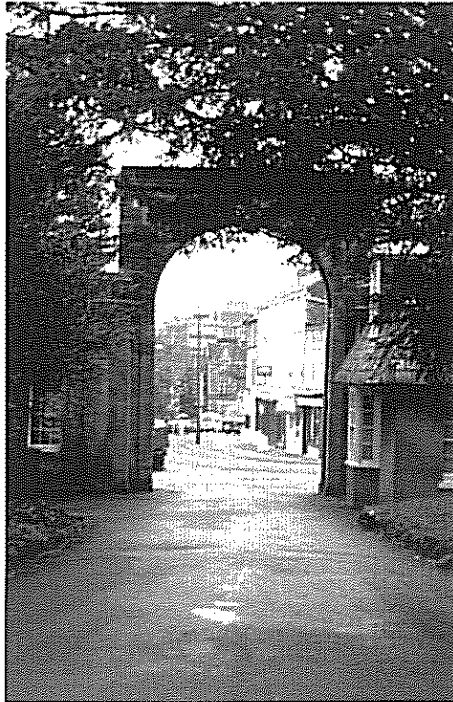


**8 CALVERLEY PARK AREA****8.1 Context****Setting**

- 8.1.1 The Common limits the westward extent of the town centre: the concentration of early residential areas therefore developed on the east side. Subsequently, as town centre functions spread northwards up the hill from the High Street, a fairly clear east-west distinction has become apparent between the mixed uses of the modern town centre, and the quiet gentility of the older residential areas. The most significant element in creating this separation is the public park of Calverley Grounds, which provides both the setting for Calverley Park and a green buffer between the development and the town centre. The topography is striking, with the park occupying the valley and steep slope up to Calverley Park, creating broad views across it from every side.

**Historical background**

- 8.1.2 The Calverley Estate
- 8.1.3 In the 1820's, John Ward (1770-1855) acquired the Calverley Estate. He commissioned a young architect, Decimus Burton, still in his twenties, to design "a self contained landscape village – virtually a new town".



*Victoria Arch, Calverley Park*

- 8.1.4 Decimus Burton (1800-1881) was the tenth child of James Burton, a successful builder who was for a large part responsible, under Nash, for Bloomsbury, Regents Park and Regent Street. The focus of the Calverley Estate is the series of 24 villas overlooking a landscape park. The additional elements to the estate included a church, a crescent shaped promenade of shops, a market place and a row of more substantial shops and hotels that stood on the site of the existing Town Hall. The plan also included the Calverley Hotel, originally built by the Earl of Egremont in about 1760 as Calverley House, but largely rebuilt in 1840 for the hotel.

- 8.1.5 Calverley Park was designed by Burton for 'the reception of genteel families'. The development was started in 1828 at the Victoria Lodge end and was completed by 1839. Each house is a delight both in itself and for its contribution to the layout as a whole. The Borough Council acquired Calverley Grounds for public use in 1920: until then they functioned as pleasure grounds to the hotel.

### **Architectural and historic qualities**

- 8.1.6 Calverley Park is of national importance as the work of Decimus Burton, who is widely considered one of the most distinguished exponents of the Greek Revival in English Architecture. Each of the main 24 villas is listed grade II\*, along with the Crescent, lodges and the boundary walls of the Park. The importance of mature landscape as part of the concept is recognised in the blanket tree preservation order (TPO) to the private gardens of the houses and a number of individual specimens within the Park.
- 8.1.7 In Calverley Park and the other Park developments, landscape is dominant. It provides both a setting for the elegant classical villas and an "arcadian" outlook from them: a fine amenity for the relatively private enjoyment of its well-to-do residents. The characteristics of this arcadian environment are a low density of building, the strong interrelationship of landscape and architecture, and naturalistic parkland or fields as an outlook. Development layouts are informal, usually employing sinuous and curving road alignments, emphasised by rustic surface treatments and continuous densely planted property boundaries with minimal breaks for vehicle access, all of which minimise the visual impact of the car.
- 8.1.8 Calverley Park represents an approach to residential planning that came to be the model for examples elsewhere throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (not least in Tunbridge Wells itself), although rarely so well conceived and executed. It establishes the concept of "*urbs in rure*" (city in countryside) as a way of planning new development that would be used as a model throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century for high quality housing across England, and eventually as the ideal for the establishment of the garden cities of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Special identity**

- 8.1.9 Constructed in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Calverley Park was Tunbridge Wells' first purpose built residential development. The series of twenty-four villas facing open parkland was intentionally sited above the Spa valley to command impressive views over to Mount Ephraim.



*Calverley Park*

- 8.1.10 From Calverley Road, which still has some of Burton's original shops, The Crescent and Keston Lodge sit adjacent to the junction known locally as Carr's Corner. Opposite this, Baston Lodge, Burton's own house, once stood on the corner of Calverley Park Gardens and Calverley Road. Today, all that remains are the boundary walls and entrance gate to the garden.

- 8.1.11 The Crescent, originally called The Promenade, was built to rival The Pantiles as a fashionable shopping parade. The long curved sandstone elevation is complemented by an oval lawn surrounded by trees. The slender white colonnade along its base emphasises the concave sweep. Although originally intended as shops, within a few years of completion, most of the properties had become residential. The unit at the southern end of the crescent was however used as a shampooing and vapour bath room.



*Calverley Crescent*

- 8.1.12 Burton's arched Victoria Lodge denoting the principal entrance to Calverley Park is named after Queen Victoria; to the right of it is the new Roman Catholic church of St. Augustine, designed by Maguire and Murray. Beyond is the Calverley Hotel (run by the "Hotel du Vin" group), which provides a strong edge and containment at the top of the steep slope of the north side of Calverley Grounds. Recent mews development retains the mature trees and sandstone walls that are critical to defining Calverley Park separately from its surroundings – in this case the Crescent Road area.
- 8.1.13 The great curve of Calverley Park then emerges as one moves east. The strength of the houses in Calverley Park is their planning which is assisted by Burton's use of a garden-fronted design in every case. The houses are not large and were intended to be run by staff of two or three servants indoors. Some of them were extended during the 19th century (no. 12 was doubled in size) and others had kitchen extensions added between the wars when basement kitchens became unacceptable. Attention should be drawn to nos. 7 and 15 in particular as 'textbook' Regency villas, and to no. 24 and Farnborough Lodge for their Gothic details.
- 8.1.14 The twenty-four houses are arranged in a semi-circle overlooking a landscaped park divided from the Calverley grounds below by a ha-ha. No two houses are identical, but they are related in proportion, materials and the way that the basic forms (bows, canted bays, towers and terraces) are assembled in different patterns. The consistency in massing and plot layout gives the development a unique character.



*Number 18 Calverley Park*

- 8.1.15 Other elements worthy of note include the informal nature of the hard landscaping on the road. A high stone content surface is edged by dished drainage channels made from ragstone spalls. There is a pleasing contrast between the greys and buffs of the sandstone elevations and hard landscaping and the dark greens of the boundary planting and central green space.



*Calverley Park*

- 8.1.16 To the rear of Calverley Park, Prospect Road links the Claremont Road area with Pembury Road. The special identity area takes in the rear plots of the Calverley Park properties, which are bounded by mature trees and an original sand stone boundary wall. Development on the opposite side of the road is set back from the carriageway behind large front gardens which adds to the 'arcadian' character.

## 8.2 Summary of the elements that contribute to the area's special character.

### Key building groups

- 8.2.1 While the character of Calverley Park is distinctive, it is not one that is created specifically by its built form. Each individual house has architectural interest, but the garden setting of the whole area allows the buildings to recede into the background, while providing a consistent scale and style. Nevertheless, collectively buildings in Calverley Park are important because of their special architectural character and consistent scale and massing.
- 8.2.2 Calverley Crescent, including Victoria Gate, is different in that it is designed as an important focal building defining the western edge of Burton's residential areas. The Calverley Hotel forms a strong grouping of buildings, important both in bounding Crescent Road and creating a defining development line above Calverley Grounds.

### Key spaces

- 8.2.3 The quality of the early planned residential areas in Tunbridge Wells is established by an overall environmental ambience which combines a fairly low density built form with a consistent landscape character that links it all together. Apart from the rather specialist spatial character of the Parks, it is not dependent on well defined urban space. Both around and within the Park, the predominant form is the curving street with its green "wall" of garden planting and boundaries.
- 8.2.4 Carr's Corner, nevertheless, is an important focus where key local routes meet, acting as an eastern gateway to the town centre (see 11.3.3 below). The oval-shaped park adjacent to Calverley Crescent is a notable incidental space related closely to the form and setting of the Crescent itself.

### **Views**

- 8.2.5 The key landmarks lie outside the area, in the spires of St. James' and St. Peter's churches, which are visible from almost every direction in the town, often from a considerable distance. The topography has been exploited in laying out these areas, with the main spines lying along spurs of higher ground emphasising the prominence of the spires. Otherwise, the dense green garden planting hides most of the area from view.
- 8.2.6 Within the area, the broad views from Calverley Park westwards to Mount Ephraim are of fundamental importance, as a key feature of the original design concept. This attribute extends to Calverley Grounds below Calverley Park, which because of the shared topography creates innumerable views from point to point across the public park. The Calverley Hotel (Hotel du Vin) figures particularly strongly in broad northward views, lying along the ridge at the top of the park. The mature trees and greenery around it make a clearly defined edge to the space of the park, and the buildings do not intrude.

### **Traditional materials and colours**

- 8.2.7 The main buildings and associated structures in Calverley Park are in Greek Revivalist and Italianate classical styles, and in this respect owe little to traditional detailing. However, Calverley Park is notable for the use of natural stone, while later developments on similar lines would use stucco for the same visual effect.
- 8.2.8 The rustic character of ground surfaces, using red brick footways and ragstone kerbs, is of importance here as elsewhere in Tunbridge Wells, in conveying the rustic informality that Burton and other designers were seeking in the setting of their developments.

### **Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges**

- 8.2.9 Trees, hedges and garden planting are so fundamentally part of the character of the Park developments, that singling out key examples risks undermining the importance of greenery everywhere else. The whole of the area of private gardens is covered by a single tree preservation order, rightly acknowledging the importance of the green setting as a whole. At the same time, space is the key element, and the central parkland gently slopes away from the villas to a boundary formed by ha-ha, which allows uninterrupted visual continuity beyond it into Calverley Grounds..
- 8.2.10 Calverley Park and Grounds are listed in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The parkland itself is predominantly open, affording views over the town centre to Mount Ephraim. There is a number of mature specimen trees planted throughout the area, notably the Cedar of Lebanon specimens, which have a striking sculptural quality. Unfortunately, recent ad hoc planting of inappropriate species within the parkland (possibly following the 1987 storm) has impacted upon the 'set-piece' landscape character. On the other hand it is developing ecological value as a natural meadowland, which, if managed sympathetically, could support interesting wild flora (uncommon in a town).
- 8.2.11 At Calverley Grounds, use as a municipal park produces a quite different environment. Here high levels of maintenance create a manicured appearance, and at the same time a very legible and usable area, keeping open broad views over the whole area.

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

- 8.3.1 Because of the pre-eminence of its architect and concept, Calverley Park has generally been able to resist serious intrusions on its character. Any proposal to build in the area, including even modest extensions to the houses, should be considered very critically, if indeed any building should be accepted at all. The listed building status of most of the important houses and structures affords some protection in this respect. Not all boundary walls are listed, however, and particular vigilance is needed to protect such "secondary" elements, which in fact have a primary role in creating Calverley Park's distinctive character. The same must be said of ground surfaces throughout the area: as elsewhere they are particularly vulnerable to damage by unthinking highway repairs and providers of underground utilities.
- 8.3.2 It is evident that the character of the landscape spaces has changed over time – not just through the process of maturing. Modern approaches to landscape management are arguably less interventionist than they might originally have been, and in Calverley Park this has allowed the establishment of a wilder character. The benefits are a richer ecological environment, but the risks are the introduction of visually inappropriate species, or the unwanted establishment of more invasive species, such as self-seeding rhododendron. A balance must be struck between ecological advantages and preservation of a setting for the development as conceived by its designers.