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**TOWN CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams**

**Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To report the outcome of the consultation process for the Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal, including four boundary additions to the Conservation Area.
2. To seek Members' approval of the appended Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal and of four boundary additions to the Conservation Area.

**Summary**

3. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 says that it is the duty of Local Planning Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area that are Conservation Areas.
4. This is achieved through Conservation Area Character Appraisals and ultimately through detailed policy in the Local Development Framework.
5. The Environment Scrutiny Review Action Plan adopted by the Cabinet highlighted the need for Conservation Area Character Appraisals to be undertaken.
6. Through Appraisals, sound decisions can be made on planning applications received for development within Conservation Areas.
7. The Town Centre is the seventh in a programme of 16 Conservation Area Character Appraisals as shown in the timetable considered by Environment and Scrutiny on 25 February 2010.

**Recommendation**

8. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the attached Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal and the four boundary additions.

**Reasons**

9. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To provide a document to assist in the preservation and enhancement of the Town Centre Conservation Area.
- (b) To ensure Conservation Area protection for the boundary additions, which relate to the existing Conservation Area boundary in terms of form and use.

**Richard Alty**  
**Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

### **Background Papers**

- (i) Background Paper 1: Conservation Areas and Appraisal Statistics
- (ii) Background Paper 2: Consultation Responses and Actions

Heather Grimshaw : Extension 2604

S17 Crime and Disorder	No issues are raised.
Health and Well Being	The Appraisal encourages a high standard of environment, preserving and enhancing existing.
Sustainability	The Appraisal encourages a high quality, sustainable environment within the Conservation Area.
Diversity	No issues are raised.
Efficiency	Conservation Area Character Appraisals assess the character and appearance of the area and look at design requirements for new development. This should lead to savings in officer time and workload later in the planning application process.
Wards Affected	Central
Groups Affected	Residents of the Town Centre Conservation Area.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This Appraisal contributes towards the priorities of Greener Darlington, Safer Darlington, Healthy Darlington and Prosperous Darlington.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

10. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on Local Planning Authorities to designate as Conservation Areas any *areas that from time to time they determine are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'*. Conservation Areas are places where buildings and the spaces around them interact to form distinctly recognisable areas of special quality and interest.
11. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 emphasises that it is the duty of Local Planning Authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area that are Conservation Areas.
12. Planning Policy Guidance 15 (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment stresses the need for Local Planning Authorities to make an assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of all Conservation Areas in their areas through an Appraisal.
13. The Environment Scrutiny Review Action Plan adopted by the Cabinet highlighted the need for Conservation Area Character Appraisals to be undertaken.
14. Darlington has 16 Conservation Areas designated between 1978 and 1997; the Town Centre Conservation Area was designated on 1 July 1976. In May 1990 the boundary was altered to bring in the Crown Street and Bondgate areas now included. The Appraisal is the seventh in a programme of 16 Conservation Area Character Appraisals as shown in the timetable taken to Economy and Environment Scrutiny on 25 February 2010. The target is to produce three Appraisals a year, thereby ensuring all Conservation Areas have Appraisals in place by 2012.
15. Character Appraisals are a tool to assist in the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas. Through Appraisals, areas, buildings and spaces of special landscape or historic and / or architectural character can be highlighted as possessing particular interest, and being worthy of preservation and enhancement. Features of special interest, such as historic walls, stiles, open spaces, trees or historic surfaces can be highlighted through the Appraisal as can features causing intrusion or damage.
16. The production of a Character Appraisal is a step in the process of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of a designated area, providing a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future. Undertaking an Appraisal offers the opportunity to re-assess the designated area and to evaluate and record its special interest. An Appraisal is not an end in itself, the process should lead to a better understanding of the character of the area and what makes it the place it is today, and so provide the basis for a positive Management Plan of the Area and / or an Article 4 (2) Direction to remove Permitted Development Rights if this is considered appropriate. Appraisals provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for Development Plan policies and future Development Management decisions.

## **Methodology**

17. Defining the 'special interest' of an area is the main purpose of an Appraisal and is gained from the area's appearance but other senses and experiences, local environmental conditions and historical associations can be drawn on.
18. Historic street patterns (building plots, layouts and the relationship of buildings to open spaces), archaeology (including any Scheduled Ancient Monuments), buildings (listed and unlisted), spaces and townscape, materials, green spaces, uses and the built environment and landscape can all contribute towards the character of an area.
19. The document is an assessment of the area's special architectural and historic interest, based on careful analysis of the area as a result of time spent in the area and academic literature sources.

## **Boundary Additions**

20. PPG15 encourages Local Planning Authorities to periodically consider revision of Conservation Area boundaries to ensure they provide protection where needed. This is often done when Appraisals are produced.
21. Looking at the existing boundary it became clear that some areas had been overlooked when the Conservation Area was designated so the opportunity was taken to propose appropriate additions for comment.
22. Four boundary additions were proposed:
  - (a) Duke Street - The full stretch of Duke Street clearly functions as part of the Town Centre and has many of the architectural styles and details characteristic of the Conservation Area. This area was only left without the Conservation Area, when designated in 1976, because of the potential for the inner-ring road route to affect Duke Street. Therefore it is now proposed to rectify this and bring Duke Street into the Town Centre Conservation Area.
  - (b) Four Riggs - Covering the area of Four Riggs, Upper Archer Street and Sun Street, this area is proposed because of some good examples of town centre fringe terraced housing and the use of ceramics on the Three Crowns PH on Archer Street. There are also areas of potential future development in the Archer Street car park and the warehouse between Four Riggs and Sun Street, which, as currently adjacent to the Conservation Area, would benefit being included.
  - (c) Northgate - This extension includes some more of Northgate, although not the entire area up to the roundabout. It is proposed because to some extent it bridges the gap between the Town Centre Conservation Area and Northgate Conservation Area, bringing in more of the town centre buildings currently overlooked, up to 'Marks and Spencer corner' before the roundabout.

- (d) Riverside - The river in this location currently adjoins the Conservation Area boundary and it therefore forms part of one of the entrances to the Conservation Area, currently unprotected; it would be beneficial to bring this area into the Conservation Area to guide future enhancement. This area also includes St Cuthbert's Bridge, an unlisted bridge worthy of Conservation Area protection.

### **Participation and Engagement**

23. Internally, emails and a link to the electronic copy of the draft Appraisal were sent internally to senior officers within Planning, Highways, Building Control, Estates and the Communications Section.
24. All Members were informed of the draft Appraisal and of the event in the Dolphin Centre via invitation cards produced by the Connecting with Communities Team.
25. Externally, public participation and engagement is an integral part of the Appraisal process to encourage valuable public understanding and 'ownership'. The formal consultation period ran from Monday 30 November 2009 until Friday 15 January 2010, during which people were encouraged to comment on the draft Appraisal.
26. Posters were produced and put up in council-owned buildings in the month before the consultation period began and residents and retailers were invited to drop-in at the event via a notice placed in the November Town Crier magazine, which is sent to every home in the Borough.
27. Letters were sent to Darlington Civic Trust, Friends of the Railway Museum and the Darlington Historical Society.
28. Residents and retailers within the Conservation Area were a high priority and were likely to want more input than those living elsewhere in the Borough. Therefore a Talking Together, informal drop-in event was held in the Central Hall in the Dolphin Centre between 18:00 and 19:30 on Monday 30 November 2009. At the event there was a rolling Powerpoint presentation, displays boards and copies of the draft Appraisal; attendees were encouraged to ask questions and make comments.

### **Key Findings from the Consultation**

29. Four formal responses were received: 3 letters, one from the Friends of North Lodge Park, one from the Friends of the Darlington Railway Centre and Museum and one from a member of the public; all were supportive of the proposed boundary additions and the content of draft Appraisal but had concerns about the condition of specific buildings, unsympathetic shopfronts and shopfront security, mismatched floorscape and street furniture within the Conservation Area; these issues had been recognised within the Appraisal. 1 email was received from a member of the public supporting the document and suggesting minor alterations to the document in the form of text on plans included with the Appraisal as well as providing a couple of factual corrections. The Appraisal has been amended accordingly. Some comments, whilst of value, were about issues that an Appraisal cannot resolve, some of which can be considered in the light of future work.

30. The participation event held at the Dolphin centre attracted approximately 20 people. Again comments were supportive of the proposed boundary additions and of the content of the draft Appraisal. Verbal comments received included the suggestion for inclusion of a section on shopfronts and security within the Appraisal due to the commercial nature of the area. The Appraisal has been amended accordingly.

## **Conclusions**

31. The attached Town Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal is the seventh in a series of Appraisals concerning the 16 Conservation Areas in the Borough. The final document required some amendment in terms of a new section on shopfronts and shopfront security, some minor factual corrections and amended maps with clearer text as a result of comments received. The proposed boundary additions received support and so have been carried forward. This document will provide a useful tool in assisting the preservation and enhancement of the Town Centre Conservation Area through development management.