

Bath and North East Somerset Council  
Development

# Draft Combe Down Character Appraisal Bath Conservation Area

May 2018



**Bath & North East  
Somerset Council**



## Contents

1. Introduction and description of the Character Area	1
2. Summary of key characteristics	6
3. Historic development	7
4. Cultural influences	14
5. Archaeology	16
6. Landmarks and views	17
7. Land uses and their influences	19
8. Buildings, architectural quality and townscape	20
9. Materials and detailing	24
10. Streets and movement	26
11. Trees, open space, parks and gardens	28
12. Night-time character	30
13. Issues affecting the Character Area	31
<b>Annex 1. Maps</b>	<b>34</b>
Map of landmarks and views	
Map of listed buildings	
Map of architectural and townscape features	
Map of trees, open space, parks and gardens.	
<b>Annex 2. Context</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Annex 3. References</b>	<b>39</b>

# 1. Introduction and description of the Character Area

## General description and form

This document is a character appraisal for the Combe Down Character Area of Bath Conservation Area.

The Character Area is fairly compact, although its boundaries are irregular. Its dimensions are approximately 0.5 miles north to south, and 0.7 miles east to west. It includes the core of Combe Down village south of North Road and Bradford Road, around The Avenue, Combe Road and Church Road. The easternmost point on North Road is c. 200 metres east of the junction with Tynning Road. The westernmost point is the west end of Greendown Terrace on Bradford Road. From its northernmost point at the top of Ralph Allen Drive, the Character Area covers everything to a point off Summer Lane just south of de Montalt Mill. Indents in the boundary are formed to exclude Beechwood Road in the south west, and Westerleigh Road in the north.

## Combe Down Character Area and the World Heritage Site

Core values and significances of Bath:

- Bath is a World Heritage Site, the only entire city in Britain to be so designated
- It is not a museum but a living city
- It has a remarkable degree of visual homogeneity
- Authenticity of the Site is of the essence; its preservation and enhancement are key criteria for all development
- Its complex and delicate hierarchy of interrelated urban spaces, landscape and architecture could be easily disrupted by overbearing or misinformed development and by the accumulation of harm.

Bath was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987. The designation describes the city as “a masterpiece of human creative genius whose protection must be the concern of all”.

The World Heritage Site designation was awarded for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) with six attributes:

### *1. Roman archaeology*

Many of the City’s Roman remains are centred around the Roman Baths. These include the archaeological remains of the Roman temple of the Goddess Sulis Minerva and the extensive bathing complex. The Roman town of Aquae Sulis was a walled settlement. Beyond the city wall are Roman and Iron Age remains including hill forts, field systems and villas, demonstrating the extent of the settlement. The road system and Roman street plan influenced the Medieval and Georgian layout.

### *2. Hot springs*

Bath’s hot springs are the only ones in Britain, producing 250,000

gallons of water every day. There are three main springs - the King's Spring, the Hetling Spring and the Cross Bath Spring. They have been central to every stage of the city's development, creating a unique social history and culture where the waters are central to healing and recreation.

### *3. 18th century architecture*

Neo-classical architectural style dominates in Bath. Architects including John Wood the Elder, John Wood the Younger, Robert Adam, Thomas Baldwin, John Palmer, John Eveleigh and John Pinch followed Palladian principles to build houses, public buildings, bridges and churches. The Georgian arrangements of crescents, squares, The Circus and terraces form iconic, internationally recognisable structures. The widespread use of local limestone and the uniform scale and height of buildings contribute to Bath's beauty today.

### *4. 18th century town planning*

In the 18th century Bath was re-invented as a fashionable health resort, expanding dramatically beyond its city walls. Medieval streets were transformed into a spacious and beautiful classical city, where architecture and the natural landscape complemented each other. Uniformity of design was enhanced with the universal use of honey-coloured Bath limestone. Innovative forms of town planning including squares, crescents and The Circus were introduced. Attractive views and vistas were deliberately created. Bath's Georgian town planning influenced subsequent developments in the UK and beyond.

### *5. Green setting*

The City of Bath lies within a hollow of the hills. There are green views in every direction from the city centre. The countryside stretches right to Bath's doorstep. The hilly, green landscape was exploited by Bath's 18th century architects and developers, who created elegant terraces and villas on the slopes. The hills to the south of the city provided the oolitic limestone from which the city was built. Trees and woodlands populate the skyline, and lend natural beauty to the river, canal, parks and gardens. Open agricultural land on the edge of Bath is still used for grazing animals, just as it was by the Georgians.

### *6. Social setting*

Bath's Georgian architecture reflected 18th century social ambitions. The city was a destination for pilgrimage, and for playing out the social aspirations of fashionable spa culture. The social, economic and physical re-birth of the city as an internationally famous spa resort was largely due to three key characters: the architect John Wood the Elder, wealthy postmaster and stone entrepreneur Ralph Allen and Bath's famous Master of Ceremonies Richard 'Beau' Nash. Visitors flocked to Bath. The list of famous and influential people who visited, lived in or wrote about the city is extensive. Customs and practices associated with 'taking the waters' were practised and developed here. The fashion for promenading influenced the design of Bath streets and gardens. The rules and etiquette governing polite society were embodied in buildings such as the Assembly Rooms and Pump Rooms.

## **How does this Character Area contribute to the World Heritage Site?**

### *1. Contribution to Roman archaeology*

The Character Area has been giving up evidence of Roman occupation since 1822 when stone coffins were found during the widening of Summer Lane. Three more were discovered nearby in 1854. It became clear that a large building had existed between Summer Lane and Belmont, culminating in 1860 with the discovery of six large rooms from the villa as well as Roman coins, glassware, ceramics and ornaments. A Latin inscription from nearby suggests it may have been the headquarters of the governor of southern Britain. The presence of the Fosseway nearby at Odd Down and the location on the hills surrounding Aquae Sulis make it possible that Roman activity was more extensive here than is now known.

### *2. Contribution to hot springs - None*

### *3. Contribution to 18th century architecture*

The history of Combe Down is closely connected with Ralph Allen (1693-1764). He purchased the Prior Park estate and surrounding land including most of Combe Down from 1726, and developed the small stone quarries there to become a major source of building stone. He built Prior Park, the Palladian mansion just to the north of Combe Down partly to advertise the virtues of Bath stone as a building material. The visual uniformity of Bath results to a large degree from the consistent use of honey-coloured oolitic limestone. Much of the ashlar facings used for the first great phase of Palladian Bath (roughly 1730-70) was undoubtedly quarried at Combe Down, including that used for world-famous set pieces such as Queen Square, The Circus and Royal Crescent.

### *4. Contribution to 18th century town planning*

The essentially industrial roots of the settlement mitigate against any significant contribution to the town planning of 18th century Bath. However as early as 1729, Ralph Allen built De Montalt Place, a handsome formally designed terrace of cottages for his quarry men, Dial House in the centre with its Classical pediment being reserved for his clerk of works, Richard Jones. This demonstrates how Georgian architectural ambition could extend to quite humble housing. In the later 18th and early 19th century Combe Down saw the building of small but formally arranged terraces (e.g. Isabella Place) as it became known as a place of convalescence. Piecemeal building of terraced and individual cottages on worked out quarry sites, connected by a network of twisting lanes and alleyways, established the informal layout of the village centre by about 1850.

### *5. Contribution to green setting*

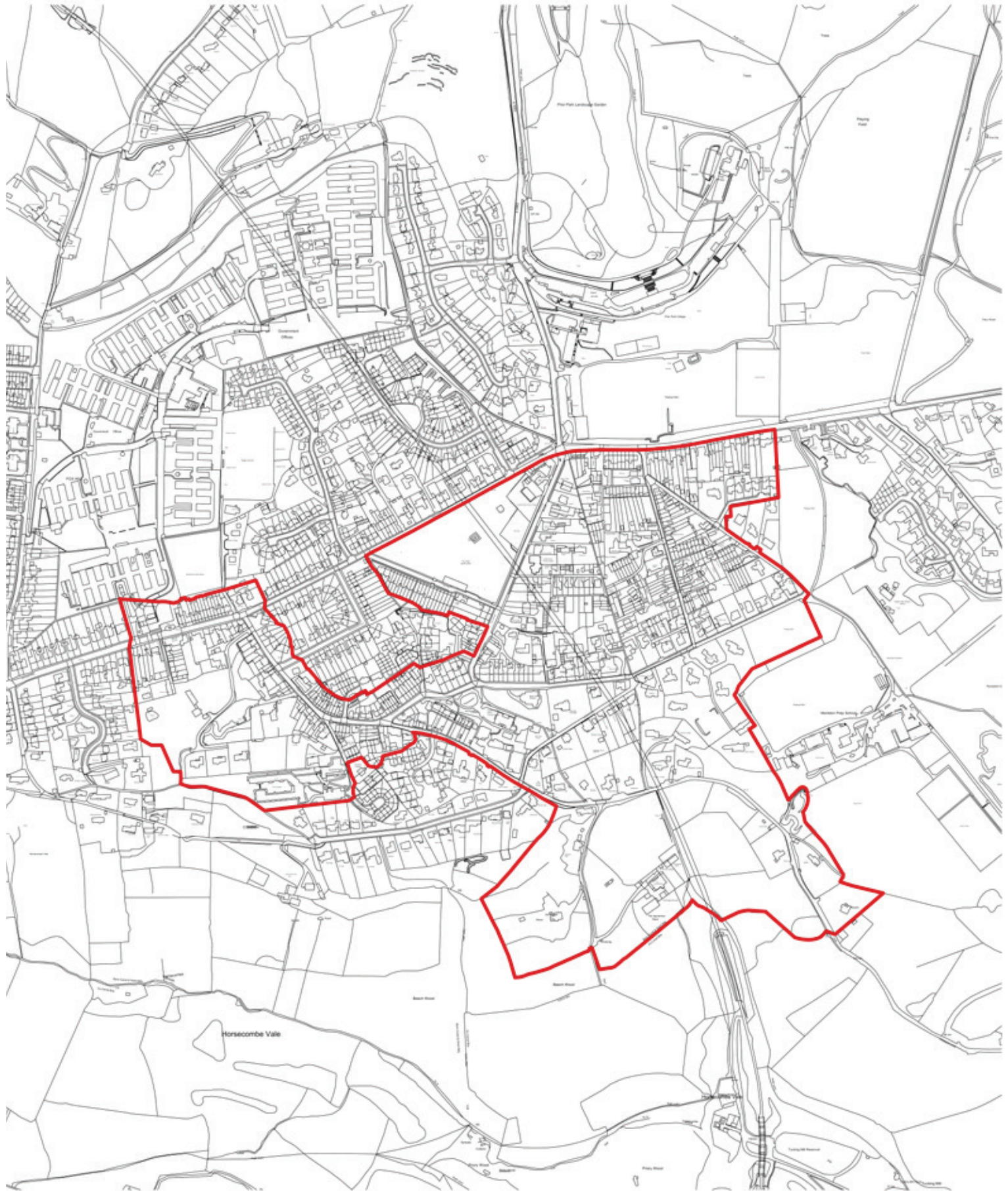
Combe Down's plateau location limits its contribution to views out from the city centre. The Character Area today is villagey and residential, with some informal open spaces interspersed with housing. The open plateau on which Ralph Allen planted belts of conifers has largely disappeared under housing, but a remnant survives in the triangular green space known as Firs Field. Holy Trinity churchyard and the school grounds adjoining form a green oasis at the village centre. To the south of Summer Lane the ground drops steeply away to the Midford Valley, with fine deciduous woodland fringing the hilltop. Breaks in the trees afford occasional vistas south towards Midford. The surrounds of the plateau are important to the green setting of the city and includes the open spaces and playing fields to the north,

east and south of the Character Area as well as the part of Combe Down to the south of Belmont Road and Church Road.

#### *6. Contribution to Social setting*

By the end of the 18th century the south facing slopes of the Down were seen as an ideal spot for convalescing after taking the waters in Bath. The Earl de Montalt converted Ralph Allen's former quarrymen's cottages into lodging houses for this purpose, and the polite three-storey terrace of Isabella Place nearby was intended for a similar clientele. The presence of substantial early Victorian villas along the north side of Church Road evidences this brief fashionability despite the continued industrial nature of the village.





Combe Down Character Area Map



## 2. Summary of key characteristics

- The Character Area is relatively small and is sited almost due south of the city centre on a high plateau in the ring of hilltops that surrounds the city of Bath. The ground is mainly flat except at the south where the landform drops significantly towards the Midford valley.
- Despite evidence of Roman residential settlement and of Saxon stone-quarrying, the modern community entirely post-dates Ralph Allen's acquisition of the land and quarrying rights c. 1726-31.
- From this date, beds of oolitic Bath limestone near the surface were intensively mined by Ralph Allen for building stone which furnished Bath's great expansion as a spa. The village evolved from a small group of houses around what is now Church Road, begun in 1729 for the quarry workers. A scattering of humbler cottages nearby existed by 1800.
- Major land sales in 1803 triggered the early 19th century development of smarter middle class dwellings around the south end of The Avenue, in Church Road and Belmont Road. By 1860 the bones of today's settlement existed, and a church, chapel, school and vicarage had been built; by this date the stone mines were largely worked out and closed.
- Infill development in the later 19th and 20th centuries was mainly of small cottages or terraces of artisan housing. An overlay of middle class suburban housing has been woven into the older streetscape since 1920, a tendency accelerated by the arrival of the Admiralty at Foxhill in 1940 to escape wartime bombing in London.





### 3. Historic development

#### Physical influences : geology, landform and drainage pattern

Combe Down's geology is the single factor which has most shaped its character and history. It sits on an outcrop of Great Oolite, a Jurassic limestone laid down c. 130 – 180 million years ago.

The Character Area is sited mostly upon the flat plateau of greater Oolitic Limestone which continues east and northward towards Claverton Down. Just outside the Character Area lies Upper Lawn Quarry, opened in 1850 and now the only working quarry at Combe Down. The highest points are about 500 feet AOD, dropping to about 300 feet in the south below Summer Lane. The surface soil covering is in places extremely thin (burials were not possible in Holy Trinity churchyard for this reason).

A spring rises on the south side of Summer Lane and flows down the Midford Valley beyond the southern boundary of the Character Area.

#### Historical influences

The plateau of which this Character Area is part probably supported isolated pockets of occupation from the earliest times, however any detailed pre-Roman history is obscure. Evidence of Roman occupation on Combe Down was discovered in 1822 during the widening of Summer Lane when several stone coffins were unearthed. It was further revealed that a probable Roman building had stood to the north of the lane. Three further coffins were found in 1854 during the construction of Belmont House (on the south side of Belmont Road and above Summer Lane) for George Cruikshank, a local landowner. The heads lay to the north, indicating heathen burials. Other finds at the same time included a complete earthenware vessel, pottery shards, a coin of Licinius, and two stone chests, one containing the head of a horse, the other some burnt bones. Later in 1854, two further stone coffin burials were found between Belmont Road and the Old Vicarage. Then in 1860 the Roman villa itself was discovered just below Belmont House. Excavation revealed about six rooms, some about 30 feet x 18 feet, over a hypocaust. The rooms were arranged around a courtyard. Numerous coins, colourless glass vessels, earthenware fragments and bronze and iron ornaments were also found.<sup>1</sup>

One of the coffins found in 1854 had a lid in four parts, of which one was a re-used inscription stone dateable to c. 212-222. It reads;

*“Pro salute imp(eratoris) C(a)es(aris) M(arci) Aur(eli) / Antonini Pii Felicis Invic / ti Aug(usti) Naevius Aug(usti) / lib(ertus) adiut(or) proc(uratorum) princi / pia ruina op(p)ress(a) a solo res / tituit ”.*

This is translated:

*“For the welfare of the Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Pius Felix Invictus Augustus, Naevius, imperial freedman, procurators’ assistant, restored from ground-level these ruined Headquarters.”*

<sup>1</sup> Peter Addison, Combe Down Roman Villa, Survey of Bath and District, 3, June 1995, p. 16

If the stone came from the nearby villa, it identifies the building as the headquarters of local procuratorial administration.<sup>2</sup> It is clear too that the Romans quarried stone locally, and Combe Down is perhaps the likeliest site for such activity.

The seemingly remote location for such an important villa site may be explained by the proposed route through Combe Down of the Roman road from Aquae Sulis to Poole harbour. Its line ran from the significant road junction at the north end of Walcot Street, across the marsh land east of the Avon (the present-day Recreation Ground), roughly followed the line of Ralph Allen Drive and then drove south in a straight line through the junction of Belmont Road with Church Road and south past de Montalt Mill and down through the Midford valley.<sup>3</sup>

The Saxons did not cease quarrying either. Little is known from archaeological finds of their activity here but the presence of Combe Down oolite elsewhere enables us to envisage something of the scale of quarrying. At Winchester, what is now called the Old Minster was built around the year 648 (if one accepts the later authority of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), and reconstructed in the late 900s. The New Minster alongside it was dedicated in 903, and demolished c. 1093-4 when the present Cathedral was built. Excavation reveals that Combe Down Oolite constituted over four-fifths of the material excavated from the Old and New Minster sites: 86.2 per cent of the architectural mouldings and sculpture from Old Minster, all those from New Minster, and 55.3 per cent of the grave-markers.

The possibility of this being reused Roman stone can be largely discounted. Both the very large block sizes and the lack of availability of such quantities from elsewhere enable the conclusion that “the Combe Down Oolite used in the Old and New Minsters was obtained fresh from the quarries 80 miles away in the 7th century as in the 10th century”.<sup>4</sup> This cannot have been the only example of the use of Combe Down stone beyond Bath. It is perhaps surprising to envisage quarrying in the 7th century on such a scale, as well as the organisational networks required to purchase and convey it to Winchester.

The eponymous ‘combe’ seems inappropriate for this high plateau until one understands that it refers to the Down associated with the parish of Monkton Combe of which Combe Down was historically a part. Land in Monkton Combe, probably including Combe Down, belonged to Bath Abbey in 1086, and the Abbey collected taxes issuing from land at Combe Down in 1291. Combe Down gained a church of its own only in 1835.

The 16th century antiquarian and traveller John Leland wrote that he approached Bath from Midford ‘by mountain and quarre’, perhaps referring to quarrying in Horsecombe Vale between Midford and Combe Down. Stone was supplied to Longleat House from ‘Horsecomb Hed’ in 1568. John Wood stated that in his day the ‘quarre’ Leland referred to bore the name Horse Combe Quarry, ‘the most westward and oldest of all the penetrations ...into the bowels of the hill in search of Free Stone’. In 1663 a Danish traveller to Bath,

2 Scarth, H.M. 1855, ‘Appendix to paper on Ancient Sepulchral Remains discovered in and around Bath’ Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society journal’ 5, 135-148. Now in the Roman Baths Museum, accession number 1986.3

3 Peter Davenport, The Fosse Way and other Roman roads around Bath: excavations and interpretations since 1997, Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society journal, pp.127-138.

4 Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, The Excavated Sculptures from Winchester, The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, vol IV, ch. 8, (1996). <http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/vol4/chap8.php>

Oluf Baruch, wrote of 'a cave ... on a nearby hill hollowed out by those who live there for stone for buildings', perhaps a reference to Combe Down.

It is clear that there was no village here before Ralph Allen's time. Apart from continued quarrying and the scattered hutment associated with it, little else is known of Combe Down before the early 18th century changes which resulted in the modern settlement.

#### *Ralph Allen and the 18th century development*

Ralph Allen (1693-1764) arrived in Bath in 1710 and quickly earned a fortune as Postmaster, administering and reforming the postal system with new contracts for 'cross posts', allowing mail to be delivered direct between provincial towns without going through London. By the mid 1720s he was financing the Avon Navigation scheme which made the river navigable between Bristol and Bath. Seeing the potential for the greater use of Bath stone as a building material, he purchased almost all of Combe Down with its quarries between 1726 and 1731. In 1729 he acquired many quarrying rights for 100 years.

In 1728 Allen bought some 76 acres of land to the north of Combe Down which became the core of the Prior Park estate. This enabled him to develop the roadway now called Ralph Allen Drive, giving access to both his quarries and the site of Prior Park mansion. Allen was noted for the increased scale of quarrying activity, and innovative methods for lifting and transporting the stone, including horse-operated cranes at the mine heads to lift the stone on to wagons. These were hauled via a horse-drawn railway along The Avenue and down Ralph Allen Drive to his stone yards and wharf at Widcombe. There, cranes loaded the stone on to barges. The cranes and the railway were designed by the engineer John Padmore. Thus Allen was able to supply both the new housing developments around Queen Square which his business partner John Wood was designing from 1728, as well as many building contracts in Bristol and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Combe Down expanded rapidly, the first significant development being de Montalt Place (1729), a row of 11 houses for his quarrymen with the pedimented central house reserved for his clerk of works, Richard Jones. Despite their humble use they were given an ambitious classical treatment which was not to be repeated at Combe Down for houses of this class. Perhaps in part because of their architectural ambition they were soon raised in status. John Collinson states in his History of Somerset (1791) that

*"They were originally built for the workmen employed in the quarries but are now chiefly let to invalids from Bath, who retire hither for the sake of a very fine air (probably rendered more salubrious by the plantation of firs), from which many have secured essential benefit."*

Stone extraction took two forms. There was some surface (open) quarrying, but the predominant method was by underground mining using the 'room and pillar' method, by which chambers were mined leaving pillars of stone between them to support the roof. The mines contained a range of features including well preserved tramways, cart-roads and crane bases. In 1811, William Smith (the 'Father of English Geology') was studying the quarries here and wrote: "The process of quarrying the freestone is conivened by making a passage ... down to the face of the rock through the rubble and rag which lies over it." Having exposed the face it could be surface quarried by

<sup>5</sup> David Workman, *A Brief History Of The Stone Quarries At Combe Down*, Journal of the Bath Geological Society, No. 23, 2004, pp. 12-15.

removing all the 'ridding' overlying the freestone, or mined. Smith continued: "If quarried underground the workmen begin holing under the Rag in the upper beds of the freestone which are called the Picking Stuff – this holding about 4 feet high is called Picking."<sup>6</sup>

The most intensive mining took place between c. 1730 and 1860 (although small-scale mining continued long after), and some 41 mines have been identified.<sup>7</sup> At the north end of Rock Hall Lane was the working yard, marked on Thorpe's map *Five Miles around Bath* (1742). Now called Ralph Allen's Yard, it is the site of the Cornerstone, a community hub and quarrying interpretation centre opened in 2014.

The mines extended under the whole central area of Combe Down from Combe Road in the west to Oxford Place in the east, and from Bradford Road in the north to Church Road in the south. To the west and south of this area, surface workings provided faces from which tunnels were driven to access the mined area. Mines were divided into two main areas: The Firs, to the east, was more associated with Ralph Allen and lay under the Firs Field and the village centre. Its boundary extended from the top of Ralph Allen Drive, followed North Road west roughly to Westerleigh Road and south to Rock Lane; its southern boundary lay north of de Montalt Place and followed Church Road from the junction with Belmont Road junction eastwards to a point between Tynning Road and Gladstone Road. The north-east boundary was beneath the north end of Gladstone Road.

The western mine was named the Byfield mine in the 1970s. Its northern boundary was roughly below North Road, and the western boundary followed Combe Road and Church Road south then east (with irregular extensions west around Rock Hall). The eastern boundary ran below Westerleigh Road and Rock Lane. A narrow passage connected the two mines below Isabella Place and the south end of The Avenue.

Ralph Allen died in 1764 leaving large debts. Much of his equipment including the cranes was sold and the railway to Widcombe was lifted in 1764. In 1765 the diggings were leased to various tenants. In 1788, Allen's estate including the quarries passed to the Earl de Montalt (later 1st Viscount Hawarden), widower of Allen's niece and last surviving legatee, Mary Allen. The estate rental book for the years 1795-99 names 15 quarry tenants, between them working 14 quarries (unnamed except by tenant). There is known to have been active surface quarrying at this time but specific locations remain obscure. Underground working may have been sharply reduced.

### *Combe Down in the 19th century*

After 1800 Combe Down began to develop its character as a select place of retirement near Bath, already noted in 1791 by Collinson (see above). The stone industry gradually declined over the 19th century, although it did not disappear completely. The reasons for this decline included urban encroachment, depleted reserves after the intensive 18th century quarrying, and competition from big new workings developed around Corsham after the arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1841. Many of Ralph Allen's quarrying rights expired in 1829, and his mines practically ceased production by about 1860. Despite minor efforts in the later 19th century, by 1900 sales of Bath stone were decreasing, and by 1914 most of the Combe Down quarries had closed. There is today just one remaining stone working on the Down, Upper Lawn Quarry just east of the Character Area boundary.

6 Smith Papers, University of Oxford Museum Library, cited in Irving, pp. 44-5.

7 R.T.A. Irving, *A History of the Byfield Mine, Combe Down*, Bath, 2005.

In 1800 the major landowner remained the 1st Viscount Hawarden, legatee of Ralph Allen's estate. At his death in 1803 his lands in Combe Down were sold off and split up with smaller investors buying the land or leasing individual quarries and the land above them. Much new building took place as a result. For example, leases were granted on Nos. 113-117 Church Road in 1805; the probable building date is 1805-6. Claremont House, No. 109 Church Road, was complete by that date too. Agreements for the building of Isabella Place, a row of five three-storey houses on Church Road, were signed by c. 1800, and on a lease for nearby land of January 1805 they are referred to as 'newly erected'. The builders were William Harrold and William Butler, and the houses were advertised in 1812 as having "every convenience fit for the reception of genteel families".<sup>8</sup>

Union Chapel was founded jointly by two Bath churches; Argyle Street Congregational Church and Somerset Street Baptist Chapel. Land adjacent to de Montalt Place was bought in 1814, the deed being signed by the ministers of both churches, and the chapel was opened in 1815 as a mission to the quarrying settlement. The porch was added and the chapel extended in 1880. A schoolroom to the east was added before 1883, and given an upper floor in 1909 to provide five extra classrooms. In 1957 an additional hall was built to the west of the entrance.

Until 1832 the only Anglican church for residents of Combe Down was at Monkton Combe. Many of the quarrymen's families were dissenters. Suggestions for a church were current by 1831, land was purchased opposite the quarrymen's cottages at de Montalt Place in December that year, and a design commissioned from Henry Edmund Goodridge, architect to the nearby Catholic community at Prior Park. The foundation stone was laid in May 1832 and the church was opened on June 29th, 1835.<sup>9</sup> The church was built in part through the 'unwearied exertions' of George Steart (a partner in the de Montalt paper mill) 'and to it he largely contributed'. Combe Down became a parish independent of Monkton Combe in 1854. Aisles and an enlarged chancel were added to the design of W.J. Willcox in 1883-4.<sup>10</sup>

A public appeal had been made in 1836 to cover the cost of adding a parsonage house because of the relative poverty of the parish. Enough had been raised by Spring 1837 to purchase the site east of the church, leaving some £500 to be raised. In April 1837, builders were invited to tender for the construction, to plans by H.E. Goodridge, architect of the church.<sup>11</sup> The site had previously been quarried leaving the ground unstable, and the builder refused to contract for the foundations which cost an additional £330. The parsonage house was completed c. 1841. It was sold as a private house in 1974.

The need for public services was soon felt. In 1830 a National School was built on Church Road at the junction with Belmont Road. Now a private house, it was enlarged in 1887 and c. 1900. An additional building was opened in 1840 north of Summer Lane and west of the lower end of Belmont Road; this is now part of the Combe Down Church of England Primary School. In 1812 a Jewish Cemetery for the whole city of Bath was established on Bradford Road adjacent to the Forester and Flower pub. The last burial was in 1942, and there are extant dated gravestones from 1842 to 1921.

8 Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, Thursday June 25, 1812.

9 Bath Chronicle 1837, obituary of George Steart.

10 Foyle and Pevsner, Somerset North and Bristol (2011), p.200.

11 Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette, April 20, 1837.

Magdalen Hospital, a school for children with learning difficulties (then termed 'idiot children and those of weak intellect') moved to Rockhall House in 1887, having been established in 1846 elsewhere in Bath by Harriette White, third wife of the curate of Combe Down. In 1891 it was renamed Magdalen Hospital School, and later Rockhall House School, which came under NHS management. It closed in 1980.

As the community grew in size commerce and industries other than stone working were established. In 1804-5, de Montalt Mill was built on the slope below Summer Lane, taking advantage of fast-flowing springs to turn an overshot waterwheel of c. 17m diameter, the largest in the country when built. It was established by the 2nd Baron de Montalt, later Viscount Hawarden, as a paper mill run by the partnership of Bally, Ellen & Steart. The mill was auctioned on February 10, 1834 after the death of William Ellen; it was probably then that it was sold to William Jennings Allen.<sup>12</sup> He ran it as a paper factory until his death in 1839 and the works were offered for sale again in 1841 as a working paper mill. It may have lain unused until July 1854 when it was reopened by Charles Middleton Kernot manufacturing felted cloth.<sup>13</sup> This followed a reported proposal to use it for manufacturing gutta percha.<sup>14</sup> The cloth venture having foundered, the mill became a laundry c. 1859-64, and the land was then farmed as a market garden. In about 1875 John Whitaker opened his successful cabinet making business from the mill. The firm went bankrupt in 1907 and the premises were taken by another furniture maker, Spencer & Morris.

De Montalt House (now de Montalt Wood), off Summer Lane, is a Picturesque Italianate villa in the manner of the group on Bathwick Hill; dated 1848 and attributed to Henry Goodridge, whose architect son Alfred lived here in 1870. Later it was occupied by John Whitaker, the furniture manufacturer at de Montalt mill nearby. The little lodge house tucked down the drive off Summer Lane is in matching style.

Brewing was a growth industry with several small scale breweries opening some attached to local pubs. The most notable was Hine's from the mid 19th century, adjacent to the King William IV pub. Shops and business evolved to serve the community and their remnants can still be seen scattered through the village centre.

On Bradford Road, Greenwood Terrace is a row of five in a Neo-Tudor style rarely seen for terraced housing. It was unfinished in 1852, but completed by 1853 when all the houses were auctioned after the death of the owner, the master mason Philip Nowell. It is possible that he designed the terrace; the square label mouldings are reminiscent of those at Rock Hall, Nowell's house nearby.

The early 20th century is marked by expansion and consolidation of the physical fabric, with bay-fronted houses along North Road, Firs Field, in Church Road west of Isabella Place, etc. In the 1930s further infill building arrived, e.g. on parts of Westerleigh Road.

The Firs Field was in private ownership until 1920. In 1904 the parish council considered purchasing it as the site for a much-needed recreation ground, but funds could not be raised. In December 1918 a group of local people including two vicars agreed the purchase from the owners, the Misses Stennard; the purchase was completed in January 1920 at a cost of £800 including legal expenses. The site was given immediately to Monkton Combe parish council. It had already been agreed to erect a Church Army hut on the field behind

12 Bristol Mercury, February 8, 1834.

13 Bath Chronicle, July 13, 1854.

14 Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, March 22, 1854.

the Hadley Arms as a practical war memorial, the foundations of which were cut in June 1919. It was replaced in 1965 by the present scout hut. The First World War Memorial on Firs Field was unveiled in May 1921. It consists of a Bath stone cross mounted on a plinth over three steps. It was designed and built by A.E. Sheppard of 103 Wells Road, with voluntary help from the villagers.<sup>15</sup> The stone weathered badly and by 1924 the names on the memorial were unreadable and were reinstated on cast metal plates.

Combe Down in the mid 20th century was fairly stable and its story mostly unremarkable. The previously noted retraction of the stone industry and the arrival of trams and later buses on North Road enabled the development of new estates and infill housing in the inter-war period. The arrival of the Admiralty at Foxhill in 1940 to avoid the London blitz brought an influx of activity and new residents. Until the 1970s Combe Down retained its local shops, which after that date began to close down as supermarkets and shopping by car became the norm.

In 1989 a utilities contractor digging a trench broke through into the Combe Down stone mines. This triggered a series of investigations over the following decade which established that the thickness of coverage between the mines and the ground surface above was in places as little as 2 metres thick, and that many of the underground pillars supporting the mines were unstable. Extraction rates in places had been around 85%, far higher than the safe limit for stability. The mines covered some 22 hectares across the entire village centre and some 700 properties sitting directly over the mines were at risk. There had already been small-scale sinkages in the ground surface. From 1999 to 2002 government funding was finalised to enable complete stabilisation of the mines. A plan was devised to pump the mines full of foamed concrete; the project was executed between 2007 and 2009. A total of 620,894 cubic metres of infill was placed in the mines, resulting in permanent stabilisation of the land. The cost was c. £161 million.

As part of the Stabilisation project the Cornerstone building in Church Road was completed in 2014. It serves as an interpretation centre for Combe Down's stone mining history, and a hub with meeting facilities for community events.



<sup>15</sup> Bath Chronicle, May 28th, 1921.

## 4. Cultural influences

### *Arts*

As one of the earliest sources for Bath stone, Combe Down can rightly claim a significant place in the history of British architecture. Its fine Oolitic limestone is creamy-white when new and weathers to honey-gold. It can be worked to a fine finish, is easily carved when freshly cut, taking fine decorative work which can be seen throughout the Georgian city of Bath. Stone from freestone beds can be sawn in any direction. Bath stone was mined here in Roman times and was used at the Saxon Old Minster in Winchester in the 7th century. In the 19th century Combe Down stone was also employed at Longleat House, Windsor Castle, Apsley House and Brompton Cemetery.

Ralph Allen entertained numerous national figures at Prior Park, perhaps most notably Alexander Pope. His association with Combe Down and the quarries makes it likely that many of his guests would have been brought to view the quarrying operations here.

On the southern slopes of Combe Down, de Montalt Mill (opened c. 1805) originally produced high quality writing paper and sketching paper, used among others by Turner, Constable, Bonnington, and Cotman, and for printing provincial bank-notes. The forgotten role of George Steart in developing almost all the coloured papers favoured by Turner has been researched recently.<sup>1</sup>

The author Eliza Humphreys (1850-1938) published 120 novels and short stories, and lived in Combe Down from 1923 until her death.

### *Science*

William Smith (1769-1839), known as the father of English Geology, resided at Monkton Combe and in c. 1811 investigated the strata of the Combe Down quarries at the “northside of the Down”, probably those adjacent to Bradford Road. This made a significant contribution to his formulation of the science of stratigraphy.

### *Leisure*

The story of Combe Down before 1800 is almost entirely about labour and industry. After 1803 when land sales enabled a spate of new building, the village was briefly promoted as a place of convalescence, no doubt because of its high breezy situation above the city. A new class of occupant arrived, typically middle class and with leisure time. The area’s former association with Ralph Allen and Prior Park is likely to have enhanced this reputation.

### *Industry and transport*

Combe Down was from the earliest times associated with stone quarrying and the transporting and shaping of stone for building. The present village owes its form and character entirely to that industry, beginning with the radical transformation achieved under Ralph Allen’s ownership of the mines from c. 1726. He was responsible for the built form beginning with the laying out of The Avenue, the line

<sup>1</sup> Peter Bower, *Innovative and Unsung; George Steart’s Development of Artists’ Watercolour and Drawing Paper, 1805-1832*. A hard to find pamphlet of c. 2001.



of the tramway to take stone down to Bath, and of de Montalt Place as houses for his workmen. Other industries have flourished, notably brewing from the mid-19th century, and the use of de Montalt Mill for paper-making, and later for furniture manufacture.

### *War and Conflict*

Combe Down was partly shaped by the arrival of the Admiralty at Foxhill, operational there from 1940 to 2011. The influx of workers during and after the war encouraged substantial infill development around Combe Down. Harry Patch (1898-2009) was born at Fonthill Cottage, Gladstone Road, the son of a stonemason. He served in the British Army from 1916 and was injured at Passchendaele in 1917. When he died aged 111 and 1 month, he was the oldest surviving combat soldier from the First World War, the oldest man in Europe and the third oldest man in the world.

## 5. Archaeology

The Character Area is predominantly an area of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century quarrying associated with Ralph Allen, although there is some evidence of earlier quarry workings. The area contains an excellent collection of Georgian and later buildings associated with this quarrying history. Discoveries in 1822 suggested a Roman building had stood north of Summer Lane, and a Roman Villa was discovered below Belmont House in 1860. It seems likely Roman quarrying took place in the area, and the concentration of Roman burials around Belmont House suggests a major Roman road ran south through the area from the top of Ralph Allen Drive.

Significant archaeology clearly remains to be discovered in this area.

## 6. Landmarks and views

*See map, Annex 1*

### Landmarks

The area is small and landmarks relatively few. The first is Holy Trinity church on Church Road, enhanced by the streetscape including de Montalt Place opposite, Union Chapel and the former Vicarage to the east.

The War Memorial and its surrounding landscape of Firs Field is a significant landmark, while the giant gatepiers with urns mark the former entrance to Prior Park estate at the top of Ralph Allen Drive.

### Views

*Views out of the Character Area:*

Because of the very flat terrain and the location of the Character Area some way south of the escarpment edge at Foxhill and Perrymead, there are few views out to the wider landscape and none to the city of Bath. The building pattern is mostly inward looking to the enclosed village centre. The most significant views are obtained from Summer Lane where a break in the trees as the ground drops away south of the lane reveals a panoramic view across the Midford Valley. Variants of this view are obtained further south-east on Summer Lane near Grey Lodge.

*Views into the Character Area:*

These are also hard to achieve, owing to the steep slopes. From Lyncombe, Widcombe and Prior Park the steep hills and tree fringed horizons obscure the village on its plateau beyond. Good distant views of Combe Down from the south are obtained from Midford



Road and the slopes around Midford Castle, and more distant views are provided e.g. from Upper Twinhoe.

*Views within the Character Area:*

Church Road, Holy Trinity church, de Montalt Place and Isabella Place provide a series of composed views with the interplay of architectural features broken by trees and gardens.

There are many open views at varied angles across Firs Field from North Road, The Firs and The Avenue. Other key views include those provided along the straight line of North Road and Bradford Road.



## 7. Land uses and their influence

The major influence of land usage in the past has been the area's geology and the consequent history of stone quarrying and mining. This was the major factor responsible for the foundation of the Combe Down settlement.

During the 19th century other industries shaped the settlement in more minor ways – most notably the establishment of breweries e.g. that associated with the King William IV public house from the 1830s. De Montalt mill, established in 1805 and functioning well into the 20th century operated first as a paper mill and later for other short-lived mill operations (e.g. felted cloth) and after the 1870s as a furniture manufacturer. The presence of a spring line and the slope of the valley side producing fast-flowing streams is responsible for these industries.

The removal of the London Admiralty operations to Bath in 1940 led to the establishment of a large site at Foxhill on Bradford Road, just outside the Character Area. This doubtless intensified the building of new housing for civil servants at Combe Down in the decades after World War II.





## 8. Buildings, architectural quality and townscape

### Building age

The earliest intact buildings are probably of the early to mid-18th century. Nothing earlier than 1700 is identifiable, although one or two houses may have earlier cores. The building of de Montalt Place in 1729 marks the start of development, with the core of the village around The Avenue and Church Road marking the areas of most building pre-1800. The outer parts of The Avenue, the eastern end of Church Road, Combe Road, Summer Lane, Belmont, Tynning Road and Gladstone Road contain a mixture of 19th and early 20th century housing, both relatively humble quarrymen's housing and smart middle-class residences, detached or terraced. Housing of similar age appears along North Road and Bradford Road. Infill housing of the 1930s to 1950s occurs in almost all of the locations above. More intensive redevelopment and infilling after 1960 can be seen at (for example) The Brow off Church Road. Conversion of former shops to residential units is evident around Combe Road and Church Road. Former industrial sites and wasteland in the village centre have been the subject of one-off redevelopments since 2000, of which the most conspicuous is the Cornerstone building (2014) on Church Road, and associated new housing on the former Ralph Allen's yard site behind.



### Building form

There are few areas where a particular age and type of building forms a distinct unit: instead, forms are interspersed across the Character Area. Most buildings are of one to three storeys in height, and the vast majority of buildings are residential. Around the south end of The Avenue, Church Road and Combe Road, the form is mainly Georgian terraced housing of two storeys, with pitched roofs over eaves. Occasional three storey terraces occur, e.g. Isabella Place, here with the roofs partly hidden behind parapets. On Church Road to the east of Holy Trinity church, and in Belmont Road are mid-sized detached villas in a late Classical style, mostly dating from c. 1830 – 1870.



The rest of the Character Area is mainly formed of a mix of later housing, for example those of c. 1890 attached to the west end of de Montalt Place, semi-detached pairs of c. 1880 strung along the north side of North Road, early 20th century detached houses on The Avenue, etc.



Small quarrymen's cottages form a distinct group. They are usually in pairs or short terraces, and occasionally are found attached singly to the end walls of earlier houses (e.g. at the bend in Church Road opposite Rock Lane). These are generally modest two-storey houses of ashlar blocks, the masonry frequently of lesser quality than the fine smooth walling seen in the Georgian city centre. They usually have a single window on each floor. Many examples of these are found in Tynning Road, Gladstone Road and the lanes and alleys leading off. Around the junction of Combe Road and Rock Hall Lane are some presumably early examples which are distinguished by being set below the level of the road. Adjacent to these are Brunswick Place (Nos. 42-44 Combe Road), which from the road display one storey over a semi-basement. These were built on former quarry workings c. 1820-25.



After 1920 some infill building is evident, for example three pairs of bungalows dated 1938 on Combe Road, near Combe Road Close. The majority of housing developments after 1920 use reconstituted stone as the facing material with clay pantiles on plain tiled roofs. Whilst casement windows would have been of painted redwood at the time of construction, a high proportion has now been changed to upvc.

### Buildings of merit

*All buildings and features cited here are examples only, not a definitive list of all buildings of merit. They are cited to give guidance as to the sort of features significant to the Character Area. Almost every street may have isolated buildings of merit, whether listed or not, and many streets are listed in their entirety.*

See maps, Annex 1



### Anchor buildings

- The Church of Holy Trinity (Grade II\*) is the most conspicuous landmark in the Character Area. The architect H.E. Goodridge was in the 1820s and 1830s exploring his own brand of quite wayward and unarchaeological Gothic, of which this church is a fine example.
- De Montalt Place (Grade II)
- First World War Memorial, Firs Field (1921, not listed). Its location surrounded by an expansive green space heightens its prominence



### Other listed buildings of historical/townscape significance

- Nos. 2-5 Avenue Place, The Avenue (Grade II); among the few examples of 18th century vernacular building in the Character Area, i.e. originally with mullioned rather than sash windows. They pre-date 1759.
- Isabella Place (Grade II) c. 1800-5. A three-storey terrace of five simple late Classical houses intended for genteel families.
- Lonsdale, No. 81 Church Road (Grade II); an eclectic Late Victorian design with a broad gable, mullioned windows and a two-storey canted bay in the centre. A quirky addition juxtaposed with the modest Classicism of de Montalt Place which it adjoins.
- Union Chapel (1815), (Grade II) 1815 and later: a simple Classical Nonconformist chapel built for the working community of Combe Down.
- Rock Hall, Rock Hall Lane (Grade II); a large and eccentric house with battlements and mildly Tudor Gothic features including a small tower. Built from c. 1829 by Philip Nowell, a local master mason for himself.
- Nos. 139–159 Church Road: (Grade II); a group of solid and respectable early Victorian villas mostly dating from c. 1840 -1870.
- Belmont House to West Brow, Belmont Road: (Grade II); a similar group of mid-19th century detached villas. Belmont House was





under construction in 1854 when the remains of a Roman villa were located at the south end of its garden.

- De Montalt House off Summer Lane is an Italianate villa of 1848, attributed to the architect H.E. Goodridge who designed Combe Down church, Beckford's Tower on Lansdown, and many other villas especially on Bathwick Hill.
- King William IV pub, Rock Hall Lane (Grade II); c. 1830, of Bath stone, four bays wide with a Tuscan columned porch. Seemingly a public house since it was built.
- Nos. 3-13 Quarry Vale Cottages, (Grade II). Early 19th century: listed as an example of quarrying cottages. Similar examples include Nos 1-3 Byfield Buildings.
- Greenwood Terrace, Bradford Road, completed c. 1853 is an unusual addition to the building stock for its faint air of Tudor Revival style with square hood moulds over the windows.



### Unlisted buildings of merit

- Former Telephone Exchange, Combe Road, now a nursery school, completed in 1939 (dated on the front of the building). It has steep and dominant tiled roofs over a single storey structure of Bath stone ashlar. The style owes something to the Edwardian blending of Classical and vernacular elements.
- The Church Rooms, 2a Avenue Place, began life as the Avenue Hall, a public hall opened in October 1897 as a memorial to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The donor was Capt. Oswald Borland (1820-1915). It was sold to Holy Trinity church in 1926. It has a mildly Tudor arched entrance and mullioned windows.
- Solid late Victorian and Edwardian housing forms a pleasing feature through most of the Character Area, many with timber framed sashes, original panelled front doors, chequer-tiled paths and low stone garden walls topped by railings. Instances include The Firs; on Church Road around the junction with Rock Lane; 15-33 Combe Road; 179-199 Bradford Road; 3-25 North Road. At 59-67 North Road are good larger semi-detached pairs of houses perhaps c. 1870-90.
- Smaller and humbler quarrymen's cottages form an essential counterpoint to these middle class developments just cited, and evoke Combe Down's quarrying past. Protecting their integrity is essential to preserving the brusque workaday nature of the Character Area.
- Nos. 43-51 North Road; another terrace of 19th century quarrymen's cottages, mostly plain with a surprisingly fancy stone porch at No. 45.
- Greendown Place (off Bradford Road) is similar in origin. The row was built piecemeal with houses of varying heights and design details forming a homogenous unit (Nos. 7 and 10 listed).
- The Cornerstone building on the former Ralph Allen's Yard site (by Hewitt Studios LLP, completed 2014) makes a striking addition combining contemporary architectural style with a low profile to fit the scale of the streetscape. It incorporates walls of a 19th century brewery. At the rear, a number of contemporary houses are successfully knitted into the older fabric, with timber cladding and exposed steelwork combined with traditional rubble stone walling.







### Townscape features of merit

- De Montalt Place with Holy Trinity church opposite makes a brief stretch of formal planned townscape amid the twisting unplanned lanes of the village centre.
- The existence of numerous back lanes and alleyways enclosed by stone walls, locally called ‘drungs’. Also characteristic of Combe Down is terraced dwellings only accessible on foot, often with an access path separating the houses from their gardens. These features probably derive from the disruptive influence of open surface quarrying and the works and accesses associated with the mines throughout the Character Area.
- The junction of North Road, the top of Ralph Allen Drive and The Avenue is marked by the imposing gatepiers and giant urns at the entrance to Prior Park, a survival from the time when this was a private drive to the house. Added piquancy derives from the fact that it was also the route for Ralph Allen’s horse-drawn tramway for transporting Bath stone between the Combe Down quarries and his wharfs at Widcombe. The Hadley Arms pub faces the gatepiers and the road junction to create an unusually formal composition.
- Jewish Burial Ground, Bradford Road. An early 19th century burial ground in use until 1942. High walled surround with a simple iron gate.



### Buildings at risk

The area is generally well cared for and, partly on account of the high property values, there are few buildings in a poor state of repair.



### Negative buildings and townscape features

- Few buildings can be singled out as negative in their entirety. However plenty of unlisted properties and some listed ones have negative features such as inappropriate uPVC double glazing, overbearing extensions and loft conversions which upset the balance and proportion of the houses and their contribution to the streetscape. Former commercial premises tend not to have fared well, e.g. the single storey former shop at the junction of Combe Road and Summer Lane, with its expanse of vacant and whited-out shop windows.
- Around Combe Down may be seen 20th century suburban-style houses in non-local materials such as ersatz ‘Cotswold’ style masonry. While nothing unusual in themselves, the choice of such material erodes the specific local character of the Conservation Area.
- Nos 1-5 Church Place, Church Road, are an early 21st century terrace making a considered effort to fit in with the surrounding streetscape of bay fronted terraced housing of c. 1900. However, the cream rendered frontages may be singled out as an example where Bath stone facings would have benefitted the streetscape and integrity of the Character Area. These details are often omitted only for reasons of economy.
- Other examples of the blander versions of 1960s infill exist, often using reconstituted Bath stone walls and large plate glass “picture” windows, and which look all the poorer by contrast with more historic neighbours. Although not exceptional themselves, they contribute negatively to the Character Area.



## 9. Materials and detailing

The almost universal facing material for buildings in this Character Area is Bath stone. Usually, the front and side elevations are of finely-jointed ashlar stone whilst the rear elevations are often of loosely coursed rubble. In some places coursed rubble is used for the street fronts, as at Gladstone Place, Tynning Road, a modest row of four mid-19th century cottages. This variety attests to the tension between economy and aspiration in the building undertaken by quarrymen often for their own occupation. The only exceptions to this rule tend to be post-1920 housing developments, where reconstituted Bath stone is sometimes used for economy.

Roofs tend to be pitched, and either gabled or hipped. In a few higher status houses (e.g. Isabella Place) the roof is hidden by a parapet, as is the norm for central Bath. But in most houses the roofs come down to exposed eaves and guttering. The commonest materials are blue slate or reddish brown clay tiles, usually either pantiles or Double Roman tiles. Post-war houses may be roofed with concrete tiles of similar tones.

Sash windows were until recently the more-or-less universal window form through the Character Area, as in most parts of Bath. In Isabella Place and de Montalt Place some retain Georgian 6 over 6 glazing bars, but elsewhere the 19th century standard prevails: two or four panes of plate glass. In one or two places (e.g. a house at the junction of North Road and Stonehouse Lane, just outside the Character Area) early to mid-18th century mullioned windows survive. Since the mid 20th century replacement double glazing in uPVC or aluminium has begun to overtake traditional forms, to the detriment of the Character Area.

Doors are in many places marked by a flat stone door canopy on shaped brackets. Only occasionally, a fully enclosed stone porch is found, as at Brunswick Place on Combe Road, c. 1820s. Plenty of timber doors with traditional moulded and recessed panels survive, and their retention should be regarded as a vital element of the Character Area. Unfortunately, replacement UPVC or metal doors are becoming more common. Later Victorian or Edwardian front doors often have a full width glazed panel at the top of the door, or a pair of vertical glazed panels in the upper half. This may be in addition to a glazed fanlight over the door.

External louvred shutters and timber blind boxes are surprisingly common survivals, most dating to the mid 19th century. A fine array of these features may be found in the larger villas at the east end of Church Road. One or two early 19th century houses have iron verandas, most notably at No. 159 Church Road, where the cast-iron frame is decorated with grape vines. Iron railings top many walls, e.g. the churchyard wall of Holy Trinity.

Boundary treatments: the typical city centre treatment of basements surrounded by area railings is hardly seen here, partly because outside the centre there was less financial pressure to build on narrow footprints. The thin soil over solid stone and the pre-existence of the stone mines discouraged the use of basements. The village centre exhibits the typical suburban Bath treatment of low garden walls to the pavement supporting half-height railings, in some cases replaced by hedges. Front gardens tend to be quite spacious, notably in Church Road. Stone gateposts and piers for railings tend to date from c. 1800-1850 or a little later, and many have a typical semicircular arched top with a simple recessed panel inset, a type

fashionable during the early 19th century Greek Revival.

20th century boundary treatments are usually either low walls, usually in rubble stone, with hedges planted to make up the remaining height, or in the most recent cases the less appropriate vertical close-boarded fences.

Street furniture : Post-boxes set into walls survive on The Avenue and Church Road near the junction with Tying Road. Both are marked GR, i.e. c. 1911-35. Also on The Avenue is a K6 type telephone kiosk, designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. Just east of the junction of North Road and Ralph Allen Drive is a granite horse trough of c. 1900 incorporating a (disused) drinking fountain. Cast-iron sewerage and drain covers survive, some with lettering e.g. at Church Road and Belmont, marked "Bath City Council Soil Sewer".





## 10. Streets and movement

### Density and degree of enclosure

The occupation of the Character Area is generally of medium-to-low density, although some back lanes and closes behind Church Road and The Avenue are closely built with small workshops interspersed with 19th century cottages and these can lead to higher density in places. Even in areas which evolved as living places for the working community of quarrymen (e.g. Tynning Road, Gladstone Road and Quarry Vale) the small scale often terraced cottages are provided with generous gardens originally for growing vegetables or perhaps keeping pigs. These ensure that the overall impression is never cramped.



The convoluted layout of the roads in the village centre and the lack of outward views lead to a sense of enclosure; however as one moves towards the long straight lines of North Road and Bradford Road, a greater sense of space is apparent. This is most noticeable around the Firs Field. The houses bordering it on all sides enjoy broader views and a sense of distance from other properties. At the eastern boundary of the Character Area the broad playing fields of Monkton Prep School provide open views.

The character changes again around Rock Hall and Summer Lane as the land slopes away to the Midford Valley. The housing is more widely spaced and belts of trees run in places to dense deciduous woodland, with occasional gaps in the greenery allowing glimpses down to panoramic open countryside in the distance.



### Street pattern

The street pattern in Combe Down is dominated by the arrow-straight line of Bradford Road and North Road along the north boundary of the Character Area. These began as the turnpike road laid out in 1707 linking the Old Wells Road at Odd Down with the route to Bradford-on-Avon via Brassknocker Hill. The village lies south of this road and its roads are by contrast narrow and curving. The main route through the village is formed by Combe Road which leaves Bradford Road near the former Ministry of Defence Foxhill site. From here it curves south and west, becoming Church Road. Near de Montalt Place, The Avenue branches north-east from Church Road leading back to join North Road at the head of Ralph Allen Drive. The straight line of The Avenue is dictated by its original role as the route of Ralph Allen's 1730s tramway taking stone from the mines. From this loop, minor roads and culs-de-sac branch off at many junctions.



An unusual characteristic in Combe Down is the amount of housing accessed via alleys and lanes (made or unmade) off the road network, for instance Williamstow (off The Avenue) and Berkeley Place off Tynning Road. Some may have their fronts accessible only by footpath, as at Quarry Vale, and in places vehicle access has been contrived via rear lanes. These aspects seem to derive from its quarrying past and the piecemeal pattern of building which was necessary to utilise available land between the various quarry workings.

## Public Realm

The Character Area has retained some of its 19th century paving materials although given the villagey and industrial character here there was never a consistent or high quality approach to this, as there was in the formally planned 18th century parts of the centre. Many streets and pavements are paved in tarmac, although they are mostly reasonably well maintained.

Pavements tend to be of tarmac or occasionally of concrete slabs. Some older kerbs of natural stone survive, but most are of precast concrete. On the narrower lanes there may be no pavements. In Summer Lane and other places where the margins become rural in character there may be soft verges of grass or vegetation.

## Vitality and tranquility

There is constant bus and motor traffic along North Road and Bradford Road, especially noticeable at the morning and evening rush hours when queueing cars form a solid barrier along the roads. However, that accounts only for the main road which bypasses the village and to some extent gives it a cut-off feel. So it is that Combe Down village centre mostly enjoys a tranquil feel, there being little reason for through-traffic to use the village. There were until the late 20th century many more local shops along Combe Road and The Avenue, but with the demise of most in favour of supermarkets, pedestrian activity in these roads is limited to the surviving convenience stores (e.g. the Co-Op on The Avenue) and one or two cafés and pubs.





## 11. Trees, open space, parks and gardens

See map, Annex 1

### Trees and vegetation

Large and small trees are integrated throughout the Character Area, as they are through much of the city of Bath. Gardens here tend to be generous, often well tended and densely planted with large shrubs or trees, screening the houses from each other.



Trees are in general probably more noticeable in the eastern part of the Character Area and at its boundaries. Mid-sized trees including conifers, birch, and small beech are much in evidence e.g. around Gladstone Road where they are interspersed with gardens and trees (cherry etc) which screen out the distant views from the road. From the east end of Church Road the playing fields of Monkton Prep School are bordered by linear screens of large trees including beech and Scots pine.

Around the Firs Field rows of conifers line The Firs, and The Avenue has continuous rows of lime trees on both verges, and smaller trees such as cherry and birch have been recently planted along the boundary of Firs Field and North Road to fill gaps. The churchyard has traditional planting of yews, none of it presumably older than the 19th century, among deciduous trees. In the neighbouring vicarage garden and primary school grounds, deciduous trees such as beech, copper beech and horse chestnut are much in evidence. Together with the churchyard they form a dense pool of greenery at the heart of the village.



Trees are a major feature around Summer Lane where the land drops down to the Midford Valley. Mixed deciduous woodland quickly takes over from the village character.

There are important tree groups and open space adjoining the Character Area which contribute much to the quality and appearance of the Character Area. These include the trees lining North Road and once forming the boundary of the Prior Park estate; east of the Character Area around St Winifred's Drive; south of Church Road in the grounds of Monkton Prep School; and on former quarry sites west of Combe Road.

### Open space and parks



There are few designed open spaces as part of the Character Area. The major one is the Firs Field, which has been in use as such since 1920. It forms a buffer between the village centre and the traffic on North Road.

At the junction of Church Road and Gladstone Road on the eastern boundary of the Character Area, the presence of Monkton Prep School playing fields forms a spacious boundary between village and the more open semi-rural landscape beyond.

### Private gardens

Private gardens form an integral part of the landscape of the Character Area. The quarrymen's cottages often had large gardens allowing

some degree of self-sufficiency to feed large working families. Such Regency and Victorian villas as were built tend to have spacious front gardens allowing the houses to be well set back from the roads. This perhaps acted as a sort of social and class-based divide allowing the middle-class occupants to feel separated to a degree from the working village. There can never have been complete separation or distinct areas exclusively for middle class occupation. This character is contrasted with streets of workers' housing such as Combe Road where the housing often stands directly on the roadside, without any front garden or other separation from the road.

## 12. Night-time character

As a predominantly residential area, the night-time character is subdued. With no secondary schools or large public buildings in the Character Area, evening events are limited to those that can be held in pubs, churches, primary schools or halls. With few shops or businesses required to open after dark, traffic is generally light and local once the evening commuter traffic on North Road and Bradford Road has died down.





## 13. Issues affecting the Character Area

### What are the assets of the Character Area?

- A strong and distinctive localised community and sense of place, perhaps largely due to its unique history and physical separation from the centre of Bath.
- An abundance of artisan housing originally built for quarry workers; such housing was subject to major losses elsewhere in Bath especially c. 1945 to 1980, making its survival here the more valuable.
- The project to backfill the stone mines completed in 2009 has resolved local fears of long-term subsidence or collapse, leading to increased confidence in the sustainability of the local built environment.
- A spacious building pattern with significant pockets of trees, planting, generous gardens and open space, creating a pleasing environment.
- The existing building stock, with many listed buildings and good quality unlisted buildings, surviving with minimal alteration, make Combe Down a desirable and pleasing place to live.
- A consistent and pleasing palette of building materials is naturally dominated by Bath stone, blue slate and clay tiles.
- It is well served by public transport links along North Road and Bradford Road
- The network of lanes and alleys allows pedestrian movement away from traffic-heavy routes.

### What are the weaknesses of the Character Area?

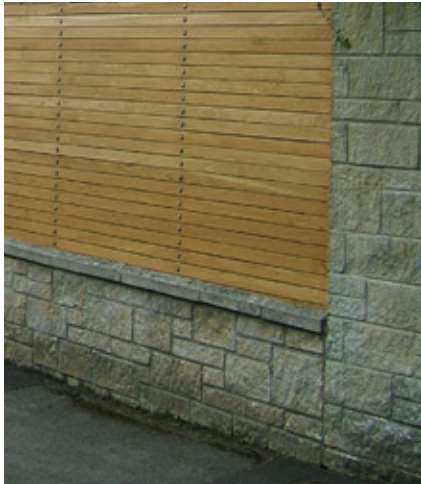
- The already heavy traffic on Bradford Road and North Road, a major arterial road around the outer south-eastern rim of the city.
- Post-war domestic architecture has tended towards bland designs by commercial developers, out-of-character features such as large picture windows, and non-traditional forms such as overbearing boxed-out dormers for loft conversions. These tendencies may be countered through good design (see Opportunities, below).
- The decrease of significant local employment (particularly since the departure of the Ministry of Defence) may encourage a tendency for the area to become a dormitory suburb.
- In the village centre, walkways and pavements are narrow and in places intermittent, particularly where the roadways themselves are narrow. This discourages walkers and tends to restrict opportunities for improving the local sense of place.
- The hilltop situation and distance (c. 1.5 miles via Ralph Allen Drive) make for a long steep climb from the city centre. This discourages walking or cycling as means of accessing the city and encourages reliance on motor transport.
- Some roads are extremely narrow, e.g. Tynning Road and Gladstone Road. Parking on pavements is the norm in these



streets, creating a danger to pedestrians and likely problems for emergency access.

- The geography and street pattern create two traffic bottlenecks where the majority of vehicle traffic must join the main route out of Combe Down: at the Hadley Arms/Ralph Allen Drive junction, and the junction of Combe Road with Bradford Road.

### What opportunities exist to improve the area?



- The tendency to introduce non-traditional and out-of-character building features (e.g. picture windows, PVC replacement glazing, boxed-out dormer roofs etc) may be countered with good sensitive design referencing the local characteristics of the historic environment.
- The palette of materials employed in new developments should refer to the local characteristics identified for Combe Down, as one way of ensuring that new buildings blend sympathetically with the existing environment. Special regard should be paid to the problems of using reconstituted stone (see Threats, below).
- New boundaries should be designed to reflect traditional local forms.
- A programme of designed improvements to the pedestrian lanes and alleys through the area could encourage greater use of these routes.
- Traffic management to limit the impact of traffic on the A3062 (North Road and Bradford Road) and the identified bottlenecks.
- Better management of parking to alleviate congestion problems in the village centre.
- Identification and recognition of undesignated heritage assets of architectural and historic interest.
- Encouraging mixed developments which include business premises allowing a more diverse local economy and employment opportunities within the Character Area.



### What factors may be seen as threats?



- Traffic levels in this area may lead to erosion of the historic fabric with pollutants likely to cause surface damage particularly to Bath stone.
- Gentrification may encourage a tendency to add formal Georgian architectural treatments and features to conversions of industrial and commercial buildings and to the modest quarrymen's cottages which are a feature here; such treatments are historically inappropriate to such building types and erode their specific meanings and visual qualities.
- Unsympathetic alterations to unlisted buildings are a threat to the character of the Conservation Area as a whole and specifically to this Character Area.
- Building height and scale of new development exceeding the traditional limits in this area, disrupting the historic character.
- Infill development may create an increasingly urban character,






particularly in views from the setting of the World Heritage Site and within the Character Area itself.

- The relative narrowness of roads in the Character Area reflects the stone mining history of Combe Down. Increasing pressure is likely to be created on the road infrastructure from infill development fuelled by Bath's high property values.
- Attempts to build in the larger gardens.
- Erosion of property boundaries for creation of car parking spaces on gardens.
- The increasing prevalence of uPVC glazing and doors erodes the character of pre-1950 unlisted buildings. The visually heavy white or coloured plastic frames are inappropriate against Bath stone, Pennant rubble and brick walls.
- The use of reconstituted Bath stone for new buildings and extensions. It provides a generally appropriate colour match but this advantage is eroded by wider mortar joints and a dull, lifeless character which (unlike Bath stone) does not improve with weathering.
- Increasing light levels from new development, floodlighting and night-time traffic may affect the Area's tranquil dark character particularly seen from the setting of the World Heritage Site.
- Boundaries of non-traditional form (e.g. close boarded timber fences and open boundaries leading onto gravelled parking spaces) counteract traditional boundary treatments such as low stone walling, railings and planting which enclose the gardens while allowing limited glimpses in and out.

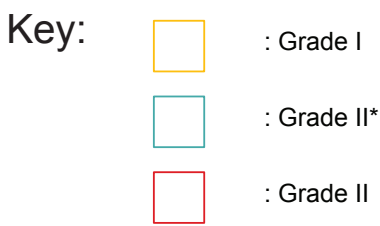


## Annex 1 - Maps



- Key:**
-  : Landmarks
  -  : View
  -  : Panoramic view


## Landmarks and views





**Listed buildings**




**Key:**


 : Unlisted building of merit


 : Negative building

 : Positive townscape feature

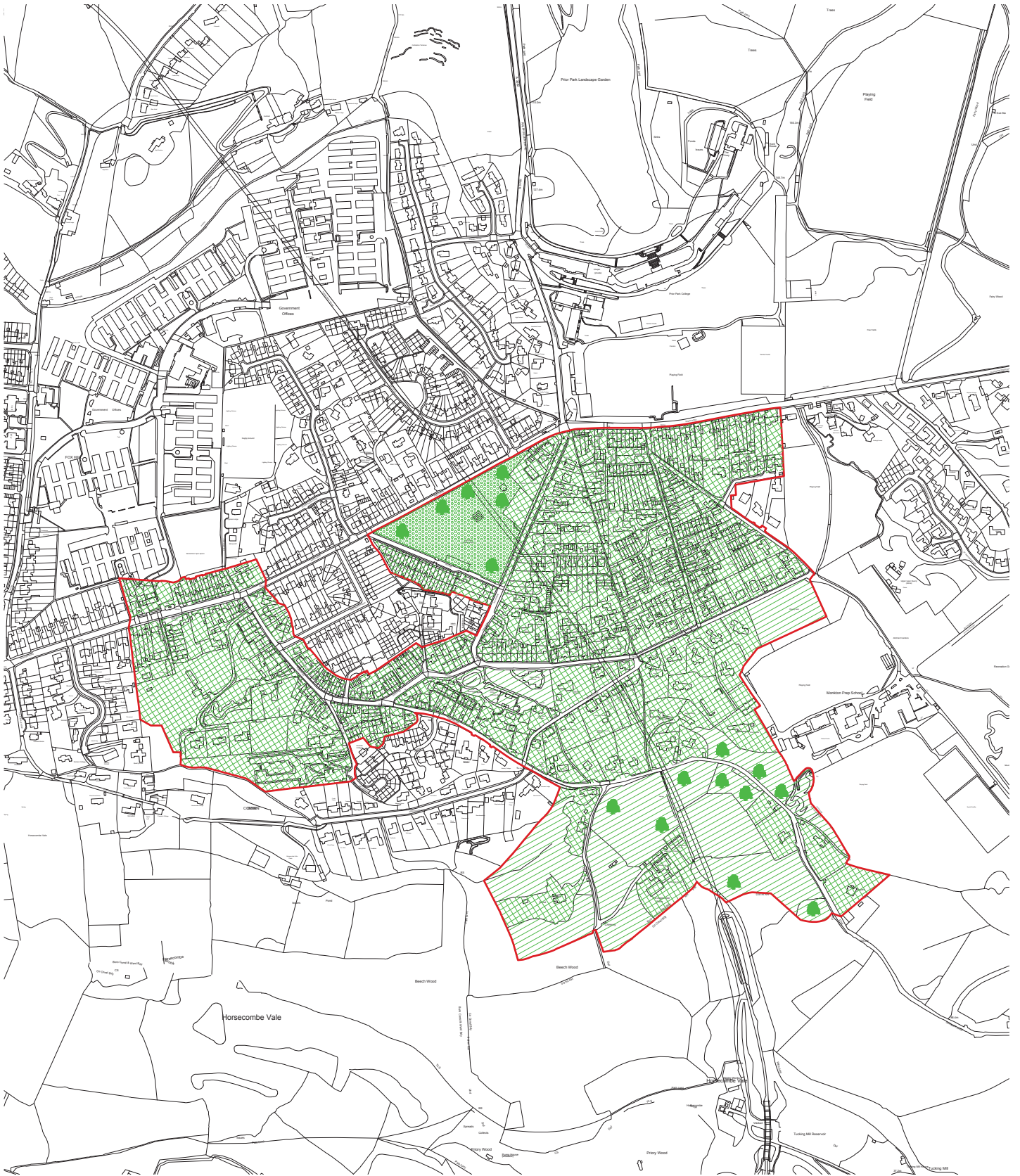
 : Negative townscape feature

 : Building at risk





 : Anchor building

 : group/included

**Townscape features**



**Key:**

-  : Open space
-  : Parks
-  : Private/Semi-private gardens (where significant)
-  : Trees

**Trees, open space,  
parks and gardens**



## Annex 2 - Context

A conservation area is designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and is defined as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The quality and interest of the area as a whole, rather than individual buildings, is the main consideration when designating such areas.

Section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to periodically formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas within the district. Section 72 requires that in considering applications for development in a conservation area, attention shall be paid to the desirability of conserving or enhancing the character of that area.

Conservation area appraisals are considered by Historic England to be vital to the conservation of these special areas. More detailed policies are to be found in the Bath and North East Somerset Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan.

## Annex 3 - References

Mike Chapman, The High Street, Twerton; An Historical Survey, (B&NES council, 2003) provides a more detailed account, from which some information here is condensed. [http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/historical\\_survey\\_-\\_high\\_street\\_twerton\\_part\\_1.pdf](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/historical_survey_-_high_street_twerton_part_1.pdf)

B&NES SMR: MBN1944

Kings College London and the University of Cambridge, Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE).

Foyle and Pevsner, The Buildings of England; Somerset North and Bristol (2011), p. 208.

Arcus, Report 825b.1, Historic Building Appraisal of Huggetts Electrical, Twerton Upper Mill, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, 2004 (detailed history of part of the Upper Mill site).

Mike Chapman, The High Street, Twerton; An Historical Survey, (B&NES council, 2003), part 2, p. 27.

Opened July 11, 1816. Uncredited newspaper cutting, see Bath in Time, ref. 42700

Peter Little, St Michael's Church, Twerton; A History, Bath 1997

Bath & Cheltenham Gazette, March 15, 1854.

<http://www.proudoftwerton.com/?p=3666>

From B&NES, Archaeology in the City of Bath: Supplementary Planning Guidance; [http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/website\\_spg\\_bath.pdf](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/website_spg_bath.pdf)

<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sitedocuments/Environment/Landscape/WHS/WHS%20Map%2008d.pdf>

Michael Forsyth, Bath (Pevsner Architectural Guides), 2003, p.45.

Andrew Foyle and Nikolaus Pevsner, Buildings of England: Somerset North and Bristol (2011), pp. 206-7.

[http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/notice\\_under\\_section\\_91\\_of\\_the\\_localism\\_act\\_2011-\\_twerton\\_hill\\_farm.docx](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/notice_under_section_91_of_the_localism_act_2011-_twerton_hill_farm.docx)

