

TRING



Urban Design Assessment



urban
practitioners



MAKING PLACES

MATERIALS AND TEXTURES

Up to the end of the 18th century, the transport of materials to inland areas like Hertfordshire was difficult and costly. Consequently builders used the sources they had to hand; flint, straw, timber and clay. The characteristic qualities of the Dacorum area owe much to the survival of such traditional materials. They have however been supplemented by many more recent materials, brought in from outside the region.

Stone

Hertfordshire has no significant source of quality freestone, being mostly reliant on chalk and its associated material, flint. Chalkstone (also known as clunch) of adequate strength for walls has long been quarried at Totternhoe near Dunstable. Its blocks have been used to construct churches or other important buildings, often in combination with flint.

Flint is used in a functional way, roughly knapped rather than squared in the East Anglian tradition. The material (and the skill to build with it) is available commercially, but it is mostly used for conservation work or sculpture.

Also to be found within the masonry of some buildings, including garden walls, is Hertfordshire 'pudding-stone' an unusual local stone of glacial origin, comprising rounded pebbles bound within in a flinty cement. The image at the top far right is an example of pudding-stone.

By the 19th century, imported limestones such as Bath



Victorian and Edwardian buildings revived the area's timber-framed tradition, applying plaster and timber for decorative effect.



In the absence of good quality sandstone or limestone, flint was used for high status buildings like churches. Limestone was reserved for dressings and mouldings.

KEY ISSUES

MPI: MATERIALS AND TEXTURES

MPIA

Tring residents value the Victorian brickwork with moulded decorative detailing.

MPIB

Tring residents frequently rejected the use of imitation styles as kitsch.

MPI C

There are some recent high quality applications of machine-made bricks on modern institutional buildings.

MPI D

There are many examples of recent residential developments with low-quality and non-local materials.

MPI E

Tring has employed distinctive and high-quality paving along the High Street, in public spaces, and on areas of the pavement.



The variety in the red bricks and the use of blue 'headers' creates a satisfying finish.



Moulded bricks, tiles and terracotta were popular decorative elements in Victorian architecture.

stone or Portland were being employed, either for dressings or full construction and largely supplanted the use of flint.

Timber

Timber-framing and weatherboarding were common up to the 18th century, when brick became much more common. Oak and elm were the preferred materials for the structural members. Church spires are usually formed in wood and clad in copper, shingle or lead to form the characteristic Hertfordshire 'spikes'. Timber frames were infilled with wattle and daub or lath and plaster panels; sometimes they were later replaced by brick.

The timber frames were almost always hidden from view - sometimes behind weatherboarding or tiles, more usually behind a protective coat of lime plaster. The East Anglian tradition of decorative plasterwork known as pargetting reaches into Hertfordshire- mostly in the east of the county, but examples are to be found in Dacorum, including Tring.

Later, the classical revival resulted in the use of rendered and painted surfaces in imitation of ashlar stonework.

Window joinery was almost always softwood, well seasoned and painted, but in some early buildings oak, elm or ash may have been used for the frames.

Brickmaking

Brickmaking was in evidence from 15th century and had become the accepted building material by the Tudor period. Local beds were used to source the clay but with improved transport, bricks were imported from further afield. In the early 19th century there was a vogue for using yellow and white bricks, often made from gault clay, in imitation of stone. In the Victorian era machine-made bricks and tiles became prevalent and coloured decorative patterns like diaper work were used to great effect.

Roofing materials

At one time thatch would have been the universal roof covering, using long straw rather than the more durable water reed that has been adopted in recent years. Thatch is however now rare in Dacorum's towns, being mainly confined to farm buildings or other rural locations.

Roof tiles were first made by the Romans but their manufacture fell out of use and was only revived during the medieval period. Until the 20th century the tiles used were normally hand pressed and made in clay, but since the 1920s machine made concrete and clay tiles have become common. Interlocking tiles, in imitation of Mediterranean or Roman tiles, are frequently to be found in postwar housing. Church roofs, if not in tile, were in lead sheet until slates became common.



Well detailed contemporary brickwork, using slim red bricks.



The simple symmetrical facade of the church is enlivened by the use of warm, red brick laid in Flemish bond, with finely cut gauged brickwork over the windows and door.



Buff bricks and dark tile hanging were favoured in the 1960s and 70s.



Although red brick is the predominant building material, render painted brickwork and grey gault brick is also to be found.

An alternative to tile would have been cedar or oak shingles (wooden tiles). Most commonly, however, slate was imported in large quantities, especially from North Wales, and was almost universal for large or industrial buildings.

Recent attempts to re-create Victorian or Tudor styles was unpopular with many of the consultation participants, drawing comments such as 'kitsch' and 'vulgar'.

Streetscape materials

The first streets in the towns were probably little more than beaten earth and ash, but after the 17th century granite setts and sandstone paving were used for heavily trafficked areas, such as town pavements or the surfacing of yards. In recent years, concrete slabs of various colours, sizes and textures have been common, with asphalt used for the carriageway. There are a variety of streetscaping elements in Tring, including the preservation of older cobblestones on areas of the pavement, small paving stones on the High Street itself, and patterned paving (in the form of a zebra's head) in the Church Square.



A variety of streetscape elements are used in Tring. The footpath is made up of modern paving bricks adjacent to much older cobblestones.



Tactile paving is an important aid to visually impaired pedestrians but needs to be carefully detailed.



Granite setts are a durable and attractive paving surface but need to be carefully laid to form an even surface. They are traditionally favoured for yards and heavily trafficked areas.

MAKING PLACES LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

Tring has several distinctive listed buildings, most of which are concentrated in the town centre. The entire town centre, the Victorian residential area to its west, and the Rothschild estate forms one large conservation area.

The listed buildings include Tring church, a series of buildings on the High Street and Akeman Street including Victoria Hall, the Zoological Museum and the nearby estate cottages and span several centuries. There are a few listed buildings outside of the conservation area, including Kay's Silk Mill built in 1823.

KEY ISSUES MP2: LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

MP2A

Tring has several significant listed buildings ranging from the medieval church to late Victorian buildings.

MP2B

The presence of poorly designed modern buildings undermines the town's character.

MP2C

Parking concerns in the conservation area, both on-street parking in the Victorian residential area and off-street car parks in the town centre, currently detract from the success of the conservation areas.

MP2D

Shopfront signage often does not enhance the conservation area.



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Tring's array of listed buildings on the High Street, Akeman Street and Park Street includes buildings spanning eight centuries. They all occur within a close proximity, providing Tring with the distinctive character of a small market town. The buildings of William Huckvale provide a late Victorian consistency which brings the town together.

Many of these listed buildings are surprising treasures. The re-direction of the Roman Road along the High Street to make way for the estate disrupted the historical development along the southern border of the town. But later buildings by Lord Rothschild, such as the Zoological Museum and the estate cottages (top near right) provide significant buildings at the end of town.

One significant issue in relation to maintaining the distinctiveness of Tring's compact core is the presence of more recent poorly designed buildings. Two examples (bottom left and far right) are the retail building on the east side of Frogmore street (just north of the critical intersection of Frogmore/Akeman and the High Street) and the large commercial building located adjacent to the Zoological Museum.



Tudor revival cottages designed by William Huckvale for Lord Rothschild late 19th century.



Park Road, Tring. A terrace of tall, Dutch-gabled Victorian homes that brings an urban quality to the area.



The modern retail building on the east side of Frogmore Street does little to maintain the distinctiveness of Tring's compact core. The flat roof and plain facade are alien to Tring's character.



The large commercial building is oversized and bulky detracting from the adjacent Zoological Museum.

The Conservation Area of Tring has both strong streetscape and significant open spaces alike. The open spaces include the church yard, a cemetery beside the church, and the Memorial Gardens. The significant streetscapes include the High Street, Akeman Street, Park Street and the old Roman road which overlooks the Green Belt.

While the Conservation Area has several well-maintained and important listed buildings there are other aspects of the built environment which impact on the conservation area's distinctiveness.

Streetscape furniture

Tring has a relatively consistent use of street lights, railings and benches that maintain the integrity of the Conservation Area. The area has several Bishop's Crook style streetlights which add to the area's character.

Shopfronts

The shopfront signage has a mixed impact on the street, with several shops displaying quality signs and many shops using poor shopfronts. Consultation participants were explicit in describing particular signs as 'bland', 'gaudy', and 'tatty'.

Paving

Tring has implemented a paving plan that attempts to maintain the integrity of the Conservation Area's town centre. The street is paved with small coloured pavers, and the pavements employ cobblestone and small coloured pavers throughout its length.

Parking

Car parking, both in terms of off-street parking by the town centre and on-street parking in the residential areas of the Conservation Area, detracts from the character of the Conservation Area. The off-street lots, while as discreetly located as possible, have not been designed as sensitively as the High Street and pavement. Three car parks are all located adjacent to historically significant sites, including the eastern gateway to the High Street, adjacent to the churchyard cemetery, and across the street from Victoria Hall (in front of the Baptist Church). In all cases, sensitive design could be achieved. The Victorian residential area, with a dense, narrow street network, forces cars to block the pavements when they are parked (bottom far right). The car parking detracts from Tring Triangle's distinctiveness.



The Memorial Gardens offers a tranquil space in the heart of the town.



A rich architectural assembly on the High Street, dating from Lord Rothschild's work in the late 19th century.



Off street parking lacks sensitivity in its design.



Dense narrow streets in the Victorian residential area forces cars to park on the pavement which detracts from Tring Triangle's distinctiveness.

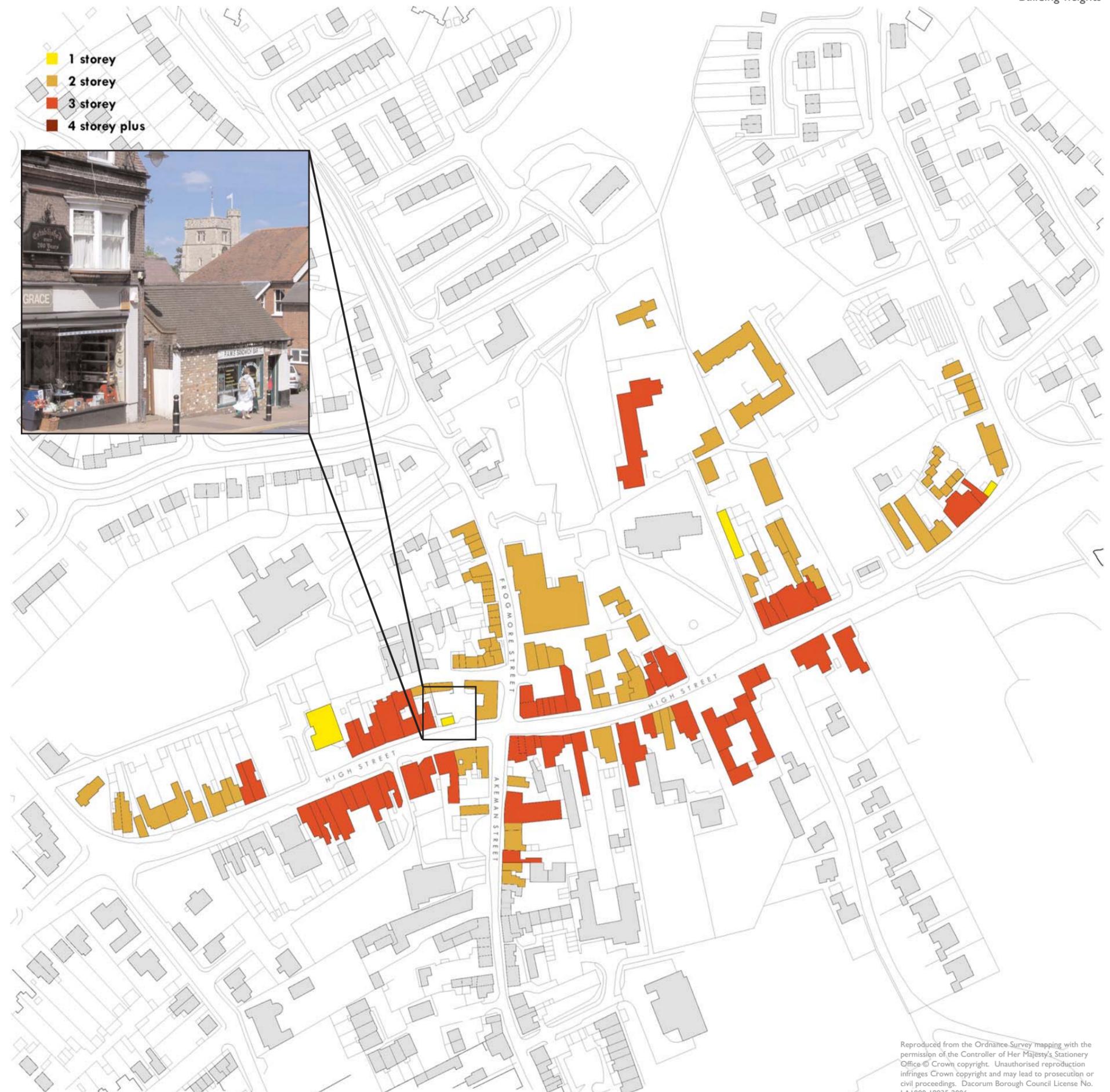
MAKING PLACES BUILDING HEIGHTS

The building heights in Tring town centre are generally three-storey with several two-storey buildings as well. The narrowness of the medieval street grid combined with the three-storey buildings, many of which are 19th century, and the topographical changes along the High Street, give Tring town centre a compact and distinctive appearance.

This character is most dramatic east of the junction of the High Street and Akeman/Frogmore Streets, where both sides of the High Street have a series of three-storey buildings, four of which date back over 200 years.

The only single-storey building on the High Street, is modest but allows a view of the medieval church tower.

The residential buildings in Tring are generally two-storey, with a number of three-storey buildings. There are isolated examples of buildings greater than three storeys as well.



KEY ISSUES MP3: BUILDING HEIGHTS

MP3A
The three-storey buildings along the High Street combined with the changes in topography and the dense nature of the street give the town centre a dramatic character.

MP3B
The poor quality one-storey building on the High Street also affords a view of the church buildings.

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MAKING PLACES DENSITY

Tring's residential areas are predominantly two-storey, although there are a few recent purpose-built flats which are three storeys or more.

There is tremendous variation in density among the two-storey houses. The adjacent images show a sample of these unit types. These were selected to display a variety of the housing types built over the last 150 years, including the 'Tring Triangle' that includes the dense Victorian and Edwardian housing, to the Silk Mill Estate built by the Greater London Council in the 1970s and recent developments from the last 20 years. While they are all two-storey buildings, they represent conditions including on and off-street parking; shared front gardens, no front gardens, both front and rear gardens; and detached housing, semi-detached housing, and terraced houses. The examples include:

1. Detached villas with front and rear gardens with driveways
2. Semi-detached housing with front and rear gardens and off-street parking,
3. Terraced units with communal front gardens and divided rear gardens and on-street parking, and
4. Courtyard development with communal front garden and shared off-street parking.

The locations of each house and plot are shown on the following page.



1. A detached house with a driveway and front and rear garden



2. A semi-detached house with rear garden and front garden and driveway

KEY ISSUES MP4: DENSITY

MP4A

There is a tremendous variation in two-storey densities ranging from 10-94 units per hectare.

MP4B

The various factors affecting density apart from building heights and floorplate area are garden size, and the incorporation of off-street parking.

MP4C

The courtyard development cited is an example of high-density low-rise development which relieves on-street parking pressures.

MP4D

Higher densities may support neighbourhood shops in areas outside of the town centre.



3. A terrace house with front garden and on street parking



4. A modern high density development with off street parking

Size and density comparisons

1. Total plot size: 983 square metres (sqm)
Unit per hectare: 10
 (Total floorplate area: 127 sqm)
2. Total plot size: 359
Unit per hectare: 28
 (Total floorplate area: 50 sqm)
3. Total plot size: 1740 sqm/7 units
Unit per hectare: 40
 (Total floorplate area: 56 sqm)
4. Total plot size: 850 sqm/8 units = 106 sqm/units
 (including car park)
Unit per hectare: 94
 (Total floorplate area: 24 sqm)

Relationship between street and housing plot

The nature of the street and street network will vary according to plot size. Smaller plots allow a denser street network with greater permeability. They tend, however, to require on-street parking which demands a wider street. The smaller plots also develop a closer relationship with the street itself, allowing less privacy but also providing more 'eyes on the street'. Courtyard developments generally do not permit permeability and require larger development sites.

When considering new development or redevelopment within the existing street network, it is important to note that the nature of each existing street is different in terms of usage and width, thus precipitating densities and housing types that are compatible with the street types.



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