

Sutton Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area

Designated in 2011, the Sutton Town Centre High Street Crossroads Conservation Area (CA) encompasses the southern end of Sutton's high street. A relatively small CA (covering 4.6ha) it nevertheless has high value in terms of its overall historic character and the significance of a number of individual buildings.

Early references to Sutton have been recorded as far back as the seventh century and Sutton remained a fairly small rural settlement until the mid-1800's. The high street has always been a busy and important thoroughfare between London and the south, with The Cock public house and hotel an important stop to refresh horses and travellers alike. A map dating from 1815 shows that Sutton has always been a linear settlement, the alignment of the high street today is likely to have been a feature of the area since the Middle Ages. With the opening of the railway in 1847 Sutton developed rapidly, bringing new trade and custom to the high street.

By 1900 Sutton was a small town and its high street was lined with Victorian shops and a number of impressive older buildings. Development continued into the early 1900's and during the inter-war period, with new public and civic buildings as well as leisure and cultural facilities including cinemas and theatres. These later developments saw the loss of some of the larger residential properties in the area, but overall, the character of the high street remained a self-sufficient and prosperous financial and retail area.



Sutton High Street in 1920. © Historic England Archive

Developments in the mid-20th century have had mixed success within the CA. Larger buildings along the high street (including two shopping centres) have

replaced older buildings, sometimes to the detriment of the character and historic context of the area. Recent public realm improvements outside Sutton station (and those completed in 2010-11) have had a positive impact along the high street, although subsequent piece-meal works and lack of a management plan are evident in parts of the CA. Much of historic Sutton still exists, although it is perhaps more evident when looking at the upper floors of buildings, with the plethora of modern treatments of shop fronts at a ground floor level, on the whole, detracting from the character of the area.

As one of only four metropolitan town centres in London, Sutton faces unprecedented levels of growth. Higher intensity development could put pressure on, and threaten, the historic fabric of the area. The CA itself is already under development pressure and is on the Heritage at Risk Register.

The London Borough of Sutton are looking to support further development and regeneration of the high street. The Sutton Town Centre Masterplan (June 2016) has identified a number of development sites within, and immediately adjacent to, the CA that could provide circa 1,300 new homes, including a new Civic Centre, over the next 15 years. There are also significant infrastructure improvements proposed including: a new Tramlink route and station, the east-west public realm improvements between Manor Park and Trinity Square and enhanced green spaces amongst others. The planned growth in the emerging Sutton Local Plan and the Mayor of London's ambitions set out in 'A City for All Londoners' is expected to put pressure on the historic fabric of Sutton but also bring opportunities for further investments and enhance its historic character.

The local authority have recognised that the CA, with its historic interest, can act as a catalyst to help support the economic growth and social vitality of this town centre, through enhancing its local distinctiveness and putting heritage at the heart of delivering sustainable growth. The Sutton Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) will support the delivery of this through new partnerships and a commitment from all stakeholders to champion the special character of the high street. HAZ partners include Successful Sutton Business Improvement District and Carshalton and District History and Archaeology Society, who are ensuring local businesses and communities champion heritage issues and create a lasting legacy for the high street. All partners will engage with residents, businesses and visitors to generate a better understanding of the value and role of local heritage, reinforce a sense of place and enhance the experience of all those who live, visit and work in Sutton.

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