



Design and Heritage Statement  
Change of use, adaption of  
internal layout and introduction  
of rooflights and windows at Earl  
Keelan House, Abbeyfield,  
Darlington

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t - 01325 460227

w - [www.wardmanbrown.com](http://www.wardmanbrown.com)

e - [info@wardmanbrown.com](mailto:info@wardmanbrown.com)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Design and Heritage Statement is prepared on behalf of Abbeyfield Darlington to support a full plans application for the change of use, adaption of internal layout and introduction of rooflights and windows at Earl Keelan House, Abbeyfield, Darlington.

## **SITE LOCATION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The site is located within the West End Conservation Area off Ashcroft Road. The site is comprised of extensive grounds and three buildings, Danby Lodge, JF Latimer House and Earl Keelan House.



Danby Lodge was bought by Charles Walter Starmer, later Sir Charles Starmer, newspaper magnate and Alderman of Darlington. The house was built between 1902 and 1904 and first opened in December 1982. Lady Starmer was a renowned philanthropist who was involved in Darlington Football Club, Darlington Operatic Society and even Darlington Brown Trout Angling Society. She left the lodge for the benefit of the town and settled upon the Abbeyfield Society as beneficiary, in the understanding it would be named in memory of her husband.

John Fenwick Latimer was the son of a local Methodist Minister and he formed a lifelong friendship with Sir Charles Starmer; he established a legal

practice on Darlington's High Row before becoming a member of the Town Council, and an Alderman.

He died suddenly in 1977 after chairing a meeting at what was Eastbourne School. His wife and daughter were determined there should options for supported living for the elderly of the town and decided Abbeyfield should be the beneficiary of their estate. No suitable property was found and the Abbeyfield Society decided to build a state-of-the-art property in the grounds of Danby Lodge. JF Latimer House was opened in 1986.

Part of Lady Starmer's bequest was what had been the coach house with a retainer's house at the end overlooking Cleveland Terrace. The coach house had been converted into a garage and the whole building became available for redevelopment. Unfortunately, not much is recorded about the three people who enabled the building of Earl Keenan House.

The two Earl brothers left bequests for the Abbeyfield Society. The first had left half of his estate to his brother and half to Darlington Borough Council. Eventually the bequest was handed over to the Abbeyfield Society. Shortly after the second brother died and the estate was transferred over. Miss Keelan who lived in Coniscliffe Road later left a £128,000 donation to Abbeyfield. The Society then developed the third house on the Darlington estate and it opened to residents in July 1991.

## **PROPOSED WORKS**

This application relates to alterations works at Earl Keelan House.

Currently laundry, storage and bathroom facilities are located on the first floor.

Intentions are to relocate these facilities to the ground floor within a smaller residential suite and relocate this suite to the first floor.

In conjunction with this relocation two additional rooflights and two additional windows are proposed to match existing windows and rooflights to adjacent rooms.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

Due to the loss of the residential suite on the ground floor there would be no net increase in the number of units within the building.

The first-floor bathroom accommodation is no longer required as there are two other communal bathrooms on the ground floor and most residential suites have their own facilities.

The storage requirement would be accommodated within the proposed laundry area.

## **HERITAGE STATEMENT**

The West End Conservation Area is a part of Darlington's inner residential suburbs and is a generally prosperous and attractive part of town. Ranging from high-density town houses near to the centre of town to large detached villas in substantial grounds, this area makes a significant contribution to Darlington's housing offer. Many of the green spaces and areas of mature tree cover remain in their historic location, although their use may have changed, adding to the spatial and amenity value of this part of town. Being either side of two major routes into town this Conservation Area makes a significant contribution to the wider character of the town and reinforces Darlington's high quality built and natural heritage.

The West End Conservation Area Character Assessment identifies this area as suburban in character. The Abbeyfield group of buildings are typical of the location with the original Danby Lodge portraying Victorian character and the more modern JF Latimer and Earl Keenan Buildings constructed in complementary styles and of complementary materials.

It is acknowledged that any proposals should seek either an improvement or neutral outcome to enhance or protect the character of the Conservation Area.

The proposed rooflights and windows would match the existing rooflights and windows within adjacent suites. On this basis these additions would not result in harm but would simply assimilate with the existing roofscape resulting in a neutral outcome.