

Dumfries and Galloway Council

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2

Whithorn Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Supplementary Guidance - March 2020



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Introduction

Background

Whithorn is a historic burgh of great character with a rich legacy through its connections with the early Christian church. The promotion of Whithorn as a tourism centre provides sound reasons to retain its inherent character and attractiveness. However, that process may also, through development pressure, increased economic activity and traffic, threaten this very character.

Some physical change in the conservation area can be a good thing and new buildings do not necessarily need to copy what is already there. A proper understanding of the character of the area will allow ordered and appropriate change and allow for development that can be of its time but respect the architectural and historical legacy of the town.

Considerable investment has been made in the historic fabric of the town by owners assisted by grants from the Council and Historic Environment Scotland under the Whithorn Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme. It would therefore be remiss not to maintain and build on that investment by careful stewardship of the historic character of Whithorn.

The local physical impact of external, even global, events, not least climate change and the need to reduce our carbon output, has the potential to influence greatly the appearance of our historic areas. The application of these measures could have a significant impact on the fabric and appearance of historic buildings and areas.

The Conservation Area

A Conservation Area is defined as; "An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Furthermore, government guidance states that "*It is the character or historic interest of an area created by individual buildings and open spaces and their relationship one with the other which the legislation covering conservation areas seeks to preserve.*" Whithorn Conservation Area was first designated in 1977. It was extended on the 6th February 1979 and its outstanding status confirmed on the 24th January 1980.

The Character Appraisal

Purpose and Justification

This Appraisal was first adopted as supplementary planning guidance to the Wigtown Local Plan which was replaced in 2014 by the Dumfries and Galloway Local Development Plan (LDP1) a document which is reviewed every 5 years. The conservation area character appraisal is considered by the Council to remain relevant and will be adopted as Supplementary Guidance to LDP2 which was adopted in October 2019.

Policy HE2: Conservation Areas ties the conservation area character appraisal to LDP2. The policy reinforces the importance and value of a conservation area character appraisal as the policy states that:

"The Council will support development proposals within or adjacent to a conservation area that preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area and is consistent with any relevant conservation area appraisal and management plan..."

Other relevant Documents and Plans

Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2)

The Dumfries and Galloway LDP2 was adopted on 4th October 2019. The Plan recognises the importance of the natural and built environment in helping to shape the economic well-being of Dumfries and Galloway.

Policies are included in LDP2 that promote the protection and enhancement of the built heritage.

LDP2 addresses a range of issues from housing land to industrial allocations, from transport to tourism. Its purpose is to guide development, to protect the environment and takes into consideration community issues, tourism and countryside matters. The Plan has been developed over several years following intense public consultation. LDP2 will provide the statutory policy framework for the area defining the principles and practices to be adopted by the Council in considering development proposals.

Historic Built Environment, Supplementary Guidance (HBE, SG)

The SG assists individuals and organisations to develop sensitive proposals in the historic built environment. It encourages people to follow the principles of 'informed conservation.' It sets out the necessary stages and steps to take to find the best balance between preservation and change. The historic elements of built structures, sites and setting must first be understood; the historic and architectural significance must be assessed; and the whole should be evaluated to reach that balance so that well-conceived, sensitive, creative proposals can be put forward.

The overriding objective of both supplementary guidance (SG) documents is to achieve consistent, high quality development in the historic environment which ensures that the historic significance and character of Annan Conservation Area is preserved.

Both LDP2 and the HBE, SG promote the need for a sustainable approach that starts with an understanding of the historical and architectural character of the town. There is an emphasis on the re-use of older buildings, repair and maintenance, attention to historical and traditional detailing and on the sensitive use of materials and techniques.

This does not, however, preclude good modern design. It is important that new development should be sympathetic and innovative. There is scope for good modern architecture, and it is hoped that parody or pastiche of the older more traditional form of development will generally be avoided. Annan is home and workplace for its inhabitants and the Appraisal itself is only the starting point from which the people of Annan can build their own responses and approaches to the care, use and future stewardship of the town.

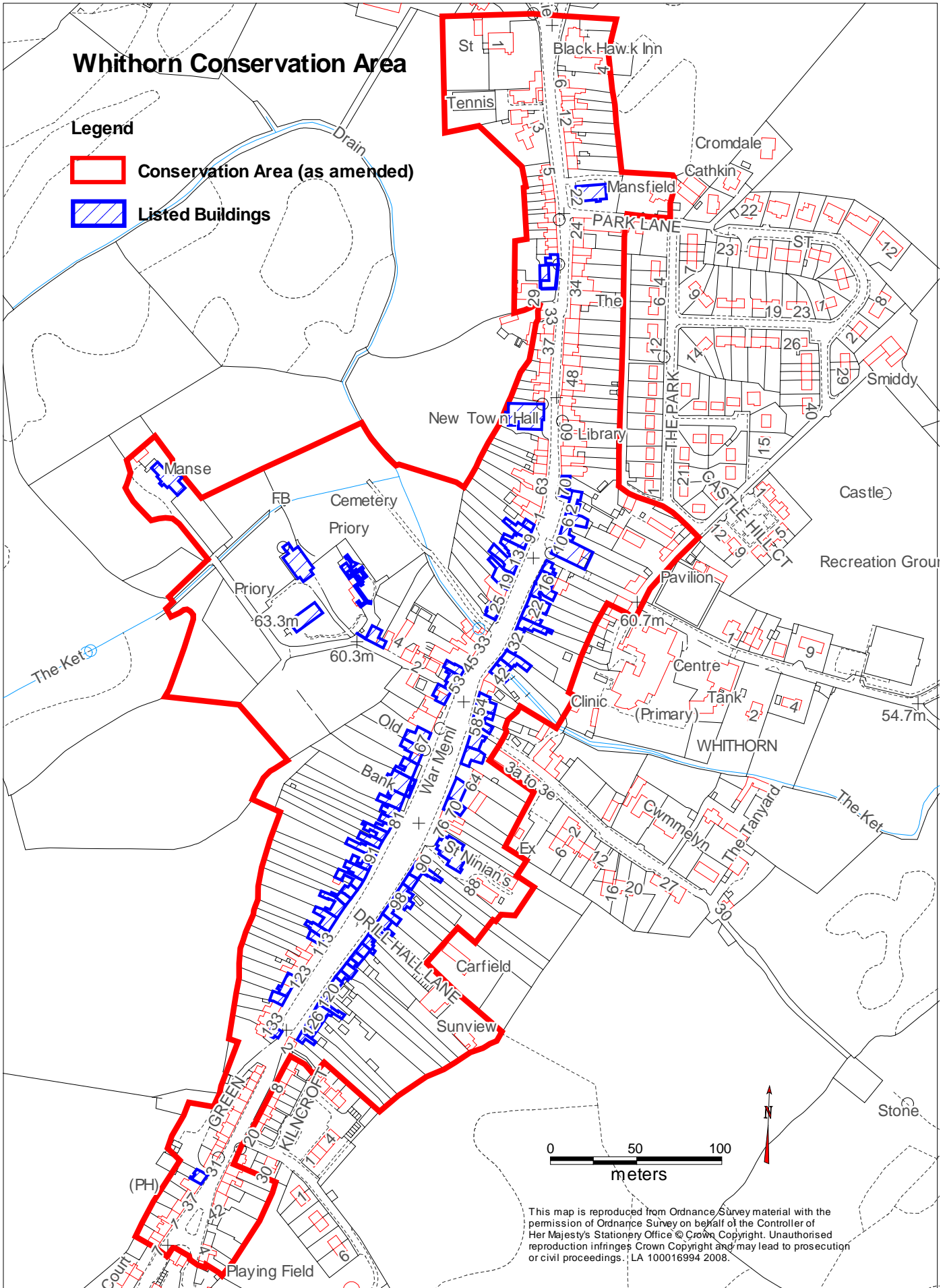
The Scottish Burgh Survey – Historic Whithorn

Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland) published the Burgh Survey in 2010. This provides a "broad ranging synthesis of the history and archaeology of Whithorn" As part of the third series of Burgh Surveys, It is intended to "furnish local authorities, developers and residents with reliable information to help manage the archaeology and historic environment of Scotland's urban centres."

The Survey includes character maps that show the different parts of Whithorn and assess their archaeological interest. A separate broadsheet published with the survey also summarises the development of the town as well as highlighting significant buildings and areas.

The Burgh Survey is an important and detailed appraisal that should be referred to before any development proposals are considered.

Fig. 1 - Whithorn Conservation Area Boundary (as amended March 2012)



Understanding the Town

History and Development

Location and Context

Whithorn is situated in the south eastern corner of the Machars peninsula in Dumfries and Galloway. It is about 18 miles from Newton Stewart the nearest larger commercial centre and 11 miles from the former county town of Wigtown. The principal economic activities are linked to agriculture or tourism.

Topography and Landscape

The triangular Machars is a low-lying undulating area of glacial deposits over Whin (greywacke) with granite intrusions. Soils are generally thin yet fertile supporting good grazing for beef and dairy herds.

Local sources of building stone are limited. The predominant materials seen in older buildings are greywacke of varying quality and colour. Granite and Sandstone; the latter from both Cumbria and Dumfriesshire, are also found.

Archaeological Interest

The early origins of Whithorn are uncertain. There is evidence to suggest that a settlement may already have grown up by around the mid-fifth century by which time Christianity was beginning to have an impact.

This means the archaeology of Whithorn is highly significant. The Priory site is a scheduled ancient monument. Work to existing buildings may reveal earlier origins or the reuse of fabric often with ecclesiastical connections. Recording of such details and the preservation of any worked stone can greatly enhance the understanding of the development of the town and its buildings.

Early Christianity

Whithorn is the scene of the earliest recorded Christian mission to Scotland. In the 6th century Whithorn was a developing ecclesiastical settlement and by the 7th century it was a monastic settlement receiving pilgrims.



The priory was later to become a house of Premonstratensian Canons and the church was the cathedral of medieval bishops. Following the suppression in the 16th century the nave was adopted as the cathedral of the Protestant bishops and finally it served as the Presbyterian parish church. A considerable amount of research and archaeological investigation has been undertaken and is variously published.

Historical Development of the Town

An up-to-date and more thorough examination of the town's origins can be found in 'Historic Whithorn Archaeology and Development' published in 2010 by Historic Scotland under the

series The Scottish Burgh Survey.

The Survey is a detailed exploration of the form and history of the town and represents an important source for the proper understanding of Whithorn's historical development. The following very brief overview is drawn from this publication by kind permission of Historic Environment Scotland.

The origins and early physical development of Whithorn are somewhat obscure. The site is not a natural location for settlement such as a river crossing or a defensible point. The relative inaccessibility and its remoteness may have had a bearing on the establishment of the religious community for which Whithorn is best known. The monastery, which may have been founded by the sixth century, became the focus for a civil settlement of craftsmen and traders. It is possible that due to its ecclesiastical connections Whithorn is indeed one of the oldest sizeable settlements in Scotland.

The town would appear to have grown up to support the Priory and accommodate services, visitors and ancillary trades. The early settlement was in and around the Priory site. The town was moved out to its present location to the east of the priory when an ecclesiastical precinct was formed, possibly during the 13th century. A burgh was erected under feudal superiority of the priory in 1325.

Whithorn was an important pilgrimage centre, on which much of its wealth depended, until prohibition in 1581; whereupon came a period of decline. Whithorn then remained a small market town for the agricultural hinterland.

After the mid 18th century, following changes in agriculture, prosperity increased. Until the arrival of the railway, trade was principally by sea and with Ireland and England as far as Liverpool.

By the mid 1790's Whithorn was described by Isaac Davidson:

"The town consists chiefly of one street, running from N. to S. From this street there are several alleys stretching to the E. and to the W. About the centre of the town there is a good hall for public meetings, adorned with a spire and turrets, and provided with a set of bells. A beautiful stream of water, over which there is a good bridge, runs across the main street, dividing it nearly into two equal parts. The houses are generally covered in slates and very commodious."

This suggests that the structure of the town as seen today was largely extant before the turn of the 19th century. It is also interesting to note the seemingly widespread use of slate, though it is not clear if this was from local sources.

The earlier Ordnance Survey maps also show a variety of commercial and industrial buildings or sites the uses of which included a tannery, windmills, quarries, banks and Inns.

Modern Development

The 19th Century

The 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map (*Fig. 2*) shows the extent of the town towards the end of the 19th century. The older medieval plot boundaries and what



is effectively the original layout of the 13th / 14th century and the wide street are clearly visible. This medieval form was not always highly regarded; “... one street running from north to south, which is very irregular, being inconveniently narrow at both extremities and uselessly wide in the middle.”

There was an air of prosperity brought about to a large extent by the rise in agriculture and further improvements in husbandry. The Reverend Nicholson describes the town’s dwelling houses as having been improved, “since the termination of the war with France” and many older houses replaced by new ones erected on the same sites.

Though it did not impact directly on the historic core, the railway and its terminus to the north of the town played an important part in the movement of goods. This helped the economic prosperity of the town in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Macleod notes how it had been possible to take a through coach from Whithorn to Edinburgh and return on the same day. The line closed in 1964.

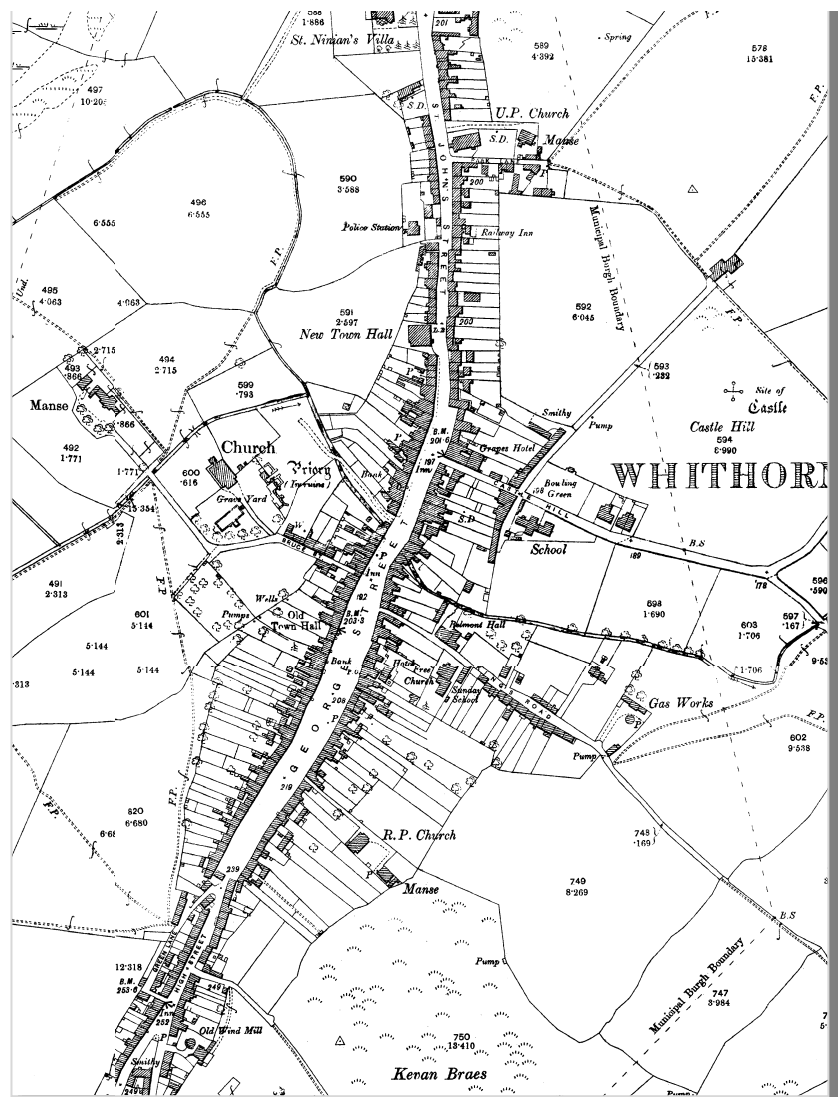
The 20th Century

The central area of Whithorn has not been subject to pressure for growth and redevelopment. As a result the direct link to open country adjacent to the back of the burgage plots, or rigs, has been retained and remains a key feature of the conservation area. New building has taken place to the east of St John Street and south of the High Street. This development has not disturbed the underlying grain of the medieval town but the form of new development is not traditional and is at variance with adjacent older development.

Some development has taken place on the plots to the east of George Street, notably off Castlehill. Such development, especially where the form of the original plot is lost has the potential to undermine the historic character of the Burgh. Of interest is the loss of what was in the late 1800’s a long line of outbuilding to the rear of the burgage plots on either side of Castlehill and rows of cottages along Kings Road.

Buildings within the conservation area are mainly in residential use. Some shops and commercial properties, often with residential accommodation on upper floors are found concentrated in the northern end of George Street and the southern part of St John Street.

Fig. 2 - Whithorn – 2nd Edition OS Map circa 1895



Character and Appearance

Setting

Landscape

Whithorn lies, on an approximately north south axis, across a shallow valley with the lowest point being between Castlehill and Bruce Street, where the burn, now in a culvert, once flowed across the street. Low gently undulating pasturelands surround Whithorn, which afford views of the town on the main approaches from the north and west.

Significant Views Panoramas and Viewpoints

From within the conservation area, at the southern end of the town, the view over the town is particularly imposing and is heightened by the closure provided by the narrow entrance to George Street from the High Street. The structure of the town and its relationship to the near and wider landscape are revealed. The houses fronting George Street, built as terraces, follow an informal, irregularly varying line along the curved street. This gives visual interest that is enhanced by the varying rooflines and the prominent chimneystacks and cans.

Glimpses to the wider landscape beyond are largely confined to the higher part of the street at the southern end from where the mass of Cairnsmore of Fleet dominates the skyline in the far distance.

Approaching from the south, most of the older town remains hidden by the ridge of higher ground. Modern housing development has breached the skyline and is now prominent.

From the north, the view of the older part of the town has as its focus the Old Town Hall, the Church and Manse. However, larger, modern agricultural buildings and new housing development on the northern and eastern periphery now intrude in the foreground on this approach.

Boundary and Key Edge Features

Much of the conservation area boundary follows the outer line of the medieval burgage plots. These are characterised to a large measure by dry-stane dykes that enclose what are now mostly private gardens.

There are few buildings or interruptions to the transition between town and country along the main western boundary. The Manse, Parish Church and Priory remains break out from this



boundary and their impact is imposing. The visual impact of the manse is softened by the mature planting nearby. On the eastern side developments such as the school and housing along Kings Road and Castlehill and the modern development further north blur this distinction; though some of the plots at the southern end of George Street do still border open pasture land.

The closer views back towards George Street from the side streets, such as Kings Road and Castlehill afford an interesting townscape comprising the rear elevations and outbuildings of the main frontage properties. Here a variety of rooflines, rear extensions and the chimneystacks dominating the skyline create an intimate and varied scene; but also highlight the importance of taking care over the design and detailing of rear extensions and other alterations to the main George Street properties.

Activity and Movement

Traffic and Pedestrian Flows

Because of the linear form of the town the main movements are along the central axis. There are also turning movements into and out of the side streets serving developments to the east of the centre; primarily Castle Hill and to a lesser extent King's Road.

The focus of commercial activity at the southern end of St John Street and the northern end of George Street means that this an area where vehicles are often parked creating congestion.

The wider spaces in George Street provide parking areas though the sense of space can encourage faster traffic flow. The main part of the street is divided by the central parking area.

Pedestrian flows vary, particularly with school periods giving localised concentration of activity around Castlehill. This has implications in respect of possible works for traffic management and safe pedestrian routes that could impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Another important focus for pedestrian movement, especially at times of high visitor numbers is the Bruce Street entrance to the Priory and the nearby Visitor Centre. This is also the primary route to the church and has ceremonial and social importance.

At the time of writing there were no bus shelters. It is suggested that great care will be required in their provision to avoid damaging visual intrusion. The impact on adjacent road-side houses will also be a significant consideration.

Street Pattern and Streetscape

Though there is evidence of an earlier settlement more closely identified with the Priory the present town is largely that created during the 13th Century. It was a 'planned' town laid out in a typically medieval pattern with burgage plots of varying length and width to the rear of properties that fronted the main enclosed space. This space was 'closed' at each end by houses built across the street to make narrow gates or 'ports'.

The present street pattern and building lines still strongly reflect this early layout with many of the rigs well defined by the rear boundaries of properties fronting George Street.

In St John Street the more informal development of the street is seen in the less regular street building lines and the more variable and shorter plot depths on the western side whilst on the eastern side the plots, mostly around 40m deep, are more formal and regular.

The strongest feature is that of the continuous frontage of terraced properties rarely broken in the full length of the conservation area giving a strong sense of enclosure.

Spaces

The principal spaces comprise the main Streets, especially George Street, the 'green' area at the junction of the High Street and Isle Street and the area around the Priory.

George Street is especially important, as its open simplicity is important to the character of the area. Some encroachment is already occurring with traffic and parking management, the introduction of planters, the bicycle stands and pedestrian refuges threatening the simple character. These are also threatening to affect the setting of the War Memorial, which forms an important focal point at the northern end of the broadest part of the street.

Now seen as a single space, it is likely that some differentiation of the area along the street into three identifiable units may have once been the case. The Ket Burn, although bridged, would have divided the street. Also, the former Tolbooth or Market House, may have defined the upper end of what might have been a ceremonial area leading up from the burn, possibly in the vicinity of the Roman Catholic Church. This may have defined the start of the third section to the south and is where the street is at its widest and where there is a change in alignment.

On the west side of the street, from the PEND up, buildings are set well back from the carriageway to allow for what were originally privately owned forelands between the houses and the footway and where one may have expected the dung heaps. These now provide potentially very attractive settings for the buildings. However, a variety of surfacing materials has disrupted the informal continuity of this area.

Trees and Soft Landscaping

Trees are not prominent in the central parts of the conservation area or as part of the streetscape.

However the area to the rear of the Old Town Hall adjacent to the Priory has a number of mature beech trees that make a significant contribution. Trees within the conservation area are protected and works such as trimming, lopping or felling may not take place unless prior notice has been given to the Council and consent granted. The Council's Trees and Development Supplementary Guidance document gives further information.

The immediate Priory grounds are laid out in a simplified interpretation of where earlier buildings stood; with mown grassed areas. Stone dykes along Bruce Street and enclosing the 'dig' site are particularly significant.



Public Realm Audit

The surfacing of streets seems to have evolved in an ad-hoc manner. Footways were first laid out in the late 19th century. Over the years many different materials were used from water worn cobbles to brick paving, small areas of which can still be seen, such as the cobbles outside No. 107 George Street.

More modern materials include standard bituminous surface dressing and small unit concrete paving slabs. Patch repairs and other works over the years have compounded the loss of visual unity and led to a diminution of the character and quality of the streetscape.

Bruce Street was identified in the CARS project as being capable of upgrade and having greatest public and conservation benefit from a sensitive scheme of resurfacing and the modest introduction of traditional materials. This work was undertaken in 2009 and has enhanced the approach to the Priory and the Parish Church.

Buildings and Townscape

The General Character of Buildings

The overall impression is that of largely nineteenth century vernacular houses that draw on the simple regularity of the Georgian period for their style. There is a greater sense of grandeur, albeit expressed circumspectly, in parts of George Street while the High Street and St John Street are more vernacular in character. However, this belies the fact that there may well be a complex layering of buildings over a long period having undergone rebuilding and redevelopment, but often incorporating earlier elements.

With the exception of the few public buildings and banks, the buildings of the conservation area are domestic in scale, design and use.

Two storey, three-bay, buildings dominate in George Street and High Street whilst single storey, often with attic dormers, are more numerous in St John Street.

All buildings have moderately steeply pitched roofs. Most are slated though there is considerable variety in the type of slate. Welsh and Cumbrian slates would seem to dominate with many roofs having been laid with random width slates in diminishing courses giving a particularly elegant appearance.

Landmark Buildings

Though there is broad uniformity in the general architectural character of buildings, there are a number that stand out:

The BLACK HAWK HOTEL, dating from the late 19th century, is a fine whinstone 'Victorian villa' prominently marking the entrance to St John Street. Nearby the pair of houses 8 AND 10 ST JOHN STREET with tall 2-storey bay windows and opposite at No. 3 with, unusually, a red-tiled roof are also noteworthy.

St John's Garage, the former UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, in a late Gothic architectural style by Thomson & Sandilands, dates from 1892. This shows that whilst new uses can be found for older buildings the changes that are needed as well as loss of original features, the bell cote/cupola and internal fittings, for example, can have a big impact on the appearance and character of the original.

7 AND 11 ST JOHN STREET are earlier 19th century and have 'rusticated' quoins exhibiting exaggerated long work.

Further along 'THE NEUK' (No. 27) is an interesting late 18th century 3-bay house set back from the road.

The NEW TOWN HALL by David Henry dating from 1885-86 with mullioned and transomed windows is a dominant large scale building. In contrast, is the diminutive PUBLIC LIBRARY opposite, by Alexander Young 1911, with red and blue brick dressings.

At the entrance to St John Street, the shop at right angles, 2 GEORGE STREET, provides the closure to the northern end of George Street; note the angled door that sweeps out in a hollow curve to the square corner above. At No 4, the fluted door architrave introduces fine detailing amid the more common, simpler architecture.

Though altered, with part having once been a double-fronted shop, the traditional Georgian frontage of the former GRAPES HOTEL dating from c.1800 is important in the street scene and representative of the simple, relatively plain majority of buildings.

Opposite, the taller ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND BUILDING dating from 1885 dominates the group. Plain, traditional, in squared whin with buff coloured sandstone margins, with a central gable and relatively large dormers on the neighbouring buildings give them a presence that emphasises the commercial and economic importance of this part of the street. Further along, NO 29 is a fine town house, with deeply recessed cavetto reveals to the door, made more prominent by its position adjacent to the gates to the cemetery.

37 GEORGE STREET retains a fine shop front with good early 20th century detailing.

The row of houses that includes the PRIORY GATEHOUSE now known as the PEND HOUSE have a historic and architectural value that is given by their age, by their association with the PRIORY, the survival of the archway and by the well crafted restoration that shows careful attention to detail coupled with good conservation practices.

Through the Pend is the former Parish School, now the PRIORY MUSEUM.

The TOWN HOUSE (OLD TOWN HALL) though relatively unadorned is given prominence by the early 18th century tower and conical spire (the town steeple) behind.

The late 19th Century granite built CLYDESDALE BANK is another tall two-storey villa style building that contrasts with the lower building adjacent at NO. 79. This house, with Ionic columns at the paired doors was originally the bank till its grander replacement was erected next door.



One of the few modern buildings in the street is the Roman Catholic CHURCH OF ST NINIAN, MARTIN AND JOHN, by Goodhart-Rendall, Broadbent and Curtis. Built in 1959-60 its interest lies partially in the fact this is the only known work in Scotland by this renowned architect and architectural historian.

Though modest in style and size the importance of 139 GEORGE STREET is vital as the visual closure to the southern end where the street is also at its highest point. This and 2 GEORGE STREET are at the points where the 'Ports' would have been that were used to enclose the street to offer protection and enclosure for livestock during the

medieval period as well as being the collection points for tolls.

Architectural Elements

Windows are mostly traditional twelve, four or two-pane sliding sash and case; though there have been several alterations with the introduction of modern alternatives. These changes are having a detrimental effect on the character of the town by the loss of original fabric and architectural detailing. Examples of lying-pane windows can be seen at 7 and 13 George Street and 92 George Street, though the latter has replacement windows to the ground floor.

Window openings are mostly vertically proportioned and typical of the architectural style that predominated from the late 18th century through the 19th. Occasionally houses have retained their smaller early 18th century openings, though the joinery has been changed; this is seen at 5 GEORGE STREET and opposite at 4 GEORGE STREET, at 100 GEORGE STREET as well as 38 ST JOHN STREET.

There are relatively few dormers in the main part of George Street on the two-storey houses. Many of the single-storey houses in St John Street have dormers, some canted, some gabled. The dormers on 63 ST JOHN STREET (Cost Cutter) are good examples of traditional dormers.

Sandstone skewers are found more usually on the later 'Victorian' buildings. Most buildings have plain, flush eaves with half-round rhones. Some of the more elaborate houses have raised parapets with hidden gutters, such as 27 GEORGE STREET, which is particularly ornate.

Other architectural embellishment is for the most part subdued; though examples of more ornate work can be found; for example, the cast-iron, patterned box-gutter at 107 GEORGE STREET.

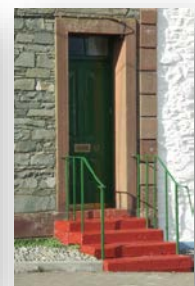
A common feature is the raised, often rusticated sandstone edge pilaster defining the ends of properties on their front elevations. These have mostly been painted over.

Materials and Finishes

Relatively few building elevations are harled. Some have more modern, smooth render or have been painted. Some elevations have been dry-dashed, which is not a traditional finish. Where stonework is exposed the majority is of coursed rubble with sandstone surrounds, though again depending on the stone used style and bonding may vary considerably. Many houses have cleanly cut greywacke laid in near regular courses of varying depths.

Most masonry and cement render dressings around windows and doors have been painted. These should be retained as found unless the paint treatment is causing damage to underlying stone work through restricting moisture movement.

It is possible that a greater number of buildings may have originally been harled or lime washed. The latter was a sacrificial coating that would have been renewed regularly. Being porous it allowed the masonry to dry out properly whilst giving some protection from water



ingress. Modern, impervious cement based coatings and other paints may trap moisture in the stonework that can lead to dampness occurring inside.

The Burgh Survey, quoting M Kerlie, suggests that there is considerable reuse of material from the ruins of the priory.

Locally made bricks are also to be seen.

Character Areas

In this character appraisal the differing qualities of parts of the conservation area are defined by the principal streets:

St John Street

Its main character derives from the relatively narrow street with an irregular building line. The buildings are principally single-storey dwellings, many with dormers, though a number of fine later Villas, including the Station Master's house are located towards the northern end of the street. The former St John's Church and the New Town Hall provide the main focus points architecturally.

Modern development has taken place to the east but this does not impinge on the character of John Street when viewed within the conservation area though views towards the area from the east are dominated by the modern development.

George Street

The Street is characterised by the large sweeping space that curves as it climbs to the higher ground at the south.

What at first may be interpreted as regular terraces of housing is in fact highly varied in roof and eaves line, widths of the houses and architectural detailing. This needs to be recognised in any proposals within the area. Though there are no gap sites any changes to individual houses need to be considered in the light of this architectural complexity. Additionally there is a change in emphasis from the larger more commercially oriented buildings at the northern end to the more vernacular smaller dwellings to the south and up the hill.

The relationship between the open spaces, the width of the street and the enclosure by buildings defines this part of the town.

To rear of George Street/North of King's Road

This area, described as an 'industrial suburb', around the banks of the Ket Burn, previously comprised a number of industries that had need of the water, such as tannery and slaughterhouse. Little evidence remains of these industries either here or on the back lane adjacent to the school, except for a few much altered semi-industrial buildings and workshops.



High Street

Formerly a 'suburb known as West Port', the High Street was developed by 1832 and leads to the roads running out to the Isle of Whithorn and Glasserton. The area now known as Kilncroft was changed by redevelopment in the 1960's. A more formal and regular row of new houses has been set higher and back from the original line shown in earlier maps, behind a retaining wall. Some demolition has also taken place opposite, which has had the effect of opening out the space leading onto Green Lane.

Though the central Green has been retained, the houses leading in from Glasserton Street and Isle street have been largely redeveloped and are mostly modern in character and appearance. Also the dominance of the roadways and junction detailing have a marked impact. Overall the High Street is more modest in scale and character than either George Street or St John Street. It is proposed to review the boundary in this part of the town to exclude the modern development on Isle Street and parts of High Street.

Bruce Street & The Priory

The area is principally defined by the Priory site comprising the green spaces of the former priory area, the remaining Priory buildings, the Parish Church, the Cemetery and Manse beyond set in undulating landscape that opens to the countryside to the west.

Bruce Street, the principal approach to the Priory, is now the access road to a number of properties and to the back or service areas of neighbouring George Street properties. The Old Parish School, now the Museum forms an important part of the streetscape.

Opposite, the open aspect to the south with the mature beech trees provides an attractive setting both to the Priory and to the rear of George Street, around the Old Town Hall the tower and spire of which are very prominent.

Bruce Street was upgraded and surfaces overlaid with a mixture of traditional and modern materials.

Building Condition Survey

In late 2005 Solway Heritage undertook a visual appraisal of the condition of properties in George Street in connection with the application for a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme Grant.

The survey concluded as follows:

External condition

The general condition of buildings varies quite considerably; however, most properties are reasonably well maintained although several have suffered considerable conservation loss through the introduction of modern, less sympathetic detailing and materials.

The group of houses to either side of the Pend Arch have been well restored and serve to show how the historic character of buildings can be retained while allowing the buildings to function for modern standards and uses.

Inevitably, there are also some buildings which require a higher degree of renovation as well as a few redundant structures. These include a former barn and house on the High Street and a cottage close to the North Port in George Street.



The Grapes Hotel, itself a crucial part of the historic streetscape, has been derelict for a number of years.

Inappropriate Alterations

The alterations have been incremental and are now threatening to undermine the rich character and quality of the Conservation Area. Changes have been made to windows and doors, substituting good traditional joinery for modern materials and designs that no longer respect the simple symmetry and elegance of the Georgian originals.

Some slate roofs have been recovered in concrete or felt tiles, affecting the colour, texture and profile of these roofs. Plastic rainwater goods and modern dry dash render have further added to this gradual but persistent erosion of the town's historic character.



Appraisal and Analysis

The following section should be read in conjunction with the guidelines that follow. Together these form the basis of recommendations and policies for the future management of the conservation area in Whithorn.

Negative Factors

Buildings

Much of what might be regarded as having a negative impact is in the aggregation of smaller incremental changes that have been occurring across the conservation area rather than any particular major elements. The insertion of modern windows has been the most significant of these changes and potentially damaging to the character of the conservation area.

In Bruce Street, at the entrance to the rear yard of the Visitor Centre, there have been alterations to properties and the layout of spaces where the design has moved away from the more traditional character of the surrounding area.

The addition of transient additions, such as antennae, satellite receiving dishes, and Utility Companies' metering and junction boxes can also have a significant impact not only on the appearance of the building but also on the wider conservation area. The undergrounding of the mains electricity supply in 2008 has led to an improvement in the general streetscape but unfortunately the heavy cabling and junction boxes affixed to many of the properties are intrusive. In future more discreet locations should be found for such equipment.

Similarly, though not yet a significant factor, the installation of micro-renewable infrastructure, (domestic wind turbines, solar panels and photo-voltaic cells), will impact on the appearance of the conservation area. All efforts should be made to mitigate their visual impact. It is important that the wider needs for reducing reliance on fossil fuels and reducing the carbon impact do not outweigh local visual and historic imperatives. Careful control on the installation of micro-renewable infrastructure will need to be maintained.

Handrails, steps and ramps have variously been added to the front of buildings to improve access. The importance and benefit of such additions is recognised. However, the detailing, unless carefully considered can lead to prominent and intrusive additions.

Buildings at Risk

There had been a few individual vacant buildings, whose deteriorating state was giving rise for concern and whose impact on the surrounding area was detrimental. Fortunately, partly as a result of the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, some have now been restored and no longer impact negatively.

The former GRAPES HOTEL is the more important of these. At the time of writing this building was the subject of a restoration proposal with work having commenced in 2011.

The OLD TOWN HALL was declared surplus to requirements by the Council and subsequently sold. Damage sustained by the lightning strike in 2000 and lack of maintenance were putting this building at risk. Proposals for a change of use to residential have been approved and work to convert the upper floor to a residential flat is complete.

9 HIGH STREET in its derelict state is threatening the character of the row of houses: a planning approval for restoration and extension as a dwelling has been granted and it is hoped that the property may be restored in early course.

4 George Street, the Old Bakery, was renovated during 2011.

The Council monitors buildings at risk with a view to determining whether or not further statutory action should be pursued. In the case of listed buildings this could mean the service of a repairs notice and in extreme cases the compulsory acquisition of the property. However, such action could only be considered where a feasibility study or options appraisal has indicated a viable future for the building and where a prospective restoring owner such as a Building Preservation Trust is on hand to take the restoration forward as the Council does not have the resources to acquire and restore such buildings itself.

Note of Specific Issues

The principal characteristics of the buildings and threats to them have been stated as part of the above general analysis. However it is worth noting that there is a likelihood of reused medieval fabric in many of the buildings. Of special note is 5 GEORGE STREET. This property retains a form that suggests very early origins; having small windows, thick walls and a remnant of a fine medieval doorway.

The Burgh Survey also notes that a number of other properties retain evidence of substantial inheritance from the first generation of priory burgh houses. It is therefore important that, whenever alterations to buildings facing the main streets are proposed, a detailed survey of the fabric be undertaken to determine the existence of earlier remains.

Large modern agricultural buildings and newer housing development, particularly to the north of the town have a significant impact on the views of the town and its profile on the approaches.

The development of wind turbines, especially those being proposed in groupings of two or three adjacent to or in association with farms will impact on the wider landscape setting of Whithorn. Such developments may also impact on the wider promotion of pilgrimage routes and the opening up of footpath links to the and from the conservation area.

Spaces

Current practices in the management of open spaces has led to the diverse use of unsympathetic modern surfacing materials as well as the introduction of structures and layout in response to traffic management with the streetscape having been largely overlooked.

The informal simplicity of the large public open space comprising George Street apparent in the earlier photographs of the town has now been largely lost; possibly due to the formalisation of the roadway and parking areas in response to vehicular traffic. A return to this straightforward definition of space should become part of the aims of future schemes of work in the public realm.

Urban clutter, signage and lighting have been allowed to develop ad-hoc and need to be reconsidered in a more comprehensive and sympathetic manner. A new threat arises from the introduction of traffic calming measures, which with attendant signage, and carriageway realignments, is leading to degradation of the historic character of the town.

The back land area off Kings Road, dropping down to the burn, where the tannery once stood, is now becoming more derelict and underused. Such areas have the potential to contribute positively to a vibrant conservation area often being areas of mixed uses, workshops and centres of activity. The empty or underused buildings and the poorly maintained track are leading to an air of general neglect.

Sensitivity Analysis

The sensitivity of the conservation area to change and loss of character is largely consistent throughout the area. The survey and analysis undertaken to support the funding bid for the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme analysed the townscape by categorising and

assessing the significance of a number of factors, which included listed buildings, culturally significant buildings and landmark buildings.

That analysis gave a focus area centred on George Street and the lower part of St John Street adjacent, which became the 'focus area' for the Whithorn CARS

Because of this, greater emphasis in prioritising works and seeking good conservation practices in planning and development as well as building conservation may, therefore, be given to George Street and in particular to the area close to the Priory entrance.

This approach is supported by the focus on the Priory, as part of the Cradle of Christianity initiative, and arises from the concentration of tourist and other activity around the Pend and Bruce Street.

Assessment of Significance

Historical – Very High

As one of the oldest of Scottish Burghs there is an overriding historical significance that underpins any consideration of further development within the town.

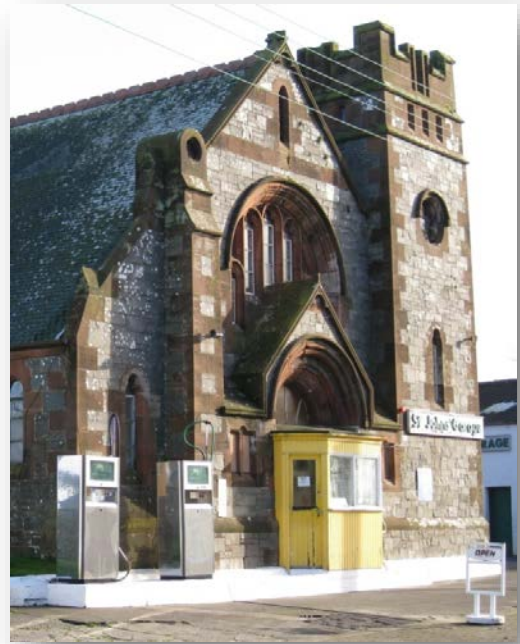
Structural – Very High

The medieval foundation and its expression today give very high significance to the town. The preservation of the layout and overall form must have a high priority in any future development considerations. The hard edge between town and country, defined by the backs of the burgage plots, is particularly significant.

Architectural - High

Though mostly modest the apparent formal regularity of the architecture of the main frontages belies a varied, interesting and significant visual streetscape. It is important that both this continuity and the subtle variety are preserved if the inherent character of the area is to be protected.





Opportunities and Strategy

Opportunities for Development

The opportunities described below relate to those that may impinge directly on the conservation area, but because of financial constraints should not be taken to imply commitment to any particular scheme or development. Similarly these should not be taken exclusively and other measures will be considered in the context of this appraisal as opportunities arise.

LDP2 refer in more detail to sites and broader planning policies that relate to future development in Whithorn. This appraisal is not intended to override any of these agreed policies or proposals.

Supporting documents which accompany development proposals, such as design, access and heritage statements, are the opportunity for agents and owners to demonstrate what aspects of the character and significance of the historic built environment have been taken into account to emphasise how the proposals address the policies and key principles of the guidance. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 imposes a duty to consider the needs of disabled people in development proposals.

Within existing Built frontages

There is little scope for development with no gap sites currently recognised as being available except the site and derelict building adjacent to No 42 High Street. Any other vacant, derelict or semi-derelict buildings should be repaired or reinstated to their former details.

Adjacent to the Conservation Area

Off King's Road, leading down to the Ket, is an area now occupied by a range of garages/workshops that was formerly the site of a row of single story cottages. This area together with the former fire station (once known as Belmont Hall) and adjacent land to the rear are important to the setting of and approach to the conservation area along King's Road.

Redevelopment of this area will need to be undertaken in a manner that makes best use of the land but also ensures a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. The scale and massing of buildings will be particularly important. Development should also maximise the contribution that the burn makes to the character and appearance of the area and further culverts should be resisted.

Vacant and underused sites

The principal underused site is that to the rear of the former Grapes Hotel. It is recommended that any proposed development will have regard to the historic burgh plot. Frontage development to the back lane, making use of the now roofless barn, would reflect earlier forms of development whilst additional accommodation could be provided with some development on the return frontage to Castlehill. This should be aligned and sited as close to the roadway as possible to retain the traditional form of development on this important entrance to the conservation area.

Neglected rear buildings such as that immediately behind the Post Office, or those lining the back lane off Castlehill should be repaired and reoccupied as part of a wider regeneration programme.

Whilst there is scope for a new interpretation of traditional forms and detailing, new buildings should not be over-large or otherwise dominate the area. Also, their disposition should reflect the surrounding traditional layout. Achieving the right plan depth of buildings, and traditional roof shape, size and massing will be crucial to the successful integration of new development even where new treatments and materials to elevations are proposed.

Opportunities for Enhancement

Within existing Built frontages

The Whithorn CARS enabled sensitive repair and restoration of a number of buildings. Future schemes, or opportunities for public investment, could consider supporting owners of other properties that have lost their original windows or roofing materials to allow these to be restored to their original detailing. Scope exists for some development or redevelopment of vacant sites or derelict buildings on the High Street.

Boundary Areas

The rear boundaries of properties fronting the west side of George Street comprise significant stone dykes. A scheme of management and repair should be introduced, subject to funding, which would enable assistance to be given to ensure their long-term preservation. This would also apply to the boundary wall to Bruce Street and to the rear of properties fronting the west side of St John Street.

Some walls and dykes on street boundaries are at risk from neglect or redevelopment or other street works; these should be retained and repaired.

The wall along Castlehill on the northern side should be retained at its present height. As part of the safer routes to schools initiative the wall on the southern side was lowered to allow visibility for children walking to school. If an opportunity arose, without compromising safety, this length of wall should be raised in height to regain the lost visual enclosure and strong linear character of the street.

Public Realm and Open Spaces

When repairs or improvements to the street are undertaken consideration should be given to the introduction of traditional materials and detailing. Such work will complement the improvements to Bruce Street and subject to budgetary constraints could comprise the following:

- Around the entrance to the Pend;
- Upgrading the surface dressing to Bruce Street;
- In the vicinity of and adjacent to the War Memorial;
- Improvements to street and footway layout and provision of bus stances in George Street between Castlehill and St John Street;
- Improvements to the South Port (the entrance to George Street from the High Street); and
- Upgrading surfacing to the entrance to Drill Hall Lane, and King's Road;
- Improvements to the Green (southern end of High Street).

If further funds were to become available, consideration should be given to promoting a scheme to unify the paving materials along the wider frontages of the George Street properties on the western side. This will require the co-operation and involvement of each property owner. If such a scheme were to be forthcoming it is unlikely that it would be

compulsory and all efforts will be made to secure a high level of support funding, though reliance on some financial commitment from property owners cannot be ruled out.

Subject to further design and historic investigation it is possible that a simple palette of materials that comprise water-worn cobbles and/or brick pavers to match existing remnants will be specified. Such a scheme would bring great improvement to the visual character and continuity of the street and would greatly enhance the quality of historic built environment in Whithorn.

Public Realm (Street Works)

In undertaking works of repair, maintenance or improvement to the streets, the Council as Roads Authority, is required to consider the need to enhance the setting and appearance of the conservation area in general terms as well as seek to implement the specific actions referred to above.

Works will be programmed as necessary and within budgetary constraints will seek to upgrade the use of materials and design in accordance with the guidance in this Appraisal and other guidance documents. Where funding allows or new schemes are introduced, specific enhancement works will be developed and implemented to build on the work started in Bruce Street. Priority will be given to George Street.

A review of the traffic and parking management scheme should be undertaken when resources allow, considering how the impact on these areas can be mitigated particularly in respect of the treatment of surfaces, road marking and in the use of signage and street furniture.

Statutory Undertakers and other organisations that need to excavate public streets and footways will be required to undertake reinstatement in a sympathetic manner. Care will need to be taken to ensure that traditional or any specially designed surfacing is replaced to match the original in form, specification and materials.

The Scottish Government has published a policy statement, 'Designing Streets', which promotes a design led solution to street works that is based on a sense of place and is responsive to local conditions and character. Whilst this is aimed primarily at new development, the principles established in the policy document can be fed through to the detailed design of existing street improvements giving a good prognosis for future public realm works in sensitive locations, such as the centre of Whithorn and other conservation areas.



Suggested Guidelines for Development Management

Introduction

As part of the normal planning management function of the Council, it is important that positive action is taken to manage and enhance the conservation area in Whithorn as described in the previous sections.

The following guidelines set out actions and criteria that can be applied when judging development proposals affecting the character and setting of the conservation area. These should be read in conjunction with the relevant policies contained in LDP2 and the Historic Built Environment Supplementary Guidance.

Guidelines

New Development

Details of development sites or allocated land can be found in LDP2. None of the following guidance should be taken to imply the suitability or otherwise of any particular site.

The Council will consider how new development on the edge of the conservation area relates to the structure of the older plan of the town. It is important to have regard to the density and form of adjacent older development. The layout and boundary treatment of such development contribute to the successful integration of new development.

Development will be judged on its impact on directly adjacent areas and on its impact on views into, out of and within the conservation area.

Sites that are on the edge of the built up areas of the town will be judged by the context they set for the conservation area and their impact on the streetscape. These may, for example, include both private and public open areas.

It is important to judge proposals in the context of the original buildings and their neighbours. The variety, range of detailing and subtlety of form and character should not be lost through inadequate specification, by the use of modern substitute materials or by injudicious painting schemes.

Similarly, requirements for parking and vehicular access in particular will need to be carefully considered to prevent an erosion of this character. This is especially important in those areas where the back lane provides vehicular access to the rear of the burgage plots off Castlehill.

The Council will consider how modern infill development within the conservation area or on opportunistic sites adjacent to the area relates to the character of the older plan of the town. It is important to have regard to the density and general scale of the existing town houses. Rooflines, building proportions, plot sizes and boundary treatments of such development all contribute to the success, or otherwise, of new development.

Although there is very little scope for new build within the main street frontages in the conservation area, it should be noted that the Council will still, in principle, be seeking to apply the general guidance that where new buildings are developed they should, for the most part, be simple, rectangular under steeply pitched slate roofs with ridges running parallel to the road. New buildings should also not cover too large an area nor have too deep a plan form and should follow existing building lines and frontages. Within the conservation area there is unlikely to be a need for new landmark buildings.

Whilst there may be potential for limited back land development on some of the more accessible long rigs it should be remembered that these, as a legacy of the medieval form, define the pattern of building in the town. Any such development must therefore prevent the loss of the medieval structure of Whithorn. Inappropriate forms or styles of building, the merging of plots or the opening up of the boundaries or loss or reduction in height of walls and dykes will not be permitted.

Existing Buildings and Townscape

The existing traditional balance between windows and walling, their general proportions and form should be retained and for the most part reproduced in any work to existing buildings. Large, new openings that may be required for garaging and other divergent detailing will not normally be permitted in existing frontages. Roof forms and materials, chimneys and other traditional detailing such as skewes should be retained as original.

It is recommended that unpainted buildings are left as such and that where benign methods can be used effectively, modern paint finishes are removed and replaced with permeable lime based finishes.

The use of colour should broadly reflect established traditional details. This appraisal does not specify a palette of colours that is considered appropriate; however, strong, vibrant and colours from modern ranges of paints will be resisted. Colours should where possible relate to and complement locally found natural materials.

Shop fronts

Existing, traditional shop fronts should be retained even in those properties being converted to residential use. The need to retain the commercial heart of the town and to allow for the commercial re-use of shops that have ceased to be used as shops is important to the overall well-being of the central area.

Satellite Dishes, Antennae, Micro-Renewable and other Equipment or Infrastructure

Micro-renewable technology can have a part to play in mitigating climate change but the installation of micro-renewable infrastructure, including heat exchangers, wind turbines, solar panels, photo-voltaic panels and Utilities' equipment will only be supported where they are not visually intrusive. This includes all building elevations or sites that are prominent in or from the principal public areas of the town or where such installations would affect the setting of the conservation area or any important buildings.

Consideration will be given to permitting such units in more discreet locations provided that the historic fabric of the building is not compromised or damaged. In all cases the installed units must be capable of being removed without damage to the building and without residual structures or fittings remaining once their use ceases.

Other additions to buildings, notably satellite receiving dishes, will not be permitted on principal or public elevations or above the ridge line of the roof. Care should be taken to site such equipment in unobtrusive locations to minimise their impact and where possible, low level or ground fixing should be considered.

New handrails to assist access to properties will need to be designed in a manner that is appropriate to the location and use. In principle traditionally detailed railing in wrought iron, or steel similarly detailed, may be used. Vertical members should normally be set directly into the stone steps in lead pockets. The older railing at No 87 George Street can be considered as a good basis for the design of any new railings. Ramps should be either deliberately free-standing and of an appropriate modern design to minimise visual intrusion or if more permanent be incorporated into the existing frontage using traditional materials.

Archaeological Recording

Proper archaeological evaluation must be an important component of any development proposals involving ground disturbance.

Buildings, whatever their age or origins, should be regarded as part of the archaeological record of Whithorn. It is important, therefore, that any buildings or historic structures that are to be changed or lost are properly recorded prior to any alteration or demolition.

Streetscape

Where appropriate, street works should incorporate the principles set out in the Scottish Government's Policy Statement, Designing Streets and as outlined in this Appraisal.

The repair or replacement of footways should be undertaken sympathetically and should prevent the proliferation of different non-compatible materials. This does not preclude modern materials but requires careful application and design. Variation in slab sizing and bonding pattern and cobbled gutters would give a more pleasing and traditional appearance. Texture and colour should be chosen to complement the adjacent buildings. Granite chippings in the surface layer of concrete slabs or asphalt should be considered where practical and where natural stone slabs or cobbles cannot be used.

The scope to work in a manner that is sensitive to the historic character of Whithorn yet meets statutory requirements needs to be examined more fully. For example, the disposition and size of traffic signs, the use of standardised markings and the geometry of road junctions may need to be modified to ensure a less intrusive approach. It is hoped that this will lead to the development of more detailed design standards that can be adopted in areas of historic importance. Of particular concern would be schemes such as the introduction of a priority flow at say the south port: here it will be important to keep signage and marking to an absolute minimum to lessen the visual intrusion of this traffic management measure.

Special attention to detail is required when work is being done to street furniture, such as the provision of litter bins and bus stances. A co-ordinated approach should be developed to the provision of bus stances, local signage and litterbins. In principle a good modern, minimalist design is likely to be worthy of consideration rather than false 'Victoriana' that has no precedence locally. Unnecessary or inappropriately styled new street furniture that could become intrusive visual clutter should not be introduced. Bollards, for example, should only be used if they are essential. Even then, they should be compatible with the style and materials of the surrounding area.

In the longer term the central parking area in George Street should be re-examined with a view to achieving a more integrated and less intrusive scheme, possibly utilizing traditional materials laid flush or near flush to define the spaces rather than raised concrete kerbing.

Reinstatement of surfaces by statutory undertakers and the roads authority needs to have regard to existing traditional materials, laying methods and detailing where enhancement schemes have been undertaken. In other areas proper reinstatement of existing materials should be undertaken to prevent a discordant, patchy appearance in the streetscape.

Some dykes on street boundaries are at risk from neglect, development or other street works. These should be retained and repaired.

Monitoring and Review

Intention to Review

This appraisal is an important part of the future management of the conservation area. The description of the area, the issues and opportunities identified herein and the scope for undertaking enhancement works will change over time.

It is important that as development of the conservation area progresses the appraisal is also reviewed and updated. Revisions to this appraisal will be made and then considered by community groups and periodically by the relevant Council Committee.

Useful Contacts

For further information please contact:

Development Planning;

Kirkbank House,

English Street,

Dumfries,

DG1 2HS

Tel 030 33 33 3000

Email: ldp@dumgal.gov.uk

Technical Information and conservation advice

Historic Environment Scotland have produced a comprehensive and very informative series of leaflets and guidance under the initiative 'INFORM' that cover many aspects of repair and maintenance of older properties.

www.historicenvironment.scot

Further Reading

Historic Whithorn – Archaeology and Development. The Scottish Burgh Survey. R D Oram, P F Martin, C A McKean, and T Neighbour. Historic Scotland 2010.



Appendix 1 – Designing Streets – Policies

The following policies are given in the Government's policy Statement, 'Designing Street' and are intended to promote good street design that is derived from 'an intelligent response to location.'

- Street design must consider place before movement.
- Street design guidance, as set out in this document [i.e. Designing Streets] can be a material consideration in determining planning applications and appeals.
- Street design should meet the six qualities of successful places, as set out in 'Designing Places'.
- Street designs should be based on balanced decision-making and must adopt a multidisciplinary collaborative approach.
- Street design should run planning permission and Road Construction Consent (RCC) processes in parallel.

The new approach defined by these policies is especially important in historic Burghs where the character of the area is so easily compromised by insensitive works that hitherto had been mostly undertaken from a perspective of easing traffic flow without necessarily having regard to the local context.