

Conservation Area Assessment *Stokesley*



Introduction

Stokesley lies in the Tees Lowlands, about 10 km south of Middlesbrough, at the foot of the Cleveland Hills.

Niklaus Pevsner described Stokesley as 'one of the most attractive towns in the North Riding'

It is the combination of buildings and the open spaces which thread the town centre, and the location along the River Leven which make the town especially memorable. The population has grown in recent years to its present figure of 4620.

The Purpose of this Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a detailed appraisal of those townscape features, buildings and spaces which make Stokesley an attractive historic town.

The booklet contains:

1. a map showing the main features which make Stokesley an attractive historic town,
2. a description of the conservation area, identifying its special character and important features which should be taken note of when new buildings are proposed,
3. some ideas for improving the appearance of the historic parts of the town.

What is a Conservation Area?

A conservation area is an area of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The Stokesley Conservation Area was designated in March 1971 and amended in February 1988.

Designation is a recognition of the group value of buildings and their surroundings and the need to protect not just individual buildings but the character of the areas as a whole. The special character of an area derives from a combination of many things, such as trees, walls, open spaces, groups of buildings and the way they are arranged. It can also draw on other senses and experiences such as sounds, smell and the hustle and bustle associated with a living market town such as Stokesley. Every area is unique.

What controls apply?

Within the 48 Conservation Areas in the District, a number of special controls apply. In addition, the planning policies of the Hambleton District Wide Local Plan aim to ensure that any development is in accordance with the special architectural or historic interest of the area.

Further general advice on conservation areas is given in Planning Information Note No.2 available from the Council.

The emphasis is always on preserving or enhancing those buildings, spaces and features which give each conservation area its special distinctive character.

A Brief History

Stokesley is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086). At that time, it had a church and a mill. By 1280, a market had been established, so clearly the town was in existence by then. However, there is little evidence on the ground to show the medieval origins of Stokesley.

The town appears to have been completely rebuilt from the early 18th century onwards, and there are few signs of older buildings, other than some dated door lintels. During the 19th century, many buildings were altered with the addition of bay windows and shop fronts, giving the town its present day appearance of a Georgian town with a Victorian veneer.

Stokesley largely escaped 19th century industrialisation, although a short lived linen mill operated at New Mill from 1823 - 1838. This is the present Armstrong Richardson building on the south side of the river. The railway made little impact on the development of the town, the station being about a mile south of the town centre.

Origins and Street Plan

The town probably developed around the church and Manor House, with the market place to the west. The Market Cross (taken down in 1780) stood near to the lane to the Packhorse Bridge. This was once the main road to Kirby, Great Ayton and Guisborough.

At each end of the town centre, are the other main open spaces, College Square and West Green, formerly Low Green.

The older core of the town is bounded by North Road (formerly Back Lane) to the north, and the River Leven to the south, but modern development has spilled out to the north and south west.

The Components of Character

The character of Stokesley is provided by a handful of different elements which combine to give the town a distinctive appearance. These elements are as follows:

1. The Buildings

These are mostly of brick or stone, with pantile or slate roofs. The more important houses are three storey, the smaller cottages are two storey, but most buildings are joined together in continuous frontages along the main streets.

2. Tofts, Crofts and Garths

Behind the buildings are long narrow gardens, called garths, tofts or crofts, bounded by brick or stone walls.

3. Back Lanes

As in many other towns and villages, the narrow gardens on the north side of the main street are bounded by a back lane, once called Back Lane, but now named North Road.

4. Greens and Spaces

The features which give Stokesley its particular visual interest is the sequence of spaces extending from West End to East End, a sequence which is punctuated by islands of buildings and contained by an irregular frontage of 2 and 3 storey 18th and 19th century buildings.

Smaller spaces flank the River Leven along Levenside, which at its eastern end is lined by many tall trees giving a rural character.

These four elements in various combinations make up a number of distinct sub areas in the conservation area as follows:-

1. West End

West End forms the main entrance to the town centre from Hutton Rudby, and provides a bottle neck entrance to West Green. It is lined by 18th and 19th Century stone, brick and rendered cottages, which give way to three storey houses at the entrance to Levenside. Two buildings form significant landmarks, Oaklands House on the corner of Thirsk Road, which was only partially completed by 1840 and never finished, and the later red brick Masonic Hall which marks the start of West Green.

2. West Green

From West End, the narrow road opens out onto West Green (formerly Low Green), a roughly triangular space containing grassy islands with trees bisected by the curving road. The larger and more imposing houses are grouped along the north side of the green, many with canted or swept bow windows to ground and first floors. Behind the houses on the north side, long brick wall bounded gardens containing outbuildings and coach-houses



West Green looking towards West End

run back to North Road, evidence of the medieval plot pattern. To the rear of the west side, hedged gardens create a similar pattern.

3. High Street and Market Place

West Green narrows to form the High Street, which constricts to a pinchpoint formed by the 1930s Nat West Bank at the end of Bridge Road. The High Street then opens out to include the Market Place containing the two island blocks housing the main 19th century civic buildings.

Two modern groups of flats mark the start of the High Street, nos. 79 - 81 on the south side, and 56 - 58 High Street, which replaced the 17th century Stone Hall (demolished 1973). These buildings respect local tradition in their design and use of materials, and successfully knit into the townscape, whereas the older Nat West Bank is a stark brick box, unhappily positioned in a key visual location on the corner of Bridge Road. Bridge Road, formerly Commercial Row, has an 18th century west side of elegant Georgian houses, now mostly in office use, and 19th century bay windowed two storey buildings on its east side.

Until the mid 19th century, the Market Place housed the shambles, a group of butchers stalls. These were demolished, and replaced in 1846 by a group of buildings containing the Police Station, the New Shambles and the Town Fire Engine House.

Next comes the small cobbled Market Place, fronted by the Toll Booth and Butter Market. This building, now converted to shops, was built with an open ground floor arcade, and its upper floor housed the Manor Court and was where market tolls were paid.

Finally comes the Town Hall built in 1853, a rather severe stone building with a hipped slate roof which looks eastwards across The Plain, the open square where the present day market is held, towards the Manor House (the library) an 18th century stone house set in wooded grounds.

The north and south sides of High Street are characterised by two and three storey buildings, mostly of brown brick, with gabled roofs of varying height and depth, frequently finished with stone copings and kneelers.



High Street looking west towards the Town Hall

4. College Square

The open market place of The Plain continues northwards as College Square, containing another island of 18th and 19th century buildings of great variety. No 26 retains its Regency cast iron balcony details, one of the few buildings in the town to do so, while Church House has some attractive detailing of 1910, to the main entrances. College Square also contains another civic building, Preston's School, a Gothic revival work of 1832. College Square is bounded by terraces of brick cottages to its northern and eastern sides, and by the boundary brick wall of the Manor House on the south. The sequence of spaces through the town centre is closed by the Manor House, and the pinch point of East End, giving views to the open countryside and Cleveland Hills beyond.



College Square



Manor House and gatepiers

5. Manor House and Church

The 18th century Manor House (the library) and the Parish Church, rebuilt in the 18th century form a green island in the town centre, both buildings being set in well wooded surroundings.

Manor House was a 17th century house with gables and mullioned windows. It was greatly altered to its present appearance in 1799, and in 1832 the gatepiers from Angram Hall were placed at the entrance to the grounds.

6. Levenside

Immediately south of the town centre runs the River Leven which sweeps in a curve around the back gardens and plots to the south of the Parish Church and High Street. Levenside is characterised by trees and water, but falls into two distinct areas, east and west of Bridge Road. To the east, it contains scattered cottages and houses, while to the west of Bridge Road, Levenside opens out into a broader rectangular space contained by 18th and 19th century cottages packed into rows, terraces and groups, with the river cutting through the centre of the area.

From Levenside can be viewed the outbuildings behind the High Street running down to the river in long parallel rows of brick buildings with pantile roofs, forming a particularly characteristic element in the street scene.



Levenside looking east

Buildings

The main impression of Stokesley is of a brick built town of mainly Georgian buildings, overlaid with a veneer of Victorian shopfronts, bay and sash windows.

The locally made bricks of the older houses are brown red in colour and are often used in conjunction with stone keystones to doors and windows, and with chamfered or flush stone copings to side gables.

The principal buildings in terms of architectural importance and their contribution to the setting of the town are Oaklands (Grade II), Handyside House (11*), Town Hall (II), St Peters Church (II), Manor House (11*), Barclays Bank 42 High Street (11*).

Building Materials

The use of stone declined after the 17th century, apart from its use for public buildings and the principal houses in the town. Many of the brick buildings incorporate older stonework, and dated stone lintels of 1671 and 1715 can be seen on Levenside. It continued to be used for quoins and dressings to later brick buildings, these details often now being painted.

Brick is the main material, in varying shades of brown tinged with red but buildings of bright hard pressed red brick are largely absent. A number of the buildings have been rendered, in white or grey roughcast, plain cement or rarely in Regency painted stucco.

Up to the early 19th century, roofs were clay pantiles, and Welsh slate appeared from the 19th century. Hipped roofs are almost unknown, except on the largest houses and main public buildings.

In the 1950s and 1960s, pantile roofs were replaced by interlocking concrete tiles to the great detriment of the appearance of the town. However since the 1970s, there has been a resurgence in the use of clay pantiles.

Negative Features in the Conservation Area

Much of the conservation area is of high visual quality, with brick and pantile buildings knitting together a distinctive sequence of open spaces. However, there are a number of areas where piecemeal demolition, decay and damage detract from the special character of the area.

These areas are identified under Policy HH14 of the District-Wide Local Plan, as areas where enhancement or the repair of buildings needs to be focused, as follows:

- North side of the High Street to the rear of Nos. 2 - 46, as far as North Road. This area includes many vacant or underused buildings and abandoned gardens. It is in danger of piecemeal erosion of character as buildings are demolished and boundary walls removed to make way for car parking or access.
- South side of High Street, to the rear of 51 to 55 High Street and the rear of Nos. 36 to 49 High Street, extending to the River Leven. This area is clearly visible from the riverside which is an area well frequented by visitors to the town. Piecemeal demolition is leading to the erosion of character.
- Church House, College Square
This is a prominently located building in clear need of repair and an alternative use.
- Levenside off Bridge Road
The areas of cobbled paving and the greens at Levenside off Bridge Road are suffering from vehicle damage and need enhancement. The area is further spoiled by overhead wires which should be removed.

Neutral Areas in the Conservation Area

Neutral areas neither enhance nor do they significantly detract from the quality of the area. They contain modern buildings in good condition but built in styles which fail to reflect local traditions of building. Many of these developments fail to respect the character of the area in terms of style, design, materials and location, and in their siting they frequently disrupt the traditional plot pattern of the town centre.

These areas are few in number and mainly found at the fringes of the conservation area, as follows:

- Stokesley Motors and Manorside
- Three Tuns Wynd
- Nat West Bank, Bridge Road

Enhancement Schemes

The Council wishes to encourage schemes to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Under the Conservation Areas Preservation and Enhancement Scheme (CAPE) grants of 50% are offered towards the repair and retention of features of interest and to reinforce the special attraction of the area.

Eligible items include:-

- the repair of brick and stone walls
- the relaying of natural stone paving
- the undergrounding of wires
- the removal of intrusive signs.

Further details of the grant are available from the Council.

Grants for Building Repair

Under the Market Towns Grant Scheme, grants of 50% are available towards the repair of most buildings within the Conservation Area.

Schemes not qualifying for this grant may qualify for Historic Building Grant. Details are available from the Council.

Further Advice

If you need further advice, please contact Hambleton District Council Planning and Environmental Services on 01609 779977 or write to the Director of Planning and Environmental Services, Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton DL6 2UU.

Listed Buildings in the Stokesley Conservation Area

Brewery Terrace	No.7
Bridge Road	3, 4, 6-10, 12-14, 16-18
College Square	25, 26, 29, 41-42, 43-46, 47, 48, 49
High Street	2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16-20, 22-24, 30, 32, 34, Gates & Gate Piers to 36, 36-38, outbuilding rear 38, outbuilding north of 38, 42, Methodist Church, 60-62, Church of St Peter and St Paul, wall north side of Churchyard, 11, 13, 15, 17-19, 21-23, 25, 27, 33, 35-37, 39, 41, 43, 45 and 45a, 47, 49, 51, 53, 59-61, 63-67, 69, 71
Levenside	6-8, Packhorse Bridge, 3, 7, garden wall north of 7, 19, 29, 37, 55, Union Mill, 67, 71-73, 75
Market Place	Town Hall, No.1 and building to west, Westbrook Garage, Manor House, garden walls and gate piers to Manor House
North Road	1-3
West End	4, 6, 10-18, Oaklands
West Green	2, wall and gate to 2, 4, 8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 1-3, 5-7, 44, 56, 58, 60-62



