

5.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

5.1 The management plan seeks to highlight the factors which diminish the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area and aims to identify opportunities through which the special character and appearance of the area may be better preserved and enhanced within a 10 year action plan. Detailed design guidance and advice on maintenance is also provided to assist those who have a responsibility for delivering change and in making informed decisions that will protect the special significance of the Conservation Area.

Key Issues

Historic Street Pattern, Pathways and Links

5.2.1 The medieval street pattern and network of pathways and alleyways are important to understanding the origins of the town and in maintaining the character and appearance of the Conservation Area but these are harmed by the following factors:

- Poor Quality Modern Development and Over-Sized Plot Widths: Some poor quality modern buildings have replaced more traditional structures and some bear no relation to the historic plot widths nor the local materials or special architectural character of Wrexham. In particular, the premises at 3 to 9 Hope Street has an extended plot width which does not respect the historic plot widths in the street. This presents a rather long unbroken fascia and glass shopfront to the street and an unimaginative and plain upper storey, which contrasts with the interest and intricacy of the buildings opposite. The service area to this building has a particularly negative impact upon Abbot Street whereby it's imposing scale and dead frontage has a significant detrimental visual impact upon one of the area's more historic streets. Parking in front of the delivery area and commercial bin storage further compound this issue and present a highly negative view into the Conservation Area from this approach.

As they arise, opportunities should be taken to replace or reconfigure poor quality modern buildings to better respect traditional plot widths and to reinstate the more intricate rhythm of the streetscene in accordance with Design Guidance as set out within Appendix 1.

- Street Clutter: Much harm is caused to the quality of the streetscape, the setting of key buildings and enjoyment of the space through general street clutter in the form of bins, street signs, advertisement boards and poorly maintained street furniture. The unsympathetic design, use of uncharacteristic materials and unsatisfactory siting disturbs the unity of facades and important views and can in some instances impede access. Lack of suitable locations to conceal or provide discreet bin storage is a concern. This creates a cluttered appearance which detracts from the setting of key listed buildings and in particular, important views and links to the Church. Purpose built storage areas are required to conceal and better manage refuse disposal in order to tackle the existing problems whilst appropriate bin storage should be designed into all new development proposals within the town centre to prevent the problem escalating.

- Poor Quality Surfacing: The condition of the street surfaces, through broken or patched paving slabs has further detrimental effect. Whilst proposals are underway to replace surface materials within parts of the Conservation Area there is a need for a consistent approach and regular maintenance and management to ensure their proper upkeep. This not only includes replacing broken slabs but also regular cleaning in particular, the removal of chewing gum.
- Lack of planting: There is an inadequate amount of tree planting and green space within the Conservation Area, most of which is currently found only within the Churchyard. Creating space for appropriate planting and complimentary soft landscaping would significantly benefit key streets within the Conservation Area, namely Hope Street but their introduction could be restricted by underground services. The Wrexham Tree and Woodland Strategy seeks to increase urban tree canopy cover within the County Borough and identifies the town centre as a priority. The Wrexham Town Centre Public Realm Strategy identifies suitable locations for new planting and this plan should be implemented where any future public realm schemes are proposed. Monies from Section 106 agreements through new development within the town centre could also be used to secure these improvements.
- Lighting: A study undertaken in support of the Wrexham Town Centre Public Realm Study (AECOM, 2015) highlighted poor quality lighting as a specific issue within the town centre. The colour temperature of existing lighting and general dimness consequently makes users feel unsafe and streets uninviting. Options for lighting improvements within the town centre are highlighted within the Public Realm Study.

Building Materials and Architectural Detail

5.2.2 The range of building materials and quality of buildings and architectural detail combine to form an interesting townscape. However this has been diminished by the following factors:

- Loss or alteration of traditional shop fronts: The appropriate size, design and illumination of signage as well as the quality and style of shop fronts is essential in maintaining the character and appearance of the Conservation area. The use of inappropriate materials and designs that bear little relation to the traditional style of existing properties is an ongoing problem.

Many ground floor frontages have been altered or modernized over time removing the historic shop fronts, features and fabric. Many of these modern substitutes do not relate well in terms of the proportions, quality or design of the original buildings which survive at the upper levels. Replacement shop fronts require planning permission and should be designed in accordance with design guidance as set out in Appendix 1. In designing new shop fronts there is a need to respect not only the existing building but adjoining buildings which may have been designed as one composition. There is also a need to design in any security measures in the most

sensitive way. In addition to more considered design enforcement action within the town centre should be prioritised.

- Inappropriate signage: The disconnect between upper and ground floors is further exacerbated by oversized vinyl fascia's that do not respect traditional proportions, quality or features of the building. In many instances these cannot be controlled through current planning requirements leading to poorly considered and inappropriate change. The introduction of an 'Area of Special Control of Advertisements' could be considered which would provide greater controls as a means by which the quality of signage within the Conservation Area could be improved.
- Lack of maintenance: Through a general lack of investment, some buildings are in need of essential repair especially at their upper levels. Despite some improvements the general condition of the buildings is poor and many require maintenance now in order to prevent more substantial repair later. There is a need to bring disused floorspace back into use to avoid further neglect. The proposed Townscape Heritage Scheme, if successful, will provide grant assistance for the repair of the historic fabric of certain buildings and other physical works to enable upper floor space to be better utilised. Guidance on maintenance is also provided in Appendix 2.
- Inappropriate materials and loss of original features: Inappropriate alterations, which have stripped away the original historic details and fabric, replacing them with poor quality modern equivalents are evident. Examples of this include artificial roof slates and tiles, modern cement renders, and the unsympathetic replacement of windows and doors in inappropriate styles and uPVC alternatives. The proposed Townscape Heritage Scheme as referred to above will support the reinstatement of lost features but enforcement action is also necessary to address unauthorised change.

Use and Vitality

5.2.3 The current economic climate and changing shopping habits are altering the way in which the town centre is used resulting in the following issues:

- Disused floor space and gap sites: The town centre experiences high vacancy and turnover and consistent under-occupation of upper floors. Many upper floors remain vacant resulting in a lack of maintenance and deterioration of the structural fabric, which degrades the overall appearance of the street-scene. The former Burtons at the junction of Hope Street and High Street is particularly detrimental in key views to and from the Church. The current condition with boarded up windows is visually poor and interim measures could be taken to improve this situation. Vacancy levels within Overton Arcade are also a concern in one of the more distinctive spaces within the town centre. Gap sites at 22 Town Hill, adjacent the Commercial Public House on College Street, to the east of the Wynnstay Hotel on Charles Street, the former Hippodrome site on Henblas Street and on Yorke Street, detrimentally affect the visual continuity of the street scene.
- Vitality: The retention of retail units and encouragement of mixed uses is essential in

ensuring the vibrancy of the Conservation Area both throughout the day and evening. There remains a lack of activity throughout the centre after normal business closing times.

Awareness and Appreciation

5.2.4 A key issue is the lack of awareness of the importance of the historic environment and the various elements which contribute to it. The conservation area needs to be considered, not only in terms of the physical fabric but also the historical associations and meanings attached to the buildings, place names and spaces. The story of the town needs to be better told and interpreted if it is to be properly valued and cared for.

- Understanding of traditional materials and skills: The historic fabric of the town can only be properly protected through the correct use of materials and proper repair techniques however there is a shortage of skilled contractors who can work with traditional materials and techniques. A traditional buildings skills programme has been developed in partnership with Cadw, Coleg Cambria, Cadwyn Clwyd, North Wales Economic Ambitions Board, CITB and CWIC (Construction Wales Innovation Centre) who recognise the challenges that currently exist in the construction sector with regard to the knowledge and skills required for the appropriate conservation of traditional buildings as well as access to and uptake of existing traditional building skill courses. Through this partnership it is anticipated that the proposed Townscape Heritage Scheme would provide a platform to help support the delivery of the programme, providing building owners, agents, contractors and those entering the sector with the opportunity to develop technical skills and raise their awareness, understanding and appreciation for heritage.
- A need for better interpretation: Wrexham has many important historical associations to people, events, trades and industry and many stories to tell that are interwoven through the buildings, places and spaces of the town. There is a lack of interpretation and information readily available to local people and visitors alike and much more research that could be undertaken.
- Emphasising positive features: Often the architecture, particularly to upper floors goes unnoticed and a negative view, of the town, driven by issues at ground level, prevails. Lighting would assist in showcasing some of the more significant buildings and place greater focus on the quality of historic environment. The Public Realm Strategy makes recommendations for the lighting of key building and spaces and these should be implemented as opportunities arise.

Conservation Area Boundary Changes

5.2.4 The Conservation Area boundary requires review from time to time. An online public survey carried out in September 2018 found that the majority of respondent's considered the existing boundary to be appropriate. There was a feeling that by enlarging the area at this time, focus on the existing heritage could be lost. On this basis it is not proposed to make any boundary adjustments at this time. However future consideration could be given to the following areas:

- Brook Street, Bridge Street and Well Street
- Chester Street and Chester Road

- Queens Square and Lambpit Street
- Land immediately south of St Giles Churchyard

Other areas were referred to within the survey but are already included under separate Conservation Area designations.