

BLYTH CENTRAL CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL



Prepared by the
North of England Civic Trust
for
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NORTH of ENGLAND CIVIC TRUST





Map 1: Blyth Central Conservation Area

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1 *Summary of Special Significance*

Blyth Central Conservation Area is an amalgam of historic buildings and modern developments. However, its visual character is still embedded in the late 19th and early 20th century. Groups of buildings from this period, mostly designed in Free Classicism style, combine to create a robust and pleasant layout within which new developments have been slotted, some more successfully than others. The historic buildings are constructed from either local carboniferous sandstone, using coursed, squared, tooled blocks, or from red bricks. Contrasting stone details and decorative terracotta tiles are used to adorn front elevations. Roofs are mainly Welsh slate brought into the port as trading ballast. Original windows, doors and shop fronts display typical joinery features, some surviving in spite of the vagaries of time and cost.

There are few historic spaces that have survived from the first wave of development which still dominates the character of the area. The market place was doubled in size in post-war years without focus or historic reference. This dramatically changed the established pattern of built development, which was based on a traditional grid-iron layout with views being channelled along streets. The historic containment and division of space has changed at the heart of the town centre.

The general impression is one where the overall character of the older buildings survives and where the combined effect of their grouping and massing provides a robust and extremely attractive spine, around which new developments have been added. However, the ground floor shop fronts tend to gel into a modern, 'anyplace' character with limited exceptions. Some of the upper floors appear to be abandoned, lending an air of decline. The cumulative effect of these problems diminishes the contribution that the historic buildings currently make to the quality of the town centre.

The conservation area excludes parts of the town centre that fall within the late C19 and early C20 historic envelope. Conversely it includes parts that have been demolished and redeveloped in a way that does not complement the historic significance of the area. This appraisal will address these issues and make recommendations regarding possible changes to the boundary.

2 *Introduction*

2.1 *Conservation Areas*

Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance¹. They are designated by the local planning authority using local criteria.

Conservation areas are about character and appearance, which can derive from many factors including individual buildings, building groups and their relationship with open spaces, architectural detailing, materials, views, colours, landscaping, street furniture and so on. Character can also draw on more abstract notions such as sounds, local environmental conditions and historical changes. These things combine to create a locally distinctive sense of place worthy of protection.

There are three conservation areas in the town of Blyth: The Central Conservation Area, The Heritage Conservation Area and Bondicar Terrace Conservation Area. They spread across the historic core of the town encompassing the port and Ridley Park (the Heritage Conservation Area), the commercial centre (The Central Conservation Area) and the finest lengths of late nineteenth century terraces and detached houses which were built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bondicar Terrace Conservation Area) (Map xx). The conservation areas are physically detached from one another and reflect discrete characters that require the preparation and implementation of specific policies to secure their protection, enhancement and management. The retention of their individual status will ensure that their specific characters can be respected and maintained in the future.

2.2 *Planning Context*

Conservation Area designation remains the principal means by which local authorities can apply conservation policies to a particular area. The Council has a duty, in exercising its planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. This duty extends to the determination of planning applications. It also has a duty, from time to time, to draw up

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, s69

and publish proposals for preservation and enhancement, and to consult local people on those proposals.

Historic environments, and their protection and preservation, are now extensively recognised for the contribution they make to the country's cultural and historic heritage, its economic well-being and quality of life. Public support for conservation - both in the built and natural environments - is also well established. National and regional government guidance reflects this. It is not the purpose of conservation areas to prevent change but to manage it in such a way as to maintain and, if possible, strengthen the area's special qualities. Current legislation is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This places a duty on the Council to declare as conservation areas those parts of their area that they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest. It also imposes on the Council a duty to review past designations from time to time. Conservation Area status also means that there are stricter controls on changes that can be made to buildings and land including the need to secure consent to demolish any building, strengthening controls over some minor forms of development and the automatic protection of all trees in conservation areas. Government policy is outlined in PPG 15 Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment advises local planning authorities on the treatment of historic buildings and the wider historic environment within the planning process²

- **The Northumberland County and National Park Structure Plan** was adopted in 2005 and includes policies that generally support conservation objectives (Appendix 4.1).
- The current Development Plan for Blyth is **Blyth Valley District Local Plan**. This was adopted in 1999. The Council has embarked on a review of the Local Plan and has decided to undertake this task as part of its preparation of the Blyth Valley Local Development Framework. The adopted Local Plan contains a number of policies that impact upon the conservation area (Appendix 4.1).
- The **Blyth Valley Community Plan**, 'The Peoples' Plan', is the Council's Community Plan and sets out the key challenges facing the Borough, identifying how they will be addressed to secure the stated vision of 'a place of involvement, opportunity and prosperity for all' (Appendix 4.1).
- **The South East Northumberland & North Tyneside Regeneration Initiative (SENNTRI)** was created in 2001 to drive forward regeneration of the sub-region. Its *Strategy & Action Plan* recognises the importance of heritage in helping encourage inward investment (Appendix 4.1).

² Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment

2.3 *The Character Appraisal*

The character appraisal is the first step in a dynamic process, the aim of which is to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. It defines and records the factors that make the conservation area special, thereby providing a baseline for decisions about the area's future. It also identifies features and problems that detract from its special quality and suggest, by means of outline management and enhancement proposals, the ways in which the special interest could be safeguarded or improved. The appraisal also provides an opportunity to review the boundaries of the conservation area and, where appropriate, propose amendments.

The survey and appraisal were carried out by the North of England Civic Trust on behalf of the Council during June, July and August 2007 following the methodology suggested by English Heritage. To ensure that a complete picture is built up about the value and character of the area the Council will consult with people who live, work and visit the area to secure their views, including what they like or dislike about the area, and ideas about how the area could be preserved or enhanced.

The next stage of the process will be to prepare a detailed Management Plan for the conservation area. This will be undertaken once the Character Appraisal has been through the consultation exercise and approved by the Council.

2.4 *Further information*

For further information on the Conservation Area and the Character Appraisal, please contact:

Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Blyth Valley District Council
Avenue Road
Seaton Delaval
NE25 ODX
Telephone number: 016770 542369

This document can be downloaded from

www.blythvalley.gov.uk

3 Location and Context

3.1 Location

Blyth is a coastal town ranged along the south side of the River Blyth estuary. It is approximately 15 kilometres to the north of Newcastle and 10 kilometres to the east of the market town of Morpeth, both significant heritage assets. The River Blyth rises to the east of the main Pennine divide and collects water from tributaries including the Pont as it travels across its 300 sq km catchment area over the south east Northumberland coastal plain before flowing into the North Sea. Blyth's development exploded in the C19 with the exploitation of the vast coal reserves and its port and shipyard facilities. Its population reflected this growth with less than 10,000 residents in 1840 rising to over 40,000 by 1900. Early Maps (Appendix 4.4 Maps 1,2,3 and 4) show that Blyth's hinterland was primarily rural with farmsteads and agricultural hamlets together with a number of pits. The nearest industrial settlement was to the west with Bedlington Iron Works and a slitting mill. This has changed with the expansion of Blyth, the coalescing of villages into Cramlington new town and the growth of Bedlington and Wansbeck in general. However, Green Belt policies maintain a clear and attractive rural separation between the urban areas.

Blyth Central Conservation Area lies within Earsdon Parish and Croft Ward. Its centre is at National Grid reference NZ3187SW.

3.2 Context

3.2.1 Geology

Blyth is positioned above the South East Northumberland coalfield and its overlying layers of carboniferous limestone separated to the west by a band of millstone grit. The River Blyth that forms the northern edge of the historic settlement cuts the edge of a basalt sill running along the coast, a feature that protects the harbour and has provided an important sheltered anchorage since at least the C14. This plains geology contrasts with the rising Northumberland fells sandstone hills to the west which provide a distant containment of the visual envelope. The carboniferous limestone that weathers down to pale buff is a vernacular material which introduces a sense of place and warmth to some historic buildings within the area. Unfortunately, the stone is soft and prone to delaminating and erosion resulting in loss of detail and occasional failure.

The sandstone is covered by a substantial impermeable Glacial till that was deposited directly by the glacier.

3.2.2 ***Topography and aspect***

Blyth is located on the coastal plain and at the estuary of the river. It is predominantly flat, the highest point of the land within the conservation area is no more than 5metres above sea level.

There are no distinguishing topographic features, consequently, built form does not take advantage of rising ground. The principal topographic influence has proved to be the configuration of the river and its tributary, 'The Gut'. 'The Gut' spread over a shallow basin before it entered the Blyth which flooded at high tide. This created a natural barrier that separated 'Old Blyth' from Cowpen until land was drained and reclaimed at the end of the C19.

The conservation area is lodged within the wider urban settlement. It is located on a pattern of predominantly open-ended roads with limited perimeter containment. This context has changed following the demolition of buildings that at one time truncated views. Landmark buildings located outside the conservation area which impact on aspect include the gasworks to the north and the Arriva bus depot to the east – the former having dominated the skyline for over 150 years.

3.2.3 ***Setting and External Relationships***

Blyth is located on the corner of land formed by the coast and the river. Its setting is formed by the vast expanse of the North Sea, the flat river estuary and the low lying rural plain. Consequently, there is little of visual interest to interrupt horizons. The conservation area is landlocked and contained by a swathe of typical North-East late C19/early C20 terraced housing to the south; the mass of the new Keel Row shopping centre replacing C19 buildings and the open aspect of the Market Place punctured by Regent Street to the north; the Market Place and the receding Waterloo Road relieved by the spires of St Mary's Church and the United Reform Church to the west; and modern commercial buildings and the Arriva bus depot with an indistinct middle-distance view of the remains of the C18 brewery to the east.

The historic role of Blyth has changed together with its relationship with the wider area. Its twin roles as a coal exporting port and shipbuilding town have gone and the introduction of service industries has moved the employment focus further inland with, latterly, some new office development on the Quays. New housing provides attractive opportunities for those wishing to live at reasonable cost on the coast and to commute into Tyneside using good road networks with straightforward access to the A1 and the A19. Blyth used to provide vital facilities for exporting the products of manufacturing and mining industries located across south east Northumberland, those industries being substantially dependant

upon the town for their economic wellbeing. This relationship with its hinterland has changed following the decline of mining and manufacturing with Blyth transforming into a settlement that contributes in a more general way to the economic wellbeing of the area. The conservation area substantially comprises the extension of the C19 commercial core that originally clustered around the Quays with some terraced housing. Within the conservation area, the banking/financial sector has declined and housing has been substantially cleared or converted to make way for new non-residential uses. Retail has been reinforced with the development of the new Keel Row Shopping Centre.

3.2.4 ***Views out of the Area***

As mentioned above (section 2.2.3), views out of the conservation area are constrained by the flat topography that reduces views to limited horizons. Views to the south are funnelled along streets of Victorian terraced housing that are built at right angles to Bridge Street. These views reinforce the late C19/early C20 century character that predominates throughout the surviving historic core of the conservation area and, through the introduction of housing into the urban mix, gives a more rounded context to the conservation area. Views to the east along Bridge Street lead to Blagdon Street and a middle-distance aspect of the listed Boathouse Tavern, a remnant of an C17 brewery. The historic context of this view has been substantially lost with the demolition of C19 housing and associated front garden landscaping and the redevelopment of the cleared sites with large, modern, buildings. Views to the west along Waterloo Road lead towards the United Reform Church where the road cranks to foreshorten longer glimpses towards Renwick Road. Views to the west across the Market Place are dominated by trees and St Mary's Church. To the north, views are contained by Market Street which forms the southern boundary of the Market Place and along Regent Street. The development of the Keelrow Shopping Centre removed a group of historic buildings that were demolished after the conservation area's designation. The Centre is, in effect, the boundary of the conservation area.

4 Historical Development

4.1 Prehistoric Period

The name Blyth is Celtic in origin – it is a river name, the meaning of which is unknown, although many river names in Celtic actually just mean ‘river’.

There is evidence of very early human habitation in the Blyth area – a perforated antler mace-head, dating from the late Neolithic period (4000 to 2500 BC) or early Bronze Age (2500 to 800 BC) was discovered at Newsham in 1979. Also, a number of unusual objects were found in the River Blyth in 1890, including animal bones and a Bronze Age spearhead and sword. Many crop marks exist in the surrounding area, believed to date from the Iron Age (700 BC to AD 43), but only a single coin from the Roman era (1st Century to 5th Century AD) has been discovered, during the building of a dry dock in the 19th Century. This cannot confirm a Roman presence in the area, despite speculation about the existence of a Roman camp on Freehold Street and a mosaic near Bath Terrace.

4.2 Mediaeval and Post-Mediaeval Periods

The Boldon Book, drawn up in 1183 to fill gaps left by the Domesday Book, which made no returns for north east England, mentions nearby Newsham as yielding £10 in labour and money dues owed by custom to the Bishop of Durham. Newsham, in fact, appears to have been more important than Blyth until around the mid-17th Century – it was owned by the Delavals, who were related by marriage to William the Conqueror from whom they received a great deal of land in Northumberland following the Conquest. The earliest record of settlement at Blyth is from 1201, when a Royal Grant was made to the Canons of Brinkburn. At this time, a saltworks and mill were already established at Cowpen. In 1208, Blyth was the subject of a lawsuit, in which the saltworks and fishery feature, involving Guy de la Val, one of the Barons of England who compelled King John to sign the Magna Carta.

Blyth is one of the oldest ports in Northumberland, first being mentioned in 1446 as a natural anchorage for shipping. From the Middle Ages it has been associated with the export of salt, coal and corn. The river and port of Blyth therefore formed a valuable part of the estates belonging to the Bishops of Durham and, as their economic potential emerged, they changed hands a number of times. In the 15th Century, the Delavals owned Blyth in addition to large swathes of Seaton Valley, however they sold the estates at the beginning of the 18th Century, which were thereafter bought and sold as investments by several London merchants. In 1723, they were acquired by the Ridley family, who established themselves as important landowners in

south east Northumberland, after many generations of success as merchants in Newcastle.

The Ridleys had a hugely significant effect on Blyth, not only because of the amount of land they owned, but also the many and varied commercial activities with which they were involved (Appendix 4 Map 3). In addition to farming and banking, they had interests in coalmining and Blyth port, and between 1784 and 1786 Sir Matthew White Ridley built a new brewery in Blyth. All these were carefully controlled interests, for example, when Sir Matthew leased public houses the lease usually stated that only beer brewed in his brewery could be sold, and combined to greatly increase the Ridley's wealth and influence.

The first stone quay at Blyth was built in 1689, but it wasn't until the C18 that harbour improvements began to take place. The first lighthouse was built in 1730, and several quays were constructed on the south side of the river. Between 1761 and 1764, John Hussey Delaval made a cut at Seaton Sluice, forming a deep water dock with a more convenient harbour entrance, and the Port of Blyth grew into a shipping centre for the entire coal field.

4.3 Mid-C19 onwards

With improvements to the Port of Blyth made by the Ridleys, in addition to them revitalising the salt industry, a shipyard was opened in the late 18th Century, followed by a dry dock in 1811. By the mid-19th Century the port was booming and, after the founding of the Blyth Harbour and Dock Company in 1854, larger ships were able to use the port due to regular dredging and the creation of a deeper channel. Additionally, a railway line opened in 1847.

By 1880, coal shipments from Blyth amounted to 235,000 tons, rising to 1.8 million in 1890 and more than 4 million by 1914, helped by the demand for coal by a number of major local industries such as shipbuilding, iron, steel and chemical. Further, extensive improvements were made to facilities at the harbour after the formation of the Blyth Harbour Commission in 1882 and by 1896 the North Eastern Railway Company, which had taken over the Blyth and Tyne Railway in 1874, had erected a number of large coal staithes.

By the time of the First World War, Blyth had become the largest coal port in Northumberland and was a centre for shipbuilding and repair, as well as heavy engineering, glass-making and numerous other maritime industries such as rope-making and sail-making. The economical growth of the Port of Blyth is reflected in the type of buildings which started to appear. Indeed, for a brief period in post-war Britain, Blyth port achieved the status of Europe's biggest exporter of coal. However, problems caused by pit closures, the diversion of coal to local power stations and the Alcan aluminium smelter

built in the 1970s led to the closure of loading staithes and ship repair yards, followed by general economic decline.

Historically, the town had clustered around the harbour side and its market place along a north-south axis. This pattern was penetrated in the mid-19th Century by a spread of rail tracks leading to coal drops feeding the collieries, and areas of terraced housing which sprang up on the back of the rapid expansion of the town, due to the growth of its associated industries. Impressive buildings were constructed in the quayside area at the turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries, reflecting the growing prosperity and status of the town. The 1896 Victorian Gothic Police Station and pre-First World War Harbour Commission Office, with its fine curved entrance, stand as testament to the power and prestige of Blyth.

The First Edition OS Map, published in 1860 (Appendix 4 Map 5), shows the area now covered by the Central Conservation Area containing relatively little housing, the majority consisting of a row of terraced housing on the north side of Bridge Street, and on Trotter Street. The Trotter Street houses include large gardens, and the Bridge Street houses all have small front gardens, though roughly half appear to also have large gardens directly across the street. Most of the development is still in the quayside area, and a large area to the south east of Bridge Street is still fields and orchards, apart from a 'Rope and Chain Manufactory' and the Plessey wagon way, which was opened around 1709 to transport coals from the Plessey colliery.

By the time of the Second Edition OS Map of 1897, (Appendix 4 Map 6) the fields are covered in terraced housing and schools up to the first of two disused Rope Walks, where the rope and chain factory stood, and Plessey wagon way has become Plessey Road. A saw mill and gas works lie to the north east of Bridge Street, grand brick and stone properties have replaced housing to the north of Bridge Street and a new market place appears at the junction of Waterloo Road, Bridge Street and Turner Street. This marked the expansion of the commercial centre of Blyth from its ties to the harbour.

The Third Edition OS Map, 1922, (Appendix 4 Map 7) shows the whole area as being developed, with the only greenery appearing to be the newly created Ridley Park on rough grassland beyond the easternmost Rope Walk and neighbourhood scale pockets of open space. Banks, a post office at the west end of Bridge Street (built in 1913), three picture theatres and the Theatre Royal on Trotter Street have also appeared (although the brewery on Blagdon Street has gone, replaced by a public house), signalling the continued growth of commerce away from the harbour, a trend which is confirmed in the Fourth Edition OS Map of 1938 (Appendix 4 Map 8).

By the time of the designation of the Central Conservation Area in 1979, change has continued to take place with the further clearance of the picture

house and the United Methodist Church in Waterloo Place to double the size of the market place, creating a large, open and soulless space; the construction of the lacklustre box-like bus station, set back from the historic building line; the application of late-20th Century shop fronts onto the face of historic buildings; and the loss of architectural details, partly as a consequence of poor or ill-advised maintenance and partly due to the corrosion of building materials.. The built link between the earlier commercial centre and the late-19th century extension has been negatively affected by construction of the massive bus depot, with its bleak industrial appearance, and now the modern Job Centre Plus building (neither of which enhances the historic character of the area). This has been exacerbated by demolition of the former grade II Central Methodist Church and its neighbouring late Georgian town house to make way for the development of the modern Keel Row Shopping Precinct.

5 *Spatial Analysis*

5.1 *Development Pattern and Layout*

Blyth developed as a port over centuries with major expansion taking place in the early to mid-C19. The Armstrong Map of 1769 (Appendix 4 Map 2) shows the town as a modest linear settlement clustered along the sides of the road with a terminating square overlooking the river. The plan shows that the town was built on a peninsula formed by the coast and The Gut that jutted out into the estuary. The 1819 and Greenwood's Map of 1828 (Appendix 4 Maps 3 and 4) show in greater detail the form of the developing town which comprised a series of open courtyard complexes and buildings occupying a substantial area of land beside the quayside. The Greenwood Map also shows railways linking the North and South Pits with The Gut where coal would have been ferried by keel to colliers. This Map shows the first indication of the layout of the conservation area with some housing along the side of what was to become Waterloo Road and the cottages along Keelman's Row that led along the line of Regent Street. The most significant building was Cowpen Lodge which was occupied in the 1870's by the Mining Engineer, Thomas Hindmarsh. It is clear that the core layout frame of the conservation area had been set out during the first quarter of C19. The Ordnance Survey First Edition of 1860 (Appendix 4 Map 5) illustrates the town and the emerging conservation area in great detail. The Map shows the construction of the staithes and rail links with multiple drops showing the importance of the town as a coal port. It also shows the spread of development and range of activities that flourished along the quays. The historic built pattern of the conservation area can be seen. This comprised a row of large terraced houses ranged along the north side of Bridge Street with detached town gardens opposite on the south side that wrapped around the eastern side of The Gut – a typical and popular early to mid-C19 layout device. The extensive grid iron pattern of C19 terraced housing to the south of Bridge Street extending over the South Croft area had not yet materialised, the site being partly occupied by market gardens. The Gut still divided Blyth from Cowpen with Waterloo Bridge, built in 1840, linking the two areas. Terraced housing, probably more modest than the properties in Bridge Street, had been built along the south side of Waterloo Road and along Trotter Street which was to become Havelock Street. The properties that were ranged along Waterloo Road backed onto the carriageway with south facing gardens. The junction of Waterloo Road with Regent Street (then unnamed) was beginning to take shape, anchored around the octagonal Zion Chapel built

in 1818, and extending along Regent Street as far as the alignment of Simpson Street. The first terraced houses that were to become Market Street and Bowes Street had been built together with the Central Hall in the south east corner of the current Market Place.

By 1897 (Appendix 4 Map 6) the area had been substantially transformed with the culverting of The Gut and the reclamation of the land to provide the opportunity for new developments. This was the catalyst for the emergence of the conservation area as the historic core of the commercial and retail heart of Blyth with the Quayside remaining focused on port related business. The Ordnance Survey 1897 Edition shows the completion of Market Street and Bowes Street; the construction of St Mary's Church and School (1897); the demolition of the Zion Chapel and its replacement by the Central Methodist Church and School; the construction of a Methodist Chapel and back-to-back houses along the north side of Waterloo Road to contain the then Market Place; the street pattern on the south side of Bridge Street and Waterloo Road becoming established with Havelock Street and Parsons Street in place and the extensive South Croft terraced housing estate nearly completed. By the turn of the century the late Victorian/early Edwardian street pattern that had been created enabled the area to move forward to fulfil its new role as the commercial centre of Blyth.

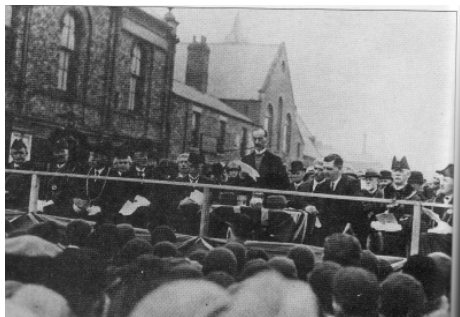
The period between 1880 and 1914 forged the historic character of the area's development pattern and appearance (Appendix 4 Maps 6 and 7). This included the construction of the fine commercial buildings and post office on the north side of Bridge Street and the demolition of some of the terraced housing on the south side of Waterloo Road and its replacement by a group of quite grand shops, offices and public houses, enhanced by the insertion of The Arcade.

This pattern remained substantially settled until the Post-War period when changes altered the established character of the conservation area and its immediate setting through the demolition of the remnants of the terraced housing located on the south side of Waterloo Road to make way for the massive slab block North East Co-operative store; the demolition of the remaining housing on the north side of Bridge Street and its replacement by the industrial shed that houses the Arriva bus depot, the demolition of the Presbyterian Church on the south side of Bridge Street and its replacement by the utilitarian Job Centre Plus building; the demolition of the Methodist Chapel and adjacent buildings to double the size of the Market Place; and, most radically, the clearance of a substantial number of the properties ranged around the junction of Waterloo Road with Regent Street and the subsequent development of the plain Keel Row Centre.

5.2 ***Grain and Density***

The grain of development within the conservation area in part reflects the historic road alignment that predates C19 urban expansion into the town's rural hinterland, providing the spine along which buildings have been built. It also reflects the later C19 high density grid iron development of housing throughout South Croft. The former follows on from ribbon development that spread along Waterloo Road with a ribbon spur along Regent Street which originally led along the western edge of The Gut to Cowpen Quay. The latter predominates in the south west corner of the area where the parallel terraces of Stanley Street and Beaconsfield Street together with their back lanes join Bridge Street at right angles.

The historic grain twisted where Waterloo Road and Bridge Street met over the former Waterloo Bridge foreshortening views from both directions. The vast open expanse of the Market Place is a Post-War modification of the turn of the century manipulation of space where the Methodist Central Hall (built in 1857), the houses and the later United Methodist Church occupied much of the southern half of the Market Place, creating a series of tighter, more intimate, spaces that reflected the traditional type and size of open areas in Blyth. Furthermore, the loss of this group of buildings has removed the visual containment of Waterloo Road.



The Market Place before the Post-War clearance of the southern half



The Market Place 2007

Other changes, particularly the demolition of key buildings in the townscape, such as the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on Waterloo Road and the Presbyterian Church on Bridge Street which both marked views, and their replacement by bland, featureless modern developments has altered the historic two and three dimensional pattern and appearance of the area.



*Bridge Street before the clearance of
the Central Methodist Church*



The replacement

The immediate setting of the conservation area is dominated by the grid iron layout of South Croft and Cowpen housing areas.

The density of the conservation area is high. This is reflected in both the grid iron housing development in the south west corner and the commercial development along both Waterloo Road and Bridge Street where a combination of architectural style, prevailing turn of the century political/social/economic values and the high cost of land led to intensive multi-storey development.

5.3 ***Views within the area***

The primary view within the area from the east is channelled along Bridge Street towards Waterloo Road where it cranks to emerge from the conservation area and haemorrhages across the open and desolate Market Place towards Market Street and St Mary's Church which can be glimpsed behind a screen of trees. The only visual interruption over the Market Place is a small area of planting and seats in the south west corner and the public conveniences located at the western extremity. The converse view to the east is deflected by the twist in Waterloo Road as it leads into Bridge Street. The view is channelled past good and indifferent buildings, the southern aspect being generally the most attractive with historic buildings being of both individual and group visual interest.

Other views are subsidiary and tend to be controlled or truncated by buildings located outside the conservation area such as the bus station, the Mecca Bingo Hall (formerly the Roxy Cinema), The Wallaw Cinema and the Waterloo Public House. Views along Stanley Street and Beaconsfield Street lead to mid and long distance vistas of grid iron housing.



Views to the north over the Market Place



View to the east along Bridge



Truncated view along Havelock Street



Channelled view along Union Street

6 Character Analysis

6.1 Land Use

Although retail activities dominate throughout the area, there is a mix of uses that can be commonly found in commercial centres. Retail (Use Classification A1) is the most prevalent and the most obvious use with many ground floors having shop fronts. Upper floors, once used for storage and office accommodation, are frequently empty or partly occupied. Recent planning activity indicates that there is some developer interest in converting vacant floor space into dwellings.

Office uses, primarily Use Classification A2 (Professional and Financial Services), such as banks and estate agents, intermingle with the shops. Cafes add to the mix. Civic/public uses are represented through the presence of the Town's Central Library. However, the general use composition has changed since the designation of the conservation area. This has been primarily driven by the demolition of the Central Methodist Church and its adjacent properties and their replacement by the modern, sheltered, Keel Row shopping centre (1991) along with the demolition of the War Memorial Hospital on Beaconsfield Street and the subsequent development of the Thomas Knight Nursing Home. This has reinforced the retail and commercial character of the area and linked the residential character of the adjacent South Croft area more effectively with the town centre.

6.2 Architectural Qualities

6.2.1 Form, Height and Scale

There are a number of building types in the area that reflect particular characteristics of form, scale and height. They are the late C19/early C20 three storey terraced commercial properties on the north side of Bridge Street and the south side of Waterloo Road; the larger three storey late C19 end of terrace buildings on the south side of Bridge Street; the modern nursing home replacement of the hospital; the large three storey late C19 Hedley Young's department store wedged between Beaconsfield Street and Union Street; the modest terraced housing in Havelock Street and the modern Keel Row Centre.

Along the main thoroughfare the general impression is one of three storey buildings rising from back of pavement surmounted by pitched roofs. The scale is impressive with the historic structures providing curtains of brick, stone and glass which create a built valley that channels views along the road before entering the Market Place where they contain its south west

corner. Within this general frame, properties display individual design characteristics that create interest and variety of form and appearance whilst generally conforming to the established ratio of solids to windows. The orientation of fenestration and inclusion of parapets and cornices provides and exaggerates vertical emphasis. The Keel Row Shopping Centre does not reflect this approach with its roof over-slipping the front elevations and horizontal glazing creating a squat form.



Vertical emphasis of historic buildings

The modern Keel Row Shopping Centre

The heights of buildings tend to reduce to two storeys away from the Bridge Street/Waterloo Road axis where their scale blends into the domestic volume and appearance of the adjacent residential streets.

The historic commercial properties tend to have relatively simple vertical planes decorated by string courses, window and door surrounds and friezes whereas the end of terrace buildings are more radically modelled with projections and recesses, such as porches, and more elaborate and sculptured roof lines. The commercial terraces are occasionally broken by the insertion of buildings that, because of material content, more elaborate design and variation of height, such as 41 Waterloo Road, a former pub, that add variety and visual interest.

6.2.2 ***Periods and styles***

The conservation area has a narrow development timeline with building focussed between 1880 and 1914 and the latter quarter of the C20. Most of the pre-1880 buildings, predominantly residential, were demolished to make way for the late C19 expansion of the town centre. The survivors from that earlier period are concentrated in Havelock Street, then known as Trotter Street. This is a group of mid-C19 terraced houses that have subsequently been converted into shops. The 25 years that spanned the late Victorian/early Edwardian period provides the greatest concentration of development and establishes the historic commercial character and conservation significance of the area. The more recent developments have reinforced and enriched its retail and commercial diversity. However,

the form design of the new shopping complex with its lack of historic references does not add to the design quality of the conservation area.

6.2.2.1 Mid-C19

The buildings in **Havelock Street** are mixed with some original properties surviving, particularly on the eastern side. They are brick built with shallow welsh slate pitched roofs. The regularly spaced first floor windows are two light vertical sliding sash. Although relatively plain, modest features such as the dentil course beneath the gutters add relief. The junction of Havelock Street with Waterloo Road provides variety with the west side being redeveloped in the late C19 to extend the Waterloo Road commercial façade, returning into Havelock Street. The east side (1 Havelock Street) is the original two storey end of terrace house with a ground floor shop. Robust stone quoins, sadly painted, book-end the street. This building is entirely at odds with the remainder of Waterloo Road and Bridge Street. It is of historic value because it is the only surviving representative of the built form, scale, use and appearance of this thoroughfare before its development as the commercial heart of Blyth.

Some original pre-Great War shop fronts survive in Havelock Street amongst a plethora of modern and poorly designed facades. Numbers 6 (Rickards) and 8 (The Beauty Parlour) are fine examples. The surviving first floor four light sash window at number 6 adds to the quality of the elevation.



Core range of mid C19 dwellings in Havelock Street



Original surviving shopfronts and fascia detail in Havelock Street

6.2.2.2 Late C19/early C20

This is the period of greatest architectural interest and heritage significance. The late Victorian/Edwardian era was a time of change and overlap in architectural styles. By 1880 most of the celebrated Victorian Gothic architects had died or ceased practicing. Although the Gothic style continued to dominate church architecture for many years to come, a variety of freely mixed styles were applied to almost all other forms of buildings. This included borrowing from earlier, predominantly English,

styles to produce an eclectic range of designs. Wren's baroque work tended to dominate 'Free Styles'. Inevitably there was a later reaction to this liberal approach with the development of more structured, discrete, styles led by architects such as Norman Shaw. However, commercial and public buildings built in Blyth during this period tend to be designed in Free Classicism Style which comprises a mix of Classical, Mannerist, Renaissance and Baroque motifs.

A number of good but mostly modest examples of Free Design give clear architectural structure to Bridge Street and Waterloo Road. English Heritage's 'Commercial Building Protection Guide' 2007 addresses issues regarding the importance of protecting the nation's stock of historic commercial buildings. It states that 'Victorian and Edwardian commercial buildings transformed our townscapes and gave many English town centres their distinctive character. Listing in the past, with its emphasis on architectural interest, has favoured the opulent and the grand at the expense of the more modest end of the sector.....consequently the latter has suffered a disproportionate loss.....sometimes special historic interest clearly resides in the unadorned fabric itself: humility can be a virtue; it is certainly now rare'. The townscape of the heart of the conservation area comprises the commercial core as built at the turn of the century. Its collective value is high and, in spite of alterations and modifications, substantially retains its original overall appearance.

a. Bridge Street and its junctions

Probably the finest group in terms of architectural style and limited, damaging, later intervention is the north side of Bridge Street. to the east of the bus station. The former stone-built Lloyds Bank, number 33 Bridge Street and listed grade II, is a fine example of Free Baroque. All of the original details are intact, including the wonderful doorway with its double pilasters and carved and decorated head. Its heavily dentilled cornice adds both relief and conceals the gutters that lead into large hoppers dated 1898. The combination of rusticated stonework on the ground floor and ashlar on the top two floors gives it a Palladian feel. It looks as though all of the original window joinery has survived. To the east, 35 Bridge Street is simpler, built out of brick, and decorated with English Renaissance motifs including the broken pediment projecting above the eaves and baroque manner window surrounds. Part of an original shop front survives but the feature stonework is in an extremely poor condition. The building was at one time joined to the fine terrace of housing that was demolished and replaced by the free standing industrial and unpleasant Arriva Garage. To the west of Lloyds Bank, numbers 25 to 31 Bridge Street is a pair of pleasant, well proportioned, classical style bright red brick built buildings that have subtle details, such as the brick piers and

frames beside and below the window openings on 29/31 together with more demonstrative features like the stone scrolled pediment which raises the eaves over the brick piers and the flattened patera motif that apparently supports the first floor central window on 25/27. The ground floor has substantially changed with the insertion of new and clumsy shop fronts with only one original door and marble and stone piers surviving. This block of properties is terminated by the Post Office. This was purpose-built in 1913. It is an attractive brick and stone building with the ground floor dominated by Lutyens Classical style large, semi-circular, keyed arched windows. The steeply pitched green slate roof sweeps down to the eaves and is punctured by a pair of Voysey style dormer windows. The combination of stone and brick gives the building a highly decorative appearance.

The bus station and the new Keel Row shopping centre complete the north side of Bridge Street. The conservation area excludes the bus station and includes part of the Keel Row centre that was built after the area's designation in 1979. The centre wraps around two historic properties at the west end of Bridge Street (numbers 3/5,7/9) that are included in the conservation area. Number 3/5 is a tall three storey painted brick building built in a Free Baroque style that is visually dominated by large heavily ornamented painted stone panels under the second floor windows. The building includes a date of 1903. It is possible that the historic shopfront survives behind the inarticulate and ungainly modern façade. Number 7/9 is a more modest three storey painted brick building with paired round-headed windows. Unfortunately, the brick modelling and stone keys over the windows together with stone cornices that decorate the parapet and pilasters are obscured by the paint. As with its neighbour, a modern shopfront diminishes its appearance.



Lloyds Bank, 33 Bridge Street



The Post Office, 21/23 Bridge Street



*Renaissance style pediment,
35 Bridge Street*



3/5 and 7/9 Bridge Street

The south side of **Bridge Street** contrasts with its northern counterpart in terms of age, style, form and scale. That part of the street within the conservation area comprises three groups of properties: the end of terrace properties and their returns between back Percy Street and Beaconsfield Street; the former Hedley Young's Department Store; and the residual frontage of Bridge Street that terminates at its junction with Havelock Street.

- *End of terrace properties*

The properties are built facing onto Bridge Street and span the depth of the adjoining houses. Number 20, the library, was built in 1882, originally as the Mechanics Institute. It is brick and relatively ornate, built in a subdued High Gothic style with its high slate roof and Flemish clock tower surmounted by a metal fretwork. Flattened round-headed windows and porch complete the picture. An attractive coloured glass name panel was added when the building was converted to the library. The general quality has been sadly diminished by the removal of original railings and the construction of an unattractive and poorly detailed ramp leading to the front entrance. Number 22, Barclays Bank, is probably newer than the library and contributes to the historic street scene in a restrained manner, its two principal features being the north and east facing ornamental gables projecting out of the roof pitch and the extensive use of terracotta details to the eaves and over the front door. As with the library, its setting has been disrupted by the addition of a poorly designed arrangement of steps and an access ramp with the added interference of being contained within a dwarf wall. Number 24, the former gas board office and now an art shop and café, is an extremely attractive stone-fronted building with a recessed west end constructed in brick. It is designed in Classic style with a stripped renaissance order. The stone front is applied to a brick building that wraps around the back, probably the Manager's house. Early photographs show the first floor brick bay on the west elevation continuing through to the ground floor. This was removed to insert the shop front.



24 Bridge Street



22 Bridge Street



20 Bridge Street

- *Former Hedley Young's department store, 18 Bridge Street*

Built in 1896, this must have been the largest shop in Blyth. It is constructed in brick and stone and designed in Free Classic style with square columns banded in the contrasting materials and rectangular windows on the upper two floors. A stone parapet surrounds the building along Bridge Street and its return along Beaconsfield Street until it reaches the point where it drops from three to two storeys in height. The return along Union Street incorporates a double gable. Much of the original shop front survives along Union Street with a traditional curved glazed porch and a delightful mosaic floor inscribed 'Hedley and Company'. This shop front is typical of the mid to late C19 with large expanses of plate glass supported by slender cast iron columns. Unfortunately, the other shop fronts have been modified, particularly by the addition of deep and ungainly fascias. Supporting stonework has been painted which is probably reversible. The building's mass and location is crucial in the historic townscape, particularly as it deflects views from Bridge Street to Waterloo Road and beyond.



Former Hedley Young department store and mosaic entrance, 18 Bridge Street

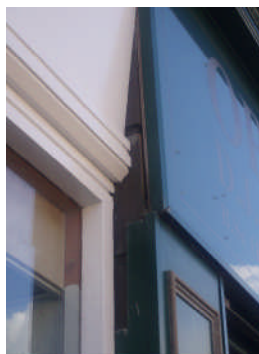
- *The residual frontage of Bridge Street.*

The block of brick buildings that runs along Bridge Street and returns to form the east side of Parsons Street and the west side of Union Street reflect two building types and uses. The western edge is the stump of a two storey block of terraced housing with the ground floor converted to shops and the remainder of the block a massive three storey block of shops with offices/storage. The latter block cranks along the Bridge Street frontage with a pattern of rectangular and arched windows that suggests two phases of development. The buildings are plain with regular openings. The limited use of contrasting stone is compensated by relief patterns in the brickwork. Interesting features include sliding sash windows that incorporate a third set of fixed lights over the upper sash and the chimney stacks and buff fire-clay pots. The shop fronts have been radically changed creating a stridently modern and unattractive ground floor elevation.

The block of properties wedged between Parsons Street and Havelock Street includes the previously mentioned mid-C19 terraced housing (6.2.2.1 above). The Bridge Street frontage is attractive and varied. The corner of Havelock Street and Bridge Street (8/6 Bridge Street) is a hipped roof brick building with a pair of angled timber bays projecting over the pavement. A rectangular window is inserted between the bays over a door accessing the first floor giving the elevation symmetry. The shopfronts incorporate substantially intact original features including cast iron columns supporting an angled porch and carved console brackets over stone pilasters. Glimpses of some features can be seen behind later timber cladding. Stone corbelling at eaves height is repeated on the chimney stacks. This building is of some merit adding variety of form, visual interest and historic detailing into the street scene. Number 4 Bridge Street is, in effect, an interwar insertion applied to an earlier structure. It has a typical 1930's appearance with art deco pretensions. A date of 1937 is inserted in the art deco style stepped top.



12 and 14 Bridge Street



Glimpse of original detail
6 Bridge Street



Original shopfront,
8 Bridge Street

Waterloo Road

The principal thoroughfare frontage moves from Bridge Street to Waterloo Road at its junction with Regent Street. Numbers 21 to 25 Waterloo Road continues the Bridge Street building line before it sets back to the footprint of the earlier, cleared, terraced housing. This building provides a robust and attractive eastern anchor to the street. Built in the early C20 it follows an Edwardian Free Classic approach with its Palladian style window surrounds, the first floor cills being supported on brackets that break through the stone string course. The second floor windows of six over six pane double hung sliding sash (number 25) are unusual in the commercial centre, the remainder being two pane double sliding sash with some modern replacements. Number 25 has been recently refurbished.

The remainder of the properties on Waterloo Road located within the conservation area reflect the piecemeal nature of their development. The OS 1897 and 1922 Maps (Appendix 4 Maps 6 and 7) illustrate the opportunist approach with new developments gradually being inserted amongst and replacing the terraced housing. The appearance of the street reflects this with a variety of styles that fall into four groups

- *27 to 35 Waterloo Road and The Arcade.*

This is formally designed to a clear Edwardian Anglo-Classic style with the eaves mounted balustrade set in front of hipped roofs, raked cornice window frames on the first floor and the banded pilasters. The elevations fronting the main street are brick with granite and sandstone ornamentation. Rustic granite is used as the contrasting material on the pilasters that run through the modern and inept shopfronts to ground level. The clock on Lewin's is both functional and attractive. Unfortunately, the stonework on 31 to 35 has been painted a garish pale lemon yellow. The Arcade runs between 29 and 31 Waterloo Road to Bondicar Terrace. It is attractive and retains the original blocked-up shopfront frames. The frames are manufactured in sandstone that is eroding to the point where modelling has, in some instances, disappeared. The Arcade is architecturally important, of heritage significance, has not suffered from inappropriate modification and is capable of restoration.



25 and 27/29 Waterloo Road



The Arcade and granite pilaster detail

- *37/39 Waterloo Road*

A three storey brick built shop, it is less elaborate and grand than both of its neighbours. It continues the Palladian approach with balustrades set in front of hipped roofs. Plain brick pilasters contain rectangular windows on the second and round top windows on the first floors. The round tops on number 35 are filled with coloured glass. Modern shopfronts damage the appearance of the elevation.

- *41 Waterloo Road*

Originally a public house, this is a grand ashlar sandstone building. It has a symmetrical elevation with a central, projecting, section that is surmounted by a gable with Dutch detailing. The gable incorporates an oriel window, matching the surround of Lewin's clock (number 25) and is topped by a triangular pediment containing a carved scrolled fan. Carved pilasters run the height of the building either side of the central section. The elevation is decorated by stone carvings including relief balustrading, dentilled cornices and ornate console brackets. The shop front incorporates the original pub façade with its fine series of round topped lights set over plate glass windows albeit diminished by a garish modern fascia. The doors have been replaced. The building adds visual exuberance to the street and an architectural presence in terms of scale and quality of design. Furthermore, the rear elevation has a certain grandeur with its centrally positioned Dutch style gable commanding views of the southern aspect of this length of Waterloo Road.

- *43 Waterloo Road*

This is a small two storey building built in 1895 at the outset of the development of this part of the new commercial and retail heart of Blyth. It comprises an ornate façade applied to a subordinate hipped roof structure. It was probably built as a bank. It is dominated by a large flattened arch window that occupies most of the first floor, the arched section being subdivided into a series of coloured glass inserts. Small

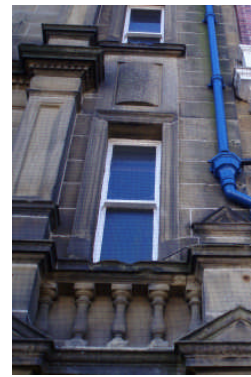
sections of broken balustrading runs along the eaves either side of the central gable.



37/39 Waterloo Street



41 Waterloo Street and decorative window detail



41 Waterloo Street - original public house window assembly and door openings



43 Waterloo Road

6.2.2.3 Post-War developments

There are two major Post-War interventions in the conservation area, the demolition of the War Memorial Hospital in Beaconsfield Street to be replaced by the Thomas Knight Nursing Home and the demolition of the buildings on the north side of Bridge Street and the construction of the Keel Row Shopping Centre with its associated car park.

The Nursing home is designed as a series of rendered panels with applied terracotta sheets punctured by windows. The panels are divided by glazed strips. A central glazed portion marks the entrance. The design is clearly modern and does not relate to its historic setting.

The Keel Row centre is a large and relatively plain development that replaces a group of mid and late C19 buildings, including the grade II Central Methodist Hall (1867) and an earlier house. Part of the C19 street pattern, notably the junction of Trotter Street with Bridge Street are also lost. The two storey shopping centre makes a lightweight contribution to the street scene which is dominated by the robust three storey blocks of property that were built in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries. It

does not contain any cogent historic references, particularly visual allusions to the Free Classicism that prevails throughout the historic core. The shopfronts are a series of bland, flat, vertical slots set into the brickwork with a variety of shop signs fixed to the brick wall without frameworks. The centre does not introduce a development that complements the setting of the historic buildings...



*1 to 11 Beaconsfield Street
Thomas Knight Nursing Home*



Keel Row Centre

6.2.3 **Building Materials**

6.2.3.1 **Clay**

The historic buildings in the conservation area are predominantly made out of brick and stone with other materials applied to provide ornamentation. Brick is the most common material using clay. There are a range of brick types and colours employed in the area, most commonly laid in English bond or English Garden Wall bond. Façade bricks on late nineteenth/early C20 buildings tend to be dark red, moving to pink in later properties, such as the post office... Examples of rubbed bricks can be found in some ornamentation and around window heads where shaped bricks can also be seen. Some facades have been painted obscuring details and incurring future maintenance liabilities. Clay is also used to manufacture terracotta tiles and plaques that are used to provide relief and decoration. Number 22 Bridge Street (Barclays Bank) provides an outstanding example. There is no evidence of clay pantiled roofs, but buff clay ridge tiles and chimney pots are to be found, the latter in decreasing numbers.

6.2.3.2 **Stone**

Stone is used throughout the historic building stock as a method of construction, for ornamentation and to cover roofs. The stone tends to be local carboniferous sandstone where used in construction and as ornamentation and Welsh slate when used on roofs. There are no buildings constructed entirely in stone although some have stone street

facing facades. Stone is used to provide decorative features such as window surrounds, corbels and pilasters. There are some examples of rustic and polished granite being used to add gravitas to some detailing. Stone is also carved and used as ornamental panels to enhance the appearance of elevations. Roofs, which are a combination of pitch and hipped profiles, are predominantly covered in Welsh slate, possibly brought into Blyth port as ballast. Westmorland green slate is occasionally used, such as on the post office.

6.2.3.3 Timber

Timber is used for the manufacture of window frames, doors and shopfronts. It is invariably painted. Original joinery survives and appears to be generally well maintained. There is some replacement, partly as a consequence of the insertion of new shopfronts and partly to reduce perceived maintenance liabilities. The survival of historic timberwork is vital for the heritage wellbeing of the conservation area.

6.2.3.4 Metal

The most common use of metal is through the fabrication of rainwater goods. They are invariably cast iron and come in a variety of shapes and dimensions ranging from the dated rectangular hoppers on Lloyds Bank (33 Bridge Street) and polygonal hoppers (39 Waterloo Road) to plain more utilitarian runs. Metal is used in the design of shopfronts with cast iron mullions and transoms (Hedley Young's Union Street frontage) and cast iron support columns. Recent use of metal can be found in the window frames of the Keel Row Shopping Centre, security grilles and aluminium shop fronts.

6.2.3.5 Render and paint

Render and pebbledash is used sparingly and is not conspicuous. It tends to be applied to the backs of buildings such as in Parsons Street where it is also applied to front elevations. Paint is used regularly covering virtually all timberwork and occasionally brickwork and stonework. Painted brick and stone can be aesthetically damaging and lead to high maintenance costs.

6.2.3.6 Other materials

Coloured glass can be found, such as over the entrance at the public library. Modern materials, such as concrete roof tiles, are used sparingly to effect repairs. However, their use is visually jarring and detracts from the appearance of the area in general and to specific sweeps of roof in particular. Plastic is used on some modern shopfronts together with composite material to replicate stone.



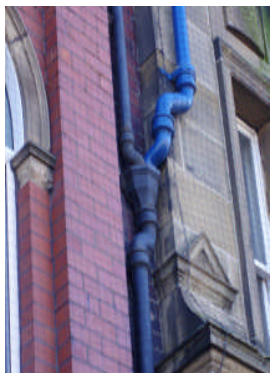
*Brick and terracotta
22 Bridge Street*



*Stone façade
33 Bridge Street*



*Timber window frames
41 Waterloo Street*



*Iron drain pipes
39/41 Waterloo Road*



*Painted stonework
16/18 Bridge Street*



*Coloured glass
20 Bridge Street*

6.3 **Contribution of Spaces**

6.3.1 **Roads and pavements**

The conservation area incorporates a street pattern that precludes any designed open space with the exception of the court in front of the bus station. Historic photographs and the Ordnance survey 1938 Edition (Appendix 4 Map 8) show that this space created an open setting to the public library and was laid out to a formal design when first developed as a bus station. Historic photographs also show that pavements were flagged with substantial stone kerbs, street drainage channels formed in setts and strips of setts at the junctions of streets with the main thoroughfare.

Bridge Street and Waterloo Road are the B1328 and B1239. This is a through route for buses, cars and lorries and is consequently heavily trafficked. The road introduces a disruptive volume of traffic into the area and with it a plethora of traffic signage and two pedestrian crossings that add clutter and visual confusion. The footpaths are laid in concrete flags. Some areas of flagging have become dirty, uneven and cracked. Blister

paving has been added which, although beneficial to the visually impaired, fractures the unity of appearance of footpaths. This is exacerbated by temporary repairs in concrete. Kerbs are a combination of concrete and whinstone. There are small areas of concrete block paving where road junctions have been closed, such as Stanley Street with Bridge Street. Pedestrian barrier rails have been introduced along Waterloo Road to channel pedestrians to controlled crossing points. As with the blister paving, the railings are designed to enhance safety. Unfortunately their 'visirail' design is utilitarian and their position divides the open space into a series of bands that marginalises pedestrians and reinforces the pre-eminence of vehicles. A variety of bollards is beginning to creep into the area. The dominant bollard design is robust, metal and black and, where used appropriately, contributes to the streetscape. Concrete and removable bollards are being added. Street lighting varies throughout the area with a combination of 'swan neck', high 'dish' lanterns and pedestrian post top mounted lights. The lighting and traffic sign columns are light grey and contrast with the black colour scheme of the other street furniture, including the new bus shelters. The uncoordinated combination of designs and colours creates a cluttered and unattractive environment.

The only designed area of open space, other than the pedestrianised junctions of streets, is at the bus station. This area is detached from the main street by virtue of a combination of bus shelters and planting boxes. Historically, the bus station visually blended into the street as a single area of open space. There is the opportunity to reclaim this relationship and add to it by virtue of the visual inclusion of the widened footpath in front of the library on the opposite side of Bridge Street. The widened footpath is cluttered by dilapidated planting boxes and a pollution testing station. This does not provide an appropriate setting for the library, a C19 building that was originally contained by iron railings, a typical arrangement for public/civic buildings of that period.



The arranged open space in front of the Library that formed the bus station c1930



The same space, changed and heavily trafficked



Public library (20 Bridge Street) c.1900



Public library 2007

6.3.2 **Landscape**

Landscape is limited to the planting of street trees along the back of the footpath in the bus station, in the pedestrianised junction of Beaconsfield Street with Bridge Street, in the planting boxes outside the library and outside Barclays Bank (22 Bridge Street). Planting boxes contain a variety of densely planted shrubs in the same location.

Flower boxes are positioned on the pedestrian safety rail on Waterloo Road.

6.3.3 **Commercial yards**

The backs of properties tend to include open and enclosed yards that are used for external storage and the collection of waste and rubbish. The yards occasionally include outbuildings of varying shapes and condition and fire escapes. The overall impression tends to be visually chaotic, lacking the uniformity of design and quality of materials on the street facing elevations.

Parsons Street includes an arrangement of space where yards have been opened out to blend into the pedestrianised street.

6.4 **Loss, intrusion and damage**

6.4.1 **Neutral areas**

Neutral areas are those where there is a balance of positive and negative factors. The only neutral area is the post-designation development of the Keel Row Shopping Centre. Its massing and design do not complement the historic character of the area. However, its role as a major contributor to the regeneration of the commercial and retail heart of Blyth is quite clear. This economic role balances the negative impact of its design. However, the opportunity for redevelopment of the site to enhance the appearance of the conservation area, bearing in mind the loss of a listed building as part of that process, has been lost. It is important to ensure

that new buildings harmonize and complement the historic grain in scale, style and use of materials.

6.4.2 **Negative factors**

Negative areas are those which detract from the overall character and appearance of the place. The principal negative factors are:

- the loss of original architectural details such as chimney stacks and chimney pots.
- The loss of original shopfronts.
- Their replacement by poorly designed and proportioned shopfronts that have little or no reference to historic appearance and material content. This removes quality and distinctiveness.
- The introduction of external security shutters and their housings.
- The presence of traffic and the clutter and variety of street furniture that has been installed as a consequence of its volume and speed.
- Poorly designed and maintained landscape features that divide rather than unify spaces.
- Maintenance of footpaths

6.4.3 **Condition and vacancy**

The overall condition of properties in the area appears to be relatively sound. Some show signs of neglect, but none appear to be threatened. The external signs of neglect include broken windows, fractured and missing rainwater goods, vegetation in gutters, dilapidated paintwork and missing stonework. The erosion of some stonework is now so advanced as to be irreparable. It is clear that although ground floor occupancy is extremely high, many upper floors are vacant. This is not unusual with shops receiving frequent deliveries removing the need for large storage areas and labour intensive administration. There has also been a shift of some professions such as solicitors and accountants away from the town centre to modern premises that are more cost effective, more comfortable, offer contemporary service infrastructures and can be more accessible. The consequence of vacant floorspace is twofold – diminishing economic returns and declining maintenance regimes.

7 *Management issues*

7.1 *Conservation Area boundary.*

The Council has a duty to review the boundaries of conservation areas from time to time and to determine whether or not they should be amended³. The conservation area was designated in 1979. Since then changes have taken place that require a review. The suggested changes are a consequence of new development removing historic buildings and changes in the way that we perceive the importance of our heritage assets. The boundary review takes into consideration national guidance that recommends that the following issues should be considered⁴:

- The boundary should be coherent and should, wherever possible, follow physical features on the ground;
- The boundary should not be drawn too tightly so as to exclude integral parts of the development pattern on the periphery of the area;
- The boundary should ensure setting is adequately protected, including landscape features such as open spaces and roads.
- The boundary should ensure that all aspects of the legislation are utilised, including the protection offered by conservation areas to trees;
- The boundary should consider more recent architecture, history, planning or townscape which may, as time moves on, be regarded as having special interest.

The proposed changes to the boundary can be summarised as follows (Appendix 4 Map 10):

7.1.1 *Removal of the Keel Row Shopping Centre*

The Keel Row Shopping Centre was built in 1991. The conservation area boundary follows the property lines of the lost buildings and consequently now runs through the middle of the centre. It is proposed that the boundary excludes the whole of the centre on the basis that it does not complement the historic character and heritage significance of the conservation area.

³ *Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, s.69(2)*

⁴ *Conservation Area Management: A Practical Guide*, English Historic Town's Forum, 1998, p13

7.1.2 **Removal of 1 Beaconsfield Road (the Thomas Knight Nursing Home)**

The home occupies the full length of Beaconsfield Terrace from the public library at its northern end to its junction with Carlton Street. It was built and opened in 2005 without any clear design and visual reference to the historic appearance of its surroundings and as such does not contribute to the historic character of the conservation area. Sitting on the southern boundary of the area its removal will not adversely impact upon its cohesion and physical integrity.

7.1.3 **The inclusion of 3 to 17 Stanley Street and 4 to 20 Stanley Street (including 15 Carlton Street)**

This terrace of mid to late C19 terraced housing is of high quality. It includes two pairs of opposing large properties with bays rising over three storeys where the terrace abuts properties facing Bridge Street that are in the conservation area. The remainder of the terrace comprises more modest properties in terms of scale and proportion. There has been a major intervention at 11 and 13 where windows have been removed and a massive dormer window inserted. However, the remainder of the terrace retains much of its original character and architectural details, including chimney stacks and pots. The addition of the terrace will protect this quality and bring into the conservation area a type of building that will enrich its character and enhance its heritage significance through the inclusion of a fine example of its historic residential setting.



1 to 17 Stanley Street



2 to 20 Stanley Street

7.1.4 **The inclusion of the Wallaw Cinema, Union Street**

The cinema abuts the boundary of the conservation area. It is a grade II listed building and is a fine example of a once popular town centre activity. Picture houses and theatres were important social and architectural components of the commercial heart of the town and played a significant role in the historic development of the area. The Wallaw Cinema and Theatre (named after Walter Lawson) was built in 1937. It was designed in 'Moderne' style by Percy Lindsay Browne, Son and Harding. It is

described in the official listing description as a '.....rare example of a streamlined Moderne cinema of the 1930's that has a rich collection of original internal features and fixtures surviving intact'. It is a landmark building and clearly forms part of the town centre matrix of historic properties and uses. Its inclusion in the conservation area will give recognition to its wider historic importance and enhance the heritage significance of the area.

7.1.5 The inclusion of The Waterloo public house, Back Croft Road.

The Waterloo is located immediately to the west of the Wallaw Cinema and to the south of Waterloo Road. It is a mid-C19 building, marked as a hotel on the 1860 Ordnance Survey where it can be seen to form part of the historic development layout of the area, terminating Havelock Street, then known as Trotter Street. It is a stone and brick building that has been part rendered. It still retains some original details including a number of six over six sliding sash windows and dentilled timber cornice at eaves level. Although it has been extended along its west elevation, the building still retains much of its original character and its historic role in the life of the town centre.



Wallaw Cinema, Union Street



The Waterloo, Back Croft Road

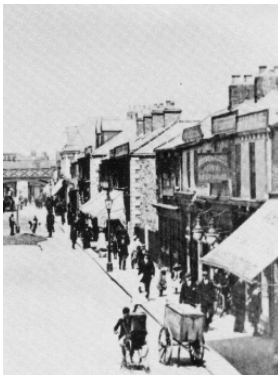
7.1.6 The inclusion of 1 Bridge Street, together with 2 Regent Street to 42 Regent Street (east side of Regent Street)

This length of Regent Street, including its short return into Bridge Street, represents the linear extension of the historic commercial centre towards Cowpen Quay. It led to the Victorian railway station since demolished and redeveloped as a supermarket. It was known originally known as Turner Street. The 1860 Ordnance Survey (Appendix 4 Map 5) indicates that Turner Street was originally developed as a residential area with at least one fine house and gardens surrounded by more modest terraced housing.

Remnants of the terraced housing have survived towards the junction of Regent Street and Simpson Street, albeit converted into ground floor

shops. Development was truncated at this point until the mere surrounding 'The Gut' was reclaimed in the latter quarter of the C19. The remainder of the mid-C19 street was incrementally demolished and redeveloped as shops and the Commercial Hotel (16 Regent Street). The latter, which has now been converted into a shop, has an attractive stone and brick façade in the C19 Palladian revival style with an original round-headed window inserted beneath a triangular arch that rises from a dentilled cornice. Unfortunately, the stonework has been painted obscuring the shaped masonry. Next door, Burton's (18/20 Regent Street), built in 1926, has a distinctive inter war frontage that is fashioned in white terracotta with a Grecian key cornice.

The remainder of the east side of Regent Street is dominated by the Blyth and Tyne Hotel (38 Regent Street) and the Pullman public house (42 Regent Street). Both are large buildings that make significant architectural statements in the street scene. The Blyth and Tyne Hotel is a hipped roof building with the ground floor facing Regent Street and its immediate returns clad in decorative brown glazed ceramic tiles with a contrasting cream tiled fascia. The first floor window openings are decorated by curved window heads with short downward returns. The Pullman also has a hipped roof but with a projecting dormer. It is a simpler design that is elevated by charming wood carvings along the fascia that illustrate the seven stages of inebriation. Number 40 Regent Street, located immediately to the south of The Pullman, is a large early C20 shop, which although altered, retains its original shape. It is possible that original fascias survive beneath the modern shopfront.



Regent Street c. 1900



East side of Regent Street



7.1.6.1 The inclusion of 2 to 4 and 1 to 7 Simpson Street together with 1 to 9 and 2 to 8 Seaforth Street

These two short streets join with the east side of Regent Street and include property returns including The Pullman and Blyth and Tyne Hotel. Both streets were truncated following the demolition of properties to make way for the town centre car park. They are included in the proposed extension of the conservation area because of the property returns.



Simpson Street



Seaforth Street

7.2 Future enhancement opportunities

A number of opportunities exist to enhance the appearance and reinforce the heritage significance of the conservation area. They include:

- Improve the quality of the public spaces, footpaths and roads through the introduction of traditional materials and following historic patterns wherever possible.
- Introduce a co-ordinated collection of street furniture painted a uniform colour.
- Rationalise street and traffic signage removing any unnecessary clutter.
- Consider options to reduce the dominance and impact of vehicular movement through the area particularly along Waterloo Road. This might be achieved through the redesign of the Market Place and the widening of footpaths.
- Ensure that all future highway work, including maintenance works, will preserve and enhance the character of the area.
- Encourage through the planning process the rediscovery of hidden historic shopfronts and features wherever possible, the reinstatement of missing elements of historic shopfronts and the replacement of inappropriate modern shopfronts.
- Reinststate missing architectural features.

- Encourage the re-use of vacant floorspace to create a sustainable future for properties and introduce new activities into the area.

7.3 ***Future Management***

Conservation status does not mean that the area should remain preserved as a museum piece but that it should be managed in a way that responds to its heritage significance, ensuring that changes enhance its special character. Good design, careful maintenance and sensitive handling of public space will allow the area to live and develop but in a way that responds to the conservation of its special character. A Conservation Area Management Plan will be prepared following the adoption of this Character Appraisal. The Management Plan will seek to achieve the following objectives,

- To establish and define the significance of the Conservation Area as a whole and of the individual elements found within it such as architectural, historical, commercial, social and industrial components.
- To assess and define the threats and opportunities within the area and how these impact on the significance of individual elements and of the Conservation Area as a whole.
- To provide policy guidance to ensure that the significance of the Conservation Area will be maintained whilst changes occur rather than being lost or damaged and that opportunities for enhancement are maximised.

English Heritage recommends that the following topics should be considered in the preparation of the Management Plan⁵:

- Article 4 directions
- Enforcement and monitoring change
- Buildings at risk
- Site specific design guidance or development briefs
- Thematic policy guidance
- Specific enhancement opportunities
- Trees and green spaces
- Urban design and public realm
- Regeneration issues

⁵ Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, English Heritage 2006

- Decision making and community consultation
- Available resources

Whilst this character appraisal provides an assessment of the physical character and appearance of the Conservation Area, what the key issues are, what the opportunities for preservation and/or enhancement are and which elements detract from the Conservation Area, its overall purpose is to provide a benchmark for assessing the impact of development proposals on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The management plan will be based on the characteristics identified in the character assessment and provides policy guidance for their preservation and enhancement.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Planning Policy Context

The following local planning policies impact upon conservation

a. Northumberland County and National Park Structure Plan

The Plan was adopted in 2005 and includes policies that generally support the aims and implementation of a THI. They include:

HC 5 This sets out the requirement that local authorities should not permit development that would be detrimental to the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas.

HC 6 This invokes a presumption against the loss of, or changes to, the appearance of listed buildings.

b. Blyth Valley District Local Plan

The Blyth Valley District Local Plan was adopted in 1999. The Council has embarked on a review of the Local Plan and has decided to undertake this task as part of its preparation of the Blyth Valley Local Development Framework. The adopted Local Plan contains a number of policies that impact upon the proposed THI. They include:

E15 Sets out the controls that have the primary aim of ensuring the protection of Conservation Areas.

E16 Covers encouraging the enhancement, maintenance and repair of Conservation Areas.

E20 Covers the design of shop fronts.

B1,B2, B3, B4 Cover reinforcing and regenerating Blyth's shopping centre. They include establishing the maximum percentages of non-retail use within the area, the retention of the market and encouragement of housing provision in the underused upper floors of commercial properties throughout the town centre.

c. Blyth Valley Community Plan

The Peoples' Plan is the Council's Community Plan and sets out the key challenges facing the Borough, identifying how they will be addressed to

secure the stated vision of ‘a place of involvement, opportunity and prosperity for all’. Six priorities have been identified, a number of which are relevant to the THI, including creating opportunities for skill attainment; encouraging the development of an entrepreneurial culture; and creating safe and valued surroundings in which the community can take pride. The plan recognises that a well-maintained and pleasant local environment encourages people to live and work in the area, and also encourages inward investment

d. SENNTRi Strategy & Action Plan

The South East Northumberland & North Tyneside Regeneration Initiative was created in 2001 to drive forward regeneration of the sub-region. Its *Strategy & Action Plan* recognises the wide range of services in its town centres and sees the need for new initiatives to increase retail demand and improve local spending. Its vision sees “economic growth reconciled with quality of life” and prioritises development of the historic environment, upgrading tired premises, and improving the general environment of town centres.

Appendix 2: Other heritage designations.

Listed Buildings

A building may be listed for its architectural and/or historical interest. The protection of listed buildings is one of the primary responsibilities of the Council under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for listing buildings on advice from English Heritage. This protection applies to the whole of a listed building and any structure attached to it as well as land within its curtilage..

Lloyds Bank, 33 Bridge Street, is the only listed building in the Central Conservation Area. It is listed grade II.

The Local List

The Council considers that there are other individual or groups of buildings of local importance. Consequently a 'local list' of such properties has been prepared. The following properties located in the Central Conservation Area are included on the local list (Map 9):

43 Waterloo Road
41 Waterloo Road
37/39 Waterloo Road
31/35 Waterloo Road
27/29 Waterloo Road
21/25 Waterloo Road
1/7 Waterloo Road / 2 / 12 / Union Street
18 Bridge Street (formerly Hedley Young's Store)
7/9 Bridge Street
Library, 20 Bridge Street
Barclays Bank, 22 Bridge Street
24 Bridge Street
35/39 Bridge Street
29 / 31 Bridge Street
23 / 27 Bridge Street
Post Office, 21 Bridge Street

Appendix 3: Implications of conservation related legislation and guidance.

This Appendix outlines key aspects of national legislation and related initiatives concerning the protection of the historic environment.

Access to relevant information

The Council holds copies of Central Government's 'List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest' for the Borough, which contains details of all listed buildings within the Borough. Local policies concerning the protection of the historic environment are set out in the Blyth Valley District Local Plan which was adopted in 1999. This includes the 'local list' of buildings of conservation interest. The Local Plan can be inspected at Council offices and public libraries, or viewed online at xxxxxxxxxx. The policies within this plan provide the basis for determining all planning applications, and remain valid until replaced by the emerging Local Development Framework.

Conservation Areas

The Council, as Local Planning Authority, has a statutory duty to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of its designated conservation areas. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as being 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. A conservation area can range from a busy city centre to a quiet village street. The decision to designate is based on its character and appearance – factors such as individual buildings or groups of buildings, the historic street pattern, building materials, trees, open spaces and views, and the area's historic associations. There are currently six conservation areas in Blyth Valley, three of which are located within Blyth town including Central Conservation Area.

Listed Building Consent

Listed Building Consent is required for any demolition (partial or total), alteration or extension, which affects the character and/or the special interest of a listed building. Alterations, either inside or outside a listed building, require consent from the Council. Whilst minor like for like repairs and maintenance works to listed buildings (such as overhauling

sash cords and boxes) do not require consent, inappropriate repairs and the use of inappropriate materials will alter the character of the building and will, if undertaken without consent, become the subject of listed building enforcement action.

Planning Permission

In many cases minor works to properties can be undertaken without planning permission. These works are often referred to as permitted development rights. Permitted development rights are more restrictive in conservation areas. Permitted development rights may be further limited by the making of Article 4 Directions which remove certain permitted development rights and the demolition of most buildings. Works to trees are also specifically controlled..

Locally Listed Buildings

The degree of protection afforded to an historic building varies according to its significance. Works to listed buildings are the most closely controlled because they have been determined by Central Government as having special architectural and/or historic interest. Listed buildings are followed in significance by buildings identified in the Local Plan as being of local interest. Although buildings included on the 'local list' have no statutory significance, owners are encouraged to maintain and enhance their buildings. Planning applications relating to them may provide scope for seeking such improvements.

Demolition Consent

Conservation area consent is required from the Council to demolish a building or structure within a conservation area, if the volume of the building equates to or is greater than 115 cubic metres. Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: (Planning and the Historic Environment) states that the demolition of a building must be fully justified with clear and convincing evidence, given that all reasonable efforts have been made to sustain its existing use or find alternate viable uses for the building; and that its demolition would produce substantial benefits for the local community before demolition is allowed.

Article 4 Directions

An Article 4 Direction can remove all or part of the permitted development rights set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted

Development) Order 1995 (as amended). This requires the owner/occupier to obtain planning permission before undertaking certain works to their property, from which the permitted development rights have been removed. The Council issues Article 4 Directions in circumstances where specific control over development is required, primarily where the character of a building or an area of acknowledged importance would be threatened.

Urgent Works Notices

Urgent works notices may be served to secure emergency or immediate repairs, in order to arrest deterioration. They can be served on the unoccupied parts of both listed and unlisted buildings in conservation areas. In the case of the latter, notices may only be served with the agreement of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, as advised by English Heritage. An urgent works notice is a statement of the local authority's intent to carry out works itself and to reclaim costs from the owner. Such notices are often enough to encourage the owner to repair the building, or to put the property on the market.

Repairs notices

Repair notices are necessary if the proper preservation of the building is to be undertaken, and can only be served on statutorily listed buildings. A repairs notice can be the first step towards compulsory purchase, but most notices prompt owners to sell the buildings concerned, rather than allowing the procedure to run its course. Much more extensive repairs can be specified here than under an urgent works notice. However, a repairs notice cannot require works to put the building into a better condition than it was at the date of listing. The local authority may not carry out works itself, although it can carry out urgent works concurrently with the repairs notice, in order to prevent further deterioration. This is usual practice unless the local authority proceeds to compulsory purchase the building, in default of the owner taking steps to carry out the specified works.

Before serving a repairs notice, or attempting to acquire property by other means, the local authority must (if they are to be successful in any subsequent Compulsory Purchase Order public inquiry) ensure that arrangements are in place for the subsequent repair of the building. This is usually achieved by means of a prior agreement with a Buildings Preservation Trust or private buyer (a 'back-to-back' arrangement). This

will involve a binding contract to purchase the building from the local authority as soon as it has been acquired.

Section 215 Notices

The Council can also use its general planning powers to serve a Section 215 Notice on the owner (or occupier) of any land or building whose condition is adversely affecting the amenity of the area, particularly within the conservation area. Such a notice requires the person responsible to clean up the site or building, or the local authority can carry out the work itself and reclaim the cost from the owner. Section 215 is a relatively straightforward power that can deliver important, substantial and lasting improvements to amenity. Local authorities are actively encouraged to use these powers where necessary.

Trees in Conservation Areas

Trees are a valuable addition to the urban landscape and within conservation areas all trees are subject to special protection. Some trees are also given special status through Tree Preservation Orders, which means that the Council's consent must be obtained before they can be cut down, topped or lopped. In addition, any work to be carried out on trees that are not the subject of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) but are sited within the boundary of the conservation area must be notified to the Council 6 weeks in advance of works. The purpose of this requirement is to give the Council an opportunity to consider bringing the tree under their general control by issuing a TPO.

New Developments

New buildings or alterations and extensions to existing buildings within the conservation area must be of a high quality design. Proposals must be compatible with the special characteristics of the conservation area, its buildings, spaces and settings, land uses, scale, form and materials. Where original materials and designs exist, the effect on the building and its neighbours should be considered before introducing alternative designs. If this is not done the resulting mixture of styles and materials can lead to a decline in the character of both the property and the area. The use of non-traditional materials in a conservation area would only be acceptable where they form part of an integrated design of high quality and are not considered to harm the appearance or character of that area.

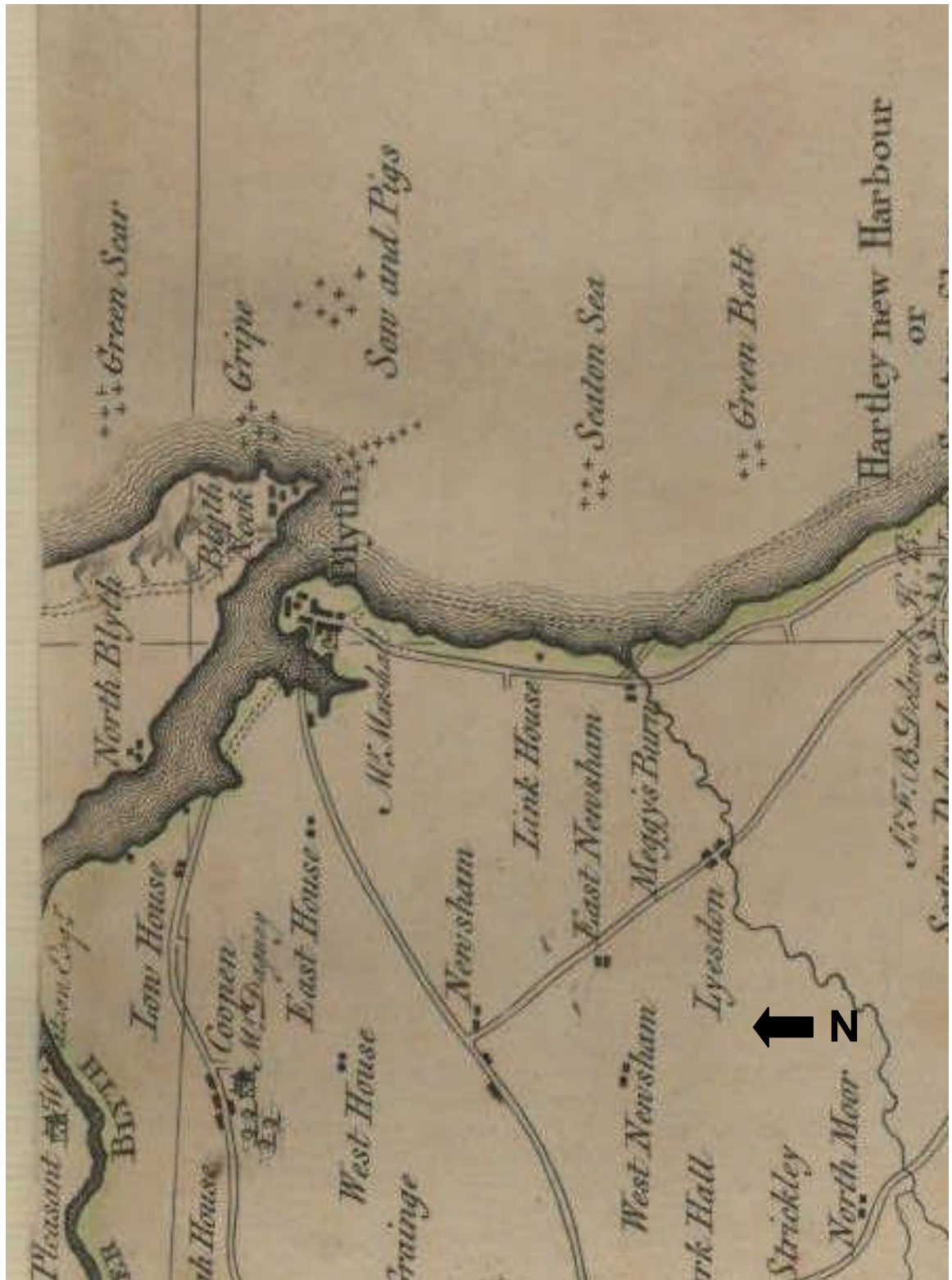
National conservation guidance

Planning Policy Guidance 15 : Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG 15) gives guidance on the Government's policies for the preservation, protection, enhancement and classification of listed buildings and conservation areas. The advice is comprehensive and is used by the Council to assist in the pursuit of the delivery of its conservation policies and in its discussions with developers, the public and property owners regarding the protection and enhancement of the conservation area's historic assets and environment.

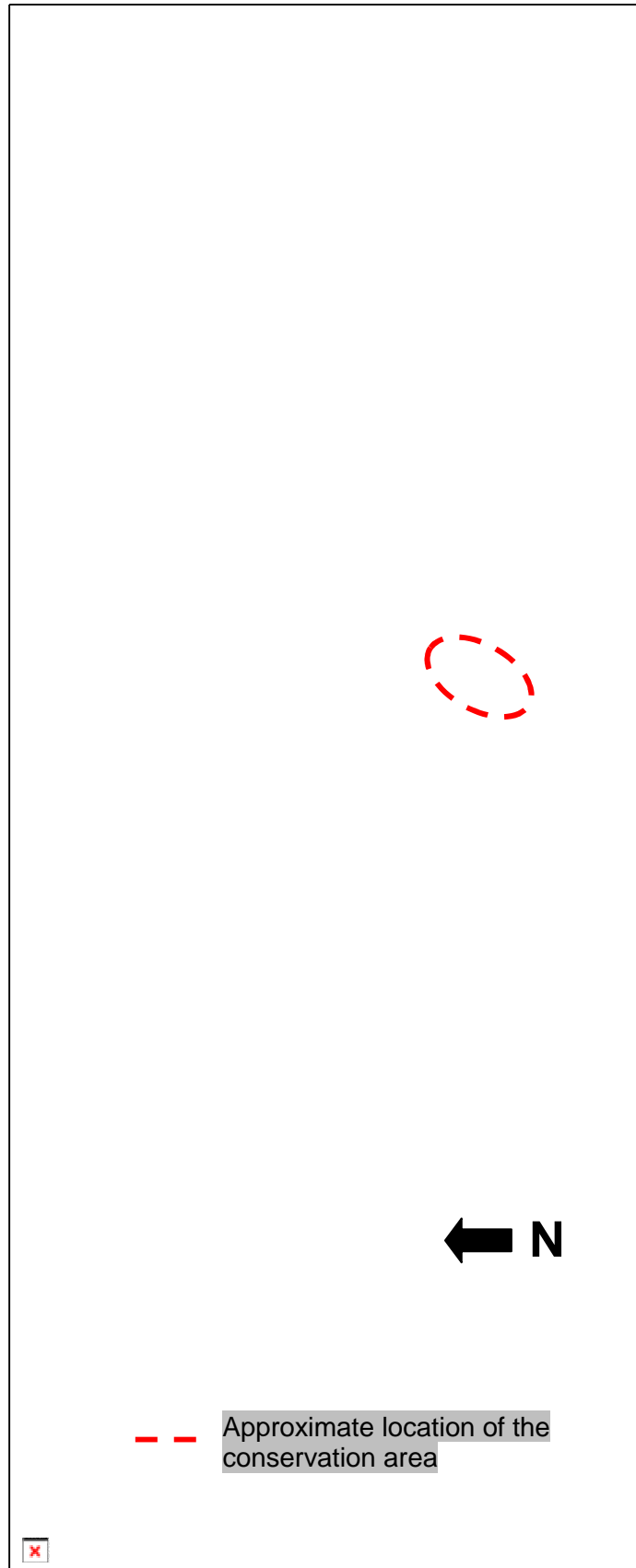
Future Legislation

The Heritage Protection Review (recently undertaken by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and a forthcoming White Paper will have an impact on the future management of Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments etc. It recommends the unification of the current regimes of Listed Building Consent and Scheduled Monument Consent into a single heritage consent. At the same time, research carried out for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has suggested the need for reform to the current heritage consent system and has also considered the potential for the unification of consent regimes.

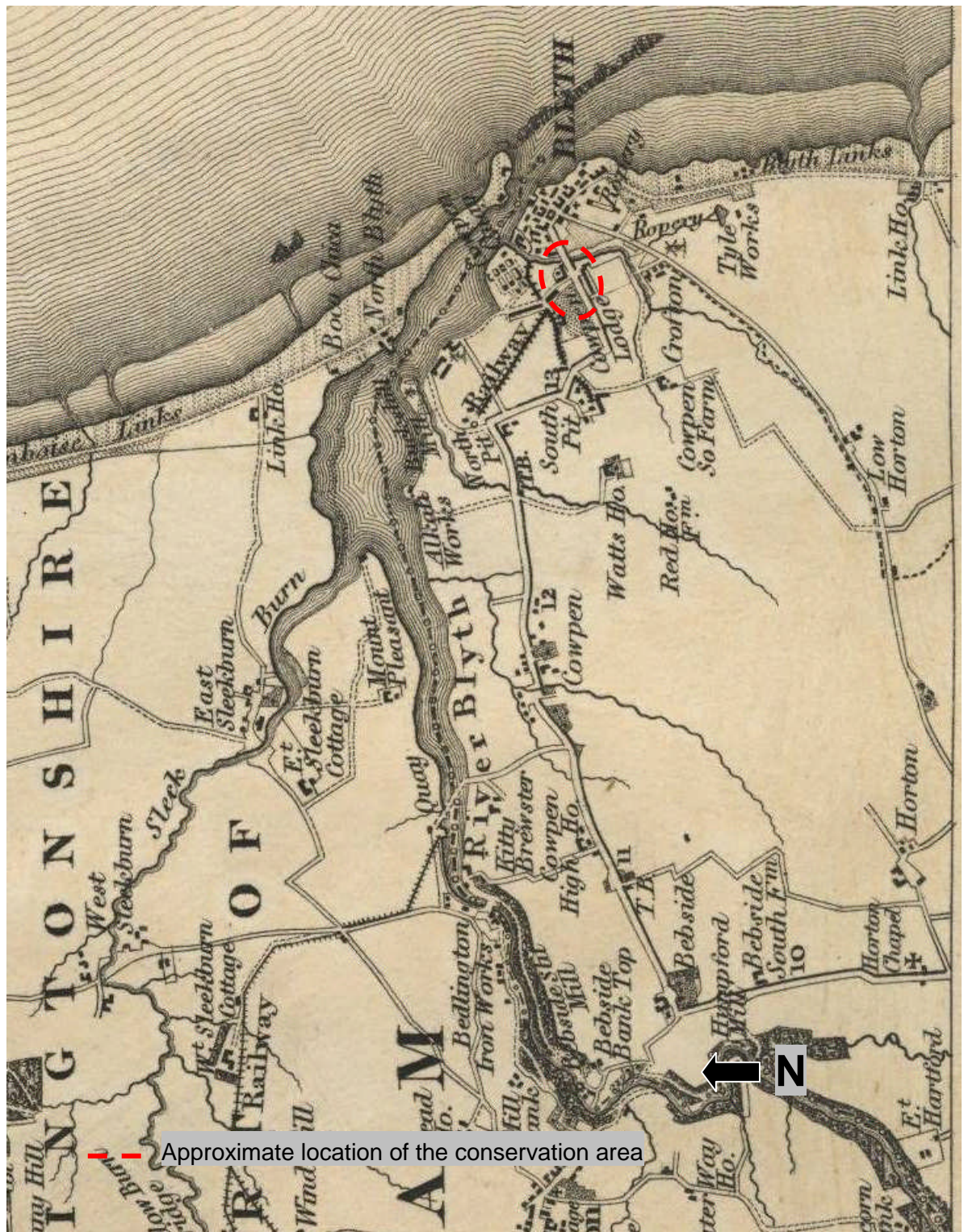
Appendix 4: Maps



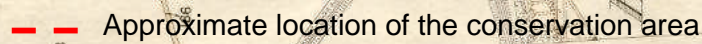
Map 2: Armstrong's Map 1769



Map 3: 1819 Map of Blyth



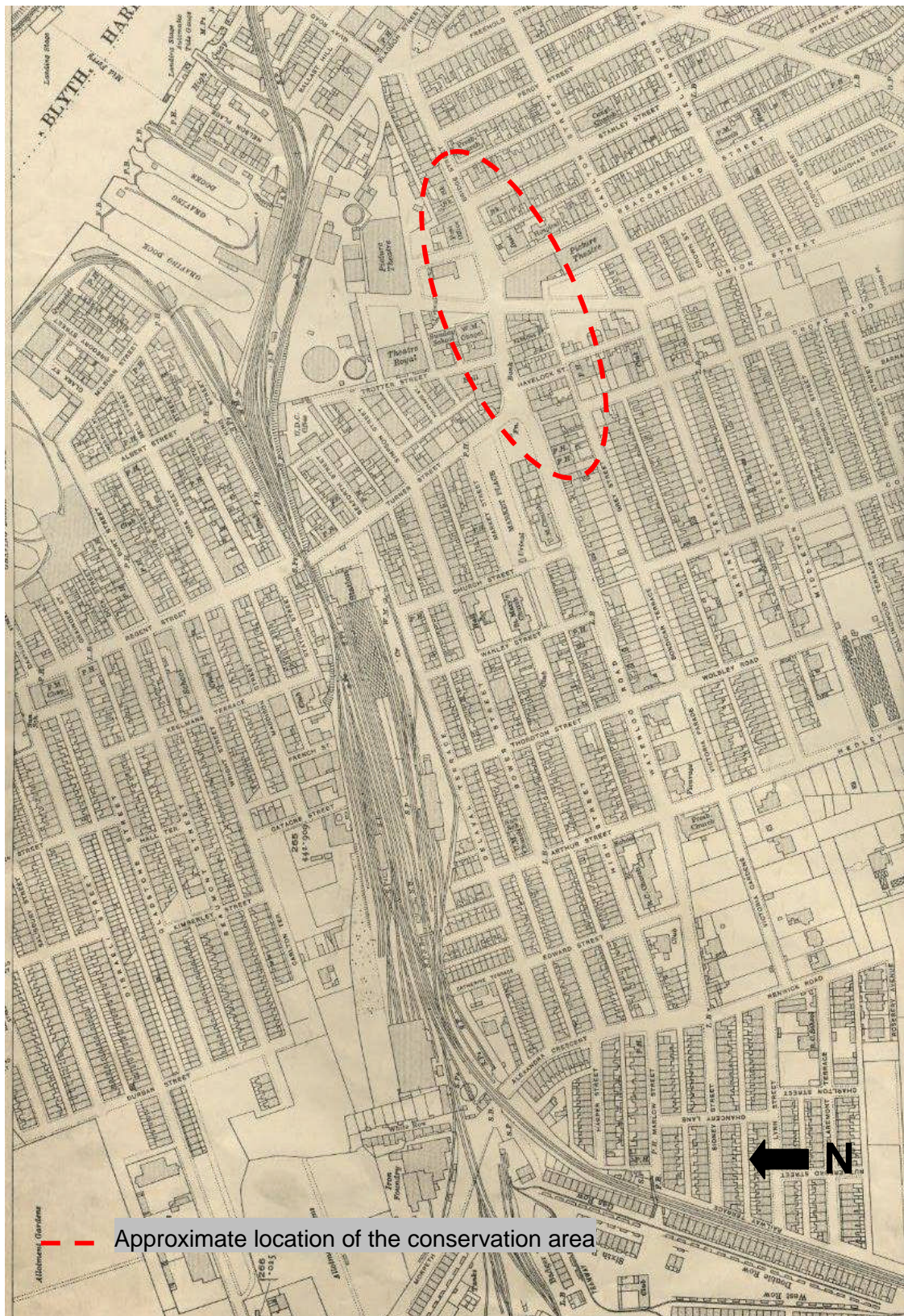
Map 4: Greenwoods Map 1828



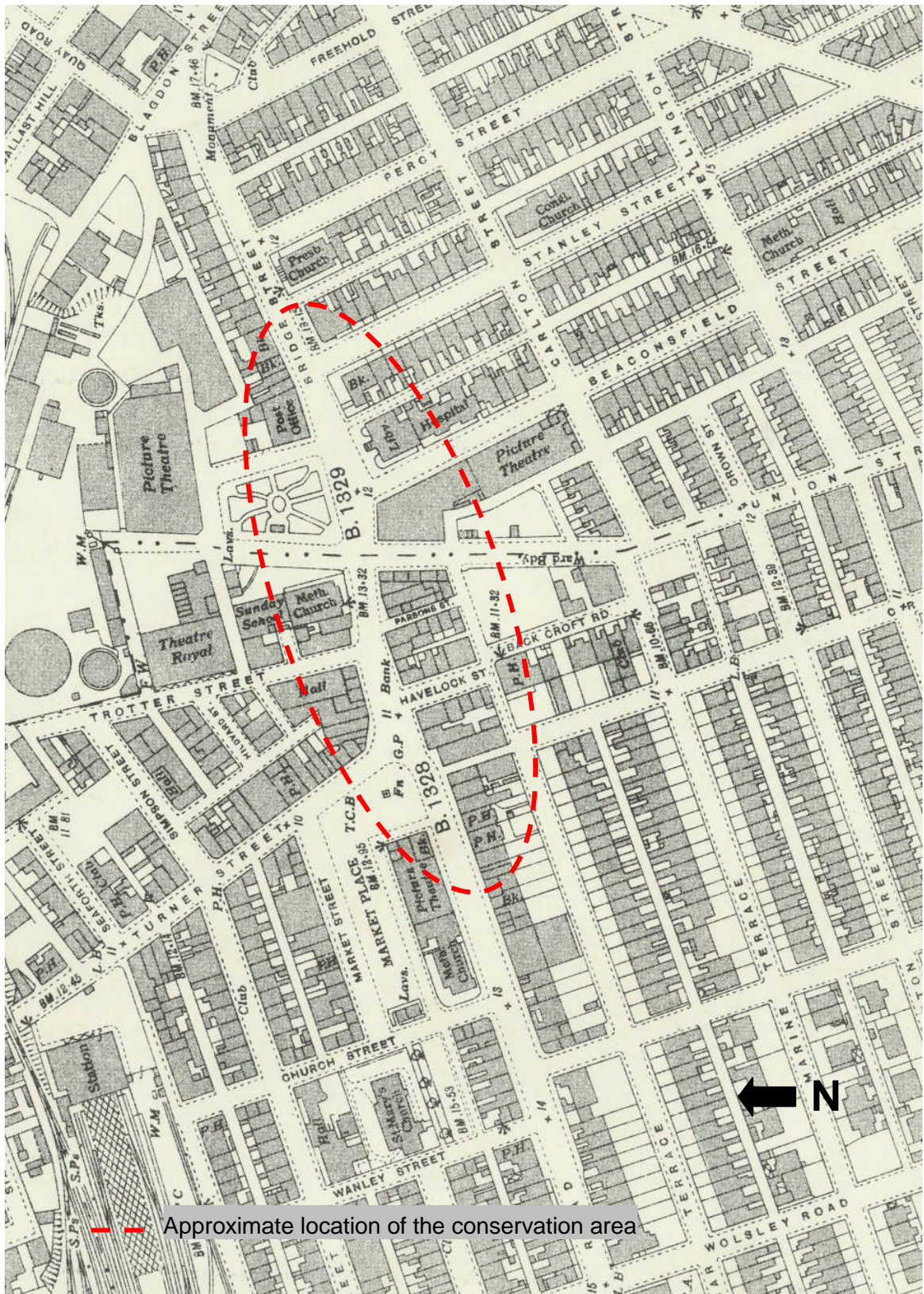
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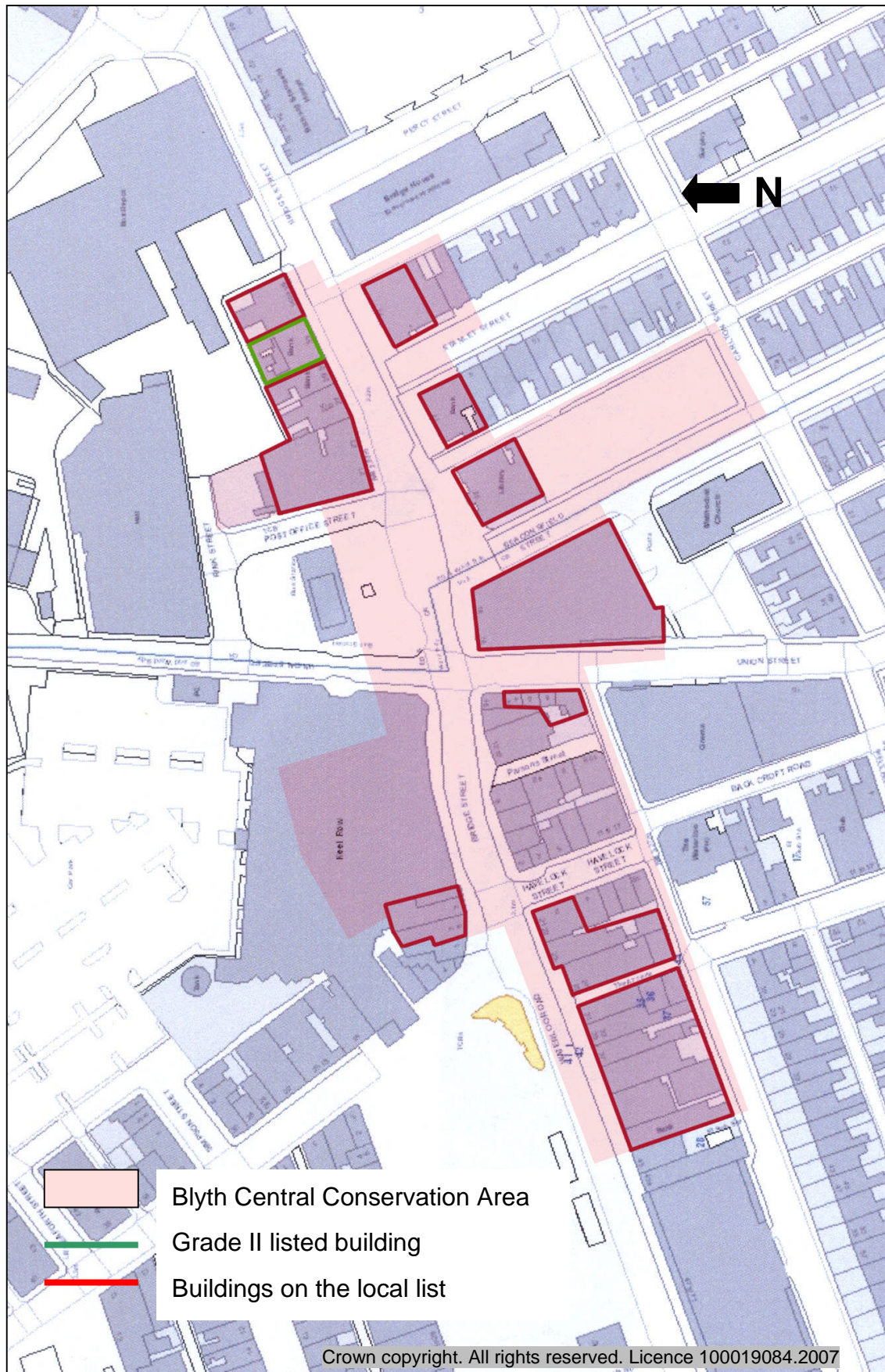
Map 6: Ordnance Survey 1897 Edition



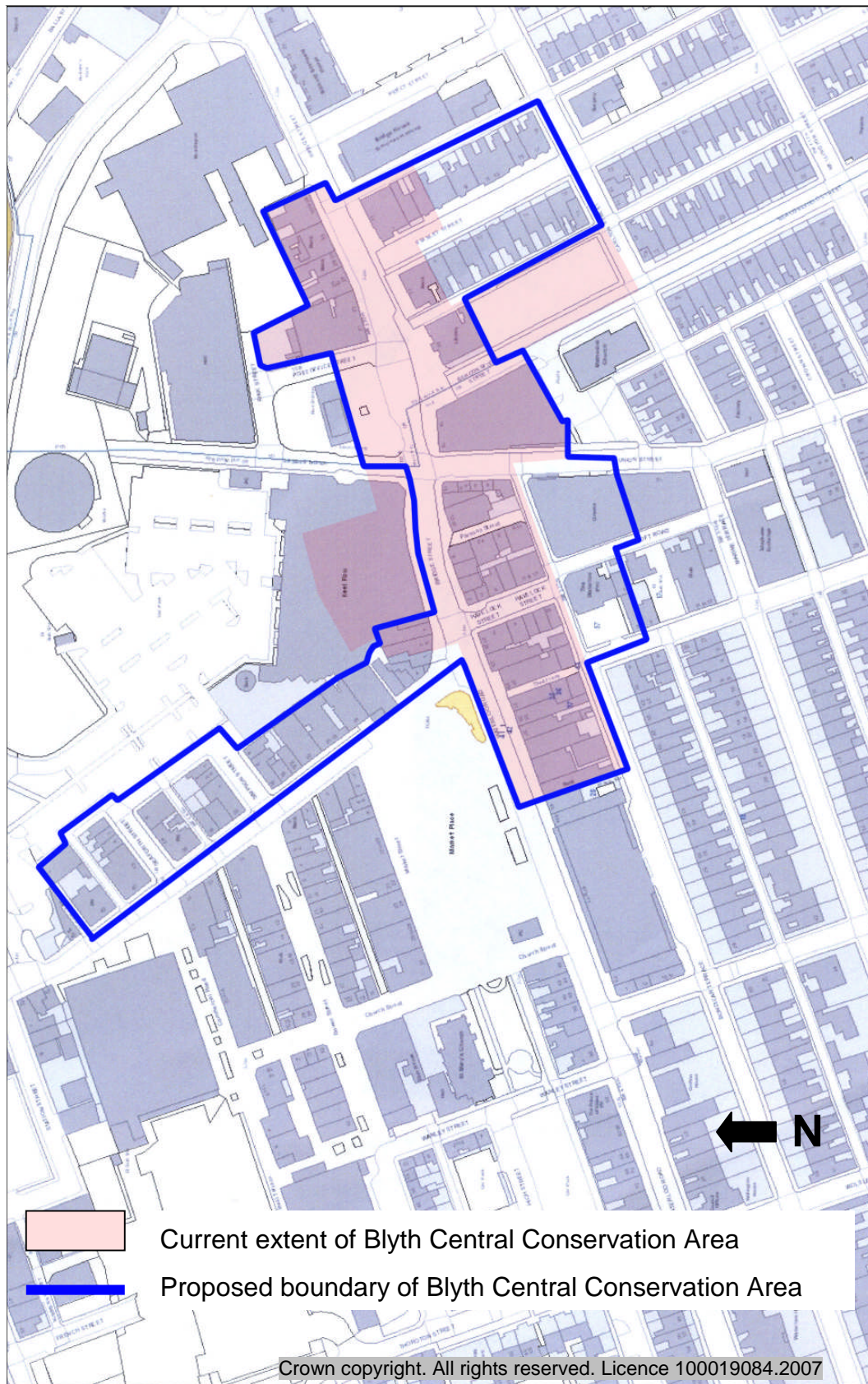
Map 7: Ordnance Survey 1922 Edition



Map 8: Ordnance Survey 1938 Edition



Map 9: Listed buildings and buildings on the local list



Map 10: Proposed changes to the conservation area boundary

Appendix 5: Sources

- The Northern Counties to AD 1000, Nick Higham
- Keys To The Past – Durham CC website
- Boldon Book Northumberland and Durham – edited by David Austin
- The History of Blyth – John Wallace
- Borough of Blyth Valley Official Guide – Blyth Valley Borough Council
- Walks Around The Old Coal Ports Of Northumberland – edited by Tony Barrow
- North East England – The Region's Development 1760–1960, Norman McCord
- Gordon Smith, Blyth Local History Society
- Blyth in Old Picture Postcards – Robert Bulmer , European Library 1983
- The Archives Photographs Series – Blyth, Blyth Local Studies Group, Chalford