

## DOWNHAM CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



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## DOWNHAM CONSERVATION AREA APPRASAL

### Introduction

#### Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give the Downham Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. The area's buildings and spaces are noted and described, and marked on the Townscape Appraisal map along with listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, significant trees and spaces, and important views into and out of the conservation area. There is a presumption that all of these features should be "preserved or enhanced", as required by the legislation.

This appraisal builds upon national policy, as set out in PPG15, and local policy, as set out in the Local Plan 1998, and provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Downham Conservation Area can be assessed.



*Old Well Hall dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest dwellings in the village*

#### Summary of special interest

The Downham Conservation Area was designated on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1978.

The special interest that justifies designation of the Downham Conservation Area derives from the following features:

- Hillside location with stunning views of the village and Pendle Hill, especially from the porch of St Leonard's Church;
- Downham Beck, ducks and stone bridges;
- Downham Hall and parkland to the west;
- Architectural and historic interest of the conservation area's buildings, including 32 listed buildings;

- Remarkable surviving historic appearance with almost complete lack of 20<sup>th</sup> century alterations and accretions;
- Historic appearance enhanced by complete absence of TV aerials and overhead wires;
- Spacious layout devoid of 20<sup>th</sup> century infill;
- Prevalent use of local building stone;
- Widespread use of timber joinery for windows and doors;
- Rural setting of the village;
- Three grade II\* listed buildings: Downham Hall, St Leonard's Church and Old Well Hall;
- Trees, both in the surrounding landscape and beside the road;
- Areas of stone floorscape;
- Local details such as the stocks, two old wells, stone boundary walls, GR PO box and telephone kiosk;
- Village green beside the brook.



*Lidgett House (rear)*

## **The planning policy context**

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A conservation area is defined as “*an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. It is the quality and interest of an *area*, rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

This document should be read in conjunction with national planning policy guidance, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) – Planning and the Historic Environment. The layout and content follows guidance produced by English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the English Historic Towns Forum.

### **Local planning policy**

Local planning policies for the preservation of scheduled monuments and conservation of historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in the Ribble Valley Local Plan which was adopted in June 1998 (Policies ENV14, ENV15, ENV16, ENV17, ENV18, ENV19, ENV20, ENV21) and the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001-2016 which was adopted on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005 (Policies 20 and 21, supported by draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) entitled ‘Landscape and Heritage’).



*Looking north up Main Street*

### **Location and setting**

#### **Location and context**

Downham lies 5 kilometres north east of Clitheroe. The main route through the village, known as Main Street, runs from Chatburn in a south-easterly direction down the slope to the valley bottom before ascending the eastern slopes of Pendle Hill. The village lies on the Lancashire cycleway and is in the Pendle Hill outlier of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area of national and international significance because of its unspoiled and richly diverse landscape and wildlife.

#### **General character and plan form**

Downham is a small rural village that has been in the ownership of one family for over 400 years. The village is scattered beside a minor road descending a south facing slope. Its current form reflects the settlement’s agricultural origins and a single landowner’s control

of development. The landowner, in successive generations, carried out limited building programmes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and, by sensitive management, has preserved and enhanced the village's historic character and appearance into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Landscape setting

### Topography, geology, relationship to surroundings

Downham lies on and beneath a limestone ridge between Pendle Hill and the River Ribble. The ridge, along which ran a Roman road, runs in an east-west direction and Downham at c. 140 metres overlooks a rural vale, well tree'd in places, that rises gently at first and then more steeply over Downham Moor to the top of Pendle Hill at 532 metres. Narrow lanes run east to Twiston and west to Worston, below the ridge. The protuberance of Worsaw Hill west of the village is prominent in views from the Gisburn Road. Downham's location on the south side of the ridge gives the village a tranquil atmosphere which belies its close proximity to Clitheroe, the railway and the busy A59 to the north.



*St Leonard's Church was substantially rebuilt in 1910, designed by Sir Mervyn McCartney*

## Historic development

### Origins and historic development

There is evidence of Roman occupations at Downham. A large stone by the entrance to Downham Hall is thought to mark the final resting place of two legionaries who died on the nearby Roman road during trouble with the Brigantes although it may be an eroded medieval cross base. Although Lancashire's climate proved too inhospitable for the Romans to establish a permanent settlement, the area was a military zone. The Ribchester to Ilkley Roman Road, a paved construction enabling the swift movement of men and materials, runs along the ridge north of Downham Hall. The road is believed previously to have been part of a 112 mile 'Gold Road' spanning Britain and used by Irish traders travelling to trade with the Danish.



Downham means ‘the habitation on the hill’ and the settlement can be traced back to before 1066. The church is recorded in 1283 from an inventory of the chapelries in the patronage of the Rector of Whalley. When the church was rebuilt in 1910, traces of what were thought to be Saxon or early Norman foundations were found. The church has been rebuilt many times, notably c1800 and 1910 but the 15<sup>th</sup> century tower and bells remain. A stone sundial in the churchyard dates to 1808. The 16<sup>th</sup> century font may be the one which was presented by John Paslew, the last Abbot of Whalley, who was executed for treason in 1537.

The manorial family of Downham is the Asshetons and successive generations of the Assheton family have lived at Downham Hall since 1558. Several Assheton men held political posts, notably Sir Ralph of Whalley and Downham who was MP for Clitheroe in several parliaments of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

William Assheton, born in 1758, and a second William Assheton, born in 1788, were both involved in much rebuilding, both of Downham Hall and the cottages in the village. The first William began alterations to the hall and later to the drive and layout in front of the hall during which time the bodies of what were thought to be two Roman soldiers were found near the present front gates. At about this time the road that runs past the post office was constructed.



*Stone walls, stone roof tiles, stone boundary wall*

The second William Assheton employed the architect George Webster of Kendal to rebuild Downham Hall in 1835. William’s son Ralph continued with building improvements on the estate, particularly the farms, many of which were rebuilt or improved in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Wesleyan Chapels were built at Downham, Bashall Eaves and Stopper Lane in 1815. The Downham Chapel flourished until the 1930s when it ceased to be used as a place of worship. It was converted, with alterations and additions, to the village hall in the late 1950s.

The first reference to a school in Downham was in 1563. A later endowment for a school was made in the will of Ralph Assheton in 1705 and in 1839 a new school was built in Main Street, now a pre-school group.

The Assheton Arms was originally a farmhouse brewing beer for their workers. The interior has a stone fireplace inscribed 'IBS 1765'. In 1872 it was known as the George and Dragon but in the 1950s was renamed the Assheton Arms in honour of Ralph Assheton's elevation to the peerage in recognition of his contribution to government during the Second World War.

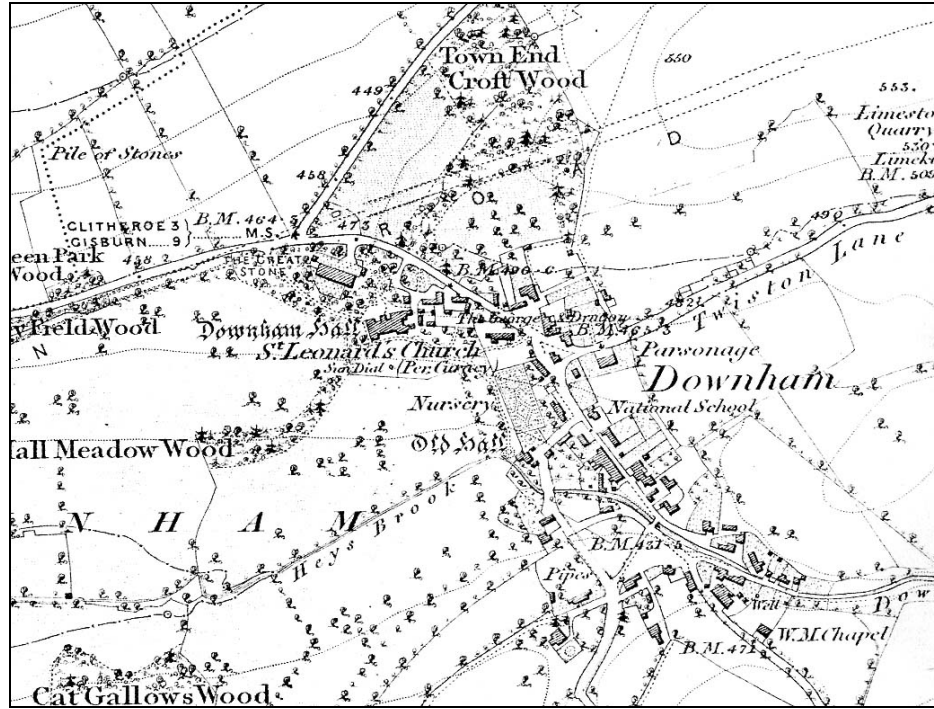
Downham had established a substantial cottage-based spinning and weaving industry long before the Industrial Revolution. No. 44 appears to have been designed for the home weaving trade. The village population increased rapidly between 1780 and 1830 before declining sharply in the 1830s with the introduction of mechanised looms.

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a large amount of rebuilding, notably St Leonard's Church (1910), the Post Office, Hillcrest and extension to the School. Since that time there has been very little new development in the village and careful management of estate properties, resisting the ubiquitous advance of UPVC joinery, has resulted in a village, and conservation area, of exceptional historic character and appearance. The population in 2000 was estimated to be 160.

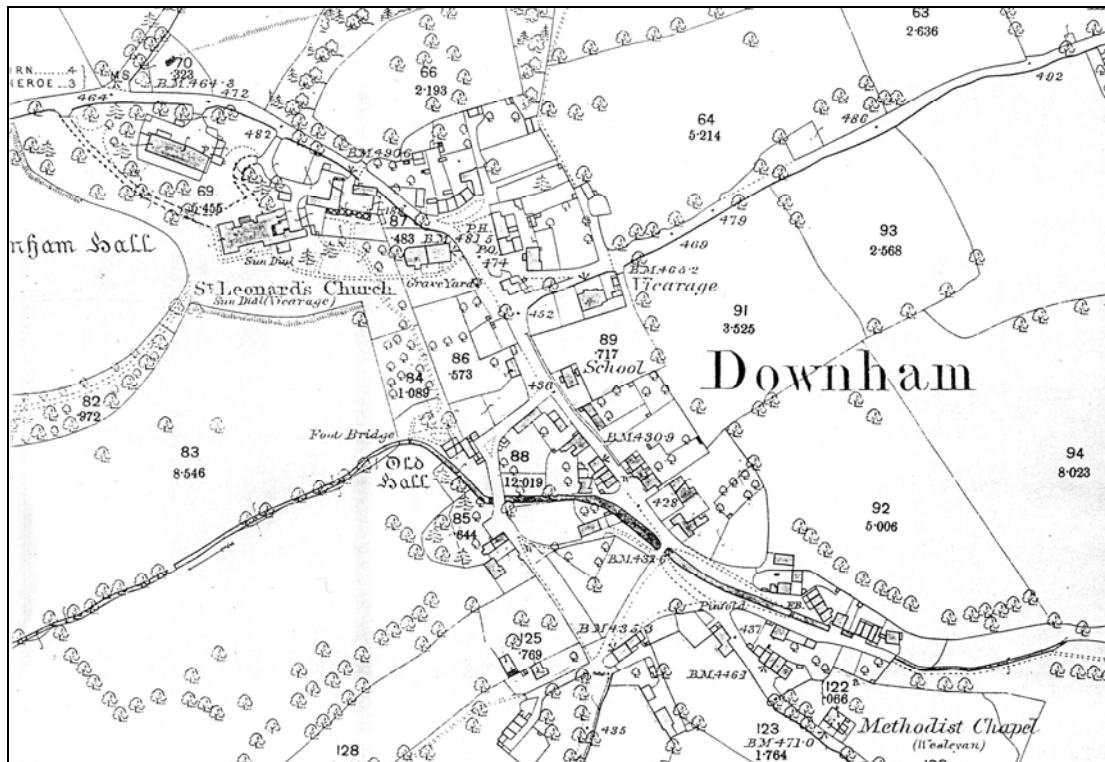


*Heys Brook south of the road bridge*





Ordnance Survey 1848



Ordnance Survey 1892

## Spatial analysis

### Key views and vistas

From the north, the conservation area is approached along a minor road from Gisburn. On the south side, within the conservation area, the parkland of Downham Hall stretches southwards. Downham Hall itself can be glimpsed at the end of a short tree-lined avenue.

After the brow of the hill, one enters the village and, from outside Top Row, there is a good southward, downhill view of the village. The best overview of the village, however, is to be gained from the churchyard, from where the southern part of the village can be viewed against the backdrop of the 'whaleback' of Pendle Hill.

From the south, along Chapel Brow, there is a picturesque view northward which includes the bridge over Downham Beck, old cottages and St Leonard's Church near the brow of the hill.

The layout of the village on a hillside alongside a single main thoroughfare and lesser side lanes provides the opportunity for many diverse and attractive views. Because of the conservation area's picturesque setting, the village is much photographed.



*Nos 45a and 45b Main Street*

### The character of spaces within the area

The conservation area boundary encloses the whole of the village settlement and parkland west of Downham Hall which is important to its setting. Within the village, buildings are grouped in twos and threes with spaces between and a generally spacious layout. Unlike many similar English villages, Downham has not suffered from loss of open space due to 20<sup>th</sup> century infill or construction of garages or off-road parking.

One of the characteristics of the conservation area are the small grassy paddocks which sometimes contain a few sheep and, together with wide grass verges, act as 'breathing spaces' for the whole village, contributing to its loose-knit layout. Grassed areas north and east of the former School and a triangle of land north of St Leonard's Church are examples. In particular, the setting of Top Row is enhanced by a grassy bank, and the Post Office, too, has an open space to the south which provides a fine setting.

Top Row, the Assheton Arms and St Leonard's Church surround an informal open sloping tarmac 'square' which at first appears to be the public focus of the settlement but the actual village green is the area of land north of West Lane House. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a large cross in the road halfway between the church gates and the inn.

The village green is public open space without formality and, despite the stone boundary walls, flows northward as far as the bank of Downham Beck. Over the centuries, celebrations with maypole dancing, bands, children's sports and other community events have taken place on the green.

South of the church is a walled kitchen garden which, from the churchyard, is not only an attractive sight in itself but also enables spectacular views to surrounding landscape. In the south of the conservation area, fields beside West Lane Farm have a rural, agricultural character and are included in the conservation area because of their importance to the setting of the southern end of the village.



*Lidgett House (1833)*

## **Definition of the special interest of the conservation area**

### **Activities/uses**

The conservation area is primarily residential. Downham has a Post Office with shop and tearooms, a pub and a village hall. The village is popular with visitors and a public car park, information centre and toilets are located in a former farmyard where there is also a blacksmith's forge. A former barn in Main Street is used as a vehicle maintenance

workshop. The former School is now home to a pre-school group. Farm buildings and barns close to Downham Hall are used for the management of the estate.

The conservation area has a tranquil atmosphere broken only by traffic noise. Downham has been a popular location for television and film productions, most recently as the village of Ormston in the BBC production, 'Born and Bred'. The unspoilt historic appearance of the village means that little alteration is needed to re-create the 1950s.

### **Architectural and historic character**

The conservation area contains buildings of a variety of ages. Apart from high status buildings such as Downham Hall, St Leonard's Church and Lidgett House, buildings are modest in scale and architectural pretension, as might be expected of a rural village. Buildings are all stone-built in the local vernacular tradition, that is to say domestic cottages and farm buildings built with local building materials by local craftsmen using traditional building techniques.



*Stone paving slabs and roadside kerbs are part of the historic floorscape*

With the exception of the prestigious buildings noted above, buildings are small two storey domestic cottages arranged in short rows beside the road with small rear gardens. Single properties in a plot of land are uncommon and do not appear until the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example Hillcrest and Chestnut Cottage. As befits an agricultural settlement, farm buildings are scattered throughout the village. Unusually, most are still working buildings i.e. have not been converted to residential use.

The church contains the oldest built fabric in the conservation area. The tower was probably built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century but, in the 1910 rebuilding, traces of what were thought to be Saxon or early Norman foundations were found. Downham Hall has some remains of an earlier building c.1600 and a pair of columns from this have been re-used as gate piers in the garden to the east of the Hall.

In external appearance, the 17<sup>th</sup> century is represented by an aisled barn north-west of Downham Hall, Old Well Hall (nos 15, 16, 17, 18), and nos 5 and 6 Top Row. Late 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century remains are also to be found at 1 Lower Hall Cottage, nos 36 and 37 (Chapel Brow) and Fir Tree House.

The conservation area has an overall 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century character and appearance. There are only a few 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in the conservation area and even these conform broadly to local building style (e.g. the Post Office and Hillcrest). Buildings from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century are notable by their absence except for a row of garages opposite Cosy Cottage.

This absence of post-1914 building is one of the main contributing factors to the Downham Conservation Area's special historic character and appearance.



*Nos. 2 – 6 Main Street overlook the open space east of the churchyard*

### **Listed buildings**

The conservation area's 32 listed buildings range in date from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and in size from St Leonard's Church (grade II\*) to the village stocks (grade II). Building types include country house, church, Methodist chapel, school, agricultural barn, vicarage, bridge, public house, sundial, stone gate piers and humble cottages. The conservation area also contains several 'buildings of townscape merit' (see below) which add to the area's range and variety of historic buildings. The presence of so many high quality historic buildings in such a small village is remarkable.

Grades I and II\* identify the outstanding architectural or historic interest of a small proportion (about 6%) of all listed buildings. The three grade II\* listed buildings are: Downham Hall, Old Well Hall and St. Leonard's Church.

Downham Hall is a country house built in 1835 but incorporating some remains of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house. The building is constructed with limestone and sandstone rubble with sandstone dressings and slate roof. Stone from the columns at the front entrance came from



Longridge quarries and some of the other building stone was quarried on Pendle Hill at Lister's Delph.

Old Well Hall is now a row of three houses, formerly one. The building dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest dwellings in the village (No. 1 Lower Hall Cottage is older). It has a stone slate roof and characteristic 17<sup>th</sup> century windows with chamfered mullions and hoods.

St Leonard's Church was substantially rebuilt in 1910, designed by Sir Mervyn McCartney at the behest of Sir Ralph Cockayne Assheton. The 15<sup>th</sup> century tower remains. It is built in a Perpendicular style. Of note are four stone gargoyles.



*Trees make a positive contribution to the conservation area*

### **Key unlisted buildings - Buildings of Townscape Merit**

Marked on the Townscape Appraisal map for the Downham Conservation Area are a number of *unlisted* buildings which have been judged as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This follows advice provided in English Heritage guidance on conservation area character appraisals, and within Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), both of which stress the importance of identifying and protecting such buildings.

The buildings are considered to be good, relatively unaltered examples, of their type where original materials and details, and the basic, historic form of the building, has survived. Unlisted buildings of note are Hillcrest, Chestnut Cottage, and West Lane Farm.

### **Building methods, materials and local details**

The village is entirely stone-built. Nos 2, 3 and 4 (Top Row) are built with local *sandstone* rubble; The Assheton Arms is built with squared coursed *limestone*. The Post Office and former School, not uncommonly, are built with a combination of both, i.e. limestone walls with sandstone dressings. There are no brick buildings.

Stone roofing slabs are common, normally laid in courses diminishing in size from eaves to ridge. Old Well Hall, Fir Tree House, the Assheton Arms and Greengates are examples of stone roofs. Elsewhere, slate is the norm, also on occasion laid in diminishing courses as at the former School and Top Row. Slate became more readily available after the coming of the railways and Downham's later buildings e.g. Chestnut Cottage, Hillcrest and the Post Office are slate covered.

The prevalence of stone as a building material, not only in habitable buildings but also for walls, gate piers, bridges, farm buildings and paving, unifies the conservation area, giving it a distinctive local identity and harmonising the many elements of the built environment.

One building in the conservation area, the White House, is painted white and may be an example of a slobbered stonework i.e. an uneven rendering of rubblestone.

Window openings fall into two main types: horizontal rectangular openings divided into sections by stone mullions and vertical rectangular openings. The former are usually earlier in date and have side-hung casement windows, the latter are more suited to sliding sashes. Early stone mullioned windows can be found in Old Well Hall and Lower Cottage

Fenestration varies but falls into two main types: casements within stone mullions or sliding sashes. The former is mainly to be found in 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings (e.g. Old Well Hall and No. 1 Lower Hall Cottage, whilst the latter is common in later 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings such as the Assheton Arms (1765) and Lidgett House (1833).

Window and door joinery in the conservation area is exclusively timber. Downham is exceptional for the absence of uPVC joinery. The retention of original, or sensitively replaced, door and window joinery makes a major contribution to the area's historic character and appearance.

Chimneys and clay chimney pots, either plain or crowned, are a feature of the area. The absence of a chimney usually indicates a farm building. The complete absence of overhead wires and TV aerials makes for a lively roofscape in which chimneys protrude from and a patchwork of stone and slate hipped and gabled roofs, especially as viewed from the churchyard.



*Agricultural buildings in the centre of the village*

## Floorscape and public realm

The conservation area's historic character is enhanced by areas of stone paving and stone cobbles or setts. The footpath to the church is paved with stone flags as is the pavement outside the Post Office is kerbed with stone, also with stone flags. Stone roadside kerbs are present along Brookside and beside the Post Office. Large single slabs of stone provide a small bridge over the cobbled gully that runs downhill from the White House past no. 43. There are no yellow line road markings in the conservation area and no traffic signs. Occasionally road surfaces are demarcated by a row of stone setts, as at the Assheton Arms.

Street lighting is by means of single black columns intermittently located along Main Street and Brookside. The conservation area is very tidy and free of litter. There are a number of discreet placed black Ribble Valley Borough Council litter bins but no sign of private rubbish bins.

The quality of the public realm is high. The public car park, information centre and toilets have been created to be respectful of existing buildings and immediate surroundings and have won awards for their design.

The only signs are small and discreet (a fascia sign at the Post Office and coat of arms at the Assheton Arms). There is no advertising, except for parasols with brewer's corporate logo at the tables outside the Assheton Arms (summer 2005).



*View northward: Note the absence of overhead wires*

## Green spaces, trees and other natural elements

The most important open spaces have been described above and include the 'village green' and small green 'breathing spaces' that, in other villages might have been infilled. Trees are a prominent feature of the area, acting as a backdrop for the conservation area's buildings and punctuating the surrounding lowland countryside before the bare moorland on the side of Pendle Hill.

Notable trees are the limes in the churchyard, yew tree beside Lower Hall Cottage and copper beech at Lidgett House. These, and other significant trees or tree groups, are

marked on the Townscape Appraisal map. Lack of a specific reference does not imply that a tree or group is not of value.

Downham Beck is a particular feature of Downham and a principal part of the picturesque character of the southern, level and more spacious quarter of the conservation area. The sandstone bridge south-west of Fir Tree House probably dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and is grade II listed. The beck by the bridge is generally very shallow in summer (but this is in a flood risk area) and a popular place for paddling children and feeding ducks.

### **Local details and features**

There are a number of local features which add to the area's distinct identity and form part of the special interest of the area. It is highly desirable that these features are retained:

The conservation is notable for its stone boundary walls. Those in the south of the area enclosing small fields are drystone, capped with a haphazard coping of stones of varying size laid vertically on end. Property boundary walls are generally constructed more neatly, pointed, with either half-round or triangular coping stone. The wall around Lidgett House has triangular stone coping, the wall in front Fir Tree House has a half-round coping. A fourth method of coping with flat slabs laid horizontally can be found around the walled garden south of St Leonard's Church.

Stone gate piers are also a feature, ranging from plain upright single stones to ornate classical piers. The two types are contrasted at the entrance to the walled garden below the church where a plain pair stand on either side of the entrance from the road whilst, a few metres away, a grandiose pair (listed grade II) form the entrance to the garden.

There is a well beside the public car park and evidence of another in the wall beside the former School. The red GR post box and red K9 telephone kiosk add to the village's distinctive character.



*Stone walls are typical of the area*



## Issues

This section provides a summary of the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) identified during the appraisal process

**Strengths: The most important *positive* features of the Downham Conservation Area are:**

- Picturesque rural village popular with tourists;
- Dedicated tourist parking;
- Occasional film and TV location;
- Exceptionally unspoilt historic character and appearance;
- Absence of road markings, TV aerials and overhead wires.

**Weaknesses: The principal *negative* features of the Downham Conservation Area are:**

- The prevalence of stone walls means that timber fences such as the one bounding the overflow car park of the Assheton Arms appear out of character;
- Ashleigh, a dwelling beside a public footpath in the north-east of the conservation area, has a 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance at odds with the rest of the conservation area;
- Parasols outside the Assheton Arms display advertising logo.



*Downham Hall is a country house built in 1835 but incorporating some remains of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house.*

## Threats to the Downham Conservation Area

The Downham Conservation Area is managed responsibly by a single Estate which retains control over minor alterations and currently carries out works with great sensitivity to the village's special historic character and appearance.

The current main threat to the character and appearance of the conservation area is traffic and the pressure of tourism.

## Recommendations

### Downham Conservation Area boundary review

It is recommended that no changes are made to the existing conservation area boundary.

### Article 4 Direction

Responsible management by the current landowner obviates the need to control development by means of Article 4 Directions.

### Monitoring and review.

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- An evaluation of changes that have taken place in the conservation area, ideally by means of an updated photographic record;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including opportunities for enhancement;
- A building condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.



*View over the village to Pendle Hill*

## Bibliography

A Walk Round Downham  
St Leonard's Church AD 2000  
Victoria County History: volume VI  
O.S. map 1884

E. Wrigley  
Guidebook

**Downham - List of photographs**

- Photograph 1*      *Old Well Hall dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is one of the oldest dwellings in the village*
- Photograph 2*      *Lidgett House (rear)*
- Photograph 3*      *Looking north up Main Street*  
*St Leonard's Church was substantially rebuilt in 1910, designed by Sir Mervyn McCartney*
- Photograph 4*      *Stone walls, stone roof tiles, stone boundary wall*
- Photograph 5*      *Heys Brook south of the road bridge*
- Photograph 6*      *Nos 45a and 45b Main Street*
- Photograph 7*      *Lidgett House (1833)*  
*Stone paving slabs and roadside kerbs are part of the historic floorscape*
- Photograph 8*      *Nos. 2 – 6 Main Street overlook the open space east of the churchyard*
- Photograph 9*      *Trees make a positive contribution to the conservation area*
- Photograph 10*     *Agricultural buildings in the centre of the village*
- Photograph 11*     *View northward: Note the absence of overhead wires*
- Photograph 12*     *Stone walls are typical of the area*  
*Downham Hall is a country house built in 1835 but incorporating some remains of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house.*
- Photograph 13*     *View over the village to Pendle Hill*
- Photograph 14*     *View over the village to Pendle Hill*