings and the character and appearance of the area as a whole.
- Overhead wires detract from the attractiveness of the Conservation Area though the cost of replacing these underground is normally prohibitive.
- The removal of traditional boundary treatment to properties (normally to create parking spaces) or the lack of such boundaries to properties can harm the unity with adjoining properties and expose views of car parking.



Incongruous or lack of boundary treatment

- Unlike the motte and castle, the importance of the historic Fosse is underplayed. The former mound and ditch, which has influenced the layout of the town so strongly, has been submerged by development and self sown saplings and trees. The boundary treatment is also utilitarian.



The Fosse

- Whilst there are public spaces which act as oases from the traffic noise in the area, the noise and presence of traffic on the High Street, Dry Hill Park Road and the main road junctions detracts from the enjoyment of many parts of the Conservation Area.

Management Proposals for the Conservation Area

English Heritage 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 Tonbridge Conservation Area.

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 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.

Implications for Tonbridge Conservation Area

Within the Tonbridge Conservation Area the Borough Council will encourage the replacement of existing, including recent, buildings with development where this preserves or enhances the character of the area. Such development may be of different architectural styles but should still be able to demonstrate a good relationship with its setting and the character of the area.

Development will also come forward outside the area and to be acceptable this must preserve or enhance the special qualities of the area. For example, significant development in the Botany area will be visible from the Castle and special attention should therefore be paid to ensuring the roofscape is interesting and attractive and does not contain plant or rooftop parking in a way which would detract from views from the Castle. Similarly, the site to the north of the Lock is proposed for residential, leisure, hotel and open space use. This development will affect the setting of the Conservation Area and should aim to ensure that there are public realm enhancements along the River Medway and that quality designs are achieved to complement that recently built along the northern bank of the river within the Conservation Area.

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. It will amplify, illustrate and potentially replace Saved Local Plan policy P4/13

Implications for Tonbridge Conservation Area

The High Street in particular contains a number of inappropriate shop fronts (or boarded up units) which, when proposals come forward, should be replaced with designs which harmonise with the original character of the area and the design elements of the buildings to which they are to be fitted.

Currently, there is not a proliferation of advertising within the Conservation Area and the number of projecting signs is limited. Strict control should be maintained over the amount and type of advertising in the Conservation Area to maintain this delicate balance. Owners of buildings, designers and development control officers would benefit from a more detailed and illustrated Supplementary Planning Document.

Repairs to Buildings in Conservation Area Good Practice Guide

It would particularly assist home owners if the Borough Council's Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas 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 and may assist with the selection of suppliers.

Implications for Tonbridge Conservation Area

Original doors, windows and roof materials have been replaced in a significant number of properties, especially Victorian, within the Conservation Area. The Leaflet will be publicised within the Conservation Area and distributed to households and be available on the website.

Grants

The Borough Council will continue to offer Listed Building Grants to assist with the repair of listed buildings within the Conservation Area.

The Borough Council will consider the costs and benefits of extending the application of its Grant Scheme to include shop fronts within the Conservation Area with a view to encouraging the replacement of inappropriate shop fronts with designs which better reflect the design elements of the building to which it is to be fitted and the character of the area.

Implications for Tonbridge Conservation Area

Tonbridge Conservation Area contains a large number of Grade 1 and 2 listed buildings which are generally well maintained. The Listed Building Grants offer financial assistance towards repairs to such buildings.

Tonbridge Conservation Area also contains a number of shopfronts which could be more appropriately designed. For this reason the Council will consider whether to expand the grants available to cover such properties in the Tonbridge Conservation Area.

Building Regulations

Government Guidance (PPG15) makes it clear that "in exercising their responsibilities for the safety of buildings under the building and fire legislation, local planning authorities should deal sympathetically with proposals for the repair or conversion of historic buildings". 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.

Management Proposals for Tonbridge Conservation Area

Street Furniture and Surface Materials Guide for Tonbridge

The Borough Council will produce a street furniture and surface materials guide for Tonbridge Conservation Area. This should feature a limited palette of street surfaces including predominantly red brick footways laid stretcher bond, granite sets and granite kerbs to follow the existing distinctive colour palette. Any painted yellow lines should be narrow in width.



In relation to street furniture, there is some consistency of black painted lamps and bins. However, as street furniture is replaced, repaired or maintained, there is a real opportunity to upgrade and group together the existing items to a common suite of specified components such as lamp standards, benches, bins, railings and bollards.

Tall modern lamps comprising a lantern design, evocative of a more traditional or historic pattern, mounted on a simplified black column have been introduced within the High Street to complement the larger scale buildings.

Elsewhere, within new housing development, smaller scale 'period' lanterns in the style of



Victorian gas lamps have been appropriately introduced. Through enhancement measures or gradual replacement, there is an opportunity to unify some of the sub areas with a consistent use of lamp columns appropriate to the scale of development.



There are a large number of prominent guard rails within Tonbridge Conservation Area. An audit should be carried out to see how many remain necessary and, for those which are required, a programme of replacement by a more sympathetic design should be undertaken. New highway proposals (see below) are likely to bring the opportunity to remove or replace existing railings.

The Conservation Area contains a range of wooden, concrete, plastic and metal bollards (of different colours). A unified design of metal bollard would help reinforce the sense of place.



There is also a real opportunity to move to a more distinctive livery for the Conservation Area such as black with gold or red details, or a different combination of colours, to ensure a common identity and to reinforce the sense of place.

The Guide will apply to all agencies in relation to replacement surfaces and to all maintained or new street furniture.

The Borough Council will cost a set of priority proposals for street furniture and surface material enhancements as part of the works required to the public realm within the town centre and, in addition to any funding from its Capital Plan budget for enhancement schemes, will seek contributions from development towards such improvements. Contributions resulting from development will be pooled in the Tonbridge Central Area Fund.

Enhancement of Bank Street/ Castle Street area

The Market Quarter is currently something of a backwater to the High Street and contains a number of vacant or underused buildings. The pedestrian environment is compromised by traffic and poor quality surfaces and the street furniture is uncoordinated. Following the completion of the Lansdowne Road Link Road, Castle Street and Bank Street will experience a reduction in traffic and there is a significant opportunity for a comprehensive enhancement scheme for this area bringing new life to old buildings and creating an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment. Co-ordinated street furniture to include replacement lighting and seating should be introduced. A shared surface street with vehicles subordinate to the pedestrian should be created with a new public space created in front of the former fire station. The Borough Council will review the provision of public toilets in this area.



Former Fire Station – a new focus for public realm improvements

Once the Lansdowne Road Link is complete the Borough Council will cost a set of enhancement proposals as part of the works required to the public realm within the town centre and will seek contributions from development towards such improvements. Contributions resulting from development will be pooled in the Tonbridge Central Area Fund.

Enhancement of the Fosse

The historic Fosse, part of the town's medieval defences, which has influenced the layout of the town so strongly has been submerged by development and self sown saplings and trees. Adjoining The Slade, boundary treatment of chespale fencing is also utilitarian.



Remains of the Fosse

The Borough Council will work with English Heritage, and through the development proposals encompassing the Fosse alignment (including those set out in the Central Area Action Plan), to bring forward proposals for improvements along the remaining visible lengths of the Fosse and will consider positioning uniquely designed metal plates to depict the original alignment of the former town boundary. An interpretive board should be placed at strategic points to explain the origins, position and influence of the Fosse in the development of Tonbridge. A trail of this unique feature may supplement visits to the motte and bailey and castle.

Enhancement of Medway Wharf Road and Town Lock

The protection and enhancement of the riverside is a key issue for the Conservation Area. To the east of the Big Bridge there has been a lot of new development both north and south of the river. In order to improve public accessibility to, and the visual appearance of, this area the river bank and adjacent areas need attention.

The Council has approved an enhancement scheme for the Town Lock area which will provide an opportunity to significantly improve its appearance. The design will need to reflect the urban riverside and link areas together. As a major project it will need to set high standards of design and use of materials that others might follow.

It is being funded by a partnership between the Borough Council, the Environment Agency and developers of sites in Medway Wharf Road.

Traffic

A number of traffic calming measures have been introduced into the High Street and Dry Hill Park Road. As well as the shorter term opportunities for further traffic calming within the Market Quarter, there is a longer term proposal for the London Road – Hadlow Road link which aims to reduce traffic in the High Street by providing a more direct traffic link. The alignment is safeguarded but funding is required through the Local Transport Plan.



London Road – Shipbourne Road junction

Following the introduction of the new road there may be opportunities for further traffic calming measures in the High Street.

There will be a need to ensure that the new road and design of the Shipbourne Road/ London Road junction do not detract from the character of the conservation area. Signage and street clutter should be kept to a minimum with any new street furniture selected from within the Borough Council's Street Furniture and Surface Materials Guide.

Design Guidelines

- The scale, massing, height, form, alignment, density and layout of any new development should respect the character of the area within which it is proposed as described in this Appraisal. Within the central sub areas of the High Street, Bank Street and the Slade, Lyons Crescent and Shipbourne Road, development should be tightly arranged to adjoining buildings and close to the road with narrow frontages to give a clear vertical emphasis. Buildings should generally be 3 – 4 storeys in height although parts would only suit 2- 3 storeys. This would also be appropriate in the Riverside Walk sub area. Within the Dry Hill Park Road sub area, development should be more loose-knit, set back from the road and giving space around buildings for substantial landscaping. Within the tight-knit domestic scale of the Slade and Mill Stream sub areas development is generally limited to 2 storeys in height.
- There are a number of isolated properties which are out of keeping with the general character of the Conservation Area. These properties may remain largely unchanged over time but there may be opportunities for new development. When assessing development proposals within the Conservation Area, the Borough Council will seek improvements to the character of the area by focusing on these areas of opportunity where new development should aim to enhance the character of the area through high quality design.
- Good quality design relies, amongst other things, on the choice and combination of materials. This is crucial to the success of a scheme. A richness of design and texture can be achieved through careful detailing and use of materials, and through a fine balance between variety and uniformity in a building or development. The number of different materials used should generally be kept to a minimum. New buildings should consist of materials which respect the character of the sub-area within which they are proposed. The materials listed in the Physical Fabric section and described in the relevant sub area section are appropriate.
- Extensions and new outbuildings should be well designed and be subordinate to the original building. Where buildings are set back a consistent distance from the street along a common building line the visual integrity of a whole street should not be compromised by porches or front extensions. For corner buildings, careful attention to the design of prominent side elevations will be necessary.
- It is important that new buildings respect the alignment of buildings in order to fit well within the local context. This not only applies to the front building line but also to the width of the development within the plot. In areas of loose-knit development such as the Dry Hill Park Road sub-area, there should be sufficient width within a plot to locate the building(s) and provide adequate separation between them. There are considerable pressures to maximise the use of sites but this should not be achieved at the cost of an erosion of the distinctive character of the sub area.
- Within the central sub areas and Dry Hill Park Road sub area, roofs should follow the rich and complex mix of roof forms, should be steeply pitched and should consist of peg or plain clay tiles. Within the smaller scale residential environments of the Slade and Mill Stream sub areas, unified, simple roof lines fronting the street should be protected from dormer windows and slate should be retained. Concrete tiles should not be used.

- Replacement doors, windows and roofs should closely match the design and materials of the original features of the building. Where inappropriate new windows, doors and roofs are to be replaced, the opportunity should be taken to put back in the original style and materials.
- Traditionally designed shop fronts should be retained. New shop fronts should respect the scale, period, design and detail of the individual building of which it forms part, as well as harmonising with the wider shopping area.
- Careful consideration should be given to ensuring that good quality traditional detailing on buildings is retained eg brick detailing such as string courses and quoins, tile patterns, brick bonding, decorative chimneys and decorative barge boards, eaves and soffits. Where removed, efforts should be made to restore them.
- Additions such as satellite dishes, flues, extractor fans and alarm boxes should preferably be located where they are not visible from public vantage points.
- Front boundaries should be retained or restored to the prevailing feature in the sub area: for example, approximately 1 metre high red brick wall with a coping and entrance gate pillars; brick wall topped by hedge; hedge and railings or mature 2 metre high hedge. Detailed brick patterns should be followed. Parking areas have been created on some frontages leading to an erosion of the street enclosure, a loss of defensible space around the building and the link to the history of the area and the locally derived material. Wherever possible, traditional boundary enclosure should be reinstated. Some boundaries are formed by close boarded fences which are out of character with the area and the period of the building. Where the opportunity arises, new boundaries should use the prevailing materials and designs in the sub area.
- Off-street parking should not diminish the character of the conservation area.
- Trees which form landmark features, or which are important to the character of the conservation area, should be retained.
- The area contains a number of local landmarks and focal points which help give reference points and prevent a monotony of appearance. These features should be protected.
- Views and vistas of townscape features, such as landmarks and focal points, and the countryside beyond the built up area should be preserved.
- Important open spaces should be retained and their tranquil character respected.
- When a proposal creates new surfaces or street furniture within its boundaries, it should be selected from the Borough Council's Street Furniture and Surface Materials Guide for Tonbridge Conservation Area.
- Buildings which would be visible from the Conservation Area, or form part of its setting, should preserve or enhance the Conservation Area.

Planning Policy Background

The Appraisal will help interpret

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 15,
- the emerging South East Plan,
- the Tonbridge and Malling Core Strategy (Policies CP1 – Sustainable Development; CP23 - Tonbridge Town Centre; CP24 – Achieving a High Quality Environment and CP25 – Mitigation of Development Impacts), and
- the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (Policies TCA1 – Quality of Development; TCA2 – Mixed-use Development; TCA5 – Secondary Shopping Areas; TCA10 – Public Realm Priorities and TCA13 – Pedestrian Priority Areas).
- Saved Local Plan Policy P4/13 – Shopfront Design

Policies within the adopted Development Plan Documents seek to preserve and enhance the natural and built environment.

The Core Strategy expects all development to be well designed and of a high quality in terms of detailing and use of appropriate materials, and must through its scale, density, layout, siting, character and appearance be designed to respect the site and its surroundings. Within the town centre the Core Strategy seeks enhancements to the public realm, including protecting and enhancing important open spaces and the creation of new ones.

Within the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan there are specific proposals relating to the Tonbridge Central Area within which the Conservation Area is located. However, where changes are anticipated, the Borough Council seeks high quality designs and provision of, or contributions towards, enhancement measures.

Planning Consultants Tony Fullwood Associates and the Borough Council would like to thank members of the Tonbridge Civic Society the Slade Area Residents' Association and individual residents who contributed to the Appraisal.

Adopted July 2009