

# WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE & LANGBOROUGH ROAD



CONSERVATION AREAS STUDY



# I. INTRODUCTION

**T**HE DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL DESIGNATE NEW CONSERVATION AREAS AND

REVIEW EXISTING CONSERVATION AREAS IN RECOGNITION OF, AND IN ORDER TO PROTECT THEIR ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE. IN ADDITION THE COUNCIL WILL IMPLEMENT SCHEMES OF ENHANCEMENT FOR CONSERVATION AREAS.

*(Deposit Draft District Plan 1996-2006)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA ?

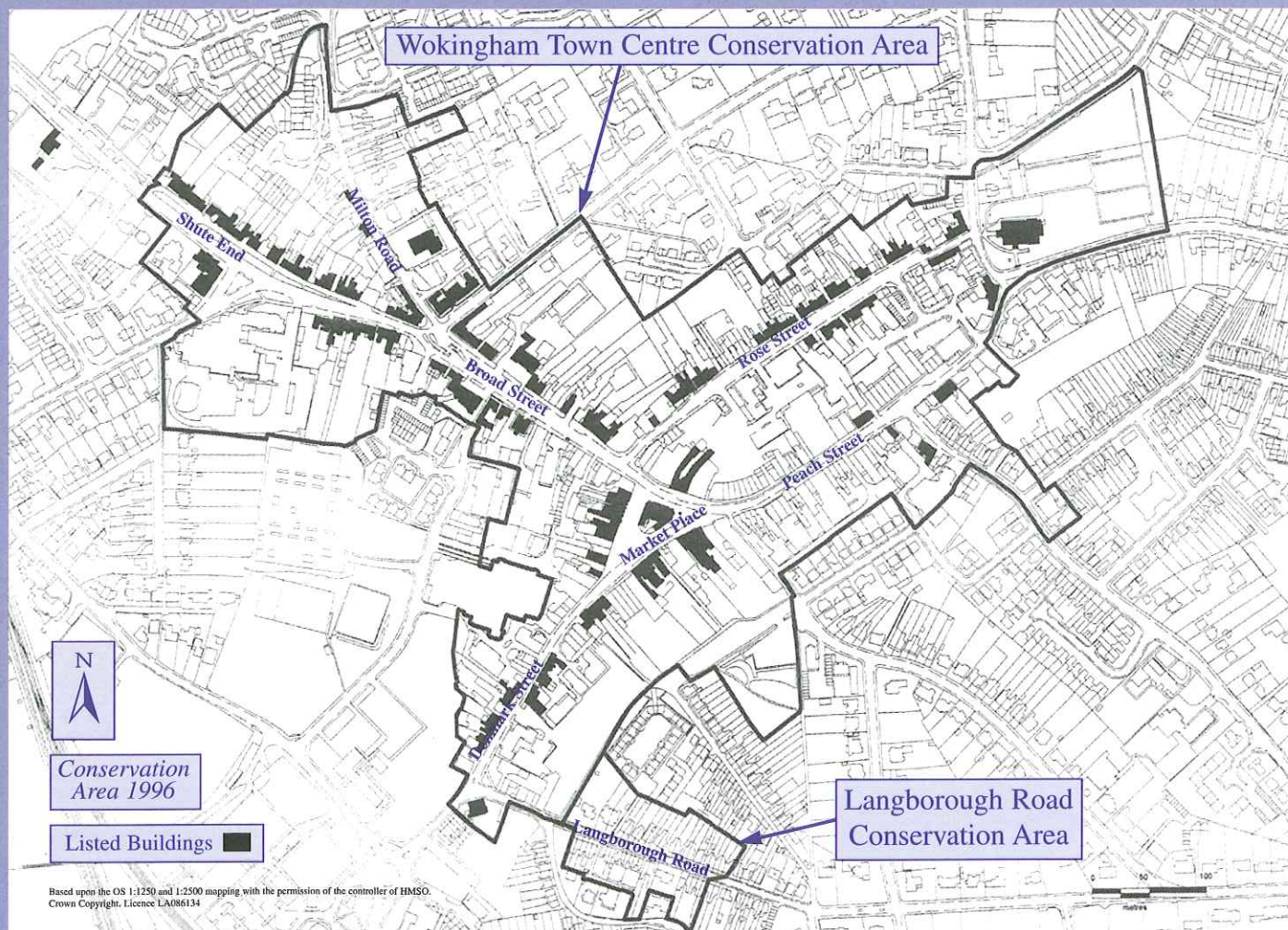
"A Conservation Area (as defined in section 69 (1) (a) of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990) is an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

The character of conservation areas can vary considerably, but they are normally historic areas centred on a concentration of listed buildings. All the elements of the area will be important in creating the character of

the conservation area, including street patterns, open spaces, trees and groups of buildings. The designation of a conservation area means that the planning authority can exercise stronger control over the development of the location, so that its special character can be protected and enhanced.

### 2. LOCATION

The Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area is in the heart of Wokingham. The area contains the historic core of the town including Rose Street, Peach Street, Denmark Street, Broad Street and Shute End. The boundaries delineate the area of the old town. Adjacent to this is the Victorian Langborough Road Conservation Area (see map below).





# II. CONTEXT

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### 1. THE NEED TO REVIEW THE CONSERVATION AREA

**T**he Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area was first designated in 1970 and was extended in both 1986 and in 1996. In the 1970 and 1986 designations some supporting evidence was produced to highlight why the area was of special character, worthy of preservation. However new guidelines on the identification and management of Conservation Areas (October 1995) from English Heritage recommended that a more in-depth analysis of the area is undertaken to include possible enhancements. This document proposes to identify the special character and outline the important issues affecting the quality of the conservation areas.

In conjunction with the study the following boundary changes have been approved.

1. The inclusion of the whole of All Saints Church's graveyard
2. The inclusion of Howard Palmer Park

The study also identified Langborough Road as an area adjacent to the existing conservation area worthy of designation. However, despite being adjacent to the existing conservation area its

characteristics are not consistent with Wokingham's medieval street pattern. The area has distinct characteristics of its own and has therefore been designated as a separate conservation area to be known as Langborough Road Conservation Area.

An action plan will be produced for the conservation areas. This will target the problems affecting them and will provide proposals for enhancement of the designated areas.

To support and provide a record of the special character of Wokingham's conservation areas a detailed photographic record and physical survey has been carried out. This provides archive information to monitor change in the future whilst at the same time recording the character which makes Wokingham special. (This will be held at the District Council offices.)

### 2. POLICY CONTEXT

The local authority is able to enhance, preserve and protect its conservation areas through the following planning law and policy documents.





# II. CONTEXT

## **a) Designation**

The Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area was one of the first to be designated by Berkshire County Council in 1970, to preserve townscape qualities. The designation allows additional controls on development which do not apply elsewhere, including the control of demolition, works to trees and controls on advertisement hoardings.

## **b) The Local Plan**

The Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area is protected by policies within the District Council's South East Area Local Plan (adopted 1994), and the Deposit Draft District Plan. The adopted and draft plans include both site specific and general policies of preservation and enhancement for this conservation area and other historic parts of the district.

## **c) Supplementary Guidance**

Development briefs for sites within the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area have been produced in order to outline the type and nature of development which would be appropriate in specific locations. The District Council's "Integrated Urban Design Briefs" identified sites within the town centre and outlines the character of the area. More detailed information, and the Council's recommended approach to the treatment of specific topics such as shop frontages, tree preservation, listed buildings and disabled access to historic buildings are outlined within the *Council's Planning Guidelines*. Both of the above should be considered within the context of development within the Conservation Areas.

## **3. OTHER AREA BASED STUDIES/INITIATIVES**

There are a number of studies and initiatives which provide recommendations which directly relate to the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area. These include the following:



*Entrance to Bush Walk, Peach Street*



# II. CONTEXT

## *The Built Environment Studies*

These outline the characteristics of the built form within areas of the district. Areas which are considered to possess special townscape qualities were identified and considered as possible new conservation areas or additions to existing ones.

## *The Buchanan Report*

This undertook an assessment of the problems affecting Wokingham's Town Centre and put forward recommendations for improvement of the area in general, as well as the development of other specific sites.

## *The Wokingham Town Centre Management Initiative (TCMI)*

This is a partnership of organisations and individuals working together to achieve a better environment and facilities for those using the town centre. The TCMI produced a strategy which identifies areas which require improvements and allocates monies from its budget or raises sponsorship to undertake these improvements.

## *Wokingham Shop Front Survey*

This recorded all shop fronts within the town centre to provide a detailed record of the frontages and planning permissions (1993).

## *Wokingham Rose Street South Site Development Brief*

This outlines proposals for this important site in the centre of the conservation area. This was adopted by Wokingham District Council in September 1996.



*Oxford House, Broad Street*



# II. CONTEXT

## 1. HISTORICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

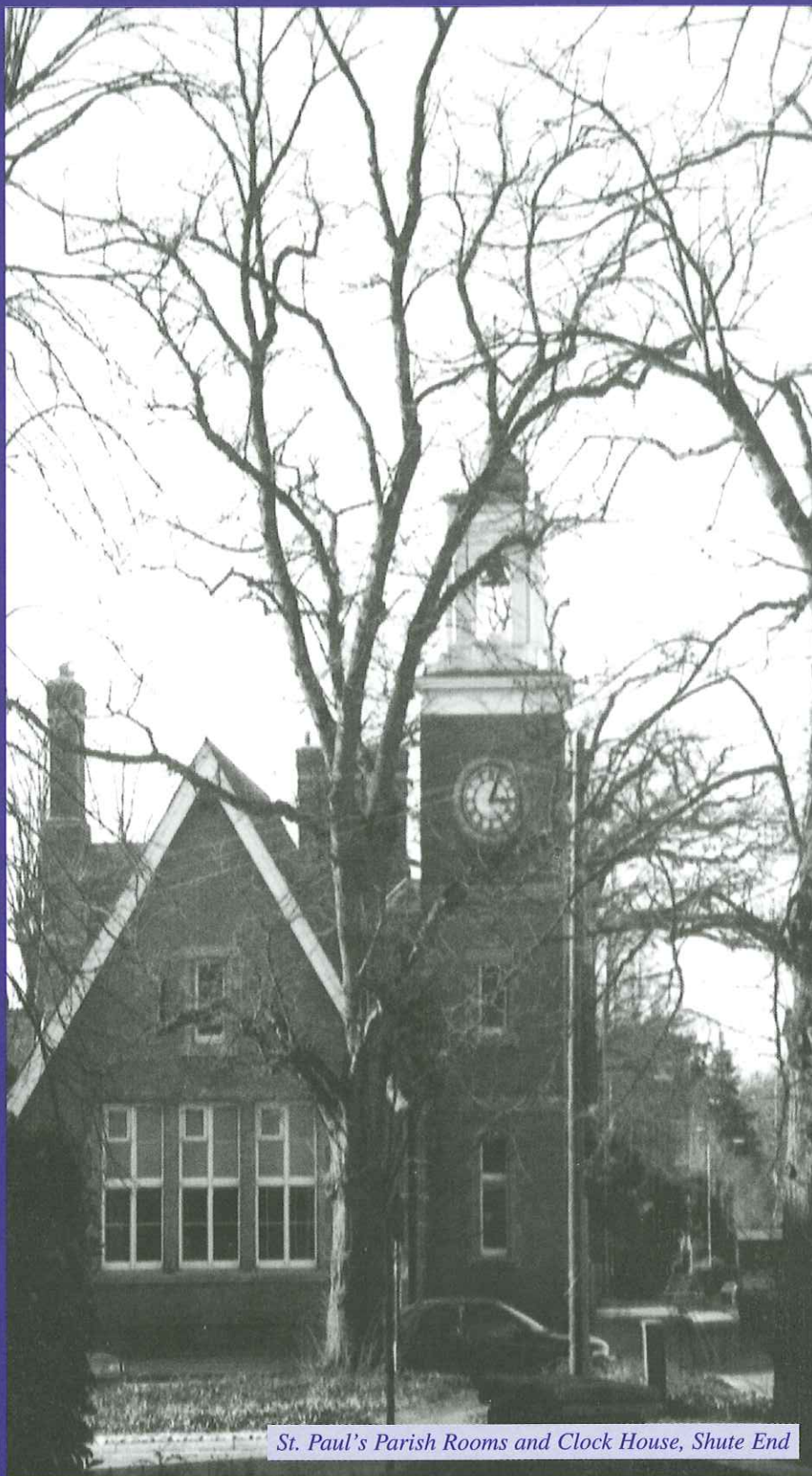
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okingham originated on the high ground above the Emmbrook flood plain,

which is at the edge of the Thames basin. The town's name literally means the homestead of the people of Wocce. These were Saxon settlers believed to have also settled in Woking, Surrey.

The development of Wokingham as a town dates back to 1219 when the town's principal streets began to develop. Market Place and Rose Street were referred to at this time, when the town's right to hold a market was granted. It is thought that this focus for trade resulted in the 13th century extension to the town including the increased development of Rose Street and the link between it and Peach Street, namely Cross Street.

Throughout the medieval period Wokingham was part of the large parish and manor of Sonning. This manor was an ecclesiastical and jurisdictional unit. Parts of today's Wokingham including All Saints' Church and the area known as Ashridge were formerly a detached part of Wiltshire separate from the county of Berkshire. This area was part of the manor of Amesbury in Wiltshire. This anomaly is due to large landowners holding property in an adjacent shires. In the middle ages land ownerships (and hence taxation) were more important than geographical proximity in determining administrative units. Evidence of this detached part of Wiltshire is provided today in the name given to Wiltshire Road, the centre of the detached area, and the County boundary sign in Rose Street.



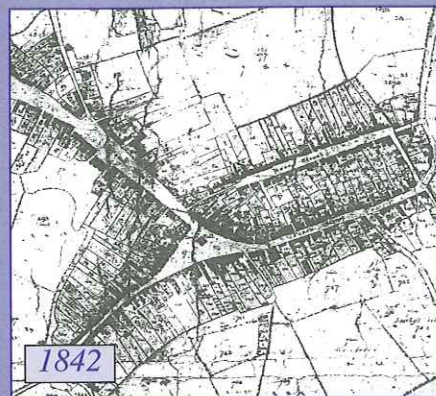
*St. Paul's Parish Rooms and Clock House, Shute End*



# III. APPRAISAL

Until this century the town's major function was as a place of market for the neighbouring agricultural communities. This was where the local people could trade their produce. Other historic industries have included a fourteenth century bell foundry which was said to have been the main supplier of bells in southern England, a silk weaving industry with mills located along Peach Street and the production of malt for the London breweries which commenced when the turnpike opened in the mid eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century the traditional industries were still in existence with this being a relatively prosperous time for the town. Unusually this prosperity did not bring any substantial growth of the built form with it (see maps dated 1761 and 1842)

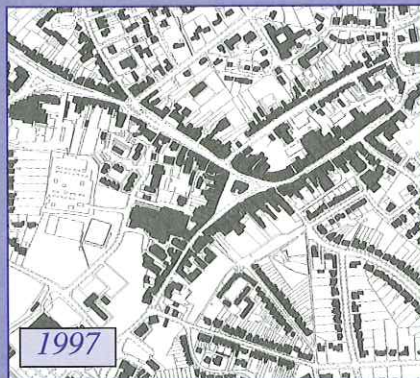


By the middle of the nineteenth century Wokingham had a population of 4,000, which still served a mainly agricultural

community. It was not until the Victorian era and the arrival of the railway that new development of the town took place (see map dated 1883). This brought increasing numbers of shops (particularly in Peach Street) low cost workers housing (Victorian terraces) and the building of a new Town Hall (1860).



The transition of Wokingham from a small market town to today's busy centre of business and light industry took place in the 20th century. The cause of this growth can be attributed to the town's close proximity to London and Heathrow and its good rail and road links to the rest of the country. These factors have made this a desirable location for those employed in London and thus the pressure to develop this area was and still is extremely strong. (see map dated 1967).



The built form of the centre of Wokingham is varied and historic in nature. The historic core provides the town with a focused area which is worthy of preservation and deserves protection and enhancement.

## 2. EXISTING FABRIC

Today's town centre still focuses around its historic Market Place and Town Hall. The old fabric and the ancient layout of the core as stayed mainly unchanged since medieval times. Unfortunately some less compelling 20th century buildings do exist within the area, but these generally do not detract from the character of the town.

## 3. CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER

### a) Town Centre Conservation Area

The building styles are generally modest, predominantly of red brick with tiled clay roofs. The buildings tend to be of a small scale and offer the characteristics of a traditional Berkshire market town. Although the town has no dominant building types, the scale colouring and variation in detailing make it rich in texture and character.

### b) The Langborough Road Conservation Area

This has qualities of a Victorian development displaying large ornate villas and small artisan cottages, predominantly in red brick.

The following Townscape analysis outlines the character of both of Wokingham's conservation areas, street by street, defining the site specific character which exists.



# III. APPRAISAL - SHUTE END

## 4. TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS

### Shute End

**S**hute End forms the western approach from Reading. The road leads up a steep slope which narrows until it eventually converges with Broad Street. The area is rich in character and offers an attractive and important gateway to Wokingham, grouped on each side with Listed Buildings, many of which are still in residential use.

The Terrace to the north of the road contains a mixture of historic buildings all of which are listed, some dating back as far as the 14th century. Its position on an embankment and the composition of buildings provides an identifiable village green character and gives a sense of entry to those approaching the town from Reading or the railway.

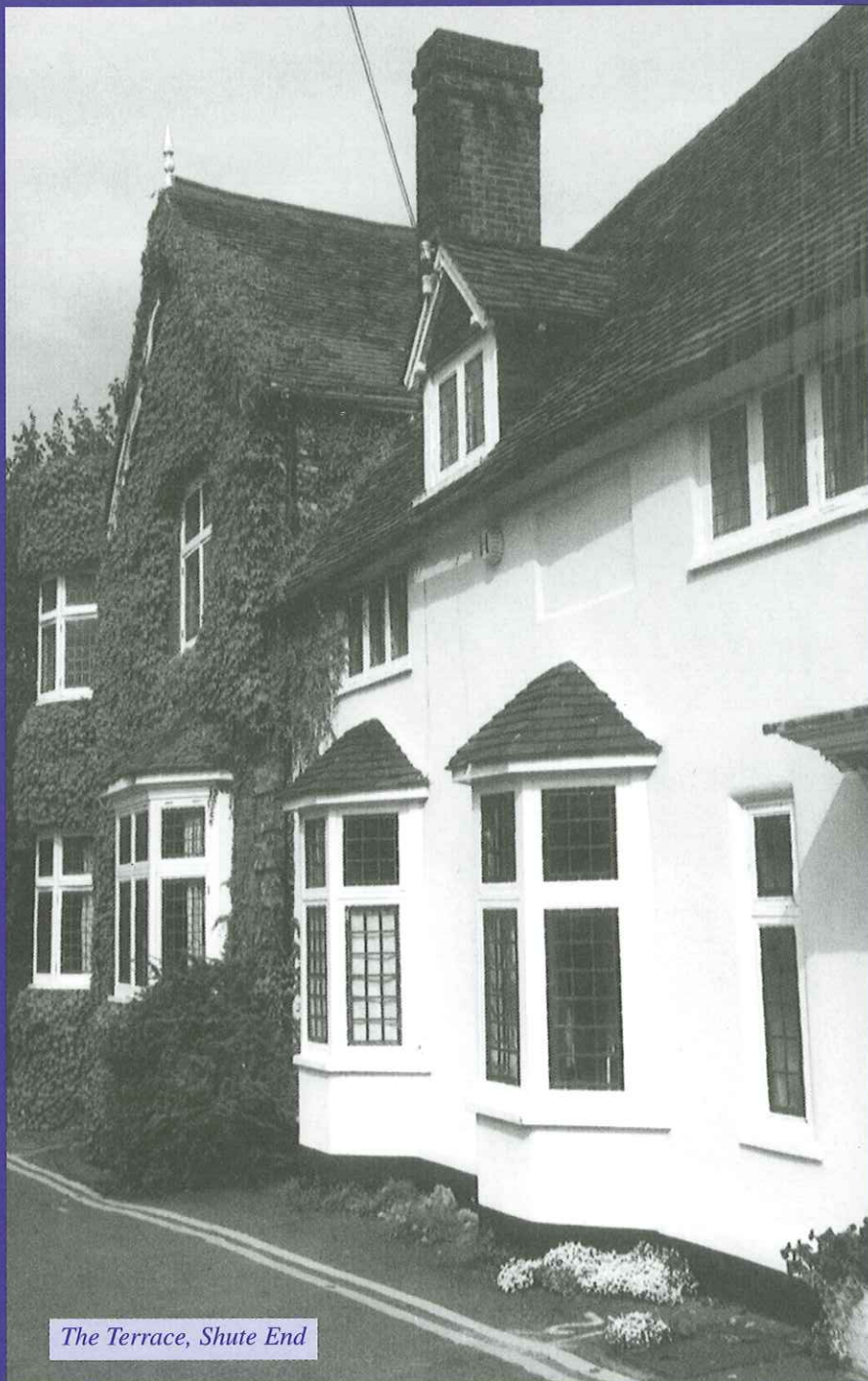
The area opposite The Terrace is split in two by the entrance to Station Road. To the west is a group of buildings dominated by St. Paul's Parish Rooms and Clock House, which are now offices. Its 14 metre high clock tower is an important visual landmark and acts as an entrance to the historic town. To the east are the district council offices comprising the historic red brick former rectory and its considerable extension. Contained at the centre of this triangular node is the important Anchor Green with a number of mature lime trees and a low-maintenance planting scheme.

Towards Broad Street, Shute End is visually contained by a mix of both residential and business uses before the grand scale of Broad Street is revealed. The larger houses (now offices) on the southern side of the road provide Wokingham with some good examples of Georgian architecture. Number 8 with its three storeys and doorway with pilasters and pediment is a fine example.

- ◆ High levels of intrusive traffic in the area
- ◆ Traffic signing adds confusion at Station Road / Shute End Junction
- ◆ Poor pedestrian links between The Terrace and Shute End
- ◆ Low key landscape treatment of

traffic island (Station Road / Shute End)

- ◆ Poor quality of paving on the lower southern side of Shute End



*The Terrace, Shute End*



# III. APPRAISAL - MILTON ROAD

Milton Road has a much more intimate and quiet character compared with that of Shute End. The road contains mainly residential and commercial properties, including a number of 16th and 17th century cottages. The most dominant building within the street scene is the well landscaped Baptist Church.

It was built in 1860 and replaced an earlier chapel on

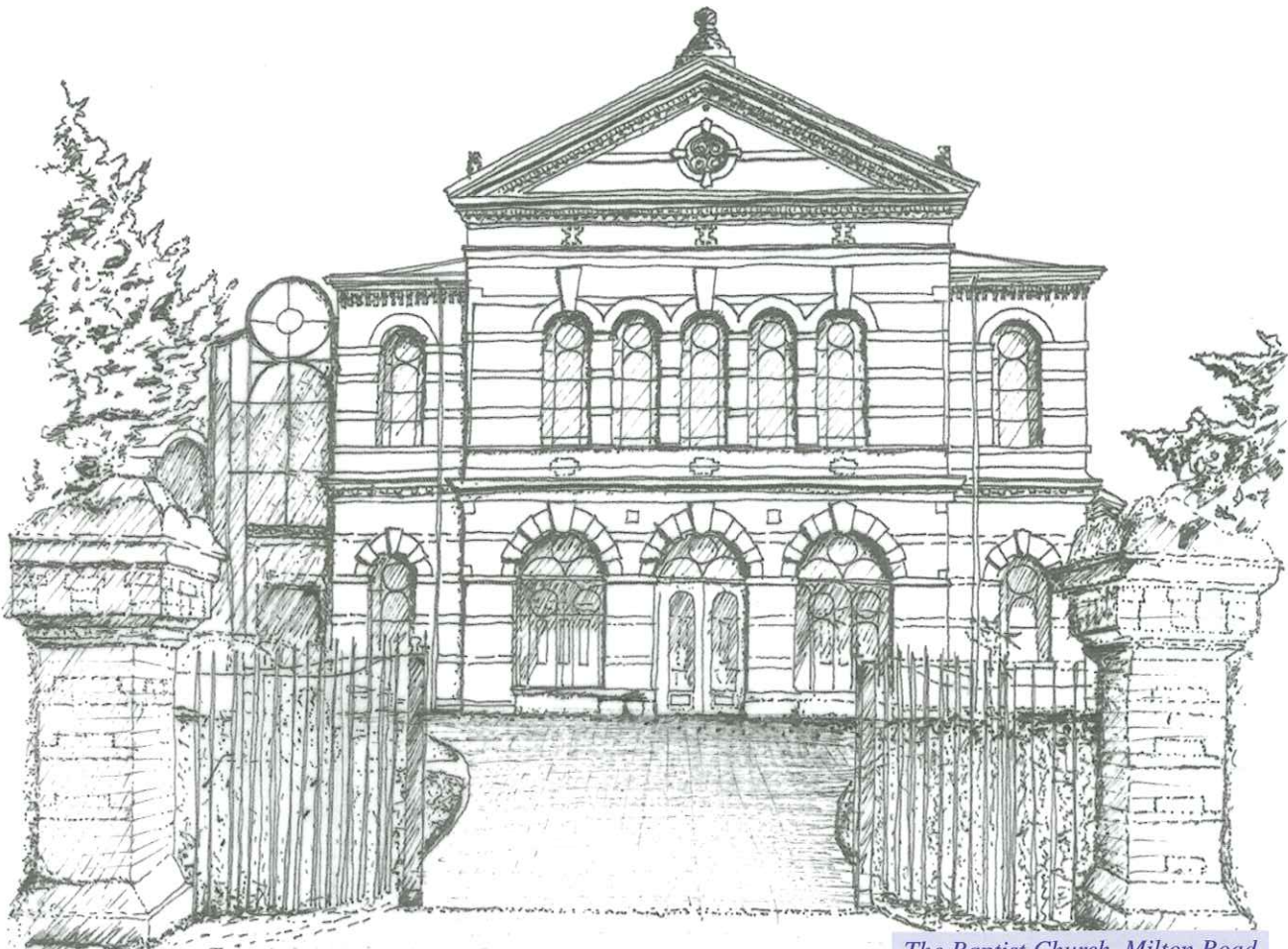
the same location. The building is a Victorian structure with banded brick work, stone dressings and a slate roof. The building has recently been sensitively extended with a glass and steel structure (See below).

Like Shute End, Milton Road climbs up hill towards the church, whereafter the road becomes flatter nearing the centre of town. The curvature of the road and its tight entrance with Rectory Road

contribute to a sense of enclosure from Broad Street, which only becomes visible at the junction of the two roads, and is now dominated by traffic controls.

## *Issues*

- ◆ Poor road surface



*The Baptist Church, Milton Road*



# III. APPRAISAL - BROAD STREET

## Broad Street

**B**road Street is a large open space dominated by its wide road. This area offers a very different atmosphere to the other main streets of the town. Buildings along Broad Street are mainly of detached and individual styles, predominately of red brick and slate. Montague House and The Elms are both good examples of large detached buildings along this street. Both are grade II\* listed and were previously town houses built in the 1700s. These would originally have been on the edge of the town and would have belonged to the wealthier members of Wokingham's community.

The western end of Broad Street contains some of the best examples of large historic buildings in Wokingham (including those mentioned above). This western end is flanked and enclosed by fine historic buildings, still displaying original features. Tudor House terminates this western view and provides the road with a sense of enclosure. This house (previously a school for girls) had an exposed timber framed façade, added in the 1920s. This was from a demolished building in Binfield.

To the eastern end of the road, the buildings tend to become more modest in scale and appearance and are more characteristic of the market town. The view to the end of the road is visually terminated by the Town Hall this pinpoints the centre of the town. (See below).

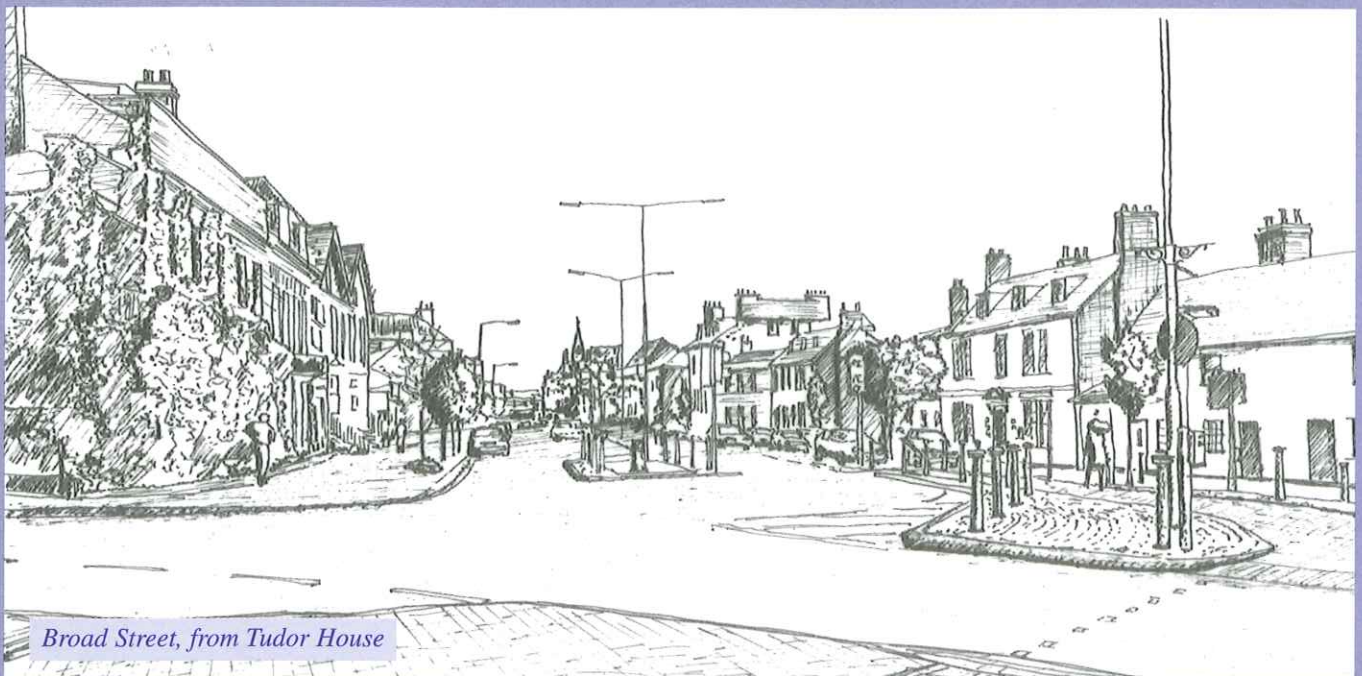
Broad Street is an example of an old street where change to commercial and business uses has in some cases been at the expense of the built environment. Fortunately the street has escaped complete redevelopment (unlike other areas of the town) and still maintains most of its historic character and provides Wokingham with part of its commercial centre.



*Tudor House, Broad Street*

## Issues

- ◆ Increased on-street parking
- ◆ Inconsistent street furniture
- ◆ Vacant upper floors above shops



*Broad Street, from Tudor House*



# III. APPRAISAL - MARKET PLACE

## Market Place

W

okingham's centre was and is still the Market Place. This is the area where the

country roads and lanes converge to meet at what used to be the focus of trade for the surrounding countryside. This area is well enclosed on all sides by a collection of listed buildings creating a roughly triangular shape. The frontage of the buildings on the northern side of the Market Place is of flat roofed 1960s commercial development, with some remnants of buildings from previous centuries (including the Bush Hotel).

The dominant building of the core is the Town Hall. Opened in 1860 in a gothic style it replaced the previous market house. The interesting features include

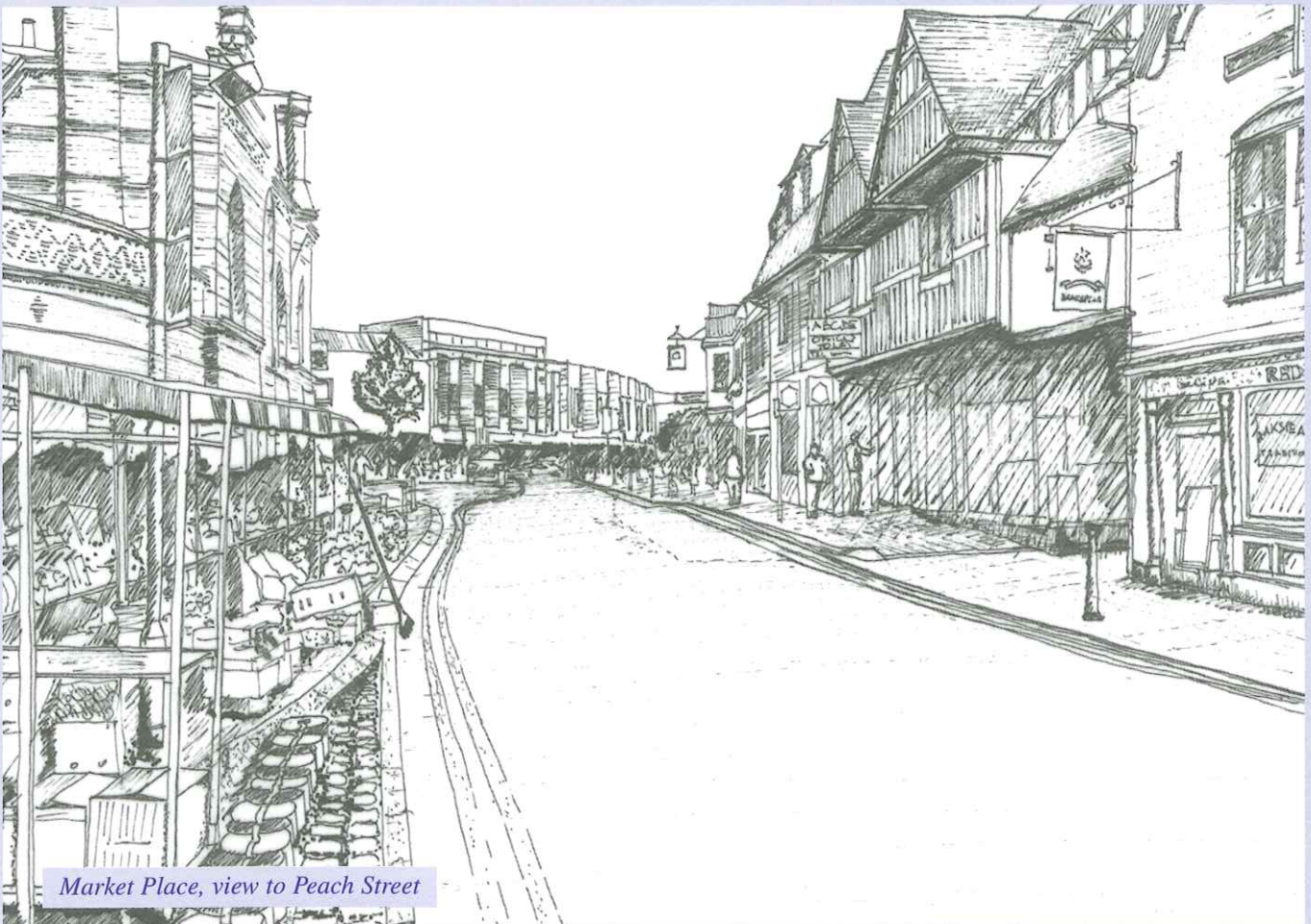
the red and blue brick detailing, stone dressings and the finely detailed metalwork. The building is centrally placed and acts as the focus of the town centre. Other significant historic buildings include the Ye Old Rose Inne, a part timbered early 15th century building altered in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Red Lion Pub with its old tile gabled roof.

The Market Place is dominated by brick paving, which was introduced in 1990 as an enhancement scheme. The area is paved with blue and red clay brick and concrete paviors. The relatively young trees help to soften the visual appearance of the area.

The sense of enclosure and the vitality of this predominantly shopping area, helps to promote this as the core of the town.

## Issues

- ◆ Pockets of poor architectural quality (including the building occupied by Superdrug)
- ◆ Conflict between vehicles and pedestrians especially at the market edge
- ◆ Some poor shop frontages and signage (including Iceland, Superdrug and the unit previously occupied by Nationwide)
- ◆ Under utilised upper floors
- ◆ Poor visual impact of empty market stalls and an introverted arrangement of the market
- ◆ The town's main open space is eroded by the inclusion of a bus lane



Market Place, view to Peach Street



# III. APPRAISAL - DENMARK STREET

## Denmark Street

**D**enmark Street was dominated by narrow fronted historic burgage plots. In many cases these plots have been adapted in order to house later 20th century buildings. These more modern infill sites generally reflect the existing historic form and in most cases fit into the overall street scene. The typical structures in the street are of two/three storeys in height, generally gable fronted and either in red brick or with rendered frontages.

The curvature of Denmark Street to the south, closes the vista and provides a sense of anticipation of what is around the corner. In the other direction there is a clear perception of the street widening towards the Market Place, thus creating a strong link between the two visually different areas.

This street integrates well with Market Place and contains a number of the town centre's listed buildings, most of which were previously residential units which are now in commercial use. The Crispin public house on the western side of the road is an example of one of these buildings and is a 16th century timber

framed public house with a grade II listing. This low scale building, is typical of the buildings to the southern end of the street.

## Issues

- ◆ Vacant units at the southern end of the road
- ◆ Poor access to the public car park
- ◆ Poor visual appearance of the Denmark Street "backs" and car park
- ◆ Poor visual appearance of area opposite the new library



*Entrance buidings to Old Drill Hall, Denmark Street*



# III. APPRAISAL - PEACH STREET

## Peach Street

A

lthough Peach Street makes up part of the medieval core of historic Wokingham, unfortunately little remains of the original

medieval structures. The surviving buildings include a group of 17th century cottages with jettied upper floors, which were restored and extensively extended in 1970. The buildings to the northern side of the street were built during the 1960s and thus reflect the design trends of the time.

The variety of buildings from different centuries along Peach Street provide much of the town's vitality. It has a number of strong links to the town centre's car parking and provides the units for many of the town centre's larger retail and business units. The eastern end possesses some listed buildings, including, the Ship Inn. This was formerly an inn and stables and is now a public house. The timber framed building with painted brick acts as the entrance to the town from the east and announces the entry to Peach Street.

The road's curvature and narrowness at its western end help to provide it with a sense of enclosure. The perception of the widening of Market Place is only evident as the two spaces converge.

## Issues

- ◆ Reduce high level of traffic
- ◆ Footpaths are too narrow in places
- ◆ Exposed and poor quality backs
- ◆ The space between Lee's the printer and the old Midland Bank (side of Toyworld) lacks visual unity
- ◆ Vacant upper floors, over retail units
- ◆ Poor appearance of the Arcade



*Commercial Units, Peach Street.*



# III. APPRAISAL - ROSE STREET

## Rose Street

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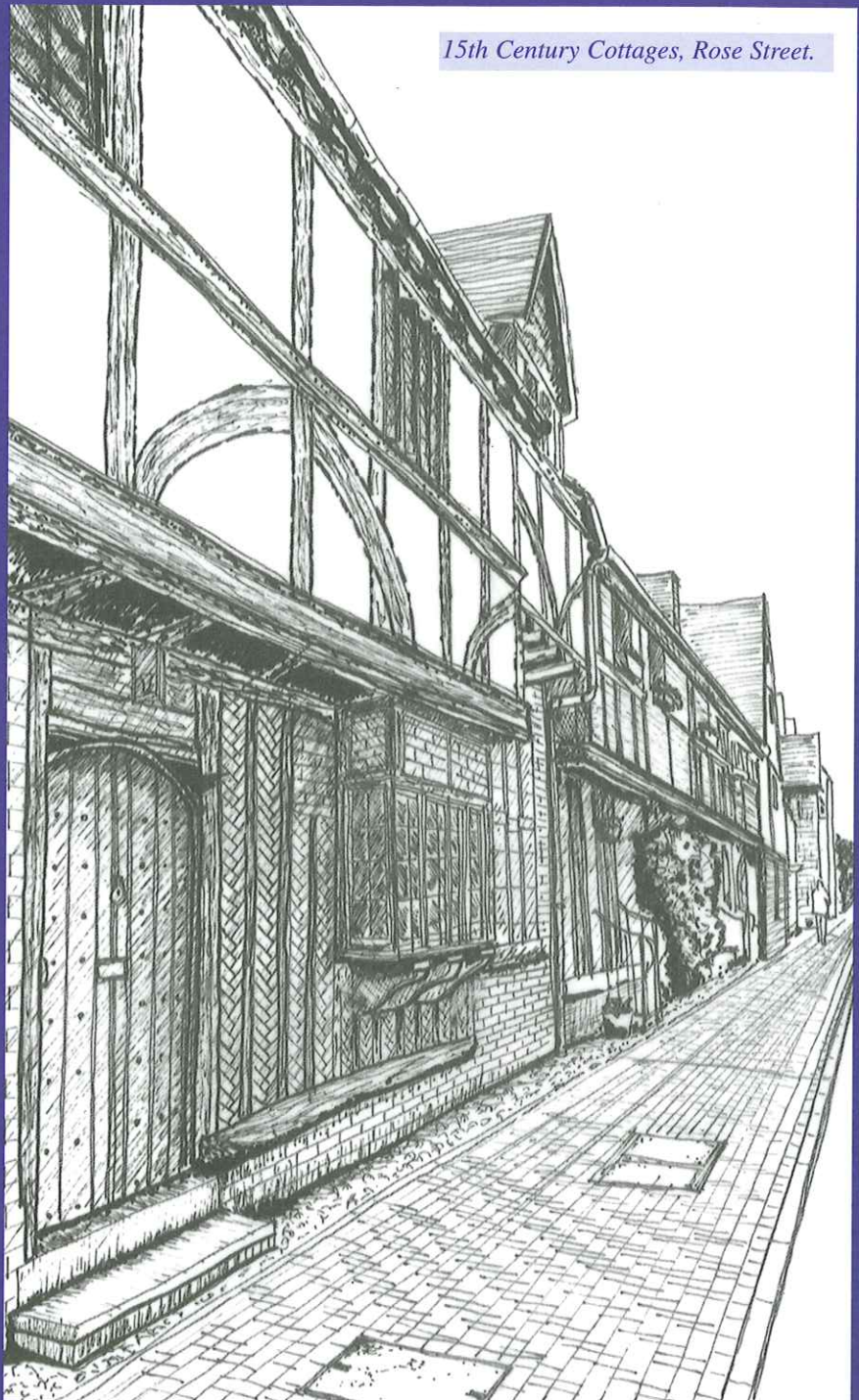
ose street is the street which has retained most of its historic character, especially on its western side.

Together with Cross Street it forms the 13th century planned addition to the town. Subsequent densification off Rose Street, for example Rose Court offers an insight into historical vernacular urban housing.

The street is still predominantly residential and the buildings are of a small scale with the majority only two storeys high. The central section of the street consists of a long simple line of cottages, some dating back as far as the 14th century. This horizontal emphasis is highlighted by the low eaves and ridge height. The space this creates is long and rectangular in shape, which is stopped at either end by buildings at right angles to the main street frontage. The narrowing of the street at its north eastern end creates a framed view of All Saints Church (dating back to the 15th century), whereas at the south western end the visual barrier is made by a three storey house whose height closes the view to Broad Street.

Towards the church and on the south eastern side of the road are examples of 15th century cottages which are still in residential use today. These are characteristic timber framed buildings, only one room wide and with attractive brick detailing (see opposite).

The streets layout has remained unchanged since medieval times and adds to the history of this area but the demolition of certain buildings and their replacement with flat surface car parking has left a number of gaps in the southern side of the street. The hard landscaping is similar to that of Market Place and adds to the overall character of the area.



15th Century Cottages, Rose Street.

## Issues

- ◆ Visual gaps on the southern side of the road
- ◆ Links to Peach Street are of poor quality

- ◆ New development on car park and vacant sites



# IV. LANGBOROUGH ROAD CONSERVATION AREA.

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## Langborough Road

Langborough Road makes up Wokingham's Victorian conservation area. The area is

made up of large Victorian villas and small artisan terraces. The larger villas are located to the north western end of the road and provide an impressive entrance to the Victorian area. The villas are predominately red brick with grey brick detailing and terracotta tiles. The smaller cottages are much more simple in design and contain very plain red brick facades. Unusually these still retain many of their original features including windows and doors.

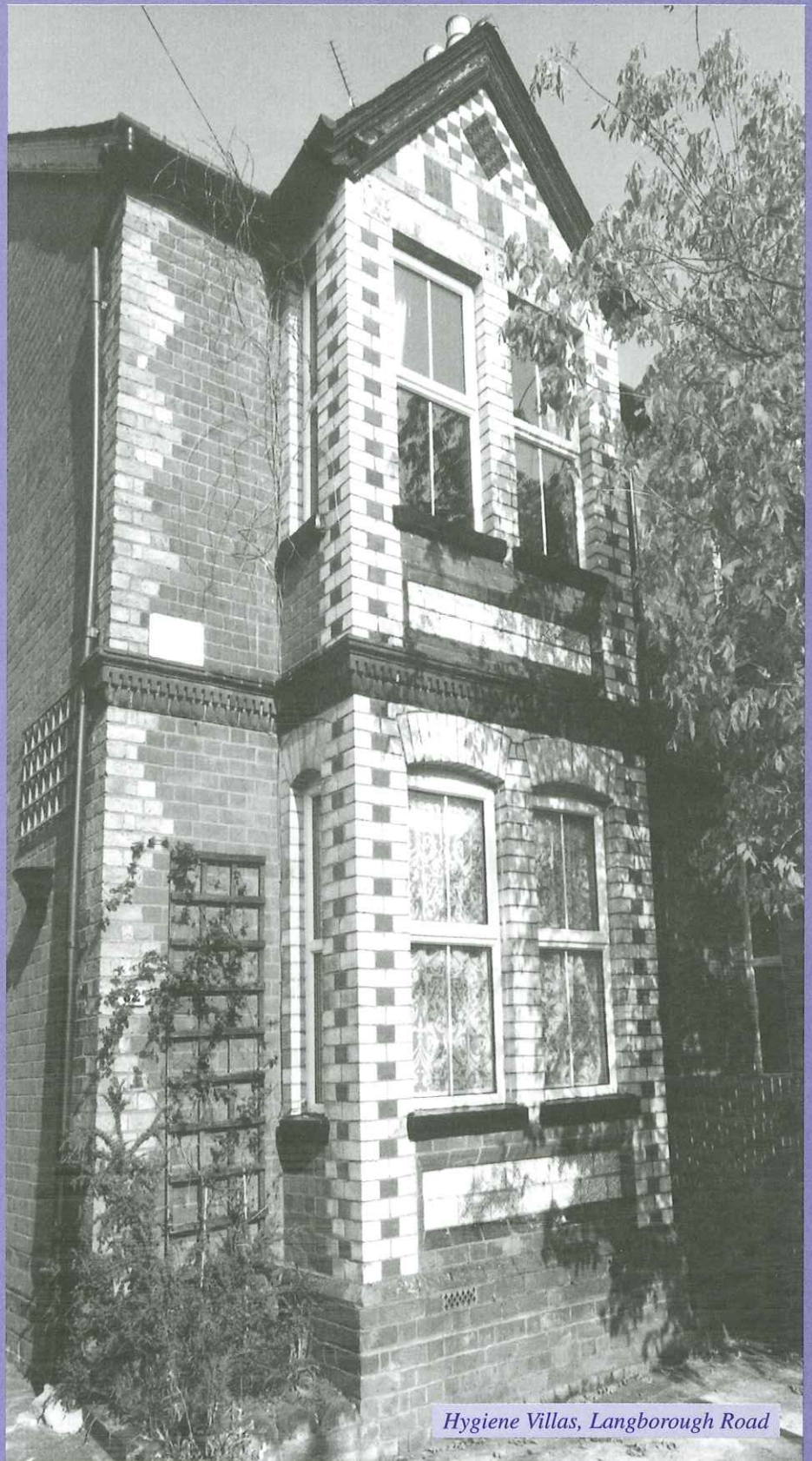
The road is narrow and enclosed with the housing dominating on both sides. The road graduates up hill towards the boundary of the conservation area and this provides a closed view of the road beyond. In the south easterly direction the frontages become smaller and reduced to road level height. This area would have historically housed the Victorian workers in the town.

This area is attractive in appearance and contains some excellent examples of Victorian housing within Wokingham. The diversity of the development in this area also provides the Langborough Road Conservation Area with historic examples of both large ornate villas as well as small worker's housing.

Langborough Road's characteristics are extremely different to those of the Town Centre Conservation Area, thus this area is worthy of preservation and enhancement under a separate conservation area designation. This provides Wokingham with its Victorian conservation area.

### Issues

- ◆ High level of traffic using the road
- ◆ Obstruction caused by on street parking



*Hygiene Villas, Langborough Road*



# IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION AREA ENHANCEMENT



## **E - Environmental improvements**

- 1 - Enhance the paved area on the south side of Shute End/Station Road junction and the hard landscape of The Terrace.
- 2 - Enhance and expand the market stall area.
- 3 - Create a civic space around the Town Hall.
- 4 - Enhance the area opposite the new library at the southern end of Denmark Street.
- 5 - Improve appearance of The Arcade.
- 6 - Enhance the space between Lee's Print shop and the old Midland Bank. (Peach Street).
- 7 - Improve area in front of Howard Palmer Park.
- 8 - Enhance paved area in Langborough Road.

## **T - Transportation improvements**

- 1 - Improve the road layout at the Shute End/Station Road Junction.
- 2 - Resolve car/pedestrian conflict between Shute End, The Terrace, and Station Road.
- 3 - Restrict car parking to residents of Milton Road.

- 4 - Relocate bus route out of Market Place entrance.
- 5 - Improve access to the public car park at the rear of Denmark Street at its eastern entrance.
- 6 - Enhance car park to the rear of Denmark Street.
- 7 - Introduce traffic calming at the junction between London Road and Peach Street.
- 8 - Add traffic calming measures between the Rose Street and Denmark Street junction.
- 9 - Reduce the impact of on-street parking in Rose Street.

## **S - Shop frontages and shopping areas**

- 1 - Improve the shop fronts at the western end of Broad Street.
- 2 - Improve shop fronts at Market Place.
- 3 - Find appropriate uses for vacant properties, in Denmark Street.
- 4 - Improve shop fronts along Peach Street.

Further information is available from:  
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