MILL STREET, EAST MALLING CONSERVATION AREA



Introduction

The objective of the Mill Street Conservation Area Appraisal is to analyse and record the special character of the Conservation Area. This will then provide further detail which will assist with the interpretation and use of planning policies. It will help guide the Council in making planning decisions 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, subject, of course, to financial limitations and other priorities.

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.



photo: East Malling Conservation Group.

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

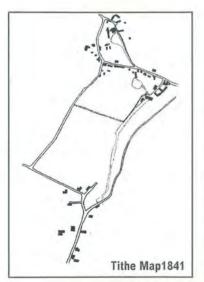
East Malling is a village located immediately adjacent to the urban area of Larkfield. It is approximately four miles to the west of Maidstone and lies to the south of the main A20 route to London. Mill Street is one of five Conservation Areas within the Parish of East Malling and separate appraisals will be carried out for each of them. Mill Street is a small Conservation Area, lying to the west of the village centre. It is situated around a tributary of the River Medway known as The Stream, which is the key to the historic development of the area. It includes the settlement at Mill Street and also the group of dwellings at The Stream's source in Well Street. Whilst the Stream, and historical watercress beds are the amalgamating element between the two settlements vehicular access is indirect. The Mill Street area therefore forms part of the village of East Malling, whilst the Well Street area appears as a distinct and separate settlement. Plan 1 over the page shows the extent of the Conservation Area.

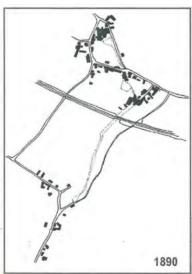


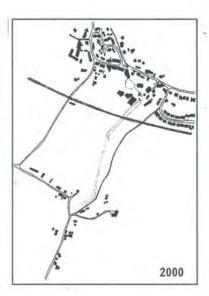


Origins and Development of the Settlement

The origins and development of the Conservation Area are principally related to The Stream which has its source within the Conservation Area, at Well Street. The Domesday Book records two mills at East Malling. During the 18th and 19th Century there were four mills, latterly paper mills, all within half a mile of each other and the area grew as a result of their prosperity. However, Lower Mill was closed during the industrial revolution. Upper Mill was demolished between the wars. Watercress beds still exist in The Stream. Although the history of these is unclear it is thought that they were altered in the 19th Century, when the Mill pond was enlarged. The drawings, below, show how development in Mill Street has changed over the years. Weir Mill, to the south of Mill Street still stands and has been converted to apartments. Middle Mill to the north was very successful in the late 19th century and many new buildings were constructed around it. In 1932 the paper machines were closed. However, after the war Middle Mill was saved and used as a drinks and bottling plant. The site has since been redeveloped for housing.







Changing Built form of Mill Street Conservation Area.

Mill Street Conservation Area, although largely an agricultural area, also developed as a place of industry with 4 mill buildings in close proximity. Although some industry and office uses still remain in the area, the activity associated with the industries and agriculture has now declined. There are no shops remaining in Mill Street, all having been converted to residential use. The character of the Area now is predominantly that of a quiet residential area. However, many of the structures and buildings indicative of the industrial prosperity of the 19th Century remain. Two Weir Mills still stand, the timber clad Mill of the 18th Century and the brick built Mill finished in 1895, as well as the 3 oasthouses in the Conservation Area.



Special Character

The Conservation Area can be divided into 3 distinguishable parts:

- the linear development along Mill Street
- The Stream, the watercress beds, the Mill race and waterfall
- the scattered rural settlement along Well Street

Townscape/Landscape analysis

The Mill Stream dictates the topography of the whole area, with the land rising gently away from it, although there are some steeper man-made embankments along the valley. The topography affects the character of the area by opening up and closing views. For instance, land to the south west of Mill Street rises steeply and is very prominent in views out of the Conservation Area.

Plans 2a and 2b show the key features of the Conservation Area and form part of the townscape appraisal. They should be looked at in conjunction with this text.

Mill Street

The development within this part of the Conservation Area is predominantly linear, with most of the historic buildings, on the south side of Mill Street, closer to the Mill Stream. One of the key characteristics of this part of the Conservation Area is the sense of enclosure created by the ragstone boundary walls and the buildings themselves. In the east, the entrance to the Area is defined by a 19th Century property (fomerly part of a terrace), situated at right angles to the road, creating a strong pinch point and gateway to the area. Further visual pinch points are created by buildings at intervals throughout the area and, in summer, by the mature chestnut trees.

At the west end of Mill Street, a curve in the road provides visual interest by creating strong sequential views. When approaching from the east the view is closed completely, and a group of attractive red brick houses forms a visual stop whilst also leading the eye round the corner.

The western entrance of the Conservation Area is defined by the narrowest pinch point, created by the two oldest properties in Mill Street. When arriving here, views into Stickens Lane and to the rising land beyond are emphasised, the nineteenth century terraces and Weir Mill being revealed and providing a visual impact once the corner is turned.

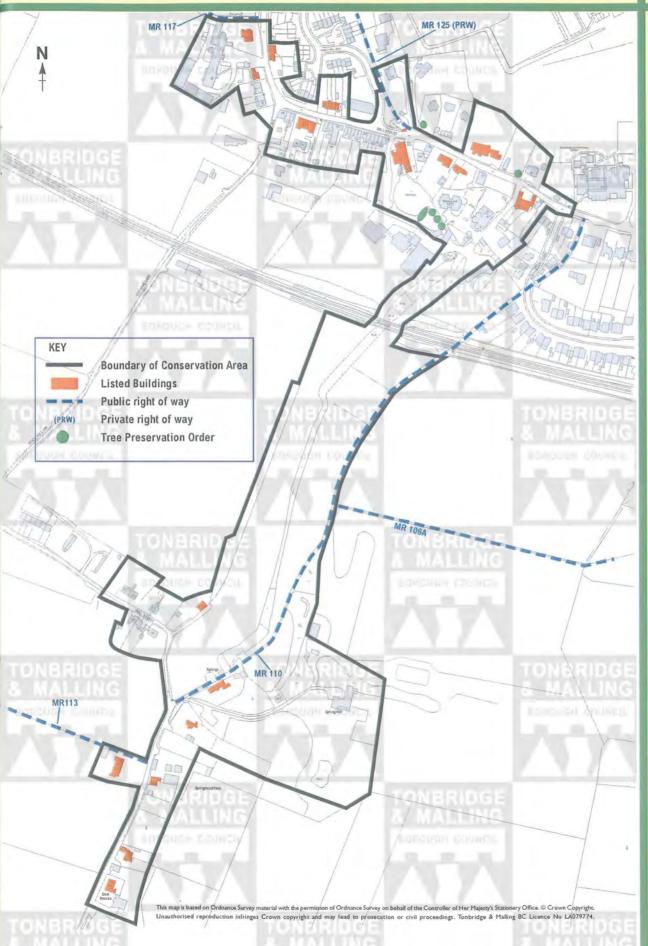
Buildings in Mill Street have a strong relationship to the street with frontages close to the road. Where this relationship is altered, the character and sense of enclosure is reduced.

Most of the properties in Mill Street have pitched roofs which face front to back, the exception being those properties which form pinch points along the street and are closer to the road. These properties have their gable ends parallel with the road and project into the views along the road.

CONSERVATION INFORMATION

MILL STREET, EAST MALLING







Development in the Conservation Area is at its densest at the centre of Mill Street, where the almshouses, terraces, public house and Weir Mill form a compact group. Beyond the Mill, to the east and west, development is more scattered, comprising cottages, former agricultural buildings and larger formal houses, although suburban development to the east, beyond the Conservation Area, now links Mill Street with East Malling High Street.



This is an important characteristic of the settlement layout. Properties close to Weir Mill are terraced with little or no frontage, limited landscaping and few opportunities for views out of the Area. The buildings themselves create the sense of enclosure. Properties closer to the eastern and western edges of the Conservation Area are set in larger curtilages, allowing for substantial landscaping and large trees, and tend to be larger detached properties. The sense of enclosure in these areas is created by the boundary walls.

The skyline in the centre of Mill Street is therefore enclosed by tightly developed buildings contrasting with the edges of the Conservation Area where it is more open and defined by mature trees and views out of the Conservation Area. Weir Mill and the oasthouses also punctuate the skyline throughout the area, giving an indication of its industrial heritage.

The Horse Pond on Mill Street is a unique feature, being fed from The Stream which passes under the road from Weir Mill. Its setting could be improved, however, by the use of more sympathetic materials on the footway. A large Mill Pond behind the Mill is not in the public realm, but is important as part of the original character of the area and in maintaining the setting for the Mill. Weir Mill still has its wheel and work to repair this has recently been grant-aided by the Council as part of its commitment to assisting with the repair of historic buildings.



photo: East Malling Conservation Group

The Stream

To the south of Mill Street, behind the houses, the Weir Mill race and waterfall are still present. One of the mill buildings, a ragstore, remains opposite the waterfall and serves to enclose and define this space, as well as reflecting the history of the area. Currently vacant, the property is in need of renovation and occupation.

Further south, the Mill Stream changes character, becoming a secluded river valley. The Stream, itself, has been artificially widened between Well Street and Mill Street to slow water down and create watercress beds. The eastern bank has also been altered, creating a steep embankment. Large ornamental trees, which create an impression of a formal walk, line the public footpath along the top of the embankment. This area has the feel of a secret hidden heritage, with views to Mill Street and out over the open countryside but with few views into the valley. The unique character of this area is the element that links Well Street and East Malling and emphasises the industrial history of the Conservation Area. At the end of The Stream, the Springhead, there is a much more enclosed, intimate feel, created by the narrowing of the valley and groups of overhanging trees.

Well Street

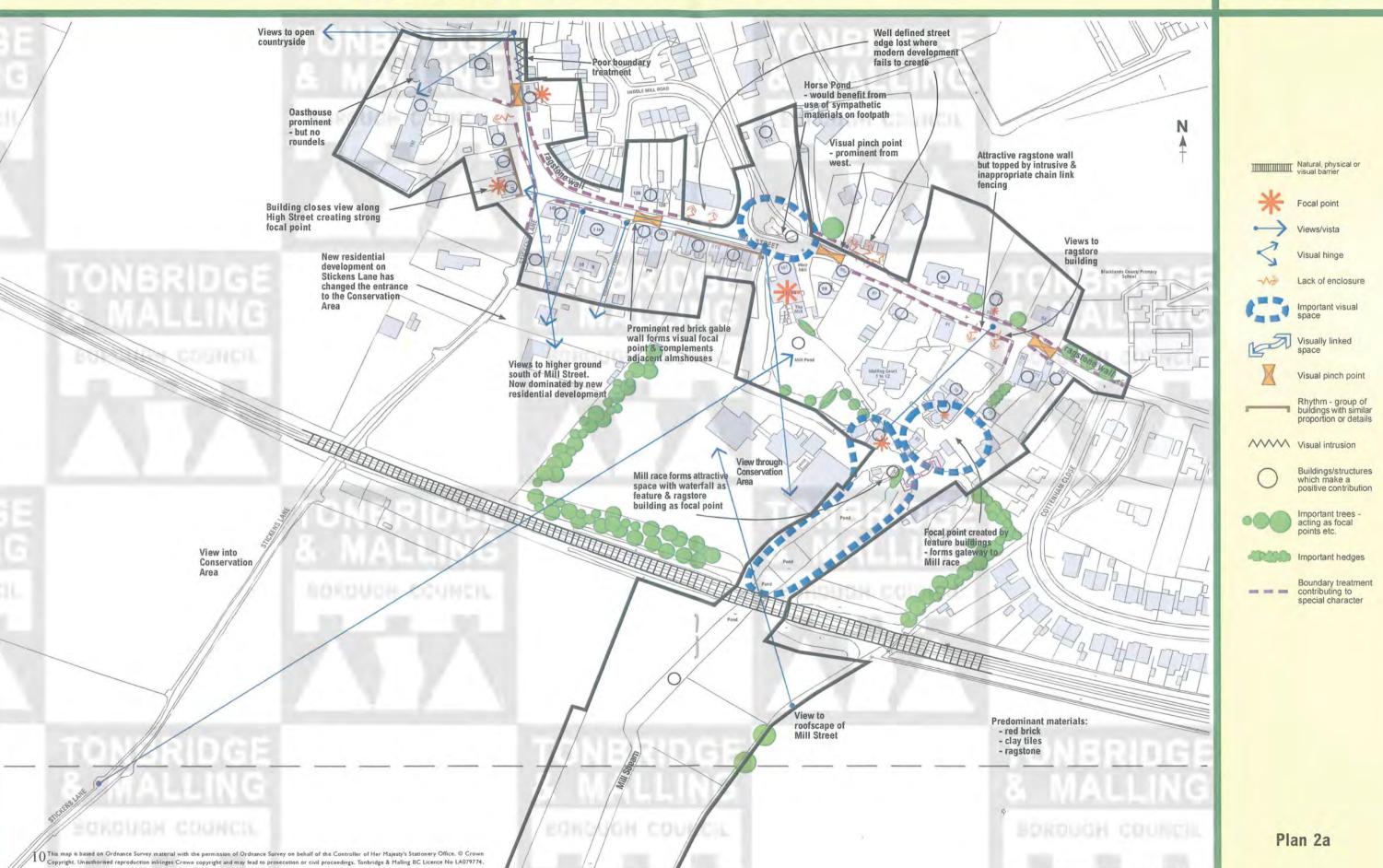
Well Street has a very different character from Mill Street with a more scattered rural form of development. Well Street, itself, is a narrow lane with no kerbs and hedges lining the road. The only hard elements are introduced by the buildings, which are situated close to the road. Properties, here, are all in residential use, separated by wedges of agricultural land allowing clear views to the countryside beyond. The majority of properties are on the East Side of Well Street, with open fields lying to the west. As the road rises and turns to the north east, development is more concentrated with smaller curtilages.

Frontages to the dwellings are more open than on Mill Street and have no unifying boundary treatments. Similar to Mill Street, the houses here are located so that the roof slope is parallel to the road, with the agricultural buildings being situated at right angles to the road. The older traditional timber-framed houses all have fully hipped roofs.

MILL STREET TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS

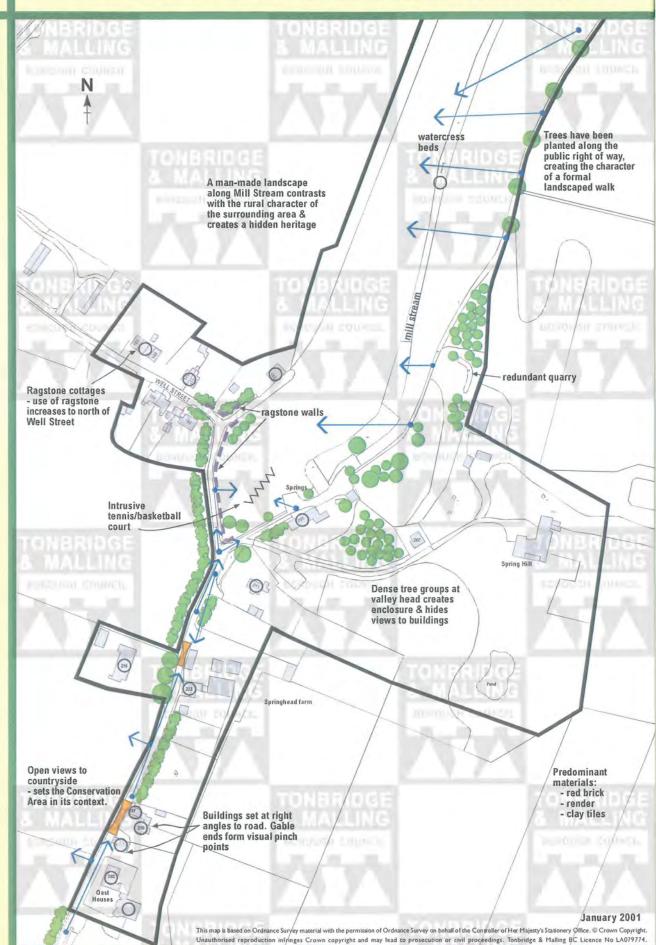


January 2001





MIIL STREET, EAST MALLING TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS





Physical fabric

There is a strong 19th Century character to the centre of Mill Street which is connected to the rise in the Mill industry, but dwellings in Well Street and those at the eastern end of Mill Street are earlier. Dwellings in Well Street date from between the 14th Century to 17th Century with those to the north-west being later. Buildings throughout the Conservation Area are predominantly two-storey, with some limited use of dormer windows in the roof.

Ragstone is used for boundary walls and is a prominent feature in Mill Street. A detailed characteristic of the area is the use of red brick saddle coping stones on the ragstone walls, which are of a style unique to the village.



Windows are predominantly white painted timber and, although of varying styles, are all vertical in proportion. Roofs in Mill Street are hipped away from the road, materials being predominantly clay tiles (both Kent Peg tiles and plain tiles) or slate. Small gables are used in the Victorian terraces in order to break up the roof line and create a strong sense of rhythm and continuity.



The three groups of terraces west of Weir Mill are all different in detail but have a uniformity created by the same rhythm. There have so far been only a few changes to windows and doors but it is unlikely that any more can be absorbed without a loss of this rhythm and therefore character of the Conservation Area.

The appearance of the properties in Well Street is predominantly white painted render on the older timber framed properties, with red brick being used for the later agricultural buildings (now converted). The use of ragstone increases in the northern part of Well Street and it may have been taken from the quarry that lies behind the Mill Stream.



A footway runs along one side of Mill Street for most of its length. This distinguishes it from the surrounding residential areas which have footways on both sides of the roads. Materials are however, modern black top with concrete kerbing. Well Street notably has no footways or kerbs, which ensures its rural character is retained.

Unifying features

- Ragstone walls, with unique red brick capping detail, in Mill Street and the northern end of Well Street.
- Red brick dwellings in Mill Street and some properties in Well Street
- Painted render on several properties in Well Street
- Hipped roofs, fronting roads
- Clay tiles



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 which are out of character with the Area. This not only emphasises the importance of the remaining special features of the area but allows potential improvements to be identified.

- The Conservation Area is tightly drawn and therefore buildings immediately outside the boundary can have a significant impact, which should be taken into account when new development is proposed in these locations.
- Recent development which is set back further than the traditional built form results in loss of enclosure affecting the appearance of the Conservation Area. However, a sense of enclosure could be recreated in such locations by the use of appropriate boundary treatment and/or planting of indigenous species.
- The character of Stickens Lane, at the Mill Street end north of the railway, has been affected by the widening of the road, provision of footpaths and change in priority as a result of the new residential development.
- Overhead wires throughout the Area, but particularly in Mill Street, detract from the attractiveness of the Conservation Area and intrude on views. If the opportunity arises, these should be rationalised or ideally be located underground.
- The dwellings built as part of the new residential development at Stickens Lane are larger and bulkier than the traditional form of development in the Conservation Area and are visible from Mill Street. Where feasible, opportunities for softening the impact of new structures should be taken.
- Although many of the original windows remain in Mill Street Conservation Area, replacement of traditional windows in modern materials and styles can affect the character of individual buildings and terraces. Where windows cannot be repaired, these should be replaced with replicas of the original. Where inappropriate modern windows are to be replaced, the opportunity should be taken to put back the original style. There is no unifying design of windows in Mill Street but reference for the correct design and detailing can be gained from adjacent similar properties and in some cases, original windows still remaining in the same property.
- Although very limited in Mill Street, domestic paraphernalia, such as satellite dishes, flues etc, can impact on the historic character of the Area. Wherever possible, effort should be made to locate these so that they are not visible from public areas.
- Utility boxes for statutory undertakers should be located carefully in order to respect the character of the Conservation Area. A coloured coating may help them become less 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.

- The ragstore is a derelict building which forms part of the industrial heritage of the area. It is an attractive and unusual building and the Conservation Area could benefit from its retention and conversion to an appropriate new use.
- The Mill race and waterfall form an important part of the character and history of the area and any proposals for the redevelopment of the former Council depot should include their retention. The opportunity should also be taken for restoration and landscaping of the area.
- Historically, pedestrian access was possible to the waterfall and Mill race, and formed part of the footpath along the Stream. However, public access has not been possible in recent years, as the Mill race has formed part of the former Council depot site. In preparing any proposals for redevelopment of the Council depot, consideration should be given to allowing for public access to this area.
- The industrial complex to the west of the Conservation Area has been identified in the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan 1998 as being suitable for residential development and has an extant planning permission. If this proceeds, retention of the oasthouse will be sought. Re-instatement of the roundels would be a beneficial enhancement to the Conservation Area.
- Lamp posts within the Conservation Area, particularly along Mill Street itself, have varying lantern styles. Replacement of the lanterns to create uniformity would contribute to the sense of place.
- Disused notice boards encourage flyposting. If they are not to be managed and well-maintained, the appearance of the Conservation Area would be enhanced by their removal.
- The formal trees lining the footpath alongside the Mill Stream are nearing the end of their natural life. The long-term character of this area would benefit from a programme of gradual replacement planting.
- The watercress beds in the Stream are an important and unique feature of the Mill Stream and the Council would be keen to encourage their reuse where this maintains the special character of the Conservation Area.



Key Design Guidelines

The positioning of dwellings in relation to the road is important. Buildings should be, in the main, parallel to the road, with simple roof styles i.e. hipped or gable end. The occasional feature building/pinch point can be used, particularly to turn corners.



- Scale and massing of buildings should reflect existing properties. The size of the footprint of properties is therefore important to ensure an appropriate roof span. Design should also take account of changing levels. Buildings should generally be 2-storey in height.
- In Mill Street, new boundary walls should be constructed in ragstone, which should have a red brick saddlestone coping to match the unique detailing of the area.



- In Well Street, existing hedges should be retained and new boundary treatment should be indigenous species hedging, low open timber fencing or ragstone walling to the north east.
- Views including those between buildings should not be dominated by unsympathetic development. Views to the countryside beyond should be maintained, where practicable.
- Density and layout of new development should respect the hierarchy in the Conservation Area. In Mill Street, density is high adjacent to Weir Mill but reduces significantly closer to the western and eastern edges of the Conservation Area, with increased views to the countryside between buildings and the opportunity for landscaping around buildings.



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 which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area is set partly within an area designated as being of Local Landscape Importance. It also falls partly within the Green Wedge which is a protected area of open land lying between built up areas in order to prevent them merging. East Malling is one of the rural settlements in the Borough where opportunities have been identified for residential development.

The former Council depot site and land to the east of Stickens Lane are allocated for residential development. The oasthouse industrial site west of Mill Street is also considered suitable for



residential development in the longer term and has an extant planning permission for redevlopment. Except for these allocated sites, residential development will normally be restricted to minor development or redevelopment.

Further Information

If you would like more advice on Mill Street 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

Or email:

planning.services@tmbc.gov.uk