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Article

Conservation Planning and the Development Trajectory of the Historic Core of Worcester, England

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Abstract
For over half a century many urban centres in England have been influenced by local conservation policies designed to preserve and enhance their historic townscapes. Whilst these policies have been viewed as broadly successful in preventing the loss of valued historic buildings, there has been limited detailed evaluation of their impact on the localised trajectories of development and change within cities. This article seeks to examine one of these localised trajectories through consideration of the impact of conservation planning on the nature of major development in the commercial core of the historic city of Worcester, England. Utilising local authority planning records, it explores the complex local unfolding of wider conservation and development interests through a focus on the outcomes of planning decision-making evident in the changing nature, location and architectural style of major development in the city core from the late 1980s onwards. The article uses the idea of conservation planning as an "assemblage" to consider how variation in the extent and nature of change across the core reflected the outcome of a complex web of decision-making, moulded by the material agency of a "heritage map" of heritage asset designation. Three distinct "turns" are noted over the study period when shifts in the wider discourses of conservation planning, changing local planning contexts, and amendments to the heritage map produced changes in the local conservation planning assemblage. The discussion highlights how a policy deficiency in articulating the value and significance of the existing urban form and character of the area impacted development proposals and outcomes, leading to the incremental erosion of local character, both in terms of morphological and functional change. The article concludes by reflecting on how exploration of change within local conservation-planning-assemblages might provide insights into some of the current challenges facing urban conservation practice in seeking to articulate how the management of historic urban landscapes can support sustainable urban development.

Keywords
city centres; commercial development; conservation areas; conservation-planning-assemblage; heritage map; townscape character; Worcester

Issue
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1. Introduction

For over half a century sizeable parts of the centres of many English towns and cities have been designated as conservation areas. Conservation areas are heritage protection designations, determined at the local planning district level, first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. They are defined in legislation as "areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (GOV.UK, 1990, clause 69) and designation offers local planning authorities (LPAs) additional planning controls, including control over the demolition of unlisted buildings. Their introduction was a response to widespread publicly expressed concern about the loss of historic urban fabric resulting from the increasing scale, pace, and style of modern commercial and public sector development in England's cities in the 1960s (Larkham, 1996). Their institution extended the scope of urban heritage protection in England beyond its earlier focus on

the guardianship of individual buildings, nationally recognised as holding historic value through listing, to encompass a wider temporal and typological range of urban fabric of local significance, and greatly extended the spatial extent of conservation controls to larger parts of cities.

Despite their growing influence on planning and change within cities, detailed research into the specific material impacts of conservation area controls and management, and the trajectories of development, and change within conservation areas, has been limited. In a review to mark the 50th anniversary of conservation areas concern was expressed that many areas were at risk of incremental erosion of their special character through a lack of monitoring of development outcomes and an absence of proactive management strategies (Civic Voice, 2018). To date, detailed analyses of change in English city centre conservation areas have principally come from a handful of academic research studies; see for example Barrett (1993) and Larkham and Barrett (1998) on Birmingham and Bristol, Madgin (2010) on Manchester, Mageean (1999) on Chester, Pendlebury (2002) on Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and While (2006) on Coventry and Plymouth. However, LPA conservation practice remains largely unacquainted with this work and how detailed analyses of change can support pro-active management of historic urban landscapes (HULs; Rodwell, 2018; Thomas, 2018; Whitehand & Gu, 2010).

This article seeks to add to our understanding of the localised impacts of conservation control by offering a detailed assessment of the specific material outcomes of conservation planning decision-making, evident in the changing trajectory of development within one early-designated conservation area, the historic core of the city of Worcester in England. It does this through an examination of the changing type and location of major development proposals documented in LPA planning records in the period from 1987–2021, and through reflection on the operation of local conservation planning practice over this timeframe, drawing on the author's role as a committee member of the city's Civic Society and its Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) throughout much of this time. The study utilises the idea of conservation planning as an assemblage of human and nonhuman actants to consider how change within Worcester's core reflected the outcome of a complex web of decision-making, moulded by the material agency of a heritage map of heritage asset designation. Three distinct "turns" are noted over the study period, when shifts in the wider discourses of conservation planning, changing local planning contexts, and alterations to the heritage map produced changes in the local conservation-planning-assemblage. These periods represent important phases in the wider development of English conservation practice as it became more central to the planning of cities, albeit with many challenges to its traditional architectural heritage focus, linked to changing national conservation agendas which impacted localised negotiations and trajectories of change (Pendlebury, 2013; Pendlebury et al., 2020; Pendlebury & Strange, 2011).

2. English Conservation Planning: Changing Discourses and Assemblages

The growing influence of conservation on the development of English cities is demonstrated by the increasing amount of built fabric afforded official protection as designated heritage assets through both the listed building and conservation area systems. Currently, in England, there are over 9,900 conservation areas and over 379,000 listed buildings (Historic England, 2021). Since their introduction in 1967, the number and variety of conservation areas has grown significantly, broadening their scope beyond an early focus on areas within recognised historic city jewels (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). As heritage values have broadened in scope, conservation area designations have expanded to embrace a greater diversity of urban fabric, more recently including areas of urban industrial heritage (Madgin, 2010) and post-war buildings (Tait & While, 2009) within England's larger industrial or core cities (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). This extension in area designations has also drawn more locally significant but unlisted fabric into the remit of conservation practice. However, it has been suggested that this expansion in conservation area designations has debased their fundamental concept, and increasingly called their special significance into question (Morton, 1991). Nevertheless, by the 1990s, this expanded scope and reach of conservation designations had positioned conservation as a more central objective within the broader realm of planning and development within English cities (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011).

2.1. Changing Values: The Authorised Heritage Discourse

The mainstreaming of conservation concerns into planning practice has increasingly challenged the authorised heritage discourse (AHD; see Smith, 2006) of historic building conservation and generated tensions between conservation and development at the local level. This has been particularly evident in city cores where economic pressures are most intense, and a multitude of forces of change and continuity collide most markedly. Equally, city cores represent the symbolic heart of the city, and as such their built forms embody multiple values and meanings which are shaped and contested through discourses about development and change. Nationally, the dominant values of the AHD have shaped the material and policy frames within which local conservation practice has operated. This has moulded the discourses about which buildings and areas are valued and protected through asset designation and outlined how protection should take place in terms of acceptable conservation practice and building management intervention. This traditional AHD, rooted in 19th-century Romanticism

(Pendlebury, 2013), has tended to overlook buildings and areas within cities of 19th and 20th-century industrial and commercial origin, and those buildings which are more mundane in scale and design, with conservation values privileging the grand and monumental, and grounded in art-historic and aesthetic philosophies. However, as Pendlebury (2013) notes, this AHD has been increasingly challenged by wider political and economic forces and changing thinking around the values underpinning conservation practice, tactically repositioning itself within these shifting frames of operation to produce a number of new conservation planning discourses.

One important tactical shift has been a repositioning to associate conservation planning with economic values. Guidance documents from the national heritage advisory body Historic England have actively sought to build on earlier economic connections between urban heritage and tourism and reposition conservation as an active agent in economic growth and regeneration, rather than being a barrier to it (Pendlebury, 2013; Pendlebury et al., 2020). In terms of local conservation practices on the ground, this shifted negotiations from tussles over the demolition versus retention of listed buildings to the degree of allowable intervention into the historic fabric, the merits of façadism (redevelopment behind a retained building façade) as a development solution, and alterations to building interiors (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). The period following the economic crash of 2008 has served to reinforce rather than sever these entanglements between conservation and economic regeneration, with a renewed emphasis on selling the historic city as a tourist and leisure destination, driven increasingly by the activities of local business organisations, in the face of austerity measures and a declining public-sector capacity to lead in managing urban change (Pendlebury et al., 2020). This has been accompanied by the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012, which has sought to mandate LPAs to take an increasingly liberal approach to decision-making and establish a more pre-determined and streamlined process of conservation planning to support economic growth (GOV.UK, 2021). These trends have continued in the period following the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, where the historic environment has again been positioned as a key player in high street recovery and economic revitalisation, following closures to shops, hospitality venues, and heritage attractions during the pandemic (Historic England, 2022).

2.2. Conservation Planning as Assemblage

In the context of examining changes in English conservation planning, focus on the shifting AHD offers an important theoretical lens to critically examine the values attached to historic buildings, the foundations of the values, and validated practice of conservation planning and tensions in the management of heritage (Pendlebury, 2013). Pendlebury (2013) contends that these dominant AHDs in conservation planning practice are articulated through an assemblage of various conservation organisations, values, and practices, with its own distinct history and narratives and with intersections with interests outside the heritage sphere. Using the idea of assemblage, with its consideration of the multi-scaled and multi-sited conjunction of different actants active in shaping urban change, can help in unpacking and understanding changes to the conservation planning process over time and its specific unfolding in particular contexts and places. Critically, assemblage thinking insists that the social is not the only basis for action or foundation for explanations of urban change, but rather locates both human and nonhuman elements in the same arena of observation and explanation (Jacobs, 2006; McGuirk et al., 2016). As Pendlebury (2013) observes, in considering the conservation-planning-assemblage the buildings and environments included in conservation practice form part of the assemblage and acquire agency. The materiality of buildings and area designations provides a critical frame through which conservation values are articulated, and through which conservation policies and guidance are enacted through the everyday practice of actors operating within the conservation-planning-assemblage at the local level. Studies of local conservation practice in Birmingham and Bristol have highlighted the influence of the type of built fabric conserved in mediating wider development trends and influencing local planning responses to wider pressures (Larkham & Barrett, 1998). Pendlebury and Strange (2011) also note the influence of the material in conservation planning, highlighting the role of the heritage map of designated heritage assets in focussing heritage-based regeneration schemes and deflecting other forms of investment to locations without designated assets within industrial core cities, although they do not elaborate on how this specifically operates as part of a conservation-planning-assemblage. The current study, therefore, seeks to develop this idea of the heritage map to explore the role that the materiality of built form and heritage asset designation play as important actants within the conservation-planning-assemblage. To do this new build development proposals are mapped, and their spatial expression related to the heritage map of asset designation, seeking to uncover the ways in which changing heritage values and discourses were articulated through the local conservation-planning-assemblage.

Variation in the operation of local conservation-planning-assemblages, reflected in different outcomes and trajectories of change within conservation areas, highlights the value of examining occurring conservation on the ground within different cities to provide insight into how broader shifts in the terrain of conservation planning have unfolded. Previous studies suggest that within English cities, changing conservation planning discourses have played out differently in those historic jewel cities that pioneered conservation protection, where tourism is a key driver (e.g., Bath or York),

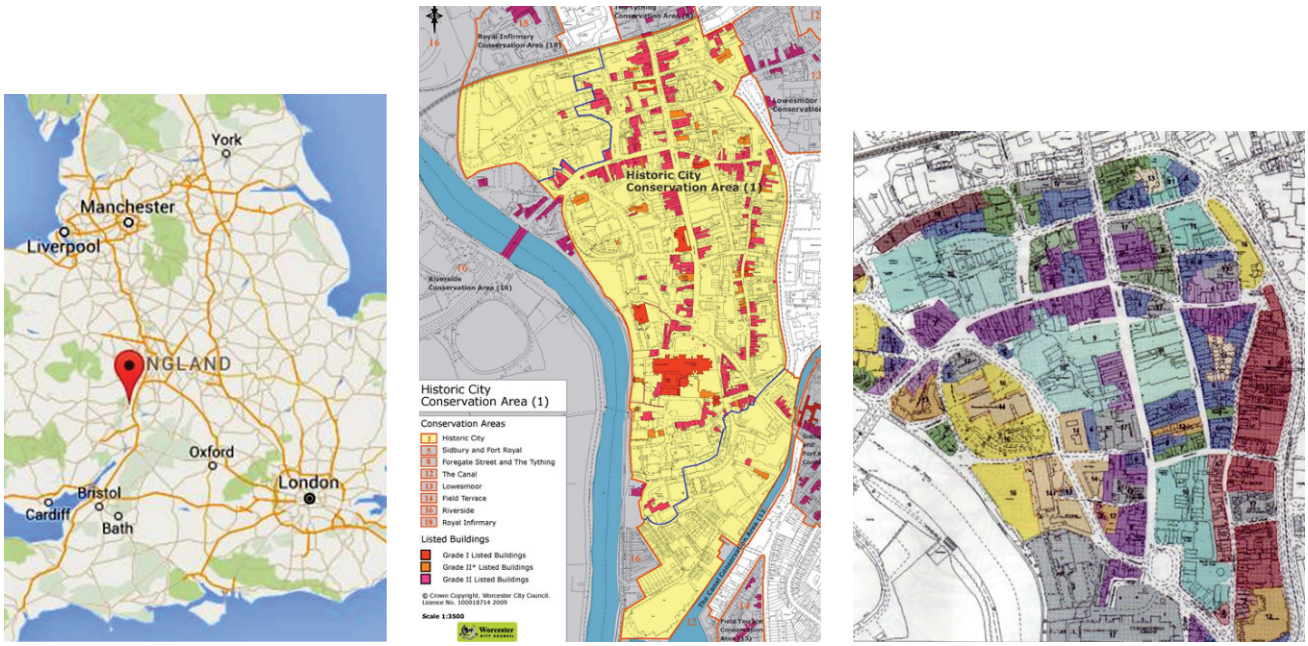
and core cities, those larger industrial cities which have embraced conservation of their industrial-era urban heritage more recently, where regeneration is the primary agenda, for example, Manchester or Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). Importantly, the different morphological and heritage map frames articulated in the classification "jewel" and "core" represent a key influence in shaping conservation planning outcomes on the ground within cities. Based on this observation, the article focuses on examining conservation planning in the context of Worcester, a small English city which exemplifies the characteristics and challenges of both a jewel and a core city, being a Medieval cathedral city but also a city with an important industrial legacy. The city has a long-established central conservation area, and exploration of change over time within this area provides an insight into the material influence of variations to the heritage map of local asset designation, and changes in personnel and policy in the local conservation planning administration, in (re)configuring its conservation-planning-assemblage.

3. Case Study City and Data Sources

3.1. The Historic City Conservation Area, Worcester

Worcester is a small city of around 100,000 people located in central England's West Midlands region on the banks of the River Severn (Figure 1a). Worcester emerged as an important ecclesiastical centre during the Anglo-Saxon period, with the development of a significant walled city in the Medieval period (Baker et al., 1992; Baker & Holt, 2004). The city's Medieval street pattern, city wall line, Medieval Cathedral, and some 16th and 17th-century timber-framed buildings are still visible in the city core, but the area's built fabric is dominated by a mix of later Georgian, Victorian, and Modern architecture. With this morphological legacy, it can be viewed as a jewel city, like other English cathedral cities, although within a tourism context it is not recognised as an official English Heritage City and underperforms in tourism visits and spending in comparison to the national average (Worcester City Council [WCC], 2017). Equally, although it is not widely recognised as an industrial/manufacturing centre, or core city, it does have a significant Victorian manufacturing heritage based on industries such as glove making, porcelain production, vinegar, and sauce making, and latterly engineering which have left an important legacy of industrial sites close to the city core (Bridges & Mundy, 1996).

The city centre was designated as the Historic City Conservation Area (HCCA) in 1969, covering a tightly drawn area focussed on the Cathedral and its setting, Foregate Street, and the commercial centre (based on the key north-south and east-west retail street spines and secondary shopping streets east of the High Street), and encompassing key listed buildings along these streets (Figure 1b). In common with other early designations, the conservation area has experienced boundary changes, representing important changes in both the local heritage map and conservation-planning-assemblage, and reflective of wider changes within the



(a) The location of Worcester in England.

(b) The Historic City Conservation Area, Worcester showing the current boundary and listed buildings within the area. Pre-2000 boundary variations shown in blue.

(c) Historic townscape characterisation of central Worcester showing designated areas.

Figure 1. The case study area. Sources: (a) World Easy Guides (n.d.), (b) WCC (n.d.), (c) Baker et al. (2004, p. 13).

national conservation AHD and a revaluing of areas of fabric within the core. In 1980, the boundary was amended to include the area within the Medieval city walls and areas that related directly to it, correcting identified deficiencies in the first boundary focused on the principal streets alone, and more clearly respecting the line of the city wall to the east, following a road redevelopment (Figure 1b). At this time Foregate Street, beyond the boundary of the railway bridge, was removed and included its own conservation area to the north. In 1992, the creation of the Riverside Conservation Area removed some parts of the riverside from the HCCA to the west. The most recent boundary change was in 2000, creating the current area boundary with the inclusion of more land to the northwest and south of the centre (Figure 1b).

The designation of the HCCA, and the aims articulated in the first designation document, represented an important "moment" in the development of conservation-planning in Worcester. A study of new building development in central Worcester from the 1940s–1980s by Vilagrasa and Larkham (1995) highlights the impact that the designation of the conservation area had. Their study reveals how planning officers were influential in shaping a new development discourse in the city, shifting the development trajectory away from the Modernist architectural styles that had dominated in the 1960s building boom, renegotiating new-build proposals to encourage the use of historical contextual styles, and promoting listed building refurbishment using grant funding (Figure 2). This transition to a greater emphasis on conservation within city centre development mirrors that of other similar historic centres during that period, such as Bristol (Barrett, 1996) and Chester (Mageean, 1999).

Whilst the HCCA is long-established and has undergone boundary reviews, the conservation area lacks a published character appraisal document to underpin management, in common with many other early-designated conservation areas (Larkham & Jones, 1993). Although national conservation legislation and guidance have made more explicit the need for these documents, complex city centre conservation areas have frequently been the last areas to be fully appraised, given the challenge of evaluating these heterogeneous areas and the capacity and resource constraints upon LPAs. Whilst historic townscape characterisation work covering the city's intra-mural core has been undertaken (Baker et al., 2004) as seen in Figure 1c, this remains unpublished and not part of the current formal planning guidance for the area. Consequently, the values embodied within the wider urban morphological frame of the area, and the significance of the constituent parts of the conservation area, remain largely unarticulated and implicit within the localised conservation-planning discourse, reliant on information relating to individual listed buildings, and bound within unpublished documents and the tacit knowledge of LPA conservation officers. This lack of a published appraisal and management document, which has been publicly consulted on, has therefore made it challenging for the LPA in managing the conservation area proactively, and in articulating whether new development preserves or enhances the area's character or contributes positively to its significance. Management has therefore been reliant on broader national and local conservation planning guidance and the everyday practice of conservation officers in advising on development proposals, with the changing conservation-planning-assemblage shaped through individual decisions on development applications which provide a useful resource to examine the unfolding of conservation practice on the ground.

3.2. The Use of Planning Application Records to Monitor Change

The principal source of data for the research is the planning application records held by LPAs. The 1947 and subsequent Town and Country Planning Acts have required all but the most minor of development proposals to obtain planning permission. LPAs hold publicly accessible records of these applications, now principally managed and accessed via online digital platforms. These planning application records provide a key resource for in-depth studies of built environment change, as they provide information on the applicants and agents involved, details of the nature of the development proposed, and the outcome of the LPA decision-making on the application. Files can also include supporting information, such as consultant reports, architectural drawings, and consultation correspondence. Supporting

(a) Modern retail development (multiple plots) (b) Modern architecture (increased height) (c) "Georgianizing" (neo-Georgian contextual style) (d) Refurbishment of listed buildings

Figure 2. Examples of Modern 1960s retail-led developments (a and b) and later contextual style schemes (c) and listed building refurbishment (d). Photos by the author.

documents and consultation responses can be helpful in exploring how particular values are articulated in the decision-making process by key actors, including developers, officers, amenity groups, and the public.

LPA planning records have been used in numerous research studies, and the benefits and challenges of utilising them have been long-articulated (Larkham, 1988). One of the primary problems in assessing the overall trajectory of change is the multiple counting of changes which can inflate the measure of development pressure. This can be a key issue when examining development in conservation areas which include many listed buildings, where separate applications for listed building consent (LBC) can duplicate full planning applications for the same development (Barrett, 1993). Within the current study, this problem of inflation is addressed by separating out these different application types in the presentation and analysis of data. Additionally, applications including multiple changes have not been disaggregated, which can also inflate figures, and each application is recorded under a single category code. Analysis concentrates on those applications categorised as major changes, which includes demolition and new building, major rebuilding schemes (principally involving redevelopment behind a retained building façade, i.e., façadism), upward or outward extensions to existing buildings, extensive refurbishment of buildings, and significant internal alteration to buildings. The category definitions used follow those employed by Barrett (1993, 1996) in studying townscape change in conservation areas. Major applications, whilst fewer in number compared to minor change applications, such as signage, have a significant visible impact upon the character of a conservation area. Additionally, a focus on major applications, particularly demolition and new building schemes, is useful as these applications are important in shaping local decision-making and therefore exploring changes in the conservation-planning-assemblage.

The study also draws upon policy information, planning meeting minutes, and personal reflection on practice to support the examination of the conservation planning discourse and contextualise the information available within the planning application records. Specifically, insights are drawn from interviews with conservation officers active in the city between 1978–2013 and minutes from the city's Planning Committee and Conservation Advisory Panel—formerly Conservation Area Advisory Committee. The analysis also draws on personal reflection in terms of the author's involvement with the Worcester Civic Society (a local amenity body) from the late 1990s onwards and as a member of the CAP since 2013. Reflection on actions from within the conservation-planning assemblage can offer additional insight into understanding the operation of everyday practices, how values were articulated, and how practice unfolded beyond traditional research observations.

4. The Changing Trajectory of Development in Worcester's Historic City Conservation Area

4.1. Overall Trends in the Volume and Nature of Major Development, 1987–2021

Analysis of planning application data reveals that the overall trajectory of major development applied for over the 35-year study period, from the late-1980s within the current boundaries of the HCCA, broadly mirrored wider commercial property development cycles within England, demonstrating the increasing interconnection between conservation and wider processes of economic change (Figure 3). The emerging wider national consensus that conservation was no longer viewed as a barrier to development is evident in the broadly similar patterns for full and LBC applications, indicating that conservation control through listing did not preclude managed change (Figure 3).

The end of the commercial property development boom of the late-1980s is evident, followed by a relative development downturn in the 1990s linked to economic declines resulting from a series of financial crises throughout the decade (Jadevicius & Huston, 2017). Within Worcester, as in other commercial cores, there

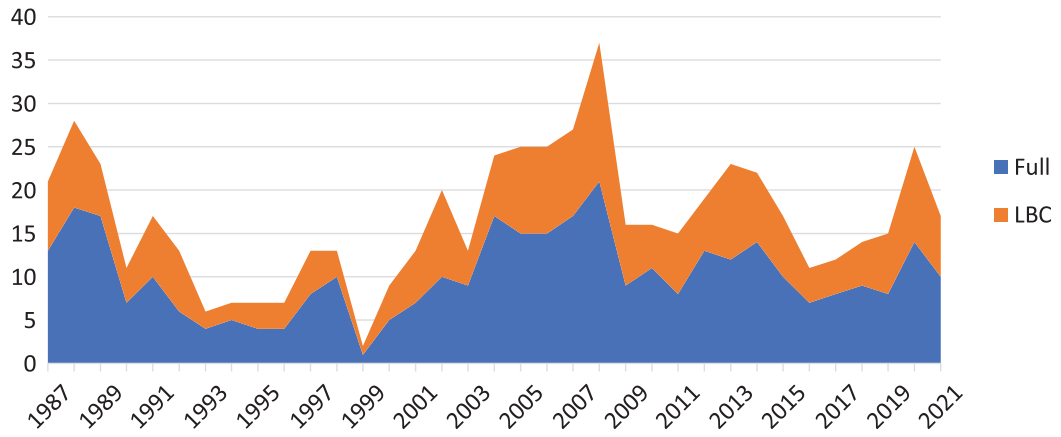


Figure 3. Volume of full (planning permission) and LBC major applications between 1987–2021 in the HCCA.

was an increasing number of applications in the early 2000s linked to the general upturn in the commercial building cycle, followed by a sharp decline after the 2008 global financial crash and a subdued recovery thereafter (Figure 3). LBC applications remained buoyant during this period, experiencing relatively less of a decline than general planning applications in line with the national picture (Historic England, 2021). In the period between 2016–2020, there was a slight rise in both planning and listed building applications, indicating a relatively confident, if modest, development market in the historic city, against a national backdrop of dips in both planning and LBC applications (Historic England, 2021). 2020 saw a sharp rise in applications, particularly LBC applications, although this declined sharply in 2021 as the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on commercial confidence were felt in the city, along with the country overall. In Worcester, as in other cities (Pendlebury et al., 2020), the increasing role of historic buildings as important elements in the economic recovery of places is evident.

Examination of the type of major change applied for over the study period offers additional insight into the local development trajectory in the core of Worcester and its relationship to conservation planning controls. Figure 4 shows that new building and demolition applications were more prevalent in the development upturns of the late-1980s and the early 2000s, although this almost all involved 20th-century unlisted fabric and minor buildings to the rear of plots. New building was more limited within periods of development downturn. Similarly, extensions to existing buildings, either to the rear or to the roofscape, were more evident in the periods of relative building boom. Both these trends highlight the impact of heritage restrictions within the historic city core, with a significant number of protected listed buildings and a small number of open development sites influencing when it was considered profitable for developers to navigate these constraints.

In this respect, Worcester mirrored the national picture with the economic benefits of historic building retention recognised, and proposals shifting from applications for demolition and rebuilding to a greater focus on the managed change of the existing historic fabric and the nature of permissible intervention (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). The strength of conservation controls is also evident in the fact that proposals involving façadism were infrequent during the study period, with this contentious practice largely rejected as a development form in the conservation area, again linked to strongly enforced building listing controls. In the late-1980s two schemes were submitted, but nothing further was applied for until 2013 and 2015 when development behind the retained façade of an unlisted Victorian factory building was proposed (Figure 4).

The other key trend, particularly from 2007 onwards, was the rising number of applications for significant internal alterations, linked to the conversion of the upper floors of buildings into housing (Figure 4). This was stimulated by two broader housing trends. Firstly, national limitations on new housebuilding on greenfield sites on the urban periphery increased the demand for, and economic return on, the development of flats in the city centre. Secondly, there was growing demand for student accommodation linked to the expansion of the University of Worcester. This trend for conversions continued from 2013 onwards as national planning changes to permitted development rights facilitated the conversion of upper-floor office accommodation to residential use. Internal alterations reached a post-2008 crash peak in 2020 but were curtailed in the mini-development slump resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been some debate as to whether the stimulus to encourage the conversion of buildings into housing represents a positive or negative trend for conservation areas and high streets (Clifford & Madeddu, 2022; Grimwood, 2021). Positively, it supports a longer-term conservation goal to bring the often empty upper floors of historic buildings in commercial centres back into use. However, concerns have also been expressed as to the quality of the new housing developed and the impact of conversions

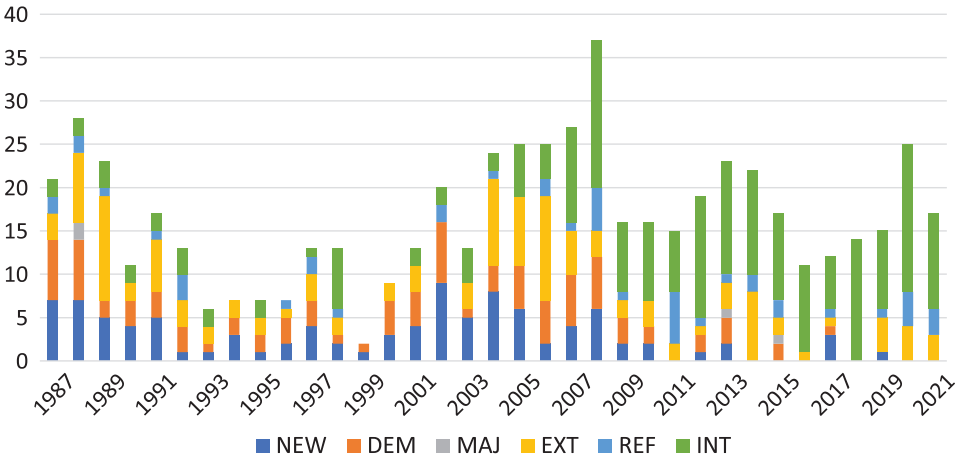


Figure 4. Trends in major development type between 1987–2021 in the HCCA. Note: Categories used refer to those outlined in Section 3.2.

on high street functional diversity. In this respect, whilst change to the external physical appearance of the conservation area was limited over the study period, the change to the functional character of the area was more extensive.

4.2. The Influence of the Heritage Map on Development in the Core

Examination of overall changes in the volume and nature of major development proposed between 1987–2021 reveals that conservation controls did not impede broader commercial development trends; however, it is clear from the analysis above that these unfolded in specific ways over the study period. Further analysis of the changing location and architectural style of applications for new build development reveals unique patterns of activity within each of the three decades of the study period, which reflected specific formations of the conservation-planning-assemblage, operating through individual application negotiations on these key developments and the changing frame of the heritage map. The first key phase is the period in the late-1980s into the 1990s when conservation became more central to the planning of the city core. The second phase covers changes in the first decade of the new millennium when conservation controls were extended beyond the focus of the intra-mural core, creating new challenges amid a rising volume of development. The final phase covers the period following the 2008 financial crisis when the period of austerity precipitated an increasing focus on heritage as an economic resource within private-sector development and created challenges for LPA conservation practice.

4.2.1. The Late-1980s and 1990s: Conservation-Led Commercial Development

By the late-1980s conservation had arguably emerged as the dominant paradigm influencing development in the city centre, in common with other historic centres (Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). The constraints offered by the 1980 revised conservation area boundary, extensive building listing, and the presence of proactive and experienced conservation and design teams within the LPA, created a strong conservation-planning-assemblage that sought to pro-actively shape development proposals and preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the historic city in line with national conservation area guidance. Figure 5 maps the location, and illustrates the style, of new build development associated with the upturn in the building cycle in the late-1980s and into the 1990s. This reveals the influence of the heritage map of building listing, and recognition of important plan forms and character areas within the intra-mural core, in providing the material context within a conservation-planning-assemblage that supported the "cloaking" of modern development or its deflection to industrial fringe sites beyond the intra-mural core.

Modern commercial development was concealed through de-modernisation of earlier modern-style retail schemes (Figure 5a), use of backland sites behind retained historic buildings (Figure 5b and 5d), or through the adoption of Post-Modern historicist architectural styles (Figure 5c and 5e), characteristic of the new "conservation-area-architecture" evident in other historic jewel cities in the 1980s and 1990s (Larkham, 1996; Mageean, 1999; Pendlebury & Strange, 2011). Within the sluggish development market of the 1990s, the

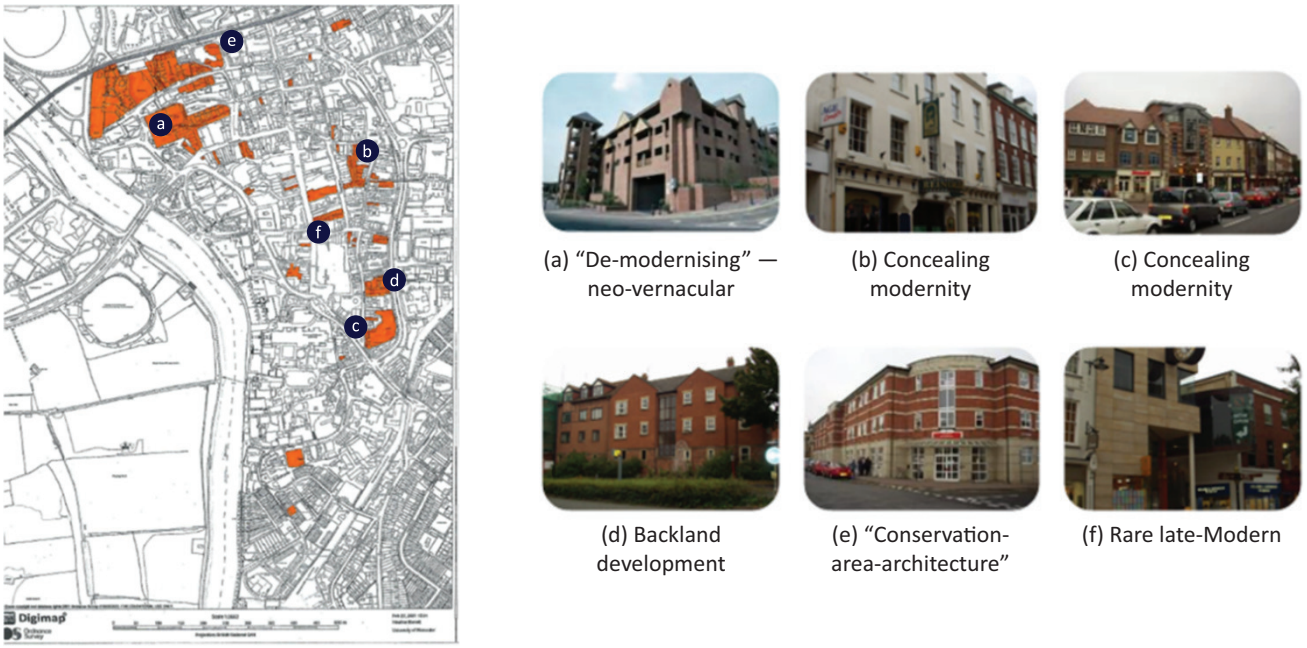


Figure 5. The location of new build development proposals between 1987–1997: The heritage map of backland development and concealed modernity. Base-map on the left by Digimap and on the right annotations and photos by the author.

experienced conservation officer team worked proactively with planning officers in the city to press developers for high-design quality conservation-led schemes. The success of this "assemblage" was most visible in a multiplex cinema development which included an extensive archaeological programme, a re-instated individual plot street frontage, and a per cent for art scheme (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008; Figure 5c). Only one new-build scheme, the City Arcade (Figure 5f), utilised the Late-Modern style more common for commercial new builds at the time. This was a contentious replacement for a Modernist 1950s shopping arcade on the High Street opposite the Grade I listed Guildhall. Within the mixed fabric of the High Street, the conservation officer had argued that this was an appropriate design response to the local historical context of the site, rather than defaulting to a Neo-Georgian pastiche building (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008). This reflected a deeper understanding of local character and value, informed by wider professional design and conservation planning values, combining retention of historical significance alongside innovative new urban design and public art schemes, with the scheme receiving recognition in the national Civic Trust Awards.

By the late-1980s, the revised heritage map, with increased asset designation and an amended 1980 conservation area boundary, had become established and deflected proposals for larger-scale commercial developments for housing, and a major supermarket, to the area to the north of the line of the city wall, beyond the conservation area boundary (Figure 1b and Figure 5). In this marginal core area, beyond the frame of the heritage map, tensions between conservation and redevelopment were played out through difficult and protracted negotiations on new build applications, with the LPA seeking to extend its conservation-led approach to commercial development by refusing initial proposals and developing an urban design brief for part of the area to provide clearer articulation of the historical value of the area and its character significance to support their wish for schemes sensitive to the local historical context (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008). That these proposed developments were not eventually built highlights the emerging tensions in the conservation-planning-assemblage, where the materiality of the undesignated fabric beyond the heritage map was less able to support the application of the conservation-led approaches and values hitherto articulated by conservation offices in commercial developments, although developers did not feel willing to test this at a planning appeal.

4.2.2. The 2000s: Shifting Boundaries and Changing Development Pressures

In the 2000s, substantive retail-led development effectively ceased within the newly expanded conservation area. The enhanced control offered by the frame of the revised heritage map deflected proposals for large retail schemes towards older industrial sites beyond the HCCA, or to retail parks on the edge of the city. Also, in Worcester, as elsewhere in the country, this was a time of change to the high street (Wrigley et al., 2015), with challenges to the dominance of the core as the primary retail zone and a shift to more non-retail and leisure uses. In this period new building proposals changed to be largely residential-led, presenting new challenges to negotiation within the conservation-planning-assemblage. However, in the continued absence of a published appraisal document for the revised conservation area, development negotiation continued to be guided by tacit conservation knowledge and the differing value attached to fabric within the intra-mural (jewel) and the extra-mural (core) parts of the conservation area.

Initially, there was continuity in the nature of proposals, which sought to utilise backland areas, or the limited number of small vacant sites within the intra-mural area, rather than seeking demolition and rebuilding (Figure 6). These smaller schemes increasingly adopted more Late-Modern styling as LPA officers continued to shape the local heritage discourse in terms of contemporary urban design approaches to conservation practice and managed change, seeking a move away from a default of historicist pastiche to promote more local context and innovation in schemes, although largely using the height and building materials pallet of the core and often only on sites hidden from the primary street frontage (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008; Figures 6d, 6e, and 6f). Consequently, there was limited impact on the physical characteristics of the conservation area demonstrating the tight material controls offered by the frame of the heritage map of enhanced designation and continuity in the values and approaches offered in negotiating proposals by established conservation and planning teams. Late-Modern styling was also used on the re-cladding of the prominent 1960s shopping centre Cathedral Square (Figure 2a in its original form) at the end of the High Street opposite Worcester Cathedral. As a refurbishment rather than a rebuild there was little negotiating leverage for LPA officers to press for a more contextual cloaked scheme, like the multiplex development in the 1990s (Figure 5c), despite its sensitive location opposite the Cathedral (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008).

Both the increasing volume and complexity of development proposals in the new millennium and personnel changes within the established conservation and planning teams precipitated modification of the established operation of the conservation-planning-assemblage, with increasing constraint on the nature and extent of conservation control exerted by LPA officers (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008). These challenges were particularly exemplified in the most significant development application during the period, again beyond the edge of the intra-mural area in an industrial core zone to the south of the conservation

Figure 6. The location of new build development proposals between 1998–2007: Change at extra-mural edges and "hidden'' late-Modernism. Base-map on the left by Digimap and on the right annotations and photos by the author.

area, with proposals for redevelopment of the former Royal Worcester Porcelain manufacturing site (Figure 6b and 6c). The speed with which the Porcelain Works became vacant left conservation officers relatively unprepared in articulating their values in guiding the redevelopment of this site, focussed as they had been on smaller developments within the intra-mural core, without a clear approach to dealing with this industrial heritage (Conservation officer, interview, 18 July 2008). Without a strong material frame of building listing or character assessment guidance to inform negotiation on development, the design of the scheme was shaped principally by the developer's generic conception of contextual canal side heritage, with little reference to Worcester's architectural vernacular or the morphology of this former industrial area. Through protracted and contentious negotiation, the one listed building was retained in the scheme, although other unlisted industrial fabric was removed or only partially retained through façadism (Figure 6c), reflecting a shift to privilege developer interests and values in negotiation within the Worcester conservation-planning-assemblage. The impact was one of both significant physical and functional character changes, resulting in the residential gentrification of this former industrial zone.

4.2.3. The 2010s: Conservation in the Age of Austerity

The economic crash of 2008 had a significant impact on development in central Worcester (Figure 7), with a reduction in the number of new building applications which paralleled development trends in other larger European historic cities (Pendlebury et al., 2020). In the face of austerity, city administrations increasingly promoted neo-liberal economic agendas of diversification and regeneration which challenged earlier conservation planning discourses, with cuts in LPA budgets curtailing their capacity to play a proactive role in guiding development (Pendlebury et al., 2020). In part, this was evident in Worcester, with cuts in planning department personnel and broader pressure to speed up decision-making on applications putting negotiating capacity under strain. The small number of recent new build developments have come primarily from either local educational institutions or culture-led commercial schemes. Firstly, the University of Worcester has been an increasingly important agent in shaping local urban heritage discourses through its developments, as has been evident in other cities (Melhuish et al., 2022). The most significant new build development during the period was a joint university and public library, "The Hive," an iconic building that could be viewed as a "flagship" development, built on an industrial site to the north of the intra-mural area (Figure 7a). The building's design emphasises sustainability and its symbolic role as linking "town and gown" in the city, rather than seeking to meld with the character of this part of the historic city. In the continued absence of an appraisal document articulating the local character, value, and significance of this part of the conservation area, conservation discourses of contextualisation have been supplanted by the discourses of iconic architecture and the creative knowledge-based city (Strange, 2016).

Other developments post-2008 also highlight the contemporary challenges to local conservation practice within the age of austerity, with the reappearance of façadism in further development proposals for the Royal Porcelain Works site (Figure 7c). Here, the planned culture-led development was substantially revised to

Figure 7. The location of new build development proposals between 2008—2021: Conservation in the "age of austerity." Sources: (a) University of Worcester (2019; image), (b) base-map on the left by Digimap, (c) annotations and photos by the author, and (d) Barnett (2019; image).

contain less retention of historic fabric and include more market housing to fund viable redevelopment (WCC CAAC, 2016). Additionally, pressures for increased building heights have emerged in Worcester, with plans for a large block of student flats opposite the Hive development (Figure 7d), reflecting the recent trend for tall buildings in cities (Short, 2007) which here has filtered down the urban hierarchy to smaller cities beyond the larger core cities. In approving the scheme, including the demolition of an unlisted 19th-century engineering factory building, the LPA's emphasis was focused on the economic value of the individual site (WCC CAP, 2019; WCC Planning Committee, 2019), with no reference to the wider character context of the conservation area, albeit still unarticulated through lack of an appraisal document, highlighting the emerging pressures which have continued to reshape Worcester's local conservation-planning-assemblage.

5. Conclusions

This article has sought to examine the trajectory of major development change from the late-1980s onwards within Worcester's HCCA, aiming to detail occurring conservation practice on the ground through a focus on the material nature of that change as an outcome of the operation of the local conservation-planning-assemblage. As an early-designated conservation area, the HCCA has experienced the effects of numerous "turns" in English conservation planning practice as this has evolved as part of the fluctuating development agendas for cities. Charting the local trajectory of major development within the conservation area over this 35-year period reveals that, in common with other English cities, conservation planning has become increasingly complexly enmeshed with development and regeneration activities, rather than separate from it, a trajectory which is set to endure with guidance at both the national (GOV.UK, 2021) and international (Roders & Bandarin, 2019) level increasingly articulating the aspiration to balance heritage protection alongside sustainable urban development.

Importantly, analysis of major development and change within a single conservation area over time reveals the ways in which this change has been shaped through the operation of an assemblage of assets, actors, policies, and practices, embodying key values and discourses about heritage and conservation. Considering conservation planning as an assemblage assists in understanding the complexity, but also mutability, of the social-material relationships in this arena of heritage management. As Pendlebury (2013, p. 724) observes: "[Assemblage] helps draw out the horizontal and shifting power relationships that exist in contestations over the management of places, alongside the hegemonic vertical power relations that also exist within AHDs." Echoing McGuirk et al.'s (2016) consideration of urban regeneration, assemblage accounts of conservation planning can invigorate our sense of its possible pathways by exposing the constitution of its trajectories, opening up new insights and revealing hidden capacities that are seemingly quiescent. Equally, assemblage's appreciation of materiality and its agentic capacities extends consideration of the range of actants and forces enlivening conservation outcomes, with the morphological materiality of buildings and places having an important role in

constructing the assemblage, its values and discourses, specifically in relation to their identification, or not, as designated heritage assets within the local heritage map.

As the Worcester example reveals, the frame offered by the heritage map of asset designation (building listing and the boundary of the conservation area) exerts a strong influence on development trajectories on the ground. In Worcester, different conservation outcomes were delivered within the professionally valued and highly protected Medieval historic core (the jewel), where redevelopment was "masked" by strong conservation-led design control, and the former industrial extra-mural areas to the north and south of the historic centre (the core), where the predominantly unlisted status of many buildings, and their comparatively late incorporation into the conservation area, lead to more comprehensive redevelopment which paid little regard to the deeper historical character of these areas in both a material and non-material sense. Critically, the preservation and enhancement of the historical character of the conservation area was hampered by the continued absence of a published character appraisal of the area. The heritage values and significance, embodied within the materiality of the wider urban morphological frame of the area, therefore remained largely unarticulated and implicit, reliant on information relating to individual listed buildings and the tacit values, knowledge, and practice of LPA conservation officers. Tensions were evident in decision-making as these unarticulated, tacit values and practices within the local conservation-planning-assemblage were increasingly challenged by different values within a changing local and national economic and political context.

Clear articulation of the values embodied in HULs is of critical concern to the development of conservation practice at all levels, not just locally in the context of Worcester's HCCA, but also nationally and internationally, in seeking to reconcile heritage protection with sustainable urban development and the continuing vitality of urban centres in a holistic way. This contemporary challenge can be viewed in the context of the UNESCO Recommendation on the HUL 2011, and its espousal of an inclusive landscape-based approach, with a clear acknowledgement of the importance of non-exceptional landscapes which are nonetheless illustrative of collective memories and identities (Sykes & Ludwig, 2015). Considering the wider historic value of urban landscapes, beyond a focus on "exceptional" individual buildings, demands the adoption of a more nuanced and informed consideration of the relational complexity of urban form and embedded cultural value (Roders & Bandarin, 2019; Rodwell, 2018). Whilst the HUL recommendation provides guidelines on implementing a landscape-based approach, it has lacked operational methods for assessment which are cross-cultural, and which provide a dynamic consideration of urban landscapes as the cumulative outcome of complex processes (Palaiologou, 2017). Several authors have suggested that the methods, concepts, and representational tools from the field of urban morphology can provide the basis for systematic investigation of the historical morphogenetic processes of urban landscape change and articulate how individual buildings, monuments, and special areas relate to one another, and how they emerge from a process of change over time and embody meanings (Palaiologou, 2017; Rodwell, 2018; Thomas, 2018; Whitehand & Gu, 2010). However, engagement with this body of work by conservation professionals remains limited (Rodwell, 2018; Thomas, 2018), and whilst urban morphological approaches have been viewed as potentially an important basis for HUL analyses (Jokilehto, 2015) their terminology and techniques are frequently viewed as too complex to understand and too time-consuming to apply (van Oers, 2015). A challenge, therefore, remains in seeking to apply more nuanced and inclusive approaches to articulating the embodied cultural values within HULs. In the context of Worcester's HCCA, this challenge is indeed pressing as it still lacks a published appraisal document through which such values can be articulated. As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, with significant government regeneration funding recently secured by WCC for projects in the city centre, it is critical that detailed character guidance for the conservation area is produced, publicly consulted on, and adopted, to clearly set out what within the city's historic centre is valued and why, and to convey a locally agreed vision for its future sustainable management. Without this, the area will be unprepared for the planning challenges which lie ahead and remain vulnerable to continued incremental erosion of its deeper local historic character and meaning.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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