

Dumfries and Galloway Council

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2

Kirkcudbright Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Supplementary Guidance - March 2020





Kirkcudbright Conservation Area

Character Appraisal

Introduction

Background

Kirkcudbright is a historic town of great character with a rich and varied townscape. Many factors have helped to shape the town including its history of people and events, its setting by the river and surrounding landscape and the architectural qualities of its buildings and spaces.

Further development of the town, and initiatives such as the promotion of the Artists' Town may lead to significant changes to the townscape, which have the potential to threaten its architectural and social legacy. Yet if sensitively designed such development also has the potential to enhance the present character of the town.

As the economic, commercial and tourist activity increases, the conservation of the existing historic townscape and fabric becomes an ever greater imperative so that Kirkcudbright may continue as an attractive historic Burgh of character and value.

This Appraisal will provide the agreed framework within which planned and managed development can proceed with the aim of securing the physical, economic and social well being of the town.



*Post card view ca. 1937 © James Bell
With thanks to James Bell for use of photograph*

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Local Context

Kirkcudbright is a small Burgh and former County Town of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, now part of the Local Authority Area of Dumfries and Galloway in South West Scotland. The present population is around 3,500 and is the third largest in the Stewartry.



Kirkcudbright has seen mixed economic fortunes over the centuries. The town flourished through its port from the later 18th century until the early 20th century, and is now the base for a significant shell fishing fleet, with an associated processing factory.

There is only limited local industrial employment which is mainly concentrated in the Dee Walk area, the Creamery to the west of the river and the Harbour. Commercially Kirkcudbright fulfils the role of a District Centre catering for the local needs of the inhabitants and surrounding rural area. A relatively high proportion of businesses are directed towards meeting the needs of visitors. The main shops and services are concentrated in St. Cuthbert Street and St. Mary Street.

The conservation area was first designated in 1974 and was extended in 1980 and declared “outstanding” in September 1980. Within the Burgh there are over 190 listed buildings.

The Character Appraisal

This document has been prepared by Dumfries and Galloway Council. It is intended to meet the need for a carefully judged appraisal of the character of conservation areas as required in Government Guidance.

The Appraisal addresses the following issues:

Understanding the Town - a description of the historical development and structure of the town;

The Character Appraisal – this includes an assessment of the Conservation Area overall and draws out its significance by considering the elements that make up the character of the town. Five character areas have been defined and are appraised separately. Within each area there is an analysis of issues and conflicts showing where change is threatening the character of Kirkcudbright;

Implementation and Review - to ensure the plan is updated and remains a useful working document.

The Appraisal is supported by Historic Built Environment Supplementary Guidance that defines the approach that the Council will adopt in its stewardship of Kirkcudbright, through the planning control process or by direct investment in road and other schemes. The two documents aim to complement and develop current guidance and Local Development Plan Policies by setting out a conservation strategy that will guide decisions on future development in Kirkcudbright.

Both the Appraisal and Supplementary Guidance promote the need for a sustainable approach that starts with an understanding of the historical and architectural character of the town. The emphasis is on the re-use of older buildings, repair and maintenance, attention to historical and traditional detailing and on sensitive use of materials and techniques. This does not, however, preclude good modern design.



It is important that new development should be sympathetic and innovative. There is scope for good modern architecture and it is hoped that parody or pastiche of the older more traditional form of development will be avoided.

Kirkcudbright is home and workplace for its inhabitants and the Appraisal itself is only the starting point from which the people of Kirkcudbright can build their own responses and approaches to their care, use and future stewardship of the town.

Other Relevant Documents and Plans

Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2)

The Dumfries and Galloway LDP2 was adopted on 4th October 2019. The Plan recognises the importance of the natural and built environment in helping to shape the economic well-being of Dumfries and Galloway.

Policies are included in LDP2 that promote the protection and enhancement of the built heritage.

LDP2 addresses a range of issues from housing land to industrial allocations, from transport to tourism. Its purpose is to guide development, to protect the environment and takes into consideration community issues, tourism and countryside matters. The Plan has been developed over several years following intense public consultation.

LDP2 will provide the statutory policy framework for the area defining the principles and practices to be adopted by the Council in considering development proposals.

Scottish Burgh Survey – Kirkcudbright, 1978

This is one of a series of reports on the history and archaeology of historic towns of Scotland. It was commissioned by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Scottish Development Department with a view to providing background information upon which to base a policy for urban research. The survey comprises an historical outline of the town and identifies those areas likely to be of particular historical or archaeological importance dating from before the 19th century. The Burgh Survey was updated in 1996 and provides an important guide to help inform the archaeological implications of new development.

Consultation

The Appraisal has been considered by the Community Council and the Kirkcudbright Forum. It has the support of both the Community Council and the Forum and the Dumfries and Galloway Council.





Understanding the Town



Topography and Landscape

Kirkcudbright lies on a narrow gravel ridge on the left bank of the river Dee. In medieval times the low lying swamp land to the east and the river creeks to the west afforded the town good physical protection.

The underlying geology is complex but is mainly composed of Greywackes (often referred to as whin) and siltstones. Igneous intrusions and younger rocks may also be found. Porphyrite and Greywacke have been quarried near Kirkcudbright with many small quarries seen around the town on the early editions of the Ordnance Survey maps.

To the east the land rises towards the granite outcrop of Bengairn and Screel and a rolling topography which includes glacial deposits. The land is mostly under pasture. To the south east of Kirkcudbright is the large military establishment at Dundrennan, used principally for training and weaponry testing.

The valley of the Dee provides an important link to the north east. The river was dammed at Tongland in the 1930's for the hydro-electric power station.

West of the Dee the land is characterised by drumlins, glacial deposits, and is again principally pasture land. It is interspersed with rocky outcrops and gorse scrub on the poorer land and is mostly enclosed by dry stane dykes.

Archaeological Potential

Though there is evidence of human activity from early periods including an early medieval settlement in Kirkcudbright, little direct



archaeological material has been found. Further excavation and investigation are required. For this reason, as part of the planning process, any new development requires archaeological evaluation / excavation. Information recovered from the historic core may establish the earliest date of settlement and provide evidence of this first period of economic and social development.

Historical Development

Kirkcudbright is an outstanding historic town with some standing buildings dating back to the late 16th century. A settlement is likely to have been in existence since before the late 12th century when Fergus, Lord of Galloway, may have erected a Norman-style motte castle on what is now Mote Brae.

The construction of a Royal Castle to the south-east of the early burgh is first recorded around 1288. The substantial earthwork remains of this can be seen at Castledykes, showing the structure to have been larger than Caerlaverock Castle.

The first indication that the town enjoyed burgh status occurs in 1330. It became a Royal Burgh in 1455, giving the town the highly significant privilege of undertaking international trade. It was one of the safest ports on the Galloway coast. Records show that there was sea trade with Ireland from the 13th century, and up to the early 17th the main trade links were with the Clyde, Cumbria, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Brittany and Spain, with some trade overland to Dumfries and Edinburgh/Leith.

The 17th and 18th centuries generally saw a decline in the fortune of Kirkcudbright, so much so, that in 1724 Defoe wrote:

“Here is a pleasant situation yet nothing pleasant to be seen. Here is a harbour without ships, a port without trade, a fishery without nets, a people without business; and that, which is worse than all, they do not seem to desire business, much less do they understand it.”

It remained a small trading port through the 17th century and the proper quay was not developed till the late 18th century. The growth of the town from the latter part of the 18th century showed that things did improve. In 1844 Lord Cockburn was much more complimentary though he did find the

“dismal swamps of deep squelchy mud exposed at low tide an enormous deduction”.

The present plan form can still be directly linked to the medieval town and to its 18th and 19th century growth. Though a more planned layout was adopted during the 19th century with wide, straight streets being the main feature, the scale and form of individual buildings resemble earlier buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet these later developments of the town contribute their own character and vitality.

Modern Development of the Town

The growth of Kirkcudbright, particularly in the 20th century has slightly weakened the relationship the town once had with its landscape setting. The spread from the gravel ridge onto the wetter land to the east and north defined a new context, which now relates more to the rising ground to the east. The riverside setting is still important, as any view from the west will testify.

The close contact with the water’s edge is limited to the harbour area and part of the rear of the High Street. Further along Castledykes Walk this relationship lessens as the open area of the former Royal Castle separates the later development from the riverside.

To the north of the Dee road bridge, beyond the modern housing development, the growth took place along the principal road and to the east of the former railway line. The industrial area of Dee Walk has a river aspect, though is not necessarily directly related to it.



East of the town centre on the rising ground is Millburn Street and beyond that isolated villa developments off St. Cuthbert's Road. The green backdrop provided by this rising ground to the east is significant in many views and may be compromised by modern development to the south and north on the edges of the town. The Local Plan limits development at the 20m contour in respect of the Cannee Field housing allocation.

The allocation of sites for development and areas of environmental importance are shown in LDP2. No major development is proposed within the conservation area. The principal threat comes from incremental development on back land, especially the older burgage plots. However, provided this new development or any redevelopment, when required, follows current advice and this Appraisal there should be no threat to the form and plan of the town.



Ordnance Survey 1850 Ed. - Town development by mid 19th century



The Character Appraisal



Modern development respecting traditional form

Urban Structure

The Historical Character as Expressed Today

The historical development of Kirkcudbright, described above, is fundamental to its present qualities. The town has grown and evolved into a modern, working, living town. It is a town of great character and considerable charm, which has largely escaped the ravages of change and redevelopment.

The significance of Kirkcudbright is essentially that of a historic burgh that has grown, developed and evolved but in a way that has added to and not taken away from its earlier origins. Imposed on the present form of the town is a strong legacy of the earlier phases of development.

The urban structure of the town is defined by five principal areas or stages of development. The first was the early development on what is now the Mote Brae or Castle Bank. Nothing remains of the original, though the name still bears testimony to its most probable first group of buildings.

Next the ridge of higher land, to the south, was developed. This later developed into the medieval burgh and consisted of a main street (now the High Street) running approximately south-south-west from the old castle mound (Mote Brae) to the Tolbooth and turning sharply towards the east. It extended as far as the Meikle Yett, being the defensive port on the east side of the medieval burgh. A gate remained there in various forms until it was finally demolished in 1771.

The medieval burgh was encircled by a wall and ditch that followed the harbour creek on the east.



A market place was established adjacent to the Tolbooth in the space created by the dog-leg of the High Street.

The Burgh pattern of development is discernible today. Medieval plots or tenements of regular width and length run back at approximately right angles to the High Street. It is likely that the earlier houses were built along these plots to varying depths but these have been mostly rebuilt and are now primarily of the 18th and 19th centuries.

After 1790 considerable development took place beyond the confines of the old burgh. The first main part of the planned growth of the town, now Castle Street and Union Street, was laid out to a formal plan agreed by the Town Council and the Earl of Selkirk.

The fourth principal phase of development was St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert's Street in the earlier part of the 19th century. As suggested by the early drafting of their layout in the plans for Castle Street, these streets continued the formal planned expansion of Kirkcudbright.

Their present character is markedly more mixed having both a range of building styles and more mixed uses, especially commercial.

The fifth area may be defined as the suburb that had grown up around a cluster of mills at Millburn and remained a separate entity till the 19th century.

Plan Form and Grain

This is the basis of the character and appearance of the town and is best seen from maps. The medieval plan is discernible and remains a key characteristic of part of the town, centred on the High Street, today. The melding of early organic growth and change in the older areas, centred on the High Street, with the two main phases of planned expansion to the north and east gives the varied but structured townscape of today.

Dominant elements of the plan form are the long wide intersecting main streets of St. Mary Street

and St. Cuthbert Street. But lying close by is the tighter urban form of the High Street with its angular turn and tightly defined long narrow plots some of which still have development in Closes down their length.

The sense of space in the wider streets is complemented by the main open areas such as the Mote Brae and the Soaperie Gardens. To those must be added a hierarchy of spaces, which include public spaces such as the bowling green, the semi-public or private spaces often comprising back gardens and closes particularly off the High Street and the lanes such as Mews Lane and St. Mary's Wynd.

Hierarchy of Open Spaces

The general character of the streets has been referred to above. However, it is important to recognise the overall effect or experience provided by the streets together and as one moves between different parts of the town. The change in emphasis that occurs, for example when leaving St. Cuthbert Street moving past Maclellan's Castle towards the High Street gives an important progression from a wide open space to a more intimate space where the relationship with the buildings also changes. These contrasts and variations are vitally important to the character of the area as a whole and need to be acknowledged in any proposed development or other schemes that might affect this.

The main public spaces can be defined by their broad character:

Green Public Spaces, especially where trees dominate; the principal public spaces comprising the Mote Brae, the Soaperie Gardens by the Parish Church, and the Dee Walk are characterised by the mature trees. These are important in retaining views and providing enclosure.

Green semi-open spaces; more intimate green spaces or those which have more limited public access such as the grounds



around Maclellan's Castle and the Bowling Club provide areas of calm and space that are in pleasant contrast to the thoroughfares and areas of greater activity or are more urban in their character.

Hard – Carparks and Harbour; These areas give an open aspect within the town that is also functional.

Hard – wide streets/market place; other "hard" public areas include the main thoroughfares especially St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert Street where their width leads to a sense of open space and informality.

These distinctly public areas are complemented by a number of more intimate spaces that, whilst public access is given, have a more private aspect. Such spaces include the courts created in the Tan Pits Lane development, Atkinson Place, the Harbour Side, and some Closes off the High Street.

Urban Structure - Issues and Conflicts

There is a need to consider the relationship of modern development to the older plan and layout of the town, especially to the south of the High Street. It is important to have regard to the narrow linear nature of the Burgage plots. New development should be laid out along these plots and should not fill the width of them. Roof lines should be kept simple with ridges running parallel to the plots. A good example of this may be seen at Rankine Place where the form of the new development is in sympathy with the grain of the rear of the High Street.

Streetscape

Public Utilities and Roads

The quality and design of street works has an important and comprehensive effect on the character and appearance of the town. The importance given to the accommodation of the motor car and to budgetary considerations has led to design and engineering solutions that have tended to militate against sensitive development of streetscape in areas where the historic setting is important. This is exemplified by features such as the materials, standardised components, the layout of junctions and street furniture.

Whilst it may not be possible to revert to more traditional surfacing materials generally much can be done to maintain the general open and informal character of many of the spaces in the town and to introduce traditional materials at key locations.

Traditional street furniture and other features such as fountains, drinking troughs or seats need to be maintained. Special attention to detail is required when work is being done to such existing items. It is also important not to introduce unnecessary or inappropriately styled new street furniture that could become intrusive visual clutter.

The scope to work in a manner that is sensitive to the historic character of Kirkcudbright yet meets statutory requirements needs to be examined more fully. For example, the disposition and size of traffic signs, the use of standardised markings and the geometry of road junctions may need to be modified from the standard technical requirement to ensure a more subtle and less intrusive approach. This may require discussion with the Scottish Government as well as within the Council. It is hoped that this will lead to the development of more detailed design standards which can be adopted in areas of historic importance.



In addition the remaining overhead electricity supply and telephone cabling can be distracting; a programme of placing these underground should be agreed.

Pedestrian Links

Important components of the street plan of Kirkcudbright are the lanes and closes. These are principally found off the High Street and in many cases serve further residential areas or houses. Their interest lies in their intimate scale, the opportunities for access, the views they afford and the paving materials. The latter, because of the standardisation of general footways is increasingly important. Many closes are cobbled in river or sea washed, rounded cobble stones, or flagged. If the variety and interest of the area is to be maintained then these materials must be kept. It may also be appropriate to consider the extension of the traditional surfaces out on to the footways to mark the entrance to the closes.



Castledykes walk with its high walls, next to Broughton House, is of special interest. The general feeling is one of harmony and intimacy in the many closes that provide a series of linked, mainly pedestrian routes.

Pedestrian links do not just comprise the closes and paths but also include street-side pavements and routes such as that round the Mote Brae linking the Harbour car park to the top end of the High Street. Such routes need to be recognised and properly safeguarded.

The recent development at Tan Pits Lane has successfully integrated new housing within a historic townscape creating a variety of interesting links and spaces. Two informal squares connect with Tan Pits lane on one side and the Parish Church on the other allowing continued use of a long established pedestrian link.

Visual Experience

Many of the more intimate visual experiences described in this Appraisal relate to the close-up views of streets and their buildings and spaces. However, the wider, more distant views of the town on the main approaches are quite different and equally important.

Because the main approach to the town, from the east, is via St. Mary Street an important part of the visual experience is the sense of spaciousness of the main streets. This is enriched by the ever-changing vistas and views as one moves away from these main streets into areas such as the High Street, Millburn or the many closes.

Another of the key elements is that of surprise views across the townscape afforded by the network of paths and small closes and pends. In particular many of them enable access to the back areas making the rear of properties as visible and as important as their street frontages. The townscape and the visual experience





gained are thereby broadened out to more than just considering the street scene so that they encompass all elevations and views of buildings and spaces within the town.

Part of the visual appeal of the conservation area is the occasional views out to the countryside. Several areas afford such glimpses. These include the view westwards along the High Street to towards the Sheriff Court and Tolbooth, views along some of the closes on the northern part of the High Street, the view eastwards along St. Cuthbert Street and the view eastwards from the High Street along St. Mary's Place.

Streetscape - Issues and Conflicts

There is a complex variety of sights and views which needs to be taken into account when considering proposals for development or change.

The Character of Buildings

Skyline and Key Buildings

Principal buildings contribute to the overall character of the conservation area in many ways and are thus important both as interesting buildings themselves and as part of the composition of views and the juxtaposition of buildings and spaces throughout the area.

The five spans of the bow-truss concrete bridge over the Dee, though just outside the Conservation area, provides an important element in many views of the town or as a backdrop from the harbour area. It should be regarded as a key landmark building. How development impinges on it or views of it will have some significance. The view back to the harbour from the bridge itself is also significantly enhanced by the former warehouses, many now converted to residential use.

MacLellan's Castle, within the town, is one of the most prominent buildings. Rising over the lower harbour cottage and other surrounding buildings

it is dominant in many views. It closes the view westwards along St. Cuthbert Street.

The Parish Church is equally significant. It not only dominates the open space on the corner of the two widest streets in the town but its mass and height ensures it is widely seen. Even in closer more intimate views, such as out through the closes of the new Tan Pits Lane housing development it offers an impressive landmark and skyline.

The Tolbooth both on its own and as a group with the two 17th century houses to the east is highly significant in views along both sections of the High Street and in forming the backdrop to the former market area. The Tolbooth is also seen from outwith the conservation area especially from the south along St. Mary's Wynd and Buchanan Street.

The Sheriff's Court rises dramatically both in bulk and height above the surrounding High Street properties. It dominates the views over the town from outside and along the High Street from the east.

The above buildings are key landmarks in views from the west side of the river and on the higher approach to the town from this side. The visual foreshortening effect is heightened by the massing of buildings on the High Street to give a complex urban grouping that needs to be considered in any development proposal in the town centre.

The conservation area is dotted with key or prominent buildings and these must be regarded as significant in any consideration of proposals affecting them or their setting. They range from the category A listed Broughton House in the High street to the finely executed former Alms Houses of Atkinson Place. Others worthy of mention include the Council Offices next to the Selkirk Arms, a fine bow fronted Georgian House, the Stewartry Museum on St. Mary Street and, nearby, the Town Hall.



The General Character of Buildings

There is considerable variety in the buildings of the town. Very formal Georgian houses whose prominent architecture proclaim a former social dominance, such as Broughton House, stand in close relationship to the smaller single and two-storey houses of much simpler architectural detailing, such as No. 37 High Street. The contrast in architectural styles and detailing within a street may be considerable.

Their principal strength, however, is the value of the group to the street scene as terraces



comprising the main street frontages. Here buildings have a simple, harmonious architectural rhythm. Some differ from their neighbours, in height or in the disposition of doors and window, or even in detail, but are unified by their form derived from elegant and well proportioned Georgian design principles.

The Victorian and some later insertions, up to the First World War, retain a harmony and balance with their neighbours despite differences in massing and architectural detailing. These buildings also make extensive, prominent use of well-detailed sandstone ashlar both decoratively and as dressing for window and door openings, quoins and verges. Examples include the Sheriff's Court, 42 High Street and, more modestly, at 21 to 25 St Mary's Place.

The limited palette of materials and forms contribute to their homogeneity. The use of random coursed rubble whinstone, gabled roofs with plain closed eaves, graded slate roofs, steep but varied roof line and the presence of chimney stacks and traditional dormers, with the resultant complexity in the roofscape all contribute to the character of the town.

Painting Buildings and the Use of Colour

Colour plays an important part in the townscape of Kirkcudbright. It is not clear how recent the phenomenon of painting facades is in the town. It is likely that the use of colour on buildings has grown in popularity over the last 50 years or so. Earlier colouring of lime wash and harl would have been based on earth colours and tended to be relatively subdued.

Brighter colours associated with synthetic paints have been introduced. Whilst these can enliven a street scene they can also jar, drawing undue attention to themselves. Further proliferation of bright colours will not be permitted.

Colour should not only be considered as an applied medium; the rich range of colour derived from natural materials is highly important to the character and appearance of the town. The building stone used, normally whin rubble, includes sand stone of varying shades and granites as well as considerable variation in the whin itself. Russets abound with reds, and green-grey tones as well as granite grey and the darker whin grey.

The Character of Buildings - Issues and Conflicts

Two principal issues need to be considered:

The first is that of the detailing of individual buildings. It is important that historical architectural features are retained and appropriately repaired. The quality and character of the buildings themselves, and



as a result, that of the conservation area as a whole, rests largely with the details. These include the materials of construction, how the materials are used, the form and detailing of architectural elements such as windows and doors. The introduction of different materials and styles of, for example windows has led to a disruption in this unity in more recent times.

The second main element is the combination of scale and proportion of the building. As with the detailing this aspect can have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the area if the existing proportions are not recognised or reflected in new development.

It is important to judge proposals in the context of the original building and its neighbouring building. The variety, range of detailing and subtlety of form and character should not be lost through inadequate specification, the use of modern substitute materials or by painting.

Having considered the more general aspects the Appraisal now focuses on five character areas; The High Street; Castle Street/Union Street; St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert Street; Castle Bank, Mote Brae and The Harbour; and Millburn Street.

The High Street

Historical Perspective

The present fabric is largely a product of the 17th and 18th centuries. As it has developed from the medieval, defended burgh the High Street area shows a diversity of building style that reflects many of the social influences on growth and development.

At first glance the High Street is quite formal. But slight variations in building lines, changes in width, the back closes and long plots give clues its early origins.

The densely populated medieval plots with houses end-on to the street, the vestiges of some of which may still be seen, were replaced by larger, grander Georgian houses. These, such as Broughton House, gave a different aspect to the street that redefined the scale and detailing to a higher architectural standard.



At its focus, the Tolbooth, the street takes a sharp turn to the east. The widening of the street on both legs giving clues that it is also the former market place.

Description and Character

There is great variety in buildings and a strong sense of a street that has evolved over many years settling into an air of fine late Georgian gentility. Detail is more complex than the first impression of regular well ordered Georgian houses might suggest.

Gentrification of the High Street has coarsened the grain of the early burgh plots by the amalgamation of two or more plots into single units. Remaining vernacular cottages, (No. 13, which has its gable to the street) stand with finely proportioned and well-detailed Georgian houses (Nos. 3 & 5). These are interspersed with good but not elaborate houses (Nos. 17 to 25).

Gordon Place is a pleasant diversion with a well-crafted vernacular proportioned house on the corner. Its fine ashlar quoins and margins contrasts with the rubble wall construction. The piend roof, now with concrete tiles, is set off against the neighbouring gabled roof. It also illustrates the often seen combining of two houses into one, with the blocked doorways retaining their margins. The change in the structure and grain of the High Street is also indicated by these houses



still end-on to the main street. The resulting form of development on narrow plots with houses running back off the street was significantly different from the present form created by rebuilding on the street frontage.

Eaves lines vary as does the level of decoration; some houses being quite plain whereas others have raised margins, elaborate door cases and moulded eaves. Views along both parts of the street are greatly enhanced by the variations in scale, size, detailing and placing. This must be considered in any proposals that involve development or redevelopment in any part of the High Street.



Pends are also important, not only for the architectural features that their doorway or arches present but also for the glimpses and views they afford of closes and beyond.

After Fisher Street, the south side of the High Street continues in a more vernacular vein, with more irregular plots. Some three-storey houses add bulk and height to the first part of the street which later gives way to single-storey cottages, with attic dormers, at the junction with St. Mary Street.

From the former market place, working eastwards, the northern side of the street is dominated by the Sheriff's Court. Before that the picturesque, now all harled and painted, row of vernacular houses provide a pleasant contrast to the battlemented, upright Court building. After Castle Street the High Street reasserts its Georgian gentility with the high quality buildings from Cannonwalls to the Selkirk Arms.

Roofs are mostly slated in dark grey slates with some variation in colour and sizing, with graded roofs predominating. Though not universal there is a considerable number of dormers. Many are reasonably well proportioned, often canted, but some are over-large, box style more modern intrusions.

Key Buildings, Sites and Vistas

In addition to the Tolbooth and Sheriff's Court, referred to above, there are many fine buildings and building groups that need special consideration. These may exhibit an obvious character or high profile, such as Broughton House or The Council Offices at No. 117, or may be of more modest character. Some buildings such as Riverside Court or the Rectory are important in closing or framing views along the street.

Views and changing vistas along the street are also important. The view into the High street and out from the High Street at the gate to the Academy is particularly noteworthy.

The High Street - Issues and Conflicts

The main threat to the character and quality of the High Street comes from the incremental changes to individual properties and their details. These include new modern windows and doors, re-roofing in concrete tiles and painting of facades.



The preservation of the varied streetscape, individual building styles, and views need to be considered in any proposals in this area.

There are no gap sites but the houses, on the corner of Castle Street, adjacent to the Sheriff's Court, may be considered to be inappropriate in their detailing and layout.

If their redevelopment were to be proposed the opportunity for a more sensitive form of development should be taken.

In some areas there is pressure for development on back land. Such development must not compromise or result in the loss of the historic layout and grain of the town. Where development is permitted in the old Burgage plots its form, scale and layout must be carefully considered to ensure it preserves the historical layout and character of the area. New buildings should, therefore, be simple, rectangular under steeply pitched slate roofs with ridges running parallel to the plot. They should also not cover too large an area nor have too deep a plan form.

Castle Street and Union Street

Historical Perspective

These streets were the first planned extension of the town in the 1790's and was overseen by the Town Council with the influence of the Dunbar family

The plan, agreed between the Council and the Earl of Selkirk, imposed strict criteria that resulted in the form of development still to be seen today. For the first houses stipulations included: " ... not under two storeys in height making a height of 18 feet at least ..., to have Pavillion roofs so that none of them are to have Gavels to the Streets. Further restrictions were imposed, for example, that they were also not to be used as barns or stables.

The plan also showed, in draft, the streets that were later to become St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert Street as a further phase of this planned development.

Description and Character

Castle Street is a simple, planned late Georgian Street with strictly controlled, straight building lines. The houses mostly two-storey, some with dormers are generally relatively plain. Those in Castle Gardens display a regular dignified rhythm with well balanced frontages combining to make a terrace of distinction.



Some have dormers, which seem for the most part, to be later additions though some retain a design that may be regarded as appropriate to the group, the canted dormer juxtaposed with the gabled dormer on No. 3 creating a reasonable balance. Others are out of proportion and intrusive.

The houses in Castle Street all have pitched roofs running parallel to the street. They are mostly in slate with some having modern concrete tiles. Most of the traditional slating is gauged and comprises a thick, textured, grey slate. The run of buildings from No. 29 to No. 35 Castle Street is a particularly good example of traditional slating.



The more straightforward houses are interspersed with a number of grander houses. Two examples are the early 19th century No. 7 Castle Street that is ashlar fronted with decorative hood moulds and the tall elaborately detailed former Bank, No. 16.

There is only a limited variation in eaves heights, which may be a result of the original strictures (see above). Walling is for the most part random rubble, some of which have been painted. A significant number of properties have been rendered, again some of which have been painted.

Elevations are simply expressed with many houses having two or three bays with doors set to one side, usually paired with neighbouring houses. A number have shared pend doors placed between the main entrance doors.

Detailing is limited and confined to occasional rusticated quoins, plain, raised window margins and in some instances a doorcase. Even larger individual houses such as No. 31, exhibit little ornamentation.

Windows are mostly vertically proportioned sash-and-case with astragals forming a six-over-six pattern. Others have large panes, though in many cases the lack of horns and the slender dimension of the meeting rails suggest that these windows may originally have had astragals that have now been removed.

Union Street, by contrast, is simpler and may be regarded as more vernacular in its aspect. The houses, though similar to those in Castle Street tend to a simpler interpretation of the Georgian style.

Most houses are of rubble whin stone having just two bays with doors to adjacent houses paired, sometimes with joint pends between.

Some houses have been painted and/or rendered. Roofs run parallel to the road and are mostly slated with a mixture of gauged and regular coursing. Some now have concrete tiles.

Elevations, ornamentation and windows are similar to Castle Street but there is a greater frequency of alterations, including rendering, removal of astragals and modern windows.

Key Buildings, Sites and Vistas

Though the two streets are relatively uniform some individual houses stand out. No. 7 with its stucco, hood moulds and moulded rhones gives has a genteel quality; the tall, red sandstone, Castle Guest House with carved window heads on ornate brackets; and the elegant corner building at No. 22 all contribute to the quality and character of the street.

The views along the street especially to the north to Greyfriars Church and the Mote Brae are also significant especially as the street is so straight and regular.

Castle Street and Union Street - Issues and Conflicts

The primary cause for concern is that of incremental changes to the buildings as described for the High Street above. There is also a trend to further painting of facades and to the use of more striking colours.

The preservation of the unified character of the street will be compromised if such changes continue unchecked.

St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert Street

Historical Perspective

These streets continued the formal, planned expansion of Kirkcudbright. They were laid out in the early part of the 19th century.

Description and Character

St. Mary Street is now the main entry to the town from both the north and south. It is a broad street



of mixed character. The main commercial part is to the north of St. Cuthbert Street. This is modest two-storey traditional development similar in character to parts of St. Cuthbert Street. Many of the properties have simple, traditional shop fronts.

Most are painted rubble walled with straightforward banding and margins and nearly all have slated roofs with dormers.

The southern section, which breaks forward in views from the north, has a more Civic character with prominent buildings such as the Town Hall, the Parish Church Hall, the Museum and the Parish Church. Adjacent to these the street is open in character dominated by the large open green, the Soaperie Gardens with mature trees around the Church and the bowling green and tennis courts further to the south. A more urban feel is introduced by the mid-Victorian terrace of granite properties, with fine lying-pane windows. The terrace, punctuated by the more massive, Gothic detailed three-storey Bank of Scotland, links the Town Hall to the Hotel on the corner with St. Cuthbert Street.

Further north the street opens into the suburban large villa developments with fine detailing. Other individual buildings of note are the Alms Houses at Atkinson Place, the Old Manse (now much altered), the Johnston Primary School and the only remaining building from the former railway station. Next to this is the Maxwell Place/Maxwell Wynd housing development. Though very modern in its appearance it is nevertheless highly important to the setting and the general street scene.

St. Cuthbert Street now functions as the town's broad central space and thoroughfare. Though it is largely commercial the underlying character is predominantly domestic in scale and feel.

To the west the street is dominated by Maclellan's Castle and the open space, Castle Gardens, The Mote Brae and the Car Park with the Harbour beyond. St. Cuthberts Church provides a focus at the corner with St. Mary Street and the mature trees add extra depth.

With the notable exception of the red sandstone supermarket at No. 4/6 and the 3-storey corner building, No. 27, the western part of the street is consistent in height and scale being fine, if modest, late Georgian 2-storey buildings exhibiting similar detailing to those in Castle Street.

The principal exception is the insertion of shop fronts into many of the properties. These range from simple traditional fronts with pilasters, fascias and cornice to more modern counterparts. Many of the older fronts, such as Don Philpott and Daughter, 32 St Cuthbert Street, are well crafted and should be retained. At the time of writing, good examples are A Thomson at 11 St. Cuthbert Street and Wm. Law at No.17. These fronts also incorporate traditional roller blinds, which are more appropriate than the modern folding canopy that is increasingly being put up without reference to the original detailing of the shopfront.

Windows are a mixture of modern insertions, 2 and 4 pane later Victorian windows and earlier 12-pane windows. Again it is reasonable to judge, from the evidence that many of the original windows would have been six-over-six astragalled windows.

Apart from shop fronts the ornamentation is limited to a few individual buildings and in general the character is similar to that defined in Castle Street. Of note is the taller three storey corner building with its battlemented small tower breaking the eaves and the oriel window to St. Mary Street.

Four key aspects beyond those of the fronting buildings are the opening to the harbour car park and thence the harbour, the closing of the view by Maclellan's Castle, the green open space of the Soaperie Garden and the intersection with St. Mary Street. These combine with the width of the street to give a sense of spaciousness that is in sharp contrast with the tighter more closed-in feel of the northern part of the High Street.





The Eastern part of St. Cuthbert Street, beyond St. Mary Street returns to a more domestic character on its northern side. This is in contrast to the large corner hotel and the new supermarket on the southern side; the latter being both uncharacteristic of the general traditional buildings of the area and set back from the building line of the rest of the street.

The street rises and narrows and is therefore significant both for the view it affords towards Maclellans Castle and for the contrast it offers to the western part of the street. There is also more variation in building heights on the north side.

The roofscape throughout is dominated by simple pitched roofs running parallel to the street. Grey, gauged slate is the predominant material. Terraced properties are usually separated by deep chimney stacks with mostly round decorative cans.

Key Sites, Buildings and Vistas

Buildings and Vistas

Several individual buildings stand out; those having a wider impact are mentioned elsewhere in this appraisal. Some of the others are the Town Hall with its elegant but simplified Neo-Georgian detailing, The Bank of Scotland built in buff sandstone with Italianate detailing, 9 to 13 St Mary Street in granite with buff dressings and lying-pane windows and Williamson and Henry Nos. 3 & 5 St. Cuthbert Street with its simple detailing and traditional canted dormers.

Both streets offer imposing and fine views. A high quality of townscape is ensured by their width and the quality of buildings, both landmark buildings and more vernacular ones.

St. Mary Street and St. Cuthbert Street - Issues and Conflicts

General issues relate to the erosion of architectural detail and the introduction of modern, unsympathetically designed shop fronts. Management of the street will need to have regard to the adjacent open areas and mature trees. Important sites are referred to below:

St. Cuthbert Street/Mews Lane

The quality and design of any redevelopment of the supermarket and its environs will need careful consideration, whether this is in the form of a new supermarket on the site or an alternative form of development to replace the supermarket. The street frontage should be recreated to lessen the gap currently presented by the supermarket car park. If the proposal is a supermarket then careful building design, the flexible use of the supermarket's front area to ensure it is appealing and attractive to pedestrians and contributes to the vitality and character of the street and an appropriate but well designed, discreet vehicular access could greatly enhance this area.





Maxwell Place/Maxwell Wynd

Though overtly modern this housing area is nevertheless important for the positive contribution it makes to the town. Having been recognised as innovative and receiving awards for housing design in the 1970's the area has suffered from lack of maintenance of the streetscape. It is still an interesting and intimate development that marks an important phase in the provision of town centre housing.

An enhancement scheme which could encompass the street surfaces, the condition of the buildings with a possible painting scheme and planting should be seen in the light of the contribution it makes, as an example of modern housing development within the conservation area.

Castle Bank, Mote Brae and the Harbour

Historical Perspective

Reputedly the site of a castle the Mote Brae has, at various times, served as the location for the Franciscan Friary, Parish Church and graveyard, merchant warehouse, timber and shipbuilding yards.

Nearby stands the impressive ruin of Maclellan's Castle, a late 16th century fortified town house, the roof of which was removed in the mid 18th century. The Castle has a most significant impact on the character and appearance of Kirkcudbright and plays a dominant visual role in many views both within and from outwith the town.

No sign of the original harbour area is now visible. The creek and inlet have been filled in. Late 18th century improvements, following on from the general rise in prosperity for Galloway, meant that Kirkcudbright became a more active port and shipbuilding centre through to the end of the 19th century.

The modern quay was developed after 1789 and is to this day still a working harbour. Finally, the area adjacent to the old harbour became a car park, which was extensively remodelled in 1993.

Description and Character

Though Castle Bank is dominated by Maclellan's Castle the street also has a more intimate scale and composition. The painted, rubble walled Harbour Cottages lead up into the street which is then flanked by the converted former warehouse with its river aspect and the row of cottages, including Auchengool House, which in turn lead the way to the corner with the High Street.



The Mote Brae is an open green mound with mature trees and the much rebuilt Greyfriars Church. It is a space that is used for informal recreation and has footpaths linking the harbour carpark to Castle Bank.

The harbour area comprises several parts including the working quay, the workshops and harbour offices, the car park and the mixed-use workshop area at Beaconsfield Place.

These areas include functional working spaces with their character and significance derived from the combination of physical appearance and the activities that take place. The quay side with its





boats, nets, ship repairs and other manifestations of the work contrasts with the calmer, greener area of Mote Brae.

The mix of uses and the diverse buildings and spaces are key elements in the definition of the character of this part of the conservation area.

Key Buildings, Sites and Vistas

The principal key buildings and their importance in views into the area have been described separately. However, even more modest buildings such as the Post Office contribute to the setting of these spaces. The open aspect to the river at the harbour side and the views afforded along the river are also important.

Castle Bank, Mote Brae and the Harbour - Issues and Conflicts

Some of the buildings between the harbour and the car park are by their nature functional but can be seen by some to detract from the general character of the area. It is, however, important that such buildings and activities are allowed to continue to play their part in the commercial life of the harbour.



Millburn Street

Historical Development

This area was until the 19th century a separate community or suburb centred on the 18th century mills. Today only one two-storey corn mill, now converted to a pottery, survives among a mix of houses.

Description and Character

This street is altogether more irregular and vernacular in character. It is lined by a variety of houses mostly of two storeys interspersed with some single storey and attic houses. The 18th century mill is to the northern end of the street. The street rises and falls being set as it is on the higher rising ground to the east of the town centre. This change in levels affords shortened views along the street and emphasises the rooflines and roovescape of chimneystacks and cans.





To the south it assumes a more open character overlooking the bowling green and the mixed area off Mews Lane with the telephone exchange and the rear of the supermarket giving opportunities for enhancement. This should, however, be undertaken in a manner that retains the mixed uses and small businesses. There may be scope for improvements to the fence line along parts of Millburn Street that fronts these areas.

Architecturally the buildings are variously painted, rendered or random and coursed rubble walled. Some intrusion of modern materials such as concrete roof tiles, unsympathetic windows and box dormers has occurred.

Key Buildings, Sites and Vistas

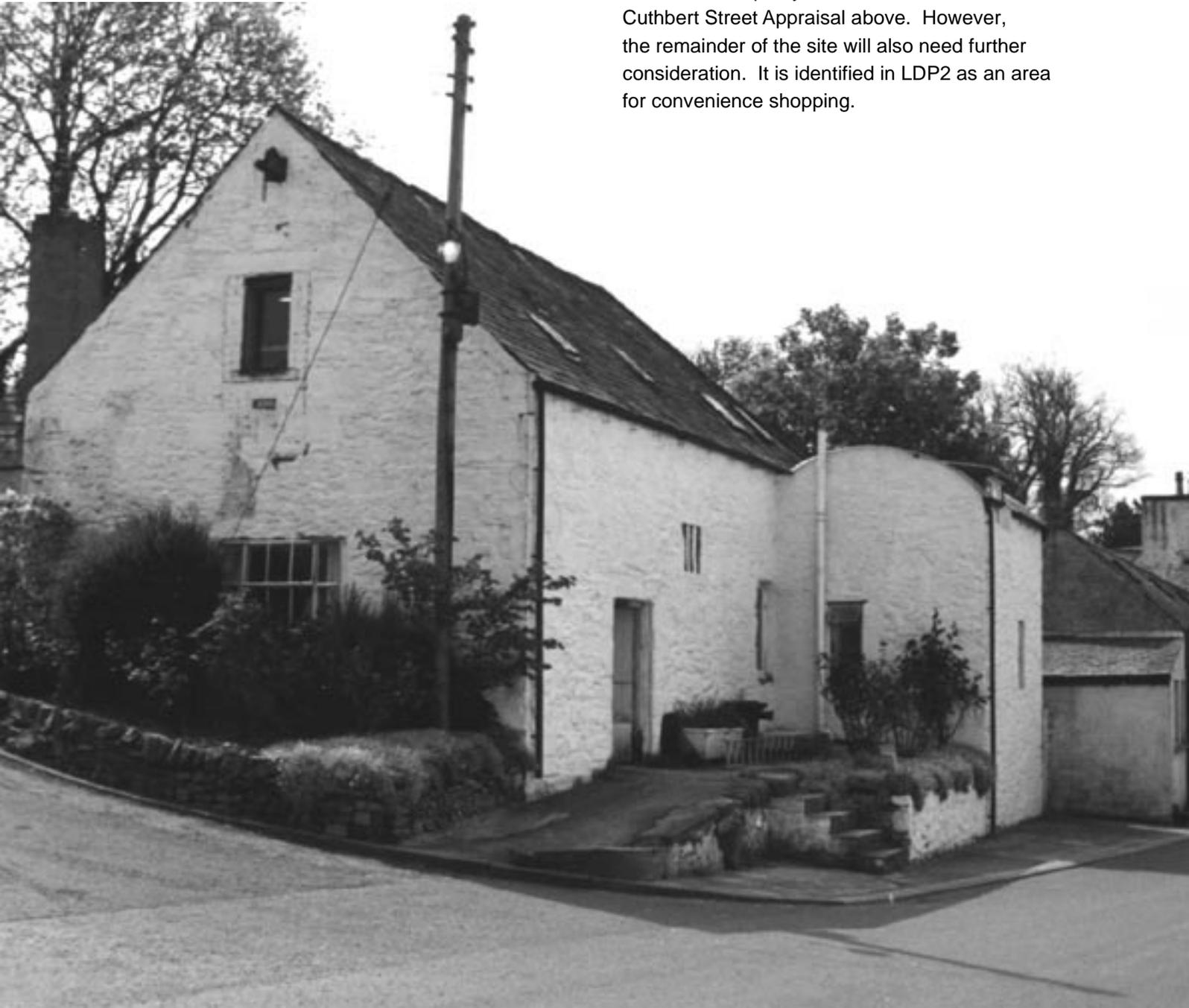
Though there are no outstanding individual buildings the topography means that there are significant views out over the town from the street especially above Church Place.

Millburn Street - Issues and Conflicts

As in other parts of the town, the primary threat to the character of the conservation area is that of incremental, minor changes to individual properties.

Mews Lane

This has been partly described under the St. Cuthbert Street Appraisal above. However, the remainder of the site will also need further consideration. It is identified in LDP2 as an area for convenience shopping.





Implementation and Review



Introduction

The management of a living, working town, such as Kirkcudbright presents complex challenges and opportunities. Many decisions affecting the town will continue to be made by individuals in their own time scale. Investment is brought forward, perhaps to enable the establishment of a new enterprise, or when an owner feels it is appropriate to undertake repairs or improvement to their property.

Likewise investment in the public realm will take place over period of time according to established priorities and budgetary constraints.

Priorities for Action

Public Realm Works

A number of potential areas for further works of enhancement, and areas where a more sensitive approach will be required in undertaking routine maintenance and improvement schemes, have been identified.



Further works in the public realm would include the general maintenance and improvement of street furniture. The Council will programme these works as necessary and within budgetary constraints and will seek to upgrade the use of materials and design in accordance with this Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

Other Initiatives

In the introduction it is stated that this Appraisal is only a starting point from which the stewardship of the town can be developed. It may be appropriate to consider other initiatives that can directly or indirectly inform and support the care and development of Kirkcudbright.

Examples of such schemes may include specific projects or funding aimed at elements of the townscape. This could be a shop fronts repair scheme or a package of incentives to promote the full use of upper floors and empty space, especially over shops and other commercial premises. Wider initiatives might be the development of historic town trails or the preparation of educational material in the form of teacher and student packs that would encourage project work based on the history and architecture of the town.

Review of Appraisal

Though the broad aims and principles set out in this Appraisal are likely to remain current for a number of years it will be necessary to monitor and review the manner in which the Appraisal is helping to direct the general management of the Kirkcudbright Conservation Area.

The Council, having endorsed the Conservation Area Character Appraisal will continue to monitor and regulate development.

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