1. INTRODUCTION

The Southampton City Centre Urban Design Strategy (CCUDS), adopted in November 2000, identified the need for urban design frameworks for the seven identified character areas. Urban design frameworks are also described in 'By Design' (DETR/CABE, 2000) as a key element of the planning toolkit. The Old Town Character Area was identifed as a high priority due to the high level of developer interest in the area, and a development strategy was commissioned under the City Council's Strategic and Economic Development Portfolio in 2000.

This is the final report of the Old Town Development Strategy (OTDS). It analyses the existing development form of the Old Town in order to establish a vision for its development, and sets the context rather than specify targets. This document has been approved by the City Council for development control purposes as a material planning consideration pending the adoption of this advice as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Moreover, it will form a key proactive tool for engagement with developers, architects, and all users of the Old Town, in guiding its development over the next ten years, supporting Southampton's aspiration to become a vibrant, safe and sustainable city centre.


The 1.5km long stretch of surviving medieval town walls, the longest in the country, defines the historic edge to the Old Town on three sides

The Old Town

Southampton's Old Town is the historic core of the city. It links the commercially and historically important waterfront with the renowned Central Parks and main retail core of the city, and contains shops, pubs, clubs, hotels, cultural attractions, homes and a school. This Character Area is clearly delineated on three sides by the longest surviving stretch of remaining medieval town walls in the country, providing a well-defined historic edge to this area that lies within a developing city centre.

Historical Development of the Old Town

The history and character of the Old Town has been shaped by a combination of geography and events, but geography is the defining factor in its existence. It occupies an area of higher ground at
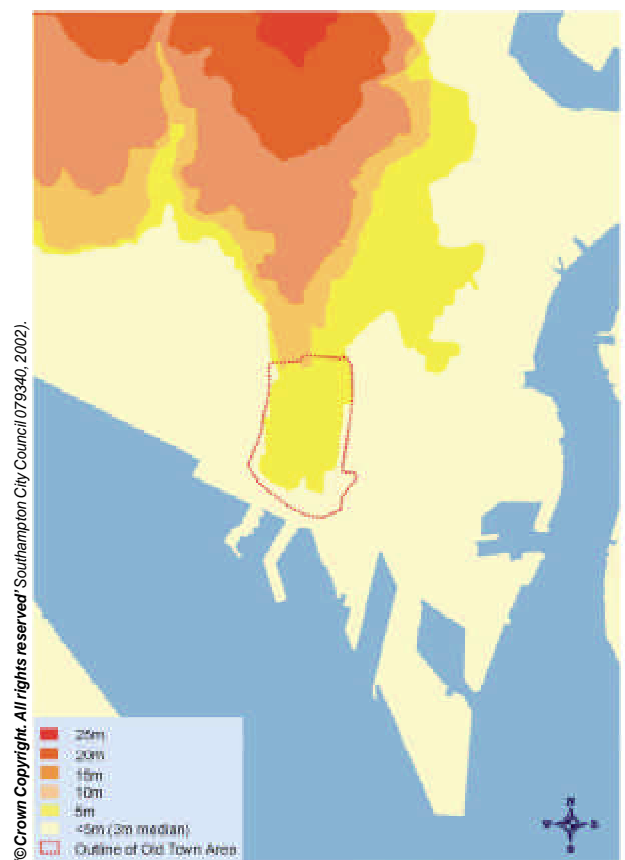
Contour map of Southampton City Centre. The Old Town, outlined in red, has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years

the confluence of the Rivers Itchen and Test, and the unique double-tide that occurs in the Solent made it an ideal location for a port once the Middle-Saxon Town of Hamwic had been abandoned. Soon after the Norman Conquest a castle was built, and it is from this period that most of the street pattern in the Old Town along with several significant buildings survive. It was not until the 15th Century that the Town Walls, started in 1340 following the French Raid of the Hundred Years' War, were completed, and it is the medieval town's street pattern that is the dominant legacy to the city today.

In the Middle Ages the Old Town was able to benefit from the Venetian and Genoese trade, confirming its position as one of the busiest five ports in the country. Some of the vaults and undercrofts from the buildings erected in this era have survived the test of time to the present day.


High Street c.1770 running through the Old Town, described as "The Finest Street in all England" by Lieutenant Hammond in 1635

Southampton dealt with decline by reinstating itself as a Spa Town in the 18th and 19th centuries, both within and beyond the walled town, before securing its position as the premier port for passenger trade with America in the mid-19th century. Overcrowding and insanitary conditions at the end of the 19th century led to slum demolition and new house building in the Old Town.

The most significant event of the 20th century was World War II. The German bombing of the port did incalculable damage to the fabric of the Old Town, and deterioration continued due to the necessarily quick but insensitive post-war rebuilding. Later development in the '60s and '80s further eroded the original medieval 'character' of the town, medieval plot widths were widened or ignored, building heights began to increase disproportionately to the surrounding structures and new roads were cut through the historic core.

As with all towns, what has survived from the past is the result of happenstance. Few timber-framed buildings have survived, but there is a rich heritage of medieval vaults and town walls, as well as high-quality Victorian architecture, the latter clearly associated with the port's development. The area includes over 90 listed buildings and 45 ancient monuments.

1791   1846   1931   2000
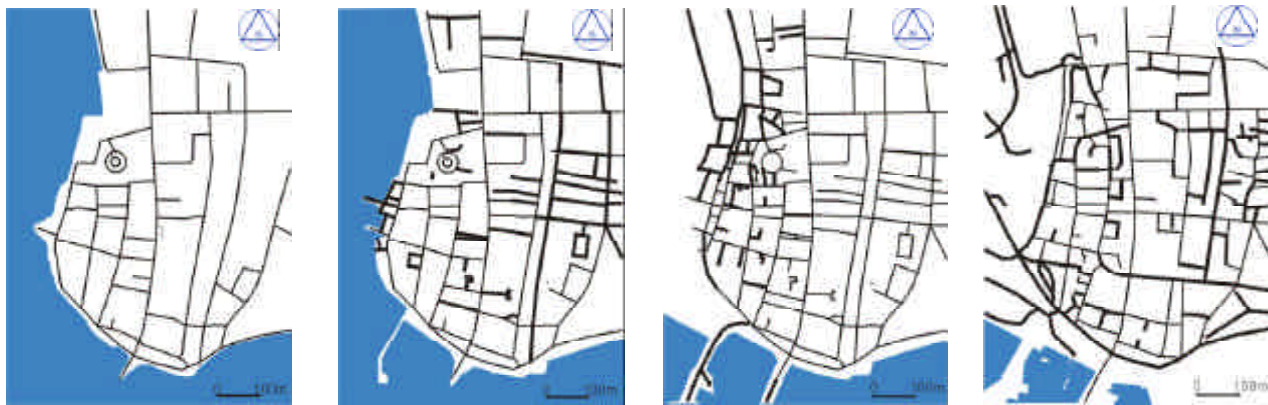
Set of historical plans 1791 to 2000, highlighting the development of quays and progressive land reclamation, but also the remaining legacy of the medieval street pattern

Bombing raids during World War II devastated the historic heart of the Old Town

The Old Town now survives in a fragmented manner with areas in the west retaining much more of the tight medieval grain, traditional materials and low-built form than areas in the east. Without the benefit of a development strategy, recent developments have been piecemeal, with rare exeptions such as upper Bugle Street.

The Old Town itself is now under pressure to change with burgeoning interest being shown in the area by developers. The extent of surviving archaeology and the damage caused by war and post-war development provide both restraints and opportunities for new development.

Recent Development and Current Pressure

Recent developments within or adjacent to the Old Town include the following:

- The DeVere Grand Harbour Hotel - completed 1991
- The Quays Swimming & Diving Complex - opened 1999
- The Central Parks - restored and enhanced 1999-2001
- Residential Developments - Merchants Quarter, City Gate, conversion of South Western Hotel - commenced 1999-2000
- WestQuay Shopping Centre - opened Autumn 2000
- Above Bar Precinct - refurbished Autumn 2000

The Above Bar Precinct and WestQuay Shopping Centre near to the historic Bargate

A rare example of recent sensitively designed development in the heart of the Old Town, which enhances the original pre-war close-knit character, and respects the early architectural dialogue of the Old Town

Merchants' Quarter: a recent residential development within the Old Town, which reinstates historic alley-ways through the site, but whose massing and scale could be more sensitive to the Old Town's character

This climate of development continues and is stimulating much developer interest within and near the Old Town:

- West Quay Phase 3 development site - development brief published in December 2001
- Royal Pier Waterfront development site - development brief published in January 2002
- Northern Above Bar Mixed Use Cultural Quarter - development brief published September 2002

Current pressures that are being experienced as a result are:

- West Quay is expanding the retail core of the city centre but not within the Old Town
- Demand for newly built residential accommodation within the historic core
- The necessity, as a result, to retain current employment opportunities within the Old Town and possibly create new ones

The Old Town does not at present fulfil its potential, either as an integrated part of the city-jigsaw or as a distinct district in its own right. The scale of development and variety of uses proposed for the major sites outlined above suggests that the Old Town is likely to be a favoured location for considerable developments in the future.

The Royal Pier Waterfront Development Brief, incorporating Royal Pier, Town Quay, and Mayflower Park, lies adjacent to the southern edge of the Old Town and proposes a residentially-driven mixed-use scheme, with extensions to Mayflower Park and a public promenade along the waterfront

The West Quay Phase III development site to the northwest of the Old Town, which, amongst other things, promotes the creation of a City Plaza for major events. From within the Old Town, these will be able to be viewed from the top of the Town Walls, which stand some 20ft high

Aims and Objectives

The Old Town Development Strategy seeks to:

- Manage and maximise the Old Town's historic value
- Re-establish its close-knit pre-war patterns
- Ensure high quality new developments
- Provide for a substantially upgraded public realm

As such, this document's purposes are:

- **To demonstrate and promote** Southampton City Council's **Vision** for the Old Town's future development, as part of a coherent and comprehensive approach to the renaissance of the wider city centre, in support of The Community Strategy;
- **To analyse** the **current context** for such development within the Old Town;
- **To outline opportunities** to achieve The Vision;
- **To set out suggestions of tasks** by which to promote and realise the opportunities;
- **To provide supplementary planning guidance** augmenting the Community Strategy, Local Plan and City Centre Urban Design Strategy; and promote the use of site specific design and development briefs.

This document is context-setting, it does not specify targets, but sets out criteria by which planning applications will be assessed, and suggests actions.

The view along Castle Way shows the sharp contrast between old and modern buildings

The picturesque West Gate Square to the east of the Old Town

Winkle Street with its narrow carriageway is full of character