

## **King's Lynn Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area**

### **Description of the Area**

King's Lynn is located c.45 miles north of Cambridge on the east bank of the River Great Ouse, 3 miles from its mouth. The town is known locally as 'Lynn'.

The King's Lynn Conservation Area was first designated in 1969 and most recently amended in 2003, when five distinct character areas were identified within it. These areas are the St Margarets, St Nicholas, Norfolk Street, The Walks, and The Friars. Together, they encompass the majority of the historic town, except an area in the town centre that was redeveloped in the mid-twentieth century.

King's Lynn was founded as Bishop's Lynn in the late 11th century by Bishop Herbert de Losinga, with its prosperity based on European wool and cereal trade. In 1271 it hosted an Office of the Hanseatic League – the group of important northern German mercantile cities who, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, were looking to expand their western trade. Lynn today contains the only historic Hanseatic warehouse remaining in England, and in 2005 became the first British member of the New Hanseatic League.

Prior to the Reformation King's Lynn was concentrated on the strip of land adjacent to the river, west of present day Friars Street, All Saints Street, Tower Street and Chapel Street. The remaining land towards the town's eastern wall and ditch remained undeveloped, forming fields and precincts for the Blackfriars, Greyfriars and Whitefriars, all of whom were established in the town during the 13th century. Lynn expanded within its town walls during subsequent centuries, finally outgrowing them in the 19th century. The Walks remains the only surviving part of the friary precincts owing to its designation in 1753 as England's earliest public park.

Lynn was one of the principal grain handling ports in England by the 18th century, but its prosperity declined following the disruption of the Napoleonic Wars, exacerbated by the arrival of the railway in 1844. The new Alexandra Dock (1869) and Bentinck Dock (1883) did not stem this tide. The 20th century witnessed growth in manufacturing and food processing – including Campbell's tinned soup - and the town was rebuilt and expanded in the post war period owing to the London overspill project. This resulted in a fifth of the historic town being rebuilt.

This history is reflected in the town's historic environment, with a stimulating mixture of surviving medieval and post-medieval street patterns, nineteenth and twentieth century expansion, fine domestic, civic and commercial buildings as well as the remains of the various medieval friaries. The King's Lynn Heritage Action Zone area, with the Conservation Area at its heart, contains 462 listed buildings (17 Grade I, 55 Grade II\* and 390 Grade II), including the Grade I St Nicholas Chapel, England's largest surviving parochial chapel; the Grade I St George's Guildhall, the largest surviving medieval guildhall in the country and the Grade I Hanse House (1485), the only surviving Hanseatic

Warehouse in England; and 6 Scheduled Monuments (SM). This showcases the heritage of King's Lynn and highlights its historic local, national and international significance.

Unfortunately, market failure, socio-economic deprivation and weak economic activity have led to reduced levels of market confidence and investment. The central area also suffers from lack of occupation in the town centre on the first and second floors of retail buildings.

The following key heritage assets are vacant or at risk:

- Guildhall of St George (Grade I)
- Sommerfield and Thomas Warehouse (Grade II)



The Guildhall of St George. © Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne



The Sommerfeld and Thomas Warehouse. © Historic England Archive, Patricia Payne

Compared to other places in the East of England, the town experiences considerable levels of deprivation. The St Nicholas with St Margaret's, North Lynn and South Lynn wards all fall within the conservation area and the HAZ. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2015) shows the wards has the following ranks of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA):

- 1 LSOA in the 3% most deprived in the country
- 7 LSOAs in the 10% most deprived in the country
- 6 LSOAs in the 20% most deprived in the country

The West Norfolk region is estimated to generate £496 million in visitor spending, from 6 million visitors annually. The region's tourist offer includes the Norfolk Coast AONB, the estuarine coastline of the Wash, seaside resorts such as Hunstanton, attractive countryside, and historic market and port towns such as Downham Market and Lynn respectively. However, King's Lynn's outstanding built environment and heritage offer is not presently exploited to the extent it could be, with a lack of facilities to attract visitors to the waterfront area.

However, King's Lynn has made progress in developing as a tourist destination through schemes such as maritime heritage trails, as well as annual festivals to promote the Hanseatic League (both modern and historic) connections and the town's history of explorers and navigation. There have also been strong initiatives to enhance the 'café culture' in the town, particularly through the refurbishment and enhancement of the Tuesday and Saturday Marketplaces. Empty and derelict heritage assets in parts of the

Conservation Area are also being tackled by an on-going HLF funded Townscape Heritage Initiative in St Margaret's' Ward, and there are new visitor facilities at St Nicholas' Chapel. Overall there is great potential for the Conservation Area's long term sustainability, preservation and enhancement, and this will be a key part of Kings Lynn's economic development in the future.

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