

13 Conclusions

13.1 Conservation in Winchester



The aim of designating a Conservation Area is to preserve or enhance an area of special architectural or historic interest. In Winchester, as elsewhere in the country, that interest takes three forms:

- The tangible evidence of the past—buildings, boundaries, landscape and other features;
- The way in which the existing urban fabric, even if of recent date, reflects earlier forms of development, for instance in the street pattern, size of building plots and overall relationship to the landscape; and
- The scale, quality and consistency of the townscape.

What is of value and importance about the Conservation Area ranges from its historical authenticity—the survival of particular historic buildings and archaeology—to its less easily classified qualities as an urban place, including views, scale, enclosure and the overall experience it provides for anyone passing through.

As this Appraisal shows, the multi-layered quality of the Winchester Conservation Area can be found in every part of the area. In all the character areas, whether it be in the heart of the Cathedral Close or at the far end of the northern or southern suburbs, there are tangible reminders of Winchester's past combined with other, less specifically historical qualities. The reason why the Conservation Area as a whole is so remarkably rich in character, is that this interaction of the past and present works so well throughout almost every part of the Area.

13.2 Strengths and weaknesses

The Conservation Area combines a wealth of varied and intricate public spaces and buildings of a quality and consistency which is almost unique in Britain. The variety of spatial experiences and dramatic contrasts—emerging from narrow, medieval street patterns around the High Street into the open greenery of the Cathedral Close, or the transition from the walled town into the Victorian suburb make the exploration of Winchester a continuous series of unexpected delights. The areas covered by Conservation Area status are remarkably consistent in their overall quality with relatively few significant negative or neutral features (compared to other Conservation Areas) to detract from the environmental quality.

The Conservation Area's key strengths are then:

- Its high consistency of quality and survival of complete elements—terraces, street patterns, walled enclaves and water courses;
- Clearly defined areas of individual character with a strong sense of place by virtue of materials, details, land use and topography;
- Accessible and, for the most part, permeable street patterns which encourage exploration, particularly on foot;
- A rich source of archaeological information and potential; and
- Large parts of the Conservation Area have significant mature tree cover.

Set against this, the Conservation Area does, however, contain small areas of indifferent quality which could be said to dilute the Conservation Area status. Furthermore, the landscape setting which is so important to Winchester is largely outside the Conservation Area but could not be included without considerable extension of the Area's boundaries to include large areas of undeveloped land.

Top: Successful conversion of the Barracks into luxury apartments

Bottom: The narrow frontages of traditional terraces allow buildings to relate to sloping ground in a more elegant way than achieved by this larger, modern building

13.3 Threats

Whilst the stature of Winchester's historic centre appears to be highly valued by residents and local businesses, the competing demands of modern commercial activity, the pressure for leisure facilities and public amenities, the increasing cost of residential accommodation and changing patterns of domestic arrangements, and the impact of traffic, all threaten the conservation of buildings and the distinctive character of key areas of the City. The following factors could be said to challenge or conflict with the Conservation Area:

- Traffic congestion with associated noise and atmospheric pollution;
- The requirements for centralised, space-intensive uses such as car parking;
- Shortage of locations available to accommodate growing pressures for development;
- The need to maintain a retail High Street which can compete both with other urban retail centres and with out-of-town shopping developments;
- Changing patterns of residential development like blocks of apartments which introduce new features at odds with existing residential forms, for instance the relationship between entrances and streets;
- Pressure for increase in scale and density of development;
- Incremental changes, particularly to residential properties arising from gentrification or from changing demographics; and
- The claims of surrounding areas of relatively high environmental quality to be included within the Conservation Area.



13.4 Opportunities

Winchester's rich townscape qualities and the clear and evident presence of history will continue to maintain Winchester as a major destination for tourism. The experience for visitors could be enhanced by improved information and signage (notably along the river walks) and through establishing visitor trails to link some of the less well-visited sites, including Hyde Abbey, St Giles' Hill and St Cross.

Development sites identified in this document and elsewhere represent opportunities to enhance the Conservation Area, replacing negative or neutral features with development which can contribute in a more positive way to the public realm.

The opportunity exists to extend the Conservation Area status to protect additional areas. This will be considered in more detail in the next part of this study, the Conservation Area Review. The final part of this study, the Conservation Area Strategy, will also consider opportunities to develop structures and policies for the future management of Winchester's built heritage.

Suggested modifications to the boundary line to be considered in the Conservation Area Review:

Western Suburb Removal of Peninsula Road; addition of Western Road/Elm Road

Eastern Suburb Addition of Canute Road/St Catherine's Road.

Northern Suburb Inclusion of short stretch of river south of King Alfred Place (the site of Abbey buildings).

Riverside Inclusion of additional stretches of river to the south.

Top: St Swithun's Street

13.5 Emerging agendas

From the issues already identified, there are a number of challenges to be faced:

- How can the City now maintain continuity with the urban structure and special relationship with the surrounding landscape?
- How can the public's enjoyment and understanding of the City's rich history be enhanced to the benefit of those who live or work in Winchester and those who come to visit?
- How best to support a vibrant and successful retail centre?
- How can new development be integrated into central areas without compromising the character of the area?

These agendas form the basis of the Conservation Area Review which seeks to highlight the essential qualities of Winchester's unique Conservation Area and to set out some of the dilemmas facing the City.