

Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

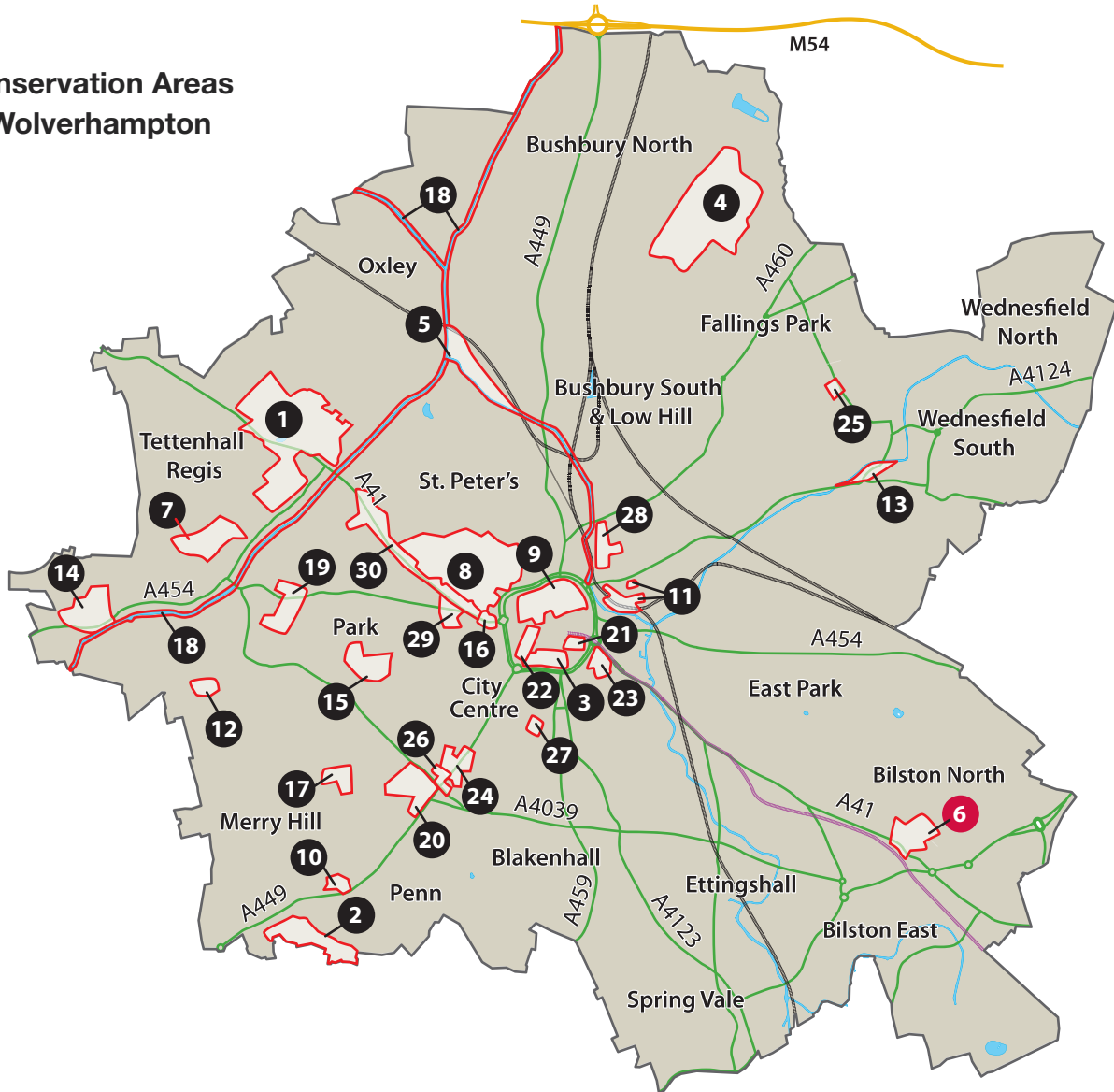


Conservation Area Character Appraisal

This document is the appraisal of the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area which was approved on 20th September 2013

To find out more about appraisals for other conservation areas in the City see the Council's web site at www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/conservationareas

Conservation Areas in Wolverhampton



- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Tettenhall Greens | 14 Wightwick Bank | 27 Fellows Street (Blakenhall) |
| 2 Vicarage Road, Penn | 15 Bantock House | 28 Springfield Brewery |
| 3 St John's Square | 16 Chapel Ash | 29 The Oaks (Merridale Road) |
| 4 Bushbury Hill | 17 St Philips (Penn Fields) | 30 Tettenhall Road |
| 5 Wolverhampton Locks | 18 Staff, Worcs & Shrop Canal | |
| 6 Bilston Town Centre | 19 Ash Hill | |
| 7 Tettenhall Wood | 20 Penn Fields | |
| 8 Park | 21 Old Hall Street | |
| 9 Wolverhampton City Centre | 22 Worcester Street | |
| 10 The Woodlands | 23 Cleveland Road | |
| 11 Union Mill | 24 Penn Road (Graiseley) | |
| 12 Castlecroft Gardens | 25 Cedar Way | |
| 13 Wednesfield | 26 Copthorne Road | |

Conservation Area Boundary

- Motorway
- Major Roads
- Railway
- Metro Line
- Council Boundary
- Waterways

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1. Introduction

The Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area was designated by Wolverhampton City Council on 29th September 1975. Its boundary was most recently reviewed on 16th October 2002 and this appraisal was published in September 2013

This document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area and identifies opportunities for enhancement. The omission of a particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A Conservation Area is defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas.

Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development in a Conservation Area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

This appraisal satisfies the requirements of the legislation and provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area can be assessed.



Arriving in Bilston at Wellington Road

2. Location and Setting



Looking towards St Leonard's church and the Town Hall from the junction of Church Street and Walsall Street in 1889 and today.

Bilston Town Centre lies approximately 2½ miles south east of Wolverhampton City Centre. The Conservation Area covers the eastern part of Bilston Town Centre and is focused on the intersections of several routes that run in from the surrounding area. Mount Pleasant approaches from the north east, Wellington Road from the north west, Church Street and Hall Street from the west and south west respectively and Fraser Street and Oxford Street from the south east. A railway line in a cutting crosses the western edge of the conservation area, but is bridged at Church Street, Walsall Street and Hall Street. The railway has now closed but is used a metro route. A metro station, Bilston Central, has been constructed in the cutting south of Church Street bringing it within the town centre.

Church Street acts as Bilston's central commercial street, becoming High Street some distance to the west. A bus station, accessed across the railway from Hall Street and a market place lie directly south of Church Street, south west of the conservation area.

The Black Country Route dual carriageway forms a boundary to the conservation area at its most southerly limit. A newly constructed police station lies between the conservation area and the dual carriageway south of Oxford Street. Developments of flats in green open space lie on the north side of this road, at the conservation area's south eastern boundary.

Streets of late 19th and early 20th century housing with a large primary school, wrap around the conservation area's eastern boundary to Mount Pleasant and form the outskirts of a large residential area.

A modern industrial estate lies north of Mount Pleasant. Wellington Road leads to a largely residential area of mixed 19th and early 20th century origin to the north and is the main road link between the town centre and Wolverhampton City Centre. To the north west a large area of surface level car parking lies on the edge of the town centre.

The level ground and built up surroundings of the conservation area prevent many views out, except those channelled along long road routes such as Mount Pleasant. To the south the land falls away into a shallow valley, through which Bilston Brook runs, now largely culverted. This provides some more expansive vistas out from the conservation area with trees in the distance adding some attractiveness to the view.

The majority of land in the Conservation Area lies within Bilston East Ward, with land north of Mount Pleasant located in Bilston North Ward.

3 Bilston's History

Bilston is an ancient settlement with a name of Anglo-Saxon origin and recorded in a charter dating from 985. It was also recorded in the Domesday Survey in 1086, when tax-paying residents included eight villeins and three bordars (suggesting eleven households), although it is not clear when a nucleated settlement was formed. Bilston lay within the royal manor of Stow Heath in the medieval period. It was granted to Roger Wascellin by Henry II but reverted to the crown during the reign of King John in the early 13th century.

In 1378 land at Bilston was given for the support of a priest and in 1458 a chantry at Bilston was endowed. This demonstrates that a chapel had become established, which later became St Leonard's Church. Church Street and High Street appear to have provided the focus of settlement in the medieval period, with a regular pattern of properties of (more or less) even width on either side. The road follows a ridge overlooking the brook, to the south east and forms the middle part of a dog leg between Wolverhampton Street, to the north and Bridge Street to the south. This odd alignment has suggested that the natural course of the road was realigned to pass along a planned settlement in the medieval period, perhaps as a stage in the deliberate development of an urban centre. The church also lies in the angle between Church Street and Walsall Street. The latter may have been of importance as the eastward continuation of a west to east route from Bridgnorth to Willenhall and the towns of Walsall and Lichfield beyond.

The earliest reference to coal mining in the vicinity dates from 1401, although it is likely that it had begun by the 13th century. In the 16th century Bilston became famous for the manufacture of hand forged locks and keys, as well as grindstones and supply of sand. Dr. Plot recorded the high quality of the grindstones found at Bilston in the 17th century.

Bilston's development into an industrial town started at a surprisingly early date. Between 1660 and 1760 Bilston expanded from a village of just forty households to a town of over 5000 inhabitants.

Bilston's location on the 30 foot seam of coal, with deposits of ironstone above and below, would have been a determinant in promoting the growth of metalworking. This resource became more valued as timber for charcoal-burning, used as a fuel for metalwork elsewhere, became scarce in the early 17th century. In 1692 an engineer from London was employed to build an 'engine' to draw water from coal mines at Bilston, demonstrating the degree of sophistication involved in the local coal mining industry.

Bilston's position on the old London to Holyhead road would also have been an influence on its early development. This route was superseded in the 1820s by Telford's New Road, which ran through the town.

Bilston also lay on regionally and locally important routes from Bridgnorth to Walsall and Dudley to Wolverhampton, each of which can be traced among surviving roads in the town centre.

A dispersed pattern of landownership following the early enclosure of the open fields may also have been a factor in the development of industry, as would the presence of an existing centre of metal-craft nearby in Birmingham. The small towns of the West Midlands also appear to have lain outside the control of the guild structures that developed in the country's larger cities during the Middle Ages encouraging the development of entrepreneurialism and working in small, independent workshops.

The town's rapid growth was evidently not without its difficulties. In 1694 a new set of stocks were set up in Lich



An example of an enamelled box made in Bilston in the late 18th century.

Gates (presumably just outside the church), suggesting concerns over law and order. A new workhouse was erected in Workhouse Fold in 1700, partly paid for by the village curate Reverend Ames. Records of epidemics in 1728/29, and 1756/57 suggest the unsanitary conditions of the rapidly growing town. The first acts to improve the roads to Bilston were passed in 1727 creating the Bilston Turnpike Trust.

Trade registers from between 1716 – 1730 record buckle makers, toy-makers and chape-makers among the craftsmen of the town. The term ‘toy’ was used in the 18th century to describe many small items of metalwork, including snuff boxes. Chapes were the back-pieces of buckles, over which a decorative ring was placed. Many of these craftsmen worked in small teams in backyard workshops. Merchants or ‘factors’ collected the produce of these small producers to export to metropolitan markets. Around 1720 the Bilston craftsmen adopting japanning and enamelling to decorate their produce and large numbers of copper enamelled boxes were produced from Bilston’s workshops until they became less popular in the mid 19th century. Enamelling on larger items continued until the early 20th century and sufficient knowledge survived to allow a revival of the craft later in the century.

Bilston’s factories also supplied trays of thin steel or tin for japanning in Wolverhampton, as well as producing particularly brightly coloured japanned items for export. Chape-making developed as the main local trade in the late 18th and 19th century, used for all kinds of buckles, including those for harnesses in the Walsall saddlery industry. There is evidence of the practice of other small metalwork crafts, including makers of locks and gun locks in the 18th century.

In 1770 the Birmingham Canal was extended from Smethwick to Aldersley Junction, passing just to the south of Bilston and instantly reducing the cost of exporting coal from the area. In the same year John Wilkinson opened his ironworks at Bradley. By 1790 it was reckoned that 15 of the 21 blast furnaces in the county were located in Bilston. This acted as a major spur to the growth of Bilston. Yates’ map of Staffordshire published in 1775 shows the basic plan of the town with the central east – west route of Church Street/High Street crossed at its east end by Lichfield Street leading to Mount Pleasant at its north end and Bridge Street to the south. Walsall Street is shown running around the north side of St Leonard’s Church with Hall Street forming a back street to the south of Church Street and joining Bridge Street in the south east.



Extract from the William Yates map of 1775 showing the road network prior to the construction of Wellington Road and the winding route of the new canal to the south of the town.

Oxford Street was made in 1809 to provide a more direct entrance to the town from the south east, bypassing the old Bridge Street route. The

improvement of the London to Holyhead Road by Thomas Telford between 1821 and 1826 created the new, direct route to Wolverhampton along Wellington Road and missing the meander through Church Street and High Street. Pipe Hall, reputedly the home of the influential Pipe family, stands on Hall Street and was built around 1810 and had an area of garden or orchard directly to the north.

Bilston expanded even more rapidly after the opening of the canal, the population reaching 12,000 in 1821 and 26,400 by 1871. The mass of the housing built to accommodate this population was concentrated

along roads and in courts running off Church Street and High Street or off the newly created Oxford Street and Temple Street. The Church of Saint Leonard (originally only a chapel) was rebuilt in 1825-6 in a style befitting the growing settlement. Bilston received a market charter in 1824. A new parsonage was built next



Wellington Road was created in the 1820s as part of Thomas Telford's new London to Holyhead Road.

were built at the junction of Bridge Street and Lichfield Street in 1823 and 1831 with a school built on Lewis Street in 1825. However, the town continued to have poor sanitary conditions and a well-documented outbreak of cholera in 1832 killed 5% of the population in just one year. It became nationally prominent after the Reverend William Leigh appealed in London Newspapers for alms to relieve the sufferings of the townsfolk. Victims of the epidemic were buried at St Leonard's Churchyard and in the Methodist Church burial ground, amongst other sites. There was another serious outbreak of the disease in Bilston in 1849.

Both the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway and GWR's Birmingham Snow Hill to Wolverhampton Railway opened their lines through Bilston in 1854, the latter cutting through the town centre and using Pipe Hall's orchards and part of the churchyard for its route. A station was built for this line just to the south of Hall Street. By 1887 Pipe's Hall, just outside the entrance to the station from Hall Street, had been converted to an hotel, presumably serving the railway station.

In 1872 Walter S. Bradley set up the Albion Works, a sheet metal working manufactory, on Mount Pleasant. This later became the Beldray Hollowware Company who remained in business until 2005. The only surviving building of their factory is the office building constructed in the 1930s on Mount Pleasant, which bears the company's logo, in a massive art-deco doorcase. Rows of houses to either side of the office block were built for the company's key staff.

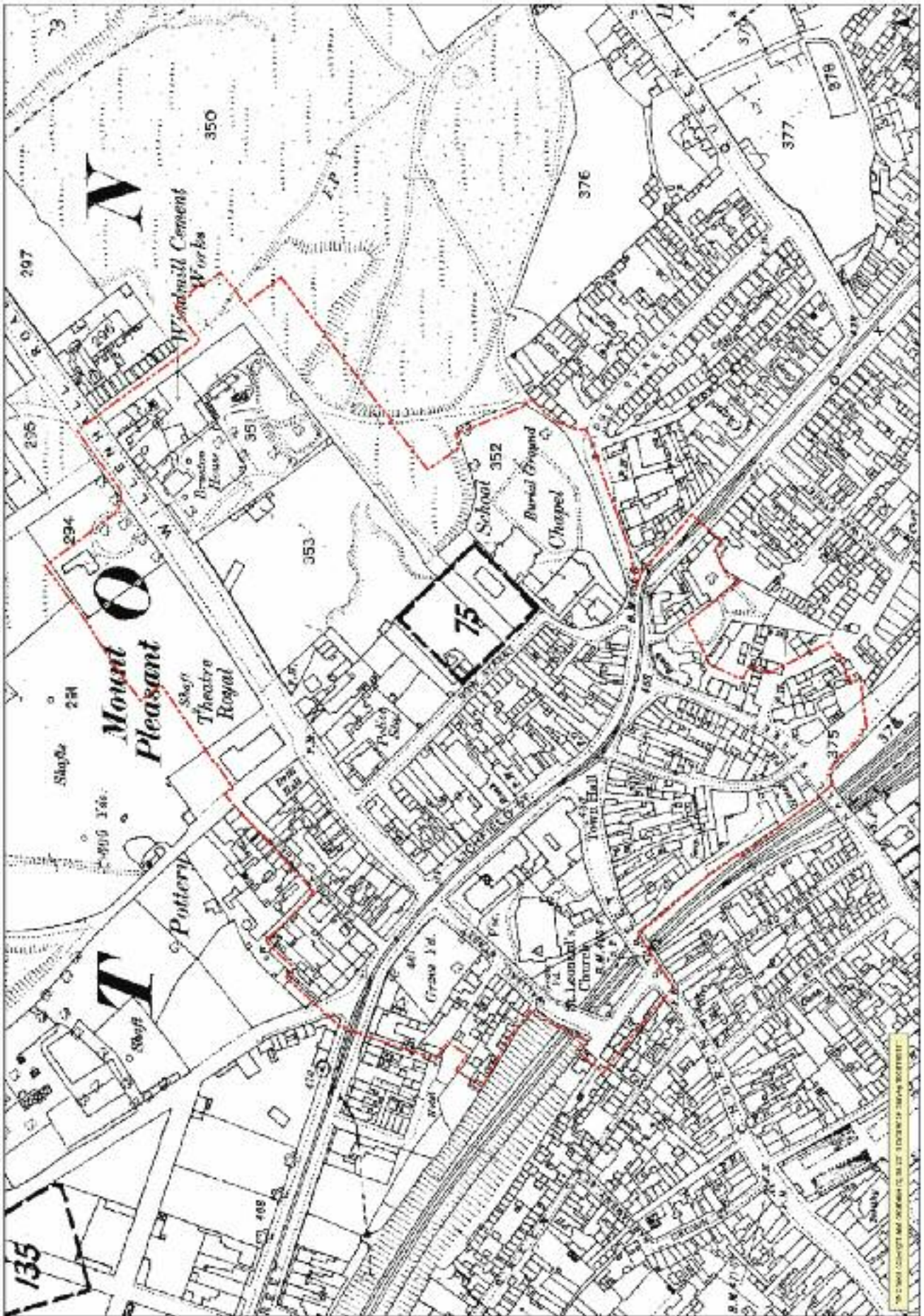
The 1887 Ordnance Survey map records significant expansion of housing northwards from Church Street (west of the railway line), as well as development of land between Oxford Street and the GWR's railway station. Buildings recorded on Lichfield Street included two banks and a post office.

to the church in the 1820s and the nearby area became a focus for the homes of Bilston's wealthier merchants with new houses running along Wellington Road (New Road on the 1832 town map) and an improved Mount Pleasant, as well as Lichfield Street. The siting of a new police station, built around 1840 in this area, may have been designed to protect the property of the town's wealthier residents. Many of these houses were later converted for commercial use by the addition of one and two storey extensions to the front, covering the gardens that once separated them from the street.

The growth of the town also required numerous new churches and chapels to serve the religious needs of the population. A Methodist Church and its manse



Map of the town of Bilston made to 1832 produced for Rev Leigh. The red spots show the locations of the first outbreaks of cholera. Note the close proximity of cases to the Bilston Brook which was probably the source of the disease being used for drinking water and waste disposal.



The 1887 Ordnance survey map showing the recently constructed town hall and police station and the railway line. Pipe Hall is in use as a hotel at this date.

The construction of the Town Hall on Lichfield Street in 1872 established this area as the civic focus of the Town Centre. An extension of the town hall to house a library was built in 1880. The 1887 map also records the construction of both a theatre and a drill hall on Mount Pleasant. Further civic investment included the construction of a Science and Art School on Mount Pleasant (the Technical School) in 1896/7. The building was designed by Captain Wilson, the Town Engineer.

The Drill Hall at Mount Pleasant was rebuilt in 1901, to designs by the architect H T Hare who was also working on the Central Library in Wolverhampton at the time, and in 1902 a group of buildings to the east, including offices, a transformer station and a repair and paint shop, were built for the Wolverhampton District Electric Tramways Limited (WDET). By 1903 the Post Office had been moved to a purpose-built building on Hall Street just outside the railway station. A new primary School at Stonefield (Prosser Street – now demolished) was built in 1906 as a highly ornate structure both inside and out. The 1903 Ordnance Survey map of the town records that Lewis Street and James Street had been laid out, just to the east of the town centre but had only received a small amount of building development. A private house on Mount Pleasant named Brueton House, set in landscaped gardens, had been recorded on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map but was rebuilt in 1905 as a large Edwardian red-brick house in spacious grounds.

Amongst other manufacturing towns, Bilston's population suffered heavily as a result of the First World War. Some 241 men of the town who died during the Great War are commemorated on the town war memorial, set up in a memorial garden at Oxford Street in 1921. A memorial cross (an example of Bloomfield's Cross of Sacrifice) was erected in the garden along with plaques recording the names of the fallen. The creation of the garden required clearance of earlier housing. By 1919 new housing had been constructed along Lewis Street and James Street, including Arthog Cottages, a row of four Arts and Crafts style red-brick bungalows – curiously named after a small village in Gwynedd.

One of the most significant changes to Lichfield Street in the early 20th century was the building of Wood's Palace Cinema, which opened in 1921 requiring redevelopment of a long section of street frontage. In 1937 Bilston Borough Council acquired Brueton House, which had served as a Girl's School since 1918. They extended and converted the building to house a museum, art gallery and library.



Wolverhampton and District Tramways Ltd offices and neighbouring transformer station in Mount Pleasant, dating from 1902.

During the 1930s large areas of the former coalfields surrounding the town were reclaimed for new streets along which new houses were built as classic Inter-War 'semi's'. Some are of an unusual modernist design, such as those at the junction of Wolverhampton Street and Shale Street, with flat roofs and canted stair-towers centrally placed on their front elevations. At the same time clearance orders were used to demolish a large number of houses declared as unfit for inhabitation in the areas immediately surrounding the town centre.

Bilston's steelworks, located just to the west of the town centre, had developed into a large producer of pig iron and steel following investment by the Hickman family between the 1860s and 1880s. The

Hickman's continued to adopt new manufacturing technologies including electric powered mills in 1907 and open hearth furnaces in 1911. Additional furnaces were built during the First World War, supplying metal for shell casings. In the 1950s a major programme of investment culminated in the erection of the Elizabeth blast furnace (affectionately known as 'Big Lizzie'), capable of producing 275,000 tons of steel a year.

However, by the late 1970s the Bilston works could no longer compete economically and in 1979 the last steel billet was cast, ending two centuries of iron and steel founding in Bilston. In 1980 the Elizabeth furnace was demolished.

A similar story can be told of the fortunes of GKN Sankey, whose main factory stood just to the south of the town centre. This company was founded from a small tin sheet stampings company on Dudley Street in the mid-19th century and grew to produce a wide range of metal laminated and holloware products including parts for electricity distribution networks, automotive uses, casks and barrels, as well as stamped artware. By the 1940s they occupied land south of the town centre between the railway station and Dudley Street, with a sports ground provided for workers on the south side of the brook. In the late 1940s and '50s they opened factories in Bombay, Calcutta, Johannesburg and Newcastle, Australia and another in Canada. Their activity in Bilston was another victim of the industrial decline of the late 20th century and the site is now partly occupied by Morrison's supermarket.

In 1957 a Local Government Bill was published proposing the creation of six new County Boroughs from the many smaller authorities within the Black Country. Feelings ran high as many of the smaller boroughs feared being swallowed up by greedy neighbours, losing their distinctive civic identities. Bilston at this time was an independently administered borough within the county of Staffordshire with a population of 35,000. Fearing the demise of the soul of the town a campaign was started for 'Bilston for the Bilstonians'. Bilston was to be included within a County Borough of Wolverhampton, for whom the amalgamation of many small urban districts and boroughs provided an opportunity to simplify a complex landscape of administrative bodies. In May and July 1965 Bilston Borough Council united with the councils of Wednesfield, Darlaston, Willenhall and Sedgley to contest the legality of the Local Government Commission's proposals in the High Court and then the Court of Appeal. Ultimately they were unsuccessful and Bilston became a part of Wolverhampton County Borough in April 1966. Having failed in their attempt to maintain independence the retiring Mayor of Bilston summed up the town's mood saying '... We have made our protest – unsuccessfully – so now we are going to do our damndest to make this work'. Happily, over forty years later, Bilston continues to be a distinctive town centre.

Clearance of the steelworks' sites in the 1980s facilitated the long expected construction of the first stage of the Black Country Route to relieve traffic congestion through Bilston Town Centre. This was completed in stages in the 1980s and 1990s, cutting through the town centre at Hall Street and Oxford Street. A bus station was opened between the Black Country Route and Church Street in 1991. In 1999 the Midland Metro reopened the Birmingham Snow Hill to Wolverhampton Line (closed in the 1960s) opening a station just north of the original one. Between 2003 and 2009 Wolverhampton City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund invested £1.8 in restoration of historic buildings in the Town Centre, working with local property owners.



The Coat of Arms for the former Bilston Urban District Council 'Bilston stands by Faith and Industry' on the library in Mount Pleasant.

4 Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area



Key grouping of listed historic buildings at the heart of the conservation area including the Victorian Town Hall, its predecessor (with later applied timber frame) the former offices of the Commissioners for Bilston and next to that the Olde White Rose Public House, both c1820 in date.

Summary of Special Interest

The Conservation Area is notable for the following:

- Numerous historic buildings documenting the development of this part of the town centre as the civic, religious and social heart of Bilston, including 18 statutory listed buildings and 12 locally listed buildings, as well as a large number of 'buildings of townscape merit'.
- A particular focus of civic and public buildings serving the town and including the Town Hall, Police Station, Drill Hall, Technical School, Library and Art Gallery and Post Office, which represent the development of Bilston's civic identity as a prosperous town in the mid 19th to early 20th century.
- A rich mixture of 18th, 19th and early 20th century buildings of architectural interest, providing evidence of the regional development of architectural styles and use of locally distinctive materials.
- A core of buildings built in or around the early 19th century creates an established character, which has been supported by the adoption of architectural motifs in later buildings.
- Curving street lines at Bridge Street, Lichfield Street, Church Street and Walsall Street, reflecting informal planning of a medieval village street pattern.
- A high level of enclosure provided by closely spaced buildings at the rear of the pavement. This constrains sight lines within the streets and creates a series of unfolding views with prominent buildings.

- Longer views along Mount Pleasant are framed by mature street trees, which form a tree-tunnel in the east. Buildings either side of Mount Pleasant, which rise to three storeys, provide a strong sense of enclosure at the west end of the street.
- Several small green open spaces with numerous trees provide a green leafy environment. The former use of several of these as churchyards provides historic interest.
- The greenery provided by mature trees both in the public realm and private gardens provides a relief to the urban surroundings and is particularly notable at Bridge Street, Lewis Street and Walsall Street.
- Individual tree groups of note include poplars on the northern edge of the memorial gardens, poplars on the north side of Hall Street, London planes outside Bilston Town Hall and further along Church Street and lime trees on Mount Pleasant.
- Lewis Street, James Street and Bow Street provide a quieter residential back-street area with Edwardian terraced housing with interesting retained architectural features.
- The unusual bungalows at Arthog Cottages provide additional architectural interest.
- Local details that collectively and individually help to give the Conservation Area its distinctive identity e.g. street signs, patterns of glazing in sash windows,

Present character: activities and uses

The area has a mixture of uses, which reflect the adaptation of the historic civic core as a local town centre. Buildings on Lichfield Street, Church Street Wellington Road and Mount Pleasant continue to provide a mixture of accommodation and commercial space. The back streets of Lewis Street and James Street are quiet residential areas with outlooks to green space at the rear of Bilston Library and Craft Gallery.

Both St Leonard's Church and Bilston Methodist Church continue to be used for religious services, although their burial grounds have been long-disused and now provide attractive publicly accessible green open space. The historic public house, the Olde White Rose remains in use, although the former Swan Bank Tavern and the Spread Eagle are notable boarded up premises. Pipe Hall (most recently known as Gavin's Sports Bar) is a highly visible, and until recently derelict, building seen from The Black Country Route and the Metro. At the time of writing works to convert this building into a training centre and offices were about to commence. The 1840s Police Station also stood vacant for some time following the opening of the new Police Station just outside the conservation area in Oxford Street, but is now converted into apartments. The Town Hall has been revitalised to provide a venue for community events as well as providing business space. The former Wood's Palace Cinema is now a banqueting venue.

The area in general forms an attractive and well-maintained gateway to the wider town centre shopping area to the west.



God's Acre (former burial ground) is one of the historic green spaces in the conservation area



The Robin 2 on Mount Pleasant has transformed the former Drill Hall into a renowned music venue.

surrounding area. Church Street has been provided with a shared surface that helps to extend the pedestrian environment and should slow traffic.

Development of street pattern

The course of the former Holyhead to London Road, as shown on the Yates Map of Staffordshire published in 1775, can still be traced on its sinuous course from Bridge Street, along Lichfield Street to Church Street. It probably provided the focus of the medieval village formed of closes or folds with houses either side of this route and with open arable fields beyond to the east, north and west and meadows running down to the brook to the south. To the west of the conservation area Church Street would have also formed part of the Bridgnorth to Willenhall/Walsall route shown on Yates' map (see page 7). This route may have been diverted to run along Walsall Street (through the conservation area) and along Mount Pleasant, which appears to have become a turnpike road in the early 18th century with a straightened course cut across earlier field boundaries. Lichfield Street provided a shortcut from Bridge Street to Mount Pleasant.

Around this basic street pattern an early addition was Hall Street, which probably originated as a lane running between the rear boundaries of folds on Church Street, and the meadows running down to the brook to the south. Subdivision of the plots on Church Street for housing during the early period of the town's industrial development had obscured this relationship by the 1770s, although the lines of routes such as Stafford Street, Pinfold Street and Wood Street, suggest the outlines of the older property boundaries.

A map of Bilston in 1799 (page 15) (copied by Timmis and Blood in 1842) records the route of Bow Street running to the east of Lichfield Street, but without any built-up frontages. This suggests a back lane to properties fronting onto Lichfield Street. Mountford Lane, running north from Mount Pleasant originated as a field lane, shown on the Tithe map.

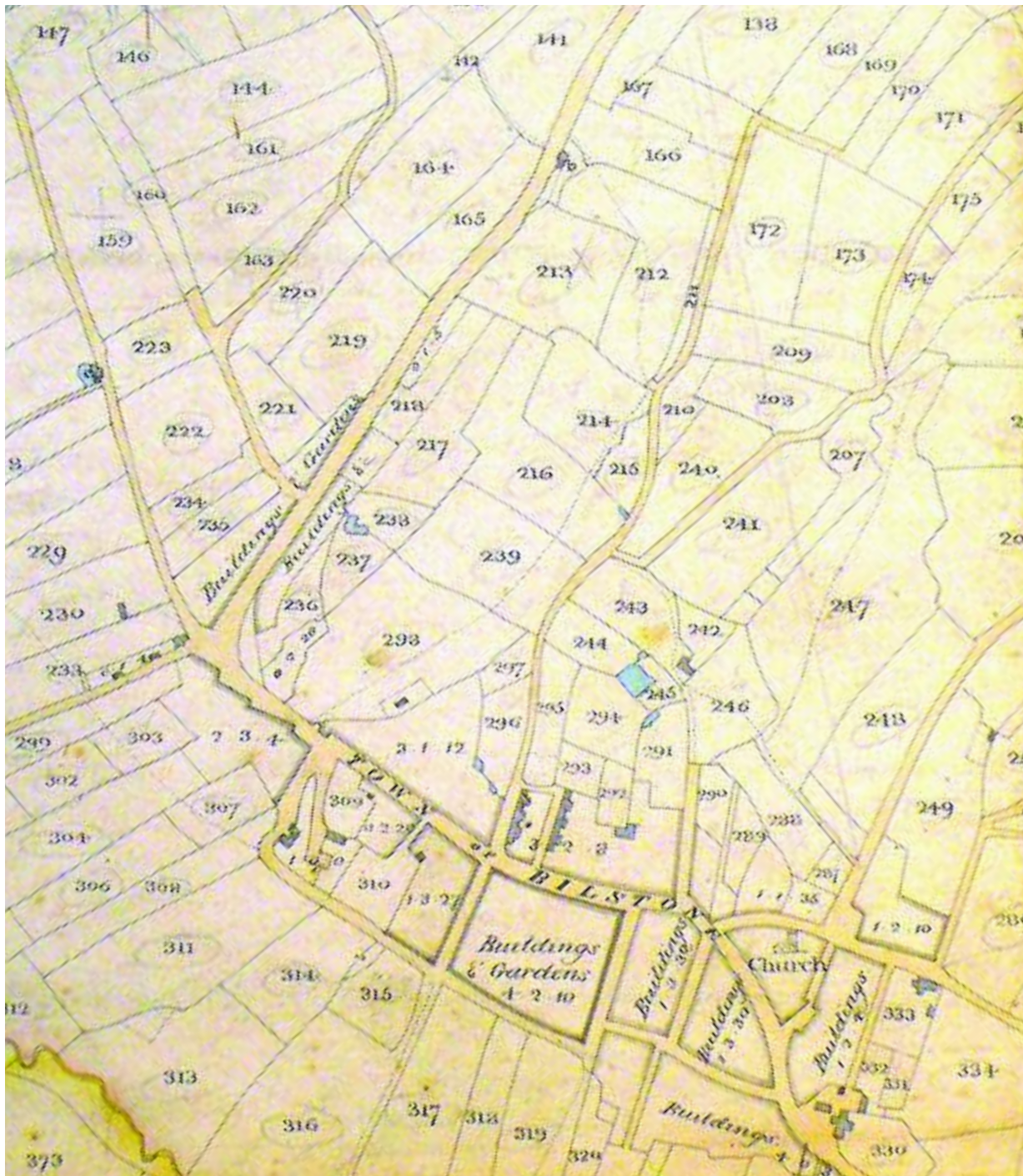
Oxford Street was constructed in 1809 and Wellington Road during the improvement of roads in 1821. Both are evident on the Bilston Town Map of 1832.

Lewis Street and James Street, were the first two of a series of formally planned streets for new housing set out across former coal mining land. The northern end of James Street had been developed by 1887 and an entry to Lewis Street had been created from Bow Street at this date. Both remained largely undeveloped in 1903 but had reached close to their current state of development by 1919 along with Fraser Street and Ashley Street to the south and east, as shown on the 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey map (page 16).

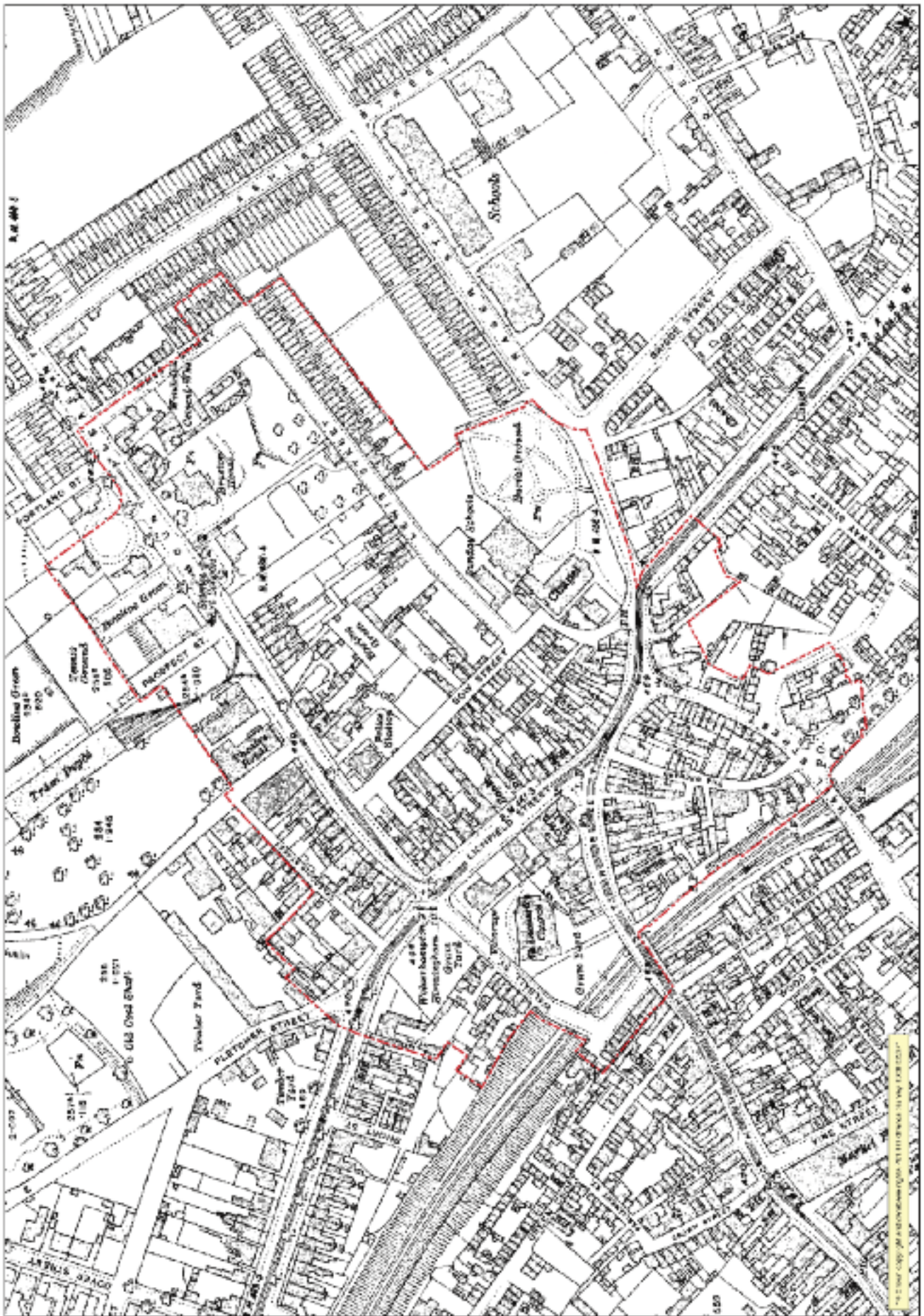
Pockets of disused land including sites at The Orchard, next to and including the former Technical School and in yards off Bow Street, detract from the general feeling of vitality of the area and the setting of historic buildings of interest.

An unusual development in the area is the Robin 2 music venue, which now occupies the former Drill Hall. This has been adapted to host large music events and neighbouring buildings have been incorporated as a hotel and bar.

The routes of Mount Pleasant, Wellington Road, Lichfield Street and Oxford Street continue to be busy with traffic, acting as arterial routes for the



Map of 1799 showing the street pattern prior to the construction of Wellington Road and Oxford Street which diverted traffic away from the old route to Wolverhampton and beyond to Holyhead via Church Street and High Street.



The 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map of c1919.

Architectural and historic character

Although Bilston was a medieval settlement and retains one 16th century timber-framed house, (outside the conservation area) the wealth brought by the canals and the subsequent rapid industrial development of the area led to replacement of much of the existing building stock, as well as new development in the late 18th and early 19th century. As a consequence the conservation area has a distinctly late Georgian character, which was largely respected by later Victorian and early 20th century development. Nevertheless, timber framed buildings were still being removed from the town centre as late as the 1960s and there remains some potential that buildings in Church Street and the High Street could preserve the structures of older buildings behind 19th and 20th century frontages.

The Georgian character is most strongly represented around the junction of Lichfield Street, Walsall Street, Wellington Road and Mount Pleasant. These buildings are tall, often of three storeys with symmetrical frontages with windows arranged with attention to proportion. The floors are often picked out using stringcourses of masonry or stucco and frontages framed by rusticated quoins or giant order engaged pilasters such as those at the White Rose public house, which have ornate moulded capitals. However, looks can be deceiving. The painted facade of Pipe's hall appears to be of stucco, but where the paint has flaked away it is revealed that the surface underneath is sandstone ashlar revealing the building to be of even better quality than it at first appears.

Elsewhere the 18th and early 19th century origins of buildings have been obscured slightly by the addition of later decorative features. Examples include the half-timbering at No. 26 Lichfield Street, or attractive Victorian and Edwardian shop and public house frontages, as well as later frontages of varying quality. However, the origins of these buildings can still be identified where original doorcases, upper floor fenestration schemes, or eaves and cornice details survive.

Smaller buildings do survive that reflect the local vernacular architecture, albeit with the accretions of later centuries. The Spread Eagle public house and No. 5 Lichfield Street (formerly the Swan Bank Tavern) reflect an earlier stage in the town's development, with broad low frontages to the street, less attention to symmetry and with steeply pitched roofs ending in low, coped parapet-gables and chimneys rising from off-centre positions on the ridge.



The architecture of the Town Hall maintains the scale of the surrounding buildings and the giant classical orders of the earlier buildings.



The Old Parsonage (now the Citizens Advice Bureau) is harmoniously coupled with St Leonard's Church and shares the giant orders of its architecture. Both were built in the 1820s.

Later buildings within this area, such as The Town Hall and Wood's Palace Cinema, were built to a scale that fitted in with the existing frontages and used similar architectural detailing including engaged pilasters, prominent pediments to gables and white painted stucco. They also introduced heavier Victorian classical features, such as deeply incised or 'rusticated' masonry or stucco bands.

The uses of buildings in this area provide an important part of their architectural character. Many were built for public or commercial functions with detailing, such as conspicuous entrances, elaborate frontages or prominent towers advertising this role. Later commercial properties such as the banking hall of Barclays Bank and the offices of the Wolverhampton and District Electric Tramways Company, were built in styles that had connotations of age and permanence, in this case a relatively restrained Flemish Renaissance style.

A feature of the more domestic buildings, which include several Georgian townhouses, is the positioning, where possible, of the main entrance on a side street away from the busiest streets, as at No. 1 Wellington Road and Nos. 22 and 24 Lichfield Street (Wellington Road was a side street until 1821).



Bilston Library and Craft Gallery was once a private home and reflects the tastes of Edwardian domestic architecture.

Large late Victorian or Edwardian domestic properties are rare in this area, the wealthier owners of businesses choosing to live away from the coalfield and factories. As such, the two surviving large houses on the south side of Mount Pleasant one now the Conservative Club and the other Bilston Library and Craft Gallery, are of particular value. The restrained architecture of Bilston Library, built in an age of florid decorations and detailing, respects the restraint of the nearby Georgian buildings, whilst the Conservative Club's Olde English style, including decorative half timbering and jettied upper floors, is more representative of the nostalgic styles of this time.

The Edwardian-style terraced housing at Lewis Street and James Street is of a small scale, originally built as artisan housing, but still received some decorative features that have survived to a varying degree. This includes decorative capitals to mullions between ground floor windows, carved stone lintels and attractive nine-over-one sash windows. Arthog cottages are contemporary with these houses but built in a simple arts and crafts style with leaded casement windows under low brick arches and with simple tiled hoods on brackets to front doors.

Some later buildings in the town centre have been unsympathetic to its appearance. Notably, the large concrete building at Nos. 23-29 Lichfield Street fails to provide the interest of colour (see materials below) and the interest of roofline and eaves detail of other buildings in this area.

Building materials

Locally produced brick is the material from which the majority of buildings in the conservation area are constructed. The coalfields surrounding the town supplied high quality brick-making clays and the ready supply of fuel encouraged a well developed brick, tile and terracotta making industry.



Arthog Cottages in Lewis Street.

The local brick is dark red in colour with occasional purples, becoming a warm dark orange in strong sunlight. This is complemented by red brown plain tile roofs on humbler buildings, whilst the more important public buildings and townhouses have natural slate tiles allowing a shallower pitch and hipped roof profiles.

Window and door openings often have decorative headers in carved stone gauged brickwork or moulded stucco. Doorways are given more prestigious treatment in some of the larger townhouses through the use of ornamental doorcases. Pale limestone is used in several places as an accent material, often in narrow bands as string courses, sill bands or as rusticated quoins.

The impressive buildings of St Leonard's Church and the Parsonage were clad with painted render or stucco reflecting the early 19th century regency style and this is seen elsewhere in the town on buildings of all standards. The repetition of these materials on 39 – 43 Lichfield Street has a spectacular unifying effect on a long frontage with profuse intricate detail. Use of painted brick with stucco detailing can be seen as a cheaper approach to achieving this effect with good examples at Nos. 52 – 56 Church Street. The front elevation of Pipe Hall has in the past been mistaken for painted stucco but is in fact stone which has been patched up in the past and painted to cover the repairs. Early photographs of Bilston provide evidence that there were several buildings with local stone frontages in the area but Pipe Hall is the sole survivor.



Terracotta detailing on the Technical School.

Elaborate terracotta detailing is a feature of both commercial and public buildings of the early 20th century, exemplified by the former Technical School at Mount Pleasant.

Vertically sliding sash windows are present in many buildings although with a great variety in design, reflecting changing styles between the mid 18th and early 20th centuries.

The character of some buildings has been eroded through the introduction of concrete tiles, uPVC windows or cladding. This is most noticeable where groups of buildings have shared a common scheme or palette of materials, which has been interrupted by intrusive additions or alterations.

Listed Buildings

A listed building is one that is included on the Government's Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. These buildings are protected by law and consent is required from the City Council before any works of alteration, extension or demolition can be carried out.

The Statutory List includes the following 15 entries within the Bilston Conservation Area, all listed Grade II:

- Church of St Leonard, Church Street
- Gallimore Monument approximately 11 metres to north of Church of St Leonard, Church Street
- Pipe Hall, Hall Street
- No. 8 (Barclays Bank and Bank Chambers) Lichfield Street
- No. 22 Lichfield Street
- No. 24 Lichfield Street
- No. 26 (The Old Parsonage) Lichfield Street (now Citizen's Advice)
- Bilston Town Hall, Lichfield Street

- Former Coach House south west of No. 24 Lichfield Street
- No. 4 Mount Pleasant
- No. 34 (Prospect House) Mount Pleasant (former tram depot offices)
- Former Police Station, Mount Pleasant
- No. 1 Wellington Road (Ivy House)
- No. 1A and 1B Wellington Road
- No. 3 Wellington Road (Wellington House)

Locally listed buildings

As well as listed buildings, the Government has for many years encouraged local planning authorities to draw up lists of locally important buildings and to formulate local plan policies for their protection, through normal development control procedures. The English Heritage Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing (2012) acknowledges that such lists have a key role in building and reinforcing a sense of local identity and distinctiveness and recommends extending local listing to all types of heritage asset to include sites, places, landscapes and archaeology. Works that require planning permission to a heritage asset included in the City of Wolverhampton Local List will be expected to take into account the special architectural and historic interest of the property



Barclays Bank, Lichfield Street, started life as a 18th century townhouse and was later extended and converted into a bank. It is grade II Listed.

The following 12 buildings are included in Wolverhampton's local list:

- Nos. 1 – 4 Bow Street (former Manse)
- Cast iron monuments set into churchyard paths, Church Street
- Hickman Monument, Church Street
- The Retreat, Church Street
- Former Wood's Palace Cinema, Lichfield Street
- No. 2 Mount Pleasant
- Library and Craft Gallery, Mount Pleasant
- Former Drill Hall, Mount Pleasant
- Former Technical School, Mount Pleasant
- Bilston Methodist Church Sunday School building, Bow Street
- War Memorial and Gardens, Oxford Street
- Former Bilston Magistrates Court, Bow Street



The Methodist Church Sunday Schools building is now on the Local List

Building of Townscape Merit

In addition, marked on the Townscape Appraisal map (see page 26) are a large number of unlisted buildings that have been judged as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This follows advice provided in English Heritage

guidance on Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management, which stresses the importance of identifying such buildings.

The buildings are considered to be of good, relatively unaltered examples, of their type where some original materials and details have survived in addition to the basic historic form of the building. Where a building has been adversely affected by modern changes and restoration is either impractical or, indeed, not possible, they are excluded. There is a general presumption in favour of retaining all Buildings of Townscape Merit.

Focal points, vistas and views

The curving course of Lichfield Street, with several streets leading off, creates a series of focal points in quick succession. The enclosure of buildings along the street retains views within its course with the scale, form and detailing of buildings contributing to the historic interest and aesthetic value of the vistas.

Prominent buildings, such as The White Rose public house, Bilston Town Hall and No. 1 Wellington Road, act as positive eye-catching end-stops.

Long views along Mount Pleasant are framed by overarching trees and the strong building frontage at the western end of the street.

The small green open spaces of the churchyard and burial grounds allow glimpsed views of buildings between trees and foliage.

The tower of St Leonard's Church is seen in many views from both within and outside the area.

Mature trees provide a softening effect and a green background in these views.

The views across unused sites at Hall Street, to the rear elevations of buildings facing Church Street, are less attractive.

The glimpsed view down The Orchard is also let down by the poor condition of the buildings including their unattractive (if necessary) security screens.

The office building of the Beldray works is prominent in views east from the conservation area along Mount Pleasant.

Open spaces, green areas and trees

The conservation area contains a number of green public open spaces, several of which contribute to the historic interest of the area. The churchyard around St Leonard's church provides a tranquil and leafy green open space at the centre of the conservation area with trees adding greenery and softening in views from several of the surrounding streets. It also provides a pedestrian link between Church Street and Walsall Street and acts as the historic setting to the listed church and monuments, as well as the adjacent former vicarage and The Retreat (locally listed).



Long view looking west along Mount Pleasant.



This view down the Orchard has great potential but is let down by the condition of the buildings and security shutters.

On the north side of Walsall Street and with a frontage to Wellington Road is 'God's Acre'. This was set up as an extension to the churchyard in the early 19th century as space for burials ran out. It was used for mass burial during the cholera epidemics in the early and mid-19th century. It now forms a pleasant small park with paths across forming a short cut between the two roads. Views from Wellington Road to the tower of St Leonard's Church are framed by mature trees in God's Acre, which also frame views along Wellington Road and Walsall Street.

In the south of the conservation area, the Memorial Gardens lie to the south west of Oxford Street. They were created during the clearance of housing in this area in the 1920s and may preserve archaeological



The former burial ground of Bilston Methodist Church has recently been renovated and provides an attractive green open space.

remains of these buildings. The gardens were set out as a memorial to the men of Bilston who died fighting in the First World War and include a 'Cross of Sacrifice' war memorial, as well as tablets recording the names of the fallen. This green open space helps to create an attractive gateway to the town centre that is also a deeply meaningful symbol of the community's history and identity. The greenery and trees of the gardens form part of the setting of the listed Barclays Bank buildings but are also locally listed as heritage assets.

Across Oxford Street is the former burial ground of the Bilston Methodist Church. Historic maps show that this was set out as an attractive landscape with numerous paths and a central fountain. It was also used for mass burial during the 19th century cholera epidemics. The burial ground had fallen into disrepair

and was a location for anti-social behaviour but has recently been renovated, including the restoration of the surviving memorials.

The former site of the Theatre Royal is currently a small municipal green open space with tree planting that provides greenery on the corner of Mount Pleasant and Mountford Lane.

Bilston Library and Craft Gallery and the adjacent Conservative Club are both set back from the road with green surroundings that contribute to the more spacious and leafy feel of Mount Pleasant in the east of the conservation area. The gardens at the rear of both also provide an attractive green edge to the northern side of Lewis Street.

Public realm

The town centre has received considerable investment in the public realm to support its status as an attractive area for businesses to locate. The northern part of Lichfield Street has been paved with sawn York Stone paving, whilst brick sets have been used along its southern part.

Street furniture has been painted a uniform blue. Roadside safety railings have been used sparingly and have been exchanged for cast metal bollards where possible. Church Street is now a shared



Local Rowley Rag dolerite paving at 24 Lichfield Street

surface street, with a nominal footway marked by a change in colour of the brick paving.

The yard between No. 24 Lichfield Street and the Town Hall preserves an area of Rowley Rag setts, whilst the churchyard has sandstone flag paving with cast iron memorials set into the pavement. Blue brick walls supporting unusual cast iron railings with alternating club and diamond heads mark the boundaries of the churchyard.

A small number of cast or stamped metal street signs are preserved, including one at the south end of Lichfield Street.

Street lighting is a mixture of tubular steel columns with plain modern lamps on brackets or at the curved end of the column, with more attractive street light at Walsall Street featuring globular lamps on curved brackets, painted blue. At the Orchard a number of Victorian-style lampposts have been installed with Windsor lanterns that contribute to a historic feel.

The bridge carrying Church Street over the railway line (now the Metro line) has been adorned with cast panels of extracts from stories of Bilston life designed by Bettina Furnee in 1997. This provides an attractive gateway feature to the conservation area from the continuation of the town centre to the west.

Bow Street provides access to the town centre from residential areas as well as the public car park. The entrance to Bow Street from Oxford Street is very narrow and is paved with block paving setting it apart from the wider highways. The narrow pavements have brick paviours and attractive bull nosed brick kerbs. Trees surrounding the car park make an important contribution to the area's appearance, softening the hard car park landscape and reducing the negative appearance of the rear elevations of buildings on Lichfield Street. The smart, blue painted railings surrounding the car park are a modern feature but help to unite the space with the town centre landscape on Lichfield Street.

Street trees make an important contribution to the appearance of Mount Pleasant, creating a boulevard at the eastern entrance to the conservation area. Mount Pleasant has not received the same investment in the public realm as other similar areas in the conservation area, which results in a feeling that this is the edge of the conservation area. For example, the safety railings outside Nos. 17 – 39 Mount Pleasant have been left with a plain galvanised finish, rather than being painted blue to match those elsewhere in the town centre. New block paving has been laid from the cross roads as far east as the former police station on the south side of the road and to The Robin 2 (the former Drill Hall) on the north side. The pavement on the north side is protected by blue painted bollards to prevent use for car parking. In several places the boundary of the public realm on Mount Pleasant is marked by brick dwarf walls, sometimes with terracotta copings, which are also found beyond the conservation area boundary to the west. These walls would have supported cast iron railings, many of which were removed during the Second World War. Reintroducing these features would support the historic character of many of the buildings along this road as well as providing better definition between public and private space.

The residential streets; Lewis Street and James Street have Rowley Rag kerbs and tar spray and chipped surfacing to the pavements. A tubular safety railing outside houses on the southern side of Lewis Street is unpainted and bucked in places which detracts from the quality of the area.



Public art piece entitled Witness by Bettina Furnee makes a contemporary contribution to the public realm of the town

Local identity

The distinctive local identity of the Bilston Conservation Area is enhanced by a number of features and historic elements that cumulatively help to give the Conservation Area a sense of place. These include:

- High number of interesting shop fronts;
- Mixture of civic buildings, representing the developing identity of the growing town as a self-governing community;
- Mixture of small historic public houses and Georgian town houses;
- The 'art bridge' mentioned above;
- Art 'standards' outside Bilston Town Hall;
- War memorial and memorial garden;
- Development of ethnic diversity in the community demonstrated by introduction of new uses for buildings, range of foods available, etc;
- Raleigh Cycles and Heaths painted signs.



View into Church Street where the painted sign for Heaths is a local landmark.

Archaeological potential

The Conservation Area includes the eastern portion of the medieval village. Buried archaeological deposits of medieval date have already been proven to exist on the east side of Bridge Street and the possibility of the presence of buried archaeological deposits should be borne in mind in coming to a decision on any development proposals within the Conservation Area. Of particular interest would be pre-medieval deposits, medieval deposits and post-medieval deposits relating to the growth of the settlement and to early industry.

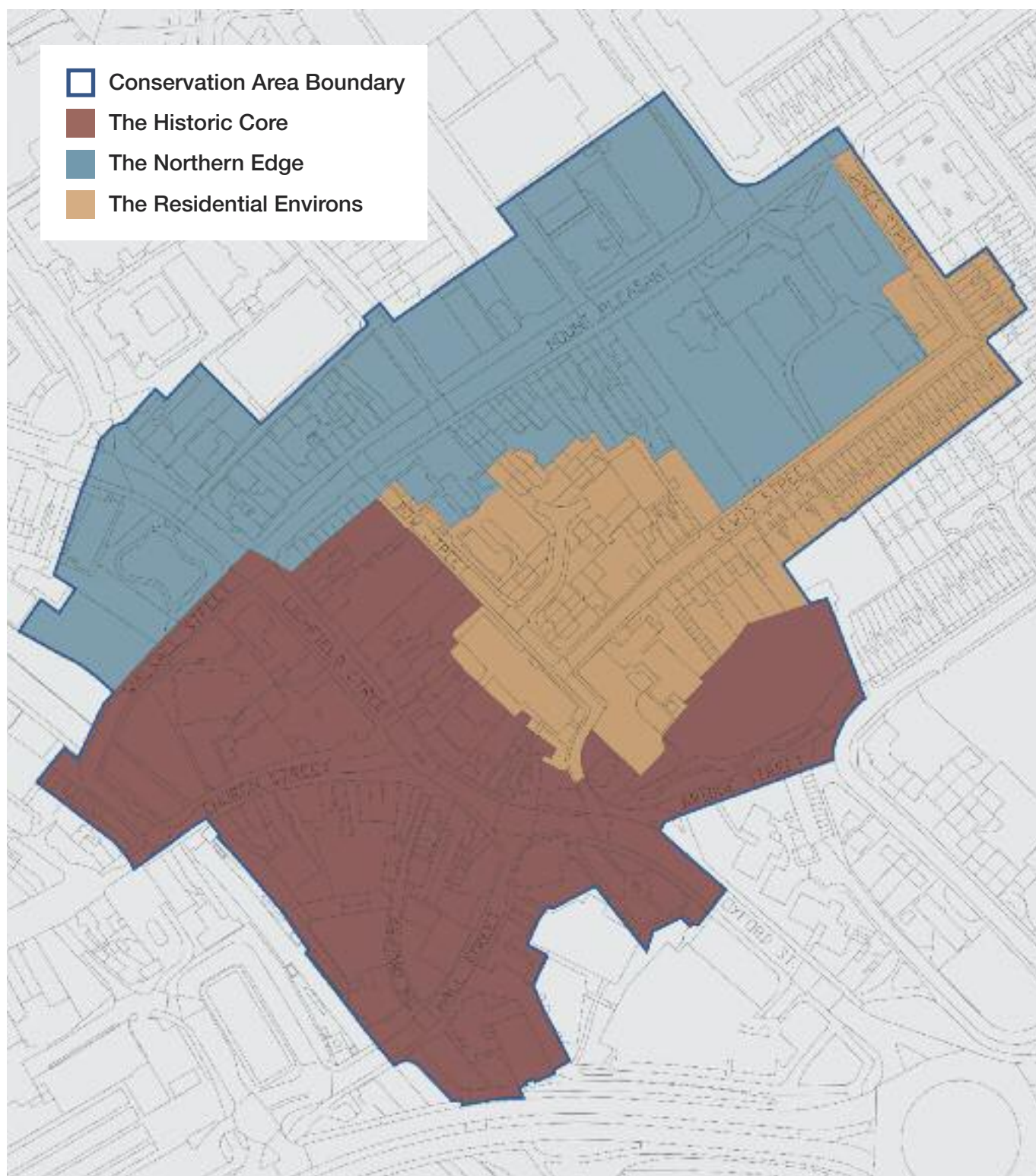
Introduction to Character Areas

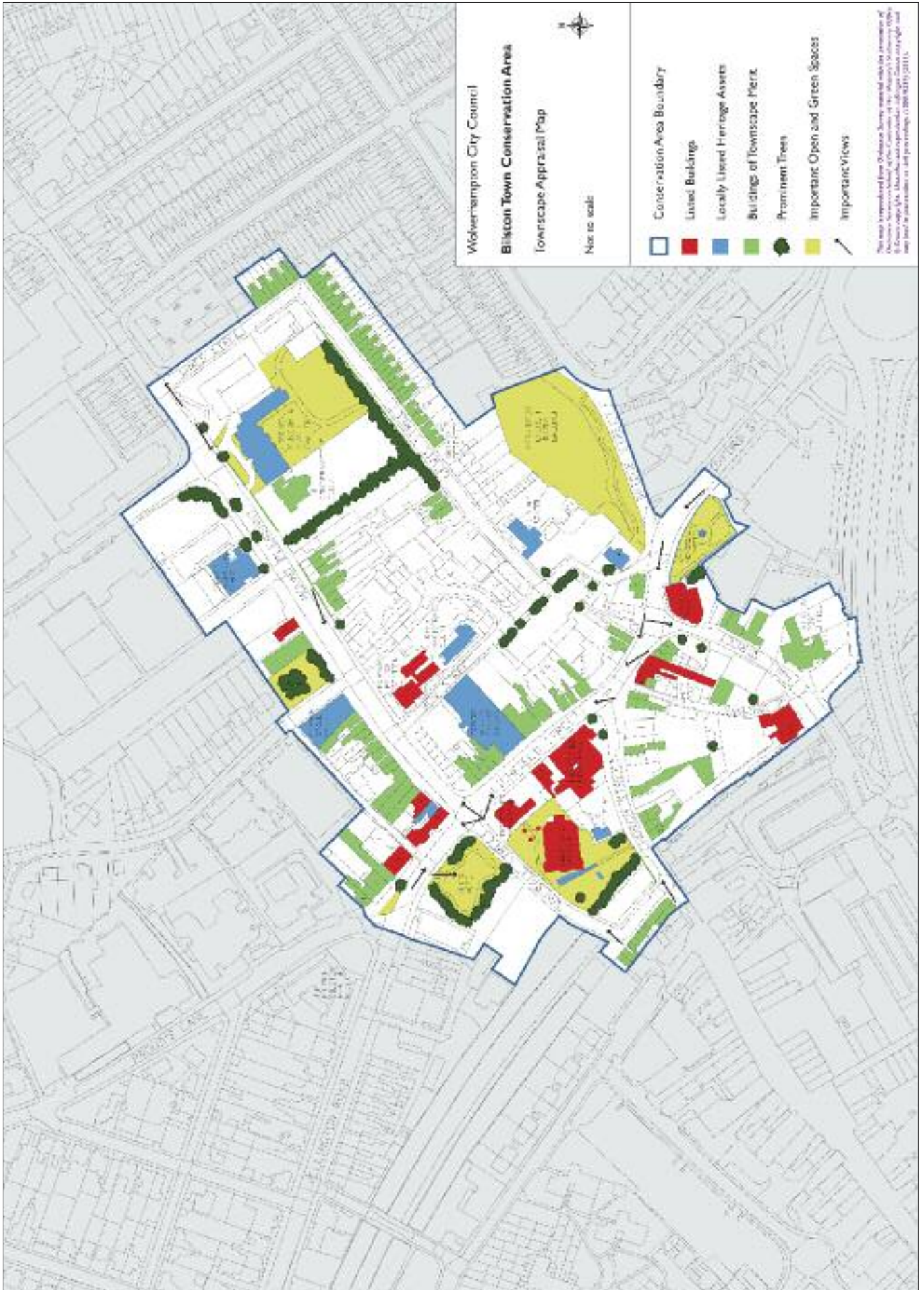
The townscape of the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area varies according to its period of development. The Conservation Area can be roughly divided into three separate character areas, each with its own characteristics defined by date or historic form and layout.

Area 1: The Historic Core: Church Street, Lichfield Street, Hall Street and The Orchard.

Area 2: The Northern Edge: Mount Pleasant, Wellington Road and Walsall Street.

Area 3: The Residential Environs: Lewis Street, James Street and Bow Street.





Area 1:

The Historic Core: Church Street, Lichfield Street, Hall Street and The Orchard



At the northern end of Lichfield Street this group of stucco fronted buildings including a former bank, cinema and shops form an attractive group illustrating both economic and cultural history of the town centre. Photographs show Lichfield Street in the 1920s and today.

Principal features

- Historic main street with curving line creating a series of unfolding views to key positive buildings;
- A high density of buildings of special historic and architectural interest illustrating the historic and continuing town centre functions of the area for the wider district of Bilston;
- A focal point marked by Bilston Town Hall;
- Landmarks: towers of the Town Hall and St Leonard's Church;
- A patchwork of historic green open spaces in churchyards and war memorial gardens;
- Historic public houses, former cinema, post office, bank and shops retaining (or with restored) traditional shopfronts;
- Well defined architectural character based on a key group of, mainly, Georgian buildings built using a restricted pallet of materials and with well preserved (or reinstated) architectural features, including doorcases, vertically sliding sash windows and stone detailing;
- Narrow side streets and backstreets with character and historic interest.



*St Leonard's Church
from Church Street*

General character and townscape

This area is typified by narrow streets with continuous or closely spaced building frontages on relatively broad plots that provide a strong sense of enclosure but with a relatively relaxed rhythm in views and with a generally low level, two to three storey scale of building. A more intensive built-up feel is created at Church Street by the taller structures of the Town Hall and St Leonard's Church on the north side of the street and the row of narrower shopfronts lining the south side, with the long three-storey frontage at Nos. 52-56 Church Street next to the bridge over the railway cutting. This more intensive commercial development is continued at Walsall Street, to the west of the railway line.

The area contains numerous substantial buildings with ostentatious use of architectural ornament that supported their historic (and current) commercial or civic functions – Examples include The Town Hall, Barclays Bank and Chambers, The Olde White Rose Inn, former Wood’s Palace Cinema and Pipe Hall. A group of Georgian town houses dating from the early 19th century have more restrained architecture.



Church Street provides an area of more intensively built up commercial frontages.

with commercial frontages, creates an intimate area with an indication of the intensive historic development of the area prior to clearances in the early 20th century

Hall Street has been broadened as a result of the demolition of a number of buildings, leaving the remaining buildings of the Post Office and Pipe Hall as prominent features of the streetscape. Although Pipe Hall is imposing now, it would be an even more striking structure if the modern paint was removed from its sandstone masonry facade and a more sympathetic entrance installed.

The paving scheme at Church Street and Lichfield Street, with colour matched street furniture, including bollards, tree guards and lampposts provides a high quality pedestrian environment and helps to unify the townscape.

Greenery is provided by the patchwork of open spaces including the recently renovated burial ground at the Methodist Church, well maintained Memorial Gardens, St Leonard’s churchyard and ‘God’s Acre’, as well as a number of trees in rear gardens and yards. The green spaces provide alternative pedestrian routes between streets. Trees in these green spaces add greenery in the background of views through the area and frame glimpsed views of the church tower as an important local landmark.

The curving street lines, including those of Bridge Street, Lichfield Street, Church Street and Hall Street, create a series of unfolding views along the street frontages, directing views to buildings at key points.

The openness and green spaces of the Memorial Gardens and Methodist Church burial ground, followed by the narrow gap between No. 5 Lichfield Street and Barclays Bank, create a gateway to the town centre on Oxford Street.

The complexity of the street pattern including small alleyways and side streets reflects a considerable period of development, hinting at the town’s medieval origins. A narrow alleyway (The Orchard),



The War Memorial gardens shortly after opening and showing the old Methodist Church, now replaced, but the former Manse and Swan Bank Tavern survive as can be seen on the same view today.

Local features

- Use of locally distinctive building materials;
- Small area of historic paving in yard to the side of No. 24 Lichfield Street;
- Sandstone paving and cast iron memorials at St Leonard's Churchyard.
- Cast iron railings at St Leonard's Churchyard and the former parsonage.
- Enhanced paving and public realm including street trees and public art;
- High level of tree planting creating an attractive green setting in the town centre;
- Painted advertisement 'Heaths' at No. 56 Church Street.
- Art bridge over the railway/Metro line.
- Victorian style lampposts and former gas catenary across the entrance at The Orchard
- Civic Society blue plaque on Barclays bank commemorating the nearby birthplace of Sir Henry Newbolt.
- The highways dominated area at the entrance to Hall Street created by the demolition of a corner building;
- The poor condition of vacant land and buildings at The Orchard and Hall Street;
- Long term vacant buildings at No. 56 Church Street and 37 Lichfield Street (Spread Eagle) both showing signs of dilapidation and deterioration of the fabric;
- Increasing unauthorised signage on shopfronts;
- Need for ongoing maintenance of shopfronts (a lick of paint needed);
- Poor condition of buildings at Nos. 1 – 6 Walsall Street;
- Use of the pavement for street trading including display of white goods for sale and 'A' Boards;
- A vacant and boarded up Swan Bank Tavern public house at No. 5 Lichfield Street, which would otherwise be a positive gateway building;
- The negative appearance of the vacant premises at No. 21 Lichfield Street. The resolution of its current negative impact might be achieved through suitable redevelopment;
- Nos. 23 – 29 Lichfield Street has an intrusive impact due to the contrast of architectural style and materials. The forecourt would be enhanced if original seating and planting were reinstated to soften the frontage.



One of the cast iron memorials set into the paving at St Leonard's Churchyard.

Area 2:

The Northern Edge: Mount Pleasant, Wellington Road and Walsall Street



Nos. 2-10 Mount Pleasant are Georgian townhouses converted to commercial use in the 20th century. Several were enhanced with the assistance of grant aid under the recent Heritage Lottery funded Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Principal features

- Long, straight streets emanating from a cross roads in the west, reflecting formal planning to improve the road system in the 18th and early 19th centuries;
- Listed and locally listed buildings evenly spaced along a long frontage and surrounding the cross roads;
- A strong architectural character formed by the use of locally distinctive red brick;
- A focus of municipal buildings contributing to the area's town centre character and reflecting the development of Bilston's civic identity in the 19th and early 20th century;
- A focus of former townhouses reflecting a period of affluence and investment in Bilston in the early 19th century;
- Good survival (or reinstatement) of architectural features, such as sash windows, shopfronts and ornamental detailing;
- Tree lines along roads providing an attractive green environment.
- Well-defined streetscape around the crossroads in the west with buildings set at the back of pavement rising to three storeys or mature trees providing enclosure.
- Lengthy views along the routes running east and north, with buildings and street trees providing framing and rhythm.

General character and townscape

Mount Pleasant has a commercial frontage forming parades of shops at the west end, leading to a group of municipal buildings (the police station, technical school and public library and craft gallery) in the east. The development of town houses into commercial premises by the addition of one and two storey extensions or insertion of shop windows can be easily recognised as an historical alteration to these buildings.

Mount Pleasant becomes more open to the east as buildings are set further back from the pavement with front gardens gradually becoming larger and defined by low walls allowing a degree of transparency between buildings and the road. Street trees create a boulevard and a tunnel of greenery in the east of the conservation area, whilst the width of building plots become very broad with green landscaping that creates

a pleasant arcadian quality. A number of plots have become vacant and one at the corner of Mountford Lane has been converted to public green open space, supporting the leafy character of the area.

The architectural decoration of the buildings also becomes more elaborate to the east including the municipal buildings of the Drill Hall, Technical School and Library and Craft Gallery, as well as the former offices of the tram company and the Bilston Conservative Club. These buildings were designed, or modified, to stand out in the street scene with a mixture of terracotta, half-timbering and stone detailing.

The short section of Wellington Road in the conservation area is enclosed by the greenery of mature trees in God's Acre on the west side and by a frontage of attractive late Georgian houses with a strong sense of unity in materials and style on the east side. These buildings diminish in height from three storeys at the junction with Mount Pleasant to two to the north west. This has the effect of lengthening their apparent frontage in views north west and develops a focal point in views south east. They are varied in height, width and detailing, but maintain a group identity through use of a consistent colour brick, white painted render detailing and natural slate roofs, as well as similar proportions and spacing for openings.

As an attractive group of buildings they retain (or have had reinstated) many original architectural details, including moulded hoods to windows on scrolled brackets, stringcourses and bay and sash windows, as well as traditional shopfronts illustrating later adaptation of buildings for commercial use. The retention or reinstatement of dwarf walls with railings to create narrow front gardens provides definition between the public realm and the private space of these buildings, which reflects their historic role as townhouses. Present uses include a mixture of residential and commercial uses, including offices, which have been sympathetically converted from the former townhouses, retaining their historic character. The image of tradition, permanence and quality these buildings provide is beneficial to the professional businesses that use these properties.



*Late Georgian townhouses on Wellington Road.
No 3 Waterloo House is Grade II Listed.*

Wellington Road is a broad thoroughfare, possibly reflecting the planning of Telford's improved London to Holyhead Road and like Mount Pleasant, benefits from an avenue of street trees (mostly London Planes), which continue from the Conservation Area along the road to the west, providing rhythm and interest in views.

Local features

- Use of locally distinctive building materials;
- Historic green open space of former burial ground;
- Historic or reinstated shopfronts including advertisements painted over brickwork;
- Surviving civic buildings with interesting decorative features, including the Bilston Borough Coat of Arms at the Library and Craft Gallery;



*The gardens to the rear of
Bilston Library & Craft Gallery.*

- Large public garden to the rear of the Library and Craft Gallery;
- Definition of gardens by dwarf walls and railings.

Negative features

- The vacant condition of the former Technical School and overgrown grounds surrounding it, create an air of neglect and create potential for loss of the fabric of a locally (or nationally) significant building.
- The shopfronts and building frontages that were restored through grant aid from the Townscape Heritage Initiative are now reaching a point where routine maintenance, including renewal of paintwork is required to prevent deterioration. Evidence of maintenance is varied.
- No. 11 Wellington Road stands out as in poor condition compared to the buildings to the south, which were all renovated through the Townscape Heritage initiative. The building bears an unattractive advertising hoarding on its north facing elevation, forming an eyesore at the entrance to the conservation area, whilst the internally illuminated shop signage, plastic framed windows and aluminium framed shopfront detract from the character and appearance of the carefully restored buildings.



The vacant former Technical School is at risk of further deterioration as a result of its vacant condition.

Area 3:

The Residential Environs: Lewis Street, James Street and Bow Street

Principal features

- Quiet backstreet area of Edwardian terraced housing;
- Unusual group of early 20th century bungalows at Arthog Cottages;
- Bilston Methodist Church Sunday School building;
- Early 20th century magistrate's court.

General character and townscape

Lewis Street and James Street

These narrow, straight streets were set out as a formal street grid over former colliery and cement works land in the late 19th century. They include a mixture of one and two storey buildings in long rows and are set directly at the back of pavement and, generally, with a built frontage on only one side of the road. The other side of the street is formed by the rear boundaries of properties fronting onto Mount Pleasant. These include the grounds of Bilston Library and Craft Gallery, the Bilston Conservative Club as well as a long, vacant plot running from Mount Pleasant to Lewis Street. These rear gardens provide considerable greenery to the street scene.

The buildings in this area have considerable uniformity in design and materials as large groups of single design houses. Their narrow frontages form terraced rows with a regular pattern of openings and chimneys that creates rhythm in views along the streets. Buildings on these two streets also derive a great deal of their architectural interest from the details of window including carved stone pillars as mullions. A small number of houses also retain the unusual nine-over-one-pane sash windows.

A group of houses built during the 1960s or 70s on the south side of Lewis Street are set back from the road with open gardens to the pavement, but are of no particular architectural or historic interest.



*late 19th century artisan housing
on Lewis Street*



*Looking north along Bow Street with the former
magistrate's court on the right.*

The early 19th century Sunday School of Bilston Methodist Church provides a point of interest at the entrance to Lewis Street from Bow Street. The semi-circular arch headed cast iron windows have a slightly industrial look, although they are enhanced by polychrome brickwork and engaged pilasters defining the building's bays.

Bow Street

This is a well shaded back lane with a car park and yards at the rear of Lichfield Street properties on the south west side and a mixed frontage of modern semi-detached housing to the north east.

The narrow entrance from Lichfield Street, to the rear of the former manse to the Methodist Church, enhances the sense of this area being 'hidden away'. The

wall of the Swan Bank Tavern (No. 5 Lichfield Street) to the north and the wall and railings of the manse enclose this space. The railings copy the style of those around St Leonard's churchyard. A similar effect is created at the entrance from Mount Pleasant where the Police Station and a parade of shops create a narrow entrance. The rear wall of the former Wood's Palace Cinema and the building of the Police Station and former Magistrate's Court create a pinch point in the street scene.

The former Magistrate's Court on Bow Street has historic interest as another facet of the civic history of Bilston but also provides architectural interest through its unusual Arts and Crafts style. It has a close relationship with the contemporary cells of the former Police Station, which are just to the north and echoes the scale of the bungalows on Lewis Street (Arthog Cottages).

A new development at Mill Croft is of no particular architectural or historic interest, but is contained by areas of historic and architectural interest on all sides. This site may have archaeological interest including the remains of a tower windmill recorded in historic photographs. This gave its name to the Windmill Cement Works, which covered land to the north in the mid-19th century and possibly to Windmill Field, one of the pre-enclosure open fields. It is now recorded in the modern street name.

Local features

- Section of clinker wall at Lewis Street;
- Cast iron gates and railings to the rear of Bilston Library and Craft Gallery, Lewis Street;
- Architectural features and detailing including carved pilaster mullions to ground floor windows, ornamental ridge tiles, cast steel casement windows (Arthog Cottages), unusual 9-over-1 pan sash windows with arched glazing bar, bracketed soffits to eaves and carved stone lintels;
- Bilston Coronation Celebrations 1953 plaque, Lewis Street.

Negative features

- The vacancy of the former Magistrate's Court raises a risk of the building falling into dereliction if not converted to a positive new use;
- Untidy areas to the rear of properties on Lichfield Street impact on the appearance of Bow Street;
- The loss of architectural features and details on Edwardian terraced housing is leading to a loss of characteristic uniformity and loss of architectural interest – particularly through the application of render cladding. (The application of such cladding now requires planning permission.);
- The featureless open area of the Methodist Church car park makes a harsh contrast with the newly restored soft green space of the former burial ground, just to the south, or the leafy course of Bow Street.



Distinctive sash windows survive in some houses on Lewis Street.



The character of many of the houses in Lewis Street has been eroded through loss of attractive original architectural features.

5. Issues

Positives

- A well defined historic town centre with a distinctive street pattern and architectural character provided by local styles and materials, with a bias to the early 19th century;
- Extension of the historic town centre on the arterial routes leading into it with historic civic, commercial and residential buildings complemented by avenues of street trees;
- Representation of the development of town centre functions through the survival of historic civic, religious and commercial buildings;
- Quiet back street areas of residential properties with architectural interest and unity;
- A focus of statutory listed buildings of special historic and architectural interest and local heritage assets;
- Green and leafy surroundings with public open spaces that have their own historic interest;
- Excellent condition of many historic buildings, partly secured through the investments of grant schemes;
- Excellent public realm in the historic core character area, including well considered paving schemes that complement the historic environment and reflects the hierarchy of streets;



Pipe Hall in Hall Street is one of the most important listed buildings in the conservation area. Having been neglected for many years it is about to get a new lease of life under proposals brought forward by its new owners.

Negatives

- The area has been affected by the present recession and, consequently, there is a lack of vitality in some parts of the town centre, including some vacant premises and undeveloped gap sites;
- A number of long term vacant properties, both buildings and gap sites, that are becoming derelict;
- Increasing appearance of unauthorised signage, including 'temporary' banners, creating street clutter and reducing the quality of street scene;
- Some shopfronts are now in need of basic maintenance to protect the enhancements provided through grant aid;
- Untidy back yards on Bow Street;
- Lost architectural detail at Lewis Street and James Street, resulting in loss of uniformity;
- Poor quality shopfront alterations at Walsall Street;
- Untidy area of cleared buildings between Hall Street and The Orchard and to the rear of the Post Office (Pipes Meadow);



A profusion of banners and signs can detract from the architectural details of traditional shopfronts.

- Unattractive external roller shutters to shopfronts, including Nos. 11 and 13 Lichfield Street;
- Forecourt area at Nos. 23 – 29 Lichfield Street in need of softening by additional planting.

Threats

- Risk of loss of structural fabric from long term vacant buildings, either as a result of neglect or criminal damage through removal of materials;
- Further loss of architectural detail from unlisted positive buildings through minor alterations, particularly at Lewis Street and James Street;
- Increasing dereliction of disused land to rear of Lichfield Street and at Hall Street/The Orchard;
- Uncontrolled increase in signage and banners;
- Loss of facade details such as hand painted advertisements through uncontrolled repainting or cladding; and
- Loss of architectural details, including those secured through grant aid, through uncontrolled minor alterations and lack of regular maintenance.



Regular maintenance is essential to protect historic features and the investment made under recent grant regimes.

6. Management Proposals

Conservation Area review 2013

The conservation area was reviewed and a new appraisal prepared during 2013 in the context of preparing evidence to inform the Bilston Corridor Area Action Plan. Public consultation took place between 14th January and 22nd February that year. Minor amendments to the draft appraisal were incorporated into the final version. No changes to the boundary of the conservation were made but two additions were made to the Local List

Householder permitted development rights

The incremental loss of original building materials and detailing and the replacement of painted timber windows and doors with uPVC alternatives have been noted as a ‘negative’ in relation to the residential areas of the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area. For family houses, such changes are called “permitted development” as set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (amended 2008), and owners do not normally need permission from Wolverhampton City Council as the local planning authority.

An Article 4(1) Direction was served in the conservation area on 14th January 2013 and confirmed on 26th March 2013 following consultation since no objections were received from those affected. This direction withdraws permitted development rights for the unlisted dwelling houses identified as buildings of townscape merit in the conservation area. This means that potentially harmful alterations to houses are given due consideration through the planning process to help ensure the preservation of unique architectural features and traditional materials.

The following dwellinghouses are covered by the Bilston Town Centre Conservation Area Article 4(1) Direction:

- Lewis Street – Nos. 1-57 (odd)
- James Street – Nos. 30-44 (even)
- Church Street: No. 43 (The Retreat)
- Lewis Street – Nos. 2-6 (even)
- Mount Pleasant : Nos. 25-37 (odd)

This Article 4 (1) Direction requires that house owners or tenants obtain planning permission for a prescribed range of development which materially affects aspects of the external appearance of dwelling houses in the conservation area. This

includes various kinds of development fronting the highway such as the enlargement, improvement, or other alteration of a dwelling house; alterations to the roof, the construction of an external porch; and the painting of a dwelling house, or of a building or enclosure within its curtilage. The Article 4 (1) Direction also brings under planning control the demolition, alteration and construction of gates, fences, walls or other means of enclosure, if they are within the curtilage of a dwelling house and front a highway, waterway or open space.



Houses in Mount Pleasant are now protected by the Article 4(1) Direction.

Commercial property owners permitted development rights

A large part of the present conservation area is either occupied as business premises or otherwise residential properties that would be rated as flats, which do not receive householder permitted development rights. However there are still some alterations that can be made without the requirement to obtain planning

permission including minor operations such as external painting and making alterations to boundary treatments.

Both the Bilston Townscape Heritage Initiative and the Bilston Development Project have invested in the fabric of commercial buildings in the town centre resulting in the current high standard of many of the properties and the positive character of the area. However, maintaining the appearance of these buildings requires a considered approach to management. The facades of many buildings have either been painted in colours carefully chosen to complement the historic buildings and the wider area, or have included



Railings and gates reinstated under the Townscape Heritage Initiative are protected by the Article 4(1) Direction.

external painting of all unlisted buildings (excluding dwellinghouses which are covered by another Article 4(1) Direction) in the conservation area. This means that potentially harmful redecoration in unsympathetic colour schemes or those which may entail loss of a traditional painted signs are controlled through the planning process. The Article 4(1) Direction also brings the erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure under planning control for those buildings where the restoration of traditional railings and gates were funded through the Bilston Townscape Heritage Initiative at: 6 -8 Mount Pleasant (India Gates) and 5 & 7 Wellington Road.

Opportunities for enhancement

The Orchard and Hall Street

This area stands out as representing an opportunity for enhancement both through a regenerated but sympathetic built environment and through improvements to the public realm (albeit retaining The Orchard's Victorian style streetlamps). Indeed, Wolverhampton City Council have already drafted a Masterplan for the regeneration of this area and submitted this for public consultation. The area covered by the Masterplan could be extended to include land at the rear of the post office at Pipes Meadow.

Forecourt to Nos. 23-29 Lichfield Street

There is potential to enhance this area to reflect the high standard of public open spaces elsewhere in the

reinstated historic advertising as wall paintings, the loss of which would be detrimental to the historic interest and character of the area. Grant aid has also been used to rectify inappropriate colour schemes that have been harmful to the setting of nearby listed buildings. Grant aid also secured the reinstatement of traditional style boundary walls and railings for several properties in the conservation area resulting in enhancement of the streetscape and settings of the buildings concerned.

An Article 4(1) Direction to bring such changes under planning control was served in the conservation area on 14th January 2013 and confirmed on 26th March 2013 following consultation since no objections were received from those affected. This direction withdraws permitted development rights for the



Traditional painted sign in Mount Pleasant

conservation area. Ideally this should include planting to surrounding built environment and seating to give the area a sense of purpose.

Lewis Street

The tubular kerb side railing in Lewis street is buckled and unpainted and detracts from the streetscene. Opportunities should be taken to refurbish it or replace it with a more sympathetic railing or remove it, in the context of any improvements to the public realm.

The overgrown vacant former site of Nos 8 to 12 should be tidied up and redeveloped if possible.

Bringing disused and derelict buildings into a positive use

- The former Technical Institute, Mount Pleasant;
- No. 56 Church Street;
- The former Magistrate's Court, Mount Pleasant/Bow Street;
- The former Spread Eagle Public House, Lichfield Street;
- The former Swan Bank Tavern (No. 5 Lichfield Street).

The Council will encourage building owners in proposals to bring these buildings into a beneficial use that ensures their preservation and continued contribution to the conservation area. However, the Council has very limited resources to support owners. Where there is evidence of deliberate

neglect of or damage to a heritage asset in the hope of obtaining consent, the resultant deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be a factor taken into account in any decision. The Council may consider using its statutory powers, including Section 215 notices to require building owners to undertake works to prevent the further deterioration of properties and remediate derelict properties.



The former Swan Bank Tavern, Lichfield Street is one of a number of vacant buildings in Bilston at risk of deterioration.

Management of advertising and signage

It was noted that an increasing quantity of signage is being attached to buildings, including banners. The Council may prosecute property owners for display of unpermitted signage. Applications for new signage will be determined with regard to the need to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

General opportunities for enhancement

The council will also seek to:

- Encourage restoration of architectural detail/reversal of unsympathetic alterations where there is sound evidence of the originals, especially timber windows, chimney stacks, original roof covering and removal of paint from brickwork;
- Promote awareness of the value and importance of the Conservation Area amongst residents and shopkeepers with a view to highlighting the importance of carefully considering any alteration or demolition (particularly that which does not require planning permission) and encouraging high standards of maintenance;

- Produce advisory guidance and ‘best practice’ notes to assist in retaining the area’s prevalent historic character and appearance e.g. written advice regarding (a) alterations to historic buildings, (b) shopfront design guidance; (c) maintenance and repairs.

Monitoring and review

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- A survey of the Conservation Area;
- A photographic record of the Conservation Area;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements;
- A building condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

7. Implications of Conservation Area Designation

Designation as a Conservation Area brings a number of specific statutory provisions aimed at assisting the “preservation and enhancement” of the area. These are as follows:

- The local authority is under a general duty to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area, and has a particular duty to prepare proposals (such as Conservation Area Appraisals or grant schemes) to that end;
- In the exercise of any powers under the Planning Acts with respect to any buildings or other land in a Conservation Area, the Council must take into consideration the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area;
- Extra publicity is given to planning applications affecting Conservation Areas. This is usually achieved through the use of advertising in the local newspaper;
- Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of most unlisted buildings and boundary walls in a Conservation Area and the local authority or the Secretary of State may take enforcement action or institute a criminal prosecution if consent is not obtained;
- Written notice must be given to the Council before works are carried out to any tree in a Conservation Area;
- The display of advertisements may be somewhat more restricted than elsewhere;
- The Council or the Secretary of State may be able to take steps to ensure that a building in a Conservation Area is kept in good repair (similar to the powers which protect listed buildings);
- Limited financial assistance may be available for the upkeep of a building in the Conservation Area through grant schemes with English Heritage or the Heritage Lottery Fund, (though these are usually targeted to areas of economic deprivation).

It is recommended that any proposals for new development or alterations of existing buildings in the Conservation Area should be discussed with a planning officer at the Council before commencing work on site. Telephone enquiries should be made to Planning **01902 556026** or email **planning@wolverhampton.gov.uk**

Bibliography and Maps

C. Upton, A History of Wolverhampton, Phillimore, 1998
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Wolverhampton History and Heritage website at www.historywebsite.co.uk
William Yates' Map of the County Of Stafford 1775
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© Photograph of Bilston Enamel on page 6, Striped cat/Tiger enamel patch box, c. 1770-80, enamel on copper with a steel mirror inside lid, 3.3 x 4.3cm, collection of WAVE, the Museums Galleries and Archives of Wolverhampton (BA 389)

Sources of further information

Historic Environment Service

Education and Enterprise
Wolverhampton City Council
Civic Centre
St. Peter's Square
Wolverhampton WV1 1RP
Tel: 01902 555622 / 555617

www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/conservationareas

For information about Conservation Areas in Wolverhampton.

Conservation Areas: A Brief Guide and List of Conservation Areas in the City of Wolverhampton (copies available from the Historic Environment Service at the City Council).

English Heritage – West Midlands Region

The Axis
10 Holliday Street
Birmingham B1 1TG
Tel: 0121 625 6820

For further information relating to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

The Georgian Group

6 Fitzroy Square
London
W1T 5DX

Tel: **087 1750 2936**

Email: info@georgiangroup.org.uk

www.georgiangroup.org.uk

The Victorian Society

1 Priory Gardens
Bedford Park
London W4 1TT

Tel: **020 8994 1019**

For the "Care for Victorian Houses" leaflet, etc.

The Twentieth Century Society

70 Cowcross Street
London
EC1M 6EJ

Tel: **020 7250 3857**

www.c20society.org.uk

Champions of important examples of twentieth century architecture such as the Bilston Health Centre

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

37 Spital Square
London E1 6DY

Tel: **020 7377 1644**

For an excellent range of technical advice leaflet.

Historic Environment Service

Education and Enterprise

Wolverhampton City Council

Civic Centre

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