

Carnforth

Scoping report to assess the potential for Conservation Area designation

July 2009

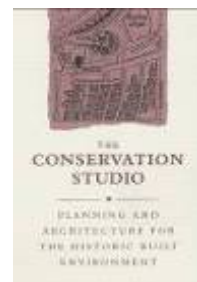


This assessment has been prepared on behalf of Lancaster City Council by:

The Conservation Studio
1 Querns Lane
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1RL

01285 642428

www.theconservationstudio.co.uk



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Carnforth is a small town on the A6 to the north of Lancaster and close to the border with Cumbria. Although there has been a settlement since Saxon times, the older area is centred on North Road to the east. The present town centre is the product of the second half of the 19th century based on fast-growing industries of iron and steel production and rail transport.
- 1.2 The historic town centre is a compact triangle of dense terraces, the northern side of which is a shopping street. Adjacent to the west is the railway station, made famous in the film *Brief Encounter*, and an extensive area of railway lands punctuated by a significant group of railway buildings.
- 1.3 The town centre is notable for its consistent use of sandstone with robust ashlar details, and roofs of blue Welsh slate made possible by the railway age. The buildings develop a strong group value.
- 1.4 Christ Church, on Lancaster Road is a listed building, as is No.10 North Road, which survives from the earlier history. The importance of Carnforth as a railway town is emphasised by the further listing of nine structures on the railway lands.



Christ Church

1.5 This report identifies the special architectural and historic interest of the area, which is also recorded on the Conservation Assessment map. It considers the desirability of preserving or enhancing the area and concludes with a recommendation as to whether the qualities are sufficient to justify formal designation as a conservation area.

1.6 Summary of special interest:

- Located on the A6 to the south of the River Keer
- A late Victorian town that developed to the west of a much earlier agricultural settlement
- Industrial economy based on gravel extraction, railways, and iron and steel
- A significant railway junction from the 1850s
- Major ironworks from the 1860s – steel production from 1871
- High density terraces of workers' housing with robust detailing
- Sinuous Market Street with several good shopfronts
- General use of local sandstone for buildings with sash windows and blue slate roofs
- Stone boundary walls and gatepiers
- Christ Church, 1875 by Brade and Smales, listed Grade II
- Extensive area of railway marshalling yard to the west includes a unique group of late 19th and early 20th century railway buildings
- Eight railway buildings listed Grade II
- Carnforth railway station was the location for the film *Brief Encounter*, 1945

1.7 Summary of recommendation:

- That a conservation area should be designated for the area identified on the Conservation Assessment map

2. Location and setting

Location

2.1 Carnforth straddles the main A6 road some 8 miles (13 km) north of Lancaster and just to the south of the River Keer.

2.2 The old road from Lancaster to Carlisle kept to the higher ground and this is why the early settlement is to be found on the winding North Road. By contrast, the 18th century turnpike (now the A6) took a more direct route across low-lying land to the west. The two roads join to the south of the town centre.

- 2.3 To the west of the A6 is the main west coast railway line to Carlisle and Glasgow. Carnforth is at the junction with lines leading west to Barrow-in-Furness and east to Skipton.

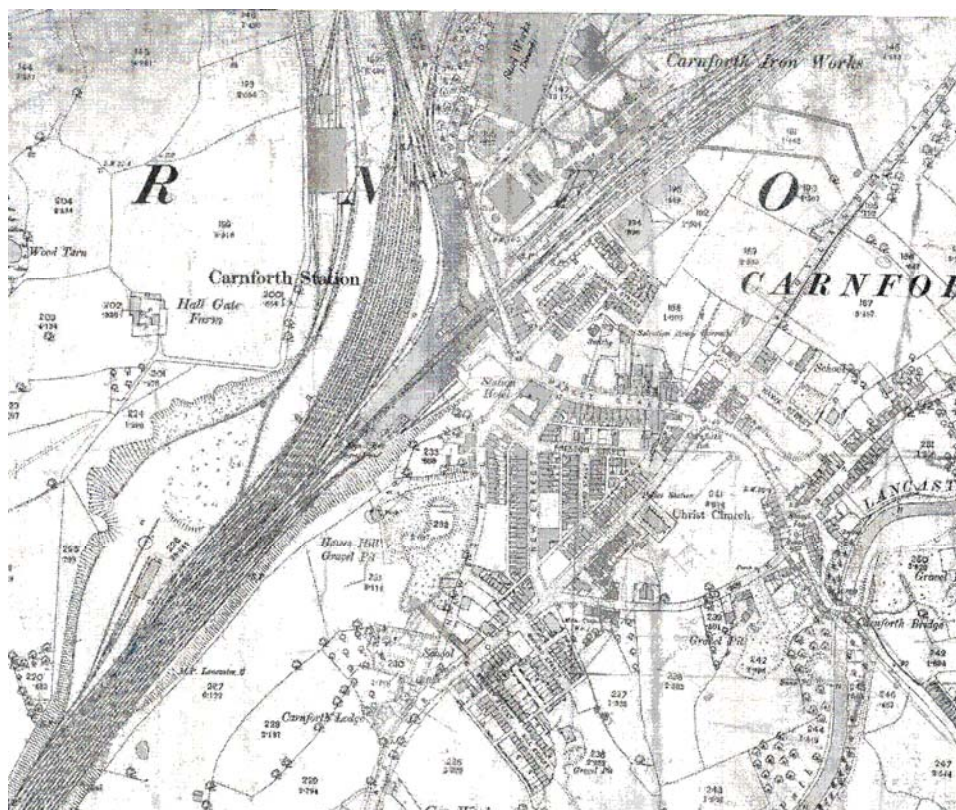
Topography and landscape setting

- 2.4 Carboniferous limestone forms the higher ground to the south and east, which quickly becomes high pasture and moorland before the rolling landscape of the Lune valley.
- 2.5 To the west and north, the limestone is overlaid by deep deposits of alluvial gravel in the Keer valley. These in turn are overlain by a light loam producing an arable landscape becoming marshland towards the coast.
- 2.6 From the railway station to Christ Church, Carnforth rises about 10.5m (35ft). This generates an interestingly stepped townscape up Market Street and Haws Hill.
- 2.7 During the 20th century, extensive housing developments have enlarged Carnforth, principally to the south west and south east.

3. Historical development

- 3.1 A settlement called Chrenefbrde already existed in 1086 when it was recorded in the Domesday survey. By 1261, it is recorded as Kerneford and the derivation is clearly the same as that for the River Keer. Originally in the parish of Bolton-le-Sands, Carnforth was transferred to that of Warton in the 13th century and the evidence of 'Chapel flat' as a local field name suggests that there was a chapel of ease.
- 3.2 The earliest surviving buildings on North Road date from the late 17th century – No.10 bears the date 1688. This was a small settlement. An early 18th century account suggests there were 44 families and the Presbyterian Chapel had a congregation of 138 in 1720.
- 3.3 The local economy was boosted in 1797 with the opening of the Lancaster Canal and gravel was extracted nearby from about 1843.
- 3.4 The railway, which had reached Lancaster in 1840, was extended to Carlisle in 1846 and a station was opened at Carnforth. In 1857, Carnforth became a junction with the opening of a branch line to Ulverston. There was steady expansion of the railway sidings and marshalling yards well into the 20th century

- 3.5 In 1864, the Haematite iron Company was established using iron ore from Cumbria, Lancashire coal and local limestone. Blast furnaces were built on the north side of the town in the 1860s followed by two Bessemer steel converters in 1871.
- 3.6 Carnforth was described in 1866 as a 'fast-increasing village'. Housing and services were developed for railway staff and iron workers, many of whom relocated from the Earl of Dudley's ironworks at Brierley Hill in Worcestershire. Christ Church was built in 1875 to the designs of Brade and Smales, and a Congregational school and chapel were built in 1878. In 1894, Carnforth officially gained the status of a town.
- 3.7 The Ordnance Survey of 1845 shows virtually no development between the original North Road settlement and the railway station. However, by the time of the next survey in 1890, the town centre was almost fully formed.



Ordnance Survey of 1890

- 3.8 Although the centre has survived, the 20th century has seen major changes. The ironworks closed in 1929, becoming an ordnance depot for the War Department. The railway, however, flourished for

a while. Part of the station was rebuilt in 1937, the concrete coaling plant was built in 1939-43, the LMS engine shed was built in 1944 and, in 1945, the iconic film *Brief Encounter* used Carnforth station as its location. The Carnforth depot was one of the last to maintain an allocation of steam locomotives until their final demise in 1968.

4. Special interest

Historic buildings

- 4.1 The late 19th century buildings that form the town centre tend to be of three storeys in the more prominent locations, such as Market Street and at the cross-roads with Lancaster Road, reducing to two storeys for housing. The dominant form in the Market Street, Lancaster Road and Haws Hill triangle is of continuous terraces fronting the edge of the pavement.
- 4.2 The buildings are united by the consistent use of squared local sandstone with blue slate roofs. Smooth ashlar is used for door and window surrounds, cill bands and quoins. Eaves cornices typically have a dentil detail. The large scale of the stonework gives a very robust quality.
- 4.3 Windows are generally traditional double-hung sashes and doors tend to have four panels, often with heavy bolection mouldings. In Market Street, several late 19th century shopfronts have survived.
- 4.4 Christ Church, of 1875, is listed Grade II. The initial church was designed by Brade and Smales, then the tower was added in the angle between the nave and south transept in 1908. To the south of the church, North Road branches off Lancaster Road and No.10 is a survivor of the earlier settlement with a datestone of 1688. It is also listed Grade II.
- 4.5 On Warton Road, the frontage building is the main evidence of the iron and steel industry. A large iron lintel over a former entrance proclaims 'Carnforth Ironworks'. On the other side of the road, on the railway land there are eight listed buildings including three signal boxes and a carriage shed from the late 19th century, and then a series of structures built between 1939-44. These include a unique coaling plant and the only engine running shed still in use.
- 4.6 The railway buildings introduced imported materials – brick, iron and, in the later structures, reinforced concrete. There are further unlisted structures of note, such as the lattice girder foot bridge and the turntable. Together, the railway buildings form a unique group.

- 4.7 The railway station itself is not listed, despite its association with the filming of *Brief Encounter*. It presents a symmetrical sandstone façade to the town with large mullion and transom windows.



Carnforth Railway Station

Townscape analysis

- 4.8 The core of the town has a dense close-knit feel, which is generated by the terraces set to the edge of the pavement and their consistent use of solid sandstone. This is a working environment and there is very little space, public or private other than the streets themselves.
- 4.9 The strong detailing of the public and commercial buildings is relieved by the rounding of corners, which gives a distinct character to the town. This is particularly evident in the bank at the corner of Market Street and Scotland Road. At the former Co-op on New Street, the acute angle becomes a conical turret, while the three storeys become two as long windows indicate the first floor assembly room.
- 4.10 The considerable change in level between the railway station and Lancaster Road produces a stepped elevation to the long two storey terrace on Haws Hill and New Street. A similar effect on Market Street is given added interest by its double curve and added height.
- 4.11 The terrace on Hunter Street is designed as a set-piece. The houses have a continuous ridge punctuated by chimney stacks, but the end houses break forward with quoined corners and gables facing the street.

- 4.12 Although some sandstone kerbs survive, pavements are generally concrete flags or tarmac. In some back streets there is still evidence of river cobbles laid with a central sandstone channel.



Cobbled back street with central channel

- 4.13 The only open space is the relatively recent landscaping around the war memorial at the foot of Market Street. However, the town quickly opens onto the railway land and the countryside beyond.
- 4.14 The survival and density of the town centre buildings means that there are very few negative elements, and modern additions, such as the supermarket and the primary school, have been built unobtrusively on adjacent sites. The least attractive buildings are those associated with railway maintenance to the south of the station.

5. Assessment and recommendations

- 5.1 The town of Carnforth, as opposed to the earlier village, experienced a very short formative history. In less than a century, it had gained significance for the production of iron and steel, and as an important railway centre, before these economic drivers then ebbed away.
- 5.2 Nonetheless, this has left an indelible legacy. Public and commercial buildings, shops and terraced housing huddle together in a compact town centre that gives a vivid impression of a self-contained

industrial community. The consistent use of local sandstone and bold architectural forms adds to a distinctive character.

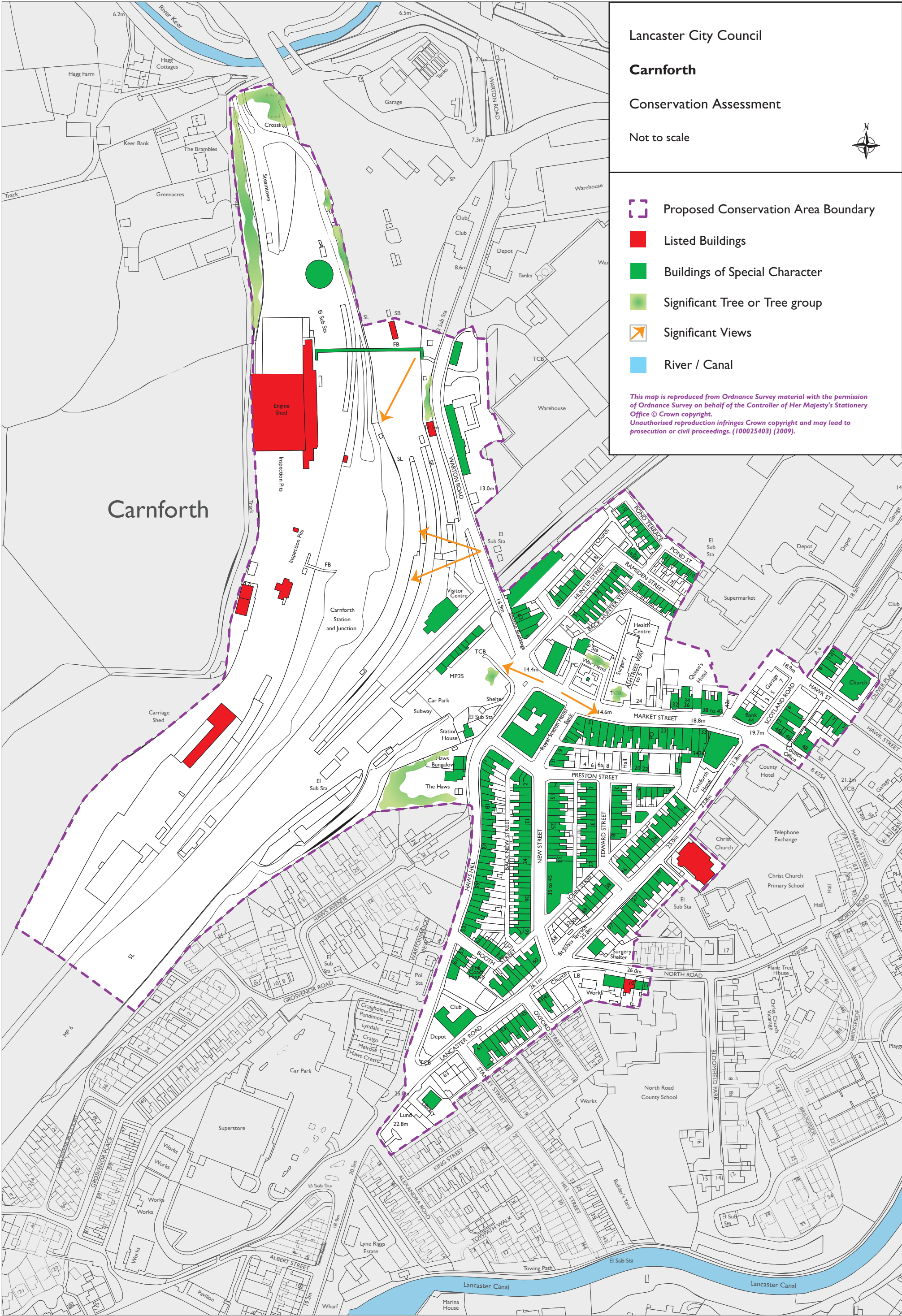
- 5.3 In contrast, the wide expanse of railway sidings to the west of the station is punctuated by one of the most important collections of railway buildings in existence. This is recognised in the listing of nine structures, but further unlisted buildings and their spatial relationship give the area a special historic interest.
- 5.4 The survival of Carnforth as a virtually intact late-Victorian town is remarkable, as is the survival of so much railway history. A conservation area is, therefore, proposed to cover the approximate triangle of Lancaster Road, Haws Hill and Market Street, including the short terraces to the north of Market Street. To the west, the area would then take in the railway station, the frontage buildings of the former ironworks and an area of the railway land to include all the significant structures.

Recommendations:

- That a conservation area should be designated for Carnforth as identified on the Conservation Assessment map included in this report
- That the designation should be supported by a conservation area appraisal to define and record its special interest
- That the local community should be given the opportunity to comment on the conservation area appraisal before it is adopted for planning purposes



Listed water tower and coaling plant



Lancaster City Council

Carnforth

Conservation Assessment

Not to scale



- Proposed Conservation Area Boundary
- Listed Buildings
- Buildings of Special Character
- Significant Tree or Tree group
- Significant Views
- River / Canal

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Appendix 1. Further information

The Conservation Team at Lancaster City Council are always interested in receiving further information or updates in relation to conservation areas. They can also give advice on the repair and maintenance of historic buildings and on the management of conservation areas:

Conservation Team
Planning and Building Control Services
Lancaster City Council
Palatine Hall
Dalton Square
Lancaster
LA1 1PW

01524 582535 or 0524 582340
customerservices@lancaster.gov.uk

Appendix 2. References

Publications:

Ed Farrer and Brownhill – *A History of the County of Lancaster: Vol 8* – Victoria
County History 1914

Lancaster City Council – *Lancaster District Local Plan* – 2004

Pevsner, Nikolaus – *The Buildings of England – Lancashire* -

Maps:

1st ed. Ordnance Survey (6 inch) – 1845

Harrison and Hall – 1877

1st revision Ordnance Survey – 1890

1:2,500 Ordnance Survey – 1913

Websites:

<http://mario.lancashire.gov.uk>

www.british-history.ac.uk

www.carnforth-station.co.uk

www.heritagegateway.org.uk

www.lan-opc.org.uk Lancashire Online Parish Clerk Project

www.lancaster.gov.uk