

Town Hall Conservation Area

Designated 2005

Introduction

The overriding character and appearance of the Town Hall Conservation Area is established by a group of important civic and public buildings set within a formal arrangement along Wellington Road South, a principal route through Stockport town centre.

An earlier historic route, Greek Street/ Edward Street, cuts across Wellington Road South at an oblique angle to the south of the Town Hall and the geometry of the resulting street layout has been exploited over time to create memorable views, vistas and visual relationships between key buildings.



History and development

Wellington Road was constructed in 1824/6 following the passing of a controversial turnpike Act to create a new road bypassing the historic core of Stockport, producing what was in essence an early forerunner of the late-twentieth century road bypass schemes. It was designed to improve transport links between Manchester to Buxton (and beyond to London) and to reduce traffic congestion in the narrow streets and steep slopes of the historic town centre around Hillgate, the Underbanks and Old Road.



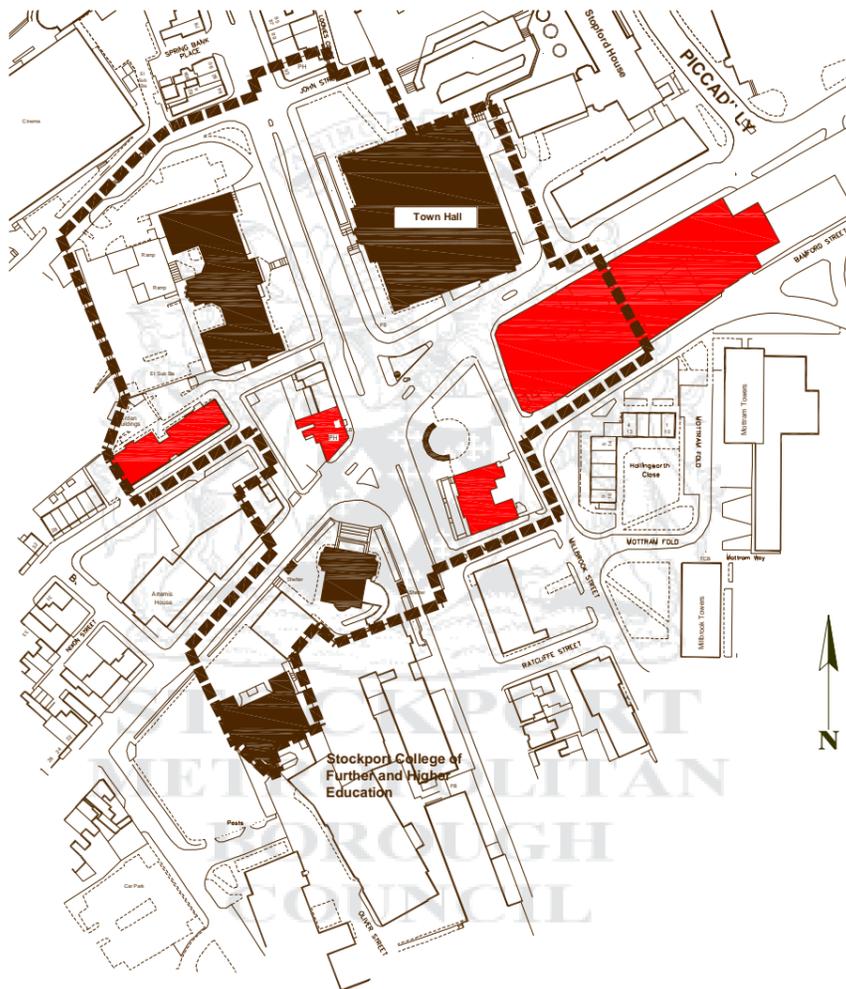
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It was described in 1882 as :

' a noble road, about 3 1/4 miles long and 24 yards wide. It crosses the vale of the Mersey by a viaduct of eleven arches, and took more than two years to construct ...The cost of this road and viaduct amounted to £36,000...It was named after the great hero of Waterloo...The opening was celebrated as a public holiday by general rejoicings and large processions...At the close of the proceedings, 8000 Sunday scholars were regaled with buns and wine...'
Heginbotham: Stockport Ancient and Modern (1882)

The new road also facilitated new development along its frontage, which at the time of construction consisted of open land lying to the west of the town centre. Initially development took place close to the bridge over the River Mersey in the form of industrial, domestic and commercial buildings but during the following decades some of the town's grandest buildings were erected near the junction with Edward Street and Greek Street. These include the Stockport Infirmary, the National School (now demolished), Mount Tabor Chapel (now demolished), the Town Hall, the War Memorial Art Gallery and the Technical School.

Greek Street is part of an early road running east-west from the town centre to Chester and Warrington, via Edgeley and Cheadle, which was turnpiked in 1820. Early development along Greek Street took the form of modest, well proportioned late Georgian two storey properties in brick and slate.



- Listed Buildings
- Locally Listed Buildings
- Boundary of the conservation area

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Special architectural and historic character

The crossroads provides the setting for a group of buildings of both local and national importance. All buildings are highly visible and most key buildings are set back and elevated above the level of the road. The public frontages of the buildings make an important and positive contribution to the area which forms a defining image of Stockport town centre.

Dating from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, there is a wide variety of styles and materials. They include the grand and highly decorative style of the Town Hall, built in Portland Stone and red brick; the classicism of the former Infirmary building, built in sandstone and the imposing Stockport College building in red brick with stone articulation. The relatively modest and functional 2 storey public house and commercial buildings in local brick, render and slate create a dramatic contrast with the height and exuberance of the Town Hall, which is the most visually dominant building in the area.



The key area of public space is the highway, which retains some historic features as well as responding to the needs of modern traffic. Important surviving historic features include a cast iron guidepost dating from the early twentieth century, Portland stone bus stop shelters in the boundary wall of the War Memorial Art Gallery, and the stone boundary walls and steps of the Town Hall, Infirmary, and War Memorial Art Gallery. Not all plots to street frontages are developed : there are two areas of open space on either side of the Town Hall, a grassed area to the north and a landscaped area to the south (on the site of the former Mount Tabor Chapel) which help to provide views of and give emphasis to grandeur of the Town Hall. Similarly an area of open space to the north of the former Infirmary serves to enhance the presence of the building.

Views along the roads in all directions, framed by the frontages of public buildings, are important in defining the character of this area.

Key historic buildings

Town Hall

The Town Hall was built 1904-8 to a design by Sir Alfred Brumwell-Thomas. It was constructed in white Portland stone and inspired by Wren's London churches, featuring a dramatic central tower rising up in diminishing stages to a crown finial. The building was described by Alastair Service in 1977 as Brumwell-Thomas' 'last and most exhilarating major building' of the High Edwardian Baroque. It has a very lavish interior and an almost complete ensemble of original fixtures and fittings. Known locally as 'the wedding cake', it was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1908.

Infirmary

The Infirmary was built 1832-34 to replace the old Dispensary and House of Recovery which stood in what is now Mersey Square. The land was given by Lady Vernon and funds were raised by public subscription. The new Infirmary was built on what was then the edge of the historic town, fronting Wellington Road. It was designed by Richard Lane, Manchester's most prominent architect of the Regency period, in Greek Revival style and is a good example of monumental architecture of the period. It was extended to the south in 1870-72 and again to the north in 1898, carefully respecting the original design. Following closure of the hospital in 1996, later extensions to the rear were demolished to make way for new additions at the rear of the building to accommodate office use.

War Memorial Art Gallery

The War Memorial Art Gallery is situated in a commanding position at the crest of a hill forming a group with the Town Hall. It is an impressive example of a First World War memorial which combines monumental architecture by James Theodore Halliday with outstanding sculpture by Gilbert Ledward. The idea for an art gallery on this site was current in 1912 but it was not until 1919 that the project took shape when it was decided to combine a hall, exhibition gallery and sculpture as a war memorial to the 2200 Stockport soldiers killed in the First War. It was opened in 1925.



Funded by voluntary donations, the War Memorial Art Gallery stands on the site of the old Stockport Grammar School, founded c.1490 by Edmund Shaa (Shaw) and the site is bounded by retaining walls which relate to the former school. Inset into the walls are foundation stones which record previous buildings of the Technical Scholl where Stockport College now stands. On both the Wellington Road South and Greek Street sides, bus shelters were inserted circa 1937 in Greek neoclassical style to match the main building. Whilst the siting and choice of materials creates a strong visual relationship with the Town Hall, the sombre Neoclassical Greek Revival style contrasts strongly with the architectural flamboyance of the Town Hall.

Stockport College building

The old college building on Greek Street was built in 1909-10 as Greek Street Secondary School, for 470 boys and 290 girls. The building is an architecturally accomplished building of an early twentieth century municipal school in the Queen Anne/Renaissance style typical of the period and one of

only a few remaining buildings of this type in the town centre. It is a four storey building constructed in red brick with stone dressings and banding and a Westmorland graduated stone slate roof, and features projecting rectangular towers with shaped gables to its parapet, surmounted by pyramidal slate spires.

Former nurses home (now Arden House)

Set back from the principal road frontages, the former Nurse's Home (now known as Arden House) is a well detailed and carefully composed 3 storey red brick building with a prominent continuous range of dormers with alternating segmental and pedimental heads. Designed by Percy Scott Worthington, it was built as a memorial to Edward VII and erected by public subscription between 1912-18.

Contributory buildings

The contrast in size, scale, siting and design between the key historic buildings noted above and other existing buildings in the area is an important element in shaping the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Many of these buildings are constructed at the back of footways and help to give definition to the street layout. For example, the Nelson Tavern occupies a prominent street corner at the junction of Greek Street and Wellington Road South. It is a relatively simple building of scribed

stucco and a slate roof which helps to emphasise the grandeur of the surrounding key buildings. It was erected between 1824 and 1836 and is therefore also of historic significance, representing an example of the first phase of development along Wellington Road. No 2 Greek Street provides a similar example.

The Mount Tabor Social Services building (constructed 1899-1900), designed in the Renaissance/Queen Anne style and with historical associations with Mount Tabor Chapel, is not as architecturally ambitious as its neighbouring counterparts, but it helps to define an important edge to the conservation area and contributes positively to the character of the area. North of the Town Hall, the Town Hall Tavern performs a similar function.

The former Hollingdrake motor car showrooms fronting Millbrook Street, constructed in the 1930s, is sensitively designed to respect the setting of the Town Hall nearby. This building is important in containing the area of public open space (the former Mount Tabor Chapel) and for framing views out of the area along Edward Street. It also provides a reminder of the rise and dominance of the car throughout the twentieth century and its impact upon the character of what is today one of the busiest trunk roads in the country.

The four Corinthian stone capitals on the corner of Edward Street and Wellington Road South (listed Grade II) are the only surviving element of the former Mount Tabor New Connexion Chapel which stood on the site until its demolition in 1969. The capitals provide a sombre reminder of a building which was equally ambitious in scale and architectural quality as its surviving neighbours.



The Purpose of Conservation Areas

- Conservation areas are designated by the Council to protect parts of the Borough which have special architectural and historic character
- The purpose of conservation areas is to help prevent the erosion of these special qualities by unsympathetic alterations to existing buildings, insensitive new development or loss through demolition
- The aim is to preserve and enhance the character of the area as a whole rather than by simply protecting individual buildings
- Conservation area status is not intended to prevent new development because sensitively designed new development can often enhance its character
- High standards of design will be expected for new buildings in conservation areas to ensure that the character of the area is maintained or enhanced

Summary of Planning Controls

- Most works to the exterior of properties in conservation areas are likely to require planning permission. These may include:
 - Roof alterations
 - Extensions
 - Cladding of exterior walls
 - New shop fronts and signs
 - Replacement windows and doors
 - Satellite dishes, extract flues or air conditioning units
- Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of buildings with a total cubic content of 115 cubic metres and the demolition of some boundary structures (eg gates, walls or fences)
- If tree works (felling, lopping or pruning) are proposed in a conservation area, six weeks notice should be given to the Council to assess the work and give consent or place a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) on the tree. Please contact the Council's Arboricultural Section (Tel. 0161-217-6111).

This represents a summary of the works for which planning permission may be required. Precise details may vary according to each building and it is advisable for owners to contact the Council's Conservation Officer (Tel. 0161-474-2620) for advice when considering carrying out alterations to their property. The Development Control Officer for the Town Hall area can be contacted at Stopford House, Piccadilly, Stockport SK1 3XE (Tel. 0161-474-3569/3541).

Listed Building Consent

Certain buildings have been statutory listed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, as being of special architectural or historic interest. Anyone intending to demolish or partially demolish such a building, or to extend or alter it needs 'listed building consent'. This is required whether or not the works are internal or external and the application has to be made to the Local Planning Authority. It is a prosecutable offence to carry out work on a listed building without first obtaining this consent. For further information please contact the Conservation Officer (Tel. 0161-474-2620).

A free interpreting service is available if you need help with this information. Please contact the Ethnic Diversity Service Tel. 0161-477-9000, Fax. 0161-480-1848, E-mail. eds.admin@stockport.gov.uk

This information can also be made available in braille, large print or audio. Please telephone 0161-474-2620 for details.