

Coventry Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area

The Conservation Area at the core of the Coventry Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) is Lady Herbert's Garden and the Burges, which lies at the northern edge of the city centre. The conservation area was designated on August 8th 1969. It originally comprised the established landscaped gardens, numbers 1-19 Chantry Place and the Coventry Theatre. In December 2014, the conservation area was expanded southwards to encompass The Burges, Hales Street and Palmer Lane. The conservation area includes some of the few remaining intact parts of the city centre to survive the war and post-war redevelopments.

Lady Herbert's Garden is a Grade II registered park and garden that contains the Swanswell Gate and the Cook Street Gate (which were constructed between 1432 and 1462) and the 150 metre length of the city wall that connects them, along with a number of other Grade II listed buildings and other features from the original garden design of 1935-38. The garden is a peaceful and attractive green space within the busy surrounding area, providing quality and interest.

The Burges, along with the adjacent Hales Street, represent some of the city centre's last surviving pre-war streets and includes locally listed buildings some of which are medieval in origin. The name "The Burges" is a corruption of the original street name, St John's Bridge and it is known to have existed since the late thirteenth century.

The building plots of The Burges extend through to Palmer Lane at the rear and span over the River Sherbourne, one of only two locations in the city centre where the river is visible above ground. Together with the historic buildings of varying dates and design, this is essentially a surviving pocket of fifteenth century townscape and a rare example of the close-knit character of the medieval city. All these heritage assets are currently on the Heritage at Risk Register.

Lady Herbert's Garden and The Burges Conservation Area are within the St Michaels' Ward of Coventry, which has high indices of deprivation and suffers from the City's highest rates of unemployment. The area has been in long-term decline and the retail offer is of poor quality with a predominance of take away and cheap drink establishments. As a result, shop frontages and signage are poor and detract significantly from the buildings historic features and there is a risk of further loss of historic detail and character. The area is currently a focus for crime and anti-social behaviour resulting in part from its run-down nature. However, there are signs that demand in the area for better quality establishments is increasing with a growing student population in the city and more than 3,000 additional student residences proposed in the vicinity.



Conservation issues on Hales Street. © Coventry City Council

The HAZ seeks to take advantage of this positive trend by tackling the issues caused by economic decline and improving the environment in the conservation area. A Historic England Partnership Scheme in a Conservation Area (PSiCA) will address the conservation issues on Hales Street whilst a complementary Townscape Heritage Scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund will similarly address The Burges.

Together these schemes will deliver the regeneration of an originally medieval quarter of the City Centre, providing employment opportunities within refurbished shops, bringing abandoned upper floors back into use as accommodation, diversifying the range of retail outlets and improving public realm and security to reduce anti-social behaviour. On completion of the grant schemes it is intended that the properties will be transferred from the ownership of the City Council to the Historic Coventry Trust who will manage retail lettings in future whilst ensuring on-going maintenance of the properties.

Historic England Repairs Grants for Heritage at Risk will address the surviving lengths of medieval city wall at Lady Herbert's Garden, consisting of conservation and consolidation of historic fabric and provision of new hard and soft cappings. Additionally repairs will be undertaken to the two surviving gate houses; Swanswell Gate and Cook Street Gate with the intention of them also being transferred to the Historic Coventry Trust and converted into residential accommodation for short stay lettings.

Overall the HAZ will boost the social and economic resurgence of the conservation area by radically improving the areas overall appearance whilst enhancing individual historic buildings and monuments at risk enabling the removal of both these and the conservation area from the Heritage at Risk Register.

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