

7 MOUNT SION AND THE HIGH STREET

7.1 Context

Setting

- 7.1.1 The Mount Sion area occupies the southern and western aspects of a promontory that rises steeply above the valley. From its junction with the High Street, Mount Sion itself rises some 30m before levelling off. This dramatic change in topography creates a particularly distinctive character, which is oddly reminiscent of a coastal town sitting above its sea front.
- 7.1.2 Like a coastal town, the views out from the area are dramatic. Instead of the sea, Mount Sion over looks the roofscape of the buildings along High Street and London Road out over to the green backdrop of the mature trees on the Common. This wooded backdrop, however is a relatively recent vista. Up until the middle of the 20th century the bulk of the Common was grazed, none more so than the area which can be seen from the Mount Sion streets.

Historical background

- 7.1.3 Mount Sion, of which the High Street (later known as "Foot of Mount Sion") formed part, was developed, along with Mount Ephraim, to provide lodgings for the rich and fashionable visitors who followed in the wake of Royal patronage of the Chalybeate spring in the 1660s. The hill on which Mount Sion now sits formed the southern corner of the forest of South Frith and, in 1684, its owner, Lady Purbeck, began to lease out building plots facing the High Street and Mount Sion Road. In the 15 years between 1684 and 1699, a total of over 50 new houses appeared on Mount Sion and in other parts of the South Frith land, which then formed Tunbridge Wells. Many of these plots were sold in 1702 by Lady Purbeck's son and, as part of these arrangements, the Grove was secured in 1703 by a deed of endowment which declared that it should be preserved 'for a Grove & Shade & Walks "for the local inhabitants "to come and go & walk in & upon the said Grove at their Will and Pleasure.

7.2 Chapel Place

- 7.2.1 Chapel Place is located at the southern end of the High Street and provides the main walking route from the town centre to the Church of King Charles the Martyr. It has good qualities as an approach, revealing its destination progressively as it widens from an enclosed alleyway to a more open space on the north eastern flank of the church. The street itself is the key link in the chain between the High Street and The Pantiles. The heavily trafficked Frant Road significantly fragments this link and severs The Pantiles from the bulk of the town centre.
- 7.2.2 Although the eastern flank of King Charles the Martyr Church provides a 'full stop' to the street, the pleasing juxtaposition of the spaces leading to Cumberland Walk invites further exploration. The glimpsed view of the former Strict Reheboth Baptist Chapel from this point similarly beckons interest in the townscape off the main route.



Chapel Place

- 7.2.3 The Church of King Charles the Martyr was the first substantial building in Tunbridge Wells. Funded by public subscription in the mid 17th century, the building was opened in 1678 and doubled in size in 1690. It has a simple exterior of red brick which has weathered to deep brown giving the building a distinctive colour. The dark brick elevations contrast pleasingly with the white painted mullions of its elegantly tall windows and beautiful weatherboarded white clock tower. The clock tower and cupola is a landmark feature which can be glimpsed from many parts of the High Street and Mount Sion area, helping orientation in the network of enclosed streets and alleyways. The roundabout and its extensive areas of tarmac adjacent to the church is an inappropriate setting for such an important building. The dominance of the highway restricts views of the impressive western elevation and constricts pedestrian flows around the building.

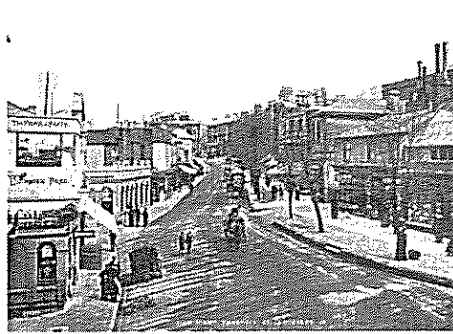


The Church of King Charles the Martyr

- 7.2.4 There is a dramatic contrast between the single storey buildings of No's 1-9 Chapel Place and the massing of the back of Kentish Mansions on the London Road side of the block. However, the protruding signs, awnings and shop fronts of No's. 16 – 22 create an energetic scene along this stretch of the street. Of particular note is the extremely large sash window of No.16, the green glazed tiles of no. 18 and the curved corner building and display racks of Halls Bookshop. Bedford Terrace is set at perpendicular axis to Chapel Place and penetrates residential uses into this commercial thoroughfare.

7.3 High Street

- 7.3.1 The High Street widens at its southern end, and its character is significantly enhanced by the differences in level of the footways on each side and the difference in position of the building façades.



High Street ca. 1907



High Street

- 7.3.2 The buildings on the western side of the High Street, between Castle Street and White Bear Passage date possibly from the later 18th century. The group varies in height from 2 to 3 storeys combining with the chimneys to form an attractive roofscape. The elevations themselves are of timber boarding in some cases grooved to imitate coursed stone.



Former Houses on High Street

- 7.3.3 On the upper side of the street, the buildings are primarily from the 19th century. The main lodging houses used to be here, looking towards the Common, but all were demolished except nos. 71-73, York House, and the house that can be glimpsed behind the shop fronts of nos. 59-61. The stepped frontages, balconies and bay windows, which overlook the street, complement the haphazard character of the older buildings opposite. The 19th century buildings are from the latter part of the century with attractive shop-fronts with traditional elements such as pilasters, stall risers and attractive signs. In addition large curved windows and mosaic floors within the doorways on a number of these properties are attractive elements. Although not of notable merit, the buildings are for the most part pleasantly proportioned above ground floor level. They are of stucco or yellow brick with moulding around the windows.
- 7.3.4 The mature Lime trees on the upper side of the High Street are impressive and important elements. Because of their size and their elevated position, the trees tower over the road below, enhancing the sense of enclosure and terminating views

along the street. Yet the most significant element of the streetscape at this point are the steps that lead to the raised footway which runs from the junction with South Grove to Mount Sion road. Even the carriageway itself has a significant cross-fall which accentuates as one moves further south. In southward views from the raised footway, the alignment of the street creates a vista to the end of Chapel Place and to the clock tower and cupola of the Church of King Charles the Martyr.

- 7.3.5 Castle Street connects the High Street to London Road with a vista to the delightfully contrasting quality of the Common. The proportions of the street are defined by three and four storey buildings on either side with a street width of only eight metres. Buildings on both sides are well preserved, with a number of attractive hanging shop signs. The defining feature of the street is the extensive use of Ragstone spalls on the carriageway, which make an essential contribution to its character. This ground surface is particularly important in views up the steep slope of the street from London Road, terminated by elevations of the eastern side of High Street at the end.
- 7.3.6 The northern part of the High Street has a different character from the southern half, lacking its distinctive elevated footways. The High Street at this point retains a strong street character, primarily by virtue of the continuation of specialist retail uses and by the enclosure created by the three and four storey buildings on each side of the street. The Christ Church centre sits unhappily in this traditional part of the street, but its car park and the adjacent tree lined road provide a welcome glimpse of the green space of The Grove, beyond.

7.4 Mount Sion

- 7.4.1 Whilst the Pantiles housed the spring and main gathering place of the new resort, the majority of lodging houses grew up around the Common at Mount Ephraim and Mount Sion. Unlike other Spa towns, there were no grandiose town planning schemes for Tunbridge Wells until well into the 19th century. Mount Sion is a product of the former approach to the town's development. An irregular pattern of closely packed buildings developed, although building was quite widely spaced in the early stages. A wide range of periods is represented here, and infill development has continued over the centuries to ensure that few gaps occur in the tight and human-scale urban form. Both this scale and the quality and proportion of detail provides a consistent character within which an enormous variety of individual expression has been possible.
- 7.4.2 The ground rises steeply from High Street and from the hillside there are impressive views to the Common beyond. Mount Sion road defines the boundary of the area to the south east and is the main thoroughfare through the area. It is also the only road in the vicinity that can comfortably accommodate two-way traffic. The pedestrian orientated nature of the area is the key to Mount Sion's charm.
- 7.4.3 On the north side of Mount Sion road a series of well preserved and noteworthy buildings climbs the hill. Many are listed, and they vary widely in age, from 1689 (no. 27) to 1927 (a former bank, at the bottom). Most are stuccoed and two groups have curved bow fronts characteristic of their periods. No's. 3 –7 at the bottom of the hill date from 1849, in keeping with the form of the earlier houses, and they complete the row. The only negative feature along this stretch of the road is the modern mansard roofed infill development of Lizanne House, built in 1972 to replace an 18th century lodging house.



Bedford Terrace

- 7.4.4 Just to its north, Cumberland Gardens is a pedestrian way leading to Bedford Terrace and Cumberland Walk. Bedford Terrace (1833) is a superb example of an early 19th century terrace of 3 storey houses with bow windows on the ground floor facing onto a brick path leading to Chapel Place. There is a terrace of ca. 1830 houses at the south end of Cumberland Gardens, set well back behind long narrow front gardens.
- 7.4.5 Cumberland Walk, formerly known as 'Patty Moon's Walk' is a pedestrian way, which originally led from the Church of King Charles the Martyr to open country to the east and, after ca. 1900, into Madeira Park. All the main entrances to the houses in Cumberland Walk are still accessed from the Walk, which as a whole is very pleasant, being bounded by hedges, trees and mature gardens on th both sides. The 3 houses to the east of the junction with Cumberland Gardens are very fine mid 19th century mansions. Nos. 6 & 7 have unusual ammonite capitals to the full height decorative piers at their corners and no 8 is faced with round coursed flints, with a superb concave red brick arch over the front door and the whole south façade is adorned with a very decorative timber balcony and canopy supported on slim columns.
- 7.4.6 Next, uphill, Jerningham House, a fine late 17th century house in the Queen Anne style dominates the south side of the road. Behind the historic Mount Sion frontage lies the recent residential infill development of Cumberland Mews. Although its detailing is unimpressive, because of its scale it sits comfortably on Cumberland Yard.
- 7.4.7 To the south and west of Mount Sion, Cumberland Gardens and Bedford Terrace, and behind them Cumberland Cottages, form a quarter of rows and terraces. The pattern of alleyways that link these areas contrasts with the rest of the area in their more spacious and rectilinear layout. Bedford Terrace (1833) is a superb example of an early 19th century terrace of three storey houses with curved bow windows on the ground floor facing onto a brick path. Cumberland Gardens is another footpath, which runs on a perpendicular axis to Bedford Terrace. The houses are set well back from the footpath behind west facing mature gardens and strong boundary treatments.

- 7.4.8 From Cumberland Gardens, the footpath steps down to Cumberland Walk, which runs east to west linking Madeira Park to the Church of King Charles the Martyr. The walk as a whole is very pleasant being bounded by hedges trees and mature gardens on either side.
- 7.4.9 Mount Sion itself continues uphill and takes a sharp turn north. No. 28 Mount Sion, a fine ivy covered brick building (1689), stands on the corner of the road defining the bend with its northern flank elevation and boundary walls. With no 30 (ca. 1800) it occupies a key visual position.

7.5 Little Mount Sion

- 7.5.1 To the north of Mount Sion, a series of very narrow streets run parallel to the main road, linked by short alleyways. The pattern of spaces is irregular and on a very intimate scale. It is likely that the area grew up as a mews area serving the grander houses on Mount Sion. Yet despite these humble origins, the area today is perhaps one of the most attractive series of streets within the conservation area. Of these, Frog Lane is probably the most important.



Frog Lane

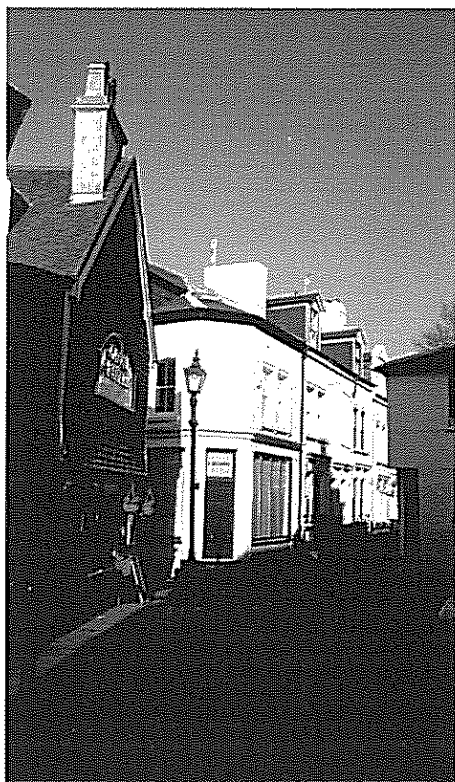
- 7.5.2 Frog Lane's name comes from the brake, or frog, which held carriages parked on a slope. The striking feature of the lane is the predominance of the Ragstone Spalls that are used to surface the lane from wall to wall. The lane is in effect a kind of rear service alley linking it to the grand houses on Mount Sion. Four 18th century cottages - Nos. 4 and 5 Frog Lane, Caxton Cottage and No. 17 Mount Sion - form a key group on each corner of the junction of Frog Lane and the intersecting alleyway between Mount Sion and Little Mount Sion (these alleyways are known locally as "twittens"). This little crossroads establishes the extremely tight scale of the area - the cottages are less than 5 metres face to face - and the general scale and massing of the buildings in relation to the width of the street is particularly important throughout the whole length of the street.
- 7.5.3 To the north along the twitten, there is another sequence of intimate spaces, which are linked by Little Mount Sion. However, on the corner of Little Mount Sion the character has been undermined by the demolition of original buildings whose sites have been used for a car park and the Toc-H hall. The gaps in townscape that this has created have interrupted the tight knit pattern of development, and the poor quality of the space and structures that now exist greatly diminishes the historic character.



Warwick Road

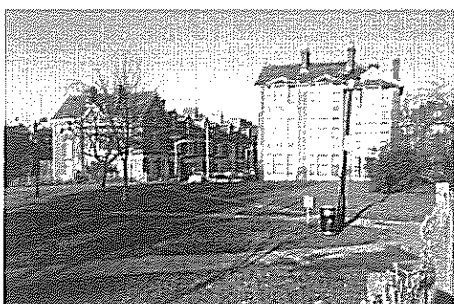
- 7.5.4 Of primary importance to the character of Little Mount Sion is the curved section between Nos. 26 - 31 (on both sides) where the building line follows the curve and the street intersects with Warwick Road. At this point, the slope, massing and fenestration accentuate the perspective. The tile-hung elevations of numbers 30 – 34 are particularly worthy of note. Number 34 is the Grove Tavern public house which turns the corner into Berkeley Road.
- 7.5.5 Looking downhill along Warwick Road, the group of yellow brick terraced cottages (Nos. 2 – 16) step down hill in pairs leading the eye to the Common beyond. The low boundary hedges assist this process. This vista is enhanced by the Ragstone Spalls which have been used to surface the narrow carriageway and are edged by the stone kerbing and red brick footways.
- 7.5.6 The historic character breaks down further along Little Mount Sion, with the forecourts of the Compasses public house and garage dominating the street. However these uses, with the workshops and the fish and chip shop, are positive urban elements, breaking up the dominant residential use and providing a mixed-use focus and vitality to the neighbourhood.
- 7.5.7 Further south, Berkeley Road running along the slope of the hill has a distinctive layout. Berkeley Place, an eighteenth century group much altered in the mid-nineteenth century, faces south along Berkeley Road. In the centre of the road a triangular area of trees and shrubbery provides the perfect foil to the adjacent buildings. Unfortunately, the form and detail of the flat roofed 20th century mews development on the eastern side of the street jars with the pitched roofs and dormers of the other buildings in the vicinity, although its scale is broadly in keeping.

7.6 The Grove



Berkeley Road, looking towards Belgrove

- 7.6.1 Belgrove, consisting of a mid-19th century terrace facing a fine terrace of 18th century houses, leads off Little Mount Sion and provides a pleasant entrance to The Grove. The Grove itself is a uniquely attractive park that contrasts directly with the linear character of the streets around it, with its mature trees (including specimens of lime, beech and oak) and open grassed areas. Railings to Claremont Road and elsewhere give a traditional urban park character, but at the same time boundary treatments to houses that immediately adjoin the other sides maintain a domestic, even rural, character.
- 7.6.2 The space is large enough to feel generous, but sufficiently in touch with the surrounding buildings to feel safely enclosed. Houses on all sides provide good surveillance, and there are many pedestrian routes crossing it, so that the park is well used but without the intrusion of traffic. The Grove has a very close association with the surrounding streets: Grove Avenue, Sutherland Road, Meadow Hill Road, Guildford Road, and South Grove all connect to the park (see 7.7.10 below). Buckingham Road, whose 2-storey terraces are part of the Grecian Villa block (see 7.7.11 below), faces onto the park, forming its eastern side.



The Grove

7.7 Claremont Road

- 7.7.1 The Grove divides the Village, and the eastern half is based on a gridded plan of streets between Claremont Road and Grove Hill Road. The exception to this pattern is the curve of Grove Hill Gardens, set out with tall stuccoed classical paired villas to overlook central gardens that are now occupied by a Bowling Green. Otherwise the area is packed with short terraced streets that form cul-de-sacs with access at their ends to the Grove, Calverley Grounds and Grove Hill Gardens. The area is also characterised by a secondary grid of narrow lanes and alleys that provide access to the rears of properties and between the ends of these cul-de-sacs, known locally as "twittens" (see 7.5.2 above).
- 7.7.2 The neighbourhood is an excellent worked example of an "urban village", with a high degree of street enclosure created by strong forward building lines, excellent pedestrian permeability allowed by the twittens and access to green open space close by, but restraint on vehicle movement within residential streets. The green spaces enjoy good surveillance from facing development, ensuring that they are attractive, well used and safe. Of course the area was laid out in the late 19th century before the impact of the car, so that there are compromises: parking is difficult, and some traffic uses Claremont Road as a back route from south to east.

Grove Hill Road

- 7.7.3 Grove Hill Road is one of the more important streets in the network of the central area of the town. It provides a strong east-west axis, linking the south-eastern residential areas of Camden Park and Hawkenbury into the key crossroads at the Station. It rises steadily from this junction, revealing long views over the town centre to the Common and the skyline of Mount Ephraim. Unfortunately, the Safeway supermarket block, with its bulky and uncompromising upper storeys of car parking, intrudes drastically into this view, and dominates the middle ground from most of Grove Hill Road.
- 7.7.4 In its lower reaches Grove Hill Road gives access to side streets that link to The Grove and Calverley Grounds, affording glimpses to the green of these spaces beyond. These developments are carefully designed to close the ends of the street blocks to ensure a good street elevation on Grove Hill Road. The street here has a busy urban feel, with tight pavements and some narrow shop fronts.
- 7.7.5 Rising up the Grove Hill Road towards Camden Hill, the street character changes to a more open, greener one. Originally there were spaciouly sited stucco villas on the northern side, and a closer development of 2nd storey paired villas on the south side (which remain with more or less intact front gardens and boundaries). The larger detached houses have been extended or replaced with 1950s and 60s buildings to provide public buildings and offices, such the Fire Station and Public Registrar's Office. Parking and forecourt areas have thinned out the garden landscape that would otherwise maintain their earlier Arcadian character. The tiny building of the town Pound, and a stable court converted to residential use beside it, provides incidental local historical interest.

Grove Hill Gardens

- 7.7.6 The key historic element at the top of Grove Hill Road is Grove Hill Gardens. This is a crescent of early 19th century paired four-storey houses, with the top floors concealed behind mansard roofs and which originally overlooked extensive gardens on the west side. Some of the houses were divided into maisonettes in the 1940/50s by the addition of crude external concrete staircases and balconies on the Claremont Road side, and these remain an unfortunate intrusion into the street scene there.

- 7.7.7 The gardens on the west side have, for many years, been considerably reduced by converting a large portion to a Bowling Club (established in 1908) and the installation of a number of concrete garages around a gravel yard. The remainder of the gardens, near the houses, has gradually been converted for parking as well, requiring the removal of much of the original shrubbery. The private road of Grove Hill Gardens has an arched entrance onto Grove Hill Road, matching that is situated at the footpath exit at the north east end of the Grove. The road is in a very poor state of repair with many large potholes and connects to the north end of Norfolk Road.

Mountfield Road and Mountfield Gardens

- 7.7.8 Mountfield Road is a strong, intact street of two-storey rendered terraced houses. Like Mountfield Gardens immediately to its east, it has a pedestrian access into Calverley Grounds, and views into the space from the whole length of the street. The ends of the terrace turn in three storey blocks onto Grove Hill Road to create a street frontage, and a similar treatment at the park end of the street on each side finishes them in a complete and symmetrical composition. East of it, a 1960s office development, raised on "pilotti" above car parking, breaks down the Grove Hill frontage between it and Hooper's Store and leaves a gap in the townscape at street level.
- 7.7.9 Mountfield Gardens is a street of fine 3 storey late Victorian brick terraces, characterised by distinctive double doors and a strong rhythm of two-storey projecting bays and half-dormer gables above. However, its character is incomplete because of a 1950s block of flat roofed flats on the corner of Grove Hill Road. A chain-link boundary fence spoils its access to Calverley Grounds.

Sutherland, Meadowhill and Guildford Roads

- 7.7.10 This block of housing is contemporary with Mountfield Gardens, and to the same three-storey brick design, again with access to green space at the end, which here is The Grove. The streets are enhanced by low boundary walls and hedges to its relatively short front gardens. The terrace ends to Sutherland and Meadowhill Roads are very neatly handled by a variation to the standard house design that gives it a southerly aspect onto the Grove. The end of Guildford Road is connected via a broad footpath linking the end of Grove Hill Gardens to The Grove, via a large, formal stone gateway. The route forms a key pedestrian spine through the area, providing access to The Grove from the whole eastern Village area, and the gateway creates a strong sense of arrival at The Grove. The gateway itself is a listed structure similar to the one at Grove Hill Gardens on Grove Hill Road, with the central carriage access closed by a wall

Arundel, Norfolk and Grecian Roads

- 7.7.11 This block of housing is in distinctive two and three storey streets. Grecian Road is a particularly visually pleasing development, built in the 1880s on the site of Grecian Villa. It was built in dark red Flemish bonded brick, but with heavy artificial stone quoins, string courses and window and door surrounds, creating an almost panelled effect to the brickwork. Subsequently many houses have been colour-washed over the brickwork. This has changed the character to something more "Mediterranean", but to some extent the limited range of pastel shades that are used mitigates the loss of original facing brickwork. However, this change is permanent as, once painted, brickwork cannot easily be reinstated, and further painting of brickwork should be strongly discouraged. Norfolk and Arundel Roads share much of this character, which depends on this strong and consistent detailing throughout.

- 7.7.12 Behind these streets is some 1930s infill of pebble-dashed semi-detached houses of indifferent quality. Boundaries and building orientation are all poorly resolved here, with broken close-boarded fences flanking the footpaths and backing on to the end of Grecian Road.



Norfolk Road

Claremont Road

- 7.7.13 Claremont Road itself is a varied scene. On the south side Victorian villas are interspersed with 1930s houses, and these large houses in garden grounds are screened from the street by mature trees and shrubbery. The scale of the planting is something of a visual balance to the buildings on the north side of Claremont Road, although it is higher than the south side and three storey buildings create a slightly one-sided street scene.
- 7.7.14 Different building styles are evident in the four short terraces that "cap" the ends of terraces in the side streets. The oldest group between Buckingham and Grecian Roads is a simple 3 storey structure with a distinctive roofed balcony running its full length at first floor level. Some houses have been altered to provide square timber window bays under the balcony, and the centre house, in the late 1960s, with a new central bowed portion of canopy. Further east late 19th and early 20th century brick houses have many attractive arts-and-crafts details in plaster and woodwork.
- 7.7.15 At the corner, beside Claremont Gardens, Claremont Lodge is a key building frontage that closes the eastward view. The building itself is architecturally interesting, dating from the late 17th century with "mathematical tiles" hung on a timber frame to simulate brickwork. Looking westwards at this point, the simple terrace of houses at nos. 62 to 70, lying almost at right angles to the street line as it curves away from the Grove, provides effective closure of the view.
- 7.7.16 The northern section of Claremont Road gives a long view through to the greenery of Calverley Park beyond Grove Hill Road. The tight row of Edwardian red brick terraces backing onto Arundel Road maintain a strong urban character, and the street enclosure is formed by the front elevations of the houses, which have minimal front garden areas. Opposite, the grounds of Claremont Primary School leave the east side of the street open. North of Poona Road (see 10.2.3 below) the street scene is less dense, with garden planting at the rear of Grove Hill Gardens, and forward of the line of nos. 3-23 Claremont Road where unfortunately forecourt car parking has resulted in the loss of many gardens.

7.8 Madeira Park and Warwick Park

Setting

- 7.8.1 Madeira Park and Warwick Park lie on the south side of the hill occupied by the historic area of Mount Sion. From the upper parts of Madeira Park, where it connects to Mount Sion, there is a broad southward aspect over the south-eastern residential areas of Tunbridge Wells. Warwick Park occupies a valley, running into the Pantiles and High Street at King Charles the Martyr, overlooked by the fine houses of Cumberland Walk.

Historic development

- 7.8.2 In 1838 the area was meadowland and pasture, occupied by a single cottage and Delves Farm. The earlier part of the area was developed as a brick works in the 1850s. Following completion of the well-to-do residential areas in the north part of the town, Madeira Park was initially laid out in the 1890s by Louis Beale. Madeira Park was further developed by 1912, and Warwick Park was also laid out during this second period.

Architectural and historic qualities

- 7.8.3 Madeira Park, and to some extent Warwick Park, are well-preserved examples of the Edwardian phase of housing expansion in Tunbridge Wells. The well heeled ex colonial/military/public service clientele still existed, who continued to be attracted by "park" style developments that owed their original inspiration to Decimus Burton 70 to 80 years earlier. Styles had changed, and the vogue had moved from classical styles to designs in the vernacular idiom cultivated by the arts-and-crafts movement. Brickwork, pargetting and relief plasterwork, decorative timberwork and cottage-style detailing are all incorporated in echoes of an imagined rural England. Indeed, some elements, such as decorative tile-hanging are legitimate borrowings from the local Wealden vernacular.
- 7.8.4 In keeping with the overall design concept, the palette of Tunbridge Wells local materials was used throughout the streetscape, i.e red brick footways, ragstone kerbs, clay stable paviour crossovers and, notably in Madeira Park, heavy rustic stone retaining walls. Madeira Park's location off the main modern traffic access routes has helped it to retain most elements of its original development concept. Although the car does now intrude, and there has been some loss of red brick paving, the houses still remain primarily in single family occupation.
- 7.8.5 Warwick Park is less complete. The row of houses on the southern side is Beale's and contemporary with Madeira Park, and shares some elements of landscape setting such as stone retaining walls and hedgerow boundaries. The street however, does not have the same qualities: it lacks the enclosure of Madeira Park's curving alignment and enveloping greenery, and the north side has been diminished with a row of 1960s builder's "chalets" at nos. 13 – 29. A stand of Scots pines in the grounds of no. 4 are of note in views along the street.

7.9 Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character

- 7.9.1 The High Street, Mount Sion and "The Village" surrounding them form a complex area, which nevertheless holds together as a tight knit neighbourhood in the centre of Tunbridge Wells. Development of the area over a long period, since the 17th century, has given rise to many sub-characters within it, dependent throughout on a close relationship with the early town centre and the Wells.

- 7.9.2 The density and variety of townscape includes very many elements that contribute to the special identity of the area. Indeed, density and variety, combined with small scale and steep topography, are perhaps the attributes that best sum up the core of the area, while the upper parts are associated with public and private open space such as The Grove, Grove Hill Gardens and Calverley Grounds. In these outer areas, views and aspect take on particular significance.

Key building groups

- 7.9.3 The character of Mount Sion, in particular, is created by its network of narrow streets. The most distinctive areas are formed in continuous frontages of two and three storey houses, in a range of architectural expressions, but consistently to a small, domestic scale of detailing (see the descriptions above for detail).
- 7.9.4 Some groups, such as Bedford Terrace, Grove Hill Gardens and the many single-development streets north of The Grove, are significant as complete architectural compositions, and should be preserved as such.

Key spaces

- 7.9.5 There are a number of important planned and incidental spaces within the area, which contribute greatly to the historic character. The scale is generally small and intimate, and closely related to key townscape frontages that look onto them. Ground surfaces are also of importance in many of the spaces, preserving red brick paving and areas of ragstone spalls.
- 7.9.6 The mapping identifies the particularly steep and narrow network of lanes around Frog Lane as key spaces. The quality of enclosure of the townscape and the ground surfaces are so distinctive as to be worthy of special mention. Chapel Place, behind King Charles the Martyr, is important in a similar way, and High Street is notable in its southern section for its distinctive split-levels.

Views

- 7.9.7 The topography of the area lends itself to the generation of distinctive vistas and panoramas throughout the area. In particular, the inter-relationship between the openness of The Common and the enclosed network of narrow streets is particularly pleasing.
- 7.9.8 There are numerous vistas from High Street up into the lanes of Mount Sion. The tight scale of the area limits views to significant landmarks, but the clock tower of King Charles the Martyr is notable in vistas along lanes that surround it.
- 7.9.9 The same range of tight vistas exists around Mount Sion itself, and it is a feature of The Village area that short streets give glimpses into the parks of The Grove and Calverley Grounds. At the ends of these streets, wide views frequently then open up across the space. Madeira Park enjoys wide views from its higher areas over the green canopy of trees that fill the gardens to its south: these views reflect the less dense development character of the area.

Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges

- 7.9.10 Much of the old town is densely developed, and as a result green space within the area is limited. Where trees do occur in the townscape, e.g. in the lower High Street, they are of very great importance. However, proximity to adjacent green spaces (including the Common) and residential areas means that there are many glimpsed vistas to trees and planting.

- 7.9.11 The Grove and Grove Hill Gardens are both planned planted areas that are an essential part of the setting of neighbouring houses. The Grove also has the important function of a local leisure space, and provides vital traffic-free linkages for pedestrians and cyclists through the area and from it to the town centre.
- 7.9.12 As elsewhere in Tunbridge Wells, mature garden trees and planting are important in the outer residential areas to provide visual continuity between the built elements. In Madeira Park such planting is of the essence of the original development design concept, and it is vital that it is protected and preserved. Key elements of the setting are front boundaries of stone walls, railings and hedges, and brick paved footways, and it is vital that such characteristics are not lost to driveway access and forecourt parking.

7.10 Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character

- 7.10.1 In such a complex area, there are inevitably many small elements that could have been better done: this is particularly true in a commercial area like the High Street where there is strong economic and business pressure, and frequent change. Shop front and signage policies can guide, but vigilance is still required. In general, the high environmental and architectural quality of the residential area is appreciated by those who live there, and detrimental change is more likely to be due to lack of awareness than to blatant disregard for the surroundings.

Intrusion

- 7.10.2 Setting aside the issue of traffic and parking, which affects the whole town, there are one or two recent developments that fail to fit sensitively into their historic surroundings. For example, Spencer Mews, on Berkeley Road, has adopted a fake mansard roof as a disguise to a modern flat structure – its proportions are unconvincing, and it remains a bulky mass in comparison to the high degree of modulation of surrounding pitched and gabled roof forms. Lizanne House exhibits a similarly inappropriate form.

Loss and damage

- 7.10.3 There are some significant gaps in the townscape where earlier buildings have been lost. In the case of the Toc H Hall on Little Mount Sion, this is a long-standing situation, but the building itself and the adjacent car park remain a serious intrusion into the quality of the locality.
- 7.10.4 The new Christ Church centre is a very recent change – the building that it replaces was listed, and the new architectural form lacks quality and dignity.
- 7.10.5 Of a more generic nature, car parking in front gardens in Claremont Road and Grove Hill Road is at the expense of boundary walls and planting that are such an essential part of the residential street scene in the area. This problem occurs elsewhere, but is most apparent in this location.