



Lancaster Conservation Area Appraisal

Character Area 7. Residential: North East

March 2013

3.7 Character Area 7. Residential: North East

3.7.1. Definition of Special Interest

"This character area comprises three separate pockets of Victorian former workers' housing built on high ground alongside the Lancaster Canal. Short angular streets accommodate long terraces of stone-built houses, with many distinctive and original features. The area retains a strong and remarkably consistent townscape."



Housing in the northern pocket (top) and southern pocket (bottom)

3.7.2. Topography and Views

The three groups of housing sit on higher ground above the canal-side. There is a distinct and complex topography here, which often results in steeply sloping streets - a factor that contributes to the character of the area. In the area around De Vitre Street, west of the canal, the high land falls away steeply to the north and west. The contour canal is at a higher level to the housing in most of this north area. On the east bank of the canal the land falls less steeply westwards along Wolseley Street. In the southern area land falls southwards, quite steeply on Williamson Road, with housing sited above the canal on its east bank. Moorgate slopes more gently downhill westwards toward the canal bridge.

Due to the continuous terraces and the angles in the street pattern this topography does not create any significant views within the streets. The domestic nature of the built form means that street vistas are not articulated. The only significant views are from the two canal bridges, along the canal corridor. The southward view from Moor Lane (actually in character area 5) also includes a good view of the Cathedral spire.

3.7.3. Current Activities and Uses

The area is residential, with a few shops and community buildings on Moorgate along the southern perimeter, concentrated in the block between Williamson Road and Bath Street and on street corners. These are relatively peaceful and quiet neighbourhoods, but the high density of housing ensures a sense of activity and surveillance.



Shops on Moorgate

3.7.4. Historical Development

This part of north-east Lancaster was mostly fields until the late 18th century. Moor Lane, to the south, was an historic route out of the town to the east, leading to quarries and farmland on Lancaster Moor. In 1797, Lancaster Canal opened, built on the 70 foot contour along the east side of the town, with a graving dock for boat repairs at Dry Dock (first shown on Binns' 1821 map). The Bath House on Bath Street is a remnant of Georgian leisure facilities; the building was designed in 1806 for cold bathing. From about this time, the west side of Bath Street was laid out with gardens, and a few houses.



Bath House, built 1806 on Bath Street

After 1819, textile mills were built alongside the canal, including Moor Lane Mills (in Area 5) and Bath Mill, 1837 (sited in the adjoining Bath Mill Conservation Area). These mills prompted the building of housing for workers; the earliest terrace on Bath Mill Lane was built in 1837 by the Threlfalls, owners of Bath

Mill. However, most of the area remained fields until later; in the 1870s, land was sold for housing development in the de Vitre Street area west of the canal. The irregular layout of the streets reflects earlier field boundaries and the shape of development plots. The bye-laws were used to control the density of buildings, road widths, back alleys and drainage and resulted in unified streets and standardised house designs but the scale and design of the houses could be adjusted to suit different social classes and anticipated rent levels. The Dry Dock Estate was developed on an area known as the Nuns' Fields, in the 1870s; most of the streets, like Garnett Street were built for working people, with a few larger houses for middle class occupants on Bath Street and at the north-west end of Wolseley Street.



Gate piers to larger terraced houses, Bath Street

To the south, Woodville Gardens was used as allotments until 1882, when the land was divided into building plots. The foot bridge over the canal was built in 1882 to improve access for workers. Terraced houses on Woodville and Greenfield Streets were occupied by 1884-86. On Moorgate, the distinctive block with raised pavement (9-31) was built by builder R.P.Moser in 1885-86. Shops and community buildings were located along Moorgate, with shops in Bath Buildings, rebuilt 1895, and on the ends of terraces. Also on Moorgate, the Gregson Institute was built for the community in 1889-94, as a memorial to Henry Gregson, and associated with the parish of Christchurch.



High density stone terraces on Denis Street and Sidney Terrace, 1870s-1886.

3.7.5. Archaeological Potential

Within the area, there is scant evidence for prehistoric activity, although in the late 19th century a possible Bronze Age urn was found on Alfred Street, on the west edge of the area. Moor Lane is likely to have been an early route east out of the settlement and may have Roman origins. Whilst it is possible that there may be chance finds within the area, archaeological potential is limited by the extensive digging of cellars during the building of 19th century housing, which will have destroyed stratigraphy. Gardens and un-developed land may have some potential, but this is likely to mainly relate to the industrial period.

The canal is the area's most significant heritage feature; the dry dock, canal retaining walls, towpaths and bridge structures are an important part of the industrial archaeology of the area and have potential to reveal more of this part of the city's history if an opportunity arises. The Bath House and its curtilage may have some archaeological potential in relation to this early 19th century facility; the bath is known to be in situ beneath the floor of the house.

3.7.6. Buildings and Architectural Quality

Buildings are all built in coursed sandstone, with rubble stone for rear and side elevations and ashlar for details. Over-painting of stone is common on some streets of smaller terraces, such as Melbourne Road, and

render has been applied on some rear elevations and outriggers. Roofs are generally laid with Welsh slates or Cumbrian in diminishing courses, but some have been replaced with concrete tiles.

The area is characterised by late 19th century terraced housing arranged in irregular grids relating to field boundaries. The housing is generally high density, with terraces mostly fronting the footway with no front gardens, but a few larger terraces have small front gardens defined by low stone walls and railings or hedges, such as those on Bath Street. Most of the terraces have back lanes or alleys for access to rear yards, but others have shared passageways to rear yards. The passages have distinctive timber gates to the street frontage in the Woodville Street area. The group of larger terraced houses at the north-west end of Wolseley Street have bay windows and gardens facing the dry dock. Bath House is notable for its walled rear yard with gate-piers. On Moorgate, houses and shops directly front this busier road, and the steps and raised pavement on the north side are a distinctive feature.



Small terrace houses with passages to rear yards on Williamson Street

All houses were built with a private rear yard, each with a privy, coal store and drying space. Most houses have cellars. Rear yards and outriggers can be seen from back lanes, where rear high stone yard walls in random rubble are a feature; some have been rendered and a few examples of original outhouses survive. The 2-storey gabled outriggers to houses on the west side of Wolseley Street are attractive, although their treatment is variable and services are

exposed to view. The scale of houses varies; most are 2-storey with some small one and a half storey terraces with gabled dormers, for example on Williamson Street and Woodville Street, and some taller houses of 2 and a half or 3 storeys on Denis Street and Bath Street.



Rear stone walls to yards west of Nuns Street



Gabled outriggers face the canal, west side of Wolseley Street

Windows on workers' housing would have been sashes, but almost none survive; most have been replaced with a variety of windows in timber or modern materials. Stone bay windows are usually reserved for middle class housing, but are a feature of some houses on De Vitre Street. A few historic doors survive; the plain panelled door at 34 Williamson Street, and the panelled door at 13 Bath Street are probably original. Architectural detail is limited to doorways which generally have a moulded stone cornice or hoodmould; west of the canal doorways are paired under one hoodmould, but are generally arranged singly to the east. Window lintels, architrave and projecting sills are plain dressed stone. Chimneys built of

stone are an important roof feature, and many retain clay pots although some stacks have been rendered. Stone corbels support rainwater gutters, originally timber troughing, but often renewed in plastic. Datestones carved with the initials of the builder are a feature of a few streets, for example on De Vitre Street, the builders Shaw & Parkinson (JS RP/1870) are recorded by initials, and Sidney Terrace is dated 1886.



Carved datestone, De Vitre Street



Stone bay windows on De Vitre Street, 1870s



Paired doorways on Denis Street, 1870s



Rare original door, Williamson Street, 1880s

The style and proportions of the early 19th century Bath House and the 1837 terrace on Bath Mill Lane (Bath Cottages) reflect an earlier phase of development that pre-dated the bye-laws. Bath House is partly faced in ashlar and has a hipped roof. There are a few examples of non-residential buildings in the area that have a different form to the terraced houses; on the west side of Bath Mill Lane, a former coach house has been adapted for housing, and adjacent to the south is the area's only red brick house, a recent conversion. Corner shops were once common, but most are now houses; their corner doorways and blocked larger windows still legible.



Former corner shop, Woodville Street

Moorgate is distinctive for a range of buildings that were provided for late 19th century community or business use. The form and elevations of these buildings express their non-residential function, with a variety of shop fronts to retail businesses and formal frontages to community buildings. The Henry Gregson Memorial Institute was built in 1889, designed by Austin & Paley; the symmetrical front elevation has a central doorway with an unusual pedimented door case with triple over-light, pairs of sashes to the ground floor and large gabled dormers lighting the upper floor hall (they have been replaced). To the rear and facing Williamson Road, the Bartlett Hall was added in 1912, also with a tall gabled window. The shops have living accommodation above and are 2 or 3-storey; the former shops towards the west end of Moorgate have projecting stone bays windows, an unusual feature.



1889 Gregson Memorial Institute, Moorgate

Historic stone paving, setts and kerbs have been retained on some streets and back lanes, contributing to the character of the area. Where historic metalwork survives, it is also an important part of the area's historic character.



Steps with 19th century iron railings, Moorgate.

The cast-iron footbridge, built in 1882 over the canal is an important feature, linking areas of housing. The approach steps and abutment walls are stone, which relate to the stone paving that still survives on Shaw Street.



1882 canal footbridge, Shaw Street

3.7.7. Assessment of Condition

Buildings in the area appear to be in generally good condition, structurally, although maintenance of external joinery, rear elevations and roofs on smaller terraces is not always good. The survival of historic joinery features is low in this area, with sliding sash windows replaced by windows in modern materials in a variety of styles. Only a few historic doors and timber shop fronts survive. Some slate roofs have been renewed in concrete tiles, and dormers altered in modern patterns. There are some cases of exterior stone work being over-painted or rendered; where this is on rear elevations it has less visual impact than on

frontages where it affects the visual unity of the whole terrace. Modern fittings such as satellite dishes are intrusive on some on front elevations.



Over-painting or rendering of stone frontages, Williamson Street

3.7.8. Urban Form

The street form results from an attempt to overlay a typical Victorian grid onto an area of steep topography, within historic property boundaries. The result is a series of shorter streets that are often angled acutely with each other, especially in the northern part of the area. The irregular blocks that result are resolved with differing lengths in rear yards. In the north-eastern pocket of housing this creates an interesting triangular shaped block, which accommodates a Y-shaped series of back alleys.

The urban form is very consistent within the area; long terraces of houses which directly front the streets. These are mostly two-storey with simple pitched roofs. There are some dormer windows in the southern part of the area and there is more variety on Moorgate, including a raised pavement, an interesting feature used to deal with the sloping topography north of the road.

3.7.9. Frontages

Terraced houses throughout the area directly front the back-of-pavement. These are active frontages with front doors and many windows to habitable rooms. The narrow streets were not designed for the motor car and the unavoidable prevalence of on-street parking

(there is no possible alternative here) intrudes on the streetscene.



Frontage on Moorgate (showing steps and raised pavement to front doors)

There are few attempts to turn corners (the Mill Street/Garnet Street corner and the retail units on Moorgate are notable exceptions), which results in some blank gables on junctions with side streets. There are small yards behind each property and rear alleys pass behind many, but not all, of the terraces. These are not gated and can be untidy and poorly maintained.



Typical street frontages, with blind gables on corners.

Unfortunately the housing layout very rarely addresses the canal, typically exposing rear or side elevations to the canal corridor, to the detriment of the amenity of this space (and potentially presenting security issues to these dwellings) although this edge is often softened and secured by extensive planting. The only exception (within this character area) is a small modern development (the single brick house) on Bath Mill Lane that overlooks and positively addresses the canal.

3.7.10. Nodes and Gateways

There is no natural gateway to these housing areas. Rather than the canal being a transition point, the entry point to this area of homogenous housing is subtly arrived at via Alfred Street and its junction with De Vitre Street. The streets are partly hidden from the entry points, which offer no indication of the extent of the area and its consistent character.

In the southern part of the area, the Moor Lane bridge is a wider gateway to the City, which overshadows any role it has in respect of this character area.

These are small residential areas though and one would not expect a gateway to them.

3.7.11. Landmarks

There are no landmark buildings in this character area.

3.7.12. Positive Spaces

The principal positive space is the canal corridor. Part of this is within the character area, although it is rather isolated from the three housing areas as public areas do not address the canal. Nevertheless, it provides a physical and conceptual connection between the three parts of the area, and to adjacent character areas. The canal-side environment here is simple in its treatment but pleasant given the effect of the water and vegetation and the enjoyment of the longer recreational route. As mentioned previously the exposed backs of houses in this area detract from this environment slightly. This contrasts with the Bath Mill Estate,

immediately to the south, where houses have a much more positive relationship with the canal and provide some surveillance over the towpath.



The canal corridor to the south, and housing on the Bath Mill Estate.

The footbridge over the canal between Shaw Street and Wolseley Street is part of important pedestrian route linking this area to the City Centre. The bridge also provides a defining experience of this character area. In addition to steps up to the bridge, the end of Shaw Street also provides an entry point to the canal towpath so this is an important pedestrian node. The public realm here is treated as a pedestrian, rather than a vehicular space with some paving flags and planting beds, but there is potential for further improvement. The iron bridge is functional, allowing good views of the canal-side. Interestingly, the bridge successfully negotiates a change in level between the two sides by having steps up on the western side but providing access to the eastern area at grade.



Shaw Street and the footbridge over the canal

3.7.13. Listed and Unlisted Buildings

Bath House is the only listed building in the area, built in the late Georgian period. The attractive stone-built terraces houses define the area's character and reflect late 19th century expansion related to local industrial development. These terraces all contribute positively to the area's character, with unified but subtly varied frontages that reflect different blocks of development by speculative builders; some have stone panels with the builders' initials and dates. Regular door and window openings, chimneys, rear yard walls, outriggers and yard gates are all important features. The 1882 iron footbridge is the most distinctive historic feature in this area, which contributes strongly to the character of the area.

3.7.14. Public Realm

The street environments generally have a standard treatment, which is often rather low grade with tarmacadam, concrete paving and kerbs. The narrow street width offers little potential for a higher quality public realm and there is very little street furniture; a cast-iron junction box on De Vitre Street is a rare, interesting historic feature. There are historic stone flags on several streets and setts survive on a few side roads such as Sidney Terrace in the north. The greater width of De Vitre Street has allowed street trees, integrated with a more considered approach that accommodates on-street parking.



Trees on De Vitre Street; Stone flags and a retained coal hatch to a property

The uniform back-of-pavement frontages mean that there are few boundary treatments, except to rear yards and alleys, where stone walls with copings are important in defining edges of the area. Stone walls generally enclose the sides of plots when they are exposed to the street, often reinforced with fences or hedges.

3.7.15. Low grade Environments and Detractors

There are no real low grade environments. The condition of the rear alleys could be improved, especially where they are visible from streets. The garages at the eastern end of Mill Street are prominently located and have the potential to be a detractor but at the time of writing had been recently painted and looked presentable.



A typical back alley with stone setts

Figure 3.6: Conservation Designations (East)

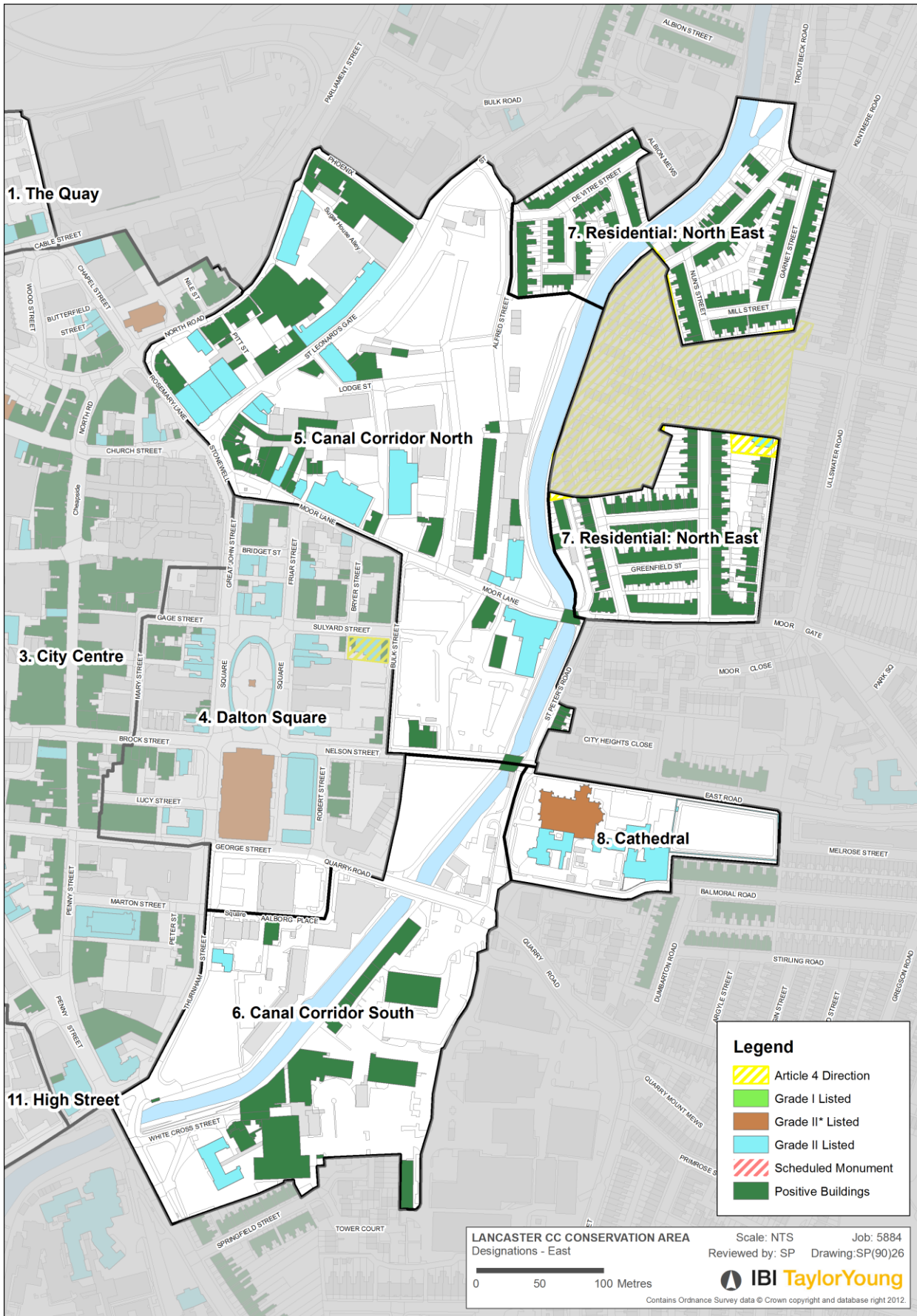


Figure 3.7: Townscape Analysis (East)

