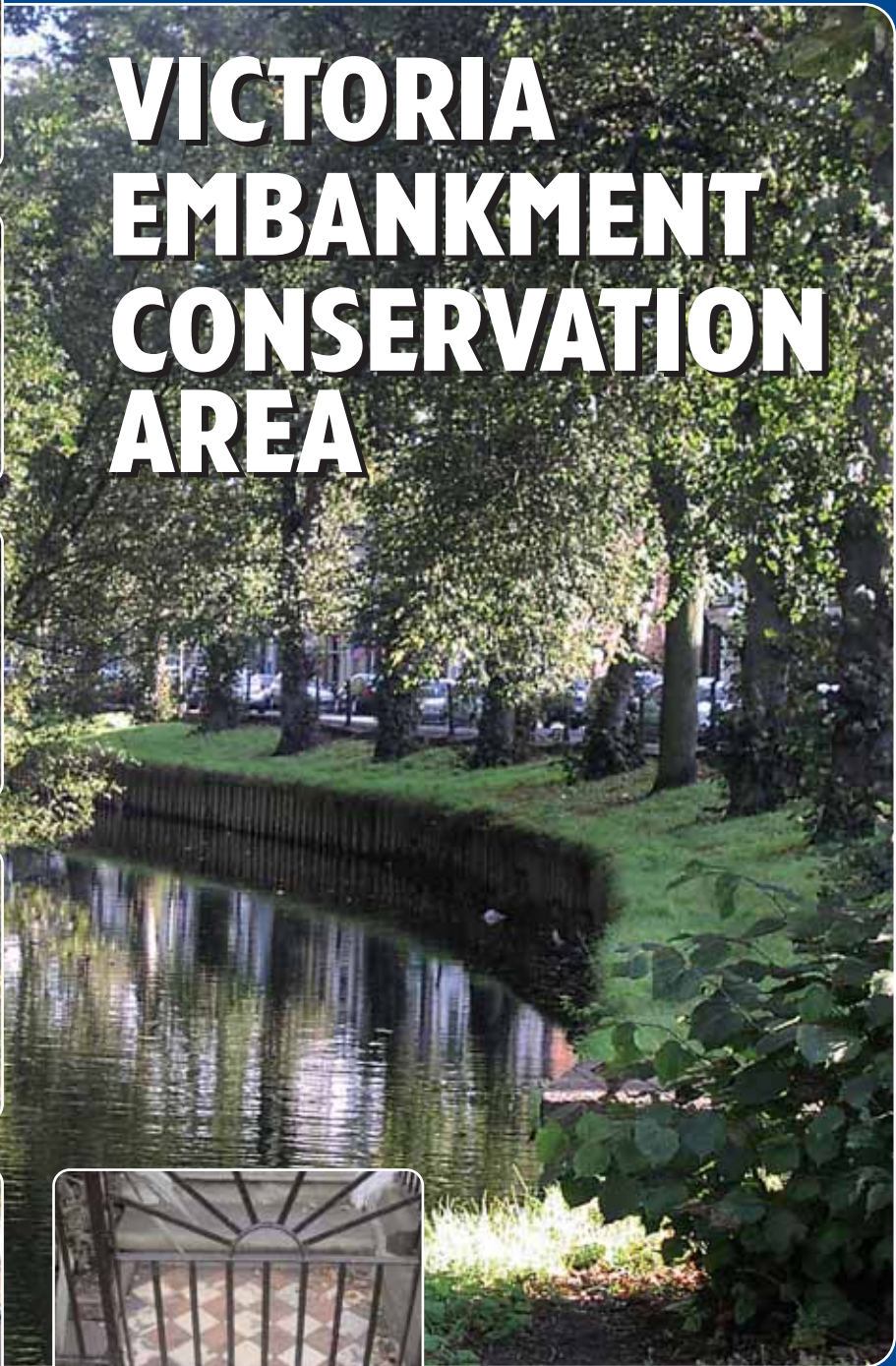


VICTORIA EMBANKMENT CONSERVATION AREA



Character Appraisal

March 2007

VICTORIA EMBANKMENT CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

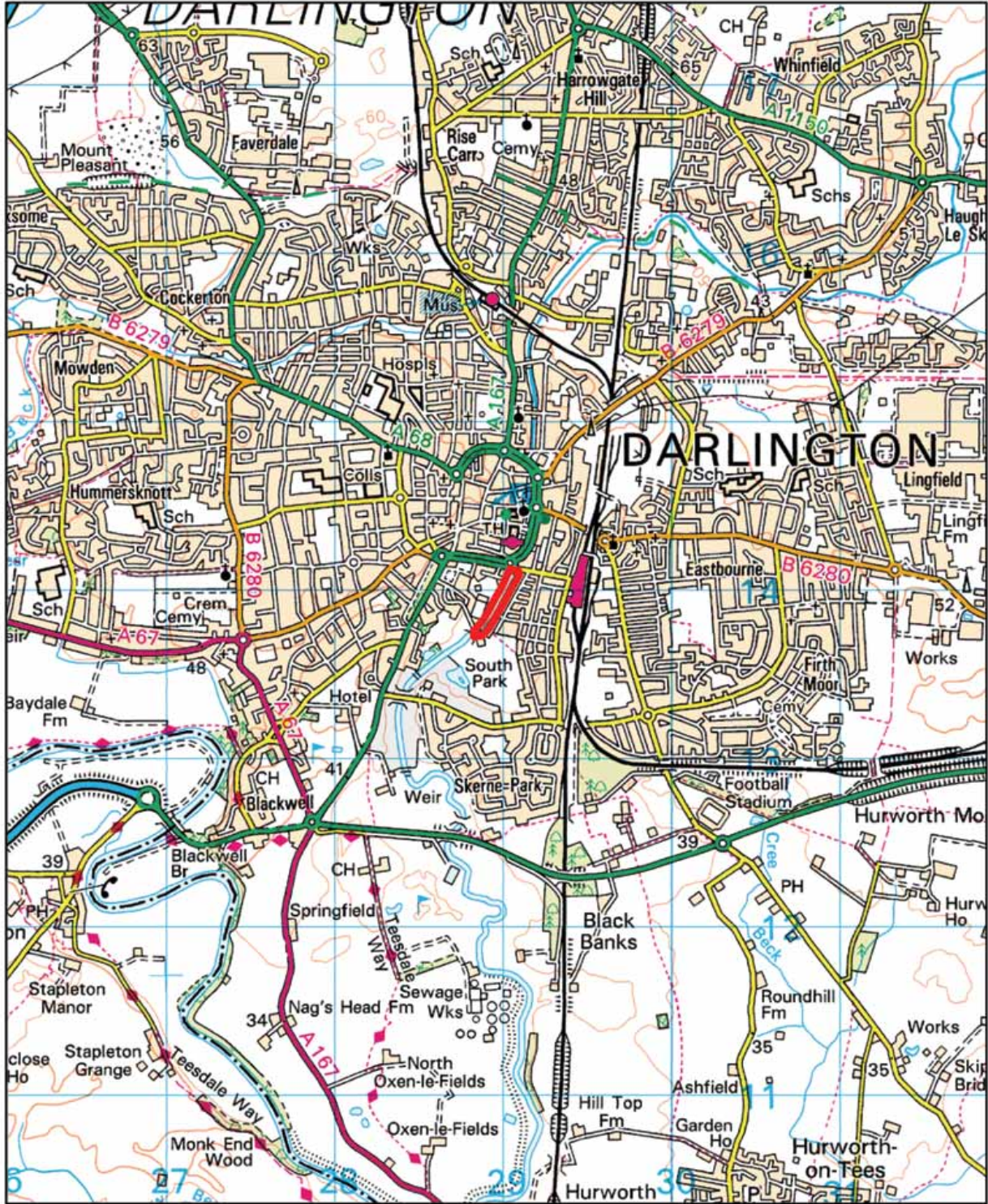
Contents	Page
1. PURPOSE OF A CHARACTER APPRAISAL	1
2. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST.....	1-2
3. VULNERABLE AREAS	2-4
Appendix	
LISTED BUILDING.....	5
PHOTOGRAPHS OF CONSERVATION AREA.....	6-10
MAPS – HISTORIC AND MODERN – SHOWING CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY	11-14
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS OF LOCAL INTEREST	15
IMPLICATIONS OF CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION INCLUDING LOCAL PLAN POLICY.....	16-17





VICTORIA EMBANKMENT CONSERVATION AREA

(INDICATED BY RED BOUNDARY)



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1. PURPOSE OF A CHARACTER APPRAISAL

- 1.1 Conservation Area designation is the main instrument available to local authorities to give effect to conservation policies for a particular neighbourhood or area. Designation introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve or enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define an area's special interest.
- 1.2 It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. Our experience of a historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings – on the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular mix of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Conservation area designation is seen as the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and of ensuring that conservation policy addresses the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as protecting individual buildings.
- 1.3 A process of change within a Conservation Area is inevitable and the purpose of a character appraisal such as this is to define as clearly as possible the historic (and by implication, archaeological), architectural and natural components of the conservation area that are considered especially important and contribute most to its character.
- 1.4 The principal aims of this document are

intended to define:-

- What influences have given Victoria Embankment its' particular character.
- What chiefly reflects this character and is most worthy of conserving.
- What has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating.
- Areas that may be improved.

2. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

This section of the appraisal contains an assessment of:-

- a) Location and Setting
- b) Historical Development
- c) Character Analysis

a. Location and Setting

- 2.1 Victoria Embankment lies just a few hundred metres South of the town centre of Darlington and is separated from it by the inner ring road built 1967-1973. The modern concrete bridge was also built at this time and replaced an earlier brick-built bridge (see historic photos). The land on which it was developed had previously been farmland (see historic maps). It is constrained by South Park to the South West, further late 19thC residential development to the East and the Feethams cricket and football grounds to the West. To the North, the junction with Victoria Road provides the boundary to the conservation area, and to the south the ornamental Polam Bridge.
- 2.2 South Park, which started developing from the 1850's, gained a better access with the canalisation of the Skerne. The formal gates and railings, recently restored and replaced provide a magnificent entrance view into the neighbouring conservation area of Grange Road/Stanhope Road.

b. Historical Development

- 2.3 When the landowners of the Polam Estate, part of which was to become Victoria Embankment, went bankrupt in 1878 the town council picked up ownership of their land. When in 1880, the borough surveyor, Thomas Smith designed the layout for the new South Park, the soil removed from the site of the pond was moved to provide a bank for what would become a fine row of middle-class housing at Victoria Embankment. The river Skerne, which at this point was a gently meandering river was “canalised” ie straightened to alleviate flooding to the Stonebridge area. This street was originally intended to be Park Avenue, then changed to Skerne Embankment, and finally at the suggestion of renowned local architect GG Hoskins, changed again to Victoria Embankment.
- 2.4 Local information suggests a landing stage was built close to Victoria road bridge to enable boat users to alight onto the park. Historic photographs show a higher river level during the existence of South Park’s boating lake. No physical evidence now remains for the feature.
- 2.5 Little has changed since, other than the development of land to the rear of Victoria Embankment in the late 19thC and removal of the 19thC stone bridge on Victoria Road in the early 1970’s, and the removal of the original cast iron front boundary railings was probably as a result of the war effort in the 1940’s. The intrusion of recent individual house modernisations has resulted in a loss of cohesion between properties.

c. Character Analysis

- 2.6 A marked contrast exists between the hard urbanity of the dwellings and the soft landscaping of a grassed area and the formal avenue of lime trees on the river bank to the East side and the overgrown and un-managed lime tree and scrub-lined

West bank. The limes on both banks have been planted uniformly, in symmetrical pairs giving the impression of a Dutch-style canal.

- 2.7 Other features are worthy of discussion as adding to the character of the area, such as the large stone plinths, beneath an uninterrupted row of ornamental cast iron posts and parallel double lengths of wrought iron chains (which came from the old Cattle Market in High Row in the 1890’s and intended to stop cattle wandering away). (see photos pp 3, 7 & 8). The cast and wrought iron Polam Bridge c1890 on the SW boundary of the area is an attractive feature and creates an interesting focal point at the southern end of the conservation area while also creating a link to Polam Lane. The bridge was closed to traffic in the 1990’s with concerns over the condition of the steel beams beneath the roadway.

3. VULNERABLE AREAS

- 3.1 The Feethams ground to the West of the conservation area has recently been the subject of a residential development proposal. This proposal (which was refused) would have incorporated a new concrete bridge to run alongside the existing Polam bridge. The now vacant Darlington football ground is also an area in need of redevelopment, but all future proposals should take into account the local importance of the Victoria Embankment Conservation Area and its significant tree covered landscaping and other historic features.
- 3.2 Development, which would affect the setting of, or views into or out of the conservation area should consider the desirability of ‘preserving and enhancing the area’, following guidance found in PPG15, Planning and the Historic Environment para. 4.14.



ABOVE: A number of the original rectangular stone blocks forming the boundary between the footpath and the grassed riverbank onto which the cast iron posts are set, have been removed and some disturbed examples lay out of their original positions and vulnerable to theft and damage.

- 3.3 Some of the chains close to South Park have been replaced in galvanized steel, a modern intrusion, which is totally unsympathetic and lacking the historic significance and hard-wrought qualities of the originals.
- 3.4 In recent years the introduction of alien

features to this 19thC development have appeared, such as unsympathetic and uncharacteristic uPVC replacement windows, doors and, significantly all the front boundary treatments which have led to the replacement of the original stone plinth walls, cast iron railings and gates. Restoring the front boundary railings would significantly improve the character and appearance of the whole terrace.

- 3.5 Modern road signage and yellow lines could be reduced, the latter (in width to 50mm) in line with English Heritage & Department for Transport guidance for historic areas as found in 'Streets for All' (2005).



ABOVE: How the majority of houses look on Victoria Embankment, with original front door, sash windows (this example with ornate leaded glazing from the 1930's) and original contrasting bands of external brickwork.

BELOW: Nearly all of the original front boundary cast iron railings have been removed and replaced with modern steel examples but a remnant remains, which could be used as a template in any future reinstatement works. (see page 8).



ABOVE: The same building, as opposite, in the 1920's - note the original cast iron railings.



ABOVE: An example of unsympathetic development – a 19thC dwelling with concrete cladding and aluminium doors and windows has a negative impact on the character of the conservation area.

3.6 The loss of many Victorian chimney pots, and changes from original roofing materials (Welsh slate) with concrete pantiles has detracted from the character and continuous roofline of the street.

LISTED BUILDING

Polam Bridge, Polam Lane, (off Victoria Embankment), Darlington – Listed Grade II on 16th August 2006.

Built c.1891 and listed for its association with South Park, this bridge is manufactured from a mixture of wrought and cast iron with mild steel beams supporting the decking. The ornamental ballustrading above the decking is of wrought iron and shows particular skill on the part of the blacksmith. The beams supporting the decking are of mild steel and are in need of

replacement. Cast iron Corinthian capitals support the columns beneath. In the later 19thC, the use of cast iron for columns (which is strong in compression) and mild steel for spans (which is strong in tension) was common practice.

Although reduced in width by boarding to prevent excess weight, this bridge is a landmark structure within the conservation area and adds quality and interest to the adjoining Grade II scheduled South Park.



The cast and wrought iron and mild steel Polam Bridge, c.1890.



VICTORIA EMBANKMENT

Photographs showing the features of Victoria Embankment

1



Photos 1 & 2: Cast iron posts c.1890.

2



Photos 3-6: Wrought iron chains showing the different styles of chain link used, also c1890, originally from High Row used during cattle market days.



Photo 7 (right): Showing the remnants of cast iron railings, probably c.1870's, and dating from when the houses were built. This design of railing is likely to have formed the front boundary treatments to all the dwellings on Victoria Embankment.

Photos 8 to 10 showing attractive Victorian features in these 1870's terraces – original doors, windows and ornamental door surrounds. Most properties still have the original 19thC doors with variation created by different paint treatments.

8



9



10



Door and surround (above right) showing a traditional "Scumbled" paint finish. These finishes simulate the graining of fine quality woods, but were often applied to pine doors, windows and panelling.

11



12



Photos 11 to 14 - examples of fine Victorian geometric tiles laid in patterns outside entrances on Victoria Embankment. It is likely that many other properties along Victoria Embankment would have had similar treatments, with tiles using geometric designs inlaid into a lime mortar screed. Many of the Victorian hallways to these properties would also have incorporated similarly designed, hard-wearing surfaces.

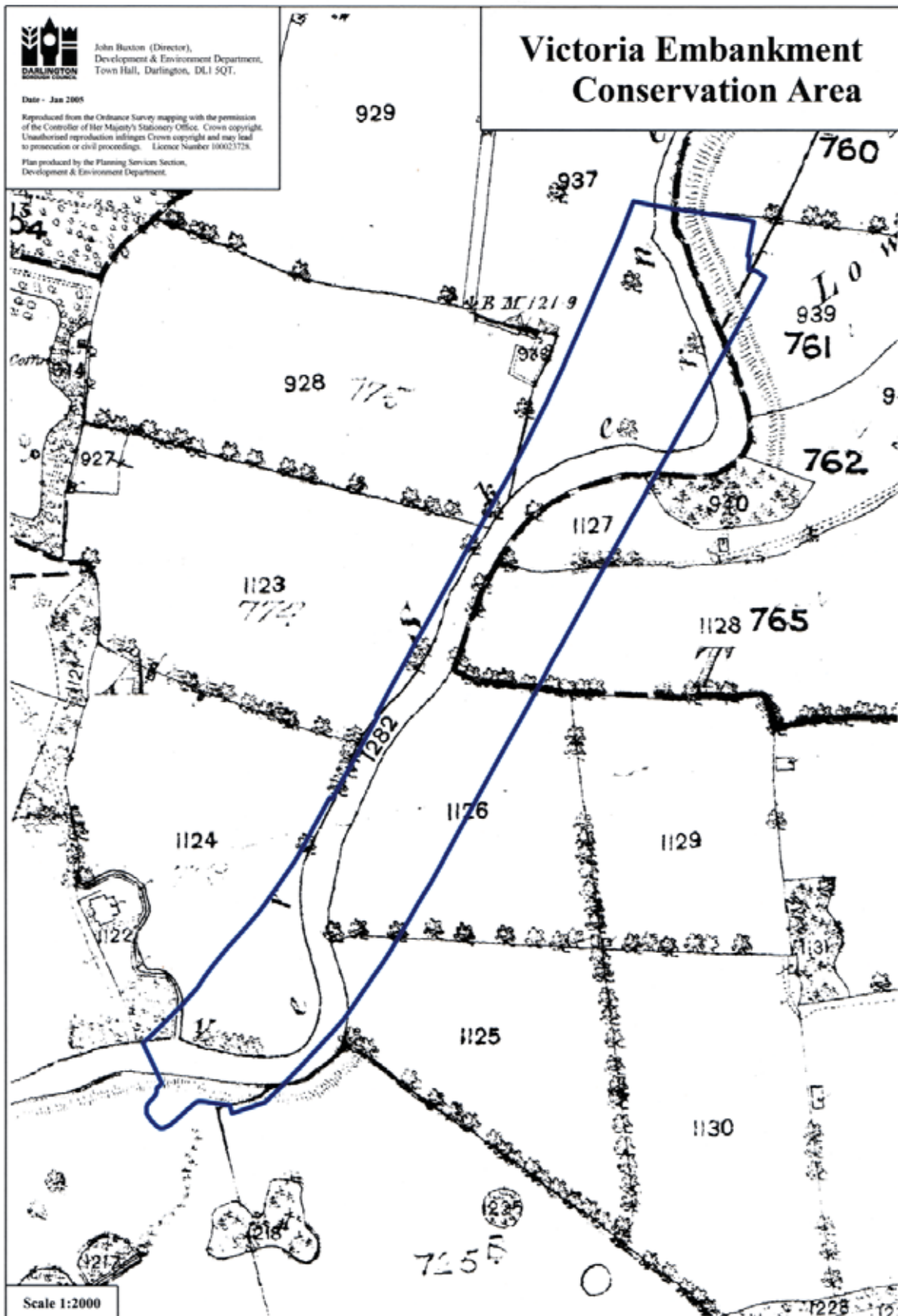
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14



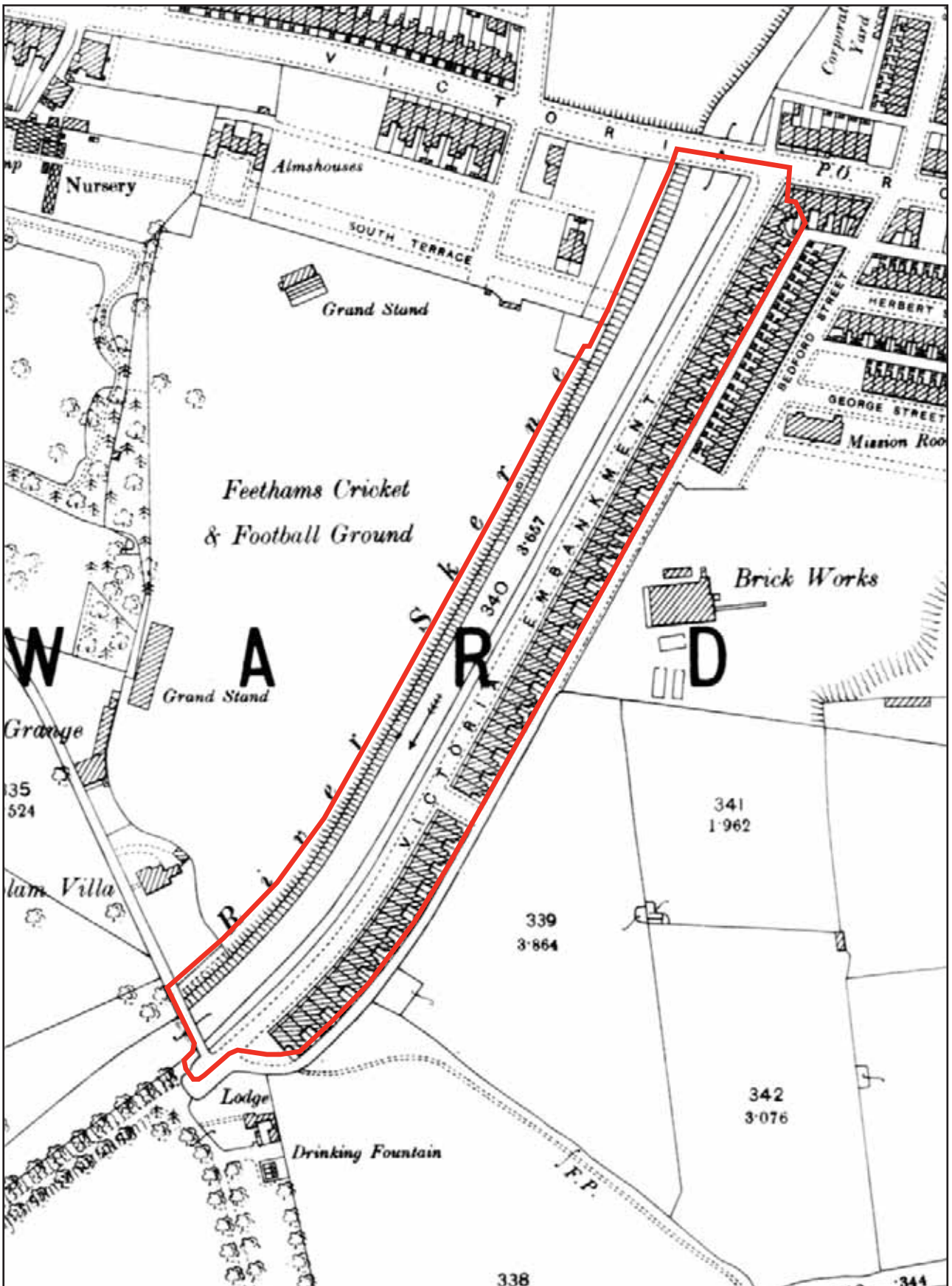
c1840's

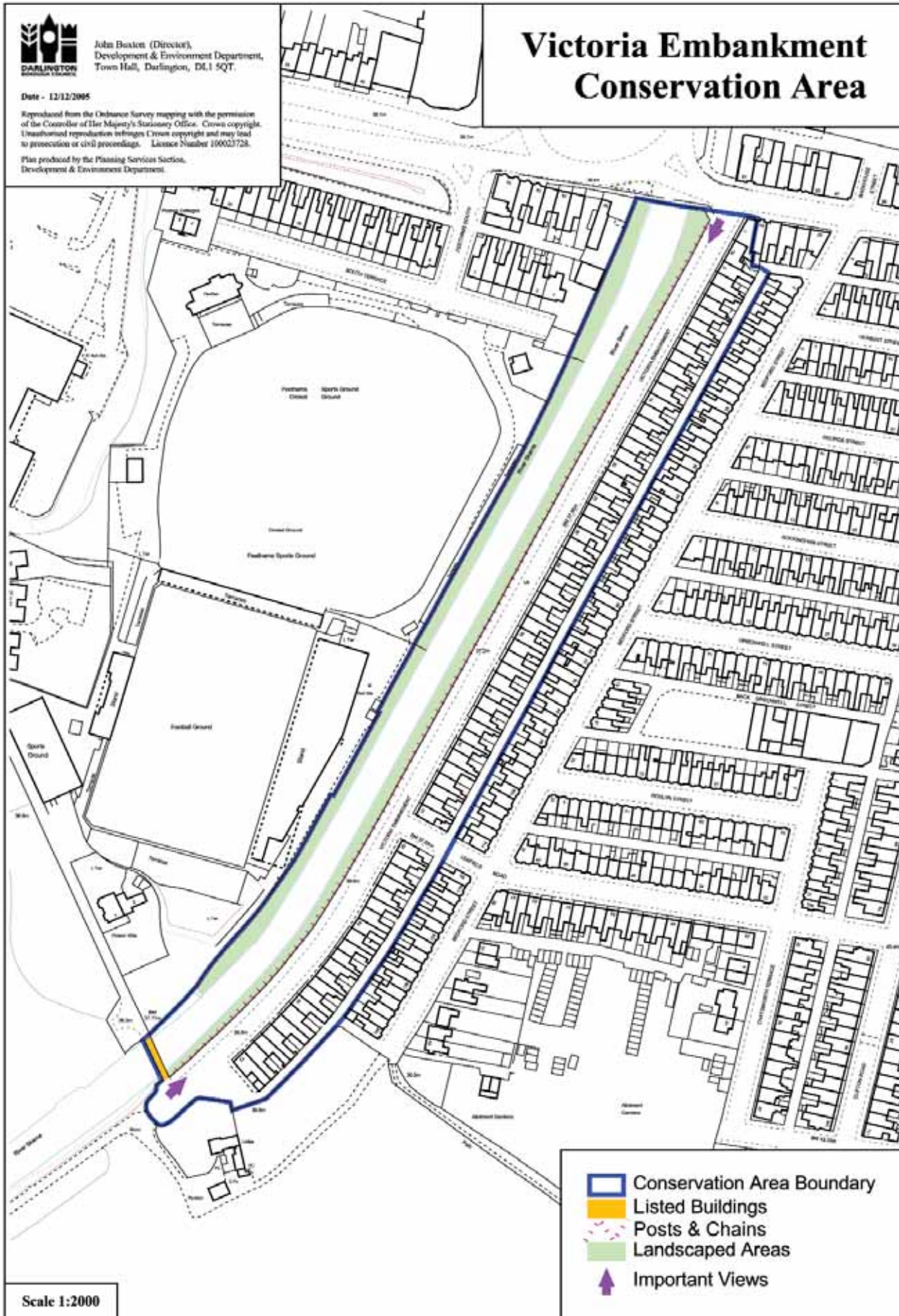


Drawing showing the proposal to straighten the River Skerne at what is now Victoria Embankment (1870's)



c1890's

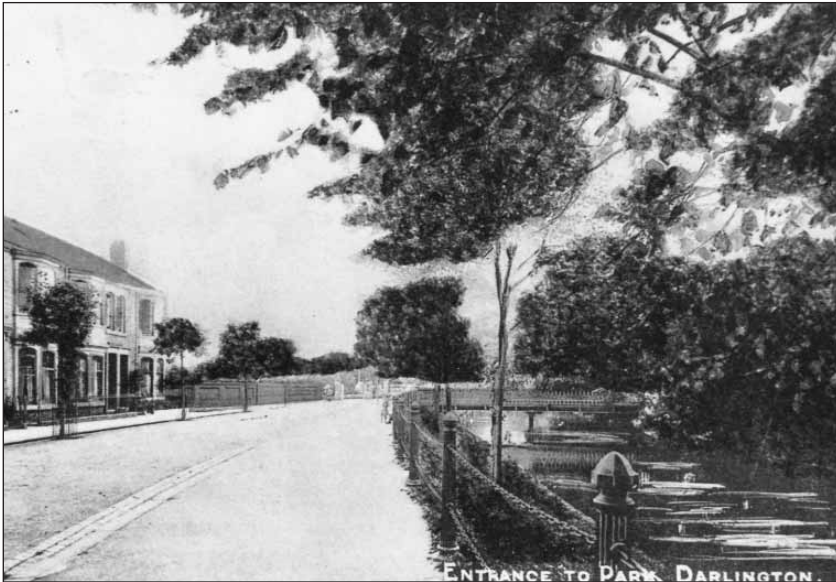




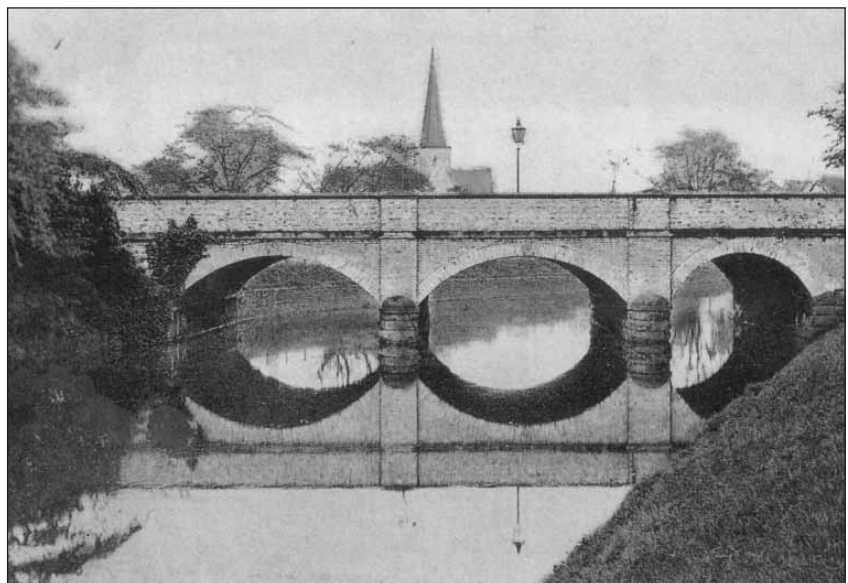
c1890



c1900



1906



4. IMPLICATIONS OF CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION INCLUDING LOCAL PLAN POLICY

4.1 The statutory definition of a Conservation Area is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate these areas as conservation areas. This requirement is expanded upon in Planning Policy Guidance note 15, “Planning and the Historic Environment”, Section 4.

The Borough of Darlington Local Plan, adopted 1997 highlights relevant policies, as follows:-

4.2 Local Plan policy E35 – Conservation Areas
 “Proposals for development in or adjacent to conservation areas will be permitted where they preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the areas. In assessing the impact of development proposals the council will pay special attention to the loss of gardens or open spaces, to matters of detailed design and to the use of traditional materials. Full or partial demolition of a building in a conservation area will be permitted only if:-

1. Because of its design it makes little or no contribution to the character or appearance of the area; or
2. It is wholly beyond repair or otherwise incapable of reasonable beneficial use; and
3. There are satisfactory detailed plans for the redevelopment of the site.

4.3 Local Plan policy E38 – Conservation Areas
 Considers alterations to business premises, including the replacement of shop-fronts and installation of roller shutters.

4.4 Local Plan policy E39 and E41
 Regulates outdoor advertising and provides special protection to conservation areas.

4.5 Where appropriate, the grant of demolition consent will be subject to a condition requiring that demolition shall not take place until a contract for the execution of the redevelopment works has been granted. Schemes for the enhancement of conservation areas will be carried out as necessary.

4.6 The council is committed to “*seek to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of designated conservation areas*”. We therefore apply special criteria when assessing planning applications within a conservation area and there are extra planning controls over most building works. Planning permission will be required if you propose to:-

- Demolish any building over 115 cubic metres in size (this is generally the size of a double garage).
- Demolish any boundary wall, fence or gate if it is more than 1 metre high and fronts a public highway; public right-of-way or an open space, or 2 metres high elsewhere.

4.7 The Council would not normally give planning permission to proposals which would:-

- Detract from the visual, historic or architectural character of the area or its setting;
- Mean the loss of buildings, walls or features, which make a positive contribution to the *character or appearance* of the area;
- Result in the loss of gardens or open spaces;
- Be detrimental to features which create the distinctive character of the area, and which contribute to the special *character and appearance* of the conservation area.

4.8 Controls also extend to **trees** in conservation areas, where:-

- At least 6 weeks notice must be given for works to trees over a diameter of 75mm, and taller than 1.5metres, which would mean the lopping, topping or felling of trees.
- Some trees are also protected by Tree Preservation Notices (for further details contact the Arboricultural Officer on 01325 383087).

Further details of all local planning policies can be found in Darlington Borough Council's Local Plan, copies of which are available to view at Darlington Town Hall and available online at: www.darlington.gov.uk/planning.

Victoria Embankment Conservation Area was designated on 10th May 1990. The boundary includes both banks of the River Skerne, the corner of Victoria Embankment/Victoria Road to the NW, and adjoins the Stanhope Road/Grange Road Conservation Area to the SE at South Park.

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www.darlington.gov.uk/planning