

4.7 K. The Old Port

Character Area Assessment

Location

The Old Port character area occupies a swathe of land to the west of the City Walls, approximately ten minutes walk from the City Centre. To the north, it takes in Tower Wharf and the canal basin up to Cambrian Road. The southern tail extends south of New Crane Street, occupying a triangular parcel of land between the railway line and the River Dee. The central portion includes the Dee Basin, Water Tower Gardens and Crane Wharf.

Sub-Areas

The Character area has been broken down into eight sub-areas as described below:

- **K1. Tower Wharf** – land around the canal basin between Raymond Street and Whipcord Lane.
- **K2. Upper Cambrian Road** – a collection of Grade II listed buildings stretching along the western banks of the canal.
- **K3. Dee Basin** – land either side of the canal between South view Road in the north and Tower Road in the south.
- **K4. New Crane Street/Crane Wharf** – a narrow strip of land along the banks of the Dee, including River Lock in the north and Crane Wharf to the south.

- **K5. Water Tower Gardens** – including the Water Tower located on the end of a spur on the north-west corner of the City Walls.
- **K6. South View Road** – a crescent of terraces framing Dee Basin, including a number of residential properties along Tower Road and part of New Crane Street.
- **K7. Sadlery Way/Riverside** – a triangular shaped parcel of land south of New Crane Street and abutting the railway line to the west.
- **K8. Sealand Road** – comprising the Cop Recreation ground and residential properties along the north side of Sealand Road.

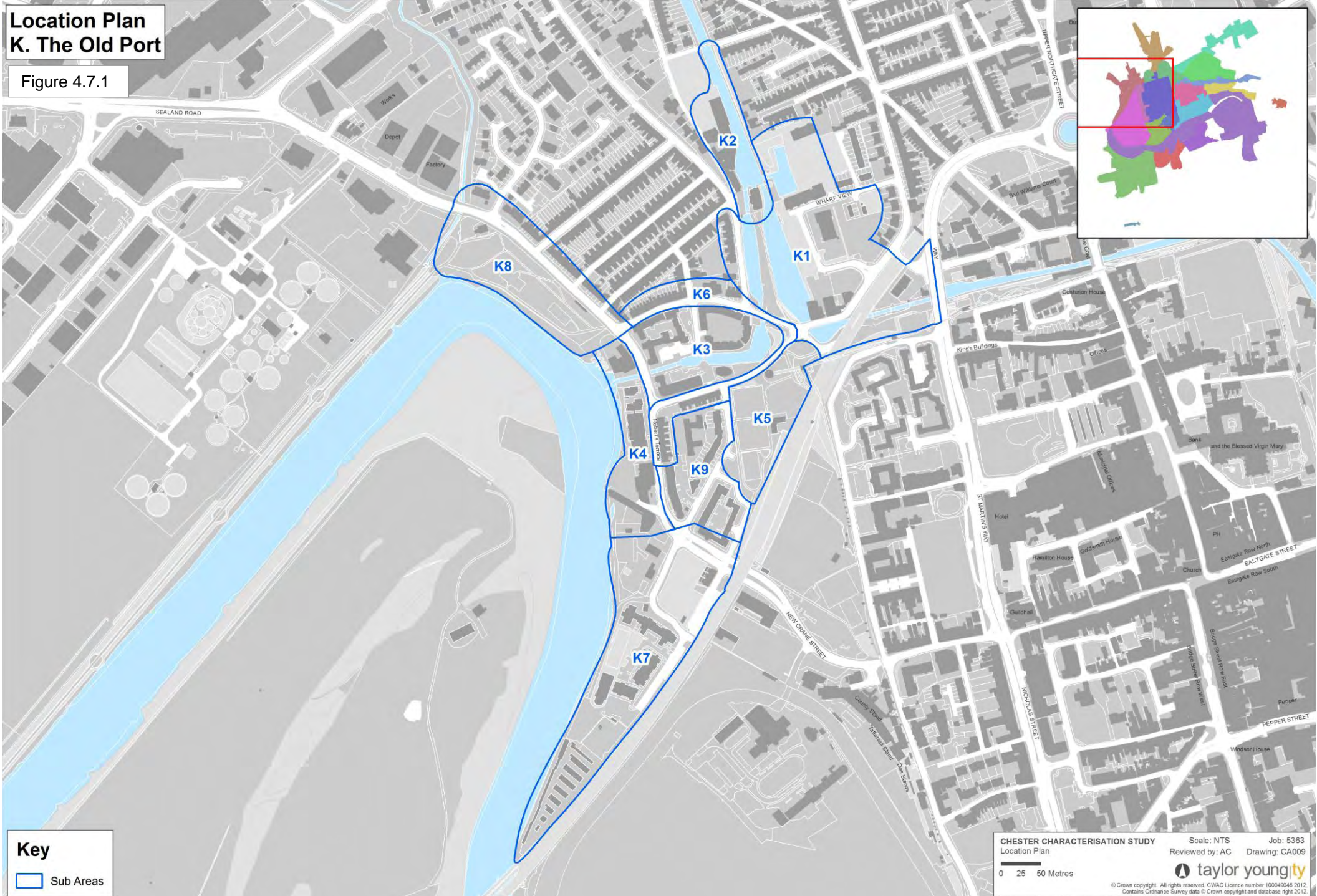


- **K9. Walls Avenue** - a new housing development accessed off New Crane Street.

Dee Basin

Location Plan K. The Old Port

Figure 4.7.1



Key

Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY Scale: NTS Job: 5363
 Location Plan Reviewed by: AC Drawing: CA009

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Historical Development

During the 13th and 14th century, Chester was the largest and busiest port in the north-west, trading with ports throughout the British Isles and Europe. In the 18th century, it traded in raw hide with the Americas and even sent slave ships to Africa. Grain and wine were also major imports.

Until the start of the 14th Century, the ancient city walls provided adequate defence to the port (the River used to extend as far as Watergate). However, silting of the river began to affect the depth of water, and it was deemed necessary to extend defences further out into the river. The Water Tower was built in 1322. In addition to its defensive role, it also functioned as a base for monitoring shipping and collecting shipping dues. Braun's Map of Chester 1581 clearly shows the Water Tower surrounded by water.

Silting of the River Dee had become a problem by the early 18th Century, leading to a loss of maritime trade to rival ports such as Liverpool. In response, the River Dee Company was formed and the Old Port area was developed as a, then, new port for the City. A cut was formed which allowed easier navigation and led to the construction of Crane Wharf. The warehouse (TS Deva), adjoining cottages and Harbour Master's House date from this time and can be seen on the map of 1789 which also shows Crane street which was laid out to link the new wharves with the city.

By the late 18th century, Chester's fortunes as a port further waned, fuelled partly by the growth in shipping at Liverpool, and focus shifted to linking it with the canal network, resulting in the construction of the Dee basin and Tower Wharf. The dry dock at Tower Wharf (known as Graving Dock) is believed to date from 1798, potentially making it the oldest surviving example of its kind on the canal system. There was still a substantial shipbuilding industry here at that time.

The Old Port area is also key to Chester's industrial development. In the early 19th century, the Roodee Gas Company built a gas works on land to the west of the railway viaduct (first used in 1846), which amalgamated with the Chester Gas Light Company in 1856. Historical maps from this period also show the Electric Light Building on Crane Street, designed by I. Matthews Jones and built in 1896. This building has local historical importance – being associated with a pioneering municipal undertaking to provide electrification to local farms. Ship building was an important industry within the area from the middle ages until the 19th century.



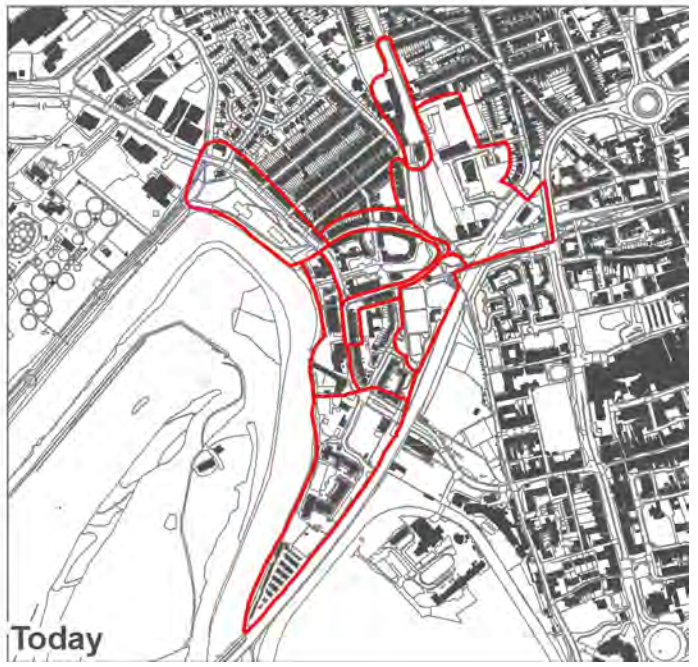
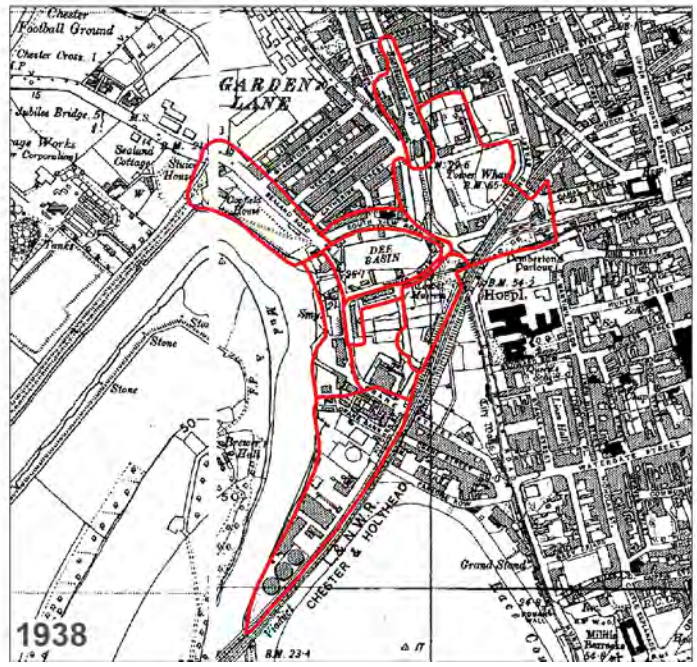
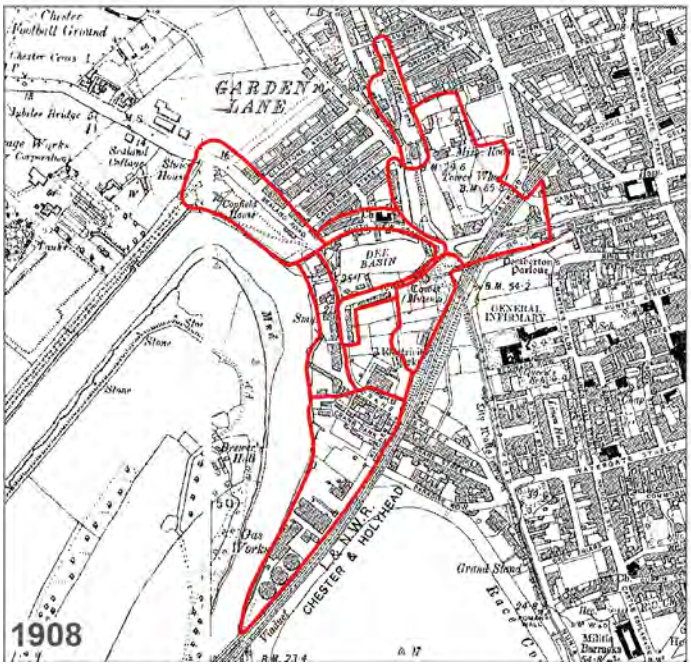
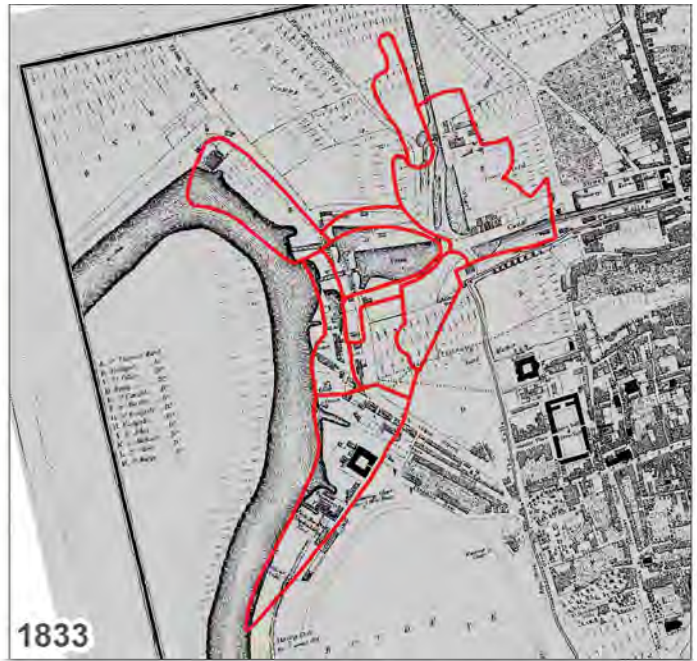
The Old Port and Water Tower (1837 engraving)



Dee Basin circa 1916 – Steamer and narrowboat 'Swan'

Historical Development K. The Old Port

Figure 4.7.2



Land-uses

The predominant land-use within this character area is residential. This comprises a mix of both traditional Victorian terraced housing (along Sealand Road and Whipcord Lane), and more recent developments (typically 3/4 storey apartment block) around Dee Basin (including some small retail uses at ground floor level), Walls Avenue and Sadlery Way.

The area also performs an important recreational role, the Cop along Sealand Road being a well used area of open space, providing access (albeit limited) to the river bank and affording long views towards Crane Wharf and beyond. Water Tower Gardens is a valued community resource, with facilities including bowls, tennis, putting and children's play.

Tower Wharf offers popular leisure moorings, allowing boaters to travel between Nantwich and Ellesmere Port and provides an attractive green setting that is popular with dog walkers. Taylor's Boatyard and The Canal Warehouse Workshop are also located here. Telford's public house adds to the leisure offer with an outdoor seating area to the rear overlooking the canal.

There are few employment uses in the area. A number of small businesses (mainly garages) operate from the railway arches nearest New Crane Street and there is a telephone exchange building at Tower Wharf. The former Canal Company Offices (Harvest House) currently provides office accommodation.

Urban Form

Transport infrastructure plays a key part in defining the character of this area, with the railway, river, canal and road network combining to provide the framework around which development has taken place. The area has undergone rapid change in recent years, with a number of modern apartment developments taking place, and further schemes are

either planned or on-site currently. These are now shaping the character of the area, although remnants of its shipping and industrial past do remain.

The area is located less than ten minutes walk from the city centre, but the ring road has a severing effect, especially where it meets Water Tower Street, although a pedestrian bridge is provided. The easiest and most direct route from the north is via the historic walls, descending into Water Tower Gardens. Crane Street provides the link with the city centre in the south, the railway viaduct providing a gateway into the site.

Leaving the historic core, the topography falls gently towards the river, signalling the presence of the Old Port area. At Raymond Street, the road rises above the canal and railway, affording long views across Tower Wharf and residential areas beyond. Level changes across Tower Wharf reinforce the prominence of the Grade II listed Telford's public house and former Canal Company offices when viewed from Whipcord Lane. The North Basin was excavated in 1999 and re-opened in 2000, providing a focal point for the adjacent new residential development.



View of Water Tower from Dee Basin

The Water Tower forms a prominent landmark with key views towards it from Walls Drive, Tower Road, Dee Basin, Whipcord Lane and the canalside. Walls Avenue offers strong views to the Walls, Water Tower and associated open space. There are long distance views from The Cop south towards Crane Wharf, TS Deva and the Harbour Master's House. From the City Walls, there are views towards the canal basin and glimpsed views of apartments at Saddlers Way which appear above the railway. The promenade at Crane Wharf, part of recent flood defence measures, provides a platform for attractive views across the river. Development at Walls Avenue frames a view across Water Tower Gardens from the steps leading down from the City Walls. Kitchen Street and Sadlery Way provide good vantage points for appreciating the railway arches.

The Earls Port development around Dee Basin comprises of mainly three and four storey apartment blocks set to back of pavement and providing a continuity of frontage along South View Road and Tower Road. The development addresses the canal well in terms of its design and scale with good articulation of corners, active ground floor uses and upper floor balconies overlooking the canal. However, the dominance of car parking does detract from the quality of the setting and the development presents a poor elevation along the western end of South View Road.

South of New Crane Street, a development of four and five storey contemporary apartment blocks is being delivered by Elan Homes, the first phase of which has reached completion (in December 2010). The development provides a strong east-west frontage, terminating views into the site. Later phases will help to strengthen the node at the New Crane Street/Walls Avenue/Sadlery Way junction, by framing the space and providing articulation of the corners.

Traditional Victorian terraced properties are concentrated along Sealand Road, South View Road, Tower Road and New Crane Street (Roberts

Terrace). Along Sealand Road, properties form a continuous frontage along the street, set back behind boundary walls. Properties overlook the park but views into it are restricted by mature trees and earth an earth mounding flood defence (known as 'The Cop'). Elsewhere, properties are typically set to back of pavement. The row of terraces along South View Road follow curve of the street, leading the eye towards the river.

Along New Crane Street, the building line is set back from the pavement edge behind low level rails and a landscaped buffer.



View south down Sadlery Way



Terraces along South View Road

Urban Form K. The Old Port

Figure 4.7.3



Key
Sub Areas

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Figure Ground – K. The Old Port
Scale: NTS Job: 5363
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: FG009
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Townscape Character

This character area contains an interesting mix of contemporary and Victorian buildings which generally sit in harmony with each other.

Terraced properties are typically Victorian in age, brick built with traditional pitched slate roofs. Properties along Tower Road contain brick banding and timber framed windows with round arched lintels and fanlights. An interesting feature of Robert's Terrace is the articulation in the roofline. Bay windows are a strong feature along Sealand Road and Whipcord Lane.

Recent development has been sympathetic to the historical context, with red brick and slate being commonly used materials. The use of simulated painted timber panelling at Sadlery Way is an appropriate response to the riverside context and shipping heritage. New townhouses on Walls Avenue replicate Victorian features such as fanlights, stringcourses and bays and gable fronts. Apartments along New Crane Street also display sensitive use of timber. Gable fronts and stone lintels a further reference to the area's heritage.

Landscape Character

The public realm is on the whole good, with some quality open spaces including the Cop Recreation ground, Water Tower Gardens and the Tower Wharf. The promenade along the eastern banks of the river, stretching from River Lock to the stables in the south, is an attractive pedestrian route offering pleasant views of the River.

There is a solid Victorian sandstone wall along sections of Tower Road, Raymond Street and South View Road that defines the street well and references the Water Tower.

Setts paving and traditional street lamps are a feature of parts of Upper Cambrian Road and this treatment could be extended further as part of

the redevelopment of the vacant plot of land at the corner of Cambrian Road.

Heavy traffic along New Crane Street has a negative impact on the area and crossing can be difficult along certain sections. Tree planting and wide pavements along Sealand Road help to soften the impact of traffic in this area.

The quality of public realm at Crane Wharf is poor considering its historical significance. Land to the rear of Crane House is dominated by car parking and the surfacing is poor, uneven and holds pools of water. There is great potential for the creation of a new public square in this location, enhancing the setting of TS Deva and Crane House.

Setting of the Walls – Water Tower Gardens: Water Tower Gardens, once a navigable waterway at high tide, provides the setting for the corner of the City Walls and the Spur Wall, which steps down steeply from Bonewaldersthorpe's Tower on the corner of the walls to the Water Tower itself, which once guarded the harbour. This is the point where Victorian engineers punched twice through the north-west corner of the Walls for railway construction. The gardens themselves are a peaceful



and high quality green space, which importantly allows an appreciation of the way the Walls were built above river levels, although from a distance it is not easy to distinguish parts of the Walls from railway retaining structures.

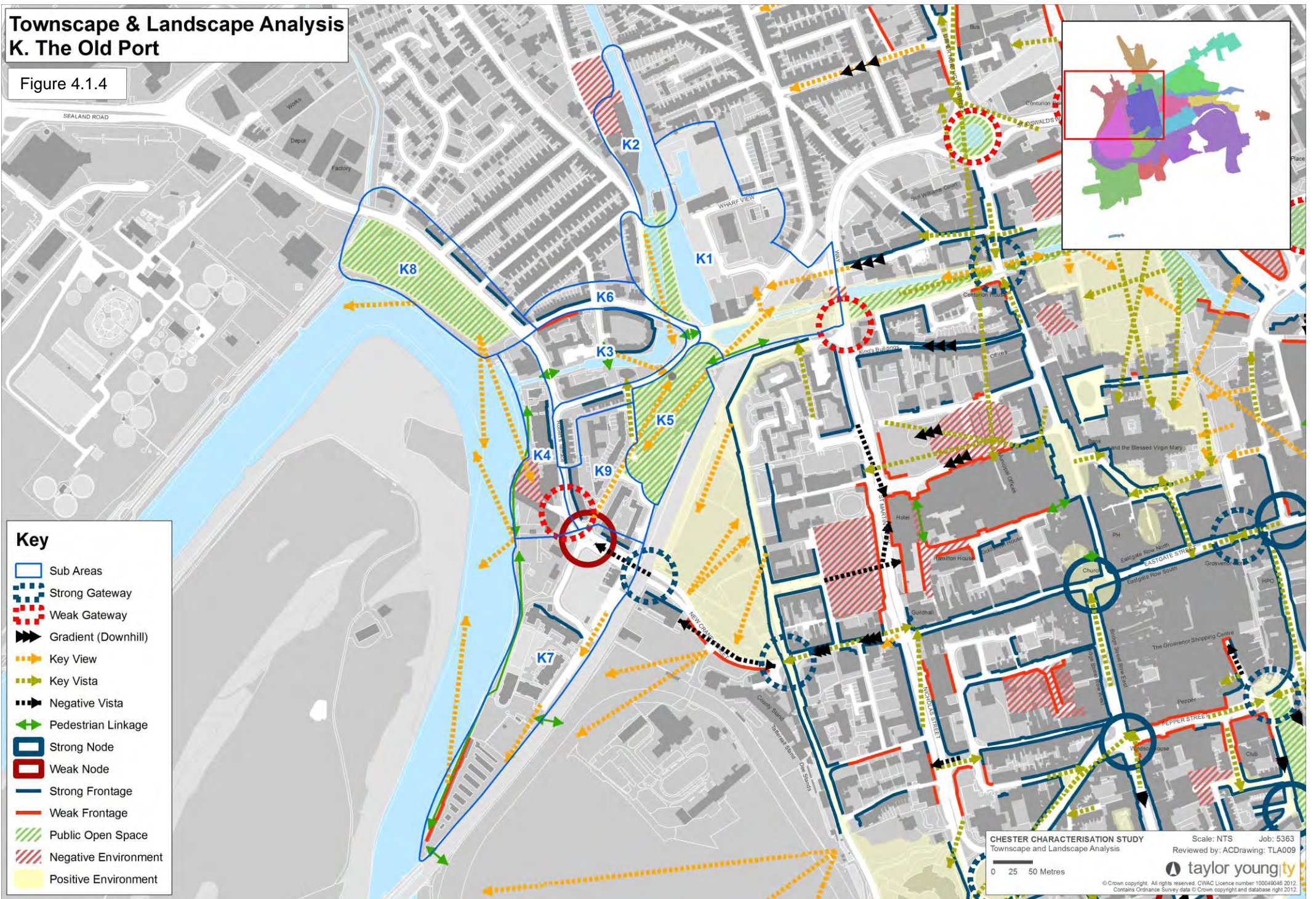
Water Tower Gardens

K. The Old Port: Typical Materials and Details



Townscape & Landscape Analysis K. The Old Port

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

Designated Heritage Assets

The area lies along the western edge of the City Conservation Area, the boundary of which follows the line of the railway until just south of New Crane Street where the conservation area extends west to the river, taking in Walls Avenue, Tower Road, Water Tower Gardens, the Dee Basin and South View Road. Sub-area K8 along Sealand Road falls outside of the conservation area.

The **Water Tower**, together with its spur wall are Grade 1 listed. The Tower was built between 1322 and 1325 and renovated in 1639.

Tower Wharf (K1) and Upper Cambrian Road (K2) fall within the conservation area, and a concentration of Grade II listed buildings can be found here, including:

- **The Iron River Bridge, Graving Dock and Graving Lock;**
- **The Canal Warehouse Workshop, Blacksmith's Forge, Sawmill, Narrow Boat shed, Taylor's Boatyard and the 'Flat Shed'** (all lining the western side of Upper Cambrian Road);
- **Telford's public house** and the **former Canal Company offices** on Raymond Street.

At **Crane Wharf**, the warehouse (now home to TS Deva Sea Cadet Corps), no 7 New Crane Bank and the adjoining three cottages are all Grade II listed. The warehouse is believed to have been built between 1750 and 1760, the northern end being rebuilt after a fire in the 19th century. The cottages were built a little later.



The Water Tower



Telford's Public House and the former canal company offices

Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Eight buildings of townscape merit have been identified within the Old Port area.

- **K1a. 'Tin Tabernacle' on Whipcord Lane** – Corrugated steel structure used as a chapel, locally important.



- **K4a. Crane House** – a 3 storey Victorian property



- **K4b. Warehouse, New Crane Street** – industrial building with local historical importance



- **K6a. Chester Deaf Centre**, South View Road – an Edwardian detached property in Queen Anne style relating well in scale and appearance to surrounding properties.



- **K6b. 1-12 Tower Road.** A 19th Century terrace of properties with traditional pitched roofs, and many original features intact



- **K6c. 1-12 Roberts Terrace, New Crane Street.** A row of 2 storey Victorian terraces with articulation in the roofline.



- **K7a. New Crane Street** – retained facade of the former Electric Lighting Company Building



- **K7b. Railway Viaduct** – south of New Crane Street



Key Detractors

Seven principal detractors have been identified in the area.

North of River Lock, the former Tilston's Joinery Yard is a key development site, occupying a significant length of frontage along New Crane Street and adjoining the riverside. The site is currently vacant although site hoardings are in place and pilings have been constructed. Development of this site will significantly enhance the streetscene, complementing development on the southern side of the Lock.

Viking Office supplies and the MOT service centre opposite occupy prominent sites on the corner of New Crane Street and New Crane Bank. The buildings are of low quality, address the street poorly, and relate badly to adjacent properties, which include the listed TS Deva and Wharf Master's House. Opportunities for strengthening this gateway should be explored.

Nearby, along Sadlery Way, there are two substation buildings which now appear obtrusive and out of context with the regeneration taking place here. The riding stables further south present a poor elevation along this stretch of the riverside promenade, the lack of active frontage and continuous brick facade detracting from the pedestrian experience.

At Tower Wharf, the Telephone Exchange building is of a particularly poor appearance and sits incongruously within the otherwise attractive canalside setting.



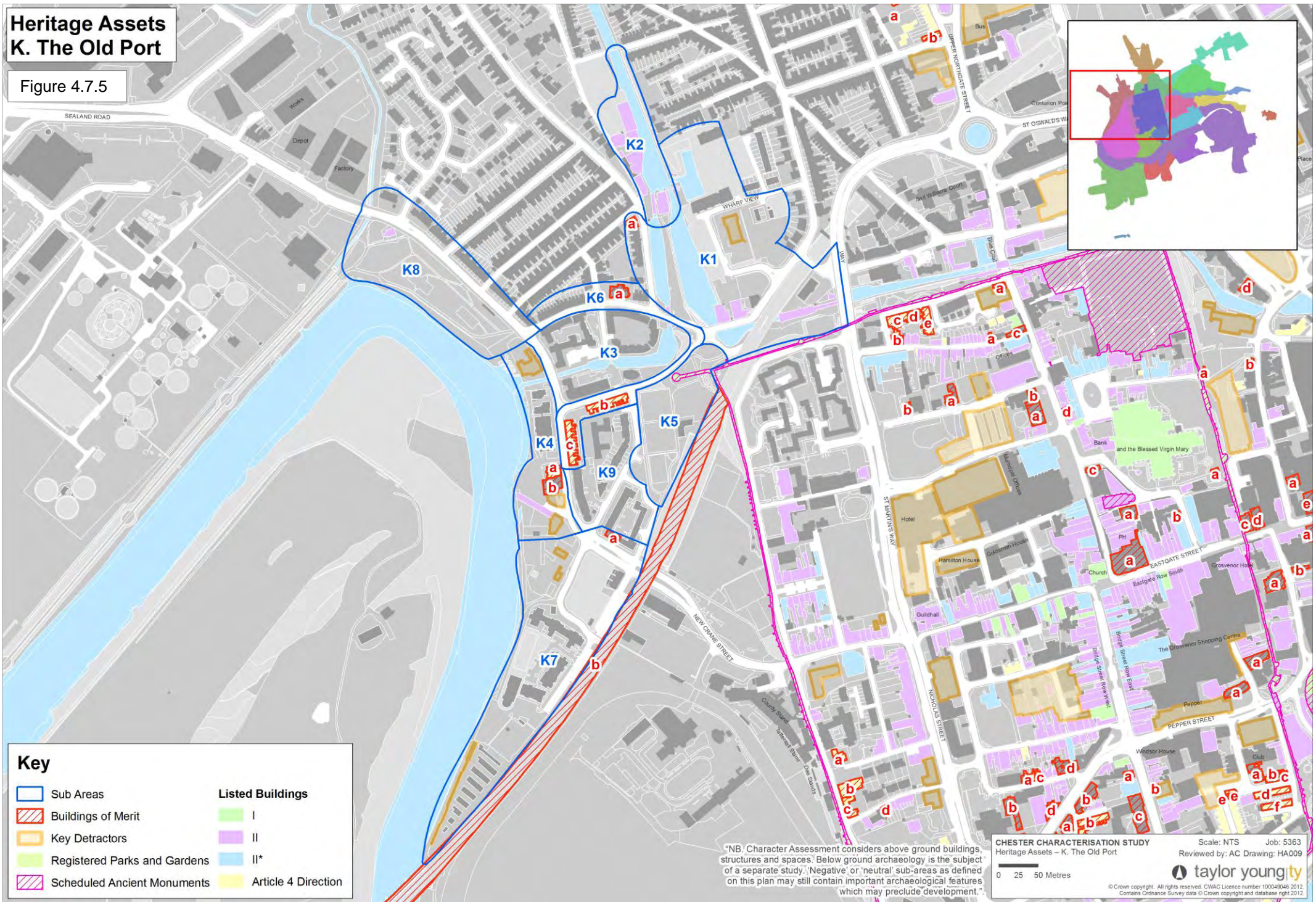
Former Tilston's Joinery Yard



Substation on Sadlery Way

Heritage Assets K. The Old Port

Figure 4.7.5



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.

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Heritage Assets – K. The Old Port

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Summary: Character Assessment

In summary, this area plays an important role in the Character of the City of Chester. The built form is predominantly contemporary in its design, with a number of new apartment developments that generally sit comfortably alongside more traditional terraced housing.

Connectivity with the city centre is an issue and heavy traffic along New Crane Street detracts from the quality of the environment and pedestrian experience.

The area contains some critical heritage assets, namely the Water Tower, buildings around Tower Wharf and the canalside and Crane Wharf. Careful control over new development will also be required in these locations will be required to ensure that their value is not compromised.

Several properties have been identified which are considered to contribute to the quality of the townscape and these should be protected.

Character Assessment is shown on Figure 4.1.6 and explained below:

- **K1. Tower Wharf: Positive** – an important opportunity site and attractive canal-side setting, overlooked by two fine listed buildings in active use and good state of repair.
- **K2. Upper Cambrian Road: Positive** – a narrow strip of land containing several listed buildings and structures associated with the canal, but which show some signs of disrepair.
- **K3. Dee Basin: Neutral** – a development of contemporary apartments framing the canal
- **K4. New Crane Street: Positive** - Crane Wharf area including the listed warehouse, adjoining cottages and Wharf Master’s House. An important remnant of Chester’s history as a major port.

- **K5. Water Tower Gardens: Critical** – an attractive area of open space and setting for the Water Tower
- **K6. South View Road: Neutral** – including Tower Road and Roberts Terrace. Contains several buildings of townscape merit but not critical to the Character of Chester.
- **K7. Sadlery Way: Neutral** – a former industrial site now undergoing major redevelopment for housing.
- **K8. Sealand Road: Neutral** – flanked by Victorian terraces, falling outside the conservation area, and containing only one building of architectural or townscape merit.
- **K9. Walls Avenue: Neutral** - sensitive contemporary development with good views to the Walls and Water Tower but no strong character of its own.

Character Statement:

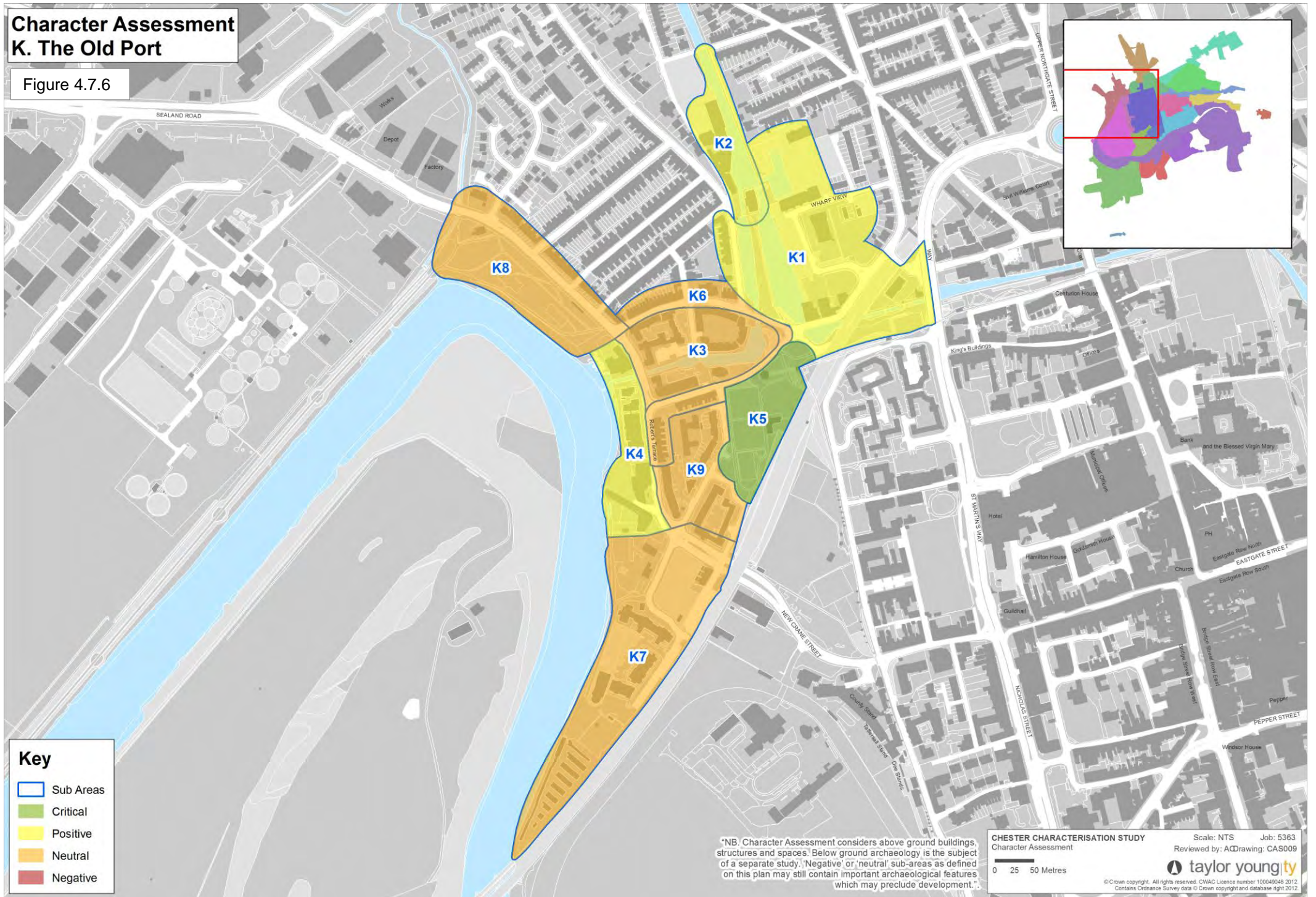
“This area plays an important role in the Character of the City of Chester. Although the area has undergone considerable redevelopment, this has been sympathetic to local heritage, building on the key assets of the river and canal. The area is fast developing an identity of its own, but one which respects its past”.

Management and Policy Recommendations

The conservation area covers those areas of greatest heritage significance and there is no case for extending its boundaries in this area.

Character Assessment K. The Old Port

Figure 4.7.6



The Old Port area is already covered by a development brief and the basic principles set out in this document remain valid.

Parts of Tower Wharf are under development currently but a wider masterplan could be produced to prevent the piecemeal development of this important site.

The Council should consider opportunities for the possible creation of a new public square at Crane Wharf, for example as part of the wider redevelopment of this area, directed by in a development brief.

Capacity to Accommodate Change

The area has already undergone significant change, with more development planned around Sadlery Way and Tower Wharf. Elsewhere, there are limited opportunities for major change but small infill opportunities exist at Tilston's Joinery yard, Cambrian Road and New Crane Street.

The creation of a new public square at Crane Wharf would be an asset.

Design Principles for New Development

Development at Tilston's Joinery yard site should follow the building line of existing properties along New Crane Street. It should maintain a similar separation distance from the lock as the existing property on the opposite side, allowing access down to the river. Building height should be restricted in order to respect views to listed buildings (i.e. generally not more than four storeys). Frontage onto New Crane Street should be designed to look more like a series of terraces, rather than a single uniform block.

Development at Cambrian Road should present a strong frontage to both the north and west and should follow the building line of the adjacent

terraced properties. A strong and active frontage should also be presented to the canal to create visual interest along the towpath. The height of buildings should be limited to around two storeys here, although a slightly taller element may be appropriate to articulate the corner of Cambrian Road and Upper Cambrian Road. A traditional palette of material should be used. Adequate separation distance from the boatyard should be achieved so as not to compromise the setting of the listed buildings.

Redevelopment of Crane Wharf should feature a hard landscaped square, linking with the existing promenade and designed to reflect the areas maritime history. The use of traditional sett paving should be considered, remnants of which are visible along part of New Crane Bank. The TS Deva Building should be sensitively converted to use as a restaurant, cafe, or bar to animate the new public square. A viable alternative use would also ensure the buildings future maintenance and upkeep. Potential exists for two landmark buildings at the entrance to the Square, framing the gateway into Crane Wharf.



Potential for new public square at Crane Wharf