

07 Central Parks

Context

The Central Parks character area covers a series of inter-linked green spaces; Watts Park, East Park, Palmerston Park, Houndwell Park and Hoglands Park which travel down through the heart of the City and provide important links with a large number of adjacent character areas. The land falls towards the south with the change in level being very apparent due to the long vistas that are enjoyed through this area. The character area includes, where appropriate, the enclosing townscape which defines the built-up edges of the character area though for the pedestrian these are often defined by the road network which lines almost the entire edge of the character area.

The Central Parks are remnants of the agricultural fields that fringed the medieval urban area. They served as 'Lammas lands', land that was farmed by the burgesses of the town until Lammas Day and then thrown open as common grazing for the remainder of the year. Despite significant pressure to develop these areas they have remained as a valuable, ecologically rich and well managed public amenity space. The legacy of tree planting in the Victorian period is very much enjoyed by the present residents and visitors to the city.

Grain

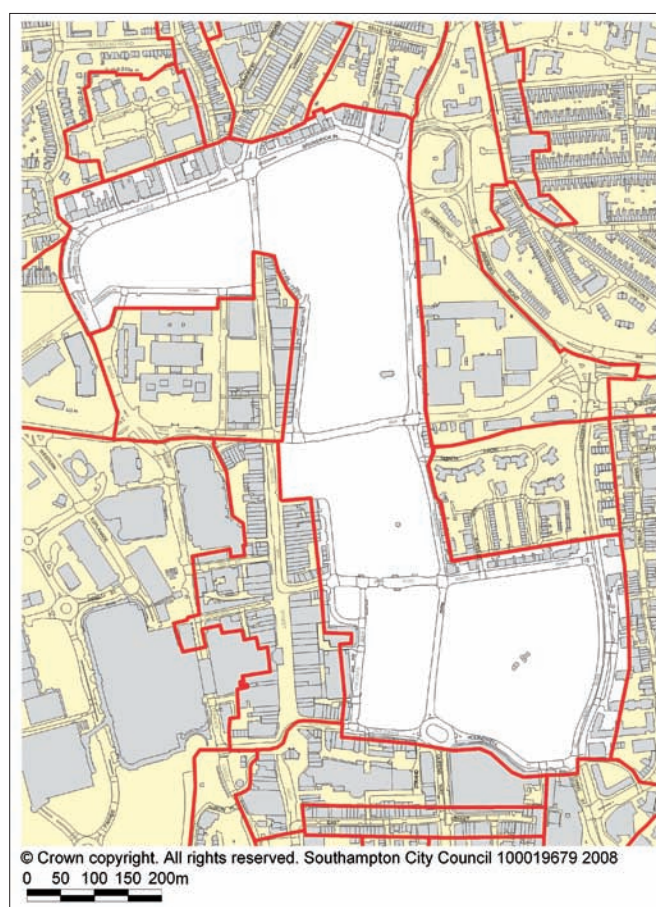
The grain of built form to the park widely varies. From modest survivals of a Georgian and Victorian terracing on a very fine grain through to the medium grain of some of the larger historic double-fronted buildings to the north edge of the parks to the coarse grain of the buildings of the Southampton Institute and much of the post-war rebuilding of the High Street which backs onto the parks but has very little positive relationship with them.

Buildings lines are consistent throughout though there is some unsuccessful setting back of some of the buildings to the Southampton Institute site which has led to some awkward dead spaces to the front of buildings which have been indifferently landscaped. The exception to this is the boundary to St Mary's Place which runs along the back of St Mary Street. Here the building line is fragmented and lacks cohesion or definition resulting in some very weak townscape and poor enclosure to Hoglands Park.

Generally the parks feel well enclosed despite some dead frontages particularly to the western edge.

Scale

The scale of built form to the edge of the parks is also varied. The height of buildings range from two storey villas to twelve storey office blocks. There are a number of strategically important views from and across the parks to St Mary's Church spire (in the south-west) and



the campanile to the Civic Centre (to the west). In addition to these landmark buildings such as Queens Keep (north-west corner), Brunswick House and Jury's Inn (north-east corner), Park View Mansions on New Road (looking east) and Albion Towers to the east of Hoglands Park have a significant impact on the skyline from the park.

The average scale of built form is between three and five storeys. This gives comfortable enclosure towards the edges of the parks but can seem weak in extended open views.

Buildings generally have a vertical emphasis through the use of traditional window proportions.

Uses

Uses to the edges of the parks comprise a mix of office, residential, education and commercial. The park itself is a highly valued amenity space for the City and incorporates a number of leisure uses including grass and all-weather tennis courts, a putting green, children's play area, cricket pitches, bandstand, skate park, information centre, café, and toilets.

The park is a very popular place for lunchtime breaks and as a breakout area for the colleges; Southampton Institute and the City College in St Mary Street.

Public Realm

The parks public realm to the edge of the character area is generally poor with patched surfaces and pedestrian barriers preventing effective pedestrian linkage. This is being addressed in places, notably the link to London Road and Bedford Place which has been the subject of considerable work to encourage the use of these thoroughfares for walking. The internal public realm infrastructure is looking dated and worn. There is seating provision for off-peak use (check with Parks and Gardens section).

The trees to the park are a highly valued natural asset and give the park structure, depth and a sense of procession through planned spaces. There are various types of mature tree within the parks but perhaps the most important group is the limes which line the north-south avenue.

Connectivity

There is a high degree of permeability within the parks and they provide very important pedestrian links between key parts of the City. However, much of the built form, particularly to the western edge (the commercial core of the City) and the eastern edge to Hoglands Park turns its back to the parkland and provides very little opportunity for positive connectivity between these key areas.

Isolation from the park is accentuated by the road



- 01 View across Hoglands towards the spire of the church of St Mary
- 02 Cumberland Place, with Queens Keep office block to western corner
- 03 View looking north up through the central avenue of trees

network which rings the parks and is a significant barrier to pedestrians and in places has a very significant impact on the setting of the park. This is particularly the case to the north boundary and the eastern boundary of Hoglands Park.

Views

Strategic views from the parks character area include views west towards the waterfront and are characterised by the working features of the port to the west. There is also the view across the park to the spire of St Mary. This is one of the best historic views of the city with the spire protruding above the mature trees of the parkland. Progressive local views across the park can be had of the spire and it is a very important local landmark in this part of the city. Local views can also be had of the campanile across East Park. The linking path running north/south lined with lime trees provides excellent views through the parkland spine of the city.

The strategic view from London Road to the campanile of the Civic Centre passes across Watts Park in the north-west.

Building types

Georgian townhouses (some converted to offices or flats), Victorian villas, post-war purpose-built commercial premises; department stores, purpose-built small scale shops, cafes and restaurants with offices above and large footprint low rise blocks of flats (imitating townhouses) and two purpose-built early and mid twentieth century public houses line the edges of the park.

Architectural qualities

The finer survivals from the late Georgian and early Victorian period are of real architectural value with fine brickwork and detailing to windows and doors. The remaining level of architectural quality is relatively poor with some of the defining landmarks (the residential and office tower blocks) being of limited architectural quality.

A notable unlisted building in the townscape is the very prominent and well detailed early twentieth century public house The Eagle, to the corner of South Front and Palmerston Road.

There is a general rhythm of window to wall proportions which provides a familiar and non-intrusive architectural framework to the built form to the edges of the park – this is particularly the case for the northern edge where the buildings though varied in style have conformed to this rhythm and sit quite well in the townscape as a group.

Within the parks there are a number of high quality monuments, war memorials and statues, some of which are listed, most notably Sir Edwin Lutyens' cenotaph of 1919.

Heritage Assets

Despite the park areas predominantly serving as agricultural land to Saxon Hamwic and the medieval town, the area is considered to possess a high degree of evidential value due to presence of important archaeological remains. Hamwic extended into the eastern edge of Hoglands and there is evidence for some dispersed medieval settlement within the parks area. Whilst it is thought that some of the buildings of the medieval leper hospital stood within CA8 (Civic Centre) alongside Above Bar, it is possible that the church of St Mary Magdalen and some of the ancillary hospital buildings stood within this area. The area was also crossed by the c.1800 canal. The archaeological remains of Hamwic are regarded as being of national importance and cultural significance. The area lies within a Local Area of Archaeological Importance to reflect this potential to yield significant evidence for past activity in the area.

There are four groups of listed and locally listed buildings lining the edge of the parks. These are all remnants of the early to mid-nineteenth century enclosure to the park with houses. The survival of these houses, despite in many (but not all) cases their change of use to offices, is historically significant as it marks a key development in Southampton; the enclosure of the parks with built form of a relatively grand style and design for the time giving these buildings aesthetic significance as well as historic importance. The Civic Centre has a very positive relationship with the parks and its design by Barry Webber was intended to be seen in various axial relationships with the park plan. The visual links to the facades and campanile of the western elevation are an important part of the aesthetic value of the parks as a setting to this Grade II* listed building. Within the park there are eleven listed monuments and other items of special interest. All of these structures are Grade II listed.

The parks are Grade II listed in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Hoglands in particular is related to the Saxon settlement at Hamwic and was separated from the urban area by a large ditch. From 1867 onwards this area was used as the municipal cricket pitch except for during the Second World War when the area was an American Army camp. These historic associations and communal importance of the parks in relatively recent times gives them a resonance with the community, some of whom can remember these important transitional uses of the parks.

Spiritual and social values are also intertwined with associative values when considering the fine group of memorials, some Grade II listed. This includes two statues; the Andrews Memorial and the Isaac Watts Statue, two Titanic Memorials, the most notable being that in Above Bar Street, of 1912, five further War Memorials and a

Peace Fountain. There is also a gas column at the southern end of the parks (Houndwell Park).

One of the finest War Memorials is Sir Edwin Lutyens' cenotaph, Watts Park. Constructed in 1919 of Portland Stone, the Whitehall cenotaph for which Lutyens is probably better known is supposed to have been modelled on the Southampton cenotaph. In this respect the cenotaph and its setting have an aesthetic and associational significance due to its unique design by a nationally recognized architect of the period and its potential historic links with further structures of outstanding architectural and historic importance.

Materials

Traditional materials are red brick, stone and faux timber framing with natural slate or clay tile roofs respectively. Modern materials comprise painted renders, various colours of stock brick, expressed concrete frames with inset walling panels of various materials including fibrous concrete and some stone cladding as curtain walling.

Condition

The buildings fronting the parks are generally in a reasonable condition with the exception of the Southampton Institute site much of which is vacant and in very poor repair.

The footpath network to the parks could do with some resurfacing in places.

Ownership

The parkland is in the ownership of Southampton City Council, as is the surrounding road network. Buildings are in multiple ownership including institutional organisations.

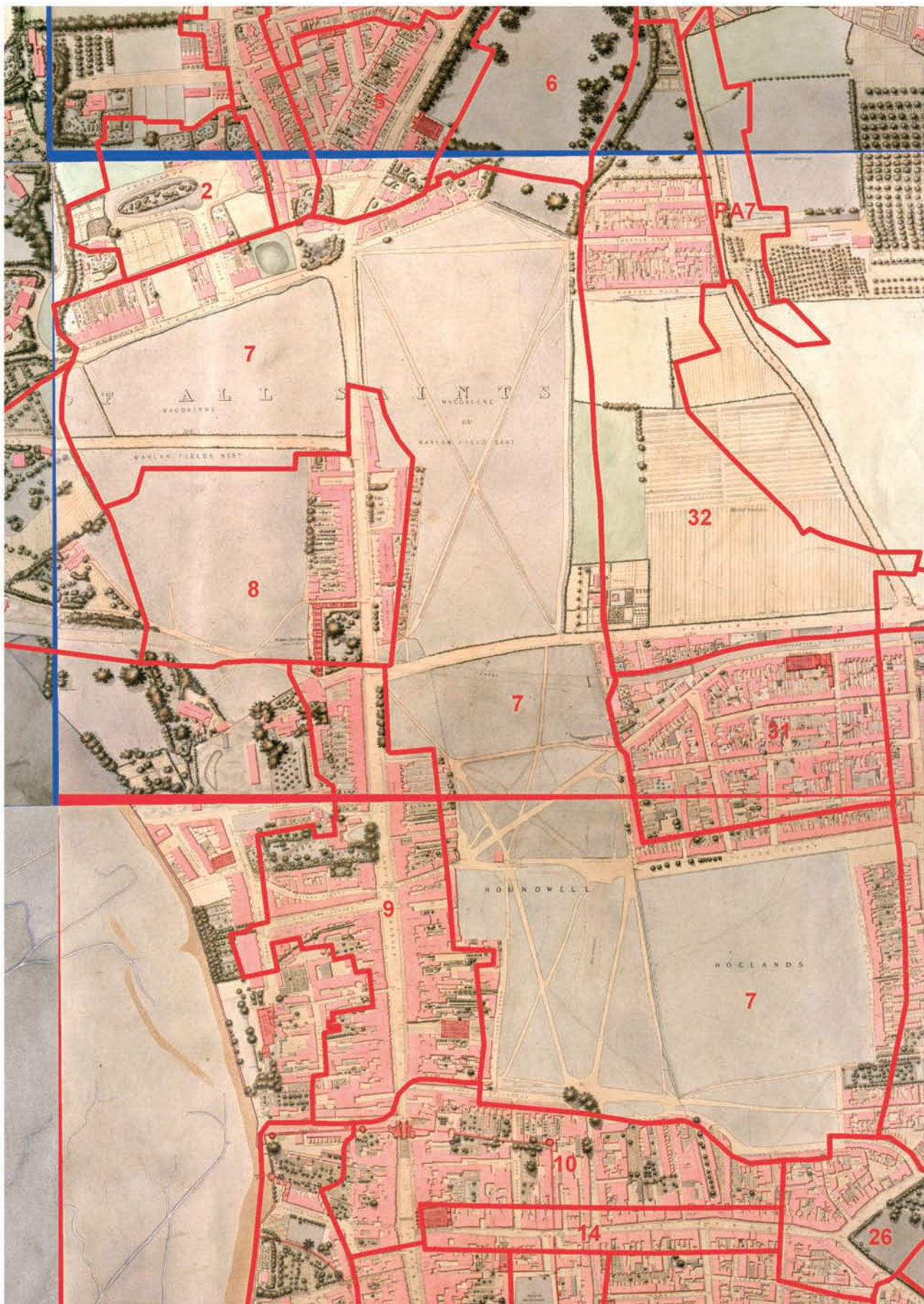
Intervention

- There is the opportunity for temporary and permanent art installations and additional pavilions with complementary uses such as cafes. These could champion innovative design and the use of materials.

- The internal park path network could benefit from a change in surface treatments for example a resin-bonded gravel and a carefully designed crossover to each entrance to denote the special character and transition into the parks.
- The highways network circling the parks, particularly to the north, east and south should be reviewed to explore ways of enabling pedestrians to cross to the park more safely and bring the park closer to the built edges rather than the roadsides.
- Development should be encouraged which addresses the poor townscape relationship between park and the rear of St Mary Street.
- St Mary's Place should be the subject of a detailed study with recommendations as to how to improve this edge to the parks.
- The western edge of the parks needs to address the park in a more positive manner either through partial redevelopment or remodelling of existing commercial units. This could include complementary uses to the park – cafes, restaurants, bars.
- Roads that cross the parks should become secondary to the parkland and provide safe crossing along their length for pedestrians. The pedestrian should take precedence over vehicles.

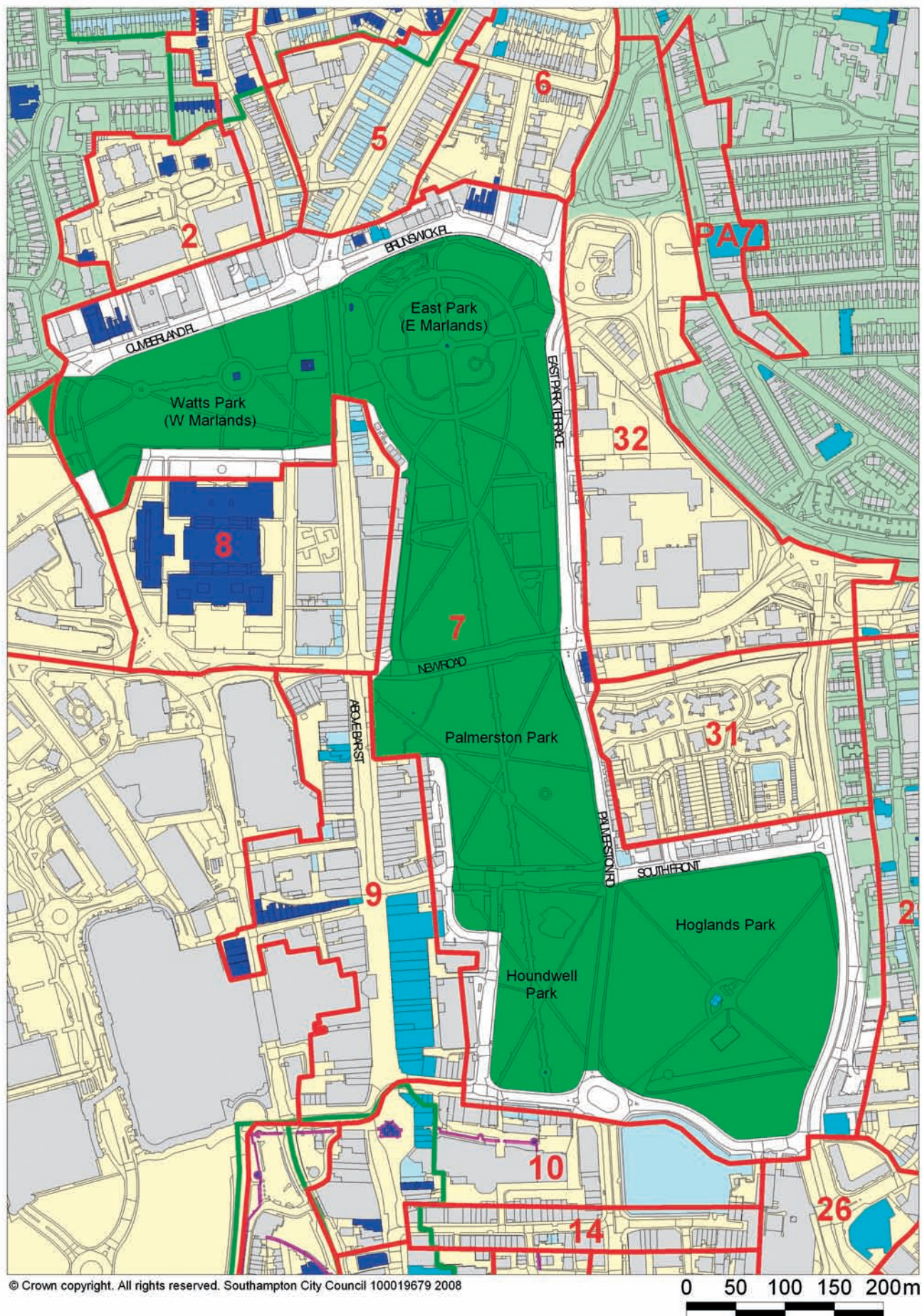
Key design principles

- The scale of buildings to the edge of the parks is very sensitive to change. Any redevelopment should pay special regard to the scale, grain and massing of built form within its immediate context (this will usually include all buildings to that edge).
- Vertical emphasis is important in design terms to produce buildings which relate to the general character of these edge buildings.
- All proposed frontage to the park should be active frontage with the emphasis on uses complementary to their park setting.
- All development within the wider setting of the parks (when viewed from or across the parks) should have regard to the strategic importance of defined views to important landmarks such as St Mary's spire and the campanile of the Civic Centre.



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Heritage Assets



Townscape