

# KINGS LANGLEY



## 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.

By the 19th century, imported limestones such as Bath stone or Portland were being employed, either for dressings or full construction and largely supplanted the



*Knapped flint with brickwork forms one of the most distinctive styles applied in Kings Langley. As can be seen in the image above, the flint is not squared. The flint has been cut roughly, producing a rustic quality. (Located on west side of the High Street)*



*In a few instances within the vicinity of the village centre, buildings employ both knapped flint and brickwork. In this particular building, the old brewery on Church Lane, the brickwork alternates between blue headers (known as 'clinkers') and standard bricking.*

### KEY ISSUES

#### MPI: MATERIALS AND TEXTURES

##### MPIA

Kings Langley residents value the older brickwork in the village.

##### MPIB

Kings Langley residents frequently dislike the recent applications of machine-made brickwork.

##### MPI C

The village centre has an inconsistent application of paving materials.

##### MPI D

The white split rail wood fence on High Street is distinctive in Hertfordshire.



*Brick is the predominant material in Kings Langley, and the village is marked by a tremendous variation in its application. In this instance where two buildings meet on The Nap, one wall shows an alternation between headers and regularly placed bricks while the other wall shows a consistent application of headers.*



*This High Street building provides an example of scalloped terracotta tiling.*

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 Hemel Hempstead.

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 in a style known as polychroming.

#### 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 and villages, 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; examples from as early as 1362 have been found at Kings Langley. 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.



*This residential building shows a red clay tiled roof with a modern application of Tudor-style timber framing.*



*In addition to the elaborate brickwork, this Victorian building exhibits a rounded arch with a decorative voussoir (keystone).*



*The newer buildings in Kings Langley tend to be built with machine-made brick, and frequently incorporate other materials as well. These particular homes off the High Street employ less traditional wood cladding.*



*These gabled houses on the site of the old Corn Mill on Mill Lane use machine-made brick. The application of a weathervaned top and mock arches are nods toward traditional design. The Mill Lane area is also distinguished by a considerable degree of asphalt paving including the path to the Canal Walk.*

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.

#### Streetscape materials

The first streets 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.

The white split rail wood fence on the western side of the Kings Langley High Street represents a very distinctive element of the village. One Hertfordshire County officer cited it as the only one of its kind in the region. It is important to note that the fence is not impeccably maintained.



Concrete blocks are the predominant form of pavement materials. This particular site on the High Street is enlivened by a small private garden on the pavement.



The area around the steps leading from the street to the upper level of pavement on the west side of the High Street displays a discordant mix of materials, including tiles, ridged tiles, machine-made bricks, older brickwork, non-slip pavers, and concrete blocks all within a few square metres.



The white split rail wood fence on the western side of the Kings Langley High Street represents a distinctive feature.



A detail of the split rail fence.

## MAKING PLACES

### LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

The main medieval monuments of Kings Langley- the Priory, the Royal Palace, the Royal Deer Park and the parish church were located on the edge of the original settlement, which has subsequently grown outward to meet them. These buildings tended to be located on higher ground, granting them clear vantage points and separation from the villagers.

The areas around these monuments form the key conservation areas along with the High Street and additional parts of Kings Langley Common.

Listed buildings are spread throughout the village, including buildings on outlying farms, the medieval monuments, several High Street buildings, and a few select buildings along the canal and the River Gade.

#### KEY ISSUES

##### MP2: LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

###### MP2A

Kings Langley has several significant listed buildings including medieval monuments.

###### MP2B

Key landmark buildings do not play a strong role in shaping gateways to Kings Langley with the exception of the southern end of the High Street.

###### MP2C

Streetscape elements often detract from the quality of conservation areas.

###### MP2D

The Canal towpath has no listed designations nor is it a conservation area.



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The village of Kings Langley has an array of high-quality listed buildings, many of them dating to the medieval period. The parish church and remains of the Priory are particularly noteworthy. For the purposes of this study, we will consider how these listed buildings contribute to the greater urban design aspects of Kings Langley.

The listed buildings along the High Street continue to anchor a significant High Street that has remained relatively consistent in form for the last century and a half. The early 19th century building (top far right image) acts as a gateway landmark at the Southern end of the High Street even though the building entry is not located on the High Street. More significantly, the buildings appearing after the landmark building are newer poor quality residential buildings with no active street frontage. The potential impact of this building as a gateway has been minimised by its current context.

The parish church remains a strong landmark located just off the High Street on Church Lane. It is worth noting that the trees on the grounds of the Memorial Gardens shroud the church tower from view on the High Street, also minimising the potential impact of the church building as a gateway at the southern end of the village.

The building at the junction of Church Lane and Waterside Lane (bottom far right) has also been listed. Currently housing a barber shop and residential units, the building has overlooked the road and bridge leading over the River Gade and later, the Grand Union Canal. Due to its current poor condition, the presence of on-site parking, and the widening of the road into a roundabout, this listed building fails to realise its potential as a gateway landmark.



*The church tower is a significant local landmark, clearly visible looking westwards across the Gade Valley and also from the foot of Water Lane. The church grounds adjoin a well-maintained Memorial Garden, but it must be noted that the Gardens' trees largely obstruct views of the church from the High Street.*



*The building with classical features at the corner of the High Street and Church Lane marks the entry into the Kings Langley village centre.*



*This High Street listed Building is one of the few buildings greater than two storeys*



*This listed building could serve as a useful gateway to the canal towpath.*

The conservation areas of Kings Langley include significant areas of open space in addition to the built environment. The two top images show different places on the Kings Langley Common which are within the Conversation Area. The near right image is just off Common Lane and provides views across the Gade Valley. The far right image looks across the Cricket Ground on Kings Langley Common. Both sites serve as significant recreational spaces and view points and are well-cared for. There are however inconsistent treatment of built elements in the landscape (note the rubbish bin in the image to the right).

The High Street represents a significant conservation area, although once again, the treatment of the built elements in the streetscape often do little to reinforce the conservation area. These elements, including the street lighting, railings, shopfronts, and paving, will be discussed in greater detail under the 'Quality of the Public Realm' criteria.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the Grand Union Canal, its locks and the older bridge are not placed within a conservation area. The opening of the canal in 1797 gave rise to a significant cluster of buildings around the lock at the foot of Water Lane, including the Corn Mill. The canal was heavily used for industrial materials, particularly in directing goods to Dickinson's paper mills to the south of Hemel Hempstead. With the opening of the railway in 1837, the freight usage of the canal went into decline. Over time, the canal towpath has become significant for recreational purposes as well as an important place of industrial history.



*A viewing bench just off Common Lane in the Kings Langley Common provides a striking view across the Gade Valley.*



*The Cricket Ground on Kings Langley Common is an important recreational site.*



*The High Street in the village centre, comprising of several listed buildings, forms a significant conservation area.*

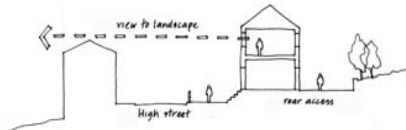


*The canal and its locks are included as part of any conservation area, despite their significance in industrial history and as a site for recreation.*

## MAKING PLACES BUILDING HEIGHTS

Building heights in the village centre of Kings Langley are very consistent, with almost all the buildings two-storey. One of the key distinctive elements in Kings Langley is the difference in elevation between the western and eastern side of the High Street, with the western side approximately a metre higher than the eastern side. This difference, which accounts for the topographical variation along the valley, is made up for by an elevated pavement on the western side of the street.

There are six buildings greater than two storeys (one of which is listed) along the High Street and four of which are of relatively poor quality. While these poorer quality buildings detract from the High Street, it is significant that there are no three-storey buildings on the eastern side of the street, thus allowing for clear views across the valley.



### KEY ISSUES MP3: BUILDING HEIGHTS

MP3A  
Building heights in the village centre are low-rise.

MP3B  
Two-storey heights on the eastern side of the street facilitates views across the Gade Valley.



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## MAKING PLACES DENSITY

The low-rise housing found throughout the settlement is a key element in shaping its distinctive 'village' character. The density of the village on the whole, including open space and public rights-of-way, is approximately 6 units per hectare.

While the residential housing in Kings Langley is generally two-storey, there is a fair amount of variation within these unit types with large implications for densities.

The adjacent images show a sampling of these unit types. They were selected to display a variety of the housing types built over the last 100 years. While they are all two-storey buildings, they represent different features including on and off-street parking; shared front gardens, no front gardens, both front and rear gardens; and detached housing, semi-detached housing, and terraces. The examples include:

1. Detached villas with front and rear gardens with driveways
2. Semi-detached housing with rear garden and shared front garden.
3. Detached houses with small front gardens and large rear gardens with on-street parking, and
4. Terraced units with negligible front gardens and divided rear gardens and on-street parking.

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

### KEY ISSUES MP4: DENSITY

#### MP4A

Two-storey housing is predominant in Kings Langley.

#### MP4B

There is tremendous variation in density among two-storey units due to variation in relation to detached/semi-detached homes; on-street and off-street parking; presence of gardens and garden size; and building plot size.

#### MP4C

Typical range in density extends from approximately 6 units/hectare to 60 units/hectare among two-storey homes.



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



2. A semi-detached house with rear garden and shared front garden with on-street parking.



3. A detached house with rear garden and garage.



4. An end of terrace house with rear garden with rear garden and on street parking.

## Size and density comparisons

1. Total plot size: 0.1545 hectares (ha)

**Units per hectare: 6.4**

(Total unit footprint area: 84 sqm)

2. Total plot size: 0.0333 sqm + 0.0100 ha (shared front garden) = 0.0433 sqm

**Units per hectare: 23**

(Total unit floor area: 45 sqm)

3. Total plot size: 0.0315 ha

**Units per hectare: 32**

(Total unit floor area: 53 sqm)

4. Total plot size: 0.0170 ha

**Units per hectare: 59**

(Total unit floor area: 44 sqm)

## Relationship between street and housing plot

The nature of the street and street network will vary according to plot size. Smaller plots tend to allow a denser street network which in turn facilitates greater permeability. They tend, however, to require on-street parking which demands a wider public right-of-way. The smaller plots also develop a closer relationship with the street itself, allowing less privacy but also providing more streetlife.

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 encouraging densities and housing types that are compatible with the street types.

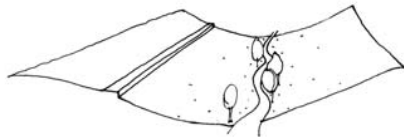


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## MAKING PLACES TOPOGRAPHY

The topography is one of the most defining characteristics of the village of Kings Langley. As can be seen in the plan to the right, the River Gade runs through the Gade Valley, and the bulk of the settlement has been developed on its slopes. The High Street, the most significant road in the village and an historically important through route, runs parallel to the River Gade and does not require any major grade changes. The older residential roads climb the valley slopes, taking advantage of the views, safety from flooding and distance from the formerly industrial canal. The Royal buildings, constructed during the medieval period, were built at the highest elevation.

The topography is mirrored on a smaller scale along the High Street, where the western side of the street steps up to accommodate the change in gradient. The High Street itself rises gently as one enters the village centre and descends upon exiting the village centre. This gradual shift creates a significant impression as one enters the village, particularly from the south.



### KEY ISSUES MP5: TOPOGRAPHY

#### MP5A

Topography is a critical feature in Kings Langley and creates significant views across the valley.

#### MP5B

Key urban design and architectural features such as the elevated pavement and the front door steps on the western side of the High Street, have emerged in Kings Langley as a consequence of the change in gradient.



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## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE VILLAGE MORPHOLOGY

The morphology drawing shown at the right illustrates only the areas of built form. The drawing highlights a number of particular features with regards to street pattern, building type and building density.

### Street pattern

The morphology of Kings Langley highlights the axial nature of the village with through routes running primarily parallel to the river valley (1) and residential streets running perpendicular (2) to the through streets and climbing the valley slopes. There are exceptions to this pattern, including Waterside Lane and the more recently developed streets where the new homes often do not face the street (3). The High Street runs through the heart of the village, although it is apparent that the High Street only has a strong building line on both sides of the street for a short distance. The street pattern breaks down most noticeably in the newer developments by the old Corn Mill (4) and at the northern periphery of the village. Kings Langley Common (5) is a major break in the street pattern.

### Building type

The industrial uses still located adjacent to the Grand Union Canal (6) are evident by the large building plots along the eastern edge of the village. The commercial uses along the High Street are also distinguished by large and more closely built plots than in the residential areas.

### Building density

Based on the spaces between roads and between built form, one can see the streets built with greater and lesser density. It is clear that the houses along the older roads running up the valley have larger gardens.

### KEY ISSUES CE1: VILLAGE MORPHOLOGY

#### CE1A

Kings Langley's morphology has generally evolved with an axial growth, consisting of through streets running parallel to the valley and key residential streets running perpendicularly to the valley

#### CE1B

Recent development has not been consistent with this pattern and buildings in newer developments often do not face the street.

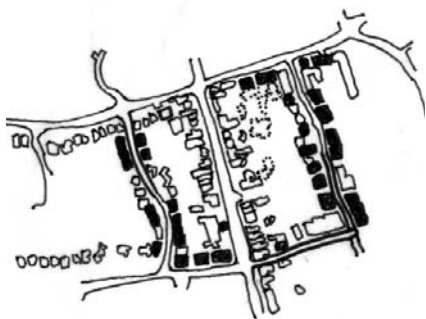


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## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE VILLAGE CENTRE MORPHOLOGY

As noted above, Kings Langley's village centre has a relatively dense and consistent building line throughout the village centre.

The clarity of the village centre morphology is quickly lost as soon as one turns off the High Street. Rather than defined blocks, these spaces are a mix of service areas accessed directly from the High Street (1), service areas accessed from side streets (2), open space (3), and a car park (4). In addition there are footpath access points and residential driveways on the eastern side of the High Street. The larger buildings shown on The Nap are the library and community centre (5). The sketch below illustrates how the street block clarity could, theoretically, be restored.



### KEY ISSUES CE2: VILLAGE CENTRE MORPHOLOGY

#### CE2A

The village centre is based around a consistent and densely constructed High Street.

#### CE2B

There is no clarity to the street blocks.



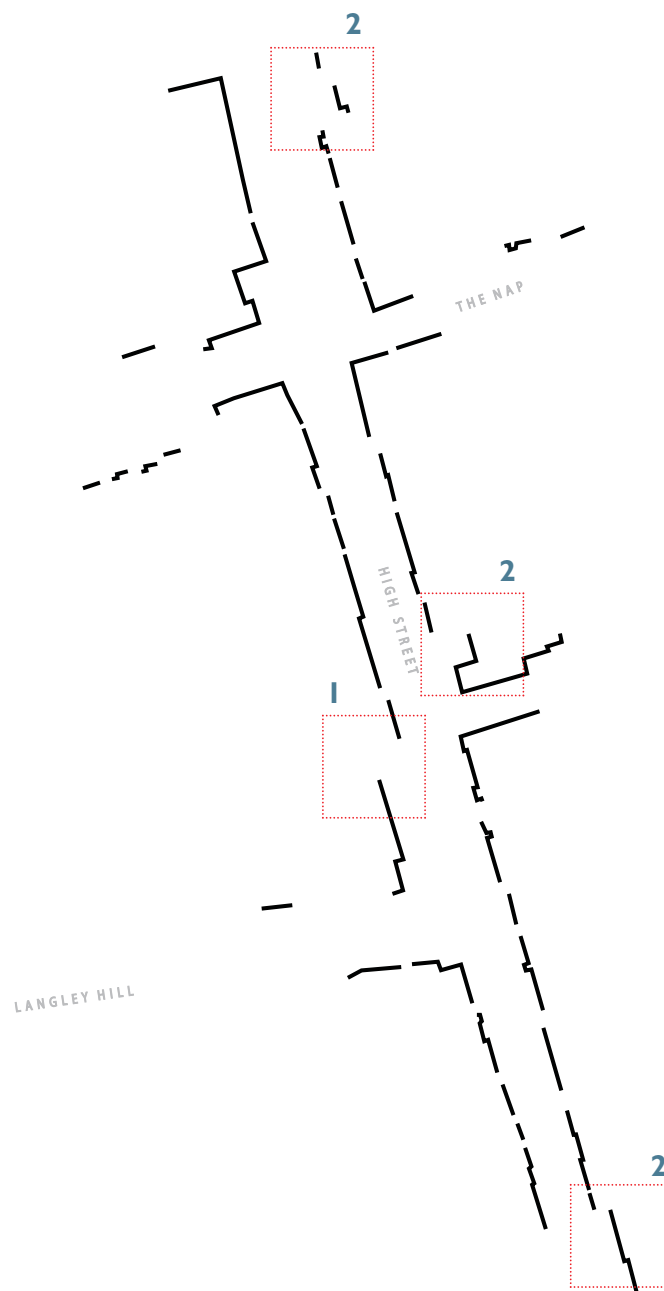
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## CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS, AND GAPS

Building lines establish the way in which a series of building structures meet the street and pavement. A continuous building line creates a clear image of the street, creating a 'street wall'. Setbacks and gaps, while sometimes providing interesting features or key gathering spaces, can impact the clarity of this street wall.

The drawing of the Kings Langley High Street confirms its overall clarity.

There are four significant setbacks along the High Street. One major setback occurs at the post office site on the western side of the High Street (1). This space contributes little to the vitality of the High Street. The other three setbacks are residential developments (2), which are relatively modern developments. The few gaps along the High Street are openings for service access, driveways or footpaths.



### KEY ISSUES CE3: BUILDING LINES, SETBACKS, GAPS

**CE3A**  
Each side of the village centre has a consistent frontage onto the High Street.

**CE3B**  
There are four notable exceptions on either side of the street that disrupt the predominantly even building lines.