

Lesbury Conservation Area Character Appraisal

January 2025



Northumberland Coast AONB

Lesbury Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

Final report

Prepared by LUC
January 2022



Northumberland Coast AONB

Lesbury Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

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A photograph of a row of traditional stone houses on a street in Lesbury. The houses are built from light-colored stone and have dark grey slate roofs with black gables. A prominent chimney is visible on the left. In the foreground, there is a low stone wall and a black metal gate. A flowering tree with pink blossoms is on the left, and a large green hedge runs along the front of the houses. The sky is clear blue.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Lesbury Main Street

Chapter 1

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 protection relates to Lesbury.

What is a conservation area?

1.1 In 1967, the Civil 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*”¹. Although the legislation applies nationally to England, conservation areas are identified and designated by local authorities based on criteria appropriate to their area.

¹ <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 Lesbury and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised soon after the Civic Amenities Act was passed, and Lesbury 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 Alnwick 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'², 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 significance³ 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 too⁴.

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*"⁵. 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

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

³ Ibid. Para.206.

⁴ Ibid. Para.189.

Chapter 1

Introduction

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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 Lesbury, 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 Lesbury 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.

Figure 1.1: Lesbury Conservation Area: Main Street and Longhoughton Road



Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

The setting of Lesbury: south and west



Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

Designation and appraisal

2.1 The special interest of Lesbury and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised soon after the Civic Amenities Act was passed, and Lesbury 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 Alnwick 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 Lesbury is located on the north bank of the Aln, around a mile inland and surrounded by agricultural land and small settlements. It lies on the historic route between Alnwick and its port of Alnmouth, now part of the Northumberland Coastal Route, and is served by Alnmouth station.

Historical development

2.3 Lesbury developed around its strategic location with a fording place and later bridge over the Aln dictating key routes between the area's settlements. The parish church may be of early medieval foundation and holds an important position above the river. Its form and location have shaped the layout and structure of the village. Important functions relating to it – the village school, vicarage and poorhouse – cluster around it with Lesbury House (the local landowner's 'big house') slightly further away in substantial grounds. Corn milling was important in the village's historical development, with substantial mills at the west end. Into the 18th century and later, agricultural improvements created farm complexes and steadings which shaped the

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Summary of Special Interest

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edges of the settlement and its setting. For much of its history, a large proportion of the village has been part of the Duke of Northumberland's Estate, with the estate responsible for its model cottages and improvements to facilities.

Summary of defining characteristics of Lesbury Conservation Area

The strong east-west structure of the main street

2.4 The western half of the street has a more formal, linear character, becoming more sinuous at the parish church running east towards Townfoot. Historic routes to bridges and the ford are preserved as footpaths.

The parish church of St Mary performs a key role as the visual and historical focus of the settlement

2.5 Other buildings with important historical functions – the former school, vicarage and poorhouse – are grouped around it.

Houses are relatively modest and uniform in scale

2.6 They are grouped in pairs or short terraces, generously spaced and set back behind front gardens with stone boundary walls.

2.7 The more important buildings punctuate this consistency of scale with contrasting height, design and architectural detailing.

Figure 2.1: Path between parish church and Lesbury Glebe



The traditional houses have a strong, consistent estate style

2.8 This features prominent chimney stacks, water tabling and kneelers, wallhead dormers, paired, tall sash and case windows and vertically-panelled timber doors. Detailing is relatively plain and severe with few purely decorative finishes.

Consistent use of sandstone and slate

2.9 Local sandstone in the form of coursed rubble is the uniform material for buildings and boundary walls; roofs are in natural slate, sash and case windows and doors are in painted timber. Stone boundary walls contribute strongly to the character of the conservation area.

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Summary of Special Interest

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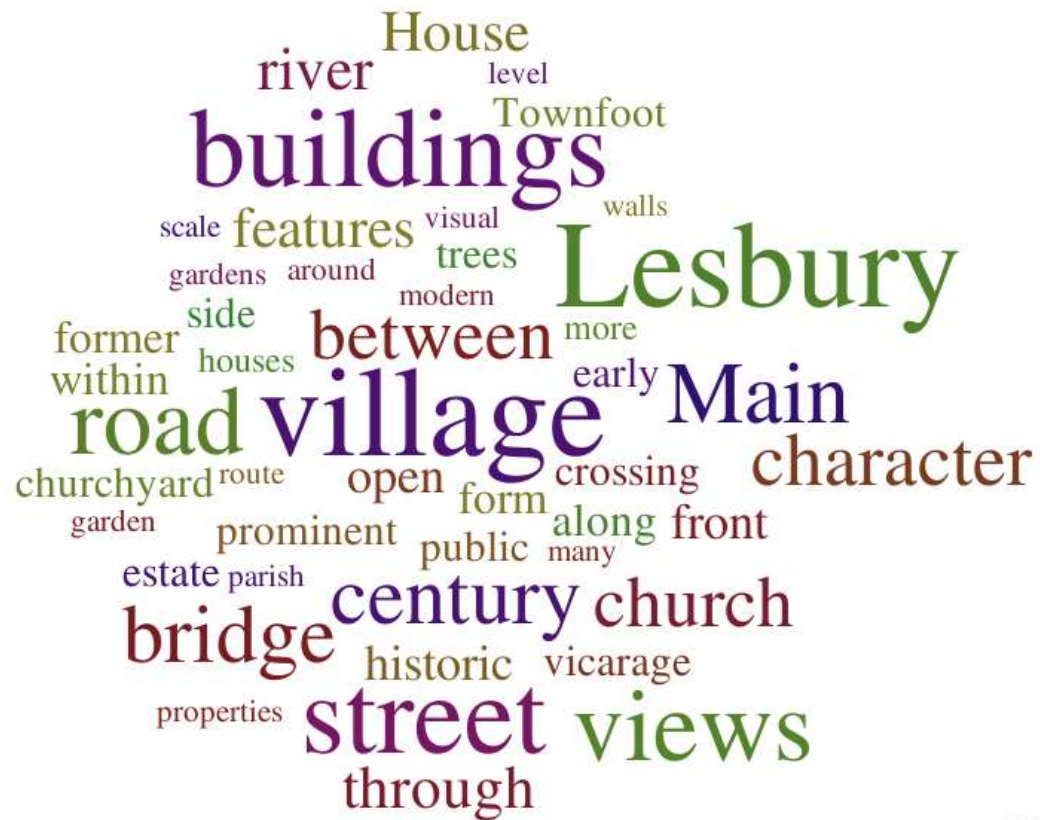
Setting, spaces and trees

2.10 The course of the AIn and its crossings, its wooded banks, and the agricultural landscape surrounding it are highly important in the character and setting of the conservation area.

2.11 The parish churchyard, open spaces on the approach to the two bridges and informal, deep verges planted with grass and trees are important public spaces within the conservation area.

2.12 Mature trees, hedges to side and rear boundaries and garden planting give the village a lush, green character, softening the formality of buildings and street form.

Figure 2.2: Lesbury Conservation Area word cloud



WordItOut

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

Chapter 3

Location and Context

The course of the Aln between Lesbury and Alnmouth



Chapter 3

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 makes 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 Lesbury that made it ripe for successful occupation.

Location

3.1 Located approximately a mile inland from the sea at the tidal limit, Lesbury is sited along the north bank of the River Aln located just off the main coastal road, the A1068. It lies on the historic route between Alnwick and its port of Alnmouth, with the lowest bridging point of the river located at the village between the 15th and 19th centuries. The nearby coastal village of Alnmouth is located 1.6km to the south-east with the larger settlement of Alnwick approximately 3.5km to the north-west. The B1339 from Longhoughton to the north joins the Alnmouth road in the village; it forms part of the tourist 'Northumberland Coastal Route' at this point. Lesbury is served by Alnmouth Station, located c.700m south-west of the village.

3.2 The majority of the residents are retired with the village's popularity giving rise to an increase in number of commuter families living in the village and modern residential

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developments. The village supports a community shop and a public house, alongside a growing number of holiday-lets.

Geology and topography

3.3 Lesbury lies on the north bank on the Aln, on the Northumbrian coastal plain surrounded by gently rolling, mainly arable land and pockets of woodland. Geologically, it lies at the junction between the Alston and Stainmore formations of sedimentary bedrock formed during the Carboniferous period, consisting of mudstones, sandstones and limestones, overlaid by superficial deposits of glacial till and riverine alluvium⁵. Sandstone is available locally; this and millstone grits exposed at the coast (known as 'Alnmouth rocks') have been used for building in Lesbury.

3.4 The conservation area is bounded to the east by the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and to the west by an Area of High Landscape Value. The Northumberland Marine Special Protection Area extends upstream along the Aln as far as the ford and footbridge within the conservation area.

The Conservation Area boundary

3.5 The conservation area includes much of the historic core of the village built along the B1339, with the northern edge following the boundary of medieval burgrave plots and excluding the modern developments beyond. The east of the conservation area consists of developments either side of Bridge End and extends down to the river. The southern bank of the River Aln forms the southern extent.

3.6 The boundary of Lesbury 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 Lesbury. A full list of these features is at **Appendix A**.

Figure 3.1: The Aln and its banks, Lesbury



3.8 Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here, drawn from the Lesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2036. 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

⁵ British Geological Survey Geology of Britain Viewer. Available at: <https://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> [accessed 08.09.2021]

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Location and Context

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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>.

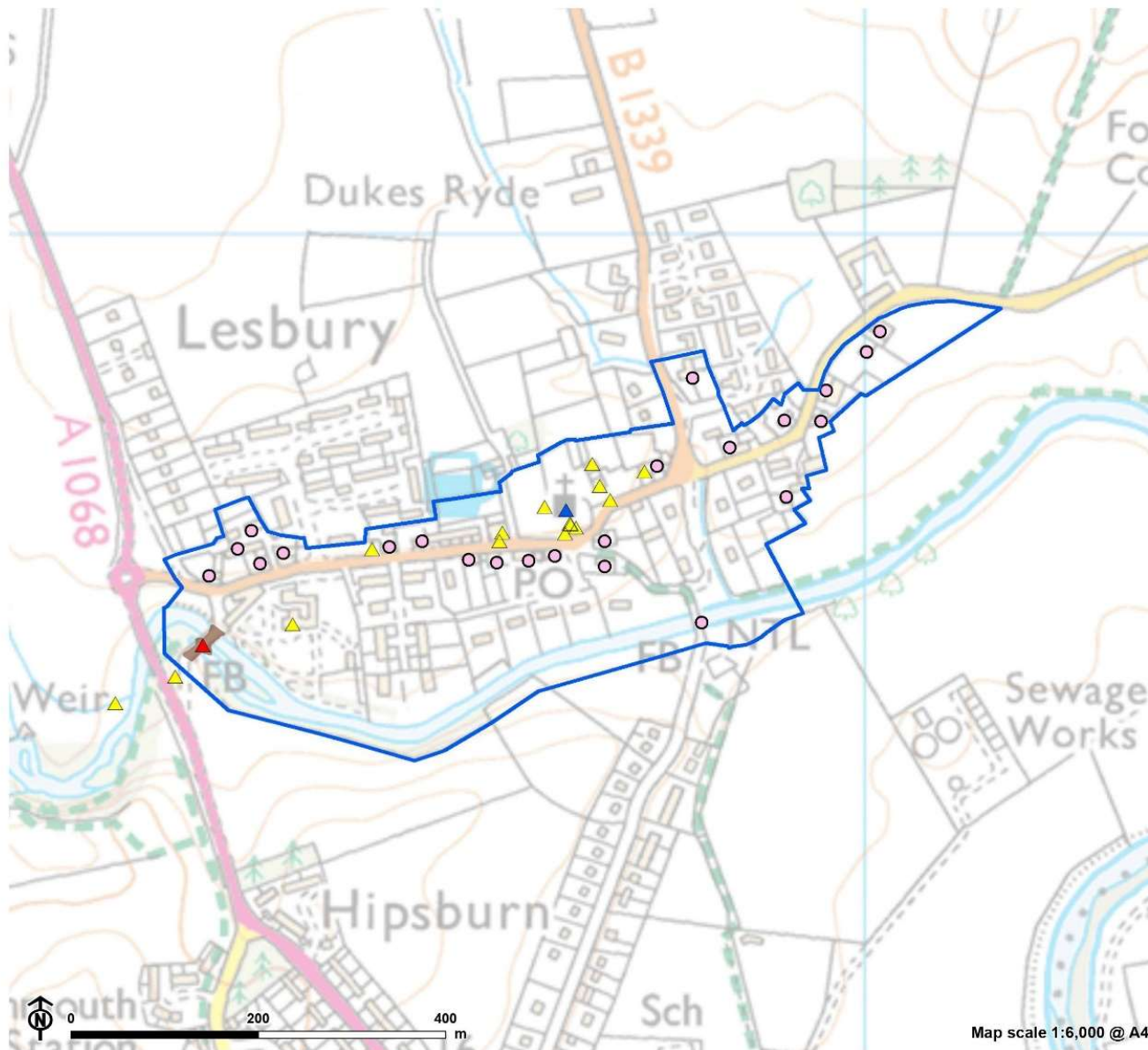


Figure 3.2: Lesbury Conservation Area and features of interest

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

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

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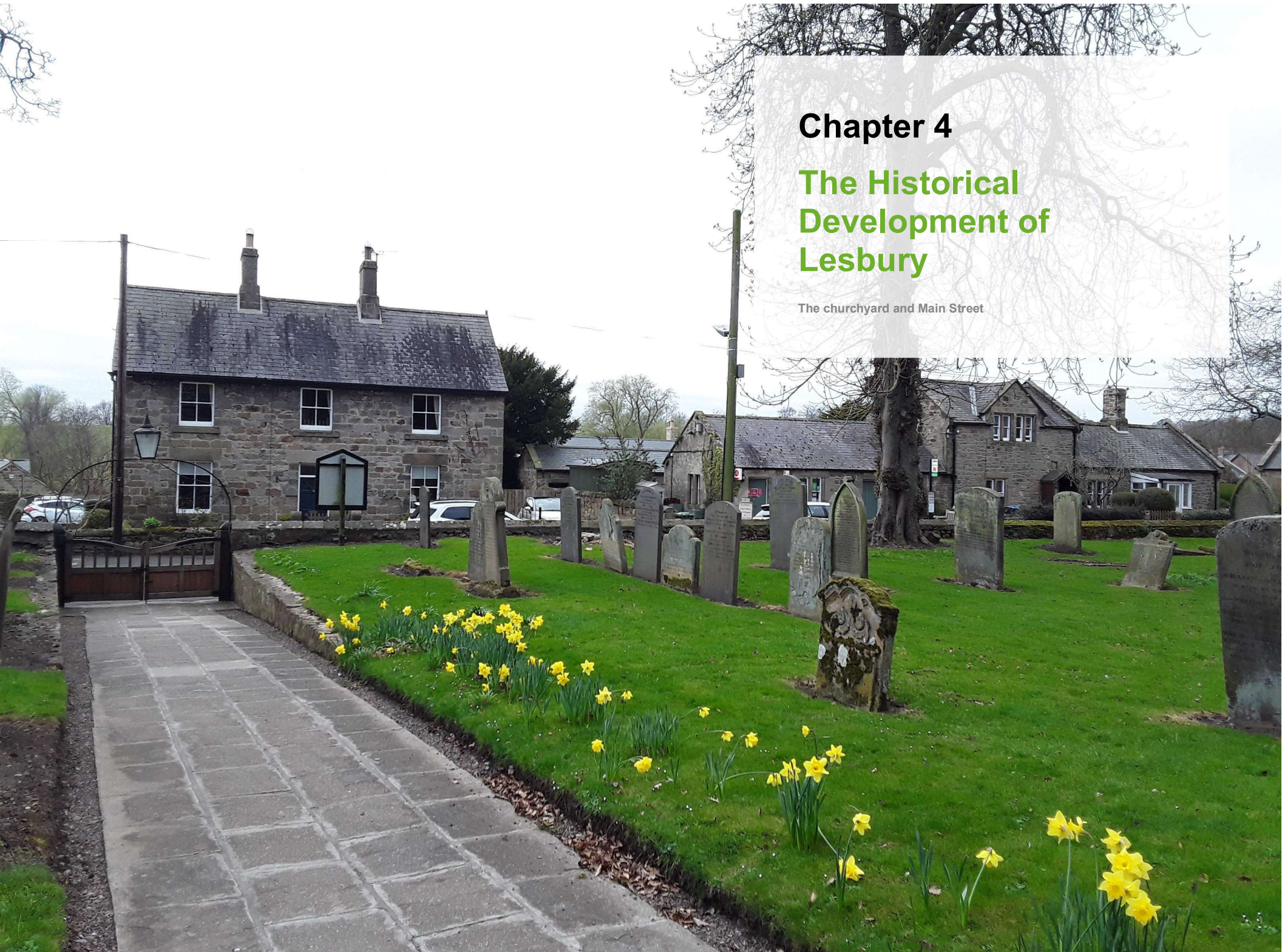
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Source: OS, NCC

Map scale 1:6,000 @ A4

Chapter 4

The Historical Development of Lesbury

The churchyard and Main Street



Chapter 4

The Historical Development of Lesbury

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 Lesbury developed from its earliest origins into the settlement we see today.

Origins of settlement

4.1 A few stone and copper items, and cairn burials at Shell Law and Birney-Knowe Field, imply some early settlement in the area, and an (undated) defended site exists at Pine Hill.

4.2 The name Lesbury is assumed to mean 'fortified place of the leech' (i.e. doctor), and the village probably dates from the Anglian period when the church, on a knoll above the river crossing, was the most important in the area. The ford and stepping stones (replaced by the modern footbridge) at the centre of the village may represent the early river crossing point; paths still connect it to the Longhoughton and Alnwick roads, and south of the river to Steppey Lane in Hipsburn. The curvilinear shape of St Mary's churchyard, with buildings around it aligned radially, is still evident on the 1844 Tithe Award map, and implies an early date as early medieval churches were defined by curved boundary walls.

Medieval Lesbury

4.3 Medieval Lesbury seems to have grown organically to either side of the church, along the road between Alnwick and Alnmouth. This route has been important since the 12th century, when Alnmouth grew in status as the port for Alnwick. The straight section of road crossing the

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stream to the east of the church, with its odd alignment around the churchyard and sudden bend at Townfoot, may date from this period.

4.4 The important Grade I listed Lesbury Bridge makes use of an island in the river at the west end of the village. Originally built in the 15th or early 16th century, the width of the bridge was doubled in 1844 with the addition of a new eastern section, faithfully copying the details of the medieval structure. From the 13th century a corn mill was located just across the river; its 18th and 19th century replacements survived until the mid-20th century, when the buildings burnt down.

Figure 4.1: Lesbury Bridge



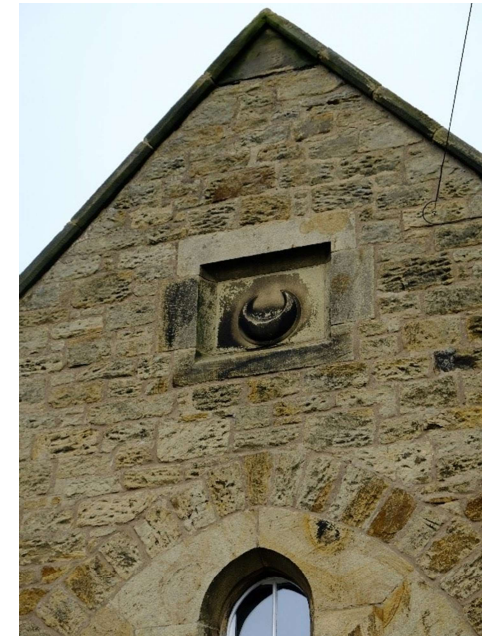
Post-medieval Lesbury

4.5 The village stretches between two farms, Townhead (at river level, by the bridge and mill) and Townfoot (up the hill at the east end of the village); as they cannot be topographical (Townhead being lower than Townfoot), the names seem to imply that the mill / bridge end of the village was considered to have a higher status. Lesbury House with its walled grounds is situated here, the present building dating from the 18th century. A planned group of cottages associated with Lesbury House was demolished in the mid-19th century, but the site has been redeveloped in an echo of the original layout. The 1844 map also shows the village extending along the road to the north of Townfoot Farm, although these buildings had been removed by the late 19th century.

Figure 4.2: Farm and estate buildings



Steading at Townhead.



The Percy crescent symbol, Old School.

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The Historical Development of Lesbury

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4.6 The bridge was widened to the east in the 19th century but its alignment made it dangerous for modern traffic, and in the early 20th century a passenger died after being thrown off a bus into the river. The modern bridge, opened in 2004, re-aligns the road over the site of Lesbury Mills, directing traffic away from the village and promoting the old bridge to a public amenity space.

4.7 In 1825 it was noted that “*Lesbury is finely situate on the banks of the Aln, which flows up thus far, in a beautiful and fertile country... It is an irregular built village, consisting of the vicarage, three farmholds, two public houses, and thirty-one cottages, with portions of land attached to each*”⁶. The arrival of the railway in 1848 does not seem to have affected it directly, and the construction of the Duchess’ Bridge effectively bypassed the village, although traffic from Longhoughton still comes through it. By 1860 buildings had been re-aligned and the churchyard boundaries straightened somewhat, but the curve at the south-east corner remains, an important reminder of the past.

Northumberland Estate

4.8 For much of its history the village (apart from Garden Terrace) has been part of the Duke of Northumberland’s estate, and in the mid-19th century many cottages were rebuilt in the Estate style. The Percy crescent, still visible on some buildings, is a reminder of the historic connections with the Estate, which carried out major improvements to its properties in the village in the early 1970s, adding bathrooms etc. The Duchess closed one of the two pubs in the early 1880s and constructed a reading room in a barn at Townhead farm (converted to a house in 1984).

Modern Lesbury

4.9 With the exception of some earlier 20th century ribbon development northwards along Alnwick Road, Lesbury remained close to its 19th century form, layout and extent until after the Second World War. From the 1960s and 70s onwards the village expanded, generally through development of former agricultural land at its edges, and through infill of the former plots between Main Street and the river Aln including some of the garden ground of Lesbury House. The substantial mills which were once a landmark at the west end of the village were

demolished and replaced by a large new road junction, bypassing the historic Lesbury Bridge, the new road crossing the Aln by a striking bowstring-arched bridge erected in 2004⁷.

Figure 4.3: Lesbury old and new bridges



⁶ ‘Lesbury Parish’ in Mackenzie, Eneas. 1825. An Historical, Topographical, and Descriptive View of the County of Northumberland.

⁷ ‘Lesbury New Bridge’. Available at: <http://www.bridgesonthetyne.co.uk/lesbrynew.html> [accessed 30.08.2021]

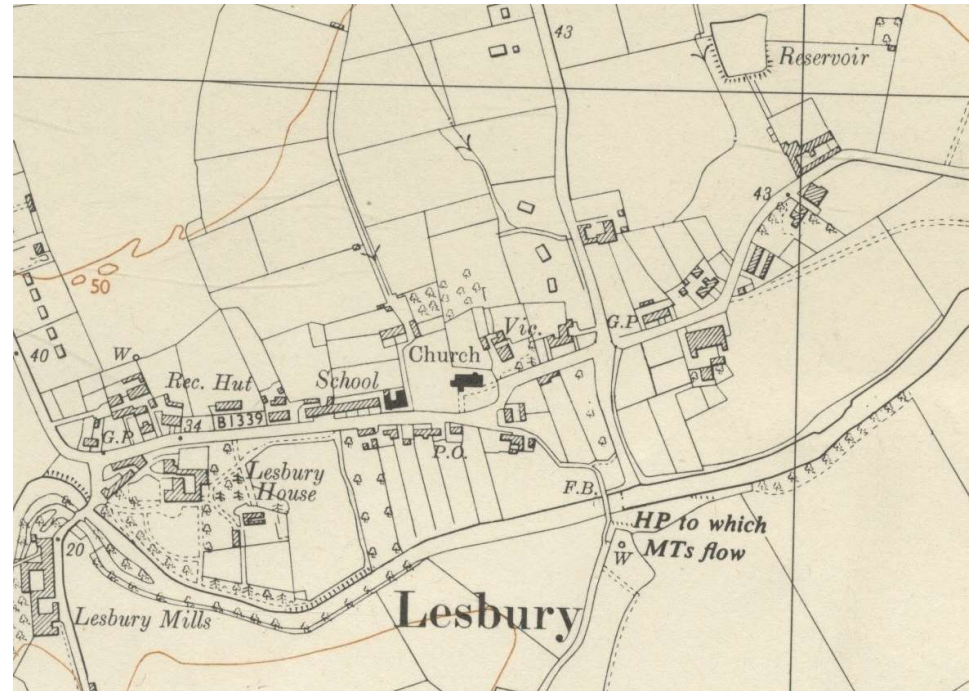
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The Historical Development of Lesbury

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Figure 4.4: Lesbury historical mapping



Lesbury 1st edition OS, 6" to 1 mile, surveyed 1861-4, published 1867. Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.

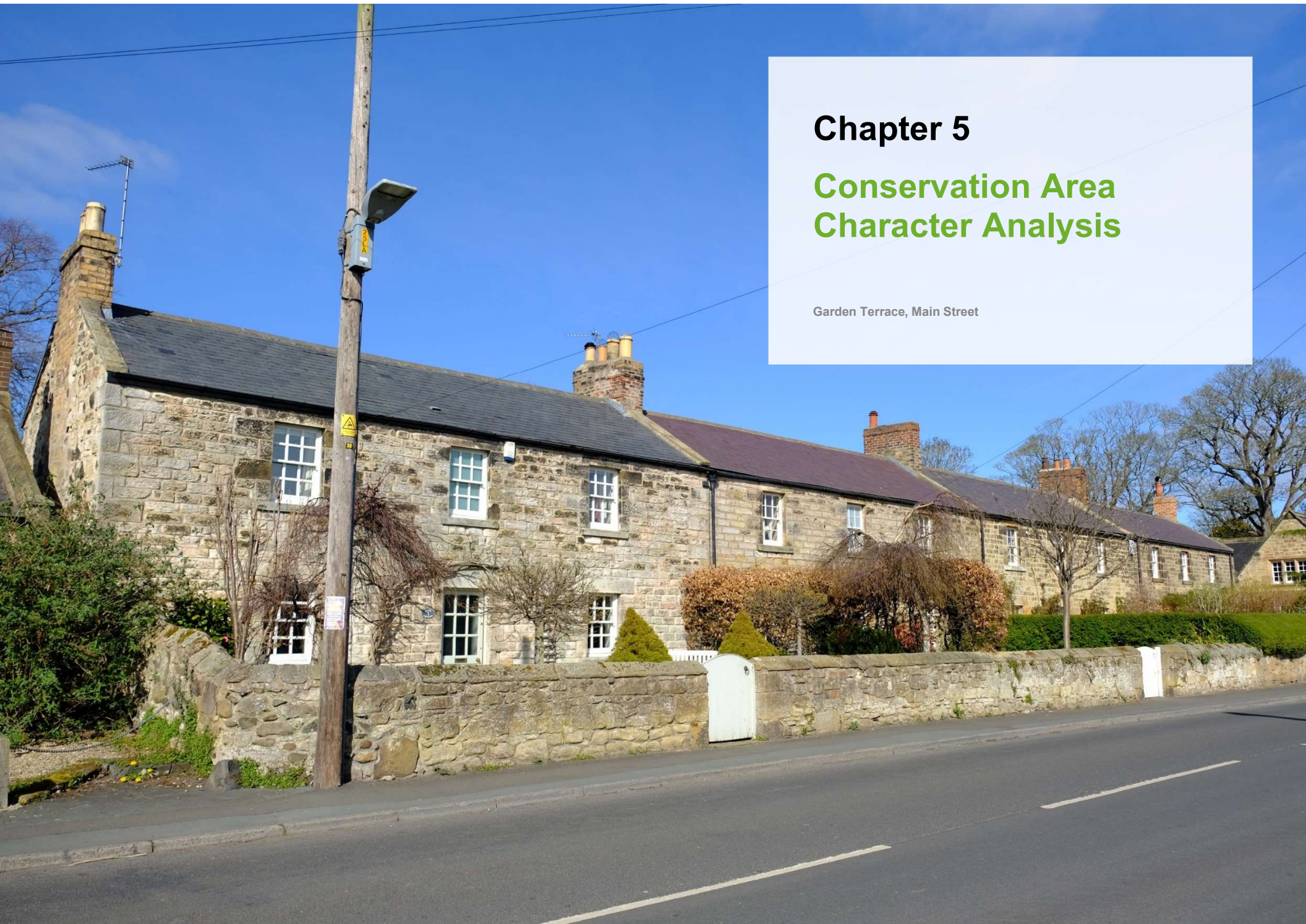


OS 1:10,000, published 1957. Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

Garden Terrace, Main Street



Chapter 5

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 Lesbury is dominated by a section of the Alnwick-Alnmouth road forming its main street. It is orientated roughly east-west; its western half has a more formal, linear character, becoming more sinuous at the parish church running east towards Townfoot and forming a crossroads with the road to Longhoughton and the old ford and crossing of the Aln. The road is broken by sharp bends at the bridge, by the church and on the hill leading up to Townfoot, which slows progress and gives a sense of expectation and interest. This pattern was dictated by the course of the Aln, its crossing points, the prominent position of the church and the use of land along the riverside for domestic cultivation in long rear plots south of Main Street. Two historic routes from Bridge End to the footbridge and ford across the Aln are preserved as footpaths. Built-up side streets such as Riverside and Alnside Court, extending at right-angles off the main route, did not begin to be developed until the later 20th century.

5.2 The parish church of St Mary sits at the centre of the village, close to the crossroads, and performs a key role as the visual and historical focus of the settlement. The change of direction of the main route is created by the bulge in the historic churchyard boundary. Other buildings with important historical functions – the former school, vicarage and poorhouse - are grouped around it.

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Conservation Area Character Analysis

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Figure 5.1: Development pattern and layout



Main Street curves around the parish church.

5.3 The houses lining the main street are mostly orientated with eaves parallel to the street and set well back from the street line within a generous front garden. They are grouped in pairs or short terraces, each with a rectangular floor plan and relatively shallow roof pitch. This orientation reinforces the formality of Main Street, where front building lines are roughly aligned, particularly on the north side. This contrasts with Bridge End where, although the same parallel alignment and spacing of buildings is used, the curving route creates variation and surprise, to picturesque effect.

Figure 5.2: Development pattern and layout



Buildings aligned along Main Street.

Grain and density

5.4 Historically, Lesbury's built-up core was only a single plot deep on either side of the main road, with generous spacing provided in front, behind and between buildings. Despite sometimes substantial backland developments having been inserted, this generosity of spacing remains characteristic of the village, with mainly modestly-sized houses spread out along the main route. The amount of private space provided to each property increases proportionately with its status; smaller properties having modest gardens, large ones such as the vicarage having relatively grand gardens.

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Figure 5.3: Grain and density: generosity of spacing



Activity and movement

5.5 Lesbury features a busy community shop, church and village hall. The shop is housed in the former Post Office. Together these serve a small resident population which is added to seasonally by visitor accommodation. The Alnwick-Alnmouth and Longhoughton roads passing through the village remain fairly busy communication routes, sometimes causing conflicts from vehicle speeds and heavy goods vehicles.

Setting

5.6 The course of the Aln and its crossings, which have dictated the location and form of Lesbury, have a surprisingly minor visual effect from within and around the conservation area because of the surrounding topography and tree cover. However, their presence remains

important and can be experienced through glimpses and other clues to their presence such as the dipping of the road to the course of the Longhoughton Burn flowing south along Longhoughton Road to meet the Aln beside the historic ford.

Figure 5.4: The setting of the conversation area



The agricultural surroundings of the village, experienced from its edges.

5.7 The wider landscape of gently rolling, low hills dropping down to the meadows bordering the Aln is experienced from many points throughout the conservation area, between buildings and at the edges of the settlement. These visual connections between the village and its setting help our understanding of its historic function and importance within the agricultural landscape, as a crossing place and as a religious focus.

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Conservation Area Character Analysis

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Function and form

Scale and hierarchy

5.8 The domestic buildings of the conservation area have a consistent scale, between 1½ and 2 storeys, with little variation in eaves and ridge height. The more prominent buildings announce their historical roles and importance through siting, scale and architectural expression: Lesbury House, the former school, the parish church and vicarage are the only major contrasts with the prevailing character of the houses. A good range of historic outbuildings and ancillary structures survives, relating to a range of building scales and types, demonstrating the hierarchy within one household or plot from the main house to the range of functions required to service it.

Figure 5.5: Scale and hierarchy



Limited variation in scale, Main Street.

Figure 5.6: Scale and hierarchy



Traditional outbuildings.

5.9 Lesbury House and the parish church mark the ends of Main Street, although they both sit relatively low in the landscape and are not prominent features over a longer range. The east and west ends of the village are marked by historic farms or steadings at Lesbury House Lodge and Townfoot Steading; although the conversion of the latter has markedly changed its agricultural character. Their distinctive low, spreading character provides a historical visual link with, and gentle transition between, the built-up area of the village and its agricultural setting.

Contribution of spaces, trees and landscaping

5.10 The parish churchyard is the most important public space in the conservation area, both in terms of its central position and its size. Its open, tranquil character, raised above street level behind a low retaining wall, along with its gravestones and mature trees, emphasise its antiquity and create a contrast with the surrounding buildings.

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Figure 5.7: Green spaces



Verge and veteran tree, Main Street.



Open space at Longhoughton Bum.

5.11 There is no formal public open space within the conservation area but there are several places where large green verges have been landscaped with grass and trees, enhancing the public space of the street. The linear example east of the junction of Lealands with Main Street contains paths and benches and is an inviting spot to sit and enjoy the surroundings. These verges provide a generous sense of space around the properties bounding Main Street and Longhoughton Road, giving the conservation area a very spacious character. The bowling green also creates a pocket of manicured open space behind Garden Terrace.

Figure 5.8: Trees and landscaping



Mature trees in private gardens.

5.12 The river forms the south edge of the conservation area and is an important open space in its own right, accessible only on foot. Two open spaces have been formed beside the old bridge and the footbridge, important in providing additional leisure spaces for the village and places to appreciate its setting and key features. The old bridge and VE Memorial Park form an intimate enclave, away from the road yet visible from it. A small community orchard has been established in the VE Memorial Park. There is an inviting contrast between the open boundaries of the park and the secluded, slightly mysterious riverbank below with its tall trees.

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5.13 Private gardens make an important contribution to the spaciousness and green character of the conservation area, separating and softening the effect of buildings, boundary walls and the street form. Front gardens containing a rich variety of ornamental species of plants, shrubs and trees provide a prominent, public display.

5.14 Mature trees, mostly located within private gardens, make a strong contribution to the conservation area, in many cases being taller than, and adding screening between, the relatively modest buildings. The churchyard and riverbanks are heavily wooded, as are parts of Longhoughton Road.

Features and design

Architectural style and features

5.15 The majority of the buildings are domestic, of the mid- to late 19th century and express the standing of the village through their quality of stonework and detailing, and through common

features tying them to their location and the Northumberland Estate. The houses associated with the estate have prominent chimney stacks, water tabling and kneelers which express the party wall between each property and create a rhythm along each building group. Many have characteristic wall-head dormers to the front elevation.

5.16 The former farm buildings and steadings have a more vernacular expression, with small openings and relatively blank north elevations, protecting from the weather. The higher-status houses – Lesbury House, its lodge and the old vicarage (Lesbury Glebe) – are larger than the average and adopt a more purposeful architectural ‘style’, which helps them to stand out of the ordinary context. The old vicarage, for instance, has a classically-inspired symmetrical principal elevation with tooled stonework, quoins, prominent cornice and plinth and a hipped roof.

5.17 Buildings with a public function – the church, former school and former poorhouse – also express their importance and contrast with their context through scale, height and contrasting architectural style. The former school, for example, announces its presence in the street through the use of gothic pointed arched openings and a prominent gable facing the street.

Figure 5.9: Features and design



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Former steading at Townhead.

Estate cottages with wallhead gables.

Old schoolhouse with two cull storeys and symmetrical elevation.

Larger scale and classical inspiration of the old vicarage.

Materials and detailing

5.18 Local sandstone in relatively pale tones of grey to warm ochre is the ubiquitous building material, used in buildings and boundary walls, generally used in the form of coursed, squared rubble and dressed to form quoins, lintels, copings and other structural features. Plaques set into gables or wall-heads displaying datestones or the Percy badge of the crescent moon can be seen, but otherwise decoration is very plain and severe, restricted to drip mouldings to kneelers and other functional weathering details.

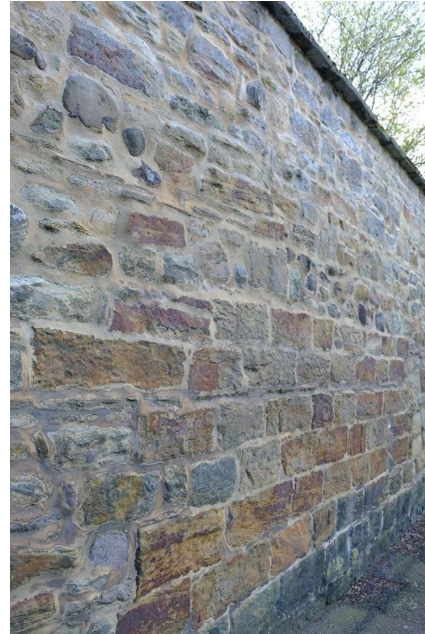
Figure 5.10: Materials and detailing



Sneaked rubble walling with distressed lintel and jambs to door. Slate roof. Vertical panelled door with elaborate straps.



Squared rubble walling with ashlar quoins and inset Percy symbol plaque. Vertical panelled door and ironwork.



Rubble wall incorporating older coursed work.



Watertabling and kneelers.

Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape

5.21 Stone boundary walls are a characteristic feature of the conservation area. Entering from the west end, the high, substantial wall surrounding Lesbury House has a strong, linear character and provides a distinctive sense of enclosure to the south side of Main Street. Most domestic boundaries to the front and side of properties are lower – knee- to hip-height – and often finished with rounded saddle coping and simple piers. Several front garden walls have gateposts formed from single stones with semi-circular tops. Hedges are often used to form the side boundaries between properties but are less commonly used as front boundary features.

Figure 5.11: Boundaries and street furniture



Substantial rock-faced boundary wall and stone retaining walls to Longhoughton Burn.



Traditional stone field-gate post, rubble boundary wall.

5.22 The remains of pants or pumps and the stonework of the culverted stream add interest for pedestrians and act as reminders of the past. Most remaining street furniture and structures – street lighting, signs, railings and so on – are of modern origin.

Figure 5.12: Boundary treatments



Stone boundary wall with square pins, pyramidal caps and coping. Note different masonry styles to each side of the opening, rock-faced ashlar to left, random rubble to right.

Views

Types of views

5.23 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 Lesbury 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 Lesbury Conservation Area

Static

5.24 The general character in Main Street is enclosed, but in a few places there are panoramic views over the river valley to the south.

5.25 Church Cottage and the Old Schoolhouse provide an important focal point in views to the east.

Figure 5.13: Static views



Combined and channelled view into the conservation area across the bridge.

Glimpsed

5.26 The raised ground level within the churchyard gives a clue to its substantial age and allows glimpse views from pavement level of the church, the space and the gravestones between the trunks of the trees.

Figure 5.14: Glimpsed views



Hints of the space within the graveyard, viewed from Main Street.

Dynamic

5.27 To the east of the church the road drops sharply to Longhoughton Burn and the road junction, then winds up the opposite bank. The changing levels and stepped buildings present views of chimneys and gables, giving it a more open and informal character than Main Street.

5.28 The pedestrian paths leading to the footbridge, with their intimate scale, railings, hedges and green open spaces, provide both a foil and introduction to the relatively untamed riverbank. The slope down to the river adds to the drama of the approach.

Figure 5.15: Dynamic views: the approach to the footbridge



Figure 5.16: Dynamic views: views from the footbridge



Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

Longhoughton Road



Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

This section considers the conservation issues and opportunities facing Lesbury Conservation Area and makes recommendations for their management.

Management issues in Lesbury 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 path, bridges and embankment to Longhoughton Burn appear to be well-maintained.

Boundary treatments

6.2 In general, historic stone boundary walls survive well in Lesbury. However, the character of the area may be at risk from inappropriate alterations to boundaries, including removal, widening of openings, or the introduction of tall and opaque fencing or dense vegetation to front boundaries. Whilst the desire for privacy is understandable, glimpsed views of buildings and garden spaces is an important characteristic of the area, and the two can be sensitively balanced as demonstrated through successful examples throughout the conservation area.

Public realm

6.3 Car parking has become relatively dominant in two locations, opposite the parish church and behind/beside the Coach Inn. Sensitive landscaping and appropriate planting would help to soften the visual impact of the expanses of tarmac and parked cars.

6.4 At present pedestrians can walk to the footbridge, and to the riverbank at the old bridge. If a path were to be constructed to link the two river crossings, possibly in conjunction with some information on the historic mill, it would considerably increase the amenity of the area and accessibility to, and appreciation of, these important parts of the conservation area.

Loss and replacement of architectural details

6.5 Lesbury retains a good proportion of its historic windows, doors and rainwater goods. However, there has been some inauthentic replacement of these historic features which, if the trend continues, will have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. Without an Article 4 Direction in place to control permitted development rights, there is a constant threat that those that do remain on non-designated buildings will be replaced. Their replacement is often in uPVC or aluminium, which has had a damaging effect on the appearance of individual buildings and cumulatively across the area by changing:

- The width, depth, profile and proportions of frames, panels, mouldings and glazing bars;
- The grain, texture and character of the surface finish;
- The window opening method (casement in place of sash, for example);
- Alteration of detailing such as horns and beading;
- The size and positioning in the opening or on the façade;
- The uniform, unbroken plane of the roof through insertion of rooflights; and
- Historic detailing such as letter boxes, knockers, door knobs, hinges, gutter spikes, handles and locks.

New development and design

6.6 Most areas of modern development are not visible from most of the conservation area, and therefore do not impact upon it. However, in a few locations the siting, scale and interrelationship of housing with its surroundings has caused harmful effects to the character of the conservation area and lessons should be learned from them for future proposals. For example, the houses along Riverside are overly-large and detached from each other. Their backs are exposed in the view along the riverbank from the footbridge, adversely affecting the

view from the south. The scale, orientation and aggressive, symmetrical formality of Alnside Court are out of character with the rest of the village. The houses fronting Main Street are more in tune with the character of the conservation area.

Figure 6.1: New development and design



Alnside Court: excessive scale and overt symmetry.

Trees and landscaping

6.7 Trees are generally very mature, and several are coming to the end of their lives. A programme of appropriate replanting would ensure the special character of the area is maintained in the future. Hedges are also an important feature of the area, and may be under threat from removal or replanting with non-indigenous species.

Recommendations and opportunities for enhancement

Recommendation 1

6.8 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 to the character of the conservation area. It is recommended that any Article 4 Direction for Lesbury should include:

- Any alterations to roofs, including changes to the design, profile or materials, or installation of rooflights;
- 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

6.9 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

6.10 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

6.11 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, including where removal is appropriate and potentially desirable (for example, where they are self-seeded and potentially damaging to built features of historic interest).

Recommendation 5

6.12 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 at **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 Lesbury. Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here, drawn from the Lesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2036. 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>.

- Cherry Tree Cottage and Alnside Cottage
- Mill Cottages
- The Reading room
- The Square
- Crescent Cottage and Maple Cottage
- Jasmine Cottage, Rose Cottage and Box Cottage
- The Coach Inn
- Garden Cottage, Garden Terrace
- The Cottage, Garden Terrace
- Post Office Cottage and River Bank Cottage
- The School House
- Aln View
- Church Cottages
- Woodbine Cottage, Bridge End
- Rose Cottage and Burn Cottage, Longhoughton Road

Appendix A

Non-Designated Buildings of Local Interest

Lesbury Conservation Area

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- Lilac Cottage, Bridge End Cottage and Bridge End
- Holme House
- Stepping stones and Steppey Lane ford
- Tide View, Mount View and Primrose Cottage
- Hawthorn Cottage (not Townfoot Farm Cottage)
- Azalea Cottage, Townfoot Farm Cottages
- Townfoot Farmhouse, Bridge End
- The Lodge, Bridge End