

**11 ST.JAMES****11.1 Context****Setting**

- 11.1.1 Following the development of Calverley Park, St James' was laid out in the 1850s. Similar issues influenced its siting and development to create a distinct and exclusive residential. It does not include the element of major landscape space that is the centrepiece of Calverley Park, so that it does not have the same sense of separation from the town centre. Indeed Calverley Road, Garden Road and Beulah Road all link directly to the busy shopping street of Camden Road, and the area includes the more modest residential quarter of Calverley Street and adjoining streets. Nevertheless, the importance of a green setting is still expressed in its mature garden and boundary planting
- 11.1.2 The area enjoys a more elevated position than the town centre, on a spur running northwards from the earlier Calverley Park development. It is also well greened and less densely developed than the neighbouring town centre and Camden Road areas, and these attributes become stronger in the more easterly parts of the area, towards Sandrock Road and Pembury Road (see chapter 12 below). In general terms the St. James' area shares the early "Arcadian" inspiration of Decimus Burton's work in Calverley Park, and later followed at Camden Park, but expounds it in a more much densely planned style.

**Historical background**

- 11.1.3 St. James, too, was a part of John Ward's Calverley Estate, and was taken forward primarily by Burton's colleague, William Willicombe. Willicombe developed Burton's purer classical style to suit the tastes of the day, and substituted stone with stucco. New styles in Gothic and Jacobean Manners were introduced often using brick.
- 11.1.4 Lansdowne Road and Beulah Road were developed through the 1850s, extending into the early 1860s. St. James' church was designed by Ewan Christian (known for the National Portrait Gallery), and completed in 1862. The area was more or less complete by the 1871 census.
- 11.1.5 The census returns provide a fascinating picture of the market for which Willicombe was catering. He made a point of providing very generous space, and most of his houses included large conservatories. They attracted very wealthy people from outside the area: many are described as "fund-holders" - i.e. drawing their income from investments and trusts rather than from paid work. Retired people from the Empire and military services also figure strongly.
- 11.1.6 In the 20th century the maintenance of such large households, which required many staff, has become impractical. The area still remains substantially residential, but some of the larger properties have been converted into offices or institutional uses, especially in Lansdowne Road. Many others have been converted to flats, and there has been pressure to infill the larger grounds with smaller new houses.

**Architectural and historic qualities**

- 11.1.7 The inner eastern residential areas of Tunbridge Wells retain a strong and consistent character, which derives from the relatively short period of their development and their wealthy upper middle class clientele. There are two main categories of development: the landscaped, almost stage-set, park land pieces of Calverley Park and Camden Park; and the streets of the St. James'/Beulah/Lansdowne Road areas.

- 11.1.8 Landscape is a key part of the development concept in the St. James' area to the north, but inevitably the street form influences its character strongly. Here mature garden planting and trees provide a green matrix that binds together lines of detached and semi-detached houses. The building line itself is strong, and provides an outer containment of the street scene. Planting helps to soften this line at low level where building façades meet the ground, and at high level where trees in gardens behind provide a backdrop for the roofline.
- 11.1.9 Within the street, the front boundary line has a particular importance. Walls 1.5 to 1.8 m high make a clear statement of the public/private interface, but views are still possible to the building façades. This is important: these houses have frontages that their owners wanted to be seen. At the same time, the continuity of the boundary walls, reinforced by hedge and shrub planting, is significant for the whole street scene.
- 11.1.10 High quality street surfaces are also part of this continuity. The Tunbridge Wells palette of red brick paving and stone kerbs features strongly and is notable by its absence where it has been lost. Where, on occasion, vehicle access was required into private plots, the crossover was made in red or sometimes blue stable pavements, of engineering brick material. One of the most significant impacts of the 20th century has been the increased need for such access for private cars: often this established detail is not used, and tarmac is laid instead, and the frequent interruption of front boundaries for access diminishes their vital visual continuity.
- 11.1.11 Another distinctive feature of the streetscape is the informal alignment of the streets, in gentle curves joining one another at acute angles. These junctions create nodal locations that are key local focuses, for example at Carr's Corner and at Ferndale Point.



*Carrs Corner*

- 11.1.12 At the periphery of the high quality middle class housing, flanking Camden Road, lie contemporary developments of lower middle class and working class housing. Except for Calverley Street, these areas fall outside the conservation area. They nevertheless have good townscape value, using many of the architectural devices of the main streets, albeit on the smaller scale of two-storey terraces.

### **Special identity areas**

- 11.1.13 More detailed description of the conservation area is given in the following sections.

## 11.2 North

### St. James Road

- 11.2.1 The focus of the northern area of the Victorian Suburbs is St. James' Church. It occupies a key position on the corner of St. James' Road and Ferndale, with its vicarage lying discreetly in the shadows of its east end in an appropriately ecclesiastical style. The church spire is a landmark, visible from almost all parts of Tunbridge Wells. Closer to hand, the setting of the church is spoiled by the modern block of flats and their garage court in the opposite corner of St. James' Road.
- 11.2.2 St. James' Road runs northward, barely curving, but just enough to contain long views along it. The view eventually terminates with a three storey block of buildings on the corner of Albion Road, which is marred by poor modern shop fronts and a cheap flat-roofed weather-boarded extension right on the corner.
- 11.2.3 There is a variety of housing styles in St. James' Road. Larger villas on the southern, upper section follow stuccoed classical designs in the manner of Willicombe. They are two and three storeys, some of them paired, and each is slightly different in its detail. Originally these houses would have been finished in "natural" unpainted stucco, in closer imitation of Decimus Burton's earlier stone designs.
- 11.2.4 Only one or two unpainted examples remain, and they arguably look a little grim, stained and darkened by 150 years of air pollution. On the other hand, paint schemes are a little too variable - generally in pastel shades, but sometimes over elaborated with details picked out like cake-icing. It is possible to create variety, but it is perhaps safer to keep to simple cream colours: - too many colours breaks up the scale of the street, which can be quaint in cottage-scale buildings but diminishes the grandeur of groups of larger houses.
- 11.2.5 At the bottom (north) end of St. James' Road the scale of houses reduces noticeably. Houses are not only two-storey, but with lower ceiling heights: there is a mix of brick and stucco. This is a transition area into the lower cost terraces and semis of the surrounding streets off Camden Road.

### Beulah Road

- 11.2.6 Beulah Road links St. James' Road with Camden Road, but its status is allied to St James'. There are more two-storey and semi-detached houses, giving the street a more intimate scale. Houses have low pitched slate roofs, with stucco facades: - some have brick side and rear elevations.

## 11.3 South

### Lansdowne Road

- 11.3.1 Lansdowne Road is distinctive for its grander scale of development, mostly by William Willicombe, compared to St. James' Road and Beulah Road. The buildings in Lansdowne Road itself remain fairly complete, although many have been converted to flats, offices or institutional uses, such as nurseries. The consequence of this intensification of use is invariably the loss of front gardens to parking forecourts, and the erosion of the street boundary. Nevertheless, the strong curving line and grand scale of the villas creates a forceful townscape.
- 11.3.2 The villas are two and three storeys, in an Italianate classical style. They have low

pitched slate roofs and most have bay windows. An attic storey appears to exist in most, and in one or two cases this has been clumsily converted to a fuller, mansard type of roof (e.g. number 13).

### **Carr's Corner**

- 11.3.3 Lansdowne Road has great importance as a route into the town centre, and its junction on Carr's Corner makes a splendid "gateway" to the municipal heart of the town via Crescent Road, and to the retail centre via Calverley Road. The significance of the location is marked by a number of key elements:-
- the pair of 81-83 Calverley Road, which provide a fine square three-storey block to the corner;
  - the end elevation of Calverley Park Crescent;
  - the distinctive two storey gatehouse to the entrance of Calverley Park;
  - the simple rounded corner of 110-112 Calverley Road, with its discreet little clock, and plain shop fronts;
  - the incidental feature of the horse-trough and fountain, and the context of red-brick paving, low sandstone walling here and in Calverley Park, and high hedges;
  - green containment of the eastern side and Calverley Park Gardens.

### **Calverley Street**

- 11.3.4 West of Lansdowne Road, Calverley Street backs onto large gardens whose mature trees provide a backdrop for the buildings. Calverley Street retains simple stuccoed houses in its east side, important as a continuous group along its whole length. The west side of the street is much more disrupted by 20th century redevelopment that backs onto Camden Road.

## **11.4 Summary of the elements that contribute to the areas special character.**

### **Key building groups**

- 11.4.1 As in the other "Arcadian" areas, while the character of the St. James Area 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 integrate into the background, while providing a consistent scale and style.
- 11.4.2 A few groups do have greater impact than others, e.g. at Carr's Corner, where the whole assembly of corner buildings defines the space and the main routes leading out of it. In Lansdowne Road, No. 17 is listed grade II, as a representative of the general style of the street, but this reflects the group value of the whole crescent in forming such a distinctive street.

### **Key spaces**

- 11.4.3 The quality of the St. James area is established by an overall environmental ambience which is a combination of a fairly low density built form and a consistent landscape character that links it all together. It is not dependent on well defined urban space. The predominant form is the curving street with its green "wall" of garden planting and boundaries.

### **Views**

- 11.4.4 The key landmarks are the spires of St. James', and outside the area St. Peter's and St. John'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 roads lying along spurs of higher ground setting up long views of the spires.
- 11.4.5 Key views into and out of the area include from Crescent Road to St. Peter's. spire, and from Stone Street/Beulah Road over roofs to St. John's, Southborough Road.
- 11.4.6 Within the area, most views are contained as vistas within the streets. St. James' is the main landmark, visible from the length of St. James' Road and in shorter views from surrounding streets. Carr's Corner is a local focus with views from all five approach roads, and most importantly from the junction rising to the gable of No. 2 Calverley Park.
- 11.4.7 Throughout the area, streets are characterised by progressive views along curving alignments, and Lansdowne Road is perhaps the most dramatic example.

### **Traditional materials and colours**

- 11.4.8 Consistency of building materials is a key component of the character of the early residential areas. The designs in the area nevertheless vary on two primary themes:
- 11.4.9 Willicombe designs in Italianate classical styles, stucco faced with a greater variety of classical and mannerist details.
- 11.4.10 A few later additions in arts-and-crafts style using stock brickwork, decorative timber and pargetted plaster panels, following an English "vernacular" tradition.
- 11.4.11 The Willicombe designs most effectively define the overall character of the area. A variety of decoration is used from the classical orders of architecture. Particular elements of note are;
- timber vertical sliding sashes;
  - panes designed with margin lights;
  - rusticated and textured stuccoed details;
  - 'guilloche' patterned parapets;
  - overhanging eaves.

### **Local details**

- 11.4.12 The architectural details adopted by Willicombe are from classical traditions, and there are relatively few examples of local "Wealden" details, such as tile-hanging and weather-boarding. The most locally distinctive elements are the street surfaces, described in 8.1 above.

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

- 11.4.13 Trees, hedges and garden planting are so fundamentally part of the character of Tunbridge Wells' older residential areas, that singling out key examples risks undermining the importance of greenery everywhere else. An important feature of planting generally is the high proportion of evergreen shrubs (particularly rhododendrons and laurel), which give a dense wall-like character to boundary hedges that is retained throughout the year.
- 11.4.14 These are some key individual stands of trees, such as the yews and maple in St. James' churchyard, the row of beeches lining the path into Stone Street, tall trees at the junction of Ferndale and Sandrock, closing the setting of St. James' church

on the east side, an evergreen oak on the inside curve of Lansdowne Road, and a yew on the junction of Beulah and St. James' Road.

- 11.4.15 A strong tree cover in Calverley Road is generally all that remains from the grand houses there, which are now replaced by modern infill: the trees mitigate their visual impact greatly. The mature boundary planting of properties within Camden Park creates a high level of enclosure along the main routes into the area, and similarly mature hedgerows define the boundaries to properties within Calverley Park. They also create a structure, helping to define the spaces adjacent to the central open space.

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

- 11.5.1 The main threat to the integrity of the St. James area is from intensification of residential uses. At the western edges there is also the risk of change to non residential uses. This threat takes many forms: modifications to buildings during conversion, including loss of green space for car parking; infill within the grounds of larger properties (less of a problem in St. James' where plot sizes are relatively small); and total demolition and redevelopment.

### **Damage and intrusion**

- 11.5.2 St. James', Beulah and Lansdowne Roads are suffering the slow degradation of through loss and damage resulting from modern changes. The main casualties are:-
- roofs: replacement of slate with concrete machine-made tiles;
  - windows: replacement with UPVC, often hinged rather than sliding sash, applied glazing "bars" to large double-glazed units;
  - basements: dug out to provide garaging;
  - boundary walls: removed for car access;
  - Pavements: red-brick removed (north end of St. James' Road); vehicle crossovers in asphalt rather than stable-paviours;
  - Street lighting: all recently replaced with utilitarian posts and luminaires;
  - Utilities: overhead telephone wiring; underground utilities causing unrepaired damage to historic paving surfaces;
  - Colour: risk of uncoordinated clashes between neighbouring properties.
- 11.5.3 Green cover must be retained as an essential part of the setting of the area. New schemes must be sympathetic to both the architectural and landscape character of the area. A few locations of negative impact exist, particularly where green cover alone has not been able to mitigate visual intrusion.
- 11.5.4 There are some elements that lie outside the area but that have impact within it. Corner shops at the north end of St. James' Road are apparent in views along its length, and behind Stone Street back-lands and garaging adjacent path to St. James' Street are untidy.

### **Areas of loss**

- 11.5.5 Carlton Road: almost all the larger properties have gone, although much of the planting remains. High density 1970s terraces have been introduced. They fail primarily because they neither recreate the style and character of the buildings they replace, nor do they create any clear spatial concept themselves - they are just terraces floating in space with little differentiation of entrances, utility areas, private or shared space.
- 11.5.6 Lansdowne Square: a weak cul-de-sac with similar problems, deriving from an open-plan site layout and excess highway space around its junction onto Lansdowne Road.

- 11.5.7 Lansdowne Road, St. James' Road and Ferndale Junctions: corner sites redeveloped with weak 1970s housing terraces.