Conservation Area Appraisals: Church Street
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Document

Church Street Conservation Area was designated in 1983. This document aims to reassess the historic and architectural character of the area in the light of changes and developments which have taken place in and around the conservation area over a period of almost a quarter century.

What is a conservation area?

Conservation Areas were introduced in 1967 by the Civic Amenities Act in response to the erosion of historic areas by inappropriate new development. This concept has been incorporated into planning legislation namely the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are now over 9000 conservation areas in England.

The statutory definition of a conservation area is ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’ (section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). The areas designated as conservation areas vary widely from historic town or village centres to sites of industrial or former industrial interest. They may be heavily built up such as a Town Centre, or quite sparsely populated such as a historic parkland. They can vary in size from small areas such as churchyards to very long linear routes such as canals.

Conservation areas create a framework within which to safeguard the character of a whole area by acknowledging the contribution of; individual buildings, street patterns and the spaces between buildings.

Conservation area designation does not prohibit new development, and is not the same as preservation. However new development in a conservation area should either preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. This will usually mean that an appropriate quality of design and materials are used for new development.

Not every part of the conservation area may be of an historic or architectural interest in its own right. In addition there may be buildings outside the conservation area that contribute to the setting of a conservation area. Development proposals in such locations must then be considered in the context of respecting the character and appearance of the adjacent conservation area.

An outline of the legal and policy framework relating to conservation areas is set out in appendix 1.

(At 5/3/07 Executive Board - The total number of Conservation Areas in Warrington was reduced from 19 to 16 after combining existing contiguous Conservation Areas in Lymm and Stockton Heath)
Conservation Area Appraisals provide a means of systematically describing and analysing their special qualities and providing an understanding of current issues which are affecting them or are likely to affect them in the future.

Guidance on the preparation of such appraisals was issued by English Heritage in 2006. This appraisal aims to follow in general terms, their recommended approach to the presentation of appraisals. The Church Street appraisal is the 4th of a series to be published for consultation by the Borough Council in Autumn 2006 following an initial round of local consultation. The companion documents relate to Bridge Street, the Town Hall and Buttermarket Street conservation areas.

The need for such reassessments is underlined by the time that has elapsed since many were first designated. The Town Hall area was for example designated in 1972, at the beginning of the New Town era.

This document aims to raise awareness of the important features of the Conservation Area, and identify any factors that detract from its special character and appearance.

1.2 Preliminary Consultation

In March 2006, a public consultation exercise was undertaken whereby local residents and businesses within the Church Street Conservation Area were consulted and their views sought on what they believed to be the main characteristics of the conservation area. The results are summarised as follows;

3 persons responded to the consultation out of the properties within the conservation area and adjoining the conservation area. Of the 3 all occupied residential properties and only 1 person knew of the conservation area designation prior to the consultation.

The views of the Church with its surrounding properties and Cromwell cottage were considered to be buildings worthy of preserving and retaining their views. There was concern that new development could erode the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Appraisals should not just be a ‘one-off’ academic exercise but will form the basis of a Management Plan for the Conservation Area. The Management Plan will address the issues raised in the appraisal, with the aim of securing the conservation area’s continued preservation and or enhancement. The Conservation Area Management Plan will be subject to a separate consultation process.

The appraisal will eventually become a supplementary planning document (SPD) which will ensure its alignment with the Local Development Framework, which is the successor to the Unitary Development Plan.

The document will be subject to public consultation, and will be referred to the Executive Board Committee of Warrington Borough Council.

Whilst this appraisal attempts to provide an appreciation of its main features of interest and to identify current issues affecting the conservation area, it cannot be all embracing. New conservation issues may, for example, arise as a result of a changing development situation. If further relevant matters emerge during the consultation process, they may warrant inclusion in the final draft.
1.3 Background to the designation of Church Street Conservation Area.

Church Street is one of 7 conservation areas that represent the historic core of the unparished area of Warrington Borough. These are shown in Figure 1. The conservation areas are in close proximity to one another, however their characters are quite distinct.

Church Street was one of the later designations made by the Borough Council, over 10 years after the initial batch. Perhaps because it was dominated by large industrial sites, was a heavily trafficked road and had become somewhat run down in general appearance, the area had not hitherto been considered as a conservation priority. Local Authorities however, had a duty under the 1971 Planning Act to review the designation of Conservation areas. Circular 12/81 required them to consider whether further areas should be designated as a result of the preparation of local plans. The Old Howley Local Plan (adopted in 1984) had in fact recommended that Church Street become a conservation area in view of its historic significance in the development of the town and the presence of a number of historic buildings including the impressive Parish Church. Moreover the impending redevelopment of Rylands wireworks gave further impetus to the desire to protect what was left of the heritage of the area.

The designation report of November 1983 referred to the historic significance of Church Street as the very origin of the settlement of Warrington and the original seat of the Lords of the Manor. The report identified four distinct groups of Listed Buildings. It noted that though some valuable townscape had been lost, the street retained much of its spatial character and was of undeniable local historic importance.

Designation, it was hoped, would help stem further loss of heritage elements and give a degree of stability to small businesses by discouraging large scale demolition.

The boundaries of the designated area are shown in Figure 2.
Figure 1: Town Centre Conservation Areas

1. Town Hall
2. Buttermarket Street
3. Palmyra Square
4. Bewsey Street
5. Bridge Street
6. Church Street
7. Winwick Street

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Figure 2: Boundaries of the Conservation Area
1.4 Summary of the main findings of this report

* Church Street has undeniably suffered more than most of the Borough’s conservation areas from the effects of demolition, modern development, the impact of advertisements and the insensitive alteration of buildings together with a generally unsympathetic public realm. Nonetheless, it retains its historic configuration as one of the town’s oldest streets and provides the setting for a number of listed buildings including the Parish Church. Conservation Area status has undoubtedly helped to ‘hold the line’ in arresting the haemorrhage of heritage interest.

* The report describes and analyses the contribution of the listed buildings to the conservation area, noting the group values of those in western Church Street and those centred around the Parish Church. It notes the dominance of the Parish Church as a focal point and unifying element in the conservation area.

* The appraisal identifies a number of negative factors, that if not addressed, will in time undermine further the special qualities of the area.

* Restoring Church Street to a reasonably cohesive environment which provides a sympathetic setting for its heritage buildings will require sustained efforts over the medium to long term e.g 5-10 years or more in three broad topic areas, notably:

1 Tackling the problem of gap sites - a number of gap sites which expose unsightly bill boards and backland areas represent potential infill development opportunities. However to ensure that future infill development conserves the setting of the heritage buildings and enhances the street scene it is essential to ensure the highest possible design standards based upon an understanding of the area’s special qualities as outlined in the appraisal. Recent developments have demonstrated that the damaged street scene can be reinstated if care is taken in all aspects of the control of infill development.

   It is preferable to retain the designation without major change, in order to assist this process.

2 Addressing unauthorised alteration and advertising

A robust approach to investigation and enforcement where necessary is recommended. Particular issues that require attention are the spread of UPVC windows and roller shutters.

3 Improving the Public Realm

The public realm of Church Street provides the setting for its listed buildings and especially the Parish Church. However the requirements of traffic management have tended to take precedence over conservation issues, for example in regard to the siting and design of street furniture and the selection and maintenance of paving materials. There are several examples of very unfortunate placing of public infrastructure in juxtaposition with historic buildings.

Improvements of the private domain must be supported by a more sympathetic and sustained approach to management and maintenance of the public realm if the conservation area is to regain a cohesive overall appearance and provide an appropriate setting for its historic buildings.

The above matters, subject to further consultation, form the recommended basis for a Conservation Area Management Strategy.
2 LOCATION AND SETTING

2.1 Strategic Location.

Church Street Conservation Area is located within Howley on the north bank of the River Mersey, with the Manchester Ship Canal and the Bridgewater Canal further south. It is within the Fairfield and Howley Ward of the Borough Council.

Church Street was the historic eastern route to and from the town centre and until the late C20th was part of the A57 classified road between Manchester, Prescot and Liverpool. The western extremity of Church Street is 450m from Market Gate, the focal point of the town centre. The conservation area extends some 360m in an easterly direction then a further 150 m in a northerly direction merging into Manchester Road at its junction with School Brow. School Brow is part of the town centre by-pass route which continues as Midland Way, replacing Church Street as the A57 route. (See Figure 3.)

Though the new road has provided some relief, Church Street, still serves as a major access route to and from the town centre and remains the most direct route between eastern Warrington and the river crossing at Bridgefoot. Farrell Street forms a ‘T’ junction with Church Street at the mid-point of the conservation area. Farrell Street is an important cross town route, opened up in the late 1960s, to provide a link between the town centre and the A50 Knutsford Road via the Manchester Ship Canal bridge at Latchford.

Church Street has always been a busy traffic route, and over the centuries has carried all manner of traffic. It was a tram route in the first quarter of this century and was used by steam wagons carrying cotton from Liverpool to Manchester.

Church Street still remains a busy two-way road and bus route, with its associated street furniture. Inevitably this has a significant impact upon the historic environment.

2.2 Physical and visual setting.

Church Street lies well outside the retail and business core of the town centre, though ironically it was the locus of the settlement of Warrington from ancient times. An outline of the origins and development of the settlement is set out in Section 5 of this appraisal. Further information relating to Warrington’s origins and development are given in the companion appraisals.

Up to the 1980s, Church Street passed through a zone of heavy industry as the focus of the town’s wire manufacturing district. Interspersed with the large industrial sites were smaller frontage commercial premises and groups of terraced cottages.

The contraction of heavy industry in the town has had a major impact upon the character and appearance of Church Street. The massive Rylands Wireworks was replaced by Sainsbury’s Superstore, c. 1984, whilst a large part of the Lockers Wireworks site is occupied by a recently completed housing development.

The area is wholly urban and is not readily distinguishable as a cohesive grouping from outside. However from its immediate approaches and from within, the street does have a degree of self-containment due to the degree of enclosure provided by the frontages and the position of the Parish Church at its pivotal point.

The Parish Church with its 86 metre high spire is the dominant visual feature of the conservation area and is also visible from a distance especially from the flatter farmland to the north of the Borough. The views from the south are often more restricted, especially along the built up road frontages such as the A49 but there is a fine prospect of the spire from the high ground at Knutsford Road about 5km to the south east.
Figure 3: Strategic Location
Aerial Photograph of Church Street - 2001
3 GENERAL CHARACTER AND BUILT FORM- Character Areas.

Church Street, 3.93 hectares in area and half a kilometre from end to end, is a substantial Conservation Area. It is linear in form comprising the frontage elements of the street, but widens out at its eastern end to take in the Parish Church and its churchyard and cemetery.

The linear form reflects its medieval origins as a street developed with burgage plots - i.e. land held by the town’s established citizens, - characterised by narrow frontage development with gardens and smallholdings extending in depth on each side. Traces of these plots are still evident despite the redevelopment during the industrial age, for example at the Bull’s Head and Marquis of Granby Inns.

As noted above, the street has a pronounced change in alignment with the cluster of buildings in front of the Church forming the fulcrum. This change effectively divides the street visually into two parts.

English Heritage consider that some larger conservation areas may have parts which possess distinctive features that are not common to the whole area. Focussing on the particular sub zones - or character areas- can facilitate description and analysis though the appraisal must also consider the contribution of the parts to the whole.

Church Street Conservation Area lends itself to description and analysis as two distinctive character areas in the manner suggested by English Heritage. The separation is reinforced by an extensive break in continuity of heritage frontage between Farrell Street and the Parish Church entrance.

For the purposes of this analysis Church Street is divided into west and east character areas as indicated in Fig. 4. It should be noted that this differentiation is purely an aid to description and analysis as the zones merge with progression along the street.

3.1 West Character Area

Western Church Street has a spacious appearance due to the generous spacing between opposite buildings and the relatively low profile of much of the frontage which is mainly two storey with some 3 storey parts.

The wide nature of the street, and the low building form is a major characteristic of the street west of the Parish Church.

Buildings on the north side are at back of a narrow footway, but on the south side, the buildings are set back in a subtly curving alignment.

The carriageway widens from about 9m at its western extremity to about 14m towards the centre, with the corresponding space between frontages varying from 17m to 20m. This widening out is typical of many old market streets and is undoubtedly associated with Church Street’s historic role as the location of the town’s earliest markets and fairs. Though little of the ancient burgage layout survives, the street retains a varied pattern of frontage widths ranging from narrow fronted cottages to the wider frontages of the old inns.

Church Street rises from 7.9m AOD at the junction with Mersey Street to a maximum of 9.4m opposite Orchard Street, levelling off at 9.1m up to Manchester Road. The falling level westwards is quite noticeable from the vicinity of the Church entrance.

The light controlled junction with Farrell Street which also controls an access to Sainsbury’s, is an impediment to pedestrian movement and visually most intrusive.

On the north side, a minor road, Orchard Street, links School Brow and serves some small business premises; Eldon Street is a narrow lane providing access to the Cromwell cottage and continuing northwards as footpath to School Brow via General Street.
On the south side, adjacent to the Marquis of Granby, a narrow lane leads off towards the Old Howley district. This lane, called Ellison Street, can be traced on the 1772 map, leading out to meadow land behind the burgage plots.

During the latter part of the C19th, and early C20th, two large wireworks became established on Church Street. Rylands occupied an extensive site on the north side now Sainsbury’s store; Thomas Locker’s site on the south side has been replaced by a housing development. (A new access on the south side has been created to serve this development). The collapse of these basic industries in the town has taken place more or less since the designation of the conservation area. The process is still continuing, with another large cleared site at the mid-point of the conservation area awaiting redevelopment.

Despite the gaps due to demolition and redevelopment, the surviving listed buildings in western Church Street form an identifiable grouping, those on the south side perhaps having greater cohesion due to the continuity of frontage.

3.2 East Character Area.

The area comprising the Parish Church, and Churchyard, the Ring ‘O Bells inn and Church cottages, may be considered as forming the historic core of the conservation area.

It is the part least damaged by demolition and redevelopment in recent times though much of historic interest had been lost prior to conservation area designation, notably the listed cottages, nos. 142-160 and the offices of the Rylands wireworks. The rambling Tudor style Clergy Daughters School had been built over the ancient site of the motte and bailey fort until its destruction by fire in 1923. The site of the Rectory has also undergone much change as outlined in section 5.5.

The Church entrance marks the position where the road curves sharply northwards before turning eastwards again as Manchester Road. The cemetery is now a landscaped green space with numerous mature trees and with a few standing tomb memorials. Beyond, a group of late C18th or early C 19th cottages on the south side, mark the transition to Manchester Road and with the large 3 storey warehouse/showroom opposite form an effective gateway to the conservation area.

The remainder of the north side is occupied by Sainsbury’s superstore but the building is set well back in a massive car park and is not within the conservation area. A margin strip of shrubs and trees is now well established and helps to a degree to offset the lack of built frontage, complementing the trees around the edge of the former cemetery. Unlike western Church Street, this section of the street is thus more open in character and dominated by trees and the Parish Church rather than by frontage development.

The relationship of spatial character and built form is indicated in Figure 4.
Figure 4: Spatial Character & Built Form
Figure 5: Land Uses
3.3 Land Uses

Church Street has always been and still remains a mixed use area. It includes retail, residential, business and commercial and food and drink uses. The disposition of the main uses of land and buildings is shown on Fig.5.

Some areas of open land shown are parking areas within the curtilage of a principal use.

The retail uses with the singular exception of Sainsbury’s are small scale and of a specialist nature, occupying converted cottages. The sub-post office is now closed and vacant. Bents ironmongers is a larger operation catering mainly for the trade.

The recent introduction of a popular Indian restaurant in Cromwell’s cottage and a Mediterranean restaurant at the White Apron, 25-31 Church Street, in addition to the existing public houses and existing Indian restaurant, has led to this area becoming a small centre of gastronomic activity centred around the evening economy. The daytime ambience is characterised by fairly hectic traffic movements, whilst the evening ambience is more leisurely.

3.4 Heritage Audit - Listed Buildings

There are 13 Listed buildings in all (by reference to List Entries).

**West Character Area**

The south side frontage includes 4 listed buildings. All are Grade II unless otherwise indicated.

Nos 25-31 (one list entry);
The Bull’s Head Inn
The former National School
The Marquis of Granby Inn and adjacent shop.
The last three above form a group

**North side.**

No. 84, former General Wolfe Inn now rebuilt and converted to residential use.
nos. 86/86A- cottages also rebuilt.
No.88-92 so called Cromwell Cottage Grade II * listed, extended and in use as a restaurant.
These form a group.

**East Character Area**

South side only.
Ring ‘O Bells Inn
Cottages 131,133, (part of Ring ‘O Bells)
Cobbles at Church Entrance
Gateway to St. Elphins
Church of St. Elphin Grade II*
135,137, (Church Cottages).
These form a group.

*The Listed Buildings are indicated on Figure 11.*
3.5 Heritage Audit - Archaeology including scheduled monuments

There are many archaeological finds recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record around Church Street. The majority of the finds are outside the conservation area, as little redevelopment has occurred within the conservation area boundaries.

The finds vary in age from a possible Roman road to the north of the churchyard, and the medieval tithe barn and original moated rectory.

There are no remaining water features within the conservation area, however there were once two springs, the first being Hallumswalle, a well documented in 15th century manuscripts. The County Sites and Monuments Record places this well below the current Borough Arms so that it would be just outside the conservation area.

Beamont tells that this location was once known as ‘under the bongs’ where according to the Lyme Manuscript of 1465, there arose a spring called ‘Fons Scaturiens.’

Another well known as St Elphins Well was sited close to the church. Excavations in 1830 found an amulu or cruet used in mass in the medieval holy well. This may be the same amulu found when the moat was infilled. The well was enclosed in a caretakers house when St Katherine’s college was on the site, and now lies beneath a modern housing estate.

Within the Churchyard there are a number of monuments the oldest dating from 1635.

3.6 The contribution made to the character of the area by green spaces and its biodiversity value.

The churchyard is an open space, which contributes greatly towards the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the setting of the listed church. The loss of the gravestones, are a severe loss to those interested in the social history of the area, however, the resulting green space created, does provide the only unbuilt area within the conservation area.

The green space of the Churchyard is of undoubted benefit to birdlife, though the steeple is perhaps no longer the meeting place for swallows described by Rector Quekett soon after completion of the spire. In 1888 Rector Quekett sadly observed that the swallows had almost abandoned the area as the chemical works at Warrington and Widnes ‘have give forth their gases which have destroyed the flies, the chief food of these birds’.

Warrington Parish Church. H.Wells.

It is quite likely that the Churchyard is a local wildlife habitat however more research is required to establish its value in this regard.

The lack of natural vegetation, elsewhere in the conservation area, is a reflection of the age of the street, wherein buildings were placed directly on the highway without front garden space whilst in the industrial era land was intensively developed, though a bowling green survived at the Marquis. Incidental landscaping schemes notably at the junction with Fennel Street and around Sainsbury’s now contribute some amenity value.
4. SUMMARY OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST OF CHURCH STREET CONSERVATION AREA

4.1 Historic Interest

- The special interest of Church Street Conservation Area derives from its historic significance as the origin of the modern town of Warrington and for its providing the setting of the town’s large parish Church and several other buildings of the pre industrial era.

- The spacious configuration of the street and the setting back of buildings on its south side reflects its historic role as the location of the town’s early markets and fairs. Some of the historic buildings that survive today, especially its old inns are also relics of this function, whilst their siting displays traces of the medieval burgage street layout.

- After the construction of the first of a series of bridges downstream of the ford, from the late C13th onwards, the commercial centre of the town gravitated westwards and Church Street gradually declined in importance.

- In the C19th the area became dominated by large industrial concerns interspersed with densely packed terraced housing. The back-land housing was cleared during the mid- C20th and by the late C20th, the large industrial sites had also given way to other forms of development including a return of housing, representing a further chapter in Church Street’s long history.

4.2 Buildings and Townscape Interest

- Of the early settlement, little remains in its original form. There is no dominant architectural theme, and it is the mixture of building types and construction materials which is the Conservation Area’s main characteristic, though slate roof covering in varied pitches is a consistent theme. The varied building types reflect the long period of building history and the piecemeal manner by which development has taken place.

- Church Street holds a significant proportion of listed buildings, 37% of the total identifiable on the map base. The listed buildings are scattered throughout the street, interspersed with gap sites, other old but unlisted buildings and modern infill development. The Secular Listed buildings vary in terms of age and detail, but are generally consistent in their unpretentious, mainly vernacular styles and modest scale.

- They range from the late medieval style ‘Cromwell Cottage’ to simple properties of Georgian style. Victorian Gothic is represented by the refurbishment of the Church in the C19th and by the adjacent Church Cottages. The three inns are of particular interest in representing vernacular building of the C17th and early C18th.

- Church Street is indeed remarkable and unique in the town for its collection of pre C18th buildings, which have survived the massive industrialisation of the area in the C19th. This is perhaps indicative of a lack of incentive for redevelopment of what had become historically a marginal area of the town centre.

- Church Street is visually divided into two parts by the change in road alignment. Western Church Street is a wide street with frontage
development of not more than 3 storeys giving it a spacious character; eastern Church Street though narrower, is more open in character with trees rather than buildings along much of its frontages. The mature landscaping of the closed cemetery is now an important green space, relieving an otherwise wholly urbanised part of the town. Maturing landscaping around Sainsbury’s extensive perimeter is also beginning to have a beneficial impact upon the amenity of the conservation area.

• The street is dominated visually by the bulk of St Elphins, with its lofty spire visible from some distance outside the conservation area and an important landmark to the skyline of the town. The historic buildings forming a group around the Church entrance are by contrast of domestic scale but harmonise with the Church in their materials and details. Because of its size and its location at the pivotal point of the street, St. Elphin’s Church provides the focus and unifying element for both parts of the conservation Area.

• The built fabric of Church Street has undoubtedly suffered over the years from demolitions resulting in a number of gap sites and from inappropriate modern development. However, the most recent infill redevelopment has been generally sympathetic in scale and detail to the surviving heritage buildings.

Though some historic buildings have been lost, and the townscape has suffered acknowledged damage, the surviving heritage provides a base upon which to re-establish a context befitting of Church Street’s origins as the town’s most historic street and the setting of the fine Parish Church.
5. ORIGINS AND HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

5.1 Early Development

Church Street is one of Warrington’s oldest streets.

Historians believe that the Romans used the ford at Latchford on their road from Wilderspool to Wigan. The ancient ford was located on a sweeping meander of the river, close to the present Black Bear Bridge on Knutsford Road. The supposed line of the Roman Road is shown on Ordnance Survey maps passing a few metres to the west of the Parish Church. In the 1930s traces of what was believed to be Roman road were discovered clipping the south west corner of the churchyard.

From ancient times the tidal and flood prone River Mersey had been a barrier to communications between the north-west and the rest of England. It had formed the boundary between the ancient Kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria. The name Mersey is indeed derived from an ‘Old English’ word ‘Maeresea,’ meaning ‘boundary river’.*

The availability of a ford was therefore of great strategic importance and worthy of safeguarding. However, the north bank of the river at Howley was not thought to have been settled until Anglo Saxon times, when a church and settlement grew up on the higher ground above the river crossing. This was the site of the present Parish Church. Following the Conquest, the Normans built a motte and bailey castle on “Mote Hill” close to the Church to guard the ford. This became the seat of the Botelers, Lords of the Manor of Warrington until the mid C13th.


Church Street gradually developed along an east west axis above the river flood plain [though before the advent of modern drainage, when the river was high Church Street was evidently inclined to become waterlogged and a ditch ran along its north side.].

The street was used in mediaeval times as a route from the berewicks of Sankey and Penketh to the home of the Lords of the Manor, and the dead from these places were brought for burial in the churchyard.

With the increasing size and prosperity of the town a guarded crossing was no longer necessary and the Lords of the Manor moved to Bewsey around 1264. Church Street possessed a number of good hostels and a fair or wake probably commemorating the feast of dedication of St Elphins Church was held for many years. The inns probably originated from the need for overnight accommodation when the Parish Church was the only cemetery for the town and its outlying suburbs.

The grouping of Church, inn and market place is a typical medieval pattern as noted by Jane Fairhurst local historian of Standish near Wigan, wherein ‘man’s needs, spiritual and temporal could be catered for’. The relationship of Church, ancient inn and market place at Standish also sited on the Roman Road, north of Wigan, is similar to that at Warrington.

J. Fairhurst, History of Standish Parish Church; Standish Local History Group; Wigan Heritage Service.
Indeed William Beamont the noted local historian, lawyer and the Borough’s first mayor writing about Church Street in 1887, quotes Defoe in his observation that near a Church such was always found,
“Whenever God erects a house of prayer,
The devil always builds a chapel there.”

William Beamont, ‘Walks about Warrington at the turn of the present Century’, 1887
Warrington Reference Library.

The commercial focus of the town moved towards Market Gate with the granting of Market and Fairs charters following the construction of the first Warrington Bridge in about 1285. Decline was clearly evident when a traveller in 1540 described Church Street as “at the Tayle of al the Tounne”.

Church Street’s inns were however favoured during the Civil War by both the Earl of Derby and Cromwell. A plaque on the so called ‘Cromwell Cottage’ commemorates the Protector’s visit in 1648.

Whilst no evidence of the original buildings stand, the proliferation of public houses and taverns that sprung up to meet the need of travellers and locals alike in the vicinity of the church, are still evident, such as, The Ring O’ Bells, early C 18th, The Marquis of Granby and the Bulls Head public houses, both dating from the C17th.

5.2 Development in the C18th.

The earliest large scale map of Warrington is the Walworth and Donbavand map of 1772.

**Fig 6.** This clearly shows the layout of the long narrow burgage plots extending rearwards from fully built up frontages. Beyond the gardens on the north side are what appear to be extensive orchards, -a far cry from the present day character of Orchard Street. The orchards extend up to Back Lane upon which the Free School is situated, later to become the Boteler Grammar School. Beyond the gardens on the south side, enclosed fields extend towards the river. Church Street extends between the Church and the junction with Mersey Street and Fennel Street which takes the form of a small square. Where the change in direction northwards occurs however, the street continues as Silk House Lane before becoming the Manchester Road. The generous width of Church Street in comparison with other town lanes is readily apparent and indicative of its status as a market place.

Development of this period included the Ring O’ Bells dating from the early C18th and the former public house, the General Wolfe dating from the late C18th.

Another C18th institution to appear is the workhouse, (1729-1851) adjoining the Bull’s Head and later occupied by nos. 25-31.
Figure 6: 1772 Wallworth & Donbovand Map
Figure 7: 1826 Manorial Survey Map
5.3 The 19th Century

The 1826 Manorial Survey Map Fig.7 is of interest in that it shows Church Street in relation to the whole town. Whilst development in depth has occurred around the Market Gate cross roads, Church Street clearly remains out on a limb with little development in depth. This map also shows the mound of the ancient motte and bailey fort and the rectory in a moated site. The town cemetery appears to be a relatively small area around the Church, with two enclosed fields extending northwards. Opposite, the terrace of cottages, nos. 142-160 is evident; These early Victorian cottages survived to become listed but were nonetheless demolished prior to the Rylands wireworks redevelopment, thereby losing an important element of historic frontage.

Howley Lane leads off from Church Street round the Rectory grounds leading to the river bank. Presumably in ancient times this would have been the route to and from the ford.

William Beamont described Church Street at the beginning of the C19th as containing a number of quaint half-timbered decorated buildings, with lattice windows, narrow gables and dormers, but writing in 1887 he observed the effects of industrial development left the street ‘no longer what it was’. Today the Bull’s Head, Marquis of Granby and ‘Cromwell Cottage’ are faint echoes of pre-industrial Church Street.

The large Scale 1851 Ordnance Survey Fig 8 still shows the south side burgage plots with long gardens and backing onto open fields. On the north side open land remains but infilling by terraced cottages is evident as is an embryonic wireworks occupying a small corner of what was later to become the enormous Rylands complex.

At the Church Gates, the road widens out and a lamp post is marked. The present Church cottages are evidently post 1851. A row of small cottages occupies their site but aligned north-south. A major feature of this area is the St. Elphin’s School (Clergy Daughters School), located on the site of the castle mound, the shape of which is reflected in the curtilage of the school. The burial ground has been extended northwards and the Manchester Road group of cottages is shown. The Rectory had evidently been replaced by a new building to the north of that shown by Donbavand, and the moat had been infilled.

Church Street was also host to another important chapter in the town’s social history in that it was the location of the town’s first elementary school, the National School of 1833. It was secured by the efforts of the Rector Rev. Powys who secured a Government grant of £415, towards the tender price of £645! The frontage part of the building survived to become incorporated in the new housing development of the former Lockers wireworks.

The Church Street Fair, held around Whitsuntide since medieval times, soldiered on until it was finally banned in 1859 on the grounds that it ‘led to scenes of riot and dissipation’. A photograph of 1855 clearly shows the fair taking place in front of the Bull’s Head and the adjacent frontages.*

* Changing Warrington, 1770s 1970, J. Hayes.
Figure 8: 1851 Ordnance Survey Map
Figure 9: 1909 Ordnance Survey Map
5.4 20th Century Developments

By the publication of the 1909 Ordnance Survey Fig 9 the transformation of Church Street’s surroundings from semi-rural to intensely urban was complete.

The former burgage plots had disappeared on the north side of the street, with some remnants remaining on the south side in the area of the current Bulls Head Inn. Industrial buildings dominate the street, with the wire works on the site of what is now Sainsburys, and many older buildings replaced with densely packed terraced housing facing onto narrow lanes and courts.

The Parish Church, Rectory gardens and cemetery and the adjacent grounds of the Clergy Daughters School- now a Training College (Girls)- provided the only greenery within the Street, but beyond on Manchester Road there was an area of open land, later to become a recreation ground.

The frontages of both sides were fully built up with a mixture of small cottages and business premises but opposite Howley Lane the massive Rylands Wireworks had expanded up to School Brow. The orchards shown on the 1851 map had been covered in rows of cottages, works and a tannery.

The influence of modern transport on the expansion of the town is evident in that Church Street now accommodates a tramway route linking the town centre with the new large cemetery on Manchester Road.

5.5 Changes in the Modern Era

The industrialisation of the late C19th, which displaced so much of the history of Church Street, has itself largely been removed and replaced, leaving very little evidence of the more recent past. The layout of the wide medieval street that held the town’s market and later enabled the area to be served by trams still exists and contributes greatly towards the character of the area. The wide street enhances the setting of St Elphins church. Three historic public houses remain reflecting the early phase of the Street’s history. The terraced houses of the industrial period have been removed, however vestiges of the frontages remain though now in isolated groups. Perhaps the greatest loss in modern times was the ‘Kinema’ one of the town’s first cinemas,1916-56, located next to the former General Wolfe pub, and which survived latterly as a ‘DIY’ outlet until just before the conservation area was designated. Its site is now occupied by Applecourt Care Home. Applecourt has a car park directly at the rear of the pavement, with the building set back from the road. This arrangement is a modern concept, and completely alien to historic streets, however the development enabled the reconstruction of the semi-derelict adjacent listed buildings.

Another regrettable change is the car wash adjacent to 40 Church Street on the site of Cherry House, a Georgian property that was the headquarters of the Warrington Labour Party since 1927, and was demolished in the early 1960’s to construct a petrol station.

In the early 1970s the St.Elphin’s Housing development was designed and built by the Local Authority. It could have been worse. It is closely clustered round the Church and comprises rows of two and three storey dwellings in red/brown brick. Its main faults are its rigid plan which leaves awkward left over spaces around the edges and of course that it obliterated the former Rectory moated site.
Figure 10: Changes since the 1960s
An earlier rectory dating from medieval times stood within a moated site to the south of the present building. An archaeological investigation in the 1970s found evidence of a moat probably of the C13th between 46-50 feet wide-(15m). Rector Powys built a new rectory in 1830 (in what appears to be a ‘Gothik’ style).

*Wells describes this as a fine house which survived until the redevelopment of the rectory garden in the early 1970s. He considers that this was a bleak time for the environs of the Church in that the nearby housing regeneration took place on land that was at the core of Saxon Warrington and had remained largely undeveloped since the Conquest. The scheme destroyed potential archaeological sites including the former moated site of the medieval rectory and involved the demolition of the fine C19th rectory, which included parts dating back to the C17th. Moreover the Church would become hemmed in by housing instead of being set within a more spacious landscaped area.

*Warrington Parish Church,a pamphlet by H. Wells. Warrington Library.

Two further major changes have occurred in modern times, as noted the redevelopment of Rylands Wireworks for the Sainsbury superstore, 1984, and more recently the redevelopment of Lockers wireworks for housing now called Pinders Farm Drive.

Fig.10 indicates the drastic extent of demolition since the 1960s.
6 ANALYSIS OF SPECIAL QUALITIES

6.1 The Contribution of Buildings

West Character Area

On the north side the former cottages nos. 34-38 are early mid C19th. two storeys, the first two are small shops. No. 34 has the original window with a small roller shutter. No. 36 has an enlarged roller shutter. No. 38 in residential use has recently been refurbished to high standard as part of the redevelopment of the former ice cream depot, no 40. This is a new 3 storey residential building which replicates the original in brick and art stone and exemplifies sensitive infill in the historic environment with noteworthy attention to materials and window detailing.

It is regrettably juxtaposed with the car wash which is arguably the single most intrusive feature of the conservation area. From a conservation viewpoint, it must be hoped that this use will, in due course, be replaced by a more sympathetic built form, especially given the new housing development opposite and to its rear.

The open site exposes the gable of no. 62 which displays a large poster panel.

The group 62-68 is 2,3 storeys shops and cottage, rendered and altered, unremarkable. Another gap site is created by the tyre depot at the junction with Orchard Street, which conveniently provides yet another gable end advertising opportunity. The tyre depot is a modern utilitarian double bay portal frame type structure.

There is nothing inherently unsuitable about the inclusion of industrial uses within Church Street provided the buildings are properly integrated with the street frontage. Setting back behind car parks creates a disjointed frontage and exposes back-land which is better concealed.
The south side western gateway to the conservation area is formed by the Listed group 25-31, described in the List Entry as a late Georgian terrace of two storeys. As it occupies the site of the workhouse, demolished 1851, it is clearly Victorian, though displaying typical Georgian details including fanlights and panelled doors with Tuscan pilasters and 12 paned windows. It appears to be a terrace of 3 but the front door of no 31 is on the east wall, facing onto a narrow sett paved lane. The terrace is wholly occupied by A3 uses and is presently defaced by excessive signage including a poster panel on the very prominent west gable. No. 31 has been over painted red at ground floor. An ugly flue emerges from its east wall near the door. All chimneys have been removed.

The Bull’s Head is a more picturesque reminder of historic Church Street. It is low profile two storeys in 3 bays, the centre with mullioned dormer of the type described by Beamont. It is described in the List Entry as restored C17th Inn dated in gable 1685, cemented front, slate roof.

The Pinder’s Farm Drive development, completed, 2005, occupies the site of Lockers works on the south side, between the Bull’s Head and the listed National School. This development in a mixture of two and three storey elements, attempts to replicate the simple Victorian terraced housing that was once prevalent in Church Street.

The Lockers offices which occupied the frontage were c1930s and of little intrinsic merit however their demolition could only be justified by replacement buildings of equal or greater merit.

Whilst a welcome step in the regeneration of the area, the larger housing development lacks the detailed refinement required to be to be wholly successful, especially the shallow window reveals and the overly steep roof pitches, whilst the insertion of an access road from Church Street creates an unfortunate break in continuity of frontage.

The Listed former National Schools facade of 1833, is rather austere with twin turrets flanking central bay windows with Mullions and transoms. The rear part was demolished many years ago and the facade stood forlorn. Its inclusion within the modern housing scheme and extension to provide useable residential space is therefore a welcome example of how the conservation area can recover from past damage.
The end of the heritage group on the south side is marked by the Marquis of Granby Inn, perhaps the most picturesque of Church Street’s surviving old inns, though in fact heavily restored in the C19th. It is described as restored C17th inn, with shoe repair workshop in former stables attached, (at time of listing- now a nail salon). 2 storeys, timber framed, black and white with cement infilling on stone base; slate roof. Right hand gable roughcast up to eaves, windows restored casements with leads. Doors restored batten. Dated 1660. A notable feature is the decorative carving of the barge boards, of the type mentioned by Beamont.

A plaque affixed to the inn by the Warrington Society, commemorates Warrington’s significant role during the Civil War, recording that the Earl of Derby made his headquarters nearby in 1642-3.

More information on this intriguing aspect of Warrington’s History is given in H.Well’s ‘Church Street’, Warrington Library.

Opposite, the listed group comprising the former General Wolfe and adjacent cottage is externally also a reminder of old Church Street but virtually rebuilt as part of the conversion to residential care accommodation. At least they provide a companion to the adjacent Cromwell Cottage a diminutive and picturesque half-timbered structure with stone slate roof. Once three C17th cottages, but possibly originally a single house, it was acquired by Rylands in 1938 and converted to their board dining room, losing most of the interior first floor in the process. It later became offices and is now a restaurant with substantial rear extensions. Windows are restored wood mullions with leads.

The cottage also has a Civil War commemorative plaque- referring this time to the opposition’s visit to Church Street a few years later!

Regrettably the setting of the ancient cottage is impaired by the grossly insensitive placing next to it of a light controlled access to Sainsbury’s. The cottage is also visually dominated by the long unbroken roof profile of the Applecourt building when seen from across the store car park.
*East Character Area*

The north side is entirely occupied by Sainsbury’s perimeter and devoid of built form except for the 3 storey red brick warehouse/showroom of Bents Ironmongers. It is curved in plan and though functional it forms a robust and effective end-stop or gateway to the conservation area. It is not shown on the 1909 plan but is probably pre-WW1.

*The Parish Church and associated building group.*

The south side contains the Parish Church of St. Elphin and associated group of listed buildings.

The current Victorian Church stands on the site of the original Anglo Saxon church. It is thought to be the fifth church on the site and the oldest dedication in Lancashire. The first Rector is recorded as Robert, of 1189.

The present building contains medieval fragments of 14th century but is mainly of 1859-69, by Frederick and Horace Francis, according to Pevsner, probably their best work. The crossing tower was reconstructed in 1859, and the tall spire added in 1860,

> *The reconstruction of the Church undertaken by Rector Quekett had become necessary as a consequence of developing cracks beneath the tower. He engaged the London architects F&H Francis whom he had previously engaged in his former parish St. Georges in the East.

>The work evolved into project to achieve a uniform design based on the restoration of the former late medieval character, that of the decorated period so that the new Church could be seen as an historical reconstruction based upon the dimensions of the C14th structure. The new aisle arcades and window tracery were designed to correspond to that period of English architecture based upon the chancel which was to be retained intact.

> *Source Warrington Parish Church, H.Wells.*

The red sandstone of the Church is typical of that outcropping in north Cheshire and South Lancashire. Its mellow appearance is particularly striking in evening light. Wells describes the steeple as its most dominant in approaches from the east. From Winwick in the north and Stockton Heath in the south the spire denotes the old crossing point of the river. At 281 feet (86m) it was said to be the third tallest parish church spire in England.

Normally access to the Church is via a north door rather than the usual route via a south door through a churchyard e.g. St Wilfrid’s Grappenhall. But St. Elphin’s also has an impressive west door which is somewhat hidden by the Ring O Bells and the Rectory grounds.
Wells describes the path from the Church gates which passes by the north door to the housing which occupies the site of the old Mote Hill as an ancient route which may well predate the Church itself. He speculates that the site of the Church may have been a pre-Christian burial site, and that Mote Hill may indeed have been a prehistoric burial mound.

The fine wrought iron Church gates and rusticated stone piers are dated 1791 and probably replaced an earlier lych gate. The approach from Church Street is via a short sett paved lane flanked on the south by the Ring O’ Bells inn and on the north by a pair of red sandstone cottages.

The List entries describe the buildings thus:

The inn : C18th 2 storeys brick with wide gabled front to Church approach; centre boarded door and 2, 12 paned sashes to each floor. A single storey wing extends to Church Street. The adjoining cottages, now part of the inn are C18th low, two storeys with flag roof; most windows square with 30 paned sashes.

The cottages nos. 135,137, are mid C19th, rusticated stone, symmetrical front; end gabled wings with door and window both pointed arched with hood mould; and cusped, 2 light windows with shaped heads.

The cottages have a distinct ecclesiastical character and blend perfectly with the Church itself. This grouping of the Church and buildings at its entrance is undoubtedly the most significant part of the whole conservation area.

The Manchester Road Group.

Beyond the cemetery, the group of cottages which form the transition with Manchester Road commences with no.1 a surgery since 1903; 2 storeys red brick Flemish bond with stone quoins. The remainder are lower in height but of similar style. Regrettably all have been re-windowed in UPVC. No. 11 has been rendered.

The change in road direction conceals the remainder of the row from the south.

This group of cottages has also undergone some insensitive alterations including conversion to shops. The whole group from no. 1 to no.19 dates from between 1826 and 1851.
To some extent the cohesive nature of the terrace has been weakened by the various alterations. However, sufficient architectural merit remains for the terrace to be considered a positive element of the Conservation Area.

The end of the row is marked by a modern housing infill scheme. This modest development reflects the scale, detail and materials of their historic environment. It makes effective use of a stepped plan form that provides variation in roof profile and breaks down its massing. This continues round the northern end of the former cemetery to which it forms a pleasing and effective enclosure.

6.2 Summary- contribution of buildings

The listed buildings by definition are key contributors to the special character of the Conservation Area but they are in separated groups. The most cohesive group is that comprising the Church and those at the Church approach. The Manchester Road cottages are undoubtedly of conservation value in regard to their age and general appearance but have been marred to varying extent, particularly by insertion of UPVC windows. Other unlisted older buildings are of varied quality and most have also undergone some alteration.

6.3 Townscape and the Public realm

Townscape

Various aspects of the general character and appearance of Church Street Conservation area have been outlined in the preceding sections. Fig. 11 illustrates some key elements of the townscape of the area - that is the relationship of buildings to spaces and the important buildings and views. Townscape may include both positive and negative elements.

Positive elements include:

- Two distinct groups of listed buildings located in the west and east character areas as described.
- Other buildings which make a generally positive contribution to the street scene as indicated;
- A reasonable sense of enclosure to the west area due to frontage development and within the Churchyard due to landscaping and boundary walls.
- A number of landmarks or focal points of which St. Elphin’s is clearly the most dominant;
- Interesting serial views due to the curvature of the road; ‘visual gateways’ where the road narrows at the east and west extremities.
Figure 11: Townscape
The Public Realm

The west character area is essentially a thoroughfare and the public realm consists of the highway and its associated street furniture and paving. On the north side, buildings are placed immediately at back of a footway of 2-3 m width. Paving is mainly tarmac and concrete flags except outside the listed group where a cobbled plinth and large stone flags have been used to good effect. This pavement detail outside ‘Cromwell Cottage’ is extremely attractive but has been compromised in part by the introduction of red tactile paving at the light controlled crossing, required to provide safe access across this busy thoroughfare. On the south side there is a wider margin between the buildings and carriageway of up to 8-9m, part of which has been paved in setts.

The east character area includes the substantial green space of the Church yard and cemetery. The setts and Church-yard gates have already been mentioned and are one of the conservation area’s most important public realm features. The cemetery is bounded by a low stone wall.

It is regrettable that the railings around the churchyard were lost, probably during the War when communities sacrificed cast iron railings and other structures to be reused in the armaments industry. A greater loss is the gravestones, which have been removed, with the exception of the larger tombs. The use of the land as a usable space, whose open nature contributes towards the area, has to be considered against the loss of social history that was provided by the gravestones. Nevertheless the graveyard is a significant open space that contributes greatly towards the setting of St Elphins and the adjacent listed buildings, and the character of the Conservation Area as a whole.

6.4 Materials and Details.

Variety in design and use of materials provides much of the character of the area.

Originally, most buildings would have been constructed in timber framing and plaster infill, expensive stone and brick being reserved for prestigious buildings such as the Church, and the rectory.
The oldest properties still remaining are the C16th inns, which are the timber framed Marquis of Gramby, the Bulls Head, and ‘Cromwell Cottage’. Examples of the carved decoration of barge boards mentioned by Beamont survive at the Marquis of Granby, and wooden mullioned windows at the cottage.

With industrialisation and improvements in transport, the manufacture of bricks became more mechanised and brick became the cheapest building material. The character of Church Street then changed with the majority of the buildings being brick built. Today, the local red brick is perhaps a consistent theme though several brick buildings have been over painted or rendered.

Before the C18th, the roofs of most ordinary buildings would have been thatched. This is still evident from the typically steep roof pitches of the surviving C16th and C17th buildings. Later, stone tiles from Pennine sources may have replaced thatch as exemplified by ‘Cromwell Cottage’. As communication routes with North Wales developed, by sea and later by rail, the lighter and cheaper roof material, slate, became more commonly used. The majority of the roof covering is now slate, although modern buildings often use imported slates.

The widespread use of slate therefore now provides a unifying element throughout the conservation area.

Architectural detailing is for the most part typical of the local vernacular, simple and functional rather than ornamental. Gauged brick window heads are a widespread feature and Flemish brick bond typical of the older properties.

The traditional method of setting windows within at least 1⁄2 brick reveals provides pleasing modelling and shadow effects to facades. Modern buildings often appear flat and bland because of windows set almost flush with wall planes. There is no overriding technical need for this and new development within conservation areas should therefore aim to provide depth and modelling to blend in with traditional buildings.

The most recent new developments use materials that blend in reasonably well with their historic context but are not always successful in their detailing.
In early times, Church Street would have probably have been unpaved or dressed with small stones, perhaps with cobbled margins or later fully cobbled, like Church Lane Grappenhall. By the late C 19th early C20th the industrial traffic and tramways required a more robust sett paved carriageway. (In November 2006 utility works in Buttermarket Street revealed the survival of stone setts beneath the modern surface).

The old surfaces have disappeared over time, with the exception of a few scattered remnants, notably the setts at the church gates which are grade II listed and the lanes at the western edge of the conservation area between The Bulls Head PH and 29 Church Street (The Royal Bombay) and directly opposite at the side of 34 Church Street and the area of open space. These sett paved lanes are an important reminder of the area’s past wealth and should be preserved.

6.5 Negative Factors Intrusion and damage.

Church Street perhaps more than any other conservation area has been affected by the economic changes which have swept the town since the early 1980s. These changes resulting in the wholesale loss of once thriving industries have transformed the context for the street through the demolition of industrial and office frontages and replacement by development of a wholly different character from the historic pattern.

The negative factors may be summarised under three broad categories:

1. Loss of heritage due to demolition causing gap sites and new development of mediocre quality;
2. Intrusion due to unsympathetic alteration of buildings, the display of advertisements, inappropriate uses.
3. Insensitive elements of the public realm and the presence of parked vehicles.

In some situations these factors combine to create a generally substandard conservation environment.

1 Impact of demolition and new development

Piecemeal demolition over the years has created a number of gap sites. The gap sites are in themselves unfortunate in breaking the continuity of frontage and consequent loss of enclosure, but they have also exposed views of side and gable walls, several of which have been exploited as advertising sites. These are a major detrimental feature of the conservation area.

- Particularly intrusive examples are those on the gables at the west extremity which present an unbecoming entrance to a conservation area.

These gable ends were exposed by demolition of adjacent properties required by the A49 diversion.
• The large advertisement panels on the gables of 62 and 66 are similarly intrusive thanks to the adjacent open car wash site and the tyre depot forecourt. Such large panel poster displays have no place in a conservation area.

• The enormous open frontage of Sainsbury’s can only be described as regrettable despite the very effective landscaping which is no substitute for built form.

• The building itself is set so far back from the road that its impact on the conservation area is marginal except for the over-sailing and overly dominant space frame which supports its illuminated sign.

• Reference has been made to the Applecourt Care home, which also creates a gap in frontage because the main building is set back.

• The tyre depot and the car wash are uses inherently difficult to accommodate within a conservation setting. The latter is arguably the most detrimental feature of the conservation area exacerbated by its dominant free-standing sign.

Not all new development has been negative. The most recent examples no.40 and the Lockers site housing can only be described as making a positive contribution.

2 Intrusion due to insensitive alterations

• The use of modern UPVC windows and doors and other modernisation’s to historic properties is increasing, and this loss of historic details is gradually eroding the character of historic areas such as conservation areas.

• The remaining terrace 1-21 Manchester Road, shows examples of replacement windows where the cohesion of the terrace is lost with individual window styles. It is noted that a UPVC window has recently been installed in the listed building 135 Church Street, the pair of gothic cottages adjacent to the Church gates. Another modern trend that is a cause of concern is the alteration of original window openings, where new window frames extend beyond the obvious structural window heads, such as 86 Church Street - Clover Racing, where a large window has been inserted on the first floor.
• The street has been a commercial street almost from the beginning, however in recent years this commercial element has resulted in the buildings being bedecked with signs. Some signs, such as those on the Marquis of Gramby public house, and the Bull’s Head, are traditional style signs and are in keeping with the character of the building. Other signs are of a material, design or degree of illumination that detract from the historic environment, for example the Wilkies Tavern sign on the gable of 31 Church Street.

The terrace at 1-21 Manchester Road, has smaller signs in comparison, however, given that the majority of the buildings were originally dwellings, and without shopfronts, any sign in this location has to be carefully detailed. The lack of obvious shopfronts and fascia detail has led to signs of varying heights, and sizes, which detract from the cohesion of the terrace.

• The introduction in recent years of roller shutters, is another area of concern. Historic buildings cannot easily accommodate externally fixed roller shutters, which require a box on the front of the building. This form of shutter detracts from the building, when raised and even more so when down and may obscure architectural details. The needs for security are recognised, particularly in situations such as Church Street, which is not a main retail area. However wherever possible, internal shutters or other forms of security which complies with the Council’s Shopfront Design Guidance should be used in preference to of external roller shutters.

There is scope for improvement in that a large majority of the above are reversible, either as a result of enforcement action or, by negotiation. Appropriate signage would benefit the commercial properties, and a reduction in the street clutter would provide positive benefits to the street scene.

3. Public realm

Probably because the conservation area has been considered first and foremost as a busy highway, few concessions have been made to the historic environment in regard to the selection and siting of street furniture. Lighting columns are hockey stick types and too tall in relation to the adjacent buildings.

The pavement itself detracts from the character of the conservation area. The original paving materials have been lost over the years, with the exception of a small area outside Cromwell’s cottage. However, this area has been marred by the introduction of red tactile paving for the light controlled crossing. The remainder of the street is a mixture of concrete paving, tarmac, square stone setts with some tactile paving. On the south side of the street, from the Bull’s Head to the Marquis of Granby, there is a raised section of square stone setts between the road and footway edged by a high kerb. The setted area appears to serve no useful purpose either for pedestrians or car users, with its only function being to house signs, both road signs and advertisement boards. Before this modification, parking at an angle to the road was commonplace and doubtless considered as an impediment to traffic flow.
The loss of historic pavement materials over the years has diminished the character of the conservation area, by virtue of the loss of a cohesive street element. The stone flag paving and setts at the Church gates are therefore important surviving historic elements and should be retained.

Because Church Street is a busy thoroughfare there is little opportunity for kerbside parking. However vehicles are commonly parked in the Church entrance area and where widened pavements permit. Parking in front of the Church Gates is visually intrusive, however, painting yellow lines on the setts would be quite unacceptable.

There are some extremely unfortunate examples of street furniture and highway signage in juxtaposition with heritage buildings. The worst examples are probably:

- The traffic direction signs in front of the Bull’s Head;
- The yellow bus shelter with poster panel in front of the Parish Church
- Galvanised railings, traffic lights and signage at the junction with School Brow.

The extreme example of the combination of detrimental factors occurs at the junction with Farrell Street where the Cromwell Cottage is juxtaposed with traffic lights, pink deterrent paving, galvanised railings, tall galvanised lighting columns, an over engineered vehicular entrance to Sainsbury's and in the background the airport terminal-like store entrance and signs.

The picture speaks for itself.

It is noted that highways signs and other types of street furniture are a necessity in such a busy thoroughfare and it may not be appropriate for the signs to be removed or the design changed. However there may be scope when signs are changed to have black posts and railings of a more traditional design rather than the usual galvanised utilitarian types. In addition, consideration should be given to economy in the use of posts and to wall mounting of certain signs.
4 Untidy Land

There are two areas of untidy land, which affect the character and appearance of the conservation area. The largest of these is a small corner of land at the junction of Church Street and Farrell Street. This open grassed area collects windblown litter, and there has been rubbish dumped on the site.

A smaller area of un-maintained land is the narrow access lane to what was once Dakin’s Yard, an area of terraced housing on the 1907 map. It subsequently became a passage at the side of the Kinema, becoming exposed to view when the latter was demolished. The access lane now runs between Applecourt and the tyre depot and does not seem to have been claimed by either. All historical reference to this narrow lane which does not lead anywhere has been lost and it has now become an unsightly litter trap.

Building maintenance

The condition of the listed buildings has generally improved since the designation of the Conservation Area, with Cromwell Cottage being removed from the Buildings at Risk register and The General Wolfe, and the former National School being repaired. However, there are still elements of concern with small alterations of listed buildings without listed building consent all of which contribute over time to the erosion of the character of the listed building and the conservation area as a whole. This cumulative erosion is a factor that should be kept in check.

Even the Parish Church is not immune from modern intrusions having acquired at some time a stainless steel flue stack!

The domestic buildings are generally well maintained, and the more recent developments clearly demonstrate a commitment to secure design standards which have the potential to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
7 CAPACITY FOR CHANGE- ISSUES FOR A CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

7.1 The continued viability of Church Street Conservation Area.

The extent of loss and damage is such that it may be questioned whether the Conservation Area as designated remains justifiable.

Nothing can bring back lost heritage. However, recent events have shown that the damaged townscape can- in time -be repaired by the consistent and diligent application of the Council’s conservation, design and development control policies. This would go some way towards recreating the built form of Church Street in a scale and form compatible with the historic environment.

The new development that has taken place has tried to address the weakened street frontage in place when the conservation area was designated, with housing built on the back of pavement, to provide a more active and interesting street frontage.

Retention of the Designated area would support this process.

The presence of various breaks in the continuity of built frontage is one of the conservation area’s most detrimental features.

As noted, the gaps result in loss of enclosure to the street and open up gable end advertising sites. The effect is to give the street a disjointed appearance. This is most pronounced on the north side where the surviving historic buildings stand alone without compatible adjacent frontage.

On the south side there is now an extensive cleared site. The quality and form of this development will be crucial to the future cohesion of the street as it lies next to the Marquis of Granby and opposite the ‘Cromwell Cottage’ listed group and will have a key role in uniting the west and eastern parts of the Conservation Area.

Planning approval has been granted for a mixed use scheme involving a frontage development of 3 storeys of shops and apartments with a hotel of 5 storeys at the Farrell Street junction. The boxy profile with flat over -sailing roofs and continuous frontage of some 95m does not echo any other design themes within the conservation area, for example, the traditional roof profiles established in the Pinder’s Farm Drive development. It remains to be seen whether this proposed development , should it proceed, will achieve the desired cohesion of townscape or add yet another different type of built form to Church Street’s existing mixture.

7.2 Issues for Conservation Area Management Plan.

It is reassuring that there has been no major heritage loss through demolition within the Church Street conservation area, since its designation, the loss of the Lockers C20th industrial site being the only major redevelopment that has occurred.

If, however, Church Street Conservation Area is to remain viable and to recover as a cohesive street, the conservation area management strategy will need to address the issues raised in this appraisal.
In setting out priorities, it should be recognised that some progress may be possible in the short term whilst in other cases a longer term approach will be required. However, it is reasonable to adopt a longer term approach to conservation area enhancement when the impetus for change is largely dependent upon the workings of the commercial property market rather than public sector initiatives. Enhancement may therefore have to take place on an opportunistic basis but based upon an agreed strategy.

In particular the Conservation Area management strategy should focus upon three broad areas of action:

1 Development of Gap sites; Raising design standards for new development. (Ref Fig. 11)

- The undeveloped site on the south side has already been mentioned. On the north side there are gap sites and mediocre buildings at the western extremity of the conservation area that would benefit from well designed redevelopment to form an appropriate gateway to the Conservation Area.

- The car wash site and tyre depot are open areas that would be improved by infill development of appropriate design.

- It seems unlikely that Sainsbury’s site can be realistically redeveloped in the short term but in the longer term the opportunity to re-establish a built form at least around the frontage might arise, if for example the parking provision is reduced or rationalised.

- The design of new development in or adjoining the conservation area should take into consideration the analysis of special character set out in this appraisal, in particular: the modest scale of buildings, their variety of form, especially roof profiles, and direct relationship to the street.

- The form of new development should aim to enhance and integrate the heritage elements of the street and not dominate or detract from it. Important views and the settings of historic buildings should be respected. The palette of materials should reflect themes established in the area.
2 Tackling Unauthorised alterations, Advertisements and Signs.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, requires that special attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This special attention would relate to the determination of planning applications, where additional measures* may be required to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. It would also relate to the adoption of suitable policies in development plans. *(see Section 7.3)

The requirement to preserve or enhance should also relate to the enforcement controls that apply to conservation areas, both in ensuring that authorised development is carried out in accordance with the approved plans, and that planning conditions are adhered to, and to the investigation of unauthorised works.

Use of enforcement powers would be an appropriate tool in our duty to preserve or enhance the Conservation Area, as all too easily, unauthorised developments can lead cumulatively to a decline in their character and appearance. A more pro-active approach to enforcement, whereby the whole conservation area is surveyed, and unauthorised works identified including unauthorised advertisements, would therefore be beneficial to the Conservation Area.

This approach should be applied to the specific negative factors outlined in section 6.5 above and include action on the following:

- Enforcement action to be taken against any signs that were erected without the necessary permissions.
- Enforcement proceedings to be initiated against any signs for which the permission has expired or where the continued presence of the advertisement can be lawfully challenged.
- Enforcement proceedings to be initiated against any unauthorised shop fronts or roller shutters and against any works to the exterior of a building that required permission including new windows being installed where consent would normally be required.
- Strict enforcement control with regard to the compliance of conditions.
- The imposition of an Article 4 Direction removing permitted development rights for Certain types of development including for example replacement windows.

3. Measures to enhance the public Realm

The designation of the area should be acknowledged corporately when highway improvements are required. Conservation Area designation should not prevent items required for public safety, such as traffic lights, tactile paving, barriers and signs. However the designation of the area as a conservation area should ensure that any highway repairs or improvements, are carried out in a manner appropriate for such a designation, and care is taken to avoid inappropriate materials and unnecessary clutter of our historic streets.
A number of aspects of the public realm that are detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area have been outlined in this appraisal. These are regarded as the priorities for any action that is possible to mitigate the impact of street furniture upon the heritage street scene.

The historic context as outlined in this appraisal should be considered by highway engineers and statutory undertakers, when the area is maintained.

The requirement for highway and pedestrian safety is acknowledged, however a more corporate approach to the management of our conservation areas could be undertaken for example by the careful selection of paving materials and by the siting and design of street furniture.

In particular, Church Street Conservation Area Management Plan should address the following:

- Review the size and positioning of traffic direction signs, and the design and placing of barriers and bollards;
- Specification of works to the street surface should ensure consistency and avoid a non-cohesive and patched effect;
- The existing highway infrastructure to be considered fully and possible modifications sought for example whether any reduction in the volume of through traffic can be achieved.
- Investigation into whether restrictions need to be put in place to prevent vehicles parking on pavements.
- Investigation into other ways the visual environment of Church Street can be improved, for example by introducing tree or shrub planting; rationalising the signage; upgrading the street lighting to a conservation specification.
- In regard to areas of untidy land, as mentioned in 6.5 (4) the use of Section 215 (Planning Act) powers might be considered where the owners of untidy private land can be traced.

7.3 Other matters to be included in the Management Strategy

- Pre-application advice actively encouraged for future planning applications and advice given in the most appropriate format.

- Applications should be accompanied by a design statement that indicates how the special qualities of the conservation area have been taken into consideration. Applications should provide contextual information including sectional elevations and montages, so that the Planning Authority and those consulted can readily appreciate the impact of the proposed development upon the character and appearance of the conservation area.
Applications to be submitted with sufficient detail to determine the application. In some instances materials to be submitted with the application and not considered as a condition. Consideration given to the continuity of materials and new developments to use the same or matching materials. Information and records to be kept of the materials used in new developments for use by other developers.

In particular, details should include large scale sections to indicate the depth of elevational features such as window and door reveals, string courses, sills and lintels, eaves and cornice details.

Periodic photographic studies of the conservation areas to monitor the character and appearance of the conservation area and to ensure that any unauthorised works are identified and acted upon within an appropriate timescale.

7.4 CONCLUSION

Refer to Section 1.4
8 SUGGESTED BOUNDARY CHANGES

The boundary of the Church Street Conservation Area, is based on the land boundaries that existed just prior to its designation. As land is developed over time, this has led to a peculiar land boundary that in places bears no relationship to the current site. There are situations where boundary runs through a site, and it is not clear from the ground where the boundary actually lies.

As Conservation Area boundaries are reviewed, this provides opportunities for sites that no longer have the criteria worthy of designation to be excluded from the conservation area, and/or adjoining areas that were previously overlooked to be included, or to include additional land where the conservation area boundary was drawn tightly around buildings without attention being paid to their setting.

Specific boundary changes include the following:

- The bowling green behind the Bull’s Head public house, should be included within the conservation area. The site is protected against inappropriate development being within the curtilage of a listed building, however, as the public house is within the conservation area, it is logical for the curtilage of the public house also to be included within the conservation area.

- The inclusion of the former factory behind the listed buildings of 25 - 31 Church Street would be considered an important addition to the conservation area, as it is now very visible from the A49, and any development on that site could have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the setting of the listed buildings.

- Another example would be the area of open space at the roundabout on the A49, which is partly within the conservation area, it is proposed that the whole of the open space be included within the conservation area.

- Other proposed changes are to clarify the boundaries within existing sites which have changed. An example of this is the car park in front of the Apple Court Nursing home, where the existing boundary runs through half of the car park, along a previous boundary, it is proposed that the entire car park is included within the conservation area for consistency.

The majority of the boundary of the conservation area is proposed to remain as existing, with minor modifications to include land/buildings previously screened, and to rectify site boundaries. The proposed boundary changes are indicated on Fig. 12.
Figure 12: Proposed Boundary Changes
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT FOR CONSERVATION AREAS

A1.1 Legal Background

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that:

Every local planning authority -

(a) shall from time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and

(b) shall designate those areas as conservation areas.

It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas; and, if they so determine, they shall designate those parts accordingly.

It has been over twenty five years since the first conservation area was designated and now over 8000 exist. Over this time the approach to designation has changed greatly in parallel with the reassessment of the criteria for and expansion of the statutory listing of historic buildings. (paragraph 1.2 of English Heritage Publication Conservation Area Practice published October 1995).

English Heritage guidance is that the decision to designate a conservation area is comparable to a major land use policy decision. The view of English Heritage that it is vital that only areas which are demonstrably of “special architectural or historic interest” in the local or regional context should be designated because of the responsibilities and obligations which designation confers. (paragraph 2.4 of English Heritage Publication Conservation Area Practice published October 1995).

Conservation Area Consent is required from the local planning authority for the demolition of unlisted buildings within a conservation area. Planning Permission may also be required for development that may not be required outside a conservation area such as some additions and alterations to dwelling houses and buildings within the curtilage of dwelling houses i.e. garages and some sheds. The local planning authority must be given 6 weeks notice of intention to lop, top or fell any tree. Additional powers to control development within conservation areas may be sought by Local Planning Authorities by use of Article 4 directions.

The legislation relating to conservation areas can be complex, having been influenced by policy and case law. The advice of the Planning Authority should be sought by those seeking to carry out development or other works within a conservation area.
A1.2 National Policy framework

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15) provides the national policy framework for Planning and the Historic Environment. The planning system is currently under reform, PPG’s will be revised as Planning Policy Statement (PPS), although PPG15 is yet to be revised and therefore remains in situ.

PPG15 provides the policy framework for developing policy at the regional and local level - both of which are discussed in more detail below.

PPG15 prescribes that Conservation policy should address the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as the protection of individual buildings.

LPAs have a duty under Section 69 to review Conservation Areas from time to time. Furthermore the designation of a Conservation Area gives the Local Planning Authority (LPA) the ability to control development within the Conservation Area and ensures the setting of the Conservation Area is not compromised to its detriment.

A1.3 Regional Policy

Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) became the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) under the new planning system. RPG13 is currently under review, however, the policies within RPG13 are still relevant, particularly; ER3 (Built Heritage) and ER4 (Contribution of Built Heritage to Regeneration) are relevant in formulating Local Policy.

A1.4 Local Policy

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2006 is the adopted development plan for Warrington. However, under the new planning system this is now under review and will be replaced by a Local Development Framework (LDF).

Relevant UDP policies include;

- BH6 - Designation and Review of Conservation Areas
- BH7/8 - Development in Conservation Areas.

A1.5 The Management Plan

The Management Plan will provide a strategy to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area and will pick up on the issues identified in the appraisal.

It is intended that the Management Plan will be formulated as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) at a future date. The adoption of the Management Plan will itself be subject to further consultation.
APPENDIX 2 : NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY

In 2000 English Heritage commissioned MORI to undertake an independent survey of people attitudes to the historic environment and the value they place upon it.

In a survey of a representative 3000 people in England MORI found that

- 96% think that all schoolchildren should be given the opportunity to find out about England’s Historic Environment.
- 96% think that the historic environment is important to teach them about the past
- 88% think it is important in creating jobs and boosting the economy
- 87% think that it plays an important part in the cultural life of the country.
- 85% think that it is important in promoting regeneration in towns and cities
- 77% disagree that we preserve too much
- 76% think that their own lives are richer for having the opportunity to visit it or see it.
- 75% think that the best of our post war building should be preserved rising to 95% of the 16-24 age group.

(SOURCE: Power of Place – the future of the historic environment page 4)