# STANSTED CONSERVATION AREA



### Introduction

Stansted Conservation Area was designated in March 1993. The objective of the Stansted Appraisal is to analyse and record the special character of the Conservation Area. 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.

Stansted Conservation Area is one of two Conservation Areas within the Parish of Stansted and a separate appraisal will be carried out for the other conservation area at Fairseat.

It is intended that the appraisal will inform the activities of the Council and other bodies (e.g. 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.

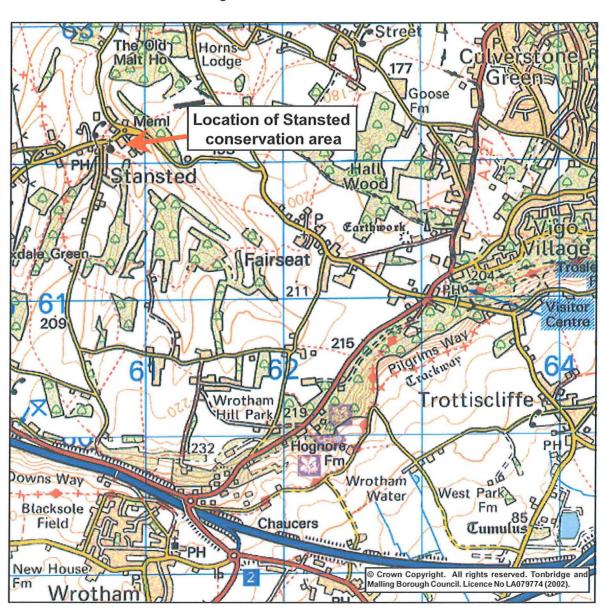


As the purpose of this appraisal is to describe the **character** of the area, it does not include a detailed description of every feature or building. Omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken, therefore, to imply that it is neither of interest nor that there are no opportunities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



### Location and Physical Setting

Stansted is a small and dispersed settlement built on downland hills where four rural lanes converge. The village is situated approximately 3 kilometres north of Wrotham and 1.5 kilometres north-west of the village of Fairseat.



The village nestles within an undulating rural landscape. The Conservation Area straddles two adjacent dry valleys that each run south-east to north-west and includes the elevated ridge running between the two valleys. The Conservation Area also extends to include the substantial south west face of the escarpment known locally as 'Martin Hill' and the visually important tree belt which runs along the top of this ridge. Indeed a key feature of the local landscape of Stansted is the many dense pockets of trees that are scattered across the area.

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







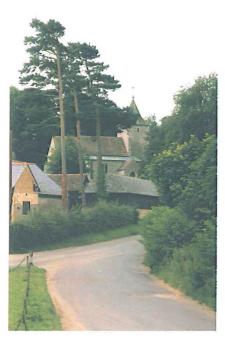
### Special Character

Stansted is located in a naturally enclosed and distinctive rural landscape. *Plan 2* shows the key features of the Conservation Area and forms part of the townscape and landscape analysis. It should be looked at in conjunction with this text.

#### Townscape/Landscape analysis

Upon approach by road, Stansted is suddenly and unexpectedly arrived at. This is due to the surrounding landform and the mature trees, dense hedgerows and embankments that enclose the narrow rural lanes and restrict most views of the village. However the network of footpaths through Stansted offers panoramic views of the overall setting of the Conservation Area.

A key characteristic of the Conservation Area is the undulating topography that encloses the settlement. The grassy escarpment to the east is one of the most distinguishing features as it forms a backdrop to the north east part of the Conservation Area. In several other places good views of gently sloping grassy banks exist. Mature trees and dense hedgerows enclose and define many of the field and property boundaries with strong, well defined lines. The landscape has a rural parkland appearance due to the deliberate planting of groups and individual specimen trees in prominent locations. The Rectory is located in its own individual parkland setting, which covers and influences the appearance of a large part of the Conservation Area. The non-indigenous Scots Pine trees near the entrance to Court Lodge Farm and the Yew tree in the churchyard are particularly interesting. The trees interspersed with the buildings are a striking feature of the Conservation Area and help to blend the dispersed development into the landscape.



The built character of the Conservation Area essentially derives from the low-density nature of development. The buildings are generally linearly arranged along the rural lanes in a loosely knit manner, so that the surrounding fields and open spaces intrude into the heart of the Conservation Area between some of the developed plots. The settlement therefore has a pleasant mix of open and enclosed spaces of varying sizes that are as important to the special character of the area as the buildings themselves.

The Stansted Conservation Area is centred around two road junctions where two small triangular green verges now exist. Few buildings front onto these wide open verges. The war memorial that sits proudly on the eastern most open green island verge, announces a strong sense of arrival to the village. Following the 1987 storm damage, several mature chestnut trees were severely lopped along the hedgerow between the church yard and this space, resulting in the

loss of its sense of enclosure. Some small replacement trees have been replanted, but meanwhile the harm is significant. The terraced green verge area at the north end of Tumblefield Road is well enclosed by hedges and trees, and it slopes steeply towards the road. These attractive spaces act as key focal points and bring a real sense of place to Stansted.



### Origins and Development of the Settlement

The name Stansted has originated from two possible sources. Originally called Stanstede the 'stede' is thought to mean a 'stony' or 'high' place. It is also possible it could have stood for a type of 'sheep station'.

The origins and development of Stansted are principally related to its agricultural links and its location at the junction of historic droveways, tracks and pathways. Stansted stands on an important ancient droveway route, which was understood to link Plaxtol, Wrotham and Dartford. Also there was an important carriage road from London, via Stansted, to Hythe. Since Neolithic times farmers settled in the sheltered downland folds of this area and Stansted has slowly established here since. The medieval St. Mary's Church was built as a chapel to the church of Wrotham when the present Parish of Stansted did not exist and was part of the much larger original Parish of Wrotham. It was made a distinct church between 1647-60 and became so again when the Parish of Stansted was split off in 1846. Historically the farmers built close to the drove ways and over time these farming communities gravitated towards the church, which acted as a focal point in the forest.

The First World War Memorial is an important and prominent feature of the area and is situated on the grassed verge island. The original bronze statue was erected in 1920 but was stolen in 1993. The present statue is a close replica.



The demographics of the village of Stansted have changed significantly in modern times due to the improved mobility of its residents. In the past most of the local people living in Stansted would have relied on agriculture in some form as a source of income. The present population of Stansted is more likely to consist of commuters and retired people. Court Lodge Farm continues as an active working farm with many buildings of considerable historic interest. Many of the older farm structures are no longer suitable for modern agricultural practices and have recently been granted approval for residential and office uses. The Church, School and Village Hall, as well as The Public House and network of public footpaths, all bring visitors to the village, thereby introducing subtle levels of activity and vibrancy to the Conservation Area.



A pleasing contrast is created between the narrow and enclosed rural lanes and the more open spaces. The lanes in Stansted steeply twist and wind their way through the village before suddenly emerging into the open green verge areas. In some places these lanes are very enclosed by steep embankments, verges and overhanging trees. There are dramatic changes in levels between the various parts of Stansted. This, combined with the glimpses of interesting rural views between the trees, hedgerows and buildings, helps to define the individuality of Stansted. The evolving views create interest as to what may be around the next bend, over the hill or through the group of trees.

Some buildings in the Conservation Area have reasonably close relationships to the roads, and are broadly orientated to front the rural lanes. Many other properties feature generous spaces to the front and side boundaries of the buildings, which include cultivated plants and hedges as well as many of the trees that contribute to the character of the Conservation Area. Some of the larger structures, including St. Mary's Church, The Old Rectory and some of the buildings at Court Lodge Farm however, are set back from the highway in more generous sized plots. In contrast some buildings that are sited very close to the edge of the highway stand out and act as focal points.

The north part of Tumblefield Road contains the largest concentration of buildings. Here the properties are more regularly arranged to form a building line. Many of the dwellings feature traditional front boundaries including napped-flint walls and hedges of traditional species. However there is increasing evidence that these traditional rural front boundaries are being removed to provide vehicular access. Lay-bys, wide driveways and exposed front lawn features are harming the sense of enclosure to the front gardens to the detriment of the rural appearance of the street scene. Such suburban treatments should be avoided.



The medieval St. Mary's Church with its spire is the most visually prominent building in the village and overlooks the north-east part of the Conservation Area. Stansted Primary School, being sited close to the edge of the lane on a slight bend, acts as another focal point. The Black Horse Public House and Church Cottage, together with the mature trees in Tumblefield Road, help frame views northwards along Tumblefield Road. The traditional form of the Oast House at Court Lodge Farm acts as a familiar Kentish landmark in the village. The impressively sized Court Lodge building is partly obscured from view from the road by its ancillary buildings.

The roofscape of the settlement is largely seen set against either the steep escarpments or groups of mature trees which dominate the skyline. The escarpment to the east acts as a dominant backdrop to the group of buildings that are evenly spaced out along Malt House Road. The many prominent large trees that exist add interesting silhouettes to the skyline.

Distant views of the ancient woodland on the slopes surrounding the village bring an enclosed feel to the Conservation Area. Good views exist between the various parts of the Conservation Area. The attractive blend of landscape with buildings here defines the uniqueness of Stansted.



### Physical Fabric

The buildings in the Conservation Area vary in age but date predominantly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest structure is the coursed rubble stone built Church, rebuilt in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Court Lodge is a substantial 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century property and is set behind its associated group of farm buildings. Church cottage is a 15<sup>th</sup> Century timber framed structure with 20<sup>th</sup> century additions.



The buildings in the Conservation Area feature a wide range of architectural styles and periods. There is little repetition of styles. Stansted consists of a mix of detached and semi detached one and two storey buildings. The structures generally have steeply pitched roofs but feature few other unifying characteristics. Some properties feature catslide extensions and there is a variety of styles of chimney stacks which have been successfully maintained.

Minor alterations to some buildings have resulted in the replacement of some traditional materials with unsuitable modern types. The changes to date are negligible and do not seriously harm the overall architectural interest and historic character of the area and its buildings. However it is clear that non-traditional materials must continue to be avoided, and traditional types reinstated .

The main materials of note used in the construction of the buildings in the Conservation Area are the white painted feather edged weatherboarding and red stock bricks. Napped flint is also used with red brick quoins and dressings added. Some buildings feature hanging clay tiles. There are other examples of the use of dark stained weatherboarding, rendering and yellow stock bricks. Clay tiles have been used extensively in the roofing of many properties and this brings a good sense of cohesion to the roofscape of the

Conservation Area. However slate roofs on some feature buildings. White painted timber windows of varying styles are still in evidence. This attractive mix of good quality traditional materials is one of the key components of the character of the Conservation Area.



# STANSTED TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS







Some napped flint front boundary walls with red brick capping can be found in the Conservation Area. The best example is the important uninterrupted stretch of wall that encloses much of the perimeter of St. Mary's Churchyard. Most front boundaries feature tall mature natural hedgerows as well as more formal trimmed hedges. Some of the original front boundary features have been removed and there is some evidence of non-indigenous evergreen species being planted to form replacement front boundaries. These are out of character with the area.



The mature hedgerows, grass verges and embankments along the rural lanes remain intact and emphasise the rural character of the area. Many of these informal grass verges are of an irregular form, depth and height that in places results in sunken lanes. The historic character of the area is enhanced by the almost total lack of hard edging along the rural lanes. Such insensitive features should continue to be avoided where possible if the character of the area is to be preserved.

### Unifying Features

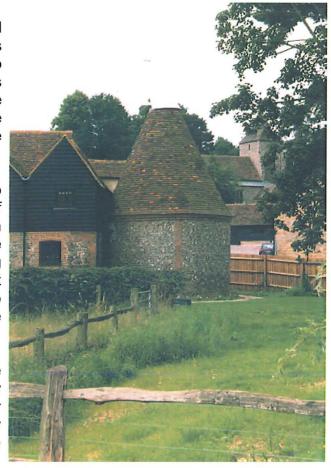
- Mix of traditional Kentish materials including weatherboarding, red stock bricks, napped flint and both Kent peg and plain clay hanging and roofing tiles.
- Steeply pitched roofs with chimneys retained.
- Spacious arrangement of buildings set back from the road, but which still front onto the highways, with well landscaped and enclosed front gardens.
- Mature hedgerows, cultivated hedges and napped flint walls along front boundaries.
- The abundance of mature trees mainly planted in dense groups.
- Views enclosed by green banks, escarpments, hills and dense groups of trees.
- Irregularly shaped grass verges and embankments creating informal edges to narrow rural lanes.
- Indigenous species of hedgerows along field boundaries and rural lanes.
- General absence of pavements and kerbstones.
- Mix of open, as well as naturally enclosed, informal and formal public green areas.
- Extension of rural fields between residential plots up to the edges of the rural lanes.



### 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.

- In some visually sensitive places, field boundaries have been lost and gaps in hedgerows have been created to form access points into fields. This has an adverse impact on the enclosed views and character of the lanes and the overall character of the Conservation Area.
- The informal grass verges help maintain the rural character of Stansted, but this has been undermined where inappropriate kerbstones have been installed along the edge of the green verge area at the north end of Tumblefield Road, to the detriment of the character of the Conservation Area.
- Uncharacteristic clutter in the Conservation Area, including utility storage boxes and equipment for statutory undertakers, can be visually intrusive and affect the character of the area.





- Some modern road signs are not in keeping with the rural character of the area.
- Overhead wires detract from the attractiveness of the Conservation Area and intrude on views.





- The inappropriate replacement of traditional materials with unsympathetic modern materials and styles has incrementally occurred on some buildings. Such changes can have a significant impact on the area and can harm the overall unity and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- Small numbers of indiscretely sited domestic paraphernalia have been added to the exteriors of several properties in Stansted, including satellite dishes, television aerials, alarm boxes and flues etc. Cumulatively this could have an adverse impact on the character of many buildings and on important views within the area.
- The front gardens of many residential properties in the Conservation Area are showing increasing signs of suburbanisation. Non-indigenous tree and shrub planting has occurred. Sections of napped flint walls and hedgerows have been removed to provide wider vehicular accesses. As a result the gardens and the rural lanes have lost their sense of enclosure and have a more open appearance. Tumblefield Road in particular suffers from such changes.
- Parking and driveway hardstandings have been constructed in the front gardens of several properties. Such extensive areas of concrete and brick paving can be a discordant feature in Conservation Areas.





## 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.

Where traditional features and materials exist within the Conservation Area which

cannot be repaired, they should be replaced with traditional materials and styles with the same colour tones and proportions as the original. (Further advice on this can be found in the Council's Conservation Areas Advice Note.)





Where gaps in hedgerows exist, new planting should be carried out to strengthen the enclosed nature of the narrow rural lanes, the field boundaries and the open green verges in Stansted. Attention should be given to

resiting access points into fields in discreet positions, away from the important green open areas. Field gates should preferably be of a traditional timber five bar style appropriate to the rural setting.

- The area would benefit from replacing decaying and neglected trees and sections of hedgerow. Fences could be replaced with hedges to define field boundaries. Where possible new boundary hedgerows should be established. New hedgerows should consist of an appropriate mix of indigenous species.
- The lack of hedgerow enclosure, evident close to the entrances to the Old Rectory in Plaxdale Green Road, The Village Hall in Malthouse Road and the Black Horse Public House car park in Tumblefield Road, should preferably be addressed. The enclosure to these important parts of the rural lanes could be re-established with appropriate front boundary treatment and/or the planting of indigenous species of trees or shrubs without compromising access, visibility or highway safety.



- Where buildings exist which are out of keeping with the special character and setting of the Conservation Area, improvements to reduce the impact of these buildings would be desirable. Any replacement buildings should be carefully designed to enhance the character of the Conservation Area.
- Wherever possible, effort should be made to remove or relocate domestic paraphernalia, such as satellite dishes, so that they are not visible from public areas. Simply locating these on the rear of the building may not always be sufficient because of the variety of views created by the undulating landform at Stansted.
- Where possible, sensitive materials should be used in the construction of hardstandings in front gardens. Pea shingle should ideally be used and should be bound to prevent unnecessary spreading onto the highway. The size of these hardstanding areas should be kept to a minimum. Appropriate landscaping should be provided to screen any existing or new areas of hardstanding.
- Consideration should be given to the relocation of any statutory undertakers' utility equipment, storage boxes or similar clutter, that are sited in the Conservation Area and which are harmful to the visual amenities of the area. Alternatively construction or boxing in, using more appropriate materials or applying an appropriate coloured external coating to such features with appropriate landscaping, would go some way towards harmonising these items with their surroundings. Where such features no longer serve any purpose they should be removed.
- The removal of inappropriate kerbstones, or their replacement with more traditional conservation standard materials (e.g. granite setts), would benefit the rural character of the



Conservation Area. Also appropriate actions to reduce the impact of vehicles eroding grass verges should be encouraged in order to maintain the rural character of the area. Ideas for their protection could include raising the height of verges to discourage vehicles from driving over them. Repairs to the verges should be considered where they have become badly damaged.

- The opportunity should be taken to replace unsympathetic directional signs with more traditional designed white finger-post signs wherever possible, and should be carefully sited to avoid causing an obstruction or being damaged by passing vehicles.
- If the opportunity arises, the areas where the overhead cables are particularly noticeable should be rationalised or ideally be located underground.
- It is important to have the opportunity to record and understand the evolution of human settlement in Stansted. Therefore, before any building works are carried out within the defined Area Of Archaeological Potential, consideration should be given to protecting archaeological remains. Further advice from an archaeologist may be helpful.



### Key Design Guidelines

- Buildings should mainly be constructed using an appropriate red stock brick with hanging clay tiles or, alternatively, white painted timber weatherboarding would be appropriate. Other suitable materials which could be used include napped flint with red brick coping, dark stained weatherboarding, yellow stock brick or painted render. The pleasing mix of materials within Stansted should continue to exist.
- Any new boundary treatments should consist of either low napped flint walls with red brick coping, or hedges of a suitable mix of indigenous species. Grass verges outside these boundaries should be retained or reinstated where missing.
- The removal of existing front boundary walls and hedges to create new vehicular accesses and parking in front garden areas should be kept to a minimum.
- Existing woodland trees and hedges should be retained where possible. Where
  disease or death of such trees occurs, or where removal is necessary, a
  programme of replacement

planting with appropriate, mainly indigenous, species should be implemented.

New hedgerows should be planted, where possible, in an attempt to recreate more traditional smaller-sized field patterns and to redefine the strong visual lines in the landscape.



- The loss of prominent individual specimen trees that act as focal points should be avoided. New trees should be planted as close to these existing trees as possible to ensure continuity of these species exists in the long term future. Good quality non-indigenous species may be appropriate in these circumstances.
- Additions and changes to buildings should be kept to a minimum and should ideally be located so as not to be visible from public vantage points.
- Views between buildings and of the surrounding countryside 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 if any new development is proposed close to Stansted.
- Installation of kerbstones should be avoided but, if considered essential, conservation standard materials should be used wherever possible to protect this rural 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.

Stansted is situated within the Green Belt and there is, therefore, a presumption against development that is deemed 'inappropriate' in the context of Planning Policy Guidance note 2: Green Belts (unless the Council is satisfied that very special circumstances apply). The Conservation Area is also set within the Special Landscape Area where planning policy gives priority to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape.

Proposed development in the parts of the Conservation Area within the defined Area of Archaeological Potential, should be considered in accordance with policy P4/3.



### **Further Information**

If you would like more advice on Stansted 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 876303.

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