

**DISTINCTLY DARLINGTON**

**DARLINGTON  
CHARACTERISATION STUDY**

**Darlington Borough Council  
July 2009**



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

- 1.1.1 The Darlington Characterisation Study aims to identify and describe in a systematic and objective way positive elements of Darlington's existing built form that help to create broad character zones across the Borough's different neighbourhoods and villages. It will inform the LDF Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document (Design SPD), particularly the design codes, set out in sections 6 and 7. It will also provide a starting point to ensure the design of new development contributes positively to the evolving character of the Borough.
- 1.1.2 Delivering design quality in new development that safeguards the best of Darlington's urban and rural buildings, townscapes and landscapes requires a clear understanding of the Borough's character, past and the current trends and pressures upon it. One way to achieve this is for design to reflect key elements of the quality environment that already exists. This helps to ensure that a development, whilst having its own identity retains the distinctive qualities that make Darlington different to other towns and cities.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND**

- 1.2.1 Darlington has rich and diverse patterns of development. To a greater or lesser degree each neighbourhood within the urban area and each village exhibits particular urban or rural characteristics unique to that area, which give it its sense of place or local distinctiveness. By developing an understanding of the Borough's built form it will help design make a positive contribution to future development and regeneration. Whether a new development is large or small, the effect upon on Darlington's distinctive character and the positive qualities of its neighbourhoods must be considered.
- 1.2.2 Distinctive character does not just include the Borough's wide range of scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas, it also includes buildings of local heritage value and good quality 20th century development, that positively contribute to Darlington's local distinctiveness.
- 1.2.3 Understanding how the past has shaped the form of the Borough today allows the definition of its character, as well as the identification of its strengths and weaknesses, which new development and/or regeneration should build upon or redress. Assessing buildings and townscapes within this wider context allows the identification of those which promote Darlington's unique character and which should be used to strengthen its future.
- 1.2.4 However, this study does not attempt to retell the history of Darlington, but rather to identify certain key themes in particular areas where the Borough's character has been particularly influenced (positively) by its past and where, it should be reflected in design for the future.
- 1.2.5 In those parts of the Borough where there is no significant positive local character, the challenge through new development is to create a distinctive place. There is no reason why character and innovation should not go together. New and old buildings can coexist, as long as the design is a positive response to good design principles and this study.

## **2.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

- 2.1 **PPS1:** design should protect and improve the character and quality of an area, appropriately reflecting its context, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. Design should be based on an understanding and evaluation of its present defining characteristics, and respond to local context to 'promote or reinforce local distinctiveness'. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which does not improve the character and quality of an area should not be accepted.

**PPS7:** development in rural areas should be well designed, in keeping and scale with its location, respecting and enhancing the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness, whilst contributing to regional diversity.

**By Design:** design should promote character in townscape and landscape, to respond to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development which consider the positive features of place. These include landscape, building traditions and materials as well as other factors that make one place different from another but which contribute to its special character. Good design should respond sensitively to the site and its setting, to create a place that is valued and pleasing to the eye and which does not rely on standard practices and products. Designing for local distinctiveness involves reconciling local practices with the latest technologies, building types and needs.

**Preparing Design Codes:** design codes are a new approach to delivering improved design quality in development. Reflecting character, they should establish the essential design elements of 'place' providing a quality threshold below which design standards must not fall. But they can also inspire better design than could otherwise be produced, providing clear guidelines for what is acceptable design quality for a particular area, to reflect local distinctiveness.

3.2 **Regional Spatial Strategy:** promotes high quality development that respects local character and distinctiveness and which appropriately uses characterisation to understand the local environment.

3.3 **Borough of Darlington Local Plan:** new development should protect and enhance the Borough's natural and built environments whilst respecting its key characteristics. Most of the adopted Local Plan policies are 'saved' until replaced by new Local Development Framework policies. Policies relevant to townscape and landscape character include: Policy E1 (Protection of the Environment), Policy E10 (Protection of Key Townscape and Landscape Features), Policy E14 (Landscaping of Development), Policy E29 (The Setting of New Development), E7 (Landscape Conservation), E8 (Area of High Landscape Value), E9 (Protection of Parklands), E12 (Trees and Development), E15 (Open Land in New Development), E38 (Alterations to Business Premises), E42 (Street Furniture), H7 (Areas of Housing Development Restraint), H11 (Design and Layout of New Housing Development), H12 (Alterations and Extensions to Existing Dwellings), H13 (Backland Development) and R7 (Design of Open Space Provision).

3.4 **One Darlington: Perfectly Placed:** identifies the need to maintain and enhance Darlington's character, scale and friendly market town atmosphere.

#### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

4.1 The Council has, with the local community, undertaken a characterisation study of the built form of the Borough, specifically the town centre, the distinct neighbourhoods within the urban area and the villages. It is not the intention of this Study to give a detailed appraisal or historical analysis, but the work has informed the detailed design guidance set out in the Design SPD.

4.2 A variety of techniques were used for appraising the unique qualities of Darlington's character. These included observation and site surveys, reviewing historic records and maps as well as the five 'high quality design' public consultation workshops, held at The Forum and the Arts Centre in the urban area and the villages of Sadberge, Middleton St George and Heighington in June-July 2008.

4.3 The aim of the characterisation process was to identify broad areas where there was distinctive townscape, patterns of development, approaches to detailing, presence of

- surviving historic street patterns, boundary treatments, relationships between buildings and spaces;
- the architecture, historic quality and character of listed and non listed buildings;
- the hierarchy of spaces and their townscape quality;
- prevalent building materials and colours;
- the contribution of green spaces, trees and hedges;
- the area's prevailing (or former) uses, plan forms and building types;
- the relationship of the built environment to landscape or countryside, including significant landmarks and key views;
- features which have been lost, or which intrude or detract from the character;
- the relationship of the Borough's movement network, including public transport, cycling and walking as well as the car, to the built environment, including gateways, nodes and landmarks.

Individual components may be found elsewhere but the local distinctiveness of each zone is based on the subtle interaction of these elements.

4.4 An analysis of constraints and opportunities in each area added to the characterisation process. These included:

- planning and strategic context (current policies and links to the wider area);
- Borough and area characteristics (ecology, landscape);
- Borough and area infrastructure (roads, services);
- statutory constraints (listed buildings, tree preservation orders);
- structuring elements (railway lines and historic routes).

## 5.0 DARLINGTON ZONE MAP

5.1 Following the surveys and assessments it was possible to divide the Borough into seven character zones (see **APPENDIX 1**). These have been mapped to produce a broad quality assessment of the Borough's built form which make up Darlington today, ranging from the historic town centre, to the inner suburbs, to the evolving outer suburbs, such as West Park:

- Z1:** Town Centre
- Z2:** Town Centre Outer Ring
- Z3:** Inner Suburban
- Z4:** Outer Suburbs
- Z5:** Rural Area
- EZ:** Employment Zone
- LT:** District and Local Services

5.2 These zones should be used as a broad indication of the general characteristics and features that contribute to the key design elements in that zone. To obtain an understanding of the distinctive character of each zone, each has been analysed against the following criteria:

- Space and Movement
- Grain and Density
- Height and Skyline
- Massing and Roofscape
- Materials

- Details and Landscape

5.3 A characterisation sheet has been produced for each zone (see **APPENDICES 2-8**). The sheets also contain context which provides brief historic information on how the zone has developed and evolved in to the current position that exists today.

## **6.0 HOW WILL THE CHARACTERISATION STUDY BE USED?**

6.1 The Characterisation Study has helped inform the Design SPD, specifically sections 6 and 7 as well as being an important part of the LDF evidence base, helping to inform the preparation of other documents including the Core Strategy.

6.2 Sections 6 and 7 of the Design SPD set out a series of design codes for elements of design that are important in Darlington. The features identified in the design codes are those highlighted through the Characterisation Study as helping to creating character in that zone and which should be reflected in new design to enhance local distinctiveness.

6.3 In the long term the Characterisation Study will form the basis of a more in-depth characterisation for the Town Centre Fringe Area Action Plan and other strategic regeneration, housing and employment sites in the Borough, adding another layer of knowledge and understanding to guide the regeneration of these areas.

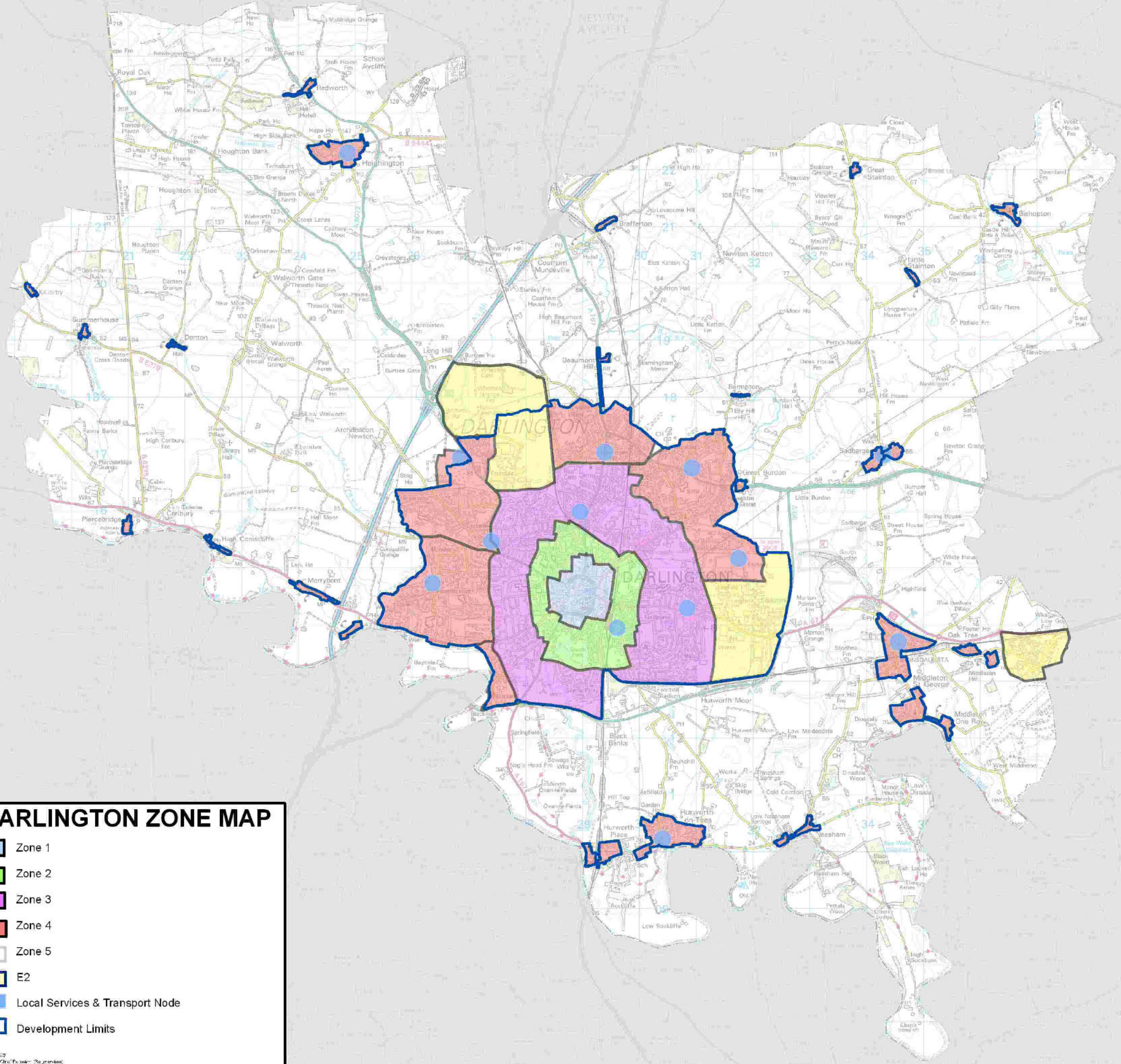
## **7.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW**

7.1 Circumstances in which a review of this characterisation study will be considered include:









- The development of strategic sites in the Core Strategy which may see an extension to identified zones or new zones being created; or
- There is a significant change in national or regional planning guidance; or
- The Council considers that the approach in the Design SPD is insufficiently effective in delivering high quality design in new development.


7.2 The Council will engage with key stakeholders and the community in any review of the SPD, in accordance with the provisions set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.





### DARLINGTON ZONE MAP

-  Zone 1
-  Zone 2
-  Zone 3
-  Zone 4
-  Zone 5
-  E2
-  Local Services & Transport Node
-  Development Limits


 Northumbria University  
 Faculty of Business  
 Newcastle Business School

This map is a simplified representation of the Darlington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is not intended to be used for legal purposes. It is based on information provided by the Darlington LEP and is subject to change without notice. © 2015 Northumbria University.

Darlington



## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- the route of the Great North Road is clearly in evidence through Zone 1
- a number of radial routes converge in Zone 1 connecting to a horseshoe shaped inner ring road
- the street pattern is predominantly organic with a variety of widths and curvature
- a series of connecting yards run between the main streets and secondary streets
- narrow wynds provide alternative access into the Town Centre area
- public spaces are generally hard landscape with the exception of one park and churchyards

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- almost all buildings are built up to the pavement edge
- close to the centre the original burgage plots are still in evidence
- terraced forms predominate with regularised plot width and building types outside the central area
- on the edge of the ring road larger footprint buildings are found, set back from the pavement considered a detractive feature
- upper storeys are often underoccupied
- densites of 100 - 140 dhp have been recorded

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 2 storeys to 5 storeys
- the Market Clock, St Cuthbert's Church and other towers and spires are strong features in the skyline
- occasional views of the distant landscape are afforded
- variations in height are common within a row of buildings, particularly in the historic core area
- recent single storey buildings in this zone are detractive features

## LANDSCAPE

- the River Skerne is a key feature in Zone 1
- although canalised the river corridor has value as a habitat
- trees are found on the riverside and in churchyards and burial grounds
- trees can be seen sporadically between and behind built frontages
- the floorscape is varied, mainly high quality natural materials are used such as granite and sandstone
- locally distinctive blue Scoria blocks are found in back lanes and alleys

## ZONE 1



## CONTEXT

- Zone 1 covers the area that was the original town centre, prior to the construction of the inner ring road
- parts of the medieval street pattern and burgage plots remain
- there is a hierarchy of buildings in terms of scale, decoration and materials from the High Row outwards along the main radial routes

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the street
- except in The Yards gable ends almost never address the street
- where the roofline is broken the wall material continues upwards creating a parapet gable
- wider spans are achieved with two steep pitches or a lower pitched roof behind a parapet
- dormers are a rare feature and where they do exist they are made from similar materials to the walls and roof
- hipped roofs are an occasional feature

## MATERIALS



- brick, render and stone are predominant materials
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- wall materials have the occasional ceramic facade or part facade
- terracotta dressings and ceramic tiles are used as DETAILS
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents and occasionally lead

## DETAILS



- doors are typically straight to the pavement, often decorated and occasionally recessed
- porches and canopies are seldom found
- entrances are sometimes placed on corners
- windows are in the main rectangular, taller than they are wide
- buildings are often highly decorated
- banding within brickwork is almost exclusively in stone - the exceptions being of lighter Pease brick



## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- a number of radial routes pass through this area heading out of the town centre with a variety of uses being found alongside including retail, commercial, residential and industrial uses
- terraced streets provide permeability across the area, although larger buildings, service areas and campuses do not allow full access
- some routes take advantage of the green infrastructure and pass through parks and run through wildlife corridors
- many terraces have back lanes for service access

## LANDSCAPE

- Zone 2 benefits from formal parks, green squares and informal open space
- both the River Skerne and Cocker Beck pass through this area, meeting at North Road
- the River Skerne is bounded by buildings that typically back onto the river which is becoming an important wildlife habitat
- to the West, significant levels of tree cover are in evidence
- a number of informal and opportunistic habitats exist on unused land

## ZONE 2



## GRAIN + DENSITY



- almost all buildings are built up to the pavement edge or have a small defensible space of no more than 2m
- a density of around 80-100 dwellings per hectare can be found in this area
- buildings are predominantly terraced in form interspersed with campus type developments and industrial and commercial buildings
- building footprints range from small terraced units to extensive clear span buildings

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the street
- gable ends almost never address the street
- where the roofline is broken the wall material continues upwards creating a parapet gable
- wider spans are achieved with two steep pitches or a lower pitched roof
- dormers are common usually as a retrofit feature of varying quality
- hipped roofs are an occasional feature

## MATERIALS



- brick, render and stone are predominant materials, although others may also be found
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- terracotta dressings and ceramic tiles are occasionally used as DETAILS
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents and occasionally lead

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 2 storeys to 8 storeys
- church towers and distant views of other towers and spires in the town are important skyline features
- occasional views of the distant landscape are afforded
- rows of buildings tend to be of similar heights
- recent single storey buildings in this zone are detractive features



## CONTEXTS

- Zone 2 covers the transitional area between the historic town centre and the later inner suburbs
- some qualities of the town centre are mixed with evidence of historic edge of town development and activity, prior to late nineteenth and twentieth century residential expansion
- mismatches in environmental quality are in evidence between the east and west of the town, reflecting historic patterns of development and land use

## DETAILS



- doors are typically straight to the pavement, occasionally decorated and sometimes recessed
- canopies over doors are found
- entrances are sometimes placed on corners
- windows are in the main rectangular, taller than they are wide and occasionally decorated
- banding within brickwork is almost exclusively in stone - the exceptions being of lighter Pease brick

## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- a number of radial routes pass through this area heading out of the town centre with a variety of uses being found alongside
- streets and suburban avenues, crescents provide permeability across the area, although larger buildings, service areas and campuses do not allow full access
- some routes take advantage of the green infrastructure and pass through parks and through wildlife corridors
- many terraces and some semi-detached properties have back lanes for service access

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- most houses have a front garden of around 3-4m in depth, although there are notable exceptions to the west where this is exceeded
- a density of around 50-80 dwellings per hectare can be found in this area
- buildings are predominantly semi-detached in form interspersed with other building types including terraces and detached houses
- building footprints are typically residential in scale

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 2 storeys to 3 storeys
- church towers and distant views of other towers and spires in the town are important skyline features
- occasional views of the distant landscape are afforded
- rows and streets of buildings tend to be of similar heights
- there are occasional single storey buildings

## LANDSCAPE

- Zone 3 has a number of parks and greenspaces, some of which interface with the countryside to the south
- the Skerne Restoration passes through the north of this zone, as well as Cocker Beck and the Brinkburn Dene
- varied levels of tree cover can be found throughout the area
- a range of created, preserved and opportunity wildlife habitats can be found

## ZONE 3



## CONTEXT

- Zone 3 covers the inner suburbs, developed in the early to mid twentieth century
- some industrial uses remain along the riverside or related to historic rail access
- mismatches in environmental quality are in evidence between the east and west of the town, reflecting historic patterns of development and land use

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the street
- gable ends almost never address the street
- dormers are occasionally found
- hipped roofs are found

## MATERIALS



- brick is the predominant wall material
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- terracotta dressings and ceramic tiles are occasionally used as DETAILS
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents

## DETAILS



- entrances face the street
- porches and canopies over doors are found
- entrances are sometimes placed on corners
- windows are in the main rectangular, taller than they are wide, although this is not always the case
- occasional decorative features are found either around openings or in brickwork
- banding within brickwork where it exists is almost exclusively in stone



## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- a number of radial routes pass through this area heading out of the town centre with predominantly residential uses alongside
- streets and suburban avenues and crescents provide permeability across the area, although this can be compromised by cul-de-sac developments
- some routes take advantage of the green infrastructure and pass through parks and through wildlife corridors
- most properties have enclosed rear gardens with no rear access

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- most houses have a front garden of around 3-4m in depth, although there are notable exceptions to the west where this is exceeded
- a density of around 30-50 dwellings per hectare can be found in this area
- buildings are predominantly semi-detached or detached in form interspersed with other building types
- building footprints are typically residential in scale

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 1 to 2 storeys
- very few buildings penetrate the skyline
- occasional views of the distant landscape are afforded
- rows and streets of buildings tend to be of similar heights

## LANDSCAPE

- Zone 4 has a number of parks and greenspaces and edges on to the countryside
- the interface with the countryside is typically via fenced gardens or with points of access between houses

## ZONE 4



## CONTEXT

- Zone 4 covers the outer suburbs, developed in the late twentieth century
- mismatches in environmental quality are evident between the east and west of the town, reflecting historic patterns of development and land use
- development patterns have followed the incremental development of agricultural fields

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the street
- gable ends usually do not address the street except in specific developments
- dormers are rarely found although they may be used as a design solution in some bungalows
- hipped roofs are occasionally found

## MATERIALS



- brick is the predominant wall material
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents

## DETAILS



- entrances face the street
- porches and canopies over doors are found
- entrances are sometimes placed on corners
- windows come in a variety of shapes
- occasional decorative features are found either around openings or in brickwork

## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- roads connect and are interspersed throughout this zone ranging from lanes and tracks to dual carriageways
- a network of public rights of way cross the landscape and connect to the town
- public open space is confined primarily to parkland and woods where access exists
- nature reserves occasionally connect the town and the countryside

## LANDSCAPE

- Zone 5 is primarily countryside, outside the development limits
- a combination of agricultural land, woodland, hamlets and farm buildings contribute to the character
- where the countryside meets the edge of the town uses change from agriculture to leisure in some places, including paddocks and parkland

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the road
- gable ends usually do not address the roads
- dormers are rarely found in traditional buildings although they may be used as a design solution in some bungalows
- hipped roofs are occasionally found

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- most houses are isolated or form part of a wider range of related buildings and have usually had an agricultural use
- densities are very low
- buildings are predominantly detached interspersed with other building types

## ZONE 5



## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 1 to 2 storeys
- very few buildings penetrate the skyline
- the landscape is the dominant feature in most cases
- distant views are an important component



## CONTEXT

- Zone 5 is outside the development limits as set by the Local Plan
- primarily undeveloped the rural and open character of the area provides the setting for the town
- the landscape around the town has many archaeological remains and deserted settlements

## MATERIALS



- brick is the predominant wall material although to the west in particular stone is used
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents

## DETAILS



- porches canopies over doors are found
- windows come in a variety of shapes
- occasional decorative features are found either around openings or in brickwork





## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- these areas are often alongside and around the primary road network
- some are on radial routes to and from town
- public open space may be related in terms of location, although this may be outside the identified centre
- there may be some amount of parking

## LANDSCAPE

- LT areas may have village greens or small plazas
- the character of the landscape changes with the distance from the centre of town - see the next closest Zone

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple pitches, sloping away from the road
- gable ends usually do not address the roads
- dormers are sometimes found
- hipped roofs are occasionally found

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- densities are typically higher than in surrounding zones
- buildings are often more densely packed
- some residential uses might be found alongside or above commercial and retail uses
- places of worship, assembly and public buildings may create larger footprint buildings
- many buildings are closer to the pavement edge

## LT



## MATERIALS



- brick is the predominant wall material
- bricks are typically red in colour unless locally distinctive Pease bricks
- roofs are typically slate, tile or modern equivalents

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 2 to 3 storeys
- very few buildings penetrate the skyline
- church towers and spires both within and around these zones can be important landmarks



## DETAILS



- porches canopies over doors are found
- windows are in a variety of shapes although mainly rectangular and taller than wide
- shopfronts are a common feature
- buildings often have higher levels of decoration and detail

## CONTEXT

- LT areas are local centres or areas where a variety of services and public transport can be accessed
- some are subsumed villages, others newly created and other reflect historic local shopping patterns
- these locations are usually accessible and provide local shops



## SPACE + MOVEMENT



- these areas are usually close to major routes and have wide roads for trucks
- public rights of way and nature reserves may be close by

## LANDSCAPE

- these areas often abut the countryside and can relate well or badly to the surrounding landscape
- buildings are often in landscaped settings

## MASSING + ROOFSCAPE



- roof forms are predominantly simple low pitches
- flat roofs with or without parapets are also found
- buildings tend to be large scale with extensive footprints

## GRAIN + DENSITY



- buildings tend to have larger footprints and development is often low density
- buildings are often single storey and clear span
- buildings are often set back from the road

## EZ



## MATERIALS



- steel cladding, curtain walling and occasionally brick are the main materials

## HEIGHT + SKYLINE



- buildings are typically within the range of 1 to 3 storeys
- very few buildings penetrate the skyline



## DETAILS



- buildings often have very few details, although these may well be expressed through their simple construction

## CONTEXT



- EZ areas are those identified for employment uses and are primarily industrial
- some high quality buildings can be found, of heritage importance