

North Street, Bridgtown Conservation Area Appraisal



April 2014

Conservation Area Appraisal North Street, Bridgtown

1. Introduction

This document seeks to provide a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation of North Street, Bridgtown 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 manage the form and style of future development in the area as it continues to evolve. An Appraisal was produced for North Street in 2000 which this document updates, making use of some of the information contained therein.

Bridgtown Conservation Area was designated in November 1988 and covers a historic group of shops and other buildings along North Street and the adjacent Union Street and Church Street. They make up the centre of the industrial settlement of Bridgtown which developed from the 1870's. The Conservation Area boundary is shown on Plan 1. Iron working has a long history in this area and the principal industry appears to have been 'edge tool' making (tools with a cutting edge, such as chisels and spades) with a substantial number of buildings surviving from this period. The buildings within the Conservation Area form an attractive cohesive group generally dating from the late 19th Century and have for the most part remained structurally unchanged. The shop premises still display traditional elements of shopfront design and the cottages exhibit a variety of decorative features. The Conservation Area extends along Union Street to include the Bethel Methodist Church, testimony to the spiritual importance of the non-conformist movement in this period.

The core of historic Bridgtown lies to the north of the Roman Road of Watling Street (A5) in the triangle formed by the southern edge of the Walsall Road (A34) into Cannock close to where the two roads meet at Churchbridge. Cannock, a mile or so away, developed as a market town with medieval origins situated to the south and south-west of the forest, heathland and high ground of Cannock Chase, where the land drops away to the valley of the Wyrley/Saredon Brook. Until the 1870's the Bridgtown area was open land dominated by a probable post-medieval field pattern. Bridge Street, North Street and Union Street/Longdon Road existed by the late 18th Century, linking the main roads and other roads appear to have been laid out by 1876. Development of buildings expanded quickly within this road network and many 19th Century properties survive today.

The Conservation Area comprises the frontages along North Street from the Union Street/Longford Road junction to the Broad Street/Church Street junction, including some buildings along the Union Street and Church Street frontages. The buildings follow the curve of North Street and are of two storey height in red brick (some painted brown or cream in recent years) under plain red and blue clay tiles or blue slate. Many retain their rear outbuildings accessed through passageways from North Street below the first floor accommodation. Current uses comprise shops, residential and small businesses. In Union Street the church is built of red brick and a simple but attractive design with pointed arched windows and door. None of the buildings in the Conservation Area are listed.

Summary of special interest of Bridgtown Conservation Area:

- Its distinctive group of terraced shops, houses, church, associated buildings and outbuildings, including some historic boundary walls, all characteristic of a settlement core developed over a short time at the end of the Victorian period
- Its homogeneity of townscape in scale and materials with diversity of detail typical of that period
- Its mix of small scale uses
- Its role as a focal point in the wider settlement where a substantial number of buildings survive from the 1870's.

The survey work for this Appraisal was carried out in 2011-2.



PLAN 1: CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY



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 Building 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 and 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 building works to take place.

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) supported by English Heritage have undertaken an Extensive Urban Survey of Cannock 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, including Bridgtown, 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. Policies CP12 and CP14 seek to enhance biodiversity and landscape character. 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. 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 management decisions.

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3. Development History

Early history The Bridgtown area formed part of the ancient parish of Cannock which included Hednesford, Huntington, Great Wyrley and Leacroft. Tithe maps were not produced because the land belonged to a religious body which was exempt from paying tithes so there are no early maps of the area prior to the 1880’s when the first OS map was published. Records in Domesday Book however indicate a substantial amount of arable land around the settlement of Cannock.

By the late 11th Century the Cannock area formed part of the Royal Forest which extended from Stafford to Wolverhampton and was an area where 'Forest Law' applied – a means of restricting hunting, timber and mineral rights to the Crown. In 1189 the Manor of Cannock, together with Rugeley, was granted to the Bishop of Lichfield and descended with the Bishop until the Dissolution in 1546. 'The Natural History of Stafford' by Robert Plot, written in 1686, refers to the area in general terms and in respect of iron ore quotes ' the first and meanest thereof they call yellow share, an ill sort that runs all to dirt and is good for nothing, and such is the iron made of the Cannock, or Cannot, Stone, the lowest measure of iron ore about Dudley, which is so very sulphurous and terrestrial, that it is not fit to make iron'. As Cannock slowly expanded as a market town in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, some of the main roads were turnpiked but the surrounding landscape remained agricultural.

19th/20th Century As the coal mining industry developed in the area, particularly during the last few decades of the 19th Century and into the 20th Century, Cannock's suburban growth expanded. By the end of the 19th Century half of southern Staffordshire's coal was produced from the greater Cannock area, with surrounding villages growing as mining settlements. Other large scale industries developed in the area which supplied local housing expansion including several brick and tile works around Bridgtown.

Bridgtown developed as an industrial settlement along pre-existing roads from the 1870's onwards. Plan 2 shows the development history of the Conservation Area. Industrial development in 19th Century Britain created increased demand for labour and where new factories, railways and canals developed new housing often accompanied it. This contrasted with older historic settlements which evolved in a more ad hoc manner over time. In some places model villages were planned and developed by factory owners, such as Bourneville in Birmingham developed by the Cadbury's; in other places new roads were laid out and the land along them divided into plots which were sold off for development. There is a planned element to the wider settlement of Bridgtown in the street pattern, however the buildings were clearly developed piecemeal, probably by individual builders so although the buildings have a similar character being developed over a short period of time, they display differences in detail following from preferences of different builders.

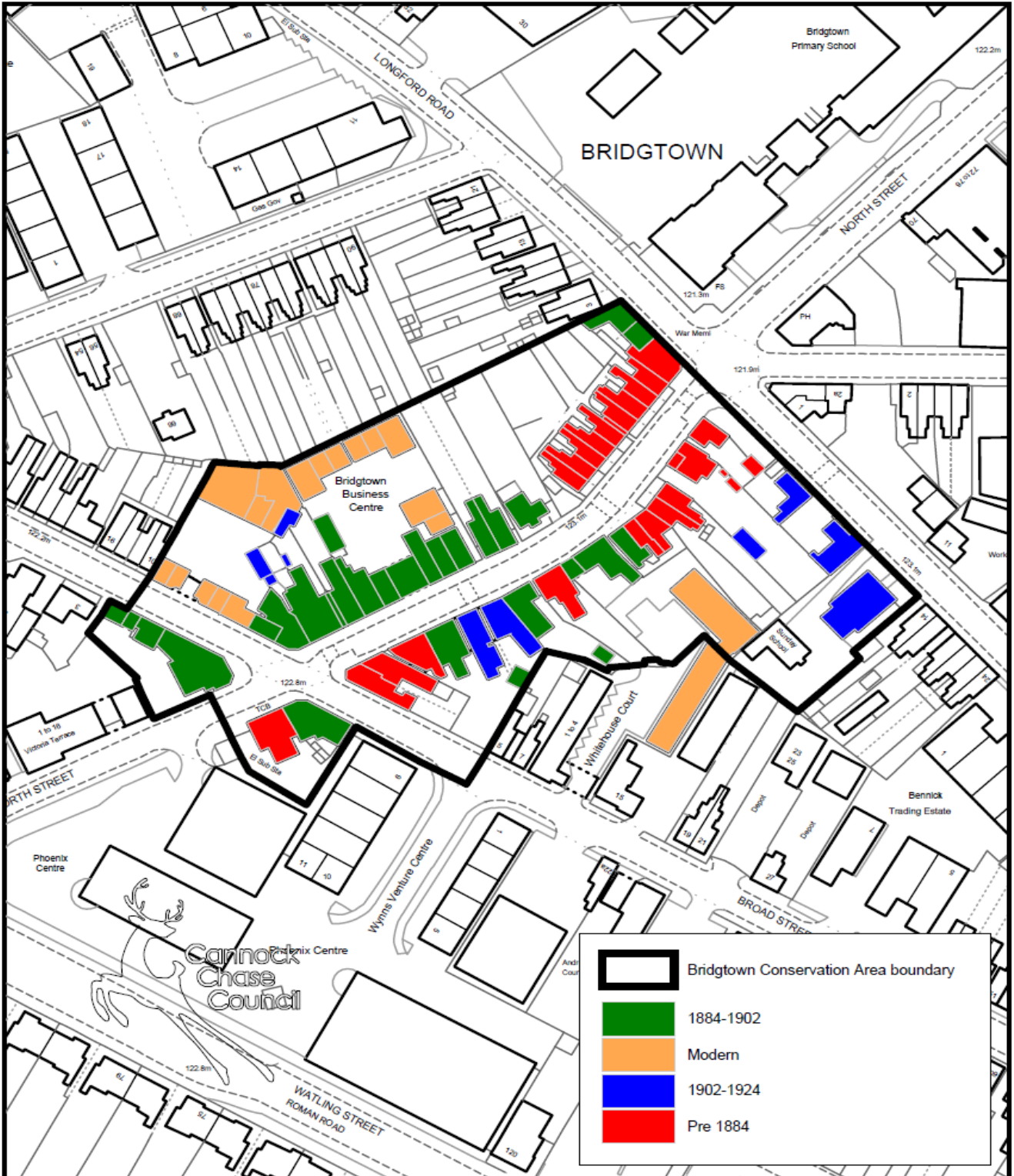
Iron working Iron working has a long history in the area, and Bridgtown in particular became noted for its number of 'edge tool' works. In the 18th Century William Gilpin, son of an 'edge tool' manufacturer from Wolverhampton, owned a flour mill and adjacent farmland following his marriage to the mill owner's daughter. The mill was on the 'Hedgford River' and by 1790 had been converted to a factory producing 'edge tools'. Production increased so a new factory was established at Churchbridge in 1806. The company acquired a nearby colliery and a tramway was constructed to the Wyrley and Essington Canal where a wharf was provided. Workers came from the established industrial areas in the Black Country and elsewhere. William Gilpin lived at Longford House, further west along Watling Street. Other 'edge tool' factories were opened by Gilpin's former employees, notably by Cornelius Whitehouse at the junction of Walsall Road and East Street and by E W Wynne on Watling Street (now the site of the Phoenix Business Park). One of these small works survives at the junction of Walsall Road and East Street and, being the surviving evidence of an important local industry, has significance for the local distinctiveness of the area.

Transport links Watling Street, the Roman road between London and North Wales, and Walsall Road, the main route between Cannock and Walsall meet at Churchbridge. Watling St became a turnpike road in 1766 and Walsall Rd in 1793. In the triangle of land between them the longer route of Union Street/Longdon Rd existed by the late 18th Century, together with link roads Bridge Street and North Street, and the remaining street pattern was present by 1876, after which development expanded quickly. Arrival of the canals revolutionised the transport of heavy goods. The Staffordshire and Worcester Canal had been opened in 1772 along the western edge of the Chase and investors such as Lord Hatherton saw the potential of local branches and spurs. The Hatherton (or Churchbridge) Branch, built in 1839, was named after him. The Cannock Extension from the Wyrley and Essington Canal was one of the last to be built in 1863. National rail routes were constructed through Staffordshire in the 1840's and local lines into and across the Chase in the 1850's as the coalfield was developed. Other mineral lines crisscrossed the area, shunting coal to central collection points, such as the East Cannock canal basin.

Two tollhouses had been built on Watling Street by 1843, one at Churchbridge and one at Walkmill Lane. The South Staffordshire railway line was extended through Churchbridge and Cannock in 1858. Clinker residue was used to improve local roads which were known as 'ironstone roads', and the area became more accessible. By 1876 Bridgtown's streets were laid out on land purchased by Cornelius Whitehouse from the Wolverhampton Building Society and housing was erected at a pace comparable with bulk housing today. Bricks were formed of locally produced Etruria marl and two or three brick and tile works grew up in the Bridgtown area in the second half of the 19th Century to supply building materials for Cannock's suburban expansion, distributed by the canal system. Longhouse Tileries was in production by 1868.



PLAN 2: DEVELOPMENT HISTORY



Religion Religious worship in industrial areas tended to be non-conformist and Bridgtown clearly demonstrates this. 'Non-conformist' was a term originally used for anyone who refused to confirm to the Act of Uniformity which came into force in 1662 and required clergy to consent to the contents of the Book of Common Prayer. It was later applied to a range of sects different from the established church as legislation permitted more freedom of worship which encouraged the building of chapels. Non-conformists were restricted from many spheres of public life until the 19th century repeals and increased religious toleration. Early chapels tended to be plain and rectangular and the humbler chapels continued thus into the 19th Century, with simplicity of interior decoration. In Victorian times religion lay at the heart of industrial middle class life, and most non-conformists shared the same outlook of work, faith and duty. A wide range of chapels developed in the newly industrialised towns and Sunday schools were run to teach children about the Christian faith. The late 20th Century industrial decline nationally accompanied by falling congregations has resulted in a reduction in the number of chapels. The earliest Methodist chapel in Bridgtown was built in Park Street in 1863, with a Primitive Methodist chapel built at the junction of East Street and Park Street in 1897, however these do not survive. The surviving Wesleyan Methodist Church on Union Street dates from 1909 and took over from the former 1879 Chapel which became the chapel schoolroom (now demolished). Although this Church is still in religious use, the loss of chapels in the area and their conversion to other uses highlights their decline in importance during the 20th Century.

The area was given its own Anglican parish church in 1876, initially a cast iron structure in Church Street, replaced by St Paul's Church in 1899. Nearby land had been given by a Miss Crockett to the vicar and churchwardens of Cannock for the foundation of a school 'for the poor children of the parish'. A teacher's house and school/church were built in 1874 and the latter had a roll of 90 children and a half yearly grant of coal from the West Cannock Colliery Company. The teacher's house has been demolished and the church has been converted into industrial premises. A new school was built in North Street in the early 20th Century, later expanded and remains in use as Bridgtown Primary School.

Recent history The First World War stimulated business for factories through Government orders however success was short lived and between 1920 and 1936 employees were recorded as working on 'short time'. Thereafter many people travelled out of the area to work in car manufacture in Wolverhampton and Birmingham or moved to jobs in the iron and steel industry in Sheffield and Bridgtown's economic base declined. New industries developed in the post-war period but as coal mining declined towards the end of the 20th Century business and retail developments began to predominate, canals went out of commercial use, were filled in and the land redeveloped. A length of the Cannock Extension Canal survives south of the A5 near Little Wyrley providing a reminder of the past as well as a valuable amenity asset. Today there are a variety of small businesses located in Bridgtown, including retail and restaurant uses along North Street and other small businesses with a concentration of larger scale retail uses along the Watling Street and Walsall Road frontages and on the nearby Orbital and Kingswood Lakeside.

The County's Historic Environment Record indicates areas of potential importance in increasing knowledge of the history of the area. Little archaeological work has been carried out so it is difficult to determine the impact Watling Street may have had on the pre-existing landscape and its relationship to surrounding communities during the Roman and later periods and the built-up nature of the area means that there is probably little opportunity for below ground archaeology to survive.

Further analysis of heritage significance is contained in the County's Extensive Urban Survey for Cannock. Remaining features/buildings contribute to an understanding of the importance of small settlements such as Bridgtown to the economic and social history of this part of Staffordshire in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Bridgtown is already under threat from piecemeal modern development, however contributes much to the historic local distinctiveness of the wider Cannock area.

Bridgtown and District Local History Society seek to raise the profile of this interesting area.

4. Townscape Character Appraisal

Location and Landscape Setting

Bridgtown is located on level ground on the southern edge of Cannock and on the northern side of the A5 corridor. The old nucleus occupies a roughly triangular area between Watling Street and the Walsall Road and the Conservation Area covers the core of this triangle. Modern development has however extended beyond the historic boundaries across these roads.

The nearby town of Cannock, on the southern edge of which Bridgtown is located, stands on ground rising from the low lying areas to the south-west and south-east to the higher plateaux of the forest and heath of Cannock Chase to the north and north-east. 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 together with agricultural land to the west and south gives a semi-rural landscape character to the setting of the town, with small settlements and scattered farmsteads and houses. The Ridings Brook runs south-west from the Chase south of Cannock town centre towards the Wash Brook and ultimately the River Penk. Cannock lies at the centre of routes from Wolverhampton, Walsall, Lichfield, Stafford and Penkridge. The A5/M6 Toll corridor runs east-west to the south of the town, linking to the M6 a few miles to the west.

Spatial Analysis

The Conservation Area covers the buildings along the central section of North Street, running north-east/south-west and closely fronting the street on both sides. It follows the curve in the street from the junction with Union Street/Longford Road to the junction with Church Street/Broad Street, and includes several buildings around these junctions. The Area is compact and small in scale, built in a linear pattern, and formed of two storey buildings almost continuously lining the frontages on North Street, with differences in the form of the plots at the north-east end where the buildings are mainly residential and stand slightly back from the pavement behind small gardens, from the remainder of the street comprising shops and businesses standing on the back of pavement line. The buildings are not uniform in height or alignment however, with variations between adjoining blocks and buildings. Generally roof slopes face the streets, with angled corners and hipped roofs around junctions. All of the plots include a moderate amount of land/garden at the rear and many have small attached and detached one and two storey brick-built outbuildings attached to or close to the rear of the main frontages. The rear plots are usually accessed along shared alleys, built over at first floor. The appearance is of an urban environment softened only by some low front garden planting/hedging and several trees in rear plots visible between buildings, there are no significant green spaces in the Conservation Area or its vicinity other than a small planted area at the junction of North Street and Union Street where one of a pair of semi detached properties, no. 60, was demolished. The Union Street frontage has more separation between the buildings where two detached houses have their gardens at the side. Also on Union Street stands the former Methodist Church within a spacious plot. Overall the buildings of the Conservation Area form a cohesive group and with the exception of the shopfronts display characteristics of the wider settlement. The small amount of modern development is confined to some backland commercial development at the rear of nos.29-35 North Street where several adjoining rear plots have been combined.

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 interrelationship of 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 the Conservation Area is defined by its linear urban street pattern and its domestic scale. The buildings are fairly homogenous in their general size, design, materials and generous plot sizes, but varied in terms of

detailed design. High brick walls, often with blue brick capping, delineate some rear plot boundaries and add to the impression of enduring solidity and quality.

At ground floor level buildings accommodate a mix of uses, with residential uses predominantly at the north-east end of North Street and a variety of retail, food and restaurant and other business uses in the centre and south-west. Ground floor uses (as at January 2012) are shown on Plan 3. At first floor level the predominant use appears to be residential. These small shop premises are still in demand, with few vacancies, mostly comprising more specialist uses eg. bridal wear, dog grooming, fishing tackle and an ironing business. The newsagent/sweetshop occupies a central position and appears to be of longstanding with a steady trade and offering an important local service. The historic buildings make a significant contribution to accommodation for small businesses and the economic vitality in the area. At one time these shops would have housed a good selection of bakers, butchers, chemists, grocers, greengrocers and sweetshops catering for the settlement's needs. Important features of the Conservation Area today are shown on Plan 4.

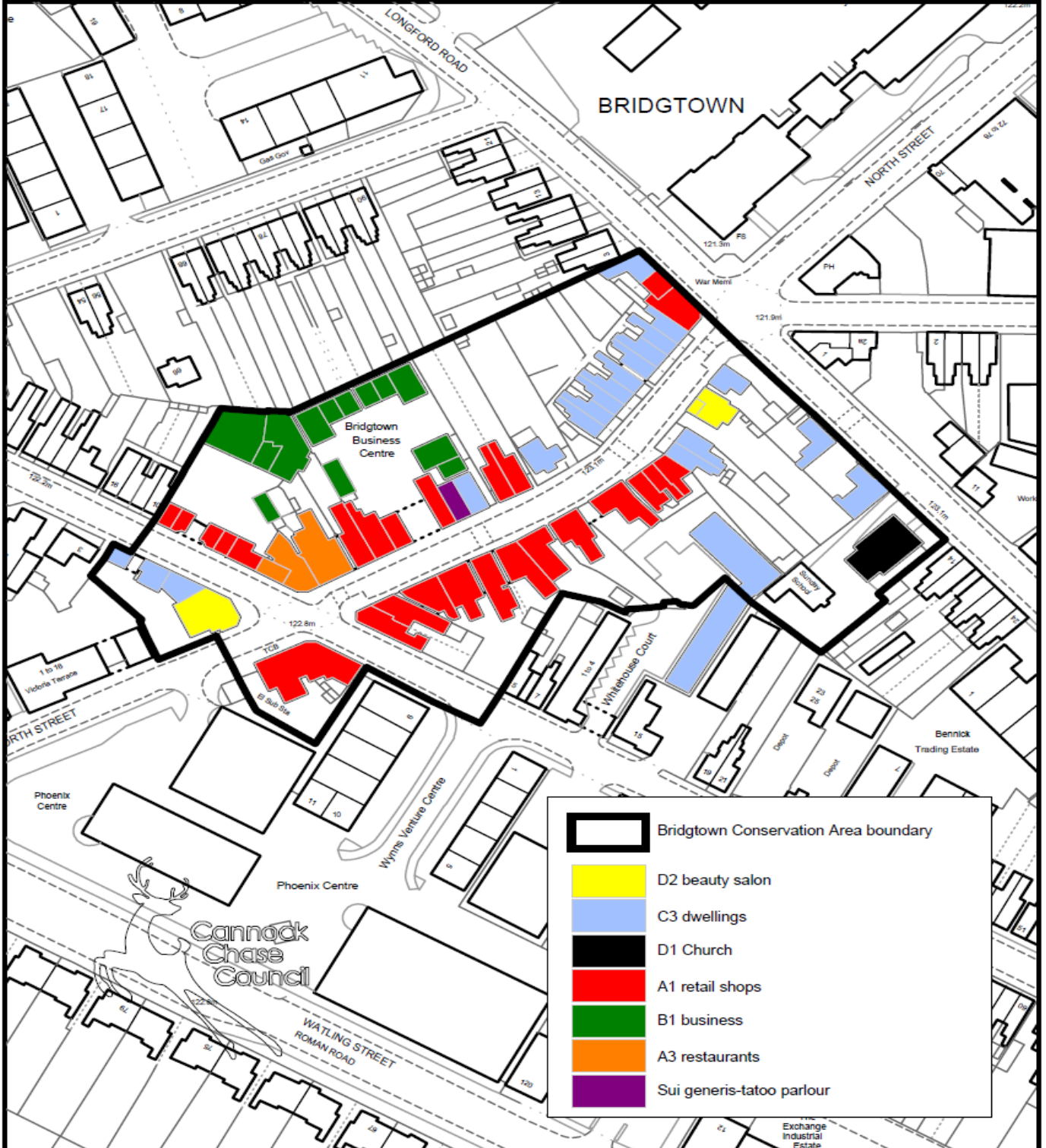
Shopfronts The shopfronts give Bridgtown its unique character and it is fortunate and rare that such a group have been retained and they should be valued. Shopfronts tend to be subject to continual changes as new shopkeepers introduce their identity and in recent years the trend nationwide for shopfront design in new materials and construction techniques have allowed use of large expanses of glass and the loss of old shopfronts with dramatic changes in the appearance of shopping streets. Shopfronts play an important role in the appearance of a street because they are designed to display goods for sale at the human pedestrian scale and to attract attention. They also have a role in projecting the image of the shop. In early times the retail trade in towns took place in the market, and at first shops were based on the market stall. At the end of the 17th Century the shop window was introduced and in the 18th Century appeared in the form we know it today. Style of shopfront developed from Georgian bays with small panes to the larger windows of Victorian and Edwardian shops allowed by the invention of plate glass. Despite changing details the same basic principles of design and proportion were always applied and the bold form and intricate detail of shopfronts provided vitality, depth and interest.

19th Century shopfront design was based on principles which successfully created a relationship with the building as a whole. The main elements enclosing shop windows and door are the 'stallriser' at the base, 'pilasters' at the sides, and the 'fascia' and 'cornice' at the top. The stallriser gives a solid base and protection at ground level, the pilasters divide adjacent shops vertically, the fascia gives space for advertising and the cornice provides weather protection at the top. All these elements form a frame and visually support the building above. Timber is a traditional shopfront material, with the fascia painted and contained at each end by a 'console' box (a classically designed bracket) or 'capital' (the decorative top of the pilaster). The cornice projecting above the fascia is both decorative and functional, and often weathered with lead sheeting. The stallriser varies in height with a moulded projecting cill and is often constructed of hard wearing materials – painted timber, tiles etc. The entrance door is often recessed and located in the centre of the shopfront flanked by display windows, and at street corners there may be a double aspect corner window. This invites shoppers in and the design of the door forms an integral part of the shopfront, often with timber panelling at the bottom to match the height of the stallriser. The pilaster is a traditionally designed pier with a base and capital which usually supports a console which itself frames the fascia panel. Timber is the most versatile of materials, can be worked to almost any profile, is durable and repainting can change the appearance of the shopfront at minimal costs. Darker colours were often traditional. Regular maintenance is essential if shopfronts are to remain attractive and long lasting, especially in the case of joinery work, and neglect will lead to decay.

There are 30 traditional shopfronts in Bridgtown which have been recorded as part of this Appraisal and photographs of them including some of the best examples of their detailing are shown in Figs 1-4. They vary in size, design and detailing, the larger ones are double fronted with a central doorway, often with a splayed opening to the recessed door. Some of the carved and moulded timber consoles and pilasters are very ornate and some have a decorative projecting cornice. Corner shops have doors facing the road junction and windows facing both roads and 19 North Street is a particularly flamboyant example of detailing. Some of the shopfronts have been repaired or replaced over the years so are not entirely in original condition but sufficient detail is retained to show the historic appearance. Two shops, 34 and 38 North Street, have shop windows which would have opened to allow their goods to be displayed to passers-by in the

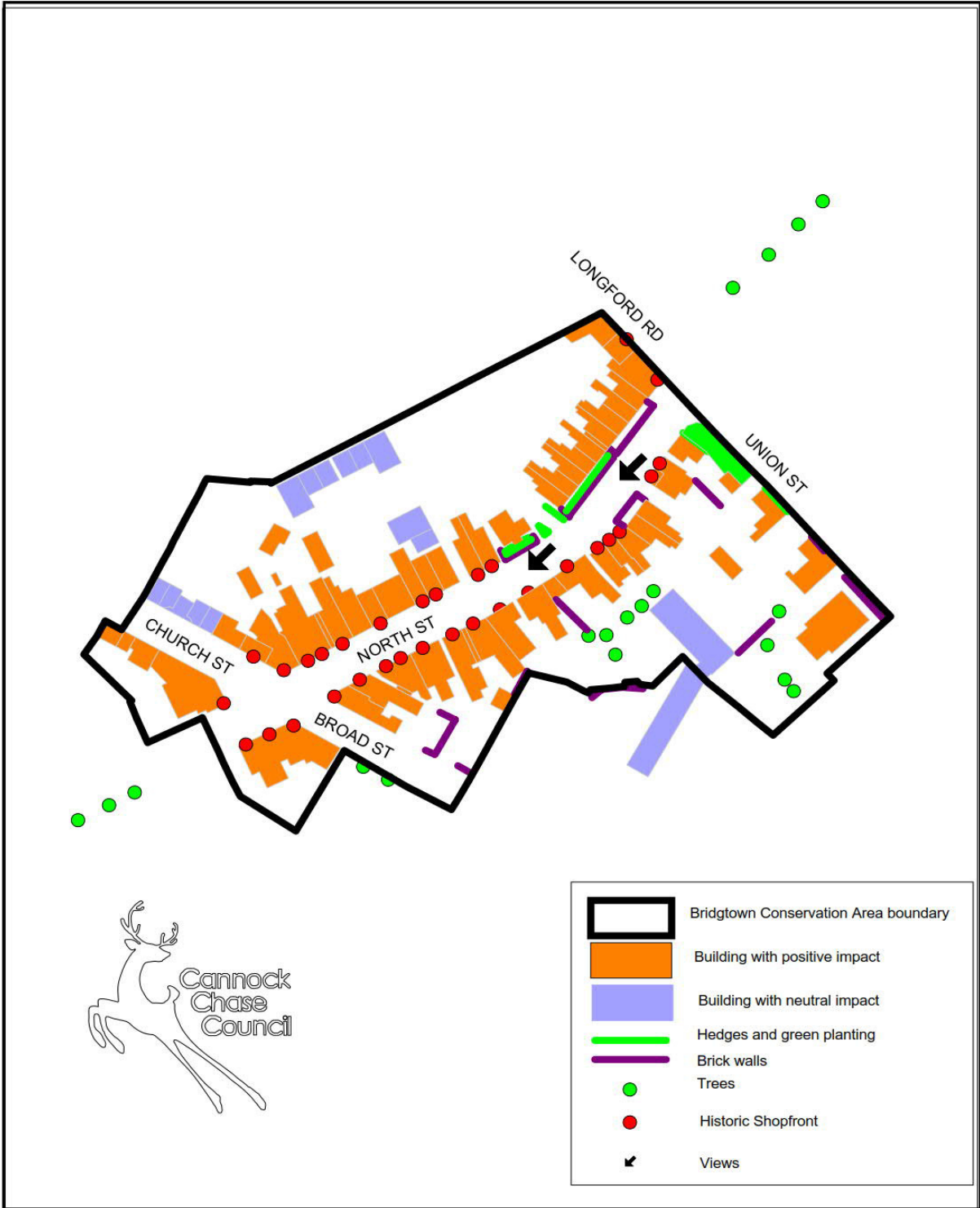


PLAN 3: GROUND FLOOR USES (MARCH 2012)





PLAN 4: TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL



street. One of the original timber shop doors remains at no. 33. Doorsteps are made of stone slabs and show the wear of many feet using the shops over the years.

Signage Well-designed signs complement a well-designed shopfront, adding to the quality of an area and creating a distinctive character to an individual shop with lettering providing decorative interest. A well-designed hanging sign from a traditional bracket in wrought or cast iron can add vitality to the street. Hanging signs were traditionally in timber and well designed examples relate to the size and scale of the building façade. The traditional position for hanging signs is level with the first floor window but there will be variations. Good examples of sympathetic signage in North Street are the hanging signs at 40 and 42 North Street, and most of the fascia signs in the Conservation Area are well-designed, small scale, modest and appropriate.

Detailing Buildings on the south side of the street often have decorative brick mouldings under their eaves, which enriches and emphasises the eaves line. On the north side they tend to be more utilitarian, with simpler blue brick detailing used to imitate more ornamental mouldings. 19 North Street has decorative finials along the roof ridge line and projecting from its corner points, maximising its visual impact in the streetscene. There are a few examples of round headed doors and windows, mainly on the larger houses on Union Street and the corner shop unit at 19 North Street.

The Conservation Area is quiet apart from passing traffic along the one-way North Street and the distant rumble of traffic on the ever-busy A5. Traffic/environmental improvements were carried out in the mid 1990's which calmed the traffic flows through the centre of Bridgtown and created on-street parking layby's in North Street and small car parks elsewhere, and provided new street furniture. Most of the historic properties around Bridgtown rely on on-street parking.

The evening economy in the Conservation Area is served by the one or two restaurants but is generally a quiet local centre in the evenings when businesses have closed and residents have returned home. Beyond the Conservation Area there are one or two public houses as well as the recent hotel development close to Churchbridge which generate some evening activity.

Building Materials

The building materials which characterise the Conservation Area are a dark orange/red local brick, some buildings having been painted, in cream or brown. Roofs are covered in red or blue clay tiles or blue slate. Brick has been used in England since Roman times and from the late 12th Century there was growing demand for fire resistant construction. As bricks became more even and regular in size thinner walls became possible due to proper bonding and the introduction of mechanical brick making in the mid 19th Century standardised the size. Staffordshire is well endowed with clay for brick and tile making, and local brickyards operated into the 20th Century. Local brick/tile yards operated nearby along Watling Street (Hawkins Longhouse Works) and Walkmill Lane.

Bonding is the name given to a construction of brick in which no vertical joint of one course is exactly over the one in the next course and is necessary to ensure that the loading is properly distributed through the wall. Bridgtown's historic brick buildings show a variety of brick bonds including: Flemish, consisting of alternate headers and stretchers in every course, a decorative bond widely used from the 18th Century onwards, economical in the use of facing bricks; Old English, with a course of headers and stretchers alternating followed by three courses of stretchers, also an economical bond; and English Garden Wall bond, one course all headers followed by three or five courses all stretchers, even more economical than conventional Flemish or English bonds. The modern buildings are built in 'stretcher' bond, widely used today for the construction of buildings with cavity walls, where all the bricks are 'stretchers' except for a 'header' in alternate courses at the quoin.

Old boundary walls and outbuildings are built of similar materials, and sometimes blue bricks are used for decorative detailing/capping of walls. Some outbuildings retain their industrial style cast iron small-paned windows frames suggesting former workshop uses, although at the time of this survey were mostly boarded up, for example the old

Fig 1. Variety of shopfront details



Fig 2. North Street shopfronts 2012 : A



18



19



27



29



33



35



37-39



40



42

Fig. 3 North Street shopfronts 2012 : B



20



24



26-28



30



34-36



38



44-48



54-56



61

Fig. 4 North Street shopfronts 2012: C



21



21-25



22



1c Longford Road

outbuildings within Bridgtown Business Centre and at the rear of 30/32. It is understood that at least four of these buildings were slaughterhouses in the past, and many have their own substantial brick chimneys.

Shop windows and fascia's are framed in carved/moulded painted timber and some of the original timber sliding sash windows have been retained.

The Public Realm

The ground surfaces in the Conservation Area were the subject of a repaving scheme in the 1990's and pavements along North Street are surfaced in blue brick pavers. Tarmac or concrete slabs are used elsewhere, and roads are paved in traditional tarmac. The ground surface is important as it links and joins the buildings and ideally should make its own contribution to the townscape rather than being a neutral ribbon.

Street furniture comprises a co-ordinated series of main elements painted in dark green - railings, lamp posts, bollards and poles for hanging baskets, with a clock attached to one of the lamp posts on North Street. A GR wall letter box (George V) is located in the wall of 20 North Street at the junction with Broad Street/Church Street. There is a modern telephone kiosk in front of 20 North Street and a series of black and white striped bollards associated with the traffic calming build-outs.

The setting of the Conservation Area

The Conservation Area forms the core of the historic settlement of Bridgtown and there has been a degree of piecemeal redevelopment and infill development in modern times affecting its setting which has sometimes paid little regard for the historic surroundings and plot boundaries, the cumulative impact of which is beginning to detract from the overall heritage value of the settlement. In the recent past a policy of business development has been pursued in Bridgtown, hence there exist small groups of modern industrial units interspersed with older dwellings and other premises as well as larger scale retail developments along Watling Street. Although these provide useful local business opportunities some of them do not fit well into their setting in design and conservation terms. More recently new development in Bridgtown has tended towards mixed residential and business uses and its design has sought to better respect local character, particularly in the immediate environs of the Conservation Area. Nevertheless, one of Bridgtown's strengths appears to be its continuing role in encouraging small business growth, so respect for this in conjunction with retention of essential character is important so that 'history lives alongside progress'.

The nearby A5 corridor in particular accommodates an assortment of unrelated building designs and signage 'clutter' with intermittent landscape planting and variable environmental quality and it is anticipated that a design strategy seeking future enhancements along this corridor may be included within a District-wide 'Design Supplementary Planning Document' currently in progress.

There are green views of tree planting outside the Conservation Area along the North Street frontages of the Phoenix Centre to the south-west and Bridgtown Primary School to the north-east which enhance the setting of the Conservation Area and views through it.

5. Loss/Intrusion/Negative feature

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. 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 either. Through careful design new buildings can respect, complement and enhance the architectural character of an area, and wherever possible conversion of attractive old buildings for new uses can not only maintain character and

local identity but lend a particular quality and value to the new development too. 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 interest is very vulnerable to the process of modernisation. Examples are replacement windows in artificial materials and non-traditional designs, on some of the houses and at first floor level above some shops. Replacement doors to some houses are also of modern designs, and a few chimneys have been shortened or removed. Loss of outbuildings and boundary walls as a result of opening up and amalgamation of former rear plots is also apparent in parts of the Conservation Area and any further losses are likely to have a significant effect. The outbuildings appear especially vulnerable as many appear to be unused. Artificial materials and non-traditional 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. Remaining features tend to be remnants of what once existed in an 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 and of its ancillary walling and small outbuildings, however although the shopfronts are kept well painted, there should be an awareness of the need for regular maintenance of other paintwork, such as upper floor windows and outbuildings.

Few of the front boundaries to houses in the Conservation Area retain the low hedging which is likely to have been traditional at one time, and it may be possible to find old photographs which show this. Reinstatement of well-kept hedging in gardens inside the low brick walls would enhance and soften the street scene. There is also potential to improve the planting in the box outside 46/48 North Street.

The traffic calming would benefit from an update and refurbishment, there may be more attractive ways today to achieve the same objective, rather than with 'buildouts', striped bollards and road paint, which could enhance the street scene.

A Management Plan will be prepared 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 the Draft Appraisal document. Occupiers of all properties in the Conservation Area, local ward Councillors, Bridgtown Parish Council and Bridgtown Local History Society, as well as 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 front North Street, Union Street and Church Street around the core of the historic settlement. The boundary has been reviewed during preparation of this Appraisal and no change is considered necessary at this time. However consideration will be given to review of this matter and to the potential for designation of a further Conservation Area in the wider Bridgtown area in the future to take account of the vulnerability of its historic features to continued piecemeal development, leading to significant loss of local distinctiveness.

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 of determining each case.

Recommendation 3: Future development should take account of the special interest of the Area as set out in this Appraisal. New development will need to acknowledge the relationship of buildings to spaces, maintain historic street patterns and urban grain, respect historic plot boundaries and reflect existing architectural detailing, including colour, texture and range of materials. It should acknowledge the value of detailed diversity in facades and roof lines and respect existing planting. Any opportunities for enhancement of areas via refurbishment of the exterior of buildings and reinstatement of boundary treatment would be welcomed.

Recommendation 4: The role traditional/historic buildings can play in accommodating diverse small business uses assisting vitality and regeneration will be recognised as a key economic asset.

Recommendation 5: Traditional materials should be used in 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, materials and glazing pattern and any opportunities to reinstate former window design will be welcomed. Repair and maintenance of upper floors should be included in any scheme of alteration or improvement of the ground floor shopfront.
- Opportunities to enhance front garden boundaries of residential properties within the Conservation Area with hedge/shrub planting behind low brick walls and the retention of tree planting in rear plots will be encouraged to maintain 'glimpses' of greenery among the buildings.

Recommendation 6: Existing timber shopfronts should be retained and repaired. New shopfronts and signs should take account of the special interest of the Area as set out in the Appraisal and should not remove or cover existing architectural features or details.

- 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/replacement 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 and design guidance on shopfronts and signage will be prepared to manage change.

Recommendation 7: Public realm improvements should include a consistent approach to street furniture and reduction of 'clutter'. Environmental improvements in key locations will be sought.

Recommendation 8: Opportunities to enhance the setting of the Conservation Area, views in and out will be pursued. In particular design guidance will be prepared to achieve enhancements along the A5 corridor.

Recommendation 9: 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.

Recommendation 10: Further consideration will be given to extension of Conservation Area boundaries/designation of a further Conservation Area in the wider Bridgtown area in the future in order to safeguard the historic interest of the setting of the Conservation Area and the settlement as a whole.

9. Useful Information

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

Principal sources of historic and local information referred to are:

- Cannock Chase Council: North Street, Bridgtown Conservation Area Appraisal 2000
- Staffordshire County Council: Extensive Urban Survey for Cannock
- Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Record
- Bridgtown Memories: David Williams/Bridgtown & District Local History Society
- Bygone Bridgtown: David Williams/Bridgtown & District Local History Society.
- Bridgtown past and Present-Calendar for 2012: Bridgtown & District Local History Society.