

8 St Giles' Hill

The Eastern Suburb

8.1 Historical development



The river Itchen defines this suburb to the west, where development began in medieval times at the base of St Giles' Hill, and several structures remain from this time. These include 42 Chesil Street and the Old Chesil Rectory, (photo 8) overlooking Bridge Street.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, the hill was the site of St Giles Fair, the greatest market in southern England, attracted traders from western Europe. Consequently, the eastern suburb became an important location, with buildings rising up onto the hill and the principal entry point to Winchester from London and the river crossing.



After the decline of the Fair, the hill remained essentially rural, with an isolation hospital near the site of St Swithun's School. It was the railway in 1885 which marked the beginning of modern development. All Saints Church (photo 7) was built in 1898 as part of the suburb of Highcliffe. When large areas of land on the hill were sold for residential development, a group of citizens collaborated to preserve the western slopes as a public park. However, development extended eastwards over the hill. The M3 replaced an earlier road to define clearly the eastern edge of the City from the downs. While river and motorway have remained as boundaries, twentieth century development has extended both north and south of the area.

8.2 Building uses

The proximity of Chesil Street and Bridge Street to the city centre is reflected in the number of offices, restaurants and pubs, although there is a significant amount of residential development, often above ground-floor level. There are also Council offices on Chesil Street. Further up the hill, the area becomes almost exclusively residential, apart from a school, a nursing home, and a shop and pub at the eastern end of Alresford Road.

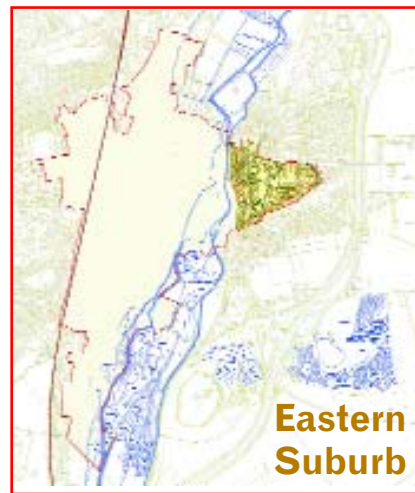


8.3 Building character

Chesil Street is characterised by a diversity of architectural languages, and a sense of growth over time. The human scale of the timber-framed medieval houses is reinforced by the low storey heights. St Peter's church with its tile-clad, timber framed upper storey forms a prominent punctuation point along the street. The Victorian terraced houses vary from two to three storeys, and are characterised by a high standard of brickwork, flat arch lintels, sash windows, and occasional use of render. St John Street displays the same variety of style, including flint and brick walls, although the buildings are narrower. Highcliffe in the south (Canute Road and St Catherine's Road), is characterised by 2-storey brick terraced houses, with arched double entrances, bay windows and small front gardens. The consistency of these terraces is the key to the character of this distinctive small suburb which is currently outside the Conservation Area (photo 3). This character is shared with terraced development on sections of Alresford Road to the north. On the main part of the hill, residential development took the form of large detached houses, On Northbrook Avenue, for example, these houses are characterised by high quality flint and brick walls, stone lintels and entrance details.



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Above: Late 19th century showing the railway completed 1885.
Below: Urban Structure

-  Main routes
-  Other important routes
-  Local Centres



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8.4 Public realm



The townscape changes dramatically as the City moves up the hill. Chesil Street and Bridge Street have a commercial feel and their narrowness and the proximity of the buildings to the street allow them to share the same character as streets in the city centre. Expansive car parking, garages and large-scale flatted developments, visible from the street, have eroded this character. Despite demolition and redevelopment in the 1970s, due to its narrowness and the small scale of its buildings, St John's Street has retained a very unspoilt, intimate, medieval quality. A sarsen stone juts out into the pavement at the end of the church. The gradual awareness, as the hill is climbed, of the church of St John the Baptist (photo 10) is a unique quality of the road, and should be protected. Although narrow and, for the most part, closed, there are occasional views through to rear courtyards, and pathways through the churchyard.



On St Giles' Hill the large number of trees and wide roads give a most suburban feel, although some roads, especially Northbrook Avenue, benefit from their unmade nature and soft verges (photo 9). This helps to reduce the emphasis on their traffic function and provide a sense of pedestrian priority. This special quality, and the proximity to the park on the western slopes, is essential to the character of the area as a whole. Alresford Road, Magdalen Hill and Quarry Road, while more heavily trafficked, enjoy some dramatic slopes and occasional long-distance views over the City (photo 1). The buildings on Quarry Road to the south are notable by their absence, as they disappear down the steep slope.



8.5 Natural features and topography

The topography of the suburb is dominated by St Giles' Hill, which rises steeply from the river, and contributes to the special qualities of many streets, especially the narrow St. John's Street and Blue Ball Hill. St John's Street demonstrates the townscape value of modest changes in level to provide dramatic changes in view over the Cathedral in a way not found elsewhere in Winchester (photo 4).

In 1937, a cutting was built for the first Winchester by-pass, which separated the hill from the downland to the east, and through which the M3 now runs. Throughout the suburb, extensive areas of mature trees provide shade and reinforce the semi-rural nature of the suburb.

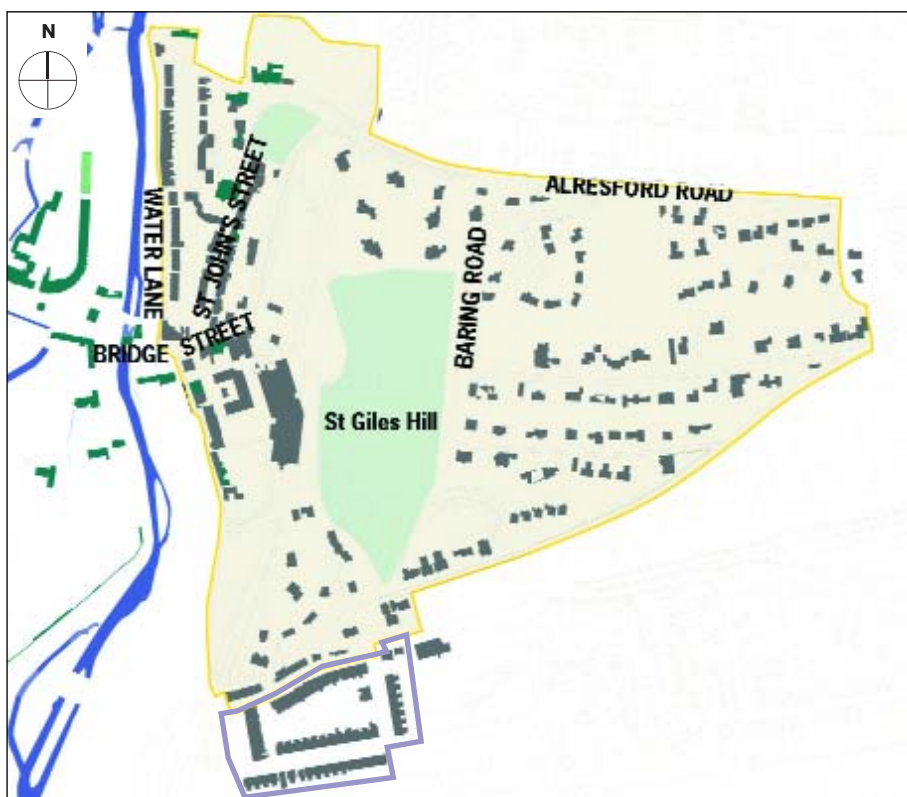
8.6 Views

The hill provides spectacular views over the cathedral and city, especially from the park and its surrounding roads and from the top of St John's Street views are often obscured by large trees, although they provide a framed view of St Catherine's Hill to the south. The open nature of Baring Road provides long views over the park, and long views to the park from within Northbrook Avenue and Stratton Road.

Because of its elevated position, St John's Church tower (photo 10), refaced in the 15th century can be seen as part of a composition with the Cathedral Tower from Magdalen Hill. It can also be seen clearly from large parts of the city centre, from St Catherine's Hill and from as far away as Bushfield Camp and should therefore be regarded as an important townscape feature.

8.7 Neutral and negative features

The multi-storey block of flats visible behind the houses to the east side of Chesil Street is a strong feature of the skyline which competes with the trees of the hill. Further south, the Chesil Street car park is an eyesore which does not do justice to the dramatic rise of the hill behind the railway cutting to the east. At the eastern end of Northbrook Avenue, opposite the junction with Quarry Road, there is a 3-storey apartment development which is out of character with the large houses adjacent to it. Quarry Road itself, along with Alresford Road and Magdalen Hill, suffer from a high level of fast-moving traffic, which detracts from their quality as pedestrian routes. Although the motorway is sunk in a deep cutting, the noise is a feature of the eastern edges of the development.



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Left: Environmental Assets

-  Listed Buildings
-  Important Unlisted Buildings
-  Area Requiring Additional Protection

8.8 Potential for enhancement

If the sites mentioned above were to be redeveloped, new building should be sympathetic to the character of the area as described. If sites along Chesil Street were to be redeveloped, a lower-rise, high density series of buildings of intimate scale and with frequent links to Chesil Street would be appropriate. Magdalen Hill and Alresford Road would benefit from visually unobtrusive traffic-calming, such as subtle road narrowing.

The distinctive late 19th century terraces in St. Catherine's Road and Canute Road would benefit from Conservation Area status.

As and when quieter road surfacing materials become available, they should be applied to the M3. In the long term, a 'green-bridge' cover over the motorway would preserve it as a vital economic artery, while re-stitching the City to the downs in the east, re-creating pedestrian and ecological linkages, and providing a linear park to complement the designated 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'.

