

6. The Buildings of the Conservation Area

6.1 Architectural and historic character

The historical development of Brierley Hill along the historic route of the Dudley to Stourbridge turnpike from the mid 18th century onwards resulted in a long ribbon of buildings along the current High Street in very mixed uses which, since the decline in local industries, have tended to become primarily commercial. The conservation area now provides a mixture of typically 'town centre' buildings - shops, offices, community and religious buildings, with a scattering of residential properties on the edges of the designated area. Many of these make use of locally produced materials with details and architectural forms which reflect the age of their construction. Due to the late development of the settlement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and to subsequent redevelopment, most of these buildings date to the mid 19th century or later. The only buildings dating to the 18th century are both listed – St Michael's Church and Nos. 30 and 32 High Street.

To maximise the use of central commercial frontage the buildings are closely packed with narrow frontages and regular vertical division. Some larger blocks, constructed as speculative commercial developments, provide wider, more consistent frontages, although these are often subdivided. A further, and regrettable change of scale, resulted in the redevelopments of the mid to late 20th century, which amalgamated plots yet again, providing much bigger buildings which contrast unfavourably with the smaller scale of the 19th and early 20th century buildings.

While many of the older commercial properties included residential accommodation or storage over ground floor shops, the 20th century buildings are more likely to have office space over, reflecting a general move towards specialisation of the town centre for commercial activity.

Despite the industrial character of the wider Brierley Hill area, only a small number of historic industrial buildings survive within the conservation area, although these make an important contribution to its character and should be protected. The town's rapid growth brought in a population of various Christian denominations resulting in the construction of a number of churches, the architecture of which reflect differences in ideological and architectural thought. The working population also required entertainment and the conservation area is notable for including a high number of 19th century public houses, most of which retain their original function. The large Odeon cinema and the Civic Hall at the northern limit of the conservation area, represent venues for other forms of entertainment built during the 20th century.

Civic buildings, reflecting the town centres administrative role in addition to its commercial focus, are of a large scale, mostly constructed in the mid and later 20th century, replacing earlier structures that have been demolished.

Many of the buildings are run down and in a poor state of repair. This is partly a result of economic difficulty in the town centre through loss of trade to other areas, including the Merry Hill development,

as well as the decline in use of space above shops for residential accommodation.

6.2 Building materials, colours and textures

Locally produced red bricks are used in the construction of many of the buildings in the conservation area, whilst those of better quality have limestone detailing, such as window lintels or string courses, which provides a good contrast with the brickwork. The bricks do vary in tone, with the highest quality bricks being a very dark shade of red. These are used on prominent structures such as No. 94 High Street, St Michael's Church and Dudley College of Technology (Annexe). Staffordshire blue brick is used only very occasionally in buildings but more often as a coping for boundary walls. Examples around Fairview are stamped with the maker's names identifying them as products from the former Brierley Hill brickworks.

Use of painted render is notable on several of the commercial buildings and public houses along High Street, although in many cases it is poorly maintained. Nos. 91 and 93 and 96 to 100 (even only) High Street represent a good use of such render.

Traditional pitched roofs are of Welsh slate although many have been replaced with unattractive concrete tiles. Examples of synthetic slate roofs are notable for their lighter colour and reflective qualities, although these are considered to be marginally more sympathetic than concrete tiles. Nos. 30 and 32 High Street have a rare clay tile roof.

Several of the buildings have traditional timber framed sash windows, which are painted in a range of colours, but most commonly white. The surviving early industrial buildings identified in the conservation area have interesting round arch headed windows with metal framed fan lights, which make an important contribution to their historic character. Several buildings along the west side of High Street, including Nos. 191 to 125 (odd only) have oriel windows at first floor level. These have been reflected in the design of the Public Library building on the east side of High Street.

Many of the historic shop buildings within the conservation area have had modern shop fronts inserted, resulting in the loss of some of the area's historic character. Surviving examples of historic shop fronts are recorded at No. 6 Mill Street and Nos. 159 and 161 High Street. Several other buildings, particularly at the southern end of High Street, and including the row of shops at Nos. 70 to 86 (odds only) and Nos. 34 and 36 High Street, retain interesting scrolled consoles and other original components of an historic shopfront. More often however, these have been removed or covered by modern fascias and advertising. No. 70 High Street includes an early shop awning box above the modern fascia.

6.3 Key Positive Buildings

The conservation area contains two statutorily listed buildings and three which have been proposed for listing. A further 12 buildings are recorded on Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's list of Buildings of Local Historic or Architectural Interest and another six are proposed for

addition to this list. These, and other buildings which make a positive contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of the conservation area, are noted below and on the accompanying Townscape Appraisal map at Figure 1. These buildings and structures are considered to be good, relatively unaltered examples, of their type where original materials and details and the basic historic form of the building has survived. Where a building has been adversely affected by modern changes and restoration is either impractical or indeed not possible, they are excluded. There is a general presumption in favour of retaining such buildings, as set out in PPG15.

6.4 Listed Buildings

St Michael's Parish Church

St Michael's Parish Church is listed Grade II and is considered to be the most important building in the conservation area. The church was originally built in 1765, but was substantially restored in 1900. The church tower is an important landmark in views from within as well as from outside the conservation area. The building's form is characteristic of the mid-late 18th century, using an austere Classical form with pedimented elevations to the east, north, and south, and a more Gothic tower of four stages to the west. The building's use of dark red brick is a highly characteristic of the larger buildings in the conservation area.

Nos. 30. and 32, High Street

Nos. 30 and 32 High Street form a single property, which is one of the few 18th century buildings in the conservation area. The building is unassuming and does not stand out particularly from the surrounding streetscape except that it is slightly better condition than many other properties along High Street. The upper floor of the building was used as a Roman Catholic Church until the erection of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church on an adjacent plot. The building retains good sash windows to the main first floor elevation and a traditional, small shop front to one bay of the ground floor.

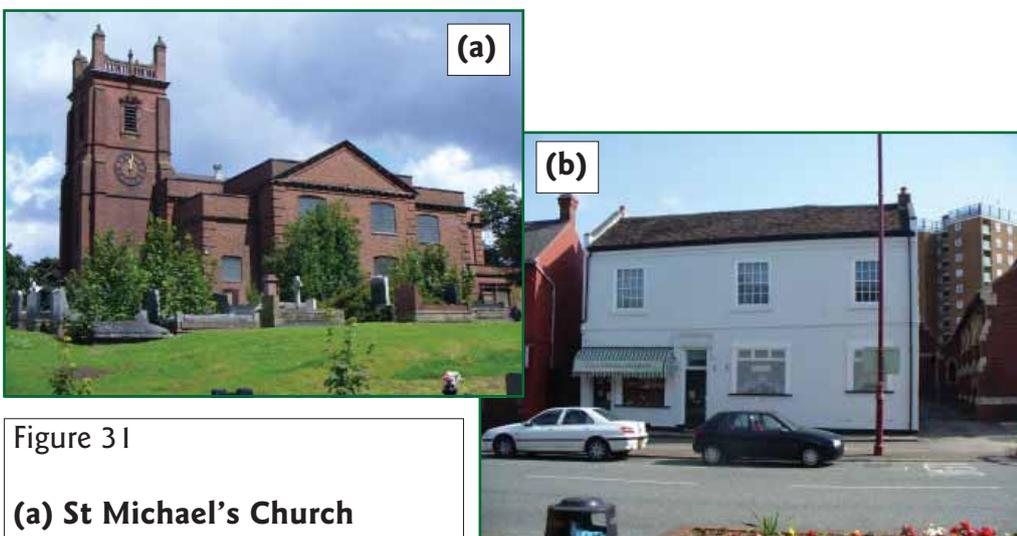


Figure 3 1

(a) St Michael's Church
(b) 30-32 High Street

Proposed Listed Buildings

Dudley College of Technology (Annexe)

The former Technical Institute and Public Library, opened in 1903, provides a very important reminder of the public works undertaken at the beginning of the 20th century both as philanthropic acts and as socialist efforts to improve the prospects of working people.

The building makes use of the locally produced high quality brick and acts as a landmark on routes into the conservation area from the west as a result of its interesting design and detailing, mass and colouring, as well as marking part of the former street plan. The cupola on the corner turret and lantern vented chimney are both visible from a distance and add to the interest of views across and into the conservation area from the north and west. Its current use has a special role in the promotion of fine craftsmanship in glass, which has been a very significant part of the character of the area for several centuries, for which it is of international importance.

The terrace of early 20th century houses, running up Bell Street to the south, has group value with the college.

Brierley Hill Police Station and Civic Hall

The Brierley Hill Police Station and Civic Hall are a combined structure representing both civic and cultural uses and include the offices of the former Brierley Hill Urban District Council. The building makes a very important contribution to the town centre's streetscape, defining the character of the open area around the junction of the historic streets of Bank Street, Level Street and High Street/Dudley Road. Although the architectural style is clearly of the mid 20th century, it makes use of the same characteristic materials, locally produced red brick and limestone, that are used in many of the town's other historic buildings. It therefore represents a high quality example of a public building of its date.

Brierley Hill War Memorial

The War Memorial occupies a focal site overlooking the southern entrance to the town centre. It is built on a pedestal and supports the figure of a soldier, with the names of battles recorded on each face and grey marble tablets with the names of servicemen engraved with gold lettering. An upper plinth, with relief images of the four main services, is supported on four columns. This is a very fine example of one of the many memorials set up following the First World War, and provides an important focus for the identity of the community. The large number of names recorded reflects the importance of manufacturing districts like Brierley Hill, which supplied many of the soldiers killed in the battles of the 20th century.



Figure 32

- (a) Dudley College of Technology (Annexe)
- (b) Police Station & Civic Hall
- (c) War Memorial

6.5 Locally Listed Buildings

The Council has drawn up a list of locally significant buildings which should be preserved and cared for. The Local List for Brierley Hill includes the following (in no particular order):

No. 1 Albion Street (Iron and Steel Warehouse)

No. 1 Albion Street is a former industrial warehouse, providing a reminder of the industrial heritage of Brierley Hill. The building makes an important contribution to views along Albion Street through the use of red and Staffordshire blue brick, round headed windows, wide central door and the long sandstone entablature bearing the legend "Iron and Steel Warehouse".

No. 18 Albion Street

An early 20th century house. Part of the fragmented historic streetscape of Albion Street and built in red brick with an unusual clay tile roof.

Nos. 7 and 11 Church Street

Both nos. 7 and 11 are former public houses which preserve part of the historic building line on the south side of Church Street, now much depleted. No. 7 in particular has part of a former brewery building at the rear, which makes an important contribution in views towards the conservation area from the lower lying ground to the south.

No. 1 to 11 Dudley Road

No. 1 to 11 Dudley Road bears a date stone of 1902, and makes use of locally produced red brick and limestone. It makes an important contribution to the appearance of both Dudley Road and the large open space at the junction with Level Street, Bank Street and High Street.

No. 17 Dudley Road (Cinema)

This large structure opened in 1936 and is a good example of an Art Deco building, constructed using a rustic brick with patterns and retaining a prominent central stained glass window.

St Mary's Catholic Church, High Street

This building dates to the mid 19th century, and is a good example of a small Gothic Revival Catholic Church, said to be from designs by Pugin. It reflects the varied backgrounds of the many workers who moved into the area, looking for work in the local industries. It makes an important contribution to views along High Street and uses locally produced red brick with limestone detail and banding.

No. 48b High Street (former Post Office)

This building represents an important former public building and is a well built structure of good design using high quality local materials (mainly red brick and limestone). It bears the inscription "Post Office", which has survived despite the introduction of new signage. The scale detail

and design of the building help to draw it together as a group with St Mary's Roman Catholic Church and the Red Lion Public House, which stand nearby on High Street, creating a locally distinctive group.

No. 68 High Street

A good example of a former public house of late 19th century with a stuccoed facade and retaining its traditional sash windows.

No. 94 High Street

No. 94, the butcher's premises, is one of the most striking buildings in the conservation area and a landmark at the junction of Mill Street and Moor Street with the High Street. The use of dark red brick and moulded terracotta detailing is a characteristic of many of the larger buildings in the conservation area.

Nos. 99/101 High Street

This building has faience tiles and moulded blue tile detailing which provide an example of Art Deco architecture that is an unusual survival in the conservation area. It represents the renewal of buildings on the High Street in the early 20th century and, as such, provides an important record of the town centre's development as well as changing architectural fashions.

Nos. 159 and 161 High Street

No. 159 High Street retains a good quality historic shop front at ground floor level, whilst No. 161 High Street has an interesting early showroom window with four arched headed lights at first floor level.

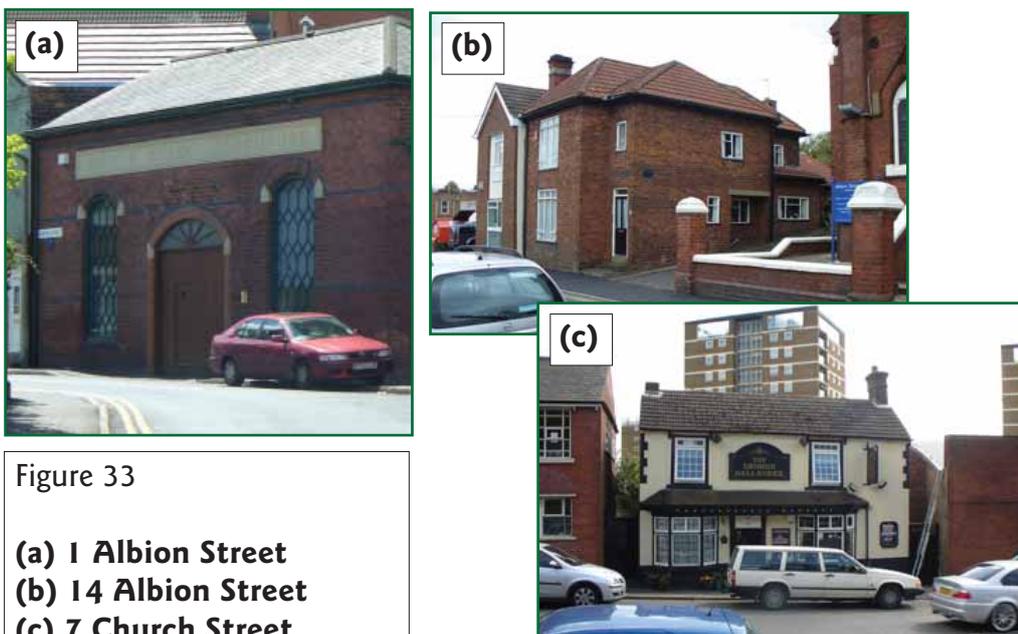




Figure 34

(a) 1 to 11 Dudley Road

(b) 17 Dudley Road

(c) St Mary's Roman Catholic Church

(d) 48b High Street

(e) 68 High Street

(f) 94 High Street

(g) 99 & 101 High Street

(h) 159 & 161 High Street

Proposed additions to the Local List

Market Hall, High Street

The Market Hall occupies an important position on the High Street and represents a focus of low key commercial activity. The building is an unusual structure and the High Street facade makes an important positive contribution to the character of the street frontage. Use of locally produced red brick with limestone detailing and decoration is highly characteristic of the buildings in the wider conservation area.

Former Industrial buildings to the rear of No. 96 High Street and Brierley Hill Market Hall

These two buildings are a rare survival of industrial structures in the conservation area and make an important contribution to its historic and architectural character. They provide interest to the area at the eastern end of Cottage Street, behind the main frontages of High Street and Mill Street. However, the use of the surrounding land as a surface car park detracts from the quality and interest of these buildings.

Red Lion Inn, High Street

The Red Lion inn on High Street is an unusual surviving fragment of the larger streetscape that was otherwise demolished for the construction of the building now occupied by the Mecca Bingo Hall. It uses red brick and limestone detailing with a neo-Jacobean design, and forms part of a wider group in this area with the former Post Office and St Mary's Roman Catholic Church.

Public Drinking Fountain, The Moor Centre, High Street

This public drinking fountain is the only surviving example of a group of three set up by the Local Board of Health in 1866. It provides an important record of the town's development. It is currently in a poor condition and requires restoration.

No. 7 Albion Street and Industrial building at the rear of No. 14 Albion Street

No. 7 Albion Street was formerly used as a Registry Office and is currently occupied by the Volunteer Centre. It is an imposing early 19th century townhouse of two storeys in red brick with a hipped late roof and retains traditional sash windows. All the ground floor windows and the main entrance have moulded hoods supported on scrolled consoles. It is a structure of particular character and quality and makes a very important contribution to both the character and appearance of Albion Street.

The Industrial building located to the rear of 14 Albion Street is another important but rare survival of the town's early industry. The round arched windows retain well detailed metal window frames. The use of locally produced red brick is characteristic of the conservation area. The building does, however, require some repair and maintenance.

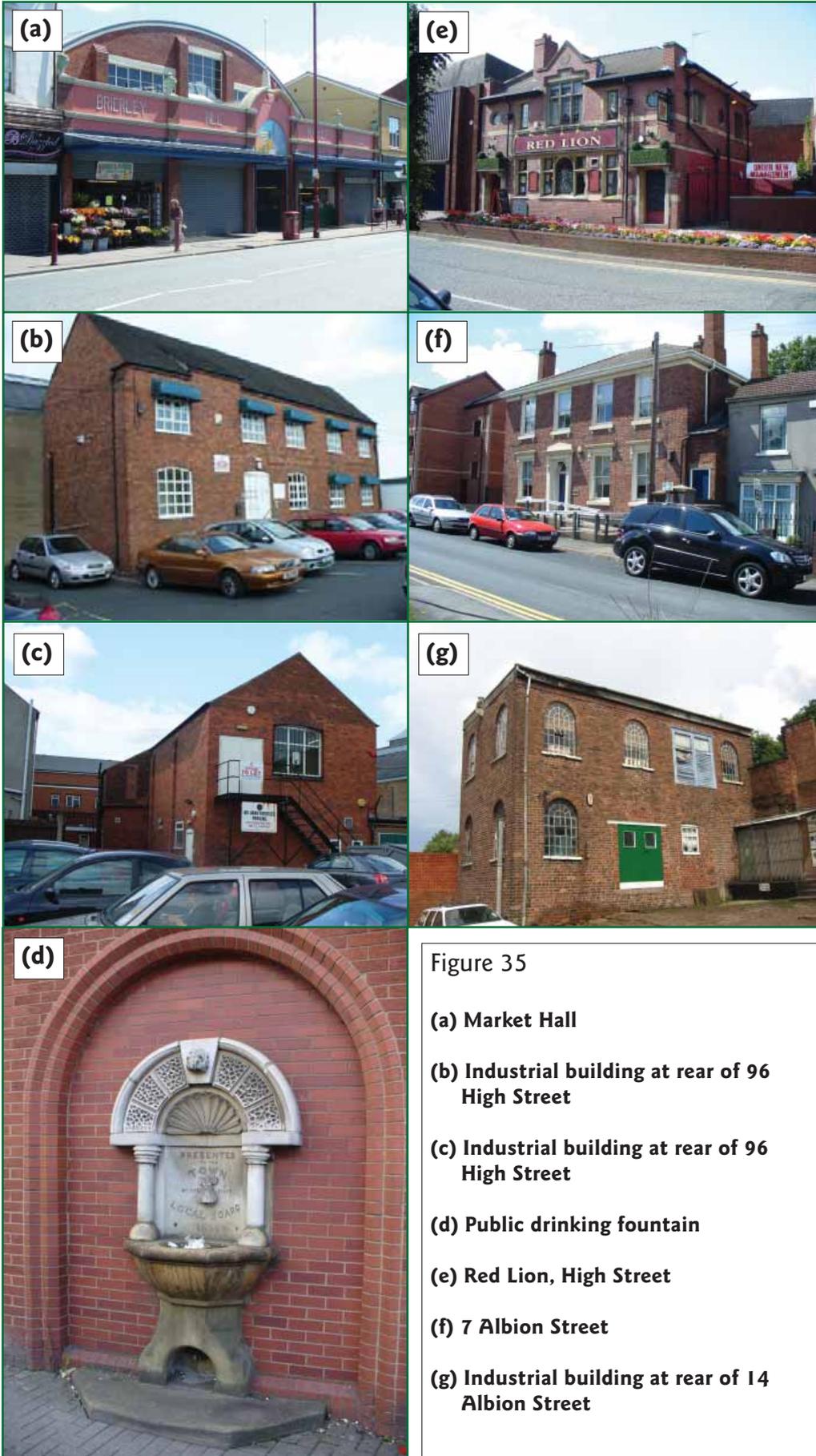


Figure 35

- (a) Market Hall
- (b) Industrial building at rear of 96 High Street
- (c) Industrial building at rear of 96 High Street
- (d) Public drinking fountain
- (e) Red Lion, High Street
- (f) 7 Albion Street
- (g) Industrial building at rear of 14 Albion Street

7. Key Issues

7.1 Negative Buildings

Most of the buildings judged to make a negative contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of the Brierley Hill High Street Conservation Area were constructed in the mid 20th century or later and do not use the local materials that are characteristic of the conservation area. Several of them intrude into the setting of existing listed buildings, or proposed listed buildings. The principal 'negative' buildings are:

- Nos. 1 – 13 High Street, an unattractive mid 20th century building that intrudes into the setting of the listed building of St Michael's Church and creates an eyesore at the entrance to the High Street;
- Intrusive mid and late 20th century commercial buildings of poor quality design and materials along High Street such as Nos. 51 and 53, 54 to 66 (even only), 63 and 65, 127 to 135 (odd only), 132 and 134, 138 to 156 (even only) and 155 and 157 High Street;
- The large modern commercial buildings of the Mecca Bingo Hall are out of scale with the structures along the High Street and fail to adequately address the High Street frontage, resulting in a lack of vitality in the area at the southern end of High Street.

7.2 Other Negative Features

- Intrusion of garish modern shop fronts and advertising and loss of traditional shop fronts;
- Vacant site with exposed basement between Nos. 112 and 120 High Street;
- Domination of the junctions of High Street/Dudley Road with Level Street and Bank Street by the very broad area of highways with heavy traffic;
- Lack of access to the green space adjoining the above junction;
- Poor maintenance and deterioration of many buildings within the conservation area;
- The erosion of detailing and the potential loss of streetscape features of interest;
- Deterioration and loss of historic industrial buildings and public houses;
- Domination of the junction of High Street with Mill Street, Moor Street and Cottage Street by traffic and severance of pedestrian areas.

- A large area of derelict and overgrown gardens lies between High Street and Albion Street. The difficulty of access to the gardens and the rear of the properties along High Street, as well as the poor condition of the gardens, must have an adverse impact on the feasibility of providing accommodation over the commercial properties along the High Street.

7.3 Buildings in need of Repair and/or Maintenance

A relatively high number of the historic buildings within the conservation area are in need of repair and maintenance to ensure their long term preservation and continued positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This is partly as a result of the currently low economic vitality of the High Street, as well as the high levels of vacancy in the upper floors above the shops.

Some of these require quite significant repair, particularly at Nos. 109 and 111, 121,123 and 125, and 151 High Street. Repairs will need to include repointing brickwork, the repair and in places replacement of windows frames and oriel window boxes, and the repair of guttering and cornices. Several of these properties are currently completely unoccupied. Finding new uses for them to ensure their continued maintenance should be a priority. Use of upper storeys, as mentioned above, for residential accommodation or commercial use should also be promoted. Apparently several buildings have had staircases to upper storeys removed, rendering them unsuitable for residential uses. Reinstating this access to upper floors should be promoted, potentially through a 'Living over the shop' campaign, as well as the provision of grant aid. Improved access to the rear of these buildings, i.e. from Albion Street, Talbot Lane and Moor Street, might also improve their economic viability.

Additionally, the condition of a number of more recent buildings is also a cause for concern, especially where basic maintenance appears to have been neglected. Several of the later 20th century buildings, which are currently considered to make a negative or, at best, neutral contribution to the conservation area, could be improved through some basic maintenance, such as repainting or cleaning of concrete or render, the replacement of facade panels and an improvement in signage. However some of the buildings, particularly Nos. 1-13 High Street and Nos. 132 and 134 High Street, provide opportunities for the enhancement of the conservation area through demolition and redevelopment.

7.4 Loss of Key Historic Buildings

The conservation area has lost a number of key historic buildings, including two listed buildings, as a result of highways improvements and other works, resulting in a significant negative impact on the conservation area's character and appearance. There should be a presumption against the demolition of all buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area unless it can be demonstrated that repair and restoration could not provide an economically viable use of the structure. Buildings designated as listed buildings, locally listed buildings, or buildings which

make a positive contribution should receive even greater protection from unsympathetic development, including developments that would harm their setting.

7.5 The Loss of Historic Shopfronts

Many buildings within the conservation area have lost traditional shop fronts and have had modern shopfronts inserted, and in other cases modern fascias have been placed over traditional ones. In both cases there has been a significant erosion of the area's historic character and appearance. In determining applications for changes to shopfronts and advertising the Council should take into consideration the importance of maintaining or enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area. Particular attention should be given to the choice of materials, colours, lighting and the best use of surviving elements of historic shopfronts. Garish shop fronts should be avoided, whilst schemes that are sympathetic to the colours and tones of the buildings and make use of traditional, locally produced materials should be preferred.

7.6 Opportunities for replacement of mid to late 20th century buildings

A number of buildings constructed in the mid and late 20th centuries have been identified as intrusive to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a result of their use of unsympathetic materials, including design and lack of detailing. These buildings should be regarded as opportunity sites for redevelopment, which could be more in keeping with the conservation area's historic character and appearance. Applications for new development should include consideration of the use of appropriate materials, scale and massing, vertical division of frontages and detailing such as sympathetically designed windows, doors, shopfronts and cornicing.

7.7 Traffic

The conservation area is currently affected by heavy traffic loads, with particular problems at the focal points of the junctions of High Street/ Dudley Road with Mill Street, Moor Street, Level Street and Bank Street. This should be significantly alleviated as a result of the opening of the Parallel Route to the east of the town centre, although it is important to ensure that the town centre is not used as a short cut around this route. The Council will need to develop a strategy for managing the traffic within and around the conservation area that takes into regard the desirability of maintaining its character and appearance as well as supporting a regenerated High Street with the needs for servicing and the protection of pedestrians being considered. Ideally a reduction in traffic should allow the removal of railings along the pavements in High Street, Mill Street and Moor Street, creating a better focal space in the town centre.

7.8 Poorly defined open space at Bank Street/High Street/Level Street junction

The large open space in the north of the conservation area, which surrounds the busy junction, is dominated by vehicular traffic creating barriers to movement and detracting from the appearance of the space and surrounding buildings. The grassed area with island beds to the west, in front of the Police Station, is well maintained but pedestrians are kept away by railings. The area lacks any sense of enclosure to the east, with negative views out to the modern industrial estate, the large scale commercial buildings further along Level Street, and the rear wall of a large supermarket. The Council could develop a strategy for the improvement of this area, following the opening of the bypass, to create a more pedestrian friendly focal area as a 'gateway' to the conservation area. This could support the potential cultural value of the Civic Hall and adjoining cinema.

7.9 Trees

Trees make a very important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The planting of street trees such as the pollarded limes already used on the southern part of High Street could introduce a necessary element of greenery at the northern end of High Street at the entrance to the town centre.

7.10 Street Surfacing

Tarmacadam is used as a street surfacing material throughout the conservation area and is considered an adequate but uninspiring material, although where it has been poorly reinstated following trenching works this creates a negative impact on the overall appearance of the conservation area. Use of traditional, better quality materials such as sandstone flags or granite setts at the conservation area's main focal points would help to enhance the appearance of the conservation area.

7.11 Views

The conservation area benefits from a number of views, which have been identified within this appraisal and illustrated on the Townscape Appraisal Map at Figure 1. These include views of significant and focal buildings, views into and across the conservation area including roofscapes, as well as views out of the conservation area beyond the wider urban area of Dudley and Stourbridge to the countryside of South Staffordshire and Worcestershire. These views make a very positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Their protection should be taken into consideration when determining planning applications for new development in the conservation area.