

Character Area Eight: Aldwark



Overview

Although ancient in origin, Aldwark is now the most modern suburb within the walls. From the 1970s, this quiet residential neighbourhood emerged from Aldwark's industrial past, urged on by Esher's vision of restoring inner-city living. The design of new development successfully compliments the 18th and 19th century houses that remain.

Aldwark is a pleasant place to live and surprisingly quiet during the day considering it is so close to the bustling city centre. However, there can be disruption in the evening from tour groups, one of the challenges of living in a historic city centre. Well organised traffic restrictions and off-street parking make it a haven for pedestrians and cyclists.

Boundaries

The medieval streets of Goodramgate and Colliergate form the western boundary and have a distinctly different plot and building type. The eastern edge is formed by roads of The Stonebow and Peasholme Green which divide the character area from the Hungate development site. The northern boundary is the city wall.

Although beyond the boundary, the Hungate site forms part of the setting of the Conservation Area and therefore reference is made to it in the following pages.

The junction of Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate / The Stonebow / Pavement / Colliergate is discussed here but overlaps with character areas 10 and 15.

Historical development

The street pattern in this area is influenced by the line of the Roman fortress wall and subsequently, by Anglo-Scandinavian planning. By 1000 the route from Pavement through St Saviourgate and Peasholme Green to Layerthorpe was established, and the number of 11th century churches founded along it attest to its importance. Another principal Anglo-Scandinavian street was Hungate, which led from St Saviourgate to the then marshy banks of the Foss.

During the Middle Ages several important religious and social institutions were established. The earliest of these is the Bedern, founded in the 13th century as a complex to house the Vicars Choral, who deputised for Canons at Minster services. The extensive complex was entered from Goodramgate; only two buildings survive, the much restored Chapel and the Hall.

The Merchant Taylors' Hall off Aldwark was founded about 1400 and is the only surviving craft guildhall in the city. Constructed as a large timber-framed building, the external walls were re-built in brick from the late 17th century. The Hall is still used by the guild and also operates as an events venue.

Another guildhall was St Anthony's Hall off Peasholme Green, built in the 15th century on the site of an earlier chapel. Built as a guildhall and hospital for the guild of St Martin, from 1550 it was used by any guild which did not have its own hall. From 1705 to 1946 it housed York Blue Coat Boys' School. The complex of buildings is now owned by York Conservation Trust and has undergone restoration, along with the gardens. Currently, The Quilt Museum and Gallery and the York Archaeological Trust operate from St Anthony's.

Maps from the 17th century show houses along the principal streets with gardens and orchards to the rear. It was at this time that the first of a series of non-conformist chapels was built on St Saviourgate for a Presbyterian congregation. During the 18th century, Georgian merchants' houses were erected along St Andrewgate and St Saviourgate, one of the best early terraces in the city. ¹

Peasholme Green was traditionally used as a market place for wool fleece. The Black Swan public house was frequented by those visiting this market and later the hay market from 1827.

In the 19th century industry colonised many of the gardens and the area descended into a poor industrial suburb. Large numbers of Irish immigrants settled here after the Famine and the Bedern became one of the city's worst slums, where the majority of families lived in one room.

The non-conformist churches gathered momentum at this time– two large new chapels which resembled Greek temples were built at each end of St Saviourgate and several other missions were set up offering Sunday schools.

Major changes occurred from the mid-20th century as the city sought to tackle the deprivation of the area. The first of these was the creation of The Stonebow in 1955. This new road linked Pavement with Peashome Green, relieving St Saviourgate of traffic. Ten years later Stonebow House was built, a controversial landmark office block.

Esher's map of the area's building uses in 1968 still shows large amount of industry and warehousing, such as the Ebor Brewery on north east side of Aldwark. Esher advocated refilling the walled city with residents and identified Aldwark as one of the three principal areas for this. Extensive demolition cleared away most of the industrial buildings and the worst of the slums and in the 1980s and 1990s these were replaced by new housing developments. The area is now held up as a successful example of how to create a new domestic neighbourhood in a sensitive historic environment.

Ambience and use

Considering its proximity to the city centre, Aldwark is a surprisingly quiet area during the day. Although there are also some small office buildings and churches, this area is overwhelming residential. These uses do not generate high levels of through traffic and a one-way system ensures the streets are mostly empty apart from pedestrians and cyclists.

This day-time ambience contrasts with the evening when groups of tourists visit the area on themed tours. This can be disruptive to residents.



Merchant Taylor's Hall, a medieval timber-framed guildhall partially re-built in brick

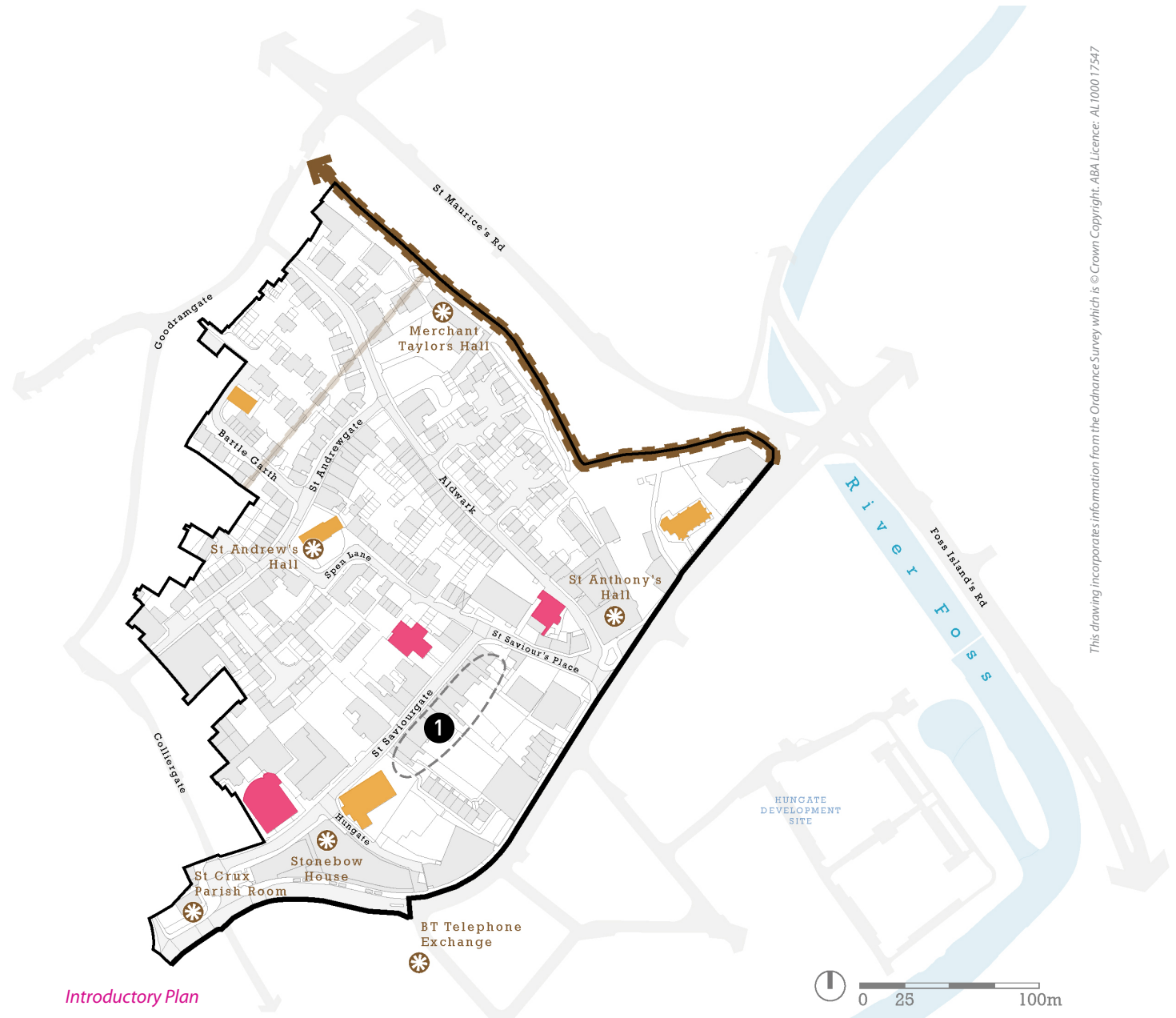
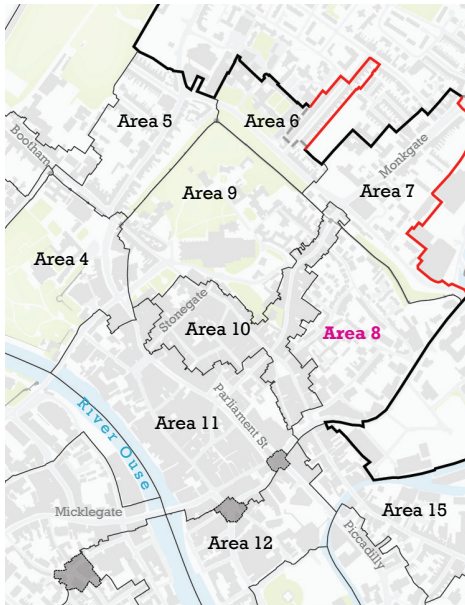


The Stonebow just after construction in 1955. Peasholme Green is in the distance

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Eight: Aldwark

-  Early Georgian houses
-  Landmark
-  City Wall
-  Line of former Roman fortress wall
-  Conservation Area boundary
-  Character Area boundary
-  Medieval church
-  Non-conformist chapel

Location plan



Introductory Plan

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Designations

This area has three Grade I listed buildings, all of which are medieval - Merchant Taylors' Hall, St Anthony's Hall and St Cuthbert's Church.

Grade II* listed buildings are also found in high numbers, concentrated along St Saviourgate, with a few on St Andrewgate. These include some churches and Georgian houses.

Most other historic buildings are either Grade II or designated buildings of merit.

There are two detracting buildings, both 20th century office blocks. Stonebow House is one of the most controversial buildings in the city: people either love it or hate it. Built in 1964 to the design of Wells, Hickman and Partners, it is the most prominent example in the city of the 'brutalist' strand of modern architecture, in which the function and structure of the building is clearly expressed by bold use of exposed concrete. The sinuous lower 'podium' - containing a parade of shops - hugs the street. Above it rises a cantilevered office tower. A car park sits over the rest of the deck.

Although the building is a confident and in many ways refined representative of its era and its architectural style, it is fundamentally flawed in the way that it relates to its setting. One of the tallest buildings in the city centre and occupying a corner position, it is out of scale with the historic townscape and competes with the height of neighbouring churches and blocks views to them. At the time of writing the building is partially vacant and due to its age and design its future use as an office block is limited.









Five-storey Hilary House is an ugly terminus to the view down the largely Georgian St Saviourgate. It replaced a late Georgian chapel. Taking little notice of the form and proportions of its surroundings, it is neither a good example of its time nor built of high quality materials.

Just beyond the boundary is the BT telephone exchange. It is in rather poor condition and by virtue of its size, dominates the approach up The Stonebow into the heart of the city. As part of the setting of the Conservation Area, this building should be considered a detractor.



Far left: Stonebow House, built in 1964 to the design of Wells, Hickman and Partners

Left: Another 1960s office block, Hilary House, is a disappointing terminus to views along St Saviourgate

-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Grade I Listed Building
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Building of merit
-  Detractor
-  Character Area boundary
-  Character Area boundary



Designations Plan

Streets & Spaces

Streets

The area has a backbone of medieval streets with 20th century cul-de-sacs grafted on.

Streets such as St Saviourgate, Aldwark and St Andrewgate, have retained the traditional arrangement of narrow plots and two and three storey buildings fronting the street. The common building line brings a sense of enclosure. Street surfaces are of high quality materials such as York paving.

The cul-de-sacs include Turks Head, St Andrew Place, and Pear Tree Court. The buildings tend to be on a staggered line, all facing into a courtyard which is often used for surface parking (though there may be garages).



St Andrew's Place is arranged around a courtyard

Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate/ The Stonebow/ Pavement/ Colliergate

This is a large junction with wide pavements but the space is poorly designed and unnecessarily cluttered with bicycle racks, parking space, benches, bollards, advertising boards and raised plant beds.

Simplifying the space would create an attractive place where people could dwell, rather than the present road junction which is simply a place to walk through. Introducing shared surfaces, using high quality materials and re-organising street furniture would help achieve this. Cycle provision could still be a part of this space if carefully designed and sited.



Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate could be re-designed

Open spaces and views

There is a significant amount of greenery in this area which is distributed throughout private developments in the form of internal courtyard gardens that seem generally well maintained. The largest ornamental garden is that of the School House Gallery/ Quilt Museum based in St Anthony's Hall. The Merchant Taylors' Hall possesses a large forecourt but this pleasant setting is compromised by its use as a car park.

Other spaces include the small churchyards of St Andrew's Hall, the Unitarian Chapel, St Saviour's and St Cuthbert's Churches.

The most significant view is that of the Minster from Bartle Garth and St Saviour's Place. Other local views include those to the Merchant Taylors' Hall and St Andrew's Hall.



The garden next to the Quilt Museum provides an attractive setting for the listed buildings and the city walls



A private courtyard garden

Buildings

This area has a high concentration of religious buildings, churches and non-conformist chapels. The Gothic, Magnesian Limestone medieval churches contrast with the classical styles of the later non-conformists. Interspersed with these are a range of houses dating from the 17th to the late 20th century; St Saviourgate has one of the best rows of early Georgian houses in the city.

Medieval churches

Of the four medieval churches in Aldwark, only three are still standing and none of these are used for worship anymore. St Andrew's Hall, Spen Lane/ St Andrewgate was redundant by 1548 and has had a variety of uses including stable, brothel and school.

St Cuthbert's, Peasholme Green, has the oldest parts, with walling from the 11th century and Roman masonry. It is now used by St Michael-le-Belfry as an administration centre and contains many important funerary monuments.

St Saviour's, St Saviourgate, 15th century with 19th century alterations, was made redundant in 1954 and in 1990 was converted into the Archaeological Resource Centre.

St Crux Church was located at a key crossroads of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement. It was demolished as unsafe in 1887. St Crux Parish Room was built on the same site in 1888 and incorporated part of the church wall.



St Andrew's



St Cuthbert's



St Saviour's



St Crux Parish Room

Non-conformist chapels

The Unitarian Chapel, in the middle of St Saviourgate, is the oldest non-conformist chapel in the city, built in 1692 for the Presbyterians who used it until 1756. It has an interesting plan-form and the use of brick and simple classical details reflect a denominational as well as architectural break from the medieval Gothic churches.

This was followed by the first Wesleyan Methodist chapel in the city at Nos. 40-42 Aldwark. Built in plain brick in 1759, it remained in use until 1805.

The Central Methodist Chapel, at the southern end of St Saviourgate, was built 1839-40 by James Simpson of Leeds to celebrate the first 100 years of Methodism. It has a grand classical stone-faced front, with a giant portico composed of a pediment supported by columns. Sadly, the view of this is largely blocked by Stonebow House.

The Salem Congregation Chapel of 1839 stood at the end of St Saviourgate until it was demolished in 1964 and replaced by Hilary House.



Unitarian Chapel



Central Methodist Chapel

20th century housing

Aldwark is well known for the successful approaches taken to modern housing design in a sensitive historic environment. The developments were carried out from the 1970s to 1990s (?) and are generally privately owned. Generally developments are composed of two and three storey terraces of houses around a courtyard.

All are in a 'neo-vernacular' style, utilising traditional domestic elements in their design. Inspired by the higgledy-piggledy character of the medieval areas of the city, the buildings are carefully arranged with changes in roof line and form and staggered frontages to create variety and visual incident, and the streets laid out to open up incidental views and glimpses of the Minster. All buildings are red brick with tiled pitched roofs; variation in window and door design give each development further personality.



Examples of new developments in Aldwark from left to right: Spen Lane, Turk's Head Court and Bedern

Traffic & Movement

A major cross-city route runs along Pavement/ The Stonebow/ Peasholme Green on the edge of this area. Large numbers of buses stop directly outside Stonebow House depositing shoppers, which can cause congestion and inhibits active uses along the ground floor units. The bus stops opposite Stonebow House are less problematic. In other character areas bus stops are an issue because of their impact on the historic environment but this is not a particularly sensitive location.

Private cars are restricted from using the route from Stonebow House into the city centre between 8am and 6pm and traffic is controlled through the rest of the area via a one-way system. In addition, bollards throughout the area, such as at the junction of Aldwark and St Andrewgate, mean non-local drivers avoid these streets.

The lack of cars and buses makes this area particularly pleasant for pedestrians and it is a popular cycling route. The design of the modern developments makes efficient use of space, providing most parking within courtyards, thereby removing the need for on-street parking.



A large group of bus stops along The Stonebow

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- Aldwark is a successful residential suburb within the city walls. 20th century developments are sensitively designed and complement surrounding historic buildings.
- Private and public spaces are well maintained and there is an excellent view of Minster from Bartle Garth.
- Traffic has been largely successfully controlled resulting in greater freedom for pedestrians and cyclists.

Weaknesses and opportunities

As described in Designations, Stonebow House detracts from the appearance of the area mainly for reasons of scale and position and its upper floors are no longer fit for purpose. Surrounding the building there are other problematic spaces:

- An empty development site behind Stonebow House and next to St Saviour's Church; approval has been given for terraced houses.
- A scruffy patch of green space opposite Stonebow House and next to the BT telephone exchange;
- A poorly designed left over and cluttered space at Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate to the west of Stonebow House.

View to the Minster from Bartle Garth



Development site behind Stonebow House



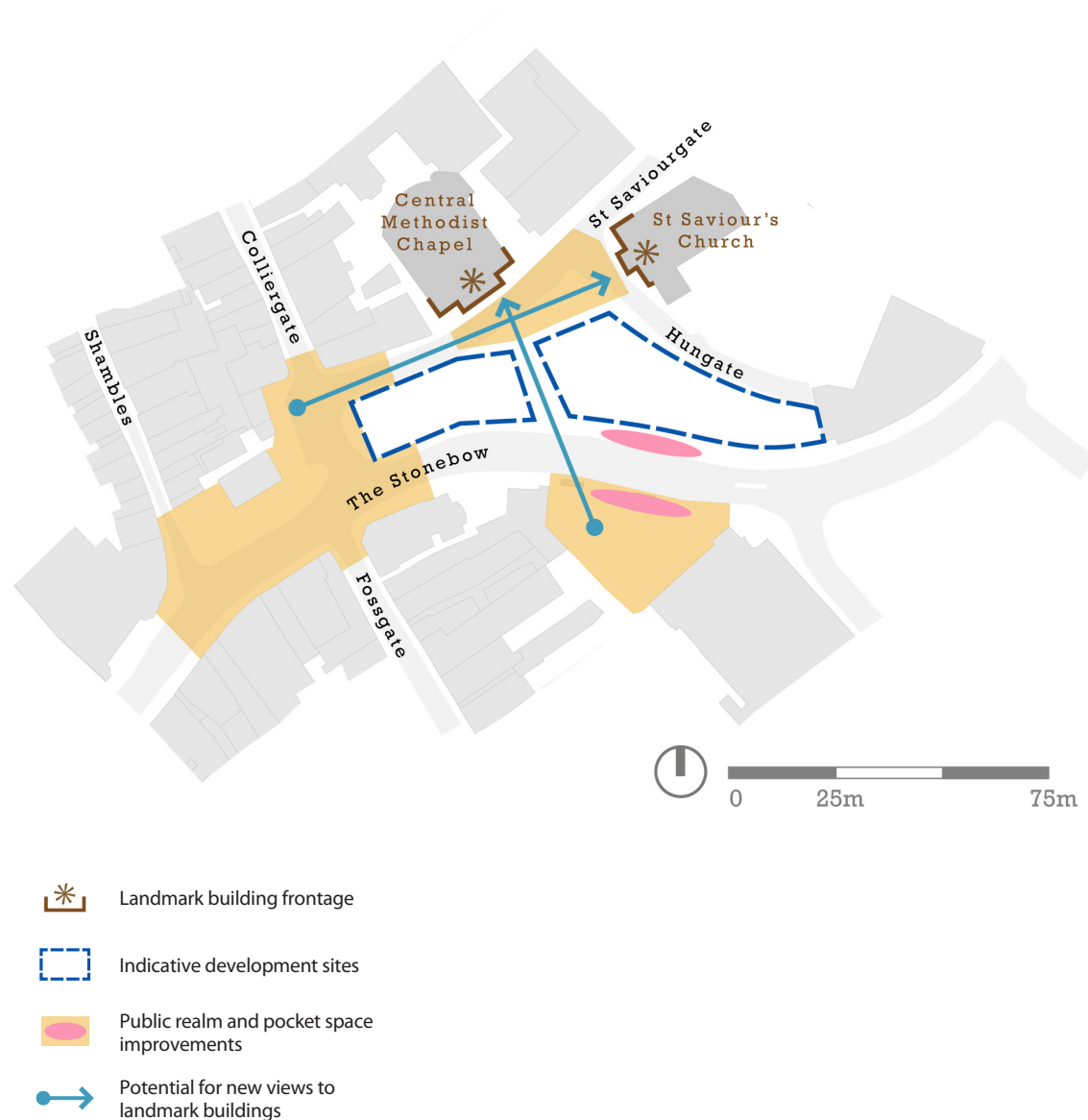
Unused space next to the Telephone Exchange, just outside the Conservation Area boundary. Stonebow House is in the background, blocking views to the Centenary Methodist Chapel



All of these issues need to be considered together with any future development of Stonebow House since the opportunities they offer are interlinked. There is already a planning statement for Stonebow House but a development brief should be prepared to address the wider issues.

The key objective should be the creation of better public spaces. In order to achieve this, design of any replacement building needs to be based on the principles that:



- The existing footprint should be broken up into separate blocks;
- Active frontages should face St Saviourgate and Hungate;
- Any new development should be no higher than five storeys to fit with the historic townscape; (this is a principle in the Management Strategy)
- Settings for the Central Methodist Chapel and St Saviour's Church should be improved through creation of public spaces;
- New glimpsed views to the Chapel and Church should be revealed from Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate and The Stonebow;
- The use and function of pocket spaces (Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma Gate and small green space next to the Telephone Exchange) should be comprehensively re-designed and landscaped.
- The location of bus stops should be reviewed with the aim of reducing pedestrian congestion.





Existing

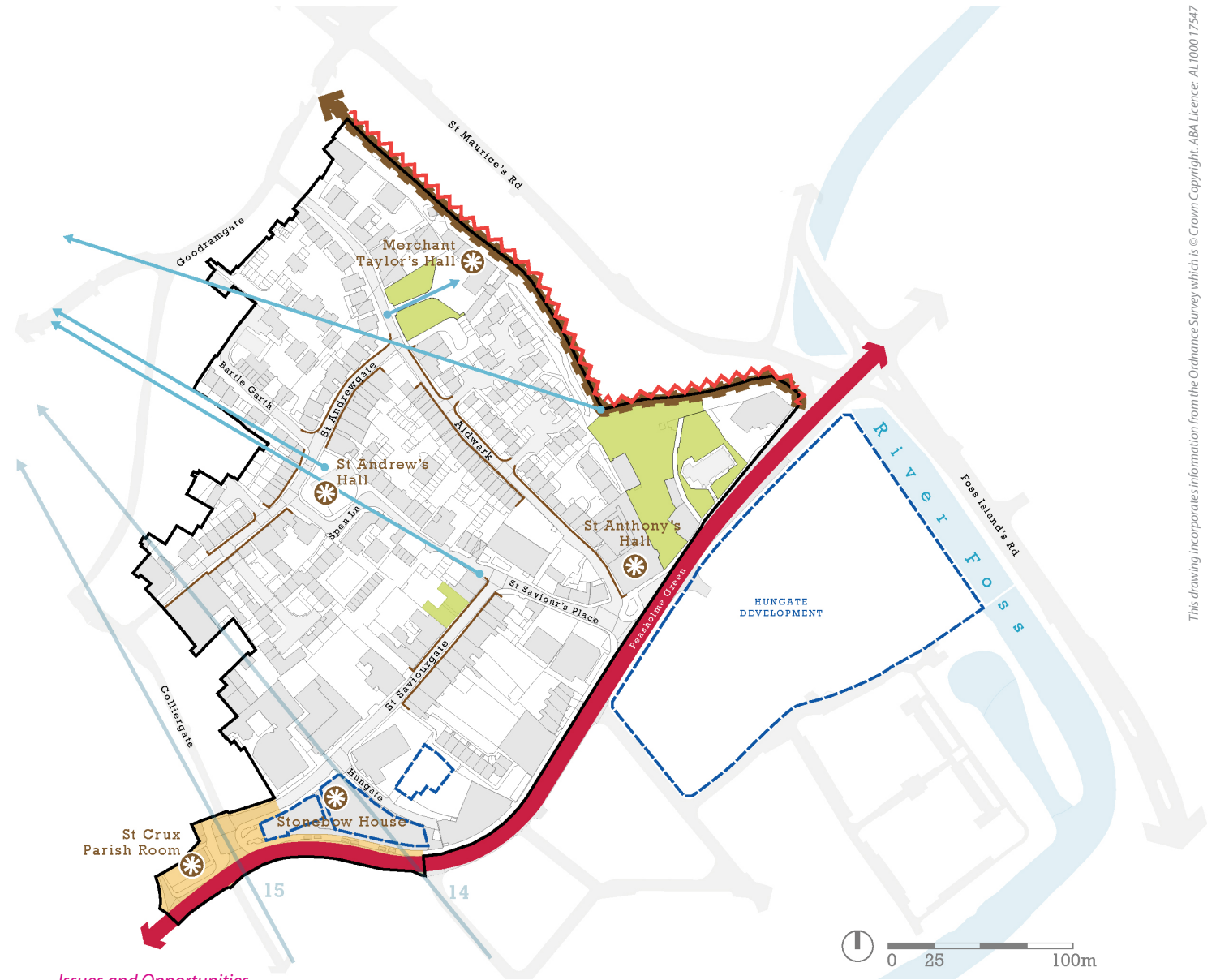
-  City Wall
-  Well enclosed street
-  Well maintained gardens
-  Landmark
-  Long stretch of City Wall without opening
-  High volume of traffic

Opportunities

-  Public space improvements
-  Potential for high quality development

Views

-  Local fixed with focal point
-  Key view from outside the character area - refer to section 3.5



Issues and Opportunities