

The Minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Area Advisory Group Meeting on 30th March 2017.

In attendance:

Annette Reeves	NCC Conservation Officer
Margaret Shaw	CARA, EWT
John Robertson	CAAG HELM
Judy Nicholson	Bridge St Traders
Bob Steward	Museum and Archives
Ian Hay	The Greenses'
Margaret Thomas	St Boisil's Residents Association
Dorothy Slater	Spittal Improvement Trust
Catherine Kent	Civic Society
David Blackburn	Berwick Town Council
Julie Kennedy	Community Trust

1. **Apologies:** Cllr Gavin Jones. Julien Lake (CT) could no longer attend due to work load pressures and Julie Kennedy (CT Project Manager) would be representing the CT on a permanent basis. Julie was welcomed to the meeting.
2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 26th January and matters arising**

AR reminded the Group that the February meeting had been dedicated to the speaker on European Walled Towns. Notes of this meeting had been circulated separately and would be discussed under item 3.

The January minutes had been sent out some time ago. There was one correction – discussions had been held with Pier Road residents (not Pier Road Maltings) under AOB.

With this correction the minutes were considered to be a true record.

Matters arising:

Lighting Strategy; there remained confusion over exactly what was intended to be replaced and when, as well as who had been consulted on the countywide strategy. Whilst everyone was aware of the need to reduce light pollution and understood the move to LED's, it was not clear what was being proposed in relation to historic lamps and fittings or locally distinctive/designed lighting. The consultation process appeared to involve Town Councils in relation to a request for funding for 'heritage lighting'.

The CAAG had made representations via Cllr Jones (CAAG minutes/actions in 2016) requesting the retention of particularly the Berwick Lantern; a modern and distinctive design (and any traditional columns or light fittings that presently existed in the Conservation Area). Cllr Jones/CAAG had received no reply. There was growing concern because it had been advised previously that Berwick was scheduled for re-fitting in February 2017 and it was not clear what lighting was being 'upgraded', removed or replaced entirely (and with what?).

NCC's Conservation Team (that included AR) had not been consulted on the Lighting Strategy and could not advise further. However, the Conservation Team and Enforcement Team were receiving a growing number of direct complaints from other Conservation Areas in the county (e.g. Hexham and Alnwick) with similar concerns about the lack of resident input and potential loss of older, traditional street lights. This was not confined to Berwick.

AR explained that unless physically attached to a listed building, the replacement of any light fitting or lamp column did not contravene any planning or conservation legislation. There were no breaches and no statutory consents required.

However, through local policies and guidance (like Berwick's Public Realm Strategy, Tweed and Silk); Building Conservation Officers supported the retention of such features that were locally distinctive and part of the character, appearance and setting of the particular conservation area.

It was not mandatory however to retain such items and Conservation has no legal remit to control the lighting programme. Guidance (as set out in the Character Appraisals and public realm strategies) can only be achieved through consultation, negotiation and cooperation between all those involved with managing Conservation Areas.

The Conservation Team had offered to assist NCC colleagues in identifying key streets or significant light fittings in an effort to reach a compromise and agreeable way forward.

The CAAG discussed the issue but considered if County Council elected Members and in-house Conservation Officers were unable to convey the very real conservation concerns of the CAAG forum, then should the CAAG go public with its concerns?

The CAAG agreed the Chair should write a letter to the local press expressing concern over the potential loss of such distinctive features. Once gone, they would never be replaced.

3. European Walled Towns (including post presentation feedback).

Positive feedback had been received from the presentation. It had been a 'thought provoking' session. The direct networking with EWTs closest to us would be of benefit. The fuller notes had been circulated on what was captured on the day.

Heritage Day(s) – is there value in having a UK chapter? This could be the focus of discussion – was there enough for a day and half conference? It was considered useful to also look at finance – the economic benefits of being a member of a EWT. We had heard how Chester had benefitted (a few years ago now) as well as Derry (through MS and AR who had attended difference conferences on EWT and Heritage led regeneration).

Why be part of a UK EWT initiative? Exploring the economic benefits would be a good angle if we could get speakers and examples of regeneration in practice.

4. CAAG Annual Conference.

The CAAG are supportive of a UK EWT being progressed as a conference topic.

The dates to aim for would be 18th and 19th October (or the week before). It was suggested that a sub group be formed to progress the conference, as well as report back to the group on a monthly basis.

The sub-group nominated is Chair (MS), Vice Chair/HELM (JR), Secretary (AR) and Community Trust (JK). JK worked on Chester's regeneration programme and will be an asset to the group. Meeting to be arranged.

5. CAAG website.

BerwickCAAG.org.uk has been purchased. This will be £30 per year. Can possibly get help with a set up grant from Berwick Community Trust – ABC development grant. JK to send to MS to apply.

Joanne Douglas/Laura can assist with setting up. CAAG need to send everything to the Trust to upload/format.

6. Treasurers Report.

MM had reported there was £910.87 in the CAAG account. No expenditure expected, but the group will need to consider how it could boost funds for this year's 2 day conference.

7. HELM.

JR had attended the HELM Conservation Area Management course. It covered topics like 'why manage' as well as convey the tools needed for effective management of historic places. Need to link to the HELM website and HE website for conference papers and topics.

HARs featured a lot (Historic Areas at Risk) and JR considered the CAAG could assist with future surveys or even as part of a future conference?

Cllr DB considered this could be a wider public consultation that everyone could comment on.

AR advised the questionnaire and indices that needed to be completed annually were set by Historic England. AR currently completes the surveys and is familiar with the terminology and references to the legislation and guidance. The HELM or CAAG would be able to assist (with some additional training), but this was very much a national monitoring document used for every Conservation Area in the country and not an inventory of 'nuisance' for local people to input to.

JR asked when the survey was due. AR advised all had to be completed and uploaded at the end of May. It was not possible therefore, to support the CAAG this year, but perhaps this could be a training initiative for next year in consultation with the CAAG's HELM? Agreed.

8. Planning Applications.

DB advised the Town Council had received notification of a pre-app enquiry for Blackburn and Price site. AR (as Conservation Officer) had also been consulted. The application sought changes to the Oil Mill Lane elevation. The CAAG is familiar with the history and background, various amendments and iterations and would be consulted if an application is subsequently submitted.

Stone Quay and Fairbains were also raised as sites that were being looked at for residential? AR was not aware of any pre-app or formal planning application submissions on these sites, but would ensure the CAAG are consulted should any applications be submitted.

9. Any other business.

JN – BST have been informed about the closure of the Old Bridge. BST are monitoring footfall and impact. Martin Podevyn (NCC Highways) is looking to survey Bridge Street as part of the second round of surveys/consultation.

JR – advised that in West Street (following the closure of the road to repair the Cowe Buildings for 18 months) footfall was down 30%; Bijou sales were also down 17% but this was hopefully a short term impact, as the Cowe buildings needed to be brought back into use.

AR – advised the Cowe Buildings ‘critical projects’ within the Berwick Townscape Heritage Initiative were completed on the 31st March. This included ‘holding repairs’ to the Green buildings to make wind and watertight and full restoration and ‘bringing vacant floor-space back into use’ for the Blue buildings. This fulfilled the terms of the HLF grant, listed building consents, planning permissions and building regulation approvals.

This concluded the Berwick Historic Area Improvement Schemes in Bridge Street. The HLF were visiting in April to coincide with Cameron Robertson’s exhibition (as THI archivist for this project) and would show before, during and after works, as well as a lot of the trade history and making of the Berwick cockle sweetie. The exhibition would run from Easter Monday (17th April) until 23rd April.

10. Date of Next Meeting

27th April 2017.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Area Advisory Group

9.15 a.m. Thursday 27th April 2017

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 30th March and matters arising.
3. European Walled Towns
4. CAAG Annual Conference
5. CAAG website
6. HELM
7. Treasurers Report
8. Current Planning Applications
9. Any other business
10. Date of next meeting

25th May 2017.