



ROYSTON

CONSERVATION AREA (WITH MAP)

27 MARCH 2007

[Part 1 of 3]

Royston Conservation Area was designated on 6th October 1969 and first reviewed on 11th June 1974. This document forms part of a second review for Royston and should be read in conjunction with the supporting detailed townscape analysis and register of Buildings of Local Interest. This document assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area. Areas where improvement or redevelopment opportunities exist are also identified.

SETTING

Royston lies some 200 feet above sea level in a shallow bowl in the East Anglian Heights chalk escarpment, which is a continuation of the Chilterns. The surrounding area has remained agricultural and heathland with broad belts of beech trees. The Heath is an essential part of Royston's landscape setting and should be protected.

The setting of the conservation area to the north, east and south is dominated by modern housing with the railway line being a notable feature when approaching from the north.



THE HEATH

CHARACTER

Royston has a high quality townscape owing significantly to the concentration of many fine historic buildings. The character of the area is principally defined as urban with a good mix of commercial and residential properties. Having said that, there is contrast:

- Firstly, between the spacious, verdant, quieter areas of The Priory Memorial Gardens on the east side of the town and The Warren to the south, with the narrower streets contained by the built form found elsewhere in the conservation area, and
- Secondly, between the types of buildings and pedestrian use of Upper and Lower King Street when compared with the main commercial streets of the town centre. This contrast is primarily a consequence of the fact that the commercial properties in the High Street and Kneesworth Street generate higher pedestrian movements and the buildings turn their backs onto Upper and Lower King Street. The latter, gives Upper and Lower King Street a one-sided (west side) residential character.



UPPER KING STREET

Unlike a number of historic towns, Royston appears to be well served by public car parks. Smaller car parks are located at Fish Hill and Market Place whilst larger car parks are located on the east (King James Way), west (Princes Mews) and south (The Warren) sides of the town centre. Another car park exists to the north at the railway station. Whilst the High Street is the main commercial hub of the town centre, the location of car parking ensures that there is regular pedestrian movement throughout the town centre which adds to the vibrant character of the area.

Beyond the main thoroughfares there are a number of properties within 'backland' locations creating a more intimate,

quieter character such as that found at The Fleet, Gaillard's Lane, Hunter's Mews and Norman's Lane. These are pleasing and somewhat unexpected areas just off the main town centre.

Historically the streets had mixed uses with houses, shops, inns and maltings. A number of traditional shop fronts exist in the High Street, southern end of Kneesworth Street, and parts of Baldock Street and Melbourn Street closest to The Cross. A more mixed character exists at Fish Hill and Market Hill with public buildings, shops and outbuildings fronting the street. The market (held on Wednesdays and Saturdays) reflects the traditional way in which this area of the town has been used, hence the name, and complements the commercial activity and reinforces the social focus of the town when trading. In contrast, London Road, Barkway Road and the west side of Upper and Lower King Street are predominantly residential.



MARKET DAY

Rear courtyards are an important part of the character and appearance of the historic town. The outbuildings that form the courtyards are situated to follow the line of the narrow rear plots and are utilitarian in character with simple features. Their appearance is functional rather than aesthetic design. Generally, the number of openings are few with windows plain in style and usually timber casements. Doors are solid plank doors with no glazing. The buildings are often timber-framed and clad with weatherboarding or rendered. A number of outbuildings were also constructed of flint and brick such as the outbuilding adjacent to no.37 Upper King Street.

The outbuildings and courtyards to the rear, would have had different uses dependent on the frontage buildings. Inns would have used the area for stabling, shops for storage and crafts or trades, dwelling houses for gardens. Since malting was also a home industry from the 16th century or perhaps earlier, a number of the outbuildings may have been constructed and used for this purpose.

Historically the roads were simple earth tracks with cobbled channels either side to take the water. The pavements were low level and constructed of irregular small brown pebbles. A distinctive part of Royston's character are the links between the High Street and Market Hill namely, George Street, John Street and Jepps Lane. A further three narrower 'twitchels' exist between the High Street and Upper King Street. Cobbled surfaces survives along some of these links. Cobbles are also used as a surface material under carriageways or between buildings providing access to the rear courtyards. Examples are found adjacent at no.18 Melbourn Street and between nos.45 and 47 Upper King Street.

Whilst the character of Royston Conservation Area is predominantly urban, some trees contribute to the streetscene whilst others define the character of spaces such as The Priory Memorial Gardens, church yard and The Warren. The churchyard and The Priory Memorial Gardens contribute positively not only to the setting of the church but also to the character and appearance of Melbourn Street. Small trees have been also been planted at The Cross and in the Diana Memorial Gardens, Kneesworth Street. Of the various tree species, there is a surprisingly large number of mature or semi-mature Yew trees within the conservation area.



THE PRIORY MEMORIAL GARDENS

Most garden trees are largely masked by the continuous frontages of buildings, however, a number of specimen trees to the rear of these buildings do make a positive contribution to the conservation area. They can be viewed either above the rooftops, or through openings into a number of courtyards. These openings with their views into courtyards also play an important part in the character and layout of the area.

Although not generally visible from the streets, the private gardens of houses within Royston are important to the character and layout of the conservation area. This is the case for the gardens of larger houses such as Banyers and The Rookery as well as the smaller houses such as no.21 Baldock Street. The trees in the gardens of Banyers, Melbourn Street and North Lodge, Kneesworth Street make a particularly special contribution to the character of the area.

It should be emphasised that the trees marked on the conservation area plan are shown in their approximate positions, crown spread is not necessarily taken into account, the plan does not show all trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (T.P.O) and there are a number shown that are not protected by a T.P.O.. The plan does not constitute a tree survey but simply highlights those trees which are considered to have more significant visual amenity value than others.

APPEARANCE

There are many buildings of good architectural quality and historic interest within the conservation area, a significant number of which are listed. The layout of Royston is predominantly medieval and rebuilding has largely occurred in relation to the shape and constraints of these early plots. However, the overall appearance of the conservation area is mainly that of 18th century and early 19th century buildings following the classical design influences of the time.

Details such as vertical sliding timber sashes, Flemish bond brickwork, cornices and classical door surrounds as well as the use of symmetry and proportion to the elevations is in evidence. The use of these classical features is best seen on the larger Georgian buildings such as The Manor House and Thurnalls, Melbourn Street and The Rookery, Kneesworth Street. However, simplified classical details are seen elsewhere in the town.

In addition, many timber-framed buildings survive, but most have been rendered or given a classical brick re-fronting. A number of features and details survive on the large number of timber-framed buildings within Royston including a number of leaded light windows as well as small paned timber casements and timber plank doors. The timber-framed buildings are predominantly rendered and coloured in off-whites, creams or ochres although some exposed frames (original and applied) are noted.



NORTHERN END OF THE HIGH STREET

There are few buildings gable end onto the street with most roofs running parallel to the street. This reinforces the strong building line and linear character to the streets. In King Street, High Street and the areas closest to the Cross in Kneesworth Street, Baldock Street and Melbourn Street, the building frontage is largely consistent following the back pavement edge with very few breaks between buildings. Where breaks do occur they are narrow and provide access through to a parallel street or to a rear courtyard. The character and appearance of the buildings to the north end of Kneesworth Street and the east end of Melbourn Street is that of dwellinghouses set in individual garden plots. They are either detached or semi-detached with spaces between. The houses are generally set back from the roads behind front walls, railings or hedges.

The buildings fronting the street are largely two storeys although some have attics with dormers in the roof slope. There are also some three storied buildings. The differing construction and styles of building results in slightly varied building heights

and rooflines to most of the streets. Chimneys are also a characteristic feature and are important in particular to views of the town from higher ground to the south.



THE OLD PALACE, KNEESWORTH STREET

Vertical sliding timber sashes are an important feature within the conservation area contributing to the Georgian character of the town and the regular and symmetrical appearance of a number of the buildings. The design of the sashes is largely of the small-paned type of the 18th century. Early 18th century small-paned windows have thick glazing bars becoming very fine and narrow by the late 18th century. Sashes with margin lights are characteristic of the early to mid 19th century buildings. Later 19th century sashes have no glazing bars, due to the improved production of glass that no longer required the same level of support.



NOS.40-46 (EVENS) KNEESWORTH STREET

Bay windows are a characteristic feature of 19th century dwellings within the town. No. 44 Kneesworth Street has very fine curved bays to either side of the façade which date to the early 19th century. No.15 Kneesworth Street dates to the 19th century and has bays extending up to first floor level. In addition some ground floor bays have historically been inserted into earlier buildings such as no.18 Upper King Street, but generally their size is restricted due to the narrow width of the pavements and most buildings abutting directly onto the pavement edge.

In the High Street and adjacent streets close to The Cross, most buildings have timber shop fronts with fascias and stall risers. Although the majority of these are modern insertions, many respect the scale and proportions of the host building following the classical influence of the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of

the shop buildings in these locations retain a more domestic character with vertical sliding sashes or bay windows used for display purposes. Signage is generally traditional in character with timber fascias or projecting hanging signs with painted or applied lettering.

The doors to dwellings largely follow the classical, solid panel style of the 18th and 19th centuries, some having classical style door surrounds with flat canopies, whilst pediments and hoods are occasionally seen. The door canopy at The Manor, Melbourn Street, is supported on large timber scrolls and the hood at The Old Palace Kneesworth Street, is a shell shaped form, both are special examples. Later in the 19th century flush arched entrances often with recessed doorways became fashionable and these are characteristic of houses of this period, particularly those to the northern end of Kneesworth Street. In the case of shops, the doors are generally part-glazed although still reflecting the style and construction of the solid panelled doors to dwellings.

The buildings within Royston generally have eaves rather than parapets. Gabled roofs are a dominant feature of the conservation area. Parapets are a feature to some of the brick fronted buildings with the strong classical style popular in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Some of the buildings have decoration under the eaves known as dentillation this is a typical classical feature and an example can be seen on no.47 Kneesworth Street. However, the vast majority of eaves in Royston are plain.

Public buildings largely date to the 19th century and follow the classical influences of the time and all make a statement within the town either in scale, design and or location. Notable examples being the Town Hall (a large building at the entrance to Melbourn Street) and the Court House as a central feature to the square in Fish Hill. Apart from those positioned at key corner sites within the town, the majority of public buildings such as the schools, court, and police station etc. are found in Fish Hill and Market Hill. Many of these buildings (including the museum and church in Kneesworth Street) are constructed in gault brick.

Curving corners to buildings are featured within the High Street notably at the corner of Melbourn Street and nos.30 and 32 High Street on the corner with John Street.

PREVALENT AND TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

There is a relatively equal mix of brick and rendered buildings. Red/orange bricks were very fashionable in 18th and early 19th centuries and as a result many new buildings were constructed or earlier timber-framed buildings were re-fronted in this brick from local clays. The brick bond is predominantly Flemish with relatively thin joints, typical of buildings of this period and classical design. Red brick was also used in some instances to construct outbuildings and boundary walls. These would normally be constructed in simple bonds i.e. English Bond or in fewer cases Flemish Bond. Brick walls are a characteristic feature within Royston lining streets such as The Green and linking the frontages of dwellings in Kneesworth Street. Gault bricks were used to construct buildings in the 19th century with improved transport links making them cheaper and more available. There are a large number of gault brick buildings within Royston. The north end of Kneesworth Street has many gault brick buildings, the museum is constructed of them and the Old Bull, High Street has been re-fronted in them. Gault clays contain enough chalk to make the bricks pale yellow or white

when burnt. The Corn Exchange is special due to its construction in moulded yellow bricks patented by Caleb Hitch.

Most of the rendered buildings have a smooth finish and are colourwashed. Render is mainly used to cover timber-framing although it was also used to cover brick in the later 19th century when red brick began to fall out of favour. There are a very limited number of buildings with exposed timber-framing to their frontages. Where framing is usually exposed it is to the end gables, or jetties, or under the carriageways through the buildings to the rear courtyards. Examples of pargetting are seen on no.61 King Street and no.14 Kneesworth Street. Stucco is another type of rendered finish also found within Royston. The render mix includes brick dust, stone dust or powdered burnt clay to give it a stone like appearance it is also lined to resemble stone work. Stucco can be seen on no.19 Baldock Street. Stucco can also be used to make stone-like mouldings to buildings as seen on the Former County Court building in Market Hill.

Flint is a very characteristic material for boundary walls within Royston, a large number exist around the town, lining roads and defining plot boundaries. These are important structures and make a major contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Some of the flint walls are very early, such as those along Fish Hill close to Priory House, which once formed part of the Priory. Its use for buildings is relatively low. The school building in Fish Hill is an example of a 19th century flint building as is Banyers Lodge in Dog Kennel Lane. Eagle House in Barkway

Road has a knapped flint plinth. Knapped flints have been broken to display the black centre of rather than the use of whole whitish nodules. The flint work within Royston is generally of the knapped type.

Weatherboarding is largely used to clad timber-framed outbuildings and is characteristically stained brown/black. It is also used on some domestic buildings where it often painted in off-whites, creams or ochres, such as nos.33 and 35 London Road.

There are a few boundary walls made of clunch within the conservation area and some survive in buildings such as no.48a Kneesworth Street. Clunch is a hard chalk, which is used in blocks to form walling and is best protected from weathering by large overhanging eaves and the use of lime wash.

Plain clay roofing tiles are a strong characteristic, they are red/orange in colour and until the 19th century were made largely from local clays. Railway transport during the second half of the 19th century led to widespread use of Welsh slate generally across the country. This is reflected in Royston where buildings of this date predominantly have slate roofs. The slate roofs of the 19th century are usually of a lower pitch than those designed for plain clay tiles.

Timber joinery provides special features within the town including sash, casement and bay windows, door surrounds and flat door canopies. Joinery is painted and is now generally white.

NEGATIVE FEATURES



SOUTHERN END OF THE HIGH STREET

Although Royston Conservation Area has a very special architectural and historic character and appearance, there are some features, which currently detract from this. These features are identified below to aid in understanding how the conservation area could be enhanced.

Surface Treatments and Materials

There are few examples of historic surfacing material within the town, such as the surviving cobbled areas within the alleys and streets linking with the High Street, under carriageways to rear courtyards and outside a couple of buildings in Baldock Street and Melbourn Street.

Although some pavement and road re-surfacing has taken place in recent years, for instance in the High Street, The Cross and parts of King Street and Kneesworth Street, there is scope for improvement. Other areas remain largely surfaced with tarmac and in some cases, particularly in Baldock Street, this is very patchy and aesthetically not pleasing. Careful attention should be paid to future re-surfacing schemes to ensure that the special

character and appearance of the area is improved rather than eroded further.

Street Furniture and Signage

Whilst noting previous positive attempts to improve the townscape by unifying the street furniture in terms of colour and design, there are areas where the use of bollards, light columns, street signage and CCTV camera columns creates visual clutter. Particularly of note are the 'no entry' signs and bollards at the southern end of the High Street (see opposite) - and the bollards, litter bin and CCTV installation outside E.H. Howes at (nos.33-39 High Street). It is important not to add to the sense of visual clutter when considering future 'improvement schemes'.

Missing Historic Railings and Hand Rails

There are a number of 18th and 19th century houses, particularly those in Kneesworth Street, where railings and handrails to the front have previously been removed. The reinstatement of these railings would enhance the setting of those buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Loss of Historic Plot Boundaries

This has occurred in two main areas. Firstly with the development of Angel Pavement and other large modern commercial buildings within the High Street. Here the narrow elongated forms of the plots have largely been joined to form larger squarer plots. The second area is to the rear of the buildings in Upper King Street which have been curtailed by housing and office development to the rear. The long elongated form of the plots, typical of the medieval layout of Royston, is no longer discernible and as a consequence of this review, a large area behind Upper King Street is no longer within the conservation area.

Rear garden to the Manor House

Unfortunately this has been converted to car parking which adversely affects the setting of the listed building and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following areas and buildings are considered to be where improvement opportunities exist.



SOMERFIELD, BALDOCK STREET

Somerfield, Baldock Street

This is a building of considerable bulk and massing occupying a prominent corner site when approaching the conservation area from the west. Although the building addresses the corner, it does not make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The Warren Car Park, Bus Station and Public Toilets

This area is considered to be a good improvement opportunity taking into account the fact that the car park is defined by reconstituted stone retaining walls, grey coloured crash barriers and railings exist nearby, the area is predominantly tarmac surfaced and the bus station/public toilets building is of no architectural merit. The forecourt to the bus station is rather cluttered with signs and other street furniture.

Southern end of Upper King Street and High Street

The number of service boxes, street furniture and road signage in this area is beginning to detract from setting of nearby listed buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Mill and adjoining garage, Kneesworth Street

The Mill is identified as a building of local interest and is located within the conservation area. The garage together with extension and some alterations to the mill are the reasons why the area is considered appropriate for improvement.

AREAS IDENTIFIED AS REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

These are areas regarded as having a negative impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area and where redevelopment is positively encouraged.

No.25 Kneesworth Street

Commercial, two storey, flat-roof building located to the north of no.23 (formerly listed as The Old Palace) which is grade I listed. No.25 is situated in a streetscene dominated by pitched roofs with ridges running parallel to the road.

Fish Hill, Market Hill and Market Place car parks

The car park adjacent to the Corn Exchange has a large mixture of surfacing materials, the overall appearance of which is visually disappointing. The mixed types, condition and random positioning of bollards and railings have a similar affect. In addition, car parks are situated within the square at the bottom of Fish Hill and along Market Hill where the street widens into the Market Place. Generally, this whole area could be improved by unifying surface finishes and considering alternatives to the existing yellow/white lining.

King Fisher House and adjacent car park and public toilets, Fish Hill

King Fisher House has little relation with the character of other buildings within the conservation area, with its first floor balcony and single-storey, flat-roofed, vertically boarded extensions. However, it does maintain the building line and scale of surrounding buildings. The resurfacing of the adjacent car park would be an improvement and the public toilets are proposed to be demolished and replaced with new public conveniences.

Public realm around The Cross including the public toilets

This area could be improved with consideration given to floorscape treatment, street furniture and the public toilets building.



NO.5 CHURCH LANE

No.5 Church Lane

Rendered building close to the east entrance gates to the church yard, covered by invasive plant growth, unoccupied and in poor condition. The building detracts from the setting of the parish church and makes no positive contribution to townscape and hence is identified as a site where improvement is positively encouraged.

Richard Cox House, Dog Kennel Lane

Whilst it is acknowledged that this building serves an important community purpose as a home for the elderly, in architectural terms and in terms of the character and appearance of the conservation area, a more appropriately designed building(s) in terms of footprint, massing and relationship to Dog Kennel Lane, would improve the area.

Nos.15 & 15a High Street

This building respects the scale of the building within the High Street, and reflects to some extent the characteristic classical appearance. However, the large flat roofed dormers, first floor metal casement windows and black frontage tiling creates a building design where the proportions, appearance and materials do not relate successfully to its historic neighbours. The ground floor shop fronts have no divisions relating to the proportions or upper floor window arrangement.

Nos.27, 27a, 27b and 27c High Street

The lack of divisions to this building provide a strong horizontal emphasis, which is not characteristic of the historic buildings within the street, which largely follow the classical style and are well proportioned and balanced. The continuous and wide section of render below the parapet also strengthens the horizontal emphasis of the building. The flat roof and boxy shape create a building with bulky appearance. The height of the building relates to the street, but the special interest of strongly hip and gabled roof forms is not respected. Some vertical emphasis is sought by the insertion of upper floor windows; however, the rendered panels underneath and the top hung lights above spoil the attempt of balance. The materials of grey bricks and grey metal window frames also have little relation to the red and gault brick and timber joinery characteristic of the street.

Nos.34-38 High Street

This building is modern and has no special interest. A part from the horizontal emphasis and design of the windows the building broadly reflects the form and character of historic buildings within the street. The ground floor is divided into individual shops relating to the first floor window pattern of the building. The use of gault bricks in Flemish Bond and the false pitch plain tiled roof also reflects the classical character and forms of buildings within the street.

Nos.40 & 42 High Street

This building is modern and has no special interest. Similar to its adjoining neighbour, it broadly reflects the form and character of buildings within the street. However, the continuous undivided shop front and the horizontal emphasis of the large windows and dormers do not respect the proportions or fenestration patterns characteristic of the historic buildings within the street. The red Flemish Bond brickwork and plain clay tile roof respect the characteristic materials of the street.

Nos.44a & 44b High Street

The building dates to the 1960's and has no special interest. It is a flat roof building with plain tiled hanging to the façade, neither of which are characteristic within the Royston Conservation Area. These elements of the design and the row of square casement windows directly under the roof produce a long façade with strong horizontal emphasis. The ground floor is divided into two shop fronts with large expanses of glass and no vertical divisions.

Nos.1-15 Angel Pavement & (nos.44a-54a High Street)

This is a large building containing a number of shops and forms a shopping centre with central arcade between the High Street and Market Hill. Its bulk, form, proportions, design and materials do not respect the scale and character of the historic buildings or layout pattern of the High Street or Market Hill. It is a large brown brick building with flat roof and tile hangings. The shop fronts and upper floor windows have large expanses of glass with few divisions, thereby not reflecting the characteristic proportions of the historic buildings and the layout of the town.

Roysia House, John Street

This is a three storey, 1960's building with a flat roof and a horizontal emphasised by (i) the white rendered elements and (ii) brown brickwork intersected with concrete panels to the lower sections of the bay running horizontally around the upper floors of the building. The ground floor is divided into shop fronts relating to the upper floor divisions of the building. The scale, form and materials creates a rather incongruous building in this part of the conservation area.

Nos.10-16 Church Lane / Nos.11-17 Melbourn Street

No.16 fronts a large section of Melbourn Street, whilst nos.10 to 14 form a staggered arrangement along Church Lane following the alignment of the lane. The buildings are constructed of brown bricks and have flat roofs and large glazed shop fronts. They do not relate to the character or appearance of the conservation area in size, materials, proportions of design.



No.10 Melbourn Street

This is a three storey flat roof building set back from the building line, with a single storey front projection at ground floor level. The first and second floors are set at an angle and staggered in design. The building is constructed in brown brick with rendered panels below each of the casement windows providing vertical emphasis to the façade.

Health Centre, flat-roofed rear additions to the Town Hall and car park to the north, Melbourn Street

The Health Centre is a two storied flat roofed building set back from the building line. It is a red brick building to the ground floor with vertical grey concrete panels to the upper floor. The single storey additions to the front and rear are red brick and also have flat roofs. The windows are a mix of vertical and horizontal casements. To the rear of the Town Hall there is a large single storey flat roof addition. The building is clad in vertical timber boarding with rows of square casement windows. The addition is a long low elongated form. If redevelopment takes place this does not necessarily include the Police Station or Town Hall.

Nos. 9-31 London Road

Two blocks of three-storied, terraced houses. They are set back from the building line with a mix of boundary treatments lining the road. The houses have casement upvc windows interspersed with grey tile hangings creating vertical stripes to the facades.

SITES BEYOND THE CONSERVATION AREA WHERE REDEVELOPMENT WOULD IMPROVE ITS SETTING

Site on the south side of Newmarket Road at the roundabout with Priory Lane

This site was previously occupied by a cinema and is an important gateway into the conservation area when approaching directly from the west.

Telephone Exchange

Three storey flat-roofed building which now appears rather incongruous when seen in the context of modern housing to the east, west and south.

PLANNING GUIDANCE - APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PURPOSES

STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION AND PROCESS

20 December 2006	Royston & District Committee
16 January 2007	Cabinet Meeting
20 January 2007	Public Exhibition at Royston Town Hall
22 January 2007	Royston Town Council
6 February 2007	Royston Town Centre Strategy Workshop
7 February until 2 March 2007	Exhibition at Royston Library
14 March 2007	Royston & District Committee
27 March 2007	Cabinet Meeting

In addition, there was local publicity, entry on the District Council's website and letters were sent to various groups, details of which are available from the address below.

If you would like a translation of this document please contact your local Council reception on 01462 474000.

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