

13 NEVILL PARK AND HUNGERSHALL PARK

13.1 Context

Setting

13.1.1 Nevill Park is perfectly positioned along the ridgeline that runs from Rusthall to Mount Ephraim. It has a southerly aspect over the intervening valley between it and the ridgeline of Hungershall Park. Hungershall Park has aspects both northwards to Nevill Park, and southwards to countryside south of the town.

Historical background

13.1.2 Hungershall to the south was developed between 1854 and 1867 and the two sequences of houses face each other across a steep central valley. Constructed some 25 years after Nevill Park, Hungershall was built to complement the older sequence. An engraving from the 1860's shows this character very well, before the specimen trees in the private gardens had softened the impact of the new development. Number 1, Nevill Park is probably the earliest house in the development, however, it is likely that all eleven of the Nevill Park houses were constructed before 1867.



Houses and boundary treatments, Nevill Park

13.2 Special identity areas

Nevill Park and Hungershall Park

13.2.1 To the east of St. Paul's Church lies the northern entrance gates and lodge house to Nevill Park. The road into Nevill Park falls away down hill from the entrance gates and is bounded on either side by extensive mature landscaping. This includes a variety of ornamental and horticultural species, which form the boundaries to the gardens. Nevill Park itself has an informal character with gravel footways on either side separated by ragstone spall dished drainage channels.

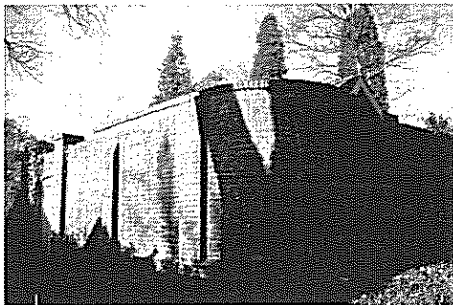


Nevill Park viewed from Hungershall Park

13.2.2 The clear contrast in character between Rusthall Common and Nevill and Hungershall Park is apparent at this point. The properties are set back from the

main access road with only glimpses of their front elevations from their driveway entrances. High walls and changes in level reinforce the containment of both private and street spaces, and the seclusion of the houses in their gardens. At this point, the conservation area boundary follows the line of Nevill Park road, excluding the modern infill development to the west of the road.

- 13.2.3 Numbers 1,2,3 and 6 Nevill Park are from the 1830's and were the first properties to be constructed in the area. These and the other properties fronting onto Nevill Park are grand villas set well back from the road. The villas are separated by stone retaining walls which are reinforced by mature boundary planting. The former rear gardens of the Nevill Park villas have subsequently been redeveloped with more recent residential developments.
- 13.2.4 Moving further along Nevill Park, the vista opens up to provide expansive and impressive views over the steep central valley to Hungershall Park and Broadwater Down beyond. A key part of this panorama is St. Mark's Church spire, which is a landmark on the distant skyline. Further east along Nevill Park there are impressive south-westerly views out to High Rocks and the Ashdown Forest beyond.
- 13.2.5 The central open space has a very rural character, which is reinforced by mature hedgerows and the two barns that sit at the bottom of the valley. These red brick structures pleasingly contrast against the verdant green of the valley and provide a foil to the formality of the other building sequences. This contrast in colour is reinforced by the two tones of red and black roof tiles. The continuity of open valley is broken up by mature tree groups, which at the same time interrupt and frame views of both parks. The central landscape is an important element that creates the balance between both developments.
- 13.2.6 Hungershall Park is an impressive sequence of Italianate villas, often with deep projecting eaves. Although there are different elements within the detailing of the elevations all are classically derived and form a harmonious group. No. 2 Hungershall Park is noteworthy for its unusual coloured ceramic tiles.



Hungershall Park boundary wall

- 13.2.7 The topography dictates that Hungershall is set below Nevill Park. Because of this, the views of the Nevill Park properties define the skyline and are set amongst the wide variety of tree species within the private gardens. Trees are therefore important to the setting of the buildings.
- 13.2.8 Hungershall Park turns south following the valley contours and at this point represents the western edge of the developed area of Tunbridge Wells. Hungershall Park connects with Cabbage Stalk Lane, which provides back access to the properties of Hungershall Park. The rear gardens are particularly long, sloping away from the properties on a south facing aspect. As it is not a through road for vehicles, Cabbage Stalk Lane has been wonderfully preserved from modernisation and is now an important walking and riding route lining to the Common. Its key attributes are the unmetalled surface of the lane, and mature overhanging hedgerows, and the rustic scale of coach-houses and stables along its margin. Collectively these elements contribute to a deep rural quality that belies its location close to such a large town as Tunbridge Wells.

- 13.2.9 The lane connects to the western part of the Common adjacent to The Cottage, an elaborately romantic little building, that exercises Gothick fantasy to its limits with a multiplicity of roof pitches, ornate projecting eaves and chimneys. Of particular note at this point is the boundary wall of No. 1 Hungershall Park that creates a clear boundary between the Common and Hungershall Park.

13.3 Summary of elements which contribute to the area's character

Key building groups

- 13.3.1 As in the other primarily green residential areas of Tunbridge Wells, building groups are the partners of landscape in defining the special character of the area. The mid 19th century villas at 1-11 Nevill Park and 1-11 Hungershall Park are very important sequences that define the northern and southern side of the development in conjunction with their boundary walls and dense garden planting. They are particularly important as a group in views across the valley, in which they sit prominently on the ridgeline.
- 13.3.2 Pool View House, Owen Cottage and Bracken Cottage form a separate important group of cottages marking the central part of the valley, and the two brick barns have similar effect in creating rustic informality.

Key spaces

- 13.3.3 The area is essential rural, and urban space is not a feature of it. Nevill Park and Hungershall Park were however conceived as wide thoroughfares for promenading by residents and visitors, from which the grand houses can be seen deep in their gardens. This setting gives a more formal, park-like air than the rustic surroundings.

Views

- 13.3.4 The topography of the area ensures generates a number of splendid views between different parts of the conservation area and from the conservation area out into the open countryside.
- 13.3.5 Views between Nevill Park and Hungershall Park –from one side of the valley to the other - are impressive 'set pieces', which emphasise the contrast between the informality of the rural valley and urban formality of the building sequences.
- 13.3.6 There are also long distance views from Nevill Park to Broadwater Down on the horizon, and further into the open countryside to the south west, and from Cabbage Stalk Lane over the valley south of the Conservation Area.

Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges

- 13.3.7 At a strategic level, the open countryside penetrates into the heart of the town centre through Nevill Park and Hungershall Park. The development was designed as 'rus in urbe' - the central valley creates a perfect juxtaposition between informal/rural character and the formal/urban character of the building sequences.
- 13.3.8 Within the valley, the mature hedgerows and trees are particularly important providing a structure to the space and following the watercourse. Mature boundary planting of the gardens of the Nevill Park and Hungershall Park properties – so typical of the 'green leathery walls' that characterise many of the suburban properties within the town centre.

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

Intrusion, loss and damage

- 13.4.1 Nevill Park and Hungershall Park are a relatively small area of the Tunbridge Wells conservation area. They are effectively detached from the rest of the conservation area between Tunbridge Wells Common and Rusthall Common, and have been well preserved from detracting influences. Clearly this sense of separation must be maintained in order to sustain the protected quality of the area. There is danger of "suburbanisation" as repairs and improvements to elements such as paving surfaces and boundary walls take place. It is vital that rustic character is not lost by the thoughtless use of standard modern machine made materials and building products.