

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Characterisation Study has been commissioned by Cheshire West and Chester Council and undertaken by Taylor Young. It follows the recently published English Heritage guidance '*Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments*'. The intention of the document is to record, as objectively as possible, the character of the built environment and natural and designed landscape, as derived from its heritage and history.
- 1.2 Geographically, the area of study focuses on the central part of the City and its key approaches (see Figure 1.1). Almost all of the study area falls within existing conservation areas, either the City Centre Conservation Areas or one of several surrounding suburban conservation areas (see Figure 1.2).
- 1.3 The content of this report has been based on extensive fieldwork analysis. This has resulted in a large amount of data being recorded and photographs taken for over 100 sub-areas and around 200 Buildings of Merit. This data has been summarised in the Character Area Assessments within this report and has also been made available in its complete form to the local authority, within the Council's Historic Environment Record. This will exist as a searchable GIS (Geographical Information System) record, which will link to data and photographs.
- 1.4 The Study will be used as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework, which is currently being prepared. It will inform this policy context by enabling a greater understanding of the existing character of each area and the capacity to which it can accommodate development and future change. Recommendations are made as to how conservation policy can be improved, how character can be enhanced and the

form of new development that would be most appropriate in each potential opportunity site. The study will also serve as a development management tool and will provide information to help architects and designers.



Former Bluecoat School, Upper Northgate Street

- 1.5 An important aspect of the study was to identify buildings (and structures) of townscape merit. These are buildings which are currently un-listed but which play an important role in contributing to local character within each character area. Over 200 buildings and structures of merit have been identified. These may be used to form a short-list for Local Listing. These buildings are described and pictured in the Character Area Assessments and have each had their physical features recorded in a form that has been passed to the local authority and will appear on the GIS record.
- 1.6 The assessments were all undertaken in December 2010 and describe the current situation of buildings and spaces. To ensure

continued effectiveness and relevance this document needs to be regularly reviewed against new site surveys. We recommend that this occurs to an agreed programme, generally every 3 years.

- 1.7 The study has been progressed with the co-operation of a Project Steering Group which included members of the Conservation, Spatial Planning, Development Management and Historic Environment Record departments of the Local Authority, alongside Council Members and representatives from Chester Renaissance, English Heritage and Chester Civic Trust.

How the Study will be Used

- 1.8 This study should be seen in the context of existing and emerging spatial planning policy and guidance, in particular the Topic Papers on Chester and Design & Heritage, Core Strategy Issues and Options Report and the Sustainability Assessment Scoping Report. These documents, all of which are available on the Council's website, explain the role that heritage plays in policy formulation and development and regeneration strategy.
- 1.9 The recommendations and findings of this Study will directly relate to existing planning policy regarding built heritage; currently this includes the relevant saved policies of the **Chester District Local Plan** (Sections C, G and H) until these are replaced by the Local Development Framework (LDF). When the Core Strategy is adopted this will provide over-arching policies on the historic environment, with detail being provided in subsequent Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents. This study provides further guidance to support these policies, specifically by defining the character of individual areas and assessing their importance in the context of the City. Section G of the current saved policies refers to a review of

Conservation Area Character Assessments. Effectively this Characterisation Study updates and replaces the existing Conservation Area Assessments and provides the guidance that will link to these policies. This study will also provide a similar function with the new LDF documents, providing an updated assessment and definition of character that will amplify relevant policies.

- 1.10 The new **Planning Policy Statement 5** (PPS5) 'Planning for the Historic Environment' (2010) seeks to ensure that "*decisions are based on the nature, extent and level of [heritage] significance*". Policy HE2: *Evidence Base for Plan-Making* requires local planning authorities to have evidence about the historic environment and heritage assets in their area and that this is publicly documented. Paragraph HE3.4 of PPS5 states that "*at a local level, plans should consider the qualities and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and how these can contribute to the development of the spatial vision in the local development framework core strategy*". This study supports all of these aims and requirements and provides the local authority with the evidence they require, in order to support plan-making and development control decisions.
- 1.11 By clearly defining the critical heritage assets of the City, which can act as positive drivers for tourism and growth, this study will be used alongside other key documents to inform masterplanning and placemaking initiatives. Chester is currently undertaking its first **One City Plan** (a single comprehensive strategy and 15 year vision), the Characterisation Study is being considered in the preparation of this. Representatives from Chester Renaissance and the consultant team have attended the Steering Group and the timescale of both studies is assisting the coordination of the work.

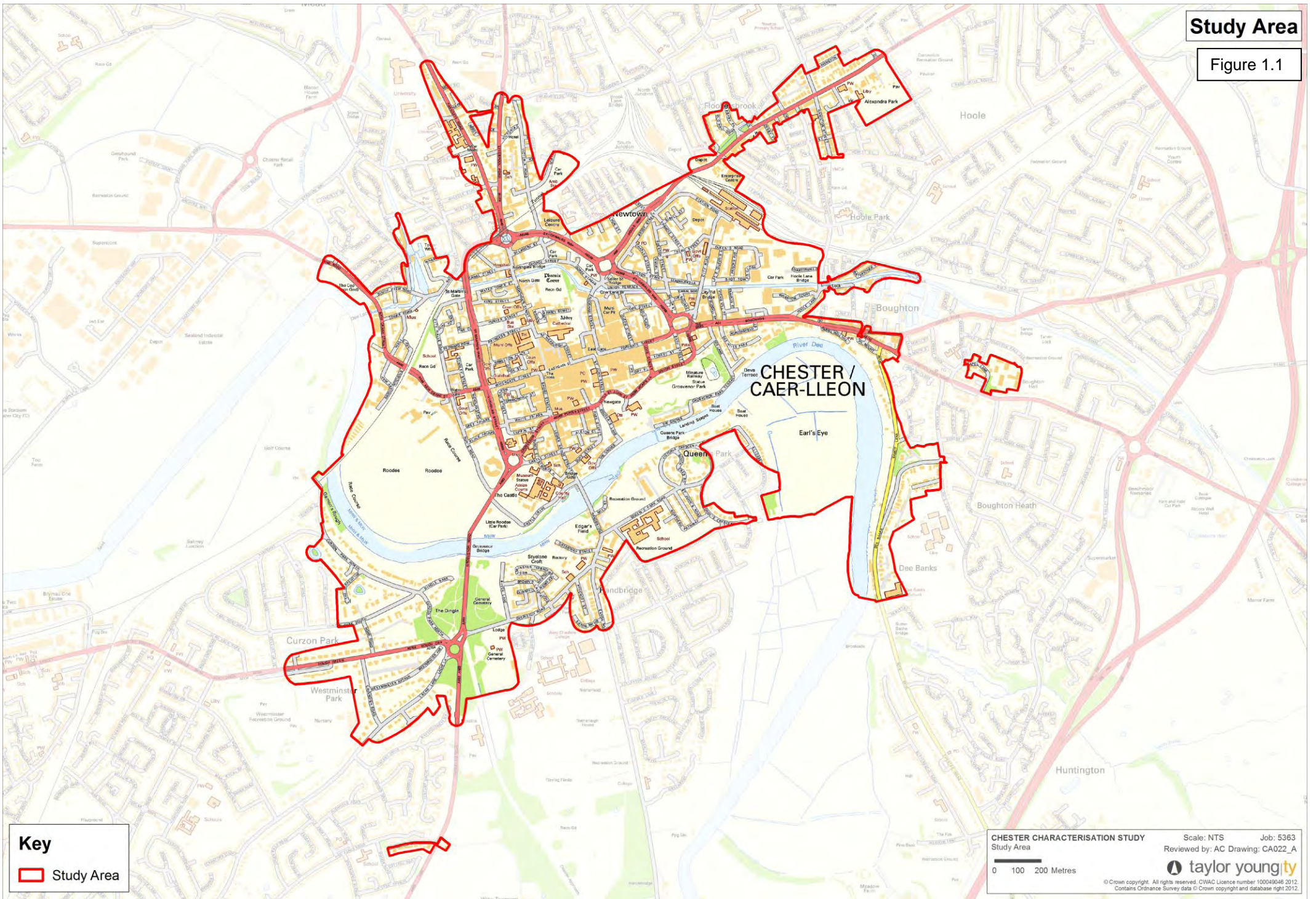
- 1.12 This study should be read alongside the recently completed **Public Realm Guide** for the City, also produced by Taylor Young. This provides much more detailed advice and recommendations on enhancing the public realm of the central area.
- 1.13 Our study has also drawn on the earlier historic area assessment prepared by Donald Insall Associates for the Central Business Quarter (land around the station gateway, canal corridor and Boughton). We have assessed these areas again and re-interpreted Insall's work in order to match the boundaries and parameters of the present commission. Our findings are consistent with those of this earlier study.
- 1.14 It should be noted that this characterisation study considers only above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is not covered in these assessments. Instead, this is the subject of a parallel Archaeology Character Map study, commissioned in April 2011. This important point should be remembered when interpreting the character assessment categorisations. If, for example, a sub-area is described as having a 'negative' character assessment it may still contain important below ground archaeology. This needs to be considered alongside the findings of this study when determining whether sites in the sub-area are appropriate for redevelopment.
- 1.15 The following sections of the report explain the study methodology and summarise the findings at study area-wide level. Individual Character Area assessments are then provided, for first the inner and then the outer areas. These assessments are designed to be read either as part of this whole report or as separate documents.




Rich detailing of the built form within the walled City

Study Area

Figure 1.1




Key

 Study Area

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Study Area

Scale: NTS
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: CA022_A

0 100 200 Metres

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Conservation Areas

Figure 1.2



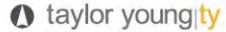
Key

-  Study Area
-  Conservation Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Conservation Areas

Scale: NTS
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: CA023_C

0 100 200 Metres

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