



Alnmouth

Conservation Area Character Appraisal



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Contents

	Preface	1
1	Introduction	2
2	Historical Character	3
3	Architectural and Townscape Character	5
4	Management Recommendations	13
	Boundary Changes 2006	15
	Bibliography	17

Appendices:

1. Conservation Area Boundary
and Listed Buildings
2. Glossary

Preface

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

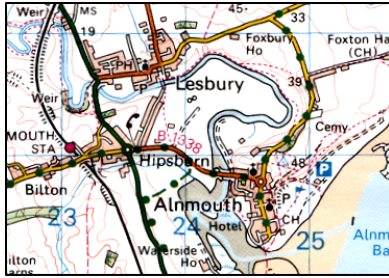
Conservation areas are built-up areas with special architectural or historic character, which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. When conservation areas were first introduced in 1967, designation carried no special restrictions. In 1974, the control of certain kinds of demolition and the protection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

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

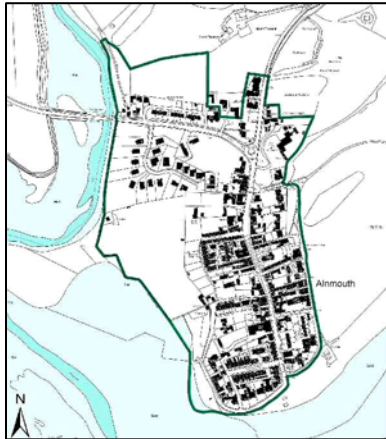
These character appraisals closely follow the framework set out in the Council's brief and the consultant's proposal dated September 2004, including guidance published by English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, English Historic Towns Forum and other authorities. They include information supplied by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

1 Introduction

As its name suggests, Alnmouth is at the mouth of the River Aln, once a natural harbour and the lowest fording point of the river. It is 7km from Alnwick by road, via the B1338 and A1068 to the A1, with 'Alnmouth for Alnwick' Inter-City station on the main east coast railway line at Bilton 1.5km away. It is on National Cycle Route 1.



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Alnmouth Conservation Area

The village is built on a gravel and clay headland between the river and the sea. Millstone grit is exposed at the coast, known locally as 'Alnmouth rocks' and used for building stone. The surrounding area is low-lying, with salt-marsh and sand dunes. The area and village are part of the Northumberland AONB and designated as an SSSI in the 1997 ADC Local Plan. The golf course is registered as common land. The area is adjacent to the Berwickshire and Northumberland Coast European Marine Site and is part of the Northumberland shore SPA.

The 2001 census gives the population as 562, in 259 households. The town has a high proportion of retired people and second/holiday homes. In common with other local coastal settlements, the main industry is tourism.

The conservation area was designated in 1972, and includes all of the settlement and some land outside it. Its importance is underlined by the large number of listed buildings within its boundaries (See Appendix 1).



Alnmouth in its setting

2 Historical Character

Although the River Aln is marked on Ptolemy's map of about AD150, and may have been used as an anchorage at that time, there is relatively little Roman or pre-Roman archaeology in the area; this may be due in part to the continuing change in sea levels and shifting shorelines, which also later led to the decline of Alnmouth as a port. The early and later history of the area is covered fully in Betts (see bibliography).

Alnmouth may be the site of Anglo-Saxon 'Twyford' (Two Fords) mentioned by Bede. The remains of a carved stone cross have been found on Church Hill, and the settlement may have been located between this and the present village, which was largely laid out in the 12th century when the deVesci's (related to the owners of Alnwick Castle) sold burgage plots to encourage its growth as a port. The town thrived, with stone and products from the sheep industry being exported; its layout, a single street leading to the church with burgage plots each side, still shapes the village although the river now intervenes and much of the detailed layout of the plots has altered. On Mayson's map of 1614 the houses and burgage plots are shown as extending further to the north than on later maps, including the sites of the allotments and old school; these areas may therefore have greater archaeological importance than is immediately apparent.

Economic decline and raids by the Scots in the later middle ages led to a reduction in trade, with fishing becoming the main activity. However, 18th century agricultural improvements and the upgrading of the existing road to a turnpike in 1753-4 to link Alnmouth with Hexham via Alnwick and Lesbury resulted in the town becoming an important port for grain (at one point exporting more than Newcastle) and the import of timber, with links to London, Holland and Norway. Some shipbuilding was also carried out, the shipyard being on the site of the Old Coastguard Station. No harbour construction took place, beyond the installation of dolphins and mooring stones, but the large granaries that are such an important feature of the town date (in their original forms) from this time; in 1769 they were reputed to be the largest in the county. It is possible that the bricks visible on a few buildings were made in the field to the west of the village. John Wesley visited twice, in 1748 and 1752; the cross in Chapel Lane marks the spot where



Based on Mayson, 1614; on the original, a building symbol is shown on the street frontage of each plot. (Current map shown faint)



Based on Wilkin, 1791



Aln House, c.1740 - Northumberland Street, an important C18 building.



Based on 1st Edition OS, 1865



Based on 3rd Edition OS, 1920



Newspaper photograph of bomb damage, Argyle Street

he preached. The old Methodist Chapel was built opposite in 1830.

During this period, the river was eroding Church Hill, and the parish church was in ruins by the 18th century. The River Aln changed its course during a severe storm on Christmas Day 1806, cutting off Church Hill and destroying the remains of the church. A new church building (now the Hindmarsh Hall) was formed in 1859 out of an old granary, apparently to a design by the well-known architect Anthony Salvin under the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland. The current parish church, built in 1876, provided a new focus for Northumberland Street. Silting of the harbour, always a problem became impossible to prevent, and by 1896 trade had ceased.

Although the arrival of the railway in 1847 further threatened Alnmouth's importance as a port, it also encouraged the tourist trade. As early as 1827 it was noted 'Some houses are furnished for the accommodation of bathers'. Some granaries were converted to community use, houses or hotels; Nether Grange was built in 1840 as a summer home for the Pease family of Pendower, Newcastle, and Lint Close around 1910 for the Scholefield family, the architect being W H Knowles of Newcastle, and the builders R Carse & Son, Amble & Morpeth. Several burgage plots became more densely built up, a trend that continues today, the physical boundaries of the village limiting sideways expansion. Riverside Road and Marine Road were improved to open up the backs of the burgage plots for holiday accommodation, which gives the village much of its special colour and variety. A field to the SW of Northumberland Street was built up with housing and guesthouses, (Part of this development suffered bomb damage in 1941, the houses being replaced by flats typical of the 1950's.) Lovaine Terrace, an early experiment in concrete block construction by local builder Peter Rule, was completed in 1878. Improvements in services and road surfacing led to a rise in pavement levels in Northumberland Street, contributing to the character of the conservation area. Tourism remains the most important industry in the area.

In 1856 the Hipsburn river bridge (renamed the Duchess's Bridge in 1864) was constructed to link the town with the station more directly. 20th century expansion has been in this direction, along Shepherds Hill, Alnwood and Wellfield Close. The school (1876), new Methodist

Chapel (1891), and the boys' club (1930's) were built in this part of the Conservation Area.

The golf course was laid out on common land in the mid-19th century, the club house on Marine Terrace forming a link with the town. The cow byres at the end of Garden Terrace were in use until the C20, the cows being taken to pasture on the common land each day.

Summary of historical features:

- Dominance of Northumberland Street, with mediaeval burgage plot boundaries and lanes each side.
- Granaries, river wall and other structures relating to the past use of the town
- Increasing density in existing built-up area
- Large holiday homes/guest houses and recreational facilities on the periphery of the area



Conservation area viewed from the river



Northumberland Street

3 Architectural and Townscape Character

Setting

Built on a spur, surrounded on three sides by water and backed to the north by high ground, the setting of the conservation area is very important to its character. From within it allows distant glimpses of dunes or hills, or the horizon, giving a spacious seaside feeling.

Viewed from the railway, river and golf course, the area is strongly defined, with densely packed buildings rising up the hill. The conservation area includes the grassy slope between The Wynd and Lookout, and the fields between the river and Riverside Road, Lovaine Terrace and to the north of Shepherds Hill; their open character is important in providing a contrasting setting for the built-up areas.



View of river - Red Lion, Northumberland Street



View of river - Garden Terrace



Church and churchyard - Northumberland Street



Public or private space? - rear of Argyle Street

Townscape and built form

The conservation area has a strongly unified character, due to a restricted palette of building forms, colours and materials and generally well-defined boundaries. However, three distinct sub-areas can be identified within it.

Area 1: Northumberland Street south of The Wynd, with its associated roads and alleys, the historic urban core of the village.

Townscape

Northumberland Street is densely built up, with a high sense of enclosure. In views towards the conservation area, its buildings appear as the spine of the village, with low rooflines punctuated by the tall church spire, which also forms the focal point of several views within the area.

Narrow lanes lead off Northumberland Street, echoing the pattern of the burgage plot boundaries. They allow sudden glimpses of the surrounding countryside and encourage surprisingly free access through such a densely built-up area. They are small-scale and often closely built-up, giving intimate views of the backs of properties and gaining in effect by contrast with the open spaces visible at the ends. Bends and undulations provide excitement and expectation.

Key buildings

Apart from the church and Saddle Hotel opposite, which form the focus of Northumberland Street, the buildings are mainly important for their contribution to the overall townscape. Older buildings such as Aln House contribute to raising the general quality of the area.

Green spaces, trees etc

Apart from the Churchyard, which emphasises the importance of the church by providing a breathing space and one of the few trees in the densely built up street, there is little public open space, emphasizing the urban character of the area in contrast with its surroundings.

Built form

Buildings are densely packed and built up to the pavement line, apart from Argyle Street where the houses have small front gardens. Buildings tend to be of simple



Typical sandstone walling - Northumberland Street



Roof details - Northumberland Street



Shop fascia - Northumberland Street

plan shape, generally 2 or 2½-storey, flat-fronted, parallel with the street, with a relatively constant, low eaves and ridge line. These are punctuated by long buildings gable-end on to the street, generally converted granaries.

Materials, colours

The predominant walling material is sandstone in shades of ochre, grey and pink, generally laid as coursed rubble, used both for buildings and boundary walls. The relatively large scale of the building stones, together with low window and door heights, enhances the small scale of the buildings. A few buildings are painted white, and a few important early houses are of warm red brick. Roofs have clipped eaves and are mainly slate, with some red clay tiles and pantiles.

Apart from a few front doors, paintwork is mainly black or white, windows being white-painted timber sashes. An important exception to the above is the rendered and colour washed Lovaine Terrace, virtually invisible from inside the conservation area but a key element in distant views and significant as an early example of the use of concrete block for buildings.

Details

Rooflines are important, punctuated by chimneys, dormers and gable ends and some interesting superstructures such as the cupola on The Hall.

Well-designed details such as ironwork, shop fronts, jetties and bay or oriel windows add interest and variety to the buildings. Interesting surface treatments such as cobbles and setts survive in places, together with built reminders of village history such as the cross in Chapel Lane and the pant in Pease's Lane.

Street Patterns



Summary of architectural/townscape character: Area 1

- Importance of ridge lines and church spire in views from surrounding countryside and within area
- Views out, often framed by buildings
- Network of open-ended lanes allowing access through the area, some with historic surfacing
- Small scale 2-or 2½-storey buildings, often terraced, built up to pavement, some with gable end to the street
- Walls coursed rubble sandstone in a wide range of colours
- Roofs slated, clipped eaves, brick chimneys with clay pots
- Windows white-painted timber sashes
- Historic shop fronts, some dormers/bays/oriels



Edge of built-up area, informal road edge - Riverside Road



Golf club - Marine Road



Ferryman's hut - Riverside Road



End of Crows Nest Lane - Marine Road



Dormers, balconies and conservatories - Riverside Road

Area 2: Marine Road and Riverside Road. Mainly developed in the later 19th century.

Townscape

This section includes much of the boundary of the conservation area. The roads are only built up on the town side, providing an important contrast with the open views to the golf course and riverbank and emphasising its recreational and holiday uses. Although defined by boundary walls of varying height, the edges of the built up area here are diffuse, penetrated by tracks and lanes encouraging exploration; sudden changes of level provide added interest. Unusually for many conservation areas, much of the boundary is publicly accessible.

Key Buildings

Some larger buildings, such as 21-27 Riverside Road and Nether Grange, dominate by sheer size and presence, their formality contrasting with and lending importance to the surrounding area. The Golf Club is also important, marking the bend in Marine Road and identifiable as a public building by its welcoming, open veranda.

Outlying built structures such as the ferryman's hut, old coastguard station and horse sheds are reminders of the various recreational uses of the open spaces, and subtly link them with the built up area.

Green spaces, trees etc

The Conservation Area here includes the green spaces of Brick-Kiln field, the playground and the grassy slope at the end of Crow's Nest Lane, which merge almost imperceptibly into the surrounding open landscapes of the golf course and riverbank. The informality achieved by the rough grass and lack of kerbs to verges, and the low fencing, is important to the character of this part of the conservation area. The trees below Lovaine Terrace are important, both from the Brick Kiln field and in views from the west.

Built form

Buildings are more substantial in scale and varied in plan than in the core of the conservation area, of 2-3½ storeys, detached and set back from the road behind stone garden walls. Gables, dormers and substantial chimneys



Bargeboards and balconies - Riverside Road

create varied roofscapes. Windows are generally larger than in the core area.

Materials, colours

Coursed rubble ochre sandstone is the predominant walling material, with red clay plain tiled or slate roofs and black or white paintwork.

Details

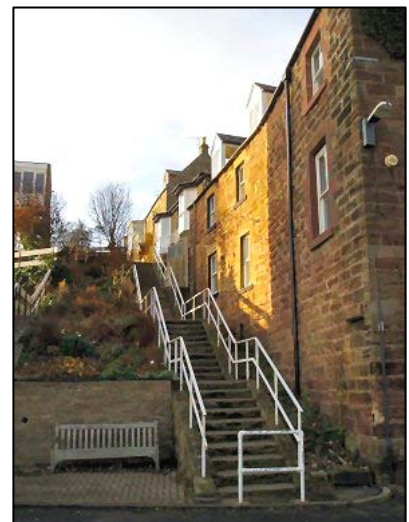
Details such as decorative bargeboards and metal railings add fine texture and contrasting scale. Varied oriels, balconies and conservatories at various levels maximise sea views and emphasise the individuality of the buildings, as well as their informal, holiday character.

Summary of architectural/townscape character: Area 2:

- Important open views of surrounding countryside, river and sea
- Informality of rough grass and verges
- Larger scale 2- 3½-storey buildings, detached, behind garden walls
- Walls coursed rubble ochre sandstone
- Roofs red clay tiles, bargeboards and open eaves, brick chimneys with clay pots
- Windows white-painted timber sashes
- Balconies, dormers, bays, oriels, decorative details



Roof Interest



Varying levels - Marine Road



Loose grouping of buildings - Friary Gardens



Mature planting - the roundabout



Lint Close



Methodist Chapel



Alnwood, below Lint Close

Area 3: North of The Wynd. This mainly represents the 20th century expansion of the settlement.

Townscape

This section is important as the entrance to the conservation area, being built up along the roads from the north and west. Their junction, at the roundabout, provides a pause on the approach to the densely built up part of Northumberland Street, the war memorial providing human scale and interest. The wider pavement and part at the junction with The Wynd perform a similar function at the entrance to the built-up area.

Groups of buildings in this area are dispersed, set back from the wider road, generally behind stone boundary walls, and have little visual relationship with each other. Buildings are mostly visible from the road and tend to be viewed individually; thus, any which are of lower quality become more obvious. The exception to this is the self-contained and inward-looking Alnwood Close, screened from the remainder of the conservation area by trees and the slope of the hill.

Key buildings

The area includes several semi-public buildings - the Methodist chapel, old school, boys' club and Lint Close - which, by their distribution, larger scale and individuality, add interest and contribute to a loose-knit character. Of these, the prominent Lint Close (the Friary) and its grounds is of particularly high quality and adds status to this part of the Conservation Area.

Green spaces, trees etc,

Green verges, hedges and mature trees are important here, particularly at the roundabout, where planting together with the mature vegetation of Wellfield and Lint Close forms a leafy contrast to the densely built-up area beyond.

The remaining trees of Aln Wood are important, particularly in views towards the conservation area from the west, providing a balance to the built-up area and a transition to the surrounding countryside.

The area includes the field behind Shepherds Hill, which forms a green backdrop to the housing, and provides visual definition to the edge of the settlement.



Window detail - Wellfield



Gatepier - The Wynd

Built form

Houses are detached or in short terraces, 1½-or 2-storeys high. They tend to be fairly plain, with gables, dormers and hips, and chimneys adding interest to the skyline. The Lint Close cottages are a good example of smaller houses in the area.

Materials, colours

Walling is sandstone or white-painted render. Roofs are mainly red clay tiles, with slate at Shepherds Hill. Windows are white-painted timber sash or side-hung casement windows, with black-painted rainwater goods and other architectural details.

Details

The front boundary walls give the area much of its character, with some decorative gate piers to openings. Architectural detailing tends to be restrained, with features such as decorative windows and doors limited to the larger properties.



Entrance to conservation area from the north



Entrance to conservation area from Duchess' Bridge

Summary of architectural/townscape character: Area 3

- Mature trees, hedges, verges and other planting
- Detached, 1½-or 2-storey buildings set back from road
- Walls sandstone or white painted render
- Roofs gabled or hipped, red clay tiles, brick chimneys, clay pots
- Windows white-painted timber sash or casement
- Stone boundary walls, gate piers

4 Management Recommendations

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

Neutral areas

Considerable development has taken place in the conservation area since designation. Alnwood/Wellfield is an inward-looking estate hidden from the remainder of the area by the slope of the hill and surrounding trees. Friary Gardens is also less visible, being in a hollow, but has an important road frontage at the nodal point of the roundabout, which could be improved if the fence were replaced with a stone wall.

Negative factors

Beech House is outside the built-up area of the village and adversely affects its setting. Other modern developments, such as the flats at Sea Bank and Argyle Street, and bungalows in Northumberland Street, being central and out of scale and character with the surrounding buildings, also have a negative effect on the conservation area. Alterations which improve these developments should be encouraged.

Smaller alterations and incremental changes to existing buildings have also contributed to some erosion of the character of the conservation area. The houses at Shepherds Hill have had a variety of additions and alterations which largely negate their group character. Some individual buildings have external treatments which are unsuitable to their character and insensitive to their surroundings. Unsuitable replacement windows have appeared in a large number of locations.

Modern street furniture and surface treatments are unsympathetic in places.

Listed Buildings

At present, all of the listed buildings in the conservation area are in the historic core of the village. However, several other buildings could be considered for listing. The most important of these is Lint Close, the Friary of St Francis, which is important architecturally and occupies a prominent position in the area. The Methodist Chapel



Beech House (far left) is outside the built-up area



Un-neighbourly paintwork spoils a fine building and conservatory - Marine Terrace



Replacement windows and other incremental changes - B1338



Unsightly lighting standards contrasting with historic railings - Chapel Lane



Lint Close from Marine Terrace



Unsuitable wooden fence - Friary Gardens



Important trees - the roundabout

and Old School could similarly be considered, as they are key buildings of character.

Management

Two sites within the conservation area have been allocated for housing in the District Plan. Of these, Friary Gardens has already been developed (see above). Any development of Wellfield garden for housing should retain the enclosing wall which, together with the Methodist church site, is important in the approach to the conservation area.

Sympathetic development within the conservation area, particularly the core, should not be ruled out, as density is important to its character. However, any further development outside the built-up areas will tend to dilute the strong boundary and should be discouraged.

Where original cobbles and other pavings still exist in the alleys these should be preserved and repaired, and it may be possible to extend them and use more imaginative surface finishes elsewhere in the area. The informal road edges to Riverside Road and Marine Road are an important part of their character, and if possible, pavement kerbs should be removed.

Street lighting could be improved, for example by replacing modern lamp standards with suitable fittings attached to the buildings, or more imaginative fittings in keeping with the historic character of the conservation area.

Trees are important in the north and to the west of the area, and should be protected, and replanting encouraged.

It would be worth considering the introduction of Article 4 Directions in the conservation area, to prevent the erosion of the area's character by the accumulation of small alterations. A photographic survey of all building frontages in the conservation area should be carried out, to act as a baseline for future management.

It would be useful to confirm ownerships of access routes through the conservation area, to discourage owners from 'privatising' public rights of way.

Summary of management recommendations:

- Encouragement of improvements to neutral and negative areas
- Consider buildings for listing
- Retain Wellfield wall and respect boundary of built-up area
- Streetscape improvements, including street furniture and surfaces
- Protect important trees and encourage replanting
- Assess traffic and parking
- Article 4 directions to protect important details and finishes, particularly windows, doors and paintwork, and prevent further erosion of character
- Photographic survey of all building frontages
- Research and record rights of way within the area
- Boundary changes - exclude areas A &B, include C&D

Boundary Changes 2006

The rationale behind the original boundaries of the Conservation Area has apparently not been recorded, but we would recommend a few amendments.

Two small areas to the west side of the village are outside the recently constructed sea wall and are largely unrelated to the conservation area, are now excluded.

The north-west corner of the village comprises 20th century developments of various dates and types. The houses at Alnwood are of interesting, unified design and appear little altered but make no contribution to the Conservation Area in architectural or historic terms that it is desirable to preserve or enhance. It has an attractive woodland setting but this is already protected, in its own right, by the Alnwood TPO. The development of Alnwood followed the original designation of the Conservation Area and, presumably, the land was originally designated to

protect the setting, but with the development that has taken place this purpose was clearly unsuccessful.

Shepherd's Hill may originally have been designated because of its gateway position and homogeneous form but although it is still at the gateway to the settlement it has lost any architectural value it once had in townscape terms as a result of change and adaptation over the years. It now has little architectural merit and little specific historic character that it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

The more recently developed Friary Gardens similarly is not of sufficient quality to merit inclusion. In respect of all three areas it is considered that to retain them as part of the Conservation Area would devalue the rest of the area and make it difficult to impose conservation area principles with any degree of success. These areas have been excluded and the Methodist church, the boundary to Wellfield and related trees now act as 'markers' at the entrance to the Conservation Area. If there is a concern to protect the high ground above Shepherds Hill to prevent development appearing on the skyline above the village this is better achieved by strong protective policies through the LDF rather than through CA status.

The allotments have now been included in the Conservation Area for completeness as they were also inside the historic boundary of the village, and may contain the remains of 'burgage' type boundaries.

The old coastguard station is important to the character of this corner of the Conservation Area dominated by the estuary and is now included.

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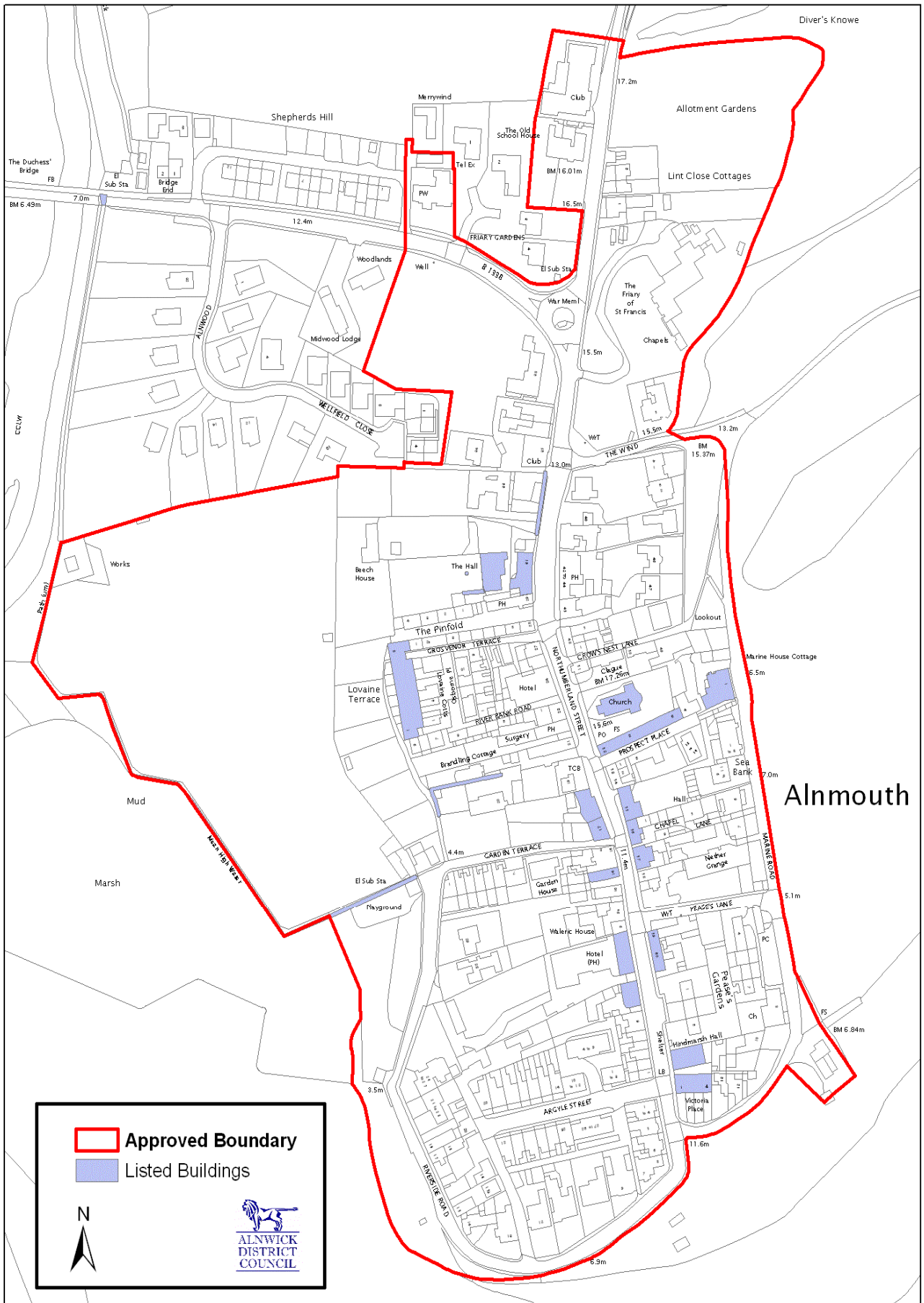
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Various photographs lent by The Teacosy, Northumberland Street, Alnmouth

Alnmouth Conservation Area



Glossary

Public Realm Audit Streetscape Surveys

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

Article 4 Directions

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

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

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

Design Information and Guidelines

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

development and design guidelines for alterations to existing buildings.

The following publications are available from the Alnwick District Council -

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

A.O.N.B – Design Guide

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

Alnwick District Council - Historic Buildings Grant scheme.

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