

## GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

# WINDMILL HILL CONSERVATION AREA

### *Scope and Purpose of Report*

*This report is an appraisal of the Windmill Hill Conservation Area in line with current English Heritage guidance. It generally complements previous conservation area work carried out by the Borough Council, particularly their detailed report on the Area dated 1981. This current report will at a future date contribute towards a more detailed publication, incorporating design guidance, planning policies and a programme for the Area, which will be subject to further public consultation.*

### **General Introduction and History**

The Conservation Area was designated in 1975 (with a small extension to the north designated in 1991) and extends to 14.5 hectares, with a population of about 6,000. It is centred on Windmill Hill and runs down to Leith Park Road to the south, Clarence Place to the north, and Parrock Road and Windmill Street to the east and west respectively. An extension to the north east takes in Christ Church Gardens and the west side of Parrock Street as far as Waterloo Street.

Windmill Hill is a significant vantage point. Possibly used by the Romans and Saxons, it certainly had a warning beacon installed in the late 14th century. It obtained its modern name in the early 18th century when two windmills were built.

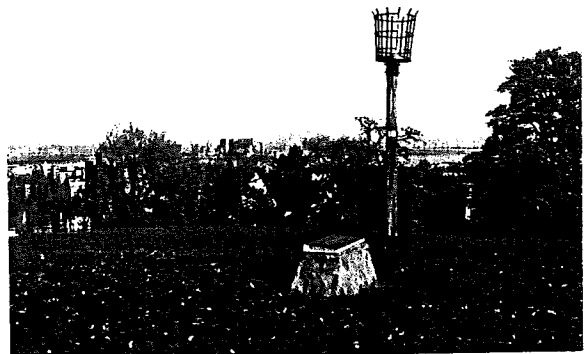
By the 1840s, Gravesend had become a popular resort, with steamboats bringing Londoners by the thousand to Windmill Hill

and 'the finest view in Kent'. Windmill Street became the principal residential street in the town; the contemporary terraces and villas here, in Parrock Street and round Windmill Hill are a reminder of the area's former attractions. On the hill there were mazes, donkey rides, a fair, a camera obscura, three public houses, tea gardens, a shrubbery and other attractions. The last surviving windmill, built in 1766, was encased in viewing platforms for the crowds to enjoy the panorama.

With the coming of the railways in mid-century, Londoners looked further afield for their amusement and Windmill Hill's attractions became disused. Gravesend Corporation purchased the lower half of the open space on the hill in 1889 and laid it out as formal gardens: the windmill was eventually demolished in 1894.

### **The Area today**

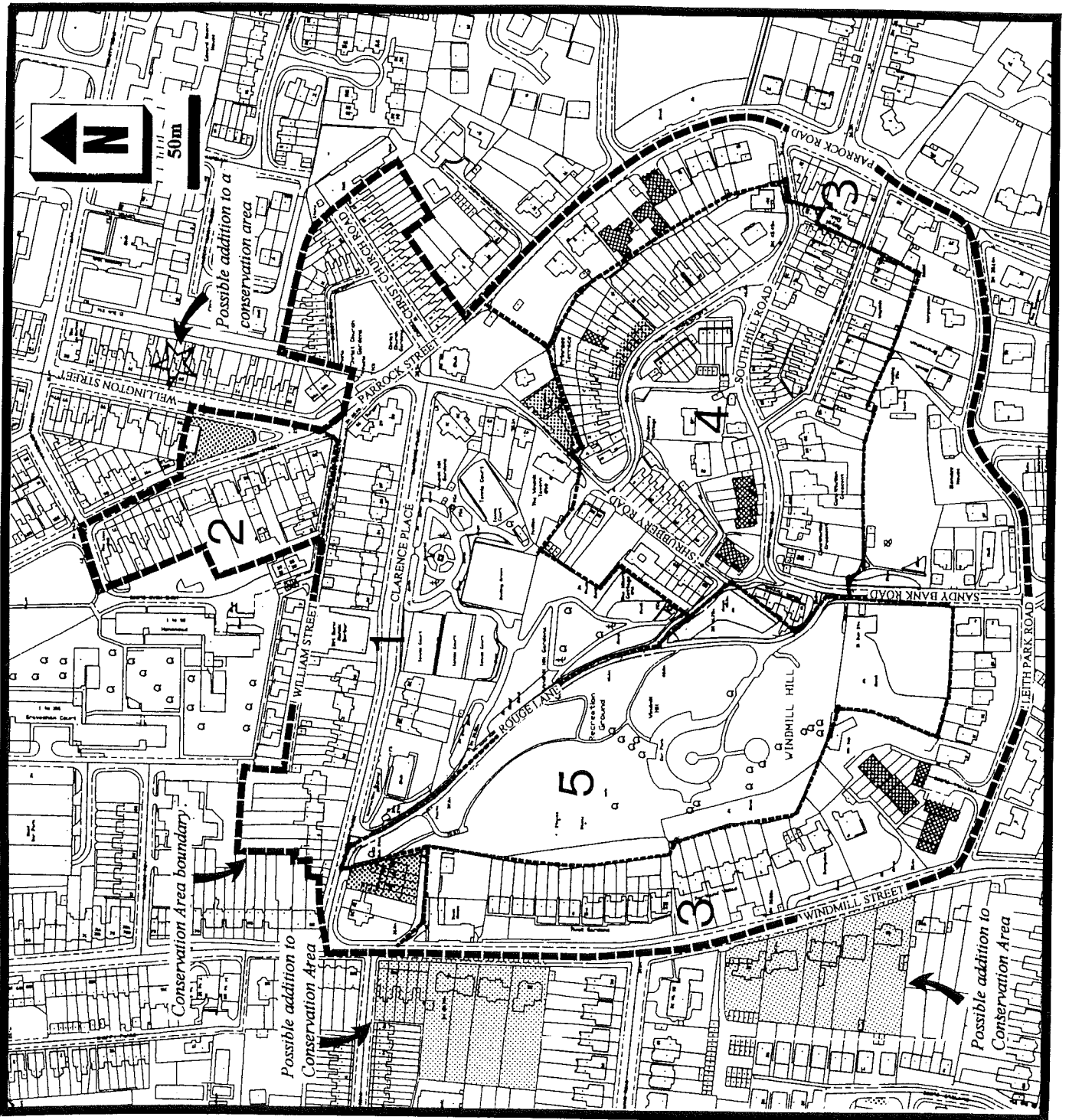
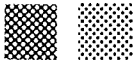
The piecemeal development of Windmill Hill coupled with the greater degree of mature



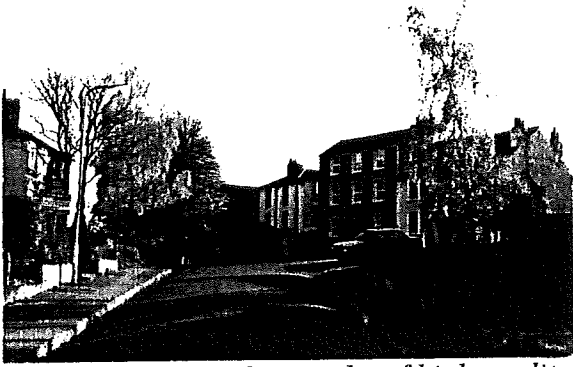
*This view of the beacon illustrates the quality of views framed by mature trees*

Negative buildings and spaces

Neutral buildings and spaces



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*Buildings do not have to be of high quality to contribute to attractive townscape*

planting throughout the Area and the often sudden glimpses of the hillside limits major vistas or panoramas in the Area to long-distance views from the summit. Important viewpoints occur where attractive building sequences or significant structures combine with streetscape, most notably in Shrubbery Road, South Hill Road, around the junction of Clarence Place and Parrock Street, and looking northwards from that junction.

There are two building types of great significance: the terrace and the semi-detached 'paired villas', the majority of which relate well to the street scene and thus have some significance as townscape. Terraces are chiefly associated with the streets approaching Windmill Hill from the north, and with the earliest colonisation of the Hill along Constitution Hill (an early track) and South Hill Road (laid out by 1865). The most attractive groupings lie on either side of Shrubbery Road above the Windmill Tavern. Post-war developments between the two public houses, particularly nos 32-34 as recently refronted, contribute positively to the character of this attractive street. Artisans' houses and unexciting post-war infill characterise South Hill Road and Constitution Hill. It is indeed to be regretted that so much post-war development has paid so little regard in the special character of Windmill Hill.



*Buildings of several centuries combine in Shrubbery Road*

Attractive early Victorian terraces can be found at the western end of Clarence Place and along Parrock Street. Later Victorian terraces also frame Christ Church Gardens, the site of a church since relocated; this little anomaly however adds a distinctive note to the Conservation Area at this point.

The great unfinished terrace of Constitution Crescent is of a different class in terms of scale, detailing and ambition. Only four out



*Classical grandeur at Constitution Terrace*



*Paired villas are one of the Area's most distinctive building types*

of a potential minimum of nine properties were completed: these may originally have been planned to stand at the head of Shrubbery Road, commanding extensive views of the nearby Shrubbery and over the River Thames.

Paired villas are the other significant building type. At their most elegant on the north side of Clarence Place and more assertive in Parrock Street and at Portland Villas, these early Victorian houses are also prominent around Parrock Road and in a more homely fashion in South Hill Road. Later pairings are of less significance; the development of Tivoli Gardens in the inter-war period is of less importance in townscape above a high retaining wall.

Many single properties contribute to the character of the Area, notably Tivoli House, the Sikh Temple, 29 Clarence Place, 1, 3, 33 and 35 Parrock Road and Glenview House



*Terraces are the other important house type in the Area*

in Leith Park Road. Scale is not necessarily important. 39 South Hill Road, formerly the Royal Oak Public House, is not large but its robust portico complements its significant location at the road junction.

Taken together, the topography and the Area's stock of buildings may be divided up into five character areas.

#### **Area 1**

#### ***Clarence Place and formal gardens, Christ Church Gardens and the lower end of Shrubbery Road***

This area was largely developed by the mid-19th century and is typified by semi-detached paired villas in an expansive and mature setting. Significant exceptions are the single properties around Shrubbery Road (the Windmill Tavern and 47 Shrubbery Road being the oldest properties in the Area) and the attractively-proportioned terraced houses around Christ Church Gardens, but the spacious and well-stocked quality of this part of the Area continues overall. The Sikh Temple is in good condition and acts as a contrasting foil to the paired villas.

All properties make some contribution to the character of the Area, with two exceptions. Kingdom Hall on Shrubbery Road is a neutral feature because of its scale and facing materials. The path to Primrose Terrace is in poor structural condition and



*Structural and ownership problems have hindered repairs along Primrose Walk*

its restoration needs urgent consideration. Secondly, 36 and 36A-D Clarence Place are neat enough modern properties but lack any resonance with their context. The extensive garage court in front of these is also an alien feature in this part of the Area.

Some of the villa forecourts have been treated harshly over the years, the major casualties being front boundaries and gardens given over to the demands of the motor car. The recent co-ordination of cast-iron railings has produced significant results: those surrounding the formal gardens could be made more prominent, with screen or specimen planting introduced to reduce the visual impact of the tennis courts. The frontage to the Veterans Club is also in need of some improvement.

Surface finishes to buildings are generally attractive and well-maintained, the blend of pastel shades at the western end of Clarence Place being particularly effective. No unpainted brickwork must now be painted. Painted masonry should be kept in a good state, and some finishes such as the grey of 18 Clarence Place should be remedied at the earliest opportunity.

## **Area 2**

### ***Parrock Street***

The northern approach to this part of Windmill Hill is a major thoroughfare with a greater density of development. It is therefore fundamentally different from Area 1, although many of its constituent elements are similar. The west side of Parrock Street consists of late Georgian and early Victorian terraces and villas, in varying stages of preservation, many with substantial party garden walls breaking up forecourts even if the actual front boundary treatment has disappeared or been altered.

Once again a variety of surface finishes is evident and is acceptable only if those natural brick surfaces which still exist



*Improvements to the boundary walls and gates would enhance this corner site*

remain unpainted and if the painted or rendered properties are well-maintained.

91 Parrock Street is included on the east side as a significant building in townscape. Despite some excellent ironwork at first floor level, it has unfortunately lost its chimneys and thus its general proportions. The prominent but unadorned front wall with its solid metal gates are out of sympathy with its historic setting.

William Street has become a backwater since the connecting streets to the north were redeveloped. Its paved surfaces are badly in need of renewal in places.

## **Area 3**

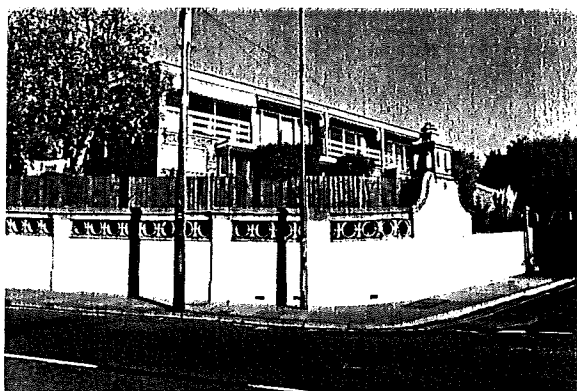
### ***Outward facing development around the edge of the Area***

On the west, east and south, Windmill Hill is strongly defined by roads, the first two (Windmill Street and Parrock Road) being major thoroughfares. Development along these roads generally faces out at a higher level, and provides a very strong edge to the Conservation Area.

As befits the older established roads, development overlooking Parrock Road and Windmill Street came earlier, and paired houses are common. The grandest by a large margin is 5/7 Parrock Road, now the Bronte School. Other properties on Parrock Road are extremely distinctive, and the group

either side of Constitution Hill is extremely picturesque. Modern bungalows intrude with unsympathetic designs. On Windmill Street, a run of early Victorian paired villas has been joined by three substantial Victorian Gothic houses behind the ornamental wall fronting the site of the ill-fated house of William Aspdin, a pioneer of Portland Cement in the early 19th century. This important and distinctive wall retains its unusual decoration continued in front of modern properties in Westhill Close and is vulnerable to further erosion and decay. While its remains can be identified in front of 1-3 Portland Villas, steps and garages have intervened further south so that complete reinstatement could unfortunately never be considered. To the north, eight pairs of inter-war semis are raised high above the road behind a plain retaining wall. The eye is drawn to the distinctive Tivoli House, formerly an hotel with pleasure garden. The large hall at the rear has been a problem building for some time because of its condition and the relative lack of access.

Leith Park Road has an assortment of 20th century houses of which the inter-war and the most recent are the best. Glenview House however is a Victorian house, later extended, which quietly occupies a pivotal position on a bend in the road. The side garden of Glenview House and the adjacent waterworks land have been identified at appeal as an important open space in an otherwise built-up location that contributes



*Westhill Close looms over the remains of William Aspdin's boundary wall*

to the open aspect of this part of the Conservation Area. Post-war infill at 1-7 Leith Park Road and 1-7 Westhill Close are aggressively horizontal in their design and thus must be regarded as negative features along with the modern houses 7A-B and 9A-B Parrock Road with their open forecourts.

#### **Area 4**

##### ***The developed summit of the hill***

While the street pattern reached its current state by the middle of the 19th century, large parts of the east side of Windmill Hill remained undeveloped until relatively recently. Much of the post-war infill development has been in the form of terraces, a significant type on Windmill Hill, though for the most part the results are mediocre and represent a wasted opportunity. The roads all connect with one another, sometimes in attractively incidental ways, such as the lane at the top of Constitution Hill and the steep turn at the very top of Shrubbery Road. Variety and the odd angles produced by topography are the chief delights of this part of the Area, culminating in the change of scale represented by Constitution Crescent.

The finest sequence is in Shrubbery Road, with the T-junction in South Hill Road a close second. From the latter the ground drops sharply to the east where Royal Oak Terrace opens up. All these locations have a



*Windmill Hill has many delightful corners which add to its charm*

very strong "sense of place" created by the inter-relationship of decent and often attractive buildings with the spaces between framed by mature planting. Primrose Terrace is difficult to include in townscape as it does not make a positive contribution in any important views, but no 13 is a negative feature since its modernisation; it has insufficient height and is unsympathetically detailed. The mix of garages at the rear is a neutral feature in views from South Hill Road. 21-23 Shrubbery Road must also be counted a negative feature: not only do they fail to respond to one of the most distinctive parts of the Area, but their brutally plain silhouette is thrown into sharp relief from the corner of Sandy Bank Road by the abrupt change in levels.

The two lodges opposite 51-53 South Hill Road have suffered over the years, the eastern one from neglect and the other from insensitive alteration. Their condition and setting demand significant improvement.

#### **Area 5** ***Informal parkland***

The summit of Windmill Hill still indicates strongly why this lookout, beacon and tourist attraction has featured so prominently in Gravesend's history. The north slope is now traversed by Rouge Lane connecting Clarence Place and Shrubbery Road: the entrance from Clarence Place is relatively informal now and the club grounds and the strips to the rear require some maintenance. The boundary treatment of the formal park is carried out in a range of materials and styles that could, with advantage, be standardised.

The most important characteristic of Windmill Hill, and its greatest strength, is the combination of informal open grass interspersed with attractive groups of mature trees framing and enhancing long-distance views to the north and east from

both the present summit and the northern brow of the hill where the beacon stands.

Any reorganisation of parking and other facility at the summit should reinforce these characteristics. New planting should be chosen and located for its future ability to create attractive groupings and to frame views. Existing planting on the south and west should be carefully assessed on the basis of species, size and condition to see whether selective thinning and management could create long-distance views in these directions, while helping the better specimens to achieve maturity and contribute more positively to the enjoyment of this distinctive location.

#### **Boundaries**

The eastern, western and southern boundaries at present run down the centres of the roads encircling the summit of the hill. While this is not ideal, in this case these streets define the hilltop: development within the current Area is usually outward-facing and in a visually dominant position. Any extensions of these boundaries would result in a change in scale and would bring in buildings with a very different relationship with their surroundings. If the Conservation Area were to be extended, however, substantial and attractive Victorian houses at 90-95 and 96-104 Windmill Street are most worthy of serious consideration.



*94-104 Windmill Street look across to  
Windmill Hill*



*92-95 Parrock Street are of interest but contrast with much of Windmill Hill*

The former canteen, now the “Old Armoury” off Armoury Drive, has also been suggested for inclusion. The rear of this distinctive building is prominent in views from Christ Church Road, but there is no other inter-relationship. It faces the wrong way, and has just been sympathetically restored to use as offices. Nothing would be achieved by an extension in this direction.

Finally, an extension has been suggested to take in the whole of the terrace between Parrock Street and Wellington Street as far as Waterloo Street. The existing Area here is already at some remove from Windmill Hill and its special character, and another extension would dilute the concept still further. If Conservation Area status is considered appropriate for this triangle, it is recommended that the whole of the Wellington Street area be assessed, and a new conservation area designated to include those parts of the Windmill Hill Area north of William Street.



*Kingdom Hall's side elevation would be enhanced if the car park were landscaped*

## Problems and opportunities

These are presented under each sub-area as described above. Where additional controls are recommended, they are underlined.

### Area 1

- Take steps to bring 12 Clarence Place from its present dilapidated state
- Rationalise street signs on Parrock Street by Christ Church Gardens
- Rationalise boundary treatments in and around Windmill Hill Gardens
- Improve Kingdom Hall car park and the forecourt to Windmill Tavern
- Rebuild the retaining wall to Primrose Terrace and restore the steps and path
- Improve boundaries to Veterans Club, to match plinth wall and railings either side of main entrance
- Improve front curtilages, particularly 34-35 and 37 Clarence Place. Article 4 directions to control further alterations
- Promote co-ordinated painting schemes for existing external rendered and painted surfaces (Article 4)

### Area 2

- Promote co-ordinated painting schemes for existing external rendered and painted surfaces (Article 4)
- Promote greater consistency in front boundary treatment (Article 4)



*The restoration of these front boundaries would be a significant enhancement*



*The bank in front of Tivoli Gardens needs comprehensive treatment*

- Improve front boundary and gates, 91 Parrock Street
- Improve surfaces, William Street

### *Area 3*

- Plant up and improve Tivoli Gardens frontage
- Preserve the remains of the frontage wall built by William Aspdin



*Rear boundaries are a significant element in the character of Constitution Hill*

- Design brief for redevelopment of buildings and yard at corner of Sandy Bank Road and Leith Park Road
- Improve entrance to pumping station (Leith Park Road)
- Reinstate front boundary railings or balustrade to 13-19 Parrock Road
- Improve road frontage to 7A and B Parrock Road
- Retain open character of Glenview House curtilage and the adjacent waterworks land

### *Area 4*

- Re-establish original glazing bar pattern and restore bottle balustrade at 2 Constitution Crescent
- Clear vegetation and damaging tree growth from around eastern lodge opposite 52 South Hill Road, and consider more appropriate detailing to western lodge
- Improve external appearance of 13 Primrose Terrace and consider adding another storey
- Formalise garage accommodation and improve consistency of prominent rear boundaries at 10-18 Primrose Terrace (from South Hill Road) and 34-39 South Hill Road (from Constitution Hill)
- Re-establish tree or feature at centre of T-junction, South Hill Road

### *Area 5*

- Consider reorganisation of facilities and selective tree management to enhance noted strengths of Windmill Hill and promote the health of the most important tree specimens.

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*This report* is one of five commissioned by Gravesham Borough Council as part of their continuing review of the conservation areas in the Borough. It was written and illustrated by Denis F McCoy FRTP I ARIBA FRIAI, Geoff Huntingford BSc MRTPI IHBC and Jason Stratton BA DipPI under the direction of the Council's Planning Services Manager, and was completed in May 1999  
*McCoy Associates is an associated practice within Planning UK Ltd*