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Church Green Conservation Area, Town Centre, Redditch

Character Appraisal

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Character Appraisal for Church Green Conservation Area Redditch

December 2005

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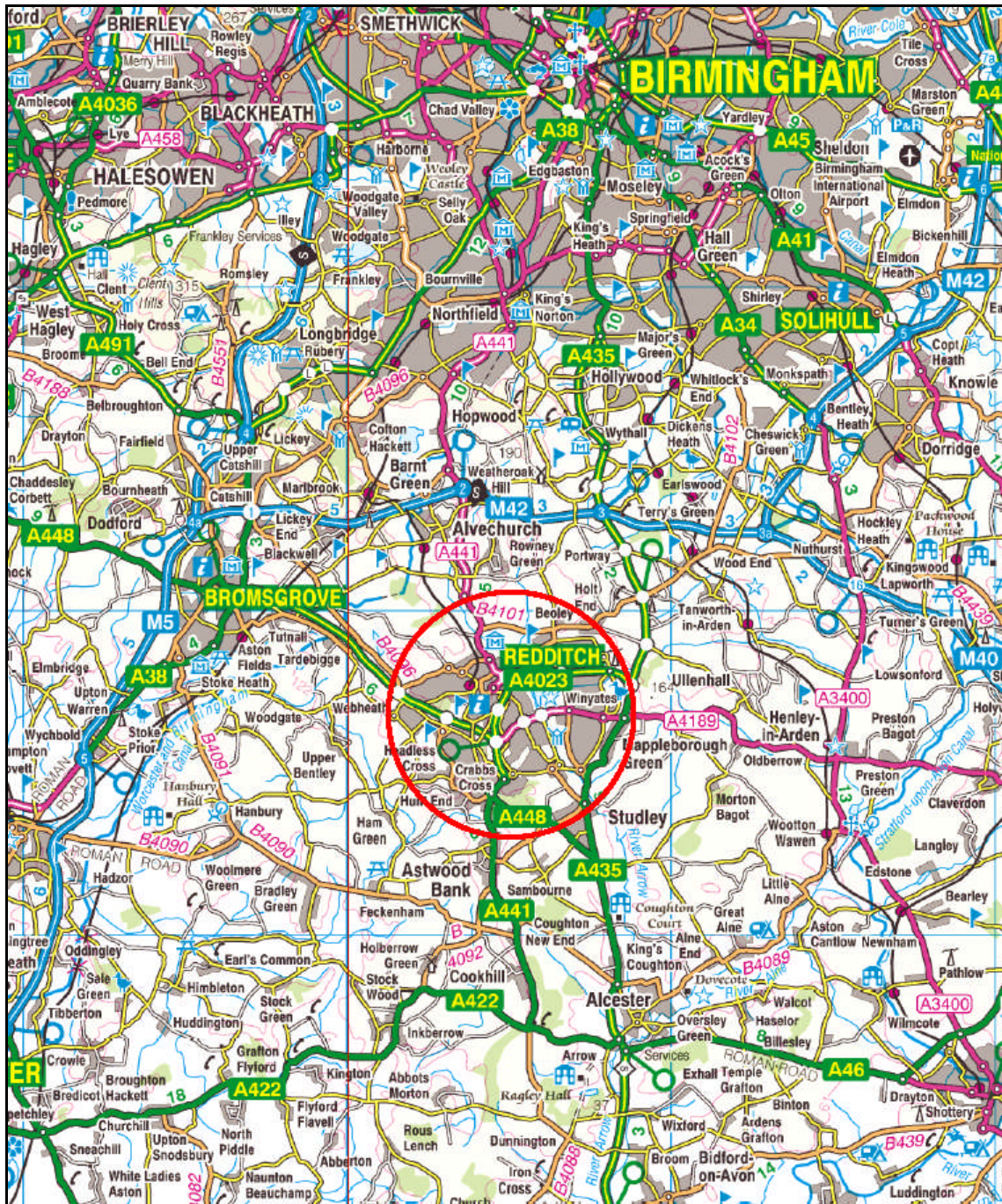


Fig 1: Location Map of Redditch

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This character appraisal relates to the Church Green Conservation Area, which is located in the town centre of Redditch in the County of Worcestershire. The Conservation Area was originally designated by Worcestershire County Council on 6 August 1971 and extended by what was then Redditch District Council on 15 November 1978, and is 2.77 hectares in extent.

The Conservation Area is roughly triangular in shape and is comprised primarily of open amenity space, focused around the Church of St Stephen, and surrounded by two pedestrianised streets and one roadway that are a remnant of an older street pattern. It also includes the row of buildings that flank its eastern perimeter and a single building located at the northern angle of the triangle. These buildings are in use as offices and commercial premises and date from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This document is intended to define and analyse the special architectural and historic interest of the Area to assist all concerned with the use and development of land and buildings within and adjoining it in order to preserve and enhance its character in accordance with Policy CTL.11 of the Redditch Borough Council Local Plan No.2.

Fig 59, at the back of this document, shows the extent of the above Conservation Area, together with a number of features referred to in this document.

2.0 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Conservation areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. In 1971 it became a requirement of every local planning authority to identify such areas, the legal definition of which has since been defined as follows:

an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. See Section 69 (a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

An Area can vary in size and form from a town centre to smaller groups of buildings, streets and squares, and it may include an historic street plan, village green or other open space or an archaeological feature which may make a special contribution to its character.

Conservation area designation brings certain duties to local planning authorities to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for their preservation and enhancement and to make decisions on proposals for development within conservation areas that will preserve and enhance their existing character and appearance. Although the word 'enhance' has come to mean 'to make attractive', the legal definition of a conservation area reveals that attractiveness is not the objective. In their document 'Conservation Area practice' (revised October 1995, paragraph 8.1), English Heritage states that enhancement means the 'reinforcement' of the existing qualities that led to designation.

Policies and proposals should thus conform to the established characteristic features which warranted designation so as to reinforce the area's special interest. Only applications which conform to these requirements will receive the support of the planning authority.

For such legislation to be fully effective, rational and consistent judgements need to be made that reflect a conservation area's special qualities and local distinctiveness. In pursuit of this aim, the government will, on occasion, issue planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) to guide the process of decision making, which carry considerable weight with both the Courts and the Planning Inspectorate. Of special relevance here is PPG 15, 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (1994), which stresses the need for local planning authorities to undertake a factual and objective analysis of a conservation area's character and appearance that will

It is, therefore, the aim of this appraisal to identify and analyse the principal qualities which give Church Green Conservation Area its special character, identity and appearance. (See Fig 2)



Fig 2: Character Appraisal Map

3.0 ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER

3.1 Setting

Church Green Conservation Area is located at the centre of Redditch and forms an area of green open space that is almost entirely surrounded by built development dating primarily from the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Fig 3) These buildings define the boundaries of the space and provide a pleasing foil to the Church of St Stephen, which forms a focal point upon the Green. Notable features of the current setting include:

- a) Its close relationship with the surviving historic street pattern, in particular with the streets now known as Church Green East, Church Green West and Market Place, which enclose the church green. (See Street Pattern and Movement, Section 3.4)
- b) A ring road, the Redditch Ringway, which encircles the town centre to the north west and south, but is visible from the Area only where it bridges the main roads into the town centre from the north and west.
- c) The redevelopment of the land within the ring road to the south and east of the Area during the second half of the twentieth century, although the nineteenth century street frontage was retained along Market Place. Behind this frontage almost half of the town centre is dominated by the Kingfisher Centre and its associated multi-storey car parks to the south and by new civic and office buildings to the east and south-east along Alcester Street and Grove Street with any vacant land in use as car parks.
- d) The large site east of the area which is occupied by North East Worcestershire (new) College. This is currently being redeveloped and the nineteenth and twentieth century buildings are now largely replaced by an entirely new structure with associated landscaping and car parking provision.
- e) The large twentieth-century office buildings and beyond the late nineteenth century buildings that include Redditch Baptist Church and Masonic Hall located to the north-east of the Area.
- f) The more fragmentary redevelopment immediately north-east of the Area. Although there has been some demolition and several new community buildings erected adjacent to the ring road, the nineteenth-century street frontages along Church Green West, Bates Hill, William Street and Church Road remain largely intact.

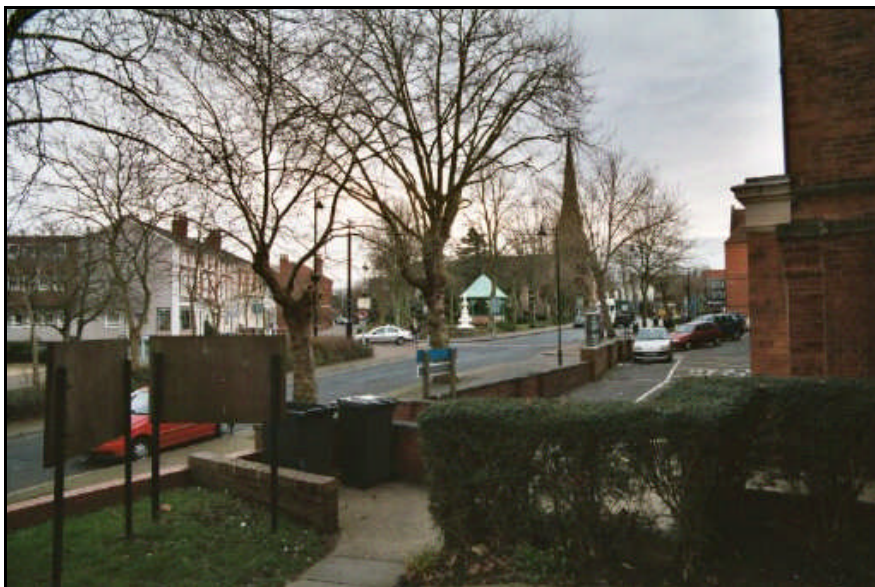


Fig 3: View south from the northern end of the conservation area

3.2 Topography

There are two main topographical influences on the Area.

- a) the long ridge that runs north/south through the western half of Redditch Borough. This reaches from the Lickey Hills on the edge of the Birmingham plateau, through Foxlydiate, to Webheath, Headless Cross, Crabbs Cross and beyond Astwood Bank. Two spurs run eastwards from the ridge, at Mount Pleasant and Rough Hill Wood. The Mount Pleasant spur terminates in a small plateau on which the town centre is located, with the Conservation Area occupying the northern tip of this spur.
- b) the Arrow valley which follows a north/south course east of the main ridge. The land falls away quite steeply to the north and east of the Area towards the river valley.

3.3 Historical Background

Redditch is renowned as the centre of the needle-making industry, but owes its origin to the Cistercian monks, who founded Bordesley Abbey in the 12th century. Prior to their arrival, the area was a marshy and uninhabited valley that lay between two ancient trade routes along the ridgeways to the east and west, although there were Saxon settlements at Beoley, Ipsley, Headless Cross, Studley and Tardebigge.

The monks drained and cleared the land, built water and windmills to run forges and established a thriving community alongside the abbey to accommodate the ironworkers, stonemasons and other labourers and their families, which was known as Red Ditch or Rubeo Fossetto, after the iron oxide discolouration of the local stream.

At the Dissolution, the local economy suffered, but was sustained by the Sheldon family of Beoley and their tapestry-making enterprise. The needle trade was already established in the region by this time and, after the Civil War, many more needlemakers settled in the Arrow valley. Local industry was fostered by the Earls of Plymouth of Hewell Grange and, by the turn of the 18th century, there were over 2000 needlemakers in the district, and also a flourishing fish-hook business. The construction of the Birmingham-Worcester canal through Tardebigge gave new impetus to local industry and the arrival of the railway in 1859 soon secured the town as the international centre of the needle-making industry. (Fig.4)

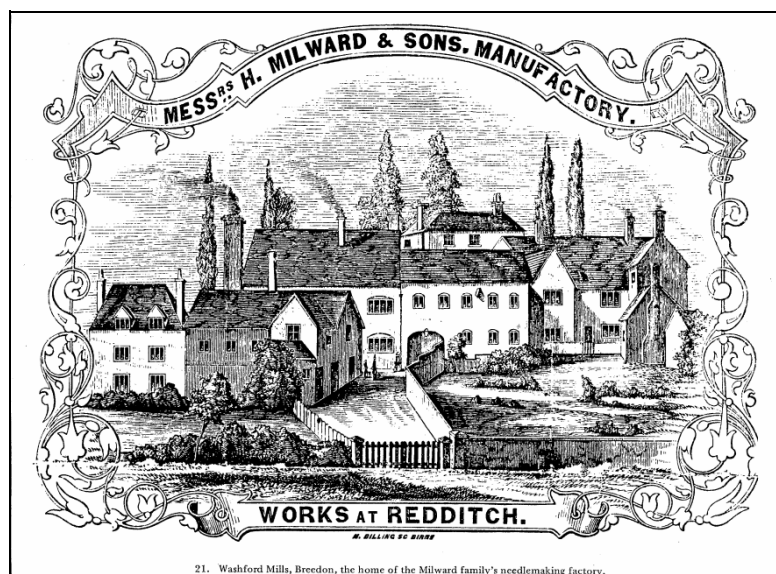


Fig 4: Washford Mills, Breedon

This new prosperity was reflected in the rapid growth and development of the town centre from the late eighteenth century onwards. (Fig. 5) Grand new houses were built along the Bromsgrove Road and Prospect Hill, conveniently located adjacent to the new large needle and fish-hook mills, such as Forge Mills, Abbey Mills, British Mills and the Easemore Works. Most significantly, the area now known as Church Green was transformed to meet the needs of the expanding urban population.

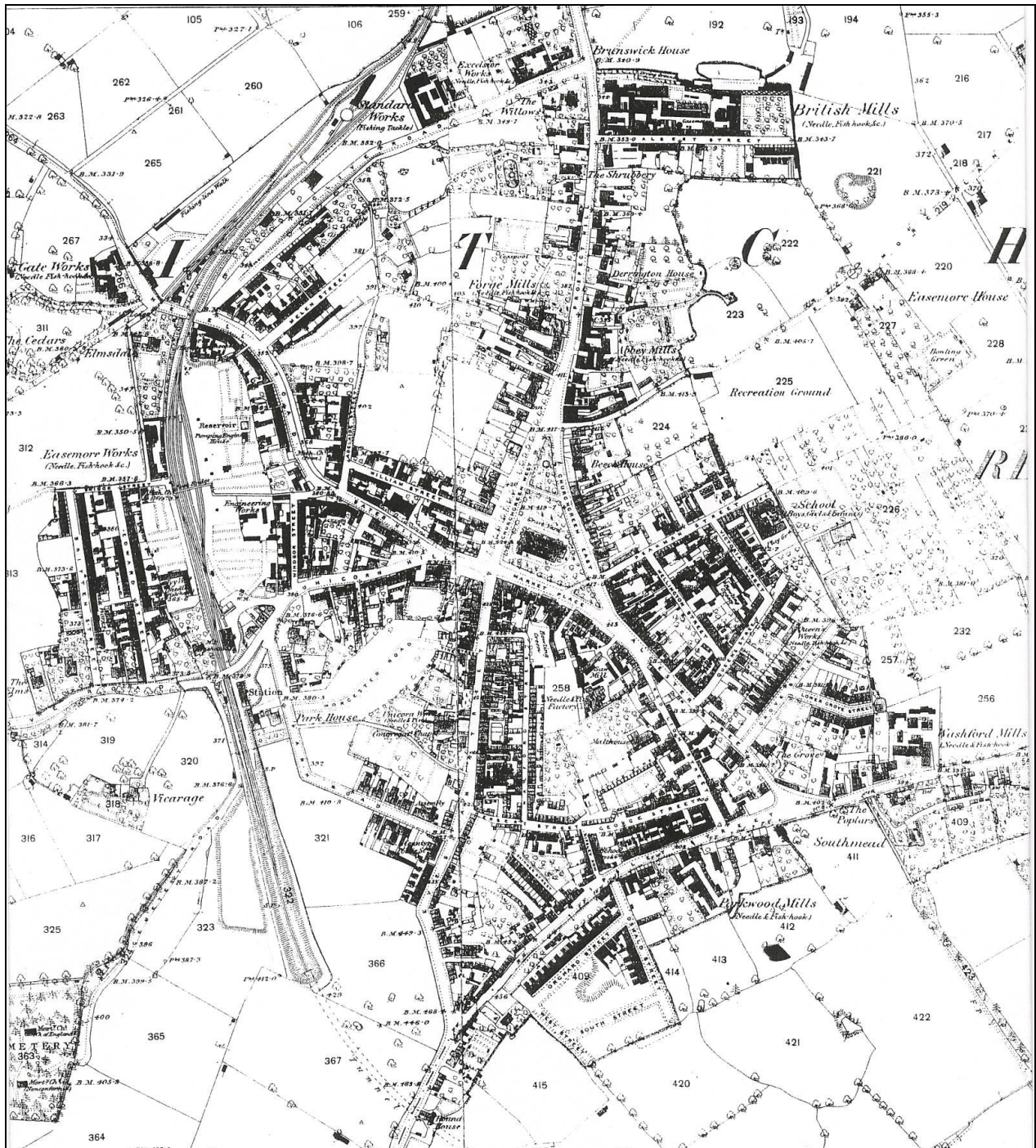


Fig 5: 1886 OS map of Redditch

Traditionally, the area now known as Church Green had provided a crossing point for several important roads through the area leading across the valley from the ridgeways, and it is probable that it served as a market and meeting place since the medieval period. A few of the timber-framed buildings dating from the seventeenth century or even earlier that fronted onto the present Market Place can be seen in early illustrations of the area, and traces of probable seventeenth-century structures survive at the rear of Church Green East.

In 1808 the Earl of Plymouth gave a portion of land on the green to the town on which to construct a chapel. (Fig6). This was then a roughly triangular parcel of flat, open ground, devoid of trees, but the new chapel, known as The Chapel on the Green, which heralded its transformation. From the late 18th century, the scattered buildings around its perimeter were steadily replaced by more substantial buildings, plots were infilled, and formal street frontages were established. Such was the expansion of the town that by 1853 the chapel was deemed inadequate and was replaced by a large new church that became a focal point and landmark at the heart of the town. Its construction was accompanied by a massive tree planting scheme on the Green, now Church Green, partly funded by public subscription, and the churchyard was enclosed by decorative iron railings. (Fig.7)

In 1883 the Bartleet fountain, cast at the Coalbrookdale Works, was erected on Church Green and set amidst formal gardens to commemorate the town's new fresh water supply and, ten years later, the church was altered and extended by the addition of a new memorial chapel. Also at this time, Church Green was enclosed to the north-west by further development, including the Scientific and Literary Institute of 1885, and Smallwood Hospital of 1894, given to the town by the Smallwood brothers, local needle manufacturers. Church Green West was then known as 'The Parade', as its avenue of trees were now sufficiently mature to create an elegant promenade.(Fig.8 and Fig.9)



Fig 6: The Chapel on the Green - Early 19th century

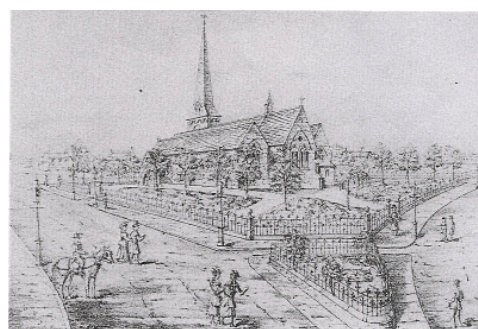


Fig 7: The church of St Stephens 1883



Fig 8: The Parade in 1907 (now Church Green west)



Fig 9: Church Green East in 1898

3.4 Street Pattern and Movement

The principal thoroughfares within the Area were laid out by the late eighteenth century and are probably medieval in origin. These are Church Green West, Church Green East and Market Place and they are still in use today, following their historic function as vehicular or pedestrian corridors within the centre of the town.

These three principal thoroughfares enclose the Green and are linked to the following principal access routes into the town centre as follows:

- At the junction of Church Green West and Church Green East there is access to the town centre up Prospect Hill from the north
- There is pedestrian access up Alcester Street leading to the junction of Church Green East and Market Place from the south-east
- At the junction of Church Green West and Market Place there is access to the town centre from Unicorn Hill from the west

The western ends of Easemore Road and Peakman Street that intersect with Church Green East at T-junctions also fall within the designated Area. Additionally, there is one minor street, Herbert Street, and part of Wellington Street, included within the Area, which defines its eastern boundary to the rear of the plots along Church Green East. Also two other minor streets adjoin the western boundary of the Area at their eastern end: these are Church Road and William Street.

Movement is among the most dominant features within the Conservation Area as follows:

a) Vehicular

Vehicular movement within the Conservation Area is restricted. Since the construction of the ring road and the new shopping centre in the second half of the twentieth century, many vehicular routes within the town centre were closed to traffic or subject to redevelopment. As a result there is now only restricted vehicular access within the town centre and within the Conservation Area in particular. Only Church Green West remains in use by through traffic and there is a designated Bus Priority route that leads from the bus station at the foot of Unicorn Hill, along Church Green West and down Easemore Road. The northern route from Church Green West down Prospect Hill is also closed to traffic, as is the western route from William Street onto Church Green West. However vehicles can still approach Church Green from the north and are then directed via a one-way system down Easemore Road.

b) Pedestrian

Pedestrians have extensive freedom of movement within the area.

- Both Church Green East and Market Place are fully pedestrianised, as are some adjoining streets, notably Alcester Street
- Access from Market Place to the Kingfisher Centre is also fully pedestrianised
- Church Green West has a very wide pavement with only limited traffic using the junction with Church Road.

3.5 Views

Important views into, out of, and within the Area are as follows:

a) *Into the Area*

The topography of the Area and the height and scale of the new development on its fringes only allows very restricted views into it from distant vantage points, but there are several places from its edge, where views into the Area are both interesting and appealing (Figs 11, 12, 13):

- From the top of Prospect Hill
- From William Street where the west elevation of the church is framed by the street front-ages
- From the top of Unicorn Hill



Fig 11: View into the area from Prospect Hill



Fig 12: View into the area from William St



Fig 13: View into the area
from the top of Unicorn Hill

b) Out of the Area

The topography of the Area offers far-reaching outward views to the north, east and west towards the fields and wooded hillsides that surround the town. However, as the Area is largely enclosed by tall buildings there is limited opportunity to gain full benefit from these and the ring road has also detracted from this asset. Again the height and scale of the new development south of the Area restricts all views in this direction. The most notable outward views are (Figs. 14, 15, 16, 17):

- From the northern end of the Area at the junction of Church Green West and Church Green East looking north
- From the junction of Market Place and Church Green West looking west down Bates Hill and Unicorn Hill
- Down Peakman Street towards the new college building looking east
- From the western end of Alcester Street looking east



Fig 14: View out of the area from Prospect Hill

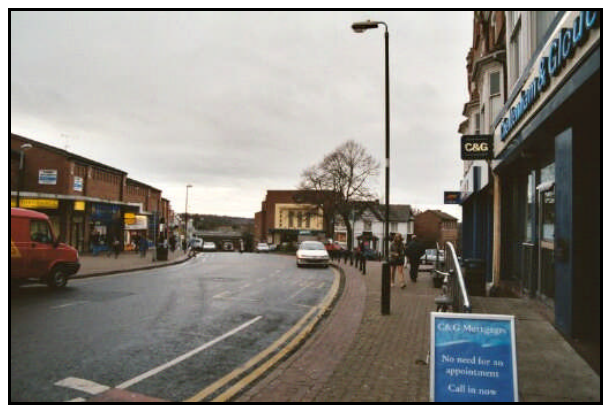


Fig 15: View out of the area from Unicorn Hill



Fig 16: View out of the area down Peckman Street



Fig 17: View out of the area down Alcester Street

c) *Within the Area*

Most of the pedestrian routes within the Area have viewing points from which other parts of the Area create interest. This is particularly true upon and immediately adjacent to Church Green itself and also north of the church where the Green has been landscaped and planted to form a small park. The following viewing points are of specific merit (Figs. 18, 19, 20):

- The view south from the northern end of Church Green looking towards the fountain, bandstand and church
- The view both north and south along Church Green East, which includes numerous listed buildings that date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
- The view north-west across the Green towards the group of buildings that includes the former Scientific and Literary Institute, Smallwood Hospital and Red House.

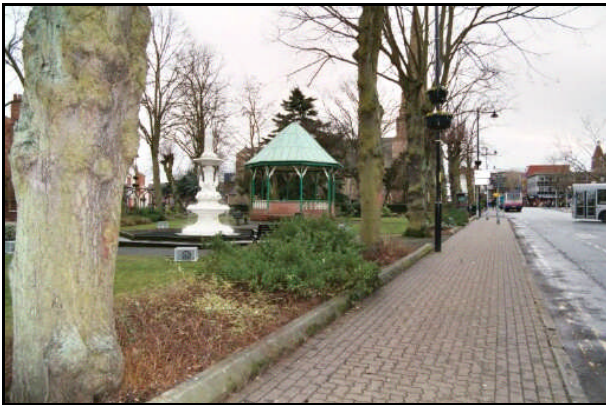


Fig 18: View south across the northern end of the Green



Fig 19: Church Green East looking North

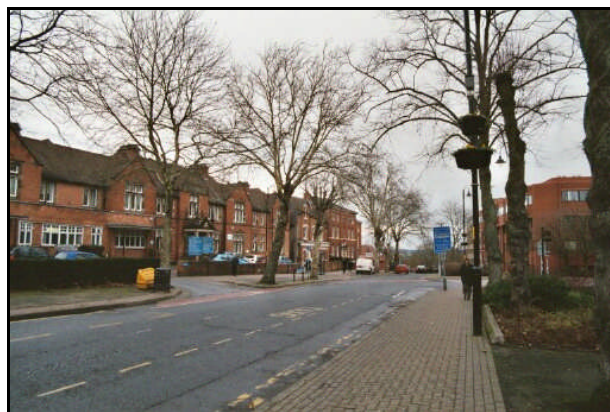


Fig 20: View north west from the Green to Smallwood Hospital and Red House

3.6 Illumination and Night Time Appearance

The Area has street lighting due to its urban location, and this creates a different range of characteristics to the familiar daylight scenes.

In general, this is brought about by subtle rather than brash or garish means. A sequence of tall, traditional style, lamps line the streets around Church Green. These are located at regular intervals and provide a low level of somewhat surreal orange light. Their height and number means that the fascia signs of the nearby shops are legible without the need for individual illumination. Despite this fact, there are a few shop fronts within and on the perimeter of the Conservation Area boundary that have either internally illuminated or externally illuminated signs that spill light either down the frontage or out onto the pavement. Although these are intrusive, they are not in sufficient number to detract significantly, or compete with, the wider spread of light from the street lamps. The overall level of illumination provides a sense of safety and comfort without any oppressive glare.

This subtle effect contrasts with the bold illumination of the Bartleet fountain, which is encircled by flood lights mounted at ground level. These provide an intense white light which, when combined with the white paintwork on the fountain, produces a dramatic effect. Arguably it would have equal impact and be less distracting if the strength of illumination was reduced slightly. The bandstand is also illuminated at night by downlighters installed on the ceiling. These give a diffused white light that effectively outlines its simple arcading and railings. The church is not illuminated at all. As the focal point of the town centre, this is regrettable and it would be beneficial if a lighting scheme were to be devised that was integrated with that of the two other built features on the Green, i.e. the fountain and bandstand.

3.7 Pattern and Density of Building

The pattern of building within the Area is clearly defined and reflects its special identity as a triangular area of green open space around the nineteenth-century church. Around one third of the Area is built upon, and, apart from the church, this consists primarily of the row of buildings that front onto Church Green East and also Red House at the northern angle of the area.

The plots along Church Green East are in general quite narrow and deep and are aligned perpendicular to the street. The building pattern is in general back of pavement. Although the facades are not in continuous alignment, the general flow of the street is maintained rather than being overtly staggered to produce a strong continuity and rhythm. It is possible that any irregularities reflect or overlie an earlier pattern of burgage plots, which were particularly common near market places. These were typically held by skilled craftsmen and traders and the house would include an integral workshop and a rear garden. The plots along Church Green East have been infilled and more densely developed from the nineteenth century, but it is notable that some archways and alleyways have been retained that lead to the rear of these plots, several of which are still in use. The buildings at the northern end of the street are set well back from the main street frontage and include a much larger plot than average, that of Beech House, a nineteenth century building that was part of the infill development of this period. (Fig.21)



Fig 21 Beech House, Church Green East

The buildings that front onto Market Place and located immediately outside the Conservation Area boundary may also stand on former burgage plots and share a similar history, although the plots at the eastern end of the street are now quite wide and were probably amalgamated at some time.

However the pattern of building immediately outside the western perimeter of the Area, i.e those buildings fronting onto Church Green West, is for the most part markedly different. These buildings all have irregularly-sized plots and this side of the Green was clearly developed in a more piecemeal fashion. From the 1886 OS map (Fig.5) it is clear that the broad pavement was established by this date, but many of the buildings were set well back from the present street line and still had large gardens. Red House in the northern angle of the Area, together with Smallwood Hospital and the houses located between them, retained this former pattern of development. However the late nineteenth century buildings at the southern end of the street and also the new Institute building of 1885 established the current street frontage, which subsequent infill and the progressively more intensive use of land has sought to retain.

3.8 Types and Uses of Buildings

The types and uses of buildings within the Area reflect the prevailing or former land uses, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, as follows:

a) *The Church of St. Stephen*

This is still in use for religious services but serves an additional community role with the conversion of the two westernmost bays of the nave as a meeting room and shop.

b) *The bandstand and fountain*

These continue to fulfil the amenity and commemorative role for which they were intended.

c) *Church Green East and Red House, Church Green West*

Many of these buildings were probably constructed as dwellings but are now primarily in office or commercial use. They include some of the largest and finest houses that survive in the town centre and reflect the status and wealth of their original owners.

3.9 Style of Buildings

The architectural style of the buildings in the Area relates to their type and date as follows:

- a) The Church of St Stephen is a fine example of a Victorian Gothic church, built in the Decorated style by Henry Woodyer between 1854-5 with alterations and additions by Temple Moore. (Fig 22)
- b) Many of the buildings in Church Street East, including Nos.7-8, 23 (Church Green House) and also Red House in Church Green West are built in a typical late Georgian style and are well-proportioned with moulded or dentilled cornices, sash windows with rubbed brick heads or rusticated voussoirs, and elegant door cases with traceried fanlights. (Fig.23)
- c) Most of the mid and late Victorian buildings and alterations are similarly proportioned but more ornate in general, many incorporating free but relatively high quality elements of Italianate classical detail including rusticated quoins, moulded flat canopies on consoles and moulded architraves to the windows, pilasters articulating the bays or flanking the windows, and some have classical porches with entablatures on Doric columns, for example, Beech House, Church Green East.
- d) In addition to these dominant architectural styles, there are various other subsidiary elements of nineteenth-century architecture found within the Area that are worthy of note:
 - The industrial vernacular common elsewhere in the town, occurs in the multi-paned metal windows with segmental-arched heads and blue brick sills in Peakman Street.
 - Oriel windows and decorative brickwork are found at Nos 13-15 Church Green East dated 1887 and the Sportsman's Arms in Peakman Street. Both are a common feature of buildings of this date in the borough.

The buildings that abut the Area boundary along Market Place and Church Green East reflect the dominant nineteenth-century style in general, but with some notable exceptions (See Section 3.11)



Fig 22: Church of St Stephen



Fig 23: Church Green East

3.10 Size and Plan of Buildings

The size and plan of buildings in the Area has been dictated by their historic uses and plot divisions.

Most of the buildings in Church Green East and also Red House in Church Green West share similar characteristics in that they are predominantly:

- Domestic in scale
- Of three storeys of good and generous proportions
- Of similar height

Their plan appears to have been defined by the plot shape in most cases and by a desire for symmetry usually expressed more emphatically on the façade.

There are three obvious exceptions to this within the Area which are:

- The Church of St. Stephen. This is the largest and tallest building in the Area, although its impact has been diminished by the scale of new development in the vicinity. It is aligned east/west and has a similarly traditional plan form with a 5-bay aisled nave, a 3-bay chancel with south chapel and north vestry and a north-west tower with an elegant octagonal spire.
- The octagonal bandstand
- The octagonal fountain.

3.11 Morphology

The morphology of buildings reflects the Georgian and Victorian phases of development, the former having a strong influence on the latter. With the obvious exception of the buildings and structures on Church Green itself, in general:

- Plot frontages are of relatively regular width that reflects their former domestic use
- They are predominantly of three storeys
- Their height is in general equal to that of the width of the street
- There are variations in the massing of the buildings along the street but this for the most part is subtle so that the roofline appears mainly uniform
- Facades are with few exceptions only slightly staggered but the overall impression is of continuity
- Profiles of some buildings are visible at roof level which adds visual interest and also reveals the depth of the floor plans
- Windows and doors are distributed regularly within the elevations to create a strong vertical rhythm within the streetscape that is reinforced by the quoins, chimneys, and downpipes and also subtly counterbalanced by the horizontal line of the eaves, roof ridges, string courses and plinths and of the overall alignment of the buildings.

It is important to note that certain buildings in Church Green West that abut the Area boundary to the west and overlook Church Green differ markedly from the overall appearance, scale and character established in Church Green East due to their different date and specific function, but in a very positive way. These include the late 19th century Gothic design of the former Scientific Institute and the long, low profile and Jacobean inspired detail of Smallwood Hospital.

3.12 Materials and Construction

The majority of buildings within the area share the following similarities in their materials and construction:

- **Roofs**

Roofs are mainly covered with natural grey Welsh slate, although a few buildings are covered with small plain clay tiles or concrete tiles. The natural slate and clay tiles have historic merit and are in sympathy with the style and character of the buildings and the Area in general.

The buildings have mainly gabled roofs of either a single or double pitch and a ridge line that runs parallel to the street. Rear wings have pitched roofs with ridges set at right angles to the street. The roof pitches vary from around 40 to 30 degrees, a few have gable end parapets, and there is a notable absence of dormers or rooflights. A few of the higher quality buildings have hipped roofs and any modern infill buildings have flat roofs set behind parapets.

Chimneys are either ridge-mounted or set within the roof pitch and built into the wall thickness rather than being externally exposed. They are brick-built, multi-flued, rectangular in plan and generally of tall, narrow proportions to give a strong vertical emphasis. Many have oversailing courses but their simple detail does not diminish the significant level of interest they impart to the roofscape.

At eaves level there are often courses of dentilled brick or other simple moulded detail, the chief exceptions to this being Beech House, which has a modillion eaves cornice, and No. 19 (Lloyd's Bank) and 20, Webb House, where the lower edge of the roof is completely concealed behind a projecting moulded cornice, the former of which is boldly modelled and enriched with modillions and other decoration.

(Fig. 24)

At gable ends, the roof covering is terminated close or flush to the wall and sealed to it with a mortar fillet. Flashings at abutments are of lead and in most cases stepped into the brick courses where required.

Rainwater goods are generally of cast iron, and original downpipes on the higher quality buildings are rectangular in cross-section.

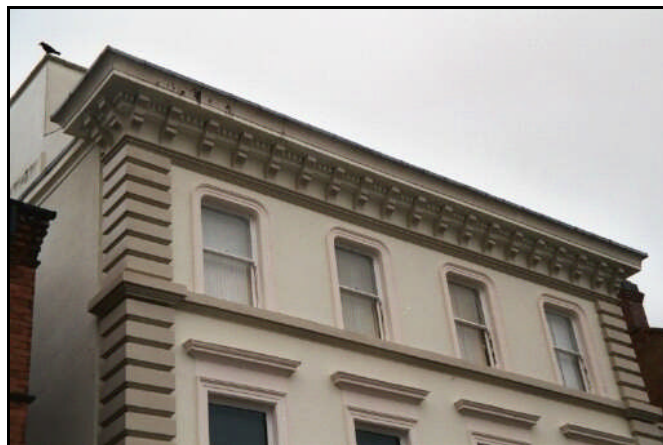


Fig 24: Cornice of No 19, Church Green East

- **Walls**

Walls are built of local brick that has an attractive soft, warm reddish-orange to reddish-brown colour lending a subtle tonal variety to the buildings. Bricks are laid in Flemish bond with narrow joints and lime mortar. (Fig.25)

Some of the buildings have stone dressings and some have been partly or wholly stuccoed and painted in pastel colours, but this is unlikely to be an original characteristic and does not do justice to the quality of the material. In some cases, quoins, string courses, and other decorative detail have been painted to add additional emphasis. No.20 has banded rustication on the ground floor which is continued across the pilasters of the shop front, whilst No.19 is entirely rendered, its prominent rusticated quoins and rock-faced rustication on the ground floor intended to lend the favoured fortified *palazzo* feel popular with provincial banks rather than relate to the local building characteristics. (Fig.26)

The notable exceptions to this include the structures on the Green as follows:

- a) The Church of St Stephen, which is constructed of dressed and coursed local Tardebigge sandstone rubble that varies in colour from soft pink to buff and brownish grey. It has ashlar dressings and slate roofs with gable end parapets, the chancel roofs being set behind high parapets.
- b) The Bartleet fountain is constructed of painted cast iron and stands at the centre of a shallow octagonal sandstone basin. The substantial shaped plinth supports a two-tiered design. On the uppermost tier stands the figure of a woman, said to represent Temperance, who pours a stream of water from an urn. The lower tier has a number of large birds, cranes or herons, grouped around the main column and standing upon very naturalistic waterlily leaves. Pevsner describes the composition as 'funny but engaging'. (Fig,27)
- c) The octagonal bandstand, which is built of painted timber on a brick base with open balustraded sides.

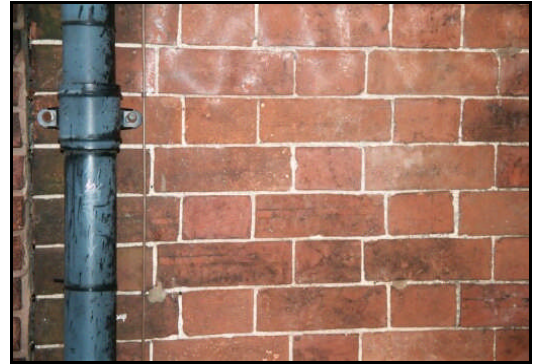


Fig 25: Brickwork detail in Church Green East



Fig 26: Rock faced rustication
No 19 Church Green East

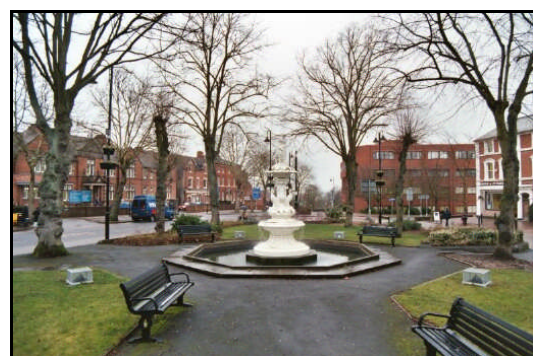


Fig 27: The Bartleet Fountain

- **Doors and Windows**

Doors and windows are rectangular with a strong vertical emphasis that plays a key role in the rhythm and proportions of the streetscape in general.

Doors are of panelled wood, traditionally painted rather than stained. They have painted timber surrounds with plain fanlights and simple flat canopies above. Higher quality buildings have semi-circular arched heads, traceried fanlights, panelled reveals, stone steps, and classically-inspired surrounds with flanking pilasters or attached Doric columns and broken pediments, as at Church Green House and Red House and also the massive rusticated Doric pilasters that flank the entrance to No.20, Webb House, Church Green East. Two buildings in Church Green East, Beech House and No.19, also have imposing classical porches. (Figs. 28, 29 and 30)

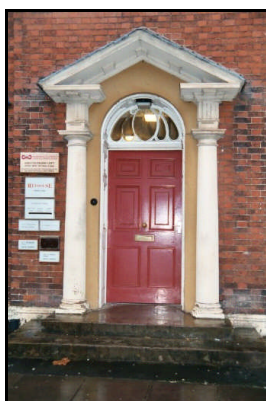


Fig 28: Entrance door.



Fig 29: Entrance



Fig 30: Entrance door.

Windows are usually slightly recessed from the wall surface. They have mainly flat heads of either rubbed brick or with rusticated stone voussoirs, either stepped or with prominent keyblocks, and also projecting stone sills. Later Victorian examples might incorporate semi-circular arched heads, moulded architraves and flat canopies on console brackets.

The window mechanism is generally the vertically-sliding sash, divided into several vertically-arranged panes held with narrow glazing bars. The height of the top floor windows is often less than that of those on the lower floors and the decorative treatment of the windows also varies with each floor. Tripartite sashes are also found within the Area. Like the doors, the windows are traditionally painted rather than stained to provide a bold contrast with the brickwork and emphasis their proportions within the façade. (Figs. 32, 33 and 34)

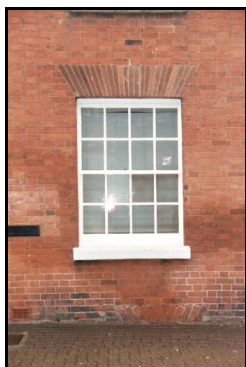


Fig 31:

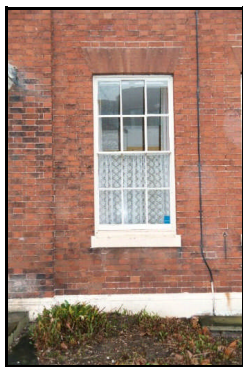


Fig 32:



Fig 33:

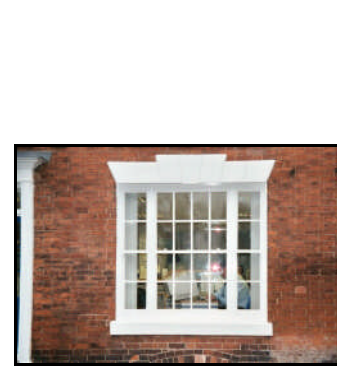


Fig 34:

The only notable exception to this general rule within the Area is as follows:

- The late 19th century canted oriel windows that run along the 5-bay façade of Nos 13-15 Church Green East
- The oriel windows on the first floor of The Sportsman's Arms in Peakman Street, which contain some leaded glass
- The rear wing of No.20, Church Green East, which has segmental-arched multi-paned metal windows with blue brick sills common to many industrial buildings elsewhere in the town (Fig.35)

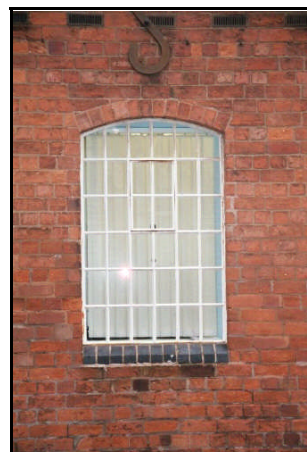


Fig 35: Window in Peakman Street

3.13 Listed Buildings and Structures

The Area includes nine listed buildings and structures, all of which are of Grade II status as follows:

1. The Church of St Stephen. 1854-5 by Henry Woodyer and extended and altered by Temple Moore 1893-4.
2. The Williams memorial about 35 yards north-west of the church. Mid 19th century chest tomb.
3. The Bartleet fountain on Church Green. 1883.
4. Nos. 7 and 8, Church Green East. Late 18th century.
5. Nos 9,10,11,and 12, Church Green East. Early 19th century.
6. No.13, Church Green East. C1840 with earlier rear range of possible late 17th century date.
7. No.20, Webb House, Church Green East. Dted 1784 with later alterations and additions.
8. No.23 Church Green House, Church Green East (National Westminster Bank). Early 19th century.
9. Red House, Church Green West. Late 18th century

The only Grade II listed building visible from the Area is No.7 and 8, Church Road (south), a stuccoed 18th century building with later alterations. However the prominent profile and bold detailing of the recently-refurbished Palace Theatre in Alcester Street also contributes to its setting.

3.14 Buildings of Local Interest

The Area includes several buildings that are not statutorily listed but which are considered to be of local interest and/or townscape value and are included on the Local List:

1. Nos 3-5, Church Green East, mid/late 19th terrace
2. Beech House, Church Green East. Well-detailed late Victorian town house
3. Nos 13-15, Church Green East. Dated 1887. Unusual row of Victorian shop fronts with oriel windows above.
4. No 19, Lloyd's Bank. Substantial building with Italianate facade. Altered but dominates the street frontage.
5. The bandstand-for townscape value rather than any special architectural merit.
6. No 1 Peakman Street. Public house with ornate tiled frontage.

There are also several buildings within the setting of the Area that are already included on the Local List as follows:

- Smallwood Hospital, Church Green West Imposing Tudor-style facade
- The former Scientific and Literary Institute, Church Green West (Fig 36)
- Redditch Baptist Church and Sunday School, Easemore Road (Fig.37)
- Masonic Hall, Easemore Road Forms good group with above
- County Court Building, Church Road Extravagant Italianate detail (Fig.38)
- Chicago Rock (former Danilo Cinema, Unicorn Hill Art Deco
- Nos 2-6 Unicorn Hill and No.2 Church Green West Corner turret. Landmark value
- No 10-12 Market Place Good example of local Victorian brickwork with townscape value



Fig 36: Striking and well-detailed Gothic building



Fig 37: Good compact group in Perpendicular Gothic-style



Fig 38: The County Court building, Church Road

3.15 Survival of Architectural Features

Many architectural features have survived within the Area, including the following:

- a) Traditional roof coverings, uninterrupted with rooflights or dormers
- b) Fine brickwork that has not been painted or rendered
- c) Original pointing
- d) Cast iron rainwater goods
- e) Original joinery
- f) White-painted woodwork with almost no use of stains
- g) Some historic shopfronts
- h) Stone kerbstones
- i) Chamfered stone blocks to the planting beds and churchyard boundary

3.16 Street Furniture

There is a variety of modern and traditional style street furniture found throughout the area. (Fig.39, 40, 41) This includes the following:

- Curved railings in short sections along Church Green West
- Traditional style signposts
- Traditional style park benches on and around Church Green
- Traditional style litter bins
- Traditional style bollards
- Traditional style street lamps
- Traditional style sign brackets
- Two pergolas run along the western side of Church Green East
- Modern black plastic tiered planters, freestanding and attached to the street lamps
- Modern phone boxes
- Modern post boxes
- Traffic signs
- Bus shelters in Church Green West
- Square metal grilles set into the pavement around the more immature trees

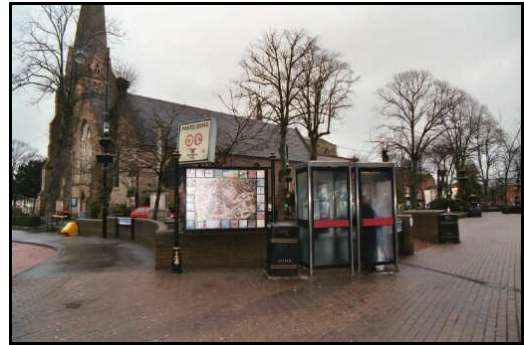


Fig 39: Street furniture near the church

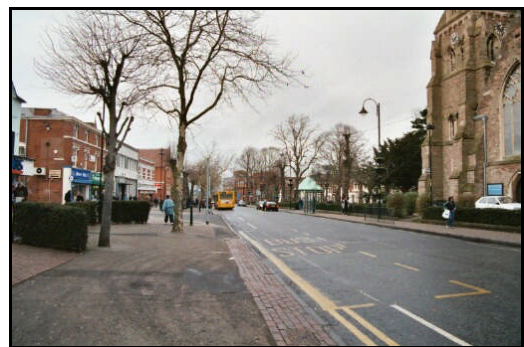


Fig 40: Street furniture in Church Green West

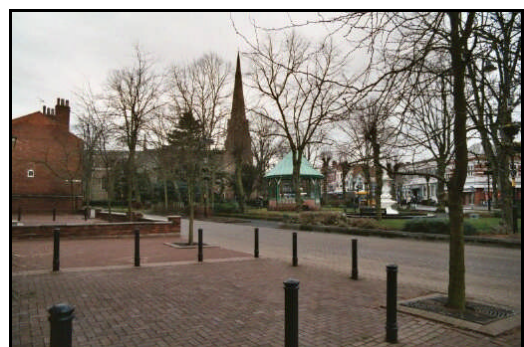


Fig 41: Bollards in Church Green West

Most of this furniture is fairly sympathetic to the character of the Area, but the modern planters are more intrusive and are used to excess. In places the signage is prolific, also intrusive and creates clutter. (See Section 3. 23)

3.17 Open Spaces

The Area itself is the most important area of open space within Redditch town centre. The abundance of vegetation and the restricted access to through traffic enhances its character considerably and it creates a sympathetic and attractive setting for the church and other historic buildings within the Area and around its perimeter. The total exclusion of vehicles from Church Green East and Market Place has increased the value of the entire area as a public space, especially during the summer months when shoppers are less inclined to retreat to the controlled climate of the Kingfisher Centre.

Church Green itself combines a variety of uses as a churchyard car park, a small public park and, in Unicorn Place around the war memorial, a low-walled enclosure serves as a tiny civic square. (Fig.42) This variety of functions is reflected in its formal and informal treatment. Apart from the paved and undistinguished area around the war memorial to the extreme south-west, the area around the church forms a fairly informal arrangement of grassed areas, tarmac paths and parking areas, trees and shrubs that survive from the former churchyard. Immediately north of the church and overshadowed by its massive form, three chest tombs remain set beside the yew hedging and here the Area retains a sense of solemnity and peace, a sense of detachment from the noise and activity of the town centre. The late nineteenth century railings that once enclosed the area have long disappeared for reuse elsewhere. However the low-level yew hedging survives and separates this area from the northern end of the Green. Here the fountain and bandstand are surrounded by pathways that form part of a more precise, geometric and formal sequence of flower beds surrounded by stone kerbs and grassed areas. There are additional large flower beds set between the pergolas along the western side of Church Green East.



Fig 42: Unicorn Place

3.18 Ground Surfaces

The principal ground surfaces in the Area are as follows:

- a) Grass set within stone and concrete kerbing and subdivided by tarmac paths on Church Green itself. Some of the stonework formed the base to the former railings.
- b) Modern interlocking buff/grey block paving along Church Green East, Market Place, the eastern pavement adjacent to Church Green in Church Green West and along the inner half of the pavement in Church Green West. This is subdivided by strips and channels of grey blocks at the edges, property divisions and street junctions etc. In places where the paving has become damaged or found difficult to repair the paving has been patched with tarmac or concrete. (Figs.43 and 44)
- c) Purplish-red herringbone brick paving is used in Unicorn Place.
- d) Similar purplish-red brick occurs elsewhere:
 - along the building line and as a broad strip flanking the interlocking paving along Church Green West and also as a narrow strip alongside the kerbstones. (Fig.45)
 - as a narrow strip at each side of the interlocking paving along Market Place
 - on the large traffic hump at the northern end of Church Green
 - on some of the building frontages e.g. 3 and 5, Church Green East
- e) Grey block paving is also used on the disabled parking area at the southern end of Church Green East
- f) Black tarmac notably:
 - along the outer half of the pavement in Church Green West
 - at the south-eastern angle of Church Green where it encircles a mature tree set within a raised circular flower bed
 - on the paths on Church Green and surrounding the church much of the tarmac is in poor condition and has been patched.
- g) Red tarmac is used to delineate cycle lanes at the northern end of Church Green and also along some sections at the edge of the road along Church Green West.

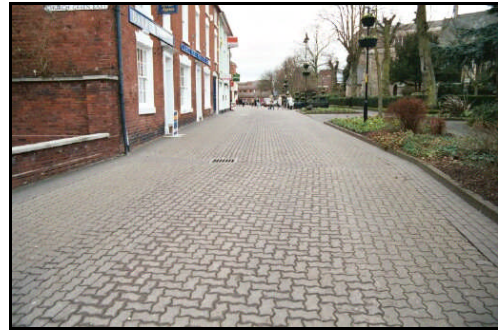


Fig 43: Paving in Church Green East

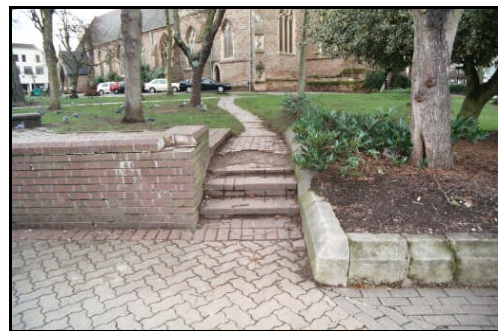


Fig 44: Paving in Market Place

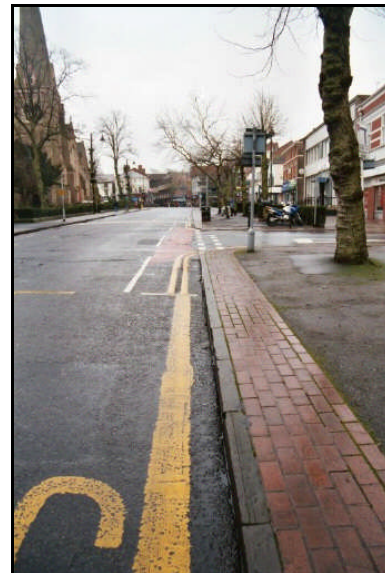


Fig 45: Ground surfacing along Church Green West

3.19 Trees and Vegetation

The numerous trees, both mature and those planted more recently, and also the vegetation in general, are a very important characteristic of the Area and of the streets in the immediate vicinity and contribute much to its appeal.

- a) The trees on and adjacent to Church Green are mainly deciduous and have now grown to a substantial size. They provide interest and colour throughout the seasonal cycles and an attractive foil to the church. Unfortunately some have been pollarded for reasons of safety and to increase light levels and have acquired an awkward and stumpy profile in the winter months. Also most of the avenue of trees along Church Green West has been removed entirely. There is clearly scope to replace them with an appropriate species and protect, maintain and if necessary replace and supplement the remainder of the trees in the Area under a clearly-defined design and maintenance programme. (Fig.46)
- b) Yew hedging is another significant feature of the Area and is kept to a height of around one metre to maintain good visibility and a sense of open space. It occurs on the Green, notably delineating the churchyard north and east of the church and subdividing it from the planted space around the fountain and bandstand. Hedging is also present in the form of three-sided enclosures that surround seating along the broad pavement of Church Green West. Although an interesting feature, they subdivide the former broad promenade and could be adapted into a more sympathetic scheme of improvement.
- c) Shrubs survive along the nave walls of the church and also new shrubs have been planted as part of an earlier landscaping scheme in and around the northern end of Church Green.
- d) The large rectangular flower beds on Church Green East and those surrounding the fountain on the Green provide an important source of colour during spring and summer and these are supplemented by the plant containers that proliferate throughout the Area.



Fig 46: Trees on Church Green

3.20 Landmarks, Focal Points and Special Features

The entire Area forms the focal point of the town centre as an oasis of green open space within the civic and commercial heart of the borough.

Various landmarks are located within and adjacent to the Area that make a positive contribution to its distinctive sense of place.

- The Church of St Stephen- the sheer scale of this building and its spire dominate the entire Area.
- The Bartleet Fountain
- The Bandstand
- The War Memorial
- The Listed buildings along Church Green East which draw the eye along the street due to the rhythm and regularity of their form, fenestration and detail.
- The former Institute building with its striking Gothic detail and small spire.
- Smallwood Hospital
- The turret on the corner at the southern end of Church Green West (Fig.47)
- The huge carved capital salvaged from Bordesley Abbey and located by the southern entrance to the church
- The needle sculptures adjacent to the Library
- The trees and general wealth of vegetation in the Area



Fig 47: Landmark feature at the corner of Church Green West and Unicorn Hill

3.21 Tranquil and Active Areas

a) Tranquil areas

Church Green itself serves as an important area of tranquillity within the town centre, despite the footpaths that provide access routes across some parts of it. Being slightly detached from the main retail centre, with only restricted traffic in the immediate vicinity and with numerous trees and other vegetation to help screen it from the adjacent offices and streets, it provides a place for retreat and recreation away from the adjacent areas of activity. The presence of the church and churchyard reinforces this sense of peace and seclusion.

b) Active areas

All the streets that surround Church Green are extremely active areas, with a steady flow of pedestrians using the adjacent streets and pavements to and from the retail centre and the nearby offices, educational and medical facilities. Although the traffic along Church Green West is not heavy, the route is in almost continual use, as is the road up Prospect Hill into Easemore Road on the perimeter of the Area.

3.22 Noise and Smells

a) Noise

The Area is subject to noise from a variety of sources as follows:

- Vehicular noise from traffic, and especially buses, using Church Green West during daylight hours and during winter till well after dark.
- The amusement arcade that is inappropriately sited in Church Green East
- Human noise from the volume of shoppers and other pedestrians, particularly in Market Place and Church Green East
- Adjacent to the church, the noise of the large pigeon population which is often supplemented by additional birdsong
- The sound of splashing water adjacent to the fountain

b) Smells

- Traffic fumes, particularly from the buses in Church Green West, which detract from the Area
- Food take-away premises on the perimeter of the Area and which detract from it.

3.23 Alien Features/Neutral Areas

Alien features and neutral areas which either detract from or make a negative contribution to the special character and amenity value of the Area are as follows:

- a) Insertion of replacement modern shopfronts in older buildings within and overlooking the Area with garish fascias, particularly along Market Place (Fig.48)
- b) Unsympathetic replacement windows in older buildings
- c) Modern infill which pays scant regard to the special architectural character of the Area, e.g. the extension to Beech House in Church Green East
- d) Unsympathetic modern buildings overlooking the Area, such as the Yorkshire Bank building at the corner of Market Place and Unicorn Hill and the HSBC building in Church Green West (Fig.49)
- e) Unsympathetic modern extensions to the rear of buildings in Church Green East
- f) Large car parks on the conservation area boundary, especially that on the eastern boundary along Herbert Street (Fig. 50)



Fig 48: Shop fascias in Market Place



Fig 49: Yorkshire Bank building, Unicorn Hill



Fig 50: Car park on Area boundary

- g) Unicorn Hill and Bates Hill have suffered from neglect and inappropriate modern development and detract from the main vehicular approach to the Area (Fig.51)
- h) Large modern buildings in Church Road, notably the night club, the vehicle depot and the multi-storey car park detract from views out of the Area and from adjacent buildings of quality. (Fig.52)
- i) The addition of small unsympathetic fixtures and fittings, including alarms, bracket signs, opening time and other excessive use of signage, etc
- j) Temporary 'A' board pavement signage, which are obstructive and create clutter
- k) Traffic barriers preventing vehicular access to the church carpark
- l) Traffic signage clutter
- m) Modern railings at the southern end of Church Green West
- n) Pedestrian crossing lights of an unsympathetic style at the southern end of Church Green West
- o) A variety of inappropriate modern ground surface materials that are not in keeping with the traditional character of the Area and are damaged in places and an excess of road markings that give a cluttered appearance
- p) Groups of modern phone boxes and postboxes on the fringes of the Area add clutter.
- q) An excess of black plastic planting boxes create clutter



Fig 51: Unicorn Hill. View towards Conservation Area

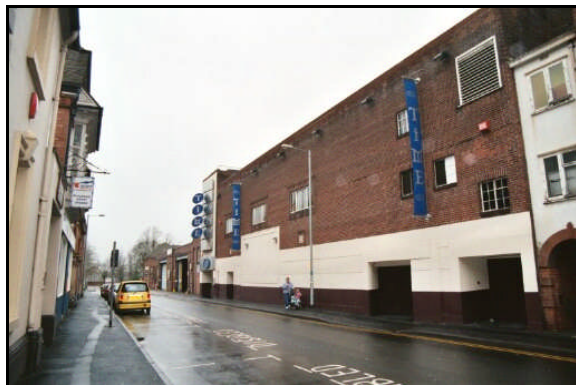


Fig 52: Night Club, Church Road

3.24 Sites that would benefit from Enhancement

In general, the hard landscaping throughout the Area and the adjoining streets is in need of replacement, in particular along Church Green West where there is a confusing proliferation of different materials. The current interlocking paving is damaged in places and presents an inappropriately bland and modern backdrop that fails to relate satisfactorily to the proportions and traditional materials of the buildings in the vicinity.

The loss and pollarding of many of the mature trees within the Area should prompt a comprehensive programme of care and replacement within to ensure that their key contribution to the character and appearance of the Area is eroded no further, rather is exploited to the full. The soft landscaping, in particular the hedging, grassed areas and shrubs should provide an opportunity for a more imaginative and integrated scheme of soft landscaping that reinforces and enhances the more positive attributes of the Area, not least the fine church, the remains of the churchyard, the public gardens and the former promenade. Also the floral displays within the area need to be rationalised to help eliminate clutter and produce a more effective but lower maintenance solution that would benefit the Area throughout the seasons.

Specific sites that would benefit from enhancement are as follows:

- a) The shop fronts along Market Place and Church Green West which disregard the traditional form, proportion and details of the local architecture. (Fig. 53)
- b) The upper end of Church Road which would benefit from more sympathetic hard landscaping
- c) Church Green itself requires a more integrated and imaginative scheme of hard and soft landscaping. The tarmac paths would benefit from resurfacing and their layout needs reconsidering to avoid worn patches of grass. The patchwork of high maintenance flowerbeds introduce colour but only on a temporary basis and any re-landscaping scheme should consider colour and interest throughout the seasons. The yew hedging around the churchyard is worthy of retention and defines the historic churchyard boundary, although it needs to be kept to its present height to reinforce the sense of open space.
- d) Unicorn Place provides a convenient seating area but fails to provide an appropriate and dignified setting for the war memorial. The surrounding low level wall is intrusive



Fig 53: Shop fronts in Church Green West

and forms a visual and physical barrier to the view into the Area from the top of Unicorn Hill

- e) The area of open space between Unicorn Hill and Bates Hill retains several mature trees and is surrounded by several historic buildings, including the former Art Deco cinema. It could form an appealing adjunct to the Conservation Area. (Fig.54) with a comprehensive scheme of hard and soft landscaping.
- f) The south-eastern corner of the Area also forms a disappointing entrance into the Area from the east. The eastern section has been covered with tarmac and lined with bollards. It would benefit from new landscaping that relates directly to the churchyard and also extends to incorporate visually to the needle sculpture set within the entrance to the market and shopping centre between the Library and Post Office. A more positive link between the civic square outside the Town Hall and the Conservation Area could also be established in this way. (Fig.55)
- g) Evesham Walk, that leads from Unicorn Place to the shopping centre, maintains an interesting historic street frontage. (Fig.56) However the entrance to it is presently filled with street furniture and the modern shop fronts fail to respect the quality of the historic buildings to which they belong. This is an important route from the shopping centre into the Area and would benefit considerably from enhancement.
- h) William Street contributes much to the character and setting of the Area. It includes several historic buildings and mature trees and offers distant views from the Area and an important view into the Area, which frames the church tower and which should be exploited more imaginatively.

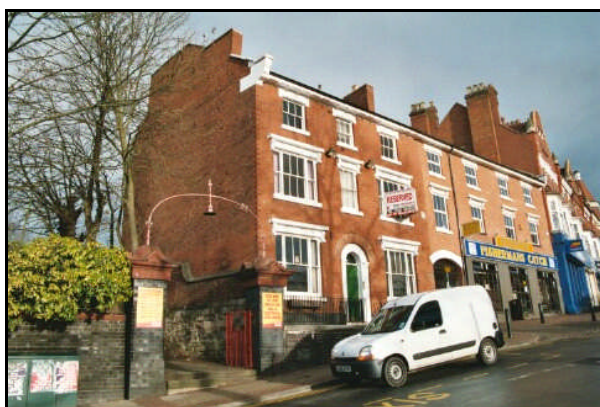


Fig 54: Historic buildings on Bates Hill



Fig 55: South Eastern corner of the

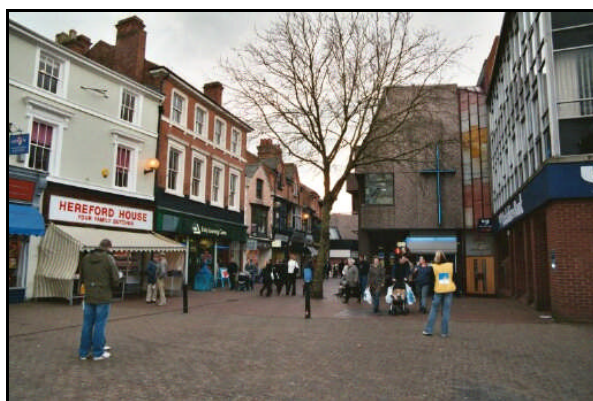
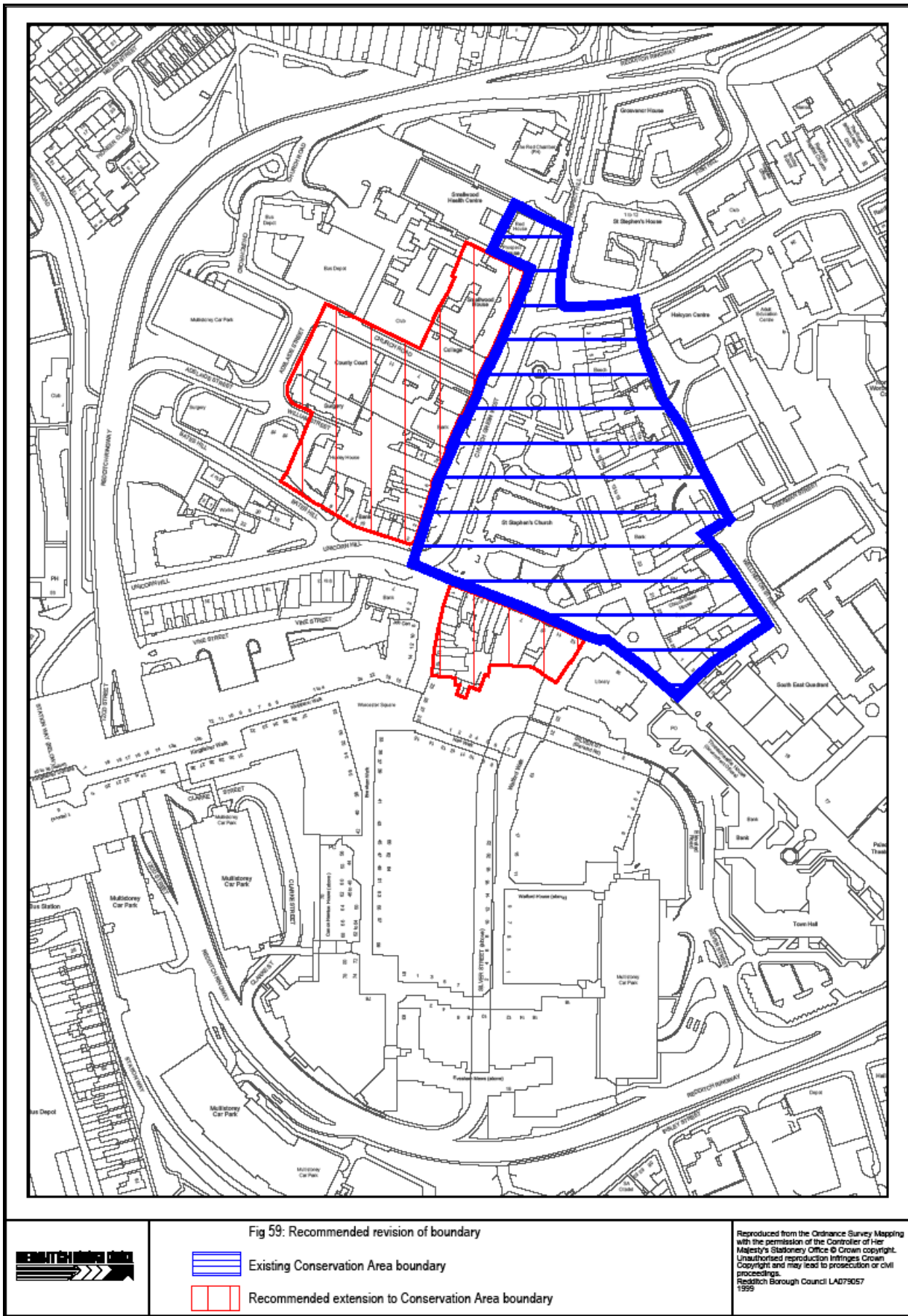


Fig 56: Evesham Walk

- i) The area to the north-west of the Area is also an unexploited asset. It includes some of the most interesting historic buildings in the town centre, two of which are statutorily listed and three are on the Local List. These include the former Gothic Institute building, (Local List) Smallwood Hospital (Local List), Red House (Grade II) and, in Church Road, Nos 7 and 8, (Grade II) and the former County Court.(Local List) Almost all these buildings are presently excluded from the Conservation Area yet they contribute much to the architectural and historic character of the locality. An enhancement of the Area should re-evaluate their considerable merits and incorporate them within any new landscaping scheme.
- J) The area of car parking that adjoins the eastern boundary of the Area along Herbert Street and part of Wellington Street contributes little to the setting of the Area. A more substantial planted screen would enhance views out of the Area at this point.

3.25 Sites within the town centre that warrant inclusion within the Conservation Area

It would be logical and beneficial to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, if the boundary were to be extended to include the buildings along Church Green West and Market Place and also along part of the streets adjacent to Church Green West, that is, Church Road, William Street and the northern end of Unicorn Hill. These form the main frontages around the green, and many are of high quality design and detail and contribute much to the character and identity of the locality. They also form part of the historic layout of the area and provide the sense of context and enclosure necessary to an appreciation of the Area, many of them forming key components of the major phase of redevelopment that occurred during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The recommended revision to the boundary is shown on the accompanying map. (Fig 57)



4.0 Concluding Statement

Church Green Conservation Area lies at the heart of Redditch town centre and provides an attractive amenity area of green open space and mature trees that offers some seclusion and escape from the traffic and ceaseless activity elsewhere in the locality. It is enclosed by some of the best historic buildings in the town, including the Church of St Stephen with its tall spire that forms an important local landmark and many former fine town houses and public buildings that date from the rapid growth of the town from the late eighteenth century onwards. The major expansion of the borough in more recent years has underlined the need to protect the special character and historic identity of Church Green, and to retain its special sense of place that provides such an important focus as well as a welcome retreat within the surrounding townscape. However the central location of Church Green means that its assets are particularly vulnerable to constant pressure from development and high levels of use. This appraisal of its special characteristics and identification of opportunities to enhance its assets should enable clear guidelines to be drawn up to inform its future management and development.



Fig 58: View south from the northern end of the Conservation Area