

## **The Minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Area Advisory Group Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2009.**

### **In attendance:**

<b>Margaret Shaw</b>	Castlegate Area Resident's Association
<b>Margaret Thomas</b>	St Bartholemew and St Boisil's Residents' Assoc
<b>John Robertson</b>	West End Resident's Association
<b>Annette Reeves</b>	NCC Conservation Officer (North)
<b>Philip Miller</b>	Berwick Community Development Trust
<b>Alison Cowe</b>	Berwick Civic Society
<b>Peter Watts</b>	The Greenses Residents' Association
<b>Tim Kirton</b>	Regeneration Team (North)
<b>Chris Burgess</b>	NCC Conservation Team Manager (North) Chair
<b>Mike Greener</b>	Spittal Improvement Trust

### **1. Apologies:**

Tony Houghton, Cllr Jim Smith.

### **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> August and matters arising.**

The minutes were agreed with the following corrections;

iii) MT raised Blackburn and Price on behalf of the Civic Society.

iv) Berwick in Bloom award was for Tweedmouth, Spittal and Berwick.

### **3. Regeneration Strategy – Protecting and enhancing the heritage asset (update on THI and Area Partnership Scheme bids).**

Match funding still an issue. No progress with the formal appointment of the project officer and delivery of the schemes. CAAG concern and offer of support noted.

AR/CB to continue to pursue funding issue through the partnership.

### **4. Heritage Protection Reform – A new planning policy statement for the historic environment (PPS15 & PPS16).**

#### **Feedback from the subgroup – AC/TH/PM.**

In the absence of AC and TH; AR/CB outlined the proposed changes of the new PPS guidance and consultation discussions to date. PM also conveyed his approach (set out in a paper) that viewed the replacement guidance from an “owner” “architect” and “development trust” perspective. There was a general CAAG discussion but it was acknowledged that the replacement PPS15/16 relied on the new Heritage Protection bill being

passed. This had not happened to date and unlikely in the near future with the additional prospect of a change in government. The replacement PPS 15/16 relied on the designations/language of the new bill e.g. “heritage assets” and “significant heritage assets” that would combine/replace the current designations (listed buildings/scheduled monuments/archaeological areas/conservation areas/world heritage sites etc.,). The various professional bodies/institutes had all expressed concern at the potential confusion; possible legal challenges and apparent weakening of the guidance in certain areas.

If CAAG wishes to comment as part of the consultation then AC to circulate her notes/paper and submit prior to deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> October.

**5. Design Guides in Conservation Area (AC to introduce topic for discussion).**

AC presented a paper (also circulated at the meeting) on Design Guides. This looked at the advantages of having a design guide; who would benefit; what a design guide might contain; potential drawbacks; who produces them and why Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal (using Spittal Point as a topical case study) should have design guides.

PM put an opposing view; design is stifled by design guidance which often takes the design down to “the acceptable; the safe and the pleasing”. Design guidance can stop innovation and prevent good modern design. It also relies on the confidence and understanding of the professionals administering the guidance. PM would rather there were more trained people assessing schemes – a person versus a book.

CAAG had a general discussion and agreed that guidance *should* be about “raising the bar”. PW concluded that design guidance would be good for stopping the “bad design” and indifferent quality schemes (which are more frequent) but it shouldn’t stop the “innovative and the brave”.

CB suggested we all think about Alison’s paper and CAAG discussion and review this at the next meeting – do we want a Design Guide for Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal?

**6. Current Planning Applications.**

- i) **Conclusion on the Spittal Point Application, finalisation of CAAG comments.**
- ii) **Royal Border Bridge (lighting project) – short presentation from Tim Kirton.**

- i) AR presented the additional photomontage prepared by Page Park architects. AR conveyed P&P concerns regarding the quality of this latest image. They had not been able to put in detail/shadow and texture and so apologised that it appeared very flat.

CAAG's previous comments had been conveyed and were still pertinent in relation to the overall scheme. However, the two issues of concern regarding the height/scale of buildings around the point and the treatment of the chimney were discussed in relation to this additional illustrative material.

CAAG considered they had justifiable concerns regarding the height and scale of buildings at the point. The "stepping up" to 4 storey buildings was considered too high and dominant in this part of the conservation area.

CAAG objected to the sheathing of the chimney but considered there should remain a strong vertical statement within this part of Spittal.

**AR** to convey these concerns and additional comments to Development Management as part of the consultation process.

- ii) TK gave a powerpoint presentation on the Royal Border Bridge lighting project. Whilst listed building consent was being sought for the impact on historic building fabric; CAAG were asked to comment on the proposal as it may impact upon the setting of all three conservation areas.

Questions/comments centred on how the lighting schemes on both bridges would look when viewed together. Would there be a coordination of colour and theme? Potential vandalism a concern as was the presence of bats. TK/AR able to confirm that consultations had been carried out with other statutory bodies and there were no objections from Natural England or English Heritage.

There had however, been no mock up depicting both bridges; but it was acknowledged that lighting was being used for different purposes; the RBB was more 'art focused' to celebrate the significant span of arches with a sophisticated lighting programme; the RTB was concerned with highway safety and street lighting although County highways had expressed an interest in the technology being use on the RBB and had conveyed that the RTB would be brought up to full lighting capacity.

CAAG were supportive of the lighting project and considered that it would enhance the character of this landmark listing building and setting of the three conservation areas.

## **7. Any Other Business.**

- i) Conservation Areas at Risk – AR reported on a recent meeting with EH and NCC conservation team regarding the response/reaction to the Conservation Areas at Risk publication. EH also concerned about the way it had been reported in the media. Regional teams had not been involved in the data collection and interpretation of stats. The initiative was being driven centrally but regions had fed back comments and lessons had been learned. However, conservation areas at risk were here to stay. Local authorities could use the data collected in a variety of ways; in spite of the problems EH considered it had been a useful exercise. There would be a 2010 update but it was not clear how a conservation area could be removed from the list once on it. EH also about to embark on a similar survey of ecclesiastical buildings to determine how many were “at risk”.
- ii) University presence in Berwick – PW informed CAAG that a bid for funding had been unsuccessful – no bids had been successful so this was not a reflection on Berwick. There had been a subsequent meeting to discuss a more immediate initiative for an improved offer in FE and FHE and for smaller amounts of funding that would possibly look to use an existing building. This could have implications for a site within the conservation area as buildings such as St Aiden’s House; Quick Save and the Barracks were possible considerations.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting.**

**10<sup>th</sup> November 2009.**

**9.00 a.m.** (please note earlier time) - venue to be confirmed but likely to be the Officer’s Mess in the Barracks.