

## Withington Conservation Area Appraisal

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Defining Conservation Areas

Conservation areas are ‘*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*’,<sup>1</sup> and are recognised for their distinctive townscape, including their buildings, streets and public realm. With regard to the English planning system, conservation areas are considered as ‘*designated heritage assets*’; any proposals for change or development must assess the effect that they might have on the character and appearance of the area. The Withington Conservation Area was first designated in July 1983.

## 1.2 Related Policy and Guidance

Once designated, Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local authorities to review the character and boundaries of its conservation areas; this appraisal of Withington Conservation Area by Donald Insall Associates provides the evidence base for this review process. The Appraisal will support the implementation of policies contained within the Manchester Local Plan Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2012), the emerging draft Local Plan and the Greater Manchester Places For Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (2021).

This document has been informed in part by the Withington Village Framework 2021 and earlier work assessing its character and appearance. The overall appraisal strategy is based on Historic England’s Guidance, in particular Historic England’s 2019 *Advice Note 1 – Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* which sets out clear guidance on the production of management plans and conservation area character appraisals.

## 1.3 Withington Village Framework

The Withington Village Framework was adopted in March 2021 to establish a vision for the village to 2030, prepared in consultation with a number of local stakeholders and partner organisations. The aim of the Vision is to improve the village centre in a way that engenders community pride and celebrates Withington’s identity, supported by a policy framework. A series of aims and objectives underpin the vision and the framework, providing a physical basis to guide, promote and implement investment in the area. This is focused on movement, access, public realm, streetscape and heritage, within overarching regeneration aims to reposition, reinvent, rebrand and restructure the village. Many of the issues and opportunities raised in the framework are also reflected in the assessment below – albeit with a particular focus on the conservation area and those elements that contribute (or detract) from its character and appearance.

## 1.4 Aims of the Appraisal

The Local Plan Core Strategy guides development in the City and specifies that development must preserve or enhance heritage assets including conservation areas – this Appraisal provides the evidence base upon which their required assessment can be based.

This Appraisal is informed by site surveys, archival research and public and stakeholder consultation. It describes the historic development and character and appearance of the conservation area. It aims to identify and define important features, highlighting buildings that contribute to the area, distinctive streetscapes and important local views. It also identifies features that detract from the area’s character, and outlines opportunities for positive change.

The National Planning Policy Framework states that ‘*when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.*’ This report also includes the process of boundary review undertaken as part of the evidence base prepared for the City

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<sup>1</sup> Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 69.

Council's Local Plan examination. It also highlights buildings and spaces considered to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area and those that detract.

### **1.5 Future Use**

This Appraisal document serves as a precursor to the accompanying Conservation Area Regeneration Plan. Both documents have been produced by Donald Insall Associates and LDA Design in partnership with Manchester City Council, Historic England and the local community and with funding support from Historic England. Site visits were undertaken in October 2023.

The Conservation Area Appraisal will serve the following key purposes:

- Address the challenges facing the area;
- Understand the significance of the conservation area and suggest opportunities to enhance its character and appearance;
- Stimulate local interest in both the protection of and the careful development of the conservation area for present and future generations;
- Encourage the conservation, repair, reuse and management of the area's historic features;
- Assist residents and developers in making informed change both in terms of small alterations and in larger scale developments;
- Provide officers with area-specific guidance to assist in their appraisal and determination of planning applications.

### **1.6 Interactive Format**

This document has been designed to serve as a practical guide for the present and future care of the conservation area. The digital version features interactive navigable elements that enhance its range and ease of uses. These include:

- A contents page with headings that directly link to the different sections within the Appraisal;
- Navigable headings at page corners, including one that returns users to the contents page.

## 2 Assessment of Significance

The significance of the Withington Conservation Area is founded in its architectural and historic interest – centred on the townscape character that is founded principally in its historic village high street. This central linear axis comprises ranges of Victorian buildings, punctured along its length by local landmark buildings, which are both listed and non-designated heritage assets. The high street has a vibrant environment and a sense of local distinctiveness, drawn from the varied architectural styles, the commercial uses, and a sense of cultural vibrancy as expressed by recent local initiatives.

Key buildings, identified for their contribution to the development of Withington as a village and their richness of architectural detailing, include civic buildings such as Withington Library and Fire Station (non-designated heritage assets), the series of public houses – including the Grade II listed Red Lion Inn and former White Lion – banks, particularly the former NatWest Bank (Grade II), the churches – St Paul's (Grade II) and Withington Methodist Church and St Cuthbert's Church (non-designated heritage assets). There are also key buildings located immediately outside the conservation area, such as Withington Baths (non-designated heritage asset), which contribute to its vitality and vibrancy.

Residential areas immediately surrounding the high-street also contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These range from large-scale Victorian houses on the principal roads (many now converted) to smaller scale domestic terraces with a more intimate character - such as Tatton View being of particular note - whilst the wider residential setting reinforces the sense of the conservation area forming the heart of the community that it serves.

It is, however, clear that the character of the conservation area has been eroded to a degree from its Victorian and early-20<sup>th</sup> century heyday, over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, despite conservation area designation in 1983, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of greatest impact are the poor-quality shopfronts and signage and a number of incremental changes. Although individually small-scale, these poor interventions have had an impact on how the conservation area is experienced on a day-to-day human scale – somewhat divorcing the ground floors from the high-quality Victorian architecture above and effectively creating a townscape of two planes. The heavily trafficked arterial road that forms the high street, narrow pavements, poor-quality public realm and the absence of amenity space put the conservation area's significance at further risk - impacting on the ability to appreciate those elements that contribute to the special qualities of the historic townscape.

What is special about the conservation area, derived through the quality of its buildings and historic townscape, however remains clear and there is an opportunity to better reveal this significance and capitalising on its unique history and heritage through the understanding which this Appraisal provides. This includes the maintenance of original and historic fabric and features, reversing poor quality alterations and interventions, improvements to the public realm, and the celebration of Withington's historic development and associations alongside more contemporary cultural initiatives.

## 3 Location and Context

### 3.1 Location and Population

Withington is located in the City of Manchester, approximately 3 miles south of the city centre. Wilmslow Road (B5093) forms the spine of the conservation area, which runs between Withington Library to the north and Tatton View (off Tatton Grove) to the south. This principal road forms the commercial core of Withington with the District Centre largely falling within the conservation area, aside from its west spur along Copson Street. The conservation area also includes small pockets of residential housing to the east and south. The boundary follows the rear of properties rather than being defined by streets, and the conservation area falls within two wards –Withington to the east of Wilmslow Road and Old Moat to the west [Map 1].

As a conservation area based on a village centre it serves a community that extends beyond its boundaries. These are principally the Withington and Old Moat wards, which lie to the east and west of the high street respectively, with a range of demographics between them. Of particular note is the high student population, the transient nature of which can bring issues in terms of a sense of ownership of the local area but can also add to the vibrancy and cultural identity; this is further reinforced by the location of the Christie Hospital immediately to the south of the conservation area, which once again draws a variety of people into the area on a more temporary basis. Through public consultation it is clear that longer-term residents have a particularly vested interest in how the conservation area has evolved and degraded, and a keenness to ensure that its significance is better revealed. It is also important that the views of the younger generation area understood in order to ensure that the relevance of the conservation area endures.

### 3.2 Gateways and Setting

The Withington Conservation Area has a completely urban setting. North of the conservation area the urban grain of larger scale properties set back from the road continues along Wilmslow Road – although now with many of the Victorian villas redeveloped, alongside further infill development, and with the large front gardens now typically hard landscaped – albeit with street trees and some trees to front gardens, retaining a sense of greenery along the busy road.

On approach along Wilmslow Road from Fallowfield the gateway is defined by the library as the road bends to reveal the high street [Plate 3.1].

To the south the gateway points are less clearly defined, with a number of roads coming together to form the key intersection at the north end of Palatine Road. However, key landmark buildings stand at the southern entry points – the 17<sup>th</sup> century Red Lion Inn and the Fire Station to Wilmslow Road and St Cuthbert's Church to Palatine Road. South of the boundary, the substantial Christie Hospital, associated buildings and neighbouring larger scale blocks form a significant intervention in the townscape to the south of the conservation area in the area spanning between Wilmslow and Palatine Roads. Although there are some pockets of more domestic-scaled intervening buildings, they are of lesser quality than those in the conservation area and the hospital forms a clear break in the Victorian suburban townscape and denotes the area's southern reach [Plates 3.2-3.4].

On approach from Burton Road the clock tower of the former White Lion Hotel, which sits on the intersection, clearly marks the entry point into the conservation area, beyond which the townscape has a more varied character of 20<sup>th</sup> century development with historic fragments interspersed, the Public Hall Institute and Withington Baths being of particular note in terms of their architectural quality and contribution to the historic development and character of the area [Plates 3.5 and 3.6].

Beyond, to the west of the conservation area, the townscape is predominantly residential, forming a mixture of Victorian terraces, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century semi-detached houses, and later 20<sup>th</sup> century social housing; representative of the suburban development of south Manchester and linked to the conservation area via the continuation of the high street along Copson Street. East of the conservation area is 'The Estate', a development of Victorian semi-detached villas, centred around Parsonage Road, which forms the eastern gateway into the conservation area and extends eastwards to Alan Road

[Plates 3.7-3.9].

## 4 Historic Development

### 4.1 Early Development by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Withington is likely to have already existed, as a farmstead, by the early medieval period, giving rise to its Anglo-Saxon name, 'Withy-ton' (the farmstead in the willow copse). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was an independent manor in its own right, subject to a Lord of the Manor, William de Withington. It was absorbed into the larger Barony of Manchester sometime later in the same century.<sup>2</sup>

Withington and its surroundings were still rural even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Egerton family acquired much of Withington. Still agricultural in character, its main buildings were a few large halls and farms occupied by landowners, interspersed with scattered clusters of smaller cottages lived in by agricultural labourers and those who worked in ancillary trades. The early settlement of Withington itself was focused on the road to Wilmslow, which ran from the south of England into central Manchester (and is today known as Wilmslow Road).<sup>3</sup> The importance of this highway was solidified in 1753, when an Act of Parliament established it as an early turnpike road. The road was subsequently re-laid and a series of milestones introduced, each giving the distance to the final terminus at St Ann's Square in central Manchester. The milestone (Grade II) that survives outside the Fire Station is a rare survivor of these [Plate 4.1].<sup>4</sup>

Over time a hamlet developed along the turnpike road, remaining much smaller than today. Christopher Green's Plan of Lancashire (published in 1818) shows what was still a linear ribbon settlement running along this main road, the largest cluster of buildings situated on the north side of the junction with what is today Burton Road [Plate 4.2]. Although this junction later became the core of the village few buildings survive from the period. The Red Lion Inn (Grade II) is an exception, built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (with later alterations and additions), when the village was mainly comprised of modest buildings housing those who worked the land, the artisans and craftsmen who serviced the local agricultural economy, and their workplaces and stores, or the shops and inns that emerged to serve residents and travellers passing through [Plate 4.3].

### 4.2 Transformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The transformation of the nearby town of Manchester began in the 1780s, as industrialisation turned what had been a small market town into a major economic power. Yet, Withington's distance from the town meant that it was initially slow to feel the effects of this. The Ordnance Survey map published in 1848 shows Withington as still semi-rural, occupied by a cluster of smaller buildings at the main junction (where the White Lion Hotel already existed), with farms and larger buildings running along the connecting roads [Plate 4.4]. A new Anglican parish church dedicated to St Paul (Grade II) did, however, now exist, erected in 1841 (to the designs of architects Hayley and Brown) and set in a large churchyard at the side of Wilmslow Road [Plate 4.5]. This would be extended in 1864, adding the chancel and chapel.

Withington's own transformation came in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it experienced an influx of affluent middle-class professionals seeking to escape the noise and grime of industrial Manchester. This was made possible in part by the sale of land from the Egerton Estate (which began in 1887), and was accelerated by the construction of a second turnpike road in 1862 – Palatine Road.<sup>5</sup> Initially these new houses were large villas, built for upper-middle-class families, individually designed and situated along the main roads. In later years, as the lower middle classes also flocked to Withington, the village grew to include new purpose-built residential side streets of smaller detached and terraced villas. A single much denser area of housing, with only yards to the rear, also emerged to the west of the high street, most likely built for the socially aspirant "respectable" working classes, needed to staff Withington's emerging businesses.

Development was rapid, the Ordnance Survey map published in 1894 now showing groups of irregular terraced buildings, likely with shops below, running along either side of Wilmslow Road to the north of the junction. A dense grid of more

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<sup>2</sup> Manchester City Council. (2014), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Withington Civic Society. (2020), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Idem., 'Village Walk'.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

regular residential terraces extended across the new streets situated to the west, whilst the land to the east of Wilmslow Road was already occupied by streets of large detached and semi-detached villas, set back from the road and with generous gardens to the rear [Plate 4.6]. Similar villas also ran along the east side of Palatine Road, the west side containing even larger and more bespoke properties, especially in the south, whilst development was also beginning to spread along Burton Road, into the fields in the southwest.

This arrival of professionals was also helped by improved transportation, linking Withington to Manchester and other surrounding towns. Withington Railway Station opened in 1880 at the corner of Palatine Road and Lapwing Lane and horse drawn trams, providing direct access to Manchester, arrived at around the same time [Plate 4.7].<sup>6</sup> These new professional classes had confidence and knowledge and were able to form a Local Board of Health (1876), responsible for many matters of local governance, amongst them building control and policing. For other matters, Withington remained part of a much wider area managed by the Chorlton Union, which had built the Chorlton Union Workhouse in 1855, situated at the southern end of Burton Road [Plates 4.8-4.9].<sup>7</sup>

Withington's Victorian residential development was also complemented by the construction of large civic, religious and commercial buildings, mainly located along Wilmslow Road and at its junction with Palatine Road [Plate 4.10]. The Withington Public Hall and Institute was constructed in 1861 as a gift to Withington from Lord Egerton of Tatton and housed the area's first lending library (and from 1906, a members' club).<sup>8</sup> It was followed by a branch of the Manchester and County Bank, opened on Wilmslow Road in the Oak Bank Buildings in 1877 (and relocated in 1890 to new purpose-built premises designed by Mills and Murgatroyd (Grade II)).<sup>9</sup> Highlighting the new wealth and fashionableness of Victorian Withington, the early-19<sup>th</sup>-century White Lion (Grade II) was also rebuilt to match these aspirations, to designs by William Mellor (completed in 1880) [Plate 4.11].<sup>10</sup> The Local Board of Health offices followed in 1881, constructed on Lapwing Lane at its junction with Palatine Road and later converted into Withington Town Hall (Grade II) [Plate 4.12]. Religious buildings were also constructed to cater for the growing populace and included Withington Methodist Church, built in 1865, the Roman Catholic Church of St Cuthbert (1881) and the Primitive Methodist Chapel of 1891 [Plate 4.13].<sup>11</sup> Travellers to and from Manchester similarly remained an important part of Withington's custom and the trough was erected in 1876 to provide water for humans, horses and dogs alike.<sup>12</sup>

### 4.3 Consolidation in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In less than 50 years Withington had been transformed from a small agricultural village, surrounded by fields, into a growing mainly middle-class and upper-middle-class suburb of Manchester. Maps and photographs from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show the village already developed with the character that exists today, with commercial activity focused on Wilmslow Road, a number of grand Victorian civic buildings, and residential areas running along the arterial roads and side streets [Plates 4.14-4.15].

Withington, Fallowfield and Didsbury had been combined as Withington Urban District in 1894 but were brought into the City of Manchester only 10 years later, formalising and confirming their identity as thoroughly urban suburbs of the growing city.<sup>13</sup> The open areas between what had once been separate villages began to disappear as development spread and the population of Withington grew accordingly, prompting a need for modern services for an urban population. The council library opened in 1911 at Wilmslow Road's junction with Wellington Road and was replaced 16 years later, by a new Carnegie Library built on the same spot to the designs of the Manchester City Architect, Henry Price [Plates 4.16-4.17].<sup>14</sup> Withington Public Baths, also by Price, were built in 1911-14 and incorporated baths and two swimming pools, the pools the first in Manchester for mixed-sex swimming [Plate 4.18-4.19].<sup>15</sup> The fire station – the first ever in a Manchester suburb – was built in 1931, and the Christie Hospital building, directly opposite, in 1932 [Plate 4.20].<sup>16</sup> This new purpose-built hospital replaced the older Christie building on Lorne Street (opened in 1892) and the Holt Radium Institute premises

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<sup>6</sup> Sussex and Helm. (1988), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Withington Civic Society, 'Village Walk'.

<sup>8</sup> Whittaker. (1969), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Hartwell et al. (2004), p. 487.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Withington Civic Society., 'Village Walk'. The trough, relocated, now sits on Copson Street.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hartwell et al. (2004), p. 485.

<sup>15</sup> Withington Civic Society. (2020), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Withington Civic Society, 'Village Walk'.

at Nelson Street, bringing the two organisations under a single roof.<sup>17</sup>

The village as established by 1900 remained fundamentally unchanged at the outbreak of the First World War, although the Scala Cinema had arrived in 1912, built with a Tudor frontage at the corner of Copson Street and Wilmslow Road [Plates 4.21-4.23]. The tram system had been electrified in the Edwardian period and remained in operation until the late 1930s, with Wilmslow Road remaining a major thoroughfare. Photographs from that time record a thriving high street, the Victorian buildings still with their traditional shopfronts, many with canopies to the front, often with signage above the shop windows or on the upper floors [Plate 4.24]. The building boom of the interwar period then added new areas of detached and semi-detached housing on the edges of the village. By 1935 several sprawling interwar housing developments had been built around the village's edge, set around cul-de-sacs and perhaps informed by the ideals of the garden city model [Plate 4.25].

The Second World War did little to affect Withington's changing character, there being only minor bomb damage, mainly affecting the high street [Plate 4.26].

#### **4.4 Changes in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Withington continued to grow and develop as a major suburb of Manchester immediately after the Second World War. Housebuilding was focused beyond the edges of the traditional village settlement, creating estates of semi-detached housing at Arnfield Road and the extended Heaton Road (1955) [Plate 4.27].

Slum clearance opened up sites for redevelopment from the later 1950s onwards and by the 1980s almost all of the cottages that had survived from Withington's formerly agricultural past had been demolished, as had the poorer-quality rows of Victorian terraces. By the late 1980s the George Street, Ashey Grove and Queen Street terraces had all been replaced by modern housing, with the cleared area to the south of Copson Street left vacant until the 1990s, when the Co-Operative store, car park and neighbouring shops were built [Plates 4.28-4.30].

The demography of Withington was also changing again as Manchester's universities expanded. An increased demand for accommodation in the southern suburbs of the city saw a growing number of the area's historic Victorian homes subdivided to create houses of multiple occupation for rent to students and young professionals. Demolition for replacement by apartments, the effects of subdivision, and the loss of gardens and landscaping for parking all combined to help prompt the City of Manchester's designation of the Withington Conservation Area in 1983.<sup>18</sup>

Wilmslow Road's high street remained strong in the post-war period, with occasional buildings replaced and many of the older buildings fitted with modern shopfronts [Plates 4.31-4.32]. The national chains, including Tesco, also began to arrive, whilst Copson Street continued to serve as a secondary high street, with several small retailers located along its eastern end and the '9-5' Police Station opened in 1981.<sup>19</sup> The trough, having been relocated to the library, was moved to Copson Street in 1987.

The postwar growth in car ownership, coupled with the 1961 closure of the Withington and West Didsbury Railway Station, acted to increase traffic pressures on Wilmslow, Palatine and Burton Roads, Wilmslow Road as a major entrance into the growing City of Manchester. The growth in traffic and success of the high street also created demand for parking spaces within the historic core itself, all creating heavy pressure on its roads and pavements [Plate 4.33]. Shopfronts also continued to be modernized, although the historic features surrounding these appear to have generally survived [Plate 4.34].

As in many other parts of Britain, the arrival of shopping centres, out-of-town retail parks and, eventually, online shopping and banking, all began to affect the fortunes of Withington's high street in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century [Plate 4.35].

#### **4.5 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Withington**

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Manchester City Council. (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Withington Civic Society, 'Village Walk'.

The White Lion fell vacant in 2007, its building remaining empty until it reopened as a Sainsbury's with apartments above, whilst the NatWest closed in 2015 and the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2018. Several historic buildings were also lost, most notably the Scala Cinema, demolished in 2010 (replaced by a contemporary mixed-use building). Outside the conservation area, the threatened closure of Withington Baths in 2013 eventually led to its reopening under community operation, supported by a £1 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund [Plate 4.36].

Further community initiatives have worked to improve the public realm, with the Withington Framework commissioned by Withington Village Regeneration Partnership (formed in 2017) and adopted by Manchester City Council in 2021.<sup>20</sup> The Withington Walls project, founded in 2020, also seeks to support local reinvigoration, commissioning and delivering street art to shutters and walls.

Outside of the conservation area, the Christie hospital has experienced extensive development since 2015, becoming a major centre of employment in Withington. The opening of the Proton Beam Therapy Centre in 2018, followed by the Paterson building in 2021, have enabled the hospital to become one of Europe's leading centres for cancer research, the 2015 construction of the Cancer Research UK Manchester Institute and Foster and Partners-designed Maggie's Centre also further consolidating the importance of the hospital [Plate 4.37].<sup>21</sup>

#### **4.6 The Evolution of the Conservation Area**

Map 2

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<sup>20</sup> Nexus Planning for Manchester City Council. (2021), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Dobson/. (2019). 'The Christie's Proton Beam Therapy unit to start treating patients' *Manchester Evening News*; Idem. (2019). 'Christie plans for new 10-storey building approved by council - despite objections from Withington Residents' *Manchester Evening News*.

## 5 Townscape Character

### 5.1 General Character

Withington is very much a distinct local village set within an urban context, with a blend of commercial, residential, and civic uses, creating a dynamic and bustling environment. Its village character is derived principally through its contained linear high street, which has a clear termination at both its north and southern ends, and by the collection of historic landmark buildings inside it (which are suggestive of its central role within a defined community). By contrast, the heavily trafficked arterial road that cuts through its centre and surrounding residential sprawl of the Victorian and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century signify the much larger urban centre of which it forms part.

As a village within a large and diverse city Withington maintains a sense of its own local identity. This is founded on the quality of its collection of principally Victorian and Edwardian buildings of architectural and historic interest, which include both individual set pieces (both listed and non-designated heritage assets) and small collections of buildings exhibiting a variety of architectural styles. The contribution that this makes to the townscape is particularly expressive and reinforces the sense of vibrancy that underpins the character of the area, primarily through independent commercial uses with animated but well-integrated shopfronts and signage, community and cultural activities, and local street art, which has become a key part of Withington's identity.

The residential areas located within the conservation area present good examples of Victorian domestic buildings – a mixture of terraces and grander semi-detached properties with attractive architectural detailing and, where retained, boundary walls and front gardens/yards that reinforce the suburban street scene.

### 5.2 Character Areas

The character of Withington is defined by eight different zones. Although each relatively small, they reflect the historic and architectural significance of the conservation area and its evolving urban landscape. The characteristics are outlined in detail below [Map 3].

#### 5.2.1 Wilmslow Road – gateway north [Plate 5.2.1]

##### Key Characteristics

###### *Role/Use*

- Transition from domestic to commercial and a looser to tighter urban grain
- Mixture of private residential and commercial uses

###### *Built Form*

- Three-five storey buildings
- Principally semi-detached villas on large plots, reflecting the grandeur of domestic buildings to Wilmslow Road historically
- Condition and vacancy of 402 and 404 Wilmslow Road is a risk, whilst the infill development at 404-408 detracts

###### *Landscaping/Public Realm*

- Buildings set back from the street, creating a 'green' frontage with private gardens and boundary walls (although with some boundaries lost and gardens given over to hard landscaping for off-road parking)
- Poor signage and commercial interventions to historic villas
- Wider pavement and road
- Presence of trees and hedges

#### 5.2.2 Library and Rutherford Place [Plate 5.2.2]

## **Key Characteristics**

### **Role/Use**

- Defined by the Carnegie Library, which stands at the 'head' of the conservation area as Wilmslow Road bends north-westerly
- The library, benefitting from a scheme of restoration in 2018, is in its original use and is a focus of the local community; otherwise, commercial uses at ground floor with residential above

### **Built Form**

- Library is distinctive for its Edwardian neo-classical design, which contrasts with the prevailing Victorian townscape, creating a local landmark in appearance as well as use
- Handsome group at 412-416 Wilmslow Road with decorative brickwork and bay windows, undermined by poor quality shopfronts and signage and contrasting brickwork and misaligned roof at 160-164 Wellington Road, which has sought to complete the terrace group with limited success

### **Landscaping/Public Realm**

- Buildings built hard up against pavement edge
- Open space in front of the library emphasises its presence and civic function and gives breathing space in the public realm, this is currently undermined by its design
- Change in material from asphalt to concrete paving slabs lined with concrete block pavers defines the public realm in front of the library but is now looking tired and in need of improvement
- Excessive street furniture creates clutter and detracts
- Some street trees soften the urban realm

## **5.2.3 Wilmslow Road – high street [Plate 5.2.3]**

## **Key Characteristics**

### **Role/Use**

- The heart of the village, with the linear axis of the high street funnelled in from the north and south (where the road junctions create a sense of the townscape opening up), creating vistas in both directions
- Predominantly commercial use at ground floor and residential above

### **Built Form**

- Defined by a consistency in the architectural form and shared building line of the ranges of two- to four-storey Victorian buildings that make up the local townscape
- Intervening local landmark buildings (listed and non-designated heritage assets) including the two former banks, two public houses and the Methodist Church – further defining the sense of an historic village – alongside particularly high-quality ranges such as Oak Bank Buildings
- Contrast in architectural styles contributes to local distinctiveness, with handsome detailing and decorative features; sets of defined ranges within continuous terrace and narrow shopfronts at ground floor
- Shopfronts and signage are uncoordinated and largely poorly integrated with each other and their host buildings
- Roller shutters create a dead frontage and cause considerable harm to the character of the conservation area; despite the positive efforts to beautify and animate these features they remain a negative feature of the local townscape.

### **Landscaping/Public Realm**

- Buildings built hard up against the pavement edge; the projecting ground floor retail units at 467 and 487 are particularly distinctive and evoke a sense of the historic mixed use of this terrace group
- Negatively impacted by a mis-mash of mismatching and poorly designed shopfronts and inappropriate signage.
- Narrow pavements with bollards; concrete pavers define loading bays

## **5.2.4 Copson Street [Plate 5.2.4]**

## **Key Characteristics**

### **Role/Use**

- Largely located outside of the conservation area but an important element of how the conservation area is accessed and experienced beyond its boundaries
- Predominantly independent commercial use at ground floor and residential above, petering out to the west
- Dominance of car parks and parking

### **Built Form**

- Variation in architectural quality and character due to redevelopment, a predominantly shared building line to the retail area; substantial change west of Moorfield Road
- The three surviving rows of originally domestic two- and three-storey traditional red brick terraces secondary to those on Wilmslow Road
- Where falling within the conservation area, the street dominated by much larger footprint modern buildings including the contemporary Scala, which mediates the junction with Wilmslow Road
- Mixture of shopfronts and signage articulate the definition of Copson Street as distinct in character from Wilmslow Road

### **Landscaping/Public Realm**

- Retail frontage east of Moorfield Road built hard up against the pavement edge
- Narrowing street section creates a sense of enclosure
- East end dominated by on street parking bays, recessed into the pavement to the south side and creating a bottle neck with the oversailing Scala building
- Withington horse trough is located outside of the conservation area towards the west end of Copson Street, but was originally positioned outside what is now Withington Public Library (in 1876) and is connected to the historic identity of the conservation area

## **5.2.5 Wilmslow Road – gateway south [Plate 5.2.5]**

## **Key Characteristics**

### **Role/Use**

- Dominated by the staggered intersection of five streets, with several split pedestrian crossings, forming the main route into and through the high street area from the south, southeast and southwest
- Mixture of commercial and domestic uses

### **Built Form**

- A mixture of Victorian and contemporary redevelopment, predominantly two and three storeys of varying heights
- Buildings of note include the Former White Lion Public House (now Sainsburys), its turret and clock tower forming a landmark at the southern end of the conservation area, whilst the contemporary Scala development sits fairly comfortably alongside, it divorces it from the historic high street to the north; the contemporary rendered 489 Wilmslow Road facing is similarly out of context and detracts
- The Withington Public Hall and Institute is also of note for its decorative Gothic style and its role in the historic development of the conservation area
- Large Victorian villas to the three southern corners set in a large plots; the more elaborate detailing and outbuildings to the Old Vicarage reflective of its use

### **Landscaping/Public Realm**

- Intersection dominated by traffic and street clutter associated with numerous junctions
- Sense of enclosure not well defined by individual buildings, with variation to pavement widths
- Domestic buildings are defined from the commercial activity by brick boundary walls framing large landscaped plots (some given over to parking) with hedges and trees; trial closing off of Parsonage Road reinforces this further
- Open hard landscaping in front of the Former White Lion Public House and Scala is reflective of the historic coaching inn with a line of cobbles remaining and provides open space on this heavily trafficked junction; the

condition of the piers and their detachment from a sense of this historic use however undermines their value

### **5.2.6 Palatine Road [Plate 5.2.6]**

#### **Key Characteristics**

##### ***Role/Use***

- Mixture of domestic use and residential buildings converted to commercial use
- St Cuthbert's Church, hall and presbytery are key assets to the local community and the character of the area
- A wide road of the later Victorian period which connects into the heart of the conservation area with residential areas beyond

##### ***Built Form***

- Two and three storey buildings
- Principally detached and semi-detached villas in Gothic and Classical styles on large plots set back from the street
- 1970s infill at Palatine Mews contrasts starkly in style, softened by its large plot and tree screening
- East side dominated by the red brick Victorian and Edwardian St Cuthbert's Church (Byzantine Gothic in style and detailing), the sympathetically detailed presbytery and the plainer loosely Gothic church school (now hall)

##### ***Landscaping/Public Realm***

- A much more open character and sense of spaciousness compared with the retail core to the immediate north, the tree-lined green frontages framing both sides of the street giving a more verdant feel, although traffic levels remain high
- Retained historic brick boundary walls, largely uninterrupted
- Wider pavements, generally uncluttered by signage and service cabinets, contribute to a sense of spaciousness

### **5.2.7 Wilmslow Road south [Plate 5.2.7]**

#### **Key Characteristics**

##### ***Role/Use***

- A pocket of domestic and civic uses frame the wide road, contrasting with the commercial area at its north and the Christie complex to the immediate south
- A series of local landmarks in architecture and use (including St Paul's Church, the Fire Station and the Red Lion Public House) stand within an otherwise domestic streetscape

##### ***Built Form***

- Chronologically and stylistically, spanning the period from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 1930s, with a predominance of Victorian buildings – the 17<sup>th</sup> century Red Lion Public House and facing milestone providing evidence of the village's origins
- Domestic Victorian terraces mainly two storeys high and with varying levels of architectural detailing, a number with roof level extensions, and evidence of refronting to the converted commercial group
- Civic buildings larger in scale, typically two or three storeys, the west tower of the neo-Gothic St Paul's Church forming a landmark feature within a cluster of architecturally distinct Victorian buildings including the former church school and the old forge (both now apartments); the utilitarian modern rectory and church hall, however, detract
- The 1930s neo-classical Police and Fire Station (the Police now vacated) is an attractive landmark building with Georgian influences although contrasting with the prevailing character

##### ***Landscaping/Public Realm***

- Largely continuous boundary walls, with varying degrees of set-back and hard landscaping
- Houses set back behind small gardens (now hard landscaped for parking), enclosed behind a continuous boundary wall, all now subdivided internally, many with poor-quality modern alterations
- Large church grounds and mature trees offer amenity in the urban setting; lawn and hedging to the Fire Station

- Setback of the Red Lion public house and seating in front evoke a sense of its less urban origins on the turnpike road

### **5.2.8 Residential area [Plate 5.2.8]**

#### **Key Characteristics**

##### **Role/Use**

- Primarily domestic, with some commercial uses

##### **Built Form**

- Urban in character to Egerton Crescent, with a more spacious feel to Parsonage Road
- Parsonage Road mainly comprised of large Victorian semi-detached dwellings of two principal storeys, framed by the substantial Old Vicarage (a detached villa, now apartments, in a generous plot, a low mews block along its perimeter in residential use and with a modern extension); consistent in character, form and style but becoming more fractured towards the junction with Wilmslow Road
- Egerton Crescent much more varied, with pockets of Victorian residential development of differing status, scale and detailing (albeit typically restrained) and prominent side returns, the cleared car parks also visually dominant and create a fractured street scene
- A shared uniformity is founded in the architectural detailing and quality of the groups of buildings reflective of their planned singular development
- The former post office a low 2 storey domestic building, now refronted with a mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial building repurposed to house the post office

##### **Landscaping/Public Realm**

- Heavy on-street parking use
- Parking evidently a concern on Egerton Crescent, with continuous double yellow lines everywhere but the on-street parking bays to the west, which give a crowded appearance to the street; bollards to the east narrow the pavement
- Parsonage Road has a more spacious and suburban feel, with largely retained historic brick boundary walls which reinforce the shared building line and create a clear distinction between the private and public realm.
- Stone gate piers and several houses with paver crossovers; landscaping and front garden trees reinforce the more sylvan character

### **5.3 Listed Buildings and Local Landmarks**

Numerous buildings within the conservation area make a positive contribution to its significance, with many considered to be non-designated heritage assets for their architectural and/or historic interest [Map 4]. Those of particular note are listed below:

#### **Former National Westminster Bank (Grade II) 437 Wilmslow Road**

A purpose-built mid-Victorian bank building in the Jacobean style, opened in 1890 as a new home for the Withington branch of the Manchester & County Bank, previously housed in the Oak Bank Buildings opposite. Loudly proclaiming its date and identity in its datestone and carved swag, the bank is an important part of the history of Withington's transformation in the final quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the expected presence of men of business and independent means. Built during the heyday of the architectural 'Battle of the Styles', the building's using of stone is comparatively unusual in the conservation area and its Jacobean style unique. The fine decorative detail of the intact Jacobean-inspired ornamental frontage – particularly the elaborate porch – and the parapet and gable, comparatively low roof and unusual cylindrical chimneys, add great visual appeal and diversity to the streetscape and roovescape, the changing angle of the street and the wide open space ideally positioned to allow the appreciation of this landmark building at the northern gateway into the main commercial area [Plates 5.3.1a/b].

#### **Former White Lion Public House (Grade II) corner of Wilmslow and Burton Roads**

This purpose-built public house dates to 1881 and replaced an 18<sup>th</sup>-century inn of the same name, rebuilt or altered in 1840. It too serves as an emblem of the late-Victorian transformation of Withington, its extravagant eclectic Gothic architecture designed to entice not only prosperous residents but also well-off passers-through. Although no longer in its original use, motifs on the frontage still give a clue as to its origins.

Designed in a contrasting palette of stone, brick, terracotta and granite, its round corner surmounted by a weighty tower and clock turret, the attractive Victorian decorative details of the White Lion are an especially high-quality and complete example of types of ornamentation and materials paralleled in several other buildings on Wilmslow Road but rarely present in such concentration. Although not authentic, the painted finish to the lower brickwork has the effect of enhancing the visual contrast between the building's different materials. Combined, its form and materials ensure that this prominent building acts as an important landmark from the south and southeast, framing the southern end of the high street and forming a fitting end to the commercial core [Plates 5.3.2a/b].

### **Two pairs of stone piers to forecourts of 494 and 496 Wilmslow Road (Grade II)**

The history of these stone piers is intrinsically linked not only to the White Lion but also to the changing character of Wilmslow Road. With the new White Lion of 1881 built to its rear, the older hotel was demolished, Wilmslow Road was straightened, the growing junction was reordered, and the horse-drawn tram was brought to Withington, where a stop was created directly outside the new White Lion, next to the carriage pull-in along its frontage. These changes were all complete by the start of the 1890s with islands built to divide the tram stop from the White Lion's carriage pull-in, two low walls with piers and railings and running down their middle to mark the boundary (and prevent casualties) and an elaborate archway leading to the front door. Over time, the tram stop was lost, cars then replaced the carriage in the pull-ins, and the islands were absorbed into zebra crossings.

Although in need of some care and maintenance, the walls and piers are a remarkable survivor, enduring the loss of the tram stop, the addition and removal of zebra crossings and the construction and replacement of the Scala Cinema, the railings, whilst not original, giving an understanding of the piers' original function. One of the few pieces of Victorian street furniture (alongside the relocated trough) to survive in the conservation area and unique in Withington as a legacy of the Victorian tram, the piers are also important in creating a widened approach from the south. The White Horse and Scala are unique on the high street in not fronting directly onto the pavement, giving a sense of spaciousness that tempers the effects of the busy junction [Plates 5.3.3a/b].

### **Church of St Paul (Grade II) *Palatine Road***

St Paul was Withington's first purpose-built church of any denomination, its construction in 1841 a product of the growing population of the area even as it remained semi-rural. Designed by local architects Hayley and Brown, its comparatively plain exterior and initially small size highlights its origins prior to the transformation of Withington in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, which created much more ornate buildings such as the former National Westminster. As one of the earliest buildings in Withington it forms an important group with the Red Lion Inn, The Albert, and Withington Methodist Church (this church also plain in style). As the parish church, and with an attached school (since converted), it has historically played an important role in the religious and social life of Withington.

Architecturally, the church is pleasant in its symmetry and tall central tower, its simple Norman-influenced style reflective of its age. Matching the dominant local material and making clear its origins as part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century growth of Withington, the use of brick beds it comfortably in the townscape. The churchyard and 1890s boundary wall and lych gate give a semi-rural feel, the churchyard adds a sense of spaciousness and provides a key green amenity space [Plates 5.3.4a/b].

### **Red Lion Inn (Grade II) *Wilmslow Road***

The earliest known building still surviving in Withington, the Red Lion is believed to have started its life in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a farmhouse or cottages. Sitting on one of the oldest routes from Manchester to the south, which was turnpiked at the early date of 1753 (evidencing its heavy use) and perhaps existed since the medieval period, the building likely became an inn at an early date. Subsequently playing an important role as the site of the Withington Court Leet and the focal point for

the annual rush cart procession, the building remains in its historic hospitality use today, still serving both locals and travellers alike.

Architecturally, the building's small proportions and mass of heavy chimneys give a sense of its age, suggesting a once heavily divided interior, the slate roof and sympathetic replacement 'Yorkshire sash' windows also enhancing its historic character (although the roughcast conceals how the building has evolved over time). With the modern additions concentrated to the rear, the beer garden to the front allows the frontage to be appreciated, the building's position set back from the street creating a pleasant break in the building line that frames the end of the conservation area [Plates 5.3.5a/b].

#### **Milestone adjacent to Withington Fire Station (Grade II) *Wilmslow Road***

The milestone is an important reminder of Withington's origins as an agricultural hamlet clustered around the road to Manchester. The Manchester and Wilmslow Turnpike Trust's adoption of the northern section of this road at the very early date of 1753 helped to turn it into the major route from the then town of Manchester to Oxford, paving the way for Withington's transformation into a commuter suburb. This milestone, dating from the mid or later 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the only one to survive from a whole series once positioned every 1/3 mile along Wilmslow Road (which was for a time known as Turnpike Lane).

Believed to still be in its original location, the understated positioning of the milestone aids its conservation, helping to avoid damage. Distinctive, evidently old, still mainly legible, and instantly recognisable to those with some knowledge, the milestone is an important part of the streetscape of the southern end of the conservation area. With the Red Lion almost opposite it serves as a reminder of the original limits of the historic village, where Victorian buildings now merge into interwar housing and the 1930s and later Christie Hospital [Plates 5.3.6a/b].

#### **454 (non-designated heritage asset), 456 (Grade II) and 458 *Wilmslow Road***

These three buildings have their origins in a group of cottages built in the 1820s and converted in the 1850s to create a shop, dwelling and beerhouse. The beerhouse seems to have remained in this use ever since, already known by 1897 as The Albert Inn (originally giving its name to the street adjacent, since renamed Barbican Street). As the only survivors of the two short terraces shown on the 1840s OS map, these are believed to be the oldest buildings surviving in the centre of Withington today.

No. 458 is more altered but the small proportions, short first floor and low roofs of nos. 454 and 456 contrast pleasingly with their mid/late 19<sup>th</sup> century surroundings, also conveying a sense of their greater age. The old bricks and small first-floor sash windows of no. 456 gives an idea of its historic appearance, whilst The Albert was refurbished in the late Victorian or Edwardian period with a glazed tile exterior, which still survives in the upper floor, doorcase and cornice (the ground floor modern but broadly sympathetic). Viewed from the north they add interest and variety to the streetscape, their low roofs framed between the flat-roofed terrace to the north and the much higher roofs at their south, The Albert's painted sign also adding a certain charm [Plates 5.3.7a/b].

#### **Withington Library (non-designated heritage asset) *Wilmslow Road***

The library was built by Manchester City Council in 1927, replacing its room in a converted house on the same site, which had itself replaced an earlier room in Withington Public Hall. Funded in part by a Carnegie grant, and one of the first libraries with a children's reading room, the library is important as an example of Manchester's civic buildings of the interwar period, here designed by the first City Architect (Henry Price). A fairly austere but dignified neoclassical building, it was built with a distinctive fan shape both accommodating the 'open book' layout popular at the time and responding to the island location, situated at the end of the northerly view along Wilmslow Road.

Distinctive in its pared-back appearance (capped by the angular rotunda) and its use of Portland stone, this good example of interwar municipal neoclassicism adds to the collective range of architectural styles and materials visible across the conservation area, its sense of gravitas and presence providing a fitting frame to the end of the high street [Plates 5.3.8a/b].

### **Oak Bank Buildings (non-designated heritage asset) *Wilmslow Road***

As the datestone proudly announces, Oak Bank Buildings was built in 1876 as a very early local example of 'chambers', having shops with offices above, one of its first occupants being the Manchester and County Bank (this branch opened in 1877). Its name, however, refers to the large villa previously occupying this part of Wilmslow Road and demolished for redevelopment, highlighting the rapid change in character that occurred in Withington after the 1860s. Cleverly designed for its corner plot, Oak Bank Buildings is one of the most ornate commercial buildings on Wilmslow Road, its Italianate style, cornices and polychromatic brickwork all giving an attractive visual quality, the shopfronts also retaining their Victorian corbelled pilasters (although partly concealed by modern materials). Unusual in its three-storey height, it adds variety to the roovescape whilst also framing the corner to Davenport Avenue (where the adjacent building may have been designed to mimic it). The lower structures to its side are also of interest, built in a sympathetic if simplified style and already existing by the 1880s, evidencing the demand for retail space during Withington's building boom [Plates 5.3.9a/b].

### **Methodist Church (non-designated heritage asset) *Wilmslow Road***

The Methodist Church was built at the early date of 1865, when the east side of Wilmslow Road was yet to be developed to the north of present-day Barbican Street, on the eve of the transformation that turned this road into a commercial high street. Built to replace the Old Hall Lane chapel of 1832, it provides evidence of the strength of South Manchester's Non-Conformist population even at this early date.

The church has a simple Gothic Revival style and although built in a non-traditional design, its lancet windows, buttresses and arched porch all combine to convey its religious character. The modern porch and the heavy ramp to the front have affected its appearance, removing the sense of a building set back from the road, but the building brings variety to the high street through its materials, more rustic appearance and steeply pitched roof. With the library, it is the only building on the high street built for a use other than domestic or commercial [Plates 5.3.10a/b].

### **St Cuthbert's Church (non-designated heritage asset) *Palatine Road***

Palatine Road was laid in 1862 and quickly developed with semi-detached villas for the prosperous upper-middle classes. The church followed soon afterwards, in 1881, designed by the eminent Catholic practice Goldie & Child, and was extended in 1902, highlighting the size and strength of the local Roman Catholic community. Withington resident Ernest Gunn is likely to have been involved in the 1902 extension, designed by the practice W. T. Gunson & Son.

Built in red brick with terracotta detailing and polygonal apses, the church has an attractive Romanesque or Byzantine Gothic style that is unusual in the conservation area (and has been identified as the possible inspiration for Westminster Cathedral). The arched windows, west porch, terracotta detailing, rose windows and apses add an attractive and distinctive character, the garden area adjacent bringing a touch of green to the main road.

The church forms a group with the school (now parish hall) of 1891 and presbytery of 1911 (also W. T. Gunson & Son), the presbytery sympathetic in character and detailing and the whole site bound by a continuous boundary wall. Built into its site, its main apse concealed in the interior and much of the frontage concealed by trees, the church does not dominate but still forms a fitting and quietly dignified frame to the end of the conservation area [Plates 5.3.11a/b].

### **Withington Fire Station (non-designated heritage asset) *Wilmslow Road***

A large neo-Georgian building of the 1930s, immediately recognisable as a fire station, this building's site has a long history of civic services, initially as a police station. In 1931 it became the site of Manchester's first fire station outside of the city centre, highlighting the size, prominence and influence of Withington as an early suburb. It remains in its primary original use today (although its firemen's flats are now in general use and the police station has been vacated).

Designed in a loose classical style, with a Georgian simplicity of design and concern for symmetry, the building complements the more austere library, these two interwar civic buildings closing the conservation area at either end. The hipped roofs, balconies and regular chimneys and lines of windows all give an attractive character, whilst the hedge and the small garden area add a touch of green to the otherwise very urban environment. With visual interest in the contrast in age and style visible between the fire station and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Red Lion opposite, this building also forms the gateway

into the 1930s housing estate that starts at this point, and the contemporaneous Christie Hospital building beyond, marking a change in character at the southern end of the Victorian village and the beginning of its interwar expansion [Plates 5.3.12a/b].

#### **Tatton View (non-designated heritage asset) *Tatton Grove***

A short middle-class terrace of 1879, named after the Lords of the Manor, these houses recall the rapid expansion of Withington in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it changed from an agricultural hamlet to a commuter suburb. Even numbers only (the planned terrace opposite never built), this is an attractive red brick terrace with bay windows, decorative details, stone finishes and tall paired chimneys, the house at the end larger and three-storeys tall. To the rear are the archetypal Victorian kitchen and bathroom wings with narrow yards, accessed by a shared passageway that still retains its original surface.

Externally intact and relatively unchanged, Tatton View is one of the best surviving examples of Victorian terraced houses of this size in the conservation area. Built just a short distance from the grand villas on Palatine Road, it demonstrates the varied character of the Victorian village as created in this period and is a good example of the lower-middle-class terraced housing built to the south and west of the village core in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although modern development affects their setting, the houses retain their attractive gardens opposite which reinforces the more tranquil setting their position affords [Plates 5.3.13a/b].

#### **5.4 Neutral and Detracting Buildings**

Neutral buildings tend to be those that have been fairly sensitively accommodated in the streetscene through a combination of their scale, composition, form and sympathetic contemporary materials and detailing which prevents them from competing with the prevailing townscape. Whilst other, more stark, developments have been less successful in their interpretation of the local context, there are examples located immediately outside of the conservation area, such as Swinbourne Grove, which demonstrate how high quality contemporary design can present an enhancement [Plates 5.4.1-5.4.4]. Typically, buildings are high quality and make a positive contribution, although this is often marred by smaller scale changes such as poor-quality shopfronts and signage, uPVC windows and doors, clutter on the facades and poor upkeep and condition, and alterations to front boundaries and the loss of front gardens.

#### **5.5 Public Realm**

Whilst the majority of the conservation area's streets are well used and functional there is significant room for improvement in terms of quality [Map 5].

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The narrow street section of Wilmslow Road, combined with the busy traffic route, creates a narrow pedestrian corridor to either side of the road. In places, the proximity to the retail frontage where there are poor shopfronts and signage causes these to dominate the street experience, rather than allowing space to look up and experience the heritage assets. The majority of the pavements within the conservation area are asphalt, although there has been an effort to distinguish the public realm around the library building, stretching down to Davenport Avenue and Davenport Grove. However, this concrete flag paving and coloured concrete block pavers now looks tired and cluttered.

Changes of material are used to delineate loading bays within the street and areas for pedestrian access only, such as Barbican Street (blocked to vehicular traffic). Some areas of intense use, such as the Gledhill Street car park and the Wilmslow Road/Burton Road Junction, are of particularly poor quality. Other more underused areas such as the pocket space opposite the Fire Station and Red Lion could be improved to enhance the overall amenity of the conservation area [Plates 5.5.1 - 5.5.6].

#### **Historic Floorspaces**

Within the conservation area there are areas where the historic floorscape remains intact. These are principally within the

curtilage of private properties or where driveways cross pavements, and consist of the original cobblestones including in front of 2 and 4 Parsonage Road. In the public realm a narrow linear strip is located directly in front of the Former White Lion Public House, where the existing cobbles have been retained whilst a rear cobblestone drive providing access to 1-13 Marriott Street survives largely intact. Granite kerbstones are present in a number of residential streets across the Conservation Area, including Marriott Street, Heaton Road and Egerton Crescent, and can be found on limited sections of Wilmslow Road [Plates 5.5.7 – 5.5.9].

### **Amenity Space**

There is little in the way of amenity space within the conservation area. The only open formal space that has an amenity function is the hard landscaped area directly south of the library, which is wrapped in bollards and contains some tree planting, planters and seating. The churchyard of St Paul's offers a green lung in an otherwise largely built-up urban environment, with the front gardens and gaps between buildings in the residential areas providing a more verdant character than that of the high street.

### **Trees**

Arrival into the village centre from the north and south is dominated by a 'green' character, although this is due to the large building setbacks and significant trees within these private spaces. There is a pocket of street trees to the northern area of Wilmslow Road, which are typically lime and are mature specimens. There is also a significant tree outside the former National Westminster Bank (Almost Famous), which could be more of a positive feature of the public realm, although this area is currently dominated by the bus stop and highways infrastructure. Street trees become more sporadic moving south down Wilmslow Road, with small specimens (Pyrus) in ad-hoc locations.

The majority of trees within the conservation area are found to the south, in the area around the Wilmslow Road/Palatine Road/Burton Road junction area. These are mainly within private gardens, but contribute to the streetscene. There is a cluster of mature trees within St Paul's Churchyard. There are five Tree Preservation Orders in the conservation area; two to the rear of 18 Parsonage Road, two to the rear of 510-512 Wilmslow Road and one to the rear of 9 Parsonage Road [Map 6].<sup>22</sup>

### **Street Furniture**

Street furniture in the conservation area is mixed, the benches and bollards being traditional style black painted metal. There are also some low-level timber planters, whilst modern chrome cycle stands provide variation. Street lamps to the highways are standard but local community groups have taken the opportunity to customise these with street art, which has likewise been used to enliven other utilitarian elements in the public realm.

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<sup>22</sup> Trees are recognised as making an important contribution to the character of the local environment. Anyone proposing to cut down, prune, top or lop a mature tree in a conservation area which is not covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) has to give six weeks' notice in writing to the Local Planning Authority prior to carrying out any works to the tree.

## 6 Views and Vistas

The northern and southern gateways into the conservation area and the linear axis of Wilmslow Road funnel and frame views. These are principally orientated on key buildings but also include more sweeping dynamic vistas both of the historic townscape and of the variety of buildings as you travel along the road [Map 7].

## 7 Negative Features and Opportunities for Enhancement

### 7.1 Introduction

The character and appearance of Withington is challenged by two fundamental issues that pose a real threat to its vibrancy and its local distinctiveness in the long term:

- The erosion of its attractive built form through small-scale incremental change, poor upkeep, changes to front boundaries and gardens and, above all, unsympathetic shopfronts and signage
- Poor-quality and limited public realm

There is clearly a strong sense of pride and identity in Withington, already harnessed through various groups and initiatives, which have successfully fostered a better understanding of its heritage significance. It is important that this continues and that mechanisms are sought to engage with business owners on their taking ownership of commercial properties in order to provide advice and guidance. There is also a need for focused public realm projects to uplift the overall environment and allow people to dwell and better engage with the special characteristics of the conservation area.

### 7.2 Community Consultation

The following provides a summary of comments received through an online survey completed in December 2023 and a public consultation event held on 11 December 2023 [Plates 7.2.1-7.2.3].

The consultation responses highlight a desire for positive changes to enhance the overall quality of life and appearance of the local area; common themes include improvements to public spaces, shopfronts, cleanliness, safety, and the diversity of local businesses. The consultation responses underscore a collective vision for Withington Village that prioritises heritage, aesthetics, diversity, safety, and community engagement. The community seeks a balance between development and heritage preservation, aiming for a vibrant, inclusive and attractive place to live.

#### Public Realm and Aesthetics

A prevalent concern is the enhancement of the public realm. Respondents expressed a desire for the removal of detracting signage and advertising and the implementation of public art. There is a call for better-designed shopfronts, complying with (and enforcing) heritage policies guidance, and for cleaner environments. Suggestions for improvement involve a design guide for shopfronts, the introduction of more wall murals, and a targeted approach to address graffiti. The idea of pedestrianisation and improving the environment for cyclists, low traffic neighbourhoods (LTN), and infrastructure for active travel is widely supported. Many respondents advocate for a heritage-led approach, focusing on architectural features and the overall appearance of the streets.

#### Business and Diversity

The community emphasised the importance of attracting a diverse range of shops, services and hospitality. There is a desire for more local, independent businesses, and for a resistance to the dominance of big chains. Suggestions include grants for shopfront improvements and initiatives to attract a variety of businesses beyond vape shops and takeaways. There is a call for more frequent street cleaning and better lighting for safety.

#### Community and Safety

The responses emphasise the importance of community-focused spaces, inclusive activities, and a sense of safety for all residents. There is a desire for local policing, reduced crime, and the creation of a more pleasant environment for families. Safety concerns extend to traffic management, with requests for better pedestrian crossings, average speed cameras, and restrictions on certain businesses. The need for a vibrant community hub and public events that bring people together is highlighted.

## **Future Vision**

Respondents envision Withington as a vibrant, attractive, and clean area that attracts both residents and visitors. They stress the importance of heritage preservation, cleaner streets, and a variety of businesses. Their aspiration is to create a destination with a unique character, encouraging growth, and providing a high quality of life for everyone. Suggestions include making the area more accessible, encouraging local businesses, and fostering a sense of community pride.

## **7.3 Detracting Features**

### **Shopfronts and Advertising**

The most significant detracting feature within the conservation area is the retail frontage, reinforced by the narrow pavements and the heavily trafficked road, which together impede views of the upper floors above and cause the ground floor to dominate in people's day-to-day experience. The low-quality contemporary shopfronts and signage, often comprising large, single-glazed openings, projecting box signs and internally illuminated – and often oversized – fascias, dominate the otherwise typically handsome buildings above and overly intrude into the streetscene.

Poor design and sizing means that features such as traditional fascia lines and cornices are often obscured, and decorative pilasters between buildings lost, damaged or concealed. Shopfronts and signage to converted domestic buildings are typically poorly related to the composition of the building, are often prolific and include freestanding signage within front gardens, which are now hard landscaped. Roller shutters are also commonplace, creating a deadening frontage when closed and adding to the perception of crime and antisocial activity at night time. Whilst the public artwork which adorn some shutters is itself of merit, this does not mitigate or ameliorate the negative impact they have on the streetscene and the character of the area and this does not justify their installation. Such artwork can be accommodated elsewhere, as perceptible across the area such as to electricity cabins and blank walls etc. [Plates 7.3.1-7.3.4].

### **Condition**

The general condition of some buildings within the conservation area is also poor in places, brought about by a lack of upkeep, repair and decoration. Typically, this is worse to the commercial core, to upper floors above retail units, and to their rears (with poor extensions, alterations and the addition of plant, etc.), whilst key local landmarks such as St Cuthbert's Church have also suffered from a decline in condition. In the main, this is linked to economic factors and a poor understanding of the heritage value of buildings [Plate 7.3.5].

### **Small-Scale Change**

Small-scale and incremental change can often have a major impact on the appearance of buildings and their contribution to the conservation area. The loss of original/historic windows, doors and other features can lead to cumulative loss of special character. In particular, replacement of timber windows/doors with plastic (uPVC) or composite units can have a significant adverse impact on the historic character of buildings. Uncoordinated and haphazard external alterations can have a particularly harmful impact – especially where they erode a previously shared uniformity. Refronting, rendering and painting buildings within otherwise brick terrace groups has also had a harmful impact, detracting from the uniformity once held whilst also concealing architectural features of interest. The addition of satellite dishes<sup>23</sup>, flues and vents and the proliferation of wiring, modern light fittings and security equipment often have a cluttering impact, which again detracts.

### **Front Boundaries, Gardens and Yard**

The alteration of boundary walls has a detrimental impact on the townscape whilst their total loss blurs the boundary between the highway and front garden space, creating a chasm within previously continuous front and side boundaries. Its negative impact is exacerbated by the replacement of front gardens – particularly the deep gardens to the Wilmslow Road

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<sup>23</sup> In a conservation area, planning permission is required to install any satellite dishes on any wall, roof slope or chimney which both faces onto and is visible from a highway or on a building more than 15 metres in height. If a dish is to be installed, then the very highest standards of care in locating and installing the equipment will be required in order to protect the special character of such an area.

villas – with hard landscaping given over to offroad parking. Cumulatively, these alterations fundamentally change the setting and historic character of the Victorian domestic buildings.

## **Public Realm**

The public realm is dominated by traffic, which detracts from the village atmosphere and creates a barrier at the heart of the conservation area. The impact of this is exacerbated by the narrow streets that hinder the ability to dwell and appreciate the historic townscape whilst also preventing the addition of outdoor seating and the potential for a café-style village culture. There is limited opportunity for amenity spaces and those more open spaces that do exist – such as the Gledhill Street car park and in front of the library – feel tired and cluttered, whilst generally the quality of the paving is poor. Street furniture is standard and does not reinforce the historic character or appearance of the conservation area, whilst the relocation of the trough out of the conservation area and the poor upkeep and condition of the milestone and the piers in front of the Former White Lion Public House pose a threat to their conservation [Plates 7.3.6 – 7.3.12].

Whilst the Withington Walls public art project has enlivened ‘dead’ elements and brought a new cultural identity to the conservation area there is otherwise no defining gateway, wayfinding or expression of the village’s identity and it would be preferable for the detracting elements that the artwork disguises to be removed [Plates 7.3.13 and 7.3.14]. The failure to articulate the village centre reduces the potential for footfall from the surrounding community and from places such as The Christie Hospital, with the absence of seating a further issue for those with mobility issues.

## **7.4 Opportunities**

Withington benefits from an engaged local community and a sense of vibrancy derived through commercial uses and cultural events. This offers great potential to reinforce its local distinctiveness, sense of place and pride, and its attraction both to its immediate community and to visitors from further afield. However, a general decline in the quality of the public realm and commercial frontage presents a serious threat to the significance of the conservation area that needs to be addressed.

The condition of Withington’s public realm is not commensurate with the quality of its built townscape and there is an opportunity to improve this in a number of ways. These include small scale changes such as improvements to surfaces, signage, removal of clutter, and improvements to junctions – particularly where Wilmslow Road, Palatine Road and Burton Road meet. Public realm projects in key areas including in front of the library and where Copson Street meets the conservation area (both currently being developed), the Gledhill Street car park and ginnel, and opposite the Red Lion public house have the potential to significantly enhance how the conservation area is experienced

A proactive approach to increasing dwell time – such as the creation of pockets of amenity space and provision of seating – would encourage better engagement with the area’s significance. This could be further reinforced through signage, wayfinding and interpretation, and the conservation of key assets in the public realm including the piers in front of the former White Lion public house, the milestone and (although now located outside of the conservation area) the trough.

A shopfront and signage improvement scheme would bring major benefits to the conservation area, revitalising the streetscene and reinforcing the architectural quality of the buildings. There are a number of examples of suitably designed and detailed shopfronts and signage – both in a traditional style and modern – that demonstrate the positive impact that these can bring not only in terms of the architectural quality of the individual building but also in the commercial attraction of its retail offer itself. In pursuing an enhancement of the commercial frontage it is important that this is brought forward in a coordinated manner – particularly to groups of commercial units contained within a range of buildings which have an intended uniformity to their architectural style and detailing.

The general upkeep and maintenance of buildings and their fabric is essential, whilst any new developments or extensions should take the opportunity to better reveal the significance of the conservation area. Long-term sustainable uses are required to support the conservation of heritage assets such as the Public Hall Institute and the currently vacant former Royal Bank of Scotland at 467 Wilmslow Road. A campaign to ‘green’ front gardens and yards where they exist would soften the sometimes harsh urban environment whilst bringing sustainability and drainage benefits. Regarding extreme

weather caused by climate change, urgent action should be taken to help minimise risk and mitigate damage, which could include responding to the need for larger rainwater goods, improved drainage, micro-renewables, better thermal efficiency, and improved cooling within buildings.

These themes are explored in more detail in the accompanying Conservation Area Regeneration Plan.

## 8 Boundary Alterations

Once designated, Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local authorities to review the character and boundaries of its conservation areas. The National Planning Policy Framework likewise states that *'when considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.'* This appraisal of the Withington Conservation Area gives an opportunity to assess whether the boundary should be extended or modified [Map 8].

It is recommended that the conservation area boundary is extended to include the following with a detailed rationale for this in Sections 8.1 and 8.2.

- 402 and 404 Wilmslow Road
- 1-17a Heaton Road
- Gledhill Street car parks
- 4 Queen Street West
- Public Hall Institute

### 8.1 Residential Estate

#### Historic Development

The residential streets to the east of the conservation area, situated between Mauldeth Road in the north and Alan Road in the east, grew out from St Paul's Church, built to provide for Didsbury's growing population and consecrated in 1841. The population of Withington township had doubled by 1863 as a new suburb emerged on previously undeveloped farmland around the original agricultural village, made possible by the arrival of Palatine Road and the railway. From the very start this displayed varied characters in different areas. The spacious residential side streets of middle-class villas shown in the 1890s between what is today Mauldeth Road in the north, the stream in the south and the new Alan Road in the east, were in vast contrast to the more densely packed workers' housing added at the same time to the west of Wilmslow Road. The expansion of these streets in the east stalled, however, in the 1890s until further land was released for development, houses beginning to emerge to the east of Alan Road by 1922 and a major building boom following in the interwar period.

#### Built Form and Character

Built in brick, the semi-detached villas have a varied character, exhibiting a number of features of the period, including bay windows, arched doorways with keystones, decorative brickwork, gables (some with half-timbering), decorative porches and dentiled / bracketed eaves. The best examples remain to Parsonage Road and the southern end of Alan Road, which also largely retain their original boundary walls, in brick with stone copings and piers, with a mixture of front gardens and hard landscaping behind. To the southern end of Heaton Road is a contrasting set of two semi-detached pairs that is more Gothic in style, with steep gables (their barge boards set on brackets), with black brick detailing. This area is, however, interrupted by modern development – principally along Heaton Road, Swinbourne Grove and St Pauls Road – and this dilutes the overall character to that of a more typical suburban area than one of a particular significance. The terrace at 1-17a Heaton Road, however, is a relatively intact group with decorative brickwork and a uniform pattern of full height bays and porches recessed under arched openings [Plates 8.1-8.4].

### 8.2 Village Centre

#### Historic Development

A group of middle-class villas emerged to the north of Mauldeth Road/Mauldeth Road West and along the adjacent section

of Wilmslow Road at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Punctuated only by the Presbyterian church, this formed a continuous line of mainly detached and semi-detached houses, set in large gardens, running between the post office at the junction with Wellington Road in the south and Brook Road in the north.

The Withington Public Hall and Institute was built in 1861 as a gift to the people of Withington from William Tatton, 1st Baron Egerton of Tatton (1806-1883), Lord of the Manor and major landowner. It included Withington's first lending library (lasting until 1911) and, from 1906, a private members' club.

Historically, the area to the west of the high street was occupied by the long rears of properties on Wilmslow Road, smaller plots running back from Copson Street and Moorfield Street and, in the area between, the terraced streets known as George Street and Ashley Grove, plus numerous smaller blocks of terraced housing. The backplots of the two Wilmslow Road houses situated to the immediate southeast of Albert Street (now Barbican Street) had already been detached by the 1890s, that in the north probably becoming a walled yard and that to its immediate south built upon (a pattern that remained consistent until they were converted to parking in or after the 1960s). Land at what was then the southern end of George Street (later Gledhill Street) – probably housing the occupants' privies – was also cleared to form a walled yard at some date between the 1930s and 1950s. This similarly remained in place until the site was cleared for parking. Both parking areas preserve, therefore, the original consistent rear plot boundary already present along the back of Wilmslow Road by the 1890s, along which George (Gledhill) Street once ran [Plate 8.5].

George Street (renamed Gledhill Street) was demolished in the late 1970s or early 80s, when the entire larger backland area behind the rears of Wilmslow Road, Moorfield Road and Hill Street was cleared. Gledhill Street (emptied of its older buildings) was then extended to become Morris Street, and the area to its north and west laid out with new cul-de-sacs of modern housing, leaving no remnants of the earlier terraces. Although now having little legibility, the southern car park – previously the privy site, and still retaining its original footprint – is one of the few relics of the blocks of the terraced housing once occupying these backlands.

To the immediate north, (West) Queen Street (originally Victoria Street) already existed in 1879, filled with similar rows of terraced housing and several industrial units, their ownership divided between Edward Smith and Robert Sherwood. Sherwood, a blacksmith, operated the smithy on the north side of the street, served by the adjacent stables. He was still here in 1911, subsequently retaining the ownership of this site and several of the houses even after he retired. The building was still a smithy in the 1920s but was extended to the front and rear in the 1930s, probably showing that it had already been converted to a motor repairs garage (the use recorded in the 1980s).

### **Built Form and Character**

402 and 404 Wilmslow Road are the sole remaining fragment of the large-scale Victorian villas that once lined this road. They are a handsome pair, exhibiting attractive architectural details including bay windows, ornate timber detailing to the gable barge boards, and decorative brickwork, and retain deep front gardens with low brick boundary walls and hedging. In townscape terms they have an important evidential role for the historic character of the street as it extends north – now dominated by modern developments of varying styles (as reflected in the building that sits between the villas and Wilmslow Library) [Plate 8.6].

Withington Public Hall and Institute is a handsome brick building in a restrained Gothic style with two interlocking ranges with pitched roofs, crested ridge tiles, and ornamental panels in dark brick that include the date of AD 1861. It very much reads as a public building within the village centre and forms part of its historic character [Plate 8.7].

The car parks to the west side of the high street are non-descript areas of modern hard landscaping, there being no distinction between the areas within and outside of the conservation area. The do, however, form a lung of open space within the urban environment and allow views of the rear of the terraces fronting the high street, which are in varying condition but have largely uniform outriggers with gable ends. The motor garage to the north of this area (4 Queen Street West) is accommodated in a Victorian building (with extensions) with a domestic aesthetic and is one of the few remaining fragments that provide evidence of the light industrial activity that historically took place behind the main street. Although a handsome building with brick arched window and door heads (the door with a key stone), and a dentil cornice at eaves level, it is dominated by extensive signage and its painted brickwork further obscures its original character [Plates 8.8 – 8.10].

## Appendix I: Further Guidance Links

Withington Village Framework (2021)

[WITHINGTON VILLAGE DRAFT FRAMEWORK AUGUST 2020 \(manchester.gov.uk\)](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/withington-village-draft-framework-august-2020)

National Planning Policy Framework (updated 2023)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/740441/National\\_Planning\\_Policy\\_Framework\\_web\\_accessible\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740441/National_Planning_Policy_Framework_web_accessible_version.pdf)

National Planning Practice Guidance (updated 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>

Historic England online guidance: Looking after Historic Buildings

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/buildings/>

Vacant Historic Buildings: Guidelines of Managing Risks (Historic England, updated 2018)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/vacanthistoricbuildings/heag183-vacant-historic-buildings/>

Stopping the Rot: A Guide to Enforcement Action to Save Historic Buildings (Historic England, updated 2016)

<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/stoppingtherot/heag046b-stopping-the-rot.pdf/>

Heritage Counts (Historic England, updated 2018)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/>

The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Historic England, updated 2017)

<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-setting-heritage-assets.pdf/>

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (Historic England)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/grants/our-grant-schemes/partnership-schemes-in-conservation-areas/>

Breathe New Life into an Old Place - Make It a Heritage Action Zone (Historic England)

<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/heritage-action-zones/breathe-new-life-into-old-places-through-heritage-action-zones/>

National Lottery Grants for Heritage

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/national-lottery-grant-heritage>

## Appendix II – Sources for the Historic Character of Withington

### Primary Materials

#### Historic Maps

Landmark, Promap, <https://www.promap.co.uk/>

National Library of Scotland, Maps, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/102344087>

#### Historic Photographs

Bell, A. (2016). 'Look back at Withington through the ages', *Manchester Evening News*

Historic England, Images & Books, <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/>

Manchester City Council, Manchester Local Image Collection, <https://images.manchester.gov.uk/>

Withington Civic Society, 'Old Photographs', <http://www.withingtoncivicsociety.co.uk/old-photographs.html>

### Secondary Materials

#### Books

Cooper, G. (2007). *The Illustrated History of Manchester's Suburbs*

Hartwell, C., Hyde, M. and Pevsner, N. (2004). *Lancashire: Manchester and the South East*

Sussex, G. and Helm, P. (1988). *Looking Back at Withington and Didsbury*

Whittaker, K. (1969). *A History of Withington*

Withington Civic Society (2020). *A Walk through the History of Withington*

#### Websites and Online Resources

Anon. Architects of Greater Manchester 1800 – 1940, <https://manchestervictorianarchitects.org.uk/>

Withington Civic Society, Village Walk, <http://www.withingtoncivicsociety.co.uk/village-walk.html>

#### Heritage Management Resources and Documents

Historic England. *National Heritage List for England*, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

Manchester City Council, Withington Conservation Area,

[https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conservation\\_areas/1042/withington\\_conservation\\_area/](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/511/conservation_areas/1042/withington_conservation_area/)

Idem. (2014). 'Withington Conservation Area Reappraisal'

Nexus Planning for Manchester City Council (2021). 'Draft Withington Village Framework'