

# CONSERVATION AREA AUDIT



WESTBOURNE

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City of Westminster



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**WESTBOURNE  
CONSERVATION AREA AUDIT**

**FOR  
CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

**adopted 20 February 2002**

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## Introduction: The Westbourne Conservation Area

The townscape of the Westbourne Conservation Area is regular, the result of having been developed over a short period of time. The area was transformed from a hamlet with fields in cultivation to a metropolitan suburb in the space of about 15 years, starting in the early 1840s.

The character of spaces reflects the method of development. The area was built up by many individual builders, without the guiding influence of a single great estate or large-scale speculator. At first, in the north, earlier landscape features set the pattern for development, which explains the sinuous line of Westbourne Park Road. A little later, in the late 1840s, a tighter gridiron pattern was adopted, creating the serried ranks of roads which march on, one after the other, west of Hereford Road, a simple additive method of growth which is highly characteristic of Victorian speculative development. The grandest houses are found in the northeastern part of Westbourne, in St. Stephen's Gardens and Westbourne Gardens, fine open spaces. The modest scale of Kildare Gardens is more in keeping with the area's pretensions, since the houses in Westbourne were for the most part built for prosperous clerks and professionals, people who would have commuted by omnibus and whose domestic staff would have been small. This explains why there are only a handful of mews spaces, though where these occur they have significant townscape value and historic interest. Interestingly one entire street, the diminutive Bridstow Place, tucked between Chepstow Road and Hereford Road, seems to have been built as for people of modest means, possibly many of them being employed in the surrounding, grander houses. It is, in essence, a mews opened out and made street-sized.

There are a limited range of architectural types, the earliest consisting of semi-detached villas in Westbourne Park Villas and Westbourne Park Road, which are similar in character to slightly earlier houses found in St. John's Wood. These have three, exceptionally four, storeys, with hipped roofs and front gardens. There is a small run of semi-detached villas on the north side of Newton Road, essentially overspill from earlier development along Westbourne Grove.

The rest of Westbourne is filled with terraced housing of different grades. Some modest examples at road intersections were built with shops on the ground floor (original shopfronts survive in places) and having only three storeys. In the north part of the Conservation Area, however, there are some fine terraced houses of ample proportions, many entirely faced in stucco and with grand entrance porches, elaborate Italianate detailing and fine railings. The finest are to be found in St. Stephen's Gardens and Westbourne Gardens, and rise to five storeys. More modest terraces with unusually deep front gardens and a great deal of good ornamental ironwork are found in the western half of the area, in the grid of streets. These terraces have, additionally, some grand architectural touches, giant pilasters applied to projecting ranges, a distant echo of Nash's Regent's Park terraces of the late 1820s. Here fine architectural detail has been eroded. The loss of front garden walls and the formation of hard standings have compromised the spatial characteristics of the street.



In Westbourne Grove there is a wider range of architectural styles as befitting its development from the 1820s through to the turn of the century. From about 1860 there was a deliberate attempt to develop it as a shopping street to rival the smart shopping streets of the West End. Whiteleys achieved some success, but relocated around the corner, in Queensway, in the twentieth century. The earliest generation of buildings are the modestly proportioned two and three storey Regency structures on the north side of Westbourne Grove just west of Newton Grove; the ground floors have been built out with Victorian and twentieth-century shopfronts. There are a fair number of stucco-faced, four storey buildings with Italianate detailing comparable to what is found on the residential properties, but by and large what one finds is a range of architectural styles, a cross section of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commercial styles. There are two of special interest: no. 26, built in 1861 by A. Billing as 'The Athenaeum' (listed Grade II) and having an arcaded elevation of great vigour and with an abundance of fine ornament; and no. 62, which on stylistic grounds can be dated to c.1900 and shows the influence of the Chicago School.

The widening of the Great Western Railway cutting in the early years of this century brought the most significant change, leading to the demolition of houses that stood on the north side of Westbourne Park Villas and leaving in their place a substantial red brick wall, a distinctive townscape feature and included within the conservation area. A handful of bombed sites were redeveloped with buildings that do not respect the character of the place, though none of these are radically out of scale with the rest of historic architecture. In the 1970s, after a period of decline, the social character of the place began to change, with more affluent residents settling here. All in all the area has a sedate, almost sleepy feel to it, as though just off the beaten path.

The view south along Northumberland Place, one of the regular gridiron of streets which are characteristic of the southern half of the conservation area. Front garden walls have been destroyed in many places to make way for hard standings, compromising what was originally a very clear division between public highway and private space. The iron porches and balconies help to soften the architectural forms and tie the buildings into the shrubbery and mature trees.





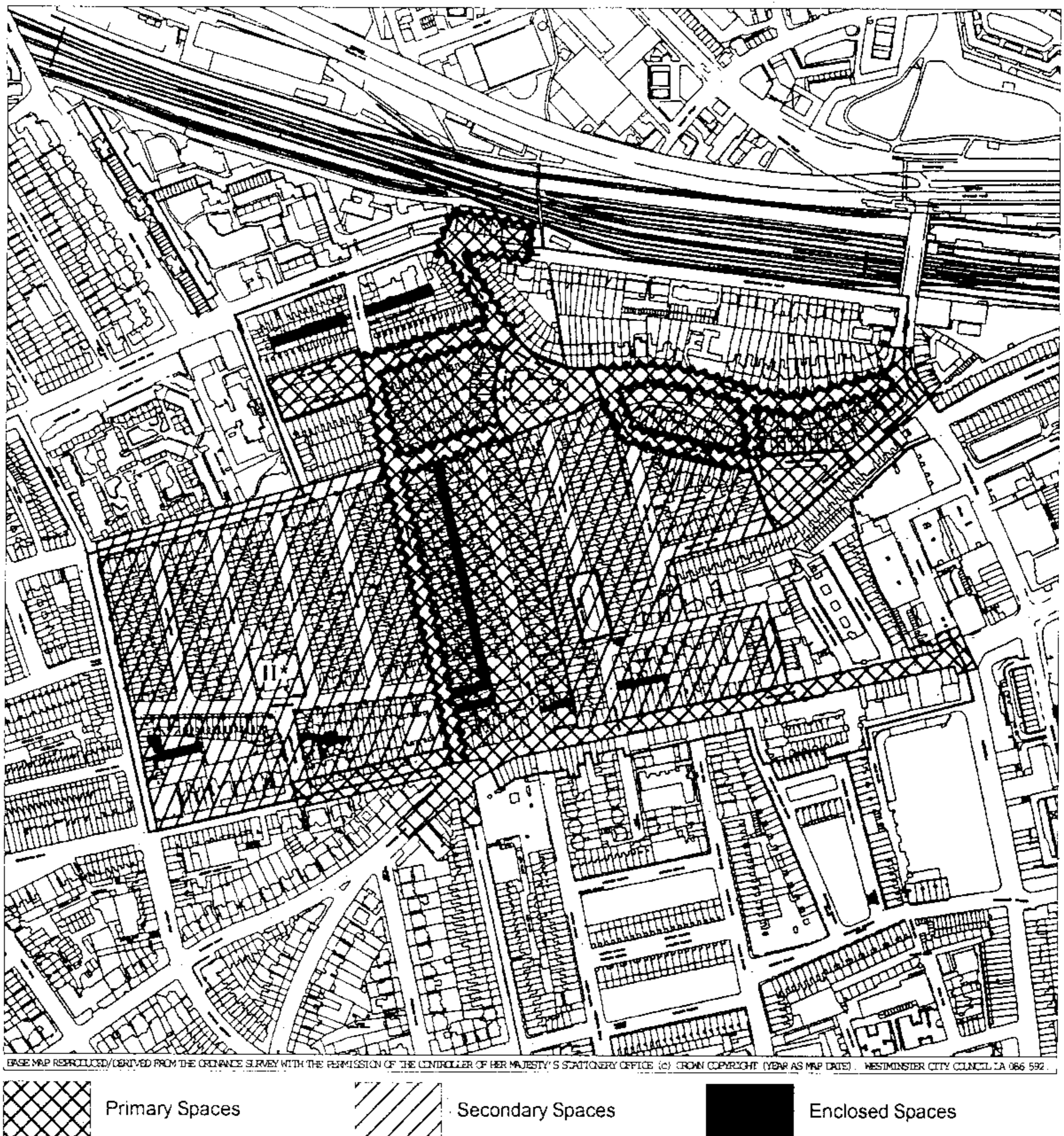
This aerial view shows the sinuous line of Westbourne Park Road, which generates excellent local views and creates a picturesque arrangement of buildings. The Church of St. Stephen near the centre is an important focal point for the area. This photograph also shows the high density of mature trees in the 'villa quarter' to the northeast part of the conservation area. Original Westbourne Park Villas, the straight street to the north, was developed on both sides but at the turn of the century the north side was demolished to widen the railway line into Paddington Station.





This aerial view of 1987 shows the southern half of the conservation area with its grid pattern of regular streets.



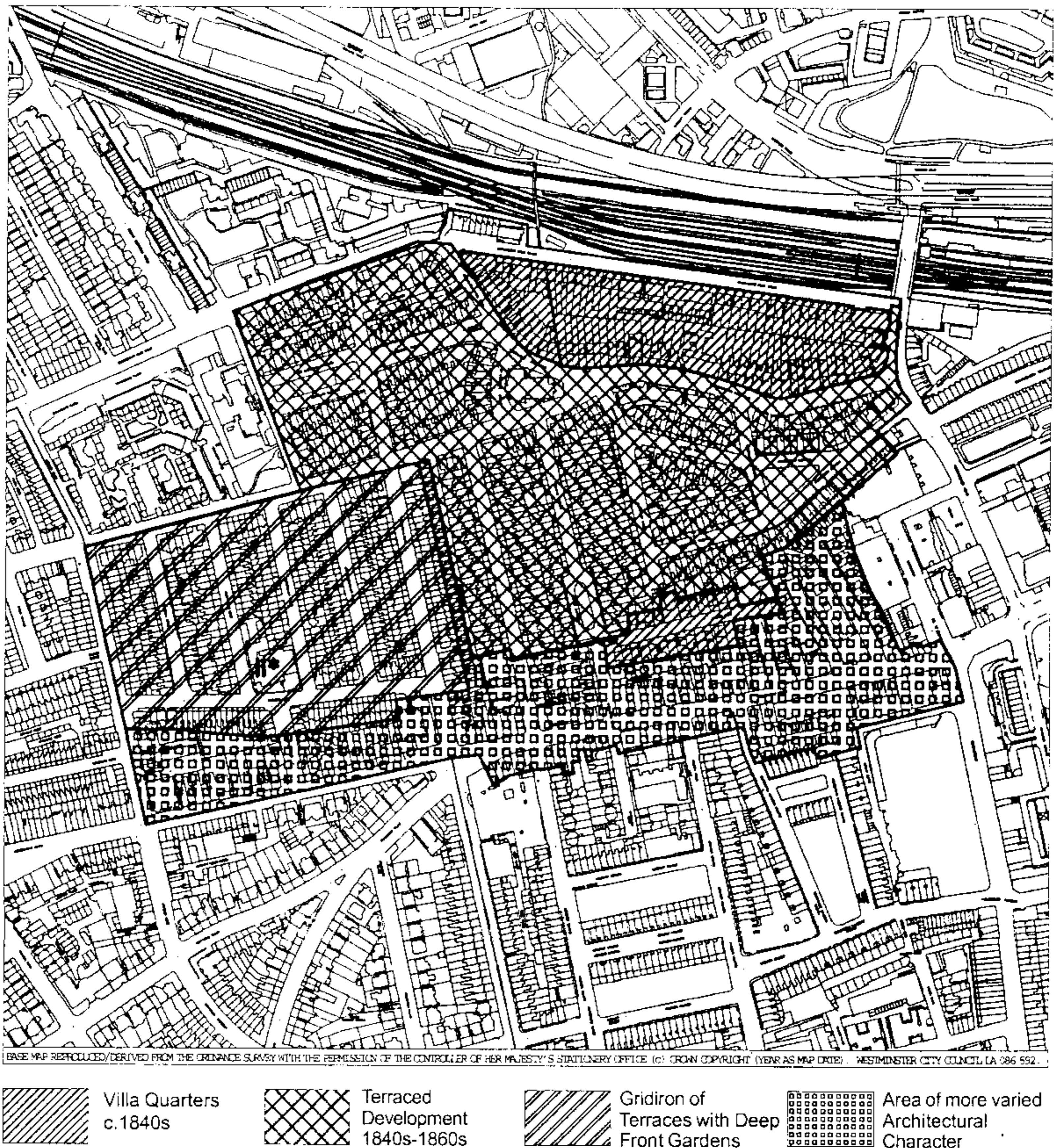


**Figure 1: Character and Hierarchy of Spaces and Open Spaces**

There are two principal east-west thoroughfares, Westbourne Park Road and Westbourne Grove. The sinuous line of the former, taken together with the triangular form of Westbourne Gardens, give this part of Westbourne a loose, picturesque configuration, with two points of focus, St. Stephen's Church and, to a lesser extent, Westbourne Gardens. The principal routes are linked by Chepstow Road, somewhat wider than its neighbours to the west, and by Hereford Road which has become a major north-south route through the area. St. Stephen's Gardens and Kildare Gardens are subsidiary to these main thoroughfares. The regular grid of streets which run west from Kildare Terrace, between Talbot Road and Westbourne Grove, are equally characteristic. Developed along similar lines, this distinctive sequence of streets is highly memorable, having a steady rhythm which is reinforced by groups of mature trees. The mews built for the grand houses on the north side of St. Stephens Gardens retain their configuration, and there are three, more diminutive mews to the south, Wellington Close, Heads Mews and Scotts Mews. Bridstow Place is a distinctive service street, long and very narrow with identical two-storey semis on the west side only. The other point of interest is the junction between the Kildare Gardens and Newton Road, where there is a marked change in level between the original ground level and the higher street level which was made up for the terraced development.

UDP policy DES11 calls on new development in conservation areas to respect of the character and scale of historic streets, lanes and passageways.





**Figure 2: Architectural and Historic Characteristics and Building Materials**

The architectural typology of the area can be broken down into two broad groups: semi-detached villas and terraced houses. The latter are by far the most numerous, and range in height from modest three-storey terraces at the top of Westbourne Park Road, to houses with four or five storeys above a raised ground floor. This typology is varied somewhat in the tight grid of roads west of Kildare Gardens. Here the houses are lower, three storeys mostly, with generous front gardens and elaborate ironwork. And here also are a few grand architectural touches, giant pilasters grouped together to emulate a palace front, distant echoes of Nash's grand Regent's Park terraces. The highlights are the listed terraces in Hereford Road itself and Chepstow Road. Most of the terraced houses originally had butterfly roofs behind straight parapets, whilst the houses in Westbourne Gardens have mansards rising from behind pierced parapets.

By contrast the semi-detached villas have high hipped roofs, prominent party walls, stacks and projecting eaves. They have front gardens as well, originally enclosed by a parapet walls and gate piers. They are mostly three storeys and are found in groups forming distinct villa quarters, not mixed in amongst the terraces. These semis appear to have been the first houses to be built in the area. There are villas as well in Newton Road, in effect overspill from earlier linear development on Westbourne Grove.



Whether semi-detached or terraced, the houses are ornamented with Italianate details, cast in stucco cement. The materials and methods of construction are also similar: outer and party walls are of brick; original roofs were covered in slate (there are scattered survivals); stucco cement facing or cast-stucco ornament, cast iron for railings, balconies and other embellishments.

Along Talbot Road there are a short runs of Tudor style terraces, stucco faced. But the real architectural contrasts are provided by St. Stephens and St. Mary of the Angels which although only slightly later than the terraces are boldly Gothic and faced in rugged Kentish ragstone. The stylistic contrast between these and the surrounding terraces is characteristic of mid Victorian suburban development.

The architecture in Westbourne Grove is more various, consistent with the street's more protracted period of development. There are several Regency period villas, now converted into retail with residential above, a variety of mid Victorian commercial styles and Edwardian too. Some of these buildings are important landmarks in their own right as discussed below.

Proposals for new development in the area will be judged partly by how well the design answers the prevailing architectural typologies outlined above. The City Council's UDP policies DES1E, F, H are particularly relevant, and specify that new development should respect existing building lines and plot widths as well as the original scale and massing of the historic architecture. Where development would affect a group of buildings of unified townscape, the scheme should be designed as a scholarly replica of the predominant pattern.



These semi-detached villas in Westbourne Park Road were amongst the first houses built in the area. Their low slung profiles and deep front gardens are characteristic of the type. Mature trees create a village-like atmosphere.



This terrace in Ledbury Road has giant Corinthian pilasters to its upper floors, a grand touch to what are actually relatively modest houses.

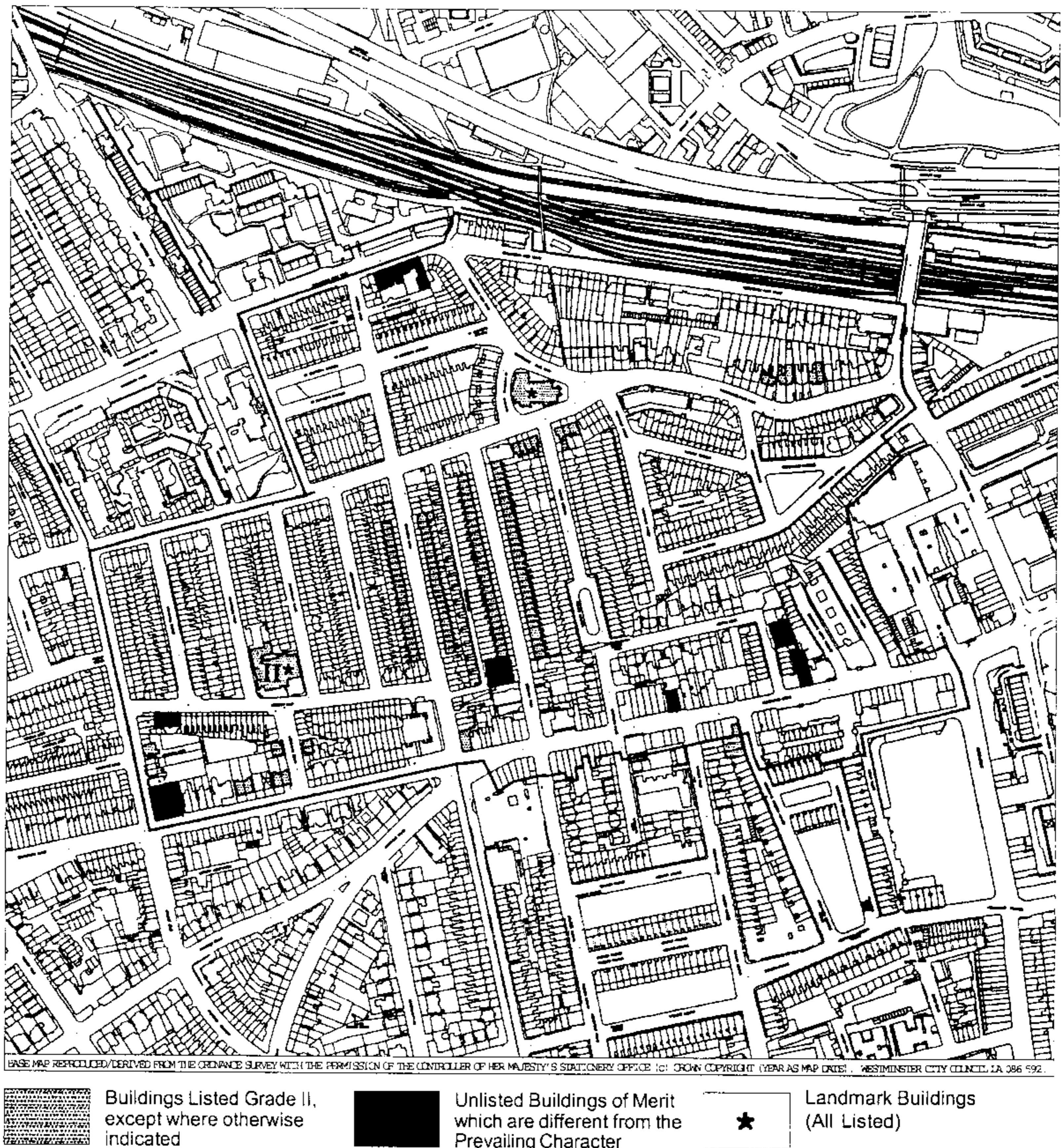


This entrance porch in Sutherland Place has a pair of Tuscan columns and fine iron railings above forming a first-floor balcony. The two-panel door is original.



The most striking landmark in the conservation area is the Gothic Revival Church of St. Stephen, whose spiky silhouette and rough Kentish ragstone facing adds variety to the otherwise uniform townscape. This contrast of style is typical of mid Victorian suburban development, where the churches of all denominations tended to be Gothic.





**Figure 3: Unlisted Buildings of Merit and Landmark Buildings**

The unified townscape which is characteristic of Westbourne means that virtually all of the unlisted buildings in it will be deemed to be unlisted buildings of merit. The City Council will seek to retain these in accordance with UDP policy DES7E. There are, in addition, several which depart from the prevailing character of the area and are unlisted but which because of their intrinsic architectural merit contribute to the appearance of the conservation area. These landmark buildings are indicated on the above map and in the accompanying photographs. Most date to the later Victorian or Edwardian period, and in some cases their distinctive style is symbolic of their original function and so contributes to the historic interest of the area. This is true of the buildings associated with the Church of St. Mary of the Angels in Moorhouse Road and of the former nonconformist church, faced in Kentish ragstone, which stands on the corner of Ledbury Road and Westbourne Grove (now the Westbourne Grove Church Centre). Further west, and of the same vintage, is no. 26 Westbourne Grove; built as 'The Athenaeum' in 1861 by A. Billing, this is an outstanding work of Victorian commercial design. No. 62, the Westbourne Gallery, is a very handsome Edwardian front. From the turn of the century is St. Stephen's School (R.C.) in Westbourne Park Villas, of 1897, a spare, erudite Gothic design. In Newton Road, to the south, is a linked pair of Arts-and-Crafts style buildings, now in the ownership of the United Reformed Church and apparently built for religious/educational purposes. Artesian House, in the road of the same name, is a small and characterful block of flats from the late 1930s.



St. Stephen's School, Westbourne Park Road. This elegant and spare Gothic elevation is actually of two buildings, an earlier dark brick structure to the left (east) side and a higher, taller addition. The 1960s block further west is of little architectural interest, although it does keep to the scale of the historic development in the road.



The former Westbourne Gallery, no. 62 Westbourne Grove, is a particularly noteworthy landmark building in this stretch of commercial and retail frontages.





The Athenaeum was built in 1861 by A. Billing (listed Grade II).

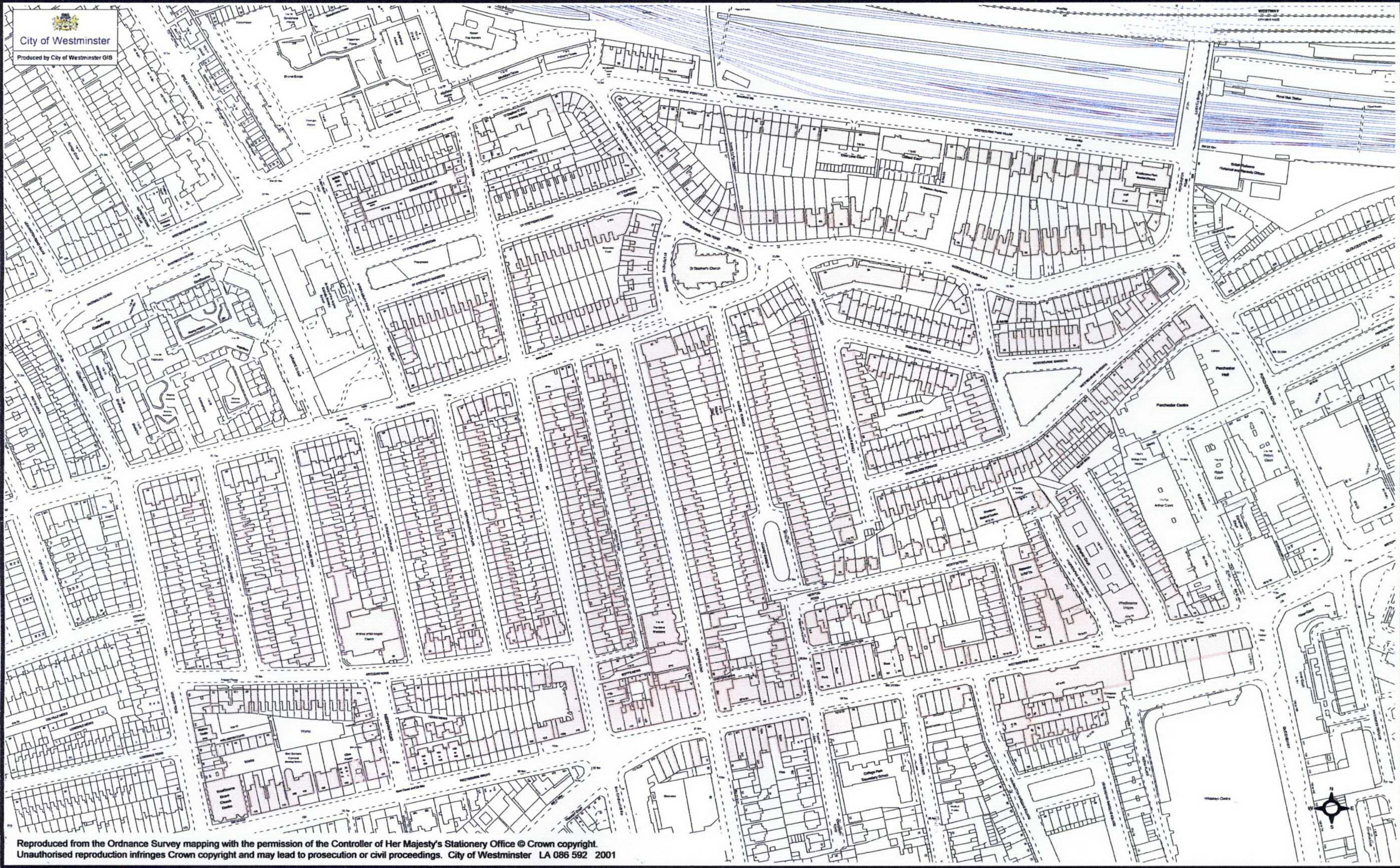


### **Buildings Where Roof Extensions Will Be Unacceptable**

In development of the kind which characterizes the Westbourne Conservation Area unbroken roof lines make a distinctive contribution to the local scene, affecting local views particularly along major routes and within the open spaces, where it is possible to see the houses from a distance. The architectural integrity of the semi-detached villas hinges on the distinctive hipped roofs with overhanging eaves and extensions to these structures will be particularly harmful to the character of the area. This is true as well for many of the terraces which were constructed with butterfly roofs concealed behind arrow-straight cornices. For these reasons roof extensions will be unacceptable in most streets in the conservation area, as indicated in the above map. The relevant City Council policies in respect of this are set down at UDP DES6C and are described in greater detail in *Roofs. A Guide to Alterations and Extensions on Domestic Buildings* (1995) available from the Department of Environment and Planning.

*Please see plan on next page*





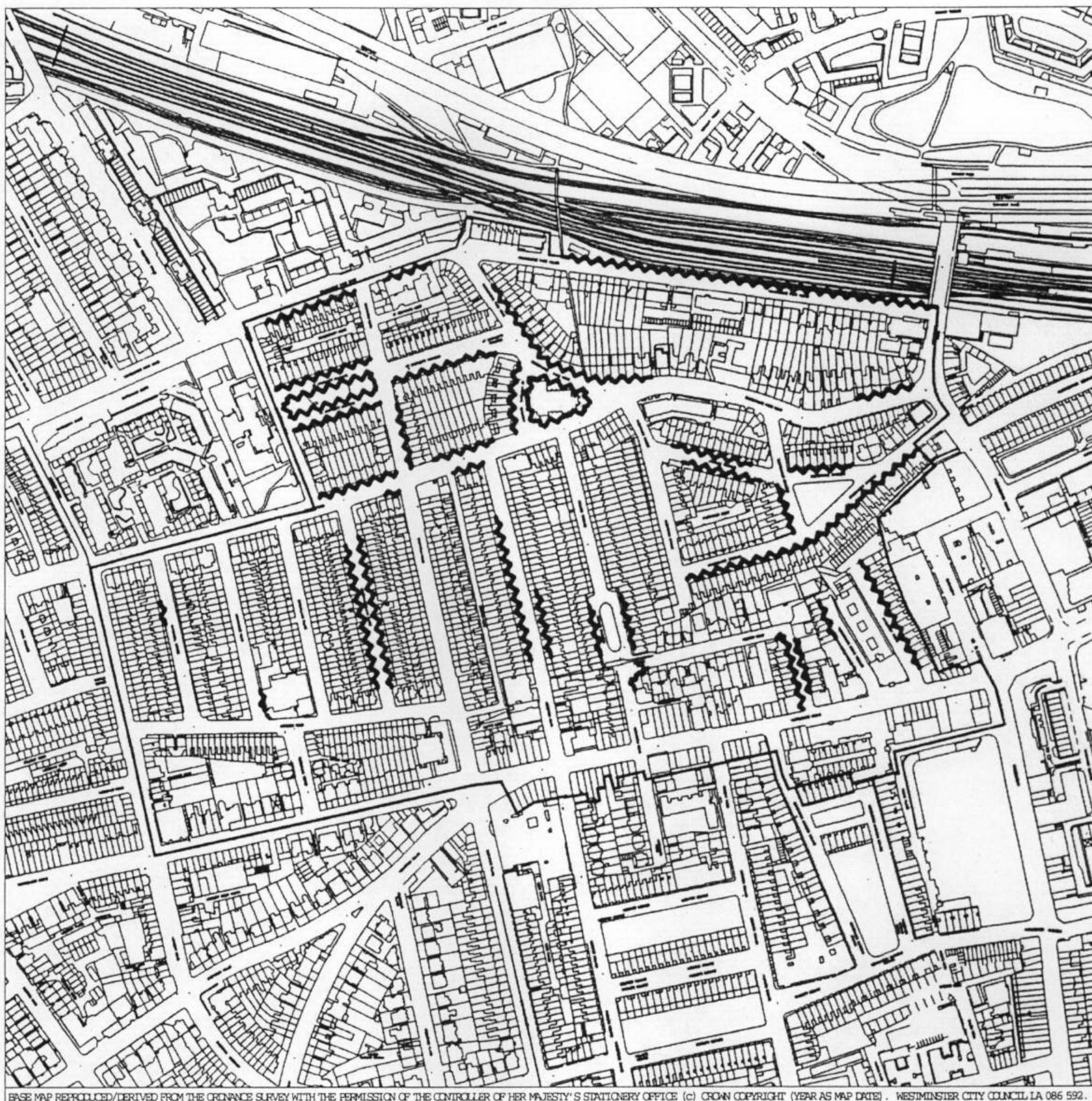
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**KEY**

**Buildings where roof extensions are unacceptable**

*Figure 4: Buildings Where Roof Extensions Will Be Unacceptable*





**Figure 5: Characteristic Local Townscape Details: Railings and Front Garden Walls**

Railings to basement areas and walls enclosing front gardens are the most significant townscape details in the Westbourne Conservation Area. Figure 6 identifies houses where railings survive in large measure and where the front walls survive either in their entirety or to a significant extent. In respect of these features UDP policy DES16 applies. A separate design guide on railings, *Railings in Westminster*, is available from the Department of Environment and Planning. The northern boundary of the area along Westbourne Villas has been amended to incorporate the high red brick wall built around the turn of the century when the Great Western Railway enlarged its cutting. This wall is a distinctive townscape feature and of historic interest, and the City Council will require its preservation on these grounds.





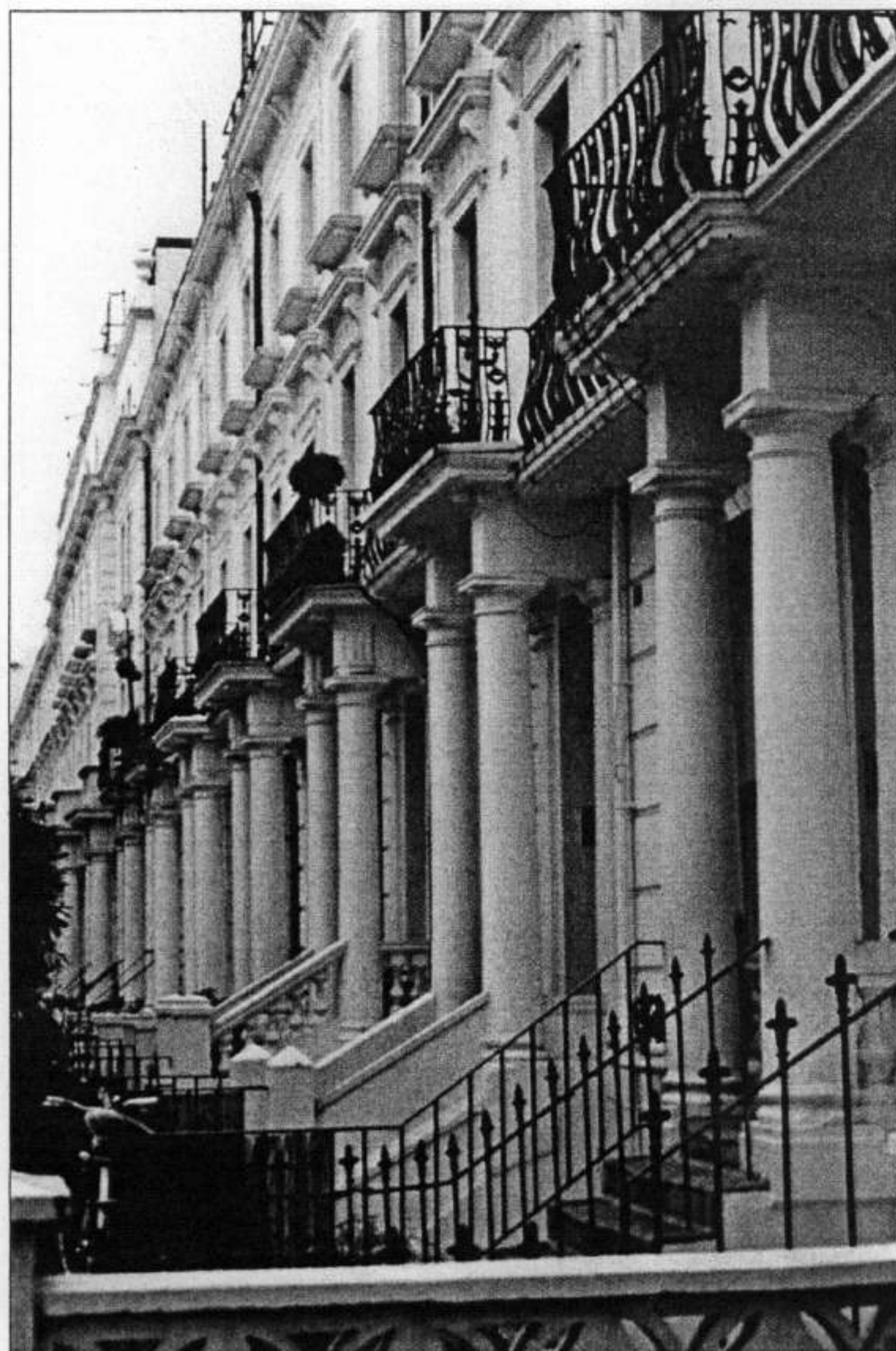
The iron railings to the basement areas of the houses in Kildare Gardens are an important townscape feature, adding texture, scale and visual interest to the fine entrance porches.



Many of the houses in the conservation area have very florid sill railings. Where these are found in conjunction with original area railings or front garden walls, the affect is particularly fine and make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area.



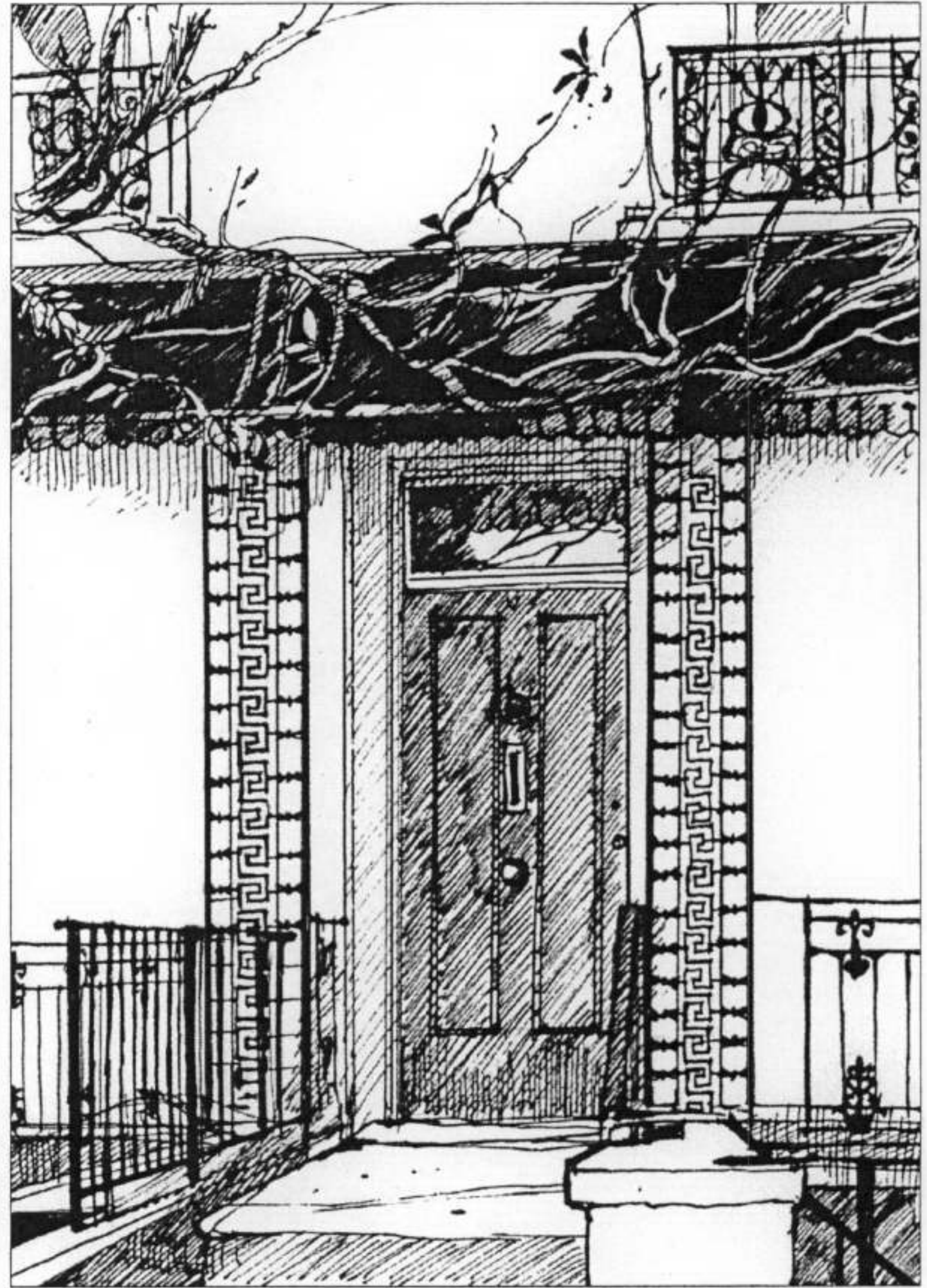
Boundary walls and railings to front gardens are an important original townscape feature, which has been eroded in many part of the area over the years. In shallow front gardens such as those in Courtnell Road there are traces of authentic railings and walls.



In roads where the front gardens are of more generous proportions (Moorhouse Road, Sutherland Place and Northumberland Place) the sense of separation between the front gardens and the public highway has been destroyed by the removal of boundary walls and the formation of hard standings. In Sunderland Terrace, shown here, with its handsome entrance porches and first-floor balcony railings, the sequence of front gardens, each with its own enclosure, has survived particularly well, even if many of the enclosing elements are of unsympathetic design.

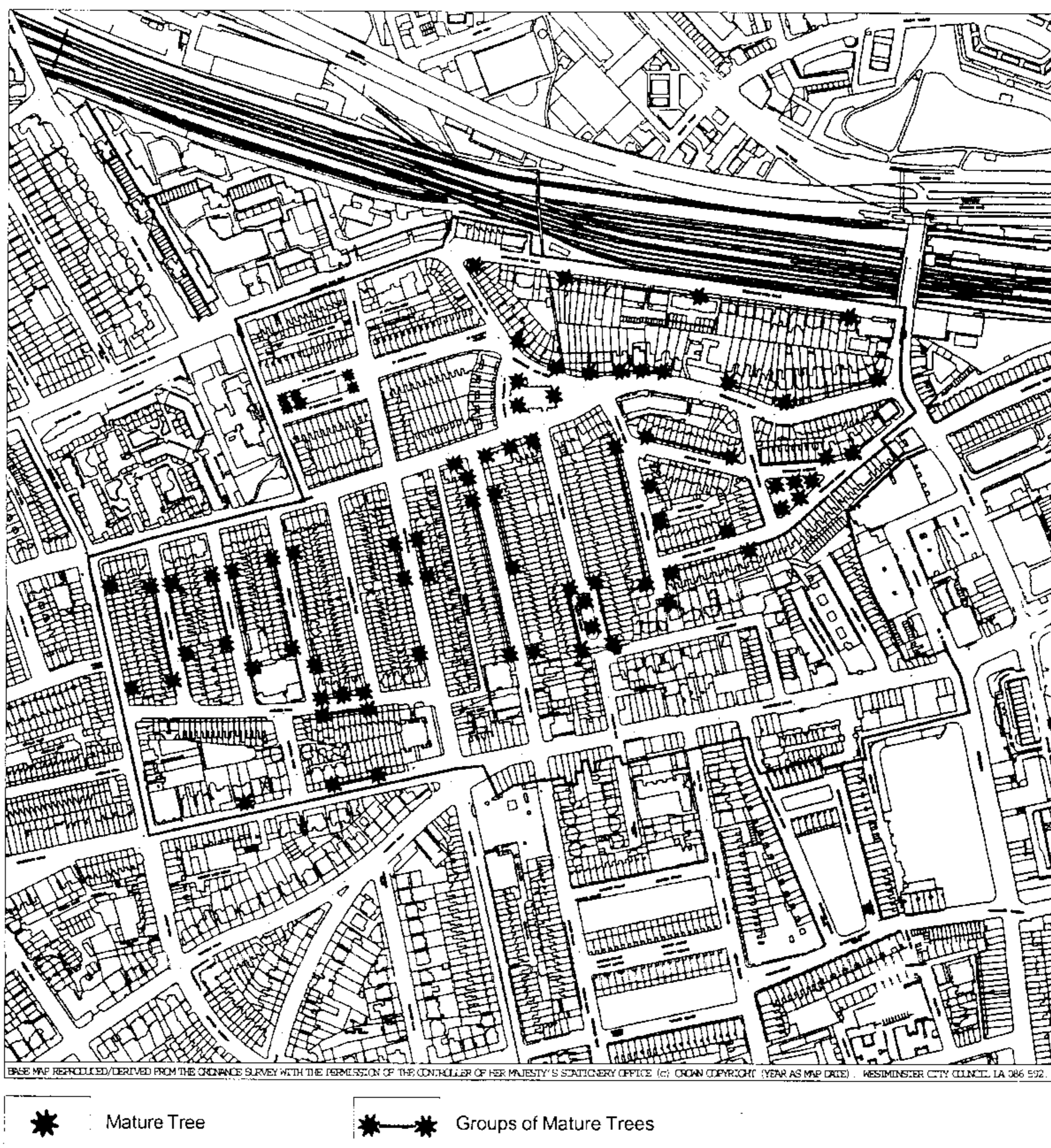


There are many very ornate railings of various sorts fixed to houses in the conservation area, with the best collection found in Hereford Road and Chepstow Road (shown here). Their affect can be compromised, however, by the loss of an appropriate front boundary wall.



The high, red-brick boundary wall which forms the north boundary of Westbourne Park Villas, and shown here, was built c.1900 when the Great Western Railway cutting was widened. This is a substantial construction, gently battered with a plinth in contrasting brick, and well formed piers. It is now well weathered and complemented by mature trees, so forming a very memorable streetscape and one which is significant in the history of the area's development.





**Figure 6 : Characteristic Local Townscape Details, Trees**

Groups of mature trees make a significant contribution to the townscape of Westbourne, enhancing the picturesque qualities of the spaces around Westbourne Gardens and Westbourne Park Road. Trees are also an important feature of Kildare and St. Stephen's Gardens. In the grid of streets that comprise the western portion of the conservation area mature trees create a domestic feeling, introduce scale and act to soften the architectural forms. Trees in back gardens (which perforce could not be indicated on *Figure 7*) come into view at junctions and perform the same function. UDP policy DES12 seeks to protect trees which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area. Guidance on this issue is available in a special design guide, *Trees and Other Planting on Development Sites* available from the Department of Environment and Planning.





**Figure 7: Characteristic Local Townscape Details, Shopfronts**

There are good groups of early original shopfronts at key points in the residential areas of the conservation area. These are modest affairs, with a simple fascia, cornice and brackets. In Westbourne Grove there is a much greater variety of shopfronts, several of high quality. The relevant City Council policies concerning historic shopfronts can be found at UDP DES5 & 7. In addition there are two design guides, *Advertisement Design Guidelines* and *Shopfronts, Blinds and Signs* both published by the City Council.



Many of the terraces were built with shops on the ground floor. These in Shrewsbury Road are a particularly good unaltered group and complement the more substantial pub frontage. Like many of the original shopfronts off the high roads, these are not all in retail or commercial use anymore. In some groups, such as those at the north end of Westbourne Park Road and in Alexander Street, there has been conversion to professional offices.



The most elaborate and varied original shopfronts are found in Westbourne Grove. No. 73, shown here, is particularly fine and retains its original iron railings to the first floor level.



No. 67, which retains its cornice and original sign fascia, is another fine example. A somewhat simplified design based on this would be suitable for nearby shops which have lost their original fronts.





These shopfronts on the north side of Westbourne Grove at the junction with Chepstow Road are both of c.1900 and outstanding examples of their type. The corner building itself, along with its shopfront, is listed; the detailing shows the influence of art nouveau. The shop adjacent has a very different stylistic character.





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**Figure 9: Local Views**

The sinuous line of Westbourne Park Road and the triangular form of Westbourne Gardens generate the most significant and exciting local views in the conservation area, and these are enhanced by the picturesque architecture (and rough materials) of St. Stephen's Church as well as by the significant groups of trees around it and in Westbourne Gardens. The views north and south in the grid of streets west of Kildare Gardens are also distinctive; they are spatially complex, the result of cornice lines, front gardens and trees working together to articulate both public space (carriageway and pavements) and private space (front gardens). These views are particularly strong where roof lines survive largely unbroken. The Church of St. Mary of the Angels in Moorfield Road also generates some fine local views. Policy UDP DES3 specifies the refusal of planning permission for any development which will have a detrimental effect on such local views.





BASE MAP REPRODUCED/DERIVED FROM THE ORDNANCE SURVEY WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE. (C) ORDNANCE SURVEY (YEAR AS MAP DATE). WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL LA 086 992.

|           |              |          |                  |          |  |  |  |
|-----------|--------------|----------|------------------|----------|--|--|--|
| <b>PH</b> | Public House | <b>E</b> | Educational      | <b>O</b> | Place of Worship                         |  | Retail Frontage with Residential above |
|           | Hotel / B&B  |          | Health & Welfare |          | Commercial/ Employment, some Residential |  |  |

**Figure 10: Characteristic Land Uses**

The prevailing character of the conservation area is residential. Commercial, employment and retail uses are concentrated in Westbourne Grove. In a few other places there are good runs of local shops. The latter have residential accommodation above. The original shops in Ledbury Road are now for the most part given over to top-end retailing (boutiques and antiques), and similar businesses are found in the short run of shops immediately north of St. Stephen's in Westbourne Park Road. The same trend is evident in Alexander and Needham Road. The variety of commercial and retail uses in Westbourne Grove gives this a lively, mixed character. There are, in addition, a hotel in St. Stephen's Gardens and a B&B in Westbourne Gardens.





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**Figure 10: Neutral or Negative Areas**

The neutral or negative areas in the Westbourne Conservation Area are for the most part those which have been redeveloped after WWII bomb damage. In scale, style and detail these do not respect the prevailing building typologies, nor are they significant works of architecture in their own right. In considering proposals for the redevelopment of these sites the City Council will apply policies DES1E, F & H.



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