

MAIDSTONE ROAD CHATHAM CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL (Adopted October 2004)

PURPOSE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Maidstone Road Chatham is an attractive suburban area made up of a group of large late Victorian and Edwardian houses of a very high quality. Most of these are well preserved in their original condition and the attractive setting of these properties, many of which are set in large mature gardens, gives the area a pleasant leafy character. The Council believes that this area is of architectural value and that its distinctive character should be preserved and has therefore afforded conservation area status for the area.

History

Maidstone Road is a relatively new part of Chatham and, until the late 19th century, the area consisted of a pair of open fields divided by the main road connecting Chatham and Maidstone. Before the late 19th century the only building in the area was Dankhill farm, a large property situated on the junction of Maidstone and Southill Roads. This was demolished before 1896.

Between 1874 and 1909 the area was developed as a smart residential suburb, in which form it largely remains today. The development pattern varied. At the south end of the area properties were individually designed to meet an owner's requirements or, in the case of semi-detached properties, for a pair of owners. Houses at the north end, which tend to be in matching pairs of small groups of identical houses, and are less ornate are likely to have been built by speculative developers. The standards of design and craftsmanship were high, with local architect R. C. Bond, who was responsible for Chatham Town Hall and the Chatham Theatre Royal designing several of the larger properties including numbers 63, 69-71, 79 and 124. Bond also designed a large villa for the site between 71 and 79. However, this was never built and the land was not developed until the 1930s.



Speculative development,
94-100 Maidstone Road



71 Maidstone Road, designed by G E Bond
for Mr Cook in 1902

By 1909 most of both sides of the road were lined with houses, the remaining gaps being filled with small-scale developments in the 1930s and 1970s. In recent years the residential character of the area has changed with many of

the larger houses being converted into flats, offices or retirement homes. Number 79 has been put to a particularly varied set of uses, being converted into a convent before finding its current use as a secondary school.

Topography and townscape

Maidstone Road runs along a ridge of land that rises gradually from near sea level in the centre of Chatham and is bordered each side by steep valleys. This to a great extent defines the form of the area with the principal views being up the hill away from the town centre. The ground falls steeply to the east of Maidstone Road.

The general pattern of the townscape is of large detached or semi-detached houses generously spaced and set well back from the road in what were originally large front gardens. Variety is a strong characteristic of the area as most of the houses are individually designed. Overall there is a feeling of space and, due to the large number of trees and bushes, the area has a pleasant, 'leafy' feel to it.

Materials

The dominant building material is a soft, smooth faced red brick. Brickwork tends to be of a very high quality characterised by fine joints between individual bricks. Upper floors and gables are occasionally rendered, often with applied false half-timbering. Stone and terracotta are used for decorative work such as door and window surrounds. Roofs are mainly of tile, though slate is used at the north end of the area.



False half timbering, 108-110 Maidstone Road



Decorative Brickwork, 43 Maidstone Road

Architecture

All the older properties are built in a flamboyant Edwardian style. Typical design features include complex rooflines with gables, cupolas and turrets, asymmetric facades, large bay windows and tall chimneys with decorative caps. Open porches under gabled roofs are also common.



65 Maidstone Road



29 Maidstone Road

Much of the charm of the area is due to the unusually high quality of detailing on the older properties. Doors are panelled. Many upper panels are glazed and feature stained glass. Single pane fanlights are also common. Doors are frequently set in elaborate surrounds of stone or alternating bands of stone and gauged brickwork with Gothic or Tudor style arches. The more elaborate houses have porches with decorative patterns of turned balusters. Windows are a mixture of sliding sashes and casements, with many of the casements featuring stained glass in the upper lights. Window surrounds are a mix of stone, alternate bands of stone and brick or stone lintels and sills. Bays often feature moulded or dentilated stringcourses at sill or lintel level. Eaves details vary from a simple box cornice, sometimes supported by decorative brackets through moulded timber cornices to elaborate timber dentil cornices. Gables tend to terminate either in bargeboards or a parapet capped with stone and enriched with dentil decoration at the apex. Other decorative features include bands of stonework, moulded brick stringcourses, decorative terracotta finials capping gables and turrets and moulded terracotta panels. The houses to the north of the area are generally simpler, with concrete window surrounds with moulded capitals typical of many houses in Rochester and Chatham.

The most interesting building in the area is number 79, now part of the St John Fisher Roman Catholic School. This was once a substantial private house built in 1901 for a Mr C Bessant by G E Bond. It is dominated by a stone oriel window rising the entire height of the building and capped with a dome and features a grand front door under a first floor gallery set in surrounds of alternating bands of brick and stone. Also of note is 128 Maidstone Road, which features a corner turret decorated with terracotta panels, a varied gabled façade and a decorative timber dentil eaves cornice. The architect is not known, but Ordnance Survey maps show it was built between 1896 and 1909.



79 Maidstone Road



128 Maidstone Road

The later buildings in the area include a set of 1930s semi-detached houses at 53 to 59 and a terrace of post World War Two houses at 114 a-d. Though these are not of architectural merit they are set well back from the road and are modestly scaled. They therefore do not detract from the character of the area.



1930s Housing



Streetscape

The most distinctive feature of the street scene are the large front gardens in front of properties. The best of these feature extensive planting with large hedges and mature trees behind low brick walls. These walls are generally of red brick with a stone capping and terminate in solid square brick piers. Occasionally yellow brick is used. The wall in front of 114 a-d is the most elaborate, with recessed panels bounded by dogtooth decoration. Originally many of these walls would have featured low cast iron railings. None of these survive and the modern replacement railings fitted are generally of poor quality. Closeboarded fencing and mature hedges have replaced railings in many instances. These features generally enhance the appearance of properties and contribute to the 'leafy' character of the area.



1930s Housing, showing unusual timber fencing



Traditional garden wall

Drives have always been a feature of houses in the area. Early maps show many of the large houses featuring a double entrance and a semicircular drive or carriage ring. Historically these drives tended to be restricted to the width of a carriage and surfaced with gravel rather than large areas of paving.

The road and pavement itself is unremarkable, apart from a scattering of mature street trees. Pavement and road surfaces are of tarmac and curbs of concrete. Lamps and signage conform to standard patterns and there is no street furniture of note.

Problems and Pressures

While Maidstone Road is in many ways an attractive area, some properties have suffered from poor quality minor alterations that detract from the appearance of the area as a whole.

The biggest threat to the character of the area is the loss of front gardens to provide parking. This involves the loss of the mature trees, hedges and garden walls that make such a large contribution to the character of the area and leaves large areas of unattractive paving in front of properties.



Effect of loss of front gardens, original windows, large signs and painted walls

Further problems affecting the area are:

- The loss of original features such as porches, windows and doors
- The covering of attractive brick façades in render and paint
- The replacement of clay tiles and natural slates with concrete tiles and artificial slates

- The replacement of the original cast iron gutters and down pipes in uPVC
- Poor quality, badly proportioned modern railings on boundary walls
- Satellite dishes on front elevations of properties
- Large signs advertising commercial premises

There is also some commercial pressure to completely redevelop sites as flats, involving the demolition of serviceable and attractive buildings.

The effect of Conservation Area Status

As Maidstone Road is within a conservation area, the Council has a duty to preserve the existing historic character of the area and to enhance the appearance of the area. Ensuring that the area is properly preserved is mainly done through the planning system, proposals to alter and extend buildings would be expected to be in sympathy with the original structure and it would not normally be acceptable to demolish buildings that contribute the attractiveness of the area. The Council also has to ensure that the parts of the area that they are responsible for, namely the streets and pavements, are looked after as sensitively as possible. This means that street furniture such as bollards and pedestrian railings, road signs and surfacing materials would have to be sensitively designed to fit in with the character of the area.

There are also legal implications to conservation area status. All the properties within the area are subject to Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) act 1990. The effect of this is fully explained in the council's leaflet: *Conservation areas in Medway – a guide to the law and our policy*. The most important effect of conservation area status is that conservation area consent would be needed to demolish, or demolish a substantial part of, any building within the area.

As much of the character of the area depends on the detailed appearance of the buildings in it, the Council has introduced an extra control, known as an Article 4(2) Direction, that means planning permission is needed to carry out minor alterations to the front of houses. This means that planning permission is needed to carry out the following works to the FRONT OF THE PROPERTY ONLY:

- Replace windows and doors in a different style or material
- Recover roofs in a different material
- Fit satellite dishes
- Paint or render external walls that are a present unpainted
- Fit dormers or roof lights
- Replace guttering and fascias in a different design or material
- Build, alter or remove a porch
- Build, alter or remove a chimney
- Lay a path or drive
- Build, demolish or alter a boundary wall
- Any other alteration or extension to the front of the building

Flats and commercial properties already need planning permission to carry out these works, as they have no permitted development rights.

Planning Policies

The following policies guide planners and applicants when making and assessing planning applications.

1. There will be a presumption against the demolition of buildings that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.
2. The Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects the character and layout of the area including the historical form of the townscape and street scene and respect existing properties in terms of bulk scale and siting. Materials and design details should be of a high quality.
3. Proposals for alterations and extension should respect the distinctive architecture style and character of the existing building in terms of bulk, height, position, size and detailed design.
4. Alterations that result on the loss of chimneys, or have a detrimental effect on roofscapes, including the construction of mansard roofs and insertion of rooflights onto front facing roofs will normally be resisted.
5. Where the building is of architectural merit the Council will require the retention of original design features, such as railings, guttering, windows and doors, and where necessary will require the use of replica features in traditional materials in replacement of these works. Aluminium and uPVC replacement units will not normally be considered acceptable.
6. In new works and replacement work, the Council will require that all materials, in particular brick and tile type and associated detailing match the original building.
7. The painting or rendering of unpainted surfaces on historic structures will not normally be acceptable.
8. The positioning of satellite dishes in prominent positions will be not normally be acceptable.
9. Significant trees will be further protected by the creation of additional Tree Preservation Orders where appropriate.
10. It is expected that originally boundary walls will be retained. Any proposals for new railings will be expected to be of a high quality and in keeping with the historic character of the property.
11. There will be a presumption against the extension of existing driveways and the laying of new drives. The retention of well-planted front gardens and mature bushes is encouraged, as is the reinstatement of front gardens that have been converted into car parking.

12. The Council will endeavour to enhance the appearance of the area by the use of appropriate street furniture and surfacing materials.

Appendix

Properties in the Proposed Conservation Area

Maidstone Road – west side:



90-114 evens, 114a-d, 116-132 evens.

Maidstone Road – east side:

29-39 odds, 43-71 odds, 71a, 73, 79 (St John Fisher Catholic School)



MAIDSTONE ROAD CHATHAM: PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA

	Conservation Area Boundary		1874-1896		1909-1939
	"Good" Building		1896-1909		Post 1939



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Scale: 1:1750

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