

North Sunderland Conservation Area Character Appraisal

January 2025





Northumberland Coast AONB

**North Sunderland
Conservation Area**
Character Appraisal
and Management
Recommendations

Final report

Prepared by LUC
January 2022



Northumberland Coast AONB

North Sunderland Conservation Area

Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

What is a conservation area?	1
Conservation area designation and appraisal	2
What should the appraisal be used for?	2
Planning for change	2
Supporting good design	3
Informing and inspiring	3
Acknowledgements	3

Chapter 2 Summary of Special Interest

Designation and appraisal	5
Location and context	5
Historical development	5
Summary of defining characteristics of North Sunderland Conservation Area	6

Chapter 3 Location and Context

Location	10
Geology and topography	11
The Conservation Area Boundary	11

Chapter 4 The Historical Development of North Sunderland

Chapter 5 Conservation Area Character Analysis

Spatial qualities	18
Development pattern and layout	18
Grain and density	19
Activity and movement	20
Setting	20
Function and form	21
Scale and hierarchy	21
Contribution of spaces	21
Features and design	22
Architectural style and features	22
Materials and detailing	23
Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape	24
Views	25
Types of views	25
Examples of views in North Sunderland Conservation Area	25

Chapter 6 Management Recommendations

Contents

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

Management issues in North Sunderland Conservation Area	28
Condition and vacancy	28
Loss and replacement of architectural details	28
Public realm	29
New development and design	30
Recommendations and opportunities for enhancement	31

Appendix A

Non-Designated Buildings of Local Interest

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1: Main Street	3
Figure 2.1: The contribution of setting	6
Figure 2.2: North Sunderland Conservation Area word cloud	8
Figure 3.1: Boundary wall made of local sandstone	11
Figure 3.2: North Sunderland Conservation Area and features of interest	12
Figure 4.1: The former Presbyterian Church, Main Street	15
Figure 4.2: Seahouses Hostel, Main Street	15

Figure 4.3: North Sunderland historical mapping	16
Figure 5.1: Development pattern: Main Street	19
Figure 5.2: Development pattern: North Lane	19
Figure 5.3: Varying levels of enclosure along Main Street	20
Figure 5.4: Setting: Osbourne Terrace	20
Figure 5.5: Building hierarchy	21
Figure 5.6: Churchyard of Paul's Church	21
Figure 5.7: Agricultural village architecture	22
Figure 5.8: The former police station, Main Street	22
Figure 5.9: Typical materials & detailing	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 5.10: Architectural detailing	23
Figure 5.11: Detailing: Former Granary	24
Figure 5.12: Boundary walls and pants	24
Figure 5.13: Street furniture	25
Figure 5.14: Glimpsed views	26
Figure 5.15: Dynamic views	26
Figure 6.1: Public realm	29
Figure 6.2: Features and details of domestic buildings	29
Figure 6.3: Vernacular farm building	30
Figure 6.4: Former granary, Main Street	31

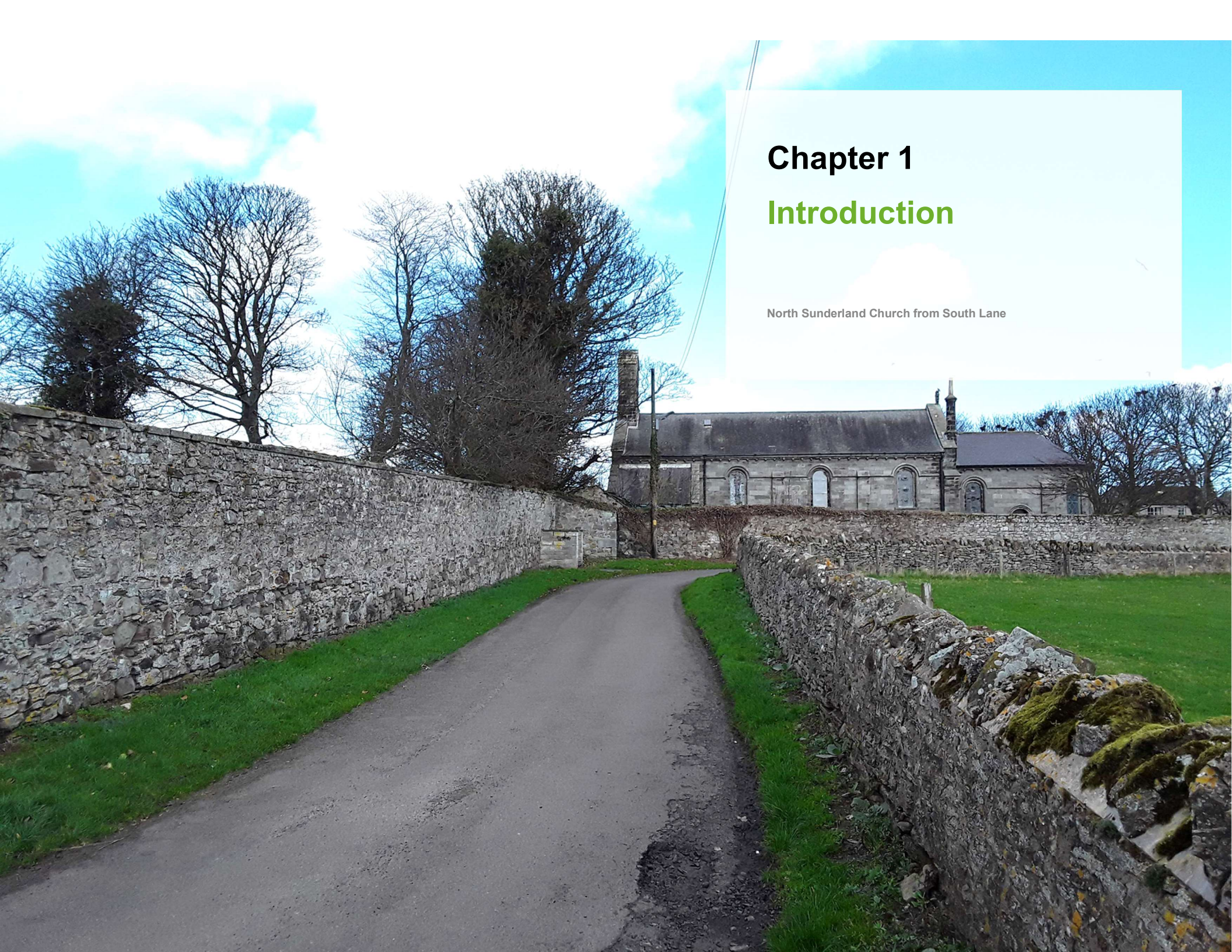
Contents

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

Chapter 1

Introduction

North Sunderland Church from South Lane



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 North Sunderland.

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”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]

Chapter 1

Introduction

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

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 North Sunderland and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised in 2005 when the area was recommended for conservation area designation. The reasons for its designation were formalised in a Conservation Area and Character Appraisal, undertaken by Berwick Upon Tweed Borough Council.

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

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

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 North Sunderland, 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 North Sunderland updates the original 2005 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.

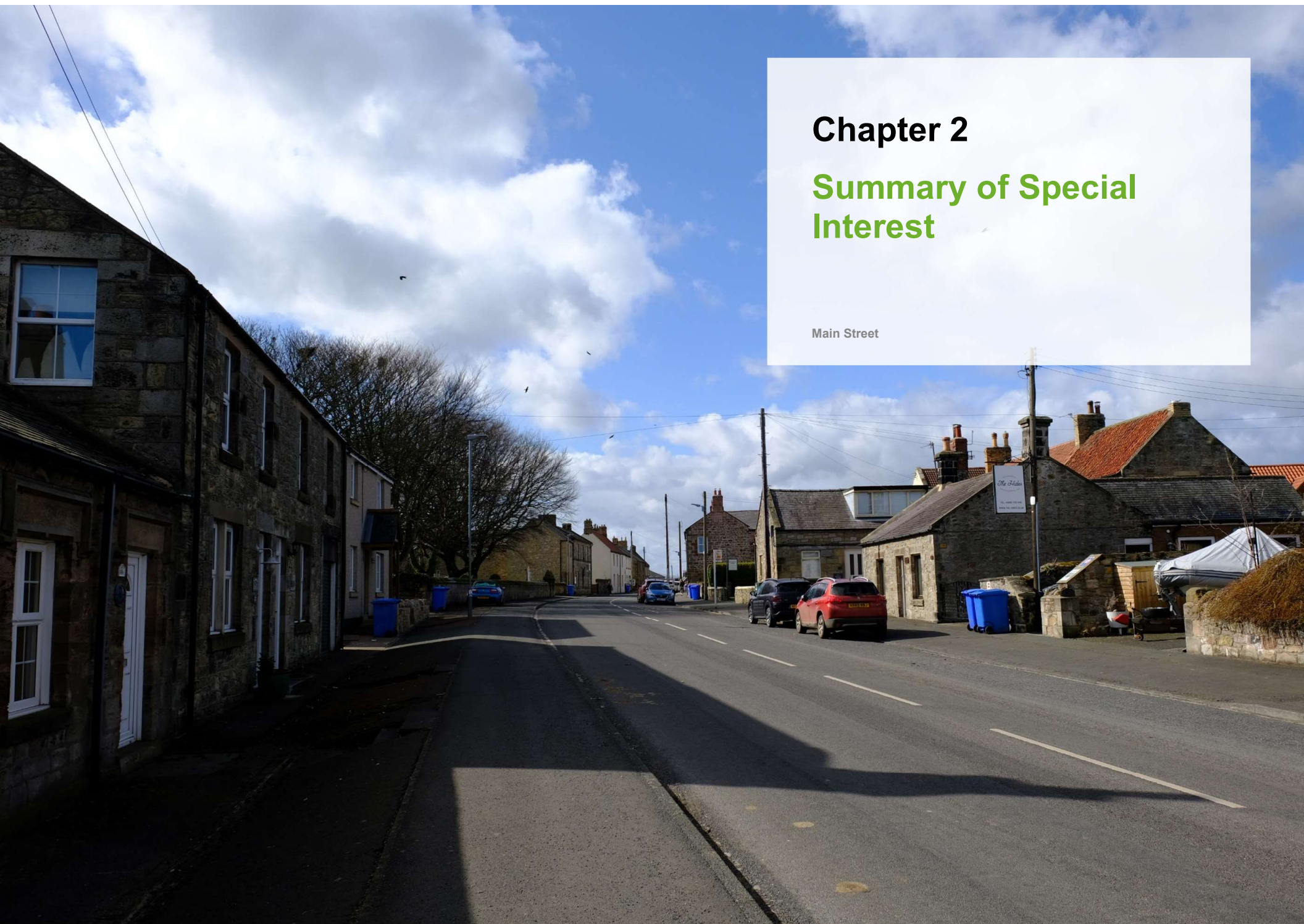
Figure 1.1: Main Street



Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

Main Street



Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

This section provides an overview of the special interest of North Sunderland Conservation Area.

Designation and appraisal

2.1 The special interest of North Sunderland and the desire to celebrate and preserve its historical importance was recognised in 2005 when the area was recommended for conservation area designation. The reasons for its designation were formalised in a Conservation Area and Character Appraisal, undertaken by Berwick Upon Tweed Borough Council. This review of the 2005 character appraisal was undertaken in 2021 by LUC and was adopted by Northumberland County Council in 2025.

Location and context

2.2 North Sunderland is a rural village which coalesces with Seahouses, a coastal village c.1km to the east. The village is predominantly residential with some holiday accommodation and small businesses.

Historical development

2.3 North Sunderland's distinctive toft structure indicates its origins as a medieval farming settlement. Its current development pattern and the majority of its buildings date from its period of growth as part of Lord Crewe's estate during the 18th and 19th centuries. Historic buildings relating to farming, grain storage, its community life of churches, schools, and a range of houses in vernacular and polite styles survive from this period.

Summary of defining characteristics of North Sunderland Conservation Area

The historic grain and structure of Main Street with tofts stretching north and south, bounded by lanes

2.4 The street-front buildings are generally sited at the back of the pavement line in irregular terraces and small groups, the pavement often very narrow, giving a dense sense of enclosure. Further development then extends north and south along the toft boundaries, at right-angles to Main Street, traditionally consisting of ancillary and agricultural buildings.

Irregular lines of development in small groups lining, and set back from, Main Street

2.5 This gives the sense of a haphazard, organic arrangement of buildings along the street. Most polite residential buildings face the street, eaves on, although there are some with gable ends facing the street, and these are more likely to be ancillary outbuildings.

Relatively subdued contribution of setting

2.6 The village context is largely agricultural, with relatively high, flat and exposed topography. Few trees and relatively ground-hugging development give it an open, quite exposed setting. South Lane forms a robust boundary between the countryside and the village.

Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

Figure 2.1: The contribution of setting



View south-west out of the conservation area at the corner of Main Street and South Lane.



View west along South Lane.

Prevailing domestic scale of buildings

2.7 The conservation area consists mainly of single-storey cottages, ancillary buildings and former agricultural structures, and two-storey houses. These vary across the conservation area but within a limited scope, which gives variety and movement to the roofline but within a small range.

Interesting range of examples of vernacular building and polite design

2.8 Buildings are generally rectangular in plan, with dual-pitched roofs and squat chimneys to gables and party walls. Front elevations and roof slopes are mostly plain.

Chapter 2

Summary of Special Interest

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

2.9 The overriding character is plain and simple; there are handsome details but nothing particularly decorative or showy. Agricultural buildings are of particular importance to the character of the village. Important evidence of past use and form often survives in the converted buildings in blocked openings, scars of lean-tos and so on.

Public spaces and landscaping are a rarity

2.10 The landscaped churchyard surrounding St Paul's Church is the only public, green space in the conservation area. Mature trees form only sporadic landmarks within the flat terrain. The public realm is relatively hard and unrelieved by gardens and green space, except for occasional front gardens and glimpses along the tofts to rear spaces.

Stone and slate are the standard building materials, with some use of pantiles

2.11 Sandstone is usually laid as coursed rubble with dressed quoins, lintels and sills, with staggered quoins being a prominent feature. Slate is the normal finish for polite, street-front buildings, pantiles are more often found to the rear in ancillary and agricultural buildings. Timber sash and case windows and panelled doors survive well.

Stone boundary walls are a strong feature of the village

2.12 These follow the structure of the tofts and lanes, and are particularly tall and prominent along South Lane, behind the church. The continuation of these boundaries out into the surrounding fields ties the village into the surrounding landscape and is a reminder of its agricultural origins.

Dynamic and glimpsed views contribute to the appreciation of the village

2.13 Movement through the village reveals the variation in roofline and building line, providing animation and interest. Gaps between the principal buildings provide glimpses into yards and gardens behind, and occasionally out to the undulating fields and horizon beyond.

Figure 2.2: North Sunderland Conservation Area word cloud



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

Chapter 3

Location and Context

Fields to the south of the village



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 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 North Sunderland that made it ripe for successful occupation.

Location

3.1 North Sunderland is a rural settlement which coalesces with Seahouses, a coastal village to the east. It is located approximately 9km to the east of the A1, with Berwick-Upon-Tweed located 29km to the north and the Cheviot Hills are approximately 24km to the west.

3.2 The village has few amenities with the exception of a church, with the majority of the area consisting of residential developments, hotels and rental cottages. Amenities are found in the neighbouring village of Seahouses.

Chapter 3

Location and Context

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

Geology and topography

3.3 The geology of the local landscape is underlain by rocks formed 350 million years ago in the Carboniferous period, which are mainly sedimentary including limestone with coal outcrops. There are a number of contemporary intrusions of igneous rocks in the Bamburgh area. To the south are deposits of alluvium formed in the glacial period. This geology has formed a distinctive local topography, with North Sunderland raised above the sea on a relatively level plateau. To the south-west is undulating arable and pasture farmland.

Figure 3.1: Boundary wall made of local sandstone



The Conservation Area Boundary

3.4 The conservation area boundary to the north of Main Street includes properties of historic and architectural interest. The boundary to the east includes the Old Police Station and old terraces to the south side of Main Street. To the south of Main Street, the conservation area includes properties of historic and architectural character, and modern houses to the south which are located on 'tofts', long narrow plots of land which are historically important features of the village. The boundary follows the south side of South Lane between the settlement and the countryside. The west boundary includes the old United Reformed Church and part of the street to the south-west of the village.

3.5 The boundary of North Sunderland Conservation Area is shown in **Figure 3.2**.

3.6 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 North Sunderland. A full list of these features is at **Appendix A**.

3.7 Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here. They include candidate Local List buildings identified in the North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2032 and further examples identified through survey work for this appraisal. 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.

3.8 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>.

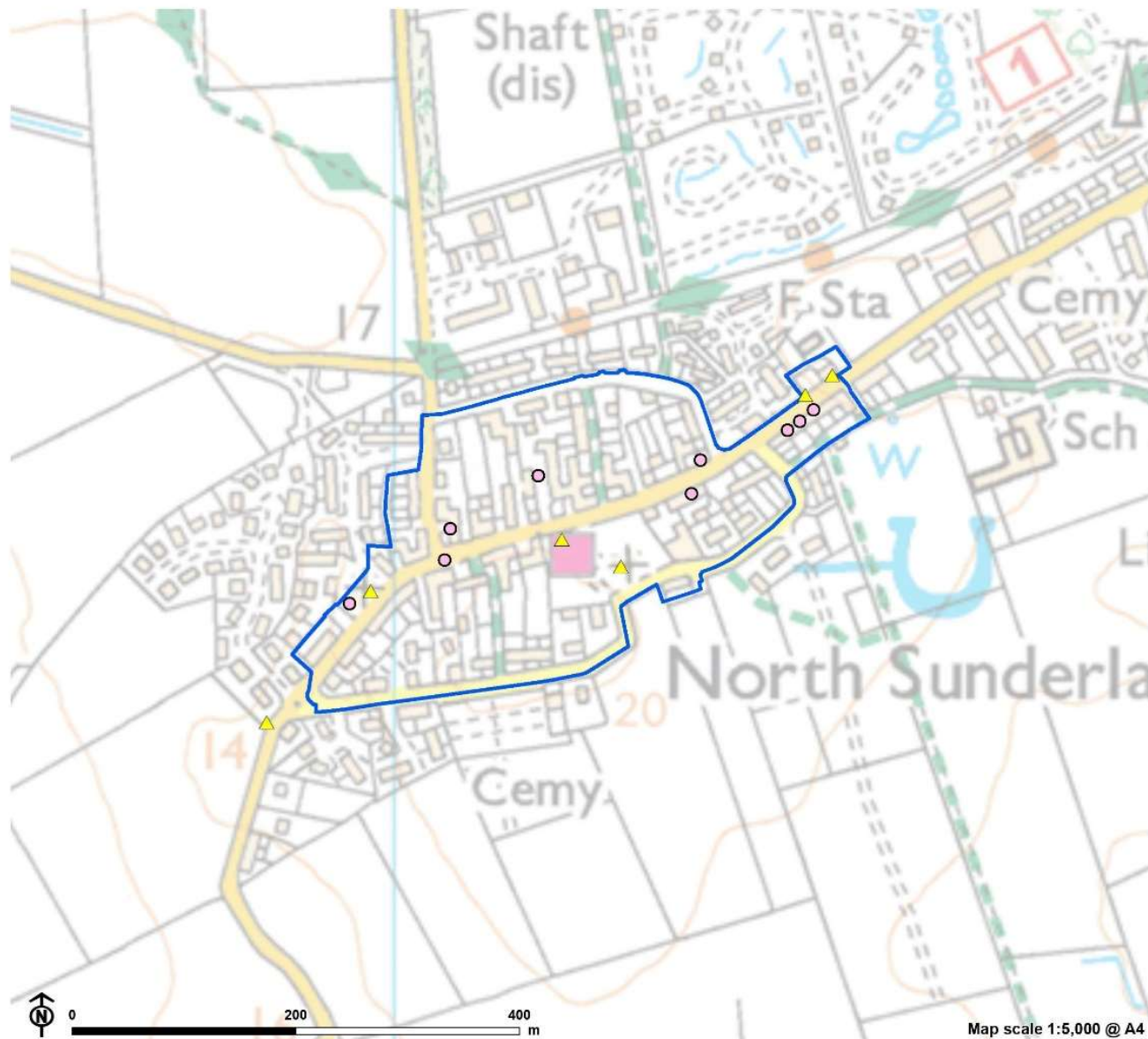


Figure 3.2: North Sunderland Conservation Area and features of interest

North Sunderland Conservation Area

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

The Historical Development of North Sunderland

North Sunderland church from the north east



Chapter 4

The Historical Development of North Sunderland

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

Prehistory to medieval

4.1 North Sunderland developed as a farming settlement on fertile land probably in the early medieval or medieval period. The distinctive features of long plots known as 'tofts' provide evidence of these origins, however discovery of Bronze Age pots here may indicate evidence of much earlier prehistoric habitation. The tofts extend north and south of Main Street and are particularly pronounced on the south side. They belonged to the properties fronting Main Street and worked like a smallholding, serving a cottage. It is possible that the land beyond the back lanes was also originally in the strip field system of farming, this pattern having been common from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards through the medieval period, with some field alignments and boundaries preserved into the present day.

Post-medieval

4.2 North Sunderland is a much earlier settlement than Seahouses. From the 18th century the village formed part of Lord Crewe's estate, along with parts of Seahouses and other land and buildings in the vicinity, within wider holdings including Bamburgh Castle and Blanchland. By

Chapter 4

The Historical Development of North Sunderland

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

1849 a large part of the village was already developed, the Estate Map of North Sunderland 1849 showing a thriving agricultural community with a full complement of services including the village farm, two churches – the former United Reformed Church built in 1810, St Paul's Anglican Church built in 1833 – and their associated manses, three schools, an inn and Railston House with its granaries on either side. A trade directory of 1841 shows the businesses operating within the village included ten shopkeepers, a baker, butcher, tailor, boot and shoemakers, cartwrights and stonemasons.

Figure 4.1: The former Presbyterian Church, Main Street



Now a dwelling, but originally a Presbyterian church, this building was in more recent years a bed and breakfast.

20th century to modern day

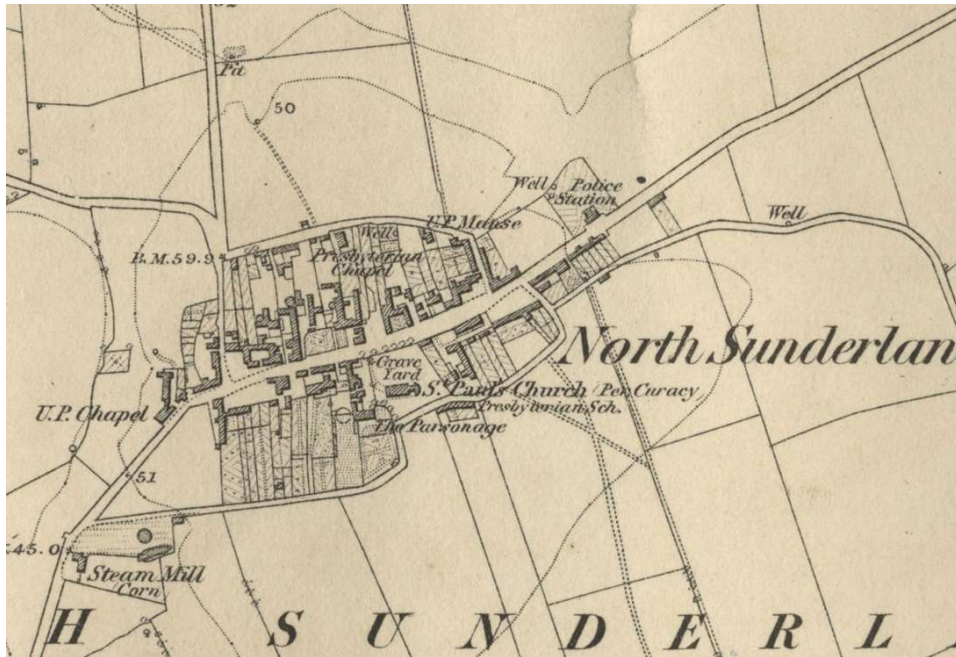
4.3 North Sunderland gradually lost its function as an active farming community during the later 20th century. The former farms within the village core are no longer worked for agricultural purposes. The village is now principally in residential use, aside from holiday accommodation, Longstone House Hotel, Lord Crewe's Hostel and several other buildings converted to B&Bs. Former farm buildings and granaries have been converted to residential use and small businesses and light industry operate within existing buildings.

Figure 4.2: Seahouses Hostel, Main Street



The Seahouses Hostel was formerly a girls' school funded by Lord Crewe's Trustees.

Figure 4.3: North Sunderland historical mapping



North Sunderland 1st edition OS, 6" to 1 mile, surveyed 1860, published 1865. Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.



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

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

Houses in 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 North Sunderland has developed around an essentially linear main route, with its core along Main Street enclosed within a wider bow shape created by North Lane and South Lane which terminate the long tofts running at right angles to the main route. Main Street contains two distinct bends, west of Broad Road and at the parish church, which allow varying perspectives of the village as one passes along it. The bends in the road combine with a slight narrowing of the carriageway which gives a 'gateway' effect and sense of entrance to the historic core of the village.

5.2 Development along Main Street forms a pattern lying parallel to the road in two main lines to north and south, one line directly fronting the street and another set back behind it. The street-front buildings are generally sited at the back of the pavement line in irregular terraces and small groups, the pavement often very narrow, giving a sense of density and enclosure. This is interspersed with ginnels accessing the tofts and backland development, and wider openings into the set-back line of development, providing breaks in the building line, interesting hints of the toft structure and glimpses of the wider setting of the village. Overall, this gives the sense of a haphazard, organic arrangement of buildings along the street line and within plots – most

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

polite residential buildings face the street, eaves on, and although there are some with gable ends facing the street, these are more likely to be ancillary outbuildings.

Figure 5.1: Development pattern: Main Street



Looking into the conservation area, with one of the principal bends of Main Street in the distance.



Linear development along Main Street within the core of the village. The buildings all face eaves on to the street.

Figure 5.2: Development pattern: North Lane



Backland and toft boundary buildings on North Lane.

5.3 Further development then extends north and south along the toft boundaries, at right-angles to Main Street, traditionally consisting of ancillary and agricultural buildings and, more recently, larger-scale residential development. As the buildings to the rear of plots have been converted and added to, new private roads have appeared. Long private gardens stretch back from Main Street, more prevalent to the south than the north, where the traditional character stems more strongly from farms, yards and working buildings.

5.4 The irregular, twisty form of South Lane adds to the strong sense of place and enclosure and forms a robust boundary at the interface between the countryside and the village. On one side is the countryside with its long straight field boundaries defined by old hawthorn hedges. On the other are high stone walls with glimpses of the church and its bellcote set in a mature landscape of overhanging trees. North Lane is also contrasting in character on its north and south sides; the south retaining substantial ranges of historic buildings including former agricultural structures, whereas its north side features more modern development of suburban character. The south side has a continuity of high walls with few openings, giving a hard edge broken only by narrow entrances, affording glimpses into the former farmyards.

Grain and density

5.5 The structure of Main Street and the tofts is still highly evident and has created a strong grain to the village, even though the dispersal of individual buildings within it gives a haphazard impression at street level. The alignment and relationship of buildings along Main Street gives a strong sense of enclosure and relative density which reduces along the tofts towards North and South Lanes before increasing again in the contrasting, suburban development pattern of the village's outer edges.

5.6 The western and eastern ends of Main Street have a more spacious character resulting from their development in the later 19th and 20th centuries. Houses are set back behind shallow front gardens and occupy rectangular plots, contrasting with the earlier toft pattern.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Figure 5.3: Varying levels of enclosure along Main Street



Each toft has been developed individually. The distances that neighbouring buildings are set back from the street is varied. Some tofts contain an outbuilding that faces gable-on to the street. These factors mean Main Street has varied levels of enclosure and the buildings can look haphazardly grouped.

Activity and movement

5.7 The village is a relatively quiet residential, agricultural and commuter centre, with a proportion of holiday accommodation. The parish church, hotel, hostel, riding school and small businesses generate activity but there is no particular focus.

Setting

5.8 The village is located on the flat plateau above the coast. Its context is agricultural, aside from where it coalesces with Seahouses to the east. This flat topography, relatively high, exposed elevation with few trees and relatively ground-hugging development give it an open, quite exposed setting. The sky and sections of the horizon are the key features visible from

within its core, aside from glimpses of the surrounding land consisting of undulating fields with hawthorn hedgerows and occasional shelterbelts of coniferous and deciduous trees.

5.9 Modern development largely encases the historic core of the village and its historic character is therefore not particularly evident when viewed from its surroundings. Views that link the area to its agricultural past and location are available at the west end of Main Street, along Broad Road, and southwards from South Lane. However, these opportunities are limited and for the most part not an influencing factor on character. The relationship with Seahouses is historically important, but is difficult to appreciate on the ground.

Figure 5.4: Setting: Osbourne Terrace



The traditional buildings of the conservation area stand opposite later suburban houses that form the immediate setting of the conservation area along Osbourne Terrace and North Lane.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Function and form

Scale and hierarchy

5.10 The prevailing scale is domestic – essentially, single-storey cottages and two-storey houses. These vary across the conservation area but within a limited scope, which gives variety and movement to the roofline but within a small range. Contrasts in storey height and use of attic half-storeys demonstrate the variations in status and original use of the buildings. The more polite and later (19th century) houses tend to be taller, the cottages and former agricultural and outbuildings generally lower.

5.11 Hierarchy is evident between and within plots. There are more polite houses with ancillary outbuildings, including attached farm buildings and linear steadings that extend in long and narrow forms behind them, most now converted to residential. However, there is no particular 'zoning' of hierarchy; there is a mix of smaller, humbler cottages and grander houses but no real segregation between them; they stand side by side throughout the area.

Figure 5.5: Building hierarchy



Different building types and scales stand side by side in North Sunderland. In this case a two storey, three bay house stands alongside what appears to have been a pair of single storey cottages.

Contribution of spaces

5.12 The landscaped churchyard surrounding St Paul's Church is the only public – and only substantial green – space in the conservation area. It therefore provides welcome relief and diversion in the streetscape, bringing in texture and movement from trees and wildlife, and a place of contemplation. The linear spaces of lanes and streets are the only other public spaces and are limited in their provision of footways or open areas to stop and spend time.

5.13 Green space and trees are remarkably lacking in the historic core of the village with substantial front gardens, such as at Longstone House Hotel, being the exception, and a few instances of grassed verges and glimpses of rear private gardens. Aside from the group within the churchyard, mature trees form only sporadic landmarks within the flat terrain. The spacious former farmyards, some now grassed over, give a surreal character to the spaces, with large-scale blank walls enclosing empty grass lawns.

Figure 5.6: Churchyard of Paul's Church



The churchyard is the principal green open space in the conservation area, and the location of many of its mature trees. It contrasts with the largely built-up character of the rest of the village centre.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Features and design

Architectural style and features

5.14 Unlike other villages in the area with spectacular settings and natural topographical interest, this conservation area is defined by its collection of buildings. It contains an interesting variety within a relatively small area and range of types, with good, vibrant examples of both vernacular building and polite design created by architects and informed owners and builders. Agricultural buildings are of particular importance to the character of the village, as they are a symbol of North Sunderland's original function as a farming community. They add their own distinctive character to the street scene with their large robust stone forms with few openings. This represents in microcosm the changes in communications spanning the 18th and 19th centuries and the re-use of older buildings as uses change.

Figure 5.7: Agricultural village architecture



The surviving farm buildings are strong reminders of past activity in North Sunderland.



Vernacular houses and cottages help give North Sunderland its rural character.

5.15 Buildings are generally rectangular in plan, with dual-pitched roofs and squat chimneys to gables and party walls. Front elevations and roof slopes are mostly plain. Protrusions such as porches, bay windows and dormers are not a characteristic feature of the historic core and tend to appear only on later 19th and 20th century villas and bungalows.

5.16 There is a scattering of other building types, which form accents rather than the prevailing character, such as the Masonic Lodge and former police station. These public or community uses tend to cluster at the east end of the village and are marked by attention to display and status in their relationship with the street, such as the use of curved wing-walls.

Figure 5.8: The former police station, Main Street



The former police station is one of a few examples of polite architecture that adds further variety to the street scene. In this case the three-bay elevation is symmetrical and is faced with smooth ashlar stonework. Its design is influenced by classical architecture.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Materials and detailing

5.17 Stone is the standard building material, sandstone of a blonde to pink tone, usually laid as coursed rubble with dressed quoins, lintels and sills. Staggered quoins to the corners of buildings and to door and window reveals are a prominent feature of many buildings, usually flush with the wall but occasionally raised with chamfered arrises (edges) and in a finer finish than the main wall material, including smooth or tooled ashlar. There is occasional use of brick and render but these are the exceptions to the prevailing character.

Figure 5.9: Typical materials and detailing



There is a hierarchy of materials in the conservation area. The gable of the main part of this house is local sandstone, the outshot and boundary wall are a different, coursed rubble and the upper storey of the outshot is rendered, a later addition.



This cottage shows many features typical to the village: coursed rubble stonework with quoins at the angles; stone tabling to the edges of the slate roof; and timber sash windows and panelled door.

5.18 Roofs are mainly in slate, varying from grey to a purple tinge, with ridge tiles of terracotta and some blue clay. Gables are often finished with raised watertabling, although there are flush gables too. There are instances of pantiles, particularly in the former agricultural ranges, visible as a clear contrast between the frontage buildings and those set back along the tofts. Some replacement of agricultural roofs in sheet materials including asbestos, corrugated iron or steel has taken place, which in themselves can be considered traditional materials, reinforcing the agricultural character of the building as long as they do not cause erosion of other historic

coverings. Timber sash and case windows and panelled doors survive well, although there have been marked levels of replacement.

5.19 The overriding character is plain and simple; there are no outstanding examples of architectural flourishes or pretensions, but some handsome examples with nicely applied, standard detailing. Use of materials and decoration generally mark the difference between polite, purpose-built houses, humbler cottages and former farm buildings. Important evidence of past use and form often survives in the converted buildings in blocked openings, scars of lean-tos and so on. Applied or borrowed details create highlights of interest: the hoodmoulds to windows in the almshouses; ventilation openings in the former grainstores; elegant classical or gothic arch-headed windows to Railston House and Lord Crewe's hostel.

Figure 5.10: Architectural detailing



In a conservation area of generally unpretentious architecture, it is the small details and embellishments that add richness to the street scene. These examples are from left to right: a hooded almshouse window; the semi-circular arched head of the main doorway (now a window) at Seahouses Hostel; the smooth squared surround of a window at the Masonic Hall.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Figure 5.11: Detailing: Former Granary



This former granary has been converted to cottages, but its original use can still be discerned. The grain was stored at first floor level away from pests and needed to be kept dry, hence the small first floor openings that would have contained vents originally for air flow. To the far left is a blocked-up loading door through which the grain was taken in or out of the loft. The sill of this door is visible between the far left window and quoins.

Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape

5.20 Stone boundary walls are a strong feature of the village, following the structure of the tofts and lanes, and are particularly tall and prominent along South Lane, behind the church. These are usually in similar stone to the walling material of the buildings but in more rugged, split rubble of varying sizes, sometimes with larger field stones incorporated into the field boundaries and 'cock-and-hen' (vertically-laid split stone) coping. The continuation of these boundaries out into the surrounding fields ties the village into the surrounding landscape and is a reminder of its agricultural origins.

5.21 Two pants, one at each end of Main Street, show the early 19th century provision of water to the village. Both have elegant square piers with pyramidal caps. Other features of note are a serpent-ended bench outside the church, and a finger post at the corner of Broad Road. Otherwise, opportunities for historic street furniture are limited by the lack of public realm.

Figure 5.12: Boundary walls and pants



The two pants (left and right photos) stand at opposite ends of the village. Their pyramidal caps are just two of many examples of this motif, which crowns gateposts across North Sunderland. These photos also hint at the variety of stone walls in the village. They vary in the shape and coursing of stonework and coping but are generally consistent in their use of local stone.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Figure 5.13: Street furniture



Traditional cast iron fingerpost.



Serpent bench, Main Street.

Views

Types of views

5.22 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 North Sunderland 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 North Sunderland Conservation Area

Static

5.23 There are no formal, set-piece views in North Sunderland but the few buildings with front elevations addressing the street in a formal manner provide opportunities for static appreciation of their effect within the street. Examples are the Masonic Lodge, the church and the former police station.

Glimpsed

5.24 These types of views are the most numerous in North Sunderland, mostly between the principal buildings into yards and gardens behind, and occasionally out to the open fields and horizon beyond. The changing colours and textures of the arable fields provide a sense of the changing seasons.

Chapter 5

Conservation Area Character Analysis

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Figure 5.14: Glimpsed views



At Village Farm there is a glimpsed view up the drive, through a flat arch to a range of old farm buildings beyond.



The village's farming past is in evidence by the glimpsed views of granaries and barns behind dwellings.

Dynamic

5.25 The experience of the conservation area is largely a dynamic one. The variation in roofline and building line provide animation and interest, concealing and then revealing buildings and details as one moves along.

Figure 5.15: Dynamic views



Interesting buildings and features enter into and recede from view as one moves around the conservation area.



Walking around the churchyard reveals interesting features from varying perspectives.

Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

Gap site at North Lane



Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

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

Management issues in North Sunderland Conservation Area

Condition and vacancy

6.1 A gap site to the west end of North Lane contains evidence of its former use and buildings in remaining walls. It is one of the few sites in the village that has not been subject to infill, but as a prime redevelopment site needs very careful management to avoid some of the inappropriate design decisions which have eroded character elsewhere – see sections below on loss and replacement of architectural details and new development and design.

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. The village contains many examples of the replacement of traditional windows, doors and rainwater goods in uPVC. In places, concrete profiled roof tiles have replaced slates or pantiles. As well as being a poor visual match for the originals, the concrete tiles are heavier and thicker and sometimes result in a distortion of the roof structure due to the additional weight. Inappropriate cement repairs and rendering to stonework have also been carried out, risking erosion and damage to stonework.

6.3 Many former farm buildings which had previously been in a neglected state have been converted to residential use. While this has prolonged the life of these structures, some of them

Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

have been highly modernised and domesticated, losing some of their detail and patina and hiding their historical use and character.

6.4 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

6.5 Most of the street floorscape is tarmac with predominately concrete kerbstones, although a few original stone kerbs are still in situ. Some tracks are covered with broken stone or gravel and there may be vestiges of historic surfacing to yards or ginnels surviving in places, hidden below modern surfacing.

6.6 The increase in vehicular traffic over the years has resulted in the erosion of the visual quality of the streetscape in North Sunderland by the intrusion of parked cars. Verges and sections of the tofts are often hard-surfaced for parking and such use risks the erosion of the historic grain and character.

6.7 Overhead wiring is prominent in the village, emphasised by the flat, open quality of the setting and the prominence of the sky and has been noted as a priority for action, subject to the views of the local community.

Figure 6.1: Public realm



The dominance of overhead wires (left) in some parts of the conservation area, and the expanses of tarmac in other parts undermines the traditional village character of North Sunderland. A higher quality public realm would strengthen the area's sense of place.

Figure 6.2: Features and details of domestic buildings



An Article 4 Direction could protect the small features and details that contribute to the area's character.

Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

New development and design

6.8 Modern development to the north of North Lane, or behind St. Cuthbert's House, for example, is of a suburban character forming an uneasy relationship to the adjacent traditional forms and structure of the conservation area. New access roads inserted into the historic grain of the tofts has eroded their form and character. Similarly, large, detached, 'executive home' style new-builds at the edges of the village are at odds with the character of its core.

6.9 These examples quote traditional design details such as the use of stone and slate, porches and sash and case windows, but these are not applied in a way which relates meaningfully to the character of North Sunderland. The siting, deep footprint and substantial massing used in these developments 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 AONB Design Guide, would help similar developments reinforce the special character of the village in future.

6.10 Care and attention to detail is needed in the conversion of older, particularly non-residential buildings – there may still be examples of former agricultural buildings which are in need of a viable and appropriate new use to help secure their future. However it is important that any change of use or alteration ensures that the historic and architectural character of the building and the conservation area are retained. As an example, the conversion of former granaries adjacent to Railston House has retained the detailing of loft openings, including a surviving ventilation grille at 129 Main Street, allowing their former use and the detailed character this brings to remain evident and continue to contribute to the conservation area.

Figure 6.3: Vernacular farm building



The traditional character and materials of a redundant or underused traditional building should be a springboard to creative, locally distinctive design in its conversion to a viable new use. This way new development can retain what is special about the conservation area.

Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

North Sunderland Conservation Area

January 2022

Figure 6.4: Former granary, Main Street



The ventilation grille detail at first floor has been retained in the conversion of this building from granary to dwelling. This retains the meaning and character of the building's former use and protects the historic character of the conservation area.

Recommendations and opportunities for enhancement

Recommendation 1

6.11 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 North Sunderland 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

6.12 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. Guidance for conversion of agricultural buildings would help stem the erosion of character resulting from overly-domestic design approaches. This would complement and enrich area-wide design guidance in the *Northumberland Coast AONB Design Guide for Built Development*.

Chapter 6

Management Recommendations

North Sunderland Conservation Area
January 2022

Recommendation 3

6.13 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

6.14 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 North Sunderland.

A.2 Those examples which make a particularly strong contribution have been identified here. They include candidate Local List buildings identified in the North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2032 and further examples identified through survey work for this appraisal. 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.

A.3 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>.

- Two-storey granary, Main St
- Former farm buildings, Main St
- Railston House, Main St
- Three-storey granary, Main St
- Row of estate cottages, Main St
- Finger post
- Primitive chapel manse
- Corner row of properties, now hotel
- Victorian detached property, Main St
- Village Farm