

**CABINET
8 APRIL 2025**

**ADOPTION OF FINALISED APPRAISAL FOR THE STOCKTON & DARLINGTON RAILWAY:
NORTHGATE CONSERVATION AREA INCLUDING CHANGES
TO ITS BOUNDARY AND NAME**

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

**Responsible Director -
Mike Poulter, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The report seeks Councillors' approval to adopt the finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal, including changes to its boundary and name. The document that has been submitted is called *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Finalised document. March 2025*.
See Appendix 1.

Summary

2. The report provides justification for adopting the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area. The draft version of the appraisal (September 2024) had been subject to a six-week public consultation period. Amendments have been made in light of the comments received (see appendix of the finalised appraisal).
3. By adopting the finalised appraisal, a new, much larger Conservation Area boundary (see chapter 6.0 of the appraisal) would be designated by the Council.
4. By adopting the finalised appraisal, the conservation area name would officially be changed from *Northgate Conservation Area* to *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area*.
5. Following the adoption of the finalised appraisal, the text currently marked in yellow will be amended to reflect the adopted status of the appraisal. No other changes will be made. The adopted appraisal will be named: *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. March 2025*

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the finalised appraisal for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area.
 - (b) Cabinet recommends that Council adopts the finalised boundary for the Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area (see chapter 6.0 of the appraisal).
 - (c) Cabinet recommends to Council the adoption of the name change from *Northgate Conservation Area* to *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area*.
 - (d) Cabinet recommends to Council authorises the amendment of finalised Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal with regards to the text marked in yellow, to reflect the adopted status of the document. The adopted appraisal will be named: *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. March 2025*.

Reasons

7. 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 in September this year. The Council has been making significant investments in preparation for the celebrations inside the Conservation Area (e.g. Hopetown Darlington, Edward Pease house).
 - (c) The current Northgate Conservation Area appraisal was adopted in January 2007 and is now deemed inadequate and out of date. The present Conservation Area boundary dates from 2003.
 - (d) The new appraisal picks up some of the 'unfinished' work carried out by Durham County Council (2022) and Land Use Consultants (2021). It provides a detailed record and analysis of the existing Conservation Area, as well as proposals for boundary changes and name change, and suggestions for improvements so that the Conservation Area may eventually be removed from the Heritage at Risk register.
 - (e) The responses on the draft document were generally very supportive of the appraisal and its proposals, including the feedback received from Historic England and the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
 - (f) Once the new appraisal has been adopted it will provide an evidence base for managing change in the area and form a material consideration in the Planning process, replacing the 2007 document.

- (g) It will also assist if funding is sought for larger regeneration schemes within the amended boundary. Historic England confirmed that they will not provide funding for improvement works within the Conservation Area until the new appraisal, including boundary changes and name change, has been adopted.

Mike Poulter
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Borough Council (2007) *Northgate Conservation Area. Character Appraisal. January 2007*
- (ii) Darlington Borough Council (2024) *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Public Consultation Draft. September 2024*
- (iii) English Heritage (2010) *Heritage at Risk. North East 2010*
- (iv) Historic England (2023) *Heritage at Risk. North East & Yorkshire Register 2023*

David Hand : Extension 6294

Council Plan	The appraisal: (a) Supports economic growth through sustainable and well-planned development (priorities). Underpins the Plan's priority of valuing our heritage and culture.
Addressing inequalities	Not Applicable
Tackling Climate Change	Possibly slightly positive impact. The 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	If the appraisal is adopted, there may be a slight increase in additional officer workload in planning applications and enforcement. (NB: The boundary of the existing article 4 direction WILL NOT change following the adoption of the new Conservation Area boundary)
Health and Wellbeing	Possibly slightly positive impact. The information provided in the appraisal may lead to wider improvements in the area.
S17 Crime and Disorder	Possibly slightly positive impact. The information provided in the 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	Ni Impact

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. 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).
9. Much of the special interest of the existing Northgate Conservation Area (boundary adopted in 2003) comprises structures and associations linked to the birth/early days of the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR). The S&DR opened in September 1825 and is of international significance, being the world's first public railway on which a locomotive hauled passengers.

10. 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.
11. An appraisal for the Northgate Conservation Area was first adopted in January 2007. The 2003 boundary was not reviewed at the time.
12. 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. Again, that document did not include an examination of the 2003 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.
13. In July 2022, Durham County Council (DCC) provided *Conservation Area Assessments – Route of the former Stockton & Darlington Railway. Darlington & Middleton St. George*. This concerned 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 proposal.
14. The Northgate Conservation Area has been on the national Heritage at Risk Register since 2010. Despite its high significance, it is the conservation area that is in worst condition inside the borough.
15. Darlington Council has been making significant investments within the Conservation Area in preparation for the 2025 celebrations of the S&DR, including the redevelopment of the railway heritage quarter (Hopetown Darlington) and regeneration works under the Towns Fund scheme, with the Edward Pease house lined up for works soon.

Draft Appraisal: September 2024

16. Darlington's present Conservation Officer joined the Council at the end of February 2023. In April 2023, there was an email from Historic England, the government's statutory adviser on the historical environment, asking for any Heritage at Risk updates. In June, the Conservation Officer had a site meeting with Jules Brown (Historic Places Adviser for North East & Yorkshire, Historic England) in the Northgate Conservation Area to discuss issues with regards to its condition and possible boundary changes, as 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.
17. The new appraisal was drafted between September 2023 and February 2024 by the Conservation Officer. It included:
 - (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. There would also be a name change to *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area*, to reflect its place in a wider historic environment beyond the Council's boundaries.
18. The finished draft was informally circulated to the Councillors of the affected wards on 2 April 2024. During the cabinet meeting on 10 September 2024, Councillors approved the proposed public consultation on the document *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Public Consultation Draft. September 2024*.
19. The draft appraisal was available for public (and internal) consultation on the Council's Conservation Areas webpage from 20 September to 1 November 2024, along with a feedback form to be completed. Paper copies of the document (read only) and feedback form were also available at the Town Hall (by appointment only) and at the Crown Street and Cockerton libraries. The public consultation was advertised on the Darlington Borough Council website and Facebook page, and inside the *One Darlington Autumn 2024* magazine, which had been distributed to homes, community venues and businesses in Darlington; it is also available online. Site notices were hung in various locations of the proposed new Conservation Area boundary (see section 5.3 of the appraisal). In addition, the Council directly notified individuals, groups and organisations that were likely to have a particular interest in the Northgate Conservation Area appraisal. At the request of the Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, the Conservation Officer gave a presentation on the proposed boundary changes to the Friends at the Darlington Cricket Club on 3 October 2024.
20. During the consultation period, a total of 18 responses were received comprising representatives of (number of responses in brackets):
- (a) (5) The Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway
 - (b) (3) Darlington Borough Council (DBC) members of staff
 - (c) (2) Residents outside the existing and new conservation area
 - (d) (2) Westbrook Area Residents Association

- (e) (1) Cinema Theatre Organisation
- (f) (1) A1 Steam Locomotive Trust
- (g) (1) DBC Councillor
- (h) (1) Historic England
- (i) (1) Durham County Council
- (j) (1) Darlington Interest Group (part of the Friends of the S&DR)

21. Following the public consultation period, a summary of all the comments received was put on the Council's Conservation Areas webpage on 6 November 2024: https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/22198/2024-11-05_gir-consultation-re-website.pdf. The feedback received is generally supportive of the document and its proposals.

Finalised Appraisal: March 2025

22. Following the consultation period, the Council's Conservation Officer worked methodically through all the feedback received and made amendments throughout the document where deemed necessary. An overview of the comments and how they were processed is provided in the appendix of *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Finalised document. March 2025.*
23. Following the feedback received during the consultation period, changes to the new conservation area boundary were made (see section 5.4 of the finalised appraisal).
24. The finalised appraisal includes text marked in yellow which will be updated once the document is approved for adoption. There will be no other changes. The adopted document will be named: *Stockton & Darlington Railway: Northgate Conservation Area Appraisal. Adopted document. March 2025.*

Financial Implications

25. None.

Legal Implications

26. Conservation area designation of the new extension areas and loss of designation for the areas to be excluded (see chapter 5.0 of the finalised appraisal).
27. NB: Following adoption of the new boundary (see chapter 6.0 of the finalised appraisal), there will be no change to the existing article 4 direction. The Northgate Conservation Area Direction (2006) will not apply to any of the extension areas, and it will remain in place for any areas that have been excluded from the 2003 boundary.

Estates & Property Advice

28. The proposed boundary changes will affect the Council-owned land.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

29. The 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.

Consultation

30. See above, paragraph 22.

Outcome of Consultation

31. See above, paragraphs 23 and 24.