

HIGH WYCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

The Town Centre: Parish Church, Old Core and High Street Area Study 1

This document forms part of a larger conservation appraisal for High Wycombe and should be read in conjunction with the master document which gives development control guidelines.

1 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

This sub-area is the most complex and architecturally diverse in the conservation area, and is what gives Wycombe its overriding character as a market town. It reflects some two thousand years of historical development and is the heart of the town, based on an early river crossing of a trade route through the Chilterns. As such, it contains the key town buildings, both ecclesiastical and public, commercial and (formerly) residential. The parish church of All Saints, the largest medieval church in the county, is set within its churchyard behind Church Square. Its west tower dominates views both within and from around the town. To the west, the island of buildings between Church Street and White Hart Street, probably a medieval market encroachment, has a complex plot pattern and a very high density. This area, which includes the west end of Castle Street and Castle Place, is the oldest part of the town. The High Street, a wide straight street laid out in the 13th century as a planned market, is eight hundred years later still filled with market stalls three days a week, although without sheep and cattle. Some of the town's finest historic buildings line the street which terminates in the Cornmarket, with the Little Market House to the north and the vista west closed by the superb Georgian Guildhall, built for Lord Shelburne in 1757.

Also included in this character area is the Victorian expansion of Castle Place of 1877-79 which overlies a much earlier settlement pattern and the earlier Church Farm. This has its own distinctive architecture and is linked visually to the churchyard area.

Location and population

This area lies at the heart of the High Wycombe conservation area. It was from this nucleus that the whole town area grew and spread.



The High Street runs east west along the valley floor with land rising to the north of it. To the south lies the River Wye, much of it hidden by culverts. Further south the inner relief road (Abbey Way) runs along the valley floor.

General character, plan form and landscape context

The town centre lies at the bottom of the River Wye Valley, with steep hills rising to the north and south. The street pattern of the old core changes significantly from east to west, with the Guildhall providing a visual break between the planned thirteenth century layout (east), and the older irregular roads (west) that make up the oldest part of the town. Historically this was the main stagecoach route from London to Oxford, although through traffic is now limited. Much of the High Street is now unloading only, and buses can pass along Church Street into Frogmoor, but much of the town centre is essentially pedestrian only.

The High Street is a long linear widened street, with a classic narrow burgage plot layout at right angles to the road. The church lies just to the north of the market square area, where the High Street widens out to join Church Street, White Hart Street and Pauls Row. (The latter led south to the original river crossing). Buildings are aligned to the front of plots perpendicular to the road frontage, with the exception of the grand Guildhall, previously the Market Hall, which sits in the middle of the Cornmarket area, although attached to The Falcon on the southern side of the road.

The plot densities on Church Street and the northern side of White Hart Street are much higher, with narrow plots crammed with buildings. This was the original pre-13th century market area, and the island of buildings now here are an early encroachment. Originally Pauls Row exhibited a similar layout pattern, but this was swept away when the Octagon Shopping Centre was built. There is far less evidence of medieval town “planning” here, as plots are of a more random size and shape.

The continued occupation has meant that many buildings have been significantly altered over time, although medieval remnants survive in places beneath the 18th and 19th century remodellings (as do wall paintings), and this variety and complexity of building form adds to the townscape character.

Form, materials and architectural style vary greatly throughout this part of the conservation area, reflecting a complex history of development of the area, mainly carried out on a plot by plot basis.

2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Origins and historic development

There are many excellent sources on the history of High Wycombe, from the VCH to recent books and articles (see the reference section



A view of the Cornmarket from the Church tower showing the abrupt change from planned wide High Street to more curvilinear road pattern.



The Guildhall and Cornmarket .



A chair arch dating from the 1880s.



The Red Lion Hotel, looking west towards the Guildhall.

All historic photographs courtesy of SWOP, Bucks County Council and the Bucks Free Press

in the main document). Space precludes a full history here except where it links particularly to the layout and development of this part of the town centre.

Prior to Domesday there is little evidence of a settlement at Wycombe, although there was a Roman villa close by on The Rye, and two hill forts to the west at Desborough Castle and West Wycombe Hill. The settlement sits on two major routes through the Chilterns - Oxford to London, and Windsor to Hatfield, and an early settlement probably grew up on the river crossing at Bridge Mill.

The first written description of the town is in the Domesday book, when Wycombe was described as a large village, which already had six mills on the Wye. Bishop Wulfstan dedicated the parish church between 1072 and 1092. As the village grew into a town during the 11th century it became important enough to have a castle – the motte remains in the grounds of Wycombe Museum. By 14th century the town was known as Chepping (meaning market) Wycombe. The development of the Borough dates from the reign of Henry II (1154-83), and the Borough status was confirmed in 1237.

The influence of the High Medieval period (850-1350) shaped the town centre, producing the current street layout, the general building plot size and shape, and freestanding buildings - notably the church.

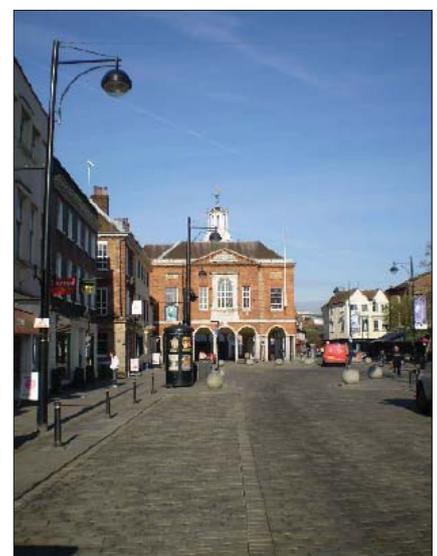
Originally the town had a large market place, stretching westwards from the church towards Frogmoor and bounded by Church Street, White Hart Street and Queen Square. This is now intensively built up, as temporary stalls were replaced by permanent buildings in typical encroachment fashion. The town's original Guildhall was located here, and survived, much transformed until the 1930's, although surrounded by the built up encroachments. At some time in the 13th century the High Street was laid out in a typical medieval planned pattern of a wide street with narrow burgage plots facing onto it. The Guildhall was built at the western end of this in the Cornmarket, in the 1470s, and largely rebuilt in 1604, before being replaced in 1757 by the second Earl Shelburne.

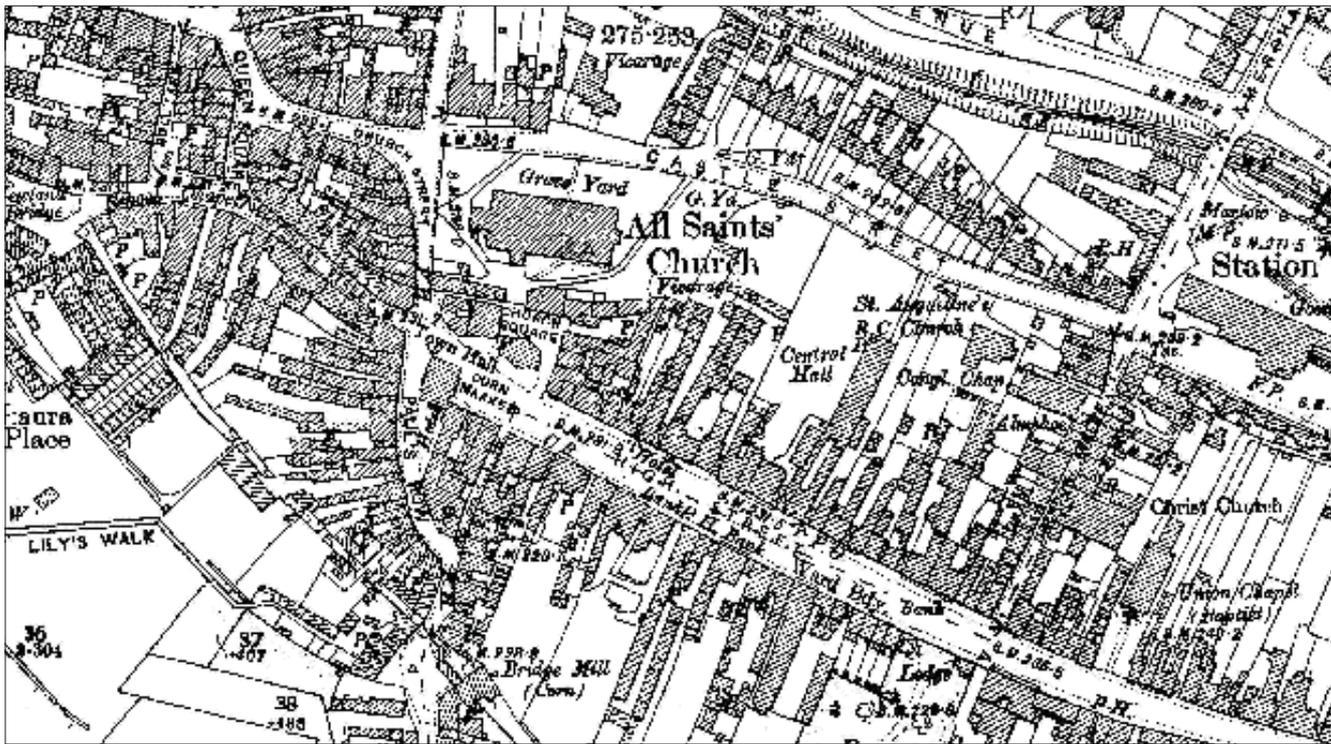
By the early modern period (1350-1750) Wycombe was a major centre for the wool and cloth trade, with the Wye powering mills for fulling. Its proximity to London meant that the market was highly successful, and the location of the town midway between Oxford and London made it a convenient stopping off place for travellers. The grain trade and the corn market were equally important and remained so until the 19th century. The wool and corn trade attracted tradesmen, shop keepers and inn keepers to the town and contributed to its medieval growth. The streets were lined with the houses and commercial buildings of the mercantile classes, some of which remain, although in an altered form.



A view of the Cornmarket and Guildhall, through the lower arcade of the Little Market House. These glimpses of historic buildings through arcading is one of the particular features of this part of the conservation area.

A view of the Guildhall looking west along the High Street. The Grade I listed building is an iconic eyecatcher along this vista, and a key symbol of the town. It also creates a pinch point separating the formality of the planned market phase, with the informal road pattern beyond.





1899 map showing plot layout.

In 1558 the town obtained its first (surviving) formal Charter of Incorporation, although the town had been a Borough for some 300 years. The core of the old Borough was around the church and the market place, with Cornmarket leading into the spacious and formally laid out High Street extension. This linked to Easton Street at the east end of the town. Crendon Street led north, while Horsenden Lane (now Queen Victoria Road) ran south to the leper hospital, Loakes Manor and Marlow Hill. The old market place led to Frogmoor and Temple End, and Pauls Row led south to St. Mary Street, Bridge Mill and thence to Marlow Hill. Some of the houses and inns that filled this space survive, particularly the Falcon and The Antelope. By the late 16th century many of the earlier medieval buildings were being improved or replaced by more substantial timber framed ones, many of which survive (at least thirty), especially around the Corn Market, but also in places along the High Street, Castle Street and Pauls Row.

In the Georgian period the character of the town changed again, mostly as the result of a long period of prosperity and new architectural and building methods. The Lords Shelburne in particular did much to beautify the town: The first Earl Shelburne, Henry Petty, bought the Manors of Temple Wycombe, Loakes and Windsor (or Chapel Fee). He was briefly MP for the town. His nephew, John Fitzmaurice inherited his estates in 1751, and was created Baron Wycombe in 1760. The second Earl Shelburne had a far more important impact on the town, and was a burgess, alderman and later MP. His most notable gift was the new town hall (now the Guildhall), built to the designs of his architect Henry Keene, in 1757. He also added the Gothic pinnacles to the tower of All Saints Church and commissioned the Scheemakers monument to the first Earl. Alterations were made to Loakes Manor (now Wycombe Abbey), again by Keene. The second

Throughout this document buildings are referred to where possible by their numbers. Often what appears to be a single frontage, will be two or more buildings, which is why in some cases the description of the building will be as a an individual structure, but the numbering may be in multiples. This is the result of refronting.

Earl died in 1761, and his son William inherited. The third Earl was probably the most prominent political figure associated with the town in the late 18th century, and was a Cabinet Minister, the first Home Secretary, and in 1782-83 Prime Minister. Politically he is probably best remembered for negotiating the Treaty of Paris which led to the independence of the United States. However he had a physical impact on the town of High Wycombe, mostly through the reordering of the land surrounding the Manor House.



The medieval encroachment onto the original market place - the plot layout is far less regular. The original Guildhall is thought to have been located in the centre of this block.

During the Georgian period many of the buildings facing the High Street were refaced in brick, with patterns picked out in contrasting brick and bond patterns. The new classicism in architectural fashion was reflected in the building styles. Many of the High Street buildings became grand merchant housing.

The Victorian period was characterized by continual refronting, and the gradual movement of the townspeople from houses on the High Street to the newer leafier suburbs on the surrounding hillsides. Many of the High Street businesses became shops and businesses.

Rebuilding and improvements to the built environment continued into the 20th century with a number of fine institutional buildings such as banks being erected on the High Street. Increased need for infrastructure led to the construction of new roads, such as Corporation Street, and improvements to others (Crendon Street). Other 20th century alterations to the town have generally been less successful. Some of the buildings in the old core have been replaced by unsympathetic modern ones, mostly dating from the latter half of the century. The burgage plot pattern has been affected by the merging and development of plots, and large scale modern developments at the rear such as car parking. Much of the historic development to the south of White Hart Street and west of Pauls Row was swept away during the slum clearance programs of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the historic shop fronts have been lost. However there has over the past 40 years been a greater appreciation of the qualities of the historic environment, and the pedestrianisation scheme has greatly enhanced the character of the High Street in particular. Guidance on shop fronts has also proved beneficial, although there is a constant battle against the requirements for corporate identity on the part of the High Street chain stores.

Archaeology

This part of the town, comprising its medieval and earlier core, is of obvious archaeological interest.

Looking east on market day, the wide planned market place with 2 and 3 storey buildings enclosing the space.



Historic maps

1875, 1899 OS. The Ordnance Survey has been producing maps of the area since 1875. Details of the 1899 map are shown on page 4.

3 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The character and interrelationship of spaces within the area

The High Street is unusually wide, due to the fact that it was a medieval planned market, with burgage plots running north-south, perpendicular to the road. There is a general feeling of spaciousness as a result of the wide street and the height of the frontages to either side. The sense of enclosure is retained however by the near continuous frontages of the 2 to 3 storey buildings that line the High Street.

Cornmarket – a larger open space at the meeting point of High Street and Church Street and Pauls Row, dominated by the Guildhall, which sits across the space and is key in views. The open arcade adds to the sense of permeability of the area. It was to the front of the Guildhall that many of the stagecoaches would stop, leading to a concentration of coaching inns on this part of the High Street.

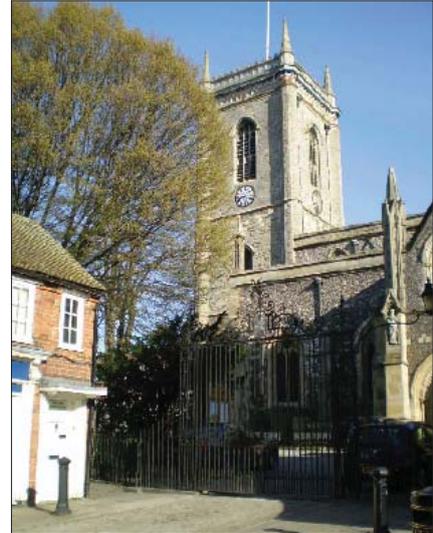
Church Square – a small tight knit urban square, enclosing the Little Market House which faces onto the High Street. This area was originally the Shambles or hog market, where pigs were butchered. There is a strong sense of enclosure due to the height and proximity of the surrounding buildings, and shared surfaces.

The Churchyard – this is a greener open space, set above the street layout within retaining walls, and open to three sides. It slopes gently to the south, and is well treed. Historic buildings face onto it from across Church Street and Castle Street. Originally there were houses all along the south side, facing the passageway called Noyes Lane, and linking the back of the Shambles with Church Street. This terminated in the Black Boy pub, but this, and another building to the south, were demolished in the mid 20th century.

Church Street and White Hart Street encompass the former market and original Guildhall. The latter curves away to the west, its southern side replaced by the bulk of the Octagon Centre/Eden. Church Street runs north and then turns sharply west to join Frogmoor. The original Guildhall site is now lost behind the continuous frontages of these streets.

Important views and vistas

The key view in the sub area is the linear view facing west along the High Street towards the Guildhall, which terminates the vista and is a landmark building. Included in this view are the fine properties to either side of the road, including Wycombe's famous Red Lion, now above the arcading of the former Woolworths store.

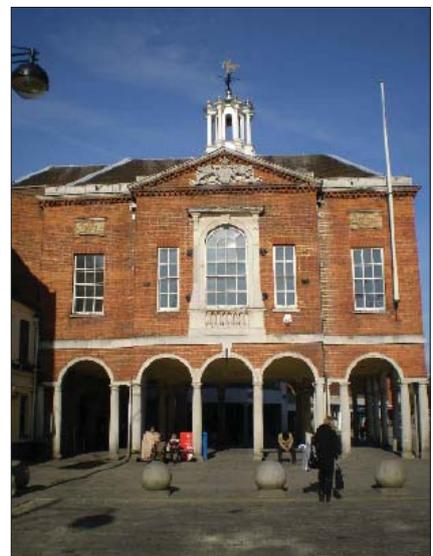


The southern entrance to the Churchyard, with gates reputed to be from Loakes Manor. Noyes Lane ran to the left behind the brick building.



The south porch to All Saints. Ground floor late 13th century, with Victorian restoration and embellishment by Street.

The fine brick facade of the Guildhall, held on graceful stone arcading. The open character of the ground floor allows for views through the building.



There is a more restricted view south east along Church Street back towards the church, with its western end and tower dominating the streetscape. Another close range view (also on Church Street) is south towards the corner of the Guildhall. Views across the High Street to the Little Market House, and beyond these through the churchyard gates to the church are also close range. Views of the Cornmarket area through the arches of the Guildhall are particularly attractive, framed by the curves of the arcade structure.

4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Activity and landuse

This sub area comprises the economic heart of the town. Originally it comprised a mix of houses and businesses, and, importantly a large number of inns and hostelries catering for the stage coach trade between London and Oxford. Some pubs remain, but the majority of the buildings are now in business and retail use.

Architectural and historical quality of buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the area

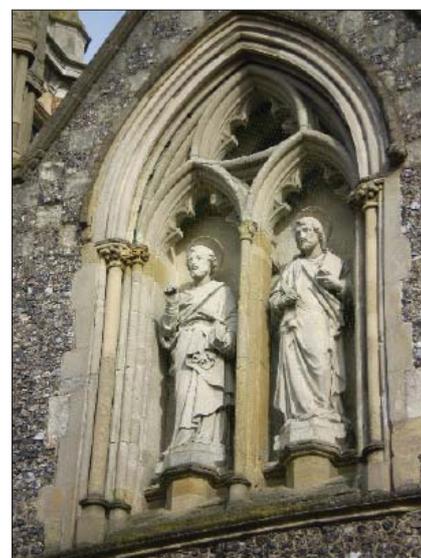
Ecclesiastical: All Saints Church: The church was founded in 1080, and rebuilt in stages from the 13th century onwards. Originally cruciform, with a central tower, it was extended during the 13th and 14th centuries. The nave and chancel were lengthened in the 13th century, and chancels and south porch were added. In the 14th century a further chapel was added and the chancel altered to add a clerestory, which reduced the pitch of the roof. At the same time the west tower was started, although not completed until 1522. In the early 16th century new arcades were constructed, and the central tower removed. There are indications that there was a chapel in the northern part of the churchyard (Holy Trinity and Our Lady) but this has long vanished, probably as a result of the Reformation. Further additions were made to the Church by Henry Keene, on the instruction of the second Earl Shelburne, who added the embellishments to the top of the western tower, and a new west door. The late Victorian era saw extensive restoration of the church by Street and Oldrid Scott. The church is the largest medieval parish church in Buckinghamshire, and contains some fine interior monuments to the Petty family, including sculptures by Carlini and Sneemakers.

The church tower dominates the skyline of the Old Core area, although the church itself is tucked away behind the High Street buildings and the main mass of the building is not visible from the High Street. On the more open Church Street the graveyard forms the western side of the road and the bulk of the medieval parish church is much better appreciated.

Public Buildings: Guildhall: The town's guildhall was originally located in Church Street, at the heart of the former market place. It was replaced on the site of a former market house in its current location in about 1440, and eventually rebuilt by Lord Shelburne

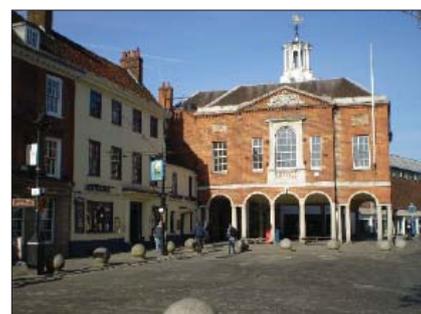


A key view in the town centre, west along the High Street.



Restored figures on the south porch of All Saints.

Improved road surfacing to the front of the Guildhall and The Falcon is more in keeping with the historic materials of the buildings. The use of bespoke granite balls delineates the formal roadway but does not segregate pedestrians, leading to an open shared area.



in 1757. The Grade I listed building is by Henry Keene, and dominates the High Street. The building is two storeys, with an open arcaded ground floor of graceful stone columns, and symmetrically designed east, west and north elevations. The south elevation has a modern brick extension sympathetically designed to be in keeping with the Georgian parts. The building is of red brick with a stone stringcourse at first floor level, and bracketed stone cornice.



The roof is of old tile, and topped with a delicate octagonal cupola. The east, west and north elevations have a central motif with a slight projection and pediment, with a round headed central sash window in stone surrounds. Altogether there are 5 sashes to each front with flat arches to side windows (some blocked). This building, standing out at right angles to the High Street fronts, makes a vital contribution to the street scene.

The Little Market House, remodelled by Robert Adam in the early 18th century. It lies in the Shambles, formerly used as a hog market and butchery area. Much of the original paving remains to the rear of the Little Market House, which adds to the historic character of the area.

The Little Market House lies opposite the Guildhall, in the area known as the Shambles (the former butchery area). It dates from about 1604 but was extensively remodelled by Robert Adam in 1761. It is a quirky little building which vastly improved the area between the church and the High Street. Of red brick with stone dressings, its central block is octagonal, with flanking wings. The ground floor is arcaded with stone clad arches and the building has a first floor stone cornice band, upon which are written distances to Oxford and London. The upper floor has sash windows in stone surrounds. The roof is a shallow lead dome with a turret light. The “Pepperpot”, as it is affectionately known locally, is one of a group of very significant buildings in the heart of town.



Cornmarket: During the 18th century many of the buildings along the High Street were re-fronted or rebuilt to the latest architectural fashions. Both sides of the wide street have a number of listed buildings, culminating in the grouping of the Guildhall and Little Market House around the area known as the Cornmarket. Adjoining the Guildhall lies the Falcon Hotel, a coaching inn on the main road from London to Oxford. This is Grade II, late 17th century, and extensively modified in the 18th. It is linked to the Guildhall by a 2 storey 18th century range, of render over brick. The main range is three storey, again render, over a surviving timber frame, with a 19th century classical stone porch to the centre. The building is painted in mellow tones of cream and brown, and forms part of the important Guildhall grouping. Immediately adjoining to the east is another fine building, now the premises of the HSBC bank. This is Grade II*, dates from the 18th century, and is of brick with a rusticated ashlar ground floor. The brickwork on the upper floors is particularly fine,



The entrance porch to The Little Market House lies on the north side of the building.

The Falcon, on Cornmarket. Crown Lane is to the left hand side of the picture and leads to Pauls Row.



being of red and grey chequer brickwork with red brick quoins. A fine example of a classically inspired town house, it too is part of the key grouping around the Guildhall.

Crown Lane/Pauls Row: Crown Lane is a narrow alleyway linking the High Street with Pauls Row. It runs between the HSBC bank and 41 High Street and is a remnant of the medieval street pattern. Pauls Row runs south from the Guildhall towards the river and the former Bridge Mill area, a major medieval route into town. Much of the historic layout of the town was lost here during the slum clearances of the 1960s. However some old buildings fronting Pauls Row have survived, and these include the listed No's 12-13 which have remnants of wall paintings inside, and No 46 south of the bridge which is a lovely 18th century brick town house. Later Victorian buildings including the Glasshouse pub (with a fine carved anchor feature over the door) and The Angel both on long established public house sites. A former warehouse constructed of brick and dating from the late 19th century stands by the bridge, utilitarian in design.

High Street, South side (west to east); The south side of the High Street contains a high percentage of listed buildings, many dating from the 18th century. No. 41 High Street, occupied by MacDonalDs, is a late 18th century town house of dark stock brick with red brick arches standing in contrast. The ground floor is ashlar and has been altered by the insertion of shop windows, although the doorway is still defined by a pediment. The roof has a cornice and a parapet.

One of the grandest buildings on the High Street is undoubtedly No. 39, now the premises of the Alliance and Leicester. This is a substantial Grade II* 18th century town house, which has retained its ground floor integrity. Of vitreous header brick (which catches the sunlight), with fine rubbed brick dressings, this building has a pleasing symmetry, and is enlivened by the eaves-cornice and pediment. The door-case is similarly grand. Unusually the original wrought iron railings to the front have been retained. Recessed on the left is a later staircase wing, of similar design and materials.

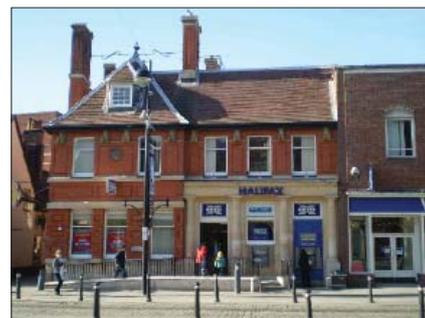
WHSmiths and 99p Stores (No's 36/38) are modern flat roofed buildings which do not add to the architectural interest of the town. No. 35 is an interesting unlisted building dating from approximately 1900. It may well have been built as a bank. The roofline in particular adds interest, with its massive stacks and ornate chimney ties. The building is of a red brick with detailing picked out in stone, and of particular note is the grand entrance.

Swan Walk leads to the Swan theatre, built across the former burgage plots at the rear of the High Street.

Stepping up the building line from Swan Walk lies a grouping of buildings all very different in appearance, which show quite clearly the development of architecture from a vernacular local style to the grand formal designs of the 18th century. The Hobgoblin (formerly the



Both No 41 (above) and No 39 (below) show superb use of glossy vitrified bricks, local to the Thames valley area. Fine rubbed bricks add varying amounts of detail to the frontages, and being more expensive, gave house owners an opportunity to exhibit their wealth.



The interesting roofline of no 35 adds character to the roofscape along the High Street.

The step up of buildings adjacent to Swan Walk, again adding interest to the roofscape.



Three Tuns) is a medieval inn, vernacular, with 17th century timber framing to the side elevation. There is a large window to the right hand side of the ground floor with glazing bars and a modillion cornice. The older gabled back wing has irregular fenestration, including some 17th century lead casements and 18th century sashes. The roof has a heightened early chimney stack. Next door lies No. 34, with a carriage arch through to a yard on the left hand side. This is a white painted early 18th century building with a symmetrical upper floor. Adjoining it is one of the grandest buildings of the High Street, presently occupied by NatWest Bank. This is No. 33, 18th century and Grade II*, of plum coloured brick with red brick dressings. The grand frontage exhibits all the characteristics of polite Georgian architecture, from the parapetted roof, to the sliding sashes, to the first floor cornice and key mask detail. The main frontage is perfectly symmetrical. An extension to the left is lower and less formal.



No 33, the “best house in the town” according to Pevsner. It has a sophisticated front rife with classical detailing and references. It exhibits classic use of red and vitrified brickwork, together with fine rubbed brick.

No. 30 High Street is a Grade II 18th century building of flint rubble with red brick dressings and quoins. There are three flat dormers to the roof, and the remnants of sash windows to the frontage. There is an imposing Ionic pedimented doorway and elaborately carved cornice. Again the railings are retained to the frontage. The setting of this building is somewhat affected by the modern 1960s building next door at No. 31.

No. 29 High Street has a low 18th century front of brick with wooden eaves-cornice and central chimney. The two oil jars affixed the front are a rare example. The building sits much lower in the street scene than its immediate neighbours.



No 29, with its prominent chimney and oil jar decoration. The building may one have been an apothecary's shop.

Nos 24-27 High Street lie adjacent to the Library Gardens (adjoining the former library building), and form the beginning of the built up southern side of the street. These are a terrace of 19th century houses (now offices) of yellow stock brick. A key feature is the wrought iron balconies at first floor level with French casements behind. Steps and railings add to the ground floor interest.

High Street North side (east to west): The White House (Nos 21 and 21a) has a fine rusticated stucco 18th century front concealing a 16th century timber frame. Inside is a early 17th century wall painting. The building is fine example of refronting in the classical style and is listed Grade II*. Next are two buildings from the early 20th century, occupying the full width of the burgage plots. One was formerly a printing works.

The White House - this building would benefit from improvements to the mismatched shop fronts at ground floor level.

No. 18 is an 18th century rebuild of an earlier house, characterized by a parapet below the tiled roof. Its brickwork contrasts with the stuccoed classical frontage of No. 17, which also has a Doric pilaster up the right hand side and wrought iron balconies. A modern building lies between this and the 1900 building on the corner of Corporation Street (No's14-16). This latter building has some fine architectural detailing in the form of brick and terracotta carvings to the façade and was originally built for Davenport Vernon.



Corporation Street was constructed in 1900 to improve access to the station. It was originally intended as the site for new council offices. The two buildings at the High Street end were intended as statement buildings. The conservation area boundary cuts across the road halfway up the hill. On the western side modern flat development of brick and render steps up the hillside to Castle Street. On the eastern side lies a mixture of modern buildings utilising more traditional plot layouts.



The north side of the High Street before Corporation Street, showing the variety of building design, but more uniformity in height. The modern buildings to the left echo the parapets of the older buildings, but their fenestration has a horizontal emphasis rather than a vertical one.

Across Corporation Street lies a fine Edwardian former bank building of red brick and stone. Its entrance faces south east across the junction and has the words Wycombe Bank inscribed over the door.

No. 12 is a low two storey 18th century building established as a business in 1775. It retains an excellent late Victorian shopfront, and has large sash windows to the first floor. The Bakers Oven at No. 11, was the former home of The Antelope Inn, and the first home of the Royal Military College. The building has a modern brick façade with Dutch gable detail.



The tiny Victorian shop front is in contrast to the grander design of the adjacent Edwardian Bank building, but this dichotomy of style adds layers of interest to the frontages.

The former Red Lion is a three part range of buildings remodelled at ground floor level in the 1970s when Woolworths took over the building. A former hotel, renowned for its political associations with both Disraeli and Churchill, the original ranges of the building can still be identified, although the rear has been substantially rebuilt. To the right hand side is the portico, with the red lion statue atop it. The arcade at ground floor level was remodelled in the 1970s to reflect the arches of the Guildhall. At upper floor level the building is of red brick, more clearly divided into three parts, with moulded brick stringcourse to the two wings. The central block has a more visible roof and chimneys.

The Red Lion is an iconic symbol of the town, and historically this is the hotel where both Disraeli and Churchill spoke. The building has been refronted, and the portico moved, but still plays a key role in the streetscene.

Beyond lie a pair of three storey buildings dating from the 19th century, red brick with stuccoed quoining. A two storey brick building (originally the Cross Keys public house) is tucked between this and the flamboyant stuccoed facade of Boots (No. 4). This cream painted building has pediment, ironwork, pilasters and other architectural detailing that make it stand out in the streetscene. No. 3 is the only medieval building in the High Street that retains its jettied frontage. It too was once a pub, The Wheatsheaf. The three storied timber framed building has each of its upper floors overhanging. The windows on the first floor are modern as is the shop front. The building is unique in this location, and forms part of an important architectural grouping in the Church Square area.



Church Square lies to the north of the Cornmarket and comprises of the grouping of buildings to the sides and the rear of the Little Market House. This incorporates what little remains of the oldest part of the town, mainly in the form of the street pattern. Nearly all of the buildings are listed and of historic interest, and range from 16th - 18th century in date. The main gates to the churchyard are also located here and are Grade II listed, and believed to have come originally from Loakes Manor. The buildings at the rear (Costa Coffee) comprise a listed three storey town house with a later Victorian addition with steep gables breaking up the roofline. The brickwork on the town house is vitrified, and set off by rubbed brick window headers. To the east side of the square lies the Antelope Inn, Grade II, (16th or C17th century) with Yorkshire sliding sashes to the first floor. This building is vernacular in style, its steeply sloping roofs punctuated with brick chimneys. The two buildings to the south are more formal in design, both white painted brick and render over early core buildings. No. 1 High Street turns the corner into Church Square and is quite dominant in views due to the bright yellow paintwork to the shop windows.



The Antelope on Church Square, white painted, with traditional wooden windows, and an interesting roofline enlivened by chimney stacks.

To the west side of the square the buildings are lower in height, mostly two storey, and swing round to face the Guildhall. No's 1, 2 and 3 sit within a single block. They are 18th century, two storey, with a gable facing onto Church Square, and vernacular in appearance. The High Street frontage has later shopfronts. No's 4, 5, 6 are early to mid 19th century and turn the corner into Church Street. These are of dark red brick, with a shallow Welsh slate roof, three storeys and sash windows.



A three storey town house with vitrified bricks to the right hand side, and a later Victorian addition with very steep gables providing an architectural contrast within the same property. This building was restored from a derelict state.

Church Street: The buildings facing the church, although much altered, give an idea of the scale of the buildings in the crowded medieval quarter of the town. Generally 2 storey, and many gabled, they range in style from medieval through Victorian to 1930s Deco. Due to the extent of alterations only a few are listed. One of the key buildings on the street is No's 1-3, formerly known as The Chequers, three storey with distinctive gables. It is a reconstruction of an earlier medieval building on the site. Facing the church No's 8, 9 and 10 are listed. No. 8 is 16th century, although much altered. It retains a timber frame, and has three distinct gables punctuating the roofline. To the north, No's 9-10 repeats this gable at full two storey height, although the building itself is rendered. It is of a similar date. No. 11 has a brick 18th century frontage with two upper floor windows. Church Street swings around the corner in front of Primark, (No's 19 to 21) and the street becomes much narrower at this point, reflecting the earlier medieval layout. 19th century buildings of brick and stone decoration, some rendered, fill the plots on the curve along Church Street until it opens up into Queen Square by the 18th century Centra chemists. This pretty little vernacular building of white painted brick and tile, its roof broken up by dormers, is rather overwhelmed by the garish signage adorning its windows.

The corner building opposite the Guildhall is a rebuild of a medieval timber framed building.. The gable feature is echoed elsewhere on Church Street, and contrasts with the more formal parapetted styles of the Georgian High Street.



The north side of Church Street is taken up with the frontages to the Chiltern Centre. Primark (formerly Marks and Spencer) is classically inspired with red brick and stone detailing, and dominates the corner. The entrance to the Chiltern Centre is modern, of dull red brick. No's 1 and 2 beyond, are classic late Victorian, of decorated red brick, with yellow stock brick dressings. No's 3 and 4 are earlier, listed, 18th century, with excellent sash windows under rubbed brick arches. Currently a cafe, its shop front is well designed and can open out onto the pavement, thus enlivening the street scene.



The step up of buildings adjacent to Swan Walk, Centra chemist, festooned with signage, forms part of Queens Square.

Church Street opens up briefly into a small area known as Queen Square, then swings north west into the larger open space of Frogmoor. Buildings of interest in this area include the Hen and Chickens, a fine five gabled Victorian building with Arts and Crafts motifs and pargetting details. A similar building, probably by the same architect, can be found at No. 18 Queen Square, which links Church Street to White Hart Street.



Classical detailing on the 1930s frontage of Primark.

Queen Square: A small square, no more than the widening of a street, Queens Square provides a link from Church Street to the southern precincts of the town centre. No. 20, currently a chemist, is the only listed building to the south, although the tight-knit medieval plot pattern is retained. The majority of the other buildings are late 19th and early 20th century, and some are locally listed. The mellow restrained brickwork of No's 19 to 21 is in contrast to the white and green painted pargetting of No. 18.

The western side of Queen Square consists of a sturdy early 19th century brick building with classical detailing, and parapetted roofs (No's 11, 13, 14), and later development from the 20th century, including the modern glass-fronted No. 28 White Hart Street, which turns the corner.

Bull Lane is a remnant of the medieval street pattern, a narrow pedestrian alley with utilitarian buildings running perpendicular to the frontages on Frogmoor.

Bull Lane: The medieval street pattern continues to be evident along White Hart Street. To the west a very narrow passage, Bull Lane, creates another link to Frogmoor. The buildings here are higgledy-piggledy and it is their rear elevations that are visible. Some are evidently more historic than others, but most are of red brick, and without excessive ornament. The boundary of the conservation area runs down the centre of this lane.



White Hart Street: East of the Queen Square area the southern side of White Hart Street has mostly been redeveloped as part of the Octagon and more recently

Eden Shopping centre. Some older 19th century buildings remain, and these have been included within the conservation area boundary (and are locally listed) No's 11-17 was originally a substantial inn dating from the 17th century. The building was refronted in the 19th century, but evidence of fine brickwork remains. The facade retains some of its replacement windows and a terracotta surround plaque from the 19th century. The roofline is defined by five gabled dormers. The ground floor fascias and signage is not particularly in keeping with the historic environment.

To the north of the street, on the former medieval encroachment, two listed buildings remain (under a single list description), and the rest comprise a mixture of two and three storey Victorian buildings, of brick or render. In the most part these are later refacings of the facades, as the original rooflines are still visible behind the parapets. No's 22, 24 is the Grade II listed building of vitrified bricks with red rubbed brick detailing, and a strong vertical stringcourse. The building adjacent is a tiny two storey vernacular house, with a 1950s box next to it. Finally a group of three storey buildings, all of the same height, run up to join the Chequers gabled building on the corner opposite the Guildhall. Although different in style, (No's 8 and 10 are rendered whilst those to either side are of brick), there is a continuity created by the similar heights, placement of windows, and architectural emphasis. One quirky building, No. 12, Buckingham House, had a previous incarnation as a butchers shop, and the highly decorative detailing of the shop window surround remains, with pigs and cows carved onto the pilasters at either end of the ground floor.

Castle Street: Castle Street lies to the north of the churchyard, and swings round to become Priory Road at the junction with Church Street. It is slightly elevated and runs uphill from west to east. The more historic buildings lie close to the church.

A cluster of medieval buildings line the north side of the street from the junction with Church Street and Priory Road. No's 1-3 are brick, 17th century (and older in parts) and have a repeating pattern of gables fronting the road. No. 5 is of vitreous and red brick, three storey and dominates the grouping. No. 7 is Grade II* listed, and incorporates an earlier frame belied by the 18th century exterior. It has excellent large sashes to the first floor. An incongruous and dominating replacement modernist building (Thame House) lies on the site of the former Vicarage (and is excluded from the conservation area).

Documentary evidence suggests that Castle Street originated as a medieval back lane to the burgage plots on the High Street. The area to the north was probably occupied by farm buildings belonging to the convent of Godstow. Castle Place site was shown on the 1849 tithe map as a house and a garden associated with Parsonage Farm. By 1875 the site was occupied by terraced houses stepping up the hill along the footpath to the railway bridge. Remnants of



Whimsical detailing on a former butchers shop in White Hart Street.



Reconstructed jettying and gable details on the corner of Church Street and White Hart Street.

Vernacular 17th century buildings on Castle Street contrast in scale with the modern block of Thame House which replaced the Vicarage in the 1960s.



the Church Farm buildings are still visible within the end terrace of Castle Place.

All Saints Churchyard was previously larger than at present - the 1849 tithe map shows it extending to the northeast. With the construction of Castle Street in the later 19th century, part of the churchyard became detached and is in use as a small park although it was still shown as a graveyard on the 1925 25-inch OS map. To the rear of this lies a terrace of rendered Victorian villas, some with gothic details, elevated above the main road below. Their long front gardens, where not replaced by car parking, add to the sense of spaciousness in this part of the conservation area.



Villas along Castle Street at the rear of the former graveyard.

Modern development along both sides of Castle Street has been omitted from the conservation area boundary. The boundary swings back in to include the parade of Victorian villas and shops that runs up to the junction with Amersham Hill, mostly two storey, brick with slate roofs, their ground floors altered by the insertion of shop fronts.

Key unlisted buildings

A high percentage of the buildings of architectural interest in the old core of the town are listed. Those of good architectural quality that are not listed tend to date from the mid-late Victorian era, and have been designed for a specific reason. In terms of grandeur and architectural embellishment, the two buildings at the bottom of Corporation Street are of interest, as is No. 35 on the south side of the High Street. These all exhibit high Victoriana in their use of detailing. The small terrace of cottages on Castle Place is an anachronistic reminder of the earlier boundary between town and suburb.



The terrace of Castle Place steps down the hillside to the church below.

There are also a number of locally listed buildings, located on the older tighter street pattern of White Hart Street and Queens Square. These tend to the vernacular, although it is proposed to add two Arts and Crafts style late Victorian buildings to the local list.

Local details

Building density: The old core area exhibits high building densities, with mostly two or three bay frontages on narrow plots, except on the High Street, where there is a higher concentration of grand buildings in terms of size and design.

Windows and window forms are invariably vertical in orientation. The majority of windows, particularly on the Regency and later buildings, are sash, however other earlier casements survive on the vernacular buildings. There are good examples of Yorkshire sliding sashes on the Antelope Inn in Church Square. Other unusual windows can be seen along White Hart Street, and on the Hen and Chickens building adjacent to Church Square.

Facades - A key indicator of street scene interest is a consideration



The only original three storeyed timber framed jettied building remaining on the High Street. This gives an indication of what the buildings would have looked like before the 18th century remodelling.

of the solid to void ratio: ie windows and doors in ratio to brick work. The more voids, the more interesting the facade is - large expanses of brickwork can look uninteresting and monolithic. An lively facade can improve the visual activity of the pavement. In the old core there is no clear rhythm along the streets (such as is found on large scale London Squares for example) because of the varied form and door/window patterns. However generally the buildings have a vertical emphasis, narrow frontages, steep roofs and vertical windows.

Shopfronts in the central core vary greatly. These provide an active frontage to the street scene, with doors and windows punctuating the facades and this activity can generate feelings of safety (this can be reduced at nighttime particularly if roller shutters are used). The majority of buildings are in retail uses, and some have good modern shopfronts in line with design guidance issued by the Council. Others are not as appropriate and there are too many examples of large plate glass windows, lack of detail and inappropriate signage throughout the core. Materials are also of concern. The use of coloured shopfronts has been debated. In some cases a well designed shop front such as that at No's 5-6 Church Square, which is a vibrant purple, and No's 4-5 Church Street, in restaurant use, which is blue painted, are both good examples of shop fronts which add to the vibrancy of the locality, although some may feel that the colours are a little too bright. The latter also has numerous openings to the street through which tables and chairs spill onto the pavement.

Eaves and roofs: Many of the refronted buildings along the High Street have parapetted roofs, a design feature of the 18th century, which imposes a classical appearance onto the front of older buildings. As a result the roofs were either rebuilt, or are hidden from view, although aerial photographs can indicate the original widths of the roofs, and thus burgage plots. There is a similar approach to refronting on White Hart Street and parts of Church Street. However where roofs are visible and where buildings retain a more vernacular feel, along Church Street and Castle Street opposite the Churchyard for example, then the roof pattern is more defined. The majority of vernacular buildings have the ridge running parallel to the road, thus filling the width of the plot, with secondary ridges to the rear along the length of the burgage plot. Gables and dormers enliven the roof patterns, particularly around the churchyard, and elsewhere on prominent corner buildings such as the Hen and Chickens, and No 1-3 Church Street.

Landmark buildings: These are buildings either at important locations along the streets, at corners, or terminating views. In the main they have a public function, in particular the Guildhall, Church and Little Market House, but others are in business use. Because of its architecture, its location terminating the High Street, and its siting on a convergence of streets and roads, the Guildhall is the key landmark building in the town centre. The Red Lion is also a landmark, particularly in views along the High Street. The Church tower is a landmark in wider views into this part of the conservation



Fine rubbed brickwork quoining with vitrified header work.



Georgian brickwork on the Guildhall, with stone detailing.

area and can be seen from the surrounding valley sides.

Surfacing: Footways and road ways are of a variety of materials. Whereas the roads tend to be of tarmac, in the centre of High Wycombe many of the pavements are of different materials. Cobbles and Denner Hill setts remain in Church Square, Castle Place and parts of Bull Lane. Pavements along the High Street and Church Street have been relaid as part of the town centre pedestrianisation scheme in yorkstone, and this has been carried through to Frogmoor. The intricate paving details around the Guildhall have been enhanced by the placement of granite stone balls to act as bollards. Where repairs to the pavement surfaces are needed appropriate materials should be used - this has not always been the case and some of the visual quality of the original finish has been compromised by poor repairs.

Street furniture within the town centre is generally in keeping with the exception of the proliferation of litter and recycling bins. Some of the street furniture was bespoke as part of the pedestrianisation scheme.

Prevalent and traditional building materials

There are a variety of construction materials within the town centre, which add to the visual interest and diversity of the historic buildings. As well as traditional materials, other newer materials have been employed on later buildings with varying degrees of success. This document concentrates on the traditional and vernacular materials.

The majority of the buildings are of brick. The Guildhall and Little Market House, which dominate views along the High Street, are both brick. Many other buildings also use it as a building or facing material. Most of this is the vernacular Bucks red brick, particularly on older buildings (although much has been painted over), and some later Victorian yellow brick is also employed. Of particular significance and beauty however is the use of vitrified bricks within a red brick framework - the glassy edges of the vitrified brick sparkling in the sunlight. This is a technique much employed in market towns along the Thames corridor, and is used here on some of the grandest town houses. The laying of bricks is also important - decorative patterns could be obtained by using different bonds, and laying of header bonds, where the ends of the bricks form the face of the buildings, indicated wealth, as this was the most expensive way to build in brick (see No 30, Alliance and Leicester). Some buildings, such as No 33, have bricks carved into intricate shapes to embellish the facade. This is a technique used on later 19th century buildings as well, as seen on Abbey National building on the corner of Corporation Street.

Stone is quite a rare building material within the area due to the lack of natural stone quarries locally. It is generally used for decorative detailing on grander buildings. The church tower, 15th century, is of stone (clunch), the remainder of the church is in flint with stone



Traditional styled but brightly coloured shop fronts.



Vernacular public house viewed through the arch of the Little Market House undercroft.



dressings.

Timber framing is extant in a number of buildings in the old core, but as many buildings have been refronted it tends only to remain visible internally and in roof spaces. The only building to retain its original jettied form is No 2 High Street. Timberframed gables can be seen along Church Street.

Buildings on the High Street are more decorative than elsewhere in terms of brickwork and detailing in the form of string courses, pediments, quoinings and eaves detailing. This is particularly the case for buildings such as No 33, which has a wealth of detailing picked out in terracotta, and the restrained classicism of the Guildhall, with stone details.

Contribution made by the natural environment

Green Spaces/Trees and Vegetation

Churchyard: This is a key green space within the town centre, shaded by mature trees, and forms an oasis of calm away from the shopping zone of the High Street and Church Road. Elevated above the surrounding streets, the green backdrop sets off the mellow stonework of the church, and is key in views and glimpses from the town centre streets.

Castle Street: to the north of the road is a small area of green space which was originally part of the graveyard, separated when Castle Street was extended along to join with Church Street. Originally the churchyard wall ran to the rear of the green space. A belt of shrubs screens the buildings behind from the traffic. Here also is located a memorial plaque to those lost during the evacuation of Dunkirk during the Second World War.

The Library Gardens (adjoining the former Library) are on the location of the original carriage drive to Loakes Manor (now Wycombe Abbey). and were created out of an incidental space left over when Queen Victoria Road was set out. This is a formal open space with no public access, and is used for municipal flower displays. However it does create a green link to the riverside and The Rye beyond and will form part of a project to improve the physical link between the town centre and The Rye.

The extent of loss, problems and pressures

Due to pedestrianisation traffic levels are less of an issue in this part of the conservation area. Car parking is limited along the High Street, and Church Street, and Frogmoor has been reclaimed as an urban open space.



Denner Hill setts retained as guttering at Castle Place.



The churchyard provides a peaceful verdant oasis in the heart of town.

The Town Centre: Parish Church, Old Core and High Street

Area 1 Study Appraisal

