**Our Place Character Appraisal**

**Portland Square, Dean St and Brigstocke Road**

**A distinctive historic city**

The City of Bristol is one of the most historic cities in England. Founded in about 1000AD the city has always been a place of change, economic growth and innovation.

Until the First World War the fabric of the city was essentially a medieval structure centred on the cross roads of High Street, Corn Street, Broad Street and Wine Street. Even the outer structure of the city, now the inner suburbs such as St Pauls and Kingsdown, was based on medieval routes or field patterns.

Despite centuries of urban growth and densification this structure remained unchanged while building forms adapted to new uses and new architectural styles.

During the 20th century Bristol has seen its most dramatic changes with the depopulation of the central core, bombing during the Second World War and the dominance of private motor car use. Although this period has continued the process of urban renewal and the replacement of built form it is the Post War highway infrastructure projects that have eroded the physical fabric of the city on a scale unlike any other period.

Within this broad context, Bristol’s character is defined by a variety of distinct neighbourhoods and designated Conservation Areas - areas with a distinctive character informed by their topography, landscape, views, layout, land use and social development, architectural style, materials, etc.

A Character Appraisal is intended to help to explain how the character of a specific neighbourhood or a designated Conservation Area has arrived at its current state from its origins, and highlighting the key features that define the area as it exists today.

This understanding of place provides an evidence base which can inform future decisions and the most appropriate changes to the area. The aim is to enable positive development, which builds upon and enhances Bristol’s historic legacy and unique sense of place. Ultimately it will help to deliver Local Plan policies particularly around issues concerning local character and distinctiveness.

**Planning Policy Context and Scope**

Planning Policy Context

The findings within a character assessment provide an evidence base for determining character and context intended to guide and inform the Development Management process in support of national and local planning policies.

The over-arching planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied at a local level. The Core Strategy is the overall approach for planning in Bristol, guiding development and setting out key elements of the planning framework up to 2026 and beyond.

 Adopted character assessments will form planning guidance with status as a material consideration in planning decisions. They form part of a suite of guidance documents referred to in Policy BCS21 of the Core Strategy and the Local Character and Distinctiveness Policy (DM26) in the Development Management Policy document.

 Policy BCS21 of the Core Strategy states that development should contribute positively to an area’s character and identity, creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness. Policy DM26 expands upon this requirement by setting out the criteria against which a development’s response to local character and distinctiveness will be assessed.

**Purpose and scope**

This character assessment is intended to define the local character of St Pauls and in particular Dean Street/Brigstocke Road and their immediately adjoining streets. It identifies aspects of positive local character and distinctiveness as well as those which offer scope to improve the quality of the area.

The overall format of a character assessment follows English Heritage best practice guidance ‘Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management’ (2005; revised 2011). The features identified also correspond to those outlined in DM26:

Landforms, green infrastructure assets and historic assets and features;

Local patterns and grain of development and the historical development of the area;

The scale, character and function of streets and public spaces;

Important views into, out of and through the area

Landmarks and focal features;

Height, scale massing, shape, form and proportion of existing buildings, building lines and set-backs from the street, skylines and roofscapes;

Locally characteristic architectural styles, rhythms, patterns, features and themes;

Predominant materials, colours, textures, landscape treatments and boundary treatments.

**Study Area Boundaries**

- This character appraisal covers the central area of St Pauls between Portland Square and City Road, in particular Dean St, Brigstocke Road and their adjoining streets (map). These boundaries have been chosen because they contain a number of development sites, within an otherwise complete grid of Victorian housing.

A small part of Dean Street is within the Portland & Brunswick Squares Conservation Area (map).

**Historic Development**

The 2004 Pevsner Architectural Guide says ‘the district of St Paul’s expanded in the late 18c to accommodate rapid population growth on the fashionable N fringe. Two good squares remain.  It became industrialised from the mid 19c, with boot and furniture making prominent.  Post-war dereliction exacerbated racial tensions here, but the area has been turned around since riots in 1989.’

Portland Square was laid out in 1789, designed by Daniel Hague.  The Portland & Brunswick Square Conservation Area Character Appraisal says (4.1) *'this Conservation Area represents one of the best surviving examples of formal Georgian town planning in Bristol.  It has the highest proportion of listed buildings of any of the City's conservation areas (almost 70%) and the only Grade I listed square in Bristol. The Conservation Area is of national significance.'*

John Betjeman wrote of [Portland Square]… ‘with its exquisitely proportioned tower of St Pauls Church rising tier on tier, out of all that stateliness.’ 1,2,3,4,41,50

 Dean St (as far as Wilder St) was laid out around 1800, these ‘side streets’ to the squares are described as ‘simpler’ in Pevsner.

Brigstocke Road, Wilder St, Argyll St were in place along with the rest of the St Pauls grid between 1855 and 1874. 42

Between 1870 and 1880, there was an exodus of households living in Portland Square and Cave St to the more fashionable suburb of Clifton, to be replaced increasingly by boot, shoe, corset and other factories 5. The commercial buildings of this period were built to a high standard 25 doorway to 19c Shoe factory in Wilson St.

Small manufacturing remained the main activity of this area until WW2.

**Bombing and Post-War**

On Dec 2nd 1940, Dean Street and its corner of Portland Square was destroyed by bombing.

Post-war reconstruction was of poor quality, filling Dean St on both sides with utilitarian, single storey commercial buildings, mostly garages and warehousing. 43,24

Regeneration

After the war, Portland and Brunswick Squares, Cave Street, Surrey St and Portland St were in commercial use, mostly offices. Dean Street had a mix of garage premises, office space, servicing and warehousing.

In 2015, 20 Portland Square, on the corner of Dean Street, was refitted from office use to high quality flats. The success of this venture has started a trend and offices are now being converted to residential use around Portland Square. 6

Change of use to residential is now spreading down Dean Street. The building on the corner of Dean St and Wilson St nears completion and the as-yet un-redeveloped 13-19 Dean St site is pending a decision on change of use to residential from an existing student consent.

**Local Character and distinctiveness**

Landforms, green infrastructure assets and historic assets and features

The St Pauls street pattern makes use of the topography; Dean St/Brigstocke Road, the main N/S road with its intervening dip and curve between Montpelier and Portland Square, leads the eye towards St Pauls church, the focal point of the area. 7

Portland Square with its mature trees and St Pauls Park playground behind the church provide almost the only green space, and are much used by the community. 8, 21,22

Portland Square is Grade 1 listed, a major historic asset of Bristol and ‘of national significance’ (Portland & Brunswick Squares CACA 4.1).

Local patterns, scale and grain of development and the historical development of the area.

The aerial photograph above of pre-bombing St Pauls shows the grid pattern. Built in the 1860s, the two main arteries, Brigstocke Road and City Road, are of 3 storeys with basement, 9 (Brigstocke Rd), 10 (City Rd)

and the remaining subsidiary streets are mostly of 2 storeys with basement, 11 (Gwynn St) 12 (Argyll St)

All the terraces north of the Squares contrast in scale to the loftier buildings to the south of Portland Square.

Apart from the bombed Dean St/Brigstocke Road and Grosvenor Rd/Wilder St, St Pauls remains a complete early Victorian suburb, subsidiary in scale and grandeur to Georgian Portland Square, and of high quality.

The character and function of streets and public spaces;

The character, function and scale of St Pauls is largely domestic. The terraces provide good family housing with gardens. 13

Pedestrian ways permeate the area 44,45

Landmarks, views and focal features

St Pauls Church tower is a key landmark from much of North/Central Bristol, in particular from the Kingsdown hillside.51  At closer range, it forms the focal point of the view from City Road. There are good views out of St Pauls of the Kingsdown hillside and Royal Fort.

Typical of Georgian and Victorian street patterns, many streets are closed by a fine building or doorway. 39, 40 There are opportunities for development to restore this effect, for instance in closing off Cave Street. 49

Locally characteristic architectural styles, rhythms, patterns, features and themes;

St Pauls is very consistent.  It was laid out with wide streets and Victorian terraces of equal 1 and 2-bay plot widths.  Slight variations in style 18(Brighton St) and 19 (City Road) add interest. Detailing of windows, bays, cornices and front doors is of high quality 20.  Some terraces have bays, some do not 11,12. Some front doors have steps and railings over basements, while others are at street level. Dividing pilasters create vertical rhythm.

Predominant materials, colours, textures, landscape treatments and boundary treatments.

Painted stucco is usual. Some unpainted brick remains here and there.  Boundaries are low walls, some with railings.11

**Challenges and Opportunities**

St Pauls has many aspects that contribute to its special interest, which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. Negative features offer the opportunity for enhancement through either beneficial change, removal or redevelopment. The negative features that tend to threaten the character and special interest of St Pauls vary, and are often dependent on predominant land-use or historic factors that have affected a specific Character Area.

The character of St Pauls can be preserved and enhanced above all through ensuring that new buildings complement the strong urban grain of the area in scale, style and use of materials.

Encouraging the retention or reinstatement of architectural, boundary, paving and other details that add character to the area; encourage the improvement of appropriate public realm, street furniture, signage and landscape improvements.

Raising awareness of the type of features that contribute to local character and distinctiveness will help enhance the area. The challenges and opportunities below of this area may be used to focus strategic priorities and external funding sources aimed at resolving them.

**Strengths and Challenges.**

Strength Description Challenges

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grid of fine terraces | Good housing mix. Excellent family housing with gardens. Larger terraces are also adaptable to flats. | Loss of family housing, due to much subdivision. Terraces are unprotected. Need for a St Pauls Conservation Area? |
| Redevelopment sites in Dean St. | Post-war development provides an opportunity for better redevelopment sympathetic to its context. | Existing buildings and recent development have set low standard for new development. Market pressure to build out of scale with surrounding context. |
| Sustainability of the housing stock | Victorian terraces well built with thick masonry walls. | Reduce energy consumption with insulation. |
| Mixed use neighbourhood | Residential, mixed with offices, shops, bars, light industrial | Preserving mixed use against market pressures. |
| Very high concentration of Historic and heritage assets | Neighbouring Grade 1 and 2 Portland and Brunswick Squares with surrounding Victorian grid pattern. | New development must respect these assets in scale, style and high quality materials. |
| Long established routes | City Road, Brigstocke Rd/Dean St. are through routes. | Manage traffic speeds and resident's parking zones in St Pauls. |
| Foot routes | Throughout, particularly to the two squares and Broadmead. | Encourage walking and cycling. Provide good all weather surfaces for walking, wheel chairs and cyclists. |
| Pavement surfaces | Often poor | Restore with higher quality materials. |
| Neighbourhood Plan/SPD10 | Covers housing and land use, employment, safety, Dove Lane site, traffic and other issues. | Now 10 years old, but fundamentals remain relevant in 2016. |

**Positive features illustrated**

Fine Victorian street layout 61

Some excellent restoration 62

Range of mixed uses makes a vibrant neighbourhood: 26,27,29

Successful recent mixed-use development 28 (Wilder St) and 48 (Backfields Lane)

Cobbled streets 64

Rich history: 57,58

**Negative Features illustrated**:

Out of scale development: 38, 34,36, 33, 35, 30

Poor materials: 33, 53, 47 (poor quality bricks)

Poor design: 31, 36, 53,

Gated development 37

Poor pavement surfaces and street furniture. 46, 60,63

Shallow window reveals and doors 55,56

Negative impact of off-street parking 52 (or 54) and 32

Poor quality balconies 59

**Community Involvement**

A St Pauls Neighbourhood Renewal programme in the 1990/2000s was an intense period of public consultation and participation, resulting in the St Pauls Neighbourhood Plan and SPD10. While this programme is now closed, a planning group set up under Neighbourhood Renewal continues to look at planning applications in St Pauls. This group has written this character study, under the guidance of City Design Group.

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