



Whittingham

Conservation Area Character Appraisal



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Preface

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

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

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

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

1 Introduction



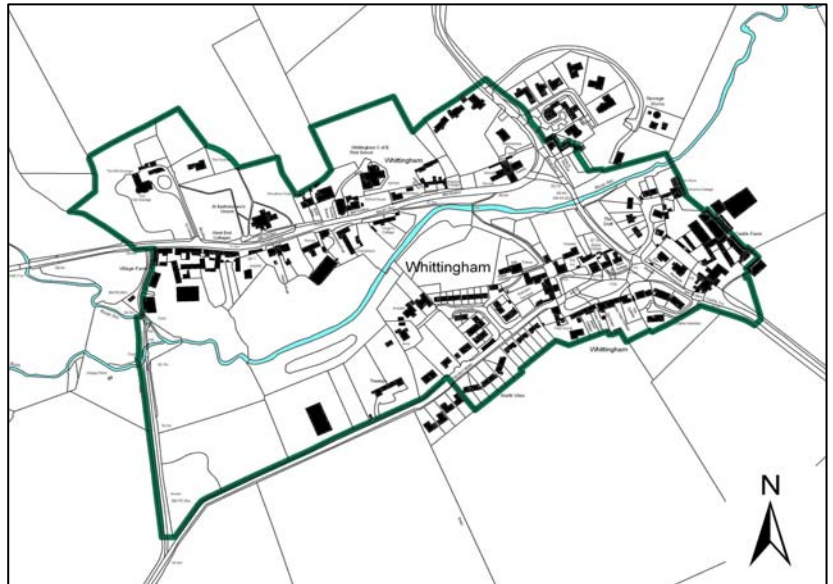
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Whittingham is situated in the valley of the Aln, here known as the Vale of Whittingham, where the Callaly Burn joins the Aln. The surrounding countryside is designated as an Area of High Landscape Value. The Vale of Whittingham is characterised by the Countryside Commission as part of the 'Cheviot Fringe', the geology of which consists of limestone and sandstone underlying glacial till, with some of the stone rubble from the till used for building.

The village is just west of the A697, between Cornhill and Morpeth and about 12 miles west of Alnwick. The OS map shows its local importance for transport routes.

The 2001 census gives the population of Whittingham parish as 406, in 184 households. The village has a part-time Post Office, a first school and a church, but no other amenities. Most residents commute to work, and the town has a small proportion of retired people and second/holiday homes.

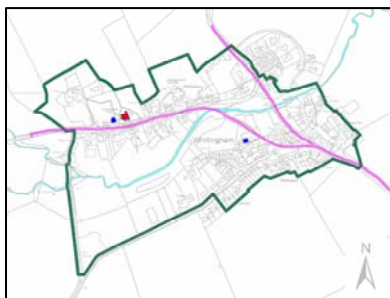
The original Conservation Area was designated in 1972, and included almost all of the settlement.



Whittingham conservation area 2006



Whittingham from the south, the hills of the Breamish / Aln watershed behind



Assumed early road layout - 'Lord's Tower' and 'Vicar's Pele' shown in blue, church in red (old CA boundary)



Armstrong, 1789



The 1818 bridge, viewed from the newly constructed portion of the Eslington road



Brick farm buildings, water fountain - Eslington Road



Inscription on the Tower, commemorating its conversion to almshouses

2 Historical Character

Whittingham's position is of historic strategic importance, at a crossing point on the River Aln where a route from the south forks to go north via two fords to Wooler or Alneham (making it a contender for the site of Anglo-Saxon 'Twyfod' mentioned by Bede). Bronze age remains have been found in the area, and it is close to the junction of two Roman roads. A church was recorded here in 735, and stonework in the present church tower dates from around 900AD. Irregular plot boundaries in the area surrounding the church imply that the early settlement may have been at this point.

The wars between England and Scotland led to the building of defensible towers on each side of the river; the 'Vicar's Pele' was sited immediately west of the church, and no longer exists, but the 'Lord's Tower' is still extant although considerably altered. The village thus grew up as two discrete areas, clearly visible on Armstrong's map of 1789, and the distinction between the two is important to the historic character of the village.

In the 1750's the route between Whittingham and Powburn was upgraded as a turnpike road, and the Eslington road extended to join it north of the river, the old route across the upper ford becoming a footpath. Armstrong's map shows the modern road alignment. Whittingham grew in importance and the Castle Inn, originally sited at the fork in the road, was enlarged to cater for the increased traffic; its formal gardens stretched back as far as The Croft.

The bridge was constructed in 1818, replacing the ford. However the village was bypassed by the re-routing of the main road (now the A697) in 1842, and the building of the main east coast railway line in 1849 (with a local branch line in 1887) made road transport less important and left much of the historic character of the village intact.

Some cottages and farm buildings by the church are of brick, significant as a fairly early use in rural Northumberland, possibly due to the relatively good road links with brickworks such as Ewart or Cottingwood.

The village was 'improved' in the mid-19th century under the patronage of the Ravensworth family, many houses being remodelled. The tower was converted to almshouses, and the church considerably altered. The family's influence continued into the 20th century, when in



Whittingham in the 1860's - from 1st Edition OS map. Castle Inn and the Hole in the Wall are still the only buildings east of the road. (Old CA boundary)

1904 the 'town pant' was converted to a drinking fountain in memory of the 3rd Earl of Ravensworth. Smithy, shops, post office and police house were located round the green in the southern half of the village in the 19th century, while the school was built near the church, maintaining these as the two important historic centres of the village.

20th century building to the east has linked the previously separated two parts of the village, and there has also been considerable development on the fields to the west of the tower.



General store, 1896 - the green. A large baker's oven was discovered in a C17 building at the rear of the shop. (Bondgate Museum)

Summary of historical features:

- Street layout, particularly footpath link between Tower and Church (route of old road)
- Separation of north and south parts of the settlement, focused on church and green
- Size and importance of Castle Inn / Farm
- Early brick buildings



Whittingham in its setting - from the south



View north across the valley to the church - Callaly road



Small scale buildings, sense of movement



Church View, from the churchyard



Entrance to conservation area from the north-west - Village Farm in the foreground

3 Architectural and Townscape Character

Setting

Nestling in the Aln valley, the setting of the conservation area is key to its special character, with important views down to the village on the approaches from the surrounding hills, between the two parts of the village across the river, and views out to the surrounding hills from within the village. This gives special significance to the outskirts of the settlement, which are important in distant views.

The townscape is dictated to a large extent by the road layout and the course of the river. While the built form is similar throughout the conservation area, the townscape varies and the conservation area can be divided along the course of the river into two distinct sub-areas (see map, Appendix 2).

Area 1: North of the river, centred on the church.

Townscape

This part of the village is linear in character, with small-scale groups of buildings strung along the road, its subtle bends and undulations giving a feeling of dynamic movement. Although the houses have a strong relationship with the road, some are set back from it, giving a relaxed spaciousness which is enhanced by the sudden drop to the river to the south and west. The school and vicarage are the only backland buildings, allowing occasional views across the valley or into gardens between groups of houses. The church is a landmark building, raised above the road and providing a focal point in views along the road, and acts as a 'hinge', as the road swings round the churchyard wall.

Key buildings

Church View is important as a foil to the church itself, mentioned above. The Memorial Institute and old school house, set back from the road, form a small public open space, which relates well to the churchyard. Village Farm marks the entrance to the conservation area from the north-west.



Gabled dormers, porch -Eslington road



Red brick -Eslington road



Fences, walls and hedges



Footpath and footbridge with view of Tower



Beech tree - the bridge

Built form

Houses are varied in form and detail, and this variety contributes to the special character of the area, but some common trends can be discerned. Houses tend to be semi-detached or in short terraces, although each unit may be identified by varying ridge heights or chimney placement. They are generally sited within small front gardens along the street frontage parallel with the contours, or opening directly on to the green.

Buildings are 1, 1½ or 2 storey, and rectangular in plan with eaves parallel to the road. Roofs are gabled, with clipped eaves, some with wallhead dormers and gable copes. All have gable end chimneys. Small porches and dormers have gabled roofs.

Materials, colours

The predominant walling material is buff sandstone, generally laid as coursed rubble. Warm red brick is also used near the church and Village Farm. Roofs are mainly Welsh slate with stone ridges, with red clay pantiles on some buildings. Chimneys are stone or brick, with clay pots.

Gutters and rainwater goods are black painted cast iron. Casement or vertical sliding sash timber windows are painted white. A few houses have horizontal sliding 'Yorkshire' sashes.

Boundaries are a mixture of low stone walls and retaining walls, hedges, or low, open wooden fences.

Green spaces, trees etc

A considerable proportion of the conservation area consists of the fields and watermeadows surrounding the village, which provide an important contrast to the built up area, but even in the built-up parts, trees and grassy areas are important, marking the course of the river and emphasising the rural atmosphere. Front garden hedges and planting underline the fact that vegetation is as important as buildings to the special character of the conservation area.

Two footpaths cross the valley. One forms the western boundary of the conservation area and is (basically) a country lane. The other is the historically important route over the ford between the church and tower, now reduced

to a footpath and footbridge but still a memorable journey with its changes of level and direction, variety of views and contrast between the urban park railings and wild woodland with glimpses of buildings.

The lack of kerbs to the grass verges allows a natural edge and is an important aspect of their informal nature.

The majestic beech tree beside the bridge at the Eslington road junction provides monumentality and a strong sense of place in what is otherwise a rather flat, amorphous area.

Summary of townscape and building features: Area 1

- Importance of views between buildings, and contribution of trees and other vegetation
- Buildings 1½ or 2 storey, grouped, parallel to roads and contours
- Each unit has rectangular plan, gabled roof, chimneys.
- Walls generally coursed sandstone rubble, windows white painted timber
- Roofs natural slate or red clay pantile
- Gabled porches and dormers
- Front boundaries low open fences or stone walls
- Close relationship of the buildings to the natural landscape setting



Buildings grouped round green, with communal features

Area 2: South of the river, centred on the green.

Townscape

Nucleated, with houses grouped round a sloping rectangular green criss-crossed by roads and footpaths and dotted with trees, this area has a strong sense of place, its central importance emphasised by civic features including flagpole, post box, telephone kiosk, notice board, pants and bus stop. The terraced cottages to the west and south of the green help to define its shape. The individual houses to the north, of varying ages, have lost some of the building line and, with the green space at the



Western entrance to the green - Callaly Road

north west corner and tower glimpsed beyond, give the green an informal character, further emphasised by the varying levels and designs of the houses, and the trees.

At the west, upper end, the road passes through a gap between the buildings lining the green, forming a visual gateway leading out to Callaly Road. Beyond this, the Callaly Road is lined with bungalows and estate housing as it rises up to the trees on the skyline beyond.

At the lower, east end, the green is more open where it meets the main road, with indifferent modern housing and the sheds of Castle Farm.



Scattered buildings, back gardens - Glanton road, looking south

Buildings to the east of the Glanton road appear randomly scattered, with wide entrances to The Croft and Alnside estates and views of the back gardens of The Croft, giving this part of the conservation area a diffuse and fragmented character.

Key buildings

The imposing three-storey Castle Inn and Farm are visible for some distance along the Morpeth road and mark the entrance to the conservation area from the south, their industrial air providing an important contrast with the rural atmosphere of the rest of the village.



Castle Inn (left) and Farm (right)

The Grade II* listed Tower glimpsed over roofs but hardly visible from the green, provides focus for a small enclave at the corner of the green which provides an important transition between the green and the riverbank, with the path to the footbridge leading off it.

Built form, materials, colours

As Area 1, but with no brick buildings.

Green spaces, trees etc

As area 1. In addition, the green is populated by trees, including an important line of large limes, which march uphill, dwarfing the surrounding houses and giving the impression of a small stretch of parkland. The lack of kerbs to the green allows a natural edge and is an important aspect of their informal nature.



The tower, with footpath to the bridge

Details: Areas 1 and 2

The two surviving finger posts are a reminder of the importance of the main road in the village's history, as are the pants and the remaining shop windows on the green.



Fingerpost - Hole in the Wall



Shop window glazing - the green



Pant



Three pants - left and centre on the green, right by the church

Summary of townscape and building features: Area 2

- Importance of views between buildings, and contribution of trees and other vegetation
- Buildings 1½ or 2 storey, grouped round green
- Each unit has rectangular plan, gabled roof, chimneys.
- Walls generally coursed sandstone rubble, windows white painted timber
- Roofs natural slate or red clay pantile
- Gabled porches and dormers
- Front boundaries low open fences or stone walls
- Details such as shop windows, pants, finger posts



Close boarded fence (compare with boundary treatment below) - Callaly Road



Open fence - Callaly Road



Bus shelter - Callaly Road junction



Whittingham Tower – note overhead wires



View of church beyond new housing - Glanton Road

4 Management Recommendations

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

Neutral areas

The housing along Callaly Road, including Towerside, North View and Treetops, is outside the historic settlement boundary and does not share or add to the character of the remainder of the conservation area; however, it does not impinge on it greatly.

Negative factors

Some infill developments adversely affect the character of the conservation area.

The tall close-boarded fencing round some gardens tends to detract from the character of the area, where boundaries are generally informal and low, allowing glimpses over and through plots.

Although the bus shelter is the point of entry to the conservation area for some people, neither it nor the plot boundaries here are of high quality.

The footpath across the river to the Tower is unimaginatively surfaced with tarmac, and the bench is broken.

Buildings at Risk

Whittingham Tower is described as in 'very bad' condition on the English Heritage 'Buildings at Risk' register. It is however apparently being renovated.

Listed Buildings

The conservation area has several listed buildings (see Appendix 1). Church View could be considered for listing because of its group value in relation to the Church (see above).

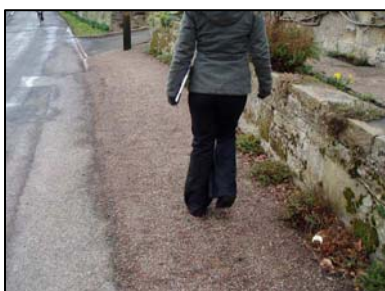
Management

The area designated for housing on the Local Plan has been partially built up, as part of a development which



New and old houses - Castle Meadow

continues north outside the conservation area; care should be taken to preserve the view of the church at the conservation area boundary here. Other new housing within the conservation area need not be ruled out, as long as it enhances the character of the area as defined above. Some recent developments, such as the houses fronting the road at Castle Meadow, maintain the character of the conservation area with reasonable success. However, the position of the Castle Inn as the entrance marker to the village from the south should be respected.



Informal gravel footpath - Eslington road

A considerable number of older buildings in the conservation area have replacement windows. As a certain amount of diversity is part of the character of the area this is not necessarily a problem, and at present, it is not worth considering the introduction of Article 4 directions. However, a photographic survey of all building frontages in the conservation area is recommended, to act as a baseline for future management.

Vegetation of all types is a feature of the conservation area, and ranges from informal field hedges and scrubby woodland to the formally clipped shrubs in the churchyard. The introduction of kerbs and over-zealous 'tidying up' of the public areas should be avoided.



Street furniture - path to footbridge

Hard surfaces are generally tarmac or earth. Although block paving etc could introduce an alien, urban character, consideration could be given to providing some footpaths with a surface such as the bound gravel pictured, to allow easier pedestrian access, for example by the post and phone boxes.

The path across the river to the Tower is important, and would benefit from upgrading its surfaces and street furniture.

The main road is all that many people will experience of the conservation area, although also the part with the weakest character. Boundaries along the east side of the road should be improved where possible, either with low walls and paling fences as elsewhere in the village or hedges planted with traditional indigenous species. The bus shelter is in a rather featureless stretch of wall and fence, and upgrading it would also improve this important and central area. Possibly some type of coloured road surfacing could enhance this part of the conservation area, and also provide a crossing point and link with the phone box/notice board complex opposite.



Housing does not add to the character of the conservation area - Towerside

The fingerpost at the corner is inside a private garden, and should if possible be moved outside the wall. It is recommended that a public realm audit is carried out, to act as a basis for the above proposals.

Original Boundaries

The boundaries of the original conservation area apparently followed the outline of the settlement when it was designated, as well as including some fields to the north and south, possibly to control development within them. Three areas are recommended for de-designation; The Croft, Towerside and Treetops (with fields to the south west).



The Percherons, Castle Inn beyond

The original inclusion of, Callaly Road and Towerside, has not prevented development within it, although it may possibly have affected the design of some of the buildings. However, as discussed above, they add little to the character of the area and it could be difficult to impose conservation area controls on them. It is assumed that development in the valley bottom would not be possible due to flood protection measures, so the field may not need the protection of conservation area status either, but the riverside should be retained as part of the conservation area to highlight its amenity value and encourage enhancements.

The Croft, does not share the character of the conservation area and tends to reduce the character of the area as a whole. However, retaining Haywards and The Percherons is suggested, as they are on the site of Castle Inn's formal garden and in the hope that their boundary walls can be improved.

Summary of management recommendations:

- No development beyond Castle Inn or blocking views of Church
- Photographic survey of frontages, public realm audit
- Avoid introduction of kerbs to roads and paths
- Gravel footpaths and coloured tarmac surfacing
- Improve boundary treatments to east of main road
- Improve bus shelter/notice board area
- Consider buildings for listing
- Remove three sites from conservation area

Boundary Changes 2006

The attempt to control development by setting the boundaries of the conservation area to include the whole of the settlement (plus fields to the north and south) has not been successful.

Development has taken place at two or three points outside the boundary, showing that the conservation area has not been effective in this role. As in other appraisals, if the concern is to achieve protection from unsympathetic development; this can be better achieved through protective policies in the LDF.

As discussed above, development on Callaly Road and at Towerside, (although well-built council and private housing) adds little to the architectural or historic character of the area which is desirable to preserve or enhance. It is considered that the area should be de-designated as it could be difficult to impose conservation area controls on buildings here; and inevitably its continuing inclusion within the boundary would weaken

and devalue what is otherwise a very fine conservation area.

Many of the comments in respect of Towerside apply equally to the Croft. The possibility of retaining the three rather attractive 'arts and crafts' style semi's facing onto the small green which have some architectural value was considered but with these houses retained it is actually very difficult to define a defensible boundary to the conservation area. Therefore, the area has been deleted but the green area retained within the Conservation Area, which provides the setting to the houses.

The riverside is retained as a part of the conservation area to highlight its crucial amenity value to the character of the area as a whole and to encourage enhancements.

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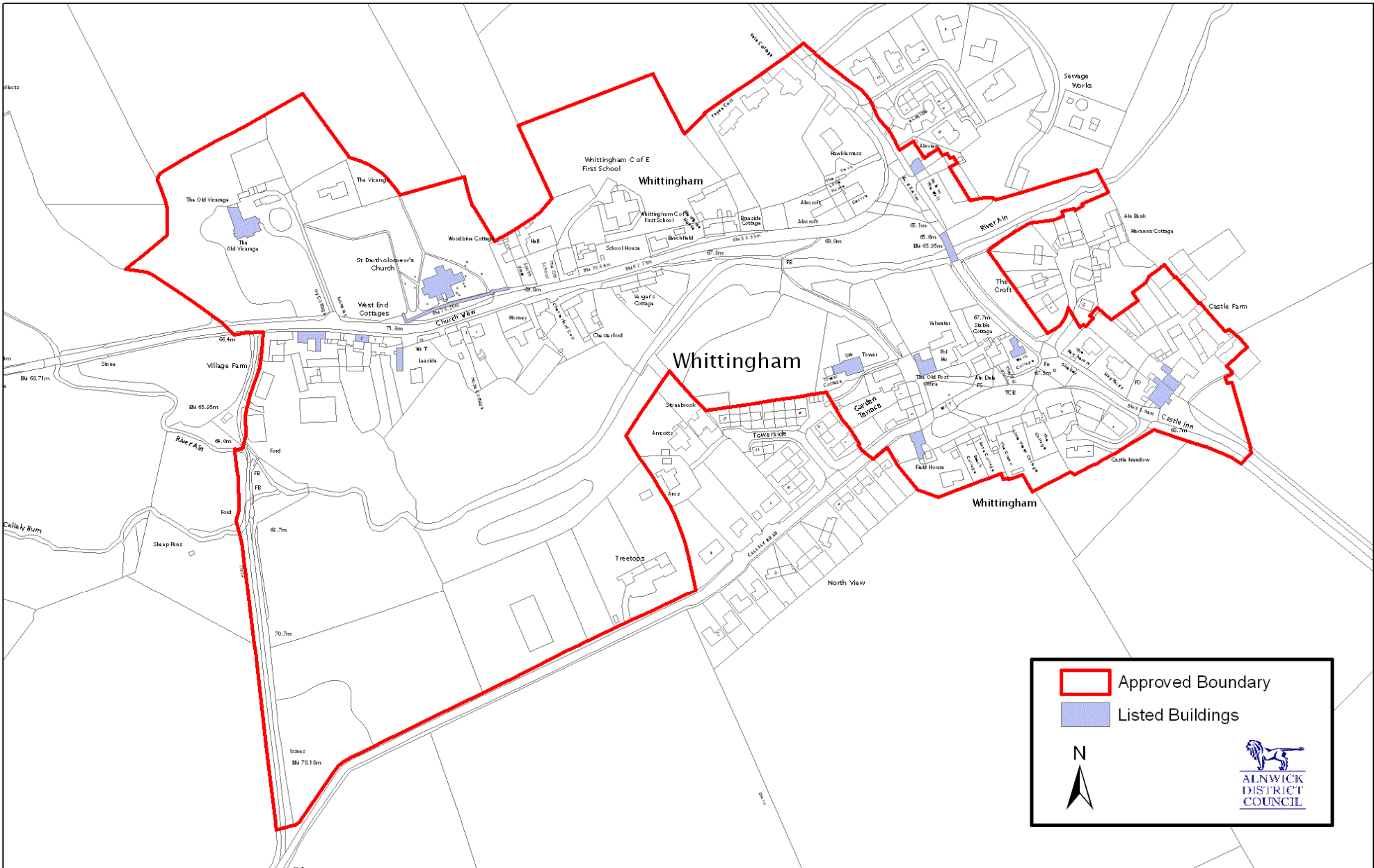
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Whittingham Conservation Area



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Glossary

Public Realm Audit Streetscape Surveys

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

Article 4 Directions

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

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

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

Design Information and Guidelines

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

The following publications are available from the Alnwick District Council -

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

A.O.N.B – Design Guide

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

Alnwick District Council - Historic Buildings Grant scheme.

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