



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 9TH JUNE 2020

ENDORSEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL FOR MORPETH

Report of Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director: Regeneration, Commercial & Economy

Cabinet Member: Cllr John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Resilience

Purpose of report

To explain the need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth, the background to this and the benefits of doing so.

Recommendation

To note the contents of the Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal and to endorse its use as an evidence base to inform Council decisions.

Link to Corporate Plan

This links to the '*We want you to love where you live (Enjoying)*' theme of the Corporate Plan, which states that '*We also appreciate the quality of the wider environment. Northumberland is blessed with stunning countryside and coastline that is peppered with a host of remarkable cultural and heritage assets and is home to a network of towns and villages that each have their own unique characteristics.*'

Key issues

The need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth

Conservation Areas are designated with the intention to preserve and enhance the special architectural or historic interest of an area and to ensure its protection and management in a positive and sustainable way.

Local authorities have a duty to formulate and publish proposals to protect and enhance their Conservation Areas. The duty is met through the production and implementation of appropriate Local Plan policy and through the adoption of Management Plans for Conservation Areas. Conservation Area Character Appraisals provide an evidence base for these two pieces of work and ensure that Conservation Areas are well managed

through the planning system. There is a commitment within the emerging Local Plan to prepare, update and act on Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Conservation Area Management Plans.¹

Up to date Conservation Area Character Appraisals are an important tool for driving transparency and consistency in planning negotiations and decisions. They provide a clear public statement as to the specific issues that schemes will need to address.. There is a *particular* need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth, as it is one of the largest towns in Northumberland with significant development activity. The Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal will provide an objective tool to inform management decisions and ensure that planning decisions help protect and enhance the special character of Morpeth and add to it's economic positioning as a "quality" place.

Background

1. Purpose and Benefit of Conservation Areas

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Section 69) places a duty on Local Authorities to designate, as Conservation Areas, those areas deemed to be of special architectural or historic interest, whose character or appearance it is desirable to protect or enhance. The Act requires Local Planning Authorities to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing Conservation Areas in the exercise of their planning function (Section 70). Conservation Areas are also considered designated heritage assets. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises heritage assets as "an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations" (NPPF para 184).

Conservation Areas play an important part in the protection of our highly valued historic towns and villages. They tend to be valued by those living and working in them as special places worthy of preservation and enhancement and are important to our economic, social and quality of life. Recent research undertaken by Historic England² has shown that, nationally, house prices in town centre Conservation Areas are 50% higher than those in similar non-Conservation Area Areas, and house prices in rural Conservation Areas are 22% higher.

2. Legal Requirement to Manage Conservation Areas

Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that it is a duty of the Local Planning Authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas. Local Plan policies play a key part in meeting this requirement. However, the production of Conservation Area Character Appraisals are important in providing the evidence base which allow Local (and National) Planning Policy to be implemented. The production of a Conservation Area Character Appraisal is also often the first step in producing a

¹

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Local%20Plan/Northumberland-Local-Plan-Reg-19-Publication-Draft-January-2019-Web-PDF-Version.pdf>

²<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2018/heritage-and-the-economy-2018/>

Conservation Area Management Plan, which also helps Local Authorities fulfil their duties under Section 71 of the Act.

The need for a full set of Conservation Area Character Appraisals was recognised following Local Government Reorganisation, when the Council took on responsibility for the protection and management of all Conservation Areas within Northumberland. However it was not possible at that time to find the resources to undertake this work. The introduction of Neighbourhood Plans has seen a new demand for Character Appraisals, with many communities recognising the value of them and including the need for one in their Neighbourhood Plan Action Plans.

3. Background to The Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Morpeth is one of the main market towns of Northumberland. The origins of the town, as we see it today, lie in the 12th century when it was developed as a planned Norman town. Its' particular historic and architectural interest was recognised in its designation as a Conservation Area in 1970. Despite being one of the major settlements in the County, Morpeth has never had a Conservation Area Character Appraisal (an Appraisal was commissioned by Castle Morpeth Borough Council in 2006 but this was never completed or adopted).

The importance of the historic environment in defining local identity and character was recognised in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan³. The Plan recognised the importance and need for a Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Morpeth. *Community Action CAHer3 A - Safeguarding Heritage Assets* included the need for a 'Review of the Morpeth Conservation Area and preparation of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan supported by the introduction of Article 4 Directions where appropriate'.

⁴

The Council's Conservation Team has worked closely with Morpeth Town Council to commission a Conservation Area Character Appraisal. The Town Council paid for the work and procured Land Use Consultants to undertake it.

Public consultation on the Conservation Area Character Appraisal was undertaken by Morpeth Town Council and included:

Woodhorn

Friends of Morpeth Museums

Neighbourhood Plan Group

Greater Morpeth Development Trust

Morpeth Antiquarian Society

³

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Morpeth-Neighbourhood-Plan-Made-May-2016.pdf>

⁴

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Morpeth-Neighbourhood-Plan-Made-May-2016.pdf>

Internal consultation within the Council included the Conservation Team, Planning Development Management Team and Planning Policy Team.

The appraisal was completed in January 2020 and adopted by Morpeth Town Council on January 22nd 2020.

4. The Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal

The Character Appraisal is a publicly accessible document available as a source of information for anyone interested in the Conservation Area. Its principle aim, as cited in the document, is to widen appreciation of the town's special interest, raise awareness of why the area is protected, and provide an evidence base for managing change. It is a detailed document, as the area it is dealing with is large and complex, but it is written in an accessible manner. The Appraisal sets out the history and development of the town and how each phase of its development has contributed to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It includes a description of the form and function of key buildings, the style and architectural detailing of the main historic periods and an analysis of the spatial qualities of the town. It also includes advice on management and enhancement and is accompanied by a gazetteer which contains a detailed description of every building within the Conservation Area.

By setting out clearly those elements which contribute to the significance of the Conservation Area, it provides an evidence base which will help Local Plan policies be developed and implemented, and planning applications determined in a clear and transparent way. It will help prospective developers bring forward appropriate developments which respect the character of the Conservation Area, will underpin any future proposals for conservation and regeneration and help local people have a better understanding of their historic environment.

5. Next Steps

The Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal will be used as an evidence base to inform Council decisions and policy. Once endorsed, the Appraisal will be placed on the Council's website so that it is publicly accessible and it will be circulated to relevant services within the Council.

Morpeth Town Council are now commissioning a further stage of work which will include a boundary review of the existing Conservation Area and production of a Management Plan. The Council's Conservation Team will continue to work closely with the Town Council on these next stages of work.

Implications

Policy	The Conservation Area Character Appraisal will form part of the evidence base for Local Plan policy development and implementation.
---------------	---

Finance and value for money	No financial costs to the Council.
Legal	Endorsing the Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal will assist the Council in fulfilling its duties under S.71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A /	None
Risk Assessment	N/A
Crime & Disorder	None
Health and Wellbeing	None
Customer Consideration	Endorsement will fulfil a community aspiration expressed in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan and through Morpeth Town Council. It will help to conserve and enhance a valued environment for local people.
Carbon reduction	None
Wards	North Ward, Kirkhill, Stobhill

Background papers:

Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal (LUC 2020)

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	

Relevant Executive Director	Juliemma McCloughlin
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	John Riddle

Author and Contact Details

Sara Rushton, Conservation Manager. 01670 622650.
sara.rushton@northumberland.gov.uk