

Chapter 2

Character and Context

2.1 The site and context

2.2 Design character

'Always design a thing by considering its larger context - a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan'.

ELLIEL SAARINEN

TABLE 2.1 SITE AND CONTEXT APPRAISAL INVENTORY.		Alterations	Extensions and small scale infill	Medium area or tall height *	Large area †
Subject	How does the development deal with the following:-				
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT					
Topography	Wind analysis (of effect of proposal).			✓	✓
Aspect	Potential for benefitting from solar design.			✓	✓
Geology and soil conditions	Suitability for building foundations, quality of soil. Any risk of contamination or salinity.		✓	✓	✓
Hydrology	Levels of water table, risk of flooding.			✓	✓
Microclimate	Potential for passive solar design, shadowing analysis, need to ameliorate exposure to wind.			✓	✓
Natural or semi-natural habitat.	Retention of habitat, including waterways, trailways margins, native planting.			✓	✓
Pollution	Air quality, noise pollution.			✓	✓
BUILT ENVIRONMENT					
Archaeological and architectural constraints	Local archaeological site and monument records, conservation areas, listed buildings, local vernacular.		✓	✓	✓
Existing buildings and spaces in relation to proposal	Layout and form, scale and grain, rhythm and pattern of buildings and spaces. Façade treatments and roofscape. Age, condition and prevalent materials, colours and textures. Street patterns and subdivisions. Effect on views.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transport network	Movement and accessibility e.g. frequency of public transport services, pedestrian and cycle links.				✓
Planted elements	Green spaces, trees, hedges and other cultivated elements.		✓	✓	✓
Existing service infrastructure	Capacity of existing networks, including Combined Heat and Power location.			✓	✓
USAGE AND COMMUNITY CONCERNS					
Facilities	Access to schools, parks etc.			✓	✓
Building and space uses	Types of existing activity and effect of loss or potential for continuity of site and neighbouring uses.				✓
Legal issues	Ownership, tenure, covenants, rights of way, easements. ‡	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local history	Local traditions and cultural patterns, memories and associations.			✓	✓
* Sites of 5 or more units of > 500m ² Commercial buildings, or buildings greater than 6 storeys or 18m. † Sites of 30 or more residential units or > 3000m ² Commercial buildings ‡ Development Control will not take account of these considerations.		✓ = This aspect needs to be addressed.			

2.0 CHARACTER AND CONTEXT

2.1 The site and context

Objectives

Developments should integrate carefully with the existing townscape. They should address the indigenous character of the 'place', reinforce local communities and be sustainable.

2.1.1 Addressing the context

Local Plan policies SDP 1 and 7 underline the importance of protecting the existing character and setting of development. The area within which the proposed scheme will sit should be thoroughly appraised. Developers should use the analysis in the City Centre Urban Design Strategy to help relate proposals to the regional and local identity of Southampton. Refer also to section 2.2 'Design Character' and Chapter 9 - 'Design Development' in this guide. The primary considerations of the appraisal are listed in Table 2.1.



Waveform roof shape in acknowledgement of the Thameside location.

As well as considering the existing nature of site and context the analysis will involve assessing the sustainability credentials of the proposals. If proposals rate poorly in terms of one or more considerations listed in Table 2.1, mitigation measures should be submitted to overcome the problems. Analysis of site and context should be in proportion to the size and importance of the site. It should form part of the Design Statement

required by Policy SDP 6 of the Local Plan. Refer to Appendix 1 for the criteria that will determine when a Design Statement will be required.

Design Principle 2.i: Designers should carry out a thorough site and context appraisal, which should be submitted as part of a Design Statement where necessary (see Appendix 1).

2.1.2 Does the vision stand up to analysis of site and context?

The site and contextual analysis should yield answers to a series of questions. Is the initial development concept still pertinent? The survey may reveal that only part of the site is economic to develop. Or perhaps the embodied energy of the existing buildings is significant in relation to in-use energy needs and therefore refurbishment becomes a more sustainable option. Are the originally proposed uses still appropriate and how can the proposed buildings integrate with the surrounding urban structure?



Dundee Wharf, Limehouse, London. The independent steel tower is a reference to the dockside travelling crane and this theme is further extended to the balconies in general; the pronounced 'V' shape being a reference to ships' loading booms (CZWG).

2.2 Design character

Objectives

To ensure that in general architectural and landscape design reinforce and enhance local distinctiveness whilst delivering development in a contemporary style.

2.2.1 Southampton style

Reinforcing individual character is a key theme of the City Centre Urban Design Strategy (CCUDS) and development should reinforce the existing positive detailed characteristics of the City, some of which are described below. Some English cities are becoming more like each other. Designs that reinforce this trend, including off-the-peg solutions will be discouraged. Designers should create locally distinct designs that respond to the past history and existing townscape of Southampton without resorting to pastiche architecture. Achieving this will help applications meet Local Plan policies SDP1 and 7. The CCUDS includes an historical analysis of the development of the City Centre (pp 16-17).



The Portland Stone Civic Centre survived wartime bombing and set the tone for much of the postwar reconstruction.

Chapter 5 of the CCUDS identifies a series of character areas, the particular strengths of which should be enhanced by new development. CCUDS describes the key design issues and townscape objectives for each area. Characteristics of each area are summarised in Table 2.2.

Despite commonality within some of the character areas there is no dominant Southampton style, for example as in Bath. Much of the traditional building in the centre was destroyed during World War II. Rebuilding of the 1950's to the 1990's is of variable quality but little is of outstanding value.



1950's redevelopment of the shopping core.

Despite this, composition and proportion of building elements and the range of frontage widths often forms a pattern which helps define townscape character. For example, Bugle Street residential properties in the Old Town are characterised by regular plot divisions with a variety of contrasting façade treatments (see photograph below). The housing development to the east of Ocean Village Marina (Cadland, Moorhead and Calshot Courts) successfully adopts this townscape type.



This view of Bugle Street illustrates the attractive and varied incrementally developed townscape of the Old Town.



The rendered Georgian terraces in the Oxford Street area have a light coloured, airy and formal character.

A different but equally distinct townscape is evident in Oxford Street where regular plot widths, uniform façade heights and façades in white or cream painted stucco determine the character. Where development is located in townscape with a distinctive and highly valued style, building form should acknowledge and reinforce local character. The above and other large-scale positive elements of the City Centre's distinctiveness are summarised below:

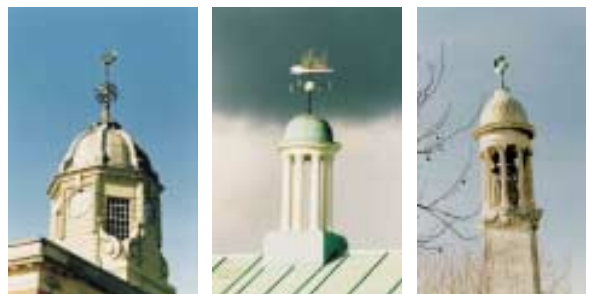
- Substantial parts of Northern, Central Parks, Eastern and Old Town character areas (refer to 2.1 Character Areas Map) of uniform white or cream render or stone
- Several areas within Northern, Old Town, Eastern and Waterfront areas comprised of plots of equal frontage, either with uniform façade style (Oxford Street and Carlton (Crescent) or varied façade style (Bugle Street, Bedford Place and Cadland, Moorhead and Calshot Courts
- The medieval Town Walls (Old Town)
- Predominant NS/EW street orientation (all areas except Weston)
- Underlying peninsular nature of topography, with the high ground flowing from Northern to Central Parks to Central and Old Town (see Section 3.2)
- Consistent fine grain 3-4 storey development in most areas which escaped bombing
- Rich in historical associations (all areas except Western and particularly Old Town and Waterfront).



Some buildings in the waterfront area have Portland Stone or modern artificial equivalent horizontal bands set in red brick.

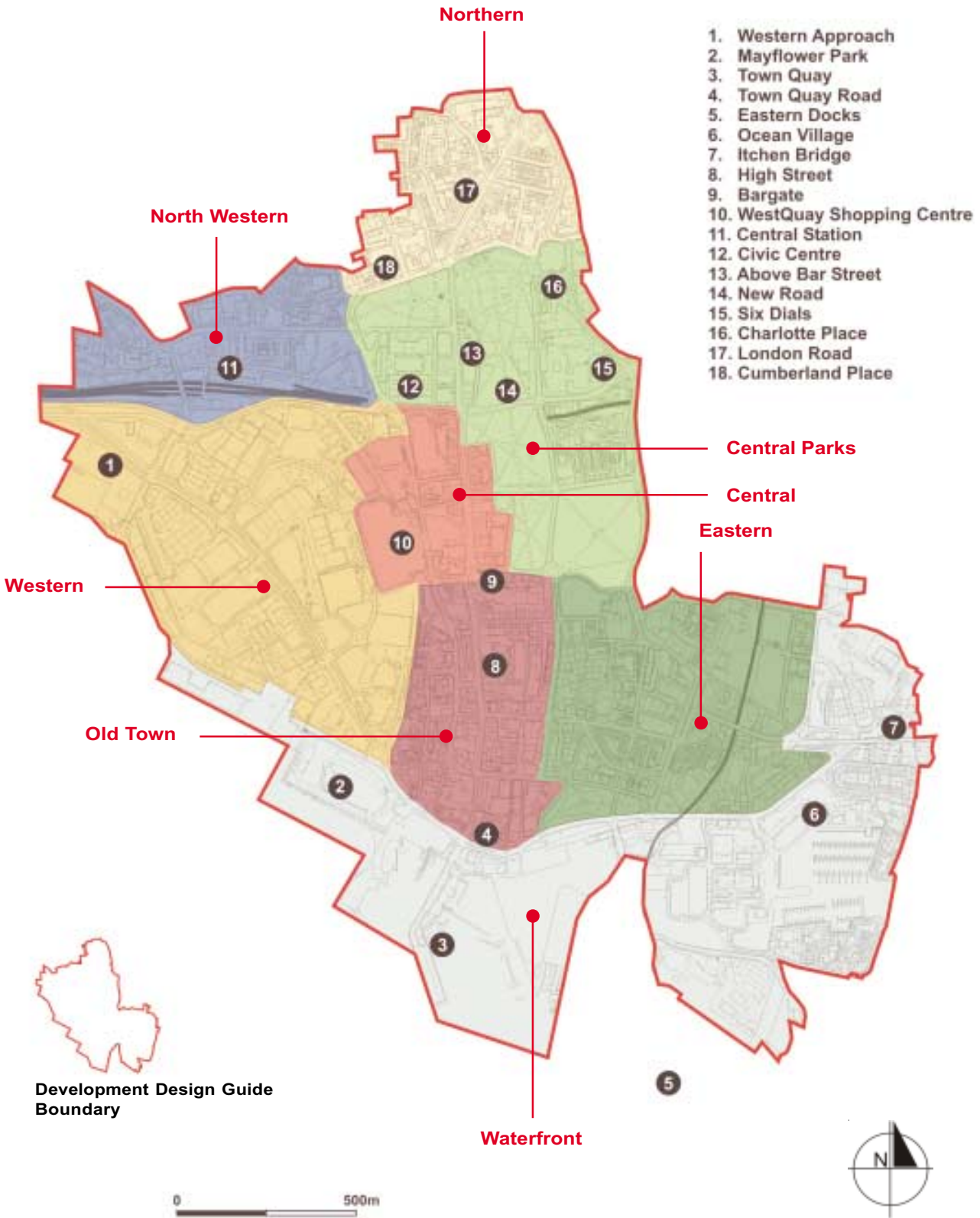


Red brick over a cream painted plinth with pronounced stonework is a common façade style in the waterfront area.



Occasional use of the cupola is made, especially amongst pre-war buildings near the waterfront.

Plan 2.1 CHARACTER AREAS MAP



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TABLE 2.2 CHARACTER AREA DESCRIPTIONS

North Western (CCUDS pages 50-52)

- Centred around Central Railway station
- Commercial, cultural and residential role
- Mixed quality, but with substantial poor post war development
- Several high rise residential and office buildings clustered near station

Northern (excluded from CCUDS)

- Gateway on North South Spine through centre
- Mixed commercial, residential and leisure role with Bedford Place providing specialised and district centre type retail
- Northern half of the area high quality pre-war buildings, southern half average quality

Central Parks (CCUDS pages 53-55)

- Key vehicular gateways on eastern side at Charlotte Place and Six Dials
- Victorian Central Parks cover two thirds of area
- West side dominated by fine Civic Centre complex with prominent clock tower, east side by Southampton Institute
- Refer also to the [Northern Above Bar Development Brief](#)

Central (CCUDS pages 56-58)

- Defined by retail core
- Majority of frontages to north south spine date from 1950's and although reasonable in quality are excessively uniform
- Poor quality facades fronting parks
- Bargate at south end is significant landmark marking the historic entrance to Old Town
- Mostly medium scale building except West Quay shopping centre which is significantly larger in mass
- Fragments of high quality pre-war townscape remain
- Refer also to the [Northern Above Bar Development Brief](#)

Old Town (CCUDS pages 59-61)

- Historic quarter of city with clear character
- Much high quality townscape and heritage above and below ground
- Typically fine grained two and three storey buildings, especially on western side, breaking down in bomb damaged east
- Major sections of medieval walls remain notably on western boundary of area
- Specialist retail in north east, elsewhere mainly residential and commercial
- St Michael's Church spire is an important landmark
- Refer also to the [Old Town Development Strategy](#), and the [Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal](#)

Western (CCUDS pages 62-64)

- All reclaimed land, with coarse grain development
- Industrial, commercial, retail and hotel uses
- Melange of mostly poor quality larger scale buildings create a disjointed, confused and illegible urban fabric
- Primary western gateway to the City characterised by poor visual quality
- Refer also to the [West Quay Phase 3 Development Strategy](#)

Eastern (CCUDS pages 65-67)

- Eastern gateway formed by Itchen Bridge
- Mix of fine grain (centred on Oxford Street) and coarse grain elsewhere
- Oxford Street area highly mixed use, other parts single use, residential, warehousing, commercial and retail
- Holyrood housing estate in west is of poor architecture with townscape lacking cohesion
- Much recent development for key-worker, student and social accomodation, mostly of high quality

Waterfront (CCUDS pages 68-70)

- Severed from rest of centre by the busy A3057
- Diverse collection of urban forms from large scale along northern edge to fine scale of Ocean Village housing
- Some mixture of uses around Ocean Village although grain of usage could be finer
- Series of high quality pre-war buildings remain along northern edge with much redevelopment around Ocean Village of mixed quality
- Refer also to the [Royal Pier Development Brief](#)

Text in blue indicates documents published by the City Council.

CCUDS: City Centre Urban Design Strategy. Pages 49 - 70 of this document provide development frameworks for the character areas.

The City has a relatively sunny climate compared to the rest of the country. Combined with the relatively open spatial quality of the city's streets and public spaces this creates a bright and airy atmosphere. A predominance of light coloured (white, cream or buff) buildings reinforces this. Many of these buildings also appear 'light' in terms of weight. This quality of lightness/heaviness is related to the surface texture and form of materials. Smooth renders and small scale, refined forms in the detailing create a much lighter feel than heavily textured and bold detailing.

Together with the above there are also a number of smaller scale details and materials that recur with regularity throughout the City Centre. Designers should utilise or interpret these as a way of reinforcing local distinctiveness. The details include:

- buildings that appear light or neutral in terms of 'weight'
- use of cream painted render as a façade finish
- use of Portland Stone, or other darker, warm grey stone similar to that from the Isle of Wight used for the Town Walls
- warehouse style architecture (waterfront only)
- buff coloured materials (stone, brick or painted render)
- polychromatic banding (red and cream)
- bow windows
- keystone in window lintel emphasised
- use of a bluish green colour as a facade highlight (see Section 9.3, Colour)
- copper clad roofs and roof details
- occasional use of the cupola amongst surviving pre-war waterfront buildings

Design Principle 2.ii: Where an established, appropriate character exists new buildings and landscape should complement and enhance this character in a high quality and contemporary manner.

Below is a visual survey of the range of distinctive or higher quality buildings in the city centre:-

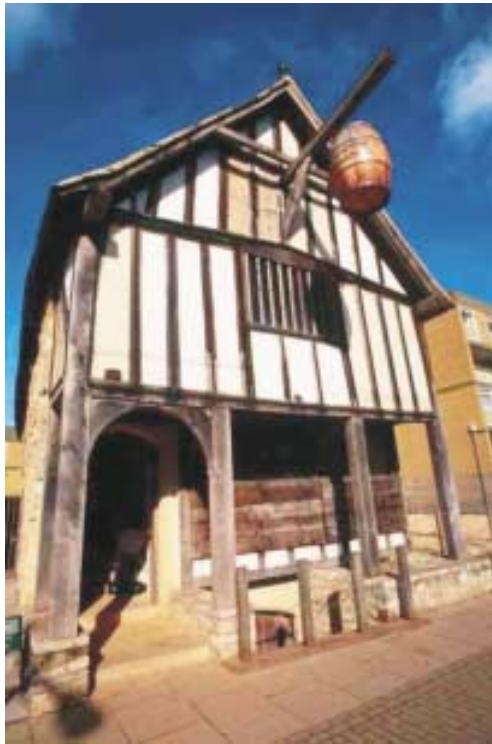
Old Town Character Area:



Woollen Hall and St Michael's Church - Old Town.



The Bargate - Old Town.



© Alan Brindle

58, French Street - Old Town.



Barclays Bank - Old Town.



West Gate - Old Town.



Building detail - Old Town.



Dolphin Hotel - Old Town.



High Street - Old Town.



High Street - Old Town.



High Street - Old Town.



Building Detail - Old Town.

Western Character Area:



Grand Harbour Hotel - Western.



*The Quays
(Eddie Read
Swimming
and Diving
Centre) -
Western.*

Additional photographs illustrating the Western Character Area can be found on pages: 34, 98, 99, 100 and 120.

Additional photographs illustrating the Old Town can be found on pages: 14, 60, 61, 100, 101, 106, 129, 132 and 145.

Eastern Character Area:



Briton House - Eastern.



Dukes Keep - Eastern.



Canute Hotel - Eastern.



The London Hotel - Eastern.



South Western House - Eastern.

Additional photographs illustrating the Eastern Character Area can be found on pages: 15, 129 and 132.

Waterfront Character Area:



Harbour Lights cinema - Waterfront.



Harbour House - Waterfront.



Admirals Quay, Ocean Village - Waterfront. Photograph by courtesy of Wilson Bowden Development.

Additional photographs illustrating the Waterfront Character Area can be found on pages: 120, 123 and 129.

Central Character Area:



Portland Street - Central.

Additional photographs illustrating the Central Character Area can be found on pages 14, 102.

Central Parks Character Area:



© Alan Brindle

Southampton Institute - Central Parks.

Additional photograph illustrating the Central Parks Character Area can be found on pages 14, 132.

Other visual influences include:



The Sail training vessel Prince William, built at Southampton in 2001.



© Alan Brindle

Liner docked at the P&O passenger terminal. Note the crane which is one of several that move along the Western Docks on rails. Together with the ships the cranes create a continually changing skyline.



The Oriana, one of the P&O liners for which Southampton is the 'home port'.

© Alan Brindle



Maritime influences promote local distinctiveness: Cochrane Square, Glasgow.

2.2.2 Contemporary architecture

The local plan seeks high quality contemporary design to assist in projecting the image of a modern, forward looking, leading International city (SDP1 8iii and M 10). Creative, innovative and bespoke architecture using high quality, durable materials and thoughtful detailing is encouraged.

Design Principle 2.iii: Where existing character is weak, development should seek to create a character identity. This should be high quality and contemporary.



Contemporary residential development, London: cream and buff colours typify the character of Southampton's City Centre.



Civic and public buildings should be easily recognisable with clearly identifiable entrances - European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg; architect Richard Rogers Partnership. Photograph by courtesy of Richard Rogers Partnership.



Above and left: urban chic at Lowford's Wharf in London. Subtle and sophisticated referencing of contextual form, shape, colour and rhythm. Copyright John Thompson and Partners and Benedict Luxmore.



Southampton's waterfront would be significantly enhanced by an iconic public building: Melbourne Exhibition Centre.



Proposal for The Point, Wapping Wharf, Bristol by Feilden Clegg Bradley.



Proposal for Brighton Goods Yard by Chetwood Associates - the light colours, mast feature and prow shaped roofscape evoke maritime images.



Bankside Lofts, Southwark - London (CZWG).



Wave form silhouette on a commercial building adjacent to Parc de la Villette, Paris.



White stucco or the cream of Portland Stone are the most common façade finishes in Southampton. Contemporary architecture with white facade colour will help reinforce this characteristic: Parc de la Villette - Paris.



*Innovative use of materials and styles which evoke maritime images: **left** the Lowry Centre - Salford; **right** the Harbour Lights cinema - Southampton.*



The high quality of architecture required must be carried through to the details - housing, Berlin.



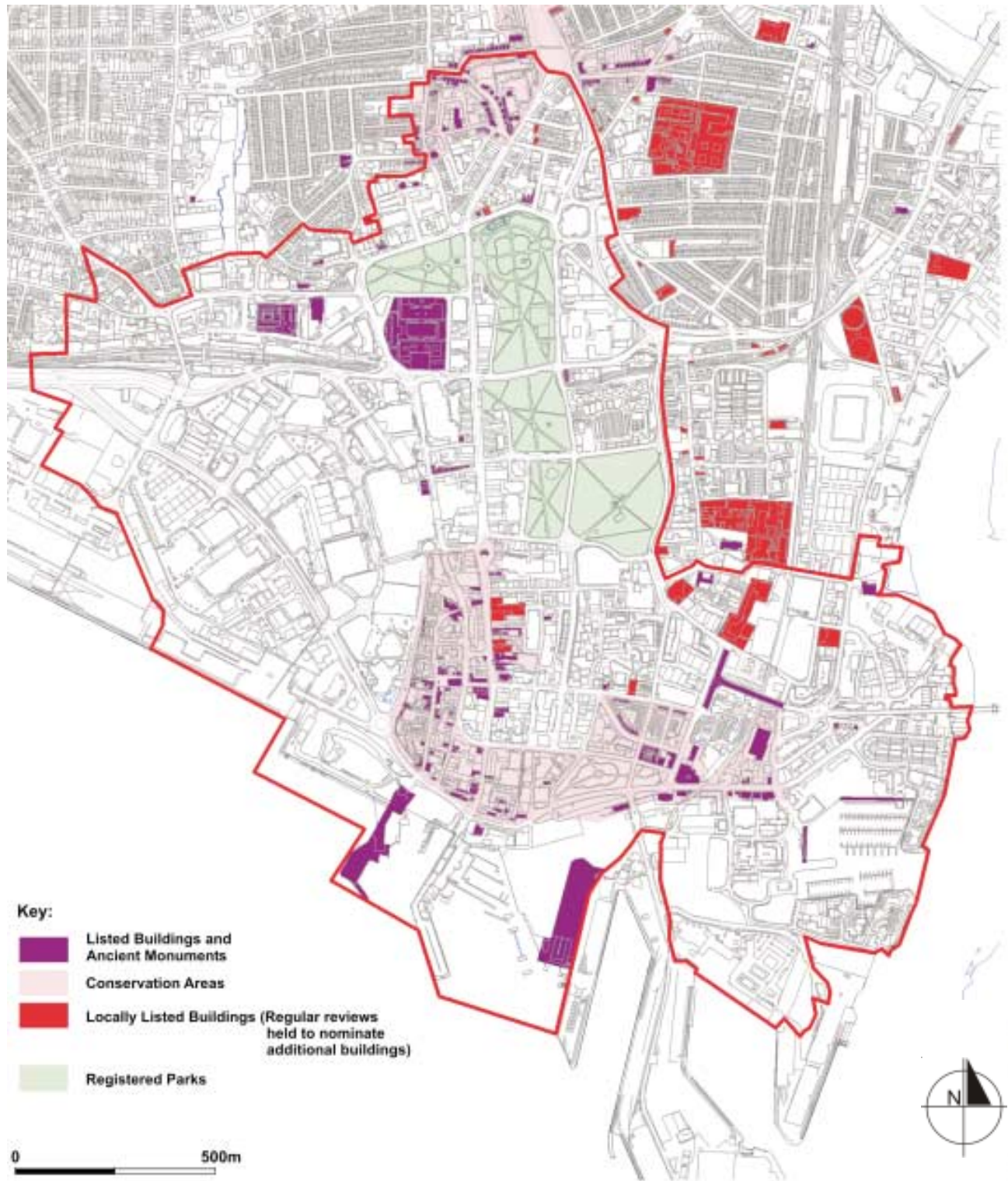
With its sunny climate Southampton provides the ideal environment for interesting effects of light and shade.



The mass and scale of large buildings can be successfully articulated by the emphatic detailing of the balconies and the varied skyline. Montevello, London - architect, Richard Rogers Partnership

© Richard Rogers Partnership

Plan 2.2 CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS



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2.2.3 Built heritage

The local plan chapter on the historic environment includes policies on the protection of conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeology and listed parks (policies HE 1-6). Plan 2.2 shows where all the protected areas / buildings are. The local plan dictates that development must 'not detract from the character and appearance' of conservation areas' and not 'adversely affect the character or setting of a listed building'.

This does not mean that new buildings must be of the same architectural style as for example a neighbouring listed building. Imitation of historic styles or features will normally be unacceptable, since this tends to devalue the merit of existing genuine build-

Contemporary architecture is welcomed adjacent to historic buildings providing the new development is of the highest quality. In this example the Bordeaux Law Courts, designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership, enhances its historic setting by virtue of its quality. However despite the contrast in style with the existing tower there is a subtle referencing between the two buildings that creates a synergy. The rhythm of the structural bays reflects the form of the tower, and the shape of the courtroom pods reflect the tower's shape.

ings. The quality of the new building's design is more important than the specific architectural genre. In sites adjacent to or in protected areas or structures the quality of design will be especially important. The existing character must be reflected in the mass, form and rhythm of the development so that the result is contemporary in style, but complementary to its townscape context.

In conservation areas, developments will be judged against Conservation Area Character Appraisals. These and other useful reference documents are listed below:

- Old Town Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2001)
- Old Town Development Strategy (2001)
- Carlton Crescent Conservation Area (1989)
- Oxford Street Conservation Area (1982)
- What listing means, a guide to owners and occupiers (1994)
- Schedule of Streets in Conservation Areas (1995)
- Conservation Areas in Southampton (leaflet).

All the above are available from the Heritage Conservation Manager, SCC, except the Old Town Development Strategy which is available from the City Design Team.



© Richard Rogers Partnership



New red sandstone in the façades complement the existing red brick building - Manchester.



One of a series of panels interpreting the history of this site on the façade of a new building - 'Back of Walls', Old Town, Southampton.



The angle and colour of the roof to the Montevetro building in London by the Richard Rogers Partnership takes its cue from that of the church in the foreground. The vertical emphasis of the balcony stacks echo the tower and the spire. The tree belt is also important in this view; it provides a neutral, buffering mass that softens the view of the new development.

© Richard Rogers Partnership

