

Urban Conservation and Design

Spring Bank Conservation Area Character Statement

A: The special character of the area

General

Spring Bank as its name implies is built along the line of the bank of the old Spring Ditch which was originally used to supply fresh water to the city from Spring Head. Development started in the early 19th century and continued through the next 100 years, encouraged by the streets proximity to the town centre and its use as a major access route. It still retains that use and its importance has increased with the passage of time.

The street has a feeling of grandeur generated by its width (it was wide enough to have a line of trees running down the centre up to the early years of the 20th century), its importance as a major route into the city and the size and imposing nature of some of the individual buildings and groups of buildings which line it. Buildings comprise a variety of styles but the dominant character is of a street enclosed by buildings and terraces which contain appreciable amounts of architectural and artistic detailing. This level of detailing adds greatly to the street scene and the character of the Conservation Area.

Originally built for mixed residential and commercial use the dominant land uses now are the distinct groupings of shops, offices and leisure premises (pubs and amusement arcades) all of which generate pedestrian activity. The private frontages between the back of the pavement and the building line, which were originally gardens separated from the public space, have, in a number of places, been brought into use as forecourts and additional display areas for the shops. This, by bringing activity out of the buildings and into the public domain, can add a particular quality to the character of those parts of the Conservation Area where it occurs, further increasing activity and contributing to the vitality and interest of the area as a whole.

Part of Spring Bank's character stems from the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic along this arterial route into the city and the resulting noise levels. The leisure premises along the street, together with the latter's role as a major traffic route, extend activity beyond normal shopping hours. Activity carries on late into the evening, giving Spring Bank a reasonably lively and well used feel which is also very much a part of its character.

A further important element which affects activity on, and therefore the character of, Spring Bank is the number of properties which contain residential accommodation. Some buildings are entirely in residential use and it is common to find flats and bed-sits above existing shops and leisure premises.

The resulting mix of uses is an integral part of the character of the street by virtue of the activities generated throughout the day and into the evening hours.

The Streetscape

Spring Bank is a long, wide, straight street affording distant views along its entire length. It is closed at its western end by the curved, three storey façade of a terraced group fronting the busy Spring Bank West/Princes Avenue junction in the adjacent Princes Avenue Conservation Area.

The street comprises predominantly 3 storey buildings constructed in distinctive terraces. Building heights often vary between individual blocks and their design frequently incorporates front facing gables and dormers which give a strong vertical emphasis to the upper parts of buildings.

In a number of places there are still private front gardens, defined by solid walls, railings or hedges. These front gardens, the vegetation associated with them and the few trees which remain, add variety to the street scene.

Apart from some notable exceptions, where development has been set-back, the building line runs consistently some metres from the kerbside (albeit that half the width of this "pavement" is frequently in the ownership of the adjacent building). Overall this means that the street has a reasonably well defined sense of enclosure although there are a number of gap sites.

A particular feature of the Conservation Area, and one which is beginning to be eroded by more recent development, is the way in which buildings at junctions with side streets in "turning the corner" give equal attention to detail and decoration on both frontages, thus forming an entrance to side streets.

Important Buildings and Groups of Buildings

Because development along Spring Bank was mainly carried out in terraces, the uniformity of layout and finish across the frontage of these groups of buildings contributes greatly to the street's form and style.

Characteristic architectural features to individual buildings include gables to front and some side elevations, dormers, pilasters, porticos at main entrances and large bay windows. In addition there is a large amount of ornate detailing in the form of mouldings above and below windows and entrances. There are also three traditional shop fronts remaining.

Prominent buildings include:

- The Botanic PH
- The Polar Bear PH
- The Swedenborgian Church 179 Spring Bank (now Vacant)
- The Tap and Spile PH (formerly the Eagle PH)
- The Hull and East Riding Institute for the Deaf
- The Spring Bank Tavern PH

Some of the more prominent and prestigious terraces towards the eastern end of the street are set back from the pavement and have basements with direct access from the street. This is an unusual feature in the flat topography of Hull and one which, by virtue of the expense and effort involved in providing them, emphasises the importance of the thoroughfare when it was originally developed. These same terraces also benefit from the provision of rear access ways, one of these being an actual street (Grey Street). This meant that they were able to have their own outbuildings including some two storey coach houses. Some of these outbuildings remain and are still in use as workshops.

Myrtle Villas, directly opposite Stanley Street, is an example of "court" development, a form of post Bye Law working class housing development. This particular style is characteristic of Hull and as such is of historic interest. This example comprises four houses with short front gardens and pedestrian only access between two tall ornate end of terrace buildings.

Materials

As is generally the case in Hull the predominant building material is brick. The red variety (which was cheaper because it was made from the clay dug in and around the city) and the distinctive cream/yellow variety produced further afield are in considerable evidence. The latter type, due to their greater cost and fashion value, were used for the more prestigious front and prominent side elevations.

Some departures do however exist on individual buildings, notably pubs, churches and the Hull and East Riding Institute for the Deaf where stone detailing has been used around windows and doors (the material generally used being sandstone from the West Riding).

A further indication of the prestigious character of the street when originally built, is the almost universal use of Welsh slates on main roofs rather than the locally made clay tiles. While some of these have been replaced, sufficient remain for them to be still an important part of the area's character.

The traditional material in Hull for window bays, door cases, barge-boards and decorative details was, at the time Spring Bank was being developed, timber which was in plentiful supply due to the ports Baltic trade. There are some fine examples of the carpenters craft on Spring Bank.

While Yorkstone was originally used in this street for paving, with granite kerbs for the pavement/road edge, the amount has gradually been reduced due to replacement with other materials. Nevertheless the isolated pockets which remain provide an indication of the original appearance.

B: NEGATIVE ELEMENTS

The street suffers in places from a run down appearance. There is a high proportion of buildings in a poor state of repair, with problems including settlement damage, cracked and missing roof slates/tiles and damaged or rotten woodwork.

In addition, the street has a number of gaps in its built frontage caused, in most cases, by demolition of original properties. Some of these sites are in a poor and unkempt condition and together they produce an incongruity in the built street scene. The main gap sites include:

- Between 178-186 Spring Bank
- The corner site adjacent 152 Spring Bank and Peel Street
- The corner site adjacent 215 Spring Bank and Middleton Street
- The site of the former Government Buildings

Some of the more recent development, given planning approval before Conservation Area designation, is out of keeping with the scale and context of the original street scene. At various points along the street high brick walls, fences and low "hitching rail" type barriers have been used on the street frontage to demark boundaries. In addition new development incorporating back of pavement car parking has been introduced. These have a detrimental effect on the area and result in a reduction of character.

Many of the original shop fronts have been replaced by new ones out of keeping with the scale and detailing of the buildings they now form part of. In addition, properties originally built as dwellings have since been converted to retail use and new shop-fronts installed which are of a style unsympathetic with the original character of the building and street frontage. This is compounded by inappropriate application of internally illuminated fascias and projecting signs.

Many buildings have been altered using inappropriate materials and design features. This has reduced the overall effect of unity and compatibility within the street scene. Examples include:

- Replacement uPVC windows and frames
- Concrete or clay tiles on roofs
- The removal of bay windows
- The replacement of dormers with velux windows

- The blocking up of openings (windows and doors) without concern for the overall appearance of the building
- Use of materials with inappropriate or unsympathetic colours

As with all modern urban streets with a predominantly commercial nature, Spring Bank suffers from the clutter created by street furniture of a design and location unsympathetic with the character or appearance of the street.

Much of the original paving materials has been either replaced by concrete pavers or in situ concrete, or covered up with tarmacadam, resulting in a patchy and unsatisfactory appearance.

While advertisements are seen as an integral part of a commercial area, they can be visually intrusive. The wall mounted advertisement hoarding on Freehold Street at its junction with Spring Bank is a prime example of this.

Approved by the Planning & Design Committee, 23rd October, 1996