

## 6 THE COMMON AND MOUNT EPHRAIM

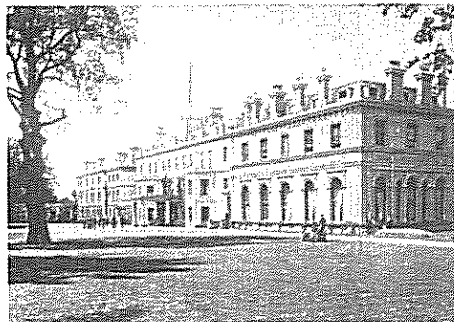
### 6.1 Context

#### Setting

- 6.1.1 On a town-wide scale, the relationship of such a broad area of countryside, i.e. the Common, to the dense and historic development of the town centre is one of the most significant contributions to Tunbridge Wells's unique identity. In a town where hills and change of level are the essence of its topography, the common represents the extremes, from its high point at Mount Ephraim of over 130 metres above to sea level to 70 metres or so at Eridge Road. This remarkable change of level generates very important vistas and broad views southward and eastward over the town and much of the conservation area.
- 6.1.2 The geomorphology described at 4.2 above gives rise to a number of sandstone outcrops on the Common, which are most evident at the Wellington Rocks. Below St. Helena Cottage a cave is formed in the sandstone, which was once open at street level.

#### Historical background

- 6.1.3 From the earliest stage of the Wells' development as a social attraction, the upper areas of the town fringing the Common were favoured for building. Elevation and separation from the hustle and bustle of the "lower levels" made Mount Ephraim a favoured spot for the erection first of lodging houses, and then of permanent and impressive houses. It is disputed that Charles II and Queen Katharine stayed at Mount Ephraim House when visiting the Wells in 1663, while their court was camped on the Common: but the story illustrates the significance of Mount Ephraim to the Wells in its earliest period of development. The Spa Hotel originated as a private house known as Bishops Down Grove, built in 1765 by Sir George Kelley, Sheriff of Kent, following his purchase of the Manor of Rusthall in 1758. It was enlarged and opened in 1878 as the Bishops Down Grove Spa and Hydropathic Sanatorium.



*Spa Hotel c.1880*

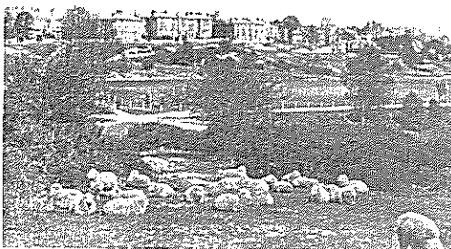
- 6.1.4 Development of various kinds continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and concern about the potential consequences of it carrying on unrestrained led to the Tunbridge Wells Act of 1739, which prohibited the erection of any buildings on the Common without the prior consent of the Lord and tenants of the Manor. The Rusthall Manor Act of 1863, enabled bylaws to be passed determining certain matters, although it was not very effective. The Tunbridge Wells Improvement Act, 1890, is now the most important document for regulating the management of the Common.
- 6.1.5 The Common was popularised during the early 1800's as a place of recreation and recuperation for local people as well as the wealthy. The racecourse on Tunbridge Wells Common is a feature that appeared on the earliest town map of

1738, and it remained in use until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with a major race event every August. Much of the course still remains intact, but the construction of roads and of the cricket ground has interrupted it at a number of places.



*Queen Anne Grove, Tunbridge Wells Common*

- 6.1.6 The Common has a long tradition of commemorative tree planting because of its open nature. The plantings were designed to become an important visual characteristic, providing subtle contrast, shade and focal points as well as framing of specific vistas. The tree planting tradition seems to have begun in 1740 with the planting of Queen Anne Grove: Queen Victoria Grove was planted in 1835. In fact, it has been only in recent times that the Common has become heavily wooded. This is as a result of the cessation of grazing on the Common with cattle and sheep during the 1940's. Prior to this, the Common was kept open and there were unrestricted views from Mount Ephraim to the town centre.



*Tunbridge Wells Common c.1890*

### **Architectural and historic qualities**

- 6.1.7 The Common is important in the Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area both historically, as a main component in the evolution and formation of the settlement, and visually as a setting for the important development frontages that border it, and as a background to views throughout the town. One of the most important physical aspects of the Common is the magnificent "edge" that is formed between town and open space along London Road. Buildings here and along Mount

Ephraim have excellent architectural qualities, including landmarks like Reliance House that is visible from many points across Tunbridge Wells, but the scale of the landscape and townscape makes the overriding impression.

- 6.1.8 At the north end, the Common funnels into to the village scale of Mount Ephraim north of London Road. Here, there is a strong urban form, although the impact of traffic as it is channelled from two main routes into the narrow street is a significant detractor. The southern edge of Eridge Road is lower key, but still expresses the same relationship of building line against the open space. The heavily wooded nature of the Common at this point, plus its steeply profiled slope above the houses facing onto Eridge Road, tends to dominate the buildings themselves.

### **Identity areas**

- 6.1.9 The common itself occupies the major part of the area. It separates the fringing areas from one another, and each has a quite distinctive character. On the north side, Bishops Down is green and leafy: the Common seems to permeate the grounds of the villas and mansions as lush garden planting, and woodland trees largely obscure them. Mount Ephraim provides a much firmer edge, but the absence of trees at the top of the Common adds enormous breadth and openness: large buildings such as Reliance House exploit this scale to good effect. Northern Mount Ephraim completes the change from rural to urban with some of the tightest spaces in the whole Conservation Area, and a unruly of mix of traffic, workshops and businesses.
- 6.1.10 The eastern side of the Common is a long and impressive stretch of development, which has considerable variation within it. Nevertheless it makes sense as a single identity area because of the continuity of the relationship between urban edge and open space. The back of The Pantiles (see chapter 5) continues this edge briefly, until London Road turns into Eridge Road, where the woodland of the rising Common dominates at the south-western approach into the town centre.

## **6.2 The Common**

- 6.2.1 The Common is criss-crossed by paths and roads that cut through the wooded areas. This creates strong, albeit random linear forms where blocks of woodland can be perceived almost like flanking walls. Bigger openings and clearings extend the pattern of green "blocks" and open space. In some respects the dense woodland could be felt as intimidating, and it does limit the accessible area of The Common, but it provides variation in character and habitat. It is notable that the most heavily used part of the Common is the area adjacent to the Cricket Ground and Wellington Rocks, which has been cleared of woodland and is very popular for recreation.
- 6.2.2 The features that make The Common a particularly distinctive area are the few individual properties sited within it and its famous rocks. Of particular note are the 'island' properties in the eastern part of the Common - Gibraltar Cottage, St. Helena Cottage and Belleville Cottage – where these elements literally come together, and the houses are constructed on rock outcrops. St. Helena cottage is situated over a cave, which can be accessed through a manhole at the foot of the rocks beside London Road. It was formerly open at street level and was used as an air raid shelter during the Second World War. Close to London road is the isolated dwelling known as Highbury. The exposure of the various buildings from all sides is an issue for the way they are sited in the Common, where fences, bins and other utility areas can be visually detrimental.

**6.3 Bishops Down**

- 6.3.1 To the north east of Nevill Park lies Major York's Road, Langton Road and Bishops Down Road meet. This is a heavily trafficked junction at a nodal point in the Common, adjacent to the imposing Spa Hotel on the northern side of Langton Road. This is an important location within the conservation area, at which the Spa Hotel is a focal building. It is set at an angle to the Langton Road creating a visual pinch point that marks the boundary between Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall: it also reflects a change in character as Langton Road passes from containment between walls to the openness of Bishops Down
- 6.3.2 The Bishops Down area lies to the north of the Langton Road, and is separated from the main road by a triangular portion of the Common. This part of the Common is now heavily wooded and provides a buffer to visual and noise intrusions from the Langton Road.
- 6.3.3 The distinctive features of the area are the extensive private houses, of which the Spa Hotel was originally one. Grange Cote is another notable example to east of the Spa Hotel - an 1880s building in the style of a lodge house. It has a veranda with turned balusters and elegant chimney stacks. Its stone boundary wall is an important feature that marks corner of Manor Park Road and Bishops Down Road, and which pre-dates the property itself. It was probably the original boundary wall of Bishops Down Grove.
- 6.3.4 The other properties along Bishops Down Road are set back from the road behind mature landscaping and substantial boundary walls. Manor House and Manor Lodge are noteworthy buildings. Further east, No. 1-19 is a recent infill development of apartments, which maintain an appropriate building line and blends into the context successfully.



*Mount Ephraim House's wall and adjacent green space*

- 6.3.5 The key spatial focus to Bishops Down is the area adjacent to the boundary wall of Mount Ephraim House. This is a wide, raised grass verge and footway, which sits above the level of the carriageway. Six benches are positioned adjacent to the wall creating a pleasant public open space facing onto the triangular section of the Common. The wall itself is a substantial structure constructed in local stone. The castellated structure at the southern end, though neglected, provides a local focus.
- 6.3.6 Mount Ephraim House itself is an impressive land mark building set on a prominent corner, effectively marking the end of the Mount Ephraim sequence of buildings. Little of the original structure survives, since the house was substantially rebuilt in the nineteenth century acquiring a new red brick façade with Dutch gables in the 1840's.
- 6.3.7 The smaller stuccoed chalet built in the grounds of the property is a charming building which complements the red brick façade of Mount Ephraim House.

## 6.4 Mount Ephraim

### Northern edge of the common

- 6.4.1 Mount Ephraim, forming the northern edge of the Common, affords perhaps the most spectacular views over the town centre and much of the conservation area. To the pedestrian walking from Bishops Down, the most immediate character of Mount Ephraim comes from the very high quality ground surfaces, in red brick and ragstone spalls, and the strength of the weighty boundary walls to properties, in sandstone and painted render. The buildings themselves, large though they are, are set well back behind these frontages, and their imposing scale is often more evident in longer views from the common. Of these, Reliance House stands out, with its important landscaped grounds and the Wellington Hotel, and Bredbury, no. 77, still retains an Italianate grandeur in mature garden grounds.
- 6.4.2 Punctuating the generous scale of Mount Ephraim and the grander buildings along it, a varied cottage group between nos. 78 and 83 provides eccentric charm, with canopies and wrought iron detail. From here, broad views over the town have a delightful focus in the middle-distance in the Mount Edgcumbe group of buildings – a mix of white weatherboard, tile hanging and gothic cottage styling. The spires of all Tunbridge Wells's main churches are evident in the panorama.
- 6.4.3 At the northern end of Mount Ephraim, the area shares the village character of the top of the Common (see 6.4.4 below), with a range of late eighteenth century cottages that have many traditional building elements, like the tile-hanging of nos. 52 and 53, and more architectural features such as the bow fronts and crenellated façade of no. 55, Temple House. The rock formations and their unique relationship with St. Helena and Gibraltar Cottages give an unusual sense of enclosure to the street, before it opens out to the magnificent southward views. Further south, towards Reliance House, the buildings make a steady transition from the intimate scale of the northern end, to the grander aspect of Wellington Place (nos. 63-65) and its neighbours over the full panorama of the Common. As elsewhere, boundary walls and landscaped drives are essential to the street level character of these groups.

### Northern Mount Ephraim



*London Road, Mount Ephraim*

- 6.4.4 The section of Mount Ephraim south of the Kent and Sussex hospital to the beginning of the Common is a valuable piece of townscape. Buildings either side of the road create a sudden narrowing, as Mount Ephraim and London Road join together northwards, and the flow of traffic through it gives a strong impression of its linearity. However, there is an important urban space here, defined by the set-back to The George, the narrow V of buildings filling the apex of Culverden Street and Mount Ephraim, and the trees and weather-boarded cottages opposite with their projecting ground floor shop fronts.

- 6.4.5 The three-storey return frontage of buildings onto the Common facing down London Road (nos. 20-26 Mount Ephraim Road) are an extremely significant group, and are a focus for wide views from the Common northwards, particularly to road users of Mount Ephraim and London Road. They provide a simple solidity to the whole block, that form a pinch point with the row of shops on the opposite side, terminating in the tile-hung façade of no. 40 Mount Ephraim. This is another important "gateway" in Tunbridge Wells, making the entrance onto the Common by contrasting its wide open spaces with the narrow street approach.

### **The north-east common**

- 6.4.6 The north-east area of the Common has the character of a village green. There is an enormous variety of buildings, mostly of two storeys, but some of three. Take, for example, the tight little corner of Mount Ephraim Road. There is the balconied early 19th century stucco house facing down the Common at No. 22, and its neighbour, a late 19th century brick corner building with three storeys of heavily detailed stone window surrounds and an elaborate cornice. Then at Thackerays (No. 85), the weather boarded face of the 17th century cottage has a rural character, contrasted with the ordered stucco facade of the Conservative Association, and its white painted neighbour at No. 83 (Torrington House) that stands forward just enough to frame the group.
- 6.4.7 Amid this variety, the key ingredient is the close positioning of buildings to one another and the public space that they address, so that the eye is led without interruption around the group. A large yew tree fills the gap on the corner of Mount Ephraim road, maintaining visual continuity. The composition boils down to two simple elements: the planes of the building faces set against the simple surface of the green. There are few elements to interrupt this simple relationship: low walls and railings mark the transition to private space, but this intermediate element is small, and private areas are clearly behind the frontages that we see. The boundaries actually help to unify the area and define the edge of the green space.

## **6.5 Eastern edge/London Road**

- 6.5.1 The eastern side of the Common forms a long and very clear edge to the built up areas that face it. London Road makes the steady rise in broad sweeps from the Pantiles up to its junction with Mount Ephraim at the top of the Common. The sheer scale of this interface is one of its primary attributes. It is over a kilometre in length, and the experience of driving or walking along it is very impressive: similar to a coastal corniche or a city river embankment. For many people passing Tunbridge Wells, this drive creates their main impression of the town.

### **London Road (north)**

- 6.5.2 From Mount Ephraim to the Vale Royal Hotel, the main road is separated from the buildings on the Common by a long mowed green. The road is broad - a good feature but spoiled by tall grey galvanised highway lamp-standards. The west side suffers less of the invasion of regenerating woodland than other parts of the Common, so that it, too, presents broad open swards. In past times the Common was grazed, and this open character was widespread: this north-eastern corner of it is one of the few parts that retains that earlier character, and this is important for the setting of the older buildings.
- 6.5.3 While the town edge to the Common is strong, it is not harsh. It is softened by garden trees and planting: the boundaries are well defined by mellowed walls and hedges. A footpath (which is a listed feature) runs the whole length from Mount Ephraim Road to the Vale Royal Hotel, detailed in old red brick and Ragstone spalls in the inimitable Tunbridge Wells fashion. A service lane maintains access to frontages up to York Road, separating the needs of houses and other premises from the busy through traffic of London Road itself.



*Summer Hill House, London Road*

### **Villa development**

- 6.5.4 South of Lime Hill Road, the pattern of large villas facing the Common in extensive grounds was established early, and was completed in the nineteenth-century contemporarily with the development of Clarence Road. Later nineteenth century redevelopment has replaced some of these early houses (e.g. at the corners of Lime Hill Road in 1887) but their garden character has been maintained. From Lime Hill Road to Church Road, large Victorian mansions observe a steady development line, set back 10 metres from the pavement. Maturity of the front boundaries and gardens is a vital part of the setting.
- 6.5.5 Below Church Road the building line moves forward, right to the edge of the brick paved footway. The relationship between the reds and burnt blue-browns of the paving, and similar colours in the tile hanging of Jordan House are particularly pleasing. The black of its Doric columns supporting the jettied upper floors in front of a recessed rendered white ground floor is evocative of the architecture of the Pantiles. This is a focal point of approaches to the town centre from the west, in which Jordan House is an important focal point.
- 6.5.6 Further south, Clarence Terrace comprises four mid-19th century houses, arranged with their gables facing the road to create a distinctive roofline. They were described in 1984 as sand stone; they are now painted blue, cream and green, at odds with the natural colours of the setting.
- 6.5.7 There are gaps in the building frontage, but they are met by strong features that maintain the overall line. For example, north of Clarence Terrace the grounds of the Homoeopathic Hospital (formerly the site of Jordan's manufactory) comes down to a dense yew hedge. South of the terrace a massive sandstone retaining wall originally bounded the grounds of Rose Hill. It has been poorly replaced in brick with a paling fence at the south end. Sadly Rose Hill made way for Rosehill Walk (see above), although the dense tree cover of its mature gardens provides the main visual frontage on the London Road. Again the footway here emphasises the informal linearity of the edge of the town, in this location laid each side with verges of Ragstone spalls.

### **South facing development**

- 6.5.8 The building frontage returns at Vale Towers (number 58), in spectacular style with a castellated sandstone mansion built as Romanoff House in the mid- nineteenth century. The Vale Royal Hotel maintains this line and echoes the change of direction on to London Road with a strong angle. Its gabled red brick form replaces earlier villas.
- 6.5.9 Richmond Terrace, a mid-nineteenth century stucco group, has been a hotel, and is now offices. This whole south facing line again provides a good "structural " edge to this part of the town centre, although modern additions such as Merevale House - a boxy brick block with an open undercroft for parking at ground floor level - are uninspiring. They illustrate the dangers of the landscape drives and front areas of the earlier development being replaced as tarmac car parking forecourts, by removing street level enclosure and visual interest.

- 6.5.10 The final building on this face to the Common is the 1896 red brick and terracotta Head Post Office. Its conversion to flats assures the conservation of an important elevation, and further development will close the gap created by its former yard. The view along London Road here is closed at right angles by buildings on the junction into Vale Road. The Methodist Church is partly obscured by trees on the Common, and the new office block on the corner of Vale Road has acquired prominence - its large rounded corner topped by a squat conical roof is very conspicuous but ungainly. The visual gap between the two is presently filled by the rear of a building on the high street, leaving the ground level of London Road itself unresolved. It is right on the axial line of view, and so is a very important site, but currently occupied only by a simple early 20th century two storey building housing a bookmakers, and the service access to high street shops.

### **London Road (south)**

- 6.5.11 South of the Vale Royal Hotel, London Road sweeps around the south eastern side of the Common, roughly following the line of the valley. Here a more wooded section of the Common on the west side contrasts with the sweep of grand buildings overlooking the Common from the east (although the bland 1960s Merevale House development and its car park are intrusive). Together they create a more contained street character than further north.
- 6.5.12 The section between Castle Street and King Charles the Martyr has a strongly metropolitan air, with generous pavements and grand frontages. The majority of buildings are four storeys or more in height: a prime example is Kentish Mansions, now an apartment building which was formerly the Kentish Royal Hotel where the stage coach to London would terminate. The grandeur of this six storey building is somewhat diminished at street level with the recent establishment of fast food and video rental uses and associated modern illuminated shop front signage.
- 6.5.13 The Kentish Royal Hotel was a reminder that, historically, the road was the old coaching route that linked London to this part of Kent and East Sussex. In modern times it retains this essential transport function, but the relatively high volumes of traffic and traffic related structures such as signage and illuminated bollards, detract from the historic character of the thoroughfare. The filling station and car sales showroom interrupt the continuity of the Common at this point. Although the modern roof is an intrusion into the historic character, its impact is mitigated by its dark green colour and the design as smaller separate canopies rather than a more typical single large rectangular structure.

## **6.6 Eridge Road**

### **Approach**

- 6.6.1 Eridge Road is the main south-western approach into Tunbridge Wells. As the road passes into the borough at Strawberry Hill it touches the edge of the conservation area at Broadwater Down (q.v.). Here it is a pleasant but busy tree and hedge-lined country road, characterised by long views over open fields towards the rising ground of the conservation area at Hungershall Park. Having passed through the modern suburbs of Ramslye and Snowsfields, it finally enters the Conservation Area beneath the Eridge Road railway bridge, and turns sharp right to skirt the bottom of The Common. This makes a very strong approach to the town, and the sheer mass of woodland rising steeply onto the Common gives Eridge Road great definition at this point, with Brighton Pond a focal element in the scene.



**Houses**

- 6.6.2 The houses on the south side, sandwiched between the road and the railway embankment, are not such a strong visual element as the woodland. Avenue trees in front and vegetation on the embankment behind are important to give some further balance to the setting scene here. The houses fall into two groups. West of Broadwater Lane, terraced groups of brick Victorian cottages stand well forward to the street, behind hedges and neat front gardens: the continuity of line and the simple, almost sparing arrangement and proportions of their elevations are their key characteristics, even though most have been renovated with inappropriate mock-Georgian multi-paned windows.
- 6.6.3 East of these, nos. 15 - 25 Eridge Road are classically designed pairs of stuccoed villas set further back behind front gardens. Their front boundaries are a valuable part of the street scene with cast stone balusters and rails and neat trimmed evergreen hedges: there are, however, significant gaps. The avenue trees are of particular importance in front of this group. The houses themselves are detailed modestly, with plaster quoins, string moulding and consoles, and sash windows with margin panes. Most preserve all these original details, which makes them a valuable group.

**Nevill Terrace**

- 6.6.4 Nevill Terrace provides a characterful and historic grouping of buildings that comprise the elegant stuccoed curve of Nevill Terrace itself, the leafy setting of Montacute Gardens, and the focal building of the old West Station. While these individual elements are strong, the area has been spoiled by highway engineering works forming the roundabouts on Eridge Road and Nevill Terrace for access to a Sainsbury's store in Linden Park Road. The petrol filling station and builder's yard behind Nevill Terrace are also detractors, creating a large gap in the townscape as well as being unattractive in themselves.
- 6.6.5 Nevill Terrace is a three storey classically designed group that appears almost to have been transplanted from other parts of Tunbridge Wells, now that highway engineering has removed so much of its immediate context. It is most visible, unfortunately, from the back on approaching the town centre from Eridge Road, across the space now occupied by the petrol station and the builder's yard. The curved front, which is well preserved, relates more closely to the old West Station, and would have been an important part of the prospect northwards from the former station entrance.
- 6.6.6 The station building itself is now a pub-restaurant. This use has at least preserved the general appearance of the building, in particular the landmark tower and lantern. Its detailing is in multi-coloured brick and artificial stone, in a style influenced by Venetian Gothic, and it is more or less intact. The external areas have, however, lost any grandeur that might have been expected of the arrival at a Victorian station, and advertising banners for the pub are a significant visual intrusion.
- 6.6.7 Montacute Gardens is a shallow crescent of four pairs of four-storey town houses (including their basements), fronting onto an extensive and mature shared garden on the north side. They are built in brick but with stuccoed bays, window surrounds and other details, which dominate the front elevation. They have long individual back gardens that run down to Linden Park Road, and are filled with mature trees that create a complete buffer between the houses and the new supermarket. Although virtually hidden by its planting, Montacute Gardens occupies an important location close to The Pantiles on the western approach. Part of the garden at the front has been taken for car parking behind Union House, which exposes the unattractive rear of that development in the main prospect towards The Pantiles – the gardens would have screened this view significantly.

## 6.7 Summary of elements which contribute to the area's character

### Key building groups

- 6.7.1 Buildings relate to the Common in two main ways: (a) as isolated and often focal elements within the Common, and (b) as lines of development around its edge that clearly demarcate its boundary with the built-up areas of the town. It is within the second group that the main townscape frontages occur.
- 6.7.2 A key townscape group exists at the north-west corner of the Common, of which the Spa Hotel is the most notable individual building. This group includes less imposing, two-storey cottages and some significant stone boundary walls, and collectively it creates an important "gateway" into the Common.

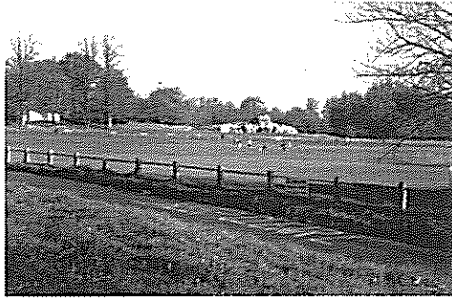


*Grange Cote, Bishops Down*

- 6.7.3 The northern edge of the common is defined by Mount Ephraim and the buildings that front onto it. While Reliance House is a widely visible landmark, a varied range of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely stuccoed, detached and linked buildings runs from Bishops Down to London Road: front boundary walls are an important part of the continuity of this townscape frontage.
- 6.7.4 Mount Ephraim from its junction with London Road to St. John's Road presents a tight, urban townscape. Its quality at the south end of this section is good, with traditional two storey forms in a range of local materials, but it falls away towards the hospital entrance and the motor dealer's workshops.
- 6.7.5 Linked to Mount Ephraim, the northern part of London Road is a key townscape frontage, facing westwards over the greens of the northern Common. The scale is village-like, with linked and individual houses of cottage scale dating back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Further south, the firm town edge is created by more widely spaced, larger buildings, and linking boundary walls are again of very great importance in maintaining continuity.
- 6.7.6 At the south side of the Common, the town edge is formed by the reverse face of The Pantiles. Here the frontage offers a townscape of variable, tight forms, but west of Union House, passing into Ridge Road, buildings form less distinctive groups. This is partly to do with the intrusions of more recent developments, and partly with the more suburban character of housing on Eridge Road.

### Key spaces

- 6.7.7 The open space of The Common is so dominant that there are few opportunities in its immediate area for distinctive urban space. However, in the north of Mount Ephraim and London Road, where the urban form is relatively strong, there are some more significant small spaces. These include the greens of the northern common (see 6.7.5 above), and the space in front of The George at the widening of the street with the junction of Culverden Street,
- 6.7.8 South of the Common, some sense of place remains in front of the old West Station in its relationship to Nevill Terrace, but widened traffic access has severely compromised its quality as an urban space.



*The Cricket Ground and Wellington Rocks, Tunbridge Wells Common*



*The Race Course, Tunbridge Wells Common*

### **Views**

- 6.7.9 Inter-visibility is a key part of townscape quality. The topography of The Common and Mount Ephraim ensures that there are many impressive views between different parts of the conservation area and from the conservation area out into the open countryside. The spires of churches in the town, - St. Peter's, St. James', St. Mark's - and outside (e.g. St. John's to the north and the church at Speldhurst) are particularly important in these long views.
- 6.7.10 Such elevated views place great importance on the roofscape of the town centre, but there are unfortunately examples of modern buildings that have intruded into the roofscape with their excessive height and bulk. The impact of development (including alterations) that matches or exceeds its surroundings in height should be carefully assessed in any proposals.
- 6.7.11 At ground level, the impressiveness of London Road as a broad sweep through the town should not be understated. Views from moving vehicles up onto the Common and along the frontages of the town side are a valuable and distinctive impression of Tunbridge Wells.

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

- 6.7.12 The self-evident main attribute of the Common is its vegetation. Within it, the rocks are uniquely distinctive focal features. The contrast of dense woodland and cleared walks, rides and recreation areas is characteristic, although historically the extent of open areas was greater. The greenery of the Common is important to the wider area of Tunbridge Wells, as a backdrop to many of the built up areas, either in glimpsed vistas between buildings or in filling the horizon in distant views. On the grandest scale, i.e. the structure of the whole town, it provides balance between developed and undeveloped areas, and brings an unequivocal boundary between town and countryside right to the town centre: this, too, makes the Common a unique feature of Tunbridge Wells.
- 6.7.13 Within the Common itself, there are some designed elements of the landscape that give essential character. These include the planted avenues of Queen Anne Grove and Queen Victoria Grove, and the substantial remaining part of the racecourse.

- 6.7.14 While the edge of the town is such a contrast, its character is itself green and well planted: boundary treatments are typically low walls with hedges and railings. At London Road and Mount Ephraim Road, mowed greenswards give the character of a village green. Further down London Road, mature garden planting, boundary walls and overhanging greenery, give strong definition to the Common edge.
- 6.7.15 The exception to this prevailing greenery is in Mount Ephraim north of London Road. Even here, plane trees in front of weather boarded buildings are a key ingredient of street character.

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

**Intrusion**

- 6.8.1 As elsewhere in Tunbridge Wells, modern traffic intrudes both because of its volume, and because of the visual effects of widened roads and other highway engineering structures. In the Common area, the problem is highlighted by the compromise to safe pedestrian access across London Road to the town centre, which severely limits the interaction of these two key areas. It is also evident in the appearance of parked cars in Major York's Road and elsewhere on the Common.
- 6.8.2 Highway engineering has spoiled the setting of King Charles the Martyr, and the old West Station and Nevill Terrace through the proliferation of barriers, traffic signage and the extensive road layout.

**Loss and damage**

- 6.8.3 Gaps have been broken in the townscape immediate surrounding the Common in a number of places. Notable locations are on Mount Ephraim at the Hospital site and Stormont Fords' forecourt and works (see also 9.2 below), and at the rear of Nevill Terrace, now occupied by a builder's yard and a petrol filling station.