

## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: STRATEGIC LEVEL CITY-WIDE URBAN CHARACTERISATION FOR CORE STRATEGY**

### **Introduction**

A City-Wide Urban Characterisation Study, appropriate to the strategic level required for the Core Strategy, has been undertaken in order to identify broad character areas across the City. Further guidance, which may be provided in a Supplementary Planning Document, will need to be supported by more detailed work which will look at a more local level and consider the finer grain of the City's character areas.

The strategic level City-Wide Urban Characterisation Study has been undertaken using the following data sources.

### **Principal data sources**

*Manchester Urban Historic Landscape Characterisation Interim Report*, GMAU, June 2009.

*The Manchester Plan 1945*

*Manchester 50 Years of Change*, Phil Bamford (Project Co-ordinator), HMSO, 1995

Google Earth and Multimap web-sites

Personal knowledge of the urban design officer

### **The analysis of physical characteristics**

The analysis undertaken found that the underlying natural topography and the historic urban evolution of the city are critical to understanding the physical character of the current-day city. Taking a broad-brush approach, eleven over-lapping areas ('strategic character areas') of varying size have been identified which can each be viewed as having a distinctive character. A more refined and detailed analysis would enable sub-areas of more localised distinctiveness to be identified within each of these strategic character areas.

The story of the city's urban evolution, as shall be seen, is clearly influenced by the economic and social changes over time. However, it is suggested that the following urban character assessment would be (and, indeed, should be) enriched by an element of social and economic analysis. This would hopefully support rather than challenge the following assessment of the physical urban character but could also assist future, more detailed work, including by potentially identifying further sub-areas of distinctiveness.

### **The presented information**

This is in three parts:

1. A selection of the background of work - mainly plan based and including 'time slices' of the city which show the urban development of the city as a series of snap-shots over time.
2. A series of overlay plans (based on the background work) that give a broad understanding of the built form of the city today and provide some

historical background and show the underlying natural topography. This underpins the final overlay which identifies the eleven 'strategic character areas' identified by this project.

3. A written commentary as follows.

### **Natural topography**

The main natural topographical features of the city – the principal rivers and overall change in land height - are apparent on the overlay plans and is a reflection of the underlying geology. This has been exploited in the past (most significantly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) for mineral extraction associated with, for example, the coal and brick industries. In certain localities this has left an impression in the landscape but one that has been largely erased by more recent development.

### **The urban history of the city**

The history of the urban development of the city is important to understanding its present-day character and has significantly influenced the identification of the strategic character areas.

#### **Pre-Roman**

The limited archaeological finds within the current-day boundary of the city suggests the presence of some permanent or semi-permanent settlement. By the time the Romans arrived in the area in the 70's AD they may have found a partially cultivated landscape dotted with farmsteads, particularly along the river valleys and defended hilltops - the promontory sites at either end of current-day Deansgate (in the vicinity of Castlefield and Hanging Ditch) have been identified as ideal pre-historic settlement sites. The climatic deterioration between about 1,300BC and 400AD may explain the lack of confirmed Iron Age (500BC - Roman invasion) settlements in the area as the lowland wetland areas increased making marginal farming unworkable. The urban legacy of this period is limited but may include a number of place names.

#### **Roman**

The Roman occupation in the area extended from the 70's AD to their withdrawal from Britain in 410AD. While the Roman fort and associated vicus in the Castlefield area was a notable feature of the time there remains minimal evidence, mainly in the form of a limited number of road-lines, of the occupation in the current-day townscape. The landscape would have largely remained as existing prior to the occupation.

#### **Medieval**

There is a reference in 919AD in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to a "burgh" (or fort) at Manchester and while this could have been in Castlefield it is believed more likely to have been in the vicinity of Hanging Ditch which was both defensible and became the focus for medieval military, ecclesiastical and urban development. Elsewhere in the city, the Chronicle only made reference to Northenden and Baguley.

By the late 1200's Manchester had become a town of regional importance but still only covered a fraction of the current core area of the present-day city centre.

Outside Manchester town during the medieval period, the landscape became dotted with isolated halls (as the centres of medieval manors) and farmsteads against a backdrop of open-field systems, pasture meadows and large tracts of woodland. By the late 1400's there were a number of small settlements but Northenden seems to be the only settlement of any note outside Manchester town.

#### Tudor, Elizabethan and Georgian periods

The population of Manchester grew steadily in the 1500's reflecting its importance for wool, linen and flax and, consequently the town started to see notable physical expansion. By the mid-1600's this industrial sprawl led to wealthier merchants and clothiers moving out to high-status country estates. The gradual increase in population placed pressure on the agricultural system which led to the increased enclosure of wastelands, the clearing of woodlands and new crops and farming methods.

The Bridgewater Canal, Ashton and Rochdale Canals were opened in 1765, 1796 and 1800 respectively and have had a continued influence on the pattern of urban development to the current day. Early water-powered mills had been established on water courses in and around the town and, at the end of the 1700's, steam-powered mills were introduced for the first time. Areas in and adjacent to Manchester town - notably the Irk and Medlock valleys - were being industrialised including with increasingly large-scale mills.

Subsequent development and redevelopment has left only traces (some notable) of the urban built form up to the end of this period. These include some buildings together with the canals and elements of the street pattern and place-names.

#### Victorian period

Between the late 1700's and early 1900's the historic centre of Manchester expanded exponentially on a series of colliding streets grids transforming it from one of town houses and small mercantile establishments to one of larger scale warehouses, hotels, theatres and high status public institutions and overlaid with new transport infrastructure. The number of people now wealthy enough to leave the centre was increasing, and by the Victorian period new planned villa suburbs began to appear around the edge of the town, notably in an arc to the south-east in the vicinity of Ardwick, and also in a broad swathe along the Oxford Road/Wilmslow Road highway but with pockets of varying size in other locations. An emphasis on tree planting and other soft landscaping as a 'natural' setting was often associated with these developments. However, the increasingly rapid expansion of the industrialising urban centre soon overwhelmed the early villa suburbs around the edge of town with the building terraced and back-to-back workers housing on a massive scale. The tight, grid-street pattern was relatively quickly

adopted which allowed for little incidental, private or public open space and the expansion gained added momentum as technology improved and with the coming of the railways in the 1830's.

In the surrounding countryside, in the early part of the Victorian period, settlements remained as small 'folds' (based on earlier farmsteads) and discrete clusters of development on key radial roads and junctions. However, Northenden remained the only nucleated settlement core of any size outside Manchester into the later 1800's by which time a number of other urban cores started to emerge often resulting from the expansion of rural settlements by a dispersed pattern of industrial development and associated workers housing.

By the end of the 1800's, outside Manchester's urban core, a pattern of residential and commercial ribbon development based on key radial routes had become established and, other than along Wilmslow Road, they were principally based on terraced housing and industry. The relentless outward push of Manchester saw a new wave of villa building on the urban fringe and principally (but not exclusively) to the south.

The Victorian legacy varies across the city. In some localities it remains very much a defining characteristic, in many places it remains clearly evident but not dominant, while in others it may only be visible, if at all, in the street pattern and residual built form following subsequent events.

#### 20th century to date

The first half of the 20th century saw a consolidation of the urban area with the infilling of significant areas between the fingers of 19th century ribbon development with a mix of public/social and private housing but also with a range of other commercial and community buildings and spaces. Local retail and civic uses had also further strengthened the identifiable urban cores that would become district centres. At the same time there was also a significant southwards urban extension focused on Wythenshawe to provide much needed, good quality social housing. The increasing number of road vehicles (and congestion) was leading to new ideas such as 'parkways' and, later, to motorways including elevated highway structures.

In the 1950's and 1960's the huge area of (often poor quality) 19th century terraced and back-to-back housing encircling the city centre was comprehensively redeveloped. The resultant urban form was typical of the era but has not proved to be successful and is now itself the subject of regeneration including, in places, wholesale replacement. Areas of redundant, former industrial and transport land have also been made available for reuse that has included residential use as well for facilities of not just local but national importance such as those at Sport City.

Similarly, since the 1950's the city centre has seen change and, more recently, regeneration. In some places this has involved significant site assembly and a radical change in scale while others have been far less dramatic but nevertheless with an important cumulative impact that clearly identifies the centre as modern and dynamic but one that is more than

comfortable with its past.

### **Strategic Character Areas**

These have been identified as follows:

1. City Centre
2. Higher Education Precinct (HEP)
3. Airport & green belt
4. Wythenshawe environs
5. South Area
6. North Area
7. Heaton Park
8. Central Area of change
9. Irk Valley
10. Medlock Valley
11. Mersey Valley

### **City Centre**

#### Underlying natural form

The city centre stands on a gentle spur of land extending from the east within the area of gentle transition between the higher land to the north and lower, flatter land to the south and is bounded on three sides by the valleys of the Rivers Irwell, Medlock and Irk. The ground levels of the current day city centre also gently respond to the remaining impression left by lesser, and now culverted, water courses such as the River Tib and Shooters Brook that cross the area.

#### Urban form

The urban form is one of contrasts. Despite an urban history dating from Roman times, the principal remaining influence of the pre-Victorian era on the city centre urban form is the street pattern in the historic core and routes that radiate from it and that respond organically to topography and other landscape features.

While some built form remains of both Medieval and Georgian Manchester, the core area is principally a mix of development from the Victorian period onwards with some localities often displaying a predominance of a particular age and style of built form and others having a more eclectic mix. A series of colliding street grids - with origins in the Georgian period but mainly dating from the Victorian period - have informed both the original and subsequent built development and the legibility and permeability of the city centre. The scale of built form also varies, sometimes dramatically, but the core area is mainly one of higher, larger scale buildings. Other than open spaces relating to transport infrastructure, the core has a relatively modest amount of open space (when compared to built floorspace) principally in the form of larger, high quality civic spaces but also with some smaller, much greener and less formal public gardens. The Conservation Area status of much of the centre and the concentration of listed buildings reflects the urban history and quality of the urban environment.

The urban form around the core reflects the economic, social and physical dynamic of the city's on-going evolution and transition from the core to the outer areas. It contains a mix of building ages, types and quality but with a predominance of often lower scale built form a greater sense of space and lower density arising from areas of cleared, previously developed land.

Mancunian Way forms a more distinct boundary to the southern edge of the City Centre than elsewhere along the remainder of the Inner Relief Route or along the River Irwell where the city centre character extends outwards.

#### Use, activity and movement

The diversity and intensity of use, including over extended periods of any 24 hour day, reflects the regional (as well as city) centre role of the area. The predominant use in any particular part of the city centre can vary in relatively short distances to give pockets with particular use and activity characteristics. However, the over-riding character of the core area is a dense mix of non-industrial commercial uses, a predominance of regionally and locally significant uses and activities (including events) and a notable number of residential apartments. By comparison, outside the core, the intensity of activity falls and, within larger areas, uses are less mixed with fewer uses of particular regional significance but that can include uses not generally found in the core area including elements of industrial use. The non-core area includes significant areas of cleared land (often used for surface car parking) and a growing component of contemporary residential use as the core area pushes outwards.

Activity in the city centre, in part, derives from the area as the focus of road, water and rail routes which often have historic origins that continue to both inform the development of the city centre and contribute to its distinctive appearance and character. Particular activity 'hot-spots' can occur where routes cross and opportunities to change travel mode are presented such as at railway stations, and tram and bus stops.

### **Higher Education Precinct (HEP)**

#### Underlying natural form

The locality where the City Centre and HEP character areas merge is demarcated by the gentle, but noticeable, valley slopes in the immediate vicinity of the River Medlock from which the HEP stretches away south-eastwards, following Oxford Road, as a relatively level area.

#### Urban form

The main Oxford Road highway runs centrally through the length of this area and, prior to the mid 1700's, would have passed through largely open countryside.

The character of the area today is very much linked to Oxford Road as the focus of the city's major education and medical facilities in a significant

number of often large, institutional buildings. These clearly relate to and define the Oxford Road frontage and give the wider area a particular sense of scale and gravitas. A number of these imposing buildings date from the later 1800's and often are in stone but also some in red brick with Portland stone or terracotta detailing. Many are from the 1950's onwards and set in soft landscaped areas and represent every period of the modern era in terms of style and elevation materials, and this process of evolution continues today with recent and on-going development at the hospital and two universities.

There still remain some limited examples of the original development of the area for higher status villas and town houses for the wealthy moving out of the urban core as it began to industrialise. However, underlying the area is the still legible but fragmented grid-street pattern that was laid down when the area was subsequently overwhelmed by workers housing of the 1800's including to serve new mills in the vicinity of the township of Chorlton-upon Medlock. Virtually all trace of the residential areas was swept away as part of their 1950's and 1960's comprehensive redevelopment, but vestiges of often domestically scaled civic and commercial buildings that served the township still survive - principally along the Oxford Road frontage and around All Saint's Square that was an integral part of the grid-iron.

#### Use, activity and movement

Not unexpectedly the area is dominated by the educational and hospital uses either directly or with ancillary uses and activity. The HEP, particularly during university term-time, is a highly active and vibrant extension to the city centre including into the night-time. The Oxford Road frontage is particularly busy with a host of student facilities, performance venues, museums, shops and bars. In contrast, since being established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Whitworth Park (at the southern extent of the HEP) has remained as a large and more relaxed green public space of sweeping lawns and mature tree planting for recreation and occasional events.

Oxford Road is an extremely busy pedestrian and vehicle route which heightens the overall sense of activity along its entire length. Other than for a limited number of east-west roads it is pedestrians that predominantly permeate the area between (but without often reaching) the Cambridge Street and heavily trafficked Upper Brook Street routes that broadly define the HEP to the west and east respectively.

#### Wythenshawe environs

##### Underlying natural form

This area slopes gently down towards the Mersey Valley to the north. In places near the river the natural change in level has become slightly exaggerated by man-made flood defences. Historically the lowlands around the Mersey basin contained large tracts of mossland which remained largely undrained until around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.

##### Urban form

The over-riding current-day character of this area derives from the 20th

century suburban residential development set within a broad framework of historic routes. The catalyst was the development of Wythenshawe as a single planned satellite town for Manchester and begun in the 1920's. This was conceived as well-ordered Garden City of low-density housing - mostly semi-detached and in short terraces - set within garden space and incidental public areas of soft landscaping. The subsequent suburban development of much of the remainder of this character area followed from about the 1950's onwards in a similar low-density character but in a more piecemeal manner of private and social housing developments of detached and semi-detached houses, short terraces and low-rise flats. The form of these developments - including some of a strongly geometric layout - represent the changing styles of modern house building. The area is punctuated by the extensive, stand-alone Wythenshawe district centre, two large planned low-rise, low-density industrial estates at Sharston and Roundthorn (all from the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the public Wythenshawe Park centred on the historic hall and its estate. In the process historic routes have been adapted and some major new routes have been created.

Within the area there are reminders of the history of the area that provide an added dimension to its character. Northenden and Baguley are known to date from the Saxon period and the Church of St. Wilfred's in Northenden and the surviving Baguley Hall and Peel Hall are of medieval origin. Northenden remained the only nucleated settlement of any significant size away from Manchester until the end of the 1800's as reflected by the layout and older age of buildings at its core. Prior to the 20th century the area was still one largely dating from the 16th century - one of isolated farmsteads and halls and a number of high-status country estates such as Newell Green Farm. There is also some evidence from the 1800's of increasing settlement: small 'folds' (associated with earlier farms), ribbon development on established routes and higher status villas including as part in a north-south concentration following Wilmslow Road.

#### Use, activity and movement

The low level of perceived activity within much of the area can be attributed, in part, to the low-density residential use across much of the area which has the consequential impact of making supporting facilities and commercial uses difficult to sustain. There are, however, points of increased activity around the Wythenshawe district centre, Wythenshawe Hospital and two industrial estates, with the latter having a strong relationship with the nearby Manchester International Airport.

The underlying car-dominated pattern of movement within the area reflects it's low-density suburban character but also the overlay of strategic east-west and north-south highway through-routes associated with the adjacent airport, the motorway network (including the city's orbital motorway) and links to the city centre and nearby Stockport and Altrincham.

#### Airport & green belt

### Underlying natural form

The area is relatively flat but with a slight fall to the River Bollin in the south. It maintains a relatively open and green appearance especially in those areas not occupied by the Manchester International Airport and represents the largest area of countryside (as opposed to parkland) within the city. However, even this countryside, which includes some limited areas of woodland, derives from human intervention in the landscape such as enclosed fields. The sense of openness is significantly increased by the views across adjoining, similarly open areas, of adjacent districts.

### Urban form

A particular urban form is associated with the airport including expansive areas of surfaced open space and a variety of modern and often extremely large buildings which is permeated by an extensive network of roads. Elsewhere in the area there is minimal and domestically scaled built form set within the countryside (mostly dating from before the mid 1800's and little from after the early 1900's) and often associated with the agricultural history of the area.

### Use, activity and movement

The airport represents a major source of activity by comparison with the remainder of the area which has a pattern of activity associated with agriculture, dispersed residential use and the use of former agricultural premises and land for airport associated car parking.

Significant volumes of traffic are generated to and from the airport the majority of which, on the ground, is road traffic with some rail use and relatively little pedestrian movement. The airport also has intense patterns of movement within its boundary. By contrast the remainder of the area generates and experiences relatively low levels of movement which contributes to the perceived sense of inactivity.

## **South area**

### Underlying natural form

The area is broadly bounded by the valleys of the Rivers Medlock, Irwell and Mersey to the north, west and south respectively. While the area is perceived as largely flat there is a gentle upwards slope moving away from the rivers and towards the east. It rises from some 30m above sea level in the Mersey Valley area to about 65m around Gorton after which the change in gradient becomes more noticeable on the eastern edge of the city. Historically the lowlands around the Mersey basin contained extensive tracts of mossland which remained largely undrained until around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Urban form

The character of this area is principally defined by the gentle topography, the overriding suburban residential use dissected by principal routes, a more domestically scaled built form in a predominance of red brick and grey roofs, a sense of greenery and a flowing transition between areas of different

development ages up to the current day (but predominantly from the late 1700's to the 1960's). The overall impression is of a complete carpet of built form, managed urban spaces and mature soft landscaping but within which there are potential sub-character areas.

There are two key components to the built character. Firstly, surviving concentrations of the 19th century development focused on main routes and the urban cores along them that often developed from former small rural settlements. In some of these areas there is a predominance of higher status villa residences set in leafy localities with some worker terraces as in a swathe along Wilmslow Road (taking in, for example, Didsbury and Withington) and in the Chorlton and Whalley Range areas. Elsewhere, but predominantly on the eastern side of the area, the reverse holds with a majority being former worker terraces associated with the original dispersal of industry to give places such as Levenshulme and Gorton a denser, harder, meaner appearance. The particular emphasis of such remaining built form suggests a number of sub-character areas could, therefore, legitimately be identified.

The second key component of this area's built character resulted from the subsequent continued expansion of the city up to the 1960's. The rural land between the earlier areas of 19th century development saw rapid piecemeal infilling with archetypal public and private suburban housing of the time: mostly two-storey and lower density in a mix of detached and semi-detached houses, short terraces and maisonettes. A patchwork of estates appeared of varying size including some large enough to present particularly extensive geometric estate layouts.

Interspersed within the area are elements of more recent development from the 1960's onwards (some of which exhibits an increase in scale and form and introduction of new building methods and materials), a number of large historic parks and other managed open spaces (contributing further to the sense of greenery) and a few fragments of the historic origins of the area: Didsbury has medieval origins and Withington Old Hall, Barlow Hall and Peel Hall are confirmed as having mediaeval foundation dates.

#### Use and activity and movement

The level and rhythm of activity within the area is set by the predominant residential and associated uses. The various district centres provide particular mixed concentrations of uses and activity.

Much of the sense of activity within the area is generated by the principal traffic routes that pass through the area and contributes to the more intense activity of the district centres. Pedestrian activity is also at its most intense in the district centres but falls away in the interiors of the residential estates and areas. While movement is generated within the area, a significant amount is also attributable to the area as a thoroughfare to the city centre from elsewhere including the airport and the M6 motorway.

## **North area**

### **Underlying natural form**

A notable characteristic of the area is the evident increase in both the height of the land heading northwards from the city centre and the complexity of level changes due to the cutting of rivers (including the River Irk that flows through the area) and their tributaries. The area has highest land in the city other than that of Heaton Park.

### **Urban form**

The character of this area is principally defined by the changing topography which affords longer range views into and out of the area. Like the lower, more level South Area of the city the overriding impression is of suburban residential use, a predominance of brick and grey roofs and significant amounts of greenery. However, unlike the South Area the picture of development is more fragmented and smaller scale with steeper locations left free of development and available for various types of, often green, open space.

The pattern of development has left a finer grained mix of developments of different ages representing the urban history of the city. There are particular yet relatively small concentrations, of later 1800's development representing the remains of larger areas of both higher status villa residences (now noticeably focused in the Crumpsall area) and workers terraced housing. The notable predominance of 19th century built form in the contiguous Cheetham Hill, Cheetham and Crumpsall areas suggest that this could be a potential character sub-area.

However, the dominant urban form within the area is of 20th century public and private suburban housing: mostly two-storey, gardened detached and semi-detached houses and short terraces together with maisonettes and some low-rise blocks of flats set in grounds. The estates do not, however, reach the heights of geometric design seen in some places in the South Area. There is a slightly greater preponderance of pre-1960's development over subsequent development but there are many examples of small infill developments including on the sites of cleared 19th century villas.

As elsewhere within the city, but perhaps even less so, little remains from pre-urban times when this area was countryside. However, traces remain in place names such as Castle Hill in Crumpsall which may have Iron Age roots, Blackley, Harpurhey and Moston are all of known medieval origin and Moston Hall remains to enhance the local townscape character.

### **Use, activity and movement**

The level and rhythm of activity within the area is set by the predominant residential and associated uses. The various district centres provide particular mixed concentrations of uses and activity.

Much of the sense of activity within the area is generated by the principal traffic routes that pass through the area and contribute to the more intense

activity of the district centres. Pedestrian activity is also at its most intense in the district centres but falls away in the interiors of the residential estates and areas. While movement is generated within the area, a significant amount is also attributable to the area as a thoroughfare to the city centre from elsewhere including the motorway network.

## **Heaton Park**

### Underlying natural form

A gently sloping area forming the eastern side of the Irk Valley and influenced by the Irwell Valley to the south. Extensive views are afforded from the highest point in the city lying to the north-eastern corner of this area.

### Urban form

The park formed the estate centred on Heaton Hall which has medieval origins. As the elite residence in the Manchester area, the hall was rebuilt to the current grand design in the late 1700's and the park laid out in the informal picturesque manner with sweeping grassed areas and strategically placed areas of trees, follies and other structures. Owned by the City Council since the early 1900's, the park is open to the public and now also contains a variety more recent structures and features, various recreational facilities, associated car parks and part of a reservoir but largely retains the character of the grounds of a country estate. The park is known to include the site of Heaton Gate - a settlement of medieval origin - and, given the history of use and as the major continuously open space in the city, the park offers a particular opportunity for archaeological investigation.

### Use, activity and movement

The park now offers a range of possibilities for informal and more organised recreational activity but, by its nature, this tends to be influenced by the time of day and year. The park has areas of higher activity although even at peak times the park can still provide areas of relative calm and solitude. The park continues an historic tradition of periodically providing space for large, organised events.

Vehicles moves around the boundary of the park on a number of principal routes and the use itself generates varying (but often significant) levels of movement by a range of modes which can be expected to provide an increased sense of activity in the wider locality. However, within the park itself movement is principally pedestrian - the Metrolink follows a former rail tunnel under the park.

## **Central area of change**

### Underlying natural form

The area gently undulates in response to the valleys of the River Irwell that bounds the area's western edge and the Rivers Medlock and Irk that flow through the area from east to west and north to south respectively. Overall the

height of land above sea level increases gently in an arc around the north-east of the area and with a more noticeable change near the North Area and on the eastern edge of the city.

### Urban form

This area covers the majority of the area engulfed by the industrialised expansion of the city in the 19th and early 20th century, focused on the Rochdale and Ashton Canals, but the current-day character principally derives from change: The subsequent comprehensive redevelopment of the area in the 1960's and the more recent on-going programme of large-scale regeneration.

As such, the urban form is predominantly of the 1960's: one of lower-density development set within open areas consisting of a mix of generous principal highways and junctions, commercial yards, public open space (including significant areas of incidental open space), school playing fields and small private gardens. The area remains the focus of the city's industrial and other out-of-centre commercial activity mostly in low-rise industrial shed-style buildings. It also contains a significant concentration of 1960's housing with a predominance of purpose-built, social housing estates, often on the segregated vehicle and pedestrian Radburn layout and containing a mix of high and low-rise flats and short terraces on a series of cul-de-sac roads.

This change was almost area-wide although pockets of older development remain to contribute to localised distinctiveness such as at Ardwick Green - both Ardwick and Clayton are known sites of medieval halls.

Change is once again underway with regeneration programmes that have, and continue, to transform the urban form of significant parts of the area. In Hulme, for example, new development has taken place on a reinstated grid-street pattern (which, as elsewhere in the area, was often swept away or heavily corrupted in the 1960's) to provide an area which is once again legible and permeable. An over-all higher density, but human scale of development has been achieved but with less incidental open space and larger areas of more meaningful public open space. New East Manchester is witnessing similar a similar approach to the urban form.

### Use, activity and movement

The greatest sense of activity within the area is found in Sport City and the other centres which are a focus for facilities, services and pedestrian and vehicle movement. The level of activity in and around Sport City increases dramatically at the time of events. The activity levels outside these 'hot-spots' are relatively low with the greatest sense of activity generated by vehicle movement on the principal routes. There are, however, localities which exhibit increased levels of overall activity: Those close to the city centre and the Higher Education Precinct and areas that have recently experienced regeneration to higher densities that can now sustain a greater range of associated facilities.

## **Irk Valley**

### **Underlying natural form**

The River Irk makes the marked but gradual descent from the higher ground in the north of the city to join the River Irwell on the northern edge of the City Centre. The valley is one of contrasts that reflects geology and topography: it is relatively restricted in perceived width for much of its route through the city with some localised lengths of a narrow cut with steep banks but in other areas it broadens out (- presumably where gradients are less steep). It is often heavily treed and semi-natural although this character changes as it approaches the edge of the city centre.

### **Urban form**

The Irk Valley has a history of early industrial development associated with mills (at first water, later steam, powered) and particularly focused near the City Centre. Today, other than in the immediate vicinity of the City Centre where the River Irk is taken underground and where the area's character becomes more like that of the City Centre, the Irk Valley provides a focus for greenery and tree planting along much of its length. However, in places, the width of open space is severely restricted by built development – particularly industrial type uses and their yards. Elsewhere, suburban houses and low-rise flats step as close to the river as the flood plain allows which gives the varying width of open valley space – often heavily treed and semi-natural but with some more formal open recreation land.

### **Use, activity and movement**

A mix of residential and industrial land uses back on to the majority of the riversides. The valley space provides some opportunity for formal and informal recreation and as a pedestrian route but overall there is a perceived low level of movement and other activity.

## **Medlock Valley**

### **Underlying natural form**

Compared to the River Irk, the River Medlock makes less of a descent across the city and has had the opportunity to meander and create a wider, shallower river valley.

### **Urban form**

This area principally covers the river valley from the eastern boundary of the city to the City Centre - within the City Centre the river is heavily channelled and culverted often with development sites and built form addressing the river walls. Outside the City Centre to Eastlands the river space becomes a little more open with increased opportunity for greenery but is still largely defined by built form. Between Eastlands and beyond the city boundary in the east the sense of openness increases and this is further emphasised both by the width of the open plain but also by the suburban scale of development alongside.

### **Use, activity and movement**

Even in the more developed localities much of the area exhibits only a modest sense of activity.

## **Mersey Valley**

### Underlying natural form

A wide bottomed valley containing the meandering River Mersey with mainly gently sloping valley sides extending into the adjacent character areas but with some localised steeper banks.

### Urban form

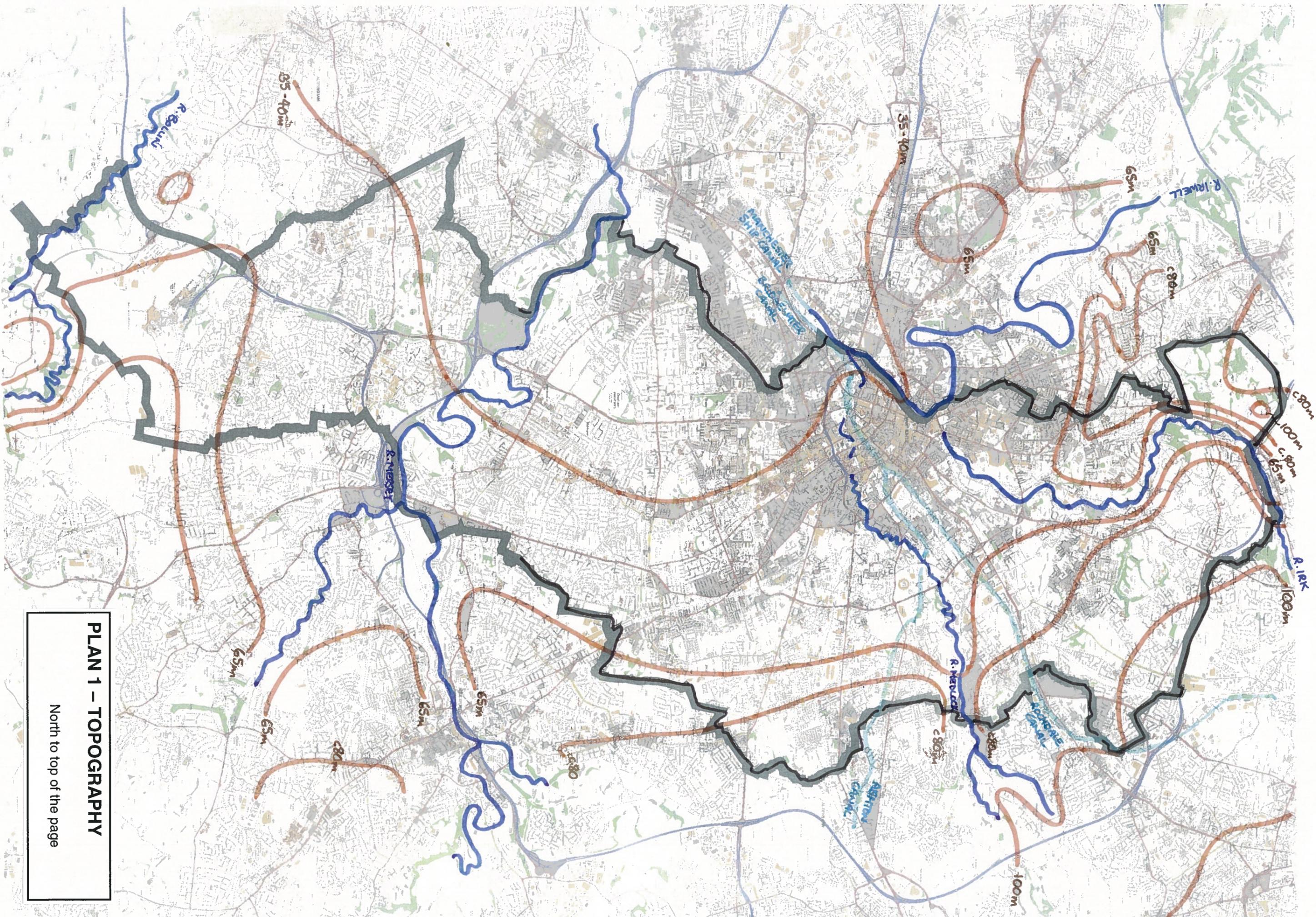
Unlike the Irk and Medlock Valleys, the Mersey Valley remained largely unaffected by the early urban industrialisation and sprawl of the city and the area retains an overall sense of openness associated with its rural past and the green belt status that covers much of the area. Today, however, the Mersey Valley is not in a natural or semi-natural state but instead is largely occupied by managed spaces such as golf courses, sports pitches and water parks. The area also accommodates flood defences, the M60 motorway that follows the southern valley side, a number of major highway junctions and several raised cross-valley routes that tend to compartmentalise the space – this is particularly the case at East Didsbury where a wide ribbon of built form also crosses the river in the vicinity of the city boundary. Significant areas and stands of trees, particularly to the valley sides, increases the overall sense of greenery by masking built form or softening its visual impact. Extensive long-range views exist from the valley sides and bridges into and along the valley.

### Use, activity and movement

The area is predominantly used during daylight hours for a mix of formal and informal recreation not involving large numbers of people congregating. Away from the intense activity associated with the major highway routes there is a prevailing sense of tranquillity.

John Whyard,  
Design, Conservation & Projects Team,  
Planning Service.

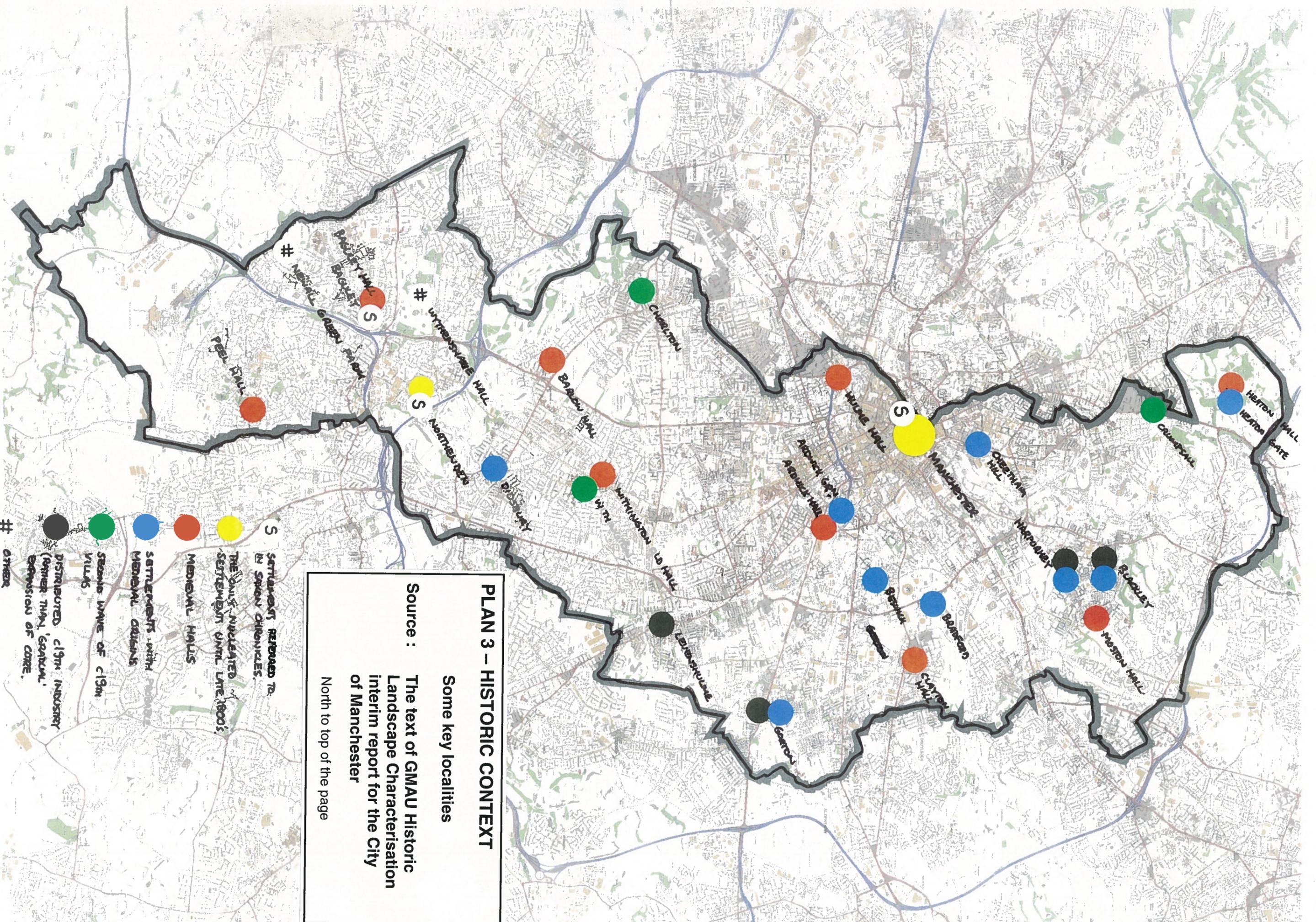
November 2010.



**PLAN 1 – TOPOGRAPHY**

North to top of the page





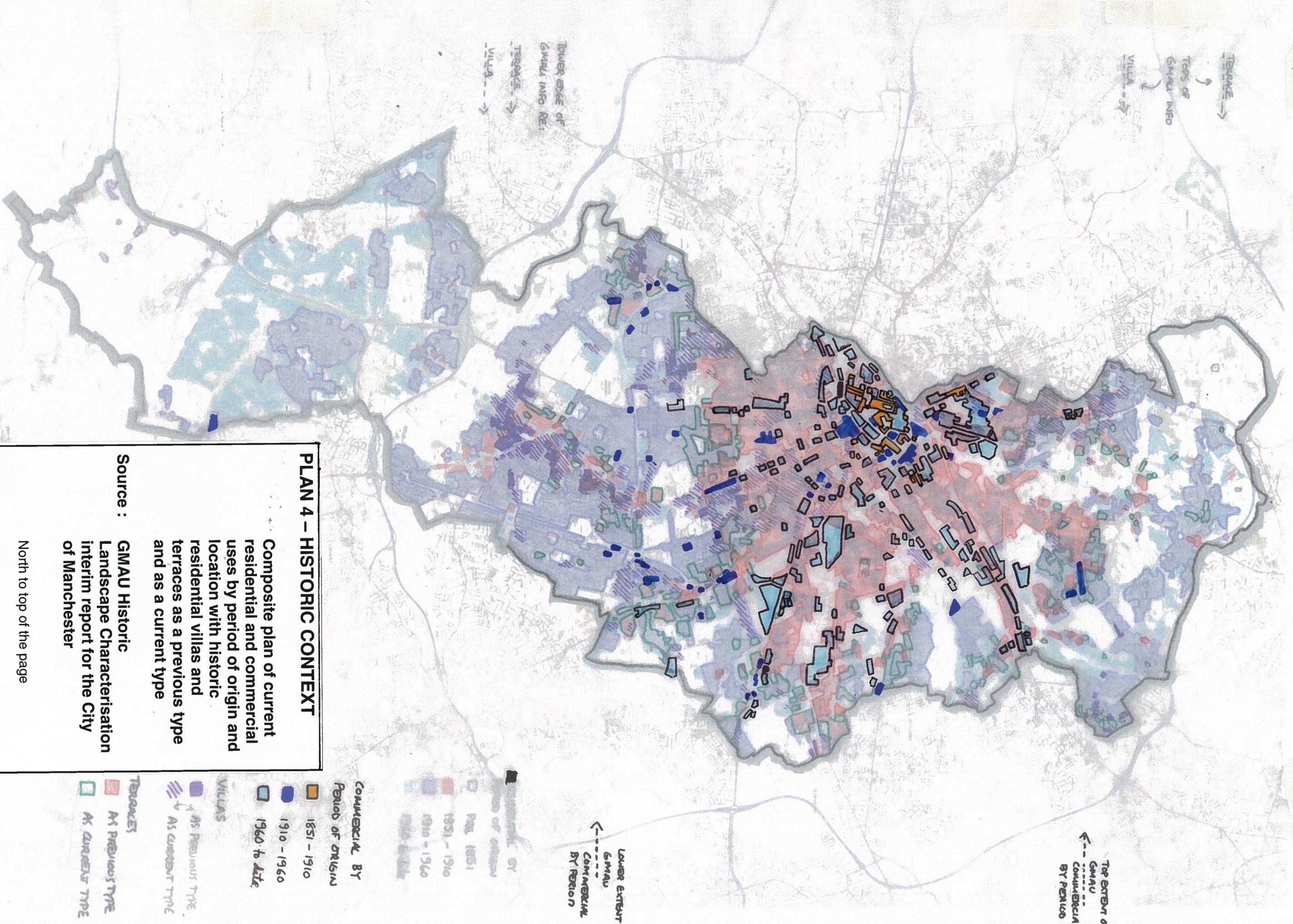
**PLAN 3 – HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Some key localities

Source : The text of GMAU Historic Landscape Characterisation interim report for the City of Manchester

North to top of the page

- S SETTLEMENT REFERRED TO IN SPAN CHRONICLES.
- THE SPAN NUCLEATED SETTLEMENT UNTIL THE 1800s.
- RED MEDIEVAL HILLS
- BLUE SETTLEMENTS WITH MEDIEVAL ORIGINS
- GREEN STREAMS WAVE OF c13m VILLAGES
- BLACK DISTURBED c19m INDUSTRY (RATHER THAN 'GARDEN' EXTENSION OF CORE).
- # OTHER



Terrace →

Tops of  
GMAU also

VILLA →

Lower edge of  
GMAU info re:

Terrace →

VILLA →

Top extent of  
GMAU  
Commercial  
by period

Lower extent of  
GMAU  
Commercial  
by period

**PLAN 4 - HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Composite plan of current residential and commercial uses by period of origin and location with historic residential villas and terraces as a previous type and as a current type

Source : GMAU Historic Landscape Characterisation interim report for the City of Manchester

North to top of the page

Commercial by  
Period of origin

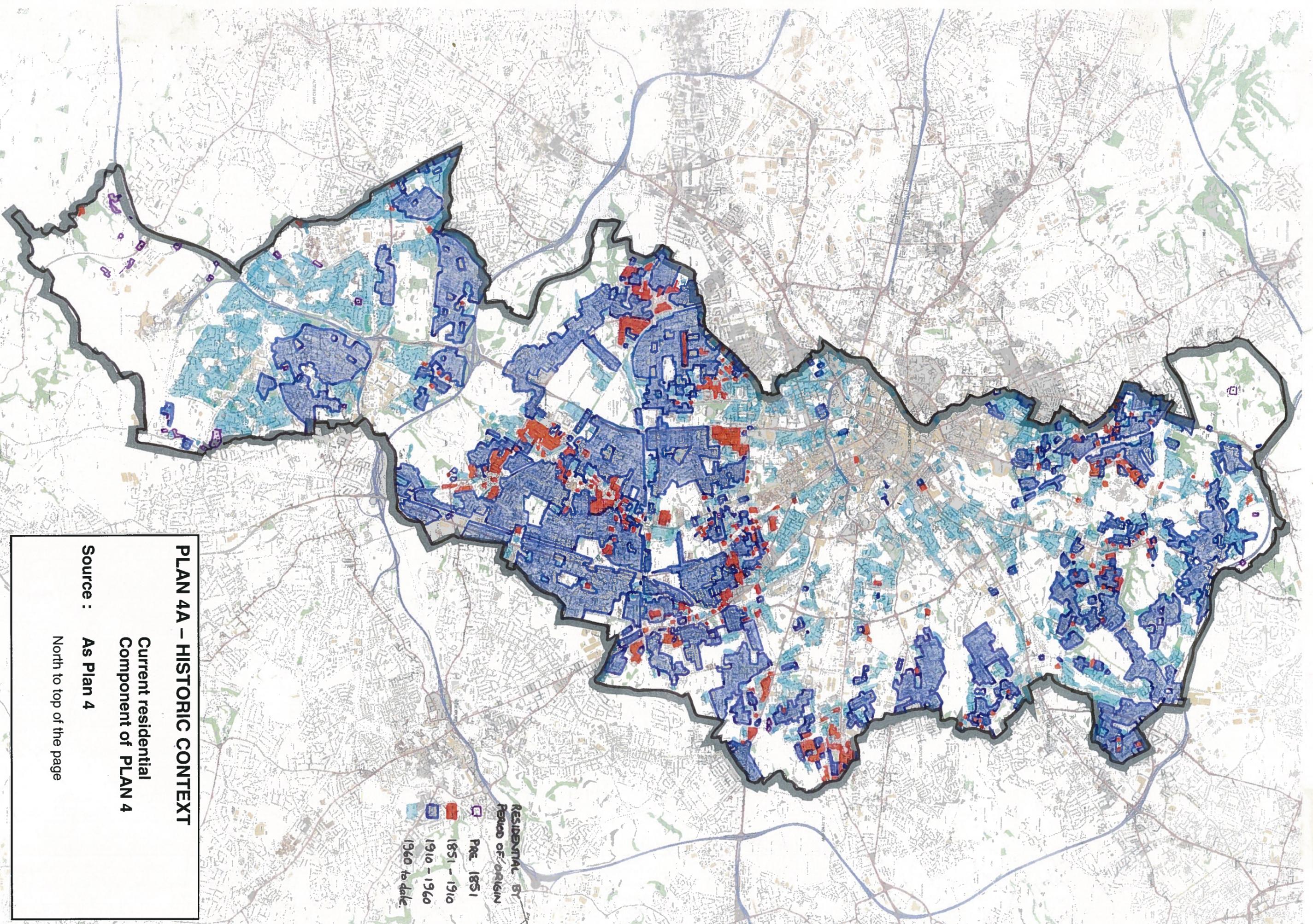
- 1851 - 1910
- 1910 - 1960
- 1960 to date

VILLAS

- As previous type
- As current type

TERRACES

- As previous type
- As current type



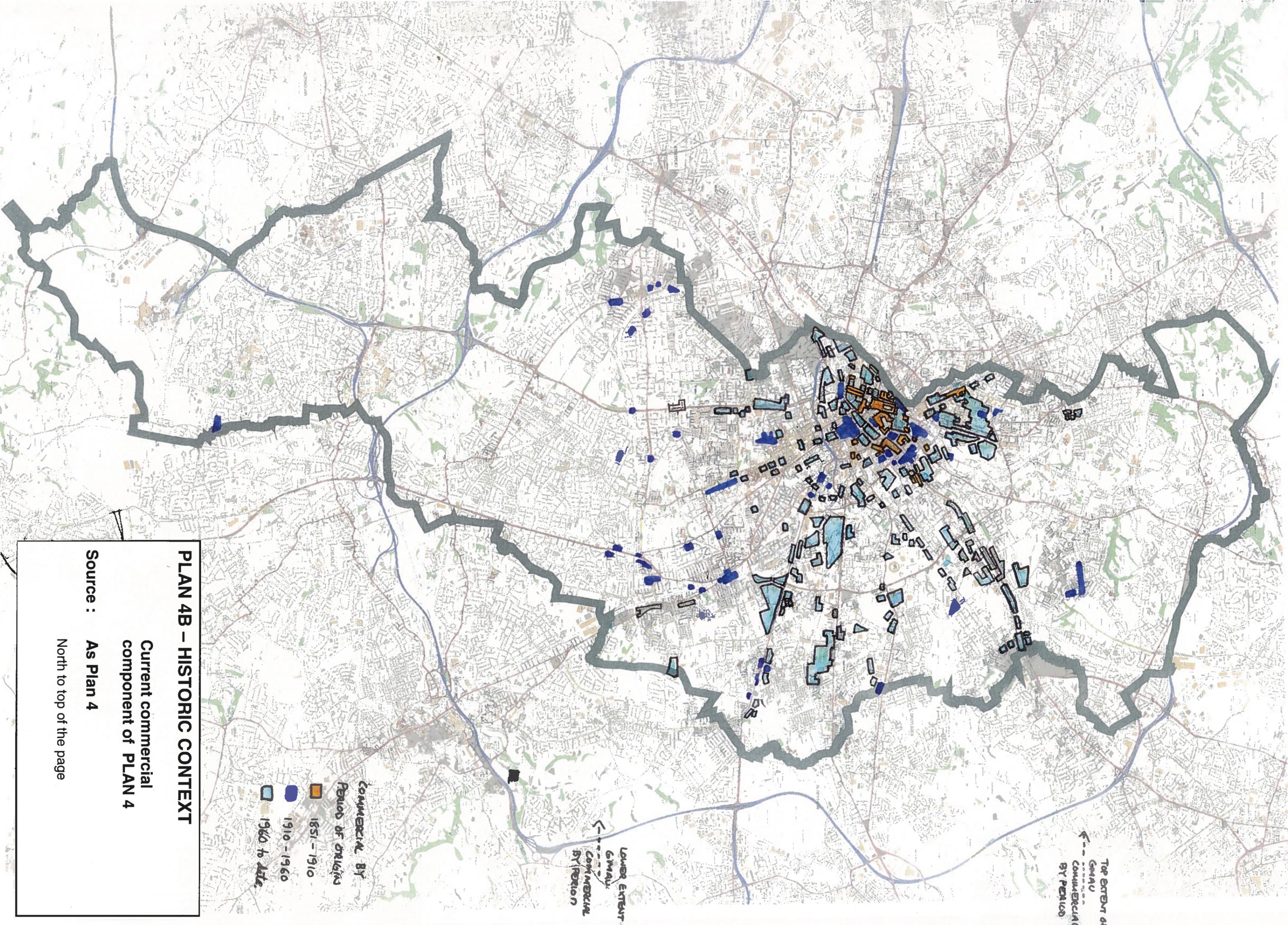
RESIDENTIAL BY  
PERIOD OF ORIGIN

- Pre 1851
- 1851 - 1910
- 1910 - 1960
- 1960 to date

**PLAN 4A - HISTORIC CONTEXT**  
Current residential  
Component of PLAN 4

Source : As Plan 4

North to top of the page



**PLAN 4B – HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Current commercial component of PLAN 4

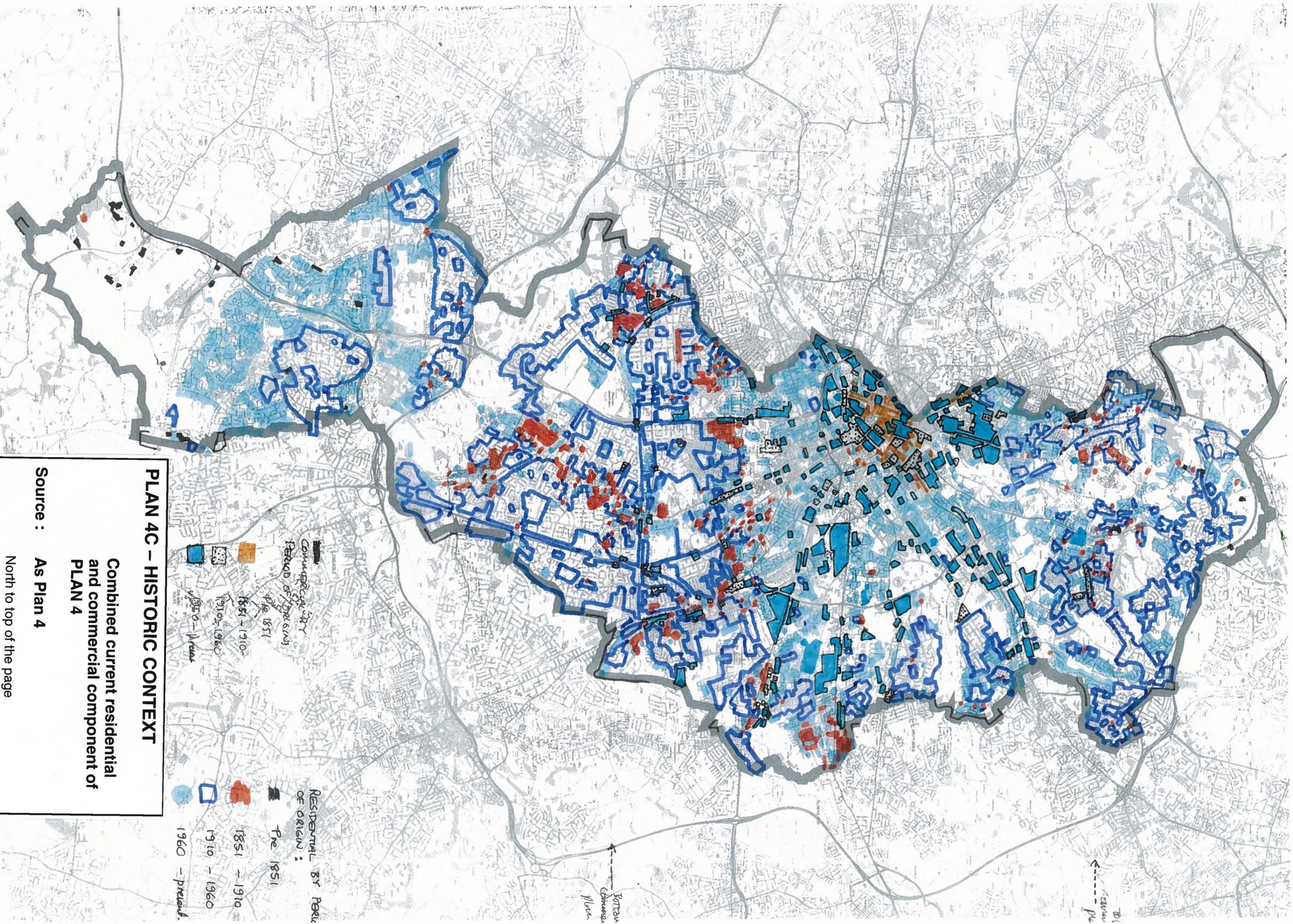
Source : As Plan 4

North to top of the page

- Commercial By Period of Origin**
- 1851 - 1910
  - 1910 - 1960
  - 1960 to date

← Lower extent of SMAU commercial by period

← Top extent of SMAU commercial by period



**PLAN 4C – HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Combined current residential and commercial component of PLAN 4

Source : As Plan 4

North to top of the page

**COMMERCIAL BY PERIOD OF ORIGIN**

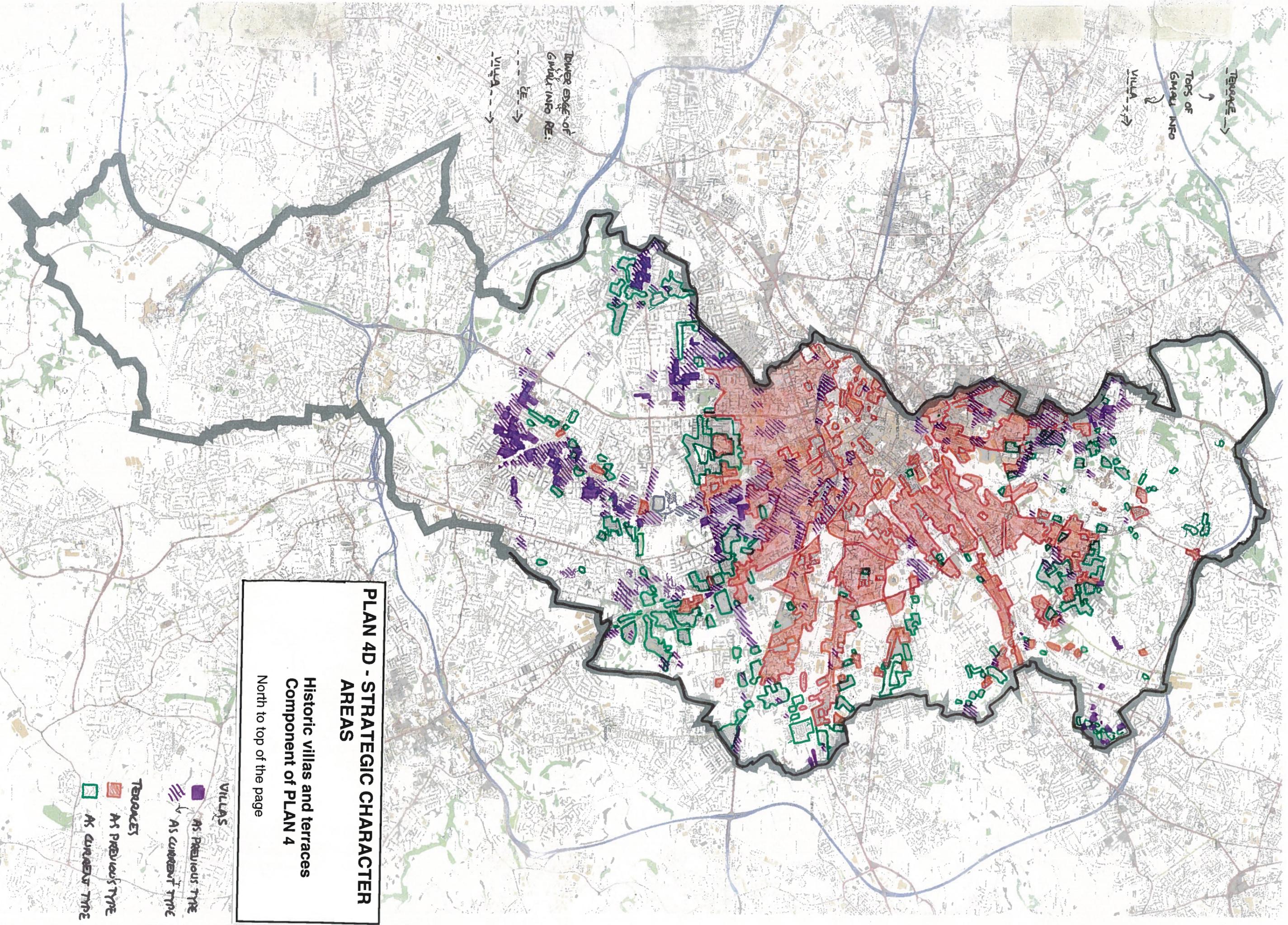
- Pre 1851
- 1851 - 1910
- 1910 - 1960
- 1960 - Present

**RESIDENTIAL BY PERIOD OF ORIGIN**

- Pre 1851
- 1851 - 1910
- 1910 - 1960
- 1960 - Present

Bottom  
Common  
Plan

Bottom  
Common  
Plan



TERRACE →

TOPS OF GMAU INFO →

VILLA →

Lower edge of GMAU INFO RE: →

TERRACE →

VILLA →

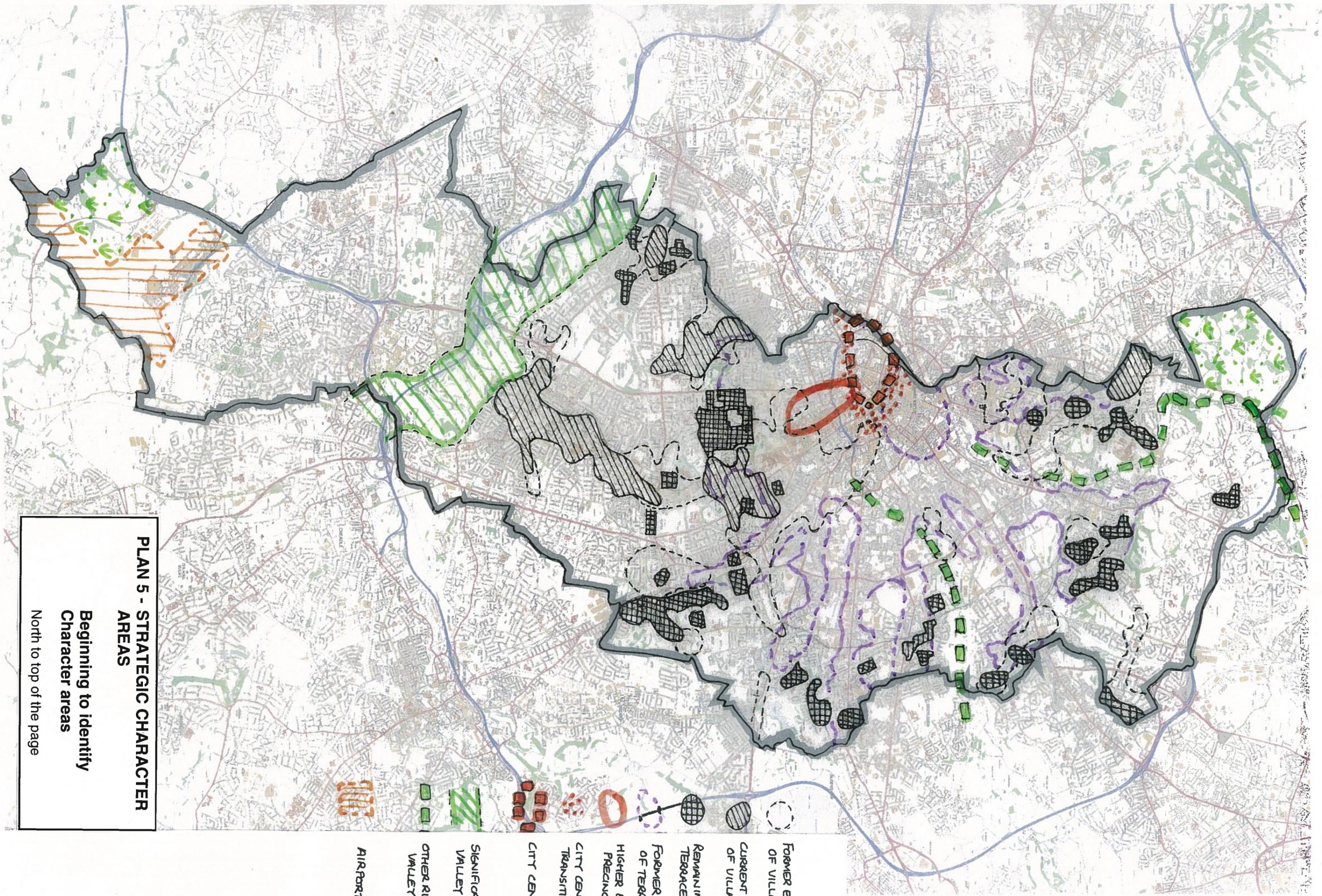
**PLAN 4D - STRATEGIC CHARACTER AREAS**

Historic villas and terraces  
Component of PLAN 4

North to top of the page

**VILLAS**  
 AS PREVIOUS TYPE  
 AS CURRENT TYPE

**TERRACES**  
 AS PREVIOUS TYPE  
 AS CURRENT TYPE

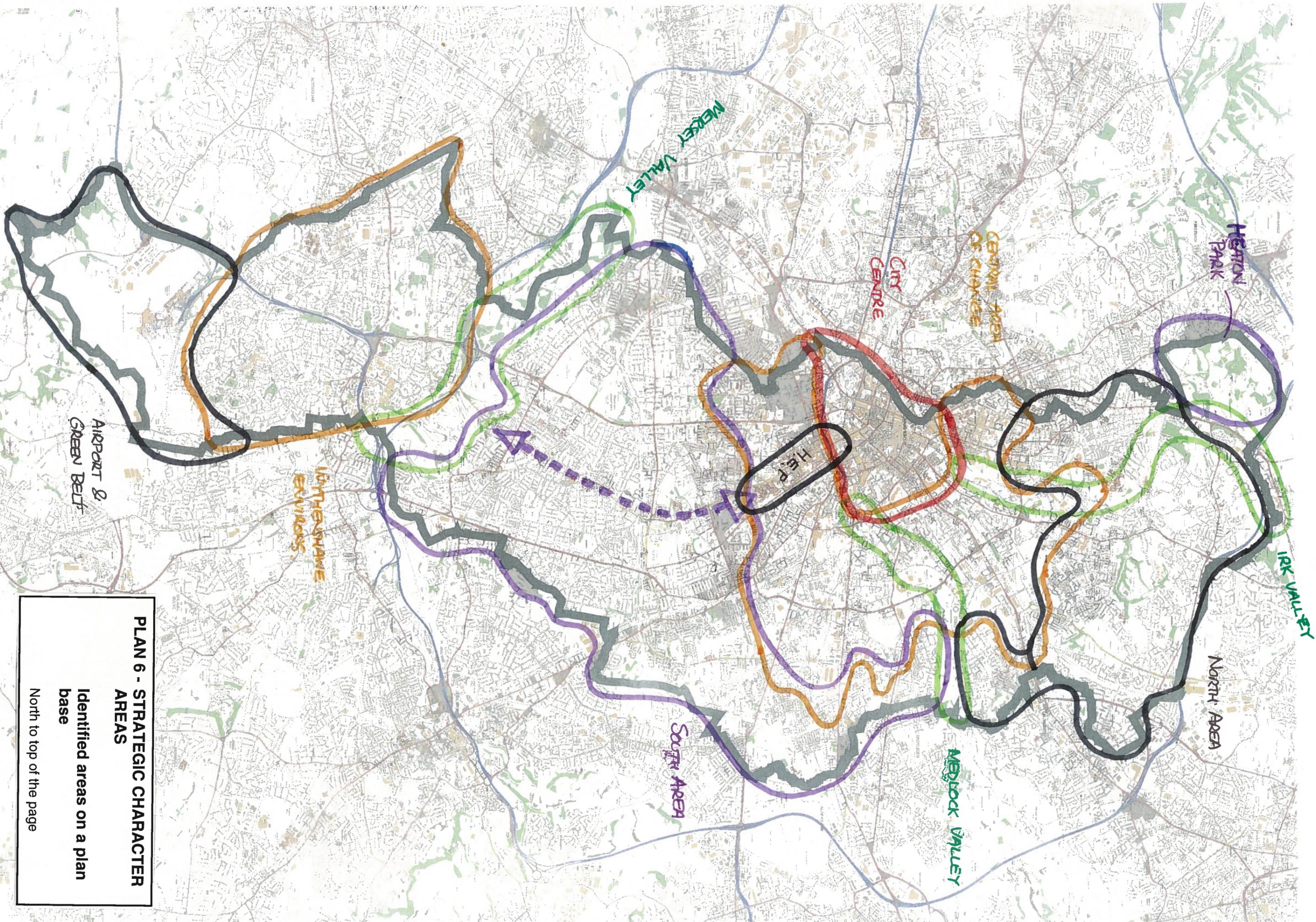


**PLAN 5 - STRATEGIC CHARACTER AREAS**

Beginning to identify Character areas

North to top of the page

- 
 FORMER EXTENT OF VILLAS
- 
 CURRENT EXTENT OF VILLAS
- 
 REMAINING TERRACES
- 
 FORMER EXTENT OF TERRACES
- 
 HIGHER EDUCATION PRECINCT
- 
 CITY CENTRE TRANSITION AREA
- 
 CITY CENTRE
- 
 SIGNIFICANT RIVER VALLEY SPACE
- 
 OTHER RIVER VALLEY SPACE
- 
 AIRPORT



HEATON  
PARK

IRK VALLEY

NORTH AREA

MERIDOK VALLEY

SOUTH AREA

CITY  
CENTRE

CENTRAL AREA  
OF CHANGES

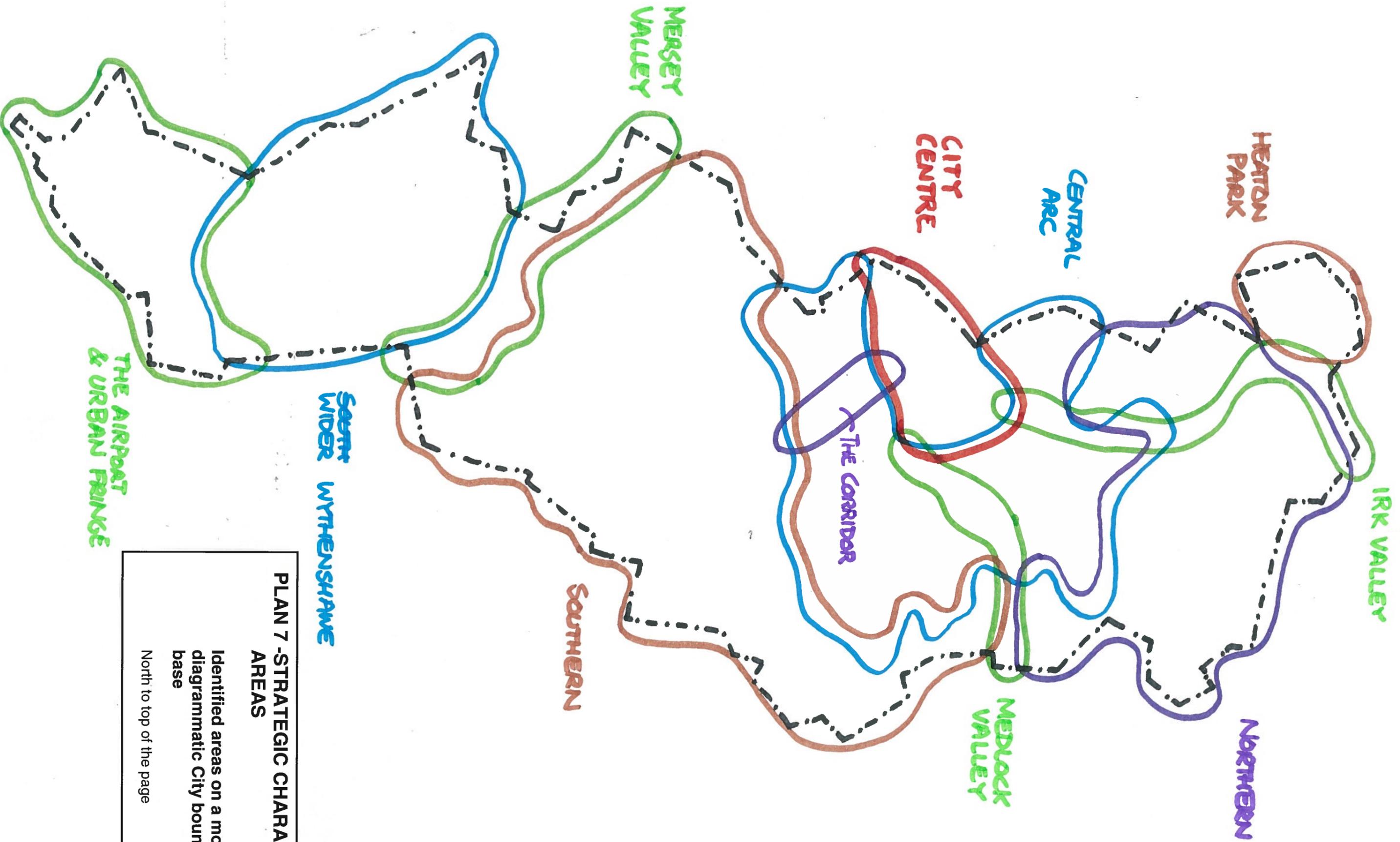
H.E.P.

A

WINTHUSWANE  
ENVIRONS

AIRPORT &  
GREEN BELT

**PLAN 6 - STRATEGIC CHARACTER AREAS**  
 Identified areas on a plan base  
 North to top of the page



**PLAN 7 - STRATEGIC CHARACTER AREAS**  
 Identified areas on a more diagrammatic City boundary base  
 North to top of the page