

## 4.1 A. Central Area

### Character Area Assessment

#### Location

**Area A** contains the majority of the walled city, a high proportion of the retail space, Chester Cathedral and Town Hall and offers a rich mixture of spaces and architectural styles.

From The Cross, approximately at its centre, the cruciform plan, which basically reflects the Roman layout, has four “quarters”:-

- **North-east:** The Cathedral, with its gateway, fine Georgian houses and open spaces.
- **South-east:** The area enclosed by Eastgate Street and Bridge Street and Rows, with their unique two-level shopping which front the Grosvenor Mall.
- **South-west:** Bounded by Watergate Street and Bridge Street and The Rows, and including a good deal of under-used land around Common Hall Street.
- **North-west:** Apart from the fine King Street and the impressive Town Hall, this is an area of almost exclusively post-war development behind the Northgate Street frontage.

The four “quarters” are linked by Northgate Street, Eastgate Street, Bridge Street and Watergate Street



*The Cross*

## Sub-Areas

The Character Area has been broken down into seventeen sub-areas of different discernible character:

- **A1. Bridge Street** – this area radiates from The Cross and contains the core of the city and the majority of the unique Rows system
- **A2. Fletchers Passage** – a series of linked rear spaces behind shop-frontages on Bridge Street and Eastgate Street.
- **A3. Cathedral Precinct** – The Cathedral with its associated buildings in Abbey Square and Abbey Street.
- **A4. St Werburgh Street** – Connecting Northgate Street and Eastgate Street, skirting the southern edge of the Cathedral.
- **A5. The Northgate**- centred on the Northgate and including the bridge over the Shropshire Union Canal.
- **A6. Whitefriars / Cuppin Street** – linking Bridge Street with Nicholas Street.
- **A7. Grosvenor Centre**– modern shopping mall integrated into and behind The Rows with street frontage mainly to Pepper Street.
- **A8. Market** – Almost entirely post-war area containing some empty sites and The Forum development which includes the covered market.
- **A9. Pepper Street** – The most visible frontage of the Grosvenor Centre and result of street-widening for the ring road.
- **A10. Commonhall Street** – backlands to the rear of Bridge Street.
- **A11 – Nicholas Street** – section of ring road widened in around 1970 lined with Georgian buildings to the west and modern to the east. Includes Stanley Palace.
- **A12. Dean’s Field** – mainly private open space, Dean’s Field, and Rufus Court integrated into the historic Northgate Street frontage.
- **A13. Town Hall** – The fine Town Hall facing the Abbey Gateway in an important urban space.
- **A14. St. Peter’s Churchyard** – a small and delightful hidden public space linked to Northgate Street and Watergate Row.
- **A15 – King Street** – a fine Georgian and Victorian street with modern development to the north.
- **A16 – Godstall Lane**- a short narrow lane linking St Werburgh Street to Eastgate Row.
- **A17 – Newgate Street** – enclosed by the Grosvenor Centre car park and City Walls.

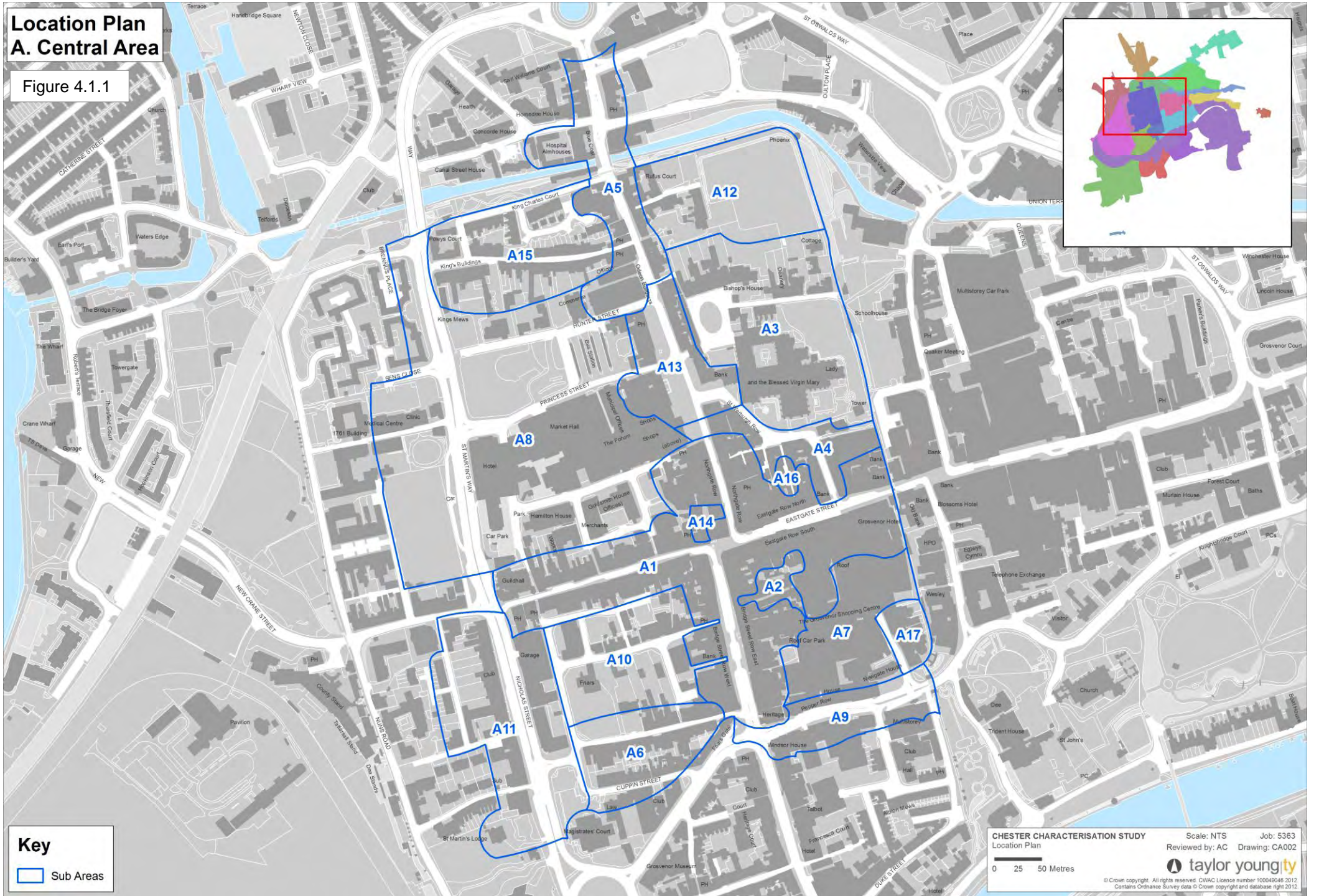


*Bridge Street*



# Location Plan A. Central Area

Figure 4.1.1



**Key**  
Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY  
Location Plan  
Scale: NTS  
Job: 5363  
Reviewed by: AC  
Drawing: CA002  
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## Historical Development

The history of The Cross area dates back to Roman times and The Cross lies at the centre of the city's original grid plan. The fortress defences enclosed an area of about 60 acres (24 hectares), rather larger than other legionary fortresses in Britain. In outline it was rectangular or 'playing card' in shape, with gateways on each side giving access to the four main streets. Three of these streets met at the central crossroads (now The Cross) in front of the massive *principia* or legionary headquarters building. Much of the rest of the space was occupied by rows of barrack blocks, baths, workshops and granaries. The basic grid pattern of the main streets has persisted to the present time, with additions and minor re-alignments over the centuries.



*Reconstruction of Chester's Roman fortress (Chester 360 website)*

Outside the defences and to the west lay the harbour, with warehouses and what may have been the homes of wealthy merchants. To the east

were shops, workshops and taverns extending along the present Foregate Street

The Roman fortress walls enclosed an area smaller than the later City Walls, but were on the same line as the medieval walls in the north east angle, which now encloses the Cathedral and Dean's Field. Excavations at Dean's Field have revealed evidence of the Roman Barracks.

Roman stonework is visible in the undercrofts of several buildings, notably on Northgate Street (columns below Blacks) and Bridge Street (hypocaust below Spud-u-like).

The Norman earls re fortified Chester and extended the Roman and Saxon defences to complete the walled circuit which survives today. The southern wall, adjacent to the river was built in the 1120s and the western side of the wall in the second half of the 12th century.

Markets are known to have been held near The Cross since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, both out of doors and under cover in a common hall.

Historic mapping (see Figure 4.1.2) reveals that this area has been continually developed since at least 1789, with much of today's street structure already in place. Braun's 1581 map of Chester also shows this area fully occupied with buildings. The main feature of later development has been the amalgamation of plots to create larger holdings and the development of former gardens, infilling the city area much more densely.

### The Rows

Individual front galleries were not unusual in medieval town houses, but Chester's Rows are unique in their linkage during the middle ages to provide direct covered access for visitors to the second storey of most merchants' premises. It is unclear how this system developed, but no other like it is known to exist on this scale. *"Rows of Chester: The Chester*

*Rows Research Project Archaeological Report*” (English Heritage: 1994), is the definitive work on this unique complex.”



*The Rows*

The origins of the Rows are unknown but may have resulted from the gradual collapse of the Roman buildings along these streets, meaning that in the Middle Ages new buildings could have been constructed above the Roman ruins, which could have sloped upwards towards the street. From the late 13<sup>th</sup> century the construction of the Rows appeared to be more formally built in a form we may recognise today. It seems highly likely that the masons employed to build Edward I’s castles on the Welsh border in the 1280s – 90s’ would have wintered in Chester, providing skilled men to build the fine undercrofts of which many examples remain. They would have provided secure and relatively fireproof storage below the merchants’ houses, which would have been mainly of timber construction above.

The Rows occur in all four main streets in the City Centre (and previously extended to Lower Bridge Street). Although the Row buildings have been re-built and altered over many centuries, they represent a building form that originated in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, having names that described their occupants, for example: Shoemakers’ Row. They were not continuous in the early years of their existence and open areas housed kitchens and other functions.

The first documentary references to the Rows relate to the area around St. Peter’s Church in the commercial heart of the city. By the 1290s, the area on the east side of Northgate Street was known as Ironmonger’s Row and houses here with undercrofts are recorded. These early Row buildings probably had an elevated gallery, but were not yet part of a continuous system. Access to Row level would have been by many different flights of steps. However, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century galleries were gradually linked to form continuous walkways, possibly through the co-operation of adjacent property owners who needed to make their premises more accessible. By about 1350 the Row system seems to have been largely in place.

From the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, householders enlarged their properties by extending the chamber over the Row and supporting it on posts in the street. The gap between these posts and the street side of the Row walkway was then covered thus extending the stallboard. The undercroft or street level shop could then also be extended, often by adding a shop front reaching as far out into the street as the stallboard above it. This process called encroachment, continued through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Sometimes a small shop or chamber was built on the stallboard, so that the Rows became exceptionally dark, dank and even dangerous places. Encroachment was carefully controlled by the City Assembly, and owners had to pay a fine and annual rent, because by extending their properties forward into the street, they were effectively taking land from the city.

Under the Tudors, Chester's fortunes began to revive once more, and Row buildings were adapted to meet the changing fashions of the period. Medieval open halls were subdivided into chambers and large chimneys replaced the open hearth. People no longer wanted to live at Row level, and lavishly decorated new chambers, like that in Bishop Lloyd's Palace, were created above the noise and bustle of the Row walkway. Tudor House in Lower Bridge Street is the best surviving example of a new Row building of this period.

Towards the end of the 17th century (following slow reconstruction after the Civil War), Chester's prosperity revived again and the city became a fashionable social centre. Landed families began to rebuild their old town houses in the latest classical styles. Wherever possible they sought to remove the Row, which was both architecturally unfashionable and an intrusion on their privacy. Licenses to obstruct the Rows were sought by some owners, including the Westminster family for their town house, (now 'The Falcon Inn') and the Row was enclosed at some points either by building extra accommodation to enclose the gallery or redeveloping without a gallery, for example, at Oddfellows Hall in Lower Bridge Street - originally Bridge House, built in 1676 by the wealthy Dame Mary Calveley who paid a fine of £20 to the City Assembly to discontinue the Row at that point.

During the late 17th century and 18th centuries, significant sections of the ancient Rows system were lost through enclosure or rebuilding. This was especially the case on Lower Bridge Street where many of the gentry had their homes. Not all property owners had the wealth to completely rebuild, many simply re-fronted their houses, absorbing the Row as an additional room. The Row at Tudor House, enclosed by Roger Ormes in 1728, still survives within the building.

Elsewhere, in the heart of the city, the Rows were still thriving places of trade and the Assembly exerted control by refusing permissions to enclose. Sir George Booth who rebuilt two medieval houses in Watergate

Street in 1700, was obliged to keep the Row walkway, ingeniously creating the best classical mansion in the Rows. However, Row enclosure can be traced in all four main streets, with the sections of Row furthest from the commercial heart of the city generally being lost.



*Rows undercroft still in use today in Watergate Street*

In the second half of the 19th century, Chester was transformed by the half-timber or vernacular revival, a major rebuilding of the city centre which was characterised by a desire to capture the spirit of former times. The Rows, which had been so unpopular and unfashionable in the 18th century, were acclaimed as a unique and historic feature, and also became valued for their tourist potential. In all but one very significant case, the Rows were respected and improved. The exception was Shoemakers' Row on the west side of Northgate Street, which was gradually redeveloped at the end of the 19th century. Today the Rows remain crucial to the special character of Chester and its attraction as a tourism and retail destination.

## History by Area

The four quarters of the cruciform plan are detailed below.

**North-east:** Chester Cathedral, formerly a monastery founded in 1092, was spared destruction by Henry VIII at the time of the Dissolution and became the Cathedral of the new Diocese of Chester in 1541. Up to that date, the Abbey was in the diocese of Lichfield. The monks attended daily services, cared for the sick and the poor and looked after travellers.

When the Abbey Church was made the Cathedral of the newly formed diocese of Chester, the monks were succeeded by the Dean and Chapter. However, apart from paving the nave floor in 1600 little building work was carried out and damage during the Civil War in the 1640s went unrepaired. By 1696 the poor condition of the building was described as “miserably ragged on the outside”. The first of four restorations began in 1818 but the most extensive work was done by Sir George Gilbert Scott between 1868 and 1876. He re-cased the worn exterior, adding his own embellishments, such as turrets and pinnacles. The nave, choir and Lady Chapel were also restored and many new features were added. Generations of re-modelling and rebuilding lie beneath the external skin.

West of the Cathedral lies Abbey Square, one of the finest groups of buildings in the city. This was originally the site of the courtyard of the Benedictine Abbey, containing its secular buildings such as the bakery and brew-house.

Most of the buildings on the west and north sides of Abbey Square are individual Georgian houses which were constructed around 1750 for the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral. They replaced older buildings which had formed part of the monastic complex. Most of the houses were built between 1754 and 1761. Two earlier cottages remain.



*The Cathedral, looking west; Town Hall in the distance, to right.*

Abbey Street, rebuilt in the 18th and early 19th century, with the houses of leading members of the Chapter on the north side and dwellings for minor canons or lay clerks to the south is a quiet backwater off Abbey Square, leading down to the City Walls and Kaleyards Gate, which once gave access to gardens serving the monastery.

St Werburgh Street, which was re-aligned and widened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contains on its east side a terrace of some of the finest work by local architect John Douglas constructed between 1895-97. He bought the site after the Council’s demolition of earlier buildings and designed in the now familiar “black and white” which has become a symbol of Chester. The west side of the widened street is by Ayrton, whose 1935 buildings with their curved colonnade are a graceful foil for the Cathedral.

Northgate Street at its northern end, retains the domestic scale of the city before its enlargement began in the 19th century. There is a wide



range of visual and historic interest: a 13th century Abbey Gateway; a pair of 15th century timber-framed houses, the most northerly of the medieval Rows, a 17th century hotel, shops in Georgian buildings, a splendid 1865 Town Hall, a timber-framed arcaded terrace of vernacular revival shops, the Edwardian facade of the City Library and a 1936 Odeon cinema. The civic centrepiece is the Town Hall. In 1862, the Exchange, its predecessor, was destroyed by fire. A competition was held to design a new Town Hall and the winning entry, by W H Lynne of Belfast, was erected between 1865 and 1869. The building was intended to be, and succeeds in being, a landmark of a quality to deserve its place opposite the Cathedral.

There was a Victorian Market Hall on the frontage to the south of the Town hall, demolished in the early 1970s. Built in 1863, just 2 years before the Town Hall, this baroque-style frontage was replaced by the somewhat brutalist Forum building. This in turn was re-fronted to give a less intrusive appearance, but the Victorian market is still fondly remembered.



*Victorian Market Hall*



*Northgate Street*



*The Blue Bell Inn, Northgate Street: one of Chester's oldest surviving domestic buildings from 1250-1400.*



**South-east:** Eastgate Street is contained on both sides by shops which form part of The Rows system. The ground in the central area has considerable falls to the south and west, which allows the network of lanes and alley ways to connect street level and Row level at various points. How much these levels are natural and how much is made by people is unknown, but it creates a permeable network for pedestrians. Eastgate Street was enhanced in 1899 by the famous clock marking Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, where the City Walls span the street. There are modern interventions in the Rows – for example at the junction of Northgate Street and Eastgate Street, as well as more obvious infill on Watergate Street, which are of a form and scale which respect the character of the complex. Such interventions have been a continuous process for centuries as fire, structural collapse and fashion have generated new activity.



*Eastgate Clock – looking west to The Cross*



*Eastgate Street, looking west towards The Cross.*

Bridge Street falls fairly steeply to the River Dee and the weir and crossing point, where numerous mills once stood and Watergate Street, as its name suggests, falls to the Watergate and leads to the Old Port – of great significance until the Dee started to silt and ships became larger. The topography allows many connections at different levels.

After centuries of evolution in The Rows on Bridge Street and Eastgate Street, a sudden and dramatic change took place in the 1970s, when the Grosvenor Centre was constructed as an extension to Lockwood’s 1909 St Michael’s Row. This is integrated into the two-level Rows system with entrances at street level on Eastgate Street and Row level on Bridge Street. Its only obviously modern street frontages are on Pepper Street and Newgate Street where the ring road was constructed, with extensive demolition of historic fabric. This elevation was again remodelled in recent years. This was the first time such a large single intervention in the city’s core had taken place and while providing modern shopping with car parking and being regarded as well designed in its day, it also destroyed significant archaeology which at that time did not enjoy the protection it

has now. Its construction also destroyed the “grain” of a large area of the city centre which previously would have been shaped by ancient burgage plots.

The second major intervention was the ring road, which required massive demolition. It did enable the city centre to be freed from traffic, but at a high price in terms of the great swathes of historic fabric which were lost, such as at Pepper Street, Nicholas Street, Linenhall Street and Cuppin Street – here the fine grain of narrow Georgian streets was replaced by a larger and more open block form.



*Pepper Street being widened for the ring road: The Newgate far centre.*

**South-west:** the south western quarter of the city has been dominated by a castle for almost 1000 years, and while the western part of the area enclosed by the city walls was quite loosely developed in medieval times – containing agricultural land as well as monastic buildings, it became densely infilled after Henry VIII sold monastic lands in the area and merchants built houses for themselves. As with many buildings in the city, Victorian or Georgian facades can often disguise medieval cellars or

interiors and many buildings have evolved as fashion and economics dictated without necessarily being redeveloped. Many of the backland areas to the west of Bridge Street, linked by narrow passageways connected at Row Level and street level, have been cleared over time, with occasional surviving mews buildings, stables and other service functions, as well as warehouses giving clues as to the former character of this area .

**White Friars:** The Dominicans or Black Friars arrived in 1236, occupying a site to the west of the city, between Black Friars Lane and Watergate Street. They were followed in 1237 by the Franciscans or Grey Friars, whose house stood north of Lower Watergate Street. Finally, the Carmelites or White Friars came sometime before 1277 and built their church alongside White Friars Lane in 1290. Although never rich, these friaries were successively enlarged and they became very significant features within the medieval townscape, occupying almost a quarter of the land within the walled city.

White Friars is now a fine street of varied architectural styles, and one side of Commonhall Street, the site of the first civic meeting place (Common Hall) up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century has survived, with some good Victorian cottages reflecting the original narrow plots, and now also contains some modern infill. The footprint of earlier streets remains, although much of the cleared area is only used for car parking at present.

Nicholas Street, having lost its east side to the ring road, still has a fine run of Georgian terraced houses (so-called “Pill-box Row” because it was a favoured address for doctors). As elsewhere, the construction of the ring road led to infilling of empty plots after its construction and there are some poor quality light industrial buildings where Georgian terraces previously stood.

Stanley Palace in Watergate Street is Chester's finest Elizabethan house. It was built in 1591 for Sir Peter Warburton of Grafton, Vice Chancellor of

the Cheshire Exchequer and the city's MP. The building was almost exported to the USA in 1866 but saved by the Chester Archaeological Society.



*Stanley Palace circa 1970*

Watergate Street and Row contain examples of buildings of many styles, plotting the development and redevelopment of the street over time. Watergate Street retains more medieval buildings than any other Chester street. During the middle ages it led to the port and was the merchants' natural choice for their homes and shops. As the port gradually silted up Watergate Street lost its advantage, so Eastgate Street and Bridge Street were preferred for redevelopment by Georgian and Victorian shopkeepers. The Row on its north side best illustrates the scale, proportions and ambience which existed in the medieval Rows.

**North-west:** King Street is a wonderful example of townscape. Once orchards and gardens for the Abbey, it was redeveloped from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century for housing. Containing mainly Georgian and Victorian houses, it falls gently to the west and curves along its length. Later

housing, Victorian and Edwardian, lines one side of Water Tower Street, where arches in the City Wall give access to the canal and Canning Street, a short Victorian terrace.



*King Street circa 1970*

The ring roads cuts short the story of King Street and Water Tower Street: empty sites awaiting redevelopment are prominent to the west of the bus station and on the site of the former stables to Chester Racecourse- which in turn are on the site of the former Linen Hall. Chester is still evolving.

To the rear of the Town Hall, the buildings of the Forum Centre, built in 1973, and the Crowne Plaza Hotel are, along with the ring road, products of their time as much as any of the other major elements in the city, perhaps carefully designed in the fashion of the day, but paying little respect to the form of earlier developments.



Popular criticism of new development is not unique to Chester, nor to historic cities. However, there was a cultural shift in the late 1960s when conservation appeared on the national agenda. The Insall report of 1968 (*Conservation in Chester, by Donald Insall Associates*) was a pioneering document which set out not just the cultural benefits of conservation, but also looked at costs and practicalities. In its wake, a massive investment was made in Chester to conserve, repair and restore a huge amount of the city's historic fabric, using grants to building owners. The first conservation officer in England was appointed by the City Council and in retrospect, the city's achievements were spectacular. Two Europa Nostra awards were bestowed on Chester and further investment saw the re-surfacing of city centre streets to provide one of the largest traffic-free areas in the country. Memories are short, but photographs of the city centre in the 1960s showed some buildings shored up as a result of structural problems, and many others in a dismal state of repair. The contrast with today's situation could hardly be more dramatic. An active Civic Trust has been central to this process, which continues today.

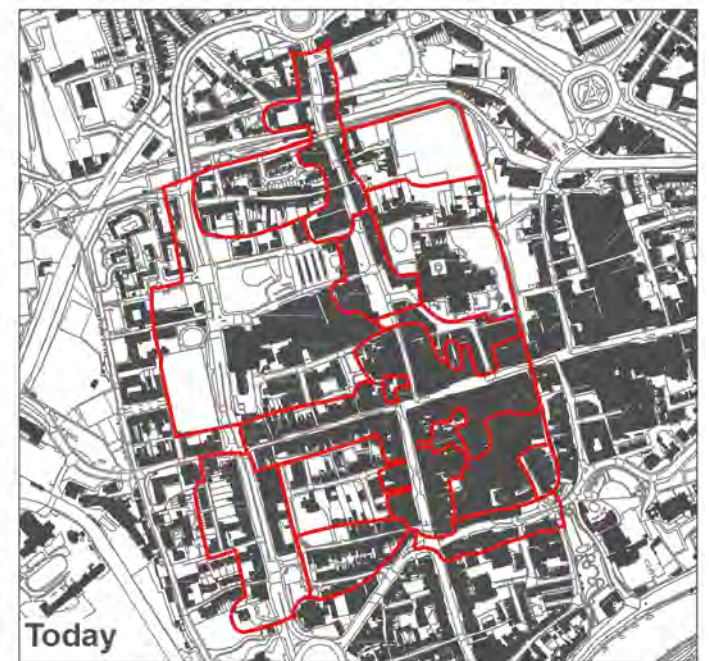
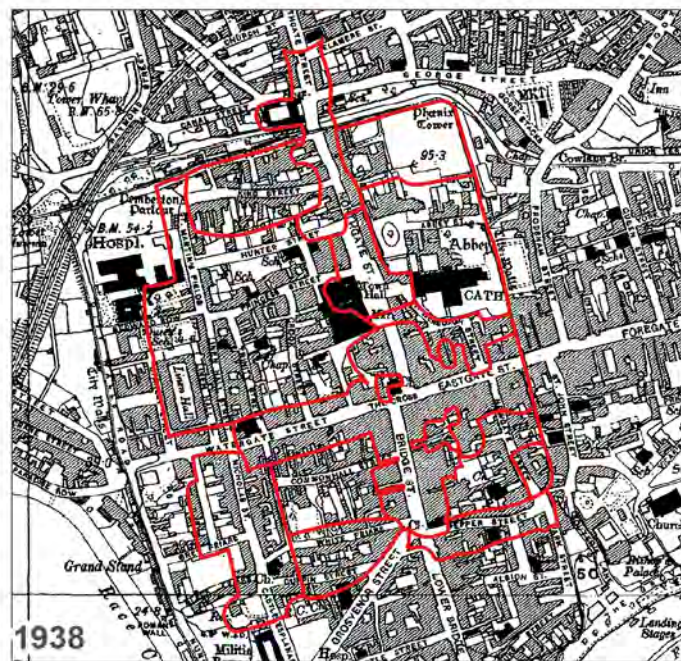
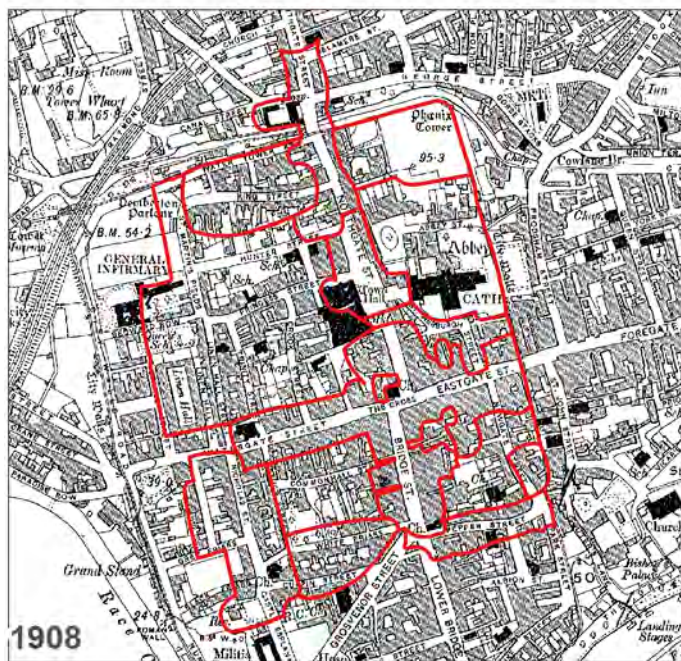
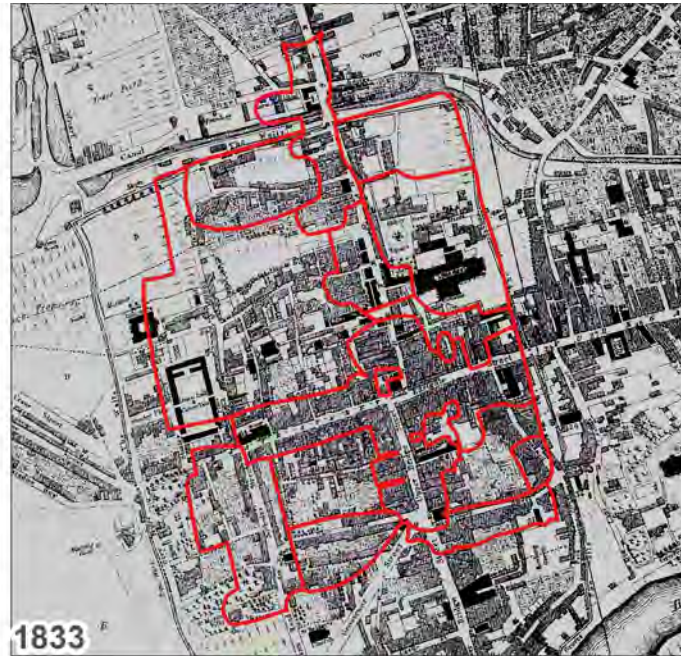


Watergate Street



# Historical Development A. Central Area

Figure 4.1.2





## Land-uses

The Cross is at the retail heart of Chester. Eastgate Street has possibly the city's heaviest footfall and the Grosvenor Mall links it to Bridge Street. Retail space is at both street level (frequently below pavement level) and Row levels, and within the Rows system there are significant numbers of restaurants, public houses, offices and a small but increasing residential component. Upper floors are sometimes in full use, but there are many under-used spaces at higher level because of lack of independent access and fire safety limitations. Retail use tapers off at the Northgate, but new developments may alter this.

The north-west quarter of The Cross area containing the market, the Forum and the bus station behind the Town Hall has high footfall, but this falls off rapidly to the rear of Northgate Street, Watergate Street (north and south) and Bridge Street (west). There are some smaller specialist shops on the fringes of the area.

The Cross area has late-night activity with public houses, bars and night clubs. The Cathedral precinct, on the other hand, has low footfall: apart from the main Cathedral-related uses, there are some professional offices and housing. The Dean's Field in the north-east corner of the City Walls is a unique reminder that once there were many open spaces within the walled city. It is a private space, visible from the Walls.

## Urban Form

This area follows the Roman and Medieval street pattern to a high degree. The powerful presence of The Rows, which rise to six storeys at the Cross in parts, and the astonishing variety in the street elevations, coupled with a strong rhythm of narrow frontages at back-of pavement, generate an unusually coherent urban form around the major routes from the Cross. In spite of a wide range of building ages and contrasting styles, there is a consistency of scale and a palette of materials which give

a strong and individual character with rich variety. The Rows also offer elevated views of the main streets, unusual in cities.

Principal streets are based on the Roman grid pattern: originally straight, but with slight bends and variations introduced over time. Other streets, added later, including St Werburgh Street and King Street, do not follow this pattern. The Rows walkways connect to alleyways linking to other streets (e.g. Godstall Lane) often a full storey apart in levels. Frequent steps connect Row and street levels.

The grain of the area generally consists of continuous blocks fronting the back-of-pavement, broken frequently by pedestrian alleys and steps. There is a powerful consistency of repetitive narrow frontages within strong terraces in the Cross area, punctuated by the Town Hall, the Cathedral, the Odeon Cinema and St Peter's Church – major townscape events against a consistent backdrop.



The Fletcher's Passage area (see left) provides a good view of the historic form of the rear of the buildings that front the principal shopping streets. The linked series of narrow lanes and yards, which are in relatively good order given their function, provide an indication of the height of the retail development and its alteration over time. It also allows one to imagine the overcrowded and ad-hoc nature of the dense Victorian and Georgian courts and infilled Row gardens that once filled such spaces.



At the Northgate, a large modern office block is an intrusion in scale and materials, while opposite, at Rufus Court, is an example of a modern insertion which respects both the footprint and scale of the city's historic fabric.

At The Cross, there are important views in four directions, notably eastwards towards the Eastgate Clock which closes the vista. The view northwards from the Pepper Street/Bridge Street junction is a wonderful set piece of townscape, with St Peter's Church Tower offset from the grid to close the vista and the Town Hall spire behind. The view south gives a glimpse of trees in the distance across the River Dee - hidden from view as the land dips towards the Old Dee Bridge.



*View north from Pepper Street/Bridge Street junction*

The Cathedral is not seen from The Cross, but it is splendidly framed in the view north from the junction of Eastgate Street and St Werburgh Street.



*View eastwards on Eastgate Street*

In contrast to the intensity of the main street frontages with their intricate detailing and the heavy modelling of the gables and set-back walkways, the peripheral streets – King Street, with its gently curved informal terraces and Water Tower Street with its disciplined elevations, speak of later incursions into previously open spaces within the Walls.

The Cathedral precinct was for centuries a private enclave, entered only by the Abbey gateway and as such has a plan form, developed independently of the city streets, and with its fine architecture, materials and planned spaces, is a precious feature of the city.

**Urban Form**  
**A. Central Area**

Figure 4.1.3



**Key**  
Sub Areas



Behind the glamour of the main shopping streets, there are substantial parts of The Cross area which are in transition. While the main streets have strong frontages with well-maintained and even iconic elevations, behind them lie areas where sites have been cleared but where no redevelopment has yet taken place. The area to the west of the bus station has been cleared and the former Commonhall Stables have been cleared to form a car park. The area to the south of Commonhall Street is fragmented and the open areas are used only for parking.

The grain of the city, strongly apparent on the main shopping streets, has been erased in many “backland” areas, and where there has been more modern infill, it has tended to ignore the original grain and take the form of blocks with larger footprints, destroying the pattern of narrow plots which has shaped Chester.

It is noticeable that whereas the greatest care has been taken over the street frontages, the backs of buildings have, in many cases, suffered from being regarded as less important. Ill-designed extensions, service yards and walls, festooned with mechanical and electrical services, have produced a visual environment which is of little quality.

One of the delights of Chester is the alleyways which pass between the main frontages, sometimes linking the Rows to unexpected destinations as the ground levels change – for example Godstall Lane. Some of these routes have been lost to larger development and some lead from the Rows to uninviting backlands, which makes the city both less permeable and less readable.



Goodstall Lane (with Cathedral at rear)



## Townscape Character

The character area contains a rich mix of buildings whose dates not only span almost a thousand years, but which are frequently made up of elements from different periods, faced by Victorian and Georgian facades. The resulting mixture has produced a townscape of rich and almost overwhelming character which for the most part successfully blends many styles .



*Chester Town Hall – Victorian Gothic Revival style*

There is a consistency of scale and height amongst historic town houses and shops which was a result of practical considerations as well as aesthetics. In most historic townscapes, only the churches and castles rose above the run of two to four storey buildings although Georgian houses had storey heights far greater than medieval buildings. However, the introduction of new building technology allowed buildings to grow higher still and some of the Victorian Gothic revival buildings in Chester, while their style reflects the medieval timber buildings nearby, have far greater storey heights and more floors than their predecessors. As a

result of this long process of gradual organic change, Chester's streets have a wonderful variety. Only the more recent additions – for example, the board-marked concrete infill on Watergate Street – stand out as incongruous in spite of careful scale and design. It is perhaps not the first time that new styles caused discomfort and it is possible that Chester's townscape is robust enough to absorb such variety in time.

## Abbey Square and Abbey Street



*Abbey Street*

Most of these houses were built in the mid 18th century on the former site of the kitchens, the bake house and the brewery of the old Abbey. They are in the then new "London style" i.e. "Georgian", although the houses next to the Abbey Gateway were not completed until the 1820s. Each terrace has a uniform design, but the individual houses are very different in their detailing.

Although most of the buildings are now used as office premises, the Square still retains an air of tranquillity. There is a garden in the centre of

the square. Abbey Square is the nearest approach to a formal Georgian Square in Chester. The cobbles and wheelers are a distinctive feature of the square, designed to allow carriages to ride smoothly for the well-to-do occupants of the Square.

### The Cathedral



*The Cathedral and War Monument*

In townscape terms, the sandstone Cathedral is central to Chester. It is seen from distant viewpoints on the approach to the city, but is not often visible from within the Walls because of the density of the street frontages. Town Hall Square and St Werburgh Street are exceptions to this. Perhaps the finest views of the building are from the City Walls, when the open space at Dean's Field allows it to be seen in a fine setting. The openness of the Kaleyards also provides a good view of the Cathedral, although its setting could be improved here. The Abbey

gateway allows access to Abbey Square, where views of the Cathedral open up and its scale can be appreciated.

There is a great tranquillity in the setting of the Cathedral, with little traffic penetrating the precinct and the green space around it provides space for contemplation and some events. The modern bell-tower, by Pace in 1974, is remote from the Cathedral and is seen mainly from the Walls. The Kaleyards area also affects the setting of the Cathedral – this lies outside of this character and is described in Section 4.8: Gorse Stacks.

### St Werburgh's Street

Until the late 19th century, St. Werburgh Street was a narrow lane leading up to the Cathedral and graveyard. This was replaced in the 1870s by a range of shops by the local architect, John Douglas. The development is regarded by some as the high point of the Vernacular Revival style. It provides a fine setting for and views of the Cathedral



*St. Werburgh Street*

The western side of St. Werburgh Street was redeveloped in 1935, when Matthew Ayrton built a row of shops and offices in the Arts and Crafts style. Ayrton was the architect of the old Wembley Stadium and an expert on reinforced concrete design. He created a street level arcade, supported by Roman Doric concrete piers. This is a well-mannered piece of civic design which blends perfectly in spite of its non-traditional approach and materials, with sweeping green slate roofs and white render.

### Eastgate Street and Row



1907 postcard – hand-coloured – corner of Eastgate/Northgate

Architectural styles range from Victorian Gothic revival to the classical Chester bank by Williams in 1860 with its great Corinthian columns – much criticised at the time for cutting off the Row and being “out of keeping” with Chester’s black and white tradition. It contains Georgian brick and stone facades, Victorian black-and-white, stone classical revival and the high gothic Penson building of 1858 with 13<sup>th</sup> century town-

house undercroft. Eastgate Street terminates visually at the City Walls , with the famous Eastgate Clock. From the Walls there are fine views back to the Cross.

### Bridge Street

From The Cross south to Pepper Street, the varied and intricate frontages are of a similar character to those described for Eastgate Street and also reveal layers of history. The view south is not closed off as the land falls away, but St Michael’s Church is a strong vertical feature at the junction with Pepper Street. Even the Georgian houses with their flat parapet rooflines merge successfully with the steep gables of the majority of buildings. The “Three Old Arches”, said to be one of the oldest shops in the country, has 13<sup>th</sup> century origins. The tallest building on the east side is the 1909 Lockwood St Michael’s Row, the entrance to this fine faience-clad mall, which was perhaps the greatest intervention in the historic Rows fabric at the time, rises to five storeys. Its 1960’s extension lacks the quality of the Lockwood design.



Bridge Street and St. Michael’s Church



### Watergate Street

The attractiveness of Watergate Street owes much to the way that the slight curve in its plan west of The Cross adds variety and surprise to the vista - and shows off the landmark buildings, notably at the entrance to the street, then Booth Mansion and the spire of the Guildhall. Watergate Street contains more medieval buildings than any other street in the character area. The view west, towards the Old Port is punctuated by the spire of the Guild Hall and there is a glimpse of Stanley Palace across the ring road. The Row is continuous on the south side but truncated to the north, though hints of it continue to the Guildhall.

Fine Georgian town-house frontages face the intricate timber of Bishop Lloyds Palace, with its medieval origins and 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuilt frontage by Lockwood.



*Bishop Lloyds Palace Watergate Street*

### White Friars

At the junction of White Friars and Trinity Streets, one side of the street is, unusually for Chester, relieved by walled gardens to two large town houses, now offices. The view uphill towards Bridge Street terminates in a glimpse of Bridge Street Row East. Frontages to White Friars are mainly Georgian terraced houses of modest scale, two and three storeys, with some Victorian frontages towards Bridge Street. The street is narrow, surfaced with granite setts and has a calm atmosphere, with the gentle curve and slow rise toward the east creating considerable charm.



*White Friars*

### Nicholas Street

Nicholas Street is arrow-straight as it passes through area A and is dual-carriageway, widened to form part of the ring road. It has a fine three storey Georgian terrace on the west side, with a modern bank building and a re-fronted 1970s office building to the east, both of quite appropriate scale, but further north, low quality two storey light industrial buildings are weak in scale and detail. The land rises as the ring road approaches the new bridge where it breaches the City Walls, and is flanked to the west by the cleared site of the former Linen Hall Stables and to the east by the Crowne Plaza Hotel and a cleared site near the junction with Princess Street. A recent housing development fronts the street opposite King's buildings, the junction with King Street.

Apart from the Georgian terrace, the street has little character and little to distinguish it from a ring road in any city.



*Nicholas Street*

### King Street

Good quality Georgian and Victorian town house line King Street, which slopes gently up to Northgate Street. The terraces have a consistency of rhythm with mainly sash windows, varying materials – brick and render and granite sett surfacing. This combines to give a pleasingly informal piece of townscape.



*King Street*

At the junction with Northgate Street are stables at the rear of public houses and lower, on the north side, is a pair of cottages with agricultural characteristics – possibly a remnant of earlier times when the area was farm and orchard land for the Abbey. Unlike the main city centre streets, there are few gables here, with ridge - lines parallel to the street and the houses tight to the back of pavement line forming a narrow street, with a strong sense of enclosure.



### Water Tower Street

A street of two-storey houses, Victorian red brick with black and white “timber frame” decoration, as well as some appropriate modern infill at the eastern end. The street has a special character because it runs parallel to the City Walls for its full length. Looking east towards the Northgate, a tall modern office block at the junction introduces a discordant element.



*Water Tower Street*

### Landscape Character

There are two major open spaces in this character area at Dean’s Field in the north east corner of the City Walls and the part of the Cathedral grounds alongside Abbey Street. This is private land owned by the Cathedral, but is of great landscape value as the City Walls enclose two sides of the space, giving possibly the best views of the Cathedral to pedestrians. There are a few trees to the west of the space, but it is

mainly clear and quite level. The green space follows the walls as far as the rear of Rufus Court.



*The Cathedral seen from the City Walls*

The Cathedral grounds immediately surrounding it provide a valuable quiet space off St Werburgh Street. There is also a footpath linking through to the City Walls by the Bell Tower, which, while a useful route, is not as attractive as might be hoped. Alongside that route, at a lower level, runs a service lane with steps and gates up to the City Walls, which is no longer passable and detracts from the quality of the space.

**Setting of the Cathedral:** Historically the earlier Anglo-Saxon church was constructed here because this was a part of the walled city that had not been previously developed by the Romans. The Cathedral, when seen across Dean's Field from Phoenix Tower and the City Walls, has an open, tranquil green setting. From the west, its setting is from the enclosure of Abbey Green's Georgian square and Abbey Street's formal cobbled route alongside Abbey Field. Seen from the City Centre, it is set in a formal

garden enclosed by St. Werburgh Street. This represents a high quality setting, which is largely traffic-free.

The City Walls themselves constitute a remarkable public open space, providing a continuous walkway which offers views of almost all aspects of the City, including high-level views into Eastgate Street, remarkable views down to the canal cutting at Northgate, views of the canal at the Water Tower, long views to the Welsh hills, spectacular views of the Cathedral and the amphitheatre amongst others. The Walls bound two sides of Area A and contribute greatly to the experience of the city.



*The City Walls walkway (near the Cathedral)*

### **Public realm**

There has been a great deal of investment over many years, aimed at improving the street environment in this central area. The pedestrian zone includes Eastgate Street, Bridge Street, Watergate Street and Northgate Street, all of which have been re-paved, mostly with high quality York stone and granite kerbs. Street furniture has been kept to a minimum required for legal and engineering reasons and consists of oak

bollards which incorporate traffic notices and waste bins. The schemes have been nationally recognised for their quality.



*High quality paving in Northgate Street*



*Oak Street furniture*

A major public realm element is, of course, the Rows Walkways, which have mixed surfaces varying from tile to timber boarding. It is important to note that The Rows are owned by the individual property owners along their length and are maintained by them. However, an architectural lighting scheme was installed by the old Chester City Council in consultation with the various owners.



*L: Rows architectural lighting scheme;*

*R: alley to St Peter's churchyard*



**Setting of the Walls and Eastgate Clock:** Eastgate Street, which extends (as Foregate Street) far beyond the line of the Walls, provides a remarkable setting for the arch in the Walls which carries the ornate Eastgate Clock. Many people will not be aware that this is in fact a part of the City Walls unless they climb to Wall level and follow it along to north or south. High quality architecture and paving at this point combine with the clock to provide one of Chester's most memorable visual compositions and the arch and clock create an important visual stop, enclosing the length of street between the cross and the Clock.



*Eastgate and the Eastgate Clock*

### **Town Hall Square and the setting for the Town Hall**

Chester Town Hall is set in perhaps the city's most important civic space, which, while not a formal square in the traditional sense, does provide a much-used central location for festivals, ceremonial events, parades and other activities. The space is contained by buildings of widely varying

architectural styles - the Victorian Town Hall itself, the Abbey Gateway, the former Kings School (Barclays Bank), the "Coach House" bar/restaurant, the Library (the retained façade of the former motor showrooms) and Weedon's Odeon cinema building (currently unused). The only building abutting the Town Hall is The Forum shopping centre, which has a fairly bland elevation. There are two pieces of sculpture in the square and a Roman column is displayed. In summary this presents a strong setting to the Town Hall, an impressive Gothic Revival building.

The space is entirely paved, although a group of trees screens the bank building opposite the Town Hall, where St Werburgh Street leads off at a tangent from the square and the Cathedral's great West Doorway, set back from the main square, faces the Town Hall.



*The former Roman courtyard at the site of Town Hall Square, prior to construction of the Town Hall.*

The rear of the Town Hall is masked by the Forum development, and here the setting is less successful, being mainly the characterless open expanse of the bus interchange.

It is worth noting that the position of the Town Hall corresponds to a central administration block within the Roman fortress (the '*principia*'). The Town Hall Square is the site of land once within the central courtyard of this building. This courtyard was, in part, preserved and used for markets and city government from the Middle Ages onwards. The space became gradually in-filled over time until the site was redeveloped for the Town Hall in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The relevance of this history is that it reveals, firstly - that this site has always had an administrative role for the City; and secondly - that the Town Hall Square has a long history of being an enclosed public space. As such, both elements are historically significant today in the character of Chester



*Town Hall Square in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*



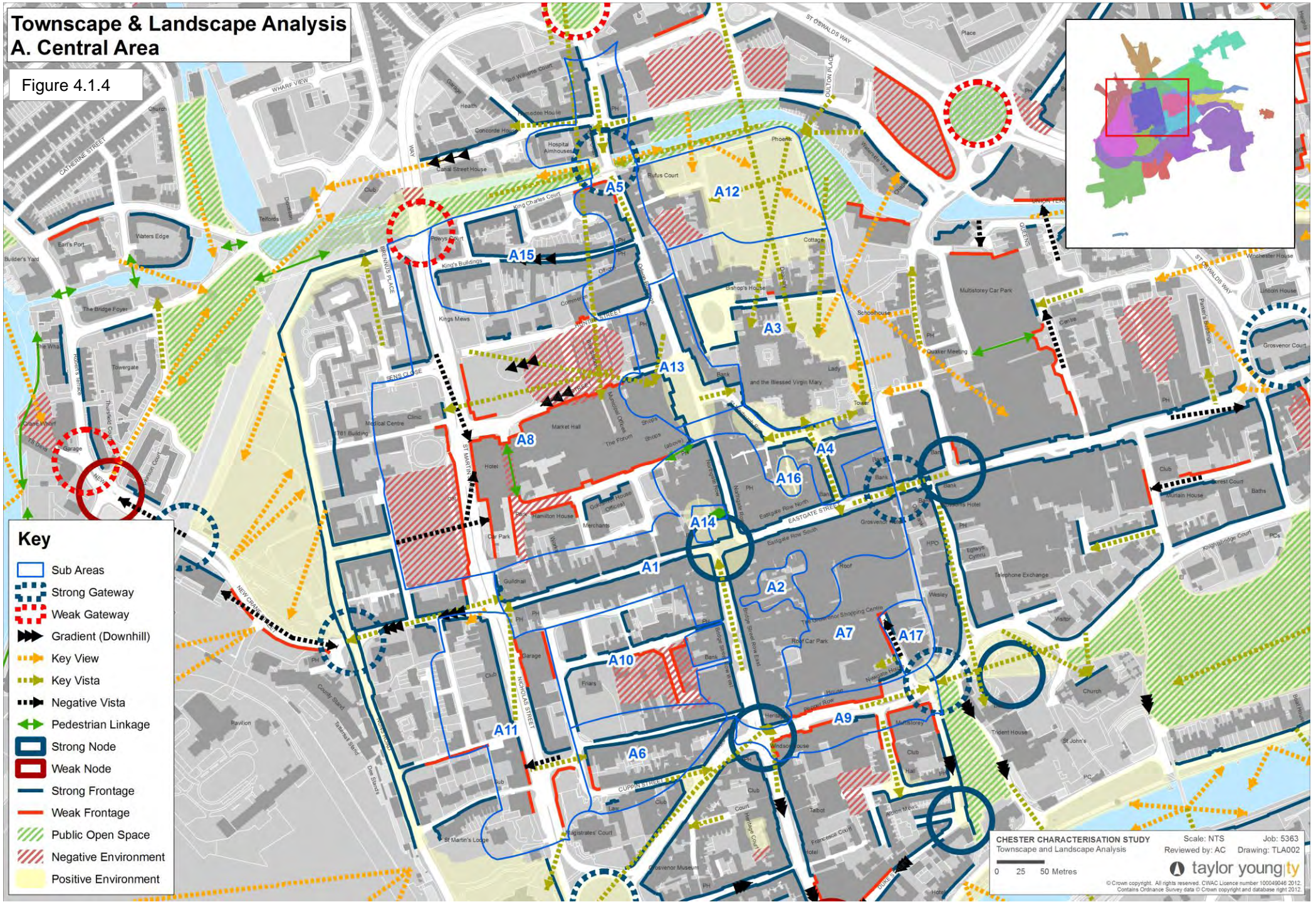
*The Cross*



# Townscape & Landscape Analysis

## A. Central Area

Figure 4.1.4



- Key**
- Sub Areas
  - Strong Gateway
  - Weak Gateway
  - Gradient (Downhill)
  - Key View
  - Key Vista
  - Negative Vista
  - Pedestrian Linkage
  - Strong Node
  - Weak Node
  - Strong Frontage
  - Weak Frontage
  - Public Open Space
  - Negative Environment
  - Positive Environment



A. Central Area: Typical Materials and Detail





## Designated Heritage Assets

All of this area is within the City Centre Conservation Area. There is a high proportion of listed buildings in the area. The majority of the core area of Northgate Street, Eastgate Street, Bridge Street and Watergate Street consists of listed buildings. The City Walls themselves, and their associated towers and gates, are Grade I listed and also registered as Scheduled Monuments, as are a number of other features, as listed below. The site of the former Roman Legionary Barracks in the north-east corner within the walls is also a Scheduled Monument. The most significant listed buildings in the area are set out below.

- **The City Walls** and associated features, namely the Phoenix Tower, Kaleyard Gate, Eastgate and Clock, South-east Angle Tower



- **Leche House**, Watergate Street (Grade I) – medieval undercroft with 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century townhouse additions
- **St Nicholas' Chapel**, St Weburgh Street (Grade II and a Scheduled Monument)

- **37 and 45 Watergate Street** (Grade I) – medieval undercroft and 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century townhouse additions



- **The Old Crypt**, Watergate Street (Grade I) - medieval undercroft with 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century townhouse additions



- **Booth Mansion and 28-34 Watergate Street** (Grade I) - medieval undercroft and 18<sup>th</sup> century townhouses
- **41 Watergate Street and Bishop Lloyds Palace** (Grade I) - medieval undercroft and early 17<sup>th</sup> century townhouse
- **Three Old Arches, Bridge Street** – medieval undercroft and shopfront (c.1200 – one of the oldest in England)



- **39 Bridge Street** (Grade I) – remains of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman bath house within the medieval undercroft.
- **Cowper House, Bridge Street** (Grade I) – medieval undercroft and 1664 townhouse
- **St Michael's Row, Bridge Street** (Grade II\*) – shopping arcade 1909-11

- **Chester Cathedral, Northgate Street** (Grade I)



- **The Bluebell PH, Northgate Street** (Grade I) – 15<sup>th</sup> century townhouse with later additions
- **The Abbey Gateway, Northgate Street** (Grade I) – arch entrance to Abbey Square, circa 1300; and Little Abbey Gateway, Northgate Street (Scheduled Monument)





- **Church of St. Peter's, The Cross** (Grade I) – 1300 to 1540



- **Chester Town Hall**, Northgate Street (Grade II\*) – 1865-1869
- **The Bluecoat School**, Northgate Street (Grade II\*) – built 1717 as a chapel, later an orphanage and school, now a youth centre



- **The Friars, Commonhall Street** (Grade II\*) – Vernacular Revival style villa (19<sup>th</sup> century) built on the site of the Thomas Egerton's mansion (1590s) and the Carmelite's Church prior to this.

- **28, 34 Eastgate**, Crypt Building (Grade I) – medieval undercroft, 1858 department store.



- **Abbey Square** – Georgian townhouses (1740-1780) facing the square, all Grade II\* listed.



## Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

21 un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit have been identified in the area.

- **A1a. Former Owen & Owen Block**, Eastgate St/Northgate St. Large and varied block in vernacular revival style. The Rows here had been historically enclosed within buildings ('The Dark Rows') but were recently redeveloped in the 1990s to open up the Rows consistently with the rest of Northgate St/Eastgate St and consequently the block was de-listed. Nevertheless it still contains significant interest and townscape value.



- **New Cathedral Bell Tower**, Cathedral Precinct – built in 1975 to rehouse the bells. This is now a contemporary local landmark that fits in well with the historic context.



- **A5a 79. Northgate Street**, Victorian Vernacular Revival style.





- **A5c. The Red Lion, Northgate Street** – Vernacular Revival pub with arcade.



- **A6b. Institutional building, Cuppin Street**



- **A6a. Victorian Vernacular Revival terrace, Cuppin Street**



- **A6c. Rendered terrace, Cuppin Street**



- **A6d. Bistro/La Tasca terrace, Cuppin Street**



- **A7a. inter-war office block, Pepper Street**



- **A8a. Arts and Crafts house, Hunter Street**



- **A8b. Victorian Vernacular Revival house, Hunter Street**





- **A13a. Edwardian library** façade – formerly motor showrooms



- **A13c. Corner building**, Northgate Street and St Werburgh Street – holds the corner well with tower feature



- **A13b. Shropshire Arms** – Vernacular Revival public house



- **A13d. 58-60 Northgate Street** – Edwardian shop units with good original shop-front.



- **A15a. 4 King Street - Victorian terrace**



- **A15b. Victorian corner building, King Street/Water Tower Street**



- **15c. Victorian terrace, Water Tower street**



- **A15d. Edlingham Buildings, Water Tower street - Victorian**





- **A15e. Canning Street terrace, Victorian**



- **A17a. Former City Council Electric Headquarters, Newgate Street – former electricity company offices, now a restaurant**



## Key Detractors

Six key detractors have been identified in this character area.

**St Nicholas Street:** The Crowne Plaza Hotel and car park, which is highly visible because of its size and bulk. The hotel was built on top of an existing car park structure and has a very thin and crude veneer of “Chester Black and White” which is wholly nonsensical when applied as it has been to a building of this massing. Its design pays no heed to the grain of the city. The development also includes a pedestrian underpass to Hamilton Place which presents a very poor and unwelcoming environment.



*Crowne Plaza Hotel*

**Hamilton Place:** The western end of this street suffers from the rear elevation of the aforementioned Crowne Plaza Hotel and car park, in addition to Hamilton House office block and the frontage to the Forum Studio Theatre. The former is a standard office block of its time that fails to match the grain or townscape of the City. The theatre is in a building of brutalist style which, whilst not without architectural interest, is not reflective of the character of Chester in general or surrounding historic buildings in particular.



*Hamilton Place*

**Market Area:** The 1960s indoor market hall and the adjacent bus station and office tower are all out of character with the prevailing urban form and townscape and present a poor appearance. This is especially unfortunate for visitors arriving by bus, or to park in the market car park, as this presents a poor first impression of the core City Centre. This area is within the setting of several listed buildings and buildings of townscape merit.



*Market area*



**Newgate Street:** The multi storey car park offers a brutal frontage to the street, detracting from some pleasant historic buildings and concealing a listed church. This intervention also truncated Newgate Street, which previously extended to form a crossroads with St Werburgh Street.



**Commonhall Street:** The vacant sites, derelict listed warehouse and the backs of numerous buildings create a poor environment in a potentially interesting area, within a few metres of one of Chester's most vibrant retail streets.



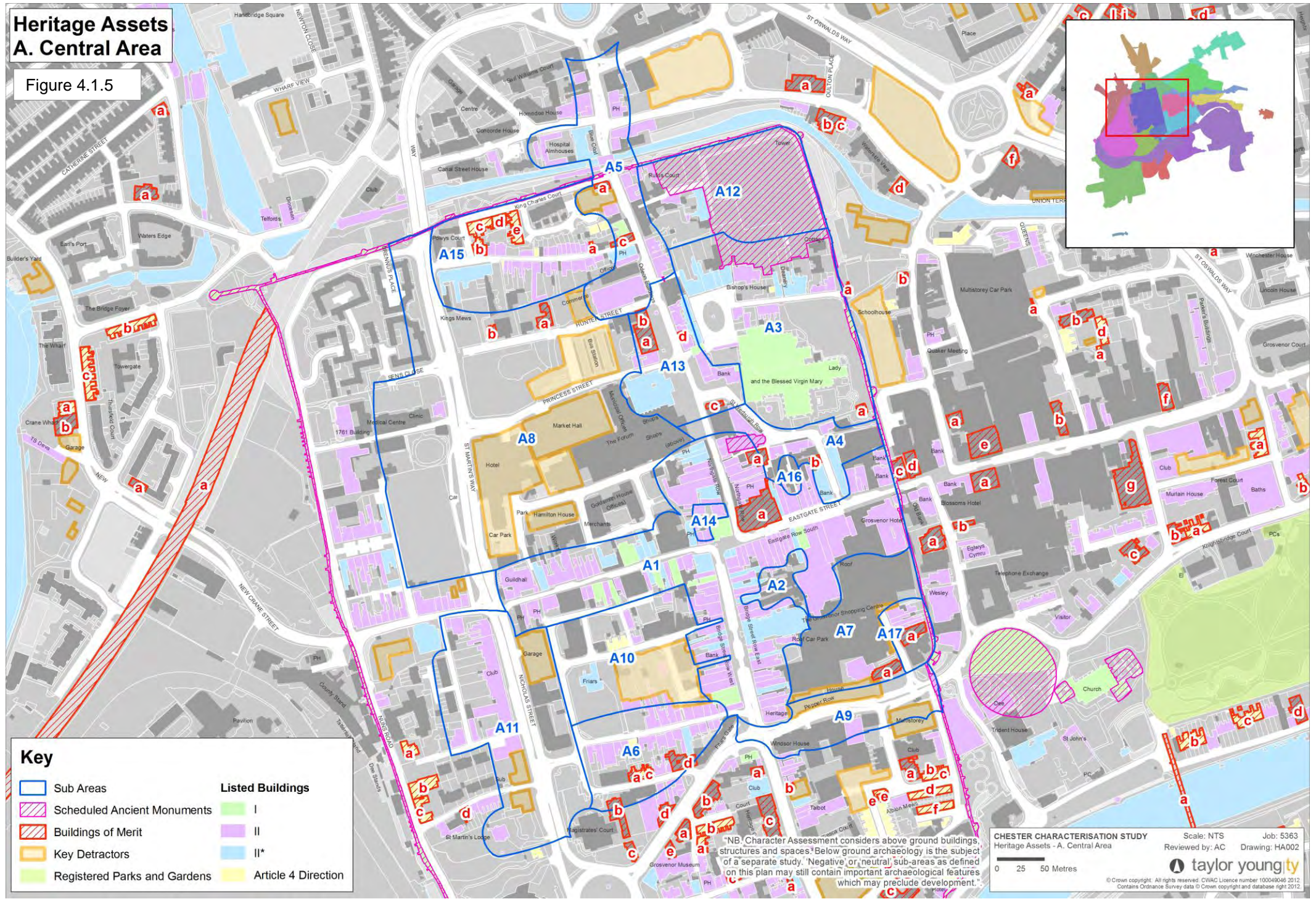
**Water Tower Street:** Centurion House, on the corner of Northgate Street rises above neighbouring buildings in a sensitive setting next to the City Walls. It pays no heed to the grain of the area.





# Heritage Assets A. Central Area

Figure 4.1.5



**Key**

Sub Areas	Listed Buildings I
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Listed Buildings II
Buildings of Merit	Listed Buildings II*
Key Detractors	Article 4 Direction
Registered Parks and Gardens	

"NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development."

**CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY**  
Heritage Assets - A. Central Area

Scale: NTS  
Reviewed by: AC  
Job: 5363  
Drawing: HA002

0 25 50 Metres

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## Summary: Character Assessment

In summary, this area defines the character of Chester for residents and visitors alike. The Cathedral, the Town Hall, The Rows, a substantial proportion of the City Walls, the key public space of Town Hall Square and an extensive selection of Chester's finest historic buildings are all contained here. The area has some of the highest quality public realm in the City.

Notwithstanding this remarkable range of assets, the area nevertheless has detracting features – the transitional areas with cleared sites, unkempt backs, alleyways which lead into less than attractive areas and with the benefit of hindsight, some buildings from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century which have not respected the character of this highly sensitive area. The character of each sub-area is assessed below.

### A1. The Cross: Critical

A key street intersection, with a remarkable mix of historic buildings, most of which are listed. The area includes The Rows, with vistas to key buildings and structures. The land falls southwards on Bridge Street towards the Dee and on Watergate Street towards the Old Port.

### A2. Fletchers' Passage: Neutral

A private, functional area within the centre of retail blocks. This is tidy enough given its function and provides an interesting glimpse of a side of the built form rarely seen but does not contribute to wider character.

### A3. Cathedral Precinct: Critical

Includes the Cathedral, the Dean's Field, Abbey Square - a remarkably intact set piece of Georgian terraces - and Abbey Street. The precinct is bounded to the east and north by the City Walls. The whole is a remarkable consistent group of buildings of unusually high quality, a tranquil and a dignified setting for the Cathedral.



*The Cross (Taylor Young 2010)*

### A4. St. Werburgh Street: Critical

Very attractive Vernacular Revival group by Douglas and outstanding arts and crafts terrace by Ayrton opposite the Cathedral. Very well detailed and in very good condition.

### A5. The Northgate: Critical

An important historic street with busy retail frontages, changing in character either side of the wall, declining in activity to the north. A major civic space between the Town Hall and the Cathedral (Town Hall Square) used for events.



Abbey Street (Taylor Young 2010)

**A6. White Friars / Cuppin Street: Positive**

A Georgian street in good condition with sett surface and buildings of different eras at either end.

**A7. Grosvenor Centre: Neutral**

Victorian shopping arcade by Lockwood with 1960s extension of lesser quality, recently refurbished. Also includes Newgate House and a listed church.

**A8. Market: Negative**

City centre edge, indoor market, shopping mall, theatre and open bus station. 1960s buildings with some interesting artwork. Large scale uses out of scale with the townscape within the Walls.

**A9. Pepper Street: Negative**

Dominated by heavy traffic and poor 1960s frontage resulting from road widening, but includes views to listed buildings and Newgate.

**A10. Commonhall Street: Neutral**

Rear area behind central shopping streets. Buildings mixed in age and quality. Some good street frontages, some underused and cleared areas. Good listed Victorian cottages.

**A11. Nicholas Street: Positive**

Positive listed Georgian terrace in good condition. Area dominated by heavy traffic. Mixed in quality bounded in parts by empty sites.

**A12. Dean's Field: Critical**

Peaceful area within City Walls, overlooking large open space. Successful modern courtyard form behind Northgate, leading to Dean's Field.

**A13. Town Hall: Critical**

City centre heart, includes Town Hall and faces Cathedral. Busy pedestrian street.

**A14. St. Peter's Churchyard: Positive**

Pleasant Georgian courtyard, once private, now with pedestrian route through from Northgate Street to Watergate Row.



### **A15. King Street: Critical**

Beautifully intact street of Georgian town houses. Different pastel colours and curving street adds interest, as does sett paving. Also strong Victorian terraces. Water Tower Street faces City Wall for the whole length of street. Peaceful and has access to Shropshire Union Canal and Northgate Locks.



*King Street (Taylor Young 2010)*

### **A16. Godstall Lane: Positive**

A charming lane with appropriate uses, views to Cathedral and intimate quality. Vibrant uses.

### **A17. Newgate Street: Neutral**

Fragmented street remnant amongst Grosvenor Centre. Still some buildings of merit but in a very poor setting.

## **Character Statement**

*“ The Cross area contains most of the key elements which give Chester its special character and strong sense of place. The Cathedral, The Rows, the Town Hall, the four principal shopping streets and the only large open space remaining inside The Walls, along with a remarkable collection of historic buildings of mixed styles but with a predominance of 'vernacular revival' black and white buildings. The unique opportunity to walk at first floor level on The Rows and also on the Walls, adds a dimension in a city unique to Chester.”*

## **Management and Policy Recommendations**

Conservation policy appears to be generally working well in the area. A significant conservation effort in the 1970s and 1980s has resulted in the major enhancement of many historic buildings which were in distress and more recently of all the major streets, including high quality re-paving. The whole area is already within a Conservation Area and there are a large number of listed buildings (including several Grade II\* and Grade I).

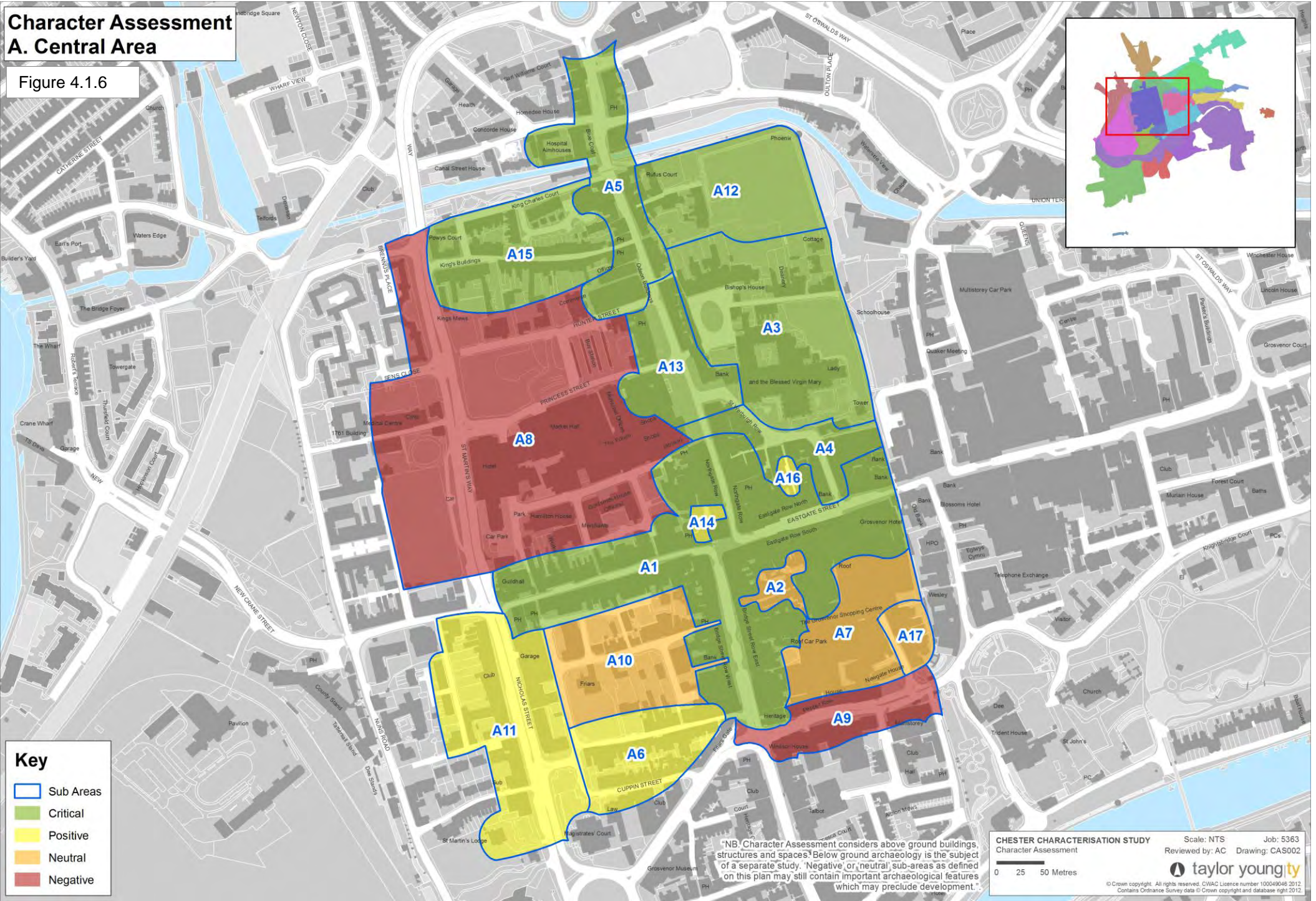
Future conservation effort should be directed to the enhancement of backland areas in terms of appropriate infill, improved public realm and the rear elevations of buildings, which have suffered from poor control of visible services such as air conditioning equipment. Pedestrian routes through existing alleyways are crucial for the permeability of the city and should be an important consideration in any redevelopment.

Shop-fronts on all the streets in the area are mixed but with many good examples, although up-dated guidance would be beneficial. Guidance on appropriate surfacing for the Rows walkways would, over time, result in a more consistent aesthetic (see the Rows Masterplan by BDP).



# Character Assessment A. Central Area

Figure 4.1.6





## Capacity to Accommodate Change

This character area is mostly a fine grain area of consistent historic value. However, there may still be opportunities for change. Larger scale opportunity for redevelopment may be provided in the Markets sub-area (A8). Elsewhere, some of the backland areas, notably Commonhall Street, have capacity for development of appropriate scale and form to reflect the surrounding historic fabric. While the Cathedral Precinct is highly sensitive, it too has areas including the former quarry (off Northgate Street via the Little Abbey Gateway, north of Abbey Square) which might hold potential for limited development of an exceptionally high design quality. What is crucial is that where there are opportunities for redevelopment, given the extent of heritage assets and their settings, development must be of an exceptionally high design quality.

The Commonhall Stables site offers a potentially significant opportunity for redevelopment which could enhance the Nicholas Street frontage. Its height should respect the Georgian terrace to the south and there is scope for contemporary design outside the historic core.

The area where change is most likely to be accommodated is the Market area (A8). This is a poor environment, including several key spaces and buildings (see the Market area and Hamilton Place descriptions under Key Detractors) and the character of City would benefit from its redevelopment. To the immediate west of the bus station is a previously developed site that, at the time of writing, has been cleared and has a temporary landscape treatment. This should be added to this area of potential change, which collectively offers a significantly sized site. This is the site of the proposed Northgate redevelopment scheme.

## Design Principles for New Development

In infill sites, new development will need to follow the proportions, materials, colours and styles of surrounding development closely,

without necessarily being pastiche. The prevailing building line and building heights should be followed, without abandoning variety and the architecture should be muted and not detract from the surrounding listed buildings. In backland areas there may be potential for new courtyard development accessed from the principal streets. This should be similar in approach to the recent developments on the Heritage Court area. The rear elevations of surrounding historic buildings should be placed in a sympathetic setting and historic routes should be maintained through the sites.

The Market area offers potential for a more comprehensive redevelopment. This needs to be mindful of the following considerations:

- providing a strong and attractive frontage to St Martin's Way
- respecting and enhancing views to the Town Hall from St Martin's Way
- respecting the setting of listed buildings, notably the Town Hall, the Cathedral, the Guildhall and rear of buildings on Watergate Street, the Coach and Horses (on Northgate Street), the Odeon and the adjacent Georgian townhouses on the western side of St Martin's Way.
- reserving and respecting the identified buildings of townscape merit on Hunter Street, Northgate Street and the rear of Watergate Street.
- re-instating the historic grain of the area by providing north-south routes through the development blocks. Where possible these should align with historic routes such as the extension of Crook Street to Princess Street.
- Elevational design, materials, colours and heights should respond to the historic townscape and urban form of the City.