



An Urban Design Study for Louth

prepared for

East Lindsey District Council

by

Matrix Partnership

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Executive Summary

that it identifies 6 key urban design features that are worthy of special emphasis, an awareness of which will be essential in any further management, improvement or redevelopment works.

These are:

Urban grain
Street frontage
Alleyways
'Backlands'
Architectural detailing
Use of local materials

The Study begins by making an analysis of the existing Town Centre under a number of different headings.

Chapter 1 begins by identifying the purpose and methodology of the Study.

Chapter 2 considers the wider regional context and the approach to the town by road and on foot, and identifies principal gateways as well as the legibility and location of car parks.

Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the historic development of the street pattern of the Town Centre that has led to the present day block structure.

A key to understanding the morphology of the town is the identification of different Character Areas, and for each area a sample figure ground diagram has been produced to illustrate the effect of development form on urban character.

Reference is made to the earlier Louth Townscape Heritage Initiative Stage 1 bid insofar that it identified a number of areas where the environmental quality of the town could be improved. This study however goes further in

allow opportunities for the Town Centre to remain the living commercial heart of the town, and to retain a sensitive balance between all activities, especially between vehicles and pedestrians.

The urban design strategy itself is identified as having 9 core elements as follows:

1. *The primacy of the street.*

This identifies the requirement to not only provide for and manage vehicular access, but also to design and manage the street as a pedestrian thoroughfare. This includes the role of the street as an important place of social interaction, not least in view of the limited public open space within the Town Centre. This aspect of the strategy recognises the essential role of high standards of detailed urban and landscape design in achieving the dual roles of traffic movement and parking and of making the streets convivial and attractive places for people.

2. *Grasping opportunities for new and improved parks and squares.*

The Study has identified the limited provision of open space within the Town Centre, and recognises the need to take every opportunity to enhance those spaces that do exist. Several specific sites are identified as needing special attention. In the instance of the The Gatherums, the importance of creating the right setting for the open space, including overlooking, is recognised. It is suggested that it may be better develop some of this space to provide frontage and overlooking and thereby a more attractive and safer place.

A number of road and traffic management proposals are made in this chapter of the Study. These include:

- Creation of a 20mph town centre zone
- Creation of pedestrian priority streets (part time restrictions)
- Key junction improvements
- Pedestrian crossing management
- Changed traffic circulation
- A reassessment of on-street parking provision
- Rationalisation of carriageway space

A most important medium to long-term proposal for dealing with traffic in the Town Centre is the re-provision of car park spaces on the western side of the town. This strategy would be an integral part of other Town Centre improvements in which, for example, the relocation of car parking spaces in the west would allow built development to take place on existing car parks in the east, thereby meeting some of the other urban improvement objectives identified in the Study.

This Study identifies the importance of the close integration of traffic management improvements with wider urban design objectives to enhance the Town Centre environment, and several examples of successful streetscape and traffic management schemes elsewhere are illustrated.

Chapter 5 of the Study builds on the analysis of the earlier chapters and identifies an urban design strategy for the Town Centre that has at its heart a three-part aim. This is to identify and conserve the historic qualities of the town, to

3. Encouraging sensitively designed contemporary architecture.

Recent development in the Town Centre has been of a generally low architectural standard and has usually been retrospective in style. A recommendation is made for higher standards of architectural design in future and for designs that are more contemporary, although sensitive to their historic context.

4. Focusing on the 'backlands'.

The townscape analysis also identifies the value and importance of the 'backland' areas of the Town Centre. These areas not only have their own intrinsic quality that contrasts with the street frontages, but they also provide an important urban context. The urban design strategy proposes the conservation of the essential qualities of these areas, that survives substantially intact in Louth, whilst allowing for appropriate and sensitive change within them.

5. Enhancing legibility.

Despite quite good 'natural' legibility, much could be done to assist the motorist and pedestrian in finding their way around the Town Centre. The town's many pedestrian routes, including those leading to The Gatherums open space are particularly difficult to identify. The improvement of signage and lighting is therefore an important element of the strategy.

6. Promoting active frontages.

The importance of retaining and encouraging active street frontages is recognised, and the Study particularly notes the dangers of inward-looking and gated developments. Large commercial developments near the Town Centre are also seen as potentially damaging to its fine

urban grain.

7. Rationalising parking provision.

Parking provision is already dealt with in Chapter 4, in which a range of initiatives is identified. The importance of integrating car parking into the overall fabric of the Town Centre is recognised as an essential part of the urban design strategy.

8. Making more of the river.

The river is acknowledged as being a much under-utilised resource and every opportunity should be taken to extend public access along its length.

9. Anticipating change.

This aspect identifies the importance of anticipating forthcoming and potential changes in the Town Centre in order to make the most of the potential available. This will mean a proactive approach and a wider view of the possibilities as illustrated in at least one of the following key sites examined (Spring Gardens).

Chapter 6 examines the opportunity sites and spaces within the Town Centre. An accompanying table in Appendix A has been provided that identifies the site area, ownership, existing use, constraints and potential opportunities of each site. Also identified are those sites and opportunities that could allow early, medium term and other possible initiatives and developments.

Several sites are examined in more detail with illustrated development options, showing how they could be developed within the framework of the urban design strategy.

These include:

- The St. James' Church area (road rationalisation, traffic management and landscape improvements),
 - BT exchange site (a larger potential redevelopment site, car parking options and an illustration of how parking could be incorporated into the urban fabric).
 - Spring Gardens (an extensive Town Centre area incorporating several sites including Queen Street car park, The Gatherums, Kidgate car park and Horse Steps. These proposals illustrate how a strategic view of a wider area can allow the creation of an exciting and integrated enhancement to the Town Centre)
 - Uppate (Potential redevelopment of a sensitive 'backland' area and an important frontage at the approach to the Town Centre)
- Chapter 7** indicates that an important element of the Urban Design Study is the identification of ways in which the various proposals and recommendations can be implemented. 10 steps are given, and these range from a program of community that stakeholder engagement and the embedding of the proposals in the Local Plan and Local transport Plan, through to the preparation of detailed Design Codes or Guides.

Finally Appendix B provides outline costs for public area works within the Town Centre including traffic management, road, parking, pedestrian and landscape improvements and enhancements. The costs are broken down into early wins and medium-term opportunities or initiatives.



Figure 1 - The study area

Chapter 1 - Setting the scene

Background

This Urban Design Study is prepared to accompany East Lindsey District Council's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Townscape Heritage Initiative funding. The report provides the foundations for a conservation-led regeneration programme to be taken forward by the District Council in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council and other stakeholders.

The District Council recognises that Louth has a high-quality environment which it needs to explore, enhance and exploit as a driver for economic regeneration and to improve the quality of life for residents.

Stage 1 of the THI bid process has already been successfully completed. The Stage 1 bid document identifies a number of areas in which the environmental quality of the town could be enhanced – and focuses in particular on where architectural improvements are needed to buildings of conservation importance.

In taking this work further forward, the Stage 2 builds on this analysis and takes a broader view of issues affecting the way in which the town functions. This strategic approach is taken to ensure that opportunities for making lasting improvements are fully grasped.

In June 2004, the District Council appointed Matrix Partnership to prepare the Urban Design Study that begins to provide the foundations for further development.

Purpose

The purpose of this Study is to achieve a clear understanding of the key environmental quality issues that have a bearing upon the physical appearance and economic and social vitality of the town. This is so that the resources made available through the THI bid can be used to maximum effect. The consultant team was asked to give particular attention to the impact of traffic circulation and parking.

The report will also have the additional benefit of informing future policy and in guiding new development and other changes within the town.

Importantly, the Study is not just a mechanism of control to ensure that new development is appropriate to the special and unique qualities of this historic town, but it also seeks to be an inspirational document.

It seeks to do this by raising the awareness of how the possibilities and potential of this outstanding market town can be sensitively harnessed and exploited, not just to enhance its appearance and quality of life of its inhabitants, but to ensure that the town remains a thriving community, both economically and socially. The study focuses in particular on central Louth – the Town Centre and its immediate hinterland. As THI funding dictates that funded schemes are located within Conservation Areas, attention is drawn to the area identified in Figure 1. However, the study does put forward suggestions for the wider area where these are considered important to the successful functioning of the town.

Method

The study has been prepared within an intensive eleven week programme. A client team comprised representatives of East Lindsey District Council's Conservation Team and the

County Council's Highways Department. A wider project Steering Group of stakeholders from a variety of public, private and voluntary sector organisations has helped to convey local issues and priorities, and guide emerging proposals.

This feedback has been augmented by a series of focused interviews with District Council departmental representatives. Mid-way through the study programme, a lively workshop was held to provide a broader range of local people with an opportunity to inform and respond to initial suggestions. Once the Stage 2 THI bid is submitted in October 2004, it is intended that an exhibition is to be held to open up wider public consultation and engagement.



The Stakeholder Workshop helped to inform emerging ideas

Chapter 2 - The wider context

Sub-regional context

In regional terms Louth is a relatively remote town, lying to the east of the main rail and road routes between the north and the south of England, and east of the county town of Lincoln (see Figure 2). Its position at the edge of the Wolds, however, is central to the eastern part of Lincolnshire, and local routes all focus upon Louth as the principal market town of that area.

This position of local importance but with relative remoteness from major routes and urban centres is one of the distinctive attributes of Louth, and is to be cherished. It has allowed Louth to continue doing what it always has done, namely to act as a market and service centre for the extensive rural communities of east Lincolnshire.

A remarkable feature of Louth is that, having grown and developed over many centuries, it has remained relatively unscathed from the damaging effects of the huge social and technological changes of modern times. So many of our towns and cities have suffered significant damage to their urban fabric as a result of these changes, but Louth has, so far, absorbed and adapted to the demands of the modern age. It has, for the most part, succeeded in remaining remarkably complete and integrated as a substantially Georgian and Victorian town without having suffered the highly damaging and often irreversible changes that are so apparent elsewhere.

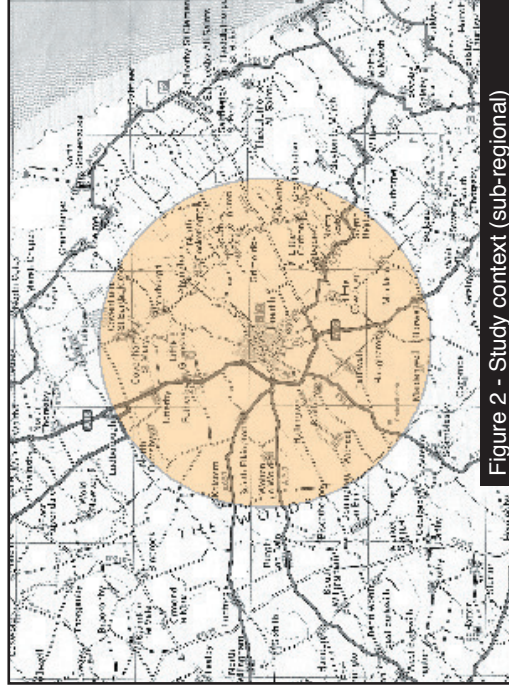


Figure 2 - Study context (sub-regional)

Economy and liveability

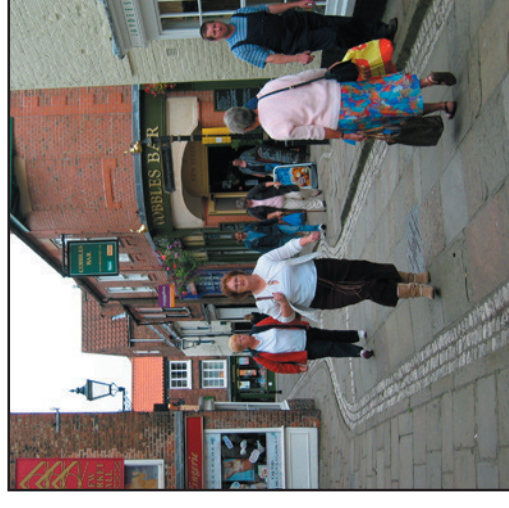
In shaping a framework for future development of the town, the challenge is to ensure that whilst the superb historic qualities of the town are enhanced and conserved, the historic fabric also remains the warp and weft within which the contemporary needs and functions of the community continue to flourish. In so many towns the demands of modern life, which differ so greatly from the conditions under which these towns originally developed, have been highly detrimental to their historic fabric. So often changes appear to have been too great and too rapid to be successfully embraced.

This study does not seek to define a method by which the town can be preserved or how it might be restored to how it might have been in the past. It does however accept, as a fundamental



principal, that the process of ongoing change is an essential and necessary element of any living community. What it seeks to do is demonstrate that, with care, sensitivity – and some inspiration – this historic town can continue to successfully absorb and respond to the new and often radical changes of the modern world, and in particular the demands of private transport.

Louth is outstanding because, to date, it remains so integrated and unspoilt by contemporary pressures. This study seeks to show how such environmental damage that does exist can be addressed, but it also seeks to provide a vision of how its superb historic physical environment can remain the fabric of a flourishing contemporary community.



Approaching the Town Centre

Approaching the town by road

First impressions count, and as one approaches Louth the first glimpses from the Lincoln Road are of the elegant St James' Church Spire.

There is another important first glimpse from London Road. As one gets closer, the main junctions where people approach the Town Centre from the suburbs or from out of town are indicated in Figure 3. At these locations there is a change of character in terms of the network of roads and paths, and they could be marked or celebrated as such. For example they could mark the point at which the palette of materials or lighting changes.

It is important that destinations and routes are adequately signed (to avoid people making unnecessary travel on the town road network). This is not always the case at present.

Approaching Uppgate on Newmarket there is no sign indicating that Uppgate leads to the Town Centre. The signing could be reviewed from the driver's perspective, and be better related to the driver's needs. If the objective is to encourage people to park in off-street car parks, then the signing should be to "Town Centre car parks" rather than to "Town Centre".

An objective should be to encourage drivers to park as close to their point of approach as possible, and to return without driving through the sensitive parts of the Town Centre (identified in Figure 4). This principle may be characterised as "Drive to, not through", as illustrated in Figure 5.

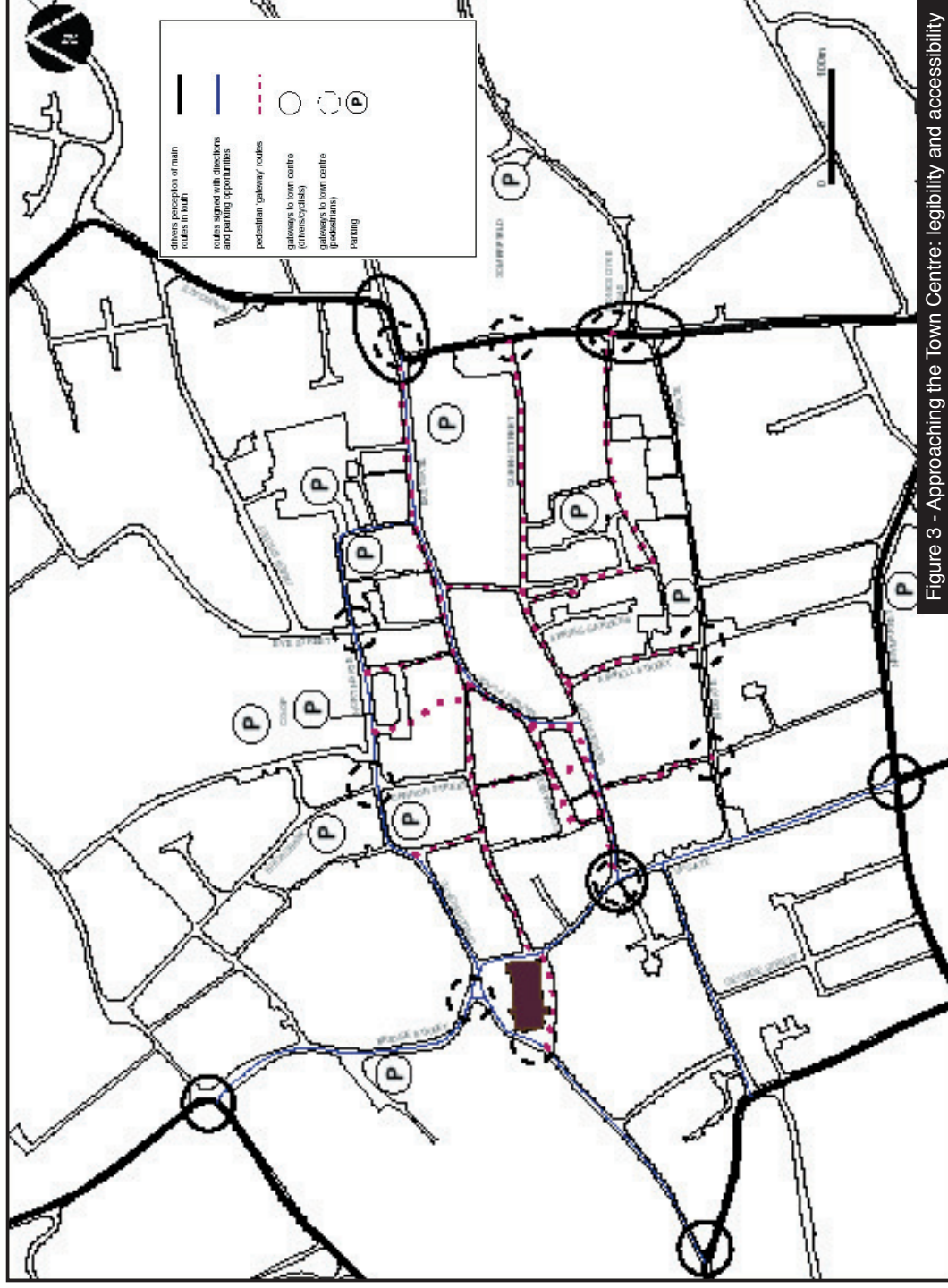


Figure 3 - Approaching the Town Centre: legibility and accessibility

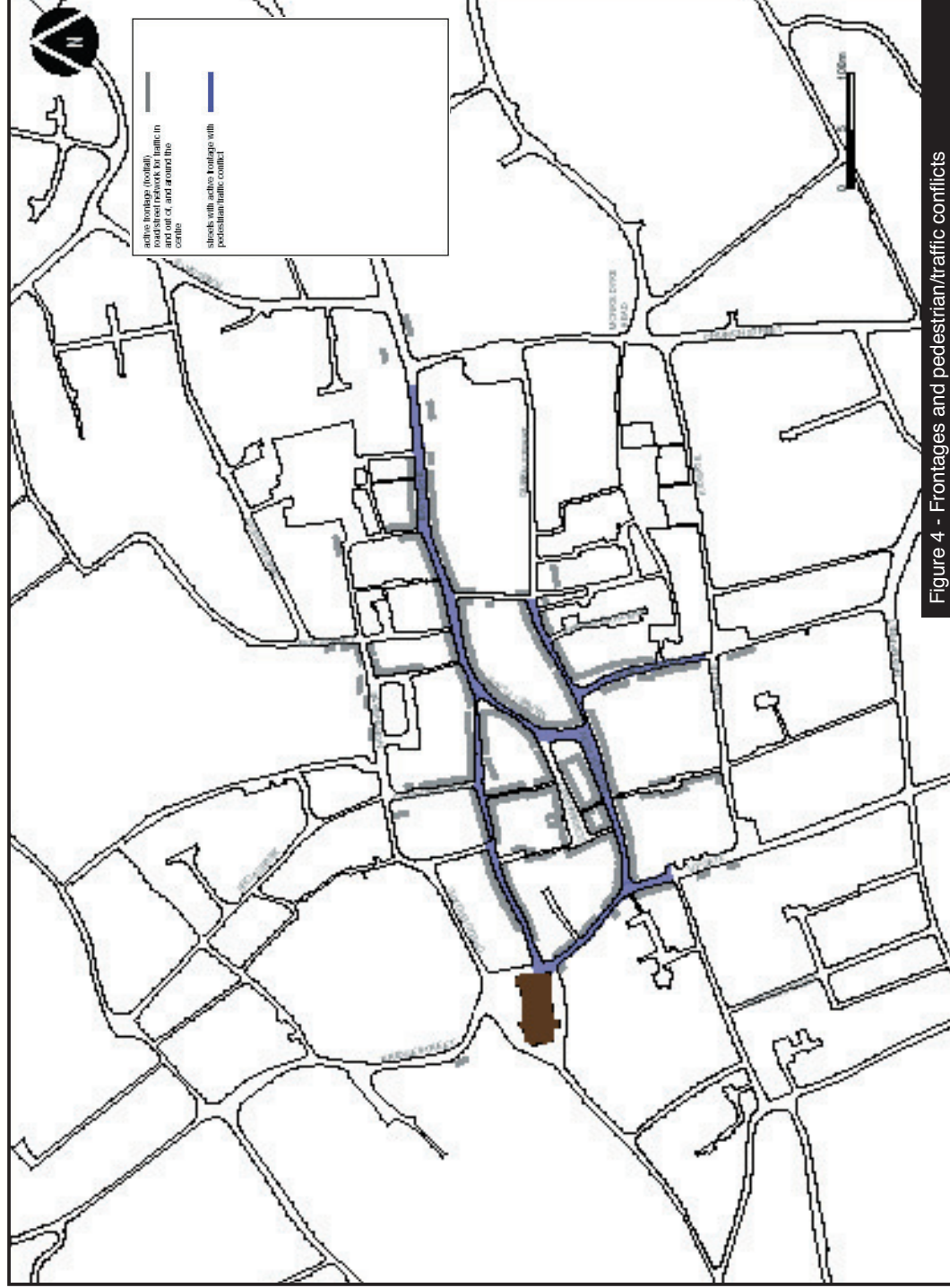


Figure 4 - Frontages and pedestrian/traffic conflicts

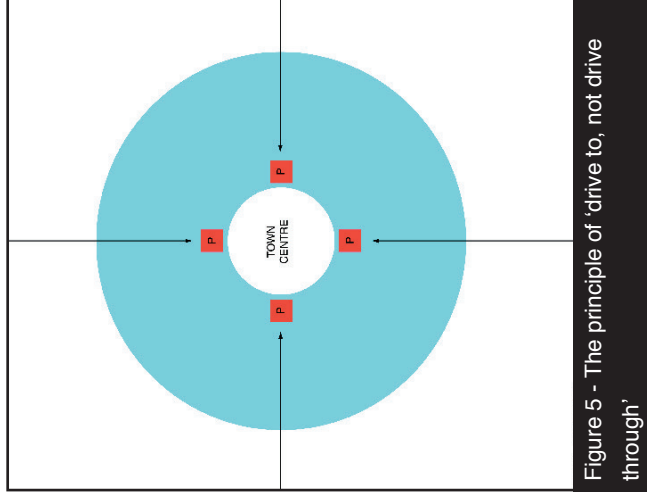


Figure 5 - The principle of 'drive to, not drive through'

Approaching the town centre on foot

There are a number of pedestrian paths approaching Louth from the surrounding countryside. All of these, however, end at the point where they meet the town road network. In some cases, the remaining walk into the centre is along relatively quiet roads, and with reasonable footway provision. In others the link could be enhanced with better footways, removal of vehicle crossover kerbs, and better crossing facilities.

Chapter 3 - The character of the Town Centre

Historical evolution

The medieval origins of Louth's Town Centre are clearly evident in the organic network of streets. Armstrong's 1778 plan shown in Figure 6 indicates the main urban structure, which remains almost entirely intact (see Figure 7). It is a key influence in shaping the character of the central area.

The original Seventh Century settlement that grew up around Louth's monastery is still evident in the street pattern today. Westgate and Eastgate follow the natural curve of the river and converge on St James' Church – emphasising its primary role in the form of the town. Upgate forms a key route from the south, leading into Northgate, which snakes down to the river. Interestingly The Gatherums open space (originally a track between two fields) defined

the southern limits of the town. A relatively large open space off Mercer Row provided the trading focus for this thriving medieval town.

As Louth's wool-trading fortunes prospered, the town's urban structure began to radiate out from this core, taking on the pattern of a 'deformed grid', as indicated in the 1834 plan.

Interestingly, the long narrow properties with minimum street frontage that extended from Mercer Row, where land was at a premium, through to Kidgate, have generated a land ownership pattern that has yielded immense variety and intrigue, as we discuss later.

As the Seventeenth Century progressed into the Eighteenth Century, more examples of Queen Anne and Georgian architecture emerged within the central and western parts of the town, often arranged within a more formal orthogonal grid. At this time the use of local brick and pantries gained popularity which have done so much to shape Louth's character and cohesive urban quality.

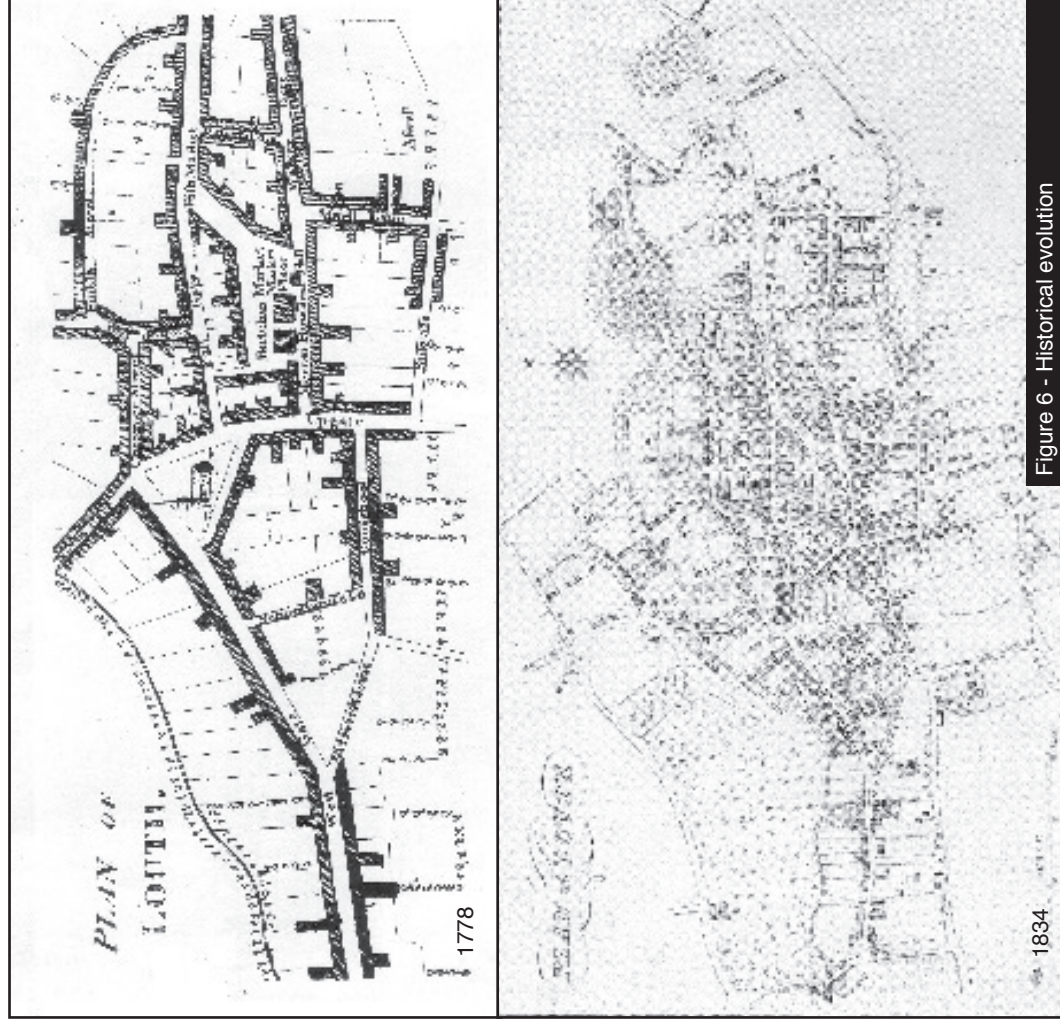


Figure 6 - Historical evolution

The historical legacy

Much of this historical legacy remains superbly intact. As Figure 8 indicates, the whole central area has been designated a Conservation Area to help ensure that this remains so. This is backed by an Article 4 Direction, which provides a further level of control over permitted architectural changes to ensure that the area's

historical integrity is respected. Also indicated is the plethora of listed buildings. Listings are based on a survey of buildings of particular historic and architectural significance that is now considered to be somewhat out-of-date. To help inform the THI-funded conservation programme, it is recommended that a thorough re-survey is undertaken to ensure that no building worthy of listing protection is omitted.



Figure 7 - Present day block structure

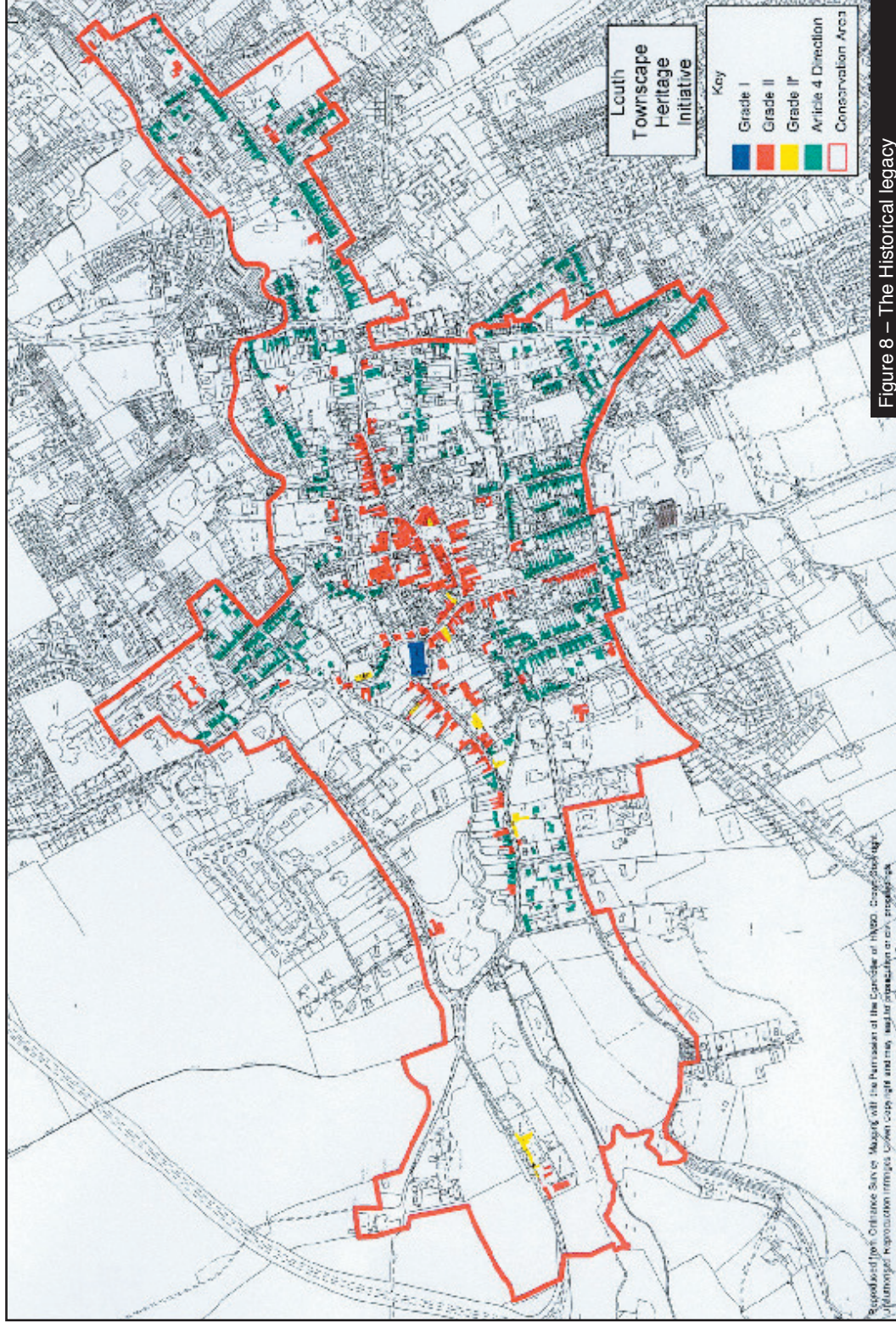


Figure 8 – The Historical legacy



Figure 9 - Character areas

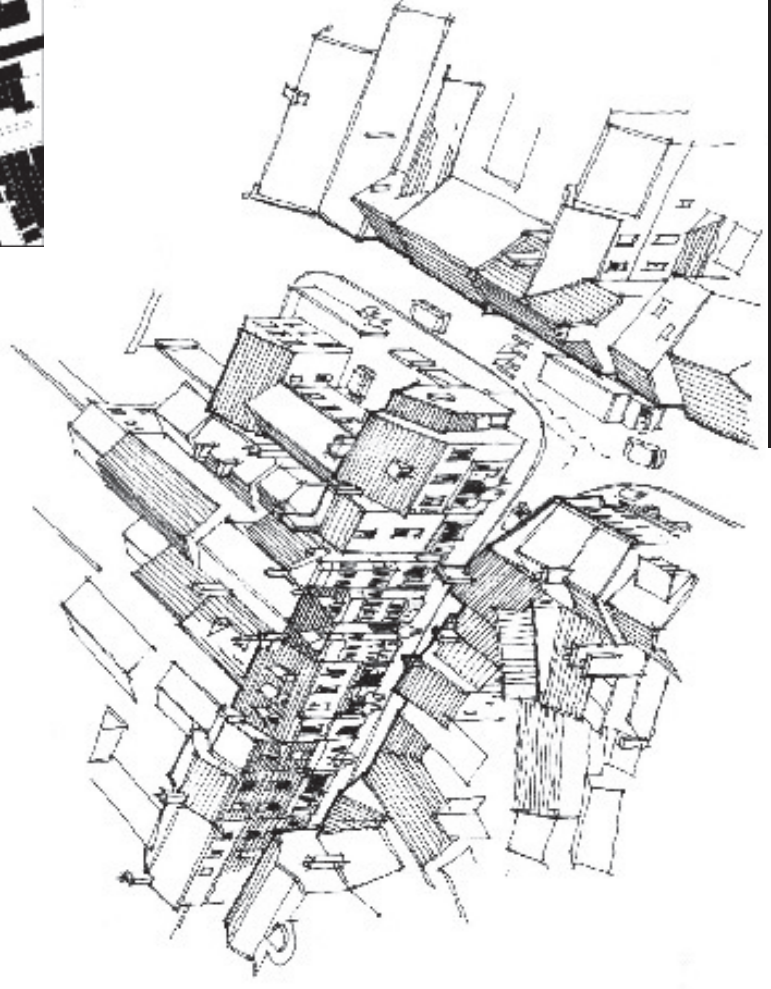
Defining local character

To help to understand the special qualities that shape Louth's unique character, eight 'Character Areas' have been identified (as identified in Figure 9). Each Area is summarised below and contains a series of common qualities and defining characteristics. Accompanying illustrations are included to convey the richness of character found in some of these Character Areas and also to highlight, in certain instances, where unsympathetic recent changes have resulted in this character being adversely affected.



1. The Town Core

The tight central area consists of a medieval street pattern mostly fronted with later Georgian facades. Long burgage plots are located behind, with narrow interconnecting pedestrian passages. This Area includes the principal civic buildings, but otherwise mostly comprises retail at ground floor with flats and accommodation above. The plots behind are used mostly for private parking and mixed uses including additional residential. Limited access often prohibits servicing from behind retail frontages. There is virtually no public open space and very few trees, but nonetheless it is an area of high urban quality.



Town Core

2. Established Edge of Centre

The edge of the Town Centre area has an historic street pattern with frontages still mostly intact. It is generally organic in character with some interconnecting pedestrian routes. Edge of street development is mostly tight, but plots behind are often larger and less intensively used than in the Town Centre. It is mostly a residential area, but other land uses include additional courtyard residential, car parks serving the Town Centre, small businesses, under-used and vacant land and public open space at The Gatherums. An often untidy ensemble creates an intriguing character, with a variety of different and often contrasting uses cheek-by-jowl. Generally it is an area prone to redevelopment, especially east of Aswell Street car park. It is an area of rich and varied urban quality, but some recent architecture and gap sites reduce its townscape quality.



3. Transitional Edge

This area is somewhat similar to the Established Edge of Centre character area, but it has been subject to some significant redevelopment in recent years that has resulted in a general change of character. This has often been at the expense of urban quality and particularly the historic urban grain. Although many Georgian and Victorian buildings still exist, mostly defining street frontages, these often appear fragmented by later development. Much of the recent development takes up large sites, especially the supermarkets and car parks, and these are inconsistent with the finer traditional grain of the Town Centre. The more recent development often sits uncomfortably with the scale, form, materials and building line of earlier development without contributing quality architecture. However the impact of these developments is generally reduced because they are situated off principal streets and behind traditional frontages. There are very few interconnecting pedestrian routes.

