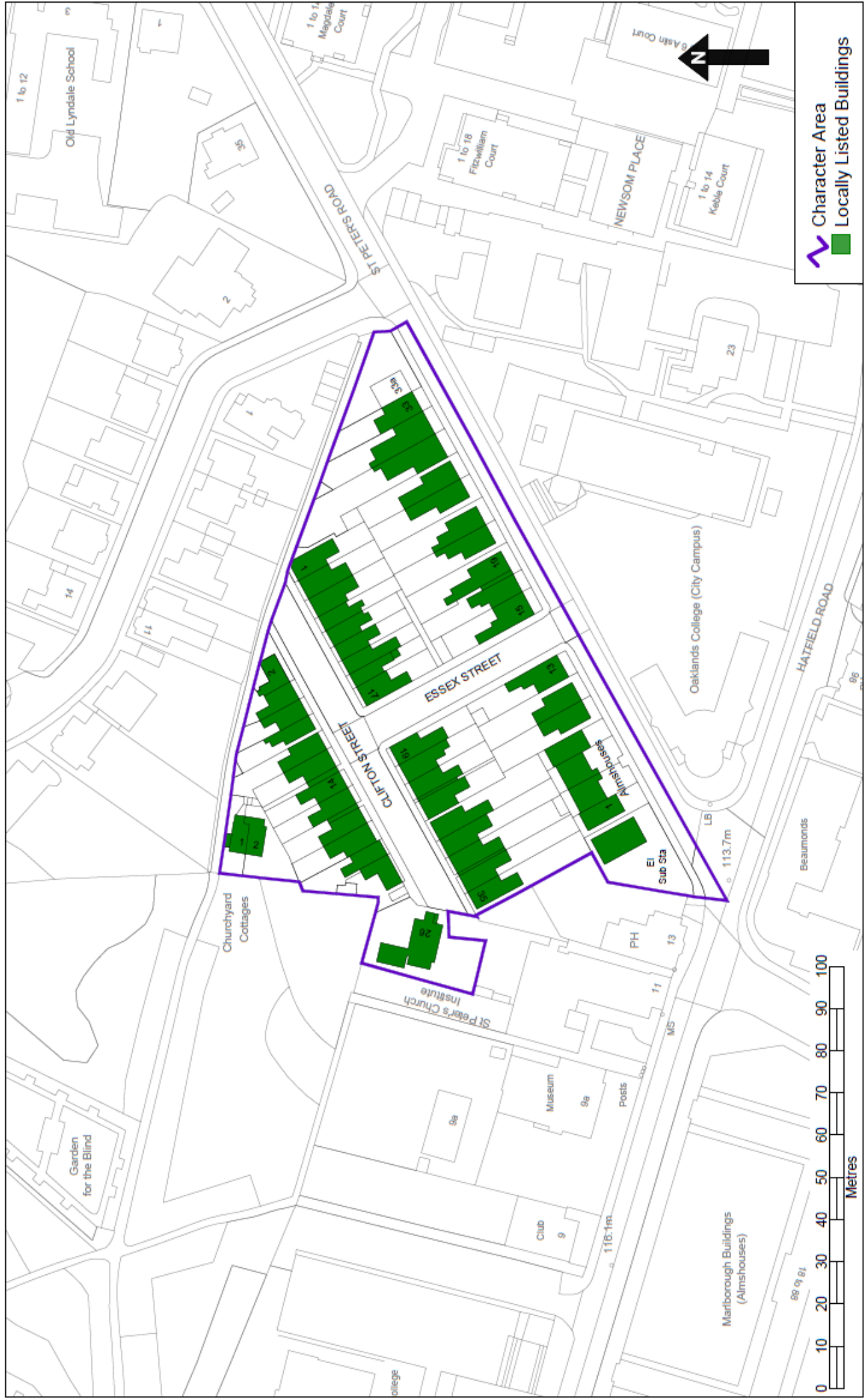


***Character Area 7g***  
***Essex Street/ Clifton Street***







Character Area  
Locally Listed Buildings

# AREA 7G: ESSEX STREET / CLIFTON STREET



## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

*Clifton Street, Essex Street, St Peter's Road (part)*

### Scheduled Monuments

None.

### Listed Buildings

None.

### Locally Listed Buildings

*Clifton Street*

Odds: 1-35 (incl).

Evens: 2-24 (incl), 26.

St Peter's Cottages 1 and 2.

*St Peter's Road*

Electricity sub station (corner of Hatfield Road).

Odds: 1-33 (incl), 35.



*Nos. 9-33 St Peter's Road (locally listed),*



*Nos. 1-7 St Peter's Road (locally listed).*



*Nos. 8-24 Clifton Street (locally listed).*



*Nos. 11-15 Clifton Street (locally listed).*



*St Peter's Church Cottages (locally listed).*



## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### Character Summary

This character area is a small unexpected pocket of tightly knit, urban, Victorian residential development. It is bordered by Area 4b, the office area of the City; Areas 7e and 7f, which are the more spacious late Victorian and Edwardian suburbs, and Area 3, St Peter's Church and churchyard. This character area is similar in layout, age and residential function to Boundary Road (Character Area 7h) further north and Liverpool Road to the south. The triangular shape and T-shaped street layout of this area consists of small scale terraces and larger semi-detached villas, all built around the

same time. There are a few charming standalone buildings, such as the almshouses and sub station which are tucked away within this area and which also serve to distinguish it from the surrounding areas. St Peter's Church is key to this area's identity, not only in the present day contribution the churchyard makes to the peaceful ambience of Clifton Street, but because historically the Church funded the almshouses on the edge of the churchyard and those on the corner of Hatfield Road and St Peter's Road.



*This area (on the left side of the above picture) is very urban in nature but is surprisingly peaceful given its proximity to the office core (Area 4b) from which this photo is taken.*



*The houses in this area are very uniform and well-detailed.*



*St Peter's Church has an important influence on the area, with links to St Peter's Church Cottages and the almshouses.*

## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### History and Buildings

The western boundary of the character area follows the line of the medieval borough boundary, Tonman's Ditch. Before development the area was open land in agricultural use. However, the majority of the current visible historic evidence comprises the Victorian dwellings which occupy the area. The interesting shape of the area developed when St Peter's Road was cut in circa 1870 to accommodate the building of the almshouses at the southern end of the road, on the junction of Hatfield Road and the new St Peter's Road and diagonally split a regularly shaped plot of land. The almshouses were built on land owned by a previous vicar of St Peter's Church, the Reverend Dunning, which adjoined the eastern end of the churchyard. The later positioning of Clifton Street and Essex Street orientated behind St Peter's Road made the most of the triangular shape, whereas the pre-existence of villas on Hatfield Road, set at right angles to the road, prohibited this on the eastern side of the road.

#### St Peter's Road

St Peter's Road is the principal road of this area and was built up in 1880-90. The current layout was in evidence in the early 1900s (apart from no. 33a which dates from 2001). Most of the historic buildings are semi detached villas, with the spaces, for example at the corner of junctions, being filled in with single dwellings. Opposite, the Oaklands College site dominates. Although some of the villas have suffered with minor alterations, mainly painting, rendering and replacement of windows, it is clear even today that they date from the same period. All were originally red brick, with shallow slate roofs and of two storeys with a basement level and therefore the front doors are approached by a small set of steps. All of the buildings display original bay windows with keystone features, many also with the original two over two sash windows, which link to the curved arches above the doorways. However, no. 19's bay window has been extended to the first floor in 1922 and, although many of the bays display the original brick detailed corbelling, some have been re-roofed and this detail has been lost. Nos. 29 and 31 are the slight exception to this pattern because, whilst

they use the same materials and date from approximately the same time, they have square arches above the doors and double height bay windows, with a gabled tile hung end facing on to the street. It looks very much like this building has jointly been altered as the gables and bay window do not sit well together and the building is at the same height and proportions to the rest of the street. Many of the front gardens have been paved over, but the fine curved walls which separate each pair of dwellings at the entrance point are in the most part retained, as are many of the traditional attractive tiled pathways. Some of the houses have railings and others low brick walls but, as all of the boundary treatments are low, there is some uniformity in the street scene, which is surprising given that the plots had different owners and therefore were constructed individually at different times rather than speculatively like Clifton Street.

The almshouses at the southern end of the street are the pleasant exception to this uniformity of street scene. They pre date the dwellings described above, dating from circa 1870. It is



*The houses in St Peter's Road are largely unaltered.*



## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### History and Buildings contd.

believed that they were built as two joined sets of two almshouses; one of which, known as the Dudding Almshouses, was built by the Reverend Horatio Nelson Dudding, formerly vicar of St. Peter's, at his own cost, adjoining the Bennett Almshouses<sup>1</sup>. They form a very quaint and pleasant introduction to the street and relate well to the rest of the buildings in scale and materials. Of an H-shape plan, the four almshouses are, like the terraces, also constructed of red brick but with a clay tiled roof with two sets of fine brick chimneys. It is a tall one storey building with a narrow projecting pointed gable at either end emphasising this fact, on each gable is a bay window which relates to the rest of the street. A central gabled porch links to these two features and is reminiscent of a church entrance. Along with the crucifixes in brick above both bay windows and atop the porch, it is clear St Peter's Church funded the accommodation. The entrance doors are subtly placed at the side of the projecting gables and the intricately laced windows add to the quaintness of the building. They are diminutive in the street scene being set further back from the road behind a low brick wall with a larger garden space in front than the terraces. These front gardens have, like the terraces, unfortunately been paved over, although in the spring and summer plants counteract this effect. In style and particularly details, this building links with St Peter's Cottages, and both are hidden gems within the conservation area.

Further to the south, the character area's border with Area 4b, the office core of the city centre, is marked by the electricity sub station on the corner of Hatfield Road and St Peter's Road. The sub station, dating from 1931, is an attractive red brick building with fine brick detailing. A one and a half storey building, it has an interesting half hipped roof which faces onto St Peter's Street, and in both its scale and orientation it relates well to the almshouses next door. It is a corner site, marked by a curved brick wall; the front corner of the site is empty which allows a break in the street scene next to the public house (see Character Area 4b). The opposite corner is matched by prominent buildings on the former

Oaklands College site (see Character Area 7f) and, although different in age and style from the sub-station, they also serve to mark the corner between the two roads, Hatfield Road and St Peter's Road.



*The almshouses are linked to St Peter's Church through their original patron and through architectural details, such as the porch and the brick crosses on the projecting gables and atop the porch.*



*Built in 1931, the electricity sub-station is an interesting building with a half hipped roof and red brick detailing.*

<sup>1</sup> From: 'Parishes: St Peter's', A History of the County of Hertford: volume 2 (1908), pp. 412-424. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43302> Date accessed: 28 July 2010.

## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### History and Buildings contd.

#### Essex Street

Essex Street is situated about half way along the section of St Peter's Road included in this character area. Clifton Street is situated at right angles at the end of Essex Street, and therefore the two roads form a T-shape. Both streets were cut at the same time, in circa 1885, and built upon in the late 1880s. Essex Street purely functions as access to Clifton Street, and along this street the back and side elevations of the houses

along St Peter's Road and Clifton Street can be seen along with access to the gardens of the surrounding properties. There is a mixture of brick walls, some of them well finished, and timber fences facing on to the street. The street is also used for parking either side of the road; about half way along there are two garages, one either side of the road. Large buildings on the former Oaklands College site dominate views south eastwards.



*Essex Street solely gives access to Clifton Street and the gardens of properties on St Peter's Road and Clifton Street.*

## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### History and Buildings contd.

#### Clifton Street

Clifton Street is similar to Essex Street in that there are parked cars either side of the road. Due to the attempt to impose a regular street plan on a triangular site, some of the gardens are very small and awkwardly shaped at the edge of the area. The houses here are similar in age and materials to those on St Peter's Road, apart from a small eastern group which were built later and not in evidence by 1920. Today there is less uniformity about the group, not because of the two periods of development, but firstly because some appear to be constructed of a browner brick and also because they have suffered more with minor alterations, for example there is a great mixture of front boundary treatments as well as a variety of painting, rendering and pebble dashing; there have also been some unusual additions, for example the shop frontage to no. 17. They are of a smaller scale and more tightly packed than the buildings on St Peter's Road, perhaps because they were built speculatively in groups of between two and four. The difference in scale is shown by the original applications for the buildings on St Peter's Road which are described as villas, whereas those on Clifton Street are described as houses. Instead of being paired, the houses on Clifton Street are terraced and, although some have light wells, the basement level does not appear as obvious. Like those buildings on St Peter's Road, bay windows are features of the front facades on all but nos. 1-17 (odds) which have flat frontages. Nos. 11-17 'Clifton Cottages' are broken up with a fine terracotta band course of a diamond pattern and brighter red bricks around the doors and windows, which creates a lively frontage. On the north side, each end of the street has a similar double-fronted house with a double bay and porch detail. At the northern end of the road, the rear elevations of Hall Place Gardens can be seen. The footpath which runs between St Peter's Churchyard and Clifton Street and behind Hall Place Gardens can be seen from within Clifton Street. Interestingly, by having its door way on the corner, the design of no. 1 Clifton Street addresses this footpath.

At the southern end of the street is no. 26. Since the early 1900s a memorial hall has been in this location, although not in its current form until later in the century. It is a modest, single storey, redbrick building and has been extended on both sides but leaving the central gabled form with an arched feature dominant. The building is set back slightly from Clifton Street at an angled orientation and with a small area of car parking and landscaping in front, nevertheless it does partly close the vista along Clifton Street together with a large tree to the south and the taller former museum behind (Area 4b).



*There have been some unusual additions to houses in Clifton Street, for example the shopfront inserted into the façade of no. 17.*



*There has been a memorial hall on the site of no. 26 Clifton Street since the early 1900s, although the current hall dates from later in the century.*



## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

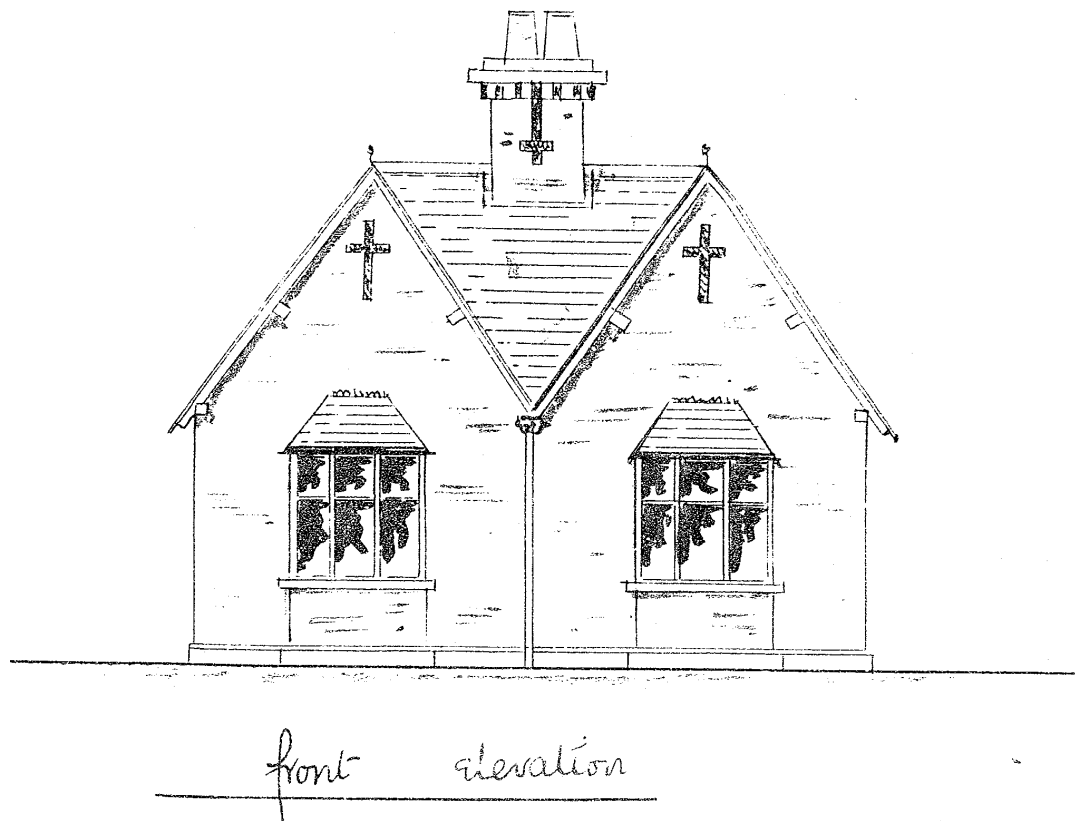
### History and Buildings contd.

#### St Peter's Church Cottages

The two church cottages are located at the rear of Clifton Street, right on the edge of the church yard, accessed only along the footpath which runs from St Peter's Road along the north edge of the character area to the churchyard. They date from 1895 and were originally built as St Peter's Almshouses, personally funded by the Reverend Horatio Nelson Dudding, formerly vicar of St Peter's, who also funded an infant school in Bernard Street and the almshouses on St Peter's Road<sup>2</sup>. They are a small attached pair of cottages with a central chimney stack and related in style to the almshouses on St Peter's Road having the same recessed brick formed crucifix and bay windows, and of similar proportions. The churchyard to the west places them in an isolated and peaceful setting and, although separated from it by a close boarded fence, their charming twin gables with elaborate bargeboards and red tiled roofs are visible from the churchyard and they are seen at close quarters from the footpath.



*St Peter's Church Cottages as seen from the churchyard.*



*The original front elevation of St Peter's Church Cottages. The crucifix decoration and bay windows relate to the almshouses.*

<sup>2</sup> From: 'Parishes: St Peter's', A History of the County of Hertford: volume 2 (1908), pp. 412-424. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43302>. Date accessed: 28 July 2010.

## Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street

### Public Realm

This area is devoid of any specific landscaped areas. However, the spaces, some of them green, which border the area contribute to this character area and prevent it feeling too hemmed in, despite its proximity to the city centre.

On St Peter's Road, this is achieved with the openness of the former Oaklands College site, situated in Character Area 7f, where the taller buildings are set back from the road. This openness is an interesting contrast to the houses opposite and allows a greater appreciation of these buildings. The few trees which border the car park also contribute positively to the character of the area. However, as St Peter's Road connects to the north east of the city, it is used as a rat run to bypass the Harpenden Road. It is therefore busy with traffic, which along with the parked cars and the larger buildings on the former Oaklands College site create a more urban character when compared to the rest of the character area.

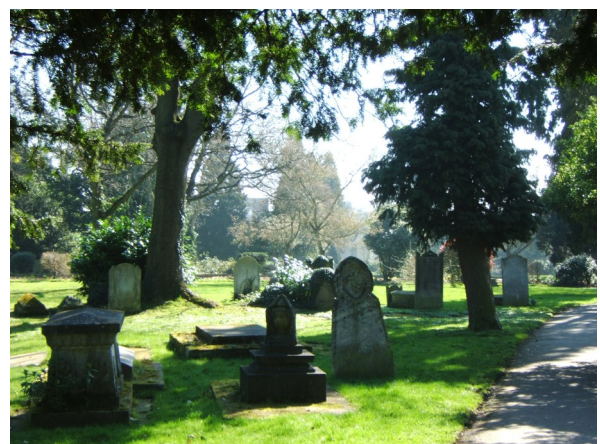
In contrast, Clifton Street and Essex Street are quieter in character and have a more peaceful ambience, similar in some ways to Orchard Street in Character Area 2b. This is achieved through the proximity of St Peter's Churchyard which allows a sense of peace to permeate the area, even though Clifton Street's buildings are tightly packed. The churchyard also contributes to the setting of St Peter's Cottages, hidden treasures, isolated in spite of their city centre location. The footpath that joins St Peter's Road, Clifton Street and the churchyard, and runs along the rear of Hall Place Gardens is also quiet and benefits from landscaping from surrounding gardens. At the western end of Clifton Street, a large tree dominates and serves to screen the church institute building behind.

Paving and street furniture in this area is generally good. In Essex Street and Clifton Street and along the footpath, traditional blue pavements are used, and on St Peter's Road larger slabs with a blue brick edging is in evidence. Several traditional historic lampposts survive on

Essex Street and Clifton Street, whereas on St Peter's Road, apart from one, modern replacements further contribute to urbanising this road. Only a few traffic signs are in evidence, which is a positive attribute to this area. However, the parked cars on either side of Essex Street and Clifton Street do detract from the area.



*The footpath from the churchyard to St Peter's Road.*



*The churchyard at St Peter's contributes to Clifton Street and Essex Street's quiet character despite being outside the character area.*



## **Area 7g: Essex Street/ Clifton Street**

### **Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change**

#### **Positive**

- ✓ The fine and unusual buildings in this character area, particularly St Peter's Cottages, the villas on St Peter's Road, Clifton Cottages, the almshouses and the sub station. Some of which are somewhat hidden treasures.
- ✓ The space around former Oaklands College site on the opposite side of St Peter's Road which allows the buildings along St Peter's Road to be appreciated (see Character Area 7f).
- ✓ The general unity of the houses on St Peter's Road, including the front boundary treatments.
- ✓ The general unity of the houses on Clifton Street, including, with few exceptions, the front boundary treatments. This unity includes the clear front slate roofscape (only one roof has a rooflight), although some have replacement profiled roof tiles.
- ✓ The footpath linking St Peter's Road, Clifton Street and St Peter's Churchyard, which leads on to the city centre via the north end of St Peter's Street and which is a well-used and pleasant alternative to busy Hatfield Road.
- ✓ The traditional pavings in the whole of this area.
- ✓ Trees in the main from the surrounding areas, although there are some large trees within gardens.
- ✓ Rear elevations of nos. 2-24 Clifton Street visible from the churchyard are for the most part traditional and well-ordered.

#### **Neutral**

- Essex Street and the northern end of Clifton Street, where the backs of properties can be seen. Although they present a mixed view, it does create a sense of peace by creating a gap between the streets, where otherwise there would be more development.

#### **Negative**

- ✗ Some alterations to the properties on Clifton Street which have affected the unity along this street.
- ✗ The parked cars, particularly on Clifton Street and Essex Street.
- ✗ The lack of landscaping, due to the small front garden size, although the trees from gardens/the churchyard, and the large trees near the church institute and along the frontage of the former Oaklands site do contribute.
- ✗ A pair of standard black and white painted tubular steel bollards sited at the junction of the footpath with Clifton Street would benefit from replacement with a more sympathetic style of bollard.

#### **Scope for Change**

- The blue brick paving should be retained.
- Small changes to properties can cumulatively negatively affect the uniformity and therefore the character of the buildings and the area.
- Re-introducing uniform frontage walls and fences would improve unity.
- Re-instating traditional roof materials would improve unity.

