

# **St George's Conservation Area Character Statement**

CONSULTATION DRAFT

JUNE 2003

This is a consultation draft of the proposed character statement for St George's Conservation Area. Comments are welcome and should be sent to June Gray, Urban Design Group, Environment, Regeneration & Development, Leicester City Council, Welford Place, Leicester, LE1 6ZG, telephone: 0116 252 7281; fax: 0116 247 1149; e-mail [grayj001@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:grayj001@leicester.gov.uk)

## Contents

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Location & landform
3.0	Archaeology, history & development
4.0	Prevailing uses
5.0	Architectural character and key unlisted buildings
6.0	Townscape
7.0	Building materials
8.0	Open spaces and trees
9.0	Lighting and street furniture
10.0	Loss of character
11.0	Preserving the character
12.0	Conservation Area boundary

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1	List of buildings in the conservation area
Appendix 2	List of listed buildings in the conservation area
Appendix 3	List of Tree Preservation Orders
Appendix 4	Glossary of architectural terms

### **List of Maps**

Map 1	City of Leicester Conservation Areas (to follow)
Map 2	Boundary of St George's Conservation Area (to follow)
Map 3	Robert's Map 1741 (to follow)
Map 4	Fowler's Map 1828 (to follow)
Map 5	Ordnance Survey Map 1885 (to follow)
Map 6	Ordnance Survey Map 1954 (to follow)
Map 7	Proposed additions to the Conservation Area

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 A conservation area is defined as *an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*<sup>1</sup>. The City Council designates conservation areas, after consulting local people, under powers contained in national planning legislation and in accordance with advice from central government. Leicester's conservation areas contain the best of the older parts of the City as well as serving the needs of Leicester today. Each conservation area is distinctive and contains qualities that help to give the City an overall character of its own.
- 1.2 The City Council has a duty to preserve and enhance the character of conservation areas and the purpose of this statement is to identify the factors which make the St George's Conservation Area an area of special architectural and historic interest. It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in the light of the existing character of the area. The Character Statement will enable the Council to ensure that, when considering planning applications within the conservation area and its borders, the development will help to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area.
- 1.3 Looking after and improving the qualities of a conservation area can bring real benefits to the people who live and work there. An attractive environment also helps to maintain property values. However, for a conservation area to be successful, both residents and property owners must play their part. The City Council will continue to strive to improve the environment of conservation areas whenever the opportunity presents itself and when resources allow and will encourage others to do likewise.
- 1.4 St George's Conservation Area was designated in May 1989 and the boundaries of the Conservation area are shown on Map 2. The Council is proposing four extensions to the conservation area (see page 17) and this draft Statement includes references to these areas as appropriate throughout the text.

## **2.0 Location and landform**

- 2.1 The conservation area is about 0.5 km (0.3 mile) due east of the city centre Clock Tower, on the edge of the commercial core of the city centre. It is about 5.7 hectares (14.1 acres) in area and is generally flat with a slight fall from Charles Street towards Humberstone Road.

---

<sup>1</sup> Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 section 69

### 3.0 Archaeology, history and development

- 3.1 The conservation area lies outside of the Roman and medieval core of Leicester and, although there was extensive development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there nevertheless remains the possibility of archaeological remains.
- 3.2 A number of artefacts have been found in the area. Finds of Roman pottery in Southampton Street and a Roman coin in Morledge Street are likely to represent chance loss or refuse disposal rather than habitation. However, the cemeteries of Roman Leicester are still poorly defined and the presence of other sites of archaeological importance in the St George's area cannot therefore be ruled out. Archaeological evidence of a pottery kiln in the vicinity could be represented by the find of an intact pot of the second to fourth centuries in Halford Street. The former name of Southampton Street, Brick Kiln Lane, may also suggest the presence of a medieval or post-medieval kiln. The line of 17<sup>th</sup> century Leicester's Civil War defences is believed to have skirted the conservation area to the west; an entrance is recorded at the junction of Humberstone Gate and Yeoman Street.
- 3.3 By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the congested narrow streets and gateways of the old town was creating increasing problems for commercial traffic. An easier north-south route became established on the east side of the River Soar from a crossing point at Belgrave village arriving outside the East Gate of the town near to where the Clock Tower now stands. The focus of business was thus shifted eastwards and the main route to London (now a turnpike road) became Gallowtree Gate instead of Welford Road. New buildings appear on Humberstone Gate, particularly inns and public houses serving the stagecoach and wagon trades, and by 1722 Stukeley's Map shows development stretching eastwards as far as what is now Clarence Street (then a narrow lane linking through to Belgrave Gate).
- 3.4 This is echoed in Roberts' map of 1741 (Map 3) which shows open land, perhaps laid out as orchards, to the east of Gallowtree Gate ('Golltree Gate' on the map). Combe's map of 1802 indicates that Charles Street, Rutland Street and Halford Street had been laid out (the last two not named) but with no significant building.
- 3.5 Features of the modern conservation area become more recognisable in Fowler's map of 1828 (Map 4), the most obvious being St George's Church, the first church built in Leicester since the Reformation<sup>2</sup>. A Workhouse occupies the future site of the Humberstone Gate weighbridge (now the taxi station) and the un-named lane mentioned in 3.3 on Stukeley's Map is now called Sand Pit Lane. There is significant

---

<sup>2</sup> David Bindman and Gottfried Rieman eds. *Karl Friedrich Schinkel 'The English Journey' journal of a visit to France and Britain in 1826*, Yale, New Haven and London 1993 p136. The great Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel visited the Church on his visit to England in 1826. His journal for Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June reads: *Drive to Leicester (from Derby) short stay there, saw a new church in medieval style. Buildings of this kind are much favoured in this area, but they are all the same, though this one has a vaulted ceiling*

new building on 'Charlton Street' (Colton Street), Upper Charles Street and the south side of Humberstone Gate.

- 3.6 Unicum's map, also of 1828, is a little more detailed, showing Southampton Street and Wimbledon Street (though not named), 'Colston' Street, Church Street, Wigston Street and Yeoman Street. Brickyards are shown to the south east of the church (note 'Brick Kiln Lane' in 3.2 above) and field plots are marked out south of Humberstone Gate. By 1840 the layout of the conservation area is starting to resemble its present shape. The frontage to Rutland Street is largely built up as is Humberstone Gate and Colton Street and there is some building in Morledge Street. Two small buildings labelled as 'schools' are shown at the Rutland Street entrance to the churchyard. The plot layouts suggest that much of the development in this period appears to be residential and this pattern is more or less unchanged on Burton's map of 1844.
- 3.7 In Spencer's New Map of 1866 development is simply blocked in but Wimbledon Street has appeared by this time. Meadows' distillery, warehouse and 'smoking room' (which can still be seen at 44 Humberstone Gate) dates from this period (1869). The weighbridge at 'the New Haymarket' on Humberstone Gate is named for the first time in the 1871 map while the 1879 edition of Spencer's map shows a skating rink on the east side of Rutland Street between Southampton Street and Humberstone Gate.
- 3.8 The first Ordnance Survey map of 1885 (Map 5) provides much more detail. It gives a picture of an area of mixed uses, primarily houses, small cottages and 'courts' but with many industrial and commercial buildings scattered amongst them. Some existing factory buildings are identifiable, including some of the area's finest at 29 Rutland Street and the two buildings flanking the southern end of Wimbledon Street. Wyggeston Hospital, later Girls' School (now Age Concern) had been built by 1878 and St George's Schools could now be found at the south-eastern corner of the churchyard. The opening of the Secular Hall in 1881 provided a purpose-built meeting place at the heart of the town's commercial district for the Freethinkers of 19<sup>th</sup> century Leicester's radical religious scene. Further east Morledge Street is lined mainly by terraced housing but there is a substantial house standing in a garden close to its northern end.
- 3.9 However, the Ordnance Survey map of the early 1930s shows the area to be altogether different. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century close mix of small houses and factories has been replaced by larger commercial and industrial uses. There is a large late 19<sup>th</sup> century factory building on the site of the former International Hotel and the corner of Rutland and Southampton Streets has been redeveloped for Faire Brothers' factory, 'Alexandra House' of 1898. Only on Colton Street and St George's Street can housing still be seen. The last link with Leicester's old hay market on Humberstone Gate, Batten & Son Ltd's Coal Corn and Hay Merchants, had been lost when the Palais de Danse was built in 1926.

- 3.10 The first of the big changes which affected the conservation area happened in the 1930s with the widening of Charles Street. This required the demolition of the housing on the south side of Colton Street and, following the official opening of the new road in 1932, new development took place on the rest of the cleared land within a few years. The Odeon Cinema was built in 1938 to replace the 19<sup>th</sup> century boot, shoe and hosiery works that had occupied the corner of Queen Street.
- 3.11 The Ordnance Survey map of 1954 (Map 6) records the conservation area just before the comprehensive redevelopment which affected the Yeoman Street/Rutland Street area. The Odeon Cinema is the central visual focus. The site on the opposite side of Rutland Street is occupied by a mixture of small industrial premises and warehouses serving the adjacent wholesale market. There is still some housing on Colton Street and St George's Street and three flats on Corporation Yard, the site of the future Corporation bus depot, in Rutland Street.
- 3.12 On the 1985 Ordnance Survey sheets shows the pattern of development has a much coarser grain with big buildings, car parks and vacant sites interspersed with a few small buildings. The former wholesale market, just to the west of the conservation area was redeveloped in the early 1970s and demolition had taken place opposite the Odeon in anticipation of a second phase of the Halford Street multi-storey car park. The former International Hotel has converted and adapted the 1950s Freeman Hardy and Willis's warehouse, which itself had replaced the firm's original 1880s building which was burned out during an air raid in August 1940. The bus depot has replaced the Corporation yard on Rutland Street.
- 3.13 By the time of its designation in 1989 the conservation area was a relatively run-down area, with high levels of vacancy and under-use of properties leading to maintenance and repair problems.
- 3.14 However, the area is now experiencing a period of change - a 'renaissance' - as the value of its buildings and its environmental potential come to be increasingly appreciated and valued. Not only are former factories being converted for new residential use on an unprecedented scale but St George's has also been chosen as the city's new Cultural Quarter (proposals include a new Theatre complex, artists' workshops, Media Centre etc). The area is therefore in a state of flux and is subject to many development pressures.
- 3.15 As a description of what is important about the character of the St George's area this appraisal provides essential background and guidelines for development and change. The second stage of the assessment - the development of enhancement proposals - will be undertaken at a later date.

#### **4.0 Prevailing uses**

- 4.1 The history set out in Section 3 above shows that the character of the conservation area has changed over the last 180 years. Beginning as a primarily residential district

with an appropriately scaled street pattern the area developed into an industrial zone with many large buildings. By keeping to the lines of the original roadlines these new buildings created the canyon-like streets that are typical of the St George's area today. The industrial and commercial functions of the area have, however, now been largely lost. Most of the big buildings around St George's Church stand empty and economic activity is mainly restricted to the busy shops, pubs and community uses on Humberstone Gate.

- 4.2 However there is an increasing recognition by private developers of the opportunities offered by these older industrial buildings, particularly for conversion into residential apartments (Queen Street Apartments, Exchange Buildings at 34-50 Rutland Street and 29 Rutland Street for example). In addition the City Council has chosen the St George's area as the location for the city's new Cultural Quarter with proposals for a new civic theatre etc, the first example of which currently on site is the conversion of the former LCB depot into CHIC (Cultural Heartlands Incubator Centre). These developments have the potential to make St George's the most dynamic of the city's conservation areas as well as creating a fundamental change in its present character and appearance.

## 5.0 Architectural character and key unlisted buildings

*The inclusion of buildings in this section is selective and is intended to illustrate the range of building types, styles and materials in the conservation area. Those unlisted buildings that are considered to make a positive contribution to the conservation area are shown in **bold**. If a building is not included this should not be taken to indicate that it does not make a significant contribution to the character of the conservation area.*

- 5.1 Large industrial buildings form the basic structure of the area's architectural character. As has been noted above several of these buildings stand on key corner sites and provide powerful corner features and many show the importance of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester in the late nineteenth century. 29 Rutland Street (Grade II listed), built as a shoe warehouse for Tyler Brothers in 1875, is Italianate in style and built in buff coloured stone and brick. Its decorative quality is enhanced by stone figures carved by Samuel Barfield. 37-43 Rutland Street (1897) (Grade II listed), turns the corner from Queen Street to the churchyard. The building, a former shoe warehouse, has a Flemish theme with an arched ground floor, semicircular fourth floor windows, gables and a corner cupola. Alexandra House (Grade II listed), on the corner of Rutland Street and Southampton Street, is perhaps the most distinctive building in the conservation area. Built as an elastic web factory for Faire Brothers in 1897 its facades are faced in ornate buff terracotta with a polished marble plinth and a wealth of decorative detail including Atlantes supporting the brackets on the main cornice. It too provides a powerful corner even after the loss of its corner cupola. The upper storey is marked by a row of semi-circular windows, an architectural feature which is common in this area and of this firm (Faire Brothers) and architect (Edward Burgess).

Similar features can be seen in other buildings in the area, the adjoining warehouse on Rutland Street and St George's Mills for example.

- 5.2 St George's Church (1823-7, chancel 1879, restored after fire 1911) (Grade C Listed), is fairly typical of the 'Commissioners' churches of the early nineteenth century. Built in local sandstone with tall cast iron tracery, the Church is the architectural centrepiece of the area and the soaring, turreted tower is a key feature of views into and within the conservation area. The Gothic design distinguishes this an ecclesiastical building different from the other buildings in the area and contributes to the range of styles and textures in the conservation area.
- 5.3 Less ornate is **96 Rutland Street** at the corner of Humberstone Gate. This four storey red brick building of the 1890s has a simple splayed corner and skyline gables. **St George's Mills** (c1890s), a shoe factory built for Faire Brothers, has a weaker corner at the junction of Wimbledon Street and Humberstone Road, marked by a somewhat insignificant clock tower. However, the frontages to Humberstone Road and Wimbledon Street are monumental: the latter has five stories and twenty-eight bays, presenting a great red-brick and glass cliff to the street. **Rowleys' building** on Queen Street (c1920) is again more significant for its linear quality than as a corner feature. Like St George's Mills it is in red brick and has a prominent cornice below the attic storey of semi-circular windows. The style of detailing is baroque, particularly evident in the gateway from Queen Street to the rear yard.
- 5.4 These four and five-storey buildings represent the upper layer of industrial and commercial buildings in the conservation area and the next layer is formed by prominent two and three-storey buildings. These include a number of buildings in a variety of styles and of considerable architectural quality. **24 Rutland Street** was built in the early twentieth century in a style influenced by the architecture of Sir Christopher Wren, in red brick with limestone dressings. The Exchange Buildings at 34-50 Rutland Street (Grade II listed), forms spectacular corners and adds an accent to the skyline of the street in the form of a French pavilion roof. This building also has an almost intact set of original shopfronts. Just opposite, nos. **33** and **35 Rutland Street** are in orange-red brick with stone dressings and terracotta window surrounds and cornice. The frontage between 68-98 Rutland Street includes a range of styles mainly in red brick. These include the American-influenced 78-80 Rutland Street (Grade II listed) of 1923 which also has an impressive glazed rear elevation; the Flemish gable and limestone oriel window of no. **74 Rutland Street (Urray House)**, the Gothic details of nos. **92 and 92a Rutland Street** with late-Victorian shopfronts and fascias.
- 5.5 **93 Humberstone Gate** is faced in white brick. Although altered at roof level, this building retains original decorative stonework in the shopfront cornice. The townscape value of the two buildings at the southern end of Rutland Street has already been noted. Both have considerable decorative quality, especially **Wimbledon House, Wimbledon Street**, with an ornate Italianate door and window surrounds in stone and a parapet balustrade. Just to the north is a much plainer red brick building of the mid-



nineteenth century representing a simpler industrial style than some of the more ostentatious buildings in the area. Also representing this simpler style is the warehouse adjoining 1 Southampton Street with a frontage also on Queen Street.

- 5.6 Colton Street and Church Street contain a number of buildings showing the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. These include **nos. 26 and 40 Colton Street** and, most notably, the Guild of the Disabled (Grade II listed). This last building is one of the most notable in the conservation area, with a broad entrance arch in the manner of CFA Voysey and an eclectic choice of details on the street elevation and at the rear is the surviving Alexandra Workshop.
- 5.7 The years since 1919 have added notable landmarks. The Odeon Cinema (Grade II listed) is a key building for the townscape value of its front-of-house elevations, its 1930s Moderne style and for its use of brown brick and faience. On the corner of Charles Street and Church Street the **Spread Eagle** pub is 1930s Classical in style and has notable leaded glass ground floor windows. The buildings at **118-142 Charles Street** represent a virtually intact collection of 1930s buildings. Here brick, stone and metal are used to create a diversity of styles from the neo-Georgian of the former Queens Pub and numbers 120-122 to the stripped-down Classical of number 118 and the old Cherub factory at number 124. Elsewhere, the small 1930s sub-station on Queen Street next to 37-43 Queen Street is one of a set of similar buildings around the city which go beyond functional design with pleasing proportions and simple decorative brickwork detailing. While the tower of the former International Hotel of the 1960s on Humberstone Gate and Rutland Street is dramatic the elevations to Rutland Street and Wimbledon Street are rather lifeless and forbidding.
- 5.8 Humberstone Gate has several notable buildings. The former Wyggeston's Girls School (Grade II listed and now occupied by Age Concern) was designed by Edward Burgess in an Elizabethan style with occasional Gothic flourishes such as the crenellated parapet and the rooftop *f*l $\hat{e}$ che. On the opposite corner the former Green's electrical shop at **44 Humberstone Gate** presents an intact but poorly maintained two storey Venetian *fa*çade to the street. The three public houses - **The Fountain, The Black Lion** and **The Three Cranes** at numbers **52, 71** and **84 Humberstone Gate** respectively - are built in three contrasting architectural styles. The Secular Hall at 73-75 Humberstone Gate is the most ornate building in this area. Designed by W.L. Sugden in 1880 in a style described as 'a free treatment of the Flemish Renaissance', this brick building displays many architectural details. There are fluted half-round and concave rectangular pilasters, rubbed brick panels depicting 'Libertas', 'Justicia' and 'Veritas' (Freedom, Justice and Truth) within the first floor blind arcading and five terracotta busts representing Socrates, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen and Jesus slightly above ground floor level. The busts caused uproar when they first appeared. By 1900, Leicester was the only city in the country that 'could boast its own fine hall entirely devoted to secular propaganda'.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> F J Gould, *The History of the Leicester Secular Society*, The Leicester Secular Society, 1900

- 5.9 The two blocks between Chatham Street and Clyde Street comprise a variety of buildings dating between 1890s and the 1970s. Some are imposing with interesting detailing (such as **66a Humberstone Gate**) while others are relatively plain with little in the way of decoration (such as the factories on Clyde Street and Erskine Street). The symmetrical block of shops and flats at **8-32 Humberstone Road** has a moulded brick date panel in the central pedimented gable that dates it to 1888. Named 'Clump Buildings' after what appears to be a small park called The Clump on the 1885 Ordnance Survey its generally plain red brick exterior is enhanced by the subtle use of shallow brick pilasters, relieving arches above the second floor windows, and other restrained decorative features. Multi-coloured leaded lights are still visible in some of the bay windows.

## 6.0 Townscape

- 6.1 The term *townscape* refers to the ways in which views open and close, as the observer moves through an area; changes in scale; visual contrast and textural qualities in the street scene: all qualities which help to give the environment of an area individuality and character.
- 6.2 Although the St George's Conservation Area is relatively flat, the layout of streets and spaces and the contrasting heights and architectural styles of the buildings offers variety and a range of visual interest within a relatively small area. The area's built form, defined by mainly three storey or taller industrial buildings, set within quite narrow streets creates a sense of scale and enclosure that is a fairly consistent and distinctive feature of the conservation area which distinguishes it from the adjoining areas of the City.

### *Street Network*

- 6.3 Within the conservation area there is a dense network of narrow streets. Humberstone Gate is the exception, being a wide thoroughfare with a complex arrangement of bus stops, parking and pedestrian flows. It is characteristically busy and vehicles dominate the space. Rutland Street is the main other route through the area, running approximately north-south. It provides a good sequence of views in either direction with buildings of varying heights and changes in the road alignment holding end enclosing views along the street. Wimbledon Street also offers a remarkable street view where from the curved corners at its junction with Southampton Street the street is narrow and bounded by tall and powerful buildings and a slight dog-leg prevents views along the entire street. The east-west routes (Southampton Street, Queen Street and Colton Street) are much straighter, lack obvious focal points, and the principal views are strongly enclosed by the facades of the buildings fronting these streets and corner buildings at their junctions with adjoining roads.

### *Landmarks*

- 6.4 The area has a number of prominent landmarks that provide focal points and visual incident, such as the tower of St George's Church, the Odeon Cinema facade and the

Exchange Buildings. Less prominent landmarks include the clock tower of Alexandra House (which can be glimpsed from Wimbledon Street) and the clock tower of St George's Mills. These are, however, dwarfed by the much taller and more prominent tower of the former International Hotel on the south side of Humberstone Road. The juxtaposition of this and its near neighbour, the international telephone exchange tower on the north side of Humberstone Road, is a particular feature of this part of the conservation area. From the west these read as an impressive 'gateway' out of the conservation area.

#### *Corner Features*

- 6.5 The conservation area is also particularly strong in prominent corner buildings. 29 Rutland Street provides a bold and ornate corner into Colton Street. The Exchange Buildings form a strong corner at the junction of Rutland Street with Wigston Street and a particularly dramatic narrow 'flat-iron' corner at the junction of Halford Street and Rutland Street. The sequence continues with 37-43 Rutland Street at the junction with Queen Street, the former Odeon Cinema, and Alexandra House at the corner of Southampton Street. The junction of this street and Wimbledon Street is particularly fine with two big curved corner buildings leading the eye into Wimbledon Street. The five storey building at the junction of Humberstone Gate and St James Street also makes a valuable contribution.

#### *Articulation, rhythm and pattern*

- 6.6 Whilst many of the buildings are very large with long street facades, consideration has been given to their appearance and by careful design and the use of architectural devices, the visual mass of these large elevations is reduced and visual interest added to the buildings. For example facades are detailed or articulated by the use of alternating piers and recessed bays, such as at St George's Mills, Wimbledon Mills and 37-43 Rutland Street. Other buildings, such as those at the corner of Southampton and Wimbledon Streets, use horizontal stringcourses in brick or stone to add visual interest to the front elevation. In others, such as 132-142 Charles Street, the facade combines strong horizontal rhythms (the windows) with more subtle horizontal patterns of light and shade (the brick courses). This latter detail is also to be found in the brickwork of the Odeon Cinema. Pattern is also introduced in other ways - the Three Cranes motif at 84 Humberstone Gate, the black lion tiled panels at the pub of the same name, and various name and date plaques on buildings across the conservation area. All these serve to create the image and character of the area as well as giving it its own identity.

#### *Skyline interest and distant views*

- 6.7 While the 'canyon streets' of Rutland Street and Wimbledon Street have little in the way of skyline interest, Humberstone Gate is particularly rich in the way buildings of different heights are juxtaposed one with another. Views westwards towards the city centre are punctuated by the copper-clad 'witch's hat' and the old Lewis's tower at either end of the new shopping development on Humberstone Gate West while the tower blocks of St Peter's estate can be seen beyond the east end of Queen Street.

Many of the buildings also have a considerable degree of skyline interest, using turrets and gables to project above the eaves and semi-round windows in the upper storeys.

## **7. Building materials**

### *Brick*

- 7.1 The majority of buildings in the conservation area are built of brick, which in most cases is laid in a Flemish bond. The earliest buildings are likely to have been built of locally made bricks, which have a distinctive warm orange-red colour. There are also a number of buildings built in a cream-grey brick which is not necessarily typical of the area but is a locally manufactured brick used throughout the City.
- 7.2 However, the development of the railways, starting with the Leicester-Swannington railway in 1834, allowed bricks to be brought from Whitwick and Ibstock. The development of the Midland railways network during the 1840's, which opened links with the Midlands, the north and London, also allowed bricks and other building materials to be imported from further afield. As a result there is a noticeable distinction between the local orange-red bricks of the early buildings and the darker red bricks used in later buildings.
- 7.3 Many of the buildings also used glazed brick at ground level to provide a cleanable surface and a contrasting plinth. This also adds a reflective surface that provides visual interest at street level. Brick is also frequently used decoratively, either as rubbed or patterned brick features around windows and doors or laid in contrasting courses, often with stone.

### *Roofs:*

- 7.4 Roofs are not particularly prominent, either because of the scale of the buildings or use of parapet walls but where they are visible the most common material is Welsh slate, a material made accessible because of the railways, although there are examples of Swithland slate and tiles.

### *Stone:*

- 7.5 Stone is only used as the principal building material on St George's Church (sandstone) and on the weigh-bridge in Humberstone Gate (Mountsorrel granite). However stone is widely used as a decorative feature to enhance the appearance of the buildings. Many of the buildings were built as warehouses and the owners wanted attractive buildings to impress visiting customers. A large number of buildings therefore incorporate stone either as a structural component, such as plinths or as sandstone and limestone dressings around windows and doors, or as a decorative element, such as balustrading at the upper levels or for sculptural elements such as the Minerva and Mercury figures at 33 Rutland Street.

### *Other Materials*

- 7.6 Apart from brick and stone, other materials can be found in the area either as the principal building material such as the use of terracotta and larvikite on Alexandra

House or as a decorative feature such as the use of faience on the former Odeon cinema. Steel windows are common on many of the twentieth century buildings.

#### *Ironwork*

- 7.7 Cast and wrought iron plays an important role in the area both as a functional and decorative material. A number of iron gates still survive: the churchyard gateway from Colton Street and the gates at the entrance to the former Rowley's factory on Queen Street are particularly good examples. There are also short runs of protective railings to basement windows which add a decorative quality to the street scene, those at Wimbledon House are among the best examples. Lining the path of the St George's Churchyard are bow top railings from the local foundry of S. Wright, probably from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Smaller functional pieces such as the metal tracks and cast iron bollards which were installed to protect the original cart entrances, such as at St George's Mills, have also survived and contribute to the interpretation and character of the area. The slightly 'Art Nouveau'-style entrance gates at Age Concern add a strong decorative element to a busy street.

#### *Glass*

- 7.8 Glass also features as both a prominent and discrete building material. The rear wall of the Pfister and Vogel building at 78-80 Rutland Street is completely glazed within narrow metal glazing bars. On a smaller scale, many of the buildings have leaded windows, such as the Exchange Buildings on Rutland Street and the Spread Eagle public house on Charles Street.

#### *Boundary Treatments*

- 7.9 The characteristic pattern of development in the conservation area is based on building to the edge of the pavement without any front areas. Therefore there are few examples of historic boundary walls or railings. Exceptions include a good redbrick boundary wall with stone caps to Humberstone Road at the side of St George's Mills, the walls flanking the entrance to the churchyard off Rutland Street and the restored boundary wall at Age Concern.

#### *Factory gateways*

- 7.10 The remaining factory gateways are particularly noteworthy features and add considerably to the detailed architectural quality of the conservation area. The gateways generally have ornate surrounds and overthrows and often have decorative ironwork grilles in the gates themselves. Fine examples can be seen at Wimbledon House and Centre House on opposite sides of Queen Street; 76 Rutland Street has a Gothic arch and a delicate wrought iron tympanum and the gateway to St George's Mills in Wimbledon Street is in brick with a moulded-brick segmental pediment.

#### *Paving and ground surfaces*

- 7.11 The roads throughout the conservation area are surfaced in tarmac, as are most footways. There are some fragments of historic paving materials such as the long stretches of Mountsorrel granite kerbs that survive along most of the streets, which should be retained, and wooden setts within the entrance to 98 Rutland Street.

## **8.0 Open spaces and trees**

- 8.1 The intensive nature of development within the conservation area has meant that, apart from a number of vacant sites awaiting redevelopment, the main area of open space within the conservation area is St George's Churchyard. Whilst there are glimpses of the Church and churchyard from a number of locations around the conservation area, the churchyard is largely hidden away behind the adjacent industrial buildings. Its limited road frontage, the principal frontage being to Rutland Street, intensifies this sense of enclosure. However it does provide a relatively well used pedestrian route between Rutland Street, Colton Street and St George Street.
- 8.2 The churchyard itself has a large collection of in-situ headstones, which is increasingly uncommon, in Swithland slate, limestone and sandstone. These not only contribute to the historic and visual value of the space but also provide a record of the history of the parish. Particularly notable are a table tomb, an obelisk and a footed sarcophagus to the west of the Church.
- 8.3 There are very few trees in the conservation area other than within St George's churchyard, which contains over fifty mature lime trees, arranged around the boundaries of the churchyard and alongside the main approaches to the Church. The site also contains mature horse chestnuts, poplar and a weeping ash. Towards the eastern side of the churchyard there are three birch trees in poor condition and a stand of twelve cherry trees.
- 8.4 The large mature trees on the churchyard site give a feeling of maturity and scale that greatly enhances the setting of the church. The birches and cherry trees are less valuable in this respect. Following a recent development proposal adjoining the churchyard, that may have required works to some of the trees, the row of ten limes on the southern boundary of the site have been protected by a Tree Preservation Order.
- 8.5 Immediately to the east of the churchyard, and separated from it by a low wall, is a rectangular area of grass and trees fronting St George Street. This area contains nineteen young and middle age trees, up to 12m in height. Species include lime, birch, whitebeam, rowan, maple, hornbeam and cherry.
- 8.6 Efforts have been made to introduce a greener environment in Humberstone Gate. There are two trees (a plane tree and a maple) near the taxi office and several London Planes in the garden of the Age Concern building. Trees and ground cover shrubs have been planted down the central reservation and serve the useful purpose of softening an otherwise hard urban environment. Elsewhere, a tiny garden has been created at the corner of Yeoman Street and Rutland Street but otherwise opportunities for planting new trees or gardens in the conservation area are limited. The churchyard is managed in part by the City Council, and it may be possible to replace some of the birch and cherry trees by other more suitable specimens. It may also be possible to

achieve tree planting as part of landscaping schemes attached to development proposals, although there is little space available.

## **9.0 Lighting and street furniture**

- 9.1 Recently the street lamps in much of the conservation area have been replaced with new columns and lanterns of a more modern design. Elsewhere standard steel columns are the norm. Litter bins are primarily of the Wybone type and there are several styles of seating. The street furniture on Humberstone Gate is generally uncoordinated, having three styles of lighting, bus shelters of differing designs and a little-used open space at the east end separated from the busy road by specially designed railings. The water feature here is rarely operational owing to abuse and vandalism. The central reservation further west is a mix of concrete bollards, timber knee rails, concrete paving slabs and metal bicycle security rails which is subject to much traffic damage.

## **10.0 Loss of character**

### *Vacant and under-used buildings*

- 10.1 Many of the buildings in the conservation area are vacant and underused. Others have rather tenuous uses and may become vacant in future. This produces a lack of activity in the area, a lack of liveliness in the appearance of buildings and streets, and poor maintenance. An example of the latter problem can be seen at 78-80 Rutland Street where fire damage awaits repair at the time of survey. Even some of the buildings which are in use have empty upper floors and this, combined with a lack of proper maintenance, leads to physical deterioration and infestation by pigeons (for example 37-43 Rutland Street). The boarding-up of the former Odeon cinema provided a particularly dispiriting centre-piece to the conservation area at the time of survey.

### *Vacant site between 76 Halford Street and 68 Rutland Street*

- 10.2 This is a key site in the conservation area but has been vacant for many years and used for car parking. The vacancy of the site leaves the townscape of Rutland Street unresolved and leaves a void at the heart of the conservation area. This is made worse by the views of the side of the multi-storey car park and the rear of properties on Vestry Street that the site affords providing particularly poor termination to the outlook along Queen Street and Southampton Street.

### *Poorly considered alterations to buildings*

- 10.3 Buildings need to adapt to changing circumstances and patterns of use but this has too often been achieved at the cost of the architectural character of the buildings. St George's Mills has bricked-up openings which were presumably made to allow machines to be installed. M&G Joiners in Wimbledon Street have uPVC windows. The ground floor of 37-43 Rutland Street has undergone alterations to the ground floor which detract considerably from its character. Several buildings have been

rendered or painted, obscuring not only fine brick or stonework but also leading to maintenance problems.

*Quality of footway surfaces*

- 10.4 Footway surfaces are mainly tarmac and are visually poor making no positive contribution to the quality of the conservation area. The damaged condition of the Humberstone Gate central reservation has already been mentioned.

*Visual clutter*

- 10.5 The character of the conservation area is adversely affected by general clutter of signs on buildings, traffic signs etc.

*The Former International Hotel*

- 10.6 The scale and presence of the corner tower of this building contributes a strong landmark feature in the character of the conservation area. However the elevations to Wimbledon Street and Rutland Street, while in scale with the buildings around them, do not share their neighbours' quality of detailing and provide lifeless ground floor frontages to the street.

## **11.0 Preserving the character**

- 11.1 This appraisal has shown how the character of the St George's area derives from the setting, layout and relationship of its buildings as well as its history and varied architectural details. It has described how these combine to create a unique place that is worthy of special care and protection. This quality and variety has been recognised by its declaration as a conservation area. The City of Leicester Local Plan (currently under review) also contains policies designed to protect the area's character, for example by ensuring that new development takes account of the scale, form, materials and details of its surroundings. Area Strategy Guidance for the St George's Area was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in June 2001. St George's Church and the former Odeon Cinema are also the subject of adopted Site Development Guidance which provides direction as to the type and form of development that would be expected on the site.
- 11.2 Further protection comes from conservation and planning legislation. Any alterations to, or demolition of, any building or part of a building in the area will need for planning and/or conservation area consent, there being no 'permitted development' rights for industrial or commercial buildings or for flats created as purpose-built units or from conversions. The presence of 12 listed buildings also means that Listed Building Consent would be required for any works to those particular properties.
- 11.3 The details of individual buildings are also important in forming the character of the area and, generally, their wholesale loss could detract from the special quality of the area as well as the building. Owners should therefore be encouraged to retain the original appearance through careful restoration and repair.



## 12.0 Conservation area boundary

- 12.1 Periodically the Council is required to review the boundaries of conservation areas and to consider changing them as appropriate. The boundaries of the St George's Conservation Area have therefore been re-assessed and five extensions are proposed. These, and the reasons for their inclusion, are set out below.

### *Area 1*

- 12.2 The range of buildings fronting Charles Street between Rutland Street and Church Street represent the fronts of many of the buildings that back onto the south side of Colton Street. Inclusion of this range of buildings would thus bring both sides of Colton Street into the conservation area giving additional protection to the townscape qualities of that street. The frontage to Charles Street was developed entirely in the 1930s when Charles Street was widened to provide a route for the A6 traffic through the City Centre. The buildings which front the new street were in a variety of styles ranging from Neo-Georgian in the pubs, at either end, through stripped down classical at 118 (winner of an RIBA award in 1933) and the baroque of 124 (Cherub Knitwear). The whole group forms an impressive ensemble and would sit comfortably within the eclecticism of the rest of the conservation area.

### *Area 2*

- 12.3 This area covers the shopping street of Humberstone Gate. Its inclusion would not only give some protection to a number of unlisted but, nonetheless interesting, buildings in the area but would also protect an important part of Leicester's commercial, industrial and social heritage.

### *Area 3*

- 12.4 The 1930s Central Police Station is important to the townscape, character and appearance of Charles Street. It is an important landmark corner building with strong visual and architectural links to *Area 1*. Its inclusion in the conservation area would represent a logical extension at this point.

### *Area 4*

- 12.5 This small area comprises two buildings from the 1920s and 1930s and is thus contemporaneous with *Areas 1* and *3*. The inclusion of this area would therefore be an appropriate reflection of the history of Charles Street.

### *Area 5*

- 12.6 This extension of the conservation area is proposed so that the rear service yard to Wimbledon Mills can be included. The industrial building between it and the building to the south (which is already in the conservation area) is therefore a logical addition.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### *List of Buildings within the existing and proposed Conservation Area boundaries*

Charles Street	118-142 Police Station
Church Street	2 (Spread Eagle), 4
Clyde Street	2
Colton Street	Mosaic (formerly Leics Guild for Disabled People), 57, 2, 4, Electricity Sub-Station, former Cherub Factory, 26, 36-38, 40
Eldon Street	8
Erskine Street	9-15 (odd)
Halford Street	41, 59-67 (odd), 68-76(even)
Humberstone Gate	49-81 (odd), 40-84 (even), 93, Taxi Station
Humberstone Road	International Hotel, 8-32 (even)
Morledge Street	22, service yard to Wimbledon Street
Queen Street	Queen Street Apartments, BL Scaffolding (former Hide & Skin Market)
Rutland Street	29-43 (odd), Odeon Cinema, 47, 57 (former International Hotel), 24-50 (even), 68-96 (even), St George's Church
St James Street	1-5 (odd)
Southampton Street	1
Wharf Street	2-6 (even), 1
Wimbledon Street	Wimbledon House, Centre House, St George's Mills
Yeoman Street	

## Appendix 2

### *Listed Buildings*

Charles Street	Police Station	Grade II
Colton Street	Mosaic (former Leicestershire Disabled Guild)	Grade II
Humberstone Gate	Taxi Station (former weighbridge)	Grade II
	46 (Clarence House)	Grade II
	73-75 (The Secular Hall)	
Rutland Street	29 (former Tyler House)	Grade II
	47 (Alexandra House)	Grade II
	78-80 (former Pfister and Vogel)	Grade II
	Former Odeon Cinema	Grade II
	St George's Church	Grade C
	34-50 (Exchange Buildings)	Grade II
	37-43	Grade II

### Appendix 3

#### *Tree Preservation Orders*

St George's Church, Rutland Street      Date 09.08.01      Ref. No.      N4.349

### Appendix 4

#### *Glossary of architectural terms<sup>4</sup>*

Atlantes	carved stone figures of men or half-men used instead of columns to support an architectural feature
blind arcading	a range of decorative arches on the face of a building
brackets	a small support to carry a projecting weight
cornice	horizontal projecting section at the top of a building or wall
crenellated	alternate high and low walls on a parapet (resembling battlements)
cupola	a dome on a roof or turret
faience	glazed decorated pottery tiles
flèche	slender spire rising from the ridge of a roof
oriel	a curved bay window projecting at an upper floor level
pediment	a low pitched gable over a door or window
pilaster	a shallow column projecting slightly from, and attached to, a wall
relieving arch	an arch built above an opening to redistribute weight
stringcourse	a continuous decorative horizontal band projecting from a wall and usually moulded
tracery	ornamental stone or metal openwork in window opening

---

<sup>4</sup> variously from *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture* (1981), *A Dictionary of Building* (Penguin, 1969) and *The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* (1998)