

Hillgate Conservation Area

Designated 1992,
Amended and extended 2002



Introduction

Hillgate Conservation Area is an area of special architectural and historic interest following the route of an historic thoroughfare that descends into Stockport town centre from the south. This leaflet provides a summary of the area's special character and appearance.

Hillgate possesses a strong linear built form and contains a multitude of surviving historic buildings. Whilst the present day townscape is dominated by buildings dating from the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods, the grain of the area is the result of a much longer process of development.

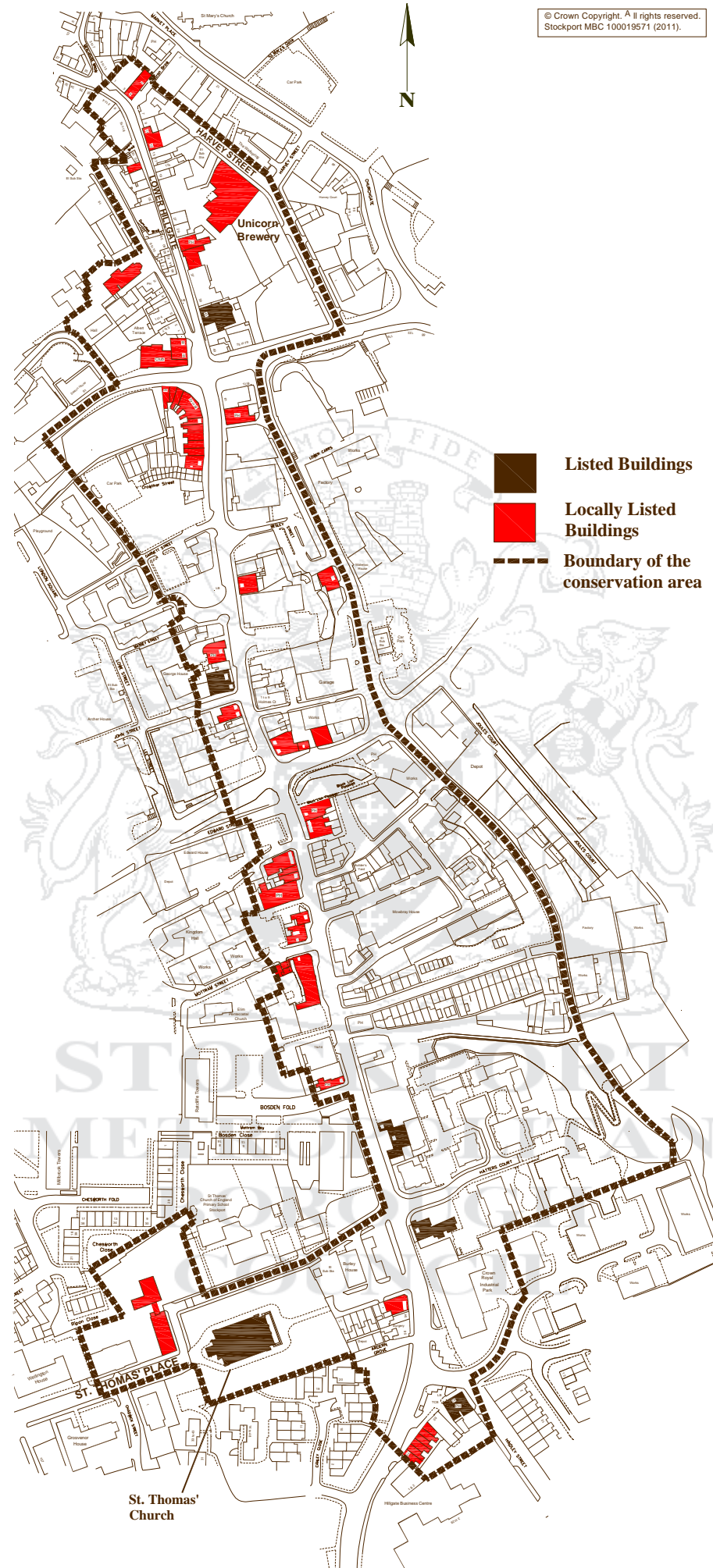
Origins and development

Stockport was granted its Market Charter in 1260 and developed through the medieval period as a market town. It was served by a network of roads including Hillgate - which converged on the Market Place and connected to a nearby bridging point over the River Mersey.

Hillgate is clearly shown on two of the earliest plans of Stockport: 'The Mapp of Stockport Town' (1680) and a map of the Stockport Township prepared for the lord of the manor, Sir George Warren (1770). Copies of these are included within 'Stockport: A History' by Peter Arrowsmith (1997). The historic alignment of Hillgate is little different from that which exists today. Both plans illustrate concentrations of narrow fronted buildings along street frontages to Lower Hillgate which reduce in density away from the town centre as the street becomes Middle and Higher Hillgate.



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By the eighteenth century Stockport was a thriving market town and had become a centre of small domestic industries such as spinning, weaving, leather working and button making. Hillgate itself formed an important coaching route and contained a variety of inns, houses, shops and early industrial activities.

The Hillgate area was most intensely developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Factory development on and in close proximity to Hillgate, initially associated with water powered silk production along the Hemphshaw Brook Valley to the east, further increased its importance. Cotton spinning and weaving, hat manufacture and other industrial activities followed. A succession of streets was laid out at right angles to the main thoroughfare, some constructed on existing long, rectangular plots of land which were the result of enclosure of the strip divisions within the town's medieval open field system. These new networks of streets contained factories and terraced housing, some arranged in grid iron street patterns or, as at Crowther Street, as steeply sloping stepped streets set into the adjoining hillside.



The importance of Hillgate was eclipsed by the construction of Wellington Road in 1824-5 and later by the construction of the railway in 1840-42, both aligned to the west of the Stockport's historic core. These new routeways became a focus for civic, commercial, and industrial development which continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. In Hillgate, the pace and intensity of development during this period was of a more modest scale and accounts for the survival of a significant number of its historic buildings.

Character and relationship of spaces within the area

A key characteristic of the conservation area is a series of shifting views towards the town centre on the descent from Higher Hillgate. The area's topographic setting creates vistas of key landmarks within the town centre - such as Robinson's Unicorn Brewery and St Mary's Parish Church - and provides higher level views of roofscapes within and adjacent to the area. Glimpsed views of warehouses, terraced houses and steps leading off from

the main thoroughfare are also a key part of the character of Hillgate.



The conservation area is strongly urban in character - densely packed with hard edges between public spaces and private buildings. It is finely grained, a reflection of the

area's long history and development. Hard surfaces dominate the public realm and traditional natural materials are evident in many of the streets running off Hillgate. The area is notable for the absence of green spaces or trees.

Key historic buildings

Hillgate contains six listed buildings of special architectural or historic interest: St Thomas's Church (Grade I), Rayner House 23 Higher Hillgate (Grade II), Samuel Oldknow's House 27 Higher Hillgate (Grade II), Star & Garter PH 61 Higher Hillgate (Grade II), 16 Middle Hillgate and Lion House 16a/18 Middle Hillgate (Grade II). Key unlisted landmark buildings include the Robinson's Unicorn Brewery off



Lower Hillgate. The overriding significance of Hillgate is associated with townscape and group value of surviving historic buildings. Most buildings date from the eighteenth and nineteenth century and front directly onto Hillgate. Aligned at back of pavement, they are typically to a height of two or three storeys and are constructed of red brick with sandstone details and Welsh blue slates.



The surviving buildings along Hillgate chart the historic development of the route and their range of architectural styles makes a significant visual contribution to the townscape of the area - the range of public houses, shops, houses and industrial buildings.

Today the predominant uses along Hillgate area are ground floor shops and offices, interspersed with numerous public houses, with light industrial uses on backlands and adjoining streets. Little evidence remains of the densely packed nineteenth century terraced housing which was once prevalent in this area and only Alberta Street provides evidence of housing which was progressively cleared in the twentieth century to make way for the high rise blocks which lie immediately to the west of the conservation area.

Character of Higher, Middle and Lower Hillgate

Higher Hillgate

Although some important buildings remain, the character of Higher Hillgate has been much altered by extensive demolition and redevelopment resulting in a less cohesive character than Middle or Lower Hillgate. The presence of gap sites and modern freestanding developments has harmed the character of the conservation area at this point.

Situated off Higher Hillgate, St Thomas's Church is, in architectural terms, the single most important building in the area. Although it does not directly address Hillgate, it is a key landmark building and its tall tower and cupola are visible from a long distance. The setting of the church and its graveyard is closely contained by residential and industrial buildings on Holt Street, St Thomas's Place and Marriott Street.

Middle Hillgate

Middle Hillgate retains a greater number of continuous building frontages. Buildings step down following the slope of the land and contain a mix of shops, pubs, public buildings, houses and workshops. There are few breaks in the building frontage, the principal exceptions being the main road intersection with Edward Street/Wellington Street, which contains undeveloped sites at three of its four corners, and Covent Garden, which is notable for the quality of its historic street surfaces.



The street pattern between Alberta Street and Waterloo Street remains unaltered since the mid nineteenth century. The area retains a fine grain of development although housing has departed from the original mix of residential and workshop units. The three streets which run from Middle Hillgate – Tollbar Street, Mowbray Street and Wellcroft Street – lead steeply down to Canal Street and are characterised by a variety of one, two and three storey back of pavement brick and slate workshops. In some areas remnants of the original setted streets remain as pavements.

Lower Hillgate

Lower Hillgate retains much of its medieval street layout and grain of development. The sense of enclosure on Lower Hillgate is created by the continuous frontage of buildings, the restricted width of the street and higher terraces of land to the east and west. The relationship between the natural and built features of the town is most keenly expressed at this point of the conservation area.

The predominant architectural character of Lower Hillgate is established by early to mid nineteenth century three storey buildings, constructed in brick with slate roofs. The street scene is interspersed with a variety of buildings from later periods, including black and white vernacular revival, stone baroque and modern flat roofed buildings, the latter harming the character of the roofscape as seen from higher levels.



The Purpose of Conservation Areas

- Conservation areas are designated by the Council to protect parts of the Borough which have special architectural and historic character
- The purpose of conservation areas is to help prevent the erosion of these special qualities by unsympathetic alterations to existing buildings, insensitive new development or loss through demolition
- The aim is to preserve and enhance the character of the area as a whole rather than by simply protecting individual buildings
- Conservation area status is not intended to prevent new development because sensitively designed new development can often enhance its character
- High standards of design will be expected for new buildings in conservation areas to ensure that the character of the area is maintained or enhanced

Summary of Planning Controls

- Most works to the exterior of properties in conservation areas are likely to require planning permission. These may include:
 - Roof alterations
 - Extensions
 - Cladding of exterior walls
 - New shop fronts and signs
 - Replacement windows and doors
 - Satellite dishes, extract flues or air conditioning units
- Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of buildings with a total cubic content of 115 cubic metres and the demolition of some boundary structures (eg gates, walls or fences)
- If tree works (felling, lopping or pruning) are proposed in a conservation area, six weeks notice should be given to the Council to assess the work and give consent or place a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on the tree. Please contact the Council's Arboricultural Section (Tel. 0161-217-6111).

This represents a summary of the works for which planning permission may be required. Precise details may vary according to each building and it is advisable for owners to contact the Council's Conservation Officer (Tel. 0161-474-2620) for advice when considering carrying out alterations to their property. The Development Control Officer for the Hillgate area can be contacted at Stopford House, Piccadilly, Stockport SK1 3XE (Tel. 0161-474-3569/3541).

Listed Building Consent

Certain buildings have been statutory listed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, as being of special architectural or historic interest. Anyone intending to demolish or partially demolish such a building, or to extend or alter it needs 'listed building consent'. This is required whether or not the works are internal or external and the application has to be made to the Local Planning Authority. It is a prosecutable offence to carry out work on a listed building without first obtaining this consent. For further information please contact the Conservation Officer (Tel. 0161-474-2620).

A free interpreting service is available if you need help with this information. Please contact the Ethnic Diversity Service Tel. 0161-477-9000, Fax. 0161-480-1848, E-mail. eds.admin@stockport.gov.uk

This information can also be made available in braille, large print or audio. Please telephone 0161-474-2620 for details.