

The Canterbury Society

COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT OF THE CANTERBURY CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

APRIL 2010

General comments

This is a comprehensive, knowledgeable and well-written document which will provide some very useful benchmarks for the future. We make two general comments, and then some more detailed notes on specific areas of the city.

First, we particularly liked the way in which the report showed awareness of the environmental situation of Canterbury and stressed the need to preserve its unique situation, especially the sight-lines from various elevated positions including the University, St Thomas's Hill, Rheims Way, Harbledown and Thannington.

However, we thought that there could be more emphasis on protecting the historic view of the Cathedral surrounded by much lower buildings and keeping any higher developments outside the city walls. The document does say that the Bell Harry Tower, 'Still has a major visual impact today' (page 12). However, recent developments, such as those in Whitefriars, on the Tannery site or for the new theatre risk reducing the magnificence of the first sight of the Cathedral from the outskirts of the city.

Secondly, the document might have more impact if it included more, and more clearly set out, recommendations. They are there in the text, but a separate section listing the recommendations would be a useful guide to future action.

One example comes on page 14, in a section which highlights the historic approach to the city from London along Rheims way. Here street lighting and trees partially block the visitor's first sight of the Cathedral. Buried in the text is a comment that the trees should be managed so they do not block the view: perhaps this point could be highlighted and be the basis for an initiative to enhance this approach to the city? On page 24 there is another example of a recommendation which could be given more prominence: it concerns the need for better signage from Canterbury West to the city centre.

Page 60

Under the heading of St Margaret's Street there should be mention of the old Fish Market (number 29?). This is a fine building with a very stylish frontage. However, the back parts of the building are currently neglected and a small grassy area, which could be an urban open space, has been fenced off.

Page 61

Note that the 'four-storey 1980s office block on the north-western side of Beer Cart Lane' was definitely in existence in 1975.

Note also that the cupola-topped building in Watling Street, described as the 'Congregational Church', is actually the United Reformed Church (the spelling on page 65 also needs correction).

Page 63

The section on Stour Street includes mention of 'the Greyfriars monastery building and gardens on the Stour'. These gardens are a wonderful green lung in the centre of a very densely built up city. It is important that they are completely protected from any further development. An Appraisal of a conservation area must surely be concerned with historic open spaces as well as with historic buildings and street forms?

Page 64

The comment is made that the Rosemary Lane car park 'does not enhance the conservation area and the site is allocated for re-development for sustainable housing'. It would be useful to add a note to the effect that any new development should not be too dense, given the over-crowding in recent developments in the city. It is also important to note that the existing houses along one side of Rosemary Lane only have windows at the front, since they back onto the multi-storey car park. Any new development should allow for light and sun to reach existing houses.

the **St Thomas's Hill, Whitstable Road, London Road, and St Dunstan's area**. In many respects this is the area least likely to change in the near future apart from infill development. A broad reading of Page 97

The section on **Whitstable Road** which is within the conservation area to the foot of St Thomas's Hill was briefly describes but supported by a useful map showing major trees. It was seen to have a variety of buildings including 17th century cottages at the lower end, with Victorian and Edwardian residences beyond.

Page 96 On **London Road** it commented that it was straight and fairly level. A valuable comment was that the eastern end at the junction with St Dunstan's Street bounded the churchyard of St Dunstan's whose railing were removed for the war effort c.1940, and '*their replacement would enclose the open space and enhance the area*'. We should support this idea if it could ever be done in view of cost. It would help to protect the churchyard from damage and unruly behaviour.

Another comment worthy of note is; the '*first building on the northern side (no 17) is a modern 1960's semi-detached house that is inappropriate in terms of scale, design and building line*'. From this we may infer that the Council is now much more aware of the necessity for architectural harmony in a sensitive

area? I hope this is so. Further observations noted the raised pavement on the north side and the Victorian character of the houses and villas set in gardens with mature trees.

Page 98 **St Dunstan's Street** is likely to see change on the east side on two sites in the near future. It commented on the rich architectural line of the south side of the street. It mentions the visual value of St Dunstan's tower at the upper end, and the Tower House in the gardens at the lower (east end) '*as providing prominent focal points in local views*'. However it did note that '*the northern side was fragmented for a considerable distance beyond the site of the demolished 1960's tyre depot which was awaiting development*'. Is this an acknowledgement that this is too valuable a site on which to make mistakes in future development? At the eastern end it noted that the '*vicinity would be enhanced if the traffic through and around the Westgate could be re-routed*'. This we would all support, but how?

This also applies, as mentioned, to North Lane which retains its character. '*The subtleties of the St Dunstan's Street and North Lane building lines combine with the architectural quality of the buildings and views to create a quality urban space*'. It felt that the new housing development in Station Road West known as St Dunstan's Gate, had regenerated the area. In a reference to a high building, it comments on the successful re-cladding of the six storey former East Kent bus company offices in Station Road West. Since the report notes the '*roof lines with gables and chimneys*' we must hope that the elevations of the new developments on the corner of Roper Road, and the Petrol station look right?

The report sketched over the historical character of the neighbouring streets such as Orchard and New where their character and value is acknowledged and there is no likely hood or and re-development. Even the freeman Hardy & Willis warehouse at the corner of Orchard Street (c 1925) is seen as of local historical significance.

It is to be hoped that the voice speaking throughout the pages of this appraisal really does represent the true regard of Canterbury city Council for its historical and natural environment and will do all it can to protect it.

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