Royal
Kingston

Kingston
Towards a Sense of Place

A Borough Character Study to support the Kingston Local Development Framework

Introduction

In order to deliver quality change that safeguards the best of the borough's character and secure positive improvements elsewhere, we need a clear understanding of the borough's existing character. Through an analysis of the borough by area, the study identifies the essential components that combine to give Kingston its particular sense of place. It identifies those areas of the borough where the existing townscape is of high quality as well as those areas that are lacking in identity, where the quality of the townscape has deteriorated over time and would benefit from regeneration in order to achieve a higher quality environment.

It will examine the features of each area and character area that contribute towards their essential character. This information will contribute towards guiding future change in the borough to ensure that local distinctiveness is preserved and that regeneration occurs in areas that would benefit from well designed new development to reinforce their existing character. The study will set a cohesive framework for the future development of the borough.

The Local Development Framework

This document will inform the Core Strategy element of the borough's emerging Local Development Framework as well as other design guidance such as Residential Design Guide SPD and DPD's. The study will inform the review of the current approach to design and density in the UDP consisting of Areas of Lower Residential Density and Strategic and Local Areas of Special Character. Design and density policies in the LDF should be in general conformity with the London Plan Density Matrix. The Matrix defines appropriate density ranges for new development according to whether the area has a central, urban or suburban setting and how accessible it is in terms of PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Level). This study will provide a local context for new design policy in the LDF by ensuring that new developments are not guided solely by strategic policies in the London Plan and ensuring that Kingston's Sense of Place is maintained and enhanced.

The RBK Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document will provide greater detail and guidance to encourage good design and development which respects the key elements of character identified in this document. This SPD will address spatial/townscape issues as well as detailed design issues.

Neighbourhood Area

Key characteristics defined

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Neighbourhood Character Area

Specific characteristics defined

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Character Area Type
Urban . Inner Suburban . Outer Suburban . Rural
Density and PTAL

Character Area Assessment
. Area of established high quality
. Area with scope to reinforce existing character
. Area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity

Method

The model above sets out the method that has been adopted in the preparation of the study

Defining the Areas

The area boundaries have been defined through local associations; areas of the borough that people recognise, refer to and identify with. The Areas were then analysed in terms of their origins and general character, as well as land use, movement, built form and open space. Key characteristics that contribute towards the sense of place for each area were then defined and mapped.

Defining the Character Areas

Each area was then further sub divided into Character Areas on the basis of identifiable characteristics in order to define areas of consistent character such as:
• Building form, age and height
• Street pattern
• Density
• Land use
• Vitality and tranquillity
• Open space
• Trees
• Features, landmarks and views

Character Area Type

On the basis of the above characteristics, as well as densities and PTAL ratings, each area was assigned a character area "type" based on the following definitions.

Urban: Mixed use areas such as town centres, busy local centres and main roads. Higher proportion of flats and smaller terraced houses. Dense development, medium building footprints and scale, 800m walking distance of a town or district centre or along main arterial routes. Wide range of building heights.

Inner suburban: Grid iron street patterns, terraced housing occupying a small plot with small gardens and parking accommodated on street. Large Victorian villas on large plots or large plots redeveloped as flats with rear or forecourt parking. Proximity to District or Town Centre. Residential building heights up to four or five storeys.

Outer suburban: Housing occupying relatively large plots e.g. detached and semi-detached houses, often accommodating on plot parking. Planned suburbs built by one developer over a relatively short period. Loosely structured suburban settlements, significant landscape, either grass verges or tree planting. Typically two storey residential development.

Rural/Open: Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land

Character Area Assessment

Judgements on the potential for future enhancement/change in the area were made on the basis of the extent to which there was a degree of cohesive quality in the area.

10 criteria were developed, based on urban design guidance relating to the creation of successful places. Key characteristics were identified with reference to CABE's "By Design" and "Building for Life: Delivering Great Places to Live". The criteria are set out overleaf with definitions showing how they have been applied to the specific Kingston context The criteria were applied to each character area and the extent to which the area made a contribution to the achievement of the criteria was recorded as a numerical value. The assumption was made that the definitions were relevant to all or part of a character area.

Good: Makes a significant contribution	Score of 10
Moderate: Makes some direct contribution	Score of 5
Poor: Does not contribute	Score of 0

Individual scores for each of the criteria were then totalled to reach a figure between 0 and 100 for each Character Area. The scores where then banded to establish the following three categories of area. Individual score sheets for each character area are available in the appendix to the study.

Area of established high quality	**80 - 100**
Area with scope to reinforce existing character	**55 - 75**
Area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity	**0 - 50**

Issues and recommendations

Issues relating to the quality of character of place have been identified. Where recommendations have been made, they are based on character. They are aspirational and any implementation will be subject to further consideration of design and site constraints, Member approval and funding being secured. Recommendations for enhancements on private land are a matter for individual land owners.

Historical Development of the Borough

Kingston upon Thames was created as a Borough in 1965, amalgamating the Old Boroughs of Kingston upon Thames, Surbiton and Malden and Coombe. The streets of the Borough have a character that reflects their past form and use. These have shaped their present day appearance.

Historically, Kingston became recognised as a town in the late 12th Century. It grew up around a crossing point on the River Thames and its name derives from "King's Tun" meaning a royal estate. The first bridge across the Thames and the Clattern Bridge across the Hogsmill were built around 1200.   The streets would have been unpaved and the buildings are likely to have comprised single-storey timber and plaster structures.

In medieval times Kingston developed into a thriving market town, particularly as Kingston Bridge formed the only crossing place over the river before London Bridge. The Market Place and the Apple Market provided the focus for trade and the medieval town's prosperity. Local industries developed and inns and public houses flourished when Kingston was a stopping-off point on the London to Portsmouth coach route. Norbiton is first mentioned in the medieval period along with Surbiton. The names mean north and south granges or granaries, and they were the agricultural stores for Kingston.

By the mid-18th century, the Borough was still largely made up of open fields although Kingston Town lay at the hub of four major turnpike routes. First, there was the ten mile stretch of road between Kingston and London which ran along London Road, Kingston Hill and Kingston Vale. Second, the Portsmouth Road was the continuation of this route from the south side of Kingston to Portsmouth, running through Surbiton, Esher and Guildford. Special arrangements were made for the linking section of road running from the bottom of Kingston Hill via London Road and the High Street, south of Kingston Town Centre. Third, a turnpike route ran from Kingston to Ewell and finally, a turnpike route ran between Kingston and Leatherhead. These historic routes into Kingston remain largely unchanged.

The 19th Century was a period of rapid expansion following the construction of a new bridge across the Thames in 1828 and the introduction and expansion of the railway system in 1838. Clarence Street was formed as the new approach to the bridge and new roads were created on the edge of Kingston Old Town. Surbiton for example was purely farmland until the early nineteenth century when some large houses were built there.   However, due to problems with landowners and opposition from the coaching trade, the people of Kingston rejected the railway in the 1830s. As a result the first railway in the area went through Surbiton in 1838 on its way from London to Portsmouth and led to rapid urbanisation in this area. Kingston did not receive the railway until 1863 which led to a housing boom and meant much of the open land was developed by the 1890s. The part of Norbiton nearest Kingston along London Road was soon built-up in a long ribbon development, and by 1841 the population was large enough to form its own parish. Similarly, New Malden sprang up in 1846 following the opening of the railway. Tolworth consisted of little more than a couple of farms until the 1920s but following the construction of the new Kingston bypass; it became a substantial suburban housing area.
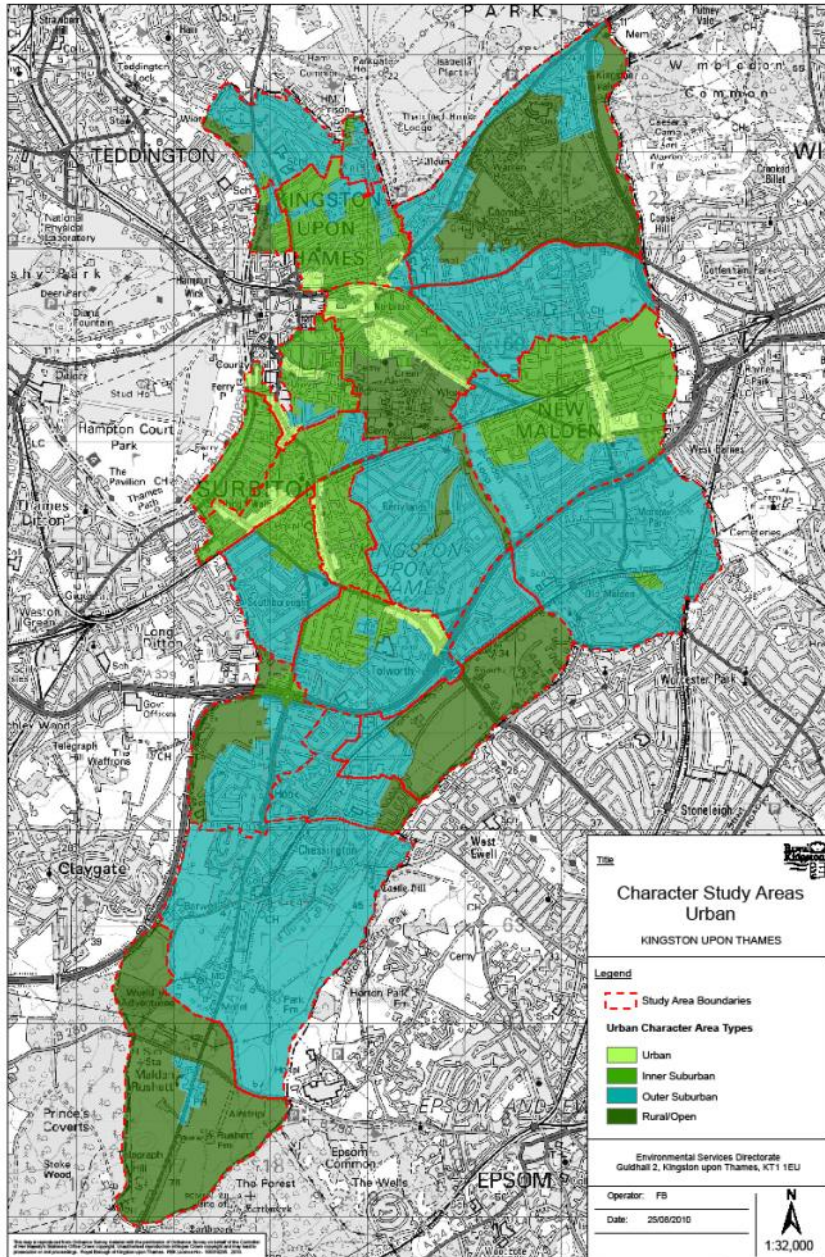
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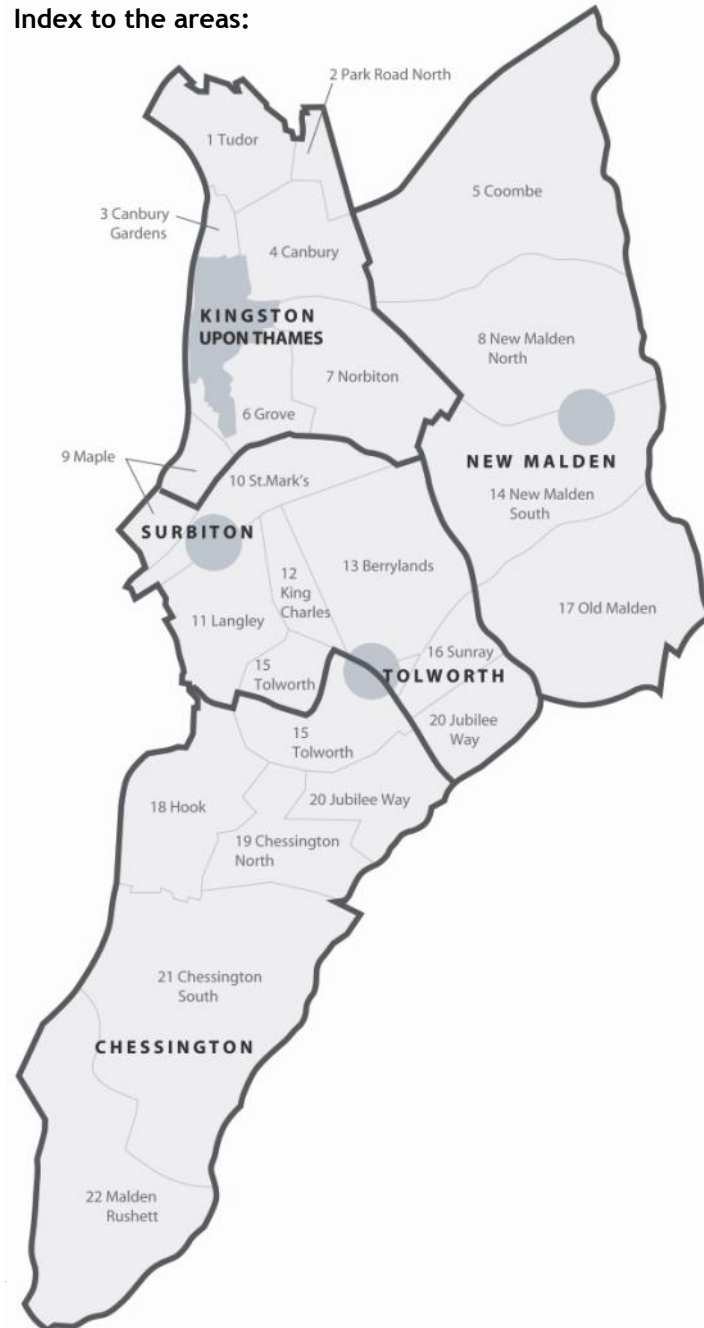
Summary

The broad findings of the study, identifying issues which are undermining the character of the borough are set out below:
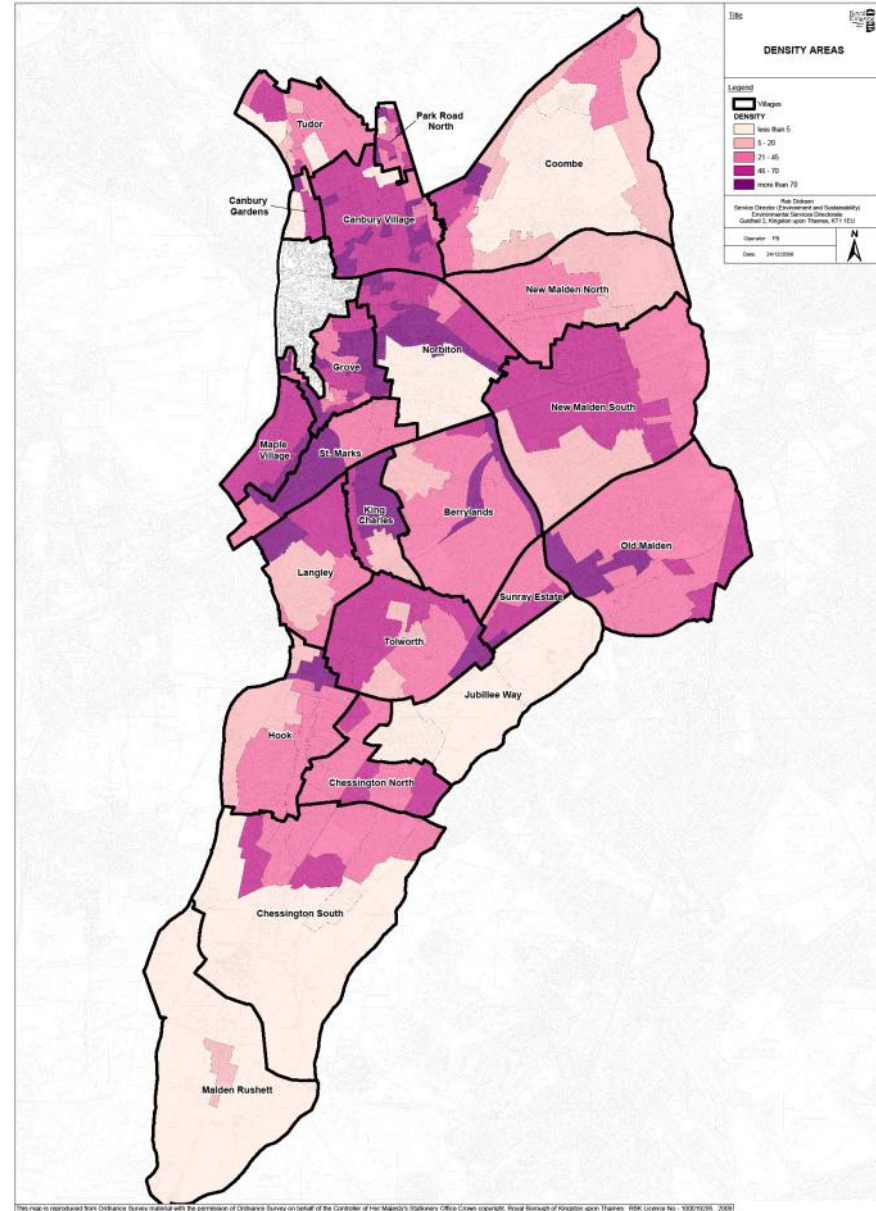
1.	Distinctive roofscapes are being lost to inappropriate roof extensions or redevelopment, particularly hip to gable conversions, raised ridges, and the loss of characteristic roof forms and detailing. This is having greatest effect in the inner suburbs such as Canbury, Tudor etc.

2.	The defining front boundary enclosures to houses which make such a contribution to the character of our streets are being lost to provide access for parking on front gardens. This undermines the setting, proportion and enclosure of the street as well as increasing hard surfaces for drainage, reducing the amount of garden planting and trees. The study found that where the street realm is high quality and parking is provided for the residents add to the wider character by planting, tidying -up, enhancing their own properties. Whilst universally an issue, it is most undermining in finer grained streets like those found in the areas Canbury, Grove etc.

3.	Gaps between buildings; characteristic gaps between plots and buildings are being reduced by new development, as well as increased footprint, higher density urban grain, disrupted building lines, increase in number of storeys (often and uncharacteristically by building into a larger roof)

4.	Street trees have been lost and not replaced. Their value as aesthetic and health assets is considerable to the borough as well as a contributor to reducing the urban heat island effect of the rest of London.

5.	The beautiful Hogsmill river is a partly inaccessible natural asset and therefore unenjoyable; a missed opportunity . Making it a special area could bring it into the lives of Kingston residents and visitors

6.	The design quality in modern developments, both buildings and public realm, is sometimes poor and lacking imagination or any character

7.	There are a number of gated and locked, private developments which break urban cohesion and disrupt permeability of streets and townscape

8.	Where good new buildings have been developed, they are often let down by poor quality or afterthought landscape, often with budgets that are little more than left-over build costs

9.	The defining natural characteristics of Kingston's townscape are the rivers, the green spaces, and trees, both private, garden trees and public, street trees. Rather than thinking of these assets in individual streets or reaches, it may be helpful to consider them as single, whole entities which are the structural framework to the built environment.

Policies in the Local Development Framework and the approach set out in the forthcoming Residential Design Guide need to address these key findings.
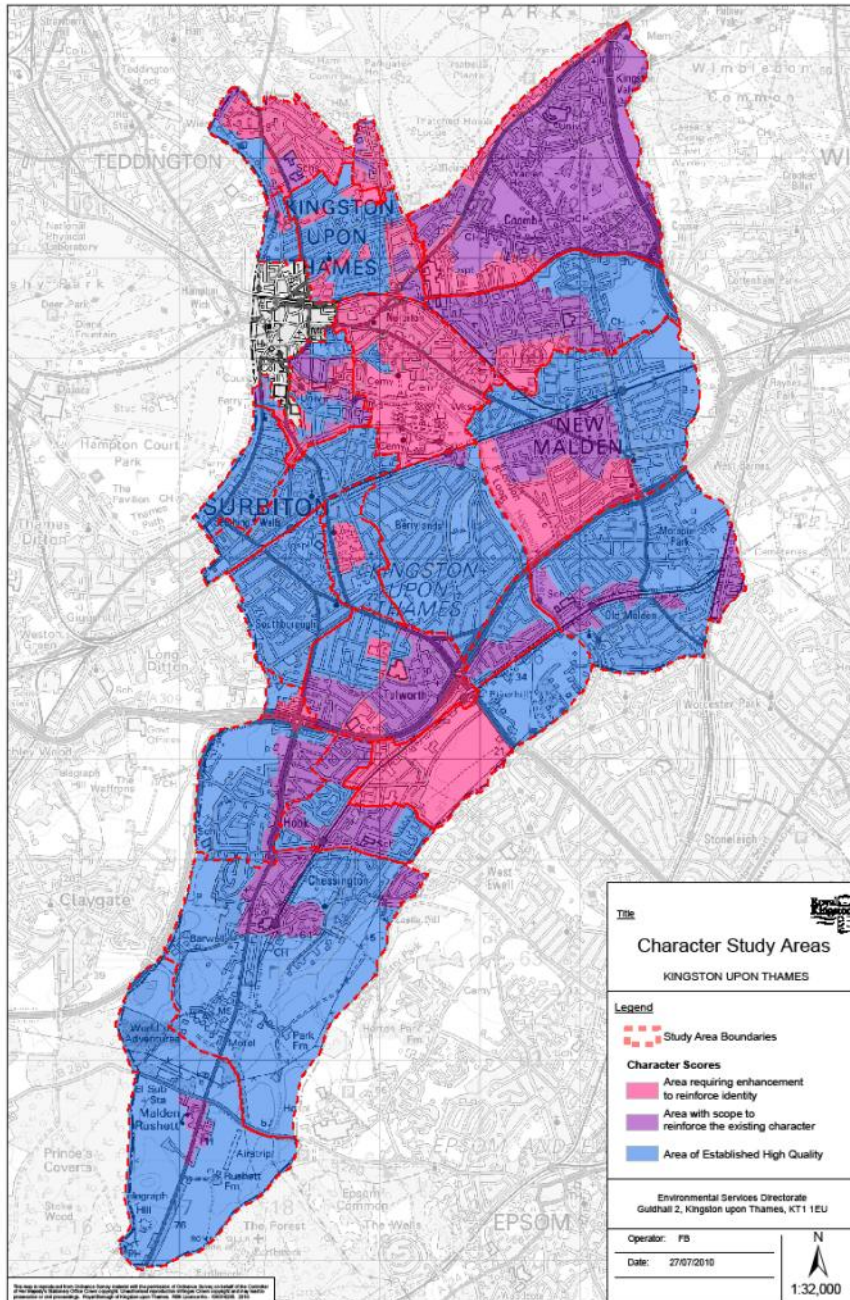
Character Area Types:

Character Area Densities:

Character Area Assessments:

Title

Character Study Areas

KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Legend

▦ Study Area Boundaries

Character Scores

▦ Area requiring enhancement to reinforce identity

▦ Area with scope to reinforce the existing character

▦ Area of Established High Quality

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Operator: FB

Date: 27/07/2010

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Character Area Assessment Criteria: Definitions

Clearly identifiable "edges" that distinguish it from the surrounding development:

  Clear change in building type, style, landscape features or use between one area and another
  Edge defined by other barrier such as roads, railway lines or landscape edges

Strong street pattern or road layout with well defined public spaces:

  Clearly defined and identifiable street layout, either planned or organic
  Clear hierarchy of streets and public spaces

Building and street layout that is easy to find your way around with good connections to the surrounding streets:

  Clearly identifiable routes around the area
  Clear hierarchy of routes for both pedestrians and vehicles
  A street layout that is well connected with the surrounding area by a variety of alternative routes

Area containing buildings of architectural or historic interest:

  Listed building or Buildings of Townscape Merit
  Other buildings of local significance in terms of their architectural or historic qualities

Buildings with cohesive scale, massing and details:

  Buildings of broadly the same height
  Buildings of similar form
  Similarity of plot widths, lengths and building lines
  Use of cohesive palette of materials
  Similar detailing e.g. Windows, brick detailing, roof details etc.

High quality public realm and or generally consistent boundary treatments:

  Public realm that contributes to rather than detracts from identity
  Public Realm with a clear relationship with building frontages
  Broadly consistent front garden boundary treatment e.g. Walls, hedges, fences
  Active edges overlooking the public realm

Significant trees or shrubs that make a positive contribution to the identity of the area:

  Trees shrubs within the public realm
  Trees or shrubs within private gardens

Green open spaces or riverside areas that make a positive contribution to the identity of the area:

  open space or riverside within or visible from an area
  Landscape in front or rear gardens that contributes to the street
  Grassed or landscaped verges or open spaces

Topography, significant views or landmarks that contribute to the experience of being within the area:

  Significant gradients
  Long distance views to open space, landmarks or landscape features
  Views to buildings or landscape features
  Individual buildings that contribute significantly to the identity of the area
  Identifiable "gateways" or entry points into an area

Area with few vacant or underused sites which affect the character:

  Empty units
  Underused buildings that detract from the area
  Vacant sites