



INTRODUCTION

High Wycombe has a proud heritage of furniture manufacture, associated with the manufacture of chairs through much of the 19th and 20th centuries. While furniture manufacturing once dominated High Wycombe many of the larger factory sites have since been demolished. Designated in 2005 by Wycombe District Council, Leigh Street represents the least altered surviving example of a furniture manufacturing community - the vast factory sites, the artisan housing for the workers, and other community facilities associated with such a community.

Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Government Guidance states that conservation areas should have an up-to-date appraisal.

Within Conservation Areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. More details on the specific controls that apply can be found in the Council's guidance note on conservation areas.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, and preservation should not be thought of as a purely negative process or as an impediment to progress. New development, where appropriate, must however be carefully designed to positively enhance the appearance and special character of the area

The designation of a conservation area imposes specific duties on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special characteristics of the conservation area are preserved and enhanced. This conservation area appraisal describes the main features of the special architectural and historic interest that justifies the designation of the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage area as a conservation area.



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Listed building consent is required for works to the listed buildings in the conservation area, whilst planning permission is needed for all changes to their fences, gates and other means of enclosure.

There are additional **planning controls** on non-listed buildings within conservation areas, in addition to usual planning permission requirements.

Wycombe District Council Contacts

For general planning enquiries contact the Duty Officer on 01494 421219.

For policy issues contact the Policy team on 01494 421581.

For queries regarding this appraisal contact the Conservation section on 01494 421527.

Most new development requires **Building Regulation Approval**. For further information on Building Regulations Approval. For further information on Building Regulations please contact a Building Control Surveyor on 01494 421403, or see the District Council website www.wycombe.gov.uk

CHAPTER 1

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The designation of a conservation area influences the way in which a Local Planning Authority applies its planning policies to the area. It ensures that any alterations or extensions to buildings within or adjacent to the conservation area respect the special characteristics identified in this document, and in local planning policies.

National policy and guidance is contained in:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012)
- English Heritage: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2005)
- English Heritage: Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas (2005)

Regional guidance on design issues is contained in the Chilterns Building Design Guide. This guidance has been supplemented by Advice Notes on Flint, Brick and Roofing materials, which provide useful guidance on materials.

Local Policy: The Wycombe District Local Plan was adopted in 2004 and as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) is gradually being replaced by a series of new local plans. In 2008 the Council adopted the Core Strategy, which replaces a number of policies in the 2004 Local Plan. The Council is in the early stages of producing new Local Plans. Until these are completed the following policies relating to Conservation Areas in the 2004 Local Plan are still in place: HE 6,8,10,11,12,13, 14 and 15.

More information on the status of the Local Plan and production of the WDF is available on the Council website.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

High Wycombe was a world famous furniture making town, its chairs exported all over the world. Much of the industry moved from small workshops to large modern factories in the last decades of Queen Victoria's reign and many of these remained in production until after the Second World War. The furniture heritage conservation area represents the least altered industrial area to be found in High Wycombe, incorporating all the important elements that one would expect to have found in such an area. Within the furniture heritage conservation area are the factories of William Birch Ltd, one of the leading chair and furniture makers of the pre-War era, whose factories survive to the south of Leigh Street and are an excellent surviving example of the large scale factory sites that were once dotted throughout the town. To the north, along Victoria Street are the former workshops of George Holt & Co, another leading chairmaker, which is indicative of the traditional earlier



Glossary of architectural terms:

Some architectural description requires the use of specialised terms and phrases to describe particular details of a building. A useful glossary can be found in Pevsner's "The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire"

brick and timber boarded two storey form of chair factories and is the only statutorily listed building in the conservation area. The area around the factories represents the industrial and social history of the area in a very compact and coherent way. It includes some artisan housing for the factory workers, the school their children would have gone to and two of the pubs serving the local community. As such it is an important reminder of Wycombe's proud chair making heritage.



CHAPTER 3 ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

1 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Location and population

A general history of the medieval origins of the town is contained within the main High Wycombe Conservation Area Appraisal. This report covers the specific history of the Victorian origins of the Furniture Heritage Conservation Area.

The conservation area is located to the west of the medieval town centre as a part of a larger expansion during the Victorian period. It is a part of the larger valley bottom town located mid way between Oxford and London. The plentiful Beech woods that lined the sides of the valley provided an ideal source of wood for chair manufacture, and the River Wye which had in earlier times provided the power for milling was now used to power the first sawmills. These factors allowed Wycombe to quickly expand into a major furniture manufacturing town. With the introduction of new machinery and techniques, plus an ever-increasing demand for Wycombe chairs, the town expanded. The conservation area is one such area of expansion.



The conservation area covers 2.3 hectares and includes 51 buildings and their various ancillary structures.

General character and plan form

The conservation area is a part of the Victorian expansion of High Wycombe, where the boom in the furniture industry caused by Wycombe's position as England's "furniture town" led to multiple large factory sites being constructed to fill demand, and dense streets of tight-packed urban housing grew up around them to provide places for the factory workers to live within earshot of the factory whistle. The area has the character of an industrial community, with long streets of semi-detached dwellings stretching outwards from Birch House, which dominates the south east corner of the area. Other factory buildings, such as the former Gomme factory to the south of the area and 8 Jubilee Road to the north west, are similarly positioned in dominant positions relative to the local housing. The former Green Street School (now Green Street Youth and Community centre) occupies a central position among the houses. Likewise the two former pubs occupy prominent locations, the former Saracen's Head for example occupies a corner plot on a junction.

Landscape context



The Bucks Landscape Plan classifies the area as Chilterns: River Valleys (Z9). Before the Victorian expansion and the coming of the factories, the area was open fields and marshes, with a track following the overall road structure of Green Street and Desborough Road and beyond it winding its way between the fields. This may have been an access to farms that once existed in the area such as Froghole Farm. It may also have at one time served as a back road to avoid the tolls on the turnpike road along the West Wycombe road to the north. Leigh Street itself is evident on the 1876 Ordinance Survey (OS) map as part of a possible footpath splitting off from the wider track, which is represented in the urbanised form of the area as a cul-de-sac serving the Birch House factory site.



Green Street School, above, was designed by architect C. E. Moxam. The date stone gives the year of construction as 1895

2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Origins and historic development

High Wycombe as “The Furniture Town” rose from humble beginnings. Chair making was at first a cottage trade, with the earliest references to chair making as a trade being a reference to a turner in the Parish lists of High Wycombe in the 1680s. Tradition holds that the first chair making workshop was established in 1805, although a furniture label for James Gomme’s firm indicates that there were furniture workshops in Wycombe by 1798. Many of the greatest chair makers began in workshops in the back gardens of their houses such as Ebenezer Gomme, whose factory is present in the area adjacent that of William Birch Ltd. Wycombe was known for the construction of furniture by the 1870’s when the quality of the product prompted a disparaging remark from Randolph Churchill in the House of Commons. At around this time the industry had begun to diversify and raise its standards. Chairs were presented as gifts from the people of Wycombe, famously two chairs were gifted to Queen Victoria for her Jubilee in 1887, a child’s chair and one carved from 17th century oak from the belfry of Hughenden Church. Rattue records that the first Wycombe chair to be presented as a gift was given to the mayor of Calais in 1876. Famously to commemorate Queen Victoria’s visit to the town in 1877 a chair arch was erected next to the Guildhall, a memorable gesture that made Wycombe synonymous with chairs. The gesture was repeated inside the Town Hall in 1962 to commemorate the visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II, and a new arch was erected in 2000 in the same style of the original chair arch to pay tribute to Wycombe’s rich history in furniture manufacture. More detailed history of the development of the chair industry in High Wycombe is given in Maye’s “The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe”, Rattue’s work “High Wycombe Past” and Miller’s unpublished work “High Wycombe Furniture Town” held by the Bucks Historic Environment Record (HER).

The final decade of the 19th century saw the development of the area around Leigh Street. Already much of the old town and surrounding area had been given over to furniture manufacture and chair factories.



The Saracen’s Head in the 1970s, when it was still a public house. The caption to this photo comments on how the building does not intend to be overlooked - this is as true now as it was 40 years ago!



The former Cane and Rush works as seen in 1967. Note the Denner Hill stone used for the drive / wagon access in the foreground, which has now sadly disappeared.

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

The 1876 OS records Leigh Street and its environs as a track winding between fields and marshlands, but the steady westward expansion of the town brought rapid urbanisation by the time of the 1899 OS. By 1925 the area had taken on the basic form that is evident today. A community had grown up around the furniture factories, with streets of artisan housing surrounding them as cottages for the factory workers, plus the presence of two pubs and a school in the locality to provide relaxation for the workers and education for their children. The development of the William Birch Ltd factory site is a good indicator of how the factories in the



The original 1901 Birch Factory. This photo from 1901 shows the factory prior to the extensive extensions and alterations that have taken place over its lifetime.

Wycombe area developed as the furniture trade prospered. Beginning as a modest factory with a large yard in 1901, the factory site underwent many additions and expansions including a large three storey building to the north of the site in 1913. This building was further redeveloped in 1926 with a side extension and a fourth storey. Extensions and redevelopments to other factories within the area are also evident showing that the factories developed and adapted along with the furniture industry. A plan showing the development of Birch House is attached as Appendix B of this appraisal.

Archaeology

There is significant potential for important industrial archaeological discoveries within the conservation area. Areas of known archaeological potential are identified on an “archaeological notification map” which is supplied to the local planning authorities and regularly updated. Where development may affect archaeological remains the Council may request that applicants supply an archaeological evaluation report as part of their planning application, and may seek preservation in situ or impose a condition requiring archaeological investigation in accordance with national and local planning guidance and policies.

The Bucks Historic Towns Project

In order to better understand the evolution of our towns and with a view to contributing towards their future management, the County Archaeological Service, in conjunction with the Milton Keynes Design and Conservation Team, is undertaking a survey of the 30 historic towns in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. This project, largely funded by English Heritage,



This picture, taken between 1926 and 1934 looks west from a former timber yard adjacent to the Wm Birch factory site. The 1913 / 1926 extensions are evident at the right of the photo, the original factory block is seen at left.

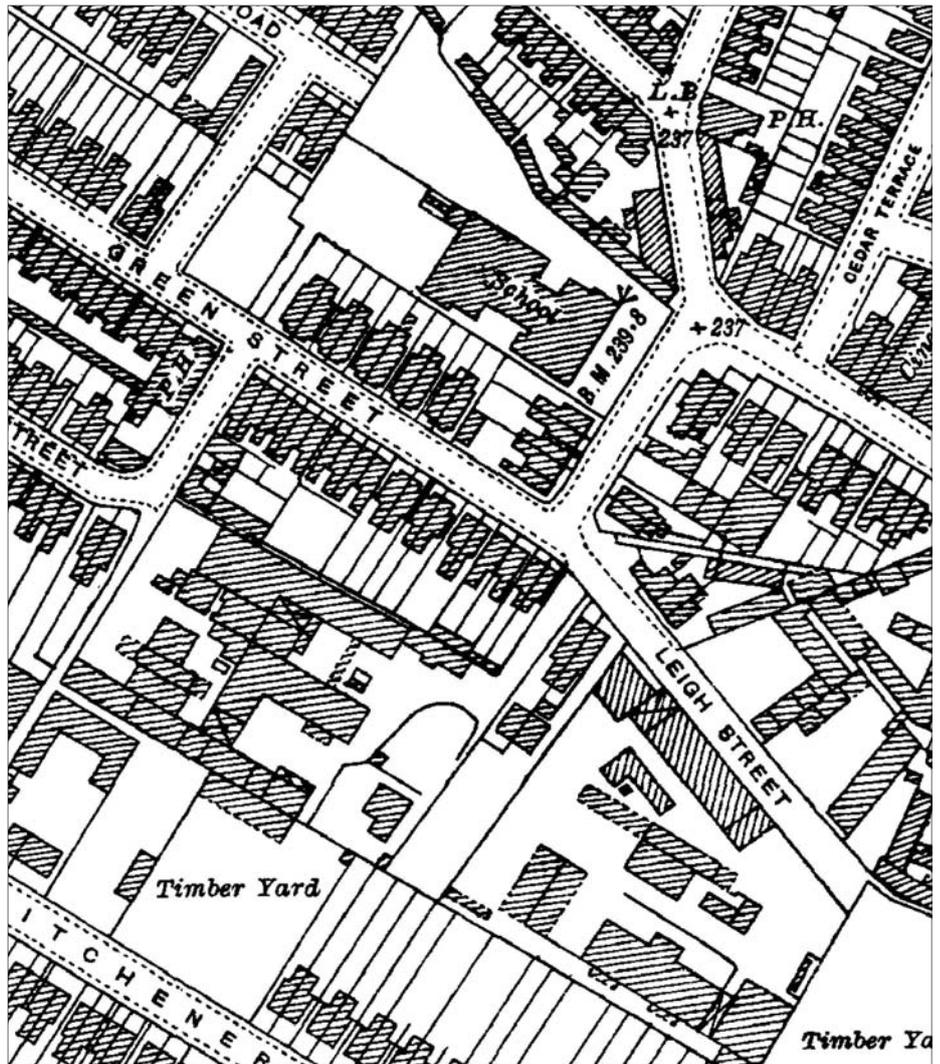
is part of a national programme of urban characterisation which aims to examine historic towns from their earliest origins up to the present day. The project method uses archaeological data, maps, photographs and documentary sources, as well as information gathered from visits to each town. On completion, the project will have compiled the information into an easily accessible database for all the towns. There will be a series of digital maps that will characterise each townscape and its development. The project will also produce individual illustrated reports for each town.

The data for the project will be held by the Bucks HER. The project covers the whole town as opposed to this appraisal which deals with the historic core conservation area.

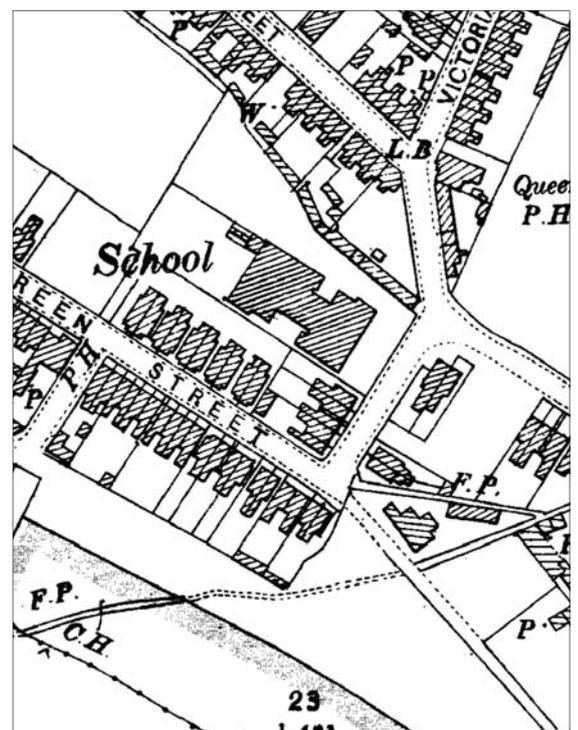
Buckinghamshire County Council's Archaeology Service has recently completed the Bucks Historic Landscape Characterisation. The Historic Landscape Characterisation project has assessed the various components of the landscape such as fields, woodland and settlement, and maps the results into a Geographical Information System (GIS); this is a flexible, digital mapping system that enables other aspects of the landscape to be recorded and updated when necessary.

In the case of High Wycombe the landscape characterisation can add an understanding of the wider historic landscape. Some of this information has been incorporated into the appraisal text above, further information can be obtained from the Archaeology pages on the Buckinghamshire County Council website - www.buckscc.gov.uk

The area is also of understandably great importance to industrial heritage. The unpublished work High Wycombe Furniture Town by Miller, held at the HER, assesses the industrial heritage of High Wycombe and the areas contribution to industrial archaeology.



Above, 1925 OS. Contrast with the 1899 OS (below) for an illustration of how the area quickly became heavily urbanised.



Historic maps

1899, 1925 OS – the rapid development of the area can clearly be seen by comparing these two maps along with the 1876 OS, in which the area is little more than a track through some fields!

3 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

The character and interrelationship of spaces within the area

Due to the primarily urban character of the area there is a marked lack of open spaces, the historic development of the area focusing instead on fitting as much as possible into as small a space as reasonable. However, beyond the buildings facing the streets there are pockets of open space, such as within the Birch House factory group, which were once the factory's yards for drying timber and loading carts and later lorries with completed furniture and other products. Some of these areas were built over and enclosed over time, such as the yard that would have been west of 8 Jubilee Road. Those that have survived are now used primarily for parking and loading for the businesses that are occupying the adjacent units. Now as then, they are functional open spaces serving the needs of the buildings of the urban area.

Another open space within the conservation area is located immediately west of the youth and community centre, formerly the school. This was the school playground when the school was open. This remains as a playground for the local community, although it also serves double duty as additional car parking space when events and functions are held at the community centre. North of the community centre and outside the area is the main car park for the community centre, with some adjacent land to the west given over to green space and a children's playground.

Important views and vistas

Many of the key views in the area are dominated by Birch House and other factory buildings, many of which stand three or four stories tall. Birch House dominates all views looking south-eastwards, as well as the views south along Victoria Road and east along Green Street. Birch House is also prominent in views across the valley. The other key community buildings, such as Saracens House, are also dominant parts of the views of their respective parts of the street scene by virtue of their grand Victorian design frontages and prominent positions in the structure of the area.



The dominance of Birch House in local views can be readily seen in these images of the area, originally created as a part of the Wycombe District Council Leigh Street Management Plan.



4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Activity and land use

In its early history the area was mainly fields, probably attached to farms such as Froghole Farm to the north. Following the Victorian expansion the fields were replaced with a heavily industrialised area given over to the furniture industry, with housing and community buildings to support this burgeoning industrial community. This is evident from the presence of the many factory buildings in the area, and also the close proximity of community buildings such as the school (now a community centre) and two former Public Houses, The Queen on Victoria Street and The Saracen's Head (now Saracen House) on Green Street. In current times, the school has become a youth community centre after narrowly escaping demolition and the two public houses have both been converted to student flats. The factories, once the heart of Wycombe's industry, have variously been given over to other forms of business such as self-storage, or in a few cases, survived as specialist manufacturers of bespoke furniture. Others have been vacant for some time such as the upper floors of Birch House - indeed the upper floors of these large buildings are well known as being hard to let.



A view into the area from the junction of Green Street, Victoria Street and Desborough Road. A different factory dominates the skyline here - the former Gomme factory, now a self storage facility. Green Street Youth & Community Centre - the former school - is partially visible at right.

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

There is only one listed building within the conservation area, the former Wycombe Cane and Rush works. It is grade II listed, dating from the late 1880s. It was originally a chair workshop owned by G. Holt and Sons, who concentrated on caning and rushing. The building is indicative of the earlier form of chair factories and workshops, with brick to the ground floor storey and timber boarded upper storey, upper floor access and casement windows. It is described in the Statutory List as "one of the best surviving examples of a chairmaking workshop". The building remained in the ownership of the Holts until 1969 when they sold up and the building was renamed to the Wycombe Cane and Rush Works. It survived as a specialist chair manufacturer until 2004. It has since been converted to residential use, with some small loss of historic character including the replacement of one of the ground floor windows with a door and the reconstruction of the southern part of the building from the courtyard access onwards. Regardless a large part of this rare survival of a 19th century chair factory retains its original external form. Adjacent lies the factory manager's house and a former Public House, The Queen. The group alludes to the early origins of the chair industry from workshops in the yards of public houses, and demonstrates the characteristic 19th century Wycombe form of a workshop and chairmaster's house in the yard of a public house.



The Grade II listed former Cane and Rush Works, before its conversion to residential use (above) and after (below).



Key unlisted buildings

Dominating the conservation area now as in its heyday is Birch House, the former William Birch Ltd factory. The original factory building to the south of the site, since extended, was built by Henry Flint in 1901, of red brick and with black engineering brick arches above the panelled windows. The factory site was added to and extended many times, including the building by Thomas Thurlow to the north of the site. This was initially a three storey building erected in 1913, of yellow brick with red brick arches over the panelled windows and red brick courses. There are decorative lozenges picked out in red brick between the second and third storeys on the north side fronting Leigh Street, and an ornate stone framed wagon access. A 14 bay extension and a fourth floor in red brick over the 1913 building was erected in 1926. In 1927 William Birch Ltd acquired the premises to the north of Leigh Street, and erected a two storey machine shop on the site, at one point connected to the rest of the factory by a link bridge. The development of the site reflects the changing nature of the furniture trade in Wycombe – the business was founded by William Birch, who is first mentioned in trade directories in 1853. His son Walter Birch took over the business in 1895 and acquired the factory from Flint as a part of his focus on manufacturing high-quality cabinet goods, showing the diversification in the goods produced at this time moving from chairs alone to furniture in general. William Birch Ltd also had a factory located in Denmark Street, which was eventually phased out in favour of the Leigh Street factory, as was the company's London showroom, consolidating everything on the one site at Leigh Street. New methods of working, new machinery and new technology are all reflected in the way that the site was developed from a relatively small single factory with a large yard, to a large factory site enclosed by buildings and dominated by the four storey range on the south side of Leigh Street. The factory was given over to war work in World War II. Like many such factories, air raid shelters were also erected for the workers and these are still visible in the gardens of the houses along Kitchener Road. In the post war years the site was acquired by Gomme (in 1954) and used to produce the G-Plan furniture. The site is currently largely vacant, and the upper floors of Birch House itself having been vacant for close to two decades.

Another major factory site adjacent to Birch House is the former Gomme factory. This site was originally built in 1909, but it almost burnt down in a fire in 1922 and is said to have been “completely gutted”. It has been refitted and renovated several times since. The external appearance is relatively unchanged although some of the works have resulted in incongruous brickwork that detracts from its appearance. During World War II it was used for aircraft manufacture. It is currently in use as a self-storage facility. Like Birch House it is in yellow brick with red brick window arches and band courses. Later additions, changes and repairs to the building are of red brick that does not blend with the overall appearance of the building. Future developments on the site should be encouraged to use more sympathetic building materials and thus seek to restore the building to its historic appearance.



The four storey Thomas Thurlow extension to the Birch factory site, built in two stages in 1913 and 1926.



View of one of the two coach arches on the Thurlow range leading to the inner courtyard. Note the stones with the initials “WB Ltd” to the top left and the date of construction, 1913, to the top right.



View of part of the inner courtyard of the Birch factory site.

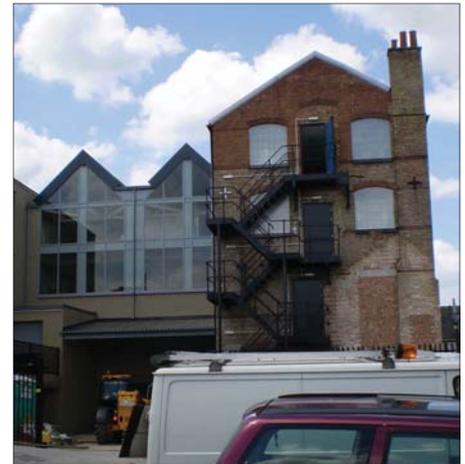
The former machine shop part of the Birch House factory site, which was located to the north side of Leigh Street. This was originally linked by a bridge to the main Birch factory.



Located in the grounds of the factory is Ebenezer Gomme's house, another example in the area of how the chairmaster's house would be located near to their factory site. It was erected with the factory in 1909 and converted into a canteen for the factory workers presumably after Ebenezer's death in 1931, and has experienced many changes of use since. Currently it is being used as offices. It is of red brick with slate tile roof, and features nicely detailed features on the headers above the windows and the door. A date stone is present on the front wall of the building.

A third surviving furniture factory is located to the north of the conservation area. 8 Jubilee Road, also known as the Jubilee Works, still continues to serve as a furniture factory, specialising in the manufacture of flush doors and veneer panels. The original factory and ancillary factory manager's house (which lies outside the conservation area) were both erected at the turn of the century, probably in 1901. The original factory building is made of yellow brick and is of a similar design to the original core factory building as the William Birch Ltd factory. The eastward facing elevation has pilasters dividing the upper bays. It is mainly of yellow brick, with red brick dressings to the sides of the pilasters and window fittings. The windows also have red brick arches. The north facing elevation is similar with yellow brick and red brick details but less elaborate. The original metal windows survive. There are several later additions to the factory to the side and rear, of red brick. The south extension is thought to date from the 1930s and is considered to be of some character. The modern side extension was built over what would have been the original building yard. OS maps indicate that the building also had a timber yard to the east, possibly located in what are now the grounds of the Green Street Youth and Community Centre. It was originally owned and operated by Owen Haines, a well-known and influential local chair maker who was also in 1960 the last chairmaster to be elected mayor of High Wycombe.

In addition to surviving factories, the facilities that served the communities working within the factories are also evident in the conservation area. Chief among these is the imposing former Green Street School, now a community centre. Erected in 1895 and designed by a local architect C. E. Moxham for the Wycombe Education Board, it is designed in the Dutch influenced style that was popular at the time. It is of red brick with rubbed brick headers and stone keystones above the windows. The distinctive curved gables which give the building a lot of its visual appeal are a mix of brick and carved stone. The elevation facing Green Street features six string courses, while the easternmost two raised gable elevations fronting Victoria Street each only feature five string courses. The date stone was laid by the serving mayor of Wycombe, J Busby JP on 30 December 1895. The school started out teaching the children of the furniture workers, and was the first to teach the children of Wycombe's Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities in the 1950s. It narrowly escaped demolition in 2004 and is now restored to community use as a youth and community centre. The grounds may include the aforementioned timber yard of 8 Jubilee Road.



A view of the former Gomme factory and its more modern additions, viewed from the east.



The Jubilee Works, 8 Jubilee Road, was erected in 1901 with a similar basic plan to the original core of the Birch factory site. The earliest part, of the greatest historic interest, is seen above with the later covered yard to the right. Below is a view on the later and more modern rear extension.



Other key amenities serving the local community included two public houses, The Queen Victoria and The Saracen's Head. The former Queen Victoria, located adjacent the former Cane and Rush Works, probably dates from the same period or slightly earlier than the adjacent Cane and Rush Works. It remained a pub for over 100 years before closing and being converted into student accommodation in 2003. The building mostly retains its historic frontage of red brick with yellow brick dressings and courses, ornate gables and slated roof.



The 1895 Green Street school, now a community centre. The building with its striking gables is the first seen when approaching the area from Desborough Road and is also prominent when approaching the area from the north.

The other former pub in the area is Saracens House, formerly The Saracen's Head. The pub was originally known as the "Saracynhede" located on the High Street, before relocating to Frogmoor in the 1840's, at premises near the junction with Oxford Street and Queen's Square. It relocated to the then new building at 46 Green Street in 1895 to serve the new working class district. It survived as a pub until October 1998 when it closed its doors for the final time, and was converted into student accommodation thereafter. The Saracen's Head is an example of a grand Victorian era Public House, built of red brick in ornate Flemish/Domestic Revival style, with highly decorative gables, brick arches with keystones above the doorways and windows. The door and window arches were rubbed brick. Pilasters are evident from the south-east elevation and are topped with decorative brickwork. Also evident when viewed from the south-east is highly ornate decorative brickwork detail to the first floor level, surrounding a namestone with "The Saracens Head" given in relief. Similar decorative brickwork is evident at the first floor level when viewing the north east elevation. There are brick courses between the storeys and level with the window sills. A bricked up archway on the road corner was once the main entrance, and features more elaborate courses and header details above it. The grand frontage of the building is particularly striking when viewed from Jubilee Court and 29 Green Street, opposite, and the raised front gable ensures it is the focus of many views within this part of the conservation area. The building has been preserved through its conversion into student apartments, although less pleasing is the painting of the ground floor which obscures the brickwork and the replacement of the original windows with UPVC, though the brick arched window fittings have been preserved. Lost during building works in 2004 was an outbuilding to the rear of the former pub, which was almost certainly a stable block for the public house.



Saracens House, formerly the Saracen's Head, is another striking building within the conservation area. Its height, molded brick details and impressive gables make it a striking addition to the street scene.



The remainder of the buildings within the area are primarily residential. They were most likely homes for the workers, and some of the chairmasters were listed on the 1910 Valuation survey as owners of these houses, but evidence does not point to chairmasters being the primary landlord interest. While some have been heavily altered, some retain elements of the original historic character. On the south side of Green Street they would originally have been typical Victorian terraces, with slate roofs, of yellow brick, with red brick courses between storeys and below the roofline. There is red brick detailing over the front doors



and first floor windows. Each property had a bay window to the ground floor, slate roofed, and with sculpted details bordering the windows. The properties would originally have had sash windows, but these have been lost in many of the properties in the area. Rubbed brick archways spaced between cottage groups allows access to back gardens. Some of the westernmost properties have been converted into shops with loss of original historic fabric as the ground floor frontages have been removed to make way for shopfronts.

To the north side of the road are semi-detached houses, dating from the same approximate time as the south side. Each semi-detached unit is of red brick, with a shared front gable. The four front windows of each pair are larger than those on the south side, and would originally have been six paned sash windows. They have red brick framing above, rubbed in some instances, and double band courses in darker brick between storeys. Other than the same issue with the windows being replaced with inappropriate modern alternatives these houses generally have retained their historic frontages more successfully than their counterparts on the south side of the road.

The buildings nearest to Birch House are again of higher quality, and potentially would have been intended for senior members of staff at the factory. In particular there is the pair known as Llanberis and Malvern which lie west of Birch House, and 2 and 4 Green Street. Nos 2 and 4 Green Street date from 1897 and were originally named "West View Cottages". Llanberis and Malvern are dated 1891 although do not appear on the 1899 OS. Both pairs are in late Victorian style and feature two storey bay windows to their front, giving the frontage a double gabled appearance. Nos 2 and 4 Green Street are fronted in a darker local red brick, with lighter red brick dressings, while Llanberis and Malvern are entirely of the lighter red brick. Both buildings use yellow brick for the sides and rear elevations, as seen on their side elevations. Both feature the same decorative features around the windows as the buildings on the south side of Green Street. Nos 2 and 4 Green Street are currently marred by painting to No 2 and a loss of the decorative features to the ground floor of No 4, as well as excessive signage. Llanberis and Malvern have fared somewhat better, other than their original windows having been replaced.

Local details

A key feature of the area lies in its industrial nature. The area contains all the elements of early 20th century industrial Wycombe. The terraces and semi detached dwellings are all of a similar construction standard; they were all likely built to standard plans but have been altered in the intervening century. The carved details on the bay windows and some of the doorways of the various houses provide a visual link between the properites of the same age, both within the area and more widely throughout High Wycombe town. Another unifying detail within the area is the grand style of both the former school building and the former Saracen's Head pub, which both feature impressive raised gables in Dutch or Flemish style respectively underlining by their more ornate architectural styling their key roles in the lives of the people that lived in



The former Queen Victoria Public House, located next to the former Cane and Rush works, is a much more modest building compared to the Saracen's Head.



Llanberis and Malvern, an 1891 semi detached pair adjacent Birch House and a good example of the kind of artisan housing that accompanied Wycombe's factory developments.



2 and 4 Green Street are a further example of semi-detached artisan housing adjacent Birch House.

the area.

Prevalent and traditional building materials

As the majority of the buildings within the area were erected within the last century, local brick, typically red or yellow stock, is used in almost all of the buildings. Generally, many of the 19th-century buildings are of yellow brick with red brick reserved for dressings and detailing, but there are examples dating from the earlier development of the area which are primarily of red brick. Stone is reserved for the larger buildings, primarily for sills or other highly decorative features.

Contribution made by the natural environment

There is a distinct lack of green space within the conservation area, although there are limited pockets of greenery, particularly opposite the former Cane and Rush Works. Historically there was a green space in the form of a garden to Ebenezer Gomme's house, although this has long since disappeared.

The extent of loss, problems and pressures

The greatest problem facing the former factory sites is the difficulty for landlords to find tenants, which in turn leads to the pressure on owners to sell their sites for redevelopment. This has historically been the case with other large former factory sites such as the former G Plan site on Spring Gardens. Indeed, the designation of this conservation area rescued one of the surviving factory sites from this fate. Finding tenants to occupy the vacant former factory buildings is an acute problem, as can be evidenced by the fact that the upper floors of Birch House have been vacant for the best part of the last quarter century. As the former Cane and Rush Works have demonstrated, it is possible to redevelop former factory sites and adapt them to modern use, either as residential or mixed use while retaining some of their historic character.



1-2 and 3 Leigh Street's prominent position immediately adjacent the main factory building suggests it would have once been home to an important member of the factory workforce, possibly the foreman.



An example of the artisan terraces that line the south side of Green Street.



One of the very few areas of greenery within the conservation area - these few trees and associated greenery are found opposite the former Cane and Rush Works and frame views of the north facing side of Green Street School.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 *The Conservation Area Appraisal and possible boundary amendments:*

The area currently represents a succinct example of a surviving factory community and associated buildings. While other historic survivors lie outside the boundaries, the current boundary is considered to represent the least altered portion of the area.

2 *Buildings that make a positive contribution to the conservation area:*

A number of buildings have been identified on the conservation area map in appendix A that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area, by virtue of their age, design, massing, scale, and enclosure. Special care should be taken in the retention and enhancement of these buildings.

3 *Proposals for the enhancement of the Conservation Area*

Retaining the buildings in their original uses is not a viable option, therefore it is of great importance that wherever possible sympathetic uses or conversions of the surviving historic buildings should be sought. These should retain the surviving historic elements and provide an alternative to developers and property owners to demolition. Some compromise of the historic material of the conservation area is unfortunately an inevitable necessity to accomplish this.

CHAPTER 5

NEXT STEPS/FURTHER INFORMATION

1 *Public Consultation and Community Involvement*

The draft Leigh Steet Furniture Heritage Conservation Area Appraisal was published in April 2012 with six weeks given for public consultation. Following the public consultation comments received have been assessed and appropriate revisions made to the appraisal. This appraisal was formally adopted in November 2012 as a material planning consideration.

2 *Monitoring*

Changes in the appearance and condition of the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area should be monitored regularly. A photographic survey was undertaken at the time of the appraisal work, and this could be updated in the future.

3 *Design Guidance*

The policies and proposals of the Wycombe Development Framework (WDF) are the primary source of reference for development management advice. In addition the Council's approved Conservation Areas guidance note is seen as a supporting document to the plan.

The Chilterns Conference first published the Chilterns Building Design Guide in 1999, and this guidance was fully revised and re-issued in February 2010. The Chilterns Conservation Board, which superseded the Conference, has published Supplementary Technical Notes concerned with the use of flint and brick and, more recently, roofing materials. These all provide guidance aimed at conserving the outstanding qualities which make the Chilterns a landscape of national importance. Copies can be inspected at the District Council Offices. It is used as a supplementary planning document.

Appended to this document is a series of development guidelines (Planning), covering both new development and the protection of existing character, and identifying sites for improvement. This forms the base of a management plan for the conservation area.

Most new development requires Building Regulations Approval. For further information on Building Regulations please contact a Building Control Surveyor on 01494 421403, or see the District Council Website www.wycombe.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix A Conservation Area Map

The Appraisal map defines the extent of the area which is regarded as possessing those qualities of townscape, character or historic interest which designation is intended to protect. It identifies particular areas, vistas, views, buildings, etc, that are considered essential to character.

It has not been possible to gain access to all areas within the conservation area boundary. There may be individual structures, features, trees or views of importance which are not visible from the public domain and which have therefore not been annotated on the conservation area map or referred to in the text. However these may also warrant protection in the evaluation of individual development proposals. The listed buildings are shown on the designations map.

As it has not been possible to gain rear access to the properties there may be inaccuracies in the recording or the extent of their curtilage. Where buildings are shown on the conservation area map as being of local importance, they are considered to make an especially positive contribution to the historic interest or architectural character of the conservation area. Other buildings within the conservation area also play a key role in the character of the settlements, and although they are not individually identified on the map, this does not necessarily mean that they are not of interest

Appendix B Birch House Development Diagram

This plan indicates the different stages of development at Birch House, as indicated by Ordinance Survey maps and the 1912 Valuation Survey. It illustrates how the chair making industry as a whole expanded in Wycombe in the early 20th century and factories increased in size as the demand for Wycombe chairs grew, along with a diversification into the production of more general furniture and changing manufacturing techniques.

Appendix C Listed Buildings

There is one listed building in the conservation area: The former Cane and Rush Works. This is indicated on the conservation area map. Further information on listed buildings can be obtained from the English Heritage website www.english-heritage.org.uk

Appendix D Bibliography

	Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire	1925
Miller, M.	High Wycombe Furniture Town	2004, Unpublished
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Mayes, L.J.	The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe	1960, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London
Mayes, L.J.	The History of the Borough of High Wycombe from 1880 to the present day	1960, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London
Ashford, L.J.	The History of the Borough of High Wycombe from its Origins to 1880	1960, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London
	The Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire, Part 1. Buckinghamshire County Council	

Acknowledgements - Wycombe District Council would like to thank Jo Tiddy and Marian Miller for their invaluable contributions to this document.

Appendix E Local Generic Guidance

The following guidelines have been drawn up for the management of change in the Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area to allow for development and alterations that keep the conservation area vital, without losing the characteristics that make it special.

In conservation areas, the Council has a duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Many seemingly minor alterations, if insensitively carried out, can have a cumulative and highly damaging effect on the overall appearance of the area. Such alterations not only damage appearance, but reduce the value of houses as historic features and attractive areas, all of which are highly desirable in today's property market. The Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area includes the additional concern that many of the buildings represent the last surviving remnants of Wycombe's past as a major furniture manufacturer and hence insensitive development may cause the permanent loss of this part of our collective local heritage.

Preservation of existing character

The maintenance of historic buildings in Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area

- The use of traditional materials and detailing can have a considerable positive effect in enhancing the conservation area. The owners of historic and prominent properties should be encouraged to remove unsympathetic modern materials, such as concrete tiles and plastic rainwater goods, and to reinstate traditional materials such as plain clay tiles, local Bucks brick or traditional yellow stock brick as appropriate, old metal industrial windows, painted timber windows and cast iron guttering.
- Repointing should only be carried out when absolutely necessary, and kept to a minimum. Variations in colour and the application of excessive amounts of mortar in a non-traditional manner detracts from brickwork and obscures it. Inappropriately hard mixes will cause brickwork to deteriorate remarkably rapidly.
- Modern window materials, such as PVCu and aluminium usually appear out of place and unsympathetic, particularly if surrounded by more traditional types. Dark staining of timber is a modern technique which does little to enhance windows.
- The conservation area has a mix of modern machine made plain clay roof tiles and traditional handmade tiles with many roofs also in natural slate. Where roofs are renewed this palette of natural roofing materials should be used and concrete or artificial slate avoided as these materials are visually detrimental.

The maintenance of trees and green spaces

- Trees make only a minimal contribution to the area but property owners should manage existing trees sensitively. Within the conservation area, consent is required to fell, lop or top trees. Consideration should be given to important views into and out of the conservation area when planting or undertaking tree works, as should the setting of historic and significant buildings.
- Due to the industrial nature of the area there are no significant public green spaces within the conservation area.

Design Guidance for new development

In the conservation area higher standards of design are required, as it is the function of the planning authority to consider all applications as to whether they preserve or enhance the special character as identified in this appraisal.

Contextural design

- The majority of planning applications made within the conservation area are required to have Design and Access Statements accompanying them, in order for local authorities to evaluate the impact of the scheme on the wider locality, and understand the design process behind the proposal. These should specifically address the impact of any proposal on the conservation area's special character as a heritage asset. Applications for listed building consent also require a Design and Access Statement.
- Within Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area new development or proposals should respect the character of the area and respond to the immediate environment, particularly in terms of scale, density, form, materials and detailing. Building works such as extensions must be designed not as a separate entity but relate to the original building.
- Listed and other significant buildings are identified on the area appraisal survey maps and their specific qualities as heritage assets are described in the accompanying text. Care should be taken to ensure that any new development does not harm these buildings or their settings or any special architectural or historic features that they may contain. It should be recognised that new development may not always be acceptable.
- Development opportunities in Leigh Street Furniture Heritage Conservation Area are limited, unless sites come up for redevelopment. Any infill development where permissible should respect the special character of the conservation area which can be summarised as artisan housing in semi detached or terraced units, and large blocks of three or four storeys. Proposals for new development within the conservation area should include a detailed analysis of the locality, and show how this has developed (see Design and Access Statements above).

Scale and density

- Scale is the combination of a building's height and bulk when related to its surroundings. The scale of any new buildings should respect surrounding development. Some modest changes of scale may be appropriate as this reflects the variety of form in the area, where buildings have developed over time. Applicants should provide accurate elevations of surrounding buildings showing how new development will relate to them. Density is the amount of development related to the site area. National and local guidance states that high density development can make good use of land, provided it is carefully chosen and sensitively sited. In a conservation area the historic environment will be considered as a positive defining characteristic. The Wycombe Housing Intensification SPD (Update 2011) requires that any scheme brought forward in this context improves or reinforces the special qualities of the area. Developers should be aware that high intensity

urbanised forms of development may not be able to satisfactorily improve or enhance the special qualities of a conservation area, and would therefore be unacceptable as being out of character with the surrounding heritage assets.

- Applications for development adjoining but outside the conservation area will be assessed for their effect upon its character, appearance and setting, and may be refused permission if this is considered adverse.

Height and massing

- Within the conservation area there are a number of buildings that are already prominent because of their height – Birch House and other former factory buildings, and Saracens House. Domestic buildings are historically of lesser impact within the townscape, being smaller scale and new development should reflect this hierarchy. This terrace housing and other smaller scale building serves a valuable role as a foil for the larger scale industrial buildings that visually dominate and form the heart of the conservation area. The height of new development should match that of adjoining buildings – in this area this is usually two storeys for single domestic dwellings, three or four storeys for industrial buildings or buildings in their style.
- Where extensions to existing buildings are proposed, the extension should be subservient to the main buildings, with a lower roofline.

Appearance, materials and detailing

- The emphasis in conservation areas is to provide high quality design. Conservation area status does not preclude good modern design provided that it takes account of the prevailing form of existing development, scale, density, height and massing. Innovative modern design can be successfully integrated into historic areas and can provide vitality and interest to the street scene. Natural materials and high quality detailing should be incorporated into any proposals.
- Where a more traditional approach is appropriate buildings should be designed in a traditional form (including plan form, roof spans etc) and include pitched roofs. Dormers and rooflights should be modestly sized and situated on rear facing roofslopes. Use of historic detailing such as stringcourses, eaves details, fenestration pattern etc, will be acceptable if they are appropriate to the design of the new building. Such detailing, or a modern interpretation of it, can do much to break up facades of buildings. Chimneys are essential in roofscapes and should be incorporated into all non-industrial designs.
- Materials for any new building works must be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area. Where possible local traditional material should be used – good quality traditional orange-red multi brick for walling or yellow stock brick and sand faced clay roof tiles or natural, slate as appropriate. Although some of the buildings within the conservation area have painted brickwork, modern interpretation and techniques are not always visually successful and should thus be used with care. Where traditional materials survive they should be retained. The Chiltern Buildings Design Guide gives general information on Chiltern building materials. Some of the historic industrial buildings use Fletton or common brick in their elevations and this use should be respected where appropriate.
- Inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Windows should be timber (painted, not stained) and their design should reflect local styles, usually sliding sashes or side hung casements. Many of the industrial buildings have metal or cast-iron windows and these should be conserved where possible. If windows are to be double glazed these must be carefully designed to reduce the bulkiness of glazing bars. Joinery details should be submitted with planning applications. Top hung lights and modern materials such as PVCu and aluminium are inappropriate in the conservation area.

Doors vary throughout the conservation area, but where they survive in original form tend to be wooden, sometimes embellished, and in keeping with the formerly domestic buildings.

Extensions to existing buildings

- Extensions to existing buildings require the same approach as to new build in that they must take into account the prevailing forms of development and complement the form and character of the original house. This is of particular importance when designing extensions to listed buildings. Design should be of high quality, and take account of rooflines and shape, eaves details, fenestration patterns, architectural detailing and the creation of new chimneys. Extensions should not dominate the original buildings or result in the loss of historic plots. Extensions to factory buildings within the conservation area should respect their character and ensure that their strong visual contribution to this industrially focused conservation area is perpetuated and enhanced.

Boundary treatments

- Traditionally properties throughout the conservation area have no formal front boundaries and are accessed directly off the pavement. Other boundaries are traditionally brick walling or fencing. Where new boundaries are proposed in the public realm, they should be in keeping, and the use of panelled fencing should be avoided.

Public realm

- Street furniture, lampposts, CCTV camera mountings and posts, telephone boxes and other public works which are beyond planning control can have a disproportionate impact on the streetscape and character of the conservation area and those responsible need to bear in mind the advice in the English Heritage publication "Streets for All" (2005). Traffic signs, road markings and street lamps can add to clutter and consideration should be given to the overall effect when installing such items. Care is needed to ensure that signage to the old industrial and other commercial buildings respects the character of the conservation area and is always externally illuminated and designed with care to enhance the appearance and character of the conservation area.

- Solar panels where possible should be positioned to minimise the effect on the appearance of the building and the amenity of the area. Where possible they should be sited in back gardens or on elevations that do not face the street. Within the conservation area solar panels are not allowed on frontage elevations. Permission will be required for solar installations for listed buildings including non-listed buildings within their grounds, generally they will not be acceptable in publicly visible locations.

- Satellite dishes and other antennae where possible should be positioned as inobtrusively as possible and be of a modest size. Care should be taken to ensure that the dish or antenna is not affixed to a chimney, wall or roof slope that is visible from the road unless express permission is first granted by the local Planning authority. Satellite dishes are generally not acceptable affixed to listed buildings in publicly visible locations.