

# Seahouses Conservation Area Character Appraisal

January 2025



## Northumberland Coast AONB

# Seahouses Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

### Final report

Prepared by LUC  
January 2022



## Northumberland Coast AONB

### Seahouses Conservation Area

#### Character Appraisal and Management Recommendations

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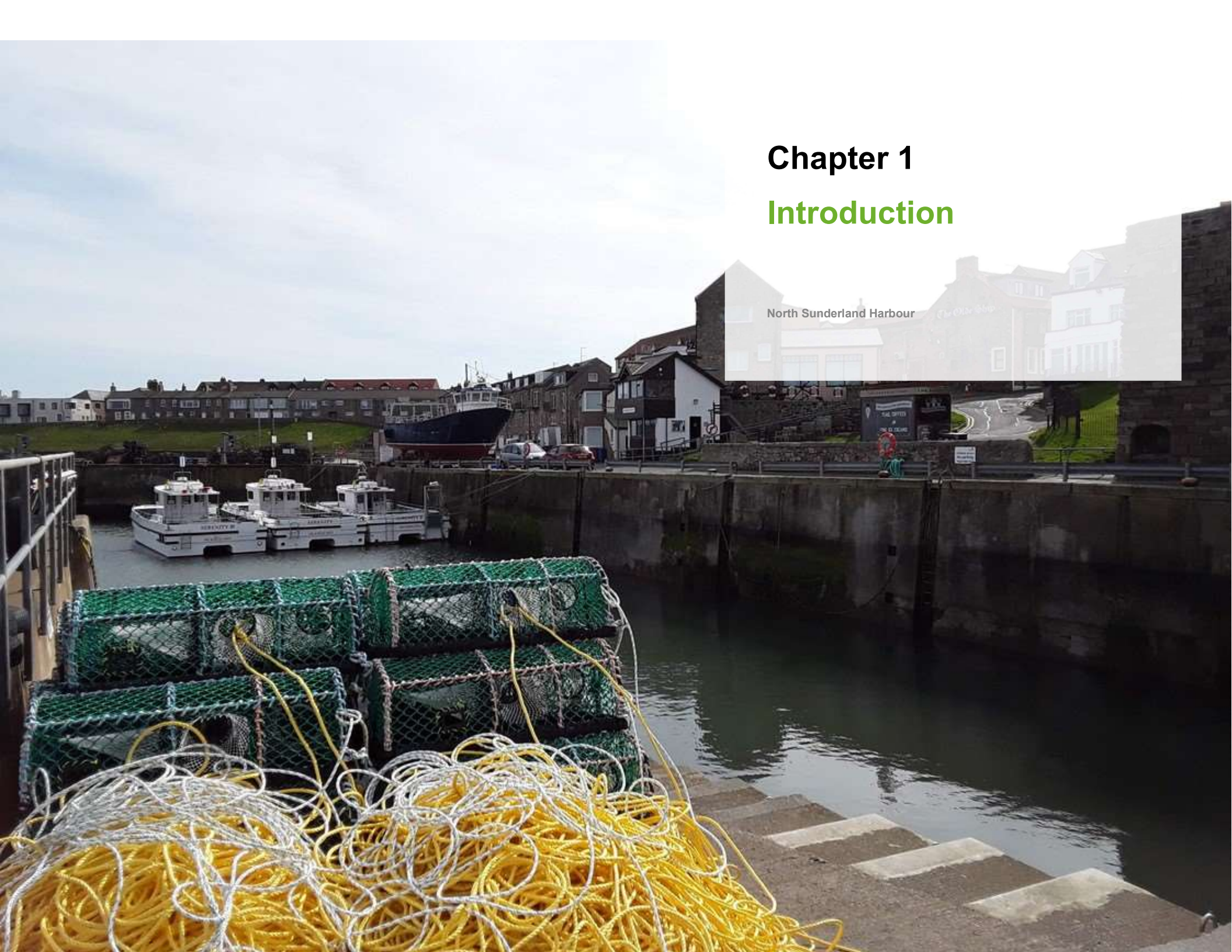
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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

North Sunderland Harbour



## Introduction

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

### What is a conservation area?

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

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

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

## Conservation area designation and appraisal

**1.3** The special interest of Seahouses 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'<sup>2</sup>, but, more than that, a conservation area appraisal is a tool to help people understand what is important about a place and manage change within it.

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

- For the demolition of any building within the conservation area;
- Control over partial demolition;
- Control over works to trees;
- Limited permitted development rights;
- The option to use Article 4 directions to further restrict specific permitted development rights; and
- Limitations on the type of advertisements that do not require consent.

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

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

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

## What should the appraisal be used for?

### Planning for change

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

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

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

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

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

### Supporting good design

**1.10** In presenting a sound understanding of character, a conservation area appraisal can be used to assess how well new development responds to the character of Seahouses, 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

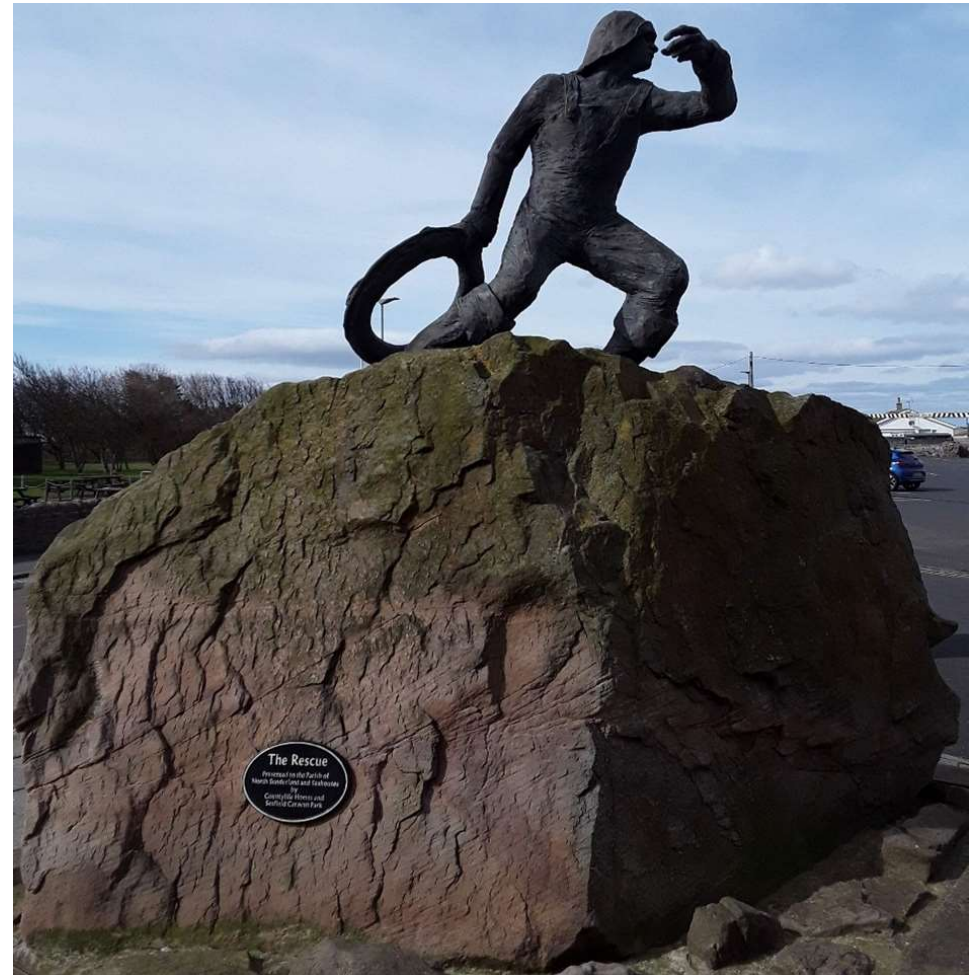
**1.11** As publicly accessible documents, available as a source of information for anyone interested, one of the principal aims of conservation area appraisals is to widen appreciation of the special interest of each area and raise awareness of why they are protected. Achieving this outcome is fundamental 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 Seahouses 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.

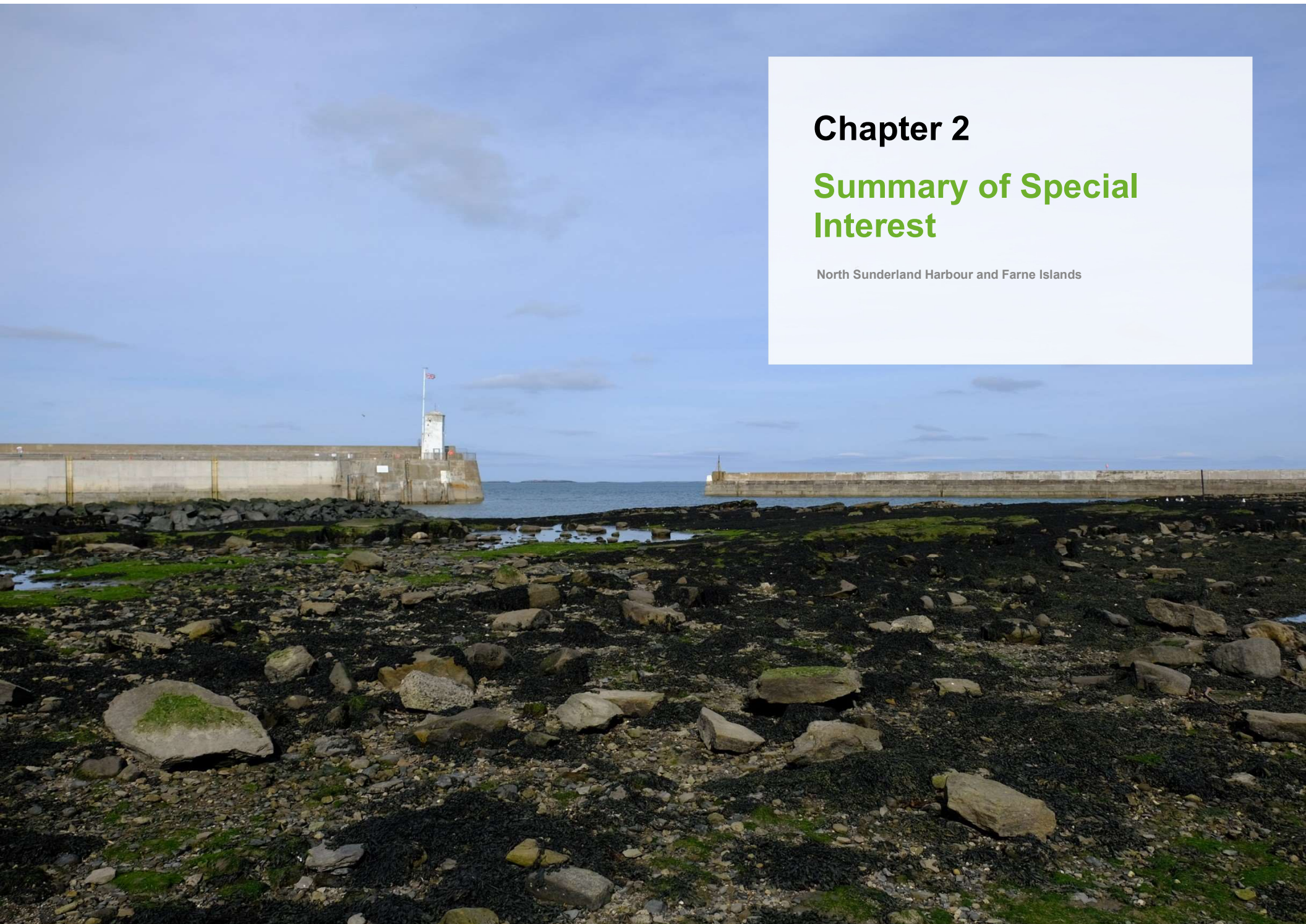
Figure 1.1: 'The Rescue' public art



## Chapter 2

# Summary of Special Interest

North Sunderland Harbour and Farne Islands



## Summary of Special Interest

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

### Designation and appraisal

**2.1** The special interest of Seahouses 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** Seahouses is a coastal settlement which coalesces with North Sunderland, a small village to the west. 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. The surrounding local topography is fairly flat, with Seahouses raised slightly above the sea, while further inland, beyond North Sunderland to the south-west, is undulating arable and pasture farmland.

### Historical development

**2.3** Seahouses developed as a village in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the earliest extant buildings being the old cottages adjoining the Harbour Master's office – known as North Sunderland Seahouses – which were in existence by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Fishing had traditionally been an important part of the local economy, peaking in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of the herring industry. Fishermen's cottages, smokeries and enclosed yards were built all

around the old harbour, which was itself rebuilt in 1886 to accommodate the rapidly expanding fleet.

**2.4** The railway arrived in 1898, initially to transport fish inland to market but later contributing to the development of a burgeoning tourist trade. The herring industry went into decline after the Second World War, and in 1951 the station closed. The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw new housing and extensive caravan parks envelop much of the historic core, coalescing Seahouses with North Sunderland and introducing a distinct suburban character to the area.

### Summary of defining characteristics of Seahouses Conservation Area

**2.5** The context and historical development of Seahouses is unique to the village, and it is from this that it draws its individual character. This strong sense of place comes from many facets, but the following characteristics are of particular importance to the character and appearance of Seahouses:

#### Historic form and layout

**2.6** The layout of the village is strongly influenced by the location of the historic harbour. The main streets follow a linear form, running north-east to south-west, reaching back from the harbour. These are interlinked with secondary roads, lanes or alleys/ginnels running north-west to south-east to form a splayed grid iron layout. The village core is tightly grained, with narrow streets creating a feeling of enclosure, especially in the former industrial area to the south-east of the harbour. Between the beach, harbour and village there is a distinct change in levels, creating both depth and interest.

#### Spectacular views of Holy Island, Bamburgh and the Farne Islands

**2.7** Views north-west to Holy Island and Bamburgh, and north to the Farne Islands, are truly beautiful, especially at sunset. As well as their aesthetic appeal, these provide orientation and serve as a reminder of the depth of history and the interconnected narrative that runs along the north-east coast. Views towards Seahouses from the beach to the north-west give a sense of its form, massing and relationship to the sea.

**Figure 2.1: North Sunderland Beach and Bamburgh Castle**



Whilst Seahouses has a busy harbour used by fishing boats and boat tours, the coastline to the immediate north is sandy beach. From here there are distant views to Bamburgh Castle, in the centre of the horizon in this image.

#### The contrasting character of the harbour and Main Street

**2.8** Seahouses has two main focuses of activity: Main Street and the harbour. Main Street is a key route for both pedestrians and traffic, and the location for the majority of shops and food and drink venues, catering for both tourists and locals. The harbour is quite different in character and remains a working fishing port, with moored fishing vessels, stacked lobster pots and the constant caw of gulls. Boat trips for tourists, mainly to the Farne islands, means the area is always busy, especially throughout the summer.

## 0

### Summary of Special Interest

Seahouses Conservation Area  
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Figure 2.2: Main Street and the Harbour



The working harbour and Main Street stand side by side and are the main focuses of activity in Seahouses.

### Combination of traditional vernacular and industrial buildings

**2.9** Seahouses' traditional buildings are generally small in scale, both in height and footprint. Hierarchy of plot and form survive, with the preservation of more humble and functional outbuildings to the rear of plots, as well as larger, street frontage properties. Views through to these back-of-plot buildings creates an attractive depth and perspective to the street, as well as animation and intrigue.

**2.10** Much of the village's visual appeal comes from the almost ubiquitous use of local sandstone that varies naturally in tone from grey, cream and yellow ochre to pink and purple. Render is also widely used to protect stone from the elements and give a cleaner finish. There

is little ornamentation, although projecting quoins, moulded window surrounds and roof copings add interest. Roofs are generally slate, although a few examples of terracotta pantiles survive on former industrial buildings. Chimneys survive well on houses, outbuildings and industrial buildings. There are also good surviving examples of traditional shopfronts.

**2.11** Former industrial buildings line the harbour – including a granary and limekilns – separating the domestic part of the village from its industrial waterfront. The stone segmental archways associated with the herring processing yards are particularly distinctive of the area.

### Contribution of spaces

**2.12** The principal public open space is the harbour, providing a sense of release and openness contrasting with the tight streets of the historic core. Substantial enclosed yards, once used for fish processing and the repair of nets, contribute to the character of the harbour area. Entered through archways, the yards were designed to provide shelter against the winds and gales sweeping in from the North Sea and have a strong sense of enclosure and protection.

**2.13** The grassed banks adjacent to the harbour and beach provide some public green space and there is a more formal public realm area around the war memorial, although this is undermined by visual clutter and traffic. Private space is minimal; small gardens are occasionally visible from the public realm, but are mostly hidden within blocks and back lanes. There is a marked absence of trees across the village.

**Figure 2.3: Seahouses Conservation Area word cloud**



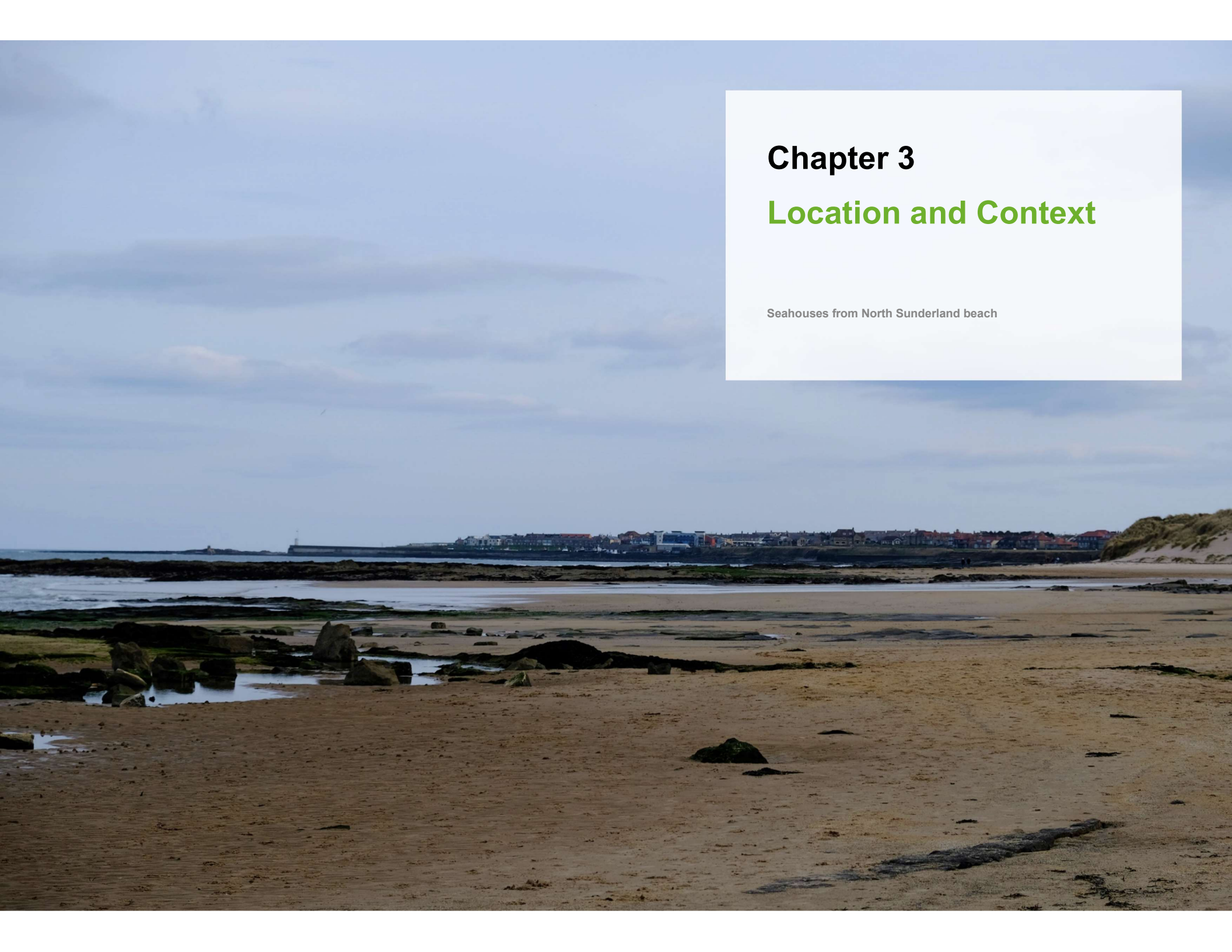
WordItOut

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

## Chapter 3

### Location and Context

Seahouses from North Sunderland beach



## 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 Seahouses that made it ripe for successful occupation.

### Location

**3.1** Seahouses is a coastal settlement which coalesces with North Sunderland, a small village to the west. 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 settlement has a range of amenities including a bank, supermarket, tourist accommodation, and tourist-focused businesses.

## Geology and topography

**3.3** The underlying geology of the local landscape is mainly limestone with coal outcrops formed approximately 300 million years ago in the Carboniferous period. There are contemporary intrusions of igneous rocks in the Bamburgh area. The intrusion also forms the Farne Islands. To the south are deposits of alluvium, formed in the glacial period. There are more recent postglacial areas of blown sand forming distinctive sand dunes on the seashore. This geology has formed a fairly flat local topography, with Seahouses raised slightly above the sea. Inland, beyond North Sunderland to the south-west, is undulating arable and pasture farmland.

**3.4** Seahouses lies within the North Northumberland Heritage Coast and the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is part of the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for its marine habitats. The coast at Seahouses forms part of the Berwick to St Mary's inshore Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar site for its ornithological interest. These designations emphasise the importance of the locale of Seahouses, not only because of its landscape value but also because of the outstanding natural environment.

## The Conservation Area boundary

**3.5** The conservation area boundary to the north-east includes the historic harbour and environs. To the south-east the area encompasses a group of streets that were the focus for the former herring processing industry, including George Street, South Street, Union Street, Taylor Street, North Street. To the south-west, the conservation area excludes Crumstone, Mayfield and the modern development to the west, and to the north-west the boundary is delineated by the edge of the settlement, including properties on Main Street and Seafield Road.

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

**3.8** 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.

**3.9** 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 3.1: The Powder House, Pace Hill**



The Powder House is one of the listed buildings in the conservation area. It was built in 1886 to store explosives used in the construction of the long pier and new harbour. It is made of the same sandstone as the rocky outcrop it stands upon.

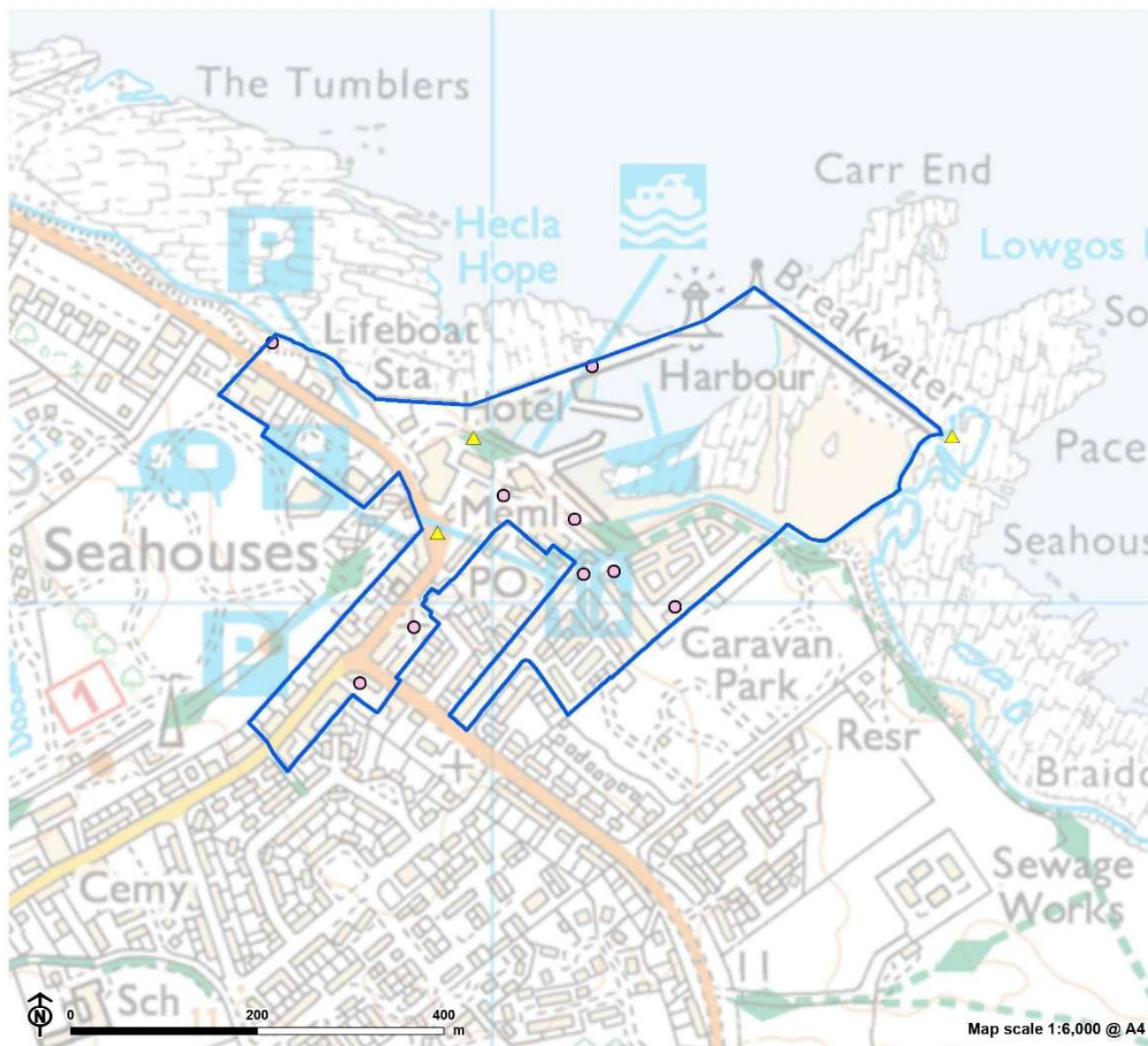


Figure 3.2: Seahouses Conservation Area and features of interest

- Seahouses 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.

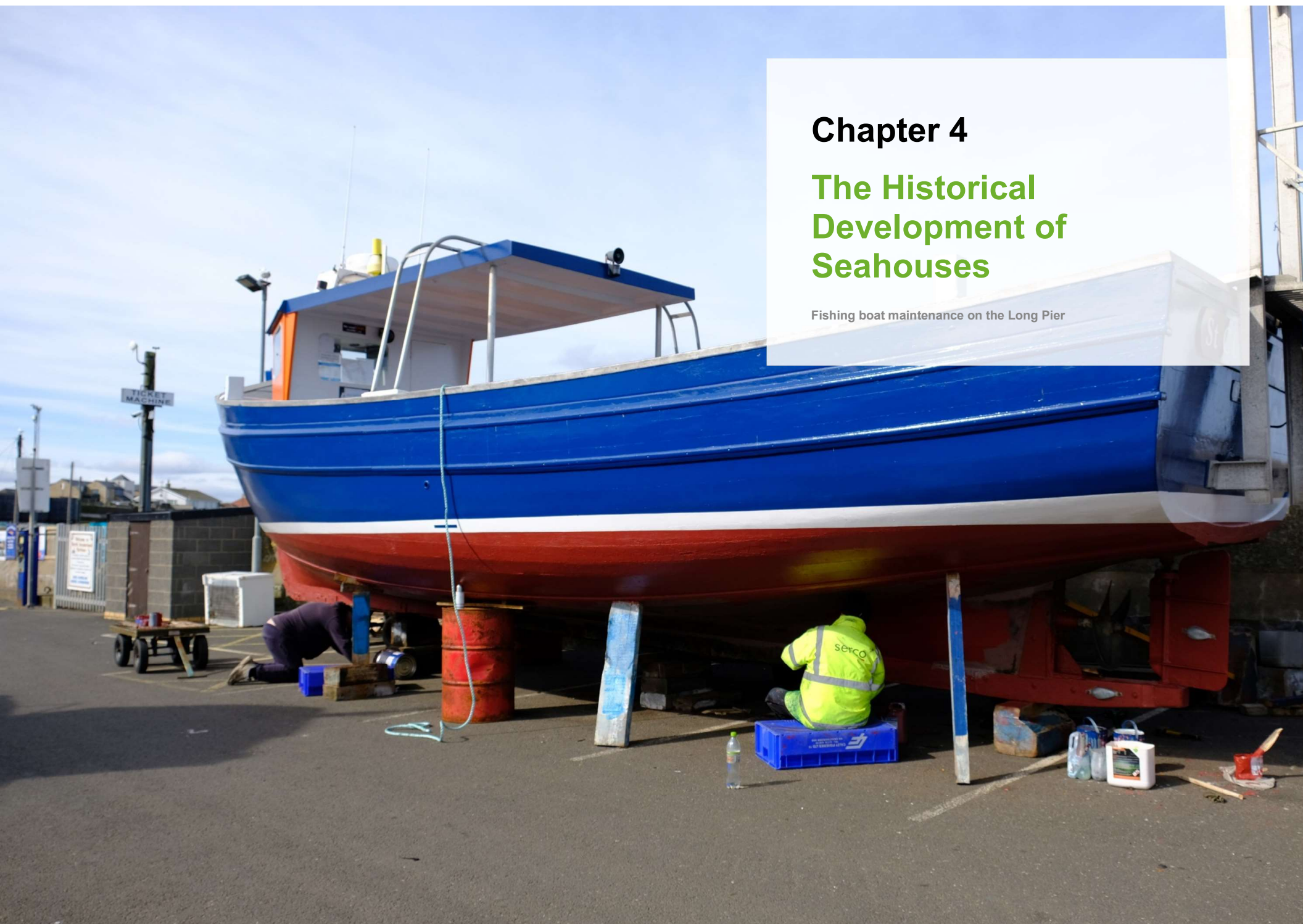
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Source: OS, NCC

## Chapter 4

# The Historical Development of Seahouses

Fishing boat maintenance on the Long Pier



## The Historical Development of Seahouses

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

**4.1** References to cists and an urn found during excavations of the reservoir are noted on the 1920s Ordnance Survey map of Seahouses, indicating early human activity in the area. However, the earliest extant buildings are old cottages adjoining the Harbour Master's office, known as North Sunderland Seahouses, which were in existence by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

**4.2** Seahouses developed as a village in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, resulting mainly from the lime burning industry in this period. The lime was transported from quarries in the south, delivered direct to lime kilns in the village and burnt by coal taken from pits to the north of Seahouses. The finished product was transported by ship from the harbour, which was built for this purpose, then on to Scotland for agricultural land improvements. Evidence of this trade can still be seen in the extant old limekilns located by the harbour, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which became redundant in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century on the decline of the industry.

**4.3** The grain trade also played an important part in the prosperity of Seahouses in the early- to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of its harbours and the construction of granaries which can still be seen adjoining the harbour, now converted to holiday homes.

**4.4** The presence of a good natural harbour used for centuries by local fishermen, and later by the herring industry, brought further prosperity to Seahouses. A new harbour was built in 1886 to allow for the great expansion of fishing which had become its main source of income. The

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population of Seahouses grew to 1000 people by 1846 reflecting this rapid expansion. Fishermen's cottages, smokeries and enclosed yards were developed by the 1860s as part of this growth. The herring industry subsequently declined after the Second World War. However, most of this development remains intact today, mostly converted for residential use, apart from the notable exception of 'Swallows Fish Smokery' on South Street which is still functioning.

**4.5** Of particular interest is the history of the lifeboat station, which is now a modern brick building constructed in 1991. There has however been a lifeboat station in Seahouses since 1827.

**4.6** The railway came to Seahouses in 1898, reflecting the great prosperity that the herring fleets brought to the area and contributing significantly to the development of the tourist trade. The line subsequently closed in 1951 and the station is now the site of a car park.

**4.7** The 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion of Seahouses for housing and extensive caravan sites has enveloped the historic core, coalescing with North Sunderland and introducing a suburban character to the village.

Figure 4.1: Lime kilns and smokehouse



Limestone was burnt in these kilns to produce lime suitable for improving soil conditions. The processed lime was loaded straight onto boats.



Swallow Fish Smokehouse is the only remaining active fish smokery in the conservation area.

Figure 4.2: Village centre shopfronts



The growing fishing industry and the boom in tourism brought by the railway saw the centre of Seahouses expand in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide a range of shops and services for locals and visitors.

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**Figure 4.3: Seahouses historical mapping**



Seahouses 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS, 6" to 1 mile, surveyed 1860, published 1865. Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.

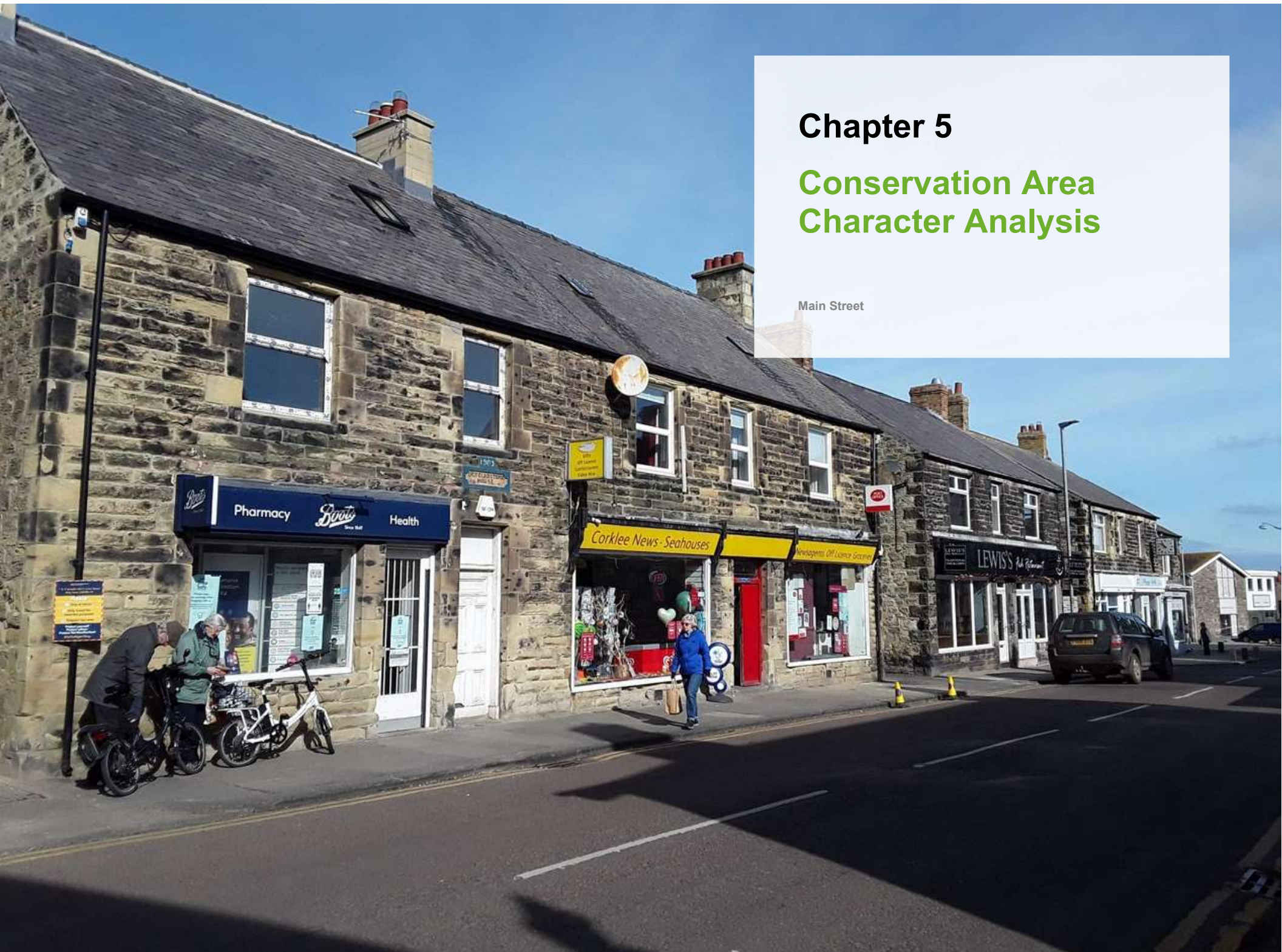


OS 1:10,000, published 1957. Supplied courtesy of Northumberland Archives.

## Chapter 5

### Conservation Area Character Analysis

Main Street



## 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** The main streets of the village follow a linear form, running north-east to south-west, reaching back from the harbour. These streets are interlinked with secondary roads, lanes or alleys/ginnels running north-west to south-east, forming a splayed grid iron layout with its shape influenced by the form of the original natural harbour. This structure creates a permeable character to the street form, breaking the built-up area down into smaller perimeter blocks and creating intimate, short-range views terminated by buildings on adjacent streets. There is a dense sense of enclosure and a sense of the organic growth of the village, with each building or plot responding to its foregoing neighbour rather than to a formal, overall plan.

**5.2** The substantial change in level between the beach, the harbour and the village, and their largely horizontal forms, create a distinctive, layered series of building planes stepping up from the beach. This change in level is defined to the west by two distinct levels of building rising up the slope, and to the east by a grassy, steeply sloping bank. Stepped lanes provide distinctive pedestrian access between the upper and lower levels.

Figure 5.1: Development pattern and layout



South Street is a narrow side street off Harbour Road. It has the short-range views that typify the densely built-up core of the village.



This narrow stepped lane from Harbour Road up to Chapel Row emphasises the dramatic change in level between the harbour and the heart of the village.

### Grain and density

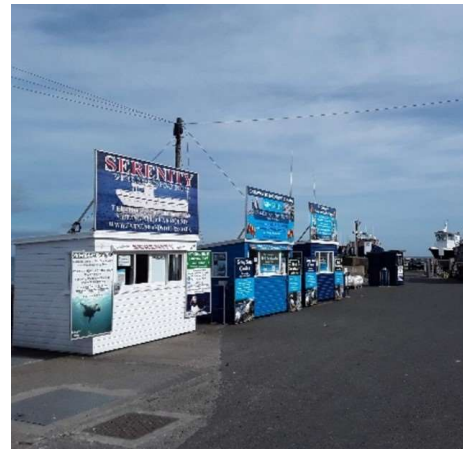
**5.3** The village core is noticeably tightly-grained, with narrow streets and buildings set at the back of the pavement creating a feeling of enclosure. This tight grain and the small scale of its constituent buildings give the feeling of the village huddling tightly into the land at the edge of the coast, forming its own shelter. The grain is tighter towards the harbour along the older streets, opening up further away from the shore and at the harbour itself.

### Activity and movement

**5.4** Seahouses has two main focuses of activity: Main Street and the harbour. Main Street is a key route for both pedestrians and traffic, and the location for the majority of shops and food and drink venues. These cater for both tourists and locals, including independent suppliers and national chains. The harbour is still a working harbour for fishing, with stacked crab pots a tell-tale feature in daily use, and has diversified into boat trips for tourists, mainly to the Farne Islands. The kipper smokery adds to the unique qualities of this part of the village, and has done so since its establishment in 1843. Key non-visual elements of the identity of Seahouses relate to harbour uses and character: the smells of the harbour, smokery and fish and chip shops; the salty sea breeze; the sound of seagulls.

**5.5** The character and level of activity changes markedly as one steps away from Main Street, to quiet, residential streets. The high proportion of holiday lets creates a particularly quiet atmosphere outside of the visitor season.

Figure 5.2: Harbour activity



The ticket cabins for boat tours are busy during the holiday season, but add colour year-round.



Stacks of fishing pots and rolled up nets are common sights at the harbour, which remains a working fishing port.

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## Setting

**5.6** Setting does not play a strong role within the core of the town as views out are highly limited. At the edges and from the harbour however, the sea and the coast come into view, contributing enormously to character both in an aesthetic sense and in illustrating their crucial historical and current role in the village's existence. Some appreciation of the inland landscape is available at points with isolated tree groups and shelterbelts drawing attention to the windswept flat landscape, exposed to the vagaries of the North Sea weather.

Figure 5.3: View north to Bamburgh



Bamburgh Castle can be seen from various locations in Seahouses and is a key feature of the horizon when looking north out of the conservation area.

Figure 5.4: View of Seahouses from North Sunderland Beach



The flat inland landscape, holiday parks and later expansion of Seahouses/North Sunderland mean that views into the conservation area are limited to the attractive views such as this one from along the coast.

**5.7** Views of Holy Island, Bamburgh and the Farne Islands appear, often unexpectedly, and are a truly beautiful sight, as well as providing orientation and a reminder of the depth of history and interconnected story that runs along the whole of the north-east coast. Views of Seahouses from the beach to the north give a sense of its form, massing and its relationship to the sea. However, from most viewpoints outside the village the historic core of the conservation area is masked by its later residential expansion.

## Function and form

### Scale and hierarchy

**5.8** Seahouses' traditional buildings are generally small in scale, both in height and footprint. Hierarchy is visible across plots – there is a good level of survival of rear outbuildings with a more humble and functional character than the frontage buildings. Views through to them between buildings creates an attractive depth and perspective to the street, as well as animation and intrigue.

**5.9** Some of the taller, larger-footprint traditional buildings are the former industrial buildings lining the harbour – the former granary, now converted to flats, and the limekilns – which form a perforated wall of enclosure behind the harbour wall and separate the domestic part of the village from its industrial waterfront.

Figure 5.5: Buildings and structures enclosing the harbour



The long row of former granaries (now converted to houses) forms a screen between the harbour and the rest of the village.



The former lime kilns perform a similar visual function as the granaries: their height and mass screen the harbour from the village.

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**5.10** Buildings with other functions such as religious or public uses, such as the Methodist Chapel or Art Deco roadhouse at Main Street/King Street, are relatively low-profile in the street and do not create a particular contrast or landmark. The lighthouse and Powder Store at the harbour are also relatively small-scale but act as eye-catchers because of their vertical emphasis in an otherwise almost exclusively horizontal landscape.

**Figure 5.6: The contribution of outbuildings**



Frequently of smaller height, footprint and scale than their parent buildings, the survival of outbuildings and ancillary structures add to the grain and visual interest of the conservation area. The barn-like boathouse on the left for example, is prominent and faces gable-on to the street. The outbuilding on the right by contrast is only glimpsed in the gap between neighbouring buildings.

### Contribution of spaces

**5.11** Aside from the streets themselves, the harbour area is the principal public open space of the conservation area, providing a sense of release and openness as one emerges from the tight streets of the historic core. This also provides some public green space in the grassed banks adjacent to the harbour and beach. There is a more formal area of public realm around the war memorial but this is undermined by visual clutter and traffic. Seafeld Park provides a public amenity space of municipal character.

**5.12** Substantial enclosed yards which were used for fish processing and the repair of nets contribute to the character of the harbour area, with examples at Sunnyside Square, Braidstone Square and Craster Square (formerly called yards). Entered through archways under the sheds, the yards have a strong geometry and were well designed for their function, giving enclosure and shelter against the winds and gales sweeping in from the North Sea.

**5.13** Private space is minimal; small gardens are occasionally visible from the public realm, but are mostly hidden within blocks and back lanes.

**5.14** The conservation area is notable for its lack of trees. The only examples are in Seafeld Park. The distinctive form and ruggedness of the dunes make a contribution at the edges of the conservation area and help to alleviate the hard urban form of its core.

**Figure 5.7: North Street**



North Street is an intimate street space. It is well enclosed by a mixture of buildings, outbuildings and high boundary walls. The tiny glimpse of the sea offers the slightest hint of the expansive views that open up over the harbour.

Figure 5.8: Enclosed yards



Enclosed yards shared by several cottages provided sheltered outdoor space from the onshore winds. These two examples, both off South Street, have broad arched entrances.

Figure 5.9: Panorama over the harbour



The openness of the harbour with its expanse of water, mud and beach bounded in places by steep grassed banks contrasts strongly with the densely built-up part of the village, which has enclosed, intimate spaces.

Figure 5.10: Corner of Union Street and North Street



Two storey stone buildings with dual pitched roofs that face eaves-on to the street are typical of the conservation area and give its streets a strongly unified character.

## Features and design

### Architectural style and features

**5.15** Seahouses' character is not particularly defined by individual buildings; it is their ensemble value within the village's distinctive form and structure that is notable, rather than any one outstanding building group or type. Most buildings in the village are domestic in origin, even where there was originally industrial, retail or commercial use at the ground floor. Buildings are mainly two storey, rectangular in plan, arranged in irregular terraced groups, with dual-pitched roofs eaves-on to the street.

**5.16** The majority of Seahouses' traditional buildings are vernacular and modest, with very few larger, showier or more polite examples. Public houses are the biggest of the historic buildings aside from the Methodist Church in Main Street. The conservation area is relatively homogeneous in its vernacular character, retaining its identity as a working seaside village. The suburb of St Aidan's, outside the conservation area and along the coast to the north, was the location of Seahouses' earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century villa expansion.

**5.17** There are some examples of historic dormer or oriel windows which add variety and modelling to the roofline, although these act as points of contrast rather than the prevailing character.

**5.18** There is also a range of other structures associated with the local economy – the harbour office, lifeboat station and the lime kilns around the harbour, for instance. These contribute to character through their use/activity and as individual features of note, rather than forming the prevailing style, scale or appearance.

Figure 5.11: Repurposed building



The added brick chimneys, former loading door aperture in the gable at first floor, small first floor windows (possibly former vents) and later openings at ground floor all point to this building near the harbour being a former granary prior to its conversion to a pair of cottages.

### Materials and detailing

**5.19** The use of materials accords with the modest vernacular style of the buildings. Much of the village's visual appeal comes from the almost ubiquitous use of local sandstone among the traditional buildings, used in the form of random rubble. This varies naturally in tone from grey, cream and yellow ochre to pink and purple and has weathered in an individual way from building to building. Render is also used, most probably to protect stone from the elements and give a cleaner finish. There is little stone ornamentation but projecting quoins, moulded window surrounds (straight-edged and also 'long and short') and plain copings to gables add interest to façades. There are a handful of more decorative examples such as on Main Street with curved brackets supporting stone door heads, and carved detail on the Methodist Chapel including stone urns. The stone segmental archways giving access to the herring processing yards are particularly distinctive of the area.

Figure 5.12: Ornamentation to openings



From left to right: rendered 'long and short' quoins to a window; projecting straight edged window surround; and, 'long and short' stonework to the door jambs picked out in render to emphasise them and give clean angles. These projecting reveals to openings all infer that the irregular stonework of the walling was historically limewashed or rendered.

**5.20** Roofs are overwhelmingly in slate; alternatives such as red clay tiles are usually on later buildings, or replacements which do not contribute to character. A few examples of terracotta pantiles survive on former industrial buildings. Chimneys survive well on houses, outbuildings and industrial buildings. There are also good surviving examples of traditional shopfronts or original pilasters with curved brackets supporting fascias indicating where older shopfronts once stood.

Figure 5.13: Double shopfront



The traditional shopfronts add substantially to the overall character of the commercial centre of Seahouses.

**5.21** Changes and modifications to stonework over the years helps to indicate the buildings' original function, particularly those formerly used for the herring industry. Examples are the infilling of former large openings low in the walls around the yards, which were used to receive the herring into the processing sheds, tipped from carts. There are also small, rectangular openings, now blocked in, just below eaves level, formerly used for ventilating herring smokeries.

### Boundary treatments, street furniture and floorscape

**5.22** There is little survival of historic street surfacing; a few whin kerbstones and Scoria setts<sup>5</sup>, and possible survival of fragments of stone paving such as in Taylor Street, consisting of embedded small narrow stones on their edges (sometimes known as 'horrification') defining a drainage channel and demarcation of the road from the pavement.

**5.23** There is some original floorscape detail of particular interest in some of the enclosed yards adjoining South Street formerly used for herring processing and net repair, but much has been eroded and lost. This originally consisted of a surface of tightly packed random shaped, flat stones with squared larger stones defining the tracks formerly used by carts. The surface has been partly replaced by gravel adjoining new development and in refurbishment schemes.

Figure 5.14: Traditional highway and floorscape surfaces



Traditional highway and floorscape surfaces are present, but rare in the conservation area. From left to right: Scoria setts, stone kerbs with setted channel, setted yard.

**5.24** Particularly distinctive are the occasional stone tightly-curved boundary walls with half round copings, which form termination features at the end of terraces. These sometimes define a steep curve and bend in the carriageway at road junctions, giving a 'ball and socket' effect visually linking one street to another.

## Views

### Types of views

**5.25** 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 Seahouses 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 Seahouses Conservation Area

#### Static

**5.26** There are no formal, designed views in Seahouses. The narrow streets reduce opportunities for fixed viewpoints of notable buildings or features but where they do occur, the subject is often viewed obliquely. There are few opportunities for views of Seahouses owing to the form of the coastline. The village is at its most prominent viewed from the sea, with its substantial harbour walls and elevated townscape surmounting the harbour.

<sup>5</sup> Scoria setts were made in Teesside during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century using the by-products of the iron smelting process to create a distinctive, hard-wearing, regular blue-grey block.

Figure 5.15: The built-up core of Seahouses as seen from the long pier



The compact fishing village of Seahouses lacks any dominant buildings, or any towers, spires or factory chimneys in its skyline, though there are notable harbour structures. The charm of the townscape is in its irregularity, collections of vernacular buildings, and spaces designed for purpose and practicality without any pretensions.

### Glimpsed

**5.27** The tight, enclosed character of the historic core and its pattern of streets, side-routes and irregular gaps between buildings introduces many opportunities for short-range glimpse views of the backs of plots and sides of buildings, often stumbled upon unexpectedly as the enclosure steps back and forward.

Figure 5.16: Glimpsed view from Chapel Row



All the top of the stepped lane down to the harbour there is a brief view of the tower at the end of the pier.

### Dynamic

**5.28** Moving north through the main streets, the tight enclosure suddenly opens out to views of the harbour. Views of Holy Island, Bamburgh and the Farne Islands appear unexpectedly at

points, providing delight and orientation. From the harbour, stunning panoramic views of the sea and coast are available.

**Figure 5.17: Harbour tower and Bamburgh Castle**



There is a multitude of attractive views along the coast that incorporate near and far landmarks.

## Chapter 6

# Management Recommendations

North Sunderland Harbour and Long Pier



## Management Recommendations

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

### Management issues in Seahouses Conservation Area

#### Condition and vacancy

**6.1** Some of the sandstone has suffered considerable weathering along its bedding plane, giving an exaggerated pattern of parallel lines, where projections of harder stone stand proud of their eroded surface. This natural tendency is accelerated by the repointing of stonework with hard cement mortar, often done using the wrong kind of joint such as ribbon pointing, and the use of concrete for replacement sills or lintels. Such alterations not only erode original fabric, detail and character but will eventually damage the stonework through differential weathering.

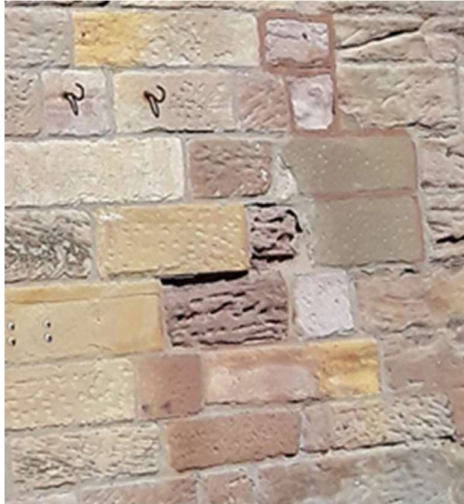
**Figure 6.1: Inappropriate mortar and pointing**



Hard cement mortar pointed in a ribbon style is aesthetically and technically incompatible with the stone.

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Figure 6.2: Accelerated stone decay and replacement



A mix of mortar types, mortar repairs and replacement stones have been used in this section of wall. The incompatibility of the materials means the two old stones in the centre continue to decay.



A period of the gutter being blocked or leaking has led to extensive frost damage and accelerated decay of the stonework below, giving the wall a pitted surface.

### Loss and replacement of architectural details

**6.2** Many buildings of Seahouses' industrial past survive, with a few still in use for fishing and processing of fish. Most, however, have been converted, becoming gentrified and domesticated, and losing important evidence of their past use and character in the process. An example is the old granary, Harbour Road.

**6.3** Seahouses has suffered considerably from loss of historic doors and windows. The occasional sash window survives, as do doors, but on the whole they have been replaced, often inappropriately with uPVC. Aperture proportions have often been changed to create wide, landscape-proportion picture windows, projecting oriels and balconies, mostly at upper storey level where there are views out to sea. These are out of character with the traditional details and proportions of the building.

**6.4** Some of the fascias and advertisements in the area are garish and out of scale with the modest size of the adjoining buildings, or create visual clutter by extending over the façades.

Figure 6.3: Loss and replacement of architectural details



The cottage on the left retains its historic window pattern, albeit with modern uPVC windows. The cottage on the right has a full-width window aperture that has significantly altered the building's character.

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### New development and design

**6.5** Much new development in and around the centre of Seahouses appears out of place because it contrasts with the small scale and tight grain of the historic core – not just tall, but large in footprint, resulting in long, flat façades, bulky massing, and overly-prominent roof/corner elements of vertical emphasis, contrasting with the historic character. Examples are the development of flats at the corner of Seafield Road and Harbour Road, and ‘The Bunker’ children’s play centre opposite. The flats in particular, especially their colour scheme and tall, gull-wing roofed towers, have an excessively prominent effect, both close-to and in longer views, drawing attention away from the traditional form and features of the village.

**6.6** The use of colour in newer development tends to reference the ‘seaside beach hut’ in cheerful bright or pastel tones. However, Seahouses is not a ‘seaside’ town in that sense, but a hardworking and functional harbour town. In allowing a generic beach/seaside look to proliferate there is a risk of homogenising the whole coast into indistinct seaside resorts and masking their authentic history and character.

**6.7** Dormers are increasingly prevalent in conversion of older buildings or expansion of existing properties into the roof space. Over-use of new dormers, or inappropriate dormer design, has eroded the traditional, plain roof forms and silhouettes in places and risks undermining character if allowed to become too common in the historic core.

Figure 6.4: Recent development in Seahouses



The combination of bright colours and building scale fenestration and massing means this development reads as a generic seaside apartment scheme rather than a design that is rooted in the character of Seahouses or the wider coastal Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### Public realm

**6.8** The war memorial appears somewhat stranded on a roundabout on the principal route through the village and in a poorly-resolved area of public realm. There is a great deal of clutter and poorly thought-out provision of street furniture, for example, large numbers of very large bins, located immediately next to benches, do not make for particularly attractive places to sit and enjoy the village and its attractions. Clearly there is a need to manage the needs of (and the waste created by) tourists but it could be resolved and integrated better with the historic character of the village.

Figure 6.5: Main Street public realm



The public realm is currently a missed opportunity to give the village centre a recognisable heart and focal point. Motor vehicles have priority and the pedestrian spaces are cluttered.

**6.9** Traffic management and parking are clearly a major challenge for the village. Currently, Main Street opens out by a traffic island to the south-east and the townscape fragments, losing definition and unity. This end of the street is the main entrance to the car park and is a busy muddle of cars and pedestrians, particularly in the holiday season. Better highways design and integration here would benefit both the character of the village and the visitor/resident experience.

**6.10** Over the years, because of the constant disturbance of the original floorscape surfaces by statutory undertakers and general neglect, there are only fragments of the original surface left, and the road is in a poor condition. Historic surfaces should be protected, where they survive.

**6.11** The popular seating area by the Bamburgh Castle Hotel is in need of imaginative redesign to take full advantage of its fine location with panoramic views of the harbour and sea.

**6.12** The row of lock-ups on Harbour Road, with their backs directly onto the harbour, create an obtrusive, bulky and blank effect.

**Figure 6.6: Harbour Road lock-ups**



Although they provide necessary convenient storage for fishermen, these lock-ups are visually intrusive due to their bulk, materials and monopitch roofs.

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### Management Recommendations

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## Recommendations and opportunities for enhancement

### Recommendation 1

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

**6.14** 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

**6.15** 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

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

## Appendix A

### Non-Designated Buildings of Local Interest

**A.1** The buildings, structures or features listed below and 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 Seahouses. 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 the absence of a building or structure does not necessarily imply it is without merit and 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>.

- Jon Woodger's kippered herring smokehouse, South Street
- Bark Pot, The Tumblers
- The harbour – inner harbour and north pier
- The Ship Inn
- Old Granary, nos. 1-11 Harbour Road
- The Black Swan Inn, Union Street
- The Cottage, 27 North Street
- New Harbour Inn, junction of Main St and Kings St
- Methodist Church, Main Street