Conservation Statement

Revised report (amendments by Gateshead Council) to support the repair and reuse of the building

March 2017
Swinburne House
Swinburne Street, Gateshead

Conservation Statement
April 2011

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**What is a Conservation Statement?**

Conservation is the process of actively managing change to an historic building or other heritage place in order to protect what makes it significant.

A Conservation Statement is a quick way of helping to prepare for changes which will affect such a place.

It allows us to work out what it is about the place which is important and what is not, so that the changes being planned can protect as much as possible of what makes the place special.

Conservation Statements are useful in advance of investment in a place, such as for repairs or minor works.

They are also useful to inform more major planning and development activities such as extension or demolition.

Statements can also be a useful everyday tool to inform the way the place is run, funded or owned.

They are useful tools to influence management and decision-making, and to raise the profile of the place amongst those that have an influence over it, such as owners, tenants and users.

A Conservation Statement can stand by itself or it can be the foundation for a more detailed Conservation Management Plan, should one be needed.

**Informed Conservation**

**THE INFORMED CONSERVATION PROCESS**

UNDERSTANDING  SIGNIFICANCE  RISKS &  POLICY

Conservation Statements are based on Informed Conservation, a process which underpins historic environment conservation theory today.

Conservation is not about preventing change in heritage assets, it’s about managing change to protect what’s significant. To do this you need to know what’s significant and what’s putting that significance at risk.

Informed Conservation has four stages. Each one is addressed in this document:

**UNDERSTANDING**
What is this place? What are its components, features and characteristics? What’s its history? What’s the context in which its future will be decided?

**SIGNIFICANCE**
What makes this place special? How important is it? Why is it valued, and by whom? Why should we conserve it?

**RISK AND ISSUES**
What is putting the place’s significance at risk? What are the threats to protecting its significance? What are the issues to be aware of when deciding its future? How harmful could their impact be, and what are the highest priorities?

**POLICY**
What should we be doing to protect the place’s significance from its risks? What conservation activity is needed to protect the place? What management regime is needed to protect it?

Once these stages have been addressed, it should be much clearer how to look after the heritage asset for the future, without preventing changes which may be necessary.

Informed Conservation is good practice in managing the historic environment. For it to have effect, this Statement should be used regularly to inform the day-to-day and longer term future of the place.

**North of England Civic Trust**

For over 40 years we have been active in conservation and regeneration across the North East of England, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

As a CIVIC TRUST we champion public involvement in the processes that shape the environment, often working with local groups.

As a BUILDING PRESERVATION TRUST, it tackles dereliction on the high street and in the countryside, from modest local landmarks to the rescue of nationally important heritage on the brink of being lost.

As a CONSULTANCY, we provide independent expert advice to all those who need it, brokering solutions to sensitive development issues and securing the resources needed to convert liabilities into assets.

Our aim is to improve the contribution the environment makes to the quality of life for all in the region, its cultural identity and its creative potential.

In recent years we have delivered nearly £10 million of projects, generating training and jobs in areas of deprivation and contributing to the local economy.

Our contribution to regeneration is in raising the standards of conservation and design, as well as education and traditional skills.

**Acknowledgements**

The Trust is very grateful to the following for their contributions to this study:

- Gateshead Central Library
- Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary’s
- Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums Service
- Gateshead Council officers including Clare Lacy, Stuart Norman, Geoff Underwood and Martin Wicks.

The Trust is particularly grateful to Colin Burrell, Swinburne House caretaker, and to the tenants and users in the building group for providing access to allow survey.

**Revised Report, March 2017**

The Council has revised the 2011 report by North of England Civic Trust to enable the plan to support, and inform, the marketing, disposal, repair, and re-use of the Swinburne House.
Brief Description

1.1 Swinburne House is an amalgamation of four adjoining Victorian commercial and civic buildings on the north side of Swinburne Street, on the edge of Gateshead town centre. In articulated sandstone with brick rear and slate roofs, the two and three storey buildings were part of the commercial core of Victorian Gateshead but are now something of a remnant. They sit alongside and are historically associated with, the former Town Hall (also the subject of a conservation statement as a sister to this study).

1.2 The buildings are individually listed at Grade II and they are in a conservation area. The group is owned by Gateshead Council, and has been for many decades. It is currently used as offices on a series of short-term lets.

Description of Elements

Introduction

1.3 To help with understanding, the site has been broken down into a series of elements based on their original design and function. The descriptions given on pages 6 to 19 include notes on construction, layout, alteration, use and general condition.

Site and Setting

1.4 The buildings face north on a linear site which slopes down to the east. The site is on an east-west terrace cut into the higher south banks of the Tyne. Cleared plots and extensive roads around leave the buildings prominent in views from the north, and with long views northwards from inside the buildings. Setting is as follows:

| SOUTH | A back lane, then a bank up with cleared plots and modern and historic buildings. |
| NORTH | Cleared plots used as car-parks, railway viaducts and major roads plus, further north, historic and modern buildings. |
| EAST | Major roads with extensive junctions. |
| WEST | Swinburne Place, then the Old Town Hall and more plots used as car-parks. |

Form and Layout

1.5 Swinburne House comprises four separate, adjoining buildings facing north on Swinburne Street, with a return onto Swinburne Place. A back lane runs behind them. They were built over 14 years in the mid Victorian period with Building D taking a large early twentieth century extension:

- **Building A** FORMER BANK 1871
- **Building B** FORMER BUILDING SOCIETY c1880
- **Building C** FORMER PUBLIC LIBRARY 1885
- **Building D** FORMER POST OFFICE 1873-75

1.6 They vary between two or three stories with basements, and from commercial to tall institutional scale.

1.7 The four buildings were once separated vertically, forming a terrace. But, over the years, they have been linked together by knocking through party walls where circulation adjoins. This has virtually created one building which is now essentially divided horizontally. Users tend to spread across the buildings on single floors.

1.8 The varied storey heights and a sloping site make for a complex arrangement of levels inside the building group. Although this is largely based on original circulation routes, it is very circuitous in places. In essence, circulation is based on Building C being the core through which most of the rest is reached, whilst parts furthest away from the core have their own entrances. There are four entrances, all original:

- **MAIN** The main entrance is to the former Public Library. This serves Buildings C and D, the upper floors of Building A and part of the upper floors of Building D.
- **EAST** The east elevation’s doorway serves Building A's ground floor only.

1.9 Other original entrances are now means of escape. Inside, it is possible to move from one end of the building group to the other but only on the first floor, and only by passing through offices rather than communal space. Ground floors at either end are only accessed from the street. Second floor rooms in Building Care sealed-up.

1.10 Vertical circulation is also complex. As the building is now essentially subdivided horizontally, some staircases act only as means of escape. Two original stairwells in Buildings C and D are used as the main vertical access in the building group. A second in Building D, both of those in Building A (original and extension) and that in Building B (later rebuild) are all essentially only means of escape. The only lift is that inserted in 2004 between basement and first floor in Building C.

Use and Condition

1.11 The buildings have not been in their original uses for many decades, the local authority gradually acquiring them from the early 1900s for use as a municipal base due to their proximity to the former Town Hall on its neighbouring plot. After this time, the buildings’ functions changed a lot. Later in the twentieth century, they were principally used as the Borough Engineer’s Department, containing functions such as planning, architecture, highways and engineering.

1.12 After the opening of Gateshead Civic Centre in 1987, the Council moved out. Since then, the building has seen a series of short-term lets, including in recent years for third
sector arts, social care and environmental bodies.

1.13 The buildings are all in a generally good to fair condition, although there are some basement concerns and Building C’s second floor rooms are sealed up. There is regular maintenance plus a series of larger programmed maintenance and repair activities by the Council in recent decades. Recent investment includes a new boiler in part of the building and the inserted lift in Building C.

**Designations & Policy**

**Introduction**

1.14 This section explains heritage and other relevant designations and policies covering the study area.

**Archaeology**

1.15 The study area is within an Area of Archaeological Importance designated in the UDP (see below).

**Listed Buildings**

1.16 Each of the four buildings is separately listed at Grade II – see pages 8, 10, 14 and 16 for details.

**Conservation Areas**

1.17 The study area is within a conservation area:

- **NAME:** Bridges Conservation Area
- **DATE:** designated 26.04.91, extended 05.08.94
- **APPRaisal:** Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CACA), adopted April 2013

**Other Heritage Designations**

1.18 Nearby but beyond the study area, there are one scheduled monument, several listed buildings (including the neighbouring former Town Hall), another conservation area and several locally listed buildings.

1.19 The site and its immediate setting are not affected by any world heritage sites, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, other archaeology designations, buildings at risk (national or local), tree preservation orders, landscape designations or biodiversity designations. On the strength of current understanding, none of these are likely.

1.20 The site is at risk of becoming ‘At Risk’ as it becomes vacant and under-used. This can be prevented by due care to ongoing maintenance and security during periods of vacancy. Regard should be had to https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/vacant/historicbuildings/acc-vacant-historic-buildings.pdf/ during this/these periods.

**Development Plan**

1.21 ‘Planning for the Future’ Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010-2030 was adopted in March 2015. Relevant policies include:

- **CS15:** Place making
- **UC14:** Heritage
- **GC1:** Central Sub-area
- **GC2:** Central Development Opportunity Sites

1.22 In addition, saved UDP policies which remain relevant include:

- **ENV7:** Development within Conservation Areas
- **ENV8:** Demolition within Conservation Areas
- **ENV9:** Setting of Conservation Areas
- **ENV11:** Listed Buildings
- **ENV12:** Demolition of Listed Buildings

1.23 The Council has also adopted informal Interim Policy Advice notes (IPAs), relevant ones being:

- **IPA4:** Tyne Gorge Study
- **IPA17:** Conservation Area Character Stmnts, Strategies & Policy Guidelines NB. This is replaced by the 2013 CACA for Bridges Conservation Area

**Other Planning & Development Context**

1.24 In 2008 the Council published Fit For A City, a regeneration delivery strategy for the town centre to 2030. This document addresses connectivity and transport, retail and office markets, city living, culture and private sector investment.

**National Policy and Guidance**

1.25 There is extensive relevant non-statutory guidance from Historic England, CABE and other bodies such as the Victorian Society and the Historic Towns’ Forum. Historic England may have a statutory role in any future planning processed depending what future plans entail regarding the listed buildings or conservation area.
Floorplans (provided by the Council)

- Former Post Office
- Former Public Library
- Former Building Society
- Former Bank

Access from street
Internal knock-through
Vertical circulation
Ground floor lowered

Second (Buildings C and D)
First (Buildings C and D)
Second (Buildings A and B)

March 2017 REVISED REPORT
Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead
A: Former Bank

**BASIC DETAILS**

**DATE:** 1871

**ARCHITECT:** Possibly John Gibson

**USE:** Bank, then municipal offices, now commercial offices.

**LISTED AS:** Swinburne Street, Municipal Buildings (LB No. 43250, listed 13.01.1983)

**GRADE:** II, GV

**DESCRIPTION:** Formerly the National Provincial Bank. 1871 possibly by John Gibson (architect to National Provincial Bank). Ashlar in Quasi-classical style. Two storeys, five bays on Swinburne Street. Three on left (East) return. Rusticated pilasters support entablature, with heavy modillion cornice and frieze inscribed: NATIONAL PROVINCIAL BANK OF ENGLAND, ESTABLISHED AD 1733. Unusual pierced parapet above. Flat arched paired upper windows, round arched ground floor windows with architraves, key and impost blocks, all with bracketed cills. Two doorways in similar openings. Included as part of group of municipal buildings in Swinburne Street - West Street.

**INTERIOR**

**ACCESS:** Two ground double-doorsways, one each in the north and east elevations. Inserted internal link to Building B (first floor).

**STAIRS:** Two original stairwells: the main one, north-west, goes from basement to second floors; a secondary one goes from basement to ground. The extension's stairwell is from ground to first floor.

**BASEMENT:** Series of interlinked offices, stores and WCs.

**GROUND:** Large central banking hall. Entrance lobby and two cellular offices at the east end. Entrance lobby, WC and stairwell in the north-west corner. Vault and safe in the south-west corner.

**MEZZ.:** There is a small, windowless mezzanine floor in the north-west corner reached from a half landing on the original stairwell. It contains a small office, boiler cupboard and WC.

**FIRST:** Five cellular offices rooms off a corridor on the south elevation running between the original stairwell and that in the extension.

**SECOND:** Small attic room in north-west corner. There are no other attic rooms.

**EXTENSION:** Large stairwell and a set of WCs on each floor.

**ROOF:** Traditional dual pitch, in Welsh slate, with half-hip at the east end and a parapet to the north and east elevations.

**EXTENSION:** Two-storey extension at the east end of the south elevation, shaped to follow the canted east end of the original building, but set back from it. Plain ashlar east and north elevations, brick west elevation. Flat roof.

**DISCUSSION**

1.26 The earliest of the four buildings, this has been quite altered internally but retains most of its original layout, even if materials and detailing are eroded. The main alterations have come from changing the building’s use from commercial to municipal, and then intensifying that use over time whilst linking it to neighbouring buildings.

1.27 Externally, it is very much intact, although chimneyns have been truncated. The rear/side extension is added to what was a party wall with buildings now gone, and so the elevation here is functionally blank. (It may originally have been rubble stone like the similarly-aged Former Post Office, Building D). There is one later first floor window and, on the ground floor, at least one other now bricked-up.

1.28 Layout is straightforward. The large ground floor banking hall has a street door at either end and is flanked by cellular offices and a vault. A small stair leads down to basement rooms and stores. The main stair in the building’s north-west comer passes a windowless mezzanine office, then up to the first floor’s cellular office suite off a back corridor. The main stair ends at a second floor attic room.

1.29 This layout is largely intact, but the first floor is now functionally separated from the ground and basement. The latter are self-contained; the first floor is reached from an inserted link from the Former Building Society (Building B) to the west, and is now part of that suite. This means the building’s original stair is no more than a communal fire escape, and the two attic and mezzanine rooms are disused.

1.30 The ground floor has less historic character than the first. The banking hall has a suspended ceiling under an original ceiling with beams and cornice work, damaged. It has a brick vaulted vaulted room and walk in safe with intact moulded steel door, but few other historic features. The street lobbies are altered. There is a WC next to the north-west lobby which cuts up against the street doorway here, taking its east sidelight. It is unclear whether this is original; it may well be, and is shown on ‘existing’ plans from 1970.

1.31 The first floor is more intact with layout only slightly altered. There are good historic features such as cornices, door surrounds, windows, and window surrounds and their dado panels beneath. Secondary glazing is added. Cellular offices describe its historic use, most partitions seemingly in original positions. The stair and landing are quite intact, including an original dormer window on the rear roof slope.

1.32 The mezzanine is original but the WC seems altered. It abuts and cuts in half the ground floor overlight, which may be original but this needs further inspection. The attic room is also quite intact with an historic cast-iron fireplace.

1.33 The basement is well intact and was originally plainer. A series of plain and barrel vaulted rooms contain some original window, door, cupboard and WC joinery, plus one intact fire surround and mantle (later boiler inserted). There are some condition concerns in the least used parts.


1.35 Overall, the impact of a change in use, and later intensification of it, has left the framework and order of the building intact, but led to erosion – rather than eradication – of character, materials and features. Insertion of modern services (eg. trunking) has added to this erosion.

**INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES**

**FORM:** Intact apart from addition of rear extension.

**LAYOUT:** Intact apart some alterations to the ground floor side offices.

**STAIRS:** The north-west staircase including balusters and handrails is intact, as is the stone basement stair. The extension’s metal stair is also intact.

**FLOORS:** Not inspected.

**PLASTER:** The ground floor ceiling is hard to inspect but seems intact yet damaged. The first floor has extensive simple cornicing, some cut by later partitions since gone. Ceilings are papered.

**WINDOWS:** All windows, including surrounds and dado panelling beneath, seem original.

**DOORS:** The east external doorway is intact; the west is largely intact (including overlight and grille) but with a modern door other changes. Most original internal doorways are intact, including surrounds, but many have modern doors (eg. with vision panels) and/ or door furniture.
JOINERY: No banking hall joinery survives. Much original skirting survives, some altered. There are built-in cupboards in the basement and mezzanine.

FIREPIECES: Two fireplaces: attic has cast-iron plate and grate with stone surround and mantle; basement has stone surround and mantle only.

OTHER: Vaults and safes describe the building’s use. A ruined door-bell coil is in the north-west lobby.
A: Former Bank

1986 EXTENSION

PARTY WALL, PROBABLY RE-BUILT

LATER WINDOW

1986 EXTENSION

LATER WINDOWS, NOW BRICKED-UP

EAST ENTRANCE

LATER PARTITIONS

FORMER BANKING HALL, (EAST EXTENT UNKNOWN)

VAULT & SAFE

ORIGINAL CELLULAR OFFICE LAYOUT

FIREPLACE

ORIGINAL DORMER OVER

STORE ROOM

STORE ROOM

ORIGINAL CELLULAR OFFICE LAYOUT

ACCESS FROM STREET

INTERNAL KNOCK-THROUGH

HISTORIC STAIR

FIRST FLOOR OFFICES

GROUND FLOOR FORMER BANKING HALL

MEZZANINE FLOOR

GROUND FLOOR LOBBY

ATTIC ROOM

ORIGINAL ATTIC ROOM

FIREPLACE

FORMER ATTIC ROOM

1986 EXTENSION

EAST ENTRANCE

ORIGINAL DORMER OVER LANDING

LATER WINDOWS (GROUND FLOOR BRICKED-UP)

ORIGINAL BLANK PARTY WALL

STORE ROOM

STORE ROOM

BUILT-IN CUPBOARDS AND WC

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

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M

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Q

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V

W

X

Y

Z

Conservation Statement
Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

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Conservation Statement
March 2017 REVISED REPORT
Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

BUILDING A: BASEMENT
- Plastered passages and offices, plus some disused parts.
- Historic built-in WC and cupboard joinery
- Barrel vaulted store room. Stone fireplace surround.

BUILDING A: GROUND
- Former Banking Hall with suspended ceiling
- WC next to south lobby - original configuration?
- Vault room and walk-in safe with steel door

BUILDING A: FIRST
- Original cellular offices. Fireplace gone
- Intact plasterwork & joinery. Secondary glazing
- Intact window and surround joinery

BUILDING A: SECOND
- Attic room with intact fireplace
- Intact stairwell and landing joinery
- Landing with dormer. Mezzanine junction with north door

BUILDING A: STAIRWELL AND MEZZANINE
- Intact stairwell and landing joinery
- Mezzanine junction with north door

BUILDING A: EXTENSION
- Stairwell and ground floor WCs in Extension
- Corridor with plasterwork
- Windowless mezzanine room with built-in cupboards
B: Former Building Society

BASIC DETAILS
DATE: c.1880
ARCHITECT: unknown
USE: Building society, then public/free library, then municipal offices, now commercial offices with consultation / activity / treatment rooms.
LISTED AS: Swinburne Street, Borough Engineering Services Department (I) (LB No. 430251, listed 13.01.1983)
GRADE: II, GV
DESCRIPTION: "The former Free Library. Circa 1880. Ashlar, classical style. Three storeys, three bays. Plinth, rusticated ground floor to band on which rest four giant pilasters supporting plain entablature and pediment. Ground floor, elliptical arched wide central window (former doorway?) flanked by round arched windows. Plain sash windows those in the wider centre bay emphasised by architraves and a first floor pediment."

EXTERIOR
FORM: Three storeys plus basement. Rectangular plan with rear stairwell offset. The building faces north, sitting between the Former Bank (Building A) to the east and the Former Public Library (Building C) to the west.
STYLE: Classical, with plain, heavy articulation to the main elevation in sandstone (see listing above).
NORTH: Principal; three bays, in articulated sandstone including "ESTABLISHED 1863" in pediment.
SOUTH: Rear; brick, plus later brick stairwell offset.
EAST: Party to Former Bank (Building A).
WEST: Party to Former Public Library (Building C).
ROOF: Traditional dual pitch, in Welsh slate, continuing over the stairwell offset.
OFFSHOT: Mid- to late-twentieth century, in brick.

YARD: Small square yard in the angle created by the stairwell offset; at a lower level than the adjoining rear lane and with no access to it.
INTERIOR
ACCESS: No access from the street. It is unclear whether one of the openings on the main elevation was once a door (see discussion below). Fire escape door onto the back lane. Inserted internal links to Buildings A (first floor) and C (all floors).
STAIRS: One original secondary stair (basement to first). Main stair, in offshot, is now a modern rebuild.
BASEMENT: Heavily altered. Ground floor structure lowered apart from under yard. Modern partitions.
GROUND: Modern, lowered ground floor structure with historic surrounding walls. Two front rooms and one rear with a west side corridor towards the rear stairwell, all altered to a degree.
FIRST: One full-width room to the front, two smaller rooms to the rear, an east-west corridor dividing front and back, plus the same circulation corridor as the ground floor on the west side, all altered to a degree.
SECOND: Altered partitions, layout similar to ground – two rooms to the front (the larger with built-in safe), one rear, and the circulation corridor on the west side, all altered to a degree.
OFFSHOT: Rear stair.

Discussion
1.38 Apparently subsumed into the adjoining library (Building C) early on, this office building has lost its own street entrance and is heavily altered in places. Despite alteration, it retains its basic form and some features and decoration. The pediment reads "ESTABLISHED 1863" though this most likely relates to the building society organisation, not the building. The listing says it is c.1880.
1.37 Externally, it is very much intact, although chimneys are truncated. Historic plans are elusive but historic maps show its original shape included a rear offshot in the same position as today’s. This is mid- to late-twentieth century rebuild, retaining the original’s historic form and function.
1.39 The building’s original layout seems straightforward. Principal rooms on each floor are to the east with circulation on the west side leading towards the stairwell to the rear.
1.40 There is no front doorway from the street but the layout suggests it was to the west. On first inspection, none of the windows seem altered from a door, suggesting the ground floor elevation is also a later rebuild (perhaps when the building was subsumed into the library and internally linked). There is slight variation between ground and upper floors stone mouldings, and possibly a slight variation in the stone shade, too.
1.41 The inserted link to the Former Bank (Building A) is a convoluted dogleg staircase. That to the Former Public Library (Building C) is simpler and at-grade. Here, a small window reveals a narrow lightwell between the two buildings to light Building C’s decorative stairwell window.
1.42 Rooms have lost some of their historic character though, due to the perimeter walls and re-used fabric, not all. Fireplaces are gone and the main first floor room has a suspended ceiling (cavity not inspected). But windows are intact throughout (there is no secondary glazing in this building), and a great deal of skirting and cornicing survives, plus many door surrounds, window surrounds and their dado panels. Later glazed partitions have character. Original partitions may have been glazed too in order to shed daylight into the darker, north-facing front rooms from the unusually large rear windows. The built-in safe against the east wall on the second floor is probably original and describes the building’s original use.

1.43 The stairwell offset has a plain municipal character, of its time. Its staircase is intact. The yard is decorated with murals and has security measures atop its rebuilt walls.
1.44 Overall, the building has seen some heavy alteration but it retains its original form, a shadow of its original layout and some historic features. Changes have come from it being subsumed into the adjoining Former Public Library, rebuilding its ground floor, and adding modern services.

INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES
FORM: Intact despite re-built stairwell offset.
LAYOUT: Altered, with a re-built and lowered ground floor structure. Original layout probably interpretable from well intact cornicing.
STAIRS: Original main staircase gone, replacement intact. Secondary basement stair intact.
PLASTER: Much cornicing survives on perimeter walls, including in the west circulation corridors. Some is cut. Ceilings have only been papered.
WINDOWS: All windows, including surrounds and dado panelling, are intact. The rear second floor rooflight structure is intact (rooflight itself not inspected).
DOORS: The street doorway is gone. Many though not all internal doorways and surrounds are historic and probably re-used. Some have modern doors and/or door furniture.
JOINERY: There is much original skirting, though some is altered, cut or covered with trunking. Glazed partitions and panelling are possibly re-used from elsewhere in the building group.
FIREPIECES: None seen.
OTHER: The second floor built-in safe describes the building’s original use.
B: Former Building Society

1. Entire ground floor is lowered concrete deck on basement steel structure.
2. General arrangement seems historic, with inserted east-west corridor.
3. General arrangement seems historic, with inserted east-west corridor.
4. Large south-facing windows (all floors).
5. Window reveals lightwell.
7. Different mouldings to panels below windows between ground and upper floors.
8. Possibly different stone shade between ground floor and rest of elevation.
9. No access from the street.
10. Internal knock-through.
11. Historic stair.

Basement under yard seems original, skylights intact.

B: Original upper floor elevation

Later ground floor elevation (see right).

Yard walls: rubble stone internally, rebuilt brick externally (no street access).

Truncated chimneys.

Rebuilt stairwell offshot.

Crawl-hole to building C.

Lightwell grates.

Heavy metal shoring at knock-thru.

No access from the street.

Basement under yard seems original, skylights intact.

Conservation Statement
Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

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BUILDING B: BASEMENT
Concrete floor deck sits on steel structure below original level.

Steel wall shoring at knock-through doorway from Building C.


BUILDING B: OFFSHOT
Modern staircase in rebuilt rear offshot. Exit to street.

BUILDING B: GROUND
Front ground floor room with rebuilt partitions and cut cornice.

Part-glazed partition between principle rooms, altered.

Altered partition between main rooms, plus change in levels.

BUILDING B: YARD
Stone boundary walls, rebuilt externally. No street access.

Re-used glazed screen. Built-in safe with steel door.

BUILDING B: FIRST
Main front room, fireplace gone, suspended ceiling.

Rear rooms, some modern cornices and door surrounds.

Probably re-used glazed partitions. Possible original panelling.

BUILDING B: SECOND
Main front room, cornice and joinery intact, altered partition.

Rear room, altered features, skirting intact but altered.

Some corridor joinery and cornicing intact.

Conservation Statement
C: Former Public Library

**BASIC DETAILS**

DATE: 1885

ARCHITECT: John Johnston (‘Johnstone’ in the listing)

USE: Public/free library, gallery and art school, then municipal offices, now commercial offices with consultation / activity / treatment rooms.

LISTED AS: Swinburne Street, Borough Engineering Services Department (II) (LB No. 430252, listed 13.01.1983)

GRADE: II, GV

DESCRIP'TN: ‘The former Public Library: 1885 by John Johnstone. Ashlar in an extravagant neo-baroque style. Welsh slate roof. Two storeys and attic, five bays, the central bay projecting under a shaped, pedimented gable with round-arched attic windows. Flanking broken serpentine pediments have round windows, urn finials and carved swags. Ums rest on parapet at ends and between gables. Heavy entablatures to both floors, resting on end pilasters and (on first floor) paired pilasters between windows. Carved frises. Flat arch first floor windows, the central tripartite and breaking the pediment of the entrance, which rests on two heavy carved brackets. Ground floor openings roundarched with archivolt, key stones with masks and impost string; nook shafts to door. Ground floor rusticated with sunken apron panels. Included partly for group interest with the other municipal buildings on Swinburne Street-West Street.”

**INTERIOR**

ACCESS: Main double doorway from the street in central bay. The only other entrance, to the west, is now blocked by part of the Former Post Office (Building B); it is now a cupboard. Inserted internal links to Buildings B and D at all floors.

STAIRS: The original stairwell is intact, as is a minor first floor staircase to the attic in the Front Range.

BASEMENT: Central corridor separating five rooms, three north two south, plus WCs. All partially altered.

GROUND: Front Range: entrance lobby and central east-west hall (with inserted lift) and grand stairwell (altered WC beneath). A former reading room either side of the lobby. Rear East Range: a large former reading room. Rear West Range: a former book store. All partially altered.

FIRST: Front Range: grand stairwell; three interlinked former art school rooms with corridor; gent’s and ladies’ WCs; inserted lift and office. Rear East Range: former gallery. All partially altered.

**SECOND:** Sealed-up; not inspected.

**Discussion**

1.48 Now the hub around which most of the rest of Swinburne House revolves, the Former Public Library is the largest and most decorative of the four buildings. It is very intact but has seen alteration to structure, layout and detail.

1.49Externally, it is very much intact. Some chimneys are truncated. To the rear, tall ground floor elevations (of the Front Range and Rear East Range) may have been re-built in the mid-twentieth century; alternatively, it is only the huge windows here which have been replaced. Tall metal security measures prevent access to the ground floor roof. Various modern signboards flank the main front doorway.

1.47 Internally, the original layout has central east-west circulation dividing the building front to back. The lobby leads to a double-height hall and stairwell (WC beneath), and up to a first floor landing. The building was split horizontally between two original uses:

- Basement and ground: public/free library with four reading rooms and four book stores / depositories.
- First and (presumably) second: art school teaching rooms and gallery space.

1.48 The ground floor has three former reading rooms (main, ladies’, reference) and one former book store. The basement has three former book stores, one former reading room (boys’) and boiler room. This is quite intact as follows:

- The structure of the north east ground floor reading room seems lowered in line with the lowered ground floor of Building B. The original reading room doorway is moved from the corridor to the lobby, and an alternative doorway inserted from the corridor has steps down into the room.
- To link to Building B, space is taken from the below-stairs WC, with steps down to the lowered level.
- To link to Building D, a second corridor is inserted south of the original, taking space from a reading room and a book store. In the process the library service counter has been altered and concealed (this was key to library operation – unlike today’s open-access libraries, readers did not browse books on shelves; they searched for a book in a catalogue, got it from the counter, and took it to a reading room).
- Partitions have been inserted in the two rear rooms.
- A platform lift has been added from the lobby to the hall, taking space from the adjoining reading room.
- A kitchen has been created in part of a reading room.
- In the basement, partitions between the rear rooms are altered, two large walk-in vaults are added (presumably during its use as civic offices), and the former boys’ reading room is now the boiler room.
- The first floor has former art school rooms and gent’s WCs, and a rear former art gallery. The first floor is largely intact, apart from inserted ladies’ WCs and a caretaker’s office, and minor corridor alterations. A passenger lift has been inserted from the basement to the first floor landing.
- This has left the various library, school and gallery rooms broadly intact, but with some change, based on:
  - the insertion of partitions (often roofless) to create corridors, links and rooms within rooms,
  - new openings: building links and internal doorways, possible re-use of glazed screens and doorways,
  - a lowered floor level in one room.

1.51 The inserted link to the Former Building Society (Building C) at first floor is off Building C’s half landing, through a doorway at the foot of the stairwell window. This is not shown on the original drawings but is very early, suggesting that Building B was subsumed into Building C’s use at an early stage. The ground floor link to Building B has steps and, in the next room, a wide ramp. Other links from Building C to B and D involve several steps.

1.52 Rooms retain a great deal of their historic character despite these alterations. They are defined by copious daylight, with huge windows and rooflights to the main rooms, and full-height glazed screens dividing rooms from each other and from circulation. Ornate Classical cast-iron columns divide the windows in the south-east reading room, and decorative metal trusses support the first floor gallery’s roof. The lobby, hall and stairwell are on a grand scale with more Classical cast-iron columns, coloured and ledged.
windows and ceiling lights, and a cantilevered stair with decorative metal balustrade. Throughout, plasterwork and doorway, window and skirting joinery are very generous and decorative, particularly on the ground floor (eg. the south-east reading room has a coffered ceiling; the lobby screen has carved goat's heads, a symbol of Gateshead). Fireplaces are gone.

1.53 The ground floor book store and all the basement rooms are plainer. The WCs are only partly intact. The Gents' stalls joinery is original but sanitaryware and finishes are modern. The Ladies' WCs are also modern and are inserted in a room with more Classical columns. The basement WCs are much altered. The inserted caretaker's office and kitchen are modern and functional.

1.54 Overall, this is a very intact building, the layout and character of which still describes well its historic purpose and use. Alterations have largely involved addition rather than removal (although there has been some loss) and a change in character due to an intensification of use and insertion of modern services (eg. trunking, kitchen, lift). Many historic features, materials and character survive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES</th>
<th>FIREPIECES:</th>
<th>OTHER:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FORM: Intact.</td>
<td>None seen.</td>
<td>Decorative crests to front ground floor external window cills (one gone). Decorative grilles to front basement windows. Large metal ridge vents to the Rear West Range roof. Decorative cast-iron columns to the lobby, south-east ground floor reading room and Ladies' WCs. Decorative metal trusses to the gallery. Decorative grilles for the original heating system ducts seen in some rooms. Later large walk-in vaults in the basement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAYOUT: Quite intact and interpretable. Altered through new partitions (eg. ground floor rear rooms), some loss (eg. at the west end), and altered circulation due to change in level of one room.</td>
<td>FIREPIECES:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAIRS: Original intact; minor loss to balustrade.</td>
<td>Historic built-in cupboards, eg. former gallery and art school rooms. Some WC stalls joinery.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLOORS: One floor lowered. Rest not inspected; mostly modern finishes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLASTER: Extensive original decorative cornicing and ceilings survive throughout, especially on the ground floor. Some is cut and (poorly) repaired. Some ceilings have been papered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINDOWS: Nearly all windows, including coloured leaded glass, joinery surrounds and dado panelling, seem to be intact. The large ground floor rear windows are possible replacements, perhaps early- to mid-twentieth century. Two openings to the ground floor book store are blocked-up. A second floor window is boarded from within.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOORS: The street doorway is intact. Many original internal doorways are intact (notably in the basement), especially surrounds, but many have modern doors and/or door furniture. There is much original skirting throughout, though some is altered, cut or covered with trunking. Many glazed partitions, mostly original, some perhaps re-positioned. Some</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOINERY:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Second floor sealed up and not inspected.
C: Former Public Library

- **Gambrel Roof with Rooflights to East**
- **Second**: Former Art College?
- **First**: Former Art College
- **Ground**: Former Public Library
- **Basement**: Former Public Library

**Access from Street**
- Internal Knock-through
- Historic Stair
- Inserted Lift

**Window Reveals Lightwell**
- Inserted doorway link to building B from half-landing

**Second Floor Sealed-up from here (not inspected)**

**Historic Built-in Cupboards**
- Open Gambrel roof form with decorative trusses

**Former Art School Gallery**
- Former Caretaker's Room
- Altered glazed screens

**Former Book Store with Lowered Ceiling from Alterations**
- Former Book Store, now Boiler Room
- Original Boiler Room

**Former Library Bookstores & Cellars, Partitions altered**
- Former Library Reading Room (Boys), now Boiler Room
- Former Library Reading Room (Ladies)

**General Zone of Inserted Circulation & Secondary Space to Replace/Add to Historic Circulation**
- Ground floor lowered to marry with that in building B
- Inserted platform lift from lobby to hall (detail not shown)

**Coffered Ceiling with Decorative Columns**
- Ground floor removed to match that in building B

**Lightwell Grates Altered**
- Lightwell full width of building covered with intact metal grates

**No Street Access**
- Crawl-hole to building B

**Later Vault**
- Double-height hall with decorative columns & grand stair

**Former Library Reading Room (Ladies)**
- Former Library Reading Room (Reference)
- Lobby and Steps
- This doorway now here

**Former Library Depository**
- Former Library Book Depository
- Ramp

**Former Book Store with Lowered Ceiling from Alterations**
- Original Boiler Room
- Former Reading Room (Boys), now Boiler Room

**Later Vault**
- WC

**Former Book Store with Lowered Ceiling from Alterations**
- Lightwell grates altered

**Former Book Store with Lowered Ceiling from Alterations**
- Coal

**Former Book Store with Lowered Ceiling from Alterations**
- Original Boiler Room

**Former Reading Room (Ladies)**
- Former Library Reading Room (Reference)
- Lobby and Steps
- This doorway now here
The basement rooms are mostly storage or unused.

Lobby screen with leaded glass and carved goat’s heads

Inserted partitions in former reading room with plasterwork

Solid partition behind glazed one creates kitchen; cornice cut

Historic joinery survives. Shelf slots are marked back to 1852

Classical cast-iron columns; inserted platform lift avoids steps

Arts, social care & environmental bodies now use the building

Inserted kitchen

Later walk-in vault. Lightwell along the north elevation

Grand staircase with cast iron balusters; altered WC beneath

Main reading room with coffered ceiling and cast-iron columns

Lowered ground floor reduces height of NE former book store.

Knocked-through junction with Building B

Former reading room with historic plaster and joinery

Leaded window to west with former entrance, now cupboard

Inserted partitions in former reading room
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUILDING C: GROUND FLOOR – REAR WEST RANGE</th>
<th>BUILDING C: FIRST FLOOR – FRONT RANGE</th>
<th>BUILDING C: FIRST FLOOR – REAR EAST RANGE</th>
<th>BUILDING C: FIRST FLOOR – LANDING, WCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inserted walls in former book store; altered service counter</td>
<td>Glazed screens and plasterwork in former art college rooms</td>
<td>Former gallery space with built-in cupboards, some altered</td>
<td>Landing showing inserted lift and caretaker's office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inserted circulation zone (corridor and ramp) in book store</td>
<td>High quality joinery in former art college rooms, some altered</td>
<td>Gambrel roof with lights to east. Inserted link to Building B</td>
<td>Original joinery and plaster in Gents' WCs, but modern fittings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original window with early inserted doorway to Building B</td>
<td>Corridor with plaster, built-in cupboards &amp; heating duct vents</td>
<td>High level decorative windows</td>
<td>Ladies WCs inserted into reading room with cast-iron columns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inserted window reveals lightwell at junction with Building B</td>
<td>Historic joinery and radiators encumbered by modern services</td>
<td>Decorative metal roof trusses</td>
<td>Stair from Gents' WCs lobby; sealed doorways onto landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

REVISED REPORT  March 2017
**D: Former Post Office**

**BASIC DETAILS**
- **DATE:** 1873-75 and c.1920s
- **ARCHITECT:** Unknown
- **USE:** Post office, then municipal offices (including police offices), now commercial offices with activity and treatment rooms. Part vacant.
- **LISTED AS:** Swinburne Street, Borough Engineering Services Department (III) (LB No. 430255, listed 13.01.1983)
- **GRADE:** II, GV

**DESCRIPTION:** *The former Post Office. 1873-5. Tooled stone with ashlar dressings, slate roof with corniced stone chimneys. Simple building with some classical detail. Three storeys (the top one seems to be an addition) five bays and three-bay West return to Swinburne Place. Rusticated ground floor up to impost string of round-headed windows and door at right, moulded plinth. Pilasters rest on ground floor entablature, frame round-arched first floor windows with archivolt and key blocks, and support a cornice. Segment arched second floor windows in raised surrounds. All windows sashes. Moulded and modillioned eaves cornice. Included partly as one of municipal group of buildings.*

**EXTERIOR**
- **FORM:** A squarish corner plot facing Swinburne Street (north) and Swinburne Place (west), built in two phases. First phase: 1870s, two storeys (or three, see below) with single storey offset. Second phase: c.1910s-20s, three storeys (plus possible third storey to the first phase). No basement. This creates an L-shaped building with the single storey offset filling the angle.

**INTERIOR**
- **ACCESS:** First phase: two historic doorways from street, one in each elevation. Second phase: plain doorway to rear. Inserted internal links to Building Cat ground, first and second floors.
- **STAIRS:** First phase: Original stairwell off Swinburne Place, altered to also serve second phase. Second phase: original staircase to rear.
- **GROUND:** First phase: front range: large central post office hall with lobby and 2 side offices; rear offset: large single depot hall with open roof structure and inserted corridor, WC and offices. Second phase: large room with side rooms. All altered.
- **FIRST:** First phase: Large main room with two side rooms. Second phase: three interconnected rooms with altered rear corridor. All partially altered.
- **SECOND:** First phase: Large main room with one side room. Second phase: three interconnected offices with altered rear corridor. All partially altered.

**STYLE:**
- **First phase:** Classical, with deeplyarticulated sandstone detailing. Second phase: plainer Classical vernacular with some stronger details.
- **NORTH:** Principal; five bays in decorative sandstone.
- **SOUTH:** Rear. First phase: rubble sandstone. Second phase: brick.
- **EAST:** Party to Former Public Library (Building C). Second phase, planer decorative sandstone.
- **WEST:** Principal. First phase, as north elevation.
- **ROOF:** Dual pitch, cross-hipped over three storey L-shaped range. Dual pitch over single storey range with rooflight, gable to lane. Welsh slate.

**INTERIOR LAYOUT:**
- First phase: two historic doorways from street, one in each elevation. Second phase: plain doorway to rear. Inserted internal links to Building Cat ground, first and second floors.

**INTERIOR SURVIVING HISTORIC FEATURES**
- **FORM:** Two-phase form intact.
- **LAYOUT:** Partially altered and parts unclear, especially on the ground floor. Alterations, additions and some loss. Historic plans would help clarify.
- **STAIRS:** Two stairwells intact, some loss to both timber and timber balustrades.
- **FLOORS:** Not inspected; mostly modern finishes.
- **PLASTER:** Some historic decorative cornicing and ceilings, notably the post office hall. Some cornices cut. Much else is simple. Some suspended ceilings.
- **WINDOWS:** Most windows are intact, some replacements to the rear in timber. Many internal surrounds and dado panelling are intact, a few are altered.
- **DOORS:** Front and side street doorways are intact, the rear one is a replacement. Inside, most historic doorways are intact; some are modem or have vision panels added. Most surrounds are intact.

**Discussion**
- The second earliest of the four buildings, the Former Post Office was later extended with the addition of a third storey to the first phase. No basement. This creates an L-shaped building with a single storey offset filling the angle.

**Historic plans are elusive, but (as the list description suggests) the original build seems to comprise a two-storey front office range with a single storey rear range, probably a depot. At some point between the 1916 and 1932 OS maps (likely closer to 1916), a second phase was added up Swinburne Place, connected internally to the first. The design of the front range’s third storey is more like that of the second phase than the rest of the front range, so this top storey seems to have been either added or rebuilt in the second phase. The rear rubbes do not support this, but these too may have been rebuilt – the rear windows here are indeed altered. Historic plans and further survey (eg. internally) would help clarify this. By this time, Building D was in municipal use, so the second phase is the only part of Swinburne House built for this use. It has in the past been used by the police; a door plate reads POLICE BAND ROOM.

1.57 Externally, it is very much intact. Chimney stacks are intact. The front range’s cornice may be reused from the first phase. An historic photo shows a front doorway in the easternmost bay which is no longer there. Historic plans would help clarify if this was in addition to the existing door at the west end, or whether a window and doorway were swapped over. Later elevations are plainer. The first phase rear elevation is rubble stone, typical of its age (suggesting the former Bank’s may once have been similar). The ground floor has various metal security measures.

1.58 Layout is altered but seems logical. The first phase had a front post office hall with side rooms, offices above and a large single storey rear offset, perhaps a depot. The original stairwell was adapted to serve the cellular offices added in the second phase, which also had its own stairwell.

1.59 The ground floor doorway link between Buildings C and D - now cupboards on both sides - is unclear. There may have been a route from the library doorway to another beneath the post office first phase’s stair, creating a library back door. Again, historic plans would help clarify this.

1.60 The layout is somewhat altered but principal room volumes are quite intact. Side offices have been added, lost or altered, and there are several added rooms, notably in the depot hall. The second phase’s offices have altered partitions and doorways; its rear corridors are much altered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOINERY:</th>
<th>There is much original skirting throughout; some is altered, cut or covered with trunking. Several built-in cupboards at chimney breasts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIREPIECES:</td>
<td>A large combined fireplace and stove (doors gone) with surround and mantle in the second floor front range, backed in the next room by a blocked fireplace, surround and mantle intact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER:</td>
<td>Shaped sandstone chimneys. Plain metal roof ties in the ground floor depot hall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D: Former Post Office

- Doorway shown here in historic photo
- Possible historic route from former public library before second phase built?
- Former Post Office Hall with altered side rooms
- Possible depot hall with inserted corridor and rooms
- First phase 2 storeys, possibly 3
- First phase 1 storey
- Second phase 3 storeys
- Access from street
- Internal knock-through
- Historic stair
- First phase rubble stone rear elevation
- Chimneys intact
- Second phase brick rear elevations
- Single storey range, possible former PO depot
- Historic built-in cupboards
- Altered corridor and WCs
- Altered windows
- Fireplace
- Simple Cellular offices
- Possibly added or rebuilt in second phase
- First phase
- Second phase

Original doorway now cupboard
Open roof form with rooflights

Possible historic route from former public library before second phase built?

If top storey is second phase, cornice possibly re-used from first phase

Possible historic route from former public library before second phase built?
Former post office hall with beam and cornice ceiling

Large office above post office hall with beam & cornice ceiling

Main room with altered partitions and suspended ceiling

Altered main room, front range second floor, poss 2nd phase

Former depot hall with beam and cornice ceiling

Alter but characterful side rooms with intact joinery

WCs now kitchen. Original config of space under stair unclear

Fireplace and stove with surround. Blocked fireplace

Side offices with joinery and plasterwork but loss of character

Altered but characterful side rooms with intact joinery

Fireplaces are gone from most of the building

Fireplaces are gone from most of the building

Corridor created in depot hall. Inserted accessible shower/WC

Simple rooms with plasterwork and joinery but no fireplaces

Simple rooms with plasterwork and joinery but no fireplaces

Corridor created in depot hall. Inserted accessible shower/WC

Original staircase with intact metal balusters

Altered room with built-in cupboard. Plain altered corridor

Original staircase with intact timber balusters

Conservation Statement

Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

REVISED REPORT  March 2017  22
Historical Notes

Gateshead to the nineteenth century

Gateshead was granted borough rights in 1164 and grew from the Tyne bridgehead, near St Mary’s church. There were markets from 1264 and, by 1576, it had 400 households. From the seventeenth century, the town’s industrial potential was exploited through coal, iron, glass, chemicals, rope, railways and heavy engineering. A new Gateshead Borough Council was created in 1835 and it became a county borough in 1880, expanding southwards with nineteenth century residential suburbs and industry.

Mid nineteenth century town planning

The main thoroughfare had been High Street which carried the Great North Road over the Tyne. By c.1830, High Street’s back lane was formalised as a second, parallel north-south route to be called West Street. By the late nineteenth century, the corridor of land between High Street and West Street was an organic jumble of nineteen century and industrial.

1.68 Planned order was imposed on this by laying out Swinburne Street probably in the late 1850s, echoing its earlier counterpart, Jackson Street, to the south. Further north, old Gateshead was being heavily remodelled due, in part, to the needs of the railways.

1.69 In 1871, the Town Hall was joined at the other end of Swinburne Street by the National Provincial Bank. The Post Office followed in 1873–75, on the corner of Swinburne Place. In c.1880, the Gateshead Institute Permanent Benefit Building Society opened its doors next to the bank; in the directories seen for this study, it was first identified in 1884.

Outgrowing the buildings

1.70 Construction of the Gateshead Free Library began in 1882. It cost £13,000 and was opened (in stages) in 1885 by Lord Northbourne and the Mayor. The Public Libraries Act 1855 had allowed rates to be increased for a penny library buildings and books, but 30 years had passed while the council debated the rise, and because the concept of a free library was opposed by the nearby Mechanics’ Institute.

1.71 The building had public reading rooms and book stores on the ground floor and basement. A 12,000-capacity Cotgreave indicator tracked the availability of each of the library’s 6,000 books (see 1.48 above). The first floor housed an art school, first identified in a 1887-88 directory.

1.72 The directories suggest a number of other organisations also used some of the buildings on this side of Swinburne Street at this time, perhaps just as a registered address. These included the Gateshead & South Shields Highways Board, the secretary of the High School for Boys Co Ltd, and various insurance agents, accountants (eg. S J Humble) and solicitors (eg. Longstaff William Hylton Dyer).

Notes

Gateshead House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead
Post-War redevelopment

1.79 After World War II, civic uses began to move from Swinburne Street and West Street. In 1954, a new Borough Treasurer’s Department opened at Shipcote (described then as ‘Civic Centre First Stage’), then a police station (1972) and courts (1976) in the town centre. During this period, the town centre was radically altered by comprehensive redevelopment. Much of nearby High Street and the north side of Swinburne Street were demolished after 1971 – for example, virtually nothing but Building A seen in the six right-hand photos on page 23 now survives. These changes ultimately led to improved east-west movement across the town, one of the original benefits of Swinburne Street itself.

1.80 A c.1973 two-storey office extension was added to the Former Bank (Building A), up High Street, to enlarge the planning department. This was replaced in 1986 with a small stairwell extension. The following year, Gateshead’s major new Civic Centre opened on Regent Street, and Swinburne House’s time as civic HQ was up. The four buildings had been listed at Grade II four years earlier.

The last few decades

1.81 Bridges Conservation Area was designated in 1991. The council retained Swinburne House in its portfolio and, in recent years, a series of commercial and third sector tenants have made their home there. Today, these include arts, social care and environmental bodies. Various alterations have been made, including the rear external security measures and a range of internal alterations including fire protection upgrades (1990, 2001), the platform lift and accessible WC (1995) and the lift in 2004.

Sources

1.82 The above historical notes are compiled from:

- Osberry Gateshead Scraps, Vols 2 and 3 (Gateshead Library, L908.9)
- Trade directories covering Gateshead, as follows:
  - Christie’s: 1876–77
  - Kelly’s: 1886, 1902, 1921, 1925
  - Directory of Gateshead: 1873 and 1884
- various historic building plan records held by Tyne & Wear Archives Service (CB.GA/BC/1/1–13)
- listing descriptions (see pages 6, 10, 14 and 19 above)

Conservation Statement

Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead

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REVISED REPORT March 2017
ABOVE: WILLIAM SWINBURNE (1855-1929), GATESHEAD TOWN CLERK 1893-1929. THE STREET WAS NAMED AFTER HIS FAMILY.

LEFT: “GATESHEAD FREE LIBRARY” INTERIOR (POSSIBLY BUILDING B), UNDATED (GATESHEAD LIBRARIES).

BELOW: SWINBURNE STREET, UNDATED, c.1920s (GATESHEAD LIBRARIES).

TOP, ABOVE, BELOW: HIGH STREET, LOOKING NORTH, SHOWING HOW THE EAST ELEVATION OF THE FORMER BANK (BUILDING A), MARKED BY THE RED LINES, WAS ONCE DESIGNED INTO THE HEART OF THE BUSTLEING TOWN CENTRE.

1902, LOOKING NORTH (GL004038)

ILUSTRATION, DATE N/K, LOOKING NORTH (GL001489)

DATE N/K, LOOKING NORTH (GL001833)

DATE N/K, LOOKING NORTH (GL000120)

DATE N/K, LOOKING NORTH (GL001489)

TOP, ABOVE: HIGH STREET IN THE POST-WWII PERIOD, SHOWING ITS DECLINE AND DEMOLITION. THE EAST ELEVATION OF THE FORMER BANK (BUILDING A) IS MARKED WITH RED LINES.

BELOW: 1973 EXTENSION TO THE FORMER BANK (BUILDING A), NOW GONE.

DATE N/K, LOOKING WEST

1972, LOOKING NORTH WEST

SWINBURNE STREET
Significance

Significance is what makes something in the historic environment *worth conserving.*

We shouldn’t conserve for conservation’s sake. We do so because we want to protect and enhance the place’s *special interest.* We judge this by evaluating how significant it is. We can then know how conservation could proceed.

**What is Significant?**
Significance often relates to the fabric of the place. Looking after the place’s actual historic material will usually protect the significance it embodies. This is why we have basic conservation principles such as:

- **MINIMUM** Change as little of the historic fabric in a place as possible.
- **INTERVENTION** Ensure that change can later be undone without lasting harm.

But significance can also relate to less tangible things. For example, a battlefield is significant because of the event that took place there, rather than necessarily the physical nature of the land. And a statue could potentially be taken down and rebuilt elsewhere without harming significance.

Significance can also come from a place’s contents (eg. furniture, archives, collections), and from its setting, too.

**Types of Significance**
Heritage assets can be significant for many reasons, and in different ways to different people. We can evaluate significance in many ways, for example by using terms like architectural, archaeological, historical, etc.

But, now, we tend to evaluate significance using four overarching themes. These cover all the different ways a heritage asset can have heritage value, and to whom:

**EVIDENTIAL**
What does study of the place reveal? What **evidence** does it hold of its past? This measure relates to the physical fabric of the place, and its role as the main source of information on the place and its past. Under this heading, **age** and **rarity** are important deciders when evaluating, but are not always paramount. The less historic fabric there is (eg. where it’s been removed or replaced), the less it can be used to evaluate significance. But, sometimes, incomplete physical remains are all that’s left to judge significance (eg. archaeological deposits).

**HISTORICAL**
What’s the place’s story? How can it *connect the past to the present?* This measure is about what the place can tell us about the past, either by **illustrating** it or by **association.** Illustrative significance is how the place can *physically demonstrate* the past, helping to understand and interpret it. Significance can be increased if the place is still in its historic use. **ASSOCIATIVE**-significance is where a place is linked to important people or events, or to movements or cultural expression, such as in art or politics. Here, *rarity,** authenticity and completeness are important. But a place can still have historical significance even when altered – it may be the very evolution of a place over time which is itself significant.

**AESTHETIC**
Is the place *stimulating* to the senses? Is it inherently attractive, eye-catching or inspiring? This can be by conscious **design,** such as the proportions or detailing of a building or the layout and planting of a landscape, or it can relate to a specific style, movement, patron or designer. Here, *quality, craft, innovation and influence* are key. But aesthetic merit can also come **fortuitously,** such as the organic growth of a medieval village, or an unplanned juxtaposition of man-made and natural features. It can also come from the way fabric has been *aged by time* or touched by nature. Aesthetic significance is primarily visual but can also relate to the other senses.

**COMMUNAL**
What does the place *mean* to people? How important is it to a community’s **collective identity?** Is it a **cherished resource?** Where significance is linked emotionally to identity, significance is often symbolic or commemorative. Such links may not always be positive (eg. war memorials). The **social** significance of a place comes from its links to a community’s identity or social practices, such as a church or political building. In some places, this can relate more to the place’s use than its physical fabric (eg. a new church on an old site of worship), but in others it is the actual fabric which is venerated (eg. Stonehenge). Communal values are closely linked to Historical ones.

**How Significant?**
Significance can be graded, using simple systems such as:

- **HIGH**
- **EXCEPTIONAL**
- **INTERNATIONAL**
- **MEDIUM**
- **CONSIDERABLE**
- **NATIONAL**
- **LOW**
- **SOME**
- **REGIONAL**
- **MARGINAL**
- **LOCAL**

Significance can also change over time. For example, World War II infrastructure remains are generally valued more now as heritage assets than they were a generation ago.

**Recognition**
The significance of a heritage asset is often recognised by it being designated, eg. as a listed building, conservation area or registered park and garden, etc.

But heritage assets are not significant because they are designated; they are designated because they are significant.

It is therefore not enough just to know that an asset is significant, we need to know why.
Significance

This stage sets out what makes Swinburne House important enough to conserve. The grading scale used for this assessment is as follows:

**EXCEPTIONAL** Aspects which are seminal to understanding the place and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would destroy or greatly compromise its significance.

**CONSIDERABLE** Aspects which go a long way to help understand the place, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would notably diminish significance but not destroy it.

**SOME** Aspects which contribute to or complement understanding of the place but are not intrinsic to it, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would not unacceptably harm its significance.

**MARGINAL** Aspects which have only minor links with the place or which could be considered intrusive, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would cause little if any harm or could bring about positive enhancement.

A summary Statement of Significance is given at the end of this section, and Significance Diagrams are on pages 31 and 32. For more information on significance, see the box on the previous page.

### Evidential Significance

**EXCEPTIONAL**

2.3 The building group is relatively intact at a basic and detailed level. The amount of original fabric can reveal much about the buildings’ history, and so is important. This varies across the site depending on rarity and intactness.

**CONSIDERABLE**

Buildings A, B and D

2.4 As a group of mid- to late-Victorian commercial buildings, Buildings A, B and Dare not nationally, are quite rare at a county level, and are very rare in Gateshead. This is shown by a brief search of Listed Buildings Online (http://ibonline.english-heritage.org.uk/Forms.aspx).

SEARCH RESULTS FOR PURPOSE-BUILT BANKS, BUILDING SOCIETIES AND POST OFFICES IN TYNE & WEAR, PRE-1919:

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**SOME**

2.5 Huge quantities of historic buildings and development pattern in Gateshead town centre were demolished in and around the 1970s. So the context of Tyne & Wear’s late nineteenth century commercially-driven heyday is significantly enlightened by the building group, and as evidence of Gateshead’s place in this, it is crucial.

**MARGINAL**

2.6 Much, but not all, of the detailed fabric and character is important to this evidence. The strength of the buildings’ forms and the principle facades are key, as are authentic components of these (eg. roofscape and joinery fabric). Internal layout is an important consideration because the loss of this evidence can greatly confuse understanding (as as happened in Building B). The scale and detail of the post office and banking halls are key, as are original stairs and the safes and vaults. The rear facades and the cellular office arrangements are useful rather than crucial evidence of the buildings’ history, and this room arrangement is not rare in the building group. (NB. see Aesthetic Significance, below).

### Building C

2.7 Building C, the former Public Library, is generally more important under this heading. It is much rarer in Tyne & Wear – only Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside have early listed public libraries – so it is good evidence of the growth of Victorian municipal services in the county.

SEARCH RESULTS FOR PURPOSE-BUILT PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN TYNE & WEAR, PRE-1919:

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* These entries identify Buildings B and C, and so constitute one library.

2.8 Equally, the building is rare evidence locally of the early public provision of tertiary education. Newcastle and Sunderland have several listed public tertiary education buildings (most now part of their universities) but other purpose-built college buildings of the time will have been demolished (eg. Rutherford College in Newcastle).

SEARCH RESULTS FOR PURPOSE-BUILT SECULAR COLLEGES IN TYNE & WEAR, PRE-1919:

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* Building C’s listing fails to mention its art college use, so it would not appear in these results.

2.9 The building’s high level of intactness is excellent evidence of its history. Like the other buildings, the Former Public Library’s form, principle façade, and component parts thereof, are key. Internal layout is important to knowing how the building worked, as are the room volumes. The large rooms lit by large windows and rooflights are key to appreciating the building’s historical uses.

### Conservation Areas and Archaeology

2.10 In the conservation area context, the building group has **EXCEPTIONAL** evidential significance. It is excellent evidence of the commercial vigour which drove development in Gateshead town centre in the mid to late nineteenth century, and it is one of the strongest building groups in the Bridges Conservation Area. There is no other part of the town centre – whether in a conservation area or not – which can reveal so much in such a focussed group about the late nineteenth century. There is nothing like them in the borough’s other conservation areas (only Low Fell, Whickham and Blaydon Bank Conservation Areas have commercial cores and none is on the town centre’s scale). In this respect, the building group is more akin to many found in Newcastle’s Central Conservation Area.

2.11 There is **SOME** potential for archaeological evidence under the site, but this is likely to have been diminished to an unknown degree by Victorian basements in Building A, B and C.

### Historical Significance

**EXCEPTIONAL**

2.12 The building group can tell a good story about Gateshead’s past, both at a general level and in more detailed terms. In some contexts, it is the only building group in the town which can tell this story, whilst, in others, it is a more common story to be found in other buildings.

**VICTORIAN GATESHEAD**

2.13 The formality and elegance of the buildings’ presence in the landscape illustrates the strength, wealth and pride of those that built them. At a time when Gateshead was driven by heavy industry, these buildings would have been a powerful representation of the benefits of commercial growth and investment in the future – investment both in economic and educational terms.

2.14 When built, land between High Street and West Street was an organic jumble of dead-ends, yards and lanes. Swinburne Street imposed planned order on this, a counter-part to the earlier Jackson Street to the south (also surviving but with few historic buildings). Over time, these four buildings – along with the adjacent Town Hall to the west – developed into a major anchor for the town centre,
which they remain to a degree despite major changes nearby.

2.15 Although much of the product of Gateshead’s Victorian commercial success survives, huge sections of the historic town are now gone. It is not always easy to tell the town’s late nineteenth century story as industrial corridors are now redeveloped or cleared, and most of the town centre comprehensively redeveloped. The long-term future of large suburbs of workers’ housing is also being debated. So remnants of Victorian Gateshead – of which Swinburne House is a strong example – are very important to being able to physically illustrate the wealth and pride which drove the town’s development at that time.

2.16 Swinburne House is not the only such building group in Gateshead with which to tell this story, but it is one of the best examples.

2.17 Building C’s particularly good at illustrating its own story. The way the building was used can be demonstrated using the layout and rooms which survive. The alteration and concealment of the library service counter is regrettable as this would have made it easier to demonstrate the book-borrowing system, which was very different to today’s.

2.18 Buildings A, B and D are less capable of telling their own story in detail (for example, there are no banking hall or post office counters with which to show the processes). But the basics can still be used to show how things worked, particularly in Building A where layout, circulation and the vaults can demonstrate what went on in a Victorian bank.

2.19 Swinburne House has exceptional historical significance as the place to illustrate the story of the town’s nineteenth and twentieth century municipal growth.

2.20 Along with the adjacent Town Hall, Swinburne House grew to become Gateshead’s first fully-fledged municipal headquarters and is key to understanding the growth of the borough. This civic history is a fundamental story to tell locally, and it would be incomplete without Swinburne House because it was into this building that the 1867 Town Hall grew, and out of which was born the 1926 Library, the 1987 Civic Centre, and other sites including the 1970s police station and magistrates courts. This long chapter of Swinburne House’s history is inextricably linked to the Town Hall and so has strong associative significance.

2.21 As a large pool of municipal functions and officers was based in Swinburne House, many of the local political and social decisions which guided Gateshead between the early 1900s and the 1980s will have been implemented there. Research might demonstrate whether the honeycomb of makeshift, converted spaces in the building group could have influenced the scale of comprehensive, Modernist redevelopment which Gateshead saw in the mid-to late-twentieth century, even if only subconsciously.

2.22 The physical evolution of the four buildings in the twentieth century helps tell this story. The internal links to create one building illustrate how they became combined civic offices, whilst Building A’s extension and the rebuilt stairwell to Building B are also illustrative. But these are useful for telling the story rather than crucial to it. The plans and photographs of the previous, larger extension to Building A are useful to tell a chapter in the story of the birth of the Civic Centre.

2.23 Although the story of municipal growth is definitive of Swinburne House’s history, these buildings are not the best evidence there is for this story in Tyne & Wear. The effect of the reforms which created the need for municipal offices is seen in different ways elsewhere. Newcastle – even worse than Gateshead – wrestled for decades with the poor capacity of its Victorian town hall (1850, also by Johnston, St Nicholas Square, demolished) and it wasn’t until the opening of the City Hall in 1928 and, four decades later, Newcastle Civic Centre, that things dramatically improved there. South Shields saw large mid- and late-twentieth century extensions to its impressive late Victorian town hall. But Wallsend is perhaps the best evidence in the county of these early twentieth century municipal reforms, manifesting as a combined town hall, police court, fire station and public baths in one intelligent, multi-use site, a vivid depiction of strong local government emerging in the early twentieth century. By contrast, on this site in Gateshead, only Building C and the second phase of Building D were purpose-built specifically for council use.

2.24 Sandstone Victorian commercial buildings, Classical in style, define many of the town centres of Tyne & Wear. But buildings of this period, style and quality are rare in Gateshead town centre, especially in this group quantity.

2.25 Each of the four buildings has a strong well-informed style which makes it a powerful piece of architecture in its own right. Each has sound Classical proportions and careful detailing which mark it out as a body of work by a collection of experienced architects. External detail adds considerably to the overall quality of the group, including the high-level carved inscriptions and mouldings, and the metalwork.

2.26 The robust Classical articulation of the former Bank (Building A) and the first phase of the former Post Office (Building D) is accomplished and well-detailed. The original elevation of the former Building Society (Building B) has an almost Greek strength and purity which, with its pediment, skilfully highlights a small building next to a more strongly articulated neighbour (the swept curves of its re-worked ground floor elevation detract from this purity a little).

2.27 The former Public Library (Building C) is the most accomplished of the group, a vigorous and intense work with great spirit and an institutional grandeur which typifies the building type and period. The scale of the doorway and windows, and the rich animation of the roofscape, are key, enhanced by the principal elevation’s carved details which add both gravitas and delight (studious Classical figures, Archimedes and Bewick are all symbolic of its original uses). The rear, with its gambrel roof form, is also very distinctive.

2.28 The second phase of Building D carefully carries the ground floor through along Swinburne Place and adds (or perhaps re-uses from the first phase) a suitably scaled cornice to the front range’s third storey. The rest of the second phase is neat and straightforward.

2.29 In each building there is an obvious respect for group value and the work of the earlier architects. Careful choice of materials is key, as is recognition of proportion and scale, despite the differences in storey heights and the sloping site. The resultant group value is one of Swinburne House’s greatest aesthetic strengths. Building B’s re-built offshoot follows this theme, but not Building A’s extension, which is weak in form and detail.

2.30 Internally, the layout of each building has logical planning related to historic uses – some simple (e.g. Buildings B and Building D’s second phase), others complex (Buildings C and A). They were probably fit for purpose when built but original users seem to have moved on so soon that it is likely they outwardly the accommodation quickly. As council offices, however, it is clear the buildings were far from fit for purpose.

2.31 The detail and decoration of Building C’s interior is rich, energetic and high quality. The metalwork, joinery and plasterwork enlivening the principle rooms is still striking today, despite the more recent changes and concealments. Without this decoration, an understanding would be lost of the building’s crucial role as a proud municipal symbol for Gateshead’s Victorian citizens.

2.32 The building demonstrates well how the layout of nineteenth century public libraries tended to follow the tradition of the gentlemen’s club and the private institute – their closest cousins at the time – and so are quite unlike libraries which emerged in the twentieth century. In many respects, one of the closest comparators for Building C’s internal layout and design is Newcastle’s former Union Club (c1874, Westgate Road, M P Manning, Grade II), now a Wetherspoon’s pub.

2.33 The internal decoration of the other buildings is also high quality, and an important part of the buildings’ period style, but it is generally plainer and less critical to the aesthetic. Where it exists in anything like its original form, neat, elegant plasterwork does add to rooms’ significance.

2.34 The appearance of the historic windows and (where they exist) doors is very important to the aesthetic significance of the main façades and also, with their trim...
and surrounds, to that of the interior. The character of nineteenth century window and door joinery is a major part of the authenticity and visual appeal of Victorian buildings and, as it survives in such great quantities here, it is crucial to Swinburne House’s aesthetic significance.

**Conservation Area**

2.35 Swinburne House has **exceptional** aesthetic significance as a major contributor to Bridges Conservation Area due to its architecture, size and prominence. The conservation area is characterised by a series of set pieces rather than a single coherent townscape. The sandstone grandeur of Swinburne House combines the adjacent and Town Hall, others on West Street, and the road layout they are on, to create an attractive, authentic scene of great character. Because the forms of the buildings are intact, this significance includes the rear elevations and back lane.

**Communal Significance**

2.36 This was not formally researched for this study, but some conclusion can be drawn from the work carried out.

2.37 If asked on the street, the average Gateshead citizen would probably have little opinion on Swinburne House. It is likely to register well as a group of old buildings which are prominent in the landscape, but it is very unlikely anyone alive would personally remember the original uses (even if there may be some parent or grandparent stories), but there was a children’s library here until 1934. However, many people will remember its use as the Council’s headquarters and will have visited it or worked there, including many existing Council staff. This will undoubtedly generate both positive and negative feelings. Although there will be some affection for it, it is unlikely to be so great as to be definitive. In this respect, Swinburne House would be seen as an interesting, functional part of the history of Council operations, but little more, and so would struggle to generate very high social significance.

2.38 When linked to the former Town Hall, this aspect does get stronger. The high symbolism and identity embodied in the Town Hall is enhanced by the presence of Swinburne House, but the former would not be fatally harmed without the latter. It is good evidence of the way political and social reform affected the accommodation needed by a sizeable local authority over the decades but, as discussed under **Historical Significance**, it is not the best evidence there is for the way that reform manifested itself in buildings. The incorporation of goat’s heads in Building C’s lobby carving is nearly symbolic but, again, not definitive. So, although there is evidence for these aspects, they do not combine to create strong symbolic significance.

2.39 Today, Swinburne House is a building of some consequence for the broad collection of third sector bodies at home there. This significance should not be underestimated and, although it is relatively recent, it should be seen as a worthy, convincing chapter in the life of the building group which has generated it some local social significance.

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**Summary Statement of Significance**

2.40 As a group of mid- to late-Victorian commercial and municipal buildings, Swinburne House is very rare in Gateshead due to the dramatic townscape changes which have taken place there since WWII.

2.41 Historically, the building group is crucial to understanding Gateshead’s place in Tyne & Wear’s late nineteenth century commercially-driven heyday. The buildings’ formality and elegance illustrate the strength, wealth and pride of those that built them, and they are a powerful representation of the Victorians’ belief in investing in commerce and education. Such Victorian remnants are very important to physically illustrating this chapter in Gateshead’s development, particularly as many other components of the story are now gone.

2.42 Along with the adjacent Old Town Hall (with which it is strongly associated) Swinburne House was Gateshead’s first fully-fledged civic headquarters, and so is the place to illustrate the town’s nineteenth and twentieth century municipal growth. It is crucial to this story in Gateshead, but there are better places in Tyne & Wear to tell the wider English story.

2.43 Architecturally, buildings of this period, **style and quality are rare** in Gateshead, especially in this group quantity. Swinburne House is relatively intact at a basic and detailed level, and much – but not all – of the detailed fabric and character is important, notably the building forms, principal façades, their main components (eg, roofs, windows) and much of the internal layouts and rooms.

2.44 The four buildings follow strong, well-informed Classical styles with sound proportions and careful detailing, making each a powerful piece of architecture in its own right. At the same time, **group value** is one of Swinburne House’s greatest aesthetic strengths, each architect displaying an obvious respect for the earlier work in scale, proportions and materials. Internal layouts have logical planning related to historic uses, even if later uses forced remodelling. **Internal decoration is high quality** and an important part of the period style, with elegant joinery and plasterwork adding to rooms’ significance, particularly the larger rooms originally publicly accessible in the bank, post office and library. The appearance of the large quantity historic window and door joinery is crucial to the authentic significance of the façades and also, with their trim and surrounds, to the interiors.

2.45 Although each building has its strengths, the **Former Public Library** (Building C) scores higher than the others under most headings. It is excellent evidence of the growth of mid-Victorian public library and education services, and is rare in Tyne & Wear (particularly the art college use). It can illustrate its own story well. A vigorous and intense work with great spirit and an institutional grandeur, it is the most architecturally accomplished of the four buildings (it is by John Johnston, the same architect as the adjacent Old Town Hall). The internal layout illustrates how the building type grew from the gentlemen’s club tradition, whilst the internal detail and decoration is rich, energetic and high quality, still demonstrating today its intended role as proud municipal symbol for Gateshead’s Victorian citizens.

2.46 The building group has some **communal significance** from its use as the Council’s headquarters, and is likely to be remembered with some affection, but this is not definitive of its importance. This is enhanced in the context of the high symbolism and identity embodied in the Old Town Hall. Its use today is a recent chapter, but a worthy one.

2.47 As one of the best set-pieces in Bridges Conservation Area, Swinburne House is excellent evidence of the commercial vigour which drove development in Gateshead town centre in the mid to late nineteenth century. There is no similar surviving group in the town centre or in any other Gateshead conservation area. It combines superbly with the adjacent Old Town Hall and the townscape around (including the road layout and rear elevations) to create an attractive, authentic scene of great grandeur. It remains a major anchor in the town centre, despite being isolated.

2.48 There is some potential for **archaeological evidence** under the site, but this is likely to have been diminished to an unknown degree by Victorian basements.

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*Conservation Statement*

Swinburne House, Swinburne Street, Gateshead
Significance Diagrams

These diagrams summarise the overall heritage significance of the fabric and room volumes at Swinburne House.

Fabric is shown solid and room volumes as tints.

The diagrams are summaries only. Within each room or stretch of fabric there will be individual elements of higher or lower significance than indicated here. As discussed in the final section of this study, the significance of every part of any fabric and space to altered should be fully understood before agreeing any change.

EXCEPTIONAL
Aspects which are seminal to understanding the place and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would destroy or greatly compromise its significance.

CONSIDERABLE
Aspects which go a long way to help understand the place, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would notably diminish significance but not destroy it.

SOME
Aspects which contribute to or complement understanding of the place but are not intrinsic to it, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would not unacceptably harm its significance.

MARGINAL
Aspects which have only minor links with the place or which could be considered intrusive, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would cause little if any harm or could bring about positive enhancement.
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These diagrams summarise the overall heritage significance of the fabric and room volumes at Swinburne House.

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**MARGINAL**
Aspects which have only minor links with the place or which could be considered intrusive, and which, if lost or substantially harmed, would cause little if any harm or could bring about positive enhancement.
STAGE THREE

Risks & Issues

3.1 With a clear understanding of why Swinburne House is significant, this section sets out how that significance might at risk. The degree to which significance is at risk governs the policies set out in the final stage.

Physical Condition

RISK TO SIGNIFICANCE: WEAK MEDIUM STRONG

3.2 The condition of Swinburne House is generally good (no formal inspection has been made for this study). There is little visual evidence of water ingress, vegetation growth, decay or neglect. Some neglect signs are clear in Buildings B and C's basements. Sealed chimney breasts and capped stacks will reduce ventilation. There is bound to be some cementitious pointing which will speed stonework decay over time. Some rooms are un- or under-used, which risks keeping signs of decay out of sight, notably:

- Building C's second floor; risks are much higher in attic space as water ingress from the building's complex roof form will be hidden from everyday view.
- Many basement rooms, especially Buildings B and C.

3.3 The original build for each of the buildings seems sound, and there are no obvious structural issues (again, no formal inspection was carried out for this study). There is significant structural alteration and shoring in the basement at the inserted doorway between Buildings B and C.

3.4 There is evidence of long term regular maintenance and programmed repair. This stems from its status as a key operational Council building, but attention does not seem to have greatly reduced since the building was no longer needed operationally. This indicates a generally sound asset management approach which should continue.

3.5 The importance of building maintenance cannot be overstated. Regular small-scale investment in maintenance and repair is almost always substantially cheaper and easier than the cost and disruption of recovery. Preventing water ingress whilst allowing the building to 'breathe' is fundamental to responding to traditional buildings' needs.

MAIN ISSUES

- PRIORITY Regularly monitoring and addressing issues in un- and under-used rooms: Building C's second floor and basement rooms, especially Buildings B and C.
- Sustaining maintenance and repair regimes at a level appropriate to the building's fabric and character.

Previous Alterations

RISK TO SIGNIFICANCE: WEAK MEDIUM STRONG

3.6 The changes which the building group has seen over time have had some impact on its heritage significance, but not in an overpowering way (even in Building B).

3.7 Each building – and the group – is quite intact in basic form, layout (apart from Building B), room volumes (apart from Building B) and some decoration. There has been loss and addition, leading to historic character erosion and modernisation. The exterior is generally more intact.

LOSS

- Loss of original doorway joinery has harmed historic appearance, whilst loss of chimneys has harmed the roofscape and the group’s authentic silhouette.
- Rebuilding Building B’s ground floor slab has been a big change, but the character of the rooms is little more eroded than other parts of the building group.
- The general erosion of decoration, fixtures and finishes (eg. joinery, fireplaces, flooring, stair treads) has deadened some rooms’ character and dulled the overall historic sense of the interior, especially where fittings would have been key character (eg, the library rooms, and the banking and post office halls).
- Loss of the original stairwell to Building B has had a similar effect, even if it has left fundamentals intact.

ADDITION

- Additions are generally of low significance, but the early twentieth century extensions to Building D are no less significant for their not being original.
- Most additions have not deeply harmed significance, supplementing rather than wiping out what existed (eg. Building A’s extension, Building C’s additional circulation zone, suspended ceilings). Some are more invasive, eg. Building C’s ground floor west end.
- Many additions are reversible without much harm, eg. room partitions and circulation knock-throughs.
3.8 Generally, the policy context offers little risk and should actively protect the significance of the place, but there are some concerns.

3.9 There could be huge risk if the current major, high-level planning and regeneration activity in and around the town centre does not take full account of the building group’s significance. But this threat does not currently seem to be present.

3.10 Policy GC1 of the March 2015 adopted ‘Planning for the Future’ Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne 2010 identifies this area (Old Town Hall Area) for Mixed Use Development as ‘Planning for the Bridges Conservation Area’ and makes clear that

3.11 Policy GC2 of the CSUCP defines the permitted uses within this development area and makes clear that development must, restore and enhance Swinburne House, the Old Town Hall, and the Old Dispensary. The Policy is clear on the parameters of development, identifying car park locations, public green space and the need to redefine the historic street pattern.

**MAIN ISSUES**
- Preparing a conservation area management strategy for the Bridges Conservation Area reflecting best practice.
- Ensuring the ongoing high-level visioning and decision-making in and around the town centre take full account of the building group’s heritage significance.

**Setting**

3.12 This is one of the building group’s biggest problems. As was typical for the Victorian period, it was designed to be part of a cohesive townscape demonstrating commercial vigour, municipal stability and civic pride. This was heavily damaged by the radical re-ordering of the development pattern north of today’s town centre, and the loss of many historic buildings. The legacy of such post-WWII planning and development continues to dog Gateshead town centre.

3.13 So, Swinburne House is unusually prominent in the townscape, marooned above sites and roads as land drops to the north. This gives it some grandeur, but ultimately confuses its status in the local scene and risks making its concealment by new development harder to argue for.

3.14 But such an approach would be ideal for the building group, realising its potential to be a key anchor for the scale and quality of planning, urban design and architecture needed to bring new order to this part of the town centre. This role is also important in the light of the risks posed by on-going comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre to the south. If the building group is to be dwarfed by a new town centre to the south, then it must be allowed to at least ‘hold its own’ amongst new development to the north.

3.15 The detail of the newly completed highway scheme on Swinburne Street intrudes somewhat on the building group. This is evidence of a risk to the overall street scene in the conservation area (including the back lane) from public works which do not respond to character and appearance.

**Access – Outside**

3.16 Being in the town centre albeit at the edge, getting to the building is generally quite easy.

3.17 Pedestrian access from the town centre to the south on West Street is good. But from the north, east and west it is significantly challenged by an extensive road network and complex junctions. The issue of poor links from the quays to the town centre has been taxing for several decades, and continues to require a broad, high level solution rather than one focussed just on the needs of Swinburne House. This is reflected in the aforementioned CSUCP Policy GC1.

3.18 Vehicular access is generally good. Swinburne Street is a quiet cul-de-sac, but getting to it is convoluted for the uninitiated.

3.19 There is no on-site parking and no capacity for it on-site without demolition, which is not an option. Current needs are met by town centre public car-parking, the site directly opposite being the main resource nearby. Any risks to the building group from a lack of parking should be managed by continuing to rely on public car-parks and exploiting town centre public transport links.

**Access – Inside**

3.20 Emergency escape meets current standards but the building would be likely to take more people were its escape capacity greater. This is hampered by the number of original exists and the way the building is divided up.

3.21 Disabled access is not great and has been achieved only through alterations, some of which are intrusive. There is a lift, platform lift and accessible WC in Building C, and a ramp and accessible WC in Building D, but overall provision will not meet best practice. As well as existing capacity, issues will include doors, signage, refuges and surfaces. But the main issue will be moving through the building which involves many steps due to the four buildings’ differing floor levels. This is only likely to be fully resolved with separate accesses to different parts of the building group. Disabled access in historic buildings is a specialist which requires careful thought and healthy collaboration to make reasonable adjustment without prejudicing significance.

3.22 There is also some risk to the ‘experience’ of the buildings. Each is designed to be entered and circulated in a particular way, and this can contribute to significance. Where this is altered, significance can be harmed. This is particularly true of Building C, the former Library, which has a hierarchy of spaces which should be best experienced in the way originally designed. Having the main entrance from, say, the rear rather than the original front door would cause harm. This has already happened to Building B (the former Building Society) which now has no front door – the only way in is from Building C which has muddied the building as a separate heritage asset and confused its internal layout and circulation. Care should be taken to avoid such harm to the other buildings.

**MAIN ISSUES**
- **Priority** Securing high level resolution to the long term poor pedestrian links between the quays and town centre.
- Not over-complicating vehicular access.
- Ensuring demands for parking are managed through public provision and public transport links.

**MAIN ISSUES**
- **Priority** Improving emergency escape capacity and disabled access could cause harm if not carefully designed.
- **Priority** Internal circulation and ‘experience’ of the buildings should be protected where it contributes to significance.
**Policy**

1. **The following principles should guide the future of Swinburne House.**

   - Swinburne House is *part of the historic environment*. Its significance should be sustained through positive conservation. It has passed through generations of guardians and it should continue to do so.
   - The historic environment is a non-renewable resource *valued by the public at large*. People should have the chance to play a part in upholding the positive values they place on Swinburne House.
   - Understanding Swinburne House is key. No change should be agreed without a clear understanding of what is to be changed, the impact the change will have on significance, and what mitigation might improve the outcome. There should be sufficient information and evidence to come to a decision.
   - There should be a presumption in favour of preservation. This does not preclude change, it only requires its justification. All justification should be clear and convincing. Change is inevitable, and some change is welcome, so it should be actively managed. Swinburne House should get sufficient attention to understand it, uphold significance, minimise harm and protect authenticity.
   - Decisions about Swinburne House should be reasonable, transparent and guided by public policy. They should use specialist expert advice and judgement proportionate to the decision at hand.
   - Decisions about Swinburne House should be suitably documented to create a *cumulative account of change*. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the effects of change should inform future decisions.
   - Swinburne House should be kept in *economically viable use(s)* consistent with its conservation. It should be used as a *positive tool for place-shaping* in Gateshead town centre, using new development opportunities to enhance its setting and linkages.

2. **Routine Maintenance**

   - The conservation of Swinburne House should be based primarily on appropriate routine maintenance.
   - Maintenance is the first priority to sustain Swinburne House’s heritage significance.
   - The fabric should receive regular maintenance appropriate to sustaining its significance. This will therefore vary according to the significance of the fabric being addressed.
   - The highest maintenance priorities are to prevent:
     - water ingress,
     - fabric decay,
     - structural instability.
   - There should be planned as well as reactive maintenance, regular monitoring, inspection and reporting. This is particularly important for Building C's second floor, which is currently sealed-up, and the basements, which are under-used.
   - Swinburne House is a traditionally constructed building which mostly uses natural materials. Works should respond to this, using traditional techniques and matching natural materials.

3. **Periodic Renewal**

   - There should be periodic renewal of elements at Swinburne House unless any harm caused to significance would not be recovered over time.
   - Some parts of Swinburne House can only take so much maintenance before they need to be replaced, for example roof coverings.
   - But this should only take place if, over time, harm will be recovered. For example, the loss of attractively-aged historic fabric may eventually be compensated for by the renewed fabric eventually aging in the same way, thus recovering aesthetic significance over time.
   - Renewal should only take place when maintenance and repair are decidedly no longer an option, which should be judged following appropriate expert advice. The principle of minimum intervention should be the guide.
   - Renewal should not be pursued as a matter of course. For example, repairing historic timber windows and doors will uphold their contribution to the place’s significance for longer than replacing them with new timber features. (Also, it can be cheaper and technically more effective to repair than renew.)
**Repair**

- Repair will be acceptable if:
  - there is a clear understanding of the repair’s impact,
  - the solution is proven to be benign for the future,
  - the repair would avoid or minimise harm.

4.13 Repairs should be the minimum necessary to allow Swinburne House to continue to function. Repair should not be a substitute for maintenance – the latter should always be the first priority.

4.14 Repairs should use proven traditional techniques and matching natural materials, unless modern techniques or materials can provide a suitable solution without harming significance, including aesthetic significance. This will be particularly important to the principal façades.

4.15 Minor removal of fabric to reveal something concealed could be pursued where there is a need for understanding which cannot be achieved another way. But such destructive intervention is unlikely to be an issue here:

- There are few parts of Swinburne House which are so poorly understood and so potentially significant that fabric must be destroyed to get to them.
- Most concealing changes have generated fabric of low significance so intervention anyway would cause little harm.
- On the strength of current understanding, there is no case for destruction of above-ground fabric solely to understand better the potential archaeological resource below-ground.

**Restoration**

- Restoration will be acceptable if:
  - it involves removing less significant fabric,
  - there is compelling evidence of what is to be restored,
  - maintenance of the restored elements is sustainable.

4.16 Restoration is a controversial practice in the historic environment as it risks creating a fake replica rather than sustaining authenticity. It is usually better for a building to honestly evolve but, on occasion, restoration is desirable, such as where it enhances understanding or significance.

4.17 Restoration should still be guided by a minimum intervention approach. Restoration should not be pursued where it would decrease authenticity (eg, replicating bank joinery in Building A) or where the later change is, in itself, causing little harm (eg, the re-built stairwell to Building B).

4.18 As the original designs of Swinburne House are more significant than the later work, there will be an argument for restoring some later work which has concealed, harmed or destroyed original designs. Obvious examples are:

  - closing the links opened-up between the buildings,
  - removing inserted partitions in principal rooms,
  - reinstating lost partitions between rooms,
  - restoring the concealed service counter in Building C,
  - putting back missing or damaged decoration where it completes a room design (eg, ceiling plasterwork, window surround joinery, staircase metalwork, etc.),
  - restoring replica doors to original doorways.

4.19 Whether to restore the ground floor levels in Buildings B and C should rest on issues other than conservation, such as structural concerns, cost or accessibility, etc. They have altered room volumes and layout, but they are not so invasive to significance that they should be restored solely for conservation reasons.

4.20 Works carried out during the buildings’ municipal use are still part of Swinburne House’s story and, if restored, should be suitably recorded first.

**New work and alteration**

- New work and alteration will be acceptable if:
  - there is a clear understanding of the proposals’ impact,
  - significance would not be materially harmed and instead would be reinforced or, if possible, revealed;
  - the proposals are high quality in design and execution,
  - the solution is proven to be benign for the future.

4.21 Conservation of Swinburne House is very likely to involve alteration and new work. Innovation and preservation are two sides of the same coin. A presumption in favour of preservation does not preclude new work, it only requires its justification. Innovation is not in conflict with protecting significance – Swinburne House proves this because changes made already have left it in broadly good shape as a heritage asset. Further change will be necessary, for example to allow sustainable new uses.

4.22 It will be important to provide sufficient information on the impacts of proposals, including visual (eg, does it protect aesthetic significance?) and technical (eg, will it cause harm in the long term?).

4.23 It will be important to justify the proposals in the context of the significance of the fabric or space concerned – the higher the significance, the stronger the justification needed. The highest priorities for upholding significance in new work and alteration will be to protect:

  - historic building forms,
  - principal façades,
  - original internal layouts, circulation and accesses,
  - principal room volumes,
  - decorative fabric and features where they contribute to evidential or aesthetic significance,
  - surviving fireplaces, safes and vaults,
  - group value of the buildings and their setting.

4.24 New work which reinforces or better reveals heritage significance will be easier to justify.

4.25 Swinburne House’s original architecture is largely high quality. So it will be important to achieve high quality in the design, materials, detailing and execution of new work and alteration. All work must achieve the quality expected of a more sensitive place.

4.26 Fashions can change but quality is enduring. New work should be honest in its style and execution unless there is a compelling case for adopting a traditional style. If so, the execution of that style must be wholly authentic.

4.27 Most new work should follow the principle of reversible change, whereby the earlier work will be left unharmed if the new work is later removed or undone.

4.28 The sort of new work for which a sound justification could be made includes:

- development in the building group’s setting to link it back into a coherent, planned townscape,
- demolishing Building A’s extension or Building B’s re-built stairwell offshoot (these are the only parts which could be demolished without unacceptable harm),
- extending Building A south along High Street,
- extending Building A upwards with additional second floor accommodation into the attic,
- extending Building D south over its single storey in a way which retained the existing gable roof form,
- making changes to bring Building C’S second floor and the basement rooms back into use,
- making changes to room volumes and layout in the less significant interiors, eg, Building B’s upper floors and the second phase of Building D.

4.29 Other new work is likely to include:

- alterations to improve disabled access,
- alterations to improve energy conservation,
- alterations to improve emergency escape capacity.

4.30 In considering new development in the building group’s setting, key factors will be street alignment, scale, height, massing and materials.