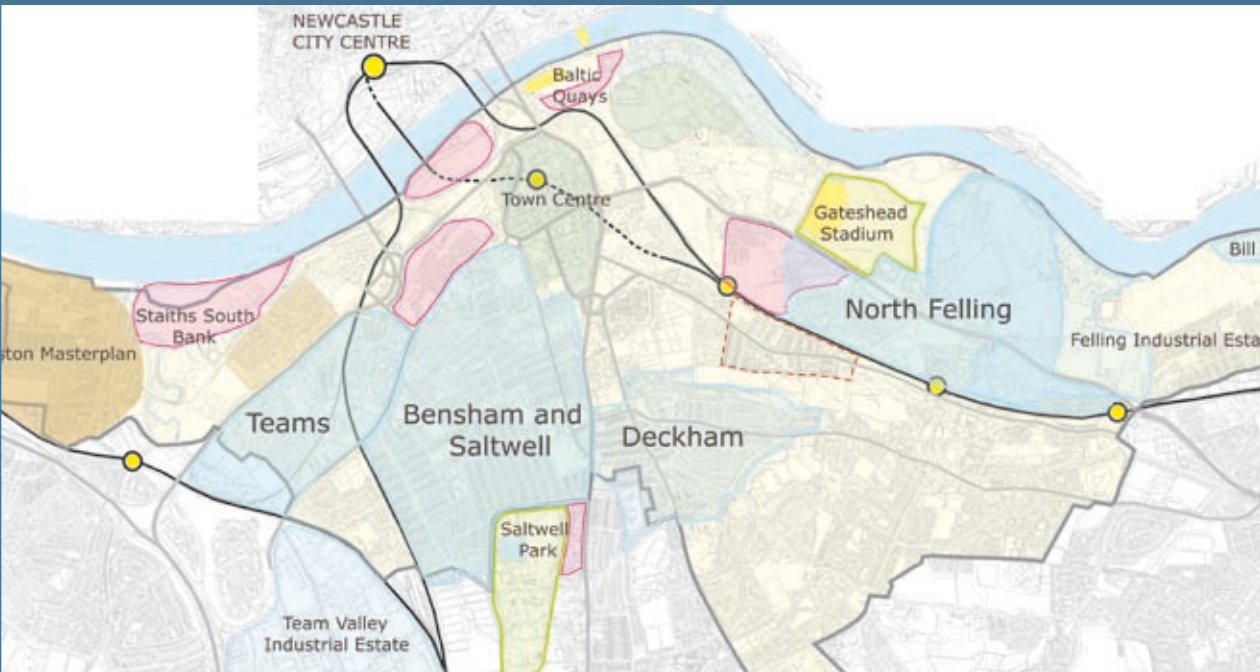


GATESHEAD COUNCIL URBAN DESIGN, HERITAGE & CHARACTER ANALYSIS REPORT

BENSHAM & SALTWELL

JANUARY 2006



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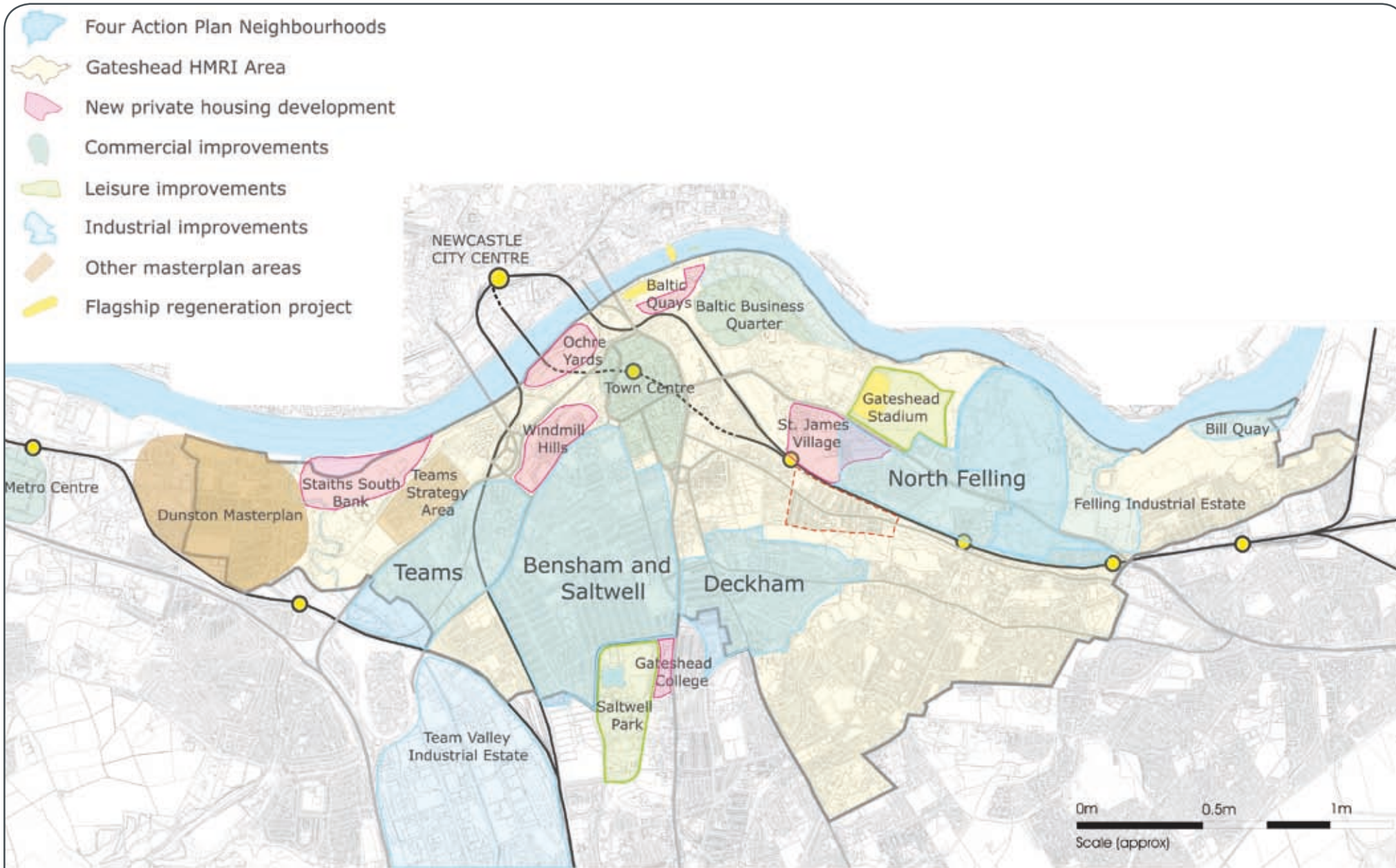
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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TODAY – THE PLACE

This report provides an evaluation of the physical strengths and weaknesses of the neighbourhood, the distinctive qualities of the historic environment and an analysis of what defines the neighbourhood's character.

It complements work commissioned by English Heritage and undertaken by the North East Civic Trust, published in the "Gateshead Urban Landscape and Townscape Analysis" (ULTA).

The study has been guided by principles of good urban design as set out by CABI, English Heritage and the ODPM.



1 LOCATION

1.1

The place name Bensham probably refers to the hill on which it stands¹. Located immediately south of the town centre, between the East Coast mainline and the old 'Great North Road', Bensham and Saltwell are largely a legacy of the rapid growth Gateshead underwent following the Industrial Revolution. They represent the emergence of the town as a modern civic entity, with strong character elements, an essentially intact historic street form, and a clear pattern of land-uses. These dwellings were originally occupied by the skilled artisans, craftsmen and tradesmen of the town – engine drivers, joiners and fitters and the like².

1.2

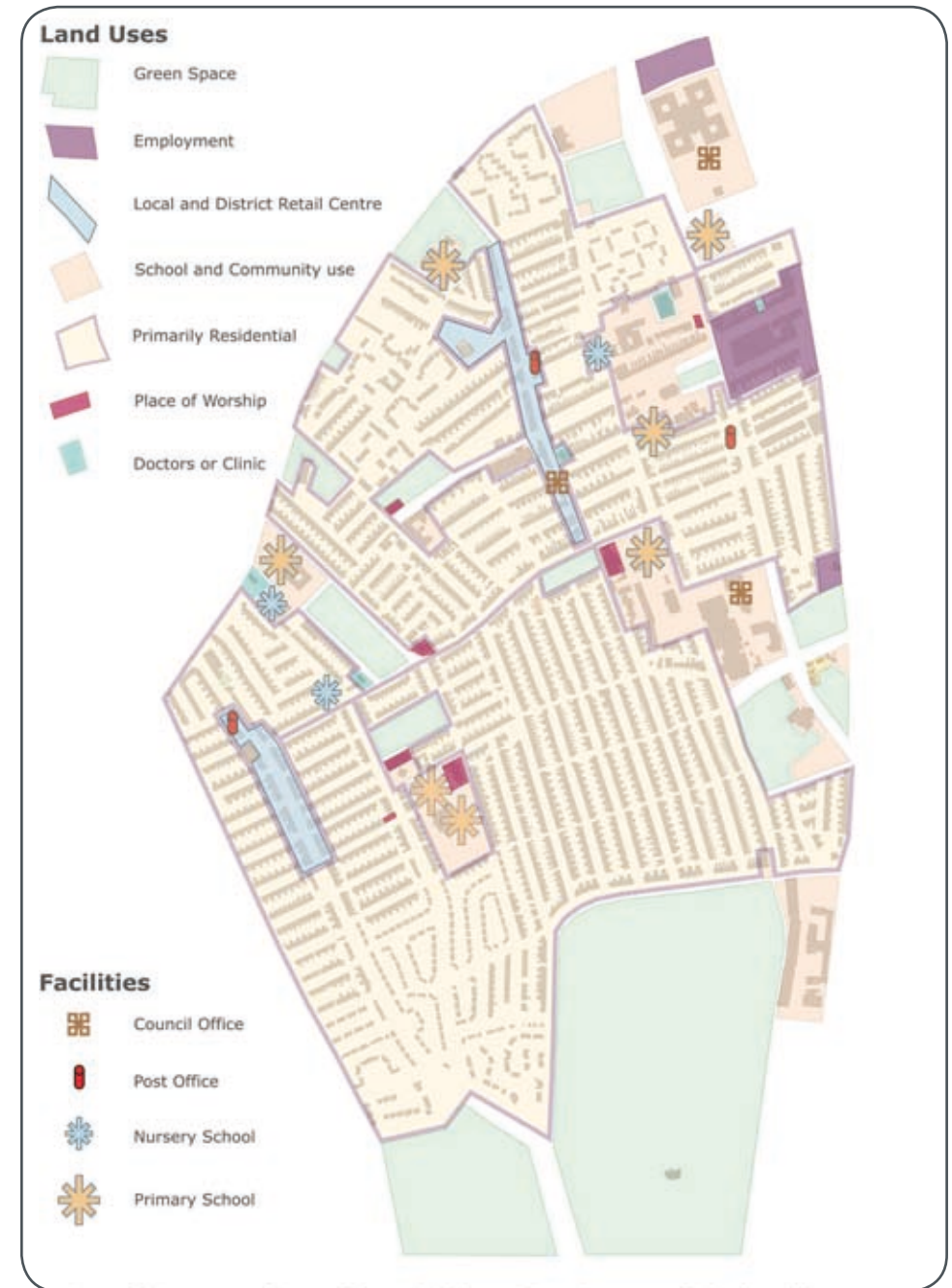
The neighbourhood lies at the point of transition between the urban core and the start of lower density suburbs to the west, south and south east. The southern end of the area borders Saltwell Park, the 'people's park' and the town's premier green space. Adjacent to this lies the Shipcote civic area on the Durham Road which provides a notable 'gateway' on the approach to the town centre and Tyne Bridge. A sloping topography is a key quality of the area, which stretches along a hillside towards the head of an elevated ridge above the Tyne and Team valleys.

¹ Gateshead Local Studies Online Places: Bensham

² Taylor and Lovie (2004) Gateshead: Architecture in A Changing English Urban Landscape



Aerial photo - Looking North West



Plan 1 – Land Use Plan

2 MIX OF USES

Residential Areas - Change and Continuity

2.1

Housing, the main use type, was developed in huge quantities between the mid 19th and early 20th centuries, in terraces built of robust local materials, organised on a regular street grid. Despite a mammoth local authority clearance programme which have replaced many terrace streets (some of fine quality such as the Crescent, demolished for a road scheme) and seen the loss of buildings of historic and architectural interest such as Bensham Road Methodist Church, much of the historic fabric remains intact. In Bensham and Saltwell this is in sharp contrast to what many would see as the visual anarchy of the town centre, where planning was driven by the demands of the car with little respect for the human being. Unfortunately this mesh of highways and roundabouts has severed the previous connectivity of Bensham with the town centre.

2.2

The development of Bensham and Saltwell during the 19th and 20th centuries largely reacted to the significant population growth and subsequent overcrowding problems that arose from the expanding industrial borough. In the mid 1850s Bensham was very rural in character. By 1914 almost all the area known previously as the town fields had been developed. The initial phase began around the Coatsworth Road and Prince Consort Road area and included some elegant villas which today are protected through conservation area and listed building status.

2.3

Isolated terraces were erected and occupied by private gentlemen and by Gateshead tradesmen and merchants, whose businesses remained in the old town centre. The first of these terraces was probably Claremont Place which was built in phases between 1819 and 1824. The houses are of stone with muted classical detailing, ashlar to the front, random rubble to the rear. They are two storeys high over service basements and have small rear service yards, but long front gardens, an arrangement characteristics of many of Bensham's early semi-rural terraces. Barrington Place, originally a row of five stone houses, had also been built by 1824. By the early 1830s more terraces had been built, including Woodbine Terrace, a phased development of 18 houses with long front gardens and small rear yards¹.

2.4

By the mid-19th Century the character of Bensham was still that of a dispersed semi-rural suburb of the middle classes. Housing development had been slow and piecemeal. However in the second half of the century the population pressure and potential financial opportunities for landlords rapidly increased the demand for housing beyond the old town. By 1900 the area had substantially changed in character, and was almost fully built up and became predominantly a working class and lower-middle class area.

2.5

In general Bensham was developed from north to south, but the development of individual streets was piecemeal and pepper potted as in the Avenues where development finally spread and ended in the terraces to the west of Saltwell Road. The terraces were built in distinct clutches by different developers, which created a variety of architectural styles, although the general size and massing and heights were consistent. Many terraces were built with corner shops at the intersection of streets, some of which remain today, although others have been converted to residential use.

2.5

This 19th century and early 20th century legacy of Bensham and Shipcote today remains largely intact. Mass housing in Gateshead had largely been built by private developers before the First World War and a locally unique housing type had been adopted and developed in the Tyneside Flat.

2.6

There have been a number of post war housing interventions in the neighbourhood comprising Windmill Hills, Ravenscourt Place, Coatsworth Court, Worcester Green and Hartington Street. Windmill Hills was a redevelopment of a notorious housing estate, St Cuthberts Village, and has been criticised as creating another soulless housing estate². Maybe a more robust design brief for the site would have delivered a scheme with better urban design qualities.

2.7

The second largest clearance site in the area was redeveloped in the 1980s as the civic centre and car park. Ravenscourt Place, Coatsworth Court and Worcester Green are areas of 60s and 70s social housing (some built to the Radburn layout) which replaced terraced streets of Tyneside flats. These estates fail to connect



White Hall Road



"Radburn" style redevelopment



¹ *ibid*

² The former chief executive of CAGE, Jon Rouse cited the development as "truly awful" (Hetherington 2003 BBC)



Windmill Hills



Windmill Hills



Hartington Street



"Orlit" Flats

the urban fabric; indeed they cause significant severance in places and lack character, bearing little in common with the surrounding terraced streets.

2.8

During the 1950s the shortage of bricks in the country fuelled the building of houses in concrete. A comparably modest example of this house type exists on Saltwell Road in the concrete "Orlit" flats built between 1952 and 1954. Bensham Court, a 16 storey tower block built in 1964 was part of a wider programme of modernist council house-building.

2.9

The latest clearance and redevelopment area at Hartington Street in the 1990s (which comprised 5 bedroom townhouses) has preserved the original street layout and is a better example of replacement housing in terms of enclosure, height and massing, and provision of private amenity space. Richmond Terrace is also a good quality example of modern housing which respects local townscape characteristics.

Civic, Cultural & Commercial Uses - Rich Mix

2.10

Alongside its primary housing role, the area contains a significant collection of civic and commercial uses, with a core of important public cultural and leisure facilities around Shipcote (a library, fine-art gallery, swimming pool and gymnasium), and two key neighbourhood retail spines, Saltwell Road and Coatsworth Road. The Shipley Art Gallery which opened to the public in 1917 has become established as a national centre for contemporary craft and has built up one of the best collections outside of London, including ceramics, wood, glass, textiles and furniture.

2.11

These amenities are complemented by schools, clubs, pubs, places of worship and corner shops located throughout the neighbourhood. Primary schooling and childcare are only a short walk away from any household. Just beyond the study area, Saltwell Park (with tennis, playgrounds, boating, bowling, bandstand etc.), Gateshead College and the town centre itself are on the area's doorstep.

2.12

A diverse ethnic and religious mix adds further interest, sustaining specialised academic and support facilities, and offering exposure to varied cultures and customs. Bensham and Saltwell is home to the third largest strictly orthodox Jewish community in Britain and is famous as the largest centre for Jewish further and higher

education in Europe. Talmudic students come from many countries to Gateshead to attend its Yeshivas and Kollles and girls come to study at its teachers training college. During term time the orthodox Jewish population is boosted to 4000 giving the area some of the characteristics of a University town. There are a number of community and religious buildings in the area including the Synagogue and Jewish Community Centre on Bewick Road, Gateshead Talmudical College on Windermere Street, Gateshead Seminary (women's teacher training college which occupies most of the terrace) on Bewick Road and the Jewish Academy for Girls on Shipcote Lane.

2.13

Overall, there is an exceedingly diverse array of private and public service provision in and around Bensham and Saltwell. Although the area continues to provide a worthwhile range of amenities and services, and is valued by residents, the local neighbourhood centres along Coatsworth Road and Saltwell Road, as well as the array of small corner shops throughout the area, have suffered some decline over a number of years. The business environment has struggled in the face of competition from the big supermarkets and retail centres. There are empty units and shop frontages in very poor condition. There are few other commercial opportunity sites. This presents a risk to investment, services and employment.

Housing Typology

2.14

Plan 1 shows the broad pattern of house-types across the Housing Market Renewal area of inner Gateshead. The red and pink colours show pre-1919 type housing. These are almost invariably terraces. The red represents Tyneside Flats, about which more will be said in the next section, and the pink represents houses. Orange colours show inter-war style housing in garden-suburb type layouts. The lighter shade of orange represents semi-detached houses, the darker (in Teams and Deckham) shows flats. The blue colour shows 1960s and 70s housing, while the green depicts the 'new build' style prevalent from the 1980s to date. Areas picked out in yellow are those where street layouts are designed around "Radburn" type principles, which attempt the separation of pedestrians from vehicular traffic.

2.15

Bensham and Saltwell stands out on the plan as an area dominated by 'pre-1919' Victorian and Edwardian type stock, mainly in the form of Tyneside Flats. This represents an exceptionally high density of housing. There is also a significant area of larger 3 storey townhouses in the streets around Coatsworth and Prince Consort

Roads. Durham Road and Saltwell View, which overlooks the park, are also lined with houses rather than flats. This reflects the prominent civic status of these routes.

2.16

Other house types are relatively limited in extent, being confined to the northern and south western edges of the neighbourhood. In the latter case, a well-integrated estate of inter-war style semi-detached council houses in a garden suburb design sits between Saltwell Park and Saltwell Road. Less well integrated are the Radburn layout estates on the northern fringe of the neighbourhood, which act as something of a barrier between the town centre and the residential area.



Shipley Gallery



Shipcote Civic Complex



Talmudical College

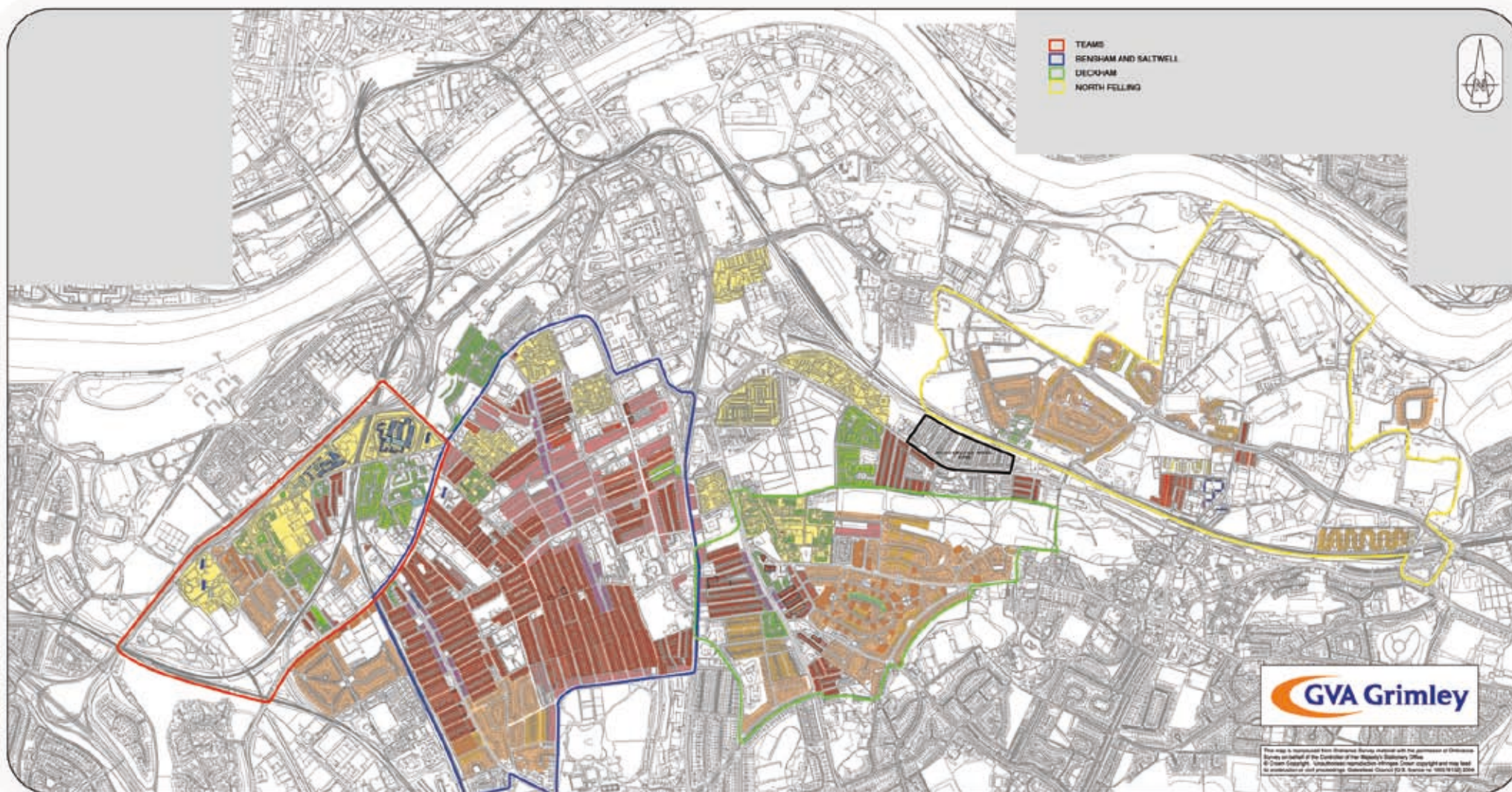


Corner shop unit, Balfour Street



Gateshead Seminary

GATESHEAD HMR NEIGHBOURHOOD MASTERPLANNING - HOUSING TYPOLOGY



- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| ■ PRE 1919 - TERRACED FLAT | ■ INTERWAR (20s - 30s) - TYNESIDE FLAT | ■ POST WAR (60s & 70s) - TERRACES & FLATS | ■ NEW BUILD (80s - DATE) - TERRACED FLAT | ■ SHOPPING FACILITIES WITH FLATS ABOVE |
| ■ PRE 1919 - 3 STOREY TERRACE | ■ INTERWAR (20s - 30s) - 2 STOREY TERRACE | ■ POST WAR (60s & 70s) - TERRACE | ■ NEW BUILD (80s - DATE) - 2 STOREY TERRACE | |
| ■ PRE 1919 - 3 STOREY TERRACE/SEMI | ■ INTERWAR (20s - 30s) - 3 STOREY TERRACE/SEMI | ■ POST WAR - BUNGALOW | ■ NEW BUILD (80s - DATE) - TOWNHOUSE/SEMI | |
| ■ PRE 1919 TERRACED FLATS (BACK OF PAVE) | ■ INTERWAR (20s - 30s) - BUNGALOW | ■ POST WAR - BUNGALOW | ■ NEW BUILD (80s - DATE) - BUNGALOW | |
| ■ PRE 1919 - 2 STOREY TERRACE (BACK OF PAVE) | | | | ■ "RADBURN" LAYOUT ESTATE (SEPARATE PEDESTRIAN & TRAFFIC NETWORKS) |

Plan 2 – Gateshead Housing Typology

3 CHARACTER

Integrity

3.1

Bensham and Saltwell are fundamental to the spirit of the town as a whole. The area has considerable character and a great deal of architectural interest and cultural activity. The overall integrity of the urban fabric remains strong, unified by the connected, permeable street network and a consistency of building materials and terraced architecture.

3.2

Whilst the neighbourhood is dominated by the terraced street layout, there are exceptions in places where the urban form exhibits a markedly different character, usually due to being developed at a different time, or as an outcome of clearance for new uses. These infill areas are usually of weaker character than the historic core.

Architecture and Heritage

3.3

“When one looks at Gateshead in 1974 there appears to be very little to remind anyone of the town in past centuries”. Most of our old buildings have been demolished, either for health reasons or general development”.¹ Undoubtedly there has been a significant amount of clearance and redevelopment through highways infrastructure and large housing estates in the borough. However what makes Bensham and Saltwell so special is the retention of much of its historic fabric, as post war development largely and fortunately has been confined to its periphery. In this respect the streets and buildings tell a story of how the neighbourhood developed over time. This is reflected in the largest number of listed buildings in the borough and confers a strong sense of place and distinctiveness that is indeed lacking in other parts of the town.

3.4

The significant emergence of the Tyneside flat as a house type so prominent within the north east of England is not completely clear. What is known is that they were built as a solution to the growing demand for housing resulting from the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. They represent a localised example of very high-density housing thought to be largely facilitated by local bye-laws².

3.5

A sense of history is important in this place, whose make-up stretches back through the 19th century. The statutorily listed buildings³ are complemented by further valued buildings identified on a ‘local list’⁴, and two conservation areas at Coatsworth and Saltwell. Saltwell Park is on the National Register of historic Parks, listed at Grade II. A schedule of both locally and nationally listed buildings in Bensham and Saltwell can be found at the back of this document. The conservation areas and park profile are noted briefly below.

¹ “A Short History of Gateshead” Gateshead Council 1998

² Daunton M (1983) *House & Home in the Victorian City : Working Class Housing 1850-1914*

³ Listed Buildings are those buildings of special architectural or historic interest and present on a list prepared by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

⁴ These buildings are considered to be of significance to the local community and hopefully will encourage owners to take pride in the care of their property

3.6

Coatsworth Conservation Area mainly includes domestic dwellings of a high architectural quality and historical significance such as those along Claremont Place, Barrington Place, Woodbine Terrace and Woodbine Place.

3.6

Saltwell Conservation Area largely focuses on the various structures and memorials in Saltwell Park (including Saltwell Towers), the Church of St Chads (a grade II* building) on Rawling Road, the Shipley Art Gallery on Prince Consort Road and buildings and structures on Durham Road.

3.7

Saltwell Park, one of Britains finest examples of a Victorian Park⁵ and part of Gateshead’s heritage since opened to the public in 1876, and is home to 11 listed buildings and monuments, including the idiosyncratic Gothic style mansion “Saltwell Towers” built by stained glass genius William Wailes. JA Shipley who founded the Shipley Art Gallery lived in Saltwell Towers. The park blends such historic features with classic Victorian landscapes (designed by the acclaimed Victorian landscape architect Edward Kemp, who co-created the first public park in Birkenhead, Merseyside) to create a wonderful “green lung” in the heart of Gateshead.

3.8

The park recently received £10 million Heritage Lottery Fund which supported a renovation project to recreate the landscape and other heritage features of the park. This includes the restoration of the original plants and trees in the series of ornamental gardens or “garden rooms” designed by Kemp, new tree and shrub planting, new Victorian style seats, new railings and walls, improvements to the footpath network around the park and restoration of Saltwell Towers to form a visitor centre, gallery, café and conference venue.

3.9

The neighbourhoods contain the greatest remaining concentrations of the Tyneside Flat,

⁵ Saltwell Park is an English Heritage registered park and historic designated landscape



Typical Tyneside Flat layout



Plan 3 – Age of Tyneside Flats (date by which constructed)
 1897 1919 1939



Plan 4 – Size of Tyneside Flats
 Small Medium Large



Plan 5 – Architectural Detail of Tyneside Flats
 No Bay Bay Square 3 Story



Good street design



Woodbine Cottage, Villa Place

the locally distinctive architectural type unique to Newcastle and Gateshead⁶. In the 1911 census of England and Wales only 2.9 % of the population lived in flats while in Gateshead it was 62.5%⁷. The distinctive Tyneside flats were built in pairs, one upstairs and one downstairs, along long terraces. Generally the flats consist of a two- bedroom ground floor flat, with a three bedroom flat above, built in a pair, with shared front and rear yards. Originally it was the custom for the owner to live in one and rent the other one out.

3.10

From the street these flats look like terraced houses but with paired front doors one to the top flat and one to the ground floor. According to Pearce (1994) “the beauty of the Tyneside flat as a house type lies in its simplicity, versatility and cheapness of design”. These flats were characterised by housing skilled artisans, craftsmen and tradesmen rather than simply labourers (Taylor 2003). It is probable that the size and quality of building design and structure, and the degree of architectural detailing was commensurate with the income of the occupier. The age of the Tyneside flats ranges from 1897 to 1939, and most range in size from 67.5 to 87.5 sq m. The plans to the left reveal patterns of age, size and architectural detail.

3.11

The area includes a notable range and variety of housing types and layouts, including the distinctive 3 bay flats on Villa Place and 3 storey flats / maisonettes on Hillfield Street and Rectory Place. Brick and slate terraces of these flats and similar looking houses are the pre-dominant building form, and define the solidly Victorian character of the area. It is fitting given the town’s long and illustrious role in heavy engineering that many of the terraces were designed by L.H. Armour, a local civil engineer⁸.

3.12

Although the buildings can at first appear uniform, it soon becomes clear that throughout most of the area there is widespread quality, subtle variety and thoughtful craftsmanship evident in design details such as brickwork, bay windows, lintel features and front railings. The size of dwelling varies from two bedroom flats in narrow back-of-pavement terraces to large three storey houses. A significant proportion of dwellings have bay fronted elevations, of various designs, some quite distinctive.

3.13

There are also a number of set piece landmark buildings, which are of architectural merit, notably the library, Shipley Art Gallery, a number of fine churches, such as St. Chad’s with its prominent octagonal tower, townhouses, including Woodbine Cottage in Villa Place, and grand terraces such as that on Claremont Place.

3.14

Monuments and Statues within the area include the George Hawks statue (of the first Mayor of Gateshead), which has been moved to the entrance of Windmill Hills Park, the George Charlton memorial in recognition of his labours in the cause of social reform (Mayor of Gateshead 1873-4), situated in Saltwell Park, and the War Memorial located at the junction of Prince Consort Road and Durham Road.

⁶ Taylor and Lovie (2004) *Gateshead: Architecture in a Changing English Urban Landscape*

⁷ Pearce K (1994). *Newcastle’s Tyneside Flats 1850-1900 By Law Housing or Cultural Phenomena?* In : Lancaster B (1994) *Working Class Housing in Tyneside 1850-1939*.

⁸ *ibid.*

Community

3.15

Character and 'feel' also change across the area due to patterns of use and condition. The well established Jewish community and their associated educational, religious, cultural and commercial activities are a unique part of the character around Coatsworth Road.

3.16

There is a locally distinctive edge to some uses that gives the area an appealingly bohemian nature – for instance, Coatsworth Road has an old fashioned cobbler and a dedicated Stamp and Postcard collectors shop; Saltwell View has its own Theatre. The café in Saltwell Road is adorned with historic photos of the area showing trams and street parties.

3.17

Communication problems between people of different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds should not be over exaggerated, but are a reality which can lead to tension and misunderstanding at times. Social cohesion amongst communities remains strong in the neighbourhood; the risk is that cohesion between neighbouring communities may weaken if tensions persist.

Density

3.18

The typical development density is very high and the layout highly urban, with minimal private garden or public green space provision within the neighbourhood. This absence of landscaping is partly mitigated by the presence of the magnificently restored Saltwell Park immediately to the south, but much of the area has a hard edged feel that lacks any relief from greenery.

Topography

3.19

Some further respite from an unrelenting built-up environment is afforded by the striking views many streets and houses enjoy to the west, across the Team Valley and the leafy suburbs and countryside beyond, but this cannot overcome the harshness of some streets.

3.20

The topography has influenced the development form of the neighbourhood. The road layout east of Brighton Road and south of Whitehall Road runs north south along the ridge, rather than cut against the steep slopes of the hillside, and is consequently made up of long parallel streets. The only east-west links are steep lanes with no active frontages. Further down the hill to the west of Brighton Road, and on the flatter top of the ridge, around Prince Consort and Coatsworth Roads, the principle streets do run east-west as well as north south.

3.21

Many of the streets that do slope with the land have an extra element of the picturesque to the rhythm of their roofscapes and facades. This is part of the special character of the area, and is something any new development should respect. However, there are negative aspects too – movement can be difficult on the steeper slopes, and unsightly elevations that would otherwise be hidden are exposed, as is the case with the backs of the Saltwell Road shops.



Topology gives views across Team Valley



Highly urban public environment, harsh in places



Eccentric character



Designed by W S Hicks and built in 1903, St Chad's on Rawling Road with its hexagonal tower is one of the grandest buildings in the town



Saltwell Towers was given to the public by the stained glass artist William Wailes and has been restored after falling into decline in the 1970s



Elevation drawing of classic Tyneside Flat block shows attractive original details such as cast-iron railings, sash windows and carved lintels



Tyneside Flats of simple back-of-pavement design, without bay windows or decoration to lintels



Tyneside Flats with single-storey bay windows, decorated lintels and front courtyard set-backs



Spacious and well proportioned townhouses on Poplar Crescent



3 storey Tyneside Flats undergoing conversion to large town houses



Double-height bay windows distinguish these later examples of the Tyneside Flat



Inter war garden suburb style council housing on the Field House estate



These distinctive terraces in the Avenues are not flats but small houses with unusual triangular bays



The area's late 20th century infill housing has little in common with its historic architecture

4 VISUAL CONDITION

4.1

In any neighbourhood, the visual appearance of housing condition is a key determinant of market appeal and demand. It is a sign of the capacity and/or the willingness of owners to maintain their property, and thus an important function of market confidence. Individuals and investors will feel far safer putting their households and their money somewhere that looks likely to be maintained, than risking them somewhere that appears to be deteriorating. Likewise, existing owners will keep their properties in good repair if neighbours are doing the same.

4.2

A rapid assessment of the visual condition of all housing across the entire neighbourhood was carried out in the spring of 2005. This looked at the state of repair of front elevations as seen from the street. The key elements assessed were boundary treatments, window frames, doors, walls, guttering, evidence of personalisation and general impression of lintels, pointing, paintwork etc.

4.3

The overall impression was scored as either very good, good, neutral, poor or very poor. Only dwellings in first class condition were rated as very good, and only dwellings that were derelict or suffering obvious subsidence were rated very poor. These were then averaged across each block, erring on the side of positive ratings so as not to 'talk the area down', i.e. a block with half its properties appearing fair and half poor would be rated as fair.

4.4

The strength of this comprehensive rapid assessment technique shown in block form is that it allows patterns of relative condition to emerge clearly, and captures the external impressions that underpin market perceptions. An important caveat is that these results are not a comment on internal or structural condition, except where obvious defects are externally visible, and are thus not intended as a substitute for full survey inspections. Also, the averaging of block condition will mask poor buildings in a well maintained block and vice versa.

4.5

Never-the-less, the overall message in the case of Bensham and Saltwell is clear and consistent. Plan 8 shows average block condition to be good or very good mainly on the edges of the area, around Saltwell Park and the town centre to the north, and also around Coatsworth Road. This reflects the majority type of properties in each case, and also perhaps the proximity to statutorily protected, leafier or more convenient environments. The large houses facing Saltwell Park are in the conservation area and appear for the most part in good condition. The garden-suburb council housing between the park and Saltwell Road likewise appears in good repair, with many signs of personalisation and well-kept gardens. In general, the larger housing around the Coatsworth Road conservation area is also visually good. Unsurprisingly, due to their much younger age and programmed maintenance, the relatively recently built Radburn style council housing in the north of the neighbourhood, and other infill new-build schemes, look in good repair. However, the group repair schemes on Kelvin Grove and Whitehall Road stand out as rare blocks still appearing

mainly in good and very good condition among the Tyneside Flats.

4.6

For the most part, the blocks of Tyneside Flats do still appear in fair condition, a testament after a century of use to the solidity of their original construction and their enduring popularity. The legacy of the investments in the eastern portion of the Avenues during the 1980s can be discerned in the relative lack of apparently poor or very poor properties when compared to similar flatted properties west of Rectory Road. Plan 10 shows the blocks in visually fair average condition.

4.7

However, a clear spatial concentration of blocks of housing mostly in visually poor condition can be identified. Plan 11 shows a 'T-shape' of blocks that look in poor or very poor repair, one bar of the 'T-shape' running either side of Armstrong Street/Dunsmuir Grove, and the other along the blocks between Brighton Road and Rectory Road. These houses are almost all Tyneside Flats and missed out on investment programmes under SRB. They also have high concentrations of private landlord ownership. Other smaller concentrations of poor visual condition show up near Durham Road and Poplar Crescent. These may be explained by the prevalence of mining subsidence in latter case, and long term blight from the road and heavy traffic in the former. Group repair is programmed for properties around Durham Road, so the picture presented by this snap-shot is likely to improve markedly there.

4.8

Plan 12 is a broad-brush schematic diagram that helps underline the way the neighbourhood exhibits zones of mainly good, fair and poor visual condition, of roughly equal size.

4.9

The north east segment between Whitehall Road, Durham Road and Bensham Road, and the rim around Saltwell Park, looks good in the main, reflecting the existence of larger and/or newer stock, and access to the convenience and services of the town centre, and of course the park-like environment around Saltwell view. It is also significant that both in part have conservation area protections.

4.10

Across the segment south of Whitehall Road and east of Rectory Road visual conditions are mostly fair. This reflects the inherent sustainability of Tyneside Flats but also the reality that they have not for some time attracted the highest levels of maintenance across the board, and perhaps cannot for as long as they are the only housing type across so much of the area.

4.11

The prevalence of housing that looks predominantly poor in the remaining 'north-west' segment is a pressing strategic problem for the area. Although our survey was external only, the harsh reality is that there is genuine housing deprivation for residents. The visual assessment at the very least shows that a large section of the neighbourhood's population

live in streets that create a poor impression to visitors, stigmatising them and their homes, and acting as a deterrent to market led investment. It is also fair to suggest that having so many properties appearing poor undermines the entire neighbourhood's image, and thereby places 'at risk' investment in properties throughout the area which are being kept in good condition.

4.12

Spatially the condition survey gives pointers to a strategic approach that contains and then diminishes the poor visual conditions and focuses on intensive improvements to the worst affected streets; bolsters the context of housing that already looks good, and attempts to draw the best qualities of the successful blocks into the intermediate area in order to lift long-term investment to sustainable levels.



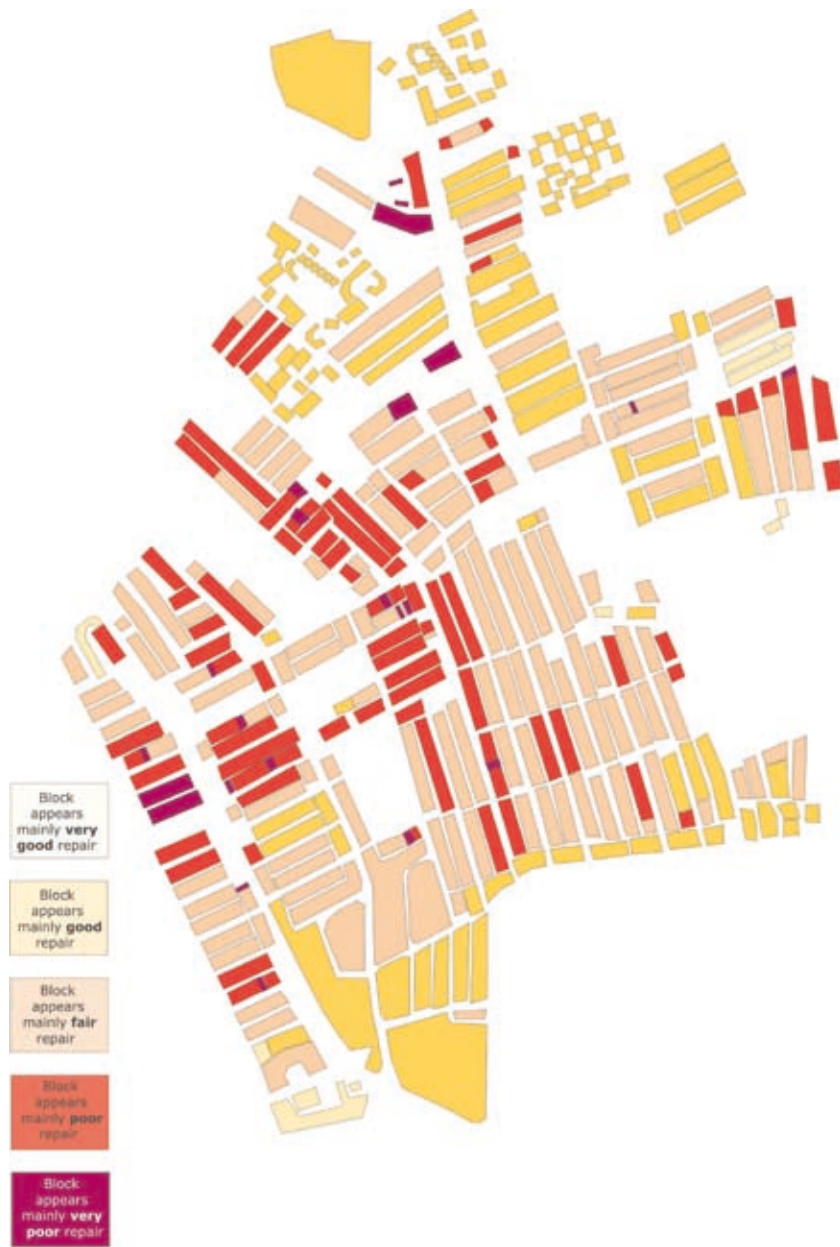
Plan 6 – Average Visual Condition by Block – Good and Very Good



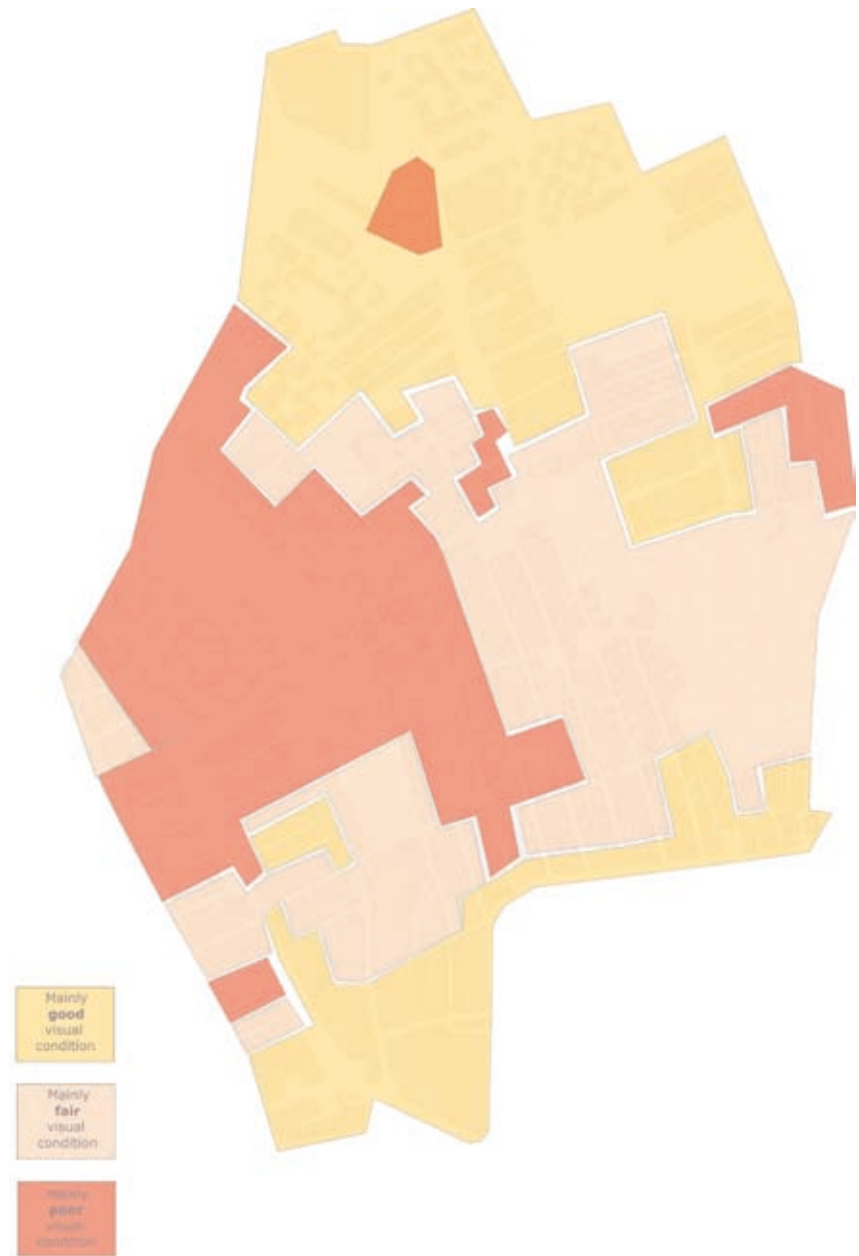
Plan 7 – Average Visual Condition by Block – Fair



Plan 8 – Average Visual Condition by Block – Poor and Very Poor



Plan 9 – Average Visual Condition by Block



Plan 10 – Visual Condition Zones

5 STOREY HEIGHTS, STREET CONTINUITY AND SPATIAL ENCLOSURE

Storey heights

5.1

Storey heights generally vary little across the study area, with most Tyneside Flats being of two or three storeys, sometimes with cellars. These buildings are considerably more substantial in height and massing than equivalent modern two or three storey buildings, as can be seen in the contrast between the historic buildings of Osbourne Terrace and their more recent neighbours. There are several church towers and two post-war tall buildings, the Swallow Hotel and a municipal block of flats, Bensham Court which is the tallest building in the neighbourhood as 16 storeys. The scale of the tower is at odds with the surrounding streets.

Street continuity

5.2

Most of the streets throughout the area are continuous elements of the strong grid structure. The same spatial continuity would once have stretched further towards the river and town centre. Comprehensive redevelopment in the 1960s and 70s destroyed this linkage and severed and eroded the northern and eastern edges of the area. Now, in built form terms, there is considerable visual and physical separation between the core neighbourhood and its partially degraded surroundings to the north and east.

5.3

The built fabric at these edges has been disconnected by past clearance, highway widening, insensitive redevelopment and underused space. Although providing a consistent road edge, the dual carriageway on the east no longer has a consistent building line and hence lacks definition and enclosure. The Radburn estates in the north of the neighbourhood have little clear relation with traditional street routes built as they were to a relatively low density with a layout separating cars from pedestrians.

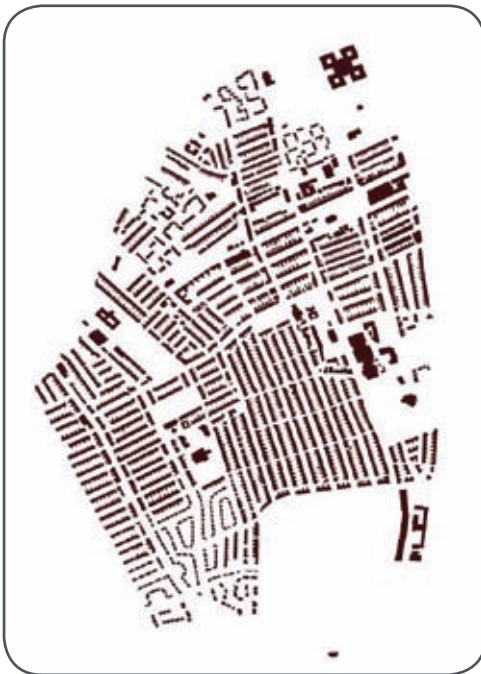
Spatial Enclosure

5.4

For the most part, thanks to the well proportioned terraces and streets, the sense of enclosure is good. Again, it is only in areas that have been subjected to ad hoc clearance and poorly designed redevelopment where this breaks down, such as around Rectory Road.

5.5

Active frontages with windows and main entrances line the traditional terraced street facades, giving streets good 'natural surveillance' and overlooking. This positive quality does not apply to back lanes and 'Radburn' layout areas, where public spaces are enclosed by high yard walls and/or poorly overlooked.



Plan 11 – Figure Ground



Bensham Court



1960s Swallow Hotel



Poorly integrated public environment in Radburn layout estates to the north of the area

6 QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM

Frontage treatments

6.1

The fundamental elements of the public realm are strong. Across most of the area, the main 'active' entrances to properties face the pavement, usually set back slightly by low walled 'courtyards'; windows, often in prominent bays, directly overlook the streets. This structure provides a fundamentally well-overlooked and secure feeling public realm, and allows a clear distinction between private and public domains.

Street activity

6.2

This is further enhanced by the well connected 'permeable' nature of the street grid, which encourages movement on foot by providing direct routes. The concentration of development, the existence of a wide range of uses and the high level of overlooking generate a good intensity of street activity and community interaction, whose vibrancy is enhanced by the established presence of minority ethnic and religious communities.

6.3

Unfortunately, traffic speeds, parking limitations and degradation in the pedestrian environment still impact badly on the active enjoyment of public areas.

Condition

6.4

Despite the robust physical structure, the general environmental quality of the area is currently poor. The intensity of use in the area is not matched by the same high levels of maintenance. Many homes and properties are not in good visual condition. Property boundaries and front forecourt gardens are generally in bad repair and appear un-maintained, most having had their railings removed during World War II and never replaced.

6.5

There has been very little investment in design and environmental improvements due to the number of residents on low incomes and a reported reticence among private landlords to match grants from the council to improve properties. A private sector house condition survey conducted by Gateshead Council in 1980 identified large pockets of housing in considerable need of intervention, particularly across the Avenues.

6.6

The Avenues Agency was established to co-ordinate improvements across the area comprising enveloping schemes, provision of new roofs and windows where required. Upgrading of side and back lanes and road entry treatments and traffic calming was also progressed. The improvements themselves were a success but the overall impact was somewhat patchy, owing to the scattered or 'pepper-potted' location of investments. The properties on Eastbourne Street benefited most, enjoying a comprehensive enveloping scheme including new roofs and boundary treatments.

6.7

As funding was depleted the focus of investment changed to target streets for more consistent treatment, rather than pepper-potting. Investment in boundary walls greatly impacted on the general visual amenity in the area, stimulating parallel investment by homeowners in the Avenues. The contrast between those properties in the Avenues not improved and those that were is very apparent.



Pedestrian activity on the street



Improvements to Eastbourne Avenue



Eastbourne Avenue



Westbourne Avenue



Poor front boundaries

6.8

Back lanes and rear elevations are almost universally unsightly across the neighbourhood (although seldom littered or unclean). Some east-west cross routes are lined with blank gable ends and thus not properly overlooked.

Materials

6.9

Generally, paving and signage are of the lowest statutory quality materials. Property boundaries have had not had their original iron railings and gates replaced. An attempt has been made to lift the appearance of the area by using red tarmac surfacing for carriageways as opposed to black. This is a surprisingly simple and cost-effective measure, and complements the quality red brick of the terraces. Some homes have had improved boundaries within the last two decades, to a reasonable standard, but many are crumbling and of low grade brick or wood.

Green space

6.10

Saltwell Park is one of the best public parks in the country, and is within easy walking distance of the southern half of the neighbourhood. It is an example of the excellence potentially achievable in the public realm.



Unsightly rear alley



Street environments dominated by hard landscaping, improved boundaries, lacking any greenery



View of saltwell park from one of the avenues



6.11

Elsewhere, greenery is badly lacking. Very few homes have any private green space at all. There are few street trees to soften the urban form – where there are, such as Prince Consort road, the effect is very attractive, but most streets are bare of planting.

6.12

Outside Saltwell Park, there are several small green spaces. Hyde Park, Whitehall Road and Bewick Road are the only green areas in the under-served north of the area. Efforts have been made to improve play and recreation facilities, particularly on Hyde Park. However, these green areas remain of minimal amenity. They are not secured at night and are often problematic, as evidenced by the number of incidents reported by wardens.

6.13

The small green spaces in the south are less problematic but could have a more positive impact. The former school playing field behind the gallery is scruffy and requires better overlooking, acting as a poor setting for the listed building. The green spaces alongside Durham Road contain some beautiful mature trees but little in the way of formal facilities. A more detailed review of the open spaces in Bensham and Saltwell can be found in Section 11.

Problem areas

6.14

Some places such as the garages and wasteland within Saltwell Place are persistent 'grot spots'. Others, notably the link along Armstrong Street to Hyde Park, are cited by residents as places with a high incidence of disorder and anti-social behaviour.

6.15

Ecological damage exists - the railway embankment is overrun with Japanese Knot-weed, which has erased bio-diversity. Mining subsidence causes problems in a few streets.

6.16

Furthermore, there are places where later 'Radburn' type development has overturned the original street form and inverted its connected qualities, dislocating the urban fabric and bringing problems of poorly overlooked and unsupervised space.



Fly tipping in Hyde Park



'Grot spot' garages behind Saltwell Place

6.17

Public realm environmental quality is an acute issue across the neighbourhood, and at present negates much of the strength of character the neighbourhoods possess. The solution is to target the structural issues and specific locations that are holding back the full power of the positive qualities.



This vibrant street scene in this historic postcard shows the fundamental strength of the area's public realm, much of which has been eroded by subsequent changes

7 MOVEMENT

Strategic Routes

7.1

The A167 Durham Road to the east forms part of the strategic cycle network and is a busy bus corridor. Bensham Road (bordering the north west of the area) is being upgraded to a quality transport corridor and benefits from excellent crossing facilities and upgraded bus shelters. Prince Consort Road is unclassified but acts as an important public transport corridor and link through the area for access to the library, art gallery and leisure centre. A mainline rail route lies to the south east of the area with frequent high speed trains.

7.2

Negative environmental impacts of these adjacent routes are felt within the area. Durham Road is a major barrier, due mostly to the volumes of traffic but also in the limited highways access to the Bensham area. Similarly, the speed of traffic on the Durham Road dominates the eastern edge and confines easterly pedestrian movement to footbridges, creating a hostile experience for those on foot, in wheelchairs or on bikes. The Bensham Road is not as brutal but still exercises a severance effect. Traffic spills over into the area from all these routes, necessitating road blocks and one-way regulations in some streets, put in place to discourage 'rat-running'. The railway embankment and high speed trains dominate the streets west of Saltwell Road. Pedestrian connections to the west are reduced to a narrow and unpleasant foot tunnel under the tracks.

7.3

More positively, adjacency to these nearby strategic routes give the area a prominent profile and makes it a convenient location, with good road accessibility.

Public Transport

7.4

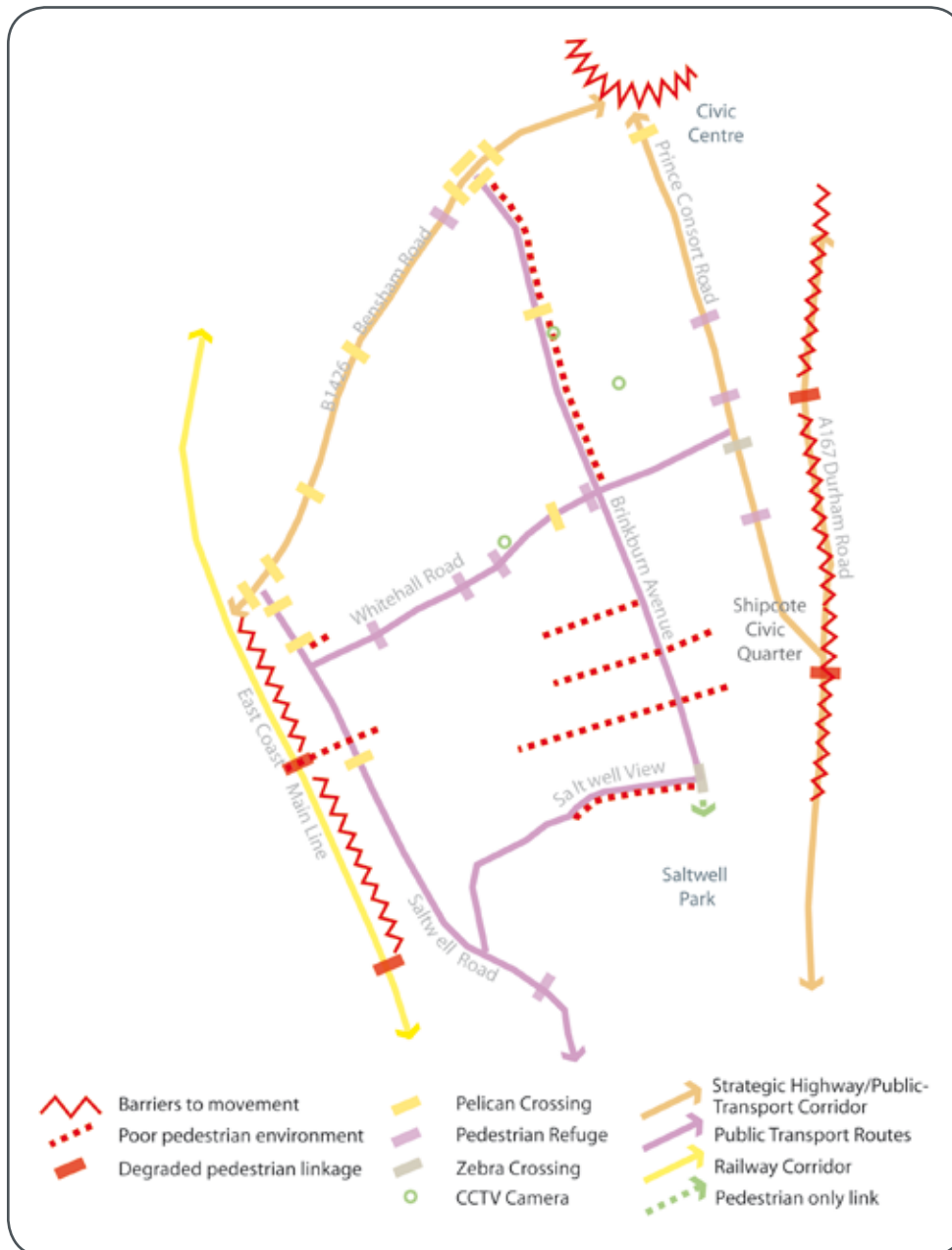
The main public transport corridors in the area are Bensham Road and Durham Road. In addition to these, the main routes penetrating the area run on Saltwell Road / Saltwell View (adjacent to Saltwell Park) Coatsworth Road, Prince Consort Road and Whitehall Road.

7.5

Service provision is excellent with good penetration through the area and a range of destinations at good frequencies. Even so, provision is hardly comparable to the days when Bensham had its own railway station and electric tram links. Mainline rail services and Metro routes are only a short journey away via the recently improved Gateshead Interchange.

7.6

Cycle provision is minimal but traffic calming in residential areas creates a safer environment to access the Bensham / Lobley Hill Road cycle route. As a quality transport corridor, the Bensham Road / Lobley Hill Road feature shared bus / cycle routes where space allows and upgrades to existing crossing facilities to toucans at strategic crossing points. In turn these link to other strategic routes to the north accessing Gateshead and Newcastle city centres. Durham Road also provides cycle lanes and forms part of the



Plan 12 – Transport and Movement

strategic network. There is currently minimal cycle parking provision.

Pedestrian Environment Links

7.7

Within the neighbourhood area, movement is facilitated by the exceptionally permeable grid pattern, which allows a wide range of route choices and direct connections. For the most part the area is very walkable.

7.8

Exceptions include mini roundabouts installed at cross roads which cause confusion for pedestrians. Wide carriageways at these locations worsen the problem by increasing the crossing distance. There are also a number of poorly located crossings which clearly are not in keeping with pedestrian desire lines. In places narrow/poor quality footways are off-putting to users with pushchairs/prams or wheelchairs. The domination of roads with guard rails and pedestrian barriers also limits ease of movement. Some pedestrian refuges, as on Prince Consort Road, are too small to be safely used a pushchair or buggy.

7.9

Pedestrian routes criss-cross the area, with two corridors in particular having a 'strategic' role, the east west route that passes under the railway at Armstrong Street and the north south routes from the park to Coatsworth Road and the town centre.

7.10

Back lanes and alleys, notably the east-west links along Westfield Terrace and leading from Faraday Grove, are commonly used as pedestrian routes but are not configured as streets, lacking windows and active building frontages. These lanes do not portray a positive image of the area.

7.11

The hilly topography presents a challenge for walkers, particularly the elderly, disabled and those with prams / pushchairs and shopping. This of course cannot be changed, but can be mitigated through the provision of regular resting places, benches etc.

7.12

For all modes, north south movement is easier than east-west – the street grid responds to

the topography by laying out most streets along the flat axis, with fewer on the steep sides.

7.13

Local centres are subject to high volumes of traffic which cause severance and pedestrian/ vehicle conflict due to motor vehicle dominance. Pavements are usually narrow relative to highway width in Saltwell and Bensham, encouraging higher traffic speeds than are safe and desirable for residential amenity. The relatively wide carriageways that exist in some areas could be re-configured to make space for parking and slow down vehicular speeds in local centres. On street parking in these areas also reduces visibility for pedestrians and drivers and results in overspill onto residential side streets.

7.14

Crossing provision on the whole is very good but in some areas insufficient. There are some problems on Coatsworth Road with both legal and illegal on-street parking and a perceived high speed of vehicles. Given the high density of housing surrounding the area, these problems are exacerbated by poor crossing facilities (a single pelican crossing serves the length of this road). Another street with a notable lack of crossings is Saltwell View where there is no footpath around the perimeter of the park and only one public access point to the park at Brinkburn Avenue. This significantly increases walking distances to the green space from certain areas.

Perception barriers

7.15

Fear of intimidation and anti-social behaviour is a barrier to free movement that should not be overlooked or tolerated. Some residents fear certain streets and spaces, especially in the evenings. Some members of the ethnic and religious minority communities feel uncomfortable about walking down the Avenues to Saltwell Park for fear of attracting racial abuse. Others are discomfited by the monotonously hard, urban nature of the public realm and its lack of greenery.

7.16

There is a lack of directional signs to amenities (e.g. Saltwell Park, Coatsworth Road and Saltwell Road) and the ring fencing of some facilities reduces their visual quality.



Armstrong Street underpass



Saltwell Road west



East-West Pedestrian link

7.17

The main roads are well lit with high quality lighting but not all back lanes benefit from adequate lighting. There is also an issue with the quality of lamp used such as those on Alexander Road / Whitehall Road. CCTV cameras have been installed on Hyde Park Street and Rectory Road, but have also been requested by residents in other places such as Saltwell Road. Feedback from wardens and at the consultations suggest that gatherings of youths have made some people have reservations about walking the area around Hyde Park and Saltwell Road in the evenings.

8 LEGIBILITY

Image

8.1

The neighbourhood displays qualities that make it impossible to mistake it for any other part of the town. The closest physical comparison would be Jesmond in Newcastle, although current market perceptions and investment conditions differ markedly.

8.2

Its best qualities remain, however, something of a well-kept secret outside the area. Because strategic transport routes tend to whisk traffic quickly around rather than through the neighbourhood, a detailed picture is seldom shown to non-residents.

Corridors and Gateways

8.3

These corridors and the gateways that lead from them into the neighbourhood need to be recognised as an important showcase of the community's best qualities and managed accordingly. This has not happened for many years and the current treatment of these high profile routes appears indifferent to how they are perceived, being cluttered with transport infrastructure, degraded boundary treatments and gap sites.

8.4

Past generations understood that prime routes and junctions warranted special design treatment. This is why the Durham Road, as the main approach to the town centre from the south, enjoys a grand scale and show piece civic buildings, aimed at expressing the pride and prosperity of the town. Prince Consort Road reflects an associated ceremonial civic role. The college, the art-gallery and the large houses with long front gardens are examples of this special treatment.

8.5

Awareness of the importance of such highly visible aspects in determining perceptions of a place's image and confidence is now returning, and Gateshead MBC is facilitating refurbishment and sensitive infill development along the Durham Road.

8.6

As local neighbourhood centres, Saltwell Road and Coatsworth Road also play a powerful role in defining the identity of the area. They too do not show evidence of being managed with this in mind.

Orientation

8.7

Orientation within the area is not always easy for those unfamiliar with it. Although there are some readily identifiable landmarks for guidance, such as the church towers, the shopping streets and the civic buildings, the sheer uniformity of the long terraces and the repetition of elements in the grid pattern is confusing to the newcomer and monotonous for residents.



The high profile of the old Great North Road meant the buildings on the Durham Road corridor were built on a grander civic scale - they are now enjoying refurbishment after a long period of decline and blight by traffic. This will improve perceptions of the neighbourhood.

9 ADAPTABILITY

Role

9.1

Over a century on from its construction, through radical and unforeseeable changes in the economy, society and environment, the area remains able to offer a popular, affordable place to live. The solidity of construction, the robust natural materials and vernacular crafts techniques employed on the buildings continue to serve the area and its diverse communities well.

Buildings

9.2

But there are constraints that have become more pressing as circumstances have evolved. A long period of economic decline, lasting from the 1970s until recently, left these properties mired in a low value, stagnant housing market. The old custom in Tyneside of owners occupying the large flat and renting out the smaller one above ebbed away. Many flats were bought as rental income investments, often let to transient tenants by absentee private landlords, who sometimes spent little on upkeep or tenant management. Some owner occupiers came to lack the income for proper repairs. Public investment was low for many years. Regular maintenance has been neglected.

9.3

Housing is dominated by a single stock type, the terrace. The English terraced house is an enduringly popular design that remains successful and sustainable across the country. The risk is that when present in such large numbers of concentrations its inherent qualities can be taken for granted and its drawbacks magnified, and the type becomes associated with a 'down market' product. To avoid 'talking down' the area, public bodies should adopt a positive perspective on core qualities of Bensham and Saltwell.

9.4

Some streets of Tyneside Flats have become stigmatised, possibly beyond redemption, and others nearby have suffered blight. Houses seem less subject to these problems of transience and poor management than flats. The overall situation is that major upgrades in condition are needed across large swathes of the private housing stock and public realm.

9.5

It is notable that many Tyneside Flats have been converted by their owners into larger private townhouses, to redress the lack of larger family type accommodation (i.e. four or more bedrooms) in the area. The standard of these conversions varies widely, from the crude to the high quality.

9.6

The best of these conversions, such as those carried out by Home Housing at the east end of Whitehall Road, are excellent, and provide a pointer to a further round of adaptation possible in the area to enable it to adjust to changing circumstances.

Back Lanes

9.7

There are physical elements of the area that may be approaching obsolescence in their current configuration. Back lanes, designed to provide separate circulation for horse-drawn service wagons in the days of coal fired heating, are now considered visually poor, with little role other than access for refuse collection. They feel oppressive and uninviting.

9.8

A potential model for overcoming the problems and providing useful new role for the spaces behind the Tyneside Flats can be found behind the stock owned by Newcastle and Whitley Housing Association on Kelvin Grove. There, back yard walls have been removed, designing out the alley-way and small yards to create a spacious and well-overlooked communal area for residents. This serves a mix of useful roles including parking, children's play and recreation. Free from through-traffic it fulfils much of the role the street traditionally did in terraced areas. People have personalised their stairways with flowers and hanging baskets, and bins are allocated specific storage spaces.



Boarded up house Armstrong street



Visually poor rear elevation typical of back lanes



Whitehall Road before and after refurbishment and conversion

9.9

The Kelvin Grove model is a basic version of what could become an innovative reinvention of the terraced layout distinctive to Gateshead. It could be improved further by only allowing residents to access the area by car, and by a more sophisticated materials and greening treatment. It might also be possible to retain semi-private 'patios' or decked areas and give upper flats large balconies, for example.

Commercial Areas

9.10

Although the area continues to provide a worthwhile range of amenities and services, and is valued by residents, the local neighbourhood centres along Coatsworth Road and Saltwell Road, as well as the array of small corner shops throughout the area, have suffered some decline over a number of years. The business environment has struggled in the face of competition from the big supermarkets and retail centres. There are empty units and shop frontages in very poor condition. There are few other commercial opportunity sites. This presents a risk to investment, services and employment.

Highways

9.11

The highway configuration may also be obsolete or inappropriate. The area's lack of greenery and recreation space were less noteworthy when motor vehicles did not

dominate the street environment – children's play and neighbourly conversation could take place safely and comfortably in the street. The current car dominated relation between carriageway and pavement space precludes this, given contemporary traffic speeds and volumes, meaning the lack of gardens for play or formal recreation space for socialising becomes much more problematic.

9.12

Other areas have resolved some of these issues by creating 'home zones', a solution especially appropriate to terraced housing areas. These are redesigned pavement and carriageways that reduce the distinction between space for cars and people, redressing the balance of spatial allocation that has swung too far in favour of the car in residential areas, and providing a softer, more humane streetscape.



1-6: Before and after photos of 'Home zones'



2



3



4



Kelvin Grove, reconfigured back lanes



Kelvin Grove, reconfigured back lanes



An example of a shared surface street



5



6



Plan 13 – Character Areas

10 CHARACTER AREAS

10.1

It is possible to identify a mosaic of individual character areas that together make up the neighbourhood. Due to the mix of uses, the refinement of architectural detailing and the changes in urban form and condition, there is a rich variety within the area. The sense and feel of each place can be tangibly different from one street to the next.

10.2

The identification and assessment of these areas is a qualitative exercise grounded in interpretation of defining character elements. These include the scale and orientation of streets and buildings, the design of architectural elements and the public realm, and the nature of the ways in which the place is used. Condition is also a factor, especially where it is particularly good or bad.

10.3

Rather than drill down in detail to this 'mosaic' of places, it is sufficient in this Chapter to distinguish several larger sub-areas or zones of the area, that can be said to operate differently enough to each other to warrant their own understanding and treatment. The boundaries of these should not be interpreted too rigidly, but rather as an aid to considering sets of issues.

- Saltwell Road – Whitehall Road
- The Saltwell Park Avenues
- Prince Consort Road
- Coatsworth Road
- Garden Suburb

Saltwell Road - Whitehall Road

10.4

This area comprises Saltwell Road, Saltwell Place and Hyde Park. Most of the terraced streets in this area were the final streets to be built in Bensham and Saltwell. In 1894 when the Avenues were being laid out the Saltwell Road area comprised fields and lanes, buildings confined to the Saltwell Place area, Bensham Tower, Bensham Hall and Field House. The streets either side of the Saltwell Road shopping area are some of the most densely developed in the town, consisting almost entirely of medium sized Tyneside flats built by 1919. The streets are relatively short with most properties benefiting from small front-courtyards, some directly abut the pavement.

10.5

The public realm is hard, relieved only by the former clearance areas of Hyde Park and Brighton Road school field. This urban character extends west up Whitehall Road as far as Rectory Road. Brighton Road and the short streets off it exhibit similar buildings, street form and conditions. Although containing some good architecture, the overall visual condition of property tends to be at best fair and generally poor. Houses looking in good repair are in a minority. There are some properties in very poor condition, and indeed an entire street in disrepair. Armstrong Street has boarded up buildings and obvious problems of subsidence. The route is a hot spot for anti-social behaviour. Unfortunately, it is this air of under-investment that characterises Saltwell Road and the west end of Whitehall Road. In places the character is dominated by the cumulative impact of poorer condition properties which overpower any architectural detail.

10.6

Saltwell Road is a wide street, and still a vital local shopping centre. It currently lacks the vibrancy it once enjoyed, and is less busy than Coatsworth Road. Shop fronts and street furniture are looking very tired, particularly the block on the corner of Brunel Street, which has only two units open. Parking problems are evident with overspill impacting on residential side streets.

10.7

Between the railway foot tunnel and Hyde Park dominated by its steep topography is an area of very poor environmental quality. The Hyde Park Area is characterised by high-density development, with a strong grid-iron layout and little distinction between private and public space. The topography affords views over the Team Valley. All flats in this area were built by 1919 and without bay windows, although benefit from small set backs with low front walls. Flats along Dunsmuir Grove are set within a hard environment with small properties directly abutting the pavement. Terraces along Whitehall Road and Hyde Park Street are of the "bookend" style, originally built to house shops on the ground floor, they are located at the back of pavement to enhance prominence. Westminster Street contains modern day interpretations of the Tyneside flat, constructed during the 1990s.

10.8

Whilst the density of the area is quite overwhelming and harsh, the regularity in patterns, railings, windows and doors provides some visual coherency to the area, punctuated by a rich array of colours, a result of the detail inherent in the construction materials used.

The streets are comparably wide allowing plentiful parking and the comfortable movement of traffic but appear harsh due to the lack of greenery. Any presence of greenery is confined to Hyde Park itself, a defining characteristic of the area, whilst subject to some anti-social behaviour problems is generally well structured. It is slightly too large to be fully overlooked, and could benefit from better boundary treatment. In general the poor condition of the stock and poor quality public realm detracts from the inherent character of the area

10.9

Saltwell Place and Bensham Avenue areas contains high density streets of flats built by 1919. The character and quality of the area is mixed and demonstrates the pepper-potted nature of poor and good condition which exist side by side. In general it lacks consistency in quality and coherency in identity. The grid-iron layout here is characterised by much shorter blocks in a finely grained mix of horizontal and vertical configurations with poorer condition focused around the area to the east of Brighton Avenue Primary School. The school and its grounds provide visual relief to the heavily built up form in the area

10.10

Most properties are bay fronted and well proportioned to the relatively wide streets they enclose, such as those on Saltwell Place with sizeable front yards and double fronted bay windows. Some of the simplest properties in the neighbourhood are the back of pavement properties on Hilda and Goshen Street with no bays. Of note are the two blocks of terraces to the south of Bensham Avenue and to the north of Brighton Road overlooking Brighton Avenue School (and benefiting from open countryside views into the distance) which contain some of the smallest and oldest Tyneside flats in the neighbourhood¹. The area contains a number of gap sites, a result of small scale clearance in the past which create a poor setting for housing further compounded by the poor condition of the properties and back lanes. Many blocks are only accessed through back lanes which creates a gloomy character as these lanes are not very visually attractive and lack any landscaping or colour. An example of this is the courtyard style of flats at the end of Goshen Street which actually creates a pleasant little space, reflected in the refurbishment of one of the flats here.

10.11

A good quality and attractive block of Victorian houses are to be found on Liddell Terrace, although directly behind these are flats in much poorer condition. More modern additions to the urban form which present poor elevations and layouts to their frontage streets are “Bensham Clinic”, a concrete, out of scale one storey building of little design merit at the end of Liddell Terrace by the junction with Whitehall Road and Bensham Court (the tallest building in the neighbourhood) a 16 storey tower block

Saltwell Park Avenues

10.12

The area known as “the Avenues” was the final phase of the mass development across Bensham in the pre World War One era². The 1894 Plan³ shows the early stages of development of the area, with dwellings erected along Brinkburn Avenue, Rodsley Avenue,

Avenue Road and the northern sections of Eastbourne and Westbourne Avenues. The Avenues were largely been completed by 1919. Long streets were laid out in a north to south linear pattern to maximise views from Saltwell Park. A distinctive feature of these streets are the wide back lanes and streets that form the structure of the area. The mix of developers who built these flats is reflected in the variety of architectural treatments. Another distinctive feature are the many corner shops throughout the Avenues designed as projections into the street from the building line at junctions. Some of these have been converted to flats or houses. Others are still shops. The topography of the area is utilised in the building form by the integration of basement storeys. The majority of flats are medium sized although some larger properties are located on the periphery of the area to the west on Rectory Road and to the east on Avenue Road.

10.13

The recently completed £12m Heritage Lottery funded restoration of Saltwell Park has revived all its key qualities. The area alongside benefits from this but could do more to spread the positive effects. A ring of fine three storey town houses overlooks the north end of the park, enjoying excellent views over the renewed green space to open countryside beyond, and protected by the parks’ conservation area status. In addition to the corner shops there is an Islamic community centre and a fine pub along Westfield Road, halfway up the Avenues. Otherwise, there is little major variation in the built form or streetscape, which can be repetitive to the point of monotony. Differences in the architectural treatment of bay windows and building lines add detailed interest but are not enough in themselves to overcome the overpowering effect of the long unbroken perspectives.

10.14

Street form on the north south routes in terms of spatial enclosure, rhythm and sense of continuity are excellent – but the sheer length and repetition requires punctuation. The east west routes are poor, running past blank gable ends which generate no overlooking or activity.



Plan 14 – Historic Map of Saltwell Park Avenues, 1894

¹ Both rows on Bensham Avenue and Brighton Road are present on the OS Map Gateshead South 1894 (Sheet 23) as are those properties on Liddell Terrace, Saltwell Place and Rawling Street

² Taylor and Lovie (2004) Gateshead: Architecture in a Changing English Urban Landscape. English Heritage England

³ Gateshead South 1894 (Tyneside sheet 23)

10.15

The public realm benefits from the attempt to match road and building materials with the use of red surfacing. Property boundaries are generally disappointing - the cast-iron railings that once echoed those around the park and added to the harmony of the streetscape have been removed, although houses east of Eastbourne Avenue have had modern walls and railings re-instated.

10.16

Although termed “Avenues”, the sense of greenery bestowed by the park drops off quickly due to the absence of significant numbers of street trees or garden greening. The tree canopy of the park remains a powerful presence even at a distance.

10.17

Brinkburn Avenue leads directly to the main gates, connecting Saltwell Park with the Coatsworth Road centre. The other avenues do not lead to park entrances of their own, and thus have a weaker relation with the green space. Saltwell View does not benefit from a pavement alongside the park, meaning it is not possible to stroll immediately adjacent to the perimeter. Access across the road is not always easy due to traffic and a lack of crossings, meaning the neighbourhood is somewhat severed from this prime asset.

10.18

Traffic and parking cause conflicts in many places, especially Brinkburn Avenue, which is a busy road and bus-route. Back lanes are detrimental to image and amenity, as elsewhere.

Prince Consort Road

10.19

This is a fine tree-lined avenue of three storey townhouses and flats, on a key route between the civic uses around Shipcote and the main Civic Centre that acts as the modern Town Hall. Some of the front gardens are larger than usual, which adds to the leafy character. Several of the streets alongside such as Cambourne Grove also have good proportions and larger front gardens than in much of the other parts of Bensham and Saltwell.

10.20

It is the civic status that defines the distinctive character of the road and adjacent Avenue Road and Shipcote Lane. Set piece buildings of considerable architectural merit grace the south end of the character area. The spaces around them are not always configured as well as they might be, especially behind the gallery and between the library and leisure centre, but the underlying quality is high. The Durham Road edge is the high profile ‘face’ of the area, and has

been eroded by traffic infrastructure. Its remaining buildings have a robust presence and deserve a better managed setting.

10.21

The north end is less well preserved, having been reconfigured and disfigured during the 1960s and 70s for new road structures and housing estates. Unsightly infill such as the car park behind the Swallow hotel fragment the street scene with dead frontages, and the condition of nearby historic buildings is mixed. The council's civic complex is well managed and maintained but presents only its car park as an edge to the top end of Prince Consort Road, damaging the continuity of the street and any pedestrian linkages to Coatsworth Road.

10.22

Lincoln and Ripon Streets are two of the oldest surviving streets of Tyneside Flats and terraced houses, part of the original grid-iron laid out by William Affleck following his purchase in 1866 of part of the Shipcote Estate⁴. They are very plain and simply detailed, without forecourts or projecting bays.

10.23

North of Whitehall Road around Hartington Road and Bewick Road live many of the town's Jewish community, close to the specialist facilities around Coatsworth Road (see below). A high quality refurbishment, new build and conversion scheme has improved the accommodation and environment of these streets.

Coatsworth Road

10.24

This area is one of the oldest in Bensham and Saltwell and currently the most vibrant area retaining a diverse mix of uses, house types, architectural styles and people from different community backgrounds. The area around Chester Place contains a distinctly different character in terms of variation in dwelling types, sizes, street widths and layouts within a small area.

10.25

The busy shopping and service area of Coatsworth Road is surrounded on both sides by streets of mostly larger flats and houses, some of which have been converted to commercial and community use. Some of these streets and buildings, notably Claremont Place, Villa Place and Woodbine Terrace are exceptionally fine for the town, and are protected by conservation area status.

⁴ Taylor and Lovie (2004) *Gateshead: Architecture in a Changing English Urban Landscape*. English Heritage England



Blank gable ends on east-west routes



Another example of blank gable ends on east-west routes



Hard pedestrian environment



View towards Saltwell Park showing tree cover

10.26

The shopping area is busy and characterful but does have a tired air. There are significant problems here in terms of accessibility for non-car users. Parking and traffic conflicts are acute. The parking area around the Bensham Social Club is unpleasant and feels insecure.

10.27

Coatsworth Road area is the centre of Gateshead's long established Jewish community, which can trace the roots of its settlement in the town back over a century to 1880. There are now around 1,500 permanent residents.

10.28

Gateshead's Jewish community is unique among provincial communities in the UK, being almost exclusively ultra-Orthodox. Its 'Yeshivas' or academies are probably the principal centres of Jewish learning in Britain, giving the area some of the character of a specialist religious university town. People attending these institutions boost the area's population and economy to a significant degree.

10.29

Growth in the population is very good for the sustainability of the area, supporting business viability and property values. It is however leading to pressures on housing, services and amenities such as parking and movement. Communications between members of different religious and ethnic communities may benefit from greater dialogue



Characterful but tired air and parking pressures on Coatsworth Road



Poorly integrated Radburn layout



Fine historic character of Woodside Terrace, compromised by inconsistent dormers

to ease any misunderstandings or tensions.

10.30

For instance, because of population growth, some houses are being extended by the insertion of dormers in the roof spaces. The design of these tends to be ad hoc, meaning streetscapes and rooflines become inconsistent and mismatched, giving fine terraces a down market look. This is understandably resisted by planners and residents. Equally understandably, extension is considered imperative for those suffering cramped accommodation. A mutually agreed design for dormers that allowed use of roof spaces but assured visual consistency and quality could help wider relationships.

10.31

To the north, as with Prince Consort Road, the historic architectural fabric is surrounded by development that followed clearance in the 1970s. This 'Radburn' layout integrates poorly with the older streets, leaving public spaces that are not overlooked and rear gardens exposed to open areas.

Garden Suburb

10.32

At the south eastern end of Saltwell and Bensham is a self-contained set of streets that offers an entirely different urban environment to the rest of the area, yet never-the-less remains well integrated with the surrounding development pattern.

10.33

Field House Road and surrounding streets are made up of well built inter-war semi-detached council houses, set in streets lined with mature trees. Gardens are very well tended and the public environment is far greener and leafier than the other parts of the neighbourhood. The layout connects well with the grid iron street pattern, and uses planting to take advantage of the proximity to Saltwell Park, drawing the ambience of the wooded green space in to soften the streetscape of the built up area.

10.34

Development density is much lower than the other character areas, making parking and movement easier, but perhaps explaining why there are no other uses or facilities aside from housing.



Claremont Place

1.1 THE ROLE OF OPEN SPACE

Saltwell Park

Rating +2, a driver of regeneration.

11.1

Saltwell Park is intensely used for both formal and informal recreation, and is exceptionally well managed following its recent . There are facilities and attractions of almost every conceivable kind, including eleven listed buildings and monuments, separate playgrounds for the under and over eights, numerous well tended bowling greens, tennis courts and sports pitches for various ball games. There are also boats for hire on the boating lake, a café and learning centre, refreshment pavilions, water features, and woodland walks, all set within a designed landscape of international significance. Parking and access are good, staff levels are high and the entire park is secured at night to discourage mis-use.

11.2

It's impact on the Bensham and Saltwell area is entirely positive – the entire southern half of the neighbourhood is within a five to ten minute walk from the perimeter, and the mature tree canopy affords a welcome green 'punctuation' to the long views south down the otherwise intensely urban 'Avenues'. The properties around the park are worth substantially more than those 'off park' and there is something of a 'halo' effect on perceptions of the area generally. In broader social and cultural terms, the amenity value for public health and community cohesion from having such a beautiful and well used open space nearby is effectively priceless. Programmes of park based events are well publicised across the town, including in libraries, transport interchanges and schools

11.3

The question is whether the role of this extraordinary public asset is as yet fully maximised in terms of its regeneration effect on a still deprived community. Evidence suggests the answer is no. This is to take nothing away from the restoration work to date or the current management regime, both of which are first class. But the 'halo' effect is limited in quantifiable housing market terms to houses with a view of the green space. Physical access to the park is not as comfortable as it might be due to the traffic on Saltwell View and the limited number of entrances at the bottom of the Avenues. The lack of pavement along much of the park side of the perimeter road makes it feel separate from the adjoining neighbourhood, and most of the core facilities and attractions are clustered in the centre of the park, some way from the northern edge. Finally, discontinuity in public realm treatments (such as the removal of Victorian railings) prevents the Avenues area from enjoying more of the cachet bestowed by proximity to the listed green space.

Hyde Park

Rating –1, negative effect on regeneration.

11.4

The public space at Hyde Park is the result of clearance of a street block of terraces in the 1970s and subsequent landscaping, rather than a purpose built urban green space. It contains a play ground, multi-use games area and youth shelters, as well as a central seating pavilion and benches. The play facilities are close to St. Chads church, which provides regular community activities including ones



Plan 15 – Open Space

aimed at children and young people.

11.5

The park's amenities are both used and abused, with vandalism and incidences of disorder a regular problem according to residents and Neighbourhood Wardens.

11.6

As a piece of townscape the park is fair, especially at the western end where it provides a setting for the fine architecture of St. Chads church. The space slopes up from east to west and affords views across the Team Valley from the Brighton Road end. Overlooked on all four sides, there is a degree of enclosure, but the space is too large for the heights of the surrounding domestic buildings to frame effectively, and the sense of stewardship of the space by surrounding residents appears tenuous. The undulating topography also prevents clear sight lines through the space, an aspect which becomes an issue in the evenings when the weak natural surveillance' lack of security and limited sense of ownership by surrounding dwellings encourages regular mis-use.

11.7

Evenings and night-time are when most problems tend to occur, suggesting the park may be improved by being secured at night. This would require a lockable boundary such as cast-iron railings and gates. Better overlooking and enclosure by buildings may also improve the quality of the space.

Playing Fields to the north of Windmill Hills School

Rating 0, neutral effect on regeneration.

11.8

These are used mainly by the adjacent primary school although some wider community sports and social events are held there from time to time.

11.9

The school and playing fields are on land cleared of terraced streets in the 1960s and 70s. The low rise buildings, palisade fence boundaries and open aspect of the site do not give a clear definition to the urban form at this point, resulting in a featureless townscape and weak sense of place.

Avenue Road – Site adjacent to Shipley Art Gallery

Rating 0, neutral effect on regeneration.

11.10

There are no formal uses of this space at present. This is the playing field of the old Gateshead Grammar School, but use has lapsed since the school closed. The school was part of a collection of fine civic buildings in Shipcote that formed effectively a new administrative and cultural town centre, with the municipality's art gallery, library, swimming pool, financial and education offices.

11.11

Apart from the school, all of these functions still exist and the green space helps provide them with a spacious setting. The underlying urban form is good, with the listed gallery building an imposing presence on the east, the well proportioned baths to the north and the attractive bay-windowed terraces on the west and south. But the existing configuration and management of the space does not bestow upon it any formal role. The sense of enclosure is fragmented, there is no landscaping or amenity provision, and the surrounding buildings relate only incidentally. The gallery does not open on to the public space and the land is simply left grassed. Tennis courts are degraded and there are patches of overgrown concrete footings where buildings have been removed.

11.12

This is a space with great potential if its configuration, landscaping and management role could be reinvented to relate better to the civic status of the area and the town's key cultural axis.

Green space to the north of Shipcote Lane

Rating +1, positive effect on regeneration.

11.13

Formally laid out with paths and mature trees, this small park is used for recreation and relaxation by local residents. Apart from the planting, amenities are limited to benches and bins. The site was originally the landscaped garden of South Close, a now demolished 19th Century Villa.

11.14

It contributes to the pleasant leafy character at the south end of Prince Consort Road and at the 'front door' of the neighbourhood as viewed from the Durham Road. As well as enhancing the setting of the civic uses around the library, it acts as a screen between them and the heavily trafficked A167.

11.15

The now derelict petrol filling station on the site of South Close detracts from the space. The area is not secured at night and may be somewhat intimidating to walk through during the hours of darkness, although consultations did not highlight it as posing any particular problems.

Open space adjacent to Synagogue on Bewick Road

Rating +1, positive effect on regeneration.

11.16

This area is used for formal recreation and relaxation by the Jewish Community. There are children's play facilities, landscaping and seating. The space is enclosed for access via the community facility on Bewick Road.

11.17

It provides a much needed green lung in an area largely devoid of public space and private gardens, but is effectively only used by one section of the community.

Avondale Terrace - Open space at corner of Whitehall Road & Coatsworth Road

Rating +1, positive effect on regeneration.

11.18

Used for recreation and relaxation by local residents, this landscaped urban square contains seating, path ways, grassed lawn areas and mature trees.

11.19

Townscape quality is very good. The space is a point of relief from the dominant high density urban fabric. It is overlooked on all four sides and has an excellent sense of enclosure and proportions. The east end is punctuated by a landmark church and the other sides are larger terraced houses of three stories in height. All these buildings are architecturally good and built of robust local materials, giving the space a harmonious aspect.

11.20

At present, there are some conflicts between the use of the space for exercising dogs and other uses, particularly informal play by children and young people. Consultation responses raised dog fouling as a serious complaint by users of the space. There are also some problems of anti-social behaviour and disorder, which may be largely resolved by securing the space at night.

11.21

This is a small but important green space located by an area of acknowledged deficiency in public and private recreation space. It deserves to be prioritised as a 'pocket park' that provides a key focal point within the built up area.

Brighton Road

Rating 0, neutral effect on regeneration.

11.22

These fields are used mainly by the adjacent primary school although some wider community sports and social events are held there from time to time. There is minimal formal landscaping or planting other than the grassed area and a handful of trees and shrubbery at the eastern edge and south western corner.

11.23

As with Windmill Hills, the school and playing fields are on land cleared of terraced streets in the 1960s and 70s, in this case the demolished Ravensworth Terrace. The low rise buildings, palisade fence boundaries and open aspect of the site weaken the urban form by

diluting the sense of spatial enclosure, but this is mitigated by the excellent views across the Team valley opened up by the space, and the relief this gives within the otherwise high density urban form, especially from Brighton Road.

Bensham Tower

Rating, -1, negative effect on regeneration.

11.24

This is the landscaping space at the base of the Bensham Tower block of flats. It is used for informal recreation such as dog-walking and ball games, although its formal purpose is solely as a setting for the building. The space and building are on the site of Bensham Rectory, which gave its name to nearby Rectory Road and Rectory Place.

11.25

Townscape quality is negative. An ugly garage block takes up the south-west corner. The green space is poorly enclosed and of uncertain function. It can be bleak and windswept in inclement weather, but does have some modest value as a piece of green land in an area otherwise dominated by built form.

Gateshead Bowling Green Club

Rating 0, neutral effect on regeneration.

11.26

This is a private members' club that acts as a sports and recreation facility in the north of the neighbourhood, with formal facilities for crown green bowling. The century old Cricket Club pitch is a large area of green space in only marginal use.

11.26

Townscape quality is negative, with the exterior elevation of the facility being a blank brick wall. An entire urban block is also rendered impermeable by the facility, albeit this has been the case for many years.

11.27

More active use of this space is warranted given that it is a large area of greenspace in an area deficient in such amenities.

Gladstone Terrace & Christ Church

Rating +1, positive effect on regeneration.

11.28

Forming the grounds of the adjacent Christ Church, an architecturally striking landmark building, this space is, like the church, currently awaiting a new use. At present, some informal recreation activity takes place there. Mature trees and planting provide a 'green lung' and wildlife habitat.

11.29

In townscape terms the space is well proportioned and attractive, overlooked by the church building and terraces of larger townhouses that together effectively form a fine urban square. With landscaping improvements and a vibrant new use for the church this ensemble can play a powerful role in regeneration of the neighbourhood.

Shipcote War Memorial

Rating +1, positive effect on regeneration.

11.30

This small formal landscaped green space is primarily the setting for the town's main War Memorial, where services are held on Remembrance Day. It also acts as an important civic focal point at the gateway to the neighbourhood and Shipcote complex from the main Durham Road. Indeed the memorial, on the apex of the triangular space, marks the point of arrival in the town for traffic from the south. Containing mature trees, the space was once the garden of a long demolished vicarage.

11.31

The condition of the memorial garden is good but it is isolated by heavy traffic and obscured by the clutter of associated highway infrastructure. A calmer street scene around it and more open sight-lines through the space would allow its serenity as a place of reflection to be better appreciated.

Bensham Road

Rating 0, neutral effect on regeneration.

11.32

Small landscaped pocket green space visible from the Bensham Road which acts in part as an incidental recreation and relaxation space but also as a visual break along the movement corridor. It includes a prominent piece of public art.

11.33

It is effectively a weak point in the continuity of the urban form but has at least enjoyed a reasonable landscape treatment and management regime. In most places it would be of little value but the deficiency of greenspace in the area gives it some small role as brief respite from the predominantly urban environment.



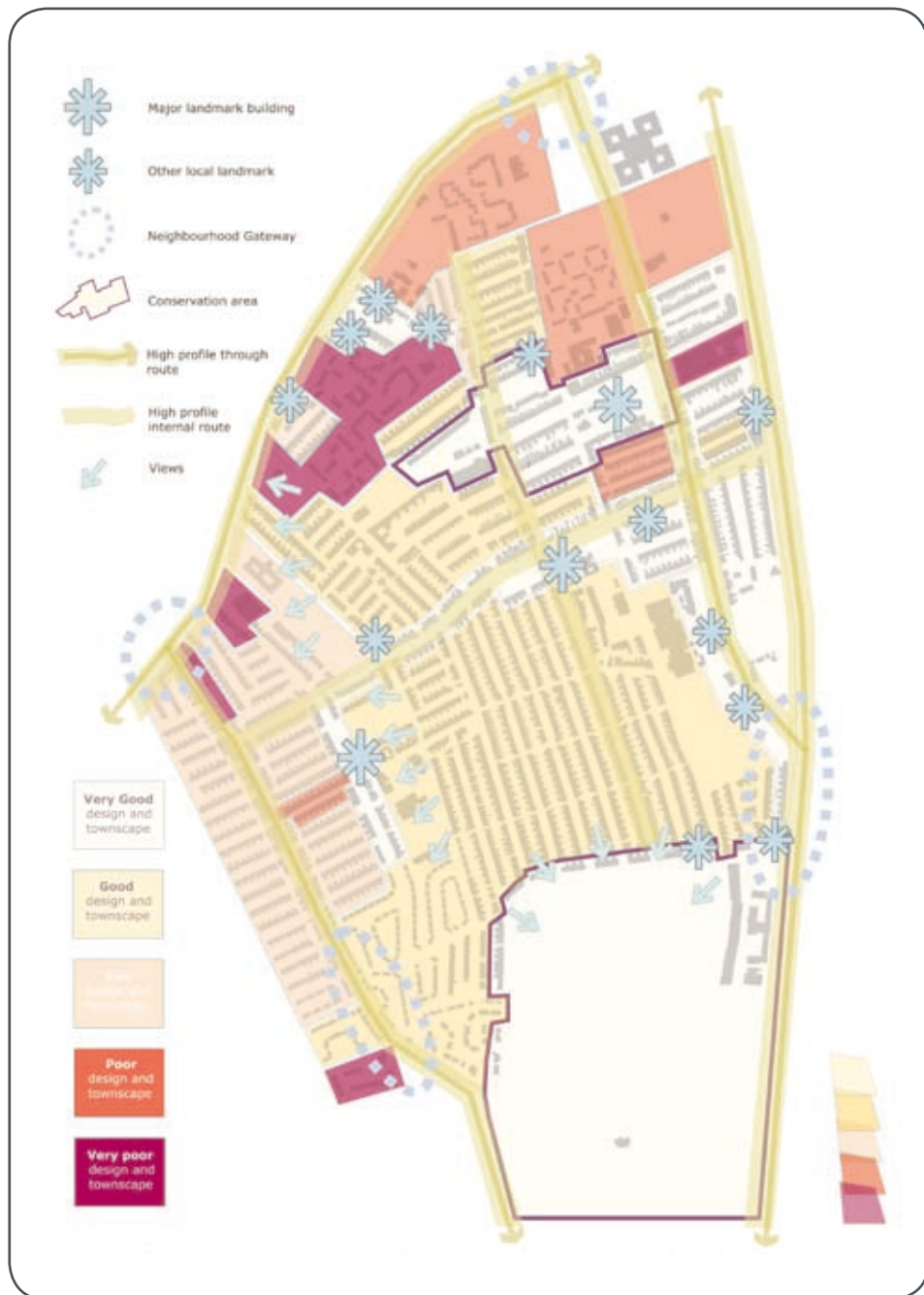
Edwardian postcards of Saltwell Park

12 STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

12.1

The table below summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the neighbourhood in terms of its prospects for supporting sustainable communities, and the opportunities and threats it faces.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
▪ Intensity of development and population supports good range of active local facilities. ▪ Proximity to Town Centre. ▪ Integrity of the historic environment and street pattern. ▪ Distinctiveness of the robustly built Tyneside Flat and terraces. ▪ Conservation areas. ▪ Shipcote Civic complex. ▪ Saltwell Park to south. ▪ Open views to river and Ravensworth west of Coatsworth Road. ▪ Garden village environment to south west corner. ▪ Fine landmark and listed buildings such as St. Chad's and Christchurch. ▪ Modest buffering "garden" areas to the front of most terraces. ▪ Well connected by road and public transport. ▪ Good examples of refurbishment and remodelling already underway.	▪ Sheer extent and intensity of development with large areas of unrelieved near identical terraces. ▪ The lack of private gardens and the under-provision of quality public space north of Saltwell Park subjects the limited green areas to intensive use and often misuse. ▪ Unsightly back lanes, dominance by highways and the general lack of soft-landscaping, street trees and greenery lead to a poor quality residential environment, even in areas of fair or better underlying townscape quality. ▪ Degraded business environment - lack of short stay parking and tired appearance around shopping streets - for example, the degraded retail block and unsightly rear elevation on Saltwell Road. ▪ Empty corner shops ▪ Rail noise at western edge. ▪ Traffic and traffic noise on Lobley Hill Road/ Bensham Road and on Durham Road. ▪ Absence of safe play facilities for children and young people. ▪ Poor quality, threatening space around Bensham Arms public house. ▪ Predominance of a single house-type, the Tyneside Flat, over much of the area, limits choice for households with families. ▪ Large area of housing around Saltwell Road/ Dunsmuir Grove and Brighton Road/Rectory Road appears in poor condition, undermining confidence of residents and potential investors. ▪ Pedestrian severance from Town Centre by highway infrastructure.	▪ Carefully selected redevelopment to bring exemplary contemporary homes of the highest architectural quality to the heart of the area and widen housing choice. ▪ Secure further quality conversions of Tyneside Flats to larger single houses along the lines of Home Housing's work around Whitehall Road. ▪ Assist owners to achieve group repair and facelifting improvements similar to those underway on Durham Road. ▪ Upgrade the public realm to address the needs of residents, pedestrians and businesses as well as drivers and deliveries, with consideration for community led 'home-zone' projects. ▪ Work with residents to design better layouts for back lanes, including consideration of an enhanced version of the successful Kelvin Grove approach. ▪ Achieve a higher profile for the Shipcote Civic Centre and other historic buildings and landmarks. ▪ Better configuration and management of existing open spaces and the creation of a web of safe 'green streets' between them. ▪ Strengthen the relationship with Saltwell Park by improving access and reinforcing physical linkages especially along the Avenues. ▪ Shop unit consolidation and face-lifting alongside parking and streetscape improvements to Saltwell and Coatsworth Road shopping centres. ▪ General environmental improvements, particularly tree planting, to soften terraced environments. ▪ Review/replacement of hardest environments - especially back of footpath terraces. ▪ Corridor improvements along Lobley Hill Road/Bensham Road and Durham Road	▪ Further decline of poorest quality property and environments spreading to surrounding areas. ▪ Further decline of shopping areas with effects on their surrounding and perception of area. ▪ Limited physical opportunity to respond to expressed or suppressed community development needs eg recreation. ▪ Continuation of perceptions of poor conditions and lack of property choice potentially threatens long term market sustainability.



Plan 16 – Townscape Quality

