CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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Character Area 1: Town Centre

Character Appraisal

CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

PURCELL

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behalf of Cheltenham
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Navigation

The Conservation Area Appraisal for Cheltenham's Central Conservation Area is made up of seven separate documents to ensure the relevant information is presented succinctly and is easy to navigate. It comprises an overview document and an individual character appraisal for each of the six character areas which make up the conservation area.

The overview document explains the relevant policy context, summarises the special interest of the Central Conservation Area as a whole, identifies boundary amendments, summarises the challenges and opportunities within the conservation area, and sets out a plan for the conservation area's future management.

The six character area appraisals provide more targeted assessments of character, special interest, challenges and opportunities for the each character area within the wider designation.

Conservation Area Appraisal: Overview Document

1.0 Introduction
Explains how to navigate between the various documents which comprise the Conservation Area Appraisal, explains the geographical scope of the conservation area, summarises its special interest, explains the purpose and scope of the appraisal and identifies relevant planning policy and guidance documents.

2.0 Assessment of special interest
Summarises the key characteristics and the history of the conservation area and explains why it is special.

3.0 Character areas
Details the various character areas within Cheltenham's Central Conservation Area.

4.0 Alterations to the conservation area boundary
Identifies proposed alterations to the boundary of the conservation area.

5.0 Summary of challenges
Summarises common challenges across the conservation area.

6.0 Opportunities For enhancement
Summarises where there are opportunities for enhancement within the conservation area.

7.0 Management plan
Identifies control measures associated with conservation area designation and provides recommendations for future management.

Character Area 1:
Town Centre

Character Area 2:
Planned Estates

Character Area 3:
Artisan Quarters

Character Area 4:
Bath Road and Suffolks

Character Area 5:
Historic Formal Suburbs

Character Area 6:
Institutional Quarters

Individual Character Area Appraisals

1.0 Introduction
Identifies which areas of the wider conservation area are included and explains the special interest of the character area.

2.0 Historical development
Explains how the character area relates historically to the wider designation and details how each part of the character area has evolved over time.

3.0 Assessment of special interest
Provides a detailed character assessment for the area, looking at elements such as architecture, materials, urban grain and configuration, key views, public realm, trees and open spaces, topography and archaeology.

4.0 Heritage assets
Identifies designated and non-designated heritage assets within the character area.

5.0 Challenges
Identifies common challenges within the character area.

6.0 Opportunities for enhancement
Identifies opportunities for incremental change which will enhance the special interest of the conservation area, as well as specific sites or areas which may could be enhanced or redeveloped in the future to the benefit of the designation.

7.0 Future Management
Signposting to the more detailed management plan in the overview document.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Areas included within the Town Centre character area

The Town Centre character area includes the following areas:

- The High Street and those streets leading off the High Street to the north and south.
- A stretch (approx. 780m) of Swindon Road/Fairview Road/St Margaret's Road to the north of the High Street.
- The Promenade, Imperial and Montpellier Gardens and Montpellier Walk.

There is a strong retail presence in much of the character area, alongside leisure, entertainment, residential uses and places of worship.

1.2 Town Centre: summary of special interest

The special interest of the Town Centre character area is derived from:

- The origins of the High Street and several of the adjacent lanes which illustrate Cheltenham's roots as a medieval town.
- Significant diversity of style and scale within the built form.
- The continuation of a strong commercial and recreational character.
- The prevalence of complete, uniform terraces.
- The geographical and historical relationship of the area to Cheltenham's Georgian pump rooms.
- Association with important figures from history including a number of prominent architects.
- Significant public open spaces.
- Views of important streetscapes, landmarks, and the surrounding landscape.

The origins of Cheltenham as a medieval settlement.

This can be read in the survival of the Norman Church of St Mary to the south of the High Street, which formed the nucleus of the medieval town. The High Street, with its narrow proportions, linear development pattern and partial survival of long narrow plots, illustrates the medieval origins of the town. Also important are the relationships between the High Street and other narrow streets leading north and south (New Street, St George's Place, North Street and Winchcombe Street) which pre-date the establishment of the spa town.

Diversity of style and scale within the built form.

The architectural typology within the character area is predominantly the restrained neo-Classicism of the late Georgian era, which illustrates the rapid expansion of Cheltenham during the early 19th century. However, there are a range of structures from different eras within the character area. These include Gothic and Gothic Revival churches and chapels; monumental civic buildings built in the eclectic styles typical of late Victorian and Edwardian eras, 1930s commercial structures inspired by the Art Deco movement and large commercial structures from the 20th and 21st centuries. The High Street in particular features notable diversity in terms of building usage, age, size, construction material and style.

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Continuation of a commercial and recreational character.

The commercial character of the area, which developed during the late 18th and 19th centuries, has been retained. The High Street and the Promenade are the principal commercial streets and form the east-west and north-south spines of the town. Where historic shopfronts survive, these make a strong contribution to the historic commercial character of the area. Historic theatres, hotels and pleasure gardens illustrate the long-standing use of the town centre for recreation and leisure by both residents and visitors since the late 18th century.

The prevalence of complete, uniform terraces.

Much of the character area is occupied by uniform terraces built in the Regency era. The scale and architectural detailing varies widely in line with the historic status of particular streets, but the fundamental characteristics of the Regency terrace are found throughout the area, lending a sense of uniformity. This is enhanced where original features such as vertically sliding timber sash windows and iron canopies survive in large numbers. Royal Crescent, just west of the Promenade, is a particularly notable and early example of such development in Cheltenham, having been built c.1806-1810.

Relationship to the Georgian pump rooms.

The Montpellier Rotunda and Pump Room, in the south of the character area, is a highly prominent building which provides a direct link to the origins of Cheltenham as a spa town. The character area also contains the site of several early spas including Vittoria House, Thompson's Baths and Sherborne Spa. The pump rooms and pleasure gardens illustrate the role of spa towns in late Georgian society, when 'taking the waters' was prompted on health grounds and provided a fashionable forum for social interaction.

Association with historic figures.

The character area has historic associations a number of historic figures including:

- Architects, R.W. and C. Jearrad, who designed the Queen's Hotel. The Jearrad brothers also designed much of the Bayshill estate.
- George Alan Underwood, who designed the Municipal Buildings and probably Montpellier Spa.
- J.B. Papworth, who designed the rotunda to Montpellier Spa. Papworth also designed some of the earlier buildings in Lansdown and Montpellier for landowner Pearson Thompson.
- The composer Gustav Holst (b.1874, d.1934), born in Pittville and commemorated with a statue in Imperial Gardens,
- Antarctic explorer Edward Wilson, born in Montpellier and commemorated with a statue in the Promenade and the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum on Clarence Street.

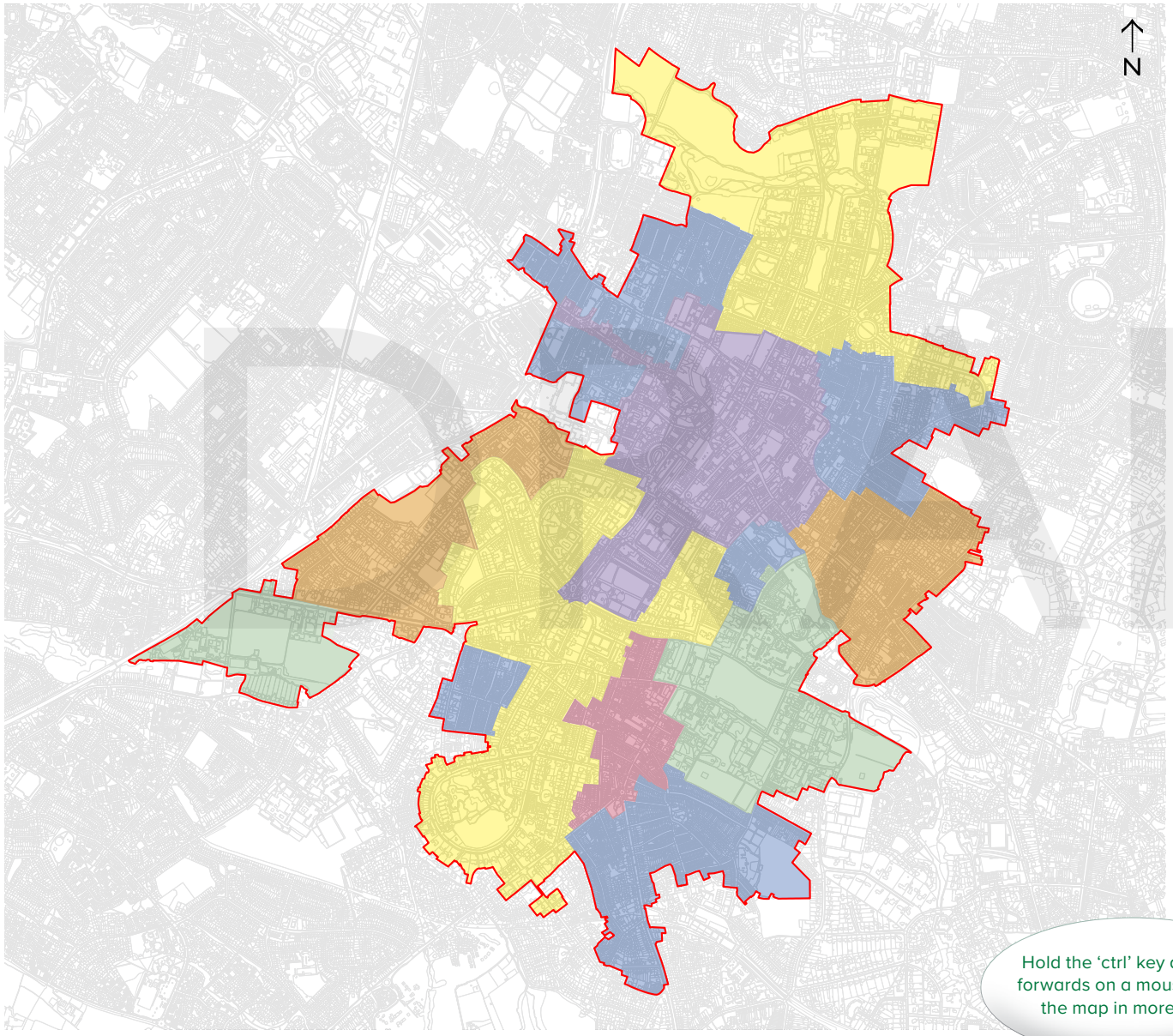
Public open spaces.

The Long Gardens, Imperial Gardens, and Montpellier Gardens provide important public open space within the town centre and greatly enhance the appearance of the conservation area. They illustrate the origins of Cheltenham as a high-status leisure resort and provide ample opportunities to appreciate the surrounding streetscapes. St Mary's churchyard provides a tranquil and enclosed pocket of space in the otherwise fine grain of the High Street.

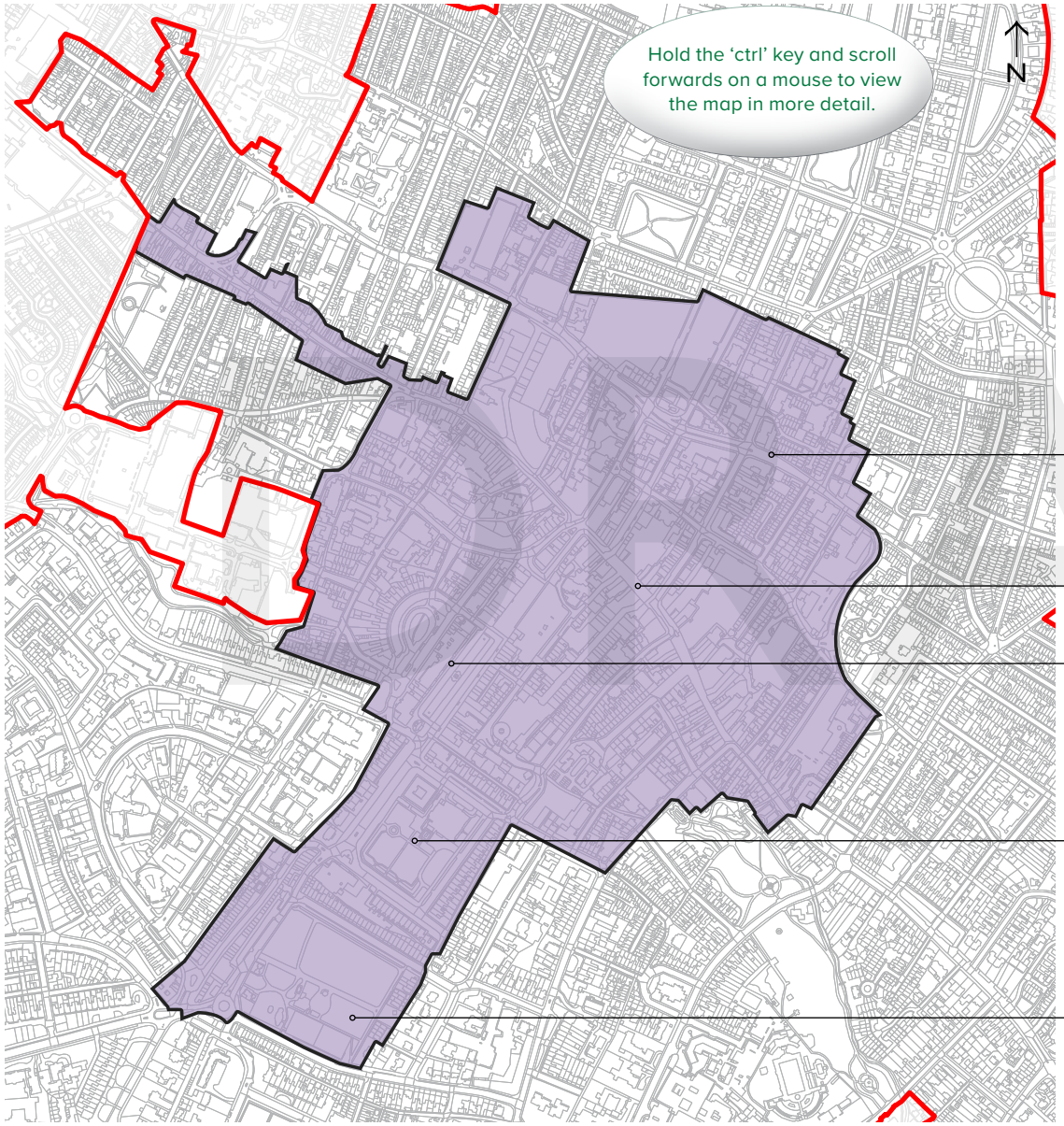
Views of important streetscapes, landmark buildings and the surrounding landscape.

There is a diverse range of streetscape views within the character area, providing opportunity to appreciate the varied and densely clustered development along the High Street, the uniform terraces flanking the formal gardens and the collection of historic shopfronts along the Promenade and Montpellier Walk. There are also important views out into the surrounding landscape (in particular the Cotswold escarpment) and of landmark buildings including the Queen's Hotel, Cambray Court and the Municipal Offices.

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Hold the 'ctrl' key and scroll forwards on a mouse to view the map in more detail.



Character Areas

- Proposed Conservation Area Boundary (2026)
- 1. Town Centre Character Area

This plan is not to scale

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2.0 Historical development

2.1 The Town Centre character area within Cheltenham's Central Conservation Area

This character area occupies the historic core of Cheltenham, which began as a small settlement strung along the High Street. The town expanded to the north and south during the late 18th century, following the discovery of spa waters and King George III's visit to patronise the town. Montpellier developed as a fashionable district in the new town, experiencing its heyday in the 1820s. As spa resorts fell out of fashion towards the middle of the 19th century, the character of this area became increasingly commercialised with new shops built and shopfronts inserted into older buildings along the High Street and the Promenade.



The Assembly Rooms on the High Street, at the corner of Rodney Road, 1813. This is now the site of Lloyds Bank, built in 1900. *British Library.*

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2.2 Historical development of the Town Centre character area

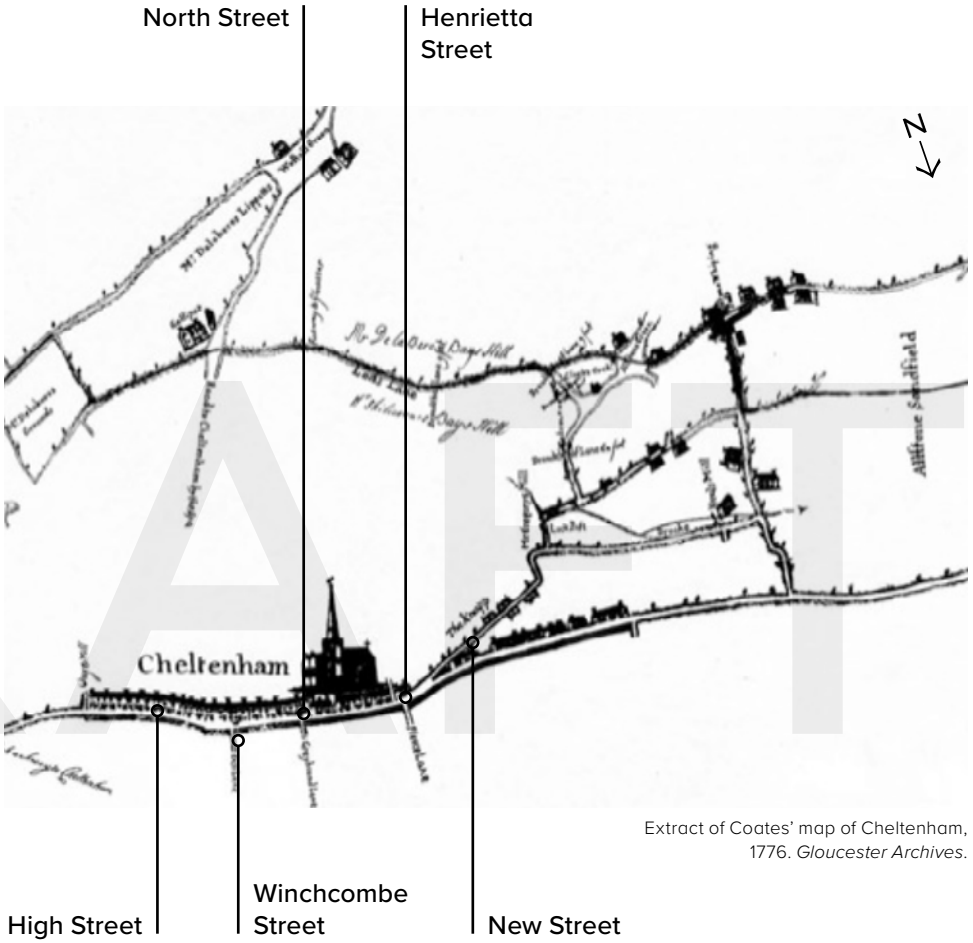
Roman activity is evidenced in the town through the discovery of Roman coins in Hanover Street, Pittville and High Street and a large quantity of Roman pottery behind St James' Square.[01] Further information on the archaeological potential of the character area is available in section 3.8.

The first documentary reference to Cheltenham itself occurs in 803. The Domesday Survey (1086) mentions five water and grain mills in Cheltenham, located along the River Chelt. Cheltenham became a market town in 1226 and the market played a key role in its economy for several centuries. A weekly market was held in the High Street until 1876, when all markets were removed to the Albion Brewery site north of Albion Street.[02]

The Norman Church of St Mary, which is believed to stand on the site of an Anglo-Saxon minster, was re-built in the 12th century.[03]

Between the 13th to mid-18th centuries, the town consisted of one long street (the High Street) with linear development in the form of narrow burgage plots and lanes leading out of it on either side, into the adjoining fields and orchards. A survey of the town from 1776 shows lanes running off the High Street including Winchcombe Street (originally named Bell Lane), North Street (originally named Greyhound Lane), Henrietta Street (originally named Fleece Lane) and New Street.

Swindon Road had existed since at least 1606, when it was known as 'Swyndones waye.'[04] Prior to widespread development in the early 19th century, the area now known as Montpellier was meadow land.



Extract of Coates' map of Cheltenham, 1776. *Gloucester Archives.*

01 Gloucestershire County Council Historic Environment Record, Monument Nos. 5436, 5472 and 5475; Cheltenham Borough Council, Central Conservation Area Old Town character area appraisal and management plan, 2007.

02 Gloucestershire County Council Historic Environment Record, Monument No. 20924.

03 https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1386792?section=official-list-entry

04 J. Hodsdon, An Historical Gazetteer of Cheltenham, 1997.

Mineral springs were discovered in 1716, in a field within the Bayshill area to the south of the historic core. In the 1730s, Bristol mariner Henry Skillicorne bought the land in this area and developed the site of the spring, building a modest pump room approached from the north by an avenue called 'Well Walk.'

The High Street was altered in the late 18th century, when the town commissioners directed the demolition of many structures including the 17th-century Market House and the High Cross, which stood near the junction with Winchcombe Street. The High Street was extended eastwards and many houses were either re-faced or re-built. The brewery at Henrietta Street opened in 1760, operating in this location until 1998.

In 1788 King George III visited Cheltenham to 'take the waters', residing for several weeks in Bayshill Lodge, a substantial building on the site of Sidney Lodge off Overton Road, which is now part of Cheltenham Ladies' College. Skillicorne's spa subsequently became known as the Royal Well. The royal visit cemented Cheltenham's success as a leading spa and initiated large scale development both within and around the historic core.

The Colonnade, at the northern entrance to the future Promenade in Montpellier, opened in 1791 with six shops.



The Well Walk, Cheltenham, now the site of Cheltenham Ladies College, show in an engraving by J. Springsguth c.1800. The River Chelt is in the foreground. *Wellcome Collection.*

From the early years of the 19th century, piecemeal development occurred on the gardens and orchards at the rear of the High Street and in the narrow lanes which led into the fields. The Enclosure Act of 1801 freed up land north of Albion Street, North Street and St Margaret's Road for development.

The old timber-framed cottages lining the High Street were rapidly replaced with terraces, which frequently comprised shops on the ground floor with living accommodation above. New terraces were built along the narrow roads running north and south of the High Street – providing accommodation for artisan workers producing goods for wealthy visitors to Cheltenham.



Royal Crescent as depicted in 1813, with St Mary's Church in the background. *British Library.*

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In the early 19th century, several more spas were constructed in the area, including Hygeia House on Vittoria Walk (1801), Thompson's Baths (1806-09) and Sherborne Spa (1816). The Montpellier Rotunda and Pump Room began construction in 1817, with the Rotunda being added in 1825-26.

The Promenade, situated directly south of the late 18th-century Colonnade, was first laid out in 1818 as a tree lined route leading to the Sherborne Spa. From 1823 onwards, development along the Promenade included the construction of the Imperial Hotel, along with a series of villas and terraces. Cavendish House, established in 1823 as the Cavendish House Silk Mercery Establishment, also opened on the Promenade during this period. Montpellier Arcade on Montpellier Street was constructed 1831-32. It originally had 16 shops and is one of the earliest shopping arcades in the country.[05]

As Cheltenham's popularity increased, many impressive Regency terraces and villas were constructed to the south of the High Street. Royal Crescent (built between 1806 and 1810) is among the earliest of these developments. Villas constructed at this time were typically large and set within generous plots surrounded by open land.

Imperial Square was laid out as a nursery ground around 1818. It later became home to the Winter Garden (now Imperial Gardens), a venue used for concerts and public meetings throughout the latter half of the 19th century.

Montpellier Gardens were landscaped in 1830 for the use of visitors to the spa.

By 1825, terraces had been constructed along Montpellier Terrace and villas were under construction along Montpellier Parade and Vittoria Walk.



The character area shown in Griffiths' map of 1825, before Montpellier Walk was developed. *Wellcome Collection.*

05 https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1245181?section=official-list-entry

The Queen's Hotel was built in 1837 and opened in 1838 on the site of the Sherborne Spa. The terrace of shops at Montpellier Walk was laid out c.1836-45, with the iconic caryatids between the units inserted in 1840.

The popularity of the spas was waning by the middle of the 19th century, but Cheltenham continued to develop with improved road networks and numerous public and private buildings. Commercial use began to spread beyond the High Street and the Promenade, with residential buildings converted to commercial and business use. A quote from *Rowe's Cheltenham Guide*, 1850, noted that: 'until within the past few years, the Promenade has always been held sacred to fashionable residences; but as the town increased in size, and the circle of residence extended itself, it was found profitable to devote many of these houses to business purposes, until now nearly the whole of the left hand side of the Promenade is devoted to professional or business establishments.'[06]

Cheltenham Ladies' College was founded in 1853 and prompted the construction of several boarding houses (such as Cambray House, now the site of Cambray Court) within the character area. The mid-late 19th century saw an increase in the number of public buildings in Montpellier and along the High Street, including churches and chapels, theatres and banking halls.

The arrival of the railway in 1847 facilitated the growth of industry within and around Cheltenham. By 1850, Shackleford's Carriage Works had been established in Albion Street, producing railway carriages, trucks and horse boxes for the Great Western Railway. A map from 1855 shows several timber yards and breweries north and south of Fairview Road. Between c.1900 and 1930, a tramway ran along High Street and Clarence Street.



An extract from an 1855 map showing Shackelford's Carriage Factory between Albion Street and Fairview Road. *Know Your Place*.

06 Rowe, George, *Rowe's Illustrated Cheltenham Guide*, 1850.

Development within the character area continued into the early 20th century. The Town Hall was built in 1902-3 immediately north of the late 19th-century Winter Garden. It replaced Cheltenham's previous main venue, the Assembly Rooms, which were in the High Street.

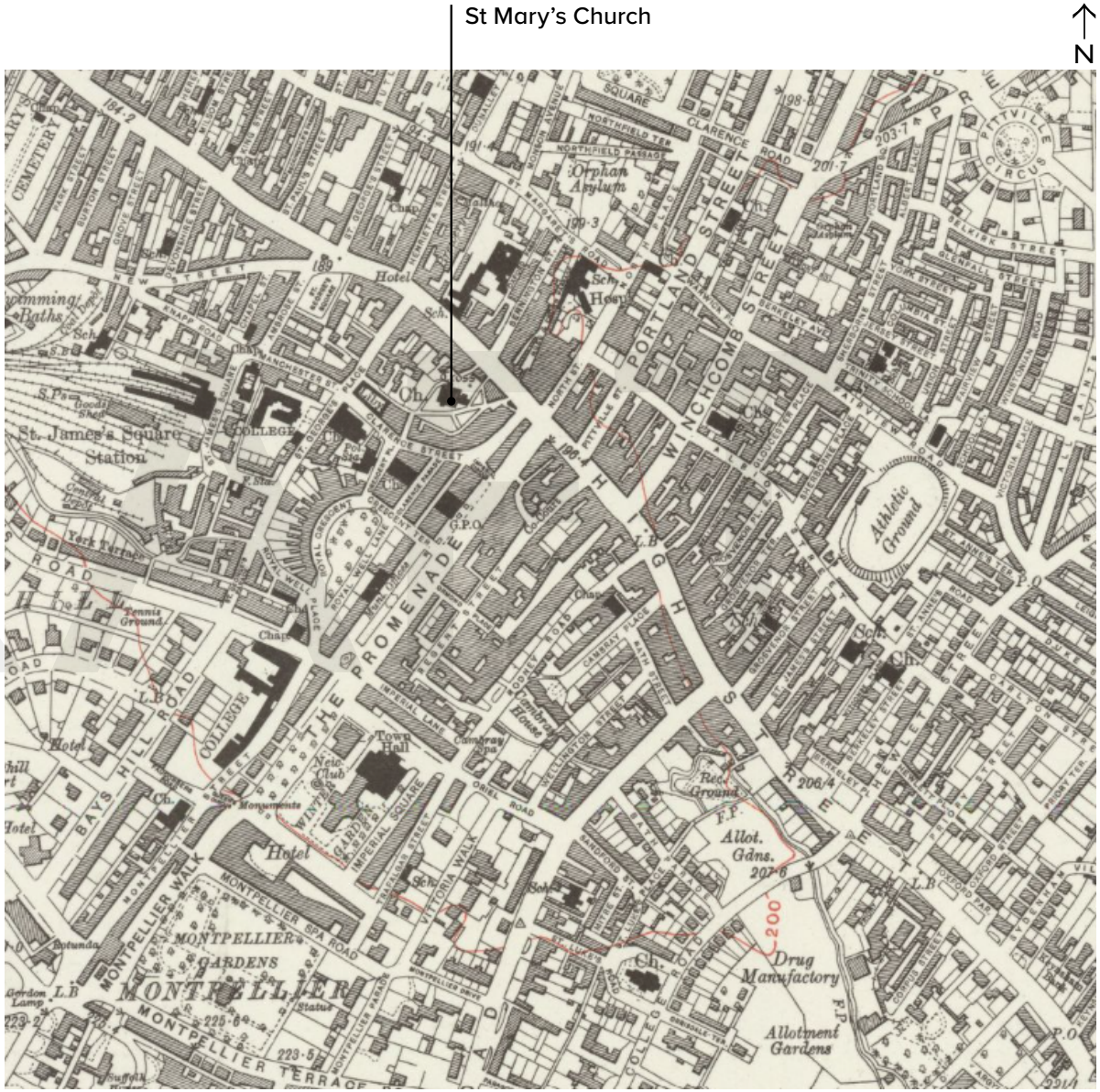
The majority of the shops on the Colonnade were removed in the 1930s and replaced with the substantial Art Deco inspired building which occupies the island between the Promenade and Clarence Street today. The striking Art Deco building at 170 High Street was likely constructed during the interwar period, as was Cambray House.

There has been both infill and larger scale post-war development on the High Street, in Montpellier and along Swindon Road/St Margaret's Road and Fairview Road. This includes the construction of Regent Arcade in the 1980s and various multi-storey carparks during the later 20th century. The Brewery Quarter, off the High Street, was redeveloped in 2016.

Continued traffic pressures saw significant alterations to the road network within the character area during the later 20th century. The introduction of the inner ring road in the early 1970s saw a new connection (Poole Way) made between the High Street and Swindon Road at the western edge of the conservation area. Fairview Road, which runs roughly parallel to the High Street, was extended westwards to connect with St Margaret's Road and southwards across a late 19th-century athletic ground to connect with Albion Street.

Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries many of the historic buildings across the character area (particularly in Montpellier) have ceased to provide their original function, with numerous residential buildings converted to shops and offices and an increasing number of former retail and commercial units converted into flats.

Leisure and entertainment uses remain prevalent, with Imperial Gardens and Montpellier Gardens hosting a variety of festivals across the year.



The character area as shown in the 1924 Ordnance Survey. Civic buildings (churches, chapels, schools, hospitals, the Town Hall etc) are shaded black.

3.0 Assessment of special interest

3.1 Built form and architecture

Regency buildings

The pared back Classicism of the Regency period (c.1795-1830), influenced by the Greek Revival, is the most common architectural style within the character area. In the historically high-status, formal areas around Montpellier to the south of the High Street, this style is expressed by imposing three-storey terraces, clad with pale render and decorated with cast-iron balconies and double-order pilasters. In the artisan quarters of the town centre, to the north of the High Street, the style is seen in simple, symmetrical terraces finished with pale render, sash windows and platbands. There are pockets of formal terracing to the north of the character area, at Gloucester Place for example.

The Regency style as expressed in Cheltenham is generally characterised by:

- Pale render (exposed brick is sometimes visible to side elevations, particularly in the artisan terraces) or fine limestone ashlar to the principal elevations;
- Vertically-sliding timber sash windows with slim glazing bars, divided into small panes, usually three panes wide. Windows are generally of vertical proportions and recessed from the outside face of the wall;
- Parapets to obscure low-pitched roofs from view;
- Classical entablature, comprising a cornice and frieze;
- Timber panelled doors under elegant arched or square fanlights;
- Brick chimneys;
- Slender pilasters (to some formal terraces);
- Projecting platbands to create visual separation between different floors; and
- Balconies with wrought-iron railings and canopies (to some formal terraces).

The Grade I listed Montpellier Rotunda and Pump Room, built between 1817 and 1826, is a striking example of a Regency spa and expresses the Greek Revival style through its Doric colonnade and circular domed roof modelled on the Pantheon.



Streetscape view showing the prevalance of Regency buildings on the High Street.

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Regency terrace to the north of Royal Crescent.



Regency terraces fronting Imperial Gardens.

Victorian and Edwardian civic and commercial buildings

The character area contains a large number of historic civic and commercial buildings from the mid-late 19th and early 20th centuries. These buildings contrast with the restraint and uniformity of the Regency style, instead illustrating bold and creative approaches to Classicism alongside revitalised interest in the Gothic style. The characteristic features of these buildings include:

- Use of ashlar masonry and exposed red brick;
- Heavy sculptural relief to primary façades (e.g. the late Victorian banking halls on the High Street);
- Stone mullions and transoms to windows;
- Projecting elements such as columns, cupolas and oriel windows; and
- Use of dark red brick (The Everyman Theatre, 1891 and Dowty House off St Margaret's Road, 1866).



The Library, Museum and Art Gallery (1880s).



Edwardian commercial building at 197-199 High Street, built in 1906.



The former Crescent Bakery, a striking Edwardian commercial structure on St George's Place.



Late 19th or early 20th-century commercial structure on the High Street.

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Churches and chapels

There are a significant number of churches and chapels within this character area. The oldest, St Mary's, sits at the centre of the High Street, its slender Gothic tower forming a local landmark. There are a number of 19th-century churches and chapels throughout, most built of exposed limestone and some with spires and towers.



The medieval St Mary's Church off the High Street.



The spire of St Gregory's Church (1854-74).



The Gothic Revival St Matthew's Church (1870s).



Holy Trinity Church, Portland Street (1820s).

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Historic commercial frontages

Historic shopfronts make a particularly important contribution to the character of the Town Centre character area. Their integrity is best preserved along the Promenade and Montpellier Walk.

Historic shopfronts tend to incorporate a stallriser (a platform below the shop window), glazing articulated by mullions and transoms (horizontal and vertical glazing bars) and a fascia which advertises the name of the business. The fascia may be flanked by corbels at either end and may sit under a projecting moulded cornice. Traditional shopfronts follow the proportions established by the host building; fascias in terraced buildings generally respect party wall divisions and are situated well below first-floor window cills so upper windows are not obscured.

Historic pubs often have commercial frontages which follow the same architectural conventions as 19th and early 20th century shopfronts. These frontages provide visual interest and enhance the historic commercial character of the Town Centre character area.



Shopfronts inserted into a Regency terrace, Winchcombe Street.



Traditionally styled modern shopfront on the east side of the Promenade.



Traditional shopfronts on Montpellier Walk.



Elaborate early 20th-century shopfront on the corner of the High Street and St James Street.

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Later 19th-century industrial buildings

The character area contains a small number of former industrial buildings, which illustrate the growth of industry in this area following the arrival of the railway.



Formal House, a former warehouse on St George's Place.



Former Whitebread Brewery malthouse on the corner of Henrietta Street and St Margaret's Road (1860s).

Interwar architecture

Although not a prominent characteristic within the town centre, there are a few striking examples of interwar architecture in the character area. Most notable are the commercial building off the Colonnade, south of the High Street, and Cambray Court off Cambray Place.



Striking Art Deco architecture at 170 High Street.



Art Nouveau detailing to a shopfront on The Promenade.



1930s commercial structure off the Colonnade.



Cambray Court

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Later 20th and 21st-century architecture

Later 20th century and contemporary architecture is also well represented within the Town Centre character area, with notable examples being the Grade II listed Cheltenham House (1970-1972), the Quadrangle off Imperial Square (1970s but recently modernised with new fenestration), the 2018 John Lewis department store on the High Street and new development at the Brewery Quarter.



Cheltenham House with sculpture by Barbara Hepworth, 1970-72.



The John Lewis department store, completed 2018.

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3.2 Materials

Common materials across the character area include:

Pale render and stucco: the dominant finish within the character area and the most common finish for domestic structures. Historic rendered and stucco finishes to Regency buildings are likely to be made of Roman Cement - a hydraulic lime-based cement first patented in 1796.

Exposed limestone: dressed limestone is the most common material used for large-scale civic structures and can also be seen to historically high-status residences. It is commonly used in dressings for brick buildings from the second half of the 19th century onwards.

Brick: the use of brick, largely exposed and dark red in colour, is found at semi-regular intervals in buildings from the second half of the 19th century onwards (e.g. the former Crescent Bakery on St George's Place and the old brewery complex on the corner of Swindon Road and Henrietta Street). Exposed yellow/buff brick can often be seen to side elevations.

Slate: Welsh slate is the most common roofing material throughout this character area.

Iron: there is a high survival rate for decorative ironmongery, particularly to the south of the High Street around Montpellier. This is found in railings and first floor balconies.

Timber: historic vertically-sliding sash windows are characteristically made with timber frames. Traditional shopfronts are also made of timber.

Glass: glass is a common feature in the town centre due to the number of shopfronts.

Modern materials: modern materials within later 20th and early 21st-century architecture include facing brick, concrete, glass, and occasional use of contemporary materials such as metal cladding.



Detail of a historic timber shopfront.


Exposed dressed stone on the High Street.


Characteristic terraces featuring pale stucco, timber sash windows and iron railings to first floor balconies.


Intricate timber fanlight on the High Street.

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3.3 Urban grain, configuration, direction of movement

The medieval High Street and the historic streets leading northwards have a compact plan form and a tight urban grain. Buildings generally front the highway directly, lending a strong sense of enclosure. To the north of Swindon Road/Fairview Road, the urban grain is coarser with smaller historic plots amalgamated via new development. The car parks at North Place and Portland Street create large gaps in the built development.

The flow of people and traffic differs substantially across the northern part of the character area. Narrow lanes such as Grosvenor Place South and Grosvenor Street experience relatively low noise and activity levels, whereas the more generous roads such as Portland Street, Albion Street and Fairview Road experience a continuous stream of traffic and pedestrians. The eastern end of the High Street, between Cambray Place and Rodney Road, is pedestrianised.

Across the Montpellier area, uniform terraces on narrow plots generally front onto open space (Cambray Place, Long Gardens, Imperial Gardens, Montpellier Gardens) or generous streets (the Promenade, Montpellier Walk).

Residential properties fronting onto green space are generally set back from the street behind railings, whilst commercial premises along The Promenade, Montpellier Walk and Montpellier Street directly abut the highway.

The character area is intersected by the inner ring road - which carries heavy volumes of traffic particularly in rush hour - and parts of approach roads from the south (Bath Road) and the west (Lansdown Road feeds into Montpellier Walk). Consequently, there are high levels of traffic activity and noise throughout the day. The presence of these routes through the area has a significant impact on the ease of pedestrian and cycle movement, which is particularly constrained in the south across Montpellier Walk and at the junction of the Promenade, St George's Road and Imperial Square.

High-traffic areas within the character area tend to be accompanied by a large amount of modern street furniture, including CCTV cameras, signage and streetlamps.



Swindon Road, Fairview Road and St Margaret's Road are today wide thoroughfares carrying multiple lanes of traffic in places.

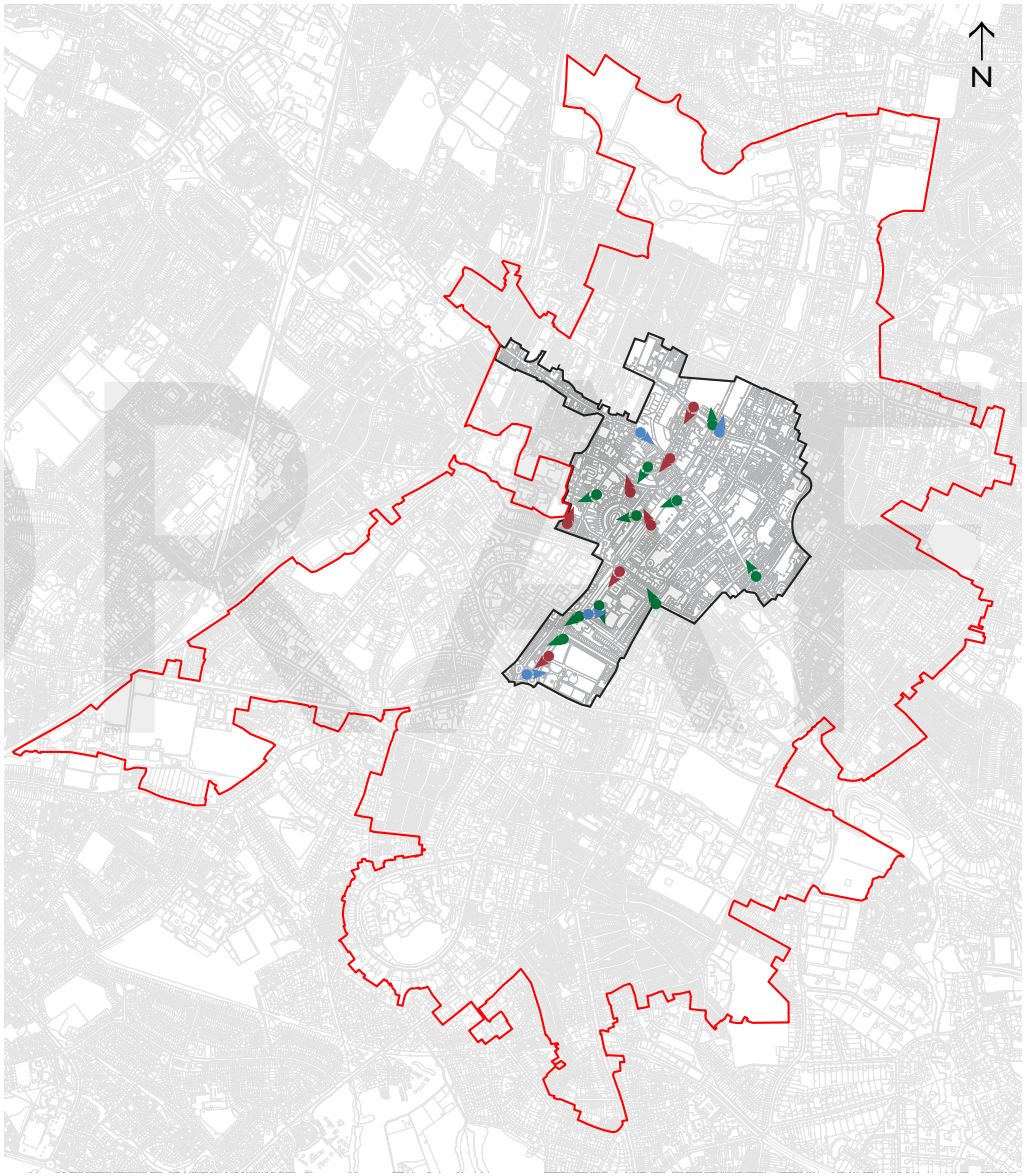


The narrow lanes leading off the High Street, shown in this view looking down Church Street, illustrate the historic core of Cheltenham and provide a contrast to the generous roads characterising the later parts of the town.

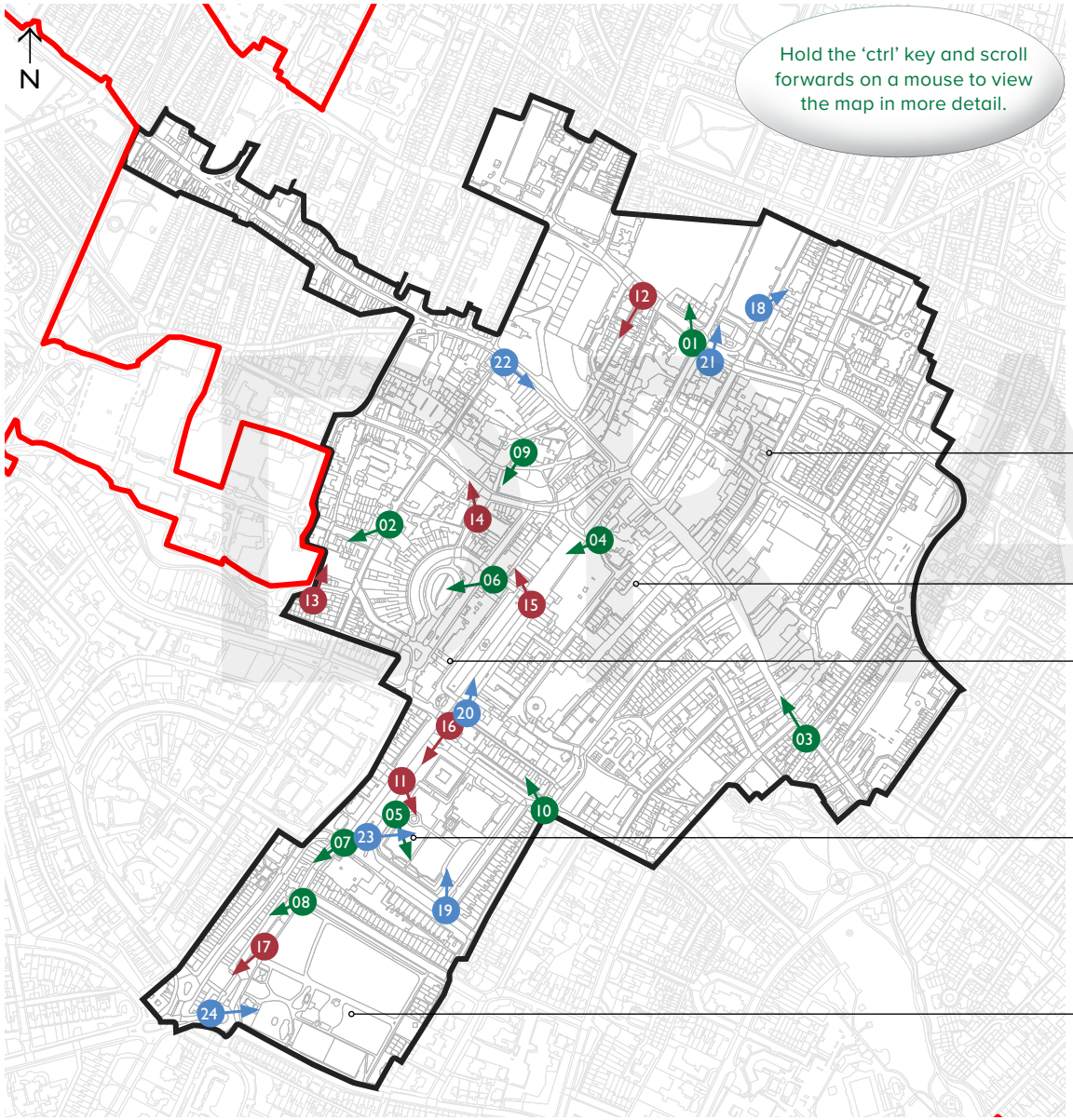
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3.4 Key views

There are several types of views which contribute to and enhance the special interest of the Town Centre character area (and the conservation area more widely). An indicative selection of these key views is provided to illustrate the views analysis. The omission of any view from the selection chosen does not indicate that said view is not important.



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Views Plan

- Proposed conservation area boundary
- Town Centre character area
- Streetscape views
- Views of local landmarks
- Views into the surrounding landscape

This plan is not to scale

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3.4.1 Streetscape views

Streetscape views along the High Street are characterised by variety in height and scale, providing a contrast with the uniformity of the terraces elsewhere in the character area. Kinetic views along the High Street provide the opportunity to appreciate how this part of Cheltenham has developed over time, with simple Regency buildings hosting Victorian shopfronts mixed in with Victorian and Edwardian houses finished with exposed red brick. The centre of the High Street is home to confident commercial and civic buildings from the later 19th century. Long views along the High Street demonstrate the gentle curve of this medieval thoroughfare.

The character area contains a significant number of Regency terraces. These provide self-contained streetscape views throughout the character area, adding significant visual interest and illustrating the development pattern of the town.

All terraces rely on the sense of uniformity for their architectural effect – with shared proportions, materials and finishes. The historic integrity of the terraces varies widely throughout the character area.



View 01: A complete terrace of six Regency houses on St Margaret's Road.



View 02: A characteristic streetscape view formed by uniform Regency terraces on St James' Square.



View 03: Looking north-west along the High Street, with its characteristic variation in building height and style.



View 04: Historic shopfronts on the Promenade enhance the historic commercial character of the streetscape.

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View 05: Formal terraces fronting Imperial Gardens.



View 06: Royal Crescent forms an impressive streetscape and illustrates some of the earliest Regency development in Cheltenham.



View 07: Mid-19th-century terraces with later shopfronts on Montepellier Walk. The spire of St Andrew's Church is visible behind.



View 08: A continuous terrace of early Victorian shops on Montpellier Walk, with caryatids separating the units.



View 09: Historic shopfronts along Well Walk, to the rear of the churchyard, lend a historic commercial character.



View 10: Regency terrace on Montpellier Spa Road.

3.4.2 Views of key landmarks

The Town Centre character area contains a number of landmark structures, which are highly prevalent in views within (and into) this part of the town. These include Eagle Tower and the churches of St Mary, St Gregory, St Andrew and St Luke (the latter in the Artisan Quarters character area), whose spires pierce the skyline. Views of these structures reinforce the historic character of the area and provide orientation.

Views of St Mary's Church and its churchyard are evident from the narrow passages leading off the High Street.

The linear nature of the street pattern in Montpellier creates a number of vistas, often stopped by views of buildings. A long vista from the Promenade up to the Queen's Hotel is created through the linear form of the Promenade.

Landmark buildings such as the Town Hall, the Quadrangle, Municipal Offices, Cheltenham Library, Montpellier Spa, Holy Trinity Church and the Queen's Hotel are visually prominent buildings in their immediate context.



View 11: Looking south-east from the Promenade across Imperial Gardens towards Eagle Tower.



View 12: The spire of St Mary's Church from Bennington Street.



View 13: Looking east across Chelt Walk car park towards the spire of St Gregory's Church.



View 14: Looking west towards Cheltenham Library.

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View 15: A glimpsed view of the spire of St Gregory's from the Promenade.



View 16: Looking along the Promenade towards the Queen's Hotel.



View 17: Although not tall enough to be a prominent feature within the skyline, the former Montpellier Spa (viewed here from the top of Montpellier Walk) is an important local landmark.



View 18: Looking north-west along Portland Street towards Holy Trinity Church



View 19: Views north-east across Imperial Gardens take in the Town Hall, the Quadrangle, the front of the Municipal Offices (partly screened behind mature street trees), the tower to the Montpellier Street wing of Cheltenham Ladies College (in the Planned Estates character area) and the spire of St Mary's Church.



View 20: The Municipal Offices

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3.4.3 Views into the surrounding landscape

The town centre is surrounded on all sides by urban development within the central conservation area. However, there are glimpsed views of Cleeve Hill (part of the Cotswold escarpment) across open spaces and in gaps between buildings in places, which situate the town centre within its wider rural setting. Cleeve Hill can be seen from the junction of Winchcombe Street and Prestbury Road. Northfield Passage provides short, medium and long-distance views of Cleeve Hill.

Fairview Road allows distant views over lower buildings towards the Cotswold escarpment. The escarpment can also be seen from North Place and there are panoramic views from St James Street, through gaps between buildings.

There are also glimpsed views of the Cotswold escarpment from the Montpellier area, notably to the south where the topography is slightly raised. There are glimpsed views of the escarpment from the Promenade, and along North Street.

Views into the surrounding landscape are very important - providing a striking rural backdrop for the architecture and tying the conservation area into its wider landscape setting.



View 21: An important glimpsed view of the Cotswold escarpment, to the north-east of Cheltenham, from the top of North Place.



View 22: Looking south-east along the High Street from outside the Brewery Quarter. The Cotswold escarpment can be glimpsed between the buildings in the far distance.



View 23: Looking north-east from the top of the Promenade. Cleeve Hill, to the north-east of Cheltenham, can be glimpsed behind the Town Hall and The Quadrangle on the corner of Imperial Square.



View 24: Cleeve Hill viewed from the southern edge of the character area at the top of Montpellier Walk, looking across Montpellier Gardens.

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3.5 Public realm

The public realm encompasses all the spaces and features which are accessible to the public and help bring together a sense of place.

Street furniture throughout the character area is of varying quality and creates notable clutter in places. Traffic signs have accrued in great number due to the inner ring road which passes through the character area.

Historic and traditionally styled streetlamps can be found in various locations including the High Street, around St Mary's churchyard, and the Promenade. Ornate, late 19th-century lamps survive in Cambray Place, Regent Street and Trafalgar Street, where they enhance the historic character of the conservation area. Otherwise, streetlamps are generally modern and have a utilitarian design.

The majority of surfaces throughout the character area have been replaced with tarmac or modern pavers. Where natural stone pavers are present, these are more in keeping with the historic character of the conservation area.

Street name plates are generally discreet and are a mixture of modern and traditional in style. Traditional name plates are in keeping with the character of the conservation area.

Benches within the character area are predominantly timber and are most prevalent in the Promenade, Imperial and Montpellier Gardens and the High Street.

Within the town centre, as with the conservation area more widely, there has been widespread loss of historic boundary treatments. However, cast and wrought-iron railings survive in some areas (to Shaftesbury Hall on St George's Place, and around the bowling green in Ambrose Street for example) where they make an important contribution to the character of the streetscape. Iron railings are more prevalent in Montpellier, where buildings are more likely to be set back from the road. Historic brick boundary walls survive in place, such as on Monson Avenue. These historic boundary treatments enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The public realm benefits from a number of monuments and memorials, particularly concentrated around the Municipal Offices on the Promenade. These historic monuments create focal points within the streetscene and lend a sense of grandeur.

Other features of interest within the public realm include the 1930s K6 telephone boxes on the promenade, a 19th-century cast-iron pillar box on Montpellier Walk, the mid-20th-century public clock at Royal Crescent and the late 20th-century 'Minotaur and Hare' sculpture on the Promenade.

To the north of the High Street, there are a number of striking murals produced during various iterations of Cheltenham Paint Festival.



Statue of Gustav Holst in the Imperial Gardens, which enhances the public realm by providing a visual focus and illustrating Cheltenham's association with the famous composer

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Traditional streetlamp on the High Street, which enhances the historic character of the streetscape.



One of several murals in Cheltenham, this one being on Albion Street. Murals associated with the Cheltenham Paint Festival enliven the streetscene in several areas.



A service box on the High Street, enhanced with a mural.



Detail of an attractive historic lamp standard on the High Street.



The caryatids along Montpellier Walk are a striking and unusual feature, and make an important contribution to the public realm.

3.6 Trees and open spaces

Trees and open spaces make a significant contribution to the character area, particularly to the south around Montpellier.

The bowling green off Ambrose Street softens the streetscape and offers medium distance views to the landmark Cheltenham Chapel and Cheltenham Library on Clarence Street, through gaps between buildings.

St Mary's churchyard creates a welcome break in the compact, fine urban grain of the High Street. High buildings and mature trees around the perimeter of the churchyard create a sense of enclosure and seclusion.

As buildings along and north of the High Street are generally built hard up against the public highway, there is a lack of incidental green space in the form of private gardens and forecourts. Where these spaces were once present, these have often been converted to hardstanding for car parking. Nevertheless, there are some surviving examples for instance the grounds of Shaftesbury Hall and to the front of a terrace at the corner of Fairview Road and St John's Avenue. There are a limited number of street trees in the north of the character area but where they are present (e.g. to St John's Avenue and St James' Square) they make a significant contribution to the character area by softening the streetscape.

To the south of the High Street around Montpellier, Long Gardens, Imperial Gardens and Montpellier Gardens make a significant contribution to the character of the area. Other spaces include the treed island at the bus station outside Royal Crescent and the Promenade.

The Long Gardens provide a formal setting for the Grade II* listed Municipal Offices, and public sculpture situated.

The Imperial Gardens provide an important historic open space within Montpellier. They were laid out by 1820, when they were called the Botanic Gardens, and contained walks and rides. Today the Imperial Gardens consist of formal leisure gardens which accommodate an open-air bar at the Town Hall and are particularly popular in the summer months. The gardens also preserve the setting of the Imperial Square terraces and the Queen's Hotel. Mature trees around the perimeter create a sense of enclosure and soften the transition between the Gardens and the Promenade pavement. The absence of trees within the central area allows for clear views across the Gardens, fostering an open, expansive character and enabling long distance views toward the rural landscape from Montpellier Walk.

Montpellier Gardens were laid out in 1830 by Pearson Thompson, owner of the Montpellier Spa, together with the Jearrad brothers. Originally created as pleasure grounds for the exclusive use of spa patrons, the Gardens evolved considerably over the next century before they were transferred into municipal ownership in the late 19th century. Later additions included the lodge, the bandstand and the proscenium building.

During the 19th century, the Gardens were well used for leisure pursuits. The Cheltenham Archery Club, founded in 1856, met there for many years. Today, the tennis courts located at the southern end of the Gardens continue this tradition of recreational use. The presence of the William IV statue, along with other historic structures, further enhances the formal, historic character of the gardens.

Montpellier Gardens permit clear medium and long distance views, creating a strong sense of openness. Mature trees within the Gardens and around the perimeter partially screen surrounding buildings and lend a verdant character.

Maps from the 19th century show the area now occupied by the Royal Well bus station as a lawned area known as Crescent Gardens, featuring groups of trees and a belt of planting along its south western boundary. A path once crossed the space where the car park in front of Royal Crescent is now located. Today, a hedge separates this car park from the bus station, creating a soft, natural boundary between the two areas. Two large, mature plane trees stand prominently at the centre of the bus station, shaping its character and providing a strong visual focus. Together with the hedgerow, these trees help soften the impact of the surrounding hard standing and enhance the setting of the Royal Crescent terraces.

The Promenade is lined with trees on both sides, with a distinctive double row along the western edge. The flanking avenues lend a semi-formal character.

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Looking across Imperial Gardens towards the Town Hall. The gardens form an important part of the setting for the Town Hall and the Regency terraces around the perimeter of the gardens.



Looking across Imperial Gardens towards the Queen's Hotel. The gardens provide a sense of openness in the centre of the town and retain and important aspect of Regency Cheltenham's original planform.



Avenue along the Promenade, which lends a formal character and channels views along this historic thoroughfare.



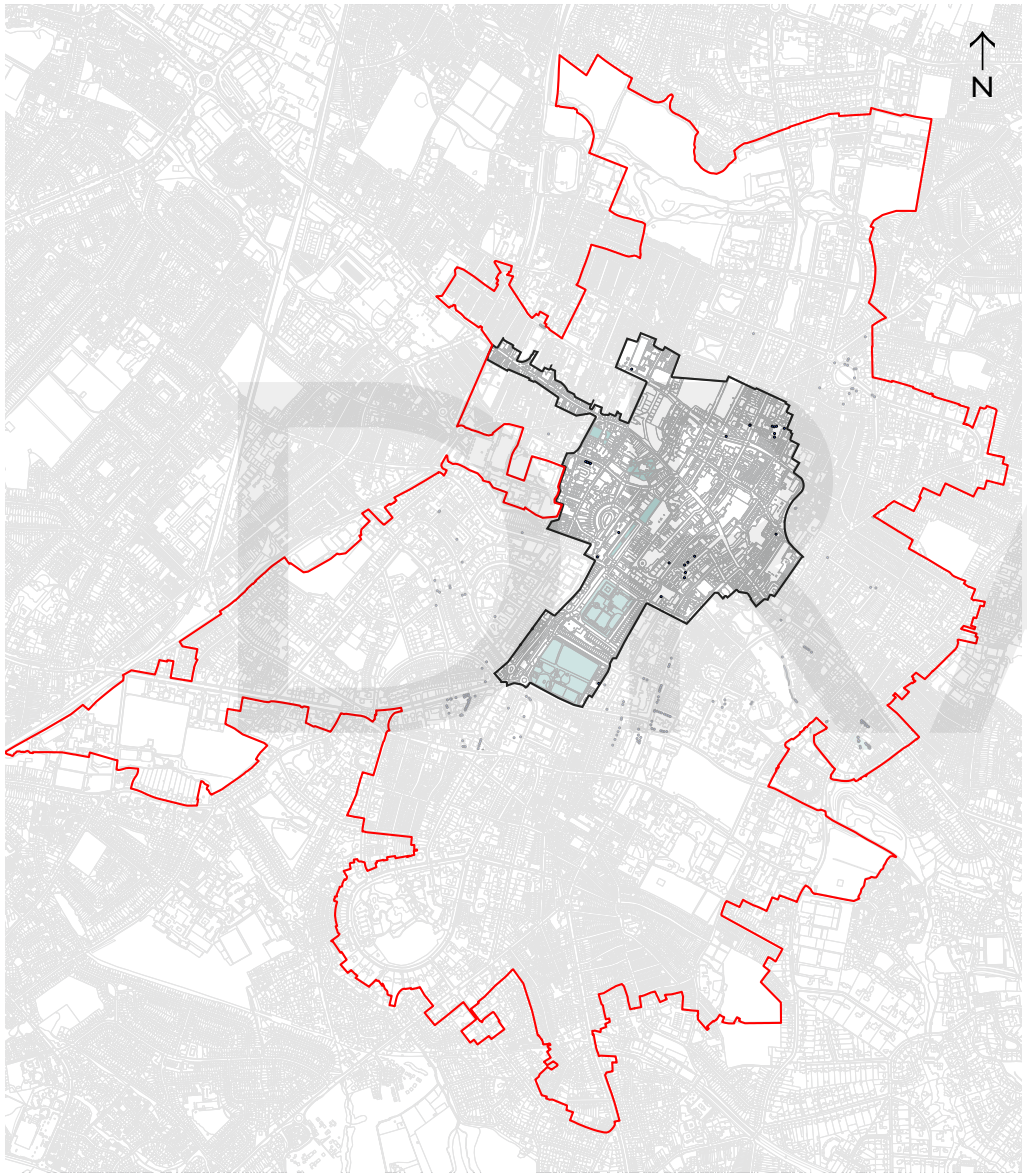
Mature trees at Royal Crescent soften the impact of adjacent hardstanding.



St Mary's churchyard creates a welcome break in the dense urban grain of the historic core.



Linear avenue along the north side of Montpellier Gardens soften the transition between the open space of the gardens and the adjacent built development.



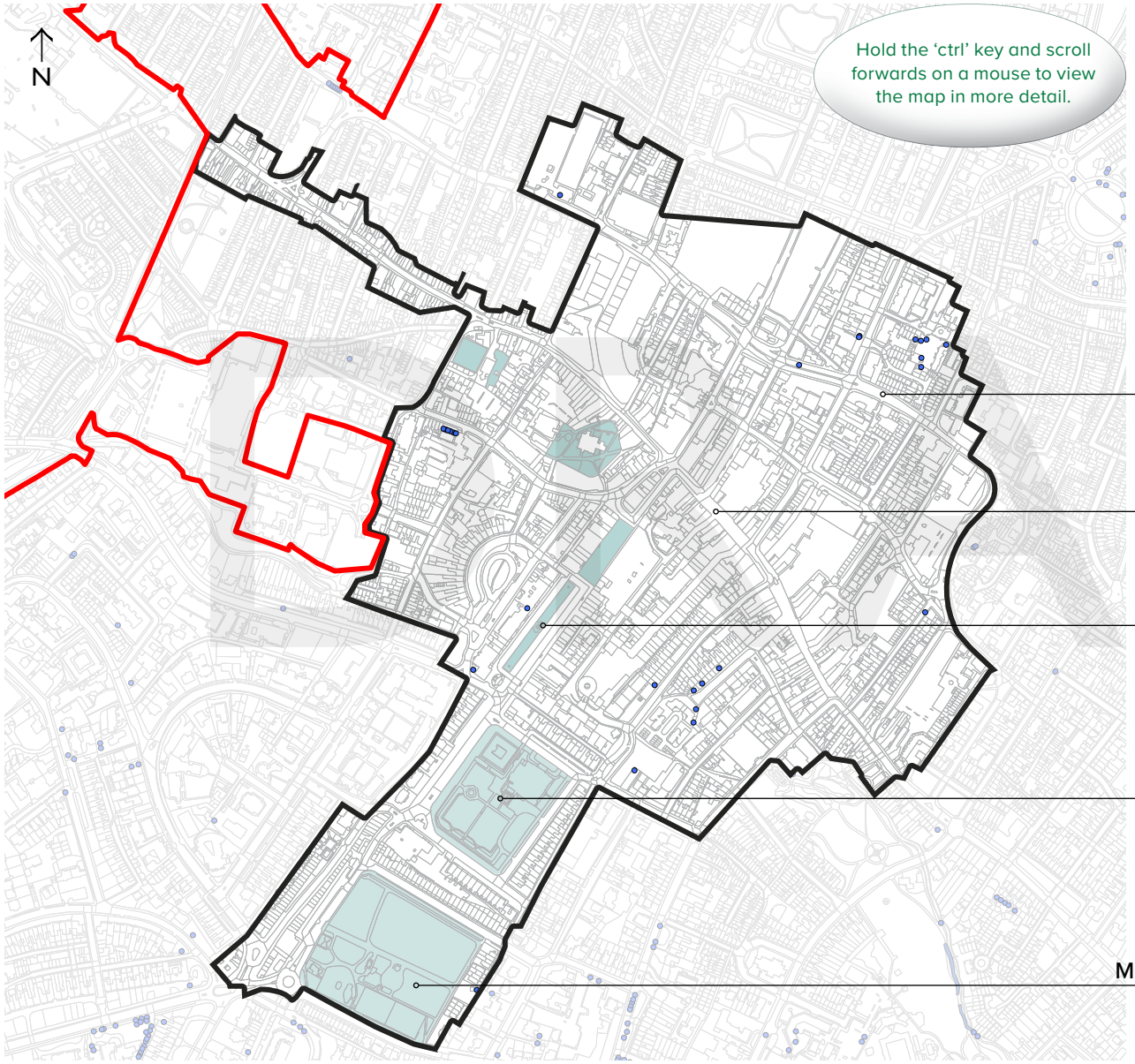
Trees and open spaces

- Proposed conservation area boundary
- Town Centre character area
- Tree preservation order
- Important open spaces

This plan is not to scale

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The information provided in this map may not accurately reflect the existing data set. Up-to-date records can be found in the relevant interactive mapping resources, which are accessible via the Council's website.

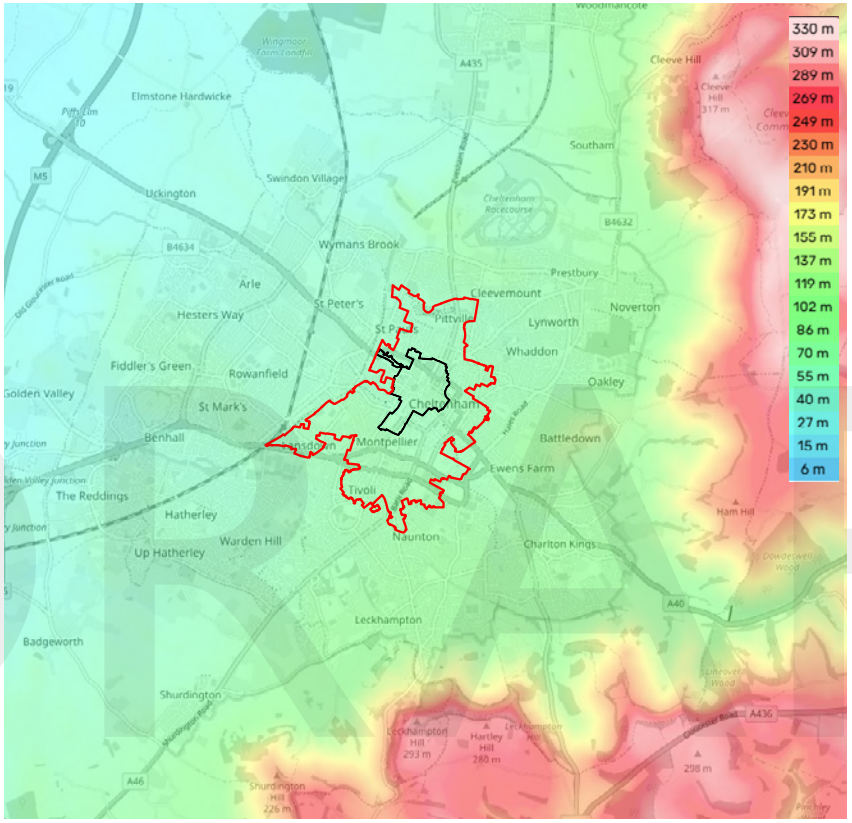


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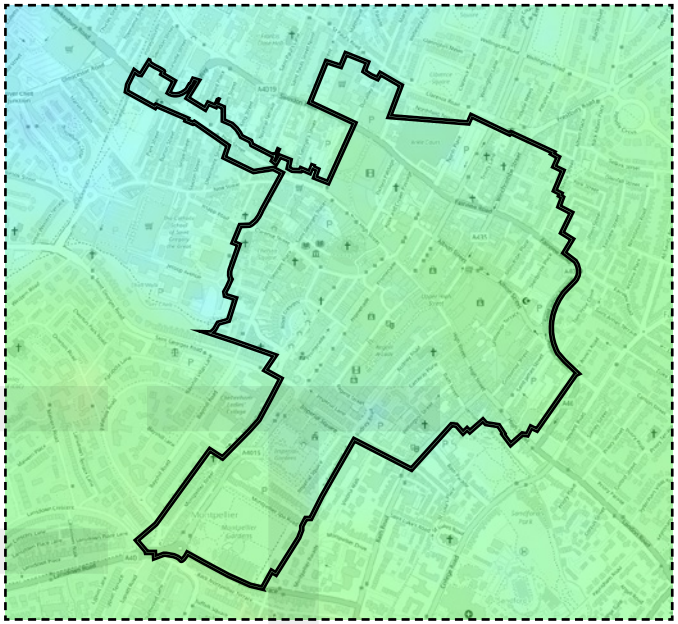
3.7 Topography

The topography within the character area is generally flat, with the lowest point around Royal Crescent. The land rises slightly to the north and south, and this gives The Queen's Hotel an imposing and slightly elevated setting in views along the Promenade. The rise in topography is most notable standing outside the Queen's Hotel and looking along Montpellier Walk, as it wends slightly westwards around the hotel to continue along the western side of Montpellier Gardens.

The dramatic topography of the surrounding landscape, particularly the Cotswold escarpment to the north-east / east, makes for striking views from various points within the character area into the landscape beyond. These views are discussed in more detail within Section 3.4.



Map showing relative topogrpahy in and around the Central Conservation Area. The coloured key represents the relative elevation of the terrain both within the Conservation Area boundary in its wider setting. Source: OpenStreetMap (ODbL)



Proposed conservation area boundary

Town Centre character area

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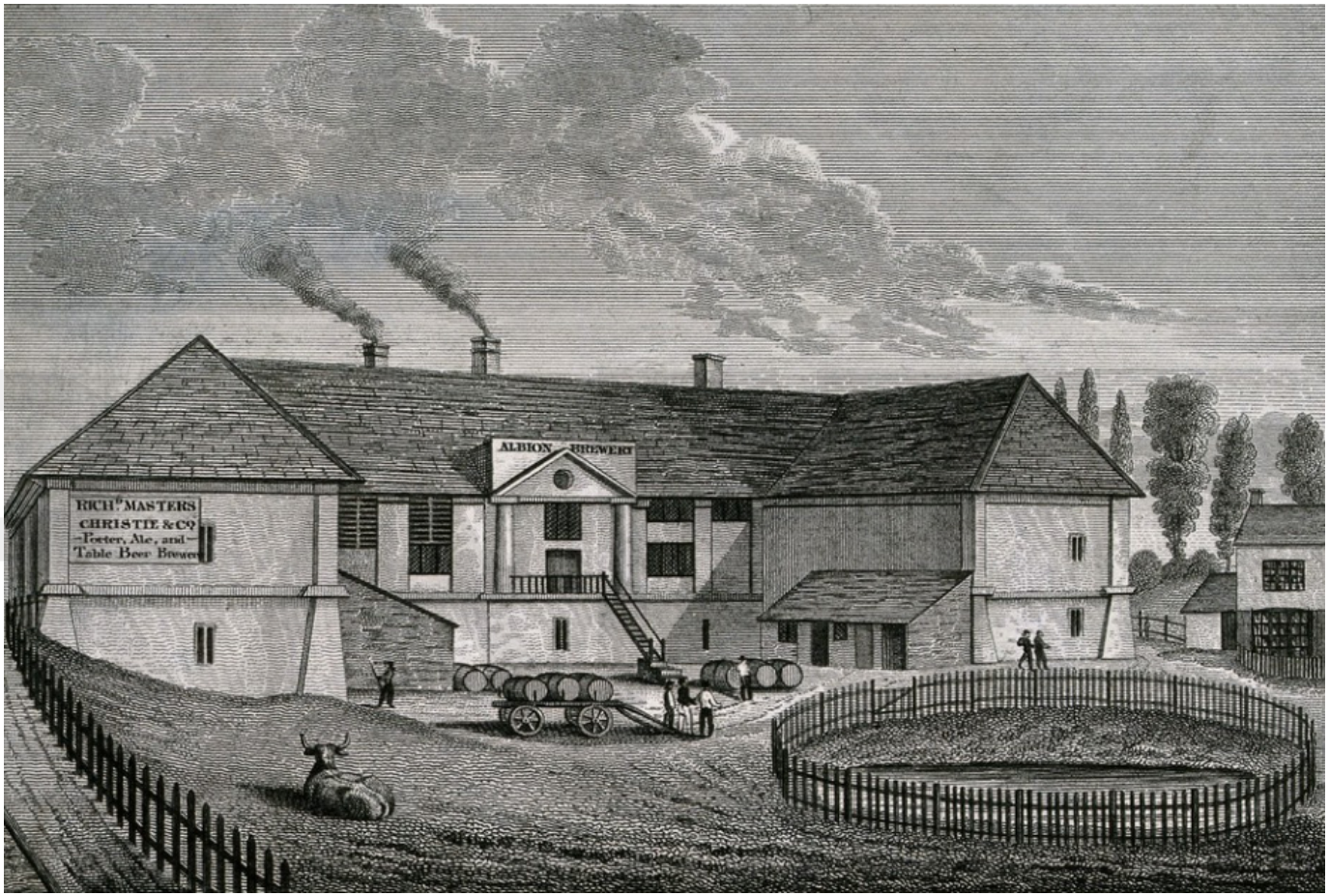
3.8 Archaeology

The town centre is densely developed, and much archaeology which may have once survived here is likely to have been truncated. However, the character area (particularly the High Street and the historic routes leading off it) occupy the core of the original settlement, which was first referenced in 803. This character area therefore has the highest archaeological potential within the conservation area. There have been some archaeological finds within the character area, including:

- a large quantity of Roman pottery behind St James' Square;
- a medieval field boundary and trackway on land adjacent Portland Street and St Margaret's Road;
- four possible Romano British pits and several post-medieval pits with pottery and tile fragments in St George's Place; and
- Norman ecclesiastical remains on the site of the old wool and corn market house in the High Street.

There is potential for archaeological remains associated with buildings from the medieval, early-modern, Georgian and Victorian eras to survive beneath later development across the character area.

Further information on the archaeological potential of the conservation area can be accessed via the Gloucestershire Historic Environment Record (HER), which is maintained by Gloucestershire County Council. Portions of the HER database can be searched online via the website Heritage Gateway.[01]



The foundations of buildings in Cheltenham which were demolished may survive beneath later development across the town. Pictured here is the Albion Brewery, near the junction of Gloucester Road and the High Street, which was demolished in the late 19th century.

01 https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/

4.0 Heritage assets

The Central Conservation Area is a heritage asset in its own right and contains numerous individual heritage assets. These include both listed and unlisted buildings and structures. A detailed assessment of heritage significance, specific to a building or site within the conservation area, should always be carried out prior to proposing any change.

The accompanying map shows the distribution of heritage assets as at May 2026. However, the National Heritage List for England via https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search/ and Cheltenham Borough Council's Index of Buildings of Local Interest should always be referenced for the most up to date records.

4.1 Listed buildings

Listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and are designated for their special architectural or historic interest. All listed buildings in England are designated at the recommendation of Historic England and details are recorded on the National Heritage List for England. Listings are ranked from Grade I (the highest level), Grade II* (in the middle) and Grade II (the lowest and most common level).

Statutory listing does not equate to a preservation order intended to prevent change. However, alterations to listed buildings will require listed building consent, which allows the local authority to make decisions that have been informed by an understanding of the building or site's heritage significance. Importantly, national and local planning policies also recognise that changes to un-listed buildings or sites in the setting of a designated heritage asset can affect its special interest.

4.2 Scheduled monuments

There is one scheduled monument within the Town Centre Character Area – the churchyard cross at St Mary's Church.[01] Scheduled monuments are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Scheduling protects nationally important archaeological sites, which can be above or below ground, and the register is managed by Historic England. Any works to a scheduled monument will require scheduled monument consent, granted at the discretion of Historic England.

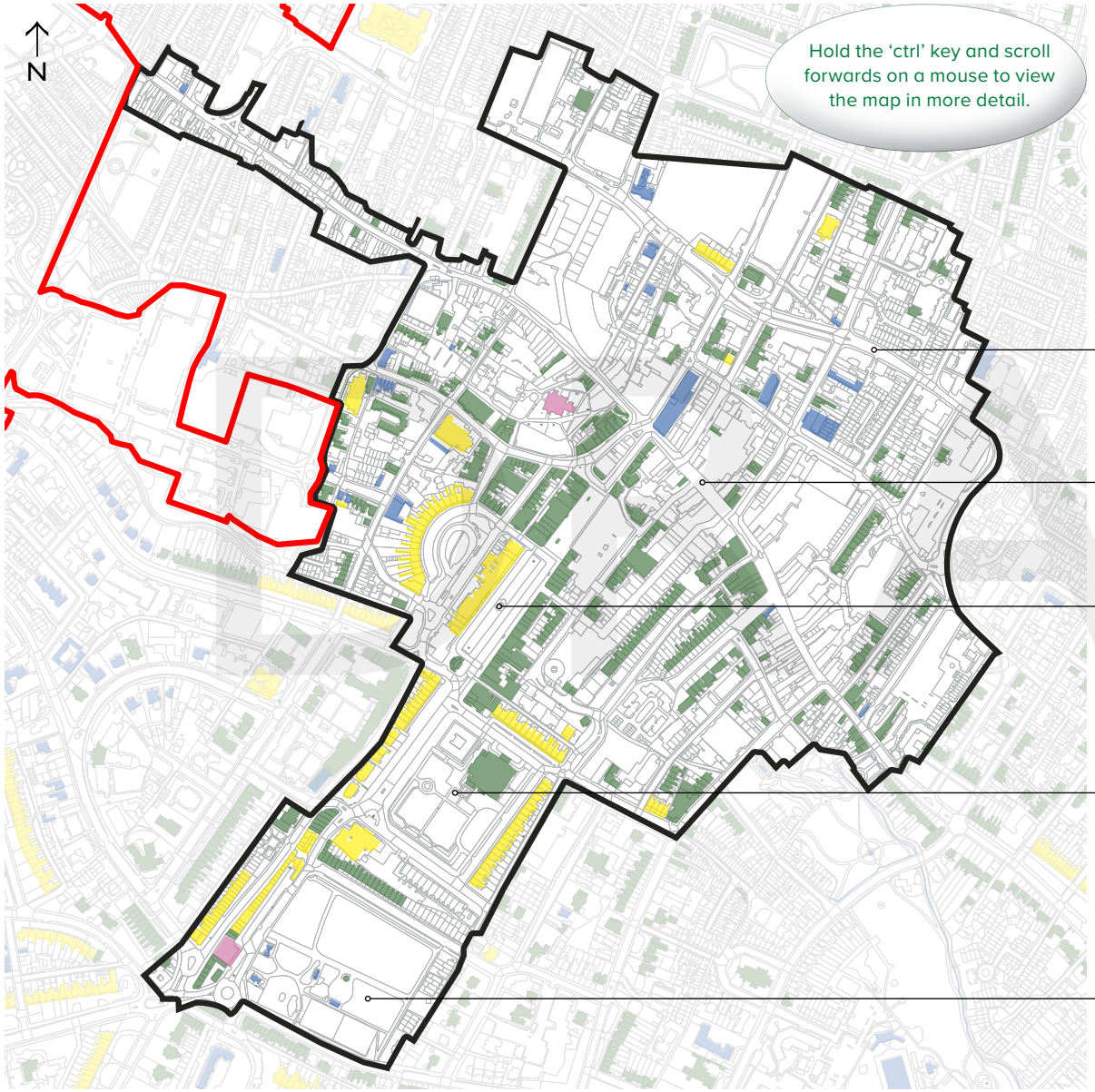
4.3 Locally indexed buildings

Cheltenham Borough Council maintains an index of buildings of local interest. These are defined as buildings which do not meet the strict criteria for listing, but still make a special contribution to the history, appearance, character and cultural value of Cheltenham. Inclusion on the index does not affect any planning rights at the properties identified.

However, the Council will give careful consideration to the local importance of the property and its setting when considering any applications for planning or other consents. The Council may consider action to protect the building if it is considered to be under threat of demolition or damage. The index is reviewed and updated from time to time.

01 https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1015389

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Heritage Assets Plan

- Proposed conservation area boundary
- Town Centre character area
- Grade I listed building
- Grade II* listed building
- Grade II listed building
- Locally indexed building
- Scheduled monument

This plan is not to scale

The information provided in this map may not accurately reflect the existing data set. Up-to-date records can be found in the relevant interactive mapping resources, which are accessible via the Council's website.

5.0 Challenges

5.1 Condition and maintenance

The condition of buildings and spaces within the character area is variable. Montpellier is generally in good condition, as are the streets to the north and south of the High Street. The High Street itself is generally in fair condition, with maintenance issues worsening towards the western end.

A high proportion of the buildings are well looked after; however, there are examples of structures of all typologies which are deteriorating. Many common problems could be easily addressed through regular maintenance or the appropriate repair.

There are localised examples of blocked gutters and downpipes, which can contribute to external staining as well as more serious issues with damp. Regular clearance of and improvements to rainwater goods can easily rectify these issues.

Render is extremely common across the character area and there is potential for the use of inappropriate cementitous materials to accelerate the deterioration of built fabric. This is because traditional buildings (generally those built before 1919) utilised 'breathable' materials which facilitate the free passage of moisture through a structure. Although older buildings absorb more moisture than modern structures, this moisture should be able to evaporate in dry conditions. Modern cement-based renders and mortars are not breathable and prevent the evaporation of moisture from a traditional building, thereby causing issues with damp and deterioration. Non-breathable paint applied over walls which were originally intended to be exposed can have a similar impact. The colour of renewed paintwork across formal terraces should be consistent, in order to retain their visual coherence.

There are several instances throughout the character area where boundary walls are suffering from a lack of maintenance which manifests in staining, vegetation growth and missing joints. This could be remedied through the careful removal of vegetation and cementitious mortar and the localised replacement of masonry/brick, bedded in and pointed with lime mortar.

Generally, the condition of the public realm along the High Street and adjoining roads is poor, with a lack of maintenance to pavement surfaces and/or inappropriate repairs (such as the replacement of pavers with black bituminous asphalt). There are several instances where historic ironwork (notably railings and lamp posts) is in need of sensitive repair to remedy corrosion.

Where timber window units and shopfronts survive, these make an important contribution to the character of the conservation area and should be regularly maintained. There are several examples of rotting joinery to historic window units and shopfronts, and this should be addressed through the replacement of damaged timbers which cannot be salvaged with new timber, and regular re-painting with suitable paint. Effective management of water run-off will also help to prevent timber decay.

Where buildings within the character area are vacant, problems with condition tend to be exacerbated as they go unnoticed for longer periods.

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Flaking paint and deteriorating joinery to a historic shopfront.



Vacant buildings deteriorate at a faster rate and encourage anti-social behaviour.



Ineffective moisture management leading to degradation of render on a Regency building.



Inappropriate repairs to a historic masonry wall using hard cementitious mortar, which causes the masonry to deteriorate at an increased rate.

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5.2 Detracting features and loss of historic details

The replacement of traditional timber framed windows with uPVC alternatives is common across parts of the character area; particularly along the High Street and to the modest Regency terraces to the north. The materials, style, opening mechanisms and position within the window reveal (i.e. flush with the elevation, rather than set back) of the uPVC replacements are detrimental to the character of the historic elevations and collectively detract from the special interest of the conservation area. Although they are often perceived to offer environmental benefits, the lifespan of uPVC windows is considerably shorter than that of well-maintained timber windows and the units cannot be easily recycled. Similarly, the replacement of traditional timber doors with modern designs in uPVC result in features which are discordant with the character of the conservation area.

The public realm within the town centre suffers on account of the amount of street furniture, including CCTV camera poles, utilitarian street furniture (including lampposts, bike storage, benches and A-boards), utility boxes, redundant services and a significant amount of traffic signage. This is partly due to the fact that the inner ring road runs through the character area. Considered rationalisation of street clutter could significantly enhance the public realm.

Similarly, the accrual of services such as security alarm boxes, satellite dishes, TV aerials and prominent vents and flues on historic buildings detracts from the historic character of the streetscapes within the character area.

The public realm is further depreciated where bins are stored on the street outside residential premises, creating unattractive visual clutter within the streetscape.

Along the High Street in particular, there is a significant lack of coordination across the surface finishes with a range of materials and colours apparent. Finishes include small concrete block pavers, larger rectangular pavers in a mixture of sizes and colours, large areas of bituminous asphalt and resin-bound aggregate. The prevalence of low-quality surface finishes and the lack of coordination across the public realm depreciates the appearance of the conservation area and detracts from its historic character.

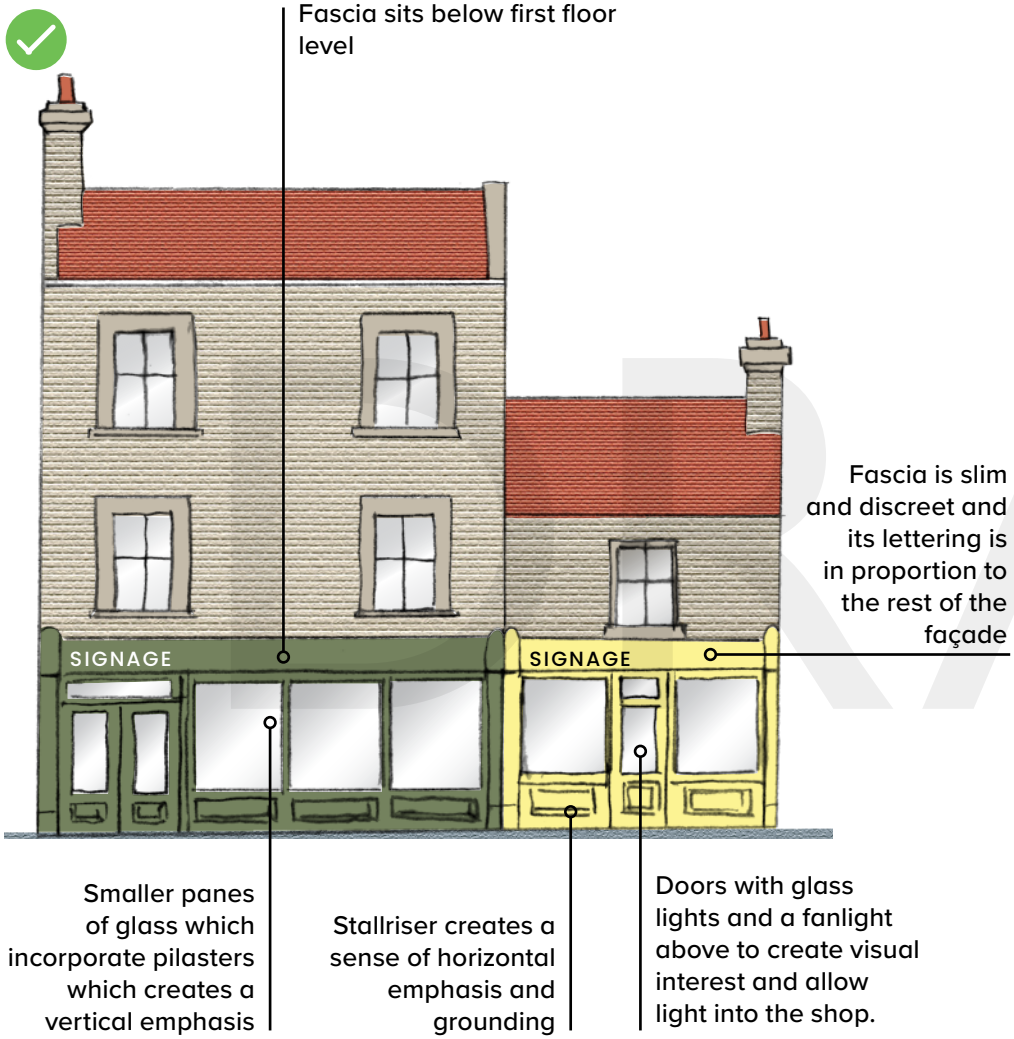
The public realm around the High Street also suffers from a distinct lack of street trees and greenery, which would alleviate the impact of extensive hardstanding.

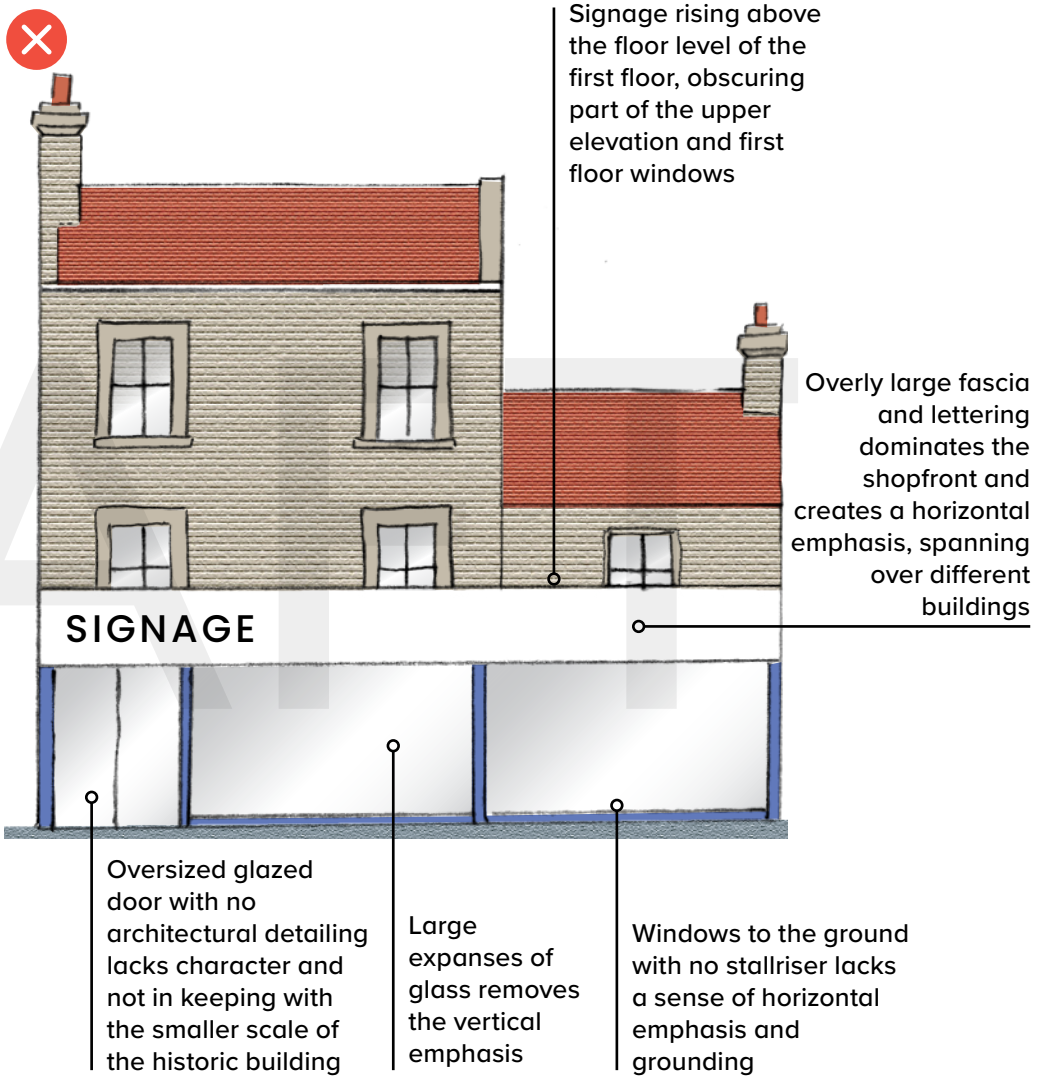
Many shopfronts retain or incorporate traditional features, particularly within Montpellier. However, a high proportion of the shopfronts along the High Street have been altered with inappropriate additions such as box fascias and expansive float glass frontages which are overly prominent and do not respect the proportions of the host building. Incorporating traditional features such as a stallriser (a platform below the shop window), glazing articulated by mullions and transoms (horizontal and vertical glazing bars), and a fascia which respects the proportions of the host building can greatly improve the character of modern retail units in the conservation area.

Retail advertising also creates significant visual clutter within the Town Centre character area. Excessive posters and vinyl stickers, poorly designed lettering (such as freestanding uPVC lettering or applied transfers rather than handpainted lettering), and internally illuminated signage detract from the aesthetic interest of the building in which the retail unit is located as wel as the wider streetscape.

Cheltenham Borough Council's supplementary planning document, 'Shopfront Design Guide: A Guide for Owners, Designers and Shopfitters', provides further information on both adapting existing shopfronts and designing new ones.

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Fascia sits below first floor level
SIGNAGE
SIGNAGE
Fascia is slim and discreet and its lettering is in proportion to the rest of the façade
Smaller panes of glass which incorporate pilasters which creates a vertical emphasis
Stallriser creates a sense of horizontal emphasis and grounding
Doors with glass lights and a fanlight above to create visual interest and allow light into the shop.


Signage rising above the floor level of the first floor, obscuring part of the upper elevation and first floor windows
SIGNAGE
Overly large fascia and lettering dominates the shopfront and creates a horizontal emphasis, spanning over different buildings
Oversized glazed door with no architectural detailing lacks character and not in keeping with the smaller scale of the historic building
Large expanses of glass removes the vertical emphasis
Windows to the ground with no stallriser lacks a sense of horizontal emphasis and grounding



Historic buildings with unsympathetic ground floor shopfronts and uPVC windows.



Deteriorating joinery and detracting trailing wires over a modern shopfront on the High Street.



Partial loss of iron railings at St Mary's churchyard.



Modern roller shutters deaden the streetscape and detract from the historic fascia and canopy over this shopfront.

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5.3 Inappropriate modern development

There are several examples of modern development within the town centre which depreciate the special interest of the conservation area through inappropriate massing and detailing, particularly along the High Street and Fairview Road. Large multi-storey car parks appear overly dominant, dwarfing the Regency buildings in their setting.



A late 20th-century flat roof building which occupies a large proportion of Wincombe Street, a historic road leading off the High Street which pre-dates the establishment of the spa town.



Insensitive late 20th-century development between historic buildings on the High Street.



Insensitive infill development on the High Street.

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5.4 Development pressures

It is acknowledged that there is pressure on housing numbers within the conservation area and that associated planning applications are likely to be submitted in the future. Providing additional residential units within historic town centres, either by adding extensions or converting existing buildings, brings challenges including:

- Maintaining the character of the roofscape. In the High Street for instance, a varied roofscape containing buildings of different heights is characteristic, whereas many residential side streets have a consistent, flat roofscape with low pitches hidden behind parapets.
- Avoiding unsightly clutter to prominent elevations through giving careful consideration to the location and appearance of features such as fire-escape stairs, vents, flues and wastepipes.
- Avoiding the loss of historic features such as sash windows and/or the introduction of unsympathetic uPVC windows.
- Avoiding bulky and insensitive box dormers, which can appear overly dominant and disrupt the restrained character of the predominantly classical architecture.

The conversion of retail premises to residential use can have adverse affects on the character of streetscape through the loss of active commercial frontages. Conversions of this type can be appropriate in certain circumstances, but success usually depends on ensuring that historic features (such as shopfront windows and joinery) are retained in situ so that the original function of the shopfront remains legible.

Where new-build accommodation is proposed, the challenges will include:

- Preserving the integrity of views into and out of the character area and wider conservation area.
- Avoiding visual competition with key local landmarks.
- Incorporating landscape improvements such as green spaces and street trees.
- Where relevant, ensuring the continued legibility of historic plot boundaries.
- Responding to the proportions of historic plots and frontages, architectural details, roofscapes and materiality.
- Enhancing the setting of surrounding heritage assets.



Alterations and extensions to rear and side elevations without due regard for visual impact can depreciate the character and appearance of the conservation area.

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5.5 Heritage at risk

Historic England's Heritage at Risk (HAR) Register is the national programme for identifying designated heritage assets that are most vulnerable to neglect, decay, inappropriate change, or other threats. Updated annually, the Register provides an overview of the condition of England's historic environment and helps to prioritise action and resources to secure the long-term conservation of at-risk heritage assets.

Holy Trinity Church and its boundary walls, off Portland Street, is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.[01] The Grade II* listed building is in poor and declining condition and has been marked by Historic England as highly vulnerable.

5.6 Traffic and parking

The inner ring road carries a significant amount of traffic through the character area, resulting in congestion, noise and barriers to pedestrian movement around the town centre. There is a significant amount of on-street parking, which detracts from the setting of the uniform terraces throughout the character area. Large car parks create significant gaps in the urban grain. Many front gardens have been lost to hard standing for car parking, reducing the small pockets of green space which would once have softened the urban environment.



Holy Trinity Church, Portland Street (1820s) - a recognised heritage asset at risk.



Car parks create large gaps in the urban grain. The impact of this is worsened where insensitive boundary treatments such as concrete bollards and high steel fencing are present.

5.7 Pressures on trees and green spaces

Trees and open spaces face a range of pressures within urban environments. Development proposals, including extensions, infill development, changes to access arrangements, and the installation of new infrastructure and services, can result in tree loss, root damage, or reductions in available growing space. Street trees may be particularly vulnerable where highway or utility works require excavation below pavements, while trees in private gardens can be affected by increased hard surfacing, subdivision of plots, and incremental development.

Climate change is likely to increase these challenges. More frequent periods of drought, higher temperatures, intense rainfall events, and storms may affect tree health, longevity, and resilience. The careful management and retention of mature trees, together with opportunities for new planting, will be important in maintaining the character, environmental quality, and landscape setting of the conservation area.

The Cheltenham Tree Strategy, published February 2026, provides further information and guidance around maintaining existing trees and planting new ones. The Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) have also published resources on best practice to support the role of urban trees through the planning, design, construction and management of urban environments.[02]

Contact details for the trees team at Cheltenham Borough Council are provided in Appendix A.

01 https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/23279 (accessed March 2026).

02 https://www.tdag.org.uk/

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6.0 Opportunities for enhancement

6.1 General opportunities

There is scope to enhance the conservation area through addressing the minor but altogether detracting elements such as external accretions, management of rainwater goods and the appropriate repair of failing elements. Incrementally addressing these issues will have a positive impact and enhance the conservation area.

Although many of the uPVC windows and doors which have already been installed are unlikely to require replacement in the near future, there is scope for any further replacement windows and doors to be carried out using styles, materials and methods that are better suited to enhancing the special interest of the conservation area. It would be especially beneficial for first-generation uPVC double-glazing, which is generally coming to the end of its life cycle, to be replaced with more suitable alternatives, rather than a more visually intrusive standard option.

There is a significant opportunity to enhance the public realm within the character area, particularly around the High Street. This may entail rationalising street furniture, removing redundant services, providing additional seating, introducing greenery and improving surface finishes. The forthcoming public realm toolkit for Cheltenham High Street & Promenade (which as of August 2026 is at public consultation stage, will provide a set of clear standards for public realm design and a useful guidance document for stakeholders in both the public and private sectors.

The replacement or alteration of unsympathetic shopfronts would greatly enhance the special interest of the conservation area.

6.2 Areas of opportunity

As well as the many minor and individual instances where there is opportunity to improve the character of the conservation area, there are specific sites within the character area that present opportunities for larger scale interventions that could have a correspondingly substantial positive impact. These range from areas where a high concentration of relatively minor individual issues could be collectively addressed to particularly positive effect, or where more substantial development may be possible (subject to sensitive proposals). In some instances, these sites align with allocations made within existing planning policy and could continue to inform future site allocations.

There is significant opportunity to enhance the High Street. This would improve the appearance of the conservation area, encourage investment to encourage upkeep of buildings, and reduce vacancy. Carrying out maintenance work to buildings, cleaning façades, replacing or altering insensitive shopfronts, removing surface mounted fittings and reducing internally illuminated lighting and vinyl advertisements would greatly enhance the character of the High Street.

There are multiple car parks within the character area, which create large gaps in the urban grain. These sites, which include the car parks at North Place, Portland Street, Rodney Road and St James Street, present opportunities for future development to replace large areas of hardstanding which make little or no contribution to the special interest of the conservation area. Multi-storey car parks including the Town Centre East car park off Fairview Road and the NCP car park off St Margarets Road may be beneficially redeveloped to the benefit of the conservation in the future, either by replacement or façade enhancement (such as recladding). The flat-roofed commercial building on the east side of Winchcombe Street is another structure which sits uncomfortably within its historic setting and could be enhanced or redeveloped in the future.

The junction of Poole Way and the High Street is generally a visually prominent, poor quality public space which could be enhanced to the benefit of the conservation area.

The historic character of the town centre would benefit from finding a new use for Cavendish House, which is a highly prominent structure fronting the Promenade on the site of Cheltenham's oldest department store. The rear elevation of the Regent Arcade is blocky and monotonous, deadening the streetscape along Regent Street. Interventions to enliven the façade and improve surrounding boundary treatments would enhance the character area.

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Similarly, the utilitarian design of the buildings occupying the Bence supplier site off Fairview Road, which is enclosed by stark utilitarian metal railings, could be improved in the future to the benefit of the character area.

When successfully delivered, new development within a conservation area responds to the proportions of historic buildings plots and frontages, existing architectural detailing, established roofscapes and materiality.

Successful, contextual design can be creative and contemporary, so long as it is rooted in a deep understanding of how a place develops and what makes it special. This also applies to developments within the setting of a conservation area.

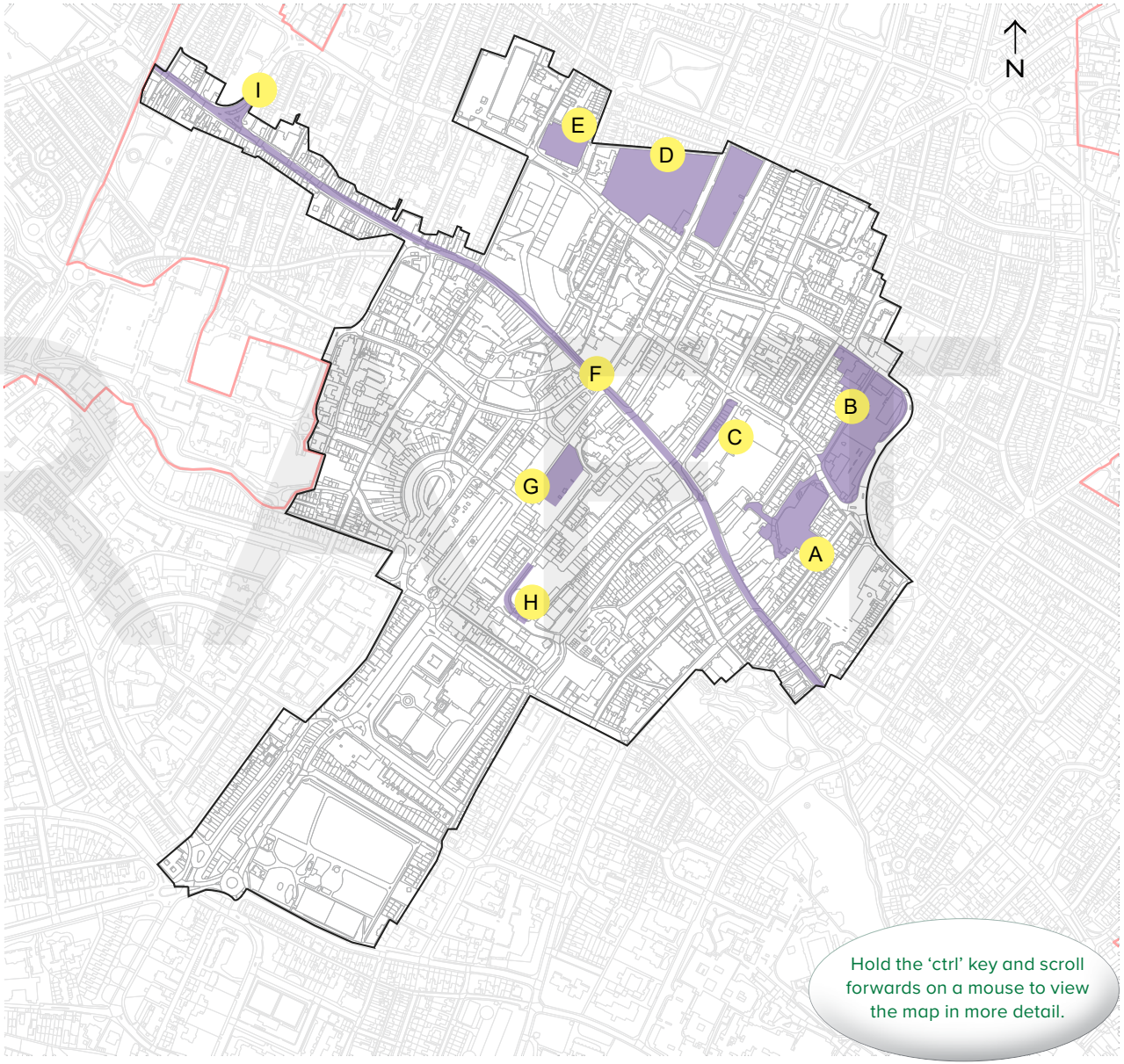
Opportunities for enhancement

- Proposed conservation area boundary
- Town Centre character area
- Opportunities for enhancement

A Town centre east car park*
B George Bence site*
C Flat-roofed commercial development at Winchombe Street*
D Car parks creating large gap in urban grain to north of Swindon Road*
E NCP multi-storey car park*
F High Street
G Cavendish House
H Regent Arcade
I Junction of Poole Way and High Street

*Areas with sensitive development potential.

This plan is not to scale



7.0 Future Management of the Town Centre

A management plan for the conservation area, including the Town Centre character area, is provided within section 7.0 of the Cheltenham Central Conservation Area Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan: Overview Document. This overarching document sets out:

- Control measure associated with conservation area designation
- Aims and best practices in conservation areas
- Protocols for repair and replacement
- Maintenance
- Tree management
- New development
- Sustainability

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