

# SION MILLS Conservation Area



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.

- PART I sets out the general objectives of designating Conservation Areas and the principles of designation.
- PART II describes and delineates the Conservation Area of Sion Mills.
- PART III contains a developers brief for the designated area.

The booklet should be regarded as **but a first step** in securing the special architectural or 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.

This is a publication by the Department of the Environment (NI) which is responsible for the designation of Conservation Areas and whose Divisional Planning Offices are responsible for development control.

March 1977

# Part 1

## A. Introduction

1. The Planning (NI) Order 1972 provided legislation for the first time in Northern Ireland for the protection of the Province's heritage of buildings of special architectural or historic interest and for the designating of whole areas of similar interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
2. While responsibility for the statutory listing of Historic Buildings and for the designating of Conservation Areas rests with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland one vitally important principle needs to be established at once. The task of conserving the heritage of Ulster cannot be left solely to Government Departments, a sprinkling of voluntary bodies and a band, albeit a growing one, of responsible conservationists.
3. The message that "conservation in Northern Ireland is the concern of everyone" must find its way into board rooms of every kind, into public and voluntary bodies with diverse aims and objectives, into schools and universities, into factories and shops and into the homes of every citizen whether they be in large conurbations or in lonely rural settings.
4. The aim of conservation must not be confined simply to keeping areas and buildings pleasant to look at or as a record of some aspect of history. It must additionally involve the continuing life and function of the areas in a present day context.

## B. Development Control

Development within a Conservation Area will be controlled with the primary aim of ensuring the retention and importance 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.

This control will be exercised as follows:—

1. Where permission is sought to demolish or alter a building which has been listed under the Planning (NI) Order 1972 as of special architectural or historic interest 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.
2. New buildings will be expected to take account of the character of their neighbours. They should, in mass and outline, continue (where applicable) the rhythm of a street scene.
3. Materials should generally be sympathetic in texture, colour and quality to traditional local usage.
4. 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 Conservation Areas will not normally be permitted.
5. 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.
6. It is desirable that applicants should consult informally with the Divisional Planning Office before the preparation of detailed plans to avoid unnecessary expense because the Divisional Planning Office will normally expect planning applications, submitted in respect of sites or buildings within Conservation Areas, to be submitted with full details in order to ensure at the initial planning stage that the development is satisfactory in all respects to the needs of the Conservation Area.

7. Development near, but not inside a 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.
8. Under the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1973 certain types of development 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 Conservation Areas.

## C. Positive Action

Schemes will be encouraged to initiate and, where appropriate, to undertake works for the visual improvement of buildings and sites. It is anticipated that District Councils may play a leading role in the formulating of such schemes. These would include the re-painting of neglected buildings, the removal or replacement of rusted and broken fences and the clearing away of rubbish.

Appropriate steps will be expected to be taken by those responsible to tidy up, improve and enhance the appearance of Conservation Areas by the control of street furniture, overhead transmission lines of all kinds and to ensure the removal of undesirable examples of the latter where at all possible.

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 business men the number of advertisements displayed within a Conservation Area could be reduced to a discreet level.

Preservation Orders will be made to protect trees or groups of trees which form an essential feature in the

character of the Conservation Area. The general appearance of many of these will be further enhanced by the selective planting of additional trees and sowing of grass areas.

In some Conservation Areas, schemes for pedestrianisation might be appropriate and as such would be carried out by the Department of the Environment. Present security arrangements have accustomed people to the concept of vehicle-free areas and it is widely accepted that the opportunity should now be taken to create permanent pedestrian zones. It will be the intention of the Department to carry out works for the improvement of the amenity of such areas.

The Roads Service will take all possible action to ensure the management of pedestrian and vehicular traffic movement in the interests of the amenities existing in a Conservation Area. Action will also be taken wherever possible to ensure that the parking of motor vehicles and the location of car parks is carried out in such a manner as to have the minimum effect on the character of an Area.

The use of floodlighting at night could in many cases be particularly effective.

If, before designation of an Area, individual listings of buildings of special architectural or historic interest have not already been considered by the Department of the Environment (NI) early action will be taken by the Department after consultation with the Historic Buildings Council and the appropriate District Council to consider appropriate listings.

#### D. Financial Assistance

In considering schemes for conservation the potentials for self-financing operations should not be lightly ignored and the fullest consideration should be given at an early stage to the use of voluntary contributions, gifts, income from sales and leases, etc. — see under "other grants" below.

#### Department of the Environment (NI)

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 recommendations of the Historic Buildings Council consider for grant-aid expenditure to be incurred in connection with the preservation or enhancement of a Conservation Area. Such expenditure should normally be related to a co-ordinated scheme.

#### Details from

Historic Monuments & Buildings Branch  
Department of the Environment (NI)  
1 Connsbrook Avenue  
BELFAST BT4 1EH  
(Telephone Belfast 653251)

#### Department of Education

District Councils have a duty to secure for their areas adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities and the approved expenses of a District Council for such purposes may be grant-aided under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1973.

The acquisition of lands for public open spaces for these purposes may also be grant-aided by the Department of the Environment (NI).

Grants of up to 75% may be made under

Section 16 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1966.

#### Details from

Sports & Recreation Branch  
Department of Education  
Londonderry House  
Chichester Street  
BELFAST BT1 4JJ  
(Telephone Belfast 34898)

Conservation Branch  
Department of the Environment (NI)  
Stormont  
BELFAST BT4 3SS  
(Telephone Belfast 768716)

#### Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Housing (NI) Order 1976 enables the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to pay grants of 75% of the approved cost of Improvement and Conversion subject to a maximum grant of £2,400 for Improvement and £2,775 for Conversion.

Grants may also be paid to help meet the cost of improving houses by providing for the first time such standard amenities as a fixed bath, a wash-hand basin, water closet, hot and cold water supply at certain fixed points.

Grants towards repairs may also be paid subject to a maximum grant of £600.

All grants are subject to certain conditions and full details may be obtained from any office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Headquarters Address ..... 10 Linenhall Street  
Belfast BT2 8EN  
(Telephone Belfast 28411)

Strabane Address ..... 48 Railway Road  
Strabane  
(Telephone Strabane 883637)

**Other Grants** ..... Charitable Trusts are sometimes willing to help with conservation of buildings in charitable or other non-profit making ownership. 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 may be had from:

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

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 Services.

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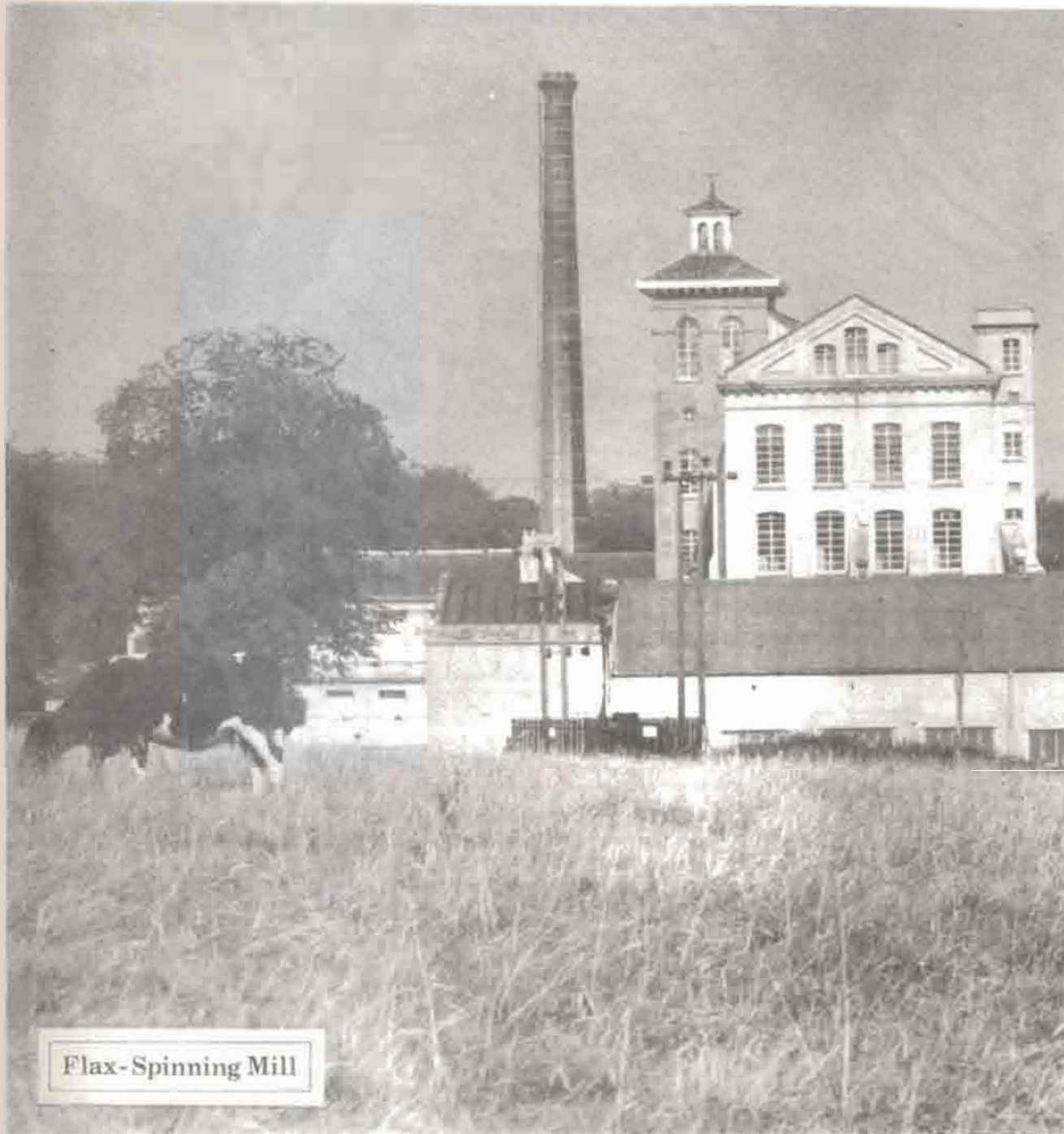
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*The Irish Town : an approach to survival*, 1975 : a study of the problems of planning in Irish Towns

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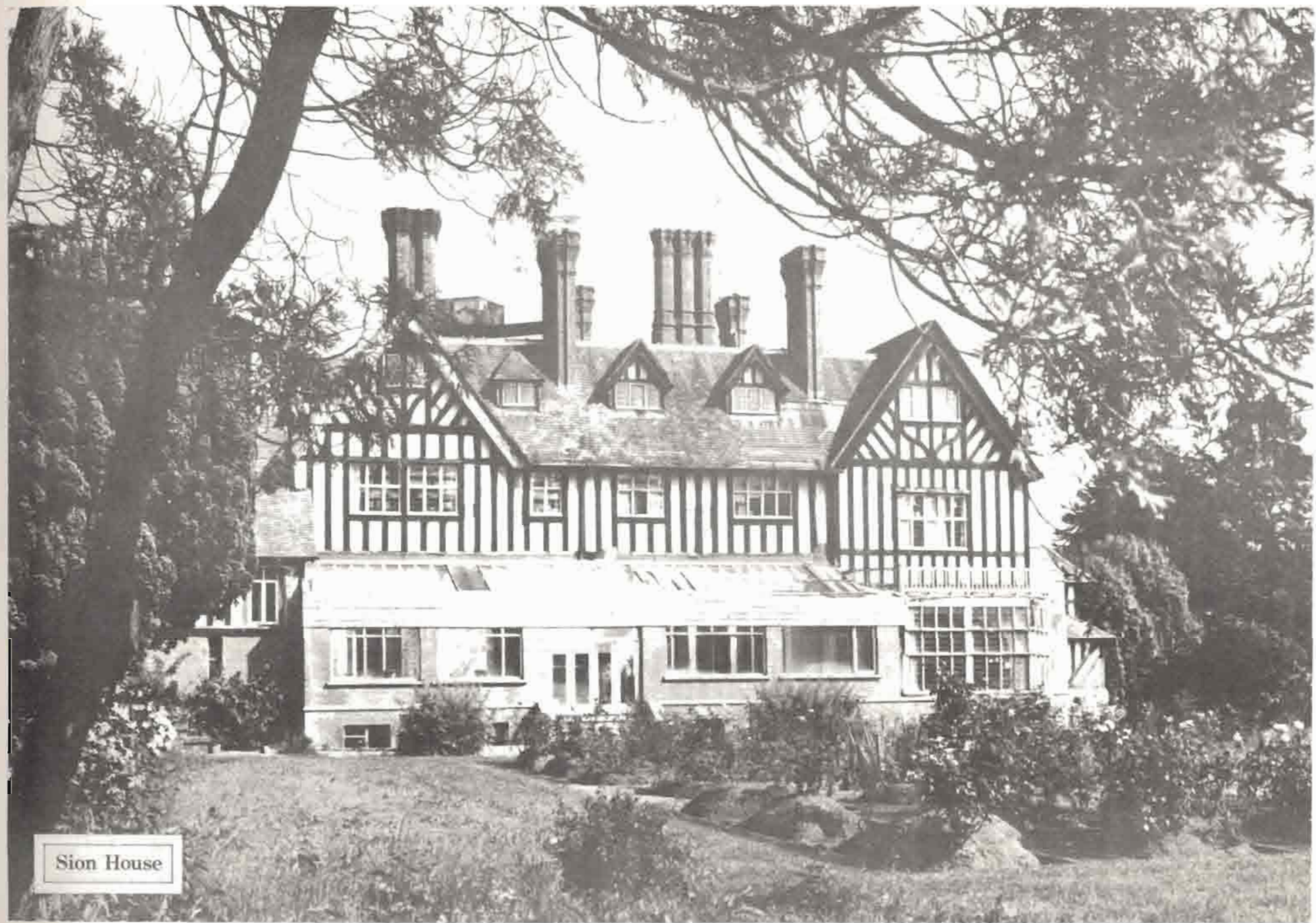
# Part 2



Flax-Spinning Mill

#### EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SION MILLS

The village of Sion Mills was formed in the early part of the 19th century by the Herdman family. The settlement which until 1835 consisted of three or four houses and a school developed around an old flour mill on the Mourne River which flows to the eastern side of the village. In 1835 brothers James and John Herdman acquired the lease of "the old mill at Sion" from Major Humphreys and the agent of the then Marquis of Hamilton. They converted it to a linen mill from which the first bundles of yarn were spun later that same year. A condition was made that the Herdman Company should not build another flour mill while the Marquis of Hamilton bound himself not to allow on his property the erection of any other flax spinning mill. In 1853 Herdmans built a new mill from stone quarried locally at Douglas. A top storey was added to it in 1879. The main four storey mill block is constructed of ashlar greystone, has a slated roof and is flanked by two and four storey yellow brick buildings. The mill chimney was built in 1877.



Sion House



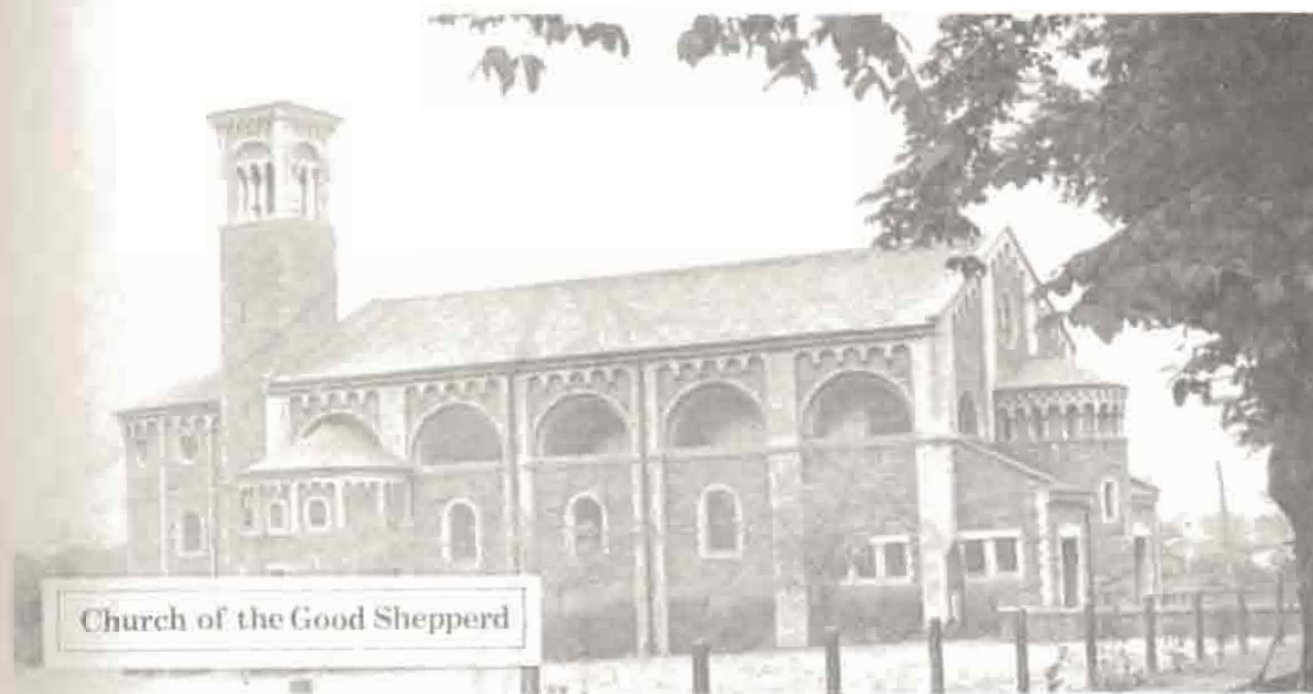
Gatehouse



Alexandra Place Cottages



Stable Clock Tower



Church of the Good Shepherd

Sion House the home of James Herdman was designed by the 19th century architect Charles Lanyon and was later very much modified for Emerson Tennent Herdman by William F Unsworth, son-in-law of James Herdman. The dwelling was changed from "a square Irish Country House" to a long, part timbered, part plastered, Elizabethan style mansion with verandahs and balconies. The building with its tiled roof has tall patterned brickwork chimneys. Stables, clock tower and gate lodge similar in character to Sion House were built at this time as was the bridge on the Avenue.

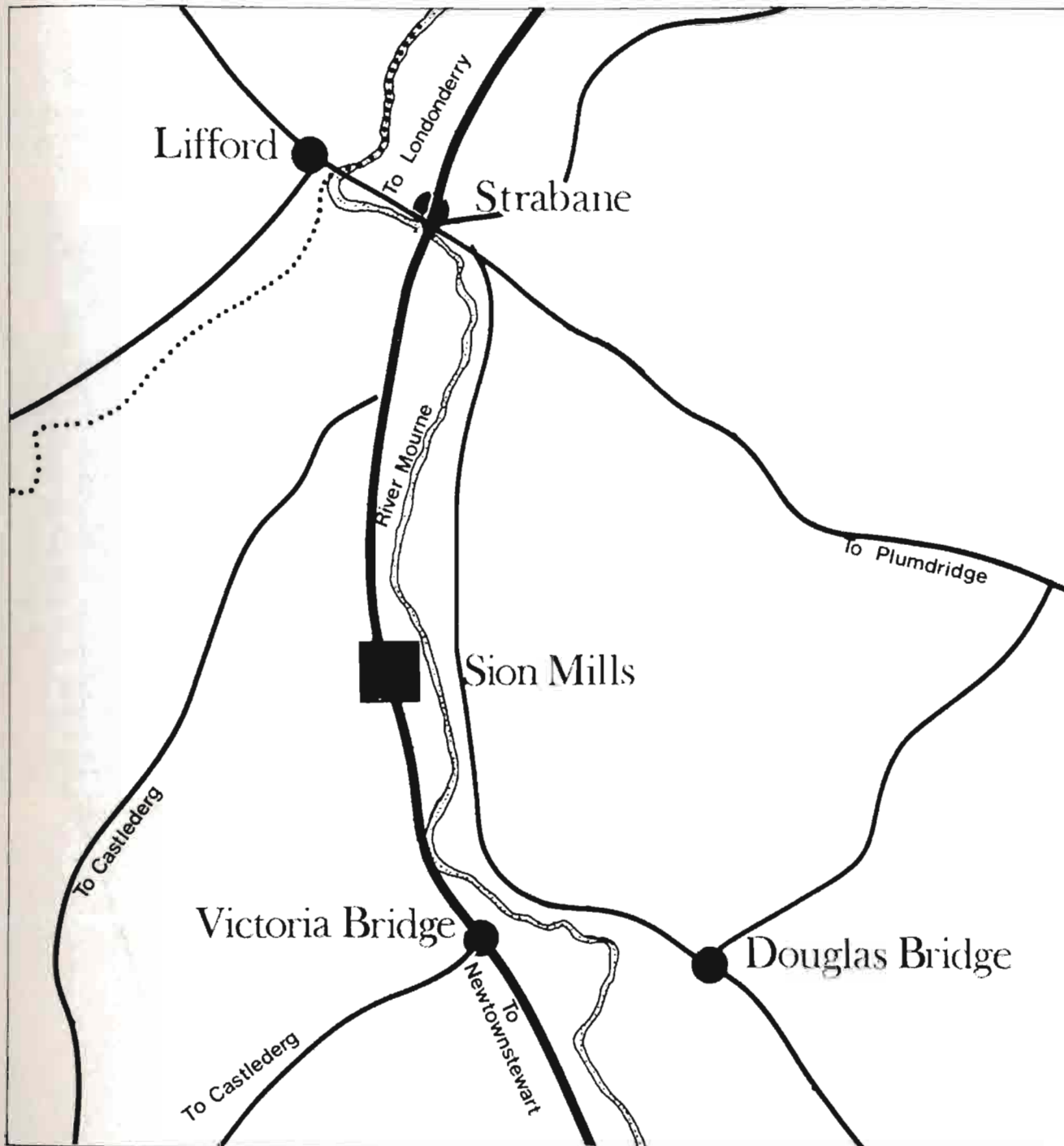


Stables

It is believed that William F Unsworth was responsible for the design of the Church of the Good Shepherd a building in Romanesque Basilica style built in coursed greystone rubble with sandstone dressings.

Dwellings both single and two storey were built by the Herdman Family to house the new generation of flax mill workers of that day, who by 1853 amounted to "upwards of 500 in number". The cottages are part of a planned layout similar to the work of Sir Titus Salt at Saltaire. The census of Sion Village (1866) detailed in the Herdman Diary shows that the company owned 118 houses there at that time. In 1866 mill workers numbered 940.

By 1879 a new school house had been completed. Later the Londonderry/Enniskillen railway extended through the Herdman property cutting between Sion House and the factory separating the latter from the mill workers' cottages.



#### DESCRIPTION OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

In Sion Mills the flax spinning mill complex lies to the east of the village on the western bank of the Mourne River. To the west of the mill lie the former Herdman home, Sion House, and Sion Cottage with extensive grounds which are separated from the mill by the old railway track. Across the main Strabane/Newtown Stewart road the terraced mill workers cottages extend both along the north axis of the road and also westwards off the main road.

North of the main group of terraced mill houses is Church Square, an open area bounded by more elaborate mill workers' dwellings to the west, with the Primary School and Working Mens' Institute to the east.

In addition to the mill workers cottages there is a group of recent public authority dwellings adjoining the former and "the Park".

The area includes other individual buildings of considerable architectural merit and character.

## THE DESIGNATION

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

A map of the designated area has been deposited at the addresses indicated below . . . . .

Strabane District Council ..... Council Offices  
Derry Road  
STRABANE

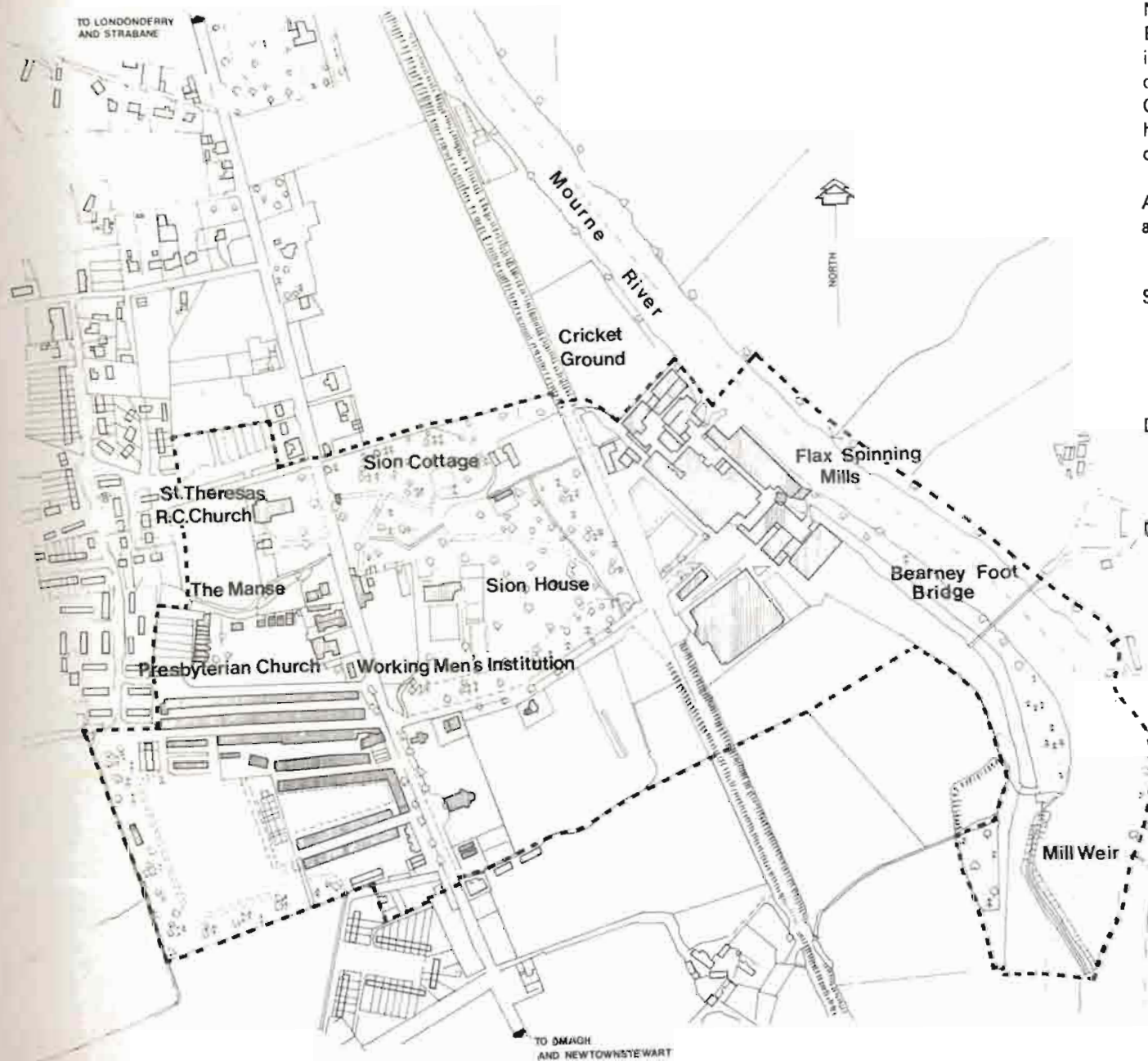
(Telephone Strabane 883204)

District Development Office ..... Derry Road  
STRABANE

(Telephone Strabane 883222)

Divisional Planning Office ..... County Hall  
Mountjoy Road  
OMAGH

(Telephone Omagh 2881)



Sion Mills  
Conservation Area  
Bounry ■ ■ ■

# Part 3

## **Sion Mills Village**

**Brief for Developers  
within the village and  
environs of Sion Mills**



Cottages



Sion Cottage

## 1. GENERAL

Four main land uses comprise the area which constitutes Sion Mills.

### Conservation Area

- (i) the old core of mill workers' dwellings. This consists mainly of a planned layout of single and two storey terraced mill dwellings built at various dates in response to the expansion of the flax spinning mill. Some of the dwellings have been altered and renovated in most cases to accommodate the change of use from residential to commercial. The predominant use is however residential. In the main the terraced dwellings are of simple rectangular form with pitched roofs some having dormer windows.
  - (ii) Community Buildings, the Mill Complex and detached residential property. Those include the Church of the Good Shepherd, St. Theresa's Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the old primary school, the Working Mens' Institute, Sion Cottage, the Mill Group of buildings and other private residential properties. These buildings include a miscellany of styles both of 19th century origin and of contemporary design. In the main the mid 19th century buildings are of greystone rubble construction.
  - (iii) the Housing Executive dwellings at Park Terrace. This area is included because of its proximity to the Park and to the terraces of mill workers houses.
  - (iv) Amenity/Open Space Area  
This includes Church Square open space; the Park, the riverside area, the bridge, organised recreational space at the mill and other incidental open space.
- Varying in degree of use and maintenance these areas are significant to the overall environmental quality of Sion Mills. Woodland amenity areas worthy of note are –
- (i) the riverside woodland;
  - (ii) the amenity woodland in private grounds;
  - (iii) the avenue/town trees along the main roads.



## 2. OLD CORE OF MILL WORKERS' DWELLINGS

### Existing Situation

The characteristic building form of Sion Mills (apart from the separate individual buildings of architectural and historic interest) consists in the main of both terraced single and two storey mill houses of varying design and elevation, having plastered walls with grey natural slate roofs or orange brown slates. Elevational treatment is that of horizontal dimensions with the small windows giving a strong horizontal appearance to the single storey cottages and a strong sense of rhythm and pattern along the street frontages. Plastered walls, doors and window frames are painted in a variety of colours varying a great

deal from pastel shades to strong gaudy tones. Enlarged shop windows in some instances dominate the small buildings and this is accentuated when painting is bright and garish or where fascia boards are out of scale with the building.

### Design Guidelines

#### Scale and Form

The emphasis in the future will continue to be on renovation and improvement rather than demolition and replacement. Retention of the terraces unbroken in form should be the prime objective and any change in elevation should be in character with the existing. Pressure for change of use from residential to commercial or for improvement will probably increase and where this

happens treatment of walls and window patterns should be carefully controlled. The importance of the integration of new elevations within the existing street frontages (New Street, Main Street, Church Square, Sion Terrace, Victoria and Alexandra Place) cannot be over-stressed. The emphasis on the long low roofline with the projecting dormer windows steeply pitched in design fronting onto the streets is important. Alterations conforming with the local tradition of existing proportions and details of doors, windows chimneys etc will help retain the domestic scale of the village.

### Materials

The use of the right kind of walling materials is a vital factor for these impart to the building its overall character. The materials to be used in new buildings should relate in character to those materials already in use in the area. In the small mill workers' dwellings traditional walling material consists of rough cast plaster while some which have been recently renovated are pebble dashed. Since there is no established tradition of facing brickwork within the streets of mill dwellings this material will not be considered an acceptable finish (except in the case of Sion Terrace which is brick). Rendered and painted elevations will be suitable for most renovations and alterations in the terraced mill workers' dwellings. Pebble dash, facing brick and ceramic tiles are considered inappropriate on the street elevations of these buildings. For roofs the use of natural slate new or second hand should continue. Window frames could be either metal or wood.

### Details

Existing dwellings and those converted to shops should retain the overall existing window pattern. Fascia boards should be kept in scale with the proportions of the buildings. Detailed design of dormer windows should be carefully controlled. They should be pitched in form as in the original design. Conversions of pitched roofs to flat should be avoided. Chimneys should be retained but where repairs etc become necessary it is recommended that replacements should be similar in design, materials and colour to those existing.

### Colours

Generally elevations painted in pastel shades eg white or grey are more acceptable than gaudy colours. Window frames, doors, downpipes, gutters, etc., could be painted in darker contrasting tones or in pastel shades to blend with the facades.



Bearney Foot Bridge

### 3. COMMUNITY BUILDINGS, THE MILL COMPLEX AND DETACHED RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY.

#### Existing Situation

The individual buildings of architectural and historic interest will generally be subject to special control under listed building legislation. There are distinct groups of mid 19th century construction: (i) the red brick Sion House, the lodge and the stables; (ii) the greystone rubble buildings — the Working Mens' Institute, Primary School, Presbyterian Church and the Church of the Good Shepherd; and (iii) the Mill Complex.

#### Design Guidelines

##### Scale and Form

The emphasis for the future will be to retain the present character and form of the individual buildings of special architectural and historic interest.

##### Materials and Colours

Where alterations, repairs etc become necessary or desirable the use of materials and colours sympathetic to the existing structures should be employed.

Although St. Theresa's Church and some individual residential properties use materials not commonly employed in the area, in general due regard should be paid to materials which will be in sympathy with the area as a whole.

##### Vegetation

Trees and woodlands of significant landscape value will be protected by Tree Preservation Orders to ensure continued and where necessary improved arrangement of woodland within the Conservation Area. Planning approvals will be subject to the retention and/or controlled replanting and felling of trees.

##### Other details:—

Undergrounding of obtrusive electricity and telephone wires is desirable, or at least a more sympathetic siting of electricity and telegraph poles particularly with

regard to the public open space areas eg. Church Square would be recommended. Greater restraint in the use of fascia boards and advertising is also desirable. Attempts should be made to reduce the general wirescape, TV aerials and associated wires running along roofs and walls to windows.

#### LANDSCAPE APPRECIATION

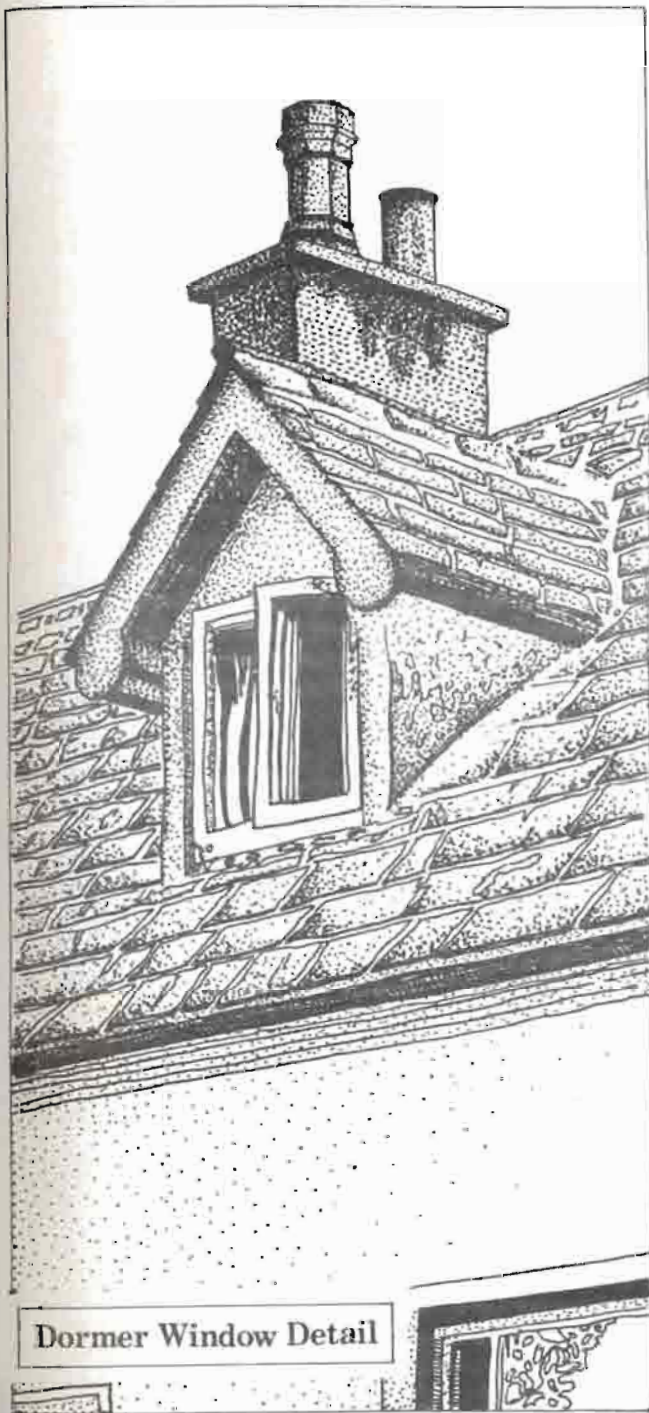
The area can be readily divided into three distinct areas:—

1. The 'domestic' heart of the village comprising Mill Cottages, Church Square and Town Park.
  2. Sion House and its environs.
  3. The Factory and the associated River and Mill Race Vegetation.
1. This industrial/domestic architecture is significant in its impact of scale in the domestic scene in Sion Mills, creating diversity between these small cottages and their grander neighbours, the Church, Sion House and the Factory.

The significance of these little dwellings lies not in their individual merit but in the quality of space created within the village; this is particularly enhanced by the planting of horse chestnut trees along the main road. The small narrow streets with their one and two storey terraces frame long views through the village up to the park and into the rural countryside beyond, which hopefully will be retained and improved as the Park is developed.

It will be seen by residents and visitors alike that although the qualities named are evident, and there is much potential within the village, there is considerable room for improvement. This applies particularly in the communal courts at the rear of the terraces, and in the deteriorating street scape, improvement to which could do much to upgrade the environment. In addition commercial development, and ad hoc additions to dwellings, while obviously necessary, are not always being handled with the sensitivity looked for in a Conservation Area.

With this in mind, it is hoped that this booklet will help towards an understanding of the problems, and give some guidance to prospective developers.



Dormer Window Detail

The Church of the Good Shepherd is a surprise in this little village. Situated at the southern end of the Village it stands in an open site, an imposing stone edifice in the landscape. Externally its form is a little severe, and could be enhanced by native hardwood planting in the grounds, but the interior is another surprise containing delightful examples of the Art Nouveau movement.

The Presbyterian Church is centrally located and its proximity to the school and the Working Mens' Institute is a happy one environmentally. The Church Square behind, with Library site and the small dwellings all add to the intimate quality of the village. Some improvement to the layout of paving, street furniture and planting could contribute greatly to the enhancement of this area.

While referring to the churches of the village, note must also be made of the successful integration of the Church of St. Theresa's, designed in 1963 by Patrick Haughey, Belfast Architect. This is an example of a major development in sympathy with its surroundings, where particular care has been taken to respect the vegetation on the site, and the local environmental quality, and at the same time introduce a modern but well integrated building into the landscape.

## 2. Sion House

Sion House is an excellent example of the Victorian love for the past, demonstrated in the "Tudor Gothic" architecture of the external details, windows and chimneys in particular; and fascination with the present, illustrated by the extravagant internal detailing of glazing, wall panelling, ironmongery etc obviously influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement then gaining popularity in England. The garden too enjoyed the current enthusiasm for new plant and tree species, so popular from the 1850's onwards, when new introductions were being made by ardent plant hunters from all over the world. This has been considerably neglected although some good trees still survive.

The Lodge, and particularly the Stables block built in beautiful soft red-brick with intricate tiled roofs (locally obtained) make the greatest immediate contribution to the village, situated as they are on the main thoroughfare. Until recently, the demesne was bounded by a brick wall which exerted a significant visual influence on this part of the village, but unhappily the wall has been removed, exposing the grounds of the house.

The entrance to the village from Strabane in the north, is greatly dominated by the superb stand of mature trees (mainly beech), planted in a belt along the east of the road from 'The Brae' right down to the end of Sion House demesne. Although none of these trees (except those at Sion House) fall within the Conservation Area, they are vital components of the 'character' of the village and, since they are reaching maturity, there is an urgent need to develop a programme of replanting to ensure the continuation of this environment.

## 3. The Mill and Its Environs

Standing as it does in the valley and on a bend in the river, the large yellow-brick factory building with its superb chimney framed by mature woodlands is a landmark for some miles around.

The building itself is an imposing piece of industrial architecture. The 'raison d'être' for the village, it is hidden to a large extent from the village itself by mature trees along Mill Lane. The area adjacent to the Factory, with one or two minor exceptions is very well maintained, and includes the grounds of the famous Sion Mills Cricket team. Until 1965 the Derry-Enniskillen railway ran between the factory and the village, but since the discontinuation of this service the line is abandoned and has some potential for future development, particularly the old platform site and adjacent line.

The factory has control over a stretch of the river which includes the Mill Race and some interesting woodland is associated with it. These trees are not being well managed at the moment, and it is necessary that some judicious thinning and replanting is carried out here in order to ensure the continuity of this tree belt in the future.

Another significant structure in the landscape here, associated with the river, is the suspension foot-bridge, which dramatically spans the river and links the factory with the housing developments on the other side. A recent superficial survey of the bridge indicates the feasibility of restoration if this is carried out in the near future.

## TREE PLANTING AND CONSERVATION

### Existing Trees

Overall, the present position appears to be very good. Something like 30% of major broad-leafed species are at the peak of maturity, and the majority of the remainder are well-established.

It is however true to say that much of the existing woodland is not currently being managed according to good arboricultural practice, and a considerable amount of attention is required to good husbandry, to ensure the success of the maturing trees.

Most of this major vegetation lies between the road and the river, and unfortunately the tree cover within the village to the north of the road is not quite as encouraging. There are very few mature trees notably the Horse Chestnut along the main road, and the mature Beech, in the grounds of the new Church, which, owing to pollarding in the first instance and site works probably in the second, are not as healthy as they might otherwise have been.

The outer edges of the village are also very exposed and lacking in mature vegetation, and some recent development here could benefit from tree planting.

Other major vegetation groups particularly along the river would benefit from some expert treatment to prune, thin and generally carry out normal forestry practice.

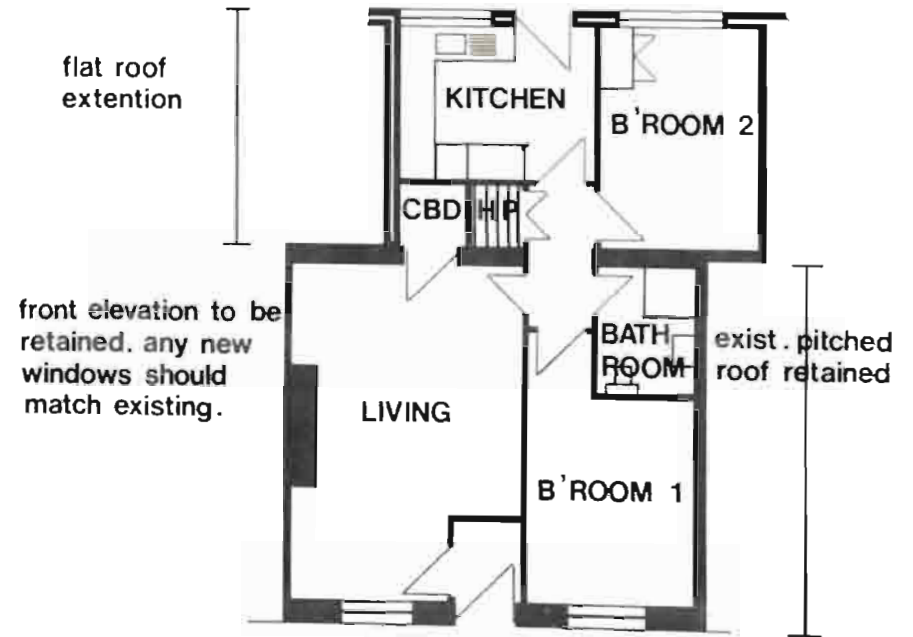
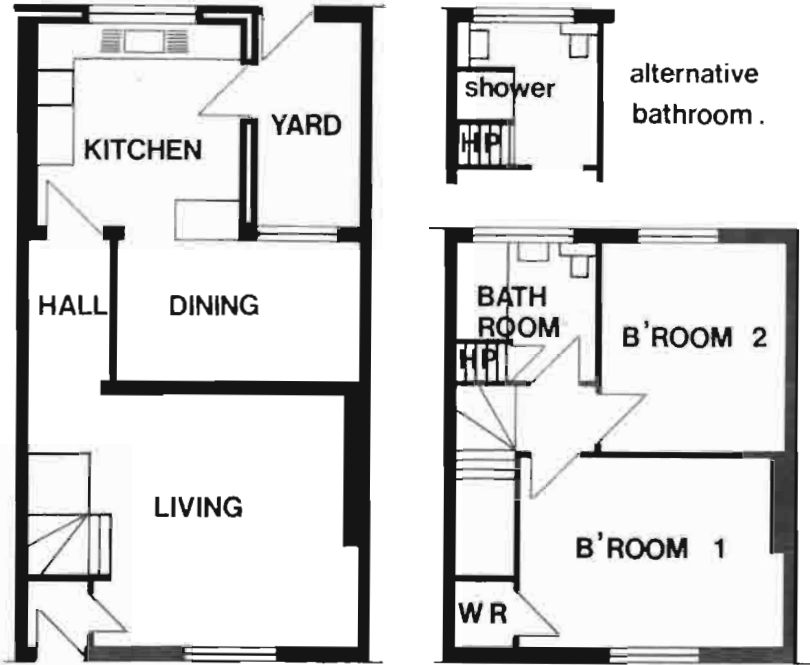
### Recommendations

It is hoped to encourage local landowners to develop a programme of remedial work to those existing stands of vegetation which currently make a major visual impact in the village, in order to maintain and perpetuate the village character; and to ensure, by good public relations that these trees are protected, and that new stands of native broad-leaf trees are planted in those areas where tree planting is advisable.

Existing landowners and residents can avail themselves of expert advice from the Landscape Service regarding species and cultivation. Tree species generally recommended for this overall tree cover would include –

Beech, Oak, Hawthorn, Elm, Scots Pine and Ash  
and in extensive sites only – Horse Chestnut

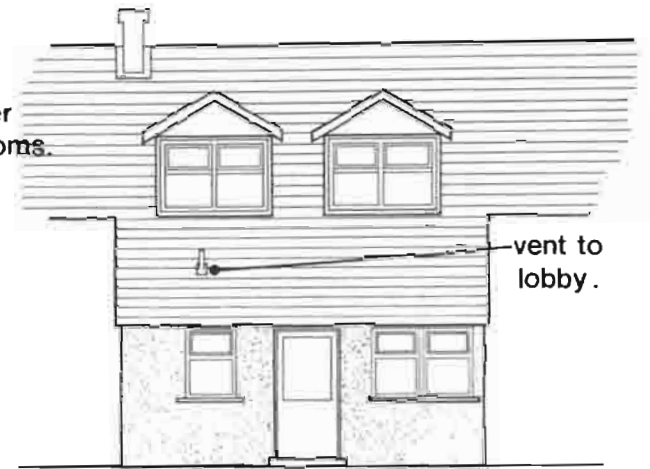
It is further suggested that a new planting policy be initiated now regarding the street trees, since many of these contain pockets of rot or are otherwise damaged.



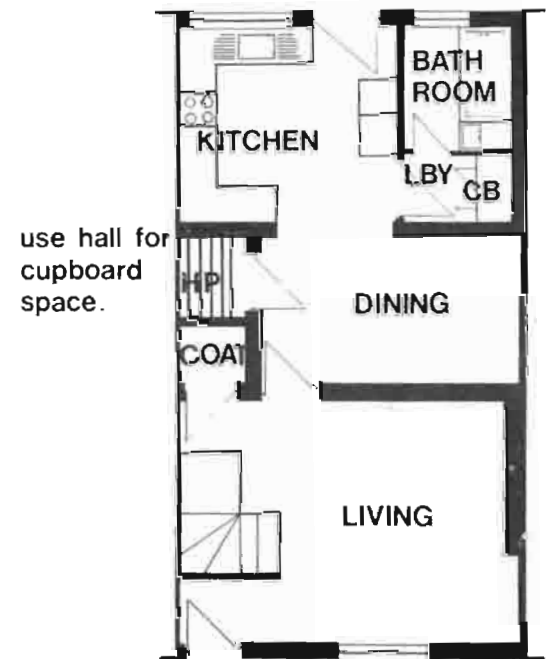
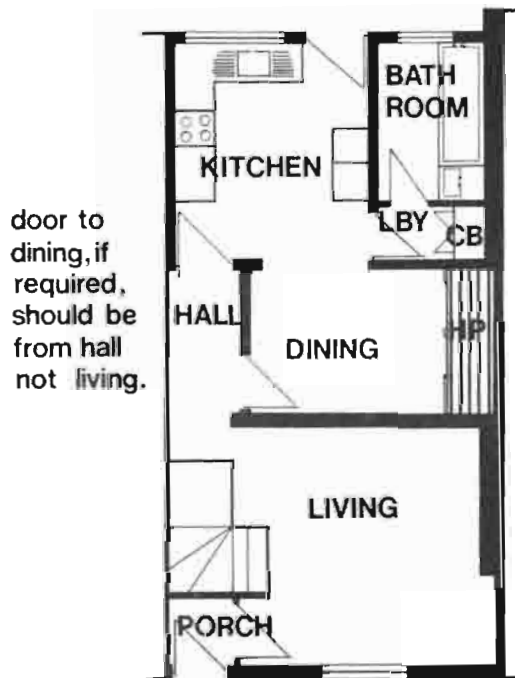
Suggested layouts showing how simple alterations can improve the internal arrangement without altering the front elevation



flat roof dormer acceptable at rear only.



pitched dormer to rear bedrooms.



446 | 5123

yellow

~~446~~ | ~~5~~ 65171

gray

5"

