

Raingate Street

Much of Raingate Street once contained poor quality housing and extensive redevelopment has taken place in the 20th C. At the easternmost edge of the conservation area where it stretches into the Lark valley and the Crankles with an almost rural feel to them, here the street is characterised by its Civic buildings which are almost pavilions on the edge of the more natural landscape. This street, where it is in the conservation area, is both wide and very open with substantial Civic buildings providing an element of enclosure but generally set back from the road in a loose manner. To the north are the former Crown Courts, to the west is the Suffolk County Record Office while to the east are the former County Council Offices, now a hotel, and the Police Station. To the south of the conservation area the street becomes much more urban in nature, reverting to a very enclosed nature. Indeed, there are very handsome 18th C brick and flint walls to the south at the corners of Swan Lane and Prussia Lane which would have been the garden walls to the large houses in St Mary's Square. Like other areas in the conservation area where there were large 18th C houses, such as Northgate Street, these walls are a very significant feature.



The road is finished in asphalt with concrete flagged pavements and grass verges which lend something of a sub-urban/ parkland feel to the location. Modern 'heritage style streetlights on columns. At the south end there are folksy telephone poles and overhead cables and outside of the 'Civic' area the pavings are asphalt.

Former Shire Hall, Raingate Street

Part of a complex of public buildings that also includes the Police Station and the County Records Office (listed Grade II in 2015) that were built in the 1960s and designed by McMorran and Whitby. Known locally as the 'New Shire Hall', it was built to provide office accommodation for West Suffolk County Council which merged with East Suffolk County Council in 1974 to become Suffolk County Council. It became redundant circa 2010 and has now been converted to hotel use since about 2015.



Work commenced in 1966 after the completion of the Police Station (1962-1964) and the County Records Office (1964-1966). The offices opened in 1968 but the finished scheme was scaled down from that first planned.

What was constructed is, in effect, an 'L' shaped office building which has similar elevations to each side and the two longest elevations are visible in Raingate Street. The building has three storeys of buff brickwork set upon a base which forms a lower ground level at the rear and a semi basement at the street frontage. This has a stone plat band at ground level and is generally blind on the west facing elevation while basement level windows emerge on the south facing elevation. Somewhat curiously there are more bays of fenestration at second floor level than on the floors below where there are thirteen to each elevation. The three over three sash windows have stone lintols and cills and the parapet above the second floor windows is also in stone - here some openings have the affection of arched openings. All the basement level openings have arched brick lintols. The four bays at the northern most corner of the west facing elevation includes the entrance, these are rather eccentric and include French casements with balconettes at first floor level, the entrance door and a recessed arch headed opening, with a similar blind opening adjacent. At second floor level the coat of arms of the West Suffolk County Council has been retained. Flanking the entrance are a pair of smaller windows with brick arched lintols.

Westmoreland slate (?) roof with metal parapet gutters in black.

The entrance is now accessed by a brick clad ramp and steps which are a more recent addition.

The building was extended to the rear circa 2012 by the addition of a four storey wing providing apartments. This was constructed after the building had ceased to be used for local government purposes and was carried out by M and D Developments who had purchased the property.

This is a reasonable, if rather pedestrian design, but is an important building as it was built for a Civic use and so has an historic significance which adds to any architectural interest which means it makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.

Police Station, Raingate Street

The Police Station was constructed between 1962 - 64 to a Donald McMorran plan. It is a two-storey buff brick symmetrical range with a central five bay section which includes the entrance that is flanked by seven bays of fenestration with a slated roof above a stone band above the first floor windows. The ground floor of the flanking bays are arcaded with brick arches and tripartite casement windows with arched heads and stone cills. The first floor to these flanks has traditional three over three sashes. The entrance bays have three tall opening with the entrance doors to the centre, otherwise the windows are large three over three sashes, the first floor having balconettes and the ground floor having a modern steel railed ramp. Flanking these central bays are single small windows matching the others on the ground floor, while the first floor is blind. Above these bays are a pair of blind arch headed dormers, presumably related to services in the building.

The south facing elevation has just two windows at first floor with a pair of arcaded blind opening flanking a central side door. Otherwise there is a wall mounted air conditioning unit which detracts from the conservation area.

The north facing elevation has two windows at each floor matching the pattern of fenestration on the street elevation.

Iron rainwater goods.

To the rear and side are single storey outbuildings which relate to the main block and apparently contemporary and by the same designer. These are rather set within a sea of asphalt which forms a very large car park. It is hard to believe this is necessary in a conservation area but the construction of the Police Station does pre-date the designation of the conservation area and the large area of parking is perhaps a consequence of the nature of the use and the increasing dependence on vehicles for the enforcement of law and order.

The principal elevation to the street has a paved forecourt with an axial paved route to the entrance, with, rather disconcertingly, a central planting bay, and a flag pole.

In the same way that the former Shire Hall makes a positive contribution to the conservation area, the Police Station is both a historic civic building of consequence as well as having some architectural significance. It forms part of a collection of buildings designed by the same architect and built in the mid-1960s. Although they were constructed piecemeal and designed for different municipal purposes, they together form an interesting group. The building therefore makes a positive contribution to the conservation area both individually and collectively as part of a group.

9-12 Raingate Street

A short terrace of early- mid 19th C cottages in two storeys of stucco render finish with a single window at each floor and a ground floor entrance door. Hipped tiled roof with brick stacks. Nos 9 to 11 seem to retain something of their original fenestration pattern, with casements at first floor and sashes at ground floor although it seems only No 9 has complete original joinery and No 10 just the ground floor sashes. All of the entrance doors are replacements, generally rather modern. No 12 has plastic windows and Nos 10 and 11 have satellite TV dishes which all detract.

The flanking elevations are in red bricks.

Plastic rainwater goods.

These are an unprepossessing group but are interesting historically as early development in the street and while their contribution is diminished by their detracting elements, if they were restored, they could make more than a modest contribution to the conservation area.



69 Raingate Street

This is a two storey building which is ranged perpendicular to the street. It is so restored that it appears almost modern, but the rear elevation appears to be in English bond and there was certainly a building on the site shown on Warren's map of 1776. So it appears that there could be under the modern render finishes an historic building.

What can be seen now is a stucco rendered main building with a gable with attic accommodation, facing the street, with further extensions to the west in a single storey. The roof is tiled with a roof light and there is a multipane casement at each floor level on the street elevation. There is a small single storey addition to the north facing elevation, with a single casement window, and there is a tall stucco finished wall to the yard/ garden - this has a wrought steel modern gate and screen to another opening in the wall. The ground floor entrance has a porch and a multipane casement to its east with another similar at first floor level.

This is a building which may be much more historically significant than it at first appears and while rather restored, it still makes a modest contribution to the conservation area.



Walls to No1 Swan Lane

In Swan Lane parts of the walls are protected by statutory listing but other rebuilt elements there are not. Neither of the walls facing onto Raingate Street are listed. These walls are tall, about eight feet, and they are built with flint and brickwork with brick dressings in the forms of piers and copings.

The modern house behind these walls does not make any contribution to the conservation area but the historic walls certainly make a strong contribution, even where rebuilt, as they reflect the enclosures of the 18th C gardens to the large houses in St Mary's Square and are characterful elements in the conservation area.



Walls to No 69 Raingate Street

While the house behind the walls is modern and makes no contribution to the conservation area, the walls to the street frontage, despite having been heavily repaired and/or rebuilt, do make a positive contribution for similar reasons to those to No 1 Swan Lane. Part of the modern dwelling appears to incorporate some of the walling and a gable with window can be seen projecting above the wall - a more recent type of red facing brick has been used in the construction of the gable and this is far less weathered than the remainder of the wall.

Here the walls are very tall and in brick mainly in Flemish bond and have been altered to allow access to the area behind. They are typical of the garden walls from the 18th C that are so characteristic of many parts of the conservation area and make a strong positive contribution to it.

