



Wicker: The case for Conservation Area designation

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Explanatory Note

The Wicker area described in this document is the area north of the River Don, bounded to the west, south and east by that river; to the northeast by the railway viaduct; and to the northwest by the inner ring road from the point that it crosses under the railway.

This document discusses the historical and architectural significance of that area and its relationship with adjacent areas. Some ways in which a future Conservation Area boundary might be drawn would take in parts of areas already recommended for designation in the report of Donald Insall Associates to Sheffield City Council.

1. Executive summary

1.1 History

The Wicker area is rich in Sheffield's history from mediaeval to recent times. The street we know as Wicker today – thought to be named for the willow and other vegetation growing in this easily-flooded riverside – is a survival of the ancient sports ground and Assembly Green. It was the site of Lord of the Manor's annual muster of armed men and horses, the town's archery butts, the manorial court that dispensed justice and the pillory and cuckstool. It became the venue for popular protest and celebration, and, for a time, the beast market. For centuries one of Sheffield's major highways has run through it from Lady's Bridge, but its best-known feature today is its triumphal railway arch.

To the west lies what was originally the castle garden, which then became the Duke of Norfolk's Nursery. As the industrial revolution took hold, the Duke laid out its characteristic grid of streets (as he also did in the Cultural Industries Quarter) and for the next two centuries small-scale industry dominated the area. East of Wicker in an area known as Good Croft were the Wicker Wheel and Tilts powered by water from Lady's Bridge weir. Their successors included world-class steel innovators: the Huntsman firm at Wicker Tilts, Samuel Osborn's Clyde Works, Shortridge and Howell's Hartford Works, and Siebohm and Dieckstahl's Dannemora Works; while in the Nursery, Harry Brearley set up the company that would ensure his successful commercialisation of his invention of stainless steel.

1.2 Character

Six major historical themes characterise the Wicker area, which extend into the adjacent areas of Castlegate or Victoria Quays. The Nursery is intimately associated with the Castle and its operation. From its origins in the Wicker, the administration of Justice has centred on Lady's Bridge. Markets were first held near Castle Square, then extended into Castlegate, the Wicker and across the river Sheaf to Victoria Quays. Industry has from its earliest days to the present maintained a very substantial presence, expanding over the rivers and onto the castle site in the early 19th century. A turnpike serving major ports and Sheffield Wicker railway station – the town's first – made it an essential part of the Logistics hub that also included Victoria Quays. The Wicker's rare ability to hold large crowds and proximity to seats of government and justice made it, with Castlegate, a venue for Sheffield's radical Politics.

Like its neighbour, Castlegate, the Wicker's architecture is an eclectic mix. A great variety of ages and styles rub shoulders, including humble houses, workshops and inns of the early 19th century, grand mid-19th century steelworks offices, spectacular late Victorian and Edwardian buildings, distinctive 20th century commercial and industrial premises, and even some of Sheffield's more meritorious early 21st century buildings.

1.3 Protection

More than sufficient buildings remain that contribute to the character or appearance of the area for it to be considered historically and architecturally 'special', despite past losses. A higher density of positive buildings is found than existed in Conservation Areas such as Furnace Hill or the Cultural Industries Quarter at the time of their designation, and many of these are depicted in the Appendix. The Wicker's unique broad funnel shape shows its Assembly Green origins, topography defines the suitability of the flat and flood-prone Nursery both as a garden and for the industry that came after, while the river Don provides a strong visual and environmental reminder of how its presence has shaped the area in multiple respects.

The area's character and appearance should be preserved or enhanced, and this is best achieved through designation as a Conservation Area. As in Furnace Hill, Well Meadow, Kelham Island and the Cultural Industries Quarter this will promote both retention of historic fabric and sympathetic development of vacant and negative sites. This document examines several options, including a dedicated Wicker designation, combination with either or both of Castlegate and Victoria Quays, and extension of the City Centre Conservation Area to include all of these.

The Wicker today has found a new, multi-cultural identity. At its heart is SADACCA, who have given new life and purpose to the building that began as a steelworks. That building's listed status ensures that the historic and architectural character that makes it special remain part of its ongoing and developing story. Conservation Area protection can and should achieve the same for the whole of the Wicker.

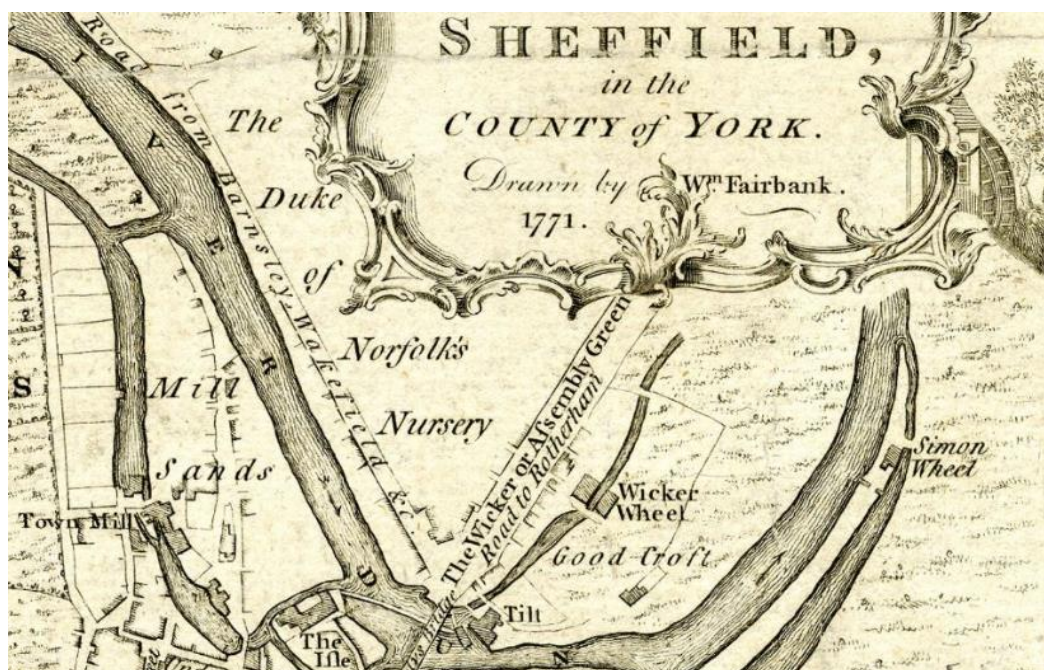
2. Historical outline



Approximate extent of the three main historical areas around the Wicker

Mid-blue triangles show the locations of Listed Buildings

Deep blue outlines show assets on the Local Heritage List and the Kelham Island Industrial Conservation Area



Fairbank Plan of 1771 showing the Assembly Green, Good Croft and Nursery

Picture Sheffield image y09226

2.1 Assembly Green

The Wicker area takes its name from an open space which coincided with the street we know today as Wicker, but was somewhat broader, especially on the west side. One definition of “wicker” as “a tangled mass of brush and underwood, occasionally flooded” has echoes in suggestions that the name comes from the osiers that grew in this flood-prone area or the wicker used to make the archery butts.

Traditionally used as a sports and athletics ground, during the mediaeval period it was the site for the annual muster of armed men and horses and acquired the name Assembly (or ‘Sembly) Green. This muster symbolised the obligation of the dependants of the Lord of the Manor to respond to the need to assemble an army in times of crisis, and was discontinued only in 1715 owing to the sensitivity around a Catholic Lord of the Manor displaying what amounted to a private army.

The Assembly Green was also the site of the Court Leet, a Manorial court trying petty crime and minor civil disputes. It was nicknamed the Court of ‘Sembly Quest, from its location. Until 1775 the ‘Sembly House where it was held was the only building here.

An act of 1472 required every man to have a bow of his own height and to be able to draw it, which was enforced by the Lord of the Manor. Archery butts were then erected, the Town Trustees being recorded as setting up a pair in 1571 along with a pillory and, a few years later, a cuckstool.

In 1751 the river Don was made navigable as far as Tinsley. To create a suitable route for the transport of goods, the road northeast toward Rotherham was turnpiked in 1759, starting its journey as it crossed the green. This enabled the turnpiking of routes to Worksop, Bawtry (then a major port), Rotherham and Doncaster. It would remain the principal trade route until the Sheffield and Tinsley Canal opened in 1819, this having been delayed by the reluctance of the Dukes of Norfolk to have an easy route for coal to compete with their own local collieries.

A parliamentary act of 1784 enabled the Duke of Norfolk to relocate and expand the various markets to meet the increased needs of a growing town. In 1786 the beast (cattle and pigs) market was moved from what we now know as Haymarket to the east side of the Assembly Green. It remained there until 1830, and when the green was fully enclosed in 1795 it was probably its presence that ensured that the street retained its unique characteristic breadth.

The 1788 Brightside enclosure act allotted the Assembly Green, previously common land, to the Duke of Norfolk. It has been suggested that the green had been about 5 or 6 acres (2 to 2.4 hectares) but that the Duke or his predecessors had encroached onto it. Enclosure transferred ownership to the Duke, making it possible for him to formalise his encroachment and develop the whole of the Nursery site.

As the only space of its size in the town centre it continued to be a venue for large gatherings. In 1819 following the Peterloo massacre in Manchester the Wicker was the gathering point for the crowd of 40-50,000 which formed a parade two miles in length, which processed to a protest meeting in the Brocco, off Broad Lane, chaired by Samuel Shore. In 1832 a crowd of 30,000 assembled in the Wicker and the new cattle market (on the other side of the river) to celebrate the passing of the Reform Act. The unpopular result of the election later that year would result in the tragic deaths of five protestors in Haymarket. Earlier, in 1812 “a dreadfully distressing time of bad trade and high prices”, able-bodied men given employment on a new burial ground paraded in the market place to highlight their poverty. A crowd gathered, looted the market and then resorted to the volunteers’ store at the far end of the Wicker to obtain weapons. A force of cavalry was despatched, which met the crowd in the Wicker and subdued them.

The Sheffield and Rotherham Railway opened in 1838, with its southern terminal at the north end of the Wicker, shifting the most efficient trade route back from the canal basin. The railway presence was consolidated by the opening of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway’s Victoria station in 1851, with its direct connection to the Wicker, which has also given its name to the landmark triumphal arch.

2.2 Good Croft

The land southeast of the green as far as the river was known as Good Croft. Until the mid-18th century the only development here was the Wicker grinding wheel, fed by the weir at Lady's Bridge, which had existed since no later than 1581. A tilt forge was added to the wheel in 1749 and a separate tilt forge using the same weir was built by Lady's Bridge in 1752. Sheffield's industrial revolution created a surge in the building of water-powered works, a cutler wheel having already been added to the 12th century Town corn mill in 1740 (both fed from the Kelham weir), and the Simon and Castle Orchards wheels built on the Sheaf in 1731 and 1732.

This heavier industrial character paved the way for the croft to be laid out for development in the 1770s. Initially most premises were on a small scale, but from the mid-19th century larger works took over. The area became associated with the names of some of the great innovators of the Sheffield steel industry. The works of Shortridge, Howell and Jessop, now the home of SADACCA, were built in 1853. Shortridge had been the builder of John Fowler's railway viaduct, including the Wicker Arch. He partnered with Howell to exploit the latter's "homogeneous metal", developing advanced casting techniques using multiple crucibles of steel (before the Bessemer converter existed to create large quantities in one vessel) to create previously impossible large steel gun barrels and Sheffield's largest steel casting to date, for a hydraulic press cylinder for Woolwich Arsenal. The ability to create large and flawless castings remains a Sheffield speciality today.

Shortridge's works were taken over by Samuel Osborn & Co. in 1868 to become their Clyde Steel Works. Robert Mushet licensed his self-hardening tungsten steel to Osborn's for production at Clyde, enabling the firm and others across Sheffield to become dominant in tool steel production and creating the modern alloy steel industry. The works closed in 1970.

Behind the Clyde Works next to the river were the Dannemora Works of Seebohm & Dieckstahl, also a major producer of special steels. The company is thought to have been the first in the country to produce a high-speed steel, in 1901, after managing director Arthur Balfour had seen it produced in America. Osborn's and other major companies also quickly adopted this technology to enable Sheffield to overtake the Americans and for a time to have a world monopoly.

The Wicker tilts were acquired first by Blonk & Co., but were taken over in the 1860s by Francis and then Benjamin Huntsman, grandson and great-grandson respectively of the inventor of crucible steel, at a time when their product was still considered to lead the field. The site was redeveloped in 1899 by veterinarian Henry Bryars and is now occupied by his Royal Exchange and Royal Victoria Buildings and Castle House.

2.3 Nursery

The wide, flat area to the northwest of the green and bounded by the river was the garden of the castle from an early date. The valley widens at the foot of Spital Hill and the river Don meanders across the floodplain, resulting in the largest flat area close to the castle of sufficient size (an area on the far bank of the Sheaf, at a similar distance but much smaller, served as the castle orchards). Alluvial deposits may also have made this fertile ground. After the slighting of the castle in 1648 the garden use remained, and it was the Duke of Norfolk's nursery until late in the 18th century.

In 1781 the nursery was opened for public recreation, but following the 1784 act the Duke of Norfolk divided it into building plots in the same characteristic grid pattern of wider streets and narrower service lanes seen in what is now known as the Cultural Industries Quarter, also developed by him at the same time, and west of Cambridge Street (then Coalpit Lane). Tenants of the new plots are named in plans from the 1790s, and the area rapidly became industrialised. The use of the viaduct arches to augment accommodation on Walker Street began in the 1860s and 1870s. The area's small-scale industrial character has persisted over more than two centuries to the present day.

In the early 1900s Harry Brearley set up his Amalgams Co. in Joiner Street. This manufacturer of cement for castings would later be diversified by Brearley and is likely to have provided him with the income stream needed to ensure that he was able to negotiate a favourable deal with Firth's, allowing him to exploit his invention of stainless steel elsewhere. Brearley was educated at Holy Trinity school nearby in Johnson Street and recalled being "enchanted by the crowded interests in the surrounding streets": railway warehouses (connected to Bridgehouses station, opened in 1845), grain stores, stables and "Little Mester" workshops.

By contrast with the focus on steel production in the Good Croft area, industry in Nursery has been a mix of metal and non-metal trades. In 1797 the type foundry of Slater and Bower was set up in Nursery Lane. This was the first in Sheffield, and originated the industry in which the city's firm of Stephenson Blake would become nationally dominant. William Batchelor's dried and canned vegetable business began in Stanley Street in 1912 and occupied various premises, expanding in 1931 by converting Bryars' Castle House into a pioneering pea-canning factory. Notable surviving buildings include United Yeast in Stanley Street and Oxo House in Joiner Street.

Street names in the area summarise its history: Nursery for its pre-industrial use; Andrew (originally Andrews) and Walker after tenants; Stanley after the banking partner of the Duke's agent, Vincent Eyre; and Joiner supposedly for the profession of another occupant.

3. Themes

3.1 Castle

The Nursery forms part of an area intimately associated with the castle and its operation extending to Bridgehouses, the foot of Spital Hill, the east bank of the Sheaf and (speculatively) Fitzalan Square.

The castle stood on the rising ground at the confluence of the rivers Don and Sheaf within a fortified inner courtyard. Adjacent were areas controlled by and providing for the castle, including an outer courtyard extending southwards, the garden to the north on the other side of Lady's Bridge, and the orchard to the east on the far bank of the Sheaf. No boundary feature of the outer courtyard has so far been discovered. Its precise extent and uses are unknown, although the names Castle Folds and Castle Laiths indicate the presence of sheep pens and barns. The orchard and garden had clearer purposes, the latter remaining the Duke of Norfolk's nursery even after the loss of the castle itself.

The 12th century corn mill at Millsands was owned and controlled by the Lord of the Manor and would certainly have been essential to the castle's operation. The early date of the Wicker wheel in Good Croft, owned by the Norfolk estate, also suggests a connection with the castle.



Approximate extent of the castle and its immediate areas of operation

3.2 Justice

From its origins in the Wicker, the administration of justice has historically been focused mainly on an area centred on Lady's Bridge.

The earliest court external to the castle is considered to be the manorial court situated on the Assembly Green (now the Wicker). Public justice was also carried out here from at latest the 16th century in the form of the pillory and cuckstool.

In the 17th century petty criminal cases and felony preliminary examinations were heard by the visiting Justices of the Peace for the West Riding. During the 18th century this took place in the Town Hall by the churchyard, moving then to the Cutlers' Hall nearby. The manorial court retained civil jurisdiction, and in the 18th century a debtor's prison was established in Pudding Lane (now King Street).

From 1810 the court house at the corner of Castle Street served the West Riding Magistrates and the Court of Requests. Extensions during the 19th century were followed by the adjacent building of police offices in 1866. A Coroner's Court (now lost) was built on Nursery Street in 1914, and in the later 20th century much larger magistrates court and police headquarters buildings were created between Snig Hill and Waingate.



Locations for the administration of justice prior to the opening of the courts in West Bar

3.3 Markets

In living memory the retail markets were concentrated on or close to the castle site, prior to their relocation to Moorfoot. Historically they have been more distributed, their recent focus being a retreat from former locations near Castle Square, in the Wicker and to the east of the rivers Don and Sheaf.

A market charter was granted to the Lord of the Manor in 1296, and presumably the market was held close to the Lord's seat at the castle and at a focal point for transport routes. Gosling's map of 1736 shows the market cross on the north side of what is now Castle Square with the Market Place stretching northward along the line of today's Angel Street. The short section of street at the top of Angel Street remains officially named and signed as Market Place today. Gosling's map shows the Beast Market where Haymarket is now.

Fairbank's map of 1771 shows much the same layout, with shambles – stalls to display meat – in the market place, the swine market between there and "Bullstake" (the beast market, now Haymarket), and the slaughter houses in an alley leading to Norfolk Street.

The act of 1784 enabled a change of layout. The shambles were enlarged and improved to become the Fitzalan market hall; the beast market moved to the Wicker, its former site becoming the Haymarket; and the slaughter houses moved to the bank of the river Don east of Lady's Bridge. Leather's plan of 1823 shows these, and also a fruit market south of the shambles and a fish market between King Street and Castle Street.

In 1830 the cattle market was moved from the Wicker to the east bank of the river Don near to Blonk Bridge. In the same period a new corn exchange (also including a fish market) was built and a larger hay market created on the east bank of the Sheaf near to Sheaf Bridge. In 1851 the new Norfolk market hall was built on the site of the Tontine Inn on the east side of the old Haymarket. The late 19th and 20th centuries saw the creation of the still larger Castle Hill and Castle Market buildings on the castle site itself, and the Castlefolds and Sheaf Markets close by, the market halls being replaced by large shop buildings.



Areas used for markets at various times prior to their relocation to Moorfoot

3.4 Industry

Accelerating after the industrial revolution in the 18th century, industrial manufacturing activity has built and maintained a very substantial presence in the Wicker area, extended in the early 1820s by the creation of steel works on the castle site and Sheaf Works by the canal (considered the first integrated steel works, accommodating the entire process from input of raw material to output of finished cutlery), followed in the 1830s by Park Works and Shrewsbury Works south of the canal. At Millsands, west of the river Don, early water-powered sites also founded an industrial presence.

The river Don was the source of the water power on which many Sheffield industries originally depended. Lady's Bridge weir and the underground remains of its associated goits mark its importance. The need for small workshops for artisans working by hand or with small forges existed throughout, and the invention of steam power made it practical to provide both for more of these workshops as overall manufacturing capacity and demand increased and for larger facilities built without the need for water-power.

The development of the Nursery and of the castle site both illustrate this change, neither benefiting from water-power. The Nursery development was contemporary with the Duke of Norfolk's very similar scheme in what is now the Cultural Industries Quarter. In both places existing water-powered industry was joined by an adjacent planned grid of streets and lanes to accommodate workshops and factories powered by hand or coal. The castle site shows a more opportunistic approach, while the arrival of the canal prompted the larger works to the east.



Main locations for industry in the Wicker/Victoria Quays/Castlegate area

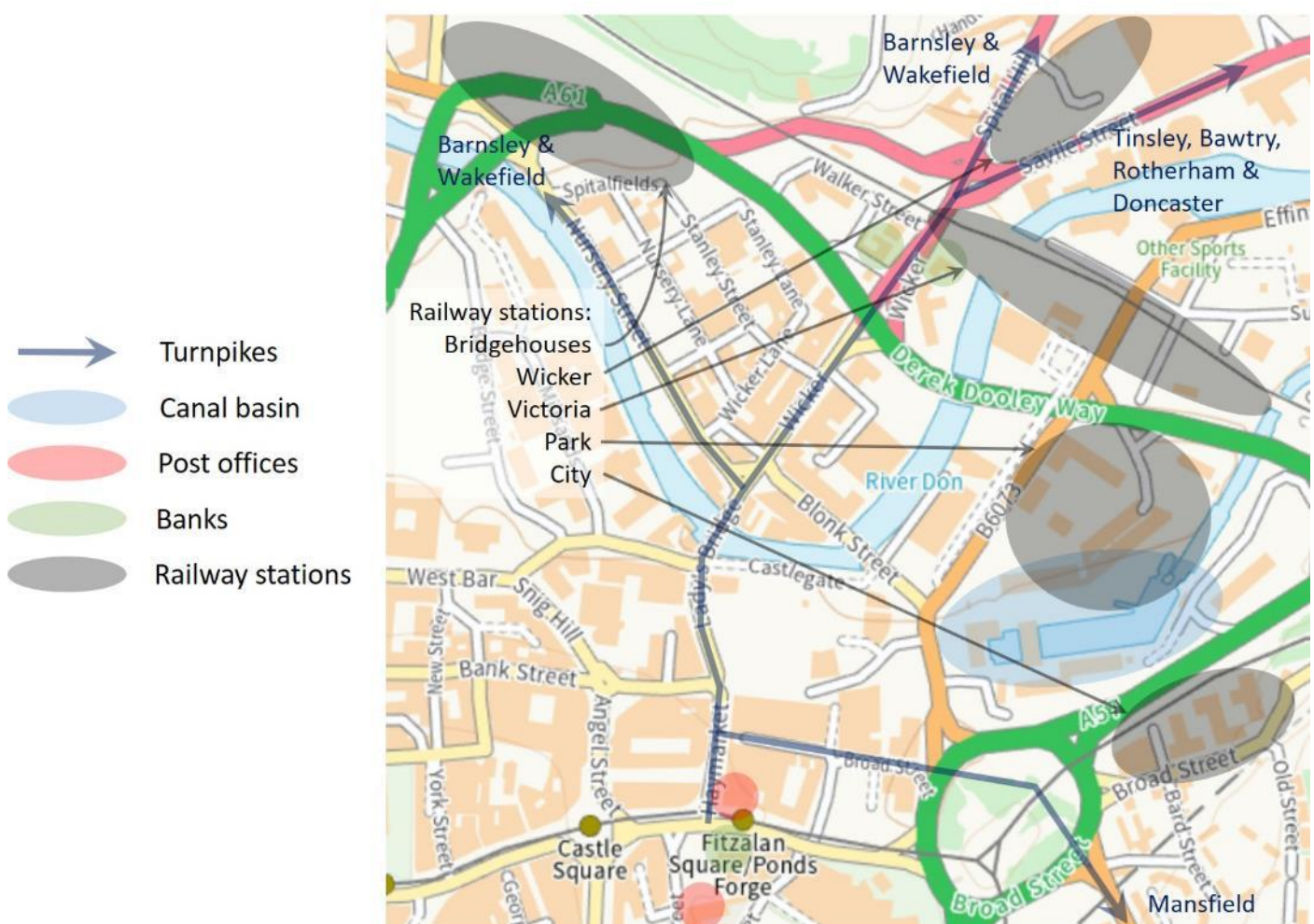
3.5 Logistics

The Wicker and the eastern banks of the rivers Don and Sheaf provided a natural gateway between the hilly town and the flatter lower Don valley and therefore became Sheffield's primary logistics hub.

The lower Don valley provides the only communication route to Sheffield that does not involve difficult terrain, and the only substantial area of flat land that can readily accommodate high-capacity transport such as canals and railways. Goods made in Sheffield or natural resources such as coal that were to be shipped in larger quantities needed to exit here; similarly, supplies for a growing town would need to enter as demand outgrew the inadequate roads through the surrounding hills. The presence of the markets nearby was convenient for both sellers and buyers.

From 1759 the Wicker was the starting point for turnpike roads to several destinations including major ports such as Bawtry, having been the main route for goods for many centuries. This continued well into the age of canals owing to the Dukes of Norfolk resisting the construction of a canal into Sheffield, so that the Wicker remained the primary route for goods to reach the docks at Tinsley. The eventual building of the canal in 1819 was closely followed in 1838 by the first railway, the Sheffield and Rotherham, also terminating at the Wicker.

The canal basin was located immediately adjacent to the Duke of Norfolk's colliery to give him ready access to the water transport required to ship the larger weight and volume of coal. Some of the goods stations connected to the Manchester Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway were therefore also built east of the rivers, but its first, Bridgehouses (1845), was built west of Nursery and its dedicated passenger station, Victoria (1851), next to the Wicker.



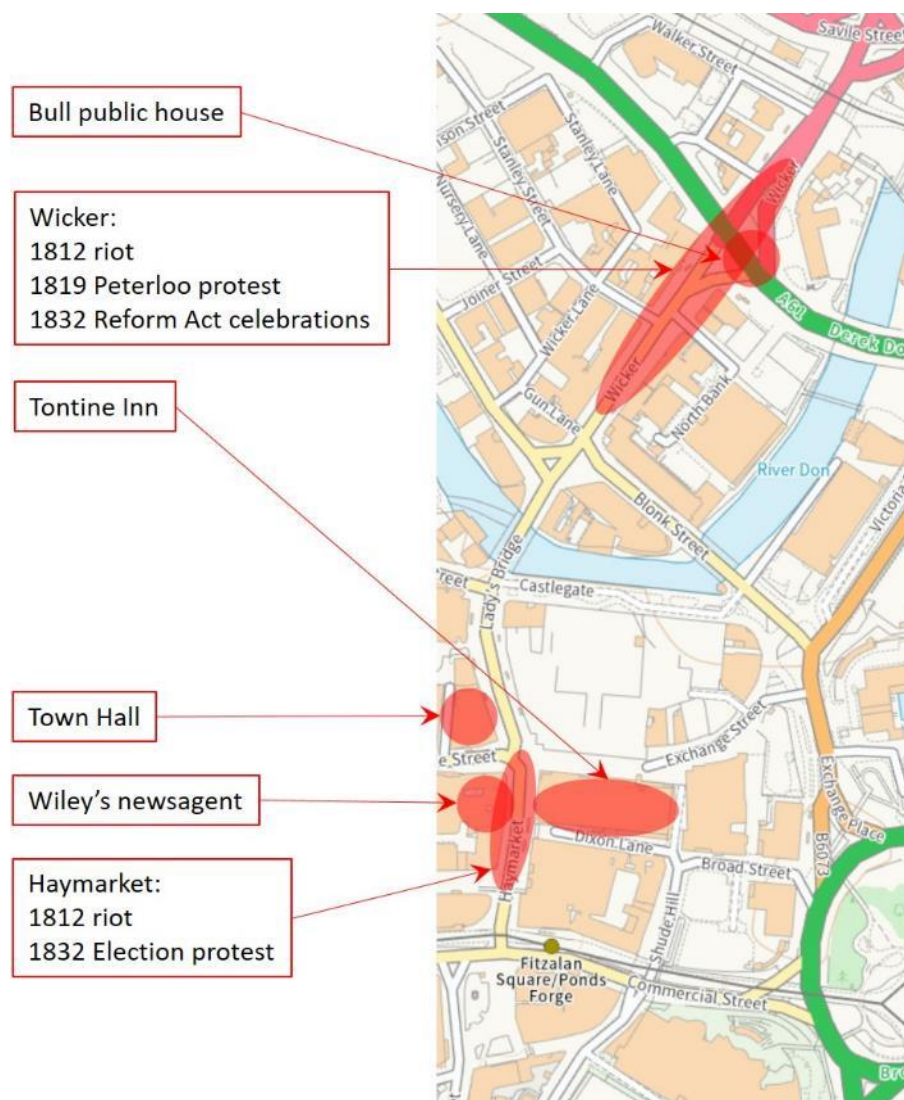
Main locations relating to logistics in the Wicker/Victoria Quays/Castlegate area

3.6 Politics

The presence of the seat of local government and the administration of justice along with one of the very few open spaces capable of accommodating large crowds made the Wicker, Waingate and Haymarket a venue for political protest and debate.

Following the French Revolution of 1789 Sheffield consolidated its reputation for political activism. Radical newspaper editor Joseph Gales, his assistant James Montgomery and others of like mind met regularly at the Bull public house in the Wicker to discuss politics and engage in satire. The Tontine Inn, built in Haymarket in 1785, became an important centre for political organisation. The opening of the Town Hall in 1810 focused the politics of the town more strongly in this area.

The riot of 1812 and the Peterloo protest of 1819 are both mentioned above as examples of the role played by the open space of the Wicker. In 1832 Thomas Wiley made newspapers available at his premises in Haymarket and displayed the latest news in the windows. The passing of the Great Reform Act that year resulted both in major celebrations (beginning in the Wicker) and tragedy (outside the Tontine and Wiley's), the dead victims of the latter being taken to the nearby Town Hall.



Some locations of key political events

4. Justification

4.1 Is there sufficient architectural or historic interest for the area to be considered 'special'?

That there is sufficient architectural or historic interest for the area to be considered 'special' is beyond doubt. It has been shown above that the historic interest of the Wicker area is profound and spans several themes: the Castle, Justice, Markets, Industry, Logistics and Politics. This is true whether it is considered in isolation or in combination with adjacent areas; and the significance of an adjacent area is considerably lessened without the contribution made by the Wicker area. Themes of significance in the proposed Castlegate area, such as the Castle, Justice or Markets, are incomplete without the historical contribution of the Wicker area. The theme of Logistics in the proposed Victoria Quays area also neglects the importance of the Wicker, in particular as the location of Sheffield's first railway station (not Victoria, as incorrectly stated in the DIA proposal) and for its key role in road transport.

More than sufficient buildings remain that contribute to the character or appearance of the area, despite past losses; and a higher density of positive buildings is found than existed in Conservation Areas such as Furnace Hill or the Cultural Industries Quarter at the time of their designation. These are identified in the Appendix.

Listed Buildings in the area (with the exception of the former Shortridge/Osborn building, now the home of SADACCA, which is of especial historic importance) are towards the periphery, but nonetheless contribute to historical and architectural significance. Some have been "borrowed" by other existing or proposed Conservation Areas: Holy Trinity and Aizlewood's Mill are in an offshoot of Kelham Island; the Royal Exchange Buildings, Royal Victoria Buildings and Castle House of Henry Bryars are proposed for inclusion in the Castlegate extension to the City Centre; and the two bank buildings are proposed for inclusion in Victoria Quays. The crucible stack on Blonk Street contributes to the historic significance of the Wicker area but has not been proposed for inclusion in any designation.

Buildings of the 20th century make a valuable contribution, especially where they demonstrate continuing industrial activity. Modest, functional structures such as the mid-20th century Waverley Works are the equivalent of the equally modest workshops of the mid-19th century and should be valued for similar reasons. More decorative buildings such as the inter-war Stanley House and Oxo House and the post-war Conquest House and Kam House show a degree of pride even where they are obscurely located. It is not valid to suggest that the 20th century buildings are of no interest. Some early 21st century buildings near Lady's Bridge also have architectural value.

Of particular importance are the more humble buildings of the early-mid 19th century, including industrial buildings and public houses. These are increasingly rare representations of the earliest development in a simple vernacular.

The Inner Ring Road intrudes into the area and its construction has done some harm. This is not fatal either to the special interest of the area or to the ability to experience it. The Hanover and Cultural Industries Quarter Conservation Area both have sections of the Inner Ring Road running through them which are similarly harmful but not fatal. The Wicker still reads as a single broad street with the railway arch providing a dramatic termination. The street grid and industrial use of the Nursery is legible on both sides of the highway, and it is the viaduct rather than the road that is the dominant feature in views containing both.

The Wicker area is finding a new purpose for a new age. SADACCA, which had its origins as the "Everyone Centre" in 1955, has occupied its adopted home in the former Shortridge/Osborn works buildings for forty-five years, creating a much-valued range of community services for a diverse community. When visiting the area its liveliness and cultural variety are very much apparent. This character is sufficiently longstanding to be considered historic, adding to the special interest of the area.

4.2 Is this special interest experienced through its character or appearance, and does this relate to the existing conservation area or is it distinct?

The connection with the Castle is primarily experienced through the topography of the Nursery site, which as an alluvial plain is unusually flat for Sheffield and exceptionally flood-prone, as has been tragically demonstrated all too recently. This made it particularly suitable as the castle garden, with a ready and still apparent connection to the castle via Lady's Bridge.

The unique breadth and funnel-like outline of the main street of Wicker is a recognisable remnant of its origins as a public open space, which led to its function as the location of the Lord of the Manor's annual muster, the seat of manorial Justice and a public arena for Politics. This openness probably survived because of its use for Markets at the time of enclosure; the impact of the latter is visible through the current format of the street and the planned layout of streets to the east. Although prior knowledge is likely to be needed to recognise the significance of these features, an observer with that knowledge will better appreciate how they relate to the history of the area. It is still possible to experience elements of the streetscape seen by contemporaries, given the survival of early 19th century buildings. Examples include the New White Lion and others on the west side of the Wicker, parts of Baker Blower Engineering in Stanley Street and other survivals amongst the Nursery industrial buildings.

The special interest relating to Industry is particularly strongly expressed in both character and appearance. The continued presence of industry in the Nursery area gives the area an industrial character that once pervaded the whole of the city centre but is now largely absent, and entirely absent from the Kelham Island Industrial Conservation Area. There are multiple buildings of existing or former industrial use across wide spans of age and status, giving the area a prominently industrial appearance. Its late 18th/early 19th century origins as an area developed with industry in mind are apparent from the characteristic grid street layout and the survival of floorscape such as kerbs and setts. Street names also provide clues to this development. Outside Nursery the industrial special interest is expressed through survivals such as the Shortridge/Osborn works, Cocker Brothers cementation furnace, Blonk Street crucible stack, Lady's Bridge weir and buried remains of the Wicker wheel and its goits. The longevity of industrial use has resulted in a collection of buildings illustrating industrial architecture throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Uses related to Logistics are also very strongly expressed. Lady's Bridge shows the Wicker's early history as the major route through the lower Don valley. The railway viaduct and its arch, which both spans and is named for the Wicker, are amongst the most prominent illustrations of character anywhere in the city. The many public houses range from the basic New White Lion and Railway Hotel from the earlier 19th century when the Wicker was still a turnpike road to larger premises of the later 19th and early 20th centuries such as the former Brown Cow and Viaduct Inn and the higher-status Station Hotel, built or renewed for the increased traffic and prosperity brought by the railways, which also prompted the new bank buildings. The importance into the early 20th century of horse-drawn transport is marked by the Henry Bryars' multi-storey stables at Castle House, near Lady's Bridge.

The river Don provides a strong visual and environmental reminder of how its presence has shaped the area, through multiple roles as a source of water-power for industry, the creator of a level and fertile floodplain that became first a garden and then space for development, a natural corridor for communication, a defensive structure for the castle and an obstacle to be bridged.

4.3 Is it desirable for this character or appearance to be preserved or enhanced, and what problems does designation help to solve?

We agree with the DIA view that it is desirable to protect historic buildings, reinforce local identity and encourage sensitive redevelopment in this area.

We also consider that it is desirable to preserve or enhance other aspects of significance. These include the historic street layout and dimensions, floorscape features such as stone kerbs and setts, the openness of the Wicker, the industrial character including active industrial uses, and more recent buildings that demonstrate the continuation of historic uses or add to the architectural quality of the area.

The historic environment is fragile and extremely vulnerable to being eroded without protection enhanced beyond what is offered by default by the planning system. Small changes such as the extinguishing of minor streets (Joiner Lane) or the recent removal of the gateposts at the former Harlequin public house (Stanley Street) have a disproportionate effect. Even major buildings such as the Coroner's Court on Nursery Street have proved impossible to save in the absence of statutory protection. For lesser buildings that are of interest but which do not meet national or local listing criteria even poorly-designed shopfronts or ill-considered elevation painting, as at the Big Gun public house (Wicker), have a disproportionately damaging effect.

Conservation Area protection has been used in several other areas to promote retention of historic fabric and sympathetic development of vacant and negative sites, in particular Furnace Hill, Well Meadow, Kelham Island and the Cultural Industries Quarter.

Alternative means such as those suggested by DIA are wholly inadequate. Most of the Listed Buildings are on the periphery of the Wicker area and their settings have been narrowly interpreted in previous planning decisions, leading to consequences such as the inappropriately tall and featureless towers consented within yards of the listed former Holy Trinity church on Nursery Street.

Addition to the Local Heritage List makes the heritage value of assets a material consideration in planning decisions, but in practice this protection is very weak compared to the statutory protection afforded by a Conservation Area. Without an Article 4 direction demolition of a locally listed heritage asset remains permitted development. Sheffield City Council lacks sufficient resources to issue all the required individual Article 4 directions, and neither they nor voluntary groups have the capacity to nominate all qualifying assets to the Local Heritage List.

Although the setting of a Conservation Area is a material consideration in planning decisions it lacks the statutory presumption against harm, so in practice also offers only weak protection. Harmful development has been consented in a Conservation Area in the past simply because it can only be seen from outside the area.

5. Options for designation

The maps above show that themes characteristic of the Wicker area extend into the adjacent Castlegate and Victoria Quays areas recommended for designation. Functions have moved within and between these three areas over time; and, as throughout the city centre, expressions of different chronological and thematic layers are visible across many locations. Sometimes several different layers may be represented by buildings or spaces in close proximity.

There are few areas with a wholly consistent or unique character, and it is unrealistic either to attempt to impose these on an area or to insist that designation is justified by such uniqueness. Any approach will involve compromise, balancing the needs of manageability, comprehensiveness and coherence. Some options are explored below.

5.1 Wicker designated as a separate Conservation Area

There is sufficient special historical and architectural interest to support designation of the Wicker area in isolation. This has the advantage of creating a small, manageable area in which future development can be guided in a tailored way that reflects its position on the periphery of the city centre.

Such a Conservation Area should take in areas that although currently included, or proposed for inclusion, in other designations have closer historical associations with the Wicker area, its themes and topography.

All six of the identified themes have significant presence in other areas proposed for designation or already designated. Planning determinations take into account only the Conservation Area containing a subject site, so there is a risk of diluting the protection for buildings that are located in one area but contribute to the significance of another. There could be difficulty in devising a common management plan to support a single theme spanning more than one area. The historical development of Industry is quite specific to the Wicker area. The other themes can only be fully understood by considering their evolution across other areas.

5.2 Wicker and Victoria Quays designated as one Conservation Area

The themes of Industry and Logistics have a strong presence in both the Wicker and Victoria Quays areas, and the two together would have greater coherence and comprehensiveness than either would alone. A combined area would be of moderate size and relatively simple to manage. Both are on the periphery of the city centre and their needs are likely to differ from the core areas, including Castlegate.

Even so, there is a risk of obscuring the thematic connections of the Wicker area with Castlegate and the same risks exist as for separate designation of the Wicker.

The Conservation Area should take in areas currently included, or proposed for inclusion, in other designations but with closer historical associations with the Wicker area, its themes and topography.

5.3 Wicker and Castlegate designated as one Conservation Area

The themes of the Castle, Justice, Markets and Politics are strongly represented in both areas. Industry and Logistics are strong in the Wicker, and have some representation in Castlegate, although less than in Victoria Quays.

The two together would have greater coherence and comprehensiveness than either would alone. A combined area would be of moderate size and relatively simple to manage. A single management plan could be beneficial to the Wicker area by ensuring that it is seen as integral to the city centre, especially when designing capital projects.

There is a risk of obscuring the thematic connections of Industry and Logistics with Victoria Quays, in which they are more strongly represented than in Castlegate. The same risks exist as for separate designation of the Wicker.

5.4 Wicker, Castlegate and Victoria Quays designated as one Conservation Area

This would create a Conservation Area of a similar size to the City Centre, which is a large area with a varied special interest. It would allow the six themes to be better understood, and remove the risk of thematic connections being obscured between the three areas. The advantages of a single management plan would be extended to Victoria Quays.

There is some logic to the separation of this area from the City Centre Conservation Area. The themes of the Castle and Markets are not represented in the City Centre area at all. Justice and Logistics are represented only to a limited extent.

Industry has historically been ubiquitous in central Sheffield. Above-ground survivals are comparatively few in the City Centre area, but the proposed West Street extension would add to these, and they are similar in kind to the Nursery area. Sheffield's radical Politics is a theme of great importance which has been neglected. The City Centre area is the location of other important sites and events and these should be better understood. There is still some risk of obscuring these thematic connections, although less than with other options.

The City Centre area will require a complex management plan, and a similarly diverse Wicker/Castlegate/Victoria Quays area would need a plan of similar complexity.

5.5 Wicker, Castlegate and Victoria Quays added to an extended City Centre Conservation Area

This combined area would stretch from north to south between Bridgehouses and Moorhead and from east to west across almost the entire diameter of the Inner Ring Road.

Such an area would enable a holistic view of special interest. Thematic connections could be properly understood and given weight in decisions even when they are widely distributed.

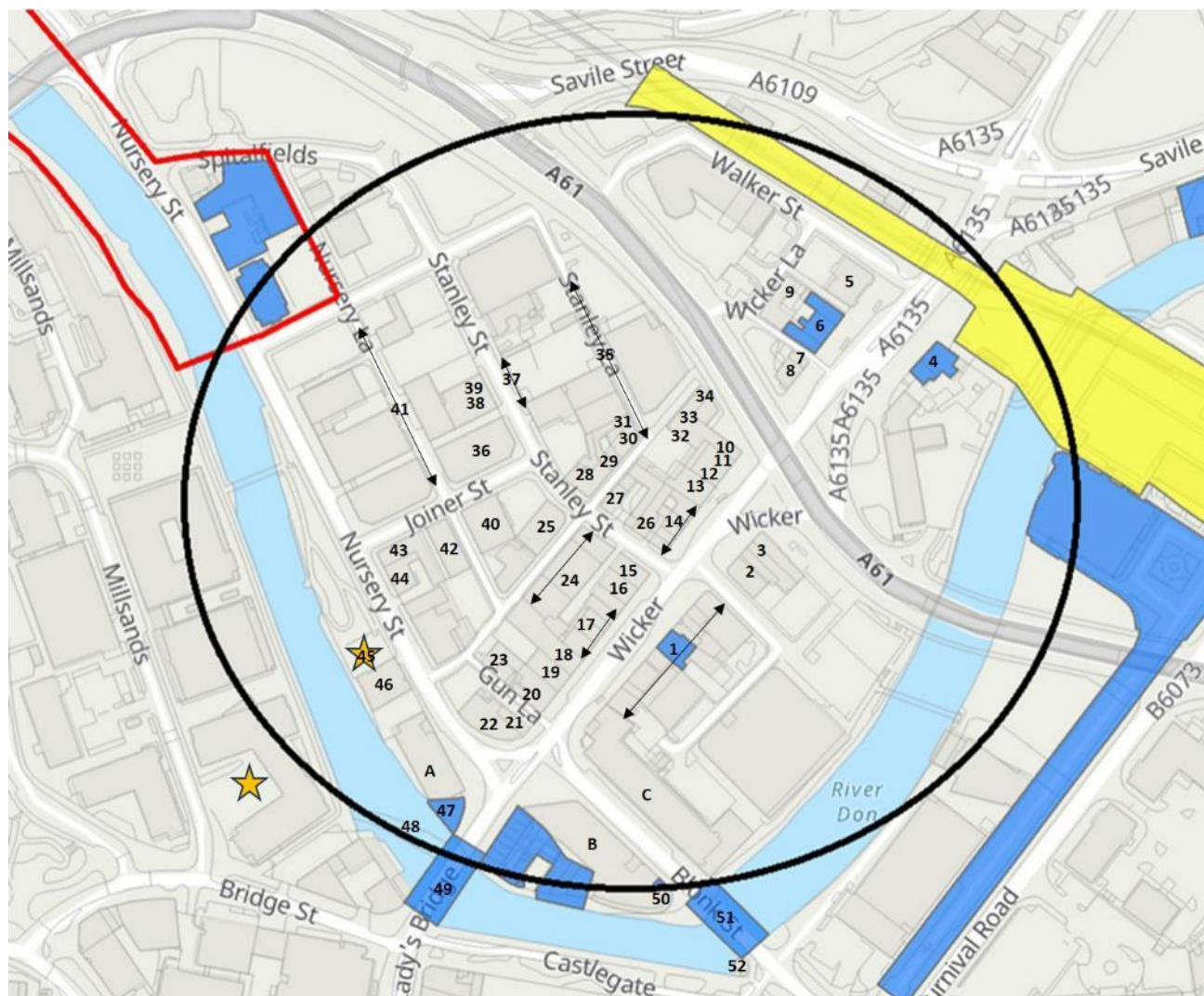
The City Centre is already extremely varied in its special interest, and would become significantly more so with the proposed addition of the Castlegate and West Street areas. These further additions could make an area that is large, complex, varied and potentially unmanageable. It would require great discipline in the writing of the appraisal and management plan. The common model of dividing the area into geographical segments would have to be entirely dispensed with.

There is also a very real risk of the large size of the area diluting the protection given to individual heritage assets. This has happened in previous planning decisions, and has been raised several times as a concern for any further enlargement of the City Centre area. No reassurance has been offered regarding this.

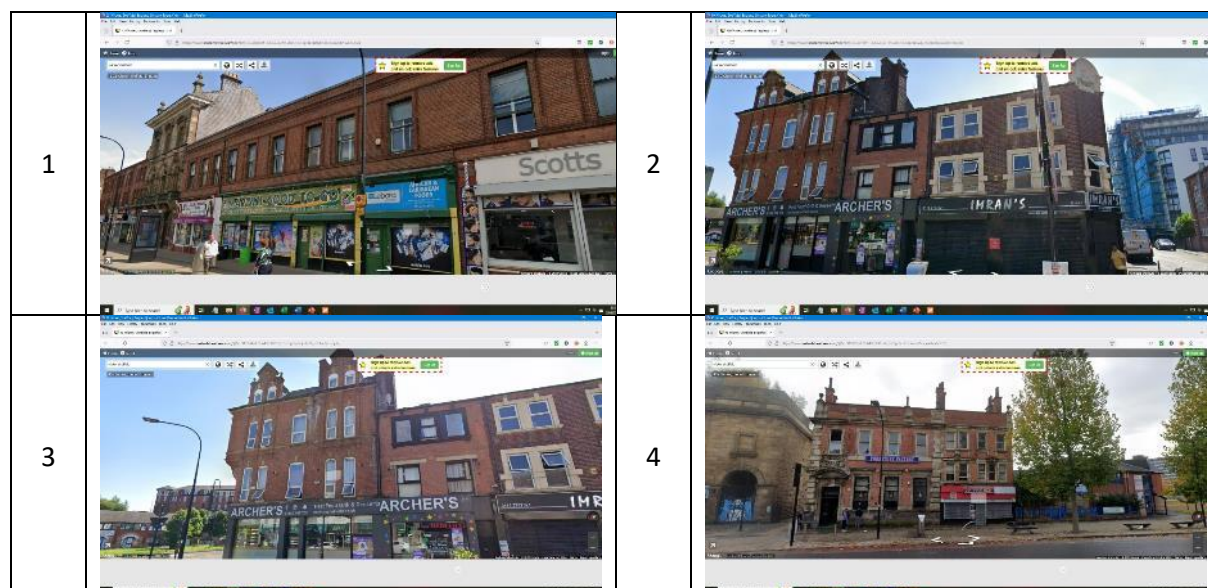
These risks need to be addressed for any enlargement of the City Centre area. Extending it even further exacerbates the risks and should only be considered if they can be fully mitigated and the advantages are beyond doubt.

*Robin Hughes
Hallamshire Historic Buildings
5th July 2025*

Appendix: positive buildings

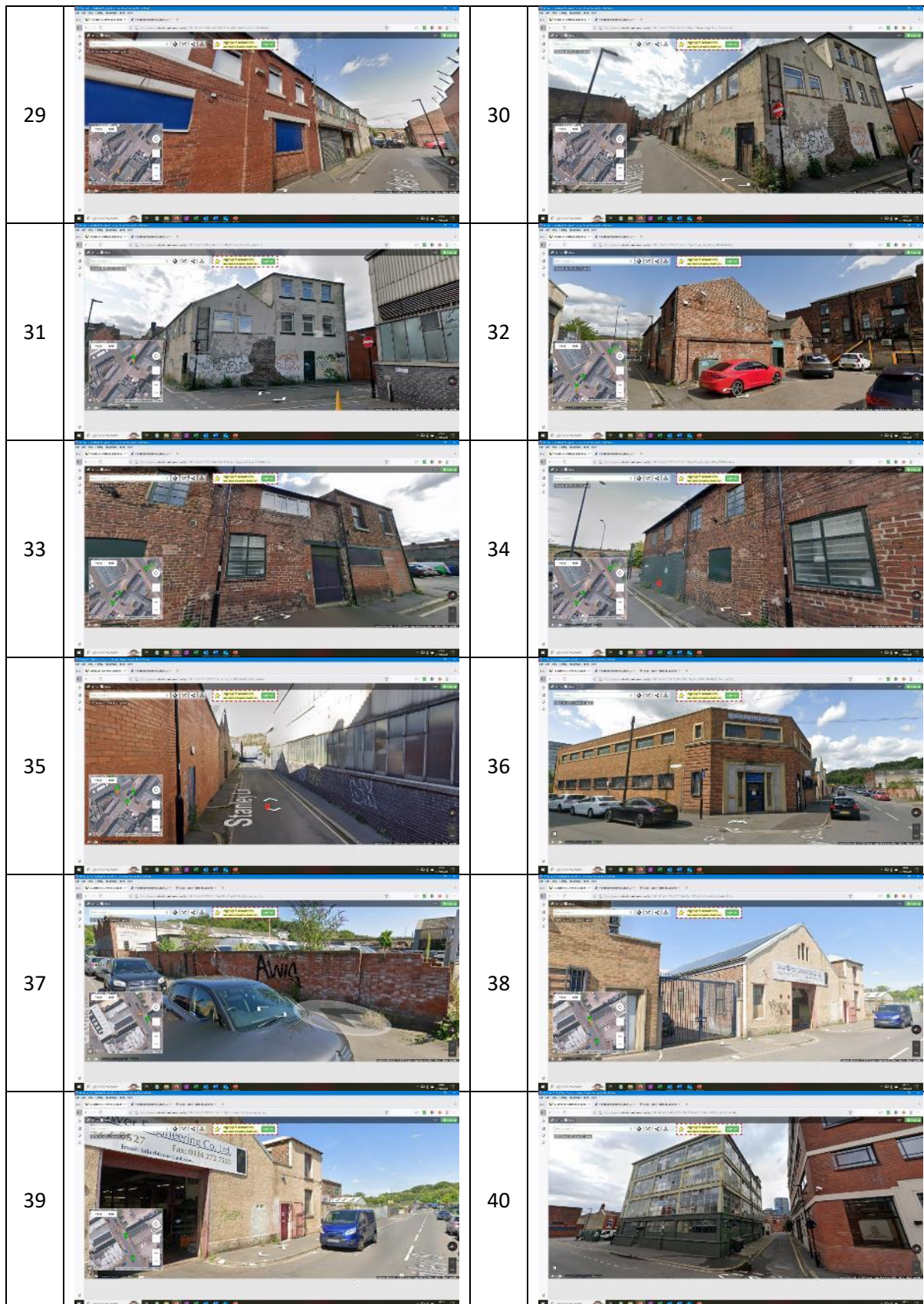


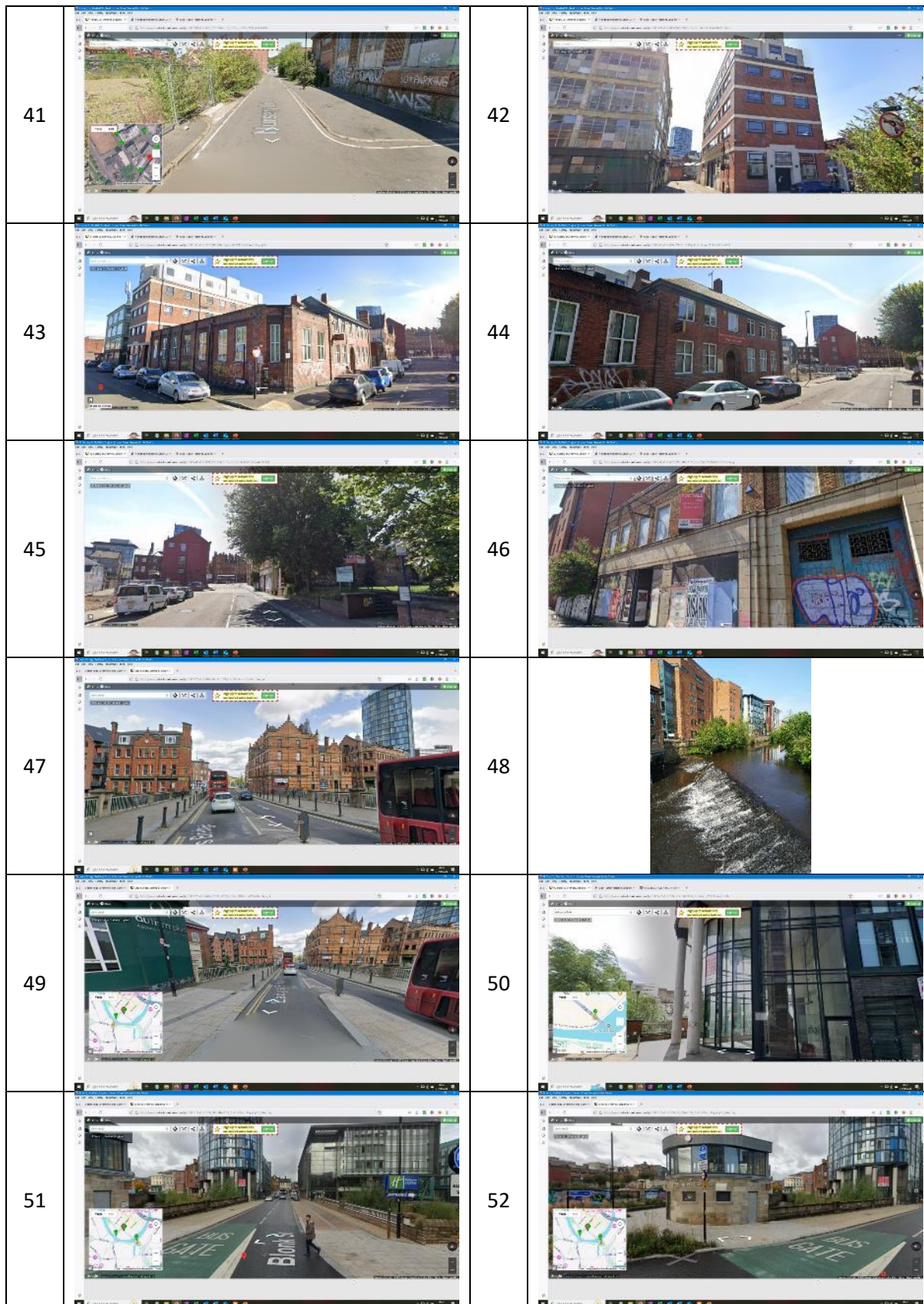
Historic buildings of merit











Recent buildings of merit

