

5 Central Winchester

The Walled Town

5.1 Historical development

Although predated by settlements on St Catherine's Hill, Oram's Arbour and Oliver's Battery, it was the Roman settlement on the western slopes that first spread down into the centre of the valley. The Roman town of Venta Belgarum, founded in AD 70, occupied the space which is now the centre of the historic city. After a period of decline following Roman withdrawal, the City was rebuilt by the Saxons. The Old Minster was sited within the walls in AD 648, and the later Saxons under King Alfred fully refurbished the Roman defences and created the modern street system. Following the Norman invasion, William the Conqueror built his castle on the south-west corner of the walled city, which has remained a centre of local government. A period of growth in medieval times, during which the present cathedral was constructed, was followed by decline after the Black Death in the mid 14th century. Winchester College was founded towards the end of the century in 1382. The Reformation brought destruction to several churches and monuments within the walled city (photo 3), as well as Hyde Abbey to the north. The City did not begin to recover economically until the late 17th century. The City's function as a military base was growing during the 18th century at the same time as the north, south and east gates were being demolished. Many buildings along the main streets were rebuilt. But although most of the buildings within the walled city are of the last three centuries, the more distant past can still be felt throughout the area, perhaps reflected by the restrictions imposed by the line of the defensive circuit and the late Saxon street system.

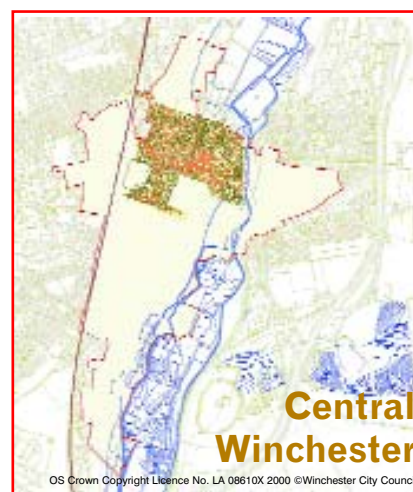
5.2 Building uses

The Cathedral Close and Peninsula Barracks represent significant areas in the walled city, and are discussed separately. Broadly, there is an interesting, three-dimensional mix of uses throughout the walled city. For example, buildings in the High Street might be occupied by retail at ground level, a hairdresser on the first floor, and offices or residential above (photo 1). However, some geographical trends can be identified. The High Street continues to be the central focus of trading activity much as it has been throughout Winchester's history.

The south-west corner of the 'walled' city has remained a centre of local government, and is now occupied mainly by the offices of Hampshire County Council and the Law Courts (photo 2). Retailing is concentrated along the High Street and in the streets to the north, including the Brook's shopping centre on St George Street and the street market on Middle Brook Street. Offices extend out along Southgate St, and to the north-west of the High St, towards the station. In particular, there is a cluster of offices and office services in the area behind the local government offices (photo 5). The area south of the High Street includes a number of visitor-oriented shops and several pubs and cafes. There is also a cinema on Southgate Street.

The Square is a lively and popular area, particularly in evening (the name commonly refers to the north and south sides of the Square but also the northern spur which links with the High Street at the Butter Cross, Slug & Lettuce, etc.) providing a mix of specialist retailers, bars, restaurants and the City Museum, linking the Close to the High Street.

Residential buildings can still be found in large parts of the walled city, particularly in the north and north-east. Roads such as North Walls (photo 4), Eastgate Street, Parchment Street and Lower and Middle Brook Street are enriched by the domestic scale of the terraced houses. In the south, St Swithun's Street is also largely residential (photo 6).

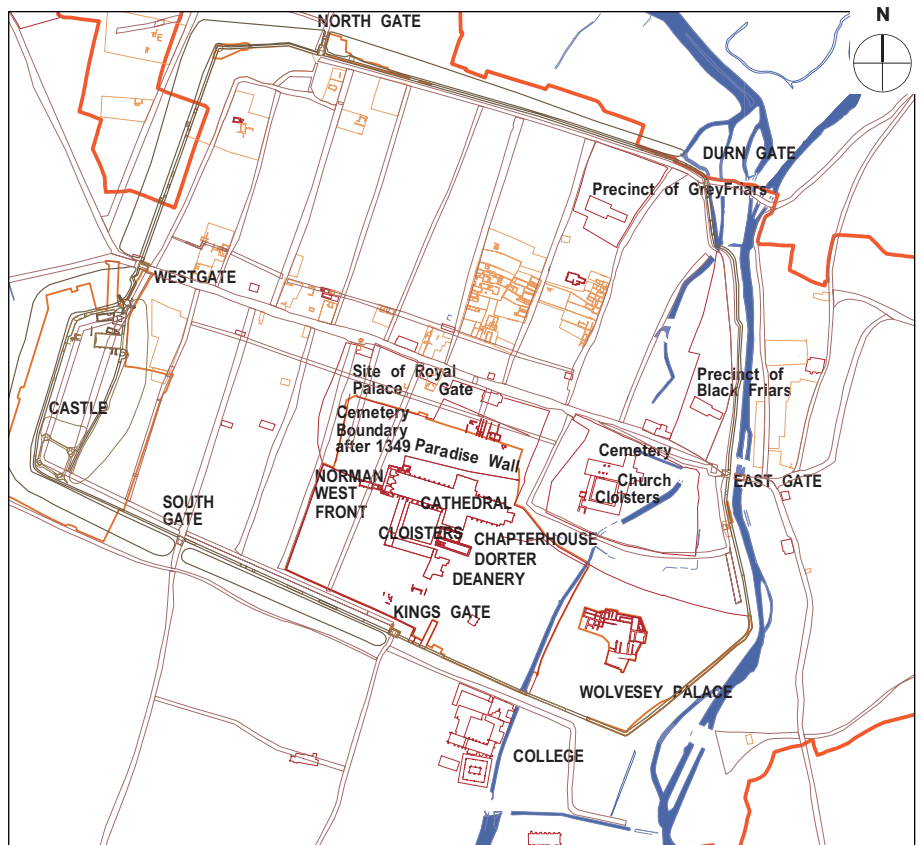


5.3 Building character

The streets of the walled city represent development over a very long period of time, and inevitably display a great range of architecture. This richness is enhanced by the relatively narrow building plots which allow many different styles to be seen in every view. This collision of styles is most evident in the High Street (photo 7), where the narrowness of the buildings is threatened by the large-scale horizontality of the retail frontages at ground level.

The High Street can be subdivided into three distinct sections:- from the West Gate to the Butter Cross, the narrower central section, and the wider Broadway heading out to the east.

After entering the High Street from the east across the bridge, St. John's House and St John's Hospital begin the composition. On the south side, Abbey House, with its late 18th century red brick castlefronted frontage, occupies its own setting in what is now a public garden with ornate heavy cast iron railings separating a water channel from the pavement. In general, the larger monumental stone buildings, like the Guildhall (gothic style, 1871-73, distinctive roof, clock tower and high-level architectural features) of the southern side contrast with the domestic, sometimes narrow-scale of the buildings to the north. These are predominantly brick terraced houses of varying heights with timber sash windows and flat-arch brick lintels.



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Above: 15th century, showing Castle, Cathedral, religious houses.

Larger Victorian commercial buildings characterise the central section of the High Street, although the plot widths are still narrow enough to provide a rich visual mix. The predominant facings are orange and red bricks, sometimes painted white, and light render and stone, usually complemented by timber sash windows painted white or black. Many buildings feature stone triangular and segmental pediments, with a variety of infills – stone carvings, brick and windows. Exuberant brick, render or stone rustication defines some vertical edges. The skyline varies considerably, touching five storeys in places, and consists of parapet walls with light stone copings, stone cornices of varying complexity and gabled-ends, with facing brick or tiles (in the case of No. 110). The roofs are usually unobtrusive, although some weathered copper is visible from the street, which adds a subtle colour at high level. The facades along the southern edge of the central section vary from large timber-framed gable-ends to heavy Doric and Tuscan colonnades and entablatures. The Pentice (Nos 30-41) a 16th century, timber framed, 3-storey partly gable fronted building, with upper floors projecting across pavement and supported on columns, is particularly significant.



On the upper part of the High Street at No. 85 (photo 8) there is a very fine carved oak projecting sign with a quill and fountain pen symbolising the goods sold by a stationer. The number of projecting signs which use symbols—boot, coffee pot, spectacles rather than corporate signage, has resulted from encouraging sympathetic fascia signs. The Council's shopfront policy has also restricted the use of illuminated signs

The buildings of the western end of the High Street (photo 7) are characterised by a larger number of projecting square and canted bay windows of a variety of materials. For example, No. 101 is a 4-storey timber-framed structure with white infill panels, double overhanging gables at top-floor level above double canted bay windows. No. 106, by contrast, is a three storey building with 5 bays and dormer windows hidden by a parapet wall. There is a segmental pediment above the large central bay, and stone trimmings to the sash windows.



No. 105 is a mid 18th century, 3-storey building with a symmetrical, 7-bay brick frontage and a very fine stucco ground floor with sash windows divided by pilasters with modillion cornice above and substantial wrought iron railings to pavement. The Butter Cross, from the early 15th century was restored by Giles Gilbert Scott in 1865, by its stepped plinth provides informal seating to street theatre spectators. No's 49-50, formerly the Old Guild Hall, was rebuilt in 1713. It has a stone Doric-Columned ground floor with a statue of Queen Anne at first-floor level and large projecting clock on carved timber brackets. The building also features a timber belfry with lead cupola, which is crowned by a golden ball and weathercock.



The buildings along Southgate Street and Jewry Street are similar in scale to the High Street, but slightly less varied in character. Nos 33-39 Southgate Street is a very fine mid-19th-century terrace of town houses with stucco porches, classical detailing and cast iron railings. On the western side of the street, south of No. 12 (Hotel du Vin) the street space is less well-defined due to the Screen Cinema (former Barracks school and Chapel), the Victorian St Thomas church and the splendid Serle's House, 1740, by Thomas Archer which are set back from the road in their own grounds.



De Lunn building is a very distinctive 3-storey block on the east side of Jewry Street near the junction with City Road, with white moulded pilasters at ground level, red brick above, and black, timber-framed balconies at second floor level with double overhanging gables. The Library, formerly the Corn Exchange (O B Carter, 1838) is a significant landmark whose deep portico is a key feature of Jewry Street. The central part of the Old Gaol with its 5-bay frontage, stone pediment, cornice and vermiculated quoins can be seen above the public house at No. 11a. The building originally had two pavilion wings but only one survives at No. 12 above an elegant early 20th century shopfront.

The Square has many listed buildings, good shopfronts and high townscape value. While many of the buildings have Georgian brick façades with characteristic timber sash windows they often conceal older timber-framed structures, some with medieval cellars.

At the southern end of Eastgate Street, the buildings contribute to the setting of the east end of the High Street and King Alfred's statue—including Nos 4-8, white stucco 2-storey bay-fronted buildings, No. 80, Eastgate House and No. 77, former public house (currently a veterinary surgery), a small 2- storey brick building in Italianate style with 'silent clock' (all Listed). This is a sensitive area as demonstrated by recent proposals to redevelop Nos 75-79.



Above: Urban Structure

Many buildings in the smaller streets were rebuilt in the 19th and early 20th century. For instance, the houses at the corner of St Swithun's Street and St Thomas Street are of red brick with white trimmings to the sash windows, white keystones set into brick arch window lintels, and white porches with broken pediments. The floor is defined by a projecting, brick string course. Near Tower Street in the north, there is a line of low 2-storey terraced houses with pale render, canted single-storey bay windows at ground level, and large chimneys with brick cornices.

The 13th and late 14th century Westgate marks the historic entrance to the walled city—a gothic-arched, pale stone masonry structure, through which the axis of the street can be seen (photo 9). The setting of the arch is somewhat compromised by the present road layout and there is an interesting juxtaposition with the adjacent Neo-Georgian red brick façades of Queen Elizabeth II Court and to a lesser extent the carefully articulated stepped façade of Mottisfont Court.

Within the Walled Town, there are a large number of buildings of note which at present are not Listed, especially buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see Appendix 1). They contribute as much to the Area as buildings from earlier periods.



Below: Mid-19th century, including remains of the Royal Palace

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5.4 Building character—Cathedral Close



The Norman cathedral, parts of which were remodelled in the 13th and 14th centuries, has a quiet, monumental presence over short and long distances. Its square tower is a distinctive feature for several miles around, but because it is low in scale it is invisible from many parts of the city centre. Cathedral Close is composed of two areas, the Inner Close and the Outer Close each with their own distinct character. A distinctive feature of Winchester is the separation between City, Cathedral and Palace, which is also found in other similar early foundations (such as Wells and Lincoln). The Close was separately enclosed and forms a separate entity distinct from the Walled Town. Another distinctive feature is the extension of similar demesnes to the south – along College Street and St. Cross. This creates a unique sequence of enclosed spaces which maintains an open topography and forms a ‘green lung’ extending into the city centre. The Close also contains a wide range of building types with surviving elements from throughout history. These include the Deanery which was the Prior’s lodging - Prior’s Hall, and is linked to the Cathedral’s south transept by a Norman arcade, the 17th century Pilgrims’ School and medieval hall, the 15th century Priors Gate and the adjacent 15th and 16th century timber-framed buildings. To the east of Pilgrims School, lies the 17th century Wolvesey Palace, designed by Christopher Wren for Bishop George Morley, and the 12th century remains of Wolvesey Castle built by Bishop Henry de Blois, with its adjacent stone wall. In contrast to the institutional scale of the Deanery and surrounding buildings, The Close also takes its character from more modest domestic buildings, including the brick terraces in Dome Alley. Also of significant interest are The Close boundary wall, which incorporates Priors Gate and is particularly well preserved along St Swithun Street and Symonds Street and Castle Wall which forms the outer city wall in part, enclosing Wolvesey Castle and Palace. Both walls date from the 13th century and are constructed from limestone rubble and flintwork. The outstanding architectural interest of the historic buildings in The Close clearly illustrates the status and patronage enjoyed by the Cathedral throughout its history.

5.5 Building character—Peninsula Barracks

Although not perfectly symmetrical, the four edges to the square represent a very complete, formal composition. The buildings, in the main dating from the early years of the 20th century, are generally 3 to 4 storeys tall, of red brick with light stone rusticated edges. The roofs are of light grey slate, and the large windows are white-painted timber sash windows. The new building adjacent to the Museum, faced in light render, is austere but its scale and monumentality make it sympathetic to this context.

New residential uses have been found for the buildings of the Lower Barracks area and new buildings which respect the scale and palette of materials of older buildings.

5.6 Public realm—Walled Town

The High Street can be perceived in its entirety only from the high ground outside its length, particularly the viewpoint on St Giles’ Hill. When actually in the High Street, it reads as three distinct sections. The western extent is clearly defined by the West Gate, the beginning of an epic sequence of spaces from west to east. The widening of the road just before entering the Pentice, combined with the pedestrian link to the Cathedral and the 15th century Butter Cross creates a distinctive meeting place and urban square. This marks the entry to the narrower pedestrian central section, characterised by the dense yet highly permeable building on either side, and the range of building heights and sizes. Finally, the street widens out into the Broadway, watched over by Thorneycroft’s statue of Alfred that has become a defining symbol of the City. Abbey Gardens provides a tranquil green haven separated from the Broadway by railings and a flowing brook.

Other pieces of public art including Dame Elisabeth Frink’s bronze statue of horse and rider (photo 12), adjacent to No. 74, and the bronze ‘Hampshire Hog’ outside Hampshire County Council’s Queen Elizabeth II Court, help to enliven the street scene.

In almost a direct legacy from the medieval period, Parchment Street and St Thomas' Street represent the narrow and intimate nature of many of the other intramural streets. Largely unbroken building frontages open occasionally to accommodate small gardens, or routes through to rear courtyards. Last in the hierarchy is a series of narrower understated pedestrian streets, contributing to the permeability of the City and the enjoyment of moving quickly between large and small spaces. The passages off Staple Gardens provide a pleasant walking experience. St Thomas' Passage, slipping quietly down the hill to the east from Southgate Street, provides a dramatic framed view of the cathedral below.

The Square provides pedestrian links to the High Street, Little Minster Street and the Close.

An important public space is situated between the Law Courts, the Great Hall and the HCC offices (photo 2). This space is well landscaped in good quality materials, on two levels. The lower level can be used for public events. The lack of surrounding active frontage and poor integration with the local street network result in it too often being under utilised and relatively deserted.

5.7 Public realm—Cathedral Close

An important part of the area's character derives from its seclusion—the manner in which the Cathedral is hidden from the High Street, allowing it to be dramatically discovered. This seclusion which derives from the areas ecclesiastic origins, creates a dramatic change of pace from the bustle of the High Street. Once inside The Close, the Cathedral can be perceived as a whole. The generally low-rise nature of the City allows trees to partially obscure the surrounding buildings, so that the various squares, paths and lawns of the close assume a quiet, park-like feel (photo 11). The huge mature trees and soft landscaping are crucial to this quality of space.

Walks through The Close are characterised by constantly changing picturesque views, due to the informality of the building layout and the range of scales from the monumental to the intimate. The five-minute sequence of passing from The Square across the Close, past the side of the Cathedral, through the Priors' Gate into St Swithun's Street, and through the Kingsgate to the south, is one of the most enjoyable and dramatic walks in the City.

5.8 Public realm—Peninsula Barracks

The main entrance is off Romsey Road, a short walk up the hill from the West Gate. There is also subsidiary pedestrian access to the rear from St James's Lane. Both offer a different entry experience into the main square, which can be seen through its open corners before it is actually entered. Another route leads via steep steps to the Lower Barracks providing a useful pedestrian connection to Southgate Street.

In contrast to the Cathedral Close, The Upper Barracks is formally landscaped, the only example in the city, and reflects its military origins. The quality of recent landscaping is very high. The water and trees in the centre are complemented by granite setts, a variety of sizes of stone paving and subtle traffic markings at the edges.

5.9 Natural features and topography

The topography of the City's valley is essential to the quality of the High Street and the City in general. Trees and greenery are essential to the calming quality of the Cathedral Close, and they help to soften the vast square of the Peninsula Barracks. Long views to the tree-covered St Giles' Hill are important from along the High Street, but especially through the arch of the West Gate. The gentle slope down to the river contributes to its picturesque quality and, from the other direction, the rise in level gives great prominence to the large local government buildings. Elsewhere in the walled town, the changes in level are more subtle. Jewry Street rises gently to the junction with City Road, and moderate changes in level add to the picturesque quality of many streets, notably St. Peter Street, St Thomas's Street, St Swithun's Street and Parchment Street.









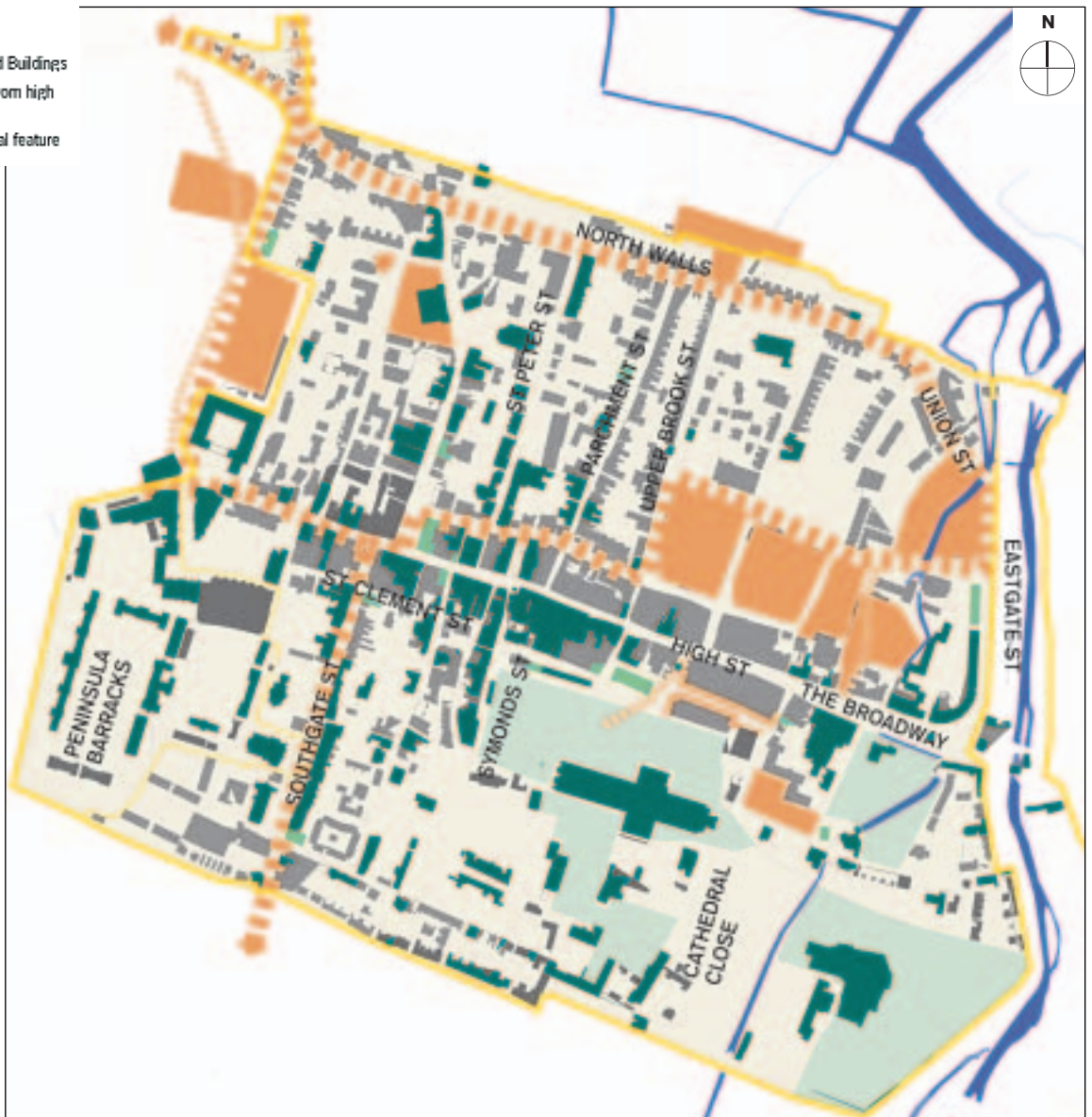
5.10 Neutral and negative features

The level of traffic on St George's Street, Friarsgate, North Walls and the west end of the High Street is very high during peak periods, and noise, pollution and the difficulty in crossing the road significantly detract from the quality of space (photo 3). The staggered crossing of the High Street between Jewry Street and Southgate Street is too much dominated by conventional traffic engineering, as is the widening of Jewry Street at the junction with St George's Street.

Winchester bus station does not provide the arrival experience which a city like Winchester deserves (photo 18). The bus gateway on the Broadway is very wide, representing a significant rupture in the otherwise continuous block; the pedestrian walkway through to Friarsgate is of poor quality. The developments west of the bus station, between Friarsgate, Upper Brook Street and Silver Hill comprise large multi-storey car parks, the Brooks shopping centre and various other uses. They are disproportionately large for the surrounding city, and present bleak, anonymous and over-scaled frontages, which are seriously detrimental to the streetscape. The housing blocks between Eastgate Street and Lawn Street, while not detracting seriously from the City, are very different in character from the rest of the walled city, and are therefore a neutral feature.

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-  Listed Buildings
-  Important Unlisted Buildings
-  Roads suffering from high levels of traffic
-  Negative or neutral feature



Above right:
Environmental Assets

The numerous car parks surrounding the centre detract from the dense quality of the City. The car park in Colebrook Street has been adequately landscaped with trees (photo 20), but the car parks at Lower Brook Street and St Peter's detract from the quality of the area. The car park behind the library in Jewry Street is an eyesore. On a smaller scale, new housing incorporating integral garages (for instance, in St Swithun's Street) has a deadening effect on the street frontages. The loss and replacement of original building details with modern substitutes, especially sash windows, is unfortunate.

5.11 Potential for enhancement

The bus station is one of the most obvious areas with potential for enhancement in the City (photo 19). Relocation or redesign of the bus station would improve the Broadway frontage. The pedestrian link through to Friarsgate should be a key part of any design, as should the potential to enhance the watercourse.

The traffic system within the walled city, while still functional, has resulted in Jewry Street and the setting of the West Gate being severely compromised. An alternative traffic strategy could close the gap next to the Gate and restore the sense of the western city walls. This would also offer the opportunity to create a pedestrian-friendly urban space just outside the West Gate at the junction of the Roman roads. The widened area of Jewry Street is over-generous in its road space.

The route through from the High Street to Cathedral Close past the end of Market Lane is potentially part of a key pedestrian route leading through to Kingsgate and north to the Art College (university) campus. Some building over the east side of the small car park may be the answer to improving the route, by increasing the density, and improving the setting of the 14th century tower from St Maurice's church.

The car parks provide an opportunity for higher density redevelopment that would respect the existing grain of streets and relieve pressure on greenfield sites surrounding the area. Owing to its hilltop location, development of the car park adjacent to the new Records Office should not exceed two storeys. Building in the car park surrounding the library on Jewry Street must preserve the sense of the library as a distinct building, instead of incorporating it into a block.

There is also a case for extensive redevelopment in the area bounded by Friarsgate, Silver Hill, Upper Brook Street and the bus station, provided that this respects the street pattern and the surviving evidence of historic water courses. The Brooks shopping centre does not function as a street, despite its cafés and through routes, because the entrances are uninspiring and difficult to use. The adjacent street market, while not beautiful, does indicate the liveliness that public spaces in this part of town can possess.

The gap site on Eastgate Street to the north of No. 77 requires sensitive infill building to reinforce character of street frontage.

Pedestrianised parts of the High Street should have upgraded paving in natural stone when resources allow.

