

02 PLANNING

This section reviews planning policy relevant to the current study.

2.1 Faversham Creekside AAP

In line with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is preparing a suite of documents to form the Local Development Framework for the Borough of Swale. Currently, the Council is at the pre-production phase for the Core Strategy, and is consulting on the issues that this document should cover. A draft Core Strategy is expected to be published in late 2010.

Alongside the Core Strategy, the Council is producing a number of other Development Plan Documents (DPDs) including an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Faversham Creek. The Local Development Scheme (February 2009 Draft Revision) states that the purpose of the AAP is to "provide a comprehensive development framework for the future of Faversham Creek and the Creekside for the period to 2026."

Swale Borough Council has provided the consultant team with interim outputs from a range of baseline studies it is undertaking as part of the Area Action Plan and Local Development Framework process. This section reviews some of the material and issues that may be relevant to the consultation process. However, this section should not be taken as a baseline study in itself, nor does it supersede or summarise the baseline studies themselves.



19th century creekside housing at Front Brents

2.2 Heritage, character, & conservation

As a settlement, Faversham dates from before the Roman conquest, and has a long and nationally-important maritime history. Faversham's Conservation Area covers much of the town, and provides a positive framework for regeneration across the entirety of the creek and its adjoining lands. The creekside area was once the industrial heart of the town, and played an important role in the development of Faversham as a whole. However the "hustle and bustle" of the historic wharves has vanished, and "...present-day uses have turned their backs on the water and silt has accumulated in the water channel" making the creek increasingly difficult to navigate (Faversham Conservation Area Character Appraisal, 2004). Large parts of the creekside have been redeveloped for residential uses, and almost all of the traditional maritime activities have disappeared from the Creek, though the wharf fronts remain an important reminder of the past.

A large number of listed and unlisted buildings and structures are important to the sense of place at Faversham Creek, many of which are related to the history of employment uses in the area, including:

- Surviving industrial buildings relating directly to the Creek, for example the 19th century yellow-brick 'Purifier Building', and the former Hops store Oyster Bay House;
- The former 'Town Warehouse', a timber framed warehouse built circa 1475 by the Corporation of Faversham – a rare example of an early commercial building, now used by the Sea Scouts as T.S. Hazard;
- A group of workshop buildings at Standard Quay, formerly the principle port of Faversham and now the only traditional, working waterside environment remaining in the town; and
- Stonebridge Ponds, a labyrinthine landscape of waterways and 'blast walls' associated with the historic explosives industry, now used as allotment gardens.

In addition, a large number of mill buildings, public houses, public open spaces, and residential terraces which cumulatively give the creekside its distinctive scale, character, and pattern of uses. The surviving traditional uses of the creek focussed around Standard Quay and Iron Wharf are a particularly important link to the historic development of Faversham and are "of crucial importance to the town's individuality" (Swale Borough Council, 2004). Similarly, the Cardox International works in Abbey Fields, represents the remaining active link to the town's longstanding explosives industry.

2.3 Landscape and environment

Notwithstanding its industrial heritage, the creekside owes much of its character to its distinctive mix of natural, semi-natural and man-made spaces. The green spaces at Front Brents give this residential waterside an informal and relaxed feel (Faversham Conservation Area Character Appraisal, 2004). The Town Green opposite is a more formal green space with an important link to the civic 'representational' life of the town, though it is currently underused due to its poor accessibility and visibility. At the head of the creek, the Stonebridge Ponds form an enclosed intimate landscape of waterside allotments. At the other end of the creek, beyond Iron Wharf, lies the strikingly open landscape of the Swale, a 6000 hectare site consisting of mudflats, saltmarsh, and freshwater grazing marsh.

The Swale has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA), and 'Ramsar' site, and is in favourable condition. Any future development proposals for the creekside will need to consider the impact on these strategically important habitats. All of the green spaces along the creekside are also currently protected from development. These include a diverse range of habitats for a number of rare and protected species. The entire basin of the Creek is also a mudflat, which is one of the Priority Habitats identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Crab Island is an unregistered semi-natural area of open space with a creek inlet with some biodiversity interests, and is highly-valued locally.

As a low-lying tidal estuary, the area immediately surrounding the creek is subject to periodic inundation, which has been confirmed by a recent Flood Risk Assessment. Flooding is part of the natural cycle of this landscape, however due to climate change this cycle is now becoming more frequent and is presenting significant challenges for the conservation of habitat and heritage, as well as representing a significant constraint to development. Conversely, while Faversham inhabitants have used the Creek for several centuries, navigation of it has severely declined in recent years. Lower levels of boating activity combined with limited maintenance of the Creek bed since the decline of commercial activity in the 1970s, has led to the increased silting of the Creek. Silting is making navigation more and more difficult, which has led to a spiral of decline in water-based activities.

2.4 Pattern and trends of land uses

The Creek has a long history of employment-related uses. The area developed as a harbour, and traditional industries that have occupied the creekside include maritime-related businesses, brewing, brick-making, and gunpowder works. During the 20th century much of the traditional industry declined in the area, and now very few traditional industries remain here. The hub of maritime industries located around Standard Quay and Iron Wharf remain an important link to the historic uses of the creek, and the specialist skills which they accommodate provide a valuable and unique offer.

On the opposite bank of the creek, the Upper Brents Industrial Estate provides freehold space for a wide variety of small businesses. However, Swale Borough Council's Draft Employment Land Review assessed this estate as of poor quality. In the context of its wider remit, it stated that:

"There may be scope to release some older, poorer performing industrial sites to other uses, either residential or mixed use development, but a cautious approach should be adopted, linked to actual problems being caused, need for new housing sites, and available sites for relocation of firms. Most of these sites are occupied and serve a local need at some level, including for 'bad neighbour' uses or firms requiring very low cost premises / sites, and replacement provision should be ensured before any releases. Possible candidates for release include the Upper Brents Industrial Estate, Faversham (2.5 ha), and the Oil Depot and Bus Garage, Faversham (0.3 ha)."

Further upstream at Belvedere Road, much of the creekside has been redeveloped for residential use. Some of the new housing restricts public access to the creek edge, which has fragmented pedestrian routes along the creekside. Pressure for housing development in the area continues to threaten the future of commercial uses in the area, and there is a need to ensure that the remaining active uses of the Creek are not displaced elsewhere and lost to the town.

The Basin area is the only part of the Creek that has remained entirely in commercial use. However, due to the nature of much of the development in this area – brewery, factory, and supermarket – there is generally a very poor visual relationship between these enclosed sites and building types and the Creek. In reviewing the Swale Borough Council Local Plan, the then Planning Inspector noted that the "current lack of housing in the [...] area provides a good and in some ways unique opportunity to promote the tourism and commercial regeneration of the area in and around the wider Creek Basin, including use of the basin and its wharfage for historic craft".

2.5 Leisure, recreation, and tourism

The Creek has significant leisure, recreation, and tourism potential, however this is severely limited by the poor condition of the Creek and access to it. There is currently no boat access to the basin due to a technical fault with the opening mechanism of the bridge. The absence of regular sluicing of the basin has led to an increase in silting of the Creek bed, and this is further exacerbated by the lack of marine traffic along the Creek due to the lack of access to the basin.

Along the creekside there are limited facilities for visitors and tourists. The Albion Public House and Le Bistrot are amongst the few places where visitors can have a meal at the creek edge. Shepherd Neame - the oldest brewer in Britain - is the main tourist attraction around the Creek and hosts regular tours of the brewery however visual and physical connections between the brewery and the Creek are not strong. The Creek is not visible from the town centre, and is not sign-posted. This combined with unattractive access routes from the town mean that visitors to Faversham could easily miss this area completely. The heritage value of the Creek is also poorly communicated, and the listed and characteristic creekside buildings are underplayed; indeed many of these have been left derelict or are obscured by newer developments. A significant challenge for the Area Action Plan process is to examine how the leisure and tourism potential of the creek can contribute to the conservation and character of the creekside and support local business and employment in a sustainable way.



Town Green, where the town meets the Creek



Davington Hill, Stonebridge Pond, and the allotments



Shepherd Neame brewery on the creekside



Standard Quay boatyard, with Oyster Bay House and Standard House

2.6 Area Action Plan (AAP) Programme

The programme for the production of the AAP is set out in the Local Development Scheme February 2009 Draft Revision as follows. Note that this timetable is subject to change.

Stage	Date
Commencement of scoping of Sustainability Appraisal for DPD	July 2008
Consultation on scoping report for Sustainability Appraisal (complete)	4 June – 16 July 2008
Collection of Pre-production information	by December 2009
Consult on Vision and Objectives (Reg 25)	February 2009
Consult on Publication Draft DPD (Regs 27,28,29)	March 2010
Submission of DPD to Secretary of State (Regulation 30)	July 2010
Notice of Examination in Public (Regulation 34)	November 2010
Examination	February 2011
Inspector's Report submitted	July 2011
Adoption of DPD	August 2011



The view to the Swale