

Response to the Great Austins Conservation Area Appraisal consultation draft on behalf of the Great Austins Area Preservation Group, Nov 2021.

The Great Austins Area Preservation Group (GAAPG) was founded in the 1980s by prominent Farnham resident John Littlewood with the objective of protecting our local environment from intrusive development and to provide a focus for like-minded people to present a united front against threats to the special character of our neighbourhood. It fought hard for the creation of the Great Austins Conservation Area (CA) ahead of its designation in 1993. There are currently nearly 100 members of the Group including around half of all the households in the CA.

The following comments on behalf of the GAAPG are informed by a number of emails received from members of the Group as well as feedback from attendance at the Public Meeting on the Appraisal held at St Thomas on the Bourne on 27 October.

In your letter to residents advising of this consultation upon the draft GACA Appraisal, you asked four questions (that were bulleted) and we use these headings to respond with our comments and representations on each:

The Appraisal

1.6 Summary of Great Austins Conservation Area

We do not support the proposed removal of areas from the CA and address this issue separately, later in this representation.

We agree with the Negative Factors that you have identified and endorse actions to address these short-comings. Have you considered applying Article 4 directions for windows and also for the cobbled road gutters and stone kerbs (if feasible to do so), as this could ensure that highways contractors would have to apply for planning permission if they wished to change these elements?

We support any firming up of planning policy that will resist plot sub-divisions.

2.1 Summary of the Special Interest of the CA

In the 'Overview' it should surely be stressed that this CA contains more than 20 houses by Harold Falkner - by far the greatest concentration of his work anywhere - rather than simply stating that 'some' houses are by HF

3.1 Location and setting

Great Austins is the name of the road. There is no suffixed 'Road'

3.1.3 Economic Profile and Potential Forces for Change

If the character of the CA is made up of large family houses in generous plots with established trees and landscape, then it is axiomatic that plot sub-division could never preserve or enhance that character. We would expect Waverley and its LPP to robustly defend against plot sub-division.

3.1.4. Vistas

This seems to be an eclectic and incomplete section. There should surely be long views down each of the roads that capture the vistas within the CA, as well as key views towards the points of entry to the CA? The relevance of views 2, 4 and 5 is unclear.

3.2 Historical Development

It is clear that this section of the Appraisal borrows heavily from the scholarly work undertaken by Sam Osmond for his book 'Harold Falkner: more than an Arts and Crafts Architect' and in particular the section in that book that deals specifically with Great Austins. In this regard it might be helpful for those reading the Appraisal to see reference made of your sources, perhaps in the form of notes or even a bibliography, if you have drawn from more than one source. In paraphrasing from this book, there seems to be an obvious error in supposing on Appraisal page 16, third paragraph, that Great Austins was constructed by Tom Mitchell "to access gravel for his only other build, the Dym"

3.3.2 Scale and height of buildings

It should perhaps be identified that all buildings within the CA were originally of detached form on individual plots and it is only later developments, prior to the designation of the CA, that are anything other.

3.3.4 Details

Under the description of the typical details/features of the Arts and Crafts house, it lists 'Gabled dormer windows', yet these are rarely if ever seen. Hipped roof dormers and slope roofed dormers are the prevalent forms (both on Arts and crafts and Wrenaissance styles) in this CA.

3.6 Positive Contributors to the CA

Should not every building by Harold Falkner be listed here?

3.7.1 Open Spaces

We have received many comments from our members to say that they regularly walk down Stan Cockett's path to enjoy the woodland space of Paradise Wood, which we believe is owned by WBC (and previously Farnham Town Council). Although outside the CA at present, it is an immediately adjacent recreational space.

The Management Plan

4.1 Managing Change

The last sentence could benefit from adding to it 'architectural design' and 'materials'

We have noticed that many planning applications in the CA are accompanied by superficial Design and Access statements that fail to demonstrate any real understanding of the existing character of the CA and how the proposals then seek to preserve or enhance it. As part of managing change within the CA we urge planning and conservation officers to be insistent on demanding a more rigorous approach from the applicants within their D&A statements. This expectation should surely be addressed in this section as a recommendation.

4.5 Enhancement Schemes

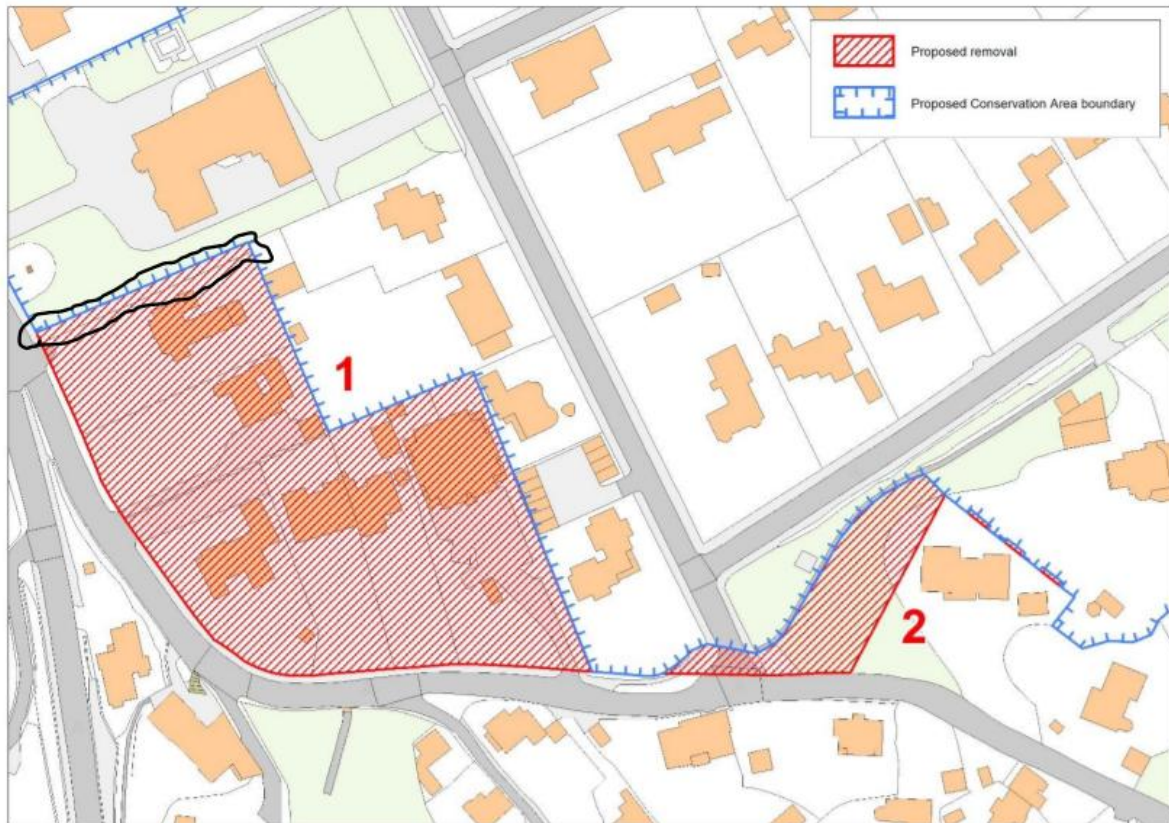
We broadly endorse this whole section of the Management Plan dealing with consistency of street furniture and repair of the public realm and welcome the fact that you view this as a priority

As well as ensuring that repairs to stone kerbs and cobbled gutters are carried out in like materials, we would like to see any future road resurfacing contract documents address the remediation issue when removing the existing surface, such that the full margins of the cobbled gutters are restored and visible once again.

Proposed removal of Areas 1 and 2 from the CA (section 3.9 of draft Appraisal)

We object to the proposal to remove the 2 areas (delineated in section 3.9 of the appraisal) from the CA. In our view, there is a strong argument to be made for retaining all of the properties earmarked for removal. In addition, there are clear mapping errors in the suggested new boundary lines which would need to be attended to in any case.

Starting with Area 1 we note at the outset that the proposed new northern edge of the CA running along the boundary of St Thomas Church cuts through the footprint of the property known as The Priory, 6 Swingate Road which has an access road leading from a large triple garage which backs onto the rear of its garden to the top of Vicarage Hill. Such a bisection of a plot would breach the clear guidance given in Para 68 of the cited Historic England document Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2019).



View down access road between Vicarage Hill and The Priory, 6 Swingate Road (outlined in black on top plan) and detail from Land Registry Title number SY305244 for said property.

More generally, the 6 properties (1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 Vicarage Hill) and the surrounding trees and hedges are perfectly in keeping with the low density, mixed building layout seen elsewhere in the CA and are particularly rich in the mature trees and verdant hedging so valued in the CA as a whole. We note that 4 of the 6 earmarked properties are period buildings set in substantial plots with one (3 Vicarage Hill) designed and built by GM Aylwin, one of the key Falkner associates cited elsewhere in the Appraisal. Another property (1 Vicarage Hill) is of a traditional Arts and Craft style dating from the 1920s. The avenue of trees planted in the early 20th century (probably as a landscaping feature for the original drive to 5 and 7 Vicarage Hill), is still in existence and it, along with the other mature trees shielding the corner opposite the Old Churchyard (now in the Old Church Lane Conservation Area), would be at risk of losing the additional protections afforded by Conservation Area status if removed from the area.



Mature avenue of trees in the area designated for removal from the CA and another key sylvan area of mature trees facing onto the old churchyard.

It was interesting that at the Public Meeting on the 27th October at St Thomas Church (which had over 40 attendees), not a single contributor was heard supporting the proposed changes to the CA footprint. Indeed one participant specifically noted that they were surprised to find, after buying a property fully aware of its position within the CA and then having work done which complied with the more onerous planning considerations that CA status requires, that removal of CA status was now being retrospectively proposed.

Turning to Area 2, we note that the reason cited for its removal (being that it forms part of the land of April Cottage, Vicarage Hill Land Registry title SY624609 which is outside of the CA) is totally erroneous. Instead, almost all of the area earmarked for removal is a stand-alone plot covered by Land Registry Title SY527647 which was retained by the developer after April Cottage was built and has recently been purchased by the owners of Mavins End, 2 Greenhill Road, one of the listed Falkner buildings in the CA. Using the existing footpath as proposed to delineate the new boundary of the CA would therefore again breach the Historic England guidance cited above as it bisects a single plot of land. Conveniently, however, the owners of April Cottage have recently built a substantial wooden fence which clearly delineates the boundary of their property and should therefore be used as the boundary of the CA in this area. Only a small change to the CA boundary will be required to correct the original mapping error (see diagrams below).



View from the existing footpath (which bisects plot of land SY527647) and from Vicarage Hill of new fence delineating the correct boundary line of April Cottage



From left to right: Land Registry Plan SY 624609 showing footprint of April Cottage, Land Registry Plan SY527647 showing stand-alone plot of land highlighted in yellow and pink running either side of public footpath. Detail of CA boundary showing the new line (dotted in black) that should follow the boundary of April Cottage (now marked by fence) to correct original mapping error.

Proposed Additions to the Conservation Area

We urge Waverley to consider extending the Conservation Area boundary to include the following area of land:

- the remaining properties on the south side of Greenhill Road
- the properties to the north and south sides of Leigh Lane from Tilford Road through to the Packway/Stan Cockett's Path (terminating with the inclusion of the Falkner house, 'Green Tubs')
- the green spaces that are bordered to the south by the rear boundaries of the properties on the north side of Leigh Lane; to the east by the rear boundaries of the houses that face Tilford Road; to the north by the rear boundaries of the houses that face Greenhill Road; to the west by Stan Cockett's Path. This includes the area known as Paradise Wood, which we understand is owned by Waverley Borough Council

Our reasoning is as follows:

The land outlined above once appears to have belonged to Greenhill Farm (now demolished), which as the historic maps show, was located on Greenhill Road directly to the east of Stan Cockett's Path. By reference to Sam Osmond's book, it is understood that Falkner, possibly in partnership, acquired much of this land and then built speculatively upon it, starting with Leigh House (1 Leigh Lane) and the cottage (3 Leigh Lane) designed in 1908. A narrow road (Leigh Lane) was then formed to the front of the house, extending from Tilford Road through to the Packway, thereby enabling the remaining land to be divided into plots, each with road frontage. Sands House (2 Leigh Lane) and its cottage (4 Leigh Lane) were then built on the north side of the road along with Green Tubs, also designed in 1908. In 1911 Costleys (now subdivided and re-named) was built on the remaining land on the south side of Leigh Lane. All these properties were designed speculatively by Harold Falkner. The remaining plots to the north of Leigh Lane appear to have been sold on for development by others in the years that followed.

These houses were being designed and built at precisely the same time that Falkner and others were buying plots and building speculatively in what is now the Conservation Area. In their large scale, design and plot size, Leigh House, Sands Lodge and Costleys closely resemble those large houses that Falkner designed on the largest plots lying on the south side of Greenhill Road, including Mavins Court (1906) and Montclare House (formerly Ilona, 1908). The 1914 OS map reveals that there were only 5 large plots on the south side of Greenhill Road - each amounting to several acres- and four of these were already built by the date of that map. The remaining plot at the western end was to be built out by Falkner as Mavins End in 1927. From this same map we can see that barely half the plots available have been developed within what is the current CA. Given that no large plots were left to develop on the southern slope from Greenhill Road, then by natural extension and in similar vein, Falkner chose to develop further large plots on southern slopes immediately adjacent to the south-east. These houses are as one with those already within the Conservation Area; if the houses on the south side of Greenhill Road are within the Great Austins Conservation Area, then so too should these be.

The remaining houses on the south side of Greenhill Road to the east of Stan Cockett's Path include the remnants of the ancillary buildings that once belonged with the now demolished Greenhill Farmhouse. Falkner himself worked on their conversion to residential use. All other buildings are later -and with the exclusion of the flatted development at the corner with Tilford Road- are large family houses in sizeable plots. In this regard they have much in common with the existing CA and in terms of architectural design are superior to many of the plot in-fills that occurred within the CA prior to its designation. Their wooded frontages are at one with the character of the remaining southern frontages in Greenhill Road

The green spaces that exist between the two areas outlined above are essentially natural woodland. With the probable exception of the last unbuilt plot that faces on to the north side of Leigh Lane, at the junction with Stan Cockett's path, the remainder is either Paradise Wood or other wooded land. As such it is backland without street frontage, upon which any development should be strongly resisted. As an open space it has amenity value - either visual or recreational - and should also be included within the Conservation Area, so with the areas outlined above it forms a parcel of land contiguous with the existing CA, under the umbrella of its protective policies..

-