

SNODLAND

CONSERVATION AREA



Introduction

The objective of the Snodland Conservation Area Appraisal is to analyse and record the special character of the Conservation Area, which was designated in June 1993. It also provides 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.

Snodland Conservation Area is one of three Conservation Areas within the Parish of Snodland and separate appraisals will be carried out for each of them.

It is intended that the appraisal will inform the activities of the Council and other bodies (eg. Town 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 not of interest or similarly that there are no opportunities to improve the character of the area.*

Location and Physical Setting

Snodland is a small town situated to the south of Strood, west of Maidstone and north of West Malling. It lies at the base of the North Kent Downs close to the River Medway and remains clearly separated from other major settlements.

The Conservation Area is focused on the commercial core of the town centre, predominantly the High Street and part of its hinterland. The High Street, and subsequently the Conservation Area, is now bisected by the Snodland bypass. Pedestrian links between the two parts are no longer direct and the station and church at the eastern edge of the Conservation Area are now remote from the town centre proper.

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



PLAN 1

Origins and Development of the Settlement

The origins and development of Snodland are principally related to water. The town is sited at a point where the River Medway cuts through the North Downs. The site is likely to have been chosen because flooding here was minimal and the soil quality was good. Streams to the north and south supplied water to the village. The river also provided an important communication link and importantly, it was shallow enough at low tide to provide a crossing point.

There is clear evidence of Saxon and Roman occupation in Snodland. Pagan Saxon burial sites were found at Holborough Hill. Known as "The Knob" this rose for over 200 feet as a separate outcrop of the chalk hills. An ancient track ran across it from Paddlesworth to Holborough. As well as a Saxon burial ground, there was evidence of a bronze age barrow at the top of the hill and a Roman barrow some 200 yards down the hill. The "Knob" has now been lost to chalk excavation but detailed records have been made of the finds there. It is also thought that the original boundaries to Snodland Parish matched those of the estate of a Roman villa built close to the river.

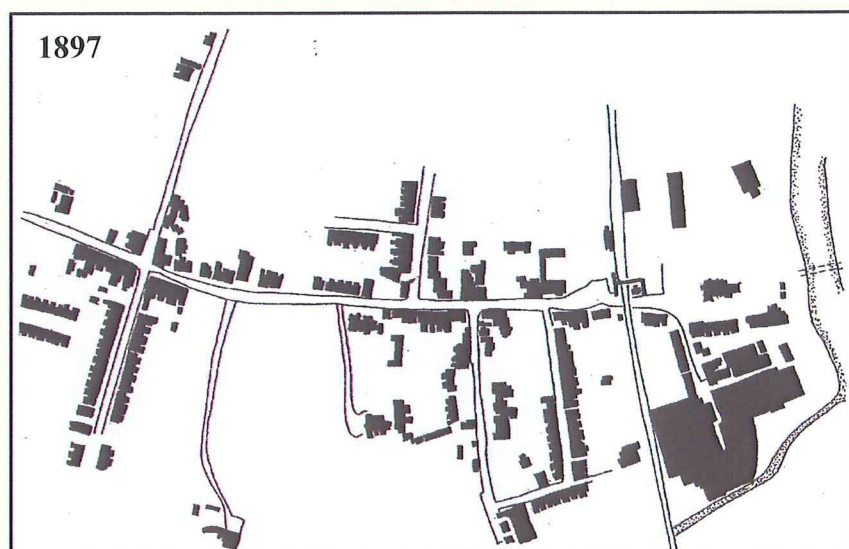
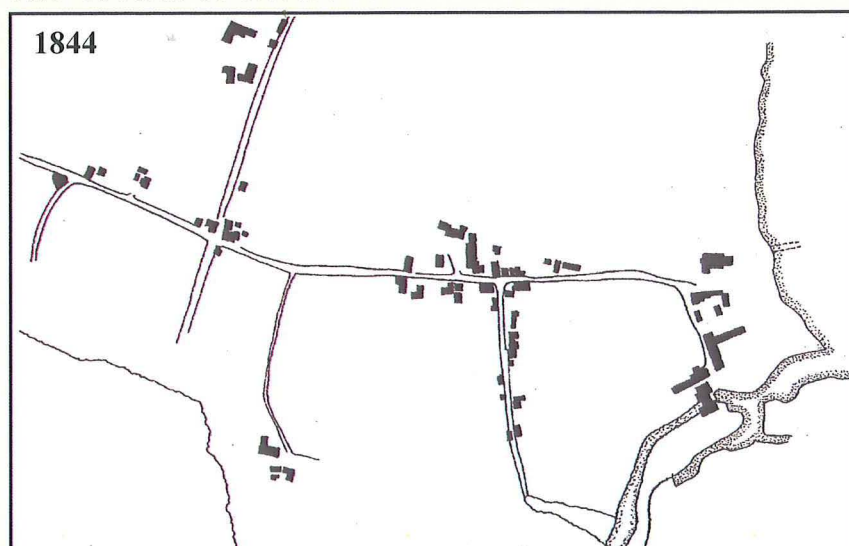
There is evidence of a church being situated adjacent to the River Medway, before 1000AD. In the 12th Century, the Church would have been small in size and would have looked similar to Paddlesworth Church as it is now. However, the earliest records of the existing parish church, All Saints Church, date from the 16th Century. The church has grown and changed over the years. One of the reasons for the expansion of the Church, was the number of pilgrims that were passing through Snodland on the way to Canterbury.

Three mills were mentioned in the Domesday survey of the area. Although the Paper Mill itself is thought to have been established in the first half of the eighteenth century, it passed into the hands of Charles Townsend Hook in 1854 and rapid expansion followed. Destroyed by fire in 1906, the Mill was quickly rebuilt and this building is still present today. The Paper Mill is still a successful business and now covers a considerable area, outside of the Conservation Area.

Chalk has been excavated from the Medway Valley for generations, starting with the Romans who used it to make quick lime. However, in the 19th and 20th centuries a whole series of cement works grew up along both banks of the River Medway.

The town, as we know it today, owes its development to these industries. The small village expanded rapidly. This can be seen clearly on the plans opposite. Terraces of houses were built for the people employed in the industries and more substantial properties for the owners and managers. Shops were established in the High Street to serve them. The Townsend Hook family particularly, were benefactors to the town, establishing schools and other community buildings. The railway came to Snodland in 1856, another reason for the dramatic growth of the village at this time. In 1841 about 500 people resided in 102 houses in Snodland. By 1891 this had grown to 3187 in 521 houses. Little further growth occurred in the town until the 1960s, when major "planned" growth took place, although predominantly outside of the Conservation Area. (In 1999 it was estimated that there were 9,350 people living in Snodland in 3800 dwellings.)

The Growth of Snodland



The plans also show how the centre of the town has changed, the village centre was previously focused on the market place (where the bypass now is). However, north-south road improvements through Snodland resulted in more activity at the crossroads, encouraging expansion in this area at the end of the 19th Century. The Snodland Bypass, opened in August 1983, accelerated this change, resulting in the loss of several properties and the town's market square, and effectively dividing the town and the Conservation Area in two.



The ferry across the River Medway, which went from the end of the High Street, also benefited from the industry in the area. Records show that, in 1880, 600 people a day crossed to and from the factories lining the river. The service ceased, however, in 1948 following closure of the Wouldham and Burham cement works. Snodland is now completely separate from the communities on the East Bank. However, Ferrymans Cottage still exists and there is a public footpath down to the river's edge.

The Conservation Area contains a variety of different uses and has retained its vitality and character, with a constant flow of people using the High Street facilities. The town is isolated from other large areas of employment and larger town centres and therefore has many small shops and businesses, which serve the local population. The recent town centre street enhancements have focused on the crossroads area and helped to create a sense of place for the town centre whilst improving the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Mid Kent Water has a large site within the Conservation Area, which contains the impressive ragstone building, Ivymeath. Now used as offices, it was built at the end of the 19th Century for Colonel Holland, manager at Townsend Hook. A new office building has recently been constructed within the site. The buildings here are very prominent in the Conservation Area due to their location adjacent to the cricket ground.

Other buildings of note within the Conservation Area are worth mentioning, as their presence maintains the historic character of the area. The Station, built in 1856, is listed and also includes an attractive iron footbridge and signal box from the same period. The Red Lion is the oldest public house in the Conservation Area and was previously located in the centre of Snodland, adjacent to the market cross. The Bull public house is a notable landmark in Snodland town centre and although the present building dates from 1881, a building existed on this site before the 1700s.

Special Character

The heart of the town centre is now the crossroads with Malling Road and Holborough Road. The Conservation Area encompasses the commercial core of the town including, shops, offices, industrial buildings and the station, as well as some housing. However, its 19th Century roots are reinforced by the Victorian terraces which surround it, providing an important setting and contributing to the character of the town.

Plan 2 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 pattern of the town centre development is essentially ribbon along the north-south and east-west routes, which meet at the crossroads, now forming the town centre. Buildings are predominantly terraced and positioned close to the road.

The setting of the Conservation Area in a downland valley is clearly apparent with several long-distance views out to the Downs. It is these long-distance views that are important in giving Snodland its identity and maintaining its relationship to the countryside. However, many of these views are now cluttered or have been lost.

Although a very urban, densely built up Conservation Area, part of its character is that trees and hedges form a backdrop to many of the buildings and views.

All Saints Church, situated on the banks of the river, is a prominent feature in the Conservation Area and a key focus for many views. The Church closes the view eastwards along the High Street. However, this important view has now been interrupted as the landscaping on the bypass has matured. Similarly, the reciprocal view from the east back to the core of the High Street has been lost due to the landscaping and so makes any visual connection with the town centre very difficult. Newcomers arriving at the station, for instance, have difficulty identifying where the High Street is. However, the flank wall of the three-storey property adjacent to the Red Lion is still clearly prominent.

Another important visual landmark in the town is the Paper Mill, which is prominent on the skyline, with its chimneys visible throughout the area.



The other landmark in the town is the clocktower. Although located outside the Conservation Area, to the north, it forms a focal point for views along the north-south Malling and Holborough Roads and gives identity to the town. It forms a key focal point when entering the Conservation Areas from the south.

Due to its linear development, there are very few closed views through Snodland Conservation Area. Views are sequential, linked by landmark buildings or features at regular intervals. For instance, when entering the Conservation Area from the east, the view is first to The Bull public house and is then partially enclosed by the trees to the cricket ground. Moving further eastwards the view to All Saints Church is revealed.



Snodland has several churches within the urban area and most of these are within the Conservation Area, all forming reference points in the streetscene. The most prominent is All Saints in the east. The New Jerusalem Church on the High Street is an attractive nonconformist church, established by the Townsend Hook family. This is currently disused but forms an important focus for views, whilst its boundary walls and railings contribute significantly to the streetscene and the trees within the site contribute to the sylvan setting of this part of the High Street. Also on the High Street is the United Church. The Roman Catholic Church is located in Holborough Road.

Buildings in the Conservation Area are predominantly terraced and two storey. There are pockets of 3 storey buildings along the High Street, many originally having commercial uses on the ground floor, and are evidence of how the town has changed. The larger 3 storey and double fronted buildings tend to be clustered close to what would have been the market place. Properties further to the west are later in origin and tend to have narrower frontages, and are predominantly 2 storey, sometimes with dormer windows.

Many of the terraced buildings in the Conservation Area retain their original features and the unity of these terraces therefore remains unspoilt, contributing to the special character of the area.

Several of the shops also still retain their original shopfronts, which further contributes to the character of the Conservation Area. The 19th Century shopfront parades, in particular, have

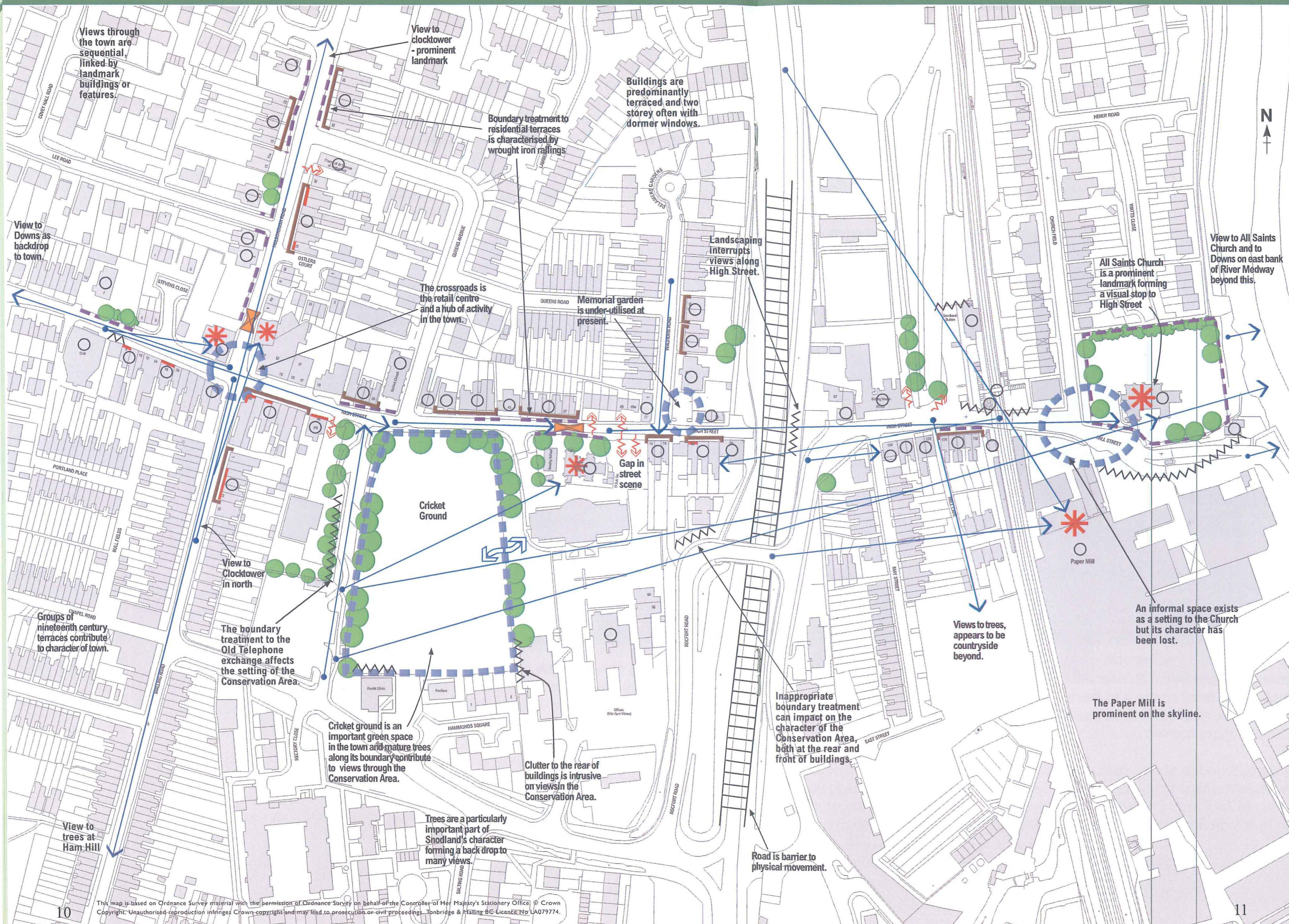


strong detailing which creates rhythm and interest on the street scene.

The buildings all relate directly to the road, being situated parallel to it. Residential dwellings have small front gardens, which allow for greening of the streetscape, whilst commercial properties, or those originally in commercial use, open directly onto the street, in some cases having a small forecourt.

Although there is a variety of building types and ages in the Conservation Area, the style which is most characteristic is the terraced building. Although several properties have been altered, the basic form and essential character of these terraces remain and are fundamental to the character of the Conservation Area. Terraces are simple with either gable end or hipped roofs. Rhythm and interest is given to the roofscape by the regular pattern of chimneys. Window styles are predominantly vertical sashes, usually two across. Residential properties often have a bay window at ground floor with this detailing occasionally being carried through to the first floor.

SNODLAND TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS



- Natural, physical or visual barrier (i.e. edge)
- Focal point
- Views/vista
- Historic shopfronts contributing to character
- Lack of enclosure
- Important visual space
- Visually linked space
- Visual pinch point
- Rhythm - group of buildings with similar proportion or details
- Visual intrusion
- Buildings/structures which make a positive contribution
- Important trees - acting as focal points etc.
- Important hedges
- Boundary treatment contributing to special character

The largest and most obvious open space within the Conservation Area is the cricket ground, developed from glebe land attached to the old rectory. This is an important green space in the Conservation Area. The mature trees that bound it contribute to the quality and character of the Conservation Area and form a key part of the view along the High Street and soften the dense built up appearance of the area. Several views also cross the cricket ground to All Saints Church and the Downs beyond. This space inter-relates visually with the office buildings of Mid Kent Water, and contributes considerably to their setting. Another, much smaller, formal space, although underused, is the memorial garden on the High Street adjacent to the Devonshire Rooms.



Other more informal spaces in the Conservation Area include the space created by the crossroads, which is the retail centre and therefore a hub of activity. The importance of this space is reinforced by recent community additions to the streetscape, such as a mosaic, a notice board and hanging baskets.

The space directly outside the station fails to read well as an entrance as it is dominated by car parking with pedestrians simply crossing it. Similarly an informal space would have existed as a setting to All Saints Church, but the character of this has now been lost, due to the change in buildings and activity which goes on around it.

Physical Fabric

Yellow and red stock bricks are the predominant building materials in the area. The yellow brick, used on many buildings, is unusual in that it is a pale yellow, relatively hard, brick with almost a glazed face. Ragstone is used on the more important feature buildings and has been used for All Saints Church, the New Jerusalem Church, Ivymeath and the Devonshire Rooms. Render has been used on several buildings to cover the original material. The original roofing material is predominantly slate although, increasingly, this is being replaced with concrete tiles.

Windows are timber and painted white and are usually sashes with vertical proportions.



One of the particular defining characteristics of Snodland Conservation Area is the retention of much of its wrought iron railings. The small front gardens to the terraced dwellings are bounded by stock brick walls, topped by wrought iron railings. Many of these railings are, unusually, still in existence and give character and interest to the area. Several of the roads outside the Conservation Area also have railings. Just 4 or 5 patterns are used, creating rhythm and identity for the town.



The High Street is a traditional street, with pavements on both sides for most of its length. These stop at the Church creating a more informal feel to the space here. No original street furniture or floorscape materials remain within the Conservation Area.

Unifying Features

- Repetitive detailing and rhythm of terraces
- Yellow and red stock bricks
- White painted timber sash windows
- Pitched roofs fronting onto roads
- Proximity of buildings to street
- Patterned wrought iron railings
- Regular focal points, along street scene

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.

- A significant element of the special character of the Conservation Area is the concentration of Victorian shops, many of which retain their original appearance. However, the quality and appearance of these retail terraces is reduced by the presence of uncharacteristic modern replacement shopfronts, many in aluminium. Original shopfronts should be repaired and retained. Where shopfronts are to be replaced, they should preferably be replicas of the original or of a traditional style sympathetic to the building.
- Uncharacteristic signage on shopfronts affects the character of the Conservation Area. Modern plastic signs are often bulky and intrude on the quality and rhythm of the terraced shops. Whenever there is a change in signage the opportunity should be taken to replace unsympathetic signs with more traditional signwritten fascias.
- Replacement of traditional windows in modern materials and styles can affect the character of individual buildings and terraces. Where windows cannot be repaired, they should be replaced with windows in the same style and proportion as the original. Where inappropriate modern windows are to be replaced, the opportunity should be taken to put back windows in the original style.
- The entrance to the old telephone exchange on the High Street results in a gap in the street scene that is out of character with the Conservation Area. In addition, lack of maintenance of the building and its unattractive boundary treatment impacts upon the setting of the Conservation Area.



- The incremental replacement of traditional materials with unsympathetic modern materials, such as slate with concrete roof tiles or cladding of brickwork, will have a significant impact on Snodland Conservation Area, as it destroys the unity of the terraces and the overall appearance of the area.
- 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.
- The backs of several buildings are prominent within the Conservation Area and on views into the area. Clutter, such as air conditioning units, flues and aerals, impact considerably on these views. Care should be taken to ensure such elements are out of sight, simply locating these on the rear of the building is not always sufficient.
- Overhead wires throughout the Area 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.
- Utility boxes for statutory undertakers can be intrusive on the streetscene and should be located carefully in order to respect the character of the Conservation Area. A coloured coating may help them become less intrusive.
- The bypass has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area by creating a division, both physical and visual. Although re-establishing the physical link is not practicable, any opportunity to re-establish the visual link should be taken.



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 re-connection of the visual link between the two sections of the High Street would result in a better understanding of the layout of Snodland and its historic character. Cutting back the landscaping on the embankment to the bypass, which currently blocks views along the High Street, would help to achieve this.



- The boundary railings are a characteristic feature of Snodland Conservation Area and, where still remaining, should be retained. Replacement of missing railings in a style to match those adjacent would significantly enhance the appearance and unity of the Conservation Area.



- Encouraging increased use of, or re-landscaping the memorial garden, would result in a higher profile for this formal space which would then make a greater contribution to the character of the Conservation Area and form a feature on this corner.

- The setting of All Saints Church could be enhanced through the use of a more sympathetic boundary treatment to the Smurfit Townsend Hook site and stronger landscaping to screen the car parking and soften its appearance.
- The re-use of the vacant commercial properties on the High Street adjacent to the bypass would bring back activity in this area, reducing the gap that exists at present between the two commercial parts of the High Street.



- The existing enclosure of the cricket ground by trees could be reinforced by additional tree planting on the eastern and southern boundaries, adjacent to Mid Kent Water and the medical centre. This will also help to screen the rear of buildings. In addition, the existing trees are nearing the end of their natural life and would benefit from a programme of gradual replacement planting.
- The New Jerusalem Church is a Listed Building and forms an important feature on the High Street. Its appropriate reuse and maintenance would enhance the appearance of the area, as well as ensuring the preservation of the building.
- Part of the character of Snodland is the continuity of the street scene, with very few gaps. Where gaps do exist, such as at the telephone exchange or adjacent to the New Jerusalem Church, they can detract from the unity and rhythm of the street and contribute nothing to the Conservation Area. Sympathetic redevelopment of these areas would have a beneficial effect on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- An improved layout to the Station forecourt and regular maintenance of the landscaped areas could enhance the setting of the Listed Station building and footbridge.
- Regular maintenance of buildings helps to preserve the attractive appearance of the Conservation Area. The properties at the crossroads are particularly prominent and form the entrance to the town and the Conservation Area for many people. The Snodland Partnership has recently grant-aided the renovation of Medway Bakery and The Bull public house. The modern shops opposite could benefit from painting of the woodwork, particularly the canopy fascia.



Key Design Guidelines

- The positioning of dwellings in relation to the road is important. Buildings should be, in the main, parallel to the road and front onto it. Residential and office buildings should have small enclosed frontages. Retail or public buildings should be either directly adjacent to the street or have small open forecourts.
- Simple roof styles should be used, i.e. hipped or gable end. The occasional feature building can be used, particularly to turn corners. Slate or a modern alternative is, in most cases, an appropriate roofing material.
- 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 and subsequent ridge height. Buildings are generally narrower in width than depth with their roof ridgelines parallel to the road. Buildings should generally be 2-3 storeys in height.
- Buildings should be constructed using an appropriate red or yellow stock brick. Any prominent public or feature buildings could use ragstone.
- Boundaries should be low brick walls topped by railings using a pattern that matches others in the street scene, where residential.
- Any landscaping should include the planting of trees indigenous to the area, which will have a long-term beneficial impact on the appearance of the streetscene and views across the area.
- Views to the Downs, the cricket ground and the key focal points identified in the town should be maintained.
- 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.



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.

Snodland Conservation Area is situated within the urban confines of Snodland. The town centre is considered to be a district shopping centre and Policy P5/20 seeks to ensure that uses suitable for a shopping centre location are maintained on the ground floor. Policy P5/21 allows non-retail uses, such as business, professional and financial and food and drink uses in certain areas adjacent to the centre. The cricket ground is identified as an Important Green Space, where development within or adjacent to the space will be resisted, unless the proposal does not harm the quality of the townscape.



Further Information

If you would like more advice on the Conservation Area, historic building repair and restoration, and grants for repair work to historic buildings, 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@tmbs.gov.uk

Further information on the history of Snodland can be found at Snodland Museum, tel: 01634-240228 for details. It holds numerous historical photos of the area, as well as details on individual buildings.