DITTON CONSERVATION AREA



Introduction

The objective of the Ditton Conservation Area Appraisal is to analyse and record the special character of the Conservation Area, which was originally designated in 1971 and extended in 1993. The Appraisal also provides further details to assist with the interpretation and use of planning policies. It will help guide the Council in making planning decisions on planning applications and to this end has been adopted for development control purposes.

It is intended that the appraisal will inform the activities of the Council and other bodies (eg. Parish Council, Kent County Council and other statutory agencies), where these impact on the Conservation Area. It will also assist in the identification of any programmes of action that are considered appropriate by these bodies, subject of course, to financial limitations and other priorities they may have.

In addition, it is hoped that the appraisal will prove to be of help to residents, businesses and landowners. For anyone proposing new development or changes within the Conservation Area, the appraisal should be read in conjunction with the Borough Council's Conservation Area Advice Note. This includes guidance with regard to the broad issues to be considered and the special controls that apply in Conservation Areas.

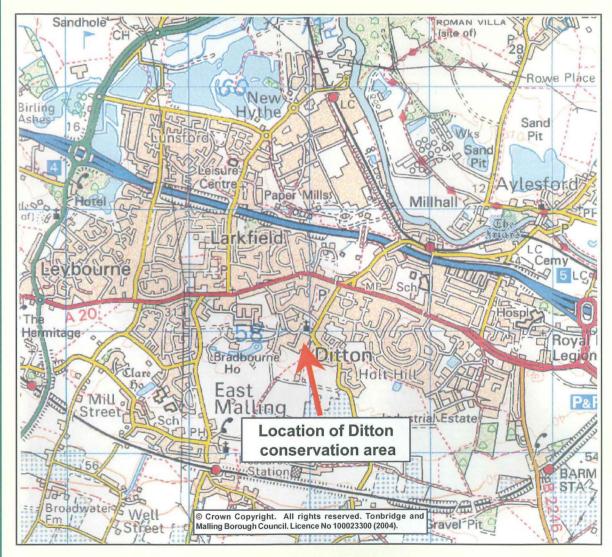


As the purpose of this appraisal is to describe the **character** of the area, it does not include a detailed description of every feature or building. Omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken, therefore, to imply that it is neither of interest nor that there are no opportunities to improve the character of the area.



Location and Physical Setting

Ditton is situated to the south of A20 London Road and merges with the urban area formed by parts of East Malling, Larkfield, Leybourne and Aylesford. Ditton lies five miles to the west of Maidstone. The village lies on the flat valley area between the Lower Greensand Ridge and the North Downs. Development over the last century has led to the historic centre of the village, which originally stood distinctly separate, now being surrounded by mainly residential areas.

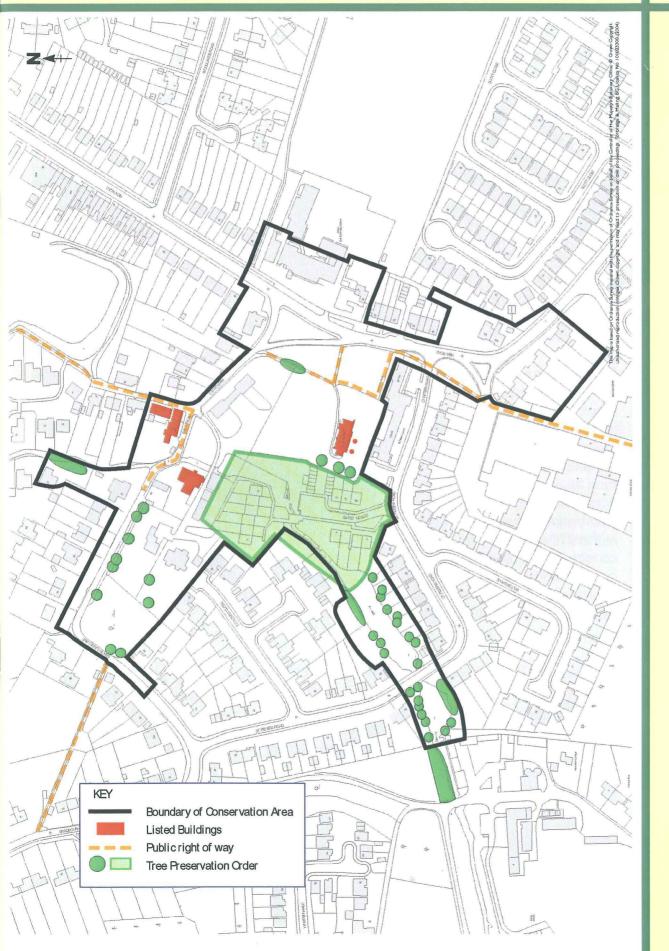


The Conservation Area covers the historic parts of the original centre of Ditton village and parts of the approach roads. It includes the church, the grounds of the former Mill and Mill House as well as the school, but also includes the important open space of the village green and churchyard. The boundary extends southwest to include part of a tributary to the River Medway known as The Stream and the ford which crosses the stream. The Stream is key to the historic development of the area. Its banks and retaining ponds also feature within the Conservation Area boundary.

Plan 1, opposite, shows the extent of the Conservation Area.

DITTON





CONSERVATION INFORMATION



Origins and Development of the Settlement

Ditton's name is believed to originate from a derivation of the Saxon name 'Dictune' which is understood to mean '*Village on the Dyke*' suggesting a reference to The Stream.

The origins and development of buildings within the Conservation Area are related to a number of factors. The area is likely to have initially been chosen by early farming settlers because the soil quality was good and because of the small stream that supplied water to the village. Orchards were a popular method of farming for many centuries in and around Ditton.

Following the establishment of early farming settlements in Norman times St Peter's Church was built in the 12th Century as a focus for the community. The location was suitable due to the convergence of rural trackways and the ford which was a natural point at which to cross the stream. A water mill was built in the 17th century. This led to the



construction of retaining ponds, which still remain today, as a way of ensuring the water flow could be controlled. The Mill no longer exists although some small outbuildings that remain may have formed part of the original mill. Cottages for the workers employed at the Mill were also built here and Old Mill House still exists.



Benefactors to the village established a school and hall in New Road, which, along with The Church, all fronted onto the village green that still remains.

The rural historic core that still remains has been encroached upon on all sides by 19th and 20th Century housing developments.

The maps show how the openness of the Conservation Area contrasts with the high density of surrounding areas.



Special Character

The Conservation Area consists of a scattered arrangement of older rural style buildings and modern dwellings. The Conservation Area continues to experience significant changes for such a small place but the original rural character of this part of the area remains remarkably well preserved.





Plan 2 (pages 8-9) shows the key features of the Conservation Area and forms part of the townscape appraisal. It should be looked at in conjunction with this text.

Townscape/Landscape analysis

The topography of the area is relatively flat. In the wider landscape, Holt Hill to the east and the Downs to the north, serve to enclose views.

The important historic character of the Conservation Area is derived largely from its open leafy character and low density of buildings consisting of a variety of ages, types and styles. A small group of buildings are sited near The Stream. The trees are mainly contained in the grounds of the Church and former Mill as well as along the banks of The Stream and Bradbourne Lane. This green space contrasts with the higher density housing which surrounds it.

The pattern of development is generally linear along the roads and village green with a small cluster close to the ford and former Mill and another close to St Peter's Church. Ditton Court Close is arranged either side of the stream in a modern cul-de-sac style layout and relates well to both clusters of buildings.



The village green has a simple open character. It is the most prominent feature and acts as a key focal point. Several important buildings and dwellings directly front onto the green serving as a traditional focus for the village. On the approaches into the village, the arrival at the village green is striking.

The Church is the most important visual landmark building in the village and is set in elegant grounds that contain many mature trees and are enclosed by a ragstone wall. The numerous trees within the Conservation Area act as a backdrop to many important views and together with occasional glimpses of the Church between the trees, helps to create a strong sense of place.



The character of the road known as The Stream changes significantly when moving westwards from the wide open space of the village green to a more confined streetscene with a leafy

character. There is a small cluster of historic rural buildings close to The Ford. The immediate sense of enclosure results from the combination of the close arrangement of buildings along the edge of the waterway with high boundary walls, mature overhanging trees and hedgerows. The raised footpath that extends along The Ford around the corner of Mill House enhances the visual townscape interest as it is elevated above the water level to neatly follow the line of the high curved red brick boundary wall. There is a sense of curiosity as to where the footpath leads.





Along the banks of The Stream the appearance of the south western part of the Conservation Area is distinctive. The original need to control the water flow and levels for the Mill led to the formation of the retaining ponds. Many of the subtle man-made grass banks and verges along the waterside are undulating and are now largely sheltered by many mature overhanging trees. This is a key characteristic of this part of the Conservation Area.

Close to the Mill grounds, the sound of gushing water is a powerful reminder of the original working mill. In contrast, where the largest pond divides the private rear curtilages of properties between St Peters Road and St Peters Close, the water is very calm. Here views across the water and under the canopies of the mature overhanging trees create interesting leafy reflections which add to the peaceful character of the area.



The buildings in the Conservation Area are of varying types and ages. They date from as far back as the 12th Century with several close to the ford dating from the 15th Century. Most other buildings date from the 19th century onwards. The buildings are two storey and were originally detached but some have been sub-divided. The older domestic properties have a considerable mass but are set in

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compact grounds close to the highway. Buildings generally have a horizontal emphasis. Many have a timber framed construction with a mix of materials to external elevations. Several feature a number of





detached or semi detached and consist of a fairly standard design but have small footprints and are sited close to the road.

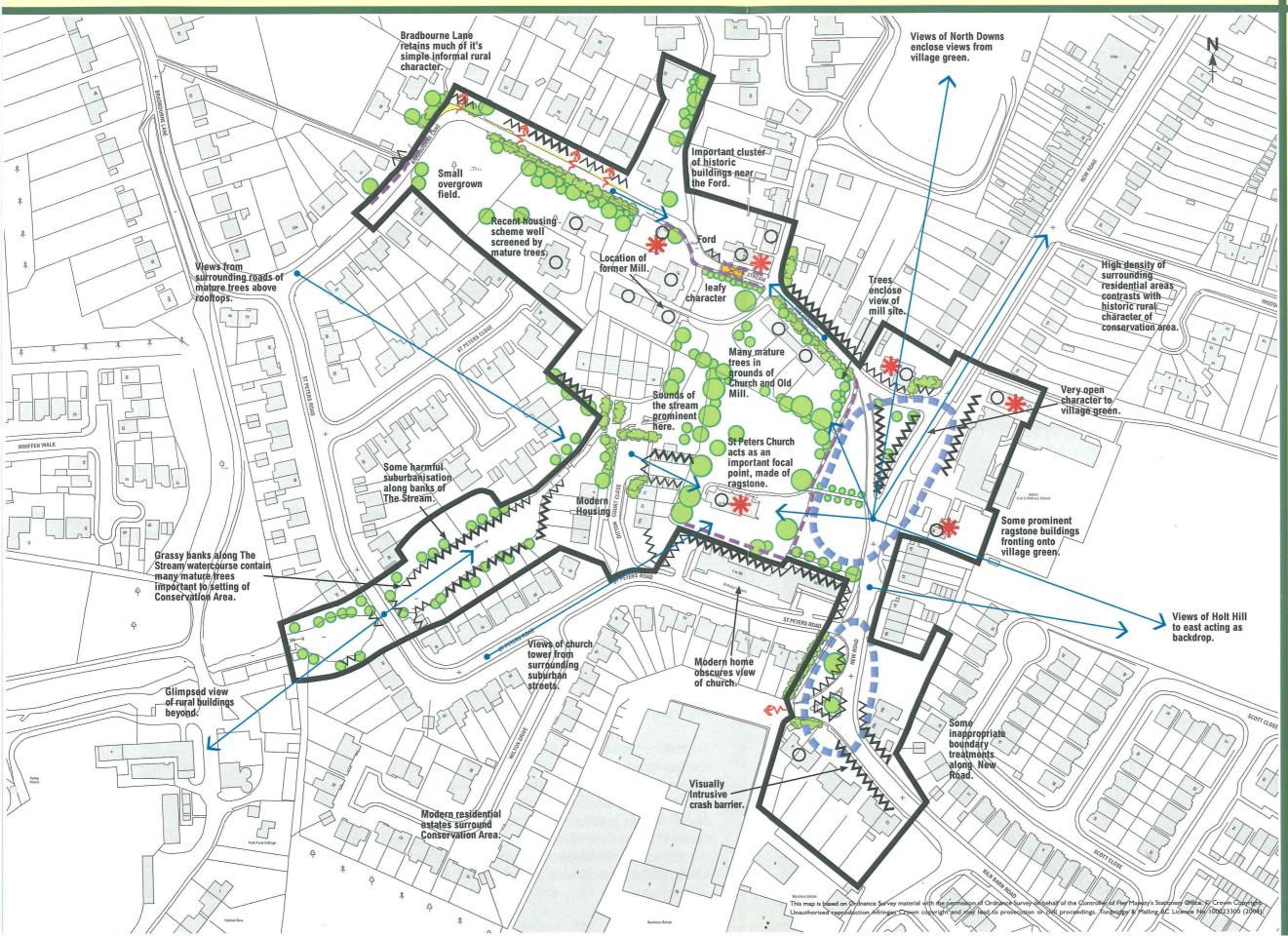
Many dwellings have small green front gardens, enclosed by white painted, timber picket fences or neatly trimmed hedgerows. Close to the Ford and church more formal boundary treatments feature, including ragstone or red brick walls.

The recent Old Mill House development successfully incorporates many original local traditional features into its design. It is well screened by mature trees and is sympathetic to the character of the Conservation Area. It has enabled the restoration of the Old Mill House building which is an important local heritage feature.

Important views out of the Conservation Area are limited due to the flat landscape and many large trees. The vistas from the village green along New Road to the north and east, are enclosed by distant hills. Views westwards of the cluster of farm buildings and distinctive cowls of the oast house emphasise the closeness of the countryside and act as a reminder of the rural landscape that once existed here.



DITTON TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS









Focal point

Views/vista

Lack of enclosure

Important visual space

Visual pinch point

Visual intrusion



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and

Buildings/structures which make a positive contribution



Important hedges

Boundary treatment contributing to special character

Important verges



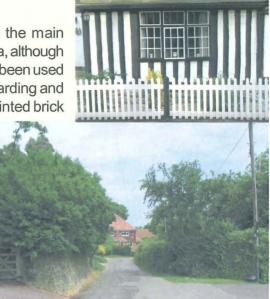


Physical Fabric

Ragstone, red brick and oak timber frames are the main traditional building materials in the Conservation Area, although traditional and modern replacement materials have been used on some external elevations, including weatherboarding and render. Roughcast render, limewashed render, painted brick

and even a pebbledashed finish cover some timber frames of buildings. Ragstone is used on prominent feature buildings.

Roofs are steeply pitched and either gabled or hipped generally away from the road but some prominent buildings feature gable elevations fronting onto the street. Roof materials are predominantly Kent peg clay or plain clay tiles with some decorative ridge tiles used.



Windows are predominantly white painted timber and are varied in style with generally a horizontal emphasis to their form but with detailing giving a vertical emphasis.

The large sections of ragstone and red brick walls to the Church and Mill grounds create rhythm and give identity for the Conservation Area.

The original rural lanes have retained some of their original informal character particularly where they feature overhanging trees along hedgerows, raised grass verges and informal edges without pavements and kerbstones.



Unfortunately few original street furniture or floorscape materials remain within the Conservation Area.

Unifying Features

- Open rural leafy character, in contrast to surrounding housing areas.
- Mature trees acting as backdrops to important views and setting of stream.
- Prominent buildings fronting the village green made from ragstone.
- Large detached timber framed buildings constructed with a rich variety of traditional materials.
- Decorative vernacular detailing on many buildings.
- White painted timber casement windows with horizontal form but detailing to give vertical emphasis.
- Steeply pitched, hipped and gable roofs, fronting onto roads.
- Proximity of buildings to street with small enclosed curtilages.
- Rural character of lanes with informal edges and lack of kerbstones and pavements.



Features affecting the character of the Conservation Area

- In understanding what is special about a Conservation Area and what serves to unify it, 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.
- The concrete and chain linked bollards around the edge of the village green help to prevent vehicles from encroaching onto the grass but disrupt the simplicity of this important historic space.
- Inappropriate materials such as kerbstones, standard modern bricks, tarmac and railings close to The Ford diminishes from the setting to this important historic feature.



- The Anti-crash barriers at the corner of New Road and Kiln Barn Road are unsightly and visually are an unsuitable solution to highway safety concerns.
- In Bradbourne Lane the corner field is overgrown with many gaps in the hedgerow although attempts are ongoing to strengthen these hedgerow boundaries. Important rural style front boundary walls and large trees have been removed from several front gardens in the lane. Close-boarded timber fences, modern brick walls, unsuitable planting on verges and tarmac driveways are other unsuitable suburban features.
- Some of the garden features in the curtilages of properties adjoining The stream, such as brick edging, patios, sheds, greenhouses and planting along the grassy banks detract from the special historic character of the Conservation Area.



The incremental replacement of traditional features and materials with unsympathetic modern materials can affect the character of individual buildings and damage

the overall appearance of the area. Domestic paraphernalia, such as satellite dishes, TV aerials and alarm units can cumulatively impact on the historic character of the area. Ditton Conservation Area is vulnerable to suburbanisation due to the many modern properties nearby.

- The plastic litterbin and the lighting column close to the church and village green could easily be improved as and when funding allows.
- The tarmac playground surface around Ditton Primary School is a very harsh feature that could be enhanced with more appropriate landscaping and fencing.









■ High and long sections of close boarded fences along front boundaries are inappropriate since they are not a traditional front boundary treatment and are out of keeping with the character of the Conservation Area.

- Overhead wires in the Area intrude on views.
- The servicing cabinet for Utility Companies on the corner of The Stream and New Road is visually intrusive.



Opportunities for preservation and enhancement

It is intended that this appraisal will be used as a tool where change is proposed in the Conservation Area. It is hoped that as well as preservation of the character of the Area, opportunities will be taken for enhancement. The following, therefore, is a list of suggestions for preservation and enhancement to be considered when opportunities arise, such as a proposal for new development or when a building is being renovated. Some of these suggestions are for the Council to take on board, some are for other agencies and some for private individuals to consider. Free advice is also available from the Council's Conservation Officer. For contact details see back page.

Further sensitive landscaping of the Village Green space would enhance the Conservation Area and improve the main focus of the village. Further improvements to paving, seating and landscaped planting would be beneficial without compromising the visual simplicity of the Green. The chain-linked bollards whilst not a traditional feature are low key and maintain the open character



Planting good quality native or specimen tree species in appropriate places would enhance the setting of the conservation area and would help to screen and soften the appearance of modern buildings. Existing trees and hedgerows that are nearing the end of their natural life would benefit from a programme of gradual replacement planting.



- Regular maintenance of buildings helps to preserve the attractive appearance of the Conservation Area. Many buildings would benefit from external repainting of woodwork and render and replacement of damaged or missing materials in the same style and proportion as the originals. Where inappropriate materials are to be replaced, the opportunity should be taken to put back traditional materials.
 - Property owners need to be aware of how relatively minor domestic changes using inexpensive standard materials can harm the important historic character. Where domestic items are absolutely necessary, every effort should be made to locate them so that they are not visible from public vantage points. Free advice is available from Planning Services and should be sought before carrying out such changes.



- Traditional floorscape materials should be re-introduced close to The Ford and elsewhere wherever possible. Ragstone setts, cobbles and paving, bound gravel or pea shingle or even small grass verges are appropriate. Yorkstone would be an acceptable alternative to ragstone. The removal of the railings would be beneficial. Otherwise they should ideally be replaced with a suitable style made of timber or cast iron.
- The provision of traditional styles of lamp posts and lanterns could reflect the special character of the place.
- If the opportunity arises, overhead cables should be rationalised where they are particularly noticeable or ideally be located underground.
- Consideration should be given to the relocation of traffic signs, bollards and utility service cabinets, which general clutter. They should be kept to a minimum.



Key Design Guidelines

Whilst the opportunities for new building in the Conservation Area are very limited any new buildings, especially those in prominent locations should be of an exceptional design standard and must respect and enhance the townscape qualities of the area. Scale, form and massing of modern buildings should be designed to respect the historic environment. The positioning of dwellings in relation to others is equally as important and must reflect the existing patterns. Extensions and outbuildings should be designed to this same



high quality but should be of a lesser size and scale. The use of local vernacular detailing in an appropriate context is important to the distinctive sense of place.

- Buildings should generally be 2 storeys in height and have their roof ridgelines parallel to the road. Simple steeply pitched roof styles should be used, i.e. hipped ends with more prominent buildings featuring gable end projections. Clay tiles are an appropriate roofing material. Concrete tiles should not be used.
- The use of good quality local materials will maintain the rich variety that is a key characteristic of the Conservation Area. These include exposed timber frames with red stock brick, ragstone or limewashed render. Weatherboarding and hanging tiles would also be appropriate but mainly to rear and side elevations or extensions and outbuildings. Prominent public or feature buildings should be of ragstone.
- Front boundary treatments should consist of ragstone, red brick, white painted timber picket fencing or hedgerows of a traditional species mix.
- Views to the Downs, Holt Hill, the Church and the other key focal points identified in the Conservation Area should be preserved.
- The Conservation Area is tightly drawn and therefore buildings immediately outside the boundary can have a significant impact on the setting and on views from the Conservation Area. This should be taken into account if any new development is proposed in these locations.
- Where informal edges currently exist, the installation of kerbstones should be avoided but where it is considered essential, conservation standard materials should be used to protect this historic character.



Local Plan Policy

The appraisal will help in the interpretation of Policies P4/4 and P4/5 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998. Policy P4/4 requires proposals for development to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of each Conservation





Area. Policy P4/5 seeks to retain buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Ditton Conservation Area is situated entirely within the defined urban confines where there is a general principle in favour of appropriate development.

The Village Green however is identified as an Important Green Space, where under Policy P4/10, development will normally be resisted, within or adjoining the space.

Further Information

If you would like more advice on Ditton Conservation Area, historic building repair and restoration, please telephone 01732 876218

For advice on new development, including works to Listed Buildings, alterations to properties, the need for planning permission and works to or affecting trees, please telephone 01732 876234.

If you would like to discuss alleged unauthorised development, please telephone 01732 876302.

Alternatively you can write to:

Planning and Engineering Services Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Gibson Building, Gibson Drive Kings Hill West Malling Kent ME19 4LZ

planning.services@tmbc.gov.uk

Or email:

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