

Bury St Edmunds Town Trust

Gazetteer of Non-Designated Heritage Assets in the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Conservation Area

An Introduction

This document was motivated by the Bury St Edmunds Town Trust (BTT) wishing to support West Suffolk Planning Authority by creating a document which all can access which will explain what are considered to be heritage assets which are important locally, although not formally protected by statutory 'listing'.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021) explains that:

192. Local planning authorities should maintain or have access to a historic environment record. This should contain up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area and be used to: a) assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment; and b) predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future.

As part of this exercise LPAs would normally prepare a catalogue of buildings which are of local interest and will often call these 'Locally Listed Buildings' (LLBs). This is encouraged by Historic England and otherwise in further policy guidance particularly in a useful document about such matters on their web site:

<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/heag018-local-heritage-listing.pdf/>

There is, due to the nature of the policy and legislation, a difference in how LLBs are protected. If an LLB is in a conservation area (CA) it would be considered necessary to make a positive contribution to that CA and, as such, normally total loss (demolition) would be resisted. Such a building would be classified as a 'non-designated heritage asset' (NHA) but because it is sited within a CA, which is a designated asset, then its contribution to that CA is protected statutorily. There are arcane arguments about what a contribution can amount to and there is case law which has established precedence on this matter but, suffice it to say, it is the external elements which contribute which are protected but the elements which do not aren't.

Just to clarify what LLBs/NHAs may be: Non-designated heritage assets are defined as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape 'identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest ... [including] assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)'.

And in terms of what protection they have: Where undesigned heritage assets are concerned, the NPPF states that '*a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset*' when change is proposed.

So it is important that NHAs are identified along with their significance and what their contribution is to the CA within which they are sited.

This document which covers the Town Centre Conservation Area is in two parts: firstly the 'Medieval Grid', and secondly the areas outside of that location. The document, advised by the Historic England document mentioned above, is set out on a street-by-street basis. In Part One, all of the buildings which are not listed have been appraised and the 'list' populated by the buildings, parts of buildings, townscape and other elements which contribute to the architectural, historic, or cultural 'special interest' of the CA. In Part Two only buildings which are considered to either make a contribution to the conservation area or are or have elements which detract from it, are described.

The creation of the 'list' begins with an understanding of heritage value. To understand if a building or other artefact contributes to a conservation area requires understanding of the significance of the particular area or street in which the different buildings are located, including the history, townscape, and other features and their interaction and value as a whole. So, BTT undertook research and site-based surveys and analysis to enable us to reach this understanding. This allowed the Trust to conclude what is important in heritage terms about the individual elements which make up the location and which make a positive contribution to it. So, the document initially describes the character of each street and the 'setting' of the buildings and then describes each building individually and explains why, if it does, it makes a positive contribution to the CA, or if it detracts or is neutral in its contribution.

Part One: The Medieval Grid

This is the central part of the town and the area laid out by Abbott Baldwin in the 12th C. It is a compact area and includes the main commercial and residential parts of the town, with the market squares to the north west and Angel Hill and the Cathedral to the east and the Greene King Brewery, which remains one of the town's most important industries, to the south east. To the west is St Andrew Street South which marks the line of the medieval town ditch infilled in the 17th C at the time the town's gates were abandoned and a defensive boundary seemed less important than trade.

The topography of the 'Grid' is not flat. The land falls from the north west corner of the Market Square in Cornhill to the east and the River Lark and to the south to the River Linnet. The Abbey was built on the land to the east of the 'Grid' and this site is now occupied by the Cathedral and the Abbey ruins. There are significant views over this site from the west to the east which were assiduously protected when development in the later 20th C was planned at Morton Hall to the east. Such views are a reminder that Bury prospered historically not only due to the Abbey but also due to its rural agricultural setting

Because the 'Grid' has been occupied over an extremely long time it inevitably has buildings dating to a very wide period. There are several buildings still surviving from the 'primary' Norman construction period, including obvious ones such as the Guildhall, in Guildhall Street and Moyses Hall in Cornhill. There are also less obvious ones too, including 48 and 49 Churchgate Street, which is a 1300 aisled house under its much later outer envelope. There are 14th C hall houses and very many medieval houses some still looking like medieval wooden framed and plastered buildings from the 14th, 15th and 16th Cs and many others which had, during the 18th and 19th Cs, Georgian frontages added to disguise their true origins. There are also many Georgian houses but, arguably not really enough to justify Professor Pevsner's claim that Bury is a Georgian town. It may have the appearance of a Georgian town but its origins are much older and many of what appear 18th C buildings are much much earlier.

In truth Bury is a medieval town, its orthogonal grid of streets is still testament to its Norman origins and even buildings which are in most respects 18th C have cores and elements which are medieval.

But its buildings are eclectic and very many are listed. It has the rare early 18th C English baroque Unitarian Meeting House in Churchgate Street and the later 18th C Robert Adam Market Cross building in Cornhill, as well as domestic buildings from the earliest times. Alongside these 'starring' buildings are the 'supporting cast'. These are not the highlights of the town but in themselves are worthy of protection as they help provide the historic setting to their more illustrious neighbours. Places like the unlisted College Walk Alms Houses, still maintained as retirement housing by the Guildhall Feoffment Trust, are in themselves handsome but not architecturally important buildings but they serve to remind us of the history of the town and its institutions. They are not the only examples, Bury is a rare place as unlike many similar towns it still has people living in its commercial centre in the 'Grid'. So, there are residential buildings and buildings with other and mixed uses all over this part of the town centre, in the way there has been for many centuries. Here are different uses of buildings rubbing shoulders providing the kind of mixed environment that others places aspire to and which is to be treasured. Many of the domestic buildings are modest, but again provide the setting for their more precious historic neighbours.

'The Grid' is a unique location with many of the town's most significant historic buildings and streets. It has a rare surviving Norman layout and many buildings which help tell the story of its nearly 1,000 years of history- but for all that, it remains a real working place with businesses and even industries in this core. It has one street that starts with a brewery and finishes with a Cathedral and it has views of the countryside along side a thriving economic centre. It is very precious historic environment but one that is robust enough to have survived nearly a thousand years. It is very special and not just for its leading buildings but also for the supporting cast.