

STRANGFORD CONSERVATION AREA



Department of the Environment (N.I.)

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The aims and policies set out in this booklet are for the guidance of District Councils, public bodies, local residents, landlords and tenants, intending developers and amenity and other groups. The booklet should be regarded as but a first step in securing the special architectural and historic interest of the designated area. It is anticipated that local initiative and discussion will give rise to proposals for repair and restorative works and developments which will not only preserve but will positively enhance the Area's special character. Designation will be of little practical value without this local support.

September 1985

Front Cover

Nos 1-7 Downpatrick Road and No 1 The Square.



Part 1

1.0 LOCATION AND HISTORY

- 1.1 Strangford stands on the west side of the narrow entrance to the great sea lough which bears its name. It appears to have become a landing place early in the Christian era though its parish, Ballyculter, does not share with its westerly neighbours, Kilclief and Saul, the honour of traditional establishment by St Patrick himself.
- 1.2 Its name derives from the Vikings who, while raiding along the coast, became aware of the strength of the tidal currents at the mouth of the 'fjord'. As elsewhere raid gave way to trade, and to the establishment of a port. Strangford's importance was no doubt enhanced by its strategic position at the point where a network of inland waterways meet the open sea. Its coves, sheltered from the tidal streams by Swan Islet, would have been an obvious place to transfer cargo from more fragile craft to larger, sea-going vessels.
- 1.3 Strangford's mediaeval prominence may be judged from its inclusion as one of only five 'Ports of Ulster' in the Crown Customs Accounts of 1281. Trade was not always peaceful; in 1400 the Constable of Dublin leading an Anglo-Irish fleet fought a savage but inconclusive battle against intrusive Scots just out to sea from Strangford. In the following years the demand for local security is shown by the building of tower houses which were encouraged after 1425 by a crown subsidy. Strangford Castle, one of many tower houses in the area, appears to date from about 1500. It was ruinous by 1540 but the importance of its position commanding the coves and the narrows beyond was probably the reason for it being rebuilt and maintained in the time of Queen Elizabeth 'for securing the Quiet of this Country'.
- 1.4 There followed two centuries of prosperous cross-channel trade with North Wales and further afield. Many of Strangford's buildings relate directly to this trade and to the benefits it brought both to customs officials and to the landlords, the Earls of Kildare and their successors the Lords deRos. The town probably developed much of its present form early in the 17th century under the direction of Valentine Payne, agent to the 16th Earl of Kildare. Some of the present buildings though much repaired have their origins in this period.
- 1.5 In 1629 Payne built the Old Quay 'where there was none before, that the biggest shippe the King hathe may lay her side beside it'. From the same year originates Old Court Chapel again supervised by Payne who, with his wife Elizabeth, presented it with a bell. This was a matter of some convenience for the community because at that time Ballyculter church was not only rather distant but also completely ruinous. The old customs warehouse standing close to the Old Quay and now converted to a dwelling is said to date from 1640. Such advantages contributed to Strangford's enhancement, and before the end of the century it had replaced Ardglass as the main port of Lecale.
- 1.6 The town was increasingly important as the outpost for Downpatrick, with its thriving county town markets, for ships unable to make the difficult and shallow passage to Quoile Quay. 'This Town', said Harris in 1744, 'is properly the Port Town of the whole Lake; for though the Collector holds his Residence at Down for the convenience of Trade yet he is obliged to keep a Clerk here'. This arrangement seems to have proved unsatisfactory for in 1789 Mr Norris the Customs Collector built Strangford House in an elegant and sophisticated style which Downpatrick could not match. The affluence which it betrays is explained by the position which Strangford achieved by the end of the century when it ranked eighth in all Irish ports in tonnage of ship registered. The singling out by John Wesley of Strangford in which to preach during his visit to Ireland of 1778 is further evidence of the importance of the town at this time.
- 1.7 Strangford remained the chief port of Lecale in the first half of the 19th century, exporting grain, provisions and livestock, and importing coal, iron, slate and timber. Churches were built for the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics and new terraces of houses; fairs were established twice yearly, and post office and police station made their appearance. Pigot's *Directory* of 1824 described Strangford as 'a small town pleasantly situated at the entrance of a beautiful lough of the same name with a good harbour for vessels of small burden. There are a number of good houses, an excellent inn and the ruins of an old castle'. By then the town's inhabitants included four grocers, a tallow chandler, a corn dealer, a spirit dealer and five publicans as well as the keeper of the hotel and posting house. Strangford was at the height of its prosperity.

1.8 Ireland's trade and with it that of Strangford, enjoyed a boom during the course of the American Civil War but subsequently the development of the town came to an abrupt close. Ships were becoming larger and required a greater draft for which Strangford could not provide the facility. The ports of Belfast and Newry were growing to provide deep water berths and with the help of the growing railway network, drew away all but a very local trade. Even locally the town was in rivalry with the Royal harbour of Ardglass and the port created by the Ward family in Killough bay. Both of these were provided with the advantage over Strangford of a railway link. More competition existed across the narrows where Portaferry had become the lively service centre for the greater part of the Ards.

1.9 Today Strangford retains much of the Georgian charm inherited from the age of prosperity. It is still beautifully framed by fine plantations of trees designed and executed for its principal land owning families. But things are much quieter now; the once busy basin has been partly filled to provide a public open space. Even the coal boat no longer calls although the coal yard remains in active use. The ferry linking to Portaferry, whose history is as old as the town itself, is the most regular user of the harbour. Other shipping at the quays is limited to pleasure craft and the occasional vessel in to fish the lough. Wild life both above and below the water line is of unparalleled variety and of great scientific importance. Of particular local interest, is the colony of Terns which have made Swan Island their nesting place. Swan Island is just off the shore in Strangford Harbour. Home industries are now few, so that most people must look to Downpatrick or Portaferry for employment and services. Tourism in the form of day trippers and visiting yachtsmen is possibly the greatest area of growth in recent times.

1.10 The Department's aim in creating a Conservation Area is not to restrict new initiatives but rather to encourage suitable enterprises in such a way as to enhance and enliven the valuable legacy we have inherited from the past.

2.0 THE DESIGNATION

2.1 Notice is hereby given that the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) in pursuance of the powers conferred upon it by Article 37 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 has designated the area outlined on the attached map as a Conservation Area being an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

2.2 A map of the designated area has been deposited at the District Council Office, Development Office and the Divisional Planning Office at the addresses indicated below:

Down District Council 24 Strangford Road
DOWNPATRICK
(Telephone Downpatrick 4331)

Development Office Medway Building
Mount Crescent
DOWNPATRICK
(Telephone Downpatrick 3821)

Divisional Planning Office Rathdune House
New Bridge Street
DOWNPATRICK
(Telephone Downpatrick 3721)

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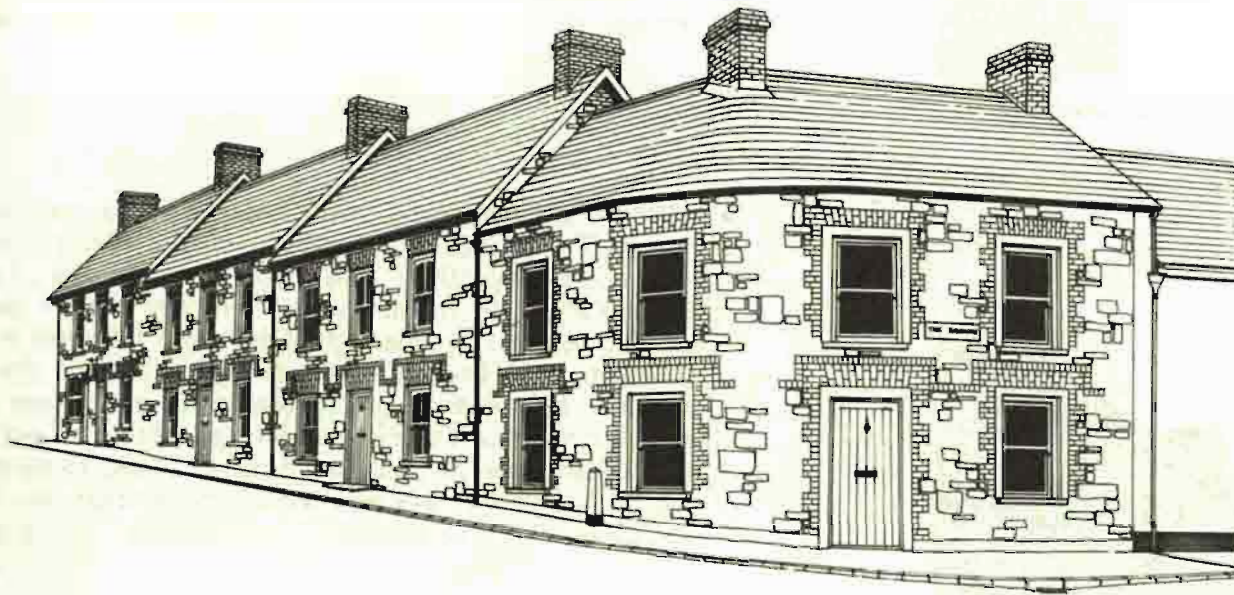
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The Department acknowledges the assistance of the South Eastern Education and Library Board in the preparation of this Bibliography.



Part 2

4.0 DEVELOPERS' BRIEF

Introduction

- 4.1 The aim of the Department in designating a Conservation Area is to preserve and enhance its character and appearance. The purpose of this part of the booklet is to identify those features which give Strangford its distinctive character, to outline the Department's policies towards potential development and to give advice on the other matters which contribute to the appearance of the village. The Department seeks to encourage direct works which enhance the architectural and historic character of the Conservation Area, and also those works which involve the removal or replacement of any features which detract from its architectural or historic character.

Land Use

- 4.2 The predominant use is residential with a number of commercial and community uses distributed throughout the area. There are some vacant, unused and derelict sites, particularly around the Newry Quay. These may be the location of new development though it is expected that proposals to alter and extend existing buildings will also arise. Any increased demand for commercial floorspace can be accommodated in the southern end of Castle Street and the Square through the expansion of existing operations or the change of use of existing buildings. In some cases other changes of use which meet normal planning criteria and do not adversely affect the appearance of a building or its setting may be acceptable.



General view of the Conservation Area from the Ferry.



Castle Street. Any increased demand for commercial floorspace can be accommodated here and in the Square.

Plan Form

- 4.3 Strangford sits between two headlands around the double bay of the harbour. Tiers of buildings step up the hill from the quays to Castle Street and Ardglass Road. The town is visually enclosed by the trees at Old Court and Compass Hill to the north and those at the Rectory and the Lodge to the south. The Square at the junction of Castle Street, Downpatrick Road and Ardglass Road provides a focal point behind the waterfront. It is the Department's policy to maintain the existing street pattern, building line and building widths. All new development will be subject to strict planning control and, if permitted it shall respect the principle of continuous frontage development abutting the pavement.

Design Scale

- 4.4 The buildings in the Conservation Area are mainly two storey with a few of single or three storey height. It is the Department's policy that any development is in keeping with the design and scale of the area and particularly adjoining properties.



The Square provides a focal point behind the waterfront.



This typical terrace illustrates the two storey design scale common throughout the Conservation Area.

Buildings

- 4.5 There are several buildings of individual merit in the Conservation Area and these, in conjunction with groupings of other buildings, contribute significantly to the overall appearance of the town. The Department has compiled a list of buildings of architectural or historic interest under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1972. These are listed in Appendix One and shown on the Map. Proposals to demolish or alter any buildings within the designated area require to be approved by the Department on application to the Town and Country Planning Service.
- 4.6 The outline and form of any permitted new buildings should be sympathetic to and consistent with the form of existing buildings in the Conservation Area. The general outline and form of extensions should be in keeping with the parent building. In this connection the appearance of the rear of a building can be important as so many are open to public view.



Strangford Castle, Castle Street.



Strangford House, Castle Street.



St. Mary's R.C. Church, Ardglass Road.

Roofs

- 4.7 Roofs are pitched at 30° and steeper with the ridge parallel to the street and are covered in natural slates. In repairs and renovations it is preferable to use natural slates. It is important in terrace buildings to maintain the appearance of continuity in roofing material. In new work roofs should be pitched in order to retain the character of the traditional roof line.
- 4.8 Dormer windows may be used to provide accommodation in an existing roofspace, but flat roofed dormers are not acceptable. Preferred forms are shown below.



Preferred forms of dormer windows.



Continuity in roofing materials is important where roofs are interrelated. Numbers 41–49 Castle Street.



A fine example of traditional dormers. Numbers 45–47 Castle Street.

Chimneys

- 4.9 Chimneys are an important element contributing to the appearance of the roofscape. They should be traditionally proportioned, with a greater depth than width and a minimum of two flues. New chimneys should be built with second hand or imported hand made bricks or finished with plain render, lined where appropriate. The use of concrete and machine cut clay bricks should be avoided, as should concrete caps.

Walls

- 4.10 Though there are a number of stone buildings and a few built of brick, the majority have been rendered with a smooth lime or cement plaster. Where buildings are of stone either plain or painted, these finishes should be maintained. Otherwise in new development or renovation a smooth plaster finish is preferable. A fine roughcast may sometimes be acceptable in rear extensions or work not exposed to public view. Pebble dash finishes or artificial stone claddings should not be used. Surrounds to doors and windows, quoinstones and other features should be retained or replaced.



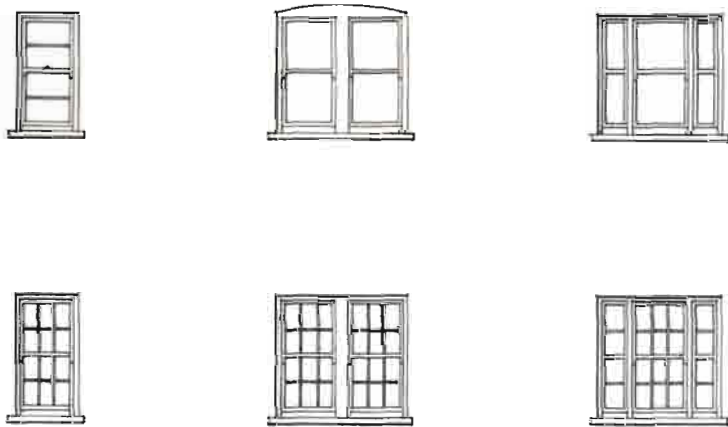
Traditional chimney proportions are illustrated in this view of Castle Street.



A fine example of random stone finish with brick detailing.

Windows

- 4.11 In renovation or new development the proportion of window to wall area should reflect the proportion existing in the area. The shape of the window opening and the window panes is also important and they should be traditionally proportioned as to height and width. If a wider opening is required then the vertical emphasis should be retained by subdividing the opening with a mullion or mullions.
- 4.12 There are fine examples of Georgian, Regency and Victorian windows in the Conservation Area. Modern window replacements are often less than sympathetic to the appearance of the building due principally to their coarse detailing, poor proportions and the obtrusiveness of the opening lights. In new buildings and in renovation and repair work, opening windows should generally be of the sliding sash type, although paired casements are recommended where they were originally fitted. Where large windows are proposed in connection with the commercial use of premises, these should be confined to the ground floor. In the case of existing buildings such alterations should be in keeping with the design of the building itself and in all cases in keeping with the character of the area.



Examples of traditional window proportions.



The window proportions of this house in Castle Street are appropriate to the Conservation Area.



An example of a shop window which reflects the scale and proportions of fenestration in the Conservation Area.

Doors

4.13 Doors should be solid either boarded or panelled. If daylight is required this can be obtained by a glazed panel in a sheeted door, by a fanlight over the door, or by the inclusion of a lobby or vestibule with an internal glazed door. Where space permits three-quarter side lights could also be used.



Examples of Doors in the Conservation Area.

Signs

- 4.14 Badly designed signs and advertisements can be visually disruptive and destroy the traditional character of the area. The principal factors to be taken into account are the scale, the relationship with the design of the building, the style of the sign, the materials and the colour. Internally illuminated signs will generally not be acceptable, nor will commercial advertising unrelated to the use of the building or site. Hand painted signs painted directly on to the walls or fascia board can be particularly effective as can the use of profiled timber lettering of a traditional design. The references to shops and shop signs listed in the bibliography contain a wealth of examples many of which would be appropriate to Strangford.

Colour

- 4.15 Caution should be exercised if painting large wall areas in strong colours. Generally all exposed timber works on public elevations should be painted not stained or varnished. Strong colours or black or white can be used on doors and windows. Plaster features such as surrounds and quoins should generally be in contrast. Rainwater guttering and downpipes should be painted the same colour as the wall behind unless they are specific design features. Iron railings look best painted either black or white.



Examples of hand painted shop signs in Strangford.



Contrasting colours or black or white are recommended for doors and windows and for features such as surrounds and quoins.

Landscape

- 4.16 The boundary of the Conservation Area has been drawn to include the major wooded areas to the north and south of the town. The trees provide the enclosure within which the town sits and they are an essential element of its setting and character. Some of the areas are in need of woodland management to ensure that they continue to grace the town and frame the buildings within the Conservation Area. Some of the presently vacant and derelict areas would benefit from selective tree and shrub planting.
- 4.17 Outdoor fittings and street furniture such as seats, lighting and lamps, litter bins, bollards and signs should be of a co-ordinated design suitable for the town. The presence of electricity and telephone cables and poles is particularly evident within the Conservation Area. The Department will encourage the undergrounding of these services and the removal or rerouting of cables running along building facades.

Advice

- 4.18 Prospective developers can see many good examples of traditional detailing within the Conservation Area. Advice on Conservation Areas generally and on Strangford in particular is available from Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch of the Department of the Environment (NI), 1 Connsbrook Avenue, Belfast BT4 1EH (Telephone Belfast 653251).



The importance of the wooded area to the south as an element of enclosure is illustrated in this view from Old Court.



The trees on Compass Hill provide an ideal backdrop for the buildings on Castle Street and Old Court.



Part 3

5.0 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND TO CONSERVATION

Introduction

- 5.1 The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 provides legislation for the protection of the Province's heritage of buildings of special architectural or historic importance. In addition it also provides for the designation of whole areas of special architectural or historic interest where it is considered that they merit preservation or enhancement.
- 5.2 Conservation is much more than just the maintenance of historically important and attractive buildings and their environments as records of the past. It also involves consideration of these matters in the context of present day life, functions and requirements.
- 5.3 Conservation in Northern Ireland is the concern of everyone. One of the aims of this booklet is to inform people about Strangford Conservation Area, its purpose and function.
- 5.4 Whilst responsibility for the statutory listing of historic buildings and for the designation of Conservation Areas lies with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, the task of conserving the Province's heritage cannot be left solely to Government Departments, a sprinkling of voluntary bodies and a band of responsible conservationists. The public at large as well as developers in the public and private sectors and those owning or occupying premises within or adjacent to Conservation Areas all have important roles to play.

Development Control

- 5.5 Development within the Conservation Area will be controlled with the primary aim of ensuring the retention and enhancement of the area's character. Every possible effort will be made to preserve the individual buildings and groups of buildings on which that character depends.
- 5.6 Where permission is sought to demolish or alter a building which has been listed under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 as being of special architectural or historic interest, or to demolish

any other building, it will be necessary to demonstrate that such works would in themselves be an enhancement or that they are required for overriding and exceptional reasons relating to the development of the area.

- 5.7 The design of new buildings must take account of buildings in the immediate area. Their mass, outline and detailing must be in sympathy with their setting.
- 5.8 Building materials must be sympathetic in texture, colour and quality and where appropriate reflect traditional local usage.
- 5.9 Changes of use necessitating a planning application which are likely to have an adverse effect on land or buildings which contribute significantly to the character of the Conservation Area will not normally be permitted.
- 5.10 The siting of new open spaces will be carefully considered to ensure that they make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and that proper provision is made for their maintenance.
- 5.11 Those wishing to make alterations to buildings or to carry out development within the Conservation Area are advised to consult informally with the Divisional Planning Office, Rathdune House, New Bridge Street, Downpatrick, (Telephone 3721) before preparing detailed plans. This will avoid unnecessary expense arising from the need to amend detailed proposals which may not adequately respect the special circumstances which exist in the Conservation Area.
- 5.12 Development near, but not inside the Conservation Area, and visually related to it should be sited and designed in size, form and materials to be in harmony with the buildings and general appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 5.13 Under the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1973, certain types of development were identified which do not require specific planning permission. However, the Department has power to direct that in any particular area these types of development should require planning permission. Such directions could be applied in this Conservation Area.

Positive Action

- 5.14 The Department seeks to encourage the initiation of schemes to improve the appearance of buildings and sites within the Conservation Area. Within its specific functions and through the initiation of community services, Down District Council will play a leading part in this exercise. Appropriate steps should be taken by those responsible to tidy up, improve and enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area by the control of street furniture, overhead transmission lines of all kinds and to ensure the removal of undesirable examples of the latter wherever possible.
- 5.15 Existing advertisements and signs of all types displayed in the area will be the subject of special consideration and it is hoped that with the co-operation of local businessmen, the number of advertisements displayed within the Conservation Area can be reduced to a discreet level.
- 5.16 Preservation Orders can be made to protect any trees or groups of trees which form an essential feature in the character of the Conservation Area. The general appearance of many of these green areas will be further enhanced by selective planting of additional trees and sowing of grass.
- 5.17 The Department will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the needs of pedestrian and vehicular traffic are balanced against those of the Conservation Area. The location of on-street parking spaces and off-street car parks is determined with a view to minimising their effect on the character of the area.

Financial Assistance

- 5.18 Finance is an important element in the realisation of schemes to improve the Conservation Area. The potential for self-financing operations is an important consideration. Other useful non-Governmental sources include voluntary contributions, gifts, income from sales and leases etc (see under "other grants" below). The Governmental sources are set out in paragraphs 5.19 to 5.22 below.

Sources of Grants

5.19 DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

(1) Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch

The Department may give financial assistance towards the cost of repairs or maintenance of buildings which have been listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. There is no fixed rate of grant and each case is considered on its merits. Grants are made on the recommendations of the Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland. Churches in use for ecclesiastical purposes are not eligible for grant aid.

The Department may also on the recommendation of the Historic Buildings Council consider grant aided expenditure in connection with the preservation or enhancement of the Conservation Area. Such expenditure should normally be related to a co-ordinated scheme.

Details can be obtained from the Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch, 1 Connsbrook Avenue, Belfast, BT4 1EH (Telephone Belfast 653251).

(2) Conservation Branch

The acquisition of lands for public open spaces may be grant aided by the Department. Grants of up to 75% may be made under Section 16 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Details can be obtained from Conservation Branch, Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, Hut 6, Castle Grounds, Stormont, Belfast 4. (Telephone Belfast 768716).

5.20 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The District Council has a duty to secure adequate recreational, social, physical and cultural facilities for Down District, and the approved expenses for such purposes may be grant aided under the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

5.21 Details can be obtained from the Sport and Recreation Branch, Department of Education, Londonderry House, Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4JJ (Telephone Belfast 232253), or from Down District Council, 24 Strangford Road, Downpatrick BT30 6SL (Telephone Downpatrick 4331).

5.22 NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE

The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 enables the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to pay grants towards the cost of improvement, conversion and repair. All grants are subject to certain conditions and full details may be obtained at any office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Headquarters address is 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8PB (Telephone Belfast 240588). The local address is 51 John Street, Downpatrick BT30 9EG (Telephone Downpatrick 3551).

Other Grants

5.23 Charitable Trusts are sometimes willing to help with the conservation of buildings in charitable or other non-profit making ownerships. The Pilgrim Trust may be prepared to give grants of this sort. The Landmark Trust is interested in purchasing properties of historical or architectural interest which can be converted into lettable holiday houses. They particularly favour buildings of individual character. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust makes grants to support countryside projects of various kinds. These include schemes for practical conservation but not for the preservation of buildings. Details can be obtained from,

- (1) Pilgrim Trust, Fielden House, Little College Street, London SW1P 3SH.
- (2) Landmark Trust, Shottesbrooke, White Waltham, Berkshire.
- (3) Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, Comely Park House, Dunfermline, Fife.

5.24 For details of other grant giving bodies, reference may be made to "The Directory of Grant Making Trusts", published by the National Council of Social Sciences.

APPENDIX ONE

List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest within Strangford Conservation Area.

1. Strangford House, Castle Street.
2. 15 Castle Street.
3. 41 Castle Street.
4. 43 Castle Street.
5. 45 Castle Street.
6. 47 Castle Street.
7. 1 Old Court.
8. Stonehaven, 2 Old Court.
9. 8 and 6 Castle Street.
10. 22 Castle Street.
11. 1 Quay Road and Stair.
12. 6 The Quay.
13. Old Court Harbour and Katherine Quay.
14. Boatman's House, Old Court Harbour.
15. Old Court Chapel of Ease and Boundary Wall.
16. 7, 5, 3 and 1 Downpatrick Road and 1 The Square.

