

4.3 C. Monastic Lands

Character Area Assessment

Location

This character area occupies the north-eastern corner of the part of the city lying within the walls, extending southwards between the western city wall and St Martin's Way/Nicholas Street.

Sub-Areas

Area C is sub-divided into four sub-areas.



C4. Nuns Road

- **C1: Watergate** – Watergate Street between from the Watergate itself to St. Martin's Way.
- **C2: Stanley Place** – the Georgian street lying between City Walls Road and the former Linen Hall site.
- **C3: Infirmary** – the Infirmary building, Queens School and the area between the City Walls and St Martin's Way, now occupied by new housing.
- **C4: Nuns Road** – the southern part of the area: Nuns Road and the western part of Grey Friars and Black Friars Streets.

Historical Development

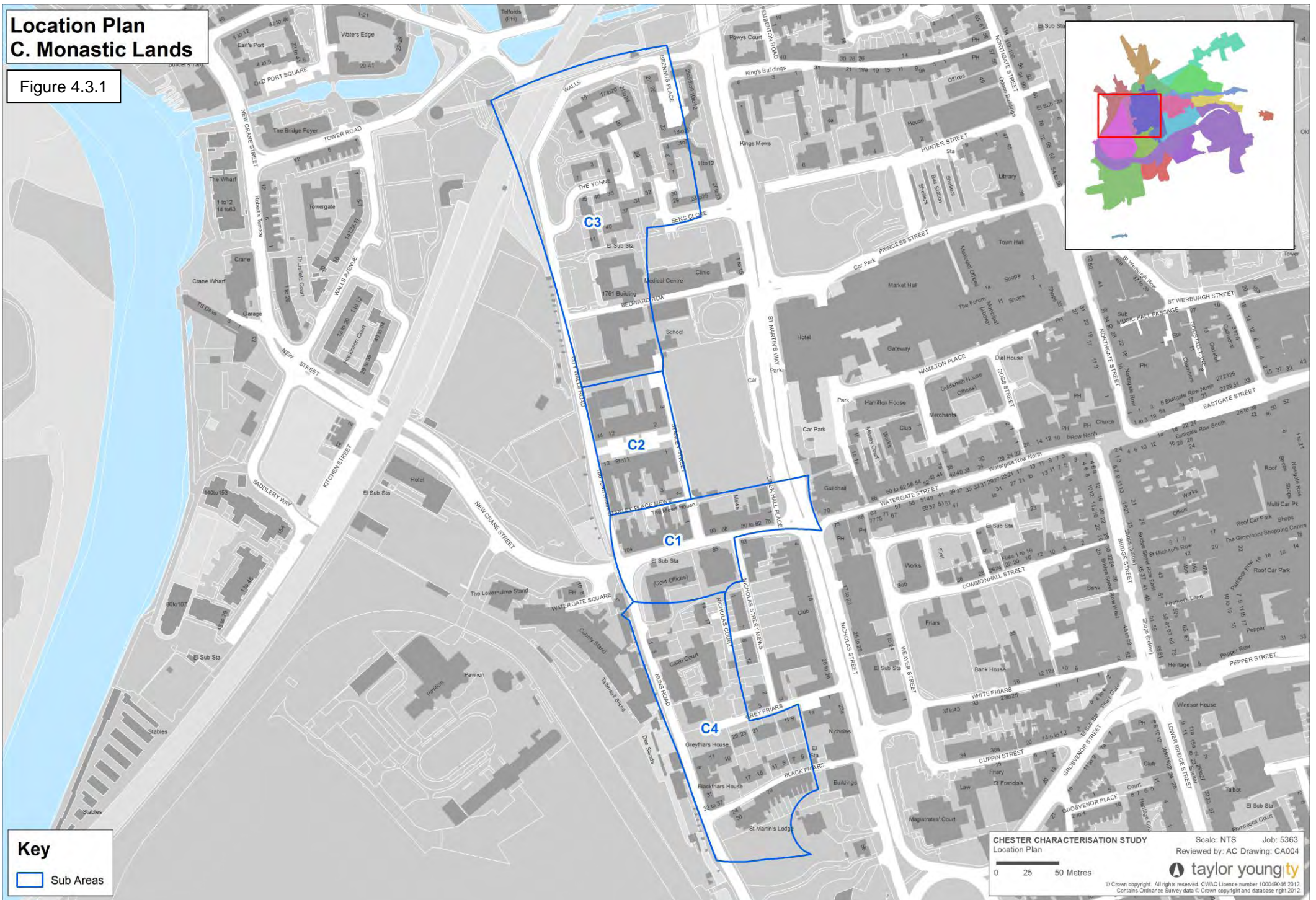
This is a part of Chester with a rich and varied history. Although within the medieval walls, much of this area has remained as open fields until the 18th to 20th centuries. Its history has also been associated with major institutional uses (the monasteries and the Infirmary), giving it a different history and character to most of Chester.

Roman Chester

In Roman times the ground on this side of the city, west of the present day Inner Ring Road, sloped sharply westwards down to the river bank and this slope was eventually cut into three terraces to produce level platforms for buildings and agriculture. The lowest of these terraces was fronted by the massive stone retaining wall which formed the Roman quayside, parts of which may still be seen on the Roodee today. This area lay outside the Roman walls but the medieval City Wall was eventually

Location Plan C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.1



built on top of this lower terrace. The erection of this great wall produced a barrier at the foot of the hillside against which deposits washed down from the slopes above could accumulate, a process that continued from the 12th century right through to fairly recent times. The result is that the entire sloping hillside has disappeared beneath around five metres of accumulated deposits and the ground level today is now more or less level with the top of the wall. Looking over the parapet opposite the Infirmary at the drop below and the City Wall's great supporting buttresses, makes the situation dramatically clear and explains why the walls are so different on this side of the City.



The dramatic change in level across the western wall

In this area, adjacent to the part of the west wall, is the foundation of an ancient Roman bath house, which is pierced by the furnace arch of a hypocaust. Also found on the site were the remains of a sudatory (sweating bath) and many tiles stamped with the wild boar motif of the XXth Legion, considerable amounts of coins of the reigns of

Hadrian and Trajan and an altar dedicated to Aesculapius: the Roman Goddess of healing who was always honoured at legionary bath houses.

The land upon which the infirmary later stood was anciently known as Lady Barrow's Hey, Hey being a Saxon name for a field enclosed with hedges. Earlier still, the land was used by the Romans as a cemetery and many graves were uncovered when the hospital was being built and enlarged. Chester historian Frank Simpson recorded that, in 1858 workmen discovered several Roman tombs, which contained such articles as terra-cotta lamps, clay vessels and coins of the period of Domitian.

The Monastic Orders

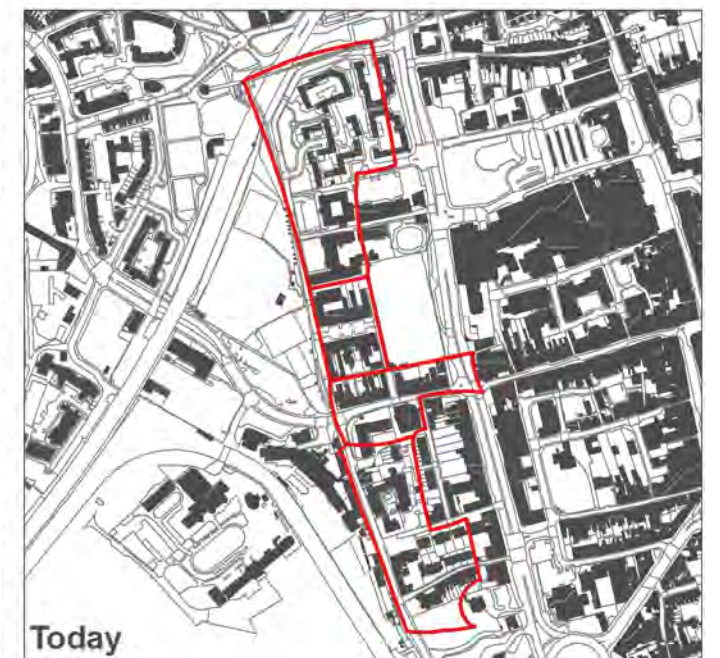
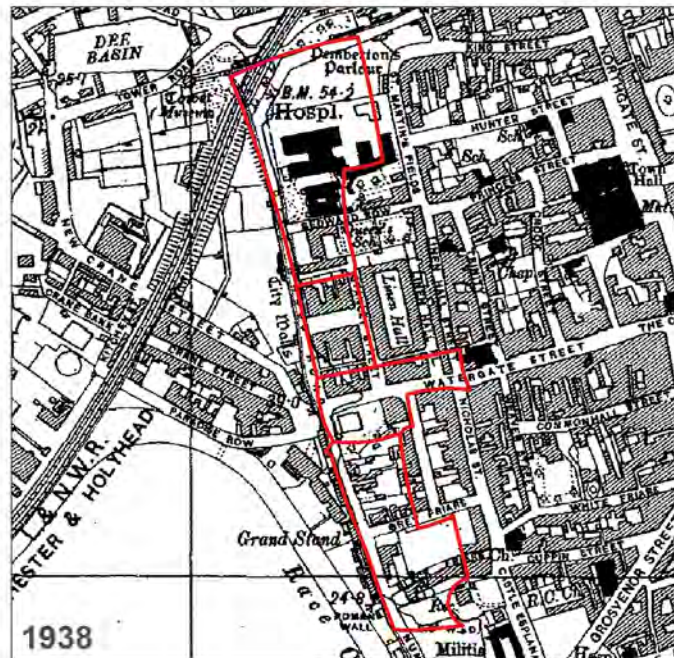
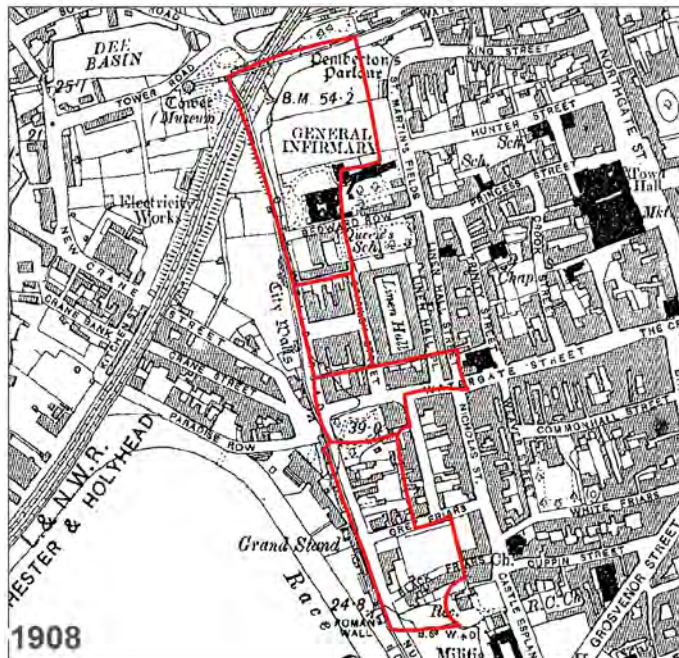
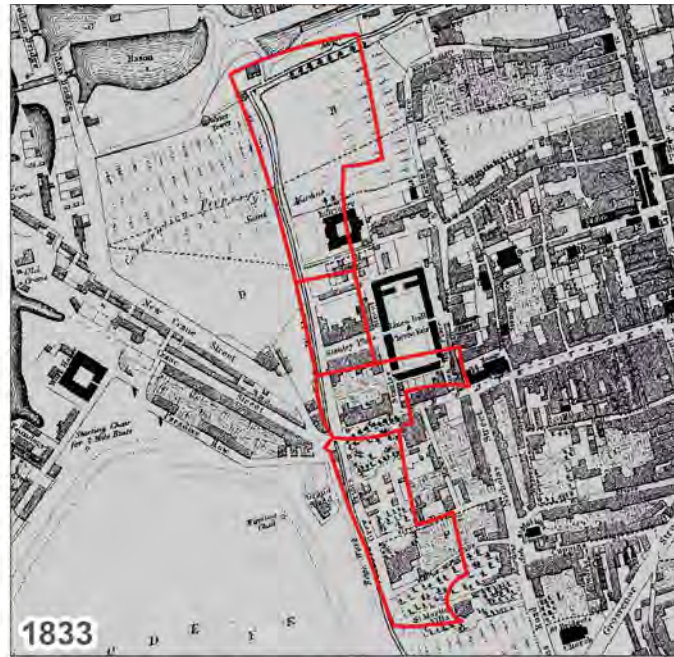
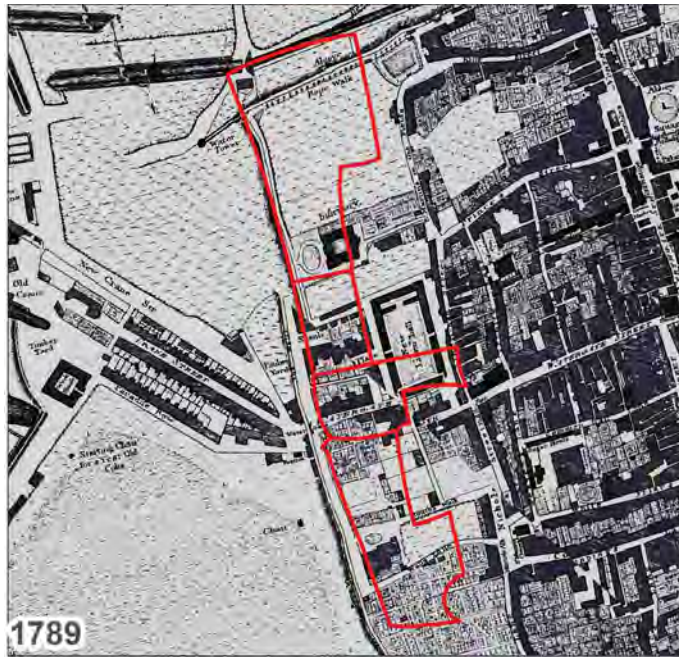
This character area is named Monastic Lands because of the former presence in this area of two religious orders: The Franciscans (or Grey Friars) and the Dominicans (or Black Friars). Additionally, close to this area, were the Nuns of St. Mary (south of Black Friars on the site of the new HQ buildings, hence 'Nun's Road'). There was also the Carmelite **White Friars**. Their monastery and lands were situated on the eastern side of Nicolas Street (hence the street name 'White Friars'). All of these orders were dissolved in 1537-8 by Henry VIII.

All of the land bounded by today's Watergate Street, Bedward Row St. Martin's Way and the City Walls once formed the precinct of the **Franciscan Friars** (the *Grey Friars*).

The street of **Black Friars** marks the approximate boundary between the precincts of the nuns of St. Mary's and the Dominican Friary, whose lands extended northward from here almost as far as Watergate Street. The Dominicans, or Black Friars, were the first to establish themselves in Chester, founding their house here around 1236 (only fifty years after the first English Dominical foundation, at Oxford) and they dedicated their church to St. Nicolas.

Historical Development C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.2





Artists impression of the Dominican Friary

Their church was rebuilt and expanded at least three times during the three centuries of occupation of the site and the last, and grandest, was still incomplete when the Friary was dissolved.

The Franciscan Friary was founded in 1237-8, only a year or so after the Dominicans.

Together with the other two Chester religious houses on this side of the City, the Franciscans finally surrendered their house to Henry VIII's commissioners on 15th August 1538 after which time the estate passed through the hands of several owners including, in 1588, the Warburtons. They sold it to the Stanleys, Earls of Derby, in 1622 who retained the lands until 1775 when they were purchased by the Linen Merchants, who erected their new Linen Hall on part of the site and sold the rest for residential development.

During the 1770s Stanley Place and Stanley Street were developed. At the time of this sale the entire area was known as the Grey Friar's Close or, alternatively, as the Yacht Field.

The friary buildings, remarkably, survived right through from the Dissolution until this final splitting up of the lands for development. The tall steeple of their church long served as a guide to mariners entering the Port of Chester, and is marked on contemporary charts as such, before falling into private hands and finally being demolished.

The Linen Hall

The Franciscan Greyfriars' monastery later became the site of Chester's Linen Hall. This was built in 1778 by Irish linen merchants as a depot containing many shops in a spacious area from which their cloth was distributed by wagon and pack horse throughout the country.



1896 OS Extract

After the linen trade declined, the building was utilised as a cheese store and market, trading in the world-renowned Cheshire cheese. It was said

to have been a sleepy and quiet place except during the Cheese Fairs, when in a few hours thousands of pounds could change hands.

The site more recently was used for stables associated with the racecourse. In 2009 the stables were demolished, they were of no special architectural merit, and the site is now in temporary use as a surface car park. Although outside the boundaries of this area, the Linen Hall site plays a significant role in its history and character.

Chester Royal Infirmary

Another key use that has influenced this area is Chester Royal Infirmary. The Infirmary was founded as a charitable institution in 1755 when it was housed in the upper part of the Bluecoat School, outside the Northgate. The Bluecoat soon became hopelessly overcrowded, and so, in 1761 a purpose-built hospital, designed to accommodate 100 patients, was erected upon open ground within the city walls, a location known as St. Martin in the Fields.



The Infirmary in the 1960s

It was here that John Haygarth, a physician much in advance of his time, who served from 1767-1798, separated victims of infectious diseases

such as small-pox, typhus and cholera from non-infectious cases. Segregation in spacious, airy wards and a regime of scrupulous cleanliness resulted in an immediate reduction in the death rate, and Dr. Haygarth's practices were soon adopted elsewhere.

Despite the development from the 1150s of houses associated with the religious orders, much of the land to the north of the Infirmary remained open, serving in its ancient role as the fields and vegetable gardens of the monks and nuns. After the Dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, their estates were gradually split up and developed, the final section, **Lady Barrow's Hey**, as late as 1963, when it was occupied by the modern extension to the Infirmary.

The former Chester Royal Infirmary finally closed in 1993 after 230 years of medical care on the site. Services were transferred to the Countess of Chester Hospital on Liverpool Road and the site was sold for the housing development that now occupies the site.

Land-uses

As the historical analysis shows the use of this area has changed significantly over time. Today most of the area is in residential use, including the original Infirmary building. Exceptions include a number of offices in the Georgian townhouses of Stanley Place and bars and restaurants on Watergate Street. In general, although historically part of the City within the walls, and in close proximity to the retail core today, the area has never been uniformly urban in character or part of the City Centre. The construction of the Inner Ring Road has served to further isolate the area from the urban core and confirm its residential function. It has a pleasant, quieter feel whilst retaining the setting of the Walls, historic buildings and views out over the Roodee.

Urban Form

The form of the area varies according to the age of development. The fact that most of the area remained open fields until the 1700s means that the organic medieval street form that is found across most of the central area does not generally exist here (with the notable exception of Watergate Street). Instead, a Georgian form predominates, consisting of a more regular pattern of straight streets and perpendicular intersections. Within this street form, buildings sit with a continuous frontage on narrow, deep plots fronting the back-of-pavement. This varies with the larger institutional uses of the Infirmary and Queen's School, which are set back in their own grounds and detached, and in areas of later infill and development. Also significant is St. Martin's Lodge, sitting within its own grounds, to the north of the HQ building.

The character area also includes the 1950s/60s office blocks and domestic houses in sub-area C4 and the new housing development in C3, all of which is out of context with any historic form.

The unifying theme in the area is the City Walls. This provides a strong environment all around the character area. Strong views are provided westwards over the wall at many points, benefiting from the change in level as land eastwards drops away and offering good views over the Racecourse. Apart from a few examples this asset has not been largely exploited by development.

Otherwise the area consists mostly of a series of side-streets and alleyways linking the inner Ring Road to the City Walls, for pedestrians if not vehicles. Opportunities for north-south movement through the area are incoherent and disjointed. The feel therefore is that of a series of different environments. Stanley Place is the best of these, providing a virtually intact and complete example of a Georgian street of townhouses. This is spoiled only by the poor vista at its eastern end,

which offers only a view of the vacant Linen Hall site and the unattractive Crowne Plaza hotel.

Watergate Street has a strong back-of-pavement form with continuous Georgian frontages on its northern side. This character holds up, despite the later development and retaining walls on the opposite side of the street. The topography here is a strong feature, with the steeply falling street serving to greater emphasis the Watergate at the bottom, and views up to the Guildhall at the top.



Watergate Street




Stanley Place

Urban Form C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.3



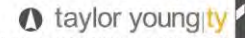
Key

 Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Figure Ground - C. Monastic Lands

Scale: NTS
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: FG004

0 25 50 Metres

 taylor young

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C. Monastic Lands: Typical Materials and Details



The recent housing development on the former Infirmary site in the north is something of a peculiarity. Great care is taken to replicate Georgian features such as the iron hooped arches and steps up to front doors yet the form of houses and apartment blocks is clearly modern, rendering the period detailing rather pointless. Nevertheless the housing is not unattractive and a strong frontage is provided to St Martin's Way. It is also pleasing to see a street vista created to frame Pemberton's Tower on the northern wall.

Townscape Character

Although the area is mixed the dominant character is that of Georgian townhouses, as most completely expressed at Stanley Place but also visible throughout the southern part of the character area and in modern pastiche in the north. Most of these buildings are three-storey, brick, mostly not covered in render (with a few exceptions) and have traditional pitched slate roofs and sash windows with lintels. A common variation is for the central window to have a round-arched head. Doors are generally recessed into frames or have porticos and generally have fanlights. Curved corners are an interesting feature that is seen in several places. On City Walls Road buildings are often two storey and round headed door arches are common.

Key buildings are the Infirmary (1761), Queens School (neo-Gothic in style) and The Friars (the area's only example of the back-and-white Vernacular Revival style).

Landscape Character

There are no formal open spaces in this area but the views over the Roodee from City Walls Road and the street trees here provide a strong landscape setting. This is in part provided by trees and grounds of the Infirmary and the new housing development here. Stanley Place also benefits from formal tree planting and investment in the public realm.



Black Friars

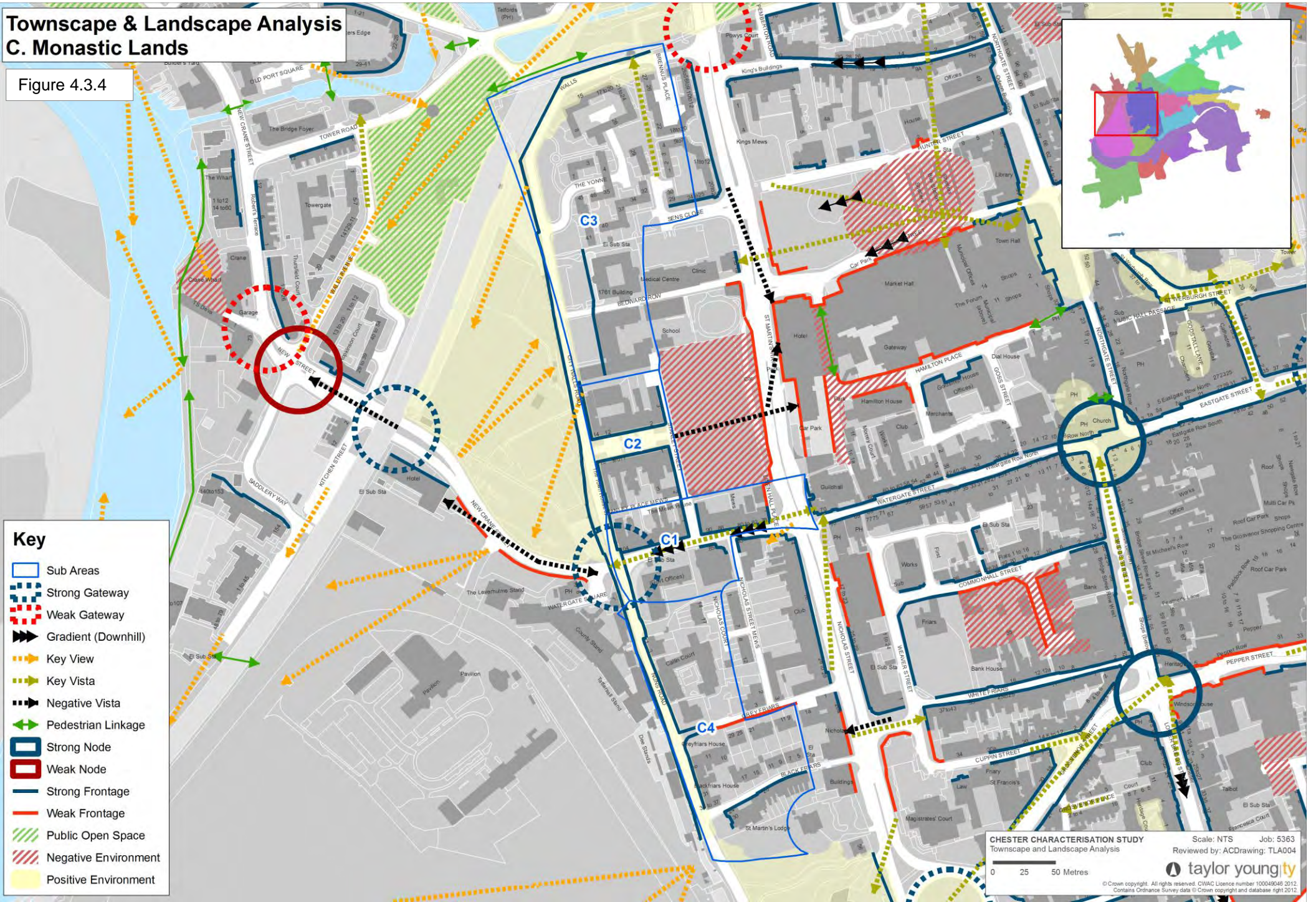
At places in the middle of the area the landscape deteriorates where it takes the forms of narrow lanes and alleys with informal car parking and unclear definition of public and private space.

Boundary treatments are generally back-of-pavement, except in the new housing development where they are set behind railings on the St Martin's Way frontage and set behind a low wall within landscaping on City Walls Road. The Queens School and the old Infirmary building are also set behind railings and hedges.

Public realm quality is generally moderate in the southern part of the area and of high quality in sub-areas C2 (Stanley Place) and C3 (Infirmary). Visible archaeology includes the City Walls and the Watergate. There have been Roman remains found here (see Historical Development).

Townscape & Landscape Analysis C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.4



- 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

Designated Heritage Assets

All of the area is within the City Centre Conservation Area. There are also a large number of listed buildings, including all of Stanley Place and all of the northern side of Watergate Street, as well as a large proportion of the southern side of Black Friars. Key listed buildings include:

- The **City Walls** and **Watergate** (Grade I, also a Scheduled Monument)
- **Sedan House**, Stanley Place, Grade II* (1780)
- **1-2 Stanley Place**, Grade II* (c.1780/1800)
- **2-3 Stanley Street**, Grade II* (1781)
- **The Infirmary**, City Walls Road, Grade II (1761 with later additions)



- **The Queens School**, City Walls Road, Grade II (1881-3)



- **Watergate House**, Watergate Street, Grade II* (1820)



There are very few Article 4 Directions in the area: just two houses on Black Friars. The condition of listed buildings in the area appears to be generally very good throughout.

Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Four un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit have been identified, all of which are in sub-area C4: Nuns Road.

- **C4a. Friar's Garden**, Grey Friars – a Vernacular Revival style villa built in the late 19th century on former monastery land.



- **C4b. 9-12 Nuns Road** – interesting Victorian building with neo-Georgian frontage with flying buttress supports.



- **C4c. Nuns Road Terrace** – early Victorian terrace with interesting Oriel windows and curved corner to Black Friars.

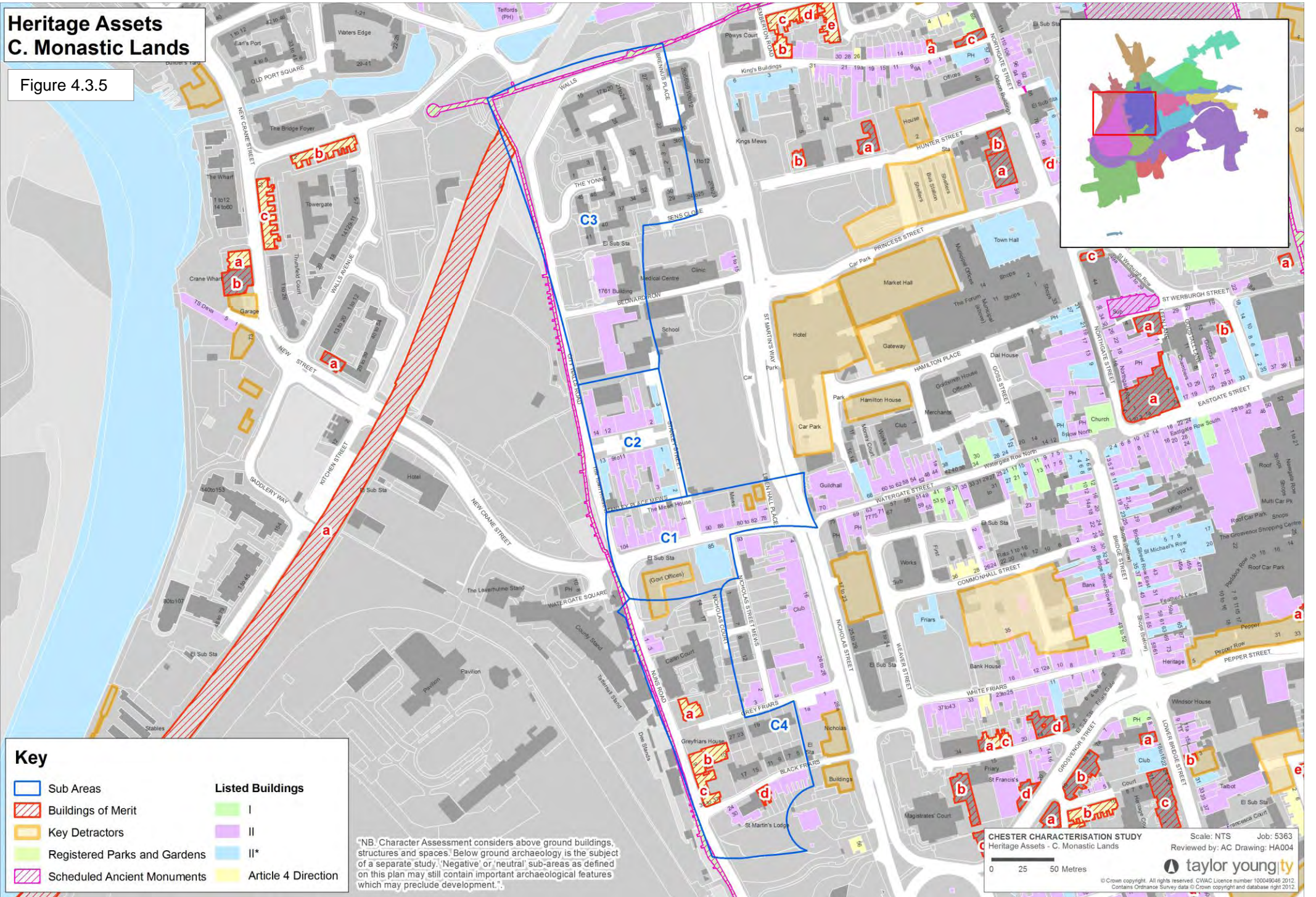


- **C4d. Early Victorian cottages**, 20-22 Black Friars – simple domestic form but good examples of their type. Already has Article 4 directions.



Heritage Assets C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.5



Key

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

"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."

Key Detractors

Detracting features in the area include two low grade sheds adjacent to the Linen Hall site, to the rear of the buildings on the north side of Watergate (in sub-area C1). Norroy House, the modern office building on the inside of the walls on Watergate Street also acts as a detractor in the setting of the walls as seen from the outside where it is visible over the top.

The key detractors to this area actually lie outside its boundaries: the Linen Hall site itself and the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The Linen Hall actually has a historic wall retained, which is in poor condition, and the temporary and low grade nature of its use creates a certain blight on this area. The Crowne Plaza is highly visible in sensitive parts of the area, for example on Stanley Place, where (together with the Linen Hall site) it presents a poor termination to the street vista.

Summary: Character Assessment

In summary this remains a well defined area of similar and discernible character. Although within the City Walls it has a quieter, more tranquil feel than other central parts of the central City with good views westward. The fine Georgian buildings are in good condition and the Inner Ring Road has had the positive effect of preserving the peaceful character of the area. The only exception is Watergate Street, which carries heavy traffic along its narrow street, limiting the quality of the pedestrian environment but not impacting negatively on the built form.

Character Assessment is shown on Figure 4.1.6 and explained below.

- **C1. Watergate : Critical** – an important medieval street lined with fine Georgian buildings, leading to the historic Watergate.
- **C2. Stanley Place : Critical** – an excellent example of a complete Georgian residential street in excellent condition.

- **C3. Infirmary : Positive** – The former Infirmary site, mostly redeveloped but with two important listed buildings in good condition.
- **C4. Nuns Road : Positive** – a mixed environment with an important history and a number of interesting buildings.

Character Statement

“This is an important area in the City’s history. Links with the monastic past are important. The relatively late development of former open land has meant that a strong Georgian street grid persists, and many Georgian buildings survive in good condition. The former Infirmary building also tells of an important use in the City’s history. The City Walls provide a pleasant setting and the area generally has a tranquil feel.”

Management and Policy Recommendations

Conservation policy appears to be working well in this area. Listed buildings are in good condition and key un-listed buildings seem to have remained close to their original form without the need for extensive Article 4 directions.

The development of the Linen Hall site will have a major impact on the character of this area and it is recommended that a Development Brief is prepared for this site soon, including firm and clear design and conservation principles.

Capacity to Accommodate Change

The area has changed several times in its history. In recent years it has undergone major change and has accommodated this without compromising the character of the area, as shown by the development of

the former Infirmary site. 1950s/60s suburban housing and offices in the southern part of the area have had poor regard to context but in general these developments have not prejudiced the overall character of the area.

Given the extent of listed buildings there are limited opportunities for significant redevelopment. This could occur if the aforementioned 1950s/60s buildings are redeveloped. If this is the case then appropriate redevelopment is likely to improve character in these areas. St. Martin's Lodge is currently vacant and attracting development interest. It is important that this building is maintained within its setting.

Design Principles for New Development

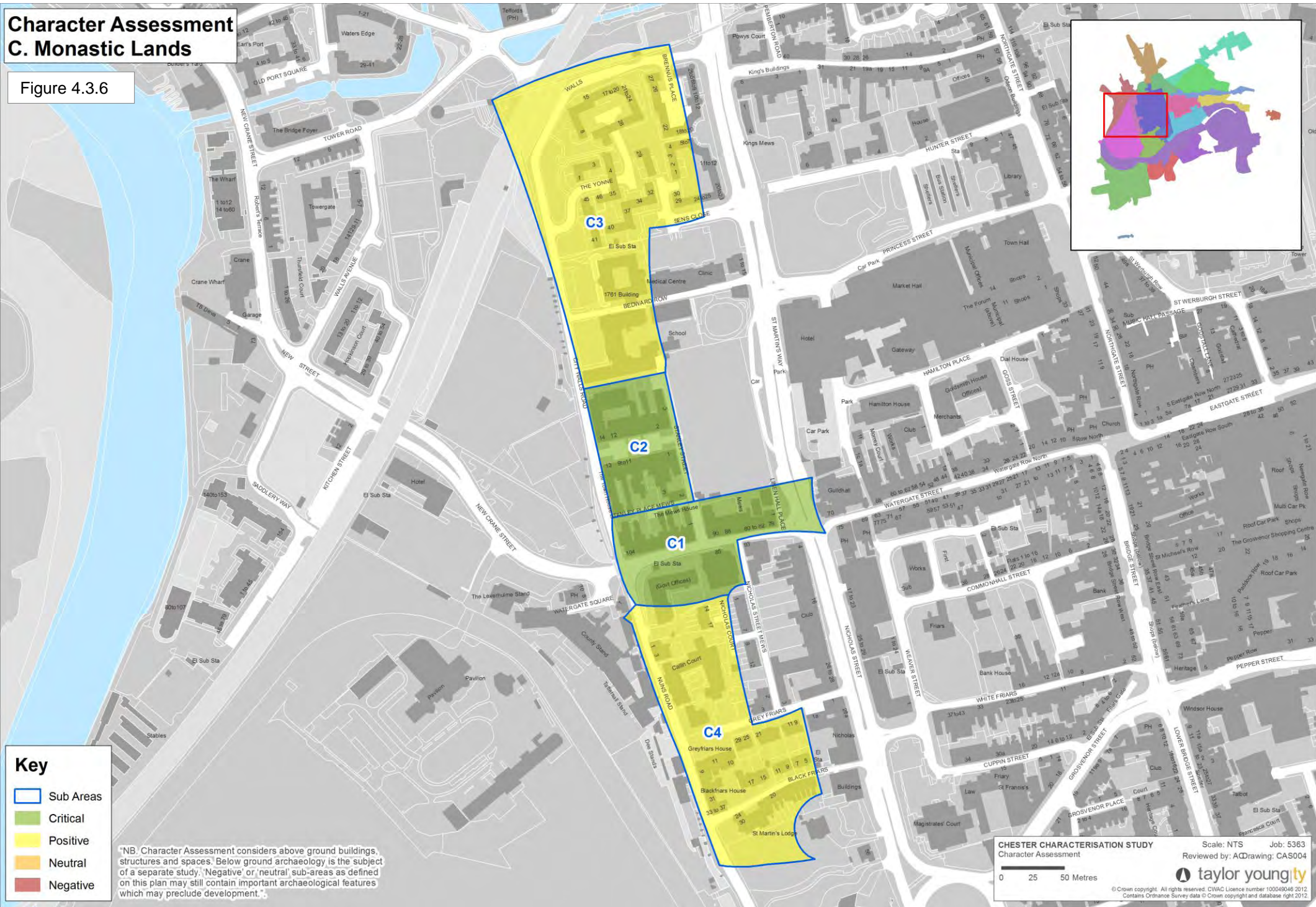
New development (whether on the Linen Hall site or in other smaller infill sites) need to respect:

- The regular Georgian street form – ensuring pedestrian permeability through the area.
- Corners and the termination of vistas created by this street pattern should be marked by development of appropriate stature and interest.
- Frontages should be generally continuous and back-of-pavement.
- Building should generally be 2-3 storeys in height in response to their surroundings, and should not detract from the setting of listed buildings.
- Elevations should follow the proportions, materials, colours and door and window detailing of the existing Georgian form. This could be interpreted either with an accurate but unobtrusive traditional approach or with an informed contemporary approach.



Character Assessment C. Monastic Lands

Figure 4.3.6



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