

Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



August 2010

Front cover (L – R): View of Commercial Street and harbour from Fort Charlotte, 1880s, *Shetland Museum and Archives*; The Islands of Shetland, H. Moll, 1745, *National Library of Scotland*; Lerwick waterfront, *Austin Taylor Photography*



Prepared for Shetland Islands Council by the Scottish Civic Trust.

Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area Character Appraisal Contents

1 Introduction, Purpose and Justification

- 1.1 Date and reason for designation
- 1.2 What does conservation area status mean?
- 1.3 Purpose of appraisal
- 1.4 Planning policy context

2 Location and landscape

- 2.1 Regional context & relationship to surroundings
- 2.2 Geology
- 2.3 Topography
- 2.4 Planned landscapes

3 Historical Development

- 3.1 Settlement development

4 Character and Appearance

4.1 Spatial Analysis

- Activities/Uses
- Street pattern
- Plot pattern
- Circulation & permeability
- Open spaces, trees and landscape
- Views, landmarks & focal points

4.2 Buildings and Townscape

- Building types
- Scheduled monuments
- Key listed and unlisted buildings
- Materials & local details
- Public realm
- Condition

4.3 Character Areas

5 Key Features / Assessment of Significance

6 Negative Factors

7 Sensitivity Analysis

8 Opportunities for Preservation & Enhancement

9 Monitoring and Review

Appendix 1 – Listed Buildings in the conservation area

Appendix 2 – Further Guidance

1 Introduction, Purpose and Justification

1.1 Date and reason for designation

The Shetland Islands area has 3 conservation areas; 2 in Lerwick and 1 in Scalloway. The Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area was designated in 1975 in recognition of its waterfront setting, its unusual town plan and its buildings worthy of preservation.

1.2 What does conservation area status mean?

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that conservation areas “are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

The main regulatory instrument afforded by conservation status is the control of demolition of unlisted buildings and structures through the mechanism of “conservation area consent” (CAC). This was introduced in 1974 in recognition of the importance that even relatively minor buildings can play to the overall character or appearance of a conservation area (in general terms, the demolition of a structure unless it is a listed building is deemed for the purposes of the Planning Acts not to involve the development of land).

Conservation area status also brings the following works under planning control:

- Removal of, or work to, trees;
- Development involving small house extensions, roof alterations, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior.

Conservation area designation enables planning authorities to implement stronger development management control via Article 4 Directions, which would otherwise not be possible. These can play a particularly important role in protecting unifying features (e.g. doors, windows and shop-fronts) and in arresting the incremental erosion of character and appearance by small-scale alterations that in themselves may not be significant but collectively and over time might have a negative impact.

It is recognised that the successful management of conservation areas can only be achieved with the support and input from stakeholders, and in particular local residents and property owners.

1.3 Purpose of appraisal

Planning Authorities have a duty to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, although there is no imposed timeframe for doing so. The Act of 1997 also indicates that planning authorities must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the designated area.

A more considered and careful approach is therefore needed in considering development proposals in a conservation area.

In response to these statutory requirements, this appraisal document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area and identifies opportunities for enhancement. The appraisal conforms to Scottish Government guidance as set out in *Planning Advice Note 71: Conservation Area Management* (December 2004). Additional government guidance regarding the management of historic buildings and conservation areas is set out within *Scottish Planning Policy* (February 2010), in *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* (July 2009), and in a series of Historic Scotland guidance notes *Managing Change in the Historic Environment*.

This document therefore seeks to:

- 1 define the special interest of the conservation area and identify the issues that threaten the special qualities of the conservation area;
- 2 provide guidelines to prevent harm and achieve enhancement;
- 3 provide Shetland Islands Council with a valuable tool with which to inform its planning practice and policies for the area.

“Preserve or Enhance”

It should be noted that the phrase “preserve or enhance” has been the subject of debate over the years, and is one of the few areas of historic environment legislation that has been subjected to legal tests. A landmark case, now known as the Steinberg principle (from *Steinberg & another v. Secretary of State for Environment*, 1988) together with further refinements of other cases (notably *South Lakeland District Council v SofS for the Environment*, 1992) defined the statutory objective of preserving and enhancing as one that achieved by positive contribution to preserve or by development which leaves the character or appearance unharmed. This is now largely considered to be the principle of “do no harm”. This assessment is required to be done against the whole of the Conservation Area, unless it can be demonstrated that there are areas of distinct character within the area. Then, the assessment of “do no harm” is made in the context of the relevant character area.

1.4 Planning policy context

This appraisal provides useful advice to assist in the submission of, and subsequent assessment of, applications for development within the conservation area. It should be read in conjunction with the wider development plan policy framework produced by Shetland Islands Council.

The Development Plan for Shetland Islands comprises:

The Shetland Structure Plan, 2000 establishes a development strategy for land use planning in the Islands until 2015 and adds a regional dimension to national guidance. In doing so it provides a spatial framework for other strategies in the region including Local Plans.

Chapter 3: Built and Natural Environment

Policy SP BE1 – Built Heritage

The Shetland Local Plan, adopted in 2004, translates the wider aims of the Structure Plan into the detailed framework needed by communities, developers, public agencies and the Council itself if land use decisions are to be soundly based. It helps to co-ordinate future development and promotes improvement and enhancement of every part of Shetland. In addition the Local Plan also sets out the criteria by which all planning applications are considered. The following sections are particularly relevant:

Chapter 3: Natural & Built Environment

Policy LP NE10 - Development and the Environment

Policy LP NE15 - Protection of Trees

Policy LP BE4 - Preservation and Re-use of Disused Buildings

Policy LP BE5 - Protection and Enhancement of Buildings

Policy LP BE6 - Listed Buildings

Policy LP BE7 - Conservation Grants

Policy LP BE8 - Development in Conservation Areas

Policy LP BE9 - Demolition in the Conservation Areas

Policy LP BE10 - Shopfronts in Conservation Areas

Policy LP BE11 - Advertisements and Signs

Policy LP BE12 - Closure of Lanes and Closes in Lerwick Town Centre

Policy LP BE13 – Design

Appendix C – Shopfront Design Guide

Appendix F – Siting & Design Guidance and Principles

2 Location and landscape

2.1 Regional context & relationship to surroundings

Lerwick is the capital and administrative centre of the Shetland Islands with a population of approximately 7000, and provides services for a large surrounding area. Lerwick is the most northerly town in Britain being located more than 100 miles (160 km) off the north coast of mainland Great Britain on the east coast of the Shetland Mainland. Lerwick is about 210 miles (340 km) north of Aberdeen, and 230 miles (370 km) west of Bergen in Norway.

Lerwick has strong ties with Scandinavian countries, particularly Norway. This is reflected in the street names of Lerwick (e.g. King Harald Street, King Haakon Street). In 2007 Lerwick had a population of 7070; a third of Shetland's total population. The discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1970s led to the building of the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal, and Shetland is now a major transit point to the North Sea oil rigs.

Ferries from Aberdeen arrive at the Holmsgarth terminal a mile north of the old harbour. There is also a roll on-roll off ferry service to Bressay and Out Skerries from a terminal within the conservation area. Island bus services start and end at the Viking Bus Station, just to the north of the conservation area.

The Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area encompasses the historic core of the town based around Commercial Street and the historic lanes, which run at right angles to it. The conservation area extends from the waterfront to the edge of the new town. The main route into and through the conservation area is the A969; Commercial Road in the north, Esplanade along the waterfront and South Road and Scalloway Road to the south-west.

There is a relationship between the Lanes Conservation Area and its immediate neighbour, the Lerwick New Town Conservation Area. Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area was designated in 1975. Hillhead was considered an important part of the conservation area, rather than simply the boundary between the old and new towns. Consequently the boundary included a few buildings on the western side of Hillhead in order to protect the setting of Hillhead. Lerwick New Town Conservation Area was designated in 1986. The existing western boundary of the Lanes Conservation Area was accepted as the eastern boundary of the New Town Conservation Area. This boundary line would benefit from some rationalisation to include buildings which were previously part of the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area in the New Town Conservation Area, which is a better match for their character.

2.2 Geology

Shetland's geology is similar to that found in the north-west Highlands of Scotland's mainland. On Shetland there is mainly hard and acidic rock, which gives soil poor in nutrients and prone to waterlogging. Under such conditions plant remains cannot decay, and accumulate to form deep deposits of peat. This is exacerbated by leaching in the cool, damp climate and the loss of the scrubby woodland that once covered much of Shetland. The waterlogged, nutrient-deficient land supports 'blanket bog' vegetation and naturally fertile

soils occur only where banks of limestone lie close to the surface of where shell sand provides the calcium necessary to 'sweeten' the soil. Shetland's blanket bogs are distinctive within Scotland.

Lerwick and its surrounding area is mostly made up of sandstones with some beds of conglomerates (rock made up of water-worn cobbles) to the north of the town.

2.3 Topography

The built-up area of Lerwick mainly occupies a small peninsula that projects into Bressay Sound. Lerwick town radiates west from the harbour area, which hosts the winding arterial thoroughfare of Commercial Street. The Lanes area is sheltered to the north, south and west and the land slopes steeply upwards from the harbour basin. There is a natural incline towards Fort Charlotte, which was originally built on a cliff above the town. The south-east portion of the town which extends into the Sound of Bressay is generally more flat, tapering towards the coast, but the landform rises up again into sea cliffs at Twagoes Road. The western side of the peninsula at the Knab also slopes upwards and there are more cliffs to the shore overlooking Brei Wick.

The steep landform of the central Lanes area as it slopes towards the shore is a strong feature of the townscape of the oldest part of Lerwick. The area from Commercial Street to the waterfront is built on land reclaimed in 1886.

2.4 Planned landscapes

Historic Scotland has responsibility for the compilation and maintenance of the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, which records those sites of regional and national importance. There are no Inventory entries in the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area.

3 **Historical Development**

Shetlanders have been making a living from the land for 5000 years. The remains that the successive residents left behind are amongst the most complete in the country telling us much about the ancient history of Scotland. The many Iron-Age brochs that are still evident in the coastal landscape show that defences were as important at one time on Shetland as they were in the rest of Scotland. Clickimin on the edge of Lerwick; a Scheduled Monument managed by Historic Scotland, provides an example of these uniquely Scottish structures. The Pictish traditions of the rest of Scotland are found on Shetland in the physical remains of settlements and field systems, carved stones and silver objects.

In Norse times (around 1000 AD), the islands were a stepping stone between Norway and its more southerly outposts; Dublin, Orkney, the Hebrides, Iceland, Isle of Man. Mentioned in the Norse saga 'Orkneyinga Saga', written by an Icelandic historian in the late 12th century, Shetland appears to have been a stable farming community. The influence of the Norse settlers on Shetland is still felt to this day; with place names and cultural traditions as evidence of this. The Norse word 'voe', meaning sea inlet, is used frequently in place-names across Shetland and the Norse fire festival of Up-Helly-Aa, although only introduced when Norse history was rediscovered by the Victorians, is celebrated every January in Lerwick.

Shetland was originally part of the Norse Earldom of Orkney but reverted to direct rule from Norway after 1194. By the 14th century the Norwegians had lost the more southerly islands of Man and the Hebrides and Norway had been taken over by Danish rulers. The marriage treaty of Margaret, Princess of Denmark to James III of Scotland involved a dowry of 10,000 florins. Part-payment of this dowry involved pawning of the Shetland Islands to Scotland on condition that when Denmark paid the debt, she would revert back to Danish rule. Attempts by the Danes to take Shetland back in the following centuries were unsuccessful. Scottish landowners moved into the islands and the law, language, economy and religion of Scotland prevailed in Shetland. The bishopric of Orkney and Shetland was transferred to the see of St Andrew's in 1472.

Fishing and fish processing is still the biggest industry on Shetland and has been for many centuries. Finnie¹ describes the typical Shetlander as, 'a fisherman with a croft'. The trade grew through Bergen in Norway which was a trading port of the Hanseatic League; a confederacy of trading cities across northern Europe during the late Medieval and Early Modern period. In return for cod and ling, the islanders would receive cash, grain, cloth, beer and other goods.

A passage of text on Moll's 1745 Map of the Shetland Isles states that the export of herring to the Dutch provided employment for all the people and that fishing and the export of other Shetland products provided 'a considerable sum of money yearly'.

¹ 'Shetland: An Illustrated Architectural Guide', Mike Finnie, 1990, p.4



The Islands of Shetland, H. Moll, 1745, National Library of Scotland

Herring became the dominant catch of the fishing trade during the late nineteenth century replacing the earlier cod. Herring fishing in Lerwick had failed in around 1840 but an offer from Hay & Co in the 1870s for Orkney boats to come north and fish herring at a favourable price per cran revived the industry. Shetland almost overnight was on course to become the biggest herring fishing centre in Britain with Lerwick as the main port.

Lerwick's docks grew and the processing of fish was the mainstay of the islands until the 1970s when oil was discovered and brought ashore. This resulted in a prosperous boom for the islands as building works, transport links and mariners were in demand for supply and maintenance of the new technology needed for the oil terminal at Sullom Voe. The terminal has forged a sensitive approach and managed to avoid large-scale pollution whilst pumping millions of pounds into the local economy and allowing the population to grow on the islands.

Lerwick

17th century

Lerwick's name comes from the Old Norse for muddy bay, *Leirvick*². Lerwick became the Shetland Isles' capital in the 17th century, relatively late in Shetland's history, mostly due to its new-found importance as a port. The Dutch herring industry allowed the port to become an important export site. A collection of huts on the western shore of the Bressay sound were what Lerwick consisted of at the beginning of the seventeenth century³. In '*Lerwick: the birth and growth of an island town*', James W. Irvine suggests that the structures may have been little more than flimsy booths, with a sense of impermanence. All of the shoreline

² 'Lerwick' leaflet, Shetland Amenity Trust, 1999.

³ 'Central Lerwick: An Area for Conservation', Zetland County Council, 1975.

was part of the scattald of Sound; a scattald being a tax-paying district, comprising one or more townships. Sir John Buchanan, Sheriff Principal of Orkney and Shetland, ordered the houses of Lerwick to be demolished in 1625 due to the outrageous behaviour of those who traded with and supplied the Dutch⁴. The possibility of trading from this area had now been established and the next logical step was the erection of solid, permanent buildings to replace the flimsy temporary booths.

It is not known when the first permanent house was built in Lerwick. Captain Smith was frequently in Bressay Sound in 1633 and was very impressed with the Sound's harbour but never once mentioned Lerwick or suggested that there was a single house standing there. The name 'Leirwick' is used for the first time in 1644 in a sasine entry, which mentions Robert Sinclair of "the tenement of land and house newly built thereon in the bay or weik callit Leirwick or Brassaysoundsyd". The witnesses to the charter were Hew Sinclair and Thomas Dunkason, both described as "indwellers in Lerwick". In 1647 Robert Sinclair now "in Lerwick" was again involved in a charter which mentions the tenement "of hous, with the yard, etc., presently possessed by him in the town and banks of Lerwick, as the same is dyked about and marched, lying betwixt the house and the tenement possessed by Hew Tyrie on the east and the house possessed by William Sutherland on the west. With his peat banks, and freedom of casting peats, on the Nes of Lerwick, set off to the said house".

From these two entries we can deduce that the place was being called Lerwick as early as 1644 and that the settlement had a number of residents in the 1640s who were obtaining official feus from the owners of the Sound scattald.

During the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the seventeenth century the ramparts of Fort Charlotte were built in 1665 for Cromwell's troops by John Mylne, Master Mason to the Crown. The fort was named after George III's queen. The building of the fort allowed for permanent settlement of Lerwick.

Fort Charlotte grew into the form it takes to this day in 1781 when the garrison blocks were built and the fort used again to defend against American warships during the American Wars of Independence. The fort remains the most complete example of its type to survive.



The Tolbooth, c.1885.

Shetland Museum and Archives

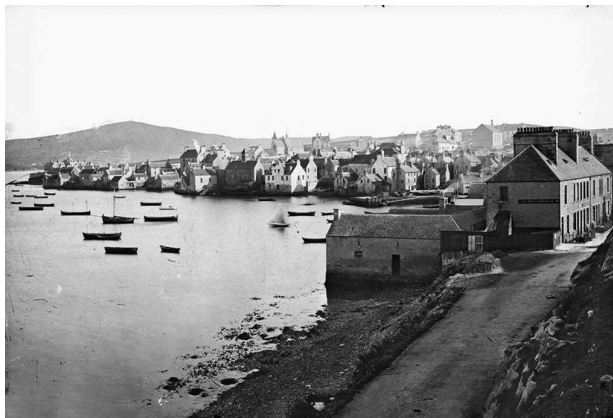
18th and 19th centuries

Scalloway was the ancient capital of Shetland and was the location of Shetland's annual parliament or 'Ting' until around 1700 when the law courts moved to Lerwick and the town's dominance in commerce and transport began. It is estimated that by 1701, when Lerwick became a parish separate from Tingwall, the population of the town was about 700. The Old Manse appeared

⁴ 'Lerwick' leaflet, Shetland Amenity Trust, 1999.

before 1700 and Patrick Scollay's house – No.10 Commercial Street - was built around 1730. The Tolbooth was completed in 1770 and the Fort was remodelled and renamed in 1781. The town grew through the 18th century and became its own parish. By the middle of the 18th century, Lerwick had grown into a prosperous trading centre. The years from 1790 to 1820 were the most important in Lerwick's urban history as the town expanded rapidly. Between 1799 and 1815 the population grew from 900 to over 2000⁵.

Commercial Street and the lanes are the distinctive heart of the town of Lerwick. The distinctive lanes spread out from Commercial Street with gables to the street and narrow spaces providing shelter from the wind. The street plan is from the earliest expansion of Lerwick during the 17th and 18th century although most of the buildings date from the 1800s. The buildings that line the route of Commercial Street are an essential part of the fabric and character of Commercial Street, displaying the traditional street pattern of this area with many being either B or C(S)- listed. Unlike a traditional burgh plan with a linear marketplace and set rigs on either side; it is thought that the development in Lerwick was rather informal, as merchants built their large houses along the sea shore which at this point roughly followed the line of the present Commercial Street. The pattern of development is therefore a distinct response to local conditions. The houses were built with their gable ends towards the sea to protect them from the elements. Many of the lanes were originally known by the names of the early builders, but were renamed by the Commissioners of Police in 1845 to reflect personalities and themes of that time; Joseph Leask's Closs, Gilbert Tait's Closs and Sutherland's Closs thus became Pitt, Reform and Fox Lanes.



View of Commercial Street & harbour from Fort Charlotte, 1880s
Shetland Museum and Archives

Dr Arthur Edmonston gives his impression of Lerwick in 1809 in his 'View of the Present State of the Zetland Islands'. Edmonston estimated that the town contained around 300 houses built from stone quarried from above the town. Some of them were handsome erections, many with doors and windows ornamented with freestone. He said that, "the houses, however have been set down without any regard to any

plan, and generally with their ends to the sea. The principal street, or rather row, which extends from one end of the town to the other, is in many places well-paved with large flags; it is, however, of very unequal dimensions, and in some parts does not exceed six feet in width". He remarked upon the agreeable effect from the houses having been built on the hill, noting that this contributed much to the 'ornament' of the town.

By 1862 it was clear that the crowded conditions in the lanes meant that there was very little space available for building. The Feuars and Heritors were the organisation that really

⁵ Finnie, p.8.

controlled Lerwick and it was clear that the only space for new building was in the 'town parks' i.e. the ground from Hillhead to Burgh Road and from Breiwick Bay to Freefield. The herring trade financed the growth of the town during the late nineteenth century. Expansion to the east resulted in the gridiron formation of a New Town. Regular squares of development were formed and these exhibited the symbols of civic pride such as the Town Hall and the County Buildings⁶

The Harbour

In the nineteenth century the docks of Lerwick began to increase in size and capability. At the south end of the harbour Gillie's Pier was built in 1817 for James Copland and is now known as Copland's Pier. The harbour then developed northwards with many private piers and lodberries constructed up to Fort Charlotte. Simultaneously with this development Hay and Ogilvy were developing the Freefield site to the north of the main harbour area to become Hay's Docks; warehousing, curing and boat-building structures were included in this large site. Hay's Dock was completed by 1825 for the curing, boatyards and warehouses of the herring trade, which reached its peak at the turn of the 20th century.

Much of the land along the Esplanade was reclaimed in harbour works in 1886. This was at the time that new feus were being taken up in the New Town and a spirit of advancement was found in Lerwick. The foreshore was completely altered as a result of the works. Cockstool and Morrison's Pier were no more and numerous lodberries disappeared or were put to other uses.

Victoria Pier was built in the mid-nineteenth century and extended during 1883-6. Albert Wharf, located between Victoria Pier and Fort Charlotte, was also constructed during this later period. Alexandra Wharf, sited between Fort Charlotte and North Ness, was completed by 1908. There can be no doubt that the harbour works were of great economic importance to the development of Lerwick. In 1905 Lerwick was Britain's busiest herring port. A further smaller pier was constructed during 1913-15 to the south of Victoria Pier, which formed the Small Boat Harbour.



Looking north along the lodberries which now form the buildings on the Esplanade, c.1870s
Shetland Museum and Archives

The unique 'Lodberry' structures on the harbour were used for loading and unloading of goods from boats brought alongside them. The word comes from the Norse *hlaoberg*, meaning a flat stone or place where boats could be brought alongside. The picturesque grouping of Robertson's Lodberry at 20 Commercial Street is A-listed and a fine example of the complexes of buildings which made up Lerwick harbour. It consists of a shop, house, sail-loft, curing shed, sea wall and

noost. Noosts are found around the west and north coast of Scotland and are places to keep

⁶ 'Lerwick' leaflet, Shetland Amenity Trust, 1999.

boats safe when they have been pulled out of the water. The small private piers associated with these lodberries have mostly been lost due to reclamation of the land in later development of the waterfront. These complexes also allowed an illicit trade to be carried out and Lerwick had a reputation for being a hotbed of smuggling. The lodberries give the waterfront of Lerwick a unique and picturesque appearance, as they are all of slightly different size and design.

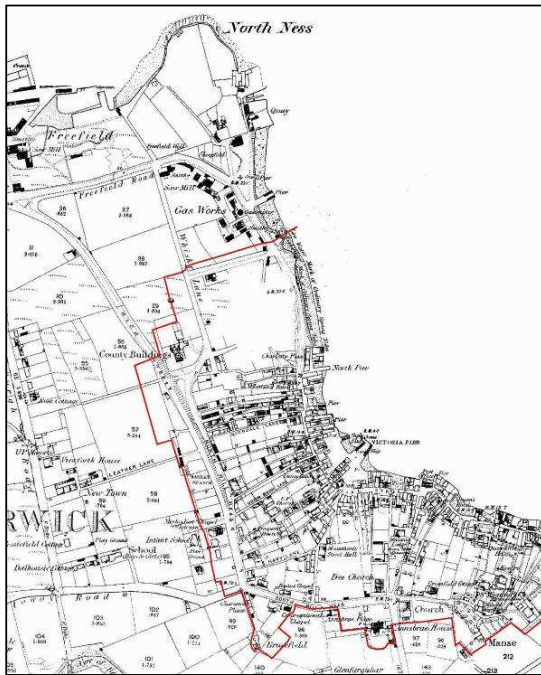
20th century

By the mid 20th century the area behind Commercial Street consisting of the tightly packed, steep and narrow lanes contained many derelict and decayed sites. Housing has long been a priority for the Council in Lerwick and in the post-war years permission for a modest amount of public housing was given. In the 1950s and 60s Richard Moira, an Edinburgh architect, designed a series of small infill housing schemes in the Lanes area, to turn run down backland sites into simple terraced housing with pedestrianised lanes and landscaped courts. The Heddell's Park and Annsbrae scheme between Mounthooly Street and Queen's Lane won a Saltire Society Housing Design Award in 1959. The rear of Burns Lane, Hill Lane and Fox Lane were demolished to allow a swimming pool to be built in the 1970's. This area is now a car park and has meant the sad loss of the distinctive lane-end gables on Hillhead.

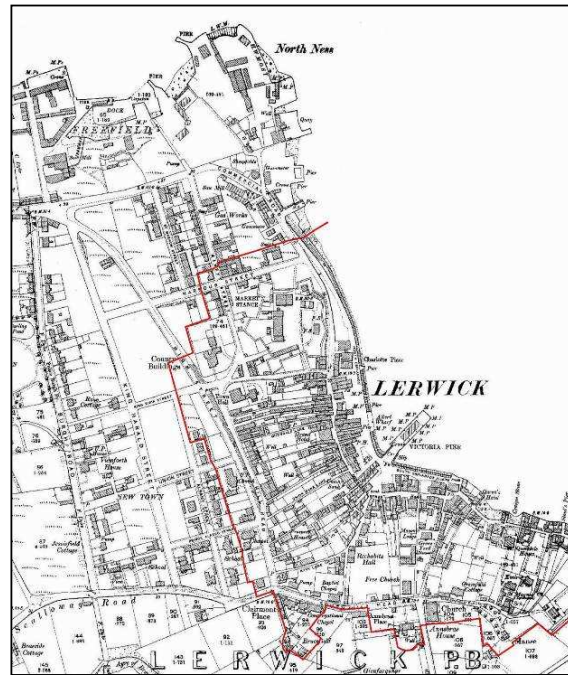
The town expanded to the north and south during twentieth century, with much new housing constructed during the 1970s to accommodate the influx of residents working at Sullom Voe or as an indirect effect of the oil boom.

The designation of a conservation area in 1975 was hoped to allow sensitive redevelopment of the important and unique townscape, and to halt unsympathetic development such as the swimming pool.

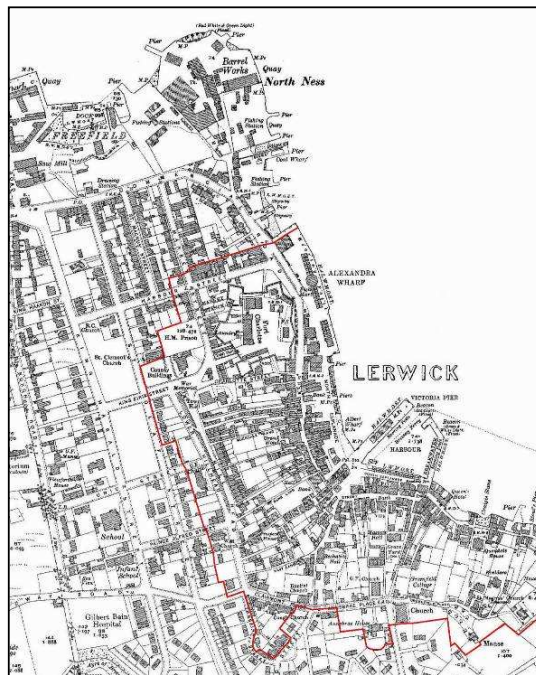
The very recent past has seen a renaissance of the waterfront in Lerwick. The new Shetland Museum and Archives Building (opened in 2007) at Freefield is a bold and imaginative modern building and the project included the restoration of the historic dock and storehouse and neighbouring boat-building sheds that give Hay's Dock a sense of continuity. The Lerwick Waterfront Regeneration project recently won the national award at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning for 2008.



OS Map 1880



OS Map 1901



OS Map 1930

4 Character and Appearance

4.1 Spatial Analysis

4.1.1 *Activities/Uses*

Lerwick is a busy and prosperous commercial centre. It is the main town of the Shetland Islands, serving a large hinterland with outside commodities and with social and business services.

From the narrow winding Commercial Street to the waterfront, building use is generally commercial and retail. Upper floors appear to be generally underused, although many are in residential use. A detailed survey of vacancy would prove useful. The dense lanes are more predominantly residential. In the south end of Commercial Street, retail and commercial use of buildings is declining. This change of use must be managed carefully to ensure that the character of this part of the conservation area is not eroded. Public buildings such as the library, churches and the Town Hall and larger stone villas are generally found along Hillhead, on the edge of the New Town.

4.1.2 *Street pattern*

Commercial Street forms the historic core of the conservation area, in places narrow and winding, and opening out to greet larger buildings such as banks and the post office, and at the Market Cross. Narrow flagged lanes to the west rise steeply; whilst lanes and closes on the right offer glimpses of the waterfront. Commercial Street was the first street in the town, as houses were laid out along the waterfront. Dr Edmonston's account of the town in 1809 [see Section 3] notes that there were houses on both sides of the street, with the buildings on the seaward side projecting into the sea. These would have been the lodberries that provided each merchant with his own little pier and store.



Commercial Street

Running approximately parallel to Commercial Street is the Esplanade, which was constructed in 1886 using reclaimed land and changed Lerwick's waterfront almost beyond recognition. Since that time the lodberries, which were once on the shoreline, have stood on dry land.

The southern part of Commercial Street opens out into the greatly enlarged Church Lane. There has been much 20th

century housing development in this area, which has generally retained the historic pattern of the lanes.

Hillhead is built at two levels, separated by a well-tended grassy bank and marks the edge of the historic core and the beginning of Lerwick's New Town.

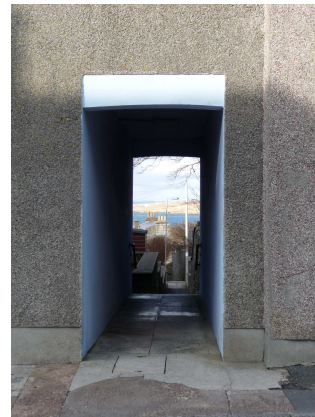
To the north the streets become more regularly laid out. Charlotte Street runs immediately south of Fort Charlotte, and despite its name retains the feeling of a lane. Market Street, once known as Whiskey Lane heads north from the junction of Charlotte Street and Hillhead past Fort Charlotte. Harbour Street runs east-west between the Esplanade and St Olaf Street in the New Town.

4.1.3 Plot pattern

The plots within the conservation area vary in size and shape depending on the area and the relative status of the house concerned. In the lanes area where development is dense, the plot sizes are fairly small. Early merchants' houses in Lerwick were built on the waterfront with gable ends towards the water and long narrow plots the width of the gable stretching out behind them. It appears that these plots were then built on gradually as the town developed, while the narrow gaps between them emerged as the lanes we see today. On the fringes of the lanes and around the Hillhead area, where more substantial stone villas are found, plot sizes increase correspondingly. Larger plots are associated with the larger properties, such as Annsbrae House or where the land is used for public buildings such as the Town Hall or the churches.



Law Lane – buildings were built with gables towards the sea



Queen's Place – existing lanes have been retained as pedestrian routes.

Modern infill has mostly been on the existing pattern either as a result of demolition or plot subdivision. A significant amount of development was carried out in the 1950s-70s when parts of the lanes area were redeveloped for housing. This housing works with the existing street pattern, retaining the lanes as pedestrian routes through the area, while small common green areas are inserted.

4.1.4 Circulation & permeability

Commercial Street was historically the main thoroughfare through the town. It is now largely pedestrian; its winding and narrow character is not suited to modern traffic levels. The Esplanade, built on reclaimed land in 1886, is now the primary vehicular route through the conservation area. The wider roads such as Church Road and Hillhead also carry significant levels of traffic.



Commercial Street is narrow and winding



The Esplanade is the main vehicular route.

Commercial Street therefore is a pedestrian area more suited to the shopping activity generated in this area. There is no vehicular access to the lanes and the network of pathways and steep lanes invites pedestrian exploration. There are some cross lanes that connect adjacent lanes allowing further permeability. The lanes leading from Commercial Street to the Esplanade provide glimpses of the waterfront and allow easy pedestrian movement between these two main streets.

The 20th century housing developments have retained the existing lanes, although the distinction between public and private space is not well defined in places.

4.1.5 Open spaces, trees and landscape

The dense nature of the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area means there is very little public open space. Some of the larger properties, particularly along Hillhead, have generous and mature gardens and the streets are wide, giving a feeling of open space. Otherwise, Commercial Street has a sense of enclosure, due to its narrowness and the small scale of any breaks in the buildings lining it.

The mid 20th century housing developments between Hillhead and Church Road have small communal green spaces inserted into the pattern of lanes.



Poor quality spaces in the lanes detract from the historic environment.

Shetland's lack of trees is well known and the majority within the conservation area are found on private land such as gardens. This is particularly the case around the Hillhead and Greenfield Place area where plot sizes are generally larger.

Underused and poor quality spaces were identified as part of this study (*identified on the Townscape Appraisal Map as 'Areas for Enhancement'*). These spaces currently detract from the historic environment and their reuse would be desirable. These areas have also been identified for enhancement within the Lerwick Town Centre Action Plan (2009). Similar small derelict spaces such as Crooked Lane (rear of Jamieson's Knitwear) and Norna's Court (rear of J.R. White) were improved in 1998 by the Lerwick Town Centre Management Group. The works included stone flags, drystone dykes, cast iron railings, and planting.

4.1.6 Views, landmarks & focal points

Views within the conservation area vary. The harbour setting provides views over the Bressay Sound towards landmark buildings on the island of Bressay. The high points provide good views from the lanes towards the waterfront and over the Bressay Sound. This higher ground also allows views of the roofscape of the lanes and Commercial Street. Views within the lanes area are limited due to the enclosed character here and the dense pattern of development. In general the level changes within the conservation area allow for glimpses between buildings to areas of higher or lower ground.

Views of special note are:

Views from the waterfront over the Bressay Sound;

Views over the lodberries and harbour from South Commercial Street above Leog Beach;

Views from Fort Charlotte over the town;

Views looking back at the town from Victoria Pier / Bressay Sound

Glimpses between buildings and over changes in level in the lanes;

Views of the New Town from Hillhead and Charlotte Street;

The view of the Tolbooth terminating Church Road.

Landmark buildings in the conservation area tend to be the larger non-domestic buildings such as the churches, the Tollbooth, the Post Office, Fort Charlotte, the Town Hall, Bank of Scotland, the Grand Hotel and the Queen's Hotel.



Views over the Bressay Sound



And back towards the town from the pier.

4.2 Buildings and Townscape

4.2.1 Building types

The most prevalent building type in the conservation area is the house, either detached, semi-detached or terraced.

Buildings range from 1 storey to 3 storeys bordering Commercial Street. The building pattern in the lanes and Commercial Street is very dense, while along Hillhead, buildings are generally larger and set in generous plots. The Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area has many 18th century buildings, dating from the period when Lerwick was expanding quickly into a prosperous trading centre. Commercial Street and the lanes also contain many 19th and early 20th century buildings that may have replaced earlier structures. An analysis of the approximate period of construction for buildings within the conservation can be found on the *Building Analysis Map*.

Commercial Street and the Esplanade are the focus for most of the retail and commercial activity with shops, banks and cafes. Some of these buildings would once have been merchant's residences built directly on the waterfront.

Many of the larger public buildings such as churches, the Town Hall and the County Buildings are found along the fringes of the conservation area, where development is less dense and plots are larger to allow for these grander buildings.

4.2.2 Scheduled monuments



Fort Charlotte is a Scheduled Monument

A scheduled monument is a monument of national importance that Scottish Ministers have given legal protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Fort Charlotte is the only designated Scheduled Monument within the conservation area. The area scheduled encompasses the area within the walls of the Fort, the walls themselves, and an area extending 2 metres in front of the walls on all sides.

Once a monument is scheduled, the prior written consent of Scottish Ministers is required for most works, including repairs. This is called scheduled monument consent (SMC). The presumption of scheduling is that any future works will be the minimum necessary consistent with the preservation of the monument.

4.2.3 Key listed and unlisted buildings

The conservation area contains 82 list entries. Each list entry may consist of more than one building. Listed buildings are identified on the *Townscape Appraisal Map*.

The listing system in Scotland operates under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. The Act places a duty on Scottish Ministers to compile or approve lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Once included on the lists the building – both exterior and interior – has statutory protection under the provisions of the 1997 Act. Listing is intended to safeguard the character of Scotland's built heritage and to guard against unnecessary loss or damage. A listing applies to any building within the curtilage of the subject of listing which was erected on or before 1 July 1948. This could include many ancillary structures such as boundary walls, garages or estate buildings.

Any work that affects the character of a listed building or structure will require listed building consent (LBC). Any work carried out to a listed building without consent, and that affects its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest, is an offence punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

Significant listed buildings include:



The Lodberrie, category A listed

'The Lodberrie', which was built in the late 18th century. It was formerly known as Robertson's Lodberry, after Bailie John Robertson who was joint agent with Charles Merrylees for the North of Scotland and Orkney and Shetland Steam Navigation Company, who owned the neighbouring "steamer" storehouse at 18 Commercial Street. Although the (then ruinous) former shop to Commercial Street was rebuilt circa 1950 and there have been some minor changes to the fenestration, this complex remains a remarkably intact example of the commercial and domestic development of a lodberry, which has led to it being listed at category A. The walls are of random rubble and the buildings are generally 2 storeys enclosing a small flagged courtyard. It is, however, most famous for the picturesque quality of the grouping, and as such is reputed to be one of the most photographed

buildings in Shetland.

The Old Manse is the oldest inhabited building in the conservation area. Built in 1690 and now B-listed it was purchased by the Heritors of the town from Mr Dick of Wornadale, to house the first minister, Mr Milne. His successor, Mr Waldie, bought the house from the Heritors who rented different houses for successive ministers pending the building of a new manse. The building is near symmetrical with 2 storeys and 3 bays. The front elevation is random rubble with a central porch of circa 1900 and harled side and rear elevations.

The Tolbooth was built circa 1767-70 on the site of a 17th century predecessor. The building is 2 storeys and 5 bays on a rectangular plan. The walls are harled with sandstone detailing. The building was restored in 2005 and the original clock tower reinstated. The Tolbooth served as Lerwick's Post Office from 1878 until 1910.

The Town Hall (B listed) was built in 1881-3 shortly after the new town was begun, illustrating the new corporate spirit of the burgh in the later 19th century. Before it opened, public meetings were held in a disused church, and Magistrates' Court and Town Council meetings in a room of the old Parish Kirk. The hall is a 2-storey, 5-bay symmetrical Gothic and Flemish Baronial town hall, with a square tower to the rear with flanking 2-storey gabled wings giving a square plan. The walls are built from Bressay stone with Eday sandstone ashlar dressings and details. It sits on the junction of Hillhead and Charlotte Street near the War memorial and really marks the boundary between the dense historic core of Lerwick and the spacious New Town.



The Tolbooth, 1767-70



The Town Hall, 1881-3

The Peerie Shop was built around 1735 as a storehouse on Grieg's Pier, or lodberry, which was originally on the waterfront until the esplanade was built in 1886. It was the lodberry of James Greig, merchant, and was also where Thomas Stove had his block making establishment. It is a rare survivor amongst the dense development built following construction of the Esplanade in 1886. The building is C(s) listed and takes the form of a long single storey and attic, 7-bay rectangular building with gable to the street and closes to either side. The walls are of random rubble with sandstone dressings.

99 Commercial Street (J R White & Co.) was built in the 18th century. It has 2 storeys and an attic and presents a 2 bay gable to Commercial Street with a 6 bay elevation to Gardie Lane. The walls are harl-pointed rubble with some cement rendering. A moulded doorway is stranded high up on the north elevation since the forestair has been lost. To Commercial Street there is a traditional painted shopfront at ground floor. The RCAHMS description of 18th March 1935 records; "Although unlikely to have been built until the second decade of the 18th century, this large tenement standing end-on to the W side of the street seems to be the oldest house in the burgh. The gable towards the street has been refaced, probably at the time when a shop with large windows to the east and north was formed within. On the north, a forestair with a good moulded cope and panelled pedestal, the latter ending in a spherical finial, rises from the street to a landing at 1st floor level, whence it is continued downward to a back court. From the landing, a central doorway gives access to the interior. The cornice and architrave of the doorway are moulded, the frieze being enriched with flutes. The house has been modernised internally, but still contains some late Georgian panelling". The list description describes this building as the most interesting of its period in this part of Commercial Street.

The conservation area also contains a large number of *unlisted* buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area. These are identified as 'positive buildings' on the *Townscape Appraisal Map*.

Buildings identified as being *positive* will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the street or landscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a *positive* contribution to the special interest of the conservation area. Where a building has

been heavily altered, and restoration would be impractical, they are excluded. National policy guidance indicates that there is a presumption for the retention of unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of a conservation area (Scottish Planning Policy 23: Planning and the historic environment).

No.179 Commercial Street is the central section of a 5 bay, 3 ½ storey terrace. The ground floor consists of retail premises, presumably with offices and residential space in the upper floors. The terrace was built between 1880 and 1900. The shopfront at No.179 is traditional in style with a central 2-leaf panelled storm door with fanlight and flanking windows. Over the door and windows is a painted sign for Smith & Robertson.



Traditional shopfront at 179 Commercial Street



Gladstone Terrace, Hillhead

No.8 Claremont Place is typical of the larger stone dwellings found along Hillhead at the edge of the new town. The property was built in the early 20th century in rubble walling with stone dressings to the windows and doors. The building is set back from the roadside slightly behind a low stone boundary wall with black iron railings. The elevation onto Claremont Place has 3 bays and 2 storeys and an attic. The central door is flanked by paired sash windows and the slated roof features a central dormer window. The building turns the corner onto Hillhead where there is a 2-storey canted bay window and a further dormer window above. The building is currently in use as a guest house.

Gladstone Terrace, on Hillhead is a short row of 5 houses set slightly back from the road. Each house has two bays with paired sash windows on ground and first floor to one side and a door with single sash window above to the other side. The houses are very simple with snecked stone walling and chamfered detailing around the windows and door. Each house features a dormer window set in the pitched slate roof, and benefits from a small front garden with a boundary wall and railings to the road.



14 Reform Lane

No.14 Reform Lane is a 19th century domestic building situated towards the top (western) end of Reform Lane (previously Gilbert Tait's Closs). It is typical of many of the buildings found in the lanes, demonstrating the traditional gable-to-harbour pattern of this area. The 3-bay house has 2 storeys and a 1metre high stone boundary wall separating it from the lane. The walls are of harl-pointed rubble and it has a pitched slate roof and a one-storey lean-to on the western gable.

4.2.4 Materials & local details

In Lerwick Lanes the most important materials are buff-grey and yellow sandstone, harl, and natural slate. Traditionally, roofs are pitched and slated with dominant gables presented to the street. This focus on the gable-end gives the buildings a strong vertical emphasis. The roof pitches are generally around 45° with skews and prominent chimneys.

For walls buff sandstone is most popular, otherwise a traditional harl is often used, sometimes with window and door detailing. Walls are generally of rubble construction often with slaister (harl) pointed joints. The more prestigious buildings may feature coursed ashlar walling but stonework is most often irregularly coursed, known as snecked walling. Generally, applied colours within the conservation area are muted pastels or white, except on Commercial Street where some properties are painted very rich, bright colours.

Apart from the roofs and walls, the historic buildings in the conservation area are enlivened by the use of timber windows and doors, the design of which varies according to the status of the house. Windows are generally timber sash and case, vertically proportioned with a range of glazing patterns. Doors within the conservation area are generally timber 6 panel doors or timber boarded doors in the lanes. The door styles found on Commercial St tend to relate to the building use, and timber doors with panes of glass are commonly found on commercial properties. The more substantial properties around the Hillhead area often have double timber storm doors, generally with 6 or 8 panels. While Article 4 directions have helped to ensure that replacement features are generally sympathetic; a historic building starts to lose its authenticity as soon as any part of its original fabric is replaced. Traditional windows can be upgraded to modern standards in a number of simple and cost-effective ways and so replacement should always be a last resort.



*Timber boarded door on
Commercial Street*



Timber sash and case windows at Ellesmere Buildings

Traditional shopfronts in the conservation area vary but the oldest shops have a domestic appearance, with a central door and flanking windows or just one window. Later properties will have a door flanked by much larger windows. Modern designs are rather formless with large areas of glazing and minimal framing and detailing.

Signage is often a controversial feature in conservation areas. Traditional signage in the conservation area is a flat timber sign with painted lettering above the door or windows or painted directly onto a stone or rendered fascia. Several of the commercial properties along Commercial Street feature a decorative tiled floor in the doorway.



Traditional shopfront on Commercial Street



And how it looked c.1900

Boundaries are usually marked by stone or harled walls from ½m - 2m high. Along Hillhead walls are often combined with railings and stone gate piers. Railings are usually simple and elegant and painted a dark colour, often with iron gates. Shetland was largely spared from the removal of iron railings during World War II and there are some fine examples in Lerwick. Higher boundary walls are found to the higher status properties.

4.2.5 *Public realm*

The public realm in Lerwick varies greatly between areas. Commercial Street was re-flagged with Caithness stone as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded project in 1999 and the stone slabs complement the historic buildings. In places stone slabs have been replaced with areas of tarmac where works have been carried out, detracting from the otherwise high quality public environment. Street lighting on Commercial Street is via traditionally styled iron hanging lamps fixed to the buildings.



Floor surfaces and street lighting are generally high quality

Within the lanes, the public realm varies in quality. Stone slabs are found in many of the lanes with stone steps and metal handrails, which suit the intimate character here. However, in others, the ground surfaces are of lower quality and appear neglected. Lighting in the lanes is provided by traditional lamps fixed to the walls of the buildings, although there are a few modern 'security' type lights and a few free-standing street lights.

In contrast, along the Esplanade, the character is much more functional and relates to the harbour uses. Here the road and pavement surfaces are generally simple tarmac and concrete. Metal bollards and low chunky metal railings reflect the marine character and the larger scale of this

area. Lighting along the Esplanade comes from very tall modern street lights – again reflecting the increase in scale along the waterfront.

Hillhead has areas of stone pavement slabs that complement the historic buildings. Low stone boundary walls are a particular feature in this area, often with railings and gate piers. Lighting is provided by standard unobtrusive modern streetlights, reflecting the more suburban character here.

Street name signs are generally traditional with raised black lettering on a white background. They often note the previous names of streets or lanes, adding another level of interest.

4.2.6 Condition

One of the greatest threats to any heritage site is the loss of primary fabric through decay and damage, reducing the authenticity of the site. The vast majority of the buildings within the conservation area are well-maintained. However, a number of cases of stone erosion were noted due to the use of cement mortars and renders in the saline environment of the harbour. This type of damage can lead to more serious problems in the future and is best dealt with early.

A significant threat to the historic fabric is inappropriate modern details and materials, such as replacement windows, doors and boundaries.

4.3 Character Areas

An analysis of the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area indicated that it can be divided into six character areas, roughly according to historical development; street pattern and layout; built form; and uses and activities.

These are:

1. Waterfront/harbour area
2. Commercial Street
3. The Lanes
4. Hillhead
5. Fort Charlotte

It should be noted that the boundaries between these areas are blurred, as the buildings close to the boundaries may contribute to the character of more than one character area.

4.3.1 Character Area 1: Waterfront

This area extends from the northern edge of the conservation area to the breakwater and forms the eastern boundary of the conservation area. The area consists of the piers and the associated buildings such as Albert Building. The character of this area is very much connected to the functional aspects of this area such as the ferry terminal and the harbour. Typical materials include corrugated metal cladding, stone, concrete surfaces and metal

bollards. The main route through the waterfront is the Esplanade, which has an open aspect over the Bressay Sound. The historic buildings lining the eastern side of Commercial Street form the western boundary of the character area and this part of the conservation area has accommodated some successful contemporary interventions such as the new Lloyds TSB bank. The historic buildings on the western side of the Esplanade are lodberries that would once have stood on the water's edge until the waterfront was reclaimed in the late 19th century. These buildings can be seen to contribute to the character of both the Waterfront Character Area and the Commercial Street Character Area, as they form the boundary between the two.



Water Pumping Station on Victoria Pier



The waterfront from Fort Charlotte

4.3.2 Character Area 2: Commercial Street

Commercial Street is the historic core of the conservation area and is the main shopping street in Lerwick. This character area curves from the south-east corner of Fort Charlotte to Copland's Pier at the south-west of the conservation area. Commercial Street is lined by buildings with narrow frontages presenting a gable to the street and extending into the lanes behind. The street is narrow and is unsuitable for modern traffic levels. The buildings contain a great variety of shopfronts but Commercial Street has retained much of its character despite changes in commercial practices. Some 18th and early 19th century shopfronts, which



Commercial Street



South Commercial Street



Market Cross

have a more domestic character, still exist and make a significant contribution to the character of the area. The street is generally paved with stone or concrete flags. The buildings on the western side of the road provide shelter while allowing glimpses of the waterfront down the narrow lanes.

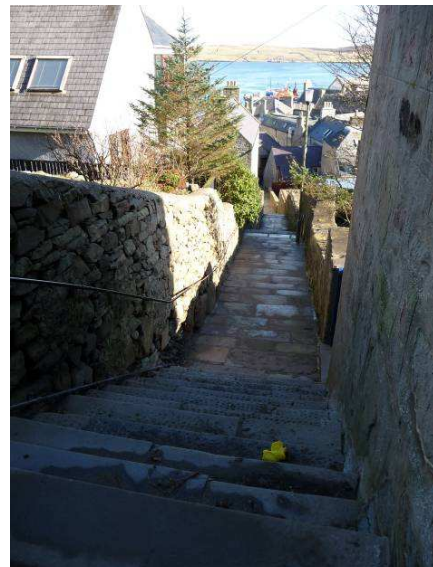
At the south end of Commercial Street, commercial use is declining and the area feels more tranquil and residential. Here there are areas where the beach is just beyond the sea wall and the street feels more exposed to the elements. In some places the sea is directly accessible from the street down the historic slipways.

4.3.3 Character Area 3: The Lanes

The lanes area extends from the eastern side of Commercial Street up a steep incline to Hillhead and encompasses the historic lanes, which form a significant part of the unique townscape of Lerwick. Along Commercial Street the buildings are set with their narrow gables facing the street and the long body of the building extending behind. The lanes are formed by the spaces between these properties. Buildings in the lanes are generally 19th century stone properties in domestic use although there are several churches and office uses. The lanes themselves are very narrow and totally inaccessible to vehicles. Many are paved with stone slabs with metal handrails and steps due to the steep gradient; however in some places the public realm appears neglected. There is very little open space in the lanes except for private gardens, which are often hidden behind stone boundary walls. There are

several areas of 20th century housing that have retained the lanes and in some cases are organised around small green spaces. At the top of the lanes, buildings generally turn to face Hillhead.

Clockwise from top left: Pitt Lane, Law Lane & Reform Lane



4.3.4 Character Area 4: Hillhead

Hillhead is built at two levels, separated by a well-tended grassy bank. The houses on the upper level are medium-sized dwellings with small gardens, whilst those lower down are larger. The gothic St. Ringan's Church, on the lower level of Hillhead, was built in 1885 by R.G.G Sykes, a Liverpool architect. The majority of buildings are of stone with grey slate roofs. Towards the War Memorial, the view is terminated by the many gabled façade of the Gothic County Buildings. To the south Hillhead turns to the east towards Annsbrae House and Greenfield Place. Here we find further medium sized stone villas and several churches.



Hillhead



7 Hillhead

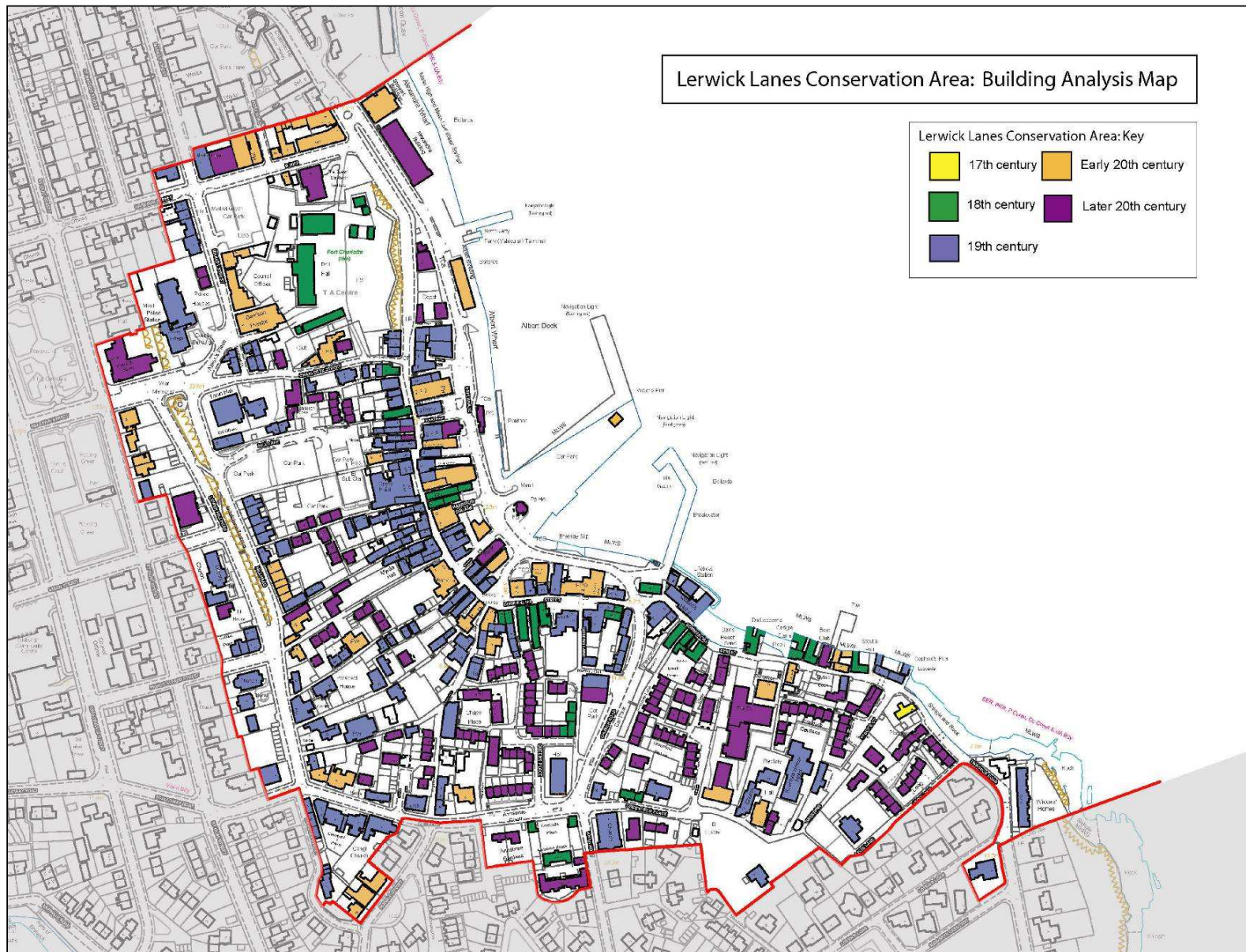
4.3.5 Character Area 5: Fort Charlotte

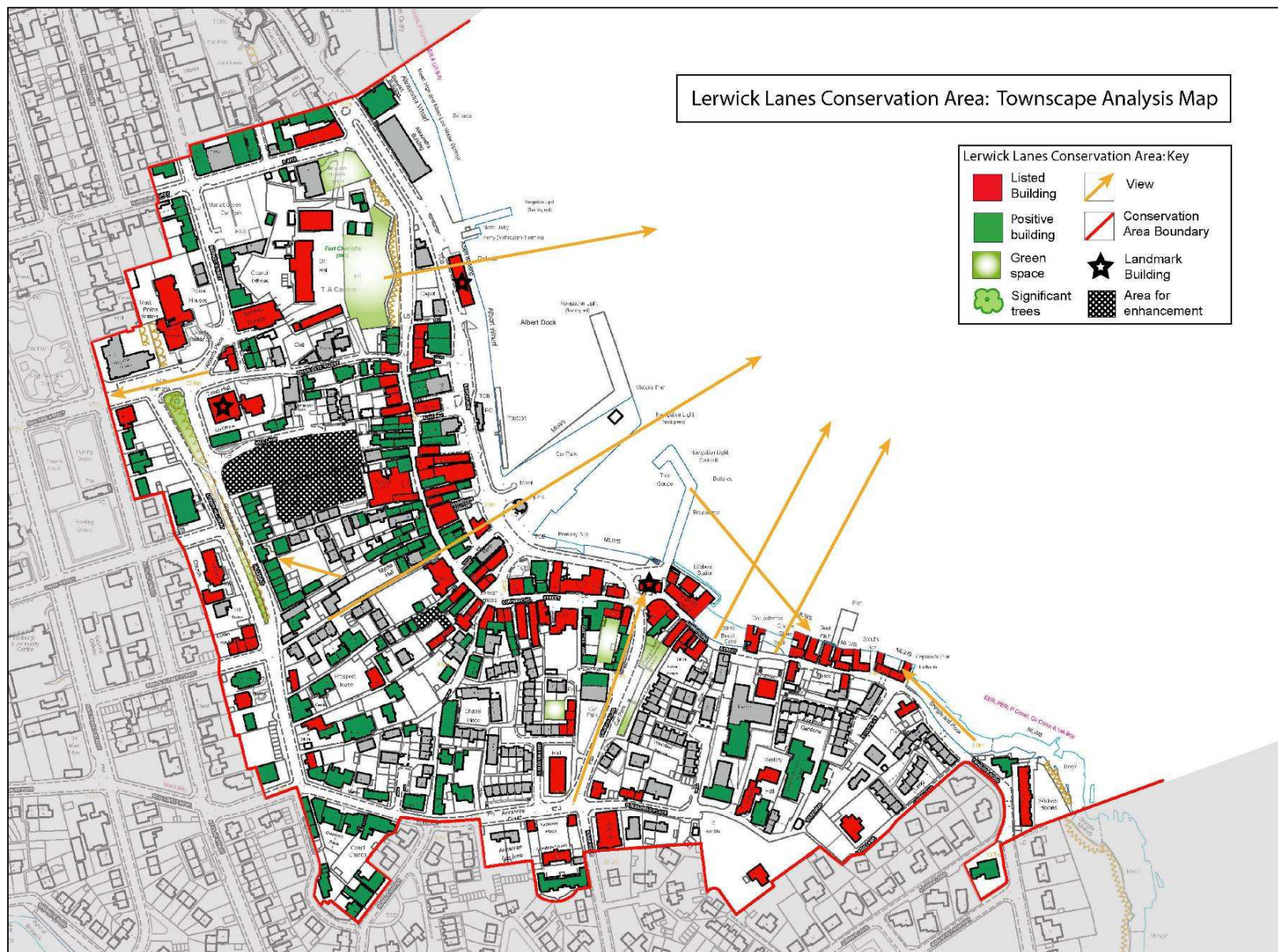
The Fort is a roughly pentagonal enclosure with bastions at the corners. The entrances (the main one being in Harbour Street) are round-arched. From the pleasant grassed area inside the Fort there is a wide view of the harbour, the Sound and Bressay. The Fort was completed in 1781 and named after the wife of George III, Queen Charlotte. Although Market Street leads past the Fort there is little evidence of its close proximity other than a high stone wall glimpsed between buildings. These buildings are of stone, although few are seen to their full advantage as most are rendered. Charlotte Street is narrower and has the feeling of a lane. Again, buildings obscure the Fort except where a grassy path leads to one of the arched gateways to the Fort complex. From Commercial Street the Fort is dominant, set high on a rocky bank with an almost open aspect towards the waterfront. However even at this point where the Fort is at its most visible it is not quite clear if, or where you can enter the complex.

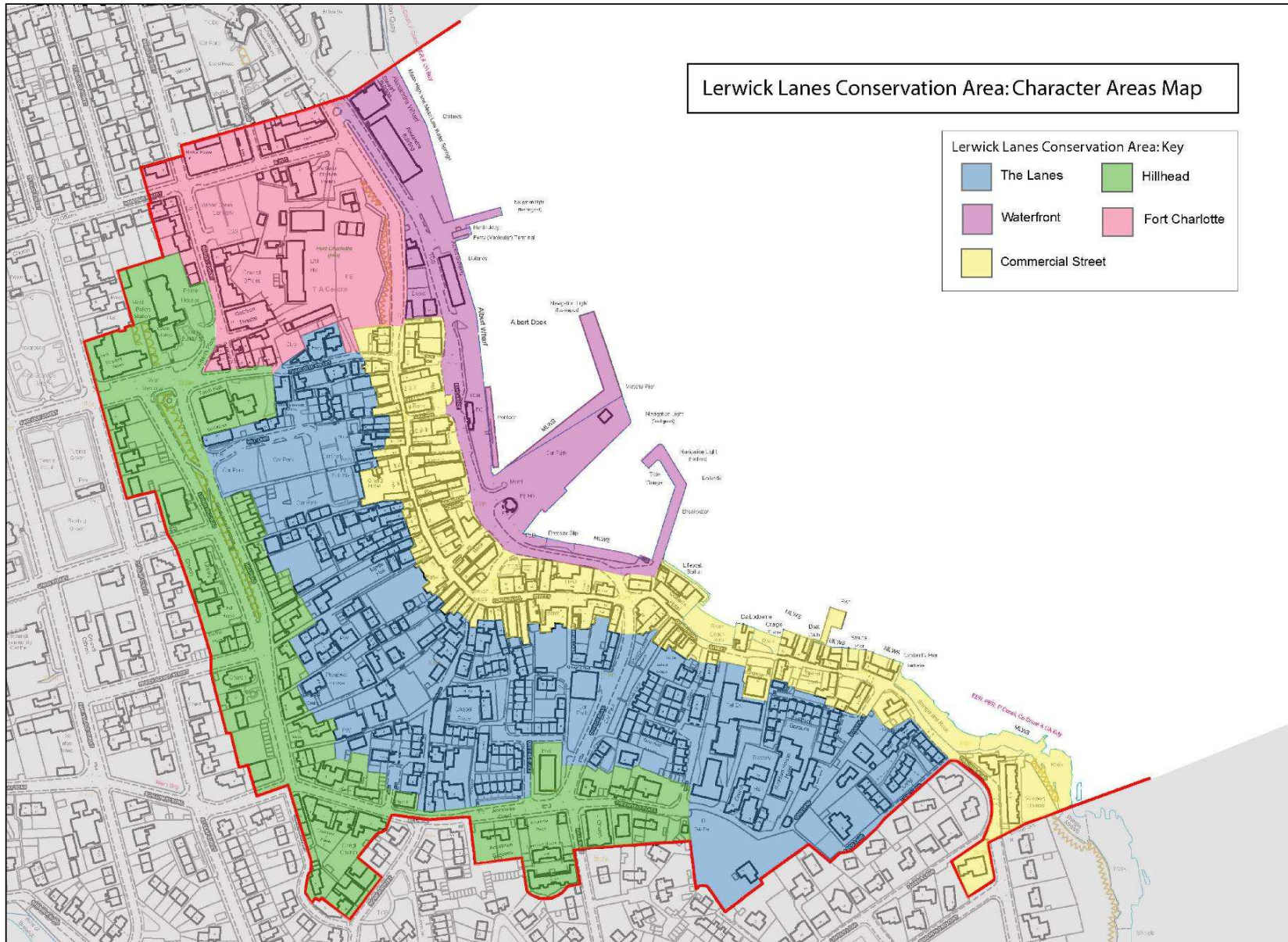


Left: Fort Charlotte as seen from Commercial Street.

Right: The arched entrance from Harbour St.







5 **Key Features / Assessment of Significance**

Having carried out an assessment of the buildings and areas it is now possible to identify the key features that define the special architectural and historic character of the area.

5.1 *Character Area 1: Waterfront*

- Setting of the harbour – busy with fishing boats, ferry terminal, cruise ships;
- Isolated buildings set on the roadside house a variety of uses;
- A more functional architectural style;
- Use of timber, corrugated metal, render;
- Functional public realm with low boundary walls and chunky metal railings, metal bollards
- Brighter colours than in Commercial Street;
- The B-listed Albert Building is a landmark;
- End gables project from Commercial Street. These buildings would once have been lodberries e.g. Peerie Shop;
- Glimpses up the lanes towards Commercial Street;
- Views over the Bressay Sound towards landmark buildings.

5.2 *Character Area 2: Commercial Street*

- Narrow pedestrianised shopping street. Ground floors generally in retail use with residential above (some evidence of underuse on upper levels);
- Gable ends face onto street with stone buildings extending back along the lanes;
- Network of lanes running perpendicular to the street;
- Stone, render, slate, timber windows and doors;
- Some traditional shopfronts;
- Local details such as tiled floors in doorways;
- Vertical emphasis to the buildings;
- Unique lodberry building types form a picturesque waterfront at the south end.

5.3 *Character Area 3: The Lanes*

- Narrow lanes stretching away from Commercial Street – often on a steep incline;
- Gables to the street to provide shelter from the elements, further up the slope buildings present gables to the lane;
- Areas of 20th century development – Richard Moira's 1950s & 60s infill housing won a Saltire Award;
- The tall gables give the buildings a strong vertical emphasis;
- Garden areas are found between buildings hidden behind stone boundary walls;
- Many historic stone 18th & 19th century buildings – mostly residential;
- Stone floor surfaces;
- Intimate spaces – public/private;
- Stone, slate, timber, iron railings



Strong gables have a significant impact in the Lanes and Commercial Street.



A tiled doorway on Commercial Street.

5.4 *Character Area 4: Hillhead*

- Edge of the New Town where plot and house sizes increase;
- Predominantly stone villas featuring bay windows, sash windows and traditional storm doors;
- More public buildings in this area – such as churches and the Town Hall. Representing the new civic spirit which leads to the building of the New Town;
- Wider airy streets contrast with the narrowness and density of the historic lanes;
- Good views north along Hillhead towards War Memorial;
- Stone, slate, timber window/doors

5.5 *Character Area 5: Fort Charlotte*

- The Fort structure dominates the area to the east but with smaller buildings clustered around the western side disguising its form;
- Streets are regularly laid out around the edges;
- Buildings are generally set on the roadside;
- Historic buildings within the Fort Complex.

6 Negative Factors

A number of negative factors have been identified and are listed below. These form the basis for the *Sensitivity Analysis* and the *Opportunities for Enhancement*.

6.1 *Character Area 1: Waterfront*

- Public realm not always of a high standard;
- Quality of architecture not high (with occasional exceptions).

6.2 *Character Area 2: Commercial Street*

- Frequent modern and bland shopfront design;
- Loss of vitality/ commercial viability;
- Underused upper floors;
- Some building maintenance issues;
- Public realm –stone flags replaced with tarmac.

6.3 *Character Area 3: The Lanes*

- Some poor quality surfaces;
- Unused/untidy spaces between buildings;
- Some of the mid-20th century development is beginning to look tired;
- Quality of new development/ extensions not always high.

6.4 *Character Area 4: Hillhead*

- Inappropriate details e.g. replacement windows;
- Small domestic developments e.g. Garages in gardens.

6.5 *Character Area 5: Fort Charlotte*

- Fort Charlotte feels isolated from the rest of the town centre and suffers from a lack of interpretation and signage and from being obscured for much of its perimeter;
- The former cinema and Excelsior pub on Harbour Street are empty and proposed for demolition.



The former cinema and public house on Harbour Street.

7 Sensitivity Analysis

7.1 *Loss of original architectural details and building materials*



Inappropriate window replacements which do not match the traditional glazing pattern on Market St.

Although the majority of the buildings in the conservation area are in good physical condition the area as a whole is at risk from small changes that, cumulatively, can dilute the special character of the area. The replacement of original timber windows or doors with inappropriate materials such as uPVC or unsympathetic designs or methods of opening, the replacement of natural roof slates or boundary treatments or the painting of walls have adversely affected some of the buildings in the conservation area. For example, the former North Star cinema on Harbour Street has been painted a vivid pink/purple colour. This colour is out of character with the surrounding area, where buildings are generally natural stone or a neutral colour, with stronger colours restricted to external woodwork. In many cases, these changes in detailing and the loss of original features have spoiled the external appearance of a building and the local streetscape.

Some buildings were identified which had suffered from stone erosion due to the use of impervious cement mortars and renders. In such a saline environment this can cause serious damage to the historic fabric of a building.

7.2 *Quality of public realm*

The poor quality of pavement and road surfaces and boundaries in some places has a negative effect on the character of the conservation area. This is an area full of character and it is vital to ensure that public works do not detract from the otherwise high quality historic environment.

7.3 *Quality of new development, alterations and extensions*

There is little modern infill due to the limited number of gap sites and the protection against demolition that conservation area designation gives. However, small extensions are common in the lanes area and where more recent developments have occurred they are not always sympathetic to traditional local details, which have provided the group value of the conservation area, in terms of their materials, proportions or general character.

Much of the mid 20th century infill architecture in the lanes area is beginning to look tired and this housing stock may need to be replaced or updated in the future. The regeneration and redevelopment of these properties will be a major issue for conservation area management in coming years.



Modern extensions in Burns Lane.

7.4 *Loss of traditional shopfronts*

Shetland Islands Council has made great efforts to prevent the loss of traditional shopfronts and avoid an influx of standard modern designs. Good shopfront examples remain on Commercial Street and should be protected. These include 80-82 Commercial Street and the Grand Hotel. There are instances of inappropriate modern shopfront designs that do not reflect the character of the conservation area. At the south end of Commercial Street, the general character has moved from a commercial and retail environment to a predominantly residential area. If this trend towards change of use continues then further traditional shopfronts may be lost.

7.5 *Loss of town centre vitality*

Lerwick has suffered from a decline in retail use of the town centre. The south end of Commercial Street has seen a particular increase in change of use from retail/ commercial to residential. This decrease in retail activity could result in buildings being neglected or left empty if there is little demand for retail space within the town centre. Continued change of use from retail could lead to the loss of traditional features and shopfronts *[see 7.4 above]*

8 Opportunities for Preservation & Enhancement

8.1 *Article 4 Directions*

The Town and Country Planning (Permitted Development)(Scotland) Order 1992 (known as the GPDO) sets out certain types of development that do not require planning permission, known as permitted development rights. In line with guidance, it has been common practice among planning authorities to extend control within Conservation Areas by way of an Article 4 Direction. Essentially, this requires planning permission to be sought for certain specified types of development where this would not normally be required.

The existing Article 4 Direction was served in 1975. The types of work that are controlled include alterations to a dwelling, such as new windows and front doors, porches, front boundaries and painting are all controlled because planning permission is needed. These additional controls appear to be working reasonably well but there are examples of poor quality detailing and inappropriate replacement windows.

The existing Article 4 Direction should be relaunched and consideration given to providing further detailed guidance on the existing character of the area, how this might be affected by cumulative change and possible appropriate design solutions. Photographic surveys of the Conservation Area were undertaken in 2002 (shop-fronts only) and 2006. This work should be continued at regular intervals and as resources allow to enable enforcement, and to assess the rate of cumulative change in the conservation area.

8.2 *The control of unlisted buildings*

As part of the appraisal process unlisted but 'positive' buildings have been identified. Generally, these are individual or groups of buildings that retain all or a high proportion of their original architectural detailing and which add interest and vitality to the appearance of the conservation area.

As with listed buildings, there is a general presumption in favour of their retention. In conservation areas, demolition of unlisted buildings is controlled in the recognition of the importance that even relatively minor buildings can play to the overall character or appearance of a conservation area (in general terms, the demolition of a structure unless it is a listed building is deemed for the purposes of the Planning Acts not to involve the development of land.)

Any application for the demolition of a building which is deemed to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area will therefore need to be accompanied by a reasoned justification as to why the building cannot be retained, similar to that required for a listed building.

It must be demonstrated by inclusion of evidence to the Planning Authority that the building

- has been actively marketed at a reasonable price and for a suitable period depending on its location, condition and possible viable use without finding a purchaser; or

- Is incapable of physical repair and re-use through the submission and verification of a thorough structural condition report;
- Or the demolition of the building is essential for delivering significant benefits to economic growth or the wider community.

In line with Local Plan Policy BE8 – Development in Conservation Areas, the Council will consider applications for change to ‘positive’ buildings extremely carefully and will refuse any that adversely affect their character, architectural or historic interest.



New development should be in keeping with the character of the area.



There is a presumption in favour of the retention of unlisted ‘positive’ buildings.

8.3 *Building maintenance & repair*

It is important that historic buildings are adequately maintained and repaired using traditional materials and techniques. Such repairs can be costly due to the additional expense of materials and employing skilled craftsmen. The Council may provide grants to owners to ensure that eligible works are undertaken to a high standard. The Heritage Service can provide advice on traditional repairs. Shetland Islands Council encourages owners of historic buildings to use traditional materials and repair techniques through advice, publications and the availability of relevant grant funding is well publicised.

The Council can also advise on appropriate paint colours and types. Where buildings in the Commercial Street area have been painted very bright, strong colours a more appropriate approach may be to use stronger colours as an accent to highlight windows and doors and other woodwork. Stonework that is unpainted should remain so. Traditional limewash and lime mortars are ideal as they allow the wall below to “breathe”, rather than sealing-in any moisture and provide a flexible finish that expands and contracts with changes in temperature and humidity.

8.4 *Buildings at Risk*

Several buildings within the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area have been identified as being without a viable use or vacant. There is a concern that if left unused these buildings will be at risk from decay due to neglect.

The Scottish Civic Trust maintains a list of buildings that are at risk from deterioration due to neglect or vandalism. This is updated as necessary and the Council has powers to protect all

listed buildings and also, in certain instances, unlisted buildings in a conservation area, where they make a positive contribution to the area's special character.

Where the condition of an historic building deteriorates to a point where it is considered vulnerable and detrimental to the character of the area then Shetland Islands Council in conjunction with the Scottish Ministers will consider appropriate action to enable its return to a reasonable state of repair. The Council will encourage the reuse of existing vacant buildings over new build construction where possible. Local Plan Policy BE4 supports this.

8.5 Public realm enhancement

Works by the Roads department or by any of the statutory undertakers, can have a profound effect on a conservation area. The Council will endeavour to ensure that all such works are coordinated as far as possible to minimise damage to the pavement surfaces and carried out to reflect the sensitive historic environment. The Council will continue to maintain and enhance the pavement surfaces within the lanes area.

8.6 Quality of new developments, building alterations and extensions

There are examples of sensitive modern developments in Lerwick Lanes, however some new developments have been out of keeping with the character of the conservation area.

In assessing planning applications within the Lerwick Lanes Conservation Area, and in line with Local Plan Policy BE8 – Development in Conservation Areas, the Council shall pay particular attention to the following:

- New development should follow existing plot ratios, with properties in spacious plots;
- New development should be in accord with the prevailing form of historic development, including the scale and massing of buildings;
- New development should not impinge on the setting of existing buildings;
- New development should use materials that are appropriate for the conservation area and of high quality (the use of UPVC, aluminium, concrete tiles or other non traditional materials are not considered appropriate in most cases);
- Trees, including those within private gardens, should be maintained and managed as an important townscape asset, particularly due to their rarity on Shetland. New development should protect important trees, hedges and other established boundaries;
- New boundary treatments should use traditional materials and be of appropriate design to suit the locality.
- The Council will require applications for new development in the Conservation Area to be accompanied by a Design Statement explaining and illustrating the principles and concept behind the design and layout of the proposed development and demonstrating how the proposal relates both to the site and its wider context. Applicants can use this Character Appraisal to assist them in this.

9 Monitoring and Review

Shetland Islands Council will review this document every 5 years from the date of its formal adoption. It will need to be assessed in the light of the emerging Local Development Plan and government policy generally. Such review will include the following:

- A survey of the conservation area including a photographic survey to aid possible enforcement action;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, and how successful they have been;
- The identification of any new issues that need to be addressed, requiring further actions or enhancements;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

It is possible that the local community under the guidance of a heritage consultant or the council could carry out this review. This would enable the local community to become more involved with the process and would raise public consciousness of the issues, including the problems associated with enforcement.

Appendix 1 - Listed Buildings

Address	Category of Listing
1 & 2 Aitkens Place	C(s)
12 Charlotte Street, Lystina House including boundary walls, gates and gatepiers	C(s)
26 Church Road including boundary walls	B
Commercial Road and Harbour St, Fort Charlotte	A
Commercial Street, 1 Hayfield Court including garden walls and railings	C(s)
Commercial Street, Telephone Kiosk	B
9 Commercial St, The Old Manse, including boundary walls wash-house	B
25-29 Commercial Street (odd nos)	C(s)
31 Commercial St, Quendale House including retaining, steps, boundary wall, railing, gatepiers and gate	B
41-43 Commercial Street (odd nos) Lochend House including courtyard, doorpiece, retaining and boundary walls	B
45 Commercial Street, Sea Winds	B
49 Commercial Street, Seafeld House and 1-3 (odd nos) Chromate Lane	B
51-61 (odd nos) Commercial Street	C(s)
67 Commercial Street and 1 Church Lane (formerly South Kirk Closs)	B
69-73 (odd nos) Commercial Street	C(s)
81-87 (odd nos) Commercial St and 2 Queens Lane, Royal Bank of Scotland with boundary wall and gatepiers	B
93-95 (odd nos) Commercial Street	C(s)
97 Commercial Street	B
99 Commercial Street	B
101 Commercial Street, and 1 & 2 Gardie Lane	B
103 & 105 Commercial Street including Heddle's Court	B
107 Commercial Street & 1 Mounthooly Street	C(s)
109 Commercial Street & 2-4 (odd nos) Mounthooly Street	C(s)
113 Commercial Street	C(s)
115-117 (odd nos) Commercial Street, Bank of Scotland including railings and piers	B
143-151 (odd nos) Commercial Street, Grand Hotel	B
165 Commercial Street	C(s)
167 Commercial Street	C(s)
169-171 (odd nos) Commercial Street including gate and gatepiers	C(s)
173 Commercial Street	C(s)
175 Commercial Street including steps and handrail	C(s)

2-8 (even nos) Commercial Street including sea wall Copeland's and Stout's Lodberries and piers	B
10 Commercial Street including Torrie's Lodberry and boundary wall	B
12 Commercial Street and Scarfataing including sea wall	C(s)
14 Commercial Street, the sea door including Murray's Lodberry and MacBeath's Lodberry	B
18 Commercial Street, "Steamer Store"	B
20 Commercial Street, The Lodberrie including Bains Beach sea wall and steps, Craigie Stane Noost and sea wall	A
24-30 (even nos) Commercial Street, Queens Hotel and Church Lane, Lifeboat Station including sea walls	B
32 Commercial Street, Old Tollbooth	B
38-42 (even nos) Commercial Street	B
44-50 (even nos) Commercial Street, Lerwick Post Office with yard wall and gatepiers	B
52 Commercial Street with gatepiers	C(s)
60-62 (even nos) Commercial Street, Anderson & Co	C(s)
64 Commercial Street	C(s)
66 Commercial Street	C(s)
80-82 (even nos) Commercial Street	B
84 Commercial Street	B
86 Commercial Street	B
90-92 (even nos) Commercial Street	C(s)
96 Commercial Street, Medical Hall	C(s)
106 Commercial Street, Clydesdale Bank	C(s)
116-126 (even nos) Commercial Street, Charlotte Place	B
Esplanade, Albert Building	B
Esplanade, Ellesmere Buildings	C(s)
Esplanade & Irvine Place Harbour Master's Office, including yard wall	C(s)
Esplanade, Leask's	C(s)
Esplanade between Griegs Closs & Campbell's Closs, The Peerie Shop	C(s)
1 Greenfield Place, St Columba's Church (Church of Scotland), including gates, retaining and boundary walls	B
11 Greenfield Place, including boundary walls and gatepiers	C(s)
2-4 (even nos) Greenfield Place	B
12-14 (even nos) Greenfield Place, St Magnus' Episcopal Church and Rectory, including boundary walls	B
1-7 (odd nos) Harbour Street, 1-3 (odd nos) Commercial Road, Brentham Place	B
Hillhead and Knab Road, Annsbrae House & 1 & 2 Annsbrae Place, including outbuildings, gates, gatepiers, boundary	B

walls and railings	
Hillhead & Charlotte Street, Lerwick Town Hall, including lamp standards, gatepiers, boundary walls and railings	B
Hillhead & King Erik Street, Lerwick War Memorial	B
Hillhead & Church Road, St Olaf's Hall (Formerly St Olaf's Church)	C(s)
Hillhead, Wesley (Methodist) Manse, including outbuilding, boundary walls, railings and gatepiers	B
17 Hillhead, including boundary walls, railings and gatepiers	B
2 Hillhead, Gordon Cottage, including boundary walls and railings	B
4 Hillhead, including boundary walls and railings	C(s)
King Erik Street & Market Street, Police Station, County Buildings, & Sheriff Courthouse (Formerly Zetland County Buildings), including boundary walls, gatepiers	B
4-8 (even nos) Law Lane	B
14 Law Lane, Windhouse, including retaining wall, boundary walls and outbuildings	B
2 Leog Lane, Leog House, including boundary walls and gatepiers	C(s)
Lower Hillhead & Prince Alfred Street, 3-6 (inclusive no's) Carlton Place	C(s)
Lower Hillhead and Union Street, St Ringan's Church (United Free Church of Scotland), including Church Hall, boundary walls and gatepiers	B
Market Cross	C(s)
Market Street, Garrison Theatre	C(s)
Prince Alfred Street, 1 & 2 Carlton Place, including boundary walls and gate	C(s)
4-8 (even nos) Queen's Lane & 1 Queen's Place	C(s)
1-12 (even nos) Twageos Road, Anderson Homes	C(s)

Appendix 2 - Further guidance

The following documents provide further detailed guidance on national and local planning policies and design guidance. All are available online.

The Shetland Local Plan, Shetland Islands Council, 2004 – (particularly Chapter 3)

The Shetland Structure Plan, Shetland Islands Council, 2000 – (particularly Chapter 3)

Advice Note 2: Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, Shetland Islands Council

Advice Note 8: Advertisements, Shetland Islands Council

Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), Historic Scotland, July 2009

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), The Scottish Government, February 2010

Managing Change in the Historic Environment guidance notes series, Historic Scotland

INFORM (Information for Historic Building Owners) guides, Historic Scotland