

09 Above Bar

Context

Above Bar is the main route to the north from the medieval walled town. The road is oriented north-south along a slight ridge and has a gentle gradient falling from north to south. Only part of Above Bar Street is within this character area with the northern section being included with CA8: Civic Campus.

The central parks (Palmerston and Houndwell) form a continuous, abrupt, green edge along the eastern side of the character area. The western edge follows the line of the survival of the immediate post-war rebuilding but includes earlier fragments of the early nineteenth century development of the Above Bar area. Part of Portland Terrace has now become redeveloped to the same scale (and indeed is considered a part) of the West Quay character area (CA33). The northern edge of the area is less distinct, and is marked by the junction with Civic Centre Road. The southern edge runs along Bargate Street with character area CA10: Bargate Environs and Hanover Buildings to the south. There is a short length of CA11 the West Gate Town Walls and Castle on the south west.

Archaeological evidence shows that there has been prehistoric, Roman and, of particular note in Southampton, early Saxon occupation in this area. However, the key period of development in the area north of Bargate was in the late Saxon or early Norman period continuing until the thirteenth century at least, as the construction of defences in the early thirteenth century resulted in at least some movement into the defended area.

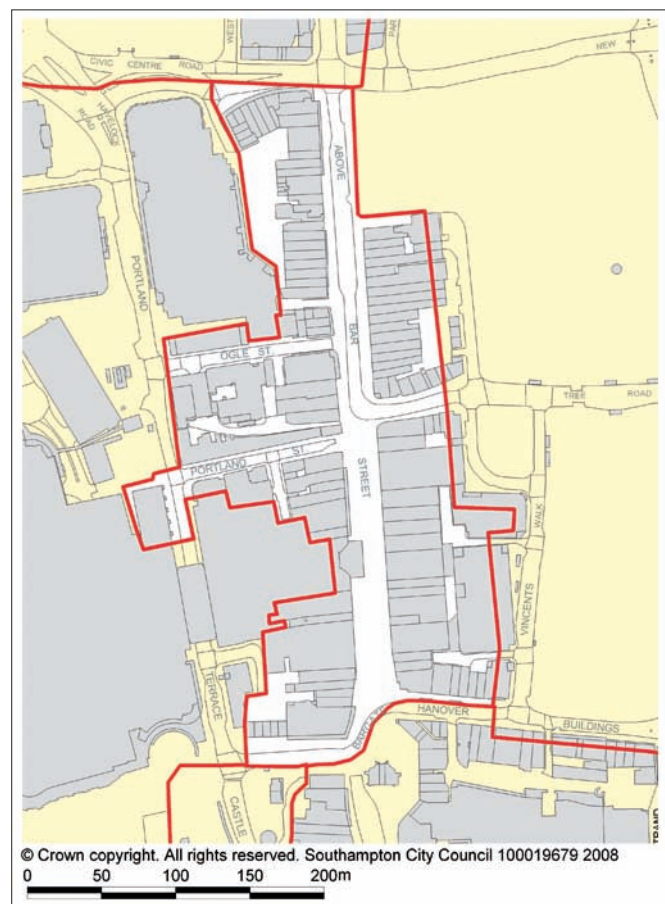
The Georgian period saw Above Bar develop into a well-to-do part of the town with fine terraced houses built for gentry visiting the spa and, later, when passenger traffic through the port increased in the early nineteenth century. The buildings of Above Bar were largely destroyed by bombing during WWII.

Grain

Above Bar Street is an historic axis although almost completely rebuilt following wartime destruction. Consequently the street has a regular profile with a relatively wide and low street section of 1 : 2.5 : 1. Side streets are generally much narrower and more enclosed with a section averaging about 1 : 1.2 : 1. Plots and Blocks: overall a relatively regular grain of narrow to medium width (6-10m) frontages and deep plots (30-40m). This pattern is interspersed with some wide front units. Building lines are continuous and regular with a strong consistency throughout the character area.

Scale

The main range of buildings on the east side of Above Bar



Street vary between two and three storeys and have been designed to create some variation of building heights, otherwise building consists of flush-fronted facades. The recent entrance to West Quays on the west side of Above Bar Street introduces a large scale in a three storey height canopied entrance. This provides some accent in a very regular street but does impact on views south towards the Bargate. The over-scaled post modern facade immediately north and south of this would be very damaging if its scale and styling were repeated. The west side of Above Bar Street is more consistently three to four storeys and higher in individual buildings. The west side is consistently higher than the east.

The tallest building is Marlands House (1963 by Architect Oliver Carey) a slab block facing Civic Centre Road at the northern extremity of the character area at six storeys but with lower two storey sections wrapping round to form part of Above Bar Street.

Uses

The predominant land use is retail, with some minor commercial uses on the side streets. Upper floors have secondary retail and commercial uses and there is limited evidence of under-use of upper floors. Residential uses are negligible.

By day Above Bar Street is a vibrant busy pedestrian thoroughfare with associated activities including street vendors and entertainers. This character changes somewhat in the evenings where it maintains a footfall but it is not a particularly inviting place to stop.

Public Realm

Above Bar Street is pedestrianised for half of its length with wide pavements elsewhere forming the main areas of public realm. There has been a recent programme of installation of street furniture of a contemporary design – especially at the southern end of Above Bar Street, and these have generally brought the quality of the street up to a good level.

Soft landscaping is mainly located on the north-east corner of the area – the interface with Palmerston Park, with four impressive plane trees lining the pavement at this point. Otherwise the area is predominantly hard landscape except for a line of four smaller trees, just north of Pound Tree Road.

Connectivity

This character area is very well connected to most parts of the city centre, with a clearly legible Main Street/Side Street structure with good visual links to other areas.

Views

The Bargate can be seen looking south for the entire length of the section of Above Bar Street in the character area. The building confidently terminates the



01 Above Bar Street commercial core (looking towards The Bargate)
02 Contemporary architecture and street furniture – Above Bar Street
03 Early nineteenth century townhouses, Portland Terrace – a valuable survival of pre-war Southampton

street and provides a key landmark for the resident and visitor alike.

There is no visual relationship with the water, except for a minor view of the distant docks to the west, across Bargate Street.

A more constricted view of the park can be seen from Pound Tree Road. A strategic view of the spire of St Mary's originates from Above Bar looking east along Hanover Buildings (when the trees are not in leaf). A further strategic view to St Mary's Church spire originates from the north-west corner of Palmerston Park as it meets Above Bar Street looking south-east across the parks. The campanile of the Civic Centre is clearly visible along much of Portland Terrace to parts of the western edge of the character area.

Building types

Predominantly medium to large floorplate shops, on two or three floors. The north side of Portland Street consists of remnants of early 19th century town houses, mainly converted to commercial premises. Two notable purpose-built banking/insurance office buildings with their signature styles and architects (in the case of the Prudential Building) can be seen interspersed with the post-war reconstruction.

Architectural qualities

The post-war rebuilding of Southampton is perhaps best illustrated in Above Bar Street with much of the architectural quality being derived from the heroic rebuilding and structuring of streets which were completely destroyed. Long facades are articulated with projecting shopfronts and set back and projecting flat bays. Windows are regular, often with stone or concrete mullions giving them added emphasis and contributing to the vertical emphasis and rhythm seen in many of the facades. Spandrel panels contrasting with the main walls and expressed structural frames in places also help maintain this pleasing rhythm along the length of Above Bar Street. There is some modern curtain walling of contemporary materials and some double height facades in structural glazing. Generally these have been executed to a high standard and add interest and incident to the street, though should not be repeated on a large scale.

Individual remnants and small groups of earlier buildings are key survivals. The Regency north side of Portland Street is a particularly important and intact survival as is the terrace to Portland Terrace with its Greek Doric Porticos with triglyph friezes. The late Victorian terracotta Prudential Building by Alfred Waterhouse is a rich and lively facade punctuating a well-mannered but on the whole unexciting townscape at the northern end of Above Bar Street.

Two other notable remnants of architectural merit are

the small Victorian warehouse on the south side of Ogle Road and the Portland Stone Italianate former bank on its north side on the corner with Above Bar Street. The latter forms a key landmark in views from the park up to Above Bar Street

There is a good modern building to the corner of Pound Tree Lane and Above Bar Street.

Heritage Assets

The area is considered to possess a high degree of evidential and historic value due to the potential to recover archaeological evidence from the prehistoric, Roman and early Saxon periods, finds and features from these periods having been recovered within the area. There is also potential for evidence of occupation dating from the late Saxon/early Norman period. Forming part of the settlement that developed on the ridge after the shift away from mid-Saxon Hamwic to the east, this area is regarded as being of national importance although it lies beyond the area bounded by the town wall. The area lies within a Local Area of Archaeological Importance to reflect this potential to yield significant evidence for past activity in the area.

The entire north side of Portland Street is Grade II listed. The survival of an entire street of early nineteenth century houses in the centre of Southampton, given the devastation inflicted by bombing in the Second World War, is of high historic and aesthetic significance as are the surviving early nineteenth century houses to Portland Terrace. Their change of use from residential to commercial – mostly office accommodation has not diminished their design quality in townscape terms, although in the case of the latter, post war buildings have somewhat compromised their setting and former scale. There is an attractively detailed mid-nineteenth century commercial building in Ogle Road also Grade II listed. This building symbolizes the cultural values of the period where vast sums of money were being made by individuals and companies taking advantage of the success of Southampton as a commercial port.

The 1950s range on the east side of Above Bar south of Pound Tree Road is locally listed. This range is aesthetically significant as it best reflects the quality of replacement buildings forming the commercial core of the city immediately post-war. Its confident use of traditional materials; Portland Stone combined with traditionally proportioned openings but arranged in an overtly modern style mainly achieved by the grouping of windows gives this group a strongly defined architectural composition.

There is a locally listed building to the corner of Portland Street and Above Bar. This building in its architectural style and high quality of materials reflects the affluence of the city in the mid-nineteenth century. Its is all the more prominent and eclectic in a townscape radically

changed post war given this building all the more significance despite only having local listing status.

Materials

There is a wide palette of materials in this character area. Historic materials include stucco, terracotta and Portland stone in very limited amounts. Post-war materials comprise: mostly Portland stone with some exposed pre-cast concrete, and reconstituted stone. There is an extensive use of structural glazing to recent developments plus exposed structure (steel) in framing and forming brise soleil.

Condition

Generally very good condition of buildings and public realm. See historic assets for conditions of these.

Ownership

Generally larger scale corporate ownership. Some smaller scale ownerships in side streets in other buildings.

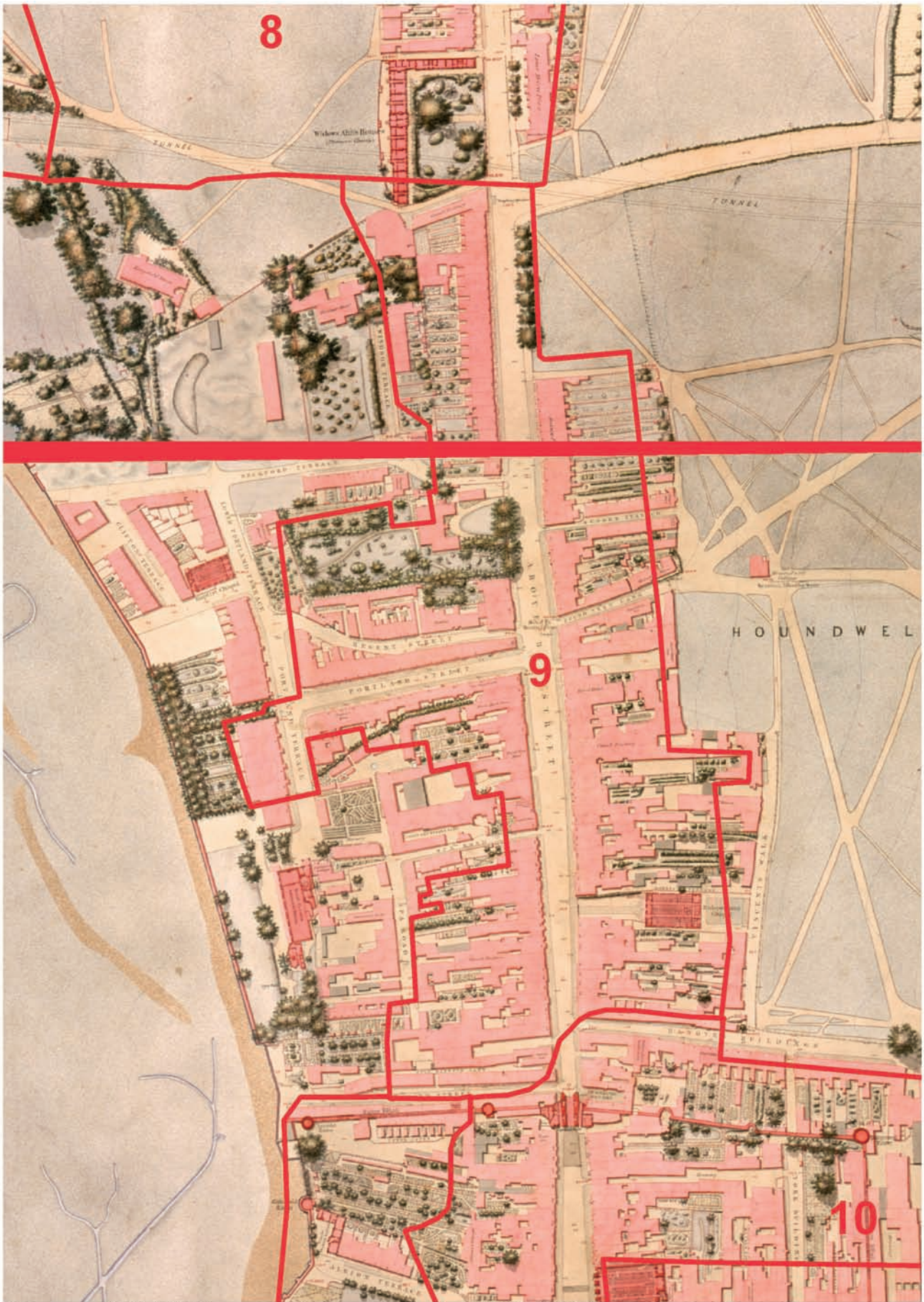
Intervention

Suggested areas for Improvement.

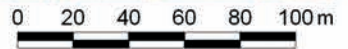
- Dead frontages facing the Central Park character area (CA7).
- The resurfacing of Portland Street commensurate with the setting of a valuable survival of the earlier historic character of this part of the city.
- Consider a shared surface treatment for the upper section of Above Bar Street (above Pound Tree Lane) to the edge of the character area.

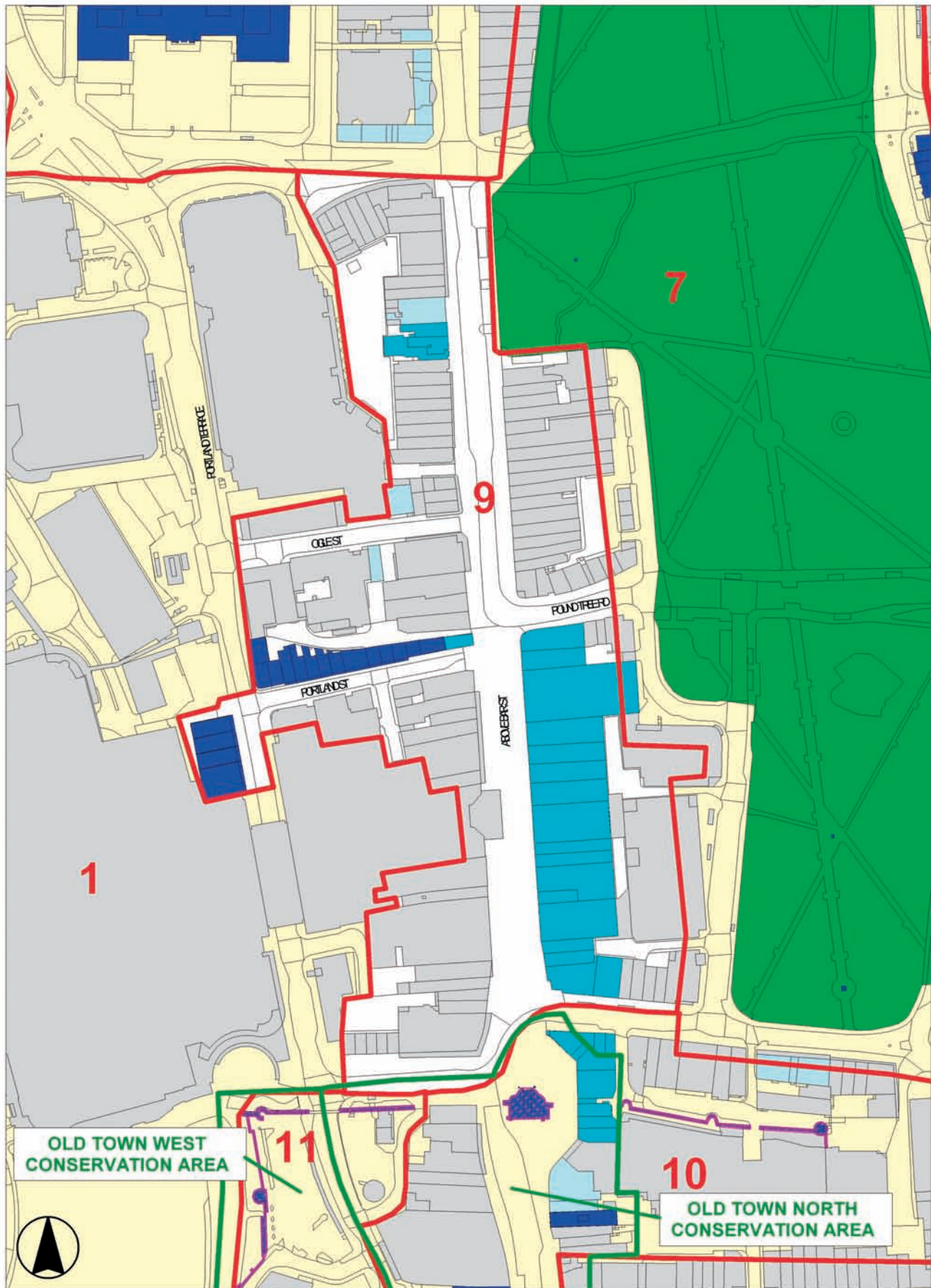
Key design principles

- A clear policy on shopfront design particularly fascias which should be administered consistently along Above Bar Street. Shopfronts should be of consistent materials and design in certain groups of buildings.
- A clear policy on signage design which is presently in places out of scale with the general human scale of this shopping street.



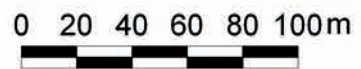
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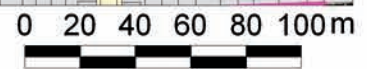
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Heritage Assets





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Townscape