

BLYTH HERITAGE CONSERVATION AREA

CHARACTER APPRAISAL

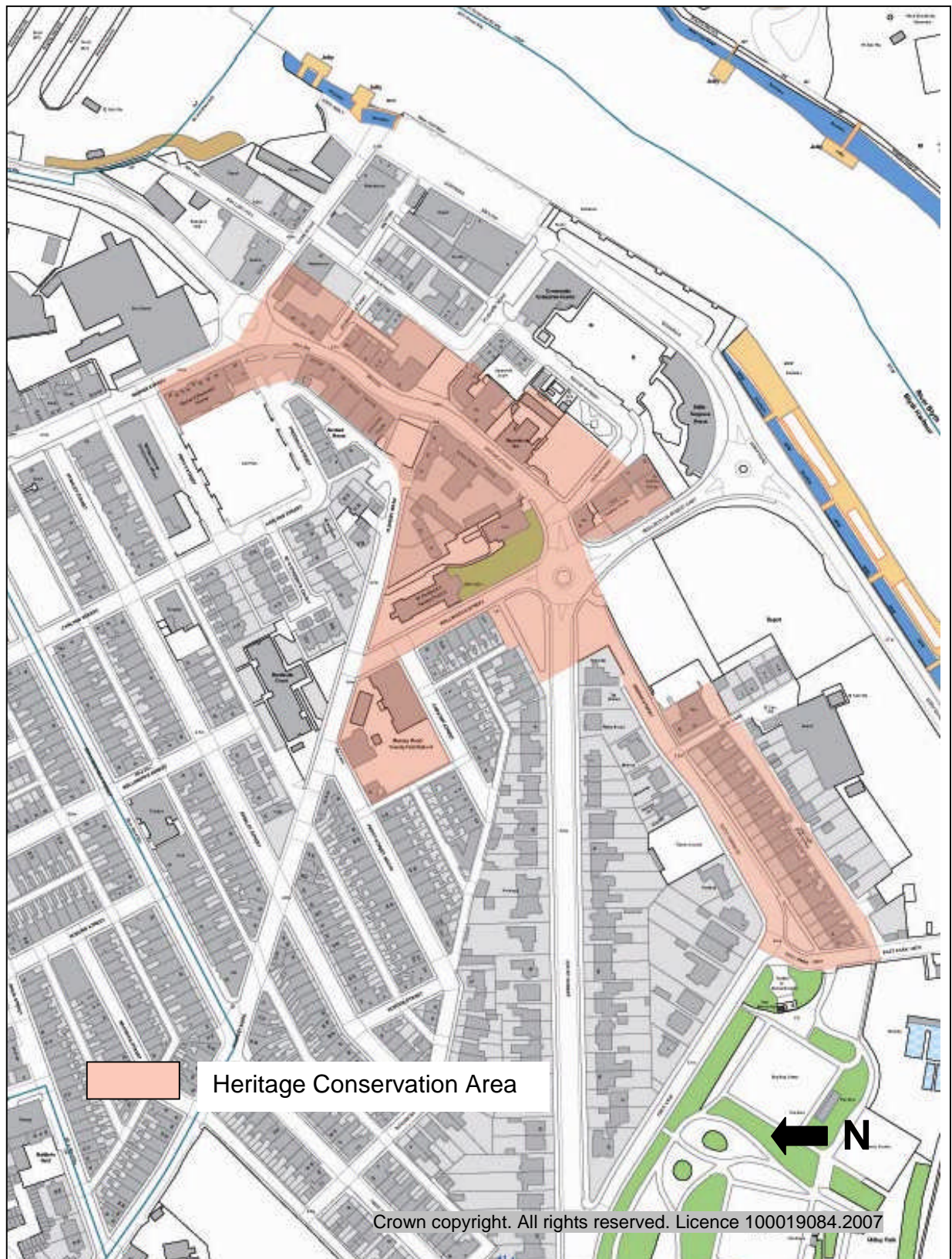


Prepared by the
North of England Civic Trust
for
Blyth Valley Borough Council
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NORTH of ENGLAND CIVIC TRUST





Map 1: Blyth Heritage Conservation Area

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1 *Summary of Special Significance*

The conservation area comprises the surviving heart of the port of Blyth and the late C19/early C20 commercial centre that grew around the maritime related activities together with the earliest extant terrace of houses in the town. Key buildings include the free baroque Police Station, the neo-classic Harbour Commissioner's Office and Customs House; the gothic revival St. Cuthbert's Church; the C18 Highlight lighthouse; and the original Georgian length of Bath Terrace. Other fine buildings complete the heritage matrix. Some are grand and others more modest in scale. However, they combine to forge an historic development pattern that displays the rich blend of building types and functions that evolved to create the unique character of the area. The twists in the street pattern and position of buildings create glimpses and views that surprise and delight. The survival of architectural details and original materials add interest depth to the history of individual buildings and the wider area. This, together with building scale, mass and patterns and the quality of materials used provide strong design reference points to guide the design of new developments within and adjacent to the conservation area.

The conservation area excludes adjacent sites that fall within the late nineteenth and early C20 historic envelope. This appraisal will address this issue and make recommendations regarding possible changes to the boundary.



Northumberland Street (now Bridge Street) c. 1900

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 enhance’¹. 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 and street furniture. 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: Central Conservation Area, Heritage Conservation Area and Bondicar Terrace Conservation Area. They spread across the historic core of the town encompassing the port (the Heritage Conservation Area) to the east, the commercial centre (The Central Conservation Area) and fine lengths of late nineteenth century terraces and detached houses which were built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bondicar Terrace Conservation Area) to the east. The conservation areas are physically detached from one another and reflect different and 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 includes when determining 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 published proposals for preservation and enhancement and consult local people on them.

The protection and preservation of historic environments are now extensively recognised for the contribution that 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 change 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 considered 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 development and the automatic protection of all trees in conservation areas. Government policy 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 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 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 1).
- **The South East Northumberland & North Tyneside Regeneration Initiative (SENNTri)** was created in 2001 to drive forward

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

regeneration of the sub-region. Its *Strategy & Action Plan* recognises the importance of heritage in helping encourage inward investment (Appendix 1).

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 the 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 opportunity to review the boundaries of the conservation area and, where appropriate, propose amendments.

This survey and appraisal was carried out by the North of England Civic Trust on behalf of the Council during August, September and October 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 it to gain secure their views.

The next stage 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 that spreads over the south east Northumberland coastal plain before issuing 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 plans (Appendix 4 Maps 1, 2 and 3) show that Blyth's hinterland was primarily rural with farmsteads and agricultural hamlets together with some pits. Nearest industrial settlement was to the west with Bedlington iron works and 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. However, Green Belt policies maintain a clear and attractive rural separation between the urban areas.

Blyth Heritage Conservation Area lies within Earsdon Parish. 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 Sandstone 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 14th century. This plains geology contrasts with the rising Northumberland Fells Sandstone hills to the west that provide a distant containment of the visual envelope. The Carboniferous Sandstone that weathers down to pale buff is a vernacular material that introduces a sense of place and warmth to some historic buildings within 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 substantially impermeable Glacial Till that was deposited directly by the glaciers.

3.2.2 ***Topography and aspect***

Blyth is located on the coastal plain and at the estuary of the river. It is predominantly flat gently rising to the south west, the highest point of the land within the conservation area is no more than 8 metres above sea level.

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

The conservation area is located towards the coastal eastern edge of the urban settlement. This area emerged as a conglomeration of streets, spaces, buildings and yards that grew in response to the development of trade and industry. They clustered along the river's edge retaining its general development pattern of enclosed courtyards, short streets and public spaces until the late C20 when new development has introduced buildings and spaces that are of a different orientation and scale. The conservation area is focused on the spine road that fed access through and onto the quayside

3.2.3 ***Setting and External Relationships***

3.2.3.1 ***Setting***

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 positioned behind the harbour edge that has now been radically transformed through the clearance of port buildings and the development of office blocks with related car parking. The historic timber staithes that led to the waiting ships have been restored to provide an outstanding heritage feature. They sweep along the river edge to provide a robust and hugely attractive heritage setting to the conservation area with the contemporary wind turbines anchored onto the century old North Pier providing a more dramatic visual backdrop. The modern offices that have been built between the quay edge and the conservation area introduce a new design element into the setting. The wider setting to the

west continues to be dominated by late C19/early C20 grid iron terraced housing with some alterations to the northern end focused on Freehold Street where clearance has resulted in the development of new terraced housing and a large car park.

3.2.3.2 External Relationships

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 some new office development on the Quay. New housing provides attractive opportunities for those wishing to live at reasonable cost at the coast and commute into Tyneside using good road networks with straightforward access to the A1 and the A19. Blyth provided 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 C19 commercial core that clustered around the Quay with some significant buildings to the west. Within the conservation area, traditional port related commerce has declined but related activities, such as pubs and the Police Station have survived

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 east are controlled by the backdrop of the early C20 land platforms that were built over the rock sills that protected the northern side of the estuary to provide the necessary elevation for the construction of the North Blyth staithes. This landscape is now quite bleak and featureless until it runs through to the north pier where it is spectacularly punctured by the wind turbines.

Views to the south are channelled along Bridge Street where they open out across the large roundabout at its junction with Ridley Avenue and Wellington Street before being split along Bath Terrace and the wider, C20, Ridley Avenue, the main southern approach to the Heritage Conservation Area. This marks a change to the historic layout pattern where Bridge Street ran through a continuously built-up area to Bath

Terrace. Views to the south along Bath Terrace are dominated by the mature trees in Ridley Park.

There are a number of views to the west from the conservation area starting at its northern end with a glimpse of the fine turn of the century commercial buildings that flank Bridge Street as it leads to the Market Place. The boundary then butts-up against the backs of new housing and across the new Freehold Street car park; over a combination of new and old terraced housing to the west of Plessey Road; and finally the west side of Bath Terrace. There are no dominant landmarks to focus views to the west.

Views to the north of the conservation area are dominated by the roundabout at the junction of Bridge Street and the new road that leads to the Keel Row car park; the modern and industrial Arriva bus depot and the gasholders



View to the east



View to the south



View to the west



View to the north

4 Historical Development

4.1.1 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 including a perforated antler mace-head, dating from the late Neolithic period (4000 to 2500 BC) or early Bronze Age (2500 to 800 BC) that 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.

4.1.2 Medieval and Post-Medieval 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. 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 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.

4.1.3 ***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 (Appendix 4 Map 2). 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. Indeed, for a brief period in post-war Britain, Blyth port achieved the status of Europe's biggest exporter of

coal, and its economical growth is reflected in the type of buildings which started to appear. 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 colliers and areas of terraced housing which sprang up on the back of the rapid expansion of the town due to the growth of its industrial base. Impressive buildings were constructed in the quayside area at the turn of the C19 and C20, reflecting the growing prosperity and status of the town.

The First Edition OS Map, published in 1860 (Appendix 4 Map 5), shows the area now covered by the Heritage Conservation Area to be the then commercial heart of Blyth. The presence of Market Street, which in later maps becomes the top of Plessey Road, indicates that the market is still in this area. Blyth Brewery is at the top of Bridge Street and there are many inns and public houses, smithies and a saltworks. A 'Rope and Chain Manufactory' runs parallel to the Plessey wagon way, which was opened around 1709 to transport coals from the Plessey colliery and later become Plessey Road. Another ropery runs south west of the bottom of Bath Row (now Bath Terrace). A light house, the Highlight, is shown at the rear of Bath Row. The area which later became Ridley Park mainly consisted of scrubland, apart from a tramway running past the south end of Bath Row to the ropery.

By the time of the Second Edition OS Map of 1897 (Appendix 4 Map 6), the fields are covered in terraced housing and schools as far as the first of two disused Rope Walks, where the rope and chain factory stood, and Plessey wagon way has become Plessey Road. The fine, Victorian Gothic Police Station, built in 1896, appears on the corner of Plessey Road and Northumberland Street, and the attractive Decorative style St Cuthbert's Church, dated 1882, just to the south. A Drill Hall for the Tynemouth Artillery Volunteers and a Lifeboat House appear on scrubland to the north east of Bath Terrace. But although the quayside area is still obviously important, expansion of the commercial centre of Blyth away from the harbour is plain, with the saw mill and gas works to the north west of Bridge Street, grand brick and stone properties replacing housing to the north of Bridge Street and the new market place at the junction of Waterloo Road, Bridge Street and Turner Street.

The Third Edition OS Map of 1922 (Appendix 4 Map 7) shows the majority of the area as being developed, with the main expanse of greenery being introduced through the newly created Ridley Park (opened in 1904) on the

scrubland beyond the easternmost Rope Walk supplemented by some neighbourhood scale pockets of open space. There is infill between the former rope walks (the line of which Ridley Avenue and Park View follow almost exactly) by larger properties with spacious gardens, creating an impressive setting for Ridley Park. At the northern end of the present conservation area the brewery on Blagdon Street has substantially gone with only 'The Quay' public house on the south east corner of the site together with the remains of a possible outbuilding surviving. The pre-First World War Harbour Commissioner's Office, with its fine curved entrance, stands across from the Police Station as further testament to the continued power and prestige of Blyth. However, the continued growth of commerce away from the harbour is becoming more apparent.

The Fourth Edition OS Map of 1938 (Appendix 4 Map 8) confirms this trend, but the areas close to the Park are also more developed, with large, generally semi-detached, properties.

By the time of the designation of the Heritage Conservation Area in 1979, the most noticeable changes are that the Cowpen Colliery, to the south west of the conservation area, has gone, as well as the railway lines running along the quayside, which had been present right through from the 2nd Edition to the 4th Edition Maps. Large industrial buildings have appeared in place of the railway lines together with improvements to road layouts, though otherwise there appears to be little marked difference to this historic area of Blyth.

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 1) 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 2 and 3) show in greater detail the form of the developing town that comprised a series of open courtyard complexes and buildings occupying a substantial area of land beside the quayside with the 1819 map showing the position of a shipbuilding yard and dry dock. The Greenwood Map shows railways linking the North and South pits with The Gut where coal would have been ferried by keelboats to colliers. The map shows the main road from Morpeth as it twisted into the quayside area, approximately along the line of Bridge Street, to provide the spine from which access was taken to the complex of port buildings to the east. The carraigeway/wagonway to Plessey Colliery and beyond is shown to run approximately along the line of Plessey Road to the north of the two roperies. The area of land between Bridge Street and Plessey Road was part of the flood plain of 'The Gut' and undeveloped. However, Bath Terrace, located at the southern end of the conservation area, had been substantially constructed by the early C19 with the first houses and the first stages of the adjacent Highlight lighthouse being built in the late C18. It is clear that during the first quarter of the C19 the core layout frame of the conservation area had been set out.

The Ordnance Survey First Edition of 1860 (Appendix 4 Map 4) illustrates in great detail the town and the emerging conservation area. 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 quay. The pattern was one of a series of streets and courtyards fronting or leading onto Market Street that ran through the area from the Morpeth road (then known as Blagdon Street) to Low Quay. The building plots, their relationships, map descriptions and the arrangement and complexity of railways and number of coal drops show that this must have been an intensely busy and varied place with workshops and smithies, many inns, warehouses, houses, hotels, shops,

a large brewery, and roperies together with a customs house, a post office and probably, but not shown, offices. The market place is revealed as a length of widened carriageway that threads through to the waterfront. An interesting geographic counterpoint to the market place can be seen to the south of Blagdon Street with the open courtyard complex known as 'Old Staith', possibly a farm complex, that sits beside the Plessey Colliery waggonway. (Appendix 4 Map 3)

By 1900 (Appendix 4 Map 5) the area to the west of the conservation area had radically changed. What had been a rural hinterland to the Quayside was comprehensively developed to provide a massive area of grid iron terraced housing. The Gut had been culverted and its flood plain reclaimed and developed to provide a built link between 'Old Blyth' and Cowpen. This in turn led to the expansion of the retail centre, including the relocation of the market place, away from the Quayside to the heart of the new residential areas at the junction of Bridge Street and Turner Street (now Regent Street). The basic layout frame of the Quayside does not change over this period. There is some clearance and subsequent limited redevelopment, particularly to the north of the Brewery where salt works and related housing were demolished and the sites redeveloped to a more structured pattern. The most dramatic modification is immediately to the south of the quayside with the construction of a group of fine and grand buildings. The Police Station (1896), St Cuthbert's Church (c.1890), the infants and junior school (c.1890 - now called Blyth Plessey Road County First School) and the Kings Hotel (c.1890). Immediately before outbreak of the First World War, the final 'grand design' building, the Harbour Commissioners Offices (1913), was added. All five buildings make impressive contributions to the townscape, both separately and as a group, and mark a defining moment in the expansion of Blyth. Ridley Park, located immediately to the south of Bath Terrace and the conservation area, was developed and opened in 1903.

By the early 1920's (Appendix 4 Map 7) the pattern at the heart of the area had become firmly established with the only changes focused on the quay front where some former yards were developed and the new Drill Hall constructed. However, a major change had started to the south of the area with the demolition of the ropeworks along the line of Rosamond Place together with properties at the junction of Northumberland Street and Wellington Street to make way for the construction of Ridley Avenue and the development of large detached and semi-detached houses. This was a major piece of town planning by virtue of opening a new, major, route into the town centre from the south

and releasing land for residential development. By the outbreak of the Second World War Ridley Avenue had been fully developed

This pattern remained substantially settled until the final quarter of the C20/early C21 when changes modified the character of the conservation area and its immediate setting:

- The removal of the Harbour Branch railway lines to and along the quayside.
- The demolition of the Ridley Street area on the quayside and its replacement by office blocks and car parking.
- The demolition of the tightly knit development of streets and courtyards that forged an historic built link between Bath Terrace and the Heritage in order to construct a new roundabout.
- The demolition of properties between the Steamboat Inn and Tate Street that radically punctures the historic continuous building line along the east side of Bridge Street. The replacement use, a car park, allows views to spill across backlands that cuts across the historic pattern and grain of development.
- The demolition of older housing in and around Freehold Street and the development of new housing and a car park. This included blocking-off Carlton Street at its junction with Plessey Road and Bridge Street, an important historic crossroads around which the Police Station and Harbour Commissioners Office are orientated, to create a secured car park for the police station.

5.2 Grain and Density

5.2.1 Grain

The grain of development within the conservation area generally reflects the early C20 footprint. This is dominated by the north-south through route that was Northumberland Street and Blagdon Street but became Bridge Street. However, the major junction of Plessey Road and Bridge Street has been closed and landscaped changing the primacy of Plessey Road as the major route to the Quay frontage. To the north of Bridge Street the two main historic courtyard areas have been substantially lost, either through redevelopment or partial demolition, but the residual street pattern remains the same with some minor modifications.

The historic grain of development is most radically altered through the demolition of the southern end of Northumberland Street to accommodate the new Ridley Avenue/Waterloo Street roundabout. This

has resulted in detaching Bath Terrace from the rest of the conservation area and the creation of a huge open space in place of the intimate and congested C19 network of streets and yards.

5.2.2 **Density**

The density of development is varied. The range of activities that would have taken place in the thriving port during the C19 and early C20 led to soaring working and residential populations with shops, inns and other supporting service trades resulting in high density development. This pattern was extended through the development of large warehouses on the quayside in the later C20. The density of development has now declined following selective clearance that has resulted in the construction of more relaxed modern buildings with large areas of car parking and some gap sites

The density of development along Bridge Street remains high, in part determined by the scale of the large late C19 buildings that create a built chasm that twists around the Bridge Street/Plessey Road junction.

5.3 **Views within the area**

The primary views within the area from are channelled along Bridge Street towards its junction with Plessey Road where they are partly blocked by the Police Station and the Harbour Commissioner's Office. The configuration and scale of fine buildings at this off-set junction is the visual focal point of the area creating a high quality urban landscape. Views to the south are split along Bath Terrace and Ridley Avenue, both residential streets, containing a mixture of old and new house styles. St Cuthbert's Church dominates views to the south and west of the area. Views across the estuary are channelled along Plessey Road and Quay Road and across the new Low Quay office car park. The construction of the Bridge Street/Ridley Avenue roundabout has opened out panoramic views of the estuary.

Views along Plessey Road to the south lead to mid and long distance vistas of grid iron housing beyond the larger scale St Cuthbert's Church and Victorian school.

6 Character Analysis

6.1 Land Use

There is a mix of uses that can be commonly found in commercial centres. Office use now dominates (Use Classification B1) with both public and private sectors occupying old and new premises. There are still some nearby workshops (Use Classification B2) to represent the area's industrial past, but like retailing (Use Classification A1), is much reduced with the decline of the port and its working and residential populations. Housing (Use Classification C3) is concentrated to the south along Bath Terrace with small isolated pockets elsewhere. However, there is evidence of developer interest in converting vacant buildings into housing as shown by the recent conversion of the Bonded Warehouse on the junction of Sussex Street and Quay Road and the development of the adjacent operational yard. Civic/public uses are represented through the presence of the Police Station and Northumberland County Council's area based offices on Bridge Street. Public houses (Use Classification A4) are still present along Bridge Street and St Cuthbert's Church and its hall (Use Classification D1) continue to provide a place for worship and community activities.

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 commercial and civic properties fronting Bridge Street on and around its junction with Plessey Road creating a built valley that channels views along the road; the two storey shops, housing and former brewery on the residual Bridge Street frontage; the large mass of St Cuthbert's Church and Blyth Plessey Road County First School that combine to create a robust group of buildings that adds both bulk and style to the townscape; and the elegant two storey length of C18 and C19 houses on Bath Terrace. Within this general frame, properties display individual design characteristics that create interest and variety of form and appearance that reflects the age and function of the buildings.

6.2.2 ***Periods and styles***

The conservation area has a relatively narrow development timeline with building focused between 1880 and 1914. The pre-1880 buildings are concentrated at the extremities of the area and comprise the remains of the former C17 brewery at the northern tip and the substantially Georgian Bath Terrace and the Highlight lighthouse at the southern end. The twenty five years that spanned the late Victorian/early Edwardian period provides the greatest concentration of development and establishes the historic character and conservation significance of the area. Generally, more recent developments do not add to the design quality of the conservation area.

6.2.2.1 **Pre-1880**

The pre-1880 buildings fall into two groups:

- ***The former Brewery***

The former Blyth Brewery occupied a significant position where Blagdon Street turned around the corner to run into Bridge Street. For a large part of the C19 it was the largest industrial complex in the area. It was substantially demolished when it ceased operation in the 1960's leaving the south west corner to be retained as a pub. Although it has been extended, the original late C17 structure is an attractive two storey building with an open pedimented pitched gable fronting onto Bridge Street. Its deeply moulded window architraves and rusticated quoins add interest and style, giving the building a sense of age.

- ***Bath Terrace***

Bath Terrace includes probably the oldest group of houses in Blyth. The central section was substantially built in the late C18. It is sandwiched between a larger late C19 block to the north and a more modest early C20 group to the south. The brick built earlier houses are remarkably unaltered with Welsh slate roofs, chimney stacks with pots, and four pane sliding sash windows, probably mid-C19 replacements of twelve pane originals. Number 11 was the Bath House, distinguished by the lettered prostyle porch. This is a delightful group whose simple Georgian style is ornamented by the attic dormers with their filigree timber barging and finials. The later additions sit comfortably with their earlier neighbours.

The Highlight lighthouse that looms over the Terrace is partly cut into the back yard of number 8. The lower stage with its cross and quatrefoil shaped windows was built in 1788 when the coastline was within 30 feet of Bath Terrace. It was added to in 1888 and 1900 and in use until 1985. Immediately to the east of the Terrace is the Life Saving Volunteers

Company stone and brick building built in the latter half of the C19. Known as the 'Rocket Brigade House' it ceased function in 1959 and is currently outside the conservation area .



The C18 remnant of the brewery



Brewery outbuilding, now a workshop



The late C18 section of Bath Terrace



*The Highlight,
Back of Bath Terrace*

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, 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 that comprises a mix of Classical, Mannerist, Renaissance and Baroque motifs.

A number of good examples of Free Design give clear architectural structure to Bridge Street; the eastern end of Plessey Road; and the

surviving historic remnants of Regent Street and Tate Street. English Heritage's 'Commercial Building Protection Guide' 2007³ 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 Heritages 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 have 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 substantially retains its original appearance and its collective value is high.

- ***Bridge Street***

Bridge Street combines a range of periods and styles. The late C19/early C20 is represented through the grand commercial and civic buildings that served the then thriving port together with the more humble shops that were built along the southern side of Bridge Street to the north of Plessey Road. The Italianate Gothic style Police Station (72 to 76 Bridge Street/23 to 27 Plessey Road) built in 1896 is probably the most exotic historic building in Blyth. Its roofscape is a collection of pedimented gables, turrets, chimney stacks, interlocking pitches, a belfry, pavilion with metal fretwork, terracotta ridges and finials. This provides an intriguing, busy and delightfully cluttered silhouette that commands the skyline. The elevations step in and out with corbelled full-height turrets and deeply rebated windows resulting in a richly modelled façade that is visually exciting. The carved bull mastiffs that ornament the front door are evocative of the Victorian era and its codes of conduct. Diagonally opposite, the later Harbour Commissioner's Offices (79 Bridge Street) curves around the corner. This building is calmer and designed in the more disciplined and restrained classic revival style with a regular pattern of windows providing symmetry either side of the central, curved, section. The channelled ashlar stone faced ground floor supports the brick walls first and second floors with the entrance porch running the length of the central bay. Ornamentation is limited to contrasting bands of stone and brick on the chimney stacks, stone quoins, deeply corbelled eaves, window surrounds and the columned entrance. The east side of Bridge Street also includes the Kings Head Hotel (85 Bridge Street) and the Steamboat Inn (89 Bridge Street). The Kings Head is an exuberant Free Baroque stone finished building decorated by Greek motifs

³ Commercial Buildings Selection Guide, English Heritage, March 2007

including Ionic pilasters and a Greek key frieze whereas the Steamboat Inn is a more modest, but attractive, brick designed in classic style with restrained ornamentation, primarily limited to door and window surrounds. Unfortunately, the continuous building line has been lost with the demolition of the two storey property that linked the Kings Head and the Steamboat Inn (87 Bridge Street). However, the view between the pubs and the police station towards the Harbour Commissioner's Office continues to be one of the most impressive in the conservation area.



*The Police Station,
Bridge Street/Plessey Road*



*The Harbour Commissioner's Office,
Bridge Street/Plessey Road*



The Kings Head & the Steamboat Inn



The view north along Bridge Street

A group of more modest mid to late C19 buildings are ranged along the west side of Bridge Street to the north of its junction with Plessey Road. They were developed as two storey brick built shops intermixed with dwellings. They include the old post office block (46 to 50 Bridge Street/1&3 Freehold Street) with its original twelve pane sliding sash windows together with two surviving shop fronts. Although they contrast with their grander neighbours, they make a substantial contribution to the heritage significance of the area.



*West side of Bridge Street
to north of Plessey Road*



*The former Post Office block
Bridge Street/Freehold Street*

- ***Plessey Road***

Leading south off Bridge Street, Plessey Road includes St Cuthbert's Church at its junction with Waterloo Street and the Blyth Plessey Road County First School and school house. The Church, built in buff sandstone between 1884 and 1893 is designed in a free C14 style with its mix of Decorated and Perpendicular fashions. It replaces an C18 church that stood on the site of the current hall. The tower with its castellated parapet and sturdy buttresses make a robust and attractive contribution to the wider townscape. The late C19 school is large and attractive incorporating two gabled wings either side of a central bay which has a mansard roof. It is decorated by details including oriel windows set into pointed stone arches. Sadly the chimneys have disappeared from the enormous stack.



*St Cuthbert's Church
Plessey Road/Waterloo Street*



*Plessey Road County First School
Plessey Road/Percy Street South*

- ***Ridley Street and Tate Street***

Ridley Street was at the heart of the maritime and port related activities that burgeoned along the quayside in the late C19. The only surviving buildings from that period located to the south of Market Street are the Customs House (32 Ridley Street) built in 1880 and its immediate neighbour, the former chandlers/warehouse (30 Ridley Street/8 Tate Street) dating from turn of the century. The brick Customs House is built to a fine neo classic design with twin triangular pediments creating a

balanced front elevation. The heavily modelled dentil courses and deep reveals to the windows create robust texture and interest. The corroded datestone with its royal insignia adds a touch of Baroque to the façade. Unfortunately the first floor windows have been replaced by PVCu inserts. The chandlers/warehouse is a remarkably attractive example of a building type that would have been part of the working life of the area. Its importance is elevated by virtue of its rarity and the restored shopfront located on its north east corner. Built in brick, the east elevation is dominated by a substantial Dutch Gable and large arched windows that create a frontage that was designed to impress.



*The Customs House
Ridley Street/Waterloo Street South*



*Former chandlers and warehouse
Ridley Street/Tate Street*

6.2.2.3 Post-War developments

Post-War developments tend to be scattered throughout the area, primarily infill buildings on cleared sites or related to Highway improvements. The most radical change has been the demolition of the properties that formerly linked Bath Terrace with Bridge Street to make way for the Ridley Avenue/Bridge Street/Wellington Street roundabout. This detached the two areas, completely changing the historic urban form and established townscape. This impact has been compounded by the demolition of the properties between the Steamboat Inn and the Oddfellows Arms to provide a car park, leaving the latter building isolated. The construction of the roundabout at the northern end of the conservation area has had less impact.

At the turn of the C19/C20, buildings developed on cleared sites were designed with some grandeur, the most notable examples being the Harbour Commissioner's Office and the Police Station. Two neighbouring sites at the junction of Plessey Road with Bridge Street have been recently developed without the same flourish, scale, quality of materials and imagination. Historically, exposed gables were constructed in brick. More recently, most gables exposed following clearance and redevelopment have been completely or patch cement rendered that look low cost, diminish the visual quality of the adjacent buildings and

the wider townscape, create maintenance problems and are subject to staining and scarring.



New development on Bridge Street



Rendered gable, Bridge Street

6.2.3 **Materials**

6.2.3.1 **Clay**

The historic buildings in the conservation area are predominantly made out of brick and/or 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, English Garden Wall bond or Flemish Bond. Façade bricks tend to be dark pink/red with some exfoliated orange in Bath Terrace where fine examples of hand made bricks can be found. Examples of rubbed bricks are present in some ornamentation and around window heads where shaped bricks can also be seen. Terracotta is employed sparingly as a method of applying ornamentation. Contrasting bricks are used to provide decoration, such as over the east elevation of St Cuthbert's Church Hall. Some facades have been painted obscuring brick details. There is photographic evidence of clay pantiled roofs being used on some properties on Bridge Street, chimney pots are to be found but in decreasing numbers and clay ridge tiles, some decorated, are present.

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. St Cuthbert's Church is constructed in entirely in stone and the Kings Head has a stone frontage. Stone is used to provide decorative features such as window surrounds, quoins, corbels and pilasters, including the selective use of polished granite. 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 brought into Blyth port as

ballast. Westmorland green slate is occasionally used, such as the Harbour Commissioner's Office. The lower, C18, stages of the Highlight lighthouse are constructed in stone.

6.2.3.3 Timber

Timber is used for the manufacture of window frames, doors and shopfronts. It is invariably painted. Originally joinery survives and appears to be generally well maintained. There are some window replacements in PVCu. Generally, the replacement PVCu window frames are thicker and more angular than the timber ones and are unable to incorporate details such as mouldings, horns and beading. PVCu 'glazing bars' are often strips superimposed onto glazing which have a flat and ephemeral appearance. Furthermore, the replacement windows tend to be placed flush with the face of the building rather than being set back into a reveal losing depth and shadow to the building's architecture. 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 ornamental hoppers on the Police Station to plain, more utilitarian, runs on residential properties. Metal is used for ornamentation, most notably the fretwork on the pavilion roof of the Police Station. Wrought iron and mild steel fences feature throughout the area. Whilst some provide security, such as the Police Station car park, others have a more decorative or boundary marker function, such as around the church grounds

6.2.3.5 Render and paint

Render is used on exposed gables (Para 6.2.2.3 above). 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 in the projecting first floor angled window bay of the Oddfellows Arms. Stained glass by Percy Bacon can be seen in St Cuthbert's Church. Modern materials, such as concrete roof tiles and concrete sills, lintels, quoins and copings are used to replace or replicate the use of traditional, natural, materials such as clay pantiles and stone dressings. Plastic is used on some modern shopfronts.



*Brick work, Customs House,
Regent Street*



*Stone details, Police Station,
Bridge Street*



*Timber dormers, windows and door,
Bath Terrace*



*Metal fretwork, Police Station,
Bridge Street*



*Painted elevation, Quay Inn,
Bridge Street/Brewery Street*



*Coloured glass, Oddfellows Arms,
Bridge Street*

6.3 **Contribution of Spaces**

6.3.1 **Roads and pavements**

The conservation area incorporates a street pattern that precludes any designed historic open space with two exceptions: the churchyard to the east of St Cuthbert's Church and the space at the junction of Bridge Street and Freehold Street. The churchyard served the earlier C18 church and contains graves from that period. The space at the junction of Bridge Street and Freehold Street included a paved area that contained the Boer War Memorial until its relocation to the north end of

Ridley Park (Appendix 4 Map 8). This space has been altered through the construction of Freehold Street car park and the formation of a formal entrance incorporating a gateway feature. The memorial site is now enclosed by a wall and fence with some boundary landscaping.

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. The area now displays an inconsistent mixture of pavement treatments with Yorkstone used as an attractive feature material, notably to the south of the Harbour Commissioner's Office, concrete flags of varying sizes, concrete block paving, poured concrete and macadam. Some areas of flagging have become dirty, uneven and cracked with temporary concrete and macadam repairs. Granite and whinstone kerbs are still used throughout the area, both as pavement edges and as a feature material.

Bridge Street is a through route for buses, cars and lorries approaching the town centre from the south and tends to be heavily trafficked. However, in spite the volume of vehicles, there is little signage leaving the area remarkably free of clutter. The street furniture along Bridge Street has been selected with care to reflect the heritage significance of the area. It includes decorative street lighting and robust metal bollards. However, modern additions including the large CCTV column to the north of the Police Station and the security barriers leading into its car park are unsightly and disruptive. Beyond Bridge Street, the furniture varies with metal and concrete lighting columns supporting a variety of tops.



*Bridge Street c.1900 showing flags,
stone kerbs and use of setts*



*.Modern use of Yorkstone,
Bridge Street/Plessey Road*

6.3.2 **Landscape**

Landscaping threads its way throughout the area. The most significant landscaping occurs in the churchyard and the church grounds where maturing trees provide a substantial and attractive setting to St

Cuthbert's. Planting has formed part of some recent highway and car parking schemes where junctions have been closed and boundaries shaped creating new spaces. Some of this planting cuts across the historic grain of development, closing down historic views and routes.

Bath Terrace has a combination of front boundary walls and hedges with a grass verge along part of the pavement. It is probable that the original design incorporated wrought iron fencing fixed into a low stone coping and supported by stone gate piers.



Trees in St Cuthbert's churchyard



Hedges in Bath Terrace

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. There are no neutral areas in the conservation area.

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 clearance of built-up areas to create large gaps resulting in a fragmented layout, perforated street frontage and views over backlands.
- Some poorly designed infill development.
- the loss original architectural details such as chimney stacks and chimney pots.
- The loss of original shopfronts.
- Poorly positioned blocks of landscaping that cut across the historic layout and grain of the area.
- Maintenance of footpaths

6.4.3 ***Condition and vacancy***

The overall condition of properties in the area appears to be relatively sound with few obvious signs of vacancy. It is possible that some upper floors are unused, but this does not appear to impact upon the condition of buildings.

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 amended⁴. The conservation area was designated in 1979. Since then changes have taken place that precipitate a review. The suggested changes are a consequence of alterations to the layout pattern following the demolition of old buildings and the development of cleared sites together with changes in the way that we perceive importance of our heritage assets. The boundary review takes into consideration national guidance which recommends that the following issues should be considered⁵:

- 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 9):

7.1.1 The removal of 99 Bridge Street/1a Bath Lane

This modern property, the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, replaces the former C18 vicarage, a locally listed building, that has been demolished since the designation of the conservation area. The new building is detached from Bath Terrace and does not contribute to the heritage significance of the area.

⁴ *Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, s.69(2)*

⁵ *Conservation Area Management: A Practical Guide*, English Historic Town's Forum, 1998, p13

7.1.2 ***The inclusion of Ridley Park***

Ridley Park, located to the south of Bath Terrace, is the Town Park. Originally an area of waste land, it was used in the mid to late C19 as a gathering area for miners picnics, fairs, circuses and meetings. The land for the park was donated by Viscount Ridley and was laid out by the Council's Park's Superintendent according to well-tried C19 principles. The design included the provision of privacy and tranquillity by screening the boundary of the park with a strong perimeter of trees and shrubs. This shielded views of adjacent railway lines from the park and provided protection from winds off the sea. Sporting facilities such as bowling and tennis courts were located away from the central core of the park which was visible from winding paths. A bandstand was positioned on the north/south path and a model boat lake located in the lower half of a large open lawn. A lodge was built at the main entrance off Ridley Avenue. The fourteen acre park was opened in 1904.

Changes have taken place over the last century and a major restoration scheme has been designed and started on site. The alterations and modifications have not altered the general shape and layout of the park. The lake was reduced in size in 1909; gates, tennis courts, pavilions and a putting green were added in 1923; and the Second World War memorial was built and the memorials to the great War and the Boer War relocated to the current site in the mid C20. The bandstand was removed in 1962 and replaced by the Round Table Rose Garden. Features in the park include the Lodge (Park House), built to the design of Goulding and Son in 1903, with new and unfortunate PVCu windows; the bust of Lord Ridley by George Skee at the Ridley Avenue entrance; the Ridley Avenue entrance gates and remains of original light fittings on the gate posts; the War Memorials; the walks and landscaping.

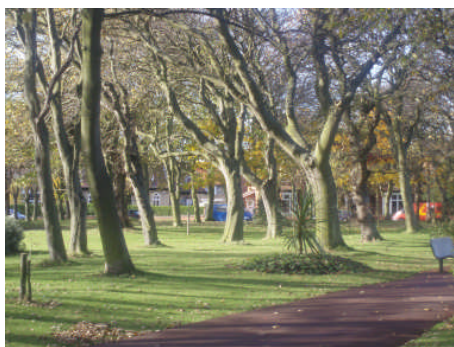
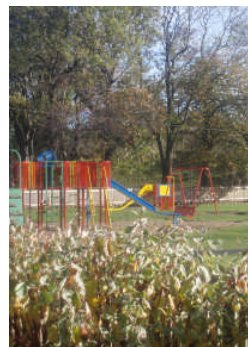
In addition to its historic merit, the park is of immense social and community importance and held in great esteem by the town. It is a place of relaxation, tranquillity, recreation and social engagement. Its inclusion in the conservation area will reinforce its heritage significance and its links to the late Victorian/Edwardian development of the town.



Ridley Park c. 1910



Ridley Park c. 1910

*The Park Lodge**Mature landscape, north end**The Ridley Statue**The War Memorials**A new play area*

7.1.3 ***The inclusion of 1 to 9 Park View.***

This group of quite grand inter war houses sits opposite the northern boundary of Ridley Park. The properties are large and incorporate a collection of features typical of the inter war period including full height bays, veranda porches and 'Tudoresque' gables. They are built in red brick with some render. Front gardens are contained by brick walls and hedges. They provide an attractive setting to the park and are good examples of large early C20 century houses.

*2 and 3 Park View**8 and 9 Park View*

7.1.4 ***The inclusion of the west side of Bath Terrace***

The length of properties located directly opposite the C18 and C19 east side were built before the outbreak of World War II and are probably

contemporary with Park View (Para 7.1.2 above). They display a range of similar stylistic themes with bays, veranda porches and half-timbered gables. Interestingly, the stone boundary wall to the front of the tennis court and number is probably the original C19 field wall that defined the rural edge of Blyth town. The inclusion of the properties will protect the integrity of Bath Terrace, remnants of Blyth's C19 rural fringe and examples of large early C20 century houses.

7.1.5 The inclusion of the 'Rocket House' to the east of Bath Terrace

As mentioned in Para 6.2.2.1 above, the Life Saving Volunteers Company built and occupied the stone and brick building located immediately to the east of Bath Terrace in the 1880's. Known as the 'Rocket Brigade House' it ceased function in 1959 but still survives with original windows. The building marks an important period in the maritime history of Blyth and the commitment of the community to help those whose lives were imperilled. Its inclusion in the conservation area complements the historic role of the neighbouring Highlight lighthouse and enriches the heritage significance of the wider area.



West side of Bath Terrace



*The Rocket Brigade House,
Back Bath Terrace*

7.1.5.1 6 Plessey Road and 2 to 6 Sussex Street

This block of late C19 corner properties was built when Market Street reduced in width following the development of the Market Place to the east of Waterloo Road. Market Street, now Plessey Road, became an access road to the quayside and its related port activities. The properties were constructed as houses with ground floor shops. They are the sole residential survivors in the area from this period, have rarity value and offer a glimpse of the late C19 urban form of the port. The shopfronts survive and have been sensitively repaired. The corbel carvings are a feature of late C19/early C20 shops in parts of Blyth. Carved by shipwrights, they illustrate the goods sold in the shops – in the case of 2 Sussex Street the split peapod suggesting a greengrocer's store.

7.1.5.2 21 Sussex Street

This is the early C20 former bonded warehouse at the junction of Sussex Street with Quay Road. It is a large imposing brick building that was attached to the former brewery. Three storeys high and with a double pitched roof, its design is relatively austere with little ornamentation other than the brick pilasters that contain the recessed window bays. However, the simplicity of the design probably reflects the style of building that would have proliferated throughout the area. The warehouse has been converted to apartments and the adjacent, vacant, site developed to match the scale of its neighbour.



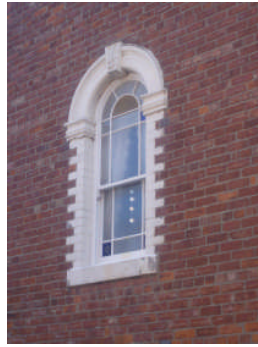
Fascia details 2, 4&6 Sussex Street



*Former bonded warehouse,
21 Sussex Street*

7.1.5.3 The inclusion of 1 to 31 Forster Street and 9 to 29 Wellington Street

These two lengths of terraces built in the last quarter of the C19 were sandwiched between St Cuthbert's Church, the school and the rope works/rope walk and, in effect, defined the urban boundary of Blyth. They have been altered with new PVCu windows, some inserts altering the size and pattern of the traditional fenestration. However, the properties still retain their fine double entrance door surrounds with decorated pilasters and projecting hoods. Number 27 retains its original six panel front door. The terraces provide an historic setting to both the church and the school and an important interface between the commercial heart of late C19 Blyth and its emerging grid-iron residential hinterland.

*Forster Street**Waterloo 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.
- Ensure that all future highway work, including maintenance works, will preserve and enhance the character of the area.
- Encourage, through the planning process, the reinstatement of missing elements of historic shopfronts and the replacement of inappropriate modern shopfronts.
- Encourage, through the planning process, the reinstatement of missing architectural features and the reversal of inappropriate changes to residential properties, including the reinstatement of boundary walls and railings.
- Encourage the re-use of vacant floorspace to create a sustainable future for properties and introduce new activities into the area.
- Ensure that the regeneration proposals for Ridley Park reflect the design and landscape principles that determined its original character and appearance.
- Prepare development briefs for vacant sites to ensure that new designs reflect the heritage character, appearance and layout pattern of 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 Plan⁶:

- 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
- 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

⁶ Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas, English Heritage 2006

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 relate to conservation areas. 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 conservation area. 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.

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 sustaining attractive and buoyant environments, 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 Heritages 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 heritage areas.

Appendix 2: Other heritage designations.

Listed Buildings (Map 10)

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. The protection afforded by this legislation applies to the whole of a listed building and any structure attached to it and land within its curtilage. The following buildings in the Heritage Conservation Area are listed, all grade II.

- The Boathouse Tavern, Bridge Street.
- The Harbour Commissioner's Office, Bridge Street
- The Kings Head Hotel, 85 Bridge Street
- The Police Station 72 to 76 Bridge Street
- 5 to 13 (inclusive) Bath Terrace
- The Highlight, back of Bath Terrace

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 Heritage Conservation Area are included on the local list:

- 62 to 64 (inclusive) Bridge Street
- The Steamboat Inn, 87 Bridge Street
- Oddfellows Arms, 91 Bridge Street
- 1 to 4 (inclusive) Bath Terrace
- 14 to 17 (inclusive) Bath Terrace
- Customs House, 32 Ridley Street
- Warehouse, 30 Ridley Street/8 Tate Street
- St Cuthbert's Church Hall, Waterloo 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 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 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 the Heritage 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; 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 will 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 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 would only be acceptable in a conservation area where they form part of an integrated design of high

quality and are not considered to harm the appearance or character of that area.

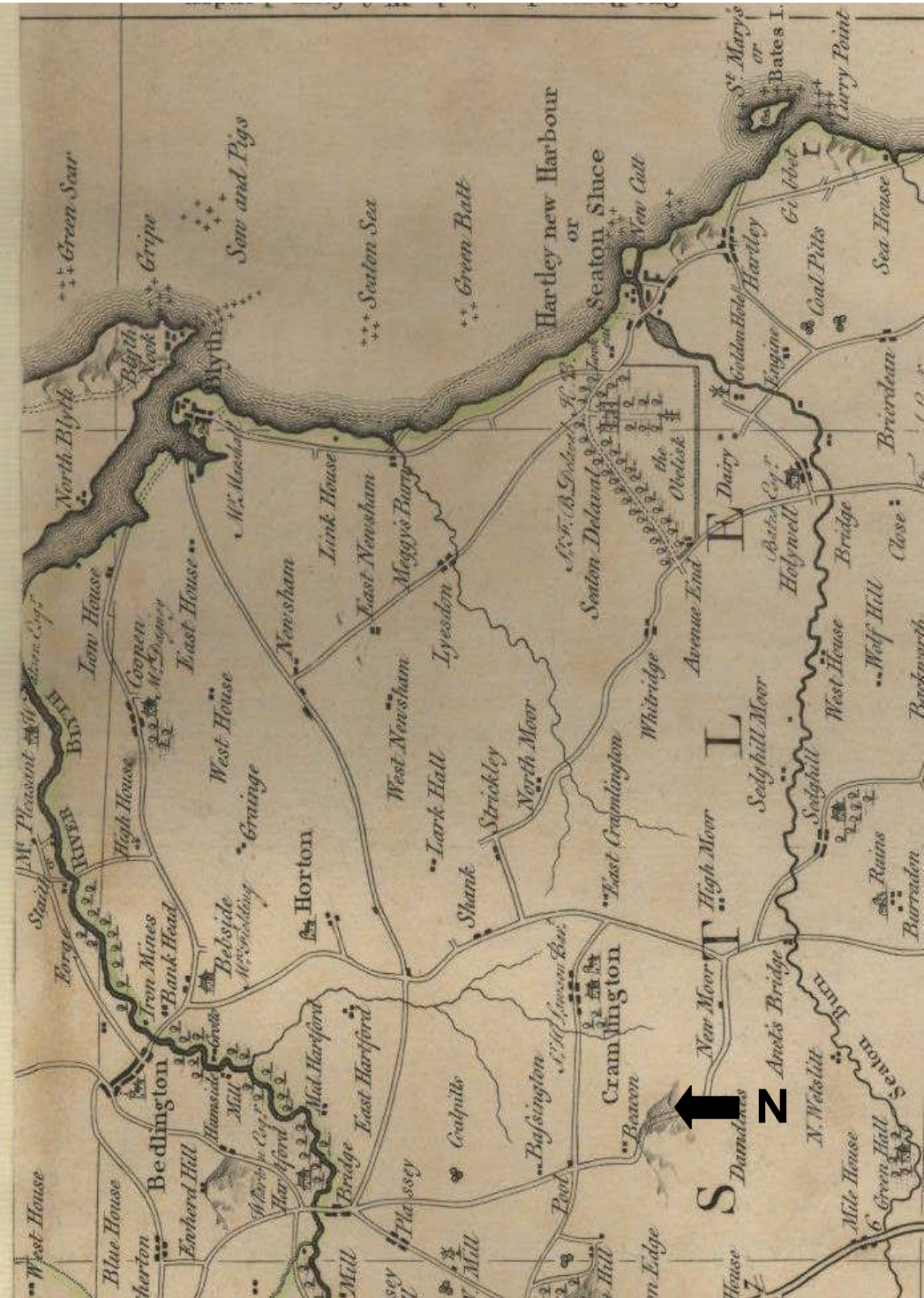
National conservation guidance

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.

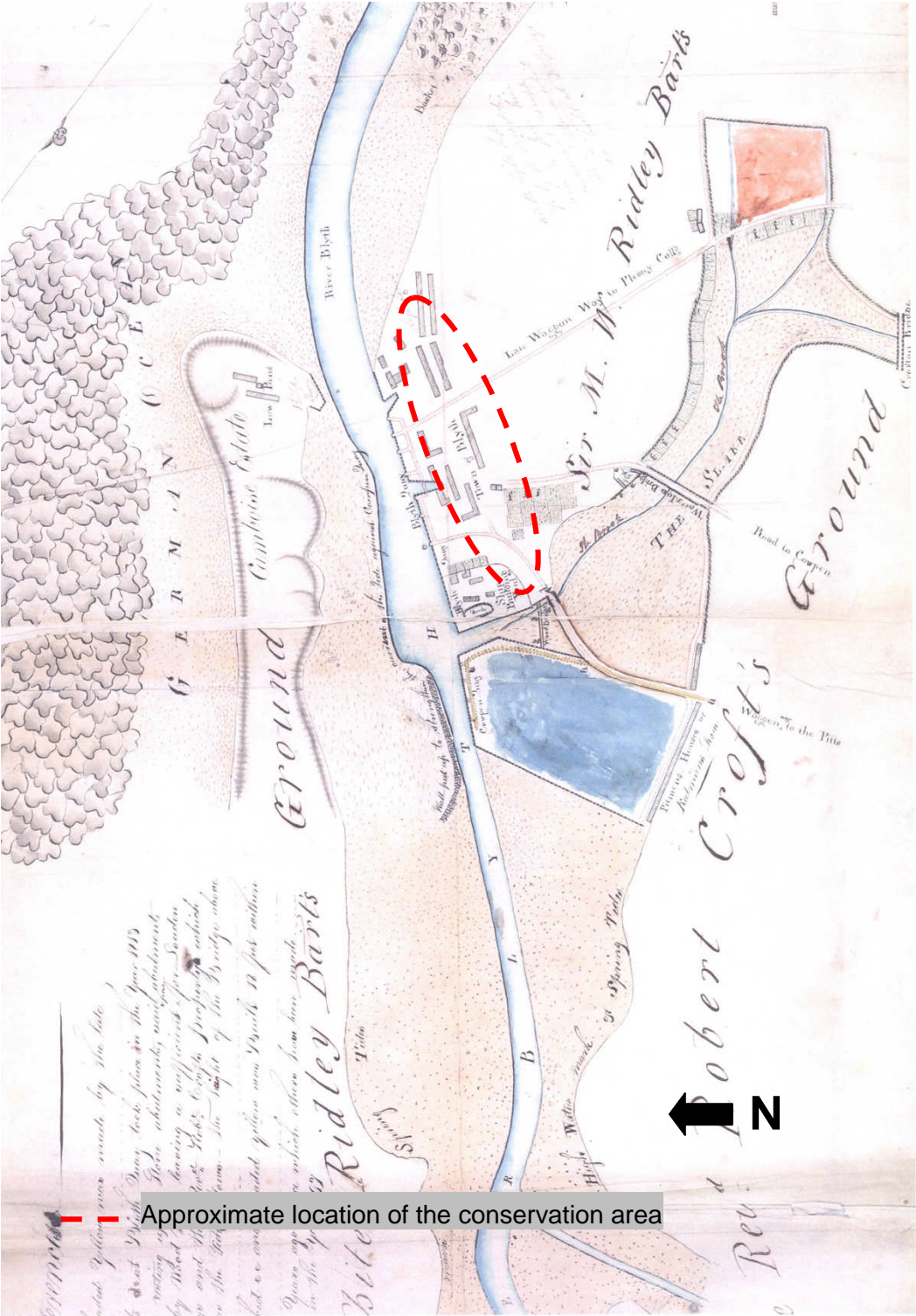
Future Legislation

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 recommended 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 considered the potential for the unification of consent regimes.

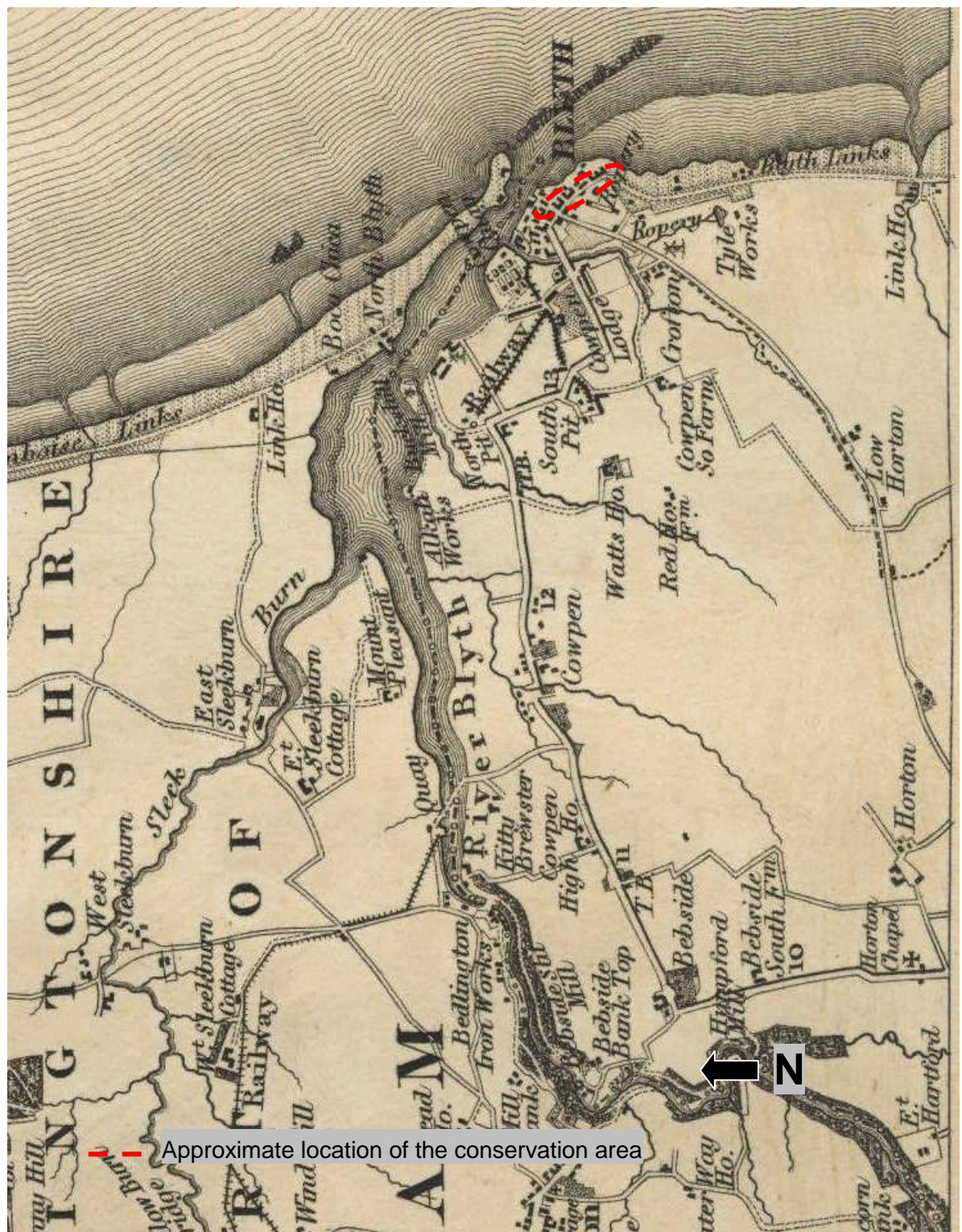
Appendix 4: Maps



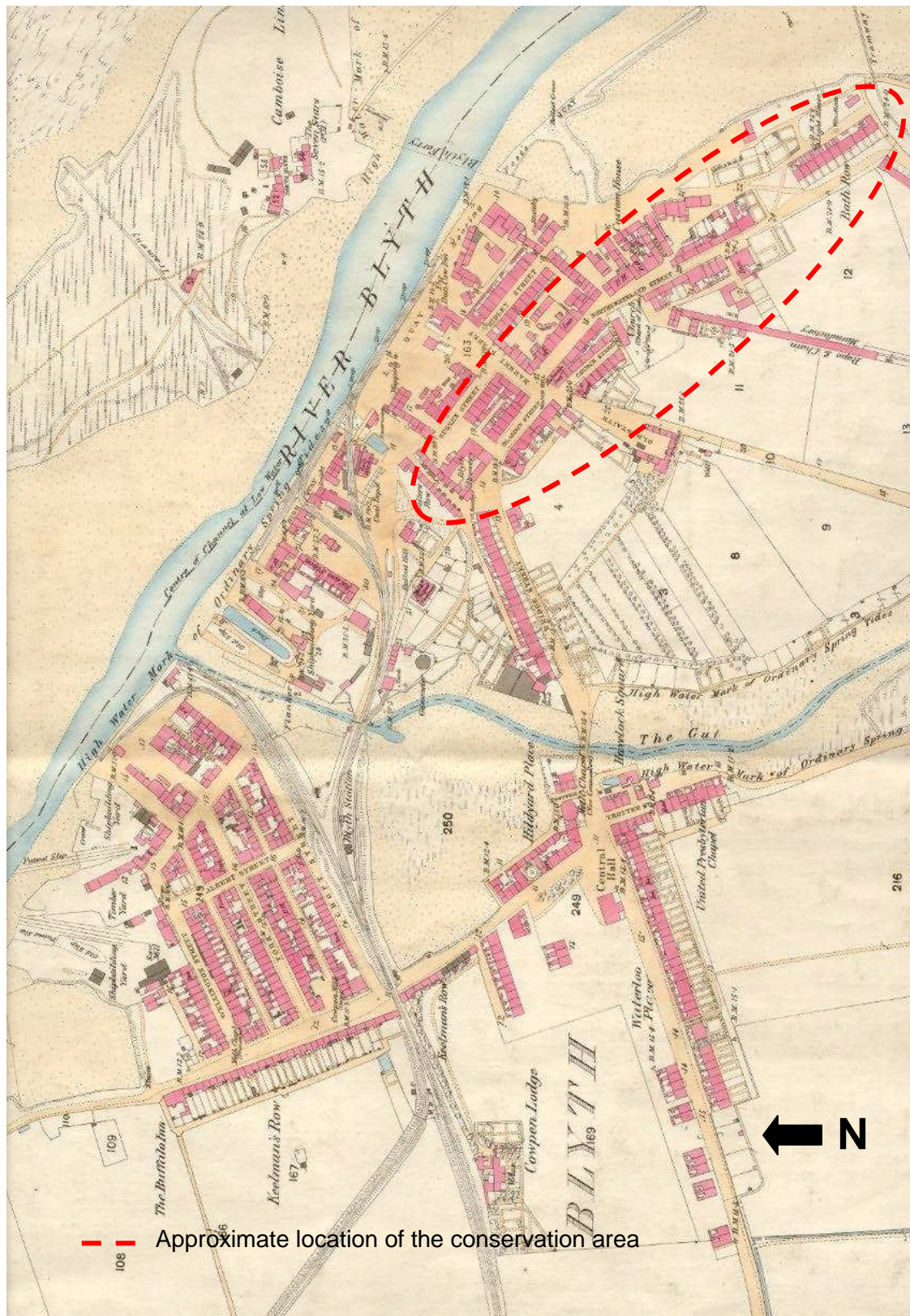
Map 2: Armstrong's map of Northumberland 1769



Map 3: 1819 Map of Blyth



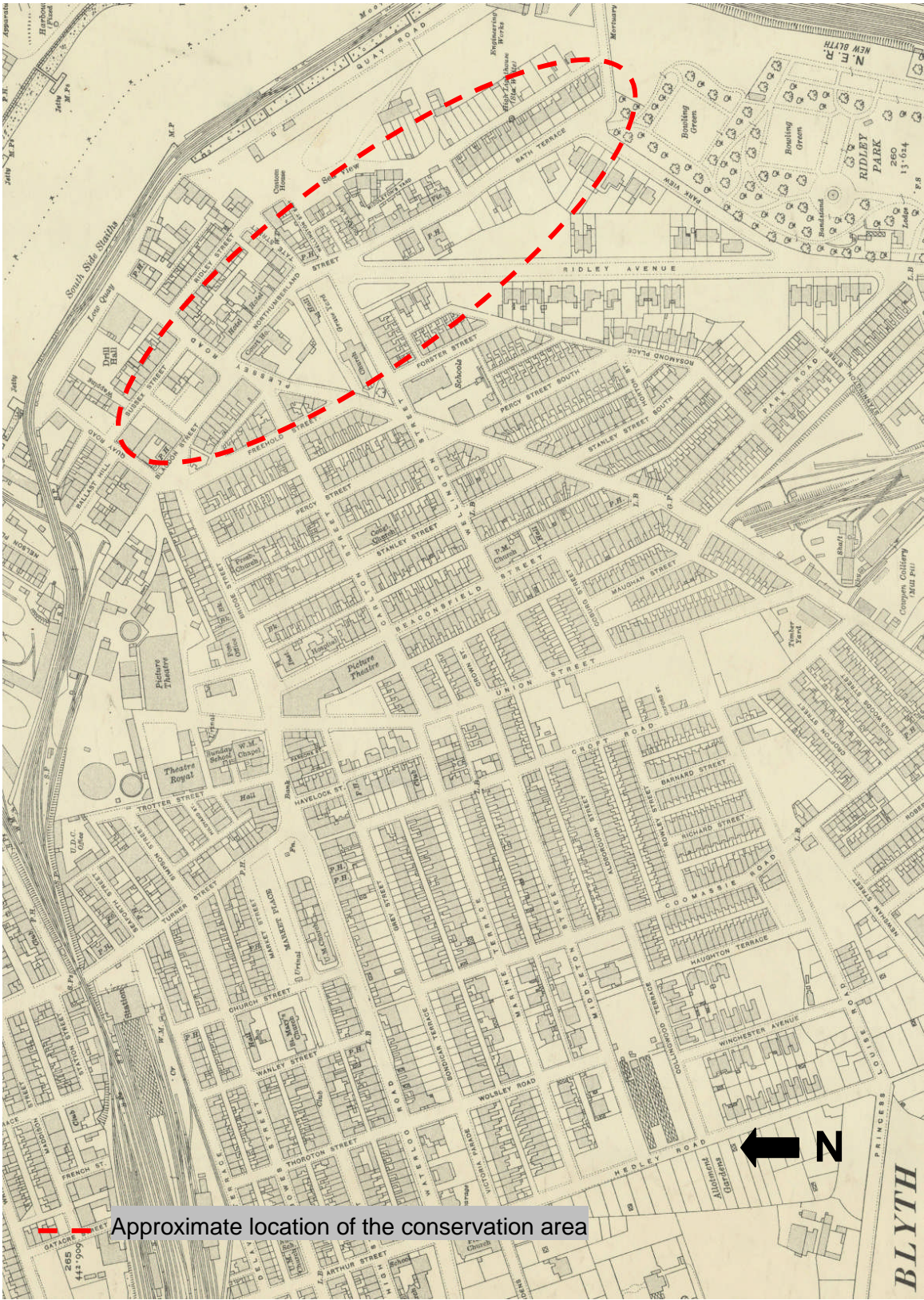
Map 4: Greenwoods Map 1828



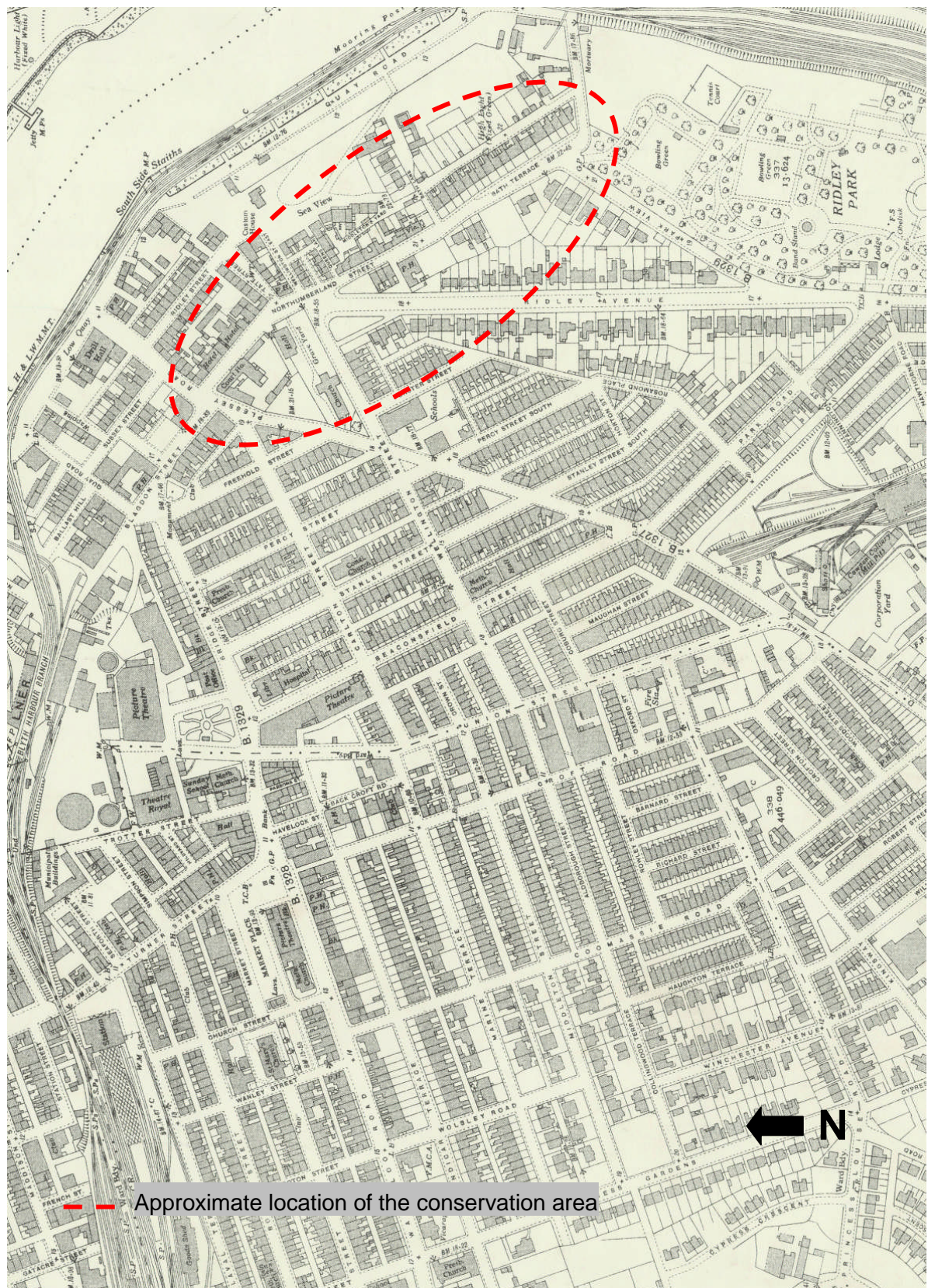
Map 5: Ordnance Survey 1860 Edition



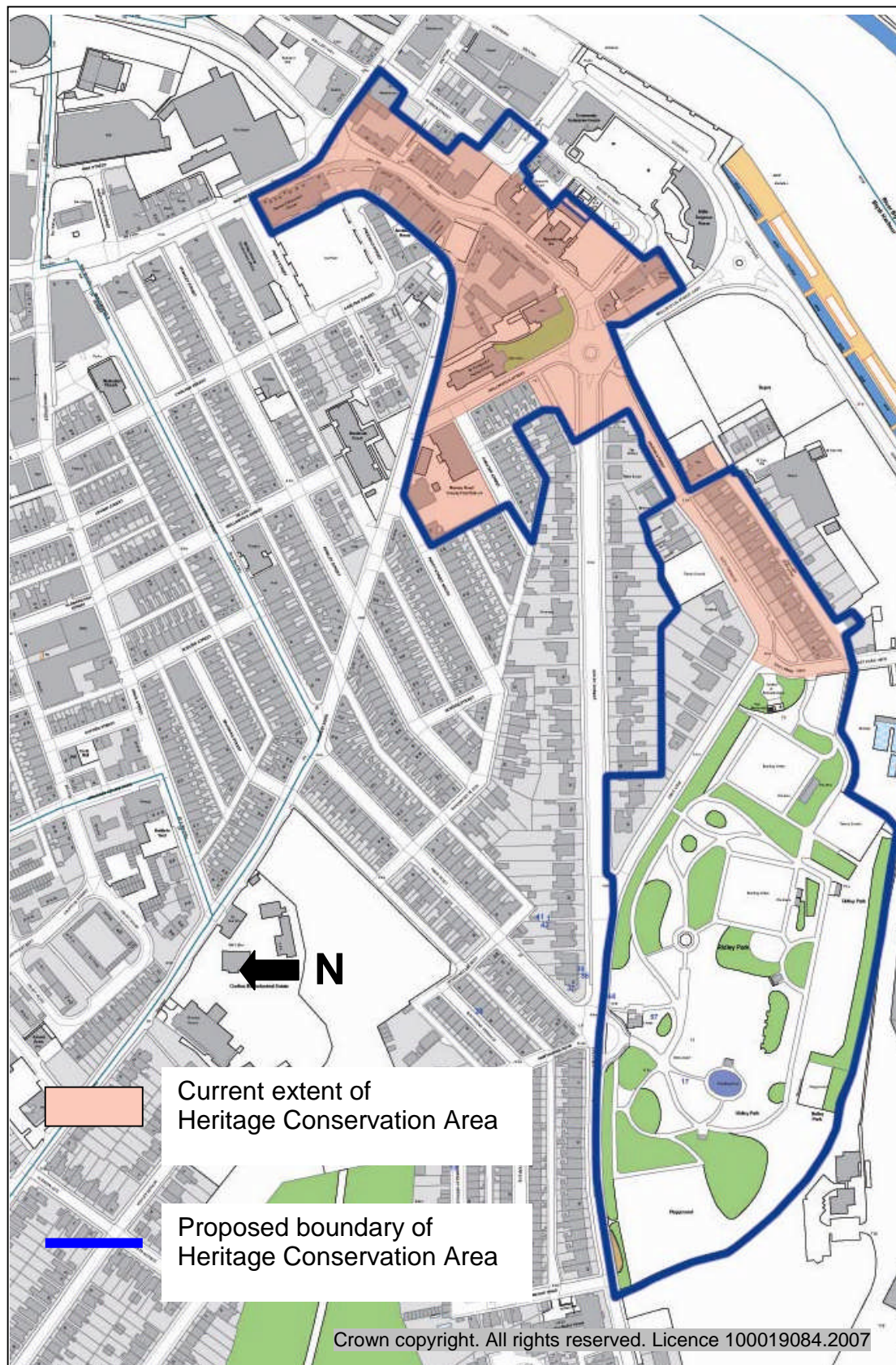
Map 6: Ordnance Survey 1897 Edition



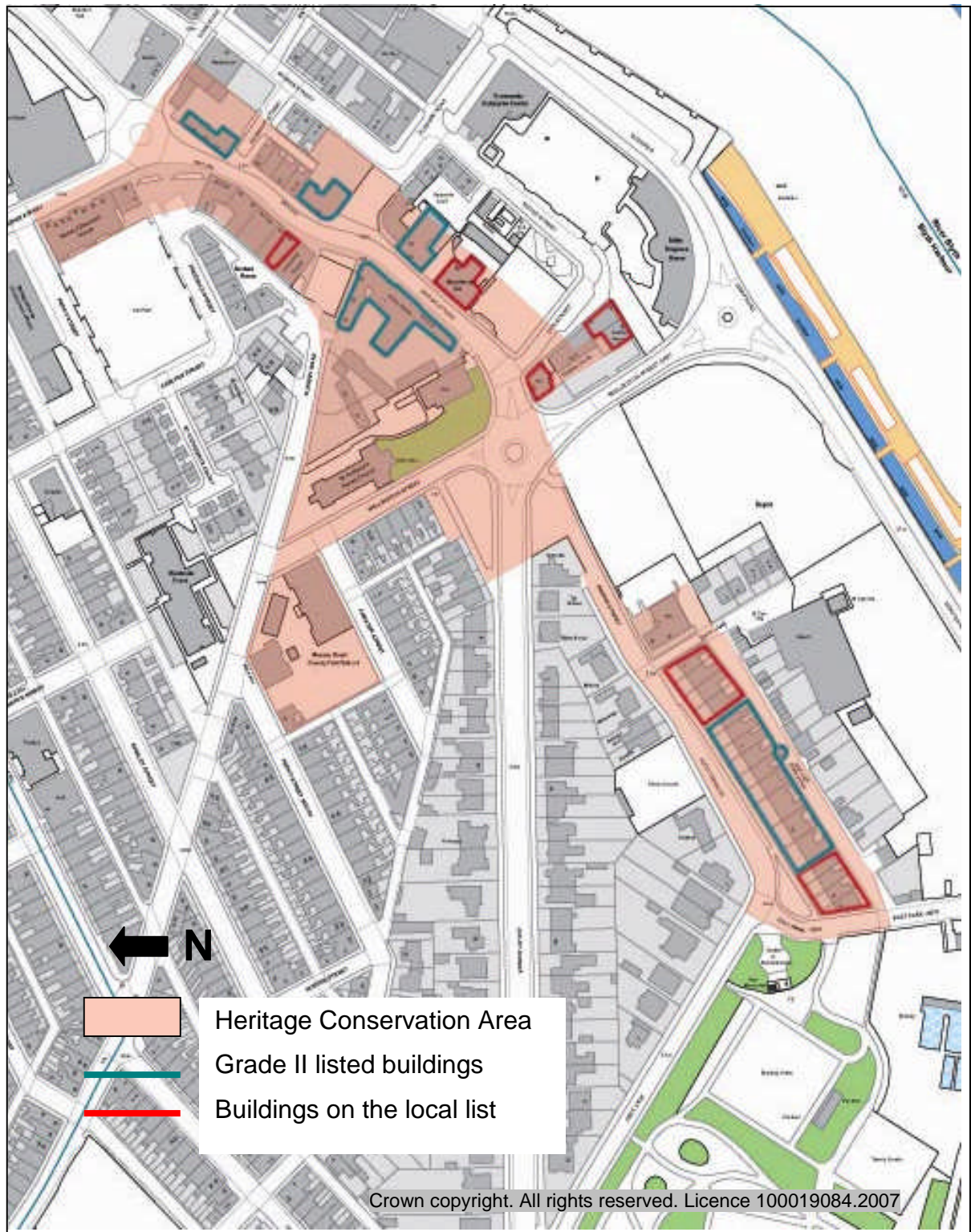
Map 7: Ordnance Survey 1922 Edition



Map 8: Ordnance Survey 1938 Edition



Map 9: Proposed changes to the Heritage Conservation Area boundary



Map 10: Grade II listed buildings and locally listed buildings

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