

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

Summary.

The Berwick-upon-Tweed Conservation Area Advisory Group (CAAG) is a Forum that comprises organisations and representatives from the local community, from elected Members and from the local planning authority. The Forum meets monthly and has an interest in the protection and enhancement of the three Conservation Areas at the mouth of the River Tweed namely Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal and specifically the existing properties within these areas and any proposed new development

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

The CAAG provides:

- Assistance in the construction of the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly with reference to the Built Environment.
- Advice in relation to the adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Strategies.
- Support for funding schemes and heritage led regeneration bids.
- Advice on significant proposals for development in the Conservation Areas
- Advice on significant public realm schemes
- Design Guidance through producing and promotion of leaflets
- A contribution to the Heritage at Risk surveys
- The opportunity to hosts seminars/symposiums that promote 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 It superseded the 'Berwick Conservation Partnership', whose principal remit was to oversee the Berwick-upon-Tweed and Holy Island of Lindisfarne Conservation Area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 has contributed to the following:

- To the successful implementation and conclusion of the Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes.
- The production and adoption of Conservation policy and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- The overall management of the town's conservation areas and identifying the need for the designation of new Conservation Areas
- Site specific and partnership projects in Conservation Areas.
- Examining site specific proposals.

Over a 22 year period the CAAG has responded to significant shifts in emphases and the changing local, regional and national priorities for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. More recently the Group has contributed to:

- The Neighbourhood Plan with specific reference to the Built Environment
- A methodology and protocol for responding to development schemes.
- The submission of 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 contributing to regional and local strategies. The group provides credible comments on planning applications, supports submissions for new heritage-based funding bids and the 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 been held monthly. Previously CAAG commented, through the nominated HELM (Heritage Environment Local Management) and then through the Conservation Officer, and more recently through its Chair.

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. The CAAG has contributed to three 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.
- In the recent past the submission and delivery of two Area Partnership Schemes and a Townscape Heritage Initiative (combined: Berwick Historic Area Improvement Scheme).

Undertaken as part of wider collaborative working with the then 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.

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 two Area Partnership Schemes and Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). Providing forum support to the then Conservation Officer, enabling local community input and providing an additional level of scrutiny. The 2.8million pound grant programme was successfully delivered across a 5-year period.

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 the production of Design Guides.

The externally funded two Area Partnership Schemes concluded in March 2015. Two outstanding THI critical projects were also concluded in 2016 and complementary initiatives have been completed or 'handed over' as an

ongoing legacy to partners (e.g. Berwick Middle School and the Changemaker project, and an Archive project as part of Berwick Record Office).

Whilst the overall CAAG Membership has worked consistently and effectively since its inception many groups or associations have experienced changes within their own organisations.

This updated report (October 2021) reflects on the work achieved through the CAAG forum since 2009; assesses the changes in local government, partner organisations and our 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 may comprise representatives from the following authorities, organisations and groups:

Northumberland County Council

Ward Members if membership does not impinge on their NCC commitments
Conservation Officer (s)

Other Groups/ Organisations.

Historic England will offer support and advice

Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society

Walled Towns Heritage

Spittal Improvement Trust

The Greenses

Berwick-upon-Tweed Community Trust

Berwick-upon-Tweed Chamber of Trade and Commerce

Town Council whose representative(s) may also be their HELM champion

CAAG nominated HELM champion

Friends of Berwick and District Museum and Archives – FBDMA

The Preservation Trust.

Those with Specific Skills.

A person who is considered to have specific skills within the area of conservation may be co-opted on to the group

1.2 The role and input of Historic England (HE), to the Berwick-upon-Tweed CAAG has been reaffirmed. As a partner organization and supporter of the CAAG forum HE will continue to receive minutes and information pertaining to the Group. A representative of HE will attend meetings as appropriate and may deliver training.

2. Functions and Relationships

2.1 The functions of CAAG are as follows in relation 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;

- Contribute, as required, to the '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, or HE).
- Administer Berwick's membership of Walled Towns Heritage
- When appropriate the hosting, organisation and contribution to seminars/ related to heritage.

2.2 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. Historic England or The Georgian Group.

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

2.4 Those individuals who have been invited to join the group because of their specific skills will also offer considered and objective advice

2.5 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 group.
- Reports a consensus opinion via the nominated group member to the North Area Development Management Team usually by posting on the website 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.

3. Working Arrangements

3.1 The group provides its own minute secretary and is chaired by a member selected from the group A vice chair may be elected from any group member.

The Conservation Officer(s) provide advice to the group relate with on conservation related matters and development management proposals

3.2. 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.

3.3. An agreed checklist and protocol for receiving architect's presentations to CAAG is used and promoted when assessing schemes

3.4 Meetings are held monthly. The Berwick Community Trust has agreed to) host meetings at their offices for the foreseeable future but subject to annual review. The practice of inviting relevant speakers or guests as part of future consultation events or fact-finding activities are welcomed.

3.5 The opportunity to visit sites within the three conservation areas should be taken whenever possible,

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

- Each partner organisation or group may nominate representative(s) who is/are able to attend and contribute to meetings, but representatives from the same organisation will only have one vote.

- On the occasion when the regular representative is unable to attend an informed substitute may attend in his/her place.
- This representative is mandated to represent the policies, objectives and views of their organisation (i.e. not convey an individual or personal opinion, but a view 'on behalf of' the group, society or organisation they are there to represent).
- This 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 memoir to assist.
- Those members who represent a specific skill will make their comments as respected individuals and will have a vote

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