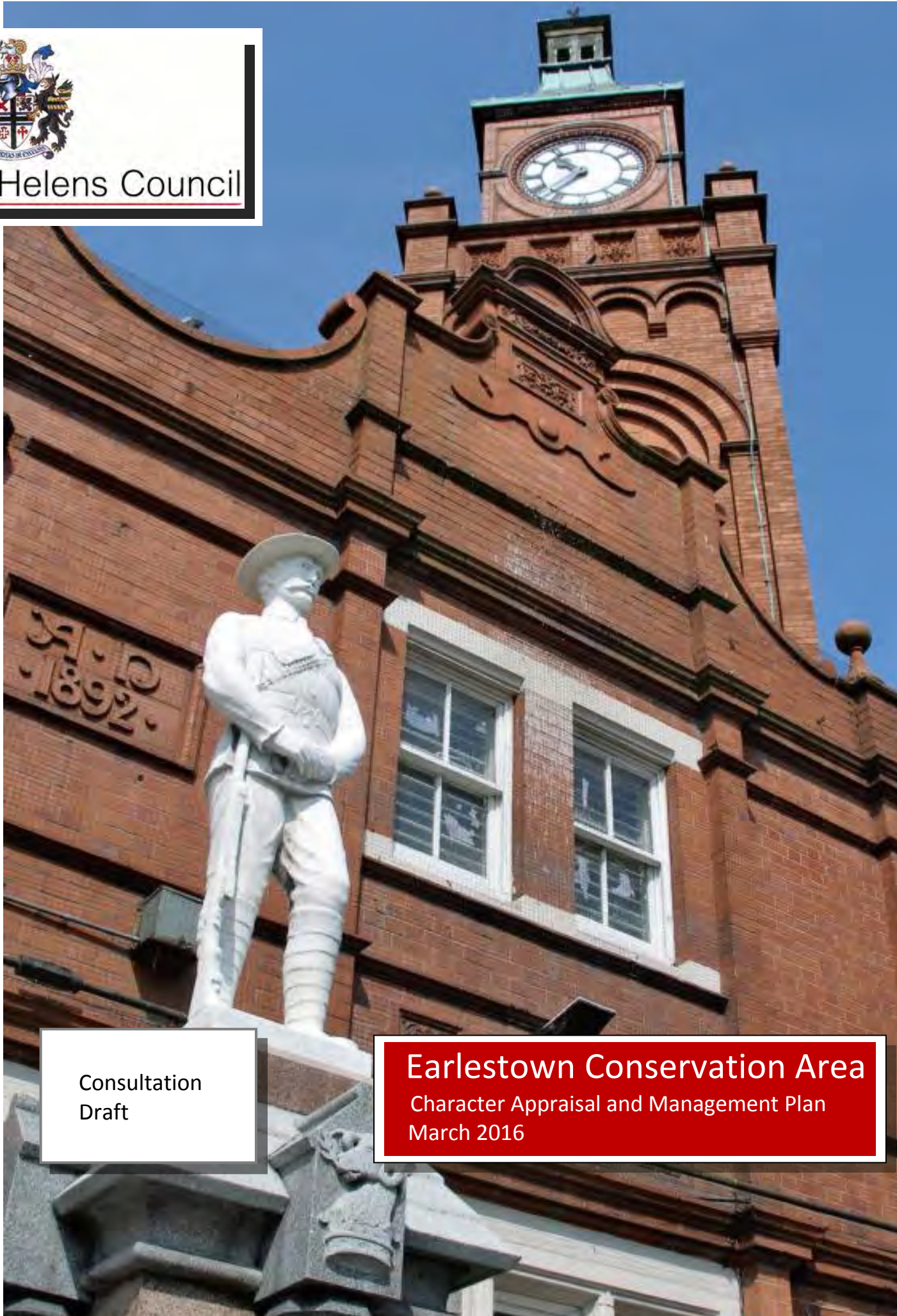




St. Helens Council



Consultation  
Draft

**Earlestown Conservation Area**  
Character Appraisal and Management Plan  
March 2016

# **Earlestown Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. It is a combination of buildings, street pattern, trees, open spaces and other features rather than buildings alone that combine to give the area its distinct character.
- 1.2. Local planning authorities are legally obliged to undertake a review from time to time to identify any parts of their areas considered worthy of special protection and to consider declaring these as conservation areas. A review undertaken in 2015 identified the central part of Earlestown as having special historical and architectural character.
- 1.3. The local authority has powers that enable it to control development in conservation areas, in order to preserve or enhance their character and appearance. However the purpose of conservation area designation is not to prevent change but to manage it in the interests of the special character of the area.
- 1.4. Conservation area status also brings the possibility of obtaining funding for heritage works such as through a Townscape Heritage Scheme, not available in other areas. Research by Historic England has demonstrated that property values have risen more quickly and are higher within conservation areas than for comparable property outside these areas (2).
- 1.5. The first part of this document is an appraisal of the character of Earlestown. New development should preserve or enhance the special character so there has to be a common understanding of what that special character is. Local residents and property owners have a major role to play by ensuring that properties are regularly maintained, and that important original features are retained and where missing possibly reinstated.
- 1.6. Designation of a conservation area also requires that the local authority formulate and publish proposals for its preservation and enhancement and the second part of the document is a management plan which lists actions required to achieve a long term vision for the area.

## **2. Purpose of the Appraisal**

- 2.1. The appraisal has been undertaken in accordance with current Historic England guidance (3). It has involved a thorough survey and visual appraisal of the area within and beyond the proposed conservation area boundary, and liaison with relevant organisations. It is intended to:
  - Provide the Council, property owners and potential developers with clear guidance on what comprises the special character of the area and
  - Provide the Council with the basis for dealing with applications for development, where applicants need to demonstrate how their proposals take account of the special character of the conservation area.

### **3. Planning Legislation and Policy**

#### **3.1. Planning legislation**

3.1.1. The process of designation and review of conservation areas in England is governed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 “the Act” (1). Section 69 of the Act requires every local planning authority from time to time to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character of which is desirable to preserve and enhance, and to designate those areas as conservation areas.

3.1.2. Conservation area status brings additional powers and duties under the Act as follows:

- Local Authorities are required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas when drawing up plans or considering development proposals both within the designated area and outside it if they would affect the setting or views into or out of it.
- Demolition or substantial demolition of a building within a conservation area will usually require planning permission from the Council.
- There is greater restriction on the types of development which can be carried out without the need for planning permission (permitted development rights). (4 )
- Felling or pruning most trees requires notifying the Council six weeks in advance. This is to give the Council time to assess the contribution the tree makes to the character of the conservation area and if the works would damage this.
- Fewer types of advertisements can be displayed with deemed consent
- The Council can add to the types of alterations that need planning permission by making an Article 4 Direction, which can be used to protect features particular or important to the area.

#### **3.2. National Planning Policy**

3.2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (5) uses the term ‘heritage assets’ to cover all aspects of heritage including those elements that contribute to the special character of conservation areas. It states:

- In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. (Paragraph 128)
- Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset and its setting, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal. (Paragraph 129).

- When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. (Paragraph 132).

### **3.3. Local Planning Policy**

3.3.1. Policy CQL 4 of the St Helens Local Plan Core Strategy (6) on Heritage and Landscape states that the Council will protect, conserve, preserve and enhance St. Helens' historic built environment and landscape character including Conservation Areas, by:

1. Protecting landscape character as well as important urban open space from development which would harm these assets;
2. Enhancing the value of St. Helens' historic built environment and landscape character by implementing Conservation Area Management Plans, education, interpretation and public access measures;
3. Ensuring all new development respects the significance and distinctive quality of the built and historic environment and landscape character and is of a high standard of design, reinforcing St. Helens' local distinctiveness; and
4. Ensuring that all development is located and designed in a way that is sensitive to its historic landscape and setting and retains or enhances the character and context

3.3.2. The Core Strategy also notes that Earlestown has the only other Town Centre in the Borough after St. Helens itself. The St. Helens Retail Capacity Study 2005 identified Earlestown Town Centre as a poorly performing centre, showing significant decline since 2001. Whilst Earlestown benefits from good accessibility and a sufficient level of service units, its convenience and comparison sector are below average and in decline. Environmental quality in the Town Centre is poor, exacerbated by an above average vacancy rate. Overall, Earlestown Town Centre is considered to be of limited vitality and viability. An Area Action Plan is proposed to tackle these problems. Two of the objectives of the proposed plan are to provide a framework for the future regeneration and development of the Town Centre and identify sites for improvement and expansion. These objectives are supported through the development of the management plan associated with this conservation area designation.

## **4. Location and Setting**

4.1. Earlestown is located approximately midway between Manchester and Liverpool and forms the eastern part of Newton le Willows. The town is steeped in historical associations, being fringed to the south by the first locomotive passenger railway line in the world, and to the west by the Sankey Canal which was the first canal of the industrial era in the world.



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Figure 1 Location Plan of Earlestown

## 5. Historical Development

- 5.1. Earlestown owes its existence and character to the railway. Prior to the second half of the 19th century it was a tiny hamlet, but by the end of that century had overtaken its medieval neighbour, Newton-le-Willows, becoming the seat of the town hall and market for both communities. The railway, engineered by George Stephenson and opened on 15 September 1830, was the first in the world to rely exclusively on steam power; the first to be entirely double track throughout its length; the first to have a signalling system; the first to be fully timetabled; and the first to carry mail. Nearby on towards Liverpool the line crosses the Sankey Canal over the world's oldest mainline railway viaduct still in use today. John B. Jervis of the Delaware and Hudson Railway some years later wrote: "It must be regarded ... as opening the epoch of railways which has revolutionised the social and commercial intercourse of the civilized world" (7).
- 5.2. Stephenson's son Robert was retained as the engineer for a spur line running to Warrington which opened in 1837. The resulting triangular track layout at the junction of the two railways, known as a 'wye', was the first ever constructed (8). The London North Western Railway Company, created in 1846, inherited this railway. The company completed construction of a wagon works on land to the west of the wye in March 1853 and shortly afterwards decided to commence construction of 200 houses for the workforce. For the foundations of the houses, the company took advantage of a huge and very cheap supply of surplus locally made bricks, the result of a takeover by Pilkington's of a rival firm and its

cancellation of a contract for a huge proposed glass works in the immediate area (9). These houses, now demolished, were the seeds from which Earlestown grew. The railway company was not an enlightened provider for its workers. Initially the company planned to supply these houses with rainwater, whilst sanitation was usually by cesspools being, as the Company said, “the cheapest of the modes proposed”.

- 5.3. Also in 1853, realising that there was no local authority supervision of the creation of the new town, the Lord of the Manor Mr. W. J. Legh proposed a bill to parliament for a Town Improvement Act. Such legislation would allow for the planning of the street layout and infrastructure of the town. The Act created the town’s Improvement Commission which commenced work on the 26th June 1855. The urban development of Earlestown came relatively late, so that advantage could be taken of new engineering and sanitary ideas. For instance, hardly any back-to-back houses were built in Earlestown, or in the rest of the town. (9)
- 5.4. The Railway Company built about 55% of the housing in the new town during its rapid early expansion. The impression that this urban industrial extension originally developed as a company town may have been reinforced by its naming as Earlestown in 1861, after the chairman of the London and North Western Railway Company, Hardman Earle. Subsequent to 1863, private individuals rather than industrial companies were responsible for most of the town’s growth. It appears that the company was not a natural benefactor but when pushed the company did show some willingness to provide for its workforce. After 1858, it laid out a gas supply to Earlestown and in 1897 following a deputation from its workforce, provided the land opposite the waggon works for a sports ground. (9)
- 5.5. The expansion of Earlestown was constrained by its location between two railways: a colliery railway to the east and the Liverpool and Manchester railway to the south. The town grew within the wedge of land between these railways and outwards along streets connected to the grid by bridges over or under the tracks. It appears that the street pattern was planned in advance because building plots were licensed and developed throughout the grid rather than spreading out from a starting place. Parts of the grid ran parallel to each rail line, intersecting with each other at an acute angle along Market Street. In 1870, Mr Legh gifted the land needed for the town market square, having relocated the market for Newton the previous year. He also provided the land on which the Town Hall was built. Permission to build the Hall was obtained in 1889, and the first meeting of the Commissioners to be held there was in December, 1893. (9)
- 5.6. Although this was not a planned town as such, the nature of its origins as a greenfield site, the existence of a street layout plan ahead of most development, the willingness of a local benefactor to provide land for public facilities and for the railway company to provide infrastructure and housing seems to have allowed it to develop in an orderly manner guided by a small number of hands.

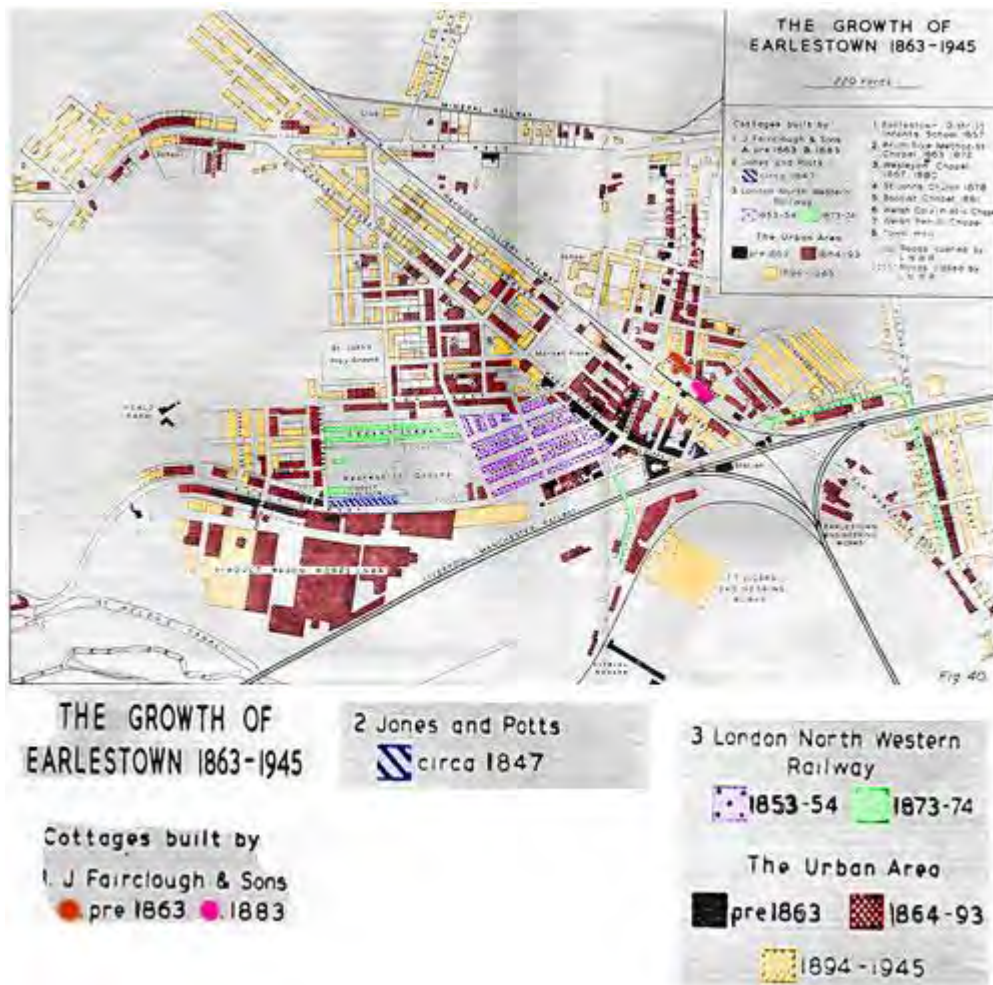


Figure 2 The development phases of Earlestown between 1830 to 1945 source: NewtonleWillows.com

## 6. The Chosen Area

- 6.1. The core of the town which forms the distinctive spine of the conservation area is the Market Street axis which runs northwest from the historic station, passing the key landmarks of the Ram's Head public house, the Market Square, the Town Hall and the Parish church of St John. The car park to the west of the Town Hall is included because through tree planting it has taken on the character of an attractive urban square. Towards the southern end of the axis, the adjoining section of Bridge Street is included because it is one of the older parts of the town and includes a range of commercial premises which form an integral part of the town centre together with Market Street. The large Methodist Church is excluded because it has been altered out of recognition from its original appearance.
- 6.2. To the west of the Bridge Street junction, a short section of Earl Street is included because it contains some of the older buildings and a landmark art deco building. The majority of Earl Street is excluded from the conservation area as its character has been severely compromised; the original residential area having been cleared and replaced by



nondescript commercial development. However, the two buildings comprising the Griffin Hotel and the Pink Pearl restaurant are included as a separate outlier of the conservation area because of their scale and high architectural quality which contributes to the local distinctiveness of the town. These buildings are also visually connected to the main part of the conservation area and therefore create a visually connected gateway to the town centre. The adjacent recreation ground is also included as evidence of the social development of the community financed by the founding railway company, and because it contains a number of mature trees which make a significant contribution to the character of this approach to the town centre. The waggon works which were located opposite have very recently been demolished.

- 6.3. The entire area of the railway wye has been included in recognition of its historical status as the world's first such structure, containing within it the world's oldest surviving working railway station building.

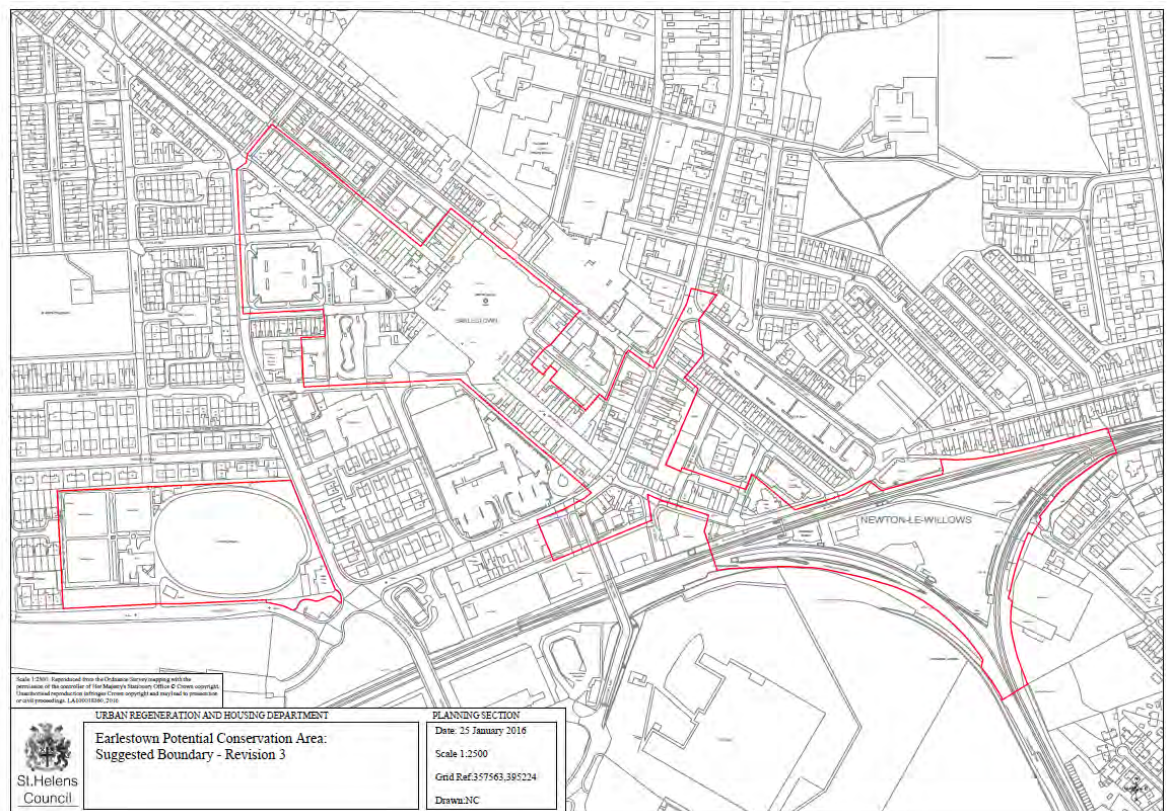


Figure 3: Plan of conservation area boundaries

## 7. Spatial Analysis

- 7.1. An urban design study of Earlestown undertaken for the St Helens Council in 2010 (10) concluded that the street pattern and layout of Earlestown centre are probably more important than the quality of the buildings in establishing the character of the area. The study noted that the street pattern is almost entirely geometric, belying its relatively recent industrial origins. This morphology is a major contributor to the special character of

Earlestown as distinct from the older, more organic core of Newton-le-Willows. The original grid of streets which ran parallel with the passenger railway line has been demolished. The remaining pattern consists of the intersection of two main sets of parallel streets. The main axis is formed by Market Street and Haydock Street, with an intervening back lane (Back Market Street). These streets were laid out in a north-west to south-east alignment, parallel with a mineral railway line which has since been taken up. The focus of the settlement, the Market Square is situated between these two linear streets. The second axis runs due east-west and includes Tamworth Street and Legh Street. A minor change in direction also occurs at the junction between Queen Street and Market Street.

- 7.2. Whereas the intersections of roads on a grid would normally be at right angles, these grids intersect to create unusual obtuse or acute triangular shaped building plots. This gives rise to some building forms which are either more open to the corner or, in the case of the town hall, present a sharp angle iron shape. At intersections where the streets change direction, long views are sometimes terminated by a building projecting out into the junction. Many buildings at such junctions have been designed with chamfered corners to offer a corner facing elevation. This has created some interesting focal points in the street scene (images 1 and 2).



1

*Nos. 4-8 Oxford street*



2

*The Market chambers*

- 7.3. The form of development during the rapid expansion of the town in the latter half of the Nineteenth century was of continuous terraces, predominantly two storeys high but with some three storey structures, typically bookending the terraces and a few landmarks, the chief of which is the tower of the Town Hall.
- 7.4. The relationship between the width of a street and the height of the buildings on either side of it helps to define its character. The southern end of Market Street is relatively narrow in relation to the height of the buildings, compared with typical wide historic high streets such as Newton le Willows. Furthermore, the building line is fairly uniform on both sides with building frontages running directly along the back edge of the pavement, and there are almost no breaks in the frontages. This all helps to create a very strong sense of unity and enclosure along this road. Taller and more ornate buildings bookend the two storey sections running through the middle of the street on the east side, creating the appearance

of a single composition. A small number of 'landmark' buildings such as the Town Hall and Parish Church stand apart from the terraces but their building lines run close to the back edge of the pavement allowing them also to contribute to the sense of enclosure of the streets.

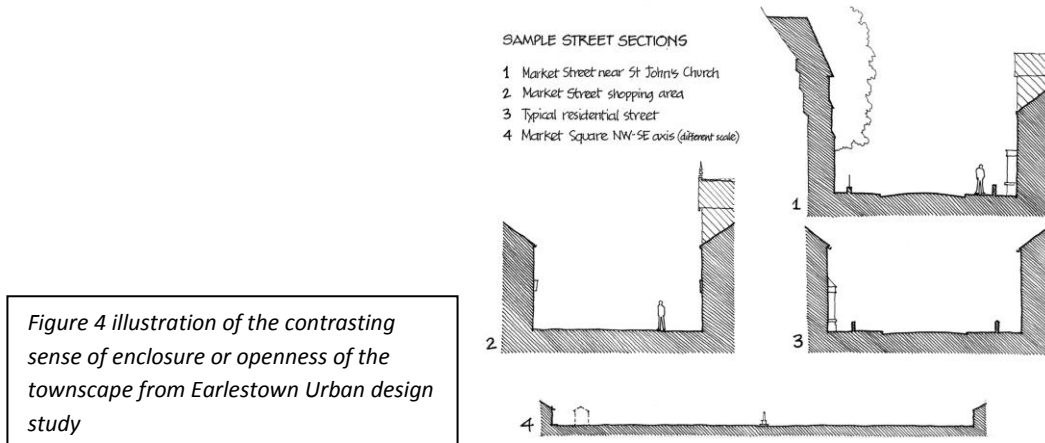


Figure 4 illustration of the contrasting sense of enclosure or openness of the townscape from Earlestown Urban design study

7.5. The strong and continuous street 'canyon' of Market Street opens out to reveal the Market Square at the core of the town. The dramatic contrast between the tightly enclosed street and the unexpectedly large market square is highly unusual if not unique in a town of such modest size and is one of the defining characteristics of Earlestown.

## 8. Building Form

8.1. The following characteristics apply to most of the older (pre Twentieth Century) buildings in the conservation area, to a greater or lesser extent:

- The taller buildings tend to form bookends to terraces of more modestly detailed two storey buildings. (image 3)
- All of the buildings have a strong vertical emphasis in the orientation and alignment of windows. The plot widths are generally quite narrow so the terraces have an interesting tight sequencing or 'rhythm' of buildings marching along the street. (image 4)



3

Market street



4

The Railway Hotel

- Buildings display strong distinction between the bottom middle and top in their composition. In this largely commercial area, the ground floors are typically shops whose surrounding pilasters and cornices act as the plinth for higher levels. The middle floor windows are often grouped and have contrasting architraves to add emphasis to them. If there is a second storey or a dormer storey this usually has smaller windows which are not strongly emphasised. Raised parapet walls; cornices; ornate chimneys, ridge tiles and finials provide create minor focal points in an interesting and varied roof-scape. (image 5)



5

*The Town Hall entrance*

- The typical decorative features are patterned and polychromatic brickwork; large dormer windows with moulded bargeboards; corbelled brick cornices, bay windows and chimney stacks, and moulded brick or stone window and entrance surrounds. (image 6 and 7)



6

*10-12 Market Street*



7

*4-8 Oxford Street*

- Windows and entrances usually have deep reveals which is to say they are set back deeply from the faces of the brick walls. (image 7)
- In summary, vertically oriented features at lower levels encourage the eye of the viewer to be drawn upward, and strong horizontal features at higher levels encourage the eye to rest before fixing on one or another focal point. All of this creates a pleasing and ‘settled’ composition.

## **Materials Colours and Textures**

- 8.2. Earlestown is predominantly a red brick town, usually a slightly mottled red-brown brick. This characteristic pattern is complemented by terracotta, the harder, redder moulded fireclay, used mainly on the Town Hall, the Griffin Hotel and in structural details elsewhere. Render or stucco provides a light painted contrast. Stone for building is a rarity, chiefly to be seen in St John’s Church and the Obelisk, or as red sandstone dressings and lintels. Roofs are almost always clad in Welsh slate.
- 8.3. There are rare patches of sandstone setts which must have covered the streets in the 19th century. These patches are adjacent to the Railway Hotel and in parts of Suez Street.
- 8.4. A limited programme of investment in recent years has resulted in repainting of red street furniture in a more appropriate black colour. However signage and lighting is often unduly prominent and can interfere with important views.
- 8.5. Sadly, the town centre has very little of the original cast iron street furniture which must have been installed in many locations. Today it is chiefly seen on the street nameplates. Most of the recent public realm surfacing and street furniture comprises standard concrete and steel products.

## **9. Landmarks and Views**

- 9.1. The conservation area is anchored by an important landmark at either end of its north – south axis. The listed railway station is the view which greets passengers arriving by train (images 8 and 9). An interesting sequence of views opens out on a walk north from the railway station. Starting at the footbridge between platforms one and two, the Ram’s Head Hotel terminates the view looking north (image 10), and walking north, the view is gradually revealed around the curve of Queen Street until it opens out along the arrow straight corridor of Market Street receding into the distance. The junction of two off set grids in the street pattern allows the Rams Head Hotel to project out as a minor landmark partly enclosing Market Street but at the same framing and drawing the eye towards a view of the town hall in the distance (image 11).
- 9.2. The focussed view along the Market Street ‘canyon’ opens out dramatically at the approach to the wide expanse of Market Square. The obelisk at the centre of the square is an essential focus for this large space, which can be rather barren on non- market days. (image 12)

9.3. Undoubtedly the 'signature' building of the town centre is the Town Hall and its clock tower. This structure is appropriately prominent in several long views as the town's principal civic building. At street level the Boer War Memorial and later plaques, provide a small scale landmark. (image 13)



*The Railway Station*



*Views along Queen Street towards the Ram's Head Hotel ...and from the Ram's head towards the Town Hall*



12

*The Obelisk Market Square*



13

*Boer War Memorial by the Town Hall*

- 9.4. Whilst St John's Church is substantial, its role as a landmark is secondary, in that it is only perceived within a short radius as it scarcely rises above local ridgelines. Nevertheless it is in a good gateway location on the approach from the north. (image 14)



14

*St John the Baptist Church*

- 9.5. On the western approach to the town centre along Earle Street, the fringe of mature trees beside the recreation ground and the unexpectedly grand buildings of the Griffin Hotel and adjacent restaurant create a surprisingly strong gateway. (images 15 and 16)

15



16

*The Griffin Hotel and adjacent restaurant*

## 10. Other Buildings Which Make a Positive Contribution

10.1. Only four buildings in the town centre are Listed (as Grade II), namely the Obelisk in the Market Place; the Boer War Memorial in front of the Town Hall, the Town Hall, (1892) and the elegant Station (c1845). In all there are 21 buildings and structures which are identified as being of particular merit and which make a positive contribution to the character of Earlestown. Some examples of these are illustrated in images 17 to 24. Each building has been selected as it fulfils one or more of the following characteristics:

- It is a good example of an architectural style, period or architectural use of materials or forms
- It is locally distinctive, constructed of local materials or help to 'tell the story' of Earlestown
- It performs a landmark function, either by prominence or significance.

**Figure 5: Buildings which make a positive contribution to the streetscape**



17

*The former Primitive Methodist Chapel*



18

*Market Square south eastern side*





19

*Residential development on Market Street*



20

*The Newmarket Public House*



21

Former Cooperative Building, 15 Earle Street



22

Art Deco style shop frontage 37 Market Street

23

24

## 11. Landscape

- 11.1. In some locations in the town centre, trees contribute to providing enclosure within the street scene. The car park on the south side of St John's Church is a good example. The formality of the tree planting echoes the shape of the square. The trees, now having reached maturity also help to 'contain' the intrusiveness of the cars. (image 25)



25

*Looking towards the Town Hall with St John Street Car Park on the right*

- 11.2. The Market Square has some tree planting around its margin, but here the trees are younger and more widely spaced. In consequence, they do not have the same effect.
- 11.3. The short line of mature street trees at the western end of the town centre, on Earle Street, makes a welcome contribution in a supporting role to the Griffin Hotel, where most of this important gateway area lacks significant spatial definition or enclosure.
- 11.4. The largest area of trees in the town centre is that within the triangle or 'wye' between the railway lines, east of the Station. This area reinforces the strong southern edge of the town centre and frames the pathway between the detached platforms of the Station. It is a great semi natural landscape, contrasting with the hard edged and formal structure of the town. (Image 26)



*Aerial view of Earlestown Station showing the world's first railway junction or 'wye'*

## **12. Uses and Activities**

- 12.1. The interactions between people, activities, spaces and buildings create a sense of a place. Earlestown becomes a vibrant place on Market days, with over 150 stalls spreading out from the market place to bring colour, sounds, smells and bustling activity into the surrounding shopping streets and car parks (image 27). On non-market days, the other nodal points become more apparent as foci of activity, namely the bus station, the railway station, the primary school, the large stores and the main shopping streets of Bridge Street and Market Street.



27

*Earlestown Market*

- 12.2. Civic and community functions, small scale industry and mixed use buildings interlock with the chief activity of shopping and commerce in the conservation area, while largely residential terraced streets occupy the immediate fringes.

### 13. Negative Characteristics: Loss Damage or Intrusion

- 13.1. **Unsympathetically altered buildings.** Many of the buildings in the conservation area have had some form of alteration which harms their architectural or historic character. Upper floor traditional sliding sash and case windows have been replaced with upvc framed windows; some decorative features and chimney pots have gone. Shop signs which were originally confined to a narrow fascia area often spread across a large part of the frontage (image 28). Most traditional shop fronts have been replaced with large plate glass fronts and many have had unattractive roller shutters installed (image 29). In some cases, shop fronts have been partially infilled with masonry walling surrounding smaller domestically scaled windows. (image 30). The cumulative impact of these individually small changes has been to lose some of the uniformity of the area and in Earlestown this uniformity is part of the defining character of the area, as exemplified by the formal lines of buildings on rows of terraced streets. At night time, the many shuttered and dark shop frontages create an unwelcoming and slightly unsafe atmosphere. Furthermore, these are the very streets which people should feel comfortable to take advantage of the short walking distances between the station and the residential areas surrounding the conservation area.



28



29

*Over-scaled shop fronts on Market Street*

*Shuttered shop fronts on Bridge Street*



30

*In-filled shop front, Market Chambers*

### 13.2. The Market Square

*“The Market Place..... that asphalted area is desperately sad, in spite of an Eighteenth Century Obelisk. ....Even more indefensible are the squalid late C20 supermarkets on opposite sides. ...If ever a place needed enlightened, imaginative place making, it is here” (11)*

The huge expanse of the Market Square is only effectively framed by buildings on the south east Oxford Street side. Elsewhere the buildings around its edges fail to create a sufficient sense of enclosure and visual interest. The Wilko store which fringes the south west side is set back from the predominant building line of Market street and displays largely blank walls with a strong horizontal emphasis in contrast to the soaring lines of the traditional buildings in the area. The north eastern side is fringed by open car parks, a garage and a retail shed. The north western side, along Stanley Street, has a terrace of domestic rather than civic scale. The flank elevation of the Police Station is not designed to address this space, and the Market Offices and WCs suffer from poorly considered alterations and additions. On non-market days, the square itself is an uninspiring car park. The surface of the Market Square is also nondescript in character. (image 31)

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### 13.3. The western approach along Earle Street

The area at the junction of Earle Street and Sankey Street, is the ‘space left over’ after road junction provision. To the east, between the Griffin Hotel and Market Street, housing turns its back on the road. The McDonalds restaurant and the car park for the Tesco store have created an environment which leaves the road space unenclosed and poorly overlooked whilst their built form fails to reinforce local character. The area has a car-dominated character which can be enervating for pedestrians.

### 13.4. Ram's head public house

Individual trees can make a positive contribution to the street scene, but occasionally they can grow to obscure important architectural features of the townscape. The tree in front of the Ram's Head public house has grown too large for its site and now obscures the focal point of the building which is its impressive stone entrance porch. (image 32). Image 33 shows how it could look.



*Obscured view of Ram's Head Public House (left) ...as could be revealed (right)*

### 13.5. Market Street public realm

The pedestrianised area of Market Street has been laid entirely in orange paviours, obscuring the distinction between former pavement and carriageway areas. The absence of clearly defined pavements detracts from the historic character of the street and removes the attractive 'frame' for at the base of the buildings (image 34).



*'Wall to wall' paving Market Street*

### 13.6. Vacant buildings and potential redevelopment sites

- 13.6.1. The two listed buildings comprising the station and town hall are vacant. The town hall is awkwardly configured for alternative uses because some of its interior spaces are large and would be difficult to sub divide into smaller units without losing some of its civic

character. The station building would be difficult to re-use because it has no direct road access.

13.6.2. There are two prominent gap sites in the conservation area. The bus station square which is an important point of arrival in the town has a large gap site on its eastern side (image 35). Another gap site blights the southern end of Queen Street, marring an early impression of the town centre from the station approach.

13.6.3. The eastern side of the Market Square lacks an appropriate sense of enclosure and overlooking by buildings because the built form on that side is set well back behind areas of servicing and parking and because the buildings are relatively nondescript. The Wilko store on the western side of the square is also inappropriate for such a potentially auspicious location, being a long low and largely windowless retail shed with little or no detailing to its elevations. Both of these areas would benefit from redevelopment in a more appropriate form to respect local character.

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## **14. Summary of Positive Characteristics of the Conservation Area**

14.1. In summary, the special character of the area may be defined as the following:

- A distinctive industrial town pattern of development resulting from two intersecting grids which gives rise to a number of interesting corner buildings
- A good sense of enclosure and rhythm created by terraces closely built up to the back edge of pavement
- A strongly contrasting large, regularly shaped and level market square
- Some important visual landmarks which draw the eye of the viewer and invite exploration
- A clear family identity in building design and materials.

## **15. Summary of Negative Characteristics of the Conservation Area**

15.1. The features which strongly detract from the special character of the conservation area may be defined as the following:

- Some inappropriate late Twentieth Century buildings which do not contribute to a suitable sense of enclosure and which are not designed to respect the familial similarities of the older buildings
- A poorly enclosed Market square which fails to live up to its potential as the centre of the town

- Tired and inappropriate surface treatment of the public realm
- Vacant historic buildings which contribute to a general sense that the area is rather run down

## Part 2: Earlestown Conservation area Management Plan

### Contents

1. Introduction
2. Objectives for Earlestown
3. Building repairs
4. Landscape and public realm improvements
5. Design guidance

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Section 71 of the Act (1) places statutory duty on a Local Planning Authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their areas which are conservation areas. The following section outlines a set of objectives for the conservation area in 2025. This will be important in order to raise optimism and garner support for heritage led regeneration leading to a successful future for the town centre. The subsequent three sections list a range of measures intended to help achieve these objectives through targeted interventions by the local authority and other public bodies. The final section is a set of design principles which will be used to guide and assess the suitability of much needed private investment in the area.

### 2. Objectives for Earlestown

- 2.1. By 2025 the centre of **Earlestown will be a much more popular and attractive location** for people to live, work and play. The historic character will have been restored and new development will reinforce that character. The great majority of buildings within the conservation area will be fully occupied with shops and leisure on the ground floors and offices and flats on the upper floors. The town hall and railway station will be refurbished and in use for business or recreational uses.
- 2.2. **The public realm will be smart, orderly, tree lined and distinctive**, reflecting the linear character of the streets. The town centre commercial area will have been diversified into a

place to enjoy leisure and recreation in the daytime and evening as well as to satisfy local shopping needs. The Market Square will be a well enclosed focus of community and commercial life.

- 2.3. **The welcoming appearance and activity of Market Street will draw movement between the town and the railway station.** Beyond the conservation area core of the town, the surrounding areas will be prospering as new and existing residents discover the potential for commuting by rail between Earlestown and the centres of Warrington; Liverpool and Manchester whilst enjoying relatively low accommodation costs.
- 2.4. **Small businesses will have recognised the potential of this location** to attract skilled employees from a wider area and perhaps it may have emerged as a niche location for artists, fashion designers or others taking up the opportunity to sell directly to customers from around the Northwest region who regularly attend the town's ever popular weekly markets.

### **3. Building Repairs and Maintenance**

- 3.1. The local authority will seek to assemble funding in order to carry out a programme of conservation led repairs for priority buildings in the conservation area. Building owners will be approached to gauge their interest in making repairs and willingness to contribute to their cost. Buildings which would consume an undue share of funds in relation to any potential public improvement will not be prioritised in this scheme.
- 3.2. Priority buildings within this programme will be identified according to the following criteria:
  - Historical significance
  - Design quality
  - Prominence in the street or scene or railway views
  - The relative impact on public views in relation to the cost of any necessary works.
- 3.3. All owners will be contacted to explain the importance of historically appropriate construction and materials within the conservation area. Where planning permission would be required for making alterations to buildings, for example by the replacement of windows, traditional replacements will be sought. The unauthorised removal of significant features such as chimneys; shop fronts and street fronting entrances will be strongly resisted and the local planning authority will seek to remediate the more inappropriate changes through enforcement measures.
- 3.4. The local authority will actively seek to promote new uses for the town hall and railway station. Appropriate uses will need to be compatible with their listed status and capable of generating the income needed to secure their long term maintenance.

### **4. Landscape and Public Realm Improvements**



- 4.1. The local authority will seek to assemble funding to carry out a programme of conservation led improvements for priority areas of public realm in order to create more attractive spaces and a more suitable setting for the adjacent buildings. The key priorities have been identified as the section of Market Street between Bridge Street and Stanley Street; the Market square and the bus station.
- 4.2. The guiding principles for such works in the conservation area will be:
  - To use materials which contrast well with the brick of the buildings
  - To replicate the visual distinction between former carriageway and pavement areas
  - Generally to emphasise the strong linear form of the street
  - To improve the sense of enclosure of the Market Square.
- 4.3. Works may comprise
  - Re-surfacing of pedestrianised areas
  - Planting of additional trees
  - Additional public seating
  - Renewal of market stalls
  - Pruning or removal of any unhealthy trees or trees which unduly obscure the close range view of important buildings
  - Creating a raised pedestrian crossing from Queen Street to Market street

## **5. Design Guidance**

- 5.1. New development in the conservation area will be expected to reinforce local character whilst adding to the richness and evolution of design in the locality. The elements listed below are for guidance and are particularly important for developers. Some deviation from the guidelines may be acceptable for high quality bespoke contemporary designs which incorporate a sufficient number of the characteristics to make a clear bond with the prevailing local character.
- 5.2. The pattern of development should reinforce the traditional character as follows:
  - Development should continue the typical terraced form of the area.
  - It should follow the traditional building line of the street. For commercial buildings this follows the back edge of pavement and for domestic buildings it sits around 1.5 to 2 metres back from the edge of the pavement providing a small area of enclosed private garden space to the frontage.

- Corner buildings should have chamfered corners creating a narrow elevation overlooking the street junction.
- Wide buildings should be sub divided into distinct bay widths to relate to the traditional plot widths and rhythm of the street.

5.3. Building form should follow the guidelines below:

- Building heights should relate to the prevailing height of the older commercial and residential buildings in the area. Because contemporary buildings have lower floor to ceiling heights than the older buildings in the area, buildings should generally be 2.5 to 3 storeys in height with the possibility of 3.5 storeys on corners.
- Roofs should generally be double pitched and gable ended with a pitch between 28 and 35 degrees. Roofs may contain flat roofed area above dormers but mansard and hipped roofs will not generally be acceptable. Long stretches of roof should be broken up with the use of chimneys, light scoops or other structures to help replicate the rhythm of the street.
- Minor focal points should be created on corners of buildings facing cross roads or long views, for example by use of projecting bays; dormers and entrances.
- Entrances should face the public street.
- Windows and doors should have a generally vertical emphasis.
- There should be some distinction between the bottom middle and top of the building, for example by varying the size and height of windows and with the smaller windows on the upper floor.
- Windows and doors should have deep reveals of between 75 and 150 mm in order to create an impression of depth and strength.

5.4. Materials

- Walls should generally be in the reddish brown brick which is common in the locality.
- Roofs should generally be in Welsh slate.
- Decorative elements could be in any contrasting material such as limestone, terracotta or glazed tiling.

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