

# *St. Margaret's Estate*

CONSERVATION



AREA STUDY



LONDON BOROUGH OF  
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Environment Planning & Review

Area no.

19

## Introduction

Conservation areas were introduced in the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and the lopping of trees above a certain size.

The objective of a conservation area study is to provide a clearly defined analysis of the character and appearance of the conservation area, defensible on appeal, to assist in development control decisions, and to address issues which have been identified in the character appraisal process, for the enhancement or preservation of the conservation area.

It is hoped that the process of the study and the finished document will stimulate and encourage public participation.

The area of St. Margaret's Estate was designated as a conservation area in 1971 by the London Borough of Hounslow, and it was known as the Old Isleworth Conservation Area. Borough Boundary changes in 1994 brought the entire estate within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The conservation area boundary was extended in 1988 to include buildings in Heathcote Road, The Avenue, St. Margaret's Road and Netherton Road.

## Character Appraisal

St. Margaret's Conservation Area is made up of three distinct areas, the residential estate of St. Margaret's, the Campus of Brunel University and to the north of the conservation area, the riverside industrial buildings and Marina. The River Crane Walk, adjoining Isleworth Promenade, is also included within the conservation area, reaching the Thames via Ranelagh Drive. The conservation area incorporates significant landmarks such as Richmond Lock and footbridge and Twickenham Bridge (both listed).

### Location

St. Margaret's Conservation Area is situated in Twickenham. The conservation area lies between the River Thames and its tributary the River Crane, the A316 to the south, and St. Margaret's Road defining the main part of the western boundary. The residential population is mainly centred to the southern area of St. Margaret's Estate, Netherton Road, Heathcote Road and St. Margaret's Road. The northern section is predominantly occupied by the university, working industrial units by the river and retail use along St. Margaret's Road.

### Origins of development

It is now seven hundred years since Twickenham Park was first created from waste lands. The area has had a variety of names: Isleworth Park; New Park of Sheen; New Park of Richmond; Twickenham Park; and in the 1800's for a brief time the northern half was known as Ailsa Park before becoming known as St. Margaret's. A house built in 1805/6 was given the name St. Margaret's by the then owner, the Marquis of Ailsa, in 1817. This name stayed with the area after demolition of the grand house in the 1930s, and the name St. Margaret's is recognised today.

### Prevailing former uses

#### St. Margaret's Estate

Frontages onto the Thames have been popular for mansions and seats for the nobility for over 500 years. Gordon House, Lacy House, St. Margaret's House and



*St. Margaret's Estate as planned by the Conservative Land Society. The church shown was never built. Poster of 1854.*

Twickenham Park House (the latter three now demolished) and their grounds would have occupied the current conservation area.

The Conservative Land Society bought the St. Margaret's site in Twickenham following the advent of the railway, which opened up the Twickenham area to considerable economic growth. The Conservative Land Society was formed in 1852 to exploit the idea of building societies, which themselves dated from 1775, and the 1832 Reform Act. Initiated by the Liberals in Birmingham in 1847, the basic idea was to purchase sites and develop them so that the residents would be obliged to become registered voters in the interest of the party concerned.

The design of the Estate, as can be seen from the artist's illustration (1854), incorporates the image of grand properties within their own parkland, even suggesting a private church, although this was never built. The plots were designed around three pleasure gardens. The sizes of the plots were established as sufficient to qualify owners to vote but frequently exceeded the minimum requirement, and the price of the planned plots varied from £50 to £475 at the river end of the estate. It was up to the owners to build their own houses, and these were consequently built at different periods, which explains the mix of architectural styles. Some plots were not developed for many years and through rights of occupation became double plots.

A trust was set up in 1854, to administer the three pleasure grounds. Their policies and that of the concomitant covenant, assist greatly in ensuring the maintenance and appearance of the grounds. An active Residents Association also exercises strong influence over the wider area of the estate and conservation area.

### **Brunel University**

Gordon House, Railshead Road, formerly known as 'Seaton House', was in residential occupancy from 1718 to 1880. The gardens were apparently designed in a Venetian style with ornamental grounds, fountains and classic vases at every turn! In 1856 it was purchased as a school for the daughters of naval officers. It then became a Royal Naval School and from 1949 an institute. The current institute, called Brunel University, maintains Gordon House, with the surrounding campus stretching down to St. Margaret's Estate.

### **Riverside development along the River Crane**

This area has been a ship builders yard since the C18, and prior to that, is reputed to have been the spot which Turner incorporates in his picture 'The Watercress Gatherers'. However, the road then came alongside the river and the bridge is now gone. During the War in the 1940s the ship yards concentrated on building torpedo boats. Railshead Ferry ran from near the steps of the current marina across to the Old Deer Park, and continued to operate throughout the war. It was feared that pedestrians would be too visible to walk along the Lock.

### **Archaeological significance**

This area would have seen many of the early invaders using the Thames as access inland. The first settlement and enclosure of land in the area probably began in the time of the Saxons as the word Isleworth is of Saxon origin. In about 1220 the area was renamed Isleworth Park by Richard Earl of Cornwall. He probably built a new manor house with a moat; although its situation is unknown, it may have been on the banks of the River Crane. From 1415- 1431 it was the site of Syon Abbey, at the instigation of Henry V, but eventually the Monastery became too small for the abess and convent who requested to move to another site in Brentford. However, it is thought that the lake, which still exists in the pleasure garden between Ailsa Road and St. George's Road, stems from the original drainage ditch dug for the Syon monastery. From 1431 – 1574 the area was put to used as a Royal Park. In about 1440 it was called New Park of Sheen as Henry VI decided to take over tenancy and to make it one of the amenities of Sheen Palace, mainly for deer. It was in the C17 and C18 that the area entered into its great period as a residence. In about 1580 Frances Bacon lived in St. Margaret's and over the years the popularity of the area can be judged by the numbers of other famous writers, musicians and painters who chose to live in the area.

### **Setting and topography**

There is a hierarchy of private space within St. Margaret's Estate. The layout was designed along early Garden Suburb lines, taking advantage of the park of

St. Margaret's House, with large plots grouped around three private 'pleasure gardens'. Not only are the houses mainly set back within large gardens, the three pleasure gardens were designed purely for the enjoyment of the occupants, with private access. There are notably large distances between the properties, which are a great asset to the spacious character of the area. Where the pleasure gardens are not surrounded by private houses they are enclosed by boundaries of brick walls. These high walls provide residents with privacy and pedestrians with a sense of enclosure and intimacy. The visitor feels excluded yet also enclosed within the relatively narrow roads.

Unlike many contemporary avenues on axial or grid plans, the roads were designed to meander through the site affording glimpses of the ornate properties, walled gardens and mature trees, reminiscent of a Capability Brown landscape. Ranelagh Drive is little changed from the original design, that of a promenade along the River Thames. The grounds of the university and the River Walk form a distinct extension to the open landscape of the river and its natural setting. The scale and quality of Gordon House equally serves to reinforce the essentially C18 landscape.

The character of the Estate is therefore defined by the grandiose villas within appropriately large gardens; the abundance of greenery and mature planting; the relationship of spaces between properties affording glimpses of the large communal gardens beyond; privacy and enclosure provided by walled gardens; the vicinity of the River Thames; and an idiosyncratic mix of property styles.

### **Architectural and historic qualities**

The southern end of St. Margaret's Road (204-212) contains several buildings of townscape merit. There are however many more buildings of townscape value, which will be assessed in the proposals section. The area provides a range of examples of high quality domestic architecture from the mid 1800s to the 1930s, an eclectic mix from Victorian to Bauhaus.



*Clifton Lodge, St. Margaret's Drive*

There is a multitude of designs and house types set within spacious boundaries. Detached villas in a deliberate mixture of styles and scales, with 2 storey cottages comfortably sitting next to 4 storey semi-detached houses, although there is a mainly 2 storey character to Ailsa Road and St. Margaret's Drive. Mixtures of concrete, yellow and red brick within buildings and throughout the area provide a variety of facing materials. Stucco work occurs as a feature rather than as complete surface treatment. Eaves brackets, band courses and architraves to openings are evident. Porches and verandahs are a key element in timber and iron.

The exception to the mix of individual properties are those properties which are of a similar style, clearly built by the same developer, but using different colours of brickwork or slight variations in the designs. 25 and 27 St. Peter's Road have a similarity in design and materials with decorative string courses and red or yellow soldier courses to the windows. Such elements are echoed around the estate. 1 Ailsa Road has an unusually high first floor level, and it is partnered by 3 Ailsa Road.

The terraces of Netherton, Kilmorey and St. Margaret's Road and the early C20 semi-detached houses on St. Margaret's Drive have considerable group value due to their fortunate unified design and unaltered state.

Netherton Road is an attractive cul-de-sac of unaltered 2 storey yellow stock brick houses under shallow slate roofs, first floor red brick fascias with terracotta detail and fishscale slates to the bays. The properties along Heathcote Road are similar in quality to those within St. Margaret's Estate with a spectacular Arts and Crafts building at 28/30 Heathcote Road.

There are a number of listed buildings in the conservation area which contribute to its character. The University campus made use of the grounds of Gordon House, and the C18 Gordon House itself, a listed grade II\* building built in 1720, with mid C18 work by Robert Adam in 1758, serves as a nucleus to the establishment. The stable block is also listed. Gordon House plays a prominent and distinguished role when viewed from the Richmond bank. Other notable listed non-residential buildings within the conservation area are the Kilmorey Mausoleum, St. Margaret's Road, built in 1854, by the Earl of Kilmorey in honour of his mistress Miss Hoste. It is built of pink and grey marble in an Egyptian style and is currently undergoing restoration. Richmond Lock and Footbridge (1894) are grade II\* listed and are built of cast iron on stone piers. With an important functional role it is also a focal point and landmark linking pedestrians from Richmond to Twickenham, providing views up and down the Thames. Twickenham Bridge (1933) designed by Dryland and Ayrton is a fine example of early C20 style. Unfortunately in need of restoration, the design of the bridge, lighting features and handrail are all of the art deco style.



*Kilmorey Mausoleum*

20 St. Peter's Road (listed) is an unusual example of a concrete house of the C19 (1883) by W H Henley of the Patent Concrete Building Company for TW Hancock. The front elevation has quite unusual detailing, and it is rendered with a wide plan of 5 bays.

Between the River Crane and Brunel University are the industrial buildings. Railshead Road is narrow with high walls. The tightly knit and informal nature of the development is typical of heavily-used riverside industrial sites, and a marked and stimulating contrast to the remainder of the area. At high water the numerous houseboats dominate the river frontage when viewed from the Surrey bank.

#### **Key unlisted buildings**

Clifton House on St. Margaret's Drive, also incorporated into Brunel University, has an intricate canopy detail of timber trellis work to the front elevation and occupies a key corner site at the junction of St. Margaret's Drive, Kilmorey Road and St. Peter's Road. It is set back within large grounds and screened by mature trees, a glimpse of Clifton House though the gates adds variety and surprise to this corner. The Violet Needham Church opposite, along Kilmorey Road, is set within spacious grounds and includes a stone rose-window and Italianate bell tower to the west-end. The surrounding boundary walls are also of merit.

#### **Materials, textures, and colours**

Despite the mix of styles within St. Margaret's Estate, brick is a dominant material whether gault, yellow or red. Decorative chimney stacks enhance the roofscape. There are also regular features in terracotta, creating plaques, string courses and bands along the upper storeys. Stone architraves and door surrounds are decorative and colourful by use of stone textures and colours. There are original examples of path tiling to the front gardens and porches.

### Local details

Throughout the area strong boundary definition is apparent, mostly achieved by low and high brick walls and hedge planting. Despite the relatively flat terrain, one can feel quite dwarfed by the height of the buildings, and by the mature trees which add further height, colour, light and shade.

Even though such large properties have been built on the St. Margaret's Estate, the pre-planned plots of land were generous and gaps between the buildings have become an important characteristic of the area. This spaciousness between and around the buildings should be maintained in order to retain the grandeur, abundance of greenery and space.

### Contribution of green areas, trees, hedges, gardens and key trees

There is an abundance of greenery from mature trees, hedges and spectacular gardens within St. Margaret's Estate. They are a great asset to the conservation area, adding life and colour, contrasting with the edges of the buildings and walls. This unusual abundance of open space, mass of trees and the vicinity of the river have encouraged a thriving habitat for wildlife.

The pleasure gardens contribute considerably to the value of the area. They provide open space, and an environment for the growth of mature trees. Glimpses of the pleasure gardens are clearly visible through the wide distance between the houses and this characteristic is integral to St. Margaret's Estate. Those properties which were built on double plots clearly indicate the maturity of trees in the pleasure gardens and provide a wonderful backdrop to the properties. The largest of the pleasure gardens between St. George's and Ailsa Road contains a lake, for some years the home for resident swans. There are also two mid C19 listed ornate iron bridges. Both are segmental arched with thin balustrades and span over the lake. Each of the pleasure gardens seem to have different characters the central being romantic and picturesque. The garden to The Avenue, St. Peter's Road and St. George's Road is for the more active, with tennis courts and areas for childrens games. The easternmost garden has the appearance of a lawned promenade, occasionally interrupted by large trees.

The rear elevations of the surrounding properties abutting the pleasure gardens, are visible through the trees and gaps in the vegetation as one walks from one end of the gardens to the other. Attention given to the rear elevation of properties is clearly an important factor in maintaining overall appearance of the area.

Tree lined Ranelagh Drive benefits from mature lime trees, Twickenham Road (A316) and The Avenue also benefit from plane trees.

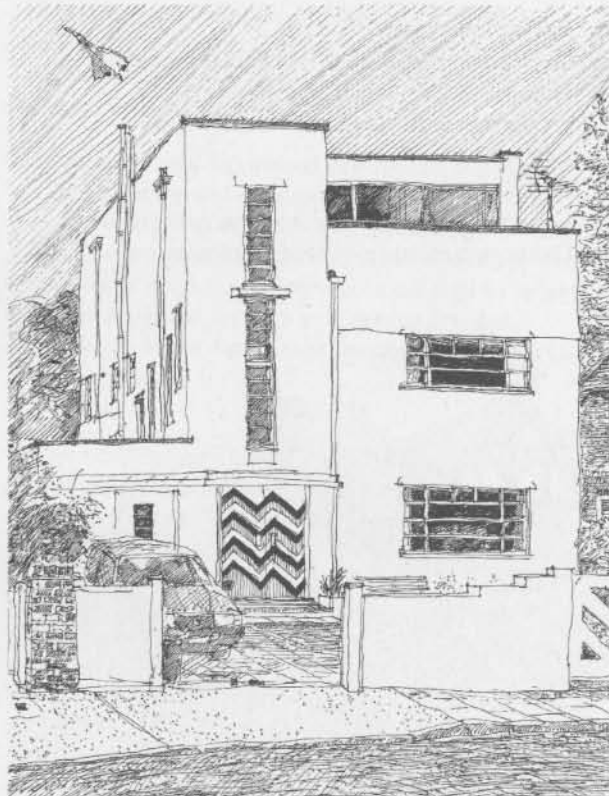
The university grounds provide a sense of spaciousness, so indicative of the conservation area, and along with the greenery of St. Margaret's Estate,

provides a lush backdrop of open space when viewed from the Old Deer Park. Students from the university often walk from Gordon House, Railshead, along the riverside walk, called 'Isleworth Promenade' to Ranelagh Drive and the Lock, which takes them over to the well-used riverside park on the opposite bank. Unfortunately the views of the river, lock and Richmond Hill from the walk are gradually being obscured by ash and sycamore scrub growing out of the bank. The lock footbridge, which was restored in 1994, is an elegant link between the Old Deer Park and St. Margaret's, railings linked to the lock continue along Ranelagh Drive and along the riverside walk as far as Railshead in a similar style. Reinstatement is necessary in some areas, and repainting to restore them to an adequate standard.

The River Crane joins the Thames at Railshead Road, and extensive works have been undertaken by the Environment Agency to shore up the banks and enhance public access. The house boats at Railshead add colourful flora by the use of tubs and pots of geraniums and flowering plants.

### Negative factors

The speed of the cars along The Avenue (A316) and St. Margaret's Road, the noise and the pollution are all detrimental to the setting of the conservation area. Traffic management measures, although necessary are unsightly, especially the crash barriers positioned along the south side of The Avenue.



46 Ailsa Road

The junctions of Ailsa Road with the A316 and St. George's Road with the A316 should be treated more sympathetically, to indicate that one is entering a conservation area, as should the junction of Railshead Road and St. Margaret's Road.

Generally speaking the properties along St. Margaret's Road are set back, with boundary treatments such as walls and mature trees, but in some cases these are being removed to provide forecourt parking, hence damaging to the character of the conservation area.

#### Neutral areas

Neutral areas are those which neither enhance nor detract from the character or appearance of the conservation area, but where there might be some potential for enhancement. Boundary House, St. Margaret's Road is set back and has mature planting along the roadside which helps to soften the appearance, however the building does not make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. Potential enhancement would include further planting and the removal of the concrete garages and their replacement with a more suitable design. A similar problem is caused by the unsightly garages to Douglas House at the corner of The Avenue and St. Margaret's Road.

At 296-298 St. Margaret's Road the shopfronts are not intrusive but improvements should be made to reinstate appropriate signs and fascia boards.

#### Key strengths of the area:

- Strong boundary definition
- Grandiose villas within spacious gardens
- Plentiful space around and between properties with views of the communal gardens beyond
- Mature gardens
- Individual designs within an organised layout
- Deliberate mixture of architectural styles



14 St. George's Road

## Problems & Pressures

- Pressures of traffic and the associated speed, noise and pollution. Aesthetically, the damaging effects of traffic measures such as intrusive crash barriers along The Avenue
- Forecourt parking, particularly along St. Margaret's Road, which has inevitably led to the loss of strong 'edges' so prominent in the conservation area
- Poor floorscape treatments along the Isleworth Promenade from Railshead Road to Ranelagh Drive, with a mixture of concrete paving and tarmac; and due to excessive tree growth along the Thames bank of the walk, loss of views across to the Old Deer Park and along the river
- The junction of Railshead Road and St. Margaret's Road is very congested with parked cars and poor signage creating an unattractive, dangerous entrance into the conservation area
- The shops at St. Margaret's Road are currently in a poor state. The effect is very damaging to the appearance of the conservation area

## Detailed Proposals

Detailed proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the conservation areas are shown on the Proposals sheet.

## Summary

For the study to be successful everyone involved in property ownership, tenancy and management in both the public and private sector needs to contribute to achieving the implementation of the detailed proposals. Many proposals fall outside the Council's control. It should also be noted that current financial constraints on the Council mean that proposals for which it is responsible may take longer than is desirable to implement. The Council will strictly apply Unitary Development Plan policies and, as opportunities arise, pursue the detailed proposals listed in the study in order to preserve, and where possible, enhance the special interest of the conservation areas.

The Proposals Map shows relevant UDP designations, identifies the problems and pressures the area faces and provides an urban design analysis of the area, identifying both positive and negative aspects of the area's character. This map is complementary to the study text and is important in identifying graphically the character of the area. The problems and pressures and the urban design analysis are an integral part of the study and will be taken into account by the Council when relevant to applications for planning permission. The map also lists specific proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area and shows the new BTMs and Article 4(2) Directions now implemented as part of the study.



*Ailsa Road from The Avenue*

## Buildings of Townscape Merit

The Schedule of Buildings of Townscape Merit (BTMs) is a local list, adopted as supplementary planning guidance in 1983, compiled to recognise the value of those buildings which make a positive contribution to the streetscape but have not been included on the statutory list of buildings of architectural and historic interest. It is hoped that by drawing attention to the historic, architectural and townscape interest of such buildings, owners, developers and others will regard them more carefully when considering any proposals for alteration, extension or replacement. BTM status is a material consideration in all planning applications relating to such buildings. In a conservation area permission will not normally be given for the demolition of BTMs. The Council has produced a planning information leaflet on BTMs which is available free of charge.

## Residential property

### The role of the Council, and Article 4(2) Directions.

The Council is able to control new development through its powers under the planning acts and is always willing to give advice to those who want to undertake new work. There is a range of guidance leaflets available regarding conservation areas, listed buildings and regarding the types of development requiring planning permission. If you are in doubt about the need to obtain planning permission for intended works, you should contact the Environment Planning & Review Department at the Civic Centre.

Where a particularly good group of single dwellings would suffer if work, exempt from planning permission, were to be carried out (e.g. changing windows, demolition of front boundary walls etc.) then the Council may apply an **Article 4(2) Direction** after consultation with owners. Such directions mean that certain permitted development rights, as specified within the Direction, are removed and owners must then apply for permission to carry out such intended works. The object of Article 4(2) Directions is to control the gradual changes to houses which can occur over time without the need for planning permission but which could, if left unchecked, lead to an erosion of the character of a conservation area.

### Permitted development rights which could be removed include:

- i. the enlargement, improvement or other alteration of a house
- ii. any alteration to the roof, including chimneys
- iii. the construction of a porch outside any external door
- iv. the provision of a hard surface within the curtilage
- v. the installation alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna
- vi. the painting of previously unpainted external surfaces
- vii. the erection, alteration or demolition in part or whole of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure.

Article 4(2) Directions have been made affecting a number of properties in the study area. These are listed in the text on the Proposals sheet.

## Notes to Owners and Occupiers of Buildings

Under present legislation residents are entitled to carry out some minor works to their houses as 'permitted development'. This freedom places a great responsibility on owners to consider the overall quality of the street and the area when considering alterations to their property. There is plenty of opportunity to preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area by paying attention to small details on houses. Without care, even apparently minor alterations, accumulating over time can dilute the quality of the area. Examples of such changes include the installation of PVCu windows, changes to roof materials, alterations to chimneys, rendering, painting or cladding in an otherwise brick faced street, removal of boundary walls and the use of front gardens for parking.

What constitutes 'permitted development' can be a complex matter and residents should contact the Council in the first instance if in any doubt. Importantly, local residents and local groups, in particular, can help preserve or enhance the conservation area by helping to record original features and passing on useful information about local crafts people and suppliers of local materials.

When considering undertaking works which do require planning permission, the best approach is still to contact the Environment Planning & Review Department for advice. Of particular concern are proposals for dormer windows and extensions, both of which can have a negative impact on the street scene. In this context it should be noted that rear elevations are also often visible from the public domain. Of equal impact is the breaking down of front boundaries and the destruction or adaption of front gardens for car parking. Design guidance leaflets are also available on these subjects from the Council and are free of charge.

## Forecourt parking

The creation of hardstandings is in many cases achieved without consideration for its effect on the surrounding environment. With a little thought the visual impact of such parking can be reduced. London Borough of Richmond upon Thames provide a leaflet entitled 'Design Guidelines for Car Parking in Front Gardens' upon request.

## Landscape and planting

Trees above a certain size in conservation areas which are not already subject to a Tree Preservation Order, are protected automatically by the requirement that six weeks' notice must be given to the Council before any proposed work is carried out. Generally this requirement applies to trees with a trunk diameter greater than 75mm at a point measured 1.5m above ground level. The Council has published planning information and design guidance leaflets regarding landscape and trees which are available free of charge.

## Implementation

The Council will implement those proposals under its control as opportunities arise and when funds become available and will give advice on grants and action that can be taken by other groups and individuals. The Council will monitor the effectiveness of any Article 4(2) Directions and will review the progress of enhancement proposals on a regular basis.

## Acknowledgements

The co-operation and input of all individuals and organisations who took part in the consultation process for this study is gratefully acknowledged by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

The illustrations used in this study were produced by Howard Vie for the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

This study was approved by the Council's Environment Committee in February 2001. The proposals for extensions to the conservation area, new Buildings of Townscape Merit and Article 4(2) Directions have now been implemented.

Front cover illustration is of the tower of Gordon House, St. Margaret's.

## Other Publications

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has also published the following information.

### Planning Information Leaflets

- no. 1 Conservation Areas
- no. 2 Listed Buildings
- no. 3 Historic Buildings
- no. 4 Historic Buildings: Maintenance and Repair
- no. 5 Trees: Legislation and Procedure
- no. 6 Buildings of Townscape Merit

### Design Guidance Leaflets

- no. 1 Design Guidelines for Shopfronts and Shopsigns
- no. 2 Design Guidelines for Car Parking in Front Gardens
- no. 3 Design Guidelines for External Alterations to Houses
- no. 4 Design Guidelines for House Extensions
- no. 5 Trees: Landscape Design, Planting and Care
- no. 6 Design Guidelines for Small Housing Sites
- no. 8 Design Guidelines: Wildlife in Gardens
- no. 9 Design Guidelines for Nature Conservation and Development
- no. 10 Security by Design
- no. 11 Design Guidelines for Shopfront Security

### Street Design Guide

### Tree Strategy

### Conservation Area Studies

Studies for the other conservation areas in the Borough are available or are in preparation.

**These leaflets and documents are available from the Environment Planning & Review Department reception on the 2nd floor of the Civic Centre.**

**If you would like a copy of this leaflet in Braille, large print, on audio tape, or in a community language, please contact the Communications & Media Unit on 020 8891 7162**

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## LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

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