Towcester is a place of special character and historic interest.

This appraisal and management plan sets out the features that contribute to its distinctiveness and identifies opportunities for its protection and enhancement.
Summary—Towcester Conservation Area

Summary of special interest

Towcester is relatively unique in that there has been continuous occupation within the historic core of the town from the Roman period through Saxon and medieval times to the present day. Each period has left its legacy in modern day Towcester.

Much of the town’s special interest lies in the survival of its ancient street plan which originates from the Roman period and the survival of the medieval town layout which has remained largely unaltered over the last millennia.

Watling Street, and the buildings along it define the character of Towcester where many buildings retain their seventeenth century fabric behind later facades. The town’s built environment is of high quality and reflects its long history as a prosperous market town.

Key characteristics of the conservation area include:

- Linear development along Watling Street forms the core of the area off which long, narrow plots run perpendicular from the road. Narrow frontages typify development throughout the area.
- Development predominately fronts the highway creating a sense of enclosure; this enclosure varies from the intimacy of Park Street to the formality of the Victorian streets.
- Most of the buildings are eighteenth century onwards in appearance although many have older origins. Older structures include the 13th century Church of St Lawrence, Bury Mount and the Roman earthworks.
- The architectural styles of building varies from vernacular farmhouses and cottages to formal Georgian houses and Victorian terraces. In addition there are a number of timber framed buildings and functional purpose built properties.
- Buildings are generally 2 or 3 storeys but with considerable variation in height creating a varied but harmonious streetscape.
- Red brick and ironstone are the predominant building materials with much of the brick work painted or rendered (off) white. Roofs tend to be clay tile or slate.
- Architectural details such as string courses and dentils are frequently used on many of the buildings in the area. The style of shop fronts, windows and doors also help to unify the area.
- The area comprises the town centre where shops dominate the ground floors, the peripheral residential/commercial area and the adjacent residential areas. The use of the building defines the appearance of the building with shop fronts prevalent in the town centre.
- Traffic movement and parked cars tends to dominate much of the area and their impact in terms of visual intrusion and sense of safety are important factors characterising the area.

The tight urban grain within the central areas means the only open space and landscaping is either private gardens or the area around Bury Mount and the Churchyard, which provide a back drop to the town and transition between the urban centre, the water meadows and historic parkland.
Summary of issues and opportunities

Change is inevitable in most conservation areas and it is not the intention of the designation to prevent the continued evolution of places. The challenge within conservation areas is to manage change in a way that maintains, reinforces and enhances the special qualities of the area.

The protection and enhancement of the special character of the conservation area owes much to positive management. In addition to the existing national statutory legislation and local planning controls the following opportunities for enhancement have been identified:

- Establish a list of locally significant buildings and policies for their protection.
- Encourage the protection of surviving historic detail and the reinstatement of appropriately detailed fittings in buildings considered to be of significance to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The use of Article 4 Directions which remove the permitted development rights of dwelling houses will help to achieve this.
- Ensure that all new development is sustainable, high quality, well designed and responds to its context in terms of urban design and its architectural design.
- Promote the sympathetic management of public spaces within the conservation area. Close working with the highway authorities on traffic management, highway works and signage may limit some of the harmful effect on the public space.

The Conservation Area Boundary

Towcester Conservation Area was first designated in June 1970, amended in November 1977, July 1994 and in February 1998. The most recent review of the Conservation Area was adopted in July 2012 and extended the boundary to include development along Richmond Road, Pomfret Road, Queens Road and a section of Brackley Road. This extension acknowledged the contribution of the development within the Victorian period to the character of the area, the layout of which closely follows the boundary of the earlier Roman defences.

Figure 1: Towcester Conservation Area
Figure 2: The boundary of the Towcester Conservation Area. Copyright Bluesky World International Ltd.
1. Introduction and Planning Policy Context

1.1 What is a conservation area

Conservation Areas were introduced under the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. That Act required local planning authorities to identify areas, as opposed to individual buildings, of special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas.

Since 1967 some 9,100 conservation areas have been designated in England, including 53 in the South Northamptonshire District to date. Towcester Conservation Area is one of the oldest of the 53 conservation areas having originally been designated in June 1970, amended in November 1977, July 1994 and in February 1998.

1.2 Planning Policy context

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides the legislative framework for the protection of the nation’s heritage of buildings and places of architectural and historic interest.

Section 69 of the 1990 Act defines a conservation area as:

“an area of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

The 1990 Act also places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to consider “from time to time” whether new areas should be designated or whether boundaries should be revised. It is now considered appropriate to review the Towcester Conservation Area in order to further define its key characteristics.

This document is an appraisal of the Towcester Conservation Area and is based on a standard recording format derived from advice contained in English Heritage’s 2006 guidance ‘Conservation Area Appraisals’.

By reviewing the conservation area and revising the appraisal for Towcester the special character and appearance of the area can continue to be identified and protected. The conservation area appraisal and management plan provide the basis for making informed, sustainable decisions in the positive management, protection and enhancement of the conservation area.

The appraisal seeks to provide a clear understanding of the special interest of Towcester by assessing how the historical development of the town has influenced the current form, analysing its present day character and identifying opportunities for enhancements.

This draft appraisal is the subject of public consultation and thereafter will be put forward for adoption by the Council to become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within the conservation area and its setting.

The appraisal is not intended to be comprehensive and omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is not of interest.

This appraisal should also be read in conjunction with the wider national and local planning policy and guidance including National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) under which a conservation area is deemed to be a Heritage Asset.

The South Northamptonshire Local Plan adopted 1997, saved in part on 28 September 2007 is also of relevance and recognises Towcester as an urban area. Policy H3 sets out the strategy for housing within the urban areas whilst there is a specific chapter on proposals for development within Towcester.

Policies EV10 and EV11 continue and state that: “The Council will seek to preserve or enhance the special character or appearance of conservation areas..” and that “Planning permission will not be granted for any development proposals outside of a conservation area which have an adverse effect on the setting of the conservation area or any views into or out of the area.”

1.3 What does conservation area status mean?

Conservation Area status provides the opportunity to promote the protection and enhancement of the special character of the area. Designation confers a general control over development that could damage the area’s character. The details are complex but can be summarised as:

- Most demolition requires permission and will be resisted if the building makes a positive contribution to the area.
- Some minor works are no longer “permitted development” and will require planning permission. Examples include external cladding and satellite antennas.
- Most works to trees have to be notified to the Local Planning Authority for its consideration.
- Generally higher standards of design apply for new buildings and alterations to existing ones.
2. Location, Topography and Geology

Figure 3: Towcester is located to the south west of Northampton on the A5 (Watling Street) at the junction with the A43.
2. Location, Topography and Geology

2.1 Location

The town of Towcester is located 11 miles south west of Northampton and 15 miles north west of Milton Keynes at the junction with the A5 and A43. Located centrally within the district of South Northamptonshire the town is the home of many of the local administrative functions. The historic core of the settlement lies on the Roman road, Watling Street (the modern day A5).

The town had a population of 8,823 in 2001 and is now estimated to be 10,023 (2010). This small market town has, and continues to play an important role locally providing local administrative functions as well as providing a good range of shops and local services. Whilst still a successful town it has also more recently become a dormitory settlement with a population that out commutes for employment.

2.2 Topography and Geology

The parish lies on land between 135m and 85m above sea level with the land sloping to the Rover Tove which crosses the parish west to east. Most of the higher land is covered with Boulder Clay whilst the river cuts through Upper Lias Clay and Oolitic Limestone.

The Northamptonshire Environmental Character and Green Infrastructure Strategies were published by the River Nene Regional Park CIC in 2006. These strategies included environmental, landscape and biodiversity character assessments for the county and identifies the various Environmental Character Areas which make up the county’s landscape.

This study shows Towcester to be within the Environmental Character Area of the Tove and Ouse Catchment Area broadly sitting within the Current Landscape Area of the Undulating Claylands.

The River Tove sits in a broad river valley which has cut through the underlying Oolitic limestone to expose Lias Mudstones. Around Towcester narrow alluvial deposits broaden out to some terraces of sand and gravel deposits. A number of local tributaries join the River Tove including Silverstone Brooke within the town itself. The river gently meanders through the broad, largely arable river valleys with limited woodland cover although the parkland of Easton Neston to the east and the former railway’s route do provide some cover.

Widespread changes to the landscape over time means there are very few natural habitats remaining although the water meadows still remain around the River Tove.

The river is clearly key to the location and development of Towcester with the earliest part of the settlement positioned on the slightly higher ground to the north west of the confluence. The early settlement was thought to be a strategic river crossing on an important east west trading route. The river was later diverted to create a leet to serve a number of watermills. The river now defines the eastern limit of town beyond which lies Easton Neston and its parkland and the floodplain.

The impact of the local landscape is clear to see with the underlying geology – limestone and ironstone, together with the nearby boulder clay providing a plentiful source of good local building materials which, reinforced with timber from nearby Whittlewood, help define the character of the town’s buildings. The predominate building materials being ironstone, limestone and locally fired red bricks and clay roof tiles.

Figure 4: Tove and Ouse Catchment (Source: River Nene Regional Park)
Figure 5: Undulating Claylands (Source River Nene Regional Park)
Figure 6: Towcester Landform (Source WNJPU Towcester Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study)
3. History and development

3.1 History

The parish of Towcester covers some 1500 hectares in the shape of an inverted Y containing at least 3 medieval estates namely Wood Burcote, Caldecote and Foscote as well as Towcester itself.

Prehistory and Roman

There is evidence of Palaeolithic or Neolithic occupation within the local area with Iron Age remains having been found which are likely to predate 1 AD when the Roman occupation commenced. This earliest settlement was located on a narrow spur with the River Tove to the north and Silverstone Brook to the south and is thought to have been located in the position of a good river crossing rather than the availability of fertile land. The settlement known as Lactodorum was located along Watling Street which runs in a northwest southeast alignment, one of the main strategic Roman routes from London to Holyhead. Evidence suggests occupation increased towards the end of the first century although the defences were not constructed until the end of the second century. The quality of construction of building found from the early period suggest some significant stone buildings with numerous other timber structures.

Figure 7: Extent of Roman Town Source RCHME)

Some buildings were undoubtedly high status given the quality of the architectural fragments and masonry found. Two sections of the town’s defences are still visible to the north east of the town centre and it is possible to envisage the location of the defences in the current layout of the town following the Mill Stream to the east and Queens Road and Pomfret Road to the west. Occupation appears to have been centred around the junction of the two Roman roads Watling Street and Alchester Street and along other minor routes leading to Brackley (Park Street) and to Northampton / Irchester (Chantry Lane onwards) within some limited occupation along Alchester Road and Brackley Road to the west of the town, Figure 6. Towcester does not seem to have been established as a fort but rather as a trading post on this strategic route. Evidence of commercial activities as well as fine homes have been found within the central area as well as other Roman activity beyond the defences but along the road. As with many areas there is little evidence of the next 500 years of occupation although it is thought that Watling Street was the boundary of Danelaw where, in 917 Edward the Elder, enhanced the defences of the town against Viking attacks.
3. History and development

Medieval

By Domesday Towcester was the centre of a late Saxon Royal estate and its administrative function prospered through the medieval period. The town stayed largely in the control of the manor until it was purchased by Richard Empson and later sold onto the Fermor family which started the 500 years of the town's association with the Fermor Hesketh family. The church is thought to have Saxon origins but was rebuilt by 1200 with alterations including the aisles and tower being added in the late 15th century. The motte, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument known as Bury Mount and is thought to have been constructed in the 11th and 12th century and was positioned close to the former Northampton Road which was realigned in the 18th century with the laying out of the formal grounds of Easton Neston estate and creation of a new Turnpike Road. The presence of the estate has had a significant impact on the development of the town in the twentieth century.

Despite being a royal manor there is no written evidence of a market charter however the outcome of an inquiry into a number of nearby markets in 1275 suggests an ancient right for a market predated the inquiry. The layout of the section of road north-west of the church where Watling Street widens out suggests that this would have been the location of the market. Although not a medieval borough there are references to burgage tenements in the town especially along Watling Street. These plots typically have the principal building on the street frontage, with other ancillary buildings and uses to the rear. The pattern of these narrow linear plots fronting Watling Street are still visible today and several of the buildings along Watling Street still retain evidence of their medieval origins with 15th century roof timbers. Recent evidence indicates that three adjacent large timber-framed late medieval inns were located on the west side of the Market Square – The Angel, The Tabard and The Swan. Some of the remaining timber framing has been dated circa 1500.

The town was fortified again in 1643 by Prince Rupert during the English Civil War.

18th and 19th Century

From the 1750s the economic changes and increase in wealth brought about by the industrial revolution gave Towcester an important new role where Watling Street once again became an important thoroughfare. Coaches to London, Oxford, Holyhead, Shrewsbury and Liverpool departed daily and the travellers were well provided for by over 20 inns, public houses and taverns in the town as well as many other supporting trades. Towcester continued to thrive during the 18th and early 19th century, with new development being established along Watling Street both to the north and south of the old town. By 1805 the Grand Union Canal opened some 3 miles to the east which further increased trade. The opening of the two railway lines to the north of the town in the mid 19th century resulted in a loss of the coaching trade and town’s prosperity was threatened. Although Towcester struggled for a while fortunately Towcester’s former administrative function, which had been overshadowed in the coaching era, reasserted itself and Towcester became the location for the local Petty Sessions, Magistrates Court and Police Station serving the western part of the county. This meant Towcester continued to prosper.

The layout of the town remained largely unaltered throughout this period with the exception of the realignment of the Northampton Road further north of its former position and slight refocusing of development to the north of the town.

Expansion took place to the west of the town in this period with the development of Richmond Road, Queens Terrace and Pomfret Row and a number of small terraces to the rear of development on Watling Street. An impressive Town Hall and Corn Exchange was also constructed on the southern edge of the market place in 1865, this building now known as the Town Hall is the main focal point in the town.

20th Century

The next phase of expansion took place in the interwar period with the local authority development to the south-west of the town. This development was separate from the town for several decades before the main period of expansion occurred from the 1960s onwards. This recent expansion is due to Towcester becoming increasingly accessible
3. History and development

with the increase in car ownership and construction of the M1 motorway; as well as becoming a more desirable place to live following the New Town expansion of nearby Northampton and Milton Keynes. Towcester has continued to expand.

**Industrial Past**

Towcester’s commercial past is still visible in today’s townscape. Coaching had a major influence on the town, which during its height had over 20 inns along Watling Street. A number of these still exist as public houses whilst evidence of others still exist with the fill in coach arches still visible. Others are lost or have only remnants remaining within later buildings.

Wool and lace were also important to the town. A number of wool warehouses still exist in the town particularly along Moat Lane and evidence of lace making can still be seen in some outbuildings with oversized windows on the first floor. Some local shoe making would also have existed in the town.

Phipps Brewery established a maltings in the town in the early C19, although now redeveloped as Malthouse Court.

**Figure 9:** Towcester 1891 © Crown copyright, database rights and Landmark Information Group Ltd. All rights reserved 2011.
3. History and development

3.2 Archaeology

The archaeological record for the parish of Towcester is far from complete. This is largely due to the continuous occupation of the historic part of the town and the limited opportunities for redevelopment and archaeological investigation. The Sites and Monuments Record records all archaeological finds and studies within the county; these records show Towcester has been occupied since the Palaeolithic era, with a strong Roman and medieval presence. Further opportunities to increase our understanding of Towcester’s past should be taken when sites come forward for development.

As well as the numerous sites, buildings and finds identified on the Sites and Monument Record there are a number of designated sites—Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings.

3.3 Scheduled Monuments

Towcester contains two Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Bury Mount and the two sections of the Bank of the Roman town.

Bury Mount is a motte sited to the north-east side of the town consisting of earthwork banks and ditches around it. The mound itself was steeply sided and approximately 70m in diameter. The remains of a substantial ditch 3m deep and 8m wide were visible on the west side of the motte and indicate that originally the mound may have been surrounded by a continuous ditch with the Mill Stream forming one side and supplying the water for the moat. On the south side of the motte are the remains of an earthwork bank. The Motte is now thought to have been constructed in the Anarchy period in the early part of the 12th century. The motte is known to have been altered during the Civil War by Prince Rupert to reinforce the defences.

Following an extensive archaeological investigation the motte has been re-profiled and landscaped to form a focus of the Moat Lane regeneration area.

To the north-west of the town two sections of a Roman defensive bank and ditch remain as slight earthworks. These small sections of bank define the outer northern limit of the Roman town Lactodorum and provide evidence that the town was fortified. This north-west corner which remains intact consists of a great ditch with remains of a stone wall.

Figure 10: Towcester Archaeological Assets. The areas delineated with green triangles indicate concentrations of finds suggesting a significant asset.
4. Spatial Analysis

4.1 Settlement form

Towcester is a compact linear settlement built principally along Watling Street, with a number of roads and alleyways running perpendicular off the road, ie Park Street, Brackley Road, Chantry Lane, Meeting Lane, Whittons Lane etc.

The plan form of the settlement remained largely unaltered until the Victorian period when there was limited expansion to the north and south along Watling Street and west along Brackley Road. Major development in the twentieth century is focussed to the south and west of the town.

As a town Towcester is fairly unique in that all the phases of known occupation over the last two thousand years are in the same area. The only significant change to the town form was the relocation of Northampton Road in the late C18 from its position near Towcester Mill and Chantry Lane to its current position which led to some limited expansion to the north and west of the town.

4.2 Street pattern

Watling Street, a strategic route both now and in historic times forms the principal route through the town which other roads lead off from, ie Northampton Road, Brackley Road, Park Street and Richmond Road. A number of these roads have historic origins linking the town with other strategic locations such as Northampton and Oxford. The other roads and numerous alleyways link the other parts of the town to Watling Street. The alleyways running perpendicular to Watling Street down the side of burgage plots, ie Whittons Lane, Meeting Lane andThe Ruins are important to the permeability of the area and an important characteristic of the town.

4.3 Grain, scale and massing

The town is finely grained with the development in the older parts of town forming a continuous built up frontage with narrow plot widths creating a very compact settlement. These plots are typical of burgage plots formed in the medieval period and although the town was not a medieval borough this form of development is still very evident within the central area. These plots typically have relatively narrow frontages in proportion to their length, with outbuildings often developed along and down the side boundaries of the plot. The general massing is domestic in scale with the exception of buildings in the Moat Lane area.

Within the historic core buildings are typically 2 or 3 storeys high although the variation with the ridge and eaves height means there is little consistency of height between the buildings which is a key characteristic of the town. Outbuildings tend to be smaller in scale, often single storey. Towcester Mill and St Lawrence
4. Spatial Analysis

Church, significant buildings in their own right, are the only exceptions in town.

The massing of building is also typical of historic buildings with a generally modest footprint where the depth of the building is generally less than the width. There are of course some historic exceptions to this with some double depth buildings.

Outbuildings located at the rear of plots make a contribution to the character of the area particularly those that relate to Towcester’s economic past.

4.4 Landmarks

The Town Hall provides the principle focal point within the centre of Towcester, this 1865 building designed by Vernon in the Italianate style defines the southern edge of the Market Place and is the key focal point in the town.

Other landmarks include the 13th century Church of St Lawrence and 12th century Bury Mount, both located between Watling Street and the Mill Stream. The Church, built in the 13th and 14th centuries in the Decorated and Perpendicular style is constructed in coursed limestone and ironstone rubble and coursed squared limestone with a lead roof. As befitting its status in the town the church is the tallest building within the town, but being set back from the main road does not impose itself on the otherwise domestic scale of buildings within the town.

Bury Mount, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was constructed as part of the Norman defences. The motte and bailey castle was periodically strengthened over time with the last phase of works taking place during the English Civil War before falling into disuse. The mount has recently been subject to an extensive archaeological appraisal and significant landscaping to open up the area as public open space.

Other landmark buildings included the early eighteenth century Saracens Head, Chantry House founded in 1447 by Archdeacon Sponne and the Police Station.

4.5 Views and Vistas

Being a compact settlement there are limited views and vistas afforded within the town. The principle views are those along the essentially linear Watling Street which reinforces the enclosed intimate nature of much of the development in Towcester. Other streets such as Park Street provide similar enclosed views whilst Brackley Road, Richmond Road, Queens Road and Pomfret Road provide more open views of the street where the buildings are set back from the road. Park Street, a narrow road which gently curves provides the most intimate views.

Other glimpsed views can be seen down the numerous alleyways, some presenting views of backland areas beyond whilst others lead you through to other buildings and sites.

The Moat Lane area is the only part of historic Towcester from which...
4. Spatial Analysis

there are vistas. From here there are open views out to the east of the town across the water meadows and into Easton Neston Park beyond. The recent landscaping of part of this area has opened up some of these views and vistas providing an attractive backdrop to the town and helps to refocus activity in this early part of the town.

The views from Moat Lane back towards Watling Street are also interesting showing the variation in building height, style and position creating an attractive composition and one which helps illustrate not only how burgage plots were developed but how intact many of those plots still are.

4.6 Open space, landscape and means of enclosure

There are very few open spaces within the town with the exception of Bury Mount and Sawpits Green. Both fulfil different functions. Bury Mount, as a Scheduled Ancient Monument helps reinforce the historic context of the town and its recent landscaping means it will be a key element of the regeneration of the Moat Lane area. Sawpits Green, whilst still a historic site is now more akin to a village green.

Although the grounds of Easton Neston House, a Registered Historic Park and Garden, form an attractive backdrop to the town on the eastern edge there is little deliberately designed landscaping in the town. The Churchyard contains a number of mature trees and is one of the few green spaces within the town. Whilst a single specimen tree on Watling Street provides not only a focal point but an uncharacteristic softness to an otherwise built up area.

Elsewhere private gardens make some contribution to the area but only where the buildings are not located along the road frontage, ie Malthouse Court and the terraced houses to the west of the town centre.

The sense of enclosure in the town is one of the key features within Towcester. This enclosure is essentially created by the buildings position at the edge of the road. This enclosure is particularly intimate along Park Street and the northern and southern part of Watling Street and only becomes more spacious between Park Street and the Town Hall. Elsewhere in the area whilst the houses still form a continuous frontage this frontage is set back from the road behind a low garden wall. This creates a more spacious yet still distinctive character.

4.7 Traffic and Parking

Traffic and parking has a major impact on the appearance and the feel of the area. Traffic and parking along the roads in Towcester both obscure the buildings and create an intimidating feel to the area. It may also lead to long term damage to adjacent buildings.
4. Spatial Analysis

Figure 11: Important Spatial Features in the Towcester Conservation Area.

- Proposed Conservation Area
- Listed Building
- Other Significant Building
- Important Wall
- Important Hedge
- Tree Preservation Order - Area
- Important Tree or Tree Group
- Registered Village Green
- Important Open Space
- Important View

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5.1 Building age, type and style

Much of the town’s long history is visible in the upstanding parts of Towcester which date back as far as the Roman period with the Roman Bank to the north west of the town, the 12th century Bury Mount and 13th century St Lawrence’s Church still very much in existence.

Much of the historic form of the town is medieval in origin with some buildings still containing remnants of the buildings from the latter part of this period within the current building structure. Most of the building façades along Watling Street date from the 17th century or later. A number of these façades have been built over the original timber-framed buildings which still exist in varying states behind.

There are a number of seventeenth century buildings still in the town but these are generally more vernacular buildings located to the north and south of Watling Street. In addition there are several early timber framed buildings within the central area.

The majority of the buildings within the central area appear to be eighteenth century Georgian buildings. It is clear when looking at some of the buildings’ interiors and rear elevations that many of these buildings were actually ‘improved’ in the 18th and 19th century with new facades. This could account for the variation in height of these buildings as they reflect the original height of the building rather than the proportion of new building of the period. Later speculative Victorian development characterises the northern and southern approaches to the town centre along Watling Street, whilst there are deliberately planned terraces to the west of the town centre.

There is a great variety of styles evident in Towcester from the vernacular ironstone farmhouses and cottages to timber framed buildings, Georgian town houses and Victorian terraces. These different building styles are mixed together in an appealing composition creating an attractive but cohesive streetscene. Located in amongst these are a number of former coaching inns some of which are still public houses. The blocked in large arched openings on the front elevation are often the only visible reminder of the building’s former function.

Within the area there are a number of 20th century buildings some of which are poorly sited and designed. Whilst these buildings do not make a positive contribution to the character of the area they do not unduly impose themselves and do not dilute the overall impression of a historic market town.

Buildings within the area are predominately residential particularly along the northern and southern approaches of the town. Within the central area the majority of buildings have retail and commercial uses on the ground floor with upper floors in residential use. Towcester is fortunate that the majority of these commercial uses have retained their traditional shop fronts.
There are also a significant number of religious and civic buildings which punctuate the street scene with their slight set back or larger footprint. These include a number of Victorian buildings such as the non-conformists chapels and the twentieth century police station.

5.2 Materials

The buildings in Towcester are mainly constructed in local ironstone or limestone and red brick with a limited amount of timber construction still visible.

Some of the earliest buildings in the town are known to be timber framed with stone gables; many of these buildings were later refaced in stone or brick although timber framing is still visible in some buildings. Later buildings in the town tend to be constructed in local stone. These buildings are constructed in both ashlar and coursed rubble stone. The ashlar is evident in the formal more imposing structures such as 157 Watling Street, Chantry House and 23 Park Street, whilst the use of rubble stone typifies the cottages, creating both a formal and vernacular style of building.

In some cases the stone work has been rendered and painted and the white/cream finish to many of the buildings in the central area has now become a characteristic of the area. Bricks are an equally popular building material in the town, particularly from the 18th century. Many of the buildings constructed in brick predate their popular use in the 19th century having made the most of the exposed clay found in the local area. References to local brickworks can still be seen on historic maps. Traditionally brick will have been laid in Flemish Bond. Brick became the material of choice from the early 19th century onwards. Similar to the stone the bricks are frequently painted over in white or cream.

Modern buildings tend to be constructed in brick but rarely match the traditional brick colour found in Towcester.

Similar to the main construction of the building there is a variety of roofing materials found in Towcester. The main materials used are welsh slate and plain clay tiles. Although thatch would have been used historically only remnants of thatch remain. Unlike many areas the town has largely retained these traditional roofing materials with very few properties having modern concrete tile roofs.

5.3 Roofscape

The roofs are generally traditional pitched roofs with the ridge running parallel to the road reinforcing the strong building line. Most of the roofs are unaltered although there are a number of buildings with dorner windows.

A number of buildings have parapets with either pitched or flat roofs behind which provides additional interest in the streetscene.
5. Architectural Analysis

The majority of roofs have central or end chimney stacks located along the ridge line, usually constructed in brick. These stacks are generally functional in appearance with very little detailing.

5.4 Windows and Doors

Sash windows are the most common style of windows within the area and typical of the Georgian and Victorian style buildings found in the area. These windows vary in style from 6 / 8 / 12 pane windows with a strong vertical emphasis. Windows within the 3 storey buildings generally show recession typical of Georgian buildings. There is some variation within the windows with some being more decorative with arched upper windows and different patterns of glazing on the upper and lower lights.

Horns on the sash windows are more common on the later windows.

Windows in the older properties are generally 2 or 3 light casement windows, with 6 or 8 panes per light. Other window types can be seen in the town but are not typical of the area.

The replacement of traditional windows with uPVC double glazing is becoming increasingly common particularly in the northern and southern parts of Watling Street and the Victorian areas. This loss of traditional windows has an adverse affect on the character of the area.

Panelled doors with either 4 or 6 panels are the most common style of door. Several of the older properties still retain their original plank doors.

5.5 Architectural Features

Common architectural details include string courses and dentil details. There are a variety of different styles of both in the area. String courses include a single brick, dogs tooth and decoration tiles whilst dentil courses also include dogs tooth, square tooth and cogging.

Some properties have small canopies over the doors, both gable and flat.
5. Architectural Analysis

5.6 Positive Buildings

Figure 12 identifies buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the area. This contribution may be in one or more of the following ways:

- Landmark buildings,
- Buildings which reflect the area’s history and development,
- Buildings of architectural merit,
- Buildings with local historical association,
- Buildings which exemplify local vernacular styles.
- Groups of buildings which together make a positive contribution to the streetscape.

Many of these buildings are of national importance and are designated as listed buildings because of their special architectural or historic interest. Other buildings may be worthy of being locally listed. It is important that the significance of these buildings is acknowledged and that significance should be conserved.

Figure 12: Significant buildings in the Towcester Conservation Area including those listed buildings of architectural or historic interest.
6. Conservation Area Boundary

6.1 Boundary justification

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to designate as conservation areas any "areas of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

It is the quality of the area rather than the individual buildings which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. It is also important that the concept is not devalued by designating areas lacking any special interest.

Towcester Conservation Area was first designated in June 1970, amended in November 1977, July 1994 and in February 1998. The most recent review of the Conservation Area was adopted in July 2012 and extended the boundary to include development along Richmond Road, Pomfret Road, Queens Road and a section of Brackley Road.

The eastern boundary of the conservation area follows the rear boundaries of Watling Street East from No 2 in the south of the town up to No 52. The boundary then travels eastwards along the southern side of Silverstone Brook, until it meets Mill Stream. The boundary continues northwards along the eastern flank of Mill Stream up to and including 186 Watling Street East.

The northern boundary includes 186 Watling Street East and the Magistrates Court / Police Station on Watling Street West and extends to the west to include the open space to the rear of the Police Station.

The western boundary follows and includes the edge of the open space which includes the Roman earthworks before cutting in towards Watling Street to include the properties in Health Terrace. It then follows the rear boundaries of 227—223 Watling Street West before crossing Brackley Road. The boundary follows the eastern side of Brackley Road until the alignment of the road turns westwards, the boundary then crosses to include the boundaries of 16—38 Brackley Road. The boundary cuts across Brackley Road to include the properties to the south of Brackley Road, 25—33 Brackley Road. The boundary includes all the properties down to and including 28 Pomfret Road before cutting across to include the properties along the south side of Richmond Road from 57 to 7 including Shire Court. To the east of Sawpits Green the boundary follows the southern edge of Richmond Road up to the rear boundary of 147 Watling Street East. The boundary continues down the rear boundaries of 147—61 Watling Street but excluding Richmond Court.

The southern boundary cuts across Watling Street between 2 and 61 Watling Street to join up with the eastern edge of the conservation area.
6. Boundary Justification

Figure 13: Towcester Conservation Area

[Map showing existing and proposed conservation areas]

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7. Management Plan

Policy Context

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. Conservation Area management proposals should be published as part of the process of area designation and review. Their aim is to provide guidance through policy statements to assist in the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.

Threats

Towcester is a busy market town where the compact urban form and attractive composition of historic buildings make a positive contribution to the character of the area. There are however a number of threats to this character and issues which have the potential to detract from its special character. By identifying these areas and putting policies in place it should be possible to protect and enhance the special character of the area.

- There are few opportunities for new development within the area. Where development opportunities occur careful consideration should be given to ensure the character of the area is preserved or enhanced.

- Buildings in the centre of Towcester are constantly under pressure from change. These changes result in the pressure to change shop fronts and signage. Poorly designed shop fronts and poor quality signage have a detrimental effect on the quality of the streetscape.

- The cumulative impact of the numerous and often small scale alterations that have occurred to the traditional buildings in the area can have a detrimental affect. Poor siting, scale, materials and detailing of extensions have eroded the character of the area particularly the rear of many plots.

- The loss of traditional features such as windows and doors and their replacement with inappropriate modern materials also has a cumulative adverse effect on the appearance of the area. These changes also include replacement roofing materials and repointing with unsympathetic modern alternatives as well as the removal of traditional features such as boundary walls.

- It is not only the loss of traditional features but the imposition of modern paraphernalia which affects the character of the area. The erection of satellite dishes and aerials as well as the installation of micro generation all alter the appearance of the buildings and the area and careful consideration should be given to their positioning. Such alterations to unlisted residential properties are generally permitted development and therefore do not require planning permission. However they can result in the erosion of the historic character and appearance of the conservation area.

- Traffic and parking has a major impact on the appearance and the feel of the area. The high volume of traffic along Watling Street, both obscures the buildings, creates an intimidating feel and may lead to damage to the buildings.

- There is often an excess and poor siting of street furniture and signage which results in harmful clutter.

The aim of management proposals suggested below is not to prevent changes but to ensure that any such changes are sympathetic to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
7. Management Plan

Management Proposals

1. Sensitive new development in the conservation area

To be successful, any future development within the conservation area needs to be mindful of the local character as appraised above. Good design should be able to accommodate 21st century requirements and still make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

Successful new development in historic areas should:
- Relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land,
- Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it,
- Respect important views,
- Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings,
- Use materials and building methods which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings,
- Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of their setting.

(Source: CABE & English Heritage publication 2001, ‘Building in Context: New development in historic areas’)

Action 1:
New development must respond sensitively and creatively to the historic environment.

2. Protect surviving historic architectural forms

There has been some incremental loss of traditional architectural detailing within the conservation area with some areas suffering more than others. The replacement of windows, doors and roofing materials with inappropriate materials and designs adversely affects the character of the buildings and the wider streetscape.

Owners of all historic properties, not just those which are listed, should be encouraged to replace inappropriate modern materials with appropriate traditional materials. Materials such as uPVC and concrete tiles look out of place in a Conservation Area and their use is discouraged.

A number of properties within Towcester Conservation Area are already covered by an Article 4 Direction. The buildings covered by the direction are considered to make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

The Article 4 Direction should be reviewed to take into account the area covered by the proposed boundary change and the revised Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order.

The establishment of a list of locally significant buildings and policies for their protection within the forthcoming Local Development Framework Core Strategy would also assist in the protection of the conservation area.

Action 2:
Review the existing Article 4 Directions in Towcester to include buildings of significance across the conservation area to ensure that positive architectural features are retained and any replacement doors or windows do not harm the character of the conservation area.

Action 3:
Establish a list of locally significant buildings and policies for their protection as part of the forthcoming Core Strategy.

3. Paving and surfacing

The retention of existing stone paving slabs, setts and kerbstones is important in maintaining the historic character of any settlement. Careful design and sensitive use of materials will be expected in any future re-surfacing works that take place in Towcester.

Opportunities should be taken to enhance areas of paving and to retain historic paving materials whenever possible.

Action 5:
Continue to retain and enhance historic paving in the conservation area.

4. Renewable Energy sources

Whilst the Council is supportive of the sustainability agenda it also recognises that many sources of renewable energy and micro generation have the potential to harm the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Care therefore
needs to be taken to balance the needs of climate change with the preservation of the historic environment.

**Action 6:**
Encourage the sympathetic location of solar panels, wind turbines and other sources of micro generation to inconspicuous roofslopes and building elevations where they will not have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

5. **Satellite Antennas**

Satellite and radio antennas are non-traditional features which have the potential to disfigure the appearance of traditional buildings. Care must be taken to ensure that they are located where they will not impact on the significance of heritage assets and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

**Action 7:**
Require the location of satellite antennas in inconspicuous sites to prevent harm to the historic character and visual appearance of the area.

6. **Tree management**

Conservation area designation affords protection to trees from unauthorised felling or lopping. The full canopies of large mature trees make a significant impact on the character of the conservation area. The variety of tree species offers interest and amenity throughout the year.

**Action 8:**
Large mature trees should be retained wherever possible in order to preserve the character of the conservation area. Opportunities should be taken as appropriate to plant young trees in order to ensure the continued existence of mature trees in the future.

7. **Development affecting the setting of the conservation area**

It is important that development around the conservation area does not harm its setting. Any development in or around Towcester which affects the setting of the conservation area should have regard to views into and out of the conservation area, the setting of positive buildings and the character of the landscape. Appropriate design and materials should be used in development adjacent to the conservation area.

**Action 9:**
The impact of development on the character and appearance of the conservation area should be considered. This applies equally to development outside the conservation area if it is likely to affect the setting of the conservation area.

8. **Protect archaeological remains**

Towcester has been inhabited for many centuries and buried evidence of past occupation may survive in the village. Development proposals should take into account the potential for remains of archaeological interest. Professional advice should be sought, and appropriate assessment undertaken.

**Action: 10**
Development which involves below-ground excavation must have regard to the potential for remains of archaeological interest.

9. **Increase understanding of the historical development of Towcester.**

The continuous occupation of the town has meant there have been limited opportunities to increase the understanding of the town’s past. In relation to the historic environment the government have expressed a clear objective to increase understanding of the town’s historical development. Where opportunities arise every attempt should be made to increase our understanding of the town.
## 8. Sources of Further Information

### References

- **CABE** 2001, ‘Building in Context: New development in historic areas’
- **George Baker**, The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton (1822-41)
- **West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit**, Towcester Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study (2009)

### Internet Sources

- [www.british-history.ac.uk](http://www.british-history.ac.uk)
- [www.mrpenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk](http://www.mrpenvironmentalcharacter.org.uk)
- [www.mkheritage.co.uk](http://www.mkheritage.co.uk)
- [www.georgiangroup.org.uk](http://www.georgiangroup.org.uk)

For further information on Historic Buildings and Local History

**Towcester Library and Northamptonshire Records Office** has a local history collection which includes books on historic buildings.

There are a wide range of national societies devoted to the study and conservation of historic buildings. Many of these national bodies have regional groups in this area.

### Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

[www.spab.org.uk](http://www.spab.org.uk)

A good source of practical information about looking after buildings of all periods.

### Ancient Monuments Society

[www.ams.org.uk](http://www.ams.org.uk)

Devoted to the study and conservation of ancient monuments, historic building and fine old craftsmanship, with a particular interest in church buildings.

### Victorian Society

[www.victoriansociety.org.uk](http://www.victoriansociety.org.uk)

Interested in the appreciation and conservation of 19th and early 20th century buildings of all types.

**The following websites are a useful source of local history information:**

- [http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/](http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/) - national archaeological data service.
- [http://www.britishhistory.ac.uk/](http://www.britishhistory.ac.uk/) - digital library of local history resources.

### Towcester and District Local History Society

Has the aim of advancing the understanding and knowledge of local history; promoting publications and articles; and holding exhibitions and similar related activities.

Meetings are held on the second Monday of the month (except August) at 7.30pm, at the Riverside Centre. Islington Road, Towcester, Northamptonshire, NN12 7AU, when talks are given on a variety of topics relating to our local heritage. Visitors are welcome at all meetings.

### Acknowledgements

Photographs courtesy of Adrian Co1well.

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9. What is a Conservation Area?

What is a conservation area?
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’.
Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

What does conservation area status mean?
Conservation area status seeks to protect and enhance the special character of the designated area. Designation confers a general control over development that could harm the area’s character. The details are complex but can be summarised as:

- Most demolition requires permission and will be resisted if the building makes a positive contribution to the area.
- Some minor works to houses is no longer "permitted development" and will require planning permission. Examples are rear dormer windows, external cladding and most satellite dishes on front elevations.
- Advertisement controls are tighter.
- Most work to trees has to be notified to the Council which then has six weeks in which to decide to impose restrictions.
- Generally, higher standards of design apply for new buildings and alterations to existing ones.

Change is inevitable in most conservation areas and it is not the intention of the designation to prevent the continued evolution of a place. The challenge within conservation areas is to manage change in a way that maintains, reinforces and enhances the special qualities of the area.

What is the purpose of this appraisal?
This appraisal will provide the basis for making informed, sustainable decisions about the positive management, protection and enhancement of the conservation area.
It provides a clear understanding of the special interest of Towcester Town Centre conservation area by:

- describing how the settlement has developed;
- analysing its present day character; and
- identifying opportunities for enhancement.

This appraisal follows the current guidance set out by English Heritage in the 2006 publication ‘Guidance on conservation area appraisals’.

The appraisal is not intended to be comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

Planning policy context
This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the wider national, regional and local planning policy and guidance. Relevant documents include:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The East Midlands Regional Plan, policies 2, 26, 27.
- The South Northamptonshire Local Plan, saved policies EV9, EV10, EV11, EV16, EV36.
- South Northamptonshire Supplementary Planning Guidance “ Conservation Areas”

Community involvement and adoption
A draft version of this appraisal will go through a public consultation process. A six week period of public consultation will include:

- An exhibition at the local library, with handout summary leaflets and access to a paper copy of the appraisal;
- A presentation of the appraisal and discussion forum at a public meeting;
- Identified stakeholders and interested parties will be directly notified;
- The appraisal and response form will be made available through the Council’s website;
- The consultation will be advertised with local press coverage and a leaflet drop to residences in the conservation area.

The consultation responses will be evaluated and the appraisal amended in light of comments received. Once adopted the appraisal will be a material consideration when applications for change within the conservation area or its setting are considered by the Council.