

## **5.0 LEIGH TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA**

### **5.1 Definition and summary of special interest**

Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area is structured around the ancient core formed by the market place and church, which are known to have existed in some form since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The historic routes running north-south and east-west form the framework of the Conservation Area, and their orientation has changed little throughout the centuries.

The character of Leigh has been influenced by many different factors over the years, from its agricultural beginnings through industrialisation, and latterly the changes that have come about following the decline of heavy industry in the town. However, despite the antiquity of the settlement, its present character derives chiefly from the changes and developments that took place towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The majority of buildings within the Conservation Area date from the mid- to late-Victorian period (1850s-1900s), within which styles vary considerably. A key characteristic of these buildings is the richness and variety of their architectural detail.

High quality buildings from the 20<sup>th</sup> century are also present, providing quite a contrast to the earlier architectural styles. Unfortunately, there are also less good examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century infill which do not make such a positive contribution to the streetscape.

The buildings on the main thoroughfare are on a grand commercial scale. Many of these have three storeys and an attic, and are further heightened by architectural features such as chimneys and gables. It is often the case that the storey heights of the later Victorian buildings are relatively tall, substantially increasing their overall scale.

The earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings tend to be smaller and more domestic in scale, with a strong Georgian element in their design. Although the Georgian period ended at around 1830, the architectural style persisted well into the Victorian era, as evidenced by the buildings that appeared at this time in Leigh.

Listed buildings (detailed in Appendix 1) are clustered in the oldest part of the Conservation Area, around the Market Place, along Market Street, and at the northern end of King Street.

### **5.2 Activities and uses**

Today, Leigh town centre is predominantly commercial in nature, with a bustling urban character that gives way to quieter areas on the edges of the Conservation Area. Within the centre is a range of public buildings which typify a small market town. These include the town hall, the library, several places of worship, and several places of leisure/entertainment.

Residential properties exist in the more peripheral parts of the Conservation Area, and down many of the side streets can be found remnants of the smaller scale industries that used to be very common in the town centre.

Retail, however, is now the main commercial activity, with a mixture of national and independent retailers in evidence, particularly along Bradshawgate, the main shopping street of the modern day town. The construction of Spinning Jenny Way allowed Bradshawgate to be partially pedestrianised in 1997. This is beneficial as it alleviates the pressure of traffic coming through the narrow street, and makes for a more relaxed shopping environment during the day.

A use that tends to survive periods of change is the inn or pub, although the physical building may be altered or completely replaced. One example is the Bull's Head on Bradshawgate, which existed as early as 1720, although the current building was remodelled in 1891.

Conversely, a use that only begins to appear in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the bank, reflecting the Victorian preoccupation with commerce and financial success. Banks were intended to denote wealth, status and authority; hence their frequent location on prominent corner sites on important thoroughfares, for example, Market Street and King Street.

### **5.3 Spatial structure – form and density**

For the most part, the Conservation Area is characterised by a dense urban grain, with the majority of street frontages being continuously developed as terraces or rows of individual buildings. The variation in building forms and architectural treatments has come about through the development and redevelopment of individual plots over the years, creating a high degree of visual interest. Plot sizes and widths tend to

vary, from the large footprints of buildings like the Town Hall through to the small, relatively narrow plots of earlier buildings, for example, on Bradshawgate.

The construction of short terraces of identical properties only occurred in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in the distinctive gridiron pattern of straight street lines, and strict geometric blocks of development. Within the Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area, this form of development occurs particularly around the War Memorial, for example, on Church Street and Silk Street.

### **5.4 Detailed character analysis**

To make the appraisal more manageable, it is proposed to divide up the Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area into three character sub-areas. These areas should not be taken as rigidly defined, or mutually exclusive in terms of their characteristics. The following character sub-areas have been identified:

1. King Street / Market Street / Market Place / The Avenue;
2. Lord St / War Memorial area;
3. Bradshawgate / Queen Street / Railway Road.

#### **5.4.1 King Street / Market Street / Market Place / The Avenue**

##### **Definition of the character of the sub-area**

This sub-area is the backbone of the Conservation Area, running more or less north/south from the King Street / Twist

Lane junction through the centre of town, and diverging along The Avenue as far as the junction with Abbey Street.

The character of the area derives from the fact that the through road, later a turnpike, was the chief means of communication with other parts of the region. The presence of the church and market place made this area the focus of community life, and was a natural gathering place for the local people. The obelisk was also the location from which public announcements were made. The trade that went on in the market was vital for the livelihood of the local community.

For a long time, this thoroughfare was the only part of the town that was developed, as is shown on the maps of 1847, 1825, and 1762. The map of 1825 shows the unbroken frontages around the market place and Market Street areas which are still characteristic today. At that time there was a lot more undeveloped land to the rear of the buildings that would gradually be built over as demand for space grew. Market Street was widened in or around 1898. A photograph from around 1896 shows that it was indeed very narrow at the point where it curved into the market place.

Architecturally, the character of the sub-area has evolved from the gradual piece-meal development and redevelopment of individual sites. Generally speaking, the scale of buildings increases markedly between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Buildings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tend to reverse that trend and the average scale begins to reduce again.

The most prevalent architectural styles in the sub-area are from the late Victorian period, and particularly from the

practice of the local architect, James Caldwell Prestwich. Born in Atherton in 1852, Prestwich trained in London, and practiced in Leigh from 1875 until 1930. His sons took over the practice, which continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The townscape has suffered most where frontages and blocks have been cleared for car-parking. Similarly, much of the east side of King Street, from the George and Dragon Inn southwards, was cleared in 1992 to make way for the current bus station, which has not been included in the Conservation Area. The map of 1893 shows the previous form of the street, with a frontage of Georgian houses and shops, and a warren of courts and yards to the rear. Woolpack Court, for example, was the location of a brew house, a slaughter house, stables and four cottages. The Goose pub (formerly the Spinning Jenny) screens the bus station to a certain extent, but does not quite achieve the architectural presence or quality of the late Victorian corner buildings.

### **Buildings of townscape merit**

#### **King Street:**

At the southern-most end of King Street is a cluster of pubs and clubs. On the west side, Edison's stands on the corner at the junction with Twist Lane. Previously known as the Eagle and Child, Edison's is a massive public house standing at a full three storeys high. Built in 1895, the building displays themes and characteristics that typify the architectural endeavours of the time: strong corner treatment; interest and detailing at the roofline; tall storeys; highly decorative door surrounds; a choice of architectural style that is carried through the details of the building. The most notable feature

of Edison's is the corner chimney, with triangular vertical ribs, rising to the height of at least one more storey above the main building.

This corner also demonstrates the abrupt changes in building scale that occur frequently in the Conservation Area. The Stella Café, adjacent to Edison's, is approximately half its height. Architecturally, the Leigh Arms is styled in a similar vein as Edison's, and these three buildings form a striking group.

Further along the east side of King Street is the Kingsleigh Methodist Church. Built in 1974, it is a distinctive modern structure, set back from the established building line of the street. Although markedly different in style to its neighbours, the building nonetheless works well as an aesthetic contrast. There are grassed areas on three sides of the building, with some young-ish trees, providing relief from the densely built up townscape.

The Manchester and Liverpool District Bank is a flamboyant example of the French Renaissance revival style. Built in 1900, the building demonstrates the use of several materials, i.e. granite, sandstone, brick and terracotta. It is often the case that the most expensive materials are used on the most prominent public façade of a building, with lesser materials used elsewhere, in order to save on costs. Surprisingly, however, the elaborate and expensive design is continued on the narrow street to the side of the bank.

Across the road on the eastern side of King Street, the George and Dragon pub is a rare survival from the 17<sup>th</sup>

century. It is likely that the building originated as a farmhouse, indicating the agricultural beginnings of Leigh. The building was recorded as a beer house in 1698. It seems that the original 17<sup>th</sup> century building was re-fronted at a later date. The imitation timber framing dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in line with the fashion of the time.



Next door to the George and Dragon is a building that demonstrates the Georgian architectural style which is typical of the earlier buildings in the Conservation Area. Key features of Georgian design were proportion, order and symmetry. Buildings were flat-fronted with plain, undecorated facades and simple rooflines. Sash windows were small paned, and the smaller window openings to the top floor are a typical feature. It is unfortunate that the ground floor of the building has been so radically altered.

The building forming the corner with Bradshawgate is a striking 20<sup>th</sup> century inter-war design for Montague Burton

Tailors, whose architects developed distinctive, classical and Art Deco facades that were easily recognisable as their premises. The upper façade is classical, with a curved corner supported on two giant fluted columns with deeply recessed windows and giant pilasters to both side facades. The pilasters and columns have highly stylised Corinthian capitals with central palmettos, and a massive cornice finishes the façade. The metal windows are typical of the 1920/30s.

Of interest amongst this group of three buildings is the clear progression in scale, from the diminutive 17<sup>th</sup> century structure through to the substantially taller early 20<sup>th</sup> century example.



### **Market Street:**

The streetscape remains very dense along Market Street, although the architectural quality is somewhat marred by the 1960s block on the corner of Bradshawgate, which is excluded from the Conservation Area. This building is monotonous and oversimplified in design, and does not respond well to its context. Unfortunately, it replaced one of

Leigh's finest Victorian corner buildings, the Rope & Anchor Hotel (1897, Prestwich). A section of the building survives on Bradshawgate, and was originally occupied by the Union of London and Smith's Bank.

The west side of the street, however, boasts arguably the best architecture in the Conservation Area. Designed by Prestwich, the entire block is of considerable quality and interest.

Built in 1908 for Parr's Bank, the current Nat West bank is of banded ashlar with emphatic first-floor window surrounds with giant keystones. It is a classical Italian Palazzo design notable for the splayed corner, and decorative details such as the second floor circular window with arched cornice and carved festoon of fruit.

A row of three shops by Prestwich in 1900 is perhaps the quirkiest example of his work. Each has been detailed differently, but as a group they exhibit the Flemish Renaissance style

The Market Street elevation of Leigh Town Hall (1904-1907, Prestwich) features large gables with massive cornices at both ends, four giant order pilasters, and a small projecting oriel window at the centre. The town hall is an example of the Edwardian Baroque style, with classical architectural features used in a monumental manner. It is constructed of Darley Dale sandstone and Westmorland slate, a favoured roofing material of Prestwich. The ground floor is occupied by a row of nine shops, opening out onto the street. They are separated by massive rusticated piers. Some of the shops

retain their original joinery, with fine detailing including classical and Art Nouveau carving. Also of note are the finely turned corner posts, or mullions. Despite the overall proportions of the town hall, the row of shops interestingly replicate the older plot sizes, helping to accommodate the mass of the building.

### **Market Place:**

According to Pevsner, the 'architectural highlight [of Leigh] is the old market place with the church and town hall facing each other across the open space.' The map of 1893 shows that the area around the old market place was much more tightly enclosed. Previously the roads and streets converged on the market place, whereas today the main road passes the modern Civic Square by. The fine grain of the townscape has in places been superseded by substantial buildings of a much larger footprint, e.g., the library, the town hall, the supermarket and the car parks.

As is frequently found within the Conservation Area, different facades of the same building have received different architectural treatment, and this is the case with the town hall. The façade facing the square is distinctly classical in its composition: apart from the elaborate entrance porch, the ground floor is relatively plain, forming a plinth to the façade; the first floor forms the main order, framed by two characteristic giant order pilasters; the heavy roof cornice completes the composition. Of the seven first floor windows, the two on the left light a committee room, and the remainder light the Council Chamber.

On the west side of the square, the Turnpike Centre, 1971, is a 'striking' building with a reinforced concrete frame and prefabricated concrete panelled walls. In the opinion of Pevsner, the building 'rather skulks'. It presents a relatively high level of three dimensional interest and texture. The deeply textured relief sculpture above the entrance was by a leading sculptor of the period, William Mitchell. Designed by Prestwich & Sons, it provides a very interesting contrast to the work of Prestwich himself.

Enclosing the square to the north, St Mary's Church, by Paley and Austin, dates mainly from 1873, although the inner structure of the tower survives from 1516, and the outer facing is of 1910. The church has a long, unbroken roof and clerestory. The aisle windows are characteristic of the Gothic Perpendicular style. The entrance has a finely detailed porch with an elaborate niche canopy and statue. The red sandstone is notable for its hammered texture.

The churchyard provides an important open space in what was previously a densely developed area. The dimensions of the grounds appear to have changed little over time. The trees are also key features, softening the area and providing relief to the hard urban surroundings. Now close to the churchyard, the obelisk was originally erected in 1762 in St Mary's Way, at its junction with the old market place. It has been moved twice, in 1859 and again in 1986, although it is thought that the base stones may be from the previous medieval market cross.

Unfortunately, the enclosure on the east side of the Civic Square, opposite the Turnpike Centre, has been lost to

clearance, and a large car park now occupies the block. The Royal Bank of Scotland and 5 Market Street hint at the street frontage that previously existed here, and the historic building line is picked up again by the Boar's Head. On the west side, the supermarket building north of the church is unremarkable in architectural terms, but at least provides some enclosure to the townscape at this point.

Built in 1900, the Boar's Head makes extensive use of highly decorative terracotta. It is one of most flamboyant buildings in Leigh. Decorative gables appear on all three elevations, as do rounded ground floor windows. The building creates another strong corner feature, a regular characteristic of the Conservation Area.

The block of buildings beyond the Boar's Head on the east side display many typical features of the sub-area. It is a row of individual buildings, with varying heights and rooflines, a dense street line right up against the pavement, with no gaps. Although none of the buildings stand out in their own right architecturally, as a group they make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

#### **The Avenue/Leigh Road:**

The first block of the Avenue forms the northern-most tip of the Conservation Area. The map of 1893 shows that the Avenue was considerably wider than the nearby streets at that time, befitting its status as the approach to the grand estate of Atherton Hall.

Houses were built on the Avenue during the extensive development of new residential areas at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. The north side of the road shows the typical Victorian pattern of a row of houses bookended with public buildings, in this case, a church and Sunday school at one end, and a public house and theatre at the other end.

The houses are set back from the road, with small front gardens enclosed by red brick walls with terracotta copings. The two storey dwellings are in red brick with fairly plain roofs, with the exception of the small gables over the first floor windows. The front doors are paired within symmetrical elevations. The pair of houses nearest Leigh Road is of higher status than the rest of the terrace, as denoted by the greater height, again a common feature of Victorian planning. Only one house, 21 The Avenue, retains its original fenestration, which is the typical multi-paned smaller top sash over the larger plain lower sash. The mullions are timber, as opposed to the stone mullions that appear elsewhere in Leigh.

The street trees and private gardens along the Avenue give it a pleasant, leafy sub-urban feel, despite its proximity to the town centre.

On Abbey Street, the Chapel and Sunday School form a dense cluster of red-brick buildings with a variety of roof shapes. The buildings are massed well, and make a positive contribution right at the edge of the Conservation Area.

At the Leigh Road end is another tight cluster of buildings, with typically very little space to the rear. The Grand Theatre & Hippodrome (1908, J C Prestwich) dominates the corner, and dwarfs the adjacent buildings, displaying a tall façade of red brick and buff terracotta. Despite its incongruous, almost

industrial scale, the mellow red brick construction enables the building to blend into its context.

### **Neutral or negative features**

The most negative features in the town centre, the bus station at King Street and the 1960s block on Market Street lie outside the Conservation Area, but nonetheless have a very negative impact on it. Any possibility of redeveloping or improving these sites should be encouraged.

Similarly, the car park opposite the Civic Square detracts from the established character of the Conservation Area. Again, any possibility of sympathetic redevelopment of the car-park would be a great opportunity to reconstruct the frontage to the streets, and thus reinstate the enclosure and density that is characteristic of the area.

Unsympathetic replacement shop fronts have eroded the architectural character of the area, for example, the altered shop fronts of the town hall building on Market Street. This is particularly unfortunate as these were designed as a row of matching shops. Similarly, unsympathetic signage, in terms of materials, form and positioning, detracts from individual buildings, and therefore the overall appearance of the Conservation Area. For example, the signs at Barclays Bank, on the junction of King Street and Railway Road, are awkwardly placed across the decorative façade of the building.

### **5.4.2 Lord Street / War Memorial area**

### **Definition of the character of the sub-area**

Situated to the east of Market Street, the sub-area is characterised by the block layout of the late Victorian gridiron development. Here the squares of development forming the grid are intact, retaining the characteristic streetscape. The south frontage of Lord Street has been excluded from the Conservation Area due to its indifferent architectural quality. Looking east from the Lord Street/Market Street junction, the street follows the familiar pattern established in the Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area. The dense frontages step gradually down in scale from the tall three-storey Royal Bank of Scotland building on the corner, to the Musketeer pub, at a relatively small two storeys.

Uses in the sub-area are less retail-orientated than in the town centre, and include: terraced housing; a couple of clubs; a church; a post office, and; some small-scale industrial premises.

### **Buildings of townscape merit**

The Musketeer was formerly a cottage which was converted into a silk receiving warehouse, where domestic silk weavers obtained yarn for weaving, and were paid for their completed products. The 1840 Pennington Rate Book shows that four such warehouses were located between Union Street and Hope Street.

On the south side of Church Street is located a double decker stable block, built adjacent to the Boar's Head to house twenty horses, with stable boy accommodation and tackle

rooms. The long stable range fronts onto Church Street, with a shorter service wing at right angles, forming an L-shape. The building is constructed of red brick with Accrington brick detailing, and a Welsh slate roof. The long ramp with sett surfacing providing animal access to the upper stables. Such buildings were common in densely developed urban areas, but only a few survive nationally today.

The War Memorial and garden (1922, Prestwich & Sons) is the only example of formally designed space in the town centre of Leigh, and takes up a whole square of the grid pattern in this area. The cenotaph is built in Portland ashlar, and the bronze plaques on either side are framed by engaged columns. The layout of the space is fairly simple, but again would have provided a glimpse of open space in an historically very built up area.

### **Neutral or negative factors**

As with the Market Street area, this sub-area has suffered loss of streetscape due to the clearance of buildings to make way for the car park. However, one advantage is that the unusual double-decker stable can be seen clearly from the centre of town

As with much of the Conservation Area, unsympathetic alterations detract from the character and appearance of the historic buildings. Set against this, the street form remains very intact throughout most of the sub-area. Unsympathetic infill also dilutes the character of the area, for example, the modern pub at 13 Lord Street.

### 5.4.3 Bradshawgate / Queen Street / Railway Road

#### Definition of the character of the sub-area

Bradshawgate is a long, relatively narrow street running east-west, at right angles to King Street/Market Street. Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was known as Windy Mill Lane. At this time, the building frontages extended only as far as Union Street on the north side (one block), and Albion Street on the south side (two blocks). Albion Street was known historically by the name of a large field to the south, 'Downcroft'. The Golden Lion Inn was recorded here in 1695, as was Leigh's first theatre in 1770. The area beyond was very industrialised.

The map of 1825 shows that little further development had taken place, except for a long row of weavers' cottages and a few other buildings present on the south side beyond Albion Street.

The map of 1847 again also shows relatively little change, and it was not until the period of 1850-1875 that development began to gather pace. From 1888 onwards, rebuilding occurred on the south side, as far as Albion Street. In 1898, a programme of road widening was undertaken, which led to rebuilding on the north side near Market Street. The new buildings were taller, wider and more elaborate, using gables to heighten their three storey facades.

As was the case with the rest of the town centre, the architectural character of Bradshawgate changed significantly during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, corresponding to the changes brought by industrialisation and greater prosperity

during that period. For example, Bradshawgate displays clear examples of the late Victorian principle of emphasis of street corners, as a means of punctuating the linear and geometric layouts they favoured. This principle resulted in a great variation of treatments, and rich architectural detailing.

As we move further east, however, the older character of the area becomes apparent. This can be seen in the smaller scale of buildings, and their plainer treatment. Also, remnants of the earlier cottage industries can be found, giving us a picture, albeit fragmented, of how Leigh appeared before the Industrial Revolution. Generally speaking, Bradshawgate has not been subject to the same level of redevelopment as the adjoining town centre streets, and so retains its finer grain of small, narrow plots. A notable exception is the Leigh Co-op building, whose footprint is similar in size to Leigh Town Hall and the Turnpike Centre.

#### Buildings of townscape merit

##### 10 - 64 Bradshawgate (south side):

Again, the influence of the architect J C Prestwich is palpable in the sub-area, and the south side of Bradshawgate, as far as the Co-op building, is very much characterised by his work. His offices at 14-18 Bradshawgate were designed and built for the practice, which remained here until 1989. The three-storey building displays many of Prestwich's trademark features: shop fronts are in dark red polished granite on grey granite plinths; upper storeys are brick banded with buff stone; continuous pilasters from ground to roof parapet wall; windows are deeply recessed, with the sashes sliding up and down behind the horizontal stone transoms.

The building next door at 20/20a Bradshawgate is the former Bull's Head Hotel, which was an inn as early as 1720. It was rebuilt in 1891, with coach houses and stables for 20 horses at the rear. It had its own brewery, and was one of the main places where farmers' carts were parked on market day. A weighing machine was located outside on the street.

34-40 Bradshawgate (1899, Prestwich) is a row of four gabled shops built in two pairs. The gables of the right-hand pair are completely built in buff Coal Measures Sandstone. The style is Arts & Crafts/Jacobean, with Queen Anne revival window frames. The left hand pair have large windows, transomed and mullioned throughout. The central sections are pedimented with distinctive scrolls. The long range of buildings at 54-64 Bradshawgate (1889-1890, Prestwich) is in the Flemish Renaissance style, with a rich, intricate roofline of Dutch gables. Each gable has a sculptured terracotta plaque with urns and plants, including sunflowers, which were favoured under the Queen Anne revival style. Windows are tall, and grouped mainly in pairs.

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century interventions appear in the form of the Superdrug building, at 24-28 Bradshawgate. Built in the 1980s, this three storey building has traditional window openings and a series of full height pilasters and horizontal sill courses. The Boulevard Arcade, a cast iron and glass structure also built in the 1980s, makes an interesting addition to the streetscape.

The Leigh Co-op building (1899, Prestwich) physically dominates the street, and is the largest and grandest

commercial building in Leigh town centre. Another example of the Flemish Renaissance style, the ground floor shop fronts are in stone, and the upper elevations are in Ruabon brick and terracotta. Gables occur at each end of the facades, and a corner tower sits on the junction of Bradshawgate and Albion Street. The detailing of each gable and wall below vary, reflecting the eclecticism that was the order of the day in architecture. With a footprint of 127ft x 113 ft, the building is nearly square.

The Co-op society came about due to the dire state of the silk trade, and was registered in 1858. Gradually, the Society acquired and opened premises in the town, and between 1865 and 1895, a steady stream of additional shops opened in the town centre.

### **9 - 53 Bradshawgate (north side):**

The north side of Bradshawgate was not as extensively redeveloped as the south, and the interest here lies in the buildings that have survived from earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although they have unfortunately been much altered. These buildings are often smaller and more domestic in scale. Due to piecemeal redevelopment, much of the rest of this row is unremarkable, with some unsympathetic 20<sup>th</sup> century infill.

19 Bradshawgate, on the corner of Union Street, is a small corner building with a splayed end and hipped roof, giving recognition and emphasis to the corner. This feature was also used for advertising. This building was originally a house, dating from first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Typical features are: the late Georgian sash windows; the hand-made red bricks, in

English Garden Wall Bond, and; the deep moulded gutter cornice.

Further to the west, 51-53 Bradshawgate (corner of Silk Street) has a distinctive first floor canted oriel window with a canopy roof. At three storeys, this building is notably higher than its neighbours.

On the corner of Back Market Street is a red-brick building range of 1924, notable for: the Art Deco scalloped fans in end pediments; the steel windows, and; the more unusual arts and crafts inspired first floor window arches built in clay tiles. The Bradford & Bingley building on the south side (32 Bradshawgate) is very similar in style.

#### **Co-op Building to 126 Bradshawgate / 2 Brown Street (south side):**

Immediately to the east of the Co-op building, the scale of the street drops considerably. This sudden change of scale is a common characteristic throughout the Conservation Area.

The row at 100-104 Bradshawgate comprises a low terrace of small shops which originated prior to 1825 as silk weavers' cottages. The loom shops were located in cellars with steps leading up to the ground floor.

On the corner of Bradshawgate and Brown Street is an attractive group of late Georgian buildings with small paned sash windows on the upper floors. 2 Brown Street has in the centre of the elevation a taking-in door which extends down to floor level, indicating that the top floor was the warehouse and winding and warping shop of a muslin, and subsequently, silk

manufacturer or agent. The Bradshawgate section was the Derby Arms Public House in 1885.

#### **55 - 123 Bradshawgate (north side):**

The red sandstone corner bank building (1906, Prestwich & Son) was originally developed to accommodate the Leigh Club and a number of shops. At only two storeys, this building is less grand than some other examples from this architect. However, it still displays key elements such as the splayed corner feature with a heavy stone canted oriel window. Although plain, the roof is of green Westmorland slate. As with many buildings in the Conservation Area, the front and side facades have been treated differently, and the building becomes plainer as we move further from Bradshawgate.

An earlier survival is The Globe Inn, built in 1854. Although altered, it retains the characteristic late Georgian style sash windows to the first floor.

The terrace of white rendered 3-storey buildings at 99-101 Bradshawgate is a particularly unfortunate example of how piecemeal alterations have eroded the character of these historic buildings. Dating from c.1870, they have lost: small paned windows; chimneys; historic roof material; historic shop fronts. All of the frontages on this row have been rendered, disguising the character of the brick facades.

An interesting terrace of earlier houses is to be found at 111-113 Bradshawgate. These two-storey dwellings were built in the 1870s, again in the later Georgian tradition. They originally had small gardens in front, but these were built over

by the row of single-storey shops in the early 1900s. Although the shop fronts are modern, the parapet wall above is a typical early 20<sup>th</sup> century feature.

The former Lilford Hotel, 115-123 Bradshawgate, is an earlier design of Prestwich in the Gothic Revival, a style which did not really catch on in the industrial regions. The hotel originally had domestic-type ground floor windows, and the modern shop fronts detract from the character of this rather fine building. However, it makes a very interesting contrast with the plainer Georgian style buildings opposite on Brown Street. Behind the hotel, on Bedford Street, is Lilford Cottage, an attractive double-fronted dwelling built mainly in common bricks. Stepped projecting bricks form corbels at eaves level, and small, ornate gables with arts and crafts patterning punctuate the roof. The house contrasts with the plainer terraced houses further back on Bedford Street.

Of further interest in this small area is the Jackson's Lilford Brewery buildings, which are located in the yard to the right of Lilford Cottage. Notable features are the blue brick details, especially those alternating with red bricks in the segmental arches above the windows and doors, and the tall doorway on the second floor which forms the taking-in door. Opened in 1895, the floors of the building were made of concrete on steel girders, a precaution against fire.

#### **Western end of Bradshawgate:**

Set at an angle to Bradshawgate, the western end of the Conservation Areas comprises Queen Street, Back Queen Street, Princess Street and Lord Street South.

Industrial uses are more prevalent here than in the rest of Bradshawgate, both historically, and in the present day, for example, the Travis and Perkins Timber and Building Supplies premises on Lord Street South. A row of modest terraced houses appears on Princess Street, adjacent to the estate agents on the corner. On Queen Street, there are a number of businesses, including a hairdressers and a jewellers.

Although altered, these terraces make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area in terms of their scale and massing, and their remaining historic features. Leigh Jewellery, for example, retains a traditional shop front, original window openings, and a decorative brick cornice.

On Back Queen Street, the former Derby Brewery forms a striking piece of streetscape. With its main block standing at five storeys high, it towers over the surrounding terraces. Traditional breweries relied on gravity to assist passage between the various stages and processes of brewing, and so towers are a characteristic feature. This is a notable example, its height emphasised by the attached single storey building on Brown Street. To the right of the tower along Back Queen Street is a long two storey building typical of brewery stables and coopers workshops where timber was stored and prepared for the manufacture of barrels. The view of Back Queen Street from Princess Street is very interesting, with a range of different building masses and shapes, and an attractive setted lane, one of few left in Leigh.

#### **Railway Road (including Back Salford and Newton Street):**

The Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area takes in the first section of Railway Road, which only developed beyond Bengal Street after 1893. Back Salford was built as a residential street for workers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was a terrace of small, low two-storey houses with stone slate roofs and horizontal sliding sash windows. Their loss is unfortunate, as few examples of weavers' houses now remain in Leigh. The row was replaced by the Leigh Conservative Club (1879, J J Bradshaw). This is a typically large-scale building executed in a very eclectic style. It was Leigh's cinema between 1908 and 1963.

### **Neutral or negative factors**

There are many examples along Bradshawgate of unsympathetic modern infill, for example, the Iceland building, on the south side opposite Bedford Street. Of the remaining historic buildings, many of the earlier examples have suffered badly from the loss of architectural features and historic materials. The painting over of brick facades also erodes the character of the area, as red brick is a strong unifying feature throughout the Conservation Area.

The main issue on this main shopping street is the proliferation of poor replacement shop fronts and signage. Problems include: unsympathetic sizing; poor materials; inappropriate colours and graphics; box signage; internal illumination; external roller shutters, and: shutter boxes. It is occasionally the case that historic shop front fabric has been covered over rather than removed.

Vacancy is a problem, particularly affecting the premises furthest from the town centre, and often the upper floors of otherwise occupied buildings. The lack of economic activity leads to a lack of investment in the surviving historic fabric.

### **5.5 Public realm**

There are few examples of surviving historic floorscape in the town centre. Instead, there is a range of different surface treatments throughout the Conservation Area dating from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the peripheral areas, a common surfacing is plain tarmac with concrete kerbing. Red or buff tactile paving is used at crossings.

In 1986, the concrete flags in the market place were replaced with clay brick pavoids in contrasting shades of red and charcoal. Although adequate, the design of the surface treatment is somewhat uninspiring. This open, public space would be further enhanced by a more sensitive design, and re-surfacing in high quality natural materials.

On Bradshawgate, extensive resurfacing was carried out during the works to pedestrianise part of the street. Within the pedestrianised area, there is no difference in levels between the 'road' and the 'footpath'. The footpath is surfaced in grey concrete flags with a narrow band of small clay blocks inlaid into the pavement, to assist partially sighted people, and a band of blue-black setts forming the 'kerb'. The road areas are laid with small reddish setts. Seating has been provided on areas that are built out from the pavement. These are laid in still another variation of flag, and the benches are arranged with bins, bollards and fingerpost signs.

In the Market Street area and along Bradshawgate, the street lights comprise round lamps hanging from fairly elaborate brackets of modern design. Aesthetically, these are successful, and they respond well to the scale of the streets. Elsewhere in the Conservation Area is found the more utilitarian 'hockey stick' style of lamp post.

Generally speaking, a high level of street clutter detracts from the quality of the architecture, for example, traffic signs, traffic lights, CCTV camera poles and bus stop poles. The proliferation of late 20<sup>th</sup> century street furniture, including bollards and guard rails, detracts from the quality and historic character of the public realm.

## **5.6 Conservation Area boundary review**

The following revisions to the existing boundary of the Leigh Town Centre Conservation Area are considered desirable:

### **5.6.1 The site enclosed by Brown Street/Bradshawgate and Chapel Street**

This small, roughly triangular-shaped site is now a car-parking area having been cleared off most of the buildings formerly located here. The only remaining structure is a section of the London and North Western Railway Line, which traverses the site. This fragment is nonetheless of historic and architectural interest, and should be included in the Conservation Area.

Although the car park does not in itself make any contribution to the architectural or historic interest of the area, its inclusion

within the Conservation Area will provide a greater degree of control in the event that a redevelopment proposal comes forward for the site.

### **5.6.2 The block enclosed by Windermere Road, Grasmere Road and Walmesley Road.**

It is proposed to amend the boundary of the Conservation Area to include the area that includes the former Leigh Girls Grammar School (Leigh Central Primary School), Leigh Sacred Heart RC School, Sacred Heart RC Church and Presbytery and Former Fire Station (listed). The area is bounded by Windermere Road, Grasmere Street and part of Walmesley Road and form a small addition to the north west side of the existing conservation area. The area is roughly square in nature and is made up with church based schools, former Fire Station and a former Court building. Given the land use of the area being primarily civic and educational, the extension adds to the already civic feel the existing conservation area exhibits. There is an incremental historical association with the adjacent land uses, such as Town Hall, Library and Arts centre, Ecclesiastical and educational use, all blend together to provide for an easy distinguished identity.

The buildings contained in the extension contain reasonably unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing, materials and interrelationship with the streetscape make a positive contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area.