

# Alnmouth Conservation Area Character Appraisal

January 2025





**Northumberland Coast AONB**

**Alnmouth  
Conservation Area**  
Character Appraisal  
and Management  
Recommendations

**Final report**

Prepared by LUC

January 2022



## Northumberland Coast AONB

### Alnmouth Conservation Area

#### Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Alnmouth and the Aln estuary from the west



## Introduction

Conservation area designation is about celebrating and preserving the local distinctiveness of places, but what exactly is a conservation area and what are the implications of designation? The aim of this section is to explain why we designate areas, why it is important to protect their character and appearance, and how this legislative protection relates to Alnmouth.

### What is a conservation area?

**1.1** In 1967, the Civic Amenities Act introduced the simple concept of recognising buildings and areas of historic interest and making provisions for the protection of that special interest. Today, the spirit of that Act has been extended and incorporated into the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which makes provision for the designation of “*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”<sup>1</sup>. Although the legislation applies nationally to England, conservation areas are identified and designated by local authorities based on criteria appropriate to their area.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/conservation-areas/> [accessed 15.03.2021]



**1.2 Preservation** of the character and appearance of conservation areas is about avoiding harm and maintaining those features of an area that make it distinctive. **Enhancement** of the character and appearance of conservation areas is concerned with the promotion of positive improvements; that is, both the removal of elements identified as harmful or detracting from the area's special interest, but also advocating and directing new development so that it responds to and reinforces the character of the area.

## Conservation area designation and appraisal

**1.3** The special interest of Alnmouth and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised soon after the Civic Amenities Act was passed, and Alnmouth became a designated area of special interest in 1972. The reasons for its designation were formalised in a Conservation Area Character Appraisal, undertaken by Robin Kent Architecture & Conservation for Alnmouth District Council and published in 2006.

**1.4** Section 71 of the 1990 Act places a duty on local authorities to 'formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas'<sup>2</sup>, but, more than that, a conservation area appraisal is a tool to help people understand what is important about a place and manage change within it.

**1.5** To facilitate the preservation or enhancement of a conservation area, as required by the 1990 Act, the designation of an area introduces some restrictions on what can and cannot be done without planning permission. These include:

- For the demolition of any building within the conservation area;
- Control over partial demolition;
- Control over works to trees;
- Limited permitted development rights;
- The option to use Article 4 directions to further restrict specific permitted development rights; and

- Limitations on the type of advertisements that do not require consent.

**1.6** In the case of conservation areas, the NPPF also requires local authorities to look for opportunities to enhance or better reveal their significance<sup>3</sup> and to recognise that historic assets are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so that future generations are able to appreciate them too<sup>4</sup>.

**1.7** The Northumberland Local Plan (March 2022) Policy ENV 1 - Historic and built environment (Strategic Policy) states "The character and/or significance of Northumberland's distinctive and valued natural, historic and built environments, will be conserved, protected and enhanced by:  
a. Giving appropriate weight to the statutory purposes and special qualities of the hierarchy of international, national and local designated and non-designated nature and historic conservation assets or sites and their settings". Policy ENV 9 deals specifically with Conservation Areas.

**1.8** The 2020-2024 AONB Management Plan recognises that the history of human interaction and occupation of the landscape is integral to the character of the AONB. Evidence of this interaction ranges from field patterns to settlements sites, route ways to buildings and quarries to castles. Objective Two of the plan relates to the historic environment, with Policy 2.1 stating "*important heritage assets including designated and non-designated archaeological sites, the character and appearance of historic buildings, settlements and the built environment will be protected, conserved and well managed*"<sup>5</sup>. This updated appraisal contributes to achieving this action to ensure that the historic environment is well-managed and better protected.

## What should the appraisal be used for?

### Planning for change

**1.9** One of the main ways change in a conservation area is managed is through the planning system. Conservation area appraisals provide an evidence base for managing change and, by adopting a conservation area appraisal, planning authorities are better placed to give due and proportionate weight to the special interest of conservation areas. This will, in turn, result in better informed and balanced decisions in relation to the historic environment. An appraisal can

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/71> [accessed 15.03.2021]

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Para.206.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Para.189.

also be used to support potential strategic plans and policies for the area, and to promote its conservation and regeneration.

### Supporting good design

**1.10** In presenting a sound understanding of character, a conservation area appraisal can be used to assess how well new development responds to the character of Alnmouth, where there may be opportunities to reverse changes that have adversely affected its character, as well as opportunities to enhance what is already present. As such, it can be used as a basis for refusing poor design that fails to respond to the character of the place or take advantage of opportunities to enhance it.

### Informing and inspiring

**1.11** As publicly accessible documents, available as a source of information for anyone interested, one of the principal aims of conservation area appraisals is to widen appreciation of the special interest of each area and raise awareness of why they are protected. Achieving this outcome is fundamental to an appraisal's purpose as, ultimately, its overarching aim is to help people better-understand and engage with the places where they live, work and visit.

### Acknowledgements

**1.12** In 2021, LUC was commissioned by the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership to provide a review of existing and potential conservation areas within the AONB. This new appraisal for Alnmouth updates the original 2006 character appraisal to ensure its content reflects the current state of the area including a fresh presentation of character analysis and management issues.

**1.13** With grateful thanks to the staff of Northumberland AONB Partnership, Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Archives for their knowledge, advice and assistance in creating this document. **NCC Front Cover image** © Dru Dodd / **Figure 2.1** © Gavin Duthie.

**Figure 1.1: Alnmouth Conservation Area roofscape and views**





## Chapter 2

### Summary of Special Interest

Lovaine Terrace



## Summary of Special Interest

**This section provides an overview of the special interest of Alnmouth Conservation Area.**

### Designation and appraisal

**2.1** The special interest of Alnmouth and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised soon after the Civic Amenities Act was passed, and Alnmouth became a designated area of special interest in 1972. The reasons for its designation were formalised in a Conservation Area Character Appraisal, undertaken by Robin Kent Architecture & Conservation for Alnmouth District Council and published in 2006. This review of the 2006 character appraisal was undertaken in 2021 by LUC and was adopted by Northumberland County Council in 2025.

### Location and context

**2.2** Alnmouth is located at the mouth of the River Aln, on a promontory surrounded by low-lying beaches, salt marsh and sand dunes. Much of the surrounding coastal landscape and habitats are protected. It is connected by road to the nearby settlements of Alnmouth, Lesbury and Warkworth and has a station c.1.5km from the village.

### Historical development

**2.3** Alnmouth first developed through its location on the River Aln, containing a natural harbour and the lowest fording point of the river. Its structure and form began to emerge in the medieval period. Its early prosperity came from trade in stone and sheep; in the post-medieval period it became an important centre for the corn export trade with impressive granaries surviving from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



**2.4** The dramatic change of course of the river and the arrival of the railway in the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century reduced the role of trade but provided opportunities for the growth of the tourist industry, attracted to the area for its dramatic natural setting and outdoor leisure. The village's built heritage reflects this evolution and history of relative prosperity through a range of impressive, high-quality buildings, mainly of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Summary of defining characteristics of Alnmouth Conservation Area

**2.5** The conservation area has a strongly unified character, due to its highly contained structure centred on the linear main street, its dramatic natural setting and a restricted palette of building forms and materials. The following characteristics are of particular importance to the character and appearance of Alnmouth:

- Northumberland Street forms the spine of the settlement, located on a slight ridge with narrow lanes falling gently towards the water's edge on each side.
- Buildings in the historic core are generally of simple plan form, in terraced groups, orientated parallel with the street with a gently varying eaves and ridge line. Less common are long buildings, gable end on to the street, generally converted granaries or lower, ancillary buildings.
- Later 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, often at the outer edges of the village, are in short terraces or groups, with picturesque composition and detailing, set back behind small front gardens.
- The area north of the Wynd has the character of a slightly separate suburb, with a few substantial detached houses and cottage-scale development loosely grouped around the former school.
- Alnmouth is strongly defined and enhanced by its setting, contained by the curve of the Aln estuary and surrounded by beaches, dunes, links, salt marsh, woodland and, further inland, an agricultural landscape.
- These factors create a sense of separation and isolation within a dramatic landscape setting, allowing appreciation of the form of the village and its layering of buildings.
- Development is tight and inward-looking with relatively few public spaces aside from the main street, the churchyard and open spaces around the edges of the village. Private gardens are relatively small; trees are relatively sparse within the historic core but make an important contribution at the west and north sides of the conservation area and in its setting. The tight-knit grain of the village means the spaces between the buildings are highly valued.
- Buildings are of a fairly consistent two storey scale and in a restricted palette of materials based on squared sandstone rubble in varied tones of grey, blonde, ochre and pink, with natural slate roofs.
- Hierarchy is expressed through storey heights, finesse of finishes and detailing and contrasting scale between the main frontage, side lanes and rear ancillary buildings.
- Alnmouth's buildings demonstrate the historical prosperity of its residents. The earlier buildings express their quality in fine, dressed stonework and refined detailing of windows, chimneys and roofs. The 19<sup>th</sup> century and later houses demonstrate large, bespoke designs with fashionable detailing including large, tall, bay windows, balustraded balconies and terraces, gables, dormers and substantial chimneys create varied, picturesque roofscapes.
- The village has a good level of survival of historic sash and case windows, panelled doors, shopfronts and boundary walls.
- There are no formal, designed views in Alnmouth. Dynamic and panoramic views into and of the conservation area are particularly strong and important in appreciating its special character. Changing views from and to the dramatic open spaces surrounding the village and evolving glimpses of the setting experienced moving along the narrow lanes are particularly characteristic.

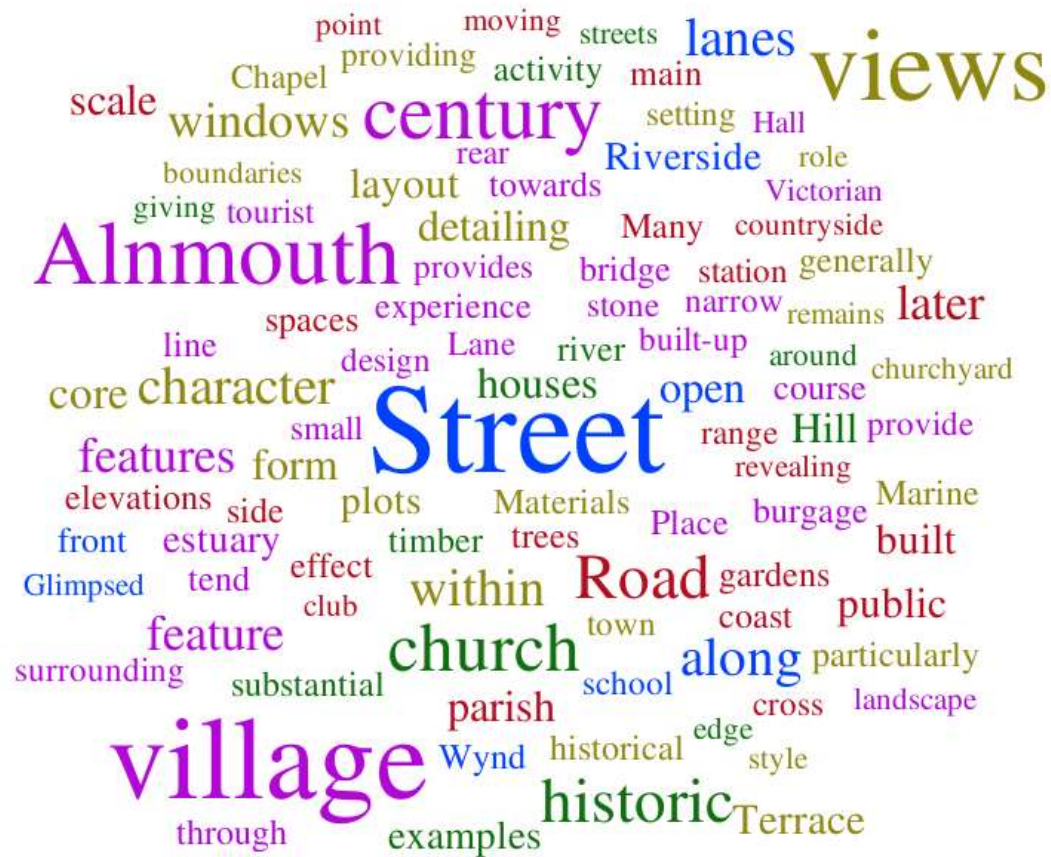
## Chapter 2

Alnmouth Conservation Area  
January 2022

Figure 2.1: The Aln, the North Sea and the edge of the village



**Figure 2.2: Single character word cloud for Alnmouth Conservation Area**



WordItOut

Visual representation of the key words featured in the historical development and character analysis chapters



## Chapter 3

### Location and Context

Alnmouth, beach and estuary from Church Hill



## Location and Context

The character of an area starts to form long before the human interventions of buildings, streets, fields and towns are established: it starts with the geology and topography of a place. These foundations are what make some places suitable for human habitation and others not, what makes some settlements flourish whilst others fade. This section considers what it is about the location and context of Alnmouth that made it ripe for successful occupation.

### Location

**3.1** As its name suggests, Alnmouth is located at the mouth of the River Aln, once a natural harbour and the lowest fording point of the river. It lies 1.2km south-east of the nearby village of Lesbury and 6km south-east from the larger settlement of Alnwick by road, via the B1338 and A1068 to the A1. The 'Alnmouth for Alnwick' station on the main east coast railway line is located at Bilton 1.5km away and the village is also on National Cycle Route 1.

**3.2** Alnmouth's main economic activity is tourism. Over 100 households have no residents which, along with a shrinking population size, demonstrates the increasing number of holiday lets and second homes within the village; a shared characteristic with other local coastal settlements.

## Geology and topography

**3.3** The village is built on a gravel and clay headland between the river and the sea. Millstone grit is exposed at the coast, known locally as 'Alnmouth rocks' and traditionally used for building stone. The surrounding area is low-lying, with salt marsh and sand dunes.

**3.4** The village and its wider context are part of the Northumberland AONB and the North Northumberland Heritage Coast. Extensive parts of the Aln estuary, coastline and marine areas adjacent to the village are designated as RAMSAR, SSSI and SAC; they also form part of the Berwickshire and Northumberland Coast European Marine Conservation Zone and the Northumberland Shore SPA.

Figure 3.1: Mudflats of the Aln estuary



## The Conservation Area boundary

**3.5** The conservation area includes all of the settlement centred on Northumberland Street and some land outside it. The boundary to the north includes the modern developments of Scholefield Place and Lint Gardens. The eastern and southern boundaries are tightly drawn around the settlement, along Marine Road and Riverside Road respectively. The western boundary incorporates an area of open ground to the west of Lovaine Terrace and is partially delimited by the Old Harbour Wall. The boundary excludes areas of modern development around Shepherds Hill and Wellfield Close.

**3.6** The boundary of Alnmouth Conservation Area is shown in **Figure 3.2**.

**3.7** The non-designated buildings of local interest identified here are not designated at a national level (e.g. through listing) but are considered to be of architectural or historical interest and to make a positive contribution to the character of Alnmouth. A full list of these features is at **Appendix A**.

**3.8** Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here. However, it should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, and that most buildings in the conservation area collectively contribute to its special character and appearance. The absence of a building or structure from the map does not imply it is without merit and hence more susceptible to modification or redevelopment. It is always recommended to contact your local Conservation Officer for further advice before embarking on any building project.

**3.9** Listed buildings and other assets designated at a national level can be found via the National Heritage List for England (NHLE): <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search>.



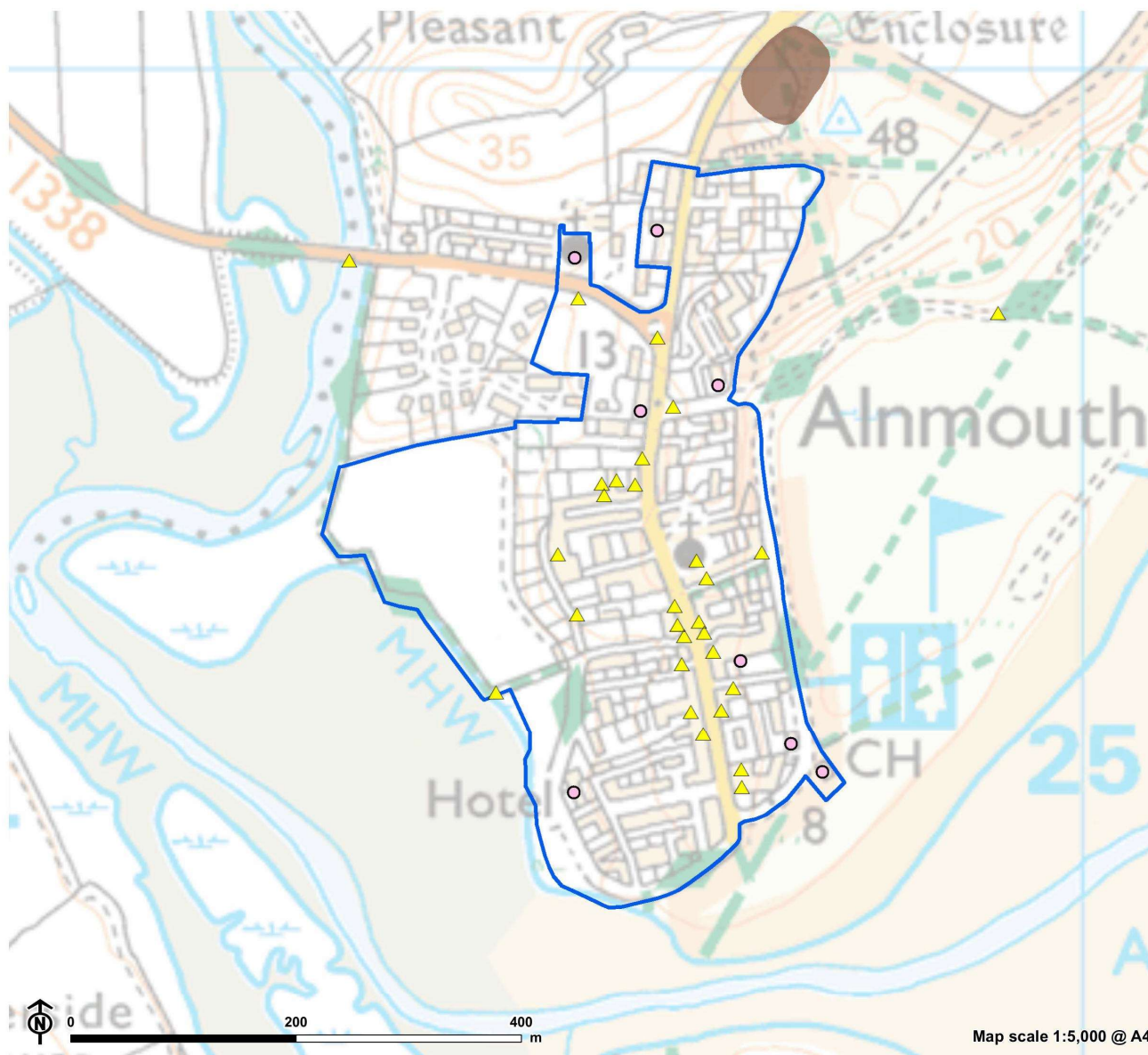


Figure 3.2: Alnmouth Conservation Area and features of interest

- Alnmouth Conservation Area
- Scheduled Monument
- Listed Building (grade)**
- ▲ II
- Non-designated building of local interest

Refer to Appendix A for list of non-designated buildings of local interest.

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Source: OS, NCC



## Chapter 4

# Historical Development of Alnmouth

The Ferryman's Hut



## The Historical Development of Alnmouth

**Conservation areas did not develop in isolation, and in order to understand what is included within the boundary and why, we must look beyond to give the area context. This section considers how Alnmouth developed from its earliest origins into the settlement we see today.**

### Prehistoric and Roman periods

**4.1** The promontory on which Alnmouth lies is likely to have been an attractive location from the earliest periods of human settlement. Flint tools and evidence of a Mesolithic camp have been found in the surrounding area. Later prehistoric remains have been found in the vicinity of Alnmouth, including cist burials and a spear-head.

**4.2** The river 'Alaunus' is mentioned in Ptolemy's writings of about AD150 and may have been used as an anchorage at that time, although there is relatively little Roman or pre-Roman archaeology in the area; this may be due in part to the continuing change in sea levels and shifting shorelines, which also later led to the decline of Alnmouth as a port.

### Medieval period

**4.3** Alnmouth may be the site of Saxon 'Twyford' (Two Fords) mentioned by Bede. The remains of a carved stone cross have been found on Church Hill, and the settlement may have been located between this and the present village, which was largely laid out in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the de Vescis (related to the owners of Alnwick Castle) sold burgage plots to encourage its growth as a port. The town thrived, with stone and products from the sheep industry being



exported; its layout, a single street leading to the church with burgage plots each side, still shapes the village although the river now intervenes and much of the detailed layout of the plots has altered. Economic decline and raids by the Scots in the later Middle Ages led to a reduction in trade, with fishing becoming the main activity.

Figure 4.1: Former church site on Church Hill



## Post-medieval period

**4.4** On Mayson's map of 1614 the houses and burgage plots are shown as extending further to the north than on later maps, including the sites of the allotments and old school; now Scholefield Place and Lint Gardens.

**4.5** 18<sup>th</sup> century agricultural improvements and the upgrading of the existing road to a turnpike in 1753-4, to link Alnmouth with Hexham via Alnwick and Lesbury, resulted in the settlement becoming an important port for grain (at one point exporting more than Newcastle) and the import of timber, with links to London, Holland and Norway. Some shipbuilding was also carried out, the shipyard being on the site of the Old Coastguard Station. No formal harbour construction took place, beyond construction of a length of wall for 250m along part of the northern side of the estuary, and installation of dolphins and mooring stones, but the large granaries that are such an important feature of the town date (in their original forms) from this time; in 1769 they were reputed to be the largest in the county. It is possible that the bricks visible on a few buildings were made in the field to the west of the village. John Wesley visited twice, in 1748 and 1752; the cross in Chapel Lane marks the spot where he preached. The old Methodist Chapel was built opposite in 1830.

**4.6** During this period, the river was eroding Church Hill and the parish church was in ruins by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The River Aln changed its course during a severe storm on Christmas Day 1806, cutting off Church Hill from the village and destroying the remains of the church. A new church building (now the Hindmarsh Hall) was formed in 1859 out of an old granary, reputedly to a design by the well-known architect Anthony Salvin under the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland. The current parish church, built in 1876, provided a new focus for Northumberland Street. Silting of the harbour, always a problem, became impossible to prevent, and by 1896 trade had ceased.

**4.7** Although the arrival of the railway in 1847 further threatened Alnmouth's importance as a port, it also encouraged the tourist trade. As early as 1827 it was noted '*Some houses are furnished for the accommodation of bathers*'. Some granaries were converted to community use, houses or hotels. Burgage plots became more densely built up, a trend that continues today, the physical boundaries of the village limiting sideways expansion. Riverside Road and Marine Road were improved to open up the backs of the burgage plots for holiday accommodation, which gives the village much of its special colour and variety.

**4.8** In 1856 the Hipsburn river bridge (renamed The Duchess' Bridge in 1864) was constructed to link the town with the station more directly. The school (1876), new Methodist Chapel (1891), and the boys' club (1930s) were built in this part of the conservation area. The golf course was laid out on common land east of the village in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the club house on Marine Terrace forming a link with the town. The cow byres at the end of Garden Terrace were in use until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cows being taken to pasture on the common land each day.

Figure 4.2: 19<sup>th</sup> century: the church and school



## Modern period

**4.9** Anti-invasion defences were installed during the Second World War along the Northumberland coast, including the beaches at Alnmouth, comprising concrete anti-tank structures, pill-boxes and reinforcement of earlier defences. An area of housing and guesthouses to the south-west of Northumberland Street suffered bomb damage in 1941; the site was redeveloped with flats typical of the 1950s. Improvements in services and road surfacing led to a rise in pavement levels in Northumberland Street. Alnmouth expanded north-west during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century along Shepherds Hill, Alnwood and Wellfield Close. Tourism remains the most important industry in the area.

Figure 4.3: Anti-tank defences, Alnmouth Beach





Chapter 4  
The Historical Development of Alnmouth

Alnmouth Conservation Area  
January 2022

Figure 4.4: Alnmouth historical mapping



Alnmouth 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS, 6" to 1 mile, surveyed 1864, published 1866.  
Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.



OS 1:10,000, published 1957.  
Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.



## Chapter 5

# Conservation Area Character Analysis

Garden Terrace





## Conservation Area Character Analysis

**This section considers how the historical development of the area, as outlined above, is evidenced in the historic environment that is included within the boundary of the conservation area.**

### Spatial qualities

#### Development pattern and layout

**5.1** Northumberland Street forms the spine of the settlement, located on a slight ridge with lanes falling gently towards the water's edge on each side. The layering of buildings and the opportunity this allows to appreciate the built form of the town within the wider landscape provides animation and interest. The location on a promontory into the AIn estuary illustrates its historical strategic position as well as the change of the course of the AIn and the resulting separation of the village from Church Hill.

**5.2** In the historic core of Northumberland Street and its lanes, buildings tend to be of simple plan form, in continuous, terraced groups, orientated parallel with the street and rising directly from the heel of the footway with a gently varying eaves and ridge line. These are punctuated by long buildings gable end on to the street, generally converted granaries or lower, ancillary buildings.

**5.3** The later 19<sup>th</sup> century development tends to be in short terraces or detached and semi-detached groups, often giving variety and a picturesque composition with staggered positioning, set back from the street line behind small front gardens.

**5.4** The area north of the Wynd has the character of a slightly separate suburb, with a few substantial detached houses and cottage-scale development loosely grouped around the former school. Groups of buildings in this area are dispersed, set back from the wider road,

generally behind stone boundary walls, and have little visual relationship with each other. The approach from the bridge is important as the entrance to the conservation area, with a clear sense of arrival into a village with a defined identity.

**Figure 5.1: Development pattern and layout**



The spine of Northumberland Street with lanes leading off.



Tight rear lanes at Grosvenor Terrace.

### Grain and density

**5.5** The containment of the village on three sides by the Aln and Alnmouth Links has restricted its spread, keeping its core dense and tightly grained. However, the edges of the built up area are diffuse, penetrated by tracks and lanes encouraging exploration; sudden changes of level provide added interest as do the remaining open spaces. Growth has tended to be by infill and

adaptation of the core, with historical mapping showing gradual development along lanes and to the rear of longer plots, following the burgage plot boundaries, but generally keeping within the historical maximum extent of the village. Many of the lanes are narrow enough to preclude vehicle access, creating a charming network of quieter, more intimate spaces. The usual pattern of linear expansion seen in contemporary settlements is restricted to later 19<sup>th</sup> century



and 20<sup>th</sup> century development outside the conservation area, such as at Shepherd's Hill, flanking the route to the bridge and station.

**Figure 5.2: North of The Wynd: more dispersed in character**



### Activity and movement

**5.6** Alnmouth is a busy local centre, with facilities serving both the local resident population and visitors and providing activity throughout the day and evening, particularly during the tourist season. Residential accommodation makes up the majority of the core buildings and, although there are many holiday lets, the village has a small permanent resident population giving it stability and year-round activity. Northumberland Street is the clear focus of commercial activity with a range of food and drink provision, small gift and grocery shops and a wide variety of

visitor accommodation. The parish church, Methodist chapel, Hindmarsh Hall, Alnmouth Friary and the Ex-Servicemens' Club provide religious and community services. The golf club is also located within the conservation area, providing a further busy focus. Outlying built structures such as the ferryman's hut, old coastguard station and horse sheds are reminders of the various historical uses of the open spaces.

**5.7** In terms of traffic movement, Alnmouth is effectively a cul-de-sac with deliveries and parking sometimes causing congestion in its narrow historic streets and lanes. Traffic heading for the

popular Alnmouth Beach enters the village along the B1338 and is directed along The Wynd to the large public car park east of the village. The East Coast main line passes west of the village with Alnmouth station c.1.5km away from its centre. The perception of train movements and noise are a regular feature within the village and views of Alnmouth from the train are a notable feature of a line famous for its scenic qualities.

Figure 5.3: Grain and density



The village is dense and tightly contained by its setting.

## Setting

**5.8** Alnmouth is strongly defined and enhanced by its setting, which creates a feeling of isolation and contrast. The course of the River Aln and its estuary define the extent of the village, which nestles along its promontory, enclosed by the landscape and the dramatic openness of the North Sea. This effect is emphasised by having to cross a bridge to reach the village on its main approach. The rising and falling of the tide ties the village to the passage of time and the seasons. These factors add to the scenic and picturesque qualities of the village, but also allow an understanding of the reasons behind its location and form. The beaches, dunes and links around the mouth of the estuary surround the south and east sides of the

village, from where its form, scale and the layered effect of its buildings created by the fall of the land can be appreciated. Significantly, the setting can be enjoyed on foot via the network of public footpaths, including Lovers Walk that runs from The Duchess' Bridge to the park, and via access to the shoreline.

**5.9** The surrounding, fertile plains of the Northumberland coast are important in demonstrating its role as a conduit for products and produce. There are very far-ranging views to and from the west, where the topography of the village and its setting can be truly appreciated. In contrast with other coastal settlements in the area, views up and down the coast are not as influential on character here – Alnmouth is set slightly inland and the curve of the coastline limits views to and parallel with the coast.

Figure 5.4: Setting



Salt marsh and dunes.



Aln estuary and beach.

## Function and form

### Scale and hierarchy

**5.10** Most buildings are two-storey, sometimes with an additional attic or half-storey, but within this pattern there is a very wide range of scale and storey heights, illustrating the purpose and relative status of each building and the importance, or ambitions, of its builder or owner. The larger and more ornate examples demonstrate Alnmouth's historical prosperity. Within the historic core of Northumberland Street, the larger buildings tend to be those with a public function, such as the parish church, hotels and Hindmarsh Hall and, at the north end, the former



school. Hindmarsh Hall, along with Prospect Place south of the parish church, are examples of former granaries, showing the scale and prominence given to these structures at the height of Alnmouth's role at the centre of the local agricultural market in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There are a few single-storey dwellings or ancillary buildings converted to dwellings, but these are also generally relatively high-status in their finishes and detailing.

**5.11** Scale and status generally reduces along each lane running from Northumberland Street towards the edges of the village. The lanes are small-scale and often closely built-up, giving

intimate views of the backs of properties. Scale then increases again at the outer perimeter of Marine Road and Riverside Road. These larger buildings tend to be private houses relating to the late-19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of Alnmouth as a tourist resort. They are often relatively tall or with a vertical emphasis, expressing their status and taking advantage of the views outwards from the village. Later 20<sup>th</sup> century infill adopts a wider range of scale, layout and footprint, such as the 1950s blocks in Argyle Street, or the one-and two-storey 1970s houses in Pease's Gardens, which nevertheless sit sympathetically within the historic street form.

Figure 5.5: Scale and hierarchy



Grander public buildings, The Schooner Hotel.



Mid-scale private housing, Northumberland Street.



More modest houses, Grosvenor Terrace.



Outbuildings, Grosvenor Terrace.

### Important spaces and trees

**5.12** Within the conservation area, development is tight and inward-looking with relatively small private gardens. The majority of former burgage plots and some gardens have been developed, leaving little open, non-built up space. The linear space of Northumberland Street is the principal public space and is relatively narrow and constricted with no pronounced cross, marketplace or gathering area. The parish churchyard provides a welcome green space and visual relief within the density and built-up character of the historic core. Similarly, the remaining garden space also provides these functions.

**5.13** Road junctions on Northumberland Street at the roundabout and at The Wynd provide spaces to pause on the approach to the densely built up part of Northumberland Street, with the war memorial and pant providing human scale and interest.

**5.14** Riverside Road and Marine Road are developed on one side only, providing a promenade around the edge of the village from which to appreciate the estuary and countryside setting. Lovers Walk allows continuation of this appreciation further along the estuary to The Duchess' Bridge. Alnmouth Playground on Riverside Road is the only formal public open space in the conservation area. Its presence provides another focus of activity and it forms part of a larger zone of open space to the west, mostly reclaimed marsh and dune. This area provides an important buffer between the built-up core and the Aln Estuary, helping to protect the green, open character of the village edge.



## 0

### Conservation Area Character Analysis

Alnmouth Conservation Area

January 2022

**5.15** There are few substantial trees within the core of the conservation area; those in the churchyard and two front courts created by the few set-back buildings on the west side of Northumberland Street are the only examples. Trees are more common in the more spacious gardens and open land at the western edge of the conservation area, particularly the area

**Figure 5.6: Important spaces and trees**



The churchyard.



Trees, open spaces and The Duchess' Bridge.



Public space at the war memorial.



Mature trees in private gardens.

## Features and design

### Architectural style and features

**5.16** The quality of construction and architectural expression of Alnmouth's buildings demonstrate the historical prosperity of its residents. The 18<sup>th</sup> century and earlier buildings are not particularly showy, architecturally, but express their quality in fine, dressed stonework and refined detailing of windows, chimneys and roofs. Among the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later houses there are many examples of large, bespoke designs, clearly involving an architect or well-informed builder with access to fashionable pattern-book detailing and up-to-the-minute servicing, house-planning and layout.

**5.17** The Victorian buildings relating to the tourist expansion of Alnmouth form a recognisable group with distinctive features: they often face outwards from the village or take advantage of an elevated or sloping position, exploiting and maximising enjoyment of the fresh air, natural light and views with tall storey heights, high proportions of glazing and openable windows, bay windows, balustraded balconies and terraces. Gables, dormers and substantial chimneys

create varied roofscapes. Some retain historic outbuildings, ranging from larger stables and laundries to simple lean-to outhouses and sheds, reflecting the range of size and complexity of Victorian households.

**Figure 5.7: Architectural style and features: 18<sup>th</sup> century**



**5.18** The Argyle Street flats are an interesting example of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century infill, created following wartime bombing, and adding an interesting modern composition to the area with nautical and slightly classical details.

**Figure 5.8: Architectural style and features: 19<sup>th</sup> century**



#### Materials and detailing

**5.19** Squared and coursed sandstone rubble or ashlar is the predominant material in Northumberland Street's main elevations, sometimes enriched with classical door surrounds or porches, dressed in-and-out work at window surrounds and rubbed brick or ashlar voussoirs to carriage arches. The stone for these formal, front elevations is carefully selected to give a consistency of block size, texture and tone. Side and rear elevations are usually in rubble or brick, usually with fewer, and smaller, window openings to protect from the weather, in keeping with vernacular tradition. Brick is unusual as a principal building material, more often found to rear elevations and outbuildings.

**5.20** The majority of roofs are in natural slate. Off Northumberland Street, in side streets or in former ancillary buildings, there are examples of clay pantiles, and smooth plain clay tiles which are a particular feature of the Victorian houses at the south-west corner of the village, used both as roofing and as vertically-hung decoration and weather protection to gables and bays.

**5.21** Most of the properties along Northumberland Street feature a traditional dual-pitch roof, creating a relatively uninterrupted roofscape, punctuated only by chimneys and the occasional

end-on gable. Some variation in roof height between blocks of buildings adds interest without disturbing the overall unity of the skyline. Here, and in the traditional adjoining back-plot properties, dormers and rooflights are rare and are not a characteristic feature of the village core. Away from the main streets there is more variation, with dormer windows a characteristic feature of the Victorian terraces and villas along Riverside Road, Argyle Street and Prospect Place. In such cases, dormers form an integral part of the overall design of the building and in keeping with its overall size and rhythm of fenestration.

**Figure 5.9: Materials and detailing: stonework**



**5.22** There is a good level of survival of historic sash and case windows in Alnmouth. These generally tell the story of the age of their host building: smaller openings, squatter proportions and multi-paned styles in the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century and older buildings; larger, more vertically-proportioned single- or two-paned plate glass sashes in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Good examples of historic timber panelled doors in various patterns and styles also survive across the conservation area. Apart from a few front doors and shopfronts, paintwork is mainly black or white, windows being white-painted timber sashes. An important exception is the rendered and colour washed Lovaine Terrace, virtually invisible from inside the conservation area but a key element in distant views and significant as an early example of the use of concrete block for buildings.

**5.23** There is a notably good group of historic shopfronts in Northumberland Street, some just a simple framing of an enlarged domestic window opening to draw attention to the display and signage, others, such as the grocer's, in a refined design with substantial double plate glass display windows over stallrisers flanking a recessed entrance, with multi-paned top lights and classical detailing. The former tend to be indicative of older display windows, the style and appearance of the latter only emerging as a distinct design feature when the technology needed to create large panes of glass was developed in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**5.24** Some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century public buildings, particularly in Northumberland Street, contrast with the prevailing sandstone by using rendered principal elevations with contrasting painted window and door margins, quoins or applied timber framing. Another small group of more modest buildings towards the south end of Northumberland Street have first floor balconies or projecting oriel windows, perhaps added to increase their appeal to holidaymakers as the village developed into a tourist destination. The contribution of these features to the character of Alnmouth is one of minor accent rather than a dominant feature.

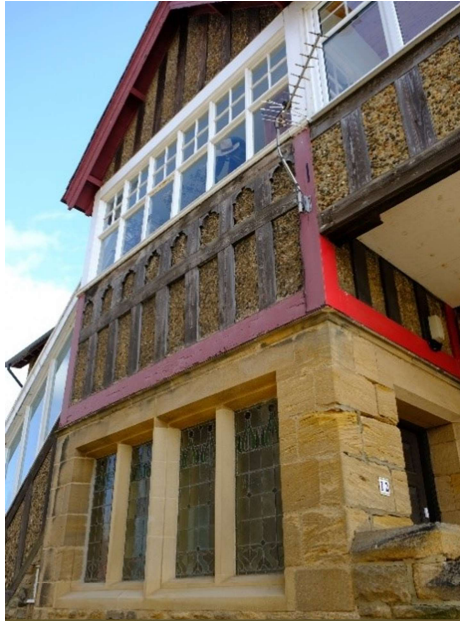


Figure 5.10: Materials and detailing: windows and doors





Figure 5.11: Materials and detailing: windows and doors



### Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape

**5.25** Substantial stone boundary walls contribute strongly to the character of Alnmouth. Forming both front and rear boundaries, they are often of a substantial height, creating a distinctive sense of enclosure to the lanes, and usually constructed in squared and coursed rubble with pointed saddle copings. The local sandstone chosen for these less-formal structures is not a uniform tone but provides a variety of colour from grey, ochre, pink and red, giving a pleasing, varied effect. Openings are often finished with piers with pyramidal tops and timber gates. Some front garden boundaries, usually to the 19<sup>th</sup> century properties, are relatively low with

additional hedging or planting. Boundary ironwork is predominantly modern replacement but historic cast ironwork occasionally survives, such as in Marine Road.

**5.26** Historic street surfacing survives in a few locations, mainly to lanes and under carriage arches, such as at the Schooner Hotel. Smooth, rounded sea-cobble surfacing with a sandstone channel survives in Prospect Place and may exist elsewhere under modern asphalt surfacing. Paving of pedestrian footways in Northumberland Street is mainly modern, in rectangular-format concrete slabs and whin kerbs with setted areas at pavement crossovers, emulating historic materials and layout. The edges of the village merge gently into the



surrounding open landscapes of the golf course and riverbank, an effect achieved by the informality of the rough grass, low timber rail fences and lack of kerbs to verges.

**5.27** Historic street furniture and features include pants at The Wynd and in Pease's Lane; the War Memorial/lantern at the northern end of Northumberland Street and the cross in Chapel Lane. There is an historic K6 telephone kiosk in Northumberland Street. Other street furniture – street lighting, signage, benches and so on – is modern.

**Figure 5.12: Materials and detailing: shopfronts and public buildings**



**Figure 5.13: Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape**





## Views

### Types of views

**5.28** Whilst all senses are engaged in our experience of place, human reliance on the visual does mean that views play a major role in our understanding and perception of character, and Alnmouth is no exception. Views come in different shapes and forms depending on whether they are designed or fortuitous; framed, contained or open; fleeting or enduring. Broadly, however, they tend to belong to one of three categories:

- **Static views** – These types of views tend to be – although not always – designed or intentional, or at least self-aware. They are a specific, fixed point from which an individual feature or particular aspect of the area's character can be best appreciated.
- **Glimpsed views** – These types of views are often enclosed and fleeting, and principally incite intrigue or surprise in those that notice them that add to the experience of an area.
- **Dynamic views** – These are views that steadily reveal different aspects of a place's character and continually evolve as we experience them. These may be panoramic views from a fixed point or kinetic views that are revealed as the observer moves through the area. These views are influenced by both constant features (not necessarily dominant features but those that remain present throughout) and transient features (accents in the view that come in and pass out of views at different points).

### Examples of views in Alnmouth Conservation Area

#### Static

**5.29** There are no formal, designed views in Alnmouth. The layout of the streets and spaces allow places to stop and appreciate the formal elevations of important buildings or features, such as the parish church viewed from the pavement in Northumberland Street. There are also informal places set aside for appreciation of the views out of the village, such as the viewpoint at the junction of Marine Road and Riverside Road, provided with benches, soft landscaping and an information panel, and the benches on the edge of the estuary, off Riverside Road.

Figure 5.14: Static views



The parish church, from the churchyard.



Space to contemplate the view, Riverside Road.

#### Glimpsed

**5.30** The tight grain and sense of enclosure of Northumberland Street and its lanes provide many opportunities for glimpsed views; walking past a narrow lane or gate and catching a glimpse of an interesting building or feature in the space beyond aids our understanding of the form and character of the village.

**5.31** The presence of the dramatic, wider landscape is hinted at from within the historic core through glimpses of the horizon and the water through narrow gaps framed by historic buildings.

**Figure 5.15: Glimpsed views: Garden Terrace**



Glimpse of shopfront in Northumberland Street.



Glimpse of the Aln and countryside beyond.

**Figure 5.16: Dynamic view: moving along Crow's Nest Lane**



### Dynamic

**5.32** The topography of Alnmouth is used to picturesque effect, and is very noticeable, particularly the role of Northumberland Street as the spine of the village and the parish church spire acting as a focal point within it.

**5.33** Many people's experience of Alnmouth will be a highly dynamic one, watched in its approach and recession from the train travelling along the East Coast main line. Many people will also experience the conservation area in views experienced moving through and across the beaches, golf course and surrounding countryside. This effect of movement past and around the village is important in revealing its character gradually through concealing and revealing views.

**5.34** At closer range too, the experience of moving through the conservation area is important in revealing its character. For example, walking south along Northumberland Street one experiences the sense of enclosure before reaching the dramatic opening-out of the space to the Aln Estuary and across to Church Hill. Similar effects are important moving along the lanes towards the outer edges of the built-up area of the village before revealing the views of the landscape beyond, or in the opposite direction, moving towards Northumberland Street. Their narrowness, changes of level and changes of building line provide excitement and expectation.





Figure 5.17: Dynamic views from Alnmouth's setting



The village from the beach.



The village from the west.

## Chapter 6

# Management Recommendations

Alnmouth from path above The Wynd





## Management Recommendations

**This section considers the principles that underpin the sustainable management of place and makes recommendations for management of the issues important to Alnmouth Conservation Area.**

### Management issues in Alnmouth Conservation Area

#### Condition and vacancy

**6.1** There are no designated assets currently on the national Heritage at Risk register. No historic buildings are noticeably vacant, or in a poor state of repair, or likely to be at risk of falling into disrepair in the near future. Elements of the public realm such as the piers and the war memorial appear to be well-maintained.

#### Loss and replacement of architectural details

**6.2** In general, the village and its historic form, detailing and materials survive to a high degree. However, there are instances of replacements in inappropriate materials or designs, such as:

- UPVC or aluminium replacement windows with inauthentic framing, opening methods or glazing bar details;
- Replacement of slate or terracotta roofs with artificial slate or profiled concrete tiles;
- Inappropriate cement repairs and render to stonework; and
- Tall, close-boarded timber fencing replacing or added to stone boundary walls.

**6.3** There is obviously already knowledge and an appetite to retain these important architectural details within the conservation area. An Article 4 Direction controlling householder permitted development rights would help avoid future replacement of windows and other incremental changes which would erode and threaten the character of the conservation area.

#### Public realm

**6.4** In general, although most street furniture and surfacing is modern, it is simply and appropriately detailed and sits sympathetically within the conservation area. There are a few locations where accumulations of street furniture have created visual clutter, such as outside the parish church where a number of benches, bins, signs and a grit bin together create a distracting visual effect. A public realm audit would help identify where such clutter occurs unnecessarily, where duplicate street furniture could be removed or relocated, and identify optimum locations for provision of services.

**6.5** Where original cobbles and other pavings still exist these should be preserved and repaired, and it may be possible to extend them, reveal covered examples and encourage the use of traditional surface finishes elsewhere in the area. It would also be useful to confirm ownerships of access routes through the conservation area, to discourage owners from 'privatising' public rights of way. The informal road edges to Riverside Road and Marine Road are an important part of their character and should be preserved, and the installation of kerbs and formal road engineering avoided.

**6.6** At the war memorial, modern road layout has left the memorial and its associated space marooned within a roundabout, cut off by surrounding roads. In the longer-term, creation of a more accessible and useable setting for the memorial, better integrated into the wider public realm, would be desirable.

#### New development and design

**6.7** Considerable development has taken place in the conservation area since designation. The more substantial areas of development such as Alnwood and Wellfield form inward-looking enclaves hidden from the remainder of the area by the slope of the hill and surrounding trees and therefore have little effect on the special character of the conservation area. Such opportunities will reduce as more areas are developed. There will therefore be increasing pressure on more prominent or more sensitive sites, including the few remaining spaces

between the buildings, as well as sites for replacement of buildings which currently have a neutral or negative affect on the conservation area.

**6.8** New houses at the north end of the village, north of the old school, have adopted ostensibly traditional design details such as weatherboarding, pantiles, porches and sash and case windows, but these are not applied in a way which relates meaningfully to the character of Alnmouth. Their siting, deep footprint and substantial massing used in this location also appear to have missed cues from the authentic character of the village. Use of a more thorough context study in preparation for design, aided by documents such as this character appraisal and the Design Guide, would help similar developments reinforce the special character of the village in future.

**6.9** Pressure has grown over recent years for alteration and opening-up of buildings to exploit views over the coast and estuary. This includes conversion of attic spaces, installation of floor-to-ceiling glazing, enlarging openings, and addition of balconies and roof terraces. Excessive use of these features, or inappropriate choice of location, scale and design, will lead to an erosion of the area's special character and should be controlled carefully.

**6.10** Sympathetic development within the conservation area, particularly the core, should not be ruled out, as density is important to its character and there are a few sites occupied by modern buildings of little merit. Nonetheless, such development needs to be sensitive to context to avoid overdevelopment, and considerate of the value of the few remaining open spaces in the village. However, any further development outside the built-up areas will dilute the strong boundary and should be discouraged.

#### Trees

**6.11** Trees are important in the north and west of the area. Conservation area designation brings the requirement for prior notification of tree works and this should be managed carefully to ensure appropriate succession planting. The case for Tree Preservation Orders in the setting of the conservation area should also be considered.



## Recommendations and opportunities for enhancement

### Recommendation 1

**6.12** An Article 4 Direction would help stem further loss of features that front public highways or important spaces, as well as provide additional protection for those features that survive well and make an important contribution of the character of the conservation area. It is recommended that any Article 4 Direction for Alnmouth should include:

- Any alterations to roofs, including changes to the design, profile or materials;
- The construction of porches or other extensions;
- Rendering or painting of previously non-rendered and unpainted elevations;
- The alteration of guttering or rainwater goods and installation of fascia boards;
- The construction, alteration or demolition of a chimney;
- Alterations to the finish, material, style, sizing, proportions, positioning and method of opening of doors and windows; and
- The erection, alteration or removal of boundary treatments and gates.

### Recommendation 2

**6.13** Place-specific design guidance for different features would help inform changes and also help people understand and meet the requirements of an Article 4 Direction; if people follow the options and detailing illustrated in the design guide then this would limit the number of additional planning applications that might otherwise be necessary with the introduction of the Direction. They may include addressing the design and materials of windows, doors, boundary treatments, guttering and façades. This would complement and enrich area-wide design guidance in *Northumberland Coast AONB Design Guide for Built Development*.

### Recommendation 3

**6.14** A survey of public realm to establish the extent of survival and potential areas for reinstatement or enhancement of floorscape and infrastructure. An inventory of street furniture – modern and historic – could help inform monitoring, maintenance and conservation of those

of historic interest, and provide principles for replacement or introduction of new furniture or signage.

### Recommendation 4

**6.15** Similarly, a tree survey to establish the current condition, range of species and expected life spans could inform the development of a strategy for succession planting and management of existing trees.

### Recommendation 5

**6.16** A guidance note on what works do not require permission, for example what constitutes like for like change.

## Appendix A

### Non-Designated Buildings of Local Interest

**A.1** The buildings, structures or features listed below and shown on **Figure 3.2** are not designated at a national level (e.g. through listing) but are considered to be of architectural or historical interest and to make a positive contribution to the character of Alnmouth. Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here. However, it should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, and that most buildings in the conservation area collectively contribute to its special character and appearance. The absence of a building or structure from this list does not imply it is without merit and hence more susceptible to modification or redevelopment. It is always recommended to contact your local Conservation Officer for further advice before embarking on any building project.

**A.2** Listed buildings and other assets designated at a national level can be found via the National Heritage List for England (NHLE): <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search>.

### Non-Designated Buildings of Local Interest

- Old School, Foxton Road
- Methodist chapel, B1338
- Large Victorian villa, The Wynd
- Ex-Servicemen's club, Northumberland Street
- Golf Clubhouse, Marine Drive
- Coastguard Station, Marine Drive
- Nether Grange and group of buildings to the west
- 21-27 Riverside Road