

# 7 Riverside

## 7.1 Historical development



The shallow river Itchen provided a crossing point which is likely to have prompted first human settlement of the area. The river formed part of successive defensive arrangements, beginning with the iron-age Oram's Arbour. Changes carried out by the Romans and later the Saxons have given the river its current position on the eastern edge of the historic walls. Although the City grew across to the east bank in medieval times, the riverside walks to the north and south widen out very quickly into open countryside. The most important developments along the river were the three medieval mills, including City Mill, at the end of the High Street. The Mill was established by the Abbess of Wherwell between 1189-99 in the reign of Richard I, replaced by the present building in 1744 and situated adjacent to the bridge at the eastern end of the High Street axis (photo 2).



In 1231, Bishop Peter des Roches, established a new jurisdiction in the southern and eastern suburbs of Winchester which is called The Soke.

## 7.2 Building uses

Entering the City from the north, the river passes alongside recreation grounds, a bowling club, and the Winchester campus, before entering the residential area along Water Lane (photo 3). The three mills are no longer in industrial use, although the City Mill has been converted into a museum with a shop and garden. The 'Old Monk' pub, although facing Bridge Street opens on to a riverside garden. The offices and houses of Chesil Street overlook the river from the east, and Wharf Mill has been converted into residential flats. Houses and recreational open space remain the main land uses south of this point.



## 7.3 Building character

Although the riverside area is remembered for its natural features, the City does intrude quietly on the central section of the river. The 18th century bridge, on the site of its medieval predecessor at the east end of the High Street helps to define the northern point of this stretch. The path runs down the western side of the river, lined by the City wall, providing views across to the back gardens of houses along Chesil Street and the trees of St Giles' Hill above (photo 12). These houses are predominantly two and sometimes three-storey, in a variety of styles. Small flint and brick buildings demonstrate the small medieval scale and informality which characterised the first buildings east of the City, and more recent developments in classical styles have preserved this essentially suburban feel. Building plots define the pattern of building, creating a fine grain of development running down to the river.

The area contains a number of the best surviving timber-frame buildings in Winchester, including the Old Blue Boar 1340, Chesil Rectory 1450, Tudor House in St John's Street and No. 42 Chesil Street. It also contains two of the most important large private houses in Winchester. The first is No. 12 Chesil Street, on the site where monks offered hospitality to travellers arriving after the town gates were closed. The second is an 18th century house, St Johns Croft, at the top of St John's Street.

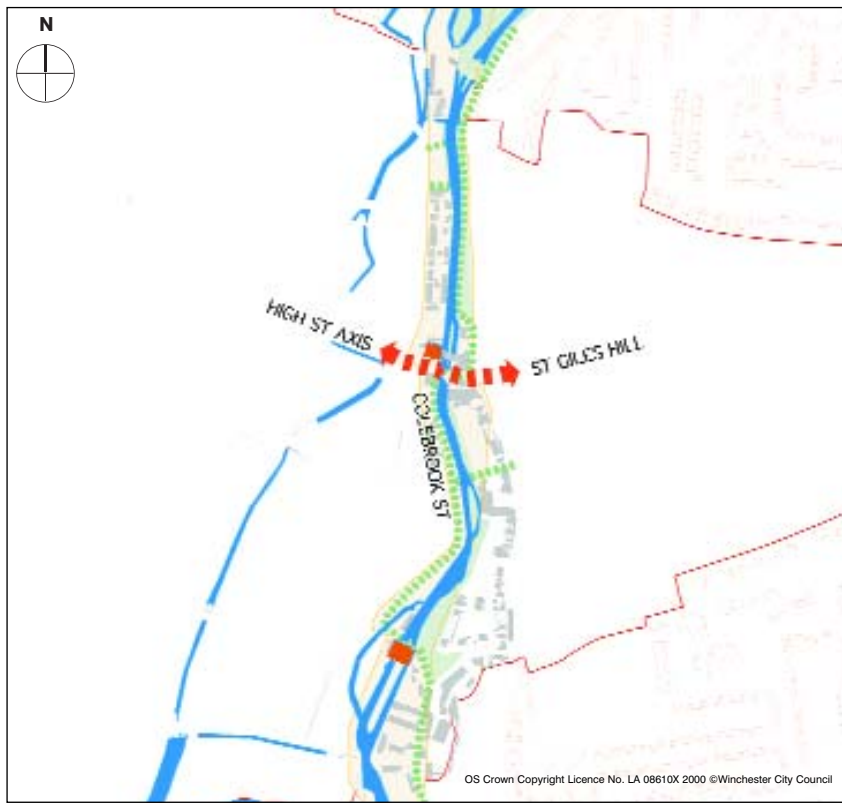
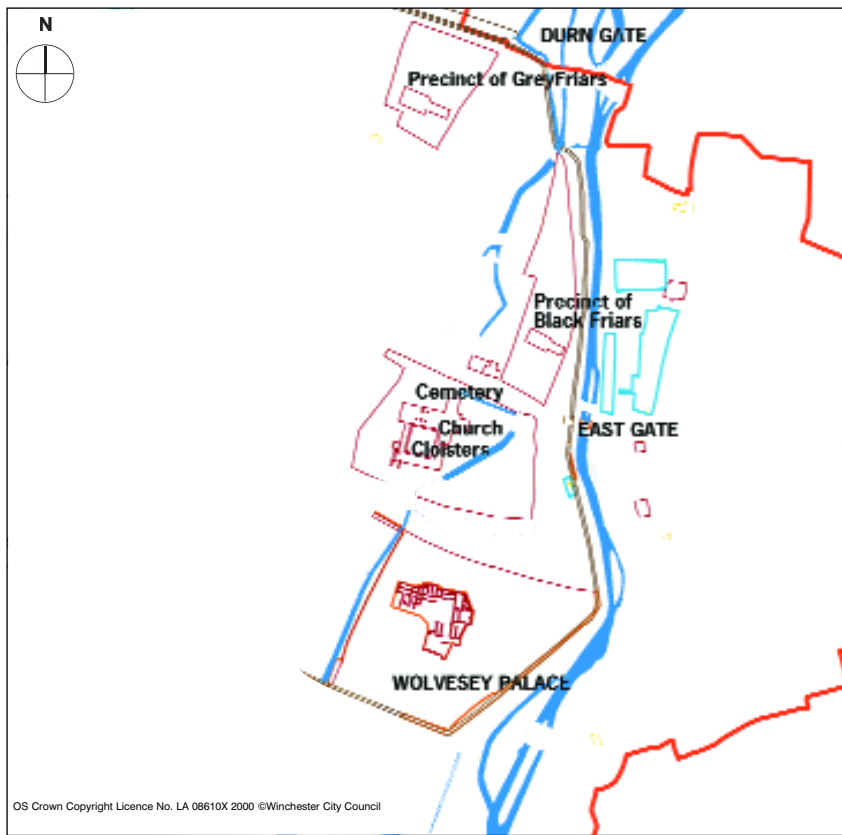
South of City Mill (photo 2) the river has strong historical associations and artefacts and virtually no direct access to dwellings. It is an important pedestrian and cycling route into the centre from Highcliffe, Wharf Mill and the College area, and a starting point for recreational walks to St Cross, St Catherine's Hill and beyond.



Wharf Mill (known as Seegrims Mill) was founded in 1205. The present building is now a substantial, converted, late 19th century brick building.

On the east bank of the river, private gardens sweep down to the river. The most important of these belongs to the late 19th century Kingsland House, which has a striking pedestrian bridge, recently replaced, to give access to the riverside walk (photo 6).



Top: Historical Development—Late 15th century, Bottom: Urban Structure



-  Other important routes
-  Pedestrian links with potential for improvement



The Almshouses of St Mary Magdalen, (photo 11) erected in the 1930s, have been extended on either side of a formal entrance with gates through the city wall (photo 11). These have bright orange tile-hanging, producing a welcome splash of colour, and triangular oriels which give the residents views up and down the river. On the east bank an island provides the nucleus of a belt of trees that shelter the river and give screening and privacy to the houses in Chesil Street, and hide the tyre repair depot.

The final section up to the terminating feature of the 18th century bridge and City Mill is parallel to Colebrook Street, which runs at a higher level within the walls. Here gardens have been inserted, including a public garden created in 1992 in memory of Sir Leslie Scott PC. This is approached by steps with very distinctive railings seen in front of the 18th century Armoury with its arched openings and sculptures.

On the east side there is an old listed wall (photo 7) making use of recycled medieval stone and bricks which gives privacy to the gardens of listed buildings in Chesil Street and at the same time grows wallflowers (photo 7). One of these gardens is a memorial garden alongside a converted malthouse. The garden of No. 12 The Soke, a 16th century stone house adjacent to St Peter's Church has lovely trees and clipped Yew topiary in its garden.

#### 7.4 Public realm

The riverside represents a unique series of spaces which should be ranked in importance alongside the High Street and the Cathedral Close. To the north and south, the 'green wedges' of open recreational and agricultural land are crucial to the character of Winchester as a whole, in the views they create from within the City and their links to the ancient paths of St. Catherine's Hill and the Downs.

The central section is a special area of tranquillity, contrasting with the density and noise of the High Street only seconds away. Its character is defined by trees, swans, ducks and running water. The strong line of the City wall contrasts with the informality of the houses across the river, stretches of medieval flint and brick wall on the east bank add to the quality of the space. Its proximity to the city centre can be felt in the number of people walking along the path, but the large number of places to sit helps to slow the pace and encourage pausing.

Bridge Street, where the two storey buildings on either side are of an appropriate scale for the lovely 18th century bridge with its high stone bottle balustrades. The restaurant on the north side is particularly important by virtue of its position looking out onto the river, the mill race and island with its Judas tree.

The northern section has a slightly different character, a mixture of less substantial residential property, industry and medieval buildings form a gently curving street called Water Lane.

The City Council under clearance schemes removed many properties on the west side of Water Lane to implement a section of the Town Centre Plan of 1967 which would have built a dual carriageway down Eastgate Street. The clearance has resulted in a road with resident parking adjacent to a wide grassy open waterside space with trees.

#### 7.5 Natural features and topography

Although much wider in medieval times, the river remains very shallow in the central section adjacent to the wall. The water is very pure due to the underlying geology, and on a sunny day the base can clearly be seen. In the northern approaches to the City, the river passes through rich areas of mature trees, including beech, sycamore and willow. The presence of the hills surrounding Winchester can be felt, particularly St Catherine's Hill to the east of the meadows in the south, but also the trees of St Giles' Hill which are visible behind the houses of Chesil Street. A dramatic line of large sycamores along the river, evenly spaced, marks the southern approach to the City.

### 7.6 Neutral and negative features

In general, the central riverside is a very pleasant and unspoilt component of the City, and there are few negative features, if any. The conversion of Wharf Mill is a welcome re-use of a historic building, although the ground floor car park under the new extension block does not sit very comfortably with the small green opposite. The Station Hill car park was developed after the resistance of earlier potentially more intrusive proposals but is only partially successful as a sensitive addition next to the prominent slopes of St Giles' Hill.

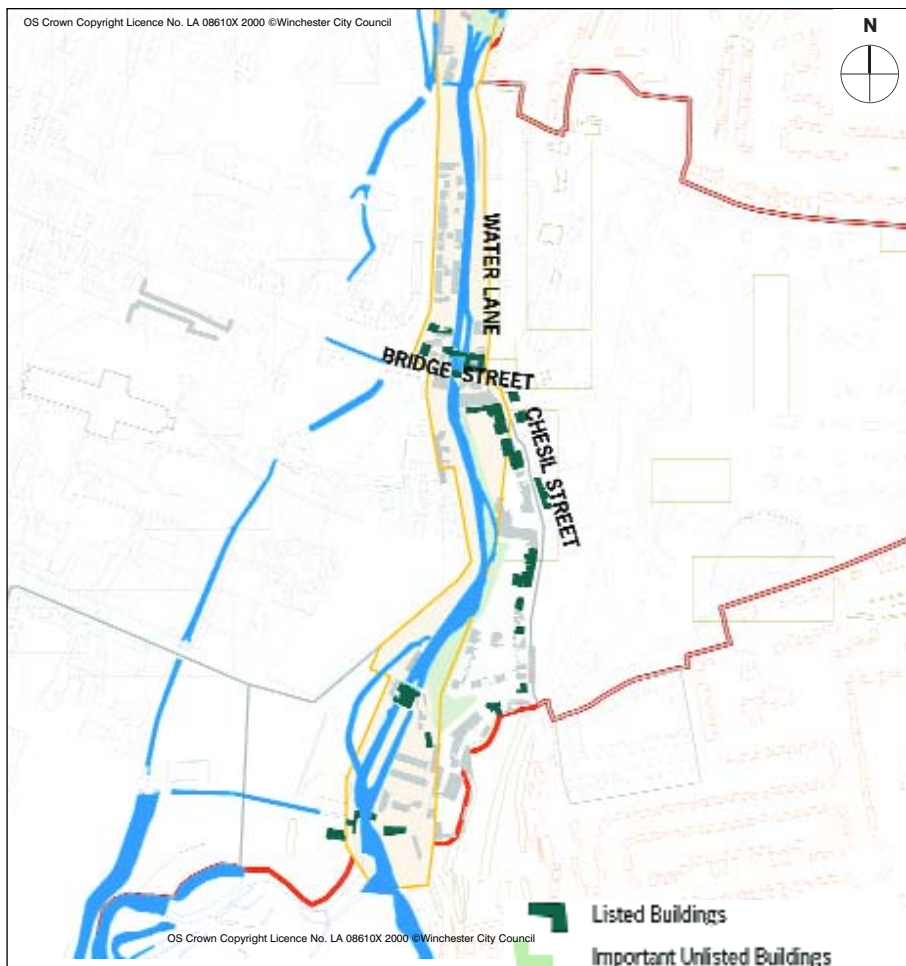
### 7.7 Potential for enhancement

It would be good if the riverside walk could continue northwards more obviously through the City Mill, instead of the circuitous route across the bridge. New bridge crossings especially for pedestrians would be a welcome addition, enhancing the enjoyment of the river and access to the east bank. A new public bridge should be added to enable the existing footpath from St Giles' Hill to get across the river and provide an alternative to the narrow footpath over City bridge.

Comprehensive design solutions could be provided for a number of spaces including the space adjacent to Chesil Rectory and the back of the Rising Sun on Station Hill.

To recreate the eastern side of Chesil street with housing from Wharf Hill to the school in, for example, a manner similar to that used in Wales Street, would restore the character of the mediaeval street, although it would require alterations to the parking in this area, to be accommodated below, making use of the levels.

The paving and railings along the river walk should be replaced to a better quality.



Left: Environmental Assets