

Bath and North East Somerset Council
Development

Draft Widcombe and the Kennet and Avon Canal Character Appraisal Bath Conservation Area

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**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**



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1. Introduction and description of the Character Area

General description and form

This document is a character appraisal for Widcombe and the Kennet and Avon Canal Character Area of Bath Conservation Area.

The character area sits to the south of the City Centre, the railway station and the junction between the river Avon and the Kennet and Avon canal. Its northern edge comprises a fairly narrow strip of flat land tracking along the railway line to the west of Churchill Bridge and eastwards along the river and the canal to Abbey View Lock. Moving south through the area the land rises through Wells Road, Holloway, Lyncombe Hill, Prior Park Road, Widcombe Hill and Abbey View forming a bowl-shaped patchwork of green space and Bath stone residential buildings.

The character of the area is that of an important transitional landscape between the urban City Centre and the surrounding countryside, containing as that does the lower slopes on the surrounding southern hills which form the setting described in the World Heritage citation.

The character area forms only part of Widcombe Parish. The historic centre of Widcombe with the church of St. Thomas à Beckett, Widcombe Manor, Prior Park and the surrounding area westwards forms a separate character area, "Entry Hill, Perrymead and Prior Park". The history and character of Widcombe is bound up in these two character areas which taken together provide a holistic view of Widcombe. Alexandra Park and the dramatic backdrop of Beechen cliff are also part of Widcombe Parish and together they comprise the area for a separate character appraisal, "Beechen Cliff and Alexandra Park".

Widcombe and the Kennet and Avon Canal Character Area and the World Heritage Site

Core values and significances of Bath:

- Bath is a World Heritage Site, the only entire City in Britain to be so designated
- It is not a museum but a living city
- It has a remarkable degree of visual homogeneity
- Authenticity of the Site is of the essence; its preservation and enhancement are key criteria for all development
- Its complex and delicate hierarchy of interrelated urban spaces, landscape and architecture could be easily disrupted by overbearing or misinformed development and by the accumulation of harm.

Bath was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987. The designation describes the City as "a masterpiece of human creative genius whose protection must be the concern of all".

The World Heritage Site designation was awarded for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) with six attributes:

1. Roman archaeology

Many of the City's Roman remains are centred around the Roman Baths. These include the archaeological remains of the Roman temple of the Goddess Sulis Minerva and the extensive bathing complex. The Roman town of Aquae Sulis was a walled settlement. Beyond the city wall are Roman and Iron Age remains including hill forts, field systems and villas, demonstrating the extent of the settlement. The road system and Roman street plan influenced the Medieval and Georgian layout.

2. Hot springs

Bath's hot springs are the only ones in Britain, producing 250,000 gallons of water every day. There are three main springs - the King's Spring, the Hetling Spring and the Cross Bath Spring. They have been central to every stage of the city's development, creating a unique social history and culture where the waters are central to healing and recreation.

3. 18th century architecture

Neo-classical architectural style dominates in Bath. Architects including John Wood the Elder, John Wood the Younger, Robert Adam, Thomas Baldwin, John Palmer, John Eveleigh and John Pinch followed Palladian principles to build houses, public buildings, bridges and churches. The Georgian arrangements of crescents, squares, the Circus and terraces form iconic, internationally recognisable structures. The widespread use of local limestone and the uniform scale and height of buildings contribute to Bath's beauty today.

4. 18th century town planning

In the 18th century Bath was re-invented as a fashionable health resort, expanding dramatically beyond its city walls. Medieval streets were transformed into a spacious and beautiful classical city, where architecture and the natural landscape complemented each other. Uniformity of design was enhanced with the universal use of honey-coloured Bath limestone. Innovative forms of town planning including squares, crescents and the circus were introduced. Attractive views and vistas were deliberately created. Bath's Georgian town planning influenced subsequent developments in the UK and beyond.

5. Green setting

The City of Bath lies within a hollow of the hills. There are green views in every direction from the city centre. The countryside stretches right to Bath's doorstep. The hilly, green landscape was exploited by Bath's 18th century architects and developers, who created elegant terraces and villas on the slopes. The hills to the south of the city provided the oolitic limestone from which the city was built. Trees and woodlands populate the skyline, and lend natural beauty to the river, canal, parks and gardens. Open agricultural land on the edge of Bath is still used for grazing animals, just as it was by the Georgians.

6. Social setting

Bath's Georgian architecture reflected 18th century social ambitions. The city was a destination for pilgrimage, and for playing out the social aspirations of fashionable spa culture. The social, economic and physical re-birth of the city as an internationally famous spa resort was largely due to three key characters: the architect John Wood the Elder, wealthy postmaster and stone entrepreneur Ralph Allen and

Bath's famous Master of Ceremonies Richard 'Beau' Nash. Visitors flocked to Bath. The list of famous and influential people who visited, lived in or wrote about the city is extensive. Customs and practices associated with 'taking the waters' were practised and developed here. The fashion for promenading influenced the design of Bath's streets and gardens. The rules and etiquette governing polite society were embodied in buildings such as the Assembly Rooms and Pump Rooms.

How does this Character Area contribute to the World Heritage Site?

1. Contribution to Roman archaeology

Very little Roman archaeology has been found within the character area. Some reference has been found to the likelihood of Roman villas and farms on the slopes of the hills in Widcombe but with little evidence. Roman coins have been found, and a few Roman graves including two on Widcombe Hill, and one in front of the White Hart.

2. Contribution to hot springs

The character area lies outside the area where the hot springs rise.

3. Contribution to 18th century architecture

There are significant contributions to 18th century architecture within the character area. These include Widcombe Crescent and 18th century villas. The former mill on Prior Park Road (now a car dealership) is a rare example in Bath of an early Georgian industrial building. Ralph Allen's cottages at the bottom of Prior Park Road (1730), designed by John Wood to house the quarrymen from the Combe Down stone mines, are good examples of Georgian artisan dwellings. The local Georgian shops on Claverton Street were built in the middle of the 18th century (one of several groups throughout Bath). The large Georgian set-piece housing developments were constructed in the early 19th century.

4. Contribution to 18th century town planning

There is little overall coherence to the 18th century development within the character area, in contrast, for example, to the Bathwick Estate and the developments to the north of the city centre. Individual developments have generally been built adjacent to established routes and appear to have been prompted by circumstance and opportunity.

5. Contribution to green setting

The character area makes an important contribution to the green setting of the World Heritage Site. Views from the city centre across to Widcombe Vale are dominated by trees, both street trees and trees within private gardens. Within the area there are important groups of trees, including those adjacent to the 18th and early 19th century developments. There is no large public green space within the character area, but there are small open spaces, both public and private, that contribute to the green setting of the World Heritage Site. The northern boundary of the character area is the river bounded by trees along its length through Widcombe. From where the river bends to the north, the boundary of the character area runs along the canal. To the south of this section of the canal are the Abbey View allotments that provide a green foreground to Abbey View Gardens,

and strengthen the green corridor provided by the canal. This green setting for the historic buildings, and the rich ecology it supports, forms a key part of the character of the area.

6. Contribution to social setting

The area's hilly topography, its seclusion and yet its closeness to Bath, all ensured that Widcombe in particular became a desirable residential area. The slopes rising above the low-lying smoky City were thought to be health-giving.





Draft Widcombe and the Kennet and Avon Canal Character Area Map



2. Summary of key characteristics



- Widcombe is identified by the local population as the place where the city meets the countryside. This perfectly describes the fingers of countryside which reach down into the City from the surrounding hills extending between the buildings on the lower slopes to provide a visual connection from the City Centre to open fields.
- The River Avon and the Kennet and Avon canal are important features in the Widcombe character area. The entry into Widcombe from the city centre is over the river on the Halfpenny Bridge. To the west the railway crosses the river on a steel girder bridge and onto the railway viaduct designed by I K Brunel. The canal runs to the east providing a pleasant walking and cycling route featuring historic locks and bridges with a backdrop of allotments along some of its length.
- The large set-piece terraces including Widcombe Crescent, Widcombe Terrace, Prior Park Buildings, Cambridge Terrace and Southcott Place. There are also individual Georgian villas, detached, semi-detached and terraced, examples being Cambridge Place on Widcombe Hill, and on both sides of Lyncombe Hill.
- Claverton St/Widcombe Parade is the main commercial street that has existed since the Georgian era, with local shops and businesses. The street became a growing mercantile centre for the area in Victorian times: photographs indicate an almost unchanged street scene over the past 100 or so years. With its mix of retail outlets it remains a flourishing High Street, with three historic pubs: The Ram, The Ring o' Bells, and the White Hart, all redesigned and refreshed over the past decade.
- St Mark's Road runs to the west of the parade, a cul de sac with the Temperance Hall at the eastern end and St Mark's at the western end. The street consists of attractive houses built from 1830-1860 all of which are listed. Holloway rising up behind the church has been a route since Roman times. The area was cleared in 1970s to build a new estate of houses on Holloway and Carlton Gardens backing on to Beechen Cliff and with fine views across the city centre.
- Lyncombe Hill, Prior Park Road and Widcombe Hill where there are fine examples of large Georgian and Victorian houses. These roads lie to the south of the parade and rise up towards the surrounding hills. The three roads provide access to the city centre from the south, outside the character area.
- Abbey View, Horseshoe Walk and Tynning End form the south easterly fringe of the character area. Abbey View is a steep terrace of attractive houses overlooking the City with fine views of the canal and the abbey. The other streets were developed in C20th using the design ethos of utilising the landscape to provide large airy homes with expansive views and generous gardens. The rear gardens of Horseshoe Walk back onto the gardens of Sydney Buildings forming an extensive area of green space enclosing the lower reaches of Smallcombe Brook.

3. Historic development

Physical influences – geology, landform and drainage patterns

The Widcombe character area of the Bath Conservation Area consists of a narrow flood plain south of the River Avon, backed by three valleys with streams: Smallcombe to the east and Widcombe to the south, which splits into Lyncombe and Widcombe valleys, each with steep-sloping sides. These slopes, with their individual drainage patterns and watercourses shape the character of the area and the setting of the many heritage assets in the area, providing open views across widely spaced mainly Georgian terraces and mansions.

The names Lyncombe and Widcombe suggest Ancient British connections: 'lynn' is a word in ancient Celtic connected with water and pools, with Lyncombe implying 'Watery Valley'; while the name 'Widcombe' is generally taken to mean wide valley, reflecting the topography (Turner 1951). However, Ekwall (1936) suggests the name has the same origin as Widecombe or Withycombe, meaning Willow Valley, and historically there was a withy bed on the site of the historic wharf at the bottom of Widcombe Hill (Scott 1984).

To the west of the area, the lower slopes back on to the dramatic, steep-sided Beechen Cliff, a prominent visual background and, like the Widcombe slopes themselves, a key element in the green setting of the city as a whole.

Historic influences

Early Widcombe

The earliest extant records for the area are Saxon, referring to the district of 'Cliftune', whose boundaries align with the historic parish of Widcombe and Lyncombe (ref 9). In 970 Saxon King Edgar granted the area to Bath Priory.

By the time of the Domesday survey of 1086, the name of the Manor had changed from *Cliftune* to *Lincuna* (Lyncombe), still including Widcombe, and lay in the Hundred of Bath Forum. The entry for Lyncombe in the Domesday Book is as follows (Morris: 1980):

The Church holds Lyncombe itself. Before 1066 it paid tax for 10 hides. Land for 8 ploughs, of which 7 hides are in lordship; 3 ploughs there; 8 slaves; 4 villages and 10 smallholders with 3 ploughs and 2 hides. 2 mills which pay 10s; meadow, 30 acres; pasture, 200 acres. 1 cob; 8 pigs, 108 sheep.

The value was £6, now £8.

The old village of Lyncombe, now lost, probably lay along the course of the Lyn Brook. The Manor of Lyncombe consisted of three small villages: Lyncombe, centred around Lyncombe Old Church (exact location not known); Widcombe, near to Widcombe Old Church (St Thomas a Becket); and Holloway, below the Magdalen Chapel, just beyond the study area to the west.

Later in the medieval period the estate became known as the Manor of Lyncombe and Widcombe, and there is a MS survey of the lands dated 1590 (ref 2, Keevil).

Major development of the area began in the 18th century, as Georgian Bath grew. In 1729, Ralph Allen, having bought the stone quarries in Combe Down a year earlier, built a row of terraced cottages for his workers at the bottom of the Widcombe Vale (now Prior Park Road). Two years later (1731) he commissioned one of the earliest “rail -way” tracks (the rails were timber) down the slope of the vale, to carry stone from his quarries down to the River (see plate 4 from DW&L, Scott). Both the cottages and the trackway are included in the Thomas Thorpe map of 1742.

Georgian Widcombe

Leisure & relaxation

In 1735 Allen commissioned his magnificent Palladian Manor at the top of the Widcombe Valley (now Ralph Allen Drive, the continuation of Prior Park Road), forming a key landscaping focus for southern views from the City, of which the lower slopes of Smallcombe, Widcombe and to an extent Lyncombe form a part; a key element in the “Georgian town planning” and “Georgian social ambitions” elements within the City’s World Heritage citation.

In 1737 Mr John Wickstead opened a water-driven cameo and seal-engraving machine at his property on Rosemount Lane, on the opposite side of Prior Park Road from the Upper Widcombe Flour Mill. “Mr Wickstead’s Machine” (*Bath & North East Somerset Heritage Record MBN11369*) served wealthy visitors to Prior Park and, later, Lyncombe Spa further up the valley (just beyond the area’s southern boundary).

From 1769 Wickstead’s site itself was developed as a spa with a mineral water spring and cold bathing known as Bagatelle Gardens. A few years later refreshments and entertainments were also offered, including a small boating lake (over the road, through a listed gateway in a stone wall, now blocked up), and illuminated waterfall (ref 1). By 1773, however, the spa had closed, although the gardens remained open until 1780. The part of the gardens to the west of the road was subsequently occupied in the early 19th century by a small group of fine residential houses. It is believed that the house now called Welton Lodge, at the junction of Rosemount and Prior Park Road, is the original “Bagatelle House”.

In 1766 *King James’s Pleasure Gardens* were opened just south of the study area in Lyncombe Vale but reached through it by visitors from the City; with many letters from the C18th and C19th referring to walking excursions to Lyncombe via Widcombe (ref 1).

Population and housing growth

The Industrial Revolution – and resulting urban population growth - the arrival of the Kennet & Avon canal (1810) and later the Great Western Railway (in 1840), brought major change to Widcombe and Lyncombe. The western section of the canal from Caen Hill to Bath was built between 1794 and 1810. Harcourt’s map of 1800 shows the canal constructed through Sydney Gardens as far as Sydney Road. The final section to Widcombe, including the locks to the River Avon and the wharf had been completed by 1810 when the locks at Devizes (the Caen Flight) were opened. The canal became the means by which coal was brought to Bath to heat the Georgian houses and stone from Bath was exported towards London.

For the first time, the valley slopes running down through Widcombe were used for housing developments, as owners sold off parcels of land. The result is an area with distinctive late Georgian and early Victorian villas and terraces, characteristic of Bath.

The change between the plan of 1810, showing the first developments on the slopes – Widcombe Crescent and Terrace (1804), and Georgian villas on the east of Lyncombe Hill road – the Cotterell plan of 1852, and the first OS map of Bath from around 1880 illustrates the pace of development.

The OS map shows widely spaced rows of terraced or detached houses, with large and mature gardens. In some parts of the area, mature orchards and meadows, apparently open for local residents to walk within, continued, contributing to an overall design of open, green spaces: distinctive from the more closely-integrated urban design of the City itself. Green space, and clear, uninterrupted views from the slopes form a key element of the design across the area.

It also shows the mean terraced housing of Calton Road and Holloway, built for working classes who lived in relatively poor conditions. Canal, building and railway construction workers had to be housed during these years of rapid expansion.

Limited new beginnings

Between the wars, as Bath's population continued to increase, new housing development was undertaken in the eastern portion of the area, on the lower slopes of Smallcombe near the Kennet & Avon canal. The "Tynning Estate" was focused around the pre-existing Tynning Lane and Horseshoe Walk. Architects continued to make use of the slopes to provide wide views for these newer houses, such as those across the canal to the City from Abbey View Gardens.

At some point after 1945, the boating lake of Wickstead's Bagatelle Gardens (within the grounds of Widcombe Manor, as Widcombe House had become called) was filled in. The portion of the Bagatelle garden to the west of this lake was added to the buildings of Upper Widcombe Flour Mill, some of which were demolished, and the site is now a modest-sized car dealership.

Destruction, conservation and renewal

Lower Widcombe was significantly affected by the period known as "the Sack of Bath", broadly during the 1960s and 1970s.

The former Abbey Poor House, located to the south just behind Claverton Street and built in the late 1770s on Orchard land purchased from Ralph Allen, was demolished in 1961, and replaced by social housing, known as Armes Court, built in 1965.

However, the greatest impact on the area was the Rossiter Relief Road scheme built in the 1970's, aimed at taking through-traffic out of the city centre, around what was termed by some as "ring-road Bath". In order to achieve this, Georgian and Victorian domestic and mercantile buildings on the southern riverbank were demolished whole-scale, to be replaced by a wide dual carriageway: these buildings included a Dispensary *, and an earlier Cold Bath, supplied by water from the local springs on Beechen Cliff. The mercantile buildings (with apartments above) of the eastern end of Claverton Street were retained, although now placed on a traffic island, in the middle of split one-way carriageways.

At the same time, several streets of houses at the southern end of Holloway were demolished, and the road cut off to vehicular traffic.

Significant demolition and reconstruction took place between Calton Road (now partially re-named Calton Gardens) and Holloway/Wellsway/Claverton Street. Georgian and Victorian terraces were replaced with modern terraced buildings in modern materials.

In several other places, “in-fill” of this time contrasts with the setting, views and character of the heritage assets. Examples include the former stone-walled ‘Nursery’ (shown in OS map 1947-64), before this a garden (according to the 1852 Cotterell map) which formed a pleasant green space between the listed buildings of Lyncombe Hill, Prior Park Cottages and Prior Park Buildings. Here, as well as on a neighbouring former garden space behind Lyncombe Hill, development of buildings took place which changed the character of the area, and the setting of local heritage assets.

However, plans to demolish Ralph Allen’s Cottages, which by the 1970s were derelict and uninhabited, were defeated after much effort by local people and the wider heritage lobby. In 1983 the houses were restored.

With the rise of the conservation movement and a new interest in historic properties, and with an increasing number of people moving to Bath for work or retirement, the 1980s and 1990s saw a gradual rebirth of the area. This brought about the renovation of many of the older houses, and a return to their original internal layout.

Further redevelopment took place on the land between St Matthew’s Church, Claverton Street and the canal in the early C21st, with the redevelopment of the site (opposite the White Hart) of the former 1970s social club, being replaced by a combination of retail and student housing and a new social club.

The Lyn Brook, which had flowed through Widcombe Valley to the river, and which powered John Wickstead’s machine at Bagatelle House, was re-directed into the drains, rather than the lower millstream. This left only the water flowing from Prior Park to provide water for the stream running further down Prior Park Road.

The Garden Centre on Prior Park Road, established on the location of former orchards (1852 OS map), subsequently allotments (1921 OS map) and then a commercial nursery (1947-65 OS map) which was expanded in 2005.

A long desire to remove Bath through traffic from Widcombe Parade was achieved in 2015, which has added to the renewal of the character of Widcombe as an area of relaxation and leisure, linked to the natural, wooded slopes of its valleys.

4. Cultural influences

Leisure

The development of the character area was particularly focused on leisure. In the past Georgian high society passed through on the way to pleasure gardens, springs, and the amazing views from Alexandra Park and Prior Park.

Nowadays Widcombe is the gateway to the many walks that follow the canal, river, two tunnels and the National Trust's Skyline walk. Widcombe Parade is a centre for independent shops, restaurants and take-away food. This Georgian Parade hosts a strong mix of local businesses and since the main road was diverted has become a place of street culture. A great place to have a coffee or a beer and watch the world go by.

It is also an entertainment centre with many community and cultural activities. These take place at the newly built Widcombe Social Club and a range of other church, pub and community venues. The highly acclaimed Natural Theatre Company has its home on the lower reaches of Widcombe Hill.

The canal is a significant leisure asset, both for Widcombe and the wider city, for boating for walking and for cycling. The river which also forms a boundary to the character area, is greatly underused as a leisure asset, but one of the few access points for boating, a recently built pontoon, is within the area.

There is a vibrant residents association which organises social gatherings, events and community activities (cycling, walking, gardening and music) throughout the year. There is also a neighbourhood group in Widcombe west and a Community Centre in St Mark's Road.

Sporting achievement

This small, hilly and built-up area does not have many direct sporting activities although it is a regular route for cyclists, particularly those cycling to Bath University campus and the Bath annual half marathon passes along Rossiter Road.

Industry and transport

The character area has been significantly shaped by the historical influences of the river, canal, railway and nearby high-quality Bath stone at Combe Down. Stone quarrying activity took place throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Ralph Allen Drive was both the access route to Prior Park mansion and the route of the tramway to bring stone from Combe Down to the river wharf at Widcombe. Engineering, coach-building, metal-working and all those trades associated with shipping, road and rail transport were located on the northern boundary of the character area. Other industrial activity included a corn mill (now a motor dealership) and pubs and breweries alongside the river. There were orchards and market gardens on the nearby hillsides bounded by Widcombe Hill and Prior Park Road. Whilst the last market garden closed soon after WW2 remnants of these orchards remain alongside the built up area.

There is now no heavy industry in this character area. There are a number of office-based businesses located in the Parade and in some of the surrounding houses.

5. Archaeology

There is limited archaeological evidence for pre-medieval habitation near the River Avon, most likely due to regular flooding together with major and repeated terracing and construction on the immediate southern river bank.

Nevertheless, there have been a few Roman finds, together with a Saxon coin horde, suggesting significant human activity over centuries. At the western end of the character area, the lower part of Holloway (*possibly derived from 'Haulers' Way' or 'Holy Way', due to it being the route from Bath to Glastonbury & Wells*) follows what was believed to be the original Roman route of the Fosse Way (see earlier maps), although this has been challenged by several more recent studies, starting with Cunliffe (1986). The derivation could simply be from 'Hollow Way' ie a sunken route due to the volume of traffic and it being eroded by spring water.

Roman burials have been found in the area, indicating the possible line of a Roman Road (Widcombe Hill) that may be one of the main Roman southern routes out of Bath, possibly leading to Poole Harbour. One of these burials was found in front of the White Hart Inn (at the junction of Widcombe Hill and Prior Park Road) during the digging of a trench in the 1900s: a stone coffin and a slab containing an inhumation were recorded (B&NES HR MBN6358).

Little post-Roman archaeological research has been undertaken in Widcombe character area, although just beyond its borders are a number of important Tudor and Stuart sites (e.g. the Church of St Thomas à Becket, Lyncombe Hall and King James Palace).

6. Landmarks and views

See map, Appendix 1.

Distinctive features in the landscape



St Matthew's Church on Widcombe Hill was completed in 1847 to cater for the expanding population, with a spire rising to 47 m. The spire is perhaps the most notable focal point in Widcombe, dominant in views down Widcombe Hill, looking up Widcombe Hill from Widcombe Parade, looking southwards over Widcombe from the City Centre, and looking over Widcombe from Beechen Cliff.



St Mark's Church with its square tower; built in 1832, appearing above the trees bordering Claverton Street. Situated in the western part of the character area, and less dominant than St Matthew's, St Mark's church is an important landmark off Lyncombe Hill, and appears in glimpsed views from the slopes of Beechen Cliff.

The White Hart is a focal point at the junction of Widcombe Hill and Prior Park Road at the east end of the Widcombe shopping parade. It was built about 1733 by Richard Jones. The area in front of it is dominated by traffic, but with careful design, has the potential to be an attractive urban space.



The large Georgian developments of Widcombe Crescent, Widcombe Terrace and Prior Park Buildings are notable features within the landscape of Widcombe. Widcombe Crescent and Prior Park Buildings are enhanced by the groups of trees planted in front of them.

The locks at the western end of the Kennet and Avon Canal are also defining features of the character area. The Deep Lock, the second lock in from the river, is the second deepest canal lock in the UK.

Brunel's Railway Viaduct which crosses over the Churchill roundabout at the western limit of the area is a significant landmark in the Widcombe landscape. Its bulk is softened by the trees planted on both sides of it.



Vistas from Widcombe

Many locations in Widcombe have impressive views either of nearby countryside or over the Georgian centre of Bath. The most notable viewing locations are:

- North from Calton Road looking over Bath to Lansdown;
- From Holloway, looking east to Bathwick Fields and, lower down, north to the railway viaduct (a vista much loved by train spotters) and across the City;
- East and north-east from the top of Rosemount Lane to Claverton Down and distant Solsbury Hill;
- West from Widcombe Terrace to the wooded skyline above Perrymead, the eastern side of Lyncombe Hill and Alexandra Park;
- A splendid panorama looking west, north and east from Abbey View and Abbey View Gardens.



Views of Widcombe

Looking south from the City Centre, from the northern slopes of Bath across the valley and from the east along the Avon valley, most of Widcombe nestles in the wooded combs and dividing hillsides which finger their way almost into the City Centre. Part of Widcombe also appears to cling to the steep slope under Beechen Cliff, just a short distance from the narrow transport ribbon and the River Avon. There is also a view from the canal towpath looking west to Widcombe with the trees round Beechen Cliff and Alexandra Park behind.



7. Land uses and their influence

Early records and maps provide evidence over the centuries of the area being mostly used for agriculture, including orchards, nurseries, and market-gardening. These traditions remain in the land to the west of Prior Park Road, a large sloping field with fruit trees, sheep and alpaca and the garden centre down the hill.

The advent of the Georgian building boom and the transport of stone from the mines at Combe Down had a significant impact on Widcombe. Along with the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal, Widcombe became a focus for industry. The traces are still apparent. The canal, first built for mercantile trade with a bustling wharf is now a haven for wildlife, nature, barge sailing and walking. The canal pond, lined by the wharf, remains, but the industries have gone and in their place are new developments of apartments, a shop and the Social Club. The balancing pond between the Bottom Lock and the Deep Lock is overlooked by an hotel, and the construction of Rossiter Road in the 1970's greatly altered the setting of the canal and changed the configuration of the locks and the balancing ponds. However it is still possible to imagine what this part of the character area must have looked like from the late Georgian period onwards.

From the Georgian period Widcombe was influenced by the expansion of residential development which continued into the Victorian and later periods. However the restrictions on further expansion due to the designation of the Green Belt has meant that the character area is close both to the City Centre and to open countryside.



8. Buildings, architectural quality and townscape



Building age

There are few pre-Georgian buildings remaining within the character area. Widcombe grew most significantly during the Georgian period (the population of Widcombe and Lyncombe increased by over 350% between 1801 and 1841). Buildings from the early Georgian period include Allen's cottages built for his workers (1730's), the White Hart (1730's), and the Upper Widcombe Mill on Prior Park Road (now a car showroom). The five houses on the west side of Widcombe Hill, immediately up-hill from the junction with Church Street, are also from this period, though at least one of them incorporates an earlier building. Widcombe Parade, the main shopping street, was built during the 1770's. However the principal set-piece Georgian developments including Widcombe Crescent and Terrace, Prior Park Buildings, Southcot Place, and Cambridge Terrace date from the early 1800's. The Baptist Church was completed in 1820 and St.Mark's Church was consecrated in 1832.



Victorian Widcombe is also clearly defined. The north side of St. Mark's Road was built between 1850 and 1870. Further up Lyncombe Hill, the south side of Alexandra Road contains the remains of a much larger area of Victorian development, and there are a number of large Victorian villas on the west side of Lyncombe Hill. Clarendon Villas (1869-1876) on Widcombe Hill and the houses on the western side of the Tynning are contrasting examples of Victorian dwellings. There is also a substantial group of Victorian dwellings on the eastern side of Prior Park Road including Gordon Road. The modest villas on the eastern side of Prior Park Road, opposite the garden centre, and the two imposing semi-detached buildings, Oriel and Baliol, straddle the Georgian/Victorian periods.



There are two principal buildings from the Edwardian period at the start of the 20th Century, the School in Millbrook Place (now converted to flats) and the extension to the Baptist Church. There are two main areas of 20th Century housing. Many of the houses on the west side of the Tynning, in Tynning End and Abbey View Gardens were built in the 1930's. The other significant area of post-war housing is the Calton area between Lyncombe Hill and Holloway, built between the late 1960's and early 1980's to replace an area of artisan housing, largely Victorian, but also including both Georgian and medieval buildings. This area was cleared in the 1960's. There are also scattered examples of 20th Century buildings throughout the character area. In the 21st Century there has been a redevelopment of the land that borders the canal basin at the bottom of Widcombe Hill and along the lower Pulteney Road.





Building form

The built form of the character area is determined by topography. As with much of Bath, Widcombe is built on steep slopes that run down to the river. The roads that now follow the two main valleys of Widcombe and Lyncombe, form the spines for the development that has, over the years, crept upwards, away from Bath. The areas in between these routes are relatively level as development has followed the contours. Thus, the external views of the character area, from the City Centre and from Bathwick, show dense low rise development clustered tightly around Beechen Cliff and running up the principal roads that enter into Widcombe from the south: Widcombe Hill, Prior Park Road, Lyncombe Hill and, at the western end, the bottom of Holloway and the Wells Road.



The Georgian development in the character area takes the form of large set-piece terraces including Widcombe Crescent, Widcombe Terrace, Prior Park Buildings, Cambridge Terrace and Southcott Place. There are also individual Georgian villas, detached, semi-detached and terraced, examples being Cambridge Place on Widcombe Hill, and on both sides of Lyncombe Hill. These illustrate the transition for the Georgian middle class from living in large houses built in terraces to individual houses with gardens.

The other defining example of Georgian development is the local centre on Claverton Street, which has retained many of its period buildings and is generally referred to as Widcombe Parade, though as it was constructed, Widcombe Parade forms the south side, and Claverton Buildings and Sussex Place, the north side of the street. It is one of several local centres in Bath built during the Georgian period. A recent redevelopment on the south side at the western end is Georgian pastiche although it does retain the scale and appearance of the original street.



Claverton Street, including the Parade was part of the main east-west route through Bath. It was partially by-passed by the construction of Rossiter Road in the 1970's, but Widcombe Parade remained the principal route for east to west traffic. In 2015 Rossiter Road was made two-way and traffic through the Georgian street was reduced by 80%.

There are areas of Victorian development throughout the character area including the Anglican church of St. Matthews. The spire is an important landmark in Widcombe, as is the tower of the late-Georgian St. Marks. The housing developments during the Victorian period include terraces (eg. Clarendon Villas on Widcombe Hill and along Alexandra Road) and detached and semi-detached villas (eg. on the west side of Lyncombe Hill). The large semi-detached Victorian villas on the eastern side of the Tynning are notable, not least for their views over the city centre and beyond.



There are two significant areas of 20th century development within the character area. The western side of the Tynning, Tynning End, Abbey View and Abbey View Gardens is sub-urban in character, being composed of detached and semi-detached houses built in the 1930's. The later development in the Calton area east of the Holloway, is more urban in character, formed with long terraces running along the contours and over-looking the City Centre. It clearly seeks to mirror the urban form of the previous largely Victorian development, even to the extent that one street (Calton Walk) has no direct road access, a characteristic of many of the earlier dwellings.



The 21st Century development at the foot of Widcombe Hill has particular significance due to its prominence. It forms the entrance to Widcombe from the east, it helps to complete the “square” in front of the White Hart (together with the Baptist church hall, and the corner of Claverton Street and Prior Park Road), and it is the focal point of the view along Widcombe Parade from the west.

A particular feature of the character area are hidden corners, streets that are away from the general gaze, sometimes with narrow accesses, but which reveal delightful groups of buildings. Examples are Hatfield Buildings, Cambridge Terrace and others off Prior Park Road, Widcombe Hill and Lyncombe Hill.

Another important feature of Widcombe, resulting from construction on steep slopes, are the retaining walls that define the edge of individual properties. These walls are built mostly in Bath stone, both Ashlar and rough dressed, and can be up to four or five metres in height. Garden boundary walls built of stone also add to the harmonious relationship between Bath stone buildings and their setting.



Buildings of merit

All buildings and features cited here are examples only, not a definitive list of all buildings of merit. They are cited to give guidance as to the sort of features significant to the character area. Almost every street may have isolated buildings of merit, whether listed or not, and many streets are listed in their entirety.

See map Annex 1

Anchor buildings



- Halfpenny bridge and toll house are part of the main pedestrian route into Widcombe from the City. The original wooden bridge collapsed in 1877 through overloading, killing 8 and injuring at least 50 people who were making their way from the station to the Bath and West Show which was being held on farmland above Beechen Cliff. The current bridge was constructed later that same year. The bridge has recently undergone a major restoration and has had concealed lighting installed that improves greatly the entrance to Widcombe.
- Prior Park Buildings (1820-25) - one of the last of the Georgian terraces of Bath (Prior Park Buildings, with its retained millstream and communal garden as part of the design).
- Widcombe Crescent and Widcombe Terrace (1805) - constructed at the same time and standing side by side these two groups of buildings and their gardens are a central part of Widcombe's Georgian heritage. The Terrace features a raised pavement with the gardens sitting below it. Both groups of buildings were constructed to take advantage of views south-west towards Beechen Cliff.
- Old Widcombe Flour Mill and Ralph Allen Cottages - two remaining structures from Ralph Allen's extensive enterprises of the 18th century. The flour mill stands within the Honda Car dealership. The cottages, restored in the 1980s are early examples of cottages designed by John Wood the Elder and built for workers so as to be close to the wharf used to ship stone from Ralph Allen's quarry.





- St Matthew's and St Mark's churches, the spire of one and the tower of other stand just beyond each end of the parade and are visible from afar. St Mark's Church was built in 1832 to cater for the rapidly expanding population in Widcombe and in 1974 became a community centre serving a number of local groups and local residents. St Matthew's completed in 1847 remains an active place of worship as part of the Widcombe Benefice.
- St James's Viaduct (1835-1840) - railway viaduct and arches. Constructed to a design by I K Brunel, a rare viaduct to survive intact from the earliest phase of the Great Western Railway and a key structure in our engineering history.
- Southcot House built in 1777 and altered in 1840, large detached house on Lyncombe Hill, built for John Evill.
- Southcot Place an elegant square off Lyncombe Hill. Its privacy enhanced by central gardens and the Baptist Burial Ground on its north side.
- Pope's House (late 17th century on the left hand side of Lyncombe Hill just below Calton Road – believed to have been occupied at one time by Alexander Pope).

Other listed buildings of historical/townscape significance



There are a large number and variety of listed buildings in Widcombe, Prior Park Road, with Lyncombe Hill, Widcombe Hill, Church St, Hatfield Buildings and St Marks Road all containing a number of fine examples. The following buildings have been selected as they display particular features that contribute to the character of the area.

- Abbey View – clinging to the hillside above the canal with views across to the east and the west this Victorian terrace is a fine example of how the topology was used to create houses with elevated aspects and open views across the countryside.
- Ebenezer Chapel - although the parade frontage to this building is partly hidden by a modern canopy/porch, the rear forms part of the remaining Georgian frontage to the canal/wharf-side. The message on the roof, although not appreciated by all, is immediately recognisable in aerial views of Widcombe.
- Temperance Hall - built in 1847 and standing on the north side of St Mark's Road.
- Cambridge Terrace - built 1821. An elevated terrace on the east side of Widcombe Hill with views across the city.
- Prior Park Cottages – a steep terrace of cottages to the north of Prior Park Buildings.



Unlisted buildings of merit

- 8-10 Clarendon Villas – the largest 3 houses in this Victorian terrace. Nos 1-7 are listed, numbers 8 -10 are not.
- The Tynning (north side) – the Tynning estate is a development from the 19th century which maintains the spaciousness and green surroundings of this part of the conservation area, with tree lined streets. The houses on the northern side of the Tynning are large and spacious buildings.
- Deep Lock House (C21) - modern house with metal frieze gate and balcony frontage set beside the canal by the Deep Lock. A modern building that sits well in its setting and provides an attractive example of architecture designed to work within its surroundings.
- Ashley Lodge – an early Victorian house built possibly by William Daly, a slate merchant, within the grounds of the former Bagatelle Gardens.





Townscape features of merit

- Kennet and Avon Canal - an early industrial landscape with several attractive and interesting structures including, Wash House Lock and Bridge, and Horseshoe Walk Bridge.
- Claverton Street appears to have a history going back to C17th although the oldest structures are no longer there and the earliest existing buildings are from the time of Ralph Allen's stone quarrying in the C18th. Claverton Buildings were built around 1770 and Widcombe Parade a little later. Some of the buildings in both Claverton Buildings and Widcombe Parade have been rebuilt, notably Nos 1 & 2 Widcombe Parade in keeping with the local architectural style, gaining an environmental award.

Buildings at risk

The area is generally well cared for and there are few buildings in a poor state of repair.

Negative buildings and townscape features



- The unwelcoming entry for pedestrians coming into Widcombe from the north. To the west of the station is a concrete underpass. It was refurbished in 2018 but has previously been clogged by rubbish and flooding. The route through the back of the station to Halfpenny Bridge passes air conditioning and extractor units behind a number of restaurants. Once across the bridge pedestrians have a confusing choice of routes across Rossiter Road into the parade.
- The railway arches along Claverton Street used as storage for material belonging to the railway station, a positive feature with potential for improvement.
- Inappropriate infill buildings dating from the 1970s.

9. Materials and detailing

The principal influences on architectural design within the character area are from the Georgian and Victorian periods. Buildings from both periods provide references that can and have been used in contemporary development. Most if not all the buildings from the Georgian period are listed, thus change and repair of these buildings has helped to retain their authenticity. Some of the Victorian buildings are listed, but most are not, and thus there is a greater degree of change from the original design, for example, with the windows and doors, extensions and even boundary fencing and walling.

The principal building material across both the Georgian and Victorian buildings in the character area is Bath stone, both Ashlar and rough dressed. This applies to both domestic and commercial buildings. A notable exception to the use of Bath Stone is the (Victorian) terrace of red brick houses near the top of Forefield Rise, one of the very few examples of red brick in the area.

More recent developments, such as the mixed student housing, retail and community building on the corner of the bottom of Widcombe Hill and Pulteney Road, use modern limestone cladding and render around steel frame construction.

Roofing materials are mostly slate or tiles, but with some more contemporary solutions. (eg. the Prior Park Garden Centre, built on the site of a former nursery, uses modern steel construction, with a “green roof” to minimise visual impact from the surrounding slopes).

Key characteristics of Georgian architecture evident in Widcombe are seen in the sash windows, typically 6 pane over 6 pane, roofs with parapets, paired chimneys and front doors with mouldings surmounted with a sunburst fanlight. Most of the Georgian houses have M-roofs, a double pitch with valley gutter to “hide” the roof behind the parapets. Iron work such as fencing at the front and balconies, both full balconies and Juliet balconies, are a feature of the character area. There are also remaining examples of ornate lamp overthrows.

The Victorian buildings in Widcombe are varied but display much of their original detail including sash windows with glazing bars. In the late Victorian period, canted bay windows with a flat front and angled sides were fashionable, and these too are evident within the character area. Another characteristic of Victorian architecture was the use of stained glass in doors and windows, and there are examples of both original and modern stained glass in Victorian dwellings within the area.

A number of the 20th and 21st century buildings in Widcombe have drawn influence from the historical architecture of the character area. Most of the buildings in this period are built either with Bath Stone, or a composite artificial stone that resembles it. The 1930's housing in the Tynning is constructed from Bath Stone, and there are examples of small details on some of these buildings that make reference to the earlier Victorian buildings adjacent to them e.g. an interrupted stone string course between the ground and first floor windows. The 20th century housing in the Calton area, built of composite stone, strongly resembles Ashlar, and the building form clearly intends to reflect Georgian terracing. There are other contemporary buildings that make clear references to the detailing of earlier periods.



10. Streets and movement

Density and degree of enclosure



The density of Widcombe is varied from the terraces of Calton, the lower levels of Lyncombe Hill and Prior Park Road, to the more spacious dwellings on Widcombe Hill, and further up Prior Park Road and Lyncombe Hill and in the Tynning. The south side of Widcombe borders countryside and the large gardens of Widcombe Manor, Prior Park and Crowe Hall.

Rossiter Road is one of the few roads in Bath to run alongside the river and to provide views of it. There is little sense of enclosure. On their lower slopes, Prior Park Road, Widcombe Hill and Lyncombe Hill are enclosed by the buildings alongside them. Only Prior Park Road opens out to wider views looking across to Lyncombe.



The northern slopes of Widcombe face across the City and are open to views from the City Centre, Lansdown, Camden and Bathwick. Higher up the valleys, there are views across the valley to Bathwick to the east and Beechen Cliff to the west. Throughout Widcombe there are hidden corners and quiet locations with a rural or semi-rural ambiance, enhanced by glimpses of the protected countryside that divides Widcombe from Bathwick, and westwards, of Beechen Cliff.

Street pattern



Widcombe is the focus for a number of the principal roads coming in to Bath from the east, west and south. The most important route south of the river Avon was Holloway which crossed the Avon via the Old Bridge (or St Lawrence's Bridge), the only bridge over the Avon until the construction of Pulteney Bridge in 1774. The bridge was at the point where the Romans had forded the river. The original bridge had been constructed around 1362, though there is some reference to an earlier date. It was replaced in 1754, and again in 1965 with the construction of the Churchill Bridges.



Widcombe is characterised by the principal roads coming into Bath from the south. These routes were in evidence in the 1700's, though most of them were only of local significance at that time. Wells Road enters from the south west at the western extremity of the area. Wellsway was built in the late 1700's as a by-pass for the principal road to the south from Bath, the Holloway. There are vestigial remains of Holloway within the character area, though its direct connection to the river and central Bath is severed. Other principal radial roads ending in Widcombe include Widcombe Hill, Prior Park Road/Ralph Allen Drive and Lyncombe Hill.

All these roads connect to the main east-west route through Bath (and Widcombe), the A36, referred to successively as Pulteney Road, Rossiter Road and Rossiter Road/Claverton Street. The heavy traffic on these major routes, especially A36, impacts on the character of Widcombe. There is a constant tension between the need for acceptable environmental conditions and the efficient movement of vehicles.



The areas between the radial routes have been filled largely with housing. The road patterns are designed to service the houses, although some of the routes enable vehicles to take short-cuts to avoid the principal roads. Some of these opportunities have been stopped-up, but others remain a source of contention. In the west of the area, roads that provide access to the Calton area reflect those that served the Georgian and Victorian artisan housing, lost during the 1960's and 1970's. The roads and lanes off Lyncombe Hill are those that provided access for Georgian development and the subsequent Victorian infilling. Prior Park Road and the lower parts of Widcombe Hill show similar characteristics. However, the road system in the eastern part of the Widcombe area towards Bathwick is more sub-urban and C20th in character.

Public realm



The main focus for Widcombe is the Parade, the Georgian local shopping street that for many years also formed part of the main east-west traffic route through Bath. Now, with most of the through traffic transferred to Rossiter Road and with some urban landscaping, the street has been transformed as a social hub for the community. Further opportunities remain to be realised, for example, the space that forms the junction at the eastern end of the Parade by the White Hart Inn.

The major Georgian developments that contribute to the public realm are set on their own roads and with heavy landscaping in front of them. Otherwise the public realm comprises the ordinary public roads onto which Georgian and Victorian terraces and villas and later developments face.

There are remaining examples of traditional street furniture from the Georgian and Victorian periods. They also provide clues to urban patterns within Widcombe that have been lost, especially in Holloway, Calton and the area between Claverton Street and the river.

The canal is an important part of the public realm within the character area. Even though it fell into an advanced state of disrepair, its restoration has retained much of the character of the 19th Century canal.



Vitality and tranquillity

The presence of major roads in Widcombe disturbs the tranquillity, but can add to the vitality. Widcombe Parade saw an 80% reduction in traffic with the introduction of the Rossiter Road scheme. This in turn led to an increase in the attractiveness of the street to local residents and businesses with four food and drink outlets now putting tables out on the pavements. The continued use of the road for local traffic and parking to support the local businesses is important to maintain the vitality of the street.

The radial routes through Widcombe also carry significant levels of traffic, especially during the morning and evening peak periods. There is a direct conflict between the residential use of the streets and the impact of the vehicles.

Away from the principal roads there is tranquillity in the streets hidden from the public gaze. Some of these narrow streets are disturbed by drivers taking short cuts to avoid congestion on the larger roads.





11. Trees, open space, parks and gardens

See map, Annex 1

The surrounding areas that provide ‘the setting’ for Widcombe include:

- The unimproved flower meadows of Bathwick Fields (National Trust NT) and ancient woodlands of Smallcombe Wood (NT) to the east;
- The renowned landscaped garden of Prior Park (NT) with its iconic Palladian Bridge, set in grassland of priority habitat designation to the south-east;
- The woods, pastures and parkland, such as Prior Park, Widcombe Manor and Crowe Hall that are listed as BAP priority habitat;
- Properties such as Widcombe Manor, Crowe Hall, Abbey Cemetery and Prior Park
- The hillsides and combes to the south created by River Avon and its tributaries: Smallcombe Brook, Widcombe Brook, Lyn Brook and Holloway springs;
- Beechen Cliff, the backdrop to Widcombe from the north.



The Georgians changed the landscape by planting ornamental trees on land that had earlier been given over to farms and orchards by the C17th and before that largely to sheep, although earlier still the area was renowned for corn. Today this is still evident in trees throughout the area.



Later, the Victorians created grander enclosed gardens in which trees and shrubs, introduced as a result of worldwide plant hunting expeditions, conferred status for their owners and further changed the landscape and plant diversity, the legacy is still evident today.

The evolution of gardens can be traced in Widcombe, with examples from Georgian terraced houses (no frontage), some formal front garden (Prior Park Buildings), larger self-contained properties (eg villas) surrounded by garden (east Prior Park Road), ‘suburban’ gardens plus verges for trees (The Tynning) – coming full circle to the early Georgian model whereby the Calton Gardens estate has modern houses built right onto the street-side.



The Widcombe character area contains relatively few ‘street trees’ compared with other parts of Bath. Historically, few opportunities were made available for street tree planting; roads were narrow and verges were not part of street design. Where no restrictions applied, more modern housing developments provided wider streets that included tree-planted verges, eg The Tynning/Tynning End, laid out with roadside grass verges and planted sparsely with Silver Birch that soften the severe lines of the houses.

Private gardens

A major part of the total ‘green space’ in Widcombe comprises private gardens that vary in size. With a diverse range of indigenous and non-indigenous species of trees and shrubs, together these gardens blend with the surrounding wooded hillsides to form a varied patchwork of textured green when viewed from outside the area. The network of gardens and the proximity of the countryside also provide a valuable and diverse habitat for wildlife throughout most of the area.



River and Canal

Railway Viaduct Gyratory

This former crossroads, where traffic used to pass through two of the Brunel railway viaduct arches until redevelopment in the 1960s, and where one of the arches housed a district police station, now comprises mown grass planted with a variety of trees, including willow, that soften the lines of the viaduct, particularly when viewed from the northern side.

Kennet & Avon Canal

The part of the Kennet & Avon Canal within the character area, by the Abbey View allotments and the Widcombe Balancing Pond, is unusual within Bath in that it has a natural earth bank, studded with trees and shrubs, providing a special habitat for waterside wildlife.



Allotments

The area between Abbey View Gardens and the Kennet & Avon Canal, covering about one hectare, comprises 61 well-tended allotments, sloping gently towards the canal edge, with enviable views across central Bath to hills in the west and north.

The land was acquired by the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee for Bath Corporation in 1935 in response to the Ministry of Food's order for land to be made available to increase home-grown produce. The committee was disbanded in 1955 when the Parks Department took over responsibility for managing all the allotments, now numbering 23 within Bath.

All plots on this site are taken and there is a waiting list of aspirant allotment holders. This fact supports the policy of B&NES for providing areas for Bath residents to grow their own vegetables and fruit, providing healthy foods and restorative outdoor activity.



The patchwork appearance of the allotments, maintained by practical labour, sits well next to the canal, the origins of which were also dependent on the manual workers in industry and commerce.

Claverton St/Widcombe Parade

There is a narrow strip of mixed trees and overgrown laurels providing a green curtain hiding buildings of St Mark's Gardens and the former Widcombe Infant School building. Leading on Widcombe Parade to a narrow strip of land with mature trees, including Lombardy Poplars notable only for their height, and mainly evergreen overgrown shrubs providing a green backdrop to the bustle of the adjacent shopping parade. A semi-mature London Plane was planted at the western end of Widcombe Parade as part of the Rossiter Road contract.



Holloway and St Marks Road

Lower Wells Road Scarp Woodland

This designated woodland is situated on a north facing scarp between the lower part of Wells Road and the modern houses of Holloway. This area of mixed woodland is only about fifty years old. All the buildings that formerly stood on this area of land were demolished in the major area redevelopment starting in the mid-1960s; some had been obliterated or damaged during the bombing raids of 1942 and most of the rest had been allowed to deteriorate so badly that they had been declared unfit for human habitation by the late 1950s. Buildings where trees now grow included: Lisbon Terrace, Paradise Place, Paradise House, Somerset Place, Warwick Place and Fry's Belle Vue. Recently, work has been carried out to clear the invasive

Cherry Laurels and regenerating Ash and Sycamore have also been removed, with the intention of establishing a range of more attractive ornamental trees in their place.

Lower Wells Road

An area of grass, shrubs and trees, tall Lombardy Poplars and Silver Birch, inadequately screening a modern low commercial retail building adjacent to the main Wells Road.



Lower Holloway Green

This is one of several green areas of varying size provided within the 'Calton/Holloway' redevelopment in the 1970s where varied tree planting has created a wooded appearance of the north-facing slope below Beechen Cliff when viewed from Bath City Centre and from the northern side of Bath. Planting includes attractive trees such as: Red Snake-bark Maple, Narrow-leaved Ash, Birch and Larch. Residents over the years have further enhanced the look of the area by planting spring-flowering bulbs. There is a small but important open space including childrens' play area, mature trees and grass at the junction of Calton Road and Alexandra Road.



St Mark's former burial grounds

The former burial grounds are split into two areas, separated by a public footpath linking Holloway with St Mark's Road. The grounds to the north and west of the building are maintained by trustees of the centre as a pleasant garden, dominated by a spreading yew and some sad-looking pollarded limes. The ground to the south-west of the former church contains a splendid Wellingtonia, probably planted in the late 1800s, plus the stumps of another row of pollarded lime.

Lyncombe Hill

Southcot Place

In the centre of this pleasant Georgian terraced development is a green area with two beautifully-shaped mature evergreen trees, a Cedar and a Wellingtonia. Trees in this situation may not have historic precedent but are important additions to this group of buildings.



Baptist Burial Ground, Lyncombe Hill: this small former burial ground hidden behind the houses fronting Lyncombe Hill, dates from the early 1800s, and was closed in 1887. It is much enjoyed by the residents whose property overlooks this green space, containing a mix of small flowering and evergreen shrubs, with a few small trees, including Yew. Many passers-by do not know of this secluded space nor that it sustains a healthy colony of honey bees. It is open to the public one day a year.

Prior Park Road

Prior Park Buildings

A strip of land separating Prior Park Buildings (Pinch c 1820s) and its canalised stream frontage with Prior Park Road. The design of this frontage marks a point in building design when the houses were set back from the public highway, providing the opportunity to personalise the garden setting of individual houses and to provide an element of privacy. This strip contains a variety of noteworthy mature trees, particularly a spectacular, large Plane tree that bears the evidence of having been pollarded many years ago, thus attesting to its great age.



Prior Park Garden Centre

Landscaped area bordered on its eastern side by Lyn Brook, alongside which there are six trees protected by TPOs (Beech, Lime & Horse Chestnut). The tree and shrub border screens the Garden Centre car park from the public highway but overshadows the brook that runs beside it.

Trees planted at the time of the opening of the new Garden Centre now give the appearance of maturity, despite being less than fifty years old; they help the development blend into the much older tree-rich surrounding hillsides.



Orchard areas by Prior Park Road and off Lyncombe Hill - these two privately owned green spaces lie close to each other, between Prior Park Road and Lyncombe Hill, with Rosemount Lane to the south, retaining some of the ancient field boundaries of Fore Field, Bean Close Orchard and Bean Close. They provide the transition from town to country and are delightful orchard pastures that formerly were common on the slopes of southern Bath. The Bean Close field still contains cropping apple trees and pasture grazed periodically by sheep.

The Old Vicarage & Bewdley House off Prior Park Road

Hidden behind a row of mature Yew trees, these are significant properties set in sizeable gardens.

Widcombe Hill



Widcombe Crescent Garden

A green area comprising ornamental Cherry, Hawthorn and a variety of evergreen shrubs set in a flat area of grass, bordered on Widcombe Hill by several trees, including a large mature Lime. The area provides an attractive setting to the frontage of the Georgian Crescent. This setting is marred by the double row of parked cars and intrusive street signage. There is sufficient open space for the planting of young trees that will eventually replace those at or nearing maturity.



Widcombe Hill - (above Widcombe Crescent)

The north side of the road comprises houses set in large gardens that back onto NT pasture land, part of Bathwick Fields. There are notable Beech trees recorded as protected by TPOs at 'Gaia', but of more historic interest is the property's western tree-lined boundary that could have formed the field boundary of one of Anthony Kingdon's fields of the late 1790s.

Abbey View

Abbey View Green

A large east-facing sloping area of grass between Abbey View and Horseshoe Walk with a fine selection of mature trees, particularly species of Lime, Horse Chestnut and Pines. There is plenty of room for the planting of succession trees here to maintain this pleasant open space and help make the transition from houses to the fields and eventual ancient woodland of Smallcombe to the south-east.

12. Night-time character

Whilst the area is predominantly residential there is a hub of night time activity in Widcombe Parade with its pubs, restaurants and take-away food outlets. Overnight visitors can stay at the hotel on the side of the canal or at local inns and B&Bs.

There are regular performance events and gatherings at venues across Widcombe including the Widcombe Social Club, St Mark's, St Matthew's, Widcombe Baptist Church, the Widcombe Institute and the local pubs. These attract many community events as well as local destination for events from across the City such as the Bath Comedy Festival.

13. Issues affecting the Character Area

What are the assets of the character area?

- The design and intent of the Georgian planners to build well-separated buildings, with impressive, borrowed views of other similar terraces and gardens, is a key element of the landscape which remains clearly visible in today's Widcombe. The development of the Tynning estate and to a lesser extent Carlton Gardens remains true to this vision, maintaining the green setting of the area.
- The area reflects the transition from large set-piece Georgian domestic architecture to smaller individual dwellings including detached and semi-detached buildings.
- The area contains a large number and variety of surviving historic buildings that are well maintained and cared for and which retain original fabric and features.
- The green spaces between the buildings, the gardens and the countryside nature of the bordering areas which provides the green setting to the southern side of the City.
- The river and canal-side, which provide a green corridor and the opportunity for wildlife, trees and other plants to thrive side by side with the City Centre as well as an important setting for the buildings nearby.



What are the weaknesses of the character area?

- The adverse impact of traffic - noise, air pollution, severance and safety. It affects the A36 (Rossiter Road/Pulteney Road, Prior Park Road, Widcombe Hill, Lyncombe Hill and Wellsway. As an example the terrace of Georgian buildings 12-48, Wellsway (circa. 1820) are particularly affected by traffic on the Wellsway and by the structure of the later realignment of Wellsway.
- Another traffic related weakness is the impact of short-cuts or rat-running on minor roads that are unsuitable for anything other than locally generated traffic.
- The entrances for pedestrians coming into Widcombe from the City are bleak and unwelcoming. The approach through the tunnels under the railway leading to the Ha'penny Bridge have been cleaned but they remain rather forbidding and need better lighting at night. The concrete underpass by the Churchill Bridge gyratory has been refurbished recently, but it remains a soulless arrival point to the City Centre. The walls of the underpass are due have a mural painted on them, but this is stalled due to lack of funds.
- The riverside, although lined with trees is similarly austere and hasn't benefitted from the considerable enhancement works that have been carried out further west. There is a general disrepair of pathway along the river.
- The canal towpath from Widcombe locks towards Bathwick is in a poor state of repair with extensive puddling following heavy rain.
- On Claverton Street and Widcombe Parade there is a need for further maintenance of the borders to the roadway. Litter in this area is also a problem.





What factors might be seen as threats?

- Apart from the traffic itself, the main threat to the quality of the public realm is the application of traffic management measures which can sometimes be unsympathetic to the historic environment, for example, road signs and the application of yellow parking restriction lines. Another major issue is the poor quality of repair of roads and footpaths and restoration of service trenches. Materials not matched, and repairs badly executed detract from the character of the area.
- Unsympathetic alterations to unlisted buildings are a threat to the character of the conservation area as a whole and specifically to this character area.
- Building height of new development exceeding the traditional limits within and around this part of the conservation area disrupting the hierarchy of public and private buildings.
- The erosion of valued green space through the construction of new buildings as in-fill and replacement.
- The character area features a large number of garden boundary and retaining walls. Some of the larger retaining walls show signs of past repair where they were not strong enough, and some are in need of repair or reinforcement. It is important that boundary walling is retained and maintained by using appropriate materials and methods.
- Attempts to build in the larger gardens of buildings which were intended to have space around them.
- Many trees in Widcombe are nearing or at maturity, there having been a lack of planned replacement planting. In addition, many trees have been reduced or even removed to make room for cars/property extensions, to reinstate views blocked by growing trees, or simply to avoid maintenance liabilities. This is an ongoing threat to the character of the area.
- The green character of gardens being lost to hard-standings for parking cars, and/or paving, shingle, chippings replacing lawns and flower beds to minimise maintenance. Such changes not only have a visual impact but also heighten the problem of surface water run-off surcharging the drainage systems during periods of heavy rain.



What opportunities exist to improve the area?

- There is an opportunity for landscape work along the Parade.
- There has been much traffic management in the vicinity of Widcombe Parade and there is the opportunity to seek to ensure that the extent of signage and traffic management measures are subject to ongoing review so that they are the minimum necessary and so avoid clutter and adverse impact on the historic environment.
- Ensuring that future repairs of roads and footpaths are undertaken well using appropriate materials e.g. replacing pavement slabs with the same type and colour of slab, not with macadam, concrete or non-matching slabs.
- Encouraging retention and maintenance of existing green spaces and trees and formulating plans for successive tree planting.
- Care and management of the quieter areas, in particular seeking to avoid narrow streets being used as short cuts to avoid congestion on the larger roads.
- Ongoing traffic management to reduce traffic impact, including controlling traffic volumes and the pressures of on-road/verge/pavement parking.
- Improvements to the river and canal side to match improvements that have already been applied to both the east and the west, including the maintenance of paths. This applies particularly to the canal towpath, which was improved between Bathampton and Bathwick, but not along the section to Widcombe.





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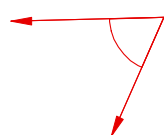
Key:



: Landmarks

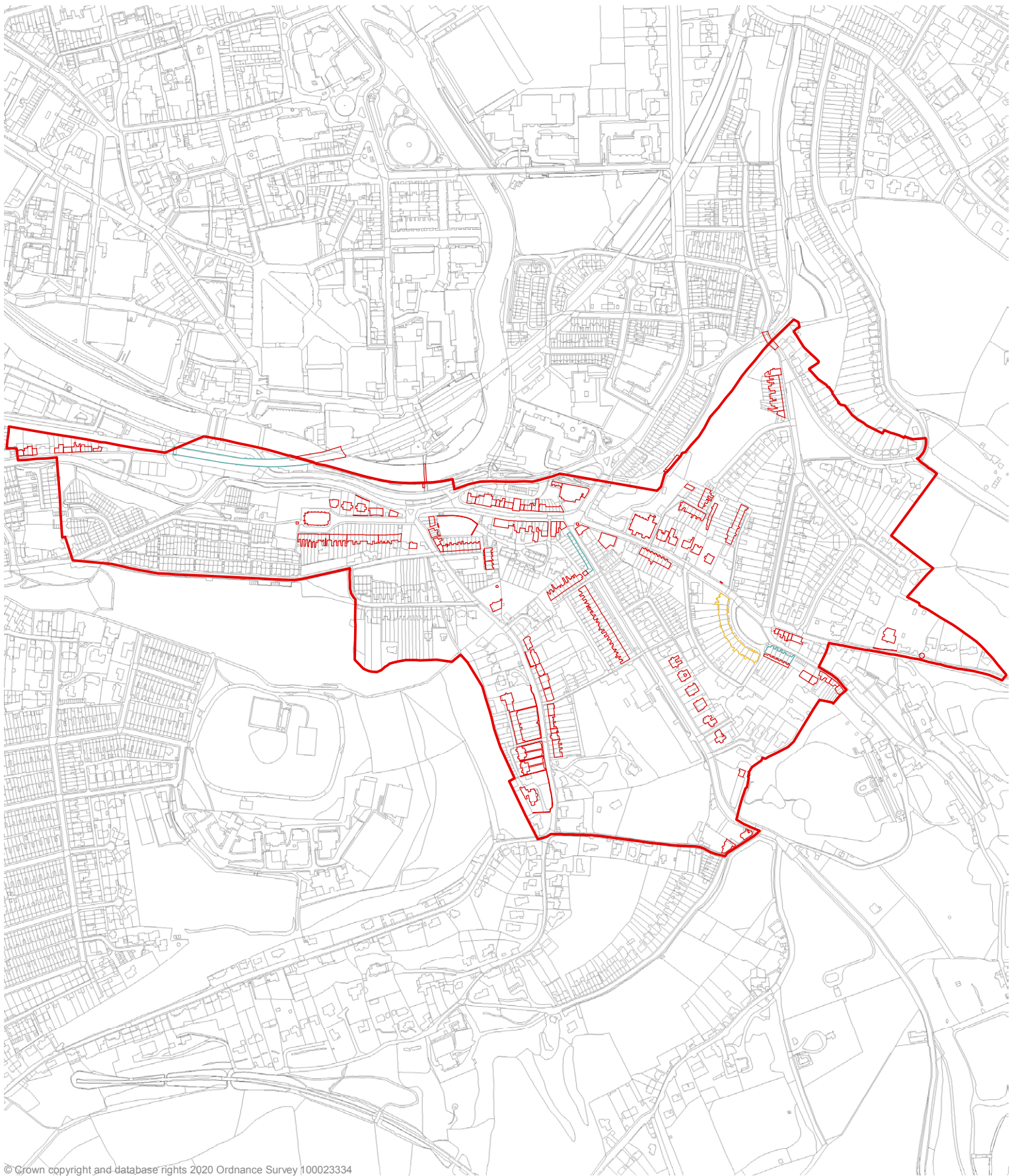


: View



: Panoramic view

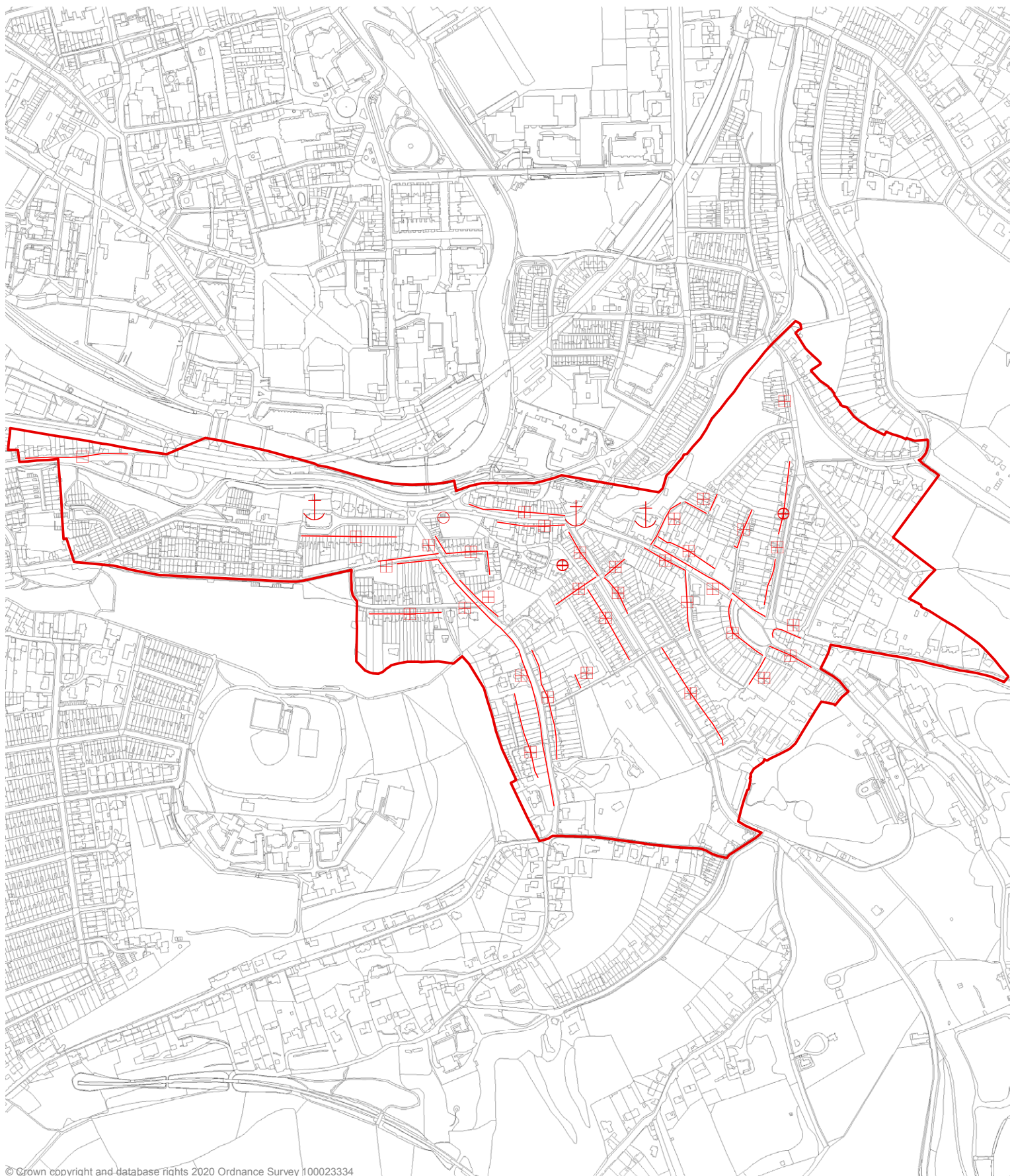
Landmarks and views



Key:

- : Grade I
- : Grade II*
- : Grade II

Listed buildings



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Key:

Townscape features



: Unlisted building of merit



: Anchor building



: Negative building



: group/included



: Positive townscape feature



: Negative townscape feature



Key:



: Open space



: Parks



: Private/Semi-private gardens (where significant)



: Tree Preservation Order



: Significant groups of trees

Trees, open space,
parks and gardens

Annexe 2 - Context

A conservation area is designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and conservation areas) Act 1990 and is defined as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The quality and interest of the area as a whole, rather than individual buildings, is the main consideration when designating such areas.

Section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to periodically formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas within the district. Section 72 requires that in considering applications for development in a conservation area, attention shall be paid to the desirability of conserving or enhancing the character of that area.

Conservation area appraisals are considered by Historic England to be vital to the conservation of these special areas.

More detailed policies are to be found in the Bath and North East Somerset Core Strategy and draft Placemaking Plan.

Annexe 3 - References

- | | |
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