Old Matlock
Conservation Area Appraisal

5. Landscape
Preamble

The natural and man-made landscapes that provide the setting for buildings are important elements affecting any Conservation Area.

The spectacular landscape both beyond and within the Conservation Area is characterised by such features as Pic Tor; precipitous cliff faces associated with the River Derwent gorge and the edge of the limestone plateau; areas of dense woodland; the Church of St. Giles and the open churchyard from where magnificent wide-ranging views are revealed, in contrast with views along the low-lying Bentley Brook.

Landscape Designations (See Fig. 9).

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (R.I.G.S.) is a non-statutory designation afforded to sites of significant geological and geomorphological value. The R.I.G.S. register is maintained by the Derbyshire R.I.G.S. steering group. R.I.G.S. are protected within the land-use policies of statutory Local Plans specifically policy NBE3 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

There is one R.I.G.S. within the Conservation Area:

- Pic Tor RIGS, which includes Pic Tor itself and the cliff faces down to the River Derwent along with part of the churchyard. It is designated for its Carboniferous limestone strata which are reef type Eyam limestones exposures with good sedimentological and mineralogical features.

Derwent Valley Heritage Trail

Opened in April 2003 the Derwent Valley Heritage Trail is a 55 mile route through the along the river Derwent from Ladybower reservoir in the north to its confluence with the river Trent at Derwent Mouth near Shardlow in the south. It was developed by the Derwent Valley Trust who are working to develop the valley into a National Heritage Corridor. The route is protected from prejudicial development by policy L10 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

Protected Trees (see Fig. 10)

The Conservation Area designation provides all trees with a stem girth of 75 mm and above measured 1 metre above ground level with a measure of protection. No felling, lopping or topping of these trees is permitted without providing six weeks notice to the Council. In addition Tree Preservation Orders (T.P.O.s) have been placed on a number of trees in the Conservation Area:

Individual trees at:

- Matlock Green on the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area - 1 no. Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus), 2 no. Ash (Fraxinus excelsior)
- Matlock Green in the field adjacent to the above – 1 no. Alder (Alnus glutinosa)

Group orders: at:

- The Rectory, Matlock – Several trees of whatever species including Ash (Fraxinus excelsior), Lime (Tilia spp), Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus) and Beech (Fagus sylvatica)
- Matlock Green in the south eastern field – 10 no. Beech (Fagus sylvatica), 7 no. Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus), 2 no. Ash (Fraxinus excelsior), 1 no. Oak (Quercus spp), 1 no. Hornbeam (Carpinus betulus), 1 no. Pine (Pinus spp).
- Matlock Green area to the rear of Malthouse Row – mixed deciduous species mainly alder (Alnus spp) and Willow (Salix spp). It should be noted that the area has been the subject of clearance and replanting as part of permitted development in recent times.
In addition to the above Derbyshire Dales District Council TPOs there is a Derbyshire County Council TPO placed on trees in an extended area within and beyond the Conservation Area on the south eastern side.

Works to trees covered by T.P.O.s can only be undertaken with the written consent of the Council except where they are deemed to be dead, dying or dangerous. It may be a requirement to replace any protected tree that is felled with a tree of appropriate species and size. Policy NBE6 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan is relevant (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

**Historic Parks and Gardens**

English Heritage maintains a national Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. Designation of a park or garden on this Register is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for development and scrutiny is given to the impact of that development on its character or setting. Designated Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest are protected by policy NBE23 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan (see section on Conservation Policy and Legislation).

There is one designated Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest on the national Register at High Tor, which immediately abuts the Conservation Area to the south.

**Matlock Parks**

The Matlock Parks Project completed in 2008 was a Heritage Lottery and Derbyshire Dales District Council funded scheme to restore and improve five parks within the Derwent valley. Pic Tor (including Knowleston Gardens, the promenade and the war memorial) is one of those five parks. Hall Leys Park, which immediately abuts the Conservation Area on its western side, is another.

The Matlock Parks are safeguarded against inappropriate development by policy L13 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

**Safeguarded Recreational Sites and Facilities**

The District Council has identified sites that it considers of such importance for recreation that it will protect them from development. Local Plan Policy L3 offers this protection. (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

The football and cricket ground at Causeway Lane immediately abutting the Conservation Area is so designated.

**Protected Important Open Space**

The District Council recognises that within settlements there are open spaces that are important to their character and appearance. These aspects could be adversely affected by development so they have been given special protection in the Local Plan by policy SF2 (see section on ‘Conservation Policy and Legislation’).

Open space at Deanfields Recreation Ground, which overlooks the Conservation Area to the north, is protected in this way.

**Landscape Character**

Though much of the Conservation Area – particularly in and around Matlock Green – is regarded as urban in nature the character of the surroundings which provide its setting is quite complex.

Old Matlock Conservation Area is situated at the juncture of three Landscape Character Areas:

- **White Peak** – to the south west where Masson Hill, Pic Tor and the Derwent Valley are prominent.
- **The Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent** - to the south and east where Riber Castle is a feature.
- **Dark Peak** – to the north west (Matlock Bank and Matlock Moor)

These Landscape Character Areas are further divided into Landscape Character Types of which the following are relevant to the Conservation Area:

**Landscape Character Area**

- **White Peak**
  - Limestone Slopes
  - Limestone Dales
- **Derbyshire Peak Fringe and Lower Derwent**
  - Wooded Slopes and Valleys
- **Dark Peak**
  - Settled Valley Pastures
The landscape character of the Conservation Area is strongly influenced both by the underlying geology and the erosive power of water.

On the fringes of the high limestone plateau in the west the slow erosion of the Carboniferous limestone has created a moderate to steeply sloping and undulating landform characterised by minor hill summits and extensive quantities of exposed rock. This has been cut through by the River Derwent to create a gorge feature characterised by the narrow, steep sided, often precipitous, valley formation which is typical of the Limestone Dales landscape type. The high limestone cliffs are a particular feature.

Here the soils are thin, particularly on the steeper slopes and hill crests where scrub vegetation and extensive areas of broadleaved woodland have become established. The main ecological interest is associated with this mix of semi natural habitats on the slopes and hill crests and habitats associated with areas of former lead mining.

The deep, steep sided heavily wooded valley creates a strong sense of enclosure while, in complete contrast, the hill tops are open and exposed offering distant and wide ranging views.

To the south and east the geology changes. Here sandstone bedrock characterises the upstanding higher ground with valleys – such as that of Bentley Brook - cut into softer, underlying mudstones. Soils tend to be agriculturally poor and the dominant land use is permanent pasture. Small fields are bounded by mixed species hedgerows and dry stone walls. The irregular field pattern suggests clearance direct from woodland with woodland trees and shrubs used to form the hedgerows. Small to medium size irregularly shaped blocks of woodland are widespread within the Wooded Slopes and Valleys landscape type but it is the mature hedgerow trees which have the stronger influence on the character of this part of the Conservation Area. The network of water courses linked with hedgerows and woodland blocks provides the key wildlife habitat.

To the north and north west the landscapes of Dark Peak have little influence on the landscape character of the Conservation Area. The underlying characteristics of the Settled Valley Pastures landscape type have been extensively modified by urban development. However the way that the underlying geology of Millstone Grit over shale has been eroded over time and created the undulating lower valley slopes and surrounding high ground provides an impressive backdrop to Old Matlock on this side.

**Topography**

Old Matlock Conservation Area is situated deep within the valley carved by the River Derwent and the Bentley Brook. It is surrounded on all sides by high ground and steep slopes being overlooked and dominated by locally prominent features such as Masson Hill, Matlock Moor and Riber Castle.

The main topographic features of the Conservation Area are the dramatic limestone cliff faces that rise high above the River Derwent in the south west and extend eastwards along the northern edges of the churchyard and housing plots on Church Street. The cliffs separate the lower parts of the Conservation Area (Matlock Green and Knowleston Gardens) occupying flatter ground associated with the floodplain of the Bentley Brook and the riverside walkway (c 90 – 93 metres aod) from the higher ground around Pic Tor (c 120 metres aod) the churchyard and areas in the extreme south. The transition between the two is managed via short, steep routes along Church Street and
Stoney Way that cut through the lower cliffs in the east.

In the south east the topography is characterised by more gently rolling slopes that, nevertheless, eventually rise to c. 260 metres and at Riber Castle which is the most prominent feature on this side of Matlock. On the northern side of Matlock Green steep slopes associated with Lime Tree Road - which eventually leads out onto Matlock Moor - are characteristic, while, in the west, the Conservation Area is approached down the long slope of the Alfreton Road.

**Vegetation**

Old Matlock Conservation Area is well vegetated throughout. Much is associated with private gardens to the general benefit of the streetscene particularly along parts of Matlock Green and Church Street. Some is “borrowed” from the surrounding countryside where field boundary hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small copses define parts of Conservation Area boundary in the south east and, indeed, extend into it to the rear of Malthouse Row and the eastern end of Brook Lea.

The most prominent features are the belts of woodland and tree planting associated with the steepest slopes - mainly ash (Fraxinus excelsior), sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus), field maple (Acer campestre), yew (Taxus baccata), and hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna) with hazel (Corylus avellana) and elm (Ulmus spp) - the River Derwent – with willow (Salix spp), alder (Alnus glutinosa), ash and cherry (Prunus avium) – and the railway embankment which wrap around its western edge and penetrate the Conservation Area along both the northern and southern edges of the churchyard.

A secondary feature is the line of the Bentley Brook along which planting extends intermittently on either side.

Some of the planting along its bank is the result of natural regeneration while other sections are more thoughtfully planted being closely associated with domestic gardens or public areas at Knowleston Gardens.

Views across the Conservation Area from open land to the north show how Old Matlock Conservation Area, though rooted in the valley, climbs the southern slope toward Pic Tor and High Tor with Masson Hill providing the backdrop. It also demonstrates the extensive vegetation associated with the Conservation Area.

The only place where there is a notable absence of vegetation is in the area of the junction of Matlock Green with Lime Tree Road and Church Street.

**Feature Trees**

The Church of St Giles is set within an extensive churchyard. Parts of the churchyard are characterised by rough ground colonised by grasses, nettles, brambles, raspberries and occasional ash, elder (Sambucus nigra) and cherry occupy the highest parts of the site to the west. This is in direct contrast to the well-maintained cemetery but provides a valuable wildlife habitat.
Yew trees at St. Giles

The majority of the churchyard is unenclosed but nevertheless contains some fine trees on the boundary with yew and Irish yew (Taxus baccata Fastigiata) scattered amongst the memorials. The roadside boundary to the south is characterised by a number of fine specimen trees – yew, cedar (Cedrus spp), hawthorn, cypress and purple cherry (Prunus pissardii). These trees help to enclose the churchyard on this side and create a very attractive landscape feature within the streetscene.

Southern boundary of Church

The area opposite Wheatsheaf House which lies to the south-west of the church and close to the road is a banked ‘triangle’ of grass within which stands a magnificent oak tree. This is a most attractive area characterised by many well-maintained gardens, which surround the area.

Magnificent Oak opposite Wheatsheaf House

There are a number of individual and groups of mature trees that are of very high quality, prominent within the street scene and help to characterise the areas within which they are situated. The trees within the churchyard and on the ‘Green’ are mentioned above as examples. Others include:

- Weeping ash (Fraxinus excelsior Pendula) in front gardens of the Almshouses, Matlock Green.
- Yew and Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris) at St Giles Walk – the former Deanhill House.
- Yew trees at Hunt Bridge on the southern frontage of Alfreton Road and line of mature trees – Norway maple (Acer platanoides), cherry and silver birch (Betula pendula), alder (Alnus glutinosa) set behind a low hedge on the northern side of the road.
- Beech trees (Fagus sylvatica) in the grounds of the Rectory off Church Street.
- Weeping beech (Fagus sylvatica Pendula) on the promenade by the river.
- Yew and sycamore trees in Knowleston Gardens on the southern side of Knowleston Place.
- Silver birch trees at Brook Lea and ash tree on Church Street in the grounds of nos. 2-8 Brook Lea.
Matlock Parks
Knowleston Gardens, Promenade and Pig Tree Meadows

Much of the riverside in the extreme west of the Conservation Area (and just beyond) is included as one of the 5 Matlock Parks - Hall Leys Park, Pic Tor, High Tor, Lovers Walks and Derwent Gardens - which extend along the River Derwent - from Matlock to Matlock Bath. The parks have, in recent years, benefited from a renovation programme. Knowleston Gardens the Promenade and Pig Tree Meadows are part of the Pic Tor Park immediately associated with the river at the foot of the cliffs.

Knowleston Gardens is an area of open spaces, terraced gardens, paths and bridges that straddles the Bentley Brook on the southern side of Knowleston Place. It was laid out as gardens by John Knowles in 1861. Prior to this it was a busy industrial site with hemp yards, lead mining and lime burning. In 1902 it was purchased by Matlock Urban District Council. The Council leased land at Pig Tree Meadows and Pic Tor from F C Arkwright at the same time with plans to construct a promenade as a tourist attraction. This was opened in 1906 as “Pic Tor Promenade” and advertised as the only “free” promenade in the District as Matlock Bath had recently started charging for its riverside walks.

Pig Tree Meadows is where space widens out at the foot of the cliff and on the inside of a meander within the river. The railway occupies part of the space before crossing the river to the north, the remainder is grassed open space used for picnicking and other informal recreation. It is completely enclosed and substantially overshadowed by tree planting along the river-bank on one side and on the railway embankment and the cliffs on the other.

Domestic Gardens

Throughout Old Matlock Conservation Area, garden planting is prominent and is very attractive within the streetscene.
Examples above and below of how planting within front gardens along Matlock Green contributes to the character of the street-scene and the Conservation Area.

Further examples on Church Street above and ....

Knowleton Place