



Victoria Place Conservation Area Appraisal

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1. Appraisal Context

1.1 This Character Appraisal has been prepared for Victoria Place Conservation Area, whose original boundaries were designated in July 1990, Stoke on Trent's seventeenth Conservation Area.

1.2 Conservation Areas are designated by Local Authorities under fulfilment of duties imposed by Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This defines Conservation Areas as:

“areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”

Special interest may originate from a variety of sources, while character is defined in a holistic sense rather than deriving from the merits of any single building.

1.3 Production of Character Appraisals is required under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's *Best Value* initiative (BVPI 219b), though best practice has long required their preparation. The objective of an Appraisal is to analyse and define in depth the special interest and traits which make up the *character* of a Conservation Area, to identify the pressures and challenges facing its survival and to recommend courses of action which will aid in achieving sensitive management, preservation and enhancement (the latter points fulfilling duties imposed by Section 71 of the 1990 Act).

1.4 Conservation Area status is a material consideration in the evaluation of planning applications. Here Section 72 of the 1990 Act requires Local Planning Authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of achieving preservation or enhancement through their decision making. Appraisals represent an important resource in fulfilling such duties while Planning Policy Guidance 15, *Planning and the Historic Environment*, provides a principal point of guidance. Where new development is planned Appraisals may provide a useful design resource to those proposing it.

1.5 Conservation Area status curtails certain 'permitted' householder development rights requiring planning permission to be sought in these areas (outlined in the General Permitted Development Order 1995). Local Authorities have further powers to restrict permitted developments to the forward elevations of properties that front the highway through the introduction of Article 4(2) designations, while approval of the Secretary of State is required for more wide ranging 4(1) designations.

1.6 English Heritage recommends production of distinct Management Strategy documents for each Conservation Area. The basis of these documents is the analysis contained within and recommendations arising from each Appraisal. These documents will provide a boost in efficiency while helping ensure fulfilment of statutory duties. In the context of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) these Management Strategy documents may eventually be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents.

1.7 Work on the new LDF is currently proceeding. In the interim, policies included within the City Plan 2001 continue in force unless superseded by those arising from the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Structure Plan 1996-2011 or Regional Planning

Guidance. The City Plan reiterates the Authority's commitment to fulfilling statutory duties regarding Conservation Areas and listed buildings, sets design and development standards, while introducing two non-statutory 'lists' of relevance to this Appraisal: a *Local List* (Buildings of Special Local Interest) and *Areas of Archaeological Importance*.

- 1.8 When reading or using an Appraisal it is important to note that while every effort is made to provide detailed analysis the document can never be comprehensive. Failure to mention a particular element or detail *must not* be taken to imply that it is of no importance to an appreciation of the character or appearance of the Area and thus of no relevance in consideration of planning applications.
- 1.9 This Appraisal has been produced by the Directorate of Regeneration and Heritage (Urban Design and Conservation), Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Enquiries regarding this Appraisal should be addressed to:

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2. The Study Area

- 2.1 “Victoria Place” Conservation Area is a group of fifteen houses and one restaurant/public house, dating from 1885. These dwellings are survivors from a larger group of thirty houses; a row of 14 houses facing City Road, were demolished in 1997 because they were in such a poor state of repair.
- 2.2 Victoria Place is located on the north side of City road, the main road linking Fenton and Stoke Upon Tent.
- 2.3 Victoria Place is still residential in character. Although some of the houses have been demolished, enough survive to show the nature and character of the original development.
- 2.4 The original houses were built for one distinct class, offering similar arrangements of accommodation and access. All provided accommodation for workers associated with one pottery to live in and were clearly built on a philanthropic model.
- 2.5 The area has suffered from economic decline since its conception. The houses fell into a state of disrepair and the Council declared the Conservation Area in 1990 in an effort to conserve them. An application for a compulsory purchase failed but successful negotiations with the then owner resulted in the buildings being refurbished. They are now in need of maintenance.



FIGURE 1: Map of Conservation Area showing locally listed buildings in grey

3. History and Archaeology

- 3.1 The town of Fenton is in the southern part of the City. Historically it consisted of two different townships of Fenton Culvert or Great Fenton and Fenton Vivian or Little Fenton. These distinct mediaeval settlements were united into one urban district in 1910.
- 3.2 The map below shows the town of Fenton recorded as Lane Delph in 1775. The road running diagonally across the map was the road from Newcastle Under Lyme to Uttoxeter turnpiked in 1759. Most of the land north of this road was Fenton Vivian; to the south, Fenton Culvert. Initially the main settlements were at Fenton Park and Great Fenton but by the middle of the 18th Century most settlements were clustered around the road.

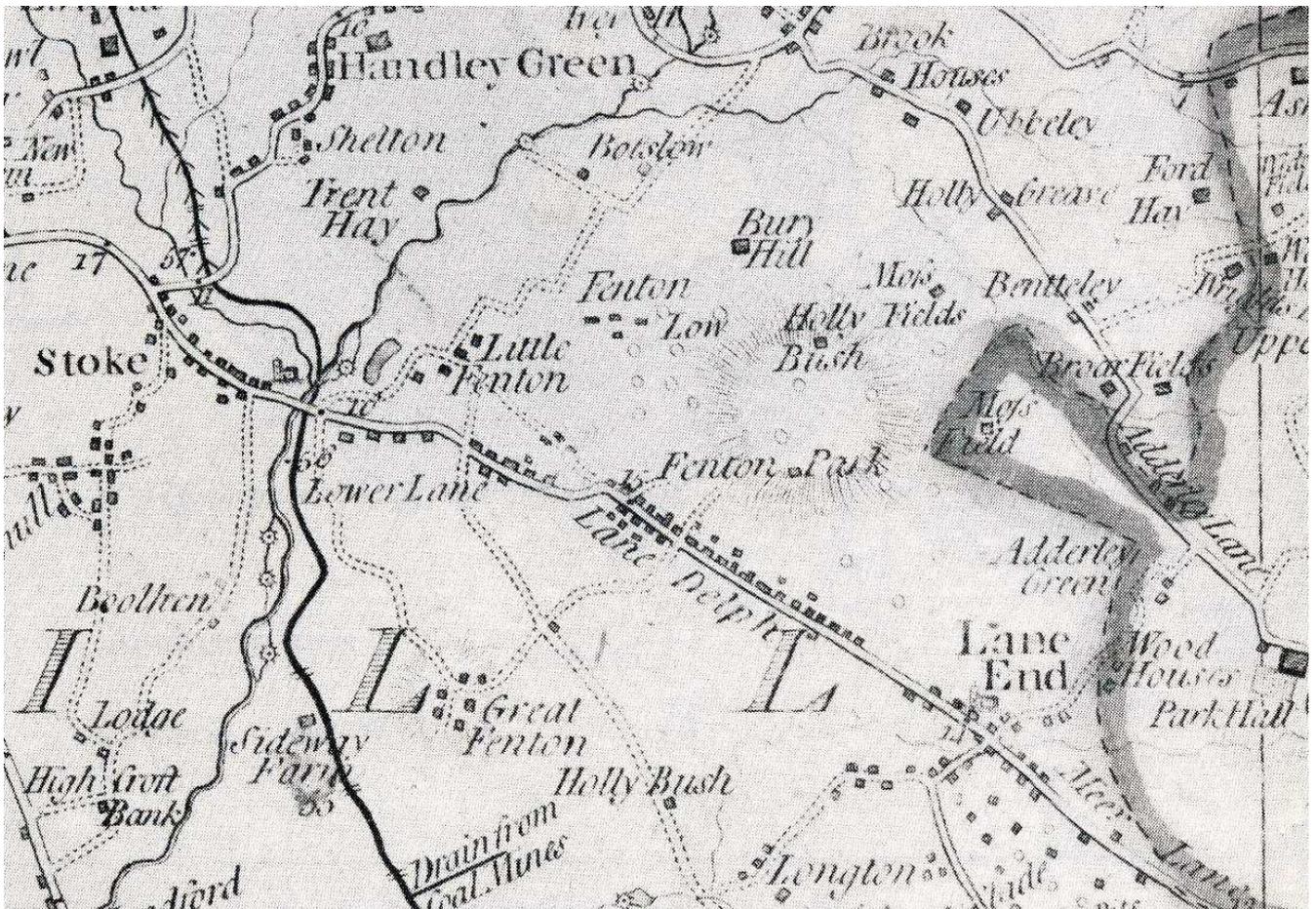


FIGURE 2: Map of Fenton, an extract from William Yates' Map of 1775

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- 3.3 The maps above show this road, then the High Street (east), now named the City Road. The 1880 map shows Fenton before the formation of Victoria Place; the 1900 map shows Victoria Place, Fountain Street and Hitchman Street.
 - 3.4 In 1765 William Baker, architect of Audlem Staffordshire, bought the estate and manor of Fenton Culvert together with a pottery for his second son William Baker II. William II died at a young age leaving William III only 13 years old. His mother Sarah married Ralph Bourne, who later took his step-son into business with him and the firm traded as Bourne and Baker. Ralph Bourne subsequently took his brother into the firm and it traded as Bourne Baker and Bourne.
 - 3.5 The factory stood on the north side of the turnpike road, a fragment of which still survives to each side of Fountain Street on the City Road. In 1806 the Trent and Mersey Canal Company built a railroad or tramway linking Stoke to Fenton. This was accessible to the north side of the factory and was used for the delivery of raw materials.
 - 3.6 By the late 1820's the Baker and Bourne families owned over 100 houses and the Roebuck Inn in Fenton. Most were situated along the north and south sides of High Street (now City Road) between Pear Tree Lane and Victoria Place.
 - 3.7 Ralph Bourne died in 1835 and shortly after the partnership was dissolved the works being carried on by William Baker. The business flourished and by 1850 the pottery had almost 500 employees and was the biggest firm in Fenton.
 - 3.8 In 1863 William bought an estate in Gloucestershire called Hasfield Court. He died two years later. The estate and factory were then inherited by his brother, the Rev. Ralph Bourne Baker; he then married the Bishop of Meath's daughter. Their son William Meath Baker inherited in 1875 and did not take an active part in running the factories. He did however, make regular visits to Fenton where, like his Uncle, he was heavily involved with the development of the town.
 - 3.9 In the mid 1880's William Meath Baker demolished the cottages on the east side of his factory fronting the High Street (now City Road) and what later became Victoria Place. In 1885 he constructed 30 houses with ornate frontages decorated with moulded brickwork and terracotta tiles. The houses were of various sizes, some double fronted and some with passage halls but most had two storey rear wings containing a third bedroom and water closet.
 - 3.10 The area at the front of the new houses at the junction of Victoria Street and the High Street is referred to as either Victoria Square (or Market Square on the 1900 OS map) and was formed by filling in a large pool in 1891. The following year plans were approved to erect a tram shelter in the centre.
 - 3.11 Most of the factory has now been demolished. A drinking fountain near the entrance to the Works was provided by William Baker for the people of Fenton. It later gave its name to the road constructed through the factory in 1900 called Fountain Street

4. Spatial Analysis and Appraisal of Views

4.1 Form

4.1.1 The layout of Victoria Place is a simple ribbon development which follows the line of the intersection of two main roads. Its original setting no longer survives however to the detriment of the houses. When first built the houses along Victoria Place would have looked on to a modest triangular open space with a pond and trees. The houses facing the high street were opposite Fenton House, the pottery owner's home. Set in open parkland. Fenton House changes between 1924 and 1937 and is shown on the 1937 OS map as the Vicarage, with much of the parkland sold off for housing and a new railway station.



FIGURE 5: Victoria Place c.1970

4.1.2 The central triangle contains a tram stop (1892) and later (1896), some lavatories but the general arrangement stays as designed until the late 1920's when the factory forming the east side of the "square" is replaced by housing. The houses to the south side of the City Road change use but the arrangement stays the same until they are demolished and replaced by a factory in the mid 1970's.

4.1.3 The row of 14 houses fronting City Road was demolished in 1997 because they were in a very poor state of repair.

4.1.4 The greatest change has been the impact of the new roundabout built in the late 1990's. Victoria Place has now almost ceased to exist. The intersection with City Road is now a large roundabout dominated by the attendant pedestrian crossings.

4.2 Views



FIGURE 6: *View of the site of demolished houses along City Road*

4.2.1 Views of quality out of the Area are limited:

- The area is now dominated by traffic flows and the roundabout. A large volume of traffic now uses Victoria Road as a main access road to the City Centre. Views to the south and west are particularly poor. The views to the east and north still have established streets and although these are eroded, they do provide a strong visual context for the houses.

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- There are no landmarks or formality to the planning of the streets. The focus of Victoria Place, the central area with trees and shelter has now been lost. The roundabout dominates the setting completely.

4.2.2 Views within the Area are simply those of the rear wings of the houses. There are views across open scrubland to the rear of the factory, now owned by James Kent.



FIGURE 7: *Modest coach house to rear yard behind individual yards, not included in the Conservation Area*

4.3 Open Spaces

4.3.1 There are no open spaces within the Conservation Area. The boundary is so tightly drawn it does not include the adjacent site shown in Figure 6.

5. Built Form

5.1 Style

- 5.1.1 The houses are almost a built exemplar of a brick-maker's copy book. There is a great deal of moulded brick ornament and variety of style – it is a modest example of Queen Anne Revival Style popular in the late 19th century. The first impression is one of order and repetition but closer inspection reveals the introduction of “one off” elements.
- 5.1.2 The most striking features of the terrace are the repeated gables, with large (over two properties) and small (over one) examples. These are either decorated with moulded brickwork in relief panels or form the front of a dormer at third floor. Slightly disturbing details within the patterns reveal pilasters balancing on top of central keystones in window arches; others simply stop in mid air.
- 5.1.3 The chimneys are of a similar height giving the buildings a much grander scale than the more prosaic terraces opposite. The gables to nos. 20 and 24 are different to the rest and are in a stepped Flemish style, one with a pedimented top, the other curved. These details are repeated further up Victoria Street at the corner of Hitchman Street - a development also built by William Meath Baker some years later.



FIGURE 8: *Strong silhouette of roof-scape is an important characteristic of the Conservation Area*

5.2 Architectural Character, Materials, Colours and Textures

5.21 Character

5.21.1 The design of all of the houses is broadly the same. The Conservation Area contains two terraces of houses sharing the same repeated details. The details have not been eroded over time because the properties have always been rented to the occupants from a single landlord. The last decoration of the exterior enhances this sense of common ownership and all houses are painted in the same way.

5.21.2 The character of the Conservation Area is therefore clearly institutional. The houses are grouped together to produce an architecture that is greater than the sum of its parts. The houses are an advert for the factory and to a greater extent for Fenton itself. The owner is creating an image and identity for the town, struggling with the competing interests of Stoke and Longton.

5.22 Plan, Form and Massing

5.22.1 The plan of development responded to the layout of the roads and to promote a public image of Fenton. The form of the terraces and the massing of them is to provide a more imposing front than would be normally expected of worker's housing. Contrast the Victorian housing with the later housing in the photograph below. The addition of huge gables and combination of housing types gives the impression of three storeys rather than two. The façade is grander and has a more impressive scale although the size differs little from the later housing opposite.



FIGURE 9: *View from City Road*

5.23 External Walls and Façade Finishes

5.23.1 Brickwork

Brickwork is the principal material for the development. There is no stone or stucco for ornament. All decoration is derived from the moulded brickwork used as cornices, aprons, cills, arches, keystones and console brackets. Dog tooth patterns enrich the gables together with flowers and leaves to the split pediments over the doors.



FIGURE 10: *View from Victoria Road*

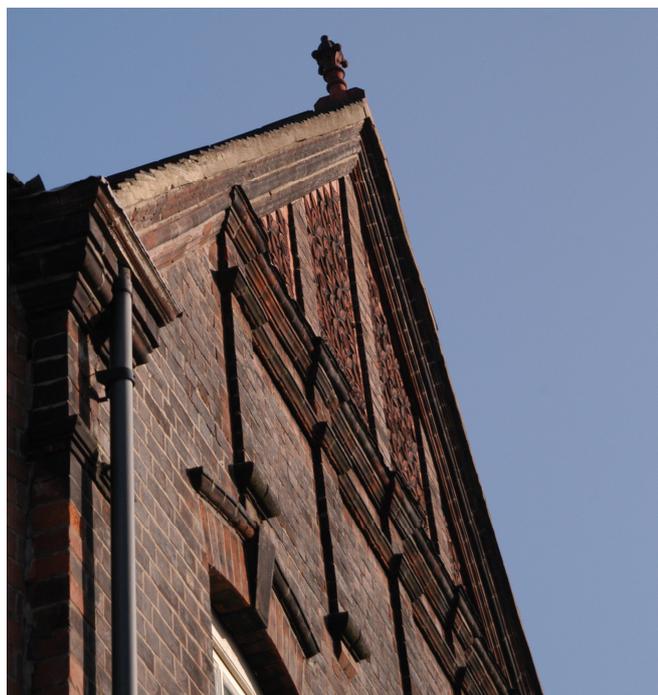


FIGURE 11: *Moulded brickwork used to great effect in gable*

5.23.2 Roofs

- Material

All roofs are as original and are covered by blue clay tiles. There are no decorated or perforated ridge tiles.



FIGURE 12: *Roofs, chimneys and original moulded chimney pots*

- Pitch and Type

The steeply pitched roofs add scale and grandeur to the small terraces. The open land to the east of Victoria Place ensures there are uninterrupted views of the Conservation Area in which the gables are a distinctive feature.

5.23.3 Windows

- Type and Fenestration

All the windows across the terraces appear to have been replaced with modern timber sash windows to a uniform design. They are not poor copies but they do lack any sense of individual detailing and the horns are crude. The sad thing is, they are not true copies of the original fenestration and as such do not add to the architectural character of the houses. The terraces were built at a time when window design was changing;

careful examination of the archive photograph shows clearly why the replacement windows appear to be crude and “off the peg”. Originally the windows did not have horns at all. The glazing bars were thinner and the upper sash panes were originally divided into four equal square panes each. This reflected the changing fashion and relative cheapness of larger panes of glass for the lower sashes. Similar examples do survive further down Victoria Street.



Figure 13: *Windows with moulded aprons and curved arches*

5.23.4 Doors

No original doors survive, again these have been replaced by well intentioned but badly formed copies. The panel pattern is correct but the central panel is too high and the lower panels too long – the original ones were much squarer.

There are no porches or hoods but there are brick door – cases which are either simple pilasters supporting pediments above fanlights or more elaborate examples rising above the ground floor cornice to a split pediment supporting a larger pediment and decorated panels. Both examples use the pairing of doorways to create a greater sense of scale and importance.

The doorways are further enhanced by the use of fanlights to exaggerate the height of the entrance. Again, some playful use is made of the keystones in arches as the spring points for supporting pilasters.



FIGURE 14: *Doors with the simplest brick door-case.*

5.23.5 Enclosure

The Conservation Area is so tightly drawn around the rear yards of the houses that it does not even include the rear yard and out-buildings built as part of the development. The enclosure of the rear yards is made by simple brick walls with moulded brick copings and timber gates.

The houses do not have any front gardens nor any other form of enclosure to the front.



FIGURE 15: *Detail from larger door-case showing decorative brickwork over door fanlights*

5.23.6 Groundscape



FIGURE 16: *Modern street surfaces running up to house facades*

There are no historic street surfaces remaining within the Conservation Area. Indeed the modern street surfaces are dominated by the traffic implementation of pedestrian crossings adjacent to the roundabout. This has caused a huge amount of visual disruption in the Conservation Area and is very damaging to its special interest. Coloured and textured paving has been extended to the front wall of the houses as they have no defensible or private space in these areas.

5.3 Listed and Unlisted Buildings of Importance

5.3.1 Buildings on the Statutory List

There are no listed buildings in the Conservation Area.

5.3.2 Buildings of Special Local Interest Listed in the Local Plan

Nos: 375 – 383 odd City Road
Nos. 10-24 even Victoria Place

5.4 Trees, Green Spaces, Edges and Ecology

5.4.1 There are no trees or green spaces within the Conservation Area. There is a landscaped area to the City Road side of the development shown in figure 4. This does not directly enhance the area nor contribute to the setting of the houses.

5.5 Detractors and Neutral Areas – Enhancement and Development Opportunities

5.5.1 Features which detract from the character and appearance of the Area include:

- Impact of street furniture and signage associated with the highway
- Pavement surfaces running directly to front walls of houses
- Lack of maintenance to windows and doors
- Painting of brickwork
- Insertion of poorly detailed windows and doors
- Tightness of boundary of Conservation Area excluding original coach house

5.5.2 Enhancement Opportunities include:

- Removal of paint to brickwork
- Limiting of street furniture related to roundabout and telephone kiosk
- Changes to pavement surface to produce a less strident impact
- Improved lighting standards

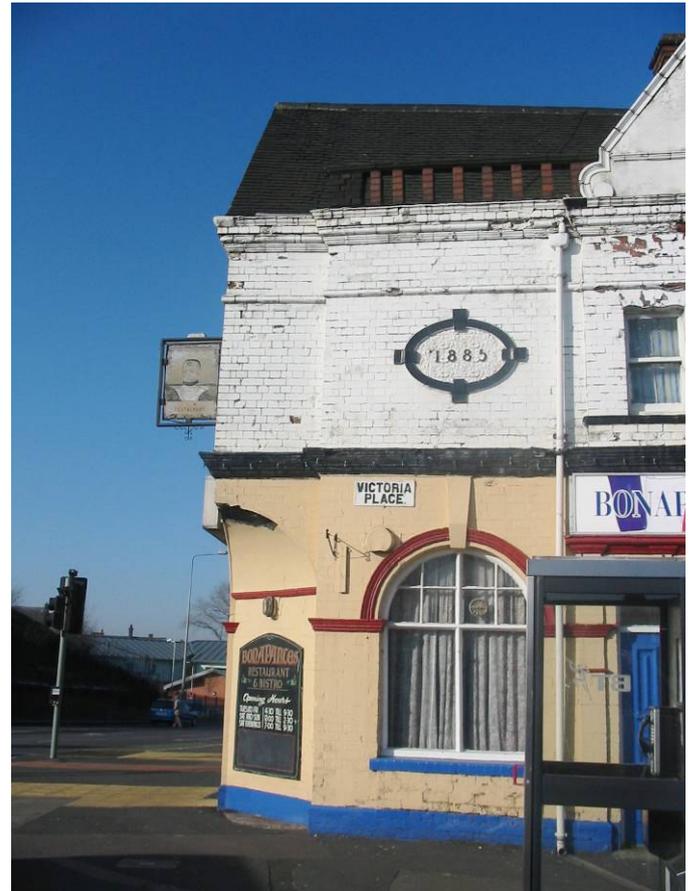


FIGURE 17: *Harmful modifications: Painted elevations of corner house at the junction of City Road and Victoria Place*

6. Pressures and Threats

- 6.1 The ownership of the houses has passed from the Baker family and the houses are clearly in need of maintenance.
- 6.2 The housing mass is so fragmentary it is vulnerable to clearance and replacement with buildings of a more commercial nature.

7. Summary of Special Interest

Architecture Victoria Place Conservation Area is probably one of the smallest Conservation Areas within the City. It was declared to save some of the finest exemplars of worker's housing that we have. The vast majority of housing of this type is speculative and was not consciously "designed". The architecture here is a bold expression of the style of the time

and is unusual by being so; most of the housing in Stoke is provincial and generally late in its conception.

History The Area has strong associations with the Baker family and what was the largest factory in Fenton. It directly relates to the grander architecture on the other side of the City road (Albert Square) as it was built by the same family to promote the civic aspirations of Fenton.

Character and Appearance The Area has a strong visual identity which is particularly distinctive. Together with Hitchman Street, also built by the Baker family for the same purpose, these houses represent a rare example of domestic philanthropic architecture. The grand scale of the gables give the impression of three storey development and the mix of house types to provide double fronted houses ensures that this development is very different to those that surround it. The amount of surface decoration to the front facades and provision of large rear wings further demonstrate the quality of the development.



FIGURE 18: *Victoria Place is now dominated by heavy traffic*

8. Recommendations and Proposals

- 8.1 It is recommended to enlarge the Conservation Area to include Hitchman Street. Both developments were built for the same people by the same employer and share history

together. The buildings also share common detailing. The boundary should also include the rear yard and the site of the demolished houses.

- 8.2 It is not recommended to alter the existing Article 4 (2) direction.
- 8.3 Consideration should be given to the provision of street trees to Victoria Place to soften the impact of the traffic and to landscape the parking bays.
- 8.4 Consideration should be given to reintroducing appropriate lamp standards to the Conservation Area, with special emphasis on the central feature where a “feature” lamp could be provided.
- 8.5 Provision of an information point giving detail about the area and its history might be considered. This could be incorporated into the design of a central feature were this course followed.



Figure 19: Postcard of Victoria Place c.1915 showing drinking fountain and W.C

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