

The Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Areas Advisory Group (CAAG)

Summary.

The Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Area Advisory Group (CAAG) is a Forum that comprises a number of organisations and representatives from the local community, from elected Members and from the local planning authority. The Forum meets monthly and has specific interest in the protection and enhancement of the three Conservation Areas at the mouth of the River Tweed namely Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.

The Group's role is advisory; it has no statutory powers but has evolved as a credible Forum of local representatives. The CAAG provides:

- Advice on new policy emerging from central government and integration of conservation into the Local Development Framework;
- Advice in relation to the adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Strategies
- Offers support for funding schemes and heritage led regeneration bids
- Provides advice on significant proposals for development in the Conservation Areas
- Provides advice on significant public realm schemes
- Produces and promotes Design Guidance
- Contributes to 'Heritage at Risk' Surveys
- Hosts an annual seminar 'Heritage Day' that promotes conservation and related issues.

Introduction and Background to the CAAG

The Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Advisory Group was originally created in 1999 as a partnership forum with the former Berwick Borough Council. It superseded the 'Berwick Conservation Partnership', whose principal remit was to oversee the Berwick-upon-Tweed and Holy Island of Lindisfarne Conservation Area Partnership Schemes.

The CAAG was primarily concerned with the following:

- Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes.
- Site specific and partnership projects in Conservation Areas.
- Conservation policy and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- Identifying the need for the designation of new Conservation Areas.
- Examining site specific proposals.

Over a 16 year period the CAAG has responded to significant shifts in emphases and changing local, regional and national priorities for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. The Group has contributed to:

- The conclusion of the HERS funding programme.
- The overall management of Berwick Borough's Conservation Areas.
- Resourcing and securing further enhancement and partnership work.
- The production and adoption of Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Strategies for the Berwick-upon-Tweed, Spittal and Tweedmouth Conservation Areas.
- The Local Development Framework and sister plans and strategies.
- The development management process.
- A methodology and protocol for responding to development schemes.
- The submission of further external funding bids.

The Group reviewed its structure and remit in 2009 when the former borough and district councils became part of a single Unitary authority for Northumberland. (NCC) The CAAG wanted to ensure it would continue to work efficiently with NCC in a partnership that responded to changes in policy; as well as contribute to a number of regional and local strategies; provide credible comments on planning applications; support submissions for new heritage based funding bids and successful delivery of grant aided projects.

The Group concluded in 2009 that the geographic remit of CAAG would be confined to three Conservation Areas; Berwick-upon-Tweed, Spittal and Tweedmouth. It extended membership to incorporate organisations and groups that had a geographic or thematic interest in these distinctive places.

Since 2009 meetings have consistently been held monthly. CAAG comments, initially through the nominated HELM (Heritage Environment Local Management) and more latterly through the seconded Conservation Project Officer (time limited); the Group has contributed to the development management process. The Group has devised its own checklist and protocol for assessing the design of new development and commented on national and regional consultations concerning the heritage protection reform and changes to the listing process. Significantly, the CAAG has contributed to three major pieces of interrelated work that encompass the three conservation areas:

- The formulation and adoption of detailed Character Appraisals and Management Strategies for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal.
- Berwick's Future Master Plan and Regeneration Strategy.
- The submission and delivery of 2 Area Partnership Schemes and Townscape Heritage Initiative (combined: Berwick Historic Area Improvement Scheme).

Undertaken as part of wider collaborative working with the new Northumberland County Council (effective from the 1st April 2009), community stakeholders and regional partners, the Berwick-upon-Tweed CAAG has been called an exemplar in the region*.

***Valuing Places: Good Practice in Conservation Areas:** English Heritage national publication (2010) uses Berwick CAAG as a case study; as an exemplar partnership forum.

Since 2009, the CAAG has been part of a sustained heritage led regeneration initiative; securing external funding bids; Delivery Plans and approved partnership working for the effective implementation of 2 Area Partnership Schemes and Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). Providing forum support to the Project Conservation Officer (secured for the lifetime of the programme); enabling local community input and providing an additional level of scrutiny, the 2.8 million pound grant programme has been successfully delivered across a 5 year period.

A number of complementary community based projects have also commenced through the combined Berwick Historic Area Improvement Scheme (BHAIS) that includes the Changemaker project, Film/Poetry and

Archive recording, Local Listing Project and production of Design Guides. However, the externally funded 2 Area Partnership Schemes conclude in March 2015. Two outstanding THI critical projects were also concluded in 2016 and a number of complementary initiatives will be completed or 'handed over' as an ongoing legacy to partners (e.g. Berwick Middle School; Changemaker project, and an Archive project as part of Berwick Record Office).

Whilst the overall CAAG Membership has worked consistently and effectively following local government re-organisation in 2009, each group or association has experienced a number of significant changes within their own organisation at a time of austerity and change.

This updated report (February 2017) reflects on the work achieved through the CAAG forum since 2009; assess the changes in local government, partner organisations and community and **reaffirms CAAG's commitment and overall remit.** It also confirms its membership, structure and protocols that will enable the Group to work effectively and efficiently in a partnership that will assist in the long term protection and enhancement of the three conservation areas.

1. The Membership of CAAG

1.1 CAAG comprises representatives from the following authorities, organisations and groups:

Northumberland County Council

Ward Members

Conservation Officer

Other Groups/ Organisations.

Historic England

Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society

Castlegate Area Residents' Association

European Walled Towns

Spittal Improvement Trust

St Boisil's Residents' Association (Tweedmouth)

West End Resident's Association (Tweedmouth)
The Greenses
Berwick-upon-Tweed Community Trust
Berwick-upon-Tweed Chamber of Trade and Commerce
Town Council whose representative may also be their HELM champion
CAAG nominated HELM champion
Bridge Street Traders
Friends of Berwick and District Museum and Archives – FBDMA
The Freemen of Berwick –upon –Tweed
The Preservation Trust.

2.2 The role and input of English Heritage, now Historic England (HE), to the Berwick-upon-Tweed CAAG has been reaffirmed. As a funder to the now completed Area Partnership Schemes, a partner organisation and supporter of the CAAG forum, will continue to receive minutes and information pertaining to the Group.

3. Functions and Relationships

3.1 The functions of CAAG can be summarised as follows as it relates to Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal conservation areas:

- The provision of advice on new policy emerging from central government, (particularly conservation policies), and advocacy for the integration of conservation into the policies and strategies of other relevant organisations;
- The provision of advice and comments on the Local Development Framework, Core Strategy, Supplementary Planning Documents, Area Action Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and development briefs in and near to the three conservation areas;
- The provision of advice in relation to the adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Strategies;
- The production and promotion of detailed conservation area guidance (principally from the Character Appraisals) e.g. leaflets on 'windows and doors'; roofs and chimneys etc.,

- The provision of advice on the sourcing, distribution and scrutiny of funding schemes; including the potential for new heritage led regeneration bids;
- The identification and provision of advice on public realm schemes;
- The provision of advice on significant proposals for development in and near to the three Conservation Areas through an agreed methodology and protocol;
- The review of Conservation Area boundaries or heritage designations;
- Contribution to the annual 'Heritage at Risk' conservation area surveys for Tweedmouth, Berwick and Spittal.
- Continually source and partake in training opportunities (e.g. through the HELM conference programme, The NECT, EWT or EH).
- Administer Berwick's membership of European Walled Towns
- The hosting, organisation and contribution to an annual seminar 'Heritage Day'.

3.2 The group's role is advisory; it has no statutory powers and is not accountable to the local community. Where the CAAG offers advice on proposals for development, the weight attached to its observations or comments in the statutory planning process will be less than that given to a statutory consultee, e.g. English Heritage or The Georgian Group.

3.3 Nevertheless the experience and knowledge held within the group should be acknowledged as a valuable resource and members should therefore offer considered and objective advice on behalf of the organisation which they represent, and in accordance with its policies and objectives*.

3.4 The nature of the development process means the planning authority will be the focus of pre and post planning application discussions. The CAAG therefore;

- Requests the referral of major development proposals to the CAAG;
- Reports a consensus opinion via the Conservation Project Officer to the North Area Development Management Team and other relevant authorities and organisations;

- Receives appropriate training and shared learning as part of the consultation process.
- Promotes a HELM champion to attend training and conferences to assist with the formulation of CAAG advice and comment.

4. Working Arrangements

Northumberland County Council provides administrative and secretarial support. The group is currently chaired by a member selected from one of one of the amenity groups and a vice chair who is also selected from one of the amenity groups. The Conservation Officer provides advice to the group in connection with conservation related matters and development management proposal

4.2 Any funds the group holds shall be kept in a bank account which will be in the name the Conservation Area Advisory Group Berwick – upon Tweed.

- There will be four signatories to the bank account and all cheques must be signed by no less than two of the signatories.
- All accounts shall be kept by the Honorary Treasurer who will provide a verbal statement of the financial position at each meeting and half yearly written statements to the group or more frequently at his/her discretion.
- All expenditure above £100 must be authorised by the signatories or the whole group whichever is more practical at the time.
- Once a year, before the end of the financial year, the accounts will be scrutinised and presented to the group.
- Upon the dissolution of CAAG any assets which remain after all liabilities have been met shall be used for charitable purposes within the three Conservation Areas in Berwick upon Tweed.

4.3 The agreed checklist and protocol for receiving architect's presentations to CAAG is used and promoted when assessing schemes (appended to this report).

4.4 Meetings are held monthly. The Berwick Community Trust has agreed to host meetings at their offices for the foreseeable future but subject to annual

renewal, and the practice of inviting relevant speakers or guests as part of future consultation events or fact finding activities will continue.

4.5 The opportunity to visit sites within the three conservation areas should be taken whenever possible, particularly as meetings are held in Berwick where focus and attention has previously been given to the implementation of various developments and BHAIS grant programme.

5. Summary of what is expected of each organisation on the CAAG Forum.

- Each partner organisation or group may nominate **one** representative who is able to attend and contribute to meetings on a monthly basis.
- On the occasion when the regular representative is unable to attend an informed substitute may attend in his/her place.
- Each representative should be mandated to represent the policies, objectives and views of their organisation (e.g. not convey an individual or personal opinion, but a view 'on behalf of' the group, society or organisation they are there to represent).
- Each representative is responsible for 'reporting back' to their organisation or group; to cascade CAAG information, Group decisions, consensus views and minuted discussions. (Agendas and minutes are an aide to this two way process but often an individual association or group is the volunteered 'lead' on a particular project *on behalf* of CAAG. The ongoing commitment and agreed task needs to be ratified by the policies and procedures of the lead organisation that is there to represent themselves as well as the CAAG 'umbrella forum').

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