

Lancaster Conservation Area Appraisal

Character Area 8. Cathedral

March 2013

3.8 Character Area 8. Cathedral

3.8.1. Definition of Special Interest

"This character area is distinctive for the fine group of buildings developed for the Roman Catholic Church from the mid 19th century, all designed by Austin & Paley. The Gothic Revival buildings are complemented by an area of enclosed burial ground, and the well maintained site has a positive impact on the surrounding area. The Cathedral spire is an important landmark from many points in the City".

3.8.2. Topography and Views

This eastern edge of the conservation area occupies ground that slopes up steeply to the east, away the City Centre. The Cathedral therefore sits at a higher level than most of the City Centre, so that the tall spire is visible from many points in the City. There are important closer views of the spire and Cathedral on St Peter's Road (from the north and south) and along the canal corridor - particularly from Moor Lane bridge (the view from Quarry Road bridge is partially obscured by new development). There is also a view into the City to the Town Hall tower from the Cathedral.

Land on East Road and Balmoral Road falls to the west alongside the Cathedral buildings. This is expressed in the stepping of coping stones on the boundary wall. The upper end of Balmoral Street is particularly steep with the school sitting on a terraced site above the Cathedral. The design and height of the Cathedral ensures that it rises above lower buildings on the upper part of the site, although it is sited below them on the slope. The highest land in the area is used as the burial ground.



View southwards to the Cathedral from St Peter's Road

3.8.3. Current Activities and Uses

The current uses are all associated with the Cathedral. In addition to the Cathedral, buildings include the presbytery to the south-west, a former school and convent, now Diocesan offices and the primary school on Balmoral Road. The upper, east part of the site is occupied by the burial ground. There is also a hard-surfaced sports pitch on the East Road part of the site.

3.8.4. Historical Development

This area was outside the east edge of the medieval town, just east of the land of the Dominican Friary. The land was laid out for detached gardens in the early 19th century, with a few small garden buildings at the west end, close to the canal. The long rectangle of gardens with formal paths is shown on Binns' map of 1821. By the 1840s, the Catholic Mission chapel on Dalton Square (Palatine Hall) was proving too small for the town's Catholics. In about 1847, Dean Richard Melchiades Brown bought the 3 acre garden site for a new church, school and cemetery.



Detail of the site before development, on Binns' 1821 map (Lancaster Library)

The first building to be constructed was the school on East Road in 1850. To the south-west of this a convent (dedicated to St Walburga) was built in 1851-53, followed by the Church of St Peter and attached presbytery, in 1857-59. All these buildings were designed by Edward Paley of Austin & Paley. The gardens in the east half of the site were not built on and were laid out for a burial ground in 1849, retaining the earlier layout of perimeter paths within high stone walls. This is shown on Harrison & Hall's 1877 map of Lancaster.



The area on the 1877 Harrison & Hall map (Lancaster Library)



The 1850s Cathedral and former convent from the south

The later buildings on the site include the Balmoral Road School, built 1895-97 and the octagonal chapter house on the north side of the Church, 1895, both designed by Austin & Paley. The 1850 school was later partly demolished and converted for use as the Diocesan Education Offices. In 1924 the Church became a Cathedral when the Diocese of Lancaster was created. The

convent was adapted for offices in the 20th century.

3.8.5. Archaeological Potential

This area was outside the south edge of the Roman and Medieval town, and no pre-19th century archaeology is known in this area. The archaeological potential is low, and is limited by ground disturbance for cellars and later development including the burial ground.

3.8.6. Buildings and Architectural Quality

All the buildings and structures in this area date from after 1850 and all were built as part of a planned complex of Catholic religious and educational buildings, to designs by one architectural practice. This gives the area great cohesion and unity. Sandstone is the dominant building material, laid in regular courses, with moulded ashlar for details. Roofs are characteristically steep and laid with Cumbrian or Welsh slates, with stone copings to gables which generally have decorative finials. Gables are a strong feature, particularly on the 1890s school. 19th century windows and doors have survived on some buildings, most often in stone arched surrounds. On the school the original windows have been replaced with upvc double glazed units.

The architectural style of the buildings is broadly Gothic Revival, with the fine Cathedral designed in the Gothic of 1300, Early English style. Ancillary buildings use a range of later Gothic or Tudor Revival motifs such as oriels and bay windows with mullioned and transomed windows, arched doorways and gabled dormers. There is a functional garage building with a corrugated sheeted roof on the south side of the Cathedral, but most of the buildings are high quality structures. The Cathedral is listed Grade II* and most of the other buildings are listed Grade II.

There is no significant recent architecture.



Balmoral Road RC School, 1890s

3.8.7. Assessment of Condition

The condition of historic buildings in the area is generally good, and the Cathedral is maintained with advice from a conservation architect. The setting of buildings is affected by car parking which is intrusive on East Road where it is visible from the public realm, but on the south side, parking is largely hidden within the walled enclosure of the site.

3.8.9. Urban Form

The buildings and associated spaces lie within a rectangular block, enclosed by a stone boundary wall. This defines the edges to the surrounding existing streets with the exception of part of Balmoral Road where the boundary passes behind terraced housing.

The site is occupied by a related group of buildings in a single co-ordinated use. Massing varies from single and 2-storey domestic scale buildings to the grandeur of the Cathedral with its spire. The buildings have been developed, extended, partially demolished and adapted over time. Their current form reflects this history and the group has strong visual coherence, except on the south side.

3.8.10. Nodes and Gateways

The bridge over the Lancaster Canal at Nelson Street functions as a gateway into the central core of Lancaster (though not quite the City Centre). The presence of the Cathedral, with its spire located on this

corner, is a strong response to this gateway. The Cathedral acts a signpost to those travelling westward on East Road, indicating that they have reach the City.

3.8.11. Landmarks

The Cathedral is a landmark of City-wide significance. The tall spire makes it highly visible from many points.



The Cathedral

3.8.12. Frontages



St Peter's Road frontage

The presence and architectural detailing of the Cathedral and adjoining presbytery ensures that there is a strong frontage to St Peter's Road, East Road and Balmoral Road. The school has a more direct relationship to

the street and creates a strong frontage. As the road curves at this point the detailed gables of the school building, seen alongside the adjacent terrace, makes a strong impression.

The coursed stone wall around the burial ground has a different character to the dressed stone on the other frontages, expressing its lower status. This, and the planting behind it with views into the burial ground, create a strong frontage on the adjacent parts of Melrose Street and East Road.

The weakest frontage is that by the sports pitch. When sports are not being played this is a large empty space and the wall is supplemented here by wire mesh fencing.



East Road frontage

3.8.13. Positive Spaces

The burial ground at the rear of the site is a well maintained and peaceful space. It is a semi-public space with its own pedestrian gate on Melrose Street and informal planting within it. This is a positive space that contributes to the character and amenity of the surrounding streets.

Other parts of the site are also positive spaces that benefit the surrounding streetscape; for example the grounds to the front of the Cathedral and presbytery on St Peter's Street.

The areas of car parking close to these buildings, on the western ends of Balmoral Street and East Road, are spaces that could

be enhanced to provide a more sympathetic setting to the listed buildings.

3.8.14. Listed and Unlisted Buildings

Character Area 8 is dominated by the Grade II* Roman Catholic Cathedral and contains a related group of handsome Grade II listed buildings, all stone and designed in Gothic Revival style, by E.G.Paley or Paley & Austin. The stone boundary walls that define the site are within the curtilage of these listed buildings or around the burial ground and all make a positive contribution to the character and design quality of the whole complex. The standing monuments within the burial ground are not listed but contribute to the character of the area.

3.8.15. Public Realm

The area does not include public realm; the boundary of the area encloses Diocese of Lancaster land. Site planting, mature trees and stone boundary walls, especially on the St Peter's Street and Balmoral Road frontages make a positive contribution to the public realm on adjoining streets.

3.8.16. Boundary Features

The site has strong boundaries, with a variety of stone boundary walls defining different elements of the area. The design and style of the walls expresses a hierarchy within the area; coursed stone walls with rough triangular copings enclose the cemetery, contrasting with finely moulded and weathered copings to the higher status west end of the site. Gothic style gate piers mark entrances and iron railings have been retained to the frontage of the school on Balmoral Road. There is a distinctive stone arched entrance on Balmoral Road, just west of the school.



Archway on Balmoral Road



Looking up Balmoral Road from St Peter's Road

3.8.17. Low Grade Environments and Detractors

other than the garage noted above, there are no low grade environments or detractors here.

Figure 3.6: Conservation Designations (East)

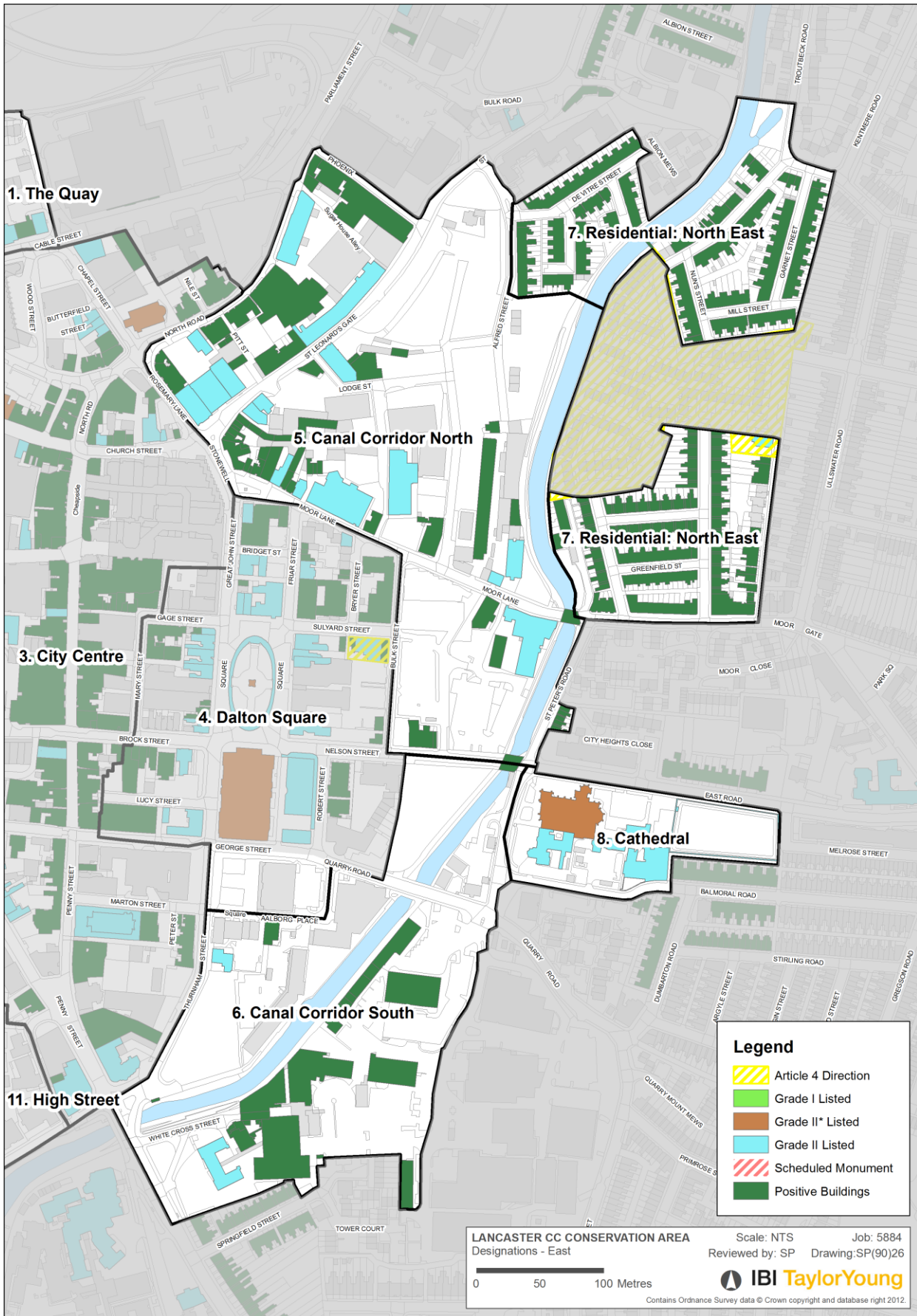


Figure 3.7: Townscape Analysis (East)

