

CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT

**MAIDENHEAD TOWN CENTRE**

Planning Policy Manager

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## **CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT: MAIDENHEAD TOWN CENTRE**

### **1. History**

- 1.1 The conservation area is focused on the town centre of Maidenhead. Settlement of the area dates back to the 13th Century, however, the evidence of settlements in the wider area of the town dates back to Domesday and before, from Domesday records and archaeological finds. The Domesday survey in 1086, records a settlement at Elentone in the area of Maidenhead now known as North Town, and Palaeolithic stone age tools have been recovered from the many gravel pits in the area west and north west of Maidenhead.
- 1.2 By 1200 a small settlement on the borders of Cookham and Bray on the site of present day Maidenhead town centre had developed. This was mentioned (in the Bray court rolls) until 1296 as South Aylington, derived from Elentone. It was seen as having very little importance until a wooden bridge was erected across the Thames. This bridge was mentioned in 1255 when Henry III issued an order for the widening of the road between the bridge and Henley to counteract robbers, but it may well have been in operation some 50 years earlier. The hamlet of South Aylington was situated as the conservation area is today, some three quarters of a mile from the river, on land just above the river flood line.
- 1.3 Alongside the bridge a timber wharf was erected, for the storage and transportation of oaks from the Forest of Windsor. This was recorded in 1538 by the antiquary Leland, when passing through. It was from this New Wharf or 'Maiden Hythe' that the town took its name during the 13th century. 33 spellings of the name have been identified before the present version came into use in 1724.
- 1.4 The medieval town stretched from present day Castle Hill along the High Street, with West Street, known as Back Lane. There was further settlement along Bridge Street which had access by a bridge across Dunmede Stream. This stream was first mentioned in 1380 by a monk of St Denys and was once a wide stream, but it has dwindled to the now York Stream which is bridged by the brick built Chapel Arches. Chapel Arches derived its name from a chapel-at-ease which was built for travellers by the Hosebund family in 1270.
- 1.5 Maidenhead was divided between the jurisdiction of the manors of Bray and Cookham until 1577 when Sir Henry Neville applied to Queen Elizabeth I to establish the town as a separate entity. During the following 200 years Maidenhead grew in size as the introduction of stage and private coaches increased the importance and usage of the main route to the west country. The town's economy owed a lot to the importance of the bridge and the travellers it brought. The area was dominated by the provision of inns, alehouses, stabling and smithies to accommodate their needs. Maps show Maidenhead at this time little bigger than the now conservation area. The presence of a large property at St Ives Place is seen, consuming a large area of land

down to the river. The wooden bridge had by this time undergone constant repairs, and eventually a stone bridge, the one there today, was built and opened in 1777.

- 1.6 By 1834 it was recorded that 823 coaches a day passed through Maidenhead the most passing through any town in England. A large area of the now conservation area was given over to coaching inns with gardens and stables. Examples of which were the Red Lion and Bear Inn in the Lower High Street and the Saracens Head and White Hart in the upper part. Maidenhead was also home to four breweries. Of these, Nicholsons survived the longest and was located on the south side of the High Street
- 1.7 In the Victorian period Maidenhead as a town saw major changes, which are still reflected in the shape and form of the conservation area. The population increased from 949 in 1801 to 3603 in 1851. This was induced by the introduction of the railway in 1835. The railway changed the economy of Maidenhead and the uses and buildings of the town centre. The number of travellers on the roads dramatically declined, meaning the loss of many of the businesses associated with the coach trade. Middle-class commuters saw Maidenhead as a place to live and to work in London. Many of the large town centre houses with gardens were replaced by smaller more affordable terraces and villas and more commercial users developed. By 1875 Queen Street and King Street had been built as new shopping areas and affordable housing built on Broadway. There were still large areas of open land to the east of the conservation area, along the river side.
- 1.8 In the 20th century the major building which has impacted on the conservation area are the building of the shopping centre on the site of Nicholson's Brewery, the building of the high rise office buildings and moving the Town Hall from the original market square where High Street meets Market Street. This area was once much wider with a Guildhall on the southern side. In 1957 the mansion at St Ives Place was demolished and the present Town Hall built on the site, allowing the Guildhall to be demolished in 1962. The 1960's saw the first stage of Nicholson's shopping precinct and the building of a six storey office block. The shopping centre was enclosed in the mid 1970's, and in 1995, 15 additional units were built. Berkshire House located off Queens Street on the site of the Guildhall was built in the 1960's. This 11 storey office block is now the tallest building in Maidenhead.

## **2. Topography and Street Patterns**

- 2.1 The town centre of Maidenhead has grown up to the west of the River Thames along the line of the main road link between London and the west of England. The Conservation Area is generally flat with a slight rise to the west away from the river, and lies just outside the flood plain of the River Thames. The High Street runs east-west following the main road line. From this Queen Street forms a curve linking the High Street with the south running King Street.
- 2.2 A major physical influence on the morphology of Maidenhead was the building of the ring road. This was built to relieve the traffic flow through the town centre and dissected many of the roads which lead out from the centre. Thus High Street no longer links up with Castle Hill nor does Market Street with the Cookham Road. This

contained the commercial area, and some public houses and shops which were located outside the ring road along these routes have vanished.

- 2.3 The presence of West Street formerly called Back Lane suggests an early planned element to the main High Street. West Street provided rear servicing for the properties on the High Street and still operates as a back street servicing the shops. There is a narrow alley way which links the High Street with West Street running between 82 and 84 High Street.
- 2.4 Coming off from the High Street are a number of small roads and courtyards, all with varying characteristics and of various ages. St Mary's Close and St Mary's Walk have been modernised and are enclosed by buildings and walls. They both have defined commercial, residential and community uses. In contrast Post Office Lane is a narrow cul-de-sac which is a mix of servicing for the properties on the High Street, car parking, and access to a small number of older buildings. Brock Lane and Nicholsons Lane both serve the new Nicholsons Walk shopping centre but both are long established and formerly served premises lying off the main High Street.
- 2.5 The building of the ring road provided the opportunity for pedestrianisation of the former main road. In the 1970's the High Street was first pedestrianised, with the closing of the street to traffic from the Methodist Church to the corner of White Hart Road. In the 1980's the remainder of the High Street to the corner of Queen Street was pedestrianised. This has now turned the corner of Queen Street and the High Street into a focus of activity as the principal junction between traffic and pedestrian activity.
- 2.6 The end of the pedestrianised area creates a division between the two distinctive characters of the High Street. The western end has larger commercial units with several of the larger chain stores. Pedestrianisation has changed the character of this end. There are no longer defined pavements, kerbs and roads, instead there is one level space which the buildings open directly onto and provide ease of access and movement. The eastern end has smaller shop units with some pubs and cafes. The street not being pedestrianised, still has kerbs edging the pavements which are narrow in places. At the junction with St Ives Road, the street becomes much wider with buildings which are lower in height which creates a feeling of space.

### **3. Chief Architectural Features**

- 3.1 Although Maidenhead does not have a rich architectural heritage, close examination of some of the buildings along the High Street, does reveal some older buildings possibly even some with evidence of timber framing. The majority of the buildings are, however, brick, generally three storey and built from the early 19th century. Some of the earlier buildings used yellow brick and rendering with slate roofs. Later in the 19th century red bricks were becoming more fashionable and the local brickwork's J K Coopers of Pinkneys Green, provided the moulded red bricks and clay tiles, which can be seen throughout the conservation area and are distinctive features throughout the town. In some buildings such as the Post Office contrasts are made by the use of imported stone.

- 3.2 The moulded tiles and bricks were used to produce some impressive facades. Although many of the shop fronts have now been modernised, on the 1st and 2nd floors there are still signs of detailed designs and grander facades. Lloyds Bank in Queen Street and Cresset Towers (nos. 69-73 High Street) are two such buildings. The buildings along Queens Street show examples of the best preserved shop fronts. In the 1880's 63-67 the High Street was the site of a large department store the window frontage of which was two storeys high. Evidence of this can still be seen above the modern shop frontage. Many other buildings throughout the conservation area retain original windows above the ground floor level. These are usually timber sliding sashes often with decorative architraves and mouldings, but there are some casements.

#### **4. Important Buildings**

- 4.1 Although within the Conservation Area there are only 4 listed buildings, there are many other buildings which either in whole or part hold details which make a positive contribution to the area and are buildings of local importance. The following are some of the most significant buildings in the conservation area but many others have a role in maintaining the character of the area.
- 4.2 The Bear Hotel is one of the most visually dominating buildings. It is a large three storey building with a span of six double hung sash windows and a slate roof hidden behind a parapet. It is on the site of one of the original inns providing travellers with stables and accommodation, although the current building dates from the early 19th century and is prominent in views turning from St. Ives Road into the High Street. The buildings adjoining the Bear at no. 4&6 the High Street, form a group with the Bear, being built in similar details and materials.
- 4.3 Sited opposite the Bear Hotel is a red brick 18th Century building located at no. 3 the High Street. It is distinctive as the facade has a curved bay front with sash windows and a hipped slate roof, partly obscured behind a brick parapet. This building adjoins a smaller redbrick building that links on into the chapel arches and forms another attractive group.
- 4.4 Nos. 25-27 The Broadway is a large building which was probably once an important residence. The grand facade has been fronted onto an older building, with double hung sash windows with glazing bars and an old tile roof with a gable end. The building behind the facade is thought to have once been a farmhouse, built in the 1700's. In the 1880's two wings were added at each end of the original building, one of one storey and another of two.
- 4.5 Maidenhead was once the home for 4 breweries. Nicholsons Brewery, on the site of the now shopping centre, was founded in 1820 by Robert Nicholson. All that survives of Maidenhead's former brewing industry are the stables which can be found on Nicholsons Lane. These are unusual as they have three storeys. The ground floor was used for the purpose of storing carts and drays, the first floor as stables, approached

by external stairs, and the second floor as a hay loft, the divided plank door with hoist above can still be seen, where the hay was loaded into the loft.

- 4.6 Cresset Towers (nos. 69-73 High Street) and Lloyds Bank on Queen Street are two of the most decorative buildings within the conservation area, although a large number of the buildings display some decorative details which date from the late 19th Century and early 20th Century. Cresset Towers is red brick with moulded brick and terracotta ornaments. This building was formerly built as a telegraph exchange and was a much larger building. The Lloyds Bank building has ornate plaster and stone work on the upper floors and its ground floor has recently been improved by the re-introduction of sash windows and removal of stone facing.
- 4.7 The main Post Office building acts as a landmark building within the western section of High Street. It has a large facade built from red brick with stone mullions and transoms to the windows and introduces a solid element in the run of modern glass shop windows. The old Post Office, situated in Old Post Office Lane, is one of the oldest buildings in Maidenhead and probably one of the buildings most easily overlooked. It probably dates from the late 16th Century and was likely to be a timber framed building but now much altered and rendered, with a hipped plain tile roof and sash windows. It is now in office use.
- 4.8 The present church of St Andrew and St Mary Magdalene occupies a site used for a church since the early 19th century. This site results from a need to move the church from the original Chapel Arches site, which by 1824 was deemed to be an obstruction to the High Street. The present church was built in 1963 and access is via St Mary's Close. It is a brick and concrete building with a spire tailing into a narrow point. The parish hall opposite the church has a large modern extension. The extension is in the same yellow brick as the church but the original building was red brick. It has a large arch window and decorative brick mouldings and was originally built in 1907.
- 4.9 The Methodist Church at the opposite end of the High Street is a late 19th century building and is a dominant building on the edge of the conservation area and adjacent to the relief road. It has a steeply pitched slate roof and is built from yellow brick with stone features. On the northern end, the most visible end, it has a bellcote on the top of the gabled wall.
- 4.10 At the southern end of the High Street the Colonnade is an early 20th century terrace of brick built shops with office use above. The row of properties is formally arranged, with the main elevation symmetrical about the middle point in terms of window layout and decorative white plastering detail.
- 4.11 One of the more unusual buildings in the conservation area, in terms of building materials used, is No. 1 Park Street. The material used here is flint with stock brick dressings. Although the front is mid to late 19th Century it has had a large modern extension to its rear built of red brick. Its facade has two symmetrical gables around a central entrance which gives a focus to the corner of Park Street and the High Street.

- 4.12 The buildings in Queen Street are principally 19th Century, three storey, terraces built with stock bricks with wooden sash windows. The street has a narrow and uniform feel created by the tall buildings and regular window and roof line. The roofs are mostly slate with lines of chimneys some supporting up to eight pots. On the corner of the Broadway and Queen Street on the east side is a dominant corner building brick built with contrasting stone facade on the first floor. Built in the 19th century it retains its sash windows and old tile roof.

## **5. Trees and Open Spaces**

- 5.1 Maidenhead town centre has very little open space. The area within the conservation area has developed as a densely built urban area with little space for public squares and parks. The area around the stream south of the Chapel Arches provides the principal open space within the conservation area, and now forms part of the Green Way. It provides a small seating area with a back drop provided by a large Horse Chestnut tree that is prominent in long views down the High Street..
- 5.2 The only remnant the former large gardens of St Ives Place is the large Deodar Cedar tree now located in the paved open space outside the library. The Deodar Cedar is visually prominent at various points within the conservation area. Another small area of open space is adjacent to the Church of St Andrew and St Mary Magdalene. This small area is grassed and hidden behind the Halifax building but provided a quiet space adjacent to the church.
- 5.3 Historically the area where the High Street, Market Street, Queen Street and Park Street joined was a market square. This was lost when the former Guildhall was demolished and modern shops and Berkshire House constructed. The pedestrianisation of much of the High Street has now provided a traffic free environment that now serves as a valuable addition to open space in the town centre.

## **6. Uses**

- 6.1 The conservation area contains the normal range of town centre activities. It is therefore mainly in commercial use but with a small amount of residential, and some community use. The centre has historically always provided commercial premises for Maidenhead. Many of the buildings were originally built with commercial premises on the ground floor and residential above, but much of the residential use has now been replaced by offices and other commercial uses in the upper storeys.
- 6.2 The majority of the shopping activity is focused along the High Street with the nationally recognised, corporate shops at the western end leading up to the Methodist Church. The shops to the eastern end of High Street including the Colonnade are smaller local businesses and include take-aways, public houses and specialist shops. Along Queen Street the shops are also small and many are occupied by boutiques and estate agents.

- 6.3 Historically Maidenhead provided many inns and resting places for travellers passing through. Today the town centre still has a number of pubs and hotels which continue the tradition. Within the conservation area there are currently five public houses, one of which also operates as a hotel.
- 6.4 The two Churches within the area provide community facilities. Both have meeting halls which bring people into the area for other uses than commercial activities and at times when the rest of the town centre activities would be closed.
- 6.5 Residential use is restricted to the upper storeys of the commercial properties. On the High Street above the entrance to St Mary's Walk are flats with balconies which overlook the street. These balconies break up the line of the street and also introduce some greenery as they are personalised by their residents. Many of the entrances to these homes are accessed from the rear of the properties off the service roads and back yards.
- 6.6 The uses in the town centre attract a considerable amount of both vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Although most of the High Street is pedestrianised most pedestrians reach the area from the peripheral car parks or by public transport. Queen Street and the lower part of the High Street are used by through traffic, servicing vehicles and public transport, and the junction of Queen Street and High Street is an area of particular pedestrian/vehicle conflict and congestion.

## **7. Important Views**

- 7.1 The long distance views of Maidenhead town centre are dominated by the high rise buildings but on closer approach glimpses of the older High Street buildings become clearer. One of the most important views, is the view from the Castle Hill roundabout, down the High Street which gives a first impression of the core of the area and the original route of the main road. The colonnade frames a similar view on the approach off the ring road from the east.
- 7.2 Once within the conservation area the high rise buildings are less obvious and there are many uninterrupted views within the conservation area. Some of the best include the view down Queen Street as it gradually curves and the curve of the High Street, around nos. 80-54. There are views which arouse curiosity or are unexpected. These are mainly found off the High Street as views are seen down small closes and alley ways towards buildings with other uses. The view of St Andrew and St Mary Magdalene is one of these views. The Church does not have a tall spire to mark its presence and so the discovery of the Church and associated Hall is a surprise one. Moving down the High Street towards the Colonnade the street opens out and gives a feeling of a much wider space and views to the trees by the Chapel Arches. From Chapel Arches bridge there is a view to the south of York Stream and the adjacent open space, this is the only indication of it being a bridge and gives a hint of the former size of the stream.

## **8. Enhancement Opportunities**

- 8.1 The town centre is primarily a retail area and much of its visual attraction is dependent on the maintenance of attractive shop premises. Many of the town centre buildings are of some quality particularly in the upper storeys and opportunities should be taken to retain these buildings and where appropriate reinstate original details.
- 8.2 Several shops particularly in Queen Street have their original timber shopfronts. These should be retained and where appropriate, for example within a uniform terrace, reinstated. Other shops have more individual detailing but improvements can still be made by introducing good quality shopfronts of traditional materials and design. Shop signage can also be improved to ensure that signs respect the building and the conservation area. Detailed guidance on shopfront design and signage is included in the Borough Council's publication; "Shopfront and Advertisement Guidelines."
- 8.3 One area where open space could be improved is around York Stream. Although it has undergone an enhancement programme and has been repaved and planted. The area needs some management to remove some of the rubbish and tidying of the landscaping.
- 8.4 Other areas which could be improved are the service roads. These are often untidy with rubbish which could be stored more discreetly. These roads are often viewed as people walk down the main shopping streets and many are used by pedestrians as routes through to the main shopping area and are the first views many get of the conservation area from the ring road. Parking can also be chaotic.
- 8.5 The former cinema site on the corner of the High Street and Bridge Avenue is currently derelict and detracts from the positive first views of the conservation area. This building needs to be found a use appropriate for the area to enable it to make a more positive contribution.

## **9. Boundaries**

- 9.1 North- The boundary runs along West Street on the south side following the kerb from the corner where it meets the ring road to the corner of Market Street. The boundary then turns and follows the kerb around to the south to cross the parking spaces to follow the southern kerb of Providence Place until meeting to follow the edge of the footbridge. It turns to run south, along the wall of St. Andrew's House until reaching St Andrews Chapel. It turns to run east along the northern edge, crossing St Mary's Close to follow the wall of the vicarage and the northern wall of the Church Hall. It follows in tightly behind the hall and turns to follow the rear boundary of the Bear Hotel and the rear boundaries of the buildings nos. 6 & 4 the High Street and 1 to 13 the Colonnade, until it reaches Crown Lane.
- 9.2 South- the boundary follows the western kerb of Crown Lane, heading southwards, across the High Street to follow the western kerb of Bridge Avenue. The boundary then turns west to follow the northern outer wall of the vacant cinema building and to

continue down to the bank of York Stream. Upon meeting the stream the boundary turns to run south-west following the bank until turning west to meet the rear property boundary, of nos. 1 to 5 the High Street. It continues west to follow the wall of the car park in the rear of 11 and 9 St Ives Road, and continues crossing over St Ives Road to follow the rear boundaries of nos. 13 to 21 the High Street. On meeting Old Post Office Lane the boundary turns to include the land to the rear of the Old Post Office and continues to follow the southern boundary of 1 Park Street. It turns to head north along the front facade of no. 1 Park Street, until continuing across Park Street to follow the rear boundaries of nos. 37 and 39 the High street. Upon meeting the rear boundary of 11 Queen Street, it turns to head south along the rear boundaries of nos. 11 to 23 Queen Street and then follows the building line of nos. 25 to 39. The boundary turns east to run along the rear walls of 25 to 29 Broadway, and turns around the building of no. 29a to run along the fronts of these buildings. The boundary runs west. to cross Queen Street and follows the kerb round until reaching the ramp leading up to the Nicholsons Walk car park, which it turns north to follow the eastern edge. Upon reaching Brock Lane the boundary crosses the lane, turns east until it reaches the rear wall of no. 12 Queen Street. The boundary then follows the rear walls of no. 12 Queen Street round to no 51 High Street and then turns to head north and turns again to include the two front units of Nicholsons Walk and continue to meet White Hart Road. From here it follows the rear boundaries of no. 69 to 75a. It crosses the entrance to Nicholsons Walk Shopping Centre to include the two units fronting onto the High Street, and then follows the northern line of Nicholsons Lane. It cuts directly across Kings Road to follow the kerb and then the building line of the High Street Methodist Church. It turns north to continue following the building line of the church and then crosses the High Street and follows the kerb of the ring road until meeting West Street.