



**Ashton-in-Makerfield**  
Conservation Area Appraisal

# Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area Appraisal

## Contents

1. Location and setting.....	3
Historic Development of Ashton-in-Makerfield.....	6
Form and Character .....	7
2. Key Characteristics .....	10
Key Views .....	13
Character Areas.....	16
3. Gerard Street Character Area .....	17
Definition of Character .....	17
Architecture, Materials and Details .....	18
Buildings of Townscape Merit.....	22
Issues and opportunities for enhancement.....	25
4. Heath Road Character Area .....	27
Definition of Character .....	27
Open Spaces.....	28
Architecture, Materials and Details .....	28
Buildings of Townscape Merit.....	30
Issues and opportunities for enhancement.....	32
5. St Oswalds and St Thomas Character Area .....	33
Definition of Character .....	33
Open Spaces.....	34
Architecture, Materials and Details .....	35
Buildings of Townscape Merit.....	37
Issues and opportunities for enhancement.....	39
6. Summary .....	39
Buildings and Sites at Risk.....	40
7. Conservation Area Boundary Review .....	40
8. Article 4 Direction Review.....	40
9. Historic Map Regression .....	42

## Policy Background

When formally adopted this document will be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). It provides guidance on how to meet the requirements pertinent to the management and protection of the Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area.

**Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy 2013:**

**CP10: Design**

**CP11: Conservation**

**Wigan Unitary Development Plan 2006 Remaining Policies**

**EV4A: Development and Design in Conservation Areas**

## 1. Location and setting

1.1 Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area covers the historic town centre and commercial heart of Ashton-in-Makerfield. It extends 7.32 hectares and primarily follows the north-south route of Gerard Street, the principal high-street. It was first designated a conservation area in January 1989.

1.2 Ashton-in-Makerfield (for short: Ashton) is the third largest town in Wigan Borough and is located within the highly urbanised area of South Lancashire to the east of the M6 motorway and to the north of the East Lancashire Road, half way between Wigan and St Helens. The Haydock Park racecourse is located on the southern edge of the town and is within St Helens Borough.

1.3 There are four Grade II listed buildings within the conservation area: The Church of St Oswald and St Edmund Arrowsmith; the Presbytery to the church; the Gates and Gate Piers of the church; and the Parish Church of St Thomas.

1.4 The conservation area is primarily commercial in character with the exception being around the churches and a small residential area behind the high street. There are a number of properties with historic shopfronts and some buildings of particularly high-quality, including former banks and pubs which tend to have a high aesthetic value.



Picture 1. Primarily commercial in character



Picture 2. There are large ornate buildings



Picture 3. Heath Road forms a small residential section of the conservation area

1.5 Ashton is not an ancient market town - the designated market place is a later addition and unusually located behind the buildings on the west side of Gerard Street (outside the conservation area) and not readily visible.



Map 1 Ashton in Makerfield Conservation Area 1:2,750 



## Historic Development of Ashton-in-Makerfield

- 1.6 There is no evidence of prehistoric settlement in Ashton, however the route of the current Warrington Road is thought to follow the path of the Roman road that led to Wigan. The earliest written evidence of the settlement was in relation to the Gerard family in the 14th Century.
- 1.7 The Gerard family are intimately connected with Ashton as lords of the manor. They lived at nearby Garswood Hall and most early mentions of the town are in relation to grants and deeds of lands in the ownership of the Gerard family. In 1589 Sir Thomas Gerard was lord of the manor and granted land to Robert Byrchall to build a grammar school on a plot of land near Seneley Green. Over the years the family would continue to make grants and hold influence in the town. The coat of arms of Ashton is an adaptation of the arms of the Gerard's. Their crest and variations of it are a common feature around the town.



Picture 4. Coat of arms of the Gerard Family

- 1.8 Ashton remained a small settlement within the Parish of Winwick, however in 1650 its chapel-of-ease, dedicated to St Thomas, was recommended to be made into an independent parish church. This indicates the growing importance and size of Ashton at that time, which is also reflected in the establishment of a Unitarian Chapel in 1697.
- 1.9 During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century coal mining and other industry became more prominent in the area. One trade of particular note were the blacksmiths who grew to specialise in the production of

door hinges, nails, files, door handles and other small ironmongery. The establishment of turnpike roads helped grow the town as it became the crossing point of the Warrington-Wigan and Liverpool-Bolton routes.

- 1.10 By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ashton had grown to a population of around 5,000 people and as the century progressed bigger factories and more industry would lead to further expansion.. Although the town was growing the layout remained firmly medieval with the majority of buildings facing the main road, Gerard Street with its distinctive curve and it's narrow burgage-style plots.
- 1.11 The 19<sup>th</sup> century until the first world war was a prosperous time for Ashton-in-Makerfield and it is from that period that most of the buildings in the town, and particularly in the conservation area date from, including its civic buildings such as the library and police station.
- 1.12 By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century industrial decline had seen the fortunes of cotton and coal collapse and with it the rapid de-industrialisation of much of Ashton. The last major company, Cromptons who had their factory on Gerard Street, closed in the 1960s and the site was redeveloped into the current Gerard Shopping Centre.
- 1.13 The opening of the M6 motorway as well as development of new industrial estates on the edge of the town changed the character of Ashton and the town centre is now dominated by traffic with large numbers of heavy goods vehicles.

## Form and Character

- 1.14 Ashton is located within the lowland Lancashire Plain. The highest ground is at 350 ft near Billinge to the west and the lowest at 90 ft on the Millingford Brook at the eastern boundary of the town.
- 1.15 The resulting landform within the conservation area is a generally level area around the two churches and the Warrington Road, with a noticeable fall in height northwards along Gerard Street until just before the junction with Wigan Road. The levels rise again slightly on the northern side of the Millingford Brook to the Cross Keys public house and beyond along the Bolton Road.



Picture 5. View north along Gerard Street showing land sloping down towards the junction with Princess Road

1.16 Gerard Street is the principal street of the town and has an unusual curved form as it rises up the hill. This provides an important focal point for the conservation area. There is a secondary focal point on Warrington Road at the approach to the junction near the Kings Arms where St Thomas Church and the historic buildings mark the entrance to the town centre.





Picture 6. The bend in Gerard Street towards the apex of the hill is a notable feature of the streetscape



Picture 7. The crossroads of Liverpool Road and Warrington Road is where the urban form begins to transition to a more tree-lined and suburban character.

1.17 The overall character of the conservation area is typically urban with Gerard Street having a commercial character with a number of large and architecturally impressive pubs. The terraces around Heath Road have a typical dense late 19<sup>th</sup> century residential character. The junction of Warrington Road marks a shift from the dense urban character of the town to a more open and

green character as at this point the conservation area takes in St Oswalds and St Thomas's Churches, including their graveyards and trees.

## 2. Key Characteristics

2.1 The majority of properties in the conservation area are Victorian, dating from around 1850 until roughly the first world war. They range in styles from the plain and functional to the grand and decorative. There are also a smaller number of mid and later 20<sup>th</sup> Century properties of varying architectural merit.



Picture 8. Most properties are Victorian of varying styles and quality.

2.2 Most non-public buildings are of 2 storeys in height rising to 2.5-3 storeys with front-facing gables, parapets and gabled dormers as common features. The variation of heights and treatments afforded by the dormers and gables create a pleasant and interesting roofline – especially to the western side of Gerard Street. It is notable that many historic features such as chimneys have been lost or truncated.

2.3 The larger buildings tend to be the more ornate however there is use of plaster, stone, terracotta and faience mouldings, including brick specials throughout the main high-street. It is also



notable that a number of larger buildings utilise mock-Tudor timber cladding, often painted in black and white (a feature also found in Wigan town centre).

2.4 Among the most characterful and ornate buildings in the conservation area are its public houses, whilst this is perhaps to be expected on the main roads it is notable that some of the backstreet pubs are also of historical and architectural interest.



Picture 9. Public houses with ornate detailing including terracotta, faience and mock-Tudor timberwork.

2.5 The small residential streets of the conservation area are mostly red-brick terraces from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century with slate-roofs, some of which have Edwardian style pebbledash and mock-Tudor cladding, particularly around St Thomas Church.



Picture 10. Residential streets have a variety of traditional forms.

2.6 The key characteristics of the conservation area that contribute toward it being an area of special architectural and historic importance are:

- Buildings are generally part of a terrace of up to 3 storeys high
- Slate or grey roofing materials
- Red brick buildings with decorative brickwork
- Use of strong front-facing gables and gabled-dormers
- Black and white mock-Tudor cladding
- Many buildings have decorative coats of arms, date-stones or patterned features on the front elevations.



Picture 11. Decorative brickwork, strong-gables and decorative date-stones.





Picture 12. The area is typified by strong front-facing gables and gabled dormers.

### Key Views

There are several key views within the conservation area (these are indicated on Map 4), each view provides different focal points and aspects:

#### 2.7



Picture 13 (a) Looking southwards up the slope of Gerard Street until it bends to the right creating a sense of anticipation.

2.8



Picture 14 (b) Looking north along Warrington Road. The former Angel Inn on the left and St Thomas's church to the right mark the approach to the town centre. The Kings Arms and the contrasting heights of the historic buildings on Gerard Street close/terminate the view.

2.9



Picture 15 (c) The view north along Gerard Street towards the boundary of the conservation area. The view is terminated by the Cross Keys and Robin Hood Inns, which face each other either side of Bolton Road.



**Map 2 Key Views, Listed Buildings and Buildings of Townscape Merit**

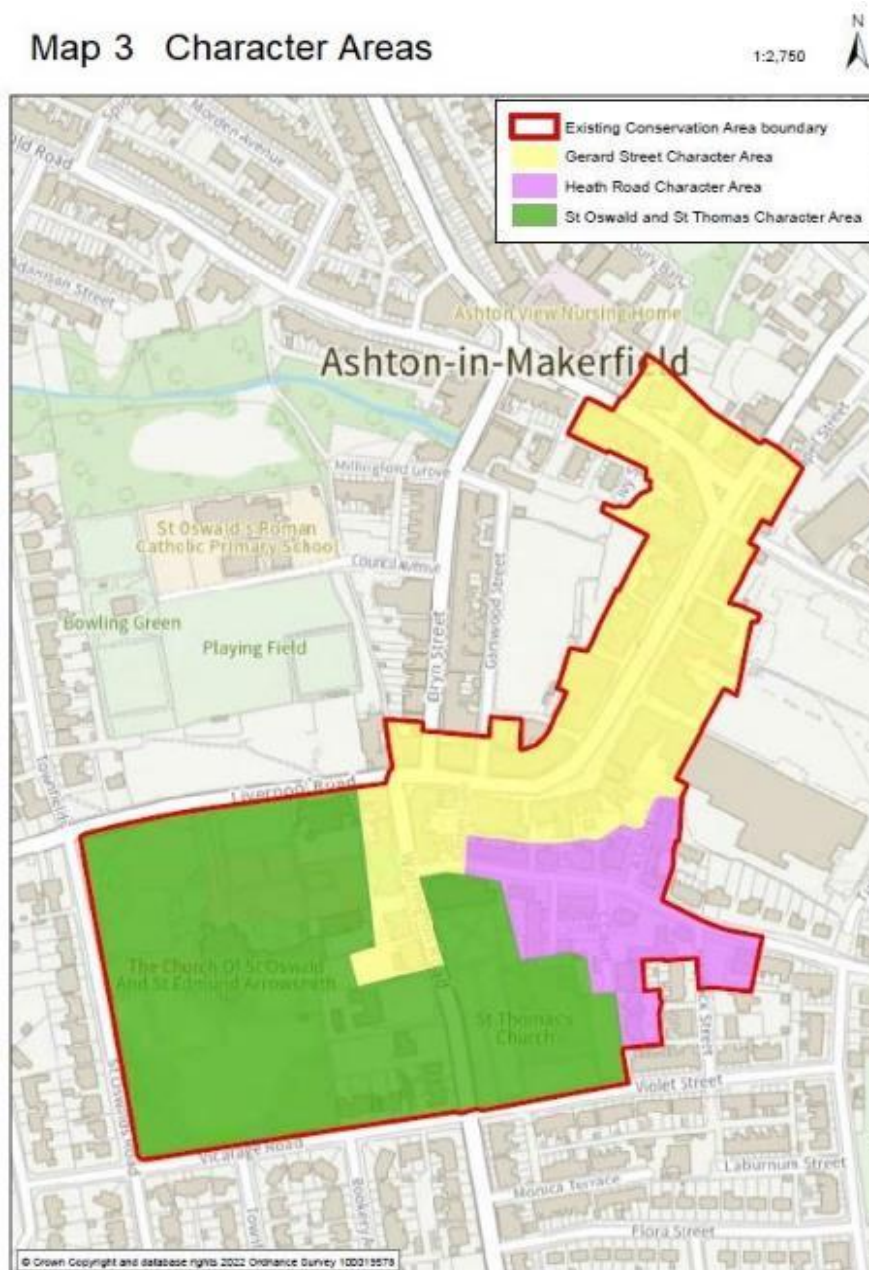


## Character Areas

2.10 For the purposes of this appraisal the conservation area has been divided into three character areas. These character areas have some differences with regard to predominant use, scale and character, but they are not mutually exclusive - they share some common qualities and features. The three character areas are:

- **Gerard Street Character Area** – Gerard Street, Warrington Road, Wigan Road and Bolton Road
- **Heath Road Character Area** – Heath Road, Butchers Lane, Church Terrace, 'A' Court
- **St Thomas & St Oswald Character Area** – Warrington Road, Liverpool Road

Map 3 Character Areas





### 3. Gerard Street Character Area

#### Definition of Character

3.1 The Gerard Street Character Area is centred on the town's main high street which follows a curved route from Bolton Road in the north, rising to Warrington Road and Liverpool Road in the south. The road is wide and lined with commercial properties which encourages high pedestrian use. Despite this the road is regularly used by heavy goods vehicles which results in an incongruous scene in the historic town centre.

3.2 Gerard Street takes its name from the Gerard family who lived nearby and were lords of the manor. The roads that connect to Gerard Street to the north (Bolton Road and Wigan Road) and to the south (Liverpool Road and Warrington Road) indicate how the town grew at the crossroads of two major turnpike routes. Both the north and south crossroads are still major junctions with key gateway buildings that help define this area.



Picture 16 The Bolton-Wigan Crossroads



Picture 17 The Liverpool-Warrington Crossroads

3.3 The majority of the buildings that exist today were built during the 1850 to 1910 period when the town was expanding fast and the economy strong. The resulting building types such as public houses and the number of buildings with fashionable architectural embellishments reflect the importance of the town for shopping and leisure. The redevelopment during this period has resulted in a Victorian architectural heritage with unifying and repeated materials, but no -single homogenous 'style'.

3.4 The route through the town centre encompasses a number of distinctive spaces that result from the historic development of the town:

- In the north, the broad junction with the Wigan Road is emphasised by the curved frontage of the Bank facing the more confined locations of the two inns either side of the Bolton Road.
- The broad width of Gerard Street provides a notable space as it rises up the hill and curves out of sight creating interest and anticipation of what may be beyond.

- The wider pavement on the south side of the bend was probably used for trading in past centuries, its location means it is still an important space.
- The tight off-set junction with Warrington Road and Bryn Street joining Gerard Street is framed by the higher Cooperative Hall and the important group of shops, no's 70-74 Gerard Street.

3.4 On either side of Gerard Street, short streets link through to back streets. These offer glimpses into different character areas i.e. Butchers Lane ended by St Thomas's Church; the 'Squeeze Belly Entry' passage through 45 Gerard Street giving a sight of A Court housing; the lane beside the Golden Lion joining the marketplace; and the route opposite the Gerard Arms leading into the Gerard Shopping Centre.

### Architecture, Materials and Details

3.5 The townscape reflects the sum of qualities of the building groupings within it. As the 19th Century progressed, the level of ornamentation and detailing increased. The earliest examples included the Palatine Buildings 1863, a simple two-storey commercial development where the detailing is limited to first-floor lintels and a corner doorway. Later commercial developments, such as the three-storey Central Buildings 1899, on the same side of Gerard Street, displayed extensive brick and terracotta detailing with exuberant window arches and parapet with name and date in large lettering.



Picture 18. The relatively plain Palatine Buildings and the more ornate Central Buildings

3.6 Although it is difficult to identify a typical 'style' of architecture each building provides a special contribution to the area with its own character giving an organic feel to the town. The townscape mixture includes two and three storey buildings, most in brick but with some rendered with Edwardian-style harling, and others with mock timbering. Roofs are generally slate and windows tend to have stone lintels or decorative mouldings and surrounds.



Picture 19. Brick, pebble-dash and mock-timbering are common materials in this character area, often on the same building.

3.7 This pleasing townscape, with a blend of styles from this period, is punctuated by the notable public house architecture of the Red Lion and the Golden Lion pubs.

3.8 The commercial buildings along the short length of Warrington Road included in this Character Area, repeat these themes including ornate public houses and public buildings. An additional point of interest is provided by the use of local sandstone facing on the buildings around the junction with Heath Road.





Picture 20. Local sandstone facing the buildings at Heath Road

3.9 The newer buildings in this character area have fitted well within the heritage townscape with a sympathetic use of scale, materials and form, notably the recent Gerard Street elevation of the Gerard Centre; no. 1 Gerard Street (2002); and the 1970's Sir Thomas Gerard pub on the site of the former Congregational Chapel.

3.9 The form and structure of the architecture is attractive, especially above ground floor but the overall townscape is dominated by inappropriate and unattractive shop fronts and signage. Many of the key attributes of the area are undermined by poor quality ground floor façades.

3.10 There are a number of fine shopfronts retained in the area, although mostly hidden by modern interventions. Some of the most interesting are those around the Warrington Road/Gerard Street junction, specifically the Cooperative Hall building.





Picture 21: High quality shopfronts and details still survive in the conservation area.



Picture 22: Shopfront and decoration at the Cooperative Hall.



Picture 23. Poor quality shopfronts contrast and detract from above ground floor.

### Buildings of Townscape Merit

3.10 Former **Armoury and Old Band House**, although extensively modified and modernised the plan and form of this building is unusual for the conservation area and is perhaps unique in Wigan. Built in 1850 this was the band house and armoury of the Lancashire Hussar Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry and as such is special for its purpose rather than its appearance.

3.11 **The Cross Keys** dates from 1900 and is particularly noteworthy for its fine terracotta trimmings and decorative moulding. The roof has a terracotta balustrade with ornamental Dutch gables.

3.12 **Bridge Foot House** (1902) is another fine terracotta building, named after the bridge over the Millingford Brook. It is notable for its fine corner turret and leaded cupula. The balustrade visually ties the building to the nearby Cross Keys.

3.13 The **Sir Thomas Gerard** is a 1970s building of plain character with unusually decorative elements in the form of inset white-stone panels carved with depictions of a boat, the Gerard coat of arms and mines/mills industry. These panels may have been added when the building was converted from retail use into a public house in the 1990s. A Congregational Chapel originally stood on the site and a small part of the church wall remains as a parapet of Millingford Brook bridge.

3.14 **Red Lion** (1893) a fine example of a mock-Tudor public house, inspired partly by the arts and crafts movement this style of pub would evolve to become the notorious 'brewers tudor' for pubs of the 1930s. Nevertheless, this building is merit-worthy for its carved timber, including square-rose panels, decorative barge-boards and elegantly curved soffits continuing the mock-timberwork into the eaves. The right-hand bay is an early 2011 extension in a pleasingly complementary style.

3.15 **Central Buildings** is another good quality terracotta building with Flemish-style gables/dormers. It is noteworthy for its large moulded signage 'A-J-H CENTRAL BUILDINGS' at the cornice level.

3.16 The **Golden Lion** (1905) continues the mock-Tudor theme from the Red Lion. This is a grand building with jettied first and second floors. Black and white panelling at second floor, pebbledash at first and decorative fiance and terracotta bay windows at ground level. Above the door is an ornate plasterwork name panel.

3.17 Former **Gerard Arms** (now the Greensway Shopping Centre) was once the grandest pub in the town. Its grandeur is now much reduced by unsympathetic alterations and additions at ground floor, however it does retain some decorative mouldings, a fine central bow-window and a prominent Gerard coat of arms.













3.18 **Kings Arms** is a historic pub, possibly originally a coaching-inn on the crossroads of two turnpike routes. It sits on a prominent corner site and is of a pre-1840s date, noteworthy for its cart-door at the rear which may have serviced stage-coaches.

3.19 **Former Fleece Hotel** is one of the oldest pubs in Ashton with records of a pub of this name from 1740. The building was regularly used for cattle auctions and had a slaughterhouse at the rear of it. The current building dates from an 1826 is unusual in Ashton due to its Jacobean-style and the use of buff sandstone and grey/green roof slates of particular character are the diamond-section chimneys.

3.20 The **Former Police Station** on Warrington Road is an important building in the conservation area forming part of the gateway to the town. Although it lacks original windows it still retains its historic character and carved police crest on the front.

3.21 Former **Angel Inn** is a fairly typical suburban pub of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century but still retains much of its built charm in the form of decorative brickwork, original windows and ornate doorway.



Buildings of Townscape Merit Photos		
		
1. Former Armoury & Band House	2. The Cross Keys	3. Bridge Foot House
		
4. The Sir Thomas Gerard	5. The Red Lion	6. Central Buildings
		
7. The Golden Lion	8. The Gerard Arms	9. The Kings Arms
		
10. The Fleece	11. Former Police Station	12. The Angel Inn



## Issues and opportunities for enhancement

3.22 The main negative factor throughout this character area is the inappropriate and poor quality shop fronts often with loud and unattractive signage that detract from the qualities of the heritage buildings along most of Gerard Street. There are numerous examples of unsuitable materials and designs with unfortunate loss of heritage shopfront detailing and signage.



Picture 24. Poor quality shopfronts including dominant and unattractive signage, clutter and inappropriate attachments.

3.23 In addition, there is a generally poor level of maintenance and repair with evidence of plant growth, broken rainwater goods and poorly maintained fascias/windows/timberwork.

3.24 There is also a prevalence of 'clutter' throughout the conservation area. Satellite dishes are the most prominent incongruous feature, but other features such as the front-mounted air conditioning unit on 48 Gerard Street also detract from the streetscape.



Picture 25 Clutter and poor repair is evidenced in the conservation area.

3.25 Most properties have lost their original windows and the replacements do not follow similar fenestration patterns. There is an opportunity here to try and ensure replacement windows respect historic forms.

3.26 Many properties, especially the larger pubs, have either lost their chimneys or had them truncated. This has a negative effect on the streetscene and further removal of chimneys should be resisted.

3.27 The other significant negative factor is the vehicular impact of through traffic – especially the numerous heavy lorries. Not only does this erode the experience for shoppers who wish to hold a conversation or try to cross the road, but it detracts from the townscape qualities and the opportunity to appreciate the historic buildings. The resulting public realm is of poor quality.



Picture 26. Vehicle traffic dominates the townscape, obscuring many views.

## 4. Heath Road Character Area

### Definition of Character

4.1 The Heath Road Character Area includes traditional terrace housing, built during the Victorian period (located directly behind Gerard Street), along with two public houses, a church institute and some modern infill development. The last terrace built in this area was constructed at the end of the 19th century and has mock-tudor cladding and views over St Thomas's graveyard.

4.2 Of particular interest is 'A Court' a backstreet terrace of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, linked directly to Gerard Street by an enclosed pedestrian passage. Old maps show there was once a number of similar passages in the town and this is the sole survivor. It is known locally as 'Squeeze Belly Entry'.





Picture 27 'Squeeze Belly Entry' from Gerard Street to 'A Court' terrace.

## Open Spaces

- 4.3 The only open space of note in this area is the car park adjacent to the Hingemakers Arms.

## Architecture, Materials and Details

4.4 The simple traditional terraces form the majority of the buildings in this character area. Although these are not listed they do make a special contribution to the area. Their value is associated with the traditional Victorian townscape and the interesting range of brick, fenestration, roofs and details.

4.5 The dominant materials are red brick with slate roofs. The earliest terrace in A Court is a very simple construction and design with basic three-dimensional brick details, and the later properties display more brick detailing and decoration and in the case of 1-13 Heath Street, include bay windows and rendering.





Picture 28. Red brick and slate roofs and decorative brick detailing.

4.6 The striking L-shaped terrace around the graveyard, Church Terrace, has rendered first floors with mock timber cross framed black boarding as decoration. A later terrace on Heath Road, facing the rear of St Thomas's, was probably designed with first floor rendered panels as decoration.



Picture 29. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century Church Terrace overlooking St Thomas Church.

4.7 There is some evidence of vestigial historic signage on Gerard Street. This appears to be an advert for William Apsinall, Chemist and Emigration Agent. This is a traditional form of signage and its

retention and if possible restoration would help restore historic character and could set a precedent for future advertisements in a traditional manner.



Picture 30. Traditional sign showing elements of textual and flower decoration.

Buildings of Townscape Merit



4.7 The **Hingemakers Arms** pub is an important reminder of the industry that once made Ashton famous. The building is relatively plain and lacks much of the ornamentation of other pubs in the area however, it is notable for the ornate statue/sign of the figure of a traditional hingemaker on the front elevation. It is reputedly the only pub of this name in the world.



Picture 31. The Hingemaker – an historical industry in the area, as depicted in the sign for the Hingemakers Arms.

4.8 The **Commercial Hotel** is a fine building and it is unusual for a building of this scale and detailing to be located away from the main street. The scale and detailing of the building (which includes terracotta mouldings and ornate windows) would be more suited to a prime position on Gerard Street.



Buildings of Townscape Merit Photos



1. The Hingemakers Arms



2. The Commercial Hotel

Issues and opportunities for enhancement

4.9 The main concern in this area is the loss of original windows. There is also a risk of losing chimneys (as has happened in the Gerard Street character area).

4.10 There is an opportunity to redevelop the land next to the Hingemakers Arms. A good quality building of 2 storeys with decorative brickwork would well fit the site and provide a focal point for this corner plot.



Picture 32. The open space near the Hingemakers Arms.

## 5. St Oswalds and St Thomas Character Area

### Definition of Character

5.1 This Character Area is centred on the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches to the southwest of the town centre. It is on somewhat of a plateau above the town with a more open and landscaped quality which presents an notable balance within the dense built townscape adjacent. The two churches with their surrounding open spaces, particularly in the case of St Oswalds, have provided a green area for the urban population.



Picture 33 The more open character of this area around the two churches.

To the north of St Oswalds church is a large open recreation area. Although not actually in the Conservation Area, the openness and green character of it reinforces the setting of the character area and helps create a green boundary to the south western side of the town centre.

## Open Spaces

5.2 This area includes the most significant open spaces and landscaped areas within the town centre. The important contribution to the townscape is defined by its open unbuilt character and with the strong emphasis given by the boundary walls, trees, hedges and green spaces.

5.3 St Thomas's graveyard is bounded by a low stone wall which enables views from Warrington Road of the side elevation of the church. A fringe of trees reinforce these edges and provide structure within the graveyard by lining key pedestrian routes and framing the views of the church.



Picture 34 St Thomas Graveyard showing the sandstone walls and trees.

5.4 In contrast, the large and dense lines of tree planting and high hedges which bound the more extensive grounds of St Oswald's creates a sizeable enclosure which is difficult to view from the surrounding roads. Though the church can be seen from its main drive, the summer foliage limits wider views of the graveyard and surrounding area. There is an unplanted part of the site that was formerly the community hall that is now utilised as car-park.





Picture 35. St Oswalds presbytery next to the church showing the enclosed grounds

5.5 The contrast between these two areas is an important element of the character of the town centre. Equally important are the trees and open spaces in the grounds of the Vicarage that link these two landscaped areas.

#### Architecture, Materials and Details

5.6 The buildings of architectural note in this character area are all Grade II listed – St Thomas's church, St Oswalds church and its Presbytery and the gates to its grounds. In addition to their qualities as individual buildings and structures, they are particularly important townscape elements with their surrounding churchyards and the adjacent urban area.

5.7 St Thomas's church and tower introduces the town centre to those arriving from the south. The churchyard with its low boundary wall provides a large open area which allows good views of the side elevation of the church and across to the mixture of attractive terrace houses that form the eastern border.



Picture 36. The tower of St Thomas Church and its presence as a gateway to the area

5.8 The grounds of St Oswald's church and presbytery are even larger. In contrast to St Thomas's, the heavy boundary planting of trees and bushes encloses the churchyard and gardens and creates an area of limited visibility from the surrounding roads.

5.9 St Oswald's grounds used to be bounded to the east by a line of terrace properties along Warrington Road which included the Vicarage for St Thomas's. The terraces to the south of The Angel public house have been demolished and replaced with modern (c. 20 century) buildings. The presence of mature trees and other landscaping provides a 'green' visual link between the two churchyards. The 20<sup>th</sup> century housing around the corner of Warrington Road and Vicarage Road has little visual or heritage merit, except for the interest in two asymmetrical sets of semi-detached houses which retain original leaded coloured glass.





Picture 37 The leaded-coloured glass of the houses on Vicarage Road.

### Buildings of Townscape Merit

All the buildings of townscape merit in this area are Listed buildings and therefore of very high heritage value.

#### 5.10 Church of St Thomas

The present church was built in 1891–93 by F.H. Oldham of Manchester with a later vestry by Paley and Austin. The building is of local red sandstone with a tower, three-bay nave and clerestory with side-aisles. There are elements of perpendicular tracery in the windows but the church follows no prominent gothic style.

#### 5.11 Church of St Oswald and St Edmund Arrowsmith Church



Built in 1925-1930, this church is recognised as a highly accomplished piece of early gothic historicism inspired by the churches of southern France. The church was largely funded by the Gerard family who were staunch Roman Catholics. The church is ornately decorated with high-quality carvings, fine Arts & Craft stained glass and finished in fine Darley Dale and Parbold Stone.

The church is also the shrine of the martyr St Edmund Arrowsmith who's holy hand is preserved as a relic in the church. Saint Edmund's mother was a member of the Gerard family.

5.12 Gate and Gate Piers To St Oswald And St Edmund Arrowsmith

These are the original gates and stone piers of the 1822 chapel that stood on the site before the present church was built. They have open scrollwork sides and decorative cornices. The gateposts have pine-cone finials and the pickets that make the gates are topped with spear-heads finials.

Buildings of Townscape Merit Photos



1. St Thomas Church



2. St Oswald and St Edmund Arrowsmith's Church



3. Gate and Piers to St Oswald's and St Edmund Arrowsmiths

### Issues and opportunities for enhancement

5.13 There is little opportunity for enhancement or development within this part of the conservation area although the land formerly occupied by the community hall may come forward at some point in the future. The high significance of the area and the proximity of listed buildings mean that any development would have to be of high quality and consistent with the preservation of the character of this area.

## 6. Summary

6.1 The Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area is a large urban town-centre conservation area with a very strong commercial character. The quality of the conservation area is generally fair but showing creeping signs of decline. Where the conservation area is weakest is the quality of historic shopfronts, especially along Gerard Street. The high levels of traffic, particularly HGVs is detrimental to the character of the area introducing a hostile, noisy and dangerous element to a town centre high street.

6.2 Being a commercial conservation area, there is a greater pressure for change and development. Managing that change in a way which allows economic growth but also protects the important qualities of the conservation area is key to ensuring sustainable development overall enhancement of the conservation area.

6.3 The following summarises the neutral and negative factors identified in the conservation area that present opportunities for enhancing the character of the conservation area:

- There are some original shopfronts remaining but these are being crowded out by modern unsympathetic ones that detract from the quality of the buildings themselves.
- Fine details such as chimneys, barge-boards and sash windows have been lost in the conservation area. Their restoration would be valuable.
- The addition of external roller shutters with exposed boxes harm the amenity of the area, this is exacerbated when used on takeaways which remain shut most of the day.
- Vacancies are increasing, especially at the north end of Gerard Street away from the more commercial area.
- There is a general lack of maintenance with many gutters and upper-floor windows being blocked, broken or unkempt.

#### Buildings and Sites at Risk

6.4 Former Kings Arms Pub is one of the historic pubs of Ashton and has been empty since around 2019. There have been numerous instances of anti-social behaviour and increasing neglect of the site. As it is on a busy junction it is quickly becoming an eyesore site and in need of action.

6.5 The New Fleece Hotel is another former pub that has been empty for a number of years. Despite plans for conversion being approved in 2020 and work starting it appears to be a 'stalled site'. Special attention should be paid to its progress and action taken to avoid its loss.

6.6 The former Natwest Bank on the junction at the bottom of Gerard Street is a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century building that has been empty for a number of years. There is currently a life planning application but like the two sites above it is a site at risk.

## 7. Conservation Area Boundary Review

7.1 The boundary of the conservation area was considered as part of the review of this Conservation Area Appraisal and the conclusion was that amendments were not necessary.

## 8. Article 4 Direction Review

8.1 Residential dwellinghouses enjoy a variety of permitted development rights which mean that certain alterations can be carried out without the requirement to obtain planning consent. These include works such as replacement windows, doors, addition of rooflights, solar panels, removal of chimneys and demolition of boundary walls, amongst others. Changes of this nature can affect features of importance and significance within the conservation area, having a detrimental impact upon character.



8.2 Under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015, permitted development rights may be restricted which means that planning consent must be secured prior to any such works being undertaken. Expanding the types of development that require planning permission provides the Council with the opportunity to ensure that the proposed development is not detrimental to the character of the conservation area.

8.3 During the review of this Conservation Area Appraisal the potential for introducing an Article 4 Direction has been considered. This assessment has considered: (a) the existence of architectural features that contribute character of the conservation area but may be altered/removed without planning consent; and (b) the degree of change/alteration to these features in the subject property and block, thus the level of intactness and impact of further loss on the character of the conservation area.

8.4 This review concluded that although Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area is predominantly commercial in nature, with only a small element of residential, that element, specifically Church Terrace, is vitally important in helping inform the character and appearance of the area and contributes significantly to the setting of St Thomas Church. As such the making of an Article 4 Direction is recommended. The details of this will be in an upcoming appendix.



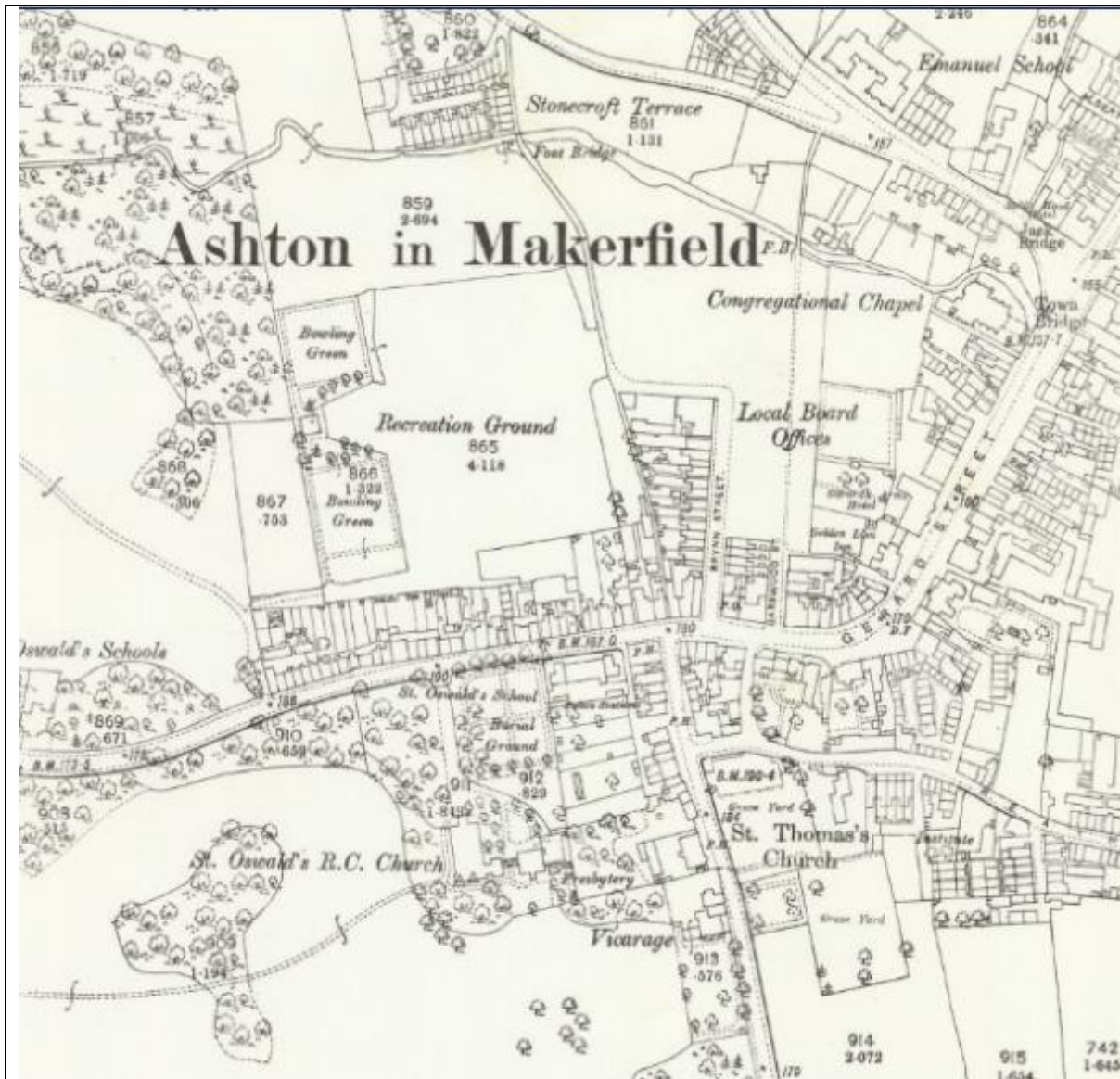
Picture 38. Church Terrace showing details of timber cladding and chimneys.

## 9. Historic Map Regression

To understand what makes a place significant, it is important to understand its historic development. One way to understand that is through historic map regression. Below is a sample of historic maps showing the development of Ashton between 1845 and 1938.

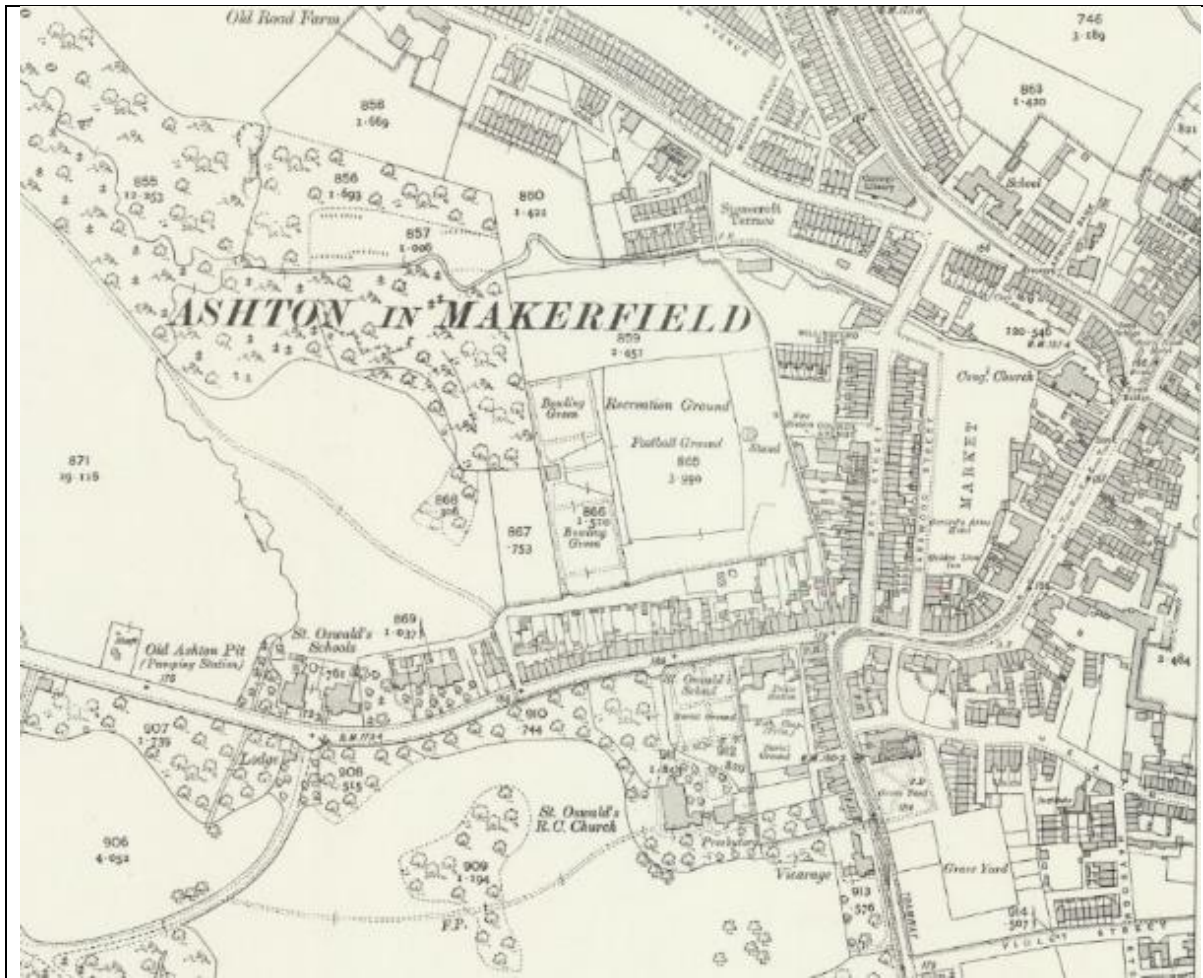


Ordnance Survey, 1845, Ashton-in-Makerfield



Ordnance Survey, 1891, Ashton-in-Makerfield





Ordnance Survey, 1908, Ashton-in-Makerfield



Ordnance Survey, 1928, Ashton-in-Makerfield



Ordnance Survey, 1947, Ashton-in-Makerfield





Ordnance Survey, 1956, Ashton-in-Makerfield



Ordnance Survey, 1965, Ashton-in-Makerfield