

WHITEHAVEN TOWN CENTRE AND HIGH STREET CONSERVATION AREAS – PROPOSAL TO MERGE AND EXTEND THE AREAS

Lead Officer: Tony Pomfret – Development Control Manager

Recommendation: That a consultation exercise comprising a public exhibition and public meeting be organised in the autumn to publicise and explain the proposed changes to the Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas and to consider comments received.

Resource Implications: The consultation will be undertaken by the North of England Civic Trust, under their existing contractual arrangements. Additional costs of room hire, advertising etc., will be covered by the existing Development Control budget.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Specialist conservation consultants, Paul Butler Associates, working with OMI Architects and Landscapes Projects, were appointed to undertake a series of studies, which were partly funded by West Lakes Renaissance and partly by the Council. The studies included:

- A Conservation Area Character Appraisal, Public Realm Appraisal and Management Plan for Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas.
- Design Guidance for Whitehaven town centre together with specific design guides for a number of town centre opportunity sites.

1.2 An interim presentation for Members on the findings of these reports was given by the consultants in November 2008. The final reports have now been completed and copies have been made available in the Members' Room. The reports comprise a suite of related planning/conservation documents. These reports were reported to the Executive on 30 June and recommendations were agreed. A number of issues of particular interest to the Planning Panel are highlighted in this report.

1.3 The Review was undertaken for the following reasons:

- a) Local Planning Authorities are required by legislation, from time to time, to review the boundaries and policies for their conservation areas;
- b) There is a need for design guidance to assist developers/architects in preparing schemes for the redevelopment of key town centre opportunity sites identified in the Local Plan, many of which are currently being discussed;

- c) The design guidance and policy advice will be fed into the emerging Local Development Framework exercise;
- d) A Conservation Area Appraisal is a prerequisite for applying for a Townscape Heritage Initiative project through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Public Realm Appraisal include a historical assessment of the town, a detailed survey of the area and an analysis of its character. It classifies the area into seven character areas, illustrated in Plan 1:

- South Harbour
- North Harbour
- Old Town
- Georgian Grid-Iron
- Flatt
- Brackenthwaite
- High Street

2.2 These individual character areas collectively shape Whitehaven's unique historical and architectural interest and highlight elements of the townscape which detract from these important features and/or are threatening to harm the town's character.

2.3 Detailed study and assessment has revealed that Whitehaven town centre's unique architectural and historical character is, however, being undermined by a number of issues and threats. The report summarises the Issues and Threats as:

- Negative buildings which erode character and quality;
- Threat of unsympathetic new development;
- Gradual erosion of special character due to loss of traditional materials and the introduction of inappropriate modern features;
- Lack of building maintenance and structural issues;
- Underuse and vacancy of historic buildings;
- Gap sites harming character and appearance;
- Threat of the maritime location;
- Inadequate gateways into the town centre;
- Lack of visual and physical linkages between the town centre and the harbour;
- Underuse and inadequate maintenance of public space;
- Loss of historic surface materials.

2.4 The Conservation Area Management Plan, Development Guidance and Public Realm Appraisal which support this Character Appraisal focus on addressing these elements and recommend a series of proposals to protect and enhance Whitehaven's special character in the future.

2.5 The purpose of the Development Guidance is to outline how the buildings, streets and places within Whitehaven can be conserved, improved and developed to enhance the special qualities of the Whitehaven Town Centre and High Street Conservation Areas.

2.6 An understanding as to how the town was formed is needed in order to gain an appreciation of its special qualities and direct building owners, developers and architects as to how these may be reinforced and improved. The guidance will be made available (on a CD) to developers and architects and they will be expected to ensure that their proposals for development take account of this design guidance and that this is reflected in their Design and Access Statements.

2.7 The Development Guide gives detailed advice on each of the following topics:

- Urban grain
- Density and mix of uses
- Height and massing
- Building type
- Façade and interface
- Details and materials

2.9 In addition to the general design advice provided in the Development Guide, specific detailed guidance has been provided for the following town centre opportunity sites:

1. Former Bus Depot, Bransty Row
2. Former Bus Station, Bransty Row
3. YMCA Building, Irish Street
4. Mark House, Former Public Baths Building, Strand Street
5. Quay Street East and West, Car Park Sites
6. Site on Corner of Strand Street/Marlborough Street
7. Bardywell Lane
8. Albion Street North
9. Albion Street South

2.10 The character and public realm appraisals and development guidance will be used in pre-application discussions with developers and architects and will be expected to be reflected in their Design and Access Statements.

3. SUGGESTED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY CHANGES

3.1 The appropriateness of the existing boundaries of Whitehaven Town Centre Conservation Area and High Street Conservation Area was reviewed as part of this Character Appraisal and four changes have been recommended as follows:

3.2 Castle Park/Crowpark Wood

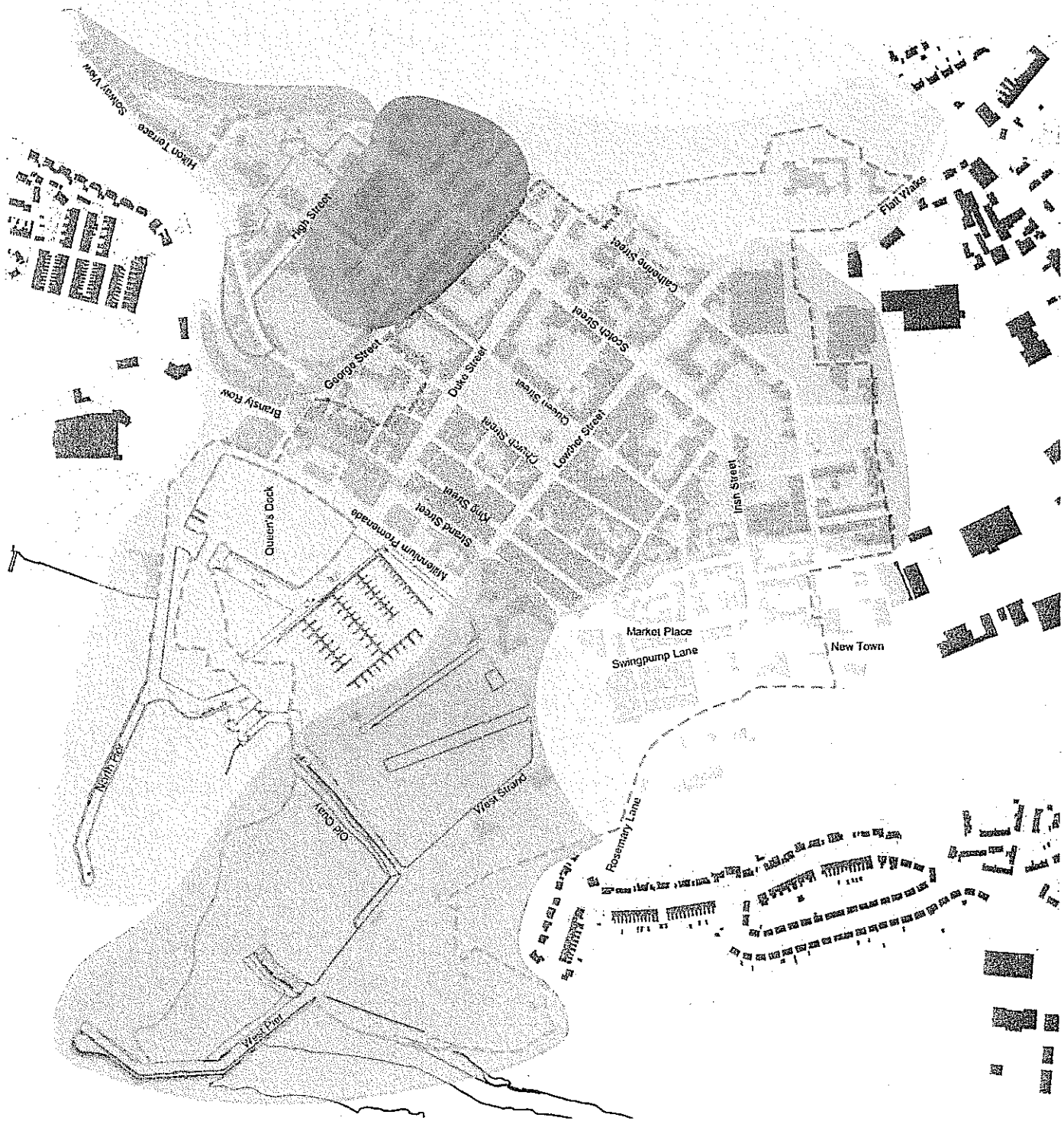
The eastern boundary of Whitehaven Town Centre Conservation Area is currently defined by a line of yew trees within Castle Park and by Whitehaven Castle. As such, the majority of the predominantly wooded Castle Park and Crowpark Wood, which together historically formed the castle's extensive grounds, are excluded from the town centre's conservation area. Due to their elevation and density of trees, Castle Park and Crowpark Wood help to give the town an attractive green backdrop and are considered fundamental to the special character of the town centre's conservation area.

- 4.2 Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that it is a duty of local planning authorities, from time to time, to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. The Act also states that proposals shall be submitted for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate and that the authority shall have regard to any views concerning the proposals expressed by persons attending the meeting.
- 4.3 It is proposed that an exhibition be arranged where interested residents and businesses can attend and ask questions and this will be followed by a public meeting where the background to the studies can be explained together with the proposals to change the conservation area boundaries.

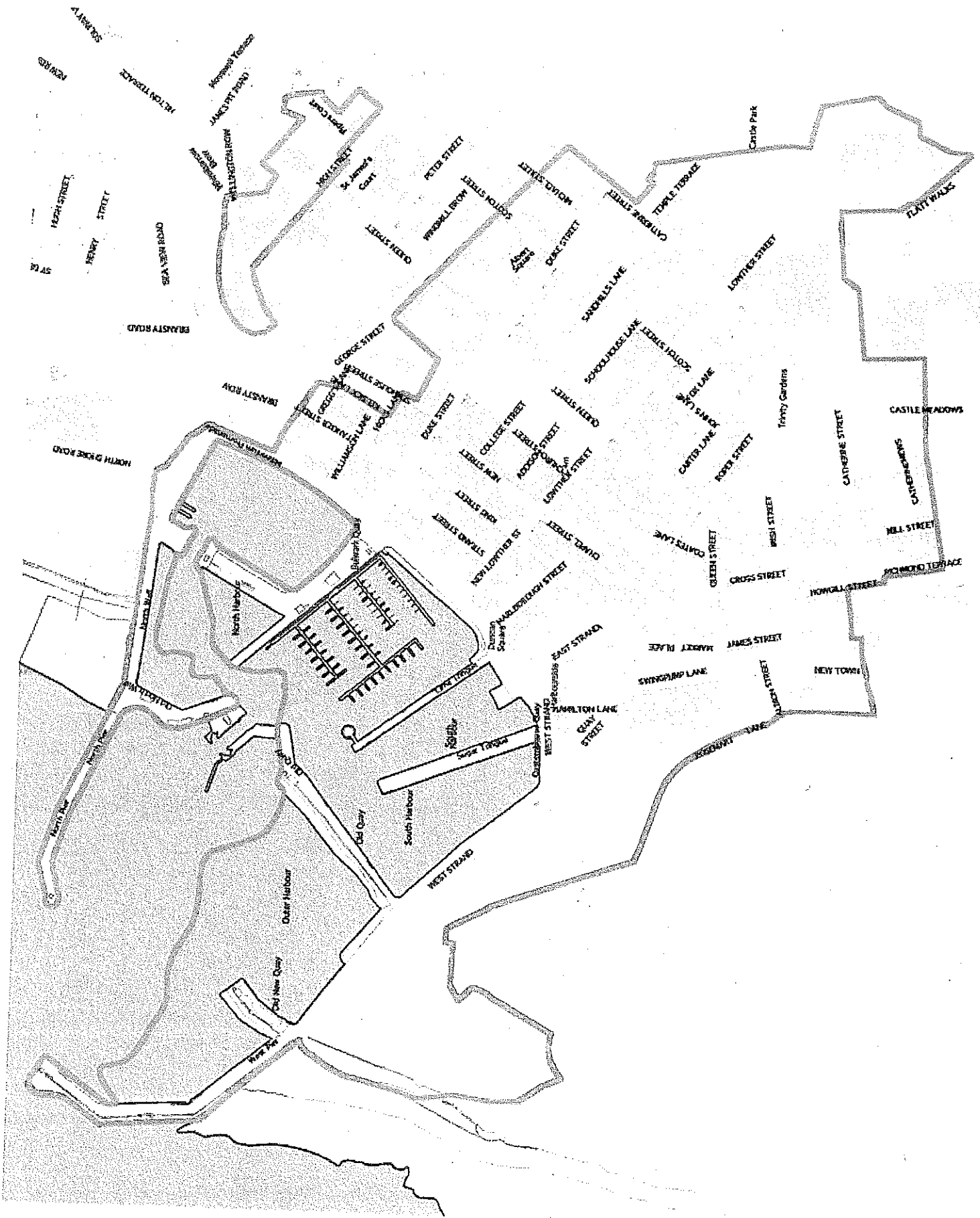
Others contacted: **Clinton Boyce, Legal Services Manager**

Contact Officer: **Tony Pomfret, Development Services Manager**

Background Papers: A suite of documents produced by Paul Butler Associates has been deposited in the Members' Room for reference.



Character areas within Whitehaven's town centre



Conservation area boundaries

PLAN 3 – PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

