

Rugeley Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal



April 2012

Conservation Area Appraisal Rugeley Town Centre

1. Introduction

This document seeks to provide a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation of Rugeley town centre as a Conservation Area through a written appraisal of its character and appearance – what matters and why. It is intended as a guide upon which to base the form and style of future development in the area as it continues to evolve. An Appraisal was produced for Rugeley following Conservation Area designation in 1973, and updated in 2000. The current document again updates its predecessors, making use of some information contained therein.

Rugeley Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in December 1973 and covers the historic core of this market town. Its boundary is shown on Plan 1. Rugeley stands between Lichfield and Stafford on the south bank of the River Trent on ground rising from the valley to the forest and heath of Cannock Chase. The Rising Brook flows down from the Chase through the centre of the town. The town was first documented at the time of the Domesday Survey, and its development has focussed on the main Lichfield-Stafford road along Horsefair, Upper and Lower Brook Street and Market Street. Rugeley's prosperity has been based on its mining and industrial history with water power an important asset and its first market charter dating from 1259. The Trent and Mersey Canal (formerly Grand Trunk Canal) to the east of the town opened in 1777 and provided the means of bulk transport of goods. Coal, power and electronics dominated during the 20th century and today's built environment continues to provide evidence of this development with the cooling towers of Rugeley power station featuring in town centre views.

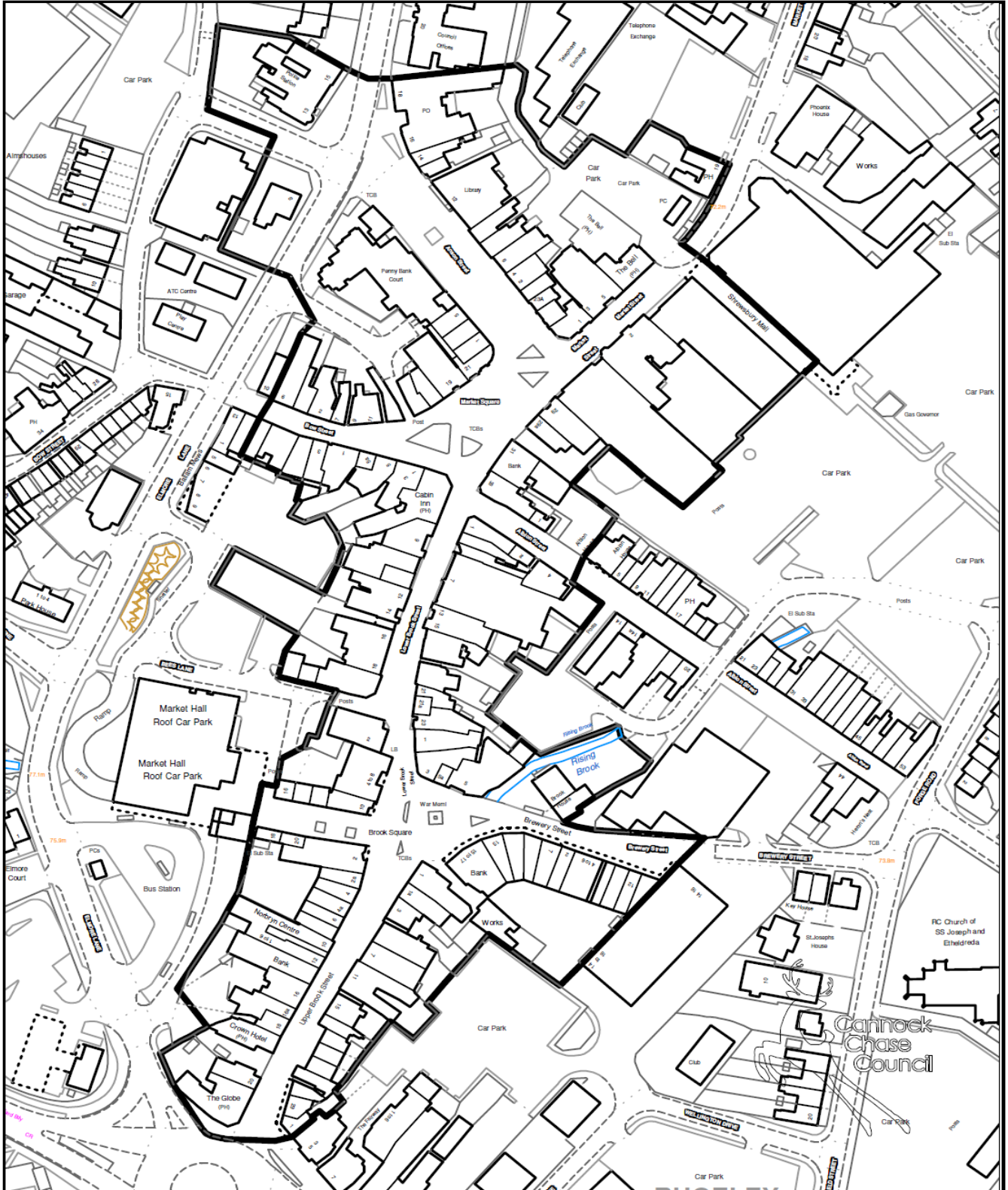
The Conservation Area comprises Upper and Lower Brook Street and part of Market Street together with Brook Square and Market Square. Also parts of Brewery Street, Bow Street, Albion Street and Anson Street which lead off the main streets. The informal street pattern contrasts the open spaces with narrow winding streets and passages and affords a variety of views. It is accentuated and complemented by the diversity of building types which frame it, this diversity being generally harmonised by their continuity and appropriate mass, height, scale and materials.

There are seven listed buildings in the Conservation Area, all Grade II: two public houses, the 17th Century timber framed Red Lion and the early 19th Century Shrew (formerly Shrewsbury Arms Hotel); the 19th Century 31/33 Market Square, Brook House, 17 and 19 Lower Brook Street and 16-18 Lower Brook Street, plus other buildings of historic and visual interest which contribute to the setting of these listed buildings, mainly from the 19th and early 20th Century. Traffic was removed from the town centre in the 1980's. Shops form the predominant use at ground floor level, together with banks, estate agents and pubs, cafes and hot food shops. Upper floors, where in use, are mainly storage, offices or flats.

Summary of Special Interest of Rugeley Town Centre Conservation Area:



PLAN 1: CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY



- Its long history still evident in its layout and buildings
- Its traditional street pattern of a tightly built up pedestrian town along a winding main street
- Its mixed small scale retail/commercial uses and markets
- Its townscape of diverse building types and buildings/groups of individual interest, harmonised by mass, height, scale and materials
- Its human scale, with visual interest created by irregular frontages, rooflines and design details

The survey work for this Appraisal was carried out in 2009.

2. Planning Policy Context

Government policy recognises the importance of effective protection for all aspects of the historic environment through legislation and policy guidance. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest. The National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (Sec 12) provides a full statement of Government policy for the protection of historic buildings, areas and other features and is supported by the Planning Practice Guidance 2014.

The Government is responsible for compiling a List of buildings of special architectural or historic interest of national significance. There are three grades of listed buildings to give an indication of relative importance, Grade I, II* and II; 94% of listed buildings are Grade II.

The Local Authority is responsible for designation of conservation areas where appropriate, and for formulating and publishing proposals for the preservation or enhancement of these areas. 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”. The effect of designation is broadly to bring demolition of buildings and work to trees under planning control and to restrict ‘permitted development’ rights which permit certain works to take place.

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) supported by Historic England have undertaken an Extensive Urban Survey of Rugeley as one of a series of 23 medieval Staffordshire towns. The draft report completed in 2010 aims to characterise the historic development of the town through reference to historic sources, cartographic material and archaeological evidence. The town is sub-divided into a series of Historic Urban Character areas (HUCA’s) with a statement of archaeological, historic, aesthetic and communal value for each one, supported by more detailed descriptions and mapping. Developers are advised to consult this document and the SCC Historic Environment Team at an early stage when considering schemes within the Conservation Area.

Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part1) was adopted in 2014 and contains local planning policy including CP15 seeking to safeguard all aspects of the District’s historic environment. Policy CP11 supports the creation of attractive town centres. Policy

CP3 seeks high standards of design of buildings and spaces, conservation and enhancement of the local historic environment as a stimulus to high quality design, and successful integration with trees, hedges and landscape features to green the built environment. It includes the Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan which sets out a planning framework to encourage the regeneration of the Town Centre and attract new retail development, and includes urban design principles and guidelines for opportunity sites. It refers to the Canal corridor and opportunities for its enhancement.

This Conservation Area Appraisal is a background document to the Local Plan. It has the status of a material planning consideration providing a basis for development control decisions.

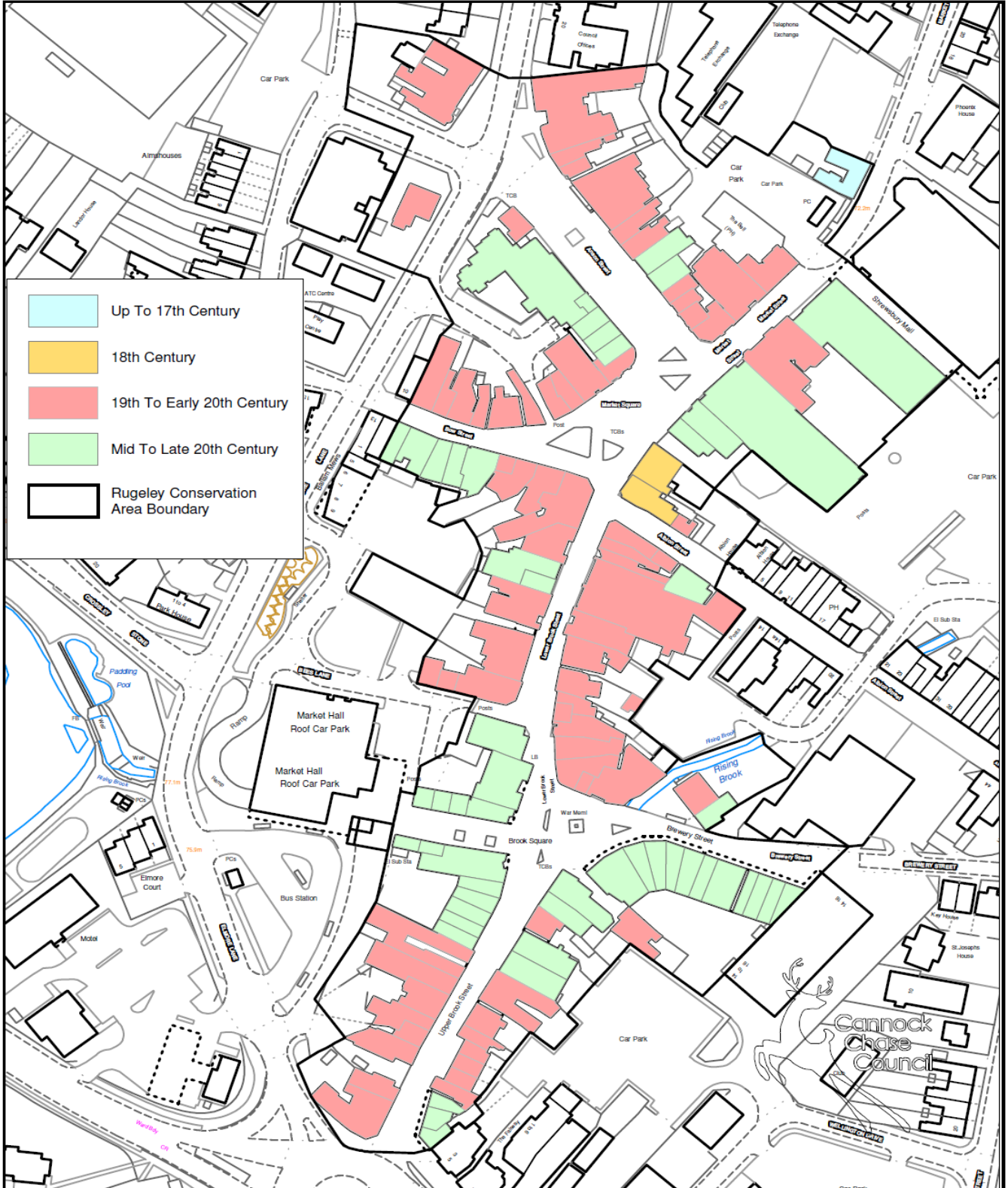
3. Development History

The name 'Rugeley' is thought to derive from the Old English 'hrycg' and 'leah' referring to a clearing on a ridge. The settlement was owned by the Earls of Mercia until 1069 when the last Earl, Edwin, son of Aelfgar of Rugeley, forfeited it to the Crown. In 1189 it was granted to the Bishop of Lichfield and it descended with the Bishop until it passed to the Paget family in 1546.

The woods, ironstone, coal and clay in the area, together with available water power, led to the town becoming an industrial settlement. There was a mill in the town, some meadow along the Trent and woodland on Cannock Chase at the time of the Domesday Survey in Rugeley in 1086, with tanneries present by the 12th century and mills and forges along the Rising Brook from the Middle Ages. In 1086 there was a mill worth 30 shillings in the Manor and by 1423 a fulling mill (for making cloth) belonging to the Lord of the Manor, believed to be the 'walkmill' on the pool (now drained) downstream from Horns Pool near Slitting Mill, on the edge of the Chase to the west. By 1560 there was a further mill leased by the Lord of the Manor. There were iron mines and a forge within the Manor by 1298 and in 1380 there were 17 workers in iron. In 1682 there was a forge near Slitting Mill and between 1692 and 1710 a slitting mill (for working the forged iron) at Rugeley was handling most of the output of Staffordshire's ironworks. There was also a forge in the centre of Rugeley around 1775 and by 1834 two forges, rolling mills and two iron foundries. By 1851 there were a large sheet iron and tin plate mill and two foundries in the town. In addition there was a diverse base of other industries including felt hat making, brewing, tanning, a chemical works and a brass foundry. Rugeley was prominent in the Midlands iron industry from the Middle Ages to Elizabethan times, and again in the Industrial Revolution at the end of the 18th Century. At the same time agriculture formed an important activity and in the Middle Ages the town was surrounded by three common fields – Churchfield, Upfield and Hodgeley – which would have given the town a spacious aspect. Early coal mining activity led to prospecting for coal at deeper levels between 1791 and 1794 and generated the social and economic development of the area from the mid 19th Century, eventually becoming the district's major industry. Plan 2 shows the development history of the Conservation Area.



PLAN 2: DEVELOPMENT HISTORY



Rugeley was of sufficient importance by 1259 that the King granted a charter for a Thursday market to the Bishop of Lichfield and an annual fair of three days to be held on the Vigil, Feast and Morrow of St Augustine of Canterbury (25-27 May). By 1747 there were two fairs a year for saddle horses and cattle and by 1834 this had increased to four. Rugeley's annual horse fair was famous throughout the Midlands, with horses being brought in from all parts of the country and Ireland for sale during the 18th and 19th Century, and tethered along Horse Fair, at a time when horse power was supreme. By 1868 a general market was being held on a Saturday as well. Market status assured the progress of the town in relation to neighbouring settlements.

A rental survey of 1570 carried out for the Paget family is well detailed and shows something of the layout of the town. It refers to 'the way at the high crosse' which presumably stood in the market square and the 'way' seems to be Bow Street. In the market square there is reference to the Court House which possibly stood in the middle of the square, as its successor the market hall did until the 19th Century. Lower Brook Street crossed the water twice (the Rising Brook and probably the trail race of the mill to which 'mille lane' led). Upper and Lower Brook Street remained divided by water with a ford and then a bridge crossing. A mill orchard is mentioned and so are two forges, probably water powered, lying on a half acre plot near the Windmyll House. Along the Rising Brook corridor there were three mills and two forges, the latter lying in the north east 'industrial quarter' of the town with one of the mills, a tannery and perhaps a windmill. The importance of the Brook in the town's early history is fundamental. The town plan of the 16th C thus consisted of one main axis running down the high street with two branches along the 'wood end lane' (Sheepfair) to the Chase and along 'Newbolde End' (Horse Fair) towards Brereton and Longdon.

Until the mid 17th C pack horse trains had formed the primary means of transport of goods, but from the mid 17th C stagecoach services developed between settlements, travel increased and places such as Lichfield were transformed into bustling cities with prominent business people and scholars, with waves of prosperity benefiting smaller settlements such as Rugeley and Brereton. The town was on a coaching route to London, Liverpool and Chester and inns expanded to serve the new trade. The Canal was cut along the eastern edge of the town in 1777 which brought further prosperity through improved transport facilities, warehouses and wharves.

In 1649 and 1709 two fires swept through Rugeley destroying property, however an account of the town from about 1829 describes its neat appearance, well built houses and recent new streets 'this little town is fast advancing into notice and its prosperity is considerable enhanced by its great thoroughfare situation and the advantages of inland navigation that it enjoys'. The first mention of a church was in 1189. This was extended and then replaced with a new St Augustine's Church in 1822, due to the state of the much altered old one which had become too small for the growing town. The church is at the northern extremity of the town, close to the sites of other historic buildings – Rugeley Grammar School dating from 1567 and the medieval tithe barn which stood until 1649. This area is outside the Town Centre Conservation Area, separated from it today by more modern development. Increased population and prosperity led to new development and redevelopment during the 18th and 19th

Century, and Rugeley developed from a busy market town to a busy industrial one. The title plan of the town in 1840 suggests that in its basic elements the layout of the town was little changed since 1570. It was however in the process of being developed with additional streets being laid out and well developed plots along all the main thoroughfares, and seems to have grown apace in the mid-19th Century. Anson Street was laid out in 1878 as the west side of the town centre was developed, and named after the Anson family of Shugborough. A wide range of trades served the local community in the early 19th Century including blacksmiths, basketmakers, shoe makers, grocers, butchers, drapers, a tea dealer and confectioner, and small breweries grew up around the town.

The railway was constructed in 1859 to carry Cannock's coal to the Trent Valley and connected Rugeley with Walsall, Wolverhampton and Birmingham. The industrialisation of the town continued through to the 20th C. In the 1950's and 60's there was a large amount of redevelopment and demolition in the town, mainly through housing clearance policies or road improvements, with cottages, shops, inns and townhouses lost. Traffic was removed from the town centre in the 1970's and new development filled some of the gaps in the drive to 'modernise' and enhance shopping facilities. New roads and opening up of building frontages around the perimeter of the town centre core enabled new service areas to be created at the rear of properties on Upper and Lower Brook Street and Market Street.

The houses of several prominent families stood in the countryside within a few miles of Rugeley: Beaudesert Hall, the seat of the Pagets, Wolseley Hall, the seat of the Wolseley family and Hagley Hall, built by Sir Richard Weston in 1636, all now demolished. Shugborough Hall, home of the Anson family, remains a few miles to the north. Their presence would have resulted in benefits and status to the community through its history.

Archaeological Potential: As identified in Section 2 of this Appraisal the Rugeley Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) identifies broad archaeological potential in the town within individual Historic Urban Character Areas (HUCA's). Section 3 has identified the potential for sensitive archaeological remains to survive which could significantly enhance our understanding of the origins of the town. Ground disturbance associated with new development may impact upon these sensitive archaeological remains. Consequently any development proposals involving ground disturbance in the Conservation Area will need to be accompanied by an appropriate archaeological assessment as part of a Heritage Assessment which should include reference to the EUS. It is acknowledged that the scale of impact and any appropriate levels of archaeological mitigation will be informed by a variety of local factors and by the size and scale of any proposed development. Early pre-application discussion is therefore advised which may highlight potential risks as well as opportunities for mitigation by design, such that the need for subsequent archaeological mitigation may be reduced or even removed. The County's Historic Environment Record also indicates areas of potential importance in increasing knowledge of the history of the town.

Through most of its history Rugeley has been a well-favoured small town, however the changes over the last 30 years, particularly the rapid loss of its main economic base, have had a significant impact in common with other coalfield communities. After a long and relatively prosperous history the town today is a quieter place, notwithstanding its strong community spirit, with most of its industries and activity having ceased and evidence of its past living on in its distinctive street layout and older buildings, street and place names, markets and the continuing presence of the Rising Brook. The Canal to the east of the town remains a valuable asset with its modern role as a leisure facility.

4. Townscape Character Appraisal

Location and Landscape Setting

Rugeley stands on the south bank of the River Trent on ground gently rising from the valley to the forest and heath of Cannock Chase to the west. The Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designated in 1958 and covers an area of approximately 6,900 hectares. Its primary purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, and this higher ground forms a green setting to the town. The Rising Brook flows down from the Chase to the Trent through Elmore Park and the centre of the town. Rugeley lies roughly halfway between the County town of Stafford and the cathedral city of Lichfield, and historically most of its buildings have been concentrated along the north-east south-west axis of the Stafford-Lichfield road. The Trent and Mersey Canal (itself a county-wide Conservation Area) runs along the eastern edge of the town, beyond which stands Rugeley Power Station with its landmark cooling towers, and further east run the River Trent and West Coast mainline railway. Waterways and routeways follow the contours between the Chase and the River, features which have determined the historic layout of the town.

Spatial analysis

The Rugeley Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) has sought to characterise the development of the town and identified that the medieval commercial core of the settlement, which developed after the market charter of 1259, lay along a north-south main street (Market Street and Lower/Upper Brook Street) with a second medieval market place at Horse Fair. A further market place evident at Brook Square seems likely to have been created in the post-medieval period, whilst Sheep Fair to the south-west of the town probably had medieval origins. Medieval burgage plots (the unit of measurement for individual properties in a medieval urban context) survive to the west of Market Street and to the north of Horse Fair, suggesting a focus of lordly attention close to the market. Elsewhere the medieval street pattern largely survives within the town centre, although development appears to have been generally piecemeal away from the principal marketing areas. The presence of the medieval church (the Old Chancel at St Augustine's) isolated from the medieval town core suggests an early medieval (Anglo-Saxon) settlement here, with the historic commercial centre laid out further south by the Bishop of Lichfield as Lord of the Manor during the 13th Century.

The town centre is physically compact comprising a curving informal linear street pattern of one main route with side streets and passages off it, the main route opening into the irregularly shaped spaces of Brook Square and Market Square. The streets are enclosed by building frontages of two and three storey height and varying plot width, design, period and materials. The town has grown up with buildings side by side along the main street frontages, a pattern retained today. The scale is essentially related to the pedestrian rather than the car. The southernmost open space is Brook Square, through which the Brook once flowed, being of an informal triangular shape; the northernmost is Market Square, a spacious rectangular shaped area and the primary open space in the town centre, bounded by larger scale buildings including the landmark feature of the Clock Tower. Both open spaces form focal points within the inward looking town centre, allowing wider views, in contrast to the adjacent narrow streets where views are directed between buildings, revealing different streetscapes unfolding as the pedestrian progresses. The street market takes place in Market Square on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays whereas Brook Square provides a quieter meeting place and seating area.

The war memorial has recently been moved from Brook Square back to a position in Anson Street near to where it stood prior to the 1970's, giving more space for Remembrance Day parades and creating a new focal point. Green space and tree planting within the Conservation Area is limited mainly to the Squares, along Rising Brook and in the more spacious, straight and formally laid out Anson Street. Views into the town centre along side streets to diverse buildings and spaces create visual interest, and views out focus on trees or landmark buildings beyond the Conservation Area boundary. These are however often separated from it by an expanse of modern car parks and service areas which have taken the place of the historic hinterland of houses, cottages and such buildings as a mill, brewery, smithy and cattle pens.

Character Analysis

Townscape is the feature which distinguishes the special interest of a Conservation Area from the merits of individual buildings within it, including the inter relationship between buildings and spaces. It derives from appearance, history and historical association, and its nature and quality may vary within the area, providing a drama of shapes, colours, textures, design and detail. Examples are noted to illustrate features and are not intended to be comprehensive.

The townscape of Rugeley town centre is defined by its informal street pattern complemented by the diversity of building types with which it is lined, this diversity being generally harmonised by their continuity and appropriate mass, height, scale and materials in relation to one another. The Rugeley EUS considers that this informal street pattern is largely medieval in date. High brick walls fill one or two historic gaps in frontages. At ground floor level the predominant use is shopping, with a range of complementary uses including banks and buildings societies, estate agents, restaurants, cafes and pubs. Also within the Conservation Area are the town library, police station, a printers and some residential property. Ground floor uses (as at August 2009) are shown on Plan 3. Above ground floor level the predominant use appears to be storage or vacant floorspace, with some offices, flats and a health and

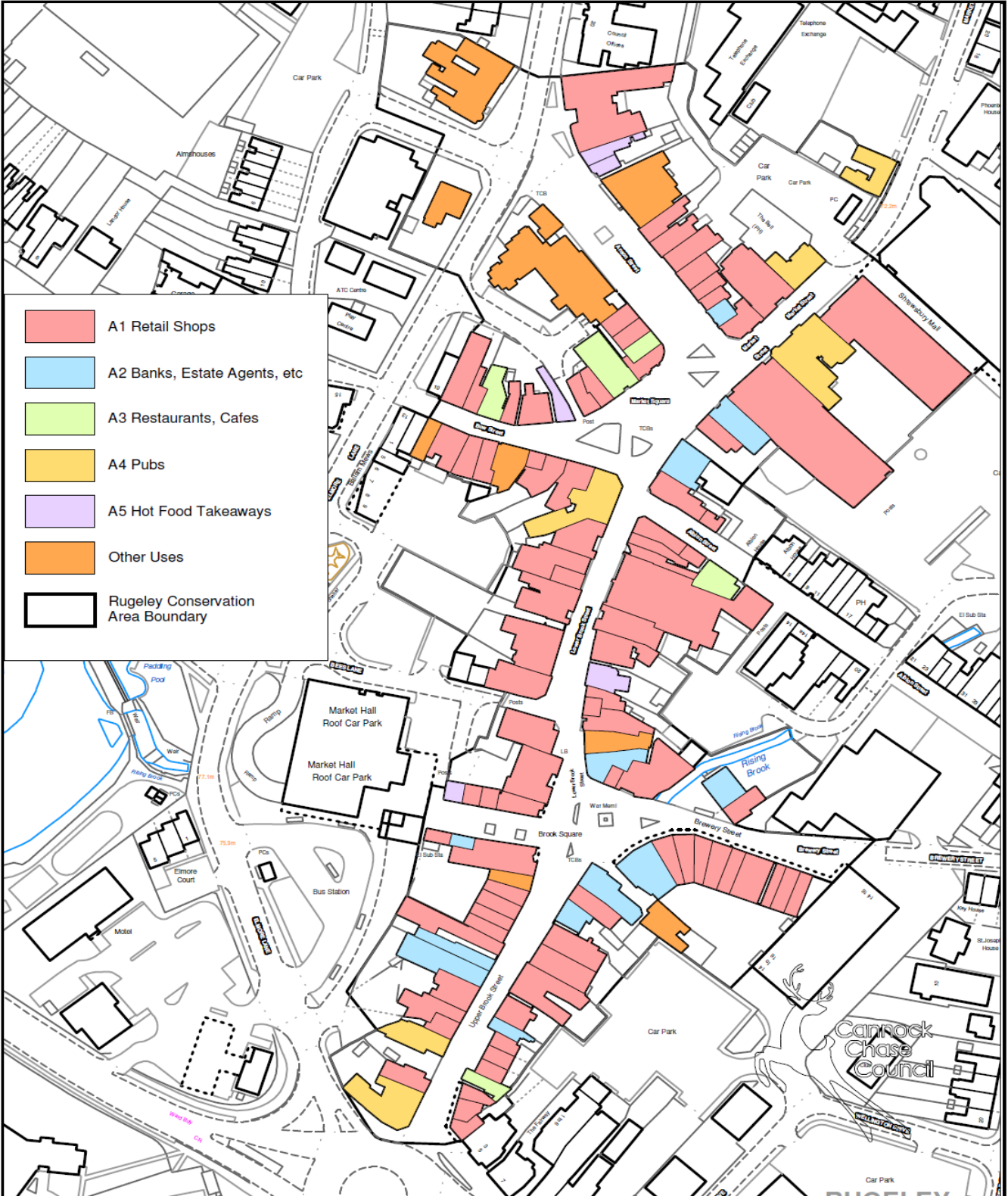
fitness club. On the whole the upper floors do not appear well used. The remains of the Anglican parish church of St Augustine, its early 19th Century successor and the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph and Etheldreda are important to the setting of this Conservation Area, and are included in other Conservation Areas.

Much of the Conservation Area appears to date from the 19th and early 20th Century, though some buildings may have earlier cores and often retain part, if not all, of their original plot to the rear, though in many cases with modern rear extensions and additions. Many of these 'back plots' have the potential to contain significant archaeological remains, particularly where extensions and infilling have not taken place. There are remnants of old brick boundary walling at the rear of 21 Upper Brook Street, 19 Lower Brook Street, 16-18 Lower Brook Street and The Pig and Bell, Market Street. There are two storey rear outbuildings which may have once been workshops at the rear of the (former) Cabin Inn and the rear of 11 Upper Brook Street. There is a considerable amount of modern infill of lengths of the frontages, including buildings with large footprint and correspondingly long shopfront, the design and materials of which are not all as sympathetic as they might be, though in general the modern infill maintains historic building lines or stands behind them and could be considered of neutral impact. Important features of the Conservation Area are shown on Plan 4.

Rooflines in the Conservation Area are of varying two and three storey height, and there are some dormer windows, chimneys with pots and decorative finials which provide additional visual interest. Roofs of older buildings are generally pitched with roof slopes facing the road frontages. Roofs of modern infill are often flat and introduce an alien appearance, though their scale and materials attempt to reflect their surroundings.



PLAN 3: GROUND FLOOR USES (August 2009)





PLAN 4: TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL



- Access
- Significant Trees
- Rugeley Conservation Area Boundary
- Significant Buildings
- Listed Buildings
- Views
- Building Frontages



Walking through the town centre from south to north, one passes from Horse Fair through the narrow confines of Upper Brook Street into the triangular shaped Brook Square, on through the narrow entrance to Lower Brook Street eventually emerging in the relatively open vista of Market Square. Market Street then leads on northwards towards St Augustine's Church in its green churchyard, whilst Anson Street runs north-west towards the Police Station. The Horse Fair frontage is not included within the Conservation Area, as few of its buildings contribute positively to the street scene and it is now dominated by a steady flow of traffic. The main buildings of interest which lie on the opposite side of the road are the listed timber framed cottages at 16, 18 and 20 Horse Fair, probably dating from the 16th Century. However they stand amongst 19th and 20th Century buildings of variable quality and are somewhat isolated from the Conservation Area. Further along Horse Fair the frontage of more traditional buildings of merit are included within the boundary of Talbot Street/Lichfield Street Conservation Area.

Upper Brook Street is a narrow gently curving street mainly containing small shops and two historic pubs, The Globe and The Crown. The Globe, at the junction with Horse Fair, creates a welcoming prominent entrance to the town centre and Conservation Area, in red brick with a slate roof, though its former corner entrance door has been blocked. It faces the busy modern road junction with tree planting (fastigate oak in Upper Brook Street and plane on the roundabout) and street furniture creating a gateway feature at the entrance to the pedestrianised town, and sets the scene for the walk in. The Crown nearby retains its Victorian frontage and rich detailing including its stone name plaque at first floor level: 'Crown Hotel Butler and Co. Famous Ales Wolverhampton', harking back to its historic past. There are several traditional shopfronts and some decorative detailing on frontages along this part of the street including the decorative eaves and sliding sash windows at first and second floor at 10-12 Upper Brook Street (Fig.1). Other buildings, though not of special significance, nonetheless provide a historic group of positive value in the streetscene. The buildings are a mixture of styles and dates constructed in red brick with tiled roofs. The frontages and rooflines are extremely irregular, with nos. 19-23 set back, forming a small recess. The close grouping of buildings in the street means that views are inward looking and are restricted at the northern end by the red brick Victorian façade of nos. 3-5 Brook Square (the building behind is modern). This long facade, 3 storeys high, with its arched windows at first floor, paired windows above and decorative eaves, is a dominant element in Brook Square, providing a visual foil to the lower development. The frontage of 3-5 is curved and serves to direct views around the corner and on down Lower Brook Street.

As Horse Fair is left behind the traffic noise reduces until the sound of footsteps and voices become predominant within the quiet central area of the Conservation Area, and the Clock Tower chimes the hours. The sound of an occasional vehicle or air conditioning unit can be heard, until traffic noise rises again beyond Market Square.

Brook Square is an area of public open space of human scale enhanced by its mature tree planting of planes and birch which extends with ash and sycamore along the adjacent open length of Rising Brook with its boardwalk access beside Brook House. The trees create a strong positive injection of soft greenery into the otherwise



Fig. 1 Windows 10 – 12 Upper Brook Street



Fig. 2 Door case at Brook House



Fig. 3 Door case 16 – 18 Lower Brook Street



Fig. 4 Windows and decorative cornice 6 Lower Brook Street

hard urban landscape of buildings and paving. The trees have both visual and environmental value, in winter the branch structure of the deciduous trees continues to add visual variety. Overall trees make a marked difference to quality of life and wellbeing, as well as having other benefits including helping to mitigate climate change. Conservation Area designation places protection over all trees, and some trees which make a particular contribution have the added protection of Tree Preservation Orders. Whilst no trees within the Conservation Area are covered by TPO, the Horse Chestnut in Brewery Street just outside the Conservation Area is protected in this way and makes a good positive contribution to the view along the street towards the spire of Sts Joseph and Etheldreda's Church and the Power Station. There are views up most of Rugeley's side streets to the greenery of trees in the distance helping to bring its landscape setting into the town. Brook House faces the Square and is a listed early 19th century building in use as offices. It presents an attractive, well-kept frontage with its elegant sash windows and moulded stucco doorcase (Fig.2). A passageway between modern buildings to the south-east of the Square leads past the front of the Benhill Press, a 19th century printing works set back from the main shopping frontage in an unobtrusive position, but a valuable link to the town's history. The pedestrian route westwards from the square leads past modern shops to the Market Hall, a bulky modern building with rooftop parking, and on to the bus station,(both just outside the Conservation Area) from where there are views of mature trees and green vegetation in Elmore Park beyond. The Rising Brook is culverted as it leaves the Park beneath the road, Market and Brook Square, but a change in the colour and pattern of the block paving denote its route. It emerges again for a short way by the boardwalk, then returns to its culvert on its route north-east.

The narrow entrance into **Lower Brook Street** from Brook Square is emphasised by the gentle curve of the road and the frontage of two and three storey buildings. At the junction of Bees Lane the former bank, now a shop, at 16-18 Lower Brook Street is a listed stuccoed mid 19th Century building with an attractive frontage, heavily rusticated at the lower storey with sash windows and a moulded doorcase (Fig.3). Already there are distant views of the trees and clock tower in Market Square. Opposite are 17 and 19 Lower Brook Street, also listed, and both early 19th Century 3 storey buildings with stuccoed elevations. No. 17 has a well detailed and rather extravagant façade in Regency style with coupled Ionic fluted pilasters over the upper storeys. Other attractive historic buildings make a positive contribution to the streetscene including no. 6, a three storey red brick building with decorative hood moulds around upper floor windows and ornate moulded cornice at the eaves, typical Victorian detailing (Fig.4); and 21/21a/23, retaining handsome first floor sliding sash windows and having pitched roofed front dormers, which add variety at roof level. A number of modern shopfronts have been introduced along this street, some more successful than others in their window size and fascia signage. As in Upper Brook Street the buildings here are small in scale, some in red brick and others rendered in a variety of finishes and light colours. Walking along the street views of the clock tower in the Square, a strong landmark building and part of the town's identity, gradually open up, first above the roof tops then between the trees in the Square.

The Market Square in Rugeley (formerly known as Market Place), although not large, does provide a distinct contrast to the rest of the town centre not only through being relatively more spacious but also because some of the buildings are larger in scale. It is the only concentration of three storey buildings in the town centre, giving strong vertical emphasis around the open space. This is particularly true of the Clock Tower and the group of three red brick three storey buildings to the north of the square at the corner of Anson Street and Market Street. The tower dates from 1879 and is built of red brick with Bath stone dressings and is a highly ornamental version of mid-Victorian Gothic. Its ironwork was made at a local foundry and it displays a plaque commemorating the town's first public water supply in 1895. It is the only remaining element of the town hall complex, now redeveloped with housing. Beside the clock tower a row of unlisted three storey 19th Century buildings create an attractive group, continuing round into Bow Street, beyond a passage way between the buildings. The south west side of Market Square is contained by a frontage of elegant three storey Victorian town houses and a pub, with varied roof lines and materials, some having distinctive dormer window treatment and retaining timber sliding sash windows above ground floor level. At the south-east corner of Market Square nos. 31-33, the former home of the Landor family and now a bank with shop adjoining, is another of Rugeley's listed buildings. It has a late 18th century appearance but with an earlier 17th century core. Its splendid stuccoed Tuscan pilaster doorcase with curved pediment and tryglyphs on the frieze, sash windows and other careful detailing shows something of the quality of workmanship and prosperity of the town at that time, features to be valued.

On market days the red and white striped awnings of the market stalls introduce a lively sense of the activity and purpose characteristic of this old market town. Mature trees reintroduce a soft green element with purple leaved plums and birch in Market Square and plane and birch, some recently planted, in Anson Street at the north end of the Conservation Area.

At the southern end of **Market Street** adjoining the Market Square the 18th Century Shrew, formerly the Shrewsbury Arms Hotel and before that the Talbot Hotel, also listed, occupies a position of prominence. The building was significantly remodelled in the 19th century, the existing frontage being attributable to this period with a stucco finish, sash windows and an advanced heavily rusticated entrance. Modern buildings adjoin on both sides. Two further pubs are located in Market Street – The Pig and Bell and, further along as the road turns, the listed 17th Century timber framed Red Lion at the northern extremity of the Conservation Area. The latter dates from around 1600 though has been altered over time with early 19th Century segmental headed windows and two simple moulded wood doorcases, and a rebuilt front in modern brick, but still retains the small scale simple presence of a local inn. The building is now somewhat isolated between two car parks, though at one time there were houses and cottages adjacent, demolished during the 20th Century. Further trees here include a cupressus in Market Street beside the Red Lion and a large eucalyptus at the rear of the Pig and Bell. Market Street becomes a vehicular highway just south of the Red Lion and the environment deteriorates with on-street parking. In the distance a further pair of listed timber framed cottages are visible at the junction of Market Street and Bryans Lane on the way to St Augustine's Church,

as the commerce of the town centre gives way to its residential surroundings and traffic once again begins to dominate.

From Market Square, several side streets lead away from the town centre, **Albion Street and Bow Street** to east and west, and the later addition of **Anson Street**. Albion Street leads out of the Conservation Area straight between 19th Century frontages of progressively smaller buildings, mostly built of red brick, in use as shops and houses with another small traditional pub halfway along, The Albion. Several of these properties retain original detailing, probably not subject to such pressures for change over time as are the main streets. Bow Street turns and leads out of the Conservation Area, as the building heights reduce to two storey once more, and no.2 retains its timber Victorian shopfront, though the rest of its façade has been much altered. Red brick and light coloured renders continue the characteristic theme. Anson Street, laid out later than the other streets, is wide and straight with a spacious feel, enclosed by substantial two and three storey Victorian and Edwardian buildings on the north side and modern buildings on the south. The Library, part way along, is an impressive large scale two storey building with dormer windows, a central triangular pediment doorcase emphasized by a flight of steps, timber sliding sash windows and dentilled eaves. Nos. 8 and 10, a pair of three storey Victorian buildings in red brick with decorative blue banding and stone heads and cills to the timber sliding sash windows to the upper floors, add visual interest to the group. No. 8 has a well maintained traditional timber shopfront. The Police Station closes the view at the edge of the Conservation Area as Anson Street regains its vehicular traffic and runs on northwards out of the Conservation Area between frontages of Victorian villas and 1930's housing.

The evening economy in Rugeley is served by a relatively small number of licensed premises, mainly around the edge of the town centre, attracting the relatively few, mainly younger, drinkers. One or two restaurants, together with the nearby Rugeley Rose, exist on the periphery but overall there are few attractors to generate any significant evening activity in the Conservation Area.

Building materials

The building materials which characterise the Conservation Area are dark orange-red brick, cream/white 'Stucco' and painted render/brick. Brick predominates, and the majority of the historic buildings are built in Flemish bond – alternate 'headers' and 'stretchers' on each course. This is a decorative bond introduced in the 17th century for more important buildings and by the 18th century was used increasingly for smaller buildings. Its greater economy in the use of brick (the proportion of 'stretchers' is greater) made this bond popular. Staffordshire is well endowed with clay suitable for brick and tile making, and local brickyards operated into the 20th century. 'Stucco' is a plastered finish, used historically instead of stone, and was considered more fashionable than brickwork. Stone detailing to window and door heads and cills adds to the characteristic range of building materials. The modern buildings are built in Stretcher bond, widely used today for the construction of cavity walls, where all the bricks are 'stretchers', except for a 'header' in alternate courses at the quoin.

Traditional roof coverings in the Conservation Area include red and blue clay tiles and blue slate. Such materials give a texture and liveliness not found in artificial materials and are to be valued. There is variety of roofscape throughout the area with varied rooflines, gables and dormer windows, dentilled eaves (decorative 'tooth like' blocks under the eaves) in both brick and plaster and a variety of clay chimney pots on top of chunky brick chimneys. 5/5a Bow Street and 10-12 Upper Brook Street have attractive first floor bay windows, and throughout the area there is a tremendous variety of traditional window design. Some shops retain their retractable awnings/canopies, such as 8 Anson Street, and some of the modern shop units also display such features. Some remnants of cast iron rainwater goods remain.

The public realm

The ground surfaces in the Conservation Area were the subject of a repaving scheme in the 1980's. The scheme sought to maintain the traditional indication of former footway and carriageway prior to pedestrianisation through the use of different materials or delineation of kerb position, which avoids a 'wall to wall' carpet effect of brick pavements. The ground surface is important as it links and joins the buildings. Ideally it should make its own contribution to the townscape rather than being a neutral ribbon. In Market Street, Market Square, Anson Street, Bow Street and the entrance to Albion Street at the north end of the town centre the former footways are paved in traditional irregular buff stone flags, with mainly red/blue brick pavements and blocks used elsewhere. The north end of Market Street is used by vehicles and the surfacing returns to tarmac (complete with double yellow lines which are quite visually intrusive), however outside the entrance to the Red Lion are the remains of granite kerbs and setts. Elsewhere off Brook Square a modern timber boardwalk runs along Rising Brook.

Street furniture comprises a coordinated series of main elements painted in a dark green colour scheme: traditional cast iron lampposts topped with lantern style lamps in the larger spaces and modern lamps high on building facades in the narrow streets; bollards, street signs, fingerposts and bins; poles to support hanging baskets and CCTV cameras painted either green or black; notice boards including the recently introduced attractive timber Chase Heritage Trail information boards in Market Square; and public art comprising a decorative ironwork gateway feature at the south end of Upper Brook Street. There are low red/blue brick built planters in Brook Square, with bedding schemes introducing colour, and taller stone planters in Market Square containing trees, shrubs and bedding. There is also an assortment of modern utility cabinets, telephone kiosks and a recycling node concentrated around Brook Square, Market Square and the entrance to Bees Lane, creating a certain amount of clutter.

Shopfronts and signs

Shopfronts have an important role to play in the appearance of the town centre because they are designed to display goods for sale and attract attention. There are some good examples of shopfront design in Rugeley which contribute positively to

the character and appearance of the Conservation Area including 21 Lower Brook Street (Fig.5), 20 Upper Brook Street (Fig.6), 8 Anson Street (Fig.7) and 2 Bow Street. These are of traditional style, though some are modern, and achieve a satisfactory relationship between the shopfront and building as a whole. Timber shopfronts are usually more appropriate for properties built prior to 1914.

Fascia and projecting signs also have a major effect on the quality of the street scene and their size, scale, materials and method of any illumination should complement the building on which they are set, as well as their surroundings. Good examples of sympathetic signage are on 21 Lower Brook Street, 8 Anson Street, 20 Upper Brook Street, 4 Albion Street and 23a Market Square (Fig.8).

The setting of the Conservation Area

Historically buildings surrounded the town centre core, however today a significant part of the setting of the Conservation Area accommodates car parking and service areas, plus some larger, modern buildings. Although necessary to the functioning of the town centre their visual impact is significantly adverse, the larger buildings are not well related in scale and materials and the open areas isolate the core from the rest of the town. The surrounding busy roads with limited pedestrian crossing points compound this effect.

An extract from the previous Appraisal from 2000 which describes buildings of interest in more detail though the area is attached as an Annex to this Appraisal.

5. Loss/Intrusion/Negative features

The character and appearance of a Conservation Area can easily be eroded as a result of unsympathetic alterations and development and the decay or removal of characteristic features. Most of the existing modern development in and adjacent to the Conservation Area was built prior to designation. Modern development, though 'of its time' is not always sympathetic to character and appearance, but conversely copying 'historic' architecture may not be the best solution. Through careful design new buildings can respect, complement and enhance the architectural character of an area. Fine buildings of any type, style and age can enhance the visual environment and contribute to a sense of community.

The cumulative effect of many minor alterations to individual properties can also have a negative effect. Special architectural interest is very vulnerable to the process of modernisation. Examples are replacement shopfronts and upper floor windows in artificial materials and non-traditional designs. Such details tend to be bland and lacking in the rich textures and colours of natural materials, and the result can be loss of diversity and subtlety, affecting character and appearance. The recovering of roofs, removal of chimney stacks and other architectural details such as decorative ridge tiles can have a similar impact. Although many old shopfronts have been replaced with modern alternatives, efforts have been made for many years to



Fig. 5 Modern Shopfront 21 Lower Brook Street



Fig. 6 Shopfront 20 Upper Brook Street



Fig. 7 Shopfront 8 Anson Street



Fig. 8 Fascia sign 23a Market Square

secure appropriate design and materials for shopfronts and signs, however lack of maintenance together with unsympathetic signage erected under deemed advertisement consent has in some cases resulted in deterioration of the appearance of the town centre. Modern infill development occupies significant lengths of street frontage in some locations, such as around Brook Square, but generally this has sought to reflect the character of the Conservation Area in one way or another, although it offers limited architectural interest. The addition of large buildings, for example supermarkets and an indoor market hall, do make a contribution economically to the functioning of the town centre, however their appearance and siting need careful design to retain the human scale of their context and frontage alignments.

The loss or decay of distinctive local features, such as those noted in this Appraisal, can also detract from special architectural and historic interest. Remaining features often tend to be the remnants of what once existed in the area. Bearing in mind that these are the very features which helped to create the distinctive character and appearance in the first place, their vulnerability is evident. The upgrading of property does not have to be at the expense of historic fabric and character, conversely retention of appropriate detailing reinforces special interest. The Conservation Area is fortunate in retaining a high proportion of detailing on its historic buildings above ground floor level, however a significant number of these are suffering from longstanding lack of maintenance. The historic fabric appears to be slowly deteriorating leading to pressure for replacement rather than conservation and repair of elements such as window frames and architectural details, some of which is taking place without any consent, in modern materials, resulting in incremental detriment to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area over time. Keeping historic buildings in use is the key to keeping them in a good state of repair, however some of the existing uses are of low economic value.

In the public realm, existing paving and street furniture is looking 'tired', and in places uneven and inconsistent, and would benefit from refurbishment. A well designed update of Market Square and Brook Square, with more high quality landscaping would enhance the town centre as an attractive destination, with resulting economic benefits. The incremental addition of utility cabinets, signs and a now redundant telephone box with other 'clutter' scattered on an ad hoc basis around any space large enough to accommodate it is also having a detrimental visual impact.

The setting of the Conservation Area is in need of enhancement including improved pedestrian links with the rest of the town, particularly with the Canal and Park, which have potential to positively enhance the town centre, and with surrounding residential areas. The extensive open parking and servicing, though fulfilling a function, isolates the town centre core from its surroundings.

The Conservation Area was placed on the English Heritage 'At Risk' Register in 2009 as a result of the deterioration of building fabric and public realm areas over recent years together with underlying economic decline resulting in empty shop units and loss of vitality. Consideration of how best to deal with future change in Rugeley

to aid the town's regeneration and benefit the local economy whilst enhancing its special architectural and historic qualities is being given through the preparation of an Area Action Plan. Public consultation has been carried out on 'Issues and Options', and 'Preferred Options' and the final document will be published in due course. It will incorporate some detailed urban design guidance. In addition a Management Plan is in preparation following from this Appraisal which will seek to address the detailed issues raised.

6. Community Involvement

A report was taken to the Council's Cabinet seeking approval for consultation on this Draft Appraisal document. Occupiers of all properties in the Conservation Area, local ward councillors, Rugeley Town Council, The Landor Society and technical consultees received publicity about the Document, inviting comments. A copy was published on the Council's website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk At the end of the consultation period representations received and proposed changes to the draft in the light of those representations were reported back to the Council's Cabinet. The Council then adopted the amended Appraisal.

7. Boundaries

The boundary of the Conservation area follows the rear boundaries of properties which have frontages to the streets within the town centre core. The boundary has been reviewed during preparation of this Appraisal and no change is considered necessary at this time.

8. Enhancement Opportunities/Recommendations for Management/Planning Policy Guidance

A specific responsibility is placed upon Local Planning Authorities to take account of the character of a Conservation Area when exercising their duties. The local distinctiveness of particular areas is greatly to be valued and needs to be reinforced in order to maintain diversity, attractiveness and historic continuity. Unless or until financial support is available as grants for building works or environmental enhancements the main opportunities for enhancement of the Conservation Area are through the Development Control process. This Appraisal makes recommendations on what it is desirable to preserve, and how, and sets out broad principles for enhancement which may be further developed within a Management Plan for the Conservation Area:

Recommendation 1: Consideration of planning applications will be informed by the detailed descriptions of character contained in this Appraisal, particularly the features of interest and the areas which would benefit from improvement. There will be a general presumption in favour of preserving buildings and features identified in this Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Recommendation 2 : Proposals affecting the Conservation Area must be advertised and account taken of representations in determining each case.

Recommendation 3: Future development should take account of the special interest of the area as set out in the Appraisal. New development will need to acknowledge the relationship of buildings to spaces and reflect existing architectural detailing, including colour, texture and range of materials. It should also respect existing trees. Any opportunities for enhancement of areas highlighted as having a negative visual impact or allowing refurbishment of the exterior of buildings would be welcomed.

Recommendation 4: Traditional materials should be used in all building repair works and both hard and soft landscape elements treated sensitively:

- Where repair works fall within planning control the use of traditional materials for routine repairs will be required, and elsewhere encouraged.
- The repair/retention of original chimney stacks and pots, ridge tiles and other architectural details will be encouraged.
- Re-roofing should use traditional tiles or slates rather than artificial substitutes. Where necessary, window replacement should match the original design and glazing pattern. Timber doorcases should be retained and repaired. Repair and maintenance of upper floors should be included in any scheme of alteration or improvement of the ground floor shopfront.

Recommendation 5: New shopfronts and signs should take account of the special interest of the area as set out in the Appraisal:

- New shopfronts or advertisements should not remove or cover existing architectural features or details such as decorative string courses. Where there are traditional shopfronts which complement a building and contribute to the character of the Conservation Area there will be a general presumption against their removal.
- New shopfronts or advertisements should complement the style, scale and proportion of the building in order to enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Recommendation 6: Public realm improvements should include a consistent approach to street furniture and reduction of clutter, with the inclusion of appropriate and suitably sited trees. Environmental improvements in key locations will be sought.

Recommendation 7: Opportunities to enhance the setting of the Conservation Area, views in and out and pedestrian links between the town centre and surrounding areas including the Trent and Mersey Canal will be pursued.

Recommendation 8: The Council will undertake to work with property owners to seek satisfactory solution of issues adversely affecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

9. Useful Information

Further advice is available on the content of this Appraisal from the Planning Services Team, Cannock Chase Council, Civic Centre, PO Box 28, Beecroft Road, Cannock, Staffs WS11 1BG.

The principal sources of historic and local information referred to are:

- Rugeley Library Local Studies Section Clippings Files
- Joint Record Office, Lichfield (Rugeley Tithe Map 1840)
- Staffordshire County Council - Historic Environment Record
- Staffordshire County Council 'Extensive Urban Survey of Rugeley'
- 'Looking Back on Rugeley' by Alec Neal, published by The Landor Society.
- Staffordshire County Council Conservation Area 51:Rugeley (1973)
- Cannock Chase Council Rugeley Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (adopted 2000)

ANNEX:

**Descriptions of Buildings of Interest within the Conservation Area reprinted
from the 2000 Conservation Area Appraisal.**