

Britannia Works Conservation Area

Appraisal



December 1999

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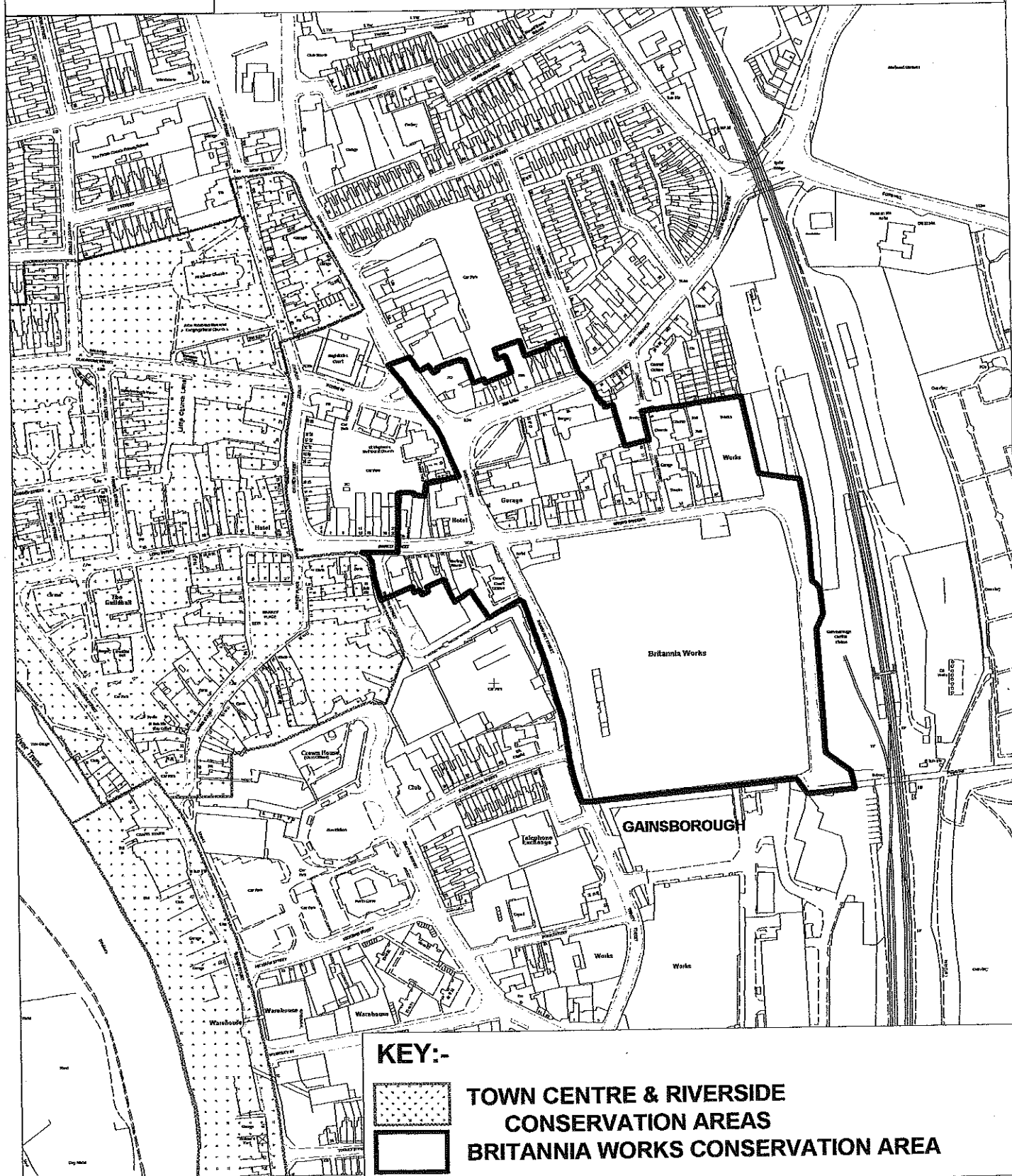
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Location Map

SCALE 1:3500



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BRITANNIA WORKS CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

LOCATION

The conservation area is based around the Britannia Works road junction in Gainsborough which is on the A159, the main route through the town. It extends from the existing town centre conservation area across the A159 to the railway line. It includes Spital Terrace, Spring Gardens, North Street, Cross Street and Beaumont Street. Britannia Works itself is a Grade II listed industrial building of enormous proportions (3.13ha in area) which dominates this entrance to the town centre. The area comprises a mixture of residential, commercial and industrial uses.

There are twelve listed buildings and also some good examples of architectural detailing in brick and stone with arches above windows and doors being particularly distinctive. In townscape terms the area is important as a primary entrance to the town centre with many buildings in the conservation area terminating vistas along streets.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

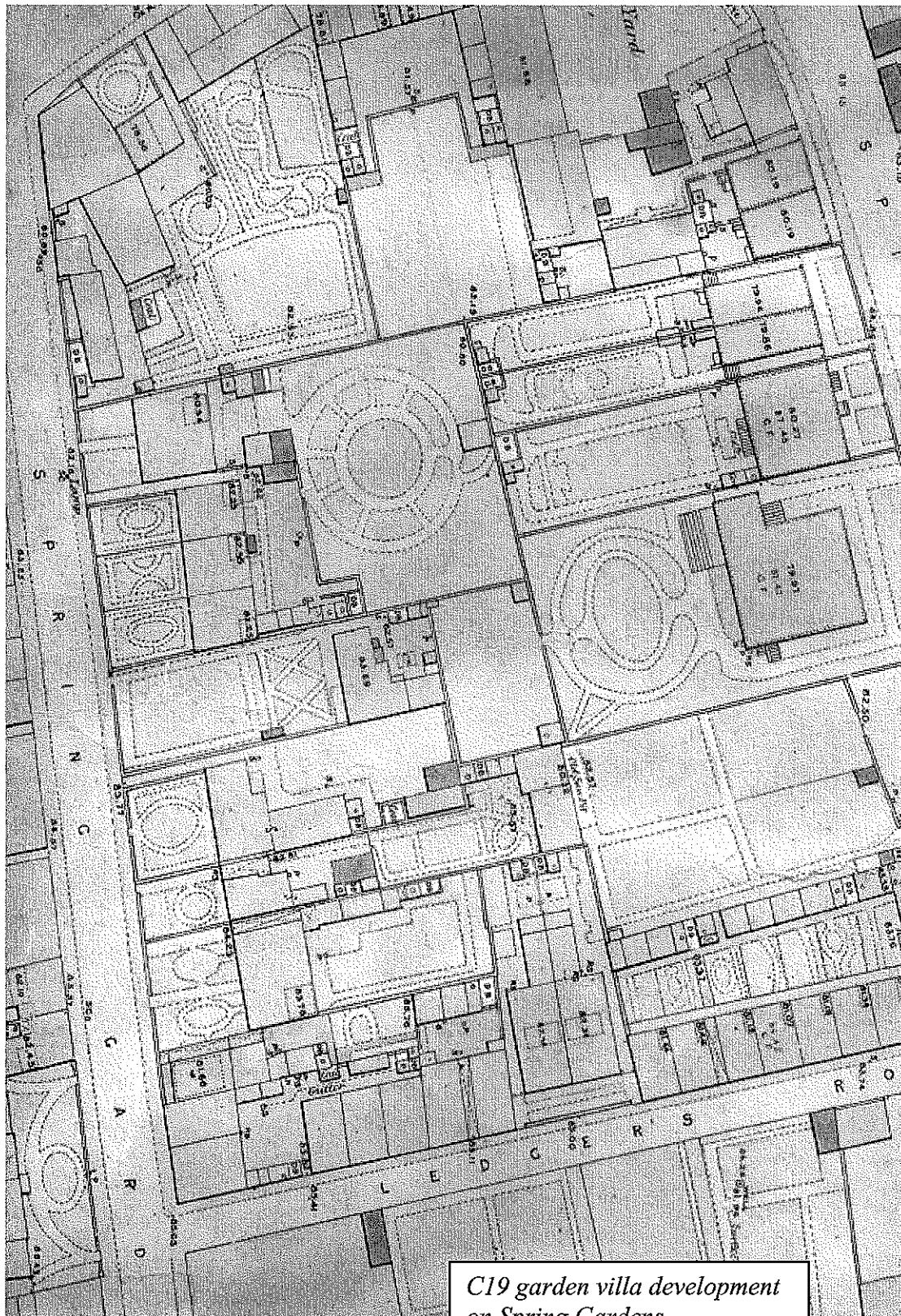
Market Street was developed as an extension to the commercial centre of the town based on the Market Place. Here several of the buildings are C18 with traditional shop fronts beneath two storey town houses. The most significant building is the Grade II* listed former Court House building dated 1759 which stands on the junction.

The junction defines the boundary of the next stage of town centre expansion, which is across the road at Spring Gardens and Spital Terrace. This part of Gainsborough was first developed at the end of the C18 when many professional and commercial families moved from the overcrowded courtyards in the centre of Gainsborough to new houses in what was then the edge of town. They built either terraced houses with front and back gardens or detached or semi-detached villas in their own grounds. The Ibbetsen map of 1853 shows quite clearly this more landscaped layout including some garden details. This basic structure is still evident today particularly along Spring Gardens with number 15 being a well maintained example.

Britannia Works followed in 1848 when Marshall's Engineering Company moved into their new premises on Beaumont Street. Marshall's was very important to the town at a time when Gainsborough was declining as a port. At its peak the firm employed 3,000 people and today Britannia Works remains the biggest building in the town. It not only occupied undeveloped land, as it grew it expanded onto land already developed with both housing, a Methodist Chapel and gardens on the south side of Spital Terrace.

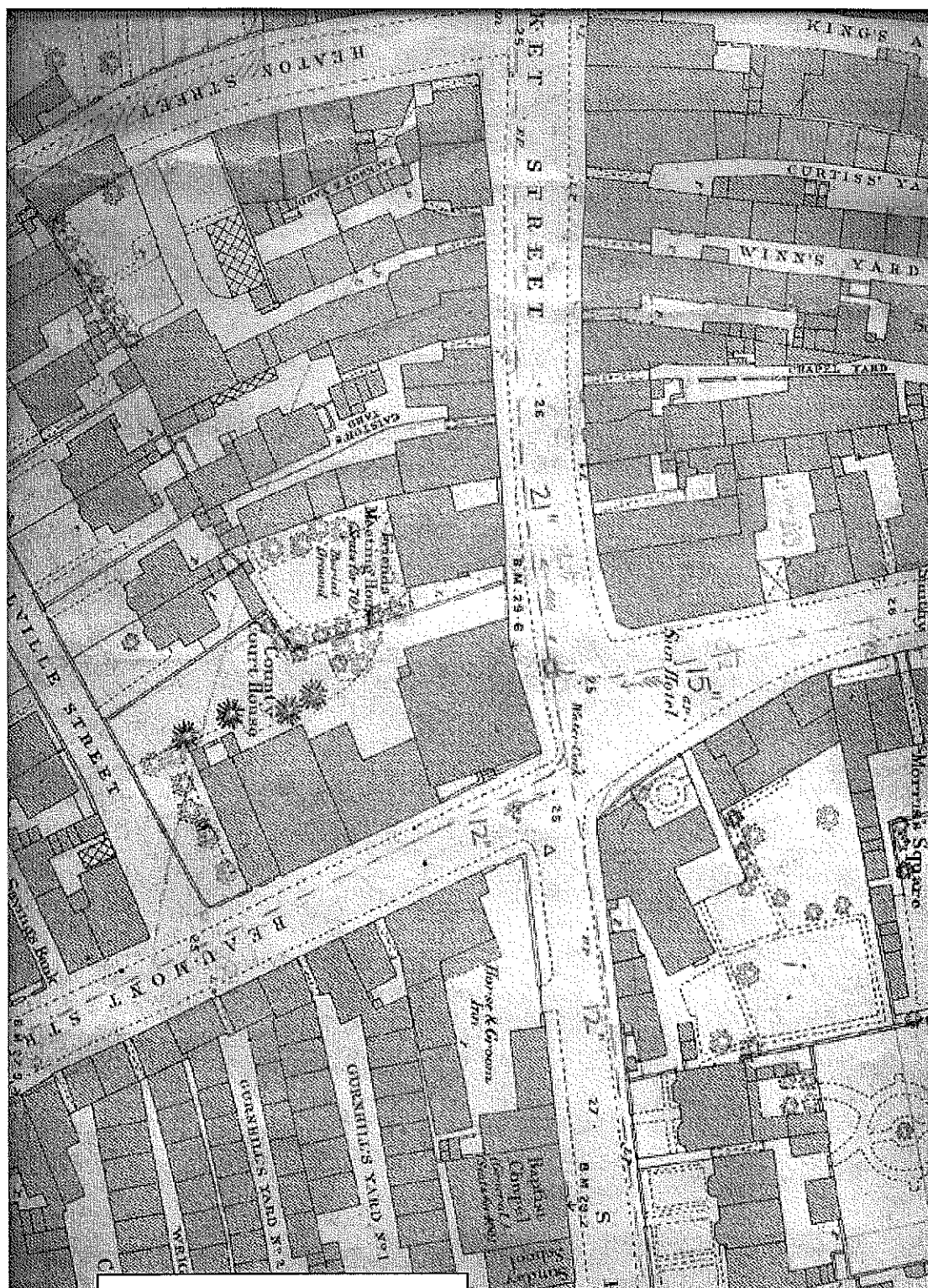
Other important Victorian buildings were constructed in the area, including the Police Station now the premises of the Gainsborough Theatre Club and St Thomas's Church, which are both listed Grade II, together with several large residential properties. The result was a mix of buildings and uses very much as exists today.

Ibbetsen's map – Gainsborough 1853



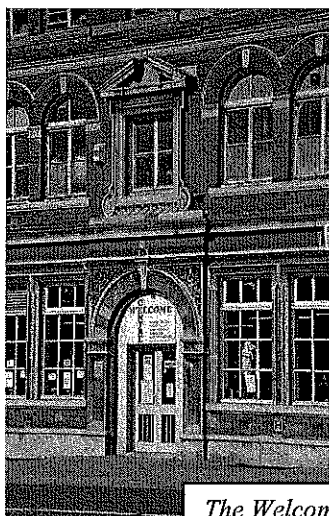
*C19 garden villa development
on Spring Gardens*

1885 Ordnance Survey map – Gainsborough Britannia corner



*Courts and yards town centre
housing in medieval plots, and
C19 villas on Spring Gardens.*

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC QUALITIES OF BUILDINGS



The Welcome Centre

The area is predominantly Victorian in character, particularly east of the main road. The bold use of brick is one of the most distinctive characteristics. Architects enjoyed the contrasts that could be achieved by combining bricks of different colours and brick and stone in one building.

Some examples in the conservation area are:

Spring Gardens - The former Police Station now the "Old Nick Theatre"

Spital Terrace – The Welcome Centre

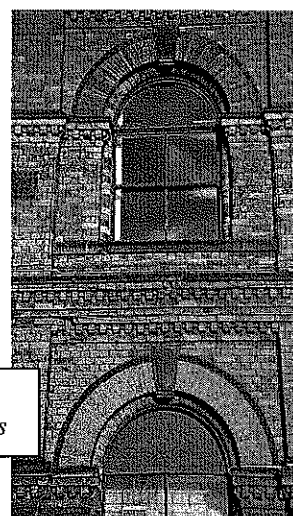
Decoration was also achieved by shaping bricks to create arches over windows and cill bands. Brick arches are a particularly distinctive feature in the conservation area and this has also been echoed in a modern context in the former post office building and within the boundary wall of the new Tesco's supermarket.

Some examples in the conservation area are:

Beaumont Street - Britannia Works

North Street – The Post Office

Brick arches in Britannia Works



Other features of Victorian buildings are pediments, Dutch gables and bay windows.



Dutch Gables on the Horse and Groom

Some examples in the conservation area are:

Spital Terrace - nos 13 – 19

Beaumont Street – Horse and Groom

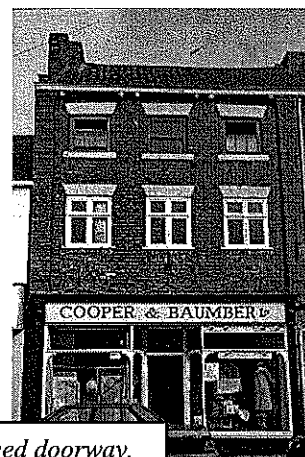
Unsympathetic alterations have occurred where these features have been removed or covered. Fortunately, this is not widespread in the conservation area.

The residential and commercial property of Market Street and Spring Gardens was generally established at

an earlier date to the Victorian property and

the character is different. Buildings here are simpler, often with windows arranged in a symmetrical pattern and with less detailing in the brick. Most of the shop fronts are traditional or small in scale which is a natural extension to those in the town centre conservation area.

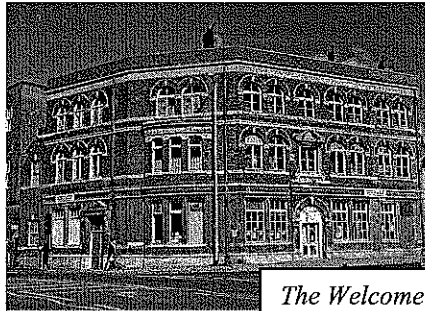
29 Market Street – traditional shopfront; recessed doorway, windows divided into small elements, painted fascia sign



Throughout the roofs are generally pitched and of the same height. Welsh slate, pantiles and plain clay tiles are common original roofing materials. The flat roofs of the modern Methodist Church and other buildings in this group are discordant and they are not included in the conservation area.

There are also a few redundant buildings, which are particularly concentrated on the Britannia Works junction. This gives a poor impression of the vitality of the town.

SPACES AND VIEWS



*The Welcome Centre,
strong corner building*

Space is confined in the conservation area. Street frontages are generally built up to the back edge of pavements and the overall effect is to emphasise the built form where buildings dominate. Corners are particularly strong with buildings following the curve in the road and being bold in design. They do not fade away but use their position to make a statement.

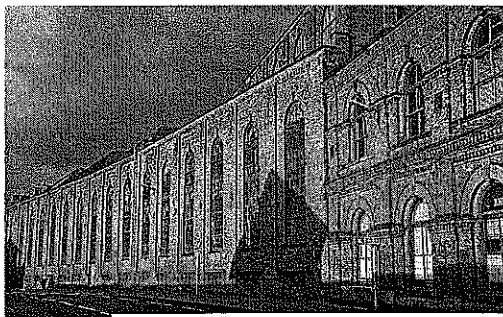
Within this overall character there are two exceptions: Spring Gardens and the corner of Spital Terrace and North Street. At Spring Gardens the buildings are set back from the road with the specific purpose of providing front gardens. However the improved quality of life that this once provided, has been compromised by the overshadowing effect of Britannia Works.

The Spital Terrace/North Street corner is weak with the space offering no substantial benefit to the conservation area. The planting and flowerbeds are low in height and the most significant feature is the series of

advertisement hoardings at the back of the site. The corner does however, provide a viewing point into the town centre conservation area with the church tower showing above the trees. Historically there always appears to have been open space at this junction and there is potential here for landscaped environmental enhancement.



The Spital Terrace/North Street corner is weak



Sweeping vista with repetitive arched window openings

Enclosed space is also significant along Beaumont Street, which is dominated by Britannia Works. Here the buildings follow the curve in the road and the repetitive arched windows lead the eye along and provide a very distinctive roadside elevation.

NATURAL FEATURES

Natural features make very little contribution to the conservation area and there is scope for introducing new planting to soften the built form and to enhance spaces. The only substantial trees are in front of no.16 Spital Terrace. Other important trees are those which form a backdrop to the eastern end of Spital Terrace. These are outside of the conservation area, in the cemetery.

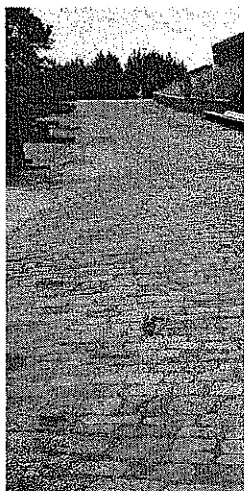


The doctors surgery tree on Spital Terrace

The lack of soft landscaping is in direct contrast to the initial vision for the area, which was to create a "garden suburb" outside the tightly built form of the town centre. The introduction of more landscaping therefore has a precedent.

Opportunities exist to enhance the planting on the open space at the corner of North Street and Spital Terrace and at the eastern end of Spital terrace along the railway embankment bordering Station Approach.

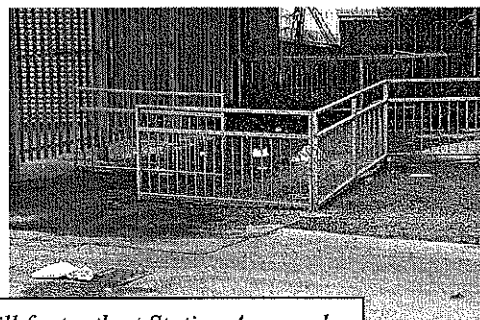
HARD SURFACES



Sandstone setts at Station Approach

There is very little of hard landscape value in the conservation area. Roads are functional rather than decorative and tarmac and concrete paving slabs predominate. Spring Gardens is the most interesting road having granite setts beneath the tarmac. More importantly, however, there are some very large stone setts which remain exposed at the eastern end of Spring gardens. These would originally have formed the access road to the railway yard. They are well laid and in excellent condition and make a positive contribution to the streetscape.

A particularly poor area of hard landscape is at the top of Pingle Hill where the footpath leaves the side of Britannia Works to pass under the railway line. Here some ugly fencing and a degraded surface make the path unpleasant. This is a focal point on Pingle Hill and some enhancement is required.

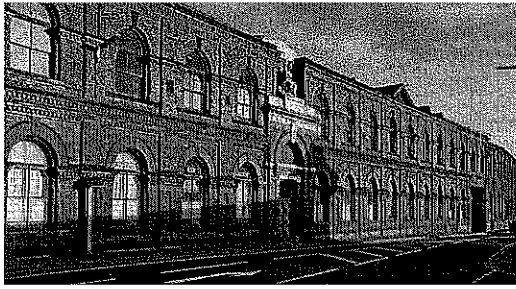


Pingle Hill footpath at Station Approach

TRAFFIC MOVEMENT

The conservation area is dominated by traffic being centred on two busy road junctions. The junctions are unpleasant for pedestrians and would benefit from traffic management and a reduction in the number of signs and roadside clutter. Several buildings along the route suffer badly from traffic mire, Britannia Works and the former Court House building are particularly dirty.

BRITANNIA WORKS



Britannia Works – office building. Grade II listed

Britannia Works by its sheer size is a significant building in the Gainsborough townscape and not just within the conservation area. It is recognised that the building has become redundant as an industrial building and that a new future is required. Any proposals concerning its future will necessarily involve a whole range of issues of which conservation will be a part.

In planning terms, its listing status takes precedence over conservation area designation. However, within the conservation area the elements which are of particular concern are the principle elevations and the roofscape. It was with these in mind that the Tesco supermarket was built with its roof beneath the Britannia Works ridgelines, and the boundary walls designed with brick arches.

Designation as a conservation area will not preclude alterations to and adaptations of the building, but any agreed changes will need to reflect its listed status and the impact the building has within the conservation area.

NEGATIVE FACTORS

Negative factors have been described throughout the document but are brought together here for ease of reference.

- The general decline of the area with a lack of investment
- Vacant and unsightly buildings particularly on the Britannia Works junction giving a poor impression of the vitality of the town
- Dirty buildings particularly along Beaumont Street
- Some loss of architectural features but this is minimal
- The lack of trees and soft landscape features
- A weak corner and poor open space at Spital Terrace/ North Street
- Uninteresting floorscape and a particularly poor surface on Spring Gardens
- The overshadowing of Spring Gardens by Britannia Works
- Poor surface and ugly fencing at Pingle Hill
- Traffic and the clutter of signs
- Pedestrian/vehicular conflict



Vacant buildings at Britannia works junction

These elements detract from the special character of the area and change would be welcome in order to make improvements.

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION AREA

This assessment is a means of understanding why the conservation area is important so that informed decisions can be made about its future and how change can be accommodated. However, it is also useful to briefly outline the aspirations for the conservation area as an indication of how the area might be improved and developed.

- Managed change within an integrated town centre and riverside strategy
- An improved entrance to the town centre
- Better traffic management particularly at the junction
- Reduction in pedestrian/traffic conflict
- Improved road and pedestrian surfaces
- Improved appearance of buildings
- New uses for important buildings and sites
- Encouragement of existing businesses and uses
- Retention of mixed uses
- An increase in the number of trees and enhanced open spaces
- Increased funding for regeneration



Britannia Works junction – entrance to town centre – Court House GradeII facing – pedestrian unfriendly*

CONCLUSION

The character and appearance of a conservation area is unlikely to be preserved or enhanced for very long unless economic vitality is encouraged. The aim must be to ensure that there is managed change so that the special character of the conservation area is retained and supported by new development.

GAINSBOROUGH BRITANNIA WORKS CONSERVATION AREA TOWNSCAPE ANALYSIS

