

# TOPSHAM CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

## INTRODUCTION

Topsham is an area of special architectural and historic interest, which was designated as a Conservation Area in 1967, making it one of the earliest Conservation Areas in the Country as the legislation for designating these areas only came into being in 1967 (The 1967 Civic Amenities Act). It is an important area of historic townscape, which contains a high proportion of listed buildings and several locally listed buildings.

The purpose of this document is to:

- *Identify and justify the special character of the area*
- *Identify elements that are worthy of retention or enhancement*
- *Identify elements that detract from the character*
- *Enable review of the existing Conservation Area boundary*
- *Act as a framework for the control of development*
- *Allow proposals to be put forward for enhancement and development opportunities*
- *Consider options for strengthening design control.*

The special character of the area is highlighted and possibilities for improvements are identified. It will be used by the City Council as guidance for assessing development proposals that affect the area, and also by those proposing new development so that they may gain a greater understanding of the character of the area, as an integral consideration in the preparation of their proposals.

Topsham has also been subject of an appraisal by the Topsham Design Group, consisting of The Topsham Society and the Topsham Community Association. This document, produced in 2005, offers community views on Topsham's landscape setting as well as views and guidance on issues such as future development, car parking and the street scene. It is an informative document and has been considered in the production of this appraisal.

*This appraisal is not intended to be comprehensive and omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The characteristics of the Topsham Conservation Area may be summarised as:

- Estuary setting defines the area
- Strong historical links as main port for Exeter
- Exceptional long-range views offered across the river.
- Detachment from Exeter maintains strong local identity and community.
- A variety of residential buildings dating from 17<sup>th</sup> century to present day
- A large number of listed and locally listed buildings contribute to the historical character of Topsham.
- Predominant walls in stone, cob, brick or render enclosing private garden areas.
- Narrow lanes courts and streets run at right angles to the main street.

## CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AMENDMENTS

Topsham Conservation Area was defined at the time of designation in December 1967 and was extended in March 1989 however through this appraisal, two areas have been considered appropriate for inclusion.

- **Area 1: Denver Road 10 – 17 and 1 – 19 (odd) Newcourt Road**

This will be a satellite area however the buildings in Denver Road are appropriate for inclusion due to the completeness of the terrace and high percentage of original windows and boundary walls. The terrace in Newcourt Road contains 6 Locally Listed buildings that are otherwise unprotected.



## Plan 1 – boundary alterations

- **Area 2: 11 – 15 Station Road (odd), Topsham Cemetery and Elm Grove Road**

A short terrace of three houses dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century incorporating the Dutch gables found on older properties in the town.



*The Dutch Gables prevalent in The Strand, repeated here in a group of unlisted properties*

The buildings beyond this and onto Elm Grove Road form an important group set within a green space containing trees and surrounded by a stone wall. The Church of the Holy Cross is built of mellow brick and red clay tiles and has an elegant campanile. The presbytery is also built of brick and clay tiles whilst the earliest building 6 Elm Grove Road is brick and slate. The church and the two houses date from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*The Church of the Holy Cross*

Topsham Cemetery and the allotments are part of the townscape and community and contain many mature trees that contribute to the street scene, as well as two locally listed chapels within the cemetery itself.

From the junction of Station Road with Elm Grove Road there is a delightful view of the listed former lodge to Lodge Hill House. This diminutive single storey limestone building is executed in the Tudor style and dates from 1850.

The proposed amendments to the conservation area boundary are shown on Plan 1, page 3.

## **EVOLUTION OF TOPSHAM**

Topsham occupies a red sandstone peninsula located at the head of the Exe estuary where the River Clyst joins the River Exe.

Indications of prehistoric activity in the area included a chance find of a stone possibly used in connection with fishing and an almost pure copper axe head. Excavations for the new school in 2000 revealed clear archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity.

Roman artifacts and pottery dating from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD had been found along with coins variously dating from the rule of Vespasian (69-79 AD) Hadrian (117-138AD) and Constantine I (306-337AD). Confirmation that Topsham had been a Roman military base also came out of excavations for the new school with evidence of 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman occupation. The Topsham to Exeter road is probably a Roman road.

The first written record of the town appears in a 10<sup>th</sup> century charter for the Manor of Topsham granted by Aethelstone. It is also recorded in the Domesday Book as Topshant.

A medieval settlement grew on the northern part of the ridge with development of a quay below the low cliff and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century Topsham was a thriving port. Much of the area was owned by the Courtenays. Countess Isabella's weir built in 1284 up the Exe meant larger vessels could not reach Exeter and had to unload at Topsham Quay. Later Hugh de Courtenay built other weirs completely blocking navigation. A quay and custom house were built on low ground at the foot of the cliff as imports and exports increased. Edward I granted a charter to Topsham in 1300 permitting a weekly market and annual fair. The long narrow burgage plots still discernible today were laid out around this time.

There were attempts by the City of Exeter to demolish the main weir following the execution of Henry de Courtenay in 1556 and the transfer of his estate to the crown. However the weir was too difficult to dismantle so a canal was constructed initially to Matford Brook.

The Exeter Canal was eventually extended to Topsham in 1676 and underwent reconstruction in 1701. The extension of the Exeter Ship Canal to Turf Locks led to the bypassing and eventual demise of Topsham as a major port. The shipbuilding industry also declined as other larger shipyards developed. Holman's shipyard with its dry dock opened in 1858 and continued until 1874 but when this closed so did the ropewalk and the nail factory on Ferry Road.

From the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century Topsham's trade was further boosted by increasing export of woollen goods, particularly jerseys produced by towns such as Tiverton and Cullompton.

A stone built parish church dedicated to St Margaret was constructed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Only the tower of this building remains.



*The C15th tower of St Margarets Church*

In the Civil War Topsham was the site of what appears to be a small fort built in the vicinity of the old Roman fort on the northern edge of the town. Whilst the suburbs of Exeter bore the brunt of the destruction and fighting, Clyst Bridge was demolished by troops under Thomas Fairfax's command in 1647.

Following the Civil War there was significant new building and redevelopment in the town. This reflected the great prosperity of the town based on the burgeoning cloth trade with exports to North America and the Low Countries.

In addition to the export trade Topsham also developed ship building with its supporting trades of sailmaking, nail and chain manufacture. The success of both foreign trade and the shipbuilding industry saw an increase in the population and the establishment of a range of services to support both residents and ships' crews.

The resultant period of major new building from 1660-1730 is epitomised by The Strand. Largely occupied by wealthy merchants and shipbuilders this development dates from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Its layout suggests a planned development with many houses

having similar scale and floor plan. The houses are generally “Dutch” gabled, built end-on to the road, 3-4 rooms deep with courtyards behind tall walls often of rendered brick. Many overlooked their own quays on the river front.



*35 The Strand, a typical C17th Merchants House*

Other areas developed about this time include Monmouth Street and both Higher and Lower Shapter Street.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century shipbuilding had become the town's major industry. One business alone, William Green's, built 100 ships between 1666 and 1711. The ship building trade was supported by many other trades such as ropemaking, sailmaking, anchorsmithing and blockmaking. Other businesses grew in association with the imports and exports eg; corn mill, brandy distillery, pipe manufacturing and salt works.

In 1713 the Quakers built themselves a meeting house on former burgage plots behind the east side of Fore Street. Later used by the Wesleyans, the meeting house became a chapel in 1811 and was extended in 1852 to incorporate a school. This attractive building stands on the north side of Majorfield Road.





*The Former Quaker Meeting House, now residential properties*

Other non conformists also built to the east of Fore Street. The Congregational Chapel in Victoria Road dates from 1839 and its Sunday School from 1897, whilst the Methodist Church on Fore Street was built in 1867 and dedicated to St Nicholas patron saint of seafarers.

St Margarets Church was rebuilt between 1874-6 by Edward Ashworth. Only the red stone tower of the original church was retained and stands in stark contrast to the grey limestone of the Victorian construction.

A substantial rebuild of Clyst Bridge was undertaken in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century reflecting the need for improved highway links.

Improved transport links also included the building of a passenger railway and a goods link to Steamer Quay in 1861. Although the line to the quay was closed it was reused as a road (Holman Way), but its railway origins can still be recognized in the steep banks and the distinctive lattice metal footbridge that spans the cutting.





*Former pedestrian bridge across railway, now over Holman Way*

Whilst the shipbuilding industry almost disappeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the port continued to function. Some of the wharves and buildings were adapted to serve the rising demand for leisure boating.

There was some decline in population into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century but then came new waves of development including enclaves of typical 1930s houses, further suburban style housing in the 1940s and 1950s as well as later blocks of flats, redevelopment, conversions and building in the grounds of older properties.

## **LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS OF TOPSHAM**

Various elements contribute to the special character of any Conservation Area, including its topography, the historical and architectural development of the area, the building materials used; the height and massing of buildings, the streets and spaces between and around buildings; the community and its facilities.

Topsham's landscape setting is integral to its importance and character, lying, as it does, at the confluence of the River Exe and the River Clyst. Along the water's edge of the River Exe tidal mud flats abut the foot of a small cliff of sandstone, although this is obscured by wharves, landing stages, causeways and stone walls. In contrast, the

frontage to the River Clyst (which is largely outside the Conservation Area), is a flat, marshy area, that then rises gently to the tree topped elevated land of Mount Howe.

Both within and adjacent to the conservation area, there are many landscape designations that indicate the importance of the site and the high levels of protection it is afforded. These include: Landscape Setting; Ramsar Special Protection Area; Site of Special Scientific Interest; Site of nature Conservation Importance; Site of Local Interest for Nature Conservation and a Valley Park. These designations can be seen on the Landscape Designations plan on page 11.

The long thin strips of the old burgage plots have strongly influenced the pattern and grain of development in the vicinity of Fore Street where courts and later terraces run at right angles. The land rises from south east to north west resulting in a stepped effect on some streets or in split levels in some properties.

Topsham displays a wide variety of buildings including large scale former industrial buildings, small cottages, grand houses as well as shops, churches and blocks of flats.

The majority of buildings have a painted stucco or rendered finish, although there are also several areas where brick predominates, particularly in the Victorian and Edwardian areas. There are some stone buildings, mostly churches and warehouses, and many of the tall walls on the waterfront are limestone. Roofs are generally natural slate or red clay tiles.



*View up Fore Street, looking north, showing predominance of render buildings with occasional brick*

*Plan 2 - Landscape designations plan*

In the urban part of the conservation area, apart from a few older houses and some of the more recent dwellings, most buildings stand with their frontage or a gable end onto the back edge of the pavement or carriageway.

In the rural part of the conservation area, open space and trees provide the setting for large detached and semi detached properties.

Narrow streets make traffic and parking difficult to accommodate in many parts of the town. The signs and road markings used for management are often visually intrusive.

There are many properties with no vehicular access, which adds greatly to the charm and character of the bustling, small-scale layout of the town.



*Fore Street, looking south*

The waterfront, with its yards and moorings containing a variety of boats including the ferries is a mixture of historic stone buildings, modern utilitarian buildings and features set against the backdrop of an estuary with a constantly changing waterscape reflecting both the tides and the weather.





*The ever-changing waterfront*

The train station and level crossing contribute another layer of activity to the town affecting traffic and pedestrian movement. The noise from trains can often be heard in the background both from the Exeter to Exmouth line that serves Topsham and from trains running on the west side of the estuary. There is also a constant background noise from the M5, audible in many parts of the conservation area.



*The busy station and level crossing*

Important views into and out of the Conservation Area are shown on the various “Key Features” plans throughout this document.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- Exceptional landscape setting creating much of the character of the development
- Exceptional long-range views offered across the river.
- A variety of residential buildings including small 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century cottages, substantial late 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch gabled merchants houses, Georgian villas and town houses, Victorian, Edwardian and 1930's terraced houses, flats including purpose built blocks and conversions of industrial buildings.
- Detachment from Exeter maintains strong local identity and community
- A range of commercial properties including shops, hotels, pubs, restaurants and offices.
- Artisans such as boatyards, builders and sailmakers are essential to the character and community of Topsham
- Several public buildings including churches, a hall, museum, library and school.
- A large number of listed and locally listed buildings contribute to the historical character of Topsham.
- The main building materials are render and stucco, with areas of brick and stone, with roofs of natural slate or red clay tiles.
- Most windows are wooden sliding sashes with a variety of glazing bar patterns. Doors are mainly timber with a range of patterns and surrounds. However some later 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century properties, have replaced traditional timber windows and doors with badly proportioned timber uPVC or aluminium windows and doors.
- Other predominant details are tall stone, cob, brick or rendered boundary walls enclosing private garden areas throughout. Some have gates or openings that allow a glimpse into pleasant green spaces or paved courtyards.
- All buildings have an impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- Narrow lanes courts and streets run at right angles to the main street.
- Pedestrian access ways pierce continuous frontages leading to rear courts.
- Numerous examples of cobbled and patterned pebble paths.
- Kerbs and gullies are often natural stone usually grey limestone or granite.
- The station and level crossing together with the sound of trains contribute to Topsham's character
- The tidal estuary, the waterfront and the activity in connection with boats are an integral part of the character of the conservation area.
- Local ferries offering the ability to arrive and leave by boat as well more usual methods of transport are important to the character of the area



*Historic cobbled passages offering glimpse views*

## **ISSUES**

- *Areas of poorly maintained pavements and carriageways*
- *Some poor quality modern development*
- *Loss of historic features on unlisted historic cottages*
- *Retention and care of the many mature and semi mature trees throughout the area.*
- *Retention, maintenance and repair of the many tall historic boundary walls in the area.*
- *Visual impact of traffic and parking*
- *Visual clutter of highway and parking signs*
- *Loss of front gardens, and sometimes front rooms, to parking*



## THE SUB AREAS

Topsham Conservation Area is extensive but can be subdivided into several sub areas;

1. The North - The northern end, focused on the area around the recreation ground and riverbank and the school.
2. High Street - The medieval core area comprising Fore Street with its associated courts and side roads down to river frontage of Ferry Road and High Street with Denver Road.
3. The Strand – The Quay and the mainly Georgian development south of the centre including Monmouth Hill, Monmouth Street (west end) The Strand and the Shapters
4. Goat Walk - the south end including The Goatwalk, Riversmeet and land around Mount Howe
5. Bridge Inn - Bridge Hill to Elm Grove Road
6. Parkfield Road - the Victorian / Edwardian area including Topsham Station, Parkfield Way and Holman Way.

These sub areas are shown on Plan 3, page 17. Each sub area is the subject of detailed analysis below and has separate plans showing the key features and building impacts.

Plan 3 – sub areas

## AREA 1 - THE NORTH

This area lies between the west side of High Street and the River Exe. It is dominated by modern development including blocks of modern flats, an estate of bungalows, a library, a new school and a large public open space.

**Ferry Road (north end)** between the river and the road frontage encompasses a roughly triangular recreation ground. Within this area there are some attractive trees and the eye is drawn to the exceptional distant views across the river. The space has an undeveloped sense that is a welcome counterpoint to the busy narrow streets surrounding it.



*Attractive open playing field have views across the river.*

To the southern end of the open space is some chainlink fencing that defines the boundary with the scout hut and the rather utilitarian Dorothy Holman Youth Centre. The buildings lack the scale massing and architectural quality required in this context, however the scout hut retains some charm through its materials and simple form.

South of the scout hut and Youth Centre is part of Halyards, a development of modern flats. The design and materials may not be typical of Topsham but consideration has been given, particularly to the properties facing onto Ferry Road, of the scale and grain of development which is consistent with the historic neighbours. Within the development, a more random pattern is less successful in preserving the character and there are no views through the development to the river. That it is a gated development creates a lack of permeability, which is detrimental to the grain of development in Topsham.

The east side of Ferry Road is lined with groups of buildings seen against a backdrop of rising land. Haven Villas is a successful example of modern development, although the presence of an adjoining block of lock-up garages detracts from the otherwise positive contribution made.



*Typical historic cottages opposite the playing fields*

### **SIR ALEX WALK**

The path known as Sir Alex Walk runs between the recreation ground and the gardens of the houses on the south west side of Riverside Road.

The tall and distinctive boundary wall is part of the original boundary wall to Retreat House, and as such predates these houses.

*Photo to follow*

Plan 4 – sub area 1 – key features

**Nelson Close** stands above and behind Ferry Road properties. This elevated land has a long history of occupation as revealed by the archaeological excavations in 2000. These revealed evidence of prehistoric occupation, a Roman military base and a possible civil war fortification. The modern development of Nelson Close and Orchard Way together with a new school now occupies the area and any traces of its past are lost. The suburban layout and design of Nelson Close estate with its bungalows, community centre, trees and open spaces does not reflect the characteristic patterns of development in Topsham, although the layout with its wide verges and mature trees is quite pleasing. The properties are typical of municipal housing for older people of the time they were built. They form an integral part of the community of Topsham, allowing older generations to still be housed in the locality.

In contrast the recently constructed terrace of two storey houses on Orchard Way opposite the school provides an example of sympathetic modern development that reflects the historic grain. The library is a prefabricated building of no design merit, whilst a block of dilapidated lock up garages at the junction of Nelson Close with High Street detract from the area.

### ISSUES

- *No visible reference to the underlying archaeology of the area*
- *Predominance of modern development that lacks the visual qualities characteristic of much of the conservation area*
- *Several groups of buildings that detract from the character and appearance of the area.*
- *Condition of Sir Alex Walk*



*Nelsons Close, wide verges compensate for lack of historic grain.*

**Plan 5 – sub are 1 – building impacts**



## AREA 2 - THE MEDIEVAL CORE

The close grained pattern of streets and back courts particularly along Fore Street reflect its medieval origins. Long narrow burgage plots run at right angles to the main road frontages. The continuous built frontages to the back edge of pavement are punctuated by narrow openings giving access to narrow streets including Follett Road, Exe Street and White Street. Other smaller gaps allow views into many of the rear courts such as Chapel Court. These are lined with a variety of buildings including long narrow former warehouses and workshops, now converted into houses.

The medieval character of this area is largely visible in the pattern of development of narrow fronted shops with long courts of workshop buildings to the rear. Many of the medieval buildings were either redeveloped in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century or re-fronted in the Georgian and Victorian periods.

Fore Street displays a wide range of building types and styles including late 17<sup>th</sup> century timber framed houses often with later windows, the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Salutation Inn, a former market house with the remnants of its arched arcade, two churches, as well as a variety of 2 and 3 storey buildings with ground floor shops, several displaying good 19<sup>th</sup> century shop fronts.



*The prominent Salutation Inn acts as a focal point in Fore Street*

The variety and high quality of many of the buildings is complemented by the presence of numerous independent businesses each with their own individual fascia boards and hanging signs. The individuality results in a strong sense of local identity and vitality.

Traffic and parking cause problems throughout this area due to the narrow street. Yellow lines, parking and other highway signs detract from the otherwise high quality of townscape.

## **Plan 6 – sub area 2- key features**

**High Street** is the main road into the town from Exeter. It has narrow pavements and a high volume of traffic.

Most of the buildings along it are set at the back edge of the pavement although there are a few blocks that are set back behind modest front gardens. The buildings are predominantly two-storey residential terraces with business premises interspersed.

The east side of High Street together with Denver Road is particularly attractive with a large number of listed buildings, ending with the grand three storey Broadway House at the southern end. There is cohesion and continuity along most of its length apart from a gap at Ash Marine.



*Typical back-of-pavement C18th properties that line High Street*

In contrast the west side is of variable quality. Many of the unlisted terrace houses have had replacement windows and doors, whilst the takeaway has inappropriate signage.

There is an area of poor townscape at the junction with Nelson Close where a block of lock up garages detracts from the appearance of the area, and this is exacerbated by the wide junction that offers views of the library. South of the lock up garages is the car park for the Lord Nelson pub, further emphasising the lack of enclosure here.

The junction of High Street with Fore Street and Station Road is dominated by signs and road markings to manage the traffic.

**Fore Street** is marked at its northern end by Grove House, a substantial three storey Georgian house, and the majority of buildings in Fore Street are also three storey. Almost every building along Fore Street is either listed or locally listed and this results in

the very high quality townscape. The buildings span a wide range of ages and styles. Some, like The Salutation Inn, have been remodelled to reflect new architectural fashions and others, like the arcaded 18<sup>th</sup> century Market House, have been adapted to new uses. Many buildings have retail or other commercial use at ground floor level, with shop fronts and signage generally in harmony with the individual building and with the wider historic context.



*Historic properties line Fore Street offering a range of heights and styles*

Courts accessed through narrow openings run at right angles to the main street and provide delightful glimpses of terraced cottages often sharing a cobbled path adorned with pots of plants. Several paths display pebble mosaics of pictures or geometric patterns, although several are in a poor state of repair, such as behind Cromer House on High Street.





*Modern cobble path and mosaic in the traditional style*

Whilst much of Fore Street is characterised by continuous frontages punctuated by narrow openings, both the Church of St Margaret and the Methodist Church of St Nicholas break this pattern of development. They are set back from the road frontage in pleasant landscaped grounds behind low walls. The locally listed Matthews Hall is also set back from the road. It is an attractive mid 20<sup>th</sup> century civic building and the focus for various community activities, but the vehicular access to the sports facilities and car park do not enhance the street scene.

Whilst the Fire Station adds to the open frontage in this area, it is an important service whose operations should not be hindered. The Fire Station garden received an Enhancing Topsham Award.



*Matthews Hall, a well-used facility.*

The gentle curve of Fore Street draws the eye along and upwards to appreciate the various architectural details of the individual buildings, including the imposing Salutation Inn. Timber framed, jettied and gabled medieval buildings, including some of the oldest in the town contribute to both the historic character and to the rhythm of the street.



*Views stopped by line of buildings and narrow carriageway*



The pavement widens close to the Methodist church and the view to the south is closed by 20 Fore Street where the road divides. Beyond this point Fore Street narrows and curves more sharply eventually meeting Ferry Road. Pavements become narrower or disappear. Where Fore Street descends towards the quay, the angles result in shortened vistas and some particularly attractive spaces when looking either up or down the street. The triangular cobbled area to the front of 47-48 Fore Street and Cromer House is a particularly charming area. Looking back up the hill the grand frontage of Cromer House dominates, whilst the mural on the gable wall of 57 Fore Street provides an unusual backdrop to a small landscaped area.



*Cobbled area offering a more open view along the narrow streets*

**Ferry Road (south end)** runs between the buildings constructed at the foot of the cliff to the east and the flat foreshore once the site of the early quays and docks on the west. Exceptional views are afforded from the road and from high level in the church green, although these have been compromised in places by pontoons. Where Follett Road meets Ferry Road, Exe Dene and 20 Ferry Road confine the access. Beyond this the rising land in the grounds of Follett Lodge is emphasised by tall stone walls. Adjacent to Follett Lodge is a prominent, charming, but dilapidated outbuilding together with a boundary wall constructed of small distinctive Dutch clinker bricks.





*Outbuilding adjacent to Follett Lodge (nb. this building is undergoing some renovations – a new photograph will be available in the final version of this document).*

A variety of listed buildings line Ferry Road including The Passage Inn, the substantial former industrial premises of Wixells, a former sail loft and nail cellars. These all provide links to the maritime activities of the past and contributing a strong historical character to this part of the conservation area.

The tall limestone wall of the church dominates the south end of Ferry Road and illustrates the presence of the cliff.



*Distant views along the river typify Topsham and are an important part of its character*

Plan 7 – sub area 2 - building impacts

To the west side the flat areas to the riverside are used either in conjunction with the buildings on the east side for example as the car park and beer garden to the pub, or for the ferry, as premises for the Sailing Club and a boatyard. The piecemeal land uses have resulted in a diversity that is characteristic of the area. Whilst the boatyard and other areas associated with sailing activities are part of the function and character of this part of the riverside some more appropriate boundary treatments would be beneficial to the appearance of Ferry Road.

**Follett Road** links Fore Street and Ferry Road. This is an attractive street mainly flanked on its south side by unlisted or locally listed 2 storey vernacular cottages displaying a range of materials including render, brick and stone under slate roofs. More “polite” architecture is displayed in Exe Dene at the western end. The north side is more varied with the locally listed cottages of Coysh’s Square set back as a small court, along with the further squares of Clara Place and numbers 11-12b Follett Road.

**Clara Place** was once the site of the town’s poorhouse but was redeveloped in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Grade II\* houses stand around a pretty garden enclosed by ornate iron railings.



*Clara Place, mid C19th Grade II\* pretty courtyard development*

Road markings and signs to control parking together with poor highway surfaces detract from the otherwise attractive appearance of this street.

**Exe Street** also links Fore Street with Ferry Road. It has a number of listed buildings and some good stone boundary walls. The rather open frontage to St Margaret's Court undermines the enclosure character of the street.



*Exe Street looking east*

**White Street** sweeps around a rising curve from the south end of Fore Street. The narrow entrance to White Street is emphasised by the tall buildings either side and the lack of any footway. The north side of the street is characterised by terraces of listed and locally listed two storey vernacular cottages whilst the south side is varied with groups running at right angles or set back as at Stanley Square.





*5- 9 White Street. Poor quality of road surface detracts from the historic street.*

The overall effect is of a charming historic street although many of the unlisted cottages have had inappropriate replacement windows that detract from their character and appearance. The setting of Stanley Square is compromised by the blockwork wall forming the boundary to the road frontage. The poor road surface and yellow lines also diminish the quality of the environment.

#### **ISSUES:**

- *Poor road surfaces*
- *Maintenance and repair of cobble/pebble paths.*
- *Visual clutter of traffic signs and yellow lines*
- *Erosion of character arising from unsympathetic alterations to many historic but unlisted properties.*

### AREA 3 - THE STRAND

As the town grew and prospered development spread out from the centre particularly along Monmouth Hill and Monmouth Street and onto the marshy area to the south of the medieval town. Much of this area was developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as demand for ships increased. The waterfront area from Topsham Quay along The Strand provided docks for shipbuilding and wharves for landing cargo, with the land behind developed for housing by the shipbuilders and merchants. Whilst many of the wharves and docks have disappeared, a few stone causeways and slipways remain. The riverside area has been infilled and provides a number of private gardens for properties along The Strand. There is no pavement on this western side of The Strand and the road edge is delineated by granite posts set against the low stone walls to the riverside gardens.

**Topsham Quay** is the historic heart of Topsham and was pivotal in its development as a major trading centre. It offers outstanding views across the river and is home to a working boatyard and The Quay Antiques centre, a large previously industrial building which is out of keeping with the openness of the rest of the Quay.

Photo to follow

**The Strand** is impressive with its concentration of substantial high quality buildings lining the eastern side. These include the 17<sup>th</sup> century Shell House, and the typical “Dutch” houses with their curved gables and tall garden walls. Most are set at the back edge of the narrow footway although the pattern is broken by Queen Anne House and Strand End, both of which are set well back behind gardens.

From the Shell House to Lower Shapter Street the buildings range from the diminutive 2 storey 17<sup>th</sup> century cottages at numbers 23- 24, to 3 storey mid 19<sup>th</sup> century houses at 16-17.

Beyond this to the south the pattern of development changes to the distinctive style and layout of the “Dutch” houses. These typically have a long narrow plan form with Dutch gables end on to the road and tall front boundary walls linking the houses. Through gates in these boundary walls there are occasional glimpses of courtyards and gardens.

Topsham Museum occupies one of these Dutch style houses and plays an important part of life in Topsham for residents and visitors alike.

Apart from a couple of individual properties and Strand Court, the west side of The Strand is mainly occupied by a series of private garden areas belonging to properties on the east side. The gardens provide pleasant green spaces with a few important trees making an attractive foreground to The Strand when viewed from the riverside as well as from the road. Tall limestone retaining walls to the river are also important features.





*47-49 The Strand, viewed from the river. The limestone river wall is a feature of the gardens here*

**Strand Court** occupies a very prominent location on the west side of The Strand. This waterfront site is an infilled former dock, built between 1964 and 1970. It is out of keeping with the surrounding buildings in terms of massing, scale and layout. The buildings detract from the setting of several nearby listed buildings and block views of the river from the Strand and the entrance is dominated by the expanse of tarmac and walls that make up the visibility splay.

However, the gardens are very visible and are well maintained, softening the central area. The entrance splay, whilst not in keeping, plays an important role as a “passing place” for the two way traffic, which benefits the historic buildings opposite.



*The massing of Strand Court is inappropriate to its setting*

**Monmouth Hill** runs roughly parallel with part of The Strand. A long terrace of properties on the west side has a three storey frontage on to The Strand and a single storey frontage to the elevated Monmouth Hill although many have added rather incongruous flat roofed dormers. Most properties are rendered but a former industrial building at the north end has interesting mellow brickwork. The east side of Monmouth Hill displays a wider variety of buildings from the modest brick and slate cottages of Jubilee Square, the substantial L shaped number 11, and tall colour-washed Drakes Cottage at the south end to the roughcast Steam Packet pub at the north end.



*Close grain of buildings give the character to Monmouth Hill*

The street is closely hemmed in by buildings, often rear or end elevations, and boundary walls, which is characteristic of the narrow lanes in the historic core. A narrow pavement with a limestone kerb runs along the east side and provides protection for the listed water pump at the north end. A triangular area of cobbles between Drakes Cottage and number 11 contributes to the historic character of the area. Elsewhere the road surface is very poor which detracts from the overall quality of the townscape.

Plan 8– sub area 3 – key features

**Monmouth Street (west end)** has a high number of listed buildings and some very fine substantial Georgian houses. Usually two storey with attics, the houses display good joinery details with a variety of sliding sash windows, panelled doors and doorcases, as well as some pretty porches. Light coloured render and slate roofs predominate.

The houses generally run in terraces parallel to the road, some standing at the back edge of the pavement others set back. Wrought iron railings define the boundary of some front gardens whilst others have brick walls.



*Some of the larger properties in Monmouth Street with formal porticoes and railings defining the boundaries, adding character to the street scene*

Front boundary walls have been removed from some properties to provide off street parking. This had an adverse impact on the setting and appearance of several listed buildings.

The carriageway and pavements are narrow. The granite kerbs have been retained but their quality is not matched by the pavement or road surfaces both with worn and patched tarmac. This undermines the quality of the historic environment.



### **Higher Shapter Street and Lower Shapter Street**

Running east from The Strand are the narrow lanes of Higher Shapter Street, Lower Shapter Street and the linking North Street. These are lined with a delightful mix of cottages and houses separated by tiny gardens and cobbled courtyards. There are few footpaths although there are several small sections of cobbles, some limestone channels and kerbs that together make an interesting floorscape contributing to the informal character of these streets. Higher Shapter Close, a 20<sup>th</sup> century development at the east end of Higher Shapter Street is in sharp contrast to these attractive intimate spaces.



*Higher Shapter Street, displaying the cobbled pavement, limestone kerbs and gullies*

Several properties have removed boundary walls to provide parking. This has eroded the sense of enclosure and resulted in the loss of historic character. Road and pavement surfaces are in poor condition and this has a negative visual impact on these streets.

Plan 9 – sub area 3 – building impacts

**Tresillian Gardens and Tresillian Cottages** are mid 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban developments that sit comfortably between The Strand and the fields that flank Mount Howe, linking the formal urban development with the surrounding rural area.

#### **ISSUES**

- *Poor road and pavement surfaces in many historic streets*
- *Maintenance and repair of cobble and pebble paths*
- *Loss of front boundary walls or railings for off street parking*
- *Inappropriate modern development*
- *Loss of riverside gardens to parking*

### **AREA 4 - GOAT WALK**

#### **Goat Walk**

At the southern end of The Strand the road terminates in a slip way. A raised footpath, The Goat Walk, listed Grade II, runs alongside a stone wall with a copse behind. Spectacular views open out to the river estuary, across to Turf and Powderham on the west and to the coastal town of Exmouth to the south. This is a distinctly rural part of the conservation area dominated by the exceptional views that exemplify Topsham.



*Outstanding views south towards Exmouth from the start of Goat Walk*

At the southern end of The Goat Walk is a slipway and beyond this the tall stone boundary wall of Riversmeet House. Standing in extensive grounds at the confluence of the Rivers Exe and Clyst, this high walled property with its converted outbuildings and mature trees makes an important visual contribution from vantage points within and outside the conservation area.



*Riversmeet House and walls from slipway*

Plan 10 – sub area 4 – key features



**Riversmeet Road** runs northeast between tall trees and the stone boundary wall. The sense of enclosure created is reinforced by the curve of the road turning north west to become Bowling Green Road.

**Bowling Green Road**, is bounded on its east side by a low lying wetland area outside the conservation area. This is Bowling Green Marsh managed as a nature reserve by RSPB. Bounded by old iron railings, hedges and trees this tranquil area is an important part of the rural setting of this part of the conservation area. From here there are important views into the conservation area.

To the west side of Bowling Green Road open land rises to the tree topped hill occupied by the imposing Mount Howe. The approach road to Mount Howe has been developed in a variety of styles that do not necessarily complement the historic building, however they are individual buildings well placed on their sites and are not detrimental overall to the setting of the main building.



*Mount Howe and adjacent modern development viewed from RSPB site*

At the junction of Bowling Green Road and Monmouth Street is an area of woodland with stone boundary walls. This woodland contributes to the rural appearance of this part of the conservation area.

## **ISSUES**

- *Repair and maintenance of stone walls especially along the waterfront.*
- *Maintenance of iron railings marking the boundary of Bowling Green Road and the RSPB nature reserve.*
- *Retention and care of the mature trees that characterise the landscape.*
- *Management of the woodlands and fields.*
- *Continued protection of the rural landscape, vital to the setting of the town.*

***Plan 11 – sub area 4 – building impacts***

## AREA 5 - BRIDGE INN

**Bridge Hill** rises from the historic Clyst Bridge a crossing point over the River Clyst. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Bridge Inn was built when the river crossing was a ford and with its range of buildings was a hive of activity not only having its own malt house and brewery but also stored salt unloaded at the nearby quay. From here there are views across the river to a mill building.

The Bridge Inn and a pair of cottages opposite, together with the mature trees in gardens frame views along Bridge Hill up to its junction with Elm Grove Road.



*Bridge Hill with the historic Bridge Inn in the foreground*

**Elm Grove Road** is very mixed. It includes the polite town architecture of 28-32 Elm Grove Road which is in stark contrast with the modern suburban developments of Elm Grove Gardens and Bridgehill Garth. These developments do not respect the setting of 28-32 Elm Grove Road, nor do they reflect the wider context in either design or materials. The main positive feature is the group of trees that abuts the railway line screening views into the developments from the west and providing a backdrop to the car park on Holman Way.

Plan 12 –sub area 5 – key features



*28, 30 and 32 Elm Grove Road*

The north east side of Elm Grove Road is lined with a variety of detached properties set in large gardens that frame the road as it curves towards the stone parapets of the railway bridge. There were long views to the attractive rolling countryside south east of Topsham from the bridge over the railway line, however these have recently been limited by the installation of an unattractive parapet by Network Rail.

#### Photo to follow

Beyond the bridge is the junction of Monmouth Street with Bowling Green Road, once the location of Altamira a large house in extensive grounds. The house was demolished and redeveloped as a housing estate with a large central landscaped green. Fortunately the estate is visually well contained since the architecture makes no reference to the local vernacular nor to any other aspect of Topsham. The only reminders of the original property are the stone gate pillars and some important mature trees close to the Elm Grove Road frontage.





*Poor townscape and lack of visual enclosure at Altimira*

Further south west on Monmouth Street is Monmouth Avenue, a mixed infill development of good quality twentieth century housing that offers visual enclosure and interest. Whilst the building styles vary on this development, with a short terrace on one side and imposing detached houses on the other, they all retain a lot of original features, including the front boundary walls, local slate hung bays and original joinery and are attractive additions to the townscape.



*Attractive terrace at Monmouth Avenue*

Plan 13 – sub area 5 – building impacts

**Holman Way** on the line of the former railway line to the quay provides a boundary between the older areas to the north and west and modern development to the south and east. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century doctor's surgery stands at the north west end of a well screened public car park. This car park has a backdrop of mature trees and a good stone boundary wall enabling it to blend with the surroundings despite a large area for parking and providing a recycling facility. The frontage to Holman Way includes a narrow path overarched by trees that rises to the old railway footbridge. This forms part of a pedestrian route via Monmouth Avenue to Monmouth Street.

## ISSUES

- *Some inappropriate modern development*
- *Retention and care of mature trees*
- *Metal parapet over railway bridge at Elm Grove Road*
- *Preservation of boundary walls*

## AREA 6 - PARKFIELD ROAD

The area between Topsham Station and the properties lining Fore Street was mainly developed during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century although there are a few older buildings as well as some mid – late 20<sup>th</sup> century properties. Development took place on the old burgage plots and this has strongly influenced the layout of development here with long terraces running parallel to narrow lanes. Whilst there is still a predominance of render there is also significant use of brick.

**Topsham Railway Station** and the associated signal box are both listed buildings. The station building dates from 1860 and the signal box from 1870. Both are good examples of Victorian railway architecture.

**Station Road** rises from the High Street/Fore Street roundabout to the level crossing. Buildings flanking this road are of variable quality with little of particular note apart from the Edwardian numbers 5 and 7. This substantial building has a distinctive roof covered in red tiles and tile hanging. It retains some of its character although UPVC windows have undermined its overall appearance.

**Plan 14 – sub area 6 – key features**

**Parkfield Road and Parkfield Way** both include some attractive semi detached and terraced houses as well as the locally listed Victorian former School and School House now part of a retirement complex. The historic buildings have been sensitively converted, however due to the development being gated, the opportunity to create permeability through the site, in keeping with the historic grain of Topsham, has been lost.



*Parkfield Road part of old school, now residential development*

The brick and slate terraces are particularly pleasing still retaining a strong rhythm and an architectural integrity of design although several have had replacement windows that detract from this to some degree.



*Parkfield Road Terraces*

**The Shrubbery** is a delightful late Victorian group of brick houses on a narrow pedestrian link. The three storey corner block, prominent dormers and substantial chimneys make a positive visual contribution to the area, as well as leading into the narrow confines of Majorfield Road.



*The four properties that make up The Shrubbery are delightfully enclosed and private*



**Majorfield Road** is a narrow lane, inaccessible by vehicles from Fore Street, which opens up to be flanked by early 20<sup>th</sup> century two storey brick and slate terraced houses set behind small front gardens. The stone front garden walls provide both enclosure and visual continuity along much of the south side of the lane. Beyond this the rhythm is broken by a modern detached property set back but then resumes with other terraced properties including four late 17<sup>th</sup> century cob and slate cottages with large front chimney stacks. The north side is more varied with several distinctly different short terraces each side of the courtyard buildings of Old School Court once the Quaker Meeting House. Overhead wires are intrusive especially at the west end of the lane

**Victoria Road** once named The Ropewalk also links Holman Way and Fore Street. The south side has several attractive Victorian houses. The semi detached pair of houses Woodlands and Randolls built in 1841 are set well back in large gardens and only glimpses of the tall gabled frontage can be seen through garden gates. Of similar age are the Congregational Chapel and an attached terrace of listed cottages with pretty dormers topped by finials. The north side of this lane has a more piecemeal appearance but the buildings still make a positive contribution to the appearance of this part of the conservation area. The road is just wide enough for some vehicular access and yellow lines intrude. The road surface is rough and patched and overhead wires interfere with otherwise attractive views along the road.



*Polite Victorian elevations glimpsed through planting and boundaries add character to the street scene.*

**Plan 15 – sub area 6 – building impacts**

**Globefield** is a wide modern road as a result of the development of a modern estate on its south side. The modern development does not reflect the style or materials typical of Topsham, but the properties are typical of municipal housing for older people of the time they were built. They form an integral part of the community of Topsham, allowing older generations to still be housed in the locality.

Part of the north side is flanked by tall boundary walls screening several substantial properties in Victoria Road, that have large gardens some with important trees. Also on the north side is Globefield Ley a modern three storey development that sits comfortably against the back edge of the footway. Its design, materials and proportions are suited to its context.

## ISSUES

- *Poor road surfaces of many streets.*
- *Overhead wires*
- *Unsympathetic alterations to historic but unlisted properties*

## LISTED AND LOCAL LIST BUILDINGS

Within the Topsham Conservation Area there are over 200 buildings on the statutory list of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest including 22 Grade II\* and a further 54 buildings identified as being of local importance.

The listed buildings include medieval timber framed houses, fine Georgian town houses buildings such as a market house, industrial and warehouse buildings, Victorian houses, a school, churches and structures such as pumps, walls, railings and telephone kiosks.

The Grade II\* buildings include many of the Dutch houses on The Strand, Clara Place, Broadway House and Cromer House.



*Grade II\* Listed Cromer House adds value to the historic townscape*

Among the Grade II buildings are Topsham Railway Station and signal box, St Margaret's church and the row of cottages on Denver Road.



*Modest Grade II Listed cottages in Denver Road*

Locally listed buildings include a civic building Matthews Hall, former school buildings on Parkfield Road, the Old Store on Denver Road and the cottages at 1-4 Follett Road.

The buildings and their settings are an essential part of the character and appearance of the area.

The listed and locally listed buildings are shown on the Key Features plans throughout this document.

## **OPEN SPACE AND TREES**

From within the conservation area there are views out to the river fronts and surrounding countryside that reinforce Topsham's special character as a small town in a rural setting. This setting is further reinforced through the landscape designations and local plan policies that apply to them (see the Landscape Designation Plan on page 11).

Within the conservation area, there are several significant areas of public and private open space. The main areas of open space are the recreation ground at the north end of the conservation area, the recreation area to the rear of Matthews Hall, St Margaret's churchyard, the private garden areas between The Strand and waterfront, land east of



The Goat Walk, the grounds around Riversmeet House, the central green at Altamira and the fields around Mount Howe, Bowling Green Road and Monmouth Street.



*Rear of Fore Street from churchyard*

Many of these areas include trees that enhance the character and appearance of the area. Some, for example those to the east of the Goat Walk and surrounding fields on Bowling Green Road, are covered by Tree Preservation Order. There are however numerous trees, individual and groups the make a significant visual contribution to the amenity of the conservation area such as the specimen trees retained on the Altamira estate, the Exeter oaks on the west side of The Strand, the trees that line the railway line or those in and around The Vicarage at Globefields.



*Important trees that add character to the conservation area*

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

Topsham conservation area has a commercial centre with a wide range of shops including a Post Office, several food shops, an off licence, shops for shoes, clothes, household goods, and newsagents. There are cafes, pubs and restaurants as well as the financial services of two banks.

In the conservation area the town has a public hall used for a range of community activities from play groups, to shows and markets. A library, bowling green, an outdoor swimming pool, the recreation ground, public tennis courts and sailing club are among the recreational facilities available. Other services include a school, fire station, doctor's surgeries, two pharmacies, and opticians.

The town has good transport links with buses and trains running to Exmouth and Exeter, as well as ferries across and along the Exe.

The range of community facilities within the conservation area provides a strong local sense of identity. There are many local societies that take a keen interest in the development and welfare of Topsham's buildings and appearance as well as its residents, as demonstrated through the recent Townscape Review and Design Statement for Topsham, produced by The Topsham Society and the Topsham Community Association. This considered document looks at the whole of the area, not just the conservation area, and picks up on issues surrounding new development, the street scene, car parking and design.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

There are several points of interest within the conservation area.

Throughout the area there are interesting floor scapes with pebble and cobble paths, some displaying geometric or pictorial insets, granite and limestone kerbs and gullies. Granite and cast iron bollards protect walls and pedestrian lanes.

Walls are important features, whether in modern or old brick, limestone or pocombe stone, or sometimes a mixture of these.





*Delightful local wall, infilled, patched and showing a variety of materials*

A mural with a maritime scene enlivens a blank gable wall on Fore Street and on the small open space beside the Matthew Hall is a modern bronze figure depicting the spirit of youth, a Millennium gift to mark the 700 year anniversary of the Topsham Charter.



*The Spirit of Youth by Janis Ridley stands outside Matthews Hall*

These features contribute to the special character and appearance of Topsham conservation area and should be retained and maintained.

## SUMMARY

The features of Topsham Conservation Area can be summarised as:

- Ancient settlement developed as a medieval borough port
- Exceptional river views throughout the area
- Important landscape setting
- Historic street pattern, with burgage plots, rear courts and tiny squares
- A large number of listed and other historic buildings
- Partly urban partly rural
- A range of building materials with stone, cob, brick including the distinctive clinker bricks, slate and red clay tiles
- Tall stone, cob, brick and rendered walls are important townscape elements
- Attractive open spaces and trees complement the buildings and provide the conservation area's setting
- A vibrant community with a strong local identity

## TOPSHAM CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

This section deals with the future of Topsham Conservation Area from the issues identified in the appraisal section.

### PUBLIC REALM ENHANCEMENT

#### **Resurfacing of roads and restoration of cobbled footways, reinstatement of stone kerbs.**

Throughout the area poor road and pavement surfaces have been highlighted. The tarmac surfaces have been patched over many years and the piecemeal repairs and reinstatement by utility companies have resulted in several otherwise attractive historic streets looking neglected. Natural stone road gullies, pebble and cobbled footways have suffered from being adjacent to tarmac areas that have then spilled over and partly covered these materials. In some streets, notably The Strand, some stone kerbing has been replaced with concrete. Where these problems have been identified it would be beneficial to work with the highway authority to ascertain when resurfacing and reinstatement works could be programmed in as part of a package of public realm enhancements. Wherever possible new surfaces and kerbs should match the remaining traditional materials in the vicinity.

#### **Audit of signage and other visual clutter.**

Road markings, signs and poles to manage traffic and parking all have a detrimental visual impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is recommended that an audit be undertaken in conjunction with the highway authority to identify opportunities for rationalization and removal.



## **Comprehensive enhancement scheme of the area around Matthews Hall.**

Matthews Hall forecourt and that of the fire station together with the vehicular access to a car park and recreational facilities at the rear have resulted in an area of weak townscape and comprehensive enhancement scheme would be beneficial. This should look at road and pavement surfaces to reduce the apparent width of the access road. A greater visual link between the forecourt of the hall and the adjacent green space could also be achieved, however retaining the essential access requirements of the Fire Station must be a priority.

## **Improvements to the Ferry Road recreation ground.**

Whilst the recreation ground has excellent views out over the river there is are limited opportunities to admire these views. A scheme to provide a framework of paths, seating areas and additional planting would allow the area to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. In addition this may be a suitable place to site information boards about the archaeology of the northern part of the conservation area.

## **OTHER ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

There are blocks of lock up garages on Ferry Road and at the junction of Nelson Close with High Street that detract from the area. Redevelopment could be explored with the owners, although it is accepted that off street parking is a necessity in Topsham and the numbers of garages should not necessarily be reduced without alternatives being offered elsewhere.

Strand Court's massing, design and access road all have a detrimental impact on the setting of listed buildings on The Strand. There may be opportunities for views into the site to be screened by some selective tree planting providing visibility up and down The Strand is not impeded.

Boatyards on Ferry Road currently have unattractive fencing. Whilst sailing and boatyards are very much part of the character of the waterfront there would be benefits to improving these boundaries, possibly with a combination of walls and railings incorporating maritime design that would still allow views to the activity behind whilst offering a more attractive frontage to the street scene.

A Blue Plaque scheme to commemorate Topsham's interesting historic figures has been suggested through this appraisal and this could be considered, providing the necessary consents were secured.

## **ISSUES RAISED**

Throughout this appraisal, there have been issues raised. This section looks at how they may be dealt with and whose responsibility this would be. Whilst it is an aspiration to deal with all of the issues, this must be weighed against other demands on resources.

Issues that have been raised in more than one sub-area are dealt with under the “Key Characteristics” heading

Issue	Action	Who
<u><i>Key Characteristics:</i></u>		
<i>Areas of poorly maintained pavements and carriageways</i>	Carry out audit of pavements and carriageways and propose priorities for resurfacing	DCC
<i>Some poor quality modern development</i>	Ensure quality of any proposed new development is in keeping with the conservation area	ECC
<i>Loss of historic features on unlisted historic buildings</i>	Consider Article 4 Directions to prevent further loss	ECC
<i>Retention and care of the many mature and semi mature trees throughout the area.</i>	Many of these are in private ownership, conservation area designation offers some protection against loss of healthy trees	Owners
<i>Retention, maintenance and repair of the many tall historic boundary walls in the area.</i>	Many of these are in private ownership. Consider Article 4 Direction to prevent loss of walls	Owners/ECC
<i>Visual impact of traffic and parking</i>	Request Devon County Environment, Economy and Culture Directorate to ascertain whether alterations to restrictions may be applied	DCC
<i>Visual clutter of highway and parking signs</i>	Request Devon County Environment, Economy and Culture Directorate to carry out audit of signage to ascertain whether this can be reduced/simplified	DCC
<i>Maintenance and repair of cobble/pebble paths.</i>	Carry out audit of cobbled paths, ascertain ownerships and consider a programme of repairs	ECC/DCC/Owners

<i>Visual clutter of traffic signs and yellow lines</i>	Request Devon County Environment, Economy and Culture Directorate to carry out audit of signage to ascertain whether this can be reduced/simplified	DCC/ECC
<u>Area 1</u>		
<i>No visible reference to the underlying archaeology of the area</i>	Consider interpretation panels if appropriate	ECC
<u>Area 2</u>	All issues dealt with under Key Characteristics	
<u>Area 3</u>		
<i>Loss of riverside gardens to parking</i>	Strengthening of existing Article 4 Direction to prevent any further loss	ECC
<u>Area 4</u>		
<i>Maintenance of iron railings marking the boundary of Bowling Green Road and the RSPB nature reserve.</i>	Ascertain ownership and work up scheme of repairs and protection	ECC/Owners
<i>Management of the woodlands and fields.</i>	No action required – continued use will ensure management	Owners
<i>Continued protection of the rural landscape, vital to the setting of the town.</i>	No action required. Local plan policies are in place	-
<u>Area 5</u>		



<i>Metal parapet over railway bridge at Elmgrove Road</i>	Network Rail are responsible for this parapet and bridge	
<u>Area 6</u>		
<i>Overhead wires</i>	Utility companies are responsible for these	

## ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS

Much of the quality of the Topsham conservation area is protected by the presence of a large number of listed buildings. However there are many groups of unlisted historic buildings mainly 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century terraces often designed with an architectural integrity whose appearance is being eroded by a variety of alterations and additions. Changes such as replacement windows and doors are allowed in unlisted residential properties under the General Permitted Development Order.

Many planning authorities use Article 4 Directions to remove particular permitted development rights on groups of buildings or areas in order to preserve the character of conservation areas. Restrictions usually relate to particular elements such as replacement doors and windows, reroofing or prevention of demolition of chimneys and walls.

There are two types of Article 4 Directions with Article 4(2) being the most frequently used in conservation areas. Article 4(2) directions restrict the particular type of development only where it fronts a “relevant location” (a highway, waterway or open space). This enables the authority to control the appearance of public frontages and thus protect the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The benefits of introducing an Article 4(2) Direction are:

- Retention of original features to maintain the appearance of buildings and the quality of the wider area.
- The use of natural materials in place of man made alternatives has a significant environmental advantage and helps to maintain traditional building crafts.
- The preservation of historic features is encouraged and may result in replacement of features that have been removed.

Owners would have to make a planning application to the Local Planning Authority for works that currently do not require consent. Such applications do not currently attract a fee.

An Article 4(2) Direction applied to groups of unlisted buildings particularly those with an underlying uniformity of design and to particular features such as boundary walls would

be beneficial for the future protection of Topsham Conservation Area's character and appearance.

An Article 4 Direction has been in force in the Strand Gardens since 1958 in order to prevent the construction of structures in these gardens. However this Direction needs to be updated and extended to further protect these important spaces from other types of intervention.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

These principles are general for the whole of the conservation area and may or may not be applicable to every site. The Topsham Society and Topsham Community Association's document, "A Townscape Review and Design Statement for Topsham" also offers guidance on issues such as future development, car parking and the street scene.

Proposals for new buildings will need to demonstrate that they will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of Topsham Conservation Area. The scale, massing, architectural detailing and pattern of development should reflect that of the existing built environment in the particular part of the conservation area. This does not imply that pastiche is expected. Good modern design respectful of the scale, massing and proportions of existing buildings can contribute to the character and appearance of the area.

Appropriate external materials and finishes will be expected on all new development. Traditional materials typical of the Topsham conservation area will be encouraged. Where modern materials and finishes are proposed these should harmonise with the existing colour palette and with the textures of surrounding buildings.

Extensions and alterations to buildings should follow the scale, proportions, detailing and materials of the existing. Similarly boundary treatments will be expected to reflect those identified as characteristic of the area.

## **LISTED AND LOCAL LIST BUILDINGS**

The appraisal has identified two examples of historic buildings in need of repair and maintenance. The outbuilding to Follett Lodge has been in a state of disrepair for several years and its restoration would do much to enhance this part of Ferry Road (nb. At the time of writing, some restoration is being carried out and this paragraph will be updated prior to the final version). The high listed wall to Grove House standing adjacent to Station Road has been variously patched but would benefit from more appropriate and comprehensive treatment.

Other than these, all of the listed and locally listed buildings appear to be in a good or reasonable state of repair.

It is unlikely that further buildings will be added to either list at the present time. However the listing process is on-going so new proposals for listing either nationally or through the local list will be considered on an individual basis.

## **Policies**

The proposals in this Management Plan reflect the Exeter Local Plan First Review adopted 31 March 2005. In particular the policies contained in Chapter 10 Conservation: C1 (development affecting a conservation area); C2 (development affecting a listed building); and C3 (development affecting a building of local importance).

Relevant policies are also included the Devon Structure Plan adopted October 2004, particularly policy CO6 (Quality of new development) and CO7 (Historic settlements and buildings).

Relevant central government guidance in planning policy Guidance Note No 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) has also been followed in the production of this document.

## **Summary**

This document has sought to identify the key characteristics of the area, its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and these are summarised below.

### **Strengths**

- Exceptional riverside setting creating unique local identity
- Large number of listed and locally listed buildings
- Diversity of styles and design
- Strong historical roots
- Range of distinct architectural features
- Wide range of services and facilities providing community focus.
- Strong local awareness of the historic environment

### **Weaknesses**

- Some areas of weak or negative townscape
- Inappropriate design of some modern development
- Poor surfaces of many roads and pavements.
- Overhead cabling

### **Opportunities**

- Article 4(2) Directions
- Enhancement schemes in the public realm
- Enhancements to privately owned land