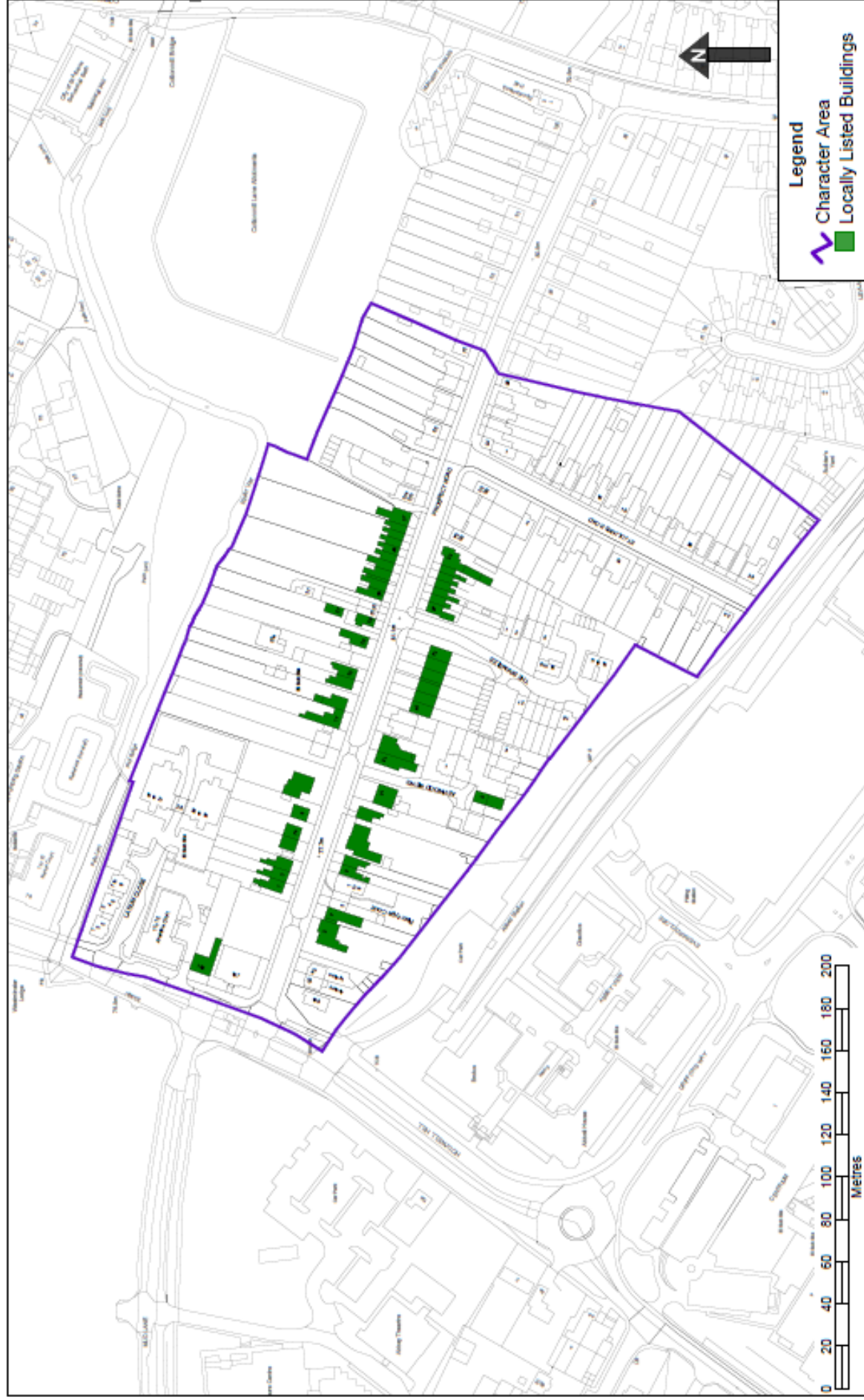


***Character Area 7a***  
***Prospect Road***





# AREA 7A: PROSPECT ROAD

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## Area 7a: Prospect Road

*Holywell Hill (part), Latium Close, Prospect Road, St Julians Road*

### Scheduled Monuments

None.

### Listed Buildings

None.

### Locally Listed Buildings

*Holywell Hill (part)*  
(see also Area 4d – Holywell Hill / Sopwell Lane), 105.

*Prospect Road*  
Evens: 2-4, 6-18 (incl.), 24-34 (incl.) (including outbuilding to r/o no. 16), 40-52 (incl.).  
Odds: 1-11 (incl.), 17-29 (incl.), 39-57 (incl.)



*No. 25 Prospect Road (locally listed).*



*No. 10 Prospect Road (locally listed).*



*No. 43 Prospect Road (locally listed).*

## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Character Summary

This character area is to the south of the city centre, near the southern outskirts of the St Albans Conservation area, to the east of Holywell Hill, the main ancient southern route out of the city. At its western edge, this character area includes the east side of the bottom of Holywell Hill. At its eastern edge, the character area boundary follows the medieval borough boundary, along the rear of the gardens of the houses on the east side of St Julian's Road and then following a line which cuts between nos. 75 and 77 Prospect Road. This eastern boundary is also the boundary of the conservation area. The area is bordered by the River Ver to the north, and the Abbey train line to the south. This area lies at the bottom of the Ver Valley, in the narrow area of flat land at the foot of Holywell Hill before the ground starts to rise again to St Stephens.

The area is rather mixed. This part of Holywell Hill has been substantially redeveloped in recent years. Large scale, modern developments, both residential flats and commercial offices, now dominate the east side of the Holywell Hill. However, from this point on Holywell Hill, there are fine views of trees and the park, to the west, and the Abbey, to the north.

The western, and earlier, half of Prospect Road has a number of early and mid-Victorian houses, villas and cottages, in a variety of styles. The scale is varied, from large, three storey detached houses to small scale, two storey workers' cottages. The eastern half of Prospect Road is a later extension of the road and was developed around 1930 by a single developer. It is a homogenous development of rather plain, two storey semi-detached houses set in good sized plots.

In recent years, back land development has been undertaken on land to the rear of the properties on the south side of Prospect Road. These developments, The Brambles and Ashwood Mews, are reasonably dense residential developments of houses and flats. They pay some respect to the older frontage development in terms of their scale and materials.

St Julian's Road was cut in 1912 and was built up gradually, in a piecemeal fashion from then on. The first phase of development followed shortly after the road was cut, when the first Edwardian houses were built. Most of the other houses were built in the 1920s and 1930s. This is a varied area of modest housing and the piecemeal nature of its development results in there being relatively little architectural cohesion.



*Prospect Road has a mixed residential character with variation in the scale, age, style and type of housing.*



*There are fine views of trees and the park to the west of the character area.*



## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Historic Development

In post-medieval times, the lower part of Holywell Hill, then on the outskirts of the City, was dominated by Holywell House and its extensive grounds. Holywell House was the home of the Jennings family, and most notably John and Sarah Churchill (née Jennings) who later became the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. Late in the seventeenth century, John Churchill demolished the original house and built a new mansion in the middle of Holywell Hill, thus diverting Holywell Hill along what is now Grove Road. The extensive terraced gardens stretched down to the River Ver and, in landscaping these gardens, it is likely that the River Ver was canalised. It now takes a straight course along the rear gardens of the houses on the northern side of Prospect Road, which is the northern boundary of this character area. Holywell House was demolished in 1837. Holywell Hill was widened and straightened, reverting to its original course, to accommodate the increased traffic on this main route into the town.

The first railway came to the town in 1858, a branch line from the London and North Western Railway at Watford, terminating at St Albans Abbey Station at the foot of Holywell Hill. In 1865, another branch line, from the Great Northern Railway main line at Hatfield, was also brought to terminate at the station. Originally, there were plans to extend the railway line to Luton and Dunstable, but these plans never materialised, as the Midland Railway Company brought the main line through St Albans in 1867, developing the St Albans main line station in Victoria Street. The terminus was renamed St Albans Abbey Station in 1924 to avoid confusion.

From the mid C19 until the mid C20, the Abbey Station was a fully functioning station with two rail tracks, a ticket office, sidings, coal yard, cattle pens and goods depot. In 1951, the Hatfield line was closed to passengers, maintaining a freight operation, and the Abbey line was severely rationalised in the 1960s. Tracks were ripped up, services cut, and buildings demolished; only a single platform and track remains, the most minimal presence of a railway station. The Hat-

field line closed altogether in 1969 and the trackway was converted to a cycle path; 'The Alban Way', in the 1980s.

It was, however, the presence of the railway terminus here, that initiated the residential development of this part of St Albans. This was Victorian suburban residential development, on a separate parcel of land, then discrete from the built up area of the city, and presumably aimed at the burgeoning commuter community.



*Holywell House c.1806. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.*



*St Albans Abbey Station before rationalisation. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.*

## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Historic Development (contd.)

In the late C19, the bottom of Holywell Hill, south of the River Ver, started to become built up. The North Western Hotel, a typical Victorian railway hotel, was built on the corner of Prospect Road and Holywell Hill. A few substantial houses were also built, the most prominent of which was Ver House, built on the southern banks of the River Ver. This house, lived in by William Hurlock, a successful London tradesman and mayor of the City, was renowned for its large and extravagant gardens which contained a fine covered swimming bath with palms and marble statuary, ornate fishponds and a belfry with a fine peal of bells. The gardens extended along the River Ver, behind the rear gardens of the houses on the northern side of Prospect Road. In 1925, after William Hurlock died, Ver House became a hotel, but in 1938 the house was demolished and the large site was redeveloped to create a roller skating rink and, subsequently, a factory works and a garage/petrol station were built on the site. In 1990, the Abbey Tavern, formerly the North Western Hotel, was demolished and this site was redeveloped as offices. In 1993, a residential development of thirty-four flats, Latium Close, was built on the site of the factory and in 2002, a residential development of twelve flats, Aventine Court, was built on the site of the garage.

Prospect Road was cut in the latter half of the C19, initially as a cul-de-sac, ending at no. 52 (south side) and no. 57 (north side). Many of the original houses in Prospect Road were constructed between 1871 and 1878.

Shortly after the houses were constructed, William Longmire, a builder and sometime resident of no. 25 Prospect Road, was commissioned to extend the chapel at Lincoln's Inn and it appears that he moved and re-erected the arched chapel entrance in the rear garden of no. 25, where it stands to this day, some fifteen feet high. In the 1890s, the C13 decorated stone window frame was removed from the east end of the Presbytery of St Albans Abbey, as part of a refurbishment commissioned by Lord Grimthorpe. This was erected in the rear garden of no. 23 but this

larger, but more slender masonry has not survived intact. Having been partially demolished by a lightning strike in the 1960s, all that now remains are some ivy-covered stone stumps. These two stone artefacts, large pieces of monumental masonry, dominated the residential rear gardens for a number of decades and are a unique and strange part of the history of Pro-



*The arched entrance of Lincoln's Inn was moved to the garden of no. 25 Prospect Road by William Longmire.*



*The remains of the Abbey's C13th window frame, now in the garden of no. 23 Prospect Road.*



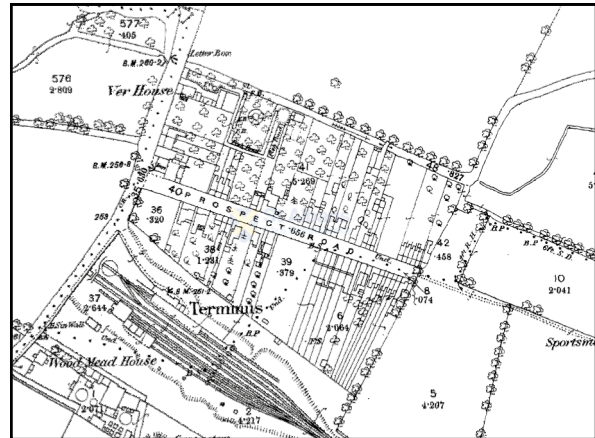
## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Historic Development (contd.)

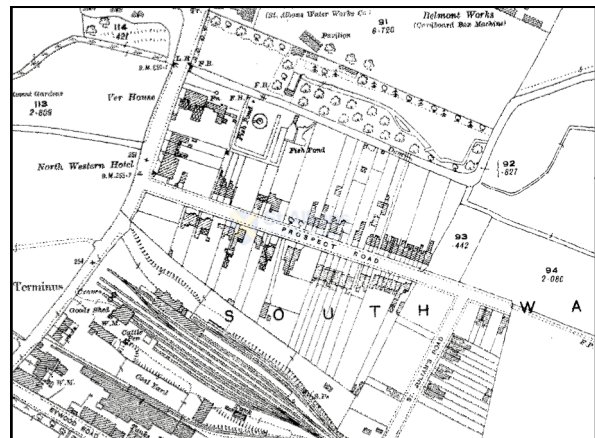
In the late C19, a large plot between nos. 14 and 24 was acquired by Thomas Mercer, who set up his Marine Chronometer factory in a workshop at the rear of the plot. At the turn of the C20, Mercer built the two large semi-detached houses, nos. 16-18, where he lived but also used as offices. By 1913, Mercer had relocated the factory to larger premises at the bottom of St Stephens Hill, but the workshop remained in commercial use until 2000, when the entire back-land plot was developed for housing. Now Ashwood Mews, Mercer's original workshop was incorporated into the scheme (nos. 6 & 7 Ashwood Mews). A similar development was undertaken in the late 1980s, when the back-land to the rear of nos. 24 to 52 was assembled and residentially developed. This 'close' is known as The Brambles.

Prospect Road was first extended in 1912 when a field at the end of the cul-de-sac was marketed for development and St Julian's Road was cut. St Julian's Road was built up in a piecemeal fashion, mainly between 1912 and 1947. The houses on the eastern corner of Prospect Road and St Julian's Road (nos. 70 - 80 Prospect Road) were built shortly after the extension of Prospect Road. The flats on the western corner of Prospect Road and St Julian's Road (nos. 54-60) were built in 1927 by The United Women's Homes Association, an early housing association, which was started after the First World War to 'provide homes at affordable rents for low paid women workers'.

Between 1928 and 1930, Prospect Road was extended to join Cottonmill Lane, and a single developer built the small estate of plain, suburban family houses which completed the road.



*The original extent of Prospect Road (1880s OS map).*



*The first extension of Prospect Road and the cutting of St Julian's Road (1920s OS map).*



*Nos. 16+18 were built and lived in by Thomas Mercer but additionally used as offices.*

## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Spatial Analysis

#### Holywell Hill

This part of Holywell Hill, sitting at the foot of the steep hill up to the city centre, has views up Holywell Hill and in particular, a good view of the Abbey tower. As Holywell Hill opens up at this point, and traffic speeds up here on its exit from the town, the wide and busy road creates an almost physical barrier between the east and west side of the street. The west side (part of Area 7b), is mainly open as part of the parkland which leads through to Westminster Lodge and Verulamium. There are particularly fine views across this parkland, giving a long open vista of grassland and trees.

The grain of development on the east side of Holywell Hill is large when compared with the surrounding residential development. The large site formerly occupied by Ver House and its gardens remained in single ownership throughout the years, allowing a large-scale redevelopment and the creation of Latium Close in the 1990s. Latium Close, a development of flats in a landscaped setting, comprises of three, three storey blocks. Although these are blocks of substantial mass, facades are broken by out-thrust gables, giving the form a vertical emphasis which references the surrounding Victorian development. The materials and detailing, particularly the brickwork detailing, are also traditional and of good quality. At the rear of this deep plot, the River Ver runs within the site and the river, together with the mature landscaping, provides a surprisingly quiet and peaceful setting for the development.

The remaining developments on Holywell Hill have a more urban character and address the street, being set back a small distance from the pavement edge behind railings. The only remnant of the era of intensive Victorian building is the substantial house at no. 105, once one of a semi-detached pair but now converted into flats, which is a good quality, red brick, well detailed house which was so typical of this area. The more recent developments, Aventine House and Thorneycroft House, are reasonably traditional in form, although their footprints are larger than the

surrounding development. Two storey with some accommodation within the roof space, they are somewhat taller than no. 105, which is set between the two, and this larger scale now predominates on this part of Holywell Hill. These buildings are built using a traditional red brick, but they lack finesse in their detailing.



*The foot of Holywell Hill from the junction with Prospect Road. At this point, the road is very wide and busy, forming something of a barrier, but great views are afforded up the hill to the Abbey tower and into the parkland on the west side of the road.*



*No. 105 is the only remaining Victorian building in this part of Holywell Hill.*



## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Spatial Analysis (contd.)

#### Prospect Road

The Victorian residential development of Prospect Road appears to have been undertaken as a number of individual developments, with little regularity of plot widths overall, although most of the larger plots and larger houses are towards Holywell Hill, and most of the small terraced cottages are at the eastern end of (what was then) the cul-de-sac. Modest villas, both semi-detached and terraced, are found throughout the road. Houses are set back from the road frontage with small gardens to the fore and, for the most part, a building line is observed, although some houses are set further back from the road. Many of the larger houses have cellars and some have small areas to the front.

The large, detached, sturdy, red brick houses are individual in their form and detail. Some are rather austere neo-classical designs, whilst others are more detailed, with decorative string courses, brick quoins, and distinctive gables, in the Queen Anne style. These houses represent solid Victorian, middle class respectability, but this is not the overwhelming character of Prospect Road, as the gracious rhythm of these houses on the street is often broken by buildings of differing scale. Some of these are smaller Victorian developments and some are smaller, 1930s infill developments, but more significantly, a redevelopment and extension of one of the original large houses in 1978, to form a block of flats, Ramryge Court, has created a development which is of too large a scale and which has created an unfortunate terracing effect on the south side of the street. Some of the other large houses have been converted to flats, but with little or no detriment to their external appearance, although their spacious garden plots are sometimes used to accommodate additional car parking.

Amongst these large family houses, the smaller artisan houses occupy smaller plots. Some of these more modest houses are good quality, neo-classical, stuccoed terraces, whilst others are brick cottages, typical of those seen throughout St Albans. Towards the end of the original cul-

de-sac, there are tightly knit terraces of workers' cottages set within narrow plots.

Within this earlier, western part of Prospect Road, a palette of traditional materials is employed and, although red-brick predominates, there are also London stock bricks, pebbledash and render used within the road. Traditional fenestration also predominates; vertically-proportioned sash windows are the norm.

This part of Prospect Road was substantially completed before 1900, save for the small amount of later infill development, mostly 1930s, which remains at odds with the prevailing character of the street.



*The smaller, terraced cottages in the street are at the eastern end of the original cul-de-sac.*



*Terraced and detached villas are mixed among other housing types throughout the road.*

## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Spatial Analysis contd.

#### Ashwood Mews

Ashwood Mews is a compact, good quality development of eight two-storey houses set, reasonably informally, in a cul-de-sac, built in 2000. The old works building from Mercer's Chronometer factory, now converted, is at the centre of the development – the gable end of the building closes the view up the close from Prospect Road. The new buildings take reference from the traditional form of this original, central building. Parking has been well thought out, so that cars do not dominate the frontage of the buildings and are not strongly apparent in the street scene. Materials and detailing are of good quality and, of particular note, is the blue brick paving which complements the landscaping.

#### The Brambles

The Brambles is similarly situated to Ashwood Mews, being a back-land cul-de-sac accessed from Prospect Road. The Brambles is a late 1980s development of eleven houses and ten flats. Houses are two-storey and of a modest scale, whilst the blocks of flats have a significant mass with a large foot print, being two and a half storey with accommodation within the large roofs facilitated by oversized dormers. Although a large garage court is attached to this development, cars do not seem to be garaged and as a result, The Brambles is quite car-dominated. Parking bays on the road frontage and on-plot parking on some frontages accentuate the problem.

#### St Julian's Road

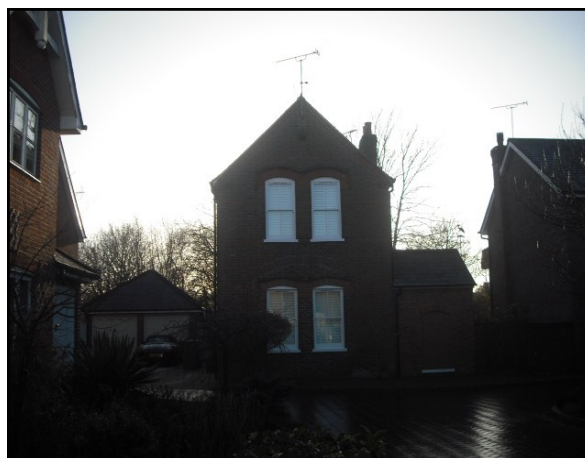
A few Edwardian houses were built shortly after St Julian's Road was cut, most obviously the houses on the east side near the junction with Prospect Road. For the most part, however, St Julian's Road was largely built up in the 1920s and 1930s and, although these are semi-detached and detached family houses of a modest scale, the overall character of the houses is rather mixed. Although mostly two storey, there are also some bungalows. A large roof extension at no. 1 has created an incongruous exception in terms of height.

Plot widths are varied, but are generally narrower on the east side of the road. The building line is observed, with houses being set back from the pavement with small front gardens. A mixed palette of traditional materials are used, red brick predominates but is often combined with pebble-dash or painted render. Many of the houses have mock Tudor gables, with half timbering.

St Julian's Road is a cul-de-sac, terminated by the Abbey train line. At the end of the road, there is some greenery on the railway bank, behind security palisade fencing. The long view through this fencing is across the railway line to Sainsbury's frontage and car park.



*The earliest development in St Julian's Road was shortly after the road was cut and is focused on the east side at the northern end of the road.*



*Nos. 6+7 Ashwood Mews, originally a workshop, was used by Thomas Mercer for his Marine Chronometer factory from late C19th until c.1913 when he moved production to the bottom of St Stephen's Hill.*



## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Public Realm

This is primarily a residential area, with little public green space. Almost all of the greenery within the area is within the front gardens of the houses. Within these gardens are some substantial mature trees which contribute greatly to the quality of the area. Any loss of these front garden areas to enable on-plot parking should be resisted.

The River Ver, to the rear of the Latium Close development and the rear of the houses in Prospect Road, makes a positive contribution to the residential amenity of the area, although, within this area, it is not within the public realm. The mature trees and the green space on the north side of the River Ver, together with the allotments, provide a separation between this area and the city centre and offer substantial screening and fine green views from the north side of Prospect Road.

In general, traffic is a problem within the area. Holywell Hill is a busy main road into the city centre. Highway paraphernalia and pedestrian barriers on Holywell Hill reinforce the barrier status of the road. Prospect Road is a popular cut through to avoid some of the city centre traffic. Traffic calming measures, width restrictions and road humps may have reduced some of the cut-through traffic. However, the car does tend to dominate this area. The density of housing ensures that parking is a significant problem.



*Greenery is contributed by mature trees in front gardens.*



*The River Ver also provides green space which contributes to the residential amenity of the area, although it is not part of the public realm of this character area.*



*Traffic calming measures in Prospect Road have reduced the use of the road as a through-route. However, the area is still dominated by cars to a large extent.*

## Area 7a: Prospect Road

### Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

#### Positive

- ✓ The good quality Victorian houses built with traditional materials and fine architectural detailing.
- ✓ The variety of housing types which gives a mixed residential area.
- ✓ Landscaping to the front garden areas.
- ✓ The long views of the parkland and trees from Holywell Hill.
- ✓ The views of the Abbey that can be seen from within the area.
- ✓ The extensive greenery and mature landscaping in views at the rear of the houses on the north side of Prospect Road.
- ✓ The River Ver at the rear of the Latium Close development and the rear of the houses on the north side of Prospect Road.



*Prospect Road has a variety of housing types, many of which are good quality Victorian houses in traditional materials with fine architectural detailing.*

#### Neutral

- Recent, large scale development on Holywell Hill, which changes the scale of this part of the area and dominates the residual Victorian development.

#### Negative

- ✗ The physical barrier between this area and the parkland caused by traffic and highway paraphernalia on Holywell Hill.
- ✗ Traffic using Prospect Road as a cut through.
- ✗ Parked cars.
- ✗ Loss of front garden areas to on-plot parking.
- ✗ The terracing effect and inappropriate scale of the Ramryge Court development.
- ✗ Some small pockets of development and individual infill developments which are not in keeping with the prevailing Victorian character of Prospect Road.
- ✗ The palisade railway fencing at the end of St Julian's Road, which is only partially screened by planting.
- ✗ Views from the area to Sainsbury's car park.

#### Scope for Change

- Improvements to the landscaping on the railway bank.
- Highways improvements to reduce the barrier effect of Holywell Hill and to give greater permeability between this area, the park and Westminster Lodge.