

Ashton-in-Makerfield

Conservation Area Appraisal



Environmental Services Department
Wigan Council
Approved July 2007



ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD CONSERVATION AREA

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Summary Definition of Special Interest

The town of Ashton-in-Makerfield has a recorded history from medieval times. Its most significant period of growth was during the C18 and C19 which resulted from the local expansion of the coal mines, the cotton mills and the manufacture of metal products. As the economy grew, the town centre developed around the traditional through route with a fine collection of Victorian commercial and public buildings. This area now forms the Conservation Area and includes most of the commercial centre, the two listed historic churches with their surrounding open spaces, and examples of Victorian workers terrace housing.

Of particular note is the large percentage of key buildings and groups that positively contribute to the important heritage townscape of the area. This Conservation Area appraisal identifies the historic townscapes and details that describe the qualities of the three Character Areas.

Three key negative factors are identified: the numerous inappropriate poor quality shopfronts and signage that detract from the heritage buildings; the frequent poor maintenance and use of unsuitable replacement materials; and the impact of the heavy through traffic.

Management and enhancement proposals are described including: changes to the boundary; local listing recommendations; the opportunities for enhancement with controls using technical guidance and a potential Article 4 Direction; and the involvement of the community.

The aim of this Conservation Area Appraisal is to assist the Council to protect and enhance the heritage while enabling the public to recognise the benefits and their own responsibilities.

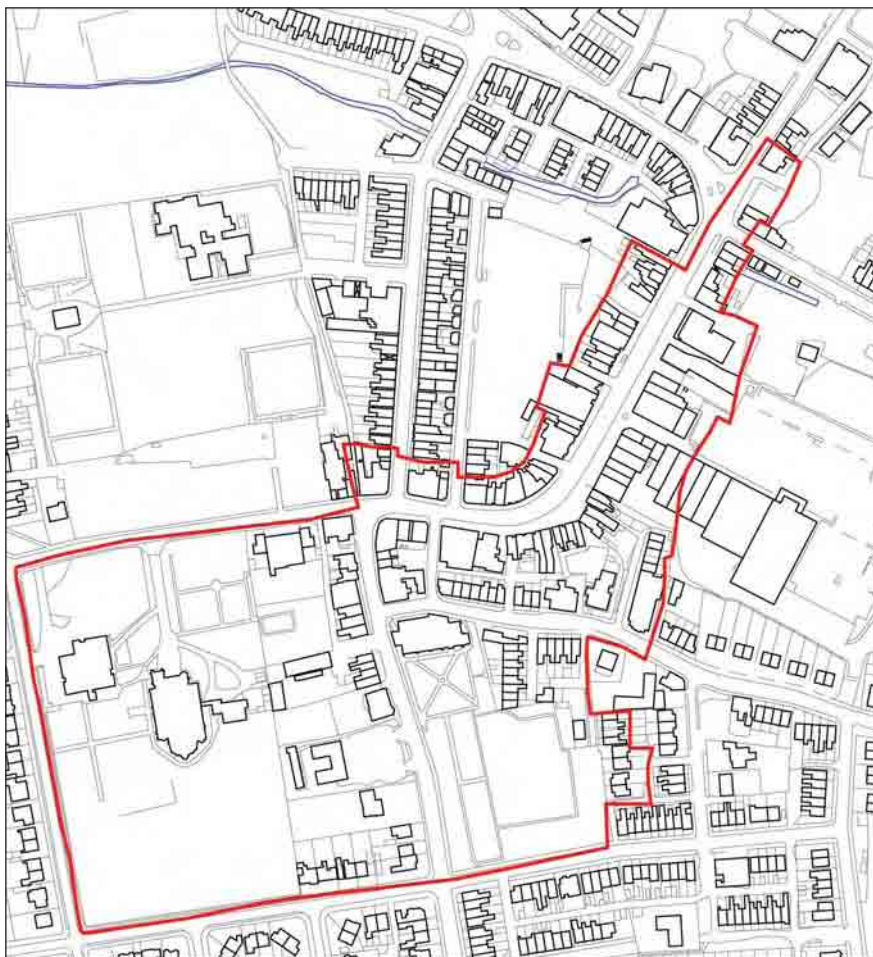


Figure 1: Ashton-in-Makerfield town centre and the Conservation Area boundary.

1. Background

1.1 Current status of Conservation Area

The Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area was adopted by Council in December 1989. The designated boundary includes an area of 7.32 ha. and is characterised as a Historic Town Centre. The plan identifies the boundary and the Listed Buildings within the area.

1.2 Statutory background

Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and are defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Conservation Area designation is more dependent on the overall quality and interest of an area, rather than individual buildings, although it is common for such areas to contain a number of Listed Buildings.

Designation as a conservation area has a number of implications. Most importantly, the Local Authority is required to give special attention to preserving and enhancing the conservation area in exercising its planning functions. Also, planning consent must be gained for certain types of development which are elsewhere classified as permitted development, such as various types of cladding, dormer windows, satellite dishes and radio masts/antennae. Consent is further required for the demolition of buildings within conservation areas. Designation also brings controls over works to trees.

The protection of an area does not end with conservation area designation. PPG15 “Planning and the Historic Environment” urges Local Authorities to prepare detailed assessments of the special interest, character and appearance of their conservation areas. A character appraisal defines and analyses the special qualities and the architectural and historic interest that warranted the conservation area designation. PPG15 states that “the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded, the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions, as well as for the formulation of proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the character or appearance of an area”. Character appraisals should therefore provide a framework against which development proposals can be assessed for their appropriateness in the historic environment.

Local Authorities are under a duty from time to time to “formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas” (Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (LBCA)) Act 1990, s.71).



1.3 Planning policy framework

The Wigan Revised Deposit Draft Replacement Unitary Development Plan – Feb 2004 emphasises the need to conserve the best of the built environment and the policies aim to enhance and protect the heritage of the Borough and their settings while supporting the reuse of old buildings.

Conservation Policy EV4 states that:

The Council will conserve the historic built environment by:

- A. NOT PERMITTING PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD HARM THE CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF LISTED BUILDINGS OR THEIR SETTINGS, NOR PROPOSALS WHICH FAIL TO PRESERVE OR ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OR APPEARANCE OF A CONSERVATION AREA;
- B. PROTECTING AND ENHANCING THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS, SITES, BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPES;
- C. EXERCISING ITS NORMAL DEVELOPMENT CONTROL POWERS TO ENCOURAGE THE PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF BUILDINGS OF LOCAL INTEREST;
- D. ENCOURAGING THE OCCUPATION OF OLD BUILDINGS AND PERMITTING NEW USES WHICH ARE COMPATIBLE WITH THEIR CHARACTER AND SETTING;
- E. CARRYING OUT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES IN CONSERVATION AREAS.

These policies are further expanded in Policies EV4A/EV4B/EV4C/EV4D/EV4E (see Appendix)

1.4 Purpose of the Conservation Area appraisal

The Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area Appraisal has been prepared in response to the guidance outlined above and, as such, discharges the Council's obligations and duties under the Planning (LBCA) Act 1990, as well as complying with English Heritage's recommendations. The study may subsequently form a Supplementary Planning Document to the Adopted Wigan UDP and will be a material consideration when considering applications for development within the conservation area.



2. Location and setting

2.1 Location and population

Ashton-in-Makerfield, the third largest town in Wigan Borough, is located within the highly urbanised area of South Lancashire to the east of the M6 motorway and to the north of the East Lancashire Road, half way between Wigan and St Helens with Manchester 15 miles to the east. The Haydock Park racecourse is located on the southern edge of the town. The Census of 2001 shows the population of Ashton to be 11,799 and of Bryn, the adjacent area to the north, to have a population of 11,769. – a potential catchment for the Ashton town centre of over 23,000 people.

The town developed with the growth of the mining, cotton weaving and ironwork industries during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Now all the significant employers in these industries have closed, with the last around 1990, being Crompton, Nettlefold, Steadman Ltd, the original hingemakers with a major building on Gerard Street.

As a shopping centre it performs poorly relatively to its size because of nearby competing centres, the lack of an in or out-of-town superstore, and the severe traffic congestion along the main shopping street. A future proposal for a by-pass may assist in alleviating some of these problems.

2.2 Landscape setting

Ashton - in - Makerfield is located within the lowland Lancashire Plain. The underlying geology is mainly Permian and Triassic with overlying glacial drift, alluvium and silt deposits which give the area a gently rolling relief. The highest ground is at 350 ft near Billinge and the lowest at 90 ft on the Millingford Brook at the eastern boundary of the town.

The resulting landform within the Conservation Area is a generally level area around the two churches and the Warrington Road, with a noticeable fall in height northwards along Gerard Street until just before the junction with the Wigan Road. The levels rise again slightly on the northern side of the Millingford Brook to the Cross Keys public house and beyond along the Bolton Road.

The most notable views within the Conservation Area are:

- from the north looking southwards up the slope of Gerard Street until it bends to the right creating a sense of anticipation as to the extent of the town centre;
- and the view on arrival from the south where first the Angel Inn and St Thomas's church announce the beginning of the town centre, and the Kings Arms and the contrasting heights of the historic buildings on Gerard Street close the view.



View up Gerard Street



View along Warrington Road towards Gerard St.

the view to the north, down Gerard Street and out of the Conservation Area is closed by the Cross Keys and Robin Hood inns facing each other across the rising Bolton Road; whereas the view out to the south has only the end of the churchyard wall to mark the boundary, as the vista along the straight Warrington Road is unexceptional.



View down Gerard Street

See Figure 2 identifying the landscape setting and views.

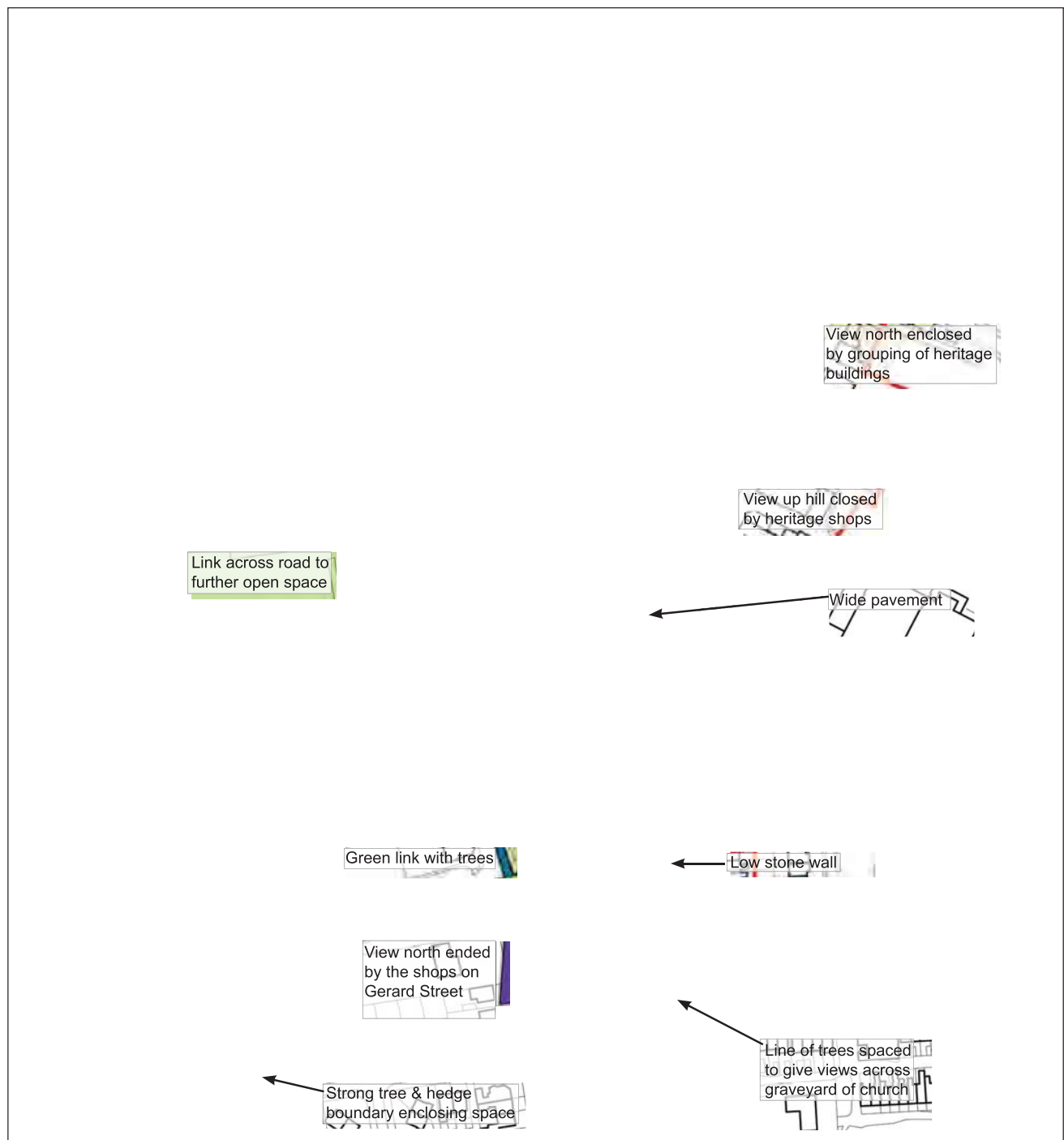


Figure 2: Landscape setting and views.

3. Historic development

3.1 Origins and historic development of settlement

In pre-historic times Lancashire was sparsely populated and lowland areas like Ashton, were covered with forest oak and scrub. No pre-historic remains have been found around Ashton. The Romans opened up the area with their roads and one road linking their forts in Warrington and Wigan passed through the middle of Ashton near what is now the Red Lion Inn on Gerard Street. There is no evidence of a settlement at this time.

People lived in scattered farmsteads or groups of cottages and it is likely from the origins of the name (ash – tree; ton – enclosure or village), that the first significant community by the brook crossing formed when the Angles settled in Lancashire in the 6th and 7th Centuries.

As the Domesday book did not identify many settlements in Lancashire, there is little evidence of the history of Ashton until the first of the Gerard family settled in the area in the 14th Century. During the early 14th Century, Thomas Earl of Lancaster was the feudal overlord of Lancashire and wide areas of the county suffered from persistent and devastating floods between 1314 – 1316, followed by the impact of the Black Death during 1349 – 1351. It is likely that the small community at Ashton experienced the impact of these disasters.

Since the 15th Century, much of the information on the history of Ashton – in - Makerfield is based on the exchanges of land, marriages and the affairs of the Gerards, a strong catholic family. The Ashton coat-of-arms is an adaption of the Gerard coat of arms. In the mid 16th Century, Sir Thomas Gerard bought the remaining part of the manor of Ashton and became the sole lord. When in 1589, Robert Byrchall made a bequeath of money to found the Ashton – in – Makerfield Grammar School, Sir Thomas Gerard granted a plot of land near Seneley Green.

St Thomas's church had been an important focal point for the village and though it was first written about in 1515 as a chapel of ease, it is likely to have been at this location since the medieval times. Ashton-in-Makerfield or in the Willows, as it was variously called, had become the largest and most populous of the settlements in the ancient Parish of Winwick, and was originally included in the Diocese of York. About the beginning of the tenth century, the land between the Ribble and the Mersey was transferred to the Diocese of Lichfield then in 1541 to the new Diocese of Chester. In 1880 the Diocese of Liverpool was created out of Chester, and Ashton has been in the Diocese of Liverpool since that date. It was rebuilt in 1784, the chapel enlarged in 1815 and then completely rebuilt in 1893 with the present building. St Oswalds Roman Catholic church was first built in 1822 and replaced on the same site in 1930. The Congregational Church designed by Waterhouse was built in 1867 next to the brook on Gerard St, but this was vacated in 1973 and has now been demolished.

During the 17th Century, Ashton would have been a small village in a very rural and sparsely populated area. The impact of the Civil War must have been significant as the routes of both the Royalist and Parliamentary armies passed through on a number of occasions, and the plague of 1649 also reduced the population. As the century continued, the first coal mines were sunk and small cotton mills built around Ashton, taking the few cottage industries into the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. This started a rapid population growth of the settlement which was marked by the first Unitarian Chapel in 1697.

Ashton was greatly affected and the social and economic life of the community saw great changes during the C18. With the expansion of mining and cotton mills around the town came the growth of metal working and ironware, particularly the manufacture of hinges, locks, nails, door handles and files. Ashton became a centre for these trades with a concentration of dealers in a relatively small town.

A sketch map of the settlement in 1796 shows the current town centre and present day Conservation Area, based on Gerard Street, as built up, with surrounding fields and mines. The influence of the Gerard family on the development of Ashton continued through these centuries – particularly after they moved to New Hall on the edge of Ashton towards the end of the C19.

By the beginning of the C19, Lancashire was the most heavily industrialised county in England and by 1814 Ashton had grown to a population of nearly 5,000 people. Baines Lancashire Directory in 1824 described Ashton as ‘this large populous village forms the centre of a brisk manufacturing district, where the poor are industrious and their employers prosperous’. Coal mining was the main industry and it played a vital role in the life of the community. Even so, the Mannex Directory of 1855 described a wide range of employment in the town also including metal workers, cotton spinners, corn millers and farmers.

The Turnpike Roads and the later expansion of the railways with the nearby station at Bryn had a significant role in promoting the growth of Ashton.

The first Ordnance Survey map of 1849 showed a small town clustered around the main through road benefiting from the brook crossing. Most of the current Conservation Area was built-up with the main through road and junctions following the Medieval layout, including the unexpected bend in Gerard Street. St Thomas’s church and vicarage and the Roman Catholic chapel with its

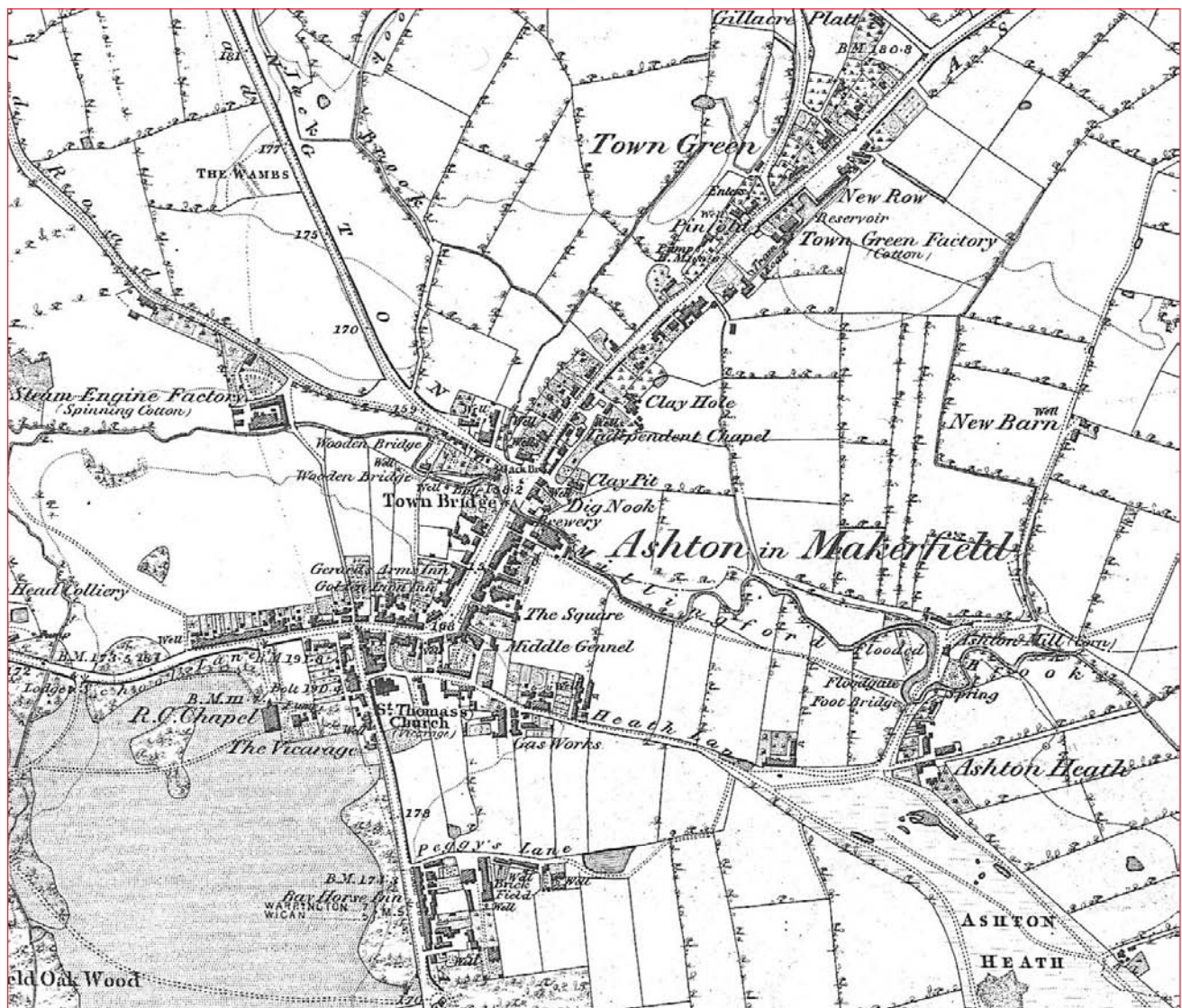


Figure 3: Ordnance Survey map of 1849

Presbytery are important buildings as are the inns, including the Golden Lion, the Gerard Arms, the King's Arms and the Robin Hood, all rebuilt in the second half of the century and still standing. The nearby coal mines and cotton spinning factories are identified around the edges of the town.

The population grew rapidly in the second half of the 19th Century - from 5,679 in 1851; to 7,463 in 1,364 houses in 1871; and 18,687 in 1901. Many immigrants came from Ireland and Wales for work in the expanding mines and cotton spinning industries. A Welsh community established on the Bolton Road at Stubshaw Cross where Welsh was widely spoken and chapels and eisteddfods supported the community. As a result of this expansion, most of the town centre was rebuilt during the period 1850 to 1905. The first redevelopments were on the north side of Gerard Street – Palatine Buildings 1863 at the Garswood Street junction, followed by the adjacent Commercial Buildings in 1876,. The redevelopment continued down the hill, to the north, with no's. 10 to 14 built in 1890, Central Buildings in 1899, the redevelopment of the Gerard Arms in 1895, and the Golden Lion Inn in 1905. Across the road, no's 3 and 5 Bridge Foot House were rebuilt in 1902, no's. 7 to 13 in 1872, the Red Lion Inn in 1893, and the Cross Keys on the corner site opposite the Wigan Road junction in 1900.

Civic buildings were added to this commercial expansion, with the Police Station on the Warrington Road and in 1906, the Carnegie Library on the Wigan Road and the Town Hall on Bryn Street – both outside the Conservation Area. This reflected the growing importance of the local Board of Health, established 1872, and the Urban District Council from 1894.

This period of major redevelopment reflected the fast growing economy based on the traditional industries and the rapidly expanding population. This confidence lasted until the First World War but the next half of the C20 saw the gradual failure and loss of the mining, cotton spinning and metalworking industries.

The last of the significant traditional industries was Cromptons whose building on the south side of Gerard Street was located on the site of Rock House, originally two houses built in the early C17, and demolished in the mid 1950's. Crompton's buildings have been replaced by the Gerard Centre shopping complex.

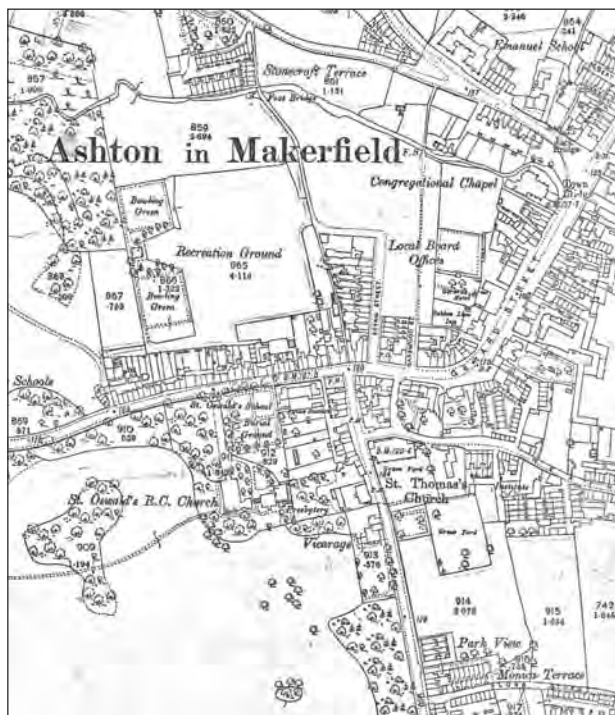


Figure 4: Ordnance Survey map of 1891



Figure 5: Ordnance Survey map of 1908



Figure 6: Ordnance Survey map of 1928

The Ordnance Survey maps of 1891 and 1908 show a few changes of note. A formal market location was established on Garswood Street, behind the Gerard Arms hotel, and the introduction of the tramway through the town centre along Warrington Road, Gerard Street and Wigan Road required the buildings on the tight corner of Warrington Road and Gerard Street to be demolished. This site was redeveloped by the 1928 Ordnance Survey (figure 6 overleaf) with the high brick Cooperative Hall which forms a significant corner feature to mark the off-set junction with Bryn Street – now an important through route for traffic.

Most of the examples of small terrace housing, along and off Heath Road were built by 1893. Of particular note are the oldest group called A Court which has a pedestrian link through the early Victorian shops onto Gerard Street. Between 1893 and 1901, the Commercial Inn and the distinctive Church Terrace were added to Heath Street with further infill housing. A cinema was built next to A Court by 1928, but this has now been demolished and the site being rebuilt with

housing. Just outside the Conservation Area is the Cave Browne Evangelical Chapel 1882 and the historic Hingemakers Arms with a fine wall plaque – listed as an active public house in 1869.

The Conservation Area includes important examples of this history and demonstrates the difference between the built up commercial centre of Gerard St, the traditional workers back street housing, and the surrounding open spaces to the west including the recreation ground and the two church grounds.

3.2 Archaeological significance

There is little current archaeological information on Ashton-in-Makerfield other than information and sightings on the route of the Roman road from Wigan to Warrington.

The line of the road crosses the Conservation Area though the most visible finds have been outside the boundary - across a field south of Nicol Road by its line of gravel; and at the west end of the Cotton Mill facing onto Old Road.

In 1993 Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit excavated a length of the Roman Road at Bryn Road. The road had a gently cambered profile and was over 5 metres wide with a possible surviving ditch to the west. It was constructed of irregular sandstone blocks bedded onto a sand and gravel base.

Further archaeological investigations of the historic settlement core will take place in the future. In particular, there may be sections of the Roamn Road that require trial trenching and more detailed excavation should significant remains be found that would be affected by development.

Development will be subject to PPG16 considerations and the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit can advise on development proposals in the Conservation Area as part of the planning process.

4. Character and appearance

4.1 Identification of Character Areas

The Conservation Area covers a relatively small area of Ashton – in – Makerfield but includes most of the Victorian town centre, the open spaces around the two churches, and examples of back street Victorian workers housing. Some poor quality mid 20th Century housing to the south is included within the boundary. See Figure 7. Character Areas.

The Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area are the two churches – St Thomas's and St Oswalds; St Oswalds presbytery; and the gates into the grounds of St Oswalds. See Figure 7. and Appendix 2.



Figure 7: Character areas and listed buildings.

4.2 Gerard Street/Warrington Road Character Area

The Gerard Street/Warrington Road area has traditionally been the commercial centre of Ashton and the building and road alignment follows the medieval form established in the early years when the settlement was little more than a village. The Angel Inn on Warrington Road marks the entrance to the town centre when entering from the south. From the north, the Wigan Road junction with Gerard Street identifies the start of the town centre Conservation Area.

As described above, the majority of the buildings were rebuilt during the 1850 to 1910 period when the town was expanding fast and the economy strong. The resulting building types reflect importance of the centre for shopping and leisure ie. the number of inns. The redevelopment during this period has left us with a cautious yet individual Victorian architectural heritage. With limited expenditure the Victorian owners were able to achieve significant detailing to provide an expression of their importance and distinction.

The route through the town centre encompasses a number of distinctive spaces that result from the historic development of the town:

- In the north, the broad junction with the Wigan Road is emphasised by the curved frontage of the Bank facing the more confining locations of the two inns either side of the Bolton Road.
- The broad alignment of Gerard Street provides a notable space as it rises up the hill and curves out of sight creating interest.
- The wider pavement on the south side of the bend was probably used for trading in past centuries.
- The tight off-set junction with Warrington Road and Bryn Street joining Gerard Street is particularly defined by the higher Cooperative building and the important group of shops, no's 70-74 Gerard Street.
- Either side of Gerard Street, short streets link through to back street activities, often giving important glimpses of potential, ie. Butchers Lane ended by St Thomas's; the passage through 45 Gerard Street giving a sight of A Court housing; the lane beside the Golden Lion joining the market; and the route opposite the Gerard Arms leading into the Gerard Shopping Centre



View of off-set junction at southern end of Gerard Street.

4.2.1 Architectural and historic qualities of buildings

The resulting townscape reflects the sum of qualities of the building groupings. As the 19th Century progressed, the level of ornamentation and detailing increased. The earliest examples included the Palatine Buildings 1863, a simple two-storey commercial development where the detailing is limited to first-floor lintels and a corner doorway. Later commercial developments, such as the three-storey Central Buildings 1899, on the same side of Gerard Street, displayed extensive brick and terracotta detailing with exuberant window arches and parapet with name and date in large lettering.



View of Central Buildings, 1899

Each development provides a special contribution to the area with its own character. The building designs range from simple two-storey mid century shop units as found on the southern side of the bend on Gerard Street, to the more extravagantly detailed parapet, brick detailing and cupola on 3-5 Gerard Street. The townscape mixture includes two and three storey buildings, most in brick but with some rendered and others with mock timbering. This pleasing townscape, with a blend of styles from this period, is punctuated by the even more notable public house architecture – in particular the Gerard Arms (now sadly having lost most of its heritage detail – see comparative photographs), the Red Lion and the Golden Lion.

The commercial buildings along the short length of the Warrington Road included in this Character Area repeat these themes. An additional point of interest is provided by the use of local sandstone facing on the buildings around the junction with Heath Street.

The newer buildings in this Character Area have fitted well within the heritage townscape with a sympathetic use of scale, materials and form – the recent Gerard Street elevation of the Gerard Centre; the 21st Century Aqua bar at no. 1 Gerard Street; and the 1970's Sir Thomas Gerard inn on the site of the Congregational Chapel.

The form and structure of the architecture is attractive but the overall townscape is dominated by inappropriate and unattractive shop fronts and signage. Many of the key attributes of the area are lost above this poor quality ground floor façade.

4.2.2 Audit of heritage assets

Although no buildings and structures of local architectural or historic interest in Ashton have been included in the local list, there are a significant number of buildings of suitable heritage quality that could qualify for this designation and present a positive contribution to the local townscape. The selection of these buildings results from their history, their architectural styles and detailing, or their importance in the townscape and group value.

Of particular note, and of suitable quality for consideration of full listing are: (see photographs):

- Cross Keys public house - 1900
- Red Lion public house - 1893
- Bridge Foot House - 1902
- No. 45 Gerard Street – an original shop front and pedestrian passage linking to A Court terrace housing - mid C19



Cross Keys public house



Red Lion public house



Bridge Foot House



45 Gerard Street

Other buildings and groups with significant townscape and heritage merit as important elements within this Character Area which could be included in the local list are: (see photographs and Figure 8. Townscape Characteristics):

- The length of buildings on the north side of Gerard Street including the Palatine Buildings 1863, Commercial Buildings 1876, the Golden Lion Inn, the Gerard Arms and Central Buildings 1899 – no's. 24-68 Gerard Street.



- The buildings on the south side of the bend of Gerard Street from no's. 43-63 including traditional brick shops and mock timber frontages.



- The grouping at the northern end of the Conservation Area including the Robin Hood public house, Cross Keys Inn, Bridge Foot House and on the opposite corner of Princess Road, no. 7 Gerard Street.

- The buildings on the off-set junction of Warrington Road/Gerard Street – the Cooperative Hall, the King's Arms Inn, 2 Liverpool Road and 70 - 74 Gerard Street which provides an important end to the view north along Warrington Road.



- Buildings along the northern end of Warrington Road – the Police Station, the Chapel, the two groups of shops and houses (Church View 1894) and the Angel inn on the west side, and the Fleece inn on the east side with its rear stable building facing Butchers Lane.



4.2.3 Local & traditional building materials

The basic local and traditional building materials are brick walls and slate roofs, with no buildings, other than the churches, above three stories high. The diversity and interest within the Conservation Area results from the variety of roof lines and the use of brick and terracotta detail and decoration, and a range of cladding materials. The earliest buildings, mid C19, have the simplest decoration. The Palatine Buildings with rendering above the shop fronts and a minimal brick decoration on the arched lintel above the first floor windows, and the undecorated brick shops no's 41 to 51 on the south side of the bend on Gerard Street. A number of the historic shopfronts merit preservation.

As the century progressed and the economy expanded, the owners sought greater detail on new buildings to demonstrate their individuality and importance. The redevelopment of Gerard Street displayed a range of materials and decoration – particularly on public houses. Examples include:

- The Red Lion 1893 and the Golden Lion Hotel 1905, both display black and white mock timber details above a brick ground floor. The Golden Lion also has terracotta facings to the ground floor bay windows and faience to the doorway.
- Central Buildings 1899 and Bridge Foot House 1900, both with ground floor retail use, have extravagant brick and terracotta detailing, especially along the parapet line. Bridge Foot House has a turret and cupola on its corner.
- The Gerard Arms Hotel previously was the grandest building in Ashton. Mainly built in brick it had two ground floor bays with balconies above and one central first floor bay. The mullions and details were in stone topped by a large carved frieze with the name and crest. The contrast with the basic painted building of today with atrocious shop signs is particularly sad (see past and present photographs).
- The group of buildings around the junction of Heath Road and Warrington Road have a sandstone facing which contrasts with the buff coal measures sandstone facings and red triassic/permian sandstone masonry on the adjacent St Thomas's church.



4.2.4 Negative factors

The main negative factor throughout this character area is the inappropriate and poor quality shop fronts often with loud and unattractive signage that detract from the qualities of the heritage buildings along most of Gerard Street.

There are numerous examples of unsuitable materials and designs with unfortunate loss of heritage shopfront detailing and signage. The most dramatic example is the changes to the front of the previous Gerard Arms with the loss of ground floor bays, to accommodate the conversion to the Greensway shopping centre and supermarket. See photographs showing the use of the building as a hotel and the current changes.

The difficult market conditions resulting from the economic downturn and other competing locations has in a number of cases led to poor maintenance, inappropriate repairs and further loss of heritage detail. An example is the fenestration on no.28 Gerard Street, on the left of the three Central Buildings 1899, where the loss of the original glazing pattern detracts from the qualities of the whole historic grouping.

The other significant negative factor is the vehicular impact of through traffic – especially the numerous heavy lorries. Not only does this erode the experience for shoppers who wish to hold a conversation or try to cross the road, but it detracts from the townscape qualities and the opportunity to appreciate the historic buildings. The resulting public realm is of poor quality with a wide road and inappropriate pedestrian surfaces and street furniture for this attractive heritage townscape.



Traffic congestion on Gerard Street and on the pavement .



Poor maintenance on Gerard Street.



Present day Gerard Arms Hotel



Gerard Arms Hotel as it was in 1920's .

4.5 Summary of Character

Figure 8. Townscape Characteristics, identifies the key findings from the three Character Areas assessments. This diagram demonstrates the density of buildings of heritage and group interest and the scale of the issues of concern.

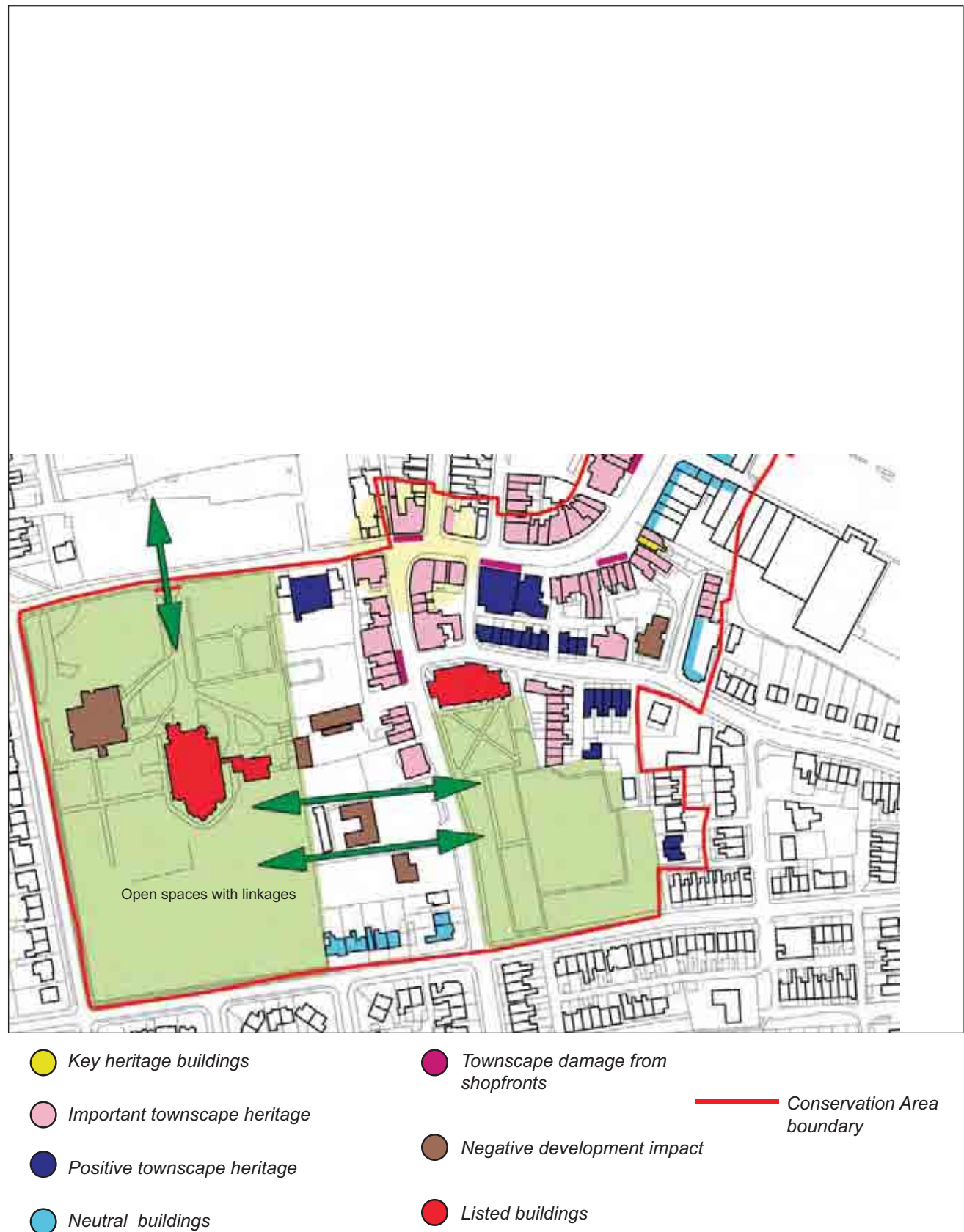


Figure 8: Townscape characteristics

4.3 St Thomas's and St Oswald's Character Area

The Character Area centred on the Parish and Roman Catholic churches to the southwest of the town centre introduces a more open and landscaped quality which presents an important balance within the built-up townscape. The area has been the traditional location of the two churches and with their surrounding open spaces, particularly in the case of St Oswalds, have provided 'green lungs' for the urban population. To the north of St Oswalds, and outside the Conservation Area is the recreation area, which is now cut into by the construction of a primary school, but together with this Character Area, this creates a 'green' boundary to the western side of the town centre.



St Oswald's Roman Catholic Church



View north from St Oswald's

4.3.1 Architectural & historic qualities

The buildings of architectural note in this Character Area are all Grade II listed – St Thomas's church, St Oswalds church and its Presbytery and the Gates to its grounds (see listing information in Appendix). In addition to their qualities as individual buildings and structures, they are particularly important townscape elements with their surrounding churchyards and the adjacent urban area.

St Thomas's church and tower introduces the town centre to those arriving from the south. The churchyard with its low boundary wall provide a large open area which enables good views of the side elevation of the church and across to the mixture of attractive terrace houses that define the eastern border.

The grounds of St Oswald's church and presbytery are even larger. In contrast to St Thomas's, the heavy boundary planting of trees and bushes encloses the churchyard and gardens and creates an area of limited visibility from the surrounding roads. A modern community centre with parking is located within the grounds and though it has few architectural qualities, the enclosing landscape and planting limits its impact.

St Oswald's grounds used to be bounded in the east by a line of terrace properties along the Warrington Road including the Vicarage for St Thomas's. To the south of the Angel public house, these have cleared and the sites redeveloped with poor quality C20 buildings – even the new Vicarage. The single storey community hall with its car park and the new vicarage both have large sites and their trees and other planting provides a 'green' visual link between the two churchyards. The C20 housing around the corner of Warrington and Vicarage Roads has little visual or heritage merit, except for the interest in two asymmetrical sets of semi-detached houses - no.s 20/22 Warrington Road and 6/8 Vicarage Road and no.s 20/22 and 2/4 retaining original leaded coloured glass.



St. Thomas's graveyard

4.3.2 Public realm audit

This Character Area includes the most significant open spaces and landscaped areas within the town centre. The important contribution to the townscape is defined by its open unbuilt character and with the strong emphasis given by the walls, trees, hedges and green spaces.

St Thomas's graveyard is bounded by a low stone wall which enables views from the Warrington Road of the side elevation of the church. Tall poplar trees reinforce these edges and provide structure within the graveyard by lining key pedestrian routes and framing the views of the church.

In contrast, the large and dense lines of tree planting and high hedges which bound the more extensive grounds of St Oswald's creates a sizeable enclosure which is difficult to view from the surrounding roads. Though the church can be seen from its main drive, the summer foliage limits views of the presbytery, the community hall and associated parking, and the more open spaces with the graveyard and sizable areas of unkempt pasture.

The contrast between these two areas provides an important element to the character of the town centre. Equally important are the trees and open spaces in the grounds of the Vicarage and the community hall that link these two landscaped areas. The frontage car park and single storey hall on the Warrington Road provide partial views of St Oswalds, and the adjacent Vicarage with its large plot has retained important large trees which reinforce this link.

4.3.3 Negative factors

The negative elements which have an impact on the quality of this Character Area are the C20 developments associated with the churches. The community Centre and Vicarage on Warrington Road are poor examples which lack any architectural or heritage merit and detract from the entrance to the town and separate the two open areas with undistinguished buildings.

4.4 Heath Road Character Area

The Heath Road Character Area includes the examples of the traditional terrace housing, built during the Victorian period, that are located directly behind the Gerard Street frontage.

The short A Court terrace linked directly by an enclosed pedestrian passage to Gerard Street, the terrace of five properties facing the Commercial Inn and the grouping called Commercial Square that have now been replaced by the day centre, are and were the oldest properties. A cinema was built on A Court in the 1920's, but this was converted for commercial uses in the 1960's, and has now been demolished for a new housing development. The latest terrace was constructed at the beginning of the C20 with views over St Thomas's graveyard.



Examples of terrace housing on heath road.

4.4.1 Architectural & historic qualities

The simple traditional terraces form the majority of the buildings in this Character Area and none have been listed or merit local listing or can be considered individually as making a special contribution to the area. In total their heritage merit results from the retention of the traditional Victorian townscape, and an interesting range of brick, fenestration and gutter details.

The predominant materials are brick with slate roofs. The earliest terrace in A Court is a very simple construction and design with basic three dimensional brick details, and the later properties display more brick detailing and decoration and in the case of 1-13 Heath Street bay windows and rendering. The striking L-shaped terrace around the graveyard, Church Terrace, has rendered first floors with mock timber cross framed black boarding as decoration. A later terrace on Heath Road, facing the rear of St Thomas's, was probably designed with first floor rendered panels as decoration.

The key building within this small grouping is the Commercial Inn. This fine redbrick public house was built as a hotel around 1900 and displays attractive brick detailing and decoration – particularly on the two gable ends facing Heath Road. Of equal importance is the distinctive L-shaped Church Terrace that provides an eastern boundary to the graveyard and war memorial. Further east and just out of the Conservation Area are buildings of historic note - Cave Browne Evangelical Church and the Hingemakers Arms.

4.4.2 Negative factors

Though much of the heritage urban structure and buildings remain, significant damage to the townscape of this Character Area has been caused in recent years by the replacement of traditional materials and details.

In particular, it is the widespread inappropriate alterations and replacements that are changing the heritage character of the area – the replacement of traditional windows and doors; the removal of brick detailing, chimney pots and stacks; the use of pebble dash and other non heritage wall finishes; the removal and replacement of boundary walls and railings; and the introduction of satellite dishes.

Together these changes have a significant impact on the overall heritage townscape and it is important to reverse these trends in order to retain the traditional character of the area.



A Court terrace with replacement doors and windows detracting from the original brick detailing.

4.5 Summary of Character

Figure 8. Townscape Characteristics, identifies the key findings from the three Character Areas assessments. This diagram demonstrates the density of buildings of heritage and group interest and the scale of the issues of concern.

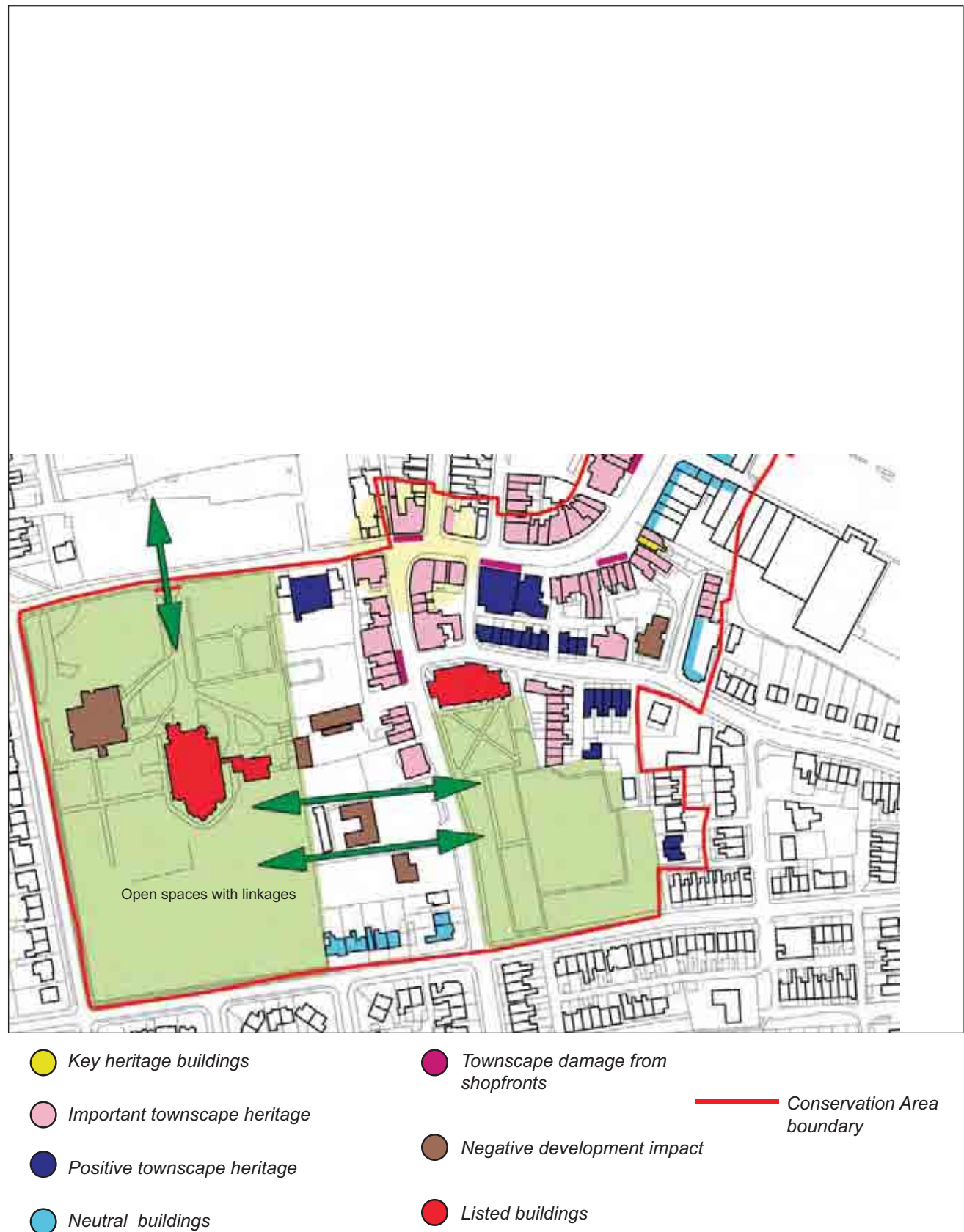


Figure 8: Townscape characteristics

5. Management and enhancement

5.1 Identification of issues

5.1.1 Positive issues and assets

The town centre Conservation Area contains an area with an attractive, if modest, Victorian townscape including notable examples of historic inns and shopfronts, and also incorporates the important ecclesiastical spaces and some of the surrounding early terrace housing.

The three Character Areas – the commercial centre, the area to the south with small terraced housing, and the more open spaces to the west around the churches, provide significant examples of the history of the development of Ashton-in-Makerfield.

Individual buildings on Gerard Street present examples of the progression of design and detailing through the second half of the C19 – from the simpler design of the Palatine Buildings 1863, to the more ornate brick and terracotta detailing of Central Buildings 1899 and Bridge Foot House 1902.

New development within the Conservation Area has retained a scale and materials that respect the heritage townscape – The Gerard Street frontage of the Gerard Shopping Centre, and Bar Aqua at no.1 Gerard Street.



Bar Aqua between heritage buildings.

5.1.2 Negative issues and problems

The three key negative issues and problems are:

1. the poor standard of building alterations, repairs and maintenance;

- loss of heritage details and materials including low quality repairs
- the use of pebble dash, render and other non heritage wall finishes
- the use of inappropriate roof materials
- the replacement of front doors with inappropriate designs
- the replacement of wooden sash windows with aluminium and UPVC frames with different window bars and of inappropriate size and shape;
- the removal of heritage mouldings and other details;
- the removal of chimney stacks and pots;
- the replacement of boundary walls and railings;
- and few considerations for the heritage character of the area when rebuilding or renovating.

2. the particular impact of inappropriate shop fronts and signage;

A significant proportion of the buildings within the conservation area are in retail use. The quality and design of the shop front and its signs has a high impact on the appearance on the building and townscape. A poor quality, or inappropriately designed shop front can dominate the elevation of a building, as well as its neighbours, and can be out of scale with the balance and proportion of the streetscape as a whole. There is evidence available from historic photographs which can provide information on the original designs of the shop fronts. Those creating significant townscape damage are shown on Figure 8, but others with a negative impact can be found at 2-12, 7-13, 44-46 and 47-49 Gerard Street; and 2c Warrington Road.



Insensitive shop fronts



3. and the effect of the heavy through traffic.

The impact of the heavy through traffic along Gerard Street and Warrington Road detracts from the experience of shopping and appreciating the Victorian townscape and severely affects the qualities of the Conservation Area, possibly limiting its economic success.

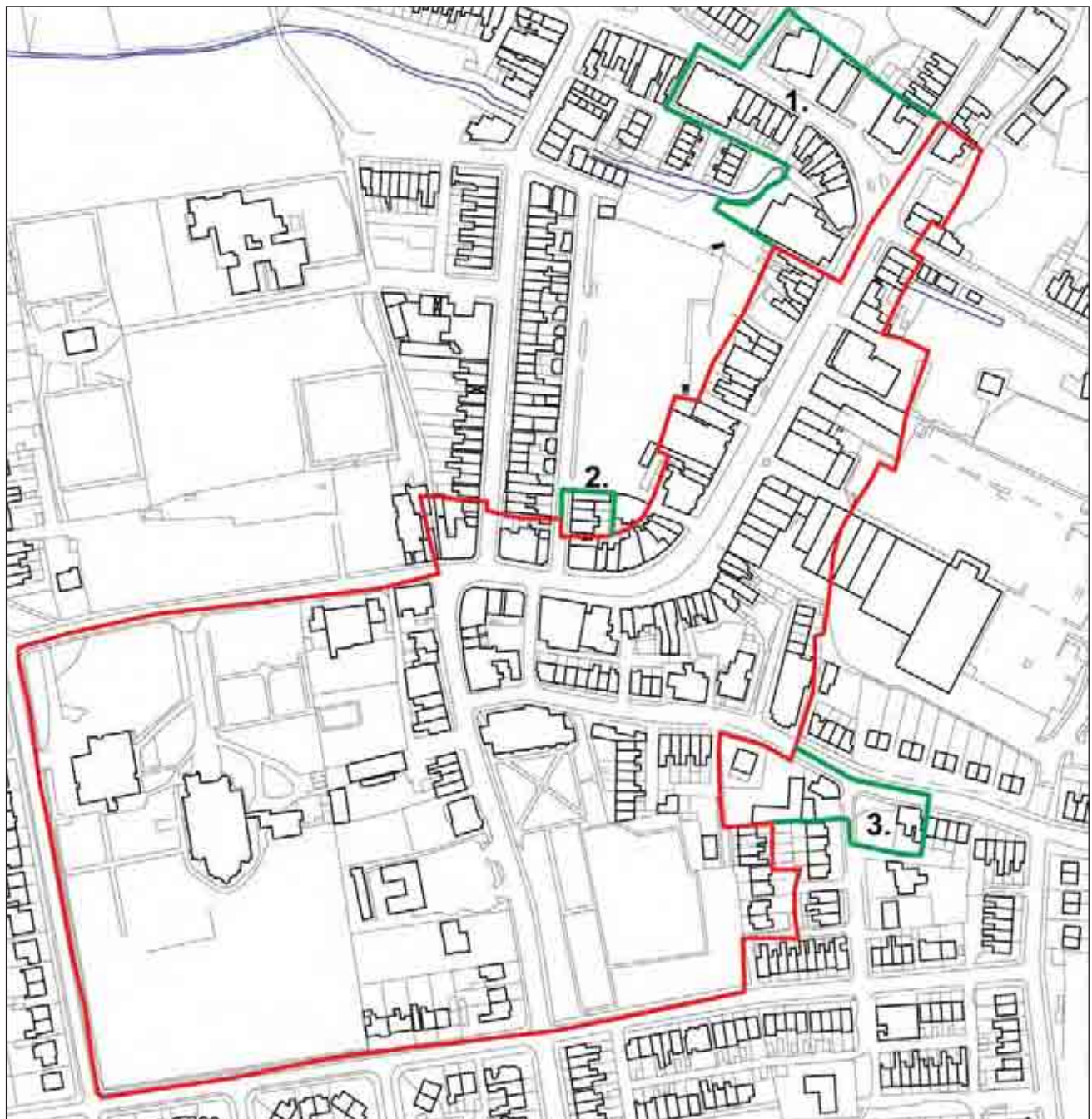
5.2 Management recommendations

5.2.1 Boundary changes

The Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area was designated in August 1989 and this Conservation Area Appraisal, 2005, has reconsidered the boundaries and suggests changes to be adopted by Wigan Council.

With slight adjustments to the existing boundary to reflect current land use and to accommodate suitable properties to complete local townscapes, this Conservation Area includes a mix of development that provide examples of the built form of an area of Victorian urban growth.

See Figure 9 showing the current and proposed boundary for the Conservation Area.



— Conservation Area boundary

— Proposed changes to boundary

Figure 9: Conservation Area proposed boundary changes

Proposed alterations to the Conservation Area boundary:

1. **Add** on the north side of Wigan Road, the Robin Hood Hotel through to no.4 Wigan Road – previously the Armoury on Armoury Bank; and the Sir Thomas Gerard public house, and the corner bank on Gerard Street with the adjacent shops through to the Queen's Theatre on the south side of the Wigan Road.



Robin Hood Inn

This will complete the local heritage townscape around the junction that includes the Cross Keys Inn and Bridge Foot House.

This grouping of notable buildings provides an important visual northern boundary to the Conservation Area when viewed along Gerard Street.

The extension along Wigan Road includes the historic Armoury 1870's, and the early C20 shops and theatre which create an important entry to the town centre.

2. **Add** the commercial premises nos. 2 to 8 Garswood Street, part of the Palatine Buildings built in 1863.



Palatine Building

This inclusion will complete the block that was built with the same scale and detailing as the Gerard Street frontage and links to the entrance to the Market.

3. **Add** the area on the south side of Heath Road to include the buildings from the Cave Browne Evangelical Church to the Hingemakers Arms.



Cave Browne Evangelical Church to the Hingemakers Arms.