

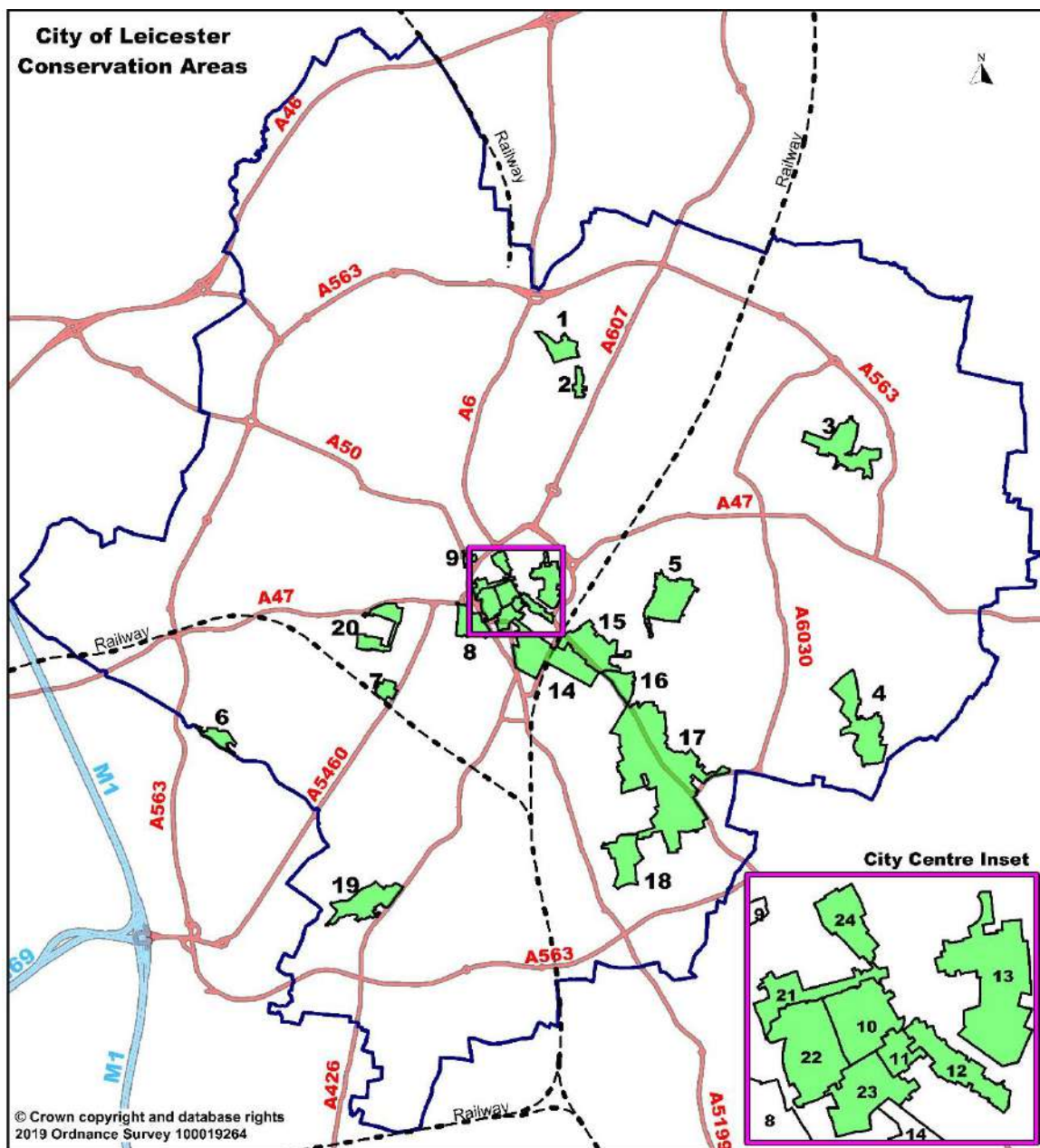
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City of Leicester Conservation Areas

1. Belgrave Hall
2. Loughborough Road
3. Old Humberstone
4. Evington Village
5. Spinney Hill Park
6. Braunstone
7. Asheigh Road
8. Castle
9. All Saints
10. Market Place
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13. St Georges
14. New Walk
15. South Highfields
16. Evington Footpath
17. Stoneygate
18. Knighton
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20. West End
21. High Street
22. Greyfriars
23. Market Street
24. Church Gate



1. Introduction

Braunstone Conservation Area Character Appraisal defines the area's special character and sets out how it can be preserved or enhanced. This appraisal will be used to help inform the design of any future development proposals so that they preserve or enhance the area and acknowledge its features. It is important to note that no appraisal can ever be completely comprehensive and that the omission of a particular feature, building or open space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

2. Background, Scope and Structure

The City of Leicester contains twenty-four conservation areas, the oldest of which were designated in 1969. This appraisal is structured to include:

- summary of designation.
- policy background.
- definition of the special interest of the area via spatial and character analysis, historical development and important features.

3. Designation

Braunstone Conservation Area was designated on the 29th of January 1974, and encompasses part of the former village of Braunstone situated within the boundary of Leicester. The rest of the former village is located on the south side of Braunstone Lane and Main Street, within the Blaby District Council. The boundary of the Conservation Area remains as first designated.

The area was designated as a direct result of the demolition of a 18th century farmhouse in 1967, which triggered a successful campaign to protect the local historic building stock.

4. Planning Policy Framework

The concept of 'conservation areas' was first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act (1967) which defined a conservation area as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent change but to manage change in ways that maintain and strengthen an area's special qualities.

The definition remains unchanged in current legislation, set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Act places duties on local planning authorities:

- To identify those parts of their area that are of special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas;
- To review past designations from time to time;
- To prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas;
- To pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas when determining planning applications for sites within such areas.

The effect of designation means that planning permission is required for the demolition of buildings, with some minor exceptions. There are also stricter controls on changes that can be made to buildings and land, and there is some protection for trees.

Government policy is provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It requires the significance of heritage assets – both its historic buildings and historic areas – to be understood by local authorities and by those who propose change. Changes that cause harm to significance will only be permitted where the harm is outweighed by public benefits.

The protection and positive use of the historic environment within new development is a theme which runs through the City of Leicester Core Strategy. It is identified as a key component in spatial objectives 7 and 9. This is further strengthened in a number of policies. The Core Strategy also makes an explicit commitment to the preservation and enhancement of Leicester's heritage in Spatial Objective 10. This is amplified in a wide-ranging policy (CS18) for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. There is a general presumption against the demolition of buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area, and the policy expects new developments and conservation-led regeneration to reflect the character and value of the historic environment. Both local and national policy puts the emphasis on the enhancement of heritage assets and positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness that should be made through new development.

5. Summary of Special Interest

Braunstone is one of the smallest Conservation Areas in Leicester, with a limited number of properties located within its boundary. It is one of six former villages incorporated into the Leicester City Council authority between 1892 and 1935 that have since been granted the conservation area status. The Conservation Area comprises part of what constituted the original Braunstone Village that developed around the central spine of Braunstone Lane.

Braunstone Conservation Area managed to escape any major redevelopment that affected many of Leicester's suburbs and the former villages from the late 19th century onwards and remains defined by a loose urban grain complimented by ample natural amenities. Its individual character is emphasized by the abutting modern developments to the north-west and the south-east. In footfall, the area is dominated by open space, with the expansive Church Fields situated at the core of the Conservation Area.

Architecturally, Braunstone Conservation Area is characterized predominantly by 19th century brick dwellings, set within carefully landscaped grounds. Due to the high level of designation in the area, most properties do survive largely unaltered, as originally built. Church of St Peter, a local landmark commanding views across the Conservation Area. Medieval in origin, with stone elevations, it does contrast with the otherwise relatively cohesive historic building stock of Braunstone Conservation Area.

6. Location and Setting

Braunstone Conservation Area covers an area of 5.3 hectares (just over 13 acres) and is bounded by Braunstone Lane and Main Street marking to north-south, Woodshawe Rise to the north and Cort Crescent to the north-east and Herle Avenue to the east. The village was founded on section of glacial sands and gravels less than a mile from Fosse Way to the east and on the southern verge of the once extensive Leicester Forest. The surface geology of the area is mostly boulder clay, with small areas of gravel and light sand to the east. The land is undulating, gradually rising westwards to a height of about 300 feet above sea level.

The Conservation Area is located south-west of the city centre, approximately 2.25 miles from the Memorial Clock Tower. Historically, it formed part of the larger development of Braunstone, initially located outside of the city's boundaries. In 1935 part of Braunstone was incorporated into Leicester, with the exception of the south-west of the original 'village' settlement, now within the Blaby District Council. The area was historically associated with the sizeable Braunstone Park and Braunstone Hall, located to the immediate north-east, albeit now physically divided by

7. Historic Development

The settlement of Braunstone is most likely Saxon in origin, established around the late 8th or early 9th century AD, as a 'daughter' settlement of Glenfield. It was first mentioned in the Domesday Survey, where it was referred to as *Brantestone* meaning the place where Brant settled. It comprised eight households and was worth 60 shillings. The contemporary tenant in chief at the time was Hugh de Grandmesnil, a great landowner in England. The presence of *socmen* indicates that Scandinavians settled in the village.

The village sat on the edge of what was once the ancient Leicester Forest, extending to the north of the Conservation Area. Timber from the area was a valuable resource, and the primary construction material for the local building stock. However, woodlands were gradually converted to pastures, with the Leicester Forest fully enclosed by 1628. Bendbow Spinney remains the only surviving remnant of this former natural asset.²

From the 13th to the 16th century the Harcourt, or Horecut, family held an over-riding interest in the estate. A survey taken in 1299 documented 24 households in the village, then centred around the open land to the immediate south of St Peter's Church, now Church Fields, which has yielded archaeological evidence of an early medieval settlement on site. A Manor House, first mentioned in documentary sources the same year, and defined as "*the capital messuage with herbage and fruit garden*" is thought to have originally stood between the Church and Braunstone Lane. It was demolished around the 16th century. Around the turn of the 17th century, a new Manor House was built by Henry Hastings on Coalpit Lane, now Braunstone Lane, in close proximity to the Old Hall Farm, built at a later stage.

What is now the Church of St Peter was purpose-built as a private chapel for The Lord of the Manor, and referred to as the Chapel of Ease for the Manor and Parish of Glenfield.³ The close physical connection of the ecclesiastical facility to the Manor House physically demonstrated its 'private' function

¹ Wiltshire, J. E. (1983). *Old Braunstone*, p.5.

² East Midland Oral History Archive (2016). *Braunstone*. Available at: <https://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/resources/braunstone/village.html> [Accessed 26 February 2019].

Top: Church Fields has formed the core of the early medieval village of Braunstone; the first Manor House was located within its grounds.

Bottom: St Peter's Church dates back to the 12th century, where it was purpose-built as a private chapel for the Lord of the Manor. It was extended and altered extensively since the 13th century.





A photograph illustrating the close-knit relationship between Braunstone Hall (Winstanley Hall) and the village, with the 19th dwelling on Main Street in the foreground.

It seems that until the late 16th century Braunstone was a village dominated by open-field cultivation, with the core of the settlement formed along Braunstone Lane, which was once known as the Coalpit Lane “due to the packhorses bringing coal to Leicester from the Swannington coalfield”.⁴ In the late 16th century the old agricultural routine of the village was broken up by the widespread conversion of arable land to pasture, followed in the early 17th century by the inclosure of Leicester Forest.⁵ Around the same time, the Lord of the Manor was the well-known Yorkist William Hastings, who probably received the land as a grant from Edward IV. He and his son Henry were the main actors responsible for the inclosure of the village fields, which totalled over 240 acres of land. Although no data documenting the exact amount of people displaced by the widespread inclosure was recorded, an estimated 40 people had left the village, an episode of major depopulation for a village its size, which caused vacancy of several properties throughout Braunstone.⁶ Henry Hastings contributed personally to further deforestation of Leicester Forest, commissioning the felling of up to 500 acres of tree cover to convert the land into pasture.

Due to the loss of substantial amount of money in the Civil War, the Hastings family was forced to sell the estate. In the mid-17th century it was acquired by the Lancashire Winstanley family for the total sum of £6,000. They had a significant impact on the broader area of Braunstone for the next three centuries, defining the **economic and social history of the wider locality**.⁷

In 1670, there appears to have been 28 households in Braunstone, a comparable number to a century earlier, meaning that some recovery had taken place since the depopulation episode.⁸ The 18th century was a period of relative prosperity. At the time, Braunstone became a fashionable spot for fox-hunting; the remnants of wide ditches and deer leaps designed to control stags for hunting still survive on Cressida Place.

In 1775, Clement Winstanley, High Sheriff of Leicester in 1774, commissioned a new Manor House to be set within 100 acres of parkland, now known as Braunstone Park. Braunstone Hall was constructed to the designs of the local builder and politician James Oldham, who later became the Lord Mayor of Leicester.⁹ Simultaneously, the old Manor House was demolished, with the Hall Farm subsequently constructed on site. Although not located in what now constitutes Braunstone Village Conservation Area,

⁴ East Midland Oral History Archive (2016).

⁵ McKinley, A. (1958). "Parishes added since 1892: Braunstone". *A History of the County of Leicester: Volume 4, the City of Leicester*. *British History Online*. Victoria County History. London. pp. 428–433.

⁶ McKinley (1958), pp. 428-433.

⁷ Burch M. (2019). "History. St Peter's Church – Braunstone Park, Leicester, UK. Available at: <http://www.stpetersbraunstone.org.uk/?page_id=16> [Accessed 3 March 2019].

⁸ McKinley (1958), pp.428-433.

The prosperity of what remained a small agricultural village continued up to the 19th century. Beside some localised home-based framework-knitting and few tradesmen active in the area, Braunstone remained largely unaffected by the growth of the adjacent city of Leicester, which had engulfed the villages of Aylestone, Belgrave, Humberstone, Evington and Knighton throughout the century.¹⁰

In early 1800s, the local population barely exceeded 200, with only around 20 people employed in trade and the manufacturing industry.¹¹ In 1859 the row of six cottages at Cressida Place were built, to a cost of £231 each. When completed, the locality was nicknamed “New Street”, a name which persisted until the 1930s.¹² Two years later, in 1861, two institutions were commissioned by the Winstanley family, namely the Parsonage and the small National School, constructed in 1864 and 1868 respectively. The latter, originally associated with an adjacent school room, never catered for large numbers, with the number of pupils possibly never exceeding thirty at any one time. It closed its doors in 1930 and was subsequently transformed into residential accommodation.¹³

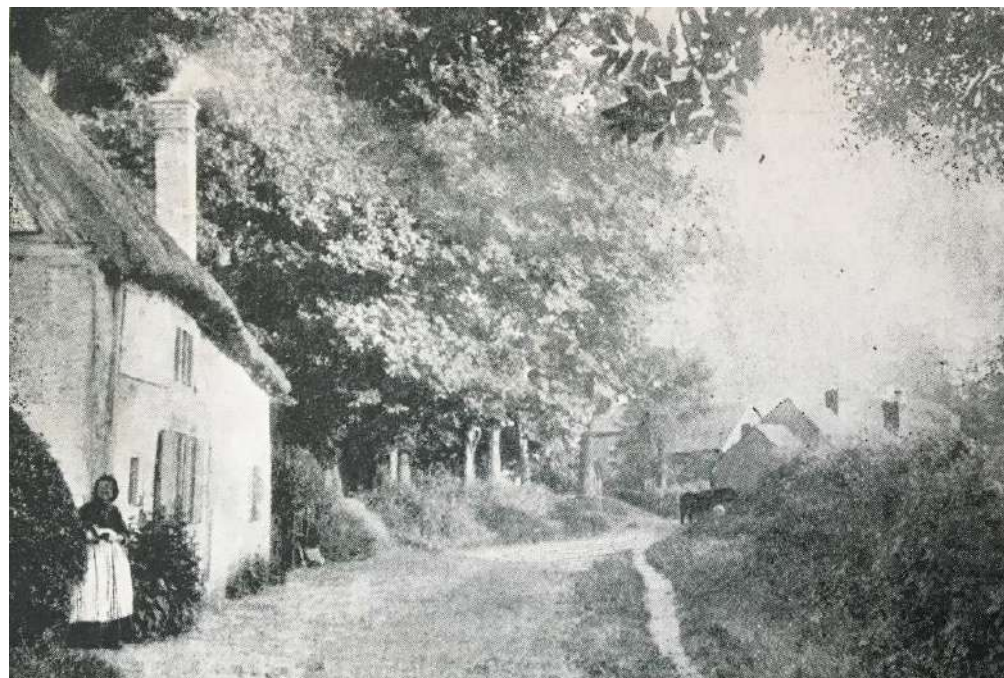
In 1877 Braunstone was described as a “pleasant and picturesque village”.¹⁴ By this point “it still had to rely on a passing carrier for its main external contact”.¹⁵ As of 1871 it had 39 houses and 215 inhabitants across 1,783 acres of land, bounded by River Soar to the east and the borough of Leicester to the north, crossed by the Roman Fosse Way.¹⁶

¹⁰ *England (1970), p. 16.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *England (1970), p. 18*

¹³ *England (1970), p. 17.*



Top: Impression of the Braunstone Village around the mid to late 19th century.

Bottom: Cressida Cottages were commissioned by the Winstanley family and erected in 1859. The photo was taken in 1973, one year before ‘old’ Braunstone was designated as a Conservation Area.



This situation continued up until the beginning of the 20th century. The early 20th century map illustrates the underdeveloped character of the Conservation Area, with St Peter's Church to the north, several properties along Braunstone Lane and the terraced cottages at Cressida Place comprising the total building stock of the area. Worth noting is the Old Hall Farm immediately outside the south-east limit of the Conservation Area, and the direct pathway between the area's northern limit and Braunstone Park. In 1924, a guide to the county described Braunstone as a "curiously remote and isolated little village" with a "quaint, old-world character".¹⁷

¹⁷ East Midland Oral History Archive (2016).

Right (OS Map 1903-1904): By the early 20th century, the area and the surrounding land remained largely undeveloped, with a significant break from the Leicester's core. The townscape of the Conservation Area hasn't significantly changed since.

Bottom: Two photographs of early 20th century 'old' Braunstone, showing its rural character and loose urban grain. The mid-19th century Vernacular Revival cottages on Braunstone Lane (left) do somewhat reflect earlier thatched dwellings (right) that provided preeminent residential accommodation in the wider area of Braunstone until the late 19th century.

