



Heritage Action Zones
Historic England

GREAT WESTON CONSERVATION AREA

Conservation Area Appraisal
and Management Plan

1. AN INTRODUCTION

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Urban Practitioners

Adopted 04 December 2018



How to find your way around

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document introduces the Great Weston Conservation Area, what makes it special and how it should be managed. The conservation area is divided into four character areas. This document can be read as a comprehensive overview and guide to the single conservation area, but if you would like to learn more about each character area, there are individual appraisals which can be viewed and accessed separately for ease. These can be found here:

www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/planning/building-control/planning/planning-advice/heritage/conservation-areas/

INTERACTIVE

This document is intended to be read online. You can navigate through it using the interactive links on the contents page and throughout the report.

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Summary of special character
Overview of current condition
Mapping character
Changes affecting the area
Managing change

4. Character Area 2: Town Centre



Introduction and history
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 Click on the character area you are interested in and you will be redirected to its appraisal.

5. Character Area 3: Hillside



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Background and context

The Great Weston Conservation Area is a new conservation for Weston-super-Mare that amalgamates five former conservation areas and adds a new part of the town around its commercial and civic centre. The former conservation areas were:

- Birnbeck (designated 1984)
- Melrose / Grove Park (designated 1980/1989)
- Boulevard and Montpelier (designated 1971)
- Beach Lawns (designated 1998)
- Ellenborough Park (designated 1985)

This new conservation area has been divided into four character areas to assist in our understanding of what makes the conservation area of special interest, and provides a basis from which change can be positively managed. Each of the four character areas has its own appraisal and management plan which can be viewed on the Council's website:

www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/planning/building-control/planning/planning-advice/heritage/conservation-areas/

The conservation area appraisal process has been informed by the views of residents, business owners and representatives of local groups. Four workshops were held at all stages of the process, and people were invited to comment on the emerging work at the draft Appraisal stage. A summary of stakeholder involvement can be found in the Appendix.

The purpose of this introduction document is to outline the boundary of the Great Weston Conservation Area and to summarise its special interest. The document also introduces the character areas.

Statement of significance

Weston-super-Mare has been a place of human habitation for more than two thousand years, making it a place of considerable historic value. Worlebury Camp, immediately to the north of the conservation area, is one of England's most important Iron Age sites, and Roman remains have been found in the town centre. Disastrous tidal flooding in the early 17th and 18th centuries almost destroyed the old settlement, but it recovered through employment in fishing, quarrying and zinc extraction.

The turning point in the town's history came after 1800 when the health-giving properties of sea bathing were being promoted, drawing visitors from Bath and Bristol. The first hotel opened in 1810 but the new resort grew sporadically until the 1840s, when the new railway brought passengers in large numbers. Development was rapid, spreading inland and south towards Uphill.

The historic interest in the hillside area of Weston where the influence of early estate ownerships can be traced to the 1830s and 40s. The survival of terraces closer to the town centre, such as Alfred Street are part of a once larger area of working class housing from the mid-19th century.

Great Weston is of high aesthetic and architectural value. There are numerous landmark buildings - Birnbeck Pier, Odeon Cinema, Town Hall, the Mercury Offices, the Grand Pier, the former Library and several fine churches. There are notable set pieces of urban planning including Ellenborough Crescent, Oriel Terrace

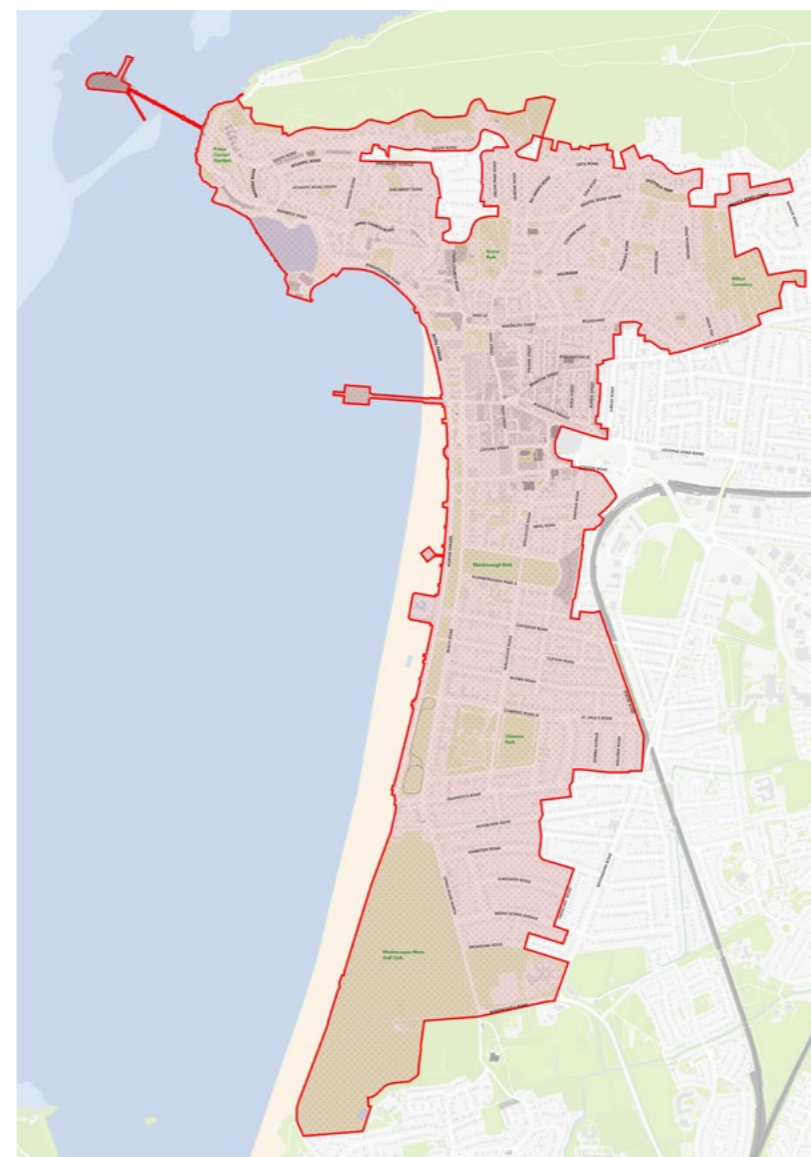
and Atlantic Terrace. There are also many buildings of lesser individual merit but high group value, reflected in patterns of design, layout or the consistency of materials.

There are few buildings by nationally known figures other than the pier engineer Eugenius Birch and the Victorian church architect G F Bodley although Hans Fowler Price, whose best work is found in Weston, was a prolific and successful architect who practised in the town for over 50 years from 1860 to 1911. Price's architectural legacy is central to Weston's present-day character.

Great Weston's aesthetic value is reflected in the overall quality of construction, alignment of buildings on plots, consistency of materials in most streets. Variation of architectural language and styles reflect the eclecticism of the Victorian period - Tudorbethan, Italianate, Gothic, neoclassical, French Renaissance, Arts and Crafts and various hybrids create a rich and lively townscape. The twentieth century legacy is also diverse with good examples of, classical revival and moderne (including the Centre on Walliscote Road, 1933) as well as International Style and Festival of Britain influences in the High Street.

There have been fewer examples of good contemporary architecture but there has been some exemplary conservation work and transformative public realm projects.

The Great Weston Conservation Area



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What is a conservation area?

Conservation areas were introduced in the 1960s as a recognition of the importance of the collective value of old buildings and places. Designating a conservation area is a statement of faith by the local planning authority that a place is of special interest, and shows a commitment to seeking its preservation or enhancement.

The statutory definition of a conservation area is an 'area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance' (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

What are appraisals and management plans?

No place stands still. Conservation is an active process of maintenance and managing change. There is a requirement to review conservation areas from time to time. Appraisals provide an evidence base for determining character and context which is then used to develop management guidance. The guidance is intended to help planners, homeowners, residents and business owners to take good care of their conservation area.

Summary of special interest

Weston-super-Mare has grown exceptionally from its humble beginnings as a fishing village to a town with over 80,000 residents. Despite parts of the town facing challenges of deprivation, Weston continues to be a popular place to live, work and visit.

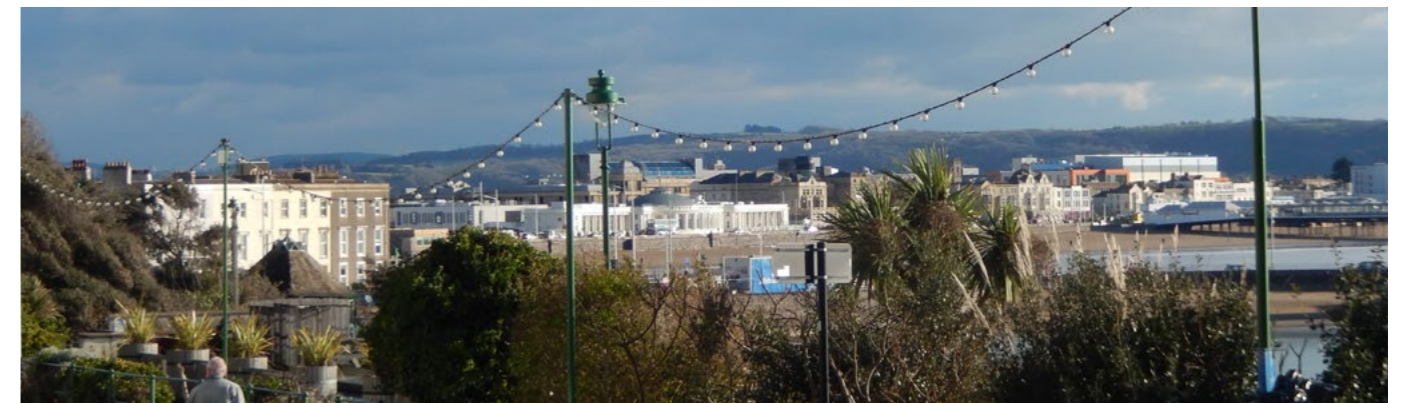
The richness of its heritage is a great asset and presents a valuable opportunity for renewal. The Great Weston Heritage Action Zone is an exciting initiative which will help the town's heritage to play a central part in its regeneration.

Weston's story can be told through layers of its heritage, not only from historic buildings, but the layout of roads, paths and boundaries, the building and paving materials, and the special relationship between the town and its seaside setting. The conservation area is unique and a product of geographical, social, economic and cultural processes that have shaped, and continue to shape its character today.



Setting and dimensions

The impressive topography and seaside setting are a defining feature of the town, providing an ever changing landscape with frequent glimpses of the sea from across Weston. The hills allow long views of the sea from the north which are complex and layered. Worlebury Hill / Weston Woods provides a great backdrop to views from the beach towards the town, and a definition to the urban edge of the town.



Victorian architecture and the stone town

The Victorian housing boom led to a distinctively 'Weston' townscape, dominated by classical villas and limestone Gothic villas with elaborate detailing. Building and boundary materials were sourced locally; Weston Stone and Bath stone contribute enormously to the areas' built character. The influential architect Hans Price made his eclectic mark on Weston's buildings in the second half of the 19th century.



Hidden gems

Weston's Victorian inheritance is evident. Less well known is the quality and variety of its 20th century buildings, including shops, offices, churches and a Grade II listed cinema.



Materials and features

Weston sits on an outcrop of grey carboniferous limestone, also known as Weston Stone. This characterful material gives the Victorian town much of its consistency and character. Shaly and rough-textured, it is not suitable as a freestone and is generally laid as coursed rubble. Dressings and carved work are executed in Bath stone, a finegrained oolitic limestone for carving and finer work like the mouldings for cornices, columns, or door and window architraves. Bath stone (or the geologically similar Dundry limestone from quarries south of Bristol) was also used for prestige compositions such as Ellenborough Crescent. Where the stones are used together, the honey-coloured Bath stone provides a pleasing contrast with the greyish-pink tones of Weston Stone.

Many of Weston's public buildings and residential streets are noteworthy for their expressive detailing – moulded and incised decoration in limestone, tile hanging, columns, pilasters, finials, bargeboards, mullioned windows, bays, oriels, dormers, chimneys and corner turrets are all evident. Elaborately carved gables are a particular Weston hallmark.

Stone came from several local quarries including the Town Quarry on the side of Worlebury Hill. Quarries were active in Weston-super-Mare until the 1920s and limestone ashlar was still being imported for higher status buildings like the Magistrates' Court or the 1950s Quaker Meeting House.

The earlier houses from the early Victorian period were often finished in stucco. Red brick was introduced after the 1860s, and by the turn of the century when it was the material of choice for many of the grander houses Red brick was also used in combination tile hanging or half-timbering. There were several local brickworks at Milton and Locking Road. Later houses often have stone fronts and more utilitarian brick to the sides and rear.

Roofs were commonly Welsh slate or Roman tile. Lead is also used, and occasionally copper, for church roofs, turrets and cupolas.

In the interwar period the palette was widened with the introduction of cement render, pebbledash and glazed tiles. Some of the earliest houses in Weston retain their delicate wrought iron balconies. Cast iron was widely used in the Victorian period, for gates, railings, balconies and rooftop decoration.

From the post-war period there are several interesting examples of curtain wall glazing, particularly in the High Street area, using structure and materials to bring a Festival of Britain lightness to the architecture.

Throughout the conservation area but particularly in the residential streets the stone boundary walls an important characteristic.

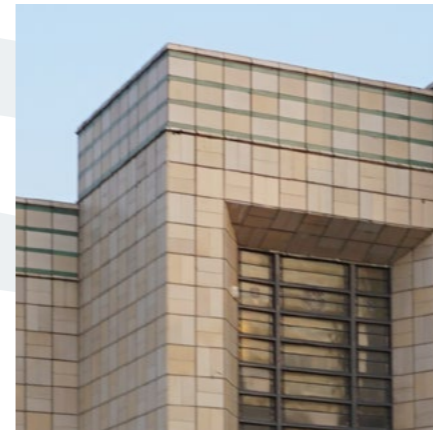
The exposure to a marine climate has taken its toll on woodwork and many doors and windows have been replaced, at the expense of the consistency and integrity of groups of buildings. Where original painted softwood sash windows or panelled doors survive, they offer important historical evidence of the original appearance.



Sash windows



Ornamental brick and stone



Art Deco glazed tile



Cast iron balcony



Stone carvings



Stone wall and cast iron street sign



1950s raised lettering



1930s door and window



Arts and Crafts detail



Gate piers



Decorative stonework



Seafront shelter



Terrazzo shop threshold



Boundary walls

WESTON'S STORY

“ SO COME! - and leave all care behind,
And be more happy, cheerful kind;
The time well spent in healthful pleasure,
Buys you in more than ample measure,
Spirits renewed - a clearer brain.
'Tis by so spending you will gain,
So doubt ye not, but quick prepare,
To breathe the pure fresh Weston air. ”
- Thomas Beedle poems, 1873



The sands looking south from the Pier, National Archives



“ Few, if any, towns of a similar class, have grown in the marvellous way that Weston-super-Mare has, we are quite sure. ”
- C. E. Wilson, 1882

1880s

By the 1880s the town has expanded significantly

From a small fishing village...

1840
Weston on the cusp of change

1851
Population rises to 4,033

1891
15,864 people

Ancient Weston

An Iron age hillfort stood at Worlebury on the site of Bronze Age remains. A Roman building once stood on the site of Weston College

Tudor Weston

The village became a hive of activity after the discovery of the mineral calamine, the first place in Britain it was found



A plan showing Worlebury Camp

1808

From the 1750s, doctors recommended bathing in the sea for its health benefits, attracting people to Weston. The first hotel is built in 1808

1801
Small fishing hamlet, population 108



LEFT: The Old Cottage

1815

The Western Enclosure Act established the road layout and ownership of land spurring growth

1841
The railway arrived in Weston-super-Mare in June on the Bristol and Exeter railway



RIGHT: British Railways poster c. 1950s



Hans Price, Architect



1861

Population is 8,033. The Victorian housing boom leads to the creation of villas, estates and boulevards

1867

Birnbeck Pier opened at a cost of £20,000



The Old Pier, Weston-super-Mare



The old pier offered a 'theatre of wonders' including a bandstand, maze and waterchute

1880s

The Sea Front Improvement Scheme led to the creation of the sea walls and promenade and day visitor numbers soared. New shops opened for visitors

1894

Weston-super-Mare Urban District created

...to a thriving Victorian seaside resort...

...from Town to Borough...



Early 1900s
Regent Street and Grand Central Hotel National Archives



1940
Weston continues to develop having been awarded Borough status in 1937



1961
Post-war development takes place to the south-east of Weston. Bournville Estate is in the most deprived 5% wards nationally



2018
Weston-super-Mare as it is today

1904

The Grand Pier opens to encourage tourists to visit shops and cafes in the town centre



Pier and promenade, early 1900s National Archives

1914

During the First World War, 80% of the trees in Weston Woods / Worlebury Hill were felled for military use. Large numbers of men from Weston died during the war.

1927

Winter Gardens and Pavilion open

1933

Summer at Beach Lawns from the air



Top: Beach Lawns
Below: Looking north across Marine Parade Historic England

1945

End of the Second World War - large areas of the town were destroyed, especially in Boulevard, High Street and Grove Park. The war brought the aircraft industry to Weston



Grove Park in 1965 Weston Mercury

1967



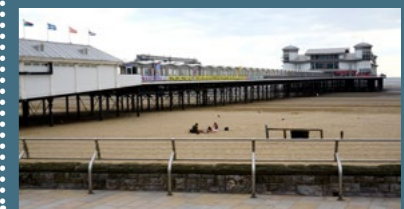
Spring Bank Holiday, 1967 Weston Mercury

1970s

Foreign holidays become cheaper and Weston begins to suffer as holidaymakers venture elsewhere

2010

The Grand Pier reopens with a new building following a fire that destroyed the pavilion in 2008



...where next for Weston?

GREAT WESTON CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER AREAS

The Great Weston Conservation Area covers a significant part of the town. Within this area are a number of different types of neighbourhoods and characters.

The appraisal of the Conservation Area has divided the designation into four character areas. These character areas reflect the varying landuse, physical form and historical development within the town. The appraisal and management plan is divided into these four areas to ensure the issues identified and the principles for change are appropriately targeted.

SEA FRONT

- 1. Marine Parade
- 2. Knightstone
- 3. Birnbeck Road

TOWN CENTRE

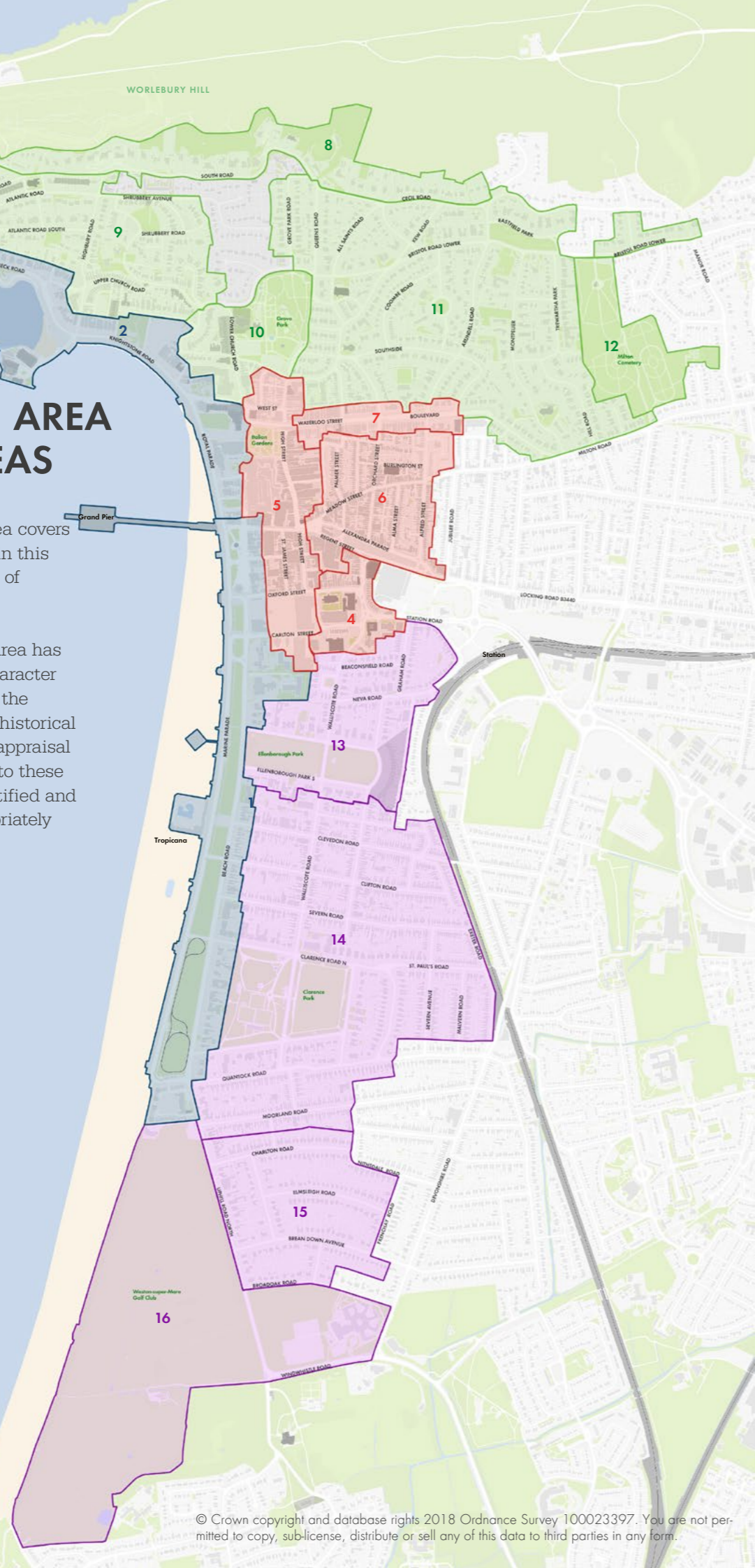
- 4. Civic Quarter
- 5. High Street
- 6. Orchard Meadows
- 7. The Boulevard

HILLSIDE

- 8. South Road / Cecil Road
- 9. The Shrubbery / Atlantic Road
- 10. Glebe Road and Grove Park
- 11. Grove and Montpelier
- 12. Milton Cemetery

WHITECROSS

- 13. Ellenborough
- 14. Walliscote
- 15. Uphill Road North
- 16. Golf Course



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SEA FRONT



The seafront is characterised by the long sweep of Weston Bay, with hotels, institutions and blocks of flats on Beach Road facing the Bristol Channel across the expanse of lawns. From **Marine Parade** there are long views north, west and south. Moving north beyond the Grand Pier the scale reduces, with smaller buildings and terraces coming closer to the Esplanade and providing some containment. **Knightstone Island** provides a vantage point across the bay to the town centre. The headland at Birnbeck pier is craggier, less formal, with sinuous terraces responding to the topography. From their raised position **Prince Consort Gardens** offer views across the bay and to the islands and the South Wales coast. The Birnbeck area includes some of the town's earliest seaside developments.

Both piers are important in the townscape, affording long views across the town. **Birnbeck** is notable for its famous designer, the pier engineer Eugenius Birch and its historical associations with the former steamer services.

At the southern end of the character area the expansive Beach Lawns create a formal character with long views. This space is edged by large hotels, B&Bs and Victorian houses looking across the bay.

New flood and tidal defence scheme in 2007-10 enabled the widening of the promenade, with new paving, lighting, seating and art works.



TOWN CENTRE



The commercial heart of Weston is centred on the spine of the **High Street** with buildings of different styles, sizes and materials, but which share a common frontage at the pavement edge. The southern end of the High Street, formerly Union Street, was widened in the 1950s. The High Street has little at shopfront level of any note but above fascia level there is a miscellany of interesting buildings of various periods and styles.

The Sovereign Centre, a large and inward-facing development, is included in this character area. East of the High Street is the **Orchard Street/Meadow Street** area, a fine-grained triangle of early Victorian terrace housing and small shops. Its intimate character contrasts with the bigger scale of the High Street.

The Old Town Hall is part of an enclave of civic and cultural buildings that includes the library, Odeon Cinema and the former Magistrates' Courts. Waterloo Street and the **Boulevard** were created in 1860 to provide a link from the High Street to the Montpelier Estate a treelined avenue of generous dimensions that includes notable buildings by Hans Price. Alexandra Parade is of interest as the site of Weston's first railway station (1841- 1866) which transformed the fortunes of the resort. Alfred Street is one of the streets in the working-class area of the town that developed to the north of the railway station, between 1853-65. Alfred Street is also the site of the town's former hospital (Hans Price architect).

The town centre character area has the strongest potential for enhancement, healing scars and repairing the historic fabric.



HILLSIDE



The slopes below Worlebury Hill include traces of the old village around the St John's Church, as well as some of the residential development built during the first decades of the seaside resort. The topography is the dominant influence; not just the natural gradient of the hill, but also the indentations of the quarry that yielded the town's distinctive Weston Stone. **South Road and Cecil Road** form a string of large detached houses, set deeply into the hillside; the **Shrubbery** area also responds to the lie of the land. Irregular, serpentine forms and mature trees typify the area. More consciously urban elements include stone terraces such as Grove Crescent, Royal Crescent and **Atlantic Road** the latter part of a planned suburb formerly known as Cliftonville. Landemann Circus developed as part of Grove Town, started in the 1860s. Notable buildings include All Saint's Church (GF Bodley 1898-1902).

Stone boundary walls, including garden retaining walls, are a distinctive component in this character area. Key open spaces are **Grove Park** (formerly the private gardens of the Smyth Pigott family, acquired as a public park in 1890). Registered Historic Park Grade II) and **Milton Cemetery**. The area also includes pockets of Arts and Crafts-inspired houses, with steeply pitched roofs and tile hanging. Landmarks include the churches and the converted water tower at the Shrubbery. Trewartha Park on the Montpelier Estate illustrates this influence well, with the upper part added in the 1890s by Hans Price including his own house (No.7).

Many of the bigger houses face south or west, taking advantage of long views across the town and the bay. Glimpses of the town centre or the sea are also experienced from many of the roads in the Hillside area.



WHITECROSS



The Whitecross character area is for the most part a residential suburb that came relatively late (1860s-1920s) in Weston's development; spreading southwards from the town centre to Uphill, and east to reach inland from Beach Road to the railway line. The largely flat terrain supported a fairly regular grid of villas and terraces, many of them built in Weston Stone. **Walliscote Road** is the main spine of the area, running parallel to and a block east of Beach Road. **Ellenborough Crescent**, built on the Bath/Clifton model of a grand terrace, is the main set piece, set back from the seafront behind the park. The roads south of Moorland Road (off Uphill Road North) are typified by early 20th century detached houses and bungalows, but with occasional highlights on corner plots. The **golf course** provides a green wedge between the seafront and the houses.

The special interest is in their historic development as the last phases of the Victorian resort. The architectural interest is the consistency of the streets, the rhythm of architectural elements such as gables, bay windows, decorative bargeboards, finials and mullioned windows. Some traditional shopfronts survive.

Landmarks in the area are principally the churches, St Paul's and Corpus Christi, but many streets contain minor incidents or corner flourishes like turrets or bay windows. The relationship with the parks and green space is important and in some streets trees make a significant contribution. The golf course and Broadoak School playing fields provide a buffer between Weston and Uphill.

Many of the cross streets end in western views of Beach Lawns and the seafront.



