

Leatherhead Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan:

Executive Summary

April 2010





Figure 1 Weatherboarded cottage, Middle Road

Purpose of document

The Leatherhead Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan are seen as the first steps in a dynamic process to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Leatherhead Conservation Area and to provide a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future management.

The appraisal and management plan aim to:

- Identify those elements of the market town of Leatherhead which contribute to its character
- Identify elements which detract from the character
- Propose measures to maintain or improve the positive character, local distinctiveness and sense of place of Leatherhead

What area is covered by the conservation area boundary? (see map)

Leatherhead is one of 26 designated conservation areas in the Mole Valley District. It was designated as a conservation area in March 1974, with extensions in April 1995 and January 1998. It covers what can be considered as the historic core, defined by the High Street, Church Street, Bridge Street and parts of North Street and the largely Victorian and Edwardian suburbs of Fairfield and around Church Road. To the south is the prominent church of St Mary and St Nicholas set within its large churchyard at the top of Dorking Road. To the west, the River Mole forms a strongly defined tree lined boundary.

The significance of the Leatherhead Conservation Area (a brief summary)

The Leatherhead Conservation Area is a broad designation taking in a small town centre and its associated Victorian and Edwardian suburbs. It is diverse in its character and appearance and has pockets of very intimate and small scale townscape, such as Gravel Hill, Middle Road and Church Walk, adjacent to much larger development and building footprint. The high quality of the entire conservation area can be attributed to the effective management and control of listed buildings (of which there are a large number in the town), and the protection given to key groups of unlisted buildings through the use of Article 4 Directions (formerly known as Article 4(2) Directions).

Article 4 Directions is the name given to additional planning controls which enable the Council to influence or prevent work being undertaken on windows, doors, roofs, the painting of a house or the removal of a boundary wall. The intention is to protect what is considered important about the character of Leatherhead in relation to these elements. Mole Valley District Council already has a number of areas covered by Article 4 Directions within the Leatherhead Conservation Area. The Council has produced a guidance leaflet Article 4 Directions Leatherhead (July 2004). The Council is considering further areas for additional controls as part of potential extensions to the boundary of the conservation area.

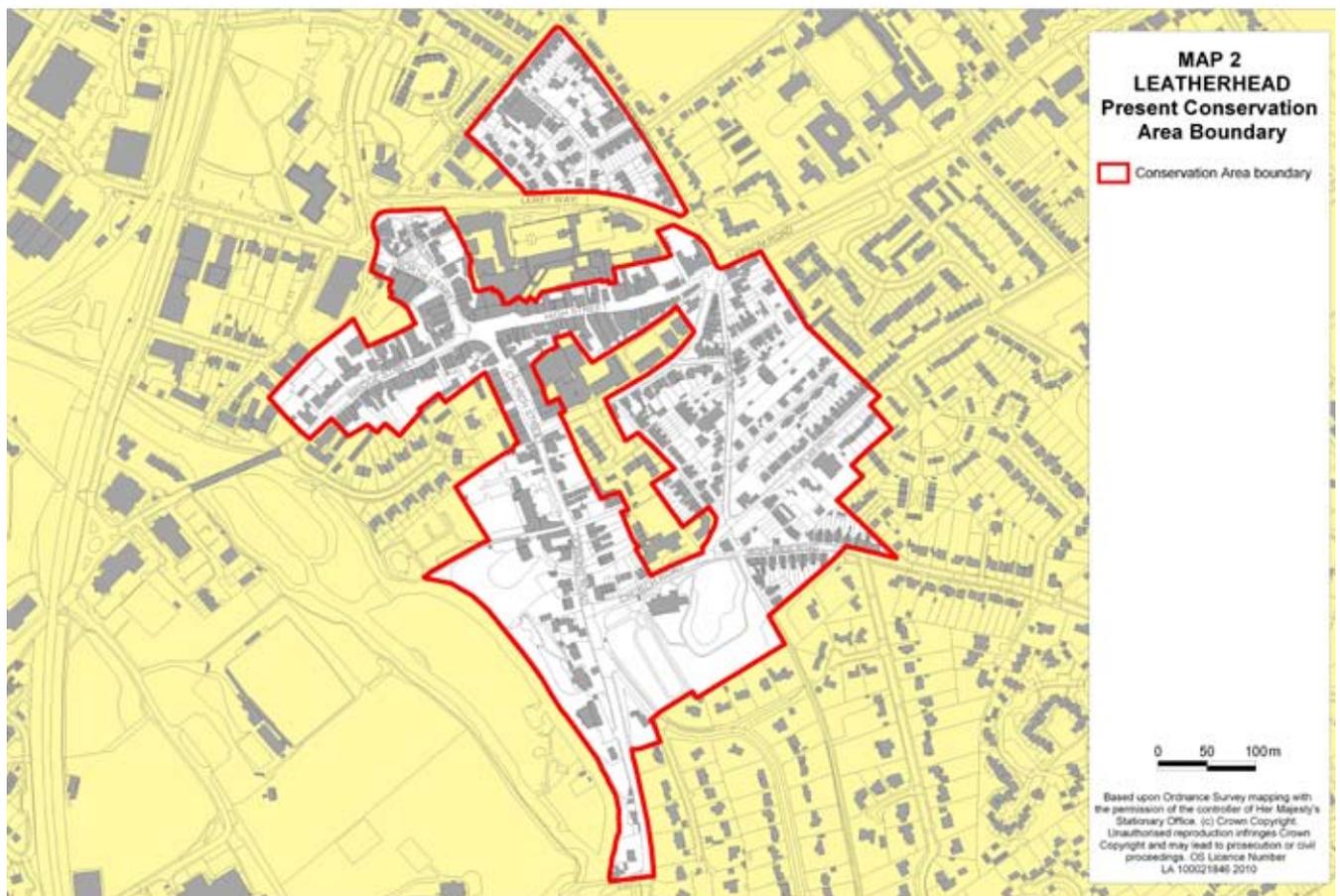


Figure 2 Leatherhead Conservation Area boundary March 2010



Figure 3 Houses to Church Walk, part of the present Article 4 areas within the Conservation Area'

KEY HISTORIC INFLUENCES

The key historic influences and characteristics of Leatherhead are:

- Its strategic position in the Mole Gap with a ford across the River Mole.
- Anglo-Saxon minster and administrative centre.
- The development of the four separate Saxon estates including Pachenesham and Thorncroft.
- Twelfth century Church of St Mary & St Nicholas, probably built by the Lords of Thorncroft and assuming the attributes of the abandoned Anglo-Saxon minster, later becoming the parish church.
- The creation of a new market centre at the crossroads of High Street, Bridge Street, Church Street and North Street, possibly in the thirteenth century.
- Victorian suburbs associated with local brick and tile industries and the railways.
- Twentieth century light industry and commerce and 1980s town centre redevelopment.

The established townscape of the historic core is varied in scale, materials and quality of buildings, with some outstanding buildings and some poor modern redevelopments. Into the suburbs the quality of development, retention of historic buildings, use and quality of traditional materials and scale becomes more consistent and well-defined.

To the west, the river forms an important physical barrier although it falls outside the Conservation Area and does not contribute directly to the setting of the town centre streets. The trees and vegetation to its banks are, however, important elements in the wider context and appreciation of the town.

The town's commercial core is mostly pedestrianised which has led to a pattern of use which in part defines the character of the town; that of a shared space which can be flexibly used (not always without conflict) by pedestrians, car users and commercial traders alike.

Trees and greenspaces form a notable part of the townscape including gateways; defining routes to the town from the south (climbing Dorking Road into the town) and west (the bridge and Bridge Street route). In places, buildings become secondary to their landscape setting and are often framed by trees or have a treed backdrop

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

To assist with the preparation of the Appraisal and Management Plan, all residents and businesses within the town, together with local councillors and key organisations, were invited to contribute. This consultation took place at an early stage (September/October 2009) and was later followed by opportunities to comment on a first draft of the document either by attending the public exhibition (in the Letherhead Institute – Jan 2010), viewing the on-line blog, by email or by letter.

Who is the Appraisal and Management Plan for?

The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is for owners and occupiers of buildings within the conservation area, developers, agents and architects undertaking or considering undertaking work to buildings or areas within the Conservation Area.

The Appraisal will also be used by the local authority when making decisions on planning applications within the Conservation Area. The Appraisal is intended to provide a framework for development and will help inform applicants of the character of the area within which they are planning to undertake works. This can be on a very small scale, such as maintenance to or removal of a tree, through to extensions to private houses, right up to major development within the town centre commercial core or elsewhere within the Conservation Area.

How is the Appraisal and Management Plan to be used?

It requires great sensitivity when proposing change in such a highly valued historic environment as the Leatherhead Conservation Area. Owners, developers, agents and commercial occupiers as well as the local authority will be able to use the Conservation Area Appraisal as a starting point for maintaining the balance between healthy, vibrant and functional shopping, commercial and residential areas and the highly valued historic and architectural qualities of this established, familiar and cherished local townscape.

Understanding the character of a place and positively responding to that character is a key part of national planning policy provided in Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development and English Heritage Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance. Using the Conservation Area Appraisal to inform a development proposal will significantly enhance the quality of planning applications and should ensure a successful scheme.

Mole Valley District Council, in their commitment to maintaining and enhancing the key qualities of the Conservation Area, will use the Appraisal and Management Plan in making decisions about future change in the area so that the special character of the conservation area may be preserved and enhanced for future generations.



Figure 4 Gravel Hill

How is the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan structured?

The document follows English Heritage's 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and its companion 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both published February 2006.

The appraisal is split into character sub areas in order to provide a clearer and more user friendly understanding of the defining elements making up the character of a particular part of the Conservation Area. This means that anyone proposing to undertake changes to a building or site can focus on a particular section of the Appraisal for detailed advice on the character of that part of the Conservation Area. However, it should be noted that whilst five sub-areas have been identified, it is also important to appreciate the cohesion of the whole Conservation Area. Sections dealing with materials, open spaces and trees deal with the Conservation Area as a whole.



Figure 5 The riverside from Mansion Gardens looking south

The status of the Management Plan and how it will be used by the Council

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') places a duty on the local authority to from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas within the District. This is reinforced by government guidance set out in *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment and its Practice Guide*.

The Management Plan, which should be read with the Appraisal, outlines the process of ongoing assessment of the Conservation Area and presents proposals to achieve the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area's special character.

The main headings are:

- Boundary revisions.
- Proposed enhancements (including traffic and public realm issues).
- Article 4 Directions.

There are also suggestions for general and specific enhancement projects. The reduction in street clutter and improvement of the quality of the public realm are general objectives but there are also specific projects such as guidance on the improvement of Church Street and High Street public realm.

It should be stressed that the Management Plan proposals are subject to the availability of resources to implement them and to further statutory and non-statutory consultation. Mole Valley District Council will seek to implement the Management Plan in a number of ways:

- Planning applications for the redevelopment of sites or buildings may provide opportunities to enhance the public realm.
- The allocation of existing staff resources and revenue funds can be used to undertake boundary revisions for example.

How and where can additional copies can be obtained?

Copies of the Leatherhead Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and executive summary can be obtained from Mole Valley District Council. The address is at the end of this document. The documents can also be found on Mole Valley's website at www.molevalley.gov.uk.

Contacts for further information:

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Mole Valley District Council web site: www.molevalley.gov.uk

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