



**Neighbourhood
Area Study**

2017 - 2022

Introduction

This document is a high-level analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of four character areas that make up the Arches 'Chatham' Neighbourhood Forum's designated area. These four areas shouldn't be considered as officially recognised settlements or places, but have instead been identified due to their distinct built form differences (e.g. age, typology, etc) and to illustrate how strengths, weaknesses and opportunities vary throughout the neighbourhood area. This document has continually been updated to ensure it accurately reflects the conditions of these four areas.

The following five aspects of the neighbourhood area are explored in this document:

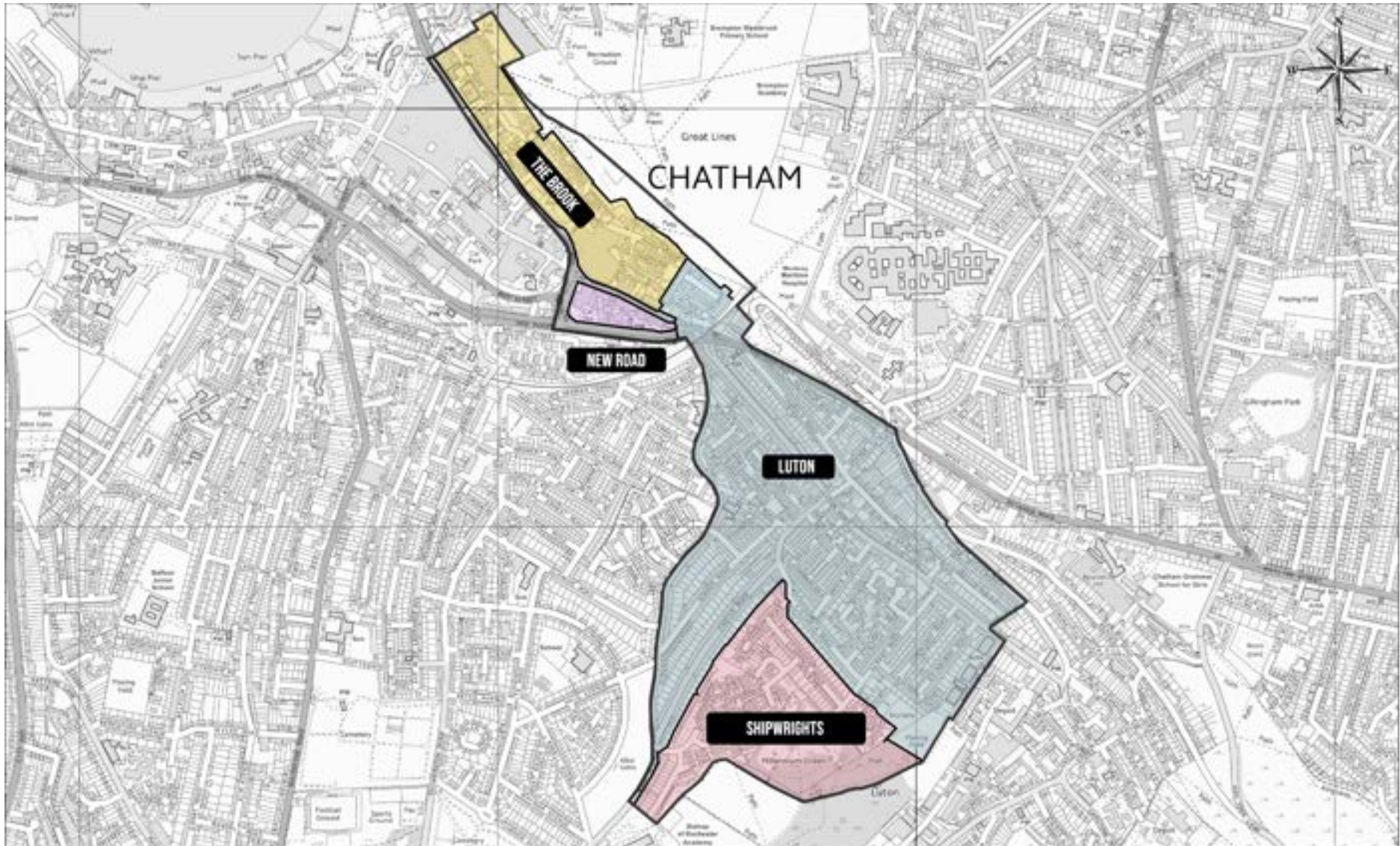
- Topography, Views & Landscape Features
- Streetscape
- Buildings
- Heritage
- Existing Access & Connectivity

This document should be used alongside the complete suite of supporting documents to the Arches (Chatham) Neighbourhood Plan to gain a greater understanding of the designated area and our community's wants and needs. In addition, the forum has created an interactive map which pinpoints potential strengths (e.g. heritage assets) and weaknesses (e.g. fly-tipping hotspots, poor quality single dwelling conversions, vacant retail units, etc) to specific locations across the neighbourhood area. The map formed the foundation of this broader study, which will elaborate further on the aspects covered.

Map can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3RUHiaU>



Figure 1
Brook Theatre, Chatham.



Map 1 Four areas identified within the designated Neighbourhood Area.

Figure 2
Caulkers House, Chatham.



Shipwrights, Chatham

Topography, Views & Landscape Features

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The elevated nature of this area creates vantage points, which offer views to the Grade I-listed Naval War Memorial and the ridge of the Field of Fire at the Great Lines. Lack of high-traffic main roads together with nearby historic permeable filters in Luton, which reduce rat-running, enable a tranquil environment.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The area's hilly environment may cause a degree of car dependency. Active travel is more difficult for cyclists and pedestrians, particularly those who are elderly or have mobility issues, which is paired with the non-existent bus service in the immediate area.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forthcoming developments could be orientated to maximise benefits from the views outlined above.

Streetscape

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As is common for low-density, post-war housing estates, this area has notably more green infrastructure than the areas of Luton, New Road and The Brook. This is predominantly in the form of verges and grassland, which accommodate some tree planting. Front gardens have mostly been retained and not converted into hardstanding parking spaces/driveways. These gardens also appear to be well-tended to in the most part, suggesting a sense of pride and individual stewardship.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A considerable amount of space left over after planning (SLOAP) exists across the estate, which are not designed to offer amenity use, lack natural surveillance and could therefore attract anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping, litter, etc. Pavement parking is common across this area, which may be further exacerbated by high parking stress. At the same, some garages appear to sit unused, not used for the intention of car storage or converted into additional dwelling space.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to further increase the greenery throughout this area through tree planting, hedgerows, etc.

Buildings

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appears to be very few examples of houses in multiple occupation or single dwelling conversions into flats. • Mostly low to medium rise buildings, e.g. two to four storeys. • There is a greater sense of pride in place, which could be evidenced by the individual upkeep of properties (e.g. condition of exterior finishes, treatment of front gardens and overall cleanliness).
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The post-war buildings don't appear to have been constructed with longevity and durability in mind. This could be evidenced through the poor physical ageing of the buildings and the use of materials, such as felt roofs. • Caulkers House is widely believed to be a blot on the landscape, poorly responding to the architecture and landscape of the wider ACNF area. It is not reflective of the area's valued characteristics.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be more dense through intensification and infill development, such as the redevelopment of redundant garage rows into mews.

Heritage

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This area offers little to no heritage significance. Only street names appear to reference naval aspects of Chatham's history.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result of the lack of heritage in this area, it is challenging to derive a sense of identity and historic linkage to the past.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are very few opportunities to 'create' a heritage given its history as undeveloped land and later allotment gardens. However, there are opportunities to strengthen the link to heritage in this area's immediate vicinity, such as Fort Luton.



Figure 3

A well-tended to front garden displaying stewardship.

Existing Access & Connectivity

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close proximity to Luton Millennium Green, which offers links to Daisy Banks.• Close proximity to educational facilities such as Victory Academy, New Horizons Primary School and Holcombe Grammar School.• Offers connectivity to M2 and A229 via car.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very few key amenities and social infrastructure in this area, e.g. community spaces, places of worship, GP, dental surgery, etc.• Entry points into Luton Millennium Green from Shipwrights Avenue and Oakum Court prevent access for wheelchair users and those with pushchairs.• Poor pedestrian experience mostly due to pavement parking.• Poor cycle experience as there is no dedicated cycle infrastructure in place.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve access into Luton Millennium Green to enable the wider community to use it.• Cycle infrastructure (e.g. junction priority and permeable filters) can improve the experience for cyclists and encourage a modal shift for short distance journeys to key amenities and social infrastructure elsewhere in the ACNF area.

Figure 4

An example of a typical end-of-terrace.





Figure 5
An example of an alleyway with 'space left over after planning' (SLOAP).

Luton, Chatham

Topography, Views & Landscape Features

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luton is nestled within a valley. It is mostly flat along Luton Road with easy access to amenities, but steeply slopes towards the northern edge closest to Chatham Hill and the southern edge approaching the Shipwrights area.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of views and seas of tarmac in the flat parts of the area can create a claustrophobic feeling.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to green the grey landscape with urban greening, particularly in the form of tree planting, hedgerows and verges.

Streetscape

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luton is mostly a legible place made up of a permeable street pattern and local landmarks/buildings used as points of reference. Key amenities including GP surgeries, dental practices, schools and grocery shops are present in this area and are within walking distance for most residents.
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Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modern additions to the historic streetscape, including pedestrian guardrailing, have prioritised vehicles and created a hostile environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Roads are cluttered with parked cars, bollards and guardrails, and not trees or hedges. An increasing number of front gardens have become hardstanding parking areas for cars. Fly-tipping and general untidiness is commonplace.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forthcoming developments could be orientated to maximise benefits from the views outlined above. Reduce car dominance by increasing the hierarchical position of the pedestrian, e.g. removing guardrailing, introducing wider pavements where possible, additional crossings, filtered permeability, etc. There is an ongoing effort to introduce street trees into this area. This should be continued and diversified to include hedgerows and low-level planting, too. SLOAP areas could be repurposed to create sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), pocket parks, etc.



Figure 6
An example of a period building in need of restoration in Luton.

Buildings

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luton's architecture is unrivalled in the neighbourhood area and heavily valued by the local and wider community. It varies from the humble terrace with simple ornamentation to ornate commercial buildings with arched transom bars and a winged cherub head with a festoon of fruit and flowers. The style and scale of these buildings are popular with local people and contribute to a distinctive sense of place identity.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run-down properties are commonplace, e.g. cracked render, broken guttering, deteriorating doors and windows, etc. Loss of traditional shopfronts and unsympathetic modern additions have harmed the character of traditional 19th and 20th century buildings. A dramatic shift in property ownership from owner-occupied to buy-to-lets owned by absentee landlords has occurred in recent decades. Infill developments have further harmed the architectural merit of the area and supercharged the race to the bottom. Lack of individual stewardship.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an opportunity to revive Luton as a historic and positive neighbourhood centre. Buildings, including shops, could be restored to reflect and enhance valued characteristics. New developments should also seek to do this.

Heritage

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luton was first seen in maps dating 1769 and is packed full of heritage, from notable historic individuals like Asquith Xavier and Anne Pratt, to the architectural legacy of the Chatham and District Co-operative Society's former shops. Thorney Lodge at 15 Luton Road is Grade II-listed.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luton's history remains largely untold. The architectural heritage that survives is in poor condition and requires restoration. Aspects of Luton's heritage have left the area over several decades, e.g. the Driver Fountain which was once situated at Luton Arches now languishes in Chatham Cemetery over a mile away from its rightful home.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lost heritage assets, such as the Driver Fountain, could be reinstated to strengthen the area's identity. There is also opportunity to retell and reimagine the story of Luton via art installations, theatre and cultural programming.

Figure 7

An example of a property in disrepair in Luton.



Existing Access & Connectivity

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A short walk to public transport, i.e. railway station and bus services.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buses are undesirable and expensive options for day-to-day travel. Services are also affected by peak hour congestion along Luton Road.• Active travel is unpleasant and potentially unsafe due to car-dominated streets.• Poor connectivity to recreational greenspaces, particularly Luton Millennium Green.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public realm improvements and street furniture decluttering to create a better active travel experience.• Improve wayfinding to Luton Millennium Green through a network of tree planting, other small-scale urban greening and more signage.• Explore options for bus priority measures at the junction of Luton Road and Chatham Hill.



Figure 8
Dilapidated properties along Luton Road.

Figures 9 & 10

Beautiful examples of Victorian terraces in Luton.





Figure 11
Poor-quality infill development in Luton.



Figure 12
An example of neglected land behind office-to-flat conversions.

New Road, Chatham

Topography, Views & Landscape Features

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It benefits from views to the Naval War Memorial and the Great Lines from particular locations. • Like Luton, this area is mostly flat as it sits at the bottom of the valley.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very little urban greenery and no greenspaces in this area.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are opportunities to soften the area with urban greening, partially in the form of tree planting, hedgerows and verges.

Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area's hilly environment may cause a degree of car dependency. • Active travel is more difficult for cyclists and pedestrians, particularly those who are elderly or have mobility issues, which is paired with the non-existent bus service in the immediate area.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forthcoming developments could be orientated to maximise benefits from the views outlined above.

Streetscape

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As is common for low-density, post-war housing estates, this area notably has more green infrastructure than the areas of Luton, New Road and The Brook. This is predominantly in the form of verges and grassland, which accommodate some tree planting. • Front gardens have mostly been retained and not converted into hardstanding parking spaces/driveways. These gardens also appear to be well-tended to in the most part, suggesting a sense of pride and stewardship.
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Figure 13

An example of a poor quality office-to-flat conversion.

Buildings

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the historic 19th century terrace on the southern side of the High Street survives.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-war infill developments along New Road and the High Street have resulted in the loss of the area's original 19th century fabric. • High concentration of very poor-quality, office-to-flat conversions created through PDR. • Private and communal amenity space (e.g. courtyards for residents) is in short supply.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to largely redevelop parts of this area to enhance the 19th century terraced buildings and to repair the fabric of the block.

Heritage

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the 19th century terraced buildings on the southern side of the High Street survive. This also includes locally valued heritage assets, such as the former Little Crown pub.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings that were considered by local people to be landmarks, including the Chatham Public Library in New Road and Chatham Technical Institute in the High Street, have been lost to modern redevelopment. • No nationally or locally listed buildings. • Although an array of original architectural features and fixtures on historic buildings in this area survive, they are in a poor condition or at risk of being lost.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring views to the Naval War Memorial and Great Lines are maintained by forthcoming developments in the New Road area. • Repairing the historic fabric of the block through sympathetic infill redevelopment.



Figure 14
Modern development which does not respond to the historic environment.

Existing Access & Connectivity

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively permeable island block with a number of historic alleyways (e.g. Market Place) providing traffic-free active travel connections between the High Street and New Road. • Several bus services run through the High Street and are accommodated by 4 bus stops, providing links to the bus station and wider Medway. • Sustainable location due to its very close proximity to key amenities in the High Street and the Pentagon Centre.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The alleyways benefit from little to no natural surveillance, which could discourage people from using it due to perceived lower levels of safety. • Pavement parking and illegal parking on double yellow lines and bus stops frequently occurs. • No cycle infrastructure is present in this area. • Bus lay-bys in the High Street create delays for bus journeys and impact reliability of services.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle infrastructure could be provided, e.g. permeable filters, cycle parking stands/storage hangers, junction priority. • Replace bus lay-bys with on-street bus stops bordering the kerbline to improve journey times.



Figure 15
Poor quality private amenity space at an office-to-flat conversion.

Figures 16-18

Examples of poor quality office-to-flat conversions.





Figure 19

An example of a poor quality post-war development.



The Brook, Chatham

Topography, Views & Landscape Features

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevated position of this area offers views over Chatham town centre and to the River Medway. • The historically significant Great Lines (Field of Fire) is situated adjacent to this area. Today, it is a landmark heritage park valued as an open space for social and recreational use. • Town Hall Gardens sits within this area and is in very close proximity to surrounding residents.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The steeply sloping nature of this area can make accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists challenging. • Forthcoming developments which may propose tall buildings could harm the significance of the Naval War Memorial and the Great Lines.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian and cycle connections to the Great Lines could be improved to encourage better use of it. • Building heights in forthcoming development should respond to the topography and strategic views out from and into the area to protect the significance of heritage assets. • Opportunity to 'bring' the Great Lines and Town Hall Gardens into the area through the creation of a green corridor network (e.g. tree-lined streets).

Streetscape

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenery is present little and often across most of this area, particularly in the form of trees, verges and some retained front gardens.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brook (A229) is heavily car-dominant and suffers from congestion during peak hours. • Cycle infrastructure is mostly inadequate or non-existent. The only facilities that exist are bike boxes at traffic lights along The Brook. • Inactive edges (e.g. former Go Outdoors superstore and market hall) create 'dead' spaces void of street activity and vitality. • Several vacant plots of land face onto The Brook and remain undeveloped since their formation in c.2011 during the road widening works.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public realm improvements could create a better experience for pedestrians and cyclists. • Further greenery should be introduced to soften the hardscape and to create green links with the Great Lines and Town Hall Gardens.



Figure 20
The Brook Theatre.

Buildings

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some historic buildings survive, including the former Churchills pub and the Ragged School, which was granted Grade II-listed status in April 2020. • The area is mostly residential with a mix of low-rise building typologies, such as mews, terraced and semi-detached housing, and blocks of flats. • The 7-storey block of flats in Carpeaux Close, which was considered a blot on the landscape, was demolished in the early 2000s, which reinstated views to the Great Lines.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The former Tesco/Go Outdoors superstore closed and sits empty. • The vast majority of this area was redeveloped in post-war years and has therefore lost almost all of its original historic terraced streets and buildings. • Inactive frontages are commonplace (e.g. former Tesco/Go Outdoors superstore, Medway County Court). • Post-war and modern buildings/structures, particularly those built in the 1960-80s, are of poor architectural quality and unsympathetic to Chatham's historic character. Sites include the former purpose-built Tesco superstore, Medway County Court and the flyover connecting the Pentagon Centre to Rope Walk.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forthcoming developments should incorporate active frontages to increase street activity and provide natural surveillance over the public realm. • Gentle density developments could be delivered on vacant plots along The Brook without causing harm to the significance of the Naval War Memorial or the Great Lines.

Heritage

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ragged School became Grade II-listed in April 2020. It is a rare surviving example of a purpose-built ragged school and offers a 19th century vestige of the Brook area of Chatham, known for its slum conditions during that period. • Town Hall Gardens survive as an early origin of civic open space in Chatham on land gifted from military to civilian ownership. It also represents Chatham Corporation's response to providing and preserving public open spaces for the health and wellbeing of local people.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vast majority of the historic Brook area, namely its terraced streets, has been lost to slum clearance and post-war redevelopment. • The historic significance of the Ragged School is poorly revealed and sits isolated within this area. It is also in a dilapidated condition requiring restoration.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ragged School could be sensitively restored to its former glory. • Sensitive improvements could be made to Town Hall Gardens to reveal its significance.

Figure 21
Modern development underway along The Brook.

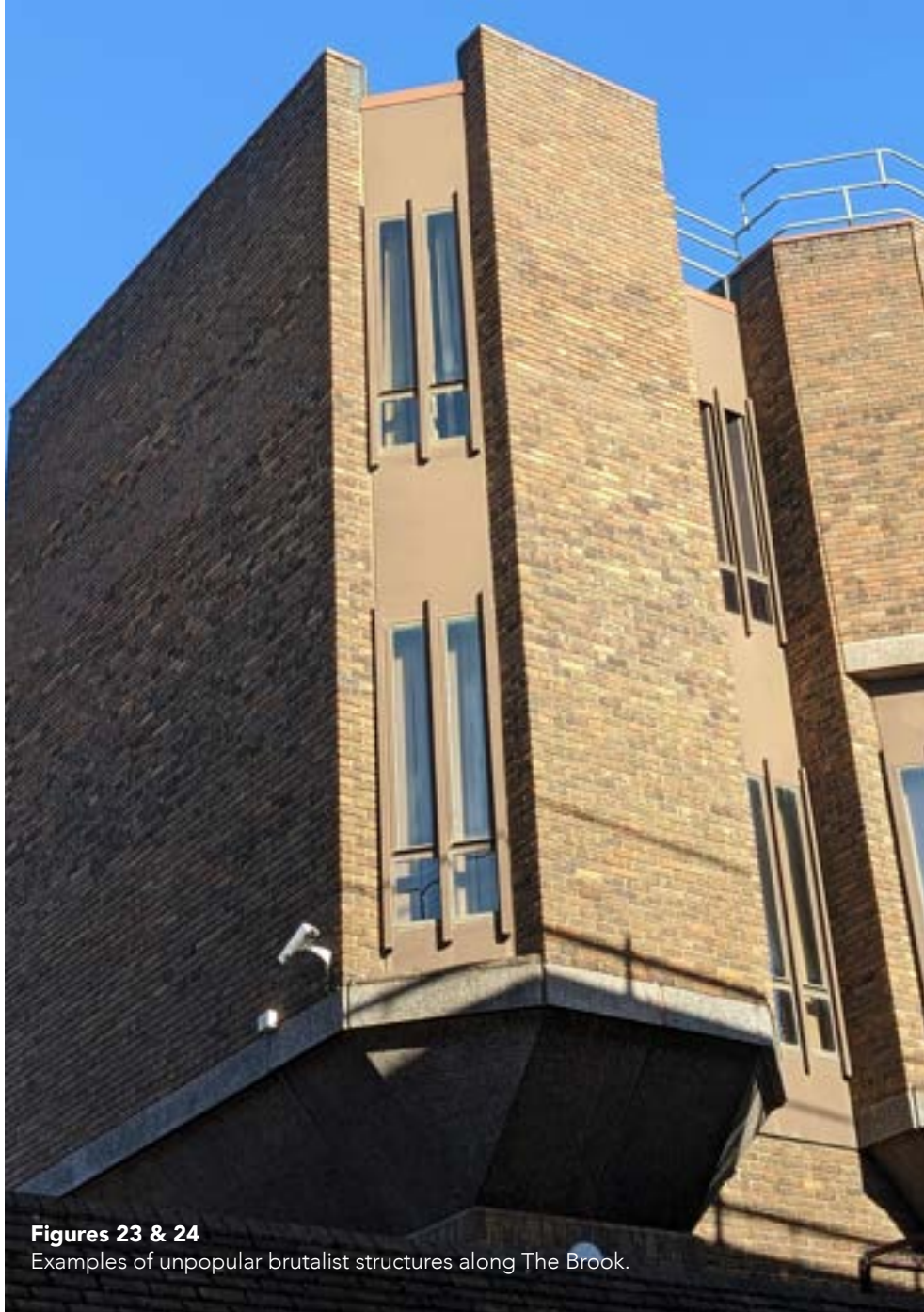


Existing Access & Connectivity

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly permeable street pattern offering access into Chatham town centre for day-to-day amenities, or to the bus and railway stations to travel further afield. • Little to no pavement parking.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some pavements are narrow and/or end abruptly in parts, particularly between Rope Walk and Queen Street. • Footpaths leading up to the Great Lines are in a poor condition, may feel unsafe (e.g. poorly lit and lacking natural surveillance) and not easily accessible due to stepped entrances, overgrown vegetation, etc. • The car-dominated environment of The Brook creates a poor pedestrian and cycle experience.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public realm improvements could create a better street environment that puts pedestrians and cyclists first, particularly along The Brook.



Figure 22
An inactive frontage of the former Go Outdoors superstore.



Figures 23 & 24
Examples of unpopular brutalist structures along The Brook.

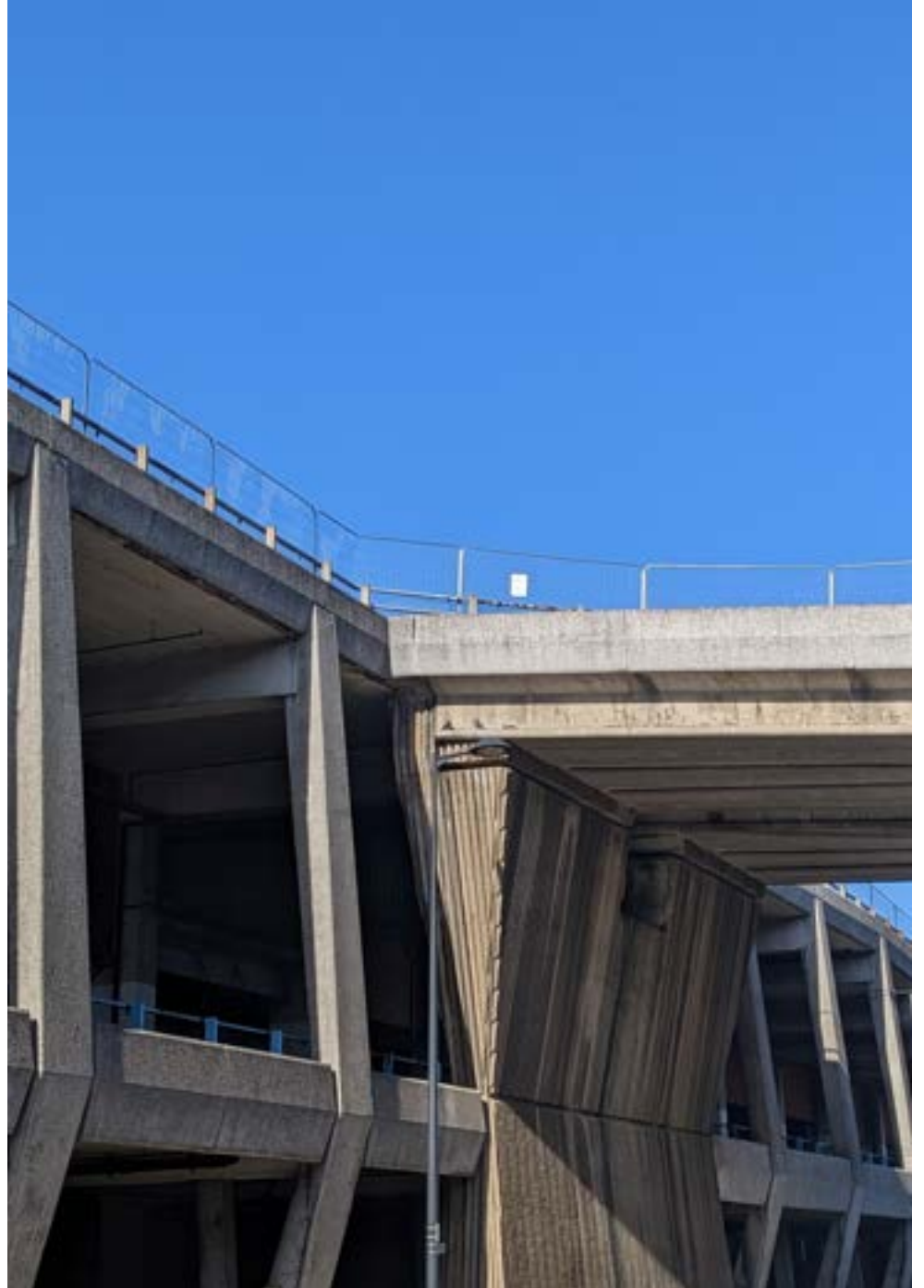




Figure 25
An example of a poor quality modern development.

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