

Appraisal



4.0 Location and setting

The conservation area is centred on Mitcham Lower Green, to the south of Mitcham Town Centre. It is bounded by Mitcham Common to the east and ends at the churchyard to Mitcham Parish Church to the west.

The conservation area covers the lower green, Cricket Green, Cranmer Green and Three Kings Piece. The area extends to just north of Mitcham tram stop to the south and the junction of Elmwood Road and London Road to the north. It extends over an area of approximately 0.52km².

The area is predominantly flat with the land rising towards the common in the east. To the north is a range of hills extending through Crystal Palace, Sydenham and Forest Hill to the east. This made the area attractive to early settlement because the alluvial deposits proved easier to cultivate than the heavier clays elsewhere in the London basin.

5.0 Historic Development and Archaeology

Historic Development

Mitcham has a significant and varied history which is reflected in its present day character. The earliest historical reference to Mitcham comes from an eighth century document, a charter of 727, confirming the grant by Erkenwald of lands at Mitcham to Chertsey Abbey. Archaeological evidence also points to Roman and early Saxon activity in the area. The presence of Romano-British and early Saxon cemeteries confirm established communities within the area.

The Domesday book records 250 people living in two hamlets, Mitcham (modern Upper Mitcham) and Whitford (Lower Mitcham). By the time of the civil war in 1642, Mitcham had become a prosperous agricultural village with wealthy merchants and those seeking refuge from London life. In 1653, Robert Cranmer, an east India merchant had purchased the manor of Mitcham Canons. In 1680 the lease for a new house on the site of the old parsonage house was granted by Robert's son. The Canons was once the manor house of Mitcham and remained the property of the Cranmer family and their descendants, the Simpsons for over two hundred and fifty years. The dovecote, which pre-dates the house is believed to have been constructed in 1511 and is thought to be the oldest building in Merton.

The village became known as the “Montpellier of England” due to its fine air which was a blessing for Londoners escaping the plague. Mitcham also became an important halting post on the route from London to Brighton, with inns such as the King's Head, now the Burn Bullock, being located along the route.

Lower Green West and the Cricket Green under the control of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury remained protected as common land, with stewards promptly dealing with any attempts at encroachment. Elsewhere in Mitcham the situation was very different. Piecemeal enclosure was taking place for building and the digging of gravel and removal of turf was destroying the main common. This prompted the formation in 1891 of the Board of Conservators in whom all the common lands of Mitcham were vested including: the Lower Greens, Cranmer Green and the Three Kings Piece.



The Canon and Dovecote

In the 18th century Mitcham evolved as a centre for calico printing as well as the growing and distilling of peppermint and lavender.

Cricket was played on the cricket green from as early as 1707. The popularity of cricket amongst the residents of Mitcham led to the formation of probably the world's oldest cricket club. Before the pavilion was built in 1904, the headquarters and changing rooms of the club were in the Cricketers Inn. During the inter war years, crowds watching the cricket could number as many as 6,000.

The character of much of Mitcham began to change during the 19th and 20th centuries. The arrival of new industries, such as paint, varnish and linoleum manufacture, coincided with the exodus of the wealthy families that occupied the larger houses and the decline of the old industries of calico bleaching and horticulture. Mitcham's rural atmosphere began to disappear and between 1900 and 1910, the population doubled to 29,606.

Settlement Plan

The Medieval village developed as a ribbon settlement, running north east to south west along the London to Sutton road with two centres, Upper Green and Lower Green. The development of the village between the 16th and 19th centuries can be partly characterised by the establishment of large properties within and around the village cores, including Eagle House on London Road and Canons House and Park Place within the conservation area. To the south of the conservation area were Mitcham Hall, Baron House and Mitcham Grove.

Church Road is a long established highway that originally linked the parish church of St. Peter and Paul to the site of “Hall Place”, a substantial medieval house, marked only by a surviving arch from its private chapel.

Along the north side of Church Road are a regular arrangement of house plots. Originally each house plot had a narrow frontage on the road and extended at the rear, with orchards to a back lane beyond which lay the open common field.



Remains of Hall Place chapel

Two other elements typical of medieval settlements still survive. The greens which were used by villagers as rough grazing for their livestock and the strip holdings to the north and north east of the church remain fossilised in the pattern of roads and housing estates of later development.

Archaeology

Within the wider area, the period from the later iron age onwards saw the growth of settlement. Within Merton, from the Roman period and from late Saxon times onwards, this can be characterised by the development of scattered settlements within an agricultural landscape. This produced a network of medieval settlements and homesteads across the borough, now largely hidden following suburbanisation during the 19th and 20th centuries.

One early focus of settlement was probably in the vicinity of the White Hart. A second is likely to have been near the Parish Church where, off Benedict Road, both Romano-British and medieval pottery fragments have been excavated. Yet another was the site of the Medieval Hall Place, where archaeological work, before the erection of Ravensbury school produced a considerable accumulation of Anglo-Norman pottery indicative of an important house.

There is additional evidence of prehistoric and Medieval activity in the area, provided by flint tools and Medieval pottery recovered from the subsoil during excavation in Cedar's Avenue to the west of the Wilson Hospital.

6.0 Spatial Analysis

Character areas

The entire conservation area has been designated for its special character. However, within the area there are smaller areas, or character areas, that differ from each other, whilst still contributing to the overall character of the whole. In order to protect and enhance the overall character of the area it is important to understand the special characteristics of these individual areas. This leads to a document that assists the Council's statutory planning functions and the control of development and works to the public realm.

Six distinct character areas within the conservation area have been identified, namely:

1. Church Road
2. The Cricket Green
3. Cranmer Green
4. Three Kings Piece
5. Mitcham Park
6. Mitcham Garden Village

Within the character area sections, two analysis plans help to inform the assessment. The Area Appraisal Plan identifies the key characteristics of the area. It identifies key locations that act as gateways into the conservation area. It identifies local landmarks that enhance the area as well as negative features that detract from the area. Views and significant open and urban spaces are also identified. The Area Appraisal Plans also make reference to suggested environmental improvements which includes sites or buildings that are in need of improvement within the area which are then detailed further in the Management Plan.

Character Areas



- 1 Church Road
- 2 The Cricket Green
- 3 Cranmer Green
- 4 Three Kings Piece
- 5 Mitcham Park
- 6 Mitcham Garden Village

The Building Quality plans identify statutorily listed and locally listed buildings. They also identify other buildings that, although not listed are considered to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. Buildings identified as having a negative impact are those that are considered to have a harmful impact on the character of the conservation area. Buildings identified as having a neutral impact are considered to neither harm nor enhance the character of the area.

This appraisal will outline the features that contribute towards the individual quality of each of these character areas. Within each character area, the appraisal will make reference to the following aspects:

- **Form and layout**
- **Scale and building line**
- **Materials and detailing**
- **Open spaces**
- **Urban spaces**
- **Views and landscape**
- **Public realm and street furniture**
- **Boundary treatments and private space**
- **Significant buildings and groups**

Overview of the character of the conservation area

The conservation area is more a collection of distinct localities than a specific place. The Lower Green and Cricket Green form the central focus of the conservation area around which are located the key areas, namely; Church Road, The Canons and Park Place, Cranmer Green, Three Kings Piece, the Garden Village and Mitcham Park. Each retains its own identity, whilst at the same time relating to the heart of the area.

The most dominant feature within the conservation area is the visual impact of the large areas of green space. Built form is clustered around the greens forming well defined edges. Ages, styles and materials of buildings are mixed, however, the dominant physical layout unifies the area.

The edges of the character area are quite clearly defined, as mixed character, more recent development around the boundaries of the conservation area, give way to the more closely defined historic character of the conservation area. This is particularly noticeable in Church Road when approaching from the north.

The buildings are fairly modest in scale and the predominantly residential development is arranged in short terraces, semi-detached pairs and occasional detached cottages facing on to the village greens. Grander detached houses are found at Park Place and the Canons with larger, non-residential buildings to the south of Cranmer Green. The northern side of Church Road has a more “commercial” feel to it, with two and three storey terraces on narrow plots.

There are a significant number of listed buildings within the conservation area and the area is characterised by a wide variety of styles and types of buildings including; the Parish Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, historic manor houses such as the Canons and Park Place and domestic villas and public houses around the greens.



The White Hart

Another significant feature of the area's character is the historic network of lanes and footpaths some of which are ancient in origin. They create a sense of pedestrian permeability across the conservation area and reinforce the sense of the historic character of the area.

Much of the area, particularly around the Lower Green is affected by the impact of traffic and the associated problems of congestion, noise and fumes. The scale of the green spaces as well as the abundance of mature trees does however, lessen the negative impact.

Summary of Special Interest

The key historic influences and characteristics of the conservation area are:

- Series of linked settlements now forming a collection of distinct localities, each retaining its own identity, but still relating to the overall character of the area.
- Extensive areas of common land of both visual and recreational significance with many mature trees.
- Open spaces bounded by many original, locally significant buildings, primarily residential in character in a variety of architectural styles.
- Contrast between buildings occupying relatively small plots and the scale and openness of the common land.
- Historic network of lanes and footpaths that create a sense of permeability across the conservation area; Jeppos Lane, Glebe Path, Cold Blows Lane and Church Path.

Summary of Conservation Area Issues

The following issues should be taken into account when considering new development or works in the public realm in the conservation area. Reference should be made to the Borough Character Study for more detail on issues and guidance:

Public Realm Issues

- The narrow public realm with fast moving traffic in Church Road and the heavy traffic on Cricket Green have a negative impact on the character of the area.
- Inappropriate advertising both within the public realm and on buildings creating visual clutter.
- Unauthorised uses can have a harmful impact on the character of the area.
- The loss of street trees and verges.
- The loss of residential front boundaries to accommodate parking in front gardens.

Built Form Issues

- The redevelopment of key sites in the area should be used as a means to reinforce the locally distinctive characteristics of the area.
- The heritage significance of some buildings and areas need to be maximised e.g The Canons.
- The loss of original building features such as porches and original windows and doors has a harmful impact on the character of the area.
- The memorials in the parish church yard are deteriorating and in need of refurbishment.

