

Preston Next Faversham conservation area character appraisal

(Extract from report to Planning Committee 09.09.04 – Agenda item no. 6, 1.2 Annex B.)

Introduction and historical background

1. Preston Next Faversham is a small settlement lying astride the London-Canterbury Road, on the southern edge of Faversham town. The original thoroughfare formed part of the old Roman Watling Street, but the oldest buildings now present at Preston, which are situated on the north side of Canterbury Road, variously date from the late C17 to the C19. It is possible, of course, that they were preceded by others that have long since been demolished.
2. This little settlement originally stood some distance apart from Faversham town, separated from it by a patchwork of fields and orchards. In the last quarter of the C20, however, new housing developments have been completed around the southern edge of Faversham which now reach up to the northern and western edges of Preston Next Faversham. Consequently, the smaller settlement is steadily, but inexorably, being absorbed into the urban fabric of its very much larger neighbour, and it is now well on the way to becoming part of an almost continuously built-up frontage stretching along the north side of the London-Canterbury Road from Ospringe to Macknade. The surviving cluster of old buildings at Preston continues, however, to record both the historical origins of the place and to illustrate its once-separate physical identity.
3. The settlement's historic relationship with other parts of old Preston parish, most especially the church to the north-west, is still given physical expression by the Preston Lane footpath that runs diagonally to the north-west. Once crossing open fields the footpath is now hard-surfaced and threads its way, still quite attractively, through an estate of bungalows and houses built in the 1980s.

The built environment

4. The historic focus of Preston Next Faversham is an attractive little group of buildings dating from the late C17, C18 and C19, positioned on the north side of Canterbury Road and built in the Kentish vernacular. The properties fronting the main road are, for the most part, set directly onto the edge of the footway.
5. Most prominent amongst them is The Windmill public house; its smartly-painted, smooth-rendered elevations, its flurry of signboards and colourful window boxes are the attractive visual focus for the group of traditional buildings around. Until 1979 the hamlet in fact contained two public houses; their presence confirmed the important role that this small roadside settlement has traditionally played in providing refuge and hospitality for passing travellers (who here at Preston were making their way along the busy London-Canterbury road). The surviving public house continues to give the hamlet an important sense of special place and historical identity; its presence also firmly 'anchors' the associated cluster of development in its rightful place on the Canterbury Road.
6. Adjoining the public house to the west (on the other side of Preston Lane) the row of little red brick cottages dates from around 1845; the cottage roofs are all attractively covered, like The Windmill public house, with Kent peg tiles. Included here is a little odd-shaped outhouse building of similar age, the working origins of which are neatly recorded by the distinctive cladding of tarred weatherboarding. The western end of this building group is terminated by the former Cherry Tree public

house, now converted to a dwelling; also C18 in origin, this building has been extended on the ground floor across the full width of the front in somewhat contrasting fashion.

7. Ivy Cottages are situated a few steps down Preston Lane. Both these red brick houses were built in the second half of the C19. Although both now have replacement windows and the northernmost one has concrete interlocking roof tiles they are nevertheless notable for their rather pleasant, cottage-like character. They are all the more distinctive for being tucked away along the narrow little footpath where their presence comes as something of a pleasant surprise. Close by, and set just behind The Windmill public house, are the more modest-looking Pile Cottages; also dating from the second half of the C19 and perhaps originally labourers' cottages, they are striking now for their prominent two storeys high, yellow-brick rear extension, topped off by a mono-pitched roof covered with roofing felt.

8. The north-eastern edge of the hamlet is bounded by one end of an old chalk pit, where lime kilns were active until the early 1920s. The natural regeneration of trees and shrubs, mostly sycamore, has until recently substantially disguised the presence of this excavation, at least from Canterbury Road, but the development of the site for housing is now bringing about a substantial change. Alongside the access track which drops down into the pit lies a pair of thatched, single storey, brick-built cottages dating from the late C17 or early C18 but later extended; the presence of this isolated thatch roof covering is unusual in an area where clay tiles have been almost universally preferred.

9. Development on the south side of the A2 is generally later in date and rather different in appearance. The development fronting directly onto Canterbury Road consists mainly of late C19 houses in the form of relatively commonplace terraces, the appearance of which has been substantially compromised by later piecemeal alterations.

10. However, just behind the easternmost terrace and accessed from Salters Lane are Mill House and Mill Cottage. The former is a mid-C19 stuccoed house of classical appearance positioned side-on to the road, now much extended and used as a residential home; the latter is early Victorian, set well back from the road, with extensions that have recently been rebuilt. A smock mill once stood here on this elevated ground; it was still present in 1933 although by then derelict. Its one-time presence therefore now lives on in the names of the two surviving properties on the site.

11. The short length of Salters Lane between Canterbury Road and Mill House is relatively narrow but essentially rural in character despite the presence of back gardens along a part of its western side. The narrow strip of woodland on the roadside bank along the eastern edge of the lane, comprised of mixed species, is an important local feature as it screens the football ground behind. The absence of footways along the lane also helps to confirm its rural character.

12. The cluster of buildings on the northern side of Canterbury Road, together with Mill House and Cottage on the south side of the road, is therefore the important historic record of earlier times in Preston Next Faversham when it was a small, free-standing settlement. The surviving vernacular architecture continues to be of sufficient strength to constitute a place both of special historical interest and local distinctiveness.

The Canterbury Road highway environment

13. Canterbury Road (A2) approximates to the alignment of old Roman Watling Street; it is, historically, the reason for the presence here of Preston Next Faversham.

14. The A2 is, however, now a heavily trafficked route of strategic importance. In consequence the main road environment through Preston Next Faversham is daily burdened with the intrusive effects of this traffic, which are further aggravated by the relatively close proximity of the modest-sized frontage properties to the carriageway. The frontage buildings on the south side of the road, where the sunshine struggles to reach the front elevations, on occasions look distinctly traffic-worn.

15. The traditional shape of the Canterbury Road highway on the eastern edge of the settlement has, in recent times, been re-engineered to provide a right turn into Salters Lane and a turning into Hilton Close (a new housing development to the north-east). A newly formed highway edge therefore now extends back into Preston Next Faversham and across the front of the chalk pit site, with the consequence that the natural shape of this section of old road alignment out of the hamlet has been substantially lost. Coupled with the insertion of pedestrian refuges into the carriageway these modern adaptations to the old highway environment have inevitably been to the detriment of the traditional simplicity of the road form.
