

Portknockie Conservation Area Review

June 2023



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1.0

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

LDN Architects was appointed by the Moray Council in September 2022, as Conservation Accredited Architects, to carry out appraisals on five of the designated Conservation Areas within Moray.

It is important to understand the criteria for designating a Conservation Area in order to assess it. Historic Environment Scotland's selection guidance is as follows –

“Areas of ‘special architectural or historic interest’ will be selected based on a range of factors which may include:

areas of significant architectural or historic interest in terms of specific listed buildings and/or scheduled monuments;

areas of significant architectural or historic interest in terms of building groupings, which may or may not include listed buildings and/or scheduled monuments, and open spaces which they abut;

areas with features of architectural or historic interest such as street pattern, planned towns and villages and historic gardens and designed landscapes; and other areas of distinctive architectural or historic character.”

“The characteristics and values that contribute to a conservation area’s special architectural or historic interest are:

its special architectural or historic importance;

its distinct character;

its value as a good example of local or regional architectural style;

its value within the wider context of the village or town; and

its present condition, and the scope for significant improvement and enhancement.”



Date of Site Assessments: June 2023

Date of Designation: Assumed 1972 by Banffshire County Council due to Cullen’s designation at this time.

What is a Conservation Area?

It is important that periodical reviews are carried out to ensure that the special interest of the Conservation Area is preserved. The purpose of the appraisal is to carry out a detailed assessment of the current townscape, which includes a building-by-building analysis, to identify areas of risk, areas of significance, opportunities, and priorities for enhancement.

This assessment also includes a review of public realm and greenspace (including trees) as these elements each contribute to a sense of place. The information gathered as part of this proposal will be used to assess the current position of the Conservation Area boundary and allow recommendations to be made for any amendment should it be relevant. The content of the report is also there to provide guidance on appropriate materials, style and colour to assist, and encourage, residents to develop proposals that are sympathetic to the character of the Conservation Area.

The following report focuses on Conservation Area Appraisal for the coastal town of Portknockie.

Conservation Areas have special architectural character or social historical interest created by the buildings and spaces – street layout, open space and the public realm - around these. The Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (Scotland) Act 1997 designated Conservation Areas for protection – the Scottish Government and Planning Authorities are required by law to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of these historical environments.

Why?

In order to maintain the special architectural character of Conservation Areas it is important that they are preserved to ensure that the elements that make them distinct are not lost through inappropriate change. Where appropriate, enhancements can be made to these areas to benefit not only the historical environment but also the residents.

What does this mean for the residents?

Whilst consents will be required from the Local Authority for certain elements (as listed out below), it does not mean that improvements and development cannot occur within these areas. Sympathetic improvements using the appropriate traditional materials are encouraged and they will bring benefit to the building owners. For example, historical buildings were constructed with traditional materials, and it is these materials that not only create the character, but they also ensure that the building fabric performs (when appropriately maintained). When modern materials are added such as uPVC elements, these not only change the character, but they also change the properties and performance of the building which can be to the detriment of the fabric. If you are proposing any of the following changes to your property then you should contact the Moray Council to confirm if you require planning permission, Conservation Area consent, or advertising consent depending on your proposal.

- Alterations – changes to the principal form, changes to fenestration (opening to include doors and windows), changes to materials such as roof, external finishes (including the painting of the building), replacement windows, doors and rainwater goods.
- Any extension to your property
- Any structures within the curtilage of a building.
- Walls, fences and other boundary treatments for domestic properties
- Demolition of unlisted buildings
- Removal of trees
- Works to shopfronts and advertisement displays

If your property is listed then you may also require listed building consent to ensure that any proposal including (alterations and extensions) do not have a detrimental effect on the character, integrity, or setting of the building. You should contact the Moray Council to establish if this is required or not.



2.0

Historical Development

2.1 History

The clifftop fishing village of Portknockie was founded in 1677 by Cullen fishermen. It is situated at the head of a sheer 50 foot cliff which falls down to the harbour. Until circa 1930, the harbour was one of the most important along the Moray Coast.

The buildings of Portknockie are similar to the adjacent Moray Coast fishing villages with the oldest being single-storey cottages. The development of the village is clearly defined by the change in building types.

Portknockie is known for the 'Bow Fiddle Rock' which has been hollowed out by the sea forming a gothic stone arch.

Excavation of a small area of headland, known as 'Green Castle' has identified that the area was occupied in the Pictish period from seventh century to the ninth century by a Promontory Fort.



1866



1902



1964



2.2 Timeline

1820

Fisherman's Hall – built as a coal store and adopted as a Hall circa 1842

1860

Construction of Portknockie Parish Church as the *United Presbyterian Free Church*

1876

Primary School constructed for Rathven School Board

1886 -
1890

Harbour constructed

1902

Church of Christ

2.3 Wider Context

Portknockie is located on the Moray Coast and forms one of the settlements that is on the waymarked coastal trail. It is located between Findochty to the west and Cullen to the east.



Portknockie is located on a spectacular cliffside location with a route down into the harbour. Multiple paths run up and down the adjacent (green) cliffs providing great walking trails that connect the coastal towns to the east and west. The harbour has two basins; the one to the west has a public lido with berths to the east.



3.0

Character and Appearance



3.1 The Buildings

The following information identifies buildings that, at the time of publishing this report, are listed by Historic Environment Scotland or on the Buildings at Risk Register Scotland. It is however important to note that the character of a Conservation Area is not about the listed buildings, it is the collection of buildings.

The adjacent map plots the listed buildings and those on the Buildings at Risk Register Scotland. The eclectic mix of building types within Portknockie is what creates the unique 'sense of place' – these have a direct relationship to the Town's origin and the development of its industries which is what enriches the Conservation Area.

The character of the Conservation Area is created by the range of traditional materials and the architectural form. For example, the window material and fenestration is central to the character of the building. This detailing can also be used to date the building from the size of the opening to the type of timber sash and case window - six-over-six or two-over-two or one-over-one.

Portknockie Conservation Area:

Listed Buildings: 124

Buildings at Risk: 0

Station Road

Church Street

Admiralty Street

Seafield Street

High Street

Pulteney Street

3.2 Setting





The Moray Coast has some of the most spectacular natural landscapes – steep coastal slopes, hidden coves and rugged cliff lines - with views over the Moray Firth.

Portknockie is one of a number of historical fishing ports located on a steep northern slope running down to the Moray coastline. A distinctive feature of Portknockie is the rugged, yet grassed, cliffs which provide a number of walking trails.





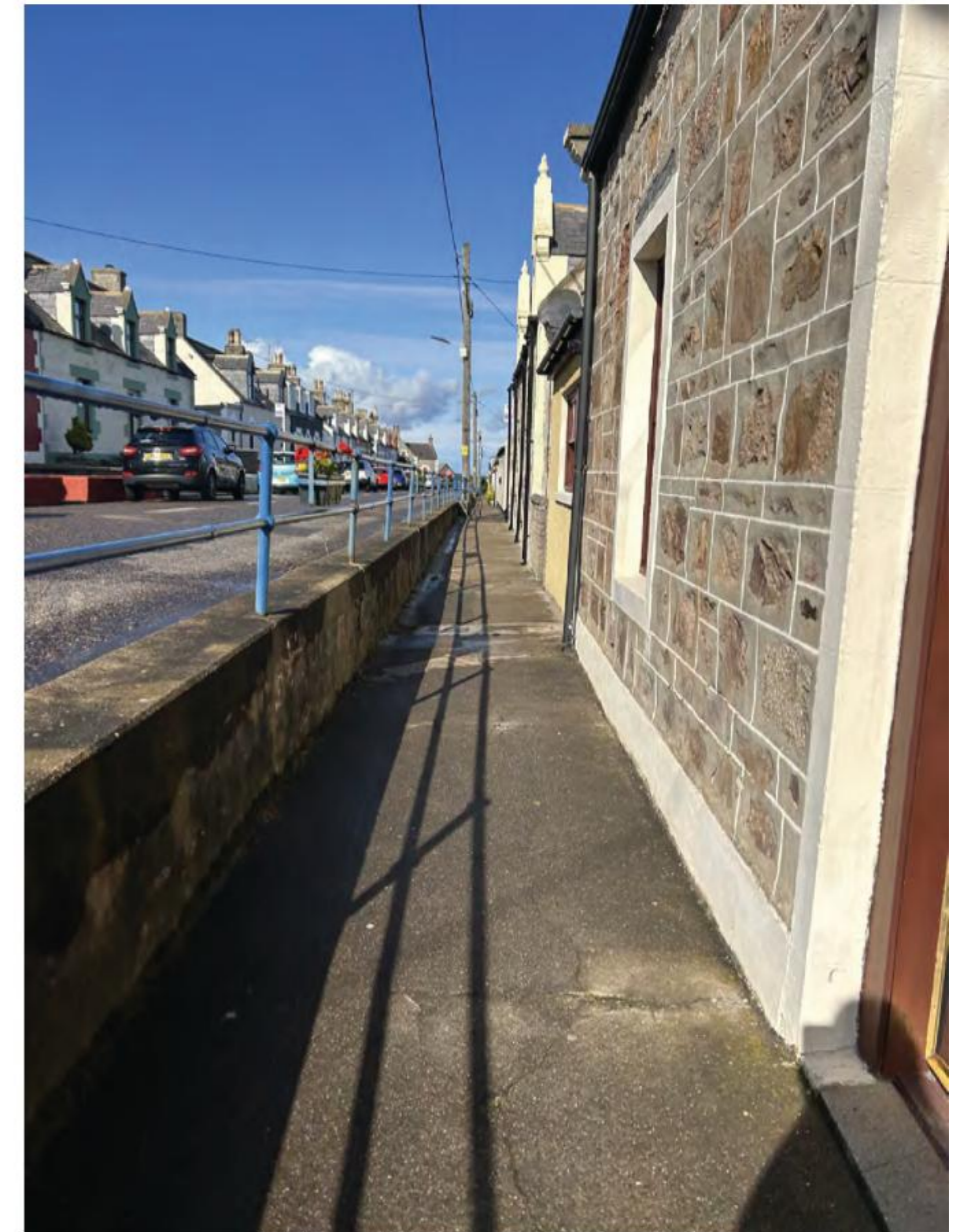
3.3 Activity and Movement

Portknockie is located to the north of the A98 a major coastal road connecting Fochabers in the west to the eastern coastal towns of Moray and Aberdeenshire. Portknockie is a destination that is reached by travelling along the A942 coastal route which runs along the southern perimeter of the Conservation Area.



3.4 Street Pattern Topography

The origin of Portknockie following the cliff edge is organic in nature with the typical single-storey design with the gable providing protection from the sea. The later settlement can be clearly identified as it has a defined Town Plan. This creates two distinctions to the plan of Portknockie.





..... Irregular street pattern of the Seatown highlighting permeability.

— Pavements typical of a planned town layout.



3.5 Spaces

The relationship between the built form and the surrounding spaces is important to the town plan because these not only define the movement through the Conservation Area but they also create spaces for the community.

There are opportunities to sympathetically develop this area to enhance the Conservation Area and bring benefit to the local community by considering how it could be used to

- Gathering – multi-generational
- Events / Festivals
- Play
- Sit / reflection
- Connections including local walking trails – promotion of green living and health benefits
- Encouraging activity and movement within Portknockie – the connecting lanes
- Educate – local heritage / circular trail
- Orientation point for the wider region



3.6 Character Areas

Portknockie is a place of significant architectural and social historical interest which gives it a unique 'sense of place'. There are two distinct town layouts that form the built environment of Portknockie – each have been informed by the development of the village. One of the special features of Portknockie is the relationship with the coast.

Form

It is the social historical development of Portknockie that makes it so delightful – from the early single storey buildings with small window openings and low door lintels (historically the average height was much shorter than today) set-out in an organic manner following the cliff edge to the later one-and-a-half storey buildings in the more defined town plan. The layout of Portknockie follows the coastal line with the town plan developing to the east and the south as the town developed inland. Generally the traditional buildings within Portknockie are modest in form – there are however some grander buildings along the coast to the west.

Roofing

There are three types of roof covering: slate, tiles and metal sheet. When the village was built the roofs would have been Scotch slate laid to diminishing courses, but this is now the minority with Welsh slate the dominant roofing material. The use of Spanish slate has also been recorded and this is not an appropriate material not only in terms of aesthetic but also longevity in Scotland's climate, especially on the coast. Some roofs have been changed to concrete tile which detracts from the overall appearance.

Rainwater Goods

Whilst Rainwater goods play an important part in the performance of a building, they can also add to the architectural character. Typically, the form of the cast iron rainwater goods are half round gutters with round downpipes. There are example of ogee wallhead rhones on the same of the later buildings.

In regard to material whilst cast iron fittings remain and have a prominence there is a significant amount of replacement in uPVC (there are a number of different styles and fittings) in varying condition.

Stonework and pointing

The stonework is typically exposed coursed rubble with dressed stone margins. There are some raised margins which suggests some building may have had a traditional lime harl coating. The majority of the pointing has been replaced in cement and 'struck' to imitate ashlar. A number of buildings have also been inappropriately coated with a wet dash or smooth cement render. There are varying levels of paint coatings to quoins and the stonework generally.

On Church Street, there is an example of moulded door hoods, decorative elements to window lintels and moulded skew puts, which greatly enhances the architectural character.

Doors

There are varying traditional panelled timber doors – the variation is dependant of the period and style of the building. The doors are another element that contributes to the overarching character of the building. Similarly to the other coastal towns, there is the distinct moulded door. In some locations the timber panelled doors have fanlights above – there is at least one example of a leaded light.

Modern timber doors or varying design and inappropriate uPVC doors have been installed in some locations. In these instances, consideration should be given to enhancing the style and detailing of the door that is appropriate to the period of the building.

Windows

The traditional window type is timber sash and case. The scale and fenestration of this varies throughout the Conservation Area dependant on when the building was constructed – the are examples of 2/2 and 1/1. This variance is important in dating the buildings.

Some windows have been replaced with modern timber casements, aluminium or uPVC units which have had a detrimental impact of the character of these buildings. As noted previously, whilst it is acknowledged, that uPVC can be considered desirable for thermal improvements, the units do have a limited guarantee. There are options for improvements to be made to traditional timber sash and case windows which are not necessarily cost prohibitive.

Colour

There is some use of sympathetic heritage colours, however, it has mostly been changed with the use of white, rosewood and grey on external joinery being the most prominent.

The use of heritage colours can enliven the architecture and should be encouraged – the unification of colour is a modern style.

External and Boundary

Whilst a number of the buildings within Portknockie have limited external space – they bound directly onto the pavement – the streets to the East; Park Street (East side only), Seafield Street and Admiralty Street have space to the rear.

From the principal elevations within the Conservation Area, these areas are defined by blockwork walls with a variety of finishes (bare, wet dash, painted, smooth render), timber fences, some stone walls (of varying style) and metal and timber gates.

4.0

Negative Factors

4.1 Negative Factors

Whilst negative factors do exist throughout the Conservation Area, it is important that these do not become the key focus in the assessment of the significance of the area. For example, whilst inappropriate materials have an impact on the character, they also affect the performance of the building, however, with careful repair and conservation these changes can be reversed thereby restoring the character. Where the form (scale and any decorative stone dressing) and composition of the traditional building remains, there is significance and therefore reversible material change should not be seen as justification to withdraw protection.

In summary the key factors are:

1. Inappropriate alterations to buildings which includes –
 - the style of some extensions
 - changes to openings
 - changes to fenestration
 - inappropriate materiality
2. Underutilised space – including green areas
3. Public Realm – rationalisation and improvement could be brought to the following areas -
 - surfaces
 - signage
 - street furniture
 - street lighting

These factors should be considered as opportunities and used as performance indicators for monitoring future enhancements.

5.0

Design Guidance

5.1 Design Guidance

The most important principle of the following design guidance is that the traditional materials are not encouraged purely for the aesthetic characteristic of the Conservation Area, but it is the performance and longevity of the building. Both of which have environmental and economic benefit.

Repair and Maintenance

- Maintenance is always required whether it is a traditional or modern material
- Implement a regular regime - whilst there is a cost involved in maintenance this should avoid significant investment due to failure of the fabric

The appropriate repair and maintenance of traditional buildings is important not only for their preservation but also for their performance. A well-maintained building should reduce the requirement for intervals of significant investment and change.

Modern materials are commonly selected because they are believed to be better and more cost effective, however, their lifespan is limited, and a limited lifespan will result in additional investment within a set time frame. It is important to note that buildings will always require maintenance.

Roofing

- Consider what is appropriate to the building type – the building was designed and built based on this material

Historically, there were two key roof types: pantile and Scotch slating. Both of these materials bring a rich character to the Conservation Area. In Seatown, the pantile roofs still have a strong presence and these should be maintained and encouraged. Scotch slating laid to diminishing course is now a minority – over the years these have been replaced in Welsh slate due to the closure of the Scottish Quarries. Reclaimed Scotch slate is available and should be considered where practicable. Where this is not an option, salvaged Welsh slate would be a suitable alternative. Spanish slate, which is not native to the area, and is distinctively different from Scotch and Welsh should not be used. This is not only because of the impact on the character of the Conservation Area, but also the performance.



Rainwater Goods

- Longevity of Cast Iron Rainwater Goods – ensure the sizes are appropriate for area of the roof
- Apply a good paint specification – an appropriate primer, undercoat and top/ finish coats – if this is maintained, it protects the main components from decay and this is what brings the longevity

Cast iron rainwater goods have a stronger visual presence on a building because of their solidity. Not only does this add to the architectural character but if they are well maintained they have a long lifespan. There is a misconception that uPVC rainwater goods do not require maintenance, however, the rubber seals at joints fail over time, they are susceptible to solar gain (resulting in eventual failure because the plastic becomes brittle) and there is higher risk in these being brought down due to snow and ice. They can also be easily damaged.

Stonework and Pointing

- A traditional lime point or harling manages the moisture in your wall thereby improving the condition of the fabric and the internal environment

Whilst a traditional lime finish on the buildings brings character to the Conservation Area, there is a key performance criterion. Historically, lessons have been learnt by the use of cementitious mortars as coatings on traditional building fabric. It has quite clearly been established that they do not preserve the fabric - they can in fact exacerbate decay and create damp buildings. The technical compatibilities of the materials used on traditional buildings are critical in relation to the performance of the fabric.

The key characteristic of a traditional wall is its porosity which will always retain a level of moisture content (referred to as a water film) and it is this content that allows the essential capillary action to occur. The important drying process within the wall is not a vapour process, it is a liquid process should this be from the inside or outside face of the fabric.

The use of lime as an ingredient in traditional construction is important because it delivers a finer porosity and greater surface area than materials with a coarse and close to impermeable makeup - the former, in effect, becoming a poultice which draws moisture out of the wall using capillary action. This can either be the joints (lime pointing) or more effectively a lime harl as this has a much larger surface area.



Doors

- Traditional timber doors
- Apply a good paint specification – an appropriate primer, undercoat and top/ finish coats – if this is maintained, it protects the main components from decay and this is what brings the longevity

It is important to note that it is not 'one' element of a building that defines the character, it is a combination of all the elements. Traditional timber doors define the entrances to the buildings and there is a significant ornate door within Seatown that should be preserved and enhanced. The doors relate to the periods of architectural development of the Conservation Areas – for example the four panelled doors represent a later build period so they are also significant to their time. Again, it is this mix of development that enriches the overall character.



Windows

- Traditional timber sash and case
- Apply a good paint specification – an appropriate primer, undercoat and top/ finish coats – if this is maintained, it protects the main components from decay and this is what brings the longevity

The original fenestration of Sash and Case windows form part of the character of a traditional building. If left to deteriorate these can become difficult to manage for the residents. Sash and Case windows can however be repaired and upgraded – draught stripping and double glazing (consideration should be given to depth of the frames and astragals). If the units are beyond repair, replica sash and case windows can be made and fitted. If these are then appropriately maintained, they can have a significant lifespan. There is a common misconception that either of these options can be cost prohibitive and appropriate support and guidance should be made available to residents to dispel this notion. Not only does this benefit the character of the Conservation Area but it is also sustainable.



Extensions

- These can provide much needed additional accommodation to secure the building's future, however, it is important that any extension should enhance, and compliment, the traditional building

In order to preserve the historical built environment, it has to be accepted that some alteration may be required in order to accommodate changes within modern society. New developments and proposals should not be pastiche – it is important that they reflect the period in which they are constructed so the development of the building can be understood. These alterations can be sympathetic and complimentary to the character area through an understanding of form, proportion and the existing local materials and colour palette.

5.2 Sustainable Conservation

The way in which traditional buildings were constructed is quite different to methods that are used in modern construction. When problems arise with traditional buildings there can be a misconception that this is due to materials used during its construction. Sometimes this can simply be attributed to the fact the materials have been there since the construction – 100 years or in many case much longer – and now is the time to replace them because they had done what they were there to do. Traditional materials, when properly applied (or installed) and maintained, can stand the test of time.

Guarantees for modern materials generally are set at a specified time limit. uPVC windows for example tend to be guaranteed for 10 years and when they fail and are replaced the units tend to go straight to land fill (unless they can be reconditioned). uPVC is prone to solar gain and over time, the colour will fade and the plastic will become brittle affecting the integrity of the unit whether that be windows, doors or rainwater goods. Whilst uPVC can be considered maintenance free, every element of a building will require maintenance and care at regular intervals.

Traditional buildings can be thermally upgraded to provide a comfortable internal environment that does not require significant energy use. It is important however that this is carried out in a manner that does not affect the performance of the fabric. When the performance of the fabric is affected, this can result in problems internally such as a rise in moisture levels.



6.0

Public Realm Audit



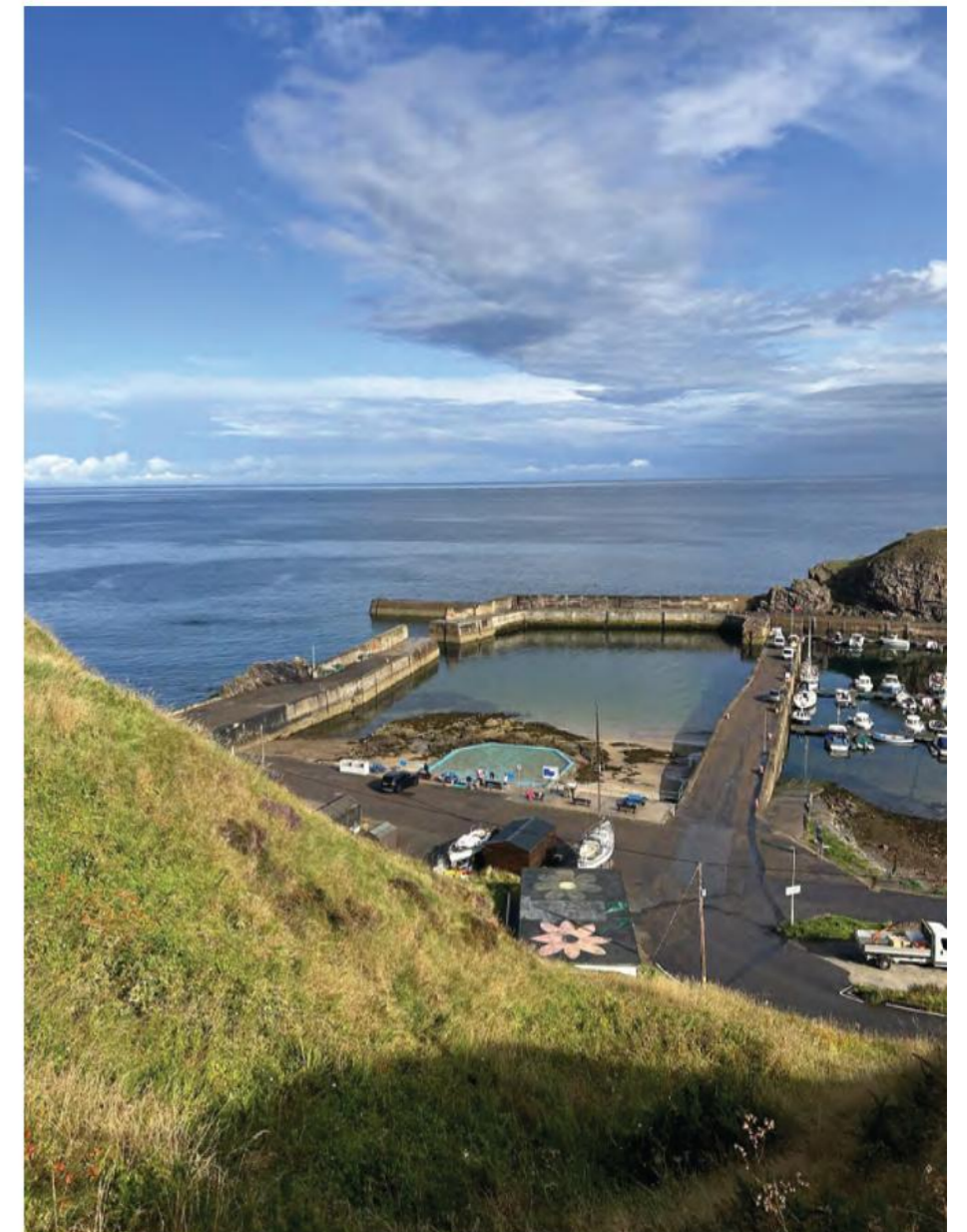
-  Key green spaces
-  Key urban spaces

6.1 Public Realm Audit

The public realm is an important contributor to the Conservation Area as the treatment of this dominates the space between the buildings. The information below is an audit of what currently exists.

- modern LED street lighting
- modern street signage
- modern benches (and some decayed timber benches) – more consideration could be brought to the placement of such
- modern generic railings – along the cliff edge they appear to be relatively recent
- generally all surface treatment is modern - tarmacadam - this includes the lanes and pavements
- the surface changed to lockblock at building entrances to define such on certain streets – Admiralty Street and Seafield Street as examples
- cars have dominance over pedestrians - definition could be brought to trails
- public lido in the harbour

Within each of the areas there are opportunities to bring enhancement.



7.0

Opportunity for Development, Enhancement

7.1 Enhancement and Development

There are opportunities throughout the Conservation Area for enhancement and development to bring benefit not only to the character but also the local community. This will however require investment. Consideration should be given to funding opportunities and how these could be utilised to assist interested parties.

Opportunities:

1. Develop walking trails – by bringing people to the area and keeping them as long practicable could bring significant economic benefit
2. Open / Greenspace – there are a number of green spaces along the coast which could be enhanced
 - a. Consider the trails and connections to the other coastal towns – key viewpoints
 - b. Utilise the coastal space – enhance the connections / paths
3. Consult with the local community and business to determine where they believe improvement could be brought and what they see as important within Portknockie
4. Enhancements on a building by building basis – restoration and conservation to include enhancement and reinstatement of traditional materials and detailing (roofing material, cast iron rainwater goods, application of lime to the stonework, timber doors and sash and case windows)
5. Sustainable Conservation – implementing the enhancements above will not only make the local environment more sustainable, but it will improve the internal environment of the building
6. Public Realm Improvements
 - a. Heritage LED lamps
 - b. Consideration of surface treatment
 - c. Improvements to trails - appropriate signage
 - d. Restore / promote the public lido
7. Education and Learning
 - a. Understanding the repair and maintenance of traditional buildings
 - b. Traditional skills and future opportunities for the younger generations - career development
8. Investment in the local heritage



Key location on the coast
Opportunities for development in terms of community green/
recreational space and tourism

Opportunities for restoration /
promotion of the existing lido

Opportunities for development
in terms of community space or
business development

Key coastal feature -
Bow Fiddle Rock



Viewpoint
Key green spaces
Key urban spaces

8.0

Conservation Strategy

8.1 Conservation Strategy

Portknockie has a strong link to its origin and it is a reflection of the development of the local industry and its associated community creating a rich built environment. As stated in the Burra Charter

'The policy for managing a place must be based on an understanding of its cultural significance.'

The form of the buildings and street plan of Portknockie inform the historical development of village and it is this that creates the significant *'sense of place'*.

In order to safeguard the historic environment, it is also important to identify where change can be made to meet current and future needs without being detrimental to the cultural significance.

The form and density throughout the Conservation Area of Portknockie varies. In the older area there are limits to where change can be sympathetically accommodated without bringing detriment to the historic environment. This, however, varies between building and its associated open space. Where change has already been introduced there are options to bring future enhancements; whether this be the sympathetic adaptation of extensions or the reinstatement of traditional detailing and this should be encouraged.

With the later, larger properties within Portknockie, there is space to the rear of the buildings which presents opportunity to allow sympathetic adaptation and supplementary construction to meet the current and future needs without being detrimental. Similarly to the older part of the Conservation Area, there is an opportunity to enhance with the reinstatement and enhancement of traditional detailing and this should be encouraged.

The over-arching conservation policy for Portknockie is to **reveal, maintain, and enhance significance but some adaptation and supplementary construction may be considered to accommodate future compatible uses.**

Maintaining our existing built heritage is infinitely sustainable and understanding how traditional fabric can be upgraded without having a detrimental effect on either the external fabric, and character, or the internal environment is critical.

The aim of the above policy is to protect the significance and allow informed decisions to be assessed and validated with rigour and consistency without bringing further detriment. These principles should be applied to the opportunities that have been identified in section 8.0.

8.2 Justification for Boundary Change

This appraisal has been developed from a thorough study of the the current Conservation Area of Portknockie. This study has consisted of –

- Historical research
- A photographic survey of the principal elevation of each building within the Conservation Area
- A review of the street pattern and topography
- A review of the open space within Portknockie (not restricted to the Conservation Area)
- A Public Realm Audit
- A study of each building within the Conservation Area which includes the recording of the principal materials and detailing, and the condition of such

The detailed study of all of these elements and the complete building stock within the Conservation Area has allowed the following to be identified –

- Opportunities for enhancement and development
- Negative factors – *the focus should not however be on the negative but the opportunity that this can bring*
- The level of modern building stock
- Impact of inappropriate material and alterations
- Space that is outwith the Conservation Area but has opportunity to bring enhancement
- Traditional buildings that contribute to the '*sense of place*' within Portknockie that are outwith the Conservation Area and deserving of protection

The above information has identified that whilst benefit could be brought to the Conservation Area through some improvement, the current boundary is justified.

9.0

Monitoring and Review

10.1 Monitoring and Review

It is important that periodical reviews are carried out to ensure that the *special interest* of the Conservation Area is preserved and there are not significant losses within a set timeframe.

Consideration should be given to the engagement with the local community who have invested in the area. This could be in the form of independent workshops with traditionally skilled professionals and contactors giving the local community an opportunity to ask questions. Improvements and enhancements to the Conservation Area could bring direct benefit to the residents whether this be –

- An improved environment to live and work
- A decrease in vacant, and in some cases, dilapidated residential properties
- A decrease in vacant, and in some cases, dilapidated commercial properties
- Increased footfall bringing economic benefit to the local area

Reviews of the Conservation Area should be carried out on a five-yearly cycle to ensure that any change is identified and managed. This next review should include –

- An updated photographic survey
- An updated building by building analysis to track any changes to materials whether it be enhancement or loss
- A review of whether any of the identified development opportunities have been undertaken and whether these have been successful
- Identification of any enhancements that have been undertaken

Date of next review – **2027**

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