

14 BROADWATER DOWN**14.1 Context****Setting**

- 14.1.1 Broadwater Down was first designated as a separate conservation area from Tunbridge Wells, which it adjoined at Frant Road, just south of the Pantiles. It forms an identity area more or less restricted to Broadwater Down and that northern stretch of Frant Road, some 1.5 km in length.
- 14.1.2 Broadwater Down is built on a sandstone ridge that runs south-westwards from the southern point of the town centre at Frant Road. This elevated aspect, with its views northwards across Nevill and Hungershall Park to the Common and Mount Ephraim, and southwards over the Sussex countryside, is what attracted its development in the 1860s. Prior to that, it was uncultivated heath.
- 14.1.3 The ridge is at about 130 metres above sea level, and links two radial routes out of Tunbridge Wells, the Frant Road in the east and the Eridge Road in the west. As Frant Road falls from the ridge towards the Pantiles it affords an excellent prospect of the historic centre of Tunbridge Wells, nestling in its distinctive setting against the rising ground of the Common.

Historical background

- 14.1.4 Broadwater Down was another of the planned residential areas of Tunbridge Wells, designed to cater to the wealthy middle classes seeking to live in this most fashionable of towns. It was part of the Abergavenny Estate, which William the 4th Earl decided to develop with the aid of developer George Mansfield. Mansfield's business was based in London and he was not a young man when commissioned to build Broadwater Down. His contemporary, Decimus Burton had been working in the town for over 30 years and had established the park estate "genre" at Calverley Park. Broadwater Down essentially continues that concept.
- 14.1.5 The plan as executed comprised 46 mansions in very extensive grounds. Originally more were intended, until the late decision by the Earl of Abergavenny, a cleric himself, to build St Marks Church and the adjacent parsonage, Montacute House.

Architectural and historic qualities

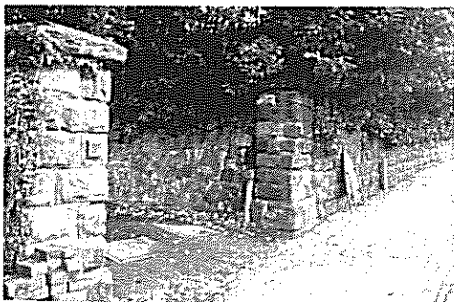
- 14.1.6 Broadwater Down itself still retains a distinctive and consistent character throughout. The key element is the heavy evergreen planting that blocks out the front boundaries of the original development plots, overhung with mature lime trees to create a full canopy across the width of the road in most places. The only built elements that are readily apparent on the street are the elaborate stone gate-piers and single storey gatehouses in picturesque and wistful classical styles. The small scale of the gatehouses is important – over-extension would damage the character of the street. The distant gables of the huge mansions set back in these extensive gardens may occasionally be apparent from the road, but generally the drives to them are arranged between sweeping curves of laurel, rhododendron and other lush planting to conceal any direct view of the main house.



Ragstone spalls and brick paving detail

14.1.7 The houses themselves are in a mixture of Gothic, Classical and Italianate styles. They are generally in a yellow gault brick, with dressings of stone, stucco and red brick, depending on the detail of the style. The quality of construction and complexity of detail of the mansions is very high, but any generalisation must be overridden by the individual touches of each house. Without diminishing their merit as fine buildings, their interest lies particularly in the style of the overall layout of Broadwater Down, and often in the status of the individuals who owned them.

14.1.8 A further point of interest is in the ground surfaces. As so often elsewhere in Tunbridge Wells, there are wonderful examples of remaining redbrick paving and ragstone spalls, which are used to separate the main carriageway from the footways: and there are areas destroyed by utilities and highway agencies, replaced with tarmac and concrete kerbs. It is evident that these materials were used throughout Broadwater Down and Frant Road originally. The street also possesses some interesting "highway artefacts" - a Victorian and an Edwardian post-box, and two classically decorated vent pipes for the drainage system.



Boundary walls and piers on Frant Road

14.2 Special identity areas

14.2.1 Broadwater Down itself now falls into two slightly differing areas: the area west of St. Marks is a little more intact in terms of its tree cover and green character than the east. Here the introduction of access roads to recent housing development areas has broken open the continuous hedgerows and tree cover to provide highway sight-lines and one or two modern houses on the street itself have taken the cue to remove garden boundaries and planting to create open-plan Californian style front yards.

14.2.2 Frant Road differs from Broadwater Down in its function as a main route into the town centre, which inevitably generates a different character.

Broadwater Down west

14.2.3 The junction of Broadwater Down and the Eridge Road is the south west entry point into Tunbridge Wells. It marks the boundary between Kent and Sussex, and

between town and country. Hargate Forest limits the southward expansion of development, and establishes a character of thickly wooded approaches to the town. As the ridge of Broadwater Down meets the Eridge Road views open out across the Grom River valley to Nevill Park and beyond to the top of the Common at Bishops Down. The 1950s suburb of Ramslye lies almost unnoticed in the valley.

- 14.2.4 Turning into Broadwater Down, the dominant feature remains the mature trees and planting flanking the road: the close boarded timber fencing that is used in addition to mark property boundaries is intrusive. The distinctive Tunbridge Wells red brick paving and ragstone spalls and kerbstones are preserved but, as ever, replacement and patching with tarmac by highways and utilities agencies is a problem. Hargate Forest extends right to the edge of Broadwater Down between Strawberry Hill and Hargate Close.



Typical villa, Broadwater Down

- 14.2.5 The south side of the Conservation Area runs along Broadwater Down, coinciding with the borough and county boundary. Modern cul-de-sacs at Strawberry Hill and Hargate Close south of the boundary, are reasonably well screened by the heavy planting that remains from the grounds of the mansions that formerly stood here. The same is true of the north side, where more original houses remain: their entrance gates and lodges punctuate the wall of evergreen.
- 14.2.6 The entrance to Kentish Gardens is an example of the problems created by modern development in this very special environment. The original house "Wyverstone", remains, and is divided into flats. New houses have been built on a site assembled out of the extensive gardens of no's 32-42 Broadwater Down, gaining access through Wyverstone's grounds. The junction design incorporates very broad radii to form sight-lines for vehicles, creating large expanses of tarmac and concrete kerbing. There is now a direct view to the front of the house, having lost significant amounts of garden planting, and with it the mystique of the original setting.
- 14.2.7 The new houses are well designed in themselves, and have gained wonderful views from the Broadwater Down ridge northwards over the town, but at the expense of a very exposed view to them from the town as a result of the loss of tree cover. The new street signs and paving are utilitarian, and the lodge has acquired a suburban image with its larch lap fence and exposed position on the new junction.

Broadwater Down east

- 14.2.8 At the junction to Strawberry Hill, Broadwater Down curves more strongly to reveal a view to St. Marks Church. St. Marks itself is in a relatively open site on the corner of St. Marks Road, which enhances its visibility. However, the junction has been further broken open by highway measures and the open plan lawns around the bungalow on its eastern side.



St. Mark's Church

- 14.2.9 East of the church, the character of planting changes to a more managed one. The dominating presence of large rambling evergreen shrubs is replaced by lower, clipped hedges, and the avenue of tall limes lends a greater formality. Ragstone spalls are still used as a narrow verge to the carriageway, but the red brick footways have been lost, and on the south side concrete kerbs have been introduced, with some ungainly details to accommodate drainage grilles. This relatively straight section of the street affords some excellent views, to St. Marks church and to the spire of St. Peters distantly in the east.
- 14.2.10 The north side of Broadwater Down continues with large-scale mansions, such as Montgomery's Second World War headquarters at no. 10. The south side has a different character, with narrower plots and more direct drive access that allows greater visibility of the houses themselves. These are still substantial properties, with sizeable coach houses and outbuildings behind; they do not have the front lodges and grand gate entrances of the north side. The main houses and their secondary buildings have generally been made into separate residences and flats.

Frant Road

- 14.2.11 Frant Road has a mixed character. There is an older village-like core at the junction of Birling Road (the B2169), of simple cottage scale directly fronting Birling Road itself, and curving into Frant Road. Above and below this are large houses on a similar scale to Broadwater Down, but lacking its quiet Arcadian seclusion.



Frant Road

- 14.2.12 The primary influence on this difference in character is the busyness of Frant Road as a main route into Tunbridge Wells. The traffic itself has a major impact, and many of the houses have changed use to office and institutional activities to take advantage of main road locations. In many instances these changes have led to the opening up of front areas and boundaries, with the loss of walls and mature garden planting.
- 14.2.13 The buildings themselves have suffered alterations, and in some instances are at risk of redevelopment as their original aesthetic appeal has been undermined. It is important that such buildings are restored to enhance the conservation area, and

that they are not replaced by poor modern substitutes. They include a similar range of styles to Broadwater Down – classical and English revival.

- 14.2.14 Nevertheless, the main ingredients of Frant Road's contribution to the Broadwater Down identity area remain, and it is vital that they are preserved and enhanced if this slow degeneration is to be halted. Of particular note are the high quality of red brick paving, stable pavioir crossovers, stone kerbs and the sandstone retaining walls of the northern section as it descends to the Pantiles. Here, and along the length of the road, are views to the Pantiles and the Common beyond. Mature trees still play an enormously important role in greening and enclosing the route.
- 14.2.15 This character extends into the quieter side roads such as Roedean Road where distinctive brick retaining walls and rhododendron planting rise above the street, and a significant pine marks its corner with Warwick Park.

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

Key building groups

- 14.3.1 The character of the Broadwater Down conservation area is determined primarily by its green setting, and built elements generally recede into the background. St. Mark's Church is the most prominent building: its spire is visible from many areas in Tunbridge Wells, and the building itself holds a pivotal position in the centre of Broadwater Down. The only truly continuous building frontage is at 1 to 30 Birling Road: a corner group that forms a "gateway" element to the southern approach to Tunbridge Wells.

Key spaces

- 14.3.2 Again, the Broadwater Down conservation area is not highly structured by urban spaces, and its character depends more on the landscape qualities of Broadwater Down and Frant Road. Three key "spaces" in the loosest sense are junctions at:
- Broadwater Down, Eridge Road:- a "gateway" location approaching Tunbridge Wells from the south, enclosed by dense planting in surrounding hedgerows and gardens, with a triangular island of glass, signposted at the junction itself.
 - Broadwater Down, Frant Road - an acute angled junction, again contained by planting and hedgerows on property boundaries.
 - Frant Road/Birling Road - defined also by the key building group of 1 to 30 Birling Road.

Views

- 14.3.3 Views are of great importance to the character of the Broadwater Down conservation area, particularly those progressive views that are revealed passing along the curving alignment of Broadwater Down. They include glimpsed views from Broadwater Down through gardens on the north side towards Rusthall, the Common and Mount Ephraim; broader views of the same, from existing and new properties on the north side of Broadwater Down; and views from east and west along Broadwater Down to St. Mark's Church.
- 14.3.4 At a wider scale, there are progressive views northwards along Frant Road to buildings on the eastern side of the Pantiles, and over them to the Common and Mount Ephraim. Long views east along Broadwater Down focus on St. Peter's spire on Bayhall Road. At the western end of the area, there are broad views from the junction at the Eridge Road northwards across Nevill Park and Hungershall Park towards the Common.

Traditional building materials and colours

- 14.3.5 The original mansion houses of Broadwater Down draw on three broad architectural styles: Classical, Gothic and English arts and crafts. While the first houses to be built near to Frant Road are stuccoed in the classical manner of William Willicombe, later buildings of all styles incorporate a large proportion of hard buff brick, complemented with dressings in stone and/or red brick. Roofs tend to be shallow-pitched slate in the classical designs; in others steeper roofs in red/brown plain tiles with prominent decorated gables are prevalent.
- 14.3.6 Windows and doors are invariably in timber, to both vertical sliding sash and side-hung casement patterns. Classically designed houses use only sliding sashes, while in others, particularly those of arts-and-crafts influenced designs, casements are often leaded. Window proportions are composed of elements that are taller than they are wide: where a wider glazed opening occurs it is divided by stone or timber millions, or two or three casements are grouped together in one opening. The horizontal emphasis given by modern "picture" window designs is avoided.



Broadwater Down

Local details

- 14.3.7 The most distinctive local details are the street surfaces of red brick footways, ragstone spalls, which were used extensively as shallow dished drainage channels to form the carriageway edge, and stone kerbs in Frant Road. They occur throughout Tunbridge Wells, and were originally used throughout the Broadwater Down conservation area, before damage and replacement in recent times. Spalls are used especially effectively in Broadwater Down in verges that separate the brick footway from the vehicle carriageway. Of special note are the dished drainage channels formed in spalls at the roadside, a detail which is retained in some places, but more often is replaced by standard highway kerbs. The carriageway itself was also originally laid in spalls to a fairly heavy camber.
- 14.3.8 Buildings have generally used the standard details of their era. The use of tile hanging is native to the Weald, and is adopted in the Old English arts-and-crafts designs.

Contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges

- 14.3.9 Greenery is the essential ingredient of the special character of Broadwater Down. Its impact is described in the identity areas above: it is primarily an overall effect, rather than relying on individual stands or specimens of trees. The following elements are of note:
- Generally: high laurel and other evergreen shrubbery flanking roads creating a "green wall" effect.
 - A stock of mature front and back garden trees, with space to allow the natural development of large species: e.g. cedar, pine, lime, birch, beech, cypress, horse chestnut.

- 14.3.10 Within this overall picture there are many specific planted elements, including, the lime avenue in Broadwater Down, tree groups on Frant Road at south entrance to the conservation area (pine and cedar), and at junction of Broadwater Down and Frant Road (yew, cedar and cypress complemented by front garden trees).
- 14.3.11 The vegetated railway cutting at the north end of Frant Road is a key feature, dominated by dense re-generating sycamore and birch.

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

Intrusion

- 14.3.12 In the commentary above, a number of niggling points are mentioned that detract from the area's special character. Heavy traffic, as everywhere, is a major issue, especially in Frant Road. Another significant issue is the intrusion of accesses into new housing cul-de-sacs, with excessive loss of enclosing greenery and over dominance of highway surfaces, and the cul-de-sac planning and open landscape of adjacent housing areas, which impinge on the conservation area.

Loss and damage

- 14.3.13 The loss of historic surfaces through repairs and maintenance by highways and utilities agencies is particularly evident in the Broadwater Down area. Frant Road is particularly susceptible, because of its busy frontage, and its buildings, too, have attracted changes of use with alterations and additions that have often degraded their architectural quality.