ASHFORD
BOROUGH
LOCAL PLAN

Conservation Area Assessment

Wye

Conservation Areas are defined as "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."

Designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve all aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest.

There are 43 Conservation Areas in Ashford Borough.

WYE CONSERVATION AREA ASSESSMENT

AREA APPRAISAL [Brief, objective description of Conservation Area - scale, location, other special characteristics]

The Wye Conservation Area is essentially linear in form and stretches from the station across the river bridge along Bridge Street up to the central area at the junction between Bridge Street and Church Street where it widens out empassing the college by the church on High Street, Upper Bridge Street and a short spur section along Scotton Street.

Apart from the area around the river bridge and station end the area is primarily urban in character with a mixture of residential and commercial properties.

There are no significant pockets of open space and apart from the area around the church and along the river bank included in the area associated with the Mill and the Tickled Trout public house there are no major treed areas, except along some boundaries of groups of buildings at various road junctions.

The college campus is one focal point of the area along with the Station and bridge at the main entrance place to the village from the west across the railway line and the river running virtually parallel to it but separated from it by open meadow land.

There are two other entrances to the area namely from Hastingleigh and Brook from the east and Hinxhill from the south.

The overall character is one reflecting the historical evolution that has taken place over many centuries with an abundance of heritage buildings of varying sizes and forms.

The area is relatively tightly drawn around the readily identifiable special historic and architectural buildings distributed mainly on both sides of the four main streets; Bridge Street, Church Street, High Street and Upper Bridge Street.

There are a number of locations throughout the area from which views to the countryside beyond can be made. This characteristic provides for an attractive setting context. Views into the village from beyond the area are also in abundance and this provides for a relatively easy recognition of the area as one of quality from a number of vantage points approaching the village to its three main entrance places.

ASPECT UNDER CONSIDERATION	COMMENT
topography/physical structure and its relationship to the sites topography	The area is relatively flat in a valley overlooked from the north-east by distant hills. The surrounding countryside gently slopes in towards the area which from the east slopes similarly gently down to the river which runs on a general north/south alignment alongside the western boundary of the village. All around the village lies open farmland much of which is associated with the Wye Agricultural College. The topographical character of the area and its setting in the countryside provides an attractive form to the area especially at the entry points to it where the open areas penetrate pleasing into the historic urban environment that primarily characterises the area.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
archaeological significance and potential of the area	Archaeologically the area is steeped in history; the track of the Pilgrims Way transverses the area from south-west to north-east across the western end and there are two areas of archaeological interest, the largest centred on Church Street and virtually encircling this the largest part of the whole area and a smaller circle of interest located to the west of the river bridge and Mill area. The Pilgrims track links these two areas together. There is archaeological potential for further archaeological findings given this historical structure to the settlement form and the linkage it has to Canterbury since it is understood that Wye was one of three small self-contained medieval towns linked to Canterbury by the Pilgrims Way. The historic analysis of the area shows that along Bridge Street up Church Street and along the High Street to Scotton Street on a virtual 'Z' alignment (the longest stretch from Church Street to the river bridge). There are individual buildings and groups of buildings linked together with some open pockets originally connected to the countryside beyond. The dating of some of these buildings goes back in time to the 13th Century but in the main most of these buildings and groups arrived in the 16th and 17th Centuries. The Church of St Gregory and St Martin and the Wye College close by to the east of it were initially developed in the 13th and 14th Centuries respectively. These two major buildings and groups of buildings combined with some along the High Street and at the northern end of Church Street form the focus of above ground archaeological interest. Finally the undercroft opposite the entrance to Church Street from Bridge Street is a scheduled ancient monument.
the character and hierarchy of spaces, and townscape quality.	Virtually all the buildings within the existing designated Conservation Area are Listed; many with the added status of group value. There are, in addition a number of buildings interspersed amongst these buildings and groups of local historic and architectural interest. The combination of these buildings make up the special heritage character of Wye. The relatively evolved tight fit between all these buildings and building groups creates in effect an angled linear space comprising sub-spaces where the building form changes direction along the 'Z' form of the three main streets.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
	There are however some open spaces more related to isolated buildings and building groups at the entry points to the village. These spaces along with the more tightly formed urban spaces make up the primary hierarchy of spaces throughout the area. Nevertheless there are a number of courtyard type areas sporadically distributed throughout the whole area that open up to and linked with the larger spaces. This overall hierarchical spacial framework gives Wye its essential small scale townscape quality. One such open space area is to the west of the church itself surrounded by a well treed but basically large open churchyard. This space forms part of one of the modern housing estates that have been developed around the historic core. These housing areas are in the main located towards the south-east and south east of Wye. Very few of these contain spaces of special character with the exception of the public open space alongside the churchyard which forms a natural visual extension of that historic place. Their potential to be included into the hierarchy of spaces within the Conservation Area and therefore to form part of an extension of it is very limited apart from the public space area. In addition the architectural character of these surrounding housing areas (with perhaps the possible exception of the Churchfield Way, Abbots Walk and The Forstal housing area which is not only planned in an attractive geometrically arranged way but also comprises architectural forms befitting the style of the time of development and of some aesthetic interest) does not make then eligible to be included into the designated area. There are other large spaces around the edge of the Conservation Area that help to visually and functionally frame it these are, the playground and recreation spaces to the south-west of the bridge area behind the Mill and the cricket ground located off the south-east corner of the area around Oxenturn House. Both these spaces are not readily seen from within the Conservation Area but they do form part of the inward viewing of it from the countryside beyond.
the use of distinctive and traditional building materials	Apart from the medieval bridge over the river, the church and part of the original Wye College building all of which are constructed either fully or partially with stone, the primary material is brick, with some imitation brick (mathematical tiling) rendered surfaces, clay roof tiling and a few exposed timber frames. Slate is used on some roofs but the overriding roof material is clay tile and in the main handmade weathered Wealden Kent Peg tiles. Some buildings are tile hung to the upper storey or storeys. Generally the unifying materials character is a mixture of brown red clay roof tiling.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
	This roof finish coupled with the varied roof line and skyline silhouette along the primary streets is an essential Conservation Area characteristic.
the contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, or other organic elements to the character of the area	The area in the vicinity of the station and the river bridge and particularly the approach to this area from the main access road on the west side beyond the railway and river sets the green space context of the main 'gateway' entrance space leading into the Conservation Area. This area is reasonably well treed and from it pleasing views are possible into the village. Similar greenery and green space character derives from the area to the north-east of the Tickled Trout group of buildings close to the bridge. This area links up with the river bank that flows behind the Tickled Trout building itself bordered by landscaped space on its north and east side. Clearly the river, the river banks and associated meadowland alongside the western boundary of the Conservation Area is an important natural characteristic of it but there are other more man made green spaces, planted and treed areas around the historic building envelope and within the area (mostly in gardens where some building lines are set back from the narrow road spaces of Bridge Street and High Street) Church Street widens out considerably from its junction with Bridge Street leading up to the church and churchyard and terminates with the impressive bold dominant building form and historic architectural character of the church. This street lacks greenery however this character is to a large degree softened by the heavily treed frontage of the churchyard combined with the low churchyard brick boundary wall. Walls (mainly of brick construction but some in ragstone) and some railings, in addition to hedges and a few traditional fences are further details that add up to the overall attractive appearance of the area. Some of these small walled areas combined with trees and planting such as The Green to the south-east of the churchyard act as mini green lungs and provide an ideal setting for the rows of buildings they often relate to. At the rear of many properties in the historic core area the gardens are quite long and spacious. Most of these have matured landscaping and this arrangement aggregates to provide for a green transition between the historic core built form and the more modern rear built up areas around it.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
the prevailing or former uses of buildings in the area, and the influence of this on plan form and building types	The prevailing use of the buildings that have evolved over many centuries but particularly in the 19th Century is residential. In the High Street and primarily along both sides of Church Street some commercial uses have been introduced often by simply changing the ground floor plan and external street elevation to indicate its function to shoppers and other users. In the main large religious and institutional buildings have retained their original function and appearances.
	The cranked linear form of the area has evolved by properties being constructed hard up against the street edge separated from the actual roadway in the main by narrow footpaths. This has created a relatively hard overall appearance to the whole area softened only at roof line level by the great variety of building types, styles and forms and also different roof profiles. It is at the rear that this hard built-up appearance changes through the retention of the lengthy and spacious gardens. Because the growth of Wye has taken place from its humble small scale early 13th Century origins to its current much larger 20th Century form, there is a wide range of building types covering a period of six centuries that make up the area particularly within in the historic sections. Of the nearly 100 Listed Buildings within the area 50% are of 18th Century style and building type. Of the 5 remaining types of a total of six general types of building typifying their centuries of origin the dominant group is from the 19th Century with 19 Listed Buildings in this category. This extensive range of styles often with later details provides for an overall rich architectural character.
historical evolution	The evolutionary development as typified by the great variety of building types is along the main streets and started with the church and close by 13th - 15th Century houses including a small manor house and the adjacent Wye College building complex which includes the original building which is not only Listed Grade I, but a scheduled ancient monument. This monument includes the remains of the medieval College of St Gregory and St Martin at Wye, founded in 1447. The college survives in the form of standing buildings and buried remains. The standing buildings are Listed Grades I, II and II*, and all are excluded from the scheduling. The buried remains survive beneath the college buildings and in areas of open space within the monument.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
	The medieval college building is in the form of a cloister quadrangle where pupils and masters lived and studied and lies to the east of the churchyard. Outbuildings are known to have stood to the east and north of the quadrangle, although these are no longer visible at ground level. The grammar school was held in the small building to the south of the main college. The main entrance to the college was to the east of the Latin School, guarded by a porter's lodge. The Old Latin School and the porter's lodge have survived almost intact as part of the modern Wye Agricultural College. From the historical standpoint the college is an important part of Wye heritage for example in February 1432, Cardinal John Kempe applied for, and obtained from Henry VI, licence to found a college for secular priests at Wye. The foundation of the college was delayed until 1447, with the college being given the same dedication as the parish church - to St Gregory and St Martin.
	After the Dissolution, the college was surrendered to the Crown Commissioners. This took place on 19 January 1545. By 1627 the estate became vested in the Crown once again, until Charles I granted the college and its possessions to Robert Maxwell Esq. In later years between 1893 and 1928 a series of college quadrangles were developed and more recently there have been further building additions. Over the years and especially in the 18th and 19th Centuries there have been a number of changes to the overall structural form of the historic core primarily of an infilling nature between the earlier period individual and groups of buildings all mostly of two-storey form. This has created a virtually continuous built form throughout the whole area, mainly on Bridge Street have some gaps remained providing glimpses of rear areas with some buildings set back from the roadway. In addition to the main 'gateway' entrance from the north-west across the arched medieval bridge (now with a modern wider superstructure the original horse cart and pedestrian way into the area). There are a number of public rights of way entering into the area, two from the north and north-east respectively past the church, the college and through the churchyard and one from the south past the school on Bridge Street. These pathways connect up to other walkways in the area mostly privately owned but nevertheless collectively forming a framework of open and enclosed alleys all contributing to the evolved character of the area.
the relationship of the built environment to landscape or open countryside	The area touches the surrounding countryside in relatively few places but where it does the interaction between rural and urban form is an important characteristic of the area especially at the bridge end of Bridge Street.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
	The other area is around the church and college campus buildings where the open landscape beyond the church links up with the 'Green' within the Churchfield Way housing area through the connecting churchyard space. Further along Churchfield Way at the bend in the road leading round to the gateway group of historic buildings comprising the Tickled Trout, the Wye Mill, Granary and Barn building and finally 5 and 7 Bridge Street, views can be readily appreciated on a wide angle looking through the wide bend in the road to the river and meadow, hills and open countryside. Similary it is possible to see into the existing Conservation Area from the north-west across the south-west to north-east alignment of the railway, part of this extension area is an area of particular interest which gives it added importance.
	A further but more obviously open area touching the existing Conservation Area is the area either side of the approach road towards the station from the south-west. When assessing the area already designated and its cessation at the station on that land around the adjoining platforms and the medieval bridge nearby, the wider area beyond the station to the north west in the vicinity of the Listed Building, Honeysuckle Cottage, and along the main approach road up to where it bends round on a northern alignment was looked at. It was found that across the railway line encompassing the meadow and open space farm land on either side of the line into the main western end of the existing Conservation Area there are quite dramatic views of firstly the station, then the medieval bridge entering the gateway group of buildings on the eastern landing area and beyond with distant views of the church. Traversing this area from the first bend in the road approaching the proposed area from south-west is the course of the original and historically important Pilgrims Way, leading more or less on a direct line to St Gregory and St Martins Church. This trackway passes across the southernmost area of the encircled area of archaeological interest embracing the Churchfield Way Water Meadow and land between it and the north-west end off Bridge Street. This area therefore plays an important part in the setting of Wye and particularly the Conservation Area that connects to it via the bridge and station.
the extent of loss, intrusion, or damage sustained by an area	In general the Conservation Area has not been badly affected by modern building intrusions but it has been impacted by the growth of traffic with the resulting congestion on the roads and demands for parking space.

AREA APPRAISAL	COMMENT
	Over the years there has been a loss of traditional streetscape surfaces with little remaining of the original diamond patterned black stable type paving to the footpaths or earlier brick cobbles and stone features at entrance ways to the rear yards of some larger building groups. Some modern buildings have occurred in more loosely developed areas such as along Upper Bridge Street which are not overly attractive architecturally. Such buildings in the main only fit into the street scene less intrusively than would be the case if they had followed the evolved historical precedent of being located on a back of pavement building line because they are set well back from the road and have reasonably matured landscaped front gardens and boundary walls to soften the impact.
identification of features that detract from the special character of the area and that may provide sites where change could be encouraged	The preponderance of overhead wires, modern pastiche window styles, inappropriate use of modern materials, and lack of proper building maintenance on both Listed and Unlisted Buildings, floorscape surfaces, signage, railings (security and safety), advertisement boards, street lighting in places, all add up to create a degree of visual untidiness in some areas. Some car parking areas need re-organising with landscaping to soften them, some sites where original uses have gone need developing (i.e Stonegate Egg Depot/Taylors Garage on Bridge Street, oil depot site, Bramble Lane, Olantigh Road/Occupation Road/Wye College area etc. These sites are amongst a number identified in the approved Rural Ashford Local Plan for development).
the existence of any neutral areas - those that neither enhance nor detract from the character of the conservation area	There are one or two car parking areas especially the one used by Wye College, behind James Wylie House accessed to High Street and Upper Bridge Street which are currently neutral areas. Plans are being prepared for the development of this site for housing in accordance with the approved Local Plan site development criteria. However with the introduction of new buildings, service roads and support facilities into this space, its essential neutral character will change. There are few other areas of similar character in the area given its already built up form.
the existence of any threats to the area	The overdevelopment of available sites if agreed policies and guidance briefs are not adhered to. Traffic generation and excessive parking on the streets is a further threat to the area's character. Overhead wires, TV aerials and dishes, tall structures such as fire station towers, security fencing and safety railings all need sensitive design treatment.

OUTCOMES

Area boundary	I recommend the following areas to extend the existing designated area:- 1. Harville Road/Bramble Lane/River Meadow/Station area. 2. Churchfield Way/River Meadow area. 3. Churchfield Way/The Forstal, Abbots Walk Field area. 1. Harville Road/Bramble Lane: This area is proposed to be included because it adds the Meadow Land to the existing bridge area between the eastern side of the railway line and the Mill Race and the area behind the Wye Mill Area picking up a small stretch of the trackway. This area is visually attractive, of landscape value and historical interest affording views across it into Wye itself and a valuable contextual area emphasising the gateway into Wye across the bridge. The proposed area borders the properties to the north-west of Bramble Lane which in the main are reasonably architecturally attractive. Amongst these properties some are of historical value; Honeysuckle Cottage in particular which forms the northern stopping point to the proposed extension. The other properties and their gardens were not considered of adequate historical importance collectively in their linear form to be included in the new area although many of the front gardens with their mature vegetation are considered to be of sufficiently visual importance to at least have their front boundaries touch the proposed new area. 2. Churchfield Way/River Meadow: This area has a natural beauty of its own and across it views in to and out of the land immediately adjacent to it towards the south can be enjoyed emphasising the visually exposed historic value of the historic core. This area is also a natural extension of the River and Meadow land close to the Tickled Trout Public House river bank garden area.

	3. Churchfield Way/The Forstal, Abbots Walk: This area is attractive in its own right and forms a logical extension of the churchyard located directly to the south. The boundary crosses Churchfield Way and includes the small area close to the substation and public toilet block. The area is well landscaped and contains many matured trees especially along The Forstal. It acts as an open space complimentary buffer zone between the Churchfield Housing area around it on its northern, western and eastern sides and the historic core of Wye. It also acts as a visually connecting link to the countryside areas to the south-east behind the church and Wye College campus area.
Potential Article 4 Directions	There are no obviously identifiable large areas of building where Listing controls do not apply which if altered by use of inappropriate materials or details (windows, doors, roof finishes, canopies, porches, dormers and bays) would seriously impact against the existing evolved pleasing character of the overall area. However there are some individual groups of buildings along Bridge Street and Upper Bridge Street which could benefit from Article 4 Direction control to avoid for example badly designed inappropriately detailed plastic windows replacing traditional vertical sliding box sash windows. Two groups identified for consideration of such additional controls are the rows of Unlisted houses opposite the Swans House block (134 - 140 Bridge Street) and the groups of buildings alongside Oxenturn House.
Site Policies (proposals and protection)	Historic Wye in its setting with access to railway connections to Ashford and Canterbury and its nationally known Wye Agricultural College is an important small town in its region It has a commercial centre with a variety of shops, large food stores and a bank along with offices and art and craft outlets and leisure facilities and provides readily accessible services to surrounding villages and hamlets (Brook for example).

The Case for Conservation

Conservation is a dynamic process as well as a preservation one. Given the natural beauty and charm of the area and its setting the emphasis will inevitably be on protecting the evolved heritage by preservation controls. However there are pressures for change which must take into account the evolved human scale created over many years. Thus the existing scale and homogeneity of the historic streets that form the structural framework of the area need to be carefully considered when infill changes are proposed where gaps occur or buildings need to be replaced. In addition special care is required to prevent incompetent alterations taking place or the introduction of suburban type shopfronts and fittings, poor lettering and incongruous fascia boards. Illuminated signs and prevention of suburban gimmicks such as reproduction wrought iron decoration, crazy paving, coach lamps and log-slice name-plates and the butchery of trees should be the subject of special control policies.

The Case for Development

The fabric of the area (buildings and infrastructure) is decaying in parts and the cost of upkeep is becoming an increasing burdensome problem for owners.

In addition the layout of the area is now unsuited to increasing motor car use and there is a lack of car parking and where parking exists it is often in the wrong place.

While it is clear that arguments for development against preservation are likely to cause friction, property developers are recognising that in areas of Special Historic Value a greater respect for the need to project heritage is required.

There is therefore a need for policies concerning existing buildings and townscape to cater for these pressures.

Heritage controls should fall under two broad headings; first concerning individual buildings and groups of buildings and second the distinctive environment created by the relationship between these buildings and groups.

	It is recommended therefore that policies should be adopted concerning (a) conservation (b) adaptation (c) renewal of all buildings and (d) land use in the central area, and (e) general policies.
	(a) Conservation All buildings should be periodically inspected to check the aesthetic, historical and structural condition. Advice on the care of old buildings should be given in the form of a pamphlet in which the importance and value of buildings and their care could be explained to owners including advice on the use of traditional building materials (i.e clay tiles, mathematical tiles, pavings etc). Traditional materials similar to the original should be used for all repairs to walls, roof and paving, e.g handmade clay tiles of similar colour to those existing, and not concrete tiles or other substitute materials. (b) Adaptation No further conversion of residential buildings into shops nor any change in external appearance should be made to any building nor should any existing shop window be increased in size except in exceptional circumstances. Encouragement should be given to the reversion to residential use of premises that have been converted into shops beyond the centre i.e the removal of shopfronts and the reinstatement of windows and doors as formerly. All adaptations should be screened by the competent adviser to prevent phoney reproduction of past styles and details. (c) Renewal Where it is necessary to replace an existing building or buildings the new building(s) should conform to the 'envelope' of the original building i.e heights of walls to eaves or parapets and height to roof ridge etc and the frontage width should be maintained. New buildings should maintain the old building line wherever possible.

Where renewal is undertaken and this could be a comprehensive development replacing derelict buildings or sites cleared of earlier buildings, its effect on place or group silhouette, scale and townscape should be established to the satisfaction of the Ashford Borough Council.

New buildings can be of contemporary design. This does not preclude the use of materials and proportions that are in character with the town.

(d) Land Use

Land indicated as being suitable for development or redevelopment should be developed in accordance with Council proposals in order to avoid damaging the form of the area, over development or a too radical departure from the existing structure form and character of the area.

There are certain vistas, views, effects and relationships which can be regarded as unique and germane to the continued existence of the area's identity and which should be preserved.

(e) General Policies Setting

(i) context

In view of the inter-relation of often so many different parts to an area that make up its character it is obviously less easy to define a control code for overall area conservation than it is for the conservation of separate buildings. However, it should not be difficult to assess the general impact of any new development on the existing scene so that a proper new relationship is achieved.

(ii) spaces

It should therefore be possible to protect the spaces and places and special characteristics of the area even though some of the component parts, the buildings may have to be altered. Thus a square would remain an enclosure even if one were to rebuild one side in a different manner to the original.

(iii) streetscape

There is a need for a co-ordinated streetscape policy to comprehensively link together floorscape treatments, car parking improvements, new landscaping areas and a rationalised signal, street lighting, traffic control system and street furniture provision.

	(iv) action area, design and development briefs A further policy provision is required to establish a development brief for the area around the Wye Bridge and Mill area. In addition a heritage policy covering historic details, materials and finishes to Listed and Unlisted buildings should be established in accordance with Government guidelines for the Historic Environment.
Potential improvement schemes	A number of potential improvement areas emerge from the assessment exercise:- 1. The station, Wye Bridge, Wye Mill, River Bank and associated Meadowland area (streetscape, landscape and floorscape). 2. Bridge Street (buildings repair and improvement, streetscape and floorscape surfaces and car parking). 3. Church Street (buildings repair and improvement, streetscape and floorscape surfaces and car parking). 4. Scotton Street and Olantigh Road junction (buildings repair and improvement, streetscape and floorscape surfaces, landscaping and car parking). Through all these areas strategically positioned tree planting and ground cover is required but positions of public services would have to be taken into account in any such improvement action. Security and/or Safety railings should be considered for renewal or new ones provided where the pavements are narrow but they should be of an acceptable design. Railings to boundary walls which originally incorporated them should be assessed for reinstatement. Places where the public gather should be encouraged particularly in areas ideally suited for bus stops or in association with important buildings (the church). The location and good design of such sites and of the shelters and associated street furniture will be important. The entrances to the area could be greatly enhanced by the introduction of suitable tree planting and appropriately sited areas of ground cover, together with the provision of public seating.

	The existing clutter of street signs, lighting and street furniture needs improvement and given the historic background of the town such street facilities could be co-ordinated into a historic theme using a coat of arms or symbol to link the facilities together into a homogeneous way.
	The streetscape needs much attention and a greater use of traditional materials. Safety kerbs and blind crossing surfaces should blend into rather than clash with attractively weathered evolved surfaces.

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