

## Lower Baxter Street

This is a street in the Town Centre Conservation Area which is dominated by two elements which, perhaps, wouldn't normally be expected to dominate such a location: they are the office building St Edmunds House, which effectively fills a half of the frontage of the west side of the street, and ground level car parks which occupy about a quarter of the east side of the street. In common with High Baxter Street, Lower Baxter Street is appropriately located within the Town Centre Conservation Area due to its historical significance as a part of the 'Medieval Grid' laid out by Abbot Baldwin in the 12<sup>th</sup> C. Also, in common with High Baxter Street this street has issues many of which are similar to its neighbour and stem from the historical use of these streets as service areas for the commercial centre to the west. Again Lower Baxter Street experienced clearances in the 1960s/70s, when St Edmunds House and an extension to the former Borough Offices on Angel Hill was built, along with attendant car parks. These buildings survive with St Edmunds House, now converted into a mix of office and residential uses and to the eastern side others have been recently transformed by remodelling.

There are no listed buildings in this street except those with Abbeygate Street addresses at the south end, and all the buildings have been built in living memory. All are different in design. None are of a quality that would ever be thought worthy of statutory protection. While the street does not have the kinds of environmental/amenity issues that are prevalent in its Higher Baxter Street neighbour, it does lack quality in its built environment and suffers from the lack of enclosure due to the proliferation of ground level car parks. Although the street is highly significant historically, its built environment could be almost anywhere. While High Baxter Street may have issues, it does at least also have some interesting buildings which reflect its diverse history. This is not true of Lower Baxter Street which is a suitable case for enhancement and these enhancements will almost certainly have to involve development on sites with car parks and that is the challenge for the future.

The main characteristic of the Town Centre Conservation Area is that it is an historic location with a rich history reflected in its streets and squares. Alas Lower Baxter Street has little of this character and re-establishing it should be the ambition.

### Building to the South of Suffolk House (6 Lower Baxter Street)

This is what appears to be a town house which is very recently been developed as part of a project which involved major interventions to the adjacent listed building in Abbeygate Street. The scheme was designed by MS2 Architectural Consultants in 2016 and modified in 2018 whilst under construction. It has a similar Queen Anne inspired style to the listed building and was built on the site of a former car park. It is in two storeys with an attic with a pair of dormers. The ground floor has faux stone piers with a roller shutter gate to allow access to a car parking area below the upper storeys to the north of a passage at the south most extremity. The first floor is red brickwork with four sash multipane windows with flat gauged arches. The roof has clay tiles and the dormers are lead clad with heavy cornices and multipane sashes. Although the treatment of the front elevation has similarities to a historic style, the rear elevation is of a modern design idiom. Part of the rear is visible in glimpses from Angel Hill

This is clearly a modern building which on the lower Baxter Street frontage approximates to a Queen Anne house. It certainly has enhanced the conservation area as it replaced a car park and overall make a modest contribution to it.

### Suffolk House (Former Extension to Council Offices on Angel Hill)

This was an unattractive 1960s building which has been transformed by remodelling and conversion to apartments in 2015. In four storeys, parts of the ground floor brickwork may be from the original construction of the building but otherwise above it now is a bright red/terracotta cladding in three storeys with a castellated top with a mixture of recessed windows with balconettes and oriel bay windows. These are arranged either side of a full height central patent glazed screen relating to the staircase; the entrance doors are to the north of this.

The north facing elevation, which overlooks a car park has three storeys of a similar nature to the remainder. To the south again the remodelling is similar and there is a steel gate and screen which leads to a small delivery/car parking area.

This is an interesting and inventive remodelling of what was a mediocre building. There is no doubt it has enhanced the conservation area to which it makes at least a modest contribution.



### Car Parks to North Of Suffolk House

There are two ground level car parks divided by a tall brick wall which to some extent hides that to the south. One of these car parks is privately owned; the northern car park is publicly owned. To the rear of the private car park, the space is rather contained by the buildings in Angel Hill forming a barrier to the east, while Suffolk House contains to the south. The northern most car park has a low brick wall to the street which does nothing to hide views of it although the trees and red brick wall behind properties in Angel Hill give some enclosure, as does the former health centre to the north. This is a very large and rather open undeveloped area in such an intimate street. To the east of this car park is a rather charming Victorian cemetery, little known about and a small oasis which certainly is an asset in the conservation area.

Because these car parks give no containment to the conservation area they detract and would be better developed.



### Former Health Centre (Blomfield House)

This building, dating originally from the 1960s and now unoccupied, faces Looms Lane where it has its principal entrance but also has a west facing elevation to Lower Baxter Street and another facing south forming the north boundary to the adjacent car park. It was constructed as a health centre following the demolition of a large house when Looms Lane was widened in the mid-1960s. This is a building in two parts: a three storey wing the front elevation of which faces north: and a single storey wing which is perpendicular to Lower Baxter Street. It was given an external make-over circa late 1980s to a scheme by Brown and Scarlett Architects when red brick cladding was applied to replace the original white glazed tiles.

The Looms Lane wing is in three storeys of red brick work with a lead clad fascia at parapet level and with continuous fenestration, in the form of metal framed casements between two towers, each surmounted by an arched roof. At ground floor level are windows that are now boarded over. On the west elevation to Lower Baxter Street the building has three bays which rather echo the principal elevation to the north but here the central bay has high level casements, presumably the location of the lavatories. To the south of this, set back, is a single storey element in relief bays of blind brickwork, and further south more of a similar construction but breaking forward back to the pavement line and this wing is the full depth of the car park to the east, breaking back to the north at its east most extremity. It has an elevation which repeats the construction of the remainder with two single opening both of which are boarded up. Above this the rear (south) elevation of the Looms Lane Block is visible with continuous glazing at first and second floor levels with a continuous red brick apron and a lead clad fascia.

There is a roof top plant room which is visible from most locations.

No building is at its best when unoccupied and clearly this building was altered with good materials in the late 20th C to improve its appearance given its prominent corner location.. It at least pretty much fills its plot and maintains a street enclosure but overall is neutral in the conservation area. A scheme was submitted in 2019 for the conversion and extension of the building into apartments.



### 7 Lower Baxter Street

This is a building, presumably from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> C but heavily remodelled in 2016. It is in two storeys with a single storey element at its north end. The first floor was completely remodelled in the recent works and the three pairs of sash windows are all from that campaign of building and all of their openings are also new. The stucco render finish is also new but the cornice below the plain parapet appears to be historic. At ground floor the north most doorway and lining are modern but not recent, while the remainder of the shop front and recessed doorways all seem to have been rebuilt during the recent works. There is a plain tiled roof and a dormer which are all modern extensions but these are only visible in views from the north. Metal rainwater goods

The northern single storey part is also stucco rendered with a parapet to a flat roof behind. This element returns to the west at its north most. Here there is a buttress and plain stucco finish while the remainder of the ground floor has channelling to imitate rustication. There is a door opening in a central recessed section. None of this seems to have been altered in the recent works.

This small group makes a positive contribution to the conservation area.



### **St Edmunds House 1 to 12 and 14 to 16 Lower Baxter Street**

This is a huge and somewhat surprisingly almost symmetrical building which dates from the early 1970s and was built as offices. Parts of the first and second floors were at one time occupied by departments of St Edmundsbury Borough Council when it was formed in 1974. It is in three storeys of buff brickwork with dormered faux mansard roof with what appear to be a number of more recent additions to the roof dating from when parts of the building were converted to apartments in the late 20th C. The building is divided into three principal bays that to the centre having five bays of paired windows and flanking single windows with, centrally at ground and first floors, recessed arched bays in flint. To the very centre at ground floor level is an entrance door with what appear to be original panelled doors. Flanking this central section are narrow bays set back, both with entrance doors which are more recent additions - that to the north having a glass canopy, and that to the south what appears to be an original arched canopy with a wooden fascia above which are small windows and, to the south, a curious later addition at eave level. Both have later access ramps. To the extreme north and south are bays with four bays of single windows and with central recessed bays which repeat the design of those to the central bay. There are regularly spaced dormers with wooden original frames, except at the northern half of the building where they seem to have been replaced with lead clad versions. The original fenestration is with aluminium framed sashes, with smaller casements. The roof has had a series of more recent changes which disturb the regularity and symmetry of the building and these detract. This is a huge building to have been insinuated into such a small street in an historic location, and to modern thinking it perhaps seems remarkable that it was. The design employed good materials and struggled to fit such a large development into its site, however, it is hard not to conclude that it was not entirely successful. It is neutral in the conservation area although recent additions at roof level detract.



### **Guildhall Pharmacy**

This is a building of the final years of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. It has two storeys of red brickwork with blue brick dressings (something of a novelty in Bury St Edmunds). It has three bays and is almost symmetrical. The central bay has the entrance doors at ground level with a very large lead clad canopy, above which is a projecting lead clad bay window with paired casements and a single conventional casement. Flanking are similar bays with almost continuous glazing in the form of casements, and the south bay has two pairs of casements and the northern a pair of French casement at ground level. There is a large sign to the north and what appears to be a later ventilation grille on the south side, which detracts. The roof has clay tiles and metal rainwater goods. A simple building of no great architectural quality which is neutral in the conservation area.

