

# Harmer Street

## Conservation Area Character Appraisal







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

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## 1. STATEMENT OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The Harmer Street Conservation Area lies close to the historic centre of Gravesend in Kent, and is centred on the buildings which form a planned development of 1840. Building on what was once open fields, Harmer Street is a prestigious development of four storey terraced townhouses that was built on a newly created road leading north from the Rochester road and to overlook the River Thames. The architect, A.H. Wilds, created a classical design with regular placement of windows and doors that extend along the road in a visually pleasing vista. At the southern end of Harmer Street, Berkley Crescent creates another visual statement with handsome three storey yellow brick buildings arranged along a semi-circular buildings line with a colonnade and facing a clock tower. The development was the beginning of an enterprise to build a "New Town" in the largely undeveloped Milton-next-Gravesend next to the crowded town and wharf area.

In the years following the original development, the setting of Harmer Street was enhanced by the addition of the new Royal Terrace Pier, Terrace Gardens and clock tower, which stood at each end. Also, the large Assembly Rooms, later a theatre, was established in Harmer Street by 1842. However, the full extent of the original plans, with an Upper Harmer Street (now The Grove) and an additional crescent forming a Circus with Berkley Crescent, was never realised. The other parts of the New Town were developed subsequently, but to less grand designs.

Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent became busy shopping areas during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and benefited from the stagecoach route passing along Milton Road and, later, from the trams that passed along it. Many ground floor shopfronts were built along Harmer Street and some of these have been restored. Berkley Crescent lost its colonnade in circa 1920, but this has been replaced under an Impact grant scheme that also funded the restoration of many of the Harmer Street houses.

Despite the loss of some vitality, the Conservation Area retains much of its prestigious 19<sup>th</sup> century character. The Conservation Area designation acknowledges this extant collection of architecture from one of the most prosperous periods in Gravesend's history which in extent and coherence is unmatched elsewhere in town.



Harmer Street (looking south) circa 1952-3



Harmer Street (looking North) circa 1952-3



## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 The Harmer Street Conservation Area

The Harmer Street Conservation Area was designated on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1970 by Kent County Council and extended on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1990 by Gravesham Borough Council. The Conservation Area's boundary contains the historic thoroughfare of Harmer Street, Berkley Crescent and part of Milton Road in the south, and part of The Terrace in the north.

### 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 Harmer Street 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 seven other 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.

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 31<sup>st</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

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.

Following the meeting, the outcomes were discussed by Gravesend 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 to this document as Appendix 4 for information.

## 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 Harmer Street 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 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Leaflets were also displayed in public places. The meeting included a description of the





Clock Tower Grade II listed - built with public donations to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 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 Harmer Street Conservation Area lies in the "New Town" of Gravesend: an area to the east of the historic town that was developed from 1836 in the neighbouring Parish of Milton. The Conservation Area overlooks the Thames riverside to the north and includes part of Milton Road to the south.

#### 3.2 Activities and uses

Gravesend is a large residential settlement with a substantial commercial centre.

Industrial areas border the centre, particularly in the west towards Northfleet. There are other activities in the town relating to its riverside setting; the headquarters of the Port of London Authority and the coastguard station.

The core of the Harmer Street Conservation Area contains many former commercial premises in a range of shops with living accommodation above. Most of the shops have closed, although a guitar shop and some businesses remain in the northern and southern ends of the street. A couple of businesses also remain in Berkley Crescent; there are restaurants and a public house in Milton Road; and on The Terrace there are two public houses and a shipping company.

#### 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, which defines the northern border of the Conservation Area, and there are far reaching views over the Port of London Authority buildings and the broad river to Essex. The steep gradient from Royal Pier Road levels off at The Terrace and then gently slopes upwards towards the clock tower in the south. The pairs of tall buildings in Harmer Street are gradually stepped up in pairs.

The relatively flat topography towards the east and west inhibits views in these directions due to the high density of the tall four storey buildings along Harmer Street. However, there are views through to other historic and modern residential developments outside the Conservation Area from Terrace Street and West Crescent Road at the rear of Harmer Street.

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 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, 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.

### 3.5 Relationship of the Conservation Area to its surroundings

The immediate surroundings of the Conservation Area are urban townscape and these are also largely designated as separate conservation areas.

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

- To the south: The continuation of New Town along the same road alignment in The Grove (formerly Upper Harmer Street) and neighbouring residential roads laid out in a grid pattern;
- To the west: Small residential streets of modest 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick terraced houses that adjoin the open spaces to the rear of the Harmer Street properties;  
To the north-west: Modern developments of flats in Terrace Street;
- To the north: Late 19<sup>th</sup> century development in The Terrace and Royal Pier Road leading to the Port of London Authority and the River Thames;
- To the east: Historic residential roads of East Terrace and Milton Place, which constitute the earliest stage of the New Town development. Some modern residential and commercial infill development separates the Harmer Street and Milton Place areas. The eight storey Chantry Court flats overlook part of Terrace Street.





Stephenson's Office Harmer Street 1890

## 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.

Harmer Street Conservation Area is just outside Kent County Council's designated Area of Archaeological Potential in Gravesend and no recorded finds have been made here.

### 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 Harmer Street Conservation Area forms part of the New Town that developed in Milton-next-Gravesend in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was named after Alderman Harmer who supported the development. The historical development 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 Harmer Street 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):

- 1258 - Richard de Gravesende made Bishop of Lincoln. The change of name from Gravesham was established for the town.
- 1300 - Gravesend had grown into a small market town based on its trade on the river and easy supplies from surrounding agricultural land.
- 1350 - Course of High Street established. It stood at the centre of a network of streets, a direct route from the river to the old Parish Church.
- 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.
- Many inns, stables and shops were established in the town, but regularly destroyed by fires.
- Gravesend was a sizeable town centred on High Street, with Queen Street and Princes Street on either side connected by alleys and yards.

#### **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 – the site of Harmer Street lies inside Milton Parish.
- 1573 - First Town Hall built. Common Market held once a week on current site of Borough Market.
- 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 Harmer Street.

#### **GEORGIAN AND REGENCY (1714 – 1837):**

- Throughout this period the developed part of Gravesend, mainly to the east, grew but was often destroyed by fires.
- 1726 - 160 houses recorded at Milton.
- 1777 - James Harmer born. As a London alderman and director of the Milton Park Estate Harmer financially and administratively supported the scheme

that would bear his name.

- 1782 - Customs House and New Tavern Fort constructed.
- 1797 - Gravesend population was 4,000, with 700 houses in nine streets, including The Terrace.
- 1790s - Houses built between New Tavern and the town by James Leigh Joynes, on south side of The Terrace (on ground known as “the camps”).
- 1812 - Ebenezer Chapel in Milton Road built.
- 1815 - First regular service of pleasure steamers from London to Gravesend.
- 1828 - Gravesend and Milton Steamboat Company formed.
- 1830 - Designs for Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent displayed at Royal Academy by the architect A.H. Wilds. These included plans for a second crescent and Upper Harmer Street (The Grove) leading to Windmill Hill, which were never built.
- 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 - The Literary Institution (later The Assembly Rooms and The Grand Theatre of Varieties) built in Harmer Street on current site of The Call Boy Public House. General social gathering place. Rebuilt in 1890s and 1950s.
- 1842 - Royal Terrace Pier opened. A promenade established along the riverfront along with more piers.
- 1845 - Gravesend and Rochester railway opened.
- 1851 - Population of Gravesend and



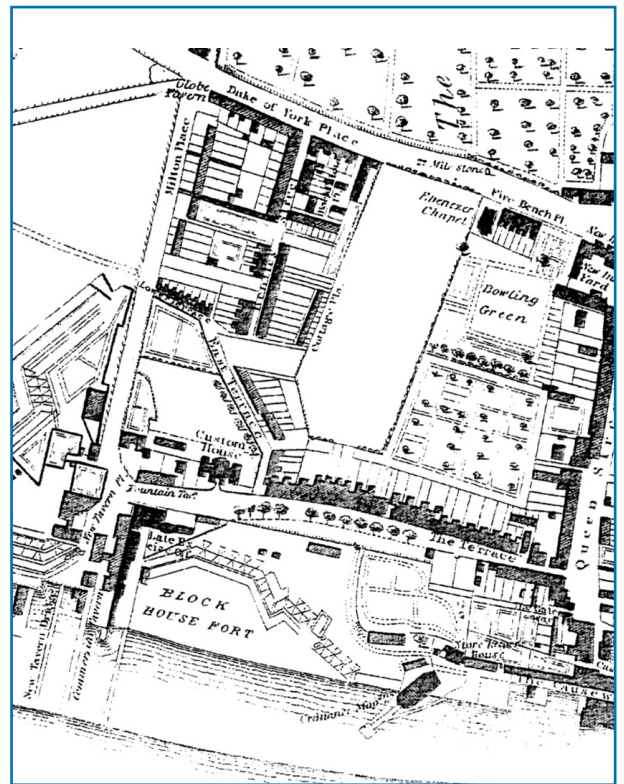
- Milton had risen to 16,633.
- 1856 - Metropolitan Board of Works scheme to discharge London sewage onto the Thames at Crossness led to end of Gravesend's status as a resort.
- 1850s to 70s – Pier used as embarkation point for Royal voyages.
- 1884 - The Literary Institution in Harmer Street became a music hall.
- 1887 - Clock tower erected to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria
- 1893 - Royal Terrace Pier restored.

#### 20th / 21st CENTURY:

- The industrialisation of the north shore of the Thames continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 for houses.
- 1902 - Electricity installed by Gravesend Town Council and electric trams replace horse drawn trams.
- 1904 - Houses built on Terrace Gardens. Automatic trams run along Milton Road.
- 1906 - New Methodist Church in Milton Road built.
- 1908 - Extension to post office in Milton Road opened.
- 1910 -14 - Suffragettes meetings at the clock tower.
- 1914 - Parishes of Gravesend and Milton combined to form the Borough of Gravesend. Double decker buses run along Milton Road.
- 1920 - Removal of colonnade in Berkley Crescent.
- 1933 - Grand Theatre closed.
- 1950s - A large power station constructed at Tilbury.
- As transport links to the city improved, Gravesend became a commuter settlement.
- 1952 - Grand Theatre demolished following a fire.
- 1958 - Creation of the Inner Ring Road which subsequently leads to increased traffic along The Terrace and through Harmer Street.
- 1960s - 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. Large shopping malls built in New Road. Businesses and shops continued to operate in Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent.
- 1970s to present - Declining economic viability of shops in Harmer Street.
- 1968 - Last of acacia trees in Berkley Crescent lost.
- 1976 - New pilot station opened on Royal Terrace Pier.
- 1977 - Clock tower restored by Corporation.
- 2000 - Reinstatement of Berkley Crescent colonnade and renovation of many buildings and the public realm under the Impact regeneration scheme.



Andrew & Drury 1769



1826 map



Tithe Map 1842



Ordnance Survey 1863





Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1874



Ordnance Survey 1907



Ordnance Survey 1932



## 5. SPATIAL ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Layout and spaces

Harmer Street was not established until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, before which the area had been part of the open fields of Milton-next-Gravesend. By 1826, it was a well defined open space surrounded by the development in Milton that had already begun along The Terrace, in Milton Place and on Duke of York Place (Milton Road).

Harmer Street was inserted into this open space from 1836 onwards and the long terraces of townhouses were complete by 1840. Some of the existing houses in The Terrace had to be demolished in order to create an opening for this north-south route, which opens more flamboyantly onto Milton Road via Berkley Crescent. The broad road is slightly skewed from the north-south orientation. Harmer Street broadens as it leads southwards, creating an impressive perspective that is enhanced by the attractive frontages of the buildings and the impact of the landmark clock tower in Berkley Crescent. The Conservation Area stretches across the busy Milton Road to include a number of buildings on this former stagecoach route.

The long, straight road with continuous frontages creates a strong visual impact, which is not reflected at the rear of the terraces. The large rear plots contain haphazard arrangements of outbuildings, extensions and car parking areas, and can be accessed by the service roads of West Crescent Road and East Crescent Road. A strong north-south division is created in the building line of Harmer Street by the entrances to both of these access routes and Terrace Street.

The latter once connected Harmer Street to Queen Street in the west, at the centre of Gravesend town.

In the north of the Conservation Area, The Terrace was established in 1791 after a new Customs and Immigration Office was built close to the Tudor fortifications of the Gravesend Blockhouse. This east-west route was built by local resident James Leigh Joynes and the row of houses he built here were the first in the town to be constructed as a private venture. The road runs parallel to the course of the river and connects the Town Pier in the west to New Tavern Fort in the east. Milton Road in the south also runs on an east-west orientation.

Harmer Street is laid out in a high density arrangement, although Berkley Crescent includes some public open space and there are a few gaps between the buildings at the northern end.

### 5.2 Relationship of Buildings to Spaces

In Harmer Street all of the buildings stand on the back edge of the pavement in mainly continuous rows. The road was laid out at the end of the 1830s in the current arrangement with buildings facing each other across the wide road. Also in the original scheme was the connecting crescent of three storey buildings in the south. The terraces of Harmer Street run north to the corners of West Crescent Road and East Crescent Road. Beyond these roads the relationship of buildings to spaces changes slightly, with a large three storey corner building on the west side (No.1a to 1e Harmer Street) standing next to a small two storey former stable. This is followed by a gap and the rear of the three storey no.39 The Terrace.

At the northern end on the eastern side of Harmer Street the streetscape is even more fragmented, with The Callboy Public House set back from the pavement edge between East Crescent Road and no.42 The Terrace. This site was occupied by a large building (first the Assembly Rooms, later the Grand Theatre) from 1844 until the early 1950's when the building was destroyed by a fire.

Further north nos. 42 to 45 The Terrace and The Terrace Tavern form a cohesive group of historic buildings facing out over the river from their elevated position. However, the views across the former Royal Terrace Gardens, which once occupied the area from The Terrace down to the river bank, have long been inhibited by terraced houses and the Port of London Authority buildings. No. 39 The Terrace has had its neighbouring buildings demolished and replaced with blocks of flats.

None of the buildings in the Conservation Area have front gardens, although originally the open space at the junction of Berkley Crescent and Milton Road was laid out as green space and the buildings were given a colonnade to the front for greater effect. This arrangement was changed with the construction of the Clock Tower in 1887.

The large rear garden plots to the Harmer Street properties have either been infilled with outbuildings of various size and age or changed to hardstanding areas for car parking.

### 5.3 Landmarks, focal points and views

The principal landmarks in the Harmer Street Conservation Area are:

- The clock tower;
- The (former) post office;
- No.146 Milton Road (former bank);
- The Call Boy Public House;
- No.1a to 1e Harmer Street;
- No.39 The Terrace.

These landmark buildings, as identified above, are linked by groups of buildings (both sides of Harmer Street and nos. 1 to 9 Berkley Crescent), providing focal points between them. The landmark buildings all make an impression on the streetscape, either through their position as corner buildings (e.g. no.39 The Terrace), their architecture (e.g. the post office), their different building form to their neighbours (e.g. The Call Boy) or for a combination of these reasons (e.g. the clock tower).

The key focal point is the view down the classical frontages of the Harmer Street properties towards the river and the Essex countryside in the distance, accentuated by the narrowing of the road to the north and the height of the buildings. Surviving and restored historic features such as iron balconies also enhance the vista. This attractive arrangement was fundamental to the creation of Harmer Street and the Royal Terrace Pier was built in alignment with the road in order to complete the effect. Formal gardens also stood between the pier and Harmer Street until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to add amenity and attractive open space to the setting. This was early Victorian planning that harnessed the relationship between the town and the river to great effect.

The principal positive views are:

- Along Harmer Street in both directions;
- The clock tower from each direction;
- Along the colonnade of Berkley Crescent, north and south;
- To Royal Terrace Pier.
- Eastwards along The Terrace to the trees on the edge of the New Tavern Fort.

#### **5.4 Trees, boundaries and planting**

There are a number of mature trees, all of which were planted after the original development of Harmer Street. These are marked on the Townscape Appraisal map. The most notable specimens in terms of their affect on the appearance of the Conservation Area are those in Berkley Crescent. Two mature trees stand in front of both sets of buildings that line the crescent. They soften the urban setting of the Conservation Area and provide a splash of colour next to the straight white columns that support the colonnade. They also frame the clock tower which rises well above the height of their crowns.





Mature Plane trees stand in front of both sets of buildings that line the crescent.



## 6. STREETScape

### 6.1 Public realm

#### Pavements

The pavements in the Harmer Street Conservation Area contain a mixture of traditional and modern urban treatments and the traditional relationship of raised pavement to road surface has been maintained in terms of levels.

Along Harmer Street, wide (300mm) granite kerbs and York flagstones give a traditional appearance to the pavements. This use of traditional materials is only interrupted temporarily by the pink tactile paving that has been laid around the pedestrian crossing at the junction with Berkley Crescent. The pavements also contain bottled glass sections which, at intervals, light basements along the road. At around three metres wide, the pavements are relatively narrow compared to the broad main carriageway.

Elsewhere in the Conservation Area there are more modern treatments, such as in West Crescent Road, Terrace Street and The Terrace where there are tarmac and concrete paviour pavements and narrow 200mm concrete kerbs. In East Crescent Road and parts of West Crescent Road there is no pavement as these service roads are generally quite narrow. East Crescent Road retains some historic stone cobbles between areas of tarmac on the main section of roadway. Another section of cobbles can be found outside the entrance to the former stables at the top of Harmer Street.

The central pedestrian area around the clock tower, which is encircled by roads on all sides and is paved in a variety of modern treatments

including buff and red coloured block paving and grey square concrete paviours. The area has the wide granite kerbing on its perimeter. The curved paved areas outside the Berkley Crescent buildings are paved with distressed concrete blocks in muted tones.

The pavements in the Conservation Area are generally well maintained.



Harmer Street coal shute covers

#### Street furniture, signage and other features

All the street furniture in the Conservation Area is located in Berkley Crescent. This includes a number of plain timber benches, square metal waste bins, stout timber posts to prevent cars parking on the central paved areas and a tall blue painted metal column is mounted with a cctv camera. There is also a more ornate iron and timber bench fixed to the pavement outside no. 8 Berkley Crescent.

A number of “one way” and “no entry” highway signs are fixed to freestanding poles around Berkley Crescent and along Harmer Street. On the northern side of the clock tower there is additional highway signage set close to the kerb giving directions to vehicle drivers approaching along Harmer Street.

There is also a pedestrian crossing across Harmer Street and between Harmer Street and the clock tower island with related traffic signals, here road signs and highway furniture create a rather cluttered appearance.

Signage on Harmer Street includes highway direction signage and a bus stop sign on freestanding poles. The only street furniture is a car parking ticket machine set close to the building line on the western side of the road outside No.37.

### Street lighting

The free flow of pedestrian movement along Harmer Street is assisted by the use of wall mounted street lights rather than lamp standards. Lamps are fixed to buildings at regular intervals along the main stretch of buildings in Harmer Street and are of modern design. At either end, "hockey stick" style lamps are set in the pavement. These are generally very tall, although this is not out of scale with the buildings in the Conservation Area. One lamp outside no.6 Berkley Crescent does, however, extend into the crown of a tree that stands next to it.

There are also three shorter cast iron street lamps with Victorian style lanterns positioned around the clock tower. These are decorated with flower baskets during the summer months.

### Pedestrian movement and footpaths

Access along the pavement is good in the Conservation Area. To the south of Harmer Street road crossing is aided by traffic signals, although towards the north there is only a single zebra crossing spanning the width of the street. At the junction of The Terrace there is no pedestrian crossing and negotiating the fast and regular traffic can be hazardous. A cast iron bell is set in the pavement on each corner of Harmer Street and The Terrace. Crossing between the southern side of Milton Road by the post office and the clock tower can also be difficult.

Additional pedestrian routes that carry less traffic are West Crescent Road and East Crescent Road.

### Traffic and parking

Harmer Street is only open to one-way traffic entering from the north, and as this is the Inner Ring Road the traffic is fast and frequent. The road is also used by heavy goods vehicles which does not enhance the character of this elegant early 19<sup>th</sup> century residential street. Milton Road is also a very busy route around the town.

The small area of The Terrace to the east of Harmer Street is not part of the ring road and the reduction in traffic, and the benefits to the character of this area, is marked.

The considerable breadth of Harmer Street leaves scope for parking along each side although this is limited close to Berkley Crescent. Despite the spacious width of the road, some vehicles mount the paving in Harmer Street and can do so easily as the kerbs are not raised very high above the road surface. There is a small amount of car parking on the forecourt of The Call Boy, but most residents or employees park in the back gardens and yards reached by the two service roads to Harmer Street.



Typical example of a Grade II listed four storey terraced property in Harmer Street.



## 7. THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### 7.1 Building types

The historic buildings in the Conservation Area have their origins mainly in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them, i.e. the elegant terrace along Harmer Street, were built to an identical design in one phase on a newly created road.

The buildings on The Terrace are of a slightly earlier date, built between 1800 and 1840 as part of the first private construction venture in Gravesend. They form a neat terraced row between street corners and are of a noticeable smaller scale and less lavishly detailed than the Harmer Street terrace to the south. They are generally in commercial use, although they have a residential use above.

The post office and former bank building on Milton Road were constructed after the Harmer Street development, once plans had been dropped to extend the scheme southwards. The buildings are designed on a more lavish civic scale with extravagant window dressings and doorcases and round headed sash windows. The British Tar Public House on the north side of Milton Road is a more modest two bay building with two storey plus attic under a clay tile mansard roof.

### 7.2 Building form

The buildings of Harmer Street are arranged in continuous rows with Berkley Crescent adjoining them to the south. The first break in the building line is at the cross roads with Terrace Street and East Crescent Road. The terrace responds to the drop in level towards the river by being grouped in pairs stepping down towards the north.

The buildings have a domestic scale and are mostly four storeys in height in Harmer Street and three storeys in Berkley Crescent and The Terrace.

### 7.3 Listed buildings

The majority of the buildings in the Harmer Street Conservation Area are grade II listed, although this amounts to only 14 listed building entries due to the 57 houses in Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent being amalgamated into three groups. The only buildings in the Harmer Street Conservation Area not to be listed are The Call Boy Public House in Harmer Street and The British Tar Public House (now TJ's) in Milton Road.

The Terrace contains five listed buildings including The Rose and Thistle Public House and the Terrace Tavern. They are mainly rendered three storey early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings (no.43 is two storey) and make an interesting group of commercial buildings with a variety of individual features such as tiling and hanging signs.

The principal Harmer Street properties are notable for their classical facades, wrought iron balconies on the first floor and series of traditional shopfronts, including some that date to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rears of the properties are generally quite modified and outbuildings in their back plots vary greatly in quality. The frontage of the buildings and their group value and setting are undoubtedly the foundation of their special interest and the heart of the special character of the Harmer Street Conservation Area as a whole.

Nos. 1 to 9 Berkley Crescent provide a grand entrance to Harmer Street. Their early 19<sup>th</sup> century elegance is enhanced by a restored colonnade that lines the row and the grade II



listed clock tower that rises above them. On the opposite side of Milton Road nos. 144, 145 and 146 are richer in architectural details such as rusticated window surrounds.

#### 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 is due to be reviewed soon.

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

Two 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 British Tar Public House;
- The Call Boy 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.

#### 7.6 Building Materials

The historic buildings of Harmer Street, Berkley Crescent and Milton Road have been built using mainly local materials, particularly yellow stock brick. Yellow stock brick is used in The Terrace. The clock tower is built of white and red stone. Some key buildings close by, however, have used other materials such as Kentish ragstone and flint (Church of St Peter and St Paul, Milton Road). The most common roofing material is Welsh slate and all the buildings have retained this roof

treatment along Harmer Street. Gravesend was at the centre of some innovation in construction techniques in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the claimed invention of Portland cement. Many cement works and chalk pits were established in the area and therefore there was no shortage of supplies at this time. Almost all of the buildings in the Harmer Street Conservation Area feature an external render coat or architectural details that use this material.

### 7.7 Local details

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

- The use of yellow stock brick;
- Ground floor design of Harmer Street terrace to two different designs, i.e. rusticated stucco render with central round headed sash windows, and timber panelled with central rectangular windows;
- Wrought iron balconies;
- Console brackets and stone ball finials on shopfronts and public house facades;
- Round corners on corner buildings (no.29 The Terrace, nos. 145 and 146 Milton Road);
- Sash windows;
- Cement storey bands;
- Glass brick pavement lights for basement rooms.

## 8. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Harmer Street Conservation Area is notable for the cohesive character of rows of Georgian townhouses which face each other at Harmer Street, and its focal buildings. Also very important is the relationship of the terraces to the crescent and clock tower at the southern end, and the views out to the pier and river at the north. This character has been somewhat diminished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the neglect of buildings and the public realm, and the introduction of heavy traffic. However, considerable efforts have been made in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to re-establish the original appearance of the buildings in the area through various regeneration schemes that funded the re-instatement of historical architectural details, such as sash windows, balconies and traditional shopfronts, as well as the colonnade lining Berkley Crescent.

Little can be done to restore the relationship Harmer Street once had to the Royal Terrace Pier, the latter now appears to be hemmed in between the Port of London Authority buildings, and the area of the former Royal Terrace Gardens has long since developed into residential streets.

The southern part of the Conservation Area retains much of the busy urban character that was fostered in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the stagecoach route along Milton Road flourished. This activity grew with the introduction of first electric trams towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the 1850s when the post office was established, this area became an important new commercial centre in the expanding town of Gravesend, and shops spread north along Harmer Street. This part of Milton Road is still a key through point in the town, although much of the

commercial activity in the town is now centred in the west around King Street, New Road and the St. George's Shopping centre.

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the commercial uses of Milton Road, Berkley Crescent and Harmer Street have suffered. Longstanding businesses such as the gentlemen's outfitters at no.1 Berkley Crescent have closed, as have most of the shops on Harmer Street, despite the restoration of a number of shopfronts. Despite the high quality townscape Harmer Street has become a place to travel through, rather than a destination in its own right. The busy passing traffic and associated noise makes the street a less attractive route to promenade or stay. The public open space at the clock tower has suffered most, being cut off by the congesting traffic surrounding it.

Behind Harmer Street, particularly in East Crescent Road, the appearance of the buildings and the activities taking place, such as car repairs, are very different. The overall appearance is generally negative with car parking areas, an informal arrangement of mostly modern and unattractive outbuildings and workshops, and some poor environmental quality in places. These features collectively generate a fairly neglected and desolate character. It is worth noting however that businesses in the area do provide employment and economic vitality.

To the north of Terrace Street the cohesive character falls away very quickly as the terraces end. A more varied arrangement of buildings is apparent, including no.1a Harmer Street which appears to be very neglected. The gaps between buildings lead up to the more open streetscape that is to be found closer to the riverside. The view towards the river is mainly obscured by trees and



buildings, in contradiction of the original intentions of the designers of Harmer Street. The Terrace marks the precise line of change of level in the slope down towards the river that characterises the area. The notable drop in level in conjunction with the looser knit development to the north of the street affords The Terrace a sense of spaciousness that is not to be found elsewhere in the Conservation Area.

The principal features of the built form are:

- Urban character;
- Cohesive qualities of four storey terraced buildings, dating from 1836 – 40, with three storey crescent at southern end. Earlier three storey terrace in The Terrace, and commercial buildings in Milton Road framing the set-piece;
- The clock tower as a landmark building;
- Buildings arranged with a common building line on the back of the pavement;
- Mainly a domestic scale of building on narrow plots;
- Shallow pitched roofs covered in slate;
- Terrace buildings stepped up in pairs from north to south along Harmer Street;
- Use of yellow stock brick, which is sometimes rendered or painted;
- Simple rectangular shapes often with shops on the ground floor level, some of them with traditionally designed timber shopfronts (Harmer Street and The Terrace);
- Simple rectangular shapes, with a mixture of modern (Berkley Crescent) and traditional timber (Harmer Street and The Terrace) shopfronts;
- Sash windows, retaining their original glazing pattern and divided into small panes, giving a predominantly vertical emphasis;
- Some modern infill (East Crescent

Road) with a more horizontal emphasis, contrasting with the height and narrowness of the buildings on the main streets;

- Hanging signs and other traditional Gravesend features such as tiled elevations on public houses and rounded corners.

Negative features/issues:

- Poor quality shopfronts and signage;
- Poor maintenance of the remaining timber shopfronts;
- Some poorly maintained and/or vacant buildings with no identified use, notably behind Harmer Street and no.1a to e Harmer Street;
- The loss of many businesses and shops in the area;
- Negative appearance of the rear of properties, partly due to multiple-occupancy of houses in Harmer Street;
- Loss of architectural features, notably some iron railings on the first floor of the buildings;
- Unsympathetic modern infill development in East Crescent Road;
- Poor environmental quality in East Crescent Road;
- Speed and volume of traffic down Harmer Street, and traffic congestion at the clock tower.

## 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. 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

It is suggested that there is little scope for extension of the boundary of the Harmer Street Conservation Area as the designation already covers most of the special architectural or historic interest related to this early 19th century planned development. However, some buildings on The Grove (nos. 47 to 50) do also have special interest and are currently not protected by any such designation. They may be considered for inclusion in the Harmer Street Conservation Area, although there is a good argument that their special interest is not particularly relevant to the appearance or character of Harmer Street itself. The properties may be more suitable for a different designation in the town such as the King Street Conservation Area.

### 9.3 Education and information

Active measures for promoting better understanding of Gravesend and its place in history underpin the regeneration of the town by drawing in external interest and resources. Gravesham Borough Council has recently published a number of guides in order to help

promote this understanding and to encourage an improvement in standards in the borough's conservation areas. These include guidance on shopfronts, windows and doors.

### 9.4 Buildings at Risk

There is one building in the Conservation Area that is in urgent need of repair and refurbishment, i.e. No. 1a Harmer Street. The former coach houses to the rear of nos. 6 and 8 Harmer Street, which are curtilage buildings to the grade II listed front buildings, are at considerable risk and are likely candidates for Urgent Works Notices. A number of other properties are part-empty and appear neglected, and their deteriorating condition needs to be watched, namely Nos. 2-8, 27 and 47. For No. 27 a scheme for the conversion and repair has been agreed and works are presently in progress. Other properties, such as No 13, 15, 17 and 23, are occupied but poorly maintained.

### 9.5 Alterations to buildings and shopfronts

While the principal properties in Harmer Street have retained much of their original appearance, or had it restored, some alterations have taken place. Most commonly, shopfronts have been introduced to the ground floor of some houses. These are sometimes unsympathetic with the historic character of the street and also feature unsuitable signage. Other negative alterations include the loss of first floor iron railings, the loss of gardens and boundary features to the rear and unsympathetic landscaping and surface treatment to former gardens, e.g. the rear of No. 39 The Terrace. Furthermore, introductions to the streetscene such as the advertisement hoarding at the northern end of Harmer Street detract from the character of the area.

### 9.6 Uses/ vitality

Gravesend is well-served by shops and pubs, but a number of shops in the wider town centre, particularly in Harmer Street, have fallen into disuse. Very few shops remain in operation in Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent. Their vacancy as well as the seemingly frequent change of tenants has led to an increase in estate agency boards fixed to the buildings or displayed in the windows, which detracts from the character of the area. Measures to support existing business and promote the vitality of the town have been in operation and are ongoing.

Multiple-occupancy of buildings is common in Harmer Street and this has led to the introduction of extraneous items such as gas meter cupboards, letterboxes and dustbins. These have a detrimental effect, particularly on the rear of properties which are often used as parking areas for the large amount of people who live and work there.

### 9.7 Highways and traffic management

Traffic management is one of the principal issues in Harmer Street. While Milton Road also suffers from traffic congestion, it is historically the main thoroughfare and so, to a degree, busy traffic has always formed part of its essential character. By contrast, Harmer Street was designed as a secondary route, but since the 1960s has carried increasing volumes of traffic. The constant and very busy activity detracts from the character and amenity of the area.

### 9.8 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.

### 9.9 Enhancement potential

Both Harmer Street and Berkley Crescent have benefited greatly from a jointly by the Borough Council and English Heritage funded Town Scheme, run in the late 1980s/ early 1990s, and a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme. These schemes have shown that the injection of funding into an area can greatly improve its appearance and character. However, the building repairs and enhancements that were carried out in the Harmer Street Conservation Area towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will require regular maintenance if they are to create an enduring improvement to the appearance of the Conservation Area. Further enhancement can probably only be achieved if other factors, such as the vacancy of commercial and residential units in the area and traffic issues, are addressed as part of a comprehensive scheme to improve the whole area.

Features whose improvement would strengthen the character of the area are:

- Restriction of traffic flow, particularly heavy goods vehicles, through Harmer Street;
- Improvement of the pedestrian crossing at the north end of Harmer Street and across Milton Road;
- The replacement of modern plate glass shopfronts and plastic signage with traditionally proportioned shopfronts and timber hand painted signage;
- The rears of Harmer Street properties;
- The general appearance and public realm



- of West Crescent Road;
- The general appearance and public realm of East Crescent Road;
- No.1a Harmer Street;
- The removal of the large advertising billboards on Harmer Street.

### 9.10 Trees

Trees make an important contribution to the character of Berkley Crescent at the entrance to The Grove (where trees were part of the original lay-out when the area was developed during the second half of the 19th century), but are less significant elsewhere.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

History of Gravesend

### Appendix 2

Bibliography

### Appendix 3

1. Townscape Appraisal Map
2. Designations Map
3. Age of Buildings Map
4. Designated Area Boundary Map

## 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 11<sup>th</sup> century Gravesham was an agricultural estate but by the 14<sup>th</sup> century it had grown into a small market town. By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 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 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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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Gravesend: then & now

**2001**

### The Architecture Centre

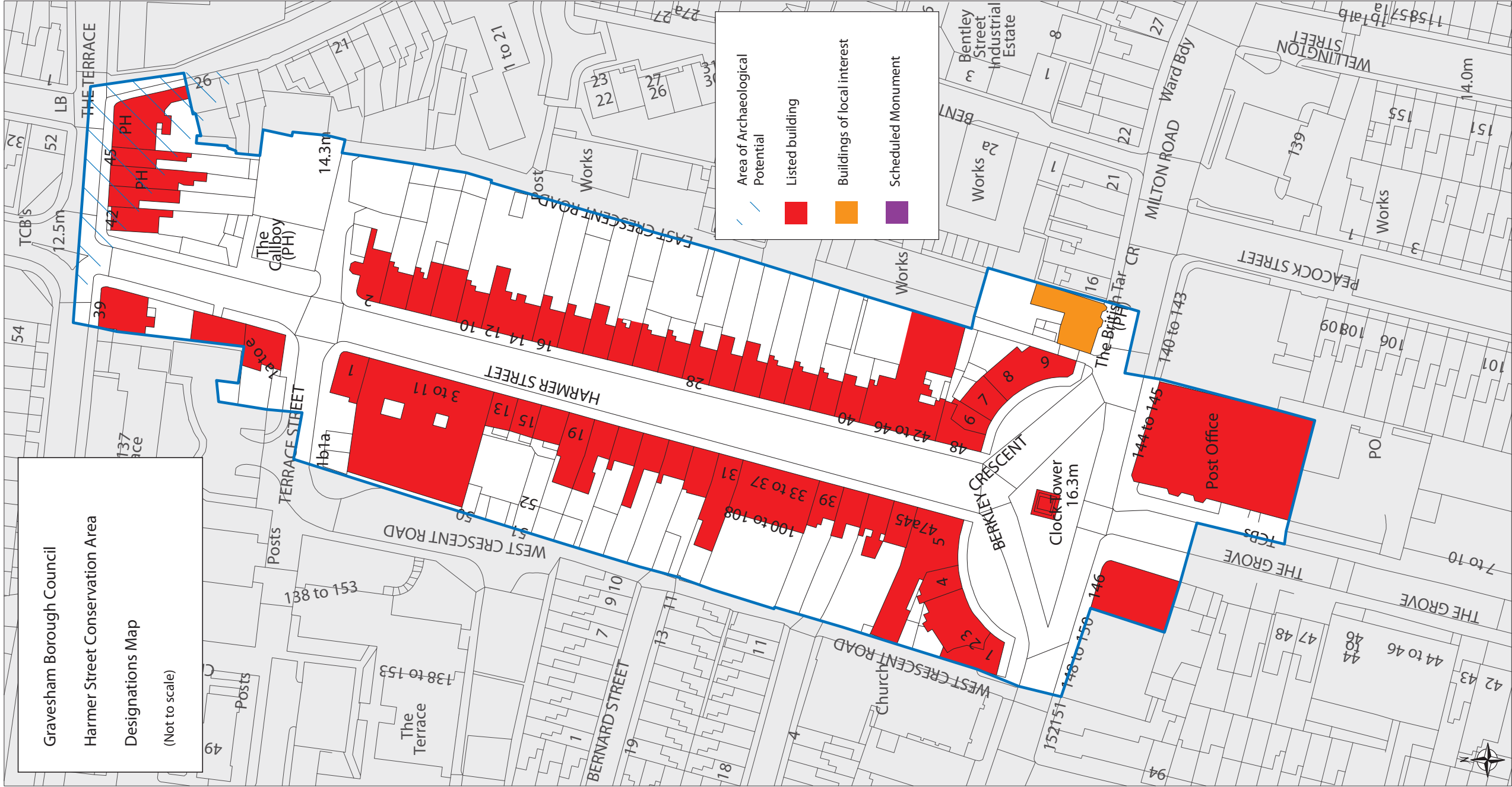
A Business Plan for Regeneration for Gravesham Borough Council

**2003**

### Images

Historic Images courtesy of Gravesend Library  
Former Post Office and Public House Milton Road - The Conservation Studio  
All other images Gravesham Borough Council











Designated Boundary Map 09.02.09

