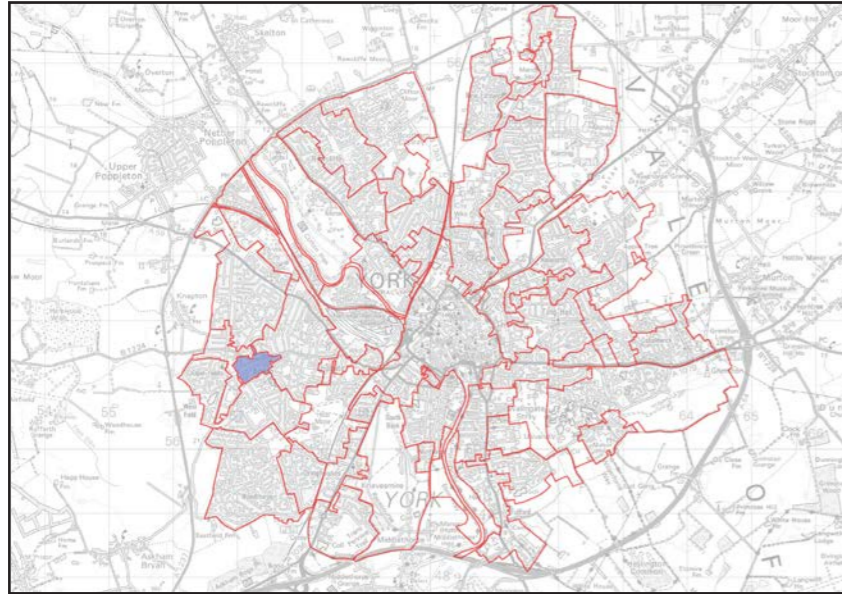


## Character area 27:Acomb



Location of character area



Extract from First Edition Ordnance Survey Plan 1852

### Key Characteristics

**General Character:** Acomb contains a variety of properties ranging from a handful of buildings dating to the 16th century, Georgian townhouses, Victorian terraces to developments spanning the whole of the 20th century.

The village has a designated green (1965), formerly a quarry, and retains its medieval street layout with a modern commercial area located at the east end of the village

Situated on relatively high ground overlooking the flood plain of the River Ouse with underlying drift geology of glacio-fluvial sand and gravel

Distinct from surrounding housing estates due to its ancient origins, village plan form and distinct historic architecture  
Includes Acomb Conservation Area

Area of Archaeological Importance

Busy, town like environment with tenuous relationship to the city

Approximate walking/cycling distance to the city centre from the centre of Front Street 3.8km via Wilton Rise/Cinder Lane

**Dominant Housing Type:** Mixture of post-medieval and 19th to 20th century dwellings

**Other Housing Types:** Mixture of late 20th century development

**Designated Heritage Assets:** 19 Grade II listed buildings and structures, Acomb House (II\*), Conservation Area and Area of Archaeological Importance and village green

**Non-designated Heritage Assets:** The Marcia Grey PH

**Key Views:** Views of the church spire can be seen from several locations, including the city walls

**Surviving historic roads and tracks:** Front Street, York Road and lanes leading north and south from village

## Archaeology and history

There is no evidence for prehistoric activity although the high ground must have been attractive for settlement. A mosaic pavement (MYO3629) found behind Acomb House in Front Street in the 19th century is evidence of high status Roman occupation although whether this represents more than a single building is not known. The ridge of high ground may form the line of a major Roman road running from York to Boroughbridge but firm evidence is yet to emerge. Acomb is a Domesday village, and was the property of the Cathedral Church of St Peter, York (York Minster) with 14 households recorded in 1086 (a medium sized settlement). By the 14th century Acomb was a thriving village with over 70 households.

The areas immediately surrounding the village remained as farmland until the end of the 19th and into the first few decades of the 20th century as the population of the area grew. Acomb Green (officially designated in 1965) was a former sand and gravel quarry depicted on the 1852 first edition OS plan but almost certainly much earlier. This is not the original village green.

In 1937 the village became formally part of the City of York. Since then, rapid housing expansion has largely obliterated all but a few traces of the former open fields. In 1975 the Acomb conservation area was established.

Much has been written on Acomb, its history and historic buildings. This document is intended to be more of a summary of the character and significances of the area rather than to repeat what is written elsewhere.



*The Marcia Grey 1935 - City of York Archives*

## Character

The village consists of a large residential area containing several churches and public houses as well as a shopping area at the east end.

Acomb Green is a notable open space although it has been surrounded on all sides by two-three storey 18th-early 20th century development. It continues to form an important amenity space and includes a recent children's playground.

Front Street and York Road retain their medieval plan form although this is not immediately obvious on the ground. Elements of original cobbled carriageway margins survive on Front Street. There are several churches and chapels in Acomb, however the original religious centre of the village is located on the north side on the higher ground. St. Stephen's Church (Grade II listed) was built in 1831-32 on the site of a 12th century church. The church spire can be seen from several locations including the city walls although is not visible from Front Street. The main roads in and out of the village remain as they would have been in the medieval period. Many of the medieval village toft and croft boundaries can still be traced on plan but are difficult to spot on the ground.

The architecture of Acomb is varied. Front Street contains a mixture of two-three storey residential and commercial properties dating from a range of periods. The oldest buildings in Acomb are situated at 14 and 16 Front Street, possibly elements of former farms along the main village street. They are the only surviving timber framed buildings in Acomb and date to the late 15th or early 16th century. York Road and The Green, are part of the original back lane of the village. Several 18th century domestic buildings survive on Front Street and York Road. 19th century development is often set back from the street on former toft boundaries.

The Marcia Grey PH (c.1900) on Front Street has been nominated for inclusion on the Local List of Heritage Assets. It replaced an earlier pub on the same site. The previous pub, the Grey Mare, was known as The Marcia from at least 1817 to the late 19th century after a favourite York racehorse.

For decades it has provided the base for a range of sporting clubs and teams in Acomb, and provides a strong link with the social history of the village.

Building has continued behind the main streets to the late 20th century, in particular along the south side of Front Street which retained many of its toft and croft boundaries into the mid 20th century. Gradually back plots were infilled by development, resulting in a gradual loss of medieval village character.

The land to the south of Acomb retained its open field character well into the mid 20th century when suburban development finally took over.

The bulk of the commercial premises are located to the east of Front Street and on York/Acomb Road. This 'High Street' area contains two storey 19th century buildings as well as purpose built mid to late 20th century shopping units. The modern units are in stark contrast to the 19th century buildings in terms of roofing, materials and window proportions. The shopping district contains modern solar powered bins, information points and seating areas. A large supermarket has been constructed at the east end of Front Street close to four listed buildings, contributing significantly to an erosion of Acomb's original character.

The eastern end of Front Street has been part pedestrianised in the late 1980s using a mix of non-natural materials. Much of the street furniture, particularly seating is tired and in need of repair and or replacement.

This area is distinct from the surrounding housing estates due to its ancient origins, village plan form and distinct historic architecture.



## Significance

**Archaeology:** The designated Area of Archaeological Importance (a sub-division of the main city wide AAI) signifies high archaeological potential both as a medieval village and as a possible important Roman route and settlement. Significant archaeological deposits representing a valuable finite resource may be present here, often at sufficient depth to be protected from development. These potentially rich deposits are one of the principal characteristics of York.

**Architecture:** The clustering of historic buildings and the amount of listed buildings in such a small area contributes to the aesthetic and historical value of the area.

However, due to mixed architectural styles within the former village and the dominance of surrounding housing development, village characteristics have been eroded. Front Street is a busy road which contains commercial properties, modern public buildings such as the Methodist Church and Library, and pockets of new development visible behind the historic street frontage.

The amenities on offer in Acomb contribute to the sense of the independence the original village had. However, they also give the impression of a slightly quaint historic thriving commercial suburb rather than the ancient rural village it once was.

**Historic:** In plan form at least, Acomb retains its medieval village origins, with Front Street, village green, and surviving croft and toft boundaries. Several former access tracks and lanes to the surrounding fields also survive, such as Green Lane and Gale Lane. Surviving areas of cobbled road margins are a key feature.

Other features of the historic environment include a stone in the car park of the former Regent Cinema building marking the boundary between Acomb and Holgate and the milepost (Grade II) on York Road.

**Streetscape components:** Mid to late 20th century street lighting, late 20th century seating, post and phone boxes, modern bus stops, street signage and waste bins. Solar powered waste bins and contemporary information points are in use within the commercial area.

Tarmac and paved carriageways and footpaths are in use throughout.

**Aesthetics:** The modern Village Green continues to form an important open amenity space in this suburban area. It is not an obvious, typical village green, and feels simply like a recreational area as it now contains a playground. Different views of village and church depending on location within Acomb due to undulating topography.

## Opportunities and recommendations

It is recommended that any extensions, new development or re-development in the area should be sympathetic in terms of style, material, proportions and density and should complement and enhance existing character. Street furniture, street signage and streetlights should integrate with the character of the area.

The cobbled margins along Front Street have, up to now been reasonably well cared for in places but further erosion should be strongly resisted. Any street works that affect these cobbles should be reinstated carefully following guidance contained in the City of York Streets and Spaces Strategy and Guidance.

Opportunities for improving the consistency of contemporary street furniture should be identified, in particular the enhancement of existing pedestrian surfaces, cycling facilities and upgrades of existing street furniture at retail facilities. This should be undertaken following guidance contained in the City of York Streets and Spaces Strategy and Guidance.

Removal of original streetscape features over time has had a negative impact on the character of the area – further loss of these features should be avoided where possible. Original street lighting columns should be retained wherever possible and where this is not possible, they should be carefully retrofitted with new lanterns where appropriate and column replacements should reflect the style of originals. The scale (height in particular) of lighting column should always respect the character of the street. Lighting columns on residential streets with low traffic volumes should reflect traditional heights. Further guidance is contained in the City of York Streets and Spaces Strategy and Guidance (City of York Council, 2013).

Wherever possible and practical, it is strongly recommended that inherited historic landscape grain evidenced through post-medieval and 19th century former field boundaries should be enhanced and conserved.

These play a key role in explaining the historic development of the area.

Where historic boundaries have been identified, either as surviving hedgerows or where retained as part of historic development, efforts should be made to ensure their continuing survival as part of any future development opportunities.

Great care should be paid to the retention of socially valued buildings and spaces with appropriate weight given to local opinions.

Hedgerows and trees should be carefully managed and opportunities for planting new trees along grass verges and in existing hedgerows should be identified in partnership with local residents. A programme of regular monitoring of original hedgerow boundaries and grass verges should be secured.

Key views of the Minster, other major heritage assets and local landmarks should be maintained and enhanced to help orientation and enhance local distinctiveness.

Development management policy should take account of the contribution made by locally identified heritage assets to the distinctive character of the area. Sub-surface archaeological sites and landscapes in this area are particularly important.

Archaeological research, targeted at revealing evidence of Acomb's early origins as an Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian settlement as well as clarifying the presence or absence of a significant Roman routeway is encouraged. Appropriate mitigation strategies should be agreed to protect potential archaeological deposits for any future development in the area.

Research projects that examine the relationship between medieval villages on the fringes of the urban area and the city centre will make a significant contribution to our understanding of post-Roman and early medieval land-use and the relationship between city and countryside. Although much of the village character has been lost to development, unlike, for instance Fulford and Heslington, enough survives that could benefit from enhancement and better revealing of significance.

The area contains a high number of listed buildings and one building that should be considered for listing or at least inclusion on the Local List of Heritage Assets - The Marcia Grey PH. All of these buildings add significant value to the character of Acomb. Every effort should be made to ensure that these buildings are retained and kept in productive use. Their loss or inappropriate alteration would have significant impacts on the character of the area.

There is an opportunity for this study to be used as baseline data for the local community to develop local priorities, encourage community cohesion, recognise and improve the quality of their environment and strengthen a sense of place. This area in particular would benefit from further study and consultation with residents to inform on its character and how that has changed over time.

The commissioning of a Conservation Area Appraisal for Acomb should be considered as has been done in other parts of the city.



## Character Area 27: Images



*Buildings surrounding the Village Green*



*Evidence of streetscape change. Above Front Street in the early 1920's (City of York Archives) and, below a similar view in 2012*



*Wesleyan Chapel on Front Street (now flats)*



*Buildings surrounding the Village Green*



*The Village Green play area*



*Unusual architecture on Front Street*



*Example of how the topography impacts upon the character of the village. A Victorian back lane looking north from Front Street to the rear of Victorian premises on York Road with the church spire visible in the background.*





*Village buildings*



*Late 19th to early 20th century shops in the commercial area of Acomb*



*Village buildings*



*Mid 20th century shops in the commercial area of Acomb*



*Village buildings*

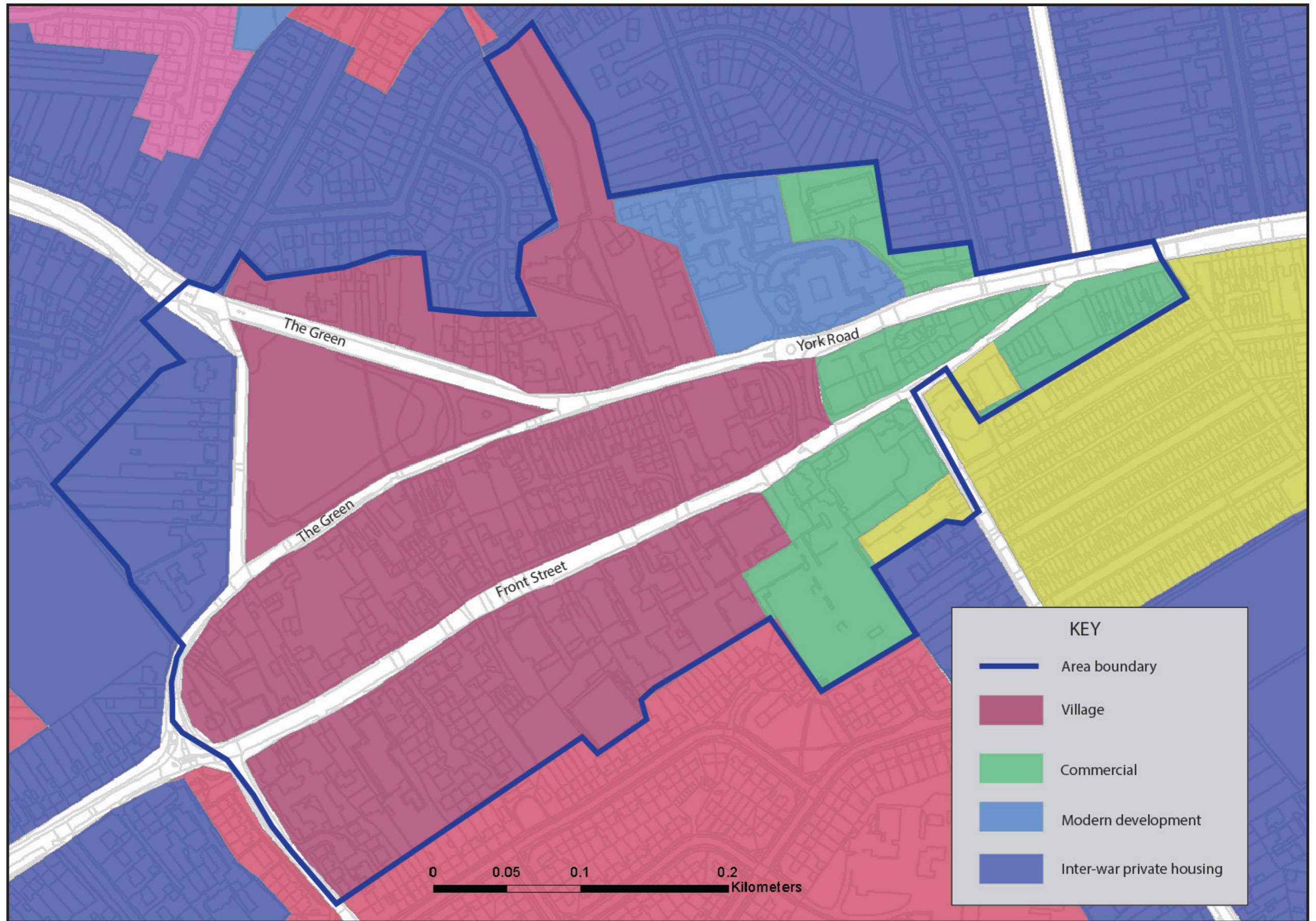


*Streetscape of the commercial area of Acomb*



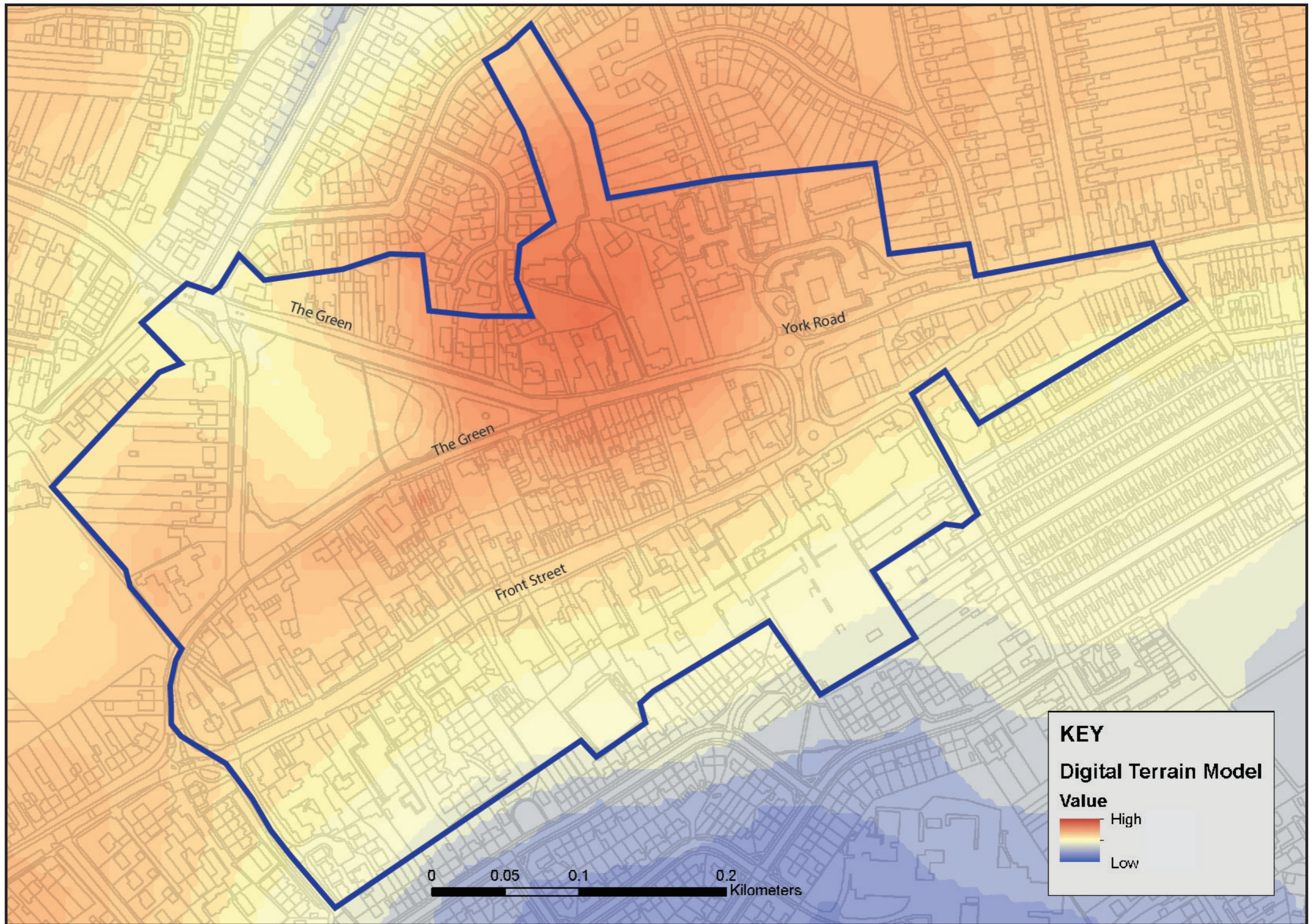
### Character Area 27: Maps

Broad Type characterisation plan. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan



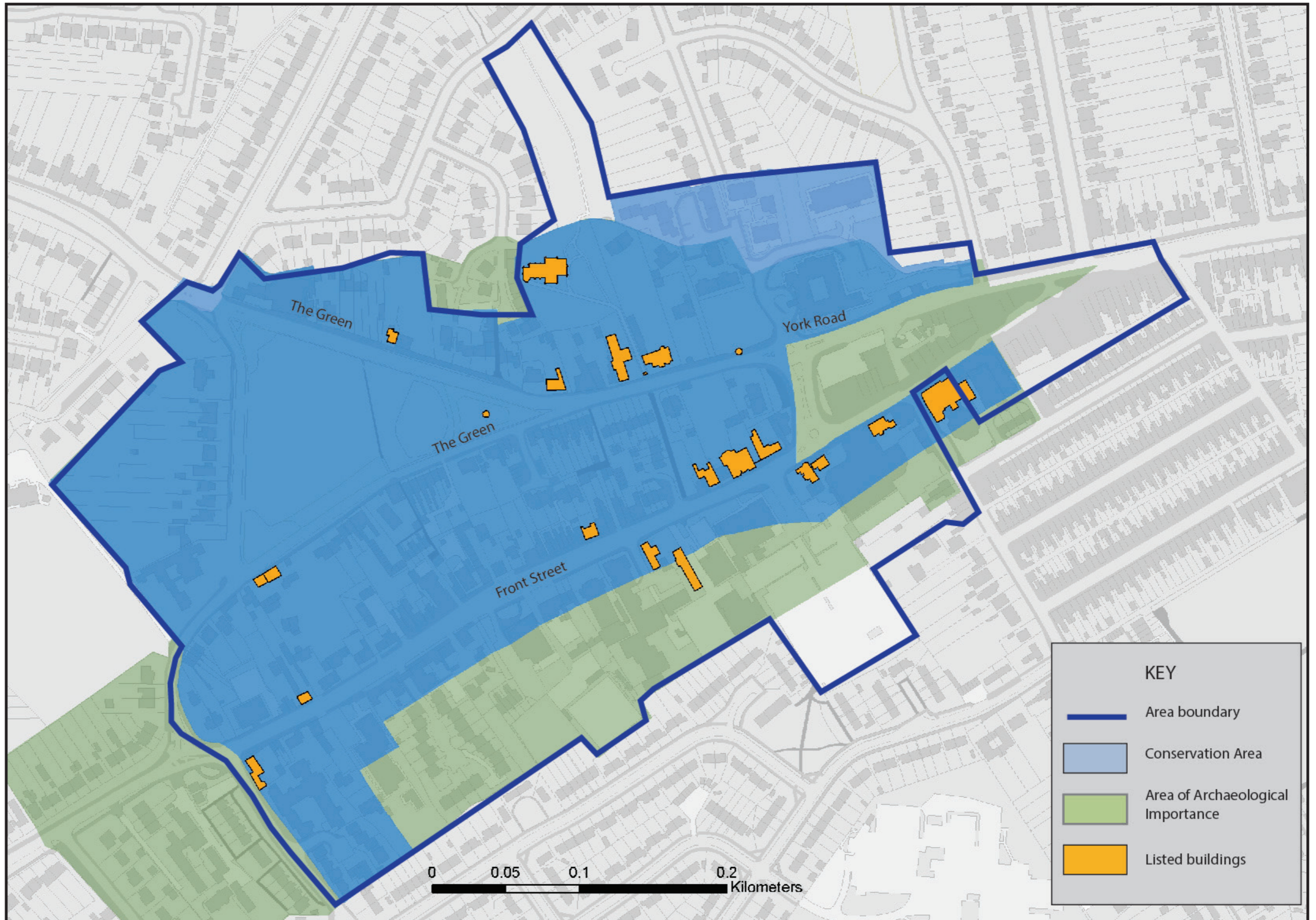


Topography





Archaeology and  
designated heritage assets





Extant surviving boundaries, roads and tracks as depicted on the 1852 First Edition Ordnance Survey Plan

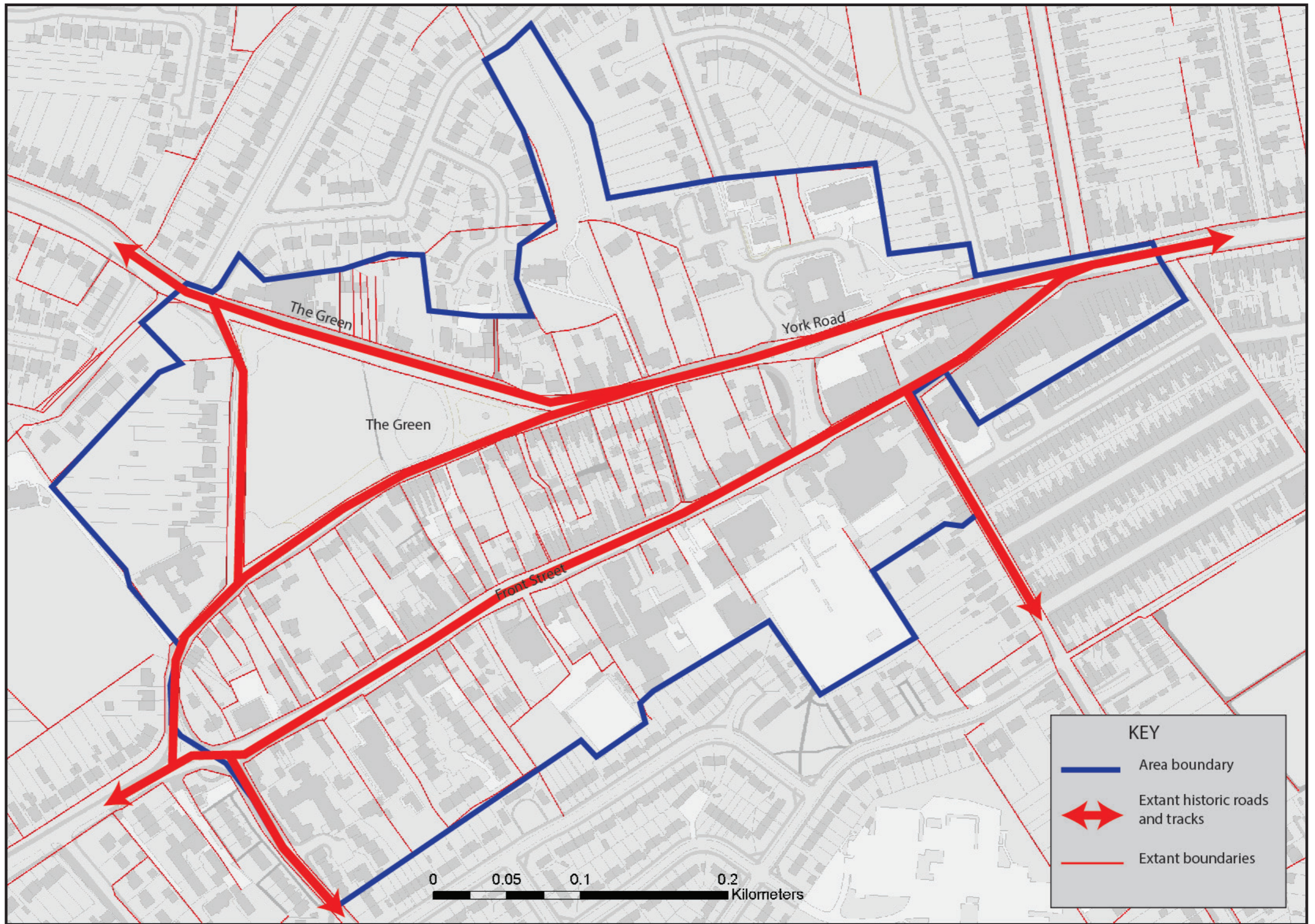




Figure ground map showing the relationship between open space (black) and the built environment





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