

Sutton Valence Conservation Area

Proposed Boundary Alterations



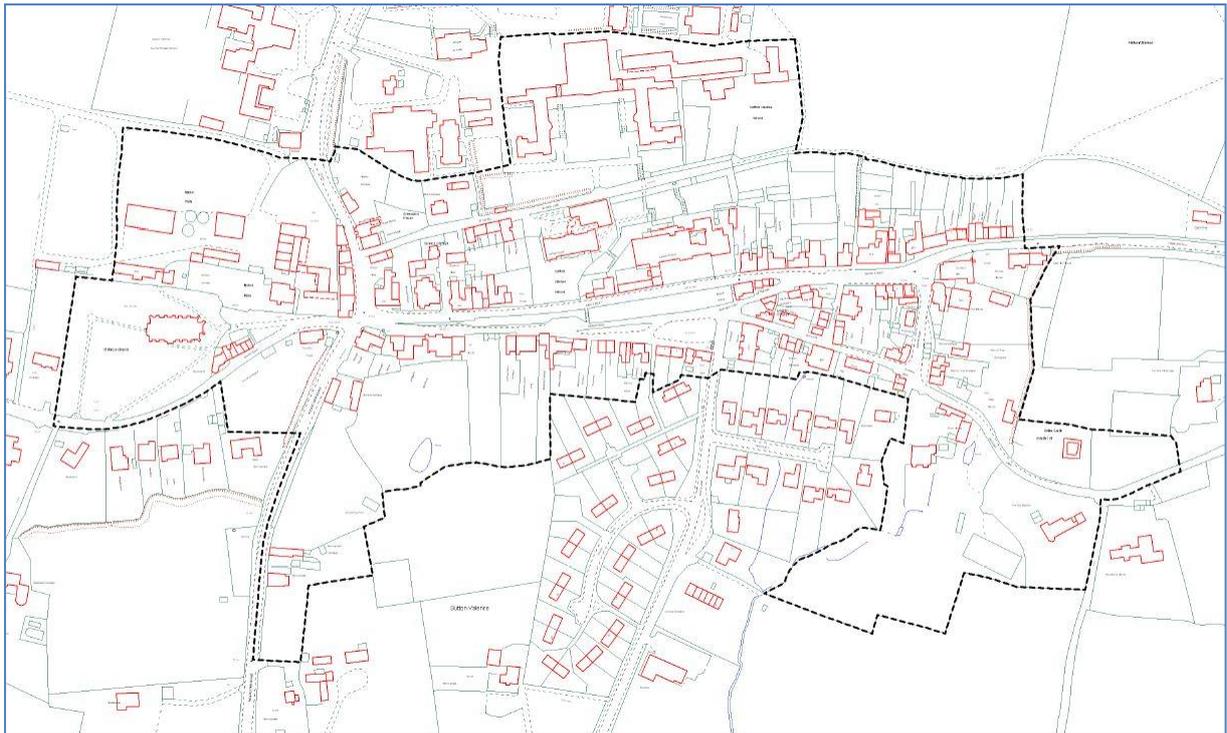
Maidstone Borough Council
December 2021

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report responds to the suggestion made in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan that a boundary alteration should be considered to the northwest to encompass the whole area that it seems likely was occupied by the castle.



Plan of Sutton Valence showing Conservation Area

- 1.2 Sutton Valence was designated in September 1971 and the boundary has not been reviewed since that time. The records relating to the designation are no longer available. The existing boundary is shown on the plan immediately above.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared within the context of the Sutton Valence Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2021. The Appraisal recommended that in due course consideration should be given to an extension of the conservation area to encompass the area forming the likely outer perimeter of the castle. The Management Plan reinforces this approach pointing out that the whole castle area is a site of significant archaeological and historical interest.

2 POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 Current policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Planning Framework (NPPF), published in March 2012 and revised in 2021, supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
- 2.2 The over-arching aim of NPPF is that there should be "a presumption in favour of sustainable development" (para. 10). One of the relevant dimensions of sustainable development is "to protect and enhance ... the built and historic environment" (para.8c). A core principle of the planning system is that it should "conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations" (para. 189)
- 2.3 Conservation areas are "designated heritage assets". Therefore, they are subject to the national planning policy for such heritage assets and their settings, set out in Section 16 of the NPPF, Conserving and enhancing the historic environment. NPPF requires that decisions about whether change is acceptable should be based on the effect on the significance of the heritage asset concerned. A full understanding of that significance is therefore the first step in determining applications for development. For conservation areas, this is set out in the relevant appraisal.
- 2.4 NPPF advises local planning authorities that: "When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation." As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. (Section 16: para 199).
- 2.5 With regards to designation (or extension) of conservation areas, the NPPF states: "When considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest" (Section 16: para 191).
- 2.6 The significance of the setting of heritage assets and the impact of development on them is recognised at para. 206 of the NPPF. It states "Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably
- 2.7 The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance, or may be neutral." Development may affect the setting of a conservation area, for example, by intruding on views into or out of the designated area, or by altering the character or use of the landscape or townscape that surrounds it.
- 2.8 The Maidstone Borough Local Plan has a policy on heritage assets (DM4). It sets out the expectation for the conservation of the historic and natural landscape. It states that: "... developers will "ensure that new development affecting a heritage asset incorporates measures to conserve and, where possible enhance, the significance of the heritage asset and, where appropriate, its setting "

- 2.9 The Council has adopted supplementary planning documents (SPD) and endorsed supplementary guidance documents (SG), including two design guides, which means that they will be taken into account in determining planning applications. Maidstone BC's Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2005)⁷ provides both general advice and specific guidance that in conservation areas, extensions should preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area" as described in the conservation area appraisal. The Kent Design Guide includes detailed advice on how to design buildings in keeping with their historic context through the use of appropriate forms, massing, scale, materials and details, and emphasises the need for building to respond individually to the unique characteristics of each conservation area.



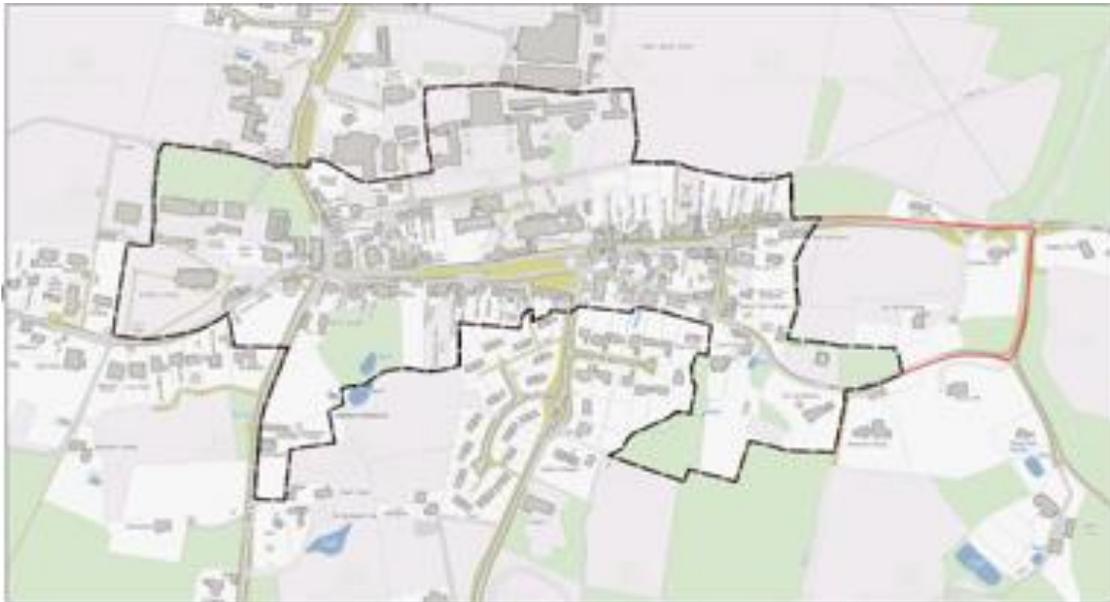
Sutton Valence Castle

3 CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 3.1 The special architectural and historic character and appearance for which the Sutton Valence Conservation Area was designated are described in the 2021 Appraisal. This section is intended only to highlight the key characteristics of the area to provide a context within which the character and appearance of the proposed extensions can be evaluated.
- 3.2 Although small the conservation area forms a complex whole with a multi-faceted range of building types and styles. It is this eclectic mix which makes for the charm and character that is the experience of the area today.
- 3.3 Open spaces are small and limited within the conservation area and tend to be effectively widening of the roads as in Broad Street or The Green but the overall feeling is not one of enclosure (except fleetingly in the High Street) because there are frequent gaps between buildings. There are also a significant number of opportunities for long range views over open countryside to the south.
- 3.4 The conservation area is richly provided with trees and other flora thanks to much small-scale forecourt planting coupled with well-established trees on private or semi-public land. There are ever present background views to the woodland and farmland beyond the conservation area. These outward, often glimpsed, views are fundamental to the character of the conservation area.
- 3.5 Brooding over it all is the presence, though not often visible, of the castle which stands on a commanding high point of the ridge at the eastern end of the conservation area dominating views from the south.

4 PROPOSED EXTENSION TO THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 4.1 The proposed extension will add approximately two hectares to the conservation area. It is the area which it is believed was contained by the outer curtain wall of the castle with the addition of the two roads – Tumblers Hill and Baker Lane which have clearly been dug out and may have been quarries that provided the stone for the castle. There have been sufficient archaeological finds to suggest that this is an accurate assessment of the extent of the castle.
- 4.2 The existing conservation incorporates the site of the castle keep which is on the extreme southern edge of the site. Its location within the site is presumably to take advantage, from a security point of view, of the excellent views over the surrounding area that its elevation at the top of the ridge would give. There are two buildings within the area of the proposed extension. These are the Old Parsonage now a private house and Tumblers Plat which is an unpretentious house from the second half of the 20th century. There is also a historic garden as that of the Old Parsonage is referenced in the Kent Historic Gardens Compendium as being of national significance.
- 4.3 Primarily however the extension is to protect what may prove to be a very important area of archaeological interest. It has yet to be fully investigated but traces of other buildings and the outer curtain wall warrant that the site should be protected at least until coordinated investigations can be undertaken



The proposed extension to the conservation area (shown in red)

5 ISSUES THAT THE EXTENSION WILL ADDRESS

- 5.1 The area of the extension is mostly in private hands but under several discrete ownerships. While the heritage assets remain hidden there is a serious risk of accidental damage, disturbance, or loss of those assets. Bringing the whole castle site within the conservation area will allow a certain degree of development control but more importantly will allow the emergence of a coordinated approach and policy towards management of the area until it can be the subject of an intensive archaeological investigation.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 For the reasons set out above it is recommended that the Sutton Valence Conservation Area should be extended in line with the plan above to incorporate the whole site of the castle complex.

