

Agenda Item	6
Report No	BSAC/10/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee

Date: 21 August 2018

Report Title: Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area Appraisal: Update

Report By: Director of Development and Infrastructure

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report summarises the public response so far to the consultation for the proposed Conservation Area Appraisal (including boundary amendments) for Grantown On Spey.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. note the public comments; and
 - ii. approve the draft appraisal to be presented for adoption at the forthcoming South Planning Applications Committee.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 provides the current legislative framework for Conservation Areas. Under the 1997 Act, The Council has a statutory duty to determine which parts of their area merit Conservation Area status and the Council is required by law to protect Conservation Areas from development which would be detrimental to their character. Note that this duty was not transferred to the Cairngorms National Park Authority, but has been retained by the Council.
- 3.2 The 1997 Act defines a Conservation Area as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. The 1997 Act places a statutory duty on the Council to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation, management and enhancement of Conservation Areas, referred to as Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans.
- 3.3 Grantown-on-Spey was designated as a Conservation Area in 1975; the Appraisal is the first formal review undertaken since designation.
- 3.4 Members approved the *draft* Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area appraisal for public consultation at their meeting dated 22 May 2018.

4 Consultation Process

- 4.1 The public consultation was launched on 5 July 2018 and closed on 17 August 2018. This was widely publicised, with a public notice placed in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald, social media postings on local Grantown-on-Spey forums and notification, by letter, to all properties (totalling 732) within the existing *and* proposed Conservation Area boundary. Other agencies, including the National Park and Historic Environment Scotland, were also invited to comment.
- 4.2 The draft Appraisal was made available (as paper copies) at Grantown Library, the Cairngorms National Park Offices in Grantown and Planning Offices in Kingussie and Inverness. The Appraisal was available to view and download via the Council's online consultation portal.
- 4.3 A public drop-in event was held at the Grantown YMCA Community Centre on 31 July 2018, with two sessions running from 1-3 and 5-7. The event was staffed by the Conservation Officer, Planning Officer and Forestry Officer, with a representative from the CNPA also present for most of the session. A representative from the Grantown History Society was also present.
- 4.4 Anyone wishing to make a representation was encouraged to do so via the online consultation portal, although representations made in other ways have also been counted and considered.

5 Consultation Response

- 5.1 At the time of this report (13 August 2018) 6 representations, all from local residents, have been received via the consultation portal.

- 5.2 The public drop in event was well attended. Most attendees were simply seeking clarification on how the proposed conservation area would affect them. A number of attendees were discovering for the first time that they were already in the conservation area. A small number of people raised specific issues, and these are discussed below.
- 5.3 It is notable that the representations received to date represent a very small percentage of the Conservation Area's population (around 1%) and that the significant majority of residents of both the existing and proposed Conservation Area have made no representation, and not raised any concerns.

6 Main Issues

6.1 *Proposed Boundary Extension*

- 6.1.1 A small number of respondents were concerned that the proposed extension would:
- De-value the existing Conservation Area;
 - Not concentrate on the problems present in the existing Conservation Area;
 - Dilute any future grant schemes as these will be stretched to include any newly designated areas;
 - Prevent much needed development, including affordable housing.
- 6.1.2 The challenges, issues and problems that presently exist in the Conservation Area will remain priority areas for action regardless of the proposed extension. An enlarged conservation area would not result in any negative affect on the management of the conservation area as it currently exists, dilution of its management or prevent action being taken where required.
- 6.1.3 Any future funding schemes (which would require an up-to-date Conservation Area appraisal) would likely be limited in area to target priority buildings and priority areas. It would not be the intention at this stage to open any grant fund to all properties in the wider conservation area (see for example the current Academy Street grant scheme in Inverness).
- 6.1.4 It is not the purpose or intention of a Conservation Area to prevent development, rather to control development to ensure it is appropriately sited and designed. This is amply demonstrated by a number of new developments that have been consented over the last few years within the existing Conservation Area (many of which are highlighted in the report as good examples of new development).
- 6.1.5 Regardless, the planning authority has a statutory duty to assess Conservation Areas to ensure they accurately represent what is of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The appraisal process has concluded that the proposed boundary amendments – which take in buildings that are contemporary with the Georgian foundation of Grantown and the later Victorian development present across the High Street and The Square – are of architectural and historic interest, add value to the Conservation Area and therefore should be included in the Conservation Area. This assessment is set out in more detail in the Conservation Area appraisal and it is recommended that the proposed boundary amendments are adopted without change.

6.2 *Trees around Inverallen Church*

6.2.1 Strong views – both for and against – have been expressed regarding the proposed inclusion of the belt of trees to the north and west of Inverallen Church. The trees contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area, form a backdrop to the Category B Listed church and provide a natural separation with the later development to the north-west. The land is in the ownership of Seafield Estate.

6.2.2 Those against the proposed amendment cite an emerging community aspiration to convert the church for community use, part funded by developing housing either side of the church; they view the inclusion of these areas in the Conservation Area as a barrier to this development.



6.2.3 Conversely, supported was offered for the inclusion of the trees precisely because it would offer greater protection to the trees and help safeguard the amenity of the area, which is also home to bats, red squirrels and deer, from speculative development.

6.2.4 It is important to note that whilst the trees would be afforded additional protection if included in the Conservation Area, the purpose of the Conservation Area is *not* to prevent new development, but to ensure it is sensitively sited and designed to protect the special character of the area. As such it is recommended that the boundary continues to include the trees around Inverallen Church to ensure that, should development proposals be brought forward in the future, that they adequately consider and address the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

7 Other issues

7.1 Concerns were raised with the quality and condition of the public realm. This is highlighted in the appraisal. Any forthcoming management plan would consider ways to implement change.

7.2 One respondent objects to the inclusion of the garden ground in Extension area 4. The current boundary runs along the rear of the buildings and takes in a small amount of garden ground. The proposed amendment seeks to include the complete curtilage of each building, thereby clarifying for the owners and Council which properties are within the boundary and that there is a clear and definable line that demarcates the extent of the boundary. From a management perspective it is not good practice to divide plots.

7.3 The numbers of Buildings At Risk (particularly the Strathspey Hotel) as well as vacant buildings, shops and upper floors were frequently cited as problem areas that require action and this is recognised in the Appraisal.

7.4 Many of the issues raised (including proactive management and enhancement of the public realm, vacant buildings/buildings at risk, management of modern (post-1948) buildings, building maintenance and improvements more generally) would be dealt with in more depth in a Conservation Area Management Plan. This is the logical next step and could be developed as part of a grant-funded project, such as a Conservation Area Regeneration or Townscape Heritage Scheme.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 Subject to member approval, the draft Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area will be presented to South Planning Applications Committee for adoption.
- 8.2 If adopted, all properties within the Conservation Area boundary (as amended) will be notified by letter. Scottish Ministers will be notified and an advert placed in the Edinburgh Gazette.
- 8.3 It is recommended that a management plan be developed to address the ongoing conservation issues raised in the report and by residents and that consideration be given to applying for grant-funding in due course.

9 Implications

- 9.1 Resource – The proposed boundary amendments will bring a number of properties into the Conservation Area and therefore under stricter planning controls. There is therefore potential for the amended boundary to generate more planning applications, although this is not expected to be significant. Most will likely be householder applications and will therefore be dealt with as part of the Council's planning caseload; the CNPA are unlikely to notice any significant change.
- 9.2 The amended boundary will need to go through due process to be adopted under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. This process will be completed following approval at South Planning Application Committee. There are no other legal implications.
- 9.3 The Appraisal does not raise any equality, climate change/carbon clever and/or rural issues for the Council. There are no other risks associated with the report.
- 9.4 Gaelic headings will be added throughout.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure.

Date: 17 May 2018

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