



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 13 September 2022

ADOPTION OF HEXHAM SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDE AND ALNWICK SHOPFRONT DESIGN GUIDE

Report of Rob Murfin, Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Horncastle, Portfolio Holder for Community Services

Purpose of report

To explain the need for the adoption of Shopfront Design Guides for Hexham and Alnwick, the background to this and the benefits of doing so.

Recommendation

To adopt the *Hexham Shopfront Design Guide and the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide* as formal guidance as material considerations in the determination of planning applications and to inform relevant Council/stakeholder project design.

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 Shopfront Design Guides for Alnwick and Hexham

Conservation Areas are designated to preserve and enhance special architectural or historic interest and to ensure their protection and management in a positive and sustainable way. The commercial centres of Hexham and Alnwick form a substantial part of their Conservation Areas and contribute significantly to their special character.

Local authorities have a duty to formulate and publish proposals to protect and enhance their Conservation Areas. This duty is met through the production and implementation of appropriate Local Plan policy and through the adoption of Management Plans and other relevant guidance. In addition, the Northumberland Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out requirements for good design which reinforces local character and contributes to making better places for people to live. Shopfront Design Guides play an important role in guiding development in town centres and helping to retain their special character.

1. Purpose and Benefit of Shopfront Design Guides

Shops and commercial premises are a key element of both the Alnwick and Hexham Conservation Areas. Ensuring a high standard of design for these historic town centres helps to attract and retain business, contributing to their vitality and making them attractive places for people to live, work and visit.

The Shopfront Design Guides will assist developers, retailers, design professionals and building owners to prepare designs for shopfronts and other commercial premises which respond well to local character. By setting out clear guidance, it will assist applicants in developing successful proposals and provide criteria against which planning decisions can be made. The Shopfront Design Guides for Hexham and Alnwick are the first in a proposed series of bespoke guidance for shops and commercial properties in the historic market towns of Northumberland.

2. Legal and Policy Requirement to Manage Conservation Areas and Ensure Good Design

Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of their area Conservation Areas. Local and national planning policy also protects the significance of Conservation Areas and ensures that planning proposals are informed by good design.

The Northumberland Local Plan (Policy QOP1) includes the requirement for design to make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. The NPPF (paragraphs 126-136) places considerable emphasis on good design, which is a key aspect of sustainable development, contributing positively to making places better for people.

The Neighbourhood Plans for Hexham and for Alnwick and Denwick both contain design principles for shopfronts. The *Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2031* (Policy HD7) requires development to be in accordance with guidance produced by Alnwick Civic Society (in association with the former Alnwick District Council). The *Hexham Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036* (Policy HNP5) requires changes to shop fronts in the Conservation Area to take account of adopted shopfront guidance.

3. Background to the Alnwick and Hexham Shopfront Design Guides

Alnwick Conservation Area was designated in 1972 and revised in 2006. Hexham Conservation Area was designated in 1973 and revised in 1992 and 2009. The historic environment of both areas is of high quality, with traditional shopfronts making a strong contribution to their character. Both towns had earlier guidance (*Hexham Interim Design Package for Shopfronts and their Advertisements*, 1991; *Alnwick Design Guide for Shop Fronts*, 1995) produced by their Civic Societies and adopted by the then District Councils. Both Civic Societies approached the Council's Environment and Design Team to request an update to the original documents.

The Environment and Design Team has worked closely with the Civic Societies in the production of the updated Design Guides. The Hexham Shopfront Design Guide was updated and published in 2018. A report was taken to the Tynedale Local Area Committee

on 12/09/2017. The Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide was updated and published in 2021. Both documents form part of the Northumberland Planning Policy Consolidated Framework, which has been updated following adoption of the Northumberland Local Plan. The guidance therefore now requires formal adoption. This paper seeks endorsement for the Hexham Shopfront Design Guide and the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide to be included in the consolidated Local Plan as non statutory planning guidance.

4. The Alnwick and Hexham Shopfront Guides

The Shopfront Design Guides have been updated to reflect current national and local planning policies and to provide a greater level of guidance. The documents are set out in an attractive and accessible manner, illustrated with local examples. They cover all relevant aspects of shopfront design, including an explanation of the principles of traditional shopfront design, materials, signage, lighting and security measure. The aim of the guides is to promote high standards of design for any proposals affecting shopfronts. They will assist the planning application process by setting out the design principles which should inform any such proposals that would affect the Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings.

5. Next Steps

The Shopfront Design Guides will be used as formally identified material considerations in determining planning applications and as guidance offered to inform design discussions and projects. The Guides are already available as hard copy and on the Council's website.

Implications

Policy	The Alnwick and Hexham Shopfront Design Guides will be used as guidance to inform Local Plan policy development and implementation.
Finance and value for money	No financial costs to the Council.
Legal	Adopting the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide and the Hexham Shopfront Design Guide 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	The documents have been supported by Hexham and Alnwick Town Councils and Civic Societies, demonstrating support from the local community.

Carbon reduction	None
Wards	Hexham Central with Acomb Hexham East; Hexham West; Alnwick

Background papers:

Hexham Shopfront Design Guide 2018
Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide 2021

Report sign off.

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

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	SB
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	JW
Relevant Executive Director	RM
Chief Executive	ROF
Portfolio Holder(s)	CH

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