

WEM CONSERVATION AREA - SUMMARY CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Designated January 1990 Population 5,142

Origins and development of settlement

Wem has a medieval street plan with High Street forming the focus point for the market and high status buildings. Noble Street and Drawwell Lane were originally back lanes and Leek Street and Chapel Street were links to the High Street. New Street was a planned extension in the late medieval period. A mill was mentioned in its present place in Domesday Book and in 1205. Wem was granted the right to hold a weekly market, which is still in existence today. Wem was almost completely destroyed by fire on March 3rd 1677 which engulfed the thatched and shingled timber framed buildings with ease, so that few buildings predate the fire. The revival of fortune is evident in the late Georgian period as many new brick buildings were constructed in the late 18th and early 19th century, especially grand merchants houses along the High Street which have been subsequently converted into shops. In the 19th century, the Shrewsbury to Crewe Railway led to part of the town being redeveloped to accommodate the station and railway line, sawmills and the timberyard. Until the late 1990s, Wem was still famous for brewing.

Areas of distinctive character

Area 1 – Gateway to Wem, once thriving industrial area now mostly redundant. Open area with attractive Corn Mill, still retaining its tall chimney, sits in tranquil setting on the edge of a busy thoroughfare. The area is under utilised and under maintained. Sensitive enhancements are necessary for this approach to the town.

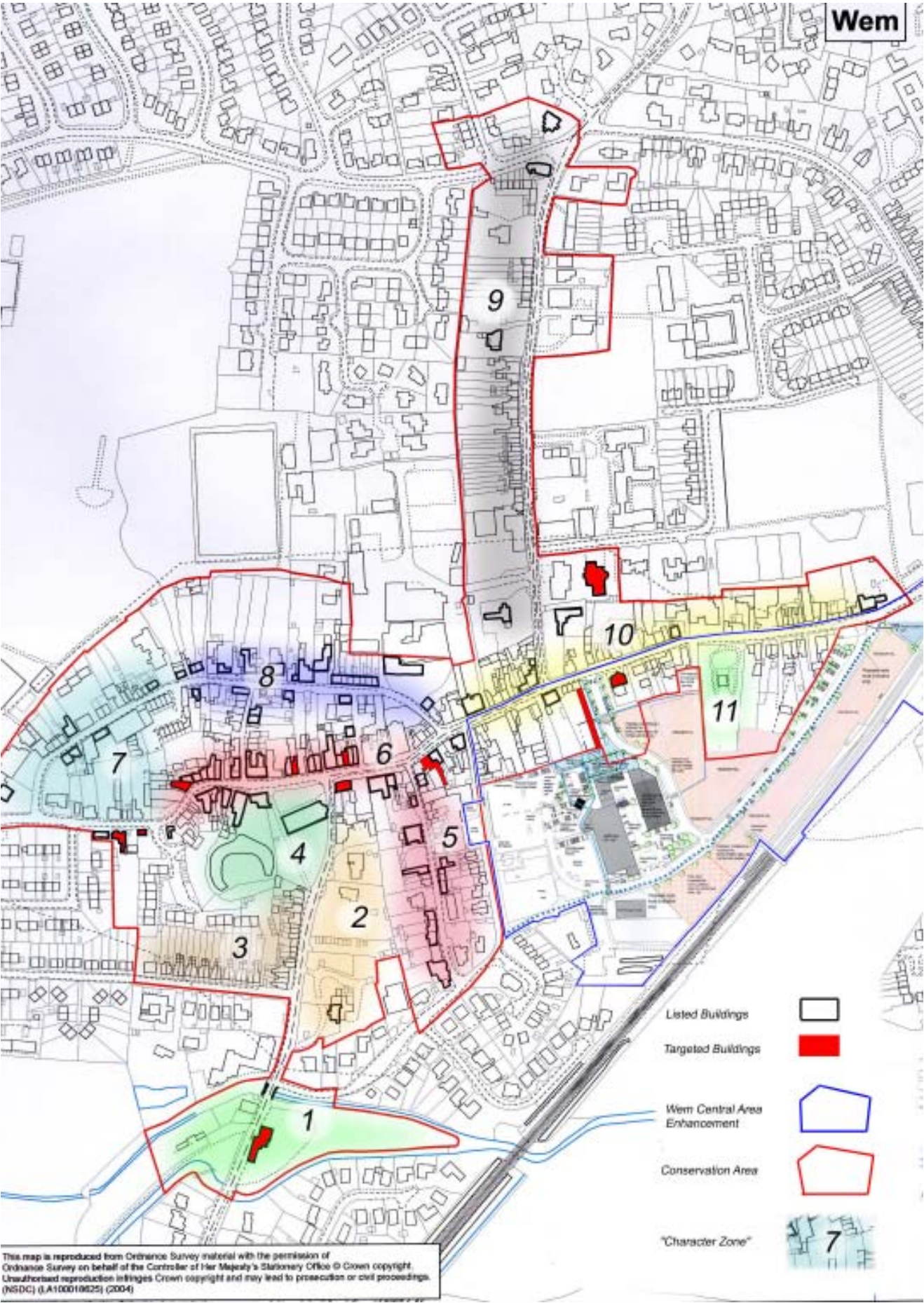
Area 2 – Spacious residential area where the majority of buildings to the E are set back some distance from road, but the trees and wall flanking the road retain a sense of enclosure. As the road narrows towards the junction, nearing the High Street, buildings are on the back edge of the pavement. The area is essentially peaceful but clearly a main thoroughfare into the town.

Area 3 – Barnard Street and Mill Street are similar streets of terrace dwellings. Two storey, some with bay windows to front, attached to 2-3 storey row of terraces fronting Mill Street. The open area around the car park gives a sense of space which is reminiscent of Areas 1 and 2.

Area 4 – The Church is a primary space providing a focal point in the centre of the town. It is raised above the other buildings in the High Street and is highly visible on the skyline. It is a landmark in the town. Castle Mound is hidden from view but has clearly had an impact on the street pattern in this part, especially High Street which turns sharply following the line of the former moat. A green, peaceful and tranquil space.

Area 5 – Chapel Street and Leek Street are, on the whole lower status than the High Street. However, Chapel Street has both a Chapel and Police Station (now a dwelling). The Congregational Chapel provides a focal point in Chapel Street. The S end of the street is more tranquil, away from the hubbub of High Street. A mixture of 2-3 storey dwellings, some with windows set into the eaves. The two streets run parallel to one another and perpendicular to High Street where the vista to the N from Chapel Street finishes at the Town Hall. Leek Street is a depressed part of this area with a significant amount of negative 1960s buildings. These add to the feeling of attrition suffered in this part of Area 5. Wem Central Area Enhancement works will provide an opportunity for improvement here.

Area 6 – High Street N of the Church has a strong sense of enclosure. A high status part of the town, mostly 3 storey, now with active shop frontages at ground floor level. This is a pleasant, dynamic, thriving, busy area, and is clearly the commercial hub of the town. To the W there are some rundown buildings in need of attention. Further contraction of retail premises in this part could be a concern. E end is situated the 1905 Town Hall, which in this direction provides a focal point.



Area 7 – A good mix of domestic, retail, and light industrial uses. Many of the commercial premises are modern buildings with inappropriate intrusive designs. Part of this area needs regeneration to enable the businesses to be maintained. There are some impressive dwellings here too, which reflects the previous prosperity of the area.



Area 8 – A quiet, peaceful area made up a mixture of 1½-3 storey buildings. Noble Street originally served High Street and is architecturally subservient to it. Market Street and Crown Street link Noble Street and High Street. High Street backing onto Noble Street has created, in places, intrusive elevations which interfere with the streetscape. These areas would benefit from sensitively designed redevelopment or landscape treatment.

Area 9 – New Street carries a significant amount of traffic into and out of the centre of Wem, but still it maintains a sense of peacefulness, especially to the N. A mixture of buildings, walls and trees enclose New Street despite being wide with on-street parking. There are 2-3 storey dwellings, and some large villas set back off the road. The retail character of the High Street spills into New Street at the junction. Some of the buildings have had intrusive and inappropriate alterations to their frontages, and others are unsympathetic modern designs. These buildings contain thriving businesses which need to be maintained, but if the opportunity arises a good design should be encouraged to uphold the vitality on the edge of this part of the conservation area.

Area 10 – The E part of High Street has a good feeling of enclosure. Mostly 2 storey with active frontages and thriving businesses. Some buildings have a negative impact on the streetscape, and should be flagged as an opportunity for enhancement. Aston Street runs away from the town centre along a busy route towards the station. Mostly 2 storey and a mixture of commercial, retail and residential uses where a strong sense of enclosure is maintained. SE of Aston Street is the station car park and a former timber yard, which is earmarked as a development site. There is significant space leakage here, regeneration is urgently required.

Area 11 – Millennium Gardens is an area which has benefited from various sources of funding, transforming an overgrown disused area and Chapel of Rest into a quiet tranquil place, and, an open air amphitheatre for arts and recreation.

Traditional Building Materials
Orange/red brick, corbelling at eaves; clay tiles, or slates on steeper pitches; good survival of traditional timber doors, shopfronts and windows.