



# PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA

Character Appraisal

January 2006



## PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

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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 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

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

This section of the appraisal contains an assessment of:-

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

### Summary of Special Interest

- 2.1 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 340 metres downstream from the current bridge. The current Piercebridge bridge incorporates two phases of development, in the early 17th and late 18th centuries.

### a. Location and Setting

2.2 Piercebridge is situated 6 miles West of Darlington town centre, lying in the midst of gently rolling countryside and bordering the adjacent southerly district of Richmondshire. The village is constrained to the South by the river Tees and to the North by Piercebridge beck and the new A67.

### b. Archaeological Significance

2.3 Piercebridge's Roman fort covered 10 acres and recent archaeological evidence appears to suggest that the settlement may pre-date the current agreed date of the fort's founding. The fort was previously thought to have been 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 5thC (cropmarks have revealed around 30 buildings visible within the settlement).

2.4 A Roman Bath house, situated in the SE corner of the fort, was still standing in the 13thC, 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).

2.5 It is not thought the village extended much beyond the original Roman boundary, and it is currently known archaeologically that the Roman settlement was located to the East of the current village within Toft field. However, the County Durham Sites and Monuments Record clearly shows that

settlement and other related activity occurred in the wider hinterland around Piercebridge.

2.6 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.

### c. Historical Development

2.7 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.

2.8 The Mediaeval and post Mediaeval development of the village closely mirrors the layout of the Roman fort and implies that remains of the fort must have been clearly visible to inhabitants when they were defining the limits of the village; alternatively, it suggests there has been continuous occupation of the site.

2.9 The current bridge over the Tees was widened and rebuilt in 1789, and has three stone arches. It replaces three earlier stone bridges, the first two Roman, the third 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.

2.10 The majority of development that we can see today dates from the mid 17thC to the 19thC, mostly 18thC, 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 20thC, except a row of modern terraced houses built in the Mid 20thC.

#### d. Character Analysis

2.11 Piercebridge is remarkable in that the archaeological heritage of the village has dictated its layout and to some extent its physical character. The village 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 3rd C fort are preserved, particularly along the Western and Northern boundaries. These earthworks have been partly excavated and are accessible to the public.

2.12 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.

2.13 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 17th, 18th and 19thC properties are listed, all but one

of them on the East side of the road, which divides the green (these are described later).

2.14 The majority of buildings, however, date from the 19thC, 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.

2.15 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.

2.16 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 highlights the presence of further archaeological remains.

### 3. ARCHAEOLOGY AND SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS (SAMS)

3.1 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.

3.2 The Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 builds on legislation dating back to 1882, and 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.

3.3 There are currently 19 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) of national importance in Darlington Borough. There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Piercebridge Conservation Area boundary. These are:-

- The Roman fort (SAM DU29, Grid Ref: NZ 210 158; NZ 209 157; NZ 210 157) occupies an area at the southern end of the village, (and on which much of the village was subsequently built). The site also includes the village green and surrounding fields but not current houses or gardens.
- Piercebridge bridge (SAM DU55, Grid Ref: NZ 211 155) has seen 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.

3.4 Current guidance is offered by the DCMS document PPG16, "Archaeology".

**4. VULNERABLE AREAS**

4.1 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.

**5. IMPLICATIONS OF CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION**

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

The other main Local Plan Policies relating to conservation areas are highlighted below:-

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

5.4 Local Plan policy E39 and E41 – Conservation Areas  
Regulates outdoor advertising and provides special protection to conservation Areas.

5.5 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.

5.6 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.

5.7 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.

5.8 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 planning policies can be found in Darlington Borough Council’s Local Plan, copies of which are available to view at Darlington Town Hall, and on the website address (below)*

**Piercebridge Conservation Area was designated on 2nd October 1972. The Conservation Area boundary largely coincides with the scheduled Ancient Monument boundary (see enclosed map).**

**Bibliography and credits**

County Durham, Nikolaus Pevsner, Yale University Press, 2002

County Durham Archaeology.

Darlington Borough Council Local Plan adopted November 1997

Contact details:

Conservation Officer: 01325 388604  
www.darlington.gov.uk/planning

# PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA

*(Important views and features – shown as blue arrows on map)*

Image 1 – looking South towards Piercebridge Bridge, showing locally important stone walls



Images 2 & 3 showing Piercebridge village green





Image showing important stone wall enclosing the Roman fort



Images showing types of ornamental hood moulds



Images showing period steps



Image of Raby Estate crest

Image 4 - showing Piercebridge looking South towards the Mid 20thC terraced housing.

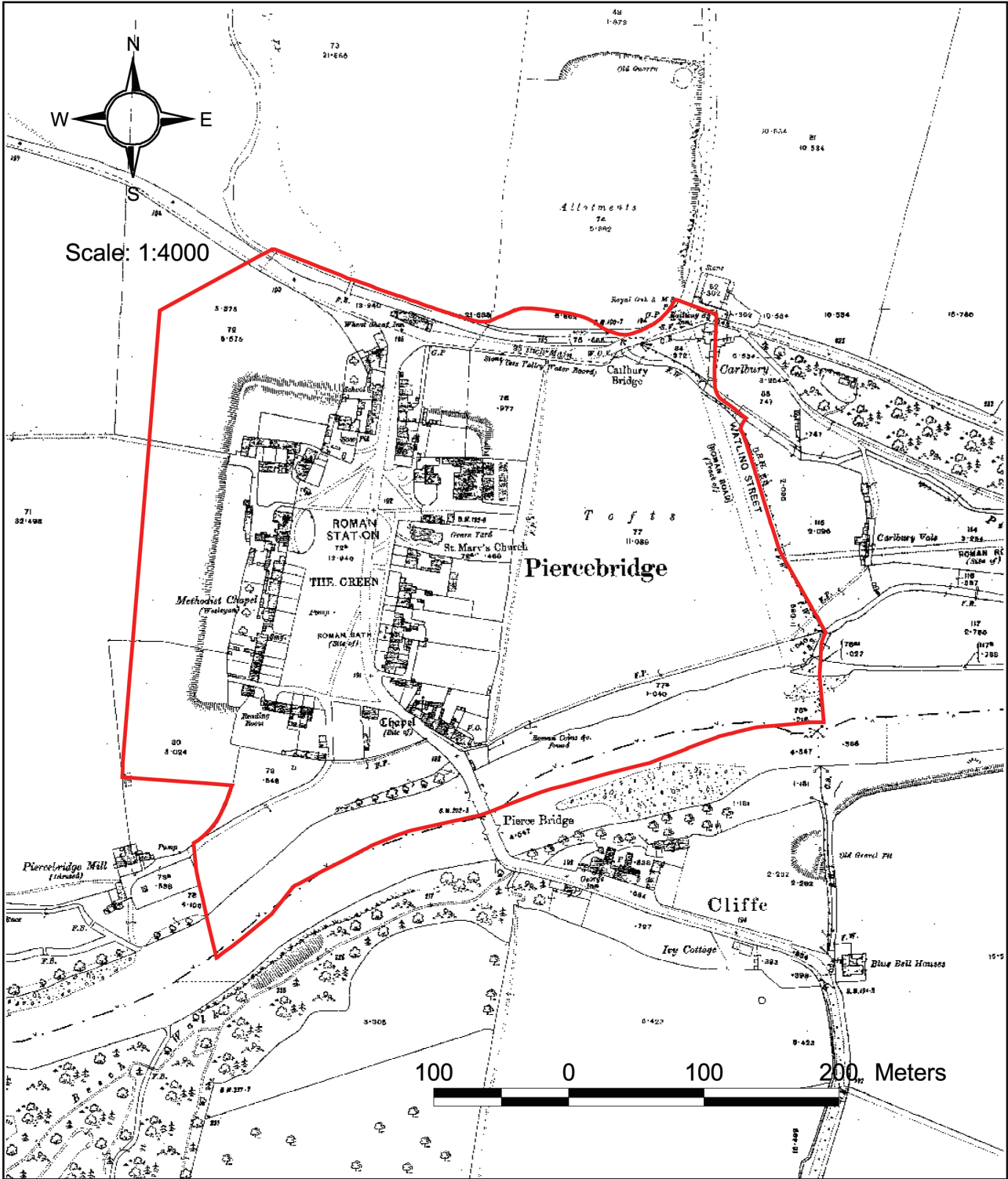


Image 5 – looking North towards Piercebridge Farm.





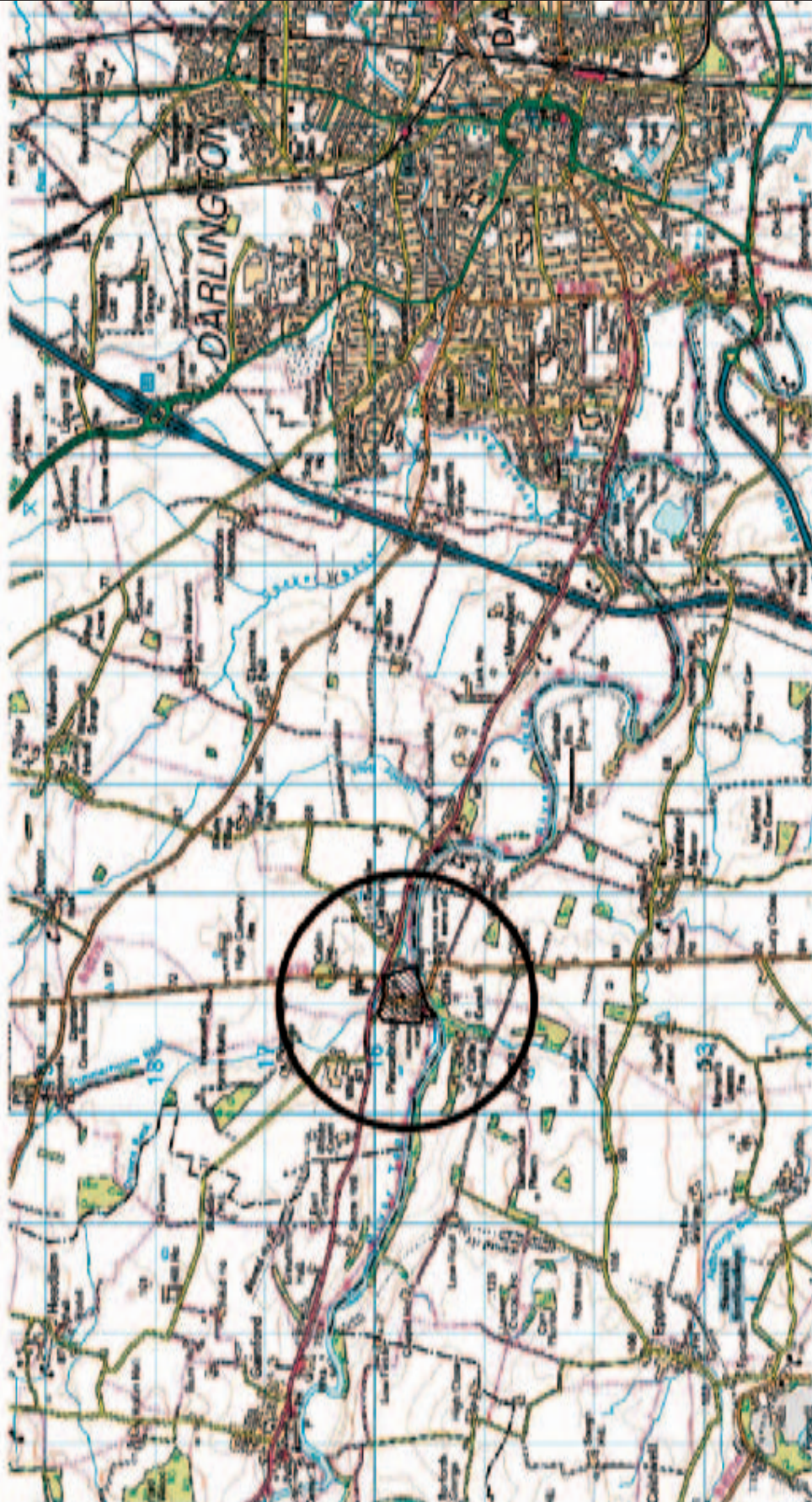
## Piercebridge 1859



# Piercebridge 1914 - 1916

PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA, DARLINGTON

Location Map

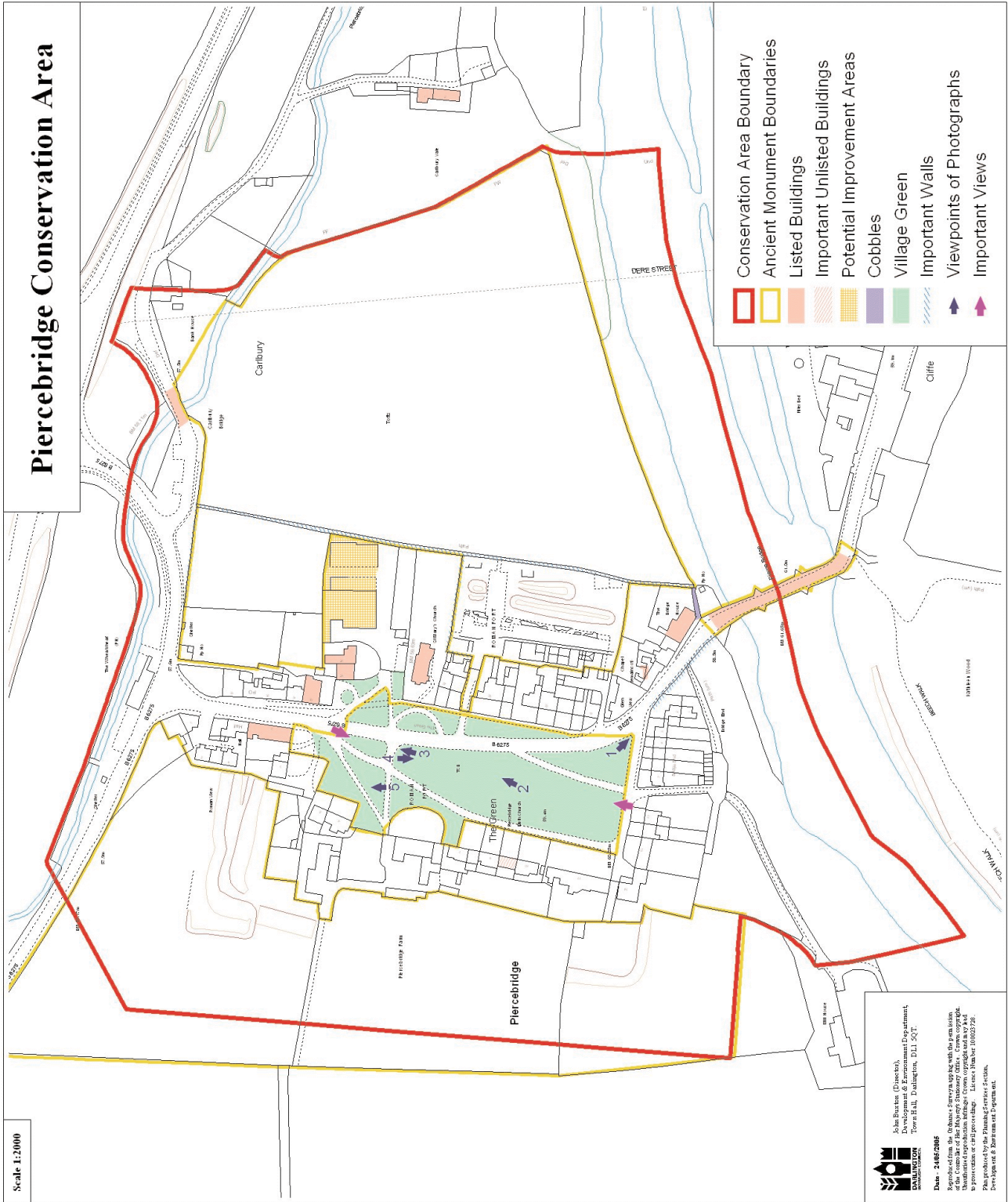


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## LISTED BUILDINGS AND UNLISTED BUILDINGS OF LOCAL INTEREST

There are 10 listed buildings in Piercebridge conservation area, including Carlbury Bridge, which borders the conservation area.



### Carlbury Bridge

**Listed Grade II, No. 17/105.** This Small late 18thC - early 19thC road bridge spans Piercebridge beck to the NE of the village on what used to be the original A67. The road over it now ends in a cul-de-sac. Listed on 16/07/1986 with possibly a later parapet. Made of dressed sandstone with a central arch (this bridge straddles the parishes of Piercebridge and High Coniscliffe).



### Piercebridge bridge

#### **Listed Grade II\*, No. 17/151 and Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)**

Listed on 06/06/1952, this road bridge over the River Tees was built in the early 17thC to the South of the village, widened on the downstream side in 1781 (although a plaque is dated '1673' albeit no longer legible), made of dressed and ashlar sandstone, with 3 wide arches of two stepped orders, a segmental central arch and slightly pointed flanking arches. This bridge straddles the parishes of Piercebridge and Cliffe, North Yorkshire.

## Medieval Chapel ruins

**Listed Grade II\*, No.17/152 and Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).** These ruins of a Medieval chapel were built partly on the foundations of a Roman bath house, and listed on 16/07/1986. Now taking up most of the rear garden of a house the wall is probably early 13thC on a c.260AD wall. The garden's rear boundary wall separates this feature from the rest of the archaeological remains at the Roman station.



## The Bridge House



**Listed Grade II, No.17/153.** This large house, dated 1764 on a lintel of the former doorway, was listed on 06/06/1952 incorporating some 19thC alterations and is built of squared rubble stone. An interesting stone door surround shows possibly re-used Medieval "quatrefoil" piers supporting a stone hood. To the right is a short passage with round-arched openings and a cobbled floor surface. A partly blocked doorway with an inserted sash, to the left of centre, has a lintel inscribed: I.W. 1764. An unusual feature is a small, carved stone head in the wall above the left end sash window.



## No.2, The Green

**Listed Grade II, No. 5/154 & 17/154.** Situated to the NW of the village, this row of three single storey cottages, now converted to a single dwelling is Early-Mid 19thC, and was listed on 06/06/1952. The whitewashed, rubble stone walls suggest it was owned by the Raby Estate. Above the door and windows are interesting ornamental "hood" moulds.





### Church of St Mary

**Listed Grade II, No. 17/155.** The parish church, centrally located on the East side of the road, was listed on 20/03/1967 and designed in 1873 by Cory and Ferguson and built in the Early English style. The church possesses an interesting projecting bellcote and spirelet, with fish-scale styled roof tiles.



### Wall, Gate piers and lantern to Church of St Mary

**Listed Grade II, No.17/156.** The churchyard wall, gate piers, overthrow and lantern, listed on 16/07/1987 were probably erected in 1873 when the church was built. The small attractive lantern in wrought iron has sloping panes and a cylindrical top vent. The low flanking front walls have triangular coping and a roll-moulded top. The wall to the right adjoins No.25, The Green; the wall to left adjoins a farm outbuilding.

### No.30, The Green.

**Listed Grade II, No.17/159.** This house, late 18thC in date is situated on the NE side of the village and was listed on 06/06/1952. The large pair of ground floor bay windows are 19thC additions.





### No.28, The Green

**Listed Grade II, No.17/157.** This Mid 17thC house, with alterations, is to the NE part of the village, and was listed on 06/06/1952. A major restoration was undertaken in 1983-5. Built of coursed rubble stone, with a renewed pantile roof and with a large rebuilt brick chimney stack on the right that has the remains of a semicircular beehive oven to the rear. A 2-storey rear wing, formerly a farm building, has a rear gable with the ledge of a former pigeon loft.



### No.29, The Green

**Listed Grade II, No.17/158.** This early 18thC house, with alterations, was listed on 06/06/1952 and is built of coursed rubble stone, painted white on the front elevation. The asymmetrical mid wall window to the right lights the internal staircase.

## Unlisted building of Local Interest

### The Chapel

This building, dated 1864 on a stone plaque, is built in the classical form of Methodist chapels with plain Victorian sash windows and a plain gabled roof. Still retaining much character, this building makes an important and positive contribution to the street scene.



