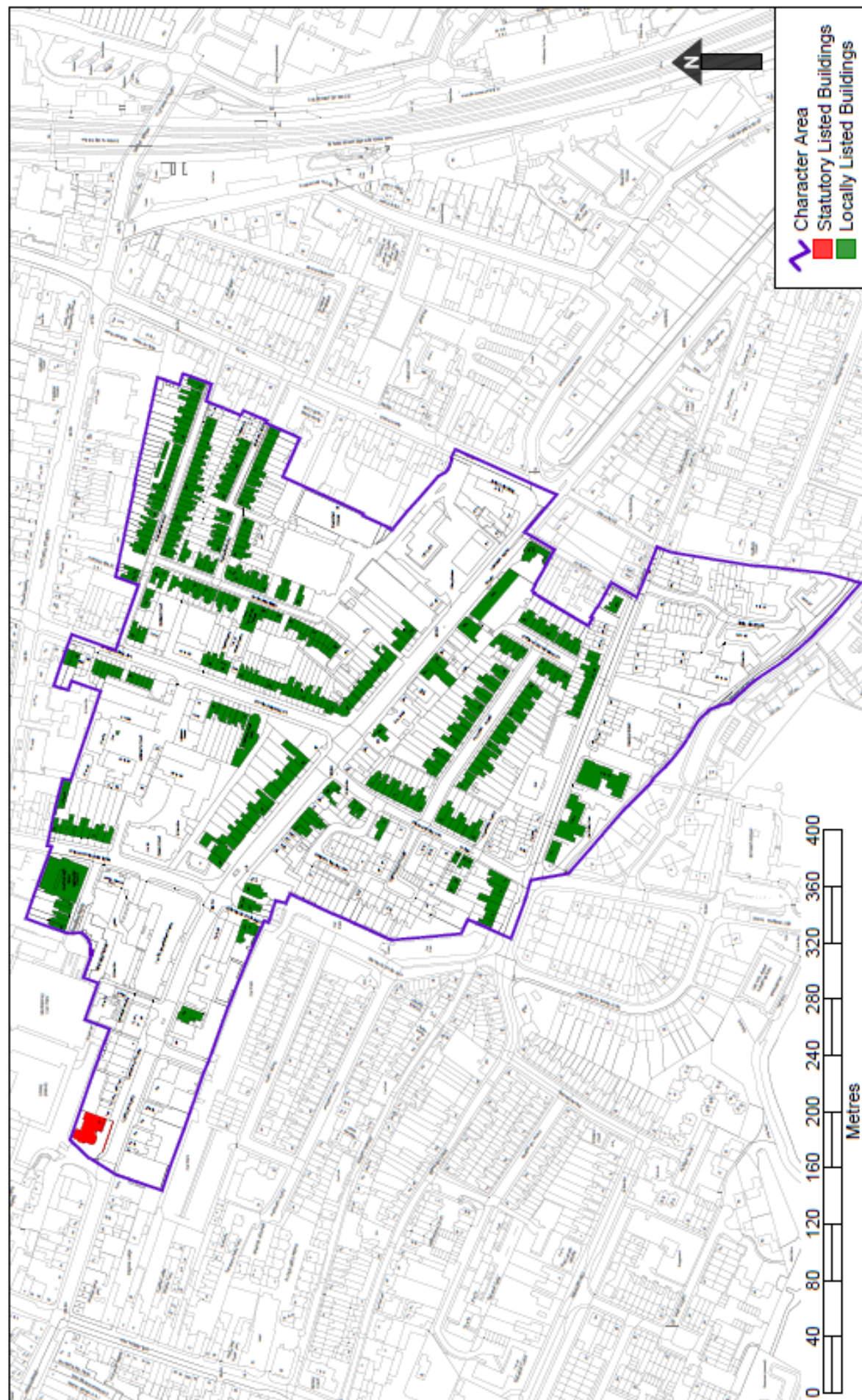


Character Area 5a London Road



Note: Parts of this character area have been subject to redevelopment since the CACS was prepared. The CACS will be updated in future reviews



AREA 5A: LONDON ROAD

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Area 5a: London Road

Alexandra Road, Bedford Road, Hopkins Yard, Inkerman Road, Keyfield Terrace (part), Lattimore Road (part) (including Oldfield Court), London Road (part, see also Areas 4a & 7d) (including Canberra House, Francis House and Warwick House), Lower Paxton Road, Milliner's Court, Miller's Rise, New Kent Road (including New Kent House), Marlborough Road (including Benedictine Place and Davis Court), Old London Road (including Old Priory Park and Henry's Grant), Paxton Road, Vernons Close, Watsons Walk, Wetherall Mews.

Scheduled Monuments

None.

Listed Buildings

London Road

11, Grade II. (172-182 London Road in Area 7d).

Locally Listed Buildings

Alexandra Road

Odds: 1-53 (incl), 55 and 57.

Evens: 1 and 2 Playford Cottages, 2-56 (incl), 60 and 62.

Bedford Road

Odds: 1-27 (incl), 31-43 (incl), 55 and 57.

Evens: 2-22 (incl), 24-36.

Inkerman Road

Odds: 1-9 (incl), 13-23 (incl), 25, 27 and 29.

Evens: 2, 4-24 (incl), 1-8 The Old Hat Factory (formerly Kyngston House), 26-32 (incl), 36-56 (incl).

Keyfield Terrace

2 (Beehive P.H.).

Lattimore Road

Odds: Lattimore Hall, 9-19 (incl), 31-39 (incl), 43-53 (incl), 57-59, Milliners Court 43-46 and free-standing chimney at 1-67.

Evens: 2-42 (incl), 36 (Fiscal House only), 58-60.

London Road

Odds: 37-63 (incl), 67-85 (incl), 87 & 87A, 89-93 (incl).

Evens: 68, 92-96 (incl), 110-116 (incl), 120, 134 (Farmers Boy PH) 152 & 154, 164, 166 (formerly Odeon cinema, façade only), 172 (Great Northern PH).

Lower Paxton Road

1-20 (cons).

Marlborough Road

Marlborough Road Methodist Church, 10-20 (incl), 22 A-E, 24 A-E.

Old London Road

Odds: 1-11 9 (incl), 71-89 (incl), 107.

Evens: 14, 1-13 Old Priory Park (Former St Peter's School).

Paxton Road

Odds: 1-35 (incl).

Evens: 2-52 (incl).

Watsons Walk

Odds: 1-29 (incl).

Evens: 34-44 (incl), 4-10 (incl), Corner Shop (corner with London Road).



The Old Hat Factory and nos. 18-24 Inkerman Road (locally listed).

Area 5a: London Road

Character Summary

This character area covers most of London Road and several streets to the north and south of it which lie on the east side of the city centre. There is an overall fall southwards from Victoria Street down towards the River Ver and a slope westwards up towards the city centre. In addition, London Road is set above the surrounding land along some of its length and to the north side there is a noticeable dip behind Alma Road, Bedford Road and Inkerman Road.

The far western end of London Road, beyond the service yard to The Maltings, is included within Character Area 4a (The Commercial Centre). The eastern end, from the boundary of the conservation area to Alma Road, is described in Character 7d.

London Road is now the main route into the city centre from the east and runs northwestwards from the village of London Colney and the M25. Formerly the A6 Trunk road, it is of historic significance in the city's development having been cut by Thomas Telford during the late C18. By far the widest of the main roads into St Albans city centre, it rises gradually from the east towards the city centre on a straight course apart from one slight kink where it crosses the medieval

borough boundary at Marlborough Road. There are therefore long views up and down this wide road. Looking southeast, the trees close to Grosvenor Road (Area 7d) form a backdrop. Looking northwest, the road climbs steadily towards the city centre and several modern corner buildings dominate the view: Benedictine Place, Edinburgh House and no. 65.

London Road is flanked along virtually its entire length, with few exceptions, by buildings. It is of mixed character with a great mixture of buildings representing many building periods from the early C19 onwards and representing different building types and uses. There are many small, narrow fronted premises in retail and service use, as well as larger office premises, some in converted buildings and others purpose built. However, the street also includes a substantial residential element from large, listed, detached and semi-detached houses to small terraced houses, houses divided into flats above shops, and modern purpose-built blocks of flats. Most of the properties are C19 and early C20 century but they are interspersed with some late C20 re-developments.



London Road is fairly straight so gives long views flanked by buildings in a mixture of uses.

Area 5a: London Road

Character Summary

Unfortunately, redevelopments along London Road over the last two hundred years have resulted in very few surviving buildings dating from the early C19. Four are statutorily listed (three of those are described in Area 7d). Contributing to its character and appearance are a large number of locally listed buildings, in the main from the C19 with some from the early years of the C20, including the Art Deco cinema at no. 166 London Road. The cinema dates from 1931 (on a site where the first cinema opened in 1908). This stands out against the nearby brick buildings but is itself a successful design, reflecting the fashion of the era, that contributes to the variety of buildings along London Road.

South of London Road, running east to west is the Old London Road, the most historic route in the character area, which was the main route into the town from the southeast from the C16 to the late C18, until it was bypassed by the new London Road in 1794. Old London Road is a narrow undulating road which slopes up westwards towards the city centre and its variety of building styles and varied building line add to its informality and strong sense of history. To the south side is a bank which slopes up to the south, believed to relate to the creation of the route in the C16 when it was diverted away from Sopwell (see Area 4e). On the north side, properties are slightly set up above the road and there are some areas of raised pavement in traditional blue brick which contribute to its informal historic character.

This character area has a built history

spanning two hundred years. Development in this character area started in the early C19 along and between Old London Road and London Road relating to local industries. There are both small cottages, grander villas and elegant terraces dating from this early phase. Later in the century, many of the side roads would be built up largely because of the railways. The tightly knit streets of terraced workers' cottages and small factories between Alma Road and Lattimore Road started to be developed in the mid C19. As the population of the city increased, formal urban roads such as Paxton Road were cut in the late 1890s. These contain medium sized homes, usually built speculatively for sale, mainly in red brick, in variations of similar architectural styles, with larger rear gardens and small front gardens with front walls or fences. Areas which had not been developed until well into the C20 continued to be infilled and one such development is an entire close of mid C20 suburban style homes in Vernons Close. Redevelopment has continued into the late C20 and beginning of the C21.

There is a strong contrast between the bustling commercial environment of London Road and the quiet atmosphere of Old London Road and the residential streets to the north and south. Much of the built environment and the street plan is a legacy of the Victorian era, it therefore retains much of its Victorian character, and reflects the life of the Victorians and how they worked and provided for themselves.



The quiet residential areas, like Alexandra Road (above), contrast with the busy, commercial character of London Road.

Area 5a: London Road

History

A major source of wealth for St Albans from the early-C18 to mid-C19 was coaching. The town was the first stop for change of horses or overnight stay on the road from London to the northwest. The topography of St Albans, almost unaltered since the time of Abbot Ulsinus, began its first stage of modern expansion with the cutting of a new London Road in 1794. Engineered by Thomas Telford, it branched from Old London Road about a mile from the centre and carried coaches higher than the old route to enter the town at the Peahen junction. The road was the starting point for the expansion of St Albans eastwards. A row of charming Regency villas were built on its north banks, one of which remains (no.11), and by 1840 the long triangle of land, enclosed by the new and old roads, had terraces of workers' cottages in the typical yellow stock brick of the period¹. Dating mostly from the mid to late C19, this area has a great variety of buildings ranging from the tightly-planned terraced housing of Alexandra Road to the spacious Victorian Gothic villas of Ridgmont Road (see Area 7d). There is also a strong contrast between the informal quiet atmosphere of Old London Road and bustling commercial environment of London Road and Victoria Street².

No.11 London Road, the remaining Regency villa referred to above, is a Grade II listed building dating from 1830, set behind listed low flint walls and gates. This is the only listed building in this character area, although there are three Regency listed buildings further east along London Road (Area 7d).

A tollgate stood at the junction of London Road and Old London Road. St Albans tollgate charges were abolished in 1871, by which time the coach traffic had been reduced significantly by the growth of the railways and the toll gates cost more to run than they earned. This tollgate was removed around 1890.

The later arrival of the railways put St Albans' industrial period behind that of most other cities. A branch line to Watford opened in 1858 and another to Hatfield came in 1865, but most important was the Midland Railway from St Pancras, which opened in 1867 giving manufacturers better access to markets in London, the Midlands and the North. Large scale commuting became possible from St Albans to the capital with the introduction of cheap workmen's tickets in 1883. The Midland station in Victoria Street was the centre of industrial expansion, which began in the quadrangle formed by London Road, Lattimore Road, Victoria Street and Alma Road. Here, small factories, such as the four storey building in Inkerman Road (a former hat factory), were built amongst workers' terraced cottages, creating an intimate blend of domestic and industrial architecture. Alexandra Road and Bedford Road, built in the 1860s, are especially interesting for their varied brick colours, which include Luton Grey, a purplish-red brick coming from the fields of south Bedfordshire and widely used in St Albans' housing until about 1910. The Luton Grey, either as background or ornament, is combined with local orange and red bricks, which by the 1880s were being made at works on Bernard's Heath, and which appeared in many hues owing to differences in clay deposits and uncertain firing methods³.



The Tollgate at the junction of London Road and Old London Road collected tolls from the huge number of coaches passing through St Albans on the road between London and the northwest. The building was demolished in 1890, 19 years after the tollgate charges had been abolished. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.

¹ Conservation Area Broadsheet 1984.

² Conservation Area Designation Report 1981.

³ Conservation Area Broadsheet 1984.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings

London Road

Cut in 1794, London Road started to be developed after that time. The tithe map shows a row of similar buildings in wide plots at the eastern end. One of these Regency villas has survived (no.11). Set up on a bank with a retaining wall and elaborate railings, this marks the western end of this character area. As late as 1967 there was a pair surviving at nos. 25 & 27 and further east nos. 51 & 53 are also Regency.

Eastwards from no. 11 are nos. 13-15 and Canberra House, two parades of typical 1930s shops with flats and maisonettes over in red brick. The western group is three storey, plain, with parapets, metal windows and shopfronts in a “stone” traditional surround (although the fascia signs on the three shops in no. 13 are over deep). Canberra House is lower, the third storey being in the prominent red tiled roof and it has some details perfectly in context with the Edwardian buildings nearby, and a good group of similar shopfronts. The building line of these shops is set back well back from the road edge; the deep pavement of the frontage incorporates a ‘forecourt’ to these shops which is delineated as ‘private’ space by a line of bollards.

Between these and Marlborough Road are two recent redevelopments of C20 buildings: Warwick House in mixed use (which replaced flats and a car showroom) and Benedictine Place residential flats with underground parking, which returns into Marlborough Road and developed the 1930s Godfrey Davis garage site. Both blocks are in red brick with slate roofs and both have prominent gables in an attempt to address their context. Their overall scale and massing prevents them from integrating into the streetscene and they are over dominant. However, from some viewpoints they do serve to screen and break up the bulk of the Maltings multi-storey car park, which sits behind.



No.11 London Road is a grade II listed Regency villa.



Nos. 13-15 and Canberra House on London Road.



Warwick House and Benedictine Place.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

From Marlborough Road eastwards, the north side of London Road assumes a more residential feel with mainly smaller scale buildings of domestic appearance. With the exception of no. 65, which is a corner office at the southern end of Lattimore Road (which replaced the Crystal Palace P.H. in the 1980s), there is a continuous run of historic locally listed buildings from no. 37 to no. 93. Nos. 37&39 are Victorian. However, nos. 41-63, the remainder of the group between Marlborough Road and Lattimore Road, are earlier, some probably late Regency, but all are of Regency appearance with white painted stucco. Nos. 51&53 are similar in appearance to the earlier Regency building at no. 11 and appear to be contemporary with it. The buildings in this group are grander, on wide plots, set back behind short front gardens but also set above the pavement. One pair is three storey and probably mid C19. The majority are in office use, although some reversal to residential is now occurring. The group from nos. 67-93 are plain, smaller scale Victorian cottages in narrow plots. Most are in yellow brick but some are in red brick, all should have slate roofs but some have been replaced with concrete tiles, and some have surviving six over six paned sash windows. Several have been adapted for retail and service uses with shopfronts inserted or added as extensions, but generally the shopfronts are bland. Others buildings, for example nos. 77-81, retain their residential use and appearance. Nos. 87-93 are more highly detailed, having decorative door and window lintels and arches. There have been some alterations, such as replacement roofs, but these changes could be reversed. The land falls away at the rear of this group and therefore there are rear basement storeys. Where these properties abut Inkerman Road they have short gardens, but several at the eastern end have long, narrow, sloping gardens, and there are some good garden walls. Here the land dips forming a depression between Bedford Road and London Road.



The Crystal Palace pub, demolished in the 1980s, it was replaced by an office building (no. 65). Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



The majority of the buildings on London Road between Marlborough Road and Lattimore Road are Regency in appearance and some may date to the late Regency era.



Nos. 87-93 are small-scale, Victorian cottages with decorative door and window lintels and arches.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

At the eastern end of the character area in the immediate vicinity of Alma Road, and on the north side of London Road, the frontage is more commercial. Generally it is also small scale and two or two and a half storeys. On the corner with Alma Road is a late 1950s retail/showroom building with two floors of flats above: its flat roofed design and fenestration is quite typical of its age. Beyond to the west, sandwiched between the modern development, there is a pleasant pair of Victorian houses (nos. 113&115) converted to service/restaurant use, although reasonably maintaining their original appearance. To their west is a petrol station, with a car showroom behind, which replaced a Victorian terrace in the early 1970s (nos. 99-111), and beyond is a purpose built retail unit from the early 1980s ((nos. 95&97) which replaced a St John's Ambulance hut). These later C20 developments do not make a positive contribution to the area. An open car park previously associated with the cinema between nos. 93 and 95 allows extensive views through to the north across the dip, but conversely this is a gap uncharacteristic of the street scene.

To the north of the frontage is the vacant former Evershed's print works site, comprising offices dating from the 1950s and various printers' workshops, some of which are Victorian. This site is awaiting redevelopment.

On the south side of London Road, the styles and roofline are more mixed and the character is more commercial overall, in line with the origins of most of the development as shops with accommodation above (sometimes for the shop owner). On this side there has been more mid-late C20 infill and redevelopment of indifferent quality (for the most part neutral in effect rather than negative). In some cases, earlier buildings have been much altered and these have turned into neutral rather than positive elements, and they would benefit from re-instatement. However, there are still some good Victorian and Edwardian buildings, locally listed for their contribution. These include three public houses: The Beehive is a small scale C19 public house with

front bays and mock half timbering. At right angles to the road where it kinks at the medieval borough boundary, it fronts onto the pedestrian link to Keyfield Terrace. Trees to the south in the car park act as backdrop and there is a view down the path in front of the Beehive P.H. to Keyfield. The Farmers Boy, no. 134, is a small, symmetrical, domestic scale building in red brick with a slate roof and a pair of front bays. Further east, The Great Northern is a mid to late C19 inn which is on the 1880 Ordnance Survey. The GNR railway was opened to St Albans in 1865 and the station is 400 metres eastwards along London Road. The inn is two storey, mock half-timbered with rendered infill above red brick and with a slate roof (most probably by or added to by Kinnear-Tarte, a local Victorian architect of note and very characteristic of his style of architecture).

Forming a group with the Beehive P.H. are no. 1 Keyfield Terrace in Area 4d (also with timbering), and nos. 92-96, an attractive pair of Edwardian houses incorporating good early paired shop-fronts and a neighbouring early C20 building incorporating a shop with a narrow front and large first floor bay window.



This late 1950s development marks the corner of London Road with Alma Road.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Further east are nos. 110-116, a typical three storey group of commercial and residential units. They are tall, with pointed gables and first floor bays and with some good shopfront joinery details but quite altered. Forming a corner landmark group at the top of Watsons Walk, where it joins London Road, is no. 120, a tall three storey red brick shop with a double height bay and corner corbelling detail. No. 152 is a small, former Catholic church, with visible church windows, and currently used as a garage. No. 154 is a gable fronted shop and it has some traditional green façade tiling. All of these buildings are locally listed.

One of the later buildings which is locally listed is the cinema (former Odeon) which closed in 1995. Significantly, the building occupies the site where the Alpha Picture Palace, the first permanent cinema in Hertfordshire, opened in July 1908: converted from a new hall for a social institute designed in 1903. The Alpha Trading Company's managing director was Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, one of the key figures in the early history of cinema, early animation, film and newsreel in Britain. He was born on the north side of London Road, at no. 99 (now demolished), in 1874. Whilst a teenager he met Birt Acres and became involved with moving photography. He later ran his Alpha Cinematograph Company from Bedford Park Road (see Area 7f) and later found larger premises in Alma Road, where the

grounds of more than two acres and various ancillary buildings were used for his film making. This is recorded by a plaque at Telford Court. In 1913, after he lost control of the company, the London Road cinema went through several ownership and name changes until, in 1930, plans were drawn up by Martin-Hatfield Architect Surveyor to build a larger cinema for Capitol in a modern Art Deco style which took up a wider site extending to the west. The side and rear elevations are typical: functional and economical, comprising plain brick walls with minimal openings. Due to the fall in ground level, the rear towers over the modest two storey Victorian cottages in Lower Paxton Road. The building was purchased in 2010 for renovation as a cinema, which will continue the legacy of cinema on this historic site.

To the west of the cinema is no.164, a red brick double gable fronted building with clay tiled roof designed in 1911 by local architect and surveyor Mence and Finn as a workshop and shop with a residential unit above, and still in mixed retail and residential use. It is separated from the cinema by a flight of steps linking London Road to Lower Paxton Road, a useful pedestrian route which predates the cinema. To the east the cinema is separated from the Great Northern P.H. by a small sloping garden.



A fire at The Regent Cinema, one of the incarnations of the previous cinema building. This photo was taken in 1927, the year The Regent burnt down. The Great Northern P.H. can be seen to the left. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



The current cinema building was built in 1931 on the site of the previous cinema but spreading further west.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Redevelopment has been continuous on London Road into the late C20 and beginning of the C21. In the 1960s to the 1980s this sometimes involved replacing historic buildings and losing character (for example at nos. 25&27 (Regency houses), no. 90 (an early house on Keyfield), nos. 60-64 (a villa and cottage related to a business use) and no. 65 (the Crystal Palace P.H.)). More recently, however, it is C20 buildings of neutral or negative appearance that have been redeveloped, either to preserve or to enhance the area's character.

On the southern side of London Road between Keyfield Terrace and the City, there is a group of office buildings which are large in scale, but nevertheless limited to three storeys or less in height. Due to their scale, they give the road a greater sense of enclosure at this point. Most of the group is modern. Nos. 82-90 Edinburgh House (1980s) is three storeys, its wide façade is broken up by a series of gables and a corner turret. No. 72 (late C20) has two storeys plus an attic floor in a developers' "mansard", and the building also incorporates an older pair of red brick houses, again with three storeys, with its top floor being expressed as tall, gothic gables. Some "gothic" arched windows are picked out in blue brick but overall the pair is sadly much altered. No. 68 is a C19 white painted building, with a slate roof, of two storeys plus an attic in a prominent gable and is locally listed. Only this building is locally listed in this group. No. 66 is a modern 1960s office and flat roofed. At no. 60, a large, gault brick, mid Victorian villa in a spacious plot fell derelict, and together with a related cottage and workshops; it was demolished in the 1980s. It was replaced by two offices (one large and one small) plus a new entrance to the public car park that runs along the back of that part of London Road. Both offices have pitched roofs: the larger office, horizontal in emphasis, and in yellow brick, is slightly set back with a landscaped frontage, including a large retained tree, which, together, helps to break up the scale of the new building. The smaller office is narrow and in red brick.

No. 40, on the south side of London Road, at the western edge of this character area, and opposite no.11 the listed Regency building, is a rather plain two storey white painted building with a parapet roof, first floor sliding sash windows and a modern shopfront. At first glance it is plain and could be modern, but it dates from the mid-C19 century. It appears on the 1880 Ordnance Survey as a Straw Hat Factory, probably changing in the early C20 century to a garage, before being converted to retail use. It falls within a slightly later group of red brick and red tiled roof buildings dating from the late Victorian and Edwardian periods which are highly decorated, in contrast with its plain appearance. It has a wider frontage than its neighbours, also reflecting its different original use.



Large scale, mid to late C20 development of earlier C20 buildings has served to preserve or enhance the area's character.



No. 40 looks modern but actually dates from the mid C19 and was used as a straw hat factory.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Buildings immediately to the west of the boundary (in Area 4a) comprise largely late Victorian, purpose built shops on the ground floor with flats above. Many of these buildings have elaborate terracotta decorative panels. Shopfronts in this group comprise the traditional elements of pilasters, stallriser, cornice and fascia, and the majority of properties have retained original shopfronts or have had traditional replacements. Fascias are for the most part restrained and in scale with the buildings.

To the east, shops have been installed into Edwardian houses which, in the main, project forward of the surviving original residential upper floors, which are characterised by tile hung gables. Most of these shop extensions were inserted during the late 1960s and 1970s before the conservation area was designated, and are negative elements in the street scene. To the eastern end of the group, the original ground floor has survived. Alteration to insert a similar modern frontage to those inserted in adjacent buildings has been resisted.

Overall, many of the Victorian and Edwardian shops and houses share similar traditional design features; predominantly buildings are two or two and a half storey, with yellow or red brick and slate roofs. The early buildings are plainer and more classical with yellow brick or stucco. The later ones are usually red brick, and often have prominent gables, overhanging eaves and tile hanging, giving some cohesion and traditional appearance and character. Traditional style timber shopfronts are in the majority. Some original painted timber shopfronts and fascias have survived and several more have been re-instated in recent years. With the cooperation of the majority of shops, restaurants, fast food outlets and offices, fascia signage is for the most part restrained. Traditional painted fascias and projecting signs are encouraged and internally illuminated box fascias are resisted. External illumination is considered acceptable provided that the lighting units are of sympathetic design.



Some of the Victorian, purpose built shops with flats above, which are immediately west of the character area boundary, have decorative terracotta panels.



The Edwardian buildings to the east of the boundary have shopfronts that project forward from the original façade seen at first floor level.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Lattimore Road and Marlborough Road.

These are two early Victorian streets that connect Victoria Street with London Road and became built up quite early on in the period. Both roads slope down towards London Road and, as they are north-south linking roads, are busy with traffic and pedestrians. There is much on site parking and loss of front gardens, which does detract from the settings of the historic buildings. The rear elevation of no. 65 London Road dominates Lattimore Road at the southern end.

Lattimore Road was built up first. In particular, it displays a range of building styles and sizes, but for the most part they are straight forward, two storey, yellow brick terraces of modest height, but some pairs are slightly taller. Overall, the low scale of the buildings in relation to this reasonably wide road gives it an open appearance. Although this provides a level of uniformity, many have been altered. There are also some modern offices and flatted housing which, although they use red or yellow brick, and some effort has been taken to add interest to their elevations, are too tall and wide and thus dominant in the street scene. Nos. 20-28 are a particularly interesting group of houses, with yellow brick quoin details on a bright red brick background. To the western side, and key to the history, is a long terrace of yellow brick houses, which fronted the former Victorian hat factory site at the rear

(now Milliner's Court). One of the houses is new and thus not included with the others which are all locally listed. One of the factories and the chimney have been restored, and the whole site converted from industrial use to residential use. Several more of the factory buildings have been re-built in facsimile around a courtyard to preserve the character of the area. From their appearance - form, height, design and fenestration - the buildings are unmistakably of factory origin. Tragically, a timber clad, early Plymouth Brethren Church (no. 21) was destroyed by fire in the 1990s and replaced by a red brick building later altered and converted to flats.



On site parking and loss of front gardens has degraded the setting of the historic buildings.



Looking north up Lattimore Road. The entrance to Milliner's Court can be seen on the left. The modest height of the yellow brick terraces and wide nature of the road gives an open appearance.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Marlborough Road was built up first on the east side at the northern end. The most northerly properties are included in Area 7c Victoria Street. Within this Area are nos. 10-24, a locally listed attractive group of mid to late Victorian houses, many with surviving features. Unfortunately, the group is marred by some on site parking which has intruded into the small front gardens. Nos. 10-12, a yellow brick pair, have particularly good fanlights and stained glass and unusual two over two paned sash windows with arched heads. No. 14 is lower, two storey and rendered; nos. 16-20 are also yellow brick with ground floor bays, whilst no. 24 is three storey, including an attic, red brick with double height bays. All apart from no. 12 have retained original slate roofs. Marlborough Road Methodist Church, which opened in 1898, is a particularly fine red brick building designed by Gordon, Lowther and Gunton. It has a red plain tiled roof and excellent stone detailing and a massive gabled front that dwarfs the small houses opposite. Where it returns into New Kent Road it is lower in scale which makes it more compatible with the cottages there.

To the southern end of Marlborough Road there are several blocks of flats, which now also dominate the street scene, although the slope of the road does reduce this effect. On the east side, Davis Court is a three storey block of retirement flats, rather busy in appearance with red and blue brick banding and "slate" roofs, "half timbered" gables and "rendered". It is set back behind a wall and landscaped area which helps to break up the wide frontage. There is a matching block to the rear arranged around a courtyard and there is a view eastwards through to the former hat factory at the rear, and to the rear of nos. 37-63 London Road. A restaurant on the corner with London Road is a low building previously the site of W.C.s which replaced the original end terraced house which fronted London Road. It has several trees which, in combination with the set back of the building, contribute to the streetscene. On the west side of the road, Wesley House (nos. 1-6) (1998) is three storey, in red brick, with a tiled roof and a frontage wall

and railing. A landscaped car park at the rear separates it from Kent House, an L-shaped matching block, in the same north-south orientation, accessed from New Kent Road. On the west corner is Benedictine Place, a modern building which turns the corner into London Road and runs uphill for some distance. In a similar idiom to Davis Court, but taller and closer to the road, it is a three storey, red brick flat development with a slate roof, attics (expressed in a series of four-storey gables), and balconies. To the frontage, it has square patterned railings on a wall. The design of the back of this group of modern buildings are well resolved and forms a reasonable aspect.



Nos. 10-12 Marlborough Road has unusual two over two paned sash windows.



Marlborough Road Methodist Church dominates the road.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

New Kent Road

Previously the site of St Albans Brewery, New Kent Road dates from 1886 when it appears in the Almanack. It has five, two storey, original terraces on the north side, the only surviving houses from a street which was entirely built up between 1886 and 1913 with thirty-one similar houses on both sides and across the western end. These five houses, nos. 2-10, are in one pair and one terrace of three. They are brick and painted, with ground floor bays and accessed up steps. The Maltings redevelopment resulted in the loss of the rest. These are now dwarfed by the Maltings car park of seven levels (the lowest set down) plus corner towers with pyramidal roofs. Gentries and signage across the entrance are minimal, but still intrusive. The opposite side of the street has been developed as a three storey residential block (New Kent House). To the north is a view of the rear of the Victoria Street properties.

Pavements in this group of roads are all concrete block paved, replacing the original pavements.



The remaining terraced houses in New Kent Road.



Maltings car park dwarfs the remaining houses in New Kent Road.



New Kent House

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Alexandra Road, Bedford Road and Inkerman Road.

These are some of the narrowest streets in the conservation area. Alexandra Road extends eastwards from Lattimore Road to Alma Road. Bedford Road and Inkerman Road lie to its south and all three have a character unique within the City. They were originally terraces of workers cottages, very small, two-up two-down. They were built up around 1860 and their general lack of stone detailing indicates their early origins, before the use of stone became widespread. Certain characteristics that unite this area include functional street surfacing with little vegetation, and small, tightly planned buildings built in a mix of brick colours with slate roofs and with timber sliding sash windows. There are some blue street name signs. Each street does have some individual characteristics.

Although they are mainly now used residentially, some small workshops and garages still exist in the area, a mix of use seen much more commonly in the Victorian era when workers lived near the factories where they worked, and part of the character. The retention of the built fabric and street plan and current mix of uses is a characteristic that reflects its C19 history but, where these buildings are residentially converted, their form and appearance can still echo their C19 origins. One commercial site at the end of Alexandra Road has recently been replaced with two houses which sit well alongside the originals.

Bedford Road runs east west from Alma Road to Inkerman Road with an unusual split in the line of the road half way along. This break exposes the entire end gables at the ends of the terraces, which then close the vista along the two ends of the street. At this point at the end of the eastern section, there is a small left over parking area which would benefit from enhancement. The terraces are brownish brick or red brick immediately onto the back of pavement and the pavements and road are narrow. The pavements are large element paving slabs and tarmac, over scaled and more typical of wide urban streets. Although most of the cottages are very

plainly fashioned, there is an unusual and interesting group at the far eastern end with half basements protected from the street by fancy iron railings and short walls. This terrace also has decoration in the form of dentilled eaves and a Greek key motif along a band course. There is some modern infill opposite this terrace which integrates quite well. There is an historic blue street sign.

Alexandra Road also runs east west. There are small front gardens and walls in this street. Houses are flat fronted, in red or yellow brick, except for two larger wide-fronted houses in Luton Greys with red detail. A fine historic shop-front survives on a former corner shop. Pavements are narrow, with original, large, blue bricks.

Inkerman Road was named after the Battle of Inkerman in the Crimean War (1854). This road slopes down from north to south with views to the rear of London Road. There is a mix of styles and brick. Some at the south are small, plain fronted, yellow brick cottages, some with early six over six sash windows and there are some later red brick houses with ground floor bays and small gardens. Inkerman Terrace is dated 1879. A factory, later a council office (Kyngston House), has been converted and named "The Old Hat Factory" in recognition of its past use. No. 1 is a taller detached more gothic style house with a steep gable.



The terraced group at the eastern end of Bedford Road is more decorative and has half basements behind railings.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Paxton Road and Lower Paxton Road

Paxton Road was cut 1897 and, apart from one later pair on the south side, these streets are entirely late Victorian. All of the houses in these streets are locally listed. Blue brick paving and historic stone kerbing survives.

Leading eastwards and sloping down from Watsons Walk, Paxton Road is a street of red brick, typical late Victorian, terraced and semi-detached houses built between 1897 & 1903. One pair was inserted in 1924 and is indiscernible from the rest. These houses have the typical L-shaped plan and ground floor semi-hexagonal bays of the period, although nos. 2 & 4, semi-detached houses built in 1897, are on the end plots of the street and have a slightly different appearance and rectangular form. This pair was designed by local architect H E Hansell. Nos. 16&18 are taller and have decorative terracotta and hooped mock-timbering details. They all have small front gardens with walls.

Across the end of Paxton Road, at ninety degrees, is Lower Paxton Road which has a strong cohesive identity. Particulars exist for the auctioning of the area in 1897. It comprises twenty late Victorian terraced cottages of two storeys in brick and slate to each side of the road, designed by Hansell in 1898 and largely unaltered. The cottages are of gault brick with orange-red brick window arches, door pediments, band courses and quoins and have sliding sash windows and prominent chimneys. Just one cottage has been painted, but several have had slates replaced with tiles or replacement windows as "permitted development". They are all locally listed. They have small front gardens, for the most part planted and enclosed by low walls, but in some cases enclosed by fences or fences on a low wall. In addition, each cottage has a modest rear garden – greening the area. The footways are Victorian blue brick. The southern end of the street is enclosed by the rear of residential properties on Old London Road.



Paxton Road looking down towards Lower Paxton Road.



Nos. 16+18 display decorative terracotta and hooped mock-timbering details.



The northern end of Lower Paxton Road is closed by the rear of the cinema on London Road, which looms over the street.

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Old London Road (see also Area 7d).

This dates from the C16, although the buildings are several centuries later. Its character is mixed. At the western end, notable buildings include the red brick, historic former school now converted to residential called Old Priory Park. Its prominent gables and enclosing wall abut the street frontage. Adjacent is an old mission hall, timber clad but altered and in poor repair. This has an interesting history relating to temperance and the Victorian workmen who constructed the City's drainage system.

On the north side are tiny terraces on small plots, and at the lower end of Alma Cut is no. 107, an unusual detached house with gothic details around the door and first floor windows set into the eaves, including a decorated hanging bay window. One terrace of cottages at the western end, although early, is much altered.

These are interspersed with modern redevelopments and infill. On the south are Henrys Grant and Millers Rise. These are substantial modern housing developments on former large commercial sites comprising houses, which have been orientated to address Old London Road, and flats at the rear, which abut Riverside Road which is at a lower level. Reasonably landscaped and assimilated into the historic area and not unduly obtrusive, they are of neutral effect on the historic street scene. Likewise, the Kingdom Hall on the north side is low and the site is well landscaped and neutral, although the large tarmaced area of car parking could perhaps be more sympathetically surfaced.

On the east corner with Watsons Walk is another modern housing development in a neo-Edwardian style. Rather diminutive in scale and unconvincing, but nevertheless well detailed with good materials. On the west corner is a terrace of particularly fine, well detailed, red brick, early C19 houses (nos. 1-11 Old London Road) with front gardens. Some pebble-dashing has occurred which does affect the group value. Nos. 5-11 are particularly elegant being three storey. Nos. 1&3 are a two storey pair with half basements. There is an historic blue street sign for Watsons Walk on the side return.



Old Priory Park.



The terrace at nos. 1-11 Old London Road

Area 5a: London Road

Buildings contd.

Watsons Walk

This is busy north-south route for traffic which is detrimental to its character. The east side largely comprises rather more robust and stocky red brick Victorian houses generally with substantial double height bays and some with gables and half timbering. All have small front gardens. The former corner shop frontage survives. The returns are visible from Paxton Road.

On the west side the properties are very mixed. At the southern end behind the gardens of the Regency terraces (nos. 5-11 Old London Road) and at the northern end behind the shops (no. 120) are some small C19 cottages on small plots. Between these and extending to Keyfield Terrace there was a plant nursery in the late C19 and early C20 and a large area remained open until the mid 1930s when Vernons Close was constructed. Clearly 1930s in style, these suburban houses and flats are finished in pebbledash with curved steel windows and tiled roofs. They were built for a London company called Hellier-Forster and designed by surveyor Leslie Raymond. There is also a factory, nos. 24-30, erected in 1928 for H Punford & Co., who embroidered badges. It is a single storey white painted building with a slate roof, and now sensitively converted to housing.

North of these the land was used for light industry (a car repair and servicing workshop) until it was redeveloped in 2008 as Wetherall Mews, a housing mews with single and two storey terraces using traditional materials: red brick, slate and timber windows. The houses are formally arranged around a mews courtyard and have small gardens. Along the north side is a high brick wall which separates the development from London Road. A house on the Watson's Walk frontage (no.10), was restored to residential use with a small curtilage as part of the scheme.



Watson's Walk is a very busy north-south route. The converted factory can be seen on the left.



1900 OS map showing the undeveloped land to the west of Watson's Walk, used as a plant nursery.

Area 5a: London Road

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ Views along London Road.
- ✓ Historic Assets - listed surviving Regency building.
- ✓ Historic Assets - locally listed buildings. Provide a strong sense of history.
- ✓ Prominent Methodist Church with excellent detailing.
- ✓ The former hat factory sites which shows characteristics of former uses and relate to other factories in adjacent character areas.
- ✓ Notable buildings which were Victorian public houses.
- ✓ Converted factory in Watson's Walk.
- ✓ The Art Deco cinema, which relates to the long history of the site as a cinema site and represents the 1930s era, although its rear elevation does dominate Lower Paxton Road.
- ✓ Converted Victorian school at Old Priory Park.
- ✓ Paxton and Lower Paxton Roads are strongly consistent late Victorian residential roads.
- ✓ Signage in the area is for the most part restrained and traditional in appearance. Most signage is modest in size, non-illuminated or externally illuminated and it is in the main flat signage, not bulky box signage and it does not use strident colouring.
- ✓ Historic street plan survives, including the C16 route of Old London Road.
- ✓ Views of the Abbey from Old London Road and the pleasing variety of buildings and sense of history along this road.
- ✓ Footpath link from London Road to Lower Paxton Road.
- ✓ Historic blue street signs survive in some streets.



Historic blue street signs survive in some of the streets in this area.

Neutral

- Where new developments have been constrained in height and depth and have used appropriate materials, the strong character of the area has been retained.
- Modern housing south of Old London Road.

Area 5a: London Road

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Negative

- ✖ Level of traffic intrusion, noise and related grime detracts from the character of the area.
- ✖ Busy roads and traffic controlled junction separates north and south sides of road and restricts the movement of pedestrians across and along London Road and between the city centre and the station.
- ✖ Whilst necessary for direction and public safety, the large amount of traffic signage and the traffic lights detract. Opportunities should be explored to improve quality and reduce the visual effect of these.
- ✖ Some prominent trees but generally a lack of greenery.
- ✖ Petrol station detracts from the appearance of the area.
- ✖ Some unsympathetic re-developments and some large scale redevelopments which detract from the area because they are over dominant.
- ✖ The deserted former Evershed's site.
- ✖ Areas of on street parking and some parking on pavements. Some parking on pavements has had to be controlled with bollards which are in turn themselves visually intrusive.
- ✖ Car parking on frontages in Lattimore Road.
- ✖ Some commercial signage is not sympathetic.
- ✖ Loss of traditional paving and functional street surfacing.
- ✖ Poorly maintained forecourts and planted areas in front of commercial premises.
- ✖ The Maltings car park affects the setting (Area 4a).



Non-traditional surfacing materials on pavements have a negative impact on the character of the area, as does traffic.



The deserted former Evershed's printing site as seen from Inkerman Road.

Scope for Change

- Many unsympathetic modern buildings in the area would benefit from redevelopment or enhancement.
- New development should respect the historic context.
- Some private and public car parks would benefit from enhancement through planting and resurfacing.
- Improvements to over-dominant and unsympathetic signage.
- Reinstatement of lost or damaged historic features would improve the appearance of the character area.
- Parts of the character area would benefit from additional landscaping and it should be included in new developments.

