

Whithorn Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Draft Planning Guidance - September 2026





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View of the tower of the Old Town Hall from Castle Hill open space on the east of Whithorn.



View from Bruce Street towards George Street from the west through the pend, once the gateway of the Priory area.



George Street, looking uphill towards the southern end

Introduction

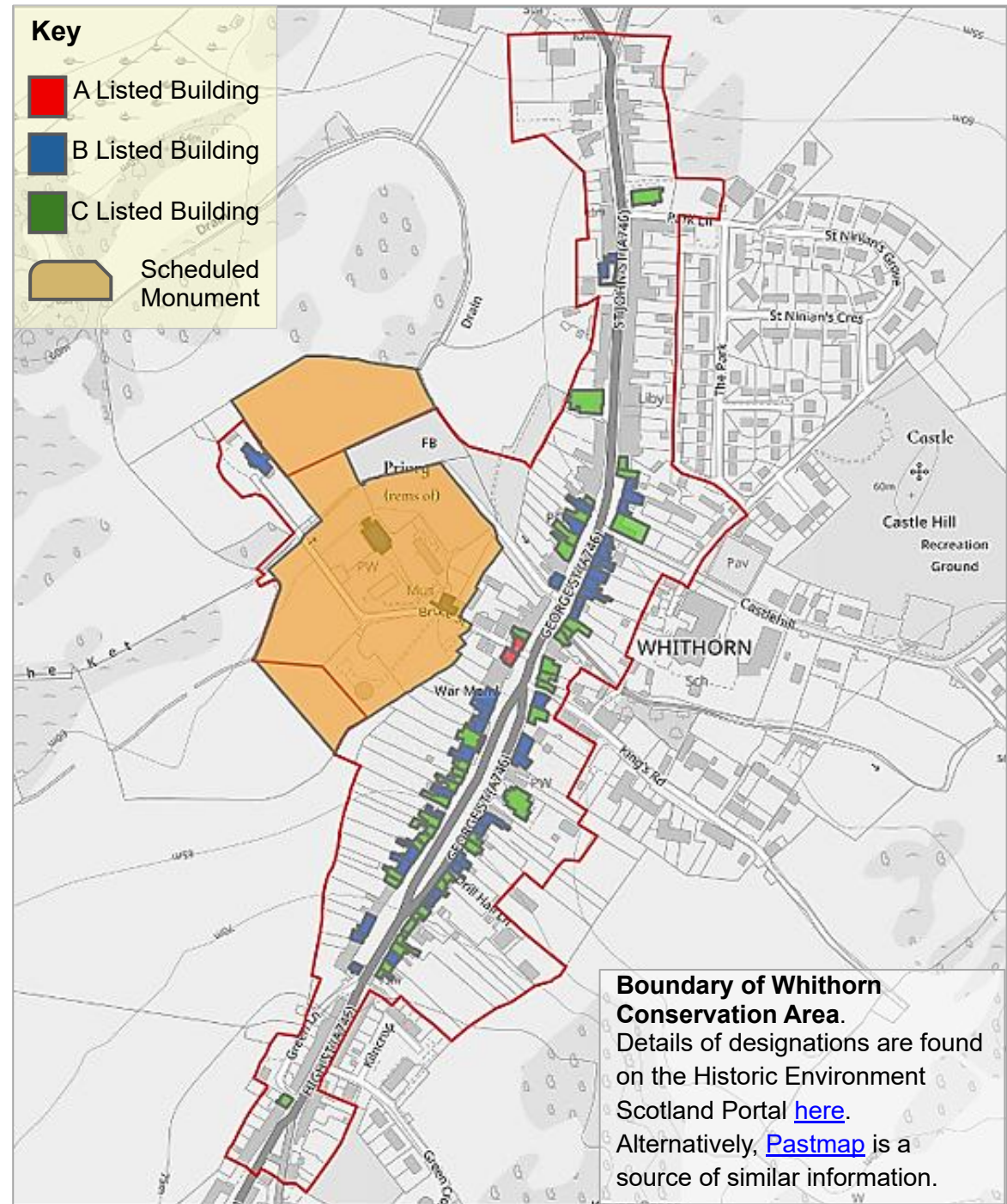
What is a conservation area?

A conservation area is defined in law as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance...” In 1967 the concept of the designation of conservation areas was introduced to the UK. The current legislation is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

The 1997 Act requires local planning authorities to identify and review areas where historic and architectural character merits conservation area status and to promote management of that character.

In a conservation area, proposals

- should be based on a clear understanding of historic and architectural character and its significance;
- should be designed to avoid or minimise detriment to character or architectural and historic interest and cultural significance; and
- demonstrate that the benefits of the proposal are being achieved in the most sympathetic way.



Character comes from a combination of various features including the layout and setting of buildings and spaces; the details and recurring themes across the buildings; the special qualities of individual buildings and groups in the conservation area.

When planning permission is required, the proposal and decision should focus on preserving or enhancing the character of the conservation area including respecting the integrity of significant elements of character.

Within a conservation area some change is inevitable to accommodate new roles and meet present day social and environmental challenges. The buildings need long term uses to support a vibrant conservation area, using sustainable, well-designed, sensitive development and adaptation. When the overall role of the area alters, the character can remain.

Purpose of Whithorn Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Its purpose is to recognise and appraise the architectural and historic character of Whithorn Conservation Area and use that information to guide development or other actions so that they are carried out in a manner that does not diminish that character. It will be used to assess planning application

proposals including new development, alterations, enhancements, upgrades or demolition to minimise detriment to the character of Whithorn Conservation Area.

It should guide owners, occupiers or developers to design their proposals to ensure they respect historic and architectural character. It supports sympathetic adaptations and sustainable development to allow existing uses and new uses to take place in healthy, resilient and comfortable buildings which last long into the future.

The character appraisal identifies significant elements of historic character and setting, focusing on individual and grouped buildings and spaces; the townscape; the layout; and the use of materials. It notes the relevance of the setting, how the historic layout contributes to character and has influenced the streetscape, architectural detail and significant features. Some built structures and spaces have been selected for comment due to their individual contribution to character.

The management plan is informed by the appraisal to give guidance on how the character, identified in the appraisal, might be preserved and enhanced. It will steer design and decision making so that the positive features of character continue.

Alterations and maintenance choices can affect an individual building, its neighbours and the character of the whole street depending on where it is.

The purpose of Whithorn CACAMP is to guide proposed change so that it:

- acknowledges the historic significance of the settlement and the religious links with the wider area;
- respects the character of the physical setting and location;
- takes full account of archaeology in all proposals – assesses, investigates and records;
- respects the buildings including the groupings and layout;
- keeps significant views to, from and through the conservation area;
- promotes the preservation, restoration and enhancement of traditional buildings, to reinforce character;
- encourages the repurposing of underused buildings and spaces including restoration and repair;
- promotes sensitive and appropriate adaptation of buildings or spaces; and
- supports ideas and projects that enhance character and which catalyse vitality and consolidate historic interest.

It supports appropriate adaptation for energy efficiency improvements provided they use suitable, compatible materials and guides carefully considered domestic renewable energy generation.

To demonstrate their understanding, energy surveyors and fitters should have experience of the national qualification **Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency for Older and Traditional Buildings**

Compatible energy efficiency adaptations for traditional buildings that will have the best outcomes for long-lasting indoor comfort should also preserve external character.

Retrofit industries recognise that climate change adaptations only work effectively when materials and systems are compatible with the original building. Some modern materials are hard, impermeable or irreversible, leading to gradual fabric damage. They may create maintenance issues including damp internal environments. Retrofit and restoration should also consider bats and birds as alteration can affect over-wintering roosts or nesting sites.

Buildings in Whithorn are generally constructed from local stone with lime mortars, some with lime wash or lime harling.

Alterations and maintenance should be matched to the original materials and construction method and be sympathetic to its design. The use of many modern materials has been seen to damage traditionally constructed buildings.

Planning controls in conservation areas.

Planning laws require permission for the following work.

Demolition of all, or most, of a building or structure needs Conservation Area Consent, with some exceptions. Demolition of a Listed Building always needs consent.

National policy discourages demolition and promotes repurposing. Where a building makes a positive contribution to character, the presumption against demolition is even stronger as its loss could be damaging to character. The use of space created by demolition may affect the decision outcome so a proposed design may be requested and carried out to an agreed timetable after demolition. Applications are made online: <https://www.eplanning.scot/ePlanningClient/default.aspx>

In 2024, changes were made to the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted](#)

[Development\) \(Scotland\) Order 1992 \(as amended\)](#).

Alterations and additions to the outside of buildings in a conservation area usually require [planning permission or an application for Prior Approval](#). The main works needing planning permission are:

- house extensions,
- balconies,
- roof alterations – dormers & rooflights,
- chimney alterations,
- stone cleaning, new exterior painting or changing paint colour,
- new render or cladding,
- changing exterior doors
- creating hard surfaces around buildings
- renewable energy equipment
- all statutorily Listed Buildings need consent for alterations.

Always check with the Council first.

Alterations or replacement of some windows in conservation areas, in unlisted buildings, may no longer need full planning permission. A [Prior Approval](#) submission should be made to establish if the design details meet the conditions set out in the 2024 GDPO amendment. All Listed buildings need permission for alterations to existing windows.

Trees in conservation areas are protected.

The following works must be notified to the Council six weeks in advance

- branch removal,
- work affecting the roots
- felling most trees

Following the notice being received the Council has 6 weeks to decide if a Tree Preservation Order is needed, if the tree/s contribute positively to character. The proposed works may be rejected or alternative works may be requested. National planning policy supports the retention of healthy trees.

<http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/15334/Protected-trees>

Attachments to the outside of buildings in conservation areas often need permission.

If not sensitively designed, equipment may affect character. It is usually possible to find discreet locations or alternative solutions. Applications are made online.

<http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/15329/A>

New buildings need Planning Permission in a conservation area.

There are some exceptions if the building is small, conforming to certain size and siting

criteria. However, Listed Building Consent may also be needed, or be needed instead, depending on the historic context of the proposed new building.

Pre-application guidance may be sought online in advance of making any form of application: [Get pre-application planning advice | Dumfries and Galloway Council](#)

The Council makes planning decisions using national and local planning policy and guidelines to assess the impact of proposals, including how they affect the character of a property, those near it and the whole Conservation Area. Officers may ask for changes to the design to improve the impact on character. The policy context is set out below.

Planning Policy

NPF4 policies and LDP policies support decision making for planning applications.

Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

[National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](#)

In February 2023, Scottish Government adopted NPF4. Its 6 overarching spatial principles and 33 policies are relevant to the historic environment. Those of most significance are considered in the following.



The 'New Town Hall' which is repurposed as a local gym, and bunkhouse for cyclists or hikers

Just transition recognises that change is needed, to reach 'net zero'. Policies support appropriate adaptation measures to reduce carbon emissions from historic buildings and improve the resilience of historic assets to climate change. The importance of

biodiversity is recognised, including how old buildings and structures can support a range of plants and animals.



Swift's nests are high up in stone buildings. Whithorn has opportunities to keep nest sites in taller buildings such as the church tower, the Old Town Hall and in houses and converted buildings.



Bats, swallows, and house martins also need nest and brood sites and the access to them to be retained. Modern artificial solutions are available.

NPF4 seeks to preserve character, encourage maintenance and promote enhancement of historic places and not only for properties with designations. NPF4 acknowledges the importance of the whole of Scotland's historic environment and that

the planning system can support its protection, enhancement and adaptation.

Conserving and recycling assets

There is a firm presumption to reuse and adapt all buildings, reducing demolition of all or parts of structures as far as possible.

“We will make productive use of existing buildings, places, infrastructure and services, locking in carbon, minimising waste and building a circular economy.”

Re-use of traditional buildings and those of historic interest, with or without historic designation, will cut the total number of demolitions. This principle recognises the value of the embodied energy of materials, construction and the original skilled work involved.

NPF4 Policy 7 Historic assets and places

Policy 7 directly refers to conservation areas and recognises that cultural heritage in Scotland contributes to the economy, to people's identity and quality of life.

The principles and intent of Policy 7 are ***“... to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and to enable positive change as a catalyst for the regeneration of places. ...”***

Policy 7 has a presumption to retain, maintain and adapt buildings where they contribute positively to historic or architectural character and find beneficial uses. Demolition is a last resort. The policy seeks to save the energy 'locked up' in the existing fabric, reduce waste and support sensitive alterations and promotes energy efficiency. This minimises carbon emissions.

Policy 7 confirms that conservation area designation seeks to sustain the special historic character, architectural interest, local identity and sense of place; sensitively reduce the impact of the built environment on climate change; and maximise the economic advantage of historic character, to benefit current and future generations of people. Policy 7 promotes the need to understand the character of conservation areas, to enable good decision-making. Character appraisals and management plans are intended to help with this.

Historic Environment Scotland [HES], the lead body advising Scottish Government, has a range of guidance, publications and other resources to help people to understand the built heritage and give more detail on national policy and good practice: [The Engine Shed publications and guidance](#) and [Managing Change](#) publications.

Local Policy

Dumfries and Galloway Council is committed to the stewardship of historic areas across the region, recognising the important contribution they make to quality of life, sense of place and the economy, including the benefits of tourism and the wider importance of the built environment in the character of the region's landscapes.

Dumfries and Galloway Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2), adopted October 2019. Historic Environment policies are included, similar to those in NPF4. General policies and a settlement statement apply to Whithorn confirming its role to provide the immediate needs of residents and attract visitors, who support many livelihoods and the local economy.

The character of conservation areas thrives when owners and occupants understand the need to maintain the historic and architectural character and fabric and find and follow good advice before deciding how to adapt or alter a building. It is essential to carry out timely, ongoing maintenance to buildings using compatible materials and sensitive construction techniques.

LDP2 Policy HE2: 'Conservation Areas' promotes sensitive, informed approaches to development within conservation areas. To

assist developers to design the most appropriate change, it refers to adopted Supplementary Guidance (SG) including the [Historic Built Environment SG](#) and a range of supplementary and planning [guidance](#) specific to places or particular buildings or themes.

Since 2025, the new regulations for producing a Local Development Plan allow planning guidance to be adopted by Councils to support their LDP policies rather than supplementary guidance.

Whithorn Conservation Area

"The town consists chiefly of one street, running from N. to S. From this street there are several alleys stretching to the E. and to the W. About the centre of the town there is a good hall for public meetings, adorned with a spire and turrets, and provided with a set of bells. A beautiful stream of water, over which there is a good bridge, runs across the main street, dividing it nearly into two equal parts. The houses are generally covered in slates and very commodious." Isaac Davidson, on Whithorn in the 1790s

The quote is from Isaac Davidson, minister of Whithorn in the later 18th century, describing Whithorn.

Whithorn Conservation Area was first designated on 6th September 1977 and extended on the 6th February 1979.

The layout seems not to have changed for more than two centuries and built structures at the core are similar. The Ket burn is now culverted under George Street and a house now spans a section on the eastern side of the street. The town hall seems a bit different in description. The slate roofing mainly persists. Although many houses are good sized family homes, they are not all large by current standards.

From the 5th century onwards, the town grew as an important site for Christianity, one of the earliest in the wider region. The term 'Cradle of Christianity' in Scotland is sometimes used for Whithorn. For more than 1000 years it has been the centre of an ecclesiastical site. The most visible part of that history is in the Whithorn Priory site, which is designated a Scheduled Monument. There is also earlier archaeology. Whithorn Priory, along with historic objects in the museum associated with archaeological excavations, is a big draw for tourism.



A replica iron age roundhouse has been constructed in the former priory area which represents part of the pre-Christian history of Whithorn.

It has been a place of pilgrimage for many centuries. The Royal Arms of Scotland plaque on the pend to Bruce Street, formerly gateway to the priory, from circa 1500, commemorates the pilgrimages of King James IV.

The replica iron age roundhouse was constructed in the former priory area. It represents part of the pre-Christian history of Whithorn.

In this area, archaeological investigation has uncovered a range of features associated with early settlement as well as those closely associated with the mediaeval Priory.

The Priory and Museum are owned and managed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Religious Heritage in Whithorn

Whithorn has a long association with Christianity as a place where it began in Scotland and subsequently over many centuries, a place of pilgrimage. Ancient crosses are preserved in the museum and occasionally others turn up repurposed by being incorporated into later buildings.

The Church of Scotland Parish Church is beside the Priory site but there are other Christian faith groups in the settlement.

The United Presbyterian Church was at the north of the town and has been converted to a service garage and a petrol station.

The Roman Catholic Church is an unusual design but just been turned down for statutory Listing. It occupies a place central in the town.

Whithorn Parish Church



Below: On the pend arch, the arms of the Bishop of Whithorn, or Galloway, 1482 to

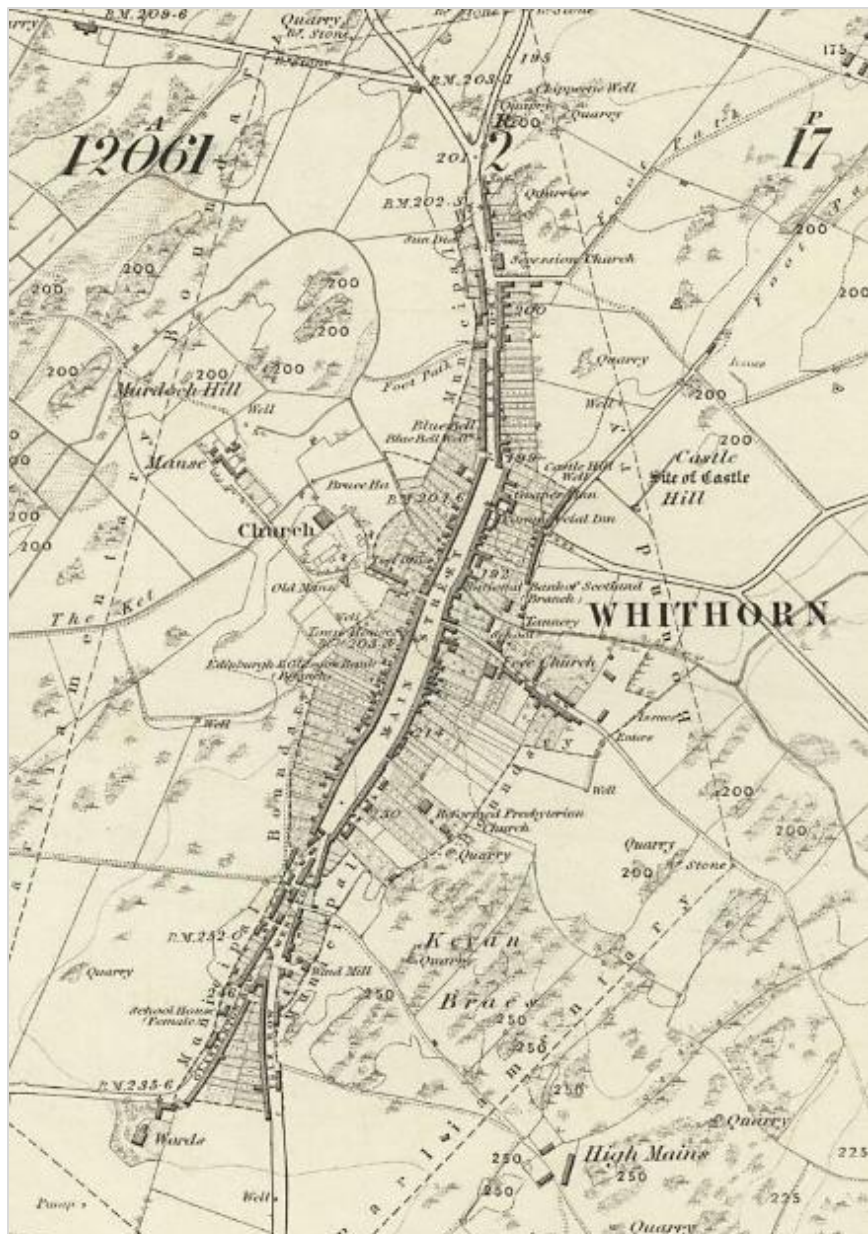


Roman Catholic Church



Some of the crosses in the museum and the graveyard beside the Priory ruins.





Ordnance survey 1849

<https://maps.nls.uk/view/74431153#zoom=5.3&lat=7969&lon=4996&layers=BT>



A 1950s postcard looking north, down the crescent shaped bend in George Street and beyond towards the Galloway Hills. The variation in height between buildings is very apparent. The mix of elevation finished can also be seen in terms of whether natural stone, harling, paint or render.

The following part of the guidance is in two parts:

PART ONE – History, Development and General Character

The historical development of Whithorn and an overview of the significant themes and elements which come together to create its character.

PART TWO: Managing Character

Management requires the character to be preserved and enhanced particularly when making planning or improvement decisions. Proposals which carry through most of the following will be supported.

- Respecting the wide central street of the historic town;
- Continuing the pattern of smaller streets leaving the central spine;
- Keeping the varied roofline heights;
- Keeping subtle architectural details and historic elements;
- Using traditional building materials; and/or
- Designing new buildings which contribute positively to existing character.

Good management supports owners, occupiers and collective groups and catalyses initiatives and suitable actions to preserve or enhance character.

PART ONE – HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL CHARACTER OF WHITHORN CONSERVATION AREA

National and Regional Context

Planning objectives

LDP2 seeks to consolidate the role of the settlement as a district centre; identify housing opportunities to allow the population of Whithorn to expand and to grow business and employment by identifying land suited to business development. There are 4 housing sites allocated in LDP2 ranging from a handful of units up to more than 70 units. LDP2 also recognises the historical and landscape characteristics of the settlement, noting the wide main street, long narrow gardens to the rear and the closes, pends and small streets leading off. It acknowledges that these features should influence and support appropriate design.

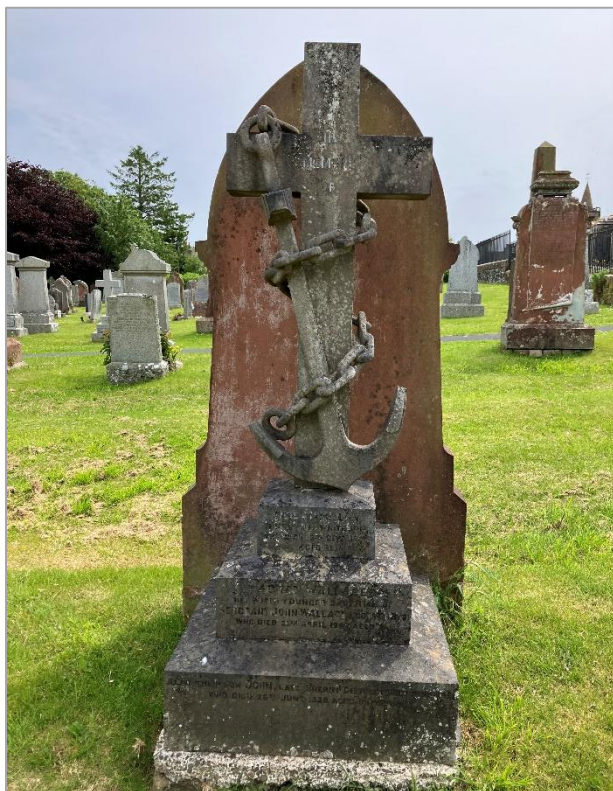
The town is on the Machars Peninsula within the Machars Coast Regional Scenic Area. It has many important historic sites in the area and is recognised as a long-standing place of pilgrimage, the accepted place where Christianity began in Scotland, with significant associated and separate history. Organisations based in the Whithorn community have promoted and achieved projects that recognise the importance of the

town as one of the destinations of ancient pilgrimage routes. The early influence of St. Ninian in bringing Christianity to Scotland is key fact that has led to the development of the town. Projects have taken advantage of the historic and architectural quality and setting of the town.



Unconventional repurposing of former UP church building on St. John Street with petrol pump at the front and engineering area inside.

The settlement has historic links with other communities, which have been explored by several archaeologists and historians over the centuries and in the 2020s. The town had a strong link and reliance on the port at the nearby Isle of Whithorn and there are hints of rivalry with Wigtown, with its own harbour.



Memorial in Whithorn Churchyard hinting at links with the sea (although the inscription refers to an innkeeper).

Several traditional stone buildings in Whithorn Conservation Area have been repurposed including conventional and more

unusual adaptations and restoration. There were many shops and some banks in the past. A few of those buildings remain commercial with public facing uses. Others are vacant or have occasional uses. Some former shops have been converted to dwellings with shopfronts retained so their former use can be seen in the street elevations.

Between the 2022 Census and the 2011 Census there have been marked changes in the demographics of Whithorn; more than the rest of the region or Scotland as a whole.

In 2022 Whithorn, as part of the Machars South area, fell into the bottom 40% of most deprived areas in Scotland in terms of health. It was also one of the 30% most deprived areas in Scotland in terms of education and housing. However, it was in the 40% of least deprived areas in terms of geographical access and 30% least deprived in terms of crime. All of these contribute to the quality of life.

Education

There is a primary school in Whithorn with a catchment area that includes many of the small, settlements in the surrounding rural area. Education above primary level is away

from the settlement and relies on public transport to Newton Stewart or Stranraer.

Population profile

The recorded population of Whithorn in 2022 was 723, a 12.8% reduction from 2011 when the regional decline was 3.6%. In 2022 there were 94 children (under 15 years old) 39% less than in 2011. In 2022 the working age population (16 to 64 years) was 394 21% less than in 2011. In 2022 there were 237 people over 65 years old rising from 176 in 2011, an increase of 34.7%. The regional over 65 population increased by 19.8% and 22.5% in Scotland as a whole for comparison.

Population of 723 (in 2022) by age is:

- 13.0% - under 16;
- 54.3% - working age (16 to 64);
- 32.7% - over 65.

Household income

Based on national average household incomes, 25% of the population of the town of Whithorn were considered to be income deprived in 2022, more than twice the proportion in the rest of the region. This probably overlaps with the 14% of households considered to be employment deprived in 2020.

Housing

In 2024 there were 428 dwellings noted in Whithorn itself. The occupancy was a little lower than occupancy across the region. 2.6% of the dwellings are known to be second homes which is higher than the 1.6% regional figure. In the town 1.6% of the dwellings are recorded as short term lets. Long term empty dwellings were 2.3% of the total number of dwellings in Whithorn.

Summary of housing information

428 - dwellings in total in 2025

393 dwellings were occupied - 91.8%

197 dwellings had single adult occupancy – 46%

5 dwellings were unoccupied

20 of the dwellings are long term empty

10 dwellings were second homes

7 short term lets, 1.6%, in 2025 in Whithorn settlement (152 dwellings in Machars South neighbourhood - 5.4%).

There is significantly higher single adult occupancy recorded than in the wider region.

There is both social and private landlord rental accommodation.

The housing variety available is within a mix of stone buildings in the central and side streets and later 20th century developments including bungalows to the south and east of the conservation area.

Affordable housing accommodation has been developed in a converted traditional former inn building by the charity All Roads Lead to Whithorn.

Health

There is a doctor's surgery in Whithorn and an ambulance first responder base (and a fire and rescue station). The nearest acute hospitals is in Stranraer, then Ayr, Dumfries or Glasgow for a full range of medical health services.

Access

There are two bus routes with regular public services linking to Stranraer or Newton Stewart as well as meeting services that carry on to Dumfries and Ayr. There are also school bus services. The main road north, south through the town links with Isle of Whithorn to the south, Glasserton and Monreith to the west, Garlieston to the east and Wigtown to the north.

Local services and employment

Within the conservation area, there are a small number of shops including small grocery shops, gift and craft outlets, café, hot food take-away all of which provide some local employment and household income. Otherwise, employment is in vehicle service, farm support, plumbing and electrical, and wider construction. Other employment is based away from the town in larger settlements.

As household income in Whithorn is known to be lower than other parts of the region with very few exceptions, financial circumstances among families and older people in Whithorn vary. There are not many opportunities for jobs locally, particularly those that are well paid. Trained trades and farming related skilled jobs perhaps provide the best opportunities for people who wish to remain local.

The local partnership initiative, Building Futures Galloway, is delivering the Whithorn reBUILD project, which is supporting young people to learn practical, hands on, traditional construction skills linked to historic building repair, restoration and re-creation.



Above: Examples of some of the traditional skills being taught in Whithorn

Below: Narrow side streets, alleys and pends in Whithorn.



Most buildings in the conservation area have uses or found new uses. Subdivision and repurposing of under-used buildings has taken place, creating a selection of dwelling types. However, there are also some buildings that seem difficult to sell, and which remain on the market or unused for some years.



*Above, The Grapes, former hotel, now flats.
Below: The Whithorn Story museum and cafe.*

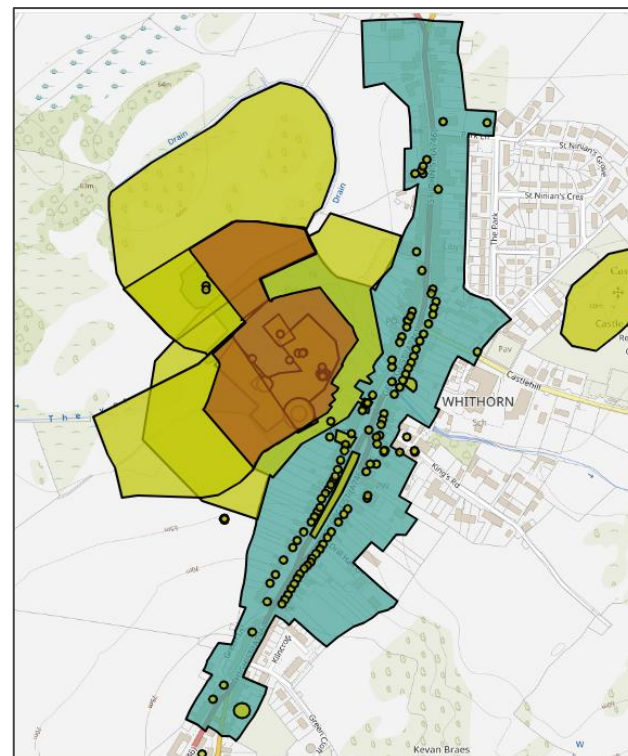


Tourism is an important element of the local economy. Whithorn is a popular base for a range of outdoor leisure and faith-based activities which overlap, such as cycling and walking in the small roads, near the coast, walking the Whithorn Way which has been revived and improved as the historic, long distance pilgrimage route; and considering the many archaeological sites in the vicinity.

The Whithorn Priory site, in the centre of Whithorn, has been developed to depict some of the early history of the region. Providing visitor accommodation in converted buildings supports the tourism economy although much of the accommodation is outside of the town.

The New Town Hall conversion [Figure 5 p.7] provides bunk house accommodation. It includes work and study stations as well as an event space and gym, developed by the charity All Roads Lead to Whithorn

Archaeology There are a range of archaeological features in the Whithorn Priory area and other remains around the settlement of interest to the origins of human settlement and cultural rituals in the wider area.



Extract from [PastMap](#) showing Scheduled Monuments, Historic Environment Records including Listed Buildings and the Conservation Area

Building materials

Most of the original building materials are stone, pointed with lime under slate roofs.



The photos on this page show some of the mix of stone types. Whinstone is most common with sandstone or granite quoins and chimneys.



Lime wash and harling is used on a significant number of buildings but bare stone features too. Where harled or render there are elevation colour variations. Cement renders were only used from the 20th century but other change took place in the 18th and 19th centuries too. Many early elevations remain. Brick buildings are not particularly evident in the conservation area.

Natural slate is the dominant historic roofing material. Some Scottish slates remain on older buildings, but others are more likely of Welsh or Cumbrian origin. Recent, imported slates have been used with noticeable change to the roof colour and slating pattern. Roof ridges are a mix of sandstone and galvanised zinc.

However, thick, flat, concrete roof tiles are evident on a small number of buildings.

The mix of stone used is sandstone, whinstone and some granite as set out in the table on the following page. There is both rubble walling and cut and dressed stone. The status and age of the building influenced the selection of the stone type to some degree in the way it was cut and coursed and its surface finish.

Building Material	Description	Use
Whinstone (local greywacke but sometimes dolerite, or basalt.)	Whinstone is usually partly metamorphosed, hard, granular, sedimentary stone in shades of grey.	A common building stone in the conservation area as both coursed and random rubble stone for elevations although often painted or rendered and painted white or cream. It is also commonly used in garden walls and sometimes for kerb stones. It is used to make pin-stones to fill the height or width of joints.
Granite (silver-grey granite)	Hard, metamorphic, speckled grey, stone some was quarried at Dalbeattie originally or Creetown.	Used in a number of buildings mostly as quoins or window margins or chimneys. Also used for steps, kerbs, setts and sculptures.
Red Sandstone (red, or brownish red from regional Permian deposits)	Sedimentary rock often with a big colour range but mostly brownish red, in Whithorn.	Sandstone is found in the facades of a number of designed 19th century buildings and used in the tracery and carved window margins of other buildings. It is used for skew stones and ridge capping and appears in some boundaries. Some may be repurposed from older buildings.

History of Whithorn Conservation Area – from before Christianity to Mediaeval

Whithorn from Prehistory to Modern

Every account of history varies, so people may not always agree on interpretation.

Whithorn appears on various historic maps using different spellings such as Hwit-aern, Quhythyrne, Whittern, Withorn and Whitehorn as seen in the following pages.

The Greco Roman, Claudius Ptolemy refers to Whithorn as Leuko or Lucopibia in 2nd century maps. The Latin version is Candida Casa, which has persisted.

The town and surrounding area have unique historic interest. Although not a natural location for a settlement without a river crossing and with no apparent defence structure. It is thought to have had some early trading importance until at least 300AD, but the development of the town is closely linked with its ecclesiastical origins.

The old town hall garden, known as Chapelheron, has been the site of stone tool finds. Iron Age remains are known in the wider landscape too.



Extract from a 1584 drawing from 2nd Century Ptolemy Map - Europae I [north point is unclear but perhaps towards the right]
<https://maps.nls.uk/view/120445502>



Black Loch of Myrton excavation around 2016 revealing a well- preserved Iron Age 'loch village' settlement near Whithorn. For your interest, view the following <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twkqs2SBFuc>

In the area of the town and conservation area, an enclosure ditch was found in the Manse Field from the Bronze Age hinting at a possible settlement with cultivated land close to the present-day town.

The term Candida Casa was used by the Romans but it refers to a white church built by St. Ninian in the 5th century. 2nd to 3rd century Roman coins have been discovered in various locations in Whithorn so their presence is confirmed. The presence of a monastery on the site seems to be from around the end of the 5th century to the

beginning of the 6th century. It is based on evidence of cultivation and building remains. Changes took place through the 6th century much of it including the addition of graves, shrines and workshops in phases which continued into the 8th century. More substantial change took place under the Northumbrian ministry in the 8th century until the early 9th century. Everything seems to have changed in the 9th century with the church becoming a barn, which then burned down, and other buildings were removed to allow the cultivation of the land. There is evidence of flooding around this time too. Phases of rebuilding on higher ground and replacement of buildings to maintain a settlement which continued in various forms perhaps sometimes under the influence of northern traders, until the 13th century.

In the 12th century a Premonstratensian convent or priory was founded including a 'cathedral'. It seems to have happened alongside the ordinary lives of the Whithorn inhabitants. Manufacture of trading goods was in evidence such as leather and antler-work. By the 14th century the existing town was beginning to take shape and some of the western areas around the Glebe Field may have slowly been abandoned. In the early 16th century more Priory buildings

were erected. The remains have survived in part.



1986-91 image from Whithorn Dig

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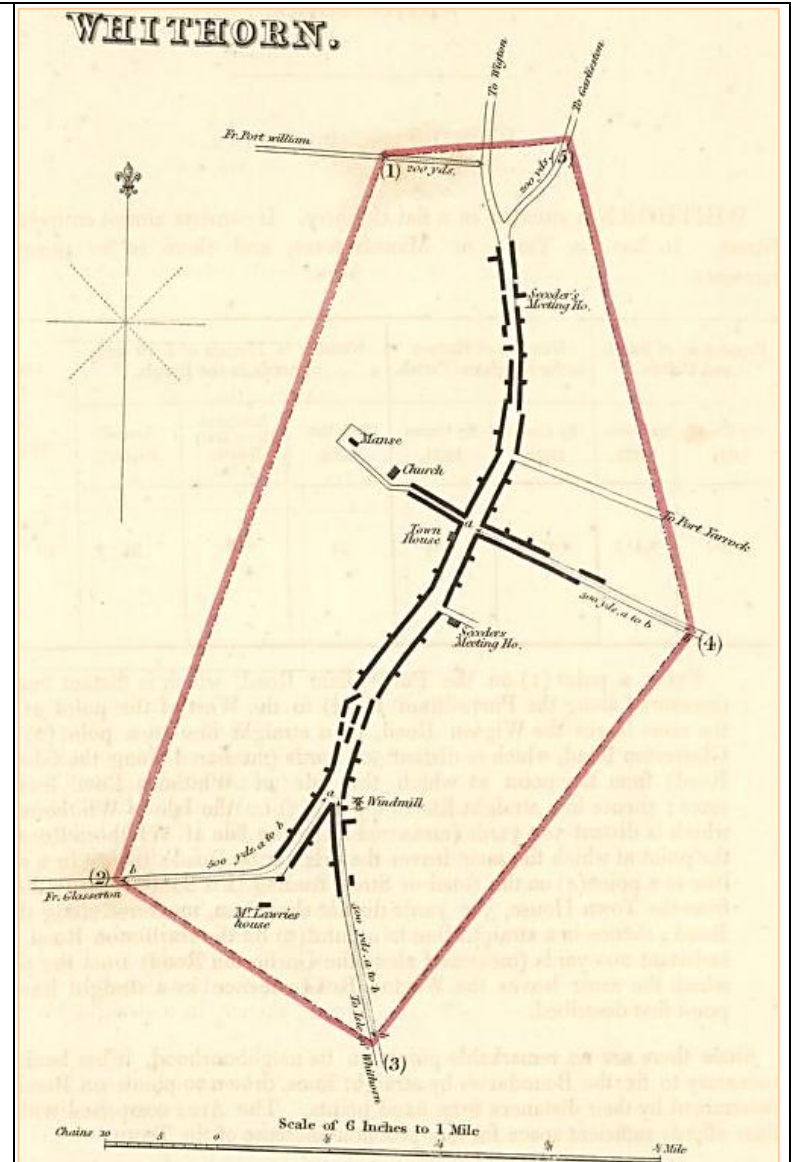
The town may have grown mainly to support the Priory and accommodate services, visitors to the Priory and ancillary trades as the early settlement associated with the Priory site moved east, when an ecclesiastical precinct was formed. A burgh was erected under feudal superiority of the Priory in 1325 and Robert the Bruce visited in 1329.



Above left: Nicolas de Nicolay, 1517-1583
[Vraye & exacte description Hydrographique des costes maritimes d'Esosse, 1583.](#)

Above: Extract from George Taylor and Andrew Skinner map of the road from Edinburgh to Wigtown and Whitehorn, 1775
<https://maps.nls.uk/view/74400346>

Left: 18th Century military map of Scotland Roy Lowlands, 1752 -55
[Georeferenced Maps viewer - Map images - National Library of Scotland](#)



Great Reform Act Plan of Whitehorn 1832
<https://maps.nls.uk/view/74491939>

The feudal layout of the mediaeval burgh of Whithorn was established in the 14th century and has largely persisted. The rear boundaries of George Street properties on the western side may be founded on walls of buildings associated with the priory. Whithorn had become an important pilgrimage centre from the 12th century, from where its wealth came, continuing until the reign of Elizabeth I and the 1581 prohibition of monasteries. Whithorn continued as the market town for the agricultural hinterland and port of the Isle of Whithorn.

The wealth of the town increased in the 18th century when agricultural reforms were taking place and most trade was with Ireland and England, mainly by sea.

The current layout of the town was well-established by the 19th century and map evidence suggests there were a variety of commercial and industrial buildings or sites including a tannery, windmills, quarries, banks and Inns. In the mid-19th century, the railways came. There was a terminus at the north end of the town and it helped move goods by land. The line closed in 1964.

Whithorn has not been subject to much recent pressure for redevelopment or

growth so the direct link to open country from back of the burgage plots, or rigs, has been largely retained and remains a key feature of the conservation area.

New building took place east of St John Street and south of High Street but the underlying grain of the mediaeval town remains. The form and layout of new development is not traditional street terraces so it contrasts with older development directly beside it.

East of George Street, development has taken place, notably off Castlehill. In many places, the form of the original plot is lost undermining the historic layout of the Burgh. A late 19th century line of outbuilding to the rear of the burgage plots on either side of Castlehill and rows of cottages along Kings Road were removed reducing the definition of the burgage plots, rigs.

Buildings within the conservation area are mainly in residential use. Some shops and commercial properties, often with residential accommodation on upper floors are found concentrated in the northern end of George Street and the southern part of St John Street.



Street Pattern and Form

The core of the settlement has retained its original layout. One of the features of the historic core is the alleys, and small streets off the central spine of High Street, George Street and St. John's Street. Some are mediaeval in origin. A few have names in John Wood's mid-19th century town plan. The loss of outbuildings to the rear of the feudal plots on the east side seems not to be a mistake in that it undermines the historic character.

All of George Street is very wide with central parking. George Street has a significant curve too.

The northern end has a cluster of commercial buildings in a former 'market square' area. The road narrows significantly as it runs north into St. John's Street in front of the New Town Hall and widens again as it leaves the Burgh.

Setting, Topography, Landscape, Location, Viewpoints and Key Approaches

Whithorn is set in undulating pasture. No hills are high and valleys are shallow. The town rolls uphill to the south and then downhill. There are significant views towards the Galloway Hills and to the coast in opposite directions. The Old Town Hall tower is visible in many views from the east and the west and along George Street.

There are important glimpses to and from the narrow streets and pends which emphasise the burgage plots as they once were.

The narrowed areas of the main spine streets may be the old gate sites or ports and as well as protecting the burgh and constricting the views they have historic interest.



The curve and incline in George Street looking south



Views east and west along Drill Hall Lane



Trees and Hedges

Trees and hedges are mainly found in the Priory area or in rear gardens where space allows. There is a permanent Christmas Tree in the central area of George Street of significance too.

Buildings

The buildings have been described in other sections in respect of their elevations, materials and roofscape. As well as the more commonly occurring terraces, there are individual buildings within the conservation area which stand out because they are detached or different in their form and add to the character through this difference. Examples are found in the following page.

Windows and doors

There are a variety of windows and doors across the conservation area and some replacements that impact the character in a variety of ways. Doors, windows and fanlights are very significant to character in many of the properties. Some traditional windows and doors and other architectural elements are included in the following tables.

Original sash and case windows had a variety of formats some with unequal opening lights. Each style is particular to the

character of each building; unfortunately many have been lost.

Original doors include 4 and 6 panelled doors, a number of double-leafed storm doors, plain planked doors and more unusual formats from different periods. Door replacement with non-traditional proportions and formats, some in modern materials has diminished character to a degree.

Fanlights are relatively simple with a few exceptions, but they are important features above the doors.



Former inn built in a restrained romantic style with front facing gable and overhanging eaves and verges. Whinstone built with sandstone quoins and margins.

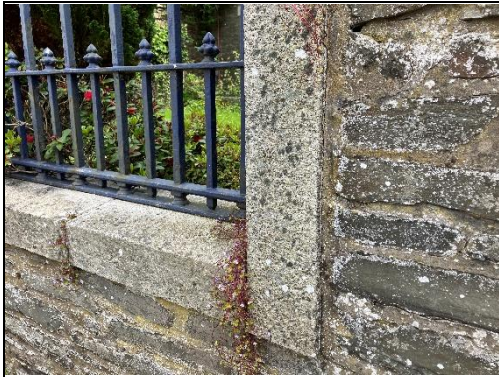


The early 20th century library on St. John's Street, brick built with a distinct symmetrical front elevation with ceramic brick and terracotta detailing and a stone lintel with inscription and date above central entrance door.



Examples of windows and fanlights.

There are only a few formats across the conservation area of 6 over 6, 2 Over 2 and 1 over 1 panes. There are some variations in the proportions of the panes that are specific to individual frontages and add to character.



Railings and gates



Doors



Roofscape, Townscapes, Building Façades and Architectural Features

The town roofs are at a mix of heights. The high points are mainly chimneys and a few dormers, some half above eaves and

others fully on the roof. The chimneys are both large and small multi-flue stacks some with interesting cans. Nearly all buildings have chimneys and are a key part of the character of the roovescape. The buildings are a mix of 2 bay, 2 storey with some 3

bay frontage buildings, generally conventional 'Georgian' style frontages which contribute to a continuity of design and character. Most buildings are not very ornate with simple themes. Most window margins through the town are painted.

Many façades are unpainted but some have harling and render with painted finishes in a variety of colours mostly not strong with a few exceptions which jar with other buildings

The buildings generally have simple architectural themes and features

Most buildings have natural slate roofs, skew stones and many have stone ridge cappings. Most of the visible roofing uses small slates in diminishing courses but a small number have replacement roofs with flat concrete tiles. The use of different materials, and change to colour and pattern of slating diminishes the character.

Roof heights are distinctively varied with few continuous runs of the same ridge heights - some are single storey, two storey and a few have dormers.

Elevations and materials:

The vernacular architectural character is of stone elevations using red sandstone, whinstone and grey granite quoins. Some are cut blocks and others rubble. R finished with paint.

Shopfronts

There are many existing shop frontages and some window opening sizes and



Two shop fronts in George Street

shapes suggest there were more in the past. Shop frontages are varied and interesting dating from different periods but quite simple. Frontages have been kept when the whole building has become residential which makes a strong feature of the past use.

Some of the shops are quite typical of Victorian and Edwardian shops, but others seem to date from the earlier Georgian period and may have existed earlier even if slightly modified. They provide a good cross-section of traditional shopfronts in the wider region and a reminder of the use of the role of the buildings they occupy and the mixed uses of the historic streets.



There are a few simpler shopfronts, some more traditional in appearance than others. The variety is very much part of the vitality of the streets

Boundaries and surfaces

There are many interesting walls and railings throughout the conservation area. Some are in need of refurbishment to replace broken elements, missing parts, fill gaps, remove rust, or repaint.

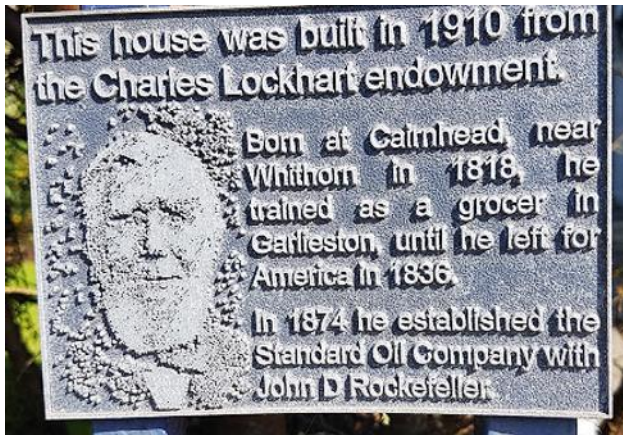
The streets are generally lined with granite kerbstones where they have not been replaced and paviers and cobbles are present in a small number of places where the historic environment

Statues, sculptures and cultural pieces

The War memorial in George Street is made from granite and is an octagonal pillar on an octagonal and stepped base. The pillar has a corona and an orb on top. It is not attributed to a named sculptor.

A plaque in front of The Manse on George Street reference Charles Lockhart. He built the first commercial oil refinery as one of the 4 founders of the Standard Oil Company – J D Rockefeller, H M Flagler and W G Warden being the other three names.





Royal Arms of James IV of Scotland at the pend through to Bruce Street



The War Memorial in George Street

PART TWO: Managing the Character of Whithorn Conservation Area

The management of the conservation area will support many of the objectives of the **Whithorn Place Plan** particularly as the objectives for the wider settlement of Whithorn that came through in the consultation with the public are:

- Intergenerational Upskilling and Training
- Community Greening and Growing
- MUGA Improvements with Micro-Hub
- Community Renewable Energy Grid
- 'Filling the Gaps' in the Bus Service
- Rethinking Car Parking
- Mobility Hub
- Whithorn Market
- Ground Surface Renovation Scheme
- Beautifying Whithorn
- Places to Wait and Rest
- Shopfront Improvements
- Flexible High Street Community Space
- Heritage Sensitive Signage Improvement,
- Reinstatement and Care of Buildings – façade upkeep; enhanced liveability; repurpose, retrofit or reoccupy empty and derelict buildings
- Safeguarding Existing Heritage Assets
- Improve Connections Within and Beyond Whithorn – map and visitor kiosk
- A Creative Wayfinding Strategy
- Formalise a Town Brand
- Diversify Whithorn's Tourist Offering

The majority of these are linked with the historic and architectural interest of Whithorn. In addition, some other initiatives were identified:

- Protecting and capitalising on Whithorn's world-class heritage;
- Protection and upkeep of characteristic town centre and buildings;
- Supporting existing community initiatives and develop new ones;
- Delivery of skills and learning;
- Combatting rural isolation;
- Town centre vibrancy - businesses, public leisure and general beautifying

- South Machars Community Centre Evolution
- Reinstatement of Derelict Historic Building at Grapes Hotel
- Net Zero Training Flagship at Whithorn Old Town Hall
- Centre for Understanding Early Mediaeval Scotland
- Aet Hwitan-Aerne: Rebuilding Whithorn's Anglian Minster
- Townscape Improvements at the Heart of Whithorn

General Character Management Points

The historic character of Whithorn has been recognised through its designation as a conservation area. There are always

challenges facing the retention of historic character. Some of these are outlined below.

Climate change adaptations

As with all climate change adaptations to traditional buildings, and in historic areas, care should be taken to use the best methods for the longevity of the individual building, the comfort of its interior and the character of the place.

Roof slopes of buildings on High Street, George Street and St John Street face west or east and are not ideal for photo-voltaic panels. Outbuildings with south facing slopes or areas where free standing panels could be erected with better orientation are options.

Adaptations to reduce emissions and costs of living should be suited to each building. UK Government reports have found that, some insulation added to buildings is a poor standard and should be replaced.

Breathable insulation products are readily available and the insulation trades have more knowledge about the sensitivity of individual buildings. The wrong materials and poor work that needs remediated is neither effective nor efficient.

Taking advantage of the aspect of the roof slopes on the main house, outbuildings and sloping gardens should be explored.

New technologies that communities can share may also be a way forward to reduce the need to have new equipment on every individual house.

Challenges:

Maintenance

The first of these is maintenance. The trend to replace older materials rather than repair, is resulting in the loss of original features that have lasted for a long time. Some of this would be unnecessary if a more targeted and regular maintenance regime was carried out to all buildings such as painting timber, re-puttying windows, regularly painting timber doors, mending roofs especially slipped slates and flashings and repairing and unblocking rainwater goods and rones. It is always best to do this as soon as they are noticed following regular inspection.

Climate Change Adaptation

The second challenge is meeting climate change targets and improving living standards within traditional buildings in the conservation area.



Damaging use of cement render on whinstone and sandstone rubble elevation now defacing the sandstone.



Some reference has already been made to this. Many modern approaches to insulation and heat retention in traditional buildings can lead to unintended damp inside the property which under-mines the intention.

Each building requires an individual approach which should be put together by a suitably qualified energy surveyor with the appropriate qualification which is: “Level 3 Award in Energy Efficiency for Older and Traditional Buildings.” Conservation experienced architects may also have the necessary knowledge. The choice of materials and methods used can improve energy efficiency and keep the character.

Retrofit Renewable Energy Generation

The third challenge is to consider how to best retrofit solar panels onto, or for, a traditional building. It is important that the condition of the roof is good before attaching panels of any type as they will prevent slipped slates from being seen and easily repaired. The method of attaching panels to an older roof needs to be very clearly detailed so that there is no unnecessary damage to the slate covering, lead flashings or the sarking boards or batons beneath the slates. The effect of wind lift on the roof should also be considered in some areas.

If there are outbuildings with a good roof slope in the right direction, they could be considered as an alternative to a main roof. New garden structures could also be considered to support solar panels.

Managing development

New buildings

There has been significant new development in the conservation area in the last 50 years and while some elements are well thought out, such as layout, the shapes and general form of some of the newer properties outside the boundary of the conservation area are not completely in keeping with the general character of Whithorn. To preserve and enhance the special built character of Whithorn Conservation Area, the existing mix of building heights, stepping down or continuous eaves between adjoining buildings which exists in each street should be noted and repeated. If there is infill development proposed it should usually take its design cues from the traditional buildings closest to carry through, preserve and enhance character.

New development should respect the layout of the existing streets and where possible, repeat the general existing characteristics. The smaller side streets

may be able to support small amounts of development if vehicle access does not compromise the character of the street.

The size of new buildings in the smaller streets should reflect the size of principle buildings and outbuildings in those streets. Using the existing street pattern outside the conservation area as a pattern for development may also help strengthen and preserve the character.

Material choices and maintenance

Some of the materials chosen to finish the elevations need better maintenance and some look unkempt. This would be easily remedied with carefully thought-out maintenance programmes which should influence the selection of materials; a useful lesson in respect of any further new development that might be proposed.

Alterations to buildings

The most important advice in respect of alterations is that they are based on a proper understanding of the significance of all the elements and materials of a building in respect of its own character and what it contributes to the wider character of the conservation area.

In the 20th century there was an unfortunate move away from the use of traditional materials although they are, and can be seen to be, sustainable and respect the original built fabric without damaging it in the longer term. Modern materials and technologies including paints and renders may have a limited lifespan and a slow but destructive impact on stone elevations, reducing the resilience of the buildings to weather and modern occupation.

Some windows and doors have been altered too but double-glazing units are susceptible to leakage after 15 to 20 years. Repair to existing windows, doors and adding secondary glazing to the interior and/or an internal lobby door, can have a good outcome over a longer period; and the failure of sealed double-glazed panes can be avoided.

Leaving original box frames in place reduces the amount of disruption to the original fabric of the building. A well thought out approach to alterations is needed. Taking advice from a surveyor or architect with traditional building expertise to consider all the possible solutions, outcomes and risks before change is made can be cost saving in the long term.

Roads and utilities work in the conservation area should be very carefully designed so as not to spoil any of the existing, valued character and ensure that the work puts back surfaces to the standard that is required in a conservation area. Granite kerb stones should be re-used if work is carried out rather than replaced. Unfortunately, mismatched materials and workmanship is evident already along with poor cleaning, maintenance and repair, illustrating the negative impact.

Changes to street furniture, surfaces or lighting need to be discussed in advance with the community particularly those people working to promote the character and appeal of the conservation area which in turn attracts tourism income. The ability to maintain street furniture well should be part of decision making as should removing redundant signs as part of regular care.

New pieces of street furniture, be that signage, information points, transport shelters or benches should be designed to work well with existing street furniture that is well-loved and appropriate to the historic character of the settlement.

Minimising clutter by sharing attachment posts where possible is important too.

Pattern and Layout

Little change took place in Whithorn except in peripheral housing developments. The basic pattern of development and the form of the conservation area remain. This is something that can easily be retained in future proposals as Whithorn has a strong and relatively simple historic core which can continue to influence design.

Historic Views

It does not appear that historic views have been significantly altered but this is a key element of the character of the conservation area and protecting those views should continue. Views to the priory, the Galloway Hills, the Old Town Hall tower and the windmill should be protected along with the glimpses through the streets to the east.

Shop fronts

New shop fronts where they are proposed should be simple or based on the form of another traditional frontage. In many cases the frontage of buildings would need very little adaptation, just signage, particularly where there are already

enlarged downstairs windows from previous use as a shop.

There is a selection of mainly sympathetic shopfronts in the conservation area and the wish to change these should be carefully balanced with the impact on historic character of the building, the street and the wider character of the conservation area. Policy encourages the re-use and adaptation of existing rather than removing any elements. There may be limited instances when a simple modern design may be the best solution.

Shop fronts have been retained in conversions to residential which allows the former use of the building to be legible in the street and reduces disruptive change to the fabric. The larger shop windows can also be a good source of natural light.

Improving energy efficiency of large shop windows can be carried out with internal secondary glazing which does not impact on the street character. This is a route worth continuing when change of use to residential of ground floor commercial units is being considered.

Advertisements and signage

There is signage attached to traditional buildings in the conservation area some of it very sympathetic. There are few free-standing signs. The current approach seems to be acceptable, with minimalist, subtle options being selected.

Signage that takes up a small place on a building in a traditional position can be as effective as large signs. Listed Buildings may have additional requirements to minimise signage, to preserve their character.

Repurposing buildings and spaces

There are few unused and under-used buildings, outbuildings and spaces but also a few vacant buildings awaiting re-use. Some are outside the conservation area.

The New Town Hall and the Grapes, have been impressively repurposed and are a good basis for other conversions and re-uses. The Community Hall is a building with potential for restoration and internal adaptation.

Buildings have been restored by the community, for the good of the community

and contribute in a beneficial way to the community.

There are a number of areas where there may be opportunity restore and adapt outbuildings to give them a new use.

Maintenance, general care and repair

There is no more important action than to maintain properties in a timely manner. using the correct materials. This prevents long term damage to the building. Sometimes this means that patience is required especially where lime mortar is needed as it may take a bit of time and care and extra knowledge although the trade skills are the same. Cement products produce more instant 'repairs' than lime products but they are often the wrong material for stone buildings.

Guidance from Historic Environment Scotland (HES) help us make the best choices. Some sources of HES guidance are provided on behalf of Scottish Government to assist owners and occupiers of buildings and spaces to consider the impact their proposals may have on historic fabric and character and give ideas on the range of options for the best outcome.

The guidance can be found on the following websites.

[The Engine Shed publications and guidance](#)

Historic Environment Scotland's [Managing Change](#)

A particularly useful page is:

[Common Problems in Buildings | The Engine Shed | Part of HES](#)

Conclusions

Management of the character of Whithorn Conservation Area will be supported by continuing interest in the place, its layout, historic fabric and the community coming together with ideas and thoughts to build on success. This includes training in skills that conserve, renovate and enhance traditional buildings. The uses and activities benefit the people who live and visit and will contribute to the ongoing vitality and historic interest of Whithorn. There are a number of community groups promoting different aspects of the initiatives in Whithorn.

The CACAMP is not trying to provide a solution to everything but to encourage thoughtful approaches to change so that the character of Whithorn Conservation Area continues very much in line with the Whithorn Place Plan.