



Lancaster Conservation Area Appraisal

## Character Area 5. Canal Corridor: North

March 2013



## 3.5 Character Area 5. Canal Corridor North

### 3.5.1. Definition of Special Interest

*"The Canal Corridor North area has experienced significant change. The industrial heritage of this district developed from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area with some interesting architecture. The Lancaster Canal is a positive asset. However, with buildings falling into neglect and large cleared sites used for car parking, the area is clearly in need of a new role and new development that will enhance the significance of the area."*

### 3.5.2. Topography and Views

The topography of the area rises gradually to the south and east away from the City Centre. This is most noticeable on St Leonard's Gate and Moor Lane. The highest point of the area is the canal, from where good medium range views can be gained south and westwards towards the Cathedral. Within the area, buildings and mature trees partially block most of these views but landmark buildings are often visible, for example the spire of the former Congregational Church (now The Friary) which can be seen terminating the view down Lodge Street. From Stonewall, attractive street vistas can be seen looking up St Leonardsgate and Moor Lane, this view benefiting from the fact that these roads are rising from this point.



*View south from the northern part of the area*

### 3.5.3. Current Activities and Uses

The area had a strong industrial past. This is clearly evident from the Victorian and early 20th century architecture that still dominates the site. As manufacturing industries have declined many of these buildings lie vacant, sometimes in poor condition or undergoing repair. Newer employment uses occupy some of these buildings (at least partially) and also occupy newer smaller-scale industrial buildings. Elsewhere large swathes of land have been cleared, for the previously proposed eastern relief-road, and are now under-utilised as large surface car parks. Moor Lane Mills South has successfully been converted for use as offices, and Moor Lane Mills North to student accommodation. The Grand Theatre is a significant local building, which is fortunately still in its original use. In the western edge of the area (i.e. on Rosemary Lane and Stonewell) edge-of-centre uses dominate: for example secondary retail and small scale offices. Only a few buildings are in residential use.

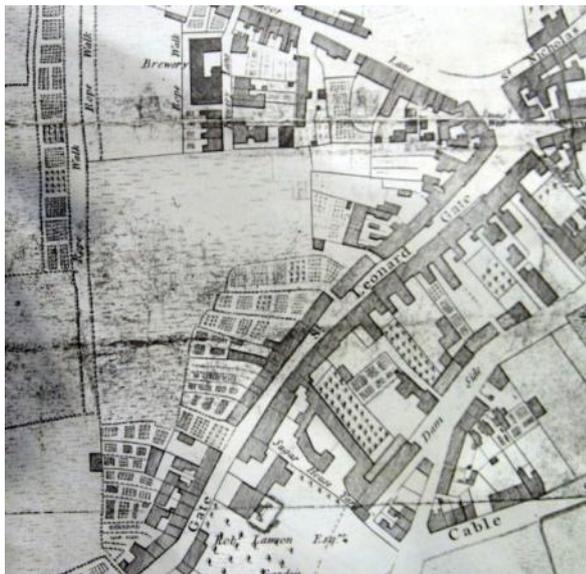


*Moor Lane Mills South, in office use*

### 3.5.4. Historical Development

The Canal Corridor North site, within this area was the subject of previous detailed research and assessment by AHP and The Conservation Studio in 2011, for the City Council and English Heritage, to inform decisions about its redevelopment. The area

was on the east edge of the Roman and Medieval town, and the main streets have early origins; Stonewell was an important junction with Lower Church Street, Rosemary Lane, St Leonard's Gate, Moor Lane and the now lost St Nicholas Street. This junction was probably on a Roman route east out of the town, leading to pottery kilns at Quernmore. The north-west edge of the area follows North Road (formerly known as Damside Street), laid out along the line of the medieval mill race that served the town's corn mill. In the medieval period, St Leonard's Gate was an important road, leading east to the Lune valley, and named after the 12<sup>th</sup> century leper's hospital of St Leonard's at Factory Hill just outside the town. This road and Stonewell were lined with houses, shown on Speed's map of 1610 and behind were rear gardens and yards. Stonewell takes its name from the stone-lined spring or well in this location, also shown on Speed's map.



Part of the area in 1778, Mackreth's map, south is to the top (Lancaster Library)

In the post-medieval period, there was a pattern of industrial development on back land in the area. Some of this was related to the town's sea trade such as sugar processing and rope-making, and other businesses such as tanning and brewing, typical of market towns. The maltings at the brewery has been dated to 1754. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, earlier houses were rebuilt in stone

and some had large gardens to the rear, shown on Mackreth's 1778 map. The area seems to have been fashionable during the Georgian period, when the theatre was built (1781) and middle class people lived in elegant houses on St Leonard's Gate. Industry was always nearby, however; Robert Lawson lived in a large 18<sup>th</sup> century house on St Leonard's Gate next to his sugar works and close to his quay on Green Ayre.



Moor Lane Mill North, built in 1819 next to the canal



11 Moor Lane, built as a house in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, later adapted for retail use and now offices

The Lancaster Canal opened in 1797, attracting textile mills to its banks. Moor Lane Mill North was built as a worsted mill in 1819 and Moor Lane Mill South was developed from 1825 by the Gregs of Styal who also took over Moor Lane Mill North. From 1861, the Storeys operated both mills. Heron Chemical Works opened in 1860, where Joseph Storey produced dyes and chemicals, partly for the textile industry. Gillows established a furniture works on land

along Damside Street (now North Road) in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, greatly expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Small-scale manufacturing was also a feature of the area, with a carriage works on Lodge Street built in the 1880s. Phoenix Street was named after the Phoenix Foundry, run by Edmund Sharpe in the 1850s; this was just outside the area.



*The Gillow showroom and offices on North Road, 1882*

Workers housing was built in courts and gardens from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Better quality housing was built on the fields east of St Leonard's Gate in the 1860s, under bylaws, on Alfred Street, Edward Street and Lodge Street. To serve the growing community, St Anne's Church was built in 1796, a Primitive Methodist Chapel on Nelson Street in 1829, Moor Lane Methodist church in the 1850s (rebuilt in 1895), the Congregational Church on St Leonard's Gate in 1881 and church schools off Brewery Lane in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Due to commercial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, houses were adapted for shops or public houses along the main streets and some purpose-built shops were built, such as the block on the east side of Rosemary Lane. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area's social status was in decline, and it was dominated by manufacturing and business which continued to be important until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Workers' housing was cleared in the 1960s for a projected (but not built) inner relief road, and since then the area has partly stagnated, although new uses such as student accommodation,

leisure and offices have given some historic buildings a new life, such as the Moor Lane Mills.



*Stonewell in c. 1900*

### 3.5.5. Archaeological Potential

Within the area, there is some evidence for prehistoric activity; a Bronze Age urn was found on Alfred Street in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and although this was an isolated chance find, it suggests a settled community nearby. The line of Moor Lane may have a Roman origin as may St Leonard's Gate. The Roman settlement probably only came as far east as Stonewell, and burials found there may be Roman, although they may also have been of pre-Conquest or medieval date, in the latter case attracted to the nearby Dominican Friary T. Outside cellared areas, there is potential for archaeology of this period, but the greatest potential within this area is likely to be for medieval and post-medieval archaeology, when the plots behind frontage buildings were used for a variety of purposes including tanning (behind Stonewell in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), and the mill race was open beneath the line of Dam Side/North Road.

Buried remains and standing buildings contribute to our understanding of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century development on this edge of the town, and a cluster of industrial sites such as Lawson's sugar house, the brewery, Moor lane Mills and Heron chemical works repay further detailed study.



17-19 Moor Lane, retains 17<sup>th</sup> century fabric

Domestic buildings are also important and several buildings on Moor Lane retain earlier timber-framed fabric behind later frontages. The remains of workers' housing in yards such as Swan Court and east of Bulk Street merit recording, even where some loss has occurred; sections of walls retain features such as doors and fireplaces..

### 3.5.6. Buildings and Architectural Quality

Sandstone is the dominant building material, although red brick is used for a few houses and early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings such as the brewery tower. Sandstone is generally laid in regular courses, using tooled ashlar for higher status buildings and details, with random masonry, often rendered, for side and rear elevations. Part of the former Gillow works on St Leonard's Gate is steel-framed, a striking exception to traditional construction in the area.

Architectural details such as raised quoins, pediments and architraves are a feature of Georgian houses, with more elaborate carved details used on 19<sup>th</sup> century churches. There are a few architectural fragments from earlier buildings, including a carved stone door lintel in Swan Court, and on Moor Lane, timber-framing survives inside some houses. Roofs are generally laid with Cumbrian or Welsh slates in diminishing courses, but some have been replaced with concrete tiles or profiled sheeting. There is no visible trace of the thatched roofs shown in some of Gideon Yates' paintings of this area (1803-1817). Historic rainwater goods are in cast-

iron with some timber gutters On corbels There is a very wide range of windows and door patterns, depending on the date and function of the building. Domestic buildings generally have sash windows, although some have been replaced with modern patterns. Industrial premises in this area have small-paned windows, usually in timber, and historic joinery has survived on the Heron Chemical Works and on the North Road mill.



Georgian doorways on St Leonard's Gate

Buildings range widely in date, with the earliest survivors built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the best quality buildings are on St Leonard's Gate and Moor Lane where there are good examples of Georgian town houses, faced in ashlar with classical details. These are generally 3-storey and built up to the back of the footway, or with a narrow railed area. There is almost no workers' housing left within this area, except for an unusual terrace of early 19<sup>th</sup> century 3-storey cottages in Swan Court, and a terrace of brick houses on St Peter's Street. Many of the buildings on Moor Lane and St Leonard's Gate were initially domestic but were later adapted for other uses, such as 17-19 Moor Lane, a 17<sup>th</sup> century house adapted as a joiners and undertakers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Purpose-built 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial or commercial premises are important to the character of the area, including shops on Moor Lane and Rosemary Lane, the former Gillow offices and works (North Road and St Leonard's Gate), the brewery, the Moor Lane mills and chemical works, former carriage works on Lodge Lane and a 2-storey mill on

North Road. The scale of these is generally 2 or 3-storey, but the multi-storey Moor Lane mills and the Gillow premises have a more dominating presence in the townscape.



*Early 19<sup>th</sup> century textile mill on North Road*

Plainly built stone workshops behind frontages contribute to the area's varied character, although these are less prominent; some can be glimpsed up yards and through covered entrances. Behind the Duke's, north of Moor Lane is a former timber yard with ranges of stone-built workshops. Off the east side of North Road are setted yards with workshops and industrial premises, such as Pitt Street and Sugar House Alley. The gabled forms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century chemical works are a distinctive feature, in views from Edward Street and the canal.



*The reinforced concrete-framed Gillow works, early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

There are some distinctive churches and chapels in the area, now all in non-worship uses, except for the 1829 chapel on Nelson Street (now a Polish Catholic centre). The

earlier chapels are in a restrained Georgian style, such as St Anne's Church, now the Duke's arts centre. This is in contrast with later 19<sup>th</sup> century churches that were designed in flamboyant Gothic Revival style, resulting in assertive gabled buildings with turrets and steeples, such as the former Congregational Church facing north into Stonewell. These have landmark quality. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century Volunteer Hall and Club premises off Phoenix Street are an example of community facilities. Revival styles were popular for business and commercial premises; the massive offices built for Gillow on North Road were designed in a severe Tudor style by Austin & Paley, with gables and mullioned windows. The former carriage showroom on St Leonard's Gate is an unusual example of a free Gothic Revival style, dated 1899.



*Former Primitive Methodist chapel built in 1829, Nelson Street*



*Former Methodist Church, Moor Lane, 1895*



*Former carriage showroom, 1899, with the Grand Theatre beyond*

Some shops retain good examples of timber shop fronts dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, either in adapted former houses or in purpose-built premises. The gabled showrooms on Moor Lane have large display windows to the frontage, framed by stone pilasters. The warehouse behind is plainer, but also stone.

Where historic metalwork survives on railings, it is an important part of the area's historic character.



*Purpose-designed showroom, 1891, Moor Lane*



*Timber shop-front on St Leonard's Gate*



*Georgian ironwork on St Leonard's Gate*

### 3.5.7. Assessment of Condition

The condition of buildings in the area varies. There is a significant number of vacant premises east of St Leonard's Gate which are in very poor condition, partly due to uncertainty over the regeneration of this area. Of particular concern are the listed brewery maltings and the rest of the former brewery, the Swan Court houses, the former Tramway Hotel and workshops behind the Dukes off Moor Lane. There are also buildings on North Road that are in need of investment. Most buildings fronting the main streets are in use and well-maintained, although behind some active frontages rear areas are in poor condition, as in Swan Court. Historic joinery such as shop fronts, doors and sash windows have been retained on many properties in the areas, and on industrial buildings there is a high rate of surviving vernacular details. Some slate roofs have been renewed in concrete tiles or sheeted material, as on the chemical works. Modern fittings such as satellite dishes and shop signage is intrusive on some on front elevations.



*Neglected buildings on North Road*

### 3.5.8. Urban Form

On a larger scale the principal roads create a strong triangular shape to the area, a result mostly of natural contours. This has formed the starting point for other streets and has meant that a regular, squarer grid has not been possible and some plots are tapered.

The urban form of the area has changed dramatically over the last century. However, the historic form is still evident in the southern and western parts of the area. This consists of large footprint, often linear, mills, arranged close together in an often somewhat haphazard plan form. These buildings are large, often four or five large storeys in height, often with long frontages with a uniform treatment. All buildings are back-of-pavement. Across the central and northern part of the area the original urban form has been lost as buildings have been cleared. Historic roads run through the car park area, providing access to adjoining sites but the overall street form is incoherent and the relationship between buildings, roads and spaces is weak. In the western edge of the area, three storey back-of-pavement Georgian and Victorian buildings have been adapted for retail and business use, maintaining their original form.

### 3.5.9. Nodes and Gateways

The topography of the area, and the line of the Canal to the east, creates a triangular street form with natural gateways to surrounding areas. The quality of these gateways on the ground varies. In the north

of the area the junction of St Leonard's Gate and Alfred Street is an important gateway to both this character area and central Lancaster, coinciding here with the Conservation Area boundary. This is on high ground with good views and contains a small area of public open space as well as the road junction. It should be an attractive and well-defined gateway, but it is not. This is because of the lack of distinction in the public realm, the extent to which the trees block wider views, and most importantly because of the lack of strong built frontage in this area - instead there is a small depot and large car park to the south of the junction, with the back of a retail park fronting St Leonard's Gate.

The south-western corner of the area includes two adjacent gateways. The junction of Rosemary Lane and St Leonard's gate is effectively an entry point to this character area on St Leonard's Gate, although City Centre uses still dominate in this area. This is a positive gateway, with strong built form and well defined by the former Congregational Church and its spire, although some buildings on St Leonard's Gate are in need of refurbishment.



*Gateway to the area seen from St Leonard's Gate*

To the immediate south of this is the junction of Stonewell and Moor Lane. This is a positive gateway that marks the intersection of three character areas. It has been covered elsewhere in this report (see Character Area 3).

The canal bridge on Moor Lane marks an entry point to both this character area and to central Lancaster. This is a generally positive

gateway although there is scope for improvement. The canal is a strong feature that clearly defines the gateway and also benefits from a view south to the Cathedral. On crossing the bridge there are some interesting historic mill buildings on Moor Lane, although these buildings do not generally present primary frontages to Moor Lane. The public realm includes stone flags but pavements are narrow and cluttered with highway signage.

### 3.5.10. Landmarks

There are a couple of landmark buildings in the area. The Grand Theatre has an historical and community importance which makes it a landmark building. The Congregational Church (now 'The Friary' night club) on Rosemary Lane is a prominent and important historical building with a spire that features in many views and street vistas. There are several significant mills in the area, especially on Moor Lane, but none of these industrial buildings stand out individually as a landmark.

### 3.5.11. Frontages

Buildings in the area generally directly front the back-of-pavement. In places where the street form has been lost new low-rise employment development is sited within enclosures, usually behind a galvanised steel fence. Older industrial buildings directly adjoin the pavement but often various buildings are grouped together around courtyards or in a more ad-hoc manner. In this case the primary frontage and entrance to the building often does not face the street (especially on Moor Lane). The frontages of the older mills and factories generally have a uniformly consistent pattern which emphasises their massing - especially on St. Leonard's Gate. Although monotonous, the frontages of the former Gillow works are architecturally interesting and the many windows to provide a sense of activity. The later development on the site replicates the scale and overall proportions of the older buildings.



*Former Gillow works on St Leonard's Gate*

The mill buildings on Moor Lane are robustly detailed but the use of local stone and survival of historical integrity adds interest, as do glimpsed views into yards on industrial sites. The stone wall on the approach to the canal bridge on the north side of Moor Lane, with its distinctive coping and response to the change in level, adds historic interest to this frontage.

The retail uses in the west of the area have very strong back-of-pavement frontages, with Georgian and Victorian buildings with mostly active ground floors.

### 3.5.12. Positive Spaces

The only positive space within this area is the canal corridor. This is set on an embankment with extensive mature vegetation and forms part of a long recreation route.



*Lancaster Canal*

The incidental open space at the junction of St Leonard's Gate and Alfred Street is

adequately maintained but lacks a function and provides little amenity benefit.

There are also a surprising number of trees within the industrial area. Located within private forecourts they serve to soften the street scene and improve frontages where built form is set back.



*Tree planting improves the street scene*

### 3.5.13. Listed and Unlisted Buildings

In Character Area 5, industrial buildings are particularly important to the character of the area; the best of these, such as Moor Lane Mills and the former brewery malthouse are listed but many unlisted examples have historic importance and are striking structures. The chemical works, the North Road mill and the Lodge Street carriage works have local historic interest and contribute to the conservation area. Smaller vernacular workshops, shops and showrooms also contribute to the character of the area, such as the former carriage works on the corner of St Leonard's Gate and Lodge Street. Former churches and chapels are also important in this area, including the Methodist Church on Moor Lane and former chapel and school room on St Leonard's Gate/Phoenix Street.

### 3.5.14. Public Realm

The public realm is generally utilitarian in nature, with a highways-dominated treatment. Pedestrian protection bollards on St Leonard's Gate serve to restrict space on already narrow pavements, especially when combined with lighting columns and

highways signage. Stone flags and setted surfaces survive on and back lanes and parts of St Leonard's and Moor Lane. Stone boundary walls often add historic character and define properties. The 1895 fountain on Moor Lane is an important feature in this triangular setted space.

### 3.5.15. Boundary Features

Boundaries between properties have largely been lost due to phases of redevelopment, but east of St Leonard's Gate there are some examples of stone walls to former Georgian gardens that have been retained and these are historically significant. On Moor Lane, the stone walls with swept copings that adjoin the canal bridge are a distinctive feature next to the Moor Lane Mill North. Fragments of stone walls remain on the car parks east of Bulk Street, evidence of the cleared workers' housing; fireplaces, blocked doors and windows can be seen in the stonework.



*Wall on Moor Lane*

### 3.5.16. Low Grade Environments and Detractors

There are a number of low grade environments in the area. The large surface car park in the north of the area is poorly landscaped and has a visually negative impact on the area. This low grade environment extends into surrounding industrial plots and vacant space. The incidental open space and depot at the north of this space offers potential for improvement and there are a number of vacant historic buildings on St Leonard's Gate and Brewery Lane, some of which are in poor condition.

**Figure 3.6: Conservation Designations (East)**

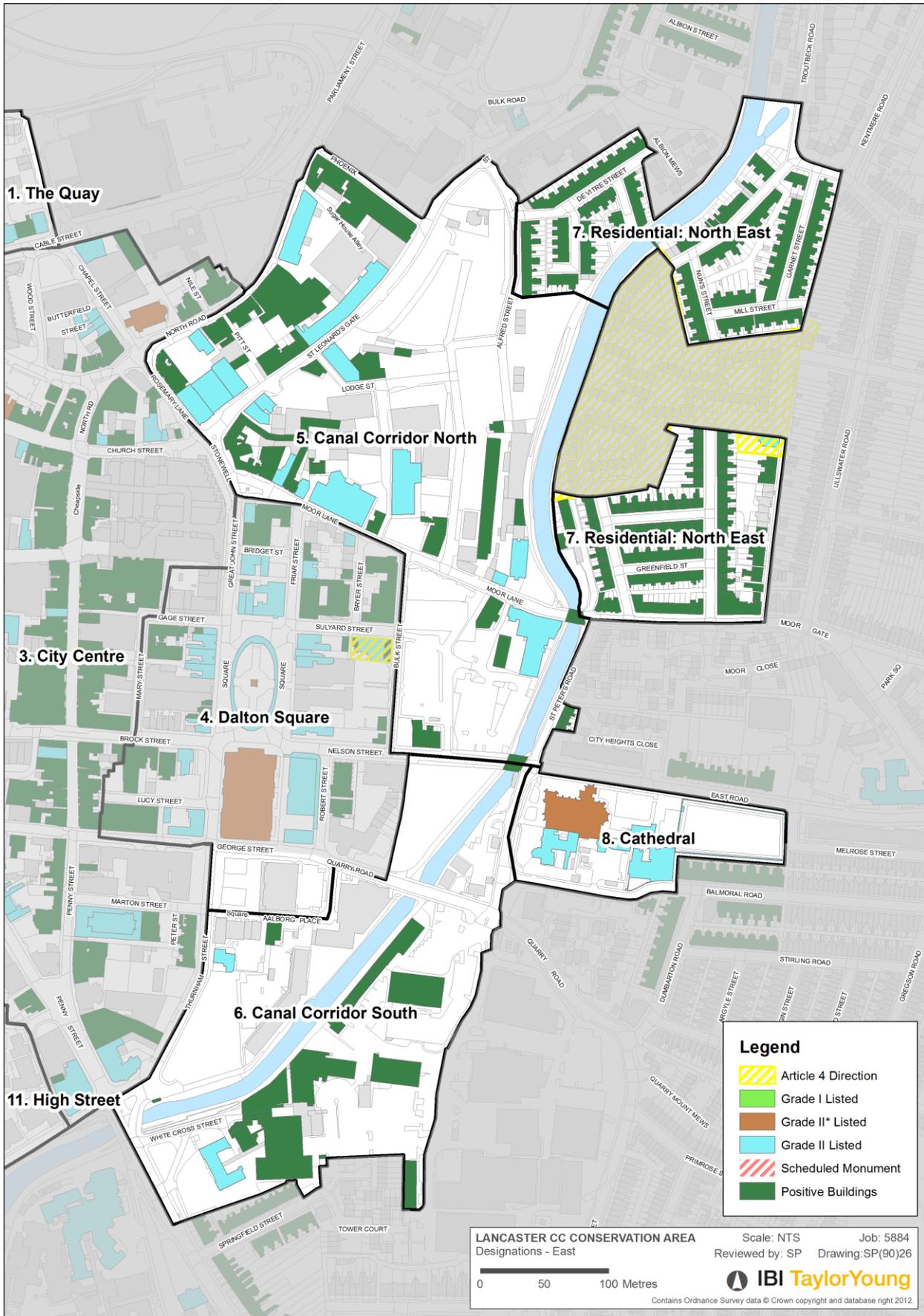


Figure 3.7: Townscape Analysis (East)

