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## Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas | Development Guide

Former YMCA Building, Irish Street

April 2009



# Whitehaven Town Centre Heritage and Design Series

This document is part of the Whitehaven Town Centre Heritage and Design Series. This series has prepared on behalf of Copeland Borough Council to ensure that all development proposals in, or adjacent to, Whitehaven town centre's conservation areas are well-considered, of high quality and have regard to their historical context.

This series is addressed to:

- Residents and businesses;
- The local community;
- Ward members;
- Council departments, including planning, land and property and highways;
- Potential public and private sector developers;
- Statutory service providers, and;
- Relevant professionals, including builders, architects and planners.

Documents in this series are:

- **Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas Character Appraisal**

*This character appraisal identifies and explains the special historical and architectural character of Whitehaven town centre's conservation areas.*

- **Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas Management Plan**

*This management plan programmes short, medium and long-term actions to preserve and enhance the conservation areas.*

- **Whitehaven Town Centre Development Guide**

*This development guide outlines the urban design principles and criteria to be applied in the town centre.*

- **Whitehaven Town Centre Site Development Guides:**

- Site 1: Former YMCA Building Irish Street
- Site 2: Albion Street South
- Site 3: Albion Street North
- Site 4: Quay Street Car Park
- Site 5: Bardywell Lane
- Site 6: Gough's Car Park, Strand Street/ Malborough Street
- Site 7: Mark House, the former Victorian public baths and the Paul Jones Pub, Strand Street
- Site 8: Former Bus Depot, Bransty Row
- Site 9: Former Bus Station and Works, Bransty Row

*These site development guides are to be read in conjunction with the Whitehaven Town Centre Development Guide and indicate the degree and type of development that will be acceptable on each development site.*

- **Whitehaven Town Centre Public Realm Appraisal**

*This public realm appraisal provides guidance on the degree and type of surface materials and street structures that will be acceptable in the town centre.*

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the people of Whitehaven who provided invaluable local knowledge and encouragement during the preparation of this report, in particular Cllr John Kane, Cllr Jeanette Williams, Cllr Henry Wormstrup, John Crewdson of the Whitehaven and District Civic Society, Michael Moon of the Whitehaven Heritage Action Group and Celia McKenzie of the Whitehaven Harbour Commission.

Thanks are also due to the staff at the Whitehaven Record Office and Local Studies Library who provided helpful assistance and to the Lowther Estate who kindly permitted the reproduction of several of the plans within this document.

# Site Development Guide

## Former YMCA Building, Irish Street

### Purpose of the Guide

The information provided here is intended to be read in conjunction with the Whitehaven Town Centre Development Guide, 2008. The purpose of this Site Development Guide is to encourage appropriate high quality development on the site and the enhancement of the special historic character of this part of the town. The information provided should assist developers in appreciating the urban design issues relating specifically to the site and the town as a whole.

### Background

The site is the former home of the YMCA in Whitehaven. The building is of significant historical importance and the location, at the southern termination of the town's historic market place, is an important component of the Georgian townscape.

### Historical Background

This part of the town is where the earliest settlement was established in the early part of the 17th Century. At that time Whitehaven was a small fishing village on the southwest side of Pow Beck (a stream on the approximate line of Market Place). By the end of the 17th Century the involvement of the landowners, the Lowther family, and in particular Sir John (1642 – 1706) had established the town as a significant port and trading centre. Irish Street and James Street were laid out by 1700 and some time after 1713 the building at no's 44/45 Irish Street was built by James Milham, a merchant.

The building served as both a warehouse and family residence. This was a common arrangement at the time and a number of similar properties still



## Historical Background (Cont.)

exist across the town such as the Waverly Hotel on Tangier Street. The central building contained the principal rooms and one or both of the wings were used for warehousing. The warehouses were often unheated and did not have windows. An early photograph shows the west wing bereft of any windows, whilst the east wing has intake doors at street level.

This form of building is also of interest because of the court that was formed off the street. The Lowthers objected to such an arrangement and brought in regulations that required owners to build up to the street and not allow any ground to "lie waste" in front of houses.

The building has been adapted several times and in the early 20th Century was taken over by the YMCA. The wings have been increased in height and a number of openings added or altered. The railings and walling onto Irish Street have also been removed.

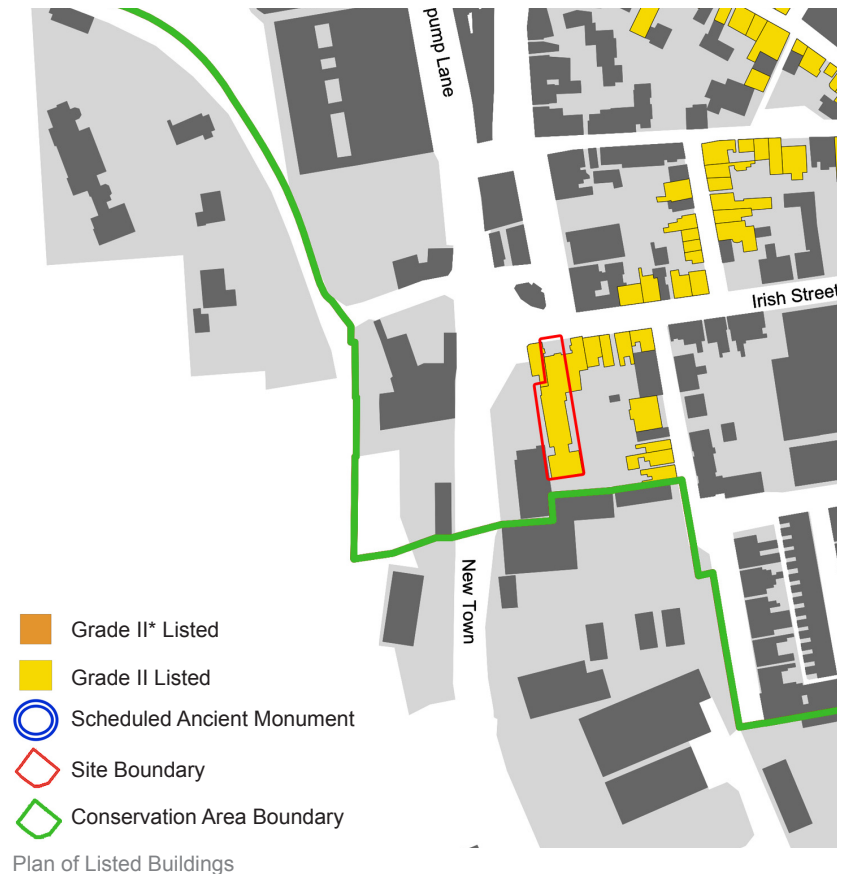
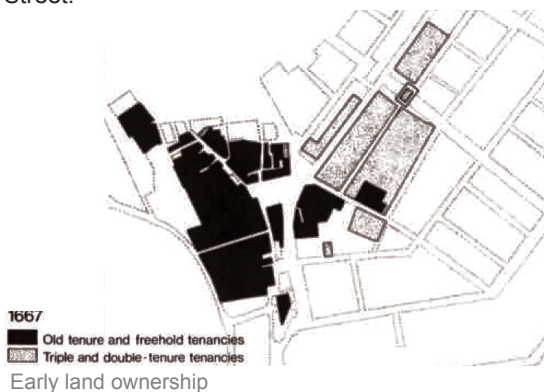
The site is within the Whitehaven Town Centre Conservation Area and the building is part of a grouping of grade II listed properties along Irish Street.



Early photograph at 1900



Railings removed and wings increased in height 1950





## Urban Blocks

The site is on the southern periphery of the Georgian town centre and was originally defined by New Town, Irish Street and Howgill Street. The block originally backed onto the open land of Castle Meadows. Additional blocks were later added southwards with the arrival of Preston Street Goods Station and the infirmary in the latter part of the 19th Century. A route connecting New Town to Barracks Road (later to be named Catherine Street) separated the block from the infirmary (later converted to a school).

Over the years the block has been redeveloped with a number of light industrial/retail buildings creating a huge single block that extends from Irish Street southward along the B5345 as far as Coach Road. This arrangement prevents any east/west connections east of New Town and Preston Street and impacts upon the permeability of the town in this location.



Catherine street looking west



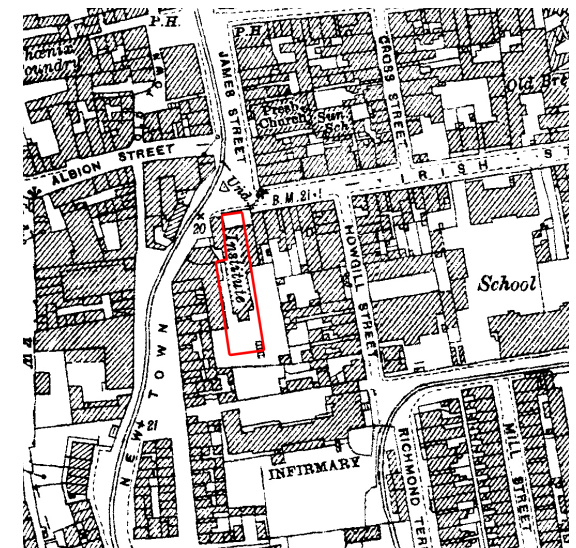
Aerial photograph of the site



Plan of Blocks



1790 Plan



1925 Plan

## Building Plots

The original building was the principal property on the block and occupied a significant plot fronting onto Irish Street, with extensive gardens to the rear. Much smaller plots enclosed the block and fronted onto New Town and Howgill Street. It was a specific decision on the part of the Lowthers to provide a variety of plot sizes to attract a range of owners. Over the years a number of the plots on New Town have been amalgamated to create sites for larger buildings. The result being a loss of any cohesive street-scene on New Town. However, Irish Street and Howgill Street have remained relatively intact and are both attractive streets.

The original plot of no's 44/45 Irish Street has been subdivided and the two original wings are now under separate ownership.



Building Plots Plan

## Density and Mix of Uses

The site has been developed for nearly 300 years and many of the original structures still remain in one form or another. Early development followed the principles laid down by the Lowthers with the buildings built up to the street edge, butting against each other. The site originally had a large garden but this was largely redeveloped in the 1900s when the YMCA took over the building. Adjacent properties had either small gardens or yards. The loss of buildings on New Town has significantly diminished the density of the block.



Howgill Street



Low grade street scene on New Town



Building Usage Plan



The former YMCA building is currently vacant. Adjacent uses on Irish Street and Howgill Street are predominantly residential with some retail and leisure uses. On New Town there is a collection of low-grade retail/light industrial uses with associated surface car parking. The site is also close to the historic market area. Appropriate uses for the site would include offices and residential.

Irish Street is a busy and attractive vehicular and pedestrian route. Howgill Street is a quiet residential street. New Town is a busy vehicular route which, because of the lack of cohesion in the street scene, is not particularly pedestrian friendly. The area attracts large numbers of pedestrians accessing the market.



Irish Street



Frontage Activity Plan



Existing Building



New Town and Irish Street junction

## Height and Massing

The Lowther Estate encouraged land owners to build 3 storeys in height to help create a strong urban setting. Consequently, the majority of the Georgian town is 3 storeys in height and subsequent developments have tended to follow suit.

The site was originally a warehouse and family residence of a wealthy merchant. The main building is in fact two storeys, originally with single storey wings. However, the building occupies a significant plot (a reflection of the owners wealth) and there was presumably less need to build higher. The two wings fronting onto Irish Street were subsequently increased in height to two storeys. The adjacent properties on Irish Street and Howgill Street are predominantly three storeys in height.

On New Town the rear buildings on the site are clearly visible and two storeys in height. Further south along New Town the retail/light industrial buildings are generally single storey, approximately 5m high.

The building on the site is a collection of forms, consequently the overall massing is relatively modest and in keeping with the general character of the town centre. The proportions are vertical with the façade predominant and the double pitched roof kept low key.

On Irish Street and Howgill Street the adjacent properties are a collection of similar (but not identical) structures.



Typical three storey properties on Irish Street



Building Heights Plan

## Views and Vistas

The site is at the termination of an extremely important vista from Market Place. The positioning of this building plot on this axis is no accident and was clearly planned by Sir John Lowther. A large plot was created to attract a substantial property.

The site is also visible from a distance along Swingpump Lane and New Town. In both cases the adjacent surface car park onto New Town exposes low grade buildings to the rear of the site that were not designed to be seen from the public domain.



View to Site from Market Place



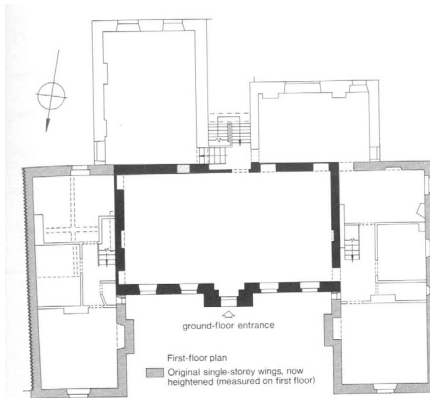
## Building Type

The building has undergone a number of changes since it was originally constructed in the early 18th Century. The floorplate has been extended to include much of what would originally have been a garden area.

The storey heights are more generous than elsewhere, and reflect the wealth of the original owners.

The building connects with the adjacent property on Irish Street to create a continuous building line up to the street. The 'U' shaped plan form of the original building is a feature of a number of merchant's houses with adjoining warehouses. The main residence being set back from the street to create a semi-private courtyard.

The building façades are relatively plain with little modelling. The central block has a protruding bay terminated by a gable interrupting the roofline. The roofs are generally simple double pitched structures with simple gable chimney stacks.



Plan of Building

## Façade and Interface

The character of the town's façade is defined by a consistent pattern of modest openings arranged in a repetitive sequence. The main façade of the former YMCA building is relatively intact, albeit in a poor state of repair. The main entrance is central to the façade, facing the street. The boundary definition to the front court is non-existent and this area has been given over to surface parking. Originally there was a low wall, railings and gates separating the court from the street. This would have helped define a clear building line with adjacent properties which were built up to the back of footpaths.

The entrance to the building is emphasised by a projecting bay and roof top gable.

## Details and Materials

The building is stone built with harled finish. Flat stone dressings define the openings and there are moulded string courses and an eaves cornice. The roof is double pitched and finished in dark slate with parapet gables. The chimney stacks are simple rectangular structures harled to match the walls. The original ground floor sash and case windows have been replaced with casements that detract from the façade proportions.

The façade has been painted in keeping with the majority of buildings in the town centre. A strong terracotta colour has been used and this has the tendency to increase the visual bulk of the building and make the façade look overwhelming. This creates an imbalance in the overall composition of the townscape and detracts from the overall character of the town.

## SITE RESPONSES

- Retain and sensitively restore the historically important Irish Street façade.
- Upgrade rear buildings that are now visible from New Town.
- Encourage good quality uses that are appropriate to this quarter of the town.
- The front courtyard should be retained and sensitively landscaped. The court should not be used for parking. The street edge should be reinforced by the reinstatement of original walls and railings.
- Limit the height of buildings to the rear of the site to three storeys to avoid any structures being visible above the main façade as seen from Market Place.
- Ensure the façade colour and materials contribute to the character of the town centre.