

---

# **Royal Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall**

*Conservation Areas Appraisal*

*Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
in Partnership with  
Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society  
and other local representatives*

**Tony Fullwood BA (Hons) Dip UD, MRTPI  
Strategy, Design and Projects Manager  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**

**Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS**

**November 2000**

*Printed on enviromentally friendly paper*

**Acknowledgements**

The Borough Council would like to thank members of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society and other local representatives for their participation in the preparation of this guidance.

The appraisal has been prepared by Roger Evans Associates (Architects, Town Planners and Urban Designers) and officers of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

---

## **CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Definition and purpose of conservation areas	1
1.2	Purpose of this appraisal	1
1.3	Tunbridge Wells conservation areas	2
1.4	Boundary review	2
	Tunbridge Wells conservation area boundary	2
	Rusthall conservation area boundary	3
1.5	Key map	4
<b>2</b>	<b>POLICY BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Local plan conservation area policies	5
2.2	Other local plan policies	6
	Green belt	6
	Sites of special scientific interest and sites with nature conservation interest	6
	Areas of important open space and areas of landscape importance	6
	Important landscaped approach	6
	Arcadian areas	6
	Shop fronts	6
	Advertisements	6
	Recreation open space and sites allocated for recreation use	6
	Shopping areas	6
	Other designations	6
<b>3</b>	<b>THE EVOLUTION AND FORM OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	Pre-1600	7
3.2	1600 to 1800	7
3.3	1800 to 1950	8
3.4	1950 to today	8
<b>4</b>	<b>CHARACTER APPRAISAL</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1	Approach	9
4.2	General context	9
	Setting	9
	Historical background	10
4.3	Architectural and historic qualities	10
4.4	Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character	10
	Key building groups – important to the enclosure of space	10
	Landmarks	11

---

	Focal points	11
	Key urban space	11
	Key open space	11
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	11
	Enclosure of space by hedges and trees	11
	Views	11
	Traditional building materials and colours	12
	Buildings:	12
	Street surfaces:	13
	Local details	13
4.5	Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character	13
<b>5</b>	<b>THE PANTILES</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1	Context	14
	Setting	14
	Historical background	14
	Architectural and historic qualities	15
5.2	Northern Walk and Chalybeate Springs	15
5.3	The Upper Walk	16
5.4	Lower Walk	18
5.5	Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character	19
	Key building groups	19
	Key spaces	19
	Alleys	19
	Views	19
	Roofscape	19
	Colour	20
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	20
5.6	Summary of Elements that detract from the area's special character	20
	Intrusions	20
<b>6</b>	<b>THE COMMON AND MOUNT EPHRAIM</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1	Context	21
	Setting	21
	Historical background	21
	Architectural and historic qualities	22
	Identity areas	23
6.2	The Common	23
6.3	Bishops Down	24
6.4	Mount Ephraim	25
	Northern edge of the common	25
	Northern Mount Ephraim	25
	The north-east common	26
6.5	Eastern edge/London Road	26
	London Road (north)	26

---

	Villa development	27
	South facing development	27
	London Road (south)	28
<b>6.6</b>	<b>Eridge Road</b>	<b>28</b>
	Approach	28
	Houses	29
	Nevill Terrace	29
<b>6.7</b>	<b>Summary of elements which contribute to the area's character</b>	<b>30</b>
	Key building groups	30
	Key spaces	30
	Views	31
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	31
<b>6.8</b>	<b>Summary of Elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>32</b>
	Intrusion	32
	Loss and damage	32
<b>7</b>	<b>MOUNT SION AND THE HIGH STREET</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>33</b>
	Setting	33
	Historical background	33
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Chapel Place</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>7.3</b>	<b>High Street</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Mount Sion</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Little Mount Sion</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>7.6</b>	<b>The Grove</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>7.7</b>	<b>Claremont Road</b>	<b>41</b>
	Grove Hill Road	41
	Grove Hill Gardens	41
	Mountfield Road and Mountfield Gardens	42
	Sutherland, Meadowhill and Guildford Roads	42
	Arundel, Norfolk and Grecian Roads	42
	Claremont Road	43
<b>7.8</b>	<b>Madeira Park and Warwick Park</b>	<b>44</b>
	Setting	44
	Historic development	44
	Architectural and historic qualities	44
<b>7.9</b>	<b>Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character</b>	<b>44</b>
	Key building groups	45
	Key spaces	45
	Views	45
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	45
<b>7.10</b>	<b>Summary of Elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>46</b>
	Intrusion	46
	Loss and damage	46

---

<b>8</b>	<b>CALVERLEY PARK AREA</b>	<b>47</b>
8.1	Context	47
	Setting	47
	Historical background	47
	Architectural and historic qualities	48
	Special identity	48
8.2	Summary of the elements that contribute to the area's special character.	50
	Key building groups	50
	Key spaces	50
	Views	51
	Traditional materials and colours	51
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	51
8.3	Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character	52
<b>9</b>	<b>TOWN CENTRE</b>	<b>53</b>
9.1	Context	53
	Setting	53
	Historical background	53
	Architectural and historic qualities	54
	Special identity areas	55
9.2	Northern Town Centre	55
	Northern gateway – St. John's Road	55
	Grosvenor Road	56
	Hanover Road and Rock Villa Road	57
	Mount Ephraim Road	58
9.3	Town Centre west	58
	Lime Hill Road and Dudley Road	58
	York Road and Church Road	59
	Clarence Road area	60
9.4	Calverley Road and Royal Victoria Place	60
	Calverley Road	61
	Royal Victoria Place	61
	Monson Road and Newton Road	62
	Camden Road	62
9.5	The Civic Area and Crescent Road	63
	The Town Hall	63
	Mount Pleasant	64
	Crescent Road	65
9.6	Mount Pleasant	66
	Corner developments	66
	Mount Pleasant terrace	67
	Relationship to Calverley Grounds	67
	Station area	67
	Vale Road	68
	Office blocks	68
	Station approach	69
9.7	Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character	69
	Key building groups	69

---

	Key spaces	70
	Views	70
	Local details	70
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	70
<b>9.8</b>	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>71</b>
	Intrusion, loss and damage	71

## **10 CAMDEN PARK AREA 72**

<b>10.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>72</b>
	Setting	72
	Historical background	72
	Architectural and historic qualities	72
<b>10.2</b>	<b>Special identity areas</b>	<b>73</b>
	Prospect Road	73
	Camden Park	73
<b>10.3</b>	<b>Summary of the elements that contribute to the area's special character.</b>	<b>75</b>
	Key townscape groups	75
	Key spaces	75
	Views	75
<b>10.4</b>	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>75</b>
	Loss, damage and intrusion	76

## **11 ST. JAMES 77**

<b>11.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>77</b>
	Setting	77
	Historical background	77
	Architectural and historic qualities	77
	Special identity areas	78
<b>11.2</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>79</b>
	St. James Road	79
	Beulah Road	79
<b>11.3</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>79</b>
	Lansdowne Road	79
	Carr's Corner	80
	Calverley Street	80
<b>11.4</b>	<b>Summary of the elements that contribute to the areas special character.</b>	<b>80</b>
	Key building groups	80
	Key spaces	80
	Views	81
	Traditional materials and colours	81
	Local details	81
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	81
<b>11.5</b>	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>82</b>
	Damage and intrusion	82
	Areas of loss	82

---

**12 PEMBURY ROAD 84**

<b>12.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>84</b>
	Setting	84
	Historical background	84
	Architectural and historic qualities	84
<b>12.2</b>	<b>Special identity areas</b>	<b>85</b>
	Sandrock Road	85
	Dunorlan Park	85
	Pembury Road	86
<b>12.3</b>	<b>Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character</b>	<b>86</b>
	Key building groups	86
	Views	87
	Traditional building materials and colours	87
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	87
<b>12.4</b>	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>87</b>
	Intrusion, loss and damage	87

**13 NEVILL PARK AND HUNGERSHALL PARK 89**

<b>13.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>89</b>
	Setting	89
	Historical background	89
<b>13.2</b>	<b>Special identity areas</b>	<b>89</b>
	Nevill Park and Hungershall Park	89
<b>13.3</b>	<b>Summary of elements which contribute to the area's character</b>	<b>91</b>
	Key building groups	91
	Key spaces	91
	Views	91
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	91
<b>13.4</b>	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>92</b>
	Intrusion, loss and damage	92

**14 BROADWATER DOWN 93**

<b>14.1</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>93</b>
	Setting	93
	Historical background	93
	Architectural and historic qualities	93
<b>14.2</b>	<b>Special Identity Areas</b>	<b>94</b>
	Broadwater Down west	94
	Broadwater Down east	95
	Frant Road	96
<b>14.3</b>	<b>Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character.</b>	<b>97</b>
	Key building groups	97
	Key spaces	97
	Views	97
	Traditional building materials and colours	98
	Local details	98

---



	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	98
	Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character	99
	Intrusion	99
	Loss and damage	99
<b>15</b>	<b>MOLYNEUX PARK</b>	<b>100</b>
15.1	<b>Context</b>	<b>100</b>
	Setting	100
	Historical background	100
	Architectural and historic qualities	101
15.2	<b>Special identity areas</b>	<b>102</b>
	Boyne Park	102
	Molyneux Park	103
15.3	<b>Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character</b>	<b>103</b>
	Key townscape groups	103
	Views	104
	Traditional materials and local details	104
	Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges	105
15.4	<b>Summary of elements that detract from the area's special character</b>	<b>105</b>
	Loss and damage	105
	Intrusions	106
<b>16</b>	<b>DENNY BOTTOM AND RUSTHALL COMMON</b>	<b>107</b>
16.1	<b>Context</b>	<b>107</b>
	Setting	107
	Historical background	107
16.2	<b>Denny Bottom</b>	<b>107</b>
	Harmony Street and Toad Rock	108
	Upper Street and Apsley Street	108
	Woodside Road	111
16.3	<b>Rusthall Common</b>	<b>111</b>
	Rusthall Road	111
	The Common (south)	113
16.4	<b>Summary of elements which contribute to the character of the area</b>	<b>114</b>
	Key building groups	114
	Key spaces	115
	Key views	115
	Building materials and colours	116
	Local details	116
	Green spaces, trees and hedgerows	116
16.5	<b>Elements which detract from the historic character of the area</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1</b>	<b>- BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>	<b>- APPRAISAL DRAWINGS</b>	<b>118</b>

---



## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Definition and purpose of conservation areas**

- 1.1.1 The first conservation areas were designated in England under the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and more than 8000 now exist. Under Section 69 of the Planning (listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, local planning authorities have a duty to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.
- 1.1.2 Conservation areas are diverse in size and character, but in general it is the quality and interest of the area that is of importance, rather than the individual buildings within it. Such designation gives the authority greater control over demolition, minor development, works to trees and advertisements in the conservation area. However, it also brings certain responsibilities. Under the terms of the 1990 Act, local authorities have a duty to review the extent of designation from time to time, to designate further areas if appropriate, to bring forward proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (with public consultation) and to pay special attention to the character or appearance of conservation areas in exercising their planning powers.
- 1.1.3 It is not just the local planning authority that has a role in protecting and enhancing conservation areas. The principal guardians are the residents and business people who live and work in the conservation area who are responsible for maintaining the individual properties, which together contribute to the character of the conservation area.
- 1.1.4 Designation also raises awareness of an area's special attributes and can foster pride in the locality. Government planning guidance stresses that our built and natural heritage should be valued and protected for their own sake as a central part of our cultural heritage and that the responsibility for environmental stewardship is shared by everyone.
- 1.1.5 New development and change can take place in conservation areas but designation should ensure that such proposals will not have an adverse effect on the character or appearance of the area.

### **1.2 Purpose of this appraisal**

- 1.2.1 This document attempts to define some of the key elements that contribute to the special historic and architectural character of the Tunbridge Wells Conservation Areas.
- 1.2.2 The character of a settlement is determined by more than just the age and style of buildings. It is also influenced by the positioning of the buildings, their use, the shape, size and use of spaces between them, the materials, colours and textures employed and the relationship between the built form and the landscape elements.
- 1.2.3 In addition, the appraisal records some of the principal elements that detract from the appearance or historic character of the conservation area. These detractors include development which is out of keeping with the character of the conservation area, unkempt buildings and spaces, poor surfacing, inappropriate street furniture, clutter of street signs and inappropriate advertisements on business premises.
- 1.2.4 This appraisal has been prepared in close partnership with a team of local people over a number of months. It will guide the local planning authority in making planning decisions and, where opportunities arise, preparing enhancement proposals. The appraisal will also inform other agencies and individuals whose activities impact on the fabric of the Tunbridge Wells Conservation Areas, such as the County and Borough Councils and local traders and householders.

### 1.3 Tunbridge Wells conservation areas

- 1.3.1 The central areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells were originally designated as a conservation area in 1969. There were subsequent extensions to it in 1974, 1983 and 1992. Furthermore, there were contiguous but separate conservation areas designated at Molyneux Park in 1983, Broadwater Down in 1989, and Pembury Road in 1992. These to an extent reflected the particular character of their areas, but the result was a series of conservation areas covering Royal Tunbridge Wells.

### 1.4 Boundary review

- 1.4.1 As part of this appraisal and boundary review, the opportunity has been taken to recognise Tunbridge Wells as a single conservation area, since the history and evolution of the various parts of the town are closely linked together. Rusthall has been separately identified as a conservation area independent of Tunbridge Wells, reflecting its historical and geographical distinctiveness.
- 1.4.2 To aid analysis and description the conservation areas are dealt with in smaller geographical groups in chapters 5 to 16. The order is approximately chronological, starting with the oldest area, The Pantiles, and progressing to the most recent, Molyneux Park, at chapter 15. Chapter 16 deals with Rusthall, which has now been designated separately from Tunbridge Wells. Refer also to the key map at 1.5.

#### Tunbridge Wells conservation area boundary

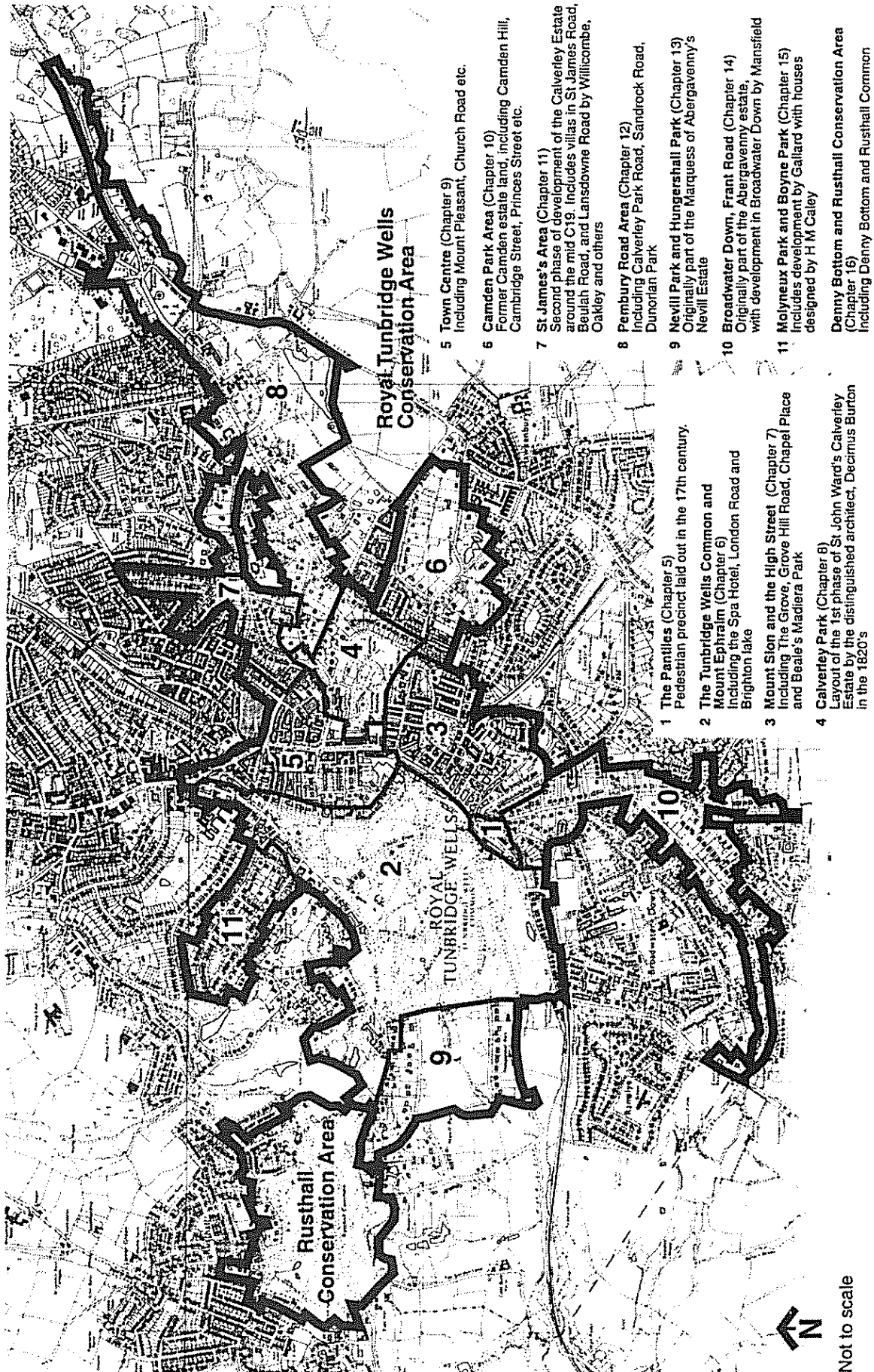
- 1.4.3 The remainder of the original Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area includes a wide range of character areas. Boundary changes have been made as adjustments to match with identifiable features on the ground, which meets changes that have inevitably occurred since the boundary was first drawn up. Some areas have been excluded because they do not reflect the high quality of environment and design that the conservation area seeks to preserve and promote.
- 1.4.4 The mature residential areas on the east side of the town centre are now included in the single main Tunbridge Wells conservation area. Boundary changes are to:
- **Include** areas of Ferndale adjacent to St. James' church;
  - **Extend** the north side of Sandrock to include all the grounds of the historic houses, retaining boundary planting along the road;
  - **Omit** the school, Shrublands and College Drive from the conservation area;
  - **Omit** the Salvation Army Citadel and Buckler's Close from the conservation area, retaining the boundaries onto Pembury Road;
  - **Complete** the boundary at Kingswood Road.
- 1.4.5 Nevill Park and Hungershall Park are well-established parts of the Tunbridge Wells conservation area, and no changes to the boundary are made in this area.
- 1.4.6 The southern edge of the Tunbridge Wells Conservation area is at Madeira Park, Claremont Road and Camden Park. The current boundary reflects the special architectural and historic character of these areas, and no change to the boundary is made in these areas.
- 1.4.7 Molyneux Park was previously a separate conservation area from the main Tunbridge Wells designation. The boundary reflected the special architectural and historic character of this area, and no change to the boundary is made, except to delete the division between it and the main conservation area.
- 1.4.8 Broadwater Down, including most of Frant Road, again previously formed a separate conservation area from the main Tunbridge Wells designation. Some minor revisions to the boundary have been made to align it with current property boundaries, and to include boundary planting on Frant Road, and the division between it and the main conservation area is deleted

- 1.4.9 Pembury Road was the final separate conservation area from the main Tunbridge Wells designation. Modifications have been made at the at Sandrock Road as described at 1.4.4 above. In addition, the boundary is rationalised to meet current property boundaries by **extending** it behind St. Christophers' Barnardos Home, and by **excluding** new development at Sherwood Park and The Pines.

**Rusthall conservation area boundary**

- 1.4.10 Rusthall and Rusthall Common were included in the original main Tunbridge Wells conservation area. In recognition of the distinctive character of the area, Rusthall becomes a separate conservation area.
- 1.4.11 In addition, it is decided to include houses in Woodside Road, and to exclude a block of modern flats at Rusthall Grange, that replace an earlier Victorian Villa.

## 1.5 Key Map



## 2 POLICY BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Local plan conservation area policies

2.1.1 There are two policies in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (adopted 1996) which relate to conservation areas. Policy EN4 seeks to control the demolition of buildings within conservation areas.

2.1.2 Policy EN4 seeks to control the demolition of buildings within conservation areas

#### **POLICY EN4:**

Proposals for the total or partial demolition of unlisted buildings which contribute positively to the character of a conservation area will not be permitted unless an overriding case can be made out against all of the following criteria:

- 1) The condition of the building, and the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its importance and the value derived from its continued use;
- 2) The adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use, including efforts to find compatible alternative uses;
- 3) The merits of alternative uses for the site; and
- 4) Whether redevelopment will produce substantial planning benefits for the community, including economic regeneration or environmental enhancement.

2.1.3 Policy EN5 sets out criteria for determining whether a development is appropriate within a conservation area,

#### **POLICY EN5:**

Proposals for development within, or affecting the character of, a conservation area will only be permitted if all of the following criteria are satisfied:

- 1) The proposal would preserve or enhance the buildings, related spaces and vegetation which combine to form the character and appearance of the area;
- 2) The siting of the development would be similar to adjoining building frontage lines where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
- 3) The layout and arrangement of the building(s) would follow the pattern of existing development and spacing of adjoining plot widths where this is important to the character of the conservation area;
- 4) The scale, massing, use of materials, detailing, boundary treatment, and landscaping would preserve or enhance the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
- 5) The use, or intensity of use, would be in sympathy with the character and appearance of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated;
- 6) The proposal would not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges or other features important to the character of that part of the conservation area in which the proposal would be situated; and
- 7) In meeting the parking and access requirements, the character and amenity of the area would not be adversely affected.

2.1.4 The detailed character appraisal contained in this document will assist in the interpretation of these policies.

## **2.2 Other local plan policies**

- 2.2.1 There are a number of other general and specific policies in the Local Plan which are relevant to the Conservation Area and may be summarised as follows:

### **Green belt**

- 2.2.2 Under policy MGB1, the limit to built development defines the edge of the town beyond which countryside policies apply.

### **Sites of special scientific interest and sites with nature conservation interest**

- 2.2.3 Proposals affecting areas designated under Policies EN7 and EN8 will only be permitted where the nature conservation interest of the site would be protected.

### **Areas of important open space and areas of landscape importance**

- 2.2.4 Policies EN18 and EN19 recognise the visual significance of open and landscaped areas within the town.

### **Important landscaped approach**

- 2.2.5 Policy EN20 seeks to prevent harm to the character and appearance of important landscape approaches to the town.

### **Arcadian areas**

- 2.2.6 Policy EN21 seeks to protect the character and appearance of areas within the town identified as having Arcadian, parkland settings.

### **Shop fronts**

- 2.2.7 Policy EN15 seeks to ensure that traditional shop fronts are retained within the Conservation Area.

### **Advertisements**

- 2.2.8 Policy EN16 seeks to ensure that advertisement proposals would not be detrimental to the appearance of the conservation area.

### **Recreation open space and sites allocated for recreation use**

- 2.2.9 Policies R1 seeks to protect areas of open space for recreation use.

### **Shopping areas**

- 2.2.10 Policies SP1, SP2 and SP3 set limits on the proportion and types of retail and non-retail uses which will be allowed.

### **Other designations**

- 2.2.11 Finally, there are designations which are made through other legislation. These include listed buildings, tree preservation orders and footpaths.



### 3 THE EVOLUTION OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS

#### 3.1 Pre-1600

- 3.1.1 Prior to 1600, the area where Tunbridge Wells now lies was little more than open countryside. Villages, mansions and iron workings were sited all around. The area sat on the boundary between Kent and Sussex and the parishes of Tonbridge, Speldhurst and Frant.

#### 3.2 1600 to 1800

- 3.2.1 Dudley Lord North discovered the original Chalybeate spring at the meeting point of the boundaries of the aforementioned parishes in 1606. The area around the springs remained free from development for another thirty years. In the intervening period however, the reputation of the healing and recuperative powers of the Wells spread, particularly amongst polite society. King Charles I's wife Henrietta Maria visited in 1630, she and her court camped in tents on the Common.
- 3.2.2 In 1636 two small houses were constructed for coffee drinking and pipe smoking. In the following couple of years a walk and an avenue were created along the axis of the adjacent river bank and market stalls were set up allowing local traders to sell their goods to the water takers. This arrangement formed the blue print for the eventual development of The Pantiles.
- 3.2.3 The freeholders of Rusthall Manor refused to allow the development of the area for fear of prejudicing their lodging businesses in Rusthall and Southborough, both of which were established well before Tunbridge Wells itself. In 1676 Lady Purbeck allocated a site for a chapel. The chapel building became The Church of King Charles the Martyr in 1889 when the chapel gained a parish.
- 3.2.4 The Manor of Rusthall was bought by Thomas Neale who was master of the Royal Mint. Neale masterminded the construction of The Pantiles. To the north of the Pantiles, the Manor of South Frith was divided into plots facing the planned roads within the Mount Sion area. These plots were leased between 1684 and 1690 and the Mount Sion plot allocations set out then remain to this day.
- 3.2.5 With less than a day's travelling time from London, the town became a popular resort. Taking the waters became an excuse for a holiday. Rituals associated with taking the waters included promenading, gaming and dancing. Farthing (1990) provides an interesting insight into the daily activity of the visitors;  
"The first event of the day was a visit to the well.... After drinking the specified dose, All returned at about nine o'clock to their lodgings to dress. At ten, some went to church, some to the coffee house and after prayers the company appeared on the Walks 'in greatest splendour, music playing all the time'. They talked and walked or played at cards or drank tea until it was time to return to the lodgings for dinner at two. In the afternoon there were excursions to the bowling greens and on most evenings there were balls from seven to eleven".
- 3.2.6 Tunbridge Wells Common was well used as an area for walks and other recreational activities. The most prominent of these being the horse races, which were run during the summer months: such activities and events were organised by the town's Master of Ceremonies. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, enthusiasm for these events was waning and Brighton was beginning to take over as the preferred resort in south east England.

### **3.3 1800 to 1950**

- 3.3.1 This shift in the town's primary role saw a change towards a more settled population who chose the town for its now well-known quality of environment. For the well-off, the town was also reasonably accessible to London, first by coach and then by railway. These wealthy residents required servants, shops and craftsmen, who lived throughout the town. New residential areas, for example Windmill Fields, Crown Fields and Camden Road, became established to house this section of the population.
- 3.3.2 One of the town's most important new development areas was instigated by local landowner John Ward. He acquired the 1000-acre Calverley Estate and employed architect Decimus Burton to construct what in effect was a new town for Tunbridge Wells. Construction on the new development started in 1827 when New Church (later Holy Trinity) was constructed. The centrepiece of the new development, Calverley Park remains intact. Along with the adjacent Crescent and Parade, Calverley Park represented a shift in the focus of the town away from The Pantiles and High Street to the area north of Mount Pleasant.
- 3.3.3 The railway arrived in 1845 and had a significant impact upon the population of the town. In 1851, the resident population stood at 10,000, by 1881 this had reached 24,000. Prestigious developments such as Camden Park, Nevill and Hungershall Park were developed at this time. The steady growth continued throughout this period and is reflected in the many late Victorian developments within the town. By 1901, the population stood at 33,373. At the turn of the century and further into the 1900's and 1910's many of Tunbridge Wells' new 'arcadian' residential areas were being laid out. This included extensions to the existing development along the Pembury and Frant Road arterial routes.
- 3.3.4 In the 1930's a competition for a new town hall and civic development was won by Percy Thomas. The resulting civic complex is now listed, at the time however, Decimus Burton's Calverley Parade was demolished to make way for it. The coming of the Second World War brought a halt to development of the town: Calverley Grounds was damaged during air attacks.

### **3.4 1950 to today**

- 3.4.1 The relative economic prosperity of the south east of England before 1939 hastened in the post war years. Tunbridge Wells was one of the towns at the forefront of this, with a number of companies, particularly those in the financial services sector, establishing their headquarters within the town.
- 3.4.2 The economic prosperity during the 1960's fuelled a number of unattractive office block developments. These have made an impact upon the historic character of certain parts of the town centre. With developments in the transportation network throughout this part of the south east, Tunbridge Wells has now become established as an attractive location within close proximity to London. This role is reflected in the recent developments within the town. In particular, the Royal Victoria Place retail development has changed the retail offer of the town centre and the balance of shopping through the town. Greater concern for conservation issues has ensured that recent developments have sought to preserve and enhance the historic character of the town.
- 3.4.3 Fuller histories of the town can be found in numerous other publications. A bibliography of texts used in assembling this appraisal is given in appendix 3.

## 4 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

### 4.1 Approach

- 4.1.1 The content of the appraisal broadly follows the headings indicated by English Heritage in their guidance note, "Conservation Area Appraisals". The document is set out to cover the wide spectrum of elements and issues that make up the character of a conservation area.
- 4.1.2 The conservation area in Tunbridge Wells covers a large proportion of the town, within which there is a very large range of areas of distinctive sub-character - "special identity areas" as English Heritage terms them. In structuring the appraisal, these special identity areas are useful to describe how all of the elements that contribute to an area's distinctive character come together.
- 4.1.3 At the same time, to deal with each special identity area separately would fragment the appraisal excessively. Accordingly, the whole conservation area is divided into areas defined broadly by their age and historical character (see 1.4.2 above), which each include a number of special identity areas. This produces eleven areas represented as separate chapters in the appraisal, and additionally the Rusthall conservation area.
- 4.1.4 There are some broad issues that are applicable across all character areas. Each section follows a similar format. Inevitably, the importance of certain aspects and elements of character will vary from one part of the town to another.

### 4.2 General context

#### Setting

- 4.2.1 Tunbridge Wells derives much of its character from the hills, upon and between which the town is sited. The historic heart of the town, The Pantiles, is set in one of the lowest parts of the valley. Hills rise away from The Pantiles to the north, east and south, in some cases 30m higher within less than 500m distance. In general, the higher ground separates the newer part of the town from the more historic area. The stream which runs through the valley and which is fed by the underwater springs, reaches the head waters of the River Medway some 6 km to the west.
- 4.2.2 More strategically, Tunbridge Wells lies in the centre of the Kent Weald, a geological region that covers the area between the North and South Downs, comprising clays and sandstone, creating a series of ridges and folds running in a south easterly direction. The geology is relatively young, formed by sedimentation in the Cretaceous period about 100 million years ago as Tunbridge Wells Sands. Two beds of the sands are separated by a clay bed (Grinstead Clay).
- 4.2.3 Although south of the line of glaciation, this anticline was gradually eroded by "periglacial" action of water and freeze-thaw cycles during the ice age. In the case of Tunbridge Wells, this erosion was an important factor in exposing the sandstone rocks to give the town its distinctive natural landmarks. The action of water seeping out above clay bands hastened the erosion of rock just above them, undercutting it and forming the distinctive formations that are seen at Toad Rock on Rusthall Common.
- 4.2.4 The juxtaposition of landscape to built development within the town is a key part of its most distinctive character. Nowhere is this more prominent than where Tunbridge Wells Common approaches the western fringes of the town centre. The Common itself was traditionally open in character, with heather, gorse, ferns and isolated tree groups defining its character. Livestock grazed the Common until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which prevented the widespread establishment of woodland and created a very open character. Today parts of the Common are

heavily wooded and this has changed the spatial relationship between the developed area of the town and the countryside.

- 4.2.5 The more detailed issues of the particular area's relationship to other parts of the town and of local topography and layout are set out in each section.

### **Historical background**

- 4.2.6 The general background at section 3 gives something of the overall development of Tunbridge Wells. Although the Wells underpins the growth of the town in general, each area responded in a different way, and each response has created a separate, special identity of its own. These particular points are set out in each section with an indication of the chronological development of the area, where it influences the nature of what we see today.

### **4.3 Architectural and historic qualities**

- 4.3.1 Under this heading, each section describes the main architectural elements that contribute to the character of the particular area. English Heritage suggests the description of special identity areas that represent variations in character, and this is where the complexity of each area is examined in some detail. The purpose is to identify the key issues that contribute to special character, rather than to enter into detailed analysis of architectural description. This information is available in other works, and in the Secretary of State's descriptions of Listed Buildings. The significance of architectural detail should always be balanced against the weight of broader environmental issues, such as streetscape, landscape or usage.
- 4.3.2 The purpose, then, is to highlight the principle features that contribute to the character of the conservation area. The conservation area is of such scale and complexity that there may be many elements that are not specifically referred to in the text, but which make an important contribution to its character nevertheless. The lack of a reference in the text or appraisal drawings should not therefore be equated to unimportance or insignificance.
- 4.3.3 If just one architectural form were nominated to represent Tunbridge Wells, it would probably be the park developments of Decimus Burton, which were the basis for many subsequent suburban schemes in a variety of architectural styles and street forms. But this would be to overlook the special urban character of the Pantiles or The Village, and indeed the range of expression of the suburban ideal itself.

### **4.4 Summary of elements that contribute to the area's special character**

- 4.4.1 Attached to the appraisal report are drawings that analyse the key elements in the conservation area. The text should be read in conjunction with the analysis drawings, and references are not exhaustive. The lack of a reference to a feature in the conservation area on the drawings or in the text does not imply that it is unimportant: all elements in the conservation area contribute in some way to its character.

### **Key building groups – important to the enclosure of space**

- 4.4.2 While conservation areas are often based on buildings that are listed or otherwise of strong architectural quality, the overall townscape is usually formed by groups of less individually notable buildings and structures that nevertheless contribute to its unique character. All built frontages in the Conservation Area are important in themselves, and the appraisal drawings note those that are especially important in defining town spaces and that form strong development edges.

### **Landmarks**

- 4.4.3 The appraisal drawings also indicate key landmarks. Landmarks are buildings or other artificial or natural features that provide the key mental marker points in the town, by which people locate and orientate themselves. They are not necessarily the most outstanding buildings, trees, etc. but they are usually strategically located to make them the most visible and memorable.

### **Focal points**

- 4.4.4 While relatively few features are landmarks of such strategic visual significance, many more provide more local reference points. Typically, they form the focus of an urban space, or close a particular vista or approach. Such features might be buildings, natural elements or other points of special interest in the townscape.

### **Key urban space**

- 4.4.5 The counterpart to key townscape frontages is key urban space. Generally such spaces are well contained by buildings or other enclosing elements, and make particularly distinctive parts of a town. At Tunbridge Wells, the special suburban character of much of the area creates more loosely defined spaces than in a more urbanised setting, and green space is of primary note. The appraisal drawings indicate those key urban spaces that are particularly special to Tunbridge Wells.

### **Key open space**

- 4.4.6 Open space is of very great significance in Tunbridge Wells. The open spaces of the town provide the basis of its green setting, in both formal and natural environments.

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

- 4.4.7 Greenery is fundamental to Tunbridge Wells's distinctive character, and is vital to the streetscape in all but the most central area: even here there are glimpses to gardens and parks through side streets and between buildings. The creation of green amenity space is a central design principle for the planned residential areas from the first example at Calverley Park. Subsequently the planting of front gardens and boundaries became predominant, as at Broadwater Down and Pembury Road, where the greenery is a distinctive and attractive aspect of the approaches to the town. In all locations, the back-drop of trees in back gardens, parks and woodland provides an important part of the setting of streets and individual buildings within the town. Each section describes in detail the green spaces and planting that contribute to its character.

### **Enclosure of space by hedges and trees**

- 4.4.8 The importance of greenery in the conservation area is such that, in many areas, space is defined by hedges and planting, and the buildings themselves provide a background element. This is particularly the case in Tunbridge Wells's loose-knit urban morphology. The appraisal drawings indicate where trees and hedges have this significance.

### **Views**

- 4.4.9 Each section identifies the key views in its area, and will be important to keep these lines of sight open to preserve the conservation area. By implication elements that frame or form the focus for views and vistas are also of great significance to the conservation area, even when they might be outside the conservation area boundary (in, for example, long distance views). It is a general characteristic, deriving from the hilly topography of Tunbridge Wells, that views and

panoramas over the town are very important. Any development proposal should consider carefully its impact in such views.

### **Traditional building materials and colours**

4.4.10 There is a general "palette" of materials used in Tunbridge Wells that is relevant across the whole conservation area. While avoiding repeating this in each section, if relevant it is noted where there are local variations or a particular prevalence of materials.

4.4.11 The common elements are:

### **Buildings:**

4.4.12 Vernacular (pre 19th century)

- Structure: 2-storey, pitched roofs, possible attic space. Timber framed or load-bearing brickwork.
- Wall surfaces: red brick, white painted weather boarding, plain clay tile-hanging, some sandstone blocks.
- Roofs: plain clay tiles, hipped and gabled.
- Doors and Windows: small, opening casement patterns, white painted timber with glazing bars.

4.4.13 NB: Some early buildings are re-faced in classical styles, using mathematical tiles to simulate brickwork and grooved timber boarding to simulate rusticated stonework.

4.4.14 Classical (late 18th – early 20th century)

- Structure: 2 and 3-storey masonry, with low-pitched roofs.
- Wall surfaces: sandstone, later rusticated and moulded stucco in Grecian and Italianate orders.
- Roofs: shallow pitched and hipped slate, lead-roll hips and ridges, with deeply overhanging eaves, supported by modillions. Alternatively, parapet roofs with concise details, shallow slate and lead pitched roofs behind.
- Doors and Windows: tall, carefully proportioned sash windows, large panes with central or margin glazing bars. Moulded panelled doors, in elaborate door-cases/ porches.

4.4.15 English Revival (late 19th – early 20th century)

- Structure: 2-storey brickwork with substantial attic storeys in steeply pitched roofs.
- Wall surfaces: red brick, sometimes with stone dressings to corners, openings, etc. Wide use of decorative timber, rendered panels with moulded motifs, and plain clay tile hangings. Some terracotta decoration, and brick "specials". Brick banding in blue and buff engineering bricks.
- Roofs: steep pitches in plain red and brown clay tiling, often with patterns of shaped and/or coloured tiles. Some slate, usually blue-grey, sometimes green. Widespread use of gables, dormers, turrets, often with decorative whiter painted timber barge and eaves boards.
- Doors and Windows: both sash and casement patterns, but always white painted timber. Leaded inserts in doors and casements, sometimes in elaborate stained glass. Tiled porches frequently with elaborate timber detailing.

### **Street surfaces:**

4.4.16 Tunbridge Well's street surfaces are amongst its most distinctive features, and are widespread throughout the conservation area. The main elements are:

- Red brick footways, laid stretcher-bond. The older surfaces include red and burnt bricks. The overall effect is brindled, but this cannot be simulated using modern brindled

bricks where the mix of colour is in each brick: the result is a plain texture rather than the variegation of the traditional surface. The brick quality is smooth, but very porous, which helps prevent slipperiness;

- Stone kerbs – usually in blue pennant or grey granite – in some cases without kerbs, using “dished” drainage channels formed in spalls;
  - Ragstone “spalls”: coarsely chipped limestone bedded in mortar. The traditional method is to lay the spalls broadest face up to achieve a relatively smooth surface, with the minimum area of mortar exposed. The spalls’ triangular shape allows some patterning to be introduced (e.g. Frog Lane);
  - Sandstone retaining walls constructed in large blocks.
- 4.4.17 The combination of red brick, yellow/brown stone and grey spalls provides Tunbridge Wells with a distinctive colour palette.

#### **Local details**

- 4.4.18 It happens that the English revival and Arts and Crafts styles that designers adopted in the late 19th century picked up on many local vernacular details. Tile hanging is a typical Wealden detail that is widely used for example. Most distinctive of all are the ragstone spall and red brick paving surfaces described above. Such local details are mentioned in the following sections where they occur.

### **4.5 Summary of elements that detract from the area’s special character**

- 4.5.1 Again, these are not exhaustive lists but they do identify the most obvious detractors:
- Areas of loss, where gaps have appeared in the urban fabric;
  - Damage, where the fabric has been poorly altered or maintained;
  - Intrusion, where new works have been introduced unsympathetically.