

CHURCH STREET CONSERVATION AREA



Visual Assessment



A. INTRODUCTION

1. The following report gives a short assessment and appraisal on the Church Street Conservation Area which was declared in 1985. 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 the Church Street 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. The attached plan (Map1) gives the current boundary of the Church Street Conservation Area consisting essentially of a single street (Church Street itself) orientated approximately east/west with a series of shorter side streets (Tower Street, Scarborough Street, Whitby Street) on the southern side of the Area. On the north side of the Conservation Area is the Hartlepool railway station. The west side of the Conservation Area is defined by Church Square with a projection of the boundary to the lower part of Victoria Road to encompass two buildings (the Grand Hotel and the former Wesley Chapel, both grade II listed buildings).



2. The plan also indicates the listed buildings contained within the Conservation Area with the majority being located along Church Street but with some on the side streets to the south, like the Constitutional Club on Whitby Street. The most prominent listed building is Christ Church (grade II* listed) in Church Square. The Church dates from 1850 and due to its physical size, but also more subtle architectural orientation, dominates the views from the eastern end of Church Street and along Tower Street. The western extension of the Conservation Area contains the previously mentioned Wesley Chapel, a building of classical design and the Grand Hotel with terracotta dressings, influenced by European design. In total there are 15 listed buildings including two bronze statues located near Christ Church. Two significant listed buildings

(grade II) are located just outside the Conservation Area boundary. These are the former Post Office building on Tower Street which is very similar to the Grand Hotel in age, style materials and detailing with the other listed building being the former Market Hotel public house (until recently the MAS Agra restaurant) on Lynn Street, with a terracotta faience forming the public house frontage. Their locations are indicated on the attached plan at the Appendix (Map1).



3. The buildings in Church Street generally are three storeys, with additional space in the attic where dormers to the roof provide light and ventilation. Buildings have a strong vertical emphasis with pitched roofs exclusively finished in slate. Traditional timber sash windows add to the vertical emphasis. Walling is constructed in brickwork, often rendered and painted. 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. These often have highly decorative features such as moulded corbels above pilasters, cornice moulding to fascias and decorative mullions and transoms.



C. LOCATION AND SETTING

1. Church Street is located on the largely level ground on the north side of Tees bay with higher ground to the north and west. As a result many of the prominent buildings of Church Street itself can be seen from the Headland to the north, Seaton Carew to the south and from high ground near the villages of Elwick and Dalton Piercy. Christ Church and its tower, and some of the other larger buildings, can be easily identified. Completely surrounding Church Street in an arc from north to south is the rest of urban Hartlepool. Immediately

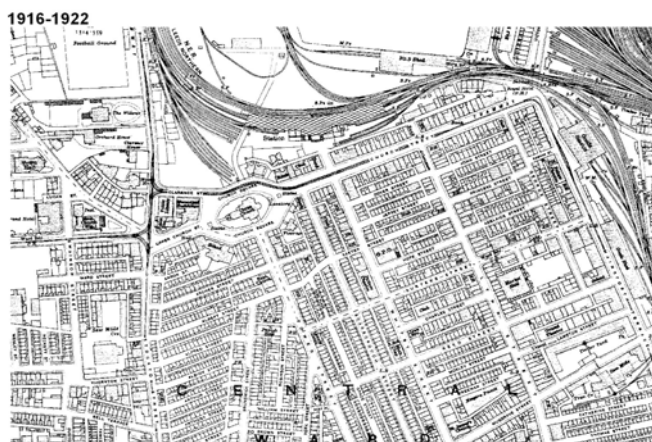


north of Church Street are Hartlepool Docks (now largely a marina) and to the east only a few hundred metres away the North Sea. Both of these have an immediate influence on the atmosphere of Hartlepool with the docks and harbour having a major influence on the historical development of Church Street.

D. HISTORY

1. Church Street formed one of the principal streets in the new West Hartlepool created in the mid-nineteenth century in response to the economic stimulus created by the harbour and dock to the north. Like many ports and harbours on the east coast of England there was high levels of trade with Europe and the Baltic. The harbour also accommodated extensive ship building facilities. West Hartlepool was established to service this trading and manufacturing economy.

2. An historic map is attached (Map 2) which shows how West Hartlepool developed prior to 1895 with a grid iron street pattern clearly evident including Church Street and other major streets like Lynn Street and Whitby Street. The town was then confined between Stockton Road (now the A689) and railway lines up against the coast.



Later historic plans dated 1916-1922 show West Hartlepool fully developed. Most of the high density development was residential but with commercial, retail, entertainment and community uses being part of the urban mix. The wealth created by the manufacturing and trade resulted in an expansion to the west with a residential escape from the densely populated West Hartlepool to areas of space and high amenity like the Grange and Park both of which are also conservation areas. West Hartlepool responded to this expansion by providing retail facilities like department stores and other commercial facilities to serve this newly created wealth.

3. In the post war period Church Street changed dramatically due to a combination of economic decline arising from the shift in trading patterns, the decline in shipbuilding, the retrenchment of the national railway system, national economic changes and changing social activities. These economic changes created a high level of unused commercial, retail and community buildings. Other sources of change were the clearance of substandard housing. The combination of these factors and a national mood to “modernise” resulted in clearance programmes causing the large scale loss of the urban fabric south of Church Street. The grid iron pattern of major streets was however largely retained despite the loss of building fabric.

E. PUBLIC INVESTMENT RESPONSE TO DECLINE

1. The physical and economic decline described above continued to affect the remaining fragment of Church Street following the loss of the surrounding area. The condition was so extreme that it was affecting the confidence of businesses that did remain in the area and the public perception of Hartlepool. The public policy response was to raise the status of Church Street by its declaration as a Conservation Area in 1985 and to apply public funding programmes in the form of the Urban Programme (in the late 1980's) and the later City Challenge (1993-98).



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2. An outline review of Church Street and the adjoining streets in terms of derelict or under used properties just before the major City Challenge investment commenced in 1992, illustrates the progress that has subsequently been made and places in context the current condition of Church Street. Generally before the investment Church Street was an area with a very high proportion of unused and under used buildings (near 50%) and a lack of confidence by private building owners that any investment, even in basic maintenance, would be worthwhile.

- Victoria Road – The Wesley Chapel opposite the Grand Hotel had been derelict since the early 1970's. The Binns Department Store (now Wilkinson's) opposite the Wesley Church also became empty.



- Church Square – Christ Church had also been unused since the early 1970's and was isolated on what was effectively a traffic island. The former Police Station on Church Square was largely unused. The adjoining public library, now known as Leadbitter Buildings, was subsequently vacated. All three buildings are listed.

- North side Church Street – Central Buildings adjacent to 48 Church Street was vacant long term with 48 Church Street subsequently losing its use. In the next block 49 to 53 Church Street (a modern building) was unused, with a prominent gap site in the frontage from wartime bomb



damage. Much of the next block consisting of 66 Church Street to The Royal Hotel was derelict and empty with properties without roofs and floors.

- South side Church Street – The worst block in this part of the street was from 31/32 Church Street (now the Hillcarter Hotel, formerly the Dovecot Salesrooms) to the Athenaeum Club on the corner of Lynn Street. Here the conditions were similar to the other side of Church Street described above, with properties without roofs and floors and the majority of other properties unused or only occupied for short periods. The Dovecot Salesrooms had been built as a department store but much of its upper floors were unused. 22 to 23 Church Street was another former department store without a use.

- Tower Street – Victoria Buildings on the corner of Church Square and Tower Street was largely unused with only some of the ground floor occupied spasmodically. Tower Street Baptist Church further along the street had been unoccupied long term. 5 and 7 Tower Street while occupied by a printing company was largely unused due to external disrepair and structural problems.



- Scarborough Street – This Street formed an enclave of businesses offering professional service to the local area from the likes of accountants, architects and surveyors. No vacant properties were present (with the exception of 37 Church Street on the corner) but the street appeared to be suffering from the lack of confidence (given by the very low maintenance undertaken) in the area arising from the large number of vacant properties nearby.
 - Whitby Street – The Constitutional Club (a listed building) had been empty long-term with intermittent uses in the adjoining Victoria public house (now Little Black Book)
 - Additional properties – Just outside the Church Street Area there were other significant properties: the former Post Office building on Whitby Street which had been empty for a considerable period and on Lynn Street the former Market Hotel which had had a series of intermittent uses. Both of these buildings are listed.
3. The public investment response under the Urban Programme in the late 1980's and the comprehensive approach of City Challenge in the 1990's addressed the problems of Church Street by means of grants to building owners or potential owners and by investment in the street scene, car parks, security measures and infill new development.

4. A combination of factors, together with the available public investment, resulted in new uses being found for almost all the buildings outlined above. Public sector requirements found new office uses for the Central Library building and the former Police Station and converted Christ Church to an art gallery. Private sector interest in creating restaurants, public houses and night clubs found uses for the empty properties in Church Street, including the Dovecot Salerooms, converted to a bar and hotel, the former Post Office to a bar and the Constitutional Club to a night club. Investment in housing created flats in Central Buildings and the “gap site” adjacent to 58 Church Street and above existing ground floor retail uses. Retail development also played a part in the area of Church Street near to the town centre.



5. Building repair and improvement grants available for existing business tackled the problems of fundamental repairs and encouraged businesses to utilise space more efficiently to expand the firm’s capabilities. This type of investment in Scarborough Street for example resulted in the street scene being improved with railings erected to the curtilages and the front elevations improved using traditional design detailing. Scarborough Street continues to function as a small professional business community with the appearance of the Street maintained, indicating the continued confidence of owners.
6. Environmental improvements were carried out along the length of Church Street to further increase owner confidence in the Church Street area. The most notable change to the street scene being the creation of a pedestrian square to the front of Christ Church, bringing to an end the physical isolation of the building, particularly with its new use as an art gallery.

F. REVIEW OF CURRENT POSITION

1. The last significant public investment in Church Street was over 10 years ago. A survey of the area shows that this investment has had a long term benefit with high levels of building occupancy and confidence by owners in the area indicated generally by the well maintained appearance of properties. This analysis extends to properties



just outside the Conservation Area where properties have been maintained to the same standard. Examples of this are the group of properties formed by The Jackson Arms and D.H. Potter at 7 to 11 Tower Street but also a group at 19 to 25 Whitby Street. This would confirm the view that public investment based on heritage assets can have a long term beneficial effect not only on the heritage asset but also on other nearby properties which are not within a conservation area or listed.

2. However there are emerging issues which need to be addressed if the positive outcome described above is to continue and the public investment protected. The emerging issues are concentrations of empty properties, maintenance of properties, shop front shutters and advertising and maintenance of the street environmental works. Each will be detailed in turn in the paragraphs below.

3. **Vacant Properties** – Overall the number of empty properties is low when compared historically. A plan is attached (Map 3) indicating the vacant buildings in the area at the moment. However as before there are concentrations of vacant properties particularly at the eastern end of Church Street. Most of the vacant properties detailed immediately below are public houses or night clubs reflecting the changes in the local market as new investment in similar facilities elsewhere in the town attracts the restricted available market to the detriment of facilities in Church Street.

- Former Wesley Church – The hall of the former Church accommodated a gym, public house and night club but this has been vacant for some time. The unoccupied state is attracting vandalism (broken windows) and theft. The rear of the main building is also suffering from broken windows.

- Whitby Street – The Constitutional Club is the most significant empty property in Whitby Street. The Constitutional Club (which is listed) has figured before as one of the problematic larger vacant buildings. It appears to be temporarily closed, as furniture and equipment is still inside and no for sale boards are displayed on the building. 9 Whitby St/3 Jersey St is a shop property (with a flat above) opposite the Club, which has been vacant long term. 10 Whitby St is also vacant but from details on the property appears about to be let. Just outside the conservation area is the Hard Rock Café (formerly the Post Office) like the Constitutional Club a listed building and one of the problematic larger vacant buildings which have figured before.



- Lynn Street - The Market Hotel on Lynn St. is also now empty after occupation as a restaurant with sale details displayed on the building.

- Church Street – The most significant concentration of vacant properties is in Church Street. Details are given below with in most cases no marketing detail displayed on the buildings.

Address	Use	Marketing
25 and 26 Church St	Night Club	Details available
22 and 23 Church St	Night Club	No details
67,68 and 69 Church St	Residential former housing association	No details
70 and 72 Church St	Public house and night club	No details
77 and 78 Church St	Retail properties	Details available
Yorkshire Bank (See Note)	Bank	No details

Note: Vacant but still providing ATM service.

4. **Building Maintenance** – There are some emerging problems of maintenance. This mostly consists of the lack of regular decoration to upper floors. Owners have decorated the ground floor which is the easier and cheaper option but not the upper floors. This is particularly noticeable in the block from the Station Approach down to the Yorkshire Bank, but also includes the Shades public house (76 Church St) and 37 and 35 Church St. In the case of 35 Church St the issue is the inappropriateness of the colour used recently to paint the shop front (i.e. bright pink). This issue would seem relatively easy to address by encouragement to owners to decorate buildings on a regular basis and also provide advice on an appropriate palette of colours appropriate for the conservation area, for owners to consider when making the decisions to decorate.

5. **Shop front shutters and advertising** - The issue for possible concern is the addition of roller shutters externally to shop fronts instead of their integration into the overall design of the shop front and the adoption of poorly designed and detailed adverts to shop fronts in the context of a conservation area or a listed building. The concern is restricted to a small number of properties.

- Integrating a roller shutter into an existing shop front can be difficult, possibly disrupting its design and appearance, particularly so if the frontage is a highly detailed original example. External shutters may in some cases be the only alternative if owners' understandable concerns to protect their properties are to be addressed and the quality of the shop front preserved. However such an approach would have a detrimental effect upon the character of Church Street as a conservation area. Investigation of alternative approaches to help owners protect their properties rather than adopting external shutters would both protect the character of the



conservation area and address some owners' need to protect their properties.

- 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 possibly agents who submit applications would be a means to address this design issue



6. **Maintenance of Street Environmental Works** – Church Street was subject to extensive street environmental works as part of the strategy to improve the appearance and increase the confidence of owners. This investment has mostly survived very well. The main exception to this is the area forming Church Square around Christ Church and to the side of Municipal Buildings. This scheme has not stood up to the wear and tear of what is still a busy street, with areas of the surfacing material failing on a regular basis. The area is likely to be subject to a further scheme to address these emerging problems. The other issue for concern is the maintenance of street furniture installed in Church Street. The furniture consists of mostly bollards, lighting columns, a canopy over 49 to 53 and 56 to 58 Church St and entrance features over Whitby Street, Lynn Street and the Station Approach. The street furniture appears not to have been decorated since installation, with the paint now oxidised. A relatively low cost scheme to decorate this furniture would have an immediate impact, but needs to be undertaken as part of an approach to owners to also consider decorating their properties as discussed above. The surfacing material to Church St and trees continue to make a positive contribution to Church Street.





G. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This assessment has shown that the Conservation Area retains many of the distinctive attributes of the Victorian new town of West Hartlepool and that substantial public sector investment of the 1990's effectively extended the life of many properties by introducing new uses in a transformed setting. The report however has also addressed the following issues in the future management of the Church Street Conservation Area:
 - Concentration of empty properties.
 - Low levels of building maintenance.
 - Installation of shop front roller shutters.
 - Maintenance of the street environment.
2. **Concentration of empty properties** – High concentrations of empty properties can have a detrimental effect upon the economic confidence of an area leading to lack of investment and low maintenance producing a spiral of economic decline. To avoid Church Street area returning to its previous position in the early 1990's intervention and investment is needed amongst other measures (see later) to arrest this potential decline. To tackle the identified vacant properties public sector funding is required to provide some level of support to encourage new potential owners to acquire buildings and provide a new use (with job creation as an additional outcome). Such funding would need to be combined with an approach to owners and estate agents of those empty buildings with a highly targeted approach to ensure that intervention is timely.
3. **Building Maintenance** – Partly related to the issue of empty properties is building maintenance and in particular the lack of regular decoration. Should funding become available to tackle empty buildings part of this could also be directed towards the decoration of buildings. Normally decoration would not attract grant aid but in this case some assistance is considered to be beneficial. As indicated above the funding would have to be highly targeted to ensure that

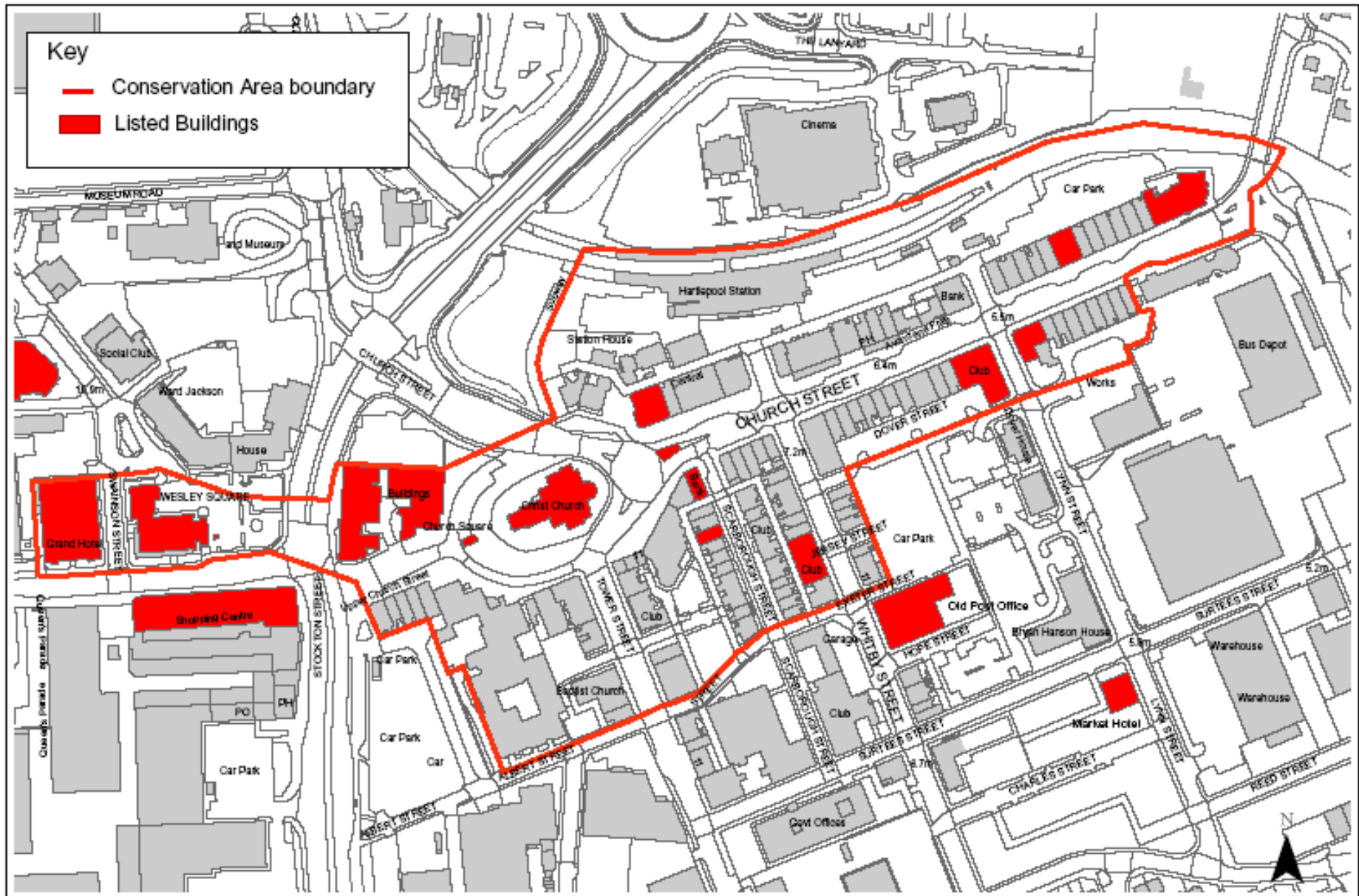
those in the worst decorative condition are addressed. The means to achieve this would be an approach to owners.

4. **Shop front shutters and advertising** – As indicated in the document the integration of roller shutters into the overall shop front design or investigation of an alternative means of protecting shop front glass from damage, can enhance the character of individual buildings and the wider appearance of Church Street. The type, design and detail of advertisements to buildings and shop fronts can equally have a positive impact on the appearance of Church Street. Some advice on the issues raised above already exists in the form of a “Shop Front Design Guide “ leaflet produced by the Council in conjunction with the New Deal for the Communities Partnership, which addresses some of the issues of roller shutters, a palette of paint colours for shop fronts and signage. Alongside this, advice is provided in the Local Plan in the form of a Supplementary Guidance Note covering shop front design and advertisements. A leaflet could be produced for owners in Church Street to emphasise some of the issues like shop front signs and advertisements. A good recent example of what is appropriate and what can be achieved is at the former Central Buildings on Church Street where a hand painted shop sign and appropriate choice of colours for the redecorated shop front has added to the quality of the surrounding area.
5. **Maintenance of Street Environment** – If building owners or new owners are to be encouraged to invest in empty buildings, decorate their buildings and be more careful in their proposals for advertisement and painting of shop fronts then the maintenance of the street furniture needs to be addressed. Subject to appropriate budgets being available a regular schedule of maintenance would address this issue.

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.

Church Street Conservation Area

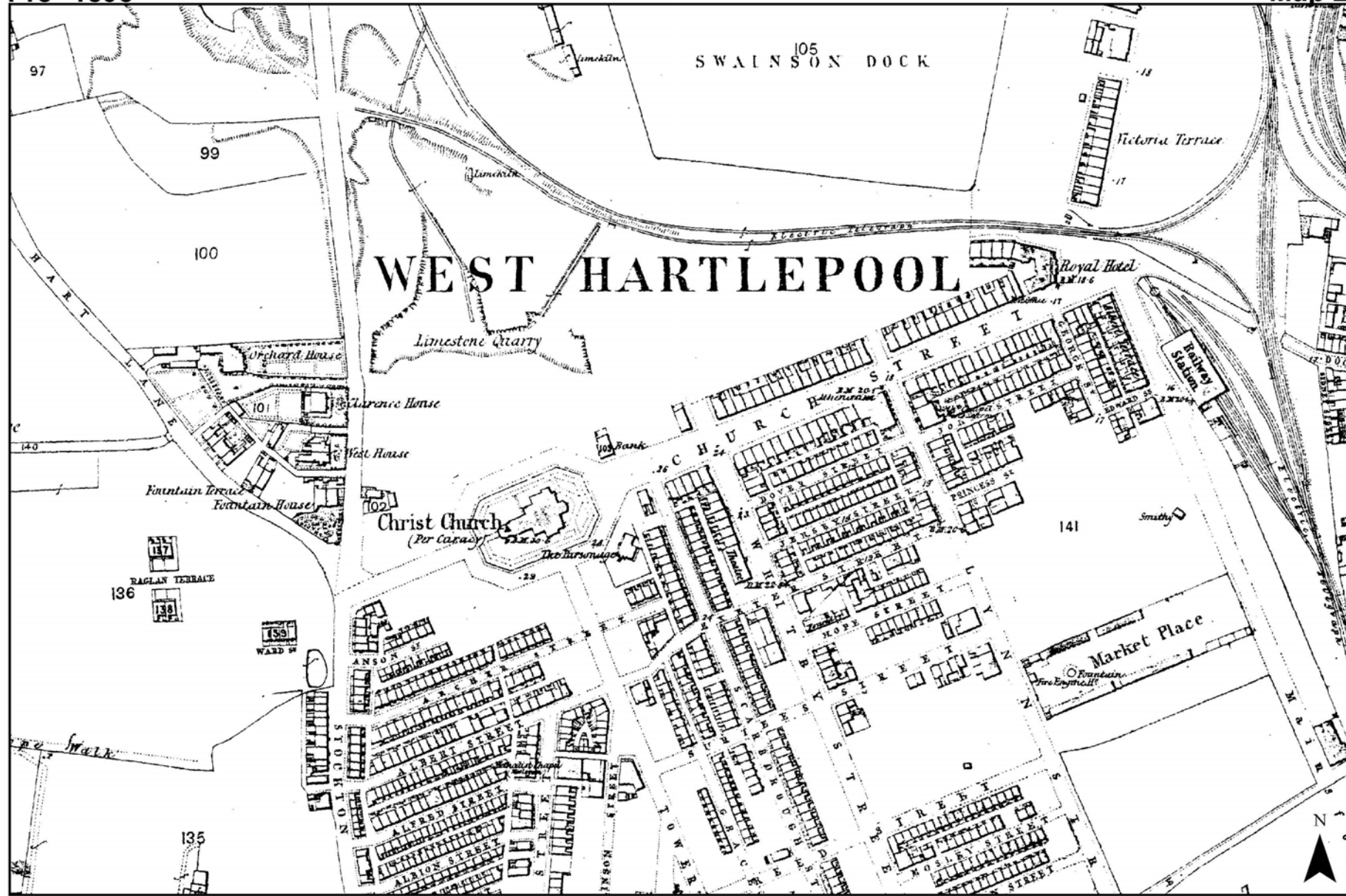
Map 1



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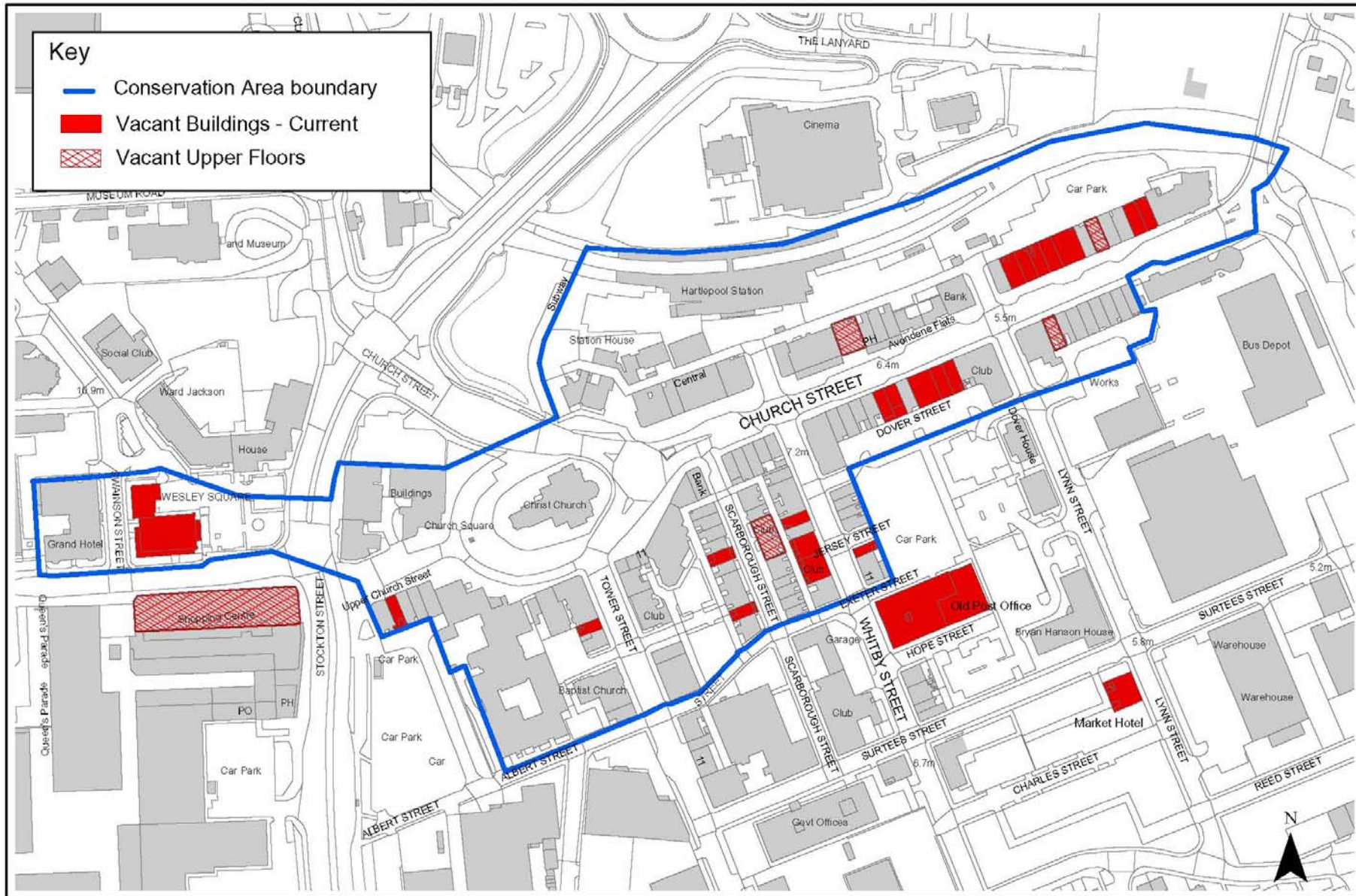


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Church Street Conservation Area - Vacant Buildings - Current



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

The above table provides a list of issues relating specifically to the conclusions drawn in the Church Street 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.