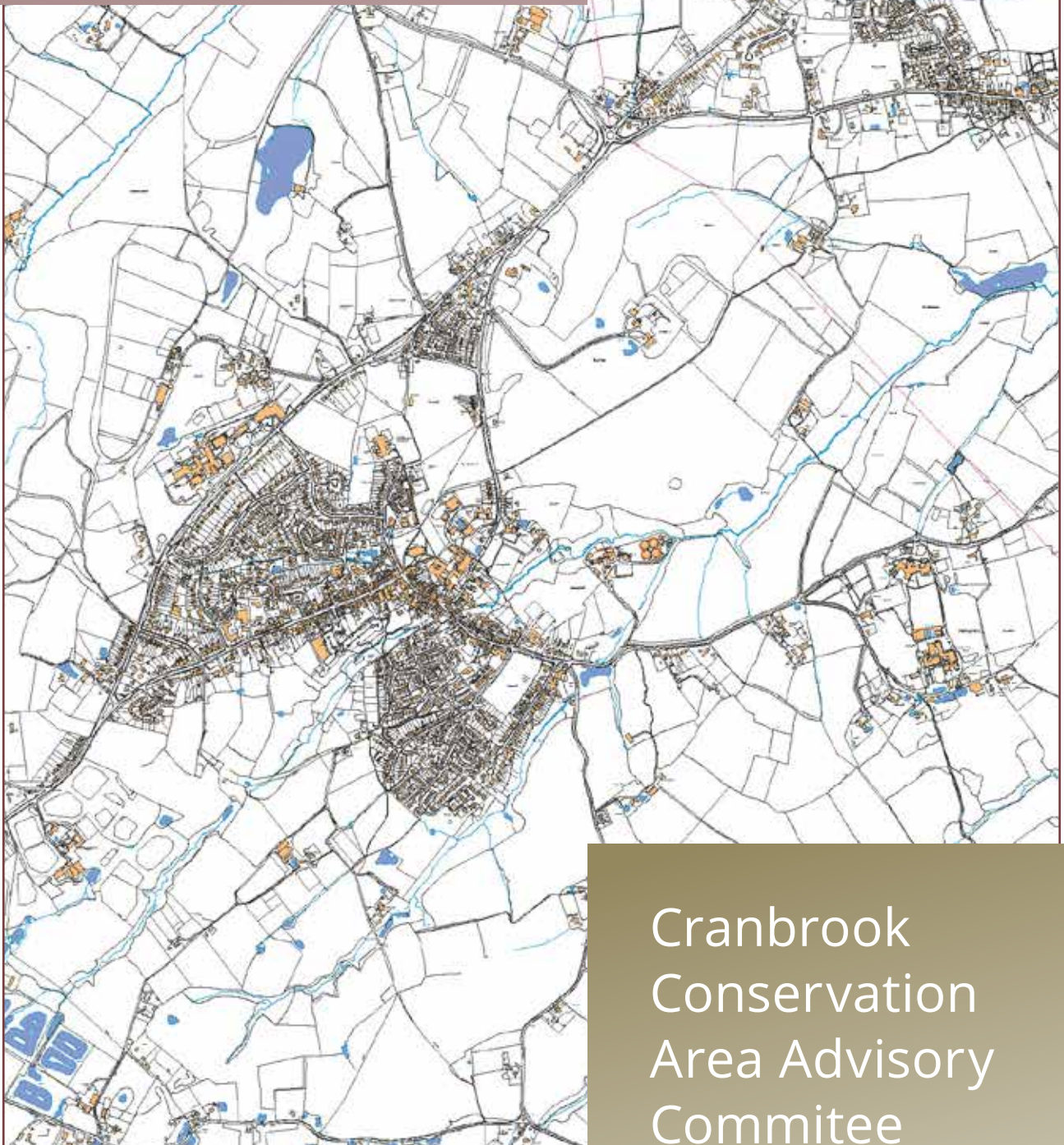


Cranbrook & Sissinghurst
Neighbourhood Plan

Position Statement

May 2017



Cranbrook
Conservation
Area Advisory
Committee

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE CRANBROOK CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CCAAC) IN RESPECT OF THE CRANBROOK AND SISSINGHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The importance of the historic core of both Cranbrook and Sissinghurst has long been recognised. The Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CCAAC) has existed since the early 70s to protect the Conservation Areas of Cranbrook, Sissinghurst and Wilsley. Throughout this time the major focus has been to protect and enhance local heritage and restrain unsuitable developments, though a considerable body of other support and planning work has also been undertaken.

Significantly, results from the Neighbourhood Plan 'visioning events' held in March show that adjectives such as historic, unique, and attractive are very important to local people - these essentially reflect the value placed on the existing Conservation Areas plus the many listed buildings in the area.

KEY POINTS

- **Protect the conservation areas** The historic and architectural heart of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst (as defined by the Conservation Areas -see plan A and B) and Wilsley (plan C) need to be retained and where possible enhanced. It is these parts of both settlements that provide the distinctiveness, uniqueness and 'sense of place' valued by local people. Moreover historic, attractive places attract visitors vital to shops and tourism and contribute to the overall vitality of both places.
- **Context** The context of the Conservation Areas also needs to be protected, so consideration of how any new build relates to the existing historic centres is vital. In this the rural setting of all three Conservation Areas is an important component. Similarly the setting of listed buildings needs to be considered. Inappropriate development too close to historic buildings or the edge of the Conservation Area can ruin the setting and ambiance and have a major negative impact. Therefore in planning new development, careful attention needs to be given to its relationship to the existing historic core and its setting.
- **Views** In planning new developments the importance of views of major historic features (such as Cranbrook church, the Windmill, Cranbrook School, Sissinghurst castle tower and Cranbrook's medieval roofscape) needs to be recognised and incorporated into the planning and design process. Creating viewpoints, glimpsed through new footpaths or between houses can also help connect the new build to the historic core of the settlements. Similarly, views out to the surrounding countryside need to be identified and where possible improved.
- **Design** The historic heart of both Cranbrook and Sissinghurst has grown organically over centuries with buildings of many styles and forms contributing to a varied and attractive townscape. Buildings with different roof heights, window detail and size sit happily together, though linked by a similarity of materials drawn from the local area - tiles, bricks, weatherboarding. This all helps to 'ground' the developments in the landscape and create the pleasing architecture of both settlements. There have also been some significant architects working in Cranbrook, such as Norman Shaw around Wilsley, Thomas Dearn and William West Neve as well as some notable and important buildings such as the Providence Chapel and the Vestry building in Cranbrook.

- The policy for design of new buildings within the Neighbourhood Plan needs to take cues from the existing high quality buildings and varied architecture and recognise not only the importance of vernacular materials but also differing roof heights, windows and massing. All too often new housing developments pay lip service to a few local materials (eg cheap tiles, bricks and weather boarding) but resort to commonplace, 'pattern book' architecture that could exist anywhere in the UK. Cranbrook and Sissinghurst deserve better - architect designed buildings of high quality using good materials, that respect where they are to be sited. This does not have to be a pastiche but can be bold imaginative designs, such as those built in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst in previous centuries.
- The scale of new build housing is also an issue. The centres of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst grew slowly and this helps contribute to the diversity and interest found there. Large scale housing schemes are less easy to absorb successfully within a small town or village, both visually and in terms of social integration. They put pressure on already stretched local services. Consideration should be given as to whether the number of houses in any new development should be capped, so as to encourage diversity and phasing of development over the plan period.
- Central Cranbrook is typified by many historic small alleys and lanes linking buildings and areas of the town. Similar pedestrian walkways need to be created in new housing developments to link to the historic core as well as providing safe, sustainable routes.
- **Protection of green spaces** The 'green feel' of the Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Conservation Areas is a key feature - the combination of attractive streets surrounded by trees and 'green wedges', with open countryside beyond, helps make both places unique. It is therefore important that green spaces and the many mature trees are retained throughout Cranbrook and Sissinghurst and are part of any new developments. It is a major concern that many of Cranbrook School playing fields appear as possible development sites on plans, shown at the visioning exercise. Even if the School no longer wants these sites for playing fields, alternative green uses (eg community open space, woodland, nature area etc) should be considered under the Neighbourhood Plan process. To lose these valuable green spaces to development would be extremely damaging for Cranbrook - once developed they are lost.
- The Crane Valley green space which borders the Conservation Area in Cranbrook is another important wildlife area, as well as providing access to the countryside and needs to be retained.

Conclusions

This sets out some key issues from the CCAAC conservation perspective to help to develop the heritage and historic context of the Neighbourhood Plan and intended to be constructive. There are two additional points to add:

- Firstly, as indicated above, the CCAAC has contributed to some important pieces of work such as the Cranbrook, Sissinghurst and Wilsley Area Appraisal documents, which have all been adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents since 2010. These are available on the TWBC website (under Conservation Area Appraisals) and are important background documents on heritage and conservation
- Secondly, the CCAAC would like to continue to contribute to the developing Neighbourhood Plan, as far as resources/ person time allows.