

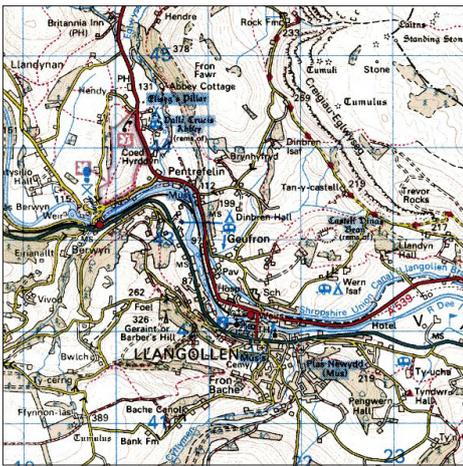
# LLANGOLLEN

## Town Centre Design Guide

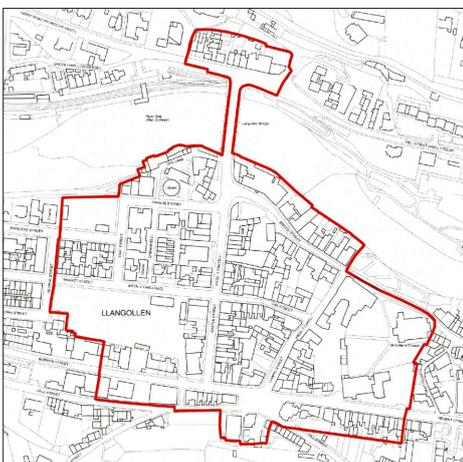
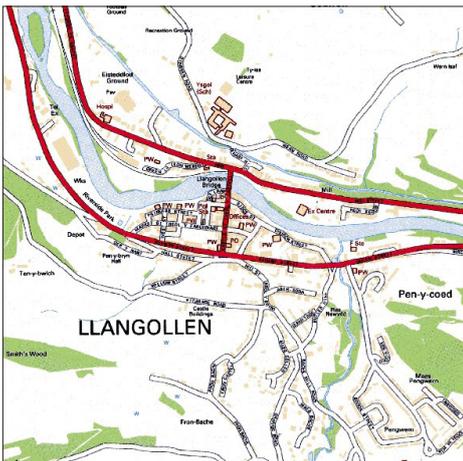


Nathaniel Lichfield  
and Partners

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Left: Plan of study area boundary

Llangollen is a town with much to offer to residents and visitors. Moreover, its spectacular setting within the Dee Valley is evident throughout the town and has led to an image which is recognised worldwide through the success of the International Eisteddfod.

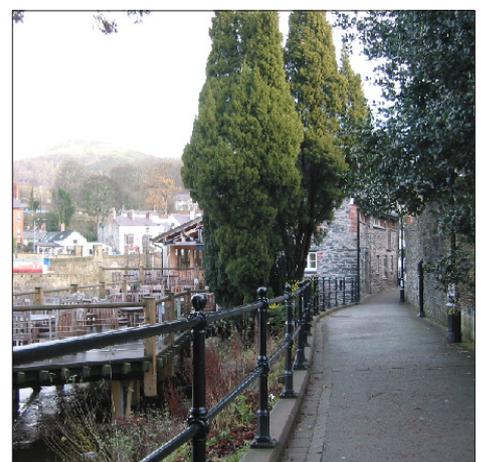
Following the publication of *Llangollen – A Strategy for the 21st Century*, the Llangollen Partnership commissioned Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) to undertake a study of the town’s built environment. The final report concentrated on the central area of the town and was subject to consultation via a workshop session attended by representatives from a variety of bodies and organisations within the community.

Having gained an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the town through this process, NLP has subsequently prepared the *Llangollen Town Centre Design Guide Consultation Draft* to highlight and provide general guidance in relation to key issues affecting the built environment of the town centre. The *Design Guide* provides advice to the public and will assist in discussions with council officers prior to the submission of planning applications.

It should also be used as a guide to building owners undertaking seemingly ‘minor’ alterations to their property, which can have a disproportionate effect upon the character and quality of buildings, if not carefully considered.

This publication is to be included within the existing series of Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes (SPGs). These clarify unitary development plan policies and other issues, with the aim of improving the design and quality of new development.

Whilst it focuses on the town centre, many of the concepts laid out within the *Design Guide* will be applicable elsewhere within Llangollen and should be considered in conjunction with other relevant SPGs and development plan policies as well as national planning and design policy and guidance.





Top left: River bridge circa: 1794

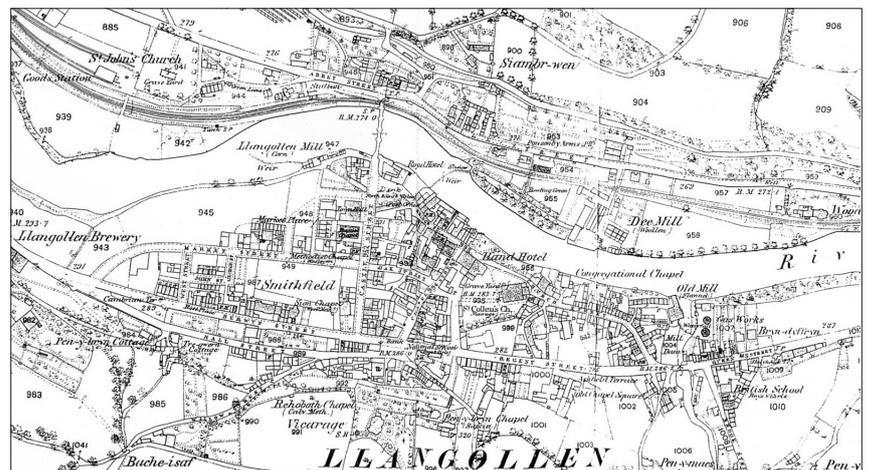
Above: The Church from Bridge St.  
(late eighteenth century)

Right: Plan of Llangollen 1873

Llangollen is an historic settlement lying within a narrow section of the Dee Valley, confined by Ruabon Mountain to the north and the Berwyn massif to the south. The remains of Castell Dinas Bran, said to be the burial site of the Holy Grail of Arthurian legend, loom over the town from an isolated hill to the north east. The nearest main towns are Wrexham (11 miles) and Bala (19 miles).

Llangollen takes its name from its founding saint, Saint Collen, who was thought to have established a church in the town during the 6th or 7th century, around which the first community began to form. The settlement also afforded a good crossing point and it is believed that Edward I funded the construction of the first river bridge. This was later rebuilt in the form of the current Dee Bridge in 1345 by the Bishop of St. Asaph. More recent alterations included the incorporation of an arch to accommodate the railway, and a widening scheme during the 1960s.

For several centuries, Llangollen remained little more than a village, with the main settlement being based around the area to the south-east of the bridge, mainly comprising Bridge St. and Church St., and to the north-east around the old village green (now the site of the station). However, the town subsequently experienced a dramatic expansion due to a number of improvements in transportation, including the arrival of the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, to the north of the river, in 1808. The town's growth was also due to its strategic position on the A5 London to Holyhead coach road, which was improved by Thomas Telford in 1815.

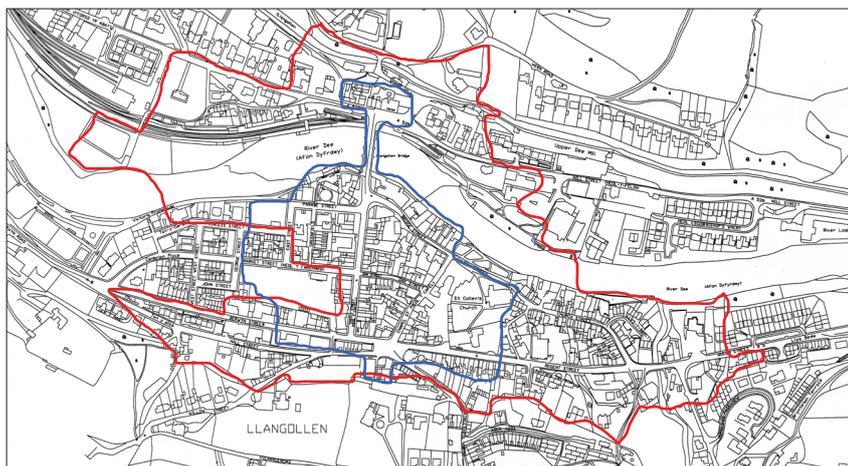


Nearly fifty years later, the opening of the Ruabon to Barmouth railway resulted in a densely populated area to the north of the river being demolished to accommodate the new station and sidings. Development within this area has remained constrained by the east/west lines of both the canal and railway ever since. These improvements in transport and the availability of local natural resources assisted in the development of various industries within Llangollen, most particularly the mills based around the river.

The Victorian era heralded the construction of Castle Street, built between 1850 and 1870 and linking through to Telford's much improved coach road. The street's north/south axial route no longer required traffic to negotiate the historic old town and provided Llangollen with a main shopping boulevard. This new approach to the town's urban planning was expanded to include an area to the west through the construction of a rectangular street grid, a format which was extended in later years.

## Modern Day Llangollen

With a population of around 3,000, Llangollen is perhaps most famous as the home of the annual International Music Eisteddfod which is held every July and brings tens of thousands of visitors to the town. Tourists are also drawn by its spectacular local scenery, with the town providing a base for outdoor activities. Other attractions include the steam railway and canal which provide additional interest focus for transport enthusiasts and tourists alike.



*Top right: town viewed from bridge*

*Above: Eisteddfod ground*

*Left: Plan of modern day Llangollen*

*red line illustrates boundary of Conservation Area*

*blue line illustrates boundary of NLP study area*



There is a wealth of built heritage both within Llangollen and nearby, much of which is subject to protected status. There are a large number of listed buildings within the centre, the majority of which make a positive contribution to the local character, and all of which have the potential to contribute to the quality of the town's built environment. Many of these buildings provide key landmarks within the town – including The Town Hall, St Collens Church and The Royal Hotel. The town centre has also retained its commercial and retail functions, including the local market.



Within the wider context, modern Llangollen has expanded somewhat beyond its Victorian boundaries despite the restrictions imposed by the route of the railway, canal, main roads and topography. Whilst some linear or ribbon development is evident along main roads, the most obvious area of expansion lies to the southeast of the town centre. The layout of the Pengwern estate clearly shows the formal urban planning applied to this site, and other developments within the same area also display the same characteristics.

The main areas of development to the west of the town have been the Royal International Pavilion, at the Eisteddfod Ground to the north of the river, and an industrial works to the south. To the east, Pen Y Coed is a sizeable residential development which occupies land accessed off Maesmawr Road.

The document *Llangollen – A Strategy for the 21st Century* highlighted a vision:



*“To make Llangollen a prosperous place to live, work and visit, through becoming a unique and renowned tourist attraction”.*

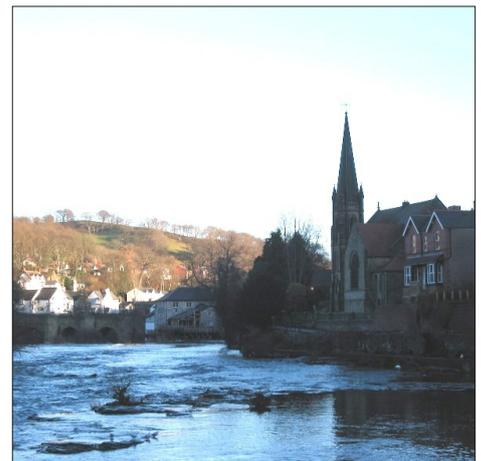
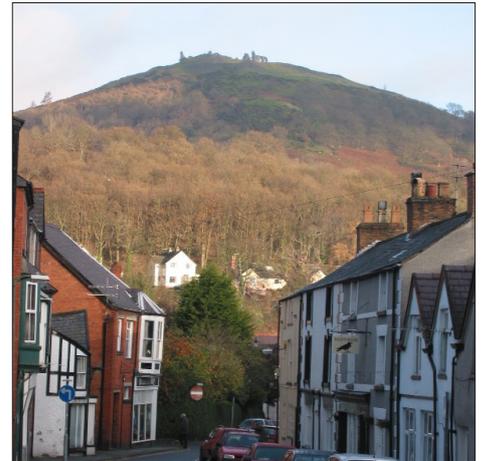
To achieve this vision, the town needs further investment and some small scale development where opportunities arise. Such schemes, whatever the scale, need to be handled sensitively, most particularly within the historic central area of the town. And whilst the town's strategic position on the A5 ensures a steady flow of traffic through Llangollen, there is still room for aesthetic improvement at critical arrival points.

Welsh national planning guidance highlights the importance of appreciating both the context and the characteristics of an area in which a development is located.

The positive features of a place, such as its landscape, building traditions and materials, help to give it a sense of identity. The best places are memorable and possess a character which people can easily appreciate. Consequently, the features which differentiate Llangollen from elsewhere need to be taken into account whenever development of any scale is being considered within the town.

## Llangollen's key characteristics are:

- The town's relationship to its setting within the valley, with the views from within and through Llangollen bringing the surrounding hills into the heart of the town.
- The dramatic focus provided by the river - the views along it to the east and west, which are important for the perception of the town.
- Dee Bridge as a defining feature of the town and an important historic landmark.
- Castle Street as key, axial route and visual corridor.
- The railway as a gateway feature of the town.
- Extensive riverside access, incorporating promenades open spaces and parks.
- The contrast between the formality of the grid street layout to the west of Castle Street and resultant clear, linear views, and the 'looser' layout of the earlier streets to east, where the eye follows the view of a curved streetscape.
- The historic character, charm and interest of buildings within the central area, as defined by the Conservation Area boundary and listed building status.
- The simplicity of the building forms, consistent in height (generally 2-3 storeys) and enriched through detailing and the variety of materials.
- The informality of the visual relationship between buildings of differing ages and styles.
- Terraced frontages featuring a standard building line with occasional set backs.
- The dense grain of development, a sense of enclosure and intimate human scale.





It is important to note that urban design is not limited to the study of a particular structure or collection of buildings. It is concerned with the overall quality and impact of the built environment. Good design should respect and enhance its context, whilst poor design can have a wider damaging effect.

Successful places tend to have some characteristics in common. These were categorised in a CABE document 'By Design' to produce a series of objectives for good urban design:

- **Character:** Promoting character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.
- **Continuity and enclosure:** Promoting continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space, clearly defining private and public areas.
- **Quality of public realm:** Promoting public spaces and routes which are safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all.
- **Ease of movement:** Promoting accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through.
- **Legibility:** Promoting legibility by providing recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.
- **Adaptability:** Promoting adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.
- **Diversity:** Promoting diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.



Llangollen's built form already provides examples of good quality urban design. However, these need to be strengthened through adhering to these objectives, gaining a better understanding of the town's character and working with the local context.

It is essential that new development sits well with the character and quality of the town's built environment. It will need to respect the importance of local styles and materials so that informed decisions can be made when making alterations or designing new developments.

Architectural styles within the study area include:

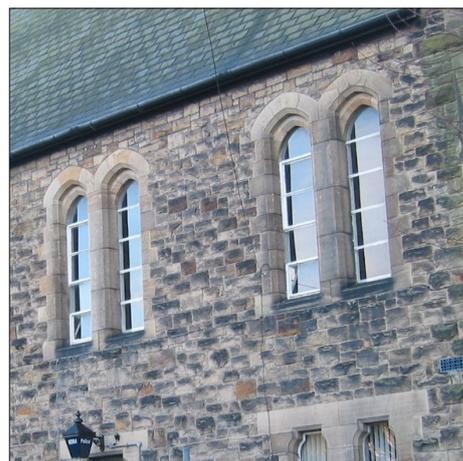
- Simple Georgian facades associated with town's period of expansion, as the predominant style.
- Earliest buildings situated in Bridge Street and Church Street, the Church of St. Collen being the oldest – an example of Early English Gothic subject of many alterations.
- Civic buildings built during the Victorian period but in the Early Gothic style.
- Examples of late Victorian and Edwardian architecture articulated in Ruabon brick.

Building materials used within the study area include:

- Locally available timber and shale stone.
- Limestone construction after the arrival of the canal.
- Sandstone – from railway cuttings.
- Ruabon brick brought into the town by rail.
- Slate provides the town's principal roofing material.
- Painted render, with contrasting detailing remains the most common finish within the town.

Design detail is of particular significance to the character of Llangollen, and includes many quality examples of :

- Projecting bays at first floor level
- Coloured render with contrasting details
- Mock Tudor detailing
- Vertical sash windows
- Mixture of flush and overlapping eaves/verge details
- Terracotta ridge tiles (red and blue/black)
- Iron railings and gates
- Stone boundary walls
- Traditional hanging signs





Any development proposal which could potentially affect the town centre’s listed buildings or conservation area would need to be designed with particular care. Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes provided by Denbighshire County Council which are important in this regard include:

- SPG 1: Extension to Dwellings
- SPG 8: Access for All
- SPG 12: Shopfronts
- SPG 13: Conservation Areas
- SPG 14: Listed Buildings
- SPG 17: Advertisements

An inclusive Design approach is recommended to incorporate design and facilities that can be used equally by everyone, irrespective of age, gender or disability, promoting a barrier free environment and Access for All. (See Disability Discrimination Act, relevant planning legislation and guidance.)

Other guidance which should be taken into account includes Planning Policy Wales *Technical Advice Note 12: Design*. The Welsh Development Agency’s *Design Guide* and the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment’s (CABE) publications *By Design* and *Paving the Way* also provide excellent sources of reference.

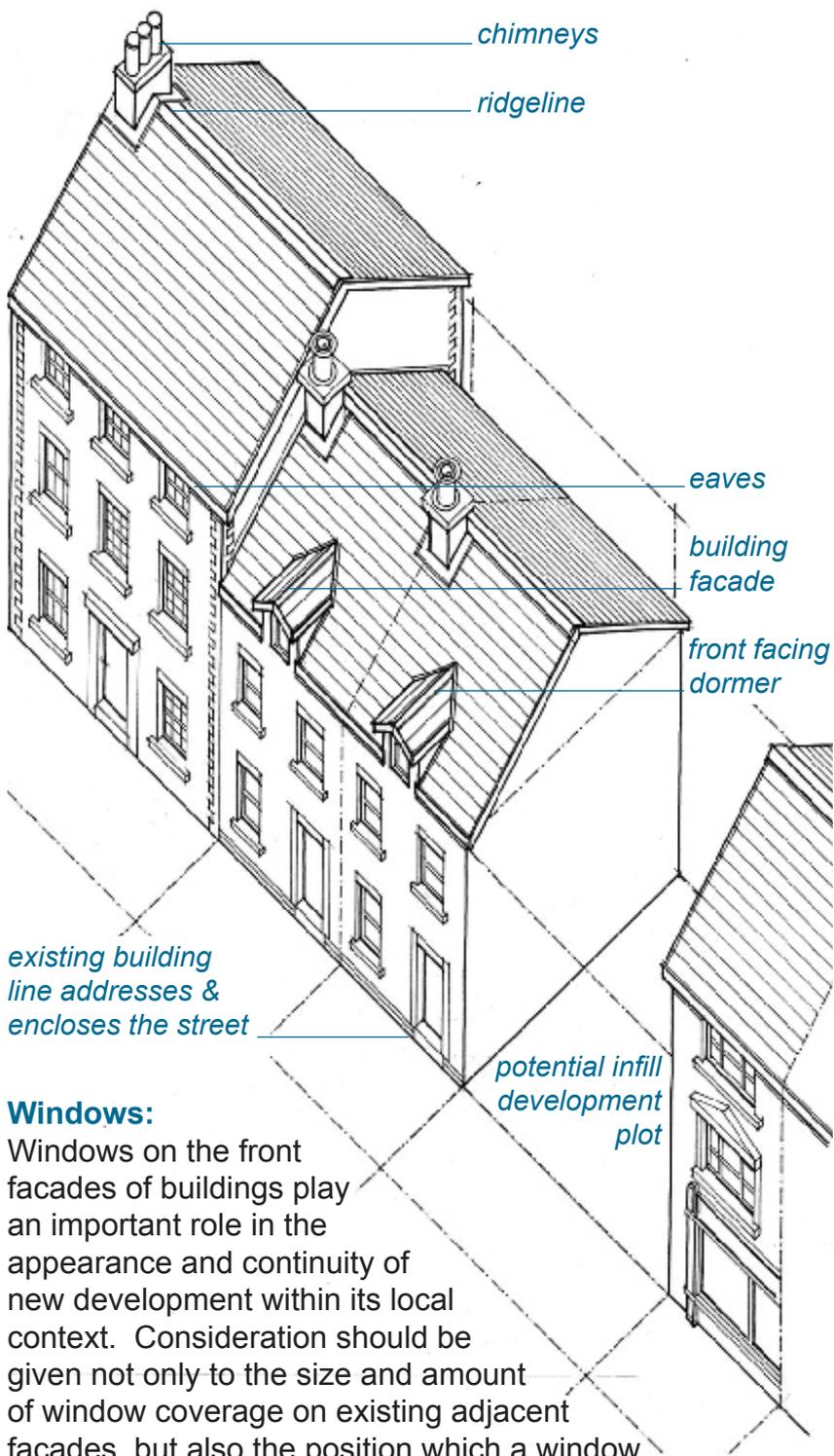
The uniqueness of the character of Llangollen has been developed over centuries and is at risk of being destroyed if unsympathetic development and alteration is allowed. It must be ensured that the elements which define the quality and individuality of the study area are retained and that potentially destructive changes, such as alien design styles and imported materials are resisted.

The cumulative effect of a number of progressive changes to seemingly minor details, such as the installation of UPVC doors and windows, concrete roof tiling and the removal or covering of architectural detailing, can be to destroy characteristics which have taken centuries to evolve. Similarly care must be taken to minimise superfluous additions to buildings and general pavement clutter (see ‘Streetscape’). Colour also plays an important role in the streetscene and great care should be taken in its choice. Bright colours should be avoided because of their tendency to detract from the quality of the historic environment. Instead more traditional colours and muted tones should be employed for the overall visually harmony of the street.

Attention should also be given to minor permitted development proposals, for which planning consent is not necessary but which may have disproportionate effect upon the quality and character of buildings.



The following pages briefly describe the main components of a typical streetscene, and provide guidance on appropriate and inappropriate ways of undertaking both alterations to existing buildings, and the development of a gap site or infill plot within the street.



## Windows:

Windows on the front facades of buildings play an important role in the appearance and continuity of new development within its local context. Consideration should be given not only to the size and amount of window coverage on existing adjacent facades, but also the position which a window is set into the building's facade as this provides a sense of depth to the elevation.

Key elements of streetscape are affected by:

**Mass and Form:** a building's height, width and construction determines how prominent it is within the street.

**Scale:** a building's scale is not just concerned with its size. If it is made up from a number of smaller elements its scale will seem smaller than if it just consists of one block. The use of features such as dormers can assist in reducing the scale of a building. Conversely a building can be given more emphasis by the features incorporated into its design.

**Roofscape:** it is important to take into account how roofs address the street. In Llangollen the majority of the steeply sloping, slate roofs are generally orientated with the main ridgelines parallel to the street, and many are punctuated with brick chimney stacks.

**Materials & Detailing:** all too often trying to imitate architectural styles results in a poor copy. It is better to focus on respecting the proportions of existing buildings and ensuring a well defined relationship with the street. The use of local materials helps buildings to fit in with their surroundings.

**Proportions:** the character of an area is influenced by the proportions of buildings which give either a vertical or horizontal emphasis to the street.

Typical townscape highlighting **poor development** principles.....  
 (to be compared with example on following page)

Illustrations of how both poor alterations to existing properties and visual clutter detract from the quality of the streetscene

Illustration of infill development which is **inappropriate** to its immediate context



Satellite dishes dotted across front elevations.

Internally illuminated projecting box signs.

'A' frame advertisements obstructing/ cluttering the footpath.

Loss of glazing pattern due to thoughtless replacement.

Replacement of existing with UPVC windows displaying thick sections & inappropriate division. Lack of depth to elevations due to position within wall.

Removal of original chimney resulting in lack of visual interest on skyline.

Use of external cladding not typical of the local area.

Flat roof dormer replacing traditional dormer.

Replacement of existing slates with concrete tiles.

Gable fronting street, compared to other properties whose ridgelines run parallel to street.

Window proportions giving horizontal rather than vertical emphasis to facade.

Detailing which is uncharacteristic of area:  
 arched brick lintels  
 projecting porch  
 contrasting panels

Oversized, unattractive signage to shopfront.

Roller shutter box fitted to front of fascia.

Expansive glazing with little division.

Prominence of ventilation systems on building facade.

Typical townscape highlighting **good development** principles.....  
 (to be compared with example on previous page)

Illustration of alterations to an existing property which enhance the adjacent streetscene

Illustration of infill development which is **appropriate** to its immediate context

Existing property displaying original features



Removal of unnecessary clutter from building facade.

Replacement timber sash windows and painted timber doors.

Eaves to line through with existing.

Signage within appropriately proportioned fascia board.

Relocate satellite dishes/ security boxes etc to less conspicuous position.

Traditional front facing dormer in keeping with adjacent property.

Gabled dormers to third storey.

Security grilles fitted internally if possible or housed behind fascia.

Inclusion of detailing which is more in keeping with the local vernacular hanging signs,externally illuminated.

Retain existing chimney for visual skyline interest.

Windows displaying vertical emphasis through use of glazing mullions.

Use of detailing that is common to Llangollen including:  
 projecting first floor bay  
 stone quoins and lintels  
 sliding sash windows

Glazed area framed by shopfront consisting of pilasters, fascia and stallriser.

Removal of 'A' frame advertisement boards.

External finish in keeping with local vernacular (see architectural style section).

New or reclaimed local slate to roof.

Replacement of glazing with similar.



The 'streetscape' comprises the elements between the buildings, including; floorscape, street furniture, lighting, planting and signage. Unfortunately incremental additions and adhoc alterations often result in clutter which detracts from the overall quality of an area. Whilst such works are often as a direct response to practical issues, a co-ordinated approach to works by utility companies, building owners and the local authority will result in a more organized and attractive street scene.

The strategy to improve Llangollen's streetscape should be based upon the:

### Reduction of clutter

- Minimising the number of elements by considering whether each item is necessary, whether it should remain, be removed or be made less obtrusive (through relocating or redecoration).
- Ventillation ducts, satellite dishes, and unnecessary signage all contribute to produce a detrimental effect on an area's visual amenity. The proliferation of moveable advertising boards can prove hazardous as well as being unsightly. Therefore their use and positioning should be carefully considered.
- The number of posts within the street should be reduced through encouraging shared usage where appropriate.
- The replacement of existing street furniture should aim to create a consistency of style and placement through a co-ordinated approach.



### Design and Maintenance

- The design and maintenance of Llangollen's streetscape should respect areas of existing quality, and enhance those of lesser merit.
- Poor maintenance practices can hasten the visual deterioration of the public realm. Reinstatement works should be carried out on a 'like for like' basis, ensuring a continuity of surface materials, appropriate to the setting.
- The use of a limited palette of floorscape materials will encourage visual clarity at ground level. Similarly furniture should be subject to a coherent painting scheme.
- Service covers should be orientated to sit 90° to the paving bond. Where this is not possible recessed covers should be used.



Initiatives such as the Welsh Assembly Government's Town Improvement Grant and Tourism Growth Area, already exist within Llangollen, providing a positive focus for development within the town. Schemes such as the proposed environmental works for the Mill St/ Abbey Road/ Castle Street junction also illustrate the enthusiasm within the town to improve its environment.

**In conclusion, the preservation and enhancement of central Llangollen means:**

- Ensuring new buildings are sympathetic to the surrounding streetscape in terms of size, massing, eaves height, roofscape and building lines.
- Requiring that alterations to existing buildings are carried out with as much consideration as new build works.
- Protecting the town's unique characteristics through both enhancing as well as conserving its historic fabric.
- Responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development.
- Strengthening the visual relationship of properties which front onto the river.
- Promoting the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space.
- Promoting diversity through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places.
- Encouraging public spaces and routes which are safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all.

In order to maintain the many unique features of Llangollen, it is essential that development be carried out sympathetically and in accordance with the guidelines within this document and the principles laid down by national and local government.





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