

GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

THONG, SHORNE CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT



Thong Lane looking north towards White Horse Cottage

November 1999

THONG, SHORNE.

Thong is situated on flattish land below an escarpment of the North Downs, close to Roman Watling Street and just to the west of Shorne, in whose parish it lies. The present conservation area includes just sixteen residential properties, set within a wide, open landscape. There is no church, pub or community facility within the hamlet which until a fifty years ago would have been involved almost totally in agriculture – now it provides houses for commuters to Gravesend or further afield. Set slightly to the north of the conservation area, but included within proposals for extending the boundary, is a unique collection of semi-detached houses with unusual barns which were built in 1924 by the London County Council as smallholdings for retired servicemen.

Thong is notable for its variety of historic buildings, its landscape setting against the wooded slopes of the North Downs, and its curved main street which links the settlement. Less attractive is the very busy traffic and lack of pedestrian facilities.

This report considers the historic development of Thong, assesses the character of the conservation area in more detail, and suggests various enhancements to the area including boundary changes and environmental improvements.

INTRODUCTION

Thong Conservation Area was first designated in March 1981 since when the boundary has not been altered. A conservation area is *an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance* (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). This Statement provides guidance on how the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the Thong Conservation area can be achieved.

Local authorities are required to *formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas* (Section 71 of the Act). This Statement fulfils this statutory duty. In making a decision on an application for development in a conservation area, *special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area* (Section 72 of the Act). While this should ensure that harmful change is not allowed, some changes, normally not requiring planning permission (known as permitted development), could still damage the special qualities of the area. Local authorities have special powers to issue directions removing certain permitted development rights from properties if it can be shown that this is necessary, and this Statement includes a proposal for an Article 4(2) Direction for Thong.

This Statement should be read in conjunction with the Gravesham Local Plan, adopted in November 1994, and with the more recent Second Review, the Main Issues Report for which was published in July 1997. Another relevant document is the Kent County Council Structure Plan of 1996. National planning policy guidance, especially Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15) "Planning and the Historic Environment" is also helpful.

This Statement has been prepared by The Conservation Studio in collaboration with Gravesham Borough Council and Shorne Parish Council. A draft with a questionnaire was circulated to all local residents and a public exhibition held at the Civic Centre between 5th and 13th October 1999. A public meeting to discuss the proposals was also held at the Civic Centre on 14th October 1999. The results of this consultation exercise have been included within this Statement which has now been adopted by Gravesham Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

THONG, SHORNE

KEY:

Existing Conservation Area Boundary



Proposed Conservation Area Boundary



Existing Listed Building



Proposed Listed Building



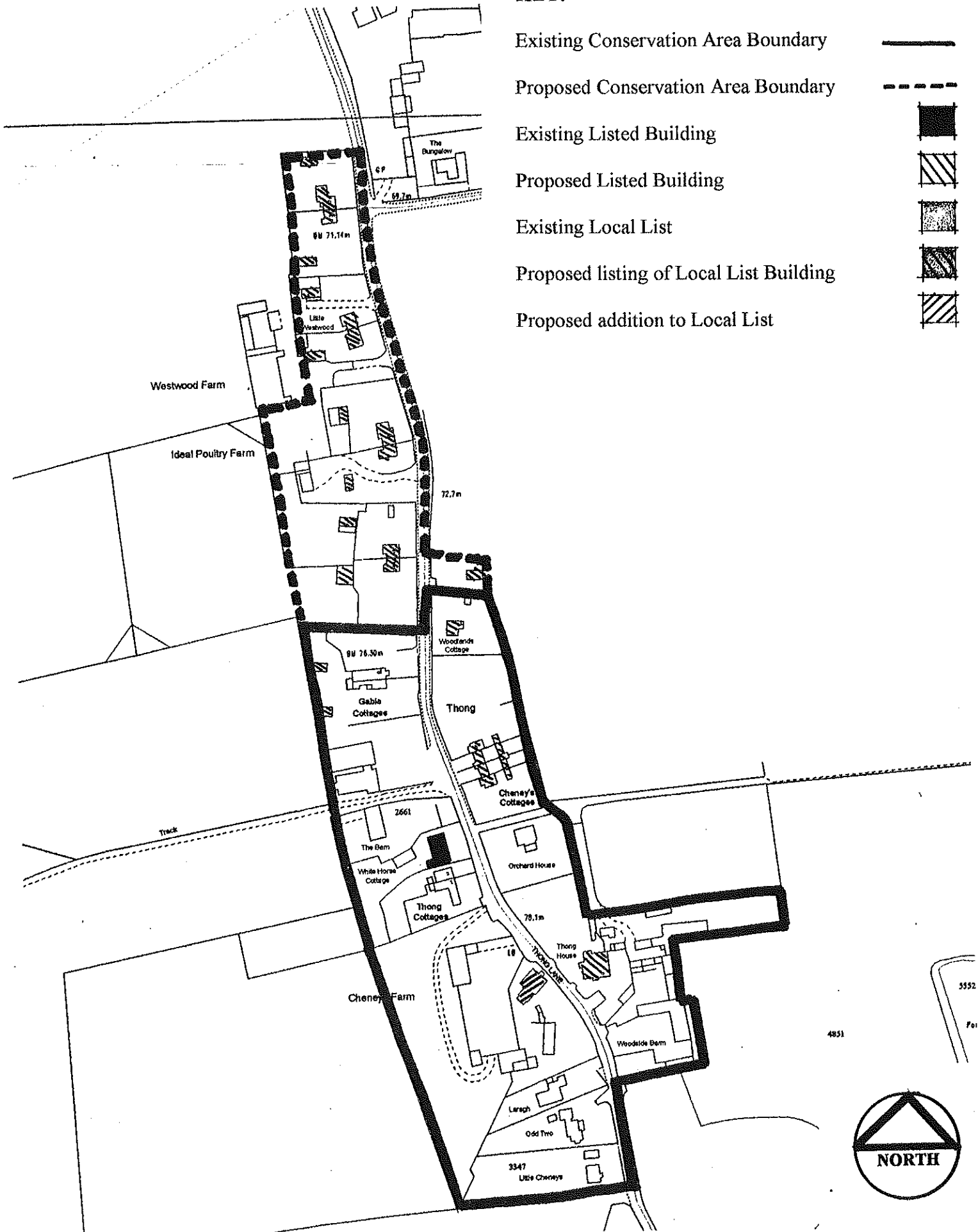
Existing Local List



Proposed listing of Local List Building



Proposed addition to Local List



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THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA.

History.

Thong lies within the parish of Shorne, with Watling Street, the old Roman road from London to Dover (now the A2) as its southern boundary. This divides it from the neighbouring parish of Cobham but there have always been strong links between the two parishes because of the patronage of successive occupants of Cobham Hall, the grade I mansion situated to the north-east of Cobham village. Thong appears to have developed on chalky but fertile land along the route of a stream which came from springs running out of the escarpments of the North Downs towards the Thames estuary. This stream has now dried up due to landscaping in Cobham Park and a swallow hole in Shorne Ifield. The village of Shorne also developed on a similar stream, which has also been lost into a swallow hole just outside the village.

The remains of prehistoric man can be seen as crop marks on the wide fields of Thong and its neighbour Chalk, dating in part to the Bronze Age. Roman remains have been found in some abundance north of Shorne village and the Romans clearly used the Thames shoreline as a mooring place. The Anglo-Saxons also had a presence locally as the name "Shorn" is based on the Saxon word "Scora", meaning steep slope. In 774 AD King Offa gave certain lands in Higham to Rochester Cathedral and just before the Norman Conquest the Priory of Rochester received tithes from a manor of "Bethencourt", which included Thong. After the reformation these were leased off but a document records the exact extent of the manor which included Thong, and parts of Shorne, Chalk, and Henhurst. The land around Thong would therefore appear to have been let to a succession of local gentry and absentee landlords, possibly including in the 17th century one Richard Cheney of London, who died in 1625, leaving in his will an annual gift to the poor of the parish of Shorne. The Cheneys were an old Kentish family but their home was in East Kent so the connection with Thong is unfortunately not clear, but it appears likely that he owned or rented land at Thong which might explain why "Cheneys Farm" is so named.

From the 18th century onwards the history of Thong is allied to Cobham Hall and its owners. The Cobham estate had been dispersed after the fall from grace of Lord Cobham in 1603, but eventually the house and some of the land had fallen into the hands of the Duke of Richmond and thence into the ownership of the Irishman John Bligh, who became the first Earl of Darnley in the late 18th century. In 1782 Cheneys Farm was purchased by John Reed, the licensee of the See Ho inn on Shorne Ridgeway, only half a mile away from Cobham Park, and after he died in 1803 the new Earl bought the two hundred acres or so of land belonging to the farm. Reed's ownership of the farm was recorded until recently when "Reeds Barn", part of Cheneys Farm, was converted into a house.

During the 1920's the then Lord and Lady Darnley resided for part of the time at a new dower house in Shorne Ridgeway and Cobham Hall was let to rich Americans. In 1924

the new A2, which roughly followed the line of Roman Watling Street, was opened, which involved the sale of further land from the Cobham estate and which separated Shorne and Cobham.

In the early 1920's the government began a policy of creating smallholdings for ex-soldiers from World War I and with this object in view the Greater London Council bought from Lord Darnley Cheneys Farm at Thong, Ifield Court Farm at Shorne, and other lands in the neighbouring parish of Chalk. These large farms were partly split into a number of smallholdings, each with a distinctive cottage and barn, and it is these cottages and barns which still remain on the northern edge of Thong. However in 1925 the scheme was failing and Kent County Council took over the administration of the land. The Council promptly stopped any further development at Cheneys Farm, and sold the remaining land into private ownership. Regrettably, many of the smallholders who had taken over the holdings were without experience in agricultural matters and by the 1930's many of the holdings were either untenanted, or had been taken over by neighbouring farms.

The sale of Cheneys Farm and Ifield Court Farm were the beginning of the break-up of the Darnley interests in Shorne. Further land in the area was sold in 1925, including a major part of the four or five hundred acres of land which Lord Darnley owned in the Shorne area. Some of this land was developed subsequently with new housing being built at Gads Hill and on the Lower Shorne Road and in the 1930's Lord Darnley leased Shorne Woods to a cement company who excavated the London clay which lay beneath the ancient woodland.

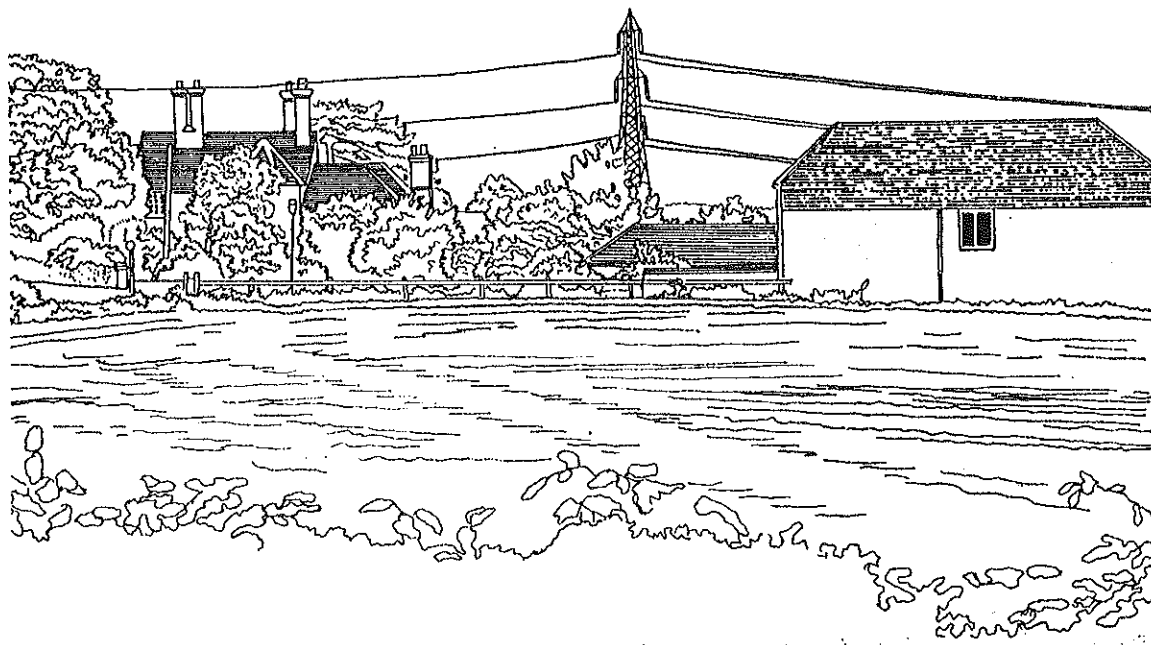
In the 1930's some enterprising speculators attempted to start a new airport on a site half a mile to the west of Thong, ambitiously called London East Airport. This was requisitioned by the RAF during World War II along with Cobham Hall. During the war Thong was therefore overrun with men and machinery and the old oast barns at Cheneys Farm were demolished by a bomb. After 1945 the RAF abandoned the site which was developed for housing, separated from Gravesend by land which is now in agricultural use.

Thong in the landscape.

Thong lies on flattish ground below the gentle, tree-covered escarpment of the North Downs. To the north lie the marshes of the Thames at Higham and Cliffe. The hills are formed from Blackheath and Woolwich beds of sand and gravel overlaid in part by a thick layer of London clay and rise some three hundred and fifty feet above river level. Thong itself sits on chalk and small chalk pits can still be seen in the locality, the chalk in the past providing materials for agriculture, lime burning, and building materials.

To the east and south of Thong are wooded hills, with wide, chalky fields sweeping up to the edge of the trees, once part of the Cobham Hall estate. To the north are impressive views across Lower Shorne, Chalk and Higham and on to the wet marshlands

of the Thames, and to the west, views across flat farmland with large open fields towards the modern housing estates which surround Gravesend. The massive electricity pylons which pass by the northern edge of the settlement do detract from this attractive setting.



View northwards towards Woodside Barn and Thong House

Thong's character.

Thong is a very small settlement with just a few (sixteen) residential properties. There is no church, pub (although White Horse Cottage used to be an inn), or community hall, the nearest such facility being located in Shorne, some two miles away. Cheney's Farm, historically one of the four largest farms in Shorne parish, would have provided local employment until the farm was sold and the land dispersed in the 1920's.

Usually Thong is a sleepy backwater but the building of the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link along the line of the A2 is having an impact on the hamlet with noise and disturbance. The very busy traffic along the road through Thong may also be as a result of the construction work. Also regrettable are some of the post-war agricultural buildings which have been built – opposite Cheney's Cottages and on the north-western edge of the settlement.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THONG.

Thong lies along Thong Lane, which runs on a north-south access in a gentle curve through the settlement. The high flint walls, soft hedges and gardens, mainly detached houses, and variety of buildings and building materials, are its special features, along with its landscaped setting. The most important buildings are Cheneys Farm, Thong House and White Horse Cottage, and most of the buildings sit on generously sized plots, set back from the road.

Views into the village from the south, which pick up the large brick barn on the south-eastern edge of Thong, are especially important, as are the vistas to the north and the distant views of the Thames estuary and beyond. Although not far from Gravesend, the openness of the fields around Thong, and the impressive views into and out of the conservation area, give Thong a slightly wild and lonely character not found for instance in Shorne or Cobham.

East side of Thong Lane.

On entering Thong from the south the most notable feature is the large red brick barn which once formed part of Cheneys Farm. This is a valuable building within the landscape and every effort should be made to retain its current appearance. Beyond it, the newly converted barn (Woodside Barn, once Reed's Barn) sits back from the road. It has a peg-tiled roof and black stained weatherboarding. Next is Thong House, with further small barns and other previously agricultural buildings behind it. Some of these, which can be seen from an access road across the field, are flat roofed and built from corrugated tin and their removal would be advantageous. Thong House is fenestrated using small paned casement windows, which appear to be 19th century, but the brickwork, coloured red with blue headers, looks earlier. A further investigation of this building would be interesting. The boundary to the road at this point is made from rough blocks of limestone for which there is no precedent elsewhere in the hamlet. Orchard House, a 1960's two storey building with a pitched roof unfortunately covered in concrete tiles, sits on the adjoining plot, with a very fine high flint wall with brick copings in front of it, and beyond this are Cheneys Cottages. These three cottages are late 19th century, with gables facing Thong Lane, steeply pitched peg-tiled roofs, prominent stacks and casement windows. They are built in the Gothic style and a very similar to other cottages built in Shorne Ridgeway, which were also constructed for workers on the Cobham estate. Behind the cottages are the original washhouses, built in red brick also.

Woodlands Cottage is the last house on the east side of Thong Lane and is built from reddish brown brick, with a peg-tiled roof. It appears to date from c.1900. next to it, but currently excluded from the conservation area, is one of the smallholder's barns of 1924, in poor condition.



Barn to north of Woodlands Cottage, Thong

West side of Thong Lane.

Included within the conservation area are three modern houses, Little Cheneys, Odd Two, and Laragh, which have a neutral contribution to make although the sites do contain some good trees and the newer buildings are therefore well screened. Cheneys Farm, a brick building with Georgian detailing, may well date to 1782 when John Reed purchased the farm, although it has recently been extensively refurbished with new windows and modern dormers being added. Forming part of the old farmyard is a derelict single storey barn, with very good quality knapped flintwork and a corrugated asbestos roof, which sits at right angles to the road. Before reaching White Horse Cottage there is a pair of 1960's cottages, of neutral effect, and then the listed building itself. This dates from the 17th century, with white weatherboarding to the first floor. The building is particularly important when viewed from the south along Thong Lane as it sits on a corner and forms the stop to a vista along the road.

A discreetly converted barn, sitting well back from the road, and Gable Cottages, another Edwardian semi-detached pair, are the final buildings within the conservation area apart from two large modern barns which sit back from the road with a large open parking area in front of them.

ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING MATERIALS.

Because Thong is built on an outcrop of chalk flint is used widely for boundary walls and for the agricultural buildings. The stone in front of Thong House may be rough chalk block, which has weathered over the years to a dark grey. Soft red bricks, made locally, also feature, but brown stock bricks are used for the 20th century cottages on the north side of Thong and these probably came from London. Roofs are covered with clay peg tiles but slate is used for some of the 19th century barns and concrete, metal sheeting, or corrugated asbestos for the 20th century agricultural buildings. The oldest building in Thong, White Horse Cottage, is timber-framed but the frame is concealed.

The buildings of Thong are varied in style but overall they fit in together, with even the modern agricultural buildings seeming strangely appropriate in this particular setting. Weather-boarded cottage, brick cottage, brick house, and weather-boarded barns are the main features, linked together by flint walls and the sinuous curve of Thong Lane.

THE PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA.

General guidance on planning control.

Gravesham Borough Council's policies relating to planning control within conservation areas are set out in the *Gravesham Local Plan First Review* dated November 1994, particularly policies TC0, TC1 and TC3. New buildings or extensions to existing buildings will be expected to positively preserve or enhance the character of the Thong Conservation Area, and applications for demolition will be refused where the loss of any building or structure would damage the character or appearance of the area. Open spaces and trees within the conservation area will also be protected and schemes for their enhancement may be produced by the Council as part of this review.

Design guidance for new development.

Conservation area designation does not suggest that any change is unacceptable, rather that new development and alterations to existing buildings should be carefully designed to preserve the character and appearance of the area (See policy TC1). However there is a presumption against any further development in Thong apart from small, domestic buildings like sheds or garages. Where new buildings are appropriate, the Council will therefore require planning applications to satisfy the following criteria:

- The scale and massing of new buildings should reflect the general pattern of building in Thong.
- Materials should be in accordance with existing traditional materials in the locality.
- The siting of new buildings should reflect the historic form of development.
- New boundaries should copy existing details, such as low brick or flint walls or low hedges.

Listed buildings.

There are over 450 listed buildings throughout the District but only one (White Horse Cottage) within the Thong Conservation Area. However it is considered that several buildings within the area merit listing and these are identified later. Policies relating to listed buildings can be found in the Local Plan, particularly policy TC2, which seeks to control alterations and extensions. Generally, the demolition of a listed building will only be allowed where there is no alternative. Further advice can be found in PPG15.

Gravesham Borough Council's "Local" list of important buildings.

Gravesham Borough Council has already drawn up a list of locally important buildings which contribute positively to the environment, and are currently preparing more detailed criteria for their selection and control. "Local" listing does not confer any special statutory protection but the Council will seek to preserve these buildings and to protect their character when considering applications which may affect them. Currently, no buildings in Thong are "locally" listed.

The protection of other buildings.

Some of the residential buildings within the Thong Conservation Area are of historic and architectural interest, and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area, although they are not actually "listed" buildings. These buildings can be altered and extended to a degree without planning permission being needed, and sometimes these changes can result in the erosion of historic character and ultimately in detrimental changes to the quality of the whole environment. However, as a way of preserving or enhancing the conservation area, the Council has powers to serve what is called an Article 4(2) Direction which would bring under planning control certain changes to the main frontages which face a public highway or public space which would normally be considered permitted development. This Statement includes a proposal for such a Direction in Thong.

The Direction does not affect listed buildings (which are controlled under different legislation), buildings in commercial use (such as public houses or shops), buildings in multiple occupation (which have different permitted development rights), or agricultural

buildings which have been converted into residential use (because they usually have their permitted development rights removed when they are first converted). The number of buildings affected by such a Direction will also depend on the outcome of an application to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport for the listing of several buildings within the conservation area.

ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS.

This Statement includes various proposals for the enhancement of the Meopham Green Conservation Area which have been subject to public consultation. These are as follows:

1. Conservation area boundary review.

An alteration to the existing conservation area boundary is suggested as follows:

- Extend the boundary northwards along Thong Lane to include the pairs of 1925 cottages just past the turning into Shorne Ifield Road. Include the barn north of Woodland's Cottage.

2. Addition of buildings to the statutory list:

The following buildings will be suggested to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, for inclusion on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest:

Thong House (following further investigation); Cheney's Cottages; all the 1920's cottages with associated barns; Woodland's Cottage; barn to north of Woodlands Cottage.

3. Addition of buildings to the local list:

The following building is suggested for inclusion on Gravesham Borough Council's list of locally important buildings:

Cheneys Farm.

4. Article 4(2) Direction.

It is proposed that the Council serve an Article 4(2) Direction on certain buildings within the conservation area which would remove certain permitted development rights and require planning permission for the following:

- Any extension or enlargement facing the highway
- Formation of any new window or door openings
- Removal or replacement of existing windows and doors
- The replacement of painted finishes with stains on any woodwork or joinery
- The addition of render or claddings
- Painting previously unpainted stonework
- Installation of satellite dish antennae
- Addition of porches, car ports and sheds
- Changes of roofing materials (front roof slope only*), or alterations to chimneys
- Installation of rooflights (front roof slope only*)
- Demolition of, or alteration to, front boundary walls or railings.

*where they face a public highway or an open space.

This Statement forms part of the process of consultation which the Council must undertake before serving such a Direction.

5. Traffic control.

There is no traffic calming along Thong Lane, or pavements. It is therefore suggested that Gravesham Borough Council and Meopham Parish Council enter into discussions with Kent County Council to draw up proposals for some limited traffic calming. This should be very simply detailed and should specify appropriate materials. An example of what might be suitable would be the use of rumble strips to warn motorists that they are driving through a conservation area. Additionally, the provision of a pavement along one side of the road, which would itself help to slow down cars, could be considered. Any works must however reflect the rural character of Thong.

6. Street lighting.

Consider the provision of street lighting in consultation with Kent County Council.

7. Undergrounding overhead wires.

Consider a scheme to underground the overhead wires within the conservation area.

Bibliography

“Shorne – The history of a Kentish village” A F Allen 1987 Meresborough Books

For further information, please contact:

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This Statement is one of nine commissioned by Gravesham Borough Council which cover the nine rural conservation areas within the borough. It was prepared by The Conservation Studio, 16 Grange Road, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1TS.
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