



5. Cathedral Close

Significance

Concentration of historic buildings

Presence of features from historical period(s)

Townscape / Landscape quality:

Quality of details:

Concentration of negative features:

Score

VERY HIGH

VERY HIGH (4)

VERY HIGH (4)

VERY HIGH (4)

VERY HIGH (4)

FEW (3)

19

Character Area Overview

Summary

The Cathedral Close is arguably the most historic area in Norwich with buildings dating from the foundation of the Cathedral in the late C11. Its layout has changed little since the Reformation and today it remains an oasis from the bustle of the City outside its two main gates which are its only access through the Precinct Wall. In addition to containing a wealth of historic buildings spanning the last 900 years, it also contains attractive riverside walks, panoramic views across the flood plain and a wealth of mature trees. The Precinct Wall effectively cuts the Close off from the rest of the City.

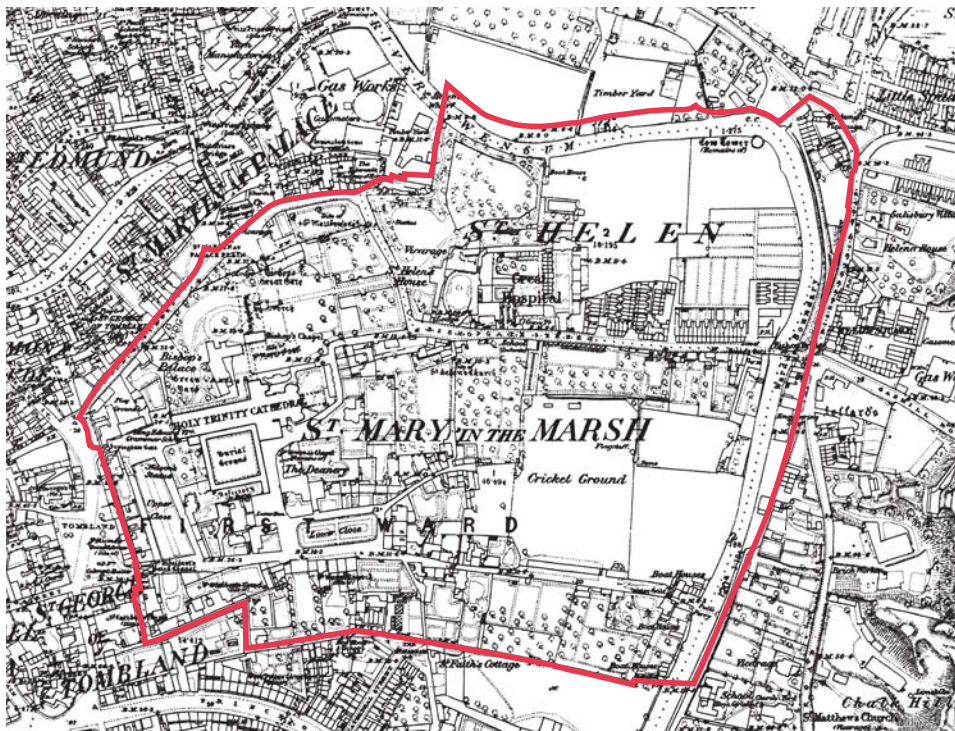
Topography & Landscape Framework

Much of the Close forms part of the floodplain of the River Wensum and is therefore low-lying land. To the east, across the river, the wooded valley sides are clearly visible.

Town Morphology, History & Archaeology

The area around the Close is the one which has been subject to the least change since medieval times. It is dominated by the Norman Cathedral, though within the Close, protected by its Precinct Wall are a range of good vernacular, Georgian and some

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Extract from 1886 OS map

Victorian buildings. Outside the old Precinct Wall is the C13 Great Hospital which, like The Close, is effectively cut off from the rest of the City by its own wall and the river.

The Upper Close (**a**) is a large open green square to the west of the Cathedral and cloister separated from Tombland by two historic gates (**b** and **c**). To the north of the Cathedral is the Norman Bishops Palace and former Carnary College (**d**) which are now parts of the Norwich School and are

separated from the public areas. To the south, and also not publicly accessible (though very visible) is Almary Green which reads as a private garden surrounded by impressive, mostly Georgian, buildings. The Lower Close **(e)** forms a separate green area to the east and flows into Ferry Lane **(f)**, a straight lane which was formerly a canal running down to the Water Gate **(g)** at the junction with the river. Hooks Walk **(h)** runs from the north east corner of The Lower Close and is a narrow, bending lane with

mostly vernacular buildings on the footpath edge producing a tight and intimate townscape.

By contrast, Bishopgate (**i**) is wider and well lined by buildings for most of its length. These include on the north side the Great Hospital (**j**) and St Helen's Church (**k**). The leg which runs north-south (**l**) does not have buildings on the back of the footpath, though the sense of enclosure is maintained by quite high and attractive walls. Adjacent to Hooks Walk is another stretch of wall with views across the school playing fields.

The riverside walk meanders along the Riverside past the Cow Tower (m), an important survival of the C14 city's defences. A block of houses and a 'tabernacle' stood to the east of St Martin's Church on Bishopgate. The only survival today is the Adam and Eve PH.

Landmarks & Views

Despite its 315ft (96m) high spire, the Cathedral does not dominate the Upper Close. However, its presence is much more commanding from across the playing fields to the east (**n**), from the Riverside Walk and from the east end of Ferry Lane. In addition, a fine view of the transept can be gained from the west end of Lower Close (**o**).

A linear view (**p**) through Lower Close and to the Water Gate can be gained from Upper Close though looking west. Views out through the gates into the town can also be gained, but only when standing quite close to them. From Hooks Walk a good view of the Great Hospital (**q**) can be seen across the school playing fields and from the same point a commanding view of the east end of the Cathedral emerges (**r**).

The Cathedral dominates views from along Bishopgate moving west; the tower of



dd. 8 - 12, The Cloisters
ee. 3 - 9, Bishopgate
ff. Tabernacle House
Bishopgate



aa. 9 - 15, Bishopgate
bb. 66 - 67, The Close
cc. 11 - 15, Bishopgate

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St Helen's Church is much less dominant (t). There are also attractive views along Bishopgate (u) and across the playing fields to the south and south-west. From the easternmost bend in the road, there is an attractive view west along the lane to the rear of the Bishop's Palace with its landscaped grounds (v). From the east end of Bishopgate the wooded slope to the east and gasometer are the focus of views (w).

From Riverside, views to the north bank are generally not particularly good where warehouse-type buildings and large areas of open car parking are readily visible. The exception is at the west end where a fine view of the St James' Mill can be gained. As the river curves, the rear of C19 and later properties are visible (x) and as the river runs north-south the mostly late C19 houses and guest houses along Riverside Road form a strong line on the east bank.

The northern-most part of the riverside walk allows glimpsed views over the buildings of the Great Hospital. The stretch east of the Lower School playing fields allows some very fine vistas of the Cathedral and its Close culminating in a long view down Ferry Lane (y).

Key Building Groups

The Cathedral is the most dominant building but there are also a significant number of important buildings and groups within the area and it is the pleasing juxtaposition of buildings of different ages and styles which gives the Close its character. The Close contains a number of buildings which have

evidence of earlier work in their façades; these are among the best examples in the City.

Amongst the other buildings of particular note are the Bishops Palace, the Carnary College Chapel, the numerous medieval buildings and other structures incorporating earlier features, Georgian and earlier buildings around Almary Green, the buildings around the Lower Close (z), the fine gateways, the Victorian Gothic No. 57 and the former stables along Ferry Lane (1). No.57 (2) (1862-4) by John Brown is one of the best examples of Victorian Gothic in the City, and the terrace on the south side of the Lower Close is a good composition of late C18 townhouses.

There are very few modern buildings; the recent Refectory (3) being extremely well-done and respectful of its sensitive setting by incorporating old fabric. Although some of the more modern school buildings are mediocre, No. 71a, a 1950s building of two types of brick, sits comfortably with its neighbours on Upper Close. Later C20 development such as Queen Elizabeth Close and No. 60a Precinct Wall have been carefully designed to incorporate the Precinct Wall and to protect its sense of exclusion to the perimeter roads.

The key group on Bishopgate is the early buildings of the Great Hospital incorporating the Church of St Helen. This group, with its cloistered quadrangle enjoys an important visual and physical relationship with the Cathedral Close. Some of the C19 additions

to the Great Hospital and almshouses form a group because of the consistent materials used (4).

St Helen's House (5) to the west of the Great Hospital is a fine building of the C18 and C19 centuries, whilst on the south side of the road, at its east end Nos. 52 & 54 date back to the C15 and is the only thatched building within the Cathedral environs.

The terrace of houses on the south side of the road was built by the Dean and Chapter in 1903 and forms a distinct group (6); all bar one have their original sash windows. Other terraced houses, now demolished, are shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey Map at the north east end of the road.

Current Uses

The Close retains its ecclesiastical use with, in addition to the place of worship, diocesan offices and dwellings. The Cathedral includes a large new Refectory, gift shop and other visitor facilities. The Norwich School occupies a range of buildings to the north of the Cathedral in addition to the playing field and lower school behind the terraced properties on Bishopgate. Bishopgate is essentially a housing area including a nursing home and groups of almshouses which are part of the Great Hospital.



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Key Characteristics

Townscape Elements

The Upper and Lower Closes with their open areas of grass and trees are very important both to the setting of numerous historic buildings (including the Cathedral) and in giving the area a generally verdant character. Although of little ecological value, the openness of the school playing fields means that long views of the Cathedral can be enjoyed within a setting of other historic buildings and substantial mature trees.

Tree planting along the boundaries of the playing fields, along the Riverside Walk and within the Closes further enhances this leafy character. The Riverside Walk acts as a linking and unifying element within the character area, and through to neighbouring areas.

The surfaces within the Close generally comprise of tarmacadam with exposed stone aggregate for the surfaces carrying vehicles. Often the original gully and runnel details in small pebbles are retained. The pedestrian paths are generally of stone flags with some sett work. Around the gates, broader areas of pebbles survive with cobbles and flags used for the carriageways. These elements tie the area together, enhancing its separateness from the rest of the city.

C19 statues of Wellington and Nelson (7) enjoy prominent positions in the Upper Close. Cast iron bollards are used to protect

the pedestrian routes from vehicular traffic and there are several traditional lantern-style street lights.

The east end of Bishopgate, except immediately around the Bishop's Bridge, is generally quite tightly enclosed by buildings on the back edge of the footpath. Opposite the Great Hospital, the presence of the playing fields and more generous setting of the Great Hospital buildings and St Helen's House generally allow space for more tree planting and the feel of the street changes. Few trees are particularly dominant and it is the cumulative effect of a number of small trees and large shrubs which produces the effect. The north-south leg of the street which runs to the Adam and Eve PH is tightly enclosed by high walls which mark the boundaries between the Great Hospital and the Cathedral Precinct.

The views out from the street, looking westwards towards the rear of the Cathedral and eastwards out of the Conservation Area towards the gasholder are both quite well provided with trees and greenery.

The railings outside St Helen's House are a particular feature of the street allowing an attractive view of the buildings enclosing the courtyard garden. Within the north-east corner of Great Hospital range, a C19 swan pool survives.

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The Riverside Walk is generally very attractive and well landscaped with mature trees and shrubs lining the path. There are some particularly good groups of trees in the stretch from the rear of the Great Hospital to south of the Cow Tower. South of Bishopgate, the playing fields have a belt of mature trees alongside the path.

Building Types

The Cathedral clearly dominates this area and is one of the best-preserved Norman Cathedrals in Britain. The Great Hospital is also a rare survival of a C13 charitable foundation with several good C19 almshouse groups around it. Both the Cathedral and Great Hospital retain cloistered walks. The Cow Tower is the best-preserved element of the town's defences and has an attractive setting whilst the remaining elements of the Precinct Walls are important in historic and townscape terms.

The Bishop's Palace includes elements of a Norman building whilst the C14 Carnary College and C15 gates to Tombland and the Water Gate are important buildings within the context of the town. Within the Close and on Bishopgate are several good C18 and C19 houses, often concealing earlier fabric. Some of the Georgian façades are especially good whilst the former stables on the north side of Ferry Lane are a rare survival in the City centre. On Bishopgate is a terrace of Edwardian houses; others were built to the

east of these but were replaced in the later C20. The Norwich School also has several late-C20 buildings both adjacent to Palace Street and on the edge of the playing fields.

Building Details

The earliest and most prestigious buildings in the Close are often of stone or of stone and flint. Stone for the Cathedral is mostly from Barnack (near Stamford) with some imported from Caen in Normandy. Timber framing is not so common here as in other historic parts of the city, though examples do survive including No.65 which is covered by mathematical tiles. Other examples are generally rendered. Red brick is also common as a walling material, particularly for the numerous C18 buildings and refacings and in conjunction with flint on several buildings, including the Victorian Gothic No. 57 with its polychromatic brickwork detailing. Gault brick is rarer but can be seen on one building on the west side of the Upper Close.

The most common walling material along Bishopgate is flint with brick rubble and brick dressings; this is also found on The Deanery (8). Red brick is also relatively common as is gault brick for C19 buildings around the Great Hospital and at St Helen's House. The use of stone is largely restricted to dressings except on the oldest buildings at the Great Hospital where it is the dominant walling material. Some elements of timber



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framing with rendered infill panels can also be seen.

Roofs within the area are most commonly of pantiles (red and black) with several buildings having clay plain tiled roofs (especially at the north end of the Close). Lead is predominantly used on the Cathedral and, although now restricted to the cloisters, was used for roofing the Great Hospital and for some other buildings. Welsh slate roofs are also relatively common particularly on C19 buildings whilst Nos. 52-4 Bishopgate is the only thatched building in this area.

Reused masonry (usually stone- or flint) is a feature of the area giving considerable texture and character to buildings and boundary walls alike (8); the reuse of stone

with flint is particularly noticeable on the north side of the Lower Close. Modern buildings in the area are generally of wire-cut brown, buff and red brick often with concrete pantiled roofs. The RIBA award winning (2005) Refectory building (by Hopkins architects) is the main exception to this as it has incorporated existing older fabric.

An interesting feature of several of the properties in the area are the gabled ends, some of which are crow-stepped or shaped in the Dutch style. 'Lucams' are less common in this area than in the streets outside the Precinct Walls. The very fine chimneys to Nos. 52-4 Bishopgate are a particular skyline feature whilst some gabled ends are of 'tumbling' brickwork.



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Management & Enhancement

1. New buildings must be of excellent architectural quality (*D1, D2.1*)
2. Contemporary materials should only be introduced to complement historic materials and should not dominate (*E1.1*)
3. Sense of exclusion created by Precinct Wall must be maintained (*D3*)
4. Retention and enhancement of river access (*LP: SR 11*)
5. Encouraging increased use of the river and riverside (*LP: TVA 3, SR 11*)
6. Enhancing the setting of the City Gates / Walls (*LP: HBE 10*)
7. Redevelopment of Cloister car park to create key urban space (*A1.1, B1.2*)
8. Enhancing setting of Cow Tower (*LP: HBE 10*)
9. Creation of City Wall walk (*LP: HBE 1, 8, 9, 12 & 16, TVA 8 & 9; SPD – Heritage Interpretation*)
10. Potential use of article 4(2) Direction to Preserve No's 20 - 48 (even) Bishopgate