

01 Station Heights

Context

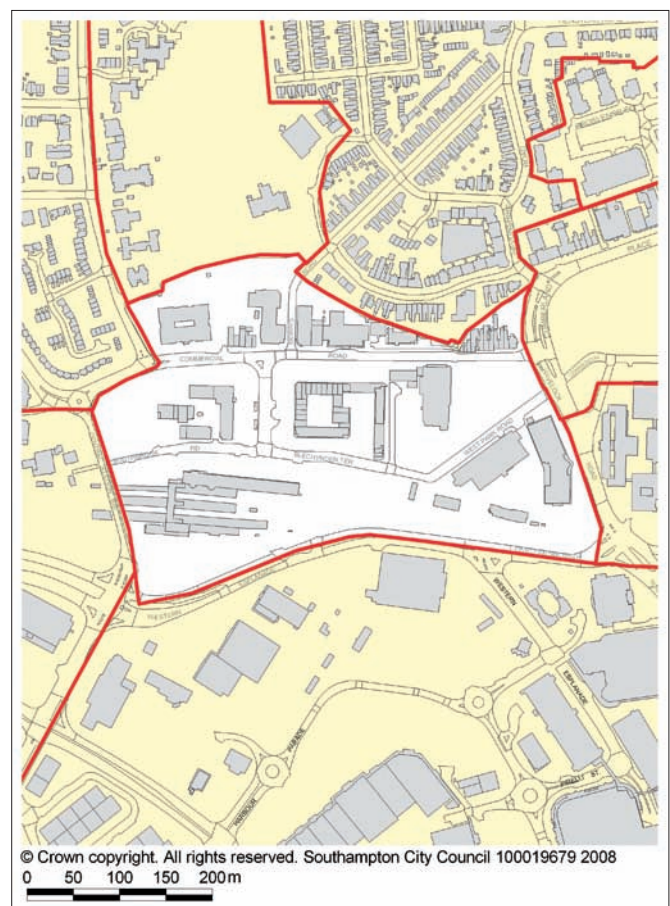
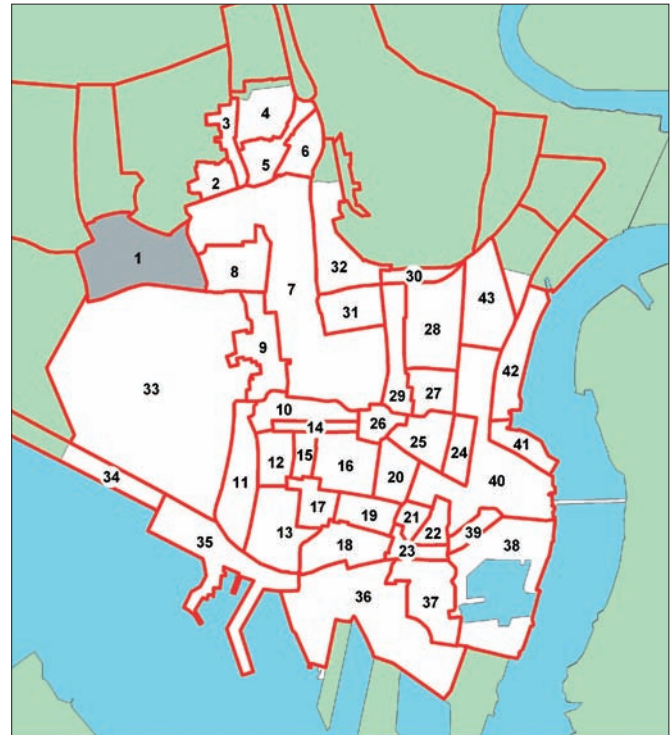
The character area is located on the north-west fringes of the city centre and is bounded by the Civic Centre (CA8) and Watts Park (CA7) to the east and residential areas (outside the study area) of differing period and character to the north. To the south is the West Quay retail park with the operational port beyond and to the south-west. The land rises to the north and east with a marked change in level of some three to four equivalent storeys between the station concourse level and the eastern edge of the character area.

The station lies close to the line of the historic shoreline before the reclamation of most of the area of CA33. Commercial Road superseded Southbrook Road and Blechynden Road as the principal route to Southampton from Redbridge and Romsey in the eighteenth century. But during this period and up until the first half of the nineteenth century the principal development was a canal, superseded by the railway. Residential development of the area occurred in the 1840s with a large house, Hamilton Place, (replaced by the Mayflower Theatre) the church of St Peter (1846) and terraced streets to the north of the station. St Peter's Church is the only building surviving from this period together with parts of the street pattern (Commercial Road, Blechynden Road, Southbrook Road and Wyndham Place).

Of note is Conduit House, of unknown date but medieval in origin, it formed part of the medieval water supply provided by the friary in the town, which was granted a licence in 1290 to pipe water from Conduit Head (outside the study area boundary) down to the friary, at the bottom of the High Street. The friars granted the town use of this supply in 1310–11. The town took over the running of the system in 1420.

Grain

The street pattern has not changed from the early nineteenth century layout of this part of the city but the fine grain of that period has been almost completely obliterated and replaced by a coarse grain of built form interspersed with pockets of fine grain terracing from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Density in residential terms is high with the main residential block Wyndham Court comprising 184 flats over six and seven storeys. Wyndham Court however does retain a human scale at street level with a series of small individual shop units lining the south side of Commercial Road set behind landscaping fronting the road. Building lines are consistent to Commercial Road, the principal transport thoroughfare through the character area. The very wide streets and large open spaces to the west of Wyndham Court and fronting the station are enclosed by suitably scaled buildings to both. This enclosure breaks down



somewhat on the eastern boundary of this character area.

Scale

Buildings widely vary in scale and height from two storey shops with flats above (two groups on the north side of Commercial Road) to sixteen storey office towers (Frobisher House – HSBC). The late twentieth century development is on large footprints of three to six and seven storey heights. Built form has deep massing and long facades with horizontal emphasis. The church of St Peter, although on raised ground to the north of Commercial Street, is no longer dominant in the street scene although it is still a notable landmark in this much altered part of the city.

Uses

There is a mix of commercial (some small scale shops and services), leisure (Mayflower Theatre) and the converted church of St Peter (now Joe Daflos – a restaurant and bar) and residential uses to Commercial Road which are well integrated at Wyndham Court. The remaining sections of the character area comprise office accommodation, local radio broadcasting studios and offices, and the station and station platforms.

Public Realm

The station is a major gateway to the city but a very poor public realm experience for the visitor. At the entrance to the station, surfaces are shared with car parking and temporary drop-off areas. Legibility is poor though new signage has been added to the existing infrastructure. There are a number of good street trees to Commercial Road which soften what is otherwise a harsh environment for the pedestrian. The barriers to Commercial Road impede pedestrian movement and are unsightly. Surface treatments are dated and poorly maintained in places.

There are two under-used and poorly maintained small parks; one to the east of the station located within the ruins of former brick buildings on the site and the other to the rear of the north-eastern end of Commercial Road.

Connectivity

This area is well connected to its neighbours and the City. Pedestrian routes (some historic, for example Water Lane) cross through (via the external footbridge) and to and from the station. The route defined by the strong axial arrangement of station with Civic Centre is the main entrance to the City for commuters and tourists alike and as such is well used but could be significantly improved.

Views

Strategic views from within the character area include the important view east to the campanile of the Grade II* listed Civic Centre from the station entrance. This is a strong wayfinding landmark and provides the visitor



- 01 Central station forecourt and approach
- 02 Commercial Road looking west
- 03 Shopping parade, Wyndham Court, Commercial Road

with a strong sense of the civic pride of the city (this being one of the tallest structures in Southampton). From the south-east corner a strategic vista of the waterfront can be appreciated taking in the low level development of 'The Sheds' of West Quay but focussing on the docked cruise liners, waterside cranes and coloured containers stacked to the west of the ever-present Solent Flour Mills building.

Further strategic views to the waterfront and focussed on the campanile pass over this character area making it sensitive to change in terms of the impact of tall buildings on these view corridors.

Frobisher House, Wyndham Court and the helm spire of the church of St Peter are all notable landmarks seen from within and beyond the character area in views of local importance.

Building types

The predominant building type is the office block. These are generally buildings which are articulated towards the street frontages in part but present a largely dead façade due to their raised positions, set backs from the back of pavement and/or use of reflective glazing. There is a small group of late nineteenth century purpose-built shops with accommodation above and houses retrofitted with shops to the east end (north side) of Commercial Road and a further two storey group of 1950s shops with storage above opposite Wyndham Place. Wyndham Court is a successful example of the 1960s 'streets in the sky' type medium rise flat block with commercial units to the ground floor. The Mayflower Theatre is Grade II listed as a good example of its type and period (early twentieth century).

Architectural qualities

Wyndham Court, (1966) by Lyons Israel Ellis is Grade II listed and won an Architectural Design Project Award in 1966. Its use of white shuttered concrete is striking in the street scene and the decks and horizontal emphasis to the elevations facing out towards the waterfront are reminiscent of an ocean liner. The remaining buildings from the late twentieth century are of reasonable quality and employ some good quality materials to vary facades and improve composition. There is a strong horizontal emphasis throughout the character area and facades are highly formulaic leading to a good sense of rhythm along streets.

The Mayflower Theatre, Grade II listed (formerly the Empire Variety Theatre and becoming a cinema after 1933) by W. and T. R. Milburn, Architects, 1928 is a large building (capacity 2,250) in 1920s Neo-Grecian style.

The church of St Peter is by Owen B Carter, a local Hampshire architect of note. Constructed in 1845 it is a significant local landmark in the street scene though

somewhat dwarfed by its neighbours in the street scene but nevertheless is seen in longer views, particularly its four-gabled Rhenish spire and polygonal apse. The church forms a group with the medieval Conduit House (A Scheduled Monument) at the corner of the churchyard (where Water Lane joins Commercial Road).

Heritage Assets

The area served as agricultural land until the first half of the nineteenth century. The area could be considered to possess a high degree of evidential value due to archaeological interest relating to the potential for prehistoric and Roman occupation and use of the area. The area lies within a Local Area of Archaeological Importance to reflect this potential to yield evidence for past activity in the area.

There are four Grade II listed buildings in the character area; St Peter's Church (1845-6) which whilst converted to a wine bar is by a local architect Owen B Carter and along with Wyndham Court, (Lyons Israel Ellis 1966) display a high degree of aesthetic value in design terms, in very different cultural contexts. The Mayflower Theatre, (W. and T. R. Milburn 1928) is probably better known for its very grand internal treatment rather than for its external presence on the street. It has a very strong association with the arts in Southampton and therefore its communal value is high. The fourteenth century (possibly earlier) Conduit House is also a Grade II listed building as well as a Scheduled Monument. Located on the north side of Commercial Road, this single storey stone building collected water from wells and springs and fed the friary in the town. It was transferred to the town council in 1420 making it one of the earliest municipally controlled water supplies on this scale in the country. In this respect the building and its associated remaining archaeology (some original piping may survive running across this area) are of very high historical significance though its evidential value is largely based on documentary evidence rather than physical survival of historic infrastructure.

Materials

The nineteenth century buildings are painted brick and render with natural slate and concrete tile roofs pitched back from the road and eaves lines parallel to the road. The mid to late twentieth century buildings are steel framed with curtain wall constructions of pre-stressed concrete, brick, stone and shuttered white concrete with very low pitched or flat roofs. Strong parapet lines and fully glazed upper storeys characterise the latter in the absence of strongly defined roofscape. The quality of materials in new buildings is generally good.

Condition

The condition of the character area is varied with some buildings; particularly Wyndham Court, for example, in very good repair and well looked after. The spaces

between buildings are looking dated in places but are also well-maintained and clean.

The station entrance and immediate environs are poor and in need of comprehensive re-design.

Ownership

Land adjacent to the railway station and the presently vacant site to the east of Wyndham Court and the Mayflower Theatre are owned by Southampton City Council. Areas of land around the station and the station itself are owned by Network Rail. Other blocks are in multiple-ownership.

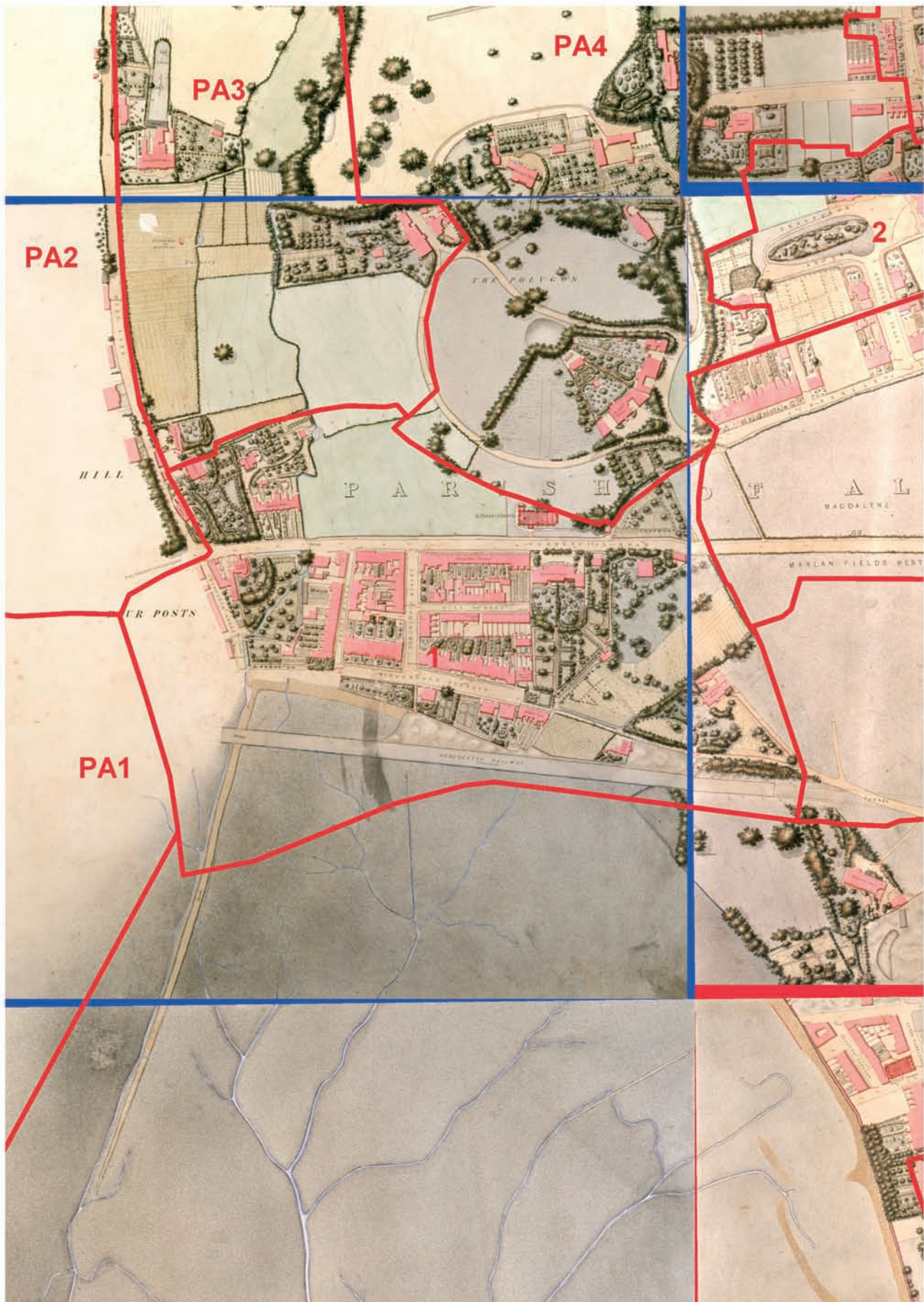
Intervention

- The entrance to the station and the pedestrian route to and from the Civic Centre need significant improvement.
- Encourage active frontage to the pedestrian route to and from the station.

- Redevelopment of the station entrance and station platforms.
- Assessing the potential for a new square in place of Wyndham Place, potential for development to the north (Commercial Road) and south (Blechynden Terrace) to further enclose this space.
- Potential for development over and adjacent to the railway to the east of the station to include reorganising the existing under-used park .

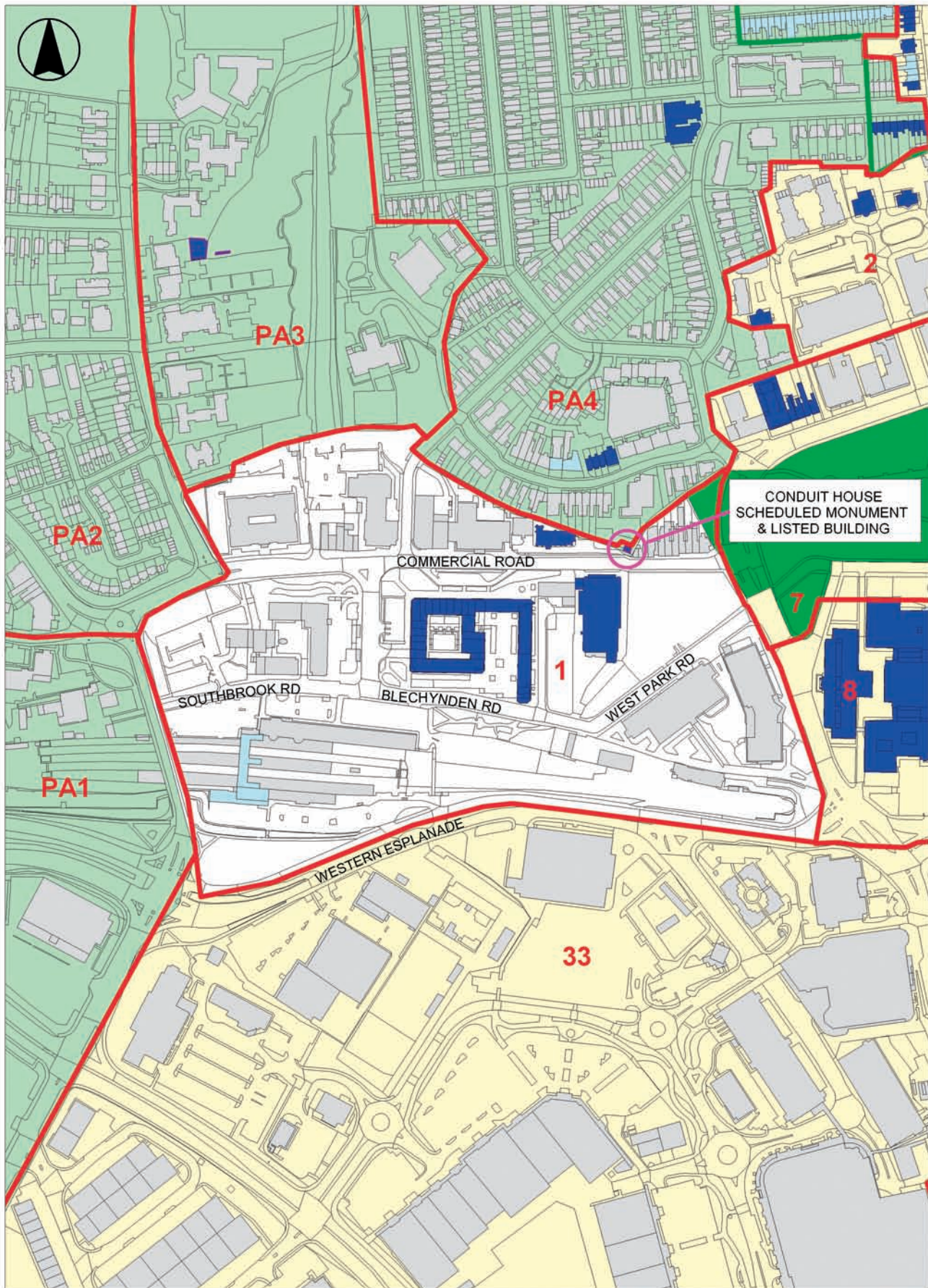
Key design principles

- Encourage more active frontage in commercial buildings – particularly office space fronting highways.
- Enhance/promote the axial route to and from the station and the Civic Centre.
- Maintain and reinforce pedestrian linkage.
- Maintain and encourage ancillary uses to the theatre – restaurants, cafes and bars.
- Recognise and improve historic routes into and through the character area, such as Water Lane.

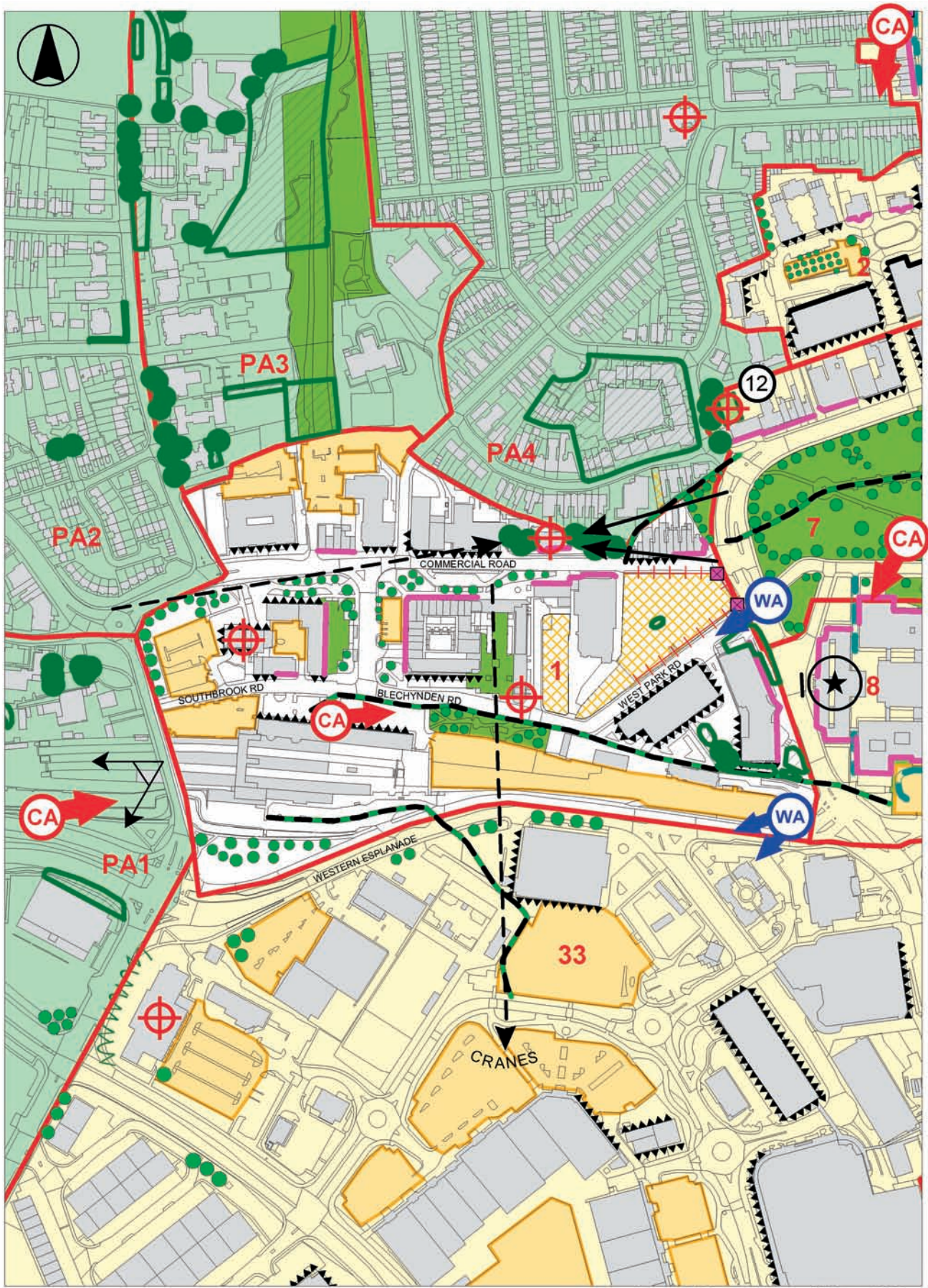


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Heritage Assets



Townscape

