

Chelmsford - Central Conservation Area

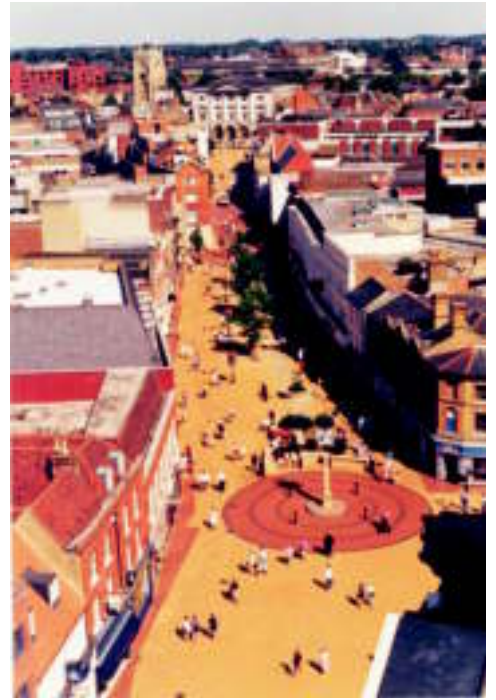
Status:

Adopted guidance

Design and conservation
01245 606294
michael.hurst@chelmsford.gov.uk



2003-2004
Quality of the Built Environment



Preface

Chelmsford Central conservation area is at the historic heart of the town embracing the Cathedral and top of the High Street. There is considerable pressure for change to its character, particularly through anticipated major redevelopment in close proximity to its boundaries. This document seeks to define the area's special character to inform any future changes and recommend proposals for enhancement, to underpin a subsequent management plan document.

There are six designated conservation areas within the town. These include Moulsham Street, New London Road, Baddow Road/River Can, West End and The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation, with the Central area forming the heart of the town (Fig. 1).

The research and fieldwork for this appraisal was carried out during 2006. Public consultation was carried out between 6 June 2007 and 19 July 2007. The document was approved by planning committee on 1 October 2007 as the basis for conservation, enhancement and management of the central area.

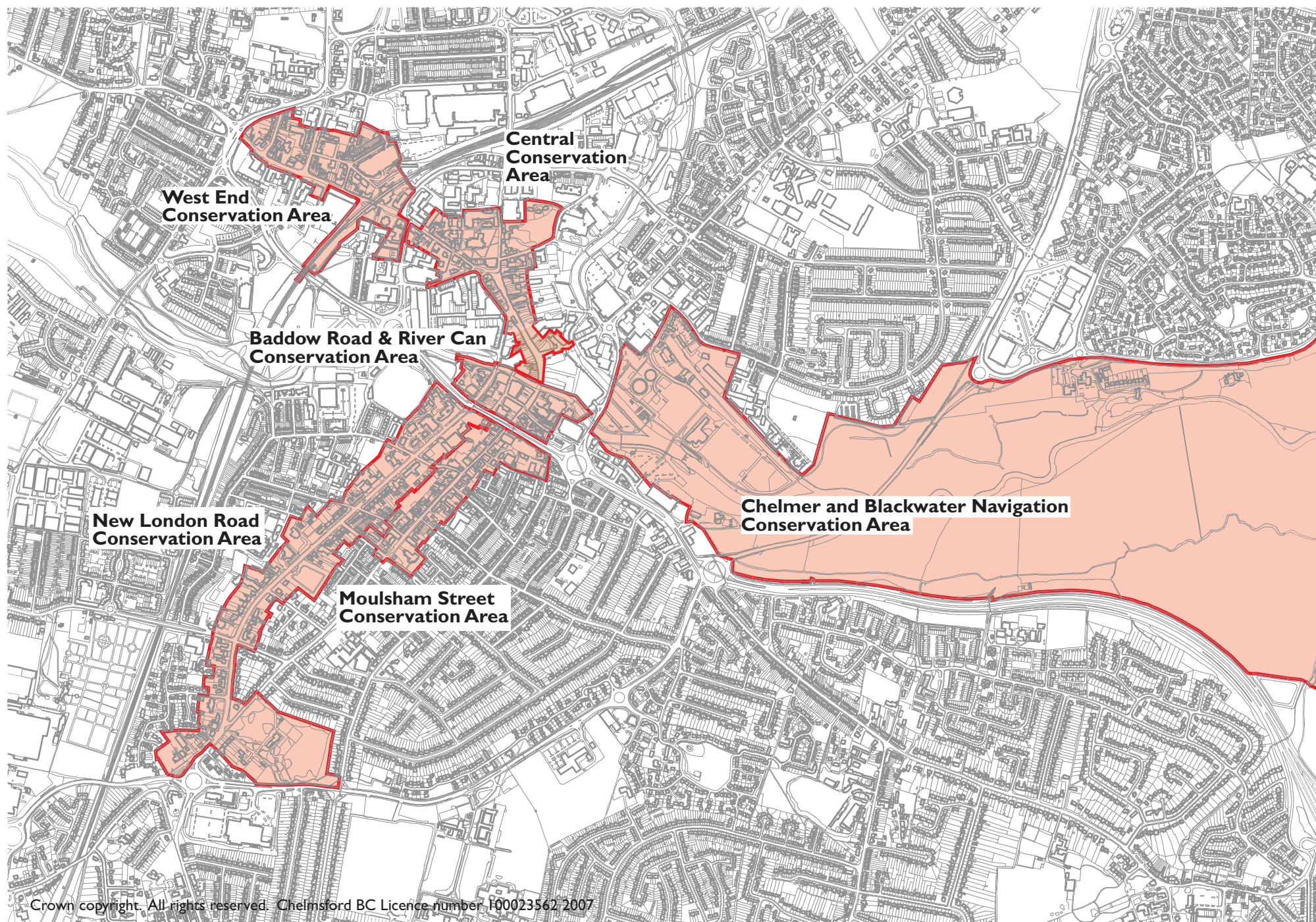
The extension of the boundary to include the southern part of the High Street was approved by Cabinet on the 6 November 2007, with immediate effect.

Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure this study clearly defines the character of the area, any omission of a particular building, feature or space does not necessarily mean that it is not considered to be of interest.

This appraisal forms part of a programme of planning work based on Chelmsford town centre Area Action Plan.

| Contents | Page |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| Purpose of this appraisal | |
| 2. Conservation Areas | 1 |
| Development and Planning Issues | |
| 3. Policy | 2 |
| Existing Statutory Planning policy | |
| Emerging Statutory Planning Policy | |
| Planning Guidance | |
| 4. Central Conservation Area | 4 |
| Character Statement | |
| 5. Location | 5 |
| Landscape setting | |
| 6. Archaeology | 7 |
| 7. Historical development | 7 |
| Cartographic Evidence | |
| 8. Land use | 12 |
| 9. Townscape | 15 |
| Views | |
| 10. Materials and details | 16 |
| Shopfronts | |
| Street Surfaces | |
| Street Furniture | |
| 11. Area Analysis | 24 |
| Assessment of Buildings | |
| Character Area 1 | |
| Duke Street | |
| Character Area 2 | |
| High Street | |
| Character Area 3 | |
| Cathedral Precinct | |
| Character Area 4 - Proposed extension to the conservation area | |
| South of High Street, Springfield Road and New London Road | |
| 12. Enhancement and management action | 39 |
| Paving and street furniture | |
| Space improvements | |
| Redevelopment of negative buildings | |
| 13. Management Issues | 42 |
| Special Advertising Controls | |
| Building maintenance | |
| Space improvements | |
| Space Management | |
| Town Centre Management | |
| Enforcement | |
| Guidance | |
| Monitoring | |
| 14 Conclusion | 43 |
| 15 Annex A | 44 |
| 1997 Local Plan Policies | |
| Bibliography | |

Figure 1. Town centre context showing conservation areas



1. Introduction

Purpose of this appraisal

1.1 This appraisal aims to examine and define the character of the Central area of the town and to describe its current appearance. The scope of the appraisal includes assessing the character of adjoining areas. Some aspects of the area contribute to the special character, for which the conservation area was designated, some have a neutral effect and some even detract from the area. These will be identified to help further the planning aim to 'preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area.' It was not designated purely to protect existing buildings and spaces.

1.2 This appraisal has several aims:

- To define the special character of the area.
- To raise awareness amongst property owners and the general public of the heritage importance of the area.
- To help inform owners, occupiers, professionals and developers when they propose alterations, extensions and redevelopment.
- To inform Chelmsford Borough councillors and planners when determining planning applications.
- To inform Essex County Council, as highways authority, when making proposals.
- To justify the existing boundaries and consider possible boundary changes.
- To provide a basis for the future enhancement of the area.
- To form a basis to develop a management plan to actively enhance the conservation area.

1.3 The boundaries of the conservation area have been reviewed as part of the appraisal process. The description and analysis of the area justifies maintaining the boundary of the existing designated area. The boundary to the north and west is quite clearly defined by the junction between modern development and the distinctive character of the conservation area. To the east the car park area, although important to the setting of the area, doesn't relate to the Central area's character.

1.4 Amendments to the boundary were made to the south. The area has a number of distinct features which relate to the character of the Central area, in particular the part of the High Street already designated. Section 12, character area 4, includes analysis and description of the area within the external conservation area boundary.

2. Conservation Areas

2.1 Conservation areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* (the Act).

2.2 Designation of a conservation area places firmer planning controls over certain types of development, including extensions, boundary treatments, the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees. It does not prevent any change to an area and it may be subject to many pressures, both good and bad, that will affect its character and appearance. Due to the commercial and mixed use of the majority of the buildings within the Central conservation area planning permission is required for most external alterations. Furthermore any internal or external alterations to listed buildings requires listed building consent.

2.3 During the post war years there was widespread redevelopment of the town centre, which involved the demolition of many historic buildings. Since the designation of the conservation area, combined with greater appreciation of the importance of historic buildings in the town centre and the listing of many buildings, the historic character has been protected more effectively.

2.4 Chelmsford Council as local planning authority (LPA) has a duty to designate areas of special character as conservation areas. Once designated the LPA has various duties imposed by the Act, including considering whether development proposals and street scene works will preserve or enhance the character of the area and to formulate proposals for enhancement.

Development and Planning Issues

2.5 There is constant pressure for change within the town centre from infill development and frontage alterations. Major redevelopment is planned for particular sites adjacent to the Central conservation area as described in the emerging town centre Area Action Plan. Figure 2 shows sites with recent or proposed redevelopment and other sites with potential for redevelopment.

3. Policy background

Existing Statutory Planning Policy

3.1 The County Structure Plan adopted 2001 (HC2) and Chelmsford Borough Local Plan adopted 1997 (ENV6, 7 and 8) provide the policy to protect or enhance the character of conservation areas, for the preparation of improvement schemes and to encourage regular maintenance.

3.2 The High Street is core retail area and the whole of the conservation area, other than the western end of Duke Street and Market Road, are within the historic core, an area of archaeological potential. The southern part of the conservation area is within the flood zone. See annex A for planning policies.

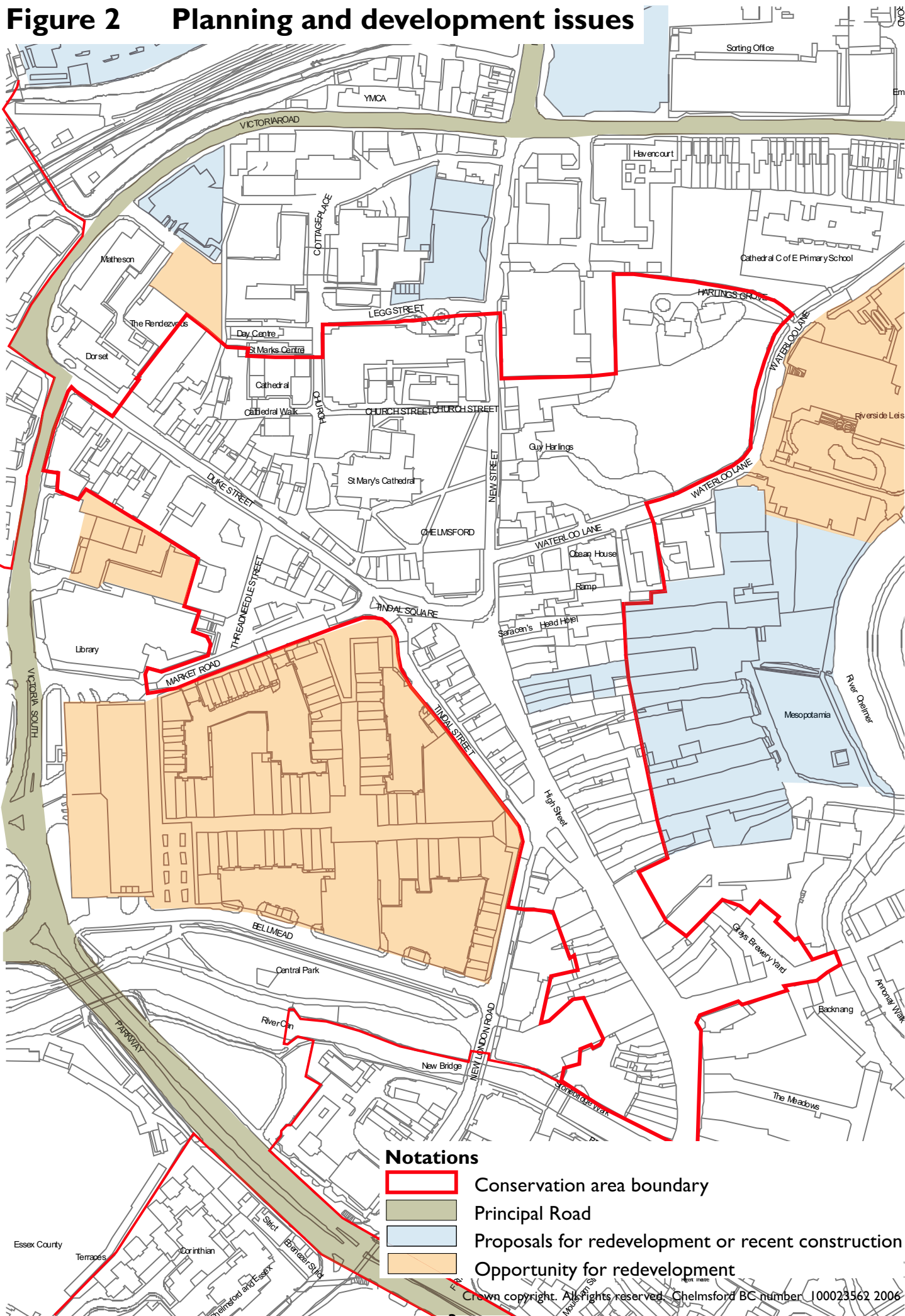
Emerging Statutory Planning Policy

3.3 Chelmsford Borough Council's Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (key parts of the Local Development Framework) are expected to be adopted in late 2007, to replace the 1997 local plan. See annex A for a comparison between the 1997 local plan policies and the emerging policies.

3.4 The council has produced an Area Action Plan (AAP) (November 2006) for the town centre to form part of the local development framework, also to be adopted in late 2007. This includes several significant proposals which are within and directly adjacent to the Central area:

- A new public square in the location of Tindal Square.
- Pedestrian priority in Duke Street, between the High Street and the railway station.
- Enhancing the existing pedestrian routes.
- Relocating the magistrates' court.
- Redevelopment or refurbishment of the High Chelmer shopping centre, market and the associated multi storey car park.
- Development within the County Hall complex.
- Redevelopment of the land to the east side of High Street.

Figure 2 Planning and development issues



3.5 The AAP also sets out wider strategic direction, including limiting building height in the historic core and identifying scope for an increase in the scale of buildings within in the town beyond the historic core. This appraisal intends to inform and assist the sensitive implementation of development proposals.

Planning Guidance

3.6 A Development Framework (February 2002) has been prepared for the land east of the High Street. This sets out the constraints of the site and principles on which the land can be developed.

3.7 A planning brief (July 2004) was adopted for the redevelopment of the land at New Street/Legg Street, this identifies the opportunity for a mixed use development of 3 and 4 storeys, with potential to significantly improve the street scene and setting of the conservation area (see Fig. 2).

3.8 Urban site guidance has been produced, which will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in early 2008. A town centre Public Realm Strategy will also be produced in the future.

4. Central Conservation Area

4.1 The Central conservation area (Fig.3) was designated in June 1971, the boundaries had minor amendments in May 1982 and April 1991. There were short reports prepared for committee at each of the revisions to the boundaries; however there has been no comprehensive review of the area or its boundaries since its first designation. Following appraisal of this report the southern part of the High Street was included within the conservation area (see fig. 41)

4.2 The present conservation area (Fig.4) includes the Cathedral precinct, Church Road, Church Lane, Tindal Street, Tindal Square, Threadneedle Street, the northern end of the High Street and parts of Duke Street, New Street, Market Road and Waterloo Lane. There are 33 listed buildings within the conservation area. The last listing survey was done rapidly in 1978, so there is potential for further buildings to be listed as older structures are revealed during works and perceptions of relative importance develop over time. The Edwardian and interwar blocks of County Hall have recently been listed in recognition of their national architectural and historic interest.

Character Statement

4.3 The character of the Chelmsford Central area is derived from its relationship with the river, the local topography, the medieval street pattern, traditional buildings and retail, ecclesiastical, administrative and judicial functions.

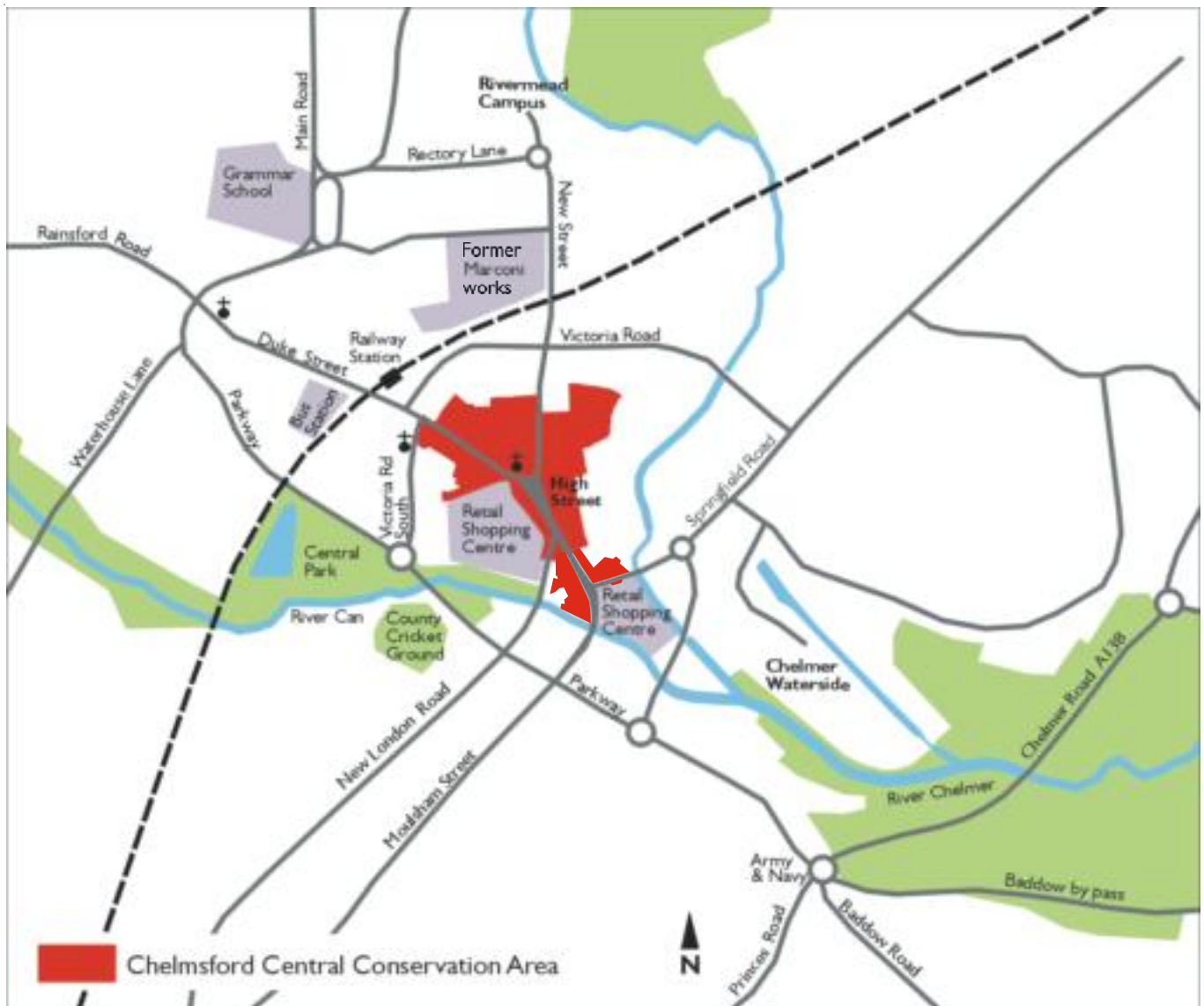
4.4 The convergence of routes at the crossing of the River Can provided the commercial success of the market town. The higher ground gave some protection from the frequent flooding. This subtle change in the topography, combined with the relationship with the rivers is essential to the character of the area.

4.5 The Central area has a tight knit fine grain urban character based on a distinctive Y shaped street pattern, with built edges defining spaces, usually with active frontages, predominantly hard landscaped. The Y shaped historic street pattern remains a strong defining feature of the town, with the elongated triangle of the medieval market place clearly evident. The narrow building frontages and plots dating from the foundation of the town also remain in places. The scale is typical of historic market towns, mostly 3 storey shallow plan frontage buildings of varying widths in deep narrow plots. More dominant landmark buildings, such as the Cathedral, Shire Hall and County Hall express the historic role and status of the town as an administrative, religious and judicial centre.

4.6 The mix of uses gives considerable vitality and activity to the Central area, whilst the historic market place is no longer used for this purpose, it remains easily recognisable and an important public space.

4.7 Buildings are a mixture of architectural styles. Other than important public buildings the scale relates directly to the Chelmsford's status as a market town, with height predominantly 3 storeys.

Figure 3. Location Plan



5 Location

5.1 The town is located centrally in the county of Essex, with the former Roman road between London and Colchester passing through as the former A12 along Moulsham Street and Springfield Road, bridging the Rivers Can and Chelmer. The underlying geology is boulder clay, which forms a plateau along the line of the Roman Road, and merges with a seam of London Clay to the south.

5.2 The town centre is within a valley, with the High Street located on an area of higher ground between the junction of the River Can and River Chelmer. The population of the whole town is approximately 100,000, although less than 100 people currently live within the Central conservation area. The Central area falls within the unparished Moulsham and Central Area.



5.3 The Central area physical character is derived first from its relationship with the Rivers Can and Chelmer. This important crossing point on the main route from London to East Anglia made the area an important and commercially successful site. Second, the higher ground allowed the High Street to be laid out to the north reducing the risk of flooding. Third, the medieval street pattern remains intact.

5.4 The historic core of the town extends beyond the Central conservation area, northwards along Duke Street and southwards along Moulsham Street.

Landscape setting

5.6 The centre of the town had a rural setting until widespread expansion in the late nineteenth century (Fig.5). The immediate setting of the Central area is urban, however the river valleys retain a partial green wedge which runs into the town (Fig.6). The water meadows to the east of the town remain a dominant landscape feature. These spaces are important, for recreation, ecology and as buffer to the built expansion of the town. The local topography means that they have been retained due to the threat of flooding.



Fig. 5 View from Springfield Hill to the Town Centre 1831

5.7 The location of the town, set within a shallow valley, means that there are a number of long views available across the town from Great Baddow, Writtle and other high ground. There are a number of key landmarks and views, but the most important feature on approach to the town is St Mary's spire (see 10.8-10.12).

6. Archaeology

6.1 The majority of the Central area is within the medieval historic core of Chelmsford and throughout there is significant archaeological potential especially relating to the development of the medieval and post medieval town. There is also the potential of prehistoric and Roman remains at the southern end of the High Street. The Historic Environment Characterisation Report (ECC 2005) identifies a key issue that 'below ground archaeological deposits need to be taken into consideration at an early stage in any development or master plan proposals'.

7. Historical development

7.1 There is archaeological evidence for much pre-historic occupation of the area around Chelmsford, the fertile Chelmer valley has been home to human activity since the Neolithic period (c.2500BC).

7.2 Following the Boudiccan revolt of 60-61 AD a Roman fort was established in the Moulsham Street area on the road between London and Colchester. Although the fort was short lived, a Romano-British settlement known as *Caesaromagus* developed containing a range of important public buildings and enclosed by earthwork defences. *Caesaromagus* appears to have declined in importance during the 4th century and was largely abandoned after the Roman withdrawal from Britain in the early 5th century.

7.3 Evidence for continued occupation during the Saxon period is scant and it is probable that settlement became based on rural estates in the surrounding countryside. Following the shift in settlement and the collapse of the bridge at Chelmsford, the London Colchester road became diverted via writtle until the original line was restored in the 12th century.

Figure 6 Aerial photograph of the town (2006) showing the contrast between built and green spaces



 Central Conservation Area Boundary

7.4 After the Norman conquest of 1066 the land north of the Can was owned by the Bishop of London. The building of St Pauls was a continuous drain on his funds and he recognised the potential of his land at Chelmsford. Around 1100 he paid for a stone bridge to be built over the River Can. This reinstated the direct route of the Roman Road and diverted traffic from Writtle through Chelmsford. The importance of Writtle declined, as Chelmsford prospered.

7.5 In 1199 a charter was granted by King John for a weekly market to be held. Further charters gave the right to sell off plots of land for building and for an annual fair. The site of the market was an elongated triangle, stretching from Springfield Road up to the parish church (now the cathedral). Long, narrow rectangular plots stretched down from a High Street frontage to the River's edge.

7.6 The market place is still instantly recognisable in the current High Street layout. Some of the narrow plots also survive. The continuous retail use of the High Street from the medieval period means that the historic street pattern has been retained, although most of the buildings have been replaced, several times in some instances. The centre of the market place was progressively infilled from the fourteenth century with permanent buildings.

7.7 Chelmsford's central position in the county and being on the primary route to East Anglia allowed it to prosper during the medieval period. Inns, hostels, blacksmiths and carriage makers served the needs of travellers. The fertile agricultural land around the town made it the natural centre for trading. The plentiful water supply available allowed various industries to develop, including brewing, flour milling and tanneries.

7.8 The town's central location and transport links made it the county town from an early date, prevailing over the larger town of Colchester. The Cathedral, its church yard, County Hall and the Shire Hall to the northern end of the High Street serve as a strong reminder of the continuing function of the town as a centre for political, judicial and ecclesiastical administration.

7.9 The town remained a prosperous service and retail centre, with regular agricultural markets. During the eighteenth century much rebuilding and modernisation was carried out. John Johnson, the county surveyor, designed the Shire Hall and the Stone Bridge over the River Can, which remain as landmark features of the town today. Various engravings and watercolours of the town are available from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Figs. 7, 8 and 9), which record the town's appearance in its most prosperous period.

7.10 From the early nineteenth century the town's industry expanded, this was spurred on by the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation in 1797 and the introduction of the railway in 1843. This fuelled a rapid expansion in population, with residential development gradually surrounding the town, beginning with the development of the New London Road area from the early 1840s.

7.11 In the late eighteenth century there was modernisation and improvement, with the addition of gas street lighting and new pavements to the High Street. Frederick Chancellor made a significant impact on the town, as seven times mayor and important local architect. He designed many buildings throughout the town, including the old library in Victoria Road South (within the West End conservation area), the school in Church Street and the corn exchange (now demolished) in Tindal Square.

7.12 The town developed as a manufacturing centre in the early twentieth century. Large scale factories were set up by Hoffmann's (ball-bearing manufacture), Cromptons (electrical engineers) and Marconi (radio manufacturers), amongst other smaller companies (Fig 10).

Figure 7
High Street 1762

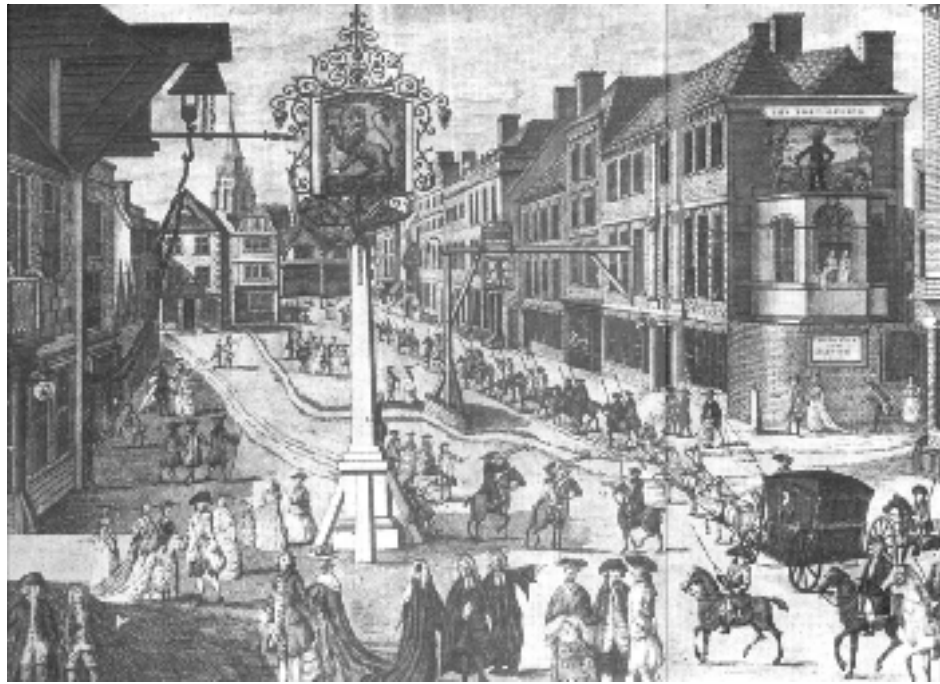


Figure 8
Tindal Square 1795



Figure 9
High Street 1821



Figure 10

Early twentieth century photograph showing the Marconi Works in the foreground and other industrial buildings to the edge of the town



7.13 The post war era saw widespread destruction of the town, with many of its historic buildings destroyed in the name of progress partly due to the proximity to London and growth beyond the green belt prior to the introduction of Conservation Legislation. Manufacturing declined, but the town retains specialist industry and business and the town centre is a major shopping and administrative centre, with a growing regional importance.

7.14 The introduction of large covered shopping centres (High Chelmer and The Meadows) and department stores (such as Marks & Spencer and Debenhams) has altered the retail character of the town with larger stores and bigger footprint buildings. The extension to County Hall complex and creation of the new public library and most recently, the bus station redevelopment, have also been major changes in the town.

7.15 The most radical change in recent years has been the pedestrian friendly alterations to the High Street in 1991, which was formerly clogged with busy traffic. There is also an ever increasing pressure for development, based on the economic growth of the town.

7.16 A detailed and scholarly history of the town, including many phased maps is available within Hilda Grieve's two volumes 'The Sleepers and The Shadows.'

Cartographic Evidence

7.17 Chelmsford is fortunate in having the earliest surviving map of any county town – the Walker Map of 1591 (Fig.11). This is exquisitely illustrated and has been shown to be a relatively accurate interpretation by comparison with surviving buildings. The existing road layout is immediately recognisable, with the central elongated market place with infill development. Duke Street and New Street exist at the northern end and Moulsham Street and Springfield Road to the south. None of the buildings shown survive in a recognisable form, other than the Cathedral, but some of the earlier timber framing remains in remodelled buildings, such as at The Saracen's Head, 11, 13 and 14 High Street and 53 New Street.

7.18 The next available map of any clarity is the Chapman and Andre' map of 1777 (Fig.12). This is at a much smaller scale and is far less detailed than the Walker map, but gives a good indication of the street patterns and extent of development. The town appears to not have expanded significantly in the period between the two maps, the historic street pattern remains and no further significant market place infill has taken place.

7.19 The mid nineteenth century and ordnance survey map of 1875 (Fig.13) show significant expansion of the town with groups of industrial buildings on the outskirts, such as the brewery complexes to north western side of Duke Street and off of Springfield Road. The historic street pattern is still evident and the blocks of market place infill are in a form recognisable today.

8. Land use

8.1 Unsurprisingly the majority of the Central area has retail, commercial and administrative uses predominating. There is some residential use in New Street and adjoining Waterloo Lane, but there is little upper floor use for residential purposes in the primary and secondary retail areas. Historically upper floors were used for residential. Recently there has been some commercial use, but widespread use of upper floors is essential to increase the town centre population and round the clock activity. Figure 14 identifies the current ground floor uses within the area.

8.2 The retail uses within the town centre help to make it a vibrant area and sub regional shopping centre. However there are some uses within the Central area that due to their nature have affected the attractiveness of the area. Banks, building societies, takeaway outlets and estate agents are predominant in parts of the area, in particular detracting from Duke Street's appearance, with much poor quality signage.

8.3 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the development of commercial banking services led to several purpose built banks being constructed (Fig.15). 2, 77-79, 99-100 High Street and 2 Tindal Square are all fine examples. These buildings are of both architectural and historic significance, their appearance is directly related to their original function and the continuing use of these buildings in their original role would preserve the character of the area.



Figure 15 Tindal square 1926

8.4 Various café and restaurant uses are present across the area including at the northern end of the High Street and Tindal Street. These uses add significantly to the level of activity in the area, but the amount of street clutter is undermining the quality of the public spaces.

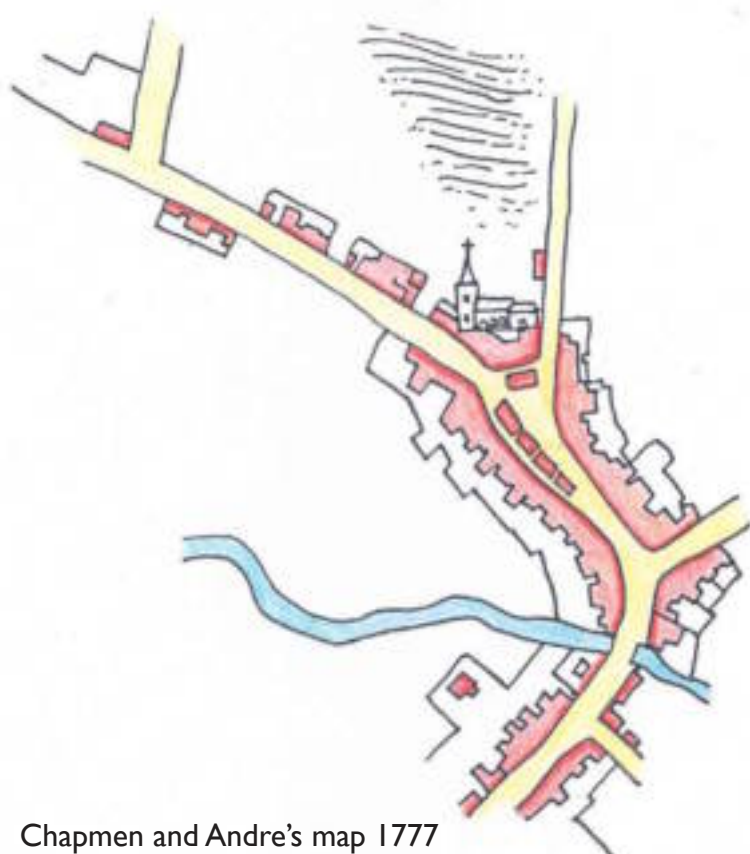
8.5 The public buildings form an important part of the character and reinforce the historic status of the town. At the northern end of the High Street the Shire Hall, Cathedral and County Hall and its associated functions add considerably to the activity and vitality of the area.

Figure 11

Walker Map 1591



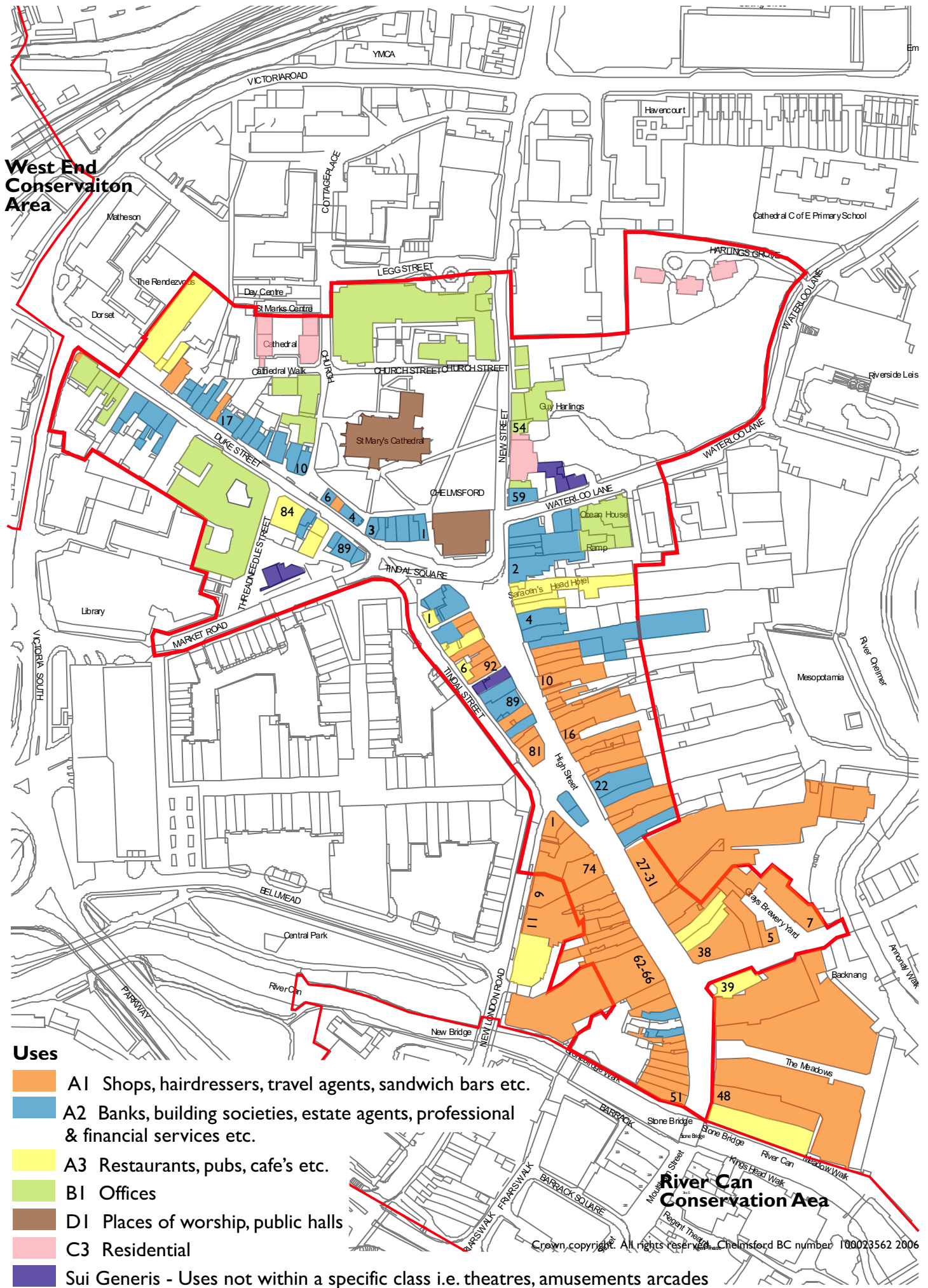
Figure 12



Chapmen and Andre's map 1777



1st edition OS map 1875



9. Townscape

9.1 Places are attractive and interesting when they have a variety of enclosed spaces, which combine to form continuous routes. A balance between variety and unity gives historic towns their identity.

9.2 The market place is an elongated triangle. Spatially it is very complex, with variable character when viewed from different vantage points. The majority of the space is cohesive due to the continuous built edges. The pinch point at the junction with High Street and Tindal Street and at the widening at Tindal Square are the most important spaces, but are less well defined, affected by modern buildings projecting at first floor level and cluttered by street furniture and highway paraphernalia.

9.3 Duke Street, New Street and Waterloo Lane are narrow, straight street spaces which combined with narrow footpaths and busy traffic (particularly in Duke Street), this makes them intimate yet dynamic spaces encouraging the pedestrian to move through quickly.

9.4 The grounds surrounding the Cathedral and to the rear of Guy Harlings have a distinctly different spatial character, defined by buildings of varying scale and form and boundary walls, the open green spaces have a quiet tranquillity and in contrast to most other parts of the Central area are destination spaces, although the grounds of Guy Harlings are hidden, with an element of surprise on arrival.

9.5 Tindal Square and Market Road are important public spaces in the context of the expansive County Hall complex, with some important historic buildings defining the spaces, but which have not recovered from the intervention of High Chelmer in Tindal Street and Market Road. At present they are uncomfortable for the pedestrian due to multiple functions, unsightly buildings and intrusive traffic routes.

9.6 The numerous narrow alley ways turning off the High Street and Duke Street provide a network of thoroughfares, with inviting routes providing permeability across the town. Many are private or semi private, but provide visual interest and important back land access, although some feel dark and unsafe at present.

9.7 Figure 16 analyses the Central area, identifying its key components of its townscape.

Views

9.8 Views in and out of the conservation area form an important part of its character. The various alley ways, particularly leading into the Cathedral Precinct, frame some of the best short views. Figure 16 identifies the most important examples.

9.9 Whilst many of the buildings, such as Shire Hall and County Hall are important landmarks due to their siting, scale, architectural treatment and public function, this is largely confined to the immediate town centre area. St Mary's Cathedral, although relatively modest in scale, remains a strong landmark feature of the town. This is a result of topography and the largely uniform market town scale of the town centre.

9.10 The Shire Hall is the most impressive feature at the top of the High Street. This forms the iconic view of the town. It is seen as a glimpse from the south and then gradually emerges as part of a sequence of views on the approach up the High Street. From certain vantage points the Cathedral and Shire Hall are viewed together.

9.11 2 High Street (Barclays) and 2 Tindal Square (HSBC) provide a focal point in views towards Tindal Square, from both Duke Street and Market Road. However Tindal House (Bairstow Eves) at the junction of these roads provides poor termination to the view on the approach from New Street. Likewise the 77-79 High Street (Lloyds) building provides the focal point half way up the High Street, but 81-83 High Street (H Samuel) appears overly bulky and bland.

9.12 The Cathedral can be seen as a silhouette on the skyline, the open setting, foreground and backdrop are all essential to its perception and appearance (also see Duke Street and Cathedral Precinct sub character areas). There are many longer views of the Cathedral, particularly the tower and spire. The most significant of the views are identified in Figure 17. As a strong landmark on the skyline these views are essential to the character of the area and the identity and legibility of the town. Both the Shire Hall and the Cathedral can be seen as a silhouette on the skyline, the open setting, foreground and backdrop are all essential to its perception and appearance (also see Duke Street and Cathedral Precinct sub character areas).

10. Materials and details

10.1 The building materials used are from the traditional palate of brick, render, timber weatherboard, clay plain tiles, slate and unusually for Essex, stone.

10.2 There is no good local stone supply, but due to the high status of Chelmsford as the county town stone was used for some important public buildings, including the Shire Hall, Cathedral and County Hall (Fig.18).

10.3 Brick (Fig.19) and painted render are the predominant wall materials, with some timber featheredged weatherboard, confined to rear wings. Timber framing was used for most buildings until the eighteenth century, when brick became most widely used. Both red and gault bricks were handmade locally.

10.4 Roofs are usually clad in either handmade plain clay tiles or natural slates. Plain tiles are used at a steep pitch of over 47 degrees and slates between 30 and 40 degrees. Slates are more common on brick buildings as supply became more common from the beginning of the nineteenth century with the introduction of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation and later the railway, which made Welsh slate more widely available. Roof forms are varied, with gables, hipped and gambrel roofs, with chimney stacks adding roof line interest (Fig.20). Eaves are sometimes very deep as a feature and in some cases with parapets (Fig.21).

10.5 Finely detailed vertically sliding painted timber sash windows are predominate (Figs.22, 23 and 24). Casement windows are also found, windows are mostly balanced in appearance. Slender metal framed windows are also found as replacements in some cases. Standard timber, aluminium or plastic replacement windows have been used on some buildings, but their profile, detailing, finish and appearance seriously harm the character of the area.

Figure 16 Townscape

Notation

- Conservation area boundary
- Landmark Building
- Important corner buildings
- Important views
- Public space in need of enhancements
- Important green space
- Preserved trees/groups
- Significant trees and groups of trees
- Pedestrian priority
- Active commercial frontages
- Opportunity for space improvements

River Can Conservation Area

Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Chelmsford BC number 100023562 2006

Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Chelmsford BC number 100023562 2006

Figure 17 Aerial view



Shopfronts

10.6 Shopfronts within the conservation area are variable in quality. Few early examples survive, but good historic examples remain, such as at 66A and 11 Duke Street (Fig.25 and 26). Sympathetic modern examples can be found at 87 and 91 High Street (Fig.27 and 28).

10.7 Some shopfronts are poorly designed and do not relate to the host building or their immediate setting. Large plate glass shopfronts and the use of aluminium or plastic which appear harsh and dominate in the street scene are a particular problem. Particularly bad examples can be found at 3 Tindal Square and 86 High Street (Fig.29 and 30).

Street Surfaces

10.8 The street surfaces are generally unsympathetic to the historic character of the town. Some areas of stone paving, brick, tiles and granite setts survive (Fig.31, 32 and 33) but footways are mostly tarmac or concrete slabs. The road surfacing is universally tarmac, granite kerb stones are present in many places. Narrow yellow lines have been successfully used in Duke Street.

10.9 The repaving and pedestrian priority of the High Street was a considerable success and immense improvement, however the clay pavers used are looking dated now. The wall to wall surfacing and random patterns, combined with the small unit sizes creates an overly fussy surface (fig.34) detracting from the buildings and the quality of the spaces.

10.10 Surviving traditional details, such as cast iron rainwater gullies (Fig.35) basement light grills (Fig. 36) and boot scrapers (Fig. 37) contribute to the visual interest and historic character of the area.

Street Furniture

10.11 Cast metal litter bins and benches are well detailed and used throughout the conservation area. Bus shelters, recycling bins, signs, traffic junctions, bike stores, benches, crossings are overly dominate and detract from the quality of the spaces. There are a mixture of bus shelter types within the conservation area, including 3 in Duke Street fronting the Cathedral, although of a simple design their bulk dominates this space.

10.12 There are 3 bespoke shelters on New London Road close to Lloyds Square. The recently added Park and Ride shelter has added to the dominance of street furniture in the particularly narrow footway.

10.13 An incremental increase in the amount of street furniture is a particular problem. There is potential to considerably improve the main public spaces in the town by rationalisation of street furniture. Traffic routes in Tindal Square (Fig.38), Tindal Street and Duke Street undermine the character of the area with the use of traffic lights, guard rails and signs which are overly dominant in the streetscape. In many cases standard highway options have been used which are inappropriate for the character of the area. There are a few traditional items remaining, such as red telephone kiosks (Fig.39) and post boxes (Fig.40) which add to the interest of the streets.



Figure 18
County Hall stonework detail,
granite plinth with Portland stone
ashlar cladding



Figure 19
Brickwork detail, with different brick
and string course details



Figure 20
Different roof forms and chimney stacks add to
roofscape interest



Figure 21
An ornate parapet detail



Figure 22
Small panel early C20 sash window



Figure 23
Small panel, finely detailed early C19 sash set in a deep reveal

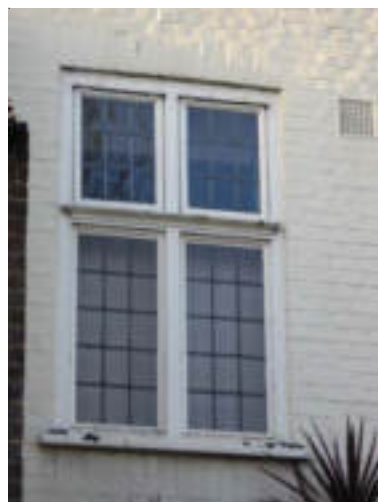


Figure 24
Mullion and transer window with leaded lights



Figure 25
Curved front early C20 shopfront



Figure 26
Late C19 shopfront



Figure 27
Modern painted timber shopfront with stall riser and pillasters



Figure 28
Modern shopfront, but with an overly deep fascia



Figure 29
Inappropriate plate glass shopfront with aluminium frame and deep plastic fascia



Figure 30
Inappropriate plate glass shopfront



Figure 31
Curb setts



Figure 32
York stone slabs



Figure 33
Clay tiles



Figure 34
High street paving with clay blocks and stone setts



Figure 35
Cast iron rainwater gully



Figure 36
Cast iron basement lightwell grill



Figure 37
Cast iron bootsop



Figure 38
Street furniture clutter



Figure 39
Traditional K6 series red telephone kiosks



Figure 40
Traditional red post box

11.0 Area Analysis

11.1 The Central area has a number of areas of individual character. For the purposes of description and analysis these are divided into four different sub areas (Fig.41). Duke Street, High Street (including Tindal Square and Tindal Street), the Cathedral Precinct (including New Street, Waterloo Lane, Church Street and Church Lane) and the area south of the High Street (including parts of Springfield road and New London Road).

Assessment of Buildings

11.2 Each of the buildings within area have been assessed in terms of individual contribution to the character of the area, this was based on a rapid external visual inspection. Each building is categorised as making a positive, neutral or negative contribution (Fig.41 & 42).

Character Area I

Duke Street summary

11.3 Duke Street has predominantly 3 storey buildings set tight to the roads edge. This relates well to the width of the street, giving a comparable building height to street ratio, retaining a human scale. The frontages are relatively narrow, which combined with the use of sash windows and chimney stacks gives a strong vertical emphasis. The roofs are generally set parallel to the road, with occasional dormers, gables, changes to materials and variations in the building line adding interest.



11.4 The 1930s County Hall building (C block) stands out as a dominant landmark to the eastern end of Duke Street, the 1909 Red brick building (D Block) helps to act as a transition for the sharp change in scale from the other traditional buildings within Duke Street (Fig.43). Its style contrasts with its surroundings but its finely detailed, vertically proportioned windows help to introduce a reference to the adjacent buildings of more domestic scale.

11.5 Such a dominant building is a reminder of the county town's administrative function. It plays a key role in the townscape as part of a local network of landmarks, including the Cathedral and Shire Hall. It is a good example of 1930s architecture which is otherwise not found in the town. The additions to County Hall are mostly beyond the conservation area boundary but the 1960s A and B blocks are bland, monolithic and totalitarian, lurking in back land views and adversely affecting the setting of the conservation area. The white stone additions from the 1980s bring a well defined edge to the road frontages and provide important semi public space within the two large atriums and arcaded ground floor to Market Road and Victoria Road South.

11.6 The strong linear character of Duke Street makes it a dynamic space, the railway bridge acts as a gateway to the west and entices the pedestrian forward, as does the open space of Tindal Square with No. 6 defining the southern edge and acting as key building.

11.7 Most of the buildings have been rebuilt in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but the medieval street pattern remains. The many alleys and breaks in the building line which lead off of Duke Street add to the visual interest, as do the widening of spaces at each end and between No's 6 and 10.

Figure 41 Character Areas

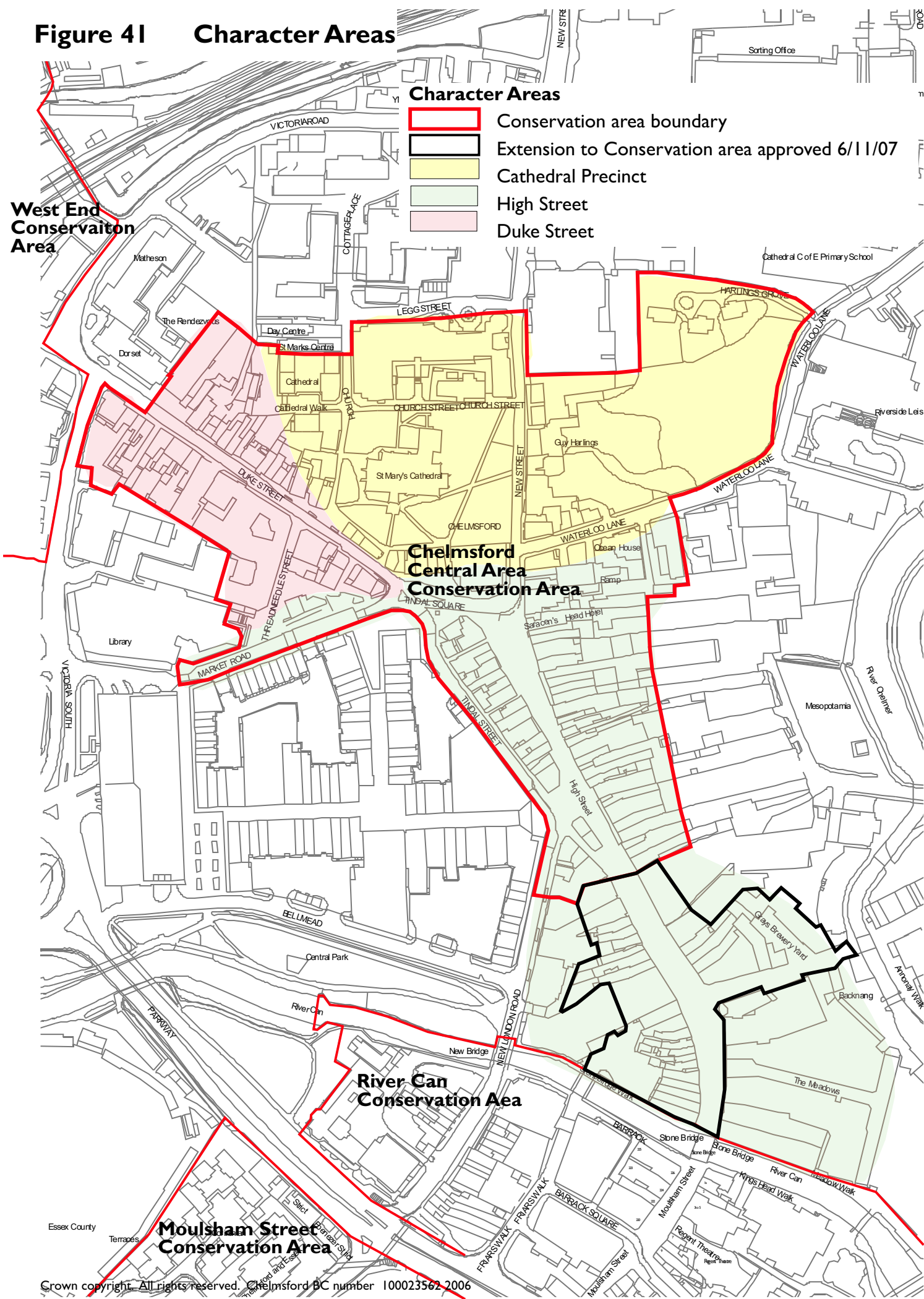


Figure 42

West End
Conservaiton
Area

River Can
Conservation Aea

Individual buildings contribution
to the character of the area

- Conservation area boundary
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

11.8 Commercial uses are predominant, which adds considerable activity to the street. Many of the buildings have shop fronts which give an active frontage to the street scene, this contrasts particularly with the south western side of Duke Street which has frontages of a domestic character. This distinct variety contributes to the character of the area.

11.9 Duke Street is the main pedestrian route into the town centre from Melbourne and the West End, including the train and bus stations. This combined with the commercial units and County Hall brings great vitality to the area. This activity has historically been a feature of the area, an account of a local resident growing up in the street gives an interesting perspective in the early twentieth century (see Harrison, 2001).

11.10 The pavements are particularly narrow in Duke Street, with barely space to pass in places. This combined with the wide vehicular surface makes the pedestrian experience unpleasant at peak times. The poor quality surfacing materials also detract from the appearance of the area. Street furniture is generally discreetly positioned, but the recent introduction of bus stop shelters has undermined the quality of the public realm.

Duke Street description

Duke Street, south side No's 66-89

11.11 **66 and 67 Duke Street** mark the western gateway to the Central area, it is a fine late nineteenth century red and stock brick building with an attractive later curved shop front to the corner. Externally it is largely unaltered and is one of the best buildings of the period within the town. Its robust detailing, slight increase in height to the adjacent building (**No.68**) and break forward from the building line give it a very imposing appearance. It forms part of an attractive group with the adjacent buildings to the east and **65a Duke Street** to the west (within the West End conservation area). Its high stock brick boundary wall along Victoria Road South encloses the site. This allows views to the rear of the Duke Street buildings, which have an interesting roofscape, combining variations in roof height with substantial chimney stacks that rise above the roof line. The trees and mature soft planting form a green backdrop behind the wall which gives a contrast to the otherwise urban street scene. The boundary wall, open space, views and trees are all important features. At the junction with Victoria Road South good views are available towards the Cathedral and along Duke Street to Tindal Square,



66-77 Duke Street

11.12 **68-70 Duke Street** is an impressive early nineteenth century gault brick terrace, which forms a continuous frontage with No's **66 and 67** (Fig 44). The gap in the building line provides an unfortunate view through to the unsightly County Hall complex. **71** reduces to two storeys, giving variation to the street scene.

11.13 **72-74 Duke Street** (Fig.45) is an imposing double pile late eighteenth century building of domestic appearance, this rises to a tall three stories and begins the transition to the larger scale buildings of County Hall.



71-74 Duke Street

11.14 **County Hall** railings help to enclose the street edge, where there is an access into the County Hall car park, but the monolithic B block and clutter (signs, cones, porters hut and car parking) detract from the street scene. The red brick Edwardian County Hall building has fine stone detailing and a well defined entrance. This building introduces a slight increase in scale before the colossal 1930s building. This group forms an interesting architectural transition from Georgian to inter-war and is listed in recognition. Whilst the 1930s County Hall stands out as a strong landmark and part of the development of the conservation area, its scale relates to the civic buildings to the west.

11.15 Nikolaus Pevsner an eminent architectural historian and champion of the modern movement describes County Hall in his buildings of England series as 'a sad anticlimax. The height of the building ruins the skyline of the town from many points by depriving the **Cathedral** tower of its pre-eminence.' Since then (1954) the site has been enclosed by further high buildings. However Pevsner's point remains valid, particularly as the town faces increased pressure for high rise development. The cathedral remains a strong feature in some views of the town, particularly from Rainsford Road, Tindal Street, Duke Street, from the East across the water meadows and from the south over High Chelmer (also see section on views, 10.8-10.12).

11.16 **The Golden Fleece** (No 84) (Fig.46) and County Hall define the entrance to Threadneedle Street, which is a busy pedestrian thoroughfare, with an important group of trees. Poor paving materials and unauthorised parking detracts from the space as does the untidy area behind the public toilets and the out of scale, monolithic **Threadneedle House**.

11.17 **85-89 Duke Street** are a varied group of nineteenth century buildings, although No **85** appears to contain an earlier core. The use of projecting bay windows and rich brick detailing adds interest, as does the view through to the mature tree between **87 and 88. Tindal House** at the end of the group jars, as a modern and harsh block.



Fig.46

The Golden Fleece, Duke Street

Duke Street, northern side, 2-24 (Dukes).

11.18 The northern side of Duke Street has a much tighter urban grain, the buildings are close up to the back edge of the narrow footpath and the plot widths narrow, relating to the early formation of the town. The narrow frontages give a vertical emphasis to the buildings, which is reinforced by the predominance of sash windows and chimney stacks and pots. The buildings are domestic scale, mostly a low three storeys in height, which makes a noticeable reduction in scale when compared to the south side of the street.

11.19 **2-3 Duke Street** (Fig.47) is a re-fronted timber framed building which forms part of a continuous urban group with **1-5 Tindal Square**. It's smaller scale, although still three stories marks the beginning of Duke Street in scale and address.

11.20 **4-6 Duke Street** are an important group of eighteenth century and earlier timber framed buildings. To each side there is a break in the building line and good views into and out of the Cathedral Precinct, which enhances the experience of Duke Street.

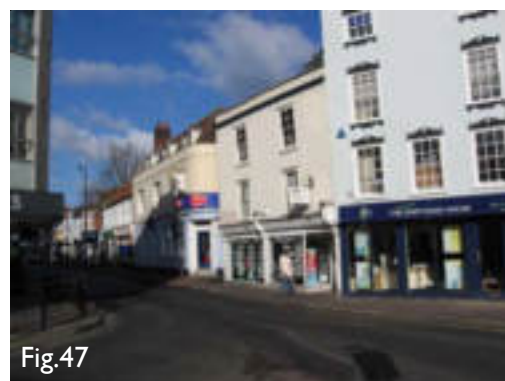


Fig.47

2-3 Duke Street

11.21 The north side of Duke Street has a unifying scale of mostly three storeys, but variations in building height, alignment and design give considerable interest. **Numbers 10-23** form an attractive group (Fig.48), each side of which the street widens into small public squares.

11.22 **Dorset House** directly adjacent to the conservation area boundary is monolithic in form, but the adjacent tree, its set back upper floor and arcade reduce its impact, the latter also adds valuable pavement width to the street space.

11.23 Key Characteristics

- o Mostly 2-3 storey, shallow plan buildings
- o Vertical proportions to elevations, emphasised by the use of sash windows and chimney stacks and pots.
- o Narrow plots, in some cases relating to the historic plot boundaries.
- o Medieval street pattern.
- o Busy and vibrant, a mix of uses and an important route between the transportation hub and the High Street.
- o Cathedral and County Hall as landmarks.
- o Mostly rendered and red brick buildings, with steep plain roofs. Deep eaves overhangs or parapets as a feature in some cases.

11.24 Negatives

- o Some poor quality shop fronts and advertising paraphernalia.
- o Paving materials.
- o Narrow footpaths.
- o Scale of the adjacent 1960s County Hall block.



Duke street north side

Character Area 2

High Street summary

11.25 The elongated triangle stretching from Springfield Road up to the edge of the Cathedral Grounds was laid out as the original market place to the town, following the granting of a market charter of 1199. Subsequently temporary market stalls were replaced with more substantial structures which led to the infilling of the market place and the creation of Tindal Street separate to the main market place.

11.26 Much rebuilding and re-fronting occurred in the eighteenth century as the town prospered as an agricultural centre. The narrow plots relating to the medieval foundation of the town were largely amalgamated at this time, but some survive as at 11 High Street, which are a key feature of the town's character as a tangible feature of its origins.

11.27 The buildings lining the High Street give a continuous frontage. Various alleys give access beyond at regular intervals. The buildings are mostly three storeys in height, but with variations in parapet and eaves heights. Painted render, gault and red brick are the prevalent materials. Slate and plain tiles are most common for roof coverings. Vertically proportioned timber sash windows are widespread, which combined with the narrow plot widths gives a strong vertical proportion.

11.28 Trees are positioned at regular intervals in the High Street and surrounding area. Maples, limes, ash, hornbeam and plane trees are most common. Trees help to soften the otherwise urban environment and are a key feature of the townscape giving visual interest.

11.29 Shire Hall stands as the dominant landmark at the top of the High Street and from certain vantage points the tower of St Mary's sits in the background (Fig.49). The street widens northwards to the junction with Duke Street and New Street. The High Chelmer shopping centre entrance opens out into a public spaces. The vehicle routes dominate Tindal Square.

High Street description

High Street West Side (numbers 3-26 consecutive)

11.30 **The Saracens Head** (No 3) is a former coaching inn originating from the sixteenth century. Its three storey formal frontage with sash windows and parapet is similar, but subtly different, most notably in the shop fronts, to **4 and 5 High Street**.

11.31 The former **Natwest** building projects forward and appears aggressive in the street scene; its width significantly undermines the character of narrow plot units. The group of buildings at **9-17 High Street** (Fig.51) reinstate the historic grain and scale, the main negative feature is poor quality shop fronts and advertising paraphernalia. There is a pinch point in the street at this point which defines the widening of the High Street and frames views up to **Shire Hall** and the **Cathedral**.

11.32 **19-25 High Street** are a varied group of modern buildings ranging from the 1960s to 1990s. **24 and 25 High Street** are particularly box like and harmful to the street scene. **26 High Street** by comparison is one of the finest eighteenth century buildings in the town, dating from c.1754 with high quality fine detailing, it rises above the surrounding building in an imposing fashion as originally intended, as a grandiose urban residence.

11.33 On the eastern side of the High Street the rear of the buildings are of variable quality. Some interesting rear wings remain, as do glimpse views of varied roofscape. However large commercial extensions have been added in many cases which dominate much of the space to the east. Surface car parking covers a large area and which appears untidy and lacks definition, activity and legibility.

High Street East Side (numbers 76a-100 consecutive)

11.34 **76 and 76a High Street** and **1-3 New London Road** are part of a mid twentieth century red brick and stone building that turns the corner. Fish Brothers has a high quality traditional shop front. **77-79 High Street** is a fine nineteenth century bank. The alley formed between the buildings is an important, well defined space, which acts as a busy route between the High Street and High Chelmer shopping centre.

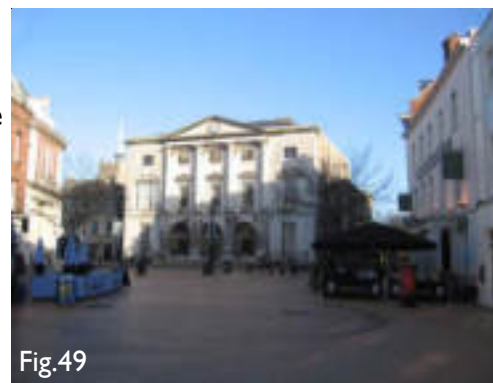


Fig.49
Shire Hall, with the Cathedral in the background



Fig.50
Saracens Head and 3-4 High Street



Fig.51
9-17 High Street



Fig.52
77-78 High Street

11.35 **81-100 High Street** (Figs.53 and 54) front the market place. The buildings are mostly 3 storeys high with narrow frontages. There are subtle variations in the building line which combined with the different building forms and materials add visual interest. There is a universal vertical proportion to the buildings. Some of the buildings are dual fronted, with a rear front to Tindal Street. **Crown passage** and **Shire Passage** are important pedestrian links, of ancient origin.



Fig.53

86-100 High Street

Market Road

11.36 Market Road provides a primary access into the top end of the High Street and Cathedral Precinct. The view up to **Shire Hall** and the bank buildings makes a visually attractive group, however the bland **High Chelmer** complex is obsessive and harsh on this approach.

11.37 The mature trees, back drop of the 1930s **County Hall** building and views of the **Cathedral** and **Shire Hall** provide the opportunity for a fine public space in Market Road, however at present the poor quality mixture of paving materials, public toilet building and cluttered street furniture make a very unattractive space which is vehicle dominated.

11.38 Threadneedle Street (Fig.55) provides a pedestrian link through to Duke Street and the Cathedral, the front of **County Hall** and trees help to define the space, but the public toilets and service area behind **The Golden Fleece**, poor quality paving and frequent unauthorised parking significantly detract from the area.



Fig.54 96 High Street

Tindal Square

11.39 Tindal Square remains the heart of the town. The buildings are little changed since the early twentieth century (compare figures 15 and 56) when there was construction of the new banks at **1, 2, 99 and 100 High Street and 6 Tindal Square**.

11.40 The buildings are of a traditional scale, typically shallow plan and of 2-3 storeys. **Shire Hall** is the dominant landmark at the top of the High Street.

11.41 Tindal Square has the potential to be one of the best public spaces in the town. However at present it is carved up by vehicular routes and all its associated road lines, signs and guard rails (Fig.38) making a dangerous and uncomfortable pedestrian environment. The surfacing materials are poor quality and the space lacks any public assembly or ceremonial function.

11.42 **1-5 Tindal Square** form an attractive and varied group, enclosing the northern side of the square. The shop fronts are poor quality for **3-5 Tindal Square**. The buildings of the **High Chelmer** and **Tindal House** are negative features, as is the public realm due to the surfacing materials and cluttered street furniture.



Fig.55

Threadneedle Street



Fig.56

Tindal Square

11.43 The **Judge Tindal Statue** (Fig.57) is an important and well known feature, but its setting is poor at present, dominated by the road.

Tindal Street

11.44 Tindal Street forms the outer edge of the historic market place to the medieval town. The southern side was lined with many fine timber framed building of domestic scale with long narrow plots which stretched down to the river's edge, however the **High Chelmer** (Fig.58) complex has destroyed this historic asset and introduced a bland mass and open service yard, creating a dead frontage. Potential future redevelopment will allow the opportunity to reinstate the rhythm of the medieval plots and maintain the strong definition to the back edge of the pavement, whilst introducing an active frontage and using a complimentary but contemporary form of architecture.

11.45 The buildings lining the northern side form the edge of the historic market place infill which occurred from the fourteenth century onwards. The current buildings predominantly date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are a mixture of double fronted units, and individual buildings fronting only Tindal Street.

11.46 The pedestrian alleys to the High Street are of ancient origin and give important pedestrian links and glimpsed views.

11.47 There are a mixture of building forms and scale, with a range of 1-4 storeys in height. Incremental changes, such as replacement windows and inappropriate signage, combined with some poor mid twentieth century redevelopment have given the street a rundown and tired appearance.

11.48 The view north across Tindal Square is one of the most impressive in the town, with **1-5 Tindal Square** and **2-3 Duke Street** form a good formal urban group, with the tower of the Cathedral in the background forming the main feature on the skyline (Figs.59 and 60).



Fig.57

Judge Tindal statue



Fig.58

Tindal Street



Fig.59 Tindal Square 1930



Fig.60

View of Tindal Square with the Cathedral in the background

11.49 At the southern end of Tindal Street and the widening of the High Street makes an important public space, currently not exploited and filled with street furniture and planters. The tight edge to the western side is very weak by the entrance to **High Chelmer. 77-79 High Street** (Lloyds bank) (Fig.52) is the main feature in the view south along Tindal Street and the alley adjacent entices the pedestrian through to the High Street.

11.50 Key Characteristics

- o Views to Tindal Square, Shire Hall and the Cathedral. St Mary's tower and spire and Shire Hall are important landmarks, their silhouette on the skyline and status in town are significant.
- o Medieval market place, street pattern and plots remain.
- o 3-4 storeys building heights, generally shallow plan.
- o Retail uses and active frontages, Purpose built historic banks to Tindal Square.
- o Important public spaces.

11.51 Negatives

- o Poor quality shop fronts, advertising paraphernalia.
- o Unsympathetic replacement windows.
- o High Chelmer edge to Tindal Street.
- o Street surfacing materials.
- o Street clutter – temporary stalls.
- o Seating.
- o Unexploited spaces in Tindal Square, Market Road and adjacent Lloyds Bank.

Character Area 3

Cathedral Precinct summary

11.52 The Cathedral precinct area is an important and well used public space within the town centre. The church yard is defined by boundary walls on all sides, with buildings set behind enclosing the edge of the space. The cathedral is the focal point; glimpse views to it and its wider townscape presence make it a strong landmark and important feature of the town's skyline. The tree planting makes a significant contribution to the space, giving a softening appearance and helping to define the edge of the church yard. High quality york stone paving has been used for the Tindal Square entrance to the Cathedral



Fig.61 Tindal Square and the Cathedral Presinct 1920

11.53 The core of the Cathedral dates from the fifteenth century, it has been significantly extended but retains the appearance of a parish church in a prosperous late medieval market town. It became a Cathedral in 1913, when the diocese of Chelmsford was created.

11.54 The square is mostly surrounded by office uses, which combined with the ecclesiastical and adjacent administrative functions and the thoroughfares to Tindal Square, Duke Street and New Street make the area well frequented during the day.

11.55 The area was historically crammed full of monuments (Fig.61), but now partly has the appearance of a park, with few tomb stones, particularly on the southern side. The area is divided by well used paths, which are mostly of indifferent materials detracting from the appearance of the area, other than the stone slabs linking Shire Hall to the Cathedral. The boundary walls maintain a narrow and pedestrian scale to the roads around the perimeter and maintain a degree of privacy and tranquillity.

11.56 The various thoroughfares give visual interest, entice the pedestrian along and give important views into and out of the cathedral grounds.

11.57 The four sides are enclosed by buildings, which although of a comparable height, are distinctly different giving four sides of individual character.

South Side

11.58 Unlike elsewhere in the Cathedral grounds the rear elevations of the buildings on the south side enclose the space. The buildings are all shallow span, with narrow plot widths, but there is great variety in materials and styles. This variety of traditional forms and materials gives considerable visual interest.

11.59 The exposed public face of the rear elevations means that there is some unattractive clutter, such as air conditioning units and refuse storage. The boundary wall and trees help to provide a screen.

11.60 The Shire Hall presents a slab like rump to the Cathedral grounds (Fig.62), the large open space and adjacent trees help to reduce its impact. To the west the lower office wing steps down and relates closely to the scale of the adjacent buildings, forming an important vista (Fig.63) into Tindal Square and the fine early twentieth century bank building (**No.6**).

West Side

11.61 The West side is enclosed by modern, scholarly neo Georgian office buildings (Fig.64). There is a mixture of forms and materials, with attention to detail which presents a strong formal front enclosing the space, yet not in a dominant form.

11.62 The residential units to the end are less successful, but their position, scale and equally subtle variety help to define the outer edge of the Cathedral grounds.

North Side (including Legg Street)

11.63 The **old school** (Fig.65) is a finely detailed building by Frederick Channellor, of c.1886. Its modest scale, with red bricks helps to define the edge of Church Street and provided a focal point of the north side of the Cathedral grounds. The new yellow brick office building wraps around it and fills the site back to Legg Street, incorporating **6 New Street**, an eighteenth century grade II listed building.



Fig.62
Rear of Shire Hall



Fig.63
Entrance to Tindal Square



Fig.64
West side, Cathedral Precint



Fig.65
Church Street

11.64 The office building is large, but articulates its form to break its mass down and minimise its impact on the **old school** and **6 New Street**. The fine row of lime trees along the northern side of the cathedral grounds help soften its appearance and enclose the narrow Church Road, also strongly defined by the buildings and the boundary wall.

11.65 Beyond the conservation area boundary the **Crown Court, Telephone Exchange** (Sadler House) and open car park (fronting New Street and Legg Street) all significantly detract from the setting of the conservation area.

East Side

11.66 New Street encloses the East side with the road set well below the Cathedral grounds, which are retained by red brick and flint walls. The change in levels gives the Cathedral and its grounds an imposing appearance (Fig.66).

11.67 There is a fine group of buildings (Fig.67) with gault brick early nineteenth century fronts, some of which encase earlier timber framed buildings. **Guy Harlings** is set back from the road which adds to its status.

11.68 The narrow path of tarmac, dominant traffic route and the poor quality boundary walls to **54-57 New Street** (consecutive) detract from an otherwise fine public space.

Waterloo Lane

11.69 The Western end of Waterloo Lane is tightly enclosed and continues the urban character of the High Street. On the South side there is a strong uniformity with a mixture of 2-3 storeys, universal use of red brick, a building line defining the back edge of the footpath and vertically proportioned windows.

11.70 The former police station (**59 New Street**), the end of **Shire Hall** and the **banking chambers** form a group at the junction with New Street (Fig.68).

11.71 The green open grounds to the rear of the buildings fronting New Street provide an important counterpoint to the otherwise urban character. The important brick boundary wall bounds Waterloo Lane and the open space behind is dominated by mature trees. Once within the semi public space to the rear of **Guy Harlings** there is a peaceful tranquillity and openness.

11.72 The three dwellings at **Harlings Grove** are set within the landscape and informally grouped so the openness and planting remains the dominant feature.



Fig.66

Cathedral viewed from New Street



Fig.67

54-57 New Street



Fig.68

Junction of Waterloo Lane and New Street

11.73 Key Characteristics

- o Open public and semi public green space.
- o Mature trees.
- o Cathedral as the landmark, both from within the precinct and from wider vantage points.
- o Space enclosed on all sides by buildings.
- o Variety of building scale and materials.
- o Buildings predominantly 2-3 storeys high.

11.74 Negatives

- o Poor boundary walls along New Street (numbers 54-57, consecutive).
- o Paving materials.
- o Crown Court.
- o Legg Street Car Park.
- o Saddlers House.
- o Clutter at the rear of buildings on the East side.

Character Area 4

South of High Street and Springfield Road

11.75 Amendments to the boundary where designated on the 6 November 2007 (fig.41). The area has a number of distinct features which relate to the character of the Central area;

- o Buildings of a scale, form and materials consistent with the designated area.
- o The High Street and Springfield Road relate to the Roman Road and medieval street pattern.
- o The surviving narrow plots relate to the early foundation of the town.
- o There is archaeological potential.

11.76 The following benefits would be gained from including this area within the conservation area:

- o The areas architectural and historic importance would be recognised.
- o The Central and Baddow Road/River Can conservation area would be linked, giving a cohesive recognition of the importance of the town centre area.
- o There would be greater control over development, alterations, extensions and advertising paraphernalia.
- o Retention of those buildings important to the character of the area.
- o There would be potential for area enhancements.

11.77 Figure 42 identifies the buildings which contribute to the area. It is proposed to include the High Street frontage up to the River Can. No's 27-38 (Debenhams, O2, Mcdonalds and Next) would also be included and the Grays Brewery Yard. Woolworths, Starbucks, The Meadows, Pound Land and Burger King would be excluded as the scale of buildings and plot widths do not relate to the conservation area's character. Although some buildings proposed to be included are of no individual interest, in order to recognise townscape importance and give cohesive coverage these buildings have been included, although this would not necessarily preclude future redevelopment. Character analysis and description of the area is given overleaf:

Townscape

11.78 The buildings follow the line of the Roman Road and southern end of the medieval market place, tightly defining the edge of the street with active retail frontages. The buildings vary considerably in height, but are almost universally three storeys. Red brick is prevalent, with parapets to many roofs.

11.79 The wide pedestrian High Street is an important public space, with the widening at the junction with Springfield Road and the enclosed courtyard at Grays Brewery providing significant public spaces. The street curves, which adds visual interest and entices the pedestrian both north and south.

11.80 Stone Bridge provides a focal point and landmark at the bottom of the High Street, although the important relationship with the river is somewhat divorced by the flood defence works carried out in the 1960s, the guard railing and the lack of recreational use on the river.

11.81 From 48 High Street (Pound Land) just beyond Stone Bridge the Shire Hall façade begins to be revealed, which adds to the townscape experience, emphasises the building's status, acts as a landmark and provides a sense of scale and context. This area of the High Street also provides a visual link between John Johnson's two remaining exceptional architectural works in the town, the Shire Hall and Stone Bridge.

11.82 Trees planted at regular intervals along the High Street and river edge help to soften an otherwise urban and hard landscaped area. The park adjacent new London Road gives an open aspect and setting to the river.

High Street, east side No's 27-38

11.83 **27-33 High Street** (Debenhams) (Fig.69) has a long frontage, although comprising various units, the window proportions, detailing and finishes tie the group together. Although horizontal in proportion the vertical window openings, division of bays and step in parapet height help to balance its appearance, with the projecting quoins emphasising the entrance. The modern additions to the rear are of no architectural or historic interest.

11.84 **34 High Street** is a nineteenth century three storey building with vertically proportioned sash windows. **35-38 High Street** are similar in scale and turn the corner into Springfield Road with a splayed corner (Fig.70). This late nineteenth century gothic revival building has good polychromatic brick work and timber sash windows. To the rear, fronting Springfield Road, modest additions link the building to **Grays Brewery** yard.



Fig.69

View north up the High Street



Fig.70

34-38 High Street

Springfield Road

11.85 **Grays Yard** (Fig.71) is an important brewing complex, one of the few remaining remnants of the former industrial buildings within the town centre. The group are all listed buildings and include a maltings, hop kiln, stables, warehouse and stores associated with the former brewery. The buildings predominantly date from the nineteenth century and are constructed with yellow stock brick and slate roofs. The courtyard is a well defined and important public space, but at present the paving is overly fussy and the area filled with furniture, which detracts from the quality of the space.



Fig. 71

Gray's Yard

11.86 **39 High Street** and **18-22 Springfield Road** define the edge of the street and are of a comparable scale with the surrounding buildings but lack any historic or architectural interest.



Fig. 72

View south, High Street

High Street, east side No's. 30-50

11.87 The group of buildings between Springfield Road and the River Can are a mixture of styles, dating from the mid-late twentieth century. They lack any historic or architectural interest, numbers **49-50 High Street** are particularly oppressive, with the bland mass of Cater House beyond.

High Street, west side No's. 51-59

11.88 This group of buildings are divided into narrow frontage units, with vertically proportioned windows, commonly constructed of red brick with parapets. **56-59 High Street** are a fine group of eighteenth century buildings (Fig.72).



Fig. 73

View from Springfield Road towards the High Street

High Street, west side No's. 60-74

11.89 **60-66 High Street** are mid twentieth century buildings which mirror the window proportions or the adjacent traditional buildings, although they provide a poor termination to the western vista along Springfield Road (Fig.73).

11.90 **67-72 High Street** is of no individual interest, but mirror the scale and unit divisions elsewhere in the High Street. Number **73 High Street** is a fine art deco building (Fig.74), with an unaltered façade to the upper floors. Number **74 High Street** is a mid twentieth century building of traditional materials and proportions, again based on a narrow frontage module. Beyond, to the existing conservation area boundary the new development at **73-74 High Street** introduces an articulated and mostly glazed frontage, giving visual interest.

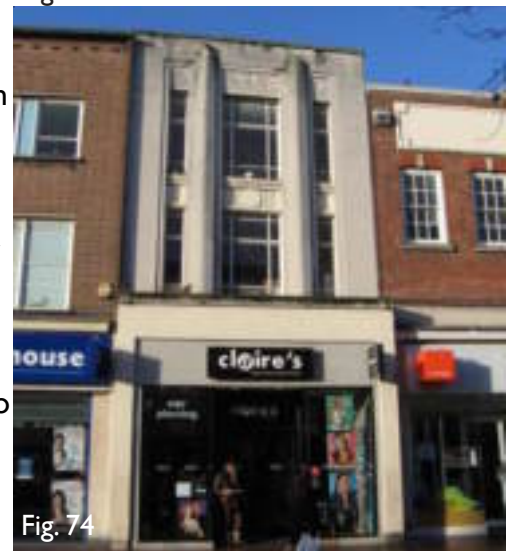


Fig. 74

73 High Street

12. Enhancement and management action

12.1 The appraisal identifies where character has been eroded and where there are opportunities for enhancement. Figure 75 and the accompanying text below propose works which would enhance the area. A future conservation area management plan would carry out more detailed design and justification for the proposals. The scope of the management plan would include the following.

Paving and street furniture

12.2 The paving materials throughout the area are generally poor. A coordinated range of traditional materials would significantly improve the appearance of the area. Detailed proposals will be prepared as part of the management plan, but the following enhancement objectives will be pursued.

- o Widening of pavements in Duke Street and New Street would improve the pedestrian experience, preferred materials include stone paving or bound pea shingle in areas with light footfall.
- o Pedestrian priority should be extended to Tindal Square and the junction of Tindal Street with High Street and along Market Road.
- o Rationalise street furniture and minimise traffic and transport signs.
- o High quality, preferably natural stone paving for High Street and Tindal Square, improved surface materials elsewhere.
- o Management of existing trees to ensure good health and new planting when possible i.e. Springfield Road.

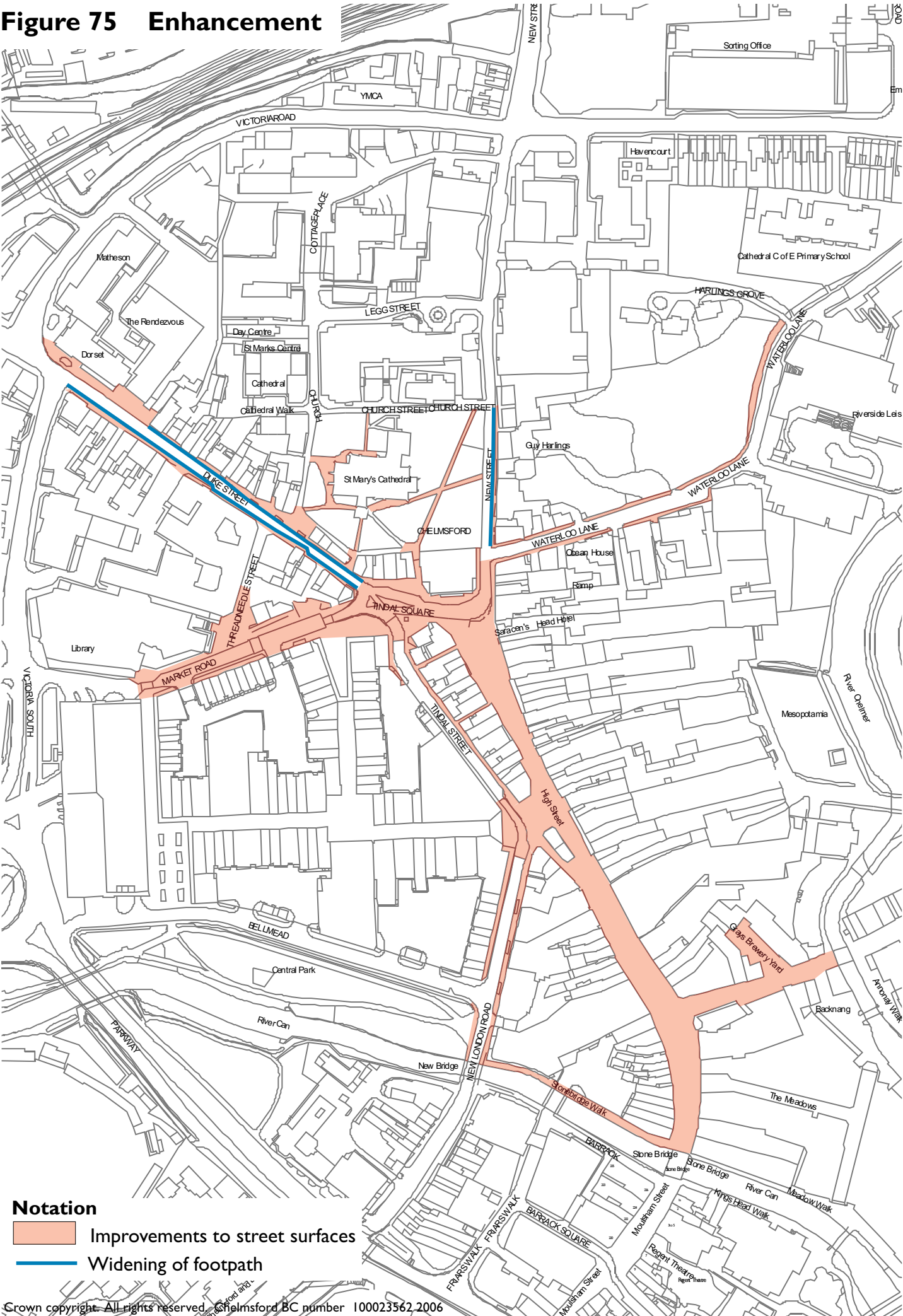
Space improvements

12.3 Tindal Square, Market Road and The High Street adjacent to Lloyds Bank are important spaces in the centre of the town. At present they are carved up by traffic routes or spoiled by clutter.

Tindal Square and Market Road

- o There is significant potential to create an attractive public space and provide an improved setting to Shire Hall and the surrounding buildings within Tindal Square and Market Road. The removal or replacement of the public toilet buildings would be required as part of these proposals, as would a pedestrian orientated environment. The Russian 26 pound Sebastopol Cannon was captured by the British and presented to the mayor of Chelmsford in 1855. It stood as a prominent feature in front of Shire Hall until it was relocated to Oaklands Park in 1937. It could be reinstated to the front of Shire Hall as a focal point of an improved public space.
- o Lloyd's Square the area adjacent to Lloyds Bank forms an important public space within the town, linking High Chelmer with the High Street. The bus route and planters detract from the quality of the space. Redesign of the space with high quality materials whilst incorporating the bus route to ensure a minimal impact, with a pedestrian orientated environment would significantly enhance the space.

Figure 75 Enhancement



Redevelopment of negative buildings

12.4 There are some sites which detract from the character of the conservation area, as a result of either open car parking and service yards or buildings of inappropriate scale, siting or form. Realistically at present many of the buildings identified as negative features (see Figure 42) may not have enough redevelopment value to warrant replacement. Physical condition and market forces will largely dictate when such sites are redeveloped. In some cases re-fronting to improve appearance as part of a refurbishment may be feasible. There are many larger sites where redevelopment is more possible (see Figure 2).

Tindal Street, High Chelmer

12.5 Tindal Street forms the outer edge of the historic market place to the medieval town. The southern side was originally lined with many fine timber framed buildings of domestic scale, however the High Chelmer complex (Fig.58) has destroyed this historic asset and introduced a bland mass and open service yard. Next to Tindal Street potential future redevelopment will allow the opportunity to reinstate the rhythm of the medieval plots and maintain the strong definition to the back edge of the pavement, whilst introducing an active frontage and using a complementary but contemporary form of architecture. The view from the south to St Mary's Cathedral could also be a strong feature of any development, providing a sense of context.

Car Park, Legg Street/New Street

12.6 A planning brief (July 2004) has been prepared for redevelopment of the car park site on the corner of Legg Street/New Street. A mixed use development of three and part four storeys is envisaged, with a building line to the back edge of footpath. This would improve the street scene and setting of the conservation area.

Car Parks, Land East of High Street

12.7 The land to the east of the High Street is an untidy open area at present. A development framework (February 2002), envisages extension of the retail area and has prompted development which is now in progress, which starts to knit the area back together. This site also has potential to replace the former Natwest building which fronts the High Street.

Bairstow Eves, Tindal Square

12.8 The building to the corner of Market Road and Duke Street is a very prominent feature from Tindal Square and detracts from one of the most important spaces within the town due to its system built format, poorly weathered material and flat roof form. (Fig.76). Redevelopment or re-cladding/refurbishment would provide the opportunity to enhance this very prominent site.



Tindal House

Debenhams

12.9 Debenhams department store occupies a large site to the east of High Street. Many of the buildings are poorly designed and relate poorly to the land east of High Street (Fig.77). The buildings fronting the High Street are of historic and townscape importance, but the rear portion of the site gives the opportunity for redevelopment. The relationship with Grays Yard and the retained buildings on the site would be critical.



Fig. 77
Rear of Debenhams

Marks and Spencer

12.10 Marks and Spencer store covers the site between High Street and New London Road, with a large service area (Fig.78). Redevelopment provides the opportunity to use the site more efficiently and improve the frontages to High Street, New London Road and the River Can.



Fig. 78
Marks and Spencer river frontage

County Hall

12.11 The County Hall site has a number of 1960s buildings which detract from the setting of the conservation area (Fig.79), particularly from views into the site from Duke Street. Redevelopment of these elements provides the opportunity to improve the setting of the conservation area. The relationship with the retained buildings, townscape, views and continuing public function of the site would be important.



Fig. 79
County Hall from Duke Street

13. Management Issues

Special Advertising Controls

13.1 Advertising clutter in the form of A boards and stop signs is a particular problem in the town centre, especially in Duke Street and Moulsham Street. A detailed study of advertising within the Central area would identify the need for any areas requiring special advertising control and the need for discontinuance orders.

Building maintenance

13.2 The buildings within the Central area are generally maintained to a high standard. There are however instances where the fabric of buildings has been allowed to deteriorate. The most common problem is lack of maintenance to rainwater goods. Particularly where upper floors are used for storage, minor leaks can go unnoticed and lead to more significant problems.

13.3 The council will monitor the condition of buildings, where necessary using statutory powers to ensure buildings are maintained.

Space improvements

13.4 The streetscape is undermined in many places by the dominance of traffic routes, narrow footpaths, street furniture clutter and poor quality paving materials. Reduction in traffic flow, rationalisation and co-ordination of street signs and furniture and improved hard landscaping materials can all be combined to improve the character and appearance of the area, creating people friendly spaces.

Space Management

13.5 Paving, street furniture and trees should all have a co-ordinated programme of maintenance and reinstatement.

Town Centre Management

The existing Chelmsford Town Centre Partnership forms the basis of town centre management. It comprises council services, traders and property owners. The continuation and strengthening of this group provides the basis for a well coordinated and prosperous town centre,

Enforcement

13.6 Works undertaken without consent can significantly undermine the character of the area. Shopfronts, signage and replacement windows and doors are a particular problem. Unchecked incremental changes can undermine the planning system and identity of an area. The Council will pursue enforcement action against unauthorised works which detract from the character of the area.

Guidance

13.7 There are specific areas where there is continual pressure for change, such as replacement of shop fronts and advertising paraphernalia. Specific guidance on these issues would make the Council's position clear, save the need for repetition and generally improve the quality of proposals within the area.

13.8 Replacement windows, particularly to the upper floor of retail units have been carried out unsympathetically in some cases. The use of standard timber, metal and plastic windows can potentially harm the appearance of buildings throughout the area. For commercial building most external changes which materially affect the appearance of the building will require planning permission. Detailed guidance for replacement windows would be beneficial.

Monitoring

13.9 Historic towns are not static, but ever changing. Whilst many elements will remain the same there is a continuing need review and monitor the conservation area. How successful are the controls? Is there scope to enlarge or reduce the boundaries? Are particular works undermining the character of the area?

13.10 A photographic survey should be carried out every 1-2 years and the review of the appraisal undertaken every 4-6 years.

14. Conclusions

14.1 The Central conservation area has a distinctive character derived from its location within the town, topography, building forms, street patterns and uses. There is continuing pressure for change, but with clear definition of character, there is a basis to ensure the special character and appearance of the Central area is not undermined.

14.2 Selective redevelopment, streetscape enhancements and greater management, monitoring and guidance provide the opportunity for enhancement of the area. Detailed proposals within a future management plan will build upon the issues identified in this appraisal.

15. Annex A –

1997 Local Plan Policies

15.1 The Chelmsford Borough Local Plan was adopted in 1997. Its objectives include promoting sustainable development, protection and enhancement of towns, villages and countryside, minimising environmental damage and protection of the Green Belt.

15.2 The Local Plan includes specific planning objectives to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas. Specific emphasis is given to the siting and design of buildings, materials, spaces, landscaping and detailing.

15.3 The Local Plan contains policies to ensure proposals preserve or enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas (ENV6), direct the preparation of enhancement schemes (ENV7) and encourage maintenance of buildings and features (ENV8). Shopfronts with character should be retained and appropriate design and materials used for new shopfronts (ENV16). ENV19 controls security grills and shutters and ENV17 and 18 advertising paraphernalia. Policies ENV9, 10 and 11 cover works to listed buildings, their re-use and maintenance. Assessment, recording and retention of archaeological remains are covered by ENV12, 13 and 14.

15.4 Policy SHP4 seeks to retain retail uses within the core area. The area to the east of the High Street, denoted SG1, is designated as an area of extension to the core retail area, as is SG4 in Market Road. The High Street is designated as a pedestrian priority area.

15.5 Parts of Duke Street, Tindal Square and Waterloo Lane are designated as secondary retail areas. Policy SHP6 seeks to retain retail, banking, professional and food outlets (use classes A1, A2 and A3). Policy SHP11 encourages residential and other appropriate use of upper floors.

15.6 There is a general presumption against new development or the intensification of development in areas liable to flooding, unless it can be demonstrated that appropriate flood protection measures will be undertaken (policy CSU8).

15.7 The north western corner of the area off of Waterloo Lane is within a housing area, policy HO5.

15.8 The table below compares the 1997 Local Plan Policies with the emerging core strategy, development control and Area Action Plan policies.

and will not necessarily be the only policies which are applicable to a specific proposal.

| 1997 Local Plan Policy* | 2006 Core Policy* | 2006 Development Control Policy* |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| ENV6 Conservation Areas | CP9 | DC20 |
| ENV7 Enhancement Schemes | CP9 | DC20, AAP |
| EHV8 Maintaining Conservation Areas | CP9 | DC20, AAP |
| ENV9-11 Listed Buildings | CP9 | DC20 |
| ENV16 Shop fronts | | DC20, DC49, AAP |
| ENV17-18 Advertising | CP9 | DC49, AAP |
| ENV19 Security Shutters | CP9 | DC46, DC49, AAP |
| SHP4 Core Retail Area | | CP7, CP22, CP23, DC5, DC63, AAP |
| SHP11 Upper floor space | | AAP |
| HO5 Housing | | DC3 |

*These policies are those which primarily cover the Central area, this is however not an exhaustive list a

Bibliography

English Heritage (2005)

Guidance on conservation area appraisals

Grieve, H. (1994)

The Sleepers and the Shadows, volumes 1 & 2.

Essex County Council: Chelmsford

Harrison, B. (2001)

A Duke Street Childhood, growing up in Duke Street 1900-1918

Ian Henry Publications: Romford

Jones, D. (2003)

Chelmsford a history

Phillimore: Chichester

Persner, N. (1954)

Buildings of England' Essex

Penguin

Torry, G. (1977)

Chelmsford through the ages

East Anglian Magazine: Ipswich

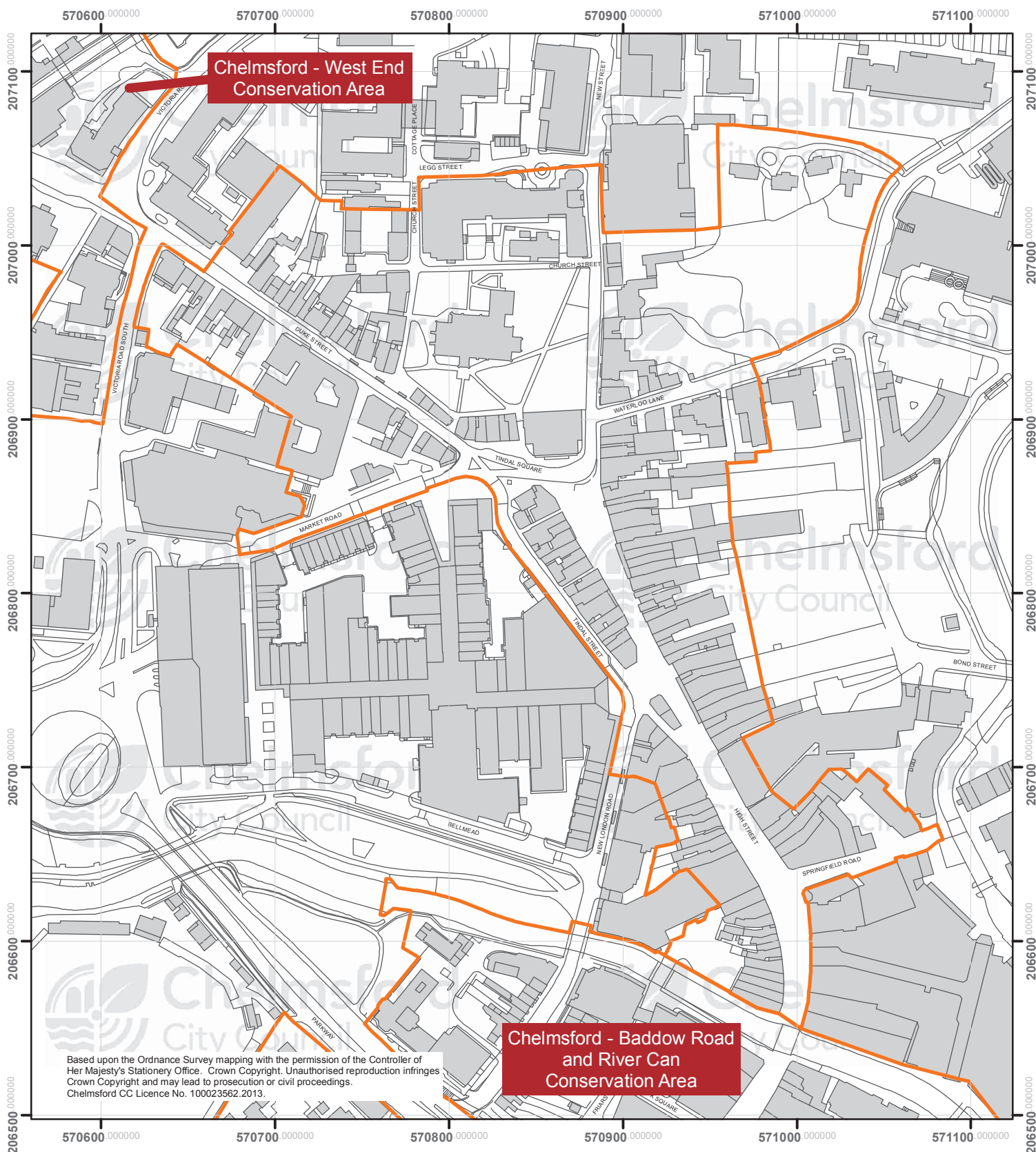
Wickenden, N. (1999)

A Celebration of Chelmsford

Chelmsford Borough Council

Chelmsford - Central Conservation Area

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| Reference | G001 |
| Designated | 11.06.1971 |
| First amendment | 27.04.1982 |
| Second amendment | 30.04.1991 |
| Third amendment | 06.11.2007 |



0 100 Metres
JULY 2013

Directorate for Sustainable Communities
Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1JE
Tel. 01245 606606 Fax. 01245 606642
Web www.chelmsford.gov.uk

