Launceston Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

2006
1.1 Introduction

The town of Launceston straddles the valley of the River Kensey in a strategic location close to the River Tamar that marks the border with Devon. Although the main A30 route now bypasses the town, Launceston remains an important ‘gateway’ settlement to Cornwall. The economic base of the town is varied and it serves a considerable rural hinterland. The problems the farming community have faced in recent years and changes in the retail environment have affected the historic centre of Launceston in many ways, notably the loss of its traditional market and some traditional retail outlets.

Launceston is a town of great individual character, derived from a rich and interesting history that has produced an eclectic collection of buildings and a distinctive settlement pattern which is etched onto a dramatic landscape setting. From various vantage points in the town centre there are fine views to the east, north and west. Conversely, the views from outside looking in are equally fine, with the distinctive silhouette of the castle and the tumbling rooftops around it a signature of the place.

The purpose of this document is to summarise the elements that combine to form the special character of the town and to suggest amendments that may be necessary to the boundaries of the present Conservation Areas. It is intended to complement the detailed report produced by the Historic Environment Service of Cornwall County Council as part of the Cornwall and Scilly Urban Survey (CSUS), so duplication is avoided where possible.

More detailed analysis, recommendations and guidance will be contained in a Conservation Area Management Plan to supplement this document.

1.2 Historical background

An excellent and much more detailed historical review can be found in the CSUS study, with maps illustrating the historic development of the town, (figs 3,4 & 5), so this section only offers a very brief summary.

Although there was Bronze Age settlement in the vicinity and possibly an Iron Age fort, the most tangible site of earliest development in Launceston was at St Stephens on the northern side of the Kensey. In Saxon times a market was held here and after the Norman Conquest a priory was founded that later moved to St Thomas.

This early medieval phase saw the development of two further distinct settlements, Newport at the valley bottom, (within the parish of St Stephen’s) and Dunheved, which grew in the vicinity of the castle. The castle appears to have been laid out from the start to accommodate both economic and defensive roles. The market was moved to Dunheved and borough status was soon achieved. During the 13th century Earl Richard set about re-modelling the castle and its surroundings according to his own designs. His establishment of the walled and gated town may still be traced in the street pattern today and subsequent developments have all built on, or added to, this early foundation. The establishment of the assizes in Launceston formed part of its economic, social and political base for
centuries. It meant that members of the legal profession and others needed accommodation, as did those who were accused and sentenced to be held in the notorious gaol set within the castle.

The closure of the priory at the dissolution marked the start of another phase of renewal and development in Launceston. This ended with the Civil War which saw the town change hands several times and impacted on both the social and physical fabric of the place.

Through the 17th and 18th centuries Launceston saw a further phase of restoration and development. Fine houses and non-conformist chapels sprang up, but there remained poorer housing and both the prison and workhouse were considered dire. A new bridge was erected at St Thomas and this assisted trade and industry. Many new mills and workshops were built in the later 18th and early 19th centuries.

Loss of the assizes in 1838 was a major blow to the status of the town, as well as the local economy, and within two years the Guildhall and County prison were demolished. This seems to have been a spur to action as the Higher and Lower markets were soon built and then the castle grounds opened as a public pleasure garden. The arrival of the railway in 1865 encouraged a new wave of visitors, some of whom chose to stay and live in a new wave of speculative housing. Many of the distinctive polychromatic Victorian buildings in the town were erected in the decade after the arrival of the railway.

The latter part of the 20th century was less kind to Launceston – poorly designed buildings have detracted from the quality of the old town and in the valley below a collection of utilitarian structures have lessened the landscape setting.

1.3 Conservation Areas and other designations

There are presently three separate Conservation Areas in Launceston; St Stephens, Kensey Valley and the commercial centre. The boundaries are quite tightly drawn and exclude a number of later developments and open spaces that contribute to the character of the settlement. Trees add considerably to the special character of the Launceston Conservation Areas; some are protected by Tree Preservation Orders but others cannot be felled, topped or lopped without notification to the Local Authority.

There are 4 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and a large number of listed buildings in Launceston, including 7 at Grade I and 13 at Grade II* over 200 Grade II.

These are shown on Maps 1a,b,c.

1.4 Architectural character and materials

Such is the variety of building types and architectural styles in Launceston that it really encapsulates the character of much of Cornwall. Cottages, outbuildings, industrial sites and villa’s are all found as well as quite grand civic and commercial buildings. As part of the analysis of each of the Character Areas there is an Architectural Character Analysis that identifies whether buildings make a key, positive or neutral/negative contribution to the townscape.

The topography of Launceston means that the roofscape is of huge importance in many views. Fortunately a high percentage of original Delabole rag and scantle slate roofs survive; but a lot are under threat from nail-rot and replacement with inferior...
alternatives is a constant threat, even though the slates themselves are often capable of re-use. There are some fine examples of local roofing with large slates to eaves and verges and random widths and diminishing courses up to the ridge. Clay ridges, (sometimes decorated), slated verges and mitred hips are the most typical roofing details; though variety is seen in the form of lead roll, clay tile hips and occasional decorative verges.

Eaves details range from simple and functional with a minimal overhang, in the vernacular tradition, to very decorative architectural statements. Half-round or ogee profile cast iron gutters remain on a lot of buildings, but many have been replaced with inferior PVCu, often in a different colour and profile. Dormers are rare and where they have been introduced it has often been detrimental to the roofscape. Rooflights are increasingly common and are harmful in some situations, especially when they diminish the harmony of a group roofscape or terrace.

Chimneys are a crucial component of the delightfully varied roofscape within Launceston and invariably add richness to a great many views. They often indicate the age and status of a building and allow a degree of interpretation to the interested viewer. Stone and brick are most commonly used for chimneys, sometimes slate hung or rendered, and a variety of pots are found. A locally distinctive alternative chimney pot detail is of slates fixed into rectangular or ridged forms.
common feature. The majority of principal elevations are rendered but exposed stone is also much in evidence. The region is one of great geological variety and several volcanic stones are used, notably Polyphant which features on some of the polychromatic buildings in the town centre. These volcanic stones were the material of choice for dressed work on the castle and other medieval buildings.

Brick is an occasional material that is used to good effect on Castle Street, though it is not characteristic of the town in general. Brick detailing, most commonly buff but occasionally red, is quite common on stone 19th century buildings in the form of lintels and window surrounds especially. Buff brick is a material that arrived with the railway and was adopted on working buildings as well as lower status housing. Chimneys built or replaced from the 18th century onwards are commonly red brick.

Timber framed buildings of the 16th and 17th centuries are seen in the town centre and patches are found on a few buildings. Timber frame is usually slate-hung, though slate hanging is also found on stone buildings, especially on return elevations and at high levels where maintenance was a problem. There is some weatherboarding, usually on workshops and other utilitarian structures; though a notable exception is found on Western Road.

[fig 5 : Weatherboarding on a principal elevation on Western road]

Cob is visible occasionally and may well form part of the unseen fabric of other buildings.

[fig 6 : Cob at Hillside Farm, St Stephen's]

Whilst a lot of traditional timber joinery remains in the form of shopfronts, windows, doors and eaves details, such features are under continual threat. Timber is replaced with PVCu or, just as harmful, it is replaced with timber in a completely different design and finish.
The result is a loss of harmony to some groups of buildings so that the sum is no longer greater than that of the constituent parts.

Enclosure is usually formed using rubble stone in a variety of heights and forms depending on age, location and purpose.

There are substantial dry stone banks formed in the Cornish way with vertical, horizontal and chevron patterns and the occasional oddity such as slate slabs on St Stephen’s Hill.
Railings were once more of a feature of the town, but much has been lost completely or replaced with less satisfying alternatives. Brick is rarely used, with the very notable exception of the grand houses and garden walls on Castle Street.

![Fig 12: Brick wall and cobbling on Castle Street](image1)

The historic granite slab paving in the town centre is one of the outstanding and distinctive character features of the place.

![Fig 12a: brick wall detail at Eagle House Hotel](image2)

The variation of pavement widths is an integral part of the character; whilst that can be a problem for some users in wheelchairs or with prams, great caution will be needed if practical improvements are to fit into the strong and established historic character. There are many locations where it is the absence of pavements that is distinctive and these locations are vulnerable to the arbitrary introduction of paving. Elsewhere there are significant survivals of cobbles and some granite kerbs, but for the most part the rest of the town is dominated by tarmac and concrete.

**1.5 Area of Archaeological Potential**

The CSUS study identifies specific sites of particular potential (figs 6.1 & 6.2) but these are indicative and the whole historic town has considerable potential. For this reason it is proposed that the Conservation Area boundary be taken to represent the Area of Archaeological Potential. There is a strong case for this to extend onto Windmill Hill but more evaluation is needed to justify this.

Launceston is a town with great archaeological potential and further evaluation and investigation is essential when sites become available through development proposals or other initiatives. Current and former building plots may reveal the extent
and function of lost buildings, whilst burgage plot gardens may reveal evidence of historic living standards in the form of middens.

It is, therefore, vital that a precautionary approach is taken and that all sites within the Conservation Area are fully evaluated at an early stage of any development proposal. The guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG 16 needs to be fully incorporated into the planning process to ensure that valuable insights into the history of the town are not missed.

### 1.6 Trees

Trees add considerably to the quality and character of the Conservation Areas and the immediate setting. Major groups of trees at Castle Green, on the eastern slopes below Dockacre Road and in the Kensey Valley are the most significant wooded areas. Clusters of trees and individual specimens in the gardens of Newport and St Stephen's give a green element to the visual character of the town on the northern side of the Kensey and lead the eye up to the tree-framed church tower.

Trees already subject to Tree Preservation Orders are identified on Maps 1a,b,c, but all trees, (with a few exceptions), are protected by Conservation Area designation insofar as the District Council must be notified prior to tree works being undertaken.

More detailed guidance is contained in the Conservation Area Management Plan, along with advice on the need for Tree Reports where proposed developments may impact on the health or positive aesthetic value of trees.
2.0 Character areas

See maps 2a,b,c

For the sake of consistency this Appraisal is closely based on the Character Areas defined by the CSUS study. Each character area has a distinct historical relevance to the town as a whole and the subdivision allows more detailed analysis. The areas are as follows:-

2.1 Commercial core (Dunheved)
2.2 St Stephen’s
2.3 Newport
2.4 St Thomas / Kensey Valley
2.5 Southern expansion
2.6 Landscape setting

2.1 Commercial core (Dunheved)

2.1.1 Character summary

The earliest settlement may have been an Iron Age fort on Windmill Hill, though firm evidence is absent. The true establishment of the settlement that became the commercial centre of Launceston happened with the Norman Conquest. The first castle was probably built shortly after the Conquest, (maybe in 1067), with clear military objectives, though there were other buildings within the bailey. By Domesday, however, St Stephen’s market had been moved to Dunheved, (the ancient name for the heart of Launceston). It appears that this was intended from the start as the castle bailey was laid out so as to leave a flat area for commercial development and the market. Whilst the market flourished it seems that development was limited until the 13th century when Earl Richard set about his re-modelling with a purpose.

The castle had been sited to command views of the Kensey valley down to the crossing point of the Tamar. Earl Richard was clearly equally concerned with how impressive his fortress appeared from those locations and his ostentatious vision remains the dominant skyline feature of the town. He built the high tower within the shell keep, where he could entertain in comfort and impress guests with the fantastic view.

He also added to the fortifications of the castle and laid out a defensive town wall, the line of which is largely preserved in the development plan of the town to this day. Fragments of the wall remain but the most impressive feature of this outer line of defence is the South Gate – a very special survival. Although the South Gate was the grandest gateway, the West Gate was the one that was used mostly on a day-to-day basis.

The street layout that we see today was pretty much in place by the early 14th century, at which time the population warranted the erection of a parish church. Many of the building plots were also established by this time and before much longer the walled town was crammed with buildings. This demand for space meant that the height and density of development was distinctly different in the commercial core. Coupled with the narrow medieval streets it was the economic success of Launceston that created the character seen today.

The growth of the economic base of Launceston was secured by the substantial rural hinterland that was drawn to the
market and also the assizes that were held here. The town offered a wide range of products and services to meet the needs of the farming community; whilst the travelling legal circus that was the assizes bought trade and cultural influences that would otherwise have passed the town by.

The Civil War was traumatic for the people of Launceston but the town regained its confidence and by the early 18th century some truly fine houses were being built. Shops, inns, hotels, chapels, workshops and homes of every status were built in the 18th and 19th centuries and the town spilled beyond the walls - down St Thomas Hill and along Western Road for example.

After the loss of the assizes in 1838 the town made a conscious effort to boost alternative income streams by replacing the old Guildhall with a new market building, (replaced by the war memorial in 1919), and an additional market house near the church. This civic investment was supplemented by private investment – many buildings were replaced or dramatically re-modelled to reflect the commercial requirements of the time. The result was the eclectic architectural pot-pourri that is the central shopping area today.

Loss of the assizes and closure of the prison left the castle without much purpose and it was neglected until the grounds were landscaped by the Duke of Northumberland in the mid 19th century. The Castle Green was opened to the public for leisure and the transformation of the castle from impregnable fortress to romantic ruin was complete.

2.1.2 Townscape Analysis

The densely developed historic core has narrow streets lined with burgage plots occupied by a varied selection of buildings from the 16th to the 20th centuries that may be 2, 3 or 3.5 storeys. These create enclosed spaces that are often intimate and fine views or glimpses of focal buildings or countryside are a feature. The major open spaces each have a very distinct character and function which adds to the richness and diversity of the place. Streets and spaces are linked and united by the wonderful granite slab pavements that are so distinctive of Launceston. Whilst there are some fine historic shopfronts there are some very poor examples that detract from the character of individual buildings and the wider townscape.

2.1.2a Castle and Castle Green

Clearly the castle is the focal point of the town and its dominance of the skyline is such that the historic significance of the site is readily apparent. It is also a significant tourist attraction that has perhaps not yet achieved its full potential. Whilst it is understandable that a charge is levied for visitors to the castle itself, this does raise a few issues. Firstly it necessitates the utilitarian chain link fence to prevent unauthorised access and secondly it means that most local people hardly ever get to go inside the signature building of the town.

For those who do make it to the top of Earl Richard’s tower there is an impressive panorama to enjoy.

From here it is apparent just how important the roofscape of Launceston is and the quality of the landscape setting. The most eye-catching focal point is the tower of St Stephen’s, nestled amongst mature trees. The backdrop of the golf course could detract from the setting of the tower but fortunately there are no visible sand bunkers to attract the eye. Occasional aberrations do stand out in this elevated view; one such is the rear elevation of the flats on The Dockey whose long balconies and railings are rather alien in form and scale to the surrounding character.
Castle Green is well used for informal relaxation and occasional events. The character of the space is very strong indeed; with the castle towering above the trees that punctuate the archaeology and remains within the bailey. Then there are the views of the deer park and countryside to the west and St Stephen’s to the northwest. The Green is a major asset and a crucial public space for residents and visitors; unfortunately the physical and visual links to the market square are lacking in both legibility and aesthetic charm.

2.1.2b Western Road (east end)

The area outside the castle entrance is probably the most hostile pedestrian environment in the whole town. Where formerly there was a fountain, a huge area is now given over to the traffic junction and visitors are surely too concerned with self-preservation to wonder what else the town centre has to offer.

2.1.2c Castle Dyke

This is an apparently unglamorous back lane skirting the outside of the bailey wall and servicing the rears of the properties on High Street and Castle Street. It is, however, a most rewarding route for the pedestrian as it offers dizzying views up to the castle keep and also some interesting burgage plot developments. These include stores, warehouses and the former ginger beer factory with its quaint gable motif.

The three alleyways at the northern end of Castle Dyke, (Sanford Timewells Lane and those either side of the Methodist church and hall), each have their own character and deserve to be cherished and used more than they appear to be.
2.1.2d The Dockey

Before the creation of Western Road, The Dockey was the link between Westgate Street and the castle entrance. This important historic street is now dominated on the east side by a large block of flats and on the west by the controversial, (but heavily camouflaged), car park.

Looking down The Dockey a delightful view of the adjacent countryside may still be enjoyed but the street has been utterly stripped of historic meaning. The Guildhall has a robust character but, like the Conservative Club, addresses Western Road rather than The Dockey.

2.1.2e Westgate Street (east end)

This historic thoroughfare was the main entrance to the Market Square as the Westgate was the principal day-to-day route into the walled town. Whilst the buildings preserve the burgage plot layout, the architecture is quite mixed, but the less attractive buildings are not prominent. Buildings of the early 19th century are set back on the south side compared to the older ones in what appears to be an attempt at road widening. In compensation for this loss of footprint these buildings nearly all have oriel windows. The NatWest bank complex is another fine example of mid Victorian design and craftsmanship and it has tremendous presence in this narrow street.

Looking south from the Square, Westgate Street is nicely framed by number 1 and 19 Broad Street; the modern carriageway paving is poor but thankfully limited in extent. The locally distinctive granite slab pavements continue and there are granite gulleys as along High Street. The entrance to the White Hart Arcade could be more eye-catching but this little covered area offers variety to the local shopping experience and a useful link through to Madford Lane.
The view south along the street is closed by the Westgate Inn, but as it is angled there is the suggestion that this is a junction that leads somewhere, as indeed it does. Buildings clamber up the hill beyond and the view is completed by a green backdrop on the skyline. Looking back the other way, the church tower peeps over the rooftops of High Street.

[fig 21 : Looking north along Westgate Street]

2.1.2f Market Square

The markets were an essential element of the medieval plan and the Market Square is a physical reminder of that association. At present it has more of the character of a car park than a bustling commercial public space. The sheer volume of parked cars and those attempting to park, greatly diminishes the character of the space and discourages enjoyment of it. Add to this large delivery vehicles, as well as the occasional snarl-up that brings the centre to gridlock, and the overall recipe is unpalatable. Traffic prevents anything much happening in this central area and that compounds the problems.

[fig 22 : The Market Square is utterly dominated by car parking and traffic]

On the positive side this is a fantastic space surrounded by an eclectic collection of architectural styles. The streets leading away from the Square should inspire an inquisitive visitor and views are attractively closed. The war memorial is a fine focal point but is subsumed by vehicles most of the time. It deserves to be seen at the centre of a pedestrian space.

Looking from the southern side of the Square the castle rises over the rooftops to form a dramatic and distinctive backdrop. At the eastern end of the Square, Broad Street narrows and frames the ornate corner building, I Southgate Street. The modern Market Court development beyond is less satisfying in both composition and materials. Over the rooftops is a view of the countryside.

Whilst there are some attractive shopfronts in the square, there are also some poor modern units that are clumsily detailed and lack the design quality that ought to be expected in such surroundings. Poor quality is sometimes exacerbated by loud and visually aggressive signage – notably on a charity shop. This mix of excellence and mediocrity applies to all of the main shopping streets in the centre of town. The Conservation Area Management Plan will offer more detailed comment and guidance on this subject.

2.1.2g High Street

The view down High Street is closed by the nave of the wonderfully decorated church,
providing a strong visual link between the ancient commercial and religious centres.

The street quickly narrows and the granite pavement peters out on the eastern side. Granite gulleys line the edge of the street, which is unusual in Launceston as historically many of the streets had central gulleys. It is a pity that the eye is drawn to the visually assertive double yellow lines rather than the historic fabric.

![View down High Street](image)

The rather surprising single storey corner extension on the tight junction with Church Street is notable for the flamboyant shopfront that is effectively the entire frontage. This quirky and prominent feature also forms a pinch point in Church Street.

![The entrance to Sanford Timewells Lane](image)

On the western side is a super little alleyway, Sanford Timewells Lane, with its decorative entrance and slab paving that gives way to cobbles as it disappears out of sight. It links through to Castle Dyke and is one of the enjoyable pedestrian links that few visitors seem to discover.

2.1.2h Church Street

At the lower end of Church Street, at the junction with Market Street, is what could be another attractive public space immediately in front of the church, but at present it is basically a road junction. The pinch point on Church Street at the junction with High Street is a classic piece of medieval street and the buildings, although not ancient themselves, frame the church tower. As in High Street the scene is diminished by yellow lines.

![The church tower framed in Church Street](image)

At the higher end the street feels very narrow as the three storey buildings enclose the space and focus the view on the exceptional Southgate. Unfortunately the junction is often clogged by traffic; even at the best of times the ambience is diminished for the pedestrian by the steady stream of vehicles.
2.1.2i Southgate Street

Like Broad Street, Southgate Street is wider than others in the town centre. With the exception of the modern brick building, 3 Southgate Street, the architecture is of high quality and great character. There is a steady stream of traffic along the street which does become a nuisance at times, especially when blockages are caused by larger delivery vans or lorries.

The pavements are more generous here and there are some notable granite slabs that span the width of doorways and run from doorstep to gutter.

Chings Alley is one of the links, known as opes, that are found around the town centre; they inspire curiosity to the passer-by but usually serve rear blocks and yards and public access is often discouraged.
On the other side of the street, next to the Southgate, is a narrow lane called Blindhole that runs parallel with the ancient town wall and links through to the Market House. This lane offers one of the attractive glimpsed views of the countryside setting. The lower end of the lane is dominated by the rear elevation of the insensitive Market Court development and then opens out into the car park of St Dominick House, a rather weak and poorly sited 20th century addition.

2.1.2j Market Street

This street connects the central area to the Market House, a very good building that appears underused at present but could be a vibrant all weather option for the shopper. It forms part of a fine group with the church, Church Stile and the Rectory Day Centre. It also links to the important and quite well used public spaces of the churchyard and parade ground. The use of concrete setts in front of number 1, opposite the church, is unfortunate but thankfully limited in extent.

[fig 30 : Market Street]

2.1.2k Churchyard and Parade Ground

Public green space is something of a rarity in the town centre, so the peace of the churchyard is a sanctuary for workers to take a relaxing lunch break and others to find peace, quiet and, (when needed), shade. The uniquely decorated church is a signature building of Launceston and the churchyard has many interesting memorials and attractive trees which aid peaceful contemplation. There is also a hidden link through to the top of Tower Street around the back of the church.

[fig 31 : Few visitors are aware that this path leads through to Tower Street]

Nice granite steps lead to the parade ground, a larger space that seems to lack function for the most part. The surfacing is bland, but that is not a problem as it reflects the former use and over-elaborate paving would seem inappropriate here. The row of lime trees offer a shady spot to sit and take in the panoramic landscape views east towards the Tamar and Dartmoor beyond.

[fig 32 : The former Parade Ground]

It may be a little unfortunate that the trees at the north end obscure the landscape views from the churchyard and consequently
visitors are not drawn through. It is certainly a pity that visitors are largely unaware of the link through to The Walk and that they are on the line of the medieval town wall.

2.1.2.1 The Walk and Dockacre Road

The southern end of Dockacre Road is marked by Dockacre House which is a very early extra-mural house surviving, (in part), from the 16th century. An attractive stepped link passes by St Dominick House, a pleasant house of early/mid 19th century date whose decorative porch and railings add greatly to the character of the vicinity.

![fig 33 : Railings and porch at St Dominick House]

The path comes out on the Parade Ground but like many other pedestrian links it seems to be little used and is unnoticed by most visitors.

Dockacre Road is a much later creation but both of these scenic routes trace the town walls and give a clear impression of the scale of Earl Richard’s town enclosure. The many trees lining The Walk and filling the steep valley side below are an absolutely essential component of the townscape when viewed from outside and create a pleasing ambience for the pedestrian. The meadow-like grass between The Walk and Dockacre Road must be good for wildlife but at times it does encroach on the paths and seems unkempt.

The link to the Tower Street car park is through an attractive stone wall that appears to have served a private garden in the past. It is again unfortunate that visitors parking here have no idea that the steps lead to such an attractive and historic alternative route to the centre of town.
The Walk offers some very special views toward St Stephen and of the wider landscape setting east of the town. The extra-mural graveyard on Dockacre Road is of historic interest and the yew trees are distinctive within the taller broadleaf trees that form a swathe along the lower slopes.

2.1.2m Tower Street

Although a smattering of historic buildings remain, Tower Street is dominated for the most part by 20th century social housing. The flats that are rendered are less offensive than the brick and block developments; they do not stand out too much in views of the town centre from across the valley, despite the sensitive location. Even though the occasional patches of stone do smack of tokenism, at least some effort was made and that is not apparent with Northgate Place. Most of these developments fail to address the historic street in any meaningful way and the inconsistent or unattractive enclosure severely weakens any sense of place.

The chapel and the group of historic houses are all the more important for their scarcity here and the early 19th century pair of houses offer a pleasing focal point in views down Tower Street from the vicinity of the car park.

The top end of Tower Street, near the church, does retain great character. As the street curves and rises there is the interesting combination of working buildings, the Sunday School and the pub.
The appearance of cobbles in the floorscape also adds to the richness of the streetscene here and at the junction with Castle Street are the imposing Methodist Church and hall.

2.1.2n Northgate Street

As seen today Northgate Street is a travesty of what was once a very important thoroughfare. Truncated by the thoughtless 20th century extension of Castle Street, it is overshadowed by blocks of flats whose plan form, siting, scale and design variously fail to complement this historic route.

These problems are compounded by excessive and ill considered planting. There are too many trees that restrict the fine views down St Thomas Hill and of the church tower looking uphill.

The planters further fill the street and cut it up into a series of minor and unsatisfying spaces that cannot be rescued by the presence of some significant areas of attractive cobbled. The planting is visually inappropriate in such an urban situation and surely raises issues of pedestrian safety, especially at night.
Despite these shortcomings there are a collection of good historic buildings here; but they are interspersed with either weak spaces that destroy the legibility of the ancient route, or aggressive enclosure, incorporating barbed wire in places. All in all, what should be a delightful pedestrian route is rendered unattractive and, to some people, an hostile and worrying place to enter.

2.1.2o Castle Street

The top end of Castle Street is closed by the church tower which is attractively framed by the Methodist Church and hall to the west and the former Liberal Club to the east.

The alleyways either side of the Methodist buildings are good links through to Castle Dyke, though they appear underused. There are several glimpsed views of the Castle that remind the viewer just how impenetrable it must have seemed centuries ago.

The space in front of the Job Centre and the adjacent car park lack clarity and definition. The tree planting occupies the space rather than enclosing it and also blocks attractive views towards St Stephen’s along Northgate Street and over the roofs of lower Castle Street. Sections of concrete sewage pipe used as planters are indicative of the budgetary constraints on this flawed and outdated enhancement scheme.

As the street turns on the radius of the castle it also drops down towards Eagle House. The fact that the closely packed urban fabric gives way briefly to large houses with enclosed gardens is an essential part of the distinctive character of this diverse street. The tunnel effect of the mature trees combines with the brick garden walls, cobbled gulleys and pavements to provide a transition before opening up at the Castle entrance on the elbow of the street. The Eagle House car park, formerly garden, has many trees around it that contribute greatly to the setting of the castle, gatehouse, Eagle House and Castle Hill House. Whilst the Castle entrance is rather understated, Eagle House is bold and showy – with Castle Hill House opposite these are excellent examples of mid 18th century design. These grand brick houses set the scene for the architectural excellence that
exemplifies the lower part of Castle Street. Despite the relative grandeur of the buildings here they remain tight to the street frontage with a long apron of cobbled paving on the west side of the street. It is unfortunate that a row of concrete bollards have been deemed necessary to restrict some of the on-street parking in the vicinity of the museum.

2.1.2p Wooda Road

The junction of Northgate Street and Wooda Road has the focal building of the Passmore Edwards Library, with its distinctive and eye-catching red terracotta details. It is a building of social interest but lacks the architectural quality of many other Victorian buildings in Launceston. Opposite to the southwest is a nice little corner space, but the niche in the stone wall is occupied only by a concrete utility marker whilst a sad looking bench sits awkwardly alongside.

The chapel and Congregational School are both in need of attention and viable future uses that preserve the contribution they make to both Castle Street and Northgate Street. The townscape unravels toward the junction with Tower Street and a truly exceptional historic street rather fizzles out in a prime example of poor 20th century planning.

The south side of Wooda Road features a long retaining wall and the north side an interesting collection of historic buildings of varied character and scale. Both sides frame a fine view of the Deer Park that is only diminished a little by the telegraph poles and wires.
2.1.2q St Thomas Road (higher end)

This is essentially an early by-pass and remains part of the principal vehicular route through Launceston. South of the chapel opposite the junction with Wooda Road the road is undeveloped and snakes along below the Castle Green, virtually out of sight except when larger vehicles are in view.

Below the Wooda Road junction, looking southeast is one of the best known and most frequently seen views of the Castle. The modern homes are themselves significantly above road level, but the topography then rises sharply to Eagle House with its tree-filled grounds and then shoots upward once more to the Castle. Overhead wires are again something of an irritation.

2.1.3 Key Buildings

An Architectural Character Survey of the Commercial Core is attached as Map 2a. Key buildings are not necessarily the oldest, best or most interesting structures; they are the ones that have the greatest significance in terms of their prominence within the townscape. Harmful alterations or incongruous works in the vicinity of such buildings are likely to have a very significant impact on the quality and character of the Conservation Area.

2.1.3i The Castle and Castle gates

The historical and scenic importance of the castle is self evident and need not be elaborated on. The south gate entrance to the castle is also a fine townscape feature on the junction of Western Road and St Thomas Road. In medieval times the gate led via a bridge to the Deer Park; today it effectively frames the Guildhall tower on leaving the Castle Green. The north gatehouse is much less prominent, but an important survival of great cultural interest that leads visitors through to the delightful townscape of Castle Street.
2.1.3ii Church of St Mary Magdalene

The 14th century tower is good, but unremarkable when compared with the extravagantly decorated body of the church. The carved granite ashlar, executed at the behest of Sir Henry Trecarrel, is truly exceptional and surely delights all who see it.

2.1.3iii War Memorial

Erected in 1919 in place of the 19th century market house, the war memorial is an attractive focal point but it is subsumed in a mass of car parking for the most part. The layout of the streets around means that it may be seen from a great variety of directions with an ever changing backdrop; so it generates considerable dynamism in the streetscene. Fenced in and with signs requesting that people keep off, the memorial is in need of rescue as both a place of congregation and remembrance.

2.1.3iv 14-28 High Street

Although all bar 12 and 14 are unlisted the group value of this streetscene is of considerable significance to the overall quality and character of the town centre. The buildings occupy single or double burgage plots and eaves levels generally fluctuate accordingly. – with wider frontages also being higher. A variety of architectural styles of the 18th to 20th centuries are represented, which is indicative of the relatively stable economy and the fact that all of these styles were considered modern and fashionable in their time. Classical, Italianate, baroque and even art deco sit comfortably together as a reminder that there is no right or wrong style of building in an historic town centre. The recent insertion of poor shopfronts and strident signage, however, demonstrate how inconsiderate changes and poor design quality can detract from the appearance of a whole group of buildings.

2.1.3v 5-15 Broad Street

All of the buildings on the south side of the Market Square are listed, apart from the bank. Again the frontages reflect the amalgamation of burgage plots over the centuries – those at the eastern end are narrower. The amalgamation of 9 and 11 reflect the creation of an early/mid 19th
century department store and the frontage, with its parapet and classical Greek detailing, is typical of that time. The scale of the 18th century White Hart is also typical of a thriving provincial market town and has the added interest of the 12th century doorway and the stag.

![Fig 53: The reclaimed Norman doorway and the white hart]

2.1.3vi 19 Broad Street

Along with 1 Westgate Street, this building helps to frame the entrance to Westgate Street and also deflects the eye in the direction of Western Road. Not one of the finest buildings but it adds to the quality of the streetscene and has significant townscape presence.

2.1.3vii 12 – 16 Westgate Street (NatWest Bank)

Built as ‘The Launceston Bank’ circa 1870 this is one of the fine Victorian buildings featuring polychromatic stonework - a solid provincial bank for new and established residents to trust their money to.

![Fig 55: The NatWest Bank]

2.1.3viii 11-13 High Street

A pair of jettied 16th century merchants houses of tremendous character; 13 was built for Thomas Hicks, mayor of Launceston in the mid 16th century. Altered a little over the centuries but still retaining the essence of their original construction, this pair of houses represent the earliest
surviving domestic buildings in the town centre.

2.1.3ix 2-6 Broad Street
A beautifully constructed group built around 1870, each to a different design but all incorporating locally sourced polychromatic stonework. The arched windows of 4 and 6 reflect the influence of Ruskin throughout the land in the second half of the 19th century. The large bracketed clock on the bank is an endearing feature and the whole group embody the civic pride and affluence of the period. [fig 57a The clock]

[fig 57 : A really fine group of Victorian buildings]

2.1.3x 1-3 Broad Street
One of the later timber framed buildings in the town, built around the early 18th century. It occupies an important corner site and contributes an understated character compared to its neighbouring corner buildings.

2.1.3xi 1 Southgate Street
A strong corner building in a prominent location as it partly closes the view down Broad Street from the market square. Late 19th century with polychromatic stonework, classical detailing and a corbelled corner turret featuring curved sheet glass and carved granite.

[fig 59 : Another strong Victorian corner building]

2.1.3xii 5-7 Southgate Street
A rare brick town house of a similar vintage as those on Castle Street but obviously in a tighter urban situation; possibly a re-working of an earlier building. Like many old buildings it was adapted to another use and the ground floor has a fairly good early 20th century shopfront. This fine building is a key element contributing to the setting of the Southgate.

[fig 58 : One of the last timber framed houses built in the town]
An outstanding survival and one of the signature buildings in Launceston; only slightly altered since it was built in the 14th century. The gate house has two fine elevations and as people pass through the building it has that added element of theatricality which makes it all the more special. Full of features of interest including its ribbed vaults, granite details, a water conduit of 1825 and a plaque recording the gift of the footway to the town by Richard Peter in commemoration of the silver jubilee of Queen Victoria.

2.1.3xiv 28 Church Street

Chosen as a key building for the attractive bowed frontage that is unusual in Launceston and has considerable presence here due to the narrowness of Church Street.
2.1.3xv 22 Church Street

‘Hayman’s Pianoforte Warehouse’ dates from around 1870 and is an excellent example of a purpose-built commercial building. The quality of detailed design and workmanship on this hidden gem is notable. It is in need of a sympathetic use that makes the best of its distinctive character.

2.1.3xvi 20 Church Street

The key feature here is the remarkable single storey shopfront that makes up in ornament and detail for the less than ideal form that the building takes.

2.1.3xvii 1 Church Street

This is a focal building in views past the church from Castle Street and a significant feature in views down High Street to the church and along Market Street.

2.1.3xviii 18 Church Street

This mid 19th century building incorporates the entrance to Timeford Sanwell Lane and a beautifully crafted jewellers shop with a complete interior as well as an art nouveau...
shopfront. Unfortunately the elegant tracery is nearly always obscured from view by the modern blind – the original awning is in place but not working.

2.1.3xix Church Stile, Market Street

A neat elevation with figurative keystones closes the view from the churchyard in a simple but satisfying way.

[fig 67 : The excellent shopfront with the modern blind up]

2.1.3xx The Market House

Designed by George Wightwick, the market hall is a distinctive part of the streetscene and an altered, but good, internal public space. Built to encourage trade after the loss of the assizes, the design is strong and incorporates a clerestory that lights the interior. At present the units don’t seem to be thriving as they surely could in a building of such quality and it is not the most obvious location for the Tourist Information Centre.

[fig 68 : Church Stile]

[fig 69 : The south west elevation]

2.1.3xxi Methodist Church and Hall, Castle Street

Quite a decorated non-conformist chapel designed by Hine and Norman; built around 1870, it had a tall spire that was part of the skyline until the 1980's. This is a substantial building with a contemporary schoolroom and attractive ironwork adding to the richness of the streetscene. Adjacent is the older, smaller chapel that is also part of this significant group.

[fig 70 : The Market House interior]
This was formerly the Liberal Club and typical of its time (1897). Designed by Otho Peter, it is unusual in the use of clay tile – not a locally distinctive material – but it makes a positive contribution to the street and to the setting of the church and chapel.

2.1.3xxiii Eagle House and Castle Hill House

Fine brick town houses of the mid 18th century are a rarity in westcountry towns and Launceston is fortunate in having these two prime examples sitting opposite one another. The Eagle House Hotel is clearly well used and maintained; Castle Hill House appears somewhat underused by comparison. The tall brick walls that enclose
these properties also make a major contribution to the special character of this location.

2.1.3xxiv 9-13 Castle Street

A top class group of buildings that includes Lawrence House, (owned by the National Trust and used as the town museum), which is another fine 18th century town house.

[fig 76: 9-13 are on the right side of this picture]

Number 11 is a Victorian house in a Queen Anne style that fits in well and has an attractive coach house that marks the end of historic Castle Street on the west side.

2.1.3xxv The Chapel, Castle Street

This is another non-conformist chapel that has considerable presence in the townscape. It appears to be in need of a sustainable use that will secure its fabric for the future.

2.1.3xxvi Congregational School, Castle Street

A good purpose-built school associated with the chapel, designed by Otho Peter and surprisingly unlisted. It adds greatly to the character of both Castle Street and Northgate Street but appears to have structural problems that need attention.
2.1.3xxvii 4 The Walk

Dating from around the mid 19th century this cottage ornee uses the local vernacular materials in a playful gothic style. This is a charming building on the edge of the ancient town and one of the incidental surprises the town has to offer.

2.1.3xxviii Passmore Edwards Building

Dated 1899 this is by no means the finest Victorian building in the town; but it occupies a key site and given the destruction of the historic townscape on Tower Street and Northgate Street it helps to hold the streetscene together. So eye-catching it draws attention from the inadequacies of the modern developments in the vicinity.

2.1.4 Proposed Amendments to the Conservation Area Boundary

2.1.4a Dockacre

There are several items of historic interest on the eastern side of Dockacre Road, including the cemetery, 4 Dockacre Road and Dockacre House.

2.1.4b Dockacre Road

It is proposed to also include some of the cottages and open space on Ridgegrove Hill. These proposals are incorporated within a
larger extension that is also considered justified on the basis of the historic landscape setting of the ancient town centre. (See 2.6.4)
2.2 St Stephen’s

The present Conservation Area and proposed amendments are attached as Map 1c & 4c.

2.2.1 Character summary

The early origins of St Stephen’s are of great historic interest but have little immediately tangible relation to the settlement that we see today. The site is elevated but level; defendable but practical to found a settlement on. It is possible that the street pattern of St Stephen’s Hill, Duke Street and North Street date from the foundation, but that is uncertain. The settlement had a Saxon market that Earl Robert relocated to the castle in 1086 and a priory, (immediately east of the present Church Hall), that moved down the hill to St Thomas in 1155.

The south side of Duke Street appears to retain evidence of medieval planning in the form of burgage plots that run down to Underhayes Lane. The direct relationship of Duke Street to the focal point of the church seems to be a formal design feature and establishes the strong east – west axis of the settlement. It is likely that the plots and the construction of the church are of the same date and we know the church was consecrated in 1259, (thought the present tower dates from the 16th century). The village green seems likely to be an early feature as it is present on an estate map of 17? that may be seen in the town museum. This was almost certainly designed as the original market square.

In the mid 19th century the Duke of Northumberland established a water supply, and built cottages. Residents provided a variety of trades and the village clearly flourished. By 1880 there were two pubs and a school but now there are no shops or pubs and a new school has replaced the old one that is now in the process of conversion. North Street may have ancient origins but its character has been fundamentally altered by infill development in the 20th century.

Dwellings are two storey with slate roofs and either rendered vernacular properties or stone built estate homes. Windows are a fairly even mix of sashes and casements. Enclosure is provided by the buildings themselves as well as stone walls or banks and hedges.

2.2.2 Townscape analysis

Clusters of buildings of two storey domestic scale are the norm. For the most part the settlement is inward looking and enclosed, but where views out are allowed there are some fine prospects towards the castle and town centre, most notably from the churchyard and the top of St Stephen’s Hill.

2.2.2a Entering from Newport:

The climb up St Stephen’s Hill is fairly steep and the sense of separation from Newport has been rather lost due to intrusive modern development. The road heading north to Bude is a busy one and the traffic does reduce the pleasantness of the place somewhat. The cluster of listed buildings at the southern entrance to St Stephen’s are an attractive group that has a certain harmony despite the variety of age, scale and design. The tollhouse and 1 Duke Street opposite form a gateway and give a sense of arrival as
the sense of space opens with the churchyard and village green. The church tower rises impressively above the village, but the best views of it are marred by overhead power cables.

2.2.2b Village Green:

Almost certainly part of the original layout as a market place, the village green now appears a little used roadside feature. The estate buildings of the former pub to the south and cottages to the west, close the generous central space and complement the church in a slightly idealised Victorian manner. Despite the attractive features of the phone box and the stone horse trough, the benches here and at the church entrance are poor. The former garage to the south is a negative feature. Development is underway behind and re-building of the frontage will be an opportunity to enhance the central area if the design is of suitable quality. To the north of the church are the British Legion Cottages, with their gable plaques and larger front gardens enclosed by stone walls.

2.2.2c North Street junction:

The northern entrance/exit to the village is framed by Park Hill House on one side with 2 and 3 North Street, an attractive pair of stone buildings, (though the latter has had PVCu windows installed). On the other side of the green are a good pair of stone-built estate cottages and to the east of them is Parkside, formerly the Post Office and before that a Smithy – a modest building that has been significant within the community for generations. This end of North Street is interesting as it is a generous triangular space that is easily large enough to have accommodated a market in the past. There may, of course, be other explanations but the origins of this space deserve attention. For the present day it is a space that could be presented better, though the wooden sculptures on display there are a distinctive and welcome local feature. The overhead cables and utility markers dominate the space and are not a good way to mark arrival into the Conservation Area.
2.2.2d North Street:

The bend half way along North Street divides it into two sections and makes Number 8 a significant focal point.

The 20th century semi-detached cottages are set back and have generous gardens front and rear, whereas the earlier properties, (Numbers 8-11), are built tight to the street. The more modern detached properties to the south of the street have not reflected the character of the settlement. From the evidence of the 17? Map there appear to have been burgage plots on the south side of North Street as at Duke Street.

Looking south to Duke Street, the view is closed by the substantial school building that is losing some of its appeal, with the addition of porches and alteration of windows and doors as part of an ongoing conversion. The long stone wall on the eastern side of that view gives an important element of enclosure to the street.

2.2.2e Gallows Hill and Crossroads:

Apart from the obvious connections of the name, Gallows Hill was also the site of a spring and holy well, (presently outside the Conservation Area). The holy well structure remains and is of considerable local interest as the site may have had significance in the founding of the ancient settlement and priory. The barn in the grounds of the property known as Gallows Hill is a focal point at the western exit to the village and the outbuildings to Hillside Farm are nice vernacular farm buildings.
Although much altered, the golf clubhouse is formed from a range of farm buildings and so retains a significant connection with its locality.

2.2.2f Duke Street:

Number 20 is a slate-hung building with a strong presence on the corner of North Street and Duke Street. Opposite is a nice little footpath through to Underhayes, though the surfacing at the entrance is untidy. To the east of this the narrow property frontages reflect the historic burgage plots that remain on the south side. The more homogenous stone workers cottages on the north side of Duke Street contrast with, but complement, the variety of older cottages on the south side, which have varied eaves and fenestration. The church tower is nicely framed but this is a fairly busy road with narrow and poorly surfaced pavements; though there are granite kerbs on the south side.

2.2.2g Underhayes Lane:

A quiet back lane intended as a service access to the burgage plots of Duke Street. It has some attractive stone banks and trees. The railings at the lower end of the link to Duke Street are unattractive and the backland development in the burgage plots on the northern side is generally poor. The insertion of parking and garages to serve these developments has resulted in a significant loss of enclosure. Towards the eastern end the toll house at the top of St Stephen’s Hill is a good focal point and before it is reached there are views of the castle to the south.
2.2.3 Key buildings

An Architectural Character Survey of St Stephens is attached as Map 2c Key buildings are not necessarily the oldest, best or most interesting structures; they are the ones that have the greatest significance in terms of their prominence within the townscape. Harmful alterations or incongruous works in the vicinity of such buildings is likely to have a very significant impact on the quality and character of the Conservation Area.

2.2.3i St Stephen’s

The 13th century church is the focal point of the village and a landmark in a huge number of views from Launceston itself. Much of the visible fabric dates from the 15th and 16th centuries and the 19th century restoration. It has a large churchyard with many interesting memorials and a very green setting which links it to the countryside to the north and east, punctuated only by the Old Vicarage and the Church Hall.

2.2.3ii Duke Cottages

The stone cottages built by the Duke overlooking the green are quite typical of the mid 19th century but as a group they are an essential element of the character of St Stephen’s.

2.2.3iii 5 Duke Street

Formerly The Northumberland Arms, a fairly large purpose-built public house with stabling to the rear. Designed in a Tudor Gothic style and impressively constructed in local rubble with good dressed stone details. Twin gables and substantial stacks give the building a distinctive form that is a strong feature of the village centre and setting to the church.

2.2.3iv The Old Toll House

A typical 19th century tollhouse in a prominent corner plot that makes it a focal
point at the southern end of Duke Street and Underhayes. The pole and overhead wires detract from its setting.

[fig 96 : The Old Toll House]

2.2.3v 1 Duke Street

This is a good 18th century village house that forms a gateway at the top of St Stephen’s Hill with the Old Tollhouse. It has an attractive rag slate roof that is particularly prominent as the building closes the view west from the vicinity of the Church Hall.

[fig 97 : 1 Duke Street seen from the east]

2.2.3vi Park Hill House

An attractive ‘gateway’ building, this stone farmhouse may be older than the mid 19th century south elevation with its brick lintols. Built gable end to the road, it marks the northern edge of the settlement and a sharp transition from country to village/town. The farm buildings to the rear also contribute positively to the character of the area.

2.2.3vii 2 and 3 North Street

A later 18th or early 19th century pair of cottages. These plain stone buildings are of significant townscape importance opposite Park Hill House at the edge of the Launceston settlements.

[fig 99 : 2 and 3 North Street with Park Hill House in the background]

2.2.3viii 8 North Street [see fig 86]

A nicely balanced house dating from the mid 19th century, with original fenestration.
Located on the bend in North Street it is a focal point of this historic street.

2.2.3ix 11 North Street

[fig 100: A rambling house with attached coach house or cartshed]

The low eaves and massive stack identify this to be the oldest relatively unaltered dwelling in St Stephen’s. Probably dating from the 17th century, this building offers a useful point of comparison with later cottages and houses in the vicinity.

2.2.3x 20 Duke Street

Quite a large house, probably of the 18th century, that is sited on the corner of Duke Street and North Street. Good slate hanging and multi-paned sashes that incorporate a fair amount of old glass.

[fig 101: 20 Duke Street is one of the larger homes in St Stephen’s]

2.2.4 Proposed amendments to the Conservation Area boundary

See Map 4c.

2.2.4a Holy well and Gallow’s Hill

[fig 102: The Holy Well structure probably dates from the 18th or 19th century]

The great antiquity of the holy well site is an historic feature of St Stephen’s and ought to be incorporated within the Conservation Area.

2.2.4b St Stephen’s Hill

Although the sense of separation from Newport has been diminished by recent developments it is still considered worthwhile to link the two areas. The green spine is attractive and the historic relationship between the two settlements ought to be acknowledged.

[fig 103: Trees and hedgerows line St Stephen’s Hill between the two Conservation Areas]
2.3 Newport

The present Conservation Area and proposed amendments are attached on Map 1b & 4b

2.3.1 Character Summary
The settlement of Newport has the typical elements of a planned medieval borough; at its heart is the market square at an important junction, where roads converge from the surrounding area, and climbing the hill above are the burgage plots. Newport appears to have begun as an offshoot of St Stephen’s as it certainly existed in the 13th century when it was still within the control of that borough. Its creation reflected the natural advantages of the river and level site for manufacturing and trade; but also the greater proximity to the castle, Dunheved and the new priory of St Thomas. By the later 15th century it was, however, an independent borough and the pattern of burgage plots on St Stephen’s Hill probably represent the expansion of the earliest settlement site around the market place.

Newport has a significant number of surviving houses of the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as later and grander homes of the 18th and 19th centuries. Some shops remain but it is essentially a dormitory settlement now and is rather dominated by the steady flow of traffic at its centre. As a result it does not appear to be a place that invites people to stop and explore, which is a shame as it has much to offer by way of historic interest and attractive townscape.

2.3.2 Townscape Analysis

Newport is an essentially linear settlement that, with St Thomas, forms the link between St Stephen’s and the town centre. As the castle and St Stephen's church sit on elevated sites at either end of this axis there are fine views of each, especially the castle. Buildings are mostly of a domestic two storey scale built at the front of burgage plots formed at right angles to the road. The streetscene is rather dominated by a steady flow of traffic that periodically becomes very congested.

2.3.2a Southern entrances:

[fig 105 : Looking down West Bridge Road from Newport Square]

Experienced from the cocoon of a motor vehicle there is little for the visitor to notice as they enter Newport. They may be aware of crossing a small river, but the quality of the bridge beneath is not apparent; nor is the amazing survival of the much older packhorse bridge to the west. Much more noticeable are the burger bar and petrol station that scream for their attention.

[fig 105a : New St Thomas bridge]

Beside the new bridge is an island that is dominated by self seeded tree growth and appears to be little cared for, though it could
be an attractive public space. West Bridge Road is a much more attractive and peaceful route that goes unseen by most as it may only be enjoyed on foot.

2.3.2b Newport Square:

![fig 106: The ancient Market Square is now a busy roundabout]

Reduced in status to more of a road junction than a market square, this space has huge and intractable problems. Yet the square is of considerable historic interest and is enclosed by a charming collection of buildings that would be greatly appreciated in a less congested location. The trellis porch on Number 6 is a delightful focal point and the Round House opposite is an intriguing and unusual building that was in need of repair at the time of survey. Its setting is rather diminished by the flat roofed toilet block attached to it.

2.3.2c Lower St Stephen’s Hill:

![fig 107: Looking down St Stephen’s Hill from the entrance to St Joseph’s school]

The lower part of St Stephen’s Hill is an outstanding piece of historic townscape. The frontages reflect the pattern of the ancient burgage plots that form the gardens to the rear, but the diversity of elevations adds great variety within that framework. Number 1 has a charming shopfront and after the attractively enclosed space adjacent there is the excellent group that is 3-13. The even numbered cottages opposite also possess tremendous group value and that is augmented by the feature of the gulley with slate slabs that mark their entrances. The sight and sound of water pouring from the spout in front of number 10 is a very distinctive character feature.

![fig 108: The water spout at number 10]

The changed road management here has reduced the volume of traffic, but a significant number of those motorists who elect to drive up the hill do tend to accelerate at the lower end; this includes small lorries and vans. Fine views of the castle may be enjoyed here, but many are spoiled by overhead wires. An effort has been made with the street lighting, which avoids Victorian pastiche; it is a shame, however, that the lamp-posts are so tall.

2.3.2d Upper St Stephen’s Hill:

The regular plot pattern is punctuated on the western side by St Joseph’s School. This site is dominated by attractive tree planting that obscures the old house part of the school and the over-assertive 20th century block attached to it. The gentle curvature of the street gives prominence to numbers 23-27; they nestle amongst trees but the view is
again diminished by poles and wires. The eastern side of St Stephen’s Hill becomes more loosely developed with terraced cottages giving way to larger houses, some attached, others detached.

[fig 109 : The upper part of St Stephen’s Hill]

The watering place/conduit is a notable feature that deserves attention. The northern limit of the present Conservation Area is marked by number 40, a nice Victorian lodge. Strong hedge planting, as well as specimen trees, are an important feature here.

[fig 110 : The water conduit]

2.3.3 Key Buildings

An Architectural Character Survey of Newport is attached as Map 2c. Key buildings are not necessarily the oldest, best or most interesting structures; they are the ones that have the greatest significance in terms of their prominence within the townscape. Harmful alterations or incongruous works in the vicinity of such buildings is likely to have a very significant impact on the quality and character of the Conservation Area.

2.3.3i The Round House

This late Georgian structure was erected for the Duke of Northumberland in 1829 to form an open-sided enclosure for the remains of the medieval market cross. The cross was the focal point for the community and used as a place for preaching and announcing election results. Today it is partly walled, gated and locked; it looks rather untidy but since this survey repair works have commenced.

[fig 111 : The Round House, Newport Square]

2.3.3ii The White Horse Inn and 10 Newport Square

[fig 112 : The White Horse Inn]
Despite the obvious problem of traffic on its doorstep, the White Horse appears to be a thriving inn. Well built in stone, with a nicely balanced principal elevation, it helps to create the sense of place here. Number 10 is attached to the inn and is very much part of the same group. It is in rather poor condition but has a good rag slate roof and historic features that indicate how it has been adapted over the centuries.

2.3.3iii 7-9 Newport Square

This is a very important pair of houses as they close the view along St Thomas Road and also form part of the whole group around Newport Square. The late 19th century trellised porch on number 7 is a character feature that is surely appreciated by most of those who pass by in their vehicles.

2.3.3iv 5 Newport Square

The other key building that adds greatly to the sense of place at Newport Square. This modest stone building is attractive and has a good later 19th century shopfront.

2.3.3v 3-13 St Stephen’s Hill

The subdivided 16th century house that is now 7 and 9 is the centre point of this most attractive group. A quaint combination of materials, fenestration, chimneys, slate roofs and a gently arcing building line all combine to give exceptional village charm. The small
front gardens, variously enclosed, also add to the general appearance.

2.3.4 Proposed amendments to the Conservation Area

As previously mentioned it is intended that the Newport and St Stephen’s Conservation Areas be linked – see Map 4b & c

2.3.4a St Cuthbert Close – Area to be removed

The modern development of this formerly green corner has stripped it of any contribution it made to the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area. It is, therefore, proposed to be removed from the designation.

2.3.4b Dutson Road, (East of Newport Square)

[fig 117 : The Spar shop closes the view at the bottom of the road to St Stephen’s and helps to frame a good view of the castle]

The 19th and early 20th century development along what is now the A388 (Dutson Road) reflects the expansion of the time. Collectively the buildings add to the overall character of the area and the larger gardens contribute to the appearance looking out from the town centre.

See also 2.6.3b.
2.4 St Thomas

The present Conservation Area and proposed amendments are attached on Maps 1b & 4b

2.4.1 Character Summary

Although the origins of St Thomas lie in the re-location of the Priory from St Stephen’s in 1155, the place has a varied and interesting history. Following the establishment of the Priory it appears that development soon followed with mills and probably houses being built. The Church of St Thomas was built in the 14th century, initially as a chapel of ease to St Stephen’s, and two more chapels were subsequently built. The combination of ecclesiastical life, business and industry must’ve made this a thriving area until the Dissolution of 1540.

The Church of St Thomas remained, as did the associated fairs; but the Kensey Valley became ever more industrialised over the following centuries. Tanning, wool-combing and serge-making were all important activities and with more housing and shops it was a thriving settlement. Perhaps more importantly the Kensey Valley became the beating heart of industry in Launceston. As well as the mills and other manufacturing activities, the town’s gas works was built here in 1834. Recreational space was also part of the local scene by the later 19th century and when the railway reached this far in 1895, St Thomas was really at its peak.

Today the valley is really separated by St Thomas Road, the lower crossing of the River Kensey. West of the ‘new’ bridge is a charming and peaceful environment, with the old St Thomas Bridge, the church and the modern bowling club. East of St Thomas Road is the bustle of the modern industrial/trading estate. Overall there is little impression of the outstanding history of this area; the Priory ruins go unseen with limited access and no interpretation, whilst many historic mills and industrial buildings have been demolished. The many sounds and smells associated with the manufacturing activities that the Kensey supported have long since disappeared. The only distinctive activity now is the steam railway that enlivens the place and brings visitors, most of whom remain unaware of the historic interest in the immediate vicinity.

2.4.2 Townscape Analysis

Historically St Thomas was always a busy and productive place, both in the time of the priory and after the dissolution as a centre for industrial activity. Many buildings have been demolished and today the historic character is rather lost amidst traffic and modern industrial or retail units. Yet a few steps away from the main road peace and history abound in the vicinity of the church and old bridge.

2.4.2a Riverside:

[fig 119: Riverside]
This location encapsulates the essence of the place. This is the site chosen for the relocated Priory and the same advantages brought the industrial activities that defined the history of manufacturing and processing in Launceston. The old St Thomas bridge is an outstanding survival that is appreciated by both locals and visitors. It continues to provide a useful pedestrian link between Riverside and West Bridge Street. As well as its physical charm and tranquil atmosphere, the bridge also has a splendid view of the Castle, though that is rather spoilt by the overhead wires and the utilitarian parish hall. The churchyard is a pleasant space with many trees adding to the rural feel that would be stronger still if views up the valley were not blocked by the bowling club pavilion. It is a pity that it is so easy for a visitor to enjoy all of these positive features without being aware of the Priory ruins.

2.4.2b Town Mills:

Much of the extensive range of mill buildings at the western end of Riverside have been demolished and those that remain have been converted with insufficient attention to detail. The Old Toll House occupies a prominent corner site but has lost much character. The site of the former Council depot is now occupied by a housing development that has tried to reflect a little ‘mill-like’ character but the basic timber fencing is unfortunate. The green and rural feel of this corner of the Conservation Area is no doubt quite different to how it was a century ago, but it is certainly part of the character now. The bridge over the railway line leads to a lane overshadowed by trees and a little way to the west is an interesting iron aquaduct that carried the historic mill leat over the railway cutting.

2.4.2c Tredydan Road:

The rural lane leading east from the railway bridge turns a small elbow and a view opens up with an early 20th century terrace in the foreground with the Castle, (again obscured by wires), rising above. These and the 19th century housing on Tredydan Road and Wooda Lane, (presently outside the Conservation Area), may well have been associated with the former foundry here. Although the walls are low and vary in material, there is a continuous sense of enclosure to the north side of the road that could be vulnerable to the creation of car parking.

The King George V playing field is an integral part of the 20th century planning in this quarter and the roofscape of the housing here is significant in views from the Castle – the fact that the roofs are slate and presently free of dormers and rooflights is a fact worthy of note.
Towards the junction with St Thomas Road the street narrows and is enclosed by railings to the north that allow views of the steam railway and associated buildings. The diversity of building forms and materials here have great character and are a reminder of the working traditions in this part of town.

2.4.2d St Thomas Road (lower end)

This important thoroughfare can get very congested and as a result the buildings can appear rather grimy. The traffic also seems to affect the nature of tenure and property values but there are actually a good variety of buildings from the 18th – 20th centuries. Those travelling south, by car or on foot, have the added pleasure of some outstanding castle views after crossing the Kensey.

The Kensey Valley was the site of much of Launceston’s industrial activity and although many buildings have been lost there are important survivals. Campbell Cottages are
an attractive terrace of workers homes in the side road adjacent to the Post Office and this planned Victorian enclave continues along St Thomas Road. The entrance to the former works is another reminder of past activity.

It is surprising that the east side of St Thomas Road, between bridge and railway, plus the west side beyond the railway line, are not presently in the Conservation Area – it is proposed to amend this.

2.4.2e The Railway

The railway assisted trade and brought tourists and new inhabitants to Launceston. Some buildings associated with the railway survive and these complement other industrial buildings in the vicinity. Today the sight, sound and smell of the steam trains is very much part of the character of the area. The activity associated with the steam railway adds an extra dimension to the Conservation Area and more interesting workshops would be a welcome reminder of historic activity here. Unfortunately a lot of the visitors attracted by the steam trains do not explore the other historic assets of the town.

2.4.2f Backlands and Priory

The Priory remains are so well hidden that it takes a genuine effort on the part of a visitor to seek them out. Access is restricted and there is no interpretation. The steam railway company have provided a viewing point that is better than nothing – but not much better. Adding to the problems here are the former gasworks site that acts as a barrier to access from St Thomas Road, and the church hall that obscures the Priory site from the Riverside. This whole backland area has considerable potential for sympathetic development but is also extremely vulnerable to proposals that fail to enhance access and secure a sustainable future for the historic resource.
2.4.2g St Thomas Hill

St Thomas Hill is a key part of the historic spine linking St Stephen’s, Newport and Dunheved and one of the earliest extra-mural development zones. The steep topography means that the informal terraces cascade down from the castle in a most satisfying manner, especially on the north eastern side. As a consequence, the roofscape here makes a particularly strong contribution in views to and from the castle. The quality and type of roofing materials, with significant survivals of rag slating, combine with a variety of chimney stacks to create a diverse but coherent character.

At street level there are some attractive tall stone and rendered (cob?) walls, plus a number of low walls that offer evidence, (direct and indirect), that there were previously iron railings here. Their loss has reduced the quality of the streetscape.

The outbuildings, extensions and garden walls at the lower end are very vulnerable to change and the townscape character needs consideration. The burial ground on the corner with Station Road is an historic space of social and historical significance; neatly enclosed by stone walls the location reflects the lack of space within the town walls for the Methodist congregation to bury their loved ones. [see fig 9] The pleasant and neat brick house and shop next to the burial ground adds to the variety of buildings on this ancient street.

As well as a series of fine views up to the castle there are also excellent views from the bottom of the hill looking north to Newport and St Stephen’s; these clearly illustrate the historic spine of Launceston.

At the top of St Thomas Hill the coherence of the historic route up to the north gate disintegrates beyond Wooda Road. The issues raised previously about Northgate Street have a direct impact on St Thomas Hill and the two streets really ought to be considered as one whole.
2.4.3 Key Buildings

An Architectural Character Survey of St Thomas is attached as Map 2c. Key buildings are not necessarily the oldest, best or most interesting structures; they are the ones that have the greatest significance in terms of their prominence within the townscape. Harmful alterations or incongruous works in the vicinity of such buildings is likely to have a very significant impact on the quality and character of the Conservation Area.

2.4.3i Church of St Thomas the Apostle

This nice 15th century church occupies an attractive riverside location and an important historic site – that of the Augustinian Priory. It is bigger than it appears from the street thanks to the south aisle and the large churchyard adds considerably to the setting.

2.4.3ii Priory ruins

In the 12th century the priory re-located here from St Stephen’s and thrived until the dissolution in the 16th century. Like many other ecclesiastical complexes it had been a major player in the local economy and closure acted as an opportunity for entrepreneurs and merchants to fill the void. The physical remains were raided for stone and are no doubt incorporated in a great many buildings in the town. Ironically the most expensively decorated stones were of least practical use to the reclaimers and so a good amount of such work remains scattered around the site.

2.4.3iii St Thomas Bridge

This is a rare late medieval pack horse bridge of great character with attractive 19th century railings and lamp standard. The river has silted up a lot over the centuries, covering the base of the piers and reducing the apparent height of the arches.

2.4.3iv Town mill

Many of the industrial buildings of the Kensey Valley have been destroyed; so although it has been converted to housing in a slightly clumsy way, the town mill is a valuable reminder of the working heritage of the town.

2.4.3v Post Office

This substantial purpose-built Post Office is a gateway building immediately south of the bridge over the Kensey and the fact that it
remains a Post Office is an intrinsic part of its charm.

[fig 135 : The Post Office is a gateway building]

2.4.3vi 9 St Thomas Road

Cornwall House is a well kept Victorian House that occupies a key location on a bend in St Thomas Road so it is a focal point for those heading downhill.

2.4.3vii Rehoboth

Opposite Cornwall House is what appears to be a converted chapel that is now a dwelling called Reheboth. This attractive stone building catches the eye of those passing up St Thomas Hill.

2.4.3viii 31 St Thomas Road

An interesting and unspoilt range of buildings adjacent to the railway; incorporating house, shop and workshop space it offers an insight into the way such plots were used in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

[fig 137 – Workshops to the rear of 31 St Thomas Road - see also figs 121 & 124]

2.4.3ix 7-17 St Thomas Hill

Due to the fact that this group occupies the slight elbow in St Thomas Hill it is prominent in views both up and down this ancient street. The curving frontage, varied elevations and cascading stepped roofs all give a distinctive character.

[fig 138 : A focal group on St Thomas Hill]
2.4.4 Proposed amendments to the Conservation Area

2.4.4a Kensey Valley (west)

The town mills, railway bridge, aqueduct and the workers housing of Tredydan Road and Wooda Lane are all part of the historical development of the town and deserve to be included in the Conservation Area. King Georges playing field and the nearby 20th century developments are worthy of inclusion as they contribute to important views from the castle and up to it as well.

[fig 139 : The castle viewed from King Georges playing field]

[fig 140 : Workers housing on Wooda Lane]

2.4.4b Kensey Valley (east)

The buildings on the east side of St Thomas Road south of the river are also part of the 19th century development. Behind the street frontage there are some remaining industrial buildings and warehouses that have historic interest.

[fig 141 : Warehouses near the entrance to the industrial estate]

2.5 Southern expansion

The present Conservation Area and proposed amendments are attached on Maps 1a & 4a

2.5.1 Character Summary

Expansion of the town beyond the defensive walls began during the medieval period and naturally this favoured the level areas first. Development of The Dockey has been erased and that location has already been covered under the Commercial Core.

Traces of relatively early building outside the town walls may be seen on Westgate Street and this was mostly residential with some shops and workshops. Today the character here, and on Western Road, is essentially that of a 19th century development. A concentration of civic buildings reflect Victorian aspirations and values – Town Hall, Guildhall, police, fire and ambulance stations are all here.

Development in the vicinity of the Southgate appears to have had a more commercial flavour that persists to the present, while Exeter Street quickly slips into a strongly residential character. The car park on Race Hill, (presently outside the Conservation Area), occupies the former site of the pannier market. This is a significant historic link as it is believed that the livestock
markets were among the first activities to have been re-located outside the town walls.

During the 19th and 20th centuries development continued upward and onward across and around Windmill Hill. Much of the expansion along Dunheved Road was of high quality but 20th century infill has degraded the original character of the area.

2.5.2 Townscape Analysis

The early growth of the town was immediately outside the walls and there is little evidence remaining. There must be considerable archaeological potential in these areas. The standing buildings appear to be mainly of the 18th-20th centuries. Close to the town centre they are commonly three storey, with more two storey houses further from the commercial core.

2.5.2a Western Road

The shortcomings of the vast traffic junction with St Thomas Road have already been covered. In townscape terms numbers 4-6 Western Road are also weak and reduce the quality of the locality. Clearly buildings here ought not compete with the Victorian grandeur of the Town Hall complex, but they could be more complementary. The fine civic buildings on the south side of Western Road are a major asset worthy of the greatest respect; for their architectural presence, but also the civic pride and ambition which they represent. The power cables across this impressive frontage are an annoyance.

The gentle arc of the road means that the gabled Oddfellows Hall becomes a significant focal point viewed from either direction. It is important that the supporting role played by the domestic scale buildings that frame it is recognized, as they appear vulnerable to neglect or insensitive alteration. Continuing the civic theme, the former Council offices see the return of an urban scale to the streetscene. The rear elevations of these buildings on Western Road are also prominent in views toward the castle and town centre from the deer park.

Approaching the town from the A30 along Western Road gives the visitor a dramatic first view of the castle; so the quality and cleanliness of this area may well influence initial perceptions of Launceston. The power cables and over-sized street lights don’t help to emphasise the sense of a special place.

2.5.2b Westgate Street (west end)

The junction of Western Road and Westgate Street is graced by a nice tollhouse that sits above the road and gives this small group a presence greater than their diminutive domestic scale. [see fig 153] Westgate Street soon gives way once more to an urban character with the essential public services all formerly represented; the fire brigade having only recently relocated leaving the least architectural reminder of their tenure. The lower end of Dunheved...
Road is marked by a length of raised pavement with railings that is unusual in the town. [see fig 154 ]

Approaching the town centre visual interest is focussed onto the south side of the street where the informal and varied terrace leads the eye to the narrow junction marking the site of the Westgate at the top of The Dockey. Numbers 19 and 20 form a tight group with the Westgate Inn – they invite the curious viewer to explore what may lie beyond. The granite slab paving also indicates that this is the edge of the town centre.

2.5.2c Madford Lane

Named after one of the largest houses in the town that formerly occupied the south side of the street, Madford Lane is now very much a tale of two sides. The south side has a mixture of buildings that are either good or at least inoffensive and includes the White Hart Arcade that offers a vital pedestrian link through to the main shopping area. Immediately adjacent is what, (at the time of survey), appears to be an inconspicuous new infill building.

The west end of Madford Lane is closed by an attractive early 20th century brick building known as Westgate and the eastern end is partly closed by 3 Southgate Place but allows a nice view through to the countryside beyond.

By contrast, the already elevated south side of Madford Lane is occupied by choice examples of 20th century post war architectural over-confidence. In the context of this historic street the library and the office block, (called Madford House after the graceful residence it replaced), are hopelessly inappropriate in terms of scale, proportion, materials and detailed design. Although outside of the Conservation Area these buildings have a profound impact on the character of the Conservation Area and, therefore, have to be mentioned.

At the eastern end of Madford Lane the charming little lodge associated with the old Madford House marks the return to the Conservation Area and to the special historic character of Launceston. This is also reflected in the reappearance of granite slab paving. Both corner sites here have good buildings, especially the one on the south side that forms part of a good group when seen from Exeter Street.

2.5.2d Southgate Place / Race Hill

Despite having a pleasant collection of buildings of varied character, Southgate Place is of most importance for providing an interesting and attractive setting for the Southgate itself. The castle rises dramatically behind but the view is again devalued by overhead cables, poor light units, inconsiderate signage and, at times, traffic. The listed water trough outside the former pannier market, (now a car park), is an interesting feature that is presently outside the Conservation Area.
2.5.2e Angel Hill

This old back lane runs down the outside of the old town wall and links through to Dockacre Road. It is rather dominated by the large and dilapidated industrial building on its south side. Opposite that is a modern development, Southgate Close, which has merit but would’ve more successfully fitted the street without the saw-tooth frontage. The junction with Dockacre Road features Number 11, a good 19th century house.

2.5.2f Exeter Street

Exeter Street is essentially urban at the Southgate end, with shops and pubs in buildings of three storeys. It is then punctuated by the industrial plot mentioned above and, on the south side, by a gap site. Beyond this the street changes to a distinctly residential character, with large detached 19th century houses on the north side and two historic terraces linked by a long modern development on the south side. Exeter Court does address the street in a meaningful way and respects historic plot sizes; but the variations in eaves line appear a bit contrived.
2.5.2g Dockacre Road (south end)

The south side is overlooked by the elevated large houses which are made more prominent and distinctive by the garden spaces between them. Conversely, the lower northern side is notable for the former prison, now converted to housing and called Kensey Place. The strong and unified character of this building is threatened by the lack of co-ordinated maintenance, which sees the painting of walls and windows left to individual owners and inevitably results in something of a patchwork effect.

2.5.3 Key Buildings

2.5.3i The Guildhall and Town Hall

This handsome range of civic buildings occupies a key site at the top of St Thomas Road, just outside the historic walled town. Designed by Otho Peter and James Hine it uses slate, granite and polyphant to good effect and has a lot of attractive detailing. Some may say too much is happening, but it is of its time, including the distinctly politically incorrect clock chimes. The variety of uses this group was designed to serve is part of its special interest and the whole complex must be viewed as a whole.

2.5.3ii The Oddfellows Hall

Dated 1880, this is another exuberant Victorian building in an eclectic style which makes it stand out in the streetscene. The pedimented gable and decorative stucco are very distinctive as the building is flanked by plain residential terraces.

2.5.3iii Toll house and 13-15 Western Road

[fig 149 : Exeter Court]

[fig 150 : Villas on Exeter Street rise above Dockacre Road]

[fig 151a Guildhall clock]

[fig 153 : Toll house and cottages on Western Road]
A typical polygonal-ended toll house with a pair of small cottages attached. Built in the early 19th century, the toll house records the major alterations to the road network at the time – the insertion of Western Road and St Thomas Road as a by-pass taking pressure off the old town streets.

2.5.3iv Former Police Station

This is a simple and neat building in rubble stone with red brick detailing; now converted to housing but retaining its character as part of the collection of civic buildings in this quarter.

2.5.3v 35-37 Westgate Street

The steep pitch of the roofs suggests that this pair of buildings may date from the 17th century and, therefore, represent early survivals of town house building outside the walled town.

2.5.3vi The Westgate Inn

This is a plain and unpretentious pub of the late 18th or early 19th century that occupies a prominent site in the vicinity of the historic West Gate.

2.5.3vii 20-22 Westgate Street

An unpretentious little corner building of the mid 19th century with nice shopfront surrounds and a roof with added interest due to the polygonal plan, which is turned with mitred hips.

2.5.3viii 15-19 Westgate Street [see fig 157]

Part of the group on the Westgate Street / Madford Lane junction, it is a taller three storey structure and built of stone. Not as flamboyant as some of its contemporary buildings but it closes the view from the west and turns the corner effectively. The dormer looks as though it may have housed a clock or perhaps a bell?

2.5.3ix Madford Lodge

The loss of context caused by the demolition of Madford House means this small lodge appears an oddity in the streetscene; but it has its own merit and is a reminder that there once was a substantial house right on the edge of the town centre.
2.5.3x 3 Southgate Place

Number 3 is a diminutive slate hung building that is a key feature looking east along Madford Lane as it frames the countryside view down Angel Hill. The full width shopfront is indicative of its position on the edge of the central shopping area.

2.5.3xi 5 Southgate Place and 1 Exeter Street

This substantial three storey corner building is a smartly detailed commercial and residential development with super shopfronts; it makes a major contribution to the setting of the Southgate.

2.5.3xii Kensey Place

This is the former prison, substantially rebuilt in the later 18th century and used later as a workhouse prior to residential conversion. It is an important building reflecting the historic role of the town as a centre for law and order.

2.5.4 Proposed Amendments to the Conservation Area Boundary

See map 4a

2.5.4a Race Hill

The historic importance of this entrance to the town ought to be acknowledged by inclusion within the Conservation Area.
The late Victorian Clarence terrace has considerable merit and so does the retaining wall opposite.

These mark the point where the Southgate comes into view so it would appear sensible to extend the boundary to here. The car park, being a former market area, is of historic interest. It is also very prominent in views of the castle and town centre from the north – the glint of windscreens can be widely seen when the sun shines. The water trough is a typical piece of Victorian philanthropy reflecting how the provision of potable water was a real concern. In this case it seems that human and animal welfare were catered for.

Race Hill Terrace has some merit and the buildings on the west side of the street indicate that this was a busy place in the later 19th century. A little hall, isolated next to the modern offices off Madford Lane appears to have been a chapel and before that possibly a store or workshop?

2.5.4b Dunheved Road and Western Road

Although much of Dunheved Road has lost its character as an area, there may be merit in extending the Conservation Area as far as the attractive late Victorian group on the west side.
The boundary could then drop down to Western Road to take in the main entrance into the town for motorists. The green gap north of the junction with Chapel Hill allows views into the deer park and is a reminder of the historic relationship this area had with the castle.

2.5.4c Bounsall's Lane

Although Windmill Hill is a narrow and historic lane offering some superb views of the castle, the quality and nature of 20th century development on it is not considered worthy of Conservation Area status. At the bottom of the hill is Bounsall's Lane which has a good terrace and row of garages that are of interest and occupy a prominent elevated site.
2.6 Landscape Setting

2.6.1 Character Summary

Until the mid 19th century Launceston was even more strongly linear than today and all parts of the town were closely connected to the surrounding land. The popularity of the town during the Victorian era generated considerable expansion to the south, onto and around Windmill Hill. In St Thomas there was growth along Woooda Lane and Tredydan Road; Newport saw building along Dutson Road. All of these developments linked to the existing town in a meaningful way and the architecture ranged from modest and functional to quite outstanding. Dunheved Road in particular has many graceful residencies of the period. Sadly nearly all have been harmed by 20th century development that is ill-considered, mediocre or downright poor. As a result this area cannot be judged to possess ‘special architectural or historic interest’.

On the other side of the Kensey the simple historic form of Newport and St Stephen’s has been substantially lost, or at least blurred at the edges, by 20th century development. In the Kensey valley itself, the modern industrial estate has sprawled in an incoherent and haphazard fashion without regard for architectural standards or the wider setting of the historic town. Fortunately the substantial tree cover on the southern side of the flood plain tends to draw the eye from the modern sheds and there is considerable potential for landscape enhancement here.

There remains much about the landscape setting of Launceston that is truly special and worthy of protection. A broad swathe of countryside on the eastern side of the town is vital to views into and out of the old settlement and to the west is the former deer park and the higher Kensey Valley.

2.6.2 Landscape Appraisal

This is a very brief appraisal from an historic environment perspective. There is a pressing need for a thorough landscape assessment to inform future policy and development decisions on the green edges of the town.

2.6.2a Former deer park

This is the most precious area of open land in Launceston due to its historic association with, and proximity to, the castle. Originally the castle south gate is believed to have opened directly into the deer park and so it formed an intimate part of Earl Richard’s estate. The steep valley sides are stepped from centuries of grazing and the wider landscape views from the Castle Green are integral to the present day experience of Launceston. There is a real danger of visual intrusion from further development on Catherine’s Hill, whether in the form of new or replacement dwellings, garden structures, loose boxes or inappropriate enclosure in the form of walls, timber fences or conifer hedges.

The allotments on Woooda Lane must be considered part of the deer park in practical terms and protected from development.

The allotments on Woooda Lane must be considered part of the deer park in practical terms and protected from development.
King George’s playing field helps to link the view through to the well wooded Riverside area of St Thomas.

2.6.2b West Kensey Valley

This is another location where the countryside still seems to slide seamlessly into the town – something that may be enjoyed from the steam railway. The flood plain is essentially undeveloped and there remains a direct visual link through the gap site between 1 and 3 St Stephen’s Hill – a site threatened with development. Excessive development, especially if it spreads into the backland will inevitably cause further harm. The precedents of St Cuthbert Close and Hollies Road ought to serve as a warning against such proposals rather than justification for them.

2.6.2c East Kensey Valley

This has long been a working area in the town and that is certain to continue. At present the sheer number of trees tends to at least partly camouflage the various utilitarian structures that litter the valley. As there will be continual pressure for infill and re-development here it is essential that some basic development principles are established. Scale, density, landscaping, roof form and cladding are all critical issues that need to be considered. Development must also be directed to land that is already underused or partially developed, rather than allowing more of the valley setting to be damaged. The industrial estate is already perilously close to Ridgegrove Hill and that is too far, especially as residential development is leaking into the valley below the Exeter Road.

2.6.2d Eastern approaches

The historic route from Exeter has been the point of arrival for visitors over the centuries and is characterised by the green valley sides providing a verdant setting to the historic silhouette of Launceston. Bit by bit this green hillside is being nibbled away and the cumulative result is inevitably going to be a serious dilution of this special setting. The green tongue between Exeter Street and Ridgegrove Hill seems particularly under
threat, along with the slope between the A388 Exeter Road and Tavistock Road.

2.6.2e Windmill Hill

Although the nature and extent of development around Windmill Hill makes it unsuitable for inclusion within the Conservation Area, the open space and, (more crucially), the many trees on private and public land create a gentle green backdrop to the historic core. The backdrop is especially important in elevated views across the town from St Stephen’s.

2.6.3 Proposed Amendments to the Conservation Area Boundary

2.6.3a Deer Park / Castle mill valley

The open space immediately west of the castle and western road has many historic dimensions. Its role as part of Earl Richard’s deer park is obviously of great interest; but there is also the archaeological potential – including the former mill site. Add to that the more recent interest of the allotments and chapel off Wooda Lane and this is clearly a priceless asset to the town.

Then there is the landscape value in terms of the setting to the town and its principal heritage feature – the castle. The public footpath through the valley offers some of the most rewarding views of the castle and Town Hall group. Even the sometimes unglamorous rear elevations of the properties along Western Road add to the overall ‘lived-in’ character of the views.

It is also proposed to extend the boundary along Wooda Lane to Tredydan Road as King Georges field and the roofscape of the associated 20th century homes is an integral element of the view from the castle.

2.6.3b West Kensey Valley

The backland west of Newport, the flood plain and town mills are all part of historic Launceston and are proposed for inclusion. Protection of the rural feel here is very desirable as it is a genuine asset for the town.

2.6.3c East Kensey Valley

The wooded fringe, meadow and pasture along the valley side that makes up the eastern fringe of Launceston is a fundamental part of the special character of the place. It is under threat and great caution is needed to avoid insensitive development causing loss of this landscape asset. Views into the
Conservation Area are important, but those looking out from places like Dockacre Road are really precious and worthy of protection.

[fig 177 : Looking down Ridgegrove Hill from Dockacre Road]
3.0 SWOT analysis

This SWOT analysis is prepared with the Conservation Area in mind but the well-being of the historic resource is inevitably linked to economic factors. These are brought into the equation as they can benefit as well as threaten the positive preservation and enhancement of historic Launceston.

3.1 Strengths

- Outstanding and very distinctive historic market town with three separate ancient settlement centres stretched across the Kensey valley.
- Traditional hinterland plus good access to A30 and proximity to tourist centres.
- Dramatic townscape silhouette and special views between the different parts of the town.
- Green landscape setting that still flows into the town in places and combines with a good scattering of mature trees throughout residential areas and on the town fringes.
- Attractive riverside area with an exceptional medieval pack horse bridge.
- Primary historic attraction of national importance in the castle and others including the steam railway and the museum.
- Castle Green is a versatile and attractive public space close to the town centre.
- High concentration of historic buildings and structures, some Scheduled Ancient Monuments, many listed and others worthy of protection for local interest.
- Medieval churches in all three settlement centres, St Mary Magdalene being especially unusual and interesting. Priory remains visible in St Thomas and hidden in St Stephen’s.
- Fantastic townscape made up of a great variety of streetscenes that reveal the historic development of the place.
- Plenty of opportunity for pedestrians to explore the town and discover features of interest.
- High quality local materials much in evidence for paving, walls and roofs.
- Historic market squares in each of the three settlements and a fine market house in the town centre.
- A lot of shop units in the town centre with a high proportion of historic shopfronts.
- Some specialist shops serving traditional local needs for products and services.
- Plenty of car parking close to the town centre.
- Good WC provision.
- Established and improving links between local organisations, councils, English Heritage etc.

3.2 Weaknesses

- Local economy has been in a period of decline and there is no longer a regular market.
- Not seen as a visitor centre – few hotels and no camping provision in the immediate area.
- No real marketing image and limited awareness of the potential that Launceston has to be a visitor destination in its own right.
- Historic town centre dominated by traffic, including many larger delivery vehicles at all times of the day. General traffic management favours the car before the pedestrian.
- St Thomas Road, Newport Square and, to a lesser extent St Stephen’s, are rather blighted by the quantity of through traffic.
- One attempt at pedestrianisation led to the annihilation of a key historic thoroughfare – Northgate Street.
- The wonderful central Market Square is used as a car park rather than a pedestrian oriented space.
- Lack of regular activity, such as markets or entertainment, to attract locals or visitors.
• Few specialist shops that might appeal to the visitor and little variety in food outlets.
• Too many shopfronts harmed or replaced and some poor signage that reduces the quality of the shopper/visitor experience.
• Poor links between Castle Green and central area – Western Road / St Thomas Road junction is very hostile to the pedestrian.
• Lack of legibility or direction for pedestrians to use the various routes available to them.
• Topography can be a disincentive for those on foot to explore. Visitors to steam railway tend not to visit the town centre and vice versa.
• Incidental spaces and seats around the town seem to be poorly tended, with broken seats, litter etc.
• Housing developments of the last 50 years have generally had a negative impact on the character of the town and its immediate setting.

3.3 Opportunities
• Retention and enhancement of historic assets; proper repair and protection of heritage buildings and structures.
• A co-ordinated parking strategy would enhance the town centre and could stimulate economic activity.
• Traffic management could reclaim some streets and improve the pedestrian experience of the town, encouraging longer stays and more spending.
• Physical enhancement of the Market Square and considered use of the space could attract more visitors and local shoppers.
• Positive action could entice investment in a wider variety of specialist retail units and food outlets.
• Use of Market Square for regular farmers markets etc. Also occasional entertainment such as children’s theatre, good buskers/street entertainers, brass bands and the like.
• Preservation and enhancement of historic shopfronts plus replacement of poor units with well designed alternatives.
• Increase awareness of potential for specialist retailers and encourage diversity and quality in food outlets.
• Encourage pedestrians to explore through better signage and maybe proposed cliff railway link between the town centre and steam railway.
• Restoration and thoughtful, high quality enhancement of Northgate Street would remove a major barrier to pedestrian movement along the historic spine of the town.
• Improved access and interpretation of St Thomas priory ruins would offer another attraction.
• Scope for additional visitor attractions and activities in the vicinity of the steam railway.
• Improved footpath and cycle access along the beautiful Kensey Valley.
• The former parade ground immediately east of the churchyard could lend itself to some additional uses, such as petanque?
• There area a number of potential residential development sites in the town and opportunities to bring upper floors into residential use. Increasing the number of dwellings in the town centre will help to support a greater range of shopping and social activities.
• Learn from other historic places via organisations like the English Historic Towns Forum.
• Establish an Historic Buildings Preservation Trust as a pro-active way to deal with historic buildings in need of solutions.

3.4 Threats
• Inaction on traffic and parking will surely lead to further decline.
• Continuation of a trend towards poorly designed shopfronts and loud or ill-considered signage will further
erode the special character of the town centre.

• Acceptance of poorly planned or designed developments on opportunity sites will not help to enhance the Conservation Area.

• Further loss of the attractive green fringe of the town to mediocre or downright poor development can only make Launceston a less attractive place.

• Enhancement schemes designed down to a budget by using inferior materials will not make the place more attractive and will reduce the value of existing historic assets.

• Ill-considered planting of trees or poorly designed planting schemes can obscure or detract from historic locations.

• Failure to inspire local interest or engage stakeholders in plans and projects.

• Indecision and inaction due to disagreement among local groups and statutory bodies.

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