

EARLY NORMAN FORTIFICATION AND VICTORIAN SCHOOL
TO BE DESTROYED IN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL



Figure 1 The former St Mary Bredin School site seen from above Dane John Gardens



Fig 12 Proposed north and west facing elevations (Guy Hollaway Architects, Drwg No 15.066-GHA-XX-PL-DR-A-300-S0-00, 16.08.2017, Rev -)

Figure 2 Elevations of the proposed flats for 156 students

INTRODUCTION

The Planning Application CA//17/02456 has just been published (November 6th. 2017) requesting permission for the building of a block of flats on the site of the former St Mary Bredin School. This is the last corner of the large site along the ring road, purchased by Canbury Holdings Ltd in 2014, and covered since then with blocks of flats designed for student use. If this application is approved then we will be faced for many years to come with a wall of high buildings, without any break of open space, between Wincheap and the New Dover Road. A tall building like this, facing a Roman/Medieval city wall, would just not be permitted in any other walled town in Europe. However this kind of general restriction on developments, because they affect the setting of existing monuments like the walls, do not seem to carry much weight in the present climate. A simple objection to the medieval pastiche design features of the proposal, which is a very odd one indeed, might not succeed on its own.

Fortunately there are two glimmers of hope, firstly because the former School of St Mary Bredin has some architectural merit and many consider worth retaining it, and secondly, and this may prove to have the greatest chance of success, recent excavations on the site of Palamon Court adjacent by Canterbury Archaeological Trust, supplemented by some trial investigation of the former St Mary Bredin School site itself, have shown that the low mound that the school sits on is dated to the time of the conquest, and is in fact the corner of the fortified outer bailey of Canterbury's Norman motte and bailey castle, which has Dane John as its motte.

Below the medieval level some Roman pottery and bone fragments have been discovered, probably related to the cemetery which surrounded this area when the Normans arrived and began to build their castle around 1066. It is thought that the South Canterbury landscape had a number of funerary mounds similar to Dane John stretching from Pin Hill across Watling Street to Oaten Hill, dominating the skyline, but so far there is no evidence, according to the new 52 page Heritage Environment Assessment commissioned by the developers on the planning portal from MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), of a Roman burial mound under the former St Mary Bredin School.

The development as described in the application would completely sweep away both the school and the remains of the medieval fortification.

FORMER ST MARY BREDIN SCHOOL



Figure 3 Former St Mary Bredin School October 2017

This building is within the city conservation area and considered by Canterbury City Council to be a "heritage asset" in their unpublished Canterbury City Council Rhodaus Town Peugeot Garage Site Development Brief 2011 p 19. According to W.H. Urry in his article on the mounds of Canterbury in *Archaeologia Cantiana* [*Salt Hill, Arch Cant* vol 61, 1949] the Rhodaus Town mound was partially lowered in 1783 to accommodate a building which in turn was replaced in 1860 by the St Mary Bredin School for 100 local boys and girls. It continued as a school until 1940 and then was used as a restaurant until the end of the war. Sold in 1951 it became part of the business space belonging to various motor trading companies, ending with Peugeot, that operated along this part of the ring road, and it was still being used as offices associated with the motor trade at final closure in 2014.

The Planning Application includes a surveyor's report, commissioned by the developer, on the state of the building with photos, in a document titled Viability Report, the building's present condition is described and various options for its future use are considered and estimates given of repair costs.

In summary :

Offices : Conversion cost	£730,000
Community Use (Nursery, Day centre)	£790,000
Residential Class C3	£740,000
Restaurant or Cafe Class A3	£1,020,000
Health Centres or Clinics Class D1	£800,000

In a letter from Historic England to the architect in September 2016 the conversion costs for Residential Class 3 were doubted and the developer stated that if required to make a formal submission about the development they would ask the Council to seek independent advice in order to get an alternative assessment (this letter is to be found amongst the 89 planning documents at the end of a document usefully labelled PART 2).

It is also worth noting that Historic England praised the building in the same letter by saying that "In its absence there is a danger that the historic city could be interpreted as having been completely contained within the wall in this area" and "demolition would result in a harm to that asset".

After that letter was written the architects apparently entered into a consultancy agreement with Historic England and had a number of meetings and by the time the last letter was written from Historic England in June 2017 the Inspector states that "justification is capable of being made for demolition of the existing school building, as required by paragraph 132 of NPPF, although we think that the financial information provided will need to be independently tested." That letter can be found at the end of the document labelled PART 3. As far as residents are concerned we would anticipate that most would prefer any of the five use options listed in preference to more flats, but clearly that wish has to be argued cogently in conjunction with the architectural ones.

RHODAS TOWN MOUND

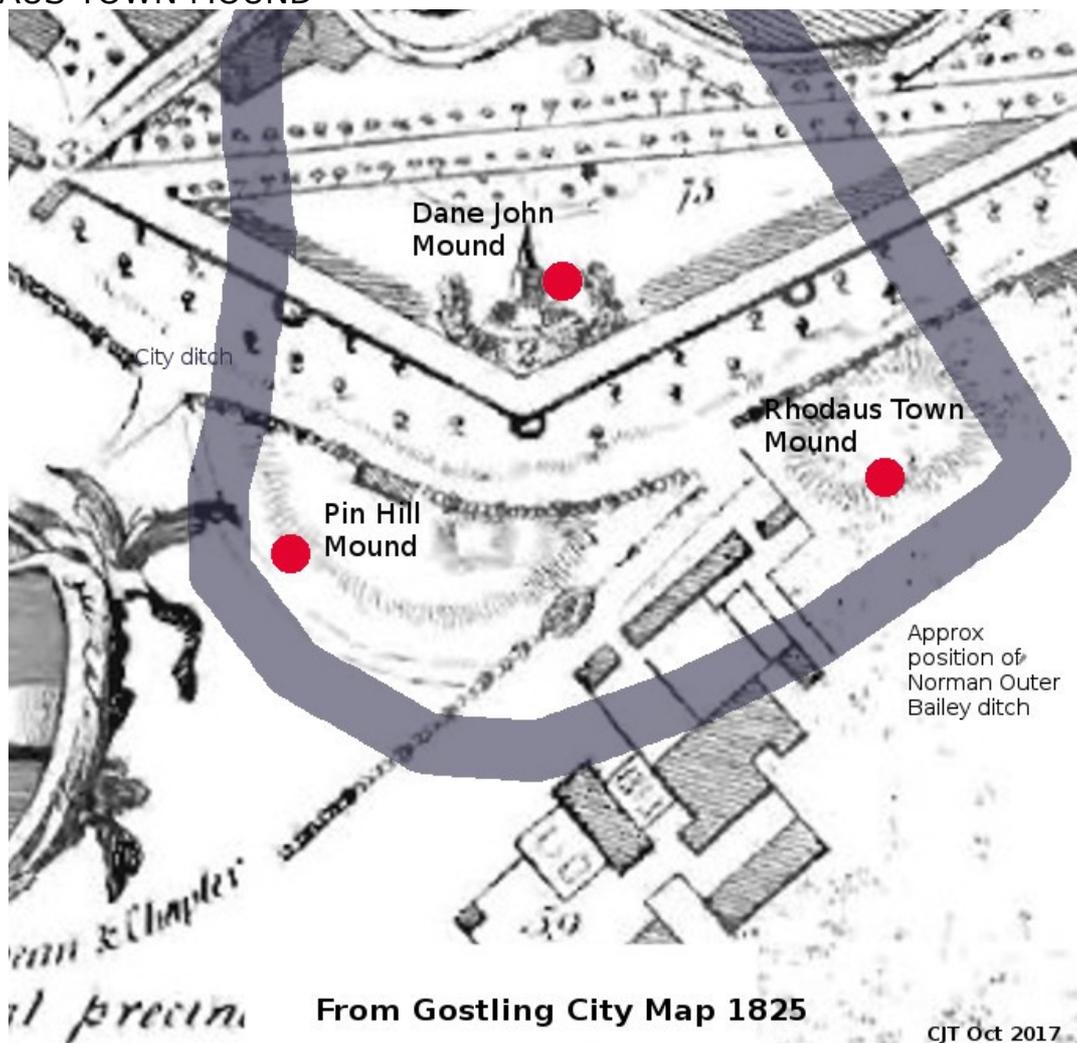


Figure 4 The Pin Hill and Rhodaus Town mounds show on Gostling's 1825 plan

The two oddly shaped mounds shown in Figure 4 are at Pin Hill and Rhodaus Town. It now seems certain that these areas, as we shall see, represent the remains of raised ground which formed part of the occupation area of the outer fortification of that motte and bailey castle centred on Dane John. The Pin Hill mound appears to show another small but higher mound above it, showing through, and this is thought to be the Roman burial mound mentioned

in histories of Canterbury. e.g. in Stukeley W, *Itinerarium curiosum*, 1724 "without the walls" at Dane John. This mound was flattened when the Canterbury East Station was built in 1860 but must have been prominent in medieval times. The other mound, under the former St Mary Bredin School, has been part of the Canterbury landscape for around 950 years but has passed largely unnoticed. It is included within Canterbury's Area of Archaeological Importance.

The MOLA Assessment contains a detailed heritage and archaeological survey which explains why the school sits on a mound that is three metres higher than the surrounding area. Test excavation trenches and boreholes show that near its top the mound contains about 2 metres of occupation material from the Norman period, with some Roman material below. Furthermore it has been confirmed that deep Norman ditches surround the mound on two sides, and most importantly a section at the top of the mound facing Palamon Court shows that the rampart, on which stood a defensive palisade of timber, is still extant, extending for as much as 15 metres along towards the ring road. The area is in fact the corner of the outer bailey of the motte and bailey castle centred on Dane John mound, with some of its medieval surface surviving intact as it has been protected by the school since 1860. This is a rare find and indicated by Historic England to be of national importance.

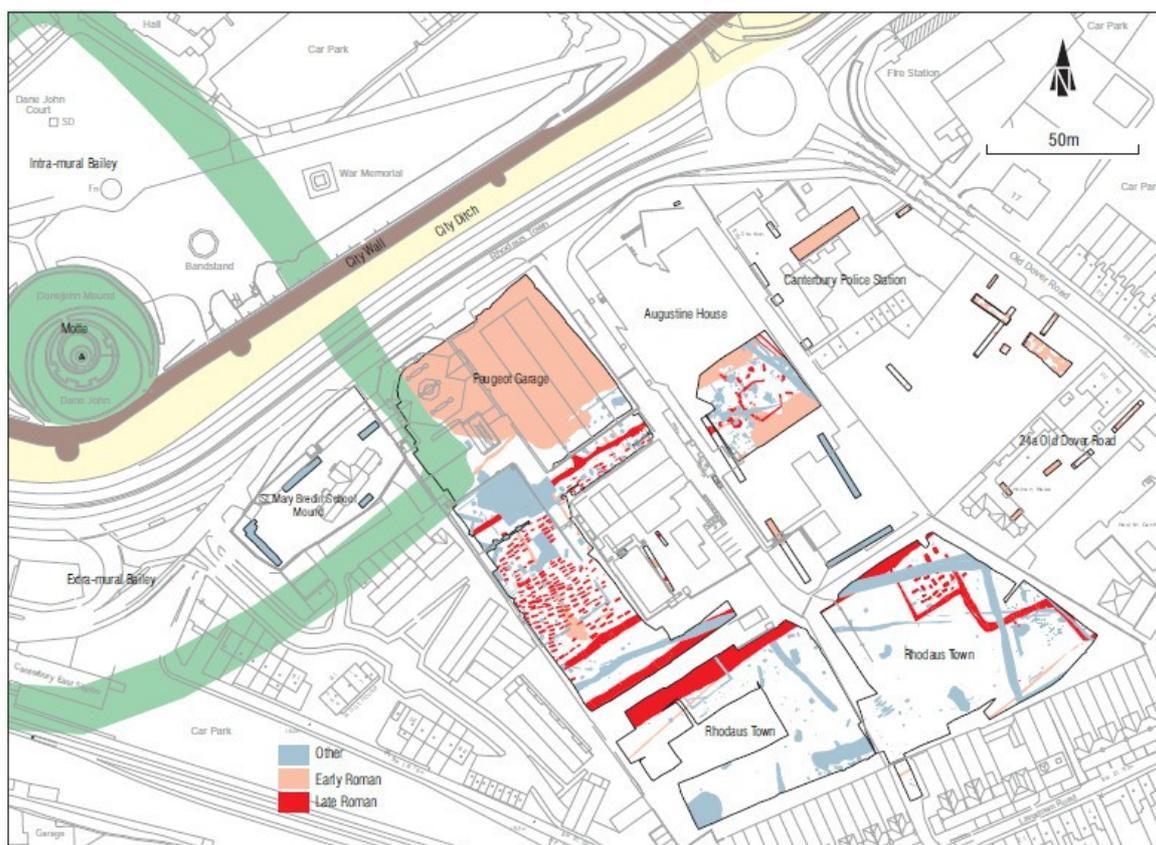


Fig 2. Excavated area showing previous archaeological investigations (1:1600)

Figure 5 from Canterbury Archaeological Trust Post-excavation report (Helm 2017)

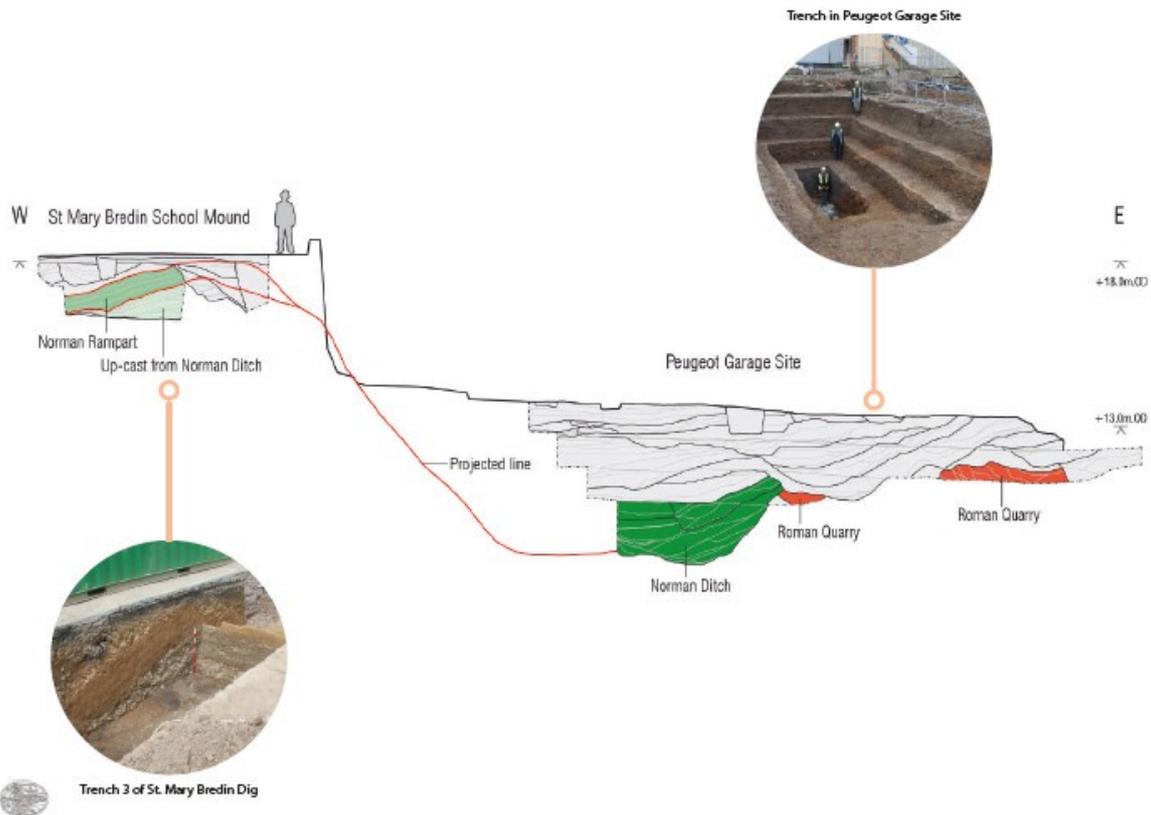
Figure 5 shows the extent of the excavations carried out last year under what is now Palamon Court. The green line shows the route of the outer bailey ditch,

and the recent excavations right up against the former St Mary Bredin School have shown that the ditch turns the corner tightly around the south-facing part of the site.

When the ditch was dug around 1066 the spare earth would have been thrown up to form the rampart. You will note that a trench has been dug by the archaeologists across into the former St Mary Bredin School site on the eastern side, and surprisingly some of this earth rampart has been preserved just under the school. This section is shown in Figure 6.

In the MOLA report p 18 they state "The remains of the Norman embankment on the site would normally be of sufficient significance to warrant preservation in situ."

It is again worth quoting the Historic England Inspector in his Sept 17th letter: "The mound on which the current school stands may be the only above ground illustration of that arrangement [motte and bailey castle] outside the wall and, when considered in conjunction with the associated buried evidence of a ditch and solid rampart, is of considerable heritage significance".



4.3 Motte and Bailey

guy hollaway
ARCHITECTS

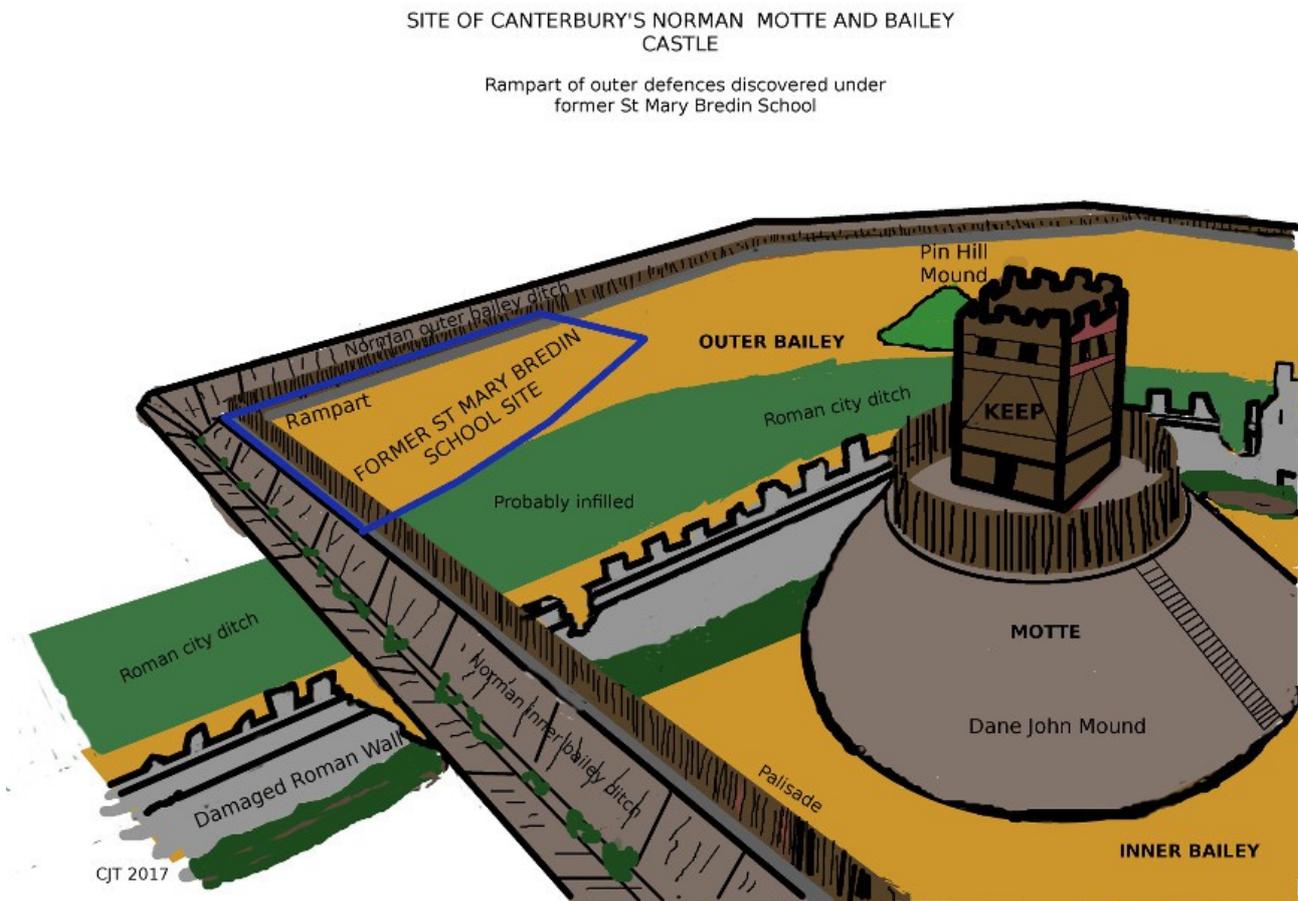
Figure 6 from Planning Application document PART 2 p 20

Figure 6 above looks north towards Dane John Gardens and shows the bottom of the Norman bailey ditch that has been revealed, under the side entrance to Palamon Court. About 8 metres above the bottom of the ditch a trench dug across shows the earth rampart curving down to the occupation surface of the

medieval fortification.

Figure 7 below is a quick sketch produced for this document which shows roughly how the motte and bailey might have looked from above what is now Dane John Gardens, looking south. The site of the former St Mary Bredin School can be seen tucked into the south eastern corner of the outer bailey with the bailey ditch on either side.

Arguments against this development should mention that the Dane John mound is already a scheduled ancient monument and so the area of the former St Mary Bredin School site, being an intrinsic part of the outer bailey fortifications of the same castle should also be scheduled. The September 2016 letter from the Inspector at Historic England stated clearly "However, of greatest importance is the discovery of a major phase of Norman defensive works, comprising evidence of an early medieval rampart and defensive ditch, all of which associated with a probable motte and bailey castle".



**Figure 7 Sketch prepared for this report showing same view angle as Figure 1
Note that arrangement of Roman wall/city ditch/bailey ditch is conjectural**

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

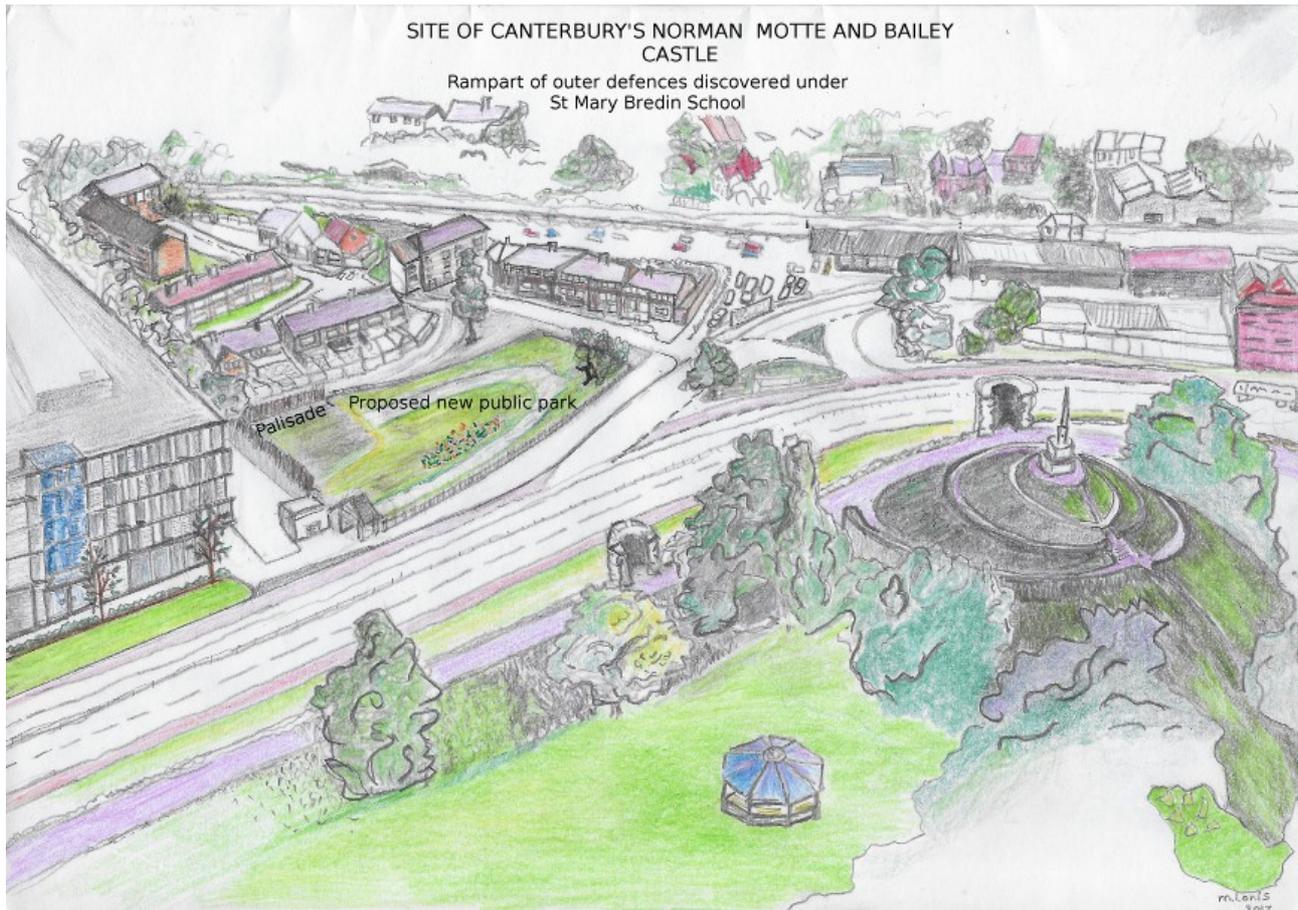


Figure 8 from same view position with an impression of how it could look

If the mound is scheduled and the school is not retained then there are many possibilities for good use of new open space, much-needed in South Canterbury.

After careful demolition of the school, archaeological investigations would be undertaken, in conjunction with Historic England. Then the area could be landscaped to imaginatively reflect the defensive function of this important heritage asset and this aspect might be well displayed by exposing the length of the rampart in the interior, building a wooden palisade along it and describing the castle on interpretative boards. As the several metre drops down to the side entrance of Palamon Court and to Rhodus Close at ground level are the locations of the ditches then these verticals might be used imaginatively too. This would be an educational asset for the city, a new place for tourists to visit, another part of the castle to see from the Dane John mound.

The addition of railings at the perimeter, possible reuse of the former St Mary Bredin School entrance porch and grass, tree and flower planting within, could transform the street scene which is currently a bleak corner of Canterbury.

Amenity benefits, in addition to the clear heritage benefit, would include:

1. Adding to public open space to replace losses elsewhere in Canterbury, used by residents, students and visitors to the historical displays.
2. A green break in the otherwise built-up view for those travelling around the

ring road between Wincheap and New Dover Road

3. A more attractive approach to Canterbury East Station

4. New trees and a break in the canyon of buildings to improve air quality.

5. Improving the increasingly impoverished setting for Rhodaus Close residents. The possible addition of land beyond the current perimeter would improve their view greatly, currently garages and vehicle hire.

OBJECTIVES

For any of the above to happen we need firstly to persuade the planning committee that the application should be rejected on the grounds that building the student accommodation block would damage our heritage asset of national importance, that being the extant part of the motte and bailey castle. If this is accepted and the site is subsequently scheduled the building upon it, the school, is unlikely to have any commercial value. At that point all interested parties will need to consider whether the school can be converted into something useful, or demolished and the land turned into new open space, along the lines described above.

If we also wish to argue, that the former St Mary Bredin School should be saved and listed because of its own special characteristics and that argument succeeds and that is the only reason given for refusal, then it will also save the castle bailey area for the time being, and we can fight that one another day. However the financial implications of keeping the building are immense. It is unfortunately not listed and who will pay up to £700,000 to modernise it?

If the site is to be scheduled, we need to use strong amenity arguments to achieve this result as Historic England have so far found low amenity values in a cleared and open site. However of course the developer would not put such positive amenity arguments to them and we need to do it, nobody else will.

When and if the site is scheduled Historic England would advise on how the site should be investigated by archaeologists and then landscaped for use by the public. This could be done at minimum cost, even just fencing the site initially whilst funds were raised, and might be financially supported by a grant from Historic England itself, Heritage Lottery Fund etc.

In summary then the main argument should perhaps be for the retention of the mound for its heritage value and the amenity open space then offered, this is likely to be more effective than arguing for the school alone, though that should also be attempted. A complex question of priorities to be resolved by us and by the planning committee.

The closing date for comments is 1st December 2017 and we hope members and others who are concerned with the preservation of this unique part of our Norman heritage, and see it as a way of creating some new open space in South Canterbury at the same time, will hopefully consider objecting to this planning application on heritage grounds and request that Historic England schedule the Rhodaus Town mound as it is an intrinsic part of the motte and

bailey castle complex and would result in a major amenity gain.
There is of course plenty of opportunity for those who are just convinced by the need to save the Victorian school building, rather than the castle remnant, to construct a good argument for their case and submit it to the council.

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for OHSCA Sub-Committee to Save the Mound

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For more information on this initiative please email info@ohsca.org

November 14th 2017