

CABINET
10 SEPTEMBER 2024

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON DRAFT APPRAISAL FOR THE NORTHGATE CONSERVATION AREA
INCLUDING PROPOSED BOUNDARY EXTENSION**

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The report seeks Members' approval to go out for public consultation with the new draft appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area – see **Appendix 1**. The document also includes proposals to significantly extend the conservation area boundary.

Summary

2. The report describes the justification for writing a new appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area including proposals to extend the boundary significantly. It also briefly outlines the contents of the document and the proposed consultation process.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Cabinet authorises public consultation on the new draft appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area.
 - (b) The draft document is publicised for a period of at least six weeks, to allow members of the public and other stakeholders sufficient time to submit comments.
 - (c) The draft document is amended and finalised in the light of comments received during the public consultation period.
 - (d) The finalised conservation area appraisal is submitted to Members for adoption; this will be subject to another cabinet report.

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) The Northgate Conservation Area is a designated heritage asset of international significance due to its structures and associations directly linked to the birth/early years of the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) of 1825. Despite its high importance, it has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010.
 - (b) The bicentennial of the S&DR is next year. There will be many events in Darlington and elsewhere to celebrate the birth of the modern railway. The Council is currently making significant investments in preparation for the 2025 celebrations including the redevelopment of the railway heritage quarter (Hopetown) inside the Northgate Conservation Area.
 - (c) The bicentennial of the S&DR is also being promoted by Historic England, the government's statutory adviser on the historic environment. They have provided financial assistance and other support for the Northgate Conservation Area.
 - (d) The present appraisal of the Northgate Conservation Area was adopted in January 2007. It is now deemed inadequate and out of date.
 - (e) The new draft appraisal picks up some of the 'unfinished' work carried out recently by Durham County Council and Land Use Consultants. It provides a detailed record and analysis of the Northgate Conservation Area which will be of interest to the public and other stakeholders, as well as some of the Council's staff (e.g. planning officers).
 - (f) The proposed boundary extension areas often relate to development that was influenced by S&DR. The draft appraisal will draw attention to locally important heritage assets to further public understanding and inform decision making.
 - (g) The draft appraisal also includes suggestions to improve the condition of the conservation area so that it may eventually be removed from the Heritage at Risk register.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Borough Council (2007) *Northgate Conservation Area. Character Appraisal. January 2007*
- (ii) English Heritage (2010) *Heritage at Risk. North East 2010*
- (iii) Historic England (2023) *Heritage at Risk. North East & Yorkshire Register 2023*

Council Plan	LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – The designation of a Conservation Area recognises the historic significance of an area and helps to maintain that quality
Addressing inequalities	No Impact
Tackling Climate Change	Possibly slightly positive impact. The draft appraisal raises some awareness against the use of modern materials that are incompatible with traditional buildings, which often have a high-carbon footprint and adverse effect on the insulating properties of traditional structures.
Efficient and effective use of resources	For the public consultation process, the additional workload will only be temporary and mainly with the Conservation Officer. In the long term, depending on the outcome of the adopted appraisal (subject to a future cabinet meeting), there may be a slight increase in additional officer workload in planning applications and enforcement.
Health and Wellbeing	Possibly slightly positive impact. The information provided in the draft appraisal may lead to wider improvements in the area.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Possibly slightly positive impact. The information provided in the draft appraisal may lead to wider improvements in the area.
Wards Affected	Northgate, Pierremont, North Road, Brinkburn & Faverdale, Stephenson
Groups Affected	No Impact
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council’s budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There is no impact on the Looked After Children and Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background Information

5. A conservation area is ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’ (Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).
6. Much of the special interest of the Northgate Conservation Area comprises structures and associations linked to the birth/early days of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR), which is of international significance, being the world’s first public railway on which a locomotive hauled passengers. The S&DR opened in September 1825.

7. Initially, a North Road Station Conservation Area was designated on 14 November 1974. On 4 December 1997, this was incorporated into the newly created Northgate Conservation Area. On 21 July 2003, the area was further extended to include additional properties to the east side of Northgate, High Northgate and the Skerne Bridge.
8. An appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area was first adopted in January 2007.
9. In March 2021, a proposed new draft character appraisal was finalised by Land Use Consultants (LUC) on behalf of Darlington Borough Council, but this was not published or adopted. Moreover, that document did not include an examination of the present conservation area boundary. LUC also produced a Northgate Urban Design Framework and Masterplan in February 2021 for a large part of the Conservation Area which now forms the strategic direction/vision for regeneration under the Towns Fund scheme.
10. In July 2022, Durham County Council (DCC) provided *Conservation Area Assessments – Route of the former Stockton & Darlington Railway. Darlington & Middleton St. George*, of the northern half of the Northgate Conservation Area only, which, at the time, was proposed to be separated from its southern half, extended, and renamed as a new conservation area. However, no appraisal had been provided by DCC to justify their drastic proposal.
11. The Conservation Northgate Area has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010. Of all the conservation areas in the borough, it is the one that is in worst condition.
12. Darlington Council has been making significant investments inside the Northgate Conservation Area in preparation for the 2025 celebrations, including the redevelopment of the railway heritage quarter and regeneration works under the Towns Fund scheme.

Recent Assessment

13. Darlington's present Conservation Officer joined the Council at the end of February 2023. In April 2023, there was an email from Historic England asking for any Heritage at Risk updates to be included on this year's Register. In June, the Conservation Officer had a site meeting with Jules Brown (Historic Places Adviser for North-East and Yorkshire, Historic England) in the Northgate Conservation Area to discuss the issues with regards to its condition and possible boundary changes, well as the ongoing redevelopment and planned events linked to the S&DR bicentennial in 2025. It was agreed that an updated appraisal of the Northgate Conservation Area should be a priority.
14. The new appraisal was drafted between September 2023 and February 2024 by the Conservation Officer. The finished draft was informally circulated to the members of the affected wards on 2 April 2024.
15. The draft appraisal includes:
 - (a) Information on the planning implications of conservation area designation, including the existing article 4 direction.

- (b) A detailed assessment of the significance of the Northgate Conservation Area based on its historical development, spatial/character analysis and values attributed by the local community and other stakeholders.
- (c) A description of its 'very bad' condition and its causes, which have resulted in social and economic decline, traffic and public realm issues, damage to the historical environment and harmful modern development.
- (d) An assessment of threats/potential future issues as well as opportunities for enhancement.
- (e) Proposed changes to the conservation area boundary comprising the exclusion of a few minor areas that are not of special interest, as well as the proposed extension of larger areas, based on DCC's initial suggestions, but amended where deemed justified.

Proposed Public Consultation Process

- 16. The draft appraisal will be available for consultation for a minimum of six weeks.
- 17. It will be available:
 - (a) On the Council's website, along with a feedback form that can be completed. Additionally, members of the public can email a response to conservation@darlington.gov.uk
 - (b) A paper copy will be available at the Town Hall and Libraries. Paper copies of the feedback form will also be provided.
- 18. At the commencement of the public consultation period, the Conservation Officer will directly approach individuals, groups and organisations that are likely to have a particular interest in the Northgate Conservation Area. These include the Council's Members of the affected wards and some of its staff, railway-related heritage groups and organisations, the Friends of North Lodge Park, etc.
- 19. Following the consultation period, the draft will be reviewed in the light of the comments received and finalised before being put to Members for adoption.

Financial Implications

- 20. There are very minor financial implications, ie printing costs of paper copies and Conservation Officer time for evaluating comments received and amending draft.

Legal Implications

- 21. At the time of public consultation there will be none.
- 22. Conservation area designation (or loss of it) would take effect following the adoption of a new boundary, which would be subject to another cabinet meeting.

23. Following adoption of a new boundary (subject to a future cabinet meeting), the existing Article 4 direction would not be automatically applied to any extension areas; it would also remain in place for any areas that have been excluded.

Estates and Property Advice

24. Proposed boundary changes may affect the Council land.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

25. The draft appraisal raises some awareness against the use of modern materials that are incompatible with traditional buildings, which often have a high-carbon footprint and adverse effect on the insulating properties of traditional structures.