

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

Agenda Item	<b>9.</b>
Report No	<b>CC/03/21</b>

**Committee:** Caithness Committee

**Date:** 21 January 2021

**Report Title:** Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, Infrastructure and Environment

**1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

1.1 This report presents the *draft* Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan for Wick: Pulteneytown conservation area.

**2 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Consider the content and findings of the Wick: Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA).
- ii. Consider the content, findings and recommendations of the Wick: Pulteneytown Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP).
- iii. Approve both the CAA and CAMP for a minimum six-week public consultation.

**3 Implications**

3.1 Resource. Conducting the public consultation and preparing the reports ready for final adoption and publication will require officer time to be dedicated to the task. Resources will be allocated from elsewhere within the service, although this should only be for a short period. There is potential for the amended boundary, if adopted, to generate more householder-scale planning applications, although this is not expected to result in significant increase in planning caseload.

3.2 Legal. The Act places a statutory duty on the Local Authority to designate conservation areas and, from time-to-time, conduct a review. It also requires the Local Authority to prepare and publish proposals for the preservation, management and enhancement of Conservation Areas. The draft Wick: Pulteneytown CAA and CAMP has been produced to satisfy this duty. The report does not present any additional legal implications for the Council.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications. The CAA and CAMP highlight Buildings at Risk, underused and vacant buildings, inappropriate or negative development and public realm works, poorly managed green space and areas that should be targeted for future regeneration. Improving the built environment can have wide-ranging benefits across the local community, including generating a sense of civic pride, investment and tourism.
- 3.3 There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.4 Risk. Although conservation area designation places a range of statutory duties on the Local Authority, in this case the CAA and CAMP reviews, revises and refines an existing designation. As such there are no new risk implications associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic. In line with Council policy, Gaelic headings will be added throughout.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [hereafter, the Act] provides the current legislative framework for conservation areas. Under the Act, The Council has a statutory duty to determine which parts of their area merit conservation area status and are required to ensure development preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- 4.2 The 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 Act places a statutory duty on the Council to formulate and publish proposals for their preservation, management and enhancement. These proposals are generally referred to as Conservation Area Appraisals (CAA) and Conservation Area Management Plans (CAMP).
- 4.3 Two small Conservation Areas were designated in Pulteneytown by Highland Regional Council in 1970. These were Argyle Square and Harbour Place / Terrace. Following a review in 2000, those areas were incorporated into the larger Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area. The draft reports (attached as appendices) are the result of the first formal review undertaken of the Conservation Area since this designation, and the first time an appraisal and management plan have been developed for Pulteneytown.
- 4.4 The CAA and CAMP have been prepared by Highland Council supported by a project Stakeholder Group consisting of representatives from the Council (including local members), Community Council, Wick Heritage Association, Wick Harbour Trust, Caithness Chamber of Commerce, Caithness Voluntary Group, Argyle Square Community Association, Beatrice Offshore Wind Farm, Wick Nucleus Archive Centre and key business contacts.
- 4.5 An initial Stakeholder Meeting was held at Wick Town Hall on 11 June 2019 to set the scene and invite a first round of views and thoughts on the management of the conservation area. On 23 July 2019 a public drop-in event was held at Mackay’s Hotel, Wick with the aim of developing an understanding of how local residents viewed the conservation area and what was most valued about its buildings, public spaces and surrounding environment. The event was attended by a cross-section of

the local community, including residents, industry/business and the harbour authority.

- 4.6 The draft CAA and CAMP were circulated to the Stakeholder Group in advance of this committee to provide an opportunity for further input from the local community, to provide feedback on the proposed amendments to the conservation area boundary and issues raised in the management plan. The stakeholder group did not propose any revisions and no issues were raised.

## **5. Purpose of the CAA and CAMP**

- 5.1 The CAA helps clarify the special interest of the area for all stakeholders, so all are aware of what is important and what is worthy of preservation and enhancement. The CAA will ensure a consistent and positive approach to the management of change across the conservation area.

- 5.2 The CAA seeks to:

- Define the special interest of the conservation area along with those key elements that contribute to its character and appearance;
- Identify any issues which threaten the special qualities of the conservation area;
- Assess the current designation along with adjacent areas and identify potential boundary alterations.

- 5.3 The CAMP sets out to address the findings of the CAA and further consider the area's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The plan provides strategy and guidance on the management of change and development in the conservation area in order to preserve and enhance its special qualities, and its character and appearance as identified in the appraisal.

- 5.4 Issues considered in the CAMP are:

- Opportunities for planning action;
- Opportunities for development;
- Opportunities for enhancement;
- Conservation strategy and guidance on key aspects;
- Monitoring and review.

## **6 Summary of Key Findings and Issues**

- 6.1 Pulteneytown remains a unique area of considerable architectural and historic interest. Pulteneytown is Thomas Telford's (1757-1834) only fully executed town plan for the British Fisheries Society, and its most successful investment; in the 19th century it was the largest herring fishing port in Europe. Today, the integrity of the original plan and built form of Pulteneytown remains largely in place. The design of the 19th century Inner and Outer Harbours is still intact. There is a predominance of original Georgian buildings and a small number of later Victorian buildings, with little historic redevelopment on original lots. Buildings and structures exhibit construction methods individual to Wick, with locally quarried Caithness stone worked in traditional ways to create distinctive construction details.

- 6.2 The CAA has identified that the area of significance is currently underrepresented by the present conservation area boundary, with good quality residential blocks, contemporary with Telford's original plan, currently omitted from the conservation

area. Equally, the harbour, which is a key architectural and historic component of Pulteneytown, is excluded from the conservation area.

- 6.3 It is recommended that the boundary of the conservation area is redrawn to include additional areas. These amendments are considered in detail in Section 5 of the CAA and mapped in Section 6.4. Following discussions with planning colleagues it is proposed to *not* proceed with the inclusion of areas referenced as A, B and E. These are geographically divorced from the main conservation area boundary and management is therefore impractical; if agreed these areas will be deleted from the draft CAA prior to public consultation.
- 6.4 As with many Conservation Areas, alongside opportunities to enhance its special qualities through planning action and development, Pulteneytown also faces challenges. Section 3 of the CAMP sets out the result of a SWOT analysis and identifies 6 key threats:
- i. Loss of Authenticity
  - ii. Vacancy and Underuse
  - iii. Inappropriate Development including unsympathetic alterations
  - iv. Quality of the Public Realm
  - v. Green Space Management
  - vi. Lack of Statutory Protection for all Heritage Assets
- 6.5 Opportunities, for example through planning action, guidance and strategy, monitoring and/or (re)development exist to preserve and enhance the Conservation Area and address each of the six threats identified above. Section 4 provides a detailed analysis of each opportunity and sets out a series of recommendations for the future positive management of the conservation area.

## 7 Consultation Process

- 7.1 Subject to member approval, the draft Wick: Pulteneytown CAA and CAMP will be released for a minimum six-week public consultation. Both documents will be made available to view and for comment via the Council's online consultation portal. Making paper copies available will be dependent on Covid-related restrictions at the time, but if possible copies of the reports will be held at local libraries, service points and Council offices.
- 7.2 The consultation will be advertised through local printed press and social media. The CAA and CAMP will be circulated as widely as possible including to interested parties, stakeholders and key partners including the Community Council, Historic Environment Scotland and the Harbours Authority.
- 7.3 As it is currently not possible to hold a public meeting, we intend to ensure that reports are made widely available and that we keep the public well informed. To this end we intend to write to all property owners/occupiers within the existing and proposed boundary areas to ensure that they are notified of the CAA and CAMP and have an opportunity to engage. In the event that the ban on public meetings is lifted we will review options for face to face events.
- 7.4 All comments will be recorded and considered. A final draft will be prepared and presented to this committee for approval. If it is agreed to amend the conservation area boundary this will require to be formally approved at the North Planning

Applications Committee. Finally, Scottish Ministers will be notified of the appraisal, management plan and revised boundary.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 7 December 2020

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**Appendix: *Draft* Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan**