



## Character appraisal

May 2012

# Prescot town centre conservation area



Knowsley Council

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Prescot Conservation Area

Prescot is located in Merseyside, formerly part of south west Lancashire, and is one of the oldest former market towns in the area. The town sits on a south-facing hill overlooking two streams and is dominated by St Mary's Church, listed grade I and the most important historic building in the Conservation Area. In the eastern half of the Conservation Area, the remains of the medieval street layout, as defined by Eccleston Street and High Street and the narrow alleyways which run between them, are of special interest. To the west, a broad swath of woodland forms the backdrop to the church, with a group of mainly listed Victorian and Georgian buildings close by. Derby Street, which leads out of this part of the town, contains further important 19<sup>th</sup> Century buildings including a complex of listed buildings close to the junction with Knowsley Park Lane. Apart from two churches, and one purpose-built 19<sup>th</sup> Century commercial office, most of the other listed buildings (of which there are 21) are either late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> Century cottages or higher status town houses. A few retain earlier fabric, although further evaluation would be helpful. There are also a high number of historic buildings which are

considered to make a 'positive' contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area, with good groups in Atherton Road, Eccleston Street, Market Place and Derby Street. A number of higher status late 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses, with more spacious gardens, can be found in West Street, close to St Mary's Church.

Whilst coal mining and pottery were once important in Prescot, of greater significance is the history of clock, watch and tool-making, which once made this part of Lancashire world-famous. Prescot was the centre of this industry in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until competition from Switzerland and America in the 1870s led to the gradual erosion of its prominence. Until then, Prescot was a town of small workshops, attached to the back of almost every house and producing a variety of very high quality work. Today, only three workshops remain in the Conservation Area, a free-standing workshop (possibly 17<sup>th</sup> Century) at the back of No. 9 Market Place, and two integral workshops at No. 17 Atherton Street and No. 74 Eccleston Street. The first two are protected by statutory listing. However, just outside the Conservation Area boundary is a detached



former workshop (No. 20 Grosvenor Road) and a large cast iron factory, built rather late in 1893 as the premises for the Lancashire Watch Company. Both are listed grade II.

Prescot has suffered from a certain amount of demolition in the 1960s and 1970s, which was usually associated with slum clearance or road widening schemes. The construction of the Prescot Shopping Centre in the 1980s has been largely over-taken by the provision of the much larger Cables Retail Park beyond, which has had a negative impact on the viability of the shops in the centre of the Conservation Area. The creation of new town centre car parks, with carefully designed street surfaces and landscaping, has helped to a degree, but many of the shops remain vacant or in low value uses. There are a number of prominent gap sites and even more examples of neglected buildings urgently in need of repair. Advertising hoardings, found on several prominent locations within the Conservation Area, are particularly inappropriate. All of these issues need to be considered as part of the Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan, which will include the Council's regeneration strategy for the area.

In response to these statutory requirements, this document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of the Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area and identifies opportunities for enhancement. It is in conformity with English Heritage guidance as set out in *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (March 2011). Additional government guidance regarding the management of historic buildings and conservation areas is set out within the *National Planning Policy Framework* (March 2012) and supersedes *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning and the Historic Environment* (PPS5).

## 1.2 The planning policy context

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. A conservation area is defined as: *“an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”*.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas. Section 72 also specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development within a conservation area, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

# 2. Location and landscape setting

## 2.1 Location and activities

Prescot forms part of the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley in Merseyside, now separated from the county of Lancashire. The town is located some nine miles to the east of Liverpool city centre and lies on the A58 which connects Liverpool (eventually) to the town of Wetherby in West Yorkshire. The M57, M62 and M6 motorways are all close by. The northern boundary of the town is contained by Knowsley Park, the historic seat of the Earls of Derby.

Activities within the Conservation Area are very mixed. There are mainly commercial premises (shops, offices and public houses) in the core area of Eccleston Street and Leyland Street, with mixed commercial and residential uses in the High Street. The Prescot Centre, a 1980s development which contains a supermarket, a small shopping mall and a block of Council offices, lies to the immediate south of Eccleston Street and links through to it in two places. The status of this shopping centre has been undermined by the Cables Retail Park, which although close to the town centre, has no direct pedestrian links through to it and because of the change in level, feels relatively remote from it.

There is a further Council office in High Street, and this adjoins the Public Library, a 1960s building of little merit but well used. Prescot Museum is housed in a prestigious red brick Georgian house on the opposite corner of the street. A Police Station is located in a well detailed late 19<sup>th</sup> Century building in Derby Street. There are a few small cafes in the Conservation Area and two larger public houses, the Deane's House Hotel, in Church Street, and the Hope and Anchor Public House in High Street. Clock Face Public House in Derby Street, formerly West End house, is now a private residence. To the north of High Street are a number of small businesses (car repairs etc.) housed in modern factory buildings of no merit.

There are four churches: St Mary's (Church Street), Our Lady Immaculate and St Joseph (Vicarage Place), the Oasis Community Church (Kemble Street) and the Methodist Church (Atherton Street), a prominent building which is currently empty and in urgent need of repairs. Most of the other buildings in the Conservation Area are in residential uses, with two blocks of 1960s flats in Market Place/Sewell Street, and a further block of flats (Yates' Court) further



south almost opposite the site wall of Tesco's Supermarket. A three storey office block has replaced the public house shown on the original Conservation Area map, which dated to at least 1893. Since the closure of the BICC factory in the late 1980s, there has been no single large employer in Prescot. The population was 11,184 in 2001.

## 2.2 Topography and geology

The Conservation Area sits on a south-facing hill overlooking the valleys of two small streams - the Prescot Brook to the west and the Hindle Brook to the south - although these are mainly culverted. The land also drops westwards down Derby Street and West Street, and there are therefore notable views down Derby Street from the junction with Church Street. This topography means that St Mary's Church sits on a natural summit and the early use of the site for a possible pre-Conquest church becomes more likely.

The town lies on an outcrop of Upper Carboniferous red sandstone which contains coal measures, referred to as Westphalian rock. Prescot forms part of the Lancashire Coalfield which stretches from Skelmersdale in the west to beyond Oldham in the east. The sandstone is tough and erosion-resistant, which makes it ideal for building walls, or for use as a paving or roofing material. St Mary's Church is the best example of the use of this material in the Conservation Area. In places, the carboniferous rocks also contain clayrocks or 'shales' from which bricks can be made.

## 2.3 Relationship of the Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area to its surroundings

Prescot was originally the centre of a very large rural parish which stretched from Rainford in the north to the Mersey in the south. The map of 1909 shows a distinct, small town, surrounded by fields to the west,

south and east, with the historic parkland of Knowsley Hall to the north. However, in more recent times it has all but merged along Warrington Road (the A57) with Whiston and Rainhill, which lie to the south east of Prescot.

Although Knowlsey Park lies close to Prescot, the town feels somewhat remote from it due to the construction of the A58 Prescot bypass, which runs in a roughly east-west direction around the northern edge of the built-up area. The park contains the historic Knowsley Hall, areas of woodland, a large ornamental lake and a safari park, but none of this is visible from Prescot. A very large reservoir, constructed initially in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to serve Liverpool, and subsequently extended, lies within the eastern edge of the park at Eccleston Lane End, but again, is not visible from the centre. Beyond the reservoir are further fields which stretch up northwards towards the A580.

To the west, the M57 curves around Prescot in a north-south orientation, with a large golf course (Huyton and Prescot) next to it. Further east, almost directly south of the Conservation Area, can be found an area of open land. This was presumably once in coal-mining use and lies between the Steley Way and the railway line, with some large factories still evident. Prescot Station still serves the town, although it is a 10 minute walk from the town centre southwards down the hill to reach it. To the immediate north, west and south west of the Conservation Area are residential suburbs, largely dating to the Inter-war period.



# 3. Historic development and archaeology

## 3.1 Introduction

Prescot is one of the oldest towns in Merseyside. It is believed that an early Christian church was established here in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, although documentary evidence for the settlement starts in the late 12<sup>th</sup> Century. In medieval times, Prescot was a thriving market town and the ecclesiastical centre of a large parish covering much of south west Lancashire. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century the area became renowned for the skill of its clock, watch and tool makers, a nationally important local industry which continued until the Americans and Swiss took over from about 1875 onwards. A few workshops associated with the industry still remain, although at one time, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they could be found throughout the town. Coal mining and pottery were also significant, the coal being dug from various sites in the immediate vicinity of the town.

The town retains a legacy of high quality Georgian and Victorian buildings although slum clearance and road improvement schemes in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the loss of a number of buildings, particularly

around St Mary's Church, where the Georgian Town Hall was demolished. The best preserved historic buildings can be found in Vicarage Place, Derby Street and High Street, although surprisingly only 21 of them are statutorily listed, including several groups of cottages. The principal listed building is St Mary's Church, listed grade I and dating mostly to the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, when it was substantially rebuilt.

## 3.2 Historic development

The name Prescot originates from the Anglo-Saxon 'Preosta-Cot', meaning a 'Priest Cottage'. The circular shape of the churchyard surrounding St Mary's, Prescot's Parish Church, and the ancient Lady's Well that once stood nearby, both suggest that Prescot may be Anglo-Saxon in origin and it is possible that an early Christian church may have been established during the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. The present church, which largely dates to the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, stands in a prominent location on a hill overlooking the valley of the Hindle Brook (to the south) and the Prescot Brook (to the west).



Prescot is first recorded in 1140, when a document details the appointment of a rector, although it should be noted that the Domesday records for Lancashire are very poor so its omission from that document may not be significant. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries it appears that Prescot was divided into two small settlements, Prescot in the west and Churchley in the east. By the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the town was simply called Prescot. For most of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the Dacre family owned Prescot Manor, and in 1333, William Dacre, 2nd Baron Dacre, obtained a charter for the holding of a three day market and moveable fair at Prescot, confirming the existence of a settlement. The manor was based at Prescot Hall, which was located to the south of the Hindle Brook off what was later Hall Lane. The town's importance is reflected in its inclusion on the Bodleian Map of Britain by Gough in 1350.

In 1391 Prescot Manor was sold to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. On his death, the Manor was inherited by his son who subsequently became King Henry IV. In 1447, King Henry established the University College of St Mary and St Nicholas in Cambridge, which later became known as King's College. Among the gifts he gave to fund the new University College was the Manor and Rectory of Prescot. Later, the arms of King's College were adopted as the Coat of Arms for Prescot and an example can be seen above the entrance of No. 8 Vicarage Place.

As the Lord of the Manor was so far away in Cambridge, the running of the town was left to an appointed steward, who was member of the Stanley family, successively Earls of Derby. The Stanleys were based at Knowsley Hall, which lay to the north of Prescot. The Stanleys had owned Knowsley Hall since 1385 when they acquired it by marriage. Knowsley grew from a hunting lodge to a large brick 18<sup>th</sup> Century house under the direction of the 10th Earl of Derby, and was extended even further in the Gothic style by John Foster Jun, then extended and altered again by subsequent members of the same family. The Hall is still owned by the Stanley family.

As the Earl was often absent, Prescot was assigned an early form of town government, known as the Court Leet or Manor Court. This was effectively removed by the Local government Act of 1894, which first established the Urban District Council, although it continued as a formality until 1936.

In 1562 the Layton family took over the tenancy of Prescot Hall and rebuilt it as a large 'mansion house'. In 1594 it is recorded that Philip Hayton cut down some of his trees to make a 'railway' to bring coal out of his colliery, an interesting early reference to the use of a railway for an industrialised process. At about this time, in 1592, a map of the area was drawn and confirms that houses were concentrated to the immediate south and east of the church, facing the Market Place, and along Eccleston Street (then called Newgate Street), with a scattering of houses facing what is now High Street. During the 1600s, the lease of Prescot Hall passed through several hands until it came to Robert Roper at the end of the century. In 1702 he sought permission from King's College to rebuild the Hall again, and a map of 1743 shows a twin gabled brick house set back from Hall Lane. This building was demolished to make way for the expansion of the BICC factory at some stage after the 1930s.

Coal mining in Prescot is first recorded in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and was used initially to assist the salt-making industry in Cheshire, and then later, to provide power for the local pottery, glass and sugar factories. The coal seams were quite near the surface, making it easier to mine, and new shafts were dug every year as the old ones flooded and could not be drained. In 1712 the Newcomen Pumping machine was invented, but as it cost around £1,000, a huge amount in those days, the price of coal was pushed up. A new turnpike road in 1726 encouraged further industrial growth. During the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the local colliery owners had a monopoly on the sale of coal to Liverpool, but this was lost with the building of the Sawkey Canal in 1757, which meant that coal from St Helens could be brought into Liverpool at

comparable rates. Prescott Manor mine closed in the mid 1800s, Whiston Colliery in 1897 and Halstead in 1900, although this was re-opened between 1914 and 1984, initially to supply coal to the Cunard shipping line. Old coal shafts were still marked on maps to the south of the junction of Sewell Street and the old College Road well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

However, by far the most important industry in Prescott developed during the early 18<sup>th</sup> and continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century after the establishment of a watch making industry by a group of religious dissenters led by the Puritan Thomas Aspinwall in Toxteth in Liverpool in the early 1600s. From about 1625 this group formed close ties with watchmakers in London and simultaneously there developed a wide range of specialist manufacturing industries which supplied watch making, clock making and precision tools. These tools enjoyed an international reputation for quality, and by 1675 there were around 50 watch makers in south west Lancashire. At about this time (1666) there were 32 households in Prescott with three hearths or more, confirming the size and status of the town. During the 1700s, as Liverpool expanded, the horological industries became concentrated in Prescott and the surrounding villages. In 1773 Thomas Pennant noted that Prescott:

*“...abounds in the manufacturers of certain branches of hardware, particularly the best and almost all of the watch movements used in England, and the best files in Europe”.*

By 1800 Prescott had become the principal United Kingdom centre for the production of watch movements, watch and clock components, and horological and precision tools. By 1841 6% of the population was engaged in watch making and by 1861 this had risen to 10%. In 1862 the journalist J Johnson Brown described Prescott as “a town of little workshops”. After about 1875 the expansion of the industry in the USA and Switzerland provided greater competition, so

that by the 1920s only a few of the several hundred workshops in the area were still in use and by 1955 there were none.

Pottery was made in Prescott from at least 1550 and at its height in the 1750s there were around five potteries working in the town. The kilns would have dominated the landscape and were centred around the Eccleston Street area. A wide range of pottery was produced, from large course storage jars, cooking pots and pans, to thin walled drinking vessels. The early Prescott potteries produced mainly earthenware from a mixture of local red and white clay. By the end of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, saltglazed stoneware was also in production. Each year a fair was held in Prescott which became known as the ‘Mugg Fair’ because of the pottery on sale there. The construction of the Sawkey Canal in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century enabled pottery to be taken by barge to Liverpool although the export of Prescott pottery to America is recorded as early as 1702. The first Ordnance Survey map of Prescott, dated 1848, shows in detail the three remaining potteries in Prescott at that time. Brook Pottery was situated to the south west of the town near what is now Beesley Road (Brook Cottage, grade II), with Mill Pottery to the east and Moss Pottery to the west. A small pottery, opened in the 1840s in Kemble Street, was the last such premises to close in 1893.

Historic maps 1891, 1907 and 1936 are included as Appendix 1, 2 & 3.

When the last potteries were closing in Prescott, another important local industry was being created which provided employment to the displaced workers. In 1891 J B Atherton and his brother Jacob opened a factory in Prescott on the large open site to the immediate south of the town, taking over the small Electrical Engineering Works which was first shown on the 1873 map. In the past, this land had been used for open-cast mining and was covered in holes. The company, called the British Insulated Wire Company, made many advances in electrical technology.

They supplied power to Knowsley Hall, which was one of the first houses in the country to have electric lights. Cables made in the Prescott factory were soon being exported all over the world, and for the first fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the company was the largest employer in Prescott, eventually amalgamating with the British Insulated Wire Company to form BICC, a vast factory complex which must have dominated Prescott for many years until it was closed in the late 1980s, after which work continued on a smaller site nearby.

Prescott also claims an unusual connection with William Shakespeare due to his patron, Ferdinand Stanley, Lord Strange and the future 5th Earl of Derby. He was, unusually, a playwright and an author, and although he died mysteriously at the age of only 35, he had enough time to sponsor a group of actors called Strange's Men who staged Shakespeare's first drama, Henry VI, in 1592 at the Rose Theatre in London to great success. Later that year, the theatres were closed due to the plague so the company moved north to their patron's ancestral seat at Knowsley Hall, and soon afterwards a playhouse was built in Prescott by Richard Harrington, an associate of the Stanley's. It is said that Shakespeare stayed in Knowsley Hall and that he composed a number of his more famous manuscripts there, although there is no documentary evidence for this. 'Shakespeare North' is a recent initiative which is supported by several very well known actors to rebuild the Playhouse in the Prescott area as part of a regeneration strategy for the area, but it has stalled due to the current economic situation. John Philip Kemble, the famous Victorian actor, was born in Prescott and his name is recorded in the naming of Kemble Street which stretches around the southern limits of the town centre.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Prescott suffered from the usual effects of post-war clearances and redevelopment. The creation of large areas of surface car parking and the construction of the Prescott Shopping Centre have eroded parts of the medieval street layout and the cohesiveness of the historic

townscape which remained relatively unaltered until this time. To prevent further losses, two separate conservation areas were first designated (Prescot Church and Prescot High Street), these being amalgamated in 1978 to form the Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area. Sewell Street and the churchyard area were added in 1997. A large supermarket (Tesco's) and a number of other large stores were built in the 1990s to the south of the Conservation Area on the former site of the BICC factory. The name of the modern development is, fittingly, the Cables Retail Park.

### 3.3 Archaeology

The HER (Historic Environment Record) for Merseyside archives all the archaeological information for the five boroughs of Merseyside storing data of Liverpool Wirral, Sefton, St Helens and Knowsley. The data is stored in a variety of formats including paper and electronically stored information. These incorporate historical and tithe maps, specific site information of settlement and development and other archaeology such as scatter finds including pottery and coinage.

Several archaeological studies have been undertaken in Prescott with their findings being published in various documents some are listed in the bibliography to the rear of this appraisal.

The publication of the document: Prescott Action Area an Archaeological View, by P Davey. Merseyside Archaeological Society, The University of Liverpool details the importance of Prescott and why it should be considered the most important historic and archaeological site of its kind in the region. Due to it being:

*...one of the oldest settlements... probably the best documented... retains much of its medieval form and structure, is one of only two medieval settlements of any consequence in Merseyside.*

(Davey 1978)

The study identifies many of the town walls and sites of specific archaeological interest. The map of the 16C sites in Prescott shows the form and layout of the town which can relate to the contemporary and present day maps of Prescott. The Survey of Urban Settlement by R A Philpott (1988) identifies certain sites within Prescott where an archaeological interpretation has been made on the findings these include:

- 19 Market Place occupied by a building in the 18C cellars had destroyed deposits on the frontage. To the rear deposits of late medieval garden soil containing quantities of pottery.
- 11 High Street, an investigative trench across the boundary of burgage plots revealed some medieval garden soil... the later levelling of the site had used much pottery manufacturing waste.
- 7-9 Derby Street on the site of land called Kiln Croft in 1592. The frontage had been destroyed land by 18C cellaring but to the rear late medieval or early post medieval soil contained daub and pottery.

Two principal areas of archaeological importance can be defined:

*The medieval focus of the town, centred on the Market Place with burgages lining the major streets, Eccleston Street, Kemble Street and High Street, is of considerable importance in attempts to understand the development and nature of urban life in the region and should have a high priority in the choices of sites of excavation or rescue recording in advance of building development.*

*The Ecclesiastical complex of the Priests Cot Vicarage and Church appears to have remained relatively undisturbed and is of primary importance in elucidating the original of the settlement of Prescott, with wider implications for the understanding of pre conquest settlement pattern and the development of the parish system in south Lancashire.*

(Extract from Philpott 1988)

Prior to any development where there is potential for archaeology the Historic Environment Record should be consulted. The Historic Environment Record (archaeology) currently resides in National Museums Liverpool. Discussions are currently underway with the five Boroughs Liverpool, Wirral, Sefton, St Helens, and Knowsley together with English Heritage and National Museums Liverpool on how to update the Historic Environment Record using a variety of medium.

# 4. Spatial analysis

## 4.1 Layout and street pattern

Prescot retains a basically medieval layout (St Mary's Church and churchyard, Market Place and Eccleston Street) with burgage plots being described in the town centre in 1537. These presumably stretched back from either side of Eccleston Street, and some idea of the plots can still be seen on the 1893 map, with rows of terraced cottages and long, thin alleys all stretching back towards High Street on the north side of Eccleston Street. Similar linear plots also appear on the north side of High Street, which could be medieval in origin.

The medieval layout of Prescot was changed by road improvements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries including the creation of new turnpike roads in the 1720s and the construction of Atherton Street and Aspinall Street in the 1870s. These provided a way through the town without the need to pass through the congested centre around Market Place and Church Street.

Today, the principal feature of the Conservation Area is therefore the circular, possibly Anglo-Saxon churchyard to St Mary's Church which formed the western

edge of the historic Market Place, now somewhat denuded since the removal of historic buildings in the 1960s. Immediately opposite the church, Eccleston Street, formerly called Fazackerley Street, leads eastwards out of Prescot and this street remains the commercial core of the town. The High Street runs roughly parallel to Eccleston Street although the dense network of small streets and courts which are shown on the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century maps have been incrementally cleared and are now the site of the town centre car parks. Similarly, Church Street, which bends noticeably between High Street and Market Place, has also been subject to a certain amount of change due to the demolition of some of the buildings which faced it and the creation of Prescot Bus Station.

## 4.2 Open spaces, trees and landscape

The Conservation Area contains a large amount of open green space to the west and south of St Mary's Church, part of which is the historic graveyard and therefore open to the public. Still within the Conservation Area, a large area of dense woodland lies further west



in which the modern Vicarage is located, but this land is private. Both of these spaces are notable for their mature trees and sense of tranquillity. Further trees can be found close by in West Street, where they form the boundaries to some of the large late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> Century houses which can be found in this part of Prescot. Some more recent tree planting is evident in Derby Street, where a tree group has been planted in one area on the south side of the road, probably in conjunction with the adjoining housing, which appears to date to the 1960s or 1970s. Trees in front of the 1960s Public Library in High Street help to shield the modern building from view.

Further east in the built-up part of the Conservation Area, there are no strong spatial 'focal points'. The Market Place is now a relatively quiet backwater as the vehicular way through the town has been sealed off. This space, once overlooked by the Georgian Town Hall, has lost any sense of its former function and whilst it does provide pleasant views towards St Mary's Church, these are blighted by the poorly maintained open space to the south east of the church which is in urgent need of improvement.

At the eastern end of Eccleston Street, a former graveyard can be found on the south side backing onto Ackers Street. This contains some trees and a few gravestones, and again, is in need of improvement. To the north, beyond Eaton Street, is a municipal park with a children's play area (King George V Memorial Garden), but this is just outside the Conservation Area boundary.

There are some mature street trees in Leyland Street, clearly planted for visual effect, but otherwise the trees in the eastern part of the Conservation Area are somewhat scarce and much could be achieved by additional tree planting, particularly in Eccleston Street.

## 4.3 Focal points, focal buildings and views

### Focal points

The most obvious focal point in the Conservation Area lies between St Mary's Church and Eccleston Street around the former Market Place, although the original function has long since ceased and the area is degraded by the low quality public realm and the empty site below the church. To the north, more careful landscaping to the area around the church and Church Street has enhanced its status, although the changes to the road layout and the loss of frontage buildings are both regrettable features. There are further focal points at road junctions, namely at the junction of Derby Street, Knowsley Park Lane, Liverpool Road and West Street in the west, and the junction of Atherton Road, Eccleston Street, and Aspinal Street in the east.

### Focal buildings

St Mary's Church, with its raised site, tall spire and imposing architecture, is the single most dominant building in Prescot. Other focal buildings include:

- Prescot Community Church, Kemble Street
- The Red Lion Hotel, Kemble Street/Market Place
- The Deane's House Hotel, Church Street
- No. 72 Eccleston Street
- Prescot Methodist Church, Atherton Street
- Prescot Museum, No. 34 Church Street
- No. 3 High Street
- The Hope and Anchor Public House, High Street
- No. 2 Derby Street
- Print House, No. 16 High Street
- The Police Station, Derby Street
- Nos. 42a, 42b and 42c Derby Street
- West End House, Liverpool Road

## Views

Because of the enclosed character of much of the eastern part of the Conservation Area, and the lack of any particular 'focal points', views are largely limited to views across or along individual streets, but they are hardly notable. However, in the centre of the Conservation Area, there are a number of important views largely focusing on St Mary's Church. These can be long or short views, as the spire of the church is a very dominant feature even from some distance. There are also views along Derby Street (both up and down the hill) and more enclosed views up West Street from the junction with Derby Street. Shorter views within St Mary's graveyard are of note, with pleasant vistas along the pathways and views into the site from the immediate surrounding area.

## 4.4 Boundaries

Because many of the buildings are located on the back of the pavement, boundaries do not feature in the main streets to any great extent in the town centre, although in the more residential areas, such as West Street, and Derby Street, they are of greater prominence as the buildings tend to be set back in garden plots. Unsurprisingly, many of these boundaries are provided by stone walls of varying designs, and in the Mill Street area they are particularly tall and dominant. Locally referred to as the 'Town Walls', they may have medieval origins. The wall around the Old Mill House Public House is made from a brown coloured rubble stone laid very roughly, but it is notable for its height (about three metres) and length - it encompasses the back garden to the public house and then turns south along the narrow alleyway that leads south towards Ecclestone Street. A further notable wall can also be seen along the north side of Derby Street, with half round copings set on roughly coursed sandstone. Outside Nos. 8 and 10 Derby Street, a long stone wall retains a canted stone coping which was clearly once used as the base for cast iron railings. In the same street, some property owners have reinstated the railings

using more modern details, usually unobtrusively. West Street also retains some historic sandstone walls, again built using large, well coursed sandstone blocks - of note is the sandstone wall around the Roman Catholic church. In West Street, there are also a number of important front walls built from brick (which matches the material of the adjoining historic houses) with moulded stone copings. Sometimes, but principally in West Street, these are backed up by hedging and trees. Some of the properties retain well detailed gate piers, made of stone with pyramidal copings, such as the pair outside Woodleigh in West Street.

## 4.5 Public realm

The 'public realm' covers the public spaces between the buildings and the details, such as street lighting or signage, which contribute to these spaces. Most of the public realm in the Conservation Area is the responsibility of Knowsley Borough Council.

The centre of the Conservation Area, namely the area around St Mary's Church, Church Street, and Market Place, has been the subject of a comprehensive enhancement scheme that has provided new natural stone paving and stone setted roadways, most of which appear to have been carried out in 1979. Close to the church, the pavement is made up from re-cycled grave stones. This area is now largely pedestrianised and despite the use of metal gates to stop through traffic, illegal car parking is evident. Victorian-style black painted street bollards and well designed modern street lights with a traditional appearance are appropriate details. A sundial feature in modern paving is located close to the church, where crisp red sandstone walls contain the pavements immediately outside the listed building, with gate pillars providing a sense of 'arrival'. Further areas of setts, laid out in a circular pattern, appear rather fussy. A War Memorial is an important feature just to the south east of the church. The natural stone flags continue down Market Place as far as the



junction with Kemble Street. In the Market Place, Eccleston Street, High Street and Derby Street, tall curved head street lights are quite dominant.

There are some small examples of original historic paving, such as the stone setted crossovers in the pavement outside Knowsley Council Offices in High Street, and along the southern continuation of Stone Street towards Eccleston Street, although there is also some modern paving using traditional stone setts. However, these materials must once have been commonplace and their loss diminishes the character of the Conservation Area. Further natural stone paving, mixed with modern materials and details, can be found in Eccleston Street.

Street nameplates are usually dark green with white lettering and a white band - they appear to be aluminium. There are also other designs, which are modern and functional. Many are dirty and require cleaning or completely replacing to a common design. Some historic street nameplates remain, and are fixed to buildings. These are made of cast iron, with rounded corners, and have black letters on a white background. An example can be seen at the southern end of Atherton Street, fixed to the Margaret Rose shop, and a further example, of slightly different design, can be seen on The Print House in High Street. There are a few sturdy cast iron pavement grilles, like the one outside Nos. 5 and 7, Atherton Street.

A Borough of Knowsley Public Notices board can be seen in Eccleston Street, somewhat neglected. The High Street suffers generally from a plethora of traffic signs which add to the poor visual appearance of the street which has already been adversely affected by the high number of modern advertising hoardings.

Otherwise, the Conservation Area contains no other special public realm details. The streets are particularly badly paved, with a variety of modern materials, often in poor condition.

# 5. The buildings of the conservation area

## 5.1 Building types

The buildings of the Prescott Town Centre Conservation Area largely date to between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There are some Art Deco buildings, most notably in Eccleston Street, of which the former cinema (dated 1922) is the largest and most prominent, although it appears to have been significantly altered as part of the Prescott Centre project.

The majority of the buildings are two or three storey houses, built in a terraced form although the Conservation Area does also include a number of prestigious brick houses dating to the Georgian period. Atherton Street contains a long row of late 18<sup>th</sup> Century houses, of which only one (No. 17) is listed. Mixed in with the residential property are a number of public houses and churches, and whilst the town was once heavily industrialised, little remains (at least within the Conservation Area) to remind the onlooker of this fact.

The largest building is the 17<sup>th</sup> Century grade I listed St Mary's Church, with the Roman Catholic church (which is located close by)

being almost as large, although due to its location it is somewhat hidden from view. The Methodist Church in Atherton Street is probably the third largest building in the Conservation Area. Many of the buildings in Eccleston Street and High Street were built as residences but have since been converted into ground floor shops, so they provide both streets with a largely domestic sense of scale.

There are several very large mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings in the Conservation Area, the most visible being the blocks of 1960s flats in Sewell Street (Greenall Court). A large care home and further blocks of flats can also be seen to the north of High Street, their scale and large footprint being somewhat out of character with the area.

## 5.2 Listed buildings

There are 21 listed buildings in the Conservation Area, all listed grade II apart from St Mary's Church, which is listed grade I. Apart from the two churches, they were all built as private residences, although one (No. 2 Derby Street) is an unusual example of a purpose-built early 19<sup>th</sup> Century office.



## Grade I

### St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church retains a 14<sup>th</sup> Century vestry, but much of the building dates to a rebuild of 1610 (dated on plaques) by John Ogle and Sir John Bold. The tower and spire were added in 1729 at a cost of £455 and later strengthened, and the aisles were added in 1818-19. The font is possibly Anglo-Saxon.

## Grade II

### No. 17 Atherton Street

This property forms part of a long terrace of similar late Georgian houses dating to c1790. It is two windows wide, three storeys high, with a slate roof over sash windows and a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century shopfront. The importance of the building lies in the survival of an integral second floor watch-makers' workshop which is visible to the rear.

### Prescot Museum, No. 34 Church Street

This substantial three storey red brick house was built in 1776 with sash windows arranged symmetrically around a central ground floor front door. A raised pediment and white painted stone parapet hide the roof.

### Offices of Henry Cross and Son, No. 2 Derby Street

Unusually, this single storey building was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century as offices for a local solicitor, and the building has remained in the ownership of the same firm since then. It is faced in painted stucco with three sash windows to the front, the central window lying in a curved bay.

### Nos. 44, 46, 48 and 50 Derby Street

This is a short terrace of one window wide two storey cottages dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century which were rebuilt in 1985. The cottages are faced in brick with concrete dressings and a slate roof.

### West End House (formerly the Clock Face Public House) No. 54 Derby Street, and No. 52 Derby Street

Formerly a public house, No. 54 was built as a dowry house to the Knowsley estate and is a substantial two storey building which dates to the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It sits at right angles to the main road, across what would once have been a large garden but is now a car park. The sandstone building is five windows wide, with a central entrance marked by an Ionic porch, and the elevations are faced in brick with stone dressings and a shallow pitched slated roof above. No. 52 is attached to No. 54 but is a more modest building facing the road. The stable building to the rear is separately listed.

### No. 30 Eccleston Street

No. 30 is the only obviously timber framed building in the Conservation Area and retains a highly decorative timber framed street front with a gable above a modern shopfront. It is dated 1621 although there is some dispute about the authenticity of this. In 1921 (both are dated) an almost matching building was added to the east. The building fronts part of the Prescot Shopping Centre but is said to retain some original timber framing and wattle-and-daub panelling.

### Masonic Hall, No. 3 High Street

No. 3 is a symmetrical early 19<sup>th</sup> Century two storey brick house with stone dressings, with three windows to the first floor and four to the ground floor. The central front entrance is marked by a later Doric porch. The shallow pitched roof is covered in slate with axial end stacks in brick.

### No. 37 High Street

This building dates to c1815 and is a small, two window wide house with a central front door with a complete fanlight. The elevations are faced in brick with stone dressings, and the windows are sashed.

### **No. 11 High Street including wall and gatepiers**

No. 11 is a substantial white-painted three storey brick house and was formerly the Conservative Club. It dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and is five windows wide with a central front door marked by a pedimented doorcase with Doric half-columns. The rusticated stone retaining walls, gatepiers and wall piers are also listed.

### **No. 9 Market Place**

The building fronts the Market Place and forms part of a terrace of similar, probably early 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses, two windows wide and three storeys high. It has a modern shopfront. Its special interest lies in the survival to the rear of a possibly 17<sup>th</sup> Century single storey free-standing tool and watch-maker's workshop built from brick with a stone-flagged floor.

### **No. 2 Vicarage Place**

No 2 dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and is built from brick with stone dressings. The four panelled front door is defined by panelled pilasters and a pediment, painted white.

### **No. 4 Vicarage Place**

No. 4 is also late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and is a more substantial house, three storeys high and five windows wide, arranged symmetrically around a central front door. The windows have six over six light sashes.

### **No. 6 Vicarage Place**

No. 6 is a smaller, two bay wide, two storey house which dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It is faced in brick with stone dressings.

### **No. 10 Vicarage Place**

No. 10 dates to c1740 and is a tall (three storey) four window wide brick house with a slate roof. The windows are all sashed and the front door is defined by panelled pilasters and a pediment. The stone coped garden wall has ornate cast iron railings with square iron gatepiers and a gate.

### **No. 14 Vicarage Place**

This property dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century and is a small brick house with stone dressings and a slate roof. It was built as servants' quarters for No. 10, which it adjoins.

### **R C Church of Our Lady Immaculate and St Joseph, Vicarage Place**

The church was built in 1856-7 to the designs of J Hansom. It is faced in rock-faced stone with ashlar dressings and a steeply pitched slate roof

## **5.3 Locally Listed buildings**

There are currently no locally listed buildings in Prescott.

## **5.4 Unlisted historic buildings**

In addition to the listed buildings, a large number of unlisted historic buildings can be found in the Conservation Area, most of which were built for residential purposes, although many, particularly in High Street and Eccleston Street, have now been converted into shops or other commercial premises. They are marked in purple on the Townscape Appraisal Map and are considered to make a *positive* contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Unlisted buildings within the Prescott Town Centre Conservation Area which make a particular contribution include several churches or chapels, as well as public houses or small hotels and one former mill (now the Mill House Public House in Mill Street). Examples include:

### **Non-residential buildings**

- Prescott Methodist Church, Atherton Street (built in 1908)
- Prescott Community Church, Kemble Street (formerly the Palace Cinema)
- Deane's House Hotel, Church Street

- Hope and Anchor Public House, High Street (dated 1906)
- The Police Station, Derby Street
- The Social Services offices next to the Police Station, Derby Street
- Nos. 2-16 even Leyland Street
- Nos. 19-23 Eccleston Street (the rear of No. 23 contains timber-framing which is visible from Stone Street)

### Residential buildings

- Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century terraced properties in Atherton Street
- Nos. 79-97 Derby Street
- Houses in West Street - a well detailed collection of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century terraced and semi-detached properties

Individual applications of Conservation Area Consent (CAC) to demolish such buildings will need to be assessed by the Borough Council on a case-by-case basis, but generally, permission will be refused. All applications for CAC will need to be accompanied by a reasoned justification for the demolition of the building (as is already required for the demolition of a listed building), and the applicant must prove that the following:

- The building is incapable of beneficial use
- The building is beyond the point of economic repair
- The building does not make a 'positive' contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area
- That the building has been marketed and an alternative use/owner has not found

## 5.5 Building styles, materials and colours

Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area date to the late 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and are built from brick or stone which has been rendered and painted. They were largely built as houses although many are now in commercial use, with a variety of shopfronts, most of little merit. The most obvious use of sandstone for building stone can be seen at St Mary's Church and on West End House, and although sandstone quarries were historically not far away, the high cost of the sandstone, and the relative availability of locally made brick, made this material more popular.

Apart from St Mary's Church, previously described, the earliest building in the Conservation Area appears to be No. 30 Eccleston Street (dated 1621), although some timber framing remains in Nos. 19-23 Eccleston Street which is visible from Stone Street - this probably dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as well. Most of the buildings in the Conservation Area were built in brick from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards with conventional Georgian details (shallow pitched slate roofs, sashed windows, symmetrical elevations and pedimented doorcases with panelled front doors). Variations on this basic theme can be seen throughout the Conservation Area, although the only building which truly stands out is Prescott Museum, but only because of its dominant location as it is very simply detailed. There are a number of very well detailed mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses in West Street which add greatly to the special interest of the Conservation Area, but again, the details (more sash windows, brick elevations and slate roofs) are simple and robust. Occasionally, some Gothic influences creep in, like some of the gate piers and porches to the houses (including Woodleigh) closer to St Mary's Church.

Colours are muted and include red brick or render, sometimes painted a pale pastel colour, with white painted windows. Contrasting brickwork, in red and blue/black, can be seen on some of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses in West Street. Roofs are mainly covered in grey slate.

There is any number of modern shopfronts and a few which retain some elements of earlier examples. The best, and most complete historic shopfront, is Margaret Rose, No. 61 Eccleston Street (late 19<sup>th</sup> Century). Otherwise, the shopfronts tend to be poorly designed and many use garish colours and poor quality signage.

# 6. Character areas

Based on building density and type, street layout, the relationship of buildings to open spaces, and landscape details, the Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area provides four areas of very distinctive character, as follows:

- Town Centre: High Street, Eccleston Street and Market Place
- Derby Street and West Street
- Vicarage Place and Church Street
- Sewell Street

## 6.1 Town Centre: High Street, Eccleston Street and Market Place

### Key positive features:

- Medieval street layout with some narrow alleys connecting Eccleston Street with High Street
- Commercial core of Prescot with a number of shops and offices
- No. 30 Eccleston Street is an ornate timber-framed property dating to the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century

- No. 9 Market Place is listed grade II for the survival of a late 17<sup>th</sup> Century watchmaker's workshop behind it
- Atherton Street retains the best preserved streetscape, and No. 17 is listed because it retains a watchmaker's workshop
- Good views westwards towards St Mary's Church
- Some high quality paving details using natural stone

### Key Negative features:

- A number of modern buildings of no merit whatsoever
- The poor condition of a number of prominent buildings, such as the Methodist Church in Atherton Street
- Buildings at risk in several locations
- Kemble Street is in need of enhancements, possibly in connection with improvements to the site of the western side of Market Place next to Greenall Court/St Mary's Church
- The loss of the historic sense of enclosure shown on maps of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- A number of empty gap sites



- Dominant advertising hoardings
- Many poor quality shop frontages
- Too much street signage
- Poor quality pavements in some areas
- Illegal on-street car parking despite the close proximity of surface car parking
- Empty or vacant shops or properties, sometimes boarded or shuttered up
- A number of mainly modern buildings where redevelopment would be welcome
- Despite the pedestrianisation of Ecclestone Street, cars still drive along it during the day

## 6.2 Derby Street and West Street

### Key positive features:

- Attractive location on west-facing slope, with long views along Derby Street over the roofs of a collection of mainly listed buildings at the junction with Knowsley Park Lane
- Derby Street's principal buildings are No. 2 (Tickle Hall Cross Solicitors) at one end of the street and West End House and the adjoining house and stables at the other end - both are listed grade II
- The unlisted but 'positive' Police Station and adjoining building (No. 10 Derby Street) are also of note
- Long terraces of well detailed mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses in both West Street (Nos. 2-12 even) and Derby Street (Nos. 79-97 odd)
- West Street has the character of a quiet residential suburb with spacious plots and mainly semi-detached late 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses, unusually well preserved
- Most of the historic buildings appear to be in reasonable condition

### Key Negative features:

- Busy traffic along Derby Street, a principal route into Prescot town centre

- A large group of terraced houses facing both Derby Street and West Street, probably dating to the early 1970s
- A certain amount of 'left-over' space with some tree planting and car parking areas
- The unlisted but positive residential buildings need to be protected from unsympathetic alterations, such as the uPVC windows on many of the unlisted but positive houses in Derby Street

## 6.3 Vicarage Place and Church Street

### Key positive features:

- Highest concentration of listed buildings in the Conservation Area - St Mary's Church; Nos. 2, 4, 6, 10 and 14 Vicarage Place; and the RC Church of Our Lady Immaculate
- Enclosed, tranquil location next to a large area of natural woodland and the well treed graveyard
- The paving and roadway in both Vicarage Place and Church Street have already been enhanced with well detailed natural materials

### Key Negative features:

- The continuity of streetscape in Church Street has been adversely affected by demolitions to create the Bus Station to the north
- Some of the paving might be considered rather over-designed and fussy in its detailing
- The use of barriers and 'gateways' in Church Street, to prevent vehicles using the street, has created a rather artificial character to the area
- Large advertising hoardings at the junction with Derby Street
- Illegal car parking in the Church Street area appears to be commonplace



- The Deane's House Hotel is in need of some enhancements and advertising and signage need to be resolved
- The close proximity of the poor quality public realm in the area to the south east of the church facing Market Place
- The close proximity of Greenall Court, a large 1960s block of flats facing the top end of Sewell Street
- The care of the graveyard including the trees and the gravestones and other memorials
- The War Memorial should be listed
- 'Blockbusters' and the adjoining garage building forms part of a prominent corner site at the eastern end of West Street where it meets Church Street - the whole site would benefit from sympathetic redevelopment
- The Church Hall is a 1960s building of no merit (though it does sit on a backland site)
- The northern end of Garden Street has incoherent streetscape with a variety of buildings and untidy plots

## 6.4 Sewell Street

### Key positive features:

- Two small groups of positive late 19<sup>th</sup> Century terraced cottages Nos. 30-38 and 56/58
- Good views from Garden Walk into the adjoining churchyard

### Key negative features:

- Busy traffic along Sewell Street
- Close proximity of the modern commercial development including the large Tesco's Supermarket
- Greenall Court and the adjoining block - both 1960s buildings of no merit
- Untidy car parking
- Post WWI buildings along Manchester Road and into Garden Walk, of no special interest

# 7. Issues

Based on the negative features identified in the previous chapter, the following Issues are considered to be the principle matters which the emerging Prescott Town Centre Conservation Area Management Plan needs to address:

## 7.1 Conservation area boundary review

The Conservation Area boundary has been extended twice, once in 1978 (when two separate conservation areas around St Mary's Church and the High Street were amalgamated) and again in 1997, when Sewell Street was added. Since then, a certain amount of new development has taken place which has weakened the cohesiveness of the historic streetscape, so a number of minor deletions are proposed. In addition, it is proposed that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century cemetery off Manchester Road is added to the Conservation Area.

### Deletions:

- (i) Delete the small area of car parking to the west of the garden wall enclosing

the present car parking area to West End House - this relates to a modern building of no special interest;

- (ii) Delete the Inter-war houses facing the King Edward VII Memorial Gardens on the northern edge of the Conservation Area which are not of any special architectural or historic interest;
- (iii) Delete the southern end of Sewell Street and Garden Lane, which contain only mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings which are not of any special architectural or historic interest.

### Additions:

- (i) Add the 20<sup>th</sup> Century cemetery which lies to the west and south of the existing Conservation Area. The cemetery contains some well detailed entrance gates and boundary railings which date to 1923 (when the cemetery was opened), and some notable mature trees, as well as making a major contribution to the setting of the woodland edge surrounding the modern vicarage, and the graveyard to St Mary's Church, both of which it immediately abuts.



## 7.2 Traffic and pedestrian movement

The present traffic management scheme prevents traffic (apart from buses and taxis) from crossing the Conservation Area - whilst this has made a safer environment for shoppers and other visitors to the town centre, it does make the town centre feel somewhat cut off. Eccleston Street has been pedestrianised, but a certain amount of traffic still uses it. Despite the provision of well laid out surface car parking in the town centre, illegal car parking is evident in the Eccleston Street and Church Street areas. Pedestrian links to Prescott Railway Station and the Cables Shopping Centre are also poor.

Clearly a balance between pedestrian movement, the demands of road users and the need for accessible and cheap car parking all need to be attended to if the town centre is to be revived as a viable commercial centre. A comprehensive scheme encompassing the needs of the various town centre users would be helpful and could include public realm improvements as detailed below.

## 7.3 Vacant or derelict sites

There are several sites where enhancements (including possibly total redevelopment) would be welcome. Some of these have buildings of some historic interest where refurbishment rather than demolition would be welcome. Key sites include:

- The site to the south east of St Mary's Church next to Market Place - this is probably the most important and visible potential redevelopment site in the whole Conservation Area
- The former PSD vehicle hire and West Street garage site at the eastern end of West Street
- The corner of Kemble Street with Sewell Street (nos. 48 and 50 Kemble Street are

historic buildings but have been much altered)

- Various buildings or blocks of buildings in Eccleston Street and High Street, notably:
  - The triangular block between High Street, Eccleston Street and Chapel Street, which contains a somewhat altered partly 'positive' building (Nos. 4-16 Warrington Road) which could be enhanced, and a number of modern buildings of no merit, as well as an empty open site with advertising hoardings
  - The 'dead' advertising hoardings site between Nos. 18 and 24 High Street
  - The empty corner site below St Mary's Church, facing Market Place
  - The 1960s buildings on the south side of Eccleston Street (Nos. 4-20 even), and although just outside the Conservation Area, Nos. 58-70 even Eccleston Street

## 7.4 Buildings at risk

There is a high number of part or fully vacant shops or upper storeys in Eccleston Street, with a few more in High Street/Warrington Road. The most obviously 'At Risk' historic buildings include:

- Prescott Methodist Church, Atherton Street - an important local building with a 1960s extension. The extension is of no merit and could be demolished and replaced with something more appropriate
- Nos. 5-11 odd Eccleston Street - all currently empty
- West End House, Derby Street - a grade II listed former public house which is currently vacant
- Prescott Community Church, Kemble Street - apparently current empty

## 7.5 Public realm

A great deal has been achieved by the Council in the provision of high quality public realm improvements, most notably in the Church Street area, as well as the western end of Eccleston Street. The imposition of a common palette of materials, signage and colours for the whole Conservation Area would greatly improve the streetscape.

Further improvements could include:

- Former graveyard, junction of Eccleston Street with Ackers Street - new trees, lighting and public seating
- Atherton Street - needs better quality paving and street lighting
- Eccleston Street - building on traditional paving already installed - needs new lighting and more street trees, as well as better quality litter bins, signage and public seating
- Leyland Street - an important link between High Street and Eccleston Street - would benefit from better quality paving and street lighting
- Site on corner of Derby Road and Church Street - remove advertising hoardings and relandscape

## 7.6 Advertising, shopfronts, signage

It has been noted how the poor quality of the shopfronts and shop signage in Eccleston Street in particular has adversely affected the streetscape. Problems include badly designed modern shopfronts with over-dominant fascias; the use of modern materials (such as plastic) for these shopfronts; poor quality signage using garish colours; and neglected or boarded up vacant shops. Some of the shops are in modern buildings which are so poorly detailed that they could be considered as having a negative impact on the streetscape.

Taken as a whole, the Council needs to address the above issues through a concentrated scheme which could include:

- Grant aid to assist private owners replace or upgrade their existing shopfronts
- The provision of free advice about new shopfront design
- The possible provision of an 'exemplar' new shopfront to encourage private owners to follow the Council's example
- The provision of other initiatives to encourage shoppers into Prescot town centre, to provide private property and business owners with an incentive to invest in the area

## 7.7 Article 4 Directions

The use of Article 4 Directions enables local planning authorities to control minor alterations to unlisted residential property which could otherwise be carried out by a property owner without planning permission under their 'permitted development' rights. Alterations such as the installation of replacement doors and windows, reroofing in modern materials, the removal of chimneys, the addition of porches, or the removal of front boundaries and the creation of car parking in front gardens, can all be controlled by an Article 4 Direction. The aim of any such Direction is to encourage property owners to use traditional materials and details appropriate to the conservation area, and to prevent the gradual erosion of its special interest which can result from uncontrolled incremental changes to the buildings within it.

As Article 4 Directions do not apply to buildings in multiple occupation, flats, non-residential buildings or to listed buildings (all of which are already controlled through separate legislation), the parts of the Prescot Town Centre where an Article 4 Direction would be most beneficial are where there are the highest concentrations of unlisted family dwellings, namely:

- West Street
- Derby Street
- Atherton Street
- High Street

An Article 4 Direction can be applied to cover all such properties in a conservation area (usually referred to as a 'blanket' Direction) or it can be applied to individual properties or groups of properties as required. For Prescot, it is recommended that a blanket Article 4 Direction is considered.

## 7.8 Heritage assets

The statutory list for Prescot was prepared in the 1980s. The published National Planning Policy Framework and the widening of the range of 'heritage assets' may be of sufficient interest to consider submitting additional local heritage assets to English Heritage for consideration and inclusion on the national list of designated heritage assets.

The National Planning Policy Framework March 2012 superseded PPS5 during the drafting of Prescot Conservation Area Appraisal. There has also been raised awareness of the significance of 'local' heritage assets which could include buildings, structures such as boundary walls, archaeological sites, historic parks and gardens, and sites or buildings associated with famous local people or events.

It is possible that several of the buildings in the Conservation Area may contain interesting features which have not been previously recorded which could make the building suitable for statutory listing. These probably lie mainly in Eccleston Street, but the whole Conservation Area should be considered. In addition, a number of the 'positive' buildings which have been identified as part of this Character Appraisal may be eligible for 'local listing' although the criteria for such a list must first be agreed and the local community's views sought. Buildings which could be considered for either statutory or local listing include:

- The Methodist Church, Atherton Street
- Nos. 5-15, and 19-25 odd Atherton Street
- Prescot Community Church, Kemble Street
- The Red Lion Hotel, Kemble Street
- The Hope and Anchor Public House, High Street

- Nos. 5-11 odd Eccleston Street
- Nos. 19-23 (odd) Eccleston Street
- No. 32 Eccleston Street (in conjunction with No. 30 which is already listed)
- Deane's House Hotel, Church Street
- The Police Station and adjoining Social Services offices (No. 10), West Street
- Nos. 38, 40 and 42 Derby Street
- The Old Mill Public House, Mill Street and adjoining boundary walls

The list of properties is not exhaustive and further study or survey may reveal the significance of other non-designated heritage assets.

## 7.9 Care of the churchyard and adjoining woodland

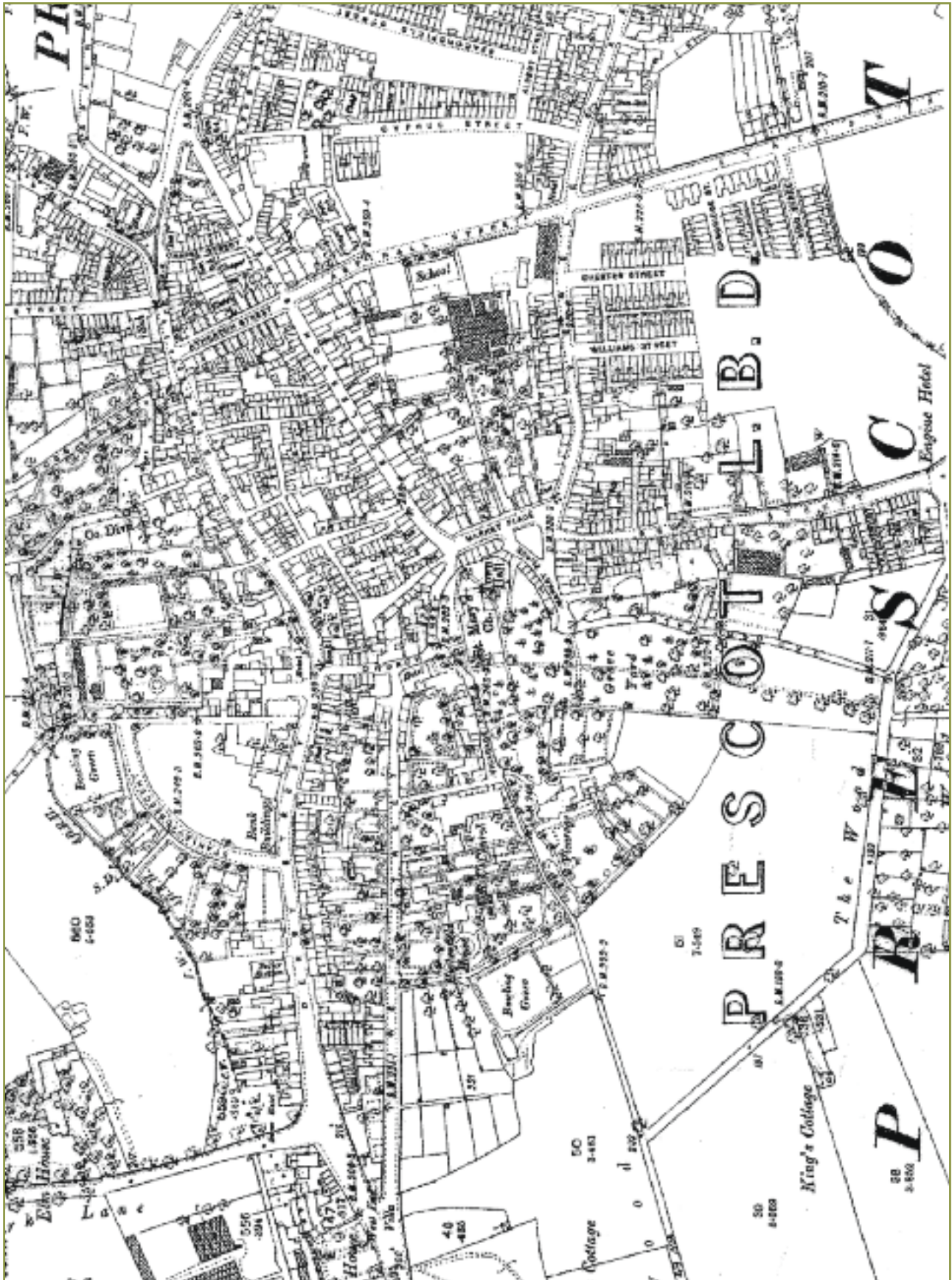
St Mary's churchyard is presumably in the care of Knowsley Borough Council. It contains a great number of trees and historic gravestones, and is a very important open green space and facility for the people of the area. It is currently rather neglected and its general appearance does not attract families or other visitors into the area. Enhancements could include:

- Some carefully planned tree management, possibly opening-up the area slightly
- The introduction of seating and well designed lighting
- The provision of information boards about the significance of the area and its history
- Improved pedestrian links across the site generally
- A record of the gravestones (if this has not been undertaken already)

The large area of woodland to the immediate west of the churchyard is presumably still in the ownership of the ecclesiastical authorities. The woodland is overgrown and neglected and the provision of a Woodland Management Plan, including the woodland in the adjoining churchyard and the more modern cemetery to the south would be beneficial.

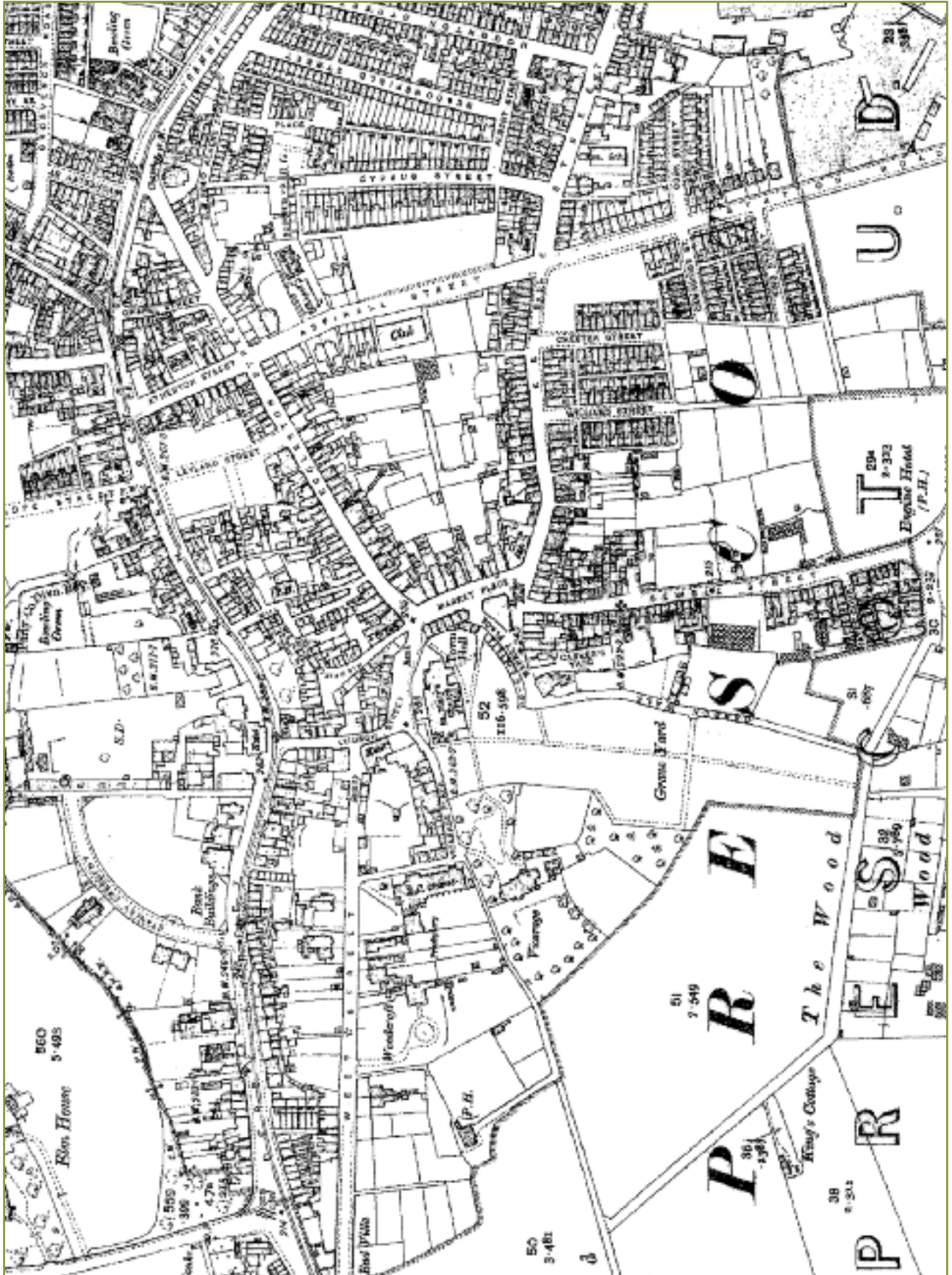
# Appendix 1

## Historic map 1893



# Appendix 2

## Historic map 1907



# Appendix 3

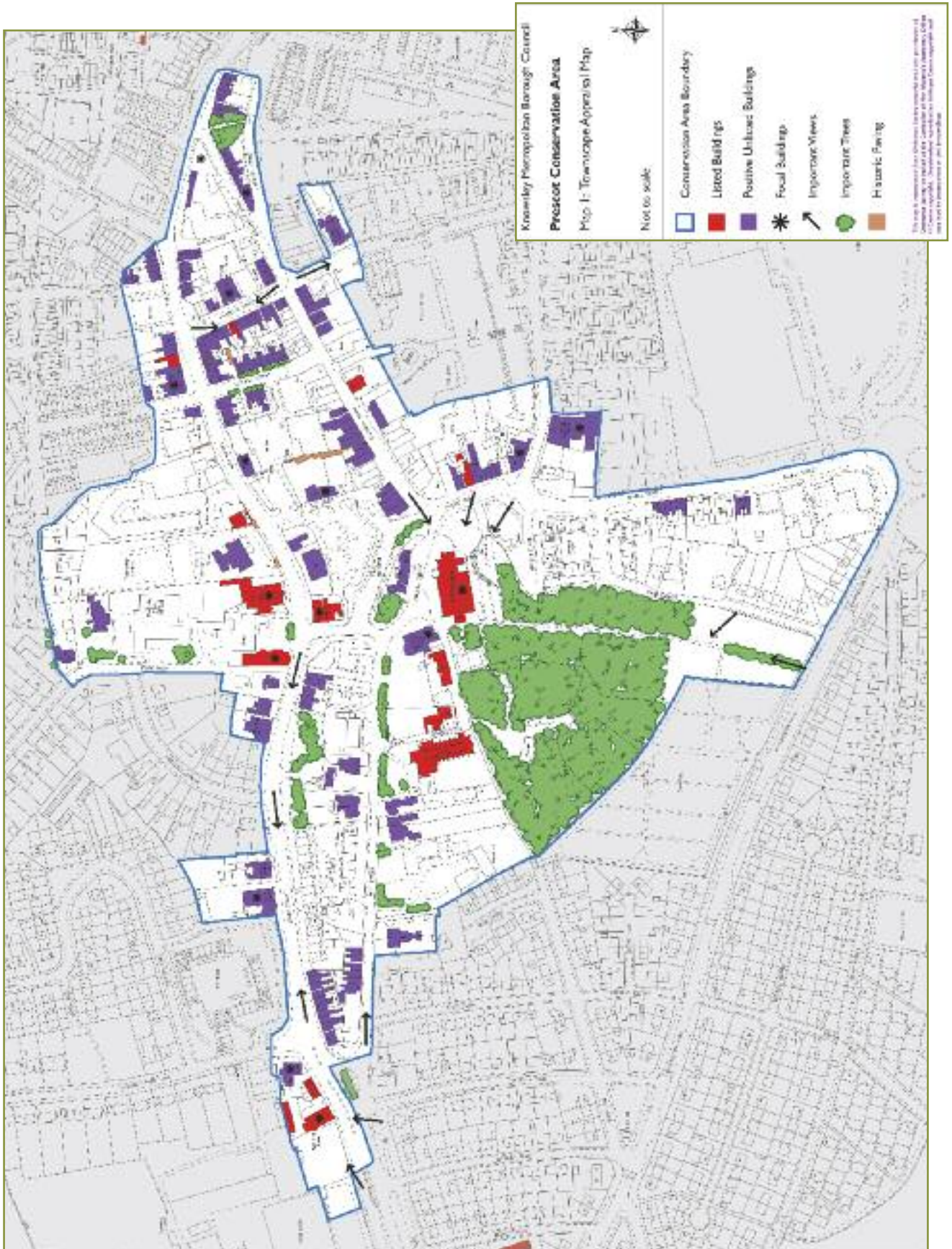
## Historic map 1936





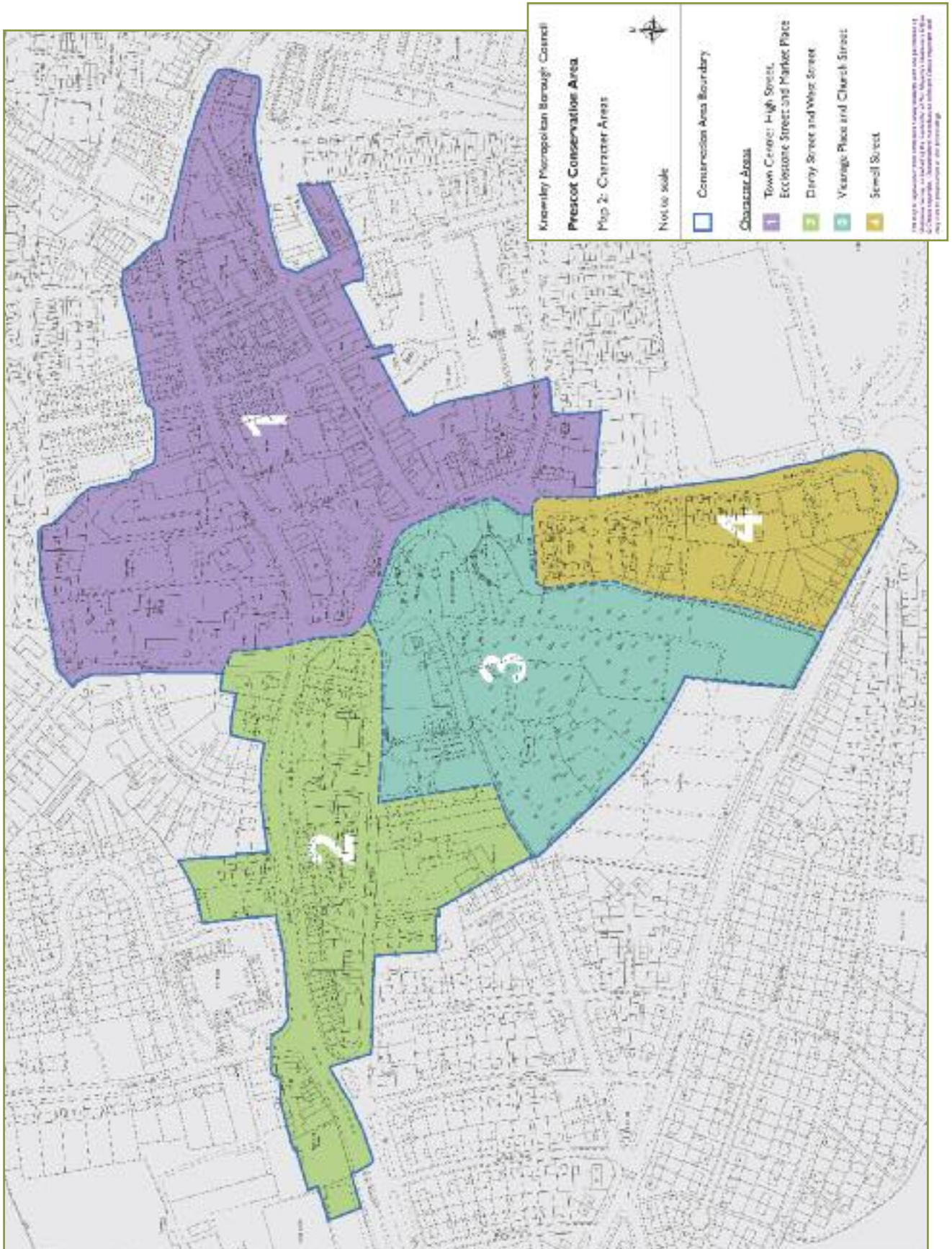
# Appendix 4

## Prescot Townscape Appraisal Map



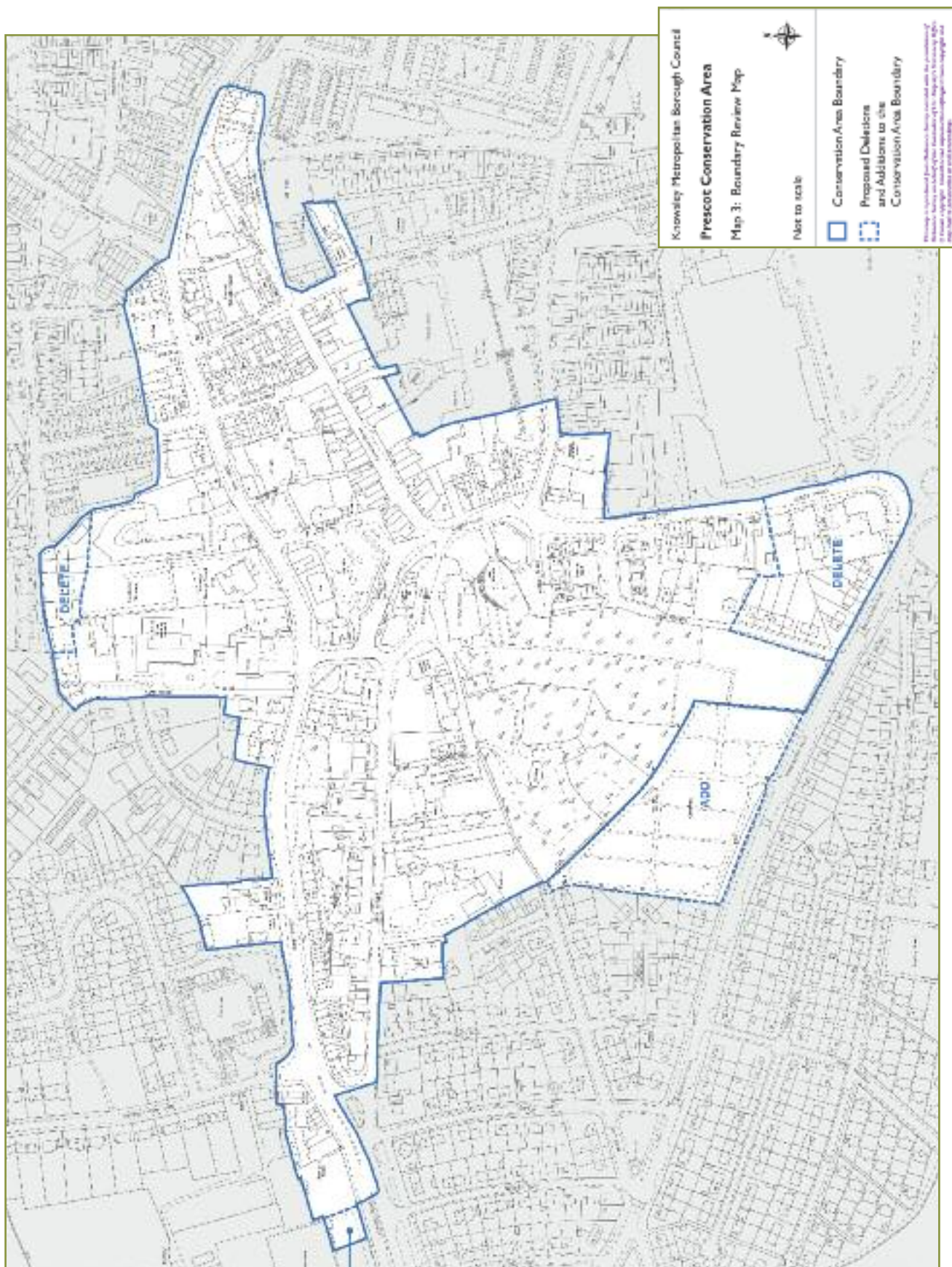
# Appendix 5

## Prescot Character Areas Map



# Appendix 6

## Prescot Conservation Area Boundary Review



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