



BISHOP AUCKLAND
PART TWO: CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN
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BISHOP AUCKLAND

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN – PART 2

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SECTION 8.0: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)



SECTION 8.0: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

8.1 Introduction

Part 2 of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan starts with a short analysis of the current challenges and opportunities which face the conservation area. These have already been outlined within each character area

in **Part 1: Section 6** and the key issues and opportunities will be drawn out and presented here as a SWOT analysis which provides a swift, at-a-glance, summary. These issues and opportunities will form the foundation for the following section where recommendations will be made to guide the protection and enhancement of the conservation area.

8.2 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

Strengths

- Government and private investment supporting the regeneration of Bishop Auckland
- Key buildings like Auckland Castle and the Town Hall
- Rich history and associations with a strong sense of local pride
- Fine selection of historic buildings from the 18th through to the 20th century
- A town set in a rich green countryside with long distance views
- Remnants of the medieval plan form
- Significant capital investment by TAP creating a heritage focused visitor attraction in Bishop Auckland
- Strong ethos of cooperation and collaboration between key stakeholders
- Large medieval marketplace
- Outputs of the Heritage Action Zone
- Public access to Auckland Park

Weaknesses

- High levels of vacancy, particularly on the key route of Newgate Street, a gateway from the railway station to the town centre
- Condition of some buildings
- Negative buildings (poor quality modern development)
- Poor quality past interventions to historic buildings
- Inappropriate shop fronts and advertising
- Poor quality public realm in some areas
- Traffic
- Pedestrian connectivity
- Lack of understanding of the special nature of the conservation area

Opportunities

- Improve vacancy levels
- Diversification of retail areas
- Continue the work begun by the HAZ
- Continue to improve the condition and appearance of historic buildings and shopfronts
- Long term programme of improvements to, or replacement of, negative buildings
- Capitalise upon projects started under Towns Fund and Future High Streets
- Continue the maintenance and improvements to the public realm
- To improve the appearance of Kingsway
- To extend the conservation area to protect industrial heritage assets
- To raise awareness and understanding of the conservation area
- Provide guidance and an action plan as part of this CAAMP

Threats

- National and Local Government funding constraints
- Economic pressures and lack of investment in the historic built environment
- Climate change
- Continuing change in shopping habits
- Continued loss of historic features such as timber windows and doors
- Increased vacancy and decline in condition of historic buildings due to lack of investment
- Future world pandemics

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Management Plan
- 9.3 Summary of Policies



SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

9.1 Introduction

Bishop Auckland is a unique and special place which has been shaped by the people who have lived and worked here over successive generations. The special interest of the conservation area is reflective of its deep and complex history, the Castle, surrounding landscape, historic buildings, open spaces and streets, alongside a strong sense of local pride. The overarching ambition for the conservation area is to preserve and enhance this special interest in a way that actively provides economic, social and environmental benefits.

Within recent years Bishop Auckland has secured considerable Government and private investment. The work of The Auckland Project has helped establish Bishop Auckland as a visitor destination, whilst funding from Government initiatives like the Town Deal and HAZ are helping support regeneration plans. Plans are underpinned by a Masterplan and are well underway to revitalise and transform this historic place into a thriving market town and cultural centre for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The latest initiatives make transport infrastructure improvements, create new leisure destinations, support new businesses, revitalise and reuse vacant buildings, support training, education initiatives, and public realm improvements. Further information about the projects and the funding streams can be found on the Bishop Auckland Regeneration website here: <https://www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com/about/>

This Management Plan has been developed with the current initiatives in mind and intends to provide a tool for unlocking the potential for heritage-led regeneration, supporting the care of the historic environment whilst guiding sensitive change and proportionate new development to create a diverse and vibrant centre for residents and visitors alike. Raising awareness of the significance of the town will help to promote shared responsibility for looking after the conservation area.

This section develops the opportunities raised in **Section 8**, then provides advice and recommendations on various topics for building owners and occupiers, landlords, consultants and developers, who should use the advice to guide choices when carrying out maintenance or when planning changes.

Durham County Council will also use this Management Plan when assessing plans for change in the area, when planning future improvement works, and in supporting funding applications for projects aimed at preserving and enhancing the conservation area.

Overarching Conservation Principles

- 01 To preserve and enhance the special architectural and historic interest of the Bishop Auckland Conservation Area, including the listed and non-designated heritage assets within it.
- 02 To ensure that change and development takes place in a considered and sympathetic way based on a solid understanding of the character and appearance of Bishop Auckland.
- 03 That shopfronts are sympathetically designed, and the momentum of the HAZ is continued.
- 04 That shop vacancy rates are reduced, and Bishop Auckland emerges as a thriving local centre with more diverse uses across the town centre ensuring its vitality and viability.
- 05 That key heritage assets like the former Cooperative, the Mechanics Institute and Masonic Lodge are bought back into use.
- 06 That all buildings and sites are maintained in good condition to ensure their preservation and positive contribution to the conservation area.
- 07 The reinstatement of lost historic features, such as timber sash windows, is pursued.
- 08 That all new development is of high quality and respond to the special character of the conservation area.
- 09 Development within the setting of the conservation area should be sympathetic to its special interest in terms of its scale, massing, proportions, materials and detailing.
- 10 Proposals for extension and alteration should preserve or enhance the special interest of the conservation area.
- 11 The removal of inappropriate and unsympathetic buildings and additions to buildings will be sought within the conservation area and in its setting.
- 12 That traffic and parking within the Market Place are controlled, making this a more pleasant and safe space for visitors and locals alike.
- 13 Key views of Auckland Castle, the Town Hall and other key heritage assets will be preserved.
- 14 The public realm of Bishop Auckland will be of the highest quality.
- 15 That green spaces, planting and trees within the conservation area are preserved and enhanced.
- 16 Changes to buildings and areas in response to climate change are encouraged but should take into consideration the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 17 That Article 4 Directions will be considered should further controls be deemed necessary to manage change to the conservation area.

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

9.2 Management Plan

9.2.1 Introduction

This section begins with an introductory section establishing general information relating to national and local legislation and guidance, and control measures in conservation areas, before setting out a number of key themes relating to the principal areas for improvement in Bishop Auckland. Each theme comprises an assessment of the challenges faced, alongside opportunities for enhancement and key recommendations (or Policies) to guide the positive future management of the conservation area. Good practise guidance is also provided.



SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

9.2.2 Planning Legislation, Policy and Guidance

Planning legislation, policy and guidance is utilised when considering development or other change within County Durham's conservation areas. This is to ensure that proposals seek to preserve or enhance an area's character and appearance, including its setting.

The primary legislation governing conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Act defines what a conservation area is and is the legislative mechanism for ensuring their preservation and enhancement.

The National Planning Policy Framework (2023) sets out the overarching requirement for local planning authorities to identify and protect areas of special interest (paragraph 190). Government guidance on the historic environment is found within the relevant section of the National Planning Practice Guidance.

The County Durham Plan (2020) sets out the Council's own policies which guide development within the county, including policies and guidance for protecting and enhancing the historic environment including conservation areas. Policies relevant to the conservation area include:

- Policy 44 Historic Environment
- Policy 29 Sustainable Design

Links and details of all the relevant policy, guidance and advice can be found in **PART 1 Further Information and Sources**.

9.2.3 Control Measures

Living, owning or managing a property in a conservation area can mean there may be more restrictions on what you can and can't do to your property, but this is about ensuring it is carried out correctly, so that the conservation area's special character and appearance is protected for today and into the future.

Generally, conservation area status can affect a property in a number of ways. These may be summarised as:

- Demolition of buildings and boundaries;
- Works which affect the front of your building;
- Works to trees; and
- Any proposal which might impact on the character of the conservation area.

Permitted Development Rights, as defined by The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, are works which can be undertaken without the need to gain planning permission. Some Permitted Development Rights are reduced in conservation areas, meaning that planning permission is needed for certain works which materially affect the external appearance of buildings.

For further information, see the information box '**Conservation Areas: A guide to householders, landlords, tenants and developers.**' If you are in doubt, advice should be obtained from the Council's planning department before proceeding.

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

Conservation Areas: A brief guide to householders, landlords, tenants and developers

A common fear or view is that conservation area status will prevent change to the detriment of those living and working within the area. The purpose, however, is not to prevent change, but to manage it in a way which preserves the special interest of the conservation area.

I am a householder: do I need to apply for planning permission?

If you live in a **single, unlisted residential dwelling** outside of a conservation area, there are a number of things which can be carried out without planning permission under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order (GPDO), commonly termed 'permitted development rights'. However, Permitted Development Rights **are reduced** in a conservation area, meaning that **planning permission** is needed for works which materially affect the **external appearance** of a building including the following:

- Extending the building to the rear if the extension would have more than one storey.
- Extending the building to the side.
- Installing external render or cladding such as external insulation, weatherboarding, plastic, timber, tiles, stone or false stone.
- Installing roof dormers or change the roof shape.
- Fixing a satellite dish to a chimney, wall or roof that faces onto, and is visible from, a highway.
- Fixing a solar panel to a wall that faces onto and is visible from a highway.
- Installing a standalone solar panel in the garden, if visible from a highway.
- Fixing a heat pump to a wall that is visible from a highway.

- The total or substantial demolition of any building with a total cubic content in excess of 115 cubic metres.
- The construction, alteration or demolition of a chimney visible from the street.

This list is not exhaustive, and it is advisable that you always check with the planning department at Durham County Council first.

Further, within the boundary of your property you will require planning permission for:

- Erection of an outbuilding such as a shed or garage to the side of a property.
- Works to trees with a diameter of 75mm or greater, measured at 1.5m from soil level.
- Demolition of a structure or wall over 1m in height including gate piers.

My commercial property is in the conservation area. How will this affect me?

Commercial properties have limited permitted development rights, therefore small works to your business premises are likely to require planning permission. If your property is within a conservation area the Council will only grant planning permission when they are satisfied that the works would preserve or enhance the special character of the area. Works that may require planning permission can include changing windows and putting up new signage.

What is an Article 4 Direction and am I affected?

Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order (GPDO) gives local planning authorities the power to limit 'permitted development rights' to some properties; generally, these usually apply to householders of single dwellings, although they have been used by some Councils to restrict change

of use or control paint colours in some towns. There are no Article 4 Directions in Bishop Auckland at present, but this does not mean to say that they will not be introduced in the future.

Article 4s, were they to be introduced, require planning permission to:

- Make changes to the front elevation including replacing windows, doors or adding porches and extensions.
- Make changes to the roof, such as the type of roof covering and the chimney.
- Make changes to the front of properties, such as adding parking, and making changes to walls, gates and fences.

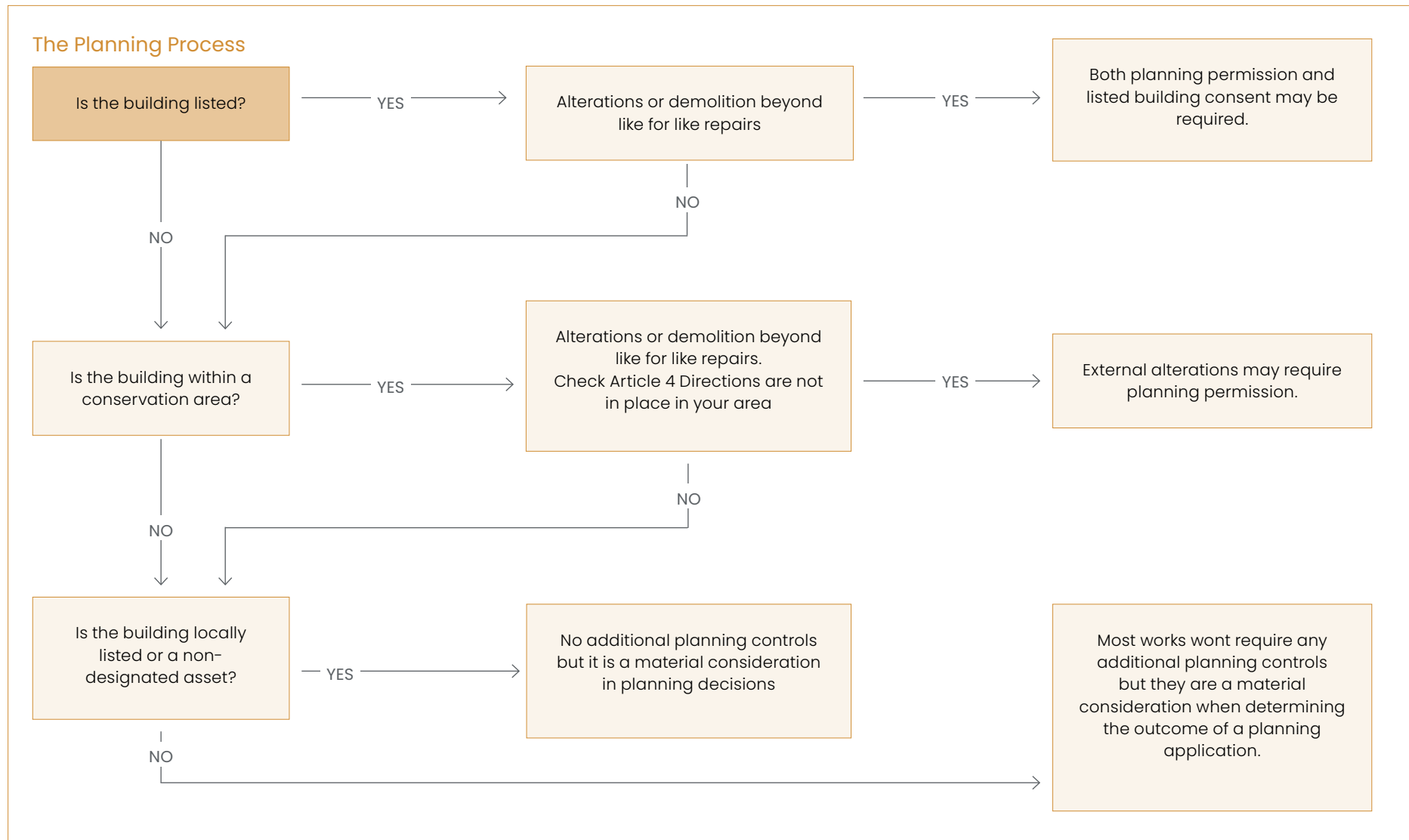
In all cases it is wise to contact the Council for advice on what planning permission is required before you consider making any changes.

Listed Buildings

In addition to planning permission, Listed Building Consent is required for works of alteration, demolition or extension to any Listed Building internally or externally, whether in commercial use or otherwise. Contact Durham County Council for further information on what permission is required before you consider making any changes.

For further information and advice about when planning permission is required within a Conservation Area, see the guidance on the Government's Planning Portal or the Council's Planning Department.

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9.2.4 Stopping the Rot

When a building has been neglected and is in disrepair, with the risk of loss of important fabric through decay, local authorities have various measures which can encourage owners to undertake works:

- **Section 215** of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives local planning authorities powers to require land to be cleaned up when its condition adversely affects the amenity of the area, such as vacant sites or derelict buildings;
- **Urgent Works Notices** which give the local authority powers to directly carry out works required to urgently make an unoccupied listed building weather tight to prevent further decay;
- **Repairs Notices** allow a local authority to specify the works the owner should carry out to secure the condition of a building; and
- **Compulsory Purchase Orders** are a last resort where local authorities can compulsorily purchase a listed building to repair it or sell it to an organisation or charity, such as a building preservation trust, to be restored.

For further information see [Historic England's Stopping the Rot: A Guide to Enforcement Action to Save Historic Buildings](#)

Policy: Planning, Control Measures and Enforcement

PL1 Durham County Council will continue to monitor and respond to planning applications and Listed Building Consents ensuring the special character of the conservation area is preserved and enhanced.

PL2 Durham County Council will consider removing permitted development rights and extending Article 4 Directions which will mean planning permission will be required to alter the exterior of buildings including windows and doors.

PL3 Durham County Council will use enforcement powers to resolve breaches of planning control.

PL4 Durham County Council will work with owners to address neglect and disrepair of buildings in the conservation area. However, they will use measures within their power, such as Urgent Works Notices or Repair Notices, to force owners where negotiation fails.

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9.2.5 Theme 1: Vacancy



The Challenges

The decline in the high street is well documented. Changing consumer habits have caused a reduction in traditional high-street shopping. Additionally, the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis, and the rising popularity of on-line shopping and out-of-town retail parks have seen many businesses in Bishop Auckland close or move online. The loss of key retailers such as Burton's, WH Smiths, Beales, and Wilkinson has led to a marked increase in vacant commercial units within the town centre. The result is reduced footfall, long-term vacancy, maintenance issues and overall poor appearance of the town centre.

KEY FACTS

The vacancy of buildings within the commercial core is becoming one of the foremost threats to the conservation area and the wider economic success of Bishop Auckland.

Vacancy is a real threat to historic buildings, as maintenance issues go unaddressed and can lead to irreversible damage and costly repairs; a leaking roof can soon lead to considerable damage, whilst a lack of security can lead to vandalism, or worse, arson.

Vacancy can also contribute to a neglected atmosphere

and a poor streetscene as well as impacting on the local economy. Vacancy of ground floor retail units and of upper floors is high in Bishop Auckland. Empty and unmaintained buildings are having a significant impact on the appearance of the conservation area and the wider town and is one of the key issues cited by the public within consultation. Empty shops can cause a 'negative feedback loop' which means they discourage investment, decrease the offer of the high street, dissuade consumers from visiting and contribute to a general sense of decline and neglect.⁰¹

Key vacant historic buildings which are significantly impacting on the appearance and vitality of the conservation area include:

- The Postchaise, Market Place
- Queen's Head Hotel, Market Place
- The Castle Bar, Market Place
- Masonic Hall, Victoria Avenue
- Mechanics Institute, Victoria Avenue
- Former Beales (Co-operative), Newgate Street
- Clairmont, Princes Street



Empty and unmaintained buildings are having a significant impact on the appearance of Bishop Auckland's main retail area



The vacancy of the Masonic Hall and the adjacent Mechanics Institute are severely impacting the appearance of the surrounding conservation area



Clairmont, a vacant former maternity unit on Princes Street

⁰¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/dealing-empty-shops-guide>

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The Opportunities

The opportunities to improve the appearance, vitality and vibrancy of Bishop Auckland and to find new uses for empty buildings, vary from soft-touch interventions to long-term projects to encourage re-use. The following will be discussed further below:

- 01 Soft touch interventions
- 02 Meanwhile uses
- 03 Proactive letting
- 04 Upper Floor Vacancy
- 05 Rebalancing and diversifying Bishop Auckland's town centre
- 06 Shop Conversions
- 07 Other options

Empty shops are literally a waste of space and a missed opportunity to enliven and diversify the retail or hospitality and leisure mix of a town centre. Durham County Council are acutely aware of this issue and are already working with landlords to maintain shopfronts and buildings during vacancy. Local landlords tend to be easier to engage with, but absentee landlords are much less so. Time limited grants are available as part of existing schemes including the Property Reuse Scheme which are already helping a number of businesses in the town centre.⁰² The Council need to proactively support owners and developers in finding occupiers for vacant buildings and help bring them back into a viable use.

However, during vacancy there are various options which could also be considered for empty buildings. These range from soft touch visual interventions making the building more interesting and attractive such as window installations, to transforming the space through to 'meanwhile-uses' such as an art gallery or pop-up shop. Other options include engaging with owners proactively to persuade landlords that it is in their interest to 'invest' in Bishop Auckland, whilst financial incentives could be further explored.

01: Soft touch interventions

Visual interventions which don't require regular use or access to the property include window painting, window displays and installations, changing exhibitions to be viewed from the outside, projections onto windows, and light installations, potentially providing both daytime and night-time animation. Window stickers which fill the glazed area can introduce interest into the streetscene by being themed. For example, historic images, photos and information on the heritage of the town. They might include relevant information of the plan by the Council for the Bishop Auckland or provide an image of a shop interior. Bright images produced in association with local schools or community groups also offer potential to enliven the streetscene. Clearly this option requires close co-operation and agreement between the landlord and the Council.



Example of a 'soft-touch' intervention on a traditional shopfront

⁰² <https://www.bishopaucklandregeneration.com/projects/area-one/property-reuse-fund/>

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02: Meanwhile Uses

Meanwhile use: a definition

'Meanwhile is a philosophy, a policy and a programme of work. As a philosophy Meanwhile is based on the belief that empty properties spoil town centres, destroy economic and social value, and waste resources that we cannot afford to leave idle. Vibrant interim uses led by local communities will benefit existing shops, as well as the wider town centre, through increased footfall, bringing life back to the high street and making better use of resources overall.'

[The Meanwhile Project](#)

Vacant shops or buildings in Bishop Auckland can also be given temporary uses whilst a more permanent occupant is found. This can include community activities such as temporary exhibition spaces, co-worker spaces, information points, community workshop spaces or charity retail functions.

The concept of 'meanwhile use' or 'pop-up' spaces has been developing for a number of years. Successfully used in many areas of the country, it offers a dynamic solution to repurposing vacant or underutilised properties or spaces, bridging the gap between initial vacancy and a longer-term lease or redevelopment.

Meanwhile uses have the potential to inject life, creativity, and economic activity into neglected areas, and often act as community-driven spaces, creating opportunities for local businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups. They can provide a launchpad for arts or cultural experiences, or emerging entrepreneurs to test their ideas, engage with customers, and gain visibility at a more affordable rent without the financial burden of long-term leases or high overhead costs. By supporting local businesses and talent, meanwhile spaces contribute to the growth and vitality of the local economy.⁰³

KEY FACTS

Meanwhile use can:

- Activate neglected spaces;
- Improve the appearance of our streets;
- Support creative industries;
- Foster entrepreneurship; and
- Enhance community engagement.

Whilst landlords may be risk averse and would prefer to wait for the 'right' tenant or the 'right' project, they should view meanwhile use as an investment into local communities, in growth companies and in charitable activity. Other advantages for landlords and property owners include:

- Lower costs during vacant periods where utility bills, security and insurance costs and rates will be covered by the occupiers, providing direct savings to the owner or landlord.
- Provide a use for vacant premises where landlords are reluctant to commit to long leases due to their own medium- or long-term plans, or due to market uncertainties.
- The security of active occupation.
- Ability for developers to test out potential commercial uses prior to any longer-term redevelopment. Trial occupants may provide a service to the local community and brand a site whilst a strategy for the site's use is being developed or undertaken.

- Increases prospect of future commercial use through an increased awareness of the property to prospective tenants or owners, particularly if it provides a home for an eye-catching project. It also gives prospective tenants the opportunity to test out a site's potential.

A high-profile example of a successful meanwhile use is that of Granada Studios in Manchester prior to its redevelopment to mixed uses. During that time, temporary events and exhibitions were held showcasing art, music, and cultural activities, and allowed local businesses, artists, and makers to set up shop and offer unique experiences to residents and visitors.⁰⁴ Vacant buildings on Market Place such as the Castle Bar, Queens Head and the Postchaise lend themselves to meanwhile uses, whilst the owners develop potential options and undergo the planning process.



Community 'meanwhile use' in York

⁰³ <https://www.savills.co.uk/blog/article/347697/commercial-property/from-vacant-spaces-to-meanwhile-places--transforming-cities-through-temporary-developments.aspx>

⁰⁴ Ibid

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03: Proactive letting

Local authorities can play a leading role in filling vacant units in their local areas including identifying promoting and publicising vacant units. The Vacant Shop Academy⁰⁵ has developed the 'audit, engage, encourage and promote' approach to provide a measurable response to tackling the empty shops issue:

- AUDIT** Carrying out a review of all the vacant units including those that may be vacant soon. Assess any gaps in business types within the town and what might be useful additions.
- ENGAGE** Engage with local agents and landlords as well as existing businesses. Collate their information on why buildings are vacant. What are the issues? Set up a trusted point of contact to keep up-to-date.
- ENCOURAGE** Work with owners, agents and landlords to encourage re-letting. Encourage meanwhile uses (see above).
- PROMOTE** Use council channels and social media to promote vacant units to would-be occupiers, and update communities, the property sector and local businesses on progress.

A useful case study for tackling vacant shop units in Telford and Wrekin is shown adjacent promoting a database of vacant retail units and grant funding to tackle the issue as it is so prominent in the area.

⁰⁵ <https://prbi.co.uk/>

Case Study - Telford & Wrekin Council: Pride in our High Street

Telford & Wrekin Council have funded a 'Pride in our High Street' grant scheme for small businesses on their high streets. These include a façade scheme to improve the look and feel of the high street, diversification grants to help existing businesses diversify to aid survival, start-up trial grants for market or pop-up shops and empty unit grants for people looking to take on a vacant unit.

The council started by identifying high streets that had vacancy levels above the national average, by walking each high street and manually noting each vacancy. These high streets were then targeted for the scheme.

Photos of these properties were taken by the council who then sought information from the Land Registry to find the owner. The owners were then contacted to establish the reason for the vacancy, and a database set up to track the status of these properties. The council also built a relationship with local commercial agents who would inform them if and when a commercial building became vacant.

Once a database of commercial vacant properties had been established, the council was able to advertise small grants to enable businesses to take on a lease, which the council stipulated had a minimum term of three years.

The lack of interest in larger vacant premises has become evident as these attract higher business rates. The solution was to trial engagement with a landlord of a large high street property and support them to turn the property into three smaller units. Businesses taking on these smaller units may be eligible to apply for a Pride in our High Street grant to assist with the cost of fixtures & fittings and start-up costs.

The project has been deemed a huge success and the council will continue to invest in the scheme. There has been a large reduction in the number of vacant properties on the high street⁰⁶.



Wrekin's Retro Shack was the winner of the Young High Street Challenge. The Wrekin team won £20,000 from Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our Community High Street Fund.

⁰⁶ <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/dealing-empty-shops-telford-wrekin-council>

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Another potential option for tackling vacancy would be a consideration of the use of Local Listed Building Consent Orders (LLBCO) and Local Development Orders (LDO), to give prior consent for the conversion of buildings with unused upper floor space to residential (and other) uses. This could potentially help ease the planning process and encourage owners to find occupiers and new uses.

Similar schemes include Wycombe District Council to allow a greater range of uses to be located in the area without the need for planning permission and in so doing encouraging take-up of empty units. An LDO was prepared that would allow a change of use between all the A use classes (now use Class E (a,b,c), along with drinking establishments and hot food takeaways), C1 (hotels), and D1 and D2 (now variously known as Class E (d-f), F1 and F2(c-d)). This scheme had some limited success. A more ambitious scheme in Swindon also allowing changes to shopfronts reported that the LDO had helped maintain steady occupancy levels and that changes of use were taking place.⁰⁷

Financial incentives such as grants to improve the appearance of units or put vacant buildings back into use can help landlords attract new tenants. These have already been found to be successful in Bishop Auckland including the Property Reuse Fund. It will be important to continue the momentum and offer incentives once the present tranche of Government funding has concluded.

Landlords can also consider offering rent-free periods to their prospective tenants, encouraging occupation. The new tenants cover the landlord's business rates, ensuring that the landlord has some financial stability during the rent-free period. This can also kick-start further occupation and investment within the surrounding area as it becomes more attractive, and footfall is increased.

04: Upper Floor Vacancy

Many upper floors in Bishop Auckland remain vacant within the retail core, even where the shop unit on the ground floor is active. In the past, the floors above a shop would have been occupied by the shop owner. However, today with the intensification of retail often with limited need for storage or as workspace, the upper floors are forgotten, have a bleak appearance and are often poorly maintained.⁰⁸



Upper floor vacancy in Bishop Auckland

There are a number of advantages to the encouragement of upper floor use:

- Upper floor use contributes to a more attractive and vibrant high street;
- Can revitalise streets outside of business hours;
- Can improve the diversity of the high street and fills the urgent need for affordable housing in town centres;
- Ensures the maintenance and repair of the existing building stock;
- Can improve town centre security;
- Can reduce the need for polluting transportation; and
- Can reduce the need for greenfield development.

The problem of unused upper storeys in town centres is not new. Most publicly, the 'Living Over The Shop' (LOTS) project operated from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. The research was led by Anne Petherick at the University of York and looked at the causes, the potential constraints, benefits and hurdles to development. This research and subsequent studies elsewhere have identified the following causes for continued vacancy, but also the significant opportunities in towns like Bishop Auckland:

- **Poor physical condition**

This is often a circular argument as low use often leads to poor condition which is off-putting for potential tenants. Urgent Works Notices can be applied to upper floors which are not in regular or active use (use for storage is considered an active use), even where the ground floor shop may be occupied. Durham County Council would, however, prefer to work with landlords to improve condition and encourage re-use.

07 <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/debate/recent/heritage-and-the-high-street/using-local-development-orders-to-help-revive-town-centres/>

08 Upper Floors in York City Centre: An Opportunity, 2013, North of England Civic Trust

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- **The nature of the floorspace**

This is often perceived to be inadequate, with poor layouts often inherited from its historic residential use. They are often too small for the commercial market but may be ideal to be returned to residential use (see Case Study below). Where a landlord owns several adjacent units, it may be possible to connect properties above the ground floor to create more flexible floor plans and options for access. Such properties are likely to attract younger people and likely be one or two bed properties.

- **Physical access**

Historically shops were built with a traditional live-work arrangement, where the upper floors were accessible from within the ground floor shop unit as the trader lived on site. Other historic shops were often supplied with separate access doors from the street which may have been lost during modernisations and a need to maximise retail space. Creating a separate access is often the most significant issue with reuse of upper floor space – unless the property has rear access, this may only be possible through the creation of an internal lobby and stair from the ground floor, with the loss of a small amount of retail space. This might be unworkable in a number of cases, unless the rental from the reuse of the upper floors significantly outweighs the reduction of rent on the ground floor.

In Bishop Auckland, the layout of streets with back alleys and parallel roads providing rear access to units, reduces this issue. However, a few areas may remain problematic, specifically in densely developed plots on Fore Bondgate and some areas of Newgate Street.

- **Planning and Listed Building Requirements**

This tends to be an imagined barrier, with Durham County Council and Historic England keen to work with owners to find solutions which will improve upper floor uses.

- **Parking, transport and residential amenity**

The lack of outdoor space and parking are limited in upper floor development, although there may be opportunities to design-in rear balconies in some cases, and to provide parking in rear yards.

- **Regulatory requirements**

These might apply and make conversion expensive where the units are on a busy highway or within a narrow street which might limit natural light or increase pollution levels. This is unlikely to be an issue in Bishop Auckland.

- **Increased construction costs**

These could potentially be higher in a town centre where streets are narrow and special scaffolding or the closure of the street is necessary. This is unlikely to apply to Bishop Auckland.

Case Study: No.14 Newgate Street

The creation of four new apartments behind and ‘above the shop’ has been proposed at No.14 Newgate Street.⁰⁹ The proposals designed by Napper Architects, the conservation architect for Bishop Auckland’s HAZ, retains but reduces the retail unit on the ground floor, inserts a residential unit into storage space to the rear of the building and converts the open plan upper floors into three further residential units. The proposals also retain and refurbish existing timber sash windows, and proposes repair works to external fabric and also the replacement of a modern window, replicating the adjacent historic window on the front façade. A new shop front (under application DM/23/00644/FPA) is proposed based upon historical research; this will significantly improve the building’s appearance.

Like many properties facing Newgate Street, the building has access from a rear lane, making it possible to successfully create independent access for both the shop and the residential units.

The proposals are an example of how vacant upper floors can be repurposed in Bishop Auckland and should serve as inspiration for other landlords and property developers. The scheme was given consent by Durham County Council in March 2024.



The property in 2014 (Google)

⁰⁹ Planning Application: DM/23/03093/FPA

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05: Rebalancing and Diversifying Bishop Auckland's Town Centre

The nineteenth century saw the massive expansion of the retail centre of Bishop Auckland. Houses facing Newgate Street had ground floors converted to take advantage of the busy street and the new opportunities. In the later nineteenth century, purpose-built shops like the Co-operative (formerly Beales) were constructed and Newgate Street continued to flourish. Today, expansion has ceased with the retail area now beyond its retail capacity, with vacancy a resulting factor.

Policy 9 of the Durham County Plan aims to protect and enhance the retail areas of County Durham. Bishop Auckland (along with Durham City Centre) is categorised as a 'sub-regional centre' due to its significant levels of floorspace and with several major national multiple retailers represented. However, this is based on an historic study from 2018, which is now out-of-date. A number of key retailers have gone out-of-business or have withdrawn from the town, with limited potential that others will replace them.

The Local Plan sets the boundary of Bishop Auckland's retail centre within which it aims to maintain the retail offer of AI facilities, along with an 'appropriate' number of non-AI facilities are also provided for variation and choice. This area stretches from North Bondgate to the railway line, and covers all of Newgate Street, North Bondgate, Fore Bondgate and the Market Place. The 'Primary Shopping Area' is defined as north Newgate Street, including the Newgate Street shopping area, extending from Fore Bondgate to Victoria Avenue. Non-retail uses are controlled within the retail area, aiming to avoid an 'over concentration' of non-retail uses. Residential uses may be considered in 'some instances' in 'suitable locations'.¹⁰



Mixed uses in Fore Bondgate

The High Street: A National, Regional and Local Assessment

The most recent study of the nation's high streets was undertaken by the Office for National Statistics in 2020.¹¹ Use categories were defined as retail, offices, community use, leisure and recreation, and residential. It showed that within the North East of England, the average high street had a high retail dependency of 38.5% against the national average of 29.1%, with other uses such as residential below average (48.15% of residential properties, compared to the national average of 57.7%). These figures also reflect the use of upper floors of buildings, suggesting a lower upper floor occupancy than the national average.

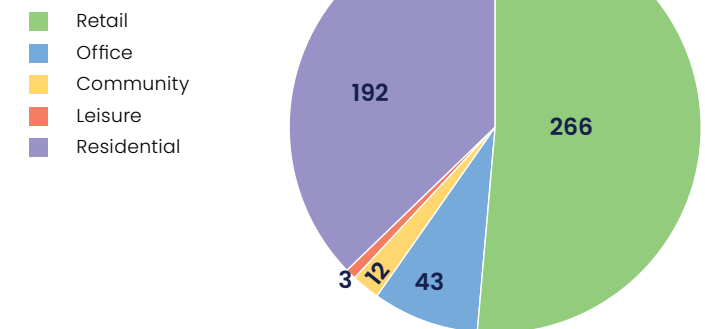
KEY FACTS

In a 2020 survey by the ONS:

- The percentage of retail units in town centres nationally was **29.1%**.
- The average town centre in the North East of England had **38.5%** addresses registered to retail use.
- Bishop Auckland's town centre recorded **51.55%** addresses in retail use.
- Of this, Newgate Street lacked the most diversity of use, featuring **64.2%** retail addresses.¹²

Within Bishop Auckland the three main retail areas are Newgate Street, Market Place and Fore Bondgate, which in 2020 listed 516 addresses. The breakdown is shown on the following graph.

High Street building usage in Bishop Auckland, 2020



¹⁰ County Durham Plan, p 84

¹¹ Office for National Statistics, [High Streets of Great Britain](#)

¹² Office for National Statistics, [High Streets of Great Britain](#)

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Not surprisingly, figures for Newgate Street alone demonstrated its high retail dependency, with 64.2% of addresses registered as retail and only 25.4% residential addresses – figures well below the regional and national average.

In another report released in 2019 by Durham County Council, it recorded that services like hairdressing, cafes, restaurants, and hot food takeaways were particularly lacking in Bishop Auckland, making up only half of the national average. This is a significant concern for the town with its emerging focus as an arts and cultural destination where food and beverage facilities will play an important role in the overall visitor experience and in extending dwell-time. Additionally, with the anticipated increase in visitors to the town, the increasing need for hotel, B&B and serviced accommodation has been recognised.¹³

Moving forward, there is a need for a re-think, allowing for more varied uses within the town centre. These might include:

- Childcare services
- Healthcare services
- Local government services
- Leisure
- Residential
- Tourist services, including hotels, holiday lets etc.

It is recognised that residential uses often play an important role in ensuring the vitality of town centres and the Council should consider encouraging residential conversions or newbuild developments within suitable locations in the town centre.

With the contraction of the retail offering in Bishop Auckland and growing vacancy, there is also the potential to refocus retail-only uses into a smaller area within the town centre. It could be argued that Newgate Street under the present declining conditions, is no longer viable in its present form; the answer might be the repurposing of vacant units in the middle of Newgate Street to other uses whilst encouraging the take-up of retail at the northern end of Newgate Street and within Fore Bondgate.

By updating local planning policy, potentially introducing Local Development Orders (see above), adapting to the present constraints of the retail market, meeting new demands and working closely with stakeholders, there is significant potential to reduce vacancy, improve the vitality and vibrancy of conservation area and benefit the wider town.

06: Shop Conversions: Good Practice

According to National Planning Policy, planning should promote a town's long-term success by allowing them to grow and develop in a way that can respond to continuing changes in the retail and leisure industry, allowing a good mix of uses (including housing).¹⁴

Changes in the retail industry have had a significant impact on the centre of Bishop Auckland which have been discussed above, whilst the growing needs of tourism, the leisure industry and the need for more affordable housing have the potential to impact on the uses of buildings and shops within the town centre in the near future. More shops are likely to be adapted should local policy be revised; however, it will be necessary to manage change sensitively to ensure the character of the conservation area is maintained and enhanced. One challenge will be in avoiding as much as possible the creation of too many 'dead' frontages i.e. buildings where no interaction is required by passing shoppers.

Good quality historic shopfronts demonstrate the history of a building and therefore should not be removed if a change of use occurs. However, there are some poor-quality modern shopfronts in Bishop Auckland which could either be replaced with a better-quality traditional style shopfront or could be converted back into residential use with the reinsertion of the ground floor walls, windows and door. Many shops along Newgate Street and Fore Bondgate were originally houses and have had shopfronts added on the ground floor and could therefore be converted back with ease. This, however, should be done alongside research to establish the original form of the building through historic photographs, plans and historic records or deeds which evidence the building was originally residential.

Where a good quality traditional or historic shopfront survives but the shop is no longer in use and it is deemed appropriate to convert the building to residential use, there should be a presumption in favour of its retention; replacement with solid walls, door and windows would not be acceptable.

To ensure privacy, internal blinds or curtains are preferable to opaque glazing or film which can create a 'dead frontage'. The shop door should become the front door of the property. If the building is being divided into flats, additional doors into individual flats should be located beyond the shop's front door, rather than inserting new doors into the shopfront. Access from the rear of the property may also be possible.

Where a shop front removal is deemed appropriate (for example an intrusive modern example), the overall design of the conversion should complement the building as a whole and retain or enhance its character. The design of windows, doors and detailing should be based on the original details of the host building. Ground floor window(s), for example, should be aligned with those above and should be as large or slightly larger.

¹³ [Bishop Auckland Regeneration – Town Centre Masterplan and Heritage Action Zone report to cabinet](#), 15 May 2019, Durham County Council

¹⁴ NPPF paras 90 to 95

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It should be remembered that proposals are likely to require planning permission for the change of use, in addition to planning permission for physical alterations and change in appearance. When planning any change, it is advisable to speak to Durham County Council's planning team at an early stage of the project.

Case Study: Cooperative building (formerly Beales), Newgate Street

The Co-operative building is Grade II listed and is a large and prominent building on Newgate Street. It developed in stages between 1873 and 1904 and has been vacant since 2017 following the closure of department store Beales. Its present appearance and continued vacancy are a cause of concern, depressing the appearance of the high street and raising questions regarding the long term future of the listed building.

Proposals were put forward in 2019 by the owners for a mixed-use development combining hotel, retail and residential functions. Planning permission was granted but development did not go ahead.

Moving forward, given the scale of the building, there is potential to provide a more diverse offer by the developers. Uses could potentially include a cooperative of small craft businesses in combination with a cafe and workshop to engage the local community and visitors to the town, along with small retail units on the ground floor. The upper floors could be converted to much needed residential, hotel or serviced apartments as originally envisaged by the developers.

The scheme put forward here also improves the appearance of the shop fronts, using the 'whole building' approach and making reference to historical imagery.



Co-op Building Speculative Elevation



Building Plan: Speculative Uses

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07: Other Options

In some cases, the long term vacancy of buildings where the owners are reluctant to put their buildings back into use, may require more active methods and partnerships between the Council, Town Council, charitable organisations and stakeholders.

Section 9.2.4 outlines some of the measures that can be taken by the Council to force owners to keep their buildings in repair, whilst compulsory purchasing a listed property could allow a building to be passed onto another organisation or charity, such as a Building Preservation Trust, to be restored and reused.

The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) is a charity which promotes the conservation and sustainable re-use of historic buildings for the benefit of communities across the UK, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. The AHF provides advice, grants and loans, aims to put sustainable heritage at the heart of vibrant local economies. More information can be found here: <https://ahfund.org.uk/>

KEY FACT: What is Building Preservation Trust?

Building Preservation Trust (BPT) is a not-for-profit organisation whose main aims include the preservation and regeneration of historic buildings. Setting up a BPT may be an option in preserving and restoring a specific building in Bishop Auckland. As a charitable organisation, funding opportunities are likely to be available. Help and support is provided by the Heritage Trust Network.

[SAVE Britain's Heritage](#) offers useful advice on their website on how to save a building at risk

Historic England [webpages](#) offer advice to help owners and purchasers of vacant buildings to reduce risks preventing unnecessary damage to a vacant building whilst options are explored:

Historic England runs a grants scheme to help local authorities take statutory action either by underwriting Urgent Works Notices and Repairs Notices or assisting in the costs of acquisition. For more information see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/grants>

Case Study: Liverpool

Liverpool's Buildings at Risk project has successfully used statutory powers to tackle the problem of derelict listed buildings.

The consistent use of Section 215 Notices and other enforcement powers has stimulated more than £30 million of investment in the city's listed buildings, which has in turn helped to deal with the attendant problems of crime, economic stagnation and adverse ownership.

Since 2001 the number of listed buildings at risk in Liverpool has fallen from 13% to under 4%.

(<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/stoppingtherot/heag046a-stopping-the-rot-summary/>)

POLICY: VACANCY

- VC01** The Council will continue to proactively engage with owners and encourage new occupants and the reuse for vacant buildings or units within the conservation area.
- VC02** The Council should consider making available a database of vacant units online.
- VC03** The Council will continue to encourage take up of the Property Reuse Fund and will continue to seek new funding streams to aid take-up of vacant buildings following the scheme's closure.
- VC04** The Council will consider working with Historic England to consider the feasibility of granting Local Listed Building Consent Orders (LLBCO) Local Development Orders (LDO) for conversion of un-used floorspace / buildings.
- VO05** The Council will use its enforcement powers such as Section 215 Notices, Urgent Works Notices and Repairs Notices. As a last resort it will also consider Compulsory Purchase Orders for Listed Buildings.

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

9.2.6 Theme 2: Condition, Maintenance and Repair

Theme 2: Condition, Maintenance and Repair

The Challenges

Although many owners or occupiers take pride in ensuring the buildings they own or rent are maintained in good order, there is localised evidence of limited maintenance and disrepair which detracts from the special interest of the conservation area. This was raised as a particular concern in consultation with the public as it provides a poor impression to visitors and reduces the enjoyment for those who live and work in Bishop Auckland. This applies both to buildings within the conservation boundary and those within its setting.

The most common problems in this respect are peeling paintwork, rotting timberwork, boarded or broken windows, a failure of roof coverings or rainwater goods which leads to the saturation and staining of masonry paint or plasterwork (encouraging biological growth), blocked drainage goods leading to the discolouration of stonework, and the growth of foliage on building frontages or roofs.

Poorly maintained façades can be unsightly; additionally, the building's condition may actually lead to the long-term vacancy. A particular issue in a prominent location on Market Place is St. Anne's Church. The roof requires urgent repair and in the meantime Heras fencing has been erected to ensure public safety - the impact on the appearance of the town centre is, however, clear.

Maintenance issues need be addressed as soon as they occur, reducing repair costs in the long term. Practises which promote good maintenance and repair regimes should be encouraged. Where repairs have taken place, they may not always be appropriate. Due to the nature of the local building stone and the use of poor repair methodologies which have utilising hard cement, stone decay is a problem. The use of cement mortar on historic buildings is generally not appropriate.



A mid-twentieth century building on Kingsway in poor condition



Poor maintenance such as blocked or missing gutters can quickly lead to issues

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The Opportunities

Maintenance

Sound maintenance and appropriate repair contributes towards the resilience and attractiveness of a place. It can have a significant impact on ensuring the appearance of the conservation area is preserved and enhanced, is a positive contributor to the lives of the inhabitants whilst encouraging economic success through increased investment and tourism.

Maintenance is defined by Historic England as '*routine work necessary to keep the fabric of a place in good order*'.¹⁵ It differs from repair in that it is a pre-planned, regular activity intended to reduce the instances where remedial or unforeseen work is needed and to ensure excessive amounts of historic fabric is not lost. Regular maintenance ensures that small problems do not escalate into larger issues, lessening the need for repairs and is therefore cost effective in the long-term.

Regular inspection of building fabric and services will help identify specific maintenance tasks relevant to each building. These could include but are not limited to:

- Regularly clearing gutters and drain grilles of debris, particularly leaves and plants that have taken root;
- Clearing any blockages in downpipes;
- Removal of vegetation growth;
- Repainting or treating timber windows and other external timberwork;
- Cleaning and/or repainting render; and
- Periodic renewal of pointing to extend the lifetime of building fabric.

A number of organisations have useful guidance on the care of historic properties. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings has a clear and down-to-earth calendar for maintenance which can be found here: https://www.spab.org.uk/sites/default/files/maintenance-toolkit/Maintenance%20Calendar_4.pdf

MAINTENANCE: A GUIDE FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

- Prepare your own individual maintenance plan – mark regular tasks on your calendar.
- Regularly repainting cast-iron will prevent rust and keep your house looking smart.
- Make sure your rainwater goods are not leaking – check for water staining or green mould on brickwork or render. A good time to inspect rainwater goods for unknown leaks is during or just after rain.
- Regularly check drains are clear of leaves or other debris.
- Clear bird droppings from perching points as guano is both unsightly and can be damaging to building materials as it contains high levels of salts and acids.
- Remove self-set vegetation from roofs, gutters or other areas as root action can be damaging.
- Self-climbing plants like hydrangeas, ivy or Virginia creeper can damage historic brickwork, mortar and renders, so consider removing them altogether.

¹⁵ Historic England, *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (April 2008)

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Repair

Repair: A Definition

‘work beyond the scope of maintenance, to remedy defects caused by decay, damage or use, including minor adaptation to achieve a sustainable outcome, but not involving alteration or restoration.’¹⁶

Whilst many buildings in the conservation area are in good condition, others are not. Examples of what constitute ‘repair’ include replacing a broken tile or slate, replacing damaged brickwork, or repairing rotted sections of timber work.

Repairs should be on a like-for-like basis to maintain the appearance and physical characteristics of the building. Like-for-like means a repair that matches the historic element removed in terms of material, construction technique, finish and means of installation. **This does not apply when an existing material is detrimental to the built fabric, e.g. if cement pointing has been used.** In such cases, the damaging material should be removed, and traditional materials put back using traditional construction methods.

Most of Bishop Auckland’s historic buildings are constructed with traditional materials, such as local stone, brick and lime renders. These traditional materials require the use of traditional techniques, particularly the use of lime mortars. This is to ensure that the breathability of the historic building is maintained, and moisture does not become trapped within the fabric, leading to decay.

Breathability is an important characteristic of historic buildings. The original materials used in the construction of a historic building are more permeable than modern materials. The replacement of old with new can therefore lead to damage to the historic fabric and other unforeseen consequences. For example, the replacement of soft lime mortar with hard cement mortar means moisture in the structure evaporates through the softer brick or stonework, rather through the less permeable cement, leading to the erosion of the brick or stonework. Where poor repair methodologies have been used in the past, it is recommended that hard mortar is carefully removed and replaced with a lime-based mortar (see information box ‘Pointing’).



Painted stonework is both damaging to the building’s fabric but also disrupts the appearance of an otherwise uniform terrace



Poorly pointed stone wall



Slipped slates can quickly lead to internal damage

¹⁶ Ibid,

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Cement renders and modern plastic paints on the exterior of a building can have the same harmful effect, causing moisture build-up, condensation, damp and mould growth with permanent damage as a result. Making the right choices at the start of repair work is therefore essential for the appearance and value of a property and the health and wellbeing of the occupants.

Further advice on maintenance, repair and how to care for historic buildings and places can be found on Historic England's website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/buildings/> and further links to other organisations can be found in the **Part 1: Further Information and Sources** section.

TOP TIPS: POINTING

As part of regular maintenance and repair works to historic buildings, stone or brick walls may require repointing. This should be carried out in lime mortar, never cement. Existing mortar should be raked out by hand using hand tools, to a depth twice as wide as the joint. Mechanical tools should not be used to rake out the joints, as these are likely to damage the surrounding stonework.

For more information about repointing and mortar mixes see Historic England's *Best Practice Guidance, Repointing Brick and Stone Walls* (2017) <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/repointing-brick-and-stone-walls/>



TOP TIPS: BUILDING MATERIALS

- The type of materials used in the repair and maintenance of properties should be appropriate to each individual property; the choice of roofing material used in re-roofing a 1930s property, for example, will be very different than that appropriate for a mid-late 19th century property where Welsh slate was commonly used.
- The use of materials in the conservation area should be guided by Section 5.3.2 of this document.
- Breathability is an important characteristic of historic buildings. The original materials used in the construction of a historic building are more permeable than modern materials, so the use of new materials (for example, cement, plastic paints, uPVC fixtures and cladding) can lead to damage to existing fabric.
- Using a modern cement-based render on a traditional building can lead to a build-up of moisture leading to damp, condensation and mould growth, damaging historic fabric and potentially impacting on the health of the occupants.
- On the majority of historic buildings, lime mortar matching the colour of the existing pointing and render should be used for any repointing works (see TOP TIPS: Pointing).

POLICY: CONDITION, MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

- CMRI** Durham County Council, where possible, will work with owners and occupiers of listed and unlisted buildings to:
- carry out repairs to historic buildings on a like-for-like basis wherever possible. On listed buildings, repairs may require Listed Building Consent;
 - replace inappropriate materials that are damaging to built fabric using traditional materials and techniques;
 - undertake the minimum intervention required for any repair, in order to preserve as much historic fabric as possible; and
 - seek grant funding where available for urgent repairs.

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9.2.7 Theme 3: Alterations to Buildings and the Loss of Traditional Features

Theme 3: Alteration of Historic Buildings and Loss of Traditional Features

The Challenges

Bishop Auckland, like many other towns, has seen its buildings subject to the inappropriate replacement of shopfronts, the loss of original windows and doors (often replaced with uPVC in varying styles and quality) the rendering or painting of original external surfaces such as brickwork and stone, and the inappropriate additions to buildings. Shopfronts in particular are being replaced in a variety of inappropriate designs (see **Theme 4**).

Problems of inappropriate windows can be found throughout the conservation area, particularly in the residential area of Etherley Lane.

A significant threat to the conservation area is the frequency of modern elements that are out of keeping with it: satellite dishes, burglar alarms boxes, light fittings, security cameras, extractor vents, solar panels and bird spikes can be found attached to buildings throughout the conservation area.

All these changes negatively affect both individual buildings and the wider streetscape. At the extreme end, they can be damaging to property prices.



Satellite dishes and aerials proliferate on this terrace



Bird spikes and the satellite dish are visually intrusive

The Opportunities

Retention and Reinstatement of Features

The original architectural features, materials, design and form of building, as outlined earlier in Section 5.3, are important for defining their character and contributing to the local streetscene of Bishop Auckland. The loss of any of these features therefore causes incremental diminishment of appearance and character. Some later additions may also be historic and/or of good quality, as well as illustrating changes to buildings over time or recording past uses of a building. Care should therefore be taken to not remove important features which, while not original to the building, are key contributors to its value. These can include:

- Windows;
- Doors;
- Roofs;
- Shopfronts;
- Boundary walls;
- Chimneys and pots; and
- Mouldings or other artistic details.

'Permitted Development' rights granted through the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 allow a wide range of minor works to residential properties without planning permission; these do not apply to commercial premises. However, even within a conservation area where these rights are further reduced, unsympathetic works are still possible which can severely erode the appearance and character of the conservation area.

Those buildings that are protected by being statutorily listed are subject to tighter controls relating to changes. Permission under Listed Building Consent must be obtained when considering alterations, extension and demolitions, including the replacement of doors or windows and other features such as roofing materials and rainwater goods.

The Council may decide in future to arrest further decline through the selective introduction of Article 4 Directives, ensuring that those historic features that exist are retained through the removal of Permitted Development rights.

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Windows and Doors

KEY FACTS

'The loss of traditional windows from our older buildings poses one of the major threats to our heritage.'

Historic England, 2017, Traditional Windows: Their care, repair and upgrading, 'Summary' <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/traditional-windows-care-repair-upgrading/>

Windows and doors are key features of historic buildings which define their character and appearance. On historic buildings, windows are typically made of timber and the traditional form of window would be a sash opening or multipaned casement. Original doors are also solid timber with moulded panels, often larger than standard modern doors. Historic 20th century buildings may retain their metal-framed windows often containing decorative stained glass. The change to uPVC alternatives is having a significant impact on the appearance of buildings throughout the conservation area and is now a real threat to the character and appearance of Bishop Auckland.

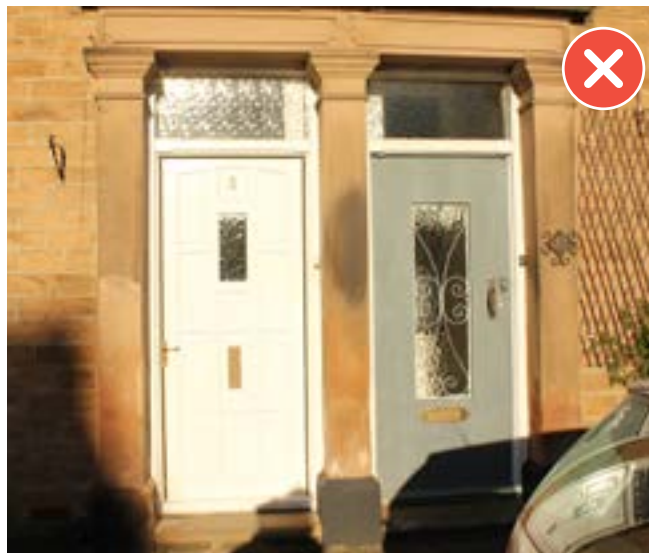
Traditional timber and metal windows are particularly prone to disrepair within historic buildings. Their poor condition often leads to their replacement with modern unsympathetic Unplasticised Polyvinyl Chloride units (uPVC). These are inappropriate owing to their design, detailing and operation making them look different to traditional windows. This has a negative impact on both the appearance and aesthetic value of the individual buildings and the wider conservation area, as well as involving the loss of historic fabric including original glass.



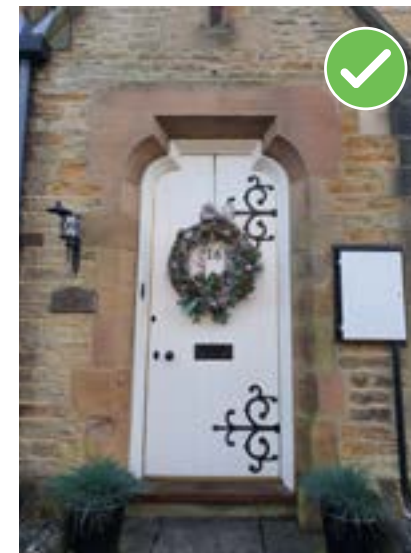
Inappropriately designed window insert into a historic bay window



Traditional bay window in timber with lead roof



Doors in an inappropriate style



Traditional door

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The replacement of traditional doors and windows with units made from uPVC or other materials, in designs that do not match the architectural style or period, or with different opening forms, can greatly change the look of a building. The use of plastic windows and doors also reduces the breathability of traditionally constructed buildings by preventing the egress of moisture, and will cause on-going degradation and problems to the fabric of traditional buildings. Plastic replacements also have a shorter service life than traditional windows and doors, are difficult to recycle and are carbon intensive to manufacture. Wherever possible, originals should be retained and maintained/ repaired to ensure their long life. If they have come to the end of their useful life, replacements should match the original as far as possible. Where inappropriate replacement has already been undertaken, periodic renewal offers the opportunity to return windows and doors back to a traditional appearance and is to be strongly encouraged.

Further guidance on the maintenance and repair of historic windows can be found on the Historic England website (see Section 8: Further Information), specifically their publication *Traditional Windows: Their Care, Repair and Upgrading*: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/traditional-windows-care-repair-upgrading/>

TOP TIPS: Doors and Windows

- Where original timber doors and windows survive these should be retained, repaired and restored as necessary.
- If the replacement of doors or windows is necessary in a historic building, whether the existing are made of timber, aluminium or uPVC, any further replacements should be in timber (unless the original windows can be proven to be of a different material, for example metal) and should represent a significant improvement over the existing.
- Where windows are replaced, they should respect the size and form of the original opening(s) and glazing bars, be set back an appropriate distance from the wall plane and be of an appropriate traditional design.

KEY FACTS: uPVC vs Timber

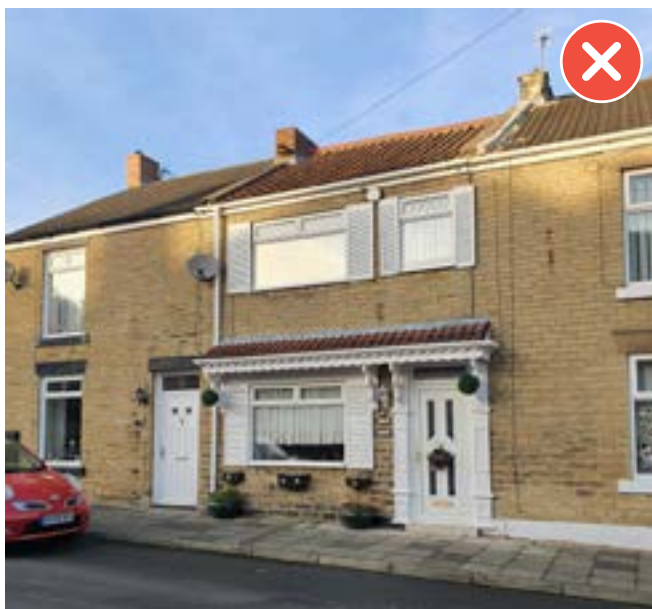
- uPVC contains toxic chemicals which can be released during a fire;
- Manufacturing uPVC windows and doors requires very high energy input;
- uPVC windows are difficult to recycle and end up in landfill, with the potential for releasing some of the most damaging industrial pollutants;
- uPVC windows and doors have a far shorter lifespan than appropriately maintained timber;
- uPVC replacements undermine the appearance of conservation areas and can threaten property values; and
- uPVC degrades, discolours and becomes brittle as a result of exposure to sunlight.
- Timber is more visually appealing and more appropriate for historic buildings;
- Can be made in a style to suit the historic building;
- Can be painted as fashions or owners change;
- Can be detailed in the same way as the originals;
- Can be fitted with double glazed units reducing condensation and noise;
- Is a superior insulator to plastic;
- Can last up to three times as long as uPVC, therefore whilst they may be more expensive upfront, the total costs are balanced out in the longer term; and
- Timber does not contain toxic chemicals and is environmentally friendly.

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Alterations and Extensions

The appearance and character of the conservation area is the result of significant development during the 19th and 20th centuries. Its appearance reflects this evolution, and it is not the purpose of conservation area designation to prevent future change which is necessary for the enduring sustainability of Bishop Auckland. Instead, the purpose of designation is to ensure change is carried out in a manner that not only does not cause harm but also, where appropriate, enhances the conservation area. The appropriateness of any demolition, alteration or extension should be considered on a case-by-case basis, as what is appropriate in one location will not necessarily be acceptable in another.

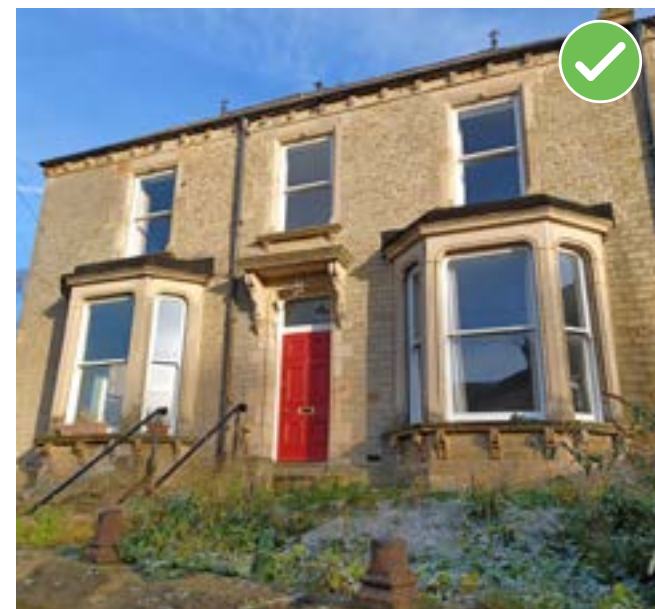
Alterations and extensions should preserve or enhance the character of the conservation area. This means that changes should be respectful of the prevailing architectural and visual character of Bishop Auckland and the specific character of the street or space in which it is located. Alterations and extensions should also use appropriate materials, whether these are the same as those typically found in the conservation area or whether they are new materials that are complementary. The materials selected should be of a composition that will not cause harm to the existing fabric. For example, alterations to historic fabric should not be carried out using mortar that is harder than the existing as it will cause the existing stone or brick to deteriorate. Rendering of historic brick or stone buildings will usually not be acceptable.



Heavily altered terraced house

Where attic conversions can be accommodated, roof lights should be limited to secondary elevations in order to limit the visual impact on the streetscape. They should also be of conservation specification, i.e. set flush with the roof rather than raised. Dormer windows may be acceptable where they are of the appropriate scale and design for the building and for the streetscape.

Buildings can be important records of their own development. There should not be a presumption that reversing historic changes will be acceptable as this can diminish the illustrative value of a building. However, not all past changes are beneficial to a building; enhancement could be achieved through removing a detracting feature and replacing it with something more 'in keeping'.



House retaining historic features

Extensions should be subordinate to the existing buildings in their scale, massing and design. In other cases, it will be appropriate for an extension to maintain the established building line. All extensions should be of high-quality design and construction. Materials and detailing should complement the existing building and the street or space within which it is located.

Demolition of buildings or removal of features that detract from the conservation area may be beneficial. Demolition of detracting buildings and features will only be permitted where suitable new development is proposed.

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Other Modern Features

There are other ad-hoc accretions that can be added to buildings which spoil their appearance, disrupting the coherence of groups of buildings or obscuring architectural details. Examples can include satellite dishes or aerials, security cameras, cabling and air-conditioning units or ventilation ducts. These items should be designed and located as discreetly as possible, preferably away from the street facing elevations of buildings. Satellite dishes and aerials are no longer becoming necessary with the advent of broadband and should be removed when redundant. The use of Wi-Fi or solar powered security cameras or lights may be preferable to the often poorly installed cable runs strung across the façade of historic buildings.

Pigeon spikes and netting are visually obtrusive and often poorly maintained meaning that guano accumulates and attracts more pigeons. Other measures for controlling birds should be considered such as the less visually intrusive anti-perching wire, the use of audible scares or lasers, and the control of rubbish as part of an integrated management strategy.

TOP TIPS

- Original features or good quality later additions to a building should be preserved through maintenance and repair. This includes windows, doors, roofs, shopfronts, chimneys and pots, mouldings or other architectural details.
- Extensions or alterations should be of a high-quality design, construction and detailing that is valued now and in the future.
- Extensions should be subsidiary to the existing buildings in their massing and design.
- Redundant satellite dishes and aerials should be removed. New satellite dishes and aerials on the front of buildings require planning permission.
- Locate solar photovoltaic (PV) or solar thermal panels on elevations or roofs which do not face the road.
- Avoid a proliferation of plastic rainwater goods. Rainwater goods on historic buildings should be painted metal.
- Locate necessary air-conditioning units, ducts or similar discreetly and chose designs which are as minimal in size as possible.
- Avoid accumulated additional fixtures and fittings on street facing elevations of buildings.
- Explore more sensitive options to bird spikes and netting which can be intrusive within the conservation area.

Policy: Alterations to Buildings and the Loss of Traditional Features

- ALT01** The Council will encourage the retention of original windows and doors. They will discourage their replacement with uPVC and other inappropriate alternatives.
- ALT02** The Council will encourage the retention of traditional features such as slate roof coverings, chimneys, metal rainwater goods and their reinstatement if lost.
- ALT03** The Council will discourage the application of non-historically authentic render, paint, cladding or other materials visible from the public realm.
- ALT04** The Council will ensure that proposals for extension and alteration will preserve or enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area.
- ALT05** The Council will ensure that the design, construction and materials of any new extension, alteration or repair should be of the highest quality and respect their local context.
- ALT06** The Council will encourage the removal of inappropriate and unsympathetic additions to buildings.
- ALT07** The Council will encourage the prevention of modern clutter such as extractor vents, satellite dishes, solar panels and other additions from front elevations or roof slopes, and encouraged to remove superfluous fixtures to improve the appearance of the conservation area.

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9.2.8 Theme 4: Shopfronts and Advertising

Theme 4: Shopfronts and Advertising

The Challenges

Shopfronts are an essential element of a market town like Bishop Auckland and an integral part of the façade of a building. They play an important role in creating a sense of place and adding vibrancy and vitality to an area; the design and appearance of a shopfront is therefore important to preserving and enhancing the appearance of the conservation area.

Whilst the shopfront serves a number of purposes – primarily allowing light into the ground floor and providing an area for displaying goods – the age, condition, design, colour, materials and signage can have a significant impact on the building and streetscape. Individually and collectively this impact can be either positive or negative.

There are number of good quality shopfronts in the conservation area. Unfortunately, many have been unsympathetically altered, or are concealed beneath modern alterations, or replaced over the years with poor quality modern shops. Poor quality or overly large signage, extensive use of window stickers and large, unbroken areas of glazing can also be found. In consultation with the public, the appearance of shopfronts was a cause for concern.



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The Opportunities

The improvement to modern and historic shopfronts both within the conservation and its setting would greatly benefit the appearance of and attractiveness of Bishop Auckland. The Council have drafted a **Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document** which, once adopted, will guide design in the conservation area.¹⁷ The shopfront guidance provided by the Council should be referred to in association with the guidance below.

The work of the HAZ in the reinstatement and restoration of traditional shopfronts in Bishop Auckland has begun a trend in the town which will hopefully continue if funding can be continued.

When considering the replacement of a shopfront, the necessary permissions must be sought first, and within the conservation area it would be pertinent to discuss your ideas with the Council's Conservation Office in advance of an application.

KEY FACTS: The benefits of a well-designed shopfront

- Creating a positive shopping experience;
- Increasing property value;
- Protecting and enhancing the heritage of the conservation area;
- Higher footfall and increased sales turnover;
- Help with the creation of a shopping community, which includes those who buy and sell locally;
- New investment and long-term sustainability.



¹⁷ <https://consult-durhamcc.objective.co.uk/kse/event/37708>

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Shopfront Design

In designing a shopfront, it should be considered as part of the building as a whole, rather than being a separate entity. The design therefore needs to reflect the style, proportions, vertical or horizontal emphasis and detailing of the rest of the building, particularly the principal elevation. A shopfront needs to sit within the original building framework set by structural and decorative features within the elevation.

It is highly desirable to reinstate historic features, such as corbels and pilasters, where these have been lost and the placement of them, or vestiges of their original design, remain. Historic photographs could also be used to identify the appearance of historic features which have been lost.

Where a unit extends or is proposed to extend across more than one building (i.e. across two or more buildings in a terraced row), it is important that the vertical division between the buildings is retained or reinstated. This may also require the use of signage which is divided in two or more parts.

Where it is appropriate to replace all or parts of a shopfront, traditional styles (or designs that retain the same proportions and materiality) are likely to be most appropriate in historic buildings, but sympathetically designed shopfronts would be appropriate in more recent and new buildings.

The components of a traditional shopfront are identified in the Council's own shopfront guidance and are also shown below. These include pilasters, corbels, fascia and stallrisers.



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Signage and Advertising

The design and detailing of advertising and signage content, both on fascia, attached to façades and hanging signs, are also important in the conservation area. The signage should complement the design of the shopfront and building, conveying a sense of permanence and quality, rather than cheap or brashness. Signage on historic shopfronts should consist of either painted lettering directly onto the fascia or individual cut lettering.

As mentioned above, the fascia should not overly dominate a shopfront and should reflect an existing historic fascia to ensure uniformity of proportion in the shopfront and along the street. To this end fascia should not be applied which extend above the shopfront onto the floor above, should not extend below obscuring the display window, or extend uninterrupted across a number of buildings. Where fascia signage has already been increased beyond the original fascia and considered to be disproportionate, a reduction in their size is encouraged.

Colour palettes, lettering style and illumination need to be considered in the design of a complementary shopfront. Colour schemes for shopfronts and signage should not be garish, preferably blending in with other subtle tones established elsewhere in good shopfront examples in the town centre.

Where chain stores, restaurants, banks, etc. have corporate branding that is designed for heritage settings, this should be used in the conservation area. Even on the edge of the conservation area garish branding can negatively impact on the conservation area.

Window signage should be kept to a minimum, and vinyl stickers should avoid large blocks of images or text and cover no more than 25% of the window space.

Where used correctly, hanging signs can increase the visual appeal of a shop and can enliven a streetscene but their overuse should be avoided to reduce clutter. Projecting signs should be high quality and relate to the size and scale of the façade. Hanging signs should be painted timber or cast metal, hang from suitably designed metal brackets fixed into mortar joints. Internally illuminate projecting signs are not appropriate in a conservation area.



This paint colours of this traditional shopfront are garish and individualistic; future tenants should consider a more sensitive approach by choosing a single, muted colour.



This traditional shop front has a muted colour scheme and elegant fascia lettering



Traditional hanging signs make a positive contribution to the conservation area

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The attaching of signage directly to stonework (for example where a business is located on an upper storey, or where no fascia exists) should be carefully considered. It should remain modest in scale and where the building is listed, consent will be required from the Council. Like hanging signs which introduce your business, they should be of the highest quality, preferably of metal or timber, and when attaching should reuse existing fittings or holes where possible to prevent an accumulation of holes which are both damaging to the fabric and also intrusive.

Temporary advertising banners are usually not appropriate in a conservation area, should only be used for a limited period and not become permanent fixtures on a building. They are usually of lesser quality and visual appearance than a superior quality painted timber sign and tend to fade rapidly.

Lighting

Generally, in most areas of the town centre, it is not necessary to illuminate shopfronts and fascias. Where lighting is necessary, for businesses operating at night for example, large projecting light fittings are intrusive, whilst subtle, minimalist, external lighting, preferably LED fittings illuminating key features on the shopfront, are more appropriate. Internally lit signage can look bulky and is inappropriate within the conservation area.

Materials

Painted timber, which is both versatile and durable, is a traditional material and is encouraged on historic shopfronts. Depending on the host building, stone, ceramic, render and metalwork may also be appropriate. Modern glossy materials such as acrylic, Perspex and uPVC are not appropriate as they have a poor-quality appearance against the traditional materials of older buildings and do not age or weather well.

Glazing is a traditional feature of shopfronts and is fundamental to the advertising and display function. Full height glazing is a modern feature and does not reflect the character of historic buildings. Smaller windows with stallrisers (a plinth under the window), transoms and mullions are typical traditional features and more appropriate in historic contexts. Where original glass remains in a shopfront it should be retained. Modern float glass is a poor replacement for historic glazing as it lacks the texture and surface interest of older glass.

Security

Security after closing time is clearly important for all businesses, but metal roller shutters are having a detrimental impact on the appearance of the conservation area. They obscure historic features and window displays and create an inactive and unpleasant streetscene when closed. Evidence suggests that external shutters are counter intuitive, as they can lead to the impression that an area is a high crime risk, further encouraging anti-social behaviour. Good security of a shop should be integrated into the overall design and ad hoc additions are rarely well implemented.

There are several alternatives to roller shutters which should be considered, including internal shutters and permeable grilles or toughened glazing. Improving the overall appearance of the streetscene, including public realm and street lighting, would assist in lowering vandalism and crime, and, along with other measures, could reduce the need for such high security requirements.



Solid roller shutters create an inactive and unpleasant streetscene when closed

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

SHOPFRONT GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

- Owners and landlords are encouraged to carry out regular maintenance on their shopfronts.
- Surviving historic shopfronts should be retained and repaired appropriately where necessary.
- Traditional shopfront design with components (pilasters, corbels, fascias, etc.) will be encouraged where appropriate. However, this does not exclude contemporary design where it is very high-quality and designed to be in keeping with the building in which it sits.
- Replacement shopfront design should take a 'whole building' approach and take account of the period and style of the building its within. Consult the Council's own guidance on shopfront design.
- Fascias can have a significant impact on the appearance of a shopfront and the building it is in; don't extend the fascia above cornice level, down over the window or across corbels at either end.
- Painted timber is the most appropriate materials for shopfronts, including signage. Materials like plastic are generally not appropriate.
- Canopies and awnings should be retractable and in canvas.
- Illumination of a shopfront should be modest and only fit when absolutely necessary.
- Large window stickers or features which obscure the view into the shop should be avoided when a shop is in use.
- Any security features required should be modest, unobtrusive and sympathetic to the historic appearance of the area. Internal security shutters or toughened glass are preferred to intrusive solid external shutters.
- Conversion of good quality historic shopfronts to residential use may be acceptable if the shopfront is retained.
- Don't forget you will need planning permission for any changes to a shopfront. If in doubt, speak to the Durham Planning Department.

Policy: Shopfronts and Advertising

- SFA01** The Council will encourage applications for high quality shopfront designs and security which is appropriate for the conservation area.
- SFA02** The Council will discourage the removal or change to historic shopfronts unless they are of beneficial impact to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- SFA03** The Council will encourage the use of their SPD on Shopfronts.
- SFA04** The Council will encourage owners to appropriately maintain and repair shopfronts.
- SFA05** The Council will encourage owners to:
 - Replace detrimental external solid metal shutters with more sensitive security measures such as toughened glass or open weave shutters; and
 - Ensure signage, lighting and advertising is appropriate.

SECTION 9.0: MANAGING CHANGE

9.2.9 Theme 5: Public Realm, Street Furniture and Green Spaces



The Challenge

The public realm, namely publicly accessible streets and open spaces, is the area from which the majority of people will experience the conservation area; preserving and enhancing its character and appearance is therefore of considerable importance for maintaining its special interest. The public realm consists not only of surface treatments but also street furniture, street signs and interpretation.

The streetscape within the conservation area is made up of many components which are vulnerable to incremental change that cumulatively affects the overall appearance of the conservation area. Additions of bollards, guardrails, modern surface materials, etc. could appear as minor changes individually, but over time these changes can incrementally impact on the condition, character and appearance of the conservation area. The repeated excavation of highways or pavements can weaken surfaces and result in unsightly patching and a poor overall appearance for the whole street.

As a tourist destination, the presentation of the public realm is an important consideration. As a conservation area there should be an appropriate, co-ordinated scheme for street furniture, bus shelters and lighting columns to give a coherent and more visually pleasing appearance to the public realm. Market Place has received a public realm refresh in recent years with sensitive surfacing and contemporary street furniture, although it remains open to traffic and car parking which are insensitive to this significant space. Other areas of the conservation area such as Newgate Street and Kingsway are now looking tired and overdue a refresh.

Etherley Lane's pavements and highway surfacing are generally of tarmac or concrete slabs (with occasional traditional pavers) and give an overall poor impression. It will be important moving forward to sensitively upgrade areas, retaining traditional surfaces where they exist, as Council funds allow.

A key character of the conservation area is its variety of public realm and open spaces; from Newgate Street with its minimal planting to the verdant parkland of Auckland Castle. Green areas provide an important contrast to areas of built development. Green spaces are important community assets, breathing spaces and places for formal and informal activities. Unlike modern developments, historic residential areas lack extensive private gardens making public green spaces all the more important.

The Opportunities

Street furniture such as the black Council waste bins should be provided throughout the conservation area and kept in a good condition. Lighting columns in the heart of the historic town centre could be replaced over time with a more sympathetic heritage-style lighting columns, particularly close to the Castle. Benched seating should be co-ordinated and in the most sensitive of areas, consideration

should be given to a heritage range when replacement is required as can be seen in areas like High Bondgate. The blue, plastic commemorative bench in Market Place should be replaced with one more in keeping.

The surfaces of roads and pavements should be maintained and kept in good order. The introduction of traditional stone flags in Market Place has been particularly successful, significantly improving the appearance of the area. The replacement of poor-quality surfacing is encouraged elsewhere and plans to improve the northern end of Newgate Street with a coordinated public realm with Market Place is due to start this year.

As a visitor destination the car parks are important to ensure that streets are not cluttered inappropriately with vehicles. To ensure that these areas do not impact negatively on the conservation area, the car parks should be well maintained, and consideration will be given to improve landscaping and provide appropriate tree and bush screening, for example, at the North Bondgate and Victoria Avenue car parks.

In addition to street furniture, road signage, freestanding shop-signage and broadband cabinets can collectively cause excessive clutter within the public realm and detract physically and visually from the pedestrian experience of the conservation area.

Applications associated with features within the public realm will be carefully considered to ensure that the public streets remain pleasant and attractive places to be whilst ensuring that commercial activities can continue successfully.

Installation of e-charging points are likely to become a feature of the streetscene in the coming years. Although these are relatively unobtrusive, they are likely to increase visual street clutter to a degree and should therefore be integrated with existing street furniture and considered alongside other reductions in street furniture.

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Highways, Surfaces and Pavements

When undertaking works to the public realm the following recommendations should be considered:

- Traditional paving and edging should be retained wherever possible. Any new or replacement paving should aim to be in historically authentic materials.
- Traditional materials should be used in preference to concrete and tarmac when undertaking surfacing and highway improvements.
- Permanent repairs to the highway network should be carefully executed, avoiding the patchwork of unsightly repairs found throughout the conservation area.
- Areas of poor paving should be replaced in traditional materials, or a modern high quality contemporary alternative.
- Road markings in a conservation need to be clear, well positioned and used only when necessary. Where yellow lines are required in conservation areas, they should be reduced to a width of 50mm (with a gap of 50mm between double yellow lines). The bright yellow paint colour should be replaced with Primrose Yellow (BS 310).

Guidance on Street Art

Street art has become a feature in some parts of the conservation area adding to its vibrancy and appeal; street art might include paintings, writing and murals on buildings, walls, or other structures.

For anyone considering adding to the street art in Bishop Auckland, the following guidance should be followed:

New Art Works

Before considering commissioning or carrying out new street art, contact the Council to ensure you have permission to do so. Written permission will be required from the owner of any building or structure that is to be painted – be aware that tenants do not have the right to grant permission.

If the building or structure lies within the boundary of the conservation area, planning permission from the Council may be required. You may also need planning permission if the piece of art lies outside of the conservation area – it is always best to check first. Street art will not usually be considered acceptable on a listed building and will require Listed Building Consent.

The Design

It is advisable to carefully consider the context within which the new work is proposed. Bishop Auckland has a rich history, some of which is already celebrated in the area's artwork. New works which continue to celebrate Bishop Auckland's heritage are preferred above artwork which has little or no relationship to its context. Work should also be respectful and not cause offence.

Consult with the Local Community

Talk to the people and businesses around the proposed site; engaging people in your project will increase understanding and support.

Protecting and Maintaining Art Work

To ensure that the Bishop Auckland remains attractive, it will be important to consider the ongoing maintenance and care of the new artwork. Artwork should be protected with anti-graffiti coating to minimise damage, allowing graffiti or tagging to be easily removed. Where damage cannot be cleaned off, the work may need to be overpainted, or removed altogether.

Overtime, artwork may deteriorate if not protected and maintained. If this happens, there is the potential for it to be viewed as an eyesore and detrimental to the conservation area. This might prevent new works being wanted by the local community or being granted permission by the Council.

Non-Compliance

Where the above guidelines are not followed, those responsible may be charged by the Council for its removal and any other costs incurred.

There may be occasions where graffiti and street art amounts to a criminal offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971.¹⁸ The maximum sentence for serious offences is 10 years in prison, where damage amounts to more than £10,000. Alternatively, a fine or community service order may be given.



In some parts of the town, street art may be intimidating, inappropriate or illegal.

¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/48/contents>

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Street Furniture

Layouts that integrate new public art, seating, trees and lighting can contribute to a more visually pleasing environment and furniture sited in ways that increase visibility helps create a safe environment for all, but it should not dominate the streetscene.

Public realm furniture with a coordinated approach will enhance the streetscape. Going forward, it will be important that public realm furniture is of the highest quality of design and materials, with a cohesive approach across the conservation area.

The best street furniture is elegant and simple, yet functional and easily maintained. Whether contemporary or traditional, the style should be sympathetic to the immediate context and consistent across areas. Innovative alternatives to bollards can be seen in the giant stone spheres on Market Place, whilst guard rails are decorative as well as functional.

1. Seating

- 01 Seats should not be placed where they might prove an obstruction.
- 02 Design seating as an integral part of the street and consider ongoing maintenance needs.
- 03 Locate seats in places of interest or activity.
- 04 Seats should be simple, functional and robust.
- 05 Create a 'seat with a view.'
- 06 Avoid overly cheap and shiny materials.
- 07 With climate change in mind, consider providing some seating that is sheltered in all weathers.



Try to create a 'seat with a view'



Avoid cheap materials and poor designs

2. Lighting columns

A 'heritage' style streetlight has been used in a number of areas, whilst contemporary lighting columns have been installed on Market Place, and are out of place against some of the most historic buildings in the town. In Fore Bondgate, wall mounted lighting has been used successfully to avoid cluttering the narrow street.

Councils around the country are committed to reducing energy consumption and the use of LED lighting will be adopted in the town centre. Incorporate power supply access to enable festive lighting should also be adopted. Low wattage whiter light is preferable to orange sodium lighting throughout the conservation area.

Top Tips: Lighting Columns

- Select lighting which suits the character and significance of the area.
- Avoid light pollution and over lighting spaces.
- Avoid clutter by mounting lights on buildings where possible.
- Heritage-style lighting is recommended for high significance spaces, whereas a high quality contemporary (but consistent) approach may be acceptable elsewhere.
- The height of lamp columns should be in proportion with the significance of the space, the surrounding buildings as well as the category of the highway.
- Ensure lighting columns are maintained.

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3. Rubbish Bins

Litter bins are an essential component of the streetscape, but great care is needed over their colour, design and siting.

Maintenance is also important to ensure the appearance of the streetscape is retained. They should be fixed to the ground to prevent vandalism and coordinated with surrounding street elements, in both siting and colour. New units should be designed as part of a family of street furniture. As part of a cohesive design black metal litter bins would provide cohesion with other items of the street furniture. Plastic bins or shiny metal bins should be avoided. The Broxap Round Medium Cast-Iron Bin (BX 2319) is commonly used in conservation areas.

Domestic and commercial bins can also impact on the streetscape, for example, on North Bondgate and to the rear of the Town Hall in Market Place. Outside of collection days, bins should be discreetly located away from public view. Collective bins stores which are screened should be created away from the public realm.



Commercial and domestic bins can negatively impact on the appearance of the conservation as here in Market Place

Other items

Consider grouping traffic signs with other items such as street lighting so that they can share the same supports. On Market Place, the signage for disabled parking bays is particularly intrusive; shared columns and other options should be explored.

If a sign and its column are no longer needed, it should be removed, thus reducing street clutter. The Traffic Signs Manual gives guidance on how to combine signs while still complying with the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (2016).

Where signs are required, they should be concise, no bigger than necessary and carefully sited. Yellow warning backing boards are visually obtrusive and are best used sparingly.

Bishop Auckland has some good examples of historic street names mounted on buildings. The Council should ensure these are maintained and consider new or replacement street names in a similar style in the most sensitive of areas.



A forest of signage for parking bays on Market Place which is particularly intrusive, and could cause obstructions during events

As part of ongoing public realm improvements, co-ordinated heritage-style pedestrian finger posts would help to improve connectivity between areas of car parking, the shops and heritage attractions.

It is already a good proportion of interpretative signage within the conservation area which is largely well designed and much of which has a shared design identity. Such signage raises awareness about the history of Bishop Auckland and the special interest of the conservation area and should be maintained, replaced when necessary and new opportunities sought as part of a cohesive scheme.



Consider combining artwork with street furniture such as telecoms and traffic cabinets as in this example in Barnsley which adopts colours which effectively 'camouflages' the cabinets



Interpretive signage is an important way of raising awareness about the history of Bishop Auckland

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Green Spaces

Existing green spaces should be preserved, the opportunity for enhancing areas with planting should continue to be explored and new areas encouraged as part of new development schemes or public realm initiatives. A special consideration should also be given to planting in areas which could soften or screen the rear of buildings on Newgate Street seen from Kingsway.

So as not to impact on the Auckland Park's special nature and its status as a Registered Park and Garden, it will be important to ensure that activities and development within and adjacent to Auckland Park are both sensitive and appropriate; applications will be monitored by the Council through the planning system.

Top Tips: Green Spaces

- Ensure existing trees are maintained.
- Replace significant trees if they come to the end of their life.
- Works to trees with a diameter of 75mm or more, measured at 1.5m from ground level, require prior notification to the Council.
- New development within the conservation area should include planting and soft landscaping.
- Public realm schemes should include new planting, trees and landscaping.

Policy: Public Realm, Street Furniture and Green Spaces

- PUB01** The Council will continue to maintain and improve the public realm to preserve and enhance the character of the conservation area.
- PUB02** Any new schemes of hard surfacing and public realm furniture will utilise high-quality materials and designs with a cohesive approach across the conservation area. There is no presumption in favour of traditional or contemporary styles.
- PUB03** The Council will work with residents and businesses to discreetly located or screened bin stores, particularly on Market Place and North Bondgate.
- PUB04** Preserve existing green spaces and look for opportunities to provide new planting both in existing public spaces and car parks, and as part of new development.

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9.2.10 Theme 6: Sustainable Development and Climate Change



The Challenges

Durham County Council recognise the threat posed by climate change. In 2019 they declared a climate emergency and are now in the second phase of their Climate Emergency Response Plan. Within their plan, they have committed to reaching Net Zero by 2030 with an 80% real carbon reduction to emissions, working with partners and communities to achieve a carbon neutral County Durham by 2045.¹⁹

KEY FACT

The continued use of historic buildings is inherently sustainable.

Maintenance and continued use of historic buildings is inherently sustainable. However, there are growing pressures to improve the energy efficiency of the country's historic building stock in order to reduce carbon emissions, particularly from heating which uses fossil fuel sources.

Historic buildings in conservation areas can play a significant role in reducing carbon emissions. This section of the report intends to provide building and homeowners with practical advice on reducing carbon emissions and retrofitting their buildings without compromising the characteristics that contribute to give the conservation area special interest. Every case should be treated individually on its own merits, having consideration for the significance of the building, its contribution to the conservation area and any impact upon these heritage assets.

As noted in **Theme 2**, historic and traditionally constructed buildings were designed to be breathable, allowing moisture to naturally exit building fabric. Care needs to be taken to make sure historic buildings remain breathable, rather than air-tight, through choosing appropriate materials that avoid water retention.

Care also needs to be taken if external changes are proposed to ensure these are sensitive to their historic context. This could include the addition of solar photovoltaic (PV) or solar thermal panels on south or east-west facing roofs as additional energy sources for heating. However, these must not detract from the historic character of the building and are likely to be only acceptable when positioned on rear roof slopes and not readily visible from the public realm. Well-integrated solar slates or tiles may in some circumstances be more visually acceptable, where solar panels are not appropriate.

Physical changes to buildings in this context need to be carefully considered so as to mitigate against harm to the significance of both individual buildings and the conservation area. This might include improvements to thermal efficiency and changing sources of heating.

Reducing petrol and diesel car use is critical to reducing carbon emissions and there is government commitment to phasing out their sale over the next decade. Petrol and diesel car use will be replaced by a combination of electric (or other carbon free) vehicles and non-motorised travel modes. Both will require infrastructure changes that will need to be considered in the context of the conservation area designation to ensure they are implemented appropriately.

Electric vehicles require e-charging points which can be installed within existing car parks and adjacent to street parking bays. Although these are relatively unobtrusive, they are likely to increase visual street clutter to a degree. Charging electric vehicles in resident parking areas, on the street outside of dwellings, presents a greater challenge with the current technology as personal charging points are expensive and could add considerable additional clutter to the conservation area. However, lamppost charging points and wireless charging may become viable in the future and are likely to be more compatible with a conservation area environment.

Other, non-motorised methods of travel should be encouraged. There is relatively little provision for bikes and cyclists in the conservation area although there are some keyhole racks on the High Street. Sheffield hoops are more appropriate in character.

¹⁹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/40220/Climate-Change-Strategy-and-Emergency-Response-Plan-2022-24/pdf/ClimateChangeStrategyAndEmergencyResponsePlan2022-24.pdf?m=637925305338470000>

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The Opportunities

There are many opportunities to make changes to historic buildings in the conservation area which will assist in tackling climate change. Many of these will have no impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area including improving the thermal performance of the building stock through insulating lofts and suspended ground floors, draught exclusion and the considered introduction of secondary glazing.

For unlisted buildings, internal works will not require planning permission, however for any works which affect the exterior of a building it will be required. Any works to Listed Buildings, both internal and external, will require Listed Building Consent, and those to the exterior will also require planning permission.

Internal works to improve energy efficiency

- a Adding insulation to lofts and below suspended ground floors will improve thermal efficiency.
- b Draft exclusion around windows, doors and vents will also be beneficial.
- c Installing secondary glazing, thick curtains and internal shutters (if appropriate to the period of the property) will improve thermal performance.
- d Care should be taken to ensure that traditionally constructed buildings remain sufficiently breathable so as to not cause harm to the fabric of the building.

Windows

- a There are opportunities to replace windows with slimline double-glazed units to improve a building's thermal efficiency where the existing are insensitive, modern or beyond repair. This will need planning permission. For Listed Buildings, where existing windows are insensitive, modern or beyond repair, proposed replacements should reflect historic joinery and glazing types.

- b However, the conservation of historic windows, even where these are not original, is encouraged wherever possible and a significance-led approach should inform any alterations. Double or triple glazing may only be appropriate in traditional buildings where it is well-designed and does not have an adverse impact on the appearance or fabric of the building or any features of architectural or historic interest.
- c When making decisions about windows, owners are first encouraged to consider low-cost solutions that can improve thermal performance whilst having less impact on the significance of a building than replacement. These include repairs, draught proofing and secondary glazing, which will not need planning permission but may need Listed Building Consent if the building is listed. Closing curtains, blinds and shutters can also produce the same heat savings as double glazing.
- d All window improvements or upgrades should be considered in the context of the 'whole building approach' to ensure that works are effective and sustainable in the long term.
- e The visual character of uPVC windows (design, materiality, detailing) makes them unsuitable for older buildings and conservation areas. The service life of these windows is short (25 years) compared to well-maintained traditional windows (often 100+ years) and they can be difficult to repair. These windows are not widely recycled and often end up in landfill sites; the carbon cost of a uPVC replacement window will therefore be higher than an appropriately upgraded traditional window.

Solar panels and renewables

- a Applications for solar panels are encouraged in rear roof slopes which are not readily visible from the public realm.
- b Well-integrated solar slates or tiles may in some circumstances be more acceptable where solar panels are inappropriate and where these do not impact the character of the conservation area.

- c Listed Building Consent is required in order to install solar panels on any roof slope of a Listed Building. Planning permission is required for the installation of solar panels to front and side roof slopes.
- d Other renewable energy sources could be considered, such as ground, air or water sourced heat pumps as long as they are not installed on a wall or roof which fronts a highway and do not detract from the appearance of the conservation area. Consents are required for any heat pumps in Listed Buildings or buildings in conservation area.

Changes to public realm

- a Installation of e-charging points are likely to become a more common feature in the streetscene in the coming years. Although these are relatively unobtrusive, they are likely to increase visual street clutter to a degree and should therefore be incorporated within existing street furniture and considered alongside other reductions in street furniture.
- b Planning permission may be required on changes to boundary treatments associated with private charging points.
- c Prioritise the selection of traditional materials from sustainable, low-carbon sources.
- d Introducing Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems can reduce the risk of flooding and pollution, in a manner that does not impact the special character and appearance of the conservation area.
- e Select native plant species for planting in public spaces which are resilient to changing weather conditions, encourage biodiversity of flora and fauna and appropriate to the character of historic open spaces.

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Traffic reduction and active travel

- a Measures should be taken to reduce or calm vehicle movement in the conservation area to improve air quality and make active travel more pleasant and safer.
- b There is an opportunity to create more road infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling such as pedestrian routes and cycle paths, as well as appropriate signposting. There is also potential to introduce additional bike stands on Newgate Street and elsewhere, as well as well-integrated bike storage. These measures should take care not to add to visual clutter and may be appropriate near the station and on car parks. This would help to reduce carbon emissions and enhance visitor experience to the area.

Retrofitting Historic Buildings

Escalating energy prices, coupled with the increasing effects of human induced climate change, is rightly drawing focus to the energy efficiency of our existing buildings. The urgency of the climate crisis means that retrofitting our historic, fossil fuel reliant building stock is important if we are to cut carbon emissions, reduce energy bills, and build energy security.

The word **retrofit** means to add something that did not originally belong when something was first built or manufactured. In recent times, retrofit has been used to describe the introduction of new materials, products, or equipment into an existing building, with the aim of reducing its energy use. However, a rush to retrofit carries many risks, particularly when it comes to Listed Buildings and buildings within Conservation Areas. The consequences of getting it wrong could cause lasting damage and unnecessary expenditure.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to retrofitting older buildings and what works on one property, may not work on its neighbour. The Sustainability Traditional Buildings Alliance (STBA)²⁰ published a report in September 2012 titled 'The Responsible Retrofit of Traditional Buildings'. The report identified significant challenges in traditional building retrofit because of the uncertainty of data and research; the complexity of interactions; and possible conflicting priorities and values. It instead champions a 'whole building approach', one which considers the building as a system of interconnected materials, functions and users, and understands the effect of external and contextual influences.

The Hierarchy of Responsible Retrofit, available [here](#), is based on this 'whole building approach' and founded on the principle that the greenest (and cheapest) energy is the energy we do not use. Reducing carbon emissions is more than simply insulating and adding solar panels: much can be achieved by changing behaviour, avoiding waste, using efficient controls and equipment and managing the building to its optimum performance.

20 <https://stbauk.org/>

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This hierarchy of responsible retrofit is broken down below:

- **Knowledge**

The first and most important step is knowledge.

Understand the context of your building: its surroundings and situation; its history, construction, and condition; its energy use and impact; its occupation and patterns of use. Understand the financial context of the project, what is the budget, are there grants or funding opportunities available?

Allowing time to properly understand the building, how it is used, and where energy is being wasted will save time and money later.

- **Eliminate**

Next, seek to eliminate unnecessary energy use.

Addressing issues like damp, draughts and other defects can be a cost-effective way of saving energy. Look at how a building is used: is a space constantly heated but only occupied once a week for example?

- **Mitigate**

This step involves mitigating the impact of things that are unavoidable. For example, lighting and electrical appliances are essential but should be as efficient as possible (LEDs etc). Is there a more efficient way of utilising the spaces?

- **Improve**

Next, improve the existing buildings fabric to reduce energy use further through passive means.

For example, upgrading windows, insulating the roof, walls, and floors, looking at air tightness and cold bridges. Traditional buildings were constructed to be 'breathable' using vapour-permeable materials. Incorporating materials that enable this permeability is crucial to avoiding unintended consequences like moisture buildup and damp. A risk-based approach will help effectively manage this. Consider occupant comfort, effective ventilation and minimise risks of overheating.

- **Active**

And last but not least, introduce appropriate 'active' energy technologies that are zero carbon and renewable.

This could include solar panels, heat pumps, district heat networks etc. This final measure is an essential part of addressing the climate emergency but jumping to this step too early could risk implementing the wrong solution. If you don't take steps to reduce energy demand first, the new energy source will need to be larger and work harder, and ultimately cost more to install and to run.

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Best Practice Guidance on Historic Buildings and Energy Efficiency

Physical changes to buildings should be guided by Historic England's extensive advice regarding historic buildings and energy efficiency, including advice on cutting carbon emissions, upgrading windows and introducing renewable energy technologies:

- **Energy Efficiency and Traditional Homes, Advice Note 14.** This advice note considers energy efficiency improvements to traditional homes that are heritage assets. The importance of the "whole building approach" lies at the heart of the advice note, which seeks the best balance between saving energy, maintaining a healthy indoor environment and sustaining heritage significance, all by understanding the building in its context.
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/energy-efficiency-and-traditional-homes-advice-note-14/heag295-energy-efficiency-traditional-homes/>
- **Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency.** This guidance is for anyone who wishes to improve energy efficiency in an historic building. It is underpinned by the "whole building approach" and provides guidance on ensuring energy-efficiency measures are suitable, robust, well-integrated, properly coordinated and sustainable. Section 3 is particularly useful in summarising practical energy efficiency improvements and considers their respective benefits, costs and technical risks.
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/eehb-how-to-improve-energy-efficiency/heag094-how-to-improve-energy-efficiency/>

- **Traditional Window: their care, repair and upgrading.** This useful guidance is aimed at building professionals and property owners and provides detailed technical advice on the maintenance, repair and thermal upgrading of windows as well as on their replacement.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/traditional-windows-care-repair-upgrading/>

- **Modifying Historic Windows as Part of Retrofitting Energy-Saving Measures.** This advice sets out Historic England's position and advice on the care and repair of old windows and improving their thermal performance both within Listed Buildings and conservation areas.

Historic England encourage owners to conserve significant historic windows wherever possible; repair, maintenance and adaption are often more sustainable than replacement.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings/modifying-historic-windows-as-part-of-retrofitting-energy-saving-measures/>

- **Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: Solar Electric (Photovoltaics).** This guidance describes different solar panels available and provides advice on minimising the potential damage to fabric and the visual impact of a renewable installation. It sets out that steps should be carried out to cut energy consumption prior to consideration of installation of renewables in line with a 'whole building approach'.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/building-services-engineering/installing-photovoltaics/>

- **How to Save Energy in an Older Home.** This provides information on saving on energy bills or cutting carbon emissions for people living in older buildings, listing options and considering their benefits, costs and risks.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/energy-efficiency/making-changes-to-save-energy/>

Other useful guidance is provided by:

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), which carries out periodical research relating to energy efficiency in old buildings and prepares briefings, research reports and advice on the subject, encouraging the holistic understanding of a building, how it performs, how it is used and how it is inhabited prior to making interventions. <https://www.spab.org.uk/advice/energy-efficiency-old-buildings>

The Building Conservation website, which features a useful article, Retrofit in Heritage Buildings. The article stresses the importance of the 'whole building approach', when improving the energy performance of buildings, to enable informed decisions to be taken. <https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/retrofit-heritage-buildings/retrofit-heritage-buildings.htm>

Policy: Sustainable Development and Climate Change

CC1 The Council encourage changes to buildings and areas in response to climate change where they take into consideration the character and appearance of the conservation area.

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Theme 7: Visitor Welcome and Connectivity

9.2.11 Theme 7: Visitor Welcome, Traffic and Connectivity

The Challenge

Visitors generally arrive by car, bus or by train into Bishop Auckland. At present the experience from the railway station is less than satisfactory, delivering visitors into a confusing car park with limited wayfinding. The only feasible route into town for pedestrians is along the busy Newgate Street where many buildings are vacant and/or poor condition, impacting of the visitor experience.

It is anticipated that the increase in visitors will see locals using more of the smaller car parks distributed around the town centre, such as on Kingsway in addition to the main car park on North Bondgate. It is already anticipated that an increase in visitors will put pressure on local facilities and services, the highway network and the overall experience of the town, particularly from increased vehicle traffic.

The Opportunities

One way of improving the visitor experience, of reviving retail areas and reducing the vacancy of shops is by improving pedestrian connectivity across the town. For example, improving access from the train station into the town centre, and from the bus station into the town centre.

The redevelopment of the bus station is already underway to improve the visitor welcome here, and to cope with the expected increased footfall in future years. A potential issue, however, remains despite improvements - the connection of the bus station for pedestrians into the town. There are limited routes, one of which is through the shopping centre or via back streets to access other areas.

A new access route for pedestrians into Fore Bondgate has recently opened following the demolition of a former amusement arcade. This new pedestrian route improves upon the much narrower alleyway currently in existence connecting Fore Bondgate with North Bondgate. Enlivened by street art, planting and sympathetic surfacing and seating, it should encourage visitors arriving to the North Bondgate car park to walk via Fore Bondgate onto Market Place or Newgate Street, rather than down the busier North Bondgate, with positive economic results and a better experience for visitors.

Further initiatives from Kingsway have already been given permission from the Council with the creation of 'Kingsway Square'; with demolition and construction works now underway, this will create access into Newgate Street from a new 'green' car park accessed via Kingsway from the north or south. Such initiatives whether led by the Council or third parties have the potential to significantly improve the visitor and shopper experience and have the potential to drive regeneration in adjacent areas. The benefits could include a reduction in vacant retail units in this section of Newgate Street.



The approved Kingsway Square is now under development

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The Auckland Project, the Council and other stakeholders continue to work together to improve other aspects of the visitor welcome including providing facilities such as public toilets, new access routes and car parking to reduce congestion, the provision of accommodation in Market Place, and encouraging food and drink outlets in the town centre. A further opportunity improves the flexibility of the Market Place and encourages increased uses for events and markets.

Improving the welcome to visitors to Newgate Street arriving at the train station could be achieved by responding to other recommendations presented in this report such as reducing vacancy of retail units, diversifying the retail centre, improving the appearance of buildings, and improving the appearance of the public realm. A shuttle bus between the station and the Market Place will also be required as visitor numbers increase.

As mentioned above in **Theme 5** elements such as finger posts and interpretation boards are important in orientating pedestrians and in raising awareness about the history of the town. As new public realm projects arise, it will be important to provide / increase these elements as part of a cohesive scheme.

Policy: Visitor Welcome and Connectivity

VWC01 The Council will continue to work with local businesses and stakeholders to improve pedestrian connectivity across the town.

VWC02 The Council will continue to work with local businesses and stakeholders to provide new visitor services such as accommodation, entertainment venues, and food and drink outlets to improve the visitor experience and dwell time.

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9.2.12 Theme 8: Detracting Buildings



The Challenges

Like many towns, Bishop Auckland lives with the legacy of 20th century clearances along with the construction of buildings which are considered to 'detract' from the special nature and character of the conservation area. Detracting buildings are typically characterised by their poor-quality design, inappropriate scale and massing, limited articulation, no or low-quality detailing and a general failure to reference or integrate with the surrounding streetscape.

Many of these detracting buildings were constructed in the mid- to late- 20th century and have been identified both within **Section 5.2**, and in **Section 6.0 Character Areas**, specifically 'Key Negative Buildings'. These also include the empty office block of Vinovium House, which dominates parts of the conservation area by its scale and appearance, despite being outside of the conservation area boundary.



Detracting building on Kingsway



Detracting building on Market Place



Modern residential block in the conservation area



Vinovium House

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The Opportunities

Detracting buildings offer great potential for enhancement of the conservation area and the wider town. This can be achieved through their refurbishment, upgrading, or demolition and replacement as part of future proposals with a carefully considered, sensitive design.

Throughout the conservation area, where plans are proposed for the redevelopment of detracting sites, proposals should exhibit high-quality design and use appropriate materials. These should also respect the historic street network, urban grain and building typologies within the conservation area. Sensitive redevelopments of detracting sites will enhance the special significance of the conservation area.

There are significant opportunities elsewhere in the conservation area to improve the appearance of detracting buildings and the Council will continue to welcome applications and to guide owners and developers. More specific guidance relating to the introduction of new, sensitively designed buildings in the place of detracting buildings and areas are included within **Theme 9**.

Policy: Detracting Buildings

DET01 The removal or improvement of a detracting building which has a negative impact on the character of the conservation area will be encouraged by the Council.

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9.2.13 Theme 9: New Development



The Challenges

The appearance and character of Bishop Auckland is the result of centuries of development and change. It is not the purpose of conservation area designation to prevent future change which is necessary for the enduring sustainability of Bishop Auckland. New development on the boundary of the conservation area offers the opportunity to redevelop existing vacant sites or the replacement of existing buildings or extensions, some of which may have a negative impact on the conservation area (as identified in **Theme 8**). However, the challenge will be to ensure that change happens in a controlled way and in a manner which does not cause harm to the special character and appearance of Bishop Auckland, but also, where possible, enhances it.

KEY FACT:

It is not the purpose of conservation area designation to prevent change, but to guide it in such a manner which does not cause harm to the special character and appearance of Bishop Auckland – and where possible, enhances it.

The Opportunities

The principal aim of any new development, alteration or extension in Bishop Auckland should be to preserve and enhance the character of its setting and the conservation area as a whole. It should respect the character, appearance, form, scale and materiality of the conservation area and the other historic buildings, particularly listed buildings or identified positive building, and their settings; for example, through the use of a local material which is a particular characteristic of Bishop Auckland, or through a style prevalent within the town. The characteristics and prevailing architectural styles found in Bishop Auckland have been identified in Section 5.0 to help guide developers and homeowners. Development on important green spaces within the conservation area should be avoided.

New development, as well as extensions and alterations, should be of a high-quality construction and detailing. They should be thoughtfully designed, whether in a traditional or contemporary style, so that they remain valued into the future. High-quality materials should also be used. Extensions should be subordinate to the existing buildings in their scale, massing and design. In other cases, it will be appropriate for an extension to maintain the established building line. Materials and detailing should complement the existing building and the street or space within which it is located.

New development will:

- Relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land
- Be informed by local character and identity
- Sit happily in the pattern of existing development
- Respect important views
- Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
- Use materials and building methods which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings
- Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of their setting

(Historic England, 2022, 'Design in the Historic Environment', <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/design-in-the-historic-environment/>)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasises the importance of good design. Following the government's Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission in 2021 and the resulting report 'Living with beauty', the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated to provide a stronger focus on beauty and design quality in planning policy to ensure the planning system can both encourage beauty and prevent ugliness.²¹

Section 12 of the NPPF sets out the importance of creating high-quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. It promotes the role of good design in achieving sustainable development, which creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

²¹ The 'Living with Beauty' report defines beauty as 'everything that promotes a happy and healthy life, everything that makes a collection of buildings into a place, everything that turns anywhere into somewhere, and nowhere into home.'

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Additionally, property owners and developers should make reference to [National Design Guide: Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places \(2021\)](#).

Achieving a high standard of new development is also a Core Principle of the Council (para 5.281) and property owners and developers must be guided by the County Durham Plan, Policy 29: Sustainable Design.²²

In all cases, the Council will critically assess new applications for development both within and adjacent to the conservation area will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, as variations in location, building type or style, detailing, etc. between one building or site and another means that what is acceptable for one place may not be for another.

The impact of proposed changes to historic buildings and sites should be undertaken through a formal Heritage Impact Assessment, which will be a requirement of any planning application for change in the conservation area (see information box). This should consider the heritage asset or assets affected, their setting and key views. As a heritage asset in its own right, any change in the conservation area or nearby (within its 'setting') will require assessment in terms of its impact on the conservation area. Further assessment may be required in relation to an individual listed building or listed buildings near the location of the proposed change. Advice is usually provided by a specialist heritage consultant.

What is a Heritage Impact Assessment?

Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is a process used when proposals are put forward for change to the historic environment. It is usually a requirement of listed building consent or planning consent for proposals within a conservation area. It identifies what is historically and architecturally important about a heritage asset, in order to be able to assess whether proposed changes will have a positive, negative or no impact on the heritage values of the place. Advice is usually given by a specialist heritage consultant and the resulting conclusions presented in a report, which should include:

- Identification and description of the proposals site and its setting;
- Identification of any designations, such as listing, which the site is subject to or which are within the setting of the site;
- Description of the history of the property;
- Identification of the 'significance' of the site, i.e. its historic and architectural interest; and
- An assessment of the impact the proposals will have on the significance of the site, as well as recommendations for any changes to the scheme that will reduce any negative impacts that are identified.

Given the considerable time-depth of Bishop Auckland, there is the potential for archaeological remains to survive below ground, particularly within the town centre and Castle area. With this in mind, developers and property owner planning change should be aware of the potential requirement for an archaeological assessment in advance of development to establish the survival, or otherwise, of below ground remains. Additionally, proposed works within Bishop Auckland may require excavation or monitoring before or during construction works. This is in order that archaeological remains are identified, recorded and preserved wherever possible. For further advice, contact the Durham County Council Archaeology Section (DCCAS).

Policy: New Development


NEW01 All applications for new development will be critically assessed by the Council to ensure they are of the highest quality design and utilise appropriate materials to and preserve or enhance the special interest of the conservation area.

NEW02 The Council will ensure that due consideration is given to archaeological potential wherever below ground intervention is proposed.

²² <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/34069/County-Durham-Plan-adopted-2020-/pdf/CountyDurhamPlanAdopted2020vDec2020.pdf?m=637725862605900000> Page 150

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9.2.14 Theme 10: Opportunities and Recommendations by Area



**Theme 10:
Opportunities and
Recommendations
by Area**

This section reflects on current opportunities and project work, and also offers an additional perspective and recommendations for a brighter Bishop Auckland and a vibrant and thriving conservation area. This is an area-by-area assessment responding to the issues and challenges identified elsewhere in this document.

Character Area 1: Auckland Castle and Park

- The Castle and Park are highly significant heritage assets. Care should be exercised to ensure that all development and activities within or in their setting are appropriate.
- Continue to engage the public as new historical and archaeological discoveries are made.

Character Area 2: Town Centre

Market Place

- Consider traffic calming measure through the Market Place.
- Make further improvements to the public realm including introducing more sympathetic planters and street lighting.
- Following the continuing success of the Food Festival and the Christmas Market, continue to expand on the activities in the Market Place. Seek to hold more speciality markets and events to increase footfall, promoting the economic success and vibrancy of the town centre.
- Continue to encourage more services such as food, beverage, entertainment, and accommodation to increase footfall and dwell-time of visitors, promoting the economic success and vibrancy of the town centre.

- Consider encouraging meanwhile uses for vacant buildings to improve the appearance, vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. These include:
 - The Castle Bar
 - The Queen's Head
 - The Postchaise
 - Nos. 32 to 33 Market Place
 - No. 43 Market Place
- The removal / redevelopment of the following detrimental buildings overlooking Market Place should be explored:
 - No. 42 Market Place
 - No. 43 Market Place
- Encourage urgent works to improve the condition of the St Andrew's Church. This will be of significant benefit to the appearance of Market Place and improve the overall experience for visitors and residents alike.
- Create communal bin stores to remove commercial and private bins from pavements and make them less visible along North Bondgate and in Market Place.

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Fore Bondgate and North Bondgate

- Continue to encourage more visitor services such as food, beverage, entertainment, and accommodation to increase footfall and dwell-time of visitors, promoting the economic success and vibrancy of the town centre.
- There is opportunity to improve the appearance of key buildings and upper floors along Fore Bondgate, improving the overall experience of shoppers and visitors.
- There is opportunity to improve the appearance of shopfronts on Fore Bondgate.
- There is opportunity to improve vacancy levels of retail units in Fore Bondgate through funding opportunities and grants, encourage take up by small and independent retailers along with other services and uses. Fore Bondgate has the potential to be developed as Bishop Auckland's equivalent of York's Shambles, which has seen significant success as Harry Potter's 'Diagon Alley' and the establishment of retail outlets selling Harry Potter merchandise.
- Access from Fore Bondgate to the side of Newgate Shopping Centre should be improved.
- North Bondgate's car park is an area of significant hard landscaping. It could be further improved with more tree planting, shrubs and better screening from the road.

North and Central Newgate Street

- Continue to encourage more visitor services such as food, beverage, entertainment, and accommodation to increase footfall and dwell-time of visitors, promoting the economic success and vibrancy of the town centre.
- There is opportunity to improve the appearance of key buildings, improving the overall experience of shoppers and visitors.
- There is opportunity to improve the appearance of shopfronts.
- There is opportunity to improve vacancy levels of retail units through funding opportunities and grants, encourage take up by small and independent retailers along with other services and uses.
- There are opportunities for public realm improvements for north Newgate Street (due to commence shortly) with potential for further improvement in central Newgate Street.
- Beales (Co-operative store) provides opportunities for redevelopment as smaller retail or workshops units, combined with hotel or residential units above (see box feature in **Theme 1**).
- Newgate Shopping Centre: Remove the entrance canopy which conceals an historic building.



Newgate Street - remove the entrance canopy to the shopping centre

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Character Area 3:Wear Chare and the Batts

- Improve pedestrian safety and access along Wear Chare.
- Resist pressures for new development. Should this take place, ensure Theme 9 above is referred to.
- Continue to maintain the flood barriers.

Character Area 4:Etherley Lane

- Consider traffic calming measures to deter traffic and reduce speeds.

Character Area 5:Kingsway and South Church Road

- Consider improvements to Victoria Avenue Car Park. Located adjacent to high-quality terraces which are listed Grade II, the car park lends itself to being regenerated as a green space to serve adjacent residential housing and businesses and for users redeveloped Masonic Hall and Mechanics Institute. There is also the potential to sympathetically redevelop the site for housing.
- Encourage the redevelopment of vacant buildings e.g. Blackett Furniture site including the Masonic Hall and Mechanics Institute, exploring a variety of potential options. (see box on following page and **Theme 1**).
- Carry out public realm improvements in the area and tree planting along Kingsway.
- Prohibit car parking along historic route of Durham Chare.



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Proposed Extension: Peel Street, Chester Street and Railway Street Industrial Area

- Ensure the historic surfaces in back lanes are maintained and repaired.
- Respond to illegal fly tipping.
- Discourage and prosecute illegal graffiti, whilst working with owners of buildings to ensure further street art is controlled in a way that does not negatively impact on the appearance of the area, damage historic buildings, or cause distress or offence. See Theme 5 for Guidance on Street Art.

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