

Shipston Road Character Study

1 Context

There has long been a core of settlement on the east side of the river crossing, and the crossing itself is naturally the focus of a number of roads, major and minor, leading in to Stratford.

Shipston Road is probably the most significant of these, being the main road to Oxford. Building began first along its western side throughout the Victorian period, but the eastern side remained undeveloped until the inter-war period.

The character of this area differs significantly between the eastern and western sides of the road. These need to be treated separately, although (for reasons stated elsewhere in this study) any policy recommendations need to consider the road as a unit.



Plate 1: Aerial view of study area
Image from Stratford upon Avon District Council
West (river and town centre) to the top

2 Site and setting: introduction

2.1 Location within settlement; routes etc

This area is part of Bridgetown, the suburban area immediately south of the River Avon where four approach roads converge on the Clopton Bridge, a Scheduled Ancient Monument but also the site of the heaviest traffic of Stratford's road network. The Shipston Road is part of the A3400 between Birmingham and Banbury.

2.2 Landscape

This area is generally flat, being on the edge of the floodplain (although physically separated from it by the tramway embankment). Even so, floodwaters have occasionally reached the Shipston Road, particularly in more recent years. To the south of this area, however, the road dips and then rises; at this point the tramway embankment is a much more significant barrier.

The area lies on alluvium to the west, and river terrace gravels to the east. The geological map suggests that the junction between the two deposits runs immediately behind the buildings fronting the west side of Shipston Road.¹

2.3 General character and plan form summary



Map 1: General character

West to the top

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- Area 1a: the area of 1930s plots east of Shipston Road.
- Area 1b: a generally very similar area south of the agricultural trackway (omitted from the original area boundary), considered here since it forms some of the first buildings seen on entering the town from the direction of Oxford and Shipston.
- Area 2: the area of very varied plots and buildings west of Shipston Road.
- Area 3a: an area of open land behind the majority of the plots of Area 2, hidden from the town by the tramway embankment vegetation.
- Area 3b: as Area 3a, but where substantial development has already taken place (the butterfly farm).
- Area 4: several plots east of Shipston Road which have been amalgamated in two larger-scale apartment developments.

2.4 Landmarks/views

The sinuous nature of the road means that there are no significant lengthy vistas. The tramway embankment provides a physical separation between the road and the river and the main part of the town, allowing virtually no views of the distant town (save perhaps from some upper floors of houses at the south-east section of the road). During the late-autumn to early-spring period at least, however, there are occasional glimpses of the church spire across the river. Pedestrians on the tramway do have good views of the town across the meadows and floodplain, but

¹ Geological Survey sheet 200, 1974.

much less of a view into the study area for much of the year owing to dense vegetation.

3. Historical development: overview

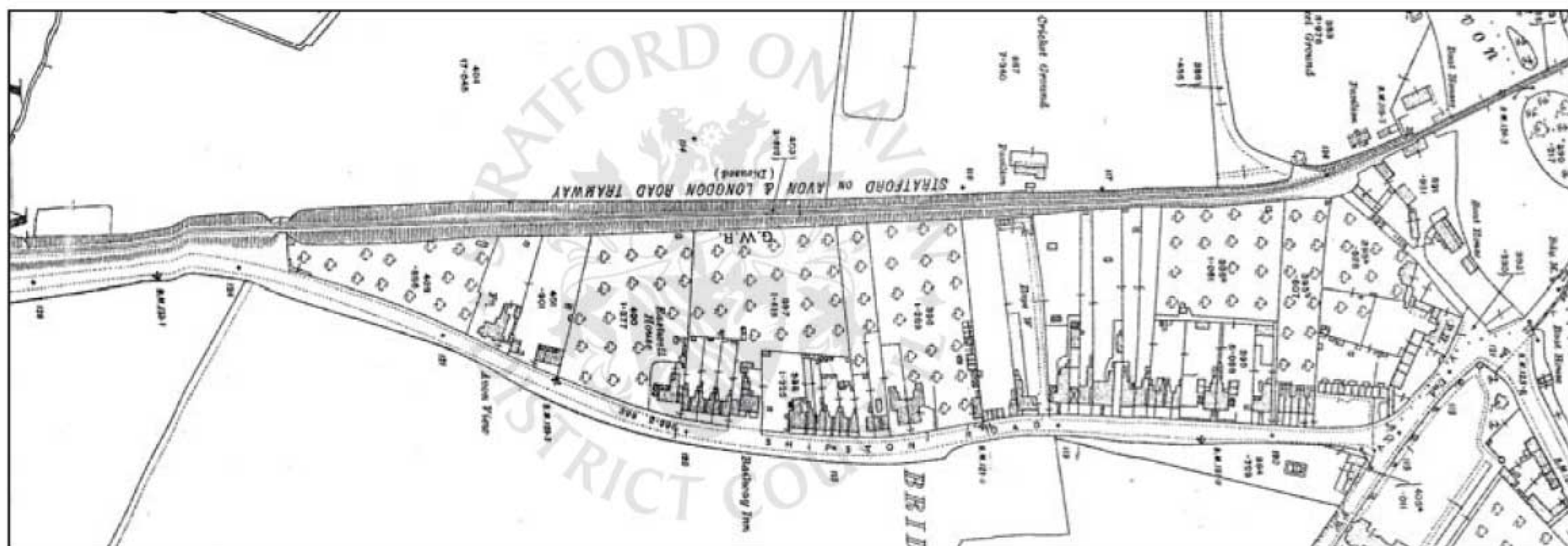
3.1 Brief summary of the settlement

This area east of the Avon was an early suburb, probably developing largely after the present Clopton Bridge was built, c. 1480-1490. At the bridgehead are two significant surviving buildings; both Listed, albeit much altered: the Swan's Nest Hotel of 1673, and the timber-framed Alveston Manor Hotel, of which the central block is c. 1500.²

In 1823 a bridge and embankment were constructed to carry a horse-drawn tramway from the town centre to Shipston-on-Stour. This embankment formed the terminus to building plots fronting the west side of Shipston Road; although there were always some large open plots here, behind the road frontages. This development continued intermittently throughout the Victorian period; one house of c. 1840 survives.

The east side of the road remained undeveloped until the inter-war period.

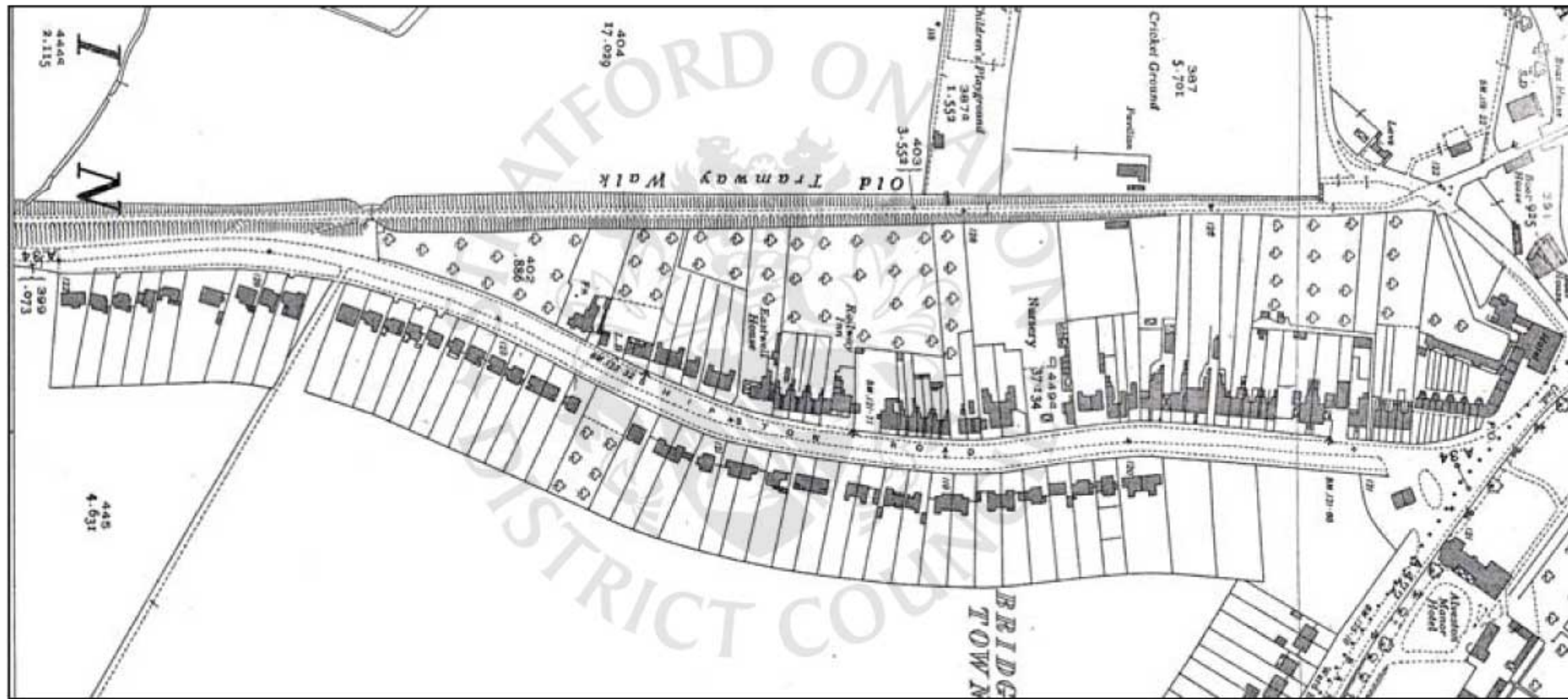
3.2 Details of the study area, using historical maps



Map 2: Ordnance Survey 1914
West to the top

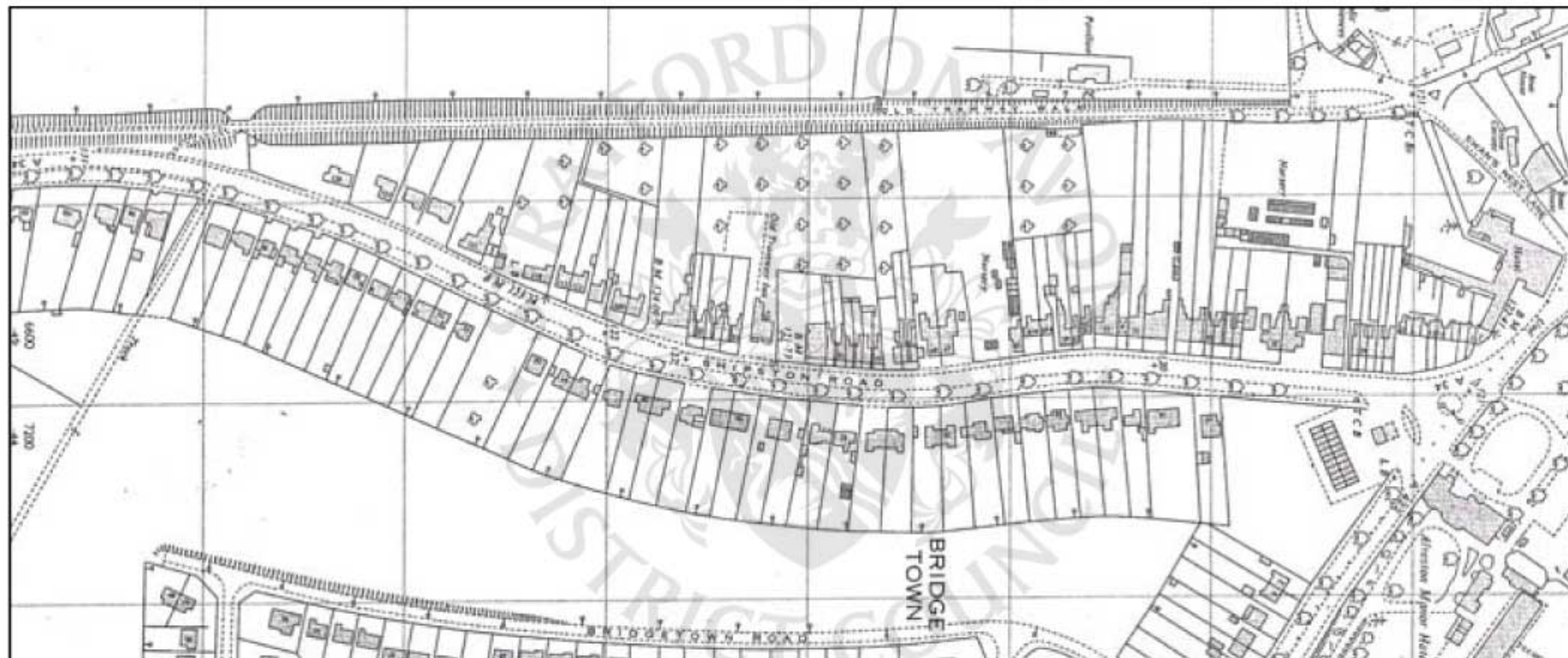
The 1914 OS 25" sheet shows that much, although not all, of the west side has been built up. Plots are relatively short; much of the land between the road and the tramway being shown as orchard. On the east side there are no buildings except for a small group at the junction with the Banbury Road. A pre-urban trackway is visible to the south-east, crossing the road and leading to a bridge underneath the tramway.

² Pevsner, N. and Wedgwood, A. (1966) *Warwickshire* (Buildings of England series) Penguin, Harmondsworth, p. 234.



Map 3: Ordnance Survey 1938
West to the top

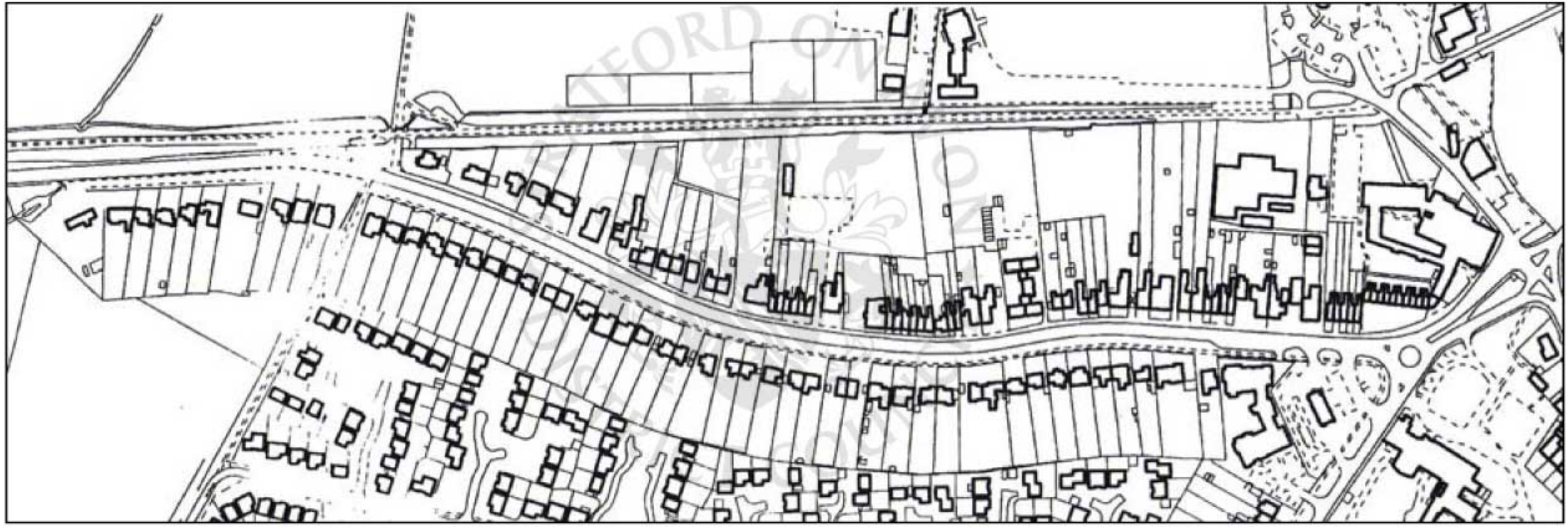
The 1938 OS 25" sheet (published 1946) shows the infilling of some plots on the west side, although with plots still truncated by orchards. To the east, most plots are developed with the exception of 68-70, shown as a single plot, part vacant, part orchard. Two vacant plots exist north of 22; the small group at the Banbury Road junction has gone and a single new building erected just at the junction.



Map 4: Ordnance Survey 1965
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The 1965 OS 25" sheet shows the complete build-up of both sides of the road. To the west there is evidence of various commercial uses, with two nurseries truncating several plots, and several other truncated plot tails are marked as orchards. To the east all plots are developed with the exception of 68-70. The corner with Banbury Road is shown as a single block of 22 garages, both otherwise vacant.



Map 5: Contemporary GIS

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The contemporary map shows a minor amount of infilling, especially of the few vacant plots. To the north, the extensive developments of apartments (behind the corner petrol station), the butterfly farm and the extended hotels appear incongruously out of scale.

4 Spatial analysis

4.1 General character of streets

This is essentially a single-street area; the street forming a major entrance route to the town from Oxford and the south. It is a busy main road, sinuous in form and thus not permitting any distant vistas. It terminates at the north at a particularly busy roundabout junction.

4.2 Character and inter-relationship of spaces

There are no significant public spaces along the length of this street until the roundabout at the Banbury Road junction is reached. However, the raised grass verges on the east side, and hence the set-back of the buildings in comparison to the west side, do make a significant contribution to the open character of the road.

The roundabout area is a very indeterminate space, the character of which is entirely determined by the geometry of standard road layouts.

4.3 Movement patterns/uses

This is the main A3400 between Birmingham and Oxford; although through traffic has declined since the construction of the M40.

The County Council's traffic counts in September 2004 record a 24-hour weekly average of 7,541 vehicles, an annual morning peak of 550 vehicles per hour and annual evening peak of 522 vehicles per hour.

5 Built character analysis

5.1 Plot patterns (including dimensional analysis)

The tramway forms the terminus for all plots on the west side. However, historically few plots appear to have run all the way to this barrier. Some separate plots in this 'backland' area existed (as nurseries or orchards). Some remain as gardens; others are overgrown and neglected.



Plate 2: Lengthy but under-used plots to rear of Shipston Road (west side)

Area 1a

(inter-war development east of road)

	Plot length (m)*	Plot width (m)**	Plot area (m ²)
Average	63.99	12.75	833.74
Maximum	65.81	14.46	1047.12
Minimum	62.46	11.73	748.69

* measured along the southern plot boundary

** measured along the street frontage

The degree of regularity, ie little variation, in plot widths and lengths suggests a single-period layout. The variations in plot area are explained by plots accommodating the road curvature.

Area 1b

(inter-war development east of road but south of original study area)

	Plot length (m)*	Plot width (m)**	Plot area (m ²)
Average	64.43	21.29	1097.56
Maximum	65.73	60.87	2334.13
Minimum	61.63	13.0	753.15

* measured along the southern plot boundary

** measured along the street frontage

This area has rather more variety in its plot size than does Area 1a, although a large part of this statistical variation is accounted for by the large plot at the southern extremity of this plot series.

Area 2

(varied development west of the road, excluding *separate* plots with no road frontage)

	Plot length (m)*	Plot width (m)**	Plot area (m ²)
Average	69.74	9.57	933.66
Maximum	118.64	23.93	4781.59†
Minimum	36.77	3.5	233.34

* measured along the southern plot boundary

** measured along the street frontage

† there are two large 'tail' plots now clearly annexed to frontage plots, and hence included here

5.2 Building patterns

Area 1a

(inter-war development east of road)

	Building setback (m)*	Building footprint (m ²)**	% of plot built over
Average	11.28	98.89	11.85
Maximum	12.87	211.81	23.6
Minimum	9.72	71.97	7.4

* measured perpendicularly from the front of plot to the nearest part of the building.

** includes all mapped extensions, outbuildings etc.

Area 1b

(inter-war development east of road but south of original study area)

	Building setback (m)*	Building footprint (m ²)**	% of plot built over
Average	10.66	115.21	11.29
Maximum	12.51	156.46	15.9
Minimum	9.4	76.99	6.7

* measured perpendicularly from the front of plot to the nearest part of the building.

** includes all mapped extensions, outbuildings etc.

Area 2

(varied development west of the road, excluding *separate* plots with no road frontage)

	Building setback (m)*	Building footprint (m ²)**	% of plot built over
Average	6.0	151.99	22.71
Maximum	15.81	549.25	49.3
Minimum	3.06	61.32	5.2

* measured perpendicularly from the front of plot to the nearest part of the building.

** includes all mapped extensions, outbuildings etc.

5.3 Architectural and/or historical qualities of buildings



Plates 3 and 4: Architectural forms in Shipston Road

The east side of the road (Plate 3) is dominated by inter-war speculative houses, mostly detached. They have little intrinsic architectural or historic merit, but are typical of the period and generally of higher status and quality than the properties developed at this time along Alcester and Evesham Roads.

Some infill to the west is of the inter-war and post-war periods; likewise this is of little intrinsic merit.

However there are some older buildings on the west side (Plate 4), of which the oldest appears to be of 1840.³ Most of the others are of the late-Victorian and early-Edwardian periods, being a mixture of substantial villas and small terraces. These have character as a group but are not of individual merit.

Some of the most recent infill development is attempting to use design ideas from the surrounding older properties. This can be done more successfully to the west, where Victorian and Edwardian terraces already exist. It is less successful to the east as it visibly contrasts with the rhythm of building and space set up by the detached and semi-detached properties.



*Map 6: Building periods
West to the top*

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³ Currently the Avon Hotel; the date is given on the hotel's website.

- Early-mid Victorian
- Late-Victorian - Edwardian
- Inter-war
- Early post-war c. 1955-1970
- Middle post-war c. 1970-1990
- Recent, post-1990

Quite a number of buildings in this area have alterations and adaptations, including various extensions built throughout the post-war period. Some of the more recent are well-designed. The incidence of front garden conversion for parking (mapped as blue dots),⁴ and window replacement (red), are very high in this area.



Map 7: Front garden conversions and replacement windows

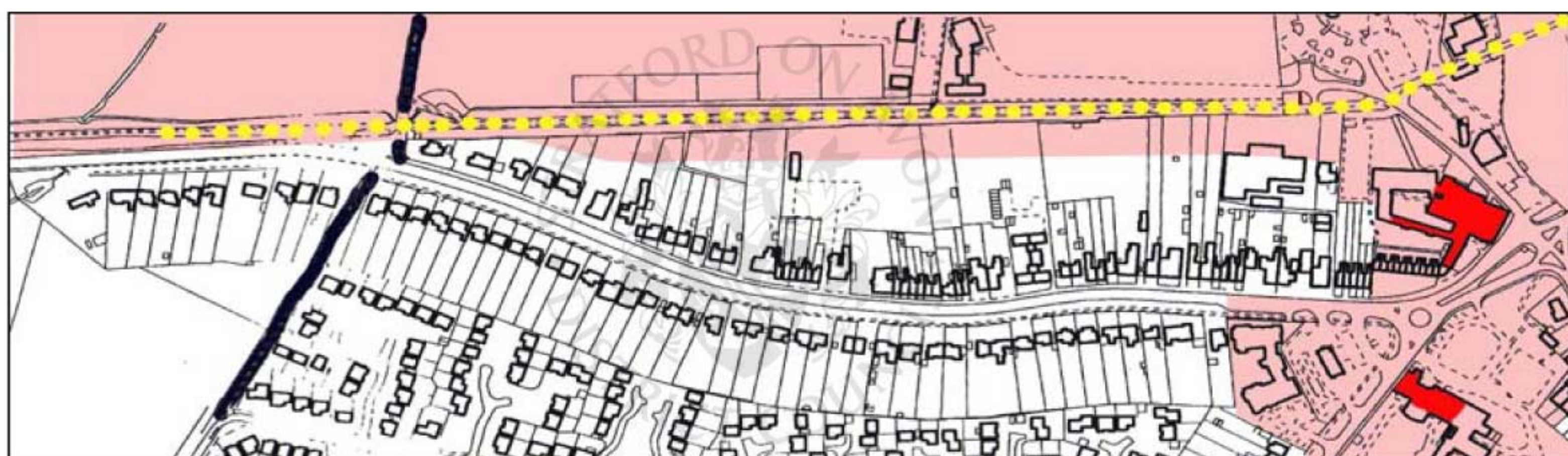
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5.4 Predominant local/traditional building materials

Virtually all buildings are of brick. Some of the late-Victorian/Edwardian buildings use stone detailing, and most have slate roofs of shallow pitch. Many of the inter-war houses have brick lower storeys and pebble-dashed/rendered, usually painted, upper storeys. They have tile roofs.

5.5 Audit of heritage assets



Map 8: Existing conservation area and Listed buildings

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⁴ From visual estimate, over 50% of the road frontage.

The tramway and parts of some of the adjoining plot tails fall within the town centre conservation area, shaded pink (although the boundary does not follow any clear property or physical boundary, and cuts across two buildings). The petrol station and large block of apartments behind it are also part of the conservation area, as is the Alveston Manor Hotel and its grounds, which terminate the view at the junction with the Banbury Road. Listed buildings are in red. The tramway is shown with yellow dots. The solid black line is a pre-urban agricultural trackway down to the river.

There is no record of significant archaeological interest in this area; although there is a single find of a medieval coin from one of the gardens west of the road⁵ and a demolished medieval chapel is suggested south of the bridge.⁶

5.6 Contribution of key unlisted buildings

The Avon Hotel is set forward on its plot and rendered/painted pale yellow, and forms a prominent marker to travellers from the south. However the building is typical of its date, is architecturally unremarkable, and would benefit from some external refurbishment.

The larger late-Victorian houses to the north-west of the area have some significant presence owing to their scale and detailing. Many have been converted for commercial use, and signs, car-parking etc can detract from their scale and architectural detail.

The Tramway public house, set very slightly further back from the road than its neighbouring terrace, is significant as a long-established use, and as an older property in good condition, rather than for any visual prominence.

The apartment block behind the garage at the Banbury Road junction is out of scale and unsympathetic in detail.

5.7 Public realm audit

The road and footpaths are surfaced in patched tarmac. The street furniture is standardised.

There is an inter-war post-box built in to a gatepost on the west side of the road.

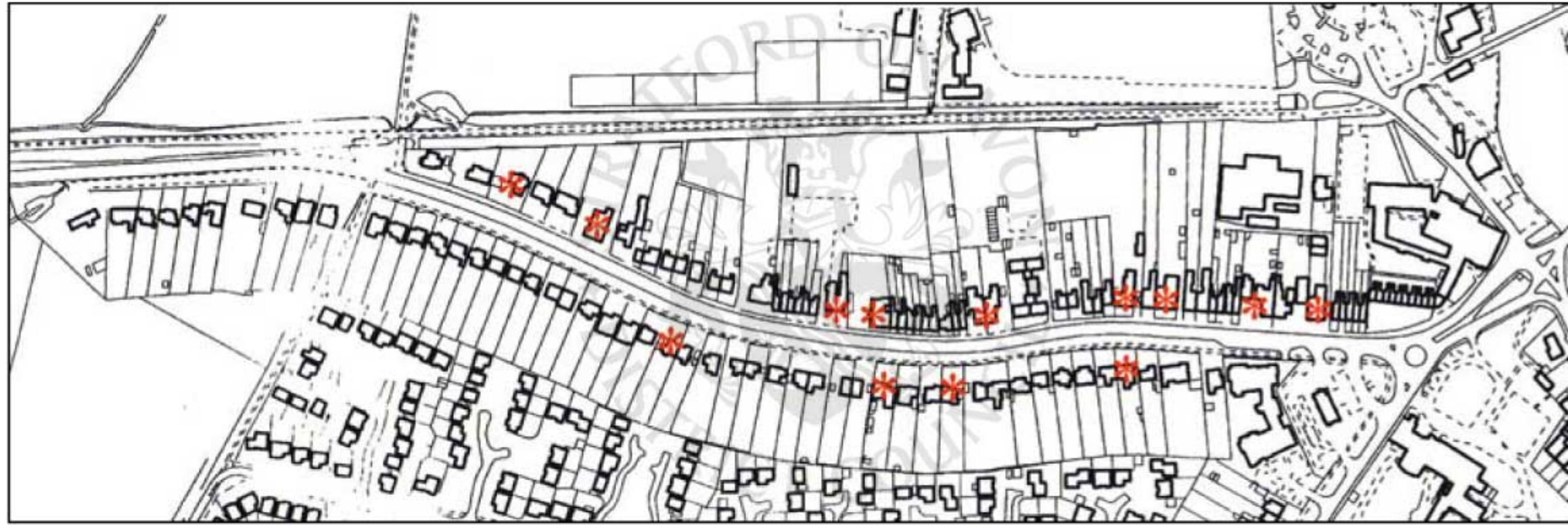
6 Other contributing factors

6.1 Land uses

The bulk of the area is in residential use. This is particularly so on the east side, where there are several commercial uses (guest-houses) operating in converted inter-war houses. On the west side there are more hotel and guest-house uses, and a pub. These commercial uses are indicated as red asterisks.

⁵ Warwickshire County Council, Sites and Monuments Record.

⁶ Slater, T.R. and Wilson, C. (1977) *Archaeology and development in Stratford-upon-Avon* West Midlands Urban Research Committee, University of Birmingham, Fig. 5.



Map 9: Commercial uses

West to the top

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6.2 Senses: sights, sounds, smells

Shipston Road is a busy main road, particularly at peak hours; traffic noise can be intrusive.

This survey was undertaken in January-February. It is impossible to say how significant or intrusive noise from the pub users, and from activities on the playing fields west of the raised tramway, are in high summer and peak tourist season.

6.3 Vegetation



Map 10: Open space and vegetation

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The plot tails on the western side are sheltered to a very considerable extent from the tramway footpath (and hence the meadows and the town itself) by substantial mature trees and vegetation (mostly deciduous ash, oak and elm; represented by green dots). It is "an important visual edge" to the town centre conservation area, with "significant tree groups".⁷ This shelter belt is overgrown and poorly maintained. However, it is of great importance in shielding this area from the town (or vice-versa).

There are some significant street trees on the eastern grass verge. Gaps between many of the houses allow glimpses of mature trees in many back gardens.

⁷ Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (1992) *Stratford-upon-Avon conservation area* Stratford-upon-Avon District Council, see section 4.4.4 and the map Appendix B.



Plate 5: Mature street trees and grass verge

7 Appraisal

7.1 Development pressure analysis



Map 11: Development pressure

West to the top

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Map 11 shows major applications in red, and those explicitly requiring the demolition of the principal building in yellow. The clustering of applications relating to the two large apartment developments south of the petrol station is clear. Of interest is the general lack of major applications across the bulk of the inter-war houses east of the road; and also that the large plot tails to the west have been subject to a small number of applications. The application details (Appendix) show determined attempts especially in recent years to increase densities in this area, by demolishing original buildings and constructing larger structures.

7.2 Key positive features/areas

The tramway itself is a strong positive feature. It acts as a boundary to the area, and it (and its associated vegetation) separate the area from the park and the town to the west.

The inter-war houses to the east of the road are a positive feature. They are of somewhat higher status than those on Alcester and Evesham Roads, and most are in somewhat better repair. Although there have been a couple of insertions, and a number of extensions, this forms a coherent period grouping.

The grass verge, with its mature trees, is a strong positive feature.

7.3 Neutral areas

Much of the built development to the west, however, is of varied form and quality; some properties being in need of maintenance. At present this area can be characterised as neutral, with the capability of improvement.

7.4 Negative features/areas (loss, damage, intrusion)

Areas 3a and 3b are negative in two senses. Area 3b has been over-developed, with large-scale commercial buildings out of keeping with the rest of the area. The large rear plots of much of Area 3a are generally neglected and overgrown. Areas 2 and 3a are prone to flooding.

Area 4 comprises two apartment blocks, and its location adjoining the petrol station should be considered. The petrol station and the older apartment block are prominent and intrusive features for traffic leaving the town, although they are within the town centre conservation area boundary. The two apartment blocks are out of scale with the original inter-war individual houses east of the road.

7.5 Character zones

The character zones in this small area are identical to the plan zones already identified (see Map 1).

7.6 Areas under existing or potential threat

There is, clearly, pressure for more intensive residential development along this road. Several redevelopments for flats/apartments are in progress or in prospect. One proposes the demolition of a late-Victorian hotel, which is set forward on its plot and rendered pale yellow, thus forming a prominent marker to travellers from the south. However the building is typical of its date and is architecturally unremarkable.



Plate 6: Hotel on West Side of Shipston Road

Given the recent Cala Homes apartment block (in Area 4) it cannot be thought that the threat is only to the already-varied development west of the road.

It also seems quite possible that further pressures for changing uses of individual houses to commercial bed and breakfast facilities, possibly with further physical adaptations (extensions, car parking) could be forthcoming.

8 Discussion of special characteristics

The tramway, the westernmost boundary of the area, is of some historical interest although its use as originally planned was short-lived. Public responses value it highly as a pedestrian route and historical feature.

The street is a pleasant entrance to the town, albeit marred by traffic noise and congestion. Some of the older buildings have been described by Inspectors at Appeal as "attractively detailed" and making "a pleasant contribution to the street scene" (decision letter, APP/J3720/A/02/1097336).

However, the character of this area can best be described as "varied". This applies to its land uses – although principally residential, there are some pub/hotel/guest-house uses. Its buildings are likewise varied, but within the range typical of the two main periods of its development; late-Victorian/Edwardian, and inter-war. There is no significant archaeological interest nor historical interest, even in the original plot formation process.

It is therefore difficult to identify any special architectural or historic interest.

9 Recommendation on designation

The tramway is already protected within the town centre conservation area. This extends down the embankment and into the plots immediately to its east, thus affording protection to the trees and providing a 'buffer zone'.

Designation of Shipston Road as a conservation area is not recommended. Following the legal definition of a conservation area, and mindful of precedents elsewhere, there is insufficient here of "special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".⁸

However, the inter-war housing east of the road, which has been identified as being a unified single-period layout, of higher standard and maintenance than some of the other areas considered, might be suitable for designation as an "Area of townscape interest".

10 Existing policy

Guidance in the Local Plan, the Town Design Statement, and the District Design Guidance, applies.

Local Plan Review Policy SUA.13 limits the conversion of residential properties to guest houses and other forms of visitor accommodation along the west side of this part of Shipston Road.

11 Policy and management suggestions

11.1 Areas 1a and 1b

The frontage development along Shipston Road is of varied form and character within a limited palette of typical inter-war styles. Further conversions of front gardens for car parking should retain as much of the existing front garden enclosures as possible. Roof conversions should have flat rooflights or appropriately-designed dormers on the front elevation. 'Terracisation' should be strongly discouraged and where extensions are proposed they should be in scale and subservient to the original dwelling and set back from the building line.

Individual properties could be replaced with new development of appropriate scale and form, and ideally employing the dominant local materials of rendered upper floor and brick ground floor. Any such new building should respect the local characteristic of building footprint being some 11-12% of the plot area on average. Building setbacks should be within the range of 9.4-13m. Large-scale plot amalgamations (cf Area 4) should be resisted, as this would damage the characteristic of individual separate buildings.

The grass verge is a significant open area and it, and its trees, should be carefully maintained.

11.2 Area 2

In this already very varied area there is some scope for new building and conversions, particularly with some extension along the longer rear plots (subject to standard conditions on privacy etc, and having regard to the existing conservation area designation which extends into these plots). Traffic resulting from any such development would require careful consideration, as recent Appeal decisions demonstrate. Plots are already at an average of 23% built over, significantly higher than Area 1. Building setbacks vary from 3-16m, so there is scope for variation around the average of 6m.

⁸ 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act.

Nevertheless, plot amalgamations and large-scale apartment blocks or similar should be resisted.

If property owners can be encouraged to maintain and improve their buildings, the character and appearance of this side of the road could be improved significantly. There is particular potential in some of the larger Victorian properties to the north of the area.

11.3 Area 3

The precedent for significant development in Area 3 has been set, particularly by the butterfly farm. As this area is sheltered from easy view from the town and river, as many of the large plots were not originally directly connected with the road frontage plots, and as a number are neglected and in poor condition, it is suggested that there is scope for introducing some new development in this location. Good design would be vital, although there would be scope for high-quality contemporary design.

APPENDIX: Selected development control information 1990-2004

Date	Address	Type	Decision
1994	r/o garage	20 apartments	permitted
1995	r/o garage	46 apartments	permitted
1995	42 Shipston Road	extension as 11-bed residential home	permitted
1997	42 Shipston Road	demolish; 6 flats	refused
2000	51-55 Shipston Road & land r/o 55a-69	80 apartments etc	refused at appeal
2001	51-55 Shipston Road & land r/o 55a-69	redevelop 51-55 as 24 apartments. 6 town houses, 50 apartments to rear	withdrawn
2002	51-55 Shipston Road & land r/o 55a-69	redevelop 51-55 as 21 apartments. 6 town houses, 50 apartments to rear	pending
2002	105 Shipston Road	6 flats	permitted
2002	16-18 Shipston Road	demolish; 3 town houses, 6 apartments	permitted
2003	16-18 Shipston Road	demolish; 3 town houses, 6 apartments & 4 additional dwellings	permitted
2004	51-53 Shipston Road	9 new apartments; convert hotel back to 2 dwellings	withdrawn
2004	Avon View Hotel	demolish; 9 apartments	withdrawn
2004	Avon View Hotel	demolish; 9 apartments	permitted
2004	89 Shipston Road	4 new apartments; convert house into 5 apartments	pending