

Agenda Item	11
Report No	ECI/32/22

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 10 November 2022

Report Title: Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plan

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following public consultation and agreement at the Caithness Area Committee, this report presents the finalised Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) and Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) for formal approval and adoption as Council planning guidance.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to adopt the Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (**Appendix 1**) as planning guidance and approve the proposed amendments to the statutory Conservation Area boundary (**Appendix 2**).

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The proposed Conservation Area boundary amendment will reduce the number of properties in the Conservation Area. This will have the effect of reinstating permitted development rights to a number of properties thereby result in fewer householder planning applications.
- 3.2 **Legal** – The Council has a statutory duty to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation, management and enhancement of its Conservation Areas. The adoption of this report will discharge this duty in relation to Thurso's Conservation Area. There are no other legal implications.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – 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, and improving sense of place.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.5 **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 existing designations. There are no new risk implications associated with the recommendations of this report.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – In line with Council policy, Gaelic headings are included throughout.

4 Background

- 4.1 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 that would be detrimental to their character.
- 4.2 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. These are referred to as Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans.

5 Process

- 5.1 Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan has been developed in consultation with wide-ranging stakeholder groups (representing local communities and heritage bodies, with local Member representation) and Council Officers. In advance of this Committee and with the agreement of local Members, the report has been through a public consultation exercise. The final post-consultation draft was presented to the Caithness Area Committee on 22 August 2022 to enable local Members to review the report and provide recommendations to this Committee.
- 5.2 Local Members requested that the proposed revised conservation area boundary be adjusted so that Old St Peter’s Kirk is retained within the Conservation Area; the requested change has been made and the boundary adjusted accordingly.

5.3 Otherwise, the Caithness Area Committee agreed to recommend that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee formally approve and adopt the Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, including the amended conservation area boundary.

6 Next Steps

6.1 Subject to Committee approval, the CAA and CAMP will be updated to reflect their adopted status, with mapping updated to reflect amended boundaries.

6.2 Scottish Ministers will be notified and an advert placed in the Edinburgh Gazette. Updated boundary information will be forwarded to Historic Environment Scotland.

6.3 All properties within the Conservation Area boundary (as amended) will be notified of the decision by letter.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 14 September 2022

Authors: Andrew Puls, Environment Team Leader
Sarah James-Gaukroger, Conservation Area Project Officer

Appendices: Appendix 1: Thurso CAA & CAMP
Appendix 2: Thurso Conservation Area Map

Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan Plana Measaidh agus Riaghlaidh Sgìre Glèidhteachais Inbhir Theòrsa

**Post Consultation Draft August 2022
with addendum**





THURSO CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

INBHIR THEÒRSA PLANA RIAGHLADH SGÌRE GLÈIDHTEACHAIS

Post Consultation Draft August 2022 with addendum



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1.0 INTRODUCTION | 1.0 RO-RÀDH

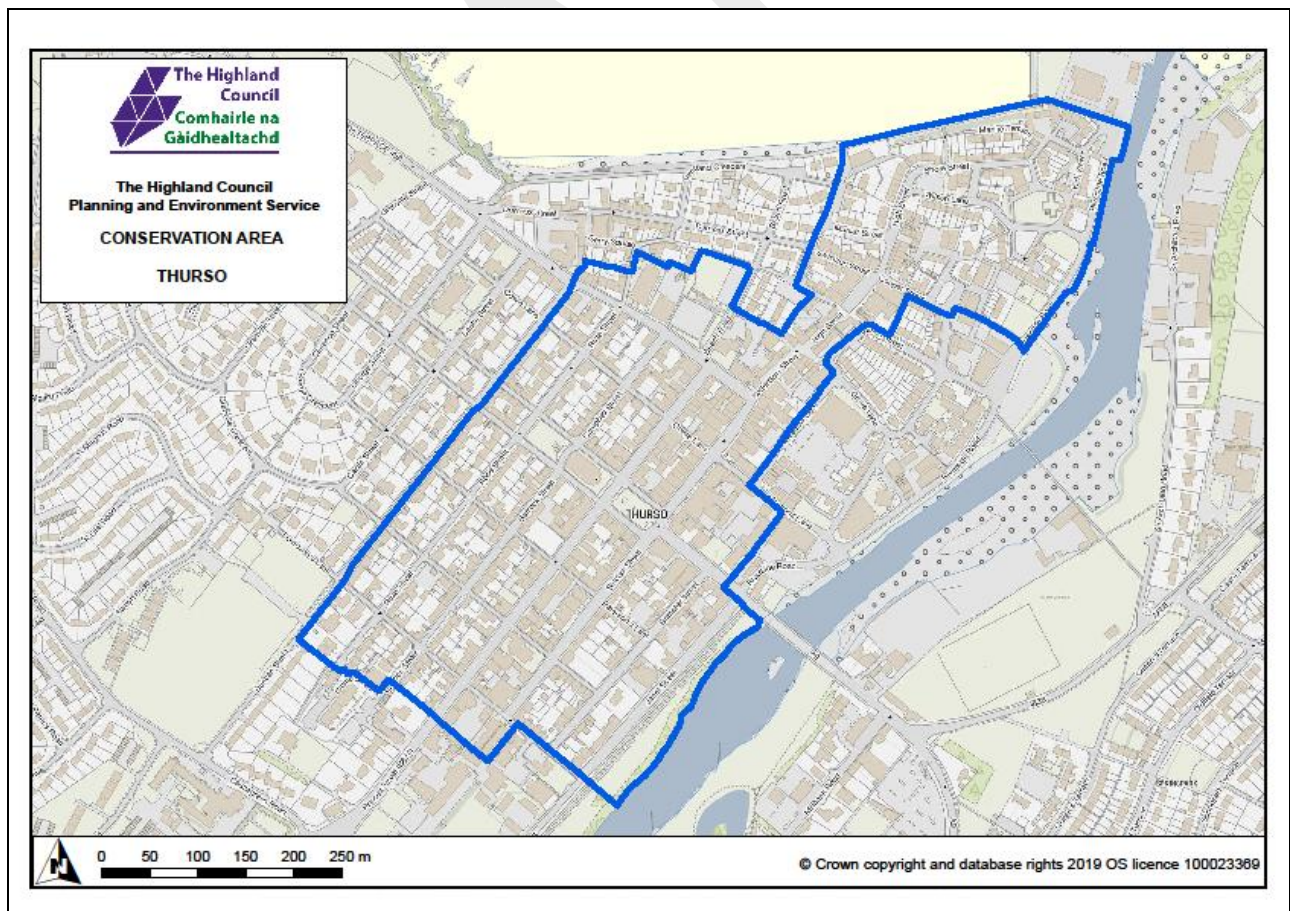
1.1 CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that conservation areas “...are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

Conservation area status brings the following works under planning control:

- Demolition of unlisted buildings or structures
- Removal of, or work to trees
- Development including, for example, small house alterations and extensions, the installation of satellite dishes, roof alterations, stone cleaning, or painting of the exterior.

It is recommended that the successful management of conservation areas can only be achieved with the support of and input from stakeholders, and in particular local residents and property owners. The Council is drafting conservation area development guidance and a historic building maintenance guide to help inform property owners. These documents will be published on the Council’s website in the near future.



Thurso Conservation Area at last designation, 1987

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE APPRAISAL

The purpose of this appraisal is to identify and assess the special architectural and historic interest of Thurso along with those key elements that contribute to its character and appearance. This document therefore seeks to:

- Define the special interest of the conservation area
- 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.

The appraisal follows Scottish Government guidance as set out in *Planning Advice Note 71: Conservation Area Management* (2004).

Planning authorities must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the designated area in making planning decisions that affect the conservation area. A more considered and careful approach is therefore needed in considering development proposals in conservation areas. The appraisal provides a firm basis on which applications for development within and in the vicinity of the conservation area can be assessed. It should be read in conjunction with the current planning policy frameworks of the Council.

Planning authorities have a duty to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, although there is no imposed timeframe for doing so. The appraisal provides a basis upon which programmes can be developed by, and in association with, the Council to protect and enhance the conservation area.

1.3 METHOD

The appraisal has been undertaken by The Highland Council with historical and background information researched and collated from both primary and secondary sources including maps and photographs. Site surveys were carried out including a character assessment comprising of setting, views, activity and movement; street pattern and urban grain; historic townscape; spatial relationships; trees and landscaping, and positive, neutral and negative factors. The methodology used is well developed across Scottish local authorities and the Scottish Civic Trust, and is in line with guidance published by Historic Environment Scotland. Please note all historic images and maps are for illustration purposes only and must not be shared or copied.

1.4 BACKGROUND

The Conservation Area was originally designated as 'The Burgh of Thurso Conservation Areas' by Thurso Town Council with effect from 04/02/1970 and included five separate areas. Most of these were within the core of the town but an additional area existed around the property known as Pennyland to the northwest. As of 13/03/1974 the area was expanded slightly by joining what had been the area around Old St Peter's Kirk in the north of the town to the core of the town. Later changes rationalised the remaining areas into a single area, one of which had spanned the Thurso River and removed Pennylands which had by that time also been designated as a Listed Building. Later still, the area around St Andrew's Church was also included. All

previous designations were cancelled with effect from 28/02/1987 when Thurso was re-designated as a single Conservation Area.

The boundaries of the Conservation Area encompass the majority of the commercial centre of Thurso, as well as some largely residential areas surrounding the core. There are no Article 4 directions in force and prior to this assessment, no conservation area appraisal or management plan has been produced.

The Thurso Conservation Area includes 93 listed buildings (48 Category C and 45 Category B) and one scheduled monument: Old St. Peter's Kirk and Burial Ground. The Conservation Area also includes hundreds of other unlisted historic buildings which contribute immeasurably to the historic townscape.

Thurso is home to a population of around 9,000 (2011 census data), a significant percentage of whom live within the boundaries of the Conservation Area. In addition to a large amount of housing, the Thurso Conservation Area also contains retail and business premises, and is a major centre of employment and economic activity.

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2.0 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE | 2.0 SUIDHEACHADH AGUS CRUTH-TÌE

2.1 LOCATION

Thurso Conservation Area forms part of the town of Thurso in the county of Caithness, which forms part of The Highland Council local authority area. Thurso is located in the far north of Scotland; 26 miles north-west of Wick by road and just over 110 miles north-east of the nearest city at Inverness. The town lies at the northern end of the A9, a major trunk road that connects the far north of Scotland with the central belt. The town also has rail connections to Wick and south via Inverness, with an airport nearby on the northern edge of neighbouring Wick.

2.2 TOPOGRAPHY

Thurso lies on the North Sea coast of Caithness at the mouth of the River Thurso, where it flows into the North Atlantic Ocean. The adjoining beach is flanked by steep cliffs, bordering the harbour and medieval area of the town. Although sitting at 13m above sea level, Thurso lies within a dip and is not initially visible when approaching by any of the main roads. There is a gentle gradient upwards from the river when approaching the town from Sir George's Street, leading into Sir John's Square.

2.3 GEOLOGY

The underlying geology of Caithness is Old Red Sandstone and Caithness flagstone which is rich in fossilised fish remains. Both stones feature predominantly in Thurso's buildings. Caithness flagstone has been used as building material since prehistoric times. The layered structure of the flagstone allows it to be easily split, like slate, into thinner and thinner sheets. This means that it can be used for roofing and paving stones, as well as for the construction of buildings and walls as is typical in Thurso. Vertical slabs of flagstone are still used to produce the thin stone walls typical of the Caithness countryside. However, it is as paving-stone that the Caithness flagstone gained its world-wide importance.

2.4 ARCHAEOLOGY

Although there is scarce physical evidence for the earlier occupation of Thurso, several finds have been made within this area that indicate that further features or deposits may well survive beneath the present-day surface. These include a Bronze Age stone ball (formerly in the collection of Robert Dick, a prominent local Victorian geologist and botanist), and now in Thurso Museum) and a Viking age tortoise brooch (in the collections of the Museum of Scotland), which illustrate the depth of history and prehistory across the wider area. To date, there have not been many opportunities for archaeological investigation, however, should opportunities arise, this will be recommended.

3.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT | 3.0 LEASACHADH EACHDRAIDHEIL

3.1 ANCIENT THURSO

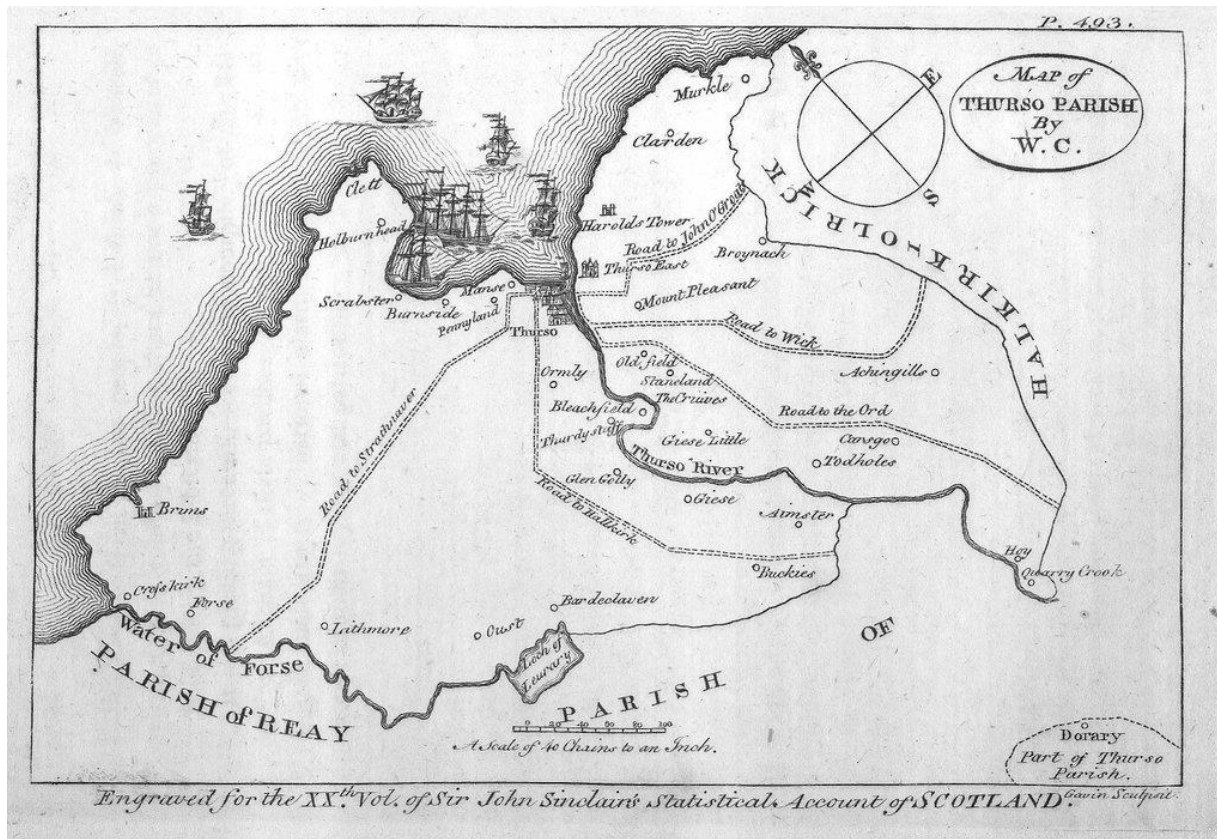
There is no doubt that Thurso is a very old town; while the area surrounding Thurso is rich with evidence of iron age settlement, the first named mentions we have of the town itself are in Norse sagas (such as the Orkneyinga Saga). It is said that the derivation of the name Thurso comes from the Old Norse for 'Thor's River', in reference to the Viking god of thunder. By 1266 when ownership of Caithness was transferred from the Norwegian Earldom of Orkney to the ascendant Kingdom of Scotland via the Treaty of Perth, Thurso had become an important trading town with established links across the North Sea to Scandinavia and continental Europe.



Shore Street, Thurso, courtesy of Am Baile/North Coast Visitor Centre

The most important historic site in Thurso is the ruinous Old St. Peter's Kirk and burial ground which is designated as a scheduled monument. The church was abandoned in 1832 when it was replaced by St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church, but parts of the church building are thought to date to at least 1125. The church is now ruinous has been partially buried over the years. A cross slab with a runic inscription, built into the church tower, possibly dating to the 10th century, was discovered at the rear of Old St Peter's in 1896. A second runic stone was discovered in the tower during a survey of the church in 1989 which is now on display in the North Coast Visitor Centre.

3.2 THURSO IN THE 17TH & 18TH CENTURIES



Map of Thurso Parish by 'WC'1790s, depicting parishes at the time of the First Statistical Account, courtesy of Am Baile

Thurso was made a 'Burgh of Barony' in 1633, a testimony to its importance both as a trading port and as an administrative centre, and for the next 200 years Thurso remained the *de facto* principal town of Caithness. In the 17th and 18th centuries Thurso enjoyed a considerable export trade in meal, beef, hides and fish. The local fishing resources became more fully exploited, as was evidenced in the now demolished kippering kiln in the 'Fisherbiggens' area (see section 7.1.12). Thurso also had a reputation for its linen-cloth and tanning activities.

In 1719 the burgh of Thurso and the surrounding lands were acquired by the Sinclairs of Ulbster, and this family would prove to have a profound impact upon the development of Thurso in the subsequent centuries. The last castle built on the east bank of the river is now ruinous, having been largely demolished in 1952.

During the 18th century the only way of crossing the river was by coble or by fording. This proved an unreliable and dangerous system, leading to some prominent cases of drowning and as a result, a bridge over the river was proposed by local landowner and politician Sir John Sinclair, 1st Baronet in 1789; this proposal fell through. Construction of the bridge designed by Robert Tulloch began nearly a decade later in 1798, opening in 1800.



Roy's map of Thurso, 1747 – 1752 Courtesy of National Library of Scotland

3.3 ESTABLISHMENT OF THURSO: BUILDING IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The bridge designed by Robert Tulloch survived until 1885 when demolition began and it was replaced by a new bridge designed by Macbey and Gordon engineers, which opened in 1887 and remains in use to this day. In 1899 an iron footbridge was constructed further up the River Thurso as a result of efforts by the Thurso River Improvement Committee.



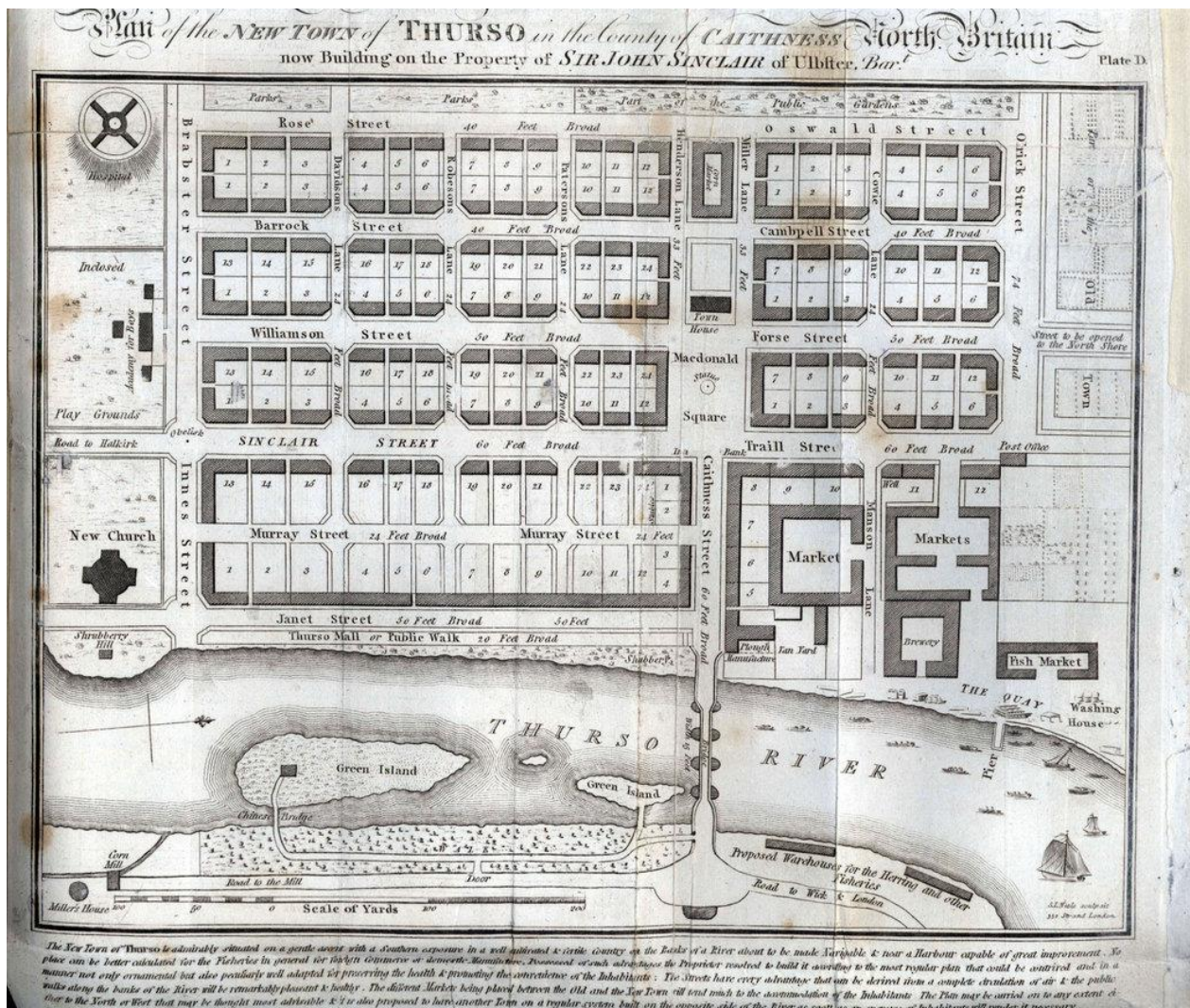
Ordnance Survey Map of Thurso, surveyed 1872, published 1877, Courtesy of National Library of Scotland

The dominant urban feature of much of the Thurso Conservation Area is the gridded street pattern, which was laid out by Sir John Sinclair, 1st Baronet. Up until that point Thurso had been concentrated around its medieval core of the High Street and the 'Fisherbiggens' area, with its narrower streets, which are more organic in formation. However, Sinclair's new gridded street layout in the centre expanded the town landward and was a complete contrast to the existing winding street patterns, which are visible on the modern-day map below.



Modern map of Thurso's street patterns

Sinclair's design for Thurso was extremely precocious and is a major reason why so much of the town's 19th century form survives to the present. The block size of the Thurso grid is small (approx. 105m. by 45m.) with the wide streets running south-west, parallel to the River Thurso and narrow lanes running south-east and downhill; this creates a dense, permeable urban form, unusual for a town of this small size. Many of the streets terminate in large public buildings creating impressive vistas and sightlines.



Original plan of Thurso grid, Sir John Sinclair, C1810 courtesy of Am Baile/HLH

The large-scale exportation of Caithness Flagstone began in earnest in 1825 and for almost a century it remained an extremely prosperous trade, until the industry collapsed due to advancements in concrete paving. All of the key flagstone quarries were located within a short distance of Thurso and so the town became the main exporting port of Caithness Flagstone, and as a result underwent a rapid economic and industrial expansion. The banks of the River Thurso became lined with pavement works, and the quays of Thurso were often insufficient to cope with the large volumes of flags awaiting export. Due to its shallow and tidal nature, it became apparent that the port of Thurso was unfit to handle the increasing volume and size of vessels required to transport the flagstones. Attempts were made to build a new harbour and breakwater in the early 1890s, but severe storms destroyed the foundations, bankrupting the contractor and resultantly the harbour improvements were never completed. Consequently, the commercial port of Thurso was relocated to the deeper and more sheltered waters of Scrabster further up the bay.

The coming of the railway in July 1874 opened up Thurso to a more accessible form of transport and accessing goods and supplies, as well as standardising time throughout the United Kingdom. The impact of faster travel meant that journeys which would have previously taken days could now be made in hours. The station was constructed as the most northerly destination of the Far North Line, which was built in several stages through sparsely populated and

undulating terrain. A wrought iron turntable, 14 meters in diameter, was built at the station by the Railway Steel and Plant Company of Manchester. The construction of the railway was largely financed by the Earl of Caithness and the Duke of Sutherland. The official opening of the railway on 28 July 1874 was attended by the Prince and Princess of Wales; an auspicious event for the town, with many local dignitaries in attendance.

Until 2000, trains from Inverness would split in half at Georgemas Junction, with one portion going to Wick and the other to Thurso. In the age of locomotive-hauled trains prior to the introduction of diesel multiple units by British Rail, a locomotive was based at Georgemas Junction to take the Thurso portion to and from the junction. The practice of splitting trains ended when Class 158s were introduced on the line – since then all services run in full between Inverness and Wick via Thurso, in both directions.

3.4 20TH CENTURY



Trail Street, Thurso, Courtesy of Am Baile/North Coast Visitor Centre

The decline of the flagstone industry at the beginning of the 20th century coincided with the collapse of herring fishing in Caithness and resultantly Thurso entered a period of economic stagnation marked by high levels of emigration. This lasted until 1954 when it was decided that a new experimental fast reactor nuclear facility would be constructed at Dounreay, not far outside Thurso. The profusion of jobs that this created both directly and indirectly, coupled with the inwards migration of new residents to the area, transformed the fortunes of Thurso and resulted again in an economically prosperous and thriving town. A second prototype fast reactor became operational in 1975 securing jobs and investment, until 1994 when Dounreay ceased to be a power generating facility and decommissioning began. Dounreay is currently being decommissioned and the process is anticipated to be completed by 2033, when it will

finally be closed. Thereafter, the site will enter an interim care and surveillance state by 2036 and become a brownfield site by 2336. In the meanwhile, the facility directly employs 1,000 people, with a similar number working at the site from the supply chain.



Ordnance Survey Map of Thurso, surveyed 1938, published 1949, Courtesy of National Library of Scotland

Starting with the opening of Dounreay, Thurso began to see the formation of large suburban housing developments around its periphery and on the east bank of the river. Areas such as Pennyland, Ormlie and Mount Vernon bear some resemblance to American style suburbs, partially because of the large number of American immigrants who moved into Thurso to work at Dounreay. During the 20th century the housing of the medieval centre of Thurso was gradually replaced with modern housing to the point that almost no historic buildings remain in this area, although the area's historic roots are still apparent in its medieval street plan.

Despite the decommissioning of Dounreay, Thurso at the beginning of the 21st century remains a prosperous and popular town, due in part to its attractive and unique built environment. Off-shore renewables have been identified as a significant growth sector due to the significant potential for generating energy from wave, tidal and off-shore wind in the northern Highlands, strengthened by the recent investments made at Scrabster Harbour.

4.0 CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE | 4.0 CARACTAR AGUS COLTAS

4.1 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

4.1.1 Gateways

The most prominent gateway into Thurso (as well as one of its most spectacular views) is the approach over Thurso Bridge and up Sir George’s Street. From this approach the street leads up a slight rise and frames views of William Burn’s gothic St. Peter and St. Andrew’s Church.



Gateway approach across Thurso Bridge



Gateway approach along Princes Street

The principal south approach is along Princes Street, another long straight road which offers views towards the Royal Bank of Scotland building.



View of Thurso from the west



View of Thurso from the north

The main route into Thurso from the West is along Orlig Street. This approach is more serpentine than the other approaches and consequently it does not offer such impressive views.

Within Thurso itself, the pedestrianised Rotterdam Street acts as a gateway from the planned town to the medieval town with its obvious narrowing of the street and the sudden shift from homogenous Victorian architecture to a more erratic mix of 20th century architectural styles.

4.1.2 Street Pattern

The street pattern of Thurso is one of its most interesting features. There are two distinctive character areas in Thurso which reflect various periods of growth and expansion in the town's history. Firstly, the medieval area or 'old town' to the north around the harbour, and secondly the Victorian planned settlement or 'new town' in central Thurso.

North of Rotterdam Street at the mouth of the river, the medieval street pattern remains, with many streets such as High Street, Durness Street and Shore Road being able to trace their history back to the Middle Ages. The streets in this part of the town are an organic combination of winding lanes and alleyways. The centre is dominated by Sinclair's gridiron street pattern which has survived largely unaltered from its original form.

4.1.3 Plot Pattern

Due to the large size of the Conservation Area, there is great variety in terms of the size and shape of the individual plots. In general, the medieval town and the planned town tend to have quite small plots. Most houses in these areas have gardens, but the size of the garden is often very small, and consequently the built form is unusually dense for a small town. In the old town we do not see the very long and narrow plot patterns radiating off a high-street that are to be found elsewhere in Scotland, but rather a very organic and irregular pattern of small plots, reflective of the irregular growth of the old town and its constrained location at the mouth of the river. Many of the plots of the planned town are of a similar size but much more ordered and rectilinear in terms of shape and orientation. Most of the buildings open directly onto the street, with front gardens a rare commodity; with a few exceptions, this ensures a strong building line and a highly ordered and regular urban grain and rhythm. Towards the river, the dense residential pattern gives way to larger more generous plots; to the south occupied by higher status and more architecturally flamboyant villas, and to the north buildings that are being used for industrial, civic or commercial purposes. Here we see more open space and a lower building density, commensurate with their status.

4.1.4 Public Space

Remarkably all the major public parks in the centre of Thurso can be attributed to one man, Sir Tollemache Sinclair, who made a series of gifts of land to the town in the latter half of the 19th century. These land gifts were often offered by Sir Tollemache to the town with conditions to ensure that they were transformed into pieces of public realm.

The first of these parks to be established was Sir George's Park which was gifted to the town in 1871 and is named after Sir Tollemache's father. Sitting on the eastern bank of the river Thurso behind the former flagstone yards, this large park is now mostly used as a sports field.

There are two small squares on either side of St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church which were also both gifts to the town by Sir Tollemache. The square to the north of the church was presented in 1872 to serve as a bleaching green but has in recent years been converted into an attractive garden park known as 'Lady Thurso Gardens'. To the south of the church there existed a square which was then known as Macdonald Square, but which has since been renamed Sir John's Square. This square was given to the town by Sir Tollemache in 1879 with the proviso that it be turned into a terraced garden, which it remains to this day. A lovely little square

furnished with flower beds, statues and ornamental railings; Sir John's square is somewhat diminished by the nearby presence of major traffic thoroughfares which limit its appeal as an area of recreation.



Lady Thurso Gardens



The Mall

The Mall was the final gift from Sir Tollemache to the people of Thurso and is a splendid park which lines both banks of the river Thurso. As part of the conditions for the gift of the land to the town, Sir Tollemache required that the town council paid for the land to be landscaped with trees, shrubs, walkways on both sides of the river and an iron foot bridge. Many of the trees planted at this time have become mature and contribute to making this an attractive and well used river walkway. The Mall underwent regeneration in two phases in 2001 and 2003 and remains a well-loved and used area. While the park is a key asset for the town, only a small section of the north of the park is currently included in the Conservation Area. Beyond these original parks there are several other large open spaces in the town's suburbs. These are either set aside as sports fields or just grassy commons and do not hold any special interest for this appraisal.

4.1.5 Trees

Public and privately owned trees play an important role in the Conservation Area, making a significant contribution to the setting and sense of place. In recognition of this, all trees within the Conservation Area are protected under the Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. Thurso benefits from a diverse tree resource, from the more formal planting at Sir John's Square and Lady Thurso Gardens, the riverside trees along the Core Path at The Mall, to individual trees scattered across the town in private gardens. Generally, there is an aging tree population throughout Thurso which needs careful management to help preserve this important amenity feature. In order to maintain and expand tree cover within the Conservation Area, a pro-active approach is required to identify new planting opportunities in anticipation of future losses.



Trees in Sir John's Square



Trees at Springbank House, Janet Street
(Recommended for inclusion in the
Conservation Area)

4.1.6 Gap Sites

There are no obvious gap sites, although outwith the Conservation Area boundary there are several prominent brownfield sites, most notably beside the railway station and along the riverbanks.

4.1.7 Activities and Uses

Being the largest town in Caithness, and indeed the largest town north of Inverness, Thurso contains a much wider range of services and facilities than you would expect to find in a town of its size. As a retail hub in the north of Scotland, Thurso has several key shopping streets such as Traill Street, Rotterdam Street and High Street, as well a good variety of bars, restaurants, hotels and bed and breakfasts. The North Coast Visitor Centre is situated in the former Town Hall building and provides a visitor experience, as well as housing Thurso's museum which contains several important artefacts from the town's past. Thurso is a destination of the NC500.

In terms of recreation Thurso has several tennis courts (two of which are in the Conservation Area), a cinema, a library and a well-used beach, home to one of the best surf sports in the country. The University of the Highlands and Islands has a campus in Thurso (outwith the Conservation Area) which is the centre of higher education for the whole of the north Highlands.

4.2 BUILDINGS AND TOWNSCAPE

Building Types

Being a fairly large town with a long history, Thurso contains a wide range of different building types and architectural styles. Building types can be established through both period and function.

4.2.1 Medieval / Post-Medieval Buildings

It is understood that none of Thurso's medieval buildings survive other than the aforementioned Old St. Peter's Kirk. One surviving structure from the post medieval period is that of 16, 18 Shore Street, known as 'The Turnpike', a two-storey tenement dated to 1686. The dominant feature of this building is its drum stair tower with turreted roof. This is a B listed building, however almost none of its original features are retained and it is marred by poor quality modern harling and external satellite dishes.



16,18 Shore Street

4.2.2 Victorian Buildings

The majority of Thurso's historic buildings date from the Victorian period, and in the centre of the town the continuity of Victorian buildings is remarkably unbroken. The Victorian houses of Thurso are distinctly north-eastern in their architectural style, characterised by small one or two storey terraced houses with minimal external decoration, exposed stonework, slate roofs, gable ends, wooden window and door frames, a vertical emphasis to the fenestration and a building line that is parallel to the street. There are exceptions to this style in the larger houses, which display Victorian architectural detailing, particularly those surrounding St John's Square, Traill Street and on the south-west corner of Janet Street. With the dominance of exposed stonework and Caithness slate, the town has a very uniform grey appearance which adds to its 'old world' feel. The 19th century planned town is the most interesting out of the two areas from a conservation stand-point, due to its high concentration of historic buildings and unique urban character.

4.2.3 Ecclesiastical Buildings

Besides Old St. Peter's Kirk there are several other important churches in Thurso. St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church, whose three-stage buttressed tower dominates the town's skyline and occupies a central location on Sir John's Square. Designed by architect William Burn and built in 1832 as a replacement for Old St. Peter's, this B-listed church is a smaller and simpler version of the Church of St John the Evangelist in Edinburgh. This church remains in use by the congregation of the Church of Scotland.

St. Andrew's Church (B listed) on Orlig Street was built in 1870 to the design of J Russell Mackenzie in a similar Gothic style he used for the town hall. It was originally built as the first Free Church in the town. The Church, with its prominent spire, was opened for public worship in 1871. It became part of the United Free Church in 1900 and of the Church of Scotland in 1929. In 1946 it united with St Peter's Church to form St Peter's and St Andrew's Church and services were held in the two buildings on alternate Sundays, until St Andrew's Church was closed in 1968, and prior to closure was latterly a funeral home. The building was purchased in 2020 and it is understood that discussions regarding its future use are being explored.

Thurso West Church (B listed) on Sinclair Street: finished in 1859 this is smaller and simpler in design than the other churches.



Thurso West Church, Sinclair Street



St Peter's & St Andrew's Church,
Sir John's Square

The Church of St Peter and the Holy Rood (C listed) on Sir George Street: built in 1885, the church is notable for its slim spire design with conical roof which resembles a medieval turret.

4.2.4 Civic and Public Buildings

There are a number of prestigious civic buildings. The B listed former Town Hall (now home to the North Coast Visitor Centre) was designed by J Russell Mackenzie in 1870 and is a 2.5 storey building with a mansard roof facing the High Street. Finished in tooled and polished ornate ashlar it adds a distinctive, grand and formal air to the High Street.



North Coast Visitor Centre



Public Library & Art Gallery

The B listed Public Library and Art Gallery, Davidson's Lane, was originally a boys' school known as the Miller Institution, later called the Miller Academy. The Miller Institution, built between 1859 and 1862, was founded by Alexander Miller and designed by W Scott, Edinburgh in classical style. It is rectangular, classical design, featuring a pedimented portico, approached by a wide flight of steps and headed by a two-stage drum tower with louvred vents, octagonal upper portion with blocked clock faces and topped with a domed lead roof and cast-iron finial. Miller, who was born in Thurso, was initially a merchant in the town before he turned to farming. The building creates an imposing vista as a viewpoint from Sinclair Street.

The former Drill Hall, Sinclair Street is a 2-storey C listed building, possibly designed by Donald Leed around 1882. It is designed in the early Renaissance style and finished in polished ashlar dressings. It has unique arched doorways and a large arched window on the first floor. The three arched doors are all original timber.

As the former home of the 1st Caithness Artillery Volunteers, the hall is an important part of the heritage of Thurso, and it has played a part in some important incidents in the town's history. This building forms a prominent and important part of the streetscape within central Thurso. This building is discussed in more detail in section 7.1.13.



Former Drill Hall, Sinclair Street

4.2.5 Shops and Commercial Buildings

Thurso boasts a great number of small shops in its central area, notably Traill Street, Orlig Street, High Street and Rotterdam Street, and while many of these occupy modern or refurbished premises, there are a number of remaining traditional shopfronts of note. There are also a number of retail premises located amongst predominately residential areas, e.g., the western section of Princes Street.



View along Rotterdam Street into High Street

4.2.6 Modern Buildings

The Conservation Area contains a number of modern buildings of differing styles, particularly in the medieval area, which is the location of a large early to mid-20th century council house development. These houses were designed for the Thurso Burgh Housing Scheme by the locally important architects Sinclair Macdonald & Son to the plans of Frank Mears. The development does, however, follow the medieval street pattern and the buildings have been well designed, relating well with the traditional architecture of the wider area, and are of high-quality materials with masonry walls and slate roofs.



Thurso Burgh Housing Scheme Houses

The small 1950/60s retail development on High Street comprises a terrace of shops with a covered walkway and deck-access flats above. The distinctly modern design is of little aesthetic or architectural quality and contrasts poorly with the otherwise traditional streetscape.

The mid-20th century Beach Court building complex which stands at the corner of Orlig Street, Traill Street and Rotterdam Street is of a plain and uninspiring design which is unfortunate given its prominent central location.



1950/60s retail development, High Street



Beach Court

Landmark Buildings

Landmark buildings are buildings or structures that, due to their size, prominence or location, act as a key focal point within a conservation area and make a particularly important contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Landmark buildings and views to and from them can be particularly sensitive to change. There are several buildings within the Conservation Area that act as landmark buildings. There is a uniformity in terms of scale, massing, bulk and finish across many of the buildings within the Conservation Area and as such, Thurso's landmarks tend to correlate with its fine ecclesiastical and civic buildings.

4.2.7 St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church

In association with Sir John's Square, St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church is one of Thurso's most prominent buildings. The church occupies a central position within the planned town from where major thoroughfares, including Sinclair, Traill and Princes Street, radiate. The church dominates views into Thurso from the Thurso Bridge to the east, acting as the town's main gateway building, framed by buildings either side of Traill Street to the east.



St Peter's & St Andrew's Church



North Coast Visitor Centre

At the west end of the town the former Town Hall and now the North Coast Visitor Centre is the main landmark, dominating the wide High Street.

Three large, imposing buildings, the Bank of Scotland, the former St. Andrew’s Church and the Royal Bank of Scotland collectively define the eastern edge of Olrig Street. All three are individually large imposing landmark buildings, but collectively form a strong and dominant edge to the Conservation Area.



Former St Andrew’s Church & Bank of Scotland



Royal Bank of Scotland

At the south-western end of Sinclair Street terminating the long unbroken vista along Traill Street sits the former Miller Institution, now the Public Library and Art Gallery. This building is distinctive not only for its neoclassical design incorporating a portico and bell tower, but for the whitewashed finish to the stonework which contrasts with the bare masonry that otherwise dominates the streetscape.



View along Sinclair Street towards Miller Institution

Further away from the river there are fewer landmark buildings as the town transitions into mainly residential areas.

4.2.8 Old St Peter’s Kirk and Burial Ground

In the medieval section of the Conservation Area sits Thurso’s only scheduled monument; Old St. Peter’s Church and burial ground. As outlined in Section 3.1, is the oldest building in Thurso. The church layout is cruciform, with no aisles. The east end of the church terminates in a low apsidal cell. Attached at an angle to the south side of the apse is a staircase tower, linked to the body of the church by a vaulted passage. The south gable retains its stone tracery, a small three-light window in the north transept also retains its tracery.



Old St Peter’s Kirk and burial ground

4.2.9 Listed Buildings

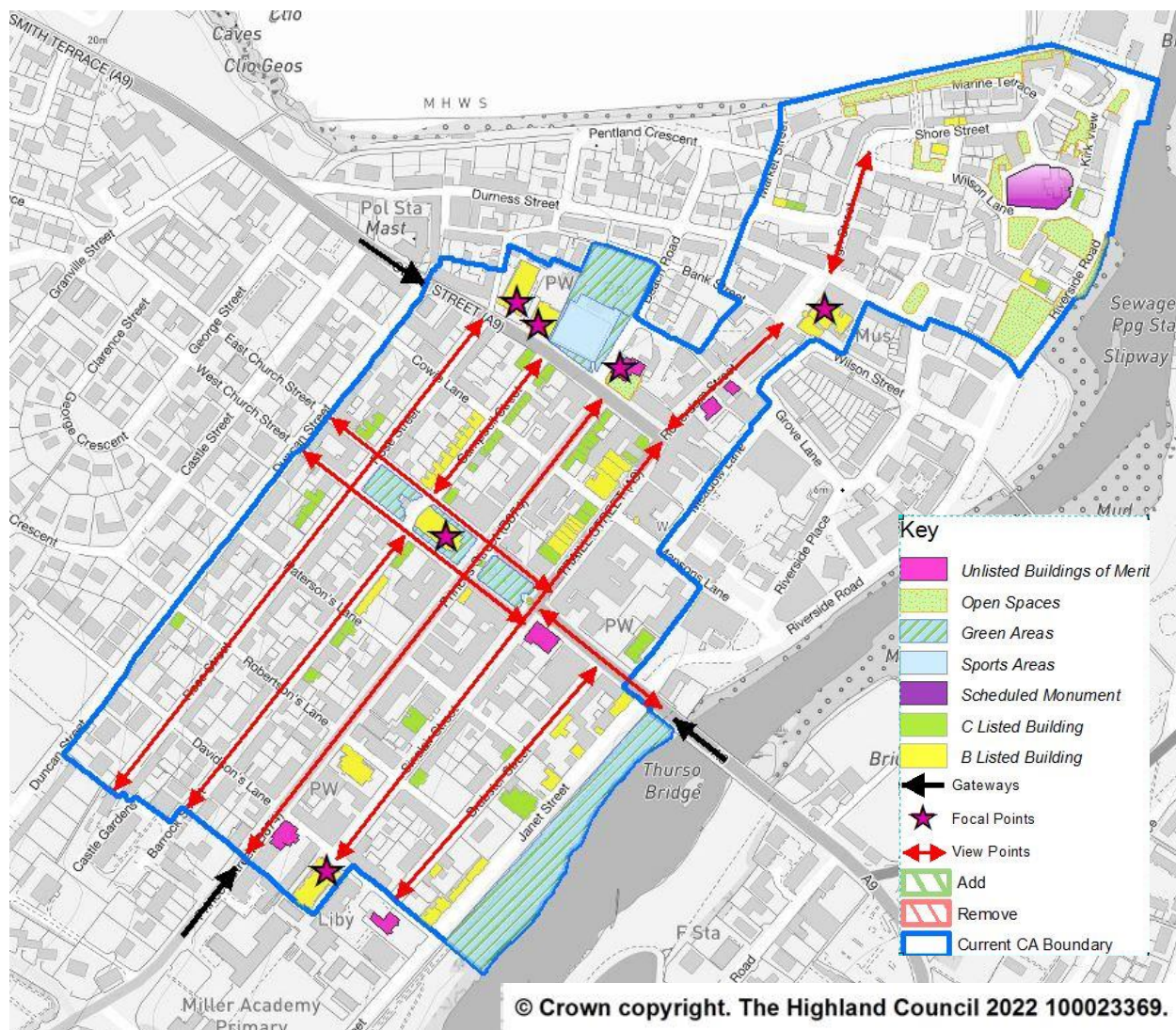
The existing Conservation Area contains 93 list entries. Each list entry may cover more than one building or address (refer Appendix 1 and map 6.3). (48 Category C and 45 Category B). The earliest listings in the Conservation Area occurred in 1975, with significant additions in 1984, and a small number of additions to the listed building records were made in the years 1979, 1989, 2003 & 2016.

It should be noted that the Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) includes information on undesignated historic environment assets, including unlisted buildings of local/regional importance, with information added on a case-by-case basis. Assets recorded in the HER are addressed in accordance with Policy 57 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

The proposed boundary changes propose to reduce this number to 82 listed buildings (38B and 34C). Details and justification for these changes are outlined in section 5.0.

4.2.10 Scheduled Monuments

Scheduled monuments are archaeological sites and features that have been designated as of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Both the monument and its setting are protected under the Act. The existing Thurso Conservation Area contains one scheduled monument; Old St. Peter's Church and Burial Ground.



Map of existing Conservation Area's Key Features

4.2.9 Key Unlisted Buildings

There are a number of buildings which, although not listed, make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and its townscape. They may be notable due to the survival of fabric and detail, architectural style, use of ornamentation, prominence within the town or history.

- Springbank House, Janet Street (recommended for inclusion in the Conservation Area)
- Camfield House, Janet Street (recommended for inclusion in the Conservation Area)
- Rosebank, Janet Street (recommended for inclusion in the Conservation Area)
- 1,3 Grove Lane
- Royal Bank of Scotland Building, Orlig Street
- Station Hotel, Princes Street
- Service Point & Registrar's Office, Rotterdam Street
- Thurso Royal Mail Sorting Office, Sinclair Street.



Springbank House, Janet Street



Camfield House, Janet Street



Rosebank, Janet Street



1,3 Grove Lane



Royal Bank of Scotland Building, Orlig Street



Station Hotel



Royal Mail Sorting Office, Sinclair St.



Service Point & Registrar's Office, Rotterdam St.

4.2.10 Negative Buildings/Features

A small number of buildings and features detract from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This may be because a building is in a state of disrepair or neglect, or that it has been subject to poor quality alterations and extensions that have compromised its character poorly. There is not a realistic opportunity to reinstate the character of the Conservation Area or to make significant improvements or enhancements.

Other issues include:

- Loss of building's historic fabric;
- Replacement of traditional windows and doors with plastic units;
- Vacancy/underuse, especially of upper floors above shops;
- Inappropriate alterations especially the insertion of modern dormers;
- Insensitive and inappropriate shop signage;
- Poor interventions to the public realm that lack uniformity and cohesiveness, which do not reflect the traditional character of the built heritage;
- Poorly conceived, designed and sited modern development. Examples of this can be seen in the medieval area, where 1940s social housing and 1950-60s bungalows have replaced the historic housing. In the wider Conservation Area, such examples of inappropriate modern development are garages and a petrol station.

These issues are discussed in more detail in section 7.

4.2.11 Buildings at Risk

There are currently no buildings included on the Buildings at Risk Register in the Conservation Area. However, the Former Drill Hall on Sinclair Street will be proposed for inclusion as it has been vacant and unused for a number of years. This building is discussed further in section 7.1.13.

4.2.12 Roads and Street Surfaces

No original road surfaces survive, and all have been replaced with tarmac; some of the pavements still retain their original flagstones, a very rare feature which reflects the town's industrial heritage. However, most of the flags have unfortunately been replaced with tarmac or modern brickwork. On some streets the road and the pavement are separated by a narrow grass verge. It is unclear whether this is an original feature, or if it is a modern intervention.

The lanes of the Victorian grid which run perpendicular to the river are very narrow with only one lane for traffic and narrow pavements (around 1m across). This helps to create a very distinctive compact urban environment.

In general, modern signage is not excessive and does not impose upon the traditional aesthetic. However, in some



Traditional Flagstone Paving

instances, particularly around Sir John’s Square and Traill Street there is excessive road signage which detracts from the character of the streetscape.

4.2.13 Public Art and Lighting

The most visible piece of public art in Thurso is the large post-modern mural on the gable side of Tollemache House on the High Street created by ‘Cazeil’. This somewhat controversial piece of art is not of particular aesthetic or historic value, although it does add interest to an otherwise fairly uninspiring piece of mid-twentieth century architecture. Street lighting is generally subdued and moderate which is appropriate for a conservation area. Much of the street lighting is provided by lights attached to buildings as opposed to free standing columns.



Mural by Cazeil, Tollemache House

4.3 Architectural Form

4.3.1 Roofs

The roofs in Thurso are mostly traditional gable ended roofs with a steep pitch (40-45 degrees) book-ended by chimneys, often with wide stacks, many of which retain original chimney pots. Roofs tend to be of Caithness stone-slate or Scottish/Welsh natural slate, some of which has been laid to diminishing courses. Statement details such as turrets can occasionally be found on focal points to add to the variety of the town’s roovescape and skyline. In some cases, slate roofs have been replaced with inappropriate materials including concrete tiles which have had a notably adverse impact on the integrity of the roovescape.



Turret detail; Traill Street/Sir John’s Square



Sympathetic dormers; Traill Street



Crow-stepped gable detailing



Diminishing slate courses

Significant parts of Thurso's roofscape are devoid of roof-lights or dormer windows, resulting in long characterful runs of uninterrupted slate roof-slopes which helps emphasise the rigid street pattern, strong building line and consistent scale of its buildings. Where historic dormers exist, they are typically Victorian hipped-roof canted dormers; there are many cases where they have been incorporated as either an integral element of the building design or integrated successfully at a later date without detriment to the character of the building. Unfortunately, however, many of Thurso's dormer windows – and certainly modern box dormers retrofitted into historic roof-slopes – fail to make a positive contribution to the building or the wider roofscape.

A few good examples of cast iron rainwater goods (including hoppers and fittings) survive, but many have now been replaced with plastic which lacks the character, patina and finish of cast iron. It is not uncommon for modern pipework to be inappropriately placed, cluttering the façade of the building.



Example of unsympathetic box dormer



Traditional rainwater goods

4.3.2 Walls

The stone used for the majority of the buildings in Thurso is sandstone, which is mostly grey with slight hints of yellow, although there are also instances of red sandstone and also Caithness stone construction. There are a variety of different styles of masonry construction, from random rubble to coursed rubble, through to higher quality ashlar, with Caithness stone with characteristic narrow beds. In most instances masonry is left exposed, and this is a discerning feature of the Conservation Area. Window and door margins have a variety of styles, ranging

from very plain margins with no architectural definition, to highly expressed margins. Also present, but much less common, are wet harled or smooth rendered finishes. There are also unfortunate examples of dry dash render applied to both historic and modern buildings, and in neither case does this finish integrate successfully with the range of traditional materials and finishes elsewhere in the Conservation Area.



Traditional lime mortar harling



Traditional rendered building

4.3.3 Windows and Doors

The majority of windows are – or should be - traditional timber sliding sash and case windows. A variety of glazing patterns are still in evidence, from 6 over 6 to single-pane sashes. A few more ornate examples also survive. A significant proportion of the buildings, however, now have modern, poorly detailed and finished uPVC replacements which detract from the traditional character and appearance of the building and Conservation Area.



Examples of traditional timber windows

Doors should be timber with solid panels, often with a fanlight above. Whilst some excellent examples featuring original detailing and traditional door furniture can be seen in the Conservation Area, the majority have been replaced with modern uPVC doors which, as with

uPVC windows, has not the finish, detailing or character of a traditional timber door and this erodes the quality and character of the Conservation Area.



Traditional timber doors

4.3.4 Architectural Detail

Most of the residential properties in Thurso are notable for their lack of external detailing. However, there are fine examples of detailing to be found in the Victorian and commercial areas of the town. Examples of architectural detailing include string courses, finials, boot scrapers, carved stone, stained glass, porticos/ornate porches, cast iron detailing, columns, pilasters, ornate timber bargeboards and detailing on gables and gable-ended dormer windows, decorative terracotta cans and decorative fanlights. More important civic buildings tend to stand out because of their use of external detailing, and it is important in these instances that these details are preserved.



Curved façade & diminishing side elevation, string courses



Dormers and stonework detailing



Doorway with pediment



Cast iron detailing

4.3.5 Shopfronts

Thurso has a good selection of historic shopfronts that retain traditional materials and details, have a dark and/or muted colour palette, and these make an important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. There are, however, a significant number of shopfronts that have been inappropriately altered over time. Many have lost their original fabric and detailing, and poorly designed and finished fascias and signage are now commonly apparent throughout the Conservation Area.

'Sutherland's Pharmacy' on Traill Street has its original windows which are extremely ornate with curved glass, a distinctive period feature shared by 'Bydand Restaurant' also on Traill Street.



Sutherland's Pharmacy, Traill Street



Bydand, Traill Street

4.3.6 Boundary Walls

In the central parts of the Conservation Area, most of the houses open directly onto the street and therefore have no boundary walls. Perhaps the most notable boundaries in this area are those surrounding St. John's Square, which are low coped stone walls with iron railings painted green. Further up the hill to the west the houses begin to have front gardens, and these tend to follow a similar style of low coped stone walls and wrought iron railings. In some instances, the railings have been removed and replaced with hedging. Within the area, there are other styles of boundary treatments, such as traditional Caithness flagstone, together with harled

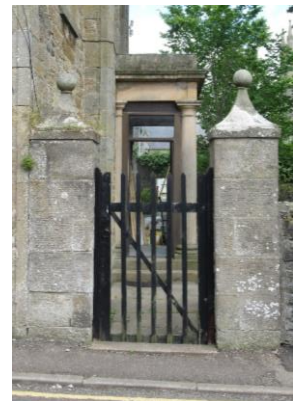
walls. Gate piers are found in the Conservation Area, some of which are ornate, and a small number are included with the building's Listing category.



Traditional Caithness Flagstone boundary wall



Detail of traditional cast iron railings



B-Listed gate piers

4.3.7 Condition

Within the Conservation Area, many of the buildings are well maintained and there is very little dereliction, with the exception of the former Drill Hall on Sinclair Street. Towards the top of the High Street the shopfronts become increasingly lower in quality and there are a few vacant premises. Many of the upper floors in the retail areas of the town show neglect e.g., peeling paintwork, and would benefit from regular maintenance. Defects, particularly at roof level, can pose a safety issue especially on public streets. These include:

- blocked and defective gutters and downpipes;
- cast iron rainwater goods with failed paint finishes and corrosion;
- failing paint finishes on masonry and timber;
- upper windows and timber work on dormers in poor condition;
- vegetation growth particularly to masonry chimney stacks;
- slated roofs in need of repair;
- settlement has been an issue in a small number of buildings across the Conservation Area.

There are a number of vacant buildings which are in poorer condition (refer to section 7.2.3, 7.2.4 and 7.2.5).

There are very few examples of inappropriate modern boundary treatments in Thurso, a factor which contributes significantly to the historical feel of the town. The standard of the public realm and associated boundaries is generally good throughout the town.

One of the greatest threats to any heritage site is the loss of primary fabric through lack of maintenance or inappropriate repair and replacement, reducing the authenticity of the site. Common and significant threats in Thurso include the use of inappropriate modern materials and details for:

Replacement windows and doors

A significant number of original windows and entrance doors have been replaced, often in inappropriate fenestration design and materials. Replacements in uPVC, aluminium, and/or non-traditional fenestration patterns and opening methods have a negative effect on both the character and quality of individual buildings and a cumulative impact on the character of the Conservation Area as a whole. The Georgian buildings would originally have had generally 6 over 6 fenestration patterns, with the Victorian buildings making use of improvements in glazing technology and having 2 over 2 or 1 over 1 fenestration patterns. The loss of the window fenestration pattern and resultant varied replacement designs has left a lack of continuity over terraced frontages, a key component of the original design intent. The majority of Thurso's traditional buildings would originally have had moulded panel entrance doors. The replacement of a significant number of original doors has meant the loss of considerable local detail and high-quality joinery work which contributed to the character and appearance of the area.

Replacement window and doors are often ill-fitted into the original stone opening and this can both reduce daylight levels and create poor thermal seals around the openings, leading to heat loss.

Replacement roof finishes

A significant number of properties have been re-roofed in a mixture of alternative slate types and inappropriate modern materials such as concrete tiles. This creates an inconsistency in the character and appearance of the roofscape, in particular where buildings form groups or terraces, and in continuous gable-to-gable properties. Modern materials such as concrete tiles effect the detailing of the roof and result both in the loss of traditional slate (a diminishing resource) and potentially roof features such as traditional stone copes. Uniformly sized tiles can also create difficulties with the waterproofing of the roof junctions, and do not have the flexibility to accommodate the natural movement and irregularity of older properties.

4.4 BUILDING MATERIALS

4.4.1 Traditional Materials

The majority of buildings in Thurso make use of a limited palette of traditional materials. These materials were often sourced from local sites, meaning that the built environment in Thurso is reflective of the natural environment of Caithness. The use of these materials is a large part of what gives the Thurso Conservation Area its special and unique character. Traditional materials found in Thurso include:

- Blonde sandstone
- Old red sandstone
- Caithness stone and stone-slate
- Scottish/Welsh slate
- Cast iron (gutters and downpipes)
- Cast and wrought iron (railings and architectural detailing)
- Timber
- Terracotta clay (chimney pots).

4.4.2 Modern Materials

One of the key defining characteristics of the Thurso Conservation Area is its predominantly intact townscape, with comparatively few modern buildings disrupting its historic grain, rhythm or authenticity. There are, however, numerous examples of its historic buildings being subject to inappropriate alterations with a corresponding loss of historic fabric and detailing, with an incremental replacement of traditional materials with unsympathetic modern alternatives. This has undoubtedly occurred in Thurso to the extent that many building groups have been altered so much that they have lost much of their historic or aesthetic importance. Examples of inappropriate modern materials are:

- Concrete tiles
- uPVC / plastic
- Cement pointing / render
- Concrete
- Dry dash harling
- Vinyl fascias in shopfronts
- Inappropriate illumination of shopfronts
- External cladding.

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5.0 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY | CRÌOCH NA SGÌRE GLÈIDHTEACHAIS

5.1 Background

The current Conservation Area boundary encompasses a large area, incorporating both the medieval centre and the Victorian planned town. The appraisal process has identified some areas where the continuity of historic buildings begins to break up and modern houses become more common, as well as streets that retain little original character.

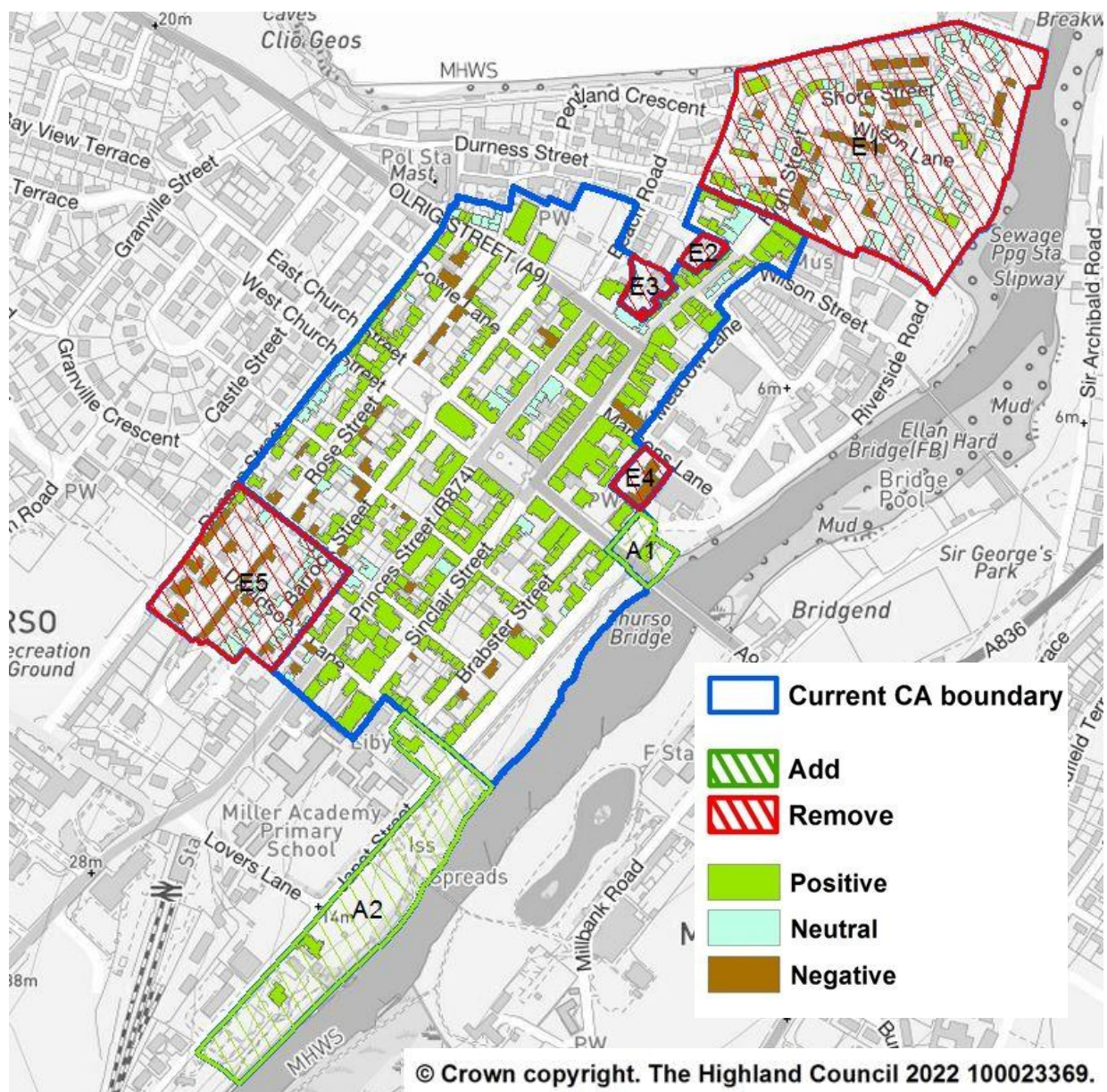
An important part of the appraisal, therefore, is to ensure that the Thurso Conservation Area boundary still accurately and appropriately reflects what is of architectural and historical importance. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 outlines three themes that may assist planning authorities in defining conservation areas and these have been used in the re-assessment:

- (a) Historical interest
- (b) Architectural interest including Character and Appearance
- (c) Setting and Physical Context.

5.2 Boundary Amendments

The proposed amended boundary follows logical and definable boundaries that can be mapped with minor amendments made to rationalise and clarify the boundary and are aligned to Ordnance Survey mapping. This should avoid ambiguity as to whether features are within or outwith the Conservation Area. Boundary amendments have been made to exclude development that is not considered to contribute to the special character of the Conservation Area, principally due to the cumulative erosion of historic character and appearance.

To inform any required boundary revisions, the buildings within the Conservation Area have been scored according to their conservation merit, in terms of positive, neutral and negative. Justification for the most significant amendments is set out below.



Map detailing positive, neutral and negative buildings

Definition of Positive, Neutral and Negative Buildings:

Positive Buildings

Buildings that are scored as positive exhibit a significant degree of authenticity, i.e., significant survival of the building's original form, historic fabric, original detailing and function. Authenticity of individual buildings can impact significantly on the authenticity of wider areas. The erosion of any one of these factors can have a negative impact on the building's authenticity and by extension, the character of an area. Positive buildings require regular management and maintenance to ensure that they remain in a positive state.

Neutral Buildings

Buildings that are assessed as neutral demonstrate that they retain the majority of their original form, but authenticity in terms of material and detailing have been compromised. A modern

building may also be classed as neutral if its design and materials do not negatively affect the townscape.

Negative Buildings

Historic buildings are ranked as negative when they have been significantly and inappropriately altered and compromised. Modern buildings that do not respect the character, grain or form of the area may be classed as negative. It is important to note that buildings which have been identified as negative can still make positive contributions to the character of the area, for example they might reflect the historic streetscape or use traditional materials. A negative scoring will not be taken into consideration as a justification for demolition.

Neutral and negative buildings may present enhancement opportunities to reverse inappropriate interventions or to rectify maintenance issues, which can result in a building which makes a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

5.2.1 Proposed exclusions from the Conservation Area

The assessment found that there are five areas included in the existing boundary which do not contribute to the special interest of the Conservation Area. It is therefore considered appropriate that these areas are excluded. The results of the conservation scoring give further weight to the recommendations to remove the following sections, marked on the map as E1, E2, E3, E4 and E5.

E1: Medieval Town

When viewed from a distance, the medieval town appears to retain its character, however upon closer inspection, the individual quality of the buildings does not merit their retention in the Conservation Area.



Views into the medieval areas of Thurso

The medieval centre retains only a small number of buildings of architectural or historic interest and is predominantly comprised of mid-later 20th century housing stock, much of it following the pre-existing plan layout. Where historic buildings have survived, there has been an incremental loss of character, appearance and historic fabric.

Towards the harbour, the former B Listed kippering kiln was demolished and this area of ground has been left without appropriate surface treatment or progression of the proposed replacement buildings, thus further eroding the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

When scored as either positive, neutral or negative, the 147 buildings in this area were assessed as follows:

- 15 were ranked as positive (these are 8 of the existing 10 listed buildings in this area)
- 51 were ranked as negative
- The remaining 81 were ranked as neutral.

The Case for Removal

Many of the most significant historic buildings located in this area already benefit from statutory protection as Listed Buildings or Scheduled Monuments and will not significantly benefit from additional protection offered by the Conservation Area. The primary evidence of the area's medieval past is the eccentric street layout, which is unlikely to change. The majority of this area's surviving high-quality historic building stock are protected as listed buildings, with many of the remaining 18th and 19th century buildings having been altered extensively, inappropriately and irreversibly over time. The 20th century housing, although of good quality, is not of significant architectural or historic importance and therefore does not warrant the additional planning controls imposed upon it. The reinstatement of householder permitted development rights is unlikely, on balance, to result in detrimental impacts to the area, and the most important features – the street pattern and roofscape – will not change significantly as a consequence of this change.

The Case Against Removal

The Conservation Area has been effective at providing additional protections to the promenade area facing the beach and has been instrumental in preventing inappropriate development on historic buildings adjacent to the promenade. The loss of the Conservation Area in this section could result in such development no longer requiring planning permission or being more difficult to refuse at planning stage. Conservation areas demand a higher quality for new development and the retention (or introduction) of traditional features that benefit the wider streetscape and sense of place. The removal of the Conservation Area here may result in a lesser quality of new development and the erosion of historic and traditional features.

The inter-war housing is a fine example of housing from this period. It is not especially vulnerable to change, with the exception of the loss of the predominantly natural slate roofs. Given the quality and longevity of natural slate, the traditional roofscape that contributes to the area's character is considered unlikely to significantly change in the medium-long term.



Miller's Lane, category B & C Listed buildings

The Category B and C listed buildings on Miller's Lane, which face the harbour, have benefitted from the protection associated with their listing status, however, should the quality of interventions in the surrounding buildings further deteriorate, this will impinge on the listed building's setting and character.

E2: Bank Street to the rear of Rotterdam Street

This section contains a mid-century rough cast house located to the rear of Rotterdam Street. The building has been ranked as negative and is surrounded by an area of surface car parking. This area contains nothing that merits its inclusion in the Conservation Area.

E3: Beach Court

The Beach Court complex occupies a very prominent position within Thurso's townscape and has been assessed as having a negative impact on the Conservation Area. Its modernist design is in stark contrast to its surroundings, and it is not considered to be contributing positively to the special character of the Thurso Conservation Area.

E4: Masons Lane Petrol Station and Garage

Masons Lane garage and petrol station are functional modern buildings of no architectural value and do not contribute to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The buildings have been assessed as negative and it is recommended that they are removed from the Conservation Area.

E5: Western part of The Grid

This encompasses a large area including most of the southern side of Duncan Street, Rose Street and Barrock Street as far as Davidson Lane. This area contains a wide mix of housing from different eras, including a significant amount of traditional housing. However, the quality of the traditional housing in this area is not as high as elsewhere in the Conservation Area and the majority have had most of their original features replaced. When assessed, all the buildings in this area were scored as neutral or negative. There is not the density of well-preserved historically significant buildings in this area to merit conservation area designation.

5.2.2 Proposed additions to the Conservation Area

Two additions to the Conservation Area (A1 and A2) are proposed to be included:

A1: Thurso Bridge/ Riverside Road

A1 recommends the inclusion of two attached buildings and their curtilages which face the River Thurso beside the bridge. These traditional buildings retain most of their heritage features and act as a gateway into Thurso’s Conservation Area from across the river. The rear gardens contain several important trees and are bounded by original cast iron railings. The buildings, garden ground and boundaries would make a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.



Thurso Bridge/Riverside Road Buildings

A2: Springbank House, Camfield House and Rosebank

This section recommends the inclusion of three substantial detached late Victorian/early Edwardian villas and grounds, and also recommends the inclusion of the entirety of the Mall; an attractive area of public river-front green space only partially included in the existing Conservation Area boundary. The villas are fine examples of traditional late Victorian/early Edwardian architectural styling and detailing and occupy prominent positions adjacent to the river. Their garden ground, much of it enclosed by good quality stone boundary walls, includes several large and prominent trees.



Camfield House, Janet Street

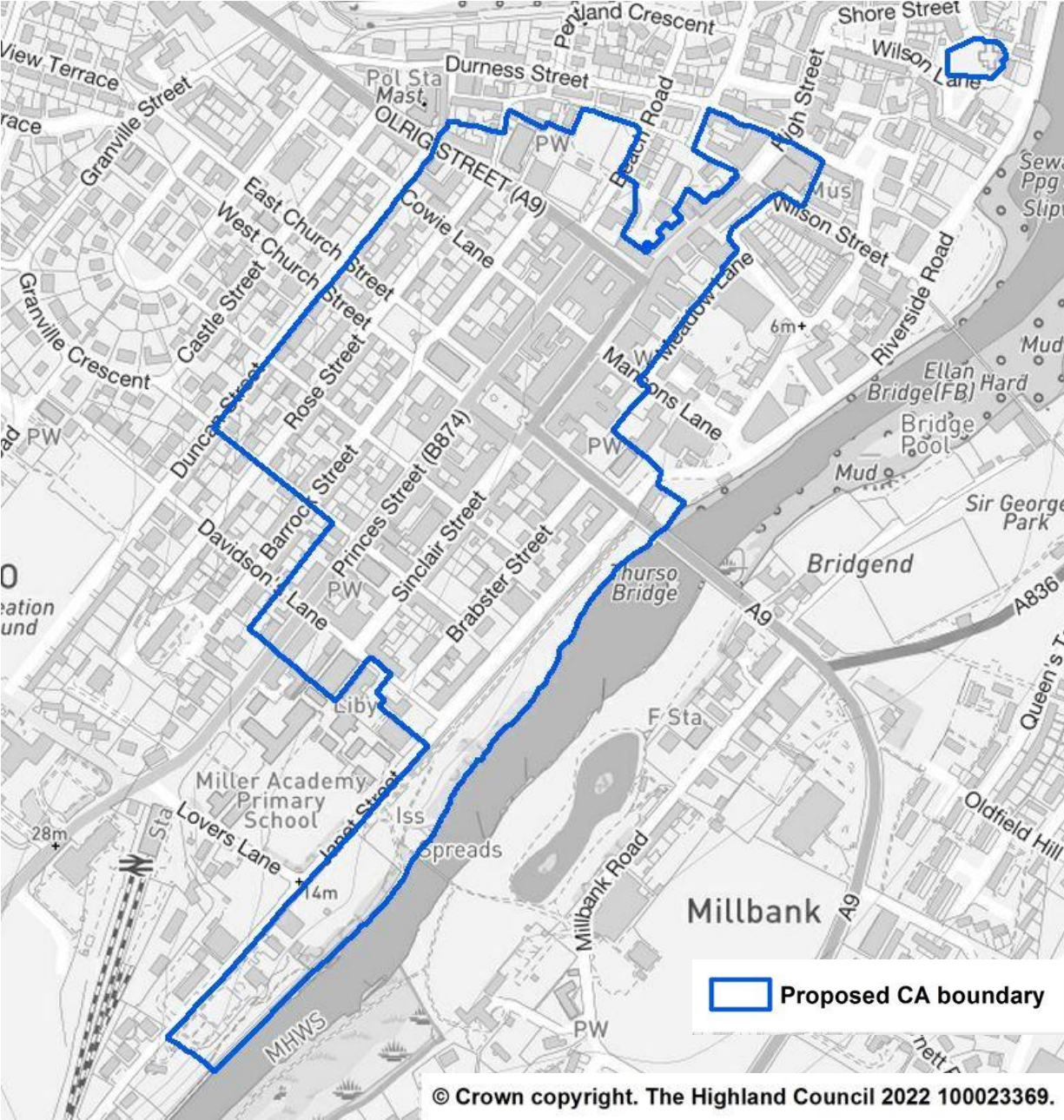


Rosebank, Janet Street



Springbank House, Janet Street

Addendum August 2022: Further to public consultation of this draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, all of the above areas have been recommended for adoption within the boundary of a revised Thurso Conservation Area, with the exception of Old St Peter’s Kirk. Further to consideration at Caithness Area Committee in August 2022, Local Members recommended that Old St Peter’s Kirk is retained as a Conservation Area, in addition to its existing protection as a Scheduled Monument.



Map of proposed Conservation Area boundary

5.2.3 Character Assessment

Having carried out a detailed assessment of buildings and areas, as outlined in Section 4, it is now possible to identify:

The key features which define the special architectural and historic character of the area are:

- Street pattern
- Building line
- Building height – eaves and ridge
- Architectural quality
- Uniformity
- Use of traditional materials.

DRAFT

6.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN | PLANA RIAGHLADH

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

6.1.1 Conservation Area Designation

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that conservation areas *"...are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance."* Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

The Conservation Area was originally designated as 'The Burgh of Thurso Conservation Areas' by Thurso Town Council with effect from 04/02/1970 and included five separate areas. Most of these were within the core of the town but an additional area existed around the property known as Pennyland to the northwest. As of 13/03/1974 the area was expanded slightly by joining what had been the area around Old St Peter's Kirk in the north of the town to the core of the town. Later changes rationalised the remaining areas into a single area, one of which had spanned the Thurso River and removed Pennylands, which had by that time also been designated as a Listed Building. Later still, the area around St Andrew's Church was also included. All previous designations were cancelled with effect from 28/02/1987 when Thurso was re-designated as a single Conservation Area.

Recommendation for changes to that boundary are detailed in Section 5, Conservation Area Boundary. This report includes reference to areas within the proposed extension as applicable.

Conservation area status brings the following works under planning control:

- Demolition of unlisted buildings or structures
- Removal of, or work to trees
- Householder development including, for example, small house alterations and extensions, the installation of satellite dishes, roof alterations, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior.

6.1.2 Purpose of the Conservation Area Management Plan

The purpose of this management plan is to address the findings of the Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and further consider its 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.

Clauses 74-76 of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan; 2018) cover policy on conservation areas, including under clause 74, that the Thurso Conservation Area was to be reviewed. Clause 76 outlines, in line with Planning Advice Note 71 Conservation Area Management (2004), the issues to be included:

- Opportunities for planning action;
- Opportunities for development;

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

This document is a valuable tool with which to inform Highland Council's planning practice and policies for the area, and assist stakeholders. The successful management of conservation areas can only be achieved with the support of and input from stakeholders, and in particular local residents and property owners.

This management plan should be used in conjunction with the Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and reference is made to relevant sections of the appraisal throughout this report.

6.2 OVERVIEW

6.2.1 Summary Statement of Significance

The character of the Thurso Conservation Area is derived from a number of unique qualities and elements which make it a distinct and important area. These factors must be considered when undertaking any new development.

Broader features that are important to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area include:

- Wider area vistas, views and panoramas experienced within the Conservation Area, looking out, and from without looking in;
- The combined effect of streets, spaces, buildings and their architectural form, scale, rhythm and massing and their interrelationship with topography;
- Plot size, plot boundaries and divisions;
- The repetition of certain distinctive architectural detail and motifs (or lack thereof) and the cumulative effect of these on the appearance of the wider townscape;
- The quality, diversity and authenticity of Thurso's historic buildings and a consistent palette of traditional materials and finishes;
- The contribution made by trees and soft landscaping both in their own right and as contributors to the setting of buildings, streets and spaces.

6.3 ASSESSMENT OF SPACES

Open spaces, both private and public, are vital contributing factors to the character of the Conservation Area. Their retention and sensitive management are crucial to maintaining this special character and for the protection of biodiversity.

6.3.1 Public Spaces

Public spaces and vistas that must be considered as part of any development proposal which might affect them include:

- Sir George's Park;
- Sir John's Square;
- Lady Thurso Gardens;

- The Mall.

6.3.2 Private Spaces

Private open spaces, including garden ground, make an immeasurable contribution throughout the Conservation Area. It is important to the Conservation Area that whenever garden ground contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area, its retention is secured.

This includes a presumption against loss of trees and hedging and replacement of soft landscaping, including lawns, with large expanses of hard surfacing.

6.3.3 Assessment of Buildings

Some of the most significant buildings are outlined in below, although the majority of the historic buildings in the Conservation Area are notable both individually and as part of a group. Nonetheless, there are buildings and building groups within the Conservation Area that are particularly sensitive to change; any proposal that may affect them or their setting will need to carefully justify the proposal in a design statement. These building groups include:

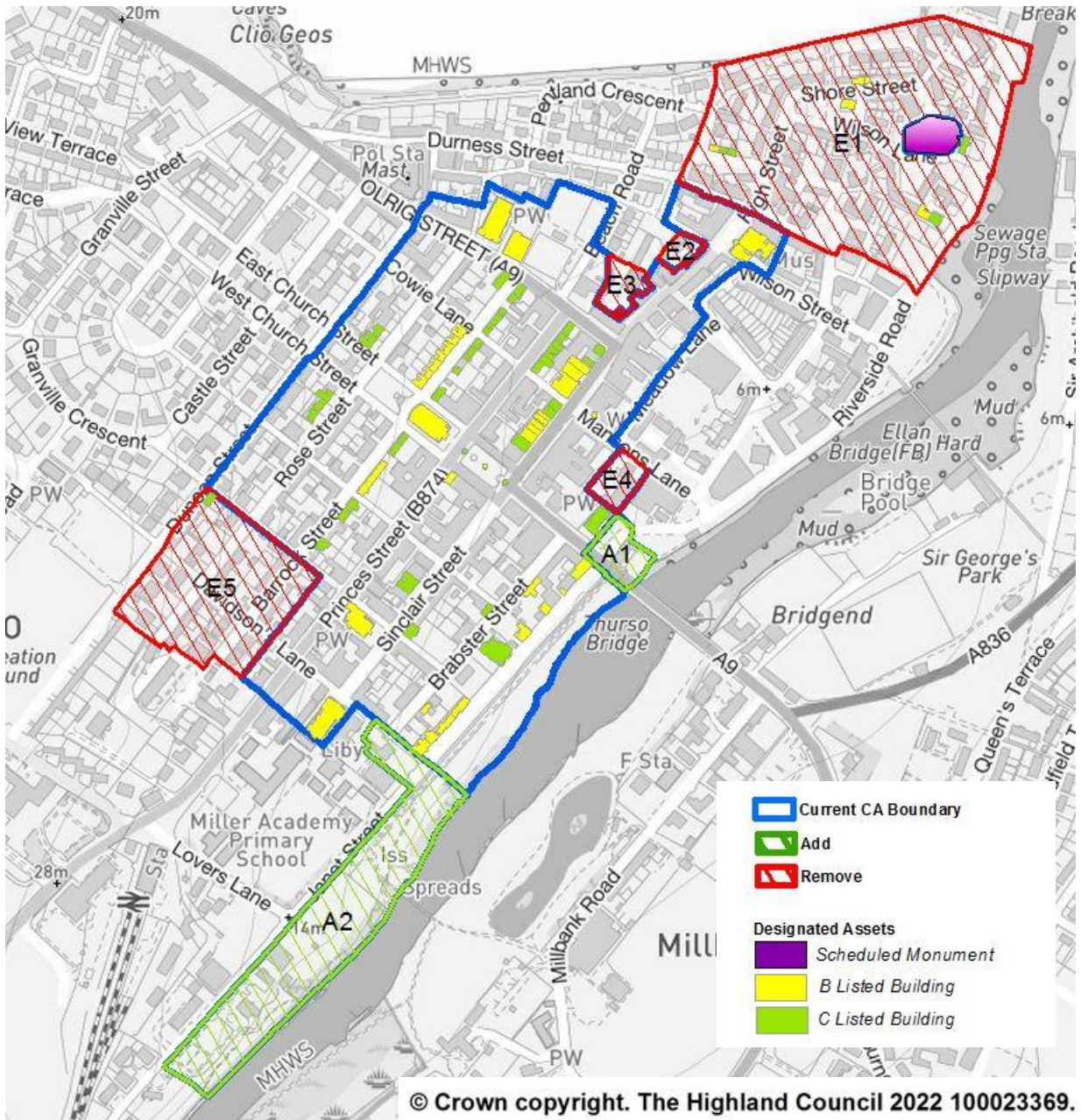
- The North Coast Visitor Centre (the former Town Hall) and K6 Telephone Kiosk, their setting, context and positive impact on the character of the High Street;
- Ecclesiastical buildings, including; St. Peter's and St. Andrew's Church, St. Andrew's Church, The Church of St. Peter and the Holy Rood and the Thurso West Church;
- The Bank of Scotland and Royal Bank of Scotland on Orlig Street, their setting, the relationship with adjacent open space and views to and from;
- The strong historic building line of Campbell Street, Janet Street and Traill Street.



Campbell Street



High Street



Map of Designated Assets

7.0 CHALLENGES AND THREATS | DÚBHLAIN AGUS BREATAICHEAN

7.1 WIDER CHALLENGES

7.1.1 Lack of Repair and Maintenance

Thurso is generally well maintained both in terms of its buildings and open spaces. However, issues such as biological growth on masonry (particularly on boundary walls), on roof tiles (especially modern concrete replacement tiles), blocked rainwater goods, inappropriate re-pointing with cement (rather than lime mortar), flaking paintwork and rotten timber are maintenance issues which affect some buildings in the Conservation Area. Regular maintenance of properties can reduce repair bills and will ensure the longevity of traditional building materials. The Council is drafting a conservation area development guide, together with a maintenance guide, to help property owners and these documents will be published on the Council's website in the near future.

7.1.2 Loss of Original Architectural Detail and Original Features

Original architectural detail makes a defining contribution to Thurso's character and appearance. It is therefore important that detail and its importance is recognised, preserved and enhanced. The incremental removal and loss of traditional features including windows and doors, roof coverings, metalwork etc. contributes to the erosion and special character of the Conservation Area.

Likewise, the erosion of Thurso's architectural detail can result in the introduction of new and inappropriate architectural forms and materials. For example, the installation of Velux skylights on original slate roofs, or the replacement of timber window casings with uPVC frames.

7.1.3 Use of Inappropriate Materials

Materials are an important element of a conservation area, and the use of traditional materials provides a unifying feature across an area. Modern materials tend to have a uniform surface, profile and patina, may weather comparatively poorly and often stand out from traditional materials. Common examples include:

- Modern plastic windows. These lack the profile, subtle detailing and variety of character of timber sash and case windows;
- uPVC, aluminium or glass doors lack the patina, colour and detailing of timber panel doors;
- Plastic rainwater goods lack the character, variety of finish and texture of cast iron;
- Use of concrete roof tiles. These appear heavy and unrefined and weather poorly compared to slate, often becoming discoloured, attracting moss and lichens;
- Dry dash render appears uniform and lacks the character of exposed stonework. It also weathers very poorly and can become discoloured by rain and car fumes.

These materials have replaced original materials to varying extents on many properties in the Thurso Conservation Area. This has resulted in a loss of uniformity, symmetry and cohesion, and has had a significant adverse impact on character and appearance across the Conservation

Area. It is important that inappropriate materials are not permitted on both traditional properties and new buildings in the Conservation Area. Since 2012, planning permission has been required to carry out most external alterations to buildings in a conservation area and inappropriate modern materials should not be proposed or permitted moving forward. Further information can be obtained via The Highland Council's THC's supplementary guidance on specific matters such as [Historic Windows and Doors](#) and also from Historic Environment Scotland's [Managing Change in Windows](#) for both property owners and professional practitioners.

7.1.4 Inappropriate and unsympathetic alterations and extensions

Due to the dense nature of central Thurso there is very little scope for extensions to the front or sides of the houses. Some properties have extended to the back and although these extensions are often hidden from public view, this should not be seen as justification for erecting extensions which are not designed to a conservation area standard. All construction within a conservation area must be to heritage standard whether it is public realm facing or otherwise. UPVC conservatories, inappropriate build materials, flat roofs and box dormers are examples of inappropriate extensions and will not be supported.

7.1.5 Service and Telecommunication Equipment

On a smaller scale, but no less significant with regard to incremental erosion of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, are poorly sited services such as satellite dishes, cabling, flues, security equipment and pipework.

7.1.6 External Insulation

External insulation is poorly detailed and results in a poor, sub-standard and non-traditional finish. It should not be considered for use in conservation areas. External insulation can obscure architectural detailing, original finishes and fabric, alter the profile of window and door openings and affect how rainwater goods and other fittings and fixtures are fixed to the building. External insulation does not only adversely affect the character and appearance of individual buildings, but it can have a detrimental impact on neighbouring buildings and on the wider streetscape. Planning permission is required to install external insulation on any building within a conservation area and as it is unlikely to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, such permission is unlikely to be granted. Internal insulation however is encouraged and should always be considered in the first instance.



7.1.7 New Development

Within the grid of central Thurso there are few gap sites and thus few opportunities for new development. Some modern development particularly from the 1970s and 80s is notable

because it does not conform to the gridded settlement pattern, and this has a severe and detrimental impact on the character of the Conservation Area. Adherence to the grid and existing building line should be strictly enforced in all new development within the Conservation Area.

7.1.8 New Development Outwith the Conservation Area

New development outwith the Conservation Area which can be seen from inside the Conservation Area, or which affects the extended streetscape of streets in the Conservation Area will be carefully assessed. It is important to maintain primary views down the long and straight streets which originate in the centre of Thurso and extend to the outskirts – particularly Princes Street and Janet Street.

7.1.9 Public Realm

The quality and upkeep of the public realm is of importance to the interests of commercial business and residents, and presents an image of the town to visitors. Principle areas of concern include quality of paving, damage to street surfaces, maintenance of public and amenity spaces, street furniture, street clutter (excessive traffic management infrastructure, wheelie bins, A-frames etc.) and inappropriate sited and/or designed advertising and signage. Consideration should be given to the creation of shared spaces, so that there are clear delineations for pedestrians, wheeling and vehicular use.

An example of poorly conceived and designed public realm infrastructure are the pedestrian road barriers on Traill Street. This significantly and negatively effects the public realm of Traill Street and discussions to determine whether the barriers are necessary should be encouraged. Consideration should be given to upgrading the barriers to a more heritage-appropriate design (for example cast iron railings similar to those surrounding Sir John's Square).

7.2 SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

7.2.1 Shopfronts

The shopfronts on Traill Street have mostly maintained their original features, however elsewhere in the town many shops have been subject to modern refurbishment. Detailing such as box-signage and inappropriate illumination will not be supported. Traditional signwriting is preferred, with the preservation of original detailing, such as the signage detailing overleaf, are supported. Further information on traditional shopfronts can be found via [https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19365/shopfront design guide](https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19365/shopfront-design-guide)



Traditional signage and sign-writing

7.2.2 Demolition of Listed Buildings

There have been two notable examples of listed buildings which have been demolished in central Thurso; the B-listed late 19th century Kippering house and Kiln complex on Shore Street and the B-listed Brewery on Mason's Lane, dated 1798. Both these buildings were highly valuable as individual buildings and also contributed significantly to the historic townscape, and their demolition was a significant loss for the town. In both cases planning permission was granted for the demolition. In future greater weight should be placed on the preservation and renovation of listed buildings with enforcement action taken to secure the building's future where necessary.



Masons Lane Brewery



Shore Street Kippering Complex
Photo courtesy of Alan McIvor

Any enhancement schemes should seek to prioritise the opportunities outlined in sections 7.2.3, 7.2.4 and 7.2.5 overleaf to reduce their negative impact. However, most are in private ownership, and liaison, detailed discussion and support from public bodies may be necessary to encourage change.

7.2.3 Former Drill Hall, 21 Sinclair Street



As outlined in section 4.2.12, this building is of great interest to the town's history. The building has been used as a joiner's and cabinet maker's workshop but is now lying empty and is advertised for sale. It is understood that there are plans under consideration to bring the building back into use.

Despite being underused for many years, the exterior of the building is in reasonable condition, although the timber doors and windows are beginning to deteriorate, and the grounds are overgrown and unkempt. As this is such a key building to the streetscape, its derelict appearance has a significant negative impact upon the appearance of the Conservation Area.

It is important that all reasonable options are explored to ensure this building is saved from deteriorating further. The building would suit a range of new uses and may be suitable for conversion to flats. The adjoining extension has already been converted into flats, although has undergone inappropriate extension and alterations as a result; this should be avoided in any future conversion of the main Drill Hall building.

7.2.4 Vacant Shop units and public realm on Traill Street / Orlig Street

Traill Street is the grandest of the Victorian Streets in Thurso, as well as its main shopping precinct. It was one of the first streets developed as part of Sir George Sinclair's plan for the town and contains many of its finest commercial buildings. However, it has also been adopted as part of the A9 and the consequent high volume of traffic, narrow pavements, utilitarian public realm and clutter of road signage and traffic control measures has had a negative impact on its role as a shopping street.

Traill Street and Orlig Street has several vacant shop units, and these can promote a negative image of an area and have an adverse effect on the character of the Conservation Area. Steps should be taken where possible, to promote quick and sustainable reoccupation of these premises. More indirectly, steps should be taken by the Council to improve the public realm of

Traill Street to foster a more inviting shopping environment. Measures which could be considered are the widening of pavements, the reduction in size and number of street signage, the improvement or removal of pedestrian safety barriers, provision of more litter bins, flowers, benches and other street furniture/decoration, with careful consideration to strike a balance of reducing street clutter and improving the holistic management of the public realm.

7.2.5 Former Medical Centre, Davidson's Lane

The former medical centre building on Davidson's Lane is currently advertised for sale. Although not in the Conservation Area, the site is adjacent to the Public Library and Art Gallery and is bordered on two sides by the Conservation Area. The derelict building has a negative and adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area. Any new development on this site must reflect, relate and respond to the adjacent Conservation Area and neighbouring listed buildings. Any new development should be no higher than two-storeys, of traditional proportions and of high-quality design and materials.



7.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

There are opportunities to enhance the positive qualities of the Thurso Conservation Area through effective management which should be seized wherever practicable. A fundamental principle when considering the management of the Conservation Area is that it should be proactive and heritage led.

7.3.1 Increased Maintenance

The best means of preserving the character and appearance of any area is through the routine maintenance of buildings, green infrastructure such as trees, open spaces and public realm. Roofs, chimneys, windows, doors, rainwater goods, stonework, paintwork, wall finishes, entrance steps, gardens and boundary treatments, both front and rear, all need regular attention to

prolong their life, secure the future of the building and enhance its setting. Regular, coordinated maintenance inspection and programmes can help reduce costs in the long term. Similar considerations apply to the management and upkeep of private gardens and other private and public open spaces. Historic Environment Scotland's free INFORM Guide series provides useful information on maintenance issues for various elements of historic buildings. THC is also drafting a maintenance guide, and this will be published on the Council's website in the near future.

7.3.2 Reinstatement of Traditional Features

Where traditional features have been lost, the Council will support their replacement. For example, replace inappropriate modern windows and doors with historically appropriate units; replace modern boundary treatments with appropriate traditional boundaries; reinstatement of traditional detailing and traditional signwriting on shopfronts etc. Further guidance can be found in Section 9: Additional Information.

7.3.3 Promotion of Sensitive Alterations

The Council encourages the sensitive alteration and extension of listed buildings, where this will not harm their special interest, and of unlisted buildings where the proposals preserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

Where work appears to be unauthorised, the Council has statutory powers to investigate alleged breaches of planning control (including listed building consent) and any attached conditions. Powers under the Historic Environment (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2011 allow for stop notices and temporary stop notices in respect of specific works and fixed penalty notices for breaches of enforcement notices. The Council may take formal action where a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved by negotiation and it is in the public interest to do so. For further information on enforcement of planning controls, please see the Council's website.

7.3.4 Promotion of Sympathetic, High Quality New Development

There are limited opportunities for development and redevelopment within the Conservation Area. However, where opportunities do arise for new development, applications will make use of sympathetic contemporary forms, taking account of local context, views, townscape, setting, scale, massing, materials and detail. Design, materials and landscaping must all be of a high quality. New development must respect the existing urban form and building lines.

One example is 9 Davidson's Lane; a 1950s building which demonstrates good functionality and is in vibrant, positive commercial use, however the design of the building does not respect the townscape or character of the adjacent buildings. The Council would support the sensitive improvements or redevelopment of this negative building, should an opportunity arise.



9 Davidson's Lane

7.3.5 Advertising and Signage

Cumulatively, a proliferation of advertising boards and signs located in the public realm can result in clutter and detract from the character of the Conservation Area, e.g., the excessive signage which is visible in Sir John's Square. It can also impact on the setting of listed buildings and amenity space. The Conservation Area would benefit from better control of advertising, especially where it is located on major roads and gateways, and of design/size that is inappropriate to the Conservation Area.



Excessive signage in Sir John's Square

Advertising and signage within the Conservation Area will in general, comply with the following principles and will accord with the Council's Shopfront Design Guidance:

- The scale and location of signage should be appropriate to the size and scale of the building and the Conservation Area in general;
- Signage and advertising will make use of traditional materials and be of an appropriate design;
- Timber painted signs utilising a traditional colour palette appropriate to the age of the building are preferred; vinyl and banner signs and/or signs with internal illumination will not be supported;
- A proliferation of temporary signage/A-boards will be avoided. This not only adds to street clutter but restricts circulation, which can have a negative impact on the character of the area.

7.3.6 Protection of Green Space, Trees and the Green Network

Green infrastructure is important in terms of townscape and local amenity and can have many benefits, including visual, health and wellbeing, ecological and biodiversity value. Private and public gardens, open spaces, and the plants, trees and built structures that help form them make an important contribution to the local landscape character. In this case, there is a presumption to retain existing open space, whether public or private, which contributes positively to the character of the area. Likewise, features that define and are integral to an area of open space (i.e., trees, hedging, boundary walls, landscaping features) that contribute positively to the historic character and biodiversity of the area should be retained, enhanced and protected. Additionally, greenspaces adjacent to or visible from the Conservation Area should be managed to positively contribute to the wider landscape.



Rose Garden; Olrig Street

7.3.7 Programme of Public Realm Improvements

There is an ongoing need for regular monitoring, maintenance and where necessary, repair of public realm projects. The Conservation Area would benefit from an overall public realm strategy to prioritise and coordinate preservation and enhancement actions in the public realm.

Thurso enjoys a generally attractive and well-maintained public realm throughout the town. One specific case where there is a need for public realm improvements is along the A9 as it runs through the town, particularly on Traill Street. Prioritisation of the car on this principal shopping street has led to a clutter of utilitarian signage and safety infrastructure and a lack of attractive landscaping works. As Traill Street is one of the most important streets in Thurso and provides many visitors with their first impression of the town, a programme of renewal and enhancement of its public works would be beneficial.

New public realm works should make use of Caithness flagstones, appropriate heritage-styled street furniture and signage/wayfinding.

7.3.8 Town Centre Regeneration

As outlined in the Caithness and Sutherland Action Plan, the Council fully supports the Town Centre First policy, thus increasing the vibrancy and vitality of town centres by steering a mix of uses to these locations, encouraging the conversion of empty spaces above shops into flats, reuse of vacant land and buildings and increasing activity and potential custom. Development which generates significant footfall will be directed to the town centre in the first instance.

7.3.9 Improved Access, Interpretation, Education and Community Engagement

Opportunities exist to improve and upgrade access and path networks within the Conservation Area. It is also important to consider ways in which interpretation and educational benefits of the Conservation Area can be maximised as a learning, teaching and participation resource for all sections of the community. Engagement with the local community is essential in fostering a sense of local ownership and responsibility for the historic environment. The Council will encourage local involvement through liaison with local and community groups, amenity/heritage groups and stakeholders with issues affecting the historic environment. Furthermore, The Council will encourage options to enhance the town's presence on the NC500, by partnership working with the North Coast Visitor Centre to further promote Thurso's rich heritage and culture. There are several information boards in prominent locations which have been created by Thurso Heritage Society to signpost visitors to local attractions and these can be further explored.

7.3.10 Future Distributor Road

Longstanding plans have existed for a distributor road which would circumvent the A9 around the south and west of Thurso so that traffic does not have to go through the narrow streets of the town centre. These plans have been updated and are included in the adopted Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan. Should this go ahead it would greatly benefit the Conservation Area, particularly Traill Street which suffers significantly from being a busy traffic route.

7.4 PLANNING POLICIES

One of the greatest threats to any conservation area can be the accumulative effect of small, incremental changes which together have a significant negative impact on its authenticity and character and appearance. This can include for example, changes to traditional window designs, removing chimneys or skew copes during roofing works, and loss of original timber doors. As well as smaller alterations like box dormers or even fitting satellite dishes and pipework without consideration of the historic building and its environment.

7.4.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

This threat chiefly relates to the management of 'change' to historic buildings and their immediate setting. This change is regulated by statute, guided by both national and local historic environment policy, and managed by the local planning authority through the Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent processes (with Historic Environment Scotland as a statutory consultee in relevant cases).

7.4.2 Conservation Area Designation and Permitted Development Rights

A lack of statutory protection over much of the Conservation Area until it was reviewed and re-designated in 1987, and continuation of Householder Permitted Development Rights until a subsequent Article 4 Direction in 2002 (Section 4.1.2), are thought to have played a part in the presence of inappropriate repairs and alterations to domestic properties. This meant that unless a building was non-domestic, or listed, the owner did not require to apply for Planning Permission for certain types of small changes in its appearance.

7.4.3 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2011 (effective from Feb. 2012)

This order has subsequently removed householder permitted development rights in a conservation area, requiring owners for any such works to apply for Planning Permission. This new legislation provides the opportunity for the planning authority to guide change and achieve steady positive enhancement.

7.4.4 Highland Historic Environment Strategy (HHES, 2013)

This is a material consideration when proposals for development are being considered – this document should be referred to in consideration to any change proposed within the Conservation Area. In relation to loss of authenticity, there are specific strategic aims on the use of traditional materials and skills.

7.4.5 New Development

- All proposals for new development (including garages and ancillary buildings etc.) will demonstrate the use of high quality (including, where appropriate contemporary) design, materials and finishes and include detail of landscaping and boundary treatments. All proposals will take particular account of local context, views, townscape, setting, scale, massing, materials and detail;

- All new development proposals will adhere to the existing street pattern and present strong and coherent frontages where the development faces onto the street;
- All new development proposals will be supported by a detailed design statement that clearly demonstrates how the proposal will either preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

7.4.6 Existing Development

- The Council will support the retention of historic features, fabric and detailing and the sensitive repair and maintenance of all buildings and built features;
- Where traditional finishes and features have been replaced with modern, inappropriate and/or unsympathetic alternatives, the Council will insist upon the reinstatement of traditional finishes and features;
- Where traditional finishes and features are proven to be beyond viable repair, the Council will support their replacement on a like-for-like basis. Non-traditional replacements, alternatives, materials and finishes will not be supported;
- The Council will support the sensitive alteration and extension of listed buildings, where there is justification to do so and where this will not harm their special interest, and of unlisted buildings where the proposals preserve and enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area;
- The Council will support the use of micro-renewables (e.g., photovoltaic panels, ground and air heat pumps, biomass and wind turbines) where these do not adversely affect the character of the Conservation Area;
- Boundary treatments will respect the historical character of the area.

7.4.7 Demolition

- The Council is committed to the sustainable use and management of the historic environment, as outlined in the Highland Historic Environment Strategy. This means meeting the needs of today without compromising the opportunity for future generations to understand, appreciate and benefit from the historic environment;
- Listed building consent is always required for the demolition of a listed building and conservation area consent is required for the demolition of an unlisted building in a conservation area. Consent is also required for structures and other elements such as gates and enclosures. Partial demolition also requires consent;
- In the context of listed buildings this involves recognising the advantages to be gained from retaining existing buildings and ensuring that their special interest is protected. Consent for demolition of a listed building is therefore only granted in exceptional circumstances. Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have made all reasonable efforts to retain the building;
- An application for demolition consent will need to be adequately justified and considered, with equal consideration to detailed plans of existing and replacement buildings if any are being proposed;
- Proposals to demolish and replace buildings on the fringes of the Conservation Area will also need to be carefully and adequately justified and considered. Future designs will need to reflect, relate and respond to the Conservation Area.

7.4.8 Spaces and Trees

- There is a presumption against the loss of all existing open space, whether public or private, which contributes positively to the Conservation Area;
- There is a presumption against the felling of trees that contribute positively to the historic character of the area and have a reasonable life expectancy unless they are likely to cause major structural damage. Where the Council has been notified of the intention to fell a tree, and silvicultural justification is not provided or is not considered sufficiently robust, the Council may consider imposing a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) in order to secure the long-term protection of the tree;
- Where tree removal has taken place, the Council will strongly support replacement planting to maintain tree cover within the Conservation Area.

7.4.9 Public Realm

- The Council will support appropriate advertising in line with the general principles set out in this document. Inappropriately sited and/or designed advertising will not be supported;
- The Council will support the maintenance and promotion of footpaths, access and interpretation in and around the Conservation Area.

7.4.10 General

- The Council will ensure permitted works have been executed properly and that any unauthorised works are investigated and dealt with appropriately. Regular surveys of the Conservation Area will be undertaken to monitor the conditions of the area, note unauthorised works, and provide evidence for enforcement action;
- It should be noted that the Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) includes information on undesignated historic environment assets, including unlisted buildings of local/regional importance, with information added on a case-by-case basis. Assets recorded in the HER are addressed in accordance with Policy 57 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

7.4.11 Local Authority Advice

THC's planning team can provide advice on traditional repairs, as can Historic Environment Scotland Technical Research team. In addition, it is important to ensure that communications from all Council departments (e.g., planning, building standards, housing, environmental health) follow best practice for repair and small alterations to traditional buildings in Thurso Conservation Area, so that a consistent message or appropriate referrals are made. This should include sharing the findings of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan with relevant departments.

8.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW | SGRÙDADH AGUS SGRÙDADH

This document should be reviewed periodically by The Highland Council and it will be assessed with reference to current Council policy for the historic environment, local development plans, and government policy and guidance on the historic environment. A review should include the following:

- A survey of the Conservation Area, including a photographic survey to aid possible enforcement action;
- An assessment of whether the recommendations detailed in both the appraisal and the management plan have been acted upon, and how successful they have been, particularly in relation to the conservation issues identified:
 1. Quality of traditional repairs and necessary replacement.
 2. Maintenance and condition of the Conservation Area.
 3. Buildings at Risk, disused buildings and gap sites.
 4. Quality of new developments and building alterations.
 5. Quality and condition of the public realm.
 6. Management of setting, open and green spaces.
 7. Protection of the heritage.

The identification of any new issues which need to be addressed, requiring further protection or enhancements.

It is recommended that the review is carried out in consultation with the local community.

9.0 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION | 8.0 FIOSRACHADH A BHARRACHD

The following offer further information on the topics covered in this appraisal:

APPROPRIATE REPAIR AND MANAGING SMALL CHANGES

Legislation

Town and Country Planning Act (Scotland) 1997

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2011

THC Development Guidance

Caithness and Sutherland Action Plan

Highland Historic Environment Strategy

Historic Windows & Doors

Shopfront Design Guide

Historic Environment Scotland Managing Change Guidance Notes

Boundaries

Doorways

External Fixtures

External Walls

Micro-renewables

Roofs

Shopfronts and Signs

Windows

Historic Environment Scotland INFORM Guides (individual subjects)

Historic Environment Scotland Short Guide series

Short Guide 1: Fabric Improvements for Energy Efficiency

Short Guide 11: Climate Change Adaptation for Traditional Buildings

PROACTIVE REPAIR & PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

Legislation

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006

Building (Scotland) Act 2003

The Highland Council Advice

Scheme of Assistance

Care & Repair Service

Historic Environment Scotland

Maintaining your home: A short guide for homeowners

INFORM Guides (individual subjects)

Other Advice

SPAB website

Under One Roof website

Traditional Buildings Health Check website

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Legislation

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997

Building (Scotland) Act 2003

Guidance

The Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland website and Toolkit online

Historic Environment Scotland *Managing Change Use & Adaptation of Listed Buildings*

Historic Environment Scotland *Managing Change Demolition of Listed Buildings (2019)*

Historic Environment Scotland *Managing Change Demolition (2010) – superseded – there is interim guidance for CAs that covers demolition of unlisted buildings in CAs*

Historic Environment Scotland: *Technical conservation advice is available via www.engineshed.org*

Architectural Heritage Fund website: Viability Grants

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Policy

Local Development Plan

Conservation Plans

BS7913:2013 *Guide to the conservation of historic buildings.*

The Conservation Plan (2013) James Semple Kerr

Historic Environment Scotland, *Conservation Plans*

National Lottery Heritage Fund: <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/conservation-planning-guidance>

Advice

Architectural Heritage Fund

Heritage Network

QUALITY OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

THC Supplementary Guidance

Historic Windows and Doors

Shopfront Design Guide

Scottish Government policy and advice

Planning Advice Note PAN 68 Design Statements

Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland

Creating Places: A Policy Statement on Architecture and Place for Scotland

Historic Environment Scotland

New Design in Historic Settings (2010)

Managing Change in the Historic Environment - *Boundaries*

Managing Change in the Historic Environment - *Setting*

Managing Change in the Historic Environment - *Extensions*

Managing Change in the Historic Environment - *Demolition*

Historic Photographs

Am Baile

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM

The Highland Council

Thurso Active Travel Masterplan

Scottish Government

Planning Advice Note 65: Planning and Open Space

Planning Advice Note PAN 71: Conservation Area Management

Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland

Creating Places: A Policy Statement on Architecture and Place for Scotland

Historic Environment Scotland

New Design in Historic Settings

GREEN SPACE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Scottish Government

Planning Advice Note PAN 71: Conservation Area Management

The Highland Council

Trees Woodlands and Development, Supplementary Guidance

Highland Council Biodiversity Strategy

NatureScot Pollinator Strategy

MISC

The Coming of the Railway:

<https://www.caithness.org/history/articles/earlyroyalvisittothurso.htm>

British Geological Society: <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/>

APPENDIX 1 DESIGNATED FEATURES: LISTED BUILDINGS

2, 4 Barrock Street (Category C, Category B grouping)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15104>

6, 8 Barrock Street, Piers and Garden walls (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15162>

10 Barrock Street (Category C)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15206>

12 Barrock Street and Garden Walls, (Category C)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15242>

18 Barrock Street (Category C)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15287>

11 Brabster Street (Category C)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15315>

1 Campbell Street (Category C, Category B Grouping with Campbell Street and 16 Orlig Street)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15328>

7 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15346>

9 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15113>

11 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15118>

13 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15123>

15 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15131>

17 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15137>

19 Campbell Street (Category B)
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15145>

2 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15149>

4 and 6 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG36412>

8 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15156>

10, 12 Campbell Street (Category C, Category B grouping)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15159>

14, 16, 18 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15169>

20 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15173>

26 Campbell Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15175>

Davidson's Lane, Thurso Library and Art Gallery (Miller Institution) (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1478>

High Street, North Coast Visitor Centre (former Town Hall) (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15203>

1 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1479>

2 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15222>

3 Janet Street House and Stables/Gighthouse (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15224>

4 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15226>

6 Janet Street, The Thurso Club (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15228>

7 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15230>

8 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15233>

9 and 10 Janet Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15239>

Mason's Lane, The Meadow Well house (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1789>

Olrig Street, Bank of Scotland (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15261>

Olrig Street, Former St. Andrew's Church (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15263>

16 Olrig Street (Category C, Category B Grouping with Campbell Street)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15268>

Princes Street, St Peter's Parish Church (church of Scotland), Church Room, Enclosure Railings and Gate Piers(Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG13626>

2 Princes Street and Court Yard Wall (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG36427>

4 Princes Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15273>

6 Princes Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15276>

8,10 Princes Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG41191>

12 Princes Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15282>

14 Princes Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15284>

30 Princes Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG36433>

9 Rose Street ('Ardlourie') and 11 Rose Street ('Bothangarrow') (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15305>

21, 23, 25 Rose Street (right to left) (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15307>

Sinclair Street, Thurso West Church (church of Scotland) Church Room and Gate Piers (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15311>

Former Drill Hall, 21 Sinclair Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG36765>

24 Sinclair Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1443>

Sir George's Street, Episcopal Church of St. Peter and the Holy Rood (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1459>

Sir John's Square, Sir George Sinclair Memorial Fountain (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1458>

Sir John's Square, War Memorial, 1914-18 and 1939-45 (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1456>

Sir John's Square, Sir John Sinclair Memorial (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG1457>

1, 3, 5, 7, 9 Traill Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15323>

11 Traill Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG41162>

13 Traill Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15325>

15 and 17 Traill Street, former Clydesdale Bank (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15326>

19, 21, 23 Traill Street (Category C)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15338>

25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35 Traill Street (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15339>

37 Traill Street (Category C)

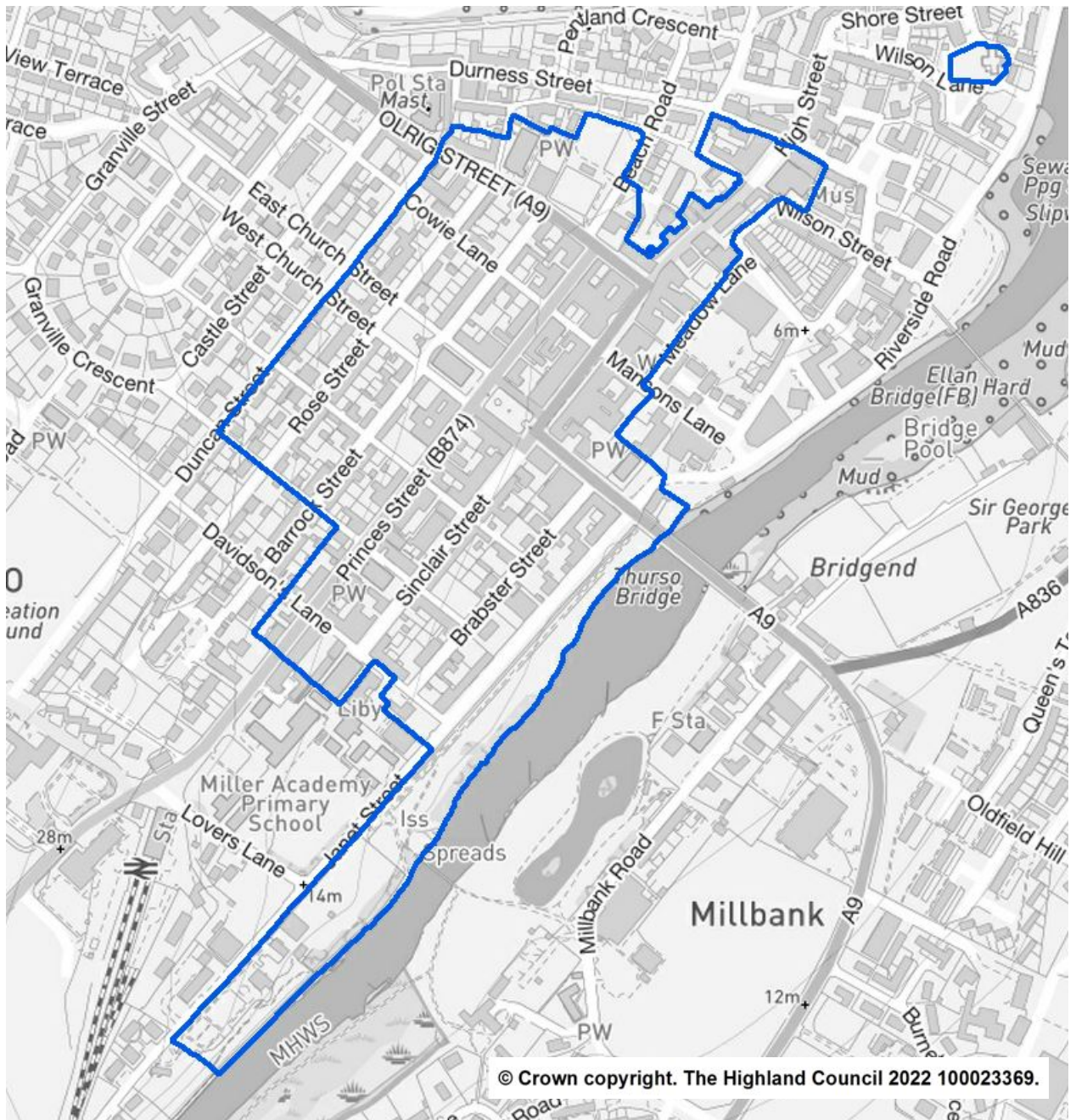
Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG15340>

K6 Telephone Kiosk at Town Hall (Category B)

Web Link: <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG36446>

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Post Public Consultation Proposed Boundary; Thurso Conservation Area