

Desborough Conservation Area Appraisal

Adopted 30th March 2007



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Abstract

This appraisal document forms the basis of the justified and evidenced designation of a conservation area within the town of Desborough. It has undergone rigorous public consultation and has been officially adopted by Kettering Borough Council.

It should be noted that this document is not intended to be completely comprehensive and that the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

1. Introduction

1.1 The potential of Desborough to provide the basis of a conservation area has arisen from the following:

- Public concern that the town's historic character has been irrevocably damaged by highway improvement schemes and that remaining character continues to be at risk.
- The publication by Northamptonshire County Council of the *Extensive Urban Survey: Desborough* (2000).
- The production by Kettering Borough Council of the *Desborough Town centre Urban Design Framework: A New Heart for Desborough* (adopted 14th January 2004).
- The aspirations for an improved understanding of the historic environment in Desborough.

1.2 The background survey carried out prior to this study was made following recommendations published in the *Extensive Urban Survey: Desborough* (2000).

1.3 The area outlined in the aforementioned document was carefully scrutinised following much reconnaissance, and subsequently, a tighter area was identified.

1.4 Consultation was undertaken with the residents of the proposed Conservation Area and local interest groups including the Desborough Civic Society.

Community feedback was carefully considered and amendments made.

2. Planning policy framework

- 2.1 The designation and protection of conservation areas is enshrined in national, regional and local planning policy.
- 2.2 A conservation area is defined by section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as “*an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”.¹
- 2.3 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate recognizable areas of special architectural or historic interest as conservation areas.
- 2.4 In making decisions on future development within a conservation area, the Council is expected to ‘*pay attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area*’, as stated by the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This should ensure that change that harms the conservation area is not allowed.
- 2.5 Planning Policy Guidance note 15: Planning and the historic environment (PPG15) notes the requirement that special attention should be paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. The conservation area’s special

interest and its character and appearance should be reflected in the assessment of the area and is a factor which is taken into account in considering appeals against refusals of planning permission and of conservation area consent for demolition.

- 2.6 The Northamptonshire County Structure Plan (1996 - 2016) states that provision will be made to conserve, and where appropriate, enhance the character, appearance or setting of conservation areas (Policy AR6).
- 2.7 The Local Plan for Kettering Borough (adopted 30th January 1994) seeks to ensure that new development in conservation areas preserves or enhances the character and/or appearance of the area (Policy ENV 22).
- 2.8 This appraisal has been prepared in light of these policies to aid better understanding of the area and to inform the consideration of development proposals within the area.

3. Definition of special interest

- 3.1 The special character of the proposed Desborough Conservation Area is derived from the appearance, layout and use of the buildings found within its boundary.
- 3.2 The area is a discernible industrial suburb, containing a disused boot and shoe factory site and related worker housing, which represents the first planned estate in Desborough, which was a direct result of the boot and shoe industry.
- 3.3 The boot and shoe industry has had a strong influence in shaping the character of the area and forming a sense of place. The form and layout of the buildings in this area remain intact, providing documentary evidence as to how the industry developed within a relatively short time.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph (2005) showing adopted conservation area boundary

4. Assessment of special interest

4.1 Location and context

- 4.1.1 The town of Desborough is situated approximately 9.7kms (6 miles) north-west of Kettering and approximately 29kms (18 miles) north of the county town of Northampton.
- 4.1.2 The 2001 Census results inform that there were 8073 people residing within the town at that time.
- 4.1.3 The proposed Desborough Conservation Area is located to the north of the town, within the town centre. It is partly bounded by the railway-line to the north and the B576 (former A6 trunk-road) to the west. A plan showing the adopted boundary of the conservation area is contained in Appendix A.
- 4.1.4 Although the former boot and Shoe factory site to the west and related residential area to the east form the majority of the conservation area, the conservation area also encloses the properties of Station Road (now the towns main shopping street), including the Station House, as well as a section of the remaining historic core of the town to the south of the conservation area in the High Street.

4.2 General character and plan form

- 4.2.1 The bulk of the conservation area is made up of workers' housing. These houses are characterised by their grouping in terraced rows along New Street, Mansefield Close and Burghley Close and along the southern side of Gladstone Street. The houses are tightly spaced creating a high density, late Victorian domestic townscape.

4.3 Underlying geology

- 4.3.1 Reference to the 1:50,000 scale Published British Geological Survey (BGS) Map Sheet 170 'Market Harborough' solid and drift edition, indicates the site to be underlain by strata from the Northampton Sand Formation which is overlying Upper Lias Clay. This geology has resulted in a relatively flat, undulating landscape.
- 4.3.2 The nearest surface watercourse is the River Isle, which is located approximately 900m to the south of the area. The site does not lie within the Fluvial Flood Plain of the river, as designated by the Environment Agency.

5. Historic development and archaeology

5.1 The origins and development of the settlement

5.1.1 The town of Desborough has been occupied since pre-historic times, remaining a small rural settlement until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when a succession of industrial activity took place which culminated in the development of the boot and shoe industry.

5.1.2 The industrial development of Desborough closely conforms to the general picture of the development of Northamptonshire, as set out by Greenall (1979). Northamptonshire was, and remained throughout the 19th century, primarily an agricultural economy. As in most towns of the midlands, woollen weaving was a long established domestic industry.

5.1.3 Moore (1910), in his writings of '*A History of Desborough*', records that woollen weaving had ceased in Desborough by 1840, by which time silk manufacture had a large foothold. The silk industry is thought likely to have been introduced to Desborough from both London and Coventry. It was first conducted in workers homes, but factories soon began to open up. However, due to changing fashions and competition from France, the silk industry declined, and it was on the back of this that the Boot and Shoe Industry grew.

5.1.4 Moore (1910) dates the introduction of wholesale footwear manufacture in Desborough to 1868, and notes that nearly all the work is done in the extensive factories that have been erected in the town². The industry is thought to have been introduced to Desborough from Leicester, through its connection with the railway, as well as religious activities. Although the labour was no cheaper, it had a skilled work- force on the brink of unemployment and central location along with a rail-link.

5.1.5 Moore (1910) states that footwear manufacture did not become significantly concentrated in powered factories until around 1895. Before this time the manufacturing was carried out in workrooms, where a large number of workpeople carried out simple tasks with hand tools and small machines driven by hand or foot.

5.1.6 The footwear industry received major stimulus from the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, and experienced rapid growth. By 1894 it is recorded that there were eight boot and shoe manufacturers and two boot and shoe makers operating in the town, as apposed to just one boot and shoe maker in 1854.³ The population of Desborough underwent a considerable expansion with the increase in industry, increasing two and a half fold from 1350 in 1851 to 3573 in 1901. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic rise in numbers.

5.1.7 Unfortunately the increase in commercial pressures, rising imports, changes in methods of distribution and a growth in the importance of fashion following the end of the Second World War slowly led to the decline of the local shoe industry. The first factory to cease manufacture after the war closed in 1952 and was followed in regular intervals by others.⁴ It can be said that the condition of the town deteriorated with the decline of the shoe industry, which was compounded by the decline of the mineral extraction industry and the dwindling fortunes of the Co-operative movement.

5.1.8 It was primarily the development of the boot and shoe industry, the construction of the railway and the formation of the Desborough Co-operative Society that led to the Victorian and Edwardian expansion of Desborough. This led to a significant amount of new development, where factories, associated social facilities and housing were laid out in a planned form adjacent to the established medieval core.⁵

5.2 The origins and development of the area

5.2.1 The history of the site has been established by reviewing County Series and National Grid plans from 1886 to 1999. However, other one-off maps pertinent to the area have been discovered through research and have consequently been analysed.

5.2.2 Prior to 1850 the site was described as agricultural fields.

5.2.3 The Midland Railway, to the immediate north of the site was opened in 1857. The Midland Railway survey drawing opposite highlights the land under study as belonging to local employer, Benjamin Riley.

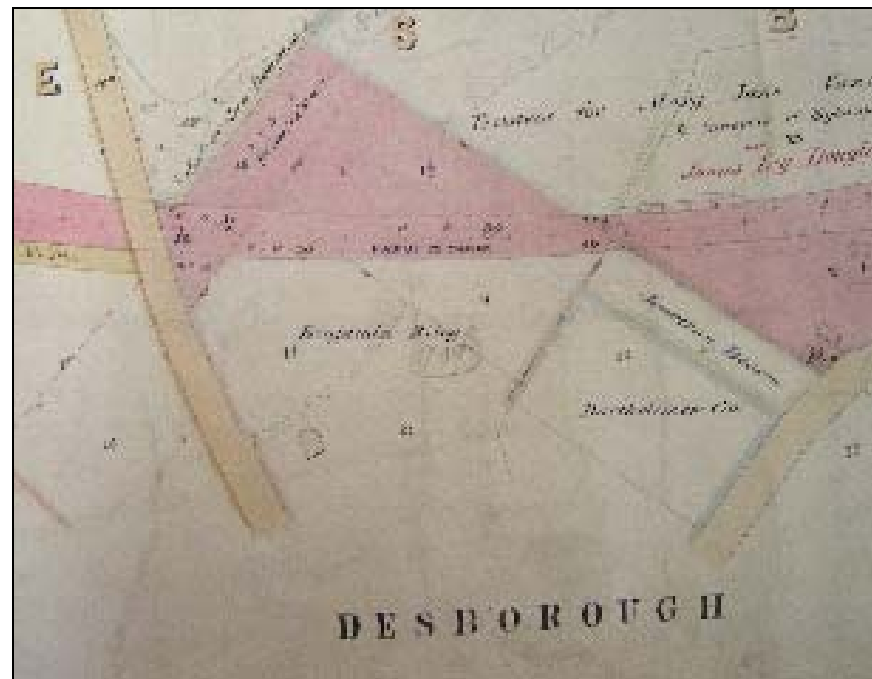


Figure 2: Extract from Midland Railway Survey

5.2.4 Upon opening the railway line, ironstone extraction started in the area. Reference was made to this by Moore (1910), in his writings of *'A History of Desborough'*, in which it states:

...as soon as the railway was completed, the local deposits of ironstone were worked... When the fields between the station and the town were cleared of their stone, they were laid out as building sites. The land bounded by Station Road, the turnpike, and the railway was laid out by private enterprise.⁶

- 5.2.5 The map opposite shows the 'land laid out as building sites', and a proposed street alignment, which is different to that which was constructed.

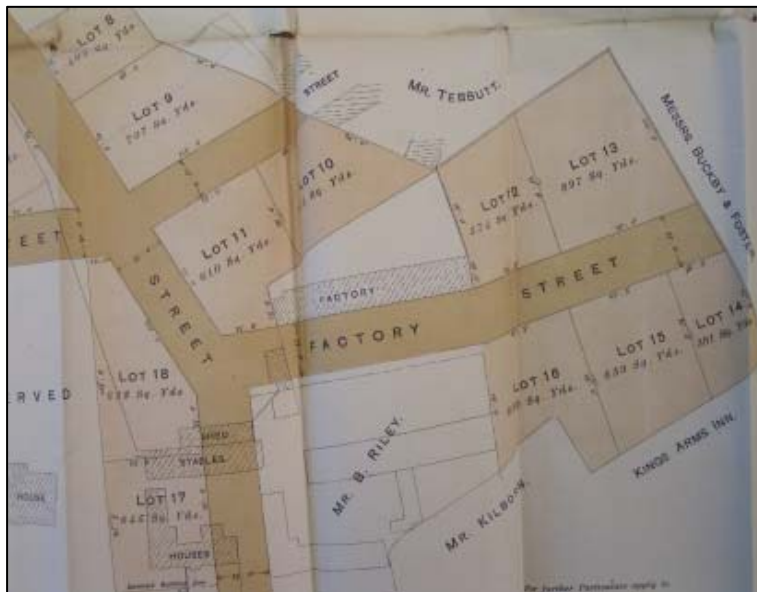


Figure 3: Extract from plan showing proposed building plots

- 5.2.6 The map shows two rectilinear factory buildings on the west of the site. One building is outlined to be the

Benjamin Riley Boot and Shoe Company factory; the other is known to be the Nichols, Evans and Clow Boot and Shoe Company.⁷ It is evident that these buildings were the first buildings to be erected in the site, built on a featureless site, which imposed no restraints on their orientation.

- 5.2.7 The OS plan of 1886 shows the new area of settlement to the north-east of the town (Station Road, New Street, Gas Street and Factory Street).

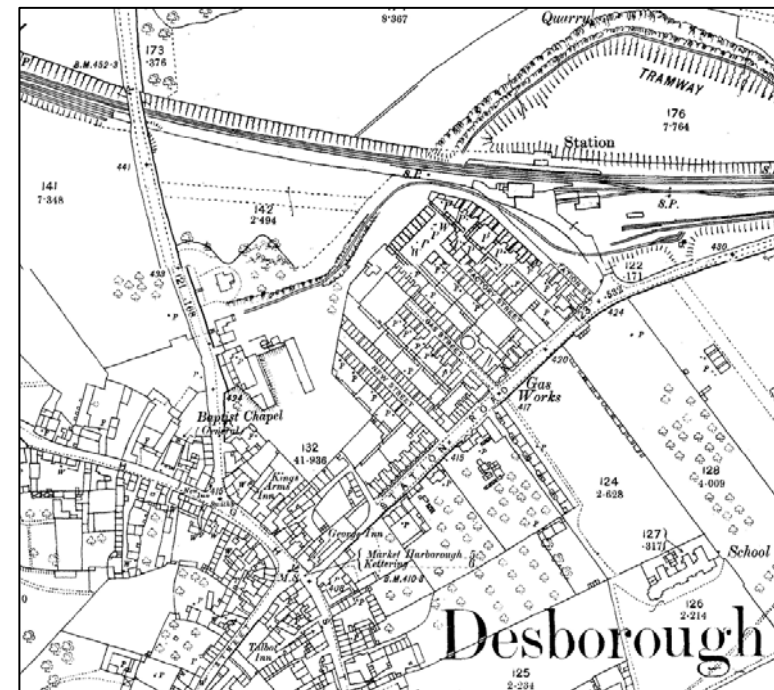


Figure 4: Extract from first edition OS (1886)

5.2.8 It is presumed that the buildings of New Street were built first, followed closely by Gas Street, Factory Street and Station Street. This is corroborated by the form and character of the surviving buildings.

5.2.9 It is reported by Moore (1910) that the gas works in Gas Street were opened in 1876.⁸ It is thought that by this time much of New Street and the other streets would also have been built up. The southwest corner of the site is covered with what appears to be older houses and coaching inns.

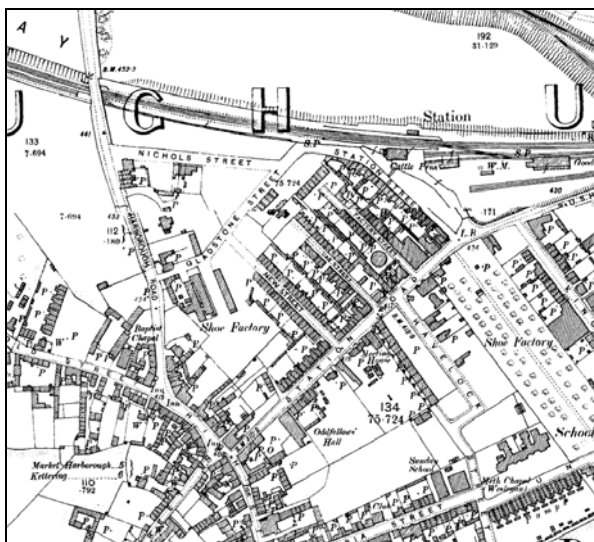


Figure 5: Extract from second edition OS (1900)

5.2.10 By 1900 an extension has been built on the eastern side of the western factory and it appears that the

ground between the two factories has been in-filled, as there are no 'cutting' marks where they were once evident. The central and southern parts of the site are indicated as being undeveloped at this time. Away from the site, extensive quarrying of ironstone can be seen in the fields to the north of the site, on the other side of the Midlands Railway.

5.2.11 By 1926 further extension has occurred to the western factory and the Lawrence Boot Factory. A number of other outbuildings have been constructed across the site and a number of fences or walls have been built. The buildings in the southwest and northwest of the whole site remain unchanged.



Figure 6: Extract from third edition OS (1926)

5.2.12 The large scale plan of 1970 shows the garage building in place with its large yard to the rear. It shows the original buildings in the southwest corner of the site still intact and it marks the Lawrence Factory as a 'Cut Sole' factory and the western factory as a 'Waste Reclamation' factory.



Figure 7: Extract from fifth edition OS (1972)

5.2.13 By 1978 the house in the southwest corner of New Street have been demolished, as has the western factory, which in turn has made room for further extension to the Lawrence shoe factory. There is a 'tank' indicated to the southeast of the shoe factory and an electricity substation marked on the eastern boundary of the site.

5.2.14 No significant alteration has occurred to the buildings within the proposed conservation area since 1978.

5.3 Archaeological significance of the area

- 5.3.1 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the town of Desborough.
- 5.3.2 It was reported by Ballinger (2002) that there would appear to be little potential for below ground archaeological investigation for the industrial period in Desborough. Ballinger (2002) states that, 'buildings and monuments of the industrial period that have been demolished have largely been replaced by modern development'.⁹ However, this does not mean that there is not mean that there are no significant archaeological remains in the area. It is worth noting that there have been finds of archaeological importance within the town.
- 5.3.3 Details from the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record have highlighted sites of likely archaeological significance within the area, as seen highlighted in figure 8 opposite.

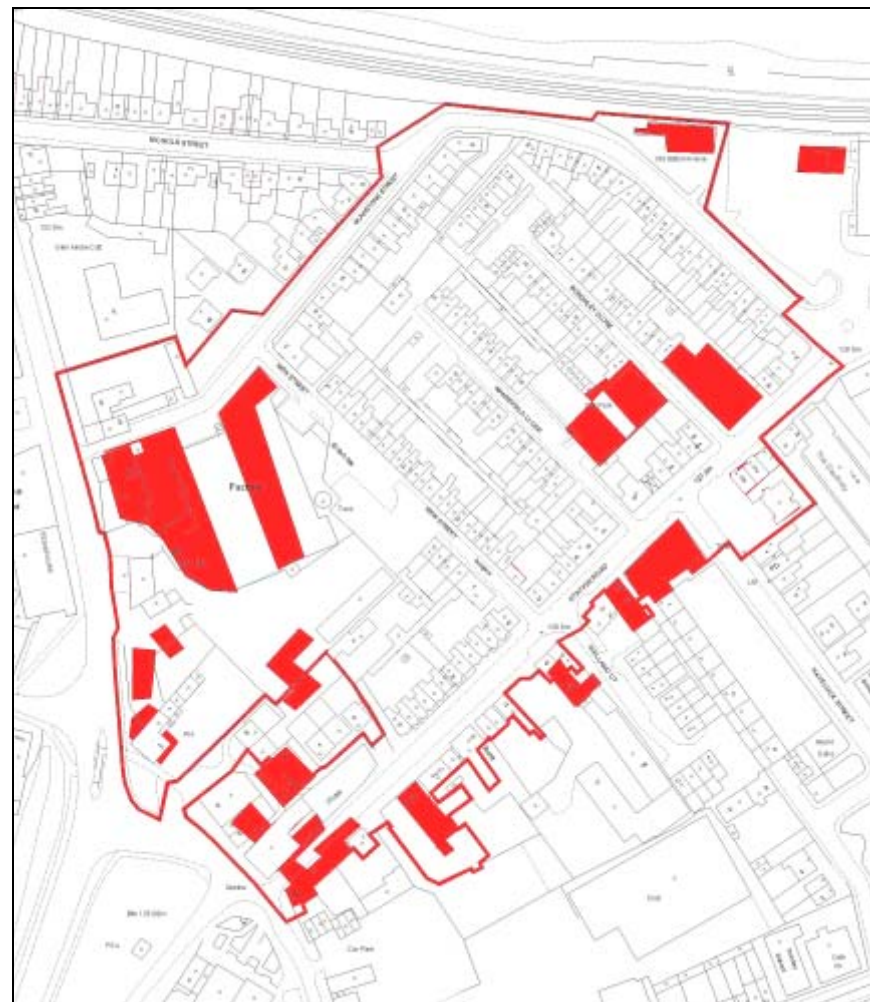


Figure 8: Known and predicted sites of archaeological significance

6. Spatial analysis

6.1 Quality of spaces within the area

- 6.1.1 The bulk of the conservation area is made up of workers' housing. These houses are characterised by their grouping in terraced rows along New Street, Mansefield Close and Burghley Close and along the southern side of Gladstone Street. In summary, the houses are tightly spaced creating a high density, very modest, late Victorian domestic townscape.
- 6.1.2 As highlighted by the figure-ground diagram opposite, the factory site to the west of the conservation area is separate and distinct from the dense worker housing to the east.
- 6.1.3 Mansefield Close and Burghley Close in particular have an enclosed and private quality created by the terracing on both sides of the narrow streets and their termination as cul-de-sacs. The site previously occupied by the Desborough Gas Works provides an open courtyard separating Mansefield Close and Burghley Close.
- 6.1.4 New Street is open along the west side and overlooks the significant open spaces around the former Lawrence's factory. At present New Street also provides a link between Station Road and Gladstone Street for pedestrians but not vehicles.



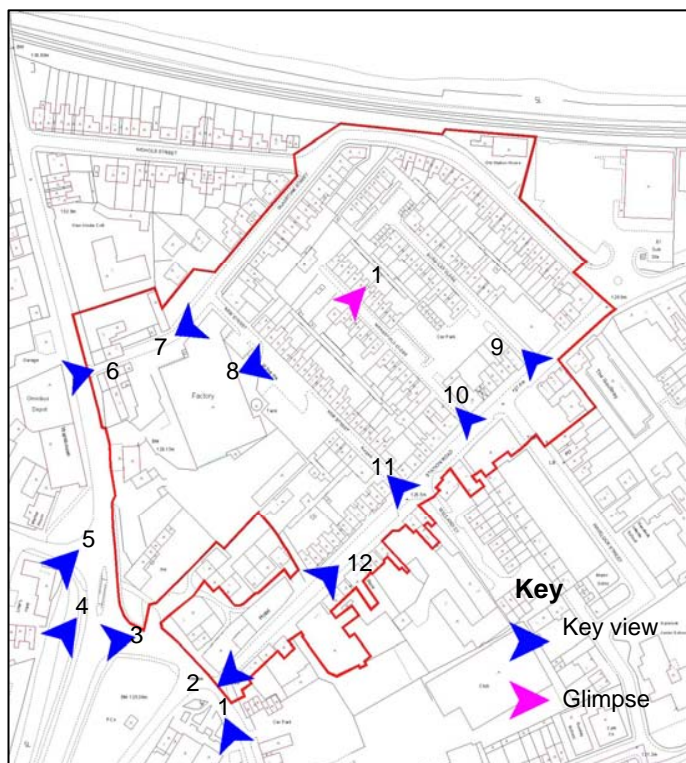
Figure 9: Figure-ground diagram

- 6.1.5 The buildings of the businesses and residences strung out along both sides of Station Road

developed piecemeal. This is partly reflected in the variation of the plot sizes.

- 6.1.6 Running north from the George public house, terminating at the Oak public house is a characterful row of stone buildings providing important boundary structures for the conservation area.

6.2 Key views into and out of the area (Figure 10)



- 6.2.1 Views are controlled and restricted within the planned part of the area. However, as seen in figure 5 above, due to the open nature of south-westerly part of the area, several views and panorama's are obtainable.

- 6.2.2 Each view marked on figure 5 above has been described and explained as following:

6.2.3 View One



View one provides a view from south of the High Street to the buildings that define the southern edge of the conservation area boundary. This view highlights the remaining historic building line of High Street, and the historical context of the milestone, seen to the left of the photograph.

6.2.4 View Two



View two provides a view from Station Road to the south, terminating at the town milestone - a key structure immediately outside the boundary. This view highlights the narrowness of Station Road to the south, where it meets remnants of the historic core.

6.2.5 View Three



As of view one, view three provides a view from Harborough Road looking east to the remaining buildings of the historic core. This view highlights the historic building line of High Street, and emphasizes the narrowness of the junction with Station Road.

6.2.6 View Four



View four provides a view looking north of Harborough Road to The Oak public house. The view highlights the listed building and its sparse setting, a result of road widening in the 1970's.

6.2.7 View Five



View five provides an important view of the factory site from Harborough Road to the north. This view highlights the rectilinear form of the former boot and shoe factory.

6.2.8 View Six



View six provides a view looking into western access point of the conservation area. This view highlights a coherent relationship between the northern range of the former boot and shoe factory and the buildings of No. 21 and 23 Harborough Road. Together the buildings create an interesting urban form.

6.2.9 View Seven



Following on from view six, view seven is taken from the opposite direction and provides a view to the rear of nos. 15, 21 and 23 Harborough Road. This view highlights the presence of the former bus depot on the former A6 trunk road, terminating the vista between Nos. 21 and 23 Harborough Road.

6.2.10 View Eight



site to the east.

View eight provides an important view of the factory, highlighting the presence of the dominating structure within the context of the tight-grained worker housing that borders the factory

6.2.11 View Nine



highlights the interspersed nature of the factories within a tight-grained residential area.

View nine emphasises the linear form and enclosure of the planned street of Burghley Close. The long, white painted building to the right of the photograph was formerly a boot and shoe factory. Its presence

6.2.12 View Ten



View ten emphasises the linear form and enclosure of Mansefield Close. The vista created by the buildings either side of the street is terminated by the Manse house at the top of the street

6.2.13 View Eleven



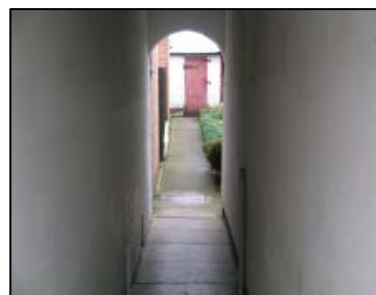
View eleven provides a view north of New Street, highlighting the uniformity of the terraces and the strong building line of the planned street

6.2.14 View Twelve



View twelve provides a view north of Station Road highlighting the strong building line and linear orientation of street.

6.2.15 Glimpse 1



Street, Mansefield Close and Burghley Close.

Glimpse one is a characteristic glimpse of a workers outhouse at the end of the garden of a property. Similar glimpses can be observed through alleyways between properties of New

7. Character analysis

7.1 Influence of current or former land uses

7.1.1 As stated earlier in the document, much of the area proposed for conservation area status was used for iron stone extraction in the direct period following 1857. Evidence of this past land use can be observed in the area to the north of the former boot and shoe factory, where the ground level noticeably differs.

7.2 Dominant architectural styles and types

7.2.1 The buildings of New Street, Mansefield Close, Burghley Close and Gladstone Street are modest, late-Victorian terraces, where each building shares form and detailing with its neighbors. However, there are slight differences in detailing from street to street.

7.2.2 The buildings from Station Road were built individually rather than as part of a terraced development and therefore differ in form and detailing. The unifying features are their building materials.

7.2.3 The buildings that survive from the historic core of the town to the south of the area are characteristic of the local vernacular, built circa 1700.

7.2.4 The buildings of Harbrough Road, to the west of the area are part of the piece-meal development of Harbrough road. Buildings of no. 21 and no. 32 Harbrough Road are representative of the Georgian period.

7.3 The contribution of significant buildings

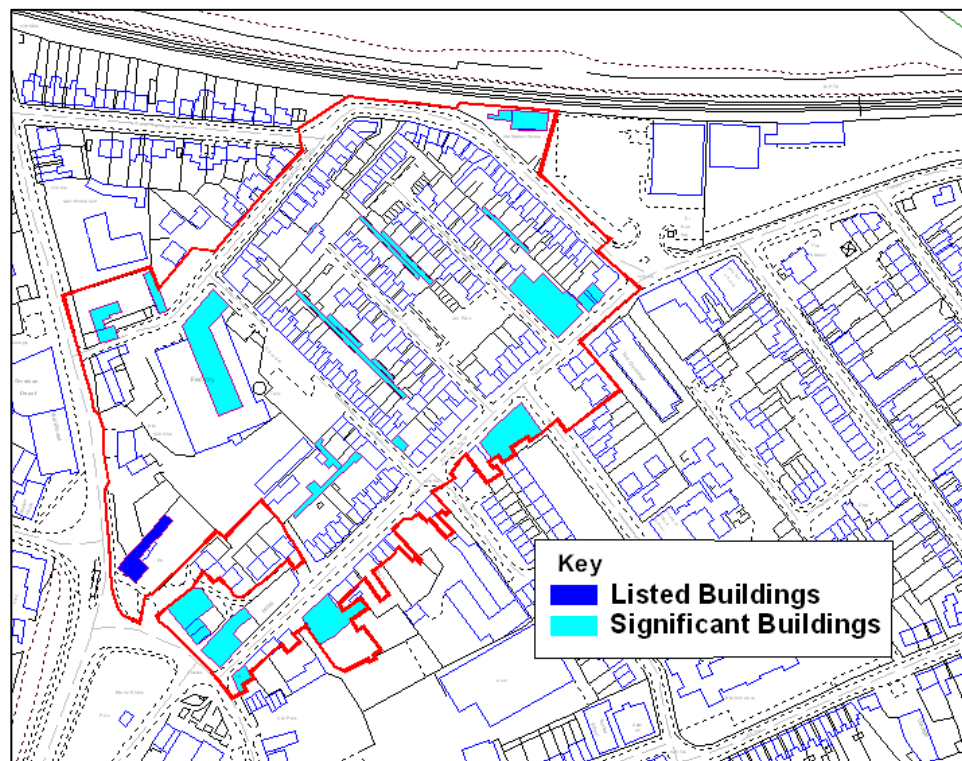


Figure 24: Listed and significant buildings

- 7.3.1 There is only one listed building within the defined area, however, it must be noted that there are several buildings of architectural or historic merit, as summarised below:

The Oak Public House

- 7.3.2 The Oak Public House is listed grade II. It was built circa 1700 and has mid nineteenth and twentieth century alterations. The front-range is comparatively little-altered example of a house of the period.

Nos. 41, 43 and 72 Station Road

- 7.3.3 Nos. 41, 43 and 72 Station Road provide a public face of one of the Desborough Co-operative Society. The businesses under the local Cooperative umbrella were another key employer in the town. The surviving buildings are a testimony to the strength of the Co-ops presence, which was unusually strong in Desborough.

Outbuildings to rear of terraced properties

- 7.3.4 The single storey brick built out-houses at the end of the gardens of the properties of New Street, Mansefield Close, Burghley Close and Gladstone Street are important historical elements relating to the development of the boot and shoe industry. They represent one of the earliest forms of factory. According to Holmes (2001) they were the most

common places of work before the factories became mechanized.

Nonconformist Meeting House

- 7.3.5 The small tin building to the north of Havelock street presently used as a garage was built circa 1900 as a tin tabernacle, and used for nonconformist religious activity around this time. This buildings significance relates to the fact that it is part of a very brief, overlooked episode in the history of church architecture. Further to this, it could be considered that its structure is an early example of prefabrication.

Nos. 81 - 83 High Street, including The George Public House

- 7.3.6 The group of significant buildings located to the south of the conservation area is deemed to be of significance through being remnants of the historic core of the town and being characteristic of the local vernacular.

The Old Station House

- 7.3.7 The Old Station House to the north of the area represents the earliest building of the pre-1850 development. Considering it was the formation of the railway that led to the development of the area, the Old Station House has significance related to this.

Nos. 68 and 70 Station Road

- 7.3.8 Nos. 68 and 70 Station Road, currently two hot food takeaways was originally the factory of Joseph Cheaney. It was built to the east of the large factory on Factory Street (now Burghley Close).

Nos. 7-9 Station Road

- 7.3.9 The building that occupies this plot is the Ritz and was formerly the Oddfellows Hall. The building has been much extended and altered in recent times; however, its original form and detailing is still discernable.

Nos. 47 – 47b Station Road

- 7.3.10 Nos. 47 – 47b Station Road are characterful buildings that contribute much to the street scene.

Building attached to no. 1 New Street

- 7.3.11 The small, rectilinear brick built building attached to no.1 New Street appears to have been built for the boot and shoe industry, although without further investigation it is difficult to assess its exact purpose.

Nos. 15, 21, 23 & 25 Harborough Road

- 7.3.12 This group of buildings are significant due to the fact they represent part of the piecemeal development along Harborough Road.



Figure 25: Building attached to no. 1 New St

- 7.3.13 The building of no. 21 Harborough Road is a surviving example of a Georgian Townhouse fronting a major highway. The building has particular significance to the boot and shoe industry, as it was lived in by 3 generations of manufacturers named Benjamin Riley (and a fourth generation: Fred T Riley)
- 7.3.14 The building of 21 Harborough Road is attached to three former cottages to the south, now no. 15 Harborough Road. The cottages are presumed to be of eighteenth century origin, however due to twentieth century alterations it is difficult to prescribe a more exact date. The former cottages represent the less formal end of the piecemeal development of Harborough Road.

Former Lawrence's Boot and Shoe Factory

7.3.14 The former Lawrence's Boot and Shoe Factory has significant local heritage importance due to its links to the silk and boot and shoe industries. It is also worth noting that Northamptonshire County Council discovered it to be the longest remaining boot and shoe factory of its age in Northamptonshire.

7.5 Prevalent and traditional building materials

7.5.1 The principal building material of the area is red brick. However, south of the boundary where there are remnants from the historic core of the town, much of the building material is iron-stone. This can be seen in figure 26 opposite.

7.5.2 Historically, Welsh slate would have been used as a roofing material, with timber doors and windows. These have largely been replaced by concrete interlocking roof tiles and plastic alternatives to doors and windows respectively. A number of houses have also been rendered or clad.

7.5.3 Some low-key decoration is still evident to the stone lintels above doors and windows. Some of the terraces also have interesting string-course patterns between ground and first floor, and brick dog toothed corbelling under the eaves.

7.5.4 The original paving materials are now missing throughout but the occasional pavement drain does survive

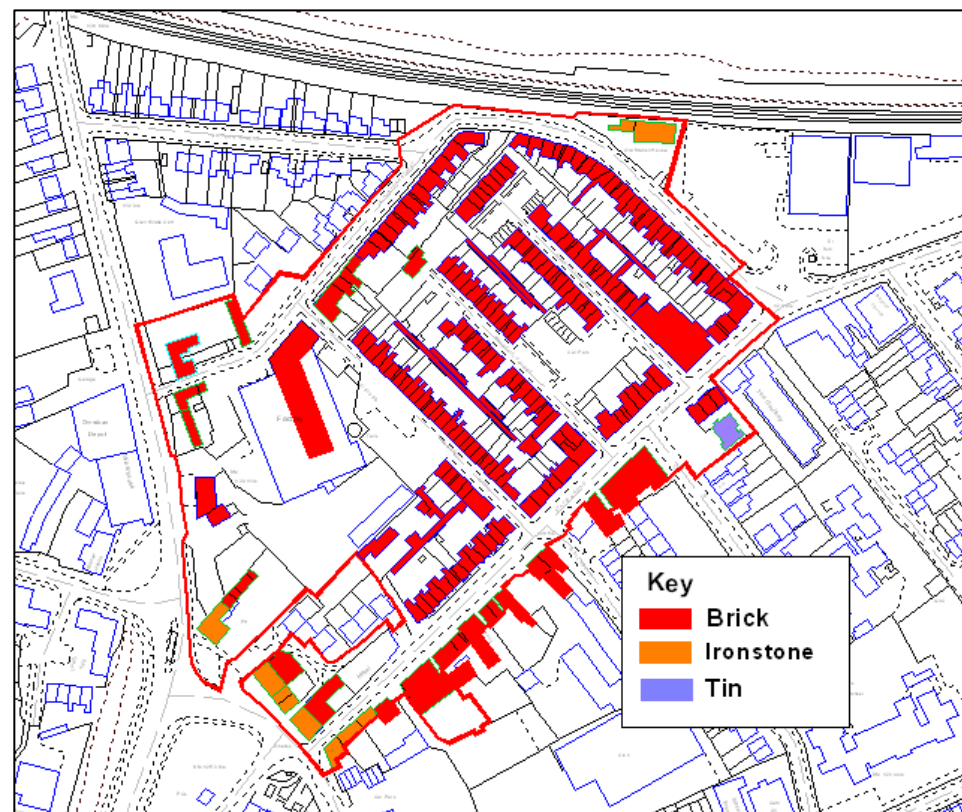


Figure 26: Building materials

7.6 The extent of intrusion

7.6.1 There are some elements which detract from the special character of the area.

7.6.2 The front facades of many houses have been rendered and clad - this appears incongruous in the street scene. In addition, the vast majority of the terraced properties no longer have their original external joinery details and several have been replaced with uPVC. As seen on figure 22, opposite, the majority of the original slate roofs have been replaced with concrete tiles.



Figure 27: Extent of alteration to terraced houses

7.6.3 The car park on the land between Mansefield Close and Burghley Close was created following the demolition of the Gas Works.

7.6.4 The demolition of the houses on New Street has left a large open space within the street scene, which is worsened by the appearance of a car park.

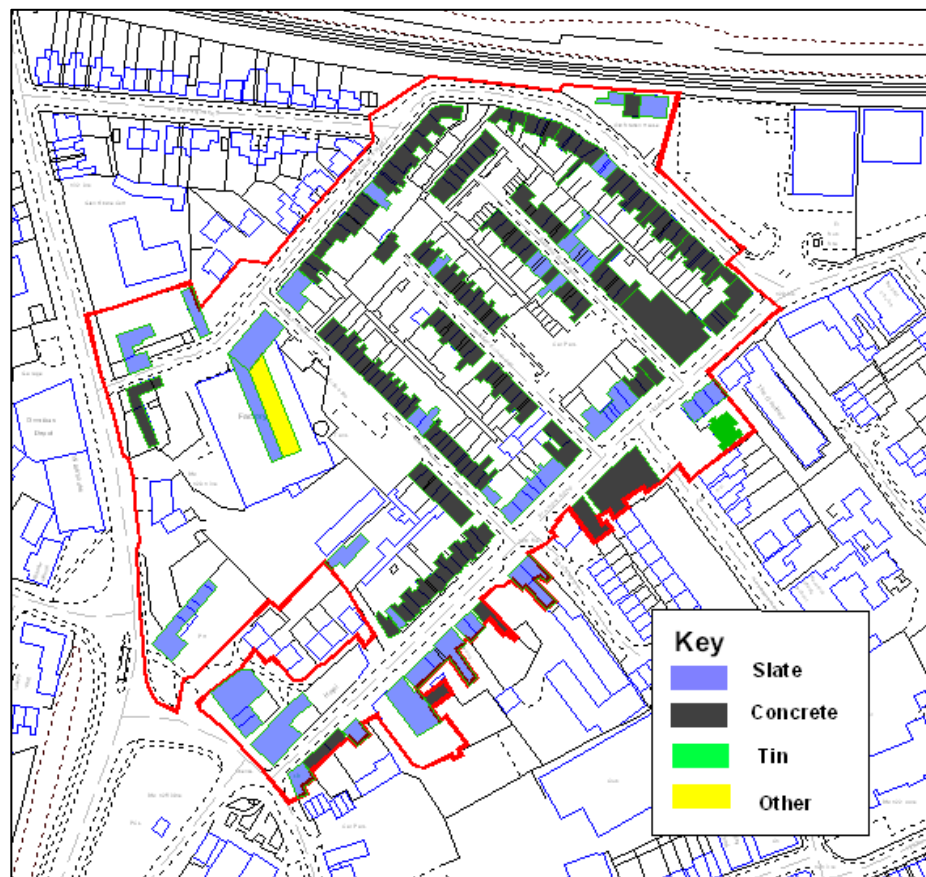


Figure 28: Roof-covering materials

8. Management Plan

- 8.1 A recent English Heritage publication has outlined the particular importance that needs to be given to the management of such areas as the one outlined in this report;

The scale and particular history of the boot and shoe industry has created townscapes that are unique in England. And, because many of the historic buildings relating to the industry are robust and versatile, they can be put to new uses and given a fresh lease of life. ...much of the character of these towns derives from a complex mix of factories, houses and workshops and the spaces between them. This calls for an imaginative strategic approach to whole areas if the distinctiveness is to be understood and sensitively managed.¹⁰

- 8.2 There are two key issues which are likely to have the greatest total impact on the future management of the conservation area:

8.3 Desborough Urban Design Framework (UDF)

- 8.4 The UDF for Desborough (2003) highlights the area within the proposed Conservation Area as 'Area 1'. The area is dominated by the Lawrences Factory Site (discussed below), but also proposes smaller schemes to support the heritage of the town centre. These include introducing high quality paving along

the High Street, new street furniture and the lighting of strategic buildings. The UDF also proposes environmental improvement works to the Burghley Street/Melton Street car park.

- 8.5 It is considered that these projects are key elements of the management plan for the conservation area.

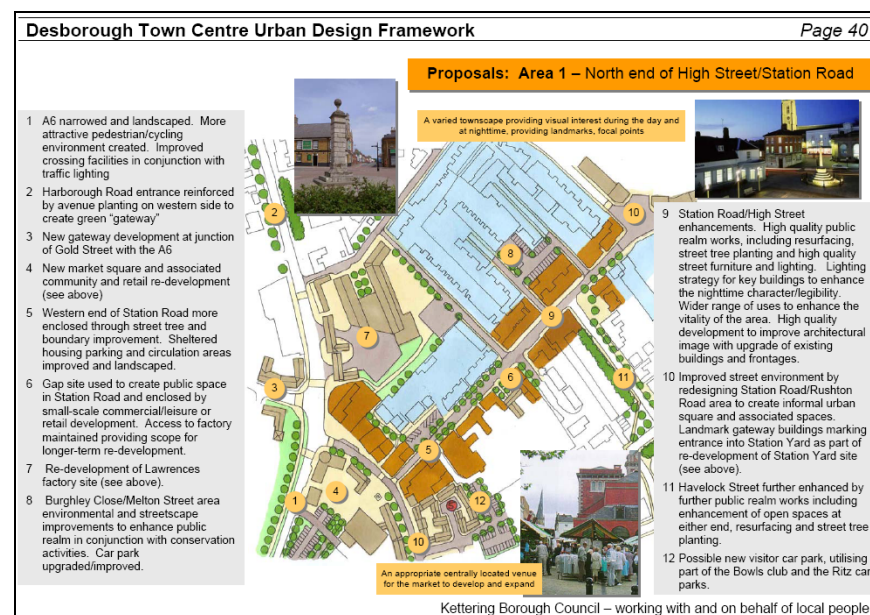


Figure 29: Extract from Desborough UDF

8.6 Lawrence's Factory Site Redevelopment

8.7 The Lawrence's Site is being redeveloped by the Borough Council with the aid of government funding. The three-storey range of the building has been retained, as has the single storey north-light element.

8.8 The aim for the site is to create a development, which not only celebrates the social history of the town, but also enhances the physical appearance of one of the defining elements of the adopted conservation area. The development will strengthen existing linkages with the existing town centre and create new spaces surrounded by active uses.

8.9 It is essential that the quality and character of materials used reinforces the quality of the area.

8.10 In addition to the two schemes detailed above, careful consideration should be given to the re-introduction of traditional building materials and detailing back into the area.

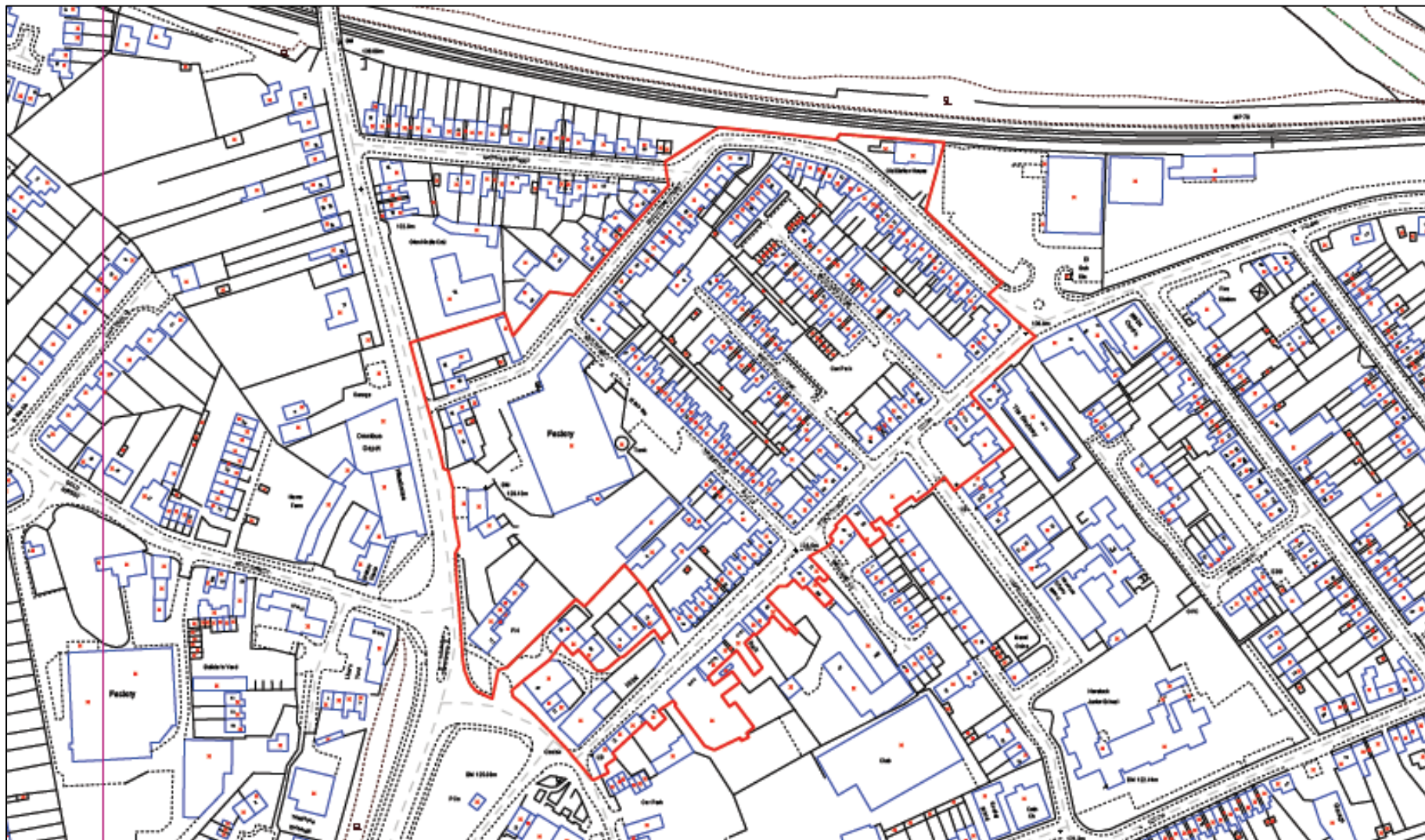
8.11 Highways Maintenance

8.12 The upkeep of the roads and pavements is the responsibility of the County Council as the Highways Authority. The consultation process has highlighted the state of the roads as an area of concern. The management plan could seek to address these issues in conjunction with the County Council.



Figure 30: Lawrence's Factory building

Appendix A: Plan of Adopted Conservation Area



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