

# SEATON CAREW CONSERVATION AREA



## Visual Assessment





## **A. INTRODUCTION.**

1. The following report gives a short assessment and appraisal on Seaton Carew Conservation Area which was declared in 1969 and subsequently extended in 1976 and 2002. The assessment and appraisal follows the framework given by English Heritage in its advisory document "Guidance on conservation area appraisals." The report is not intended to be an in depth analysis of Seaton Carew Conservation Area but is intended as a short working document to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the Conservation Area and what actions, if any, are required to tackle emerging issues within the Area.

## **B. DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION AREA**

1. Seaton Carew Conservation Area is located on the coast 2 miles south of Hartlepool. Plan 1 in the appendices shows the relationship of Seaton Carew to the main settlement of Hartlepool. A further plan (Plan 2) gives the current boundary of Seaton Carew Conservation Area. In form Seaton Carew Conservation Area consists of a frontage of properties facing out to the North Sea, across a wide expanse of sandy beach (at low tide) with a single road running north south to the front (the A178). This road is divided into two parts at the junction with Station Lane (which comes in from the west) with The Cliff to the north and The Front to the south. A more or less continuous frontage of buildings is formed behind this road, from Lawson Road in the north to South End at the southern end of the Conservation Area. This largely continuous frontage is punctuated by The Green which is a large impressive square of properties set back from The Cliff, the junction of Station Lane (already mentioned) and the relatively narrow building-lined Church Street leading up to Holy Trinity Church. The exception to this general description is a small terrace of properties on the east side of the road at 70 to 79 The Front set with the rear elevations facing the sea. Just south of this group of buildings is the art deco Seaton Bus Station facing inwards in a similar way. Though not in the Conservation Area boundary the Longscar Centre falls into a similar category.
2. Plan 2 in the appendices also indicates the listed buildings contained within the Conservation Area with the majority being located on the western side of The Green. Two further listed buildings are located at



the south side of The Green (18 and 19 The Green) with a listed telephone box located on the north side of The Green itself. The other significant listed buildings are located at the southern end of the conservation area consisting of the Marine Hotel on The Front, the Seaton Hotel at the corner of The Front and Church Street, Holy Trinity Church at the top of Church Street and the Seaton Bus Station. There is a further small group of listed buildings at South End at the very southern extremity of the Conservation Area. The Bus Station is most impressive architecturally consisting of two sweeping symmetrical shelters either side



of a central clock tower with an overall length of 150 metres. The Shelter constructed in the mid 1930's in reinforced concrete with a rendered finish reflects the Art Deco style of the period. Holy Trinity Church located within its churchyard at the edge of the Conservation Area provides a quiet space away from the main part of the Conservation Area. In terms of atmosphere and more intangible qualities Seaton Carew Conservation Area can be split at Station Lane with the area to the north being residential with a relaxed quiet quality while the area to the south is the busy commercial part aimed at a market of day trippers with hot food take aways, amusement arcades and novelty shops with the exception of Holy Trinity Church and church yard which offer an alternative quality as already noted.

3. The buildings in Seaton Carew vary in height from single to three storeys, with additional space in the attic where dormers to the roof provide light and ventilation. The Marine Hotel is an exception to this being 3 or 4 storeys in height. Buildings have a strong vertical emphasis with pitched roofs, the earliest buildings finished in clay pantile with the later buildings finished in slate. Traditional timber sash windows predominate many of which are multi paned and add to the vertical emphasis, but there are examples of casement and horizontal sliding sash windows.



Walling is commonly constructed in brickwork, often rendered and painted but the earlier buildings are constructed in random rubble and whitewashed. Bay windows of the Victorian canted type and the Edwardian square type have been added at first floor level, sometimes replacing an earlier sash window. Of particular note are the traditional shop fronts with many original examples surviving. Unlike examples in

### **C. LOCATION AND SETTING**

1. Seaton Carew Conservation Area is located on level ground south of Hartlepool with equally flat topography in an arc from north to the south of the Conservation Area. Extensive flat sands and the expanse of the North Sea form the other boundary. Seaton Carew is visible from the north from areas like the Headland set against the undulating sand dunes of the North Gare, the Tees estuary and the Cleveland Hills and industry to the south of the Tees. Much of the atmosphere of Seaton Carew and its main economic function is given by this seaside location.



### **D. HISTORY**

1. The name Seaton Carew derives from sea-town or on-sea and from the family manorial name of Carrowe. While the earliest evidence of settlement dates from the medieval and Roman periods, the layout and building character now evident in the Conservation Area derives from the economic and social activities between the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
2. These economic and social activities and their effect on the character of the Conservation Areas can be divided into three distinct phases. Each phase produced its own distinct building design and appearance and use of particular materials. This has produced the distinctive character of Seaton Carew with a mixture of buildings of different periods mixed together side by side to produce an interesting and unique appearance.
  - The first is from fishing, agriculture and the collection of sea coal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; though a salt industry derived from an evaporation process of brine and later boring for brine on the marshes south of Seaton Carew were a much earlier influence from the 15<sup>th</sup> century and





before. This produced much of the informal layout of Seaton Carew and buildings like Ashburn Cottage, 7 to 9 Green Terrace, 7 to 10 The Green and 5 to 8 South End all of which are constructed in random stonework with clay pantile roofs and a simple unselfconscious external appearance influenced by local needs.

- The second distinct phase was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when access to Seaton Carew was improved by the construction of railways and roads to replace rough tracks. This was supplemented by a tram service from Hartlepool in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This improved access had two effects one was to change Seaton Carew to a seaside resort with visitors attracted by the easily accessible beaches and secondly to create a residential escape for families made wealthy by the industrial and commercial success of Hartlepool, a similar process already noted in conservation appraisals for the Park Conservation Area. This period produced its own set of buildings;

consciously designed residential villas the prime example of which is the Staincliffe (now a hotel), but also 1 to 5 The Cliffe and the majority of the houses around The Green (with some of these converted from the earlier phase like 10 The Green). The response in terms of buildings to the visitors to Seaton Carew was the construction of hotels like the Seaton Hotel and the Seven Stars Hotel, later to be demolished and replaced by the Marine Hotel (both grade 2 listed).



All these buildings, unlike the earliest phase of Seaton Carew have a designed appearance with strong vertical emphasis and the display of self-conscious architectural ideas imported from beyond Seaton Carew. The materials used are brickwork (often with decorative render), slate roofs with elaborate detailed decoration in the form of balconies, porches and towers.

- The final phase in the development of Seaton Carew in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the conscious reinforcement of its role as a seaside resort by the creation of the Bus Station with its South Shelter and the North Shelter opposite The Green (both shelters now demolished). These buildings were aimed at improving the experience of visitors to Seaton Carew. All were constructed in the favoured material of the time which was reinforced concrete and reflected the Art Deco design influences of the 1930's when they were built.



A more formal promenade layout was also introduced to improve

completion of the formal Esplanade at the northern end in 1905.

3. Attached in the appendices is Plan 3, a historic map from 1897 with the present Conservation Area boundary super imposed which shows that this boundary includes much of the original settlement of Seaton Carew. The historic plan illustrates how compact Seaton Carew was, concentrated on a narrow strip facing the North Sea. One feature of note from the historic plan is that with the exception of 70 to 79 The Front the sea frontage was clear of buildings. With historic photographs, as added information, the frontage to the sea was very informal consisting of rough grass and sand dunes bounded by a bird's mouth fence, until this was formalised as noted immediately above. All the land to the west was an extensive agricultural field system managed from farm buildings within Seaton. Prior to the construction of roads and the railways the plan also shows how isolated Seaton was. Until 1882 when the road between Seaton and Hartlepool was constructed communication was by means of a meandering track. At the southern end of Seaton the road ended in a farm track and footpath with a road to Graythorp etc only constructed relatively recently in 1914, creating the current through route for traffic. In 1836 a railway link was constructed between the Hartlepool and the Clarence lines to connect to Seaton, also causing the creation of a road link from the west along Station Lane. Before these changes access to the outside world was via a coach service for the wealthy and stage wagon for those that were not, running from Darlington in 1783. A regular coach service started from Hartlepool to Stockton passing through Seaton in 1836. A tram service commenced in 1902. The slowly improving transport access was the cause for the most recent change to Seaton with the conversion of the agricultural land to the west of Seaton to a residential suburban character, a process that was already beginning in 1897 and can be seen continuing in attached historic plans for 1938.

#### **E. PUBLIC INVESTMENT RESPONSE TO DECLINE**

1. Visitors have been important to the economy of Seaton since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A visitor, William Tate, in 1821 observed that two thirds of the Seaton villagers were employed as waiters, cooks, laundresses and cleaners. This importance to the local economy continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with improved communications (indicated previously) visitors changed from paying guests staying for weeks at time to day trippers arriving in large numbers first by train, then by bus and coach at the Bus Station and then by their own cars. With larger numbers the economic importance widened beyond Seaton to become important to the economy of Hartlepool. With rising affluence in the form of increasing car ownership and the ability to travel the attractiveness of Seaton declined and with reduced visitors, investment in Seaton as a resort also declined. By the 1960's, together with the wider economic problems of Hartlepool, Seaton Carew was visibly deteriorating. The

public policy response was to raise the status of Seaton Carew by its declaration as a Conservation Area in 1969 and to apply public funding programmes in the form of the Urban Programme (in the late 1980's) and a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS) in 2002 to 2005 funded from central government sources, English Heritage and Hartlepool Council.



2. The public investment response under these two programmes was to provide building grants to undertake basic repairs to properties and undo the many inappropriate alterations to restore the original character of buildings. One particular design difficulty was past investment by amusement arcade owners, introducing long continuous modern shop frontages running across several different properties, producing a single appearance but obliterating the variety and differences between buildings which provides much of the character of Seaton. Other investment occurred in the environment, particularly under the HERS where a paving scheme was undertaken on both sides of The Front from Station Lane to Church Street. Public investment under the Urban Programme also occurred in the environment, but as the two phases of investment were not to a common set of design criteria there is reduced mutual reinforcement from the public investment made.



3. The public investment was only partly successful. The take up of building grants was patchy despite the rate of grant for shop fronts under the HERS being 75% and for works to the rest of the front elevation at 60%. Feedback from owners/developers indicates that the day tripper economy does not generate enough income for them to take part fully in publically funded investment initiatives. The day tripper economy of Seaton Carew is only significant between Easter and autumn in any year and can be highly affected by bad weather during this period. The day tripper economy is also low value with low





spend per head. The consequence is that building owners cannot accumulate the capital (or raise by commercial borrowing) to fund their proportion of grant aided works despite the high levels of grant offered. The Seaton day tripper economy for many business owners is largely a subsistence one.

4. An element of the intention of the public investment was to diversify the Seaton economy partly away from the day tripper economy, but also to support it. Part of the support was to introduce an all year indoor facility which would attract visitors to Seaton unaffected by the weather and the time of year, to extend the trading period for local owners and increase their incomes. The diversification was to introduce different economic uses to Seaton which were unconnected with the day tripper economy and connected to a wider economy. Partial success was achieved in this with a music shop and gift and flower shop having set up together with restaurants, some with the aid of building grants. Progress in establishing any substantial new-build attraction on the sea front, however, depends on a positive outcome from current coast defence studies.



## **F. REVIEW OF CURRENT POSITION**

1. Overall Seaton Carew can be considered to be in relatively good condition with no vacant or underused groups of buildings (unlike Church Street Conservation Area which was recently assessed) which can have a detrimental effect not only on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area but on the local economy. One exception to this is the Longscar Centre which although not in the Conservation Area boundary is adjacent to it and is largely unused and empty. The last significant public investment in the Conservation Area was in 2005 and as indicated this was only partially successful. There are remaining issues of poor building maintenance and inappropriate alterations which can have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and upon the attractiveness as a visitor destination. A related issue to the appearance of buildings is the design and appearance of adverts. The public investment in the environment that has been made has been restricted by the budgets available with a consequent reduced impact. The appearance also appears piecemeal and therefore reduced in impact due to the lack of a common design approach.
2. Seaton Carew Conservation Area can be divided and considered in two distinct parts, divided by the road junction at Station Lane. To the north of Station Lane the character is predominantly residential, though there

are a small number of hotels and bed and breakfasts. The area to the south of Station Lane is predominately commercial and retail in character, but with some solely residential properties mostly on the north side of Church Street and at 4 to 6 The Front .

3. **Area north of Station Lane** – As a consequence of the predominately residential character there are no empty buildings with properties largely well maintained. The commercial properties like Staincliffe Hotel, Norton Hotel and 18 to 19 The Green(a bed and breakfast) are also well maintained. The commercial properties benefited from grant investment under the Urban Programme as did 12 The Green under the HERS scheme. Residential properties have also received grant under the Council's Conservation grant budget. This investment has therefore had a long-term benefit. The appearance of the Esplanade to this area is also well maintained with recent improvements achieved following the demolition of the structurally unsound North Shelter (the reinforced concrete construction had been badly affected by the seaside location).



4. The area of The Green provides an opportunity to create a significant environment which could improve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area. Set back from the Esplanade, The Green presents an interesting open space framed by buildings. Although the buildings are mostly well maintained with many having benefited from public investment and retaining period detailing, The Green itself has not benefited from any recent investment. An environmental scheme including the footpath across The Green and its boundary, the surrounding roads, footpaths and lighting has the potential to create a greater positive impact. Residents have also expressed an interest in a railing restoration scheme to their property boundaries. At the north east corner of The Green is a war memorial, the setting of which could be improved in a similar way to that undertaken at the Headland enhancing this particular corner of The Green.



5. **Area south of Station Lane** – The area to the south of Station Lane is predominately commercial and retail in character. The issues in this area to be considered are building appearance arising from inappropriate repairs and alterations, inappropriately designed and

detailed advertisements to properties and the incoherent appearance of the street environment, mostly to the Esplanade. The presence of the Longscar Centre and its largely unused condition, although not in the Conservation Area, has a major detrimental effect upon its character and economic confidence.

- Building appearance. The character of the Conservation Area is reduced by inappropriate alterations and maintenance. A good example of this is 34 The Front which has lost all original period details including shop front, first floor bay windows and sash windows. One notable issue is the predominance of amusement arcade frontages at 18 to 25 The Front and 12 to 13 The Front, where a single modern shop front design has been introduced across the front of a number of buildings, removing the variety of detail between buildings that is the character of Seaton Carew.

- The Longscar Centre is at the centre of the area south of Station Lane. Although not in the Conservation Areas it is adjacent to the boundary and its presence physically dominates the surrounding area. The Centre has been extended to improve its economic viability, measures which have largely failed with the result that the Centre is mostly in an unused condition and adversely affects the local economy and the quality of the Conservation Area.



- The design of adverts to properties in the form of fascia signs to shop fronts and hanging signs to front elevations and their illumination can enhance the quality of a building and the conservation area. The choice of materials, style or font type of letters used, the colours used for backgrounds and letters and the way the advert is illuminated are some of the detailed issues which need to be addressed to achieve satisfactory advert design. Design advice made available to owners and agents who submit applications would be a means to address this design issue.



- The Esplanade, including the car park to the rear of 70 to 79 The Front and the area to the rear of the Bus Station has been subject to successive environmental schemes under Urban Programme and the HERS. The public investment has of necessity

been piecemeal with no overall single initial design and palette of materials. A consistent design approach for this area including material types (also taking in the area of the Longscar Centre) which could be implemented over an extended period would achieve an improved impact.

- Another area to be considered for environmental scheme which could enhance the character of the conservation area and the visitor experience is the church yard to Holy Trinity (grade 2 listed). The rear of the Church yard contained the Vicarage until it was demolished. The churchyard surrounded by a wall and containing original features like railings provides a space for an alternative quieter environment for visitors with the opportunity to create a garden in the area of the former vicarage.



- The future management of Seaton Carew Conservation Area needs to be considered in the context of the Sea Change initiative which is a possible source of public investment in the environment, buildings and heritage of seaside resorts. A number of seaside resorts in the north east region have already been successful in obtaining funding from the Sea Change initiative. An application to Sea Change has been submitted for Seaton Carew. The application focuses on the area around the Bus Station. Alongside this application s wider feasibility study is being carried out to the seafront area in conjunction with the Coast Strategy which is considering sea defences in the area.

## **G. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

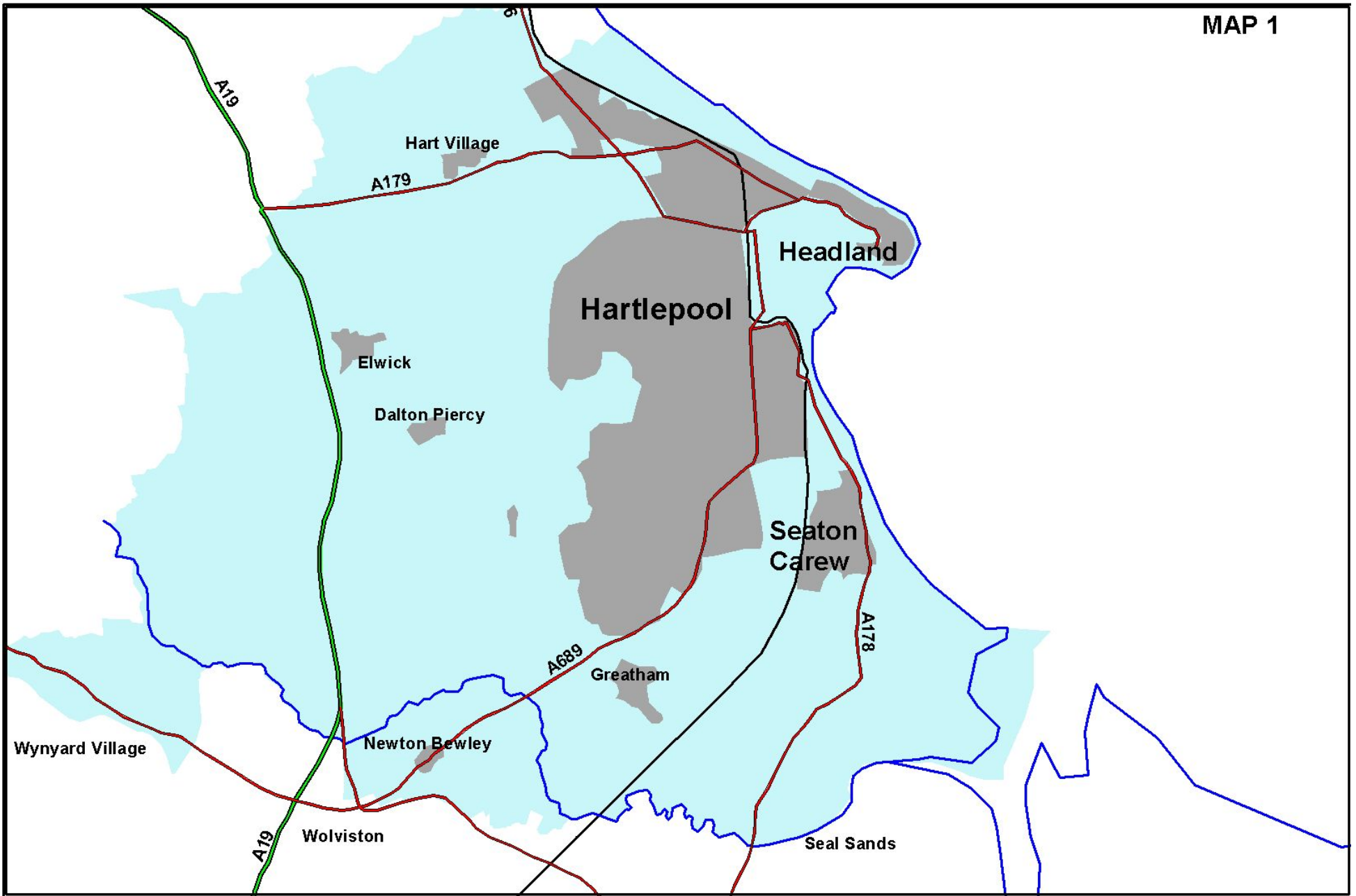
1. The heritage of buildings and the general environment in any sea side resort form an important part of an area therefore steps to achieve the appropriate management of Seaton Carew Conservation Area will be a foundation for a successful resort. The conservation area appraisal report has addressed the following issues in the future management of Seaton Carew Conservation Area:
  - Building appearance, arising from inappropriate alterations and maintenance.
  - The design of adverts to properties.
  - The design and appearance of the street environment, including the possibility of further areas of enhancement.
2. **Building Appearance** – As the report indicates the quality of the Conservation Area is reduced by inappropriate alterations to buildings, poor design and maintenance in the context of a conservation area.

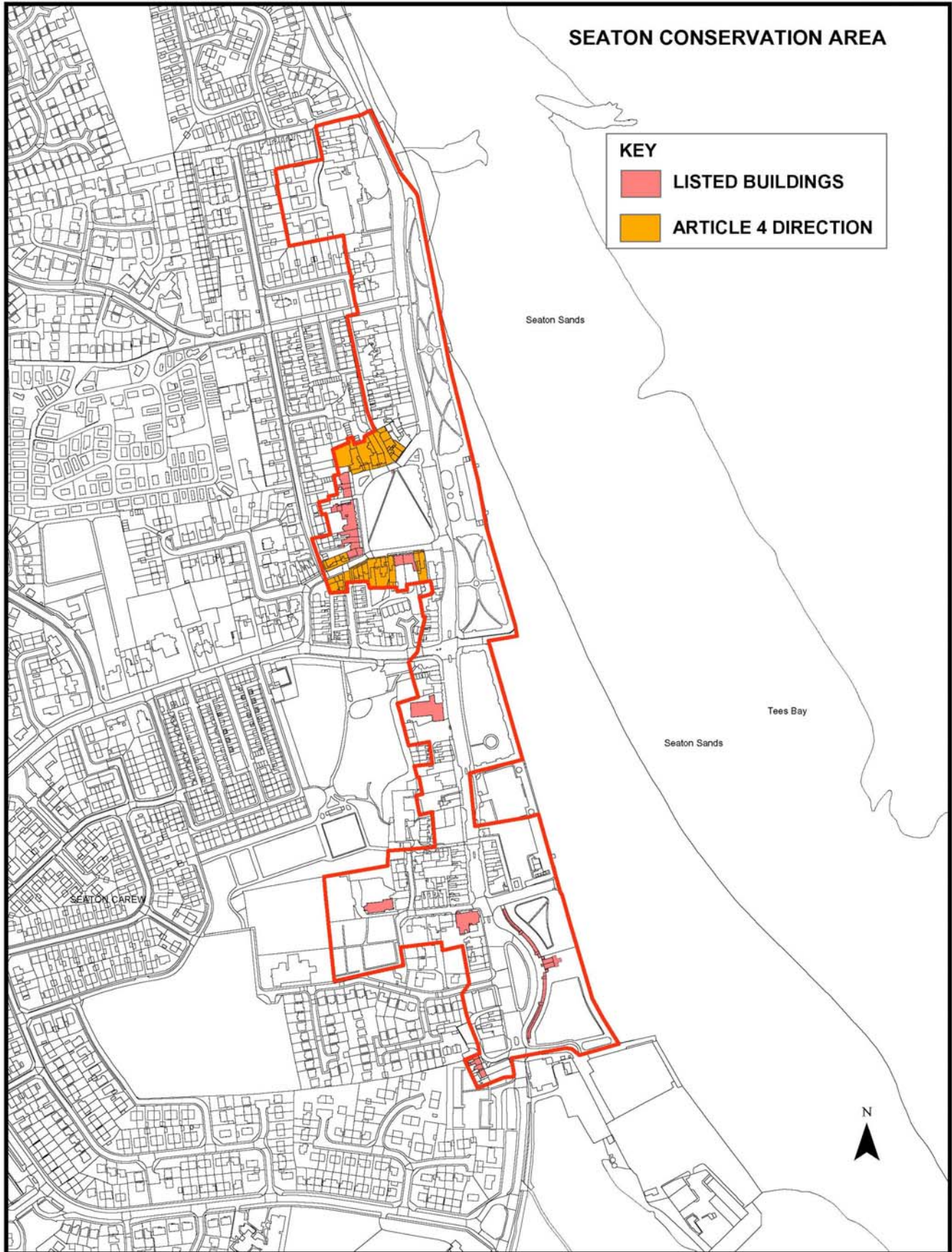
The report noted the example of properties on The Front where all the traditional appearance has been lost by inappropriate alterations. The predominance of long continuous horizontal amusement arcade frontages have removed the variety and interest that a number of differing traditionally detailed frontages would provide. Part of the solution to achieve an improvement would be to provide building design advice to owners particularly concerning shop front design. A leaflet "Shop front Design Guide" already exists along with a Supplementary Guidance Note in the Local Plan providing guidance on shopfronts and advertisements. These could be adapted and expanded in a leaflet to be applicable to Seaton Carew. The Appraisal has also noted the detrimental effect of the Longscar Hall on the positive character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Although outside the Conservation Area it abuts the boundary and because of its physical size and largely unused condition has a negative effect.

3. **Design of advertising** – The type of design and detail of advertisements to buildings and shop fronts can have a positive impact on the appearance of Seaton Carew as a Conservation Area. The leaflet on "Shop Front Design" mentioned above could be adapted to address good design of advertisements on buildings and shop fronts in the context of a conservation area. The integration of roller shutters into the overall shop front design can enhance the character of individual buildings and the wider appearance of Seaton Carew and the leaflet could address this issue as well.
4. **Design and Appearance of the Street Environment** – The Appraisal report has noted the condition of some of the street environment, particularly the area around the Longscar Hall, the car park to the rear of 70 to 79 The Front and to the rear of the bus station. This area has been subject to a number of environmental improvement schemes which due to the periodic availability of funding has been piecemeal and not to a single overall standard. The materials used have also not been of sufficient quality to be long lasting. An approach working to a single overall design with a limited range of high quality materials (which could be implemented over an extended period, if sufficient funding was not readily available) would provide a consistent overall outcome. The Appraisal report also notes that beside the sea front other areas seem appropriate for environmental improvements consisting of The Green (including a railing scheme suggested by residents) and the churchyard to Holy Trinity Church.

Attached as an appendix is a table outlining the issues in the conservation area drawn from the above conclusions and the way in which these can be addressed through existing working practices.



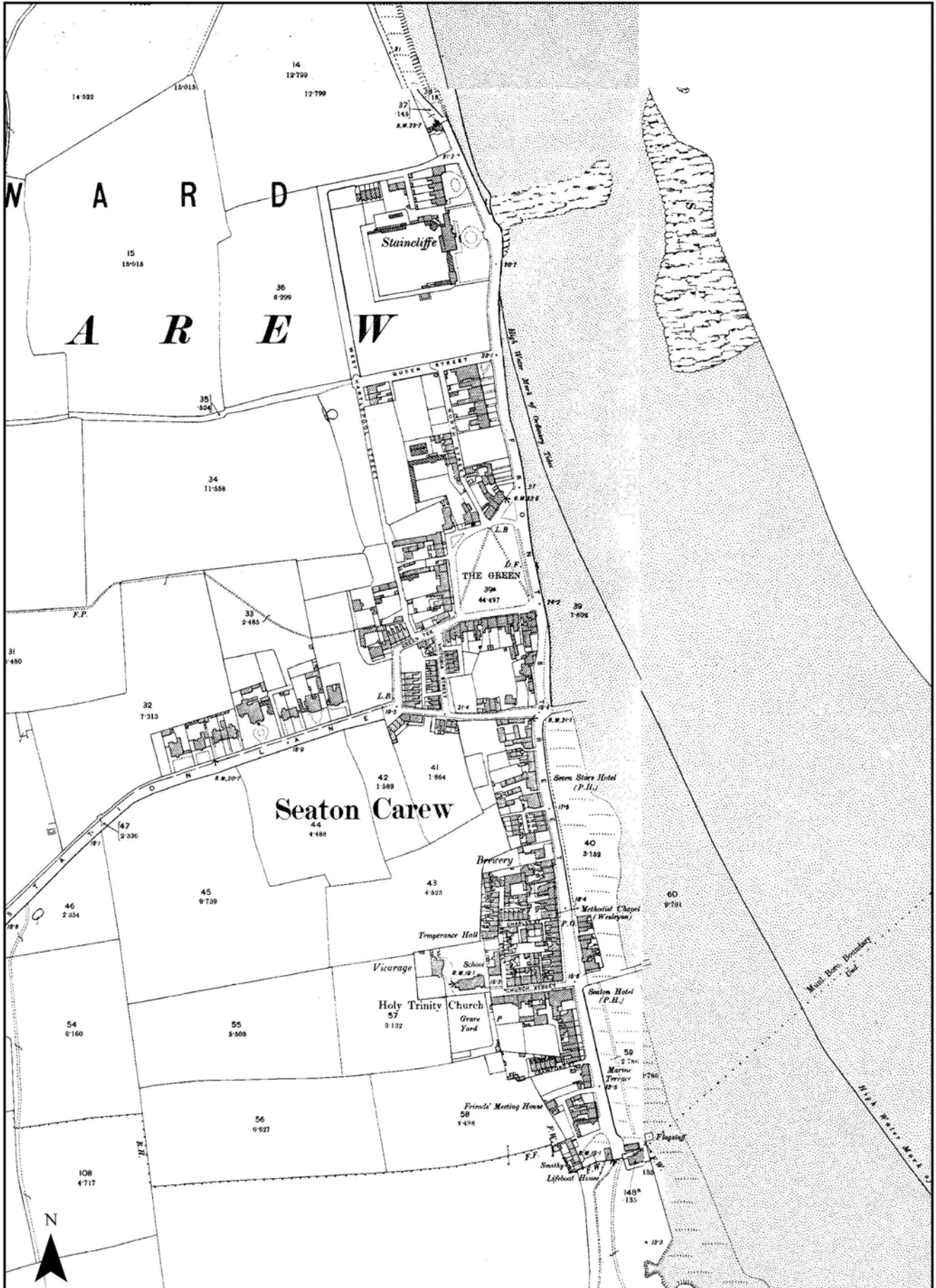




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### Action Plan addressing issues which have arisen from the appraisal

Issue	Potential Action
Unsympathetic alterations and loss of traditional architectural details to buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where consent is required, resist unsympathetic alterations and loss of traditional architectural details through positive use of existing development control powers.</li> <li>• Encourage appropriate reinstatement of traditional architectural details in future development negotiations.</li> <li>• Take enforcement action against unauthorised removal of traditional architectural details where a breach of planning control has occurred.</li> </ul>
Poor quality shop fronts and signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take enforcement action against unauthorised change of use or removal of a shopfront where there is a negative impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area.</li> <li>• Encourage appropriate reinstatement or sympathetic shopfront and signage design (following guidance in Local Plan Supplementary Guidance Note 5)</li> <li>• Provide a leaflet offering guidance to building owners of alterations to shop fronts similar to that provided by the New Deal for Communities Partnership.</li> </ul>
Poor maintenance of buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek improvements to poorly maintained buildings or land by negotiation through the development control process.</li> <li>• Consider a strategy for using Section 215 Notices*1 to improve quality of built environment.</li> <li>• Serve Section 54 Urgent Works Notices*2 on listed buildings at risk, and consider use on unlisted buildings at risk, with agreement from appropriate authorities.</li> </ul>
Maintenance of street surfaces and street furniture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure retention/reinstatement of traditional paving and hard landscaping.</li> <li>• Encourage like-for-like replacement, provided material is 'fit for purpose', where damage to street surface occurs.</li> <li>• Where wholesale replacement is required co-ordinate with appropriate sections to ensure consistency and quality of alternative material.</li> <li>• Ensure good maintenance of street furniture, and, where replacement is required that they are of an appropriate design.</li> </ul>

The above table provides a list of issues relating specifically to the conclusions drawn in the Seaton Carew Conservation Area Appraisal. The implementation of the potential actions may depend on the existing and future financial and staff resources that Hartlepool Borough Council departments work within.

\*1 A Section 215 Notice is a notice that is served on the owner or occupier when the poor condition and the appearance of the property or land are detrimental to the surrounding area or neighbourhood. The notice requires proper maintenance of the property of land in question, and it specifies what steps are required to remedy the problem within a specific time period.

\*2 An Urgent Works Notice is served under section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended, and can be served on a vacant (or vacant parts of a) listed building where works are urgently necessary for the preservation of a listed building. In exceptional circumstances there are special powers available to the Secretary of State to authorise the use of these powers to an unlisted building in a conservation area where the preservation of the building is important for maintaining the character or appearance of the area. The works that can be implemented include making the building weather tight, safe from structural collapse and preventing unauthorised entry, vandalism or theft.