

Maidstone (Ashford Road) Conservation Area Appraisal



Maidstone Borough Council
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MAIDSTONE ASHFORD ROAD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

I Introduction

The Definition, Purpose and Effect of Conservation Areas

The concept of conservation areas was first brought into being by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, but the relevant legislation now is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990. This Act places a duty on local authorities to designate conservation areas where appropriate and defines a conservation area as "an area of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."

Designation as a conservation area brings additional powers to the local authority. Briefly these include the control of demolition of unlisted buildings, more restricted permitted development rights for single dwelling houses and a notification system relating to works to trees not covered by a tree preservation order.

In addition to these enhanced powers, the local authority is also required when dealing with applications for planning permission to have special regard to the question of whether or not the proposed development would either preserve or enhance the special character of the conservation area. There is a presumption that developments which would neither preserve nor enhance this special character should be refused planning permission.

The Purpose of the Appraisal

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local authorities to review their conservation areas from time to time in order to consider the possibility of revising their extent and to identify changes and pressures which may affect the original reasons for designation. It is also important to identify the nature of the special character of conservation areas which it is sought to preserve or enhance in order that informed decisions can be made on planning applications.

The most appropriate way of fulfilling these requirements is the production of a conservation area appraisal for each individual conservation area. English Heritage published an advisory booklet on the form which conservation area appraisals should take in February 2006, and this current appraisal has been prepared in accordance with these guidelines. It is intended to identify the key elements which combine to produce the special historic and architectural character of the conservation area, to analyse how they interact and impact upon one another and to explain how the area has developed into its current form. It will also seek to identify pressures and developments which threaten the special character of the conservation area and sites and features which detract from its character and appearance.

The clear understanding of the conservation area's qualities which the appraisal will produce will provide suggestions for future policies and

improvements as well as providing a framework against which decisions on individual planning proposals may be assessed.

History of Designation

The Maidstone (Ashford Road) Conservation Area was first designated by the Maidstone Borough Council on 19th October 1977 as part of a general review of conservation areas in the Borough. It includes properties on both sides of Ashford Road from its junction with Albion Place as far as No. 24 as well as Clarendon Place on the north side of King Street between the junctions of Queen Anne Road and Albion Place and outbuildings to the rear of the Clarendon Place buildings fronting Brooks Place.

Short of a brief statement that the area was considered to be of “special quality” there is no indication of the precise reasons for designation. However, it may be inferred that these would relate to the concentration of listed buildings together with the quality of most of the unlisted buildings within the area and the homogeneity of the age of development which forms a late Georgian/early Victorian suburb adjacent to the medieval town centre with few modern intrusions.

Location and Topography

The Conservation Area lies immediately to the east of the pre-Georgian town centre on the north side of the valley of the river Len and is underlain by the Hythe Beds, part of the Lower Greensand formation of sandstone which produce the Kentish Rag building stone. From east to west the route of Ashford Road is almost level, rising from 19.4 metres AOD to 19.9 metres AOD, but to the south of the road the level falls away quite sharply to the river Len which forms the southern boundary of the conservation area. To the north the land rises more gradually towards Penenden Heath.

II Historical Development

Archaeology

The Conservation Area lies outside the pre-Georgian town and archaeological potential may therefore be low. There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Conservation Area, and the Kent Historic Towns Survey volume for Maidstone, published by Kent County Council in 2004, only notes one instance of archaeological remains in its vicinity – a late Iron Age cremation group dating from the 1st Century AD found in 1963, the site now being beneath Andrew Broughton Way just to the north-east of the conservation area.

Development History

Prior to the early 1800s the land now covered by the Conservation Area lay beyond the eastern extent of the town of Maidstone, and Ashford Road did not exist. From the town centre eastwards, King Street (formerly East Lane) only continued as far as Queen Anne Road – to travel towards Ashford entailed continuing up Queen Anne Road and Sittingbourne Road to Penenden Heath and then turning right through Bearsted to Hollingbourne. The alternative

route from town went from Wrens Cross and Mote Road then via what is now the main drive through Mote Park (passing close to the north side of the mansion) and then via Madginford to Hollingbourne. From the sharp bend where King Street turned in Queen Anne Road a track existed more or less following the current line of Ashford Road.

The making of the existing Ashford Road dates from 1814/1815 and was probably at the instigation of Lord Romney of Mote House – the old road past the mansion presumably came too close for comfort and its closure and the movement of the road further north enabled the expansion of Mote Park as well as providing a more convenient route out of the town centre. Albion Place followed in 1822, giving a straighter and broader approach to the Sittingbourne Road than Queen Anne Road.

Browns Map of Maidstone (published in 1823 but surveyed in 1821) shows that development at first was slow. Within the Conservation Area the only buildings shown are No. 4 (Lenworth House) and nos. 13/15, the latter on land owned by J Whatman, the paper manufacturer of Turkey Mill. However, by 1839 when J Smith, printer and bookseller of Week Street, published his Topography of Maidstone and Environs the (albeit rather schematic) map included suggests that the road was built up on both sides as far as Square Hill. That this was not entirely the case is shown by the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Maidstone published in 1848 where it can be seen that a gap existed on the south side of the road between nos. 6 and 24. However, by 1867, map evidence shows that this gap had been filled and the development of the Conservation Area was complete.

In terms of the character of development, this typically took the form of detached or semi-detached villas in spacious grounds, although there is one example of a terrace at Clarendon Place at the end of King Street (but even this is in fact a composition of houses butted up to each other rather than a single unified design). There is also a subtle difference between development on the north and south sides of Ashford Road which probably reflects different land ownerships – land on the north was owned by G H Foote, who at the same time was developing the Brewer Street area; land on the south appears from Brown's Map of 1823 to have been in use as market gardens and may not have been subject to so rigorous a development policy.

The area seems to have early developed a character as a well-to-do suburb, as might be expected from the type of housing built. Smith's Topography of Maidstone and Environs of 1839 lists numerous members of the "nobility, clergy, gentry and c." as living in Ashford Road, with no entries at all for tradesman. It was thus exclusively a residential area to begin with, and seems to have developed something of the character of a professional enclave – Steven's Directory of Maidstone 1882 lists four surgeons within the area (at nos. 1, 7 and 18 Ashford Road and 1 Clarendon Place). Three surgeons and a dentist, plus a clergyman, are listed in the Kent Messenger Directory of Maidstone in 1903, as well as a high class boarding and day school for girls (The Fellenberg School) at no. 18 Ashford Road. By 1921, although two surgeons are still listed, occupations are becoming more diverse and include a solicitor, a motor car proprietor, an accountant and the governor of Maidstone Prison.

The first indications of a real change in the exclusively residential nature of the area appear circa 1930 – professions are still represented by a doctor at no. 7 and an architect at no. 24 Ashford Road and an accountant in Clarendon Place, but no. 1 Ashford Road is listed as vacant, no. 3 is occupied by a credit draper and no. 5 has become a builders yard. By 1937/8 further changes include no. 1 becoming an annexe to the Girls Grammar School in Albion Place, no. 10 the offices of the Southern Counties Car Club Ltd and no. 7 an antique dealership. Only one professional remains in Ashford Road (a dentist at no. 24), but a doctor, a dentist and an accountant are still listed in Clarendon Place. Perhaps even more telling of a decline in the area's fortune is the existence of four vacant properties at nos. 4, 18 and 15 Ashford Road and 1 Clarendon Place.

Change in character had become quite radical by the early post-war years, as shown by entries in Kelly's Directory of Maidstone 1947. Only two addresses are occupied by professionals and a number of buildings have been converted to flats (nos. 1, 8, 10 and 11) and nos. 4 and 5 Clarendon Place have become a boarding house. Two drapers are listed (at 1 Clarendon Place and 3 Ashford Road) and a turf accountant at 3 Clarendon Place. Nos. 7 and 15 Ashford Road have become offices and No. 4 the Maidstone Ex-Services Club. In one of the decreasing number of single dwelling houses left, no. 13 Ashford Road, a certain Leonard James Callaghan (the future Prime Minister) is listed as resident.

By 1964 the entire north side of Ashford Road had fallen into office use with the exception of no. 13. Further changes included the use of no. 2 Clarendon Place as staff accommodation for the Royal Star Hotel and no. 5 Clarendon Place as an Army Information Office with a flat above.

By 1973 the sole professional still in residence in the area was a dentist at no. 24 Ashford Road and the other houses on the south side of the road had become predominantly converted to flats. Clarendon Place retained no residential accommodation at all other than for staff of the Royal Star Hotel (this facility having moved from no. 2 to no. 6). Indeed, by the 1970s the area was designated in the Maidstone and Vicinity Town Map for office use.

Nos. 1 and 3 Ashford Road had been listed as buildings of special architectural or historic interest in 1951. In 1973 nos. 7, 9 and 11 were also spot-listed, and at the re-survey of listed buildings in 1974 nos. 13/15, 6 and 24 were added along with Clarendon Place. In 1973 no. 5 Ashford Road was demolished. The whole area had been blighted by County Council road proposals since 1965 and some buildings (notably nos. 8-18) had been acquired by the County Council for demolition in connection with such schemes. In 1980 Kent County Council applied for listed building consent to demolish nos. 13/15 and conservation area consent to demolish nos. 8-18. Strong objections to these proposals were received from the Victorian Society and the Ancient Monuments Society together with a petition with 1103 signatures, and Maidstone Borough Council raised objections to the scheme, resulting in its abandonment in favour of a less extensive and less destructive road improvement scheme subsequently implemented some ten years later. However, the abandonment of the scheme did not immediately help the

properties at nos. 8-18 Ashford Road, which remained vacant in County Council ownership until sold to developers in 1990. By this time the houses had become largely derelict, and permission was granted on appeal in 1990 to demolish no. 10, convert the remainder to flats and erect new blocks of flats on the garden land to the rear. By 1991 these buildings were largely roofless and a further application was made to demolish them and replace them with facsimile buildings to provide office accommodation with further office development on the site at the rear, but this application was withdrawn. In the same year, the Borough Council took action under the emergency repairs procedure available under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which resulted in the restoration of these important buildings.

Despite the reduced nature of the eventually built scheme, there is no doubt that the new road system as laid out circa 1990 has had a major impact on the character of the conservation area, principally because of the creation of the major junction at Wat Tyler Way which interrupts the flow of the street and isolates nos. 1/3 Ashford Road on an island site. However, apart from this (and the loss of no. 5 for the road route) the Conservation Area retains all of its original buildings. The only new developments are the three blocks of flats built in the rear gardens of nos. 8-18 Ashford Road circa 1990s, but because of their situation deep in the valley of the Len they have only a restricted impact on the character and appearance of the area.

III Character Appraisal

General Townscape Character

The Conservation Area exhibits a unity of building age, representing as it does suburban expansion to the east of the medieval town centre which took place in the first half of the 19th Century. The original buildings, which survive in their entirety with the exception of No. 5 Ashford Road (demolished in the 1960s), share a certain unity of appearance which may be broadly described as "late Georgian". The Conservation Area acts as an important "gateway" to the approach to the historic town centre from the East.

In contrast to the Holy Trinity Conservation Area, which lies immediately to the north-west and was developed at roughly the same time, the predominant form of development is the detached or semi-detached villa rather than the terraced house. In fact, the one example of a "terrace" within the Ashford Road Conservation Area, Clarendon Place, upon close inspection is revealed to be not a unified structure but a number of buildings butted up to each other. Building is therefore in the newly-fashionable villa style popularised in the 1820s by such developments as John Nash's Park Village to the north of Regents Park in London.

Building heights are restricted to 2 or 3 storeys, but all the houses are of some presence, built for the upper middle class market, with no houses within the current Conservation Area providing accommodation for other sectors of society. In form, the Conservation Area is simply ribbon development laid out along the new main road out of town constructed in 1815, although it is noticeable that there is a subtle difference between development on the north and south sides of the road which reflects different land ownerships in the

early 19th Century. The north side seems to have largely developed earliest and is slightly more spaciouly laid out than the south side.

The dominant architectural style is a restrained classicism, and most buildings are characterised by such features as small-paned vertically-sliding sash windows of painted timber, panelled doors (often with fanlights above), door-cases or canopies and fine rubbed-brick arches or Italianate cornices over openings. The predominant building materials are yellow stock brick and natural slate roofs of low pitch, although there are some examples of stucco and red brick. Large, multiple-flued chimney stacks with chimney pots (some original) are noticeable features of the area, often positioned on flank walls.

The individual merit of a high proportion of the buildings in the Conservation Area has been recognised by Central Government and a total of 16 properties are statutorily listed as buildings of special architectural and historic interest; virtually every other building in the Conservation Area also makes a positive contribution to its character.

Small details can impact on the character of the Conservation Area. Street furniture, for example, where it is historic or of good design, can make a positive contribution and add to local distinctiveness. Unfortunately, there are no such good examples within the Ashford Road Conservation Area, and the street furniture which does exist detracts from the character of the area. Particularly intrusive is modern highway clutter, especially at the junction of Ashford Road and Wat Tyler Way where the combination of standard guard railings, traffic lights, traffic signs, street lights, control boxes and tactile paving result in a visual cacophony which severely interrupts the flow of the street and adversely affects the settings of a number of listed buildings. The use of standard grey plastic-coated poles for much of the signage and the poor maintenance standards also result in a loss of character – e.g. poles out of vertical or in need of repainting.

There is no surviving historic paving within the Conservation Area and the use of black tarmac is all pervading. No record remains of previous paving materials, although it is known that the original road surface was ragstone blocks, replaced in the later 19th Century by granite setts.

Side boundary walls were traditionally constructed of brick, and some of these remain. A particularly important one forms the side boundary to no. 1 Ashford Road, where it defines the eastern edge of the bottom section of Albion Place. Front boundaries were originally largely of cast-iron railings on dwarf walls, and a few examples survive or have been replaced with modern railings, but in a large number of cases this original boundary treatment has disappeared, sometimes leaving open tarmac forecourts which are not attractive.

Townscape Analysis/Approaches and Views

The townscape exhibits a strong sense of enclosure, largely brought about by the limited set-back of the building line but enhanced by the curve of the road; buildings in Ashford Road but outside the Conservation Area are important factors in maintaining the closed nature of the view to the east.

Buildings are the dominant features in the townscape, with few trees existing, although those at Clarendon Place, no. 6 Ashford Road and between nos. 7 and 9 Ashford Road do make some contribution. Views into the Conservation Area from the east are unfortunately dominated by the tall office block over the Chequers Centre, and views out to the east leak away into the indeterminate area of traffic engineering and garage uses around the junction of Andrew Broughton Way and Ashford Road. In this area the bulk of Victoria Court (which replaced two early 19th Century villas) is a further unfortunate feature. Within the Conservation Area, the unity of building age, scale and materials together with the high quality of all the buildings form the defining features giving it its special character.

Apart from the features previously mentioned as detracting from this special character, one other area has a poor visual quality – this is Brooks Place, behind Clarendon Place. In part the problems of this street stem from the fact that it only ever formed a rear access to properties in Clarendon Place and was never developed along its frontage. However, it would have originally had high walls on the street edge to define it, but most of these have been demolished to provide car parking, resulting in a lack of enclosure and the opening up of views of the backs of Clarendon Place seen over a sea of parked cars. The varied rough surfaces and use of unattractive and uncoordinated bollards and barriers add to the visual confusion of the scheme.

The most important feature detracting from the area however has been the cutting through of Wat Tyler Way which has effectively divided the street into two halves, interrupting its flow. The large amount of traffic on the gyratory system is a major environmental disbenefit to the Conservation Area.

As outlined above, the Conservation Area has changed in character from a wholly residential environment of high quality to a largely commercial area. This change took place before the Conservation Area was designated, and in its favour it can be said that it has probably enabled the preservation of the original buildings. On the downside, however, it has resulted in some problems of signage clutter and the giving over of forecourts to car parking.

Detailed Analysis and Description

A detailed description of all buildings and sites within the Conservation Area follows. These descriptions are based on examination from the street and historic map analysis.

Buildings and structures have been assessed according to their value to the character of the Conservation Area. They have been graded as follows: -

- Essential – buildings which because of their high architectural or historical interest or townscape function must be retained.
- Positive – buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and interest of the Conservation Area and whose retention should be encouraged wherever possible. Some buildings in this grade may have suffered from unsympathetic alteration but could be restored to their original appearance relatively easily.

- Neutral – buildings which do not harm the character of the area but whose retention is not necessary.
- Negative – buildings/sites which harm the character of the area and where redevelopment could be advantageous.

Ashford Road

General Character

After it was first laid out in 1815, Ashford Road appears not to have developed very quickly for about the first ten years. By the time that Brown's map was produced in 1823 the only buildings shown are nos. 4 and 13-15. By 1848, the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map shows the north side of the road to be fully developed and nos. 6 and 24 added on the south side. The 1867 map shows development to be completed. Both sides of the road show a mixture of detached and semi-detached properties with spacious gardens, although plots tend to be wider on the north side of the road than the south (with the exception of no. 4 which had the widest plot of all, most of it to the east of the house and now buried under Wat Tyler Way). There was also a more generous building line to the north side, with curving carriage drives being evident on the 1867 map – this difference has been subsequently lessened by road widening on this side of the street which has particularly eaten in to the front gardens of nos. 7-11. Buildings on the south side of the road originally had long narrow plots running down to the millpond on the river Len – these have only been truncated in the late 20th Century with the development of blocks of flats in River Bank Close.

The importance of buildings on the south side of Ashford Road, but currently outside the Conservation Area, to the creation of an enclosed street scene has already been noted. As these buildings all appear to date from prior to 1848 a case could be made for the extension of the Conservation to include them, despite their generally more modest character. However, the case for such an extension would need to be examined in more detail by further survey work.

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
Nos. 1-3	Listed Grade II	An impressive pair of semi-detached houses designed as one composition, probably circa 1830. 3 storeys with parapet of which the central section is balustraded. Central 3 bays project and contain the two front doors of 8 fielded panels under a joint portico supported on six slender fluted columns with leaf capitals. Stuccoed to front elevation, with rustication to ground floor; yellow stock brick to other elevations. 7 windows wide, all are sashes with glazing bars intact and surrounded by moulded architraves. First floor windows have cornices above, central 3 with console brackets. Large arched chimneybreasts to side elevations. Slate roof. Forecourt enclosed by low stuccoed wall surmounted by modern railings. The tall original brick boundary wall to Albion Place is an important townscape feature providing enclosure.	Essential
Sterling House No. 7	Listed Grade II	Probably circa 1830. 3 storeys in yellow stock brick and slate roof. Bold projecting painted cornice and parapet, painted string courses above ground and first floor. Probably originally designed as a symmetrical detached villa with a central door and flanking two storey bays, but extended in matching style by an additional bay to the west (added by 1867). Lunette dormer to roof. Sash windows, glazing bars missing, under gauged brick arches. Doorcase with Doric columns, projecting cornice and door of 6 fielded panels with rectangular fanlight above. Modern spearhead railings to front garden. Now forms focal point in views from Wat Tyler Way approach to Conservation Area.	Essential
No. 9	Listed Grade II	Probably circa 1840. 2 storeys yellow stock brick and slate roof. Canted bay window to west side of front elevation. Sash windows with glazing bars intact under gauged brick arches. Raised string course	Essential

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
		between ground and first floors. Entrance in east side elevation. Modern spearhead railings to front garden.	
No. 11	Listed Grade II	Probably circa 1830. A narrow 2-storey building with pedimented gable facing road. Yellow stock brick with slate roof. Sash windows that to 1 st floor in main central portion having gothick glazing bars. Ground floor window to central portion is a casement with gothick glazing bars in a round-headed tall opening. Porch to right side also with gothick glazing. Modern spearhead railings to front garden.	Essential
Nos. 13/15	Listed Grade II	Early 19 th Century (before 1821). A pair of 2 storeyed stuccoed houses under a hipped slate roof. No. 13 retains original form of central door-case with reeded pilasters and cornice with a sash window to each side on each floor (but western ground floor one replaced by Victorian 3-light canted bay window). No. 15 has rustication to the render and two double-height canted Victorian bay windows with slate roofs and a steeply-pitched pediment above the door. Modern spearhead railings to front boundary and wide vehicular entrance to No. 15 which also has front garden in tarmac for car parking.	Essential
No. 4 (Lenworth House)	Unlisted	Circa 1820. A large detached house of yellow stock brick. 3 Storeys, roof hidden behind parapet. Two full height bays (one rounded, one canted) facing east towards former garden (now occupied by Wat Tyler Way). Ashford Road elevation refaced in red brick and openings altered and two storey red brick fore-building added in later 19 th Century – these alterations have adversely affected the street frontage, whereas east and south elevations remain in original attractive form. 2 storey late 19 th Century addition in yellow stock brick with slate roof to west side.	Positive

		Vacant at time of survey.	
Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
No. 6 (Wellington House)	Listed Grade II	Probably circa 1830. 3 storeys, yellow stock brick with slate roof. 3 bays wide, sash windows with glazing bars intact to all floors under gauged brick arches. Central porch with fluted engaged Tuscan columns, a rectangular fanlight with decorative tracery and a 6-panelled door. Painted projecting string course between ground and first floor, moulded eaves cornice. Large chimney stacks to centre and east end of roof. Later 19 th Century 2-storey single bay extension to east side, with lean-to roof hidden behind parapet, has sash windows with glazing bars intact under gauged brick arches. Modern railings and brick planters to fore-court.	Essential
Nos. 8-18	Unlisted	3 pairs of semi-detached houses in a matching Italianate style, circa 1850-1860. 3 storeys, yellow stock brick with hipped slate roofs. Bracketed eaves cornices. Sash windows with glazing bars intact set within moulded architraves. Nos. 8-10 are 5 bays wide with no. 8 having an "extra" bay, nos. 12-14 and 16-18 4 bays wide. Ground floor canted bay window with lead roofs to Nos. 8-10; larger tripartite sashes to ground and first floor of no. 16. Central paired doorways under continuous bracketed cornice. Moulded cornice over central pairs of windows to nos. 12-14 and 16-18. Projecting painted string courses between each floor. Modern railings to street frontage.	Essential
Nos. 20-22	Unlisted	A semi-detached pair designed to appear as a single dwelling (no. 20 has centrally-placed door to street elevation, no. 22 has door on side elevation). Probably circa 1830 but altered, with a mix of red and yellow stock brick to front elevation. 3 storeys. No. 22 retains slate roof but no. 20 has replacement concrete tiles. Sash windows with central vertical glazing bar only under rendered flat arches, but no. 22 has	Positive

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
		later 19 th Century 2 storey canted bay under a slate roof. Centrally located door case with Tuscan pilasters and half-glazed panelled door under rectangular fanlight. Large chimney stacks to centre of roof and at west end. Modern brick boundary wall to street.	
No. 24	Listed Grade II	Circa 1825-1830. 2 storeys stuccoed with slate roof behind parapet. Projecting stringcourse between ground and first floor and block cornice to parapet. 2 sash windows to each floor with glazing bars intact, central window blank to first floor. Central door-case of engaged Tuscan columns with projecting cornice, segmental fanlight and door of 6 moulded panels. Large chimney stacks to each gable end. Low brick boundary wall to street.	Essential

Brooks Place

General Character

Brooks Place is a short street running between Queen Anne Road and Albion Place, which originated as a rear access way to the Clarendon Place buildings in King Street. As such it never developed any primary frontage buildings, its north side being bounded by the flank walls and garden boundaries of properties in Queen Anne Road and Albion Place and its south side being defined by the rear boundaries of Clarendon Place together with ancillary buildings such as stables or coach-houses serving those properties. By 1848, such buildings are shown to exist at the rear of nos. 2, 3, 5 and 6 Clarendon Place, and by 1867 these had been joined by a smaller building to the rear of no. 4.

Only the south side of the street lies within the Conservation Area and modern demolitions and the opening up of rear gardens in Clarendon Place to form car parking areas have resulted in an unsatisfactory environment. This has been exacerbated by the late 20th Century demolition of corner properties on the north side by the junction with Queen Anne Road and the creation of a small public car park, resulting in further loss of street enclosure.

Within the Conservation Area only one building survives, no. 5 Brooks Place. This appears to be the original outbuilding to nos. 5 and 6 Clarendon Place shown on the 1848 Ordnance Survey Map, albeit with a late 20th Century flat-roofed 2-storeyed extension in non-matching style added to its northern side.

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
No. 5	Unlisted	Circa 1830-1840 but with late 20 th Century 2-storey extension to north side. 2 storeys, yellow and red stock brick (partially rendered) with gable-ended roof (originally slate). Blind roundel windows to west elevation at first floor level. Probably a former stable/coach house.	Positive

King Street

General Character

Only a small part of King Street lies within the Conservation Area – just the northern side between Queen Anne Road and Albion Place, the area occupied by Clarendon Place. Prior to 1815, King Street (formerly known as East Lane) only stretched as far east as the junction with Queen Anne Road, and this marked the eastern boundary of the town until the early 19th Century. Brown's Map of 1823 (surveyed in 1821) shows the site of Clarendon Place as occupied by a single large dwelling set back behind a landscaped forecourt. Its form, with a central block and two forward-projecting wings, is similar to nos. 31/33 Earl Street which date from the early 17th Century and it is possible that this building was of similar date. The map shows it to have possessed extensive grounds stretching as far east as the boundary with no. 13 Ashford Road and back up Queen Anne Road as far as the junction with Union Street, and to have been in the ownership of G H Foote Esq. It must have been demolished in 1822 when Albion Place was built on its grounds, but it is highly probable that archaeological remains of it may exist below the rear garden areas of Clarendon Place.

Brown's Map shows the south side of Ashford Road at this point to be fully developed by 1823, largely by buildings which still exist but which currently lie outside the Conservation Area. Clarendon Place itself was probably developed between 1825 and 1830, following the laying out of Albion Place to which no. 7 Clarendon Place addresses itself in its return elevation. It does not form a unified terrace, but is united by a common painted projecting stringcourse at sill level to the first floor windows and by the consistent use of yellow stock brick and slate roofs. The development is set back from the established older building line to the west (as still shown by nos. 91/93 King Street), marking a transition to the more spacious layout of the new suburb which is not echoed by the slightly earlier development on the opposite side of the road. In general, therefore, King Street has a tighter, more urban feel than the development just to the east in Ashford Road, with continuously built-up frontages and smaller distances between the fronts of buildings on opposite sides of the street. This, together with the straightness of the street, gives it a more dynamic feel than Ashford Road.

The existence of early 19th Century development (and older) on the south side of King Street and also extending further west along it may justify extensions to the Conservation Area, subject to further study work.

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
1-4 Clarendon Place	Listed Grade II	Circa 1825-1830. A three-storeyed terrace in yellow stock brick with slate roof. Ground floor windows in round-headed arched recesses, upper floor windows under gauged brick arches. Sash windows, glazing bars removed except on top floor. Painted projecting string course linking first floor window sills, with fine original incised lettering reading "Clarendon Place" on no. 1. Two-storeyed extension in matching style to side of no. 1 with lean-to roof behind parapet. Porches with Tuscan columns and cornices above, those to nos. 2 and 3 paired. Panelled doors. Forecourts have lost their original railings, only dwarf walls remaining.	Essential
5 and 6 Clarendon Place	Listed Grade II	Circa 1825-1830. Designed as a semi-detached pair but contiguous with nos. 4 and 7. Three-storeys yellow stock brick with rendered band at top with cornice and parapet. Each house has a full height curved bay. Sash windows under gauged brick arches (but with bracketed cornice to central first floor windows) – glazing bars intact to no. 5 only. Projecting painted stringcourse linking first floor window sills. Paired central porch with engaged Tuscan columns and cornice over. Panelled doors with rectangular fanlights. Forecourts have lost original railings to street (except for short section to side boundary of no. 6), forecourts now open and tarmac surfaced. Painting of sills and stringcourse to no. 6 in dark green upsets unity of composition.	Essential
No. 7 Clarendon Place	Listed Grade II	Circa 1825-1830. Three storeys yellow stock brick in matching style to nos. 5 and 6. One bay facing King Street, curved corner to Albion Place and 3 windows facing Albion	Essential

Address	Listed/ Unlisted	Description/Comments	Value to Character
		Place. All sash windows replaced inappropriately. Bracketed cornice to first floor window facing King Street – 2 nd floor window above this and all windows/window blanks to curved corner section have moulded architraves. Windows facing Albion Place have gauged brick arches. Porch facing King Street with Tuscan columns and cornice over. Modern door with rectangular fanlight. Open forecourt surfaced in tarmac.	

River Bank Close

General Character

River Bank Close, which is accessed off Square Hill Road, is a modern development built during the 1990s in the long back gardens of properties on the south side of Ashford Road. It consists of four blocks of flats, only three of which are situated within the Conservation Area. Although these flat blocks are of larger scale than the historic development of Ashford Road, their situation at a considerably lower level in the deeply-incised valley of the River Len means that they have only a minor impact on the character of the Conservation Area and they can be assessed as having a neutral value to the character of the Conservation Area. It may, however, be appropriate to consider an amendment to the Conservation Area boundary to exclude this development.

IV CONCLUSIONS

The Conservation Area is a fine example of a late Georgian/early Victorian well-to-do suburb just outside the confines of the medieval town. It exhibits a very consistent character in terms of building materials, scale, architectural style and layouts, and development was completed largely between 1820 and 1860. Within the Conservation Area itself all the original buildings remain except for no. 5 Ashford Road, demolished in 1973 and whose site now lies under Wat Tyler Way; new buildings are confined to the recent development of River Bank Close which, because of the topography, has limited impact on the character of the Conservation Area. There are, however, other unfortunate losses of original buildings just outside the Conservation Area, particularly at nos. 17 and 19 Ashford Road where the loss is exacerbated by the over-scaled replacement building which adversely affects the setting of the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area has been fortunate in not being subjected to great pressure for redevelopment – much of this has been diverted to the eastern side of Albion Place in the late 20th Century. Although its character as an exclusively residential area was lost in the inter-war years to its present

largely commercial guise, this has at least so far secured the preservation of the historic buildings. The low incidence of buildings remaining in use as single dwellings has also meant that there have been few depredations caused by minor alterations carried out under permitted development rights. This fact, together with the relatively high proportion of listed buildings, means that it is not necessary to seek further controls by way of an Article 4 Direction within this Conservation Area.

The major damage which has occurred within the Conservation Area since its designation has been the new gyratory road system involving the construction of Wat Tyler Way and Andrew Broughton Way. The former in particular causes significant damage by cutting across the grain of Ashford Road via a large junction with a considerable amount of highway paraphernalia, and both open up views of the rear of properties. The new road system has also resulted in additional traffic being routed through the Conservation Area, making it a dominant element detrimental to the ambience of the area.

The detailed street and building analysis carried out in Section III of this Appraisal provides a basis for considering future proposals for redevelopment or alterations. All buildings except for the flats in River Bank Close have been assessed as "essential" or "positive" and it is therefore considered that redevelopment proposals will be inappropriate. Some small scale development may be appropriate in Brooks Place to form a street frontage to improve the character of the street.

Trees are not a major feature of the townscape, but it will be important to seek the retention of the limited number of trees which do make a significant contribution. Within the Conservation Area it is necessary for six weeks notice in writing to be given regarding any proposed works to trees with a trunk diameter greater than 75mm measured at a height of 1.5 metres above ground level. Where expedient the Council will seek to protect suitable trees by the making of Tree Preservation Orders.

The production of this Appraisal has suggested a number of areas for investigation regarding the enhancement of the Conservation Area. These include: -

- i) Improvement to paving surfaces.
- ii) A programme of re-installment of original boundary railings etc.
- iii) Improvements/rationalisation of road traffic signage, street lighting and safety railings.

Studies carried out in connection with the historical development of the area and with the townscape appraisal have also suggested that there may be justification to amend the boundaries of the Conservation Area. The following areas may be appropriate for inclusion in the Conservation Area, subject to further study and survey: -

- i) The south side of Ashford Road from no. 26 to the junction with Square Hill, together with the western side of Square Hill to include the locally listed public house.
- ii) Nos. 70-106 King Street, 91-93 King Street and 2a Ashford Road.

iii) The western side of Albion Place as far as no. 23.
In addition, the modern development in River Bank Close may be considered for exclusion from the Conservation Area.

It is the Council's intention to follow up this Conservation Area Appraisal with a Conservation Area Management Plan which will address these recommendations in greater detail.