



Alnwick District Council

Department of Environment & Regeneration

Whitton

Conservation Area



Character Appraisal and Management Matters

Produced by



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**Designation Report
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Map 1. Whitton Conservation Area



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1 *Introduction*

1.1 *Conservation Areas*

Conservation areas are “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”¹. They are designated by the local planning authority using local criteria.

Conservation areas are about character and appearance, which can derive from many factors including individual buildings, building groups and their relationship with open spaces, architectural detailing, materials, views, colours, landscaping, street furniture and so on. Character can also draw on more abstract notions such as sounds, local environmental conditions and historical changes. These things combine to create a locally distinctive sense of place worthy of protection.

Conservation areas do not prevent development from taking place. Rather, they are designed to manage change, controlling the way new development and other investment reflects the character of its surroundings. Being in a conservation area does tend to increase the standards required for aspects such as repairs, alterations or new building, but this is often outweighed by the ‘cachet’ of living or running a business in a conservation area, and the tendency of a well-maintained neighbourhood character to sustain, or even enhance, property values.

The first conservation areas were created in 1967 and now over 9,100 have been designated, varying greatly in character and size. There are currently 15 in Alnwick district, as set out below:

- Alnmouth
- Alnwick
- Amble
- Eglington
- Embleton
- Felton
- Glanton

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, s69.

- Guyzance
- Lesbury
- Newton on the Moor
- Rock
- Rothbury
- Warkworth
- Whittingham
- Whitton

1.2 **Town Planning Context**

Designation remains the principal means by which local authorities can apply conservation policies to a particular area. The Council has a duty, in exercising its planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. It also has a duty, from time to time, to draw up and publish proposals for preservation and enhancement, and to consult local people on them². The local planning authority also has extra powers in conservation areas over demolition, minor developments, and tree protection (see page 45). Government policy in PPG15³ stresses the need for local planning authorities to define and record the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in their districts.

The current development plan for the district comprises the Alnwick District Core Strategy (adopted October 2007) and the saved policies of both the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (September 2007) and the Northumberland County & National Park Joint Structure Plan (February 2008). The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy due to be adopted in 2008 carries significant weight and will, when adopted, supersede the saved policies of the county structure plan.

The Council is working on area development plan documents and topic-specific supplementary planning documents which, with the Core Strategy, will form the district Local Development Framework. Conservation area matters are considered within this framework.

1.3 **This Character Appraisal**

This character appraisal is for Whitton. Its preparation began during winter 2007 by North of England Civic Trust for Alnwick District Council. Comment and information was invited from local stakeholders during its preparation, and a draft was put out to public consultation. Responses were then considered and a version presented to the Alnwick Operations Executive Committee on 12 June 2007 for decision. **The committee agreed to the designation of Amble Conservation Area.**

² Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, s72 and s71

³ Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning & The Historic Environment

By its very nature, this document cannot be exhaustive. Omissions should not necessarily be regarded as having no special interest or making no positive contribution to the character and appearance of Whitton. Following designation of the conservation area, the character appraisal should be updated every five years or so, taking account of changes in the area and further understanding of the place.

1.4 **Further Information**

For further information on this character appraisal, or conservation in Alnwick in general, please contact:

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2 *Location and Context*

2.1 *Location*

Whitton is an historic hamlet about half a mile south of the market town of Rothbury (a conservation area). While Rothbury is set on the east-flowing Coquet River, Whitton is located on an alp above, on the south side of the valley. South of Whitton, the land dips slightly into the depression of the Whitton Burn and crosses Garleigh Moor, with its prehistoric rock art, standing stones, burial cairns and hill fort, before climbing steeply up to the Simonside hills that mark the southern edge of the Coquet Valley.

Whitton is some 11 miles from Alnwick and 14 miles from the coast to the east. It is 27 miles from the Scottish border and 27 miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne, the regional capital. It is also within 2 miles of the eastern edge of the Northumberland National Park. Whitton's centre is at grid reference NU 057 011.

The hamlet lies in the Tosson & Whitton parish, and in Rothbury & South Rural ward of Alnwick district. In the 2001 census, the ward had a population of 2,880, most of which is in either Rothbury or the villages, hamlets or farmsteads along the Coquet Valley.

2.2 *Context*

2.2.1 *Geology*

Whitton is at the centre of the Northumberland Sandstone Hills countryside character area (no.2)⁴. The Northumberland Sandstone Hills, including those at Harbottle, Simonside, Chillingham, Alnwick Moor, Kyloe and Ford Moss-Fowberry Moor, extend from the Borders and swing across the centre of Northumberland county in a wide arc of high ground which separates the vales of the Cheviots from the flat Northumberland Coastal Plain. The rugged, flat-topped hills are formed of carboniferous fell sandstone in a thick sequence deposited by a series of rivers about 300 million years ago. The sandstones and underlying beds are relatively weak and have been eroded into the highly distinctive ridges of which the

⁴ Countryside character areas, devised by the Countryside Agency, provide a context to local planning and development. There are 159 areas in England, unique in terms of land form, historical and cultural attributes.

Simonside Hills and Harbottle Craggs are typical examples. Outcrops typically carry very acid soils on which heather moor has become well developed in many parts. Fell sandstones are well suited as building materials and many settlements had their own local quarry from which to conveniently extract the yellow stone which weathers to an iron grey. These mini-quarries, although now overgrown, often remain as historical features of many local settlements, including Whitton. The pale pink Doddington sandstone, used inside and outside the area, provides a distinctive variation in locally worked stone.

2.2.2 **Topography and Aspect**



The buildings of Whitton are clustered on a low mound on an alp above the River Coquet plain, on the south side of the valley. As this elevated land is at a curve in the valley, the hamlet has open aspects to almost all points of the compass. To the north, the settlement is open to the wider Coquet Valley which then sweeps to the south giving Whitton an open aspect to the east across the valley. The southern aspect extends across the ancient Garleigh Moor before being terminated by the

Simonside Hills, some two to three miles away. The western aspect is up and across the Coquet Valley, here at its widest part. Topographically, Whitton is therefore on an exposed hill in an upland landscape of steep sided valleys, rugged pasture and heathlands, and craggy sandstone ridges.

2.2.3 **Setting and External Relationships**

Historically, Whitton's main relationship with Rothbury, known as the Capital of Coquetdale, was both commercial and ecclesiastical. The commercial link with Rothbury as the market town of Coquetdale is still strong, particularly as Whitton has neither shops nor public houses. The ecclesiastical link – as the home of the Vicar of Rothbury – was severed when Whitton Tower ceased to be the vicarage in 1934 and became a convalescent home for children (see *Historical Development* below).

Being on the old east-west road on the south side of the Coquet Valley gave Whitton a relationship with neighbouring farms and settlements in the past. But this has little significance today, except when the Coquet floods the low road at Rothbury and traffic is diverted through Whitton (see *Development Pattern* below).

Being in the main a small commuter and retirement settlement, Whitton's functional relationships and needs are currently fairly limited. But, through Whitton Farm, the settlement still retains an active, seasonal working relationship with the fields and landscape around, whilst the neighbouring caravan park, whilst opening up many visitor links with the locality, seems to have no service or other relationship with Whitton at all.

Although Whitton is not geographically isolated due of its proximity to Rothbury, it nonetheless feels isolated by its low level of active functional relationships with the surrounding population and territory.

2.2.4 **Views out of the Area**



As discussed above, Whitton has an almost 360 degree open aspect – indeed, it was mainly this characteristic that prompted Archdeacon Sharpe to build his 30 foot high tower here so that he could survey the sea, the stars, the surrounding landscape and his parishioners across the river in Rothbury.

To the north, are views of the busy northern slopes above Rothbury, now

criss-crossed with modern housing platforms up to the heather cap on top of the slope. To the east, the view consists mainly of Craggside's fine mature woodland, but this dominance is now being challenged by the scarring of the landscape in readiness for further major residential and transport development in the valley. The wide southern views are dominated by heather moors and the rugged outline of the Simonside hills, while the open western views up the Coquet Valley are somewhat filtered by nearby tree planting and land outcrops. However, despite these interruptions, all the panoramic views out of Whitton have the interest that distance, width and variety can offer. It is, however, important to note that all these views are only randomly available between and from the historic pattern of buildings and trees in the hamlet. Only from Sharpe's Folly is the opportunity for views out in any way planned or controlled.

Because of its exposed location, Whitton is visible from many points in the landscapes around. Again, these are random opportunities and in most of the views Whitton appears more as an isolated copse of trees than a settlement. But in views from the north side of the Coquet Valley, Whitton attains a special significance in the wider landscape. Seen against the simplicity of the pastures around the hamlet, the heathland behind and the towering backdrop of the hills, Whitton and its tight collection of unusual (and mildly exotic) trees appears as a planned addition, a little touch of cultured landscape inserted to romantically set off the wild ruggedness of south Coquetdale. This demonstrates the wider impact of the mature planting in Whitton's two large pleasure gardens. They clearly have a significance beyond the hamlet itself.



See page 17 for a discussion of views within Whitton.

3 *Historical Development*

3.1 *Development History*

3.1.1 **Name**

The name of Whitton is Old English in origin, which means the settlement originated sometime between the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlements in the fifth century AD and about 1100. It has two possible meanings: *Hwita's settlement* or *white farm*, with the earliest recorded spelling being *Witton* in 1228. The only reliable implication for Whitton's development from this is that a settlement existed in 1228 which had been given its name prior to 1100. Whether Hwita's people or a white farm were involved at some stage, is as yet unknown.

3.1.2 **Prehistoric Period**

Although there are no prehistoric records associated with Whitton, the middle Coquet Valley is known as an area of almost continuous and widespread human activity from 6,000 years ago to the present. Within a two mile radius of Whitton lie Neolithic (4000 to 2500BC) standing stones and cup-and-ring rock carvings, Bronze Age (2500 to 800BC) burial cairns and weapons, and Iron Age (800BC to 43AD) hill forts at Lordenshaws and Rothbury.

3.1.3 **Medieval and Post-Medieval Periods**

Whitton lies far to the north of the Roman Wall which explains why there is little evidence of Roman occupation locally. For most of the native inhabitants of the area, life is likely to have continued in the same way during Roman occupation further south. About this time, an undefended settlement was established on the site of the previous hill fort at Lordenshaws, possibly indicating that the invaders had brought a measure of peace to the native populations.

Although a Saxon settlement may have been established at Whitton, we have only the origin of the name to offer as evidence as there is no archaeological confirmation of this yet. After the Norman invasion of 1066, England was divided between various lords and barons; the people of Tosson parish on the south side of Coquetdale lived in small villages and hamlets like Newton, Great Tosson and Ryehill. Farms were established at Newton West and a monastic sheep farm at

nearby Whittondean. It is known that, from Norman times, the vicars of Rothbury held land at Whitton from the Lordship of Rothbury.

Northumberland suffered considerably during the wars with Scotland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, encouraging those that could afford it to build defensive homes in the form of tower houses. Here is where the known history of Whitton really begins as the vicars of Rothbury, in the fourteenth century, built themselves a tower house at Whitton. Such towers have become known as vicar's peles, but it is incorrect to confuse such tower houses with the peles (or peels) of the surrounding area, which were much earlier and much smaller. It is also likely that the original Whitton tower was encircled by a defensive wall, or barmkin as they were called locally. The tower survives and, albeit with eighteenth century additions, it served as the vicar's residence until the mid nineteenth century when a substantial Tudor-style house was attached. The combined tower and house continued as a vicarage until 1934 when it was sold to Cllr Angus Watson of Newcastle, who had already acquired the vicarage glebe lands as well as nearby Whitton Grange, to preserve what he called the "amenities of the district". Within a year, he had leased Whitton Tower to Newcastle City Council for a children's convalescent home, a use it retained until late in the twentieth century after which it reverted to residential use. Another medieval tower house had also been built in Whitton, in what were to become the gardens of Whitton Grange, but only its base now survives, with walls in places up to 2.7 metres (9 ft) high.

The turmoil of the medieval period was echoed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the fierce feuds between Border families. Those who could afford it built defended farmhouses called bastles, two (or possibly three) of which still survive as modified farmhouses or cottages in Whitton. The hamlet's tally for the 400 years of medieval Border warfare – two tower houses and at least two bastle houses – is a remarkable score for such a small settlement.

3.1.4 *Post-Map Development History (c.1848 Onwards)*

By 1848, Whitton had become a township in the parish of Rothbury. A tithe map of this date shows the hamlet laid out more or less as it is today – but it also contains several surprises. First of all, none of the land in the township is in the ownership of the Duke of Northumberland, unlike many of the surrounding townships. Secondly, a pinfold (a compound for holding stray animals) once stood on the site of the present Grange Cottage. And thirdly, three cottages occupied the now empty site between Whitton Farm and Hillhead Road, north of Folly Cottage. Perhaps most surprising of all, though, is that the triangular area of the village now occupied by Whitton Cottage and Hill Cottage, is described in the schedule to the map (along with the three surrounding roadways) as the "village green" in the ownership of the "Freemen of Whitton Township". Could this area have been Whitton's village green in the past? The same freemen also held, in 1848, the land on which the pinfold had stood and the area of the "Common and Quarry" immediately south of the hamlet. The present site of Whitton Grange was occupied by the original eighteenth century Whitton Cottage, owned in 1848 by William

Creighton who leased it out to a John Davison. On plan, compared with the Grange that replaced it, the Cottage must have been a fairly small, modest house.

The First Edition OS map of 1866, at the beginning of the great tradition of OS maps, is much more detailed than the 1848 tithe map, yet also more readable. The plan of Whitton Tower shows its mid nineteenth century additions, its historic garden plan (a small area of parkland adjacent to the house surrounded by dense tree belts), its two walled produce gardens hidden in the north tree belt, its fish pond and pleasure gardens on the north side of Carterside Road, its generous stable, coach block and eighteenth century water trough north of the house, and its eighteenth century folly (Sharp's Folly) set on the highest point of the hamlet.

The rest of the village appears as it was in 1848. Whitton Cottage and Whitton Farmhouse Farm (part of which is now The Pines) on the north side, with the current Whitton Cottage (not named as such in 1866) and Whitton Farm and cottages on the south side. To the north east of today's Folly Cottage was a small building marked as a smithy. Cottages shown on the map between it and Whitton Farm do not survive. The quarry across the road from Sharpe's Folly is clearly marked and would have been a source of building material for the hamlet. Little seemed to have changed at the two farms since 1848, including the horse gin (or gin-gan) attached to the western range of Whitton Farm.



By the first quarter of the twentieth century, things had begun to change. The Second Edition OS map of 1923 shows the original Whitton Cottage had been replaced (in 1921) by the grand buildings and Arcadian gardens of Whitton Grange, plus an entirely new Whitton Cottage. Whether the original cottage was totally destroyed or whether some of its structure was incorporated into the new buildings by the Newcastle architect, Robert Mauchlen, needs further investigation. What is certain though, is that he produced the best house and Gertrude Jekyll-style garden of its period in the whole of Northumberland.

The horse gin on Whitton Farm had now gone, perhaps replaced by steam driven machinery, and the small smithy had also disappeared. Both farms had added further

accommodation for people, machinery and animals, indicating that they were still thriving business operations. A reservoir of late nineteenth century origins, situated on the west side of Silverton Lane, was then run by the local council as Rothbury UDC Water Works.

By 1979, some 56 years later, very little had changed. More barns had been added to both farms, including the surviving green-painted corrugated iron barn of Whitton Farmhouse and the corrugated roof of the barn of Whitton Farm on Silverton Lane (both now noticeable features of modern Whitton). Also, a larger structure had

appeared on the former pinfold site, likely to have been the timber house with a red pantile roof that was replaced a few years ago by the current Grange Cottage. Finally, Hill Cottage, built 1967, is shown next to the modern Whitton Cottage.

Sometime late in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Whitton Farmhouse was converted to a hotel and public bar. This use subsequently disappeared to be replaced by separate residential and stable uses, which in turn have also now disappeared, the farm complex now all in sub-divided residential use.

The most recent stage in the development of the hamlet took place at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Four new houses were slotted into the eighteenth century walled gardens of Whitton Tower, two substantial properties in the large kitchen garden and two smaller brick houses in what was possibly the fruit garden. Although these properties were thoughtfully inserted into the existing fabric of the hamlet, their independent access requirements did require breaching both the old gardens walls and the ancient surrounding outer walls of the grounds of Whitton Tower, in three separate places. Parking also required paving over large areas of the old produce gardens. Also during this recent time, Whitton Cottage was substantially extended to the rear, Hill Cottage was extended eastwards and Grange Cottage built to replace the earlier timber structure on the site. Finally, a large steel framed barn west of Whitton Cottage was dismantled, much improving the view from Whitton Farm North Cottage, itself recently divided into holiday lets.



3.2 **Archaeology**

There are no scheduled monuments in Whitton but most of the oldest structures are protected as listed buildings. The potential for below-ground archaeology may be limited because little evidence of early settlement has been discovered so far and, since the medieval period, there has been relatively little developmental change in the settlement to provide a depth of layered history. Although it would be most interesting to expose the earliest history of Whitton, no sites for potentially fruitful excavation have yet identified themselves. In due course, possible further research and investigation of some of the underused private open yards and gardens could change this.

Of perhaps greater importance than the below-ground potential is that of the standing buildings. Researching Whitton Tower, Whitton Grange and their gardens could reveal more about their own history and that of the hamlet itself. Some

buildings of the two farmsteads are probably older than they first appear and thus worthy of desk-top research and possible on-site evaluation that could reveal much about their construction, use and significance in the historic development of the settlement.

An archaeological understanding of the fabric and spaces of Whitton would help to manage change in the future in the interests of retaining its character for the benefit of all.

4 *Spatial Analysis*

4.1 *Development Pattern*

The earliest development known in Whitton, the two medieval towers, are located at the top and bottom of a short slope which climbs up the west side of the mound that was to be occupied by the future hamlet of Whitton. From these locations, high above the Coquet Valley, the inhabitants of the towers could detect threats to their safety long before the threat arrived from all directions. Tree planting around them would have been kept to a minimum to preserve this visibility.

The towers were also located on the long established, contour-hugging track that served farms and settlements on the south side of the Coquet. The track ran parallel with the river but high enough above it to avoid the periodic flooding to which the lower valley road was prone. Even today, the usual tranquillity of the hamlet is shattered by the diversion of all the traffic along the south side through the village when the lower road is flooded (apparently happening more frequently in recent times).

So the first known pattern is of two towers and associated defended yards on opposite sides of the main east-west track as it climbs up the west side of a locally notable mound. To these structures were added, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a cluster of two or three bastle houses on the flattened top of the mound, above the earlier towers. These defended houses also sat either side of the track that continued across the mound, before eventually dropping down into the Coquet Valley towards the growing settlement of Rothbury.

The hamlet, such as it became, developed around these older structures and the track between them. The service yards around them developed into proper farm yards and steadings, some around the towers eventually becoming both pleasure and produce gardens as the threat of conflict diminished. There is a hint on the 1848 tithe map that the hamlet had a triangular shaped village green at its centre, where the east-west track met a lesser track coming in from the south. If this is the case, then the centre of the green was probably enclosed in the eighteenth century to create the private development plots now occupied by the modern Hill Cottage and the early nineteenth century Whitton Cottage.

This is the pattern of development which still survives today. Any developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as they were, have been slotted into this pattern with no change to the overall structure and layout.

4.2 **Layout, Grain and Density**

Although there is a general operational logic to the layout of Whitton, this has never been purposefully composed to create aesthetic effect or any kind of townscape formality. Now that the only public space – the village green (the existence of which is still unproven) – has been colonized by development, the hamlet lacks any pretensions to a formal plan. In fact its main spatial interest today arises directly out of the mature and romantic informality of its layout.

In places with parallel terraces, the grain of the development is a determinant of character but there has never been such a formal determinant in Whitton. The buildings are either detached or in functional clusters as farm units, where the directional grain of development or enclosures is never more important than immediate operational needs and the limitations of ownerships. Although a few buildings were built close to the roads, most sit deep within their plots and gardens. The majority, therefore, require an independent access into plots from main roads or side roads, which, in the case of the modern developments in the grounds of Whitton Tower, required independent openings being broken through the original walls of the enclosed produce gardens.

Density of building development is very low with lots of open and planted space between them. This is an integral part of the area's character and it should be protected in the future from incremental backland development. The density of tree cover also has some influence on character with variations in density across the village. The impact of tree cover, which is as crucial to the character of Whitton today as the disposition of its buildings, is discussed under *Character Analysis* below.

4.3 **Views within the Area**



Because of the informality of the plan, Whitton has no composed or formal views. But there are many random, informal views along lanes, across gardens, into paved yards or into buildings groups. The sloping stretch of Carterside Road passing the Tower and the Grange, and the short stretch of Hillhead Road between Hill Cottage and Woodfold, have

views contained by old walls and mature trees. All other stretches of road in Whitton offer unrestricted views of the wider landscape around as well as random local views. Although this lack of visual containment may decrease the apparent unity of the hamlet, it does offer continual reminders of the wider attractive and ancient landscape in which Whitton is set.

See page 10 for a discussion of views out of the area.

5 Character Analysis

5.1 Land Use

The foundation of the area is the traditional rural hamlet mix of agricultural and residential uses, plus a minimum of commercial services. Known historical commercial uses in Whitton, include a pinfold and smithy in the nineteenth century and a hotel with public bar and a riding stable in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The hotel and stable, which no longer operate, were both, at different times, in Whitton Farmhouse. The loss of the public bar, as the only social focus of Whitton, is understood to still be lamented by some local people.



Although Whitton Farm still functions for its original purpose, the rest of the village is in residential use. Historically, this use at the Tower was somewhat specialised – built as a defensible vicarage and later converted for use as a children's care home. Whitton Grange, built in 1921 as a grand family home is also unlike any other house in the hamlet.

All other residential properties, old and new, are single family homes except for Whitton Farm North Cottage which is a new departure for the hamlet (as well as a sign of the times in Northumberland) – a national increase in disposable income and the vacancy of many traditional buildings in attractive rural areas have encouraged the growth of conversion of traditional buildings into second homes or holiday lets, and the old cottage at Whitton Farm is now in such use.

Open land uses in Whitton include private farmyards, farm steadings, a disused quarry, small domestic gardens, paved parking areas or grand pleasure gardens, of which the hamlet has two. The only public open spaces in Whitton are metalled roads, rough tracks, verges and the small covered reservoir.

5.2 *Architectural Qualities*

5.2.1 *Form, Height and Scale*

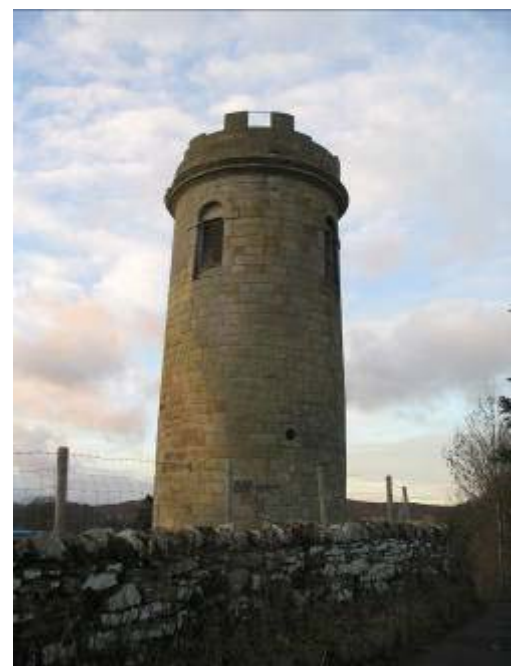
The usual height of the buildings in Whitton, both old and recent, is two storeys, with some (eg. Folly Cottage) possibly having been raised from a single storey. The only exceptions are Whitton Tower (three storeys plus a basement) and Sharpe's Folly (around 10m (30 ft) high – three storeys).

The dominant form of buildings is eighteenth or nineteenth century vernacular agricultural building, both farms and cottages. The Pines has been upgraded beyond this vernacular and the forms of both the Tower and Grange, which each belong to very different architectural traditions, are on yet another level of opulence entirely. Whitton's six modern residences range from small traditional cottage to large footprint single storey with an added dormer floor, but all of these have a small scale that does not challenge the historic character of Whitton's older buildings.



The last common building form in the hamlet is the working farm building. These include traditional single storey stone outbuildings and sheds, usually built in ranges, and later corrugated-iron barns which usually stand-alone. Both the old and the new are uniquely combined in the interesting farm building on the north side of the yard of Whitton Farm – a traditional stone building with a more recent curved corrugated iron roof.

In addition to the unique forms of the Tower and the Grange is the distinctive form of Sharpe's Tower, the idiosyncratic folly. As a tower, it does not mimic anything around it and is not designed to blend in with Whitton's other traditional or familiar building forms. When built, it must have been seen as truly radical and wilful, and it now deserves to be celebrated not only as a current treasure of the hamlet, but also as a fine product of the combined aristocratic and charitable thinking that so characterised eighteenth century England.



5.2.2 ***Periods and Styles***

The architecture of Whitton covers an unusually long development period for such a small settlement. The main periods represented are:

- ***Medieval***

This period in Northumberland was one of threat which was countered (by the wealthy) with stout stone towers and heavy curtain walls. Whitton has two buildings of this type from this period – the original Whitton Tower and the remains of another tower house that once stood in what are now the gardens of Whitton Grange.

- ***Late Medieval***

This period was dominated in the district by inter-family conflict, resulting in the development of bastle houses, a design unique to the northern border areas. They were characterised by thick ground floor walls for animals, small windows or arrow-slits for light, a lack of a permanent access to the upper floor and a fire-proof roof of stone slates. Two or maybe three of the oldest farm buildings in Whitton may have begun life as bastles and been considerably modified for more comfortable living since, which makes identification of their origins a matter of specialist investigation.

- ***Georgian***

The main architectural style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was based on Classical style and proportions. Georgian architecture is simple, often symmetrical and based on 'polite' ideas and designs which could come from style handbooks. The proportions and detailing of Georgian architecture follow set principles, and result in unfussy, straightforward buildings.

Such refined houses which suited the gracious living of the time are not present here but architecture from this period includes Sharpe's Folly, surviving garden walls of the original Whitton Cottage (now around the Grange), garden walls and major alterations of The Pines, the water trough north of Whitton Tower, possibly some of the garden walls of the Tower, and some of the buildings and alterations to the two farms and steads.

- ***Victorian***

Dating from the mid nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth, Victorian architecture is very varied with many sub-categories, but much is based on showy, confident themes designed to demonstrate the wealth and power of the building owner with splendid, high-class architecture. Rich, traditional materials are used – often brick, stone, timber and iron – with good quality, solid construction and plenty of flare. The three strongest Victorian revival styles were Gothic (defined by verticality, asymmetry, pointed arches, gables and carving), Italianate (with low roofs, bracketed eaves and some stucco) and Queen Anne (red brick with Dutch gables, white joinery, doorcases and terracotta). There were also other revival styles. In addition, the Arts & Crafts style began in the late nineteenth century.

Little of such exuberance or innovation touched Whitton, but architecture of this period includes the huge Tudor style mid-nineteenth century addition to the Tower, and additions and alterations at the two working farms. It is also possible that Folly Cottage received its upper storey in this period.

- *Early to Mid Twentieth Century*

The post-First World War housing boom saw suburban semi-detached houses and bungalows spread throughout many towns.

Architecture of the 1920s and 1930s developed along three main styles – the ‘Tudorbeathan’ or rustic cottage style, a Georgian revival (especially for townhouses), and the Moderne or International style (stark, plain, flat-roofed boxes with large windows).

Art Deco also developed during this period, with strong geometry, abstract shapes, and smooth, sleek lines.

Whitton was, fortunately, untouched by this huge post-First World War suburban housing boom but it was particularly fortunate in becoming home to an excellent example of and Arts & Crafts designs, still a fashionable movement at the time . Whitton Grange and Cottage (the second house of

this name on the site) were built in 1921 by Robert Mauchlen, architect, for Sir Angus Watson, entrepreneur and Newcastle city councillor. The materials and appointments were opulent Arts & Crafts and extended into the design details of the sumptuous

surrounding pleasure gardens. This celebrated house is described in Pevsner as “the best building of its date in the county”⁵.



⁵ Pevsner N, *Northumberland*, 1957; Grundy, Linsley, McCombie, Ryder and Welfare, 2nd edition 1992

- *Late Twentieth Century*

The second half of the twentieth century saw a wide range of stylistic approaches develop and merge. Towards the end of the century, mass commercial housing tended to adopt architectural styles in only a cursory way, with generic suburban housing often demonstrating little depth or flare in its design, mixed materials, pale revivals of historic styles and extensive hard surfaces and garages.



Although the buildings from this period in Whitton introduce new materials and finishes, and have garages and parking areas, their architectural style is generally inoffensive. They are most acceptable where traditional materials are used properly and their size is in scale with the rest of the hamlet; they are least successful where hard surfaces are extensive, garages inappropriately designed, and materials do not reflect the quality of the rest of Whitton.



Local traditional architecture which adopts no discernable style is known as vernacular, usually resulting in plain, robust buildings in local materials with little ornamentation:

5.2.3 **Features, Detailing and Materials**

The character of Whitton stems from a variety of different architectural features and simple detailing and a uniformity of materials. The features are:

- masonry
- doorways
- windows
- roofs, including ridges, eaves and verges
- dormer windows and rooflights
- chimneys
- rainwater goods, such as drainpipes and gutters

The simplicity of most of these features and the limited palette of materials contributes to the appealing plainness of much of the area's architecture, although there are also some more decorative architectural pieces which are individually outstanding. Some details have been altered over time but a great deal of the original build is intact in detail.

5.2.4 **Masonry**

The principal walling material throughout the traditional buildings of Whitton is natural sandstone, usually as roughly coursed rubble, and probably some of it sourced in the past from the small quarry in the hamlet. Around door and window openings, more regularly-sized, square-cut blocks of the same material are used to provide a more regular finish than can be provided by rubble.



The stone for the four major buildings of Whitton – Sharp's Folly, the Tower, the Grange and the house of Whitton Farmhouse – is more refined, appropriate for more considered architecture. Stonework here is of carefully dressed and squared blocks, laid in regular courses. On both the Folly and the farm house, the fine stonework

is left plain, but for the other two properties, it is decorated with drip-moulds over the windows and decorative treatments at eaves, gables, doors and so on, as befits Tudor-inspired and Arts & Craft styles. The stone dressings of the Grange are particularly refined, as is the detailing of the 1920s gate piers, set in the dressed stone of the original eighteenth century garden walls. In fact, garden walls to both the Tower and The Pines are of equal quality, some is of the same period, particularly the handsome water trough in the wall north of the Tower. It is more likely the stonework for this quality came from outside Whitton rather than its own quarry.



Most stone is exposed and has gained a rich patina of age, creating an attractive, mature, weathered finish, particularly under the many mature trees where moist, shaded conditions have encouraged the growth of lichens and other tiny plants on the chemical rich surface of the stone.

On the flanking wall of the entrance to the Tower, this richness has been enhanced by the addition of a dark red colouring at some time in the past which has encouraged an explosion of multi-coloured lichens.



Fortunately, there are no examples of stonework painted over with masonry paint in Whitton, as this can be a severely damaging process and dulls the historic character of the stone. Pointing

(the way the mortar is finished off between the stones) varies, but is generally appropriate to the quality and type of stonework. Coursed rubble tends to be

roughly pointed back from the face of the stone, whereas with the more refined stonework, joints are as tight as possible, removing the need for heavy re-pointing. There is little evidence of poor use of either type of pointing.



The modern developments introduced new walling materials into Whitton. Two buildings are in dark red brick (the only brick in the hamlet), another is in art-stone (an artificial material manufactured to look like stone), and the last is finished in pebble-dash with stone quoins (probably, as it dates from 1967, over cement block). The latter is alien to Whitton but has at least weathered down over the years. The large south extension to sandstone Whitton Cottage is also in art-stone, revealed by the uniformity of its building blocks despite its now well-matured appearance.

Corrugated iron is another traditional walling material used in Whitton. Although

more common in the past, it is now confined to a simple barn that stands between the road and Whitton Farmhouse. Its condition is maintained and appearance much improved by its green paint, leaving an acceptable feature on the main road through the village.



Because of weathering, the predominance of sandstone in various forms and the general reticence of the modern developments, the character of the hamlet has been largely unaffected by the introduction of new materials, but care must be taken in the future not to upset this balance in favour of man-made or reconstituted materials over the natural, local and traditional.

5.2.5 **Doorways**



Most doorways in Whitton are uncomplicated features with doors of a simple, traditional nature. The only prominent non-traditional door in a traditional building is that on the north side of Whitton Farm North Cottage. Here a plastic door with an oval glazed panel and inappropriate detailing has been added.

The most ornate is the Grange's front door. Two semicircular steps lead up to a large panelled timber door set in a moulded stonework surround, topped by a stone lintel inscribed "A 19 W 21" and sheltered by a shaped stone hood on brackets. A wonderful first impression of an excellent building.

By contrast, the Tower's main entrance is from the side rather than

the front and is guarded by a heavy stone castellated porch of large proportions, necessary to enable the visitor to find the entrance in such a large building with an irregular plan.



A few timber pedestrian doors survive in the hamlet's agricultural buildings and the south-facing doorways of the modern stable block at Whitton Farmhouse have half-doors, but most of the large vehicular openings in the older farm buildings no longer have full sized doors, presenting large 'black holes' to the outside world most of the time.



5.2.6 **Windows**

Although many windows in Whitton's vernacular buildings are timber, most of those in the farm houses and outbuildings have been modified to form modern casements. However, there are timber sliding sashes (mostly later replacements in a Victorian style) in Folly Cottage and The Pines. Like its doorway, Whitton Farm North Cottage has inappropriate plastic casement windows. Sadly, the joinery in the Folly's windows is almost gone, rotted away through lack of maintenance.

The disposition of windows in the older building can sometimes be haphazard, but buildings which were altered over time, such as The Pines, had

the patterns of openings made symmetrical about a central door. This is typical of the eighteenth century.

Once again, the windows of both the Tower and the Grange are in a grand style – solid vertical stone mullions hold simple timber windows in groups of vertical openings, so appropriate for their respective periods and styles. The grouping and number of windows in proportion to the solid masonry between, gives the Grange a greater lightness of appearance than the

Tower with its fewer, often smaller windows.

Window openings in all periods of building are strongly vertical, one of the defining features of Whitton. Unfortunately, not all the modern buildings have followed this tradition, some introducing horizontal openings, and one recent extension introducing an oriel window, an entirely new feature to the hamlet. Consistency of openings and windows is required for to ensure they marry well with Whitton's historic character.



5.2.7 **Roofs**



Traditional dual pitch roofs are used almost exclusively throughout Whitton, but there is considerable subtle variation in orientation, pitch and form. Older roofs tend to be steeper in pitch, as at Whitton Farm North Cottage which may derive from a bastle house, whereas more recent buildings

have relatively shallow pitch roofs. Ironically, one of the shallowest pitch roofs in the hamlet is on its oldest building, Whitton Tower, but being added in the nineteenth century, the roof is hundreds of years younger than the original tower house itself. Traditional off-shoots on both cottages and working farm buildings have single pitch roofs.



Although there are no flat roofs visible in Whitton, there are four curved roofs in the hamlet, all of agricultural origin. Whitton Farmhouse farm has three, one in corrugated iron and two of timber covered in felt, while Whitton Farm has one in corrugated iron. Such roofs are represent in sufficient numbers for them to become another defining feature of the area.

Most domestic roofs are covered in Welsh slate which date from after the arrival of the railway in Rothbury in 1870. Previous traditional roofing materials in Coquetdale were stone slates or heather thatch, and possibly some imported clay pantiles.

As expected, the roofs of the Tower and the Grange are different again from the rest of the hamlet. The Tower's roofs carry both neat grey Welsh and chunky green Lakeland slates, with the later addition n more likely to have the Welsh slate roof. The Grange also has a Lakeland slate roof but, on this building, added period refinement is provided by being meticulously laid in diminishing courses (deepest



course at the eaves, shallowest at the ridge), appropriate for the style and material and typical of the Arts & Crafts movement's high quality workmanship expounded.

Also as expected, modern developments introduced new roof materials too. Red flat tiles on two buildings, and artificial slate on three others – which, out of a total of six recent properties demonstrates a weak response to the area's

traditional architecture. (The general reticence of these building in their scale and siting has, however, already been noted.)



There is no stone cornicing at the eaves of most of Whitton's vernacular roofs, but stone detailing is present in abundance at both eaves and verges on the Tower and the Grange, further emphasising the architectural gulf between these two properties and the other buildings of the hamlet. Only The Pines approaches the finesse of these two, but even here can only offer a cast iron gutter, stone water-tabling and decorative kneelers at eaves and gables.

Finally, the only historic roof not visible from the ground is the Folly's. What is it like? Does a roof even exist? The general state of maintenance of the rest of the structure could give particular cause for concern about the condition of its roof, and therefore the interior it would protect.

5.2.8 ***Dormer Windows and Rooflights***

Neither are particularly strong traditional features of historic Whitton. Except for Victorian cast iron rooflights in the farm houses and outbuildings, all others that are present are later and generally alien to the character of the place.



There are also few dormer windows, which is fortunate as they can harm the appearance of most historic domestic buildings. Probably the most noticeable modern flat roofed dormer on an old property is that on the south side of the low range of farm outbuildings next to The Pines, a particularly large



feature visible from the main road. Another appears on the south pitch of Whitton Farm North Cottage but this is small, has a pitch roof and is not particularly visible from any public areas.

Unfortunately, Whitton Cottage has two dormers and a large rooflight which clutter the roof of such a diminutive building when viewed from the lane at the side.

In such an old settlement as Whitton with so many traditional roofs intact and a commendable restraint on including dormers and rooflights in the more recent buildings, a continued approach to excluding rooflights and dormers would help protect character and appearance in the future.

5.2.9 ***Chimneys***

As heating systems have changed, chimneys have become one of the features of old buildings most vulnerable to removal and loss. Retaining chimneys, however, retains the intact historic character of older buildings (as well as allowing their re-use in the future). With irregular vernacular architecture it is not always possible to

decide where chimneys have been removed, and this is true in Whitton. It is likely that chimneys, domestic and semi-industrial, have been removed at some time from both farm complexes, and probably also Hill Cottage and Whitton Cottage.



Notably, stone gable end chimneys still exist at Whitton Farm and its North Cottage and at The Pines. The multiple stacks and decorative pots of the chimneys at the Tower and the Grange are a part of the essential character of



these handsome properties.

Chimneys have been omitted from the designs of most of the modern additions to Whitton, except for the extension to Whitton



Cottage (which may be a thoughtful gesture to tradition rather than a real chimney). This is to be regretted but the general reticence of such buildings has already been noted.

5.2.10 **Rainwater Goods**

Rainwater goods, including gutters, hoppers and drainpipes, are not designed to be prominent features of the area's buildings, except likely at the Grange where no detail, however small, will have escaped the architect's attention. The vast majority are simple features applied modestly to simple eaves by means of standard spikes. Cast iron is the traditional material but little of this is likely to remain on the vernacular buildings, having been replaced in other metals or in plastic – although fortunately not much of the latter is in evidence in Whitton.

For Whitton's more architecturally prominent buildings, rainwater goods are hidden behind the moulded stone cornices at the eaves, and hoppers and drainpipes incorporated externally into the overall design.

5.3 **Contribution of Spaces**

Because of Whitton's incremental development history and the lack of a planned layout, the impact of open spaces is not fundamental to the character of the area. What open spaces do exist, therefore, tend to be of localised importance only. In particular, the contribution made by the domestic gardens and commercial yards seen from the public realm, is high. The main spaces in Whitton are:

- roads, lanes and verges
- domestic yards
- domestic gardens

- commercial yards and paddocks
- wider landscape

Trees also make a fundamental contribution to the character and appearance of Whitton, and these two are discussed below.

5.3.1 **Roads, Lanes & Verges**

Roads, lanes and their edges make a strong contribution to character and appearance. Their meanderings among buildings, their changes of level as they climb and dip, and their loss and gain of visual containment present an endless variety of combinations. They determine how and in what order the place is experienced.

The especially attractive and memorable lane in Whitton is the stretch of Carterside



Road that climbs up between the gardens of the Tower and the Grange. Mature trees of mildly exotic varieties and flowering verges, provide attractive visual containment – even the intrusive wire-scape above disappears in this part of the hamlet. The attractive containment continues to the right, up Hillhead Road for a little way, while the main road offers some sense of arrival as it levels off and opens out on the flat land at the heart of Whitton.

The approach from the east along Silvertown Lane also offers many visual attractions, but these arise more from the dramatic impact of the Folly and the open setting of the hamlet in the wider pastoral landscape than from visual containment by attractive features. Silvertown Lane, as the name implies, is a much more rural affair than Carterside Road. The other two lanes in Whitton that merge into Hillhead Road, characterised by their unfinished surface treatments and thinning tree borders, have an attractive informality that leads naturally up the hill to the surprise that the Folly eventually presents. Paradoxically, although the Folly is visible from miles around the hamlet, it can be seen from only a few places from within Whitton itself.

The differing surface treatments of the lanes – tarmac to rough track – results in a simple hierarchy of routes in Whitton which increases its legibility as an historic settlement. This hierarchy is a characteristic which should be protected in the future.



Whitton also boasts two water troughs or pants as part of the pleasure (and past function) of its public realm. Although the later one in the heart of the settlement is simple and modest, the other, being at the grand entrance to Whitton Tower, is more elaborate and elegantly decorated with balled finials.

5.3.2 *Domestic Yards*

Unfortunately, with the growth of vehicle ownership, more and more private space particularly at the front of houses is being paved over, often with little thought for the visual impact on the street scene. Whitton has not been immune from this national trend, but its impact has so far has been confined to the modern housing.



The domestic hardstandings in the old walled gardens of Whitton Tower are a relatively recent feature of Whitton and, although they are not the worst thing to have happened in recent times in the hamlet, they are not entirely in keeping with its historic character. Fortunately, the density of the mature landscaping around them, helps to mitigate something of their impact. This cannot, however, be said of the extensive red gravelled yard that washes around Whitton Farm North Cottage, which has nothing to reduce its visual impact from the street.

5.3.3 *Domestic Gardens*

Whitton has a robustly landscaped character but few front gardens are a visible part of the public scene. Instead, on several parts of the main street, naturally



planted verges – which the local residents lovingly tend – are more prominent than the gardens behind them. The only frontage plot that approaches a typical front garden is the large green behind the front walls of The Pines, but even this only visible through an open gateway.

There are rear gardens in the hamlet behind Whitton Cottage and Hill Cottage. Neither make any contribution to public character as they are hidden from public view behind fences and shrubbery.



However, about 70% of the land surface of the hamlet is given over to two huge



private pleasure gardens. The earliest, belonging to the Tower, is likely to be of eighteenth century origin and extends from the landscaped walks and fish pond north of Carterside Road, west to the caravan site, south to the Folly and east along Hillhead Road. It once included open parkland surrounded by tree belts amongst which were shady walks, floral walks and walled produce gardens. Although the tree belts have thinned out, the handsome garden walls breeched by new housing,

and the floral features depleted, the views into the gardens from surrounding lanes present glimpses into a charming secret garden under cathedral-like canopies of trees, as well as wholesome vistas across handsome parkland.

The other pleasure garden, that surrounding the Grange, is much more hidden from the street. But its quality and maturity is apparent from the surrounding exotic and opulent planting, and from the carefully planned and kept landscaped visible on approaching the front door, designed on the principle that first impressions can be made to last. The garden and house were designed as one, so local sandstone in the form of paths, steps and retaining walls radiate out from the building in an integrated and planned experience, quite different from the relaxed parkland approach of the earlier gardens of the Tower. The Grange also has a garden folly but one which is very different from Sharpe's Folly in the Tower's gardens – it is a secluded gazebo, sited to enable the residents of the Grange to enjoy their own private view across the Coquet Valley.

It is also important to note, the views of Whitton from the other side of the Coquet Valley are greatly influenced by the nature and age of the tree planting in Whitton's two extraordinary pleasure gardens. The contribution of these gardens to the internal and external



character and appearance of Whitton is therefore huge.

5.3.4 **Commercial Yards & Paddocks**

The only commercial yards and paddocks in Whitton belong to the two farms. The old yard of Whitton Farmhouse, the northernmost farm, has been heavily built over through the years and now remains only as a small rough metalled yard hidden



behind the modern green corrugated iron barn. But, when the farm became commercial stables in the late twentieth century, a new yard was formed in front of the new stables at the east end of the farm. Unfortunately, this new yard has none of the attractive qualities of old, and is nothing more than a large tarmac car park for ten vehicles or so – without the

relief of any softer landscaping, it is somewhat incongruous in Whitton.

Whitton Farm, however, has retained its original yard on the east side and, with its full set of traditional stone farm buildings surrounding it (house, barn, storage, animal sheds), its roughly finished surface and continuing use for its agricultural purposes, give it an authenticity which makes a major contribution to the character of Whitton.



The only grassed enclosures or paddocks divided by stone walls that still survive are those that surround Whitton Farm in an arc from west to south and, together, they make a huge contribution to the character of the hamlet. They create a hill-top area of central open space which not only provides a welcome contrast to the visual containment of the rest of the hamlet, but also provides the



opportunity to enjoy open views into Whitton as well as vistas out into the open countryside eastwards. Until recently, the northernmost paddock was cluttered with a metal-framed barn which blocked views to the southern open paddocks around the hamlet. To the delight of local people, this has now been removed and the sense of space at the heart of Whitton can now be enjoyed. The openness of these paddocks should be valued

into the future.

5.3.5 **Wider Landscape**

Because Whitton occupies a high point above the surrounding landscape and river



valley, the wider landscape is ever present as people move around the settlement. Whether on the Carterside Road bank, at the top of the main street, walking up to the Folly or taking the foot path across the fields to Rothbury, there are continuous reminders of the dominant hill-top site of Whitton. In an overall sense, the wider landscape setting of the hamlet is a fundamental characteristic of the place which should be recognised and

protected. It is, therefore, equally important that Whitton retains its physical isolation from neighbouring settlements or developments.

5.3.6 **Trees**

The huge contribution of the trees in Whitton's two large pleasure gardens to the internal and external character of the settlement has already been noted. But other areas of mature trees are also important in reinforcing this sylvan character.

The other major contributory group of mature trees stands in the old quarry, at the highest part of the hamlet. They help define Whitton in views to the south. However two other areas are slowly becoming at risk through loss without replacement – the belt of trees on the west side of Hillhead Road, and the old belt that defines the small open parkland close to the Tower. These belts continue to provide a defining visual structure to historic Whitton and need to be rescued from depletion.



There is likely to be a need to audit all the mature planting in the hamlet, especially around the Tower, as much of it is probably of the same age and possibly liable similar loss.

New, reinforcing planting around the rest of Whitton should be resisted to maintain the present characteristic balance between visual containment and open links with the wider landscape. It is no surprise that the present structural planting that has come down the ages

happens to provide comprehensive shelter for the settlement from the prevailing westerly winds.

5.4 **Atmosphere**

The area's character is gained not only from the built fabric and the spaces around it, but also the atmosphere they help create. The isolation and the depth of history in the hamlet generates particular types of social use which introduce a gentle rhythm into the general tranquillity of the place. The willingness of local people to tend the verges and to enjoy the hamlet through the seasons is evidence of a degree of local 'ownership', a kind of subtle civic pride which is valuable and a real advantage to be generated and nurtured. As a result, the area has a friendly, restful feel but one which seldom descends into rural dullness due to the busyness of Whitton Farm, the clear night sky, the wealth of historic character for locals to explore, and the ever-changing character of the tree cover which also brings other sounds which are the benchmark of a rich, green rural character – bird song and the rustling of leaves.

5.5 **Loss, Intrusion & Damage**

5.5.1 **Neutral Parts**

There are no neutral parts in Whitton. Neutral areas are those which have a balance of positive and negative characteristics.

5.5.2 **Negative Parts**

Negative parts are those which detract from the overall character and appearance of the place. The only area in Whitton that does negatively affect the character of the hamlet is the stables and its hardstanding to the east of Whitton Farmhouse. The combination of the under-used timber stables and the unrelieved sea of black-top in front are not in keeping with either the vernacular or quality characteristics of the rest of the hamlet.

5.5.3 **Incremental Change**

Gradual modernisation has seen several incremental changes to architectural features, detailing and materials, under two main themes:

- loss and replacement of original architectural details
- inappropriate designs, materials and methods for repairs, alterations and new work

Much of this has involved lower quality work, synthetic materials, and ill-informed or now-discredited approaches. The detailed variety in the architecture means that some change can be readily absorbed without too much harm but, as the architecture is simple, the palette of natural materials limited, and basic architectural features relatively modest, some changes can become particularly prominent. The attractively inconsistent balance this creates can be easily damaged through loss or alteration of those features, materials or design intent. There is not, however, a sufficient accumulation of change to have seriously

weakened character and appearance in any part of the area. Some changes took place before the conservation area was designated in 1991, but most will have taken place in the last few decades, having been given consent in less conservation-minded times, or – more likely – the result of permitted development rights, ie. works which do not require planning permission.

It will be important to try to curtail the most harmful damage and loss. It would also be important to find opportunities for reversing over time harmful changes to the architectural and historic qualities which give the area its distinctive character. Both would be more easily achieved with detailed guidance and incentives. Monitoring these and other changes should take place to ensure accumulated change over time does not further weaken or erode the area's special local architectural and historic interest.

5.5.4 ***Loss and Replacement of Original Architectural Details***

A few original architectural features which helped to define the special interest of the area have been lost incrementally over time, mostly some of the windows and doors. These are changes which have not required planning permission, although



some will have received permission or listed building consent. Several original windows that would have been traditional timber sliding sashes of various designs have been replaced in the late twentieth century with modern timber casements. One house has received replacement windows and door in PVCu to inappropriate designs, one of the most harmful cases of loss and unsuitable replacement in the place.

The effect which fenestration has on a building's character and appearance should not be underestimated. Even slight changes to details (such as glazing bar profile or width) can dramatically alter the character and appearance of a building. This can be true if one in a set of windows is changed or if it is repeated across a whole façade. The visual effect of modern materials and

inaccurate designs is invariably jarring against a well-aged building in natural traditional materials. The success of PVCu windows which attempt to copy the design and proportions of traditional windows, depends on the width and profile of the frames. It is generally the case that PVCu frames are thicker and more angular than timber ones, and can not accurately incorporate details such as mouldings, horns, beading and stained glass. PVCu 'glazing bars' are often false strips superimposed onto glazing which have a flat, flimsy appearance. Neither does PVCu take on the patina of time like timber. The result will almost always harm character and appearance. The same is true of 'fake' sash windows (top-hung casements) which rarely reflect the particular style of the building. These and other

modern window styles often have clumsy, chunky proportions and are often placed flush with the face of the building, rather than being set back into an appropriate reveal, thus losing depth and shadow to the building's architecture. Such cases should be avoided in Whitton to protect its character and appearance.

5.5.5 ***Inappropriate Designs, Methods and Materials***

There are a few cases of repairs, alterations and new work which have used designs, methods or materials which are inappropriate to the area's special local architectural and historic interest. Some of these would not have required planning permission, but others would have received consent. For example:

- Hardstandings for residential parking, a new feature in the hamlet, which can be out of keeping if they are large, in inappropriate materials or colours.
- Residential alterations and additions which include design features which are not reflected in the vernacular or quality of Whitton's historic architecture.
- Some new materials which are alien to the area, such as red brick, blockwork, roof felt and other modern roofing and floorscape materials. These can be particularly challenging to the natural stone colour of the rest of Whitton, whilst the artificial regularity, colouring and weathering of manufactured wall and roof materials dilutes the feeling of natural quality in parts.



5.5.6 ***Condition & Vacancy***

Poor condition and vacancy of historic buildings can undermine the character of a place and threaten the sustainability of its future. In Whitton, the general maintenance of vernacular outbuildings is not always good and two buildings in the hamlet give particular cause for concern:

- The lean-to shed at the north west corner of the Whitton Farm complex is vacant and in an advanced state of decay. The roof has partially collapsed exposing internal joinery to the weather and the west walls are unstable, possibly a consequence of the removal of the large framed barn that was once attached to it.



- Sharpe's Folly, although listed Grade II*, appears to be suffering from neglect and the ravages of the weather. Masonry is missing from its castellated parapet and almost all its window joinery has gone. The condition of the roof, which is not visible from the ground, is also likely to be of concern.

These will need to be positively addressed to prevent harm to character and appearance in the medium term.



5.5.7 ***Damage to Spaces***

Although there are no formal public spaces in Whitton, the condition of the surface of un-adopted roads in the hamlet is inconsistent and uneven. But, unlike in heavily used urban areas, such condition is not unacceptable in isolated and lightly-used Whitton – it is part of the area's defining rural character, increasing both the rustic appeal and the environmental legibility of the settlement.

The important open paddock areas at the heart of Whitton appear to be suffering from some neglect, particularly with the presence of apparently surplus building materials and the remains of former buildings. Although these open spaces should not be groomed like parks, their rugged character could nonetheless be enhanced by the removal of unused rubble and redundant structure.

6 *Designation & Management Matters*

6.1 *Designation*

The 2005 scoping study recommended that Whitton be considered for designation as a conservation area because of its special historic, architectural and townscape interest. This special interest, based on factors such as history, quality and integrity, has been assessed in the preceding chapters, and it is on the basis of this assessment that Whitton Conservation Area has been designated.

6.1.1 *Summary of Whitton's special architectural and historic interest*

Whitton's special historic interest derives, first, from its medieval and late medieval past as a settlement of defensible buildings and spaces; second, from its transition through the post-Medieval period into a place of high quality residences contrasted with busy agricultural units; and, finally, from its conversion into a modern settlement whilst still retaining the contrast of uses, character and appearance from the past. In addition, although its history has not yet been traced in a direct line back to earliest times, Whitton does stand on the edge of an important upland prehistoric landscape with a surviving scatter of special archaeological features in the vicinity. This history of Whitton is clearly of great interest and, although other northern settlements share this process of history, the intensity of contrast between vernacular and quality developments that took place in Whitton and, more importantly, the survival of structures, spaces and layout that witness this quality history, this tiny hamlet is special in comparison with other similar upland settlements.

Its special architectural interest is not difficult to identify. Within this small settlement are the substantial remains of two medieval tower houses and two, possibly three, seventeenth or eighteenth century bastle houses, both unique northern building types. In addition, there is a fascinating eighteenth century tower folly, a Georgian pant with an unusually elaborate water operation and, finally, a high quality early twentieth century Arts & Crafts residence, regarded as the best building of its period anywhere in Northumberland. This impressive list has resulted in this diminutive hamlet bearing a total of 10 entries on the statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, of which two are at Grade II* ('two star'), being in the top 8% of statutorily protected buildings in the country.

Added to this, the landscape architectural value of Whitton is also special. Few upland settlements, particularly as small as Whitton, have over 75% of their land surface still given over to quality pleasure gardens and, in addition, gardens that represent the changing fashions of the 150 years from the mid eighteenth century to the early twentieth centuries – from the times and styles of Capability Brown through to Gertrude Jekyll.

Finally, in townscape terms, although Whitton has no formal townscape qualities, its soft agricultural environment and its quality residential corners gain extra visual containment and added anticipation through changes in level and mature tree cover. One special townscape feature that Whitton has retained is its physical isolation from other settlements, adding value to the identity and self-containment of the hamlet. And not only is the landscape in which the hamlet stands of high archaeological value but, in the 1997 Alnwick District Wide Local Plan, it was designated as an Area of High Landscape Value, adding further quality to the settlement as part of a wider setting.

Sufficient of these special interests or qualities survive with a coherent integrity on the ground to give Whitton the special character and appearance it has today.

6.1.2 ***The desirability of preserving or enhancing Whitton's character and appearance***

Even before designation, decisions had already been made that certain parts of Whitton should be preserved and enhanced anyway. Already, Whitton has at least 10 buildings and walls scattered through the hamlet which are listed and therefore conserved, plus many trees and extensive planted areas in the grounds of Whitton Tower covered by Tree Preservation Orders (see 7.1.2 below).

The whole settlement provides the physical and cultural context for all its protected components and, in addition, it provides huge added value of place and history which is more than just the sum of its protected parts. The overall integrity of the place makes sense of the history of the component and provides a continuous cultural environment in which they can be experienced. It also has its own existence as the long established and significant settlement of Whitton itself, and is therefore more than merely the cultural and environmental glue that holds its precious parts together.

Therefore, both as a context for the valued, and as an historically and culturally valuable entity in itself, it is desirable for the character and appearance of Whitton to be preserved or enhanced.

6.2 ***Agreed Boundary***

The drawing of a conservation area boundary for any isolated country settlement may be complex so it is best to be guided by sound principles.

PPG15 suggests the use of consistent local (ie. district-wide) standards to ensure conservation areas are not 'devalued' by drawing boundaries to include areas

without special interest. The principles for a boundary for Whitton should therefore be the following:

- begin with the minimum area of the core of the settlement,
- extend this by adding additional areas of strategic conservation importance, such as in protecting the settlement from potential future threats from nearby existing development or settlement expansion, or because they are part of the natural landscape context of the area and deserve to be protected with it;
- 'holes' of undesignated parts within a continuous boundary should be avoided;
- avoid taking boundaries along the middle of a road or waterway where character is similar on both sides;
- run boundaries along visible features on the ground, where possible.

Applying these principles – especially the first two – to Whitton produces the boundary shown on Map 1. The core settlement has been augmented by strategic areas that protect its valuable physical isolation from expansion of the neighbouring caravan site, and of Rothbury up the hill past the recently-built hospital. In addition,, areas of landscape to the north and south of Whitton are included as they are parts of the mound landscape feature on which the hamlet sits.

Other strategic parts adjoining to the east were considered in addition to this boundary if the 'settlement boundaries' (designations to control the outward spread of settlements in the district) included in the current Alnwick District Wide Local Plan are to expand when they are updated for the Local Development Framework currently being prepared.

6.3 **Planning Policy**

Now Whitton is designated as a conservation area, the current development plan policies as listed in section 7.4 below apply. Guidance should always be sought to identify any newly issued policies or guidance.

The two pleasure gardens in Whitton are of such historic quality and survival, especially at Whitton Grange, that they should be considered for designation as historic parks and gardens.

6.4 **Suggested Amendments and Additions to Listed Buildings**

6.4.1 **Amendments to Existing Listed Building Records**

It was noted on the GIS map of listed buildings that the full extent of the L-plan listed front garden wall to The Pines (Listed NGR: NU 05824 01136 as Whitton Farmhouse) was not marked. This should be rectified for clarity. All the other nine entries are fully represented on the map.

Further research on The Pines is suggested in order to ascertain whether it originated as a bastle house or not – this could hopefully remove the mystery about its 'older core'.

6.4.2 ***Suggested Additional Listed Buildings***

The Keys To the Past website (see 7.2 below) carries information for a popular audience on historic sites in Northumberland, and it indicates that both Whitton Farm house and Whitton Farm North Cottage could have originated as bastles. Further research is recommended on both properties to clarify this situation and, should they prove to have such a past, then they should be considered for listing in spite of the changes that have taken place since. A recognised expert in the regional on defended houses is Peter Ryder, and he should be approached to carry out the necessary research (he contributed to the Whitton entries on this website). Unfortunately, the Whitton Farm house entry on the website incorrectly describes it as being listed already, which it is not.

6.5 ***Possible Enhancement Schemes***



Because of the desirability of keeping the rugged, rustic character of Whitton, environmental enhancement could run the risk of gentrification of its public lanes. Part of its attraction is the 'warts and all' appearance which, in general, it is better to retain. The only modern distraction from this are the overhead wires, particularly on the east side of the hamlet (on the west they are hidden by mature trees). Re-routing the wires to reduce their impact, could be explored to advantage.

The Folly should be repaired and consolidated to make it wind and watertight as well as to improve its appearance. It is listed Grade II* and has already been added to the national Building at Risk register, as a positive way of turning attention to its problems and potentially bringing in finance and skills to secure its future. Another possible

focus is for the proper restoration, repair and maintenance of the ruinous building north of Whitton Farm, which should be reused rather than allowed to disappear.

Following suitable research, the restoration of lost planting features of the Tower pleasure garden could also be explored, particularly the east-west planted belt running west from the Folly, as this would help to reintegrate the Folly back into the garden and thereby increase the chances of it being repaired. One option could be for the owners of all the mature trees in Whitton to collectively commission a survey and management plan for the hamlet so that their future continuity can be secured. The mildly exotic mature trees in Whitton are one of its most important features, as well as being one reason why the hamlet enjoys shelter from the prevailing westerly winds.

6.6 ***Future Management***

Change is an inevitable component of most conservation areas; the challenge is to manage change in ways which maintain and, if possible, strengthen an area's

special qualities. The character of conservation areas is rarely static and is susceptible to incremental, as well as dramatic, change. Some areas are in a state of relative economic decline, and suffer from lack of investment. In others, the qualities that make conservation areas appealing also help to encourage over-investment and pressure for development in them. Positive management is essential if such pressure for change, which tends to alter the very character that made the areas attractive in the first place, is to be limited.

Proactively managing Whitton Conservation Area will therefore be an essential way of preserving and enhancing its character and appearance into the future. New English Heritage guidance suggests the following topics should be considered when addressing the need for a management strategy for the area⁶:

- boundary review
- article 4 directions
- enforcement and monitoring change
- buildings at risk
- site specific design guidance or development briefs
- thematic policy guidance (for example on windows or doors)
- enhancement opportunities
- trees and green spaces
- urban design and/or public realm
- regeneration issues
- decision making and community consultation
- available resources

In addition, development plan policies and Council procedures which relate to all conservation areas in the district will be applied to Whitton now that it is a conservation area.

⁶ *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, English Heritage, 2006

7 Additional Information

7.1 Other Designations

7.1.1 Listed Buildings

Entries on the 'Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest' cover the whole building (including the interior), may cover more than one building, and may also include other buildings, walls and structures in the building's curtilage. Contact the Council for more advice (see page 7).

No.	Name	Grade	GV	Made
	Whitton Farmhouse	II		
	Whitton Farmhouse garden wall	II		
	Whitton Grange	II		
	Whitton Grange gates/walls	II		
	Whitton Grange towerhouse remains	II		
	Whitton Grange gazebo	II		
	Whitton Grange terrace wall	II		
	Whitton Pant	II		
	Sharp's Folly	II*		
	Whitton Tower	II*		

7.1.2 Tree Preservation Orders

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) are made by local authorities to protect visually strategic groups or individual specimens of trees from damage such as felling, lopping or topping. Trees not only soften the environment, they add the colours of changing seasons, shade and, in a shelter belt, can hide unsightly developments from view. In Alnwick, some TPOs are made by the District Council (light green on Map 4) and some by the County Council (dark green on Map 4), but both have the same legal status.

Order	Notes
	<i>County Council TPOs</i>
	solid and deep belts of trees along the north and east boundaries of the caravan site

<i>District Council TPOs</i>	
	area of trees around the pond at the junction of Carterside Road and Whitton Road
	tree belts around the western end and to the south of the former walled produce gardens of Whitton Tower
	a scatter of individual trees north of the former walled garden and along the western side of Hillhead Road

This means that, at present, the significant groups of mature trees around the refuse tip, in the gardens of Whitton Grange, and at the Pines are unprotected. Designation as a conservation area would provide the whole of Whitton with added protection over works to trees (see 7.3.3 below).

7.1.3 **Area of High Landscape Value**

Whitton is included in an Area of High Landscape Value that stretches from the Northumberland National Park boundaries to a line through Longframlington and Alnwick in the east. The majority of such designations are associated with upland areas, river valleys and parklands. In such areas, new developments which would have an impact on the appearance of the areas require careful consideration under Policy RE17 of the Alnwick Local Plan, which discourages development which would have a significant and adverse effect on the AHLV's appearance.

There is no incompatibility in designating a conservation area in an AHLV, as they are designated for different reasons. It is in fact likely they would complement each other in providing environmental protection at both micro and macro scales.

7.2 **Archaeological Records**

Northumberland County Council's record of archaeological sites, whether they are scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings or neither, are accessed through the national archaeological data base, Archaeological Data Services (ADS). This website, which also includes entries from English Heritage, National Trust and Defence of Britain, can be accessed via www.northumberland.gov.uk. A 5km search zone around Whitton returned some 340 sites. Of these, 13 were in Whitton itself and comprised the 10 listed buildings identified above, plus Whitton Farm North Cottage, and two 1940 pillboxes which were part of the Coquet Line defensive system.

The Keys To The Past website (www.keystothepast.info) also carries information on many historic environment sites in Northumberland (and County Durham), aimed at a more general audience. The same 13 entries for Whitton are returned from this website.

7.3 **The Implications Of Conservation Area Status**

The local planning authority has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing character and appearance of conservation

areas in exercising their planning powers. In particular, the local authority has extra controls over the following in conservation areas:

- demolition
- minor developments
- the protection of trees

7.3.1 **Demolition**

Outside conservation areas, buildings which are not statutorily listed can be demolished without approval under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Within conservation areas, the demolition of unlisted buildings requires conservation area consent. Applications for consent to totally or substantially demolish any building within a conservation area must be made to Alnwick District Council or, on appeal or call-in, to the Secretary of State. Procedures are basically the same as for listed building consent applications. Generally, there is a presumption in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area.

7.3.2 **Minor Developments**

Within in a conservation area, legislation⁷ states that there are certain cases where permission must be obtained before making alterations which would normally be permitted elsewhere. This is to ensure that any alterations do not detract from the area's character and appearance. The changes include certain types of exterior painting and cladding, roof alterations including inserting dormer windows, and putting up satellite dishes which are visible from the street. The size of extensions to dwellinghouses which can be erected without consent is also restricted to 50m³.

Under Article 4 of the same legislation, there can be further measures to restrict other kinds of alteration which are normally allowed under so-called 'permitted development rights'. These measures, called Article 4 Directions, can be selective in the buildings they cover within the conservation area, and the types of restriction they impose depending on how they might affect key building elements and so character and appearance. These Directions effectively control the proliferation of relatively minor alterations to buildings in conservation areas that can cumulatively lead to erosion of character and appearance over time. Development is not precluded, but selected alterations would require planning permission and special attention would be paid to the potential effect of proposals when permission was sought. Examples might be putting up porches, painting a house a different colour, or changing distinctive doors, windows or other architectural details. The local authority has to give good reason for making these restrictions, and must take account of public views before doing so.

⁷ Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1997

To many owners, any tighter restrictions or additional costs, such as for special building materials, are more than outweighed by the pleasure they derive from living in such an area.

7.3.3 **Trees**

Trees make an important contribution to the character of the local environment. Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, whether or not it is covered by a tree preservation order, has to give notice to the local planning authority. The authority can then consider the contribution the tree makes to the character of the area and if necessary make a tree preservation order to protect it.

7.4 **Current Development Plan Policies**

The following policies would be generally applicable to development in settlements within Alnwick District and will apply to Whitton Conservation Area now it is designated.

- Core Strategy Policies
 - S1-S23
- Saved Policies from Alnwick District Wide Local Plan
 - BE2, BE8, BE12, BE13, H19

7.5 **Unlisted Buildings In A Conservation Area**

When considering the contribution made by unlisted buildings to the special architectural or historic interest of a conservation area, the following questions might be asked⁸:

- Is the building the work of a particular architect of regional or local note?
- Has it qualities of age, style, materials or any other characteristics which reflect those of at least a substantial number of the buildings in the conservation area?
- Does it relate by age, materials, or in any other historically significant way to adjacent listed buildings, and contribute positively to their setting?
- Does it individually, or as part of a group, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in which it stands, or of an earlier phase of growth?
- Does it have significant historic association with established features such as the road layout, burgage plots, a town park or a landscape feature?
- Does the building have landmark quality, or contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces, including exteriors or open spaces with a complex of public buildings?
- Does it reflect the traditional functional character of, or former uses within, the area?

⁸ Taken from *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals*, English Heritage, 2006

- Has it significant historic associations with local people or past events?
- Does its use contribute to the character or appearance of the conservation area?
- If a structure associated with a designed landscape within the conservation area, such as a significant wall, terracing or a minor garden building, is it of identifiable importance to the historic design?

Alnwick District Council believes any one of these characteristics could provide the basis for considering that a building makes a positive contribution to the special interest of a conservation area, provided that its historic form and values have not been seriously eroded by unsympathetic alteration.

7.6 **Sources**

The following sources were used in production of this appraisal:

- *Alnwick District Wide Local Plan*, Alnwick District Council, 1997
- *Northumberland Place-Names*, Stan Beckensall, Butler Publishing, 2004
- *The Buildings of England: Northumberland*, John Grundy et al, 1992
- *Medieval Castle, Towers, Peles & Bastles of Northumberland*, T H Rowland, Sandhill Press, 1987
- *Victorian County History: Northumberland*, Volume 5, 1940
- Northumberland County Archives, Woodhorn
- www.keystothepast.info
- www.northumberland.gov.uk

7.7 **Photographic Record**

Photographs taken during site survey for this report are contained in a digital archive held by Alnwick District Council.

Whitton

Legend:

- Medieval (14th century)
- Possible bastle (17th/18th century)
- 18th century
- 19th century (with earlier parts)
- 19th century
- Early 20th century (1921)
- Modern (1960s onwards)

Map 3. Other Designations



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