

## 5.0 The Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area

### Analysis

- 5.1 Berkhamsted Conservation Area covers a large urban area of approximately 98 hectares, the second largest conservation area in the Borough, which includes about half the total area of the town's built environment. The majority of the conservation area comprises the linear High Street that runs in a northwest to southeast direction and originally centred upon the Parish Church of St. Peter and the market place. In addition there also a significant number of smaller roads running north and south from the High Street leading between the former rear plots of the buildings that line the main road through Berkhamsted; Castle Street, Manor Street, Ravens Lane, Holliday Street, Chesham Road, Kings Road / Lower Kings Road, Boxwell Road and Kitsbury Road.
- 5.2 Today the High Street is lined on either side by mostly commercial premises (such as shops, restaurants, banks, offices, public houses), places of worship and public buildings. It remains a busy and vibrant town centre with a high proportion of surviving historic properties with significant local and national heritage value. There are a small number of residential properties dotted along the High Street, mostly at the east and west ends where commercial use is less dominant. In more recent years there has been a move towards the re-development of some sites at the east end of the High Street into residential use from their former commercial use, such as the houses on Robertson Road / Cooper Way / McDougal Road and a row of flats located on a prominent site near the Parish Church between Castle Street and Manor Street; Pilkington Manor.
- 5.3 The built environment of the High Street dates back to the thirteenth century when St. Peter's Church was constructed; the stone church is a grade II\* listed building and stands within the central core of the conservation area by the old Market Place. A significant proportion of neighbouring surrounding properties on the High Street and Castle Street are also statutory listed and, as a result, their historic character has been retained and this has had a positive impact upon the conservation area. Listed buildings also extend east and west to the boundary limits of the conservation area. Most date to between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Court House (Church Lane), 129 High Street (Dean Incent's House) and 125 High Street were built in the sixteenth century and are timber framed. However, 173 High Street, which is also timber framed, has been scientifically dated to the thirteenth century. It is grade II\* listed and is thought to be a service wing to a former aisled hall. In addition, the front range of the former Swan public house, no. 139, is thought to have been an open timber hall dating to the fourteenth century and was later extended to the west and east.
- 5.4 The High Street is also well known for its coaching inns and public houses dating between the sixteenth and nineteenth century; some are still in use as public houses today (The Bull, The Crown, The Kings Arms, The Lamb and The George) while others have been converted to restaurants or residential use (The Swan and The Black Horse). It is not clear if The Swan was built as an inn, but was used as such from the seventeenth century onwards; it began to run its own coach to London in c1800.
- 5.5 The significance of the High Street continued into the nineteenth and twentieth century when new buildings were constructed in red or yellow brick: The Old Town Hall, the Baptist Church, the Civic Centre, The Rex Cinema (adjoining flats and restaurant, The Gatsby). Some modern developments have respected the older character of the High Street, while others are less sympathetic (taller and out-of-scale; whether civic, commercial or residential) with the surviving historic built environment. Flats have become more common from their use in large modern residential developments, and not just on the High Street. While their materials blend in with the surrounding buildings and have some interesting design features, the overall scale and massing has begun to impact upon the local character.

- 5.6 The settlement of the High Street is both defined and enhanced by its linear plan and the surviving regular plots within the urban landscape. This regular pattern is also seen within the later building plots of Castle Street, Ravens Lane, Holliday Street, Highfield Road, Victoria Road, Bridge Street, Lower Kings Road and Park Street. However, some larger buildings of the twentieth century have eroded the earlier plot widths on the High Street, such as The Rex Cinema (including the adjoining flats), and a row of shops on the north side of the street between Water Lane and Lower Kings Road (162 – 192 High Street). The large plot to the rear of the Parish Church on Castle Street is occupied by a large number of buildings belonging to Berkhamsted Collegiate School, part of which dates back to 1544 when the first structure was erected and is now a grade I listed building. Later buildings were added to form a four-sided courtyard on Castle Street and it is the largest school within the conservation area; it later branched out to Chesham Road and Kings Road.
- 5.7 Residential streets leading away from the High Street have an overall common character as urban development began to expand rapidly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Small terrace groups and semi-detached properties (single or adjoining groups) tend to lie close to the town centre and the railway serving the needs of the working class, while larger villa-style houses and detached houses of the professional classes are found to the southwest of the town (Charles Street and Shrublands Avenue etc). While few buildings on these streets are statutory listed (47 Highfield Road and All Saints Church, Shrublands Road), the surviving character of the built environment has significant local heritage value. In many cases it is not just individual buildings that are of local importance, but the nature of group value (such as the consistency of design, features and materials used) that gives them their special character. The danger is that unsympathetic alterations, developments within subdivided plots / gardens, removal of boundary walls, raising of rooflines and removal of chimney stacks will begin to erode their character, which will impact upon the group value as a whole.
- 5.8 To the north of the High Street lies the River Bulbourne and the Grand Union Canal, the railway line and the remains of the twelfth century Berkhamsted Castle. To the east of the railway station and southeast of the castle are a series of residential roads lined with terraced housing.
- 5.9 As the Grand Union Canal and River Bulbourne pass through the conservation area the character of their immediate surroundings changes. In the western half (upstream from the vicinity of the station) they flow through meadows of considerable width and with only a small number of buildings encroaching upon their banks. The points where Mill Street and Castle Street meet to cross the two watercourses signal a change. From here downstream and moving East through the conservation area a good deal of development has taken place.
- 5.10 Such development may be categorised as, firstly, former industrial sites now converted or re-developed for residential use or, secondly, as nineteenth century housing areas developed close to the banks of the canal or within a short distance from the banks. A number of more recent in-fills have introduced additional housing into this overall pattern.
- 5.11 A number of sites that stand close to the banks of the canal are separated from the water by their rear gardens and the future of the canal's setting would be affected to a high degree by any potential development in these areas. Similarly, two rows of garages may be found (close to the George Street Playground and at the lower end of Bedford Street) situated at points immediately next to the towpath. These garages are currently of poor quality (being "neutral" in their architectural contribution) and their sites are worthy of improvement.
- 5.12 Land use north of the town along the railway line (Area 2) is mostly occupied by its walls and embankments. In visual terms the railway areas (with the exception of the station

and its immediate environs) may be termed as “neutral” but at the same time devoid of many potential sites for development. A builder’s yard stands in Station Road on a narrow wedge-shaped site immediately next to the tracks but this location does not appear likely to attract future development. One other railway site requires notice: it stands at the farthest eastern end of Ellesmere Road after the last house and it is just within the conservation area boundary. Partly occupied by a domestic garden, by rough ground and by the road and railway embankments near to the bridge which crosses the tracks at this point, the openness of the site is currently its greatest positive quality and development here would be of possible detriment to this.

- 5.13 To the southwest of the High Street is a predominantly residential area (Area 3). It comprises the Victorian / Edwardian spread of the town to the southwest of the High Street. Compared to earlier nineteenth century development at the eastern end of the town for instance, which included industrial / commercial development, this area of the town was developed for more middle class residents. This explains why it is almost entirely housing with little by way of workshops, stores, yards or corner shops (and no Public House) such as are often found in mid-late nineteenth century areas. Exceptionally, there are a few shops on Charles Street at Kitsbury Road (including a former corner shop at 56 Charles Street) and a few small former workshops / stores on Middle Road.
- 5.14 Berkhamsted Conservation Area is divided into three main character areas, each with its own very distinct and diverse identity; the resulting overall character of the town is therefore much greater than the sum of its individual parts.

### **Summary of Townscape Features**

- Medieval origins; a town plan and its burgage plots, particularly the High Street that centres around the medieval core and old Market Place next to the Parish Church. Burgage plots extending away from the core to the eastern boundary limits (as far as Robertson Road) and to the west (up to Park View Road).
- The dominance of the commercial High Street linear plan and the adjoining straight residential side streets.
- The views along the High Street, up and down the side streets, towards the River Bulbourne and Grand Union Canal, and across the Bulbourne Valley.
- Diversity of building types across the whole conservation area: commercial, industrial, public, educational, religious and residential. These building types form the backbone of the three individual character areas.
- Surviving shops, public houses, religious buildings and civic buildings that retain their original function, along with the re-use of some older buildings to new commercial uses.
- Construction materials are varied across the conservation area and relate to the type of common materials used within a set build period: the majority are built from red or yellow brick or, particularly along the High Street, have a timber frame encased in brick / render. Others have an exposed old timber frame, while only the Parish Church is built in stone. Some properties have flint, stone or terracotta tile decoration.
- Properties throughout the conservation area are commonly two-storey or two and a half storeys with tiled or slate covered roofs. Most twentieth century properties are three or four storeys (typically along the High Street) and have varying roof coverings. Old chimney stacks survive and are common features.
- Buildings generally face directly onto street frontages; side street properties often stand a short distance from the roadside with very small front gardens with low boundary walls.

- Views of the rear of properties are uncommon; they are generally restricted by the medieval burgage plot layout or from nineteenth century terracing (including adjoining groups of two and three). Views across rear plots can be seen in very few locations; Charles Street (looking north over adjoining streets), Mill Street (east and west sides), Holliday Street (west side - rear of Ravens Lane properties), Robertson Road (most of the estate and adjoining streets) and Water Lane car park (the backs of High Street buildings). The rear view of High Street properties beyond the junction of Lower Kings Road are seen from within the two other public car parks (St. John's Well Lane and Lower Kings Road).
- Residential buildings range from small terrace groups, semi-detached properties (single or adjoining groups) to larger villa-style houses and detached houses. Flats have become more common from their use in large modern residential developments.
- Canal bridges and locks provide vital focal points in the parts of the conservation area where they stand. Listed fabric in the shape of the lock keepers' cottages and various buildings being proposed for local listing, such as the canal-side pubs, provide further significant features. The banks of the canal have undergone alterations in the aftermath of the change from being previous industrial sites and now park-like scenery characterises the canal banks with play areas for children and other leisure amenities. Housing development (usually as blocks of flats) has replaced the former warehouses etc. and previously empty sites have sometimes also been developed in a few parts of the canal's banks.
- Railway scenery remains essentially unchanged since the 1830s although modernisation has come to the station and to the bridges with the line here highly used over a continuous period. The walls and embankments of the railway provide strong local landmarks together with other surviving nineteenth century buildings and the layout of the town remains highly affected by the presence of these features.
- With its status as a Scheduled Monument, Berkhamsted Castle enjoys the highest degree of planning protection and its role as a major historic and landscape feature of large dimensions is secure. Due to the fact that the canal and railway separate the castle's site from the rest of the town to the south diminishes the extent to which views of the castle may be enjoyed from nearly any point in the town centre across the canal. The presence of the castle has acted as a restraint on development in this area on the far side of the railway and presumably it will continue to do so.

### **Current activities and uses**

- 5.15 As a busy and vibrant town centre, Berkhamsted displays many of the characteristics of an historic medieval market town that has continued to prosper and grow while retaining key public facilities: a variety of small local shops and larger chain stores including supermarkets, banks, pharmacies, post office, estate agents, a railway station, a garden centre, a cinema (The Rex Cinema), a civic centre, several schools and religious centres, a garage, a library, a fire and ambulance station, many public houses, cafes and restaurants, sports facilities, and a local heritage museum store.
- 5.16 As a commercial centre, the diversity of facilities brings visitors into the town. Some commute into town for the railway, while others work in the shops, banks and offices. All these add to the traffic congestion and the pressure on parking facilities within Berkhamsted, especially during the working week and on Saturdays. The sports facilities, Berkhamsted Lawn Tennis and Squash Rackets Club, and Cricket Club lie outside the conservation area, and like the railway, have their own car parking facilities. Although the Bowls Club is located next to Berkhamsted Lawn Tennis and Squash Rackets Club, it lies within the conservation area boundary.

### **Focal points, views and vistas**

- 5.17 Partly because of its size, and partly because of the topography, no single place provides a comprehensive view of the whole of Berkhamsted Conservation Area. Nevertheless, views and vistas out, within and across the conservation area are abundant and varied (Areas 1, 2 and 3).
- 5.18 It is recognised that views along the High Street (Area 1) are an important feature of its linear character. However, due to its length and tree cover, it cannot be viewed as a whole from end to end. For example, the view from the east end by Swing Gate Lane reaches comfortably as far as the Baptist Church by Ravens Lane / Holliday Street, and then from there to The Rex Cinema, then to the Parish Church of St. Peter, then on to the crossroads with Kings Road etc, namely large recognisable structures or sites that the eye is drawn to as a full stop.
- 5.19 Views to and from the High Street along adjoining streets are also important (Chesham Road), as well as along shorter streets (Bridge Street) and longer streets (Charles Street, Lower Kings Road). Views between buildings or small open areas are also part of the character of the High Street: the High Street / Church Lane area where The Court House and War Memorial can be seen; the wider pavement on the north side of the High Street between Water Lane and Lower Kings Road; the High Street cross roads at Lower Kings Street / Kings Road; the gap between 208 and 210 High Street to Park View Cottage; Sevens Close (between 69 and 71 High Street). In some cases narrow footpaths open out into areas that provide a surprise view such as the narrow footpath between 280 and 284 High Street.
- 5.20 However, there a number of vistas that play a significant role within the wider town centre and are taken from high vantage points within the conservation area boundary (Areas 1, 2 and 3). These relate to stunning snapshot vistas across the Bulbourne river valley as seen from the south side of the town, such as Highfield Road, Victoria Road and Kings Road (Area 1), and roads that cross Charles Street such as Cowper Road, Park View Road, Kitsbury Road, Cross Oak Road, and from the southern end of Shrublands Avenue (Area 3).
- 5.21 The Grand Union Canal has a number of views and vistas that are important, particularly from road bridges and foot bridges; Lower Kings Road, Castle Street, and Ravens Lane (Area 2).
- 5.22 The castle, like most surviving and important sites of this type, was surrounded by an area deliberately left without development (known as a *glacis*) for defensive reasons (Area 2). However, the continuance of this area being left empty has resulted in the surroundings of the castle as far as the station being a green and highly picturesque part of the outskirts of the town thus preserving here a wealth of views and vistas.
- 5.23 From the Victorian / Edwardian housing area southwest of the High Street there are vistas not only up and down the streets on this hillside but also over the High Street and to the trees and buildings on the northern side of the valley. Such views feature from for instance, from junctions of Charles Street with the various north-south streets. Equally, new development visible in views from the northern valley slope back towards these terraced streets, would potentially affect perceptions of the conservation area.

### **Open spaces, landscape and trees**

- 5.24 Due to the urban nature of Berkhamsted, there is little open space to be noted within the town centre itself, other than the hard standing surfaces of Water Lane car park and Lower Kings Road / St. John's Well Lane car park (Area 1). However, on the edge of the conservation area boundary lies the largest principal open area, Berkhamsted Castle, which is also a significant historical landscape feature and a Scheduled Monument (Area 2).

- 5.25 Throughout the conservation area are *pockets of open space, considered to be semi-public spaces*, which are visible and have an attractive quality. These are:
- a small area of open space on land at end of Ravens Lane / Chapel Street / Holliday Street with a single mature tree at the centre (Area 1)
  - the graveyard to the rear of St. Peter's Church, viewed from the High Street and Castle Street (Area 1). Most of the site has been cleared of headstones and so its character is very open with a few mature trees, as such it is visually the most openly green space close to the High Street
  - the semi-open space within the larger cemetery by Three Close Lane / Rectory Lane (Area 1). Whilst hidden from view by its walls along Three Close Lane, it occupies a significant portion of land and has heavy tree coverage
  - 'The Moor' (recreation ground) on Mill Street, between the River Bulbourne and the Grand Union Canal (Area 2)
  - the tennis courts on Greenfield Road / Lower Kings Road (Area 2)
  - land alongside the Bowling Green by the Grand Union Canal (Area 2)
  - the playground on George Street (Area 2)
- 5.26 Private gardens are relatively small within the urban setting, especially those closest to the town centre (Areas 1, 2 and 3). Nevertheless, there are still a small handful of properties that lie within the boundary that have retained their larger plot size, such as those at the southern end of Kitsbury Road and Cross Oak Road.
- 5.27 Limited but important open spaces can also be found within private properties of organisations such as the courtyard of Berkhamsted Collegiate School, Castle Street, St. John's on Chesham Road and land by the Royal Mail Offices, on the corner of the High Street and St. John's Well Lane that is planted with mature trees (Area 1).
- 5.28 Area 2 contains an abundance of open spaces due to the fact that the canal, the railway and the castle sites are all situated within its boundaries. In future, the railway and the castle sites are not likely to undergo significant development or alteration (for reasons that are obvious) and thus little further comment is required here.
- 5.29 The future of the canal as an area of open space running through the length of the conservation area is also presumed to be mainly secure but a number of points need to be made with regard to its setting. At various places along its length the canal is flanked by open areas or by existing structures that might become the focus of attention as sites considered for future development, for extensions to existing buildings or for re-development intensifying use. A good deal of encroachment has already taken place in parts of the downstream area below the station area and any further building here requires careful consideration if the open spaces that are currently provided due to the canal are to be preserved. The open areas upstream from Mill Street and the station require vigilance if the current leisure uses are to be preserved and the overall setting maintained and enhanced.
- 5.30 The George Street Playground is another leisure area sited a short distance from the canal. It consists of a walled area on the remains of a former coal yard and it stands within the conservation area. It is regularly used by local families as a play area for young children due to the secure boundary provided by the brick wall that completely encloses it and by the shelter from the nearby houses that gives rise to a micro-climate. The location is ideal as it stands in the midst of the two-storey houses of the district and it can also be reached from other areas via the towpath's traffic-free access routes. The playground's great popularity is well known but the conservation area status should also provide useful tools for the future preservation and improvement of this well-frequented amenity.

- 5.31 At many points along its course downstream from Castle Street and the station area the canal is flanked by privately-owned open spaces. These areas consist of the gardens belonging to individual houses, of communal areas attached to nearby housing developments and of the outdoor drinking areas attached to pubs. In addition to the three pubs located inside the boundaries of the conservation area there is also the Old Mill (listed grade II but just outside the conservation area). This establishment has gardens and car parking sufficiently close to the canal's banks as to make a contribution to the canal's amenity. Most significantly, the north bank of the canal is flanked by private open space (i.e. gardens attached to houses) all the way from the Crystal Palace pub to the area where the conservation area currently terminates in the east near the end of Bedford Street. The long sloping gardens behind the houses in Station Road that run down to the towpath give a particularly good example of how private green spaces provide a pleasant setting for the canal. The effect here is quite different from the public open spaces that characterise the banks of the canal in the upstream areas of the conservation area with their broad meadow scenery in communal ownership and used for public leisure. The private gardens next to the canal, however, reflect individual tastes in their planting and boundary hedges and with garden sheds sometimes adding to the scene. The preservation of a high degree of openness and a green setting for the canal will make a vital contribution to the future of the conservation area in all parts of Area 2.
- 5.32 Butts Meadow recreation ground off Kings Road is a significant open space which together with the adjoining allotments, figure strongly in the topography and character of that part of the conservation area (Area 3). There are views over the meadow and, back down to the High Street and to woodland beyond from Kings Road.
- 5.33 Throughout the conservation area trees play a role in defining the character, whether they are single trees, clusters or larger groups and can be found in private, semi-public and public spaces. This is especially true of those that lie along the Grand Union Canal (between Castle Street and Park Street) and also the High Street (roughly between Highfield Road and Cowper Road), as both have a significant visual impact on the local character and on views along the canal bank and pavements (Areas 1 and 2). The High Street is lined on both sides with semi-mature trees that were planted as part of a twentieth century initiative to soften the urban character of Berkhamsted. The trees along the canal can be viewed not just by travelling along the canal but also from the road bridges, footbridges, towpaths and gaps with views down to the canal, such as along Robertson Road.
- 5.34 Trees lying within gardens of private houses that can be seen from public roads and footpaths also provide character to the conservation area. Those of special note are on land behind the flats at Waterside, the foreground of the former Congregational Church, now Alexander House on Chapel Street, houses on the north side of Chapel Street whose rear gardens back onto the canal side, Berkhamsted Collegiate School behind St. Peter's Church, and the gardens of the semi-detached Victorian villas at 320 – 338 High Street (Area 1). Coverage along the footpath to the footbridge over the canal by Londrina Terrace off the High Street, coupled with those in the private front gardens of the cottages that front the footpath, has a pleasant 'green' character more in-keeping with the canal side than the urban High Street (Area 1).
- 5.35 A number of other types of sites (public and semi-public spaces) also have significant tree coverage. Some of these are particularly old trees and are thought to be those depicted on late nineteenth century maps. Those that seem to appear on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map and survive today are at Berkhamsted Castle, the rear churchyard at St. Peter's Church, Castle Street, the cemetery by Three Close Lane / Rectory Lane, land to the rear of St. John's on Chesham Road, and land by the Royal Mail Offices on the corner of the High Street and St. John's Well Lane (Area 1). Other well established trees that stand upon land at the rear of the flats at Deans Lawn,

Chesham Road and the boundaries of 'The Moor' (recreation ground), including Mill Street are thought to be shown on the 1898 Ordnance Survey map (Areas 1 and 2).

- 5.36 Other groups of significant, but more modern, trees in public / semi-public spaces include those around the tennis courts on Greenfield Road / Lower Kings Road, the group on the west side of Lower Kings Road by the road bridge, and the trees planted along the pavement on Mill Street (west side) outside the Berkhamsted Collegiate School (Areas 1 and 2).
- 5.37 Trees provide a backdrop of green as one looks from central areas of the town towards the north and in the direction of the rising land beyond the railway (Area 2). These trees form an important element in the local scenery. The future preservation of this screen of greenery, against which the tops of the buildings are seen in silhouette, should be a high priority for all who value the natural setting of the town.
- 5.38 Trees and hedges line much of the canal near to its banks in a variety of sites both public and private (Area 2). Many private domestic gardens flank the towpaths. Rows of trees flank the water at points such as where lime trees stand in a row near to the Crystal Palace pub or willows grow on the banks near the Park Street pedestrian bridge. Photographic evidence from the past shows how the canal now passes through a more generally green corridor than it previously did as recently as the 1960s. The canal's transformation in the course of recent decades from industrial to leisure uses accounts for this change despite the partial encroachment of domestic development. At present the canal can be described as being a linear urban park with an abundance of trees for most of its passage through the conservation area. In fine weather the canal is intensely used for recreation on the water, along the towpaths and in the adjoining areas on the banks. Open spaces, trees and buildings act in combination to provide the canal corridor with a pleasing and balanced environment. Such a balance will only be preserved in future if due care is exercised in maintaining and improving the quality of the green spaces and by ensuring that development does not endanger the openness of the canal's bankside areas.
- 5.39 In areas to the west (in the upstream direction from Mill Street and the Station) the canal is flanked by open spaces and many trees as far as the boundary of the conservation area slightly beyond the Park Street pedestrian bridge (Area 2). This part of the area contains three significant public leisure spaces and their trees etc.
- Mill Street is flanked by a children's playground area with grass and with large trees along its boundaries. It occupies the drained former lake along the course of the Bulbourne and the timber yard which once stood here next to the canal. The creation of this small park has produced an amenity area of great value and visual quality. Its beauty and well-defined boundaries make it highly attractive to younger children who play here in family groups.
  - On the opposite bank, social club buildings and the town's sports ground are found a little further upstream. This area makes little positive contribution to the scenery through which the canal passes at this point and it remains outside the conservation area boundary. Although outside, the site is close enough to the conservation area boundary so as to affect the visual quality of the canal's setting.
  - The remaining area upstream on the north bank consists of further open green spaces in mixed public leisure use. The canal is flanked by these open spaces with their trees and the public car park that services them. As far as the pedestrian bridge which virtually marks the western limit of the conservation area this open leisure area provides equally a setting for the canal and a principal location for the canal's enjoyment along the banks by locals and visitors. A line of large willows that require lopping if they are not to collapse into the water stand at the water's edge at this point. The quality of the car

park's visual setting is not good and scope exists to improve this part of the canal's immediate environment. The area where the cars park is treeless and some form of perimeter screening with hedges could be an improvement.

- Trees in the residential area Victorian / Edwardian area southwest of the High Street are predominantly garden trees and are important across virtually all of Area 3. Specimen trees outside of gardens are relatively scarce and therefore significant. All Saints church has three tall pines, which are a significant feature of the locality.

### **Public Realm: floorscape, street lighting and street furniture**

- 5.40 Roads throughout the conservation area are generally laid in with a metalled road surface (tarmacadam). The exceptions to this are:
- *Church Lane* (Area 1: High Street Central): a brick cobbled surface along its length and its surface up to the entrance with the High Street.
  - *Middle Road* (Area 3); unmade-up road reflecting its original nature as an access road and now a distinctive feature.
  - *Hamilton Road* (Area 3): unmade-up road and has an informal character.
- 5.41 Along the High Street (Area 1) speed controls are in place that include a raised brick laid road bumps signifying crossing areas, some with additional lighted bollards and islands. In addition, a few of the centrally located side streets are paved with brick laid surfaces at their entrances where they join the main High Street (Castle Street, Chesham Road, Prince Edward Street and Water Lane). In general, painted signs on the road have been kept to a minimum.
- 5.42 In Area 3 various stretches of street are still edged with the original stone kerbing (see character area descriptions for examples). In places, where patches of the modern road surface have come away, old cobble stones can be seen beneath.
- 5.43 The two main public car parks in the conservation area lie within Area 1 (High Street) and comprise Water Lane car park and the Lower Kings Road / St. John's Well Lane car park. Both are laid with a metalled road surface and have also been planted with small numbers of trees to try to soften their urban character. Lower Kings Road / St. John's Well Lane car park is shielded from the River Bulbourne and the canal beyond by tree cover along its northern boundary. Water Lane car park has a more urban character and is surrounded by many different types of buildings (commercial, residential, educational and industrial).
- 5.44 Parking on the High Street (Area 1) has several forms:
- short, delineated, roadside, parking bays (west of the entrance to Holliday Street and outside the Royal Mail Offices)
  - off-street parking on sloping pavements with a tarmacadam surface (Highfield Road to roughly Victoria Road, rather awkward-looking and possibly a former grassed bank)
  - parking bays set into former pavement areas with brick cobbled surfaces (Manor Street to Park View Road)
  - brick cobbled surface on pavements (loading bays only)
- 5.45 A third public car park, Canal Fields / Broadwater, lies on the north side of the canal in Area 2, opposite the St. John's Well Lane car park. It is also laid with a metalled road surface and is partly shielded from the canal by trees to its southern boundary. A footbridge provides access over the canal from Canal Fields / Broadwater to St. John's Well car park. The area could be visually improved by making the parking area greener

and more visually pleasing than it currently is (see 5.36 above). The remaining car park in Area 2 is found principally in front of the Station. The Station car park and taxi rank are relatively small and they have only a minimal impact on the visual presentation of the nearby buildings.

- 5.46 Most other roads away from the High Street (Area 1) have some form of on street parking, and a few have delineated parking bays. There are some parking controls within the conservation area using both single and double yellow lines; a few streets do not allow any parking such as Church Lane. Car parks to the rear lots of the High Street (mostly business use) are also hard surfaced as are those associated with public buildings, such as schools. Berkhamsted Town Council is currently reviewing parking on side streets; public consultation is being undertaken in the areas to the north and south of the High Street (Castle Street – Station Road – Holliday Street, and Charles Street – Doctor’s Commons Road – Cowper Road – Park View Road).
- 5.47 In other parts of the residential areas within Area 2 parking remains a difficult problem. The nineteenth century streets were laid out well before the era of the motor car and parking in the on-street locations is difficult at most points. Few houses have their own garages and a number of garages in rows exist at various locations. Two examples of these off-street garages may be found in the conservation area close to the canal near the George Street playground and at the end of Bedford Street and both of these sites fail to contribute positively to the architectural quality locally.
- 5.48 Within Area 3, given the nature of the terraced streets, much parking is on-street though larger houses may have garages. Where later garages have been built in gaps along a street frontage they can appear incongruous and result in visually disruptive features in the street. Flatted developments generally include car parking and views into car parks from the street and poorly handled car park entrances are one of the major detractors in this part of the conservation area as they tend to “puncture” street frontages.
- 5.49 Most roads in the conservation area have some form of pavement, in varying widths and materials, but there are a few exceptions such as Rectory Lane and Church Lane that are so narrow they have no room for pavements (Area 1). In general, pavement coverings throughout the conservation area laid are mostly in tarmac, except for the High Street, which has a mixture of stone paving and areas of brick laid cobbling. The type of ‘conservation’, grey / rose coloured, square stone paving is consistent along most of the commercial length of the High Street (Area 1). However, it stops abruptly at the Manor Street / Three Close Lane junction and the Park View Road junction where the pavement cover reverts to tarmac. In addition, the shorter pavement on the north side of the High Street between Ravens Lane and Manor Street has a red / buff coloured brick laid surface. This means that while the majority of the paving in the High Street is consistent, the treatment towards each end of the High Street conservation area is poor.
- 5.50 Other variants in Area 1 to the tarmac pavement covering are found on Bridge Street and Mill Street. Bridge Street has broad slab stones that extend to the full width of the pavement area and run on each side of the street in front of the terraced houses. This is the only surviving pavement cover of this kind in the conservation area, and while it is broken in places and uneven, it is very distinctive and an essential part of the character of this street. Along Mill Street (west side) outside the Berkhamsted Collegiate School from ‘Newcroft’ to The Moor the pavement is laid with modern, square paving slabs.
- 5.51 With the exception of Area 3, most of the curbstones in the conservation area are generally standard, narrow, granite, elongated blocks or pre-cast concrete narrow forms. In the High Street (Area 1) some curbstones have been laid with wider granite forms, contemporary with the ‘conservation’ stone paving and brick cobbled parking

- bays. Those on Bridge Street comprise short, broad, older blocks of granite curbstones (Area 1).
- 5.52 There are several different styles of lamp posts within the whole conservation area providing street lighting;
- modern, very tall posts with plain lights, some with single and some with double lights (High Street and car parks: Area 1)
  - modern, shorter posts with plain lights (residential streets: Area 1)
  - some converted modern lamp posts with 'conservation style' lights (on the High Street from St. John's Well Lane to Manor Street: Area 1)
- 5.53 Other types of street lighting include old Victorian style lamps attached to buildings (Castle Street) and free-standing, short, Victorian High Gothic style lampposts outside St. Peter's Church on the High Street by Church Lane and by the Old Town Hall (Area 1).
- 5.54 In Area 2 there is only one significant item that comes into this category; the street lighting that mainly runs between the carriageway and the banks of the canal opposite the station. The street lights comprise ornamental ironwork lamp standards with (recently restored) globes. The wall appears to be late-nineteenth century in date and has coping brickwork along its top edge. Further fragments of the same wall may be found near the canal bridge and on the far bank near to the (former) Castle public house, a grade II listed building. This wall, along with its ornamental ironwork lamp standards, forms an attractive boundary and has much period character. It should therefore should be retained and preserved for the future.
- 5.55 Recent shorter lamp posts in bare metal with plain lights are generally found throughout the Area 3. Torrington Road and Hamilton Road have one column each (on Hamilton Road it is a type with a lantern – again of recent period). Smaller roads such as Middle Road and Kitsbury Terrace do not have street lighting columns and this suits their character.
- 5.56 Street furniture in Berkhamsted is a mixture of traditional and modern. In some places there is an over proliferation of many different types of street furniture and inconsistency in their design. Traditional street furniture such as red telephone boxes and post boxes (wall and pillar styles) are not prevalent in the conservation area, but where they do survive they offer a pleasant and easily recognisable positive character feature. One telephone box lies opposite St. Peter's Church on the High Street outside no. 129, Dean Incent's House, and is statutory listed (Area 1). Two modern, double, red pillar post boxes stand on the north side of the High Street; one by the entrance to Church Lane and one outside 222 High Street, The Bourne School (Britannia Building Society). An older single post box stands outside 13 High Street (near Swing Gate Lane: Area 1) with another on Charles Street (George V) on the corner of Kitsbury Road and Charles Street (Area 3). This corner post box stands outside the former Post Office, now a newsagent shop, and a red telephone once accompanied it, but has since been removed. There is another post box in the front garden of 18 Gravel Path ('The Old Post Office': Area 2).
- 5.57 Signage such as road signs, street names signs and directing signposts (finger posts) are more prolific in the High Street (Area 1) than in other locations within the conservation area. They are a mixture of modern and more traditional styles and materials. Black and gold painted metal, more traditional style finger posts appear on the High Street and on Lower Kings Road. The timber town sign on the High Street by the Civic Centre has a traditional design. Although some modern, free-standing, road name signs are present in the side streets off the High Street, some older style, more traditional (metal) road name signs attached to walls and properties tend to better survive away from the town centre.

- 5.58 Refuse bins on the High Street are, on the whole, black and gold painted to complement the character of the fingerposts. Commercial refuse bins are not readily seen on the High Street and are kept to the rear of premises, only being visible from open areas such as Water Lane car park. Commercial bins however are particularly 'on view' along Church Lane, which detracts from the character of the narrow, brick cobbled street. Private refuse bins are generally kept away from the street and front gardens in Area 1. However there are some exceptions, such as the bins of 35 / 36 Castle Street that stand by the entrance to the Fire and Ambulance Station.
- 5.59 Covered bus stops are a rare feature in Berkhamsted Conservation Area, except for one modern-style perspex bus stop with a domed roof and seating in the central High Street outside no. 178 - 180 (WH Smiths). There is another bus shelter outside 199 High Street (NatWest Bank), but this has a more traditional low-key design.
- 5.60 Not a lot of public seating has been provided within the town centre, but there are one or two timber benches on the High Street at the central core, between Castle Street and Lower Kings Road. There are several punched metal bench seats found in the cemetery on Three Close Lane / Rectory Lane (Area 1). However, café-style (bistro) seating has begun to emerge along the High Street often under traditional flat awnings, which adds a vibrancy to the commercial centre and means that public seating may not be as much used. Larger areas of bistro seating have begun to occupy wider pavements and includes colourful advertising, barriers and umbrellas often in less traditional styles. While these larger areas of seating add to the street scene and town centre as a whole, over-proliferation of seating / advertising / umbrellas would be detrimental to the character of the conservation area.
- 5.61 Metal railings and, particularly, metal and plastic bollards, are found along the High Street and on some of the adjoining side roads. Bollards have different styles and are mostly used to prevent parking on the pavements. Timber bicycle parking mounts are positioned on the pavements of the High Street. Circular metal railings have been placed around the tree trunks of the trees planted on the High Street.
- 5.62 Traffic lights have been kept to a minimum on the High Street and are not intrusive upon the character of area.
- 5.63 On the whole, shopfronts have been treated well on the High Street and Lower Kings Road (Area 1) in terms of their design and restrained signage / advertising, and form a considerable part of the character of the conservation area. Many of these are statutory listed buildings and so their character and materials have been retained and kept to a minimum. Modern shopfronts do appear, sometimes in older properties but more often as part of earlier modern build. These shopfronts often comprise large aluminium shop windows and doors that tend to have a 'flat-looking' appearance compared to more traditional forms.
- 5.64 Efforts have been made to try to keep the signage on shop fascias on the High Street and Lower Kings Road to the width of a single property, even if the shop extends into two or more buildings (Area 1). Some shops occupied by larger chains have adapted their signage to the size of the property and so it is more in-keeping with the character of the conservation area. The one or two that have not adapted their signage are therefore more strikingly obvious and as such jar with the street scene. Problems associated with some shopfronts are given in Chapter 7; most of these relate to commercial properties in High Street West (beyond the Lower Kings Road / Kings Road junction).
- 5.65 Traditional pub signs are an important feature, as are the names of the public houses / inns and give people a sense of place, history and local identity. On the High Street (Area 1) they include timber hanging signs with motifs or coats of arms, and low-key lettering or timber fascias with lettering. These have been more or less retained on public houses along the High Street; 'sports bar' style signage has not been introduced

to any great degree. The retention of the decorative bracket for the sign of the former Gardeners Arms on Castle Street is a noted feature.

- 5.66 Outside the main High Street within Area 2, shop signage is restricted to the butcher's premises in Gravel Path and the three public houses standing on the banks of the canal. All of these commercial premises have acceptable signage and the traditional advertising style of the Rising Sun pub near the canal lock here deserves praise and preservation in particular.

**The Berkhamsted Heritage Walk, the local 'Blue Plaque' scheme, information boards and desk stones**

- 5.67 The Berkhamsted Heritage Walk is a leaflet published by Berkhamsted Town Council that sets out a short guide walking tour around the Berkhamsted by way of explaining 32 interesting / historic buildings and structures of local and national significance. Most of these properties have a circular 'blue plaque' attached, such as Dean Incent's House, The Dower House and the Kings Arms Hotel, with brief details about the building. It also includes St. John's on Chesham Road, the birthplace of Graham Greene. The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust hosts the annual Graham Greene Festival and 'The Graham Greene Trail' that is part of the Berkhamsted Heritage Walk.
- 5.68 There are a few information boards within Berkhamsted Conservation Area, mainly within Areas 1 and 2. Those relating to the river / canal are clear and interactive, such as a series of desk stones for brass rubbing (*'Berkhamsted Hub of Transport'*, and *'The Canal and River Berkhamsted'* by Berkhamsted Community Partnership / Canal and Riverside Partnership, and Action for Market Towns). There is also information regarding the nature of the canal fields.
- 5.69 There are also two information boards within Waitrose car park ('Historic Berkhamsted') that identify historic buildings in the town. These are informative, if a little basic, and could be improved.
- 5.70 There is also an information board between 1 – 4 St. John's Well Lane and the canal; although currently outside the conservation area it forms part of the proposed extension to the Berkhamsted Conservation Area boundary.
- 5.71 There are also low-key information boards at Berkhamsted Castle, which are managed by English Heritage.