

# **PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA**

## **Character appraisal**



**Consultation  
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**CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

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- Photographs of listed buildings and unlisted buildings of local interest.



## **Purpose of a Character Appraisal**

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.

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.

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.

The principal aims of this document are intended to define:-

- What influences have given Piercebridge its particular character
- What chiefly reflects this character and is most worth conserving
- What has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating
- Areas that may be improved

## **History of Piercebridge**

Settlement at Piercebridge dates to Roman times. Currently partly occupying the extent of a Roman fort, it was built to protect the point where Dere Street crossed the River Tees to the east. Dere Street was a Roman road, which ran from Yorkshire to Scotland and which, initially passed by the fort but was later redirected. The South abutment and four piers from a Roman bridge are still visible approximately 60 metres downstream from the current bridge. The current Piercebridge bridge incorporates two phases of development, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Roman fort was built c.260-270AD and was maintained from c.290-350AD, with some later development. A settlement was established to the East of the fort (known as a vicus, the latin name for the smallest form of civilian settlement) and which probably supplied goods and services to the fort until it was finally abandoned in the early 5<sup>th</sup>C (cropmarks have revealed around 30 buildings visible within the settlement).

A Roman Bath house, situated in the SE corner of the fort, was still standing in the 13<sup>th</sup>C, when parts were incorporated into a new building, known as the Chapel of St Mary. The ruins of this building still exist and it is both a Grade II\* listed building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).

The village now known as Piercebridge was first recorded in about 1050AD. The name probably means 'Percy's Bridge'. The medieval settlement was never very important and did not have its own parish and only a small chapel. The medieval development of Piercebridge seemed to have consisted of two rows of houses along the village green, although nothing above ground remains today.

The current bridge over the Tees was widened and rebuilt in 1789, and has three stone arches. It replaces two earlier stone bridges, the first Roman, the second of c.1673 – a plaque no longer legible bears the date - which was swept away by a great flood. During the English Civil War, Parliamentary troops under Lord Fairfax were defeated by a small Royalist force when they attempted to cross the bridge.

The village has never extended beyond the original Roman boundary, and much of the Roman residential occupation took place to the West of the revealed Roman ruins. These ruins are now a Scheduled Ancient Monument as is Piercebridge bridge, which is also Grade II\* listed.

The majority of development that we can see today dates from the mid 17<sup>th</sup>C to the 19<sup>th</sup>C, mostly 18<sup>th</sup>C, and possibly built on the footprints of the earlier buildings. Historically, part of the Raby estate, very little development has taken place in Piercebridge in the 20<sup>th</sup>C, except a row of modern terraced houses built in the Mid 20<sup>th</sup>C.

## **The Character of Piercebridge**

Piercebridge is remarkable in that it occupies the exact extent of the site of a Roman fort, which protected the point where Dere Street crossed the river Tees, to the East. Dere Street and its connecting road to the fort are still traceable and are included in the area Scheduled as an Ancient Monument. The village has never extended beyond this limit, so that the extensive earthworks of the 4<sup>th</sup>C fort are preserved, particularly along the Western and Northern boundaries. These earthworks have been partly excavated.

Included within the conservation area boundary is part of the land to the North of the former A67, now bypassed, including Piercebridge beck and The Carlbury Arms, the latter being an essential visual element in the village street-scene, acting as a visual stop to Piercebridge at the far North end of the village.

The present village consists of a framework of one and two storey buildings around a rectangular, tree-lined green, visually completely enclosed. The buildings are a mixture of styles, mostly possessing some degree of formality; a number of 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>C properties are listed, all but one of them on the West side of the road, which divides the green (these are described later).

The majority of buildings, however, date from the 19<sup>th</sup>C, many possessing fine architectural detailing, such as elaborate hood-moulds over doors and windows, Victorian bay windows, stone date plaques, and period-style timber sash windows. A row of terraced dwellings has more recently been added, to the South of the village, across the road from Bridge House.

The building materials used are mostly random rubble sandstone, with a few, more significant buildings using cut stone, and incorporating detailing such as stone voussoirs, sills, lintels, quoin stones and kneelers. Roofing materials are also a mixture of stone slate, Welsh slate tile and clay pantiles. The exterior walls to some properties have been whitewashed; these are dwellings occupied by tenants of the Raby Estate.

The attractive open character of The Green allows unrestricted views from the North of the village to the South. A number of mature trees on the Green give a degree of permanence to the setting, and various lumps and bumps within it suggest the presence of further archaeological remains.

### **Vulnerable Areas**

The area highlighted in the attached map (shown as yellow hatching) is indicated as a Potential Improvement Area. The land use here is currently agricultural, and a number of buildings within this area are poor quality outbuildings where scope exists for future improvement.

## **Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)**

Scheduled Ancient Monuments are above or below ground archaeological remains. These remains can date from prehistoric times, and can be as diverse as standing stones and burial mounds to Roman forts and medieval villages. Also included are some more recent structures such as collieries, industrial and agricultural remains and wartime pill-boxes.

The main legislation concerning archaeology in the UK is the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. This Act, building on legislation dating back to 1882, provides for nationally important archaeological sites to be statutorily protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for implementing the Act in England, and is advised by English Heritage (EH). During the 1990s the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage engaged in a joint review of all archaeological sites in England (the Monuments Protection Programme), and identified which of some 600,000 sites were of outstanding national importance and worthy of protection.

The scheduling of a monument means that permission - 'Scheduled Monument Consent' (SMC) - is required for works affecting that monument.

There are currently 20 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) of national importance in Darlington Borough. There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Piercebridge Conservation Area boundary.

- The Roman fort, which occupies an area at the southern end of the village, (and on which much of the village was subsequently built).
- Piercebridge bridge, which has two periods of rebuilding, in the early 17<sup>th</sup>C and later 18<sup>th</sup>C. The bridge is also Grade II\* listed.

## **Implications of Conservation Area designation**

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.

### Local Plans 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 planning policies can be found in Darlington Borough Council's Local Plan, copies of which are available to view at Darlington Town Hall.*

Piercebridge Conservation Area was designated on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1972. The boundary largely coincides with the scheduled Ancient Monument boundary (see map), except that the modern properties are excluded and the bank of the river Tees is included.