



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

9TH NOVEMBER 2021

Proposed Adoption of Revised Boundary for Morpeth Conservation Area

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

Cabinet Member: Cllr Colin Horncastle, Portfolio Holder for Community Services

Purpose of report

To explain the need to review the Morpeth Conservation Area and to seek approval to adopt the recommended extension to the current Conservation Area boundary.

Recommendation

Cabinet is Recommended to:

Approve the proposals to revise the boundary of the Morpeth Conservation Area as set out in Chapter 11 of the Morpeth Conservation Area Boundary Review Final Report and the enclosed plan.

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

1. *The need to revise the Morpeth Conservation Area boundary.*

Conservation Area designation aims to preserve and enhance a place with special architectural or historic interest to ensure its character and appearance is protected and managed in a positive and sustainable way. Local planning authorities are responsible for designating Conservation Areas under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There are currently 70 Conservation Areas in Northumberland. Local authorities have a duty to review Conservation Areas from time to time and to determine whether any further parts should be added to the designation.

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. Key elements that define its special architectural and historic interest include the preservation of the medieval layout of the town, important medieval and civic structures (such as The Chantry, the Castles and Courthouse), the town's close relationship with the River Wansbeck, and the organic evolution of the buildings, which has produced an array of building types and styles that together demonstrate the development of the town and define its appearance.

The historic and architectural interest of Morpeth was recognised in its designation as a Conservation Area in 1970 but there has been no subsequent review of the boundary. Recent assessment of the Morpeth Conservation Area¹ has identified areas of special architectural or historic interest which it is recommended should now be included within the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area designation will assist in the protection and enhancement of its special architectural and historic interest. Conservation Areas are afforded a higher level of

¹ Morpeth Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Land Use Consultants. 2020

protection in the planning system as they are 'designated heritage assets', whose significance is given weight by national and local planning policies.

2. *Origins of the Proposal.*

The Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan recognises the importance of the historic environment in defining local identity and character. *Community Action CAHer3 A - Safeguarding Heritage Assets* includes 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

Morpeth Town Council approached the Council's Environment and Design Team to assist with commissioning a Conservation Area Character Appraisal and review of the current Conservation Area boundary. The Conservation Area Character Appraisal was endorsed by Cabinet in June 2020.

3. *Work Done to Date*

Morpeth Town Council and the County Council's Environment and Design Team have worked together on the Character Appraisal and Boundary Review for Morpeth. Funding was provided by Morpeth Town Council and the work was undertaken by heritage specialists from Land Use Consultants. The review has identified areas that are no longer appropriate for inclusion and areas that it is considered should now be included. The full Boundary Review Report is included in the background papers². The report concluded that the boundary of the current Conservation Area is too tightly drawn and many features that are fundamental to our understanding and appreciation of the area fall outside it and should be included.

The current Conservation Area boundary centres on the market place and the principal routes that radiate from this point, it also extends across the river to the south at Telford Bridge to take in the Courthouse and buildings around Castle Square. The boundary is very tightly drawn, with an emphasis on the 17th to 19th century commercial core of the town.

The Boundary Review identified a number of criteria against which potential areas for inclusion would be assessed. These included those areas that shared a common character with the existing Conservation Area, whether the areas in question possess sufficient architectural or historic interest to be considered to have 'special interest' and whether it is desirable for that character or appearance to be preserved or enhanced. A

² Morpeth Conservation Area Boundary Review Final Report. Land Use Consultants. March 2021

number of important buildings of architectural and historical interest were not able to be included because they are either isolated or separated from the main Conservation Area by intervening space or development that is not consistent with its character.

4. Recommendations of the Boundary Review

The boundary review demonstrated that there is sufficient special interest to justify extending the designation of the Conservation Area. The review originally proposed changes affecting eight distinct areas of Morpeth; these areas are identified on the map in Section 7 below. The areas include:

- i. *North Approach*: It is proposed that the Conservation Area boundary here is extended north along Pottery Bank / North Place. This would include a collection of historic buildings of architectural and historic interest, including the large, late-19th century Hill Brow House to the west side of the road and the 19th century Sunday School (currently Bolland Nursery) and a traditional stone-built 19th century house to the east. This area marks a sense of arrival into the historic settlement and is an important approach to the Conservation Area.
- ii. *High Stanners*: The proposed Conservation Area boundary would extend west across the River Wansbeck. It would include the green space and riverside of High Stanners. The extension includes the historic crossing points at the Bakehouse Steps and Skinnery Footbridge. The area is an important part of the quieter, riverside green space character. There are important views along the riverside and back towards the town which allow the form and layout of the town to be read and an appreciation of the relationship between river and town.
- iii. *West Approach*: In this area, the original proposal was to extend the boundary west from Oldgate, to include the line of houses at the foot of Curly Kews. The extension would also cover the western entrance into the medieval town, Oldgate Bridge and a historic fording point. The approach contributes to the experience of the Conservation Area, with views towards Oldgate showing the outer extent of the medieval town and views across the town. The proposal for this area has now been amended following consultation, as explained in Section 6 below; it no longer includes the houses lining the approach as they are not considered to have sufficient special architectural or historic interest.
- iv. *Riverside*: This is a large extension to the Conservation Area, taking in the area between the back of Oldgate and Bridge Street and the river. The river is one of the fundamental features of the town and one of the principal reasons the town is located where it is. The green space that extends out from the banks of the river accounts for most of the town's amenity space. The river has also exerted considerable influence and constraint on the physical development of Morpeth. Historic plot boundaries and street forms still survive and there is a good mix of different phases and uses of buildings in this area. The more recent development of Mathesons Gardens also has architectural merit, having won national awards.
- v. *Carlisle Park and the Castles*: This extension of the southern boundary of the Conservation Area would take in Carlisle Park, Ha Hill and Morpeth Castle. The castles, which are historically significant in their own right, played a fundamental part in the development of the town. They are highly visible reminders of its' past,

the region's turbulent history and Morpeth's continuing role as an important, strategic settlement. Carlisle Park was opened in 1929 on land donated to the town by the Countess of Carlisle. At that time, it was already an established open space crossed by a network of footpaths and, before that, land associated with the castles. The area is a popular and attractive amenity space and has a close historic, spatial and visual connection to the town.

- vi. *South Approach*: In this area, it is proposed that the Conservation Area boundary is extended south, along Castle Bank, and east, behind the Courthouse. This would include what remains of the 'civic complex' of buildings in this area (the Police Station and associated buildings behind the Courthouse). This cluster of buildings exert a notable influence over the character of this part of the Conservation Area and help to illustrate the important role that the town has played historically as an administrative centre for the region. The area also includes another important approach to the town down Castle Bank, it marks the beginning of the historic core of the area and leads to the main crossing point of the river.
- vii. *Bridge Street Backlands*: Proposals in this area include relatively minor amendments to the boundary north of Bridge Street. These changes will rationalise the boundary, which currently runs through buildings and excludes some important historic buildings to the rear of plots, whilst including other parts that have lost historic and architectural interest. It will include a row of terraces on Burnside which follow the vestige of historic plot boundaries and contribute to the mix of uses in this area. It will also include the Horsley Buildings, a row of dwellings which appear on the 1826 Town Map and part of the riverside to the south of St George's Church alongside Telford Bridge. The boundary revision also proposes to exclude part of the old car park currently under development for the new leisure centre.
- viii. *Manchester Street, Dacre Street, and Howard Road*. The proposal includes a significant extension to the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area. It will extend east to Dark Lane, to include Dacre Street, all of Manchester Street, Well Way, Wellway Court and the southern side of Howard Road. An extension north is also proposed along Cottingwood Lane. There are a number of reasons for these proposed changes. The area forms part of the historic core of the town, with strong visual and physical connections to the Conservation Area. Howard Road and Dark Lane relate to medieval routes through the town, which gave access to the backlands and surrounding fields beyond burgage plots. The area includes a mix of uses – churches, commercial, retail and residential – and mix of phases, although predominantly 18th and 19th century. Of particular note is the collection of Nonconformist places of worship, including a Presbyterian Chapel (1722), later used as a school and now converted to residential, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (1884), now the Boys' Brigade Hall, a Congregational Chapel (1898) and a Primitive Methodist Chapel (1904).

Detailed maps of the existing and proposed boundaries for each area are included in the Boundary Review Report (Chapters 2-9). The proposals were amended following wider consultation and final proposals are set out in Section 6 below.

5. **Public Consultation Undertaken**

Public consultation was undertaken by Land Use Consultants on behalf of the Town Council and the County Council. Consultations ran for a period of 7 weeks, from 20th November 2020 to 11th January 2021. The restrictions due to COVID-19 meant that the drop-in sessions originally planned could not be held, and instead an online consultation hub was created. The hub provided background information to the consultation, access to the Boundary Review Report, the Conservation Area Appraisal and an interactive map that allowed people to submit comments on the proposals. A contact email address was also provided for submission of further questions or comments. The consultation was advertised in the Morpeth Herald, in Inside Morpeth (a free magazine delivered to all residents of Morpeth), on social media and on the display screen at the front of the Town Hall. Hard copies of the boundary review report were available upon request.

There were twenty-four written or telephone responses to the consultation. There were also nine posts on Facebook which were also taken into consideration. Seven of the responses were in support of the proposals. Fourteen responses objected to the proposals, although four of these responses were duplicated on the consultation hub and in written or telephone responses, so there is some double-counting in these figures. Twelve responses were neither objection nor support and mostly related to requests for clarification or further information, with some comments posted in response to other comments on Facebook and two questioning why more of the High Stanners area was not included.

Morpeth Antiquarian Society wrote a strong letter of support for the proposals, recognising the benefits the increased designation would bring and hoping that the proposals would be adopted in full. Further individual expressions of support were provided for the inclusions around High Stanners, Carlisle Park and the Castles and the Southern Approach, with some surprise expressed that many of these areas were not already included within the current Conservation Area.

The majority of objections were in relation to the proposed extension into Manchester Street, Dacre Street and Howard Road. These objections were mostly from property owners in these areas; these included concerns that the designation would add expense, restrictions and bureaucracy to owners wishing to maintain and extend their properties and would adversely affect the value of their properties. Three respondents also felt that they should have been written to directly to explain the proposals. One respondent queried whether all the areas proposed were of sufficient historic or architectural interest or had sufficient relationship with the existing Conservation Area. This respondent also raised other issues around the need to address climate change which are outside the scope of the boundary review.

A detailed letter of objection was also received from BH Planning and Design, on behalf of clients who own the former Police Station site. This made the point that the proposal to include the former Police Station site didn't recognise the changes to the site that would occur if the current planning permission for the site (17/02588/FUL) is implemented. This permission would result in approximately 75% of the former Police Station complex of buildings being demolished and replaced by purpose built residential dwellings, although the main headquarters building would remain. The objector felt these changes, and

associated landscaping, would alter the character of the site from that forming part of a “civic complex” of buildings to a predominately residential area. The objection also referred to the fact that the original 1970’s designation did not include the Police Station when it was operational and questioned the justification for including it now.

Details of all the responses are set out in full in Appendix A of the Conservation Area Boundary Review Report.

6. *Response to Consultation Responses*

A detailed response to all the points raised during the consultation is included in Chapter 10 of the Conservation Area Boundary Review Report. Three main areas of concern have been identified from the responses, these include: perceived restrictions on works owners would be able to carry out on their properties; inclusion of buildings and areas not considered to be of special interest; concern that the potential impact of implementing existing planning permissions for the old Police Station site has not been considered.

Concerns from residents regarding restrictions to works to their properties are largely based on a misunderstanding of the effect of designation; maintenance work, internal works and replacement of windows and doors to most residential properties would not require additional consent and so there would be no increased burden on homeowners in this respect. Conservation Area status does include some additional planning controls including notification of demolition of buildings; control over partial demolition; control over works to trees; potential limitations on permitted development rights; limitation on the type of advertisements that do not require consent and the need for planning permission to replace windows in flats. Any development is expected to enhance or better reveal the significance of the area, so there will be a requirement for good design and appropriate materials for extensions and new development in the area. With regard to the impact on property values, research has shown that house prices in town centre Conservation Areas are 50% higher than in similar non-Conservation Area areas, and 22% higher in rural Conservation Areas³, so it is not anticipated that there will be any adverse impact on property values.

Some comments pointed out that the revised boundary would include some buildings which are not of special architectural or historic interest. This is particularly the case around Wellway, where the designation includes, for example, the surgery and Wellway Court. This point is accepted; however, Conservation Areas are area designations and inevitably some buildings will lie within these areas which are not of special interest. Whilst there are some later developments in the Manchester St., Dacre St. And Howard Road

³ Heritage Counts: Heritage and the Economy 2020. Historic England (p47).
<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2020/heritage-and-the-economy-2020/>

area, it still has a predominantly historic character that relates to the existing Conservation Area. However, further consideration has been given to the inclusion of the buildings lining the West approach at the foot of Curly Kews and it is now recommended that this area is not included within the revised boundary due to the lack of historic or architectural interest and the recognition that this area should, instead, be viewed as forming part of the setting of the Conservation Area.

With regard to the inclusion of the old Police Station, it is acknowledged that the character of the area will change if the extant planning permission is implemented. The proposed inclusion of this area within the designation would not interfere with the implementation of the approved scheme. Moreover, the scheme has not commenced and there is no certainty that it will be implemented. At present, the site retains the architectural and historic interest required to be recommended for inclusion. It is considered that a change to residential use would not remove the civic quality and character of its architecture or its historic interest. The point raised that the buildings were not included in the original Conservation Area designation is not a valid objection, as Section 69(2) of the (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to review their Conservation Areas and determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated. Understanding and appreciation of heritage assets can change over time, as has happened in the review of the Morpeth Conservation Area boundary, which is now over 50 years old.

7. *Final Recommendations*

The outcomes of the boundary review, as set out in detail in Chapter 11 of the Morpeth Conservation Area Boundary Review Final Report, and outlined in Section 4 above, are recommended for acceptance, with the exception of the inclusion of the houses at Curly Kews. The map below shows the existing Conservation Area boundary, outlined in black, and the proposed extension, outlined in red. It is recommended that this revised boundary is adopted for the Morpeth Conservation Area.

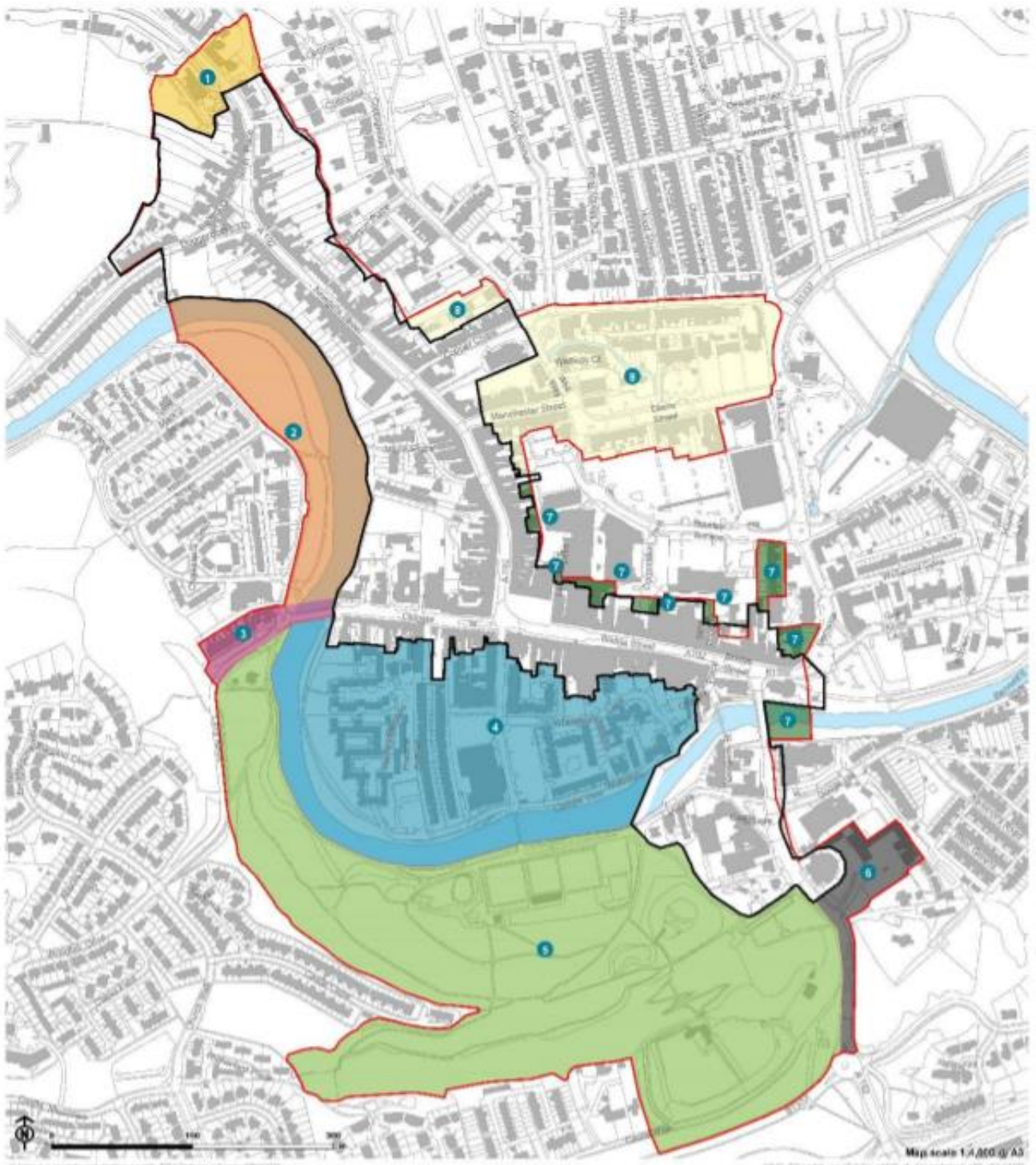


Figure 1: Morpeth Conservation Area - Proposed Boundary Amendments

Existing Conservation Area boundary
 Proposed Conservation Area boundary amendment

Road areas
 1: North Approach
 2: High Starnes
 3: West Approach

5: Carlisle Park and the Castles
 6: South Approach
 7: Bridge Street Backlands
 8: Manchester St, Dacre St and Howard Road

8. *Next Steps*

If the recommended boundary extension is approved, it will become formally designated. The revised boundary will be advertised locally and nationally (London Gazette). A local land charge will be registered for every property and parcel of land within the designated area. The County Council and Morpeth Town Council will publicise the designation to the public and partners. A guidance note will also be produced for owners of properties within the Conservation Area.

BACKGROUND

Legislation - Duty to designate

The [Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) Act 1990](#) imposes a duty on Local Authorities to designate areas which are of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance (Section 69, 1). There is a further requirement for Local Authorities *'from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas; and, if they so determine, they shall designate those parts accordingly'* (section 69, 2).

The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 191) stipulates that local planning authorities should only designate a Conservation Area if a place "justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest". The review of the Morpeth Conservation Area boundary has demonstrated that the proposed extensions have the special qualities to justify designation as a Conservation Area.

Benefits and effects of designation

Conservation Areas are 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 189). Extending the Conservation Area boundary in Morpeth will ensure future development takes into account all areas of special architectural or historic significance currently identified in the town.

Chapter 16 *'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'* of the NPPF provides guidance on assessment of significance of heritage assets and for considering potential impacts of proposed developments. Applicants seeking planning permission within the Conservation Area will need to provide a Heritage Statement that sets out the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Within a Conservation Area, planning permission may be required for alterations, repairs and extensions to ensure that these changes do not harm the Conservation Area's character or appearance. Planning permission is required for the demolition of unlisted buildings. Trees within a Conservation Area are protected in a similar manner to those under a tree preservation order and, as such, permission is required for felling, pruning or

uprooting trees. Permitted development rights continue to operate in Conservation Areas however if changes to the built environment erode the special qualities of the Conservation Area, the local planning authority can, if they wish, introduce an Article 4 Direction, whereby planning permission for such changes will be required.

Implications

Policy	Planning policies relating to Conservation Areas will become relevant to the determination of planning applications within the proposed Conservation Area boundary upon its designation.
Finance and value for money	No financial costs to the Council.
Legal	By reviewing the Conservation Area the Council will be fulfilling its duties under S.69 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. Land Use Consultants. 2020

Morpeth Conservation Area Boundary Review Final Report. Land Use Consultants. March 2021

Report sign off.

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

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