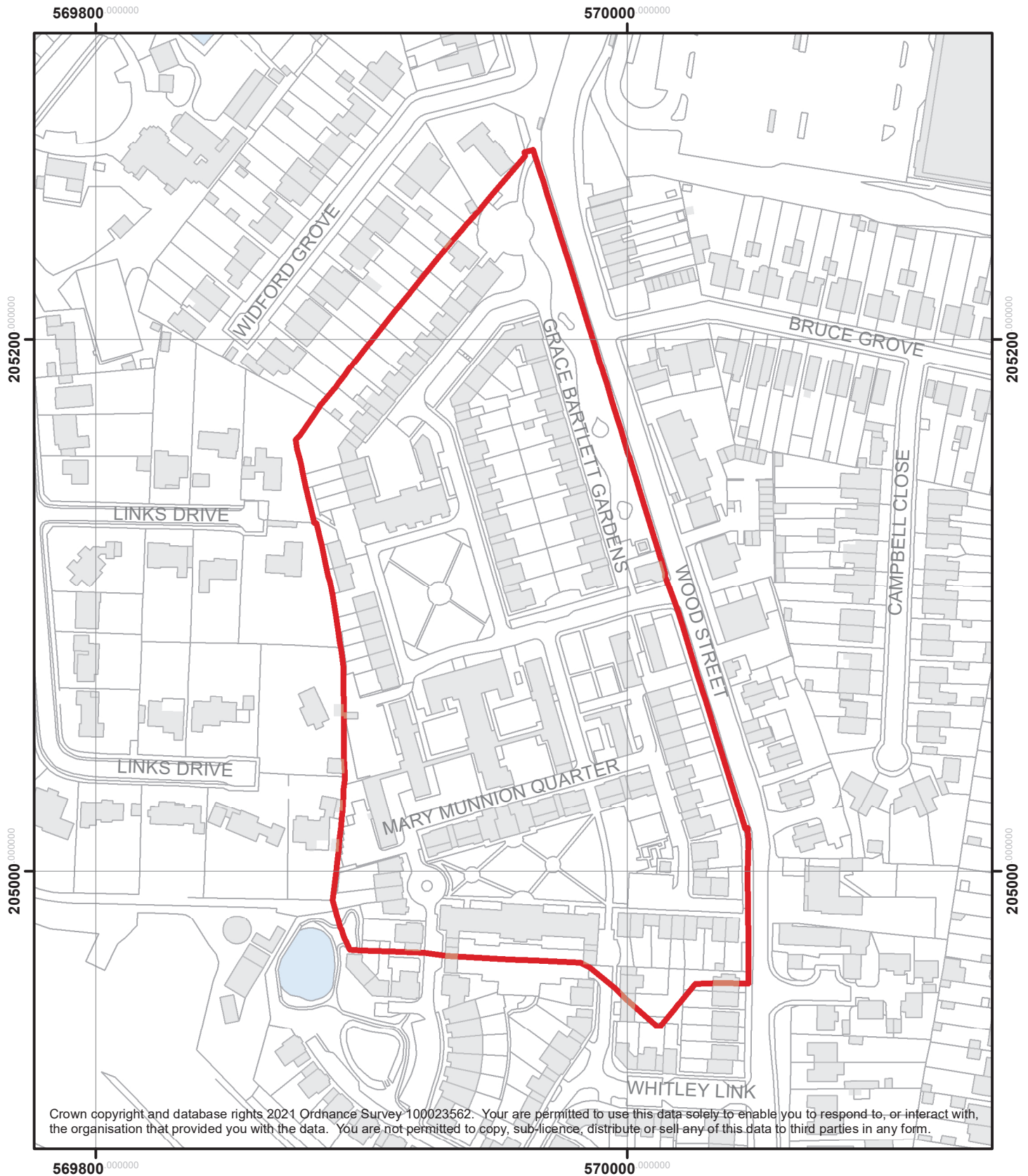


Chelmsford - St. John's Hospital Conservation Area

Ref. G.023

Originally designated 22.10.03



0 25 50
Metres

June 2021

Directorate for Sustainable Communities
Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1JE
Tel. 01245 606606
Web www.chelmsford.gov.uk



**Conservation area
character appraisal**

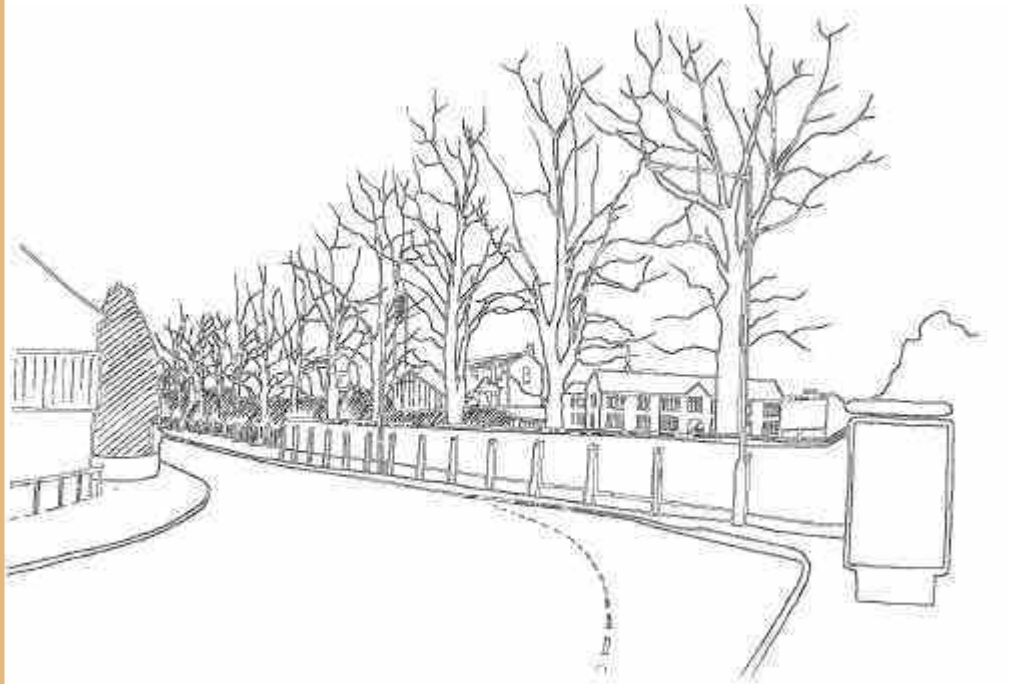
Chelmsford - St John's Hospital Conservation Area

(former Chelmsford Union
Workhouse, Wood Street,
Chelmsford)

Status:
Adopted guidance

Design and development
co-ordination team
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October 2003



1. INTRODUCTION

The former Chelmsford Union Workhouse buildings form the core of St. John's Hospital and give it an important historic character.

Workhouses evolved from the Poor Laws, which placed a duty on parishes and later unions to provide relief for the poor. They are a poignant reminder of our social history, embodying our recent forefathers' attitudes to welfare and care for the poor. Often places of social experimentation, they were designed to provide basic shelter and sustenance for those unable to care for themselves. The workhouse was always a place of awe, neither welcoming nor convivial, a place where no one but the truly destitute would choose to be.

The importance of remaining workhouses has been recognised by English Heritage who undertook a national survey during the 1990's.

A detailed survey of the poor law buildings of Essex undertaken by Essex County Council in 1998 recommended that the site of the former Chelmsford Union Workhouse (now part of St. John's Hospital) should be afforded conservation area status.

St. John's Hospital Conservation Area was designated by Chelmsford Borough Council on 22 October 2003, based on the findings of this appraisal.

2. PURPOSE OF THE APPRAISAL

This document defines the special architectural and historic interest of the former workhouse at St. John's Hospital. It sets out reasons for the designation of a conservation area and forms the basis for subsequent guidance on enhancement proposals, preservation of key elements and the design of new development.

It is intended that the document will be used by :-

- 1 The Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust and North Essex Mental Health Partnership, as site owners, to help them understand the importance of individual buildings, spaces and other built and natural elements within the conservation area.
- 2 The Borough Council, as local planning authority, to form the basis of character protection and enhancement through environmental improvement schemes and control of new development. The appraisal is the starting point for further work that will ultimately include a planning brief to guide future development of the hospital land.
- 3 Essex County Council, as highway authority, to help its appreciation of the impact of possible future highway works on the character of the area.
- 4 The local community, to increase awareness of the special character of the area.

3. DEFINITION OF THE STUDY AREA

Boundaries of the conservation area have been drawn to include surviving boundary walls which have historically defined the extent of the workhouse. The main grouping plus additions to the workhouse complex constructed in 1926 and the former workhouse gardens have been included in the conservation area, however former World War II medical scheme buildings located towards the south of the hospital complex have been excluded as they are physically separate and do not contribute to the character of the main grouping.

4. POLICY BACKGROUND

Most of St. John's Hospital is allocated for housing in the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan adopted April 1997 (proposal H8; policy and proposal map extract held at appendix 1). The policy anticipates part of the site being retained for health related development. Against this background the healthcare provider responsible for most of the site (the Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust) has stated its intention to decamp from St. John's to new facilities in Broomfield Hospital in approximately five or six years time. In consequence there will inevitably be pressure for change and new development at St John's in the relatively near future.

Essex County Council Highways have established an improvement line along Wood Street that affects the hospital frontage. A control line has been safeguarded for in excess of 20 years, however there is presently no timescale for implementation of an improvement scheme.

The Chelmsford Borough Local Plan adopted 1997 commits the Council to designating new conservation areas when their special architectural or historic interest is established (paragraph 8.23 refers). Policies in both the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan adopted April 2001 (HC2) and the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan (ENV6, 7 and 8) provide the policy background for protecting and/or enhancing the character of designated conservation areas, for the preparation of enhancement schemes and encouragement of regular maintenance of important features.

5. CONSERVATION AREAS

Conservation areas were introduced through the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. Today their legislative framework is provided mainly by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The legislation requires local planning authorities to designate conservation areas, to keep them under review, and, if appropriate, to designate further conservation areas. A conservation area should be designated where an area has special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 – *Planning and the Historic Environment* advises that the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it. Conservation area designation acknowledges the contribution these areas make to the Borough's cultural inheritance and economic well-being.

Designation of a conservation area places firmer control over the demolition of unlisted property, carries stricter provisions concerning certain kinds of development and permitted development rights, and requires notification of works to trees, in addition to normal planning controls.

Conservation area designation does not prohibit new development, rather it affords a local planning authority more control over the design of new development.

Once designated, the local planning authority is required to pay special attention to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area, and to publish proposals to further preserve and enhance the conservation area.

Without the designation of a conservation area at St John's there would have been no planning control over the demolition of the former workhouse buildings and their presence and contribution to the town's social history could very easily have been lost forever upon redevelopment of the site. The designation of a conservation area will not prevent the development envisaged by the Local Plan, rather it obliges the Council to ensure that new development is sympathetic to the important character of the former workhouse. Designation provides a firm basis for the retention and enhancement of buildings, trees and spaces that contribute positively to the character of the area.

6. LOCATION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Location plan (not to scale)



St. John's Hospital is located on the periphery of Chelmsford, approximately 2 kilometres southwest of the town centre. The site lies within Goat Hall ward but is locally associated with the former Parish of Widford, a small settlement centred around a Church on the road connecting Chelmsford to London.

Wood Street is part of the route that runs southwards out of town to the villages of Galleywood and Stock, as well as the adjoining town of Billericay. The road is designated as the B1007 county/urban distributor and is generally heavily trafficked. Residential neighbourhoods lie to the north and east of the hospital. The valley of the River Wid and attractive countryside extends to the south and west.

The hospital complex has three main elements. A former World War II emergency medical scheme hospital occupies the southern most third of the site. The former Chelmsford Union Workhouse buildings occupy the central portion, and the northern third of the site, which is mainly open, accommodates a handful of modern buildings and a car park on what was the gardens of the workhouse.

7. CONTEXT

North and east of St. John's there lies areas of medium density semi-detached housing dating from the mid twentieth century, Wood Street itself has a more organic and mixed character, containing an assortment of one and two storey buildings, set back varying distances from the road, with some units on back edge of footway. The street is mainly residential but with some commercial/institutional uses including the hospital, a parade of shops at the junction of Wood Street and Galleywood Road, a pub and a motorcycle showroom. Wood Street is extremely eclectic in building form and arrangement, and is weak in character being dominated by heavy traffic which often crawls single file in both directions. However, buildings, walls and trees within St. John's provide visual interest and continuity to the west side of Wood Street and are a vital character element to the streetspace.

The hospital lies on a natural slope, the northern end of the complex laying some ten metres lower than the southern end. This change in levels produces a dramatic setting for the old workhouse buildings.

Links Drive to the West of the Hospital is a low-density neighbourhood consisting of large mid/late twentieth century villas in extensive mature grounds. This area is generally visually detached from the hospital, however trees in the gardens of adjoining houses provide a backdrop to the former workhouse gardens to the north of the hospital site.

South of the old workhouse buildings lie a large number of low prefabricated buildings that form part of the modern hospital complex, these are of little architectural or visual merit.

The mature landscape of an established golf course abuts the south western boundary of the hospital site, allowing views over attractive countryside beyond including Moulsham Thrift Wood and Hylands registered park and garden.

Context Plan



1. View of housing to the north (Widford Grove).



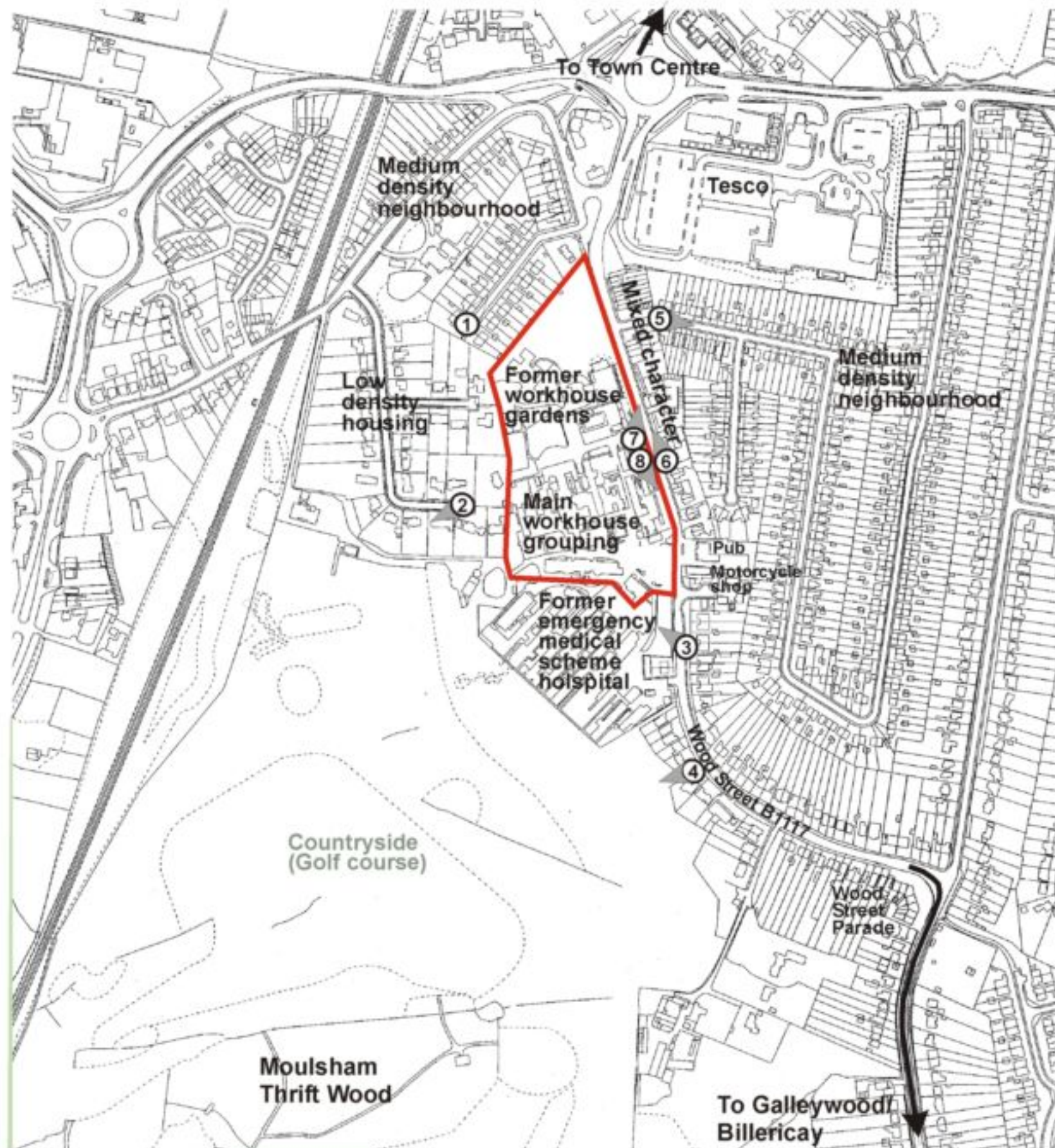
2. Low density detached housing in Links Drive.



3. View across top of hospital site at junction of workhouse and WWI emergency medical scheme hospital.



4. View from Wood Street across countryside to south/west of hospital.



Notation

- Conservation Area
- Linear ribbon of mixed twentieth century development.
- Varied forms - predominantly residential



5. Medium density housing to the east (Bruce Grove).



6. View down Wood Street - hospital buildings, wall and trees form strong edge to street and add character despite heavy traffic on road.



7. New development opposite the hospital. Walling and tower designed to relate to St. John's.

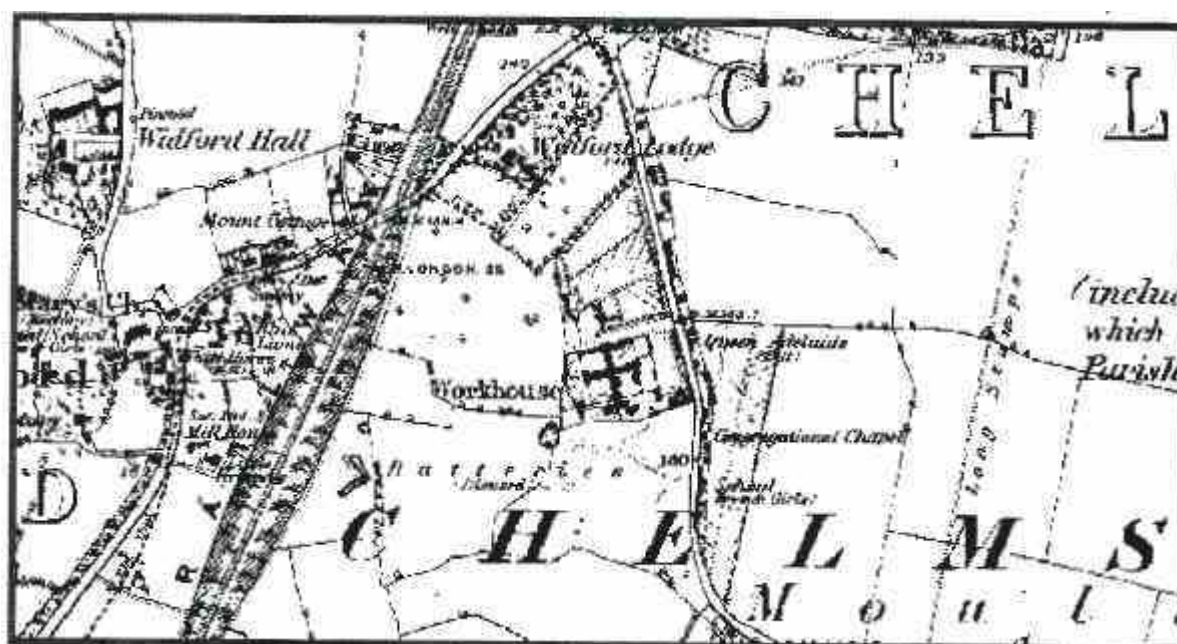


8. Mixed character evident along east side of Wood Street. Mix of small/large units, varying storey heights, designs and set backs. Some non-residential uses.

8. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Early records show that the site was used as a barrack ground during the Napoleonic War until 1828. Evidence of associated fortifications and batteries remains today on land to the west and south of the hospital.

Chelmsford Union was established following the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, when responsibility for the poor was passed from individual parishes to a Union. Chelmsford Union purchased land and constructed a square/cruciform plan workhouse on the upper part of the former barrack grounds in 1837. Being on the periphery of town and recently vacated by the army the site would have been available and relatively cheap. The site would have had the locational benefit of being in relatively close proximity of the town but detached from it.



OS First Edition

Date 1881

A fire destroyed most, but not all, of the original workhouse in 1886, and a new workhouse was erected in 1889. The new pavilion-plan workhouse incorporated some of the surviving 1837 structures and made use of some existing foundations, it followed the designs of Frederick Chancellor ⁽¹⁾, an influential local architect who went on to become the first Mayor of Chelmsford. It was built to house up to 435 paupers and consisted of segregated male, female, boys and girls blocks together with master's, administrative and vagrant's accommodation.

A new infirmary and nurses' home designed by Tooley and Foster Architects were erected immediately south of the original workhouse complex in 1926.

(1) Frederick Chancellor (1825-1918) was responsible for many public buildings in Essex. He also worked in London and many other parts of the country producing schools, churches, commercial, agricultural, industrial and residential buildings – a number of which are now listed. Chancellor came to Chelmsford from London in 1846 and became a prominent civic dignitary – he was the first Mayor of Chelmsford following incorporation in 1888 and was later given the freedom of the Borough.

The workhouse was transferred to Essex County Council in 1930 following the disbanding of the Poor Laws in 1929 and the premises became known as the Chelmsford Public Assistance Institution and Infirmary. An emergency medical scheme hospital was set up during the Second World War on land south of the workhouse formerly belonging to Chelmsford Golf Club.

In 1948 the hospital transferred to the National Health Service. The whole now functions as a general hospital known as St John's. Some staff accommodation is present on the site, the population is otherwise transient, being a place where people visit or stay for treatment or go to work.

Numerous modern buildings have been added to the hospital in the later half of the twentieth century, most significantly in the previously undeveloped workhouse gardens in the north of the site. The majority of Chancellor's workhouse buildings however remain intact.

9. HISTORIC AND CURRENT LAND USE AND ECONOMY

Essentially the site has been in institutional use for approximately 170 years and has been in single occupation for almost all of that time. The workhouse evolved into a public assistance institution and infirmary in the early 1930s, and became part of a general hospital in the 1940s.

Following the reorganisation of the National Health Service in the late twentieth century the ownership of the site is now split between two public healthcare organisations, however the overall impression remains that of a single base for a variety of healthcare services, including outpatients and general wards as well as a large maternity unit. Many Chelmsford residents have an affinity with St Johns as it has been the birth place for a significant proportion of the population.

This history of essentially single institutional occupation has helped maintain a cohesion and unity in treatment of buildings that has preserved the character of the former workhouse. NHS management, and its splintering in the latter twentieth century, has resulted in a number of insensitive and ad-hoc additions to buildings and the site, notably in the former workhouse gardens, although this has not affected the close relationship of buildings within the workhouse complex itself where the previous function of buildings and spaces, and their interconnections, is still readily appreciated today.

10. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Extracts from the Essex heritage sites and monuments record are reproduced in Appendix 2. The main archaeological significance within the area relates to the Napoleonic barracks and defences that preceded the workhouse.

11. LAYOUT OF THE WORKHOUSE

St. John's is the only example of a pavilion-plan workhouse in the region. The layout of buildings is formal and regimented. The formal layout has been forced despite the sloping site, with the long pavilion wards actually running against the slope, rather than across it. Like all workhouses it was designed to enable efficient control and segregation of paupers.

The main group comprised a central block, consisting of kitchen, stores, dining room, chapel, administration and master's house with three storey men's and boys' wards to the east and two storey girls and women's wards to the west. A central corridor ran east-west connecting all wards to the central administration block. Segregated airing yards were formed between wards for old men, able bodied men, boys, old women, able bodied women and girls. One and two storey receiving and casual wards and a porter's lodge were located close to the road frontage.

An isolated two storey house dated 1869, and therefore erected between the construction of the original and replacement workhouse stands 45m north west of the administration block. Its original purpose is unclear, but it was possibly an infectious disease block designed by Charles Pertrose in 1864.

An infirmary stood towards the south of the site, this was replaced by a new infirmary in a similar position in 1926. A nurses' home was also erected at this time, necessitating removal of much of the southern boundary wall of the workhouse. These new buildings deviated from the formal building alignment of Chancellor's building but served to create new positive space in what was previously very much the back of the original complex.

With the exception of an idiot's ward, located where the modern boiler house now stands, the infirmary (replaced in 1926), the male vagrant's block and ancillary buildings on the Wood Street frontage (Weigh-bridge, stables and cart-shed), Chancellor's workhouse remains intact, albeit with some modern interventions. Significantly the key elements of male/female blocks and administration block remain and their physical and functional connectivity has been preserved.

Progression from Chelmsford Union Workhouse to St John's Hospital



1921 - Workhouse



1947 - Hospital



2003 - Today

12. BUILDING FORM AND CHARACTER

The most striking aspect of the architecture of the former workhouse is its uniformity and homogeneity. Chancellor's buildings are constructed in red brick, laid in English bond and have fairly slack pitched roofs covered in natural slate with red clay angular ridge tiles.

Architectural detailing is relatively simple and this reflects the function of the workhouse. There are however characterful touches such as moulded bricks beneath eaves and stringcourses that are repeated throughout and these reinforce uniformity.

Ward blocks are one room deep, thereby dictating relatively shallow plan forms. In combination with deep windows, placed in opposition across the wards, this plan form permitted good ventilation and circulation of air. The main wards take the form of elongated fingers which run north-south, these are connected to the central administration block by a long corridor running east-west.

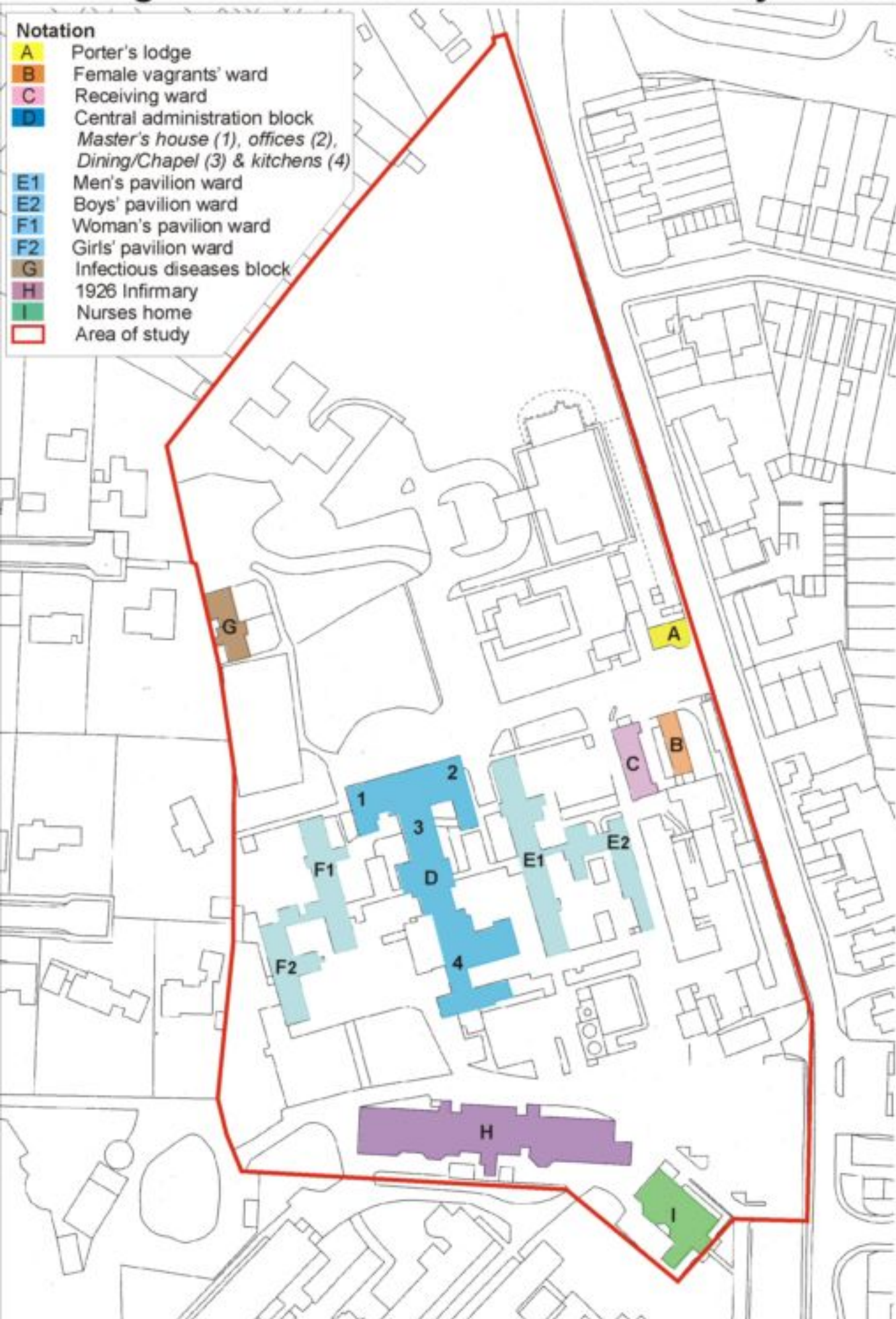
The remaining vagrants block and receiving ward are lower than the main wards, but share a unity of materials and detailing. The central administration block and master's house is deliberately more ornamental than the remainder of the workhouse, it is physically connected to the wards but is set forward of other buildings with good views across the workhouse gardens to create slightly improved environs. Unlike other buildings in the complex, the administration block/masters house incorporates heavy stone detailing around windows and two storey bays are used to embellish the main elevation. This building was designed as the polite front to the workhouse.

The nurses home and infirmary are of later construction than the other workhouse buildings. Their architecture complements that of Chancellor's buildings despite significant differences in form, materials and detailing. Both buildings utilise deeper plan forms, the infirmary being two rooms deep in part with a central corridor. These buildings have larger roofs than others within the complex and these are clad in clay plain tiles. The infirmary has flat roofed wings as a result of an additional storey being added in the 1930s. Bricks are red, but have more of a brown hue, than those used in the 1889 buildings.

13. BUILDINGS THAT HELP TO DEFINE THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA.

There are no listed buildings within the hospital. A description of individual (unlisted) buildings that contribute to the character of the area follows. Buildings have been assessed using the checklist contained in the appendix to English Heritage's advice on conservation area appraisals. Descriptions are purposely brief as it is largely their cumulative impact that produces the special character.

Building that contribute to character - Key sheet



A. Porter's Lodge – Located immediately north of site access and comprising a two storey range to Wood Street and a single storey range on its western side. Road elevation is blind, southern end is polygonal. Original doorway in southern elevation now blocked. Hipped slated roof and red brick, horned sash windows. Building has low eaves with upper floor lit by hipped dormers at either end. This attractive building defined the site access and creates visual interest along Wood Street.



B. Female vagrant's block – One storey high and four bays long located close to the original access off Wood Street, in red brick with a slated roof. Moulded bricks used at verge. Entered through a door in its northern flank, individual cells lit by windows along its length. Relatively unspectacular architecture. Limited townscape value in helping to define northern edge of main complex, main aesthetic contribution lies in group value.



C. Receiving Block – Lays adjacent to and parallel with the female vagrant's block. Of one-and-a-half storeys in red brick and slate. Symmetrical plan incorporating entrances in each of its gable ends and in the centre of the west side. End entrances flanked by sanitary facilities on their eastern side. Deep 6/6 sliding sash windows present in ground floor, upper floor lit by three gabled dormers on the east side and two

Gabled and two flat-roofed dormers on the west. Good amount of visual interest, the building helps define the intersection of main workhouse approach and interior track.

D. Master's House / Administration block

Seven bays and of two storeys. North facing. Gabled central bay, incorporating round headed recessed entrance with four light window over and terracotta plaque in gable. Two hipped, canted bays to either side with stone window surrounds. A long range of buildings extends southwards from this block incorporating first the dining hall and chapel, then a kitchen block.



Master's House – Polite front of the workhouse. Strong formal composition, robust and well ordered. Ornamentation articulates special historical role of building.

The chapel is lit by four pairs of closely set lancet windows. A gabled traverse block containing stairwells lies to the south and is surmounted by a lead bell turret. Beyond this the north/south range continues eventually abutting a three storey kitchen block that is now the only element that obviously remains from the original 1837 workhouse. A much altered three storey traverse block terminates the range



Administration/dining/chapel and kitchen range. Buildings form the core of the workhouse and constitute a strong group. Southern most range, of limited architectural merit includes a flat roofed element.

E/F. Male and female pavilion wards - In total there are four main pavilion wards. These comprise a two storey girls block and two storey women's block to the west of the administration/chapel range, and a three storey men's block and three storey boys block to the east of the administration/chapel range. The pavilion blocks lie parallel to each other, running north-south and are linked by a central corridor. Original 6/9 sliding sash windows are present, set in deep reveals with stone cills and segmental brick arches. Sash boxes are concealed behind the outer leaf of brickwork. All are of red brick with brick plat bands, and have gabled slated roofs with red ridge tiles. A small amount of moulded brick is used as string courses and gable surrounds. Occasional full storey height but shallow gabled projections spring from the side of the pavilions, accommodating stairs and sanitary facilities. Solid chimney stacks present on gables and roofs. Wards integral to the historic function of the workhouses, demonstrating key principle of segregation.



Girls pavilion block



Men's pavilion block

G. Infectious diseases block - Two storeys in red brick with hipped slated roof. Main building of five bays and symmetrical plan with central gabled projection at front containing an ocular vent dated 1869. Two storey addition to north. 6/6 sliding sash windows, some openings altered. Now converted into two dwellings, original exercise yards still evident on eastern side. Well proportioned, free standing structure enjoys attractive landscape setting.





H. Infirmary – Three storeys in red-brown brick with quoins, constructed in 1926. The central block has a hipped roof clad in plain clay tiles and projects forwards incorporating a tripartite Tuscan colonnade at the main entrance in the centre of the northern elevation. Parapetted flat roofed wings lie at either side. Deep windows with 6/6 sliding sashes, lower floors have hopper over.

Numerous modern additions at rear. In use as a general maternity unit for some time. Attractive formal composition, its scale commands the space to its front. Flat roofed additions to wings unfortunate.

I. Nurses Home – Constructed in 1926. Two-and-a-half-storeys in red-brown brick with plain clay tiled roof and timbered gables. Canted bays with balcony over to rear. Sound building although architecturally relatively unremarkable. Building helps define space in the south of the workhouse and, like the replacement infirmary, is an important part of the evolution of the workhouse as Victorian attitudes became softened in the early 20th century



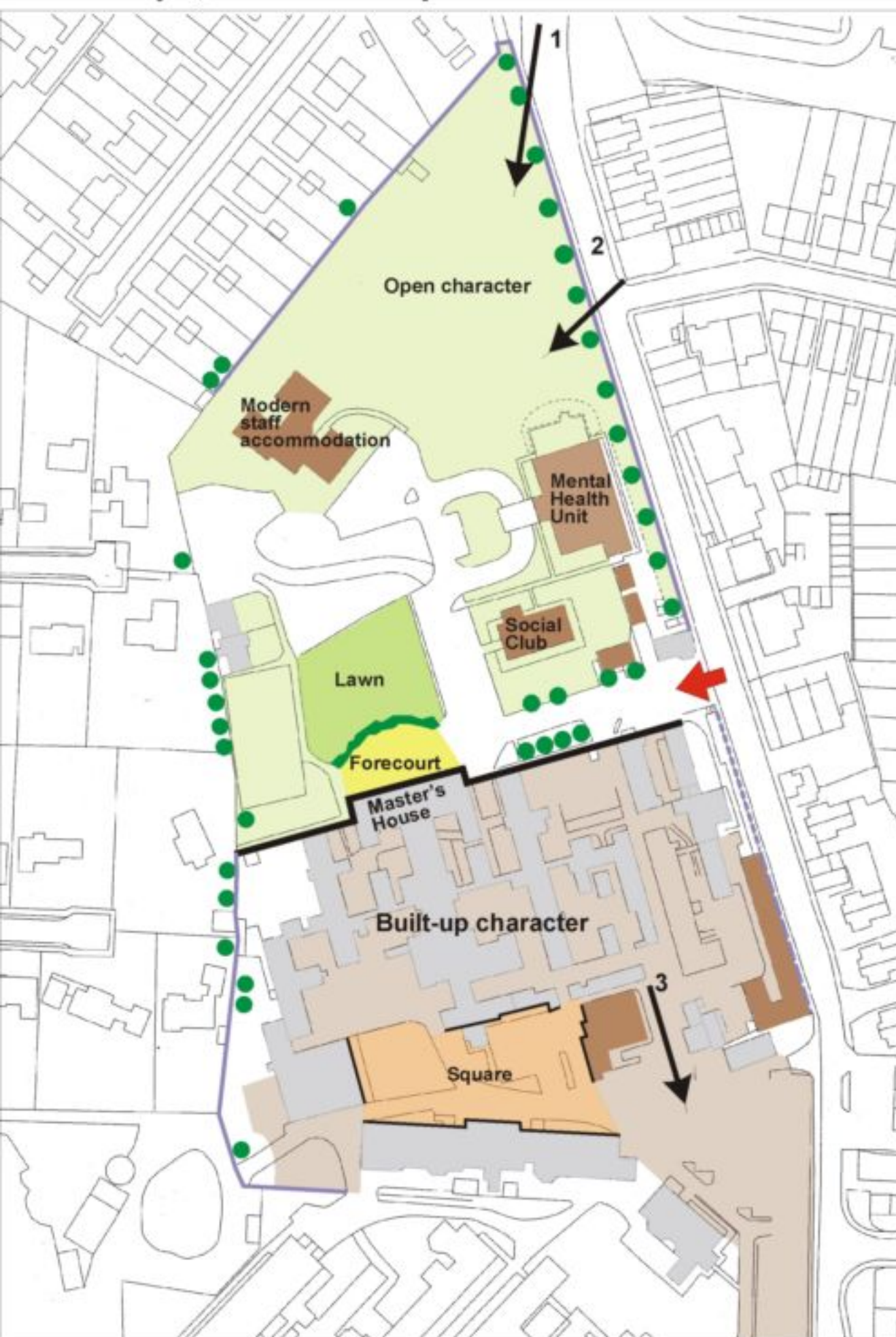
14. MATERIALS

The uniformity of materials contributes significantly to the unity of the workhouse composition. Soft orangey-red bricks are evident in all buildings except the later infirmary and nurses' home where a darker red brick is used. Brickwork within Chancellor's buildings is almost entirely laid in English bond using lime-based mortar. Economics probably meant that the bricks were produced from local clay, there may have been some recycling of materials from the 1837 workhouse although there is no evidence to support this.

Welsh slate is used on all roofs with the exception of the 1926 buildings and others that post-date the workhouse. The growth of the railway made transportation of building materials easier and cheaper, thus leading to increased use of slate in Essex where clay plain tiles would have predominated previously. Red clay ridge tiles are utilised, this being a fairly typical Victorian feature when red-brick is used in main elevations. Stone is generally used sparingly, mainly for cills, but is used more generously in the master's house/administration block.

Windows are mainly vertical sliding sashes with glazing bars and have white painted frames. Most original windows remain, with the exception of those in the master's house / administration block, which have been replaced with slender metal casements.

Townscape, views and spaces



Notation

— Strong edge

Grass/soft landscaping
in former Workhouse gardens

Hard-scape (cartways/yards etc)
within main workhouse grouping

Former workhouse buildings

Late 20th century structures

● Trees of amenity value

← Site access

Views 1. Workhouse on hill,
dramatic skyline
2. Infectious disease block
within open gardens
3. Nurses home terminates
vista

— Robust wall/wall & railings

- - - Lower section of wall replacing old wall and lacking
solidity of original

- - - Modern 5m high wall - rear of estates block

15. TOWNSCAPE, VIEWS AND SPACES

Within the conservation area there is a clear distinction between the main complex of workhouse buildings, where there is a very strong urban character, and the former workhouse gardens, which remain generally open and undeveloped, although car parking and a handful of modern buildings have encroached into the landscape. A strong edge is formed between these areas of distinct character by the northern flanks of the female vagrant's block, the receiving ward, men's pavilion and women's pavilion and master's house, the latter of which is articulated by being set slightly forward.



View into site from main entrance. Buildings to left form strong edge between the main grouping and the more open former gardens to the right (beyond the porter's lodge). Note – Fire escape on end of men's block and horizontal railings to left of access are notable visual distractions.

The workhouse itself is built to a high density. Mainly two and three storey buildings are arranged formally and create tight urban courtyards which would have been used as segregated airing yards for paupers. The level of enclosure that can still be experienced in these spaces gives one a good impression of life and conditions in the workhouse



View into airing yard

Elsewhere a number of cartways and walkways traverse the interior of the complex, these are defined by buildings with a high degree of enclosure and are arranged formally at right angles, being straight and parallel to buildings. Hardscape predominates within the workhouse complex itself, there is a distinct lack of soft landscaping with the exception of a narrow landscaped strip on the western boundary of the site.



View along interior cartway, with old receiving ward to left and boy's pavilion ward to right. Buildings enclose space, and hardscaping reinforces urban character of main workhouse grouping.

Despite the encroachment of hospital buildings into the former workhouse gardens in the latter half of the twentieth century, including the mental health unit, staff accommodation block and flat-roofed social club, this area retains an open and undeveloped character in contrast to the workhouse itself which lies to the south on higher ground. The extreme contrast in density in these two areas, and strong edge formed by the northern facades of workhouse buildings, together with the topography, produce dramatic views of the workhouse buildings when viewed from the north.



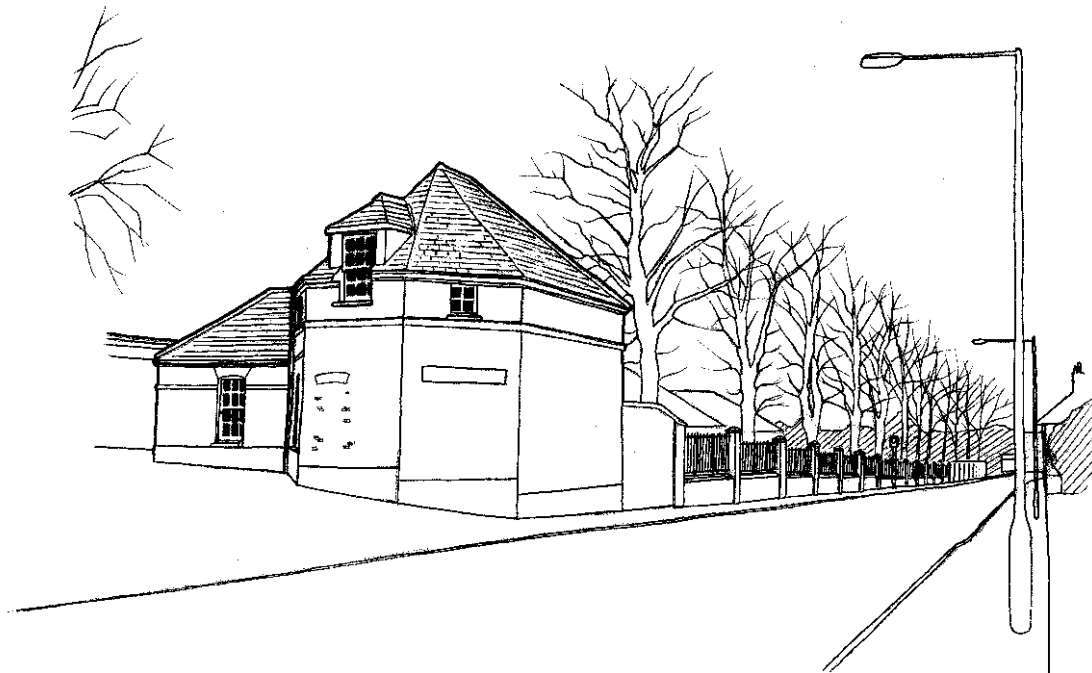
View of main grouping from bottom of hill across former workhouse gardens. Dramatic skyline created by topography and strong edge. Roofline enlivened by chimneys, cupolas, turrets and varying storey heights.

A high wall would have surrounded the workhouse to detach paupers from the surrounding community, the majority of this wall which is approximately 2-2.5m high remains intact with the notable exceptions of the southern boundary where most of the wall was removed no doubt to permit expansion of the hospital to the south, and the southern section of the Wood Street frontage where a newer wall replaces the original wall which incorporated a number of structures including cart-sheds, stables and the male vagrant's block. The wall that does remain, together with a number of mature trees around the margins of the grounds, provide good enclosure to the periphery of the former workhouse gardens enhancing and reinforcing the Wood Street frontage.



The wall at the bottom of Wood Street is approximately 2.5m high and is a strong and robust feature that contributes significantly to the feel of Wood Street, which is otherwise characterised by nondescript mixed twentieth century ribbon development and is dominated by vehicular traffic. The wall retains higher ground on the hospital side and a projecting plinth is present at the level of the ground behind. Constructed in soft red bricks, the wall incorporates uniformly spaced pilasters with sloping shoulders, plinth capping bricks are also used to provide

ornamental coping. The upper section of the wall gives way to railings. A retaining plinth wall remains with concrete coping stones, 18 inch thick brick pillars are uniformly spaced carrying simple iron railings with no decorative detailing. The railings run up the hill to a further short section of wall which terminates in the porter's lodge placed hard up against the road and forming an edge to the street. A line of preserved lime trees behind the wall and railings overhang Wood Street, forming a strong linear feature of high amenity value.



Views up and down Wood Street. Wall, wall and railings, buildings and trees within hospital grounds provide good enclosure and character to the west side of the street. Trees are the subject of a tree preservation order (Ref : 2003/43)

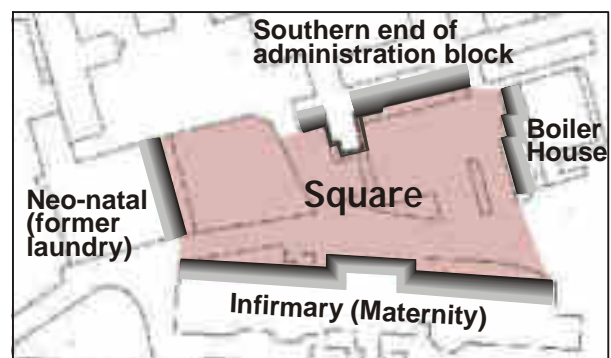
The upper section of wall to Wood Street, south of the site entrance has been replaced and consists first of a 2m retaining wall then a 5m high blank wall that is actually the rear of a modern flat roofed estates block on the road boundary of the hospital. These walls reflect the imagery of the old workhouse wall in the most basic sense, but lack proper detailing. The lower wall lacks robustness in comparison to the original wall, the 5m section is a fairly bland and intimidating feature in Wood Street.

The remaining sections of original wall provide a tangible reference to the original function of the site and clearly serve to segregate the former workhouse from public and other private land beyond. Definition of private and public spaces within the site is now more blurred no doubt because the current hospital has evolved slowly over-time utilising most of the buildings and spaces of the old workhouse. Many of the wing walls and gate piers that provided additional segregation and security within the main workhouse grouping have been lost over time.

Other site features and spaces that contribute to character include a square to the south of the old workhouse complex defined by the 1926 infirmary (maternity unit), a much altered laundry block (neo-natal clinic), the southern end of the main administration block and a modern boiler house. The neo-natal clinic and maternity unit take access off the square, the latter in particular features a good formal elevation to enclose the southern side of the square. The space within the square is somewhat disrupted by ad-hoc car parking and street furniture.



View into square



The forecourt to the master's house and administration block on the northern side of the complex can still be distinguished and is separated from other car parking within the former workhouse gardens by a laurel hedge and formal lawn. The forecourt, hedge and lawn provide a good setting for the building which is relatively grand and well ornamented in deliberate contrast to the rest of the workhouse.



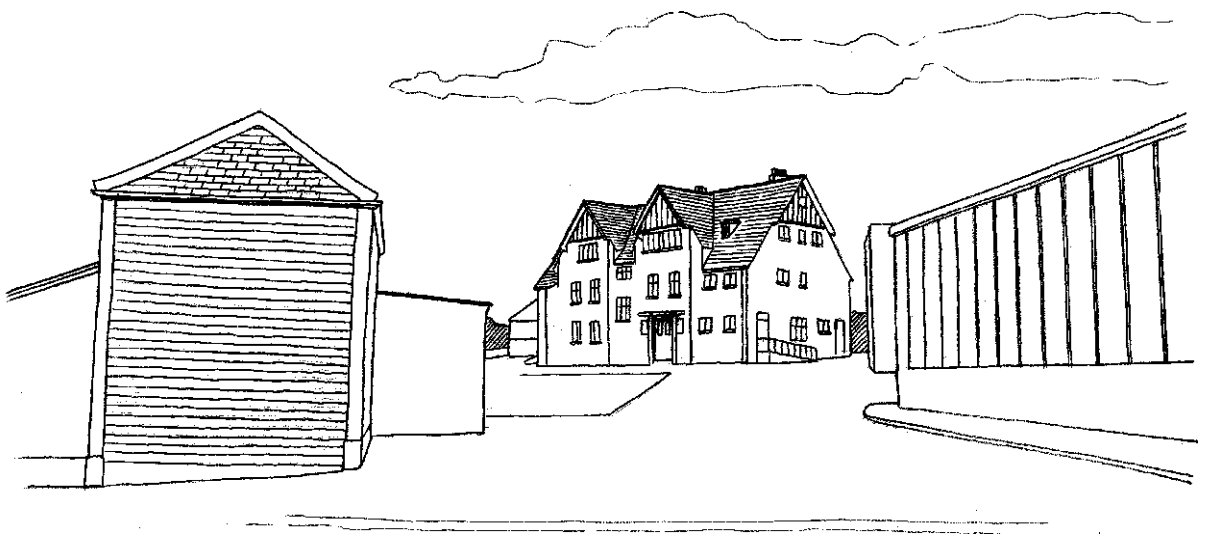
A short avenue of pollarded lime trees lies at the entrance beyond the porter's lodge. Whilst some trees have been lost those that remain still form an attractive

feature on the approach to the master's house / administration block and have been the subject of a tree preservation order (ref : 2003/43). The trees like the master's house, provide a welcome foil to the harshness of the workhouse buildings to the south.



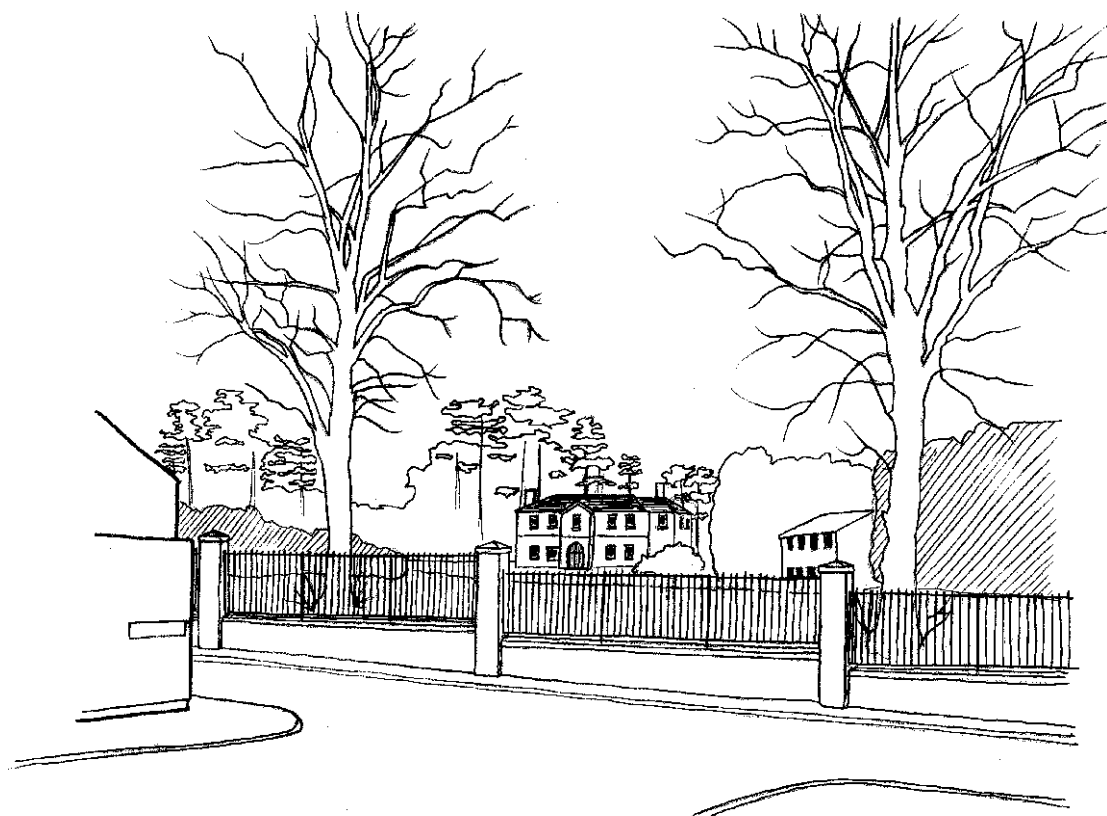
View of avenue at site entrance looking back from master's house / administration block

The 1926 nurses' home now terminates the vista at the top of the original cartway that runs north-south through the site. The track would have once ended in an enclosed yard.



View looking northwards up cartway to nurses home.

The former infectious diseases block lies on the western side of the former workhouse gardens. It is framed by trees in views from Bruce Grove at its junction with Wood Street. The undeveloped character of the former workhouse gardens, and impact of trees and wall/railings is evident.



View across former workhouse gardens to old infectious diseases block. Building framed by trees in foreground, pine trees of houses in Links Drive provide a backdrop.

16. CHARACTER OVERVIEW

'The distinctiveness of a place may come from much more than its appearance. It may draw on other senses and experience, such as sounds, smells, local environmental conditions or historical associations, for example those connected with particular crafts or famous people.' Conservation area appraisals – English Heritage.

Whilst there are specific spaces, elements and views which contribute to the townscape of the former Chelmsford Union Workhouse, much of the character of the area is derived from the architectural uniformity of its buildings; their homogeneity and surviving inter-relationships. The social history associated with the former workhouse, its institutional past and the completeness of the complex also contribute significantly to the character of the conservation area.

The workhouse and its grounds are an important component of the nineteenth-century social history of Chelmsford, it is the only surviving pavilion plan workhouse in the region and is a good example of the work of Frederick Chancellor, a prolific and renowned local architect of regional note.

17. NEGATIVE FEATURES

Features and elements that detract from the character of the conservation area include:

- The modern buildings within the former gardens in the north of the site, including the mental health unit, social club and staff accommodation are poorly sited and make inefficient use of land. Their layout and building forms, materials and detailing bear no relation to the character of the original workhouse buildings and they disrupt the openness of this part of the site.
- Car parking occurs in a fairly ad-hoc fashion across the site, small pockets have cropped up within the old exercise yards, in gaps between buildings and outside designated spaces. This disrupts, and often dominates, the spaces between buildings.
- A large amount of uncoordinated signage and street furniture detracts from the former workhouse buildings and the spaces between them. Equipment cabins, shelters, car parking machines, bollards, lighting columns, signs, bins etc are generally functional in appearance, lack consistency in design/treatment and are often unnecessarily prominently sited.
- Excepting the lime trees on the Wood Street frontage and at the main entrance, landscaping lacks any proper structure. A handful of small ornamental trees, islands of grass and occasional beds, lack cohesion and do little to reinforce the character of spaces. Hard landscaping is similarly disjointed with conspicuous patching, illogical changes in material and odd sections of dwarf wall that disturb the eye.
- The modern boiler house in the centre of the site is aesthetically brutal and unsympathetic to the architecture of Chancellor's workhouse, its high metal chimney is an unsightly eyesore, highly conspicuous for some distance around including those views of the former workhouse from the top of Wood Street.
- Further conspicuous interventions are evident within the main group of buildings including external utility runs (elevated pipework and cabling on gantries), galvanised steel fire escapes, altered openings and flat-roofed adjunctures. These are of functional, utilitarian design and create visual clutter.
- The close boarded fence running westward from the northern flank of the former womens' block, whilst not particularly prominent, jars with the more robust walling evident elsewhere.

- The detailing of the original perimeter wall is absent from that stretch of the Wood Street frontage south of the porter's lodge. The lower section of this stretch lacks robustness with the void created by the demolition of the male vagrants' block apparent from the road. The rear wall of the estates block turns its back on Wood Street, presenting a high featureless elevation to the road.
- The space in front of the nurses home lacks definition – the space leaks away and lacks enclosure on all sides other than that defined by the facade of the nurses home.
- The former emergency medical scheme buildings in the south of the site are low, sprawling structures of lightweight construction. They do not sit well with the more solid and substantial workhouse buildings within the conservation area to the north.

Compared with the strength of character that the workhouse possesses these negative features are relatively minor in significance and can be satisfactorily addressed through specific enhancement measures or as part of the future evolution of most of the site into a new residential area.

Negative features



Notation

- Modern interventions in workhouse gardens
- Car parking disrupting space between buildings or quality of open space
- Other areas significantly affected by clutter
- Modern boiler house
- Close boarded fence
- Rear of estates block
- Visually weak wall
- Conservation area boundary

18. POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT

The character and appearance of the area could be enhanced by the following measures;

- Removal of the modern buildings in the lower (northern) portion of the grounds would restore the historical sense of openness in this area, thereby reinforcing the contrast between workhouse and gardens. It is recognised however that future residential development of St Johns will inevitably result in new development in the former gardens – careful consideration of the intensity of development, layout and form of development in this area will help maintain a contrast between the main workhouse grouping and their former gardens. Further ad-hoc or piecemeal development should be resisted in those parts of the grounds that remain open, in particular the forecourt/lawn in front of the former masters house.
- Rationalisation of car parking arrangements would improve the hospital environs. More careful consideration of the areas designated for car parking together with their screening and landscaping, stricter enforcement of parking in prohibited areas and promotion of alternatives to the car (particularly for staff) should all be considered. Minimising the impact of car parking is a factor significant to the residential future for the site.
- Street furniture should be consolidated, rationalised and sited so as to minimise its visual impact. Coordinated bespoke designs should be used in recognition of the special interest of the area. There is no historical precedent on the site however indicating an appropriate design, therefore high quality contemporary designs would be appropriate.
- In particular clutter should be reduced within the square defined by the maternity block, neo-natal unit, southern end of the main administration range and the boiler house. Replacement of the boiler house and alteration of the traverse range at the end of the administration block should be considered to provide more sympathetic buildings that provide better enclosure and definition to the square.
- Structure should be introduced to tree planting and soft landscaping elements, either as part of enhancement works or as part of new development proposals. Occasional use of good-specimen trees within the main group of buildings, such as in the square in front of the maternity block, would provide focal points. Formal planting of avenue trees within the lower grounds would help enclose walkways and frame views, thereby increasing enjoyment of the space – historical precedents should be researched.
- Hard surfacing should be tidied, replaced wholesale wherever possible rather than patched, and visual logic introduced to changes of material. The forecourt to the master's house would benefit from a softer, more natural treatment such as bound shingle, to harmonise with the unique role of the building.

- Pipework and utility runs should be placed underground to reduce their visual impact. This could be done in combination with resurfacing works. Reuse of the site for residential purposes in the future is an opportunity to achieve both of those enhancement measures.
- Removal of the boiler chimney would be welcomed should the possibility of practical alternative means of heating arise. It significantly detracts from the otherwise interesting and dramatic skyline of the former workhouse.
- Where fire escapes are prominent they should be repositioned to less conspicuous elevations if practical or otherwise should be painted a dark colour. Removal of modern flat roof additions to the workhouse buildings would help restore the original proportions of the airing yards between pavilions.
- The close boarded fencing running westwards from the northern flank of the former womens' block should be replaced with a robust wall built in red-brick and detailed to match those evident elsewhere within and around the grounds. Sections of the perimeter wall that have been demolished or lost should be replaced.
- The newer sections of wall at the Wood Street frontage should be replaced, with a combination of robust walling detailed to match of the original wall that remains, and buildings designed with active frontages to sit harmoniously with those designed by Chancellor – there is historical precedent for this and it will help enliven the street frontage.
- The space in front of the nurses home would benefit from better definition, perhaps by additional or replacement buildings addressing the space
- The site access is extremely wide, feeling more so since the removal of the open porch on the southern side of the porter's lodge and the male vagrants' ward. Reinstatement of a building on the southern side of the access, the porter's lodge porch and other measures to visually narrow the access and reduce highway dominance would be welcomed.
- Given the significance of buildings, walls/railings and trees on the Wood Street frontage the planned improvement to the B1007 should be reconsidered, as part of a future planning brief for St Johns, to enable retention of these important features.
- The proposed relocation of hospital functions to Broomfield will enable removal of the prefabricated buildings in the south of the site, and their replacement with development more respectful of the character of the old workhouse grouping.

Future changes of use of buildings as part of redevelopment will provide a significant opportunity for character enhancement and reinforcement.

These are factors for consideration in a conservation area study.

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Appendix 1 – Extracts from Chelmsford Borough Local Plan adopted April 1997

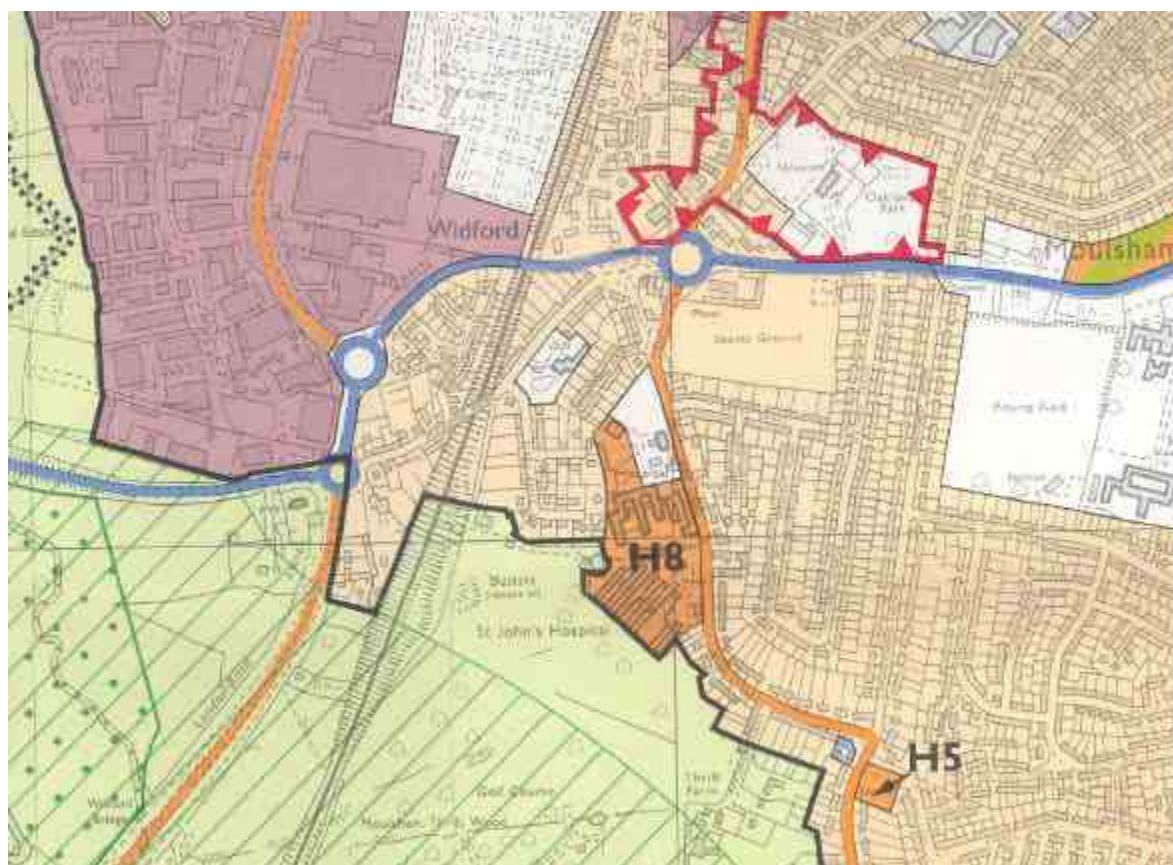
Allocation of Sites for New Housing (Para 2.1000 p40)

The following sites shown on the Proposals Map are defined as sites for development or redevelopment for new housing.





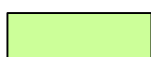

Site 8 – St Johns Hospital, Chelmsford (H8)

A site of 4.62 hectares (11.4 acres) where the Council has resolved to grant planning permission subject to the conclusion of a Section 106 Agreement. It is estimated that the site may accommodate about 115 dwellings. The remainder of the hospital site is to be retained for health service purposes.

Proposals map extract



Notation

	Site for new housing		Urban area boundary
	Housing policy area		principal road
	Metropolitan Greenbelt		
	Special Landscape Area		

Appendix 2 – Extracts from Essex Heritage Sites and Monuments Records

ESSEX HERITAGE CONSERVATION RECORD

(Monument Report)

27/01/2003

SMR No: 849

Site Name: Star Battery

Record Type: Monument

MonUID: EX3164

Location:

National Grid Reference: TL697050

FCE

TL60NE

Administrative Area: Non Parish Area

CHELMSFORD,CHELMSFORD,ESSEX

Description:

Star Battery and Old Barracks 1796. Later used as a workhouse. <1> Part of Chelmsford's Napoleonic defences (see 5742, 8930 & 8931). The Star Battery was built in 1803 and described as a 'field fort'. It was to accommodate 600 men with a detached openwork protecting its southwestern flank. This was to overlook and command the Great London Road which passed through Widford. The battery was at the western end of a defensive chain 2.8 km long, which terminated at the larger artillery fort at Galleywood Common (see 8930). The defences were never used and dismantled prior to Napoleon's final defeat in 1815. Most of the Star Battery was obliterated by the Chelmsford to London railway built in the last century. Part of the easternmost ditch survives within Chelmsford Golf Course at TL 69860488.. <2> - <

Site Assessment = Levelled. <1> Mostly destroyed, but some of the eastern earthworks survive in golf course.. <2>

Classification:

Type and Date:

Materials/Evidence:

BATTERY	Post Medieval - 1803 AD to	
BATTERY	Post Medieval - 1803 AD to	EARTHWORK
BATTERY	Post Medieval - 1803 AD to	DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Associated Finds:

Status and other references:

Sites & Monuments Record - 849

Old SMR Number - TL60-116

Rating and Scoring:

Condition	C	-
Completeness	7	-

Associated Events/Activities:

Survey - measured: FULL SURVEY by RCHME,, 01/01/1992 - 31/12/1992

EX3165

Sources:

<1>	DESC TEXT: TL60-116, , , ,	EHCR	EX3166
<2>	DESC TEXT: Galleywood Entrenchments, , RCHME, 1992,	EHCR	EX3167
<3>	DESC TEXT: Chelmsford Golf Club 1893-1993, , Warden, K & Williams, M, 1993,	EHCR	EX3168
<4>	DESC TEXT: The Defence of Chelmsford, , Wright, AC, 1974, vol 9, p15-21	EHCR	EX3169

ESSEX HERITAGE CONSERVATION RECORD

(Monument Report)

27/01/2003

SMR No: 849

<5>	DESC TEXT: Essex and the French Wars, , Wood, RGE, 1977, ERO publication no. 70	EHCR	EX3170
<6>	MENTION: Plan of entrenchments, , , 1804, D-DU 289-47	EHCR	EX3171

Compiler:

Gilman PJ - Heritage Information and Records
White Clifford Manning - Unassigned

Created By:

Date:

Updated By:

Date:

ESSEX HERITAGE CONSERVATION RECORD

(Monument Report)

27/01/2003

SMR No: 8931**Site Name:** Bastion trace between Widford & Galleywood**Record Type:** Monument**MonUID:** EX28555**Location:****National Grid Reference:** TL69600490
TL70330273FCE TL60SE
FCE TL70SW**Administrative Area:** Non Parish Area CHELMSFORD,CHELMSFORD,ESSEX**Description:**

Part of the Napoleonic defences of Chelmsford, constructed 1803. The bastion trace ran for 2.8 km between Star Fort at Widford and artillery fort at Galleywood. The defences were never used, and dismantled by 1813. The bastion trace comprised of ditch and rampart, and zig-zagged from the Star fort at Widford, through the grounds of the present St Johns Hospital, across Wood St and onto Galleywood between the present Galleywood Rd and Beehive Lane. Some survive on the golf course as golfing hazards. <1> <2> Elsewhere some survived until as late as the 1950's, but most were levelled during the course of the C19. Although observed in APs, most of the area where the trace was located is now under housing development. A parchmark of a section of the trace beneath the present Chelmer Park is visible on AP <3> <1>. <4>.

Classification:**Type and Date:**EARTHWORK
BASTIONPost Medieval - 1803 AD to
Post Medieval - 1803 AD to**Materials/Evidence:**

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Associated Finds:**Status and other references:**Sites & Monuments Record - 8931
Old SMR Number - TL69SE
Old SMR Number - TL70SW**Rating and Scoring:****Associated Events/Activities:**

Survey - partial: PART SURVEY by RCHME,, 01/01/1992 - 31/12/1992

EX28556

Sources:

<3>	AP: MAL 76054.250, , MAL, 1976,	RCHME	EX28557
<1>	DESC TEXT: Galleywood Entrenchments, , RCHME, 1992,	EHCR	EX3167
<2>	DESC TEXT: Chelmsford Golf Club 1893-1993, , Warden, K & Williams, M, 1993,	EHCR	EX3168
<4>	AP: CP/00/22/13, , Tyler, Sue, 2000,	EHCR	EX60451

Compiler:

White Clifford Manning - Unassigned

ESSEX HERITAGE CONSERVATION RECORD

(Monument Report)

27/01/2003

SMR No: 8931

Created By:

Date:

Updated By:

Date: