

Lancaster Conservation Area Appraisal

## Character Area 2. The Castle

March 2013



## 3.2 Character Area 2. The Castle

### 3.2.1. Definition of Special Interest

*"The Castle area, dominated by Castle and Priory church, represents the historic heart of historic Lancaster. It is rich in the archaeology of the Roman and early medieval settlement and the architecture of the medieval and Georgian periods. Today the area retains important religious, civic and cultural functions, maintaining its symbolic role. The dramatic topography of this area reinforces this importance, creating views to and from Castle Hill which define character through central Lancaster."*



View east from Castle Hill

### 3.2.2. Topography and Views

The Castle character area corresponds with Castle Hill. Its focus is the Castle and Priory Church that sit atop the hill, whilst the area also includes surrounding lower-lying streets and open space. This is the highest land in the Conservation Area. It has commanding views over the rest of the City and further afield and, accordingly, the Castle and Priory Church can be seen from many points. Key views from Castle Hill are north-west to the River Lune, and further to Morecambe Bay, and eastwards over the City with the Ashton

Memorial in the background. The steep change in level from the hilltop to the lower-lying streets at the edge of this character area is one of its defining characteristics (especially on the steeply descending streets of Castle Hill and Church Street).

### 3.2.3. Current Activities and Uses

The Castle precinct is remarkable in the continuity of its use. The Castle was used as a prison from the 17th century to as recently as 2011, and a Crown Court still operates in the Castle. The Priory Church of St Mary is the key Anglican church in the City. These buildings still represent the symbolic, religious and civic heart of the City (the Cathedral on St Peter's Road is a Roman Catholic Cathedral).

Land to the north of the castle precinct remains as open public space: Vicarage Fields (south of the railway line) and Quay Meadow (north of the former railway line). This land overlies the Roman fort and has never been developed; it was once the glebe land of the Priory (cultivable land owned by the church). Today it is rather under-used as informal recreation space.

The Georgian townhouses that immediately surround the Castle were built as high status houses, close to the seat of power and occupying the highest land in the city. Today they are still desirable as homes. Although Meeting House Lane is busy as the main route into the city centre from the station, most of this area has a tranquil atmosphere, set apart from the city centre.

The lower-lying streets house a mix of uses, consistent with their edge-of-centre location. Several of the Georgian houses on Castle Hill and Church Street have now been converted for professional services (including a small Georgian warehouse on Castle Hill). This is also the case on Meeting House Lane, which represents a transition from residential use at the western end to more retail/leisure and office uses at its eastern end. Notable uses on the northern side of this road include the historic Friends Meeting House and the Storey Institute, now an arts centre (Storey Creative Industries Centre).

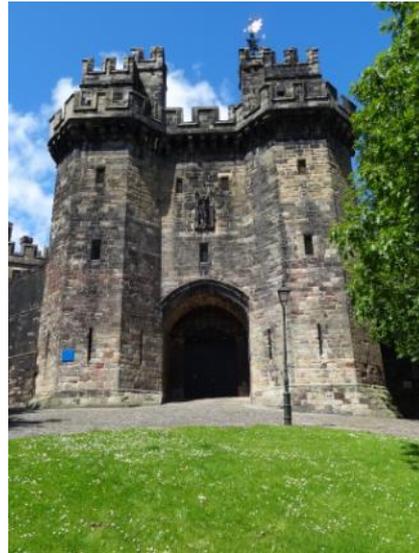


*Railway station, built 1844*

The railway station is also within this area, at the western end of Meeting House Lane, with the north-south railway cutting marking the western edge of the character area. The location of the station results in a significant amount of footfall on Meeting House Lane, as people travel between the Station and the City Centre.

### 3.2.4. Historical Development

This character area contains the area of the Roman fort, occupied and rebuilt from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD until the 5<sup>th</sup> century; the east gate of the fort, in the area of the Judges Lodgings, led to the main road through the Roman town, aligned with Church Street. The abandoned fort was chosen as the location for the city's two key historic buildings: the Castle and the Priory. An early Christian community built the first church, probably in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; the Priory was founded in 1094. Around the same time, the castle was built, on the bluff overlooking the river. This developed into an important strategic base during the medieval period; the keep is largely 12<sup>th</sup> century and the imposing gatehouse dates from c.1400, built by Henry IV. The Assizes courts were held in the medieval hall and most of the Castle used as a prison. The Priory Church was largely rebuilt after 1431 when it was taken over by the Convent of Syon; most the current building is late 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century. After the Dissolution, the building became a Parish Church. The open area overlying the north side of the fort was never built on, but Speed's map of 1610 shows the medieval layout of Castle and Priory, with houses lining China Street and Church Street.



*The Castle gatehouse, c1400*

As the town prospered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the area around the Castle was gradually developed; by 1684, a Quaker Meeting House had been built on the site of the present building on what was then called Kiln Lane. A Friends' school opened in 1690, attached to the Meeting House. Lancaster Grammar School was endowed in 1492 (a school is recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century), with premises to the west of the Castle. A few wealthier people started building houses in stone, such as Thomas Covell who built a stone town house at the top of Church Street in around 1625, reflecting his position as Keeper of the Castle and Mayor (later The Judges' Lodgings). The Castle was notorious in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century for the trials of alleged witches; eight women and two men from Pendle were tried at the Castle in 1612 and executed on Lancaster Moor. George Fox founder of the Quakers was imprisoned there in the 1660s. In the Civil War the Castle was taken by the Parliamentarians in 1643; it subsequently had no defensive role.

Following the boom in maritime trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Castle Park became a fashionable address with large town houses, fronting spacious gardens. Gillows, manufacturers of fine mahogany furniture built an office, workshop and showroom at No.1 Castle Hill, in 1770. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, improvements were made to the Priory and the Castle; Liverpool architect, Henry Sephton rebuilt the Priory tower in 1759. At the Castle, a new Governor's house and

male prison were added, both designed by Thomas Harrison. A new Crown Court and Shire Hall were built at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, also designed by Harrison in neo-Gothic style, creating an imposing complex.



*Gillow & Co.'s premises, 1 Castle Hill, built 1770*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Castle was again improved with a new women's prison by Joseph Gandy in 1816-9 and further cells added later. Thomas Covell's house was adapted for the Judges' Lodgings in 1828. Architects Paley and Austin used a former townhouse on Castle Park as offices from 1871. A Mechanics' Institute was built on St Mary Street and later on the corner of Meeting House Lane and Castle Hill. This was re-built in 1887-91 and named the Storey Institute, before being extended in 1905. The area had a mix of uses alongside residential, with Shrigley and Hunt's workshop at No.23 Castle Hill from the 1870s. The Lancaster and Carlisle Railway built the Tudor-style Castle station in 1846. Buildings have been extended during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with a house for the station master built on the east side of the tracks on Meeting House Lane, sometime before 1877.

### **3.2.5. Archaeological Potential**

The archaeological potential of this area is very high; Castle Hill is the site of the Roman fort, courtyard house and bath house, the medieval Castle and pre-Conquest and medieval the Priory. The area is rich in Georgian buildings and gardens. Cellars in most buildings limit below-ground potential within buildings, but there are plenty of open, undeveloped areas in this area, including Vicarage Fields and Quay Meadows.

Prehistoric archaeology has some potential; Palaeolithic and Neolithic material has been found, although not from stratified or recorded contexts. The potential for Roman material is high, demonstrated by excavations. Research work has concentrated on the higher land of the Vicarage Fields, with some investigation in gardens behind Castle Park and but little on Quay Meadows. Early remains survive beneath the castle yard and assessment works at 27 Castle Hill indicate that the Roman fort may be much more extensive than previously thought. Other works and antiquarian reports, such as at the Judges Lodgings and by the station, hint lost or hidden remains below extant buildings and streets. The excavated Bath House and Wery Wall have recently been consolidated, but there has been no modern excavation in this area.

There is a strong likelihood of early Priory structures surviving near the Old Vicarage, along with medieval remains of the castle and early settlement, which may be particularly important for understanding more about the early settlement of the town, in the post-Roman period.

There is high potential for non-invasive investigation of the structure of the Priory and Castle; as their archaeology has not been fully recorded. This is urgent at the castle, since the prison closed, and the complex needs a new future; and decisions on alterations should be informed by a thorough understanding of its archaeology and architecture through proper recording and analysis. The building archaeology of the Judges' Lodgings also has potential; the first house on this site may date from at least 1314, when reference is made to the construction of a large house for Sir Robert de Holland, which may be the 'Olde Hall' marked on Speed's map of 1610, rebuilt by Thomas Covell. Timber-framed fabric survives from an earlier house.

Very little investigation has been undertaken of the Georgian and Victorian buildings within this part of the Conservation Area, referred to in White's 'Buildings of Georgian Lancaster' (1997), and it is possible that they too contain remains of earlier structures. Of note because of its unusual use is 23 Castle Hill,

the former Shrigley and Hunt premises. In the rear yard of this 18<sup>th</sup> century house is the stump of a warehouse whose basement contains a set of annealing ovens, used in stained glass manufacture; this unusual survival is designated as a Scheduled Monument.

### 3.2.6. Buildings and Architectural Quality

Building materials in this area are almost entirely of local sandstone; 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings are generally faced with ashlar to the front, although rubble stone is used for rear elevations. The Well Tower of the castle contains significant amounts of red sandstone. Local stone slate roofs have survived occasionally and these should be preserved, most roofs are laid with Cumbrian slates in diminishing courses. A few buildings are finished with a rough cast render, a vernacular material, including the Friends Meeting House which retains a stone slate roof, and the coach house next to 20 Castle Park.



*Friends Meeting House, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century*

Most of the buildings in this area, apart from the landmark Castle, Priory and Judges' Lodgings, were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as private houses for the town's middle classes, with a few cottages for working people. Warehouses on Castle Hill are a reminder of the city's mercantile past. The city's changing commercial requirements resulted in some houses being adapted for other uses. The predominant character and architectural style of domestic property is Georgian. 18<sup>th</sup> century town houses are generally three storeys and up to five bays in width, built as

continuous frontages, but of individual design. Later examples are quite austere, with earlier 18<sup>th</sup> century houses more richly decorated. Paneled doors and sliding sash windows are set in moulded stone architraves, with raised quoins and moulded cornices to the eaves. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced houses are generally plainer, often without window architraves. There are also some simple mid-18<sup>th</sup> century two-storey vernacular cottages, one of which is now a museum. The 19<sup>th</sup> century brought a variety of revival styles; the former vicarage built in 1848 is in Elizabethan style. Paley, Austen & Paley's Storey Institute is Neo-Jacobean with shaped gables and a corner turret. The several phases of the railway station are Elizabethan-style with the letters 'LC' in cartouches, mullioned windows, gables and tall chimneys. 20<sup>th</sup> century development uses a variety of styles and materials; the new vicarage behind the Priory is in a contemporary style.



*18th Century houses and a warehouse, Castle Hill*

Buildings are generally built up to the pavement but there are some exceptions on Castle Park, which are set back from the pavement with railings or a cobbled yard in front, and the former vicarage which is set within grounds next to the Priory. The Castle walls rise in places directly off the street or are set in green spaces. The Storey is set back behind a low stone wall with moulded swept copings and iron gates; at the eastern end, the wall has balustrade panels. In response to the topography of the area,

some houses have steps up to their entrances, with iron railings. The rooflines vary depending on the topography and building uses; houses on Castle Park have a uniform scale with horizontal eaves, but on Castle Hill buildings step up the hill, punctuated by gabled warehouses.



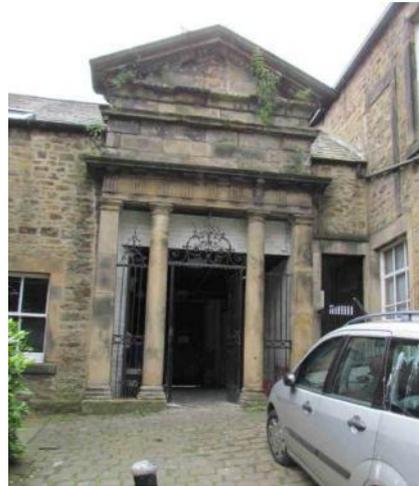
Georgian town houses, Castle Park



Storey Institute, 1887-91

High status buildings such as the Castle, St Mary's Church and the Storey are large scale, designed to stand out above the prevailing low rise of the city. Some alleys provide access to the rear of former burgage plots and allow glimpses of the much plainer rear of some properties. The Storey Gardens lie behind walls off Meeting House Lane with access from Castle Park through a portico moved from Fenton Cawthorne House (1770) on Meeting House Lane, after it was demolished in 1921. The intact medieval street layout and hilly topography provides framed views of buildings, and the green spaces of the Castle precinct provide a fine

setting for the Castle and the Georgian houses of Castle Park.



18<sup>th</sup> century portico to Storey Gardens, re-built here in 1921



20 Castle Park, built 1720 for the Birdsworth family

Architectural details relate to particular periods of architecture: Georgian domestic buildings are distinguished by moulded window and door surrounds, sliding sash windows, panelled timber doors with fanlights and pediments, eaves cornices, quoins, and gable end chimney stacks. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some small-paned Georgian sashes were replaced with plate glass sashes. Later 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings feature more elaborate details taken from pre-Georgian design; hoodmoulds, gables with finials, strapwork panels, oriels, turrets and bay windows. Warehouses are characterised by strong vertical emphasis, with functional loading slots and gabled canopies. Most buildings have a variety of cast-iron rainwater goods

which should be preserved as far as possible.



*Timber panelled door and transom light*

Changing uses are reflected in some distinctive details; the Shrigley & Hunt premises at No. 23 Castle Hill have tiling to the entrance incorporating the letters S & H and dormer windows to the roof. Some former warehouses retain gables and full-height loading slots but new uses have introduced large areas of glazing to loading slots. Glazed doors were inserted at the former Gillow premises, as part of restoration after a fire in 1985. On Meeting House Lane, the Storey Institute was built for educational purposes but has recently been successfully refurbished as a centre for creative industries.



*Tiling at Shrigley & Hunt's stained glass premises, 23 Castle Hill*

### 3.2.7. Assessment of Condition

Most of the property is well maintained and in good condition. However, there is some damage to the historic gates at the entrance to the Storey Gardens and the Tasting Gardens were closed at the time of writing due to vandalism, due to re-open in the summer of 2012. The station bridges have a rather neglected appearance.

Many buildings retain their historic fenestration and stonework intact but sliding sash windows in a few unlisted buildings have been replaced by uPVC or other non-traditional windows. Some roofs have been replaced with concrete tiles. Non-traditional doors, windows and roof coverings erode the appearance and character of historic buildings; Georgian architecture is particularly sensitive to changes to external details.

This area represents a tangible link with key events in the city's history; plaques on buildings provide a discreet level of historical information, but additional interpretation panels could help visitors to appreciate the area's heritage particularly on the site of the Roman fort and Priory precinct, and around the Castle and Priory Church. Adapting the Castle for new uses now that the prison use has ceased offers an opportunity to revitalise the area, improve public access and attract tourism.

### 3.2.8. Urban Form

The topography defines the street form to a large extent in this area. The alignment of streets such as Castle Hill follow contours (although there is a steep descent). Within this street pattern, which dates from the medieval period, the buildings are on narrow plots and built to form a continuous street frontage. Georgian, and later, buildings follow this template. Buildings here are mostly three-storey. The much larger massing of the Castle and Priory dominate the surrounding buildings. The railway station is surprisingly modest given its use, and somewhat hidden. On the north side of Meeting House Lane the steep topography has resulted in a large retaining wall and a significant reduction in the extent of development, with much of the land behind the wall being occupied by the

Storey Gardens. At the eastern end of this road, the Storey Institute building dominates the street corner.

### 3.2.9. Nodes and Gateways

There are two significant nodes in this area. The visitor arriving at the train station enters the City Centre via Meeting House Lane. The junction of Meeting House Lane and Fenton Street effectively marks the moment of arrival. This is well defined by the striking presence of the Storey Institute. The access northwards to Castle Hill from here increases the importance of this node, acting also as a gateway to the Castle precinct. East of here the crossroads with Market Street and China Street marks the gateway to the pedestrianised shopping core.



*Route to the Castle precinct from Meeting House Lane*

The space in front of the Judges' Lodgings is also an important node. Historically this was an important gateway, with the eastern gate to the Roman fort located here. The space marks the confluence of several routes, linking Castle Hill with the City Centre on Church Street and marks the junction between two character areas. To the east is the entry point to the pedestrianised shopping core at Church Street; the gateway value of this point is enhanced by this public space. Church Street benefits from vistas of this space, with the historic Judges' Lodgings and Covell Cross. The historical significance of the Judges' Lodgings buildings, the quality of the public space and the presence of the Covell Cross, all serve to mark this as a positive gateway.

### 3.2.10. Landmarks

More than any other character area in the City, this area is defined by landmark buildings. The Castle and the Priory, and to a lesser, but still significant extent on a City-wide scale, the Storey Institute and the Station are landmarks due to their physical form and their function. The Castle is the pre-eminent landmark in the City and is the defining presence in this area. All of these landmark buildings draw people to the area, identify this part of the City Centre, feature in views and define gateways and key nodes.



*Lancaster Priory*

### 3.2.11. Frontages

The tight urban form of continuous back-of-pavement development and the survival of many historic buildings creates strong and positive frontages on Meeting House Lane, Castle Park, Castle Hill, Church Street and St Mary's Parade. These frontages provide a strong setting for the Castle opposite, which is set back from the tight street form within its own grounds. The Georgian frontages on Castle Hill are well preserved and retain the unity of their original composition. The curving descending lanes of Church Street and Castle Hill allow the frontages to gradually reveal themselves and open up views to the square in front of the Judges' Lodgings, adding further interest and character.

Development on Meeting House Lane is more mixed but benefits from variety and activity in the retail frontages. Where development does not front the street on the north side of Meeting House Lane, the

retaining wall preserves the street enclosure whilst views into the grounds of the Friend's Meeting House, and the location of the Storey Gardens, present interest and a sense of discovery to the space behind.



*Retail units on the southern side of Meeting House Lane*

### 3.2.12. Positive Spaces

There are a number of positive spaces that contribute positively to the character of this area. Most notable is the Castle Precinct itself. The spaces around the Castle and the Priory are well maintained and attractive, providing a strong setting to these buildings. The presence of mature trees contributes strongly to the character of these spaces, though they also restrict views of the Castle & Priory. The provision of stone boundary walls and good quality street furniture and traditional lighting columns also enhance the character.

The character of the space itself varies; there is a more formal setting to the east and south of the Castle, where the grounds front a traditional street setting and benefit from the surrounding Georgian frontages. The setting to the west of the Castle becomes more informal as the topography results in a less continuous built form. The land around the Castle benefits strongly from long range views. These open up at key points as the character changes, most notably to the east of the Castle from St Mary's Parade.



*Castle precinct; view of the Courts*

The Priory has its own distinct setting. This includes the more formal grounds directly adjoining the church and a semi-formal space to the west which takes advantage of strong long range views to the north and west. The formal setting includes stone flags and improves the setting, but elsewhere the floorscape here, and on paths to the west of the church, it is a standard tarmac and could be improved. The informal space to the west of the Priory benefits from some retained historic street furniture and features, including the remains of a memorial. There is also some new signage. This space also has several benches and is well used and enjoyed by people taking advantage of the long range views.



*Open space to the west of the Priory*

The public square in front of the historic Judges' Lodgings (now a museum) is also a positive space in the City. The space serves to both articulate and provide relief in the tight medieval street form. The space provides a strong setting for the important historic building as well as enhancing a

gateway location (see above). The space today is well preserved and has strong character. The setted and paved surfaces enhance the setting of the Judges' Lodgings and the siting of the Covell Cross provides a centrepiece which allows the space to be seen on views down the lanes from Castle Hill. The space benefits from the boundary treatment and wall to the Judges' Lodgings, the stone steps and adjacent historic buildings to the north and south, which have been sensitively adapted and provided strong continuity and enclosure. Heritage-style street furniture has been installed and painted black. These are generally sensitive additions, despite the presence of a large number of bollards. There is a new interpretation sign sensitively located on an adjacent building, but this does not provide specific information about this space.



*Public space in front of the Judges' Lodgings*

### 3.2.13. Significant Open Spaces, Parks and Trees

Quay Meadows: the open land between the Castle precinct and St George's Quay is now used as informal public open space, divided by a former railway line converted to a cycle route, and crossed by a number of pedestrian routes. Unfortunately it is now very overgrown in places with mature vegetation. This reduces both long range views from the Castle precinct, and also views into and out of these spaces. The spaces themselves are rather uninviting and hidden away as a result, and people may have personal security concerns about using them. There are some well-maintained pedestrian routes with signage that navigate the changes in levels but the heavy

vegetation means that they are enclosed routes. The presence of the important Roman Bath House is not well advertised, and the general lack of visibility in the area means that better signage is required for those that are not familiar with this site and routes across the space. The area is under rough grassland with mature vegetation to the edges.



*Quay Meadows*



*Pedestrian route by Quay Meadow*

### 3.2.14. Listed and Unlisted Buildings

Character Area 2 contains some of the city's key historic landmarks; The Castle and Priory are listed at high grade, the station is Grade II and there are fine groups of Georgian houses, also listed. Only a few buildings are not listed in this area; three unlisted buildings on Hill Side are good examples of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses which reflect the traditional character of the area and make a positive contribution. Marshrange on Long Marsh Lane is a good example of Victorian

Gothic Revival architecture, shown on the 1877 map.

### 3.2.15. Public Realm

On Meeting House Lane the public realm often consists of the standard concrete flags and kerbs to footways and standard lighting columns. However, this footway is enhanced by the stone retaining walls that line the back of the pavement and by surviving historic boundary features such as iron gates, railings, stone walls and gate piers. Stone gate piers and iron gates frame the important east approach to the station.



*East entrance to railway station*



*Historic features on Meeting House Lane*

The lanes leading up to the Castle precinct have stone flags and cobbles or setts and are sensitive to their setting. The Georgian buildings here directly front the lanes tightly

without front boundaries, but overhanging lamps and trade signs create interest and add character to the streetscene. The streets around the Castle have been discussed above; they generally have appropriate surface treatments, although the carriageways are mainly plain tarmacadam. On-street parking can appear rather haphazard and sometimes detracts from the streetscene. Natural stone flagged footways are prevalent and cobbled forecourts are a distinctive local detail and an attractive feature of many areas within Lancaster.



*Public realm on Castle Park*

The public realm benefits from retained historic street furniture and boundary treatments. Street furniture here is the black painted heritage-style lighting columns, signage and bollards. There are also many stone kerbs, gate piers and retaining walls that all add character. Many of these include surviving features such as hand wrought or cast iron decorative railings that have additional value due to their current rarity.

The Georgian buildings that occupy the streets and lanes around the Castle front the back-of-pavement without boundary treatments but the building line is often set-back, creating variety and interest and allowing a cobbled surface to the public realm, for example the forecourt of 22 Castle Park, which is itself Grade II\* listed.

### 3.2.16. Low Grade Environments and Detractors

Quay Meadows, as described above, is the only lower grade environment in the area. This is not considered to significantly detract

from the overall character of surrounding historic areas, such as the Castle precinct and St George's Quay, as the Meadows are generally hidden from them, at least outside of wintertime. Reduction and better management of the mature vegetation would, however, enhance the character of the Castle precinct by improving views northwards. Further recommendations are provided in Section 4.

Figure 3.2: Conservation Designations (North)

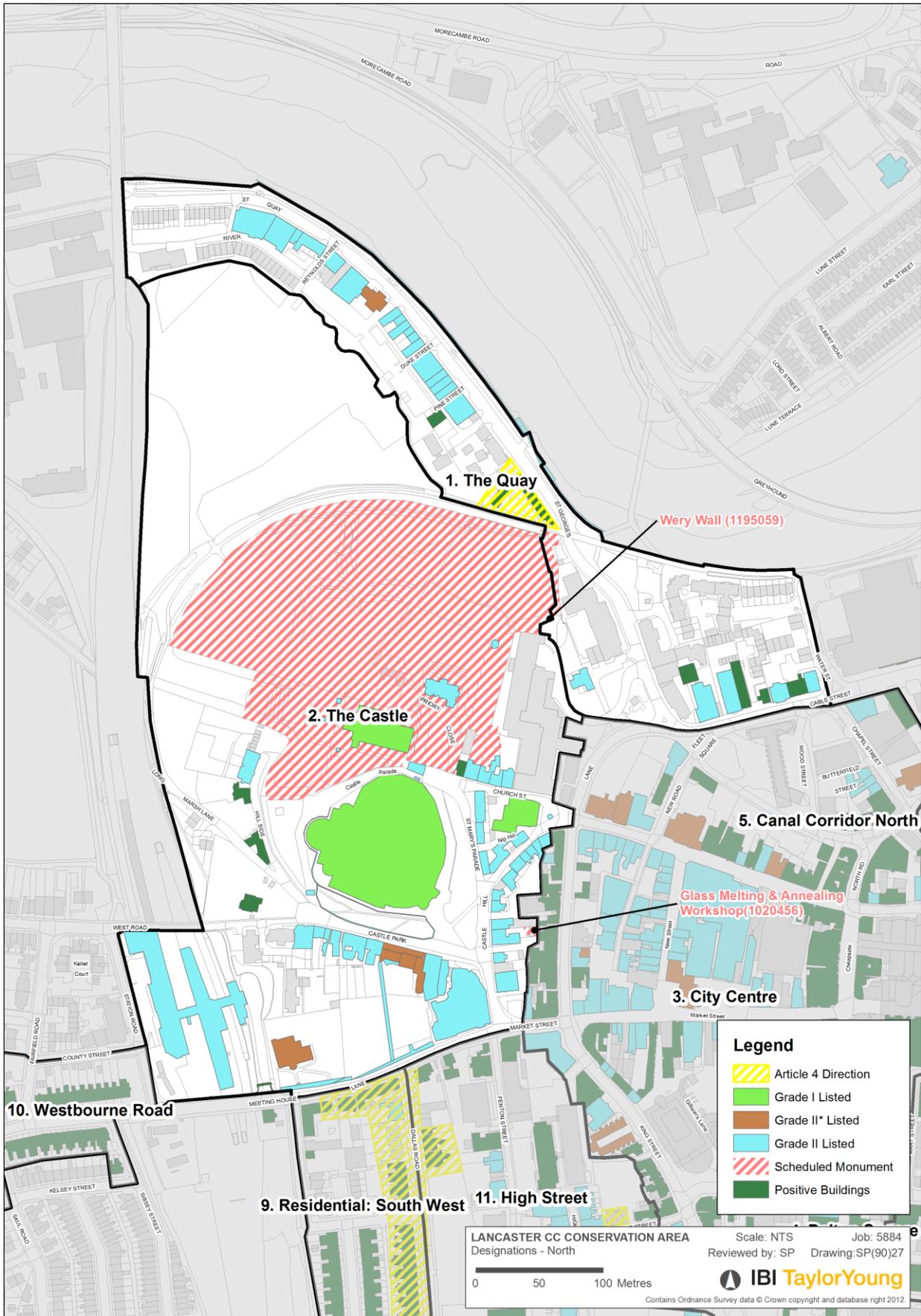


Figure 3.3: Townscape Analysis (North)

