



Romsey Design Statement Overview

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Purpose of Look at Romsey

The Romsey and District Society (RandDS) undertook to prepare a Town Design Statement at the suggestion of Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC). The objective was to analyse the appearance of the town of Romsey and determine what gives Romsey its unique appearance and to identify the visual features that are important in the townscape. The work has also identified some areas where improvements would be desirable.

The project has encompassed the whole of the urban part of Romsey both the historic core and the surrounding residential areas, including those within the town and the built-up part of Romsey Extra. A project as comprehensive as this is rare for a community the size of Romsey.

This document (the Overview) contains some Design Recommendations but only as relate to more than one area of Romsey. In general specific Design Recommendations have been made in the individual area Statements.

The results have been presented to the TVBC with the aim of their becoming a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The statement will be a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications and as far as possible will set guidelines for what is visually acceptable in part of the town and for Romsey as a whole.

Method

Romsey was divided into twelve neighbourhood areas. No attempt was made to make them even in acreage or number of households. Each area produced its own design statement.

A working party of residents was established in each area. In two areas the project was managed jointly with Romsey Extra Parish Council and in another a partnership was formed with Great Woodley Residents Association.

Residents were encouraged to participate in the preparation of their local Design Statements. Activities included public meetings, exhibitions, guided walks, and a questionnaire to every household. The overall response rate to the questionnaires was 15% (1,268 replies). The highest was 31% and the lowest was 12%.

Following the initial programme of consultation, each area produced its own Design Statement. TVBC was consulted about content but the documents that were submitted were based on the decisions of the relevant working party. Every household was invited to comment on the draft statement, as were other interested parties.



Look at Romsey exhibition in Town Hall

Organisation

The project has been organised by Phoebe Merrick on behalf of Romsey & District Society (R&DS), with support and guidance from Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC).

The project has been funded by; TVBC, Romsey Town Council (RTC), Romsey Extra Parish Council (REPC), Hampshire County Council (HCC) and contributions from the devolved budgets of Romsey Town County Councillor Mark Cooper and Romsey Extra County Councillor Roy Perry, Town Centre Management in Test Valley (TCM) and R&DS.

It has the support of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

Romsey in its Context

Romsey is a small market town with a population of about 17,000. It lies in the Hampshire basin, in the lower Test valley. On either side hills, parallel to the river, rise up to plateaux before falling away again as the river valley is left behind.



Test Valley from Carisbrooke Court

The original settlement was built on shingle banks on the valley floor. Subsequently building has taken place on both peat and clay seams and the town has extended northwards in the river valley and eastwards up the hillsides to the level land beyond. The town is constrained on the west by the River Test, on the south by Broadlands, an historic house and park, and on the north by the wetlands of the river valley floor.



Romsey Abbey seen from the Test

The main part of the River Test flows from north to south on the western side of the town with many braids and streams leaving and joining it on its way southwards. These include the remains of a canal. There is also a small stream called Tadburn Lake that cuts a substantial valley into the eastern hill above Romsey.



Bridge over the Canal

The town is served by two railway lines and the M27 is nearby. The railway lines pass over low bridges which obstruct the movement of high vehicles. There is a by-pass that runs to the south of the town centre and gives some relief to it.



The Sun Arch railway bridge, in Winchester Road

Romsey is close to the New Forest, and to Southampton, with Salisbury and Winchester being within easy reach.



Romsey By-pass with its characteristic poplar trees

Setting and Landscape

People have lived and worked in the heart of the town since Roman times and in the tenth century a Benedictine nunnery was established here. The many water channels that run through the town once had industrial uses such as milling and brewing.



The Horsefair and former brewery building

The River Test provides some splendid views, although little of the main river is open to the public. The views of Broadlands house and park to the south of Middlebridge and of Sadlers Mill to the north of the bridge are particularly valued.



Sadlers Mill by Salmon Leap

Both to east and west the trees along the hilltops that are parallel to the river provide a framework for the view. A treasured view of Romsey is found at the top of Green Hill in an informal lay-by on the A27. The eastern skyline is less dramatic but the trees in Botley Road cemetery and the two little chapels there form part of the skyline for much of the town.



The Victorian cemetery in Botley Road

Within the town itself, the abbey church is the prime focus in the landscape. This substantial church can be seen from many places, both close to and from afar. The town centre is further enhanced by glimpses of turrets on the United Reformed Church and on Lloyds TSB bank and the tower of the old brewery malt house.

There was little or no expansion of the town after the sixteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. Railway lines were built in 1847 and 1865, the second line rising to join the embankment created for the first. The embankment created a physical barrier to the north and east of the town. It acted as an outer edge of the town until after the Second World War. The railway to Andover has closed, but there are still train connections to Southampton, Salisbury, Eastleigh and beyond.



Tunnel under railway embankment near the station

The town's commercial activities take place in or close to the historic core where communal services such as the library, clubs and doctors' surgeries are mostly to be found in addition to shops. There are two industrial estates to the north of the town and one to the south-east as well as some other scattered smaller sites.



Inter-war house in Halterworth Lane

After 1918, pressure for more housing brought development to the lands beyond the railway embankment, with some ribbon development in the inter-War years and substantial building in the years after 1960.



Estate housing from the 1970s,

Fairview Drive

Design Guidelines

- Ensure that the views of interesting roof features are not obscured.

Settlement Pattern

The historic core of the town has its focus in the Market Place which was established outside the gates of the nunnery. Roads led away from the Market Place to the north, east and south and these form the skeleton of the old town. Although some lesser roads spur off these, it is only in the last thirty years that there has been much development of the backland in the town centre.



The Hundred leading eastwards from the Market Place

The modern routes of the main roads leading to the town were laid down in the eighteenth century, and lesser roads were created on the eastern side of town in the early nineteenth century. Together with routes built to join the town to the railway station, these roads form the framework around which the twentieth century expansion took place.



Terraced housing in Cherville Street

Within the town centre, there is fairly continuous building along the street frontages and the older houses mostly lack front gardens. Housing consists primarily of small terraces, semi-detached houses or detached houses and a few bungalows.

One of the charms of the town centre is the way in which the streets twist about. By walking only a few yards, one is presented with a quite different vista. In those streets where houses have been demolished and new buildings set back, this feature has been reduced.



Street widening in Cherville Street

After 1945 houses were mostly built in estates. These differ in their layout, reflecting the fashion of the time when they were built. Thus Whitenap has many cul de sacs with no pedestrian access at their closed ends, unlike Halterworth where there are plenty of footpaths joining the different parts of the estate. Several later developments have been created as cul-de-sacs where pedestrians cannot walk through to other places, the permeability expected of a vibrant town.



Woodlands Gardens, where traffic and pedestrians are segregated

Greater Woodley is a 'Radburn' style estate with traffic and houses separated which results in an irregular layout. The area has many footways that are away from traffic. By contrast, the nearby Upper Cupernham area has no paths away from roads and all the houses line the streets. Most of the estates have some houses that face the main roads, but in places only the fences of back gardens face the roads which make them somewhat impersonal.

Parking is perceived as a problem throughout Romsey. Many of the houses in residential areas have garages within their curtilages, although these are often used for storage. Increasing numbers of front gardens are being paved and used for parking. In some parts of the town, separate blocks of garages are provided. Some of these are well designed and attractive but others consist of very basic structures with flat roofs and often in poorly lit areas.

Design Guidelines

- Houses should face streets, and where they have been built turned away, their boundaries should preferably be surrounded with shrubs. The use of high fences as boundary features should be avoided.
- New developments should preferably allow pedestrians through passage, and not end in cul-de-sacs.
- Garage courts and parking areas should be well lit.

Open and Other Spaces

Within the town there is a variety of public open spaces. The largest of these is the War Memorial Park with its bowling green and children's playground.



War Memorial Park (Rivermead House in background)

There are substantial open spaces on either side of the Canal, where people can walk or children play informally. There are smaller open spaces such as the lands around the Abbey church or the formal King John's Garden in the town centre. Many informal greens with and without trees are to be found in the newer parts of Romsey.



King John's Garden seen from Lortemore car park

Nearly every part of Romsey has streams running through it, whether they be substantial braids of the River Test or small streams on the hillsides. These are much valued by the people who live near them or walk alongside them. In particular, the pathways alongside Tadburn Lake and the Canal form major pedestrian routes to the town centre. Both would benefit from greater attention to their upkeep.

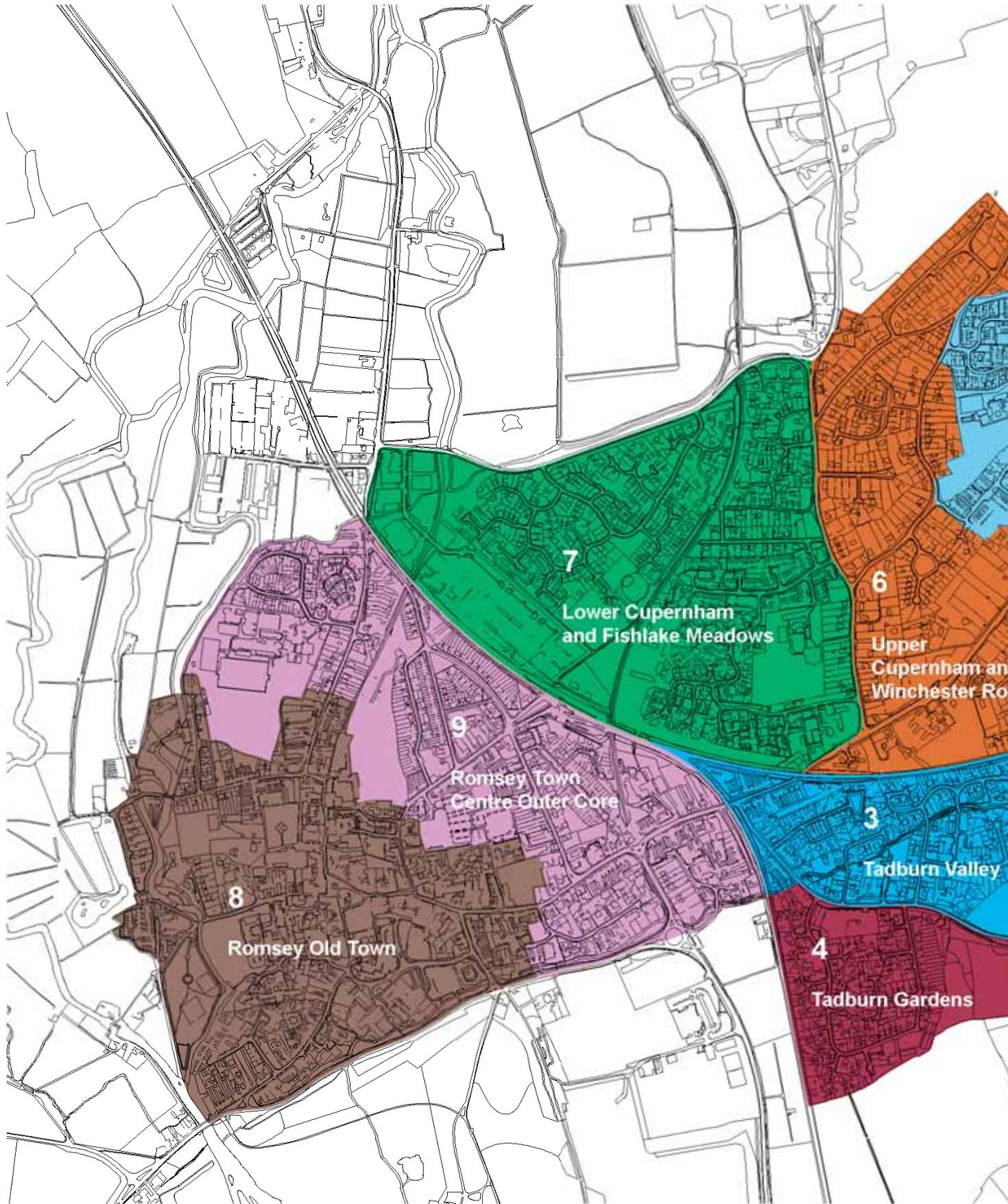


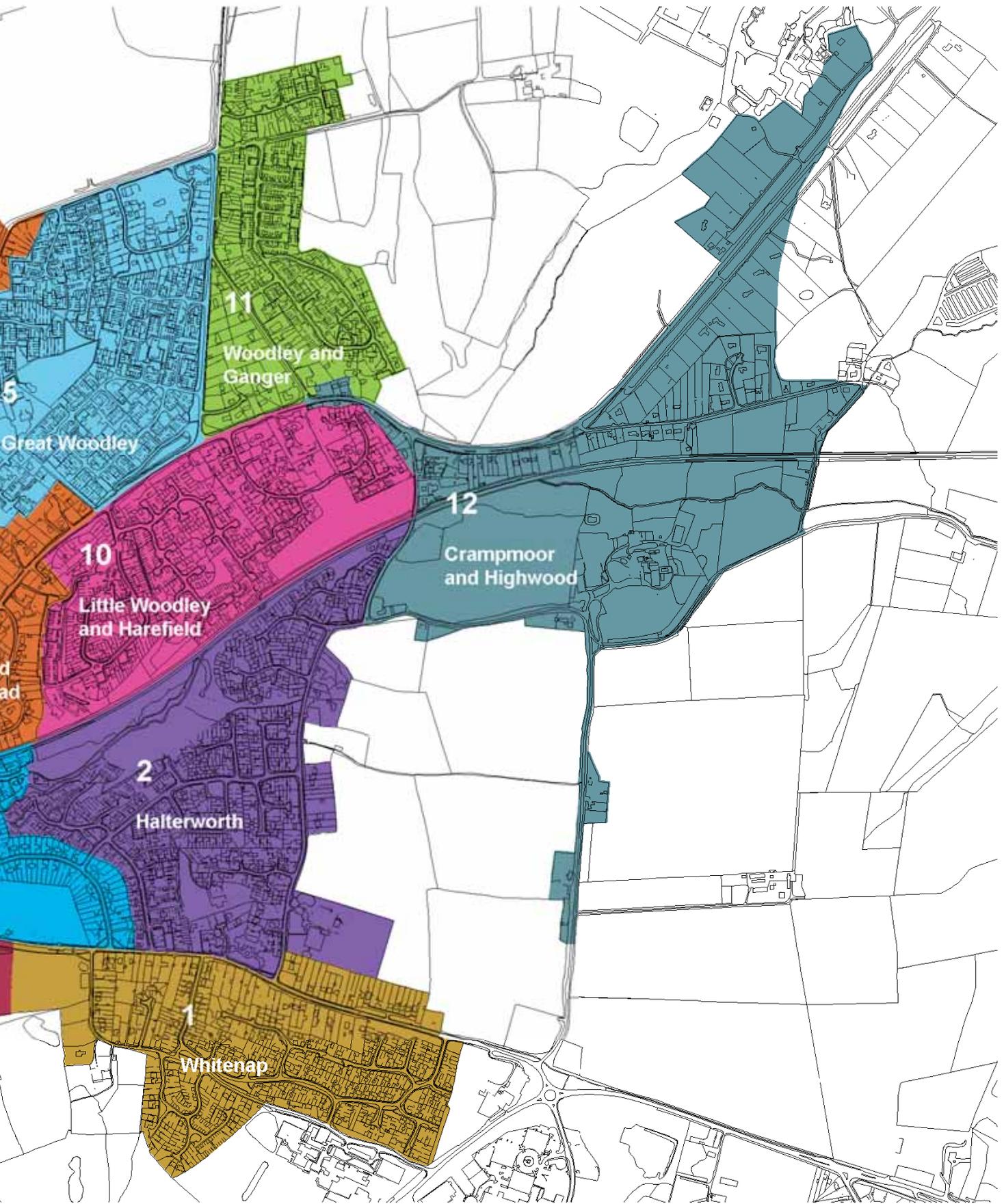
Tadburn Lake in Tadburn Meadows

The watercourses fed by the Fishlake are less important as routes. However they are significant in the way in which they appear in many parts of the town, providing attractive glimpses of water within an otherwise urban setting. To the west of the town, the braids of the Test perform a similar function although on a larger scale. These waterways give Romsey a very distinctive character that generally should be more highly valued. They are also of benefit to wildlife. The network is complicated and many people are confused by which waterway is which. Some form of identification would help.

Within the town centre there are several public car parks. Some attempt has been made to landscape them usually by planting trees or bushes.

Map showing the areas of the Look at Romsey Project





Not to scale



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Building Form



Terraced housing, Winchester Road

The predominant style of housing in Romsey is for small buildings, mostly of two storeys, although scattered across the town are some that are taller and others that have been extended upwards by means of gables.



Estate houses in Whitenap

There are a number of groups of bungalows built at various times from the 1920s onwards.



Bungalows in Mercer Way

The larger buildings are notable for their larger footprint rather than for greater height. They are dispersed across the town although many of them are to be found in the historic town centre.



Wykeham House, The Hundred

The larger buildings include those with commercial use such as shops and community buildings. They include the town's several churches, town hall, borough council offices, local hospital, schools, and meeting places. There are also larger buildings on the industrial estates.



United Reformed Church seen from the Market Place

The town has a number of buildings for multiple occupancy. There are some purpose-built blocks of flats and others in converted buildings. Those built in the 1960s were noted for their flat-roofs and plain rectangular shapes whilst the later blocks of flats mostly have more style.



Flats, Broadwater Road

In addition there are both nursing homes and sheltered accommodation which are variously in purpose-built accommodation such as Edwina Mountbatten House or in converted villas.



Cedar Lawn nursing home

Many of the large buildings blend so well into the landscape that it is easy to overlook them. Recently some new buildings have been erected on corner plots with features that emphasise their position. Some of these have been very effective. There are other new buildings that lack rhythm and do not enhance the townscape.

Design Guidelines

- New buildings should be sympathetic to the scale of those surrounding them although there is scope for occasional well-designed landmark buildings.
- The roofs of new buildings should normally reflect the pitch and covering of those nearby unless bold architectural statement is appropriate in the context.
- New buildings should be both well-built and attractively designed.
- Building lines should enhance and respect the street scene and preserve it.

Materials and Fenestration

The traditional building material in this area is red brick made from local clay, with hand made clay tiles on the roofs. Many of the older buildings in Romsey were constructed with timber frames which were hidden behind a rendered facade. A few of the grander houses have been built in yellow bricks.



Brickwork on Tudor House, The Hundred

From the mid-nineteenth century houses were often roofed in slate. Slates do not need as steep a pitch as clay tiles to throw the water off. Later houses have concrete tiles with various interlocking-type profiles. Thatch is rare in the town.



Victorian roof in Viney Avenue

Increasingly the estates built around the town have used a variety of brick colours and finishes that are not native to this area. These include orange-hued bricks, pink bricks, flint panel insets and stippled bricks.

Amongst the older buildings a few high-status buildings used non-native materials. For example the Abbey church is one of the few buildings made of stone. In the 1840s one or two buildings were faced with flint, including the police station.



Romsey Police, 1916. The Police station is still in use

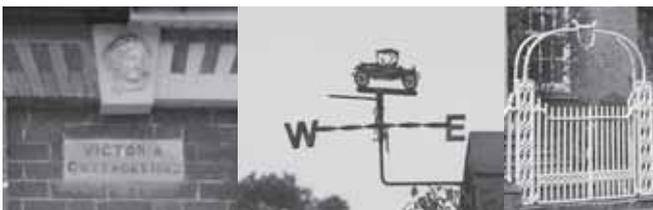
There is a variety of brickwork, from the delicate patterning on the southern end of the Post Office, to the elaborate decoration of the library designed by the architect Nesfield. Brick walls have used a variety of bonds and are often enhanced by the use of burnt bricks. A number of the older houses have string courses at the intersection between ground and first floor, and decorative courses are not uncommon just below the roof.



Tile hanging in Portersbridge Street

Right across Romsey it is common to find upper storeys differently clad from ground floors. This often takes the form of tile-hanging, although slate or shiplap are common, the latter especially on the newer estates.

The Victorian and post-Victorian terraces were originally constructed with sash windows, and have lost much of their cohesion as these and their doors have been replaced in a variety of ways.



Decorative details, Winchester Road,
Highwood and The Hundred

Details on individual buildings include mathematical tiling, Yorkshire sash windows and several decorative terracotta panels.

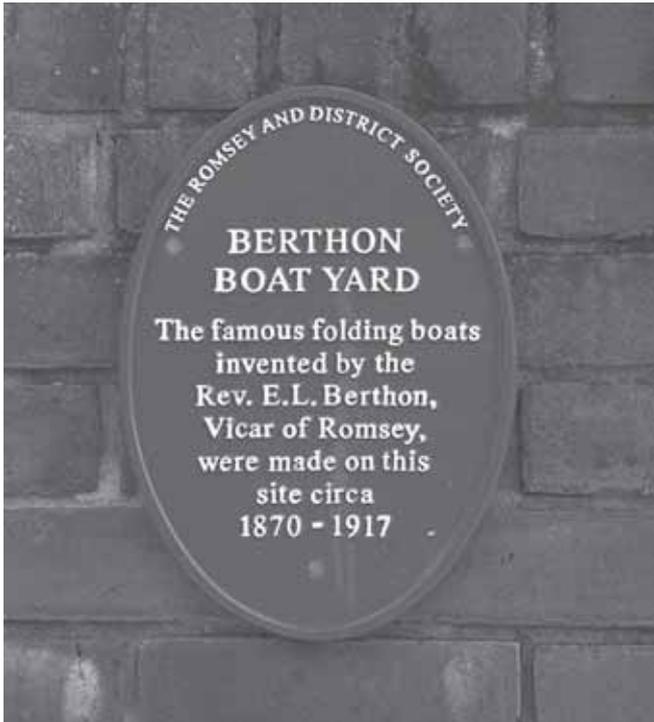
Most of the town is vernacular in style although influenced by the architectural fashions of the last two centuries. This variety helps to give the town its charm.

Design Guidelines

- Care should be exercised in choice of colour and materials for outside walls of buildings and should normally be expected to reflect that which was traditionally found in this area.
- As opportunities arise, care should be taken to maintain and restore the unity of the late Victorian and Edwardian terraces in the town.
- The little decorative features that adorn individual houses should be preserved.

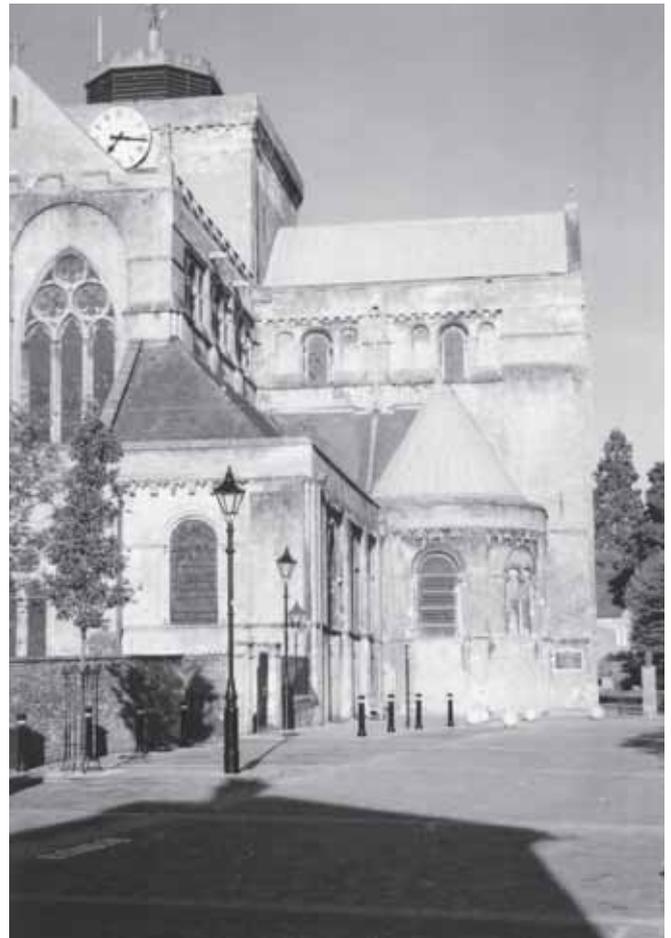
Streets and Street Furniture

Walking around Romsey and looking at the town gives pleasure to many people. The town has a mixture of street styles and street furniture. A number of plaques enable the visitor to learn more about particular places in the town.



Plaque near Lortemore car park

In parts of the historic core, Victorian style lamp standards have been installed, while in other parts of the town, concrete lamp standards and overhead cables dominate the skyline.



The approach to Romsey Abbey

There is a limited amount of public art within the town centre, including the figure of Lord Palmerston in the Market Place, Charter Stone in Church Place and the town's War Memorial in the Memorial Park. In addition, there are examples of decorative ironwork in the town centre.



Decorative lamp bracket at Town Hall

There are, however, some areas where improvements could be made. For example, street name signs have been placed with motorists in mind, and the needs of pedestrians walking through footpaths are not always met. Many of the street names face only one way so that traffic coming from another direction cannot read them.



Sign on path at Great Woodley

The number and placement of traffic signs, though necessary, sometimes block the sight of neighbouring buildings, and motor trade forecourts tend to interrupt the flow of the street lines.



Straight Mile leading to Romsey

Romsey has a mixed group of approach roads. Some are outstandingly attractive, like the Straight Mile (A3090), but others have less cohesion and therefore do not make the town as inviting as they might.



Trees and grass edges, Northlands Road

Many of the outer town estates have grass strips between footpath and road which create a feeling of spaciousness but there are several residential roads, built in the mid-twentieth century, that need refurbishment. They have become tired and both the road surface and the surroundings have a run-down appearance.



Footway in need of repair

Trees, Hedges and Other Landscape Features



The tree-lined By-pass

Romsey is blessed with many trees, both standing alone as architectural features and in lines. One of the favourite rows of trees is that of the ornamental cherries along the By-pass. The By-pass is also graced by avenues of Lombardy poplars and maples.

Within the town centre, there are avenues of chestnuts along the south side of Broadwater Road and in Malmesbury Road. Pollarded limes are a feature of the North Garth of the Abbey church.

Amongst other avenues of trees that are of considerable landscape importance are the limes at the entrance to Viney Avenue and behind Montfort College. There is a fine row of oak trees to the north of Brook Way.



Pollarded limes near the Abbey church

Mature trees are found along the approach roads such as Botley Road and the upper part of Winchester Road.



Oak trees framing Brook Way

The town has a number of ornamental trees that form important landscape features. Examples include the horse chestnut beside the library, the Wellingtonia that forms part of the skyline at the top of Winchester Hill or the cedars and a monkey puzzle tree (araucaria) in Botley Road cemetery.

Many of the residential streets have small trees growing alongside the footpath, including several flowering species. Mistletoe grows on trees in several areas. Many of the open spaces within housing estates have attractive stands of trees, such as those in Carisbrooke Court, Ashley Meadows or Tadfield Road.



Holm oak in Five Elms Drive

Design Guidelines

- **The avenues of trees about the town are a great asset in the landscape and should be retained.**

Boundary Features



Traditional privet hedge in The Abbey

In the residential areas, many of the modern estates were laid out with open plan front gardens. The fate of these features is variable. Some retain their openness, either as gardens or as parking places with hard landscaping. A few have been enclosed with tall hedges which detract from the spacious feel of the estate.

Some housing estates have been laid out in such a way that the old field boundaries have been respected and in some case the hedgerows have been retained. There are also hedges lining several of the older footpaths. Most are well maintained, but others are neglected and may be lost unless remedial action is taken.

The older parts of town have a variety of hedges and fences that reflect their age. Thus the large houses at the top of Winchester Hill are set back behind tall shrubs, while the smaller houses in Botley Road have a mixture of walls and privet hedges.



Cottage gardens in Mill Lane

Further into town, many of the houses have low walls at the front of their gardens, which used to be topped with metal railings. Some of these have been replaced, though not always in such a way as to bring unity to the street scene.

There are some attractive railings alongside some of the streams which enhance both the street and the water. By contrast Abbey Water is enclosed in a concrete wall with a tubular rail on top.



Barrier in Abbey Water

Some properties have substantial brick walls often surrounding their back gardens. These are usually built of bricks similar to those of the nearby houses. In addition the town has a number of gateways that form focal points.

The railway embankment forms a very definite boundary between the old parts of Romsey and the newer roads. Recent maintenance work has shown that it is an interesting feature of the town. It is sufficiently prominent that any neglect is very apparent.

Final Note

This overview gives a flavour of the work carried out by the twelve different groups of Romsey residents. Each group has drawn up its own detailed, descriptive account of the area in which its members live, together with recommendations for future policy and action. Their twelve separate reports and this Overview together form a Design Statement for the town of Romsey. It is hoped that each of them separately and all of them together will prove of great interest to present and future residents of Romsey.

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Look At Romsey:

Overview

Area 1 Whitenap

Area 2 Halterworth

Area 3 Tadburn Valley

Area 4 Tadburn Gardens

Area 5 Great Woodley

Area 6 Upper Cupernham and Winchester Road

Area 7 Lower Cupernham and Fishlake Meadows

Area 8 Romsey Old Town

Area 9 Town Centre, Outer Core

Area 10 Harefield and Little Woodley

Area 11 Woodley and Ganger

Area 12 Crampmoor and Highwood