

INTRODUCTION



The subjects of the Conservation Plan are Merton Priory, a monastic complex first established on the site in 1117AD and continuously rebuilt, extended and occupied until the Dissolution in 1538, and Merton Abbey Mills, a series of water-based and water-powered industrial works developed on the site of the Priory from the seventeenth century, some of which continued to operate into the twentieth century.

The site now contains :

- the visible and buried remains of Merton Priory;
- a purpose-built Chapter House chamber containing a number of objects associated with the Priory;
- two early industrial buildings originally associated with calico-printing in the eighteenth century and the sites of others;
- several nineteenth and twentieth century buildings associated with the fabric-printing works of Edmund Littler and Liberty & Co; and
- the site of the design workshops and works of William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Much of the site of Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills has been developed for housing, industry, leisure and retail, but the chamber contains remains of the monastic chapter house and the area generally provides a resource for research, education, and inspiration by virtue of its historical connections with the Priory and the works of Littler, Liberty and Morris. The former industrial buildings are mostly used as craft shops and studio offices.

Aerial photograph taken in the late 1990s, showing the approximate extent of the area covered in the Conservation Plan (dotted outline) and the Visitor Centre (outlined red).



However, although there are several industrial buildings surviving, fragments of the Priory are still visible, and other remains have been preserved beneath later structures, the character of the area and its historical associations are being lost beneath modern buildings and roads.

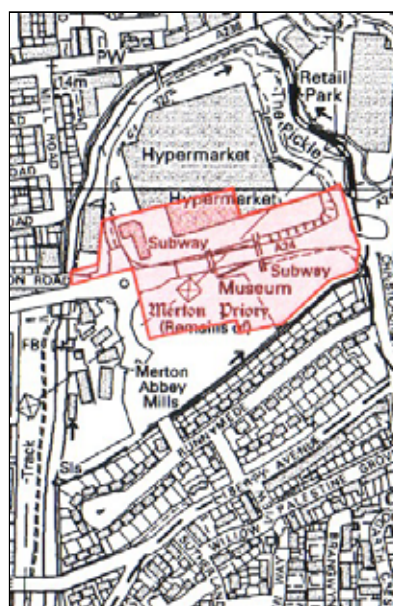
BRIEF

This Conservation Plan was prepared by the Merton Priory Trust in association with the London Borough of Merton and was intended to establish as full an understanding of the site and its significance as was possible; to determine how that significance was vulnerable; and to prepare a set of policies intended to guide the future long-term care, conservation, and management of the site and objects associated with it, with reference to current development proposals which include a visitor centre.

The separate Management Plan is intended to suggest how current proposals might be implemented.

STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

An area containing the foundations of the monastic chapter house and the site of the principal monastic buildings, some of which survive as remains under recent buildings and structures, was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the 1980s, prior to large scale redevelopment which commenced in January 1986 (SAM No LO151). The limits of the Scheduled area are indicated on an extract from the latest Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map, issued by English Heritage.



Extract from the map issued by English Heritage, showing the extent of the Scheduled area (shown red). [Not to scale- illustrative purposes only.]

However, the map issued by English Heritage is relatively small in scale and for the purposes of the Conservation Plan an attempt has been made to transcribe the extent of the Scheduled area onto all editions of the Ordnance Survey twenty five-inch and 1:1250 plans, as far as this was reasonably possible.

The boundary of the Scheduled area now bears little relationship to the existing features on the site, but it does appear to contain the principal buildings of the monastic complex.

Two lengths of precinct wall are Grade II Listed buildings, being located to the north-east and west of the monastic buildings, as also are the two older buildings at Merton Abbey Mills.

In addition to these statutory designations there are a number of policies relevant to any proposals for the site. These are contained either within national advisory notes, such as the Planning Policy Guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment as *PPG15 : Planning and the Historic Environment* (September 1994) and *PPG 16 : Archaeology & Planning* (November 1990), or local planning policies contained within the *Unitary Development Plan* adopted by the London Borough of Merton in October 2003.

UDP Policy CW.1 relates to proposals to regenerate the Colliers Wood Urban Centre, which includes the sites of Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills, for the benefit of the local community, with new development, environmental improvements, and new facilities, but the document also includes the intention to protect and enhance the heritage features within the same area. The Proposals Map in the UDP identifies both the Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Designated Conservation Area based on Merton Abbey Mills, and the document includes policies applicable to both of these (UDP Policies BE1-BE8 and BE13).

Extract from the latest Ordnance Survey plan, showing the extent of the Merton Abbey Mills Designated Conservation Area (outlined orange).



The UDP also refers to Archaeological Priority Zones and includes policies for their protection (Policies BE13-BE14). The Proposals Map includes an extensive Archaeological Priority Zone containing both Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills.

PPG 9 'Nature Conservation' and the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) also apply here.

With respect to nature conservation outside of statutory designated sites, PPG 9 states that "Sensitive landscaping and planting, the creation, maintenance and management of landscape features important to wildlife, and the skilled adaptation of derelict areas can provide extended habitats."

The UDP identifies the following environmental policies in relation to the Merton Priory site and its immediate urban context:

The Wandle Valley is identified as –

- Metropolitan Open Land (Policies NE1, NE2 and ST20)
- A Green Corridor (Policy NE8)
- A Green Chain (Policy NE3)
- A Leisure Walking Route (Policy WC1 and L2)
- An Existing Cycle Route (Policy WC4)

The A 24 Merantun Way is identified as an area subject to –

- Improvements to Streetscape/ Frontage Policy (Policy CW1)
- An existing Cycle Route (Policy WC4)

PREPARATION

The Conservation Plan has been prepared by Barry Stow DipArch RIBA FRSA, conservation architect; Fred Aldsworth BA FSA MIFA IHBC, archaeologist and heritage consultant; and Russ Canning MLI MRTPI FRSA, landscape architect.

They were greatly assisted by David Saxby AIFA, of the Museum of London Archaeology Service, and members of the Merton Priory Trust, particularly John Schofield and Dennis Turner, to whom they are grateful for their assistance.

LIMITATIONS

No particular limitations were placed on the work involved in the preparation of the Conservation Plan. It was recognised, however, that a full excavation report on works undertaken on the site by the Museum of London Archaeology Service was due to be published later in 2006 and that this may include additional material relating to the post-medieval period. The information in the document is, therefore, based almost entirely on previously published material, interim reports on the excavations, and the three popular booklets published by the Museum of London in association with the London Borough of Merton (*Bruce & Mason 1993; Saxby 1995; and Saxby 2005*). It is recognised that it may not comprise a full and complete account of all previous archaeological discoveries and that some modifications and additions may be desirable when the results of all previous investigations are available.

CONSULTATIONS

During the preparation of the Conservation Plan the consultants had contact with a number of individuals and attended four project review meetings with the Merton Priory Trust and the London Borough of Merton.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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ADOPTION

The Conservation Plan was approved by English Heritage on the and adopted by the Merton Priory Trust and the London Borough of Merton on

STRUCTURE

The Conservation Plan conforms to the structure proposed by the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage.

The sections in Part One : Significance consider aspects which provide an understanding of the site (1.1); a description and gazetteer (1.2); an historical overview (1.3); and an assessment of the significance of the whole site and components of it (1.4).

The topography and geology (1.1.1) provides a context for the setting of Merton Priory and Merton Abbey Mills and the section on archaeology (1.1.2) deals with discoveries relating to settlement or activities in the area prior to the establishment of the medieval Priory in 1114AD. The section on Merton Priory (1.1.3) deals with the history of the medieval Priory; the excavations that have been undertaken on its site; and provides an interpretation of the two sources of evidence. There is then an account of the Priory at and immediately following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538 (1.1.4) and this is followed by a description of the subsequent historical development of the site from the earliest industrial activities down to the present day, under the general heading of Merton Abbey Mills (1.1.5).

The following sections provide descriptions in the form of a gazetteer of visible and buried remains of Merton Priory and of large objects associated with it (1.2.1); of buildings associated with Merton Abbey mills (1.2.2); of earlier and later structures on or near the site (1.2.3); and of the urban landscape and ecology (1.2.4).

The historical overview (1.3) considers the intrinsic importance and heritage value of the site and the remains that survive, whilst the assessment of significance (1.4) considers its broader role as a heritage asset. The latter includes a statement of significance (1.4.1) and some general comments relating to the assessment of individual elements (1.4.2).

The sections in Part Two : Conservation Policy provide an introduction (2.1) and then explain how the significance of the various elements are vulnerable to change (2.2). The next sections deal with conflicts between different interests as issues (2.3) and then provide a series of Conservation Plan policies which are intended to protect the long- term significance of the site and the remains on it and guide immediate management proposals (2.4). These are followed by a statement indicating how the document will be implemented and reviewed in the future (2.5). Finally, there is supporting information in the form of a list of references and bibliography.