

Gravesend Riverside

Conservation Area Character Appraisal



GRAVESEND RIVERSIDE CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

This document was prepared on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council based on an extensive survey dated 2007 by:

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Errata:

Note that since undertaking this survey, the area of the Dell, referred to at pages 14, 23 and 26, has been re-landscaped and re-opened for the public.

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1. STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area encompasses a long stretch of the Thames river frontage to the east of the town of Gravesend in Kent. The setting, close to London and at the mouth of the Thames estuary, defined the importance of Gravesend for many centuries. The town was the first port coming up the river toward London and a natural breaking point for ships on the tide. Traditionally, ships would land here on entering the river or complete victualling or embarking passengers before leaving.

Because of this strategic importance, Gravesend was also chosen as a key defensive location on the river approach to London. Firstly, under Henry VIII the Gravesend Blockhouse was built. Later, in response to increased international tension at the end of the 18th century, the defences at Gravesend were strengthened with the construction of the New Tavern Fort to the east of Blockhouse. This fort lies at the heart of the Riverside Conservation Area. It remained in use and was substantially rebuilt in the 19th century by Gravesend resident General Charles Gordon, whose famous deeds in China and Africa epitomise the image of the heroic Victorian military commander. His connection with Gravesend reinforces the town's link with the maritime military, and the riverside area even retains the Mission House in which Gordon once taught.

The Conservation Area celebrates the river and the relationship that the people of the town have had with it for many centuries. The historic buildings within the Conservation Area track the earliest settlement in the Parish of Milton to the beginnings of the New

Town that was part of the early 19th century expansion of Gravesend. From the modest beginnings of a hospital and religious order at Milton Chantry, through a period of serving the commercial and official activities in the wharves and piers close by, to an established military and naval centre, the riverside has grown. To the east of this area another maritime hub also grew around the Canal Basin and this still provides an industrial focus to the Conservation Area, although it is in the process of transforming into a modern residential area.

The section between the two historic cores has, since the late 19th century been provided for the enjoyment of the local people and its landscaped green open spaces have led to the area having a dominantly leisure based character. This character has extended to the Fort Gardens and the Canal Basin so that the primary characteristic is one of relaxation in a heritage setting close to the ancient thoroughfare and trading route of the River Thames. The wide open spaces and abundant trees, shrubs and flowers within the Conservation Area are as important as the panorama and historic uses of the waterway with which it connects.

The riverside location itself is instrumental in the development of the town of Gravesend and the views out to Gravesend Reach mark the important role the area has played in international travel, trade and expansion for many centuries. Gravesend, Milton and Tilbury were key strategic positions close to the Thames estuary and the New Tavern Fort is of great national historic importance.

The historic recreational activities in Gravesend continue in the social use of the parks, gardens and Fort and the naming of the recreation ground after General Gordon

recognises the military history of the area. The promenade still provides a clear connection with the river that has produced most of the town's prosperity and the positive features of the environment, such as generous open spaces and groups of mature trees have encouraged the once declining industrial parts of the area to be regenerated into modern residential communities.

The western part of the Conservation Area includes the later 19th century houses along The Terrace, Royal Pier Road and Clarendon Road which were developed on the site of the former Terrace Gardens. Their more formal urban arrangement in rows with front gardens is typical for its time and marks them as later infill during a period when many of the remaining open spaces within the town were developed to cater for a rapidly growing population at the end of the 19th century.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area

The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area was designated on 18th December 1980 by Gravesham Borough Council. It was extended on 14th February 2001. The Conservation Area's boundary includes the Thames riverfront from the Port of London Authority buildings in the west to the entrance to the Canal Basin in the east. It also contains the historic residential streets of Royal Pier Road, The Terrace (part), Clarendon Road, Commercial Place and Canal Road (part), as well as the large New Tavern Fort and Gordon Recreation Ground.

2.2 Purpose of the appraisal

This conservation area appraisal has been written by The Conservation Studio on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council. It was prepared in September 2007 and was followed by a process of community engagement, which informed the content of this document. This appraisal defines the special architectural and historic interest for which the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area merits designation. It identifies the positive features that should be protected and highlights the negative factors that detract from its character and appearance. It will be used by the Borough Council in considering proposals for demolition or alteration of buildings, as well as for new developments. It will also help property owners and developers to take account of the importance of buildings, features, spaces and landscape within and adjacent to the Conservation Area.

This conservation area character appraisal, and those for the seven other town centre

conservation areas in Gravesend, will lead to a Management Plan, setting out policies and actions to conserve and enhance their special architectural and historic interest and to mitigate the effects of negative features. The appraisals and Management Plans are to be included as background papers in the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) and, as such, will be a due consideration in the planning process. In due course the appraisals and management plans may also be adopted as separate Supplementary Planning Documents within the LDF.

Preparation of the appraisal involved an extensive survey of the conservation area undertaken in July 2007. The omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

2.3 Planning policy context

Conservation Areas are defined as 'areas of architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (The Act). Local Planning Authorities are required by the Act to identify the parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They must also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting.

Broadly, the effects of designation are:

- Conservation Area Consent must be obtained from the local planning

authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition of any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions;

- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area when assessing applications for change in conservation areas;
- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas;
- Permission is required from the planning authority to fell or lop a tree over a certain size.

Further, more detailed information is provided in the Management Plan.

As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are protected by regional, county and local planning policies. Relevant policies include:

- Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) (published March 2001), Key Development Principle No.9; Policy Q2; Policy Q5; Policy Q7; Policy E1.
- Regional Planning Guidance 9a: The Thames Gateway Planning Framework (1995), Paras. 5.4.7 & 5.4.8: Built Heritage, Annex 1: Planning Framework Principles No.13.
- Draft South East Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy) (submitted to Government on 31st March 2006), Section D8 Management of the Built and Historic Environment: Policy BE1; Policy BE2; Policy BE7; Section E4 (Kent Thames Gateway).
- The Kent and Medway Structure Plan (adopted 6th July 2006), Policy QL1: Quality of Development and Design; Policy QL6: Conservation Areas; Policy

QL7: Archaeological Sites; Policy QL8: Buildings of Architectural or Historic Importance; Policy QL9: Historic Landscape Features; Policy QL10: Heritage Assets – Enabling Development.

- Gravesham Local Plan First Review (adopted November 1994), Policy TC0, TC1, TC2, TC3, TC4, TC5, TC6, TC7, TC8, TC9, TC10, TC11, TC12, Policy R3, Proposal PM13, Policy AP3.

Thames Gateway

In addition to the various conservation areas in the town, Gravesend is recognised as being in a Growth Area within the Kent Thames Gateway Sub-region by the Draft South East Plan of the South East Regional Assembly. The various policy documents outlined above have, since RPG9 (1994), recognised Gravesham and Gravesend's important place in the Thames Gateway (incorporating the former East Thames Corridor). RPG9a emphasizes the importance of Gravesham in achieving the Thames Gateway's overall vision (para. 6.8.1) and that future development of industrial sites should "avoid adverse impacts on the historic townscape of Gravesend town centre and its relationship with the River Thames" (para. 6.8.14).

The Thames Gateway is an overarching term for the regeneration of large parts of East London and parts of Essex and Kent, including Gravesend. It was first embarked on as a major planning concept in the 1980s and has developed at various stages since then. The Thames Gateway London Partnership estimates that the expected investment in the whole region will provide 150,000 jobs and 200,000 homes over the next 10 years. The large scale of this scheme will see a great deal of change across the area, including the introduction of new large scale transport

infrastructure such as the Channel Tunnel Rail link (with a proposed connection to Gravesend) and major road building schemes such as the widening of the A2 south of the town.

The policies included in the local and regional guidance as outlined above seek to guide this period of change and the specified policies all recognise the importance of retaining the built as well as natural heritage of Gravesend. This document identifies the special character of Gravesend's built heritage and the accompanying Management Plan will propose how that special character can best be preserved and enhanced in the light of the large scale changes that are currently taking place in the area.

Following the meeting, the outcomes were discussed by Gravesham Borough Council and The Conservation Studio. Subsequently, a four week period of full public consultation was held after which revisions were made to arrive at this final agreed document. A public consultation report is attached as Appendix 4 to this document.

2.4 Community involvement

The survey of the Conservation Area has included a process of public consultation to identify the following:

- The special characteristics of Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area;
- The key negative features and issues;
- A range of possible actions that would mitigate or offset these detractors.

The consultation began with the notification of key stakeholders in Gravesend at the beginning of the appraisal process. It was followed by the distribution to every property in the conservation areas of an invitation to a public meeting held on 5th September 2007. Leaflets were also displayed in public places. The meeting included a description of the principal and desired outcomes of appraisals and management plans and led into a general discussion. The meeting was attended by various representatives of the Borough Council and local interest groups.

3. LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

3.1 Location

Gravesend is the administrative capital of the Borough of Gravesham, which contains 25,000 acres of countryside and is generally rural in appearance, containing a number of attractive historic villages. The town lies in north-west Kent, 40 kilometres to the east of central London. Canterbury is approximately 65 kilometres further along the Thames estuary coastline to the southeast and the major A2 and M2 trunk roads link the settlements. Due to the major transport infrastructure in the area, including the M25, M20 and the rail link to the Channel Tunnel, Gravesend is very well connected to other parts of the country and beyond.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit's Kent Historic Landscape Characterisation (2001), commissioned by Kent County Council and English Heritage, and notes that: "The process of 19th and 20th century urbanisation is particularly marked in the northern areas of Kent". The Dartford and Gravesham Conurbation is characterised as "a well defined urban conurbation with some limited marshland and horticulture along its edges".

The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area encompasses the New Tavern Fort and its wider setting to the east of Gravesend town centre, which includes residential streets, riverfront and piers, public gardens and a former industrial area including a Canal Basin.

3.2 Activities and uses

Gravesend is a large residential settlement with a substantial commercial centre. Industrial areas border the commercial centre,

particularly in the west towards Northfleet. There are also other activities in the town relating to its riverside setting, including those linked to the headquarters of the Port of London Authority and the coastguard station.

The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area is mainly recreational, although residential houses and flats stand on the east and west ends of the area. Also, the Port of London Authority offices are in Royal Pier Road and the coastguard is stationed on Royal Terrace Pier. The blend of uses gives variety to the different parts of the Conservation Area, but it generally has a sedate character, being away from the commercial and residential centres of the town and the busier sections of road.

3.3 Topography

Gravesend lies on the relatively shallow slopes of the south bank of the River Thames, close to where it widens into the estuary. The land rises steadily from the riverside to The Terrace and there are far reaching views over the Port of London Authority buildings and the broad river to Essex. To the east, the ground rises more gently from the riverside to the Canal Basin where it levels off.

A manmade topography has been created by the construction of the New Tavern Fort with tall steep embankments falling away to the east and north. The base of the fortifications is now an area known as The Dell.

3.4 Geology and Biodiversity

Gravesend lies on the thick belt of chalk that is the most famous geological trademark of this part of Kent. Otherwise, the geology of Kent is varied and lies on a "crumpled dome" of sedimentary rock which also lies under Sussex and Surrey. The dome's peak has

eroded exposing the rocks below, while the chalk along the edge has been more resilient to erosion and formed the North Downs in Kent and South Downs in Sussex. The area between the two is the Weald, notable for its heavy clays and sandstone outcrops. Gravesend also lies close to areas of Thanet beds which contain clay and together with the London Clay found on the nearby Hoo Peninsula to the east produced the raw materials for brick making. Therefore, this area supplied the London stock bricks that were used for the intensive building programmes in London and Gravesend in the 19th and 20th centuries.

While chalk is also found locally it is too soft to be used for building large structures, although it supplied the raw materials for lime and, later, cement. Flints, found with chalk, are also evident in parts of Gravesend, and are sometimes used as a walling material. Kentish Ragstone, quarried from neighbouring areas, is also found in the architecture of the town.

There are no formal designations of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Conservation Area or, indeed, in the immediate vicinity of Gravesend, although there is the large South Thames Estuary & Marshes SSSI, which extends to the area a short distance to the east of the town.

Farmland around Gravesend is largely permanent arable and pasture, with some hedgerows that support an abundance of wild plants and attendant wildlife.

Some invasive non-native plants including self seeding sycamores and, more worryingly, Japanese Knot Weed, are notable within the conservation area.

3.5 Relationship of the Conservation Area to its surroundings

The immediate surroundings of the Conservation Area are urban townscape, some of which is designated in separate conservation areas.

The following features form the immediate setting of the Conservation Area:

- To the south: The large public surface car park that backs onto Ordnance Road and a large early 20th century school beyond;
- To the west: 19th century residential streets of the New Town and the continuation of Royal Pier Road including the Clarendon Royal Hotel and St Andrews Arts Centre. Further west lies St Andrews Gardens;
- To the north: The River Thames;
- To the east: Modern industrial buildings.

4. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Archaeology

Evidence of prehistoric activity in and around Gravesend is limited to individual finds of items such as Neolithic axe heads and Iron Age coins, although there are indications from recent excavations at Gravesend Hospital that this site was close to an area of prehistoric occupation.

A number of excavations, including those at Gravesend Hospital, have revealed evidence of Roman and Saxon occupation in the area. It is likely that Gravesend has sustained habitation since the early part of the Roman occupation of Britain. The most important and extensive excavation in recent years, at nearby Springhead on the path of the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link, has uncovered the Roman town of Vagniacae, an Iron Age settlement that the Romans occupied in 43 AD. Hoards of Saxon coins and early Saxon pottery have also been found at various locations around the town.

Most of the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area lies within Kent County Council's principal designated Area of Archaeological Potential (AOP) that covers central Gravesend, although the Canal Basin has a separate AOP.

4.2 Historical development

The name "Gravesend" is derived from Gravesham, possibly meaning "graaf-ham", the home of the reeve or bailiff of the Lord of the Manor. The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area is located in the parish of Milton, a name of unknown origin but called "Meletune" in The Domesday Book of 1086. Milton was always the smaller neighbour of

Gravesham, mainly given over to the monastic order that founded Milton Chantry and then the large fortifications that were built here in the 18th century. With the development of the New Town in the 19th century, the area became a conurbation with Gravesend and began to form the greater urban area there is today. The historical development of Gravesend and Milton has been covered in detail in a variety of publications, details of which are included in the Bibliography at the end of this document. A summary of the development of the town is included in Appendix 2.

The principal features of the historical development of the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area are as follows:

ANGLO-SAXON AND NORMAN (450 – 1200):

- 798AD - Archbishop of Canterbury acquired a large landholding in Northfleet
- Small community established next to Thames centred on a landing place ("hithe").
- 1086 - Reference to the Manors of Gravesham and Meletune (Milton).

MEDIEVAL (1200 – 1485):

- 1189 – Hospital founded on the future site of Milton Chantry.
- 1258 - Richard de Gravesende made Bishop of Lincoln. The change of name from Gravesham to Gravesend was established for the town.
- 1300 - Gravesend had grown into a small market town via its trade on the river and easy supply of supplies from neighbouring agricultural land.
- 1322 - Milton Chantry founded by Aymer de Valence. The chapel still stands in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation

Area as part of the New Tavern Fort. It was a religious institution that owned considerable land in the area, on the outskirts of the fledgling town.

- The town grew under various lordships including the crown, nobility and the Cistercian Abbey of the St Mary Graces in London.
- 1380 - French and Spanish warships attacked Gravesend. Most of the town was destroyed. In recompense Richard II granted the people of Gravesend sole rights to ferry passengers to London giving rise to Gravesend's growth as a maritime centre and trading port.
- Gravesend Watermen operated open barges, the Long Ferry, and transported passengers to and from the Pool of London. Larger, ocean-going vessels continued out along the estuary to the international destinations beyond.
- River related occupations, including, ferrying, victualling, rope and sail making and boat building and repairing, occupied the majority of the town's inhabitants.

TUDOR AND JACOBAN (1485 – 1714):

- 1539/ 40 - Blockhouses erected at Gravesend, Tilbury, Milton and Higham to defend London from attack.
- 1562 - Charter of Incorporation united the two parishes of Milton and Gravesend.
- 1650 - All landing stages except for the common bridge (Town Pier) removed.
- 1709 - Gravesend to Rochester Road (in part Milton Road) created.
- 1711 - Turnpike Act led to stagecoach route along Milton Road at the top of Milton Place.

GEORGIAN & REGENCY (1714 – 1837):

- Throughout this period Gravesend grew, but was often destroyed by fires.
- 1726 - 160 houses at Milton.
- 1782 - New Tavern Fort constructed. Customs House constructed. Later to become Whitehall Place and, after partial demolition, is no.47 The Terrace.
- 1797 - Gravesend population was 4,000, with 700 houses in nine streets, including The Terrace.
- 1791 – 32 houses called the Terrace built between New Tavern village and the town of Gravesend by James Leigh Joynes.
- 1800 – First Act of Parliament passed granting the construction of the Thames and Medway Canal.
- Early 1800s – Albion swimming baths established to the east of the Canal Basin. Failed to rival Clifton Baths in Northfleet.
- 1813 – Wates's Hotel established by the river.
- 1815 – New house erected on south side of The Terrace on the site of the Old Fountain Public House. Later to be occupied by customs and excise.
- 1815 - First regular service of pleasure steamers from London to Gravesend.
- 1824 – Thames and Medway Canal finally opened.
- 1825 – Customs and Excise merged and moved into the former Old Fountain Public House.
- 1826 – Obelisk erected on site of the Round Tree, used to mark the limits for charging duty on coal entering London. This was also the site of Milton Blockhouse.
- 1828 - Gravesend and Milton Steamboat Company formed.
- 1834 - Blockhouse Fort site sold and developed as Terrace Gardens.
- 1836 - Gravesend Freehold Investment

Company formed to create Milton Park Estate, including Harmer Street.

VICTORIAN (1837-1901):

- 1840 - Harmer Street completed.
- 1842 - Royal Terrace Pier opened. A promenade established along the riverfront along with more piers.
- 1845 – Single line railway opened between Canal Basin and Strood to transport coal.
- 1851 - Population of Gravesend and Milton had risen to 16,633.
- 1856 - Metropolitan Board of Works scheme to discharge London sewage onto the Thames at Crossness led to end of Gravesend's status as a resort.
- 1850s to 70s – Terrace Pier used as embarkation point for Royal voyages.
- 1865 – General Gordon comes to Gravesend to take charge of rebuilding the New Tavern Fort.
- 1878 – Gravesend Rowing Club established.
- 1884 - The Literary Institution in Harmer Street became a music hall.
- 1885 – General Gordon is killed at Khartoum.
- 1886 – Gordon Promenade opened by Countess of Darnley. Former fort grounds leased to the Corporation and became a public recreation field.
- 1886 – Sailor's Home created in the Wates Hotel building.
- 1892 – Obelisk re-erected at entrance to the Gordon Memorial Gardens.
- 1893 - Royal Terrace Pier restored.
- 1895 – Customs Pier built.

20th / 21st CENTURY:

- Gravesend continued to grow as a small market town with industrial areas. Much of the industry was occupied with producing building materials for houses.
- 1902 - Electricity installed by Gravesend Town Council and electric trams replaced horse drawn trams.
- 1903 – First electric street lighting in Gravesend.
- 1904 - Houses built on Terrace Gardens (now Royal Pier Road).
- 1905 – Gravesend sailing club moved to Canal Basin from Rosherville.
- 1918 – Sailor's Home demolished and replaced by a Sea School.
- 1975 – Sea School demolished. Heritage Quay built on the site in the 2000s.
- 1933 - Grand Theatre closed.
- 1935 – Thames and Medway Canal abandoned.
- 1950s - A large power station constructed at Tilbury.
- 1958 - Creation of Inner Ring Road created increased traffic along The Terrace and through Harmer Street.
- 1969 - Town Pier closed. Car ferry discontinued and passenger service moved to West Street Pier. The river lost its relevance to life in the town. The commercial centre shifted from High Street to New Road and King Street.
- 1970s to present - Declining commercial viability of the east end of town.
- 1972 – Canal Basin bought by Corporation and used as a marina. Offices built on south side.
- 1976 - New pilot station opened on Royal Terrace Pier.
- 1990s – 2000s – Building of new blocks of flats on the riverside and around the Canal Basin. General regeneration of the riverside.



1843 - 1893



1891 - 1912



1904 - 1939



1919 - 1943

5. SPATIAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Layout and spaces

The street layout and open spaces of Gravesend Riverside have evolved over different periods, although the fundamental layout of land bordering the river has remained unchanged for centuries.

The layout began with the foundation of a hospital in the 12th century on the site of Milton Chantry. The hospital building stood surrounded by fields except a small road to the south that connected the fledgling town of Gravesend with Rochester. It was replaced by the Chantry, housing a small religious community, in the 14th century.

In Tudor times, the building of Gravesend Blockhouse (just outside the Conservation Area boundary to the west) and Milton Blockhouse either side of the Chantry introduced more built form. Gravesend was extended towards the Chantry in the 17th century but there was still no formal road layout, only footpaths.

The Chantry became an alehouse in 1697 and by the time it was named the New Tavern in the 18th century, 10 houses had been built next to it. The Board of Ordnance demolished the houses when they bought the site to convert into the fort in 1781. This spelled the changes to the area that formed the layout that we see today. The large ramparts of the fort were constructed and in 1791 The Terrace was constructed to connect the area to the centre of Gravesend. This was followed by the building of customs and excise buildings and Fort House, which no longer survives on Milton Place.

Following the 19th century enlargements

to the fort, they fell out of use and the area was given over to public use. The area to the east of the fort was donated to the people of town and the whole, including a large stretch of land next to the Promenade, provides a generous public open space. Further east, the Canal Basin dominates the landscape and it was inserted in fields in the early 19th century.

Additional layout in the Conservation Area includes the piers that stretch into the Thames. The Royal Terrace Pier, Customs Pier and Wates's Pier form long thin fingers stretching into the river and were established at different times, but each has a road extending southwards from it. Their junctions with the bank are generally areas inaccessible to the public due to their use by organisations such as the Port of London Authority, although some residential streets and flats have been inserted close by.

The only part of the open space in the Conservation Area that is not well maintained is The Dell, which is at the bottom of the eastern ramparts. The ponds here are sectioned off from the public and would benefit from some regeneration and enhancement.

5.2 Relationship of Buildings to Spaces

One of the most striking features of the Conservation Area is the large open space contained by large buildings either side of it. Tall blocks of flats line Commercial Place but fail to upstage the mass of the New Tavern Fort, which has the appearance of an open space despite being a manmade structure. Smaller buildings, such as Milton Chantry, the Sea School and the bandstand are small islands of domestic scale architecture between. On the northern side of the fort ramparts, other relatively small buildings such as the boat store and cafeteria next to the

recreation ground are dwarfed by the wide expanse of open grass and water in front of them and the open space behind.

The Canal Basin completes what is a consistent feature of this Conservation Area, with a large open space sitting directly next to a very large structure. The tall and wide block of flats on the site of an old laboratory give a flat rigid backdrop to the marina, while small buildings with a range of appearances scattered around the swing bridge stand to the north.

It is only in the west of the Conservation Area, in The Terrace, Royal Pier Road and Clarendon Road that a more formal urban arrangement can be found with rows of terraced two storey houses with front gardens (except in Clarendon Road where houses are located directly on the footway).

5.3 Landmarks, focal points and views

The principal landmarks in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area are:

- New Tavern Fort;
- Custom House;
- Ordnance Road flats;
- Milton Chantry;
- Bandstand;
- Chantry Court;
- Port of London buildings (including Royal Terrace Pier);
- General Gordon statue;
- Obelisk;
- Canal Tavern.

The Conservation Area includes a range of landmark buildings, as identified above. Landmark buildings all make an impression on the streetscape, either through their impact

on the landscape (e.g. the Fort), their historic character (e.g. Custom House), their scale (e.g. Chantry Court), and their position in large open spaces (e.g. Gordon statue) or their different building form to their neighbours (e.g. Port of London buildings).

Key focal points are the well maintained gardens and lake, the armaments on top of the fort ramparts, the Promenade, the Canal Basin and the piers reaching out into the river.

The principal positive views are:

- From the top of the fort across the river to Tilbury;
- Along Gordon Promenade and the river in both directions;
- From River Thames/Essex shore toward The Promenade/New Tavern Fort
- Along the Terrace to the spire of the parish church;
- From Royal Pier Road towards the Clarendon Royal Hotel;
- From Khartoum Place into Gordon Gardens;
- From New Tavern Fort through gateway into Milton Place;
- Within New Tavern Fort;
- From open space on east side of Canal Basin across marina to the river;
- From the Ordnance Road open space toward the Riverside Leisure Area/Gordon Gardens.

There are also extensive views the across the public car park from the New Tavern Fort gardens and Gordon Recreation Ground to Ordnance Road.

5.4 Trees, boundaries and planting

Trees provide an important part of the character of the Conservation Area.

Carefully chosen specimens have been placed in groups and individually around Gordon Gardens to great effect. A more wild arrangement has been allowed to grow between the gardens and the fort and these do require some management particularly near the top of the ramparts where their growth has resulted in the loss of views across the estuary.

Within Fort Gardens, more sensitive planting has taken place since the 19th century, with mature trees lining Milton Place and partially obscuring some of the bulk of Chantry Court.

Other trees of importance are those that line Gordon Promenade in the traditional manner. They are also accompanied by planting which brightens many corners of the Conservation Area including the lawned areas of the fort itself.

The houses in residential roads in the west of the Conservation Area have a mixture of boundaries. The Terrace properties have iron railings bounding steps that lead down to basements. Royal Pier Roads have front gardens with dwarf walling with inset railings or metre high walling with flood gates. Clarendon Road properties are set directly on the back of the pavement with no front gardens.

The large modern flats of Heritage Quay have stretches of communal gardens that border Commercial Place with boundaries of tall piers and low walling of red brick, with iron railings set into them. Further north along Commercial Place, The Boat House has a generous front garden surrounded by tall cast iron railings and gates.

An important historic boundary that has survived is part of the walling to Terrace

Gardens, which was replaced by housing in the early 20th century. Concrete detailing, including a parapet and piers are visible on either side of the north-south stretch of Royal Pier Road.

A mixture of cast iron railings and red brick walls surround Fort Gardens and Gordon Gardens.

There is attractive planting in beds throughout Fort Gardens and Gordon Gardens.

6. STREETSCAPE

6.1 Public realm

Pavements

The pavements in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area generally feature concrete paviours and kerbing, although parts of The Terrace have tarmac surfacing. Outside Custom House large granite kerbs still protect the kerbside drains.

Pavement upgrading has taken place outside the Port of London Authority buildings where concrete paviours have been replaced with deep red concrete blocks and granite kerbing with cast iron bollards fixed at the pavement edge. Three rows of square granite sets also run down the middle of the pavement to form a shallow gutter. Three rows of brick shaped stones line the gutter at the kerb edge.

Street furniture, signage and other features

The street furniture (waste bins, benches, etcetera) in the Conservation Area is generally found in Fort Gardens, the Promenade and Gordon Gardens. Concrete bollards also line the western entrance to Fort Gardens and the concrete forecourt of the Port of London Authority buildings.

Timber and cast iron benches and square metal waste bins are placed at regular intervals on the Gordon Promenade overlooking the Thames. Similar style bins and traditional style park benches line the footpaths through Gordon Gardens. Simple backless benches are dotted around the lake in the gardens. An ornate cast iron drinking fountain stands outside the southern gates to Gordon Gardens near to the obelisk.

In Fort Gardens the furniture is sparse with a few low timber square waste bins, dog litter bins and benches fixed at various points.

There is a good deal of signage in the Conservation Area including brown and blue tourist and pedestrian information signage attached to lamp posts and freestanding information boards in New Tavern Fort describing local history. There is also a large information board at the western entrance to Fort Gardens.

Street lighting

The street lamps in the Conservation Area vary in design, but are all from the late 20th century. These include steel standards with “hockey stick” style lamps in The Terrace and Milton Place, as well as Royal Pier Road and Clarendon Road. There is also a tall column with a round lamp at the junction of The Terrace and Royal Pier Road and a single round lantern with a swan neck post by the Port of London Authority buildings.

In Canal Road, tall hockey stick posts line the road between the new blocks of flats and next to the Canal Tavern. Only a few industrial style small floodlights on poles smaller hockey stick lamps are in place around the Canal Basin, to the north and east of the basin.

Along the Promenade there are tall standards with round lamps in an informal arrangement and the units are widely spaced apart along the riverside and the path that runs in front of the cafeteria to the car park on Gordon Promenade East.

The only lighting in Gordon Gardens is provided by three large lighting columns placed at either end of the lake with three sets of crocus shaped lamps on each. CCTV

cameras are also fixed to the poles. There is no lighting in Fort Gardens.

Pedestrian movement and footpaths

Access along the pavements is good in the Conservation Area and the network of footpaths is extensive and well maintained. The large area of gardens, foreshore and promenade creates a substantial pedestrian area that is unimpeded by motor traffic.

Pedestrian movement along the riverside beyond the promenade and Commercial Place is hindered by the private land, including the Port of London Authority area. Access around the Canal Basin is also difficult and badly signposted.

Gravesend Riverside stands at the beginning of the Saxon Shore Way to Hastings. This long distance path follows the diverse coastline for 262 kilometres.

Traffic and parking

Traffic through the residential road is generally light and limited to local residents and deliveries. Much of the parking is on the kerbside although some roads, such as The Terrace have restrictions. There is additional parking outside the entrance to Fort Gardens and in the Milton Place surface car park next to the Riverside Leisure Area between Gordon Gardens and Ordnance Road. Further parking is available in Gordon Promenade East. A permit holder's scheme operates in Royal Pier Road.

In the east of the Conservation Area traffic is generally quite light although it is likely to be increased at key times once the large blocks of flats are finished and occupied.

7. THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

7.1 Building types

The Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area has rich and varied types of buildings:

- A 14th century chapel with later extensions and modifications;
- 18th century government administrative buildings;
- 18th and 19th century fortifications;
- 19th century residential two story houses;
- Early 20th century local amenity buildings;
- 20th century government administrative buildings;
- 20th and 21st century blocks of flats.

The buildings have different scales, materials and designs and create an interesting mix of structures that sometimes create a visual clash with their neighbours (Port of London Authority buildings and Royal Pier Road residences) and occasionally blend into the landscape (New Tavern Fort).

7.2 Building form

The wide variety of building form in the Conservation Area is notable. From west to east is:

- Two storey houses in terraced rows;
- Two large blocks of three storey office buildings at the Port of London Authority separated by the single storey entrance to Royal Terrace Pier;
- Single storey outbuildings and stables around the three storey Custom House;
- Three storey plus attic Heritage Quay in two large blocks;
- Single storey detached Gravesend Rowing Club building;

- Large unroofed fort covering an oval shaped area with zigzagging ramparts on the eastern side along with cell-like compartments in the north and east sides of the fortification;
- Two storey Milton Chantry chapel;
- Single storey cafeteria building within a park setting;
- Small single and two storey detached buildings next to the river entrance to the Canal Basin;
- Long 20 bay modern block of flats, three storeys tall plus undercroft, lining the basin-side;
- Two storey 19th century tavern.

7.3 Listed buildings

The listed buildings in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area are:

- Milton Chantry (grade II*, also a Scheduled Monument);
- New Tavern Fort (grade II*, also a Scheduled Monument), the bandstand is also listed by reason of its location within the curtilage of New Tavern Fort;
- Royal Terrace Pier (grade II);
- Custom House (grade II) and gazebo (grade II);
- Statue of General Gordon (grade II);
- Obelisk (grade II).

Milton Chantry is an intriguing survivor of 14th century ecclesiastical building in Gravesend. The stone mullioned window that faces east across the fort courtyard is set in a flint wall and the obvious age of the elevation is at odds with the steel steps and gantries that surround it. This part of the building is also connected to 18th and 19th century rebuilds of the structure that took place as it was converted to a public house and, subsequently, offices. The building retains a quaint charm on the edge of the

cumbersome fortifications and 19th century formal public gardens.

Custom House has the stern demeanour of an early 19th century government building and stands close to the pavement edge, commanding its corner location over three storeys. It is built of plain brown stock brick and has retained handsome original doors and windows with simple historic details such as a stone stringcourse and cornice.

The structure of Royal Terrace Pier is mainly hidden from view from the Conservation Area by the modern buildings that stand on either side. However, at the shore end two single storey pavilions stand either side of the entrance. These coursed stone buildings have quoins, cornices and dressed ashlar bases and are painted with turreted roofs. The main body of the pier is visible from St Andrews Gardens to the west and was built in 1844 of cast iron.

The statue of General Gordon and the Obelisk are important visual monuments in Gordon Gardens and commemorate key landmarks in the history of this part of Gravesend.

7.4 Locally listed buildings

Government advice is that the preparation of a List of Locally Significant Buildings is a useful planning tool. "Locally Listed" buildings are valued for their contribution to the local scene, or for their local historic associations, but are not considered to be of national importance, so they are usually not eligible for statutory listing. Policies to control them can be included in the Local Development Framework.

Gravesham Council does not currently maintain a formal list of locally significant

buildings (usually called the 'Local List') either in Gravesend or elsewhere, although all buildings that were identified in the 1974 Listed Buildings Survey for their architectural or historic interest, but were not awarded a listing status, have been treated as 'Buildings of Local Interest' ever since when considering planning applications. Following the importance the Government places in its Heritage White Paper on the compilation of Lists of Buildings of Local Interest, Gravesham Borough Council's list will be reviewed in due course.

The Management Proposals for the Gravesend conservation areas contain a list of buildings which might be considered for inclusion in a Local List, once the Council have approved the criteria to be used for selection. All of them are considered to be key unlisted buildings.

7.5 Key unlisted buildings

A number of unlisted buildings have been identified as being buildings of townscape merit. Buildings identified as having 'townscape merit' will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of the conservation area. Where a building has been heavily altered, and restoration would be impractical, they are excluded. Key unlisted buildings include:

- The building known as 'Boat House';
- Canal Tavern;
- Heritage Quay;
- Gravesend Rowing Club;
- The City B and B (former City of London

Public House)

Government guidance in PPG15 'Planning and the historic environment' advises that a general presumption exists in favour of retaining those buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area (paragraph 4.27). The guidance note states that proposals to demolish such buildings should be assessed against the same broad criteria as proposals to demolish listed buildings.

New Tavern Fort.

- Wrought iron railings as boundary treatments;
- Decorated canted bays on terraced 19th century houses;
- Sash windows, including sashes with round heads on the ground floor;
- The concrete posts that mark the water edge along the Promenade

7.6 Building Materials

The historic buildings of Royal Pier Road, Clarendon Road and The Terrace have been built using mainly local materials, particularly yellow, red or brown stock brick. Some key buildings, however, have used other materials such as stone and flint (Milton Chantry). The entrance to Royal Terrace Pier has used ragstone and has ashlar dressings including quoins. The most common roofing material is Welsh slate and although many buildings now have replacement concrete tiles.

The large modern steel-framed buildings are often faced in non-traditional materials. However, Heritage Quay has used the traditional weatherboarding technique to tie the buildings into the local vernacular architecture.

7.7 Local details

Some of the local details in the Conservation Area are particularly distinctive. These include:

- The use of red, brown and yellow brick, occasionally with patterning;
- Cannons and other military features in the

8. CHARACTER AREAS

8.1 Summary of Character Areas

Within the present boundaries the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area can be divided into four Character Areas according to landscape, topography, historical development, layout, building type, and uses.. Positive features that contribute to the character of each area, or negative features that detract from it, are summarised at end of each section. The four Character Areas are:

Character Area 1: Royal Pier Road and The Terrace

Character Area 2: New Tavern Fort

Character Area 3: Gordon Gardens and Promenade

Character Area 4: Canal Basin

The majority of the built form lies to the west, where late 19th century terraced houses stand next to the large Port of London Authority buildings and Custom House. In the centre of the Conservation Area the New Tavern Fort Scheduled Monument dominates the landscape and beyond the Gordon Recreation Ground and Pleasure Gardens to the east lays the open area of the Canal Basin and large blocks of recently built flats.

8.2 Character Area 1: Royal Pier Road and The Terrace

The Terrace climbs away from Milton Place as it heads west towards Gravesend town centre and there is a visual connection with a view of St George's Parish Church spire. The early 19th century buildings quickly move away from being detached buildings to groups of terraces on short residential roads, such as Clarendon Road.

Royal Pier Road drops down towards the entrance to Royal Terrace Pier and the Port of London Authority buildings before turning sharply to the west on the alignment of the ancient easterly riverside approach to Gravesend. The road is lined on the southern side by early 20th century terraced houses with front gardens protected by flood gates and fine architectural details embellishing their front elevations. This is an urban streetscape setting, but one mixed with large official buildings and public open spaces fronting the riverside close by. The Port of London Authority buildings have large steel structures projecting from the roof and these tower over the residential properties.

Further east, behind Custom House, large modern apartment blocks are a more recent high density type of housing that began with the 1960s and 1970s blocks such as Chantry Court that stands just outside the Conservation Area.

The principal features of the built form are:

- Urban riverside character;
- Cohesive qualities of two storey terraced buildings, dating from the later 19th century and early 20th century;
- Landmark early 19th century Custom House;
- Continuous building line on the back of the pavement or behind front gardens;
- Mainly a "domestic" scale of building;
- Use of red and yellow brick;
- Large modern blocks: office and residential uses;
- Sash windows, retaining their original glazing pattern and divided into small panes or with central glazing bars, giving a predominantly vertical emphasis.

Negative features/issues:

- Loss of original architectural features, notably some iron railings on The Terrace, replacement slate roofs, replacement of timber doors and windows with uPVC (Clarendon Road);
- Speed and volume of traffic along part of The Terrace.
- Lack of continuity of the public realm, e.g. pavement surfaces;
- Impact of overlarge residential developments on the edge of the Conservation Area (e.g. Chantry Court);
- Some use of unsympathetic materials in 20th century development, i.e. concrete blocks and aluminium windows on Alexandra House (Port of London Authority building);
- Poor state of remaining features of the former Terrace Gardens, i.e. parapets at Royal Pier Road,
- Addition of satellite dishes on front elevation of properties;
- Flood defences along the front of the properties in Royal Pier Road.

8.3 Character Area 2: New Tavern Fort

This character is very self-contained as it follows the limit of the fortifications. The ramparts to the north and east are stepped and steep and have utilitarian appearance. The gardens that run through the fort and are terraced to the south have the appearance of a suburban park with well stocked borders and a variety of trees including many non-native species.

The character of this area is based around its military history and the bulky built form that contains it. The views from the gun emplacements to the north of the fort, over the river and back down into the fort itself give the

best outlook over this unusual piece of urban riverside landscape. The distinct character of the fort is reinforced by the mixture of modern and historic buildings that surround it and the modestly sized Milton Chantry that has been swamped by the large fortification since the 18th century.

The principal features of the built form are:

- Distinctive individual fortification character;
- Stepped embankment rising up in three levels;
- Various compartments built into fortifications;
- Parapets with openings for guns;
- Landmark 14th century Chantry House;
- Landmark bandstand;
- Concrete areas to the north with large sections of steel gantries and ladders.

Negative features/issues:

- Graffiti on guns and gun emplacements
- Lack of continuity of the public realm, e.g. street furniture;
- Lack of tree management, i.e. important views from the New Tavern Fort are obscured by mature trees;
- Lack of access to The Dell;
- Lack of ongoing maintenance of The Dell.

8.4 Character Area 3: Gordon Gardens and Promenade

Gordon Gardens has very little built form and its special character is as a planned public open space from the late 19th century. It does include the grade II listed statue of General Gordon and a cafeteria, but it is the openness of the space, which leads straight out into an open promenade, foreshore and river that is of particular interest. In all directions but north there is a heavily built up urban landscape

and so this is an oasis of green and calm.

Activities in the area include walking, playing, general relaxation, fishing and kite flying.

The principal features of the built form are:

- The statue of General Gordon;
- The cafeteria.

Negative features/issues:

- Poor visual quality of the cafeteria building,
- Closure of cafeteria during the winter months;
- Loss of views across the estuary due to vegetation;
- Vandalism on Gordon Promenade.

8.5 Character Area 4: Canal Basin

By contrast to the gardens lying to the west, the Canal Basin is almost completely built form, except for the water that fills it. The modern block of flats that run 20 bays wide towers over the basin and the boats that lie anchored within it.

The area has a rundown appearance to the north, by the swing bridge that connects the two parts of the promenade. Light industrial buildings and cranes stand just outside the Conservation Area but add to this neglected appearance. The large amounts of concrete and the plain appearance of the Sailing Club do not enhance the appearance of the area. The public open space with poorly maintained benches on the eastern side of the basin is also rather forlorn and the murky water that enters from the Thames is unattractive.

Entering the Canal Basin from the south via Canal Road and Gordon Promenade East,

the curve of the road passes between the tree lined border of Gordon Gardens and the flat open area of the basin itself and the vista across the Thames opens out to the north.

The principal features of the built form are:

- Urban residential and industrial riverside character;
- Small 20th century boathouses and light industrial buildings to the north;
- Landmark 21st century residential block on laboratory site on the southern edge of the basin;
- The Canal Tavern Public House;
- Surface car park.

Negative features/issues:

- Impact of the neighbouring industrial buildings;
- Poor visual quality of security fencing around the sailing club;
- Impact of flood defence wall,
- Under-use of the marina and poor environmental quality of the water;
- Lack of sensitive bedding and borders
- Lack of tree management.

9. ISSUES

9.1 Definition of Issues

The following 'Issues' have been identified by the appraisal process (via extensive survey work) and have been modified to include the views of the local community as part of the public consultation exercise, including a public meeting and four week period of consultation. They provide the basis for the Site Specific Actions in the management proposals for the eight Gravesend town centre Conservation Areas (see Gravesend Town Centre Conservation Areas: Management Plan, February 2008). These issues will be subject to regular review by the Council and new ones may be added in the future.

9.2 Conservation area boundary review

The area covered by the Ordnance Road open space and Milton Place car park was originally part of the Board of Ordnance land and thus forms part of the historic curtilage of the New Tavern Fort. It is therefore suggested to include the area to the south of Gordon Recreation Grounds circumscribed by Milton Place, Khartoum Place and Ordnance Road into the Conservation Area.

The western part of Royal Pier Road and St. Andrews Gardens, including the St. Andrews Arts Centre, Mission House, Thames House, Clarendon Royal Hotel and remains of the Gravesend Blockhouse could be transferred into the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area. This would combine much of the Gravesend's riverside areas into one Conservation Area and also re-combine all the land that was historically in ownership of the Board of Ordnance comprising all archaeological and upstanding remains of Gravesend's historic river fortifications.

9.3 Education and information

There are displays in the Chantry Heritage Centre and in the magazines of the fort that inform about the history of these important buildings. The external information boards within the Fort however have become difficult to read due to weathering and vandalism, and the polycarbonate sheets that cover these boards should be replaced.

9.4 Alterations to buildings

It is evident that well-intentioned changes, especially to doors, windows and roofs, have begun to have a cumulative effect that is damaging to the character of some conservation areas in Gravesend. These changes include the replacement of timber sash windows and doors with uPVC, which leads to a loss of the original appearance of properties through incremental change. Also, the addition of features such as satellite dishes can harm the character of a conservation area.

Where these properties are in use as single family dwelling houses an Article 4 Direction can be served by the Borough Council to bring such changes under planning control. Some Article 4 Directions already exist in the Borough of Gravesend.

9.5 Uses/ vitality

The western quarter of Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area is a quiet residential and administrative area, most of which benefits from not being on the Inner Ring Road.

From the Fort eastwards to the Canal Basin the area has a varied leisure use, attracting an inclusive mix of Gravesend residents to enjoy the gardens and the river views.

The Canal Basin has suffered from a lack of use in the past but is in the process of being revitalised by the influx of a new population accommodated in the newly constructed residential units.

9.6 Enforcement

During the survey work for the Character Appraisal, a number of sites or buildings were identified where works have taken place that may not have been authorised. These were generally the placement of satellite dishes in unsuitable locations.

9.7 Locally Listed buildings

There is no adopted comprehensive Local List for Gravesend (nor indeed, for Gravesham Borough generally) and the identification of buildings or structures for a Local List is considered to be a priority, once the criteria have been agreed. Any Local List should be drawn up with the full consultation of the local community.

9.8 Highways and traffic

The traffic regulation throughout the Conservation Area, and the strict parking controls, has had beneficial effects on the amenity of the area. However, a stretch The Terrace does suffer from its position on part of the Inner Ring Road.

9.9 Enhancement potential

A neighbouring conservation area focusing on Harmer Street has shown that the injection of public funding into an area can greatly improve its appearance and character. These improvements, particularly to the pavements and street furniture could be carried through to Royal Pier Road and

Clarendon Road. Other features whose improvement would strengthen the character of the area are:

- The information boards in Fort Gardens (see above 9.3);
- The appearance of the Canal Basin and its connection to the Promenade, along with the appearance of the small public open space to the east of the basin;
- The Dell, which should be regenerated;
- The entrance to Fort Gardens from Milton Place, which is presently a tarmac car parking area.

9.10 Trees

Trees make an important contribution to the character of Character Areas 2 and 3, but are less significant elsewhere. A tree strategy that considered issues of amenity, practicality and, importantly, succession planning would reduce the need to take ad hoc decisions on a case-by-case basis. Some trees also currently obscure the views out the Fort to the river.

9.11 Archaeological potential

As a result of excavations, it is known that there are a number of archaeological remains in the Conservation Area, particularly around Milton Chantry and the New Tavern Fort. The area has been continually occupied since the early medieval period and it is likely that other archaeological potential lies here. Other areas of considerable archaeological potential include the site of Milton Blockhouse to the east.

Any development in the area should respect the setting of a Scheduled Monument and be carried out following a full archaeological evaluation. There is likely to be evidence below ground and investigation of this

archaeological potential would add to the understanding of Gravesend's past.

Appendices

Appendix 1

History of Gravesend

Appendix 2

Bibliography

Appendix 3

Townscape Appraisal Map

Age of Buildings Map

Designations Map

Character Area Map

Conservation Area Boundary Map 2009

APPENDIX 1

History of Gravesend

The earliest written recording of a settlement here is a reference to Gravesham in The Domesday Book of 1086. The name most likely means “graaf-ham”, the home of the reeve or bailiff of the Lord of the Manor. The Book refers to Gravesham being in the ownership of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (the brother of William I) although it notes that the Manor had been split into three under the ownership of three Saxon thanes (or lords) before 1066. The Saxon settlement had grown around the Old Dover Road where the Saxon Parish Church of St Mary was built. There was also a small community to the north centred on a landing place (“hithe”) close to the location of the Town Pier, at the head of what was to become High Street.

In the 11th century Gravesham was an agricultural estate but by the 14th century it had grown into a small market town. By the end of the 13th century it had adopted the name Gravesend and the Bishop of London was Richard de Gravesende at this time.

The oldest building in Gravesend, Milton Chantry, dates from the 14th century and stands in the Gravesend Riverside Conservation Area next to the fort. It was a religious institution that owned considerable land in the area, on the outskirts of the fledgling town.

The course of High Street had been established by the middle of the 14th century. It stood at the centre of a network of streets and created a direct route from the river landing stage southwards out of the town towards the old Parish Church. It seems that at the time of the town’s first market charter,

in 1356, the town re-established itself in a new position closer to the river and it is likely that the market itself was sited on the corner of High Street and West Street next to the landing stage. This development led to the redundancy of the church and a chapel was built behind High Street on the present day site of the Parish Church of St George.

The town grew under various lordships including the crown, nobility and the Cistercian Abbey of the St Mary Graces in London. Although the location of the manor house has never been discovered, it would have been close to the church and possibly within or adjacent to the boundary of the Conservation Area.

In the medieval period most of the buildings were constructed of timber and therefore susceptible to fire damage. Although the houses and shops that lined the rising gradient of High Street would not have been as densely packed or as tall as they are today, the threat from the spread of fire was still great. Towards the end of the 14th century the town was almost completely destroyed by a combined French and Spanish force that sailed as far as Gravesend before retreating from an attack aimed at London. The resultant destruction led to the first rebuilding of the town.

In recompense for the attack, Richard II granted the people of Gravesend sole rights to ferry passengers to London and this gave rise to Gravesend’s growth as a maritime centre and trading port. The suitability of Gravesend in this regard was supported by its location as the first settlement after the estuary, the deep anchorage in the area and the relatively short crossing to the north bank at this location. Open barges transported passengers to and from the Pool of London and larger, ocean-

going vessels continued out along the estuary to the international destinations beyond.

By the end of the medieval period Gravesend was a sizeable town centred on High Street, with a variety of wharves and quays established around the landing stage. River related occupations, including, ferrying, victualling, rope and sail making and boat building and repairing, occupied the majority of the town's inhabitants. Many inns, stables and shops were established in the town, although none of these remain due to the regular outbreak of fires, which continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. Gravesend was surrounded by agricultural land, the produce of which continued to sustain those within the town, as it had done for many centuries before.

The important strategic position of Gravesend at the entry point to the river from the estuary led to Henry VIII constructing defences in the area. Five blockhouses were built between 1539 and 1540: two on the north bank near Tilbury and three on the south bank at Gravesend, Milton and Higham. The remains of the Gravesend Blockhouse stand on the eastern perimeter of the Conservation Area.

In 1562 a Charter of Incorporation united the two parishes of Milton and Gravesend, although the parish boundary runs down the centre of High Street, dividing it in terms of religious jurisdiction. Early maps therefore tend to show one side of High Street or the other, depending on which parish they relate to. The inhabitants of the newly unified areas were required to meet to transact municipal business and the first Town Hall was built in 1573. The Charter also required a Common Market to be held once a week and this was established behind the Town Hall next to Queen Street (at one time known as Milton

Backside) and this arrangement still exists in the 21st century. The market and fairs were confirmed in various Royal Charters by subsequent reigning monarchs and the commercial life of the town grew.

National and international trade also grew and Gravesend became a busy port. The Long Ferry was established by the 17th century, which took passengers who had disembarked from ocean voyages from Gravesend to Billingsgate. It also brought outward bound passengers including colonial settlers, twice a day. Pocahontas, the famous daughter of a Native American chief, died at Gravesend, and was buried in the crypt of the Church of St Mary.

The Great Fire of 1727 destroyed most of the High Street, surrounding streets and the 15th century parish church. The town was rebuilt and a new church (St George's) was erected by the Corporation. Gravesend was prosperous enough to recover from this and many other subsequent fires. Later in the century the town's standing was further boosted when the Duke of York, later King James II, built a Lord High Admiral's residence here. The house was on the site of the current Clarendon Royal Hotel, next to Gravesend Blockhouse, in the eastern corner of the Conservation Area.

Although the river remained the easiest route to trade and ferry passengers to and from London, the roads in England improved in the 18th century with the advent of the turnpikes. At the southern end of High Street, New Road and King Street were part of the stagecoach route from London to Rochester. The staging point at the New Inn would have encouraged further trade and activity at this southern end of High Street.

The 18th century saw the town grow into a

bustling centre that mixed commercial and residential uses, and the adjoining streets catered for the varying needs of residents. A Congregational chapel opened in Princes Street in 1717.

In response to increased international tension at the end of the 18th century, the defences at Gravesend were strengthened with the construction of the New Town Fort to the east of Gravesend Blockhouse, and new taller stone walls were built, connecting the two fortifications. The fort remained in use and was substantially rebuilt in the 19th century by Gravesend resident General Charles Gordon, whose famous deeds in China and Africa epitomise the image of the heroic Victorian military commander. His connection with Gravesend reinforces the town's link with the maritime military, and the riverside area even retains the Mission House in which Gordon once taught.

The 19th century also saw the development of the town in other ways. Gravesend became a destination for day trippers from London and visitors would arrive by steam boat and would then walk up Windmill Hill to take in the views and enjoy the entertainment. In the 1840s Rosherville Gardens were also opened. These pleasure grounds were created to the east of the town, ran up to the river's edge and wound up the cliffside to give impressive views across the river to Tilbury. In its heyday 20,000 visitors came to Gravesend every year, many of whom would have to pass from the newly built Town Pier through the Town Quay (now Town Pier Square). Engravings from the time show visitors on the promenade along the riverfront, and many would have continued to walk up High Street to Windmill Hill.

By the end of the 19th century, fashions had

changed and the improved railway network took day trippers to further afield resorts such as Margate and Ramsgate. Gravesend became more industrial as chalk pits and brickworks were opened in the surrounding areas, particularly Northfleet. Eventually Rosherville Gardens was closed and transformed into a cement works (utilising the local chalk). The marine industries, such as fishing and shrimping, which had supported the community in earlier centuries, came back to the fore, although modern advancements in shipbuilding meant that many ancillary trades were no longer required.

The opening of the Tilbury docks in 1886 provided some alternative means of employment. Travel to work was made possible by the ferry service between the two ports, which was converted to steam power in 1855. The industrialisation of the north shore of the Thames continued into the 20th century and in the 1950s a large power station was constructed at Tilbury. This giant structure and its smoking towers has dominated the view out of Gravesend ever since.

In the 20th century Gravesend continued to grow as a small market town with areas of light industry. Much of the industry was occupied with producing building materials which were often used to build houses in nearby London. As transport links to the city improved, Gravesend became a commuter settlement and with the addition of large retail parks close by, commercial trade has waned in the town. However, there has also been much development in the town, mostly residential. The majority of construction has been beyond the boundary of the Queen Street Conservation Area, although some historic buildings have been lost and replaced within the Conservation Area in the late 20th century. The Town Pier closed in 1969

when the car ferry was discontinued and the passenger service was moved to West Street Pier. Many of the wharves and houses, especially those between the river and St Andrew's Chapel were cleared when the inner ring road was created. Other residential roads were also removed to make way for the St George's Shopping Centre.

In the 21st century the town is the focus of large residential building projects to meet the needs of the people in the area, although the historic commercial centre of High Street has been retained and seeks to attract shoppers that have more specialist, individual requirements.

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Kent County Council

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Gravesend **2004**

Pevsner, N & Newman J

Buildings of England: Kent
1983

Solly, Raymond

Gravesend: a photographic history
of your town **2002**

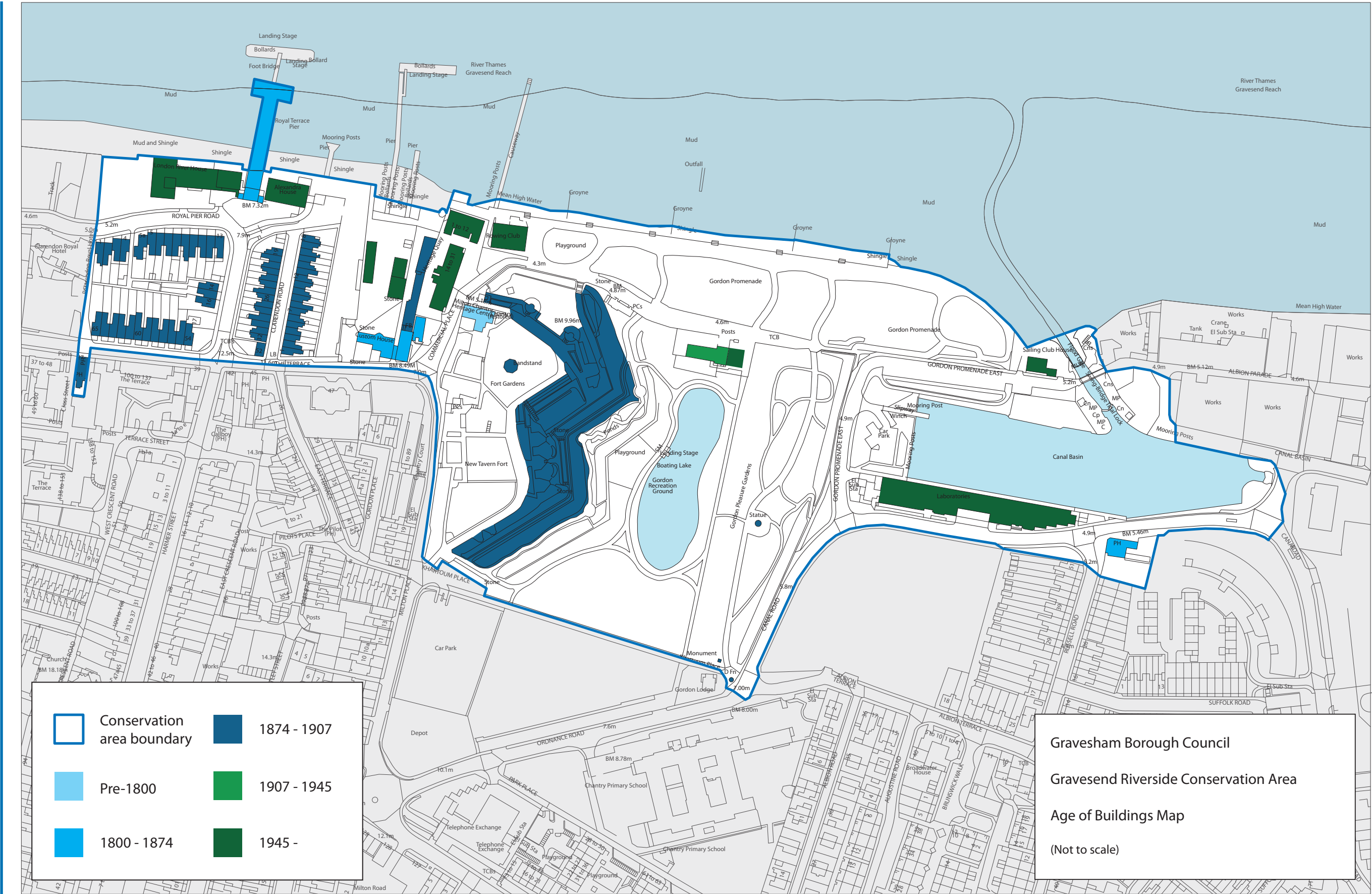
Streeter, Eve

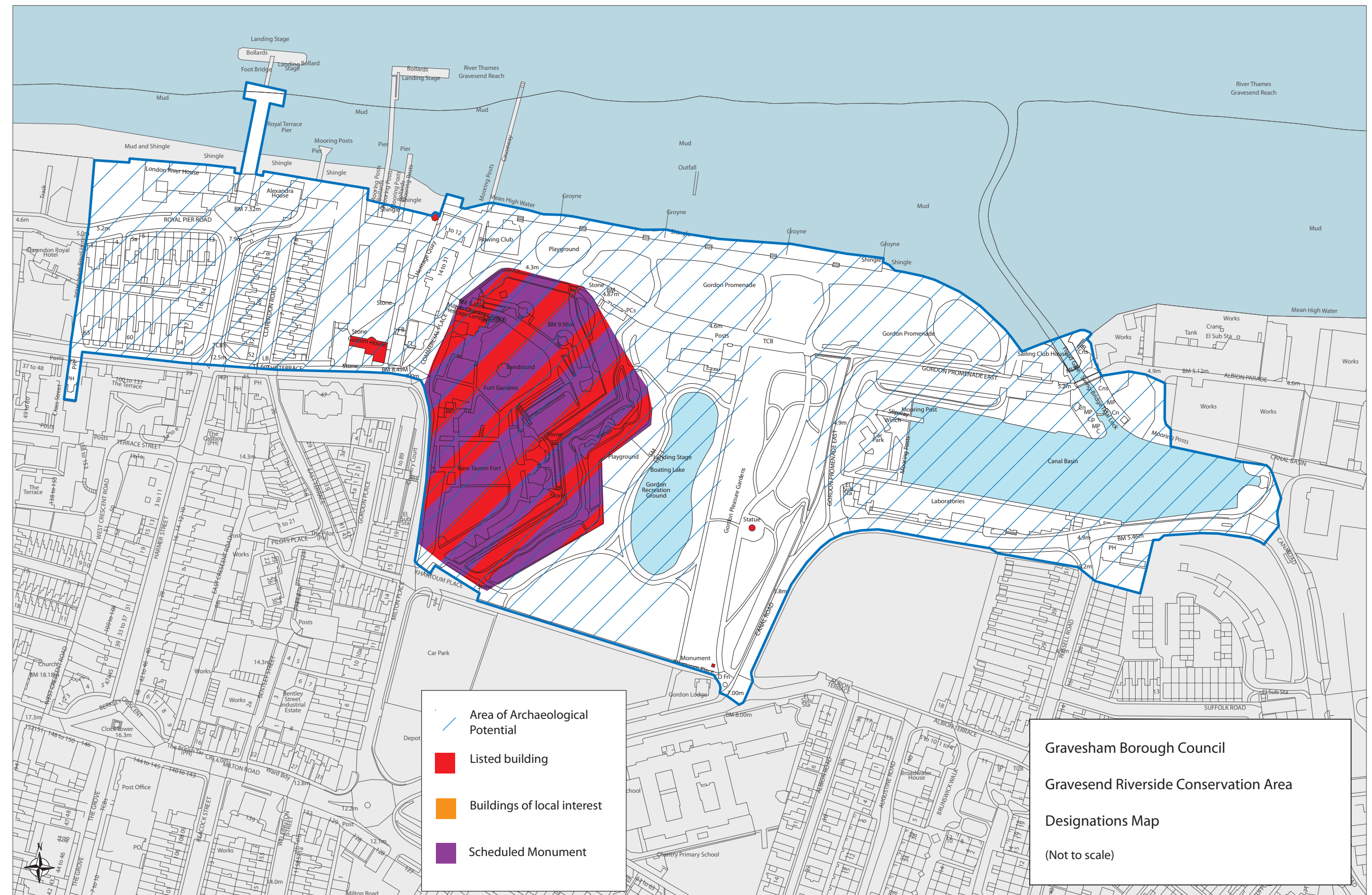
Gravesend: then & now **2001**

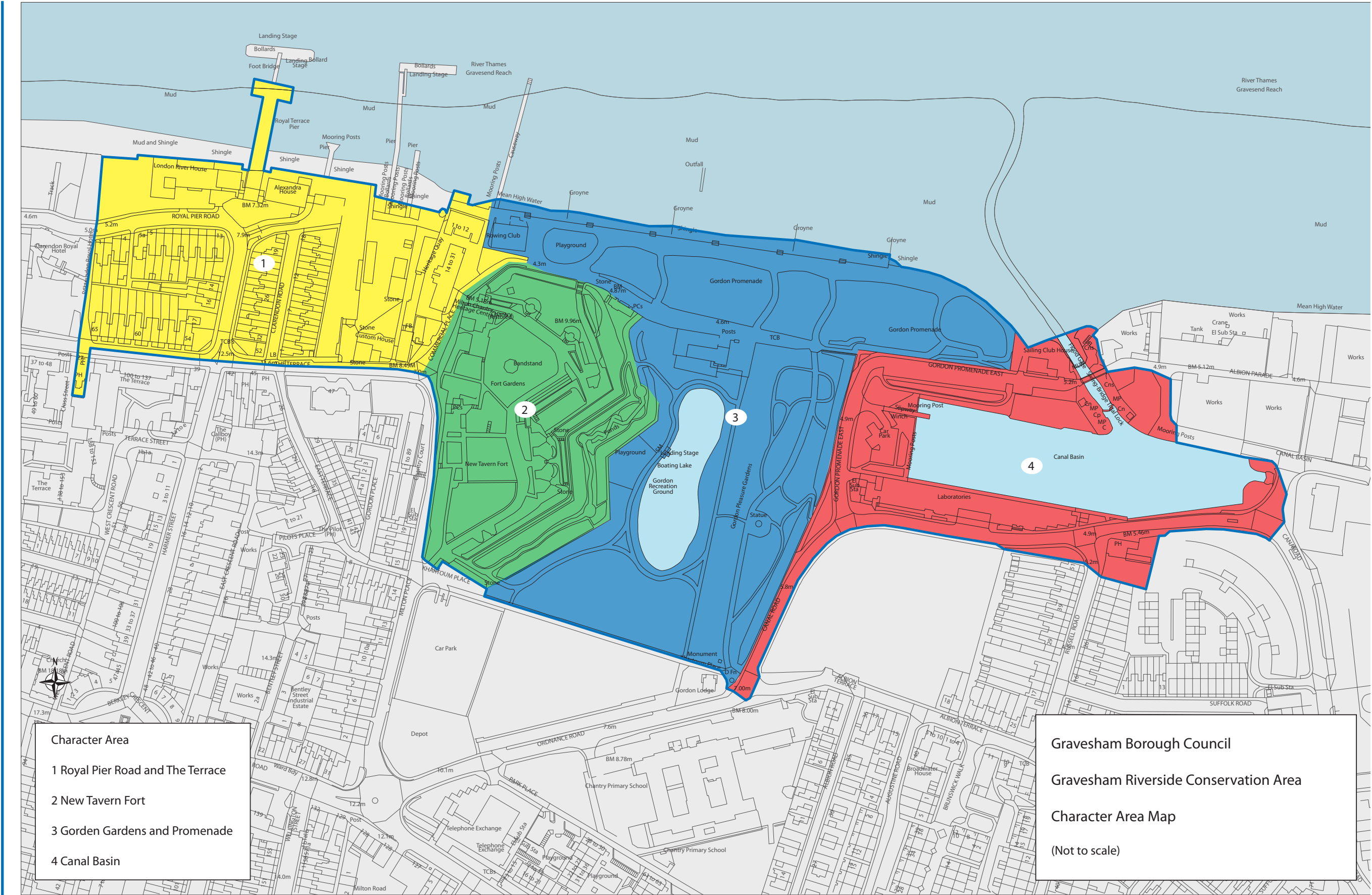
The Architecture Centre

A Business Plan for Regeneration for
Gravesham Borough Council
2003









Designated Boundary Map 09.02.09

