



# Main Road, Brereton

## Conservation Area Appraisal

May 2009



CANNOCK  
CHASE  
COUNCIL



2004-2005  
*Crime and Disorder Partnerships*  
2005-2006  
*Healthy Communities*  
2006-2007  
*Transforming the Delivery of  
Services Through Partnerships*

## 1. **Introduction**

This document seeks to provide a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation of Brereton 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.

Brereton Conservation Area was designated in February 2002. It comprises the core of the old village along Main Road, an interesting mix of grand houses, workers' cottages and community buildings, standing against the green backdrop of Cannock Chase. Although absorbed by the southward spread of the adjacent market town of Rugeley, its historic settlement pattern is still evident as is its earlier life as a thriving village, its listed buildings amongst the most distinctive in the District. The Conservation Area comprises the frontages of Main Road through the central part of Brereton from Armitage Lane to St. Michael's Drive. Main Road forms part of the main route between Lichfield and Rugeley and part of the coach road from London to the north-west. The Conservation Area is located approximately 1.5 miles south-east of Rugeley town centre. The boundary of the Conservation Area is shown on Plan 1.

The settlement is first documented c.1228 and 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. Earl Talbot's map of Brereton Manor of 1795 shows the village then consisted of houses mostly clustered around Brereton Brook, where it crossed the Main Road, and in Coalpit Lane, so it is likely that it owes its existence to the brook providing clean and reliable water for domestic and agricultural purposes, the road providing some passing trade. It has remained focussed along the main road, and its first period of prosperity came with the coaching era from the mid 17th century. The growing influence of coal mining in the area from the beginning of the 19th century transformed Brereton from a small agricultural community to a prosperous industrial one. The built environment of Brereton today provides evidence of this development.

The Conservation Area contains six listed buildings: Brereton Hall dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its stone barn to the rear, the Georgian Brereton House and forecourt walls, railings and steps, the Regency Cedar Tree Hotel and the 19th century St. Michael's Church. Most of the remaining buildings are from the 19th and early 20th centuries, though some may have earlier origins, and include houses and cottages, public houses, the Methodist Church and several former schools. The buildings stand within a setting of mature trees which contribute significantly to the appearance of the Conservation Area.

Modern development had a major impact in the 1970's when a road improvement scheme resulted in demolition of a number of 19th century buildings in the centre of the village together with subsequent infill development. As a result, the prominence of the road was increased at the expense of village character, a situation typical of the post-war period.



Summary of Special Interest of Brereton Conservation Area:

- its long history, still evident in its layout and buildings;
- its relationship to the wider area in terms of coal mining history, road and canal transport;
- its townscape having a strong frontage of individually distinctive buildings onto Main Road with terraced cottages behind;
- the contribution of its mature tree cover including significant specimens and groups.

The survey work for this Appraisal was carried out in early 2006.

## 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. PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994) provides a full statement of Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other features, and complements the guidance given in PPG16: Archaeology and Planning (1990).

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.

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (2004) sets out a framework of policies seeking to protect and enhance the historic environment. It highlights the need to identify, conserve and enhance the region’s diverse historic environment and manage change in such a way that respects local character and distinctiveness. The distinctiveness of a place may derive from more than its appearance, its buildings and the spaces between them, and include historical associations and the local environment. Defining character or special interest includes understanding and assessing the value of the area, both in its parts and as a whole.

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011 explains the planning strategy within the County, including broad policies to preserve and enhance the special character, appearance and interest of conservation areas. It states that any new development within or adjacent to a conservation area should protect its special qualities and respect the scale, height and form of older buildings.

Cannock Chase Local Plan 1997 contains detailed policies B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 relating to listed buildings, archaeology and new development in and adjacent to conservation areas, and C15 protecting trees. The Local Development Framework will supersede the Local Plan in due course, but at present the existing policies are retained.

This Conservation Area Appraisal is a background document to the Local Development Framework, identified as such in the Local Development Scheme 2008. It has the status of a material planning consideration providing a basis for development control.

## **Townscape Character Appraisal**

### (a) Location and Landscape Setting

The old village of Brereton has today been absorbed into the southern part of suburban Rugeley, on the edge of which development gives way to undulating open countryside and woodland. Rising ground to the west forms part of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, designated in 1958 covering an area of approximately 6,900 hectares. Its primary purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area's forests and heathland, and this higher ground provides a green backdrop to the Conservation Area.

Eastwards, built development extends down into the Trent Valley. The Trent and Mersey Canal (itself a county-wide conservation area) runs along the eastern edge of Brereton & Rugeley, beyond which stands Rugeley Power Station with its landmark cooling towers, and further east the River Trent and West Coast mainline railway. Waterways and routeways follow the contours between the Chase to the south-west and river to the north-east.

### (b) Historic Development

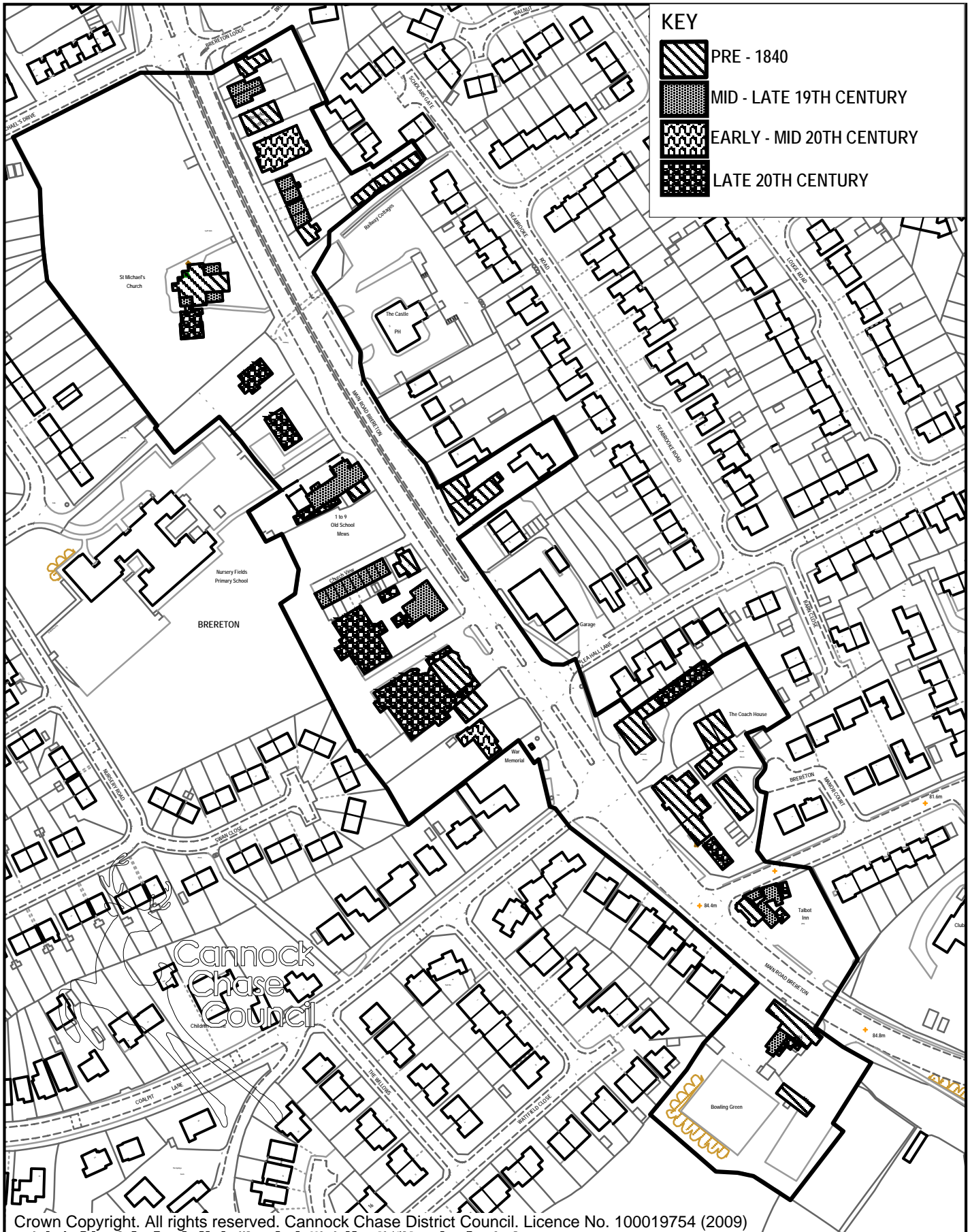
The name of Brereton (Brerdun) suggests an Old English origin with 'Brer' meaning briar, bramble or thorn and 'dun' referring to a hill. In 1230 Adam de Mytton of Ingestre was Lord of the Manor, and his land passed to his descendants the Earls Talbot, the family name of the Earls of Shrewsbury. The adjacent area of Brereton Hayes was held by the Pagets of Beaudesert, later Earls of Uxbridge and Marquis of Anglesey.

The County's Historic Environment Record indicates a series of three fish ponds immediately north-east of The Coach House/Brereton House. These were created by the Birch family between 1795 and 1820 and were supplied with water from Brereton Brook which flows from Brereton Hayes to the Trent. The ponds have subsequently been filled in and the land developed.

The earliest inhabitants of the area were probably attracted by its iron for smelting with charcoal, and the first mention of coal appears to be in 1498. Until the 17th century pack horse trains travelling through the village formed the primary means of transport of goods.

From the mid-17th century stagecoach services developed between settlements, travel increased and settlements 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. Inns such as the Red Lion and Swan expanded to serve the new trade, and craftsmen such as blacksmiths located in the village.

Increased population and prosperity in the area led to new development and redevelopment in the village during the 18th century. Plan 2 shows the development history of the Conservation Area. Brereton Hall is regarded as the 17th Century manor house and was extensively altered c.1795, being



divided into two houses between 1812-15. Brereton House was built shortly before 1772 for Brereton landowner and maltster Andrew Birch, probably as a new home on his marriage. In 1777 the Grand Trunk Canal (later known as the Trent and Mersey Canal) opened, providing a means of bulk transport of goods. Essentially the area still relied on an agricultural economy.

Towards the end of the 18th century deep coal mining began to have a significant influence on the area, leading to a further increase in population and prosperity in Brereton. The 1840 tithe map shows development scattered along both frontages of Main Road and up Coalpit Lane. By 1884 further development had infilled some plots and some buildings had been redeveloped, however the village still had plenty of open space and garden land on both frontages. Little further development then appears to have taken place until modern times. Many of the buildings developed over this time are still evident today. Eight mining sites were worked to the south-west of the village at the northern edge of the Cannock Chase Coalfield. Tramways such as the 'Ginny Wagons', built c.1810, ran from Brereton Levels down through the village across Main Road to the canal basin. Later, a tunnel under Main Road enabled the steam powered rope haulage system to be extended to the basin, used until c.1922 when canal trade declined. The tunnel was then used as a wartime air-raid shelter for the nearby school and later as a pedestrian underpass and only filled in in 2003.

Brick making sites accompanied the collieries and bricks were used to supply the pits as well as to construct many of the buildings around the village. The 18th Century brick facing to Brereton Hall is said to have been from a special batch of distinctive yellow clay from the pit bottom.

During the 19th Century the northern part of Brereton Hall was the home of Elizabeth and Harriet Sneyd, who built Brereton's first school, St. Michael's Church of England School (the remains surviving as part of the old Community Centre, now Old School Mews) and were amongst the principal contributors to the building of St. Michael's Church. The Hall was owned by the Earls Talbot until sold to the Colliery company in 1924 and then occupied by Colliery officials for many years. In the early 20th century the southern part of the Hall was a Girls Training Home for domestic servants.

The nearby Brereton House became the lifelong home of local Methodist benefactress Elizabeth Birch and her sister Ann. In the 19th century Brereton was known as a centre of Methodism. In 1824 Elizabeth Birch had built Railway Cottages, a row of six almshouses, so named because of their proximity to the Ginny Wagons tramway, their occupants to be poor persons of good moral character, aged over 50, and regular attendees at the Methodist Chapel. She also founded the 'Free School' in 1838 for the education of boys aged 6-14 years of poor parents living within 3 miles of Brereton and lessons had to be free from any sectarian tendencies. The school ran a night class for working miners, and fuel to heat the classrooms was provided free each winter from 1876 by Earl Talbot's collieries. Elizabeth Birch died in 1842 and is buried in the grounds of Brereton Methodist Church. In the late 19th and early



20th Centuries Brereton House was occupied by successive General Managers of the collieries.

The Cedar Tree Hotel was remodelled in Regency fashion in the early 19th century, though its core is probably 18th century. It was built as a private house, becoming a guest house in the 20th century and a hotel in the 1960's following extensions and alterations. In earlier times it stood behind a high roadside wall. The adjacent pair of Victorian houses to the north (now the hotel annex) replaced a timber-framed house said to have been Elizabethan. Until recently these houses had front garden walls with gate piers with stone caps, inscribed with the original house names – Ivy Villa (south) and Rose Villa (north). In 1881 Ivy Villa was occupied by landscape artist H.W. Henley, who exhibited at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists between 1871-95, and whose name is on an 1880's painting of Brereton Church.

St. Michael's Church opened in 1837, built on land and using stone given by the 2nd Earl Talbot. The architect was Thomas Trubshaw, however as the population expanded, major extensions and alterations were carried out later in the century under the direction of architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, who designed notable buildings in London such as St. Pancras Station and Hotel. These alterations were initiated by the Rev. Edward Samson during his vicarship from 1874 to 1897, often at his own expense. The clock was added to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, with the octagonal tower raised to accommodate the clock and four extra bells. A map of 1775 indicates a large building in this general area, but whether this is an early church is unknown. The roadside lychgate dates to 1884, although it has been repositioned. The Rev. Samson also built four almshouses opposite the church in 1902, held in trust for needy inhabitants, the Edward Samson Cottage Homes.

Despite its growth, by the early 20th century Brereton still remained a country village, with gardens up to the road frontages and plenty of trees. In the 1960's and 1970's modern housing development infilled the Main Road frontages and land behind, and a road widening scheme in 1971 resulted in loss of a group of 19th century buildings in the centre of the village between the present Castle Inn and Lea Hall Lane. Today Brereton has become absorbed by the southward spread of Rugeley, although the old linear settlement pattern is still evident from the location of the older buildings which form the basis of the Conservation Area. Brereton's earlier life as a thriving village is also evident in the survival of its community buildings, many adapted to new uses.

### (c) Spatial Analysis

Although the large width of the highway running through the Conservation Area is balanced by some of the substantial buildings and mature trees along both frontages, it has however reduced the cohesion of the frontages. Front gardens remain enclosed for the most part with walls, hedges and railings defining public and private space. Conversion of the larger buildings into

residential use has generally included communal parking at the rear, avoiding opening up of front gardens for parking.

St. Michael's churchyard remains the one significant area of landscaped green open space at the north end of the Area, with the War Memorial in its small garden creating a landscape feature at the south end.

Most of the larger historic gaps in the built-up frontages have already been developed, but smaller gaps between buildings are valuable in affording views of planting to the rear. The central part of the Conservation Area has an open aspect as a result of the hotel car park almost opposite to the Castle Inn car park, both sites where older buildings were demolished.

At the southern end of the Conservation Area the car parks of the Red Lion and Talbot Inn form a gentle transition from urban to rural land use, and the juxtaposition of village and countryside contributes to the character positively.

The majority of the older buildings face Main Road, however in places short rows of cottages run back from it at 90 degrees, and buildings behind Brereton House and Hall form small complexes behind the main frontage. The Area is characterised by substantial detached buildings, some rising to three storeys, in generous plots.

There is a sequence of interesting views through the Conservation Area along the frontages of the group of listed buildings at the south end, the central group around the Cedar Tree Hotel and old Community Centre, and the environs of St. Michael's Church. There are also attractive views into the Conservation Area from all directions, towards diverse groups of buildings. Views outward extend to the countryside setting of the village and glimpses of the power station cooling towers to the north-east.

#### (d) 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. Examples are noted to illustrate features and are not intended to be comprehensive.

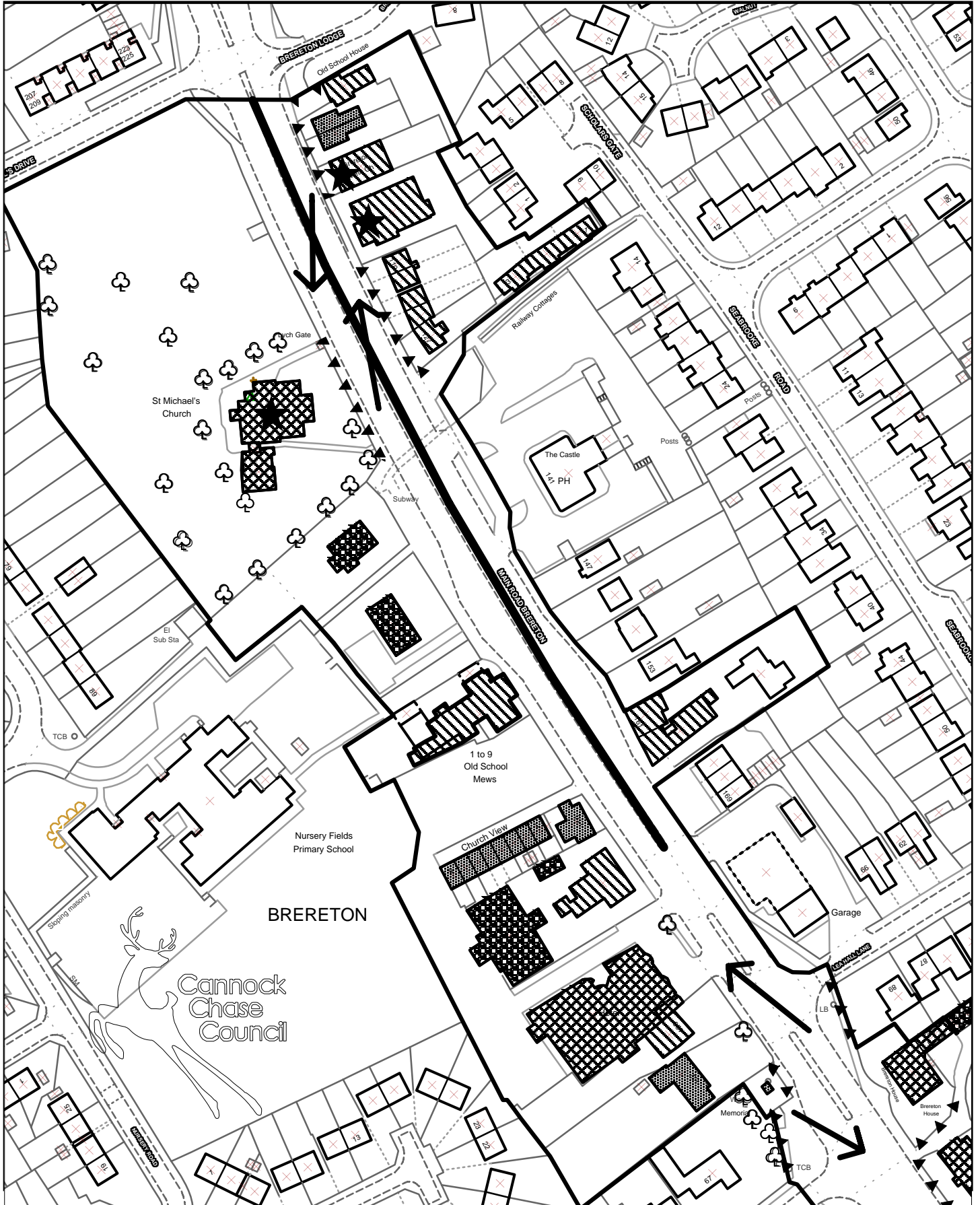
The townscape of Brereton Conservation Area is defined by its attractive and interesting mix of grand houses, workers' cottages and community buildings within a village setting. Although the original uses of some buildings have changed, the range of building types remaining are a reminder of Brereton's history.

Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area make a positive contribution to its character, taking account of their three-dimensional appearance, integrity as historic structures, their roofscapes and detailing. Important features are shown on Plans 3 and 4.

PLAN 3: TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL - NORTH SECTION



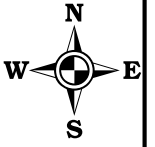
KEY			
	BUILDINGS MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION		BOUNDARIES MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION
	BUILDINGS HAVING NEUTRAL IMPACT		BOUNDARIES MAKING A NEGATIVE CONTRIBUTION
	LISTED BUILDINGS		SIGNIFICANT TREES AND TREE GROUPS
	UNLISTED BUILDINGS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST		VIEW
			SKY LINE FEATURE



# PLAN 4: TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL - SOUTH SECTION



KEY			
	BUILDINGS MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION		BOUNDARIES MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION
	BUILDINGS HAVING NEUTRAL IMPACT		BOUNDARIES MAKING A NEGATIVE CONTRIBUTION
	LISTED BUILDINGS		SIGNIFICANT TREES AND TREE GROUPS
	UNLISTED BUILDINGS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST		VIEW
			SKY LINE FEATURE



At the southern end of the Conservation Area two historic public houses stand on opposite sides of Main Road, still a welcoming presence at the entrance to Rugeley today. The Red Lion with its rear barn and long rendered frontage with central gable dates back to coaching days and provides a focal point as the road curves on into the village past The Talbot Inn. The Talbot is almost certainly named after the Earls Talbot family, whose family crest includes a 'Talbot', a white hound. Although subject to 20th century alterations the symmetrical two-storey frontage of the Inn retains its sturdy traditional appearance, with the remains of an old painted sign on the Armitage Lane façade, the lettering carefully emphasised with shadowing. The traditional public house signage on both premises adds vitality and interest.

Beyond Armitage Lane, the view through the village opens up with glimpses of buildings between mature trees. Brereton Hall, with its yellow brick façade, handsome sash windows, hipped slate roof and substantial chimneys, is regarded as once being Brereton's manor house. It is one of the area's few Grade II\* listed buildings, by virtue of its containing a rare late 16th century frieze of mural paintings and traces of a plaster ceiling, discovered during renovation in 1993. Its long three-storey frontage makes an imposing statement, and its local yellow brick is an unusual and distinctive feature. At the rear stands its associated barn, dating to the 17th century. Its simple design and substantial stone ashlar construction is typical of its type and a reminder of the importance placed on storage of grain etc. in an agricultural community.

North of the Hall stands the Grade II listed Brereton House behind its splendid stone walls, piers, steps and wrought iron gates. Set a little apart from its neighbours, and elevated above the road, this three-storey, late 18th century house is a landmark in both the Conservation Area and the wider district. Built of red brick with its stuccoed Tuscan doorcase (Fig. 1), moulded plaster eaves and bands, and elegant sash windows (Fig. 2), its architecture is typical of the Georgian period (18th and early 19th Century) reflecting wider architectural influences fashionable at the time. Its northern gable with double chimney projections forms a prominent edifice in views from the north. At the rear is a two-storey wing and substantial detached red brick coach houses, which form an important backdrop to the listed buildings.

These buildings, though diverse in design and materials, form an attractive group and contribute strongly to each other's setting. They create an unusual and distinctive piece of local townscape. Alterations have been carried out sympathetically over time allowing their essential character to be retained.

The war memorial near the junction of Coalpit Lane at the south end of the Conservation Area stands within a small garden. It comprises a cross-shaped column in light coloured Cornish Granite on a multi-tiered base, carrying lettering displaying nineteen World War I names and ten World War II names, and was unveiled in 1922. It stands above road level in a garden retained by stone walling, with a backdrop of trees and holly hedging and gives this corner of the Conservation Area a somewhat sombre atmosphere.



Fig. 1 Stuccoed Tuscan doorcase at Brereton House



Fig. 2 Sash window at Brereton House

The central part of the Conservation Area comprises the remains of the old village core. On the western frontage stand a group of domestic buildings which include the Cedar Tree Hotel, adjacent villas and the terraced cottages on Church View. The hotel, three-storeys, with its white stucco elevations, two-storey convex front bays crowned with wrought iron balconettes (Fig. 3), sash windows and doorcase on Tuscan columns, is typical of the Regency period (early 19th Century) although the house probably has 18th Century origins. The intricacy of its detailing adds interest and quality to the street scene. Standing behind its magnificent cedar tree, it is another piece of landmark architecture in the District, and although much extended during its development from a house into a guesthouse and then an hotel during the mid-20th century, its essential character has been retained.

The buildings which face Main Road on either side of the hotel further demonstrate the diversity of architectural style in the Conservation Area, and their age, scale and siting help them to contribute positively to the setting of the listed building and the streetscape of the Conservation Area. 120 Main Road was at one time an inn, The Swan, and its upper casement windows (Fig. 4) remain typical of old-style Staffordshire vernacular. 110 Main Road, dating to before 1820, was originally double fronted and red brick, with sash windows creating an elegant symmetrical façade, though it has been subject to some modernisation. Behind, and running at 90 degrees to Main Road, is a terrace of eight cottages at Church View (formerly Malabar's Row). These two-storey buildings, in red brick with modest dentilled eaves and brick detailing around windows and doors, retain much of their mid-Victorian (mid-late 19th century) appearance and are prominent in views from the north. Several buildings between Church View and the old Community Centre fronting Main Road were demolished in the 20th century, the space now used as the hotel car park.

The eastern side of Main Road at this point was, until the road widening, occupied by a further group of 19th century buildings, the sole survivor being 161-3 Main Road. Here a range of two-storey buildings faces Main Road, with a terrace of two-storey cottages adjoining at 90 degrees. The site has recently undergone conversion to residential units (Fig. 5), with new build residential development on the land at the rear. Though modest in overall proportions and design, the frontage buildings retain vestiges of the original sash windows and a recently reconstructed timber doorcase. They accommodated a grocery and general store, run by successive generations of Brereton's once prominent Bradbury family until the early 1960's, then Brereton's Post Office, and until recently an antique shop. The cottages are the surviving block of two terraces of old cottages running back from Main Road, once known as Bradbury's Row, and before that Phillip's Row, and are prominent in views from the south. They are built in local red brick, with the elevation facing the road painted cream. Although rather isolated between frontages of modern development, these buildings retain their prominence in the street scene standing close to, and higher than, the road, whilst adjacent properties are set back.



Fig. 3 Two storey front bays with wrought iron balconettes and sash windows at The Cedar Tree

Fig. 4 Casement window at 120 Main Road





On the western road frontage in this part of the Conservation Area stands the old Community Centre, another landmark building. Its high red tiled roof slopes run at 90 degrees to the road and its siting at the back of the pavement relative to the gaps and adjacent building set backs guarantees its visual prominence in views through the Conservation Area from both north and south. Its design, with side porch, is typical of many late Victorian schools, the main part of the existing building dating from 1891. It was a girls only Church of England school until the 1930's, when it became a school for children up to age 11 until its closure in 1971, after which it was used as Brereton's Community Centre. Its detailing with decorative tile hanging on the original dormer and decorative ridge tiles add to its distinctive appearance. Conversion to residential units has recently taken place after a long period of vacancy, securing its use into the future. The conversion included extensions to side and rear, carefully conserving existing features and matching existing materials and is a good example of a development sympathetic to the historic fabric and character of the area (Fig. 6).

Main Road curves gently and rises onto a brow at the northern end of the Conservation Area, with views beyond over urban Rugeley. The western frontage is bounded by St. Michael's Church which stands in an elevated position above the road within its 2.5 acre landscaped churchyard. Stone and brick retaining walls bound Main Road, together with a well-carved lych gate, these relocated westwards from their original positions during road widening in 1971. The listed church dates from 1837, built in stone ashlar in early English Gothic style, and subsequently altered and enlarged. Its gabled roof and octagonal bell turret stand against the sky, and the whole ensemble amongst mature trees, particularly the large yews, contributes an atmosphere of peace and green calm to the Conservation Area, in contrast to the busy road below.

The group of buildings on the eastern side of Main Road provide more links with Brereton's fascinating history and a further demonstration of the architectural variety which characterises the Conservation Area. Here the 'Ginny Wagons' tramway, having crossed the road beside the churchyard, ran down to the canal in front of Railway Cottages. The Cottages date from 1824, and form a row of three (converted from the original six) gabled single-storey dwellings at 90 degrees to Main Road and lower down the slope. Whilst unobtrusive in design and siting their local historic value contributes significantly to the interest of the Area.

Close to the Main Road frontage stand the Edward Samson Cottage Homes. The gabled bays and red tiled roofs of these four single-storey cottages, built in 1902, present an attractive frontage to the road behind a well-maintained hawthorn hedge. The adjoining house, 127 Main Road, was known as Church Cottage. Its white rendered two-storey elevations, symmetrical front elevation with simple but attractive carved timber doorcase around the central door are a feature of the streetscene, though partially hidden behind a modern fence.

Further north, the former red brick Methodist school rises above the Cottage Homes, with its gabled rooflines, skyline bell turret (Fig. 7) and decorative



Fig. 5 Recently refurbished cottages rear of 161-3 Main Road

Fig. 6 Community Centre recently converted to residential units



ridge tiles. The school opened in 1905 to admit boys and girls, indicated by carved stone signs over the entrances, and remained in school use until the 1980's. It is now being converted to residential use following a consent some years ago. Some modern materials are in use on this site, however prior to Conservation Area designation there was more flexibility in this regard. Rising beyond the Methodist school is the substantial dark red brick Methodist church, built in 1809 and enlarged in 1872. Its buttresses rise to stone pointed finials, a distinctive skyline feature, and its symmetrical façade stands close to the road. Elizabeth Birch is buried in the small walled graveyard at the rear, and inside the church are memorial tablets of local significance.

This group of buildings is completed at the northern edge of the Conservation Area by a pair of semi-detached Victorian houses, 'Wesley Cottages', dating from 1895, standing close to the road with small front gardens, and the old Methodist Free School, built in 1838. The single-storey school stands back from the road in an unobtrusive position, yet its interesting roof shape and decorative brickwork, together with its prominent datestone, lend this building much local significance. It now serves as a Sunday School and meeting room. A high brick wall forms the northern boundary of both this site and the Conservation Area, beyond which the road bends and falls away towards Rugeley, with the spire of Sts. Joseph and Etheldreda Church visible in the distance amongst the trees.

Most of the modern development through the village is outside the Conservation Area boundary and pre-dates designation. Although it comprises a range of modern designs and materials, it tends to be set back further than the older building lines and does not intrude, so can be viewed as having a neutral visual impact. Development which has taken place at the old Community Centre and 161-3 Main Road however, seeks to show a greater sympathy for its surroundings and retain the essential character of existing buildings.

The main unifying feature throughout the Conservation Area is the local warm orange-red and dark red brick. Staffordshire is well endowed with clay suitable for brick and tile making, and local brickyards operated into the 20th century. Flemish bond brickwork predominates, with alternate 'headers' and 'stretchers' in each course. This is an economical yet ornamental bond. Some of the larger buildings, such as the old Community Centre, employ English bond, consisting of alternate courses of all headers and all stretchers. This is considered to be the strongest of all bonds because no continuous vertical joints are formed in the brickwork. In the 19th century it was often used for warehouses and factories where structural strength was considered important. Some of the older brick façades have been painted, and the Cedar Tree Hotel has a 'stucco' finish. 'Stucco' is a plastered finish, used historically as an external rendering instead of stone and was considered more fashionable than brickwork. The stone buildings and walling of white sandstone cut into ashlar blocks, add to the distinctive range of building materials.

Traditional roof coverings in the Conservation Area include blue slate and small red clay tiles, and this original treatment is generally retained. Such

traditional roofing materials give a texture and liveliness not found in artificial materials, and are to be valued.

There is variety in the roofscape throughout the area with varied rooflines, gables and hips, decorative ridge tiles and an assortment of chimneys and pots. The bell turret of the old Methodist School, the finials of the Methodist Church and the bell turret of St. Michael's Church all punctuate the skyline. Although there are isolated examples of roof lights, there is a general absence of dormer windows in the Conservation Area, leaving roof slopes uncluttered. Remnants of cast iron rainwater goods remain, however many have been replaced with metal or plastic.

Boundary treatment to frontages appears to have suffered as a result of the road widening, and only remnants of old brick and stone walling remain. Such boundary treatment is important in providing a sense of enclosure and emphasising the distinction between public and private space. On the front boundary of the old Methodist school stands a single cast-iron gatepost, perhaps the remains of the original school entrance. Along this frontage are several brick piers with sandstone copings. A stone wall with stone piers (a Listed structure) stands in front of Brereton House, and an old brick wall with stone copings stands at the rear of Brereton Hall. Other front boundaries are marked by modern low brick walls, some with hedging behind, or railings.

There is no evidence of any historic highway ground surfaces apparent in the Conservation Area and a neutral floorscape of tarmac with concrete kerbs runs through the Area. Street furniture and road markings are quite visually intrusive, particularly the highway railings which create a visual and physical barrier between the opposing building frontages along Main Road (Fig. 8).

There are a number of plaques inscribed with names and dates on buildings within the Conservation Area which provide reminders of the historical associations of the area and help to reinforce its special character.

Tree cover makes an important contribution to the appearance of the Conservation Area, giving a maturity and softness to the street scene and having both visual and environmental value. Significant tree groups are found in the garden of Brereton Hall close to the junction of Main Road and Armitage Lane, the trees and hedges around the war memorial, and in St. Michael's Churchyard, particularly the yews at the south-east corner. Other important individual trees include the cedar tree in front of the Cedar Tree Hotel and the horse chestnut in front of 122 Main Road. The cedar tree in particular forms a striking landscape feature in its own right. Mature tree and hedge planting between and behind buildings contribute to the sense of enclosure and has a positive visual impact. The trees in and around St. Michael's churchyard are of particular merit, being in an elevated position and comprising a wide range of species. The dense green foliage of yew and holly punctuate the streetscene along Main Road, whilst the winter branch structure of the deciduous trees adds further richness and drama. Conservation Area designation places protection over all trees, and some trees which make a



Fig. 7 Bell turret and decorative ridge tiles at the former Methodist school



Fig. 8 Highway railings creating visual and physical barrier along Main Road

particular contribution, such as the cedar tree and trees adjacent to Brereton Hall, have the additional protection of Tree Preservation Orders.

(e) 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 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 impact of many minor alterations to individual properties can also have a negative effect. Special architectural or historic interest is very vulnerable to the process of modernisation. Examples are replacement windows and doors 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 appearance and character. The recovering of roofs, removal of chimney stacks and other architectural details such as decorative ridge tiles, can have a similar impact. Although a significant number of windows and some doors have been replaced with UPVC alternatives, and some chimney stacks have been lost, the Conservation Area is fortunate in retaining a high proportion of original roof coverings and detailing. Painting of buildings or details in bright colours can also have an adverse effect, out of character with the surroundings. Many such minor works to dwellings are permitted to householders. Necessary modern additions, such as extraction flues on commercial buildings, can usually be sited and painted to reduce their visual impact.

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. The listed buildings in the Conservation Area form a good example of how retention of appropriate detailing reinforces special architectural or historic interest.

There is potential for improvement of the frontage of the hotel car park between Church View and the old Community Centre, and the Castle Inn frontage, which both occupy prominent positions in the centre of the Conservation Area. This may also be an appropriate location for new tree planting, should the opportunity arise, to give a sense of scale and visual interest.

Consideration of the potential for less obtrusive street furniture in terms of the highway railings, bollards and extensive painted road markings which are so visually prominent would also be beneficial. The recently completed Rugeley bypass may allow Main Road to be downgraded in highway terms, with a lower speed limit and environmental improvements.

### 3. **Community Involvement**

A report was taken to the Council's Cabinet seeking approval for consultations to be carried out on the Draft Appraisal. A copy of the document was sent to occupiers of all properties in the Conservation Area, local Ward Councillors, Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Council, the Landor Society and technical consultees, inviting comments. Copies were available in Rugeley Area Office and Libraries at Rugeley and Brereton. A copy was also published on the Council's website ([www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk](http://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 to the Council's Cabinet. The Council then adopted the amended Appraisal and a copy has been published on the Council's website.

### 4. **Boundaries**

The boundary of the Conservation Area follows the rear boundaries of properties with the exception of lengths of modern frontage. The boundary has been reviewed during preparation of this Appraisal and no change is considered necessary at this time.

## 5. **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 description 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 and hedging. Any opportunities for enhancement of areas highlighted as having a negative visual impact or allowing environmental improvements to the Main Road frontages, 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 will be 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. Replacement doors should be to an appropriate panelled design and timber doorcases retained and repaired.

- The repair/reinstatement of brick boundary walling, piers and hedging will be encouraged and the opening up of front gardens should be avoided. Railings should be reinforced by a hedge, preferably holly, privet or beech.
- The inclusion of appropriate trees within new development will be required, especially larger, long-lived and suitably sited species, eventually to replace the older trees.
- Highway improvements should include a consistent approach to street furniture and reduction of clutter, and consideration of alternative, less visually intrusive methods of traffic management.

Recommendation 5: The Council will give consideration to the imposition of additional controls over minor development through an 'Article 4 Direction' in order to manage future changes to the many details which contribute to the special architectural and historic interest of the Area. Such powers are available under Article 4(2) of the General Permitted Development Order 1995, and the effect is that minor works to dwellings previously permitted without consent, such as small extensions, porches, replacement windows and doors, re-roofing, alternations to boundary walls, chimneys and other architectural details and the external painting of a building where the development fronts a highway would then require planning permission. The intention is not to unnecessarily restrict the individual freedom of residents but to enable the Council to have the opportunity of advising residents on the most appropriate design and materials.

Recommendation 6: The Council will give consideration to the use of Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees which make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Recommendation 7: The Council will undertake to work with property owners to seek satisfactory solution of issues adversely affecting the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

## 6. **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
- ‘The Brereton Collieries 1791-1960’ Ken Edwards (2005) Cannock Chase Mining Historical Society
- ‘Buildings and Features of Interest in Brereton’ – notes by Brereton & Ravenhill Parish Council
- Joint Record Office, Lichfield (Rugeley Tithe Map 1840)
- Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Record
- Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Plan 2006