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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this character statement is (a) to identify, define and record the factors that make Church Gate an area of architectural or historic interest, and (b) to assess the action that may be necessary to safeguard that special interest. The appraisal also identifies those features or problems that detract from the quality of the area and the Character Statement includes proposals and policies for the management of the area so that its character can be preserved and enhanced.
- 1.2 The survey and appraisal of the conservation area was carried out during 2005 following the methodology suggested by English Heritage. Following consultation with local people and other interested parties the completed Character Statement will be presented to the Cabinet of Leicester City Council for formal adoption in January 2006.
- 1.3 The proposed conservation area lies just to the east of the walls that surrounded Leicester in ancient and medieval times. Its core is Church Gate, a route that developed to provide the townspeople with access to the medieval St Margaret's church and that later became the main north-south road that served the town.

2.0 Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 Protection and/or preservation of historic environments is now extensively recognised for the contribution they make to the country's cultural inheritance, economic well-being and quality of life. Public support for conservation areas as places that give identity to people and communities is well established. National legislation and regional guidance reflects this.
- 2.2 The concept of 'conservation areas' was first introduced in national legislation in 1967 in the Civic Amenities Act which defined a conservation area as "*an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*". It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in ways that maintain and, if possible, strengthen an area's special qualities.
- 2.3 Current legislation governing conservation areas is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This places a duty on local planning authorities to declare as conservation areas those parts of their area that they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest [s.69(1)]. It also imposes on them a duty to review past designations from time to time [s.69(2)].
- 2.4 The City Council also has a duty to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of each Conservation Area [s.71(1) of that 1990 Act], and must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of the area when determining planning applications [s.72(1)].
- 2.5 There are also some stricter controls on changes that can be made to buildings and land in conservation areas. These include the need for permission to demolish a building or part of a building, strengthened controls over some minor forms of development (such as replacing doors and windows in non-domestic buildings), and the automatic protection of all trees. There is also normally a presumption in favour of retaining buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

2.6 The East Midlands Regional Strategy also confirms the importance of conservation in its environment policy EN1: 'to protect, improve and manage the rich diversity of the natural and built environmental and archaeological assets of the Region'. Similar policies are included in the City of Leicester Local Plan and Replacement Local Plan (see Appendix 5).

3.0 Definition of the special interest

3.1 Although it has few outstanding architectural features and, indeed, some poorly designed buildings and other physical alterations, the Church Gate area outlined on Map 2 nevertheless possesses an environment and quality that contribute significantly to an understanding of the history of Leicester. Its buildings and spaces help to explain why and how the city developed and the part Church Gate played, and plays, in its commercial life.

3.2 The area's special interest can be defined as follows:

- The area is of historic and archaeological importance, particularly as it relates to Leicester's early suburbs and the Roman and medieval town;
- It preserves the ancient links to the medieval St Margaret's Church including the dramatic views of the church from the south;
- It includes several listed buildings, including one of the town's earliest brick buildings (the Great Meeting Chapel) and an unusual timber warehouse (66 Church Gate);
- Townscape features such as the sinuous building lines of Church Gate and Short Street create strong feelings of enclosure and 'place';
- Church Gate's densely built-up narrow plots reflect the ancient pattern of 'burgage' plots in the area;
- The historic street pattern and layout remain largely intact;
- There is a high level of visual interest created by the varying heights and styles of development as well as a consistency of materials reflective of Leicester's 19th century development history;

4.0 Assessment of the Special Interest

Location and setting

4.1 The proposed Church Gate Conservation Area (Map 2) is located immediately to the north-west of the Clock Tower. It comprises Church Gate itself and is bounded on the west side by East Bond Street, to the north by Darker Street, Butt Close Lane and Gravel Street and by Sandacre Street/Mansfield Street to the east. It covers an area of just under 4 hectares (10 acres).

4.2 It is located on a low river gravel terrace of the River Soar, which is about 500m to the north. The ground slopes, sharply at first, north-westwards towards the Soar, falling from a height of 61 metres above sea level at the Clock Tower to 56m at the junction of Church Gate and Gravel Street.

Historic development and archaeology

4.3 Little is known about the early history of the Church Gate area. However, records from the mid 7th to the late 9th centuries suggest that there might have been a church on the site of the present St Margaret's Church. Leicester was then part of the Kingdom of Mercia and was the seat of a Bishop whose Cathedral Church could have been St Margaret's. After the fall of Mercia, Leicester was incorporated into the 'Danelaw' and the bishopric was moved to the Kingdom of

Wessex (to Dorchester-on-Thames). Evidence for its early Danish links is in its name; the 'Gate' in "*Church Gate*" derives from the Danish word '*gata*' for "road". The road itself originated as a lane that ran just outside Leicester's eastern boundary walls (which consisted of a rampart, wall and double ditch structure) and linked St Margaret's Church with the town's East Gate. After the Norman Conquest in the 11th century the bishopric moved from Dorchester back to the East Midlands but centred on Lincoln. The Domesday survey records, however, that the Bishop of Lincoln retained two churches in Leicester, one of which may well have been St Margaret's.

- 4.4 A suburban extension of the town in the Church Gate area is documented from the late 13th century and tenements are recorded abutting the town walls and ditch in the late 14th century, although the extent of the development is not known. During the 15th century a King's commission (in 1493) records that the wall was broken and that stones had been removed. It is likely that, at that time, the ditches were being filled in and that buildings were being built on top of them. It is during the 15th century that the first written reference to the name "*Church Gate*" is found (in 1478), when it was recorded as a lane leading onto Sanvey Gate, which ran east-west just outside the north wall.
- 4.5 The first maps of Leicester in the early 17th century (Speede's map of 1610, for example) show that development was somewhat scattered rather than continuous along Church Gate. The area around Sanvey Gate and the northern end of Church Gate is low-lying and suffered frequent flooding at that time, rendering it unattractive for building. This remained the situation into the 18th century when the pavements on Church Gate were raised in 1744 to avoid flooding. Even well into the 19th century the area was noted for its poor sanitation, a circumstance as much to do with its liability to flooding as to the lack of proper sewers.
- 4.6 In the 18th century Leicester was still a small town and there was little incentive or need to build on its unattractive parts such as Church Gate. An important exception was the construction in 1707 of the Great Meeting Chapel on East Bond Street. It is possible that East Bond Street (or "Goldsmith's Grave" as it is shown on Roberts' map of 1741) was chosen because non-Conformists, with their radical political and religious views, had to maintain a discreet presence in the town. A 'backland' site would have been seen as an ideal location. Roberts' map (Map 3) also indicates that most of the northern half of the walled town consisted of open land. A single row of buildings fronted onto the southern end of Church Gate and East Bond Street (then known as Swine Market) with back lanes leading into open land, possibly laid out as orchards and gardens. St Margaret's Church was set within open fields although Great Meeting Chapel (1707) had been established.
- 4.7 In the 16th century Elizabeth I donated an area of open land to the freemen of Leicester for archery practice. On this 'butts' or shooting marks were erected and the activity is recorded in the name Butt Close Lane which now runs approximately along the southern edge. The butt close survived until the 19th century. A survivor from the 18th century is No.11-13 Church Gate (the date 1717 can be seen at first floor level) indicates the modest scale of development on Church Gate at that time. By the 18th century, and due primarily to the restriction created by the East Gate, Sanvey Gate and Church Gate had become the main coach route into the town from the west. The former Fish & Quart Hotel (now 63 Church Gate), for example, originated as a coaching inn. A single line of buildings had also been built along East Bond Street (then known as Swine Market).

- 4.8 By the time the East Gate was finally removed in 1773 the centre of the town had gravitated from the High Cross towards East Gates and Church Gate. The improvement of the Harborough Turnpike route to London, which ran via Gallowtree Gate had also encouraged development at the southern end of Church Gate. The site of the present Clock Tower was therefore a major junction. Originally a mound known variously as the *Berehill or Berehill Cross* (medieval) or the '*Barrell Crosse*' (Speede's map of 1610), the 1741 map shows a group of buildings (Coal Hill) in the centre of the crossroads, just outside the East Gate. Assembly Rooms with shops on the ground floor (referred to historically as the "Old Haymarket") were built on the site in 1750 and these were not demolished until 1862 when the building became too much of an obstacle to traffic; it was replaced by the Clock Tower in 1868.
- 4.9 Although the street pattern had been established, there was still only a limited amount of development in the area at the beginning of the 19th century. Fowler's map of 1828 (Map 4) shows a single line of buildings fronting Church Gate, with back lanes and open land to the rear. St Margaret's Church still stood in open fields. Many of the properties on the east side of Church Gate, notably beyond Mansfield Street, still reflect the burgage plot layout with a narrow plot and outbuildings accessed by a rear lane. Apart from Great Meeting, the only other building that is identified is St Margaret's church school, built on the site of the archery butts in 1809 (and demolished in 1928). Development had, however, commenced to the east of Church Gate along Archdeacon Lane and the first buildings along Mansfield Street and Short Street can be identified.
- 4.10 The growth of the boot and shoe and hosiery industries from the 1830s onwards led to the expansion of Leicester and the widespread development of the area. Spencer's map of 1857 suggests that land on either side of Church Gate had now been developed and the majority of buildings in the conservation area date from the 1840s onwards. The hosier's house and workshop at 3 Darker Street dates from this period. To the east of Church Gate, a largely lower working class district developed around Burleys Lane, with numerous small and cramped housing courts. Trade directories and the 1st (1886) edition of the Ordnance Survey (Map 5) provide more detail and indicate a number of small-scale commercial businesses operating along Church Gate, probably with the proprietor living above.
- 4.11 There was also a number of inns and workshops and some housing courts to the rear. A horse tramway was laid along Church Gate in 1875 but was replaced by electric trams along the newly-widened High Street in 1904. The 1886 plan also shows that large scale industrial uses had become established in the area. These included hosiery and footwear – some of the buildings of which survive - as well as heavier industrial works. The west side of Bond Street was dominated by Fielding Johnson's Bond Street Mills, which remained until the early 1970s.
- 4.11 Of the other streets in the conservation area, Butt Close Lane is shown simply as a lane on Roberts' plan of 1741. It cuts across the line of the town wall and ditch, which today is marked by the rise in level. By 1886, there was a terrace of buildings along the whole of the north side, of which only The Salmon public house at the corner of Blake Street now survives. On the south side, the burial ground of the Great Meeting Chapel now provides the only open space in the area. On the east side of Church Gate, Mansfield Street is shown as a lane within open land on the 1741 plan, but is named on the 1828 map and with buildings along the north side. Short Street is also identified on the 1828 map and the

buildings that enclose it are surviving examples of the early industrialisation of Leicester. Gravel Street, however, was extended through to Church Gate in the 1930s, probably to access St Margaret's bus station.

4.12 Several sites, particularly along Church Gate, were redeveloped in the early part of the 20th century, when the old housing courts were cleared. The area became commercial in character with a range of shops, businesses and factories. By the 1960s, Church Gate had become a secondary shopping location and its less attractive location is probably why there was only a limited amount of redevelopment at that time.

4.13 The developments that had the greatest impact on the character of Church Gate were the construction of the inner ring road in the late 1960s and the Shires shopping centre in the 1990s. The ring road followed the line of Archdeacon Lane/Burleys Lane but was eight lanes wide and severed the lower (city) end of Church Gate from the church itself. The later addition of St Peter's Lane in the 1970s to link the ring road to Mansfield Street further isolated the northern end of Church Gate. The Shires development also involved the loss of all the buildings on the west side of New Bond Street including a fine Working Men's Club and a pair of early 19th century buildings on Church Gate (Nos. 6 & 8).

4.14 Character Analysis

Character zones (see Map 6)

4.15 The conservation area is not homogeneous; different parts are used and perceived in different ways. Although it is small, three distinct zones can be identified, each of which has particular features or townscape characteristics that set it apart from its neighbours and add to the experience of the area to those passing through it. The three zones are identified below and will be used in the assessment of the area's architectural character and key unlisted buildings (section 4.3.4 below)

- The 'commercial', or busy, zone on Church Gate
- The 'quiet' zone around The Greet Meeting Chapel and Butt Close Lane
- The 'industrial' zone between Short Street and Sandacre Street

Prevailing and former uses

4.16 Remnants of the area's medieval origins can be seen in Church Gate and New Bond Street where many buildings still stand on the narrow plots that were a feature of urban form at that time. This feature is particularly obvious on the 1886 Ordnance Survey. The residential, industrial and coaching inn uses that once lined the street in the 18th and 19th centuries have now largely gone and Church Gate, the area's main thoroughfare, has been relegated to its present role as a secondary shopping street in the city centre. Traditionally an area of small businesses, the conservation area has nevertheless managed to retain that character, although rents have increased sharply and several characteristic small shops have closed as a result. The few, more grandly designed, former industrial buildings that punctuate the street are now converted, horizontally and vertically, for shops and service uses. Generally, however, businesses remain small scale or specialist in nature.

- 4.17 The number of shoppers and pedestrians on Church Gate creates gives the street a very active and busy 'feel'. Its small-scale intimate character is, however, changing as shops are amalgamated to create larger units. The intensity of use of the area has also changed over recent years with larger-scale leisure uses replacing the area's historic associations with smaller coaching inns and public houses. There is a marked contrast between the daytime and night-time activities and uses in Church Gate. Longer licensing hours and an altered 'bar culture' are contributing to increased daytime noise levels, as are sound systems in the shops. The night-time economy has also grown considerably and nightclubs and bars contribute much towards perceived and real problems of public safety. This has impacted on the image of the area, generally to its detriment.
- 4.18 The Supplementary Planning Guidance on 'Class A3 Uses for the City Centre' (adopted 2003) suggest specifically that Church Gate is likely to be unsuitable for new residential uses because of the present high concentration of A3 and leisure uses.
- 4.19 In contrast, the environs of New Bond Street, East Bond Street and Butt Close Lane have retained a quieter, more reflective character that is reinforced by the 'greener' aspect created by the trees around the Great Meeting Chapel.
- 4.20 The character changes again along Mansfield Street and Short Street, which were traditionally industrial streets. Here the buildings reflect the small-scale industrialisation of Leicester in the first half of the 19th century.

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 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 area.*

- 4.21 The principal characteristic of the conservation area is the narrow streets that still largely reflect the medieval street pattern, a feature that is generally uncommon in the city. The area's buildings, many of which are relatively ordinary examples of vernacular architecture, are built in a variety of scales and designs but their proximity to the street creates a strong sense of enclosure. Church Gate makes a particularly interesting visual statement both in the intense sense of enclosure that the buildings create at the Clock Tower end and in the way in which its uneven built edges frame the distant view of St Margaret's Church.
- 4.22 The majority of buildings date from the 19th century onwards, but there are some earlier known survivors (suggested by the proportions of the windows) and other buildings which may preserve earlier elements hidden beneath later fabric. Although there has been some redevelopment, a number of historic buildings survive, often in groups, and it is the contribution of these groups of sometimes modestly designed buildings that helps create a distinctive townscape. Particularly along Church Gate, and to a lesser extent East Bond Street, the variety in the height and scale of the buildings creates strong visual interest and reflects the piecemeal development of the area over the past three centuries. Ranging between two and four-stories, the changes in roof lines and chimney heights create a varied, almost jumbled, skyline, with gable ends alternately visible. This is one of the area's strongest visual features.

Area 1 : the commercial zone

- 4.23 Starting at the Clock Tower, the four-storey **Church Gate Tavern**, built as the Cricket Players Hotel in the 1870s, is constructed in silver-grey brick - an unusual building material for Leicester - and has fine Classical mouldings to the stone window surrounds. Alongside, **(11-13 Church Gate)** are a pair of early 18th century properties – the date “1717” is picked out in vitrified brick at first floor level. The 1886 Ordnance Survey indicates that the building was then the Windmill Inn, but a plaque on the building records that it was previously a coffee house run by Thomas Cooper, one of the leading figures in the Chartist movement of the 1830s-40s. Although the ground floor has been extensively altered, the buildings are of considerable significance as an example of 18th century brickwork and retain a Swithland slate roof. Next to them is a very fine four-storey building **(15-21 Church Gate)** dating from the early part of the 20th century and built in Queen Anne style in red brick with stone dressings; the semi-circular windows are surrounded by brick and stone voussoirs on the top floor. The 1886 plan shows the site as comprising an inn (the *Coachmakers Arms*) with an entrance to a housing court at the rear.
- 4.24 The former Loughborough House inn **(29 Church Gate)** probably dates from the late 18th century and was built as a coaching inn; it has particularly attractive oriel windows on the first floor. Alongside **(33-39 Church Gate)** is a good group of three-storey Georgian buildings, which retain their original timber sash windows on the upper floors; the projecting clock outside No.37 is a particularly attractive feature of the street. No.39 retains its original small pane timber sash windows on the upper floors, although it is unfortunate that the brickwork at some time has been painted. Next door **Nos.41-47** is a group of small, 18th century buildings, with a good, rugged Swithland slate roof, although their appearance is marred by replacement upvc windows. Between these and the former Broughton’s ironmongers at the corner of Mansfield Street **(No. 59 Church Gate)** is an infill of 1960s shops which, although of little architectural merit, respect the height and scale of their neighbours. **No. 59 Church Gate**, is a two-storey 19th century building, extended at the rear so that it attractively turns the corner into Mansfield Street; it has retained its original timber windows on the upper floor but has been re-roofed in concrete tiles.
- 4.25 **No.61 Church Gate**, at the corner of Mansfield Street, is a small three-storey 18th century building which complements in height and scale the building opposite and together they provide an attractive street corner. Although the ground floor has been altered and the chimney stack removed, it has retained timber sash windows on the upper floors. Alongside is the former Fish & Quart public house **(63 Church Gate)**, an 18th century coaching inn that had stables and outbuildings at the rear. Although it has been extensively altered in recent years, it is an important historic landmark on Church Gate. Next to it, and creating an interesting contrast in scale, are **Nos. 67-71 Church Gate**, a group of small 18th century buildings. Again original windows survive on the upper floor and the tall, prominent chimney stacks retain their original pots. The shopfront to No.67 has original curved brackets to the fascia. The properties are separated by an archway leading to a yard in which can be found an original public weighbridge; the buildings at the rear have been attractively converted.
- 4.26 **73 Church Gate** is, in comparison, probably the most architecturally distinctive building on Church Gate. It is built in red brick with stone detailing, twin pedimented gables, a large recessed central window and a stone balustrade. It was built in the late 1890s as a house (Hasledene) and offices for a local builder,

on a site identified as part of Goodwin & Barsby's iron foundry on the 1886 Ordnance Survey. It was subsequently used as an adult school, offices, a nightclub and has now been converted into shops. Next to it, **No.75 Church Gate** is an attractively proportioned, three storey Victorian warehouse that has been recently converted into a restaurant and flats but with unsympathetic upvc windows on the upper floors. Finally on the east side of Church Gate, the premises occupied by Langton's (**81 Church Gate**) at the corner of Gravel Street are of interest. They were built as a garage (Castle's Motors) in the 1930s, probably at the time when Gravel Street was extended. It is in Art deco style – popular for such uses at that time - and features a tower that acts as a prominent local landmark.

4.27 **Nos. 12-18 Church Gate** form a good three-storey Georgian terrace of shops with residential accommodation on the upper floors. They have recessed windows set in stone surrounds with smaller openings on the third floor and prominent chimney stacks. **No. 30 Church Gate** is a big, three storey late-Victorian factory, built in Classical Italianate style and identified as Lowe & Son's "Fancy Hosiery Works" on the 1886 map. The ground floor has rusticated stone pilasters and acts as a landmark feature in the street. Unfortunately the appearance of the building is adversely affected by the paint that has been applied to the brickwork. There is also a three-storey workshop to the rear and a distinctive chimney, an attractive feature that can be glimpsed on the skyline. Alongside, is **32 Church Gate**, an interesting three-storey twin gabled property, dating from the late 19th century with a workshop at the rear. The buildings were in use as a leather-belt factory until the 1960s (H Pretty & Sons Victoria Works) before being converted into a shop. In contrast, alongside is a group of smaller early 19th buildings (**Nos. 34-44 Church Gate**) the appearance of which is marred by the insertion of replacement windows and the painting of the brickwork. Numbers. 34 & 36 were for many years Oldham's tools shop. **No. 50 Church Gate** is another three storey early 19th century building that would originally have been within a terrace before re-development in the 1960s on one side and the creation of the St Peter's Lane extension on the other left it isolated. The building has been awkwardly extended to turn the corner to face the new road.

4.28 The construction of St Peter's Lane, the form and width of the road junction and the heavy traffic it carries means that the north end of Church Gate appears sadly divorced from the south end of the street. To the rear of Church Gate is the five storey Grade II listed timber warehouse (66 Church Gate) dating from around 1830, built as the office and workshop for a builder and now used as an antiques centre – one of the more unusual and interesting survivors in the area. On the Church Gate side, there is an interesting extension facing the side yard, built in red brick with stone bay windows and Art Nouveau detailing. It adjoins an imposing late Victorian factory (**No. 74-76 Church Gate**), built as Jennings' boot and shoe manufacturers, with a plaque dating the building as 1877. Although the ground and first floor windows have been altered, the upper floors have retained their original small pane windows. It forms a good landmark entrance feature to Church Gate from the north and attractively (and prominently) turns the corner into Butt Close Lane.

Area 2 : the quiet zone

4.29 At the corner of Butt Close Lane and Blake Street, **The Salmon** is a good, surviving example of a Victorian street corner public house. To the rear, **No.3 Darker Street** is a rare example of a hosier master's house and workshop, built

around 1850 and pre-dating the large-scale industrialisation that was to occur within a few years; the house and workshop are Grade II listed. On the south side of Butt Close Lane, the boundary wall to the **Great Meeting Chapel** reveals a very early section of rubble walling at the base – reputed to be stone from the town wall. Above the plinth is 18th century brickwork - the small, hand-made bricks being typical of the period. The burial ground to the Chapel, accessed from Butt Close Lane, was landscaped in the 1990s and provides an attractive area of open space – the only such space within the conservation area. Alongside, the side elevation of the timber warehouse is a strong visual feature.

East Bond Street

4.30 **Great Meeting Chapel** is one of the earliest brick buildings (1707) of any importance in the city, built in a plain but solid manner with stucco detailing and a steeply-pitched slate roof. It became a Unitarian chapel in the 19th century and the front projection probably dates from that period. Alongside, the former schoolrooms date from 1859 and are built in red and yellow brick in Gothic Revival style, with pointed arch windows; it has been linked to the chapel with an attractive extension, clearly modern but echoing the style of the buildings. The adjacent **Cherry Tree** public house is an attractive three-storey former hotel that can be identified on the 1828 plan. It would originally have been within a row of buildings but the construction of the St Peter's Lane extension in the 1970s and has left it standing in isolation.

4.31 On the south side of St Peter's Lane, there are several groups of properties on **East Bond Street and New Bond Street** that create an attractive streetscene facing the blank side elevation and delivery yard of The Shires shopping centre. Notable buildings include **Nos. 21- 25 East Bond Street**, a prominent three-storey building dating from the early 20th century in Classical style, with a semi-circular pediment above the entrance and original timber windows recessed behind deep pilaster. **Nos. 9-15 East Bond Street** is another distinctive group of 19th century buildings, featuring original windows on the first floor and a steeply pitched roof with attractive dormers and prominent chimney-stacks, but again marred by painted brickwork. **Nos. 3-7 East Bond Street** is an earlier group of 19th century buildings with good upper floor detailing and original windows. They form a "crank" in the building line with New Bond Street.

Bond Street area

4.32 The overall character of the south end of East Bond Street and New Bond Street was adversely affected with the construction of The Shires shopping centre in the early 1990s. Not only was the entrance into East Gates severed, thus destroying the connection with the rest of the city centre, but the west side of the street was demolished and the street widened, further damaging the townscape.

Area 3 : the industrial zone

4.33 The buildings along Mansfield Street and Short Street are of importance as survivors of the early large-scale industrialisation of Leicester in the mid-19th century. Particularly important are the buildings along the **east side of Short Street** and the three-storey former warehouse at the corner of Mansfield Street (**32 Mansfield Street**), which dates from the early 19th century. The narrow width of Short Street creates a character and sense of enclosure that is unique in Leicester. Despite alterations to the windows on the Mansfield Street side, the contrast of scale between the workshops on the west side of Short Street and the three storey factory on the east side (**No.6 Mansfield Street**) is visually interesting. Further along, the three storey former warehouse at **36 Mansfield**

Street now stands isolated following the demolition of the buildings alongside; nevertheless, it makes a positive contribution to the street and, with good brick detailing and recessed windows, has a strong vertical rhythm.

Building materials and the public realm

Brick

- 4.34 The majority of buildings in the conservation area are built of brick. The earliest buildings are likely to have been built of locally made bricks, which have a distinctive warm orange-red colour; the first floor of 11-13 Church Gate is an attractive example of early brickwork.
- 4.35 The development of the railway network from the 1840s onwards 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 regular sized, machine-made darker red bricks used in the later Victorian buildings. This contrast in colour and size of the bricks is apparent when comparing Nos. 11-13 Church Gate and the early 20th century building alongside (Nos. 15-21).
- 4.36 There is also a limited use of lighter coloured bricks, notably the silver-grey bricks used for the Church Gate public house. This is not a common local building material.

Timber

- 4.37 Timber is still the most commonly used material for windows and roof eaves in the conservation area but at the rear of 66 Church Gate a unique and spectacular warehouse is constructed entirely in weatherboarded timber throughout its upper four storeys.

Roofs

- 4.38 The roofs of most of the smaller buildings within the conservation area are visible from the street. Some of the early buildings have retained a Swithland slate roof (notably Nos. 41-45 Church Gate). However, with the coming of the railways, Welsh slate became more widely used from the middle of the 19th century onwards and is the predominant roofing material in the area. Welsh slate cleaves more easily than local Swithland slate and roofs covered in it are noticeably less rugged.

Stone

- 4.39 The use of stone as a building material is not found within the conservation area, although stone detailing is used on some of the grander buildings.

Windows

- 4.40 The original windows to buildings in the area would have been made of timber, usually sliding sash. The top floor windows on Georgian buildings are often smaller in size than those on the first floor and are an indication of the likely age of the building. Some windows have also retained small panes of glass typical of 18th and early 19th century windows, while others are recessed behind the front of the building, a requirement of the Building Act of 1776 to prevent the spread of fire. Some properties have bay windows on the upper floors, which became fashionable from the 1870s onwards and replaced earlier sash windows, an example being at 35-39 Church Gate. A number of windows have recently been replaced in upvc.

Greenery and open spaces

- 4.41 The only area of open space within the conservation area is the former burial ground to Great Meeting Chapel. The burial ground was landscaped by the City Council in the early 1990s and provides an attractive space within the area.
- 4.42 Although the conservation area is not well provided with trees, there are some notable specimens that make an important contribution to the appearance and character of the area. Of particular value are the large, mature plane trees and limes on the East Bond Street side of Great Meeting Chapel. There are additional mature plane trees and two Indian bean trees within the burial ground which are protected by a Tree Preservation Order. At the corner of Butt Close Lane and East Bond Street are a large ash and lime that are close to the church building.
- 4.43 There are also some significant trees within the highway fronting St Peter's Lane. These include two cherry trees, sycamores, a maple and an ornamental thorn. There is also a mature Sorbus and mid-age sycamore and maple trees in front of advert hoardings. Of most interest, however, is a foxglove tree - an unusual tree in the city.
- 4.44 There are also important trees around the Matalan car park. These include four plane trees on the Church Gate frontage and several mature cherry trees and younger rowans on Butt Close Lane. The planes help to soften the appearance of the car park although the cherries and rowans are of limited value and could be better replaced by fewer, more substantial trees.
- 4.45 Along Church Gate there are several fastigate hornbeam trees in circular planters that were introduced as part of the pedestrianisation in the early 1990.

Negative factors

- 4.46 The appraisal has identified buildings that make positive contributions to the character and appearance of the conservation area. However, there are many examples of other changes, both large and small, that have begun to erode the special quality of the area.

Existing buildings and new development

- 4.47 There has been a limited amount of infill redevelopment within the conservation area, mostly in the late 1960s and 1970s. Most of the new buildings reflect the prevailing scale and proportions of the historic buildings in the area. However, the four storey block close to the junction with St Peter's Lane (46-48 Church Gate) is poorly detailed and proportioned, with a flat roof not in keeping with the roof line. Overall this building detracts from the historic streetscene. Similarly, the two-storey 1960s shops on the opposite side (Nos.49-51 Church Gate) have long horizontal windows which fail to respect the proportions of the facades in the rest of the street. Nearby, the Inland Revenue offices on Causeway Lane dominate the street scene and have a generally detrimental effect on the setting of the area's most important listed building, the Great Meeting Chapel.

Bars and night-clubs

- 4.48 Church Gate has several bars and nightclubs in and around it and has become the focus of the 'night-time economy'. This has created particular problems which have not only affected the appearance of some buildings (such as 63 Church Gate) but have had a detrimental effect on the 'image' and perceived safety of the area.

Building materials

- 4.449 The predominant building material within the conservation area is red brick, with a limited amount of stone detailing. Other materials and colours have been used in the area and these stand out as 'alien' features.

Shopfronts

- 4.50 A large number of properties along Church Gate have installed replacement shopfronts. Although buildings need to adapt to changing circumstances and patterns of use, this has often been achieved at the cost of the architectural and historic character of the buildings. Many of the modern shopfronts along Church Gate are unsympathetically designed with overly deep fascias, using inappropriate materials that are not in keeping with the character of the rest of the building. Particularly poor examples are the shopfronts to the 18th century buildings at 11-13 Church Gate. In many locations solid security shutters have also been added and this has not only adversely affected the appearance of the buildings but has also created a depressing image when they are closed.

Signs and street clutter

- 4.51 A particular feature of Church Gate is the number and variety of signs to commercial premises. Historically, some of these have been at high level. However, several recently erected signs – notably to hot food takeaways - are overly large and garish and are not sympathetic to the proportions of the building on which they are displayed. A further feature which creates a negative appearance is the number of traffic direction and information signs, which creates a cluttered appearance, particularly at the junction of Church Gate and St Peter's Lane/Mansfield Street.

- 4.52 Because of the narrow width of the street, a number of street lights on Church Gate are fixed at high level on buildings. This has the advantage of reducing clutter. Some replica "Victorian" lighting columns have also been erected. However, the general quality and condition of the road surface, litter bins and planters is poor and out-dated. 'A' boards outside shops add to the cluttered and untidy appearance.

Replacement windows and doors

- 4.53 A number of original timber windows - especially on upper floors – have been replaced with upvc units, particularly over the past 10 years. Not only is upvc an alien material on 18th and 19th century buildings it cannot replicate the proportions, intricacy or fine detailing of the original timber windows. Upvc windows have also tended to be installed at the forward edges of window openings rather than being fully recessed. This results in a loss of texture, rhythm and subtle shadows and 'flattens' the façade. The windows installed at Nos. 41-43 Church Gate are an example where the character of an 18th century building has been compromised. Many new windows, even those made of timber, have outward opening 'mock' sashes, and these disrupt the visual rhythm of a terrace.

Replacement roofs

- 4.54 Although not widespread, some properties have been re-roofed in non-original materials, such as concrete tiles or artificial slates; particular examples are 59 Church Gate and former workshops on Mansfield Street. The appearance of these roofs generally fails to match the profile and definition of a natural slate roof and are detrimental both to the appearance and character of the individual building and as the streetscene generally.

Painting of brickwork

- 4.55 The brickwork on several buildings, particularly along Church Gate, has been painted, usually white. Not only does this destroy the red brick character of the street but it also results in the need for regular and on-going maintenance. The application of paint can also cause damage to the brickwork as it traps moisture.

Vacant buildings

- 4.56 Several buildings on Short Street, notably the former warehouse at the corner of Mansfield Street, are vacant. The hosier master's house and workshop at the corner of Darker Street and Blake Street is a listed building at risk that urgently requires a sympathetic new use.
- 4.57 Some upper floors on Church Gate and East Bond Street are vacant. The lack of occupation of upper floors can lead to actual, as well as an appearance of, neglect if they are not properly maintained. This in turn can lead to deterioration in the building fabric.

Car parks

- 4.58 There are three surface level car parks in the conservation area – one serving Matalan on the site of the former Butts on Church Gate, another on Mansfield Street and a third at the Butt Close Lane/East Bond Street. All detract from the appearance of the conservation area and sympathetic redevelopment would be preferable. There is also a private car park on St Peter's Lane that is screened by advert hoardings.

Vacant sites

- 4.59 The only demolition site within the conservation area is at the corner of Gravel Street and Short Street. Demolition of the building on this site and delay in redevelopment is regrettable and is detrimental to the appearance of the area.

Advertisement Hoardings

- 4.60 There are two sets of advertisement hoardings within the conservation area, both on the extension to St Peter's Lane. One hoarding screens a car park and so has some beneficial effect. However, the hoardings on the north side of St Peter's Lane, by partly obscuring the Great Meeting Chapel and its grounds, are a detriment to the area's visual amenity.

The public realm

- 4.61 The Council undertook repaving with brick paviors and installed planter beds, trees and an information board when Church Gate was part-pedestrianised during the 1980s. Unfortunately, the appearance of the streetscape has been affected by vandalism, poor maintenance and illegal parking on the footway. It is now dirty with cracked and uneven surfaces. The colours that have been used have also tended to detract from, rather than enhance, the appearance of the area and overall red and blue brick pavers may, in hindsight, have been a bad choice for this street.

General condition of the area and buildings

- 4.62 In general the condition of the buildings in the area is acceptable although the level of maintenance of some buildings is low (overflowing or broken rainwater goods, peeling paintwork etc). This adds to the impression that the area is run-down, a situation that is compounded by the poor quality and condition of the public realm. Church Gate's high level of unauthorised traffic and its reputation for anti-social behaviour make it unattractive to shoppers and visitors.

- 4.63 Two buildings create cause for concern, however. The former hosiery master's house and workshop at 3 *Darker Street* is in poor condition, and was subject to an Urgent Works Notice in 2005 to secure the structure and prevent access. It remains vacant. The factory on the east side of *Short Street* is also vacant and the rear half of the building is subject to regular checks on its structural stability. At present it remains stable but not useable.
- 4.64 There is also a substantial area of vacant land between Gravel Street and Mansfield Street that detracts from the quality of the area. One building has recently been demolished and most of the land remains unused.

Problems, pressures & capacity for change

Pressures - The Shires shopping centre extension

- 4.65 Imminent changes to The Shires shopping centre may bring increasing pressure for change to other buildings and land in the Church Gate area. It has already been shown how inappropriate changes can have a significant effect on the character and appearance of the area. It will be important to ensure that such changes respect the area's built form and character.

Pedestrian and vehicle traffic

- 4.66 As part of the scheme for the extension of the Shires shopping centre, High Street is to be closed to vehicle traffic, which will mean that bus access to the city centre will be re-routed along Mansfield Street, St Peter's Lane and Causeway Lane. This will fundamentally alter the function of this route, that is, from a busy access to the present multi-storey car parks to a primarily bus-only route. This could have both positive and negative effects for the conservation area.
- 4.67 On the positive side, the introduction of a more circuitous traffic system should reduce the incidence of unauthorised traffic access and parking that currently spoil Church Gate. The introduction of bus stops along St Peter's Lane and Causeway Lane will bring bus users closer to Church Gate and this could benefit both the local businesses and land values in the area. However, it could also increase actual or perceived pedestrian crossing problems at the junction with Church Gate. Junction design will therefore be of critical importance to ensure ease of pedestrian movement.

Sites and buildings

- 4.68 The Spatial Analysis map (Map 6) shows that there are a number of sites (shown blue) that do not contribute to, or actively detract from, the character or appearance of the conservation area. These sites, however, have the potential to make real and positive contributions to the quality of the built environment and to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The preparation of Site Development Guidance would therefore be appropriate
- 4.69 At the smaller scale, there is a need to improve the design of shopfronts and their signage. Grant funds for improvement and restoration work have helped in the past to achieve this, and a Shopfront Security Design Policy has been in place for some years. Unfortunately, shutters are often installed without planning permission and these need to be identified quickly so that action can be taken to resolve the worst offences.

Nightclubs

- 4.70 The problems associated with the night-time economy have already been mentioned. As a result, Church Gate has developed a poor image and this, taken

together with problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, has had a damaging effect on other businesses in the area. However, the police have reported that recent lighting upgrades at the northern end of Church Gate have contributed to a reduction in crime in that area and taxi pick-up points have been relocated to help disperse late night crowds. Further lighting improvements in the area south of Mansfield Street, as well as planned public realm improvements, would therefore seem appropriate.

5.0 Community involvement

- 5.1 Although there is no statutory requirement to consult prior to designating a conservation area, it is highly desirable to obtain the views of local residents, businesses and others who share an interest in the area. Local knowledge of problems and issues, together with ideas for improvements can be very valuable.
- 5.2 Extensive consultation was undertaken about the proposed conservation area and a list of people and organisations consulted can be found at Appendix 4a. A letter and plan was sent to all occupiers to inform them of the proposal and an exhibition was held from October 1st to 9th in the Haymarket shopping centre, advertised by a Press Release in late September. The draft text of the Character Statement was also placed on the Council's website and in the Customer Service Centre at the Council's offices. A public meeting for owners and occupiers was also held on November 28th for the purpose of discussing the proposed management plan.
- 5.3 A summary of the main issues raised during consultation can be found at Appendix 4a.

6.0 Conservation Area boundary

- 6.1 The boundary of the proposed conservation area has been drawn beyond the 'spine' of Church Gate to include the elements that contribute to the architectural and historic interest of the area. The buildings within the boundary are the remnants of an older, more intricate urban form, but nonetheless retain their historic associations one with another. Thus, the boundary has been drawn along the centres of Gravel, Sandacre and Mansfield Streets so as to exclude the modern developments that do not possess sufficient strength of character. However, several vacant sites have been included because any future development on these plots would have a significant impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area and future redevelopment proposals will have to be subject to more detailed consideration in that light.

7.0 Management strategy and enhancement proposals

- 7.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires Councils to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas when considering planning applications. They must also prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of such areas.
- 7.2 Based on the issues identified by the character appraisal, and from the issues raised during the consultation process, a management strategy has been drawn up to address the following:

- preventing the loss of original features and materials, such as windows, doors, rainwater goods, chimney stacks, shopfronts, roofing materials (Welsh slate, clay tiles, Swithland slate);
- the removal, where possible and practical, of paint from facing bricks;
- securing the retention of original shopfront and more sympathetic designs for replacement shopfronts;
- ensuring that security shutters, whether existing or proposed, are as unobtrusive as possible when in position;
- ensuring that commercial signage is designed and placed so that it is sympathetic to the building on which it is placed;
- securing high quality design in the redevelopment of vacant sites so that any new buildings are sympathetic to the scale and character of the area;
- securing improvements to the public realm, particularly lighting, traffic management and highway surfaces, including, wherever possible, the retention or restoration of traditional materials such as Mountsorrel granite kerbstones;
- removal of street clutter.

7.3 The **strategy and proposals** are set out in **Appendix 3**, together with indications as to possible sources of funding and timescales (short (1-2 years), medium (3-5 years), long-term (over 5 years)).

8.0 Contacts and Appendices

8.1 For further information on this, or other, conservation areas you can contact the Council's Building Conservation Officers by phone, letter or e-mail at the following addresses:

- Urban Design Group, Regeneration and Culture, Leicester City Council, New Walk Centre, Welford Place, Leicester, LE1 6ZG;
- 0116 2527296
- urbandesigngroup@leicester.gov.uk

There is also information on all conservation areas on the Council's website (www.leicester.gov.uk) including Character Appraisals where adopted.

APPENDIX 1**List of buildings in the conservation area**

Butt Close Lane	19 (The Salmon PH)
Church Gate	2d, 4-54 (even), 62-74 (even), Matalan car park, 7-81 (odd)
Darker Street	1,3
East Bond Street	3-25 (odd), 43-45 (odd), Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel, 51-57 (odd)
Gravel Street	vacant site, shop
New Bond Street	31-37 (odd)
St Peter's Lane	1-5 (odd), car park
Sandacre Street	12-14 (even), service yard
Short Street	Haymarket Theatre Costume Store
Mansfield Street	2-6 (even), 32, car park, 36

APPENDIX 2**List of listed buildings and Tree Preservation Orders in the conservation area**

Butt Close Lane	wall to north of Unitarian Chapel (Grade II)
Church Gate	66 (timber warehouse)(Grade II)
Darker Street	3
East Bond Street	Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel, 45 (former Great Meeting School), wall to north of Unitarian Chapel (all Grade II)
100 Church Gate	Tree Preservation Order No.418
East Bond Street	Tree Preservation Order No.293

APPENDIX 3**Management Strategy and Enhancement Proposals**

Location	Strategy, Proposals and delivery mechanism
Church Gate	<p>1.0 secure improvements to the management of traffic so as to discourage/prevent access by vehicles other than service vehicles, taxis and blue badge holders;</p> <p>Delivery - short term : the Council will be assuming responsibility for parking enforcement in 2007. Medium term : new traffic management systems are due to be in place for the opening of the Shires extension in 2008. This should make unauthorised access to Church Gate less attractive.</p> <p>2.0 secure improvements to the 'public realm' including new street surfaces in appropriate materials;</p> <p>Delivery – medium term : Church Gate is the first priority in the second stage of the Public Realm Strategy (due 2008/09). Funding will be sought via Council Capital Programme, Local Transport Plan and Leics Strategic Economic Partnership (LSEP).</p> <p>3.0 identify shopfronts, historic features etc requiring improvement/restoration and seek funds for grants towards improvement works;</p>

	<p>Delivery – short to medium term. Work to identify locations will be completed within 6 months. Bids will be prepared to English Heritage (for Heritage Economic Regeneration Funds) or LSEP (for match funding for private sector grant schemes) according to their funding programmes and deadlines.</p>
Mansfield Street, Short Street, Gravel Street	<p>4.0 prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the redevelopment of the area</p> <p>Delivery – short term : an SPD will be included in the 2006/06 Local Development Scheme (LDS)</p>
General	<p>5.0 monitor the conservation area by checklist and photographic survey every 4 years to identify unauthorised alterations and undertake enforcement action as necessary;</p> <p>6.0 ensure that the policies contained in the City of Leicester Local Plan and its Replacement are applied, including a strong presumption in favour of preserving listed buildings and their settings, and buildings that contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area;</p> <p>7.0 retain, wherever possible and practical, original surface materials such as granite kerbstones etc;</p> <p>8.0 develop Advice Notes for Owners on the alteration, repair and maintenance of their buildings, with special reference to 1. windows, doors, roofs, demolition and part-demolition, alterations and decorative features; 2. relevant Local Plan policies and Design Guides (Shopfront/Security);</p> <p>Delivery – as 3.0 above</p> <p>9.0 update the Council's Shopfront Design Guide and Shopfront Security Design Guide as SPD, with special reference to commercial properties in conservation areas and circulate to all shops in the area for their information;</p> <p>Delivery – medium term : subject to its inclusion in the 2006/07 or 2007/08 LDS</p> <p>10.0 continue to work with owners or other interested parties to secure the restoration and re-use of the listed building at 3 Darker Street;</p> <p>11.0 investigate the practicality of removing paint or other applied finishes from facades that were not originally so treated;</p> <p>12.0 undertake survey of signage, including 'A' boards, and other alterations to identify unauthorised works. Assess and prioritise for enforcement action;</p> <p>Delivery – short term : as 3.0 above</p> <p>13.0 where enforcement action is not justifiable consider means of securing funds to provide grants for improvements to shopfronts and/or re-instatement of historic features.</p> <p>Delivery – short term : as 3.0 above</p> <p>14.0 undertake a survey to identify gateways, entrances,</p>

	shopfronts etc that require special security measures, develop design solutions and seek funding to grant aid installations on site. Delivery – short term : as 3.0 above
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APPENDIX 4	The Consultation Process
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1. The draft Statement, summary and map was put ‘on deposit’ in the City Council’s Customer Services Centre (New Walk Centre) and the Council’s website;
2. A press release was issued setting out where the documents can be viewed;
3. A summary of the Statement and the map were distributed to all addresses in the conservation area, as well as other appropriate organisations in the city;
4. The public was given about a month to comment by phone, letter, e-mail etc
5. Where addresses were given each respondent received answers to any queries raised;
6. Any comments not directly related to conservation issues were forwarded to the relevant department;
7. Amendments were made as appropriate to the draft text, boundary & summary
8. Amended text etc will be put before Cabinet for approval;
9. Press release announcing adoption will be issued once all the legal requirements are complete;
10. Full copy of the document and maps will be placed in the Central Reference library and on the Council website.

APPENDIX 4a	List of people and organisations consulted and Results of Consultation
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All occupiers, residents and businesses (108)	English Heritage
Chamber of Commerce	Leicestershire Asian Business Association
Victorian Society	Leicester Civic Society
Police Architectural Liaison Officer	Society for the Blind
Visually Impaired Access Group	Leicester Disabled People’s Access Group
City Disability Consultation Forum	Centre for Deaf People
Leics Centre for Integrated Living	Fairdeal
CLASP	Mosaic
Mencap	Ward Councillors (3)

Results of Consultation

The public consultation process identified four main areas of concern for local shoppers and businesses. These were

- the levels of unauthorised traffic and parking,
- the appearance of the public realm,

- the high numbers of and problems associated with nightclubs and takeaway shops (litter, anti-social behaviour), and
- the run-down, poor quality image of the area.

These were reported in full to the 30th January Cabinet meeting and are acknowledged to be real and important issues for in the Church Gate area. Appendix 3 above shows that the Council has already put plans in place that should, in the short to medium term, improve the public realm and reduce substantially the problems of unauthorised access and parking. The Local Plan policies (see Appendix 5) will be actively applied and will help to achieve improvements to the private realm (shopfronts, signs, limiting the numbers of particular types of uses). The Council will also bid for appropriate funding to help and encourage owners and occupiers to improve and repair their buildings.

Appendix 5 Relevant policy documents (abbreviated)

City of Leicester Local Plan (adopted January 2006)

Subject	Policy No.	Details
The Plan Strategy		
	PS01	The Plan Strategy
	PS09	Potential Development Areas
	PS09a	Proposed PDA Uses within the Strategic Regeneration Area
Urban Design		
	UD01	High Quality Building Design & Local Context
	UD02	Building Layout, Form & Positioning
	UD03	Design & Layout of Streets & Public Places
Special Policy Areas		
	SPA01	Retailing within the Central Shopping Core
	SPA03	Offices for Financial & Professional Services
	SPA04	Food & Drink Uses in the Central Shopping Core
	SPA07	Further Pedestrianisation around the Clock Tower
Retailing		
	R04	Offices for Financial & Professional Services
	R05	Development for Food & Drink Purposes
Built Environment		
	BE01	Preservation of the City's Archaeological Heritage
	BE02	Alterations and Extensions to Listed Buildings

	BE03	Changes of Use of Listed Buildings
	BE04	Setting of a Listed Building
	BE05	Demolition of Listed Buildings
	BE06	New Development and Changes of Use in Conservation Areas
	BE07	Demolition in Conservation Areas
	BE08	Buildings of Local Interest
	BE10	Shopfront Design
	BE11	Shopfront Security
	BE13	Advertisement Design
	BE14	Projecting Signs
	BE21	Noise
	BE22	Outside Lighting

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Guidelines for A3 Class Uses in the City Centre (Area Strategy Guidance)

Appendix 6	Glossary of architectural terms
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bracket	a small support carrying a projecting weight
moulding	a continuous groove or projection used decoratively to throw shadow on, or water away from, a wall
oriel	a curved bay window projecting out from an upper floor
pediment	a low pitched gable or roof or opening
pilaster	a shallow column attached to, and slightly projecting from, a wall
plinth	the plain projecting base of a wall
rusticated	square blocks placed at regular intervals along the length of the shaft of a column or pilaster
vitriified	hard-burnt to create a dark, slightly glazed finish
vousoir	one of the wedge shaped stones used to form an arch