



Felton

Conservation Area Character Appraisal



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Preface

Section 71 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that 'It shall be the duty of a Local Planning Authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas.' In fulfilment of this statutory obligation Alnwick District Council commissioned Robin Kent Architecture & Conservation, on 27 October 2004, to undertake conservation area character appraisals focusing on 8 of the Council's 10 conservation areas: Alnwick, Alnmouth, Eglington, Felton, Glanton, Lesbury, Newton on the Moor and Whittingham.

Conservation areas are built-up areas with special architectural or historic character, which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. When conservation areas were first introduced in 1967, designation carried no special restrictions. In 1974, the control of certain kinds of demolition and the protection of trees was introduced. In certain cases, Article 4 Directives may be made, restricting permitted development.

The main aim of conservation areas is the preservation of buildings and the spaces between them, to suggest stability and continuity in a rapidly changing world. By preserving distinctive local character, conservation areas may improve the local economy, encourage tourism, attract grants and investment, raise property values, prevent un-neighbourly alterations and encourage traditional building trades.

These character appraisals closely follow the framework set out in the Council's brief and the consultant's proposal dated September 2004, including guidance published by English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, English Historic Towns Forum and other authorities. They include information supplied by the Council, supplemented by archival research and townscape analysis; nevertheless they are necessarily 'snapshots' of each area at a particular time and exclusion of any aspects should not be taken as implying they are of no importance. The commission included reviewing the boundaries of the conservation area, outlining other issues relating to management and making recommendations for changes.



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1 Introduction

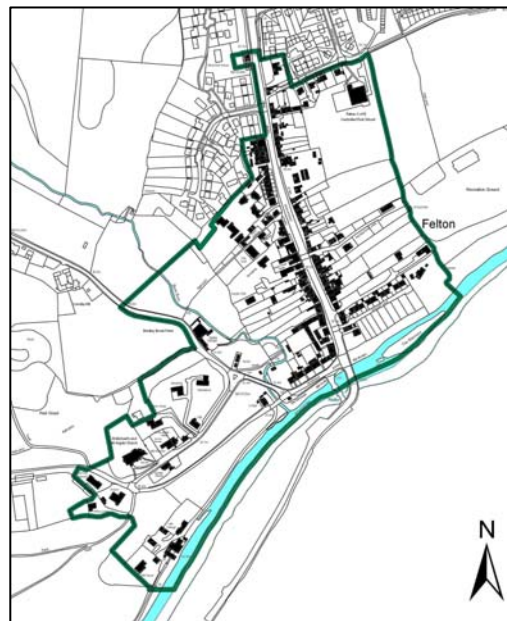
Now bypassed by the A1, Felton is situated on the historic route of the Great North Road, approximately equidistant from Alnwick and Morpeth. The settlement has built up along the road as it dives down into the relatively sheltered valley of the River Coquet, at its confluence with the Back Burn, and marks an important crossing point of the river.

'The scenery about Felton is beautifully romantic: fine rocks and hanging woods form the margins of the winding river, whilst on every side lies a rich and highly cultivated country.' (Parson & White, 1827) This is still true today; the land to the south, east and west of the village is designated as part of the Coquet Valley Area of High Landscape Value, while the river itself is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. To the west of the settlement is the designed landscape of Felton Park.

The population in 2001 was 958, in 386 households. Most residents work outside Felton. The village supports three shops, a hairdresser, a doctor's surgery with dispensary, and a pub, as well as the local first school. The river is important locally for fishing and recreation.

The conservation area was designated in 1972. West Thirston, although linked to Felton and important in views from it, is outside the Alnwick District Council area.

The 2001 'Village Design Statement', adopted by Alnwick District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance, gives a fuller coverage of some items discussed.



Felton conservation area (old boundary)



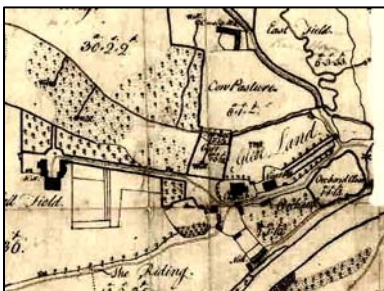
Ridge and furrow, trees of old vicarage garden beyond



Speed, 1621, showing the bridge



The old bridge



Estate map, 1777, showing designed landscape of vicarage and Felton Hall (the main street is missing)



Original pavement level - Main Street

Historical Character

A considerable number of flint and stone tools have been found locally, but no other evidence of activity until the start of the second millennium AD. The area was then extensively farmed, with traces of medieval fields still extant; the name 'Felton' probably means 'Field Farm'.

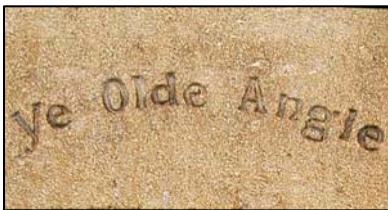
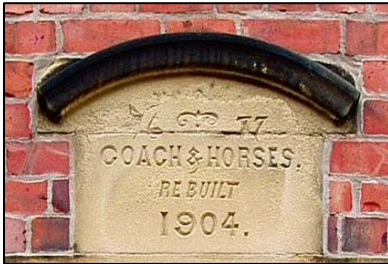
The church, on its knoll high above the village between the steep slopes of the Coquet and Back Burn, may date from the 12th century; there was also a bridge in existence at that time. Felton was confirmed as a borough in 1323, and important medieval features include the long thin plots at the south end of Main Street resulting in a typical street pattern of houses with mostly uniform frontages built up to the pavement. Recreation Lane was important as the route out to the fields to the east, while the path beside Rose Cottage led to a spring on the hillside to the west. The area of Felton Park (a designed landscape), to the west of the church, was a hunting forest; its wooded character still reflecting this.

The present 'old bridge' dates from the 15th century (originally built as a packhorse bridge and widened in the 18th-20th century). It is one of very few bridges shown on Speed's map of 1621, underlining its importance. A new bridge was constructed in the early 20th century just to the east, on the line of the main street and the original ford. Most of the listed buildings are in the vicinity of the river crossing, including the ancient mill site, a mill here being mentioned as early as 1374. The present buildings date from the 18th and 19th century, when the mill had three undershot wheels; it was the last in Northumberland to operate, and was converted to housing during the 1970's.

Felton's position on communication routes meant that although it was always an important settlement it suffered during the period of border warfare, and very few buildings date recognisably from before the 18th century; no. 6 Riverside is an exception, retaining its early 17th century longhouse plan. With peace and increasing wealth, many buildings were built or rebuilt during the 18th century, including the elegant terrace on Riverside and the vicarage with its formal garden running alongside the road to the church, which at this period was also the access to Felton Park. In the early 19th century a new drive and lodge were built through an orchard to provide a grander and more picturesque approach, although the



The Pant - Main Street



Records of previous uses - Main Street



Wesleyan Chapel - Main Street

road bridge over the Back Burn was not built until the end of the 19th century.

Increase in traffic required some re-grading of Main Street in 1821, resulting in areas of raised and lowered pavements which are important survivals. New buildings were constructed at the north end of Main Street as well as along the burgage plots. In the 19th century there were at least five inns (the Red Lion included a theatre) and many other businesses; most of the surviving fronts date from this time. In a few cases, buildings include datestones and inscriptions recording previous uses, giving them special interest.

Later in the century, several larger buildings were constructed, including the Catholic School (1872), Wesleyan Chapel (c.1890) and North Eastern Bank (1895). The gasworks of 1865 was sited just outside the built-up area of the village, to reduce the nuisance from smells. Although houses were rebuilt on their original plots, the upper end of Main Street was reduced in width by the addition of front gardens to some properties. A terrace by the bridge was demolished, opening up the bottom of the street to the riverside; the area is now the garden of no 2 Main Street, an important open space.

Apart from the police station, traditionally sited away from other houses, the village more or less retained its early 19th century boundaries into the 20th century. As the burgage plots have no back lane, new houses were often built along the length of the plots and accessed from the main road, along lanes such as Coquet Vale and Victoria Terrace. The first housing estate was built between 1940-1955, enlarging the village to the north over the rim of the valley. Development has continued in this direction, together with infill within the burgage plot boundaries and individual houses on new plots, between the Back Burn and Felton Park.

Summary of historical features:

- Bridge and riverside as focus of village
- Survival of mediaeval plot boundaries
- Survival of important features such as inscribed stones, shop fronts, previous road levels
- Remains of designed landscape of Vicarage and Felton Park

3 Architectural and Townscape Character

Setting

The setting of the conservation area, diving down from the rim of the wooded Coquet valley, which is even steeper on the opposite bank, results in a strong sense of enclosure, although with a variety of views in and out. The conservation area is divided by the valley of the Back Burn, and views across this are important.

Townscape and built form

The conservation area contains two distinct character sub-areas, either side of the Back Burn.

Area 1: Main Street with its associated roads and alleys, in form and function closely connected to the bridge.

Townscape

Approached from the bridge, the wide street has the air of a processional way as it continues almost straight up the hill to the horizon, Riverside and Coquet Vale acting as wings in a stage set. In the other direction the view is blocked by the steep river bank and buildings of South Thirston. The street is wide, level and strongly directional between banks of terraced housing. Variations in pavement levels add interest for the pedestrian. Roads and lanes leading from Main Street are entirely subsidiary, having narrow, unobtrusive entrances, although these and other gaps and archways between houses add subtlety and variety to the streetscape.

Houses are stacked up the hill, gable-ends, chimneys and the stepped roof lines adding interest to the skyline, their rhythm largely controlled by the width of the individual burgage plots. A few larger buildings with gables on the street frontage provide variety and contrast. The upper part of the street is flatter and has long terraces with uniform eaves lines and detailing, and occasional arches to backs (eg no's 42-58).

Development within the burgage plots allows some lateral movement through the area to less formal spaces at the rear. Some of the plots are built up along their length, as at Coquet Vale and the lane beside Rose Cottage, while others appear almost derelict. Those on the west side of the street allow glimpses of the wooded slopes across the



Open view of sky - Main Street looking north



Closed view of river bank opposite - Main Street looking south



View west across Back Burn framed by pend - Main Street



View east- lane at rear of Coquet Vale



Riverside



Garden with riverbank trees beyond - Main Street



Varied pavement levels and surface treatments - Main Street



Typical buildings - Main Street



Varied door openings - Main Street



Shop front - Main Street

Back Burn, and to the east views are open and spacious along the valley.

Key buildings

In townscape terms, the most important buildings are on the opposite bank of the river, facing the bridge and closing the views south from Main Street; however, these are in the West Thirston conservation area in Castle Morpeth district. The key buildings on Main Street are the high quality North Eastern Bank and the Methodist Chapel, with their gable ends punctuating the street. Riverside is particularly important in views from the bridge and across the river.

Green spaces, trees etc

The wooded riverbanks are important in views to the south and provide a refreshing contrast to the densely built-up street; the pedestrianised old bridge area also encourages appreciation of the riverside and its natural heritage interest. In contrast to this, the remainder of Main Street has few mature trees, and many have been removed from the burgage plots. At the upper end of the area hedges become an important feature of gardens, denoting the transition between the suburban and urban sections of Main Street; they also appear beside the river, reflecting the natural vegetation of the riverbanks.

Surfaces

Some old pavement surfaces including cobbles, whin and sandstone setts survive, particularly where road levels have been altered, giving special interest and variety to the street. The coloured gravel dressing used on the old bridge and Coquet Vale adds to the variety of finishes, its informality a reminder of the essentially rural nature of the surroundings.

Built form

Houses are predominantly terraced with a stepped ridge line, 2-storey, built eaves-on to the road with chimneys at the ridges. Plan depth is fairly standard and widths are dictated by the burgage plot layout. Most are built up to the pavement line, but the upper end of Main Street has small front gardens, with low stone walls, and the houses maintain a unified building and eaves line. Eaves are clipped, and some gables have stone copes. A few roofs are hipped; there are very few dormers. Window



North Eastern Bank - Main Street

openings are vertical format, regularly spaced on elevation.

Materials, colours

The local buff sandstone predominates for house and garden walls, laid as ashlar or coursed rubble, with some random rubble to side and rear elevations. Roofs are Welsh slate.

Details

Most buildings are restrained, in keeping with the functional nature of the settlement, making more formal architectural compositions like the frontage of the Bank, and details such as the central roundel on nos 10-16 Riverside and the unusual cast iron pediments on 69 Main Street stand out.

Details such as historic shop fronts, inscriptions, street signs, the pant and K6 telephone kiosk are important in underlining the special urban character of this core part of the conservation area.



Various details



Cast iron pediment



Cast iron street sign



Tethering hook - shop



Street number, Coquet View

Summary of architectural/townscape character: Area 1

- Small-scale openings to roads and lanes off Main Street, views at each end of the street
- Areas of natural vegetation on river bank
- Buildings terraced, 2-storey, built up to pavement, roofs parallel to street, chimneys on ridge line
- Walls buff sandstone, ashlar or coursed rubble
- Roofs natural slate, stone or brick chimney stacks, buff clay pots
- Windows vertical format, white painted timber sliding sash; doors timber, panelled, with fixed light above frame
- Urban detailing



Roads, walls, formal and informal planting - B6345



Trees cleared, view of village - junction of B6345 and Church road



Mill from the old bridge, showing riverbank trees



Lodge at entrance to Felton Park



Entrance to settlement, with backs of burgage plots visible to the left - B6345

Area 2: Southwest of Back Burn centred on the Church.

Townscape, green spaces, trees etc

Comprising almost half the conservation area, this part is dominated by landscape rather than buildings.

The straight, wide directionality of Riverside changes character beyond the burn; the road to the Church branches off, and each road climbs fairly steeply uphill, articulated by bends giving successive unfolding views. Detached buildings (or close-knit groups such as the Mill and Bradley Brook Farm) occur at widely spread intervals. The area is also crossed by several tracks and footpaths, allowing enjoyment of the natural heritage of the area. Clearance of trees for development at the road junction has opened up an important view across the valley towards the rear of the burgage plots, but otherwise the two character areas have little visual relationship.

The close-knit group of the Church, Old Vicarage and Garden House forms the functional core of the area; however even the Church plays a low-key role visually, with its broken massing and lack of height.

The area is dominated by mature trees, both formally and informally planted. Roads are bordered by low walls, giving way to rural hedges beyond Bradley Brook Farm, and informal grass verges are an important feature. Part of the designed landscape of Felton Park, with its variety of trees, is included in the conservation area.

Key buildings

The lodge at the entrance to Felton Park, the only building visible in the woodland here, emphasises the importance of this part of the village, and as the road dives down to the conservation area from the B6345 the old Gas Works (now Bradley Brook Farm) is important for marking the entrance to the settlement at this point.

Built form, materials, colours, details

Older houses in the area share many characteristics with Area 1, including being built up to the road frontage or having small front gardens, although all are subservient to the surrounding vegetation. They are individualised by details such as the overhanging eaves of the lodge, the

porch on Garden House or the lunette windows on Bradley Brook Farm.



'FELTON GAS WORKS 1865' - Stable Cottage



Lunette window, Stable Cottage



Porch, Garden House

Summary of architectural/townscape character: Area 2

- Roads have bends and undulations, grass verges, walls
- Dominance of trees and other vegetation
- Buildings widely spaced or in close-knit groups, separated by vegetation
- Buildings terraced, 2-storey, built up to pavement, roofs parallel to street, chimneys on ridge line
- Walls buff sandstone, ashlar or coursed rubble
- Roofs natural slate, stone or brick chimney stacks, buff clay pots
- Windows vertical format, white painted timber sliding sash; doors timber, panelled, with fixed light above frame



Randomly sited unsympathetically designed houses on backland - Victoria Terrace



Primary School site - Moldhaugh Road



Houses not aligned with the road; wall in poor condition - Church road



Houses not aligned with the road



Examples of modern alterations in the conservation area

4 Management Recommendations

In general, the conservation area retains much of the character and interest for which it was originally designated. However, some neutral and negative factors can be distinguished.

Neutral areas

Development on the rear of plots in Main Street has not always been sensitive in style or layout to the rest of the conservation area. Where this does not impinge on views from Main Street it can be regarded as neutral, although views over and from Back Burn should also be considered.

Similarly, the primary school and houses on Mouldhaugh Road tend to dilute the character of the conservation area but are hidden from Main Street and can thus be regarded as neutral.

Negative factors

Most of the recent detached houses in sub-area 2 have little relationship with the road or other buildings in the conservation area. They should not be used as precedents for further development.

The brick no 7 Main Street is out of scale and alignment with its neighbours, and redevelopment on this site could be encouraged. Similarly, the site of no's 60 and 62 could be redeveloped in the future as a terrace at the road edge.

Smaller alterations and incremental changes to existing buildings have also contributed to some erosion of the character of the conservation area. Unsuitable replacement windows and doors have appeared in a large number of locations. Doors with integral fanlights are particularly obtrusive. Some window openings have been widened and/or shop fascias removed. A few houses are rendered and painted; these can be seen as adding interest to the streetscape, but if any more are given this treatment, it could tend to dilute the character of the conservation area.

Modern street furniture and surface treatments are unsympathetic in places, particularly the wide stretches of patched blacktop in Main Street and beside the bridges. Poles and overhead lines are obtrusive, particularly in



Large areas of blacktop, poles and overhead wires - Main Street

Main Street, as is advertising on the front of the General Store. (however, these changes occurred before the conservation area was designated).

Listed Buildings, Buildings at Risk

The Grade II listed Felton Park Lodge appears to be empty and in poor condition.

Management

In general, development which respects the grain of the plot boundaries along Main Street could be encouraged as long as entrances to the street are not enlarged. Development in character area 2 should be very carefully controlled in order to keep the balance between the natural and built environment. One small, close-knit group of houses may be more suitable than several detached ones.



Felton Park Lodge

Street lighting could be improved in some parts of the conservation area, for example by replacing modern lamp standards with suitable fittings attached to the buildings, or more imaginative fittings in keeping with the historic character of the conservation area. Historic pavement features should be conserved and repaired, and could provide examples for improvements in Area 1 where varied surface treatments could also help with traffic calming. A public realm audit should be carried out to provide a baseline for such improvements.



General Store

Given the number of replacement windows and doors appearing in the area, the introduction of Article 4 directions should be considered for Main Street; older buildings in the remainder of the area are mostly listed, and therefore protected already. Signage could be improved to the commercial properties in the conservation area.

A photographic survey of all building frontages in the conservation area is strongly suggested, to act as a baseline for future management.

The designed landscape around Felton Park and the Church should be recorded, and a scheme of management and improvement put in place. Management of the other woodland in the conservation area should also be planned.

Boundary changes 2006

The rationale behind the original boundaries of the conservation area has, apparently, not been recorded but a few amendments are recommended.

As discussed above, the School and Moldshaugh Lane can be seen as having a neutral impact on the conservation area. The school is a modern, flat-roofed building of no architectural or historic interest with adjoining car park and hard play areas. It adds nothing to the Conservation Area and it may be difficult to argue for conservation area controls being used here. It is assumed that any original purpose of designation was to protect the setting of the Main Street section of the Conservation Area from the East but as stated with other appraisals this objective of protection is better achieved by protective policies in the Local Development Framework. The area has been de-designated.

Summary of management recommendations:

- Development behind Main Street should follow historic grain of plots
- Development in character area 2 should respect natural environment
- Consider buildings for listing
- Public realm audit and streetscape improvements, including surfaces and overhead wires
- Article 4 directions to protect important details and finishes, particularly windows and doors, and prevent further erosion of character
- Photographic survey of all building frontages to act as a baseline
- Request to English Heritage to include Felton Park on the register of historic parks and gardens

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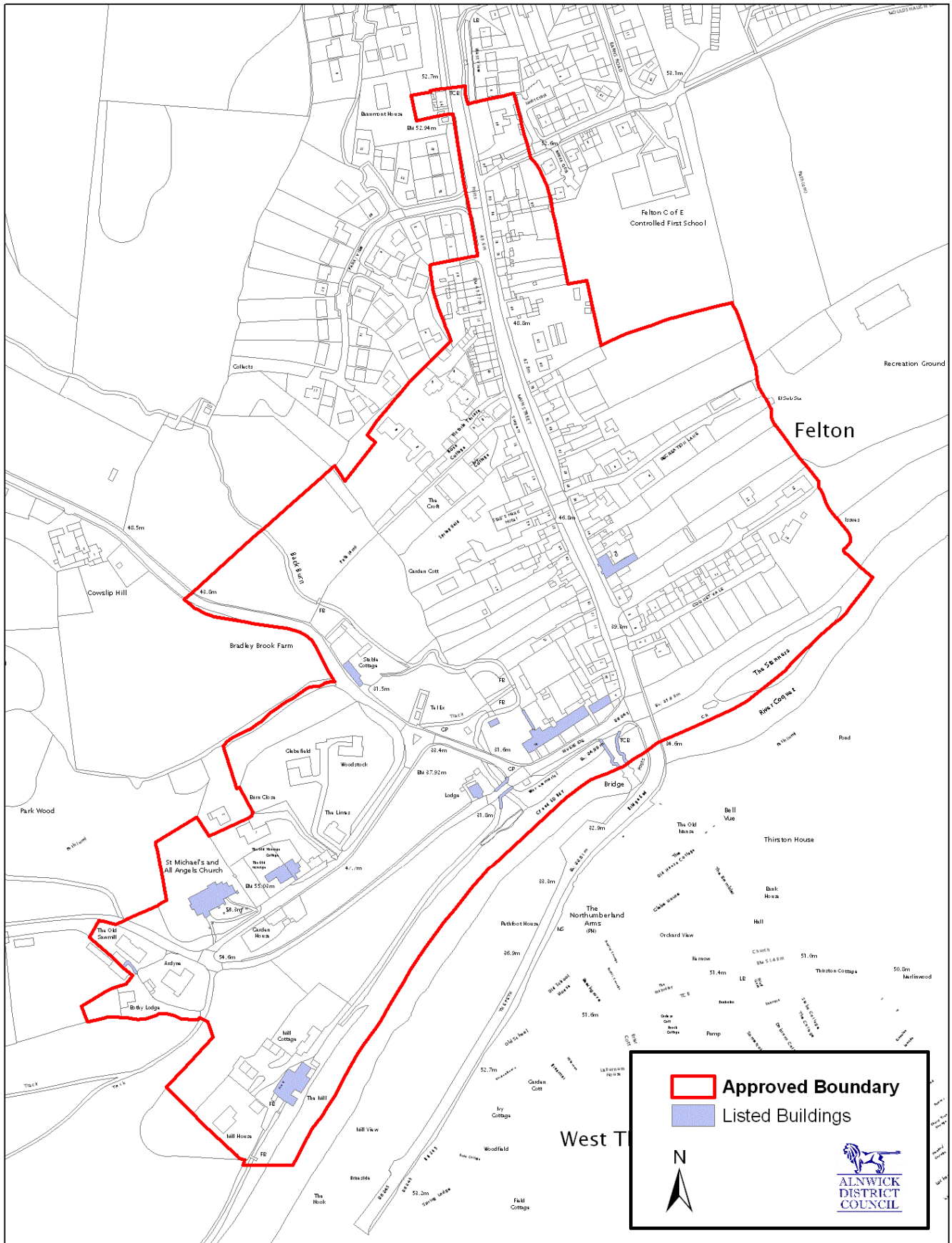
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Felton Conservation Area



Glossary

Public Realm Audit Streetscape Surveys

A focal point of conservation area designation is the careful maintenance and use of public space. This incorporates assessment of signage use, surface materials, street furniture, parking and traffic management issues. A public realm audit/streetscape survey considers the suitability of these elements against the character of the area and the practicality of their position and location and provides an opportunity to define and enhance the conservation area environment.

Article 4 Directions

The aim of an Article 4(2) Direction is to encourage the retention of high quality architectural features on buildings and to preserve and enhance the conservation area of which they are part. 'Like for like' repairs and reinstatement of architectural features will be encouraged, along with the removal of previously unsympathetic changes to buildings.

In order to keep control over development in Conservation Areas and very occasionally outside Conservation Areas, the Council is able to make an 'Article 4 Direction', the effect of which is to take away 'permitted development' rights, meaning that Planning Permission will be required.

Where there is not a Direction, owners of houses within a conservation area have rights to undertake considerable alterations to their property without the need for planning permission (Permitted Development Rights). Where these rights are unchecked they can undermine and erode the 'special interest' of a conservation area, allowing changes to the windows and doors, additions such as porches and general lack of attention to detail.

Design Information and Guidelines

Alnwick District Council has undertaken a study of the district to identify the principal characteristics of the built environment. This has provided the basis of three documents that aim to provide recommendations for new development and design guidelines for alterations to existing building

The following publications are available from the Alnwick District Council -

- **Guide to historic windows**
- **Colour Schemes**
- **Conversion of Rural Buildings**

A.O.N.B – Design Guide

Northumberland County Council together with Alnwick and Berwick District Council's, have a responsibility to protect and enhance the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. To achieve this aim, a series of 'Northumberland Coast AONB Design Guides' have been produced. These guides focus not only on the character of traditional local buildings and their repair and maintenance but incorporate a strategy for quality housing design that benefits both the rural community and environment.

Alnwick District Council - Historic Buildings Grant scheme.

The main purpose of Historic Buildings Grants scheme is to ensure the continued survival of important historic fabric, and to enhance and preserve the appearance of listed buildings or buildings of architectural importance.