

Benholm



Conservation Area

Appraisal



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INTRODUCTION

Definition of a Conservation Area

Conservation Areas were first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 provides the current legislative framework for the designation of Conservation Areas.

A Conservation Area is defined as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. All planning authorities are required by the Act to determine which parts of their area merit Conservation Area status. Aberdeenshire currently has 36 Conservation Areas varying in character from central Stonehaven to the small coastal settlement of Pennan.

What does Conservation Area Status mean?

In a Conservation Area it is the buildings and the spaces between them that are of architectural or historical interest. Therefore it is important to maintain the integrity of the entire area and enhance its special character. Conservation Area status affords greater control over development. However this does not mean that new development is unacceptable. Care must be taken to ensure that new development will not damage the appearance or character of the area.

Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal

The purpose of a Conservation Area appraisal is to identify the area's special features and interest, and to delineate its boundaries. It should also provide a vital tool to assist the active management of the area by providing the context for the assessment of development proposals, and identifying opportunities and priorities for enhancement.

The appraisal should be regarded as supplementary guidance to the policies set out in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan.

Proposed Designation

Benholm Conservation Area was proposed, and a boundary identified in the Aberdeenshire Local Plan, which was adopted in 2006.

Location

The small settlement of Benholm lies in Kincardine and Mearns, the most southerly of the six administrative areas of Aberdeenshire. It is located approximately 3 km south west of Inverberrie and approximately 1.5 km from the coast.



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15 October 2013

Aberdeenshire Council

Scale - 1:50000

Not to scale



Historical Development

Early History

Benholm has a long history. Lying in the centre of the historic parish of the same name there has been a church on the site since at least 1242AD. The Mill has similarly early origins and it is probable that there has been a mill at Benholm since at least the 12th century. Parts of the existing mill building date back to the 18th century, although the majority of buildings on the site are Victorian. By the beginning of the 18th century, if not long before, there was a well established community.



Garden's Map of Kincardineshire 1774 Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Scotland



Ordnance Survey six-inch 1st edition 1864 Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Scotland

Twentieth Century

In the early part of the 20th century Benholm was a thriving rural community. The former coaching inn had been converted to a farmhouse following the closure of the old road. However, the smiddy, school and schoolhouse, village hall, Post Office, Kirk and manse, and the meal mill continued to support the population of the many independent farms in the surrounding area.

After the Second World War increasing mechanisation accelerated rural depopulation. The 1950s saw the closure of the smiddy and in 1968 the school closed. The hall was sold in 1972 and demolished in 1992. The Post Office closed in 1988 and the Kirk in June 2004.

The many changes taking place in the farming industry, including the decline of oats in favour of barley and the dramatic reduction in the number of independent farm units, eventually took its toll. The Mill finally stopped production in 1982.

In more recent times the village has been revitalised with new people moving in and alternative uses being found for many of the old buildings. The Mill was bought by the Local Authority in 1984. It has been restored and until recently was operating as a local heritage visitor centre and training facility for adults with special needs. In 2006 the Kirk was bought by the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust. The school and Post Office are now private houses. The smiddy and the village hall have both been demolished and have been replaced by modern houses and a new bungalow has been built in the glebe adjacent to the church. Other properties have been altered and extended but despite these alterations and additions the essential character of the historic settlement has been retained.

CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

Topography

As the name suggests the local topography displays the characteristics of hill (ben) and low lying ground (holme). The significant changes in level and the gradients of the river banks which run through the area have shaped the development and layout of the village. The principal buildings are primarily located on a promontory between the Burn of Benholm to the south and the Castle Burn to the north. Some half a mile to the north, with policies stretching to the village, stands Benholm Castle. The former lodge house and southern access to the castle, now derelict and unused, are located on the northern edge of the village although the Castle itself lies out of sight just under 1 km further north. To the south, just below the Kirktown, the Mill of Benholm and it's associated buildings lie adjacent to the Burn of Benholm. Approximately 200m to the west of the kirkyard adjacent to the Birnie Bridge over the Burn of Benholm is another small grouping of residential properties, known as Burn of Benholm.



Gateways

Topography has also played a significant role in defining the gateways into the village. Access into and through the settlement is controlled by the bridges which cross the adjacent water courses. This is as true today as it was in the past. In the 18th century the main route from Montrose to Aberdeen, known as the “post road” or the “auld road”, passed through the settlement across two bridges, one over the Burn of Benholm sometimes referred to as the Birnie Bridge, and the other over the Castle Burn.



Birnie Bridge



Bridge over the Castle Burn

Around 1800 a new turnpike road was built. It deviated from the old post road, lying at a lower level along what is now the A92. A new bridge was built over the Benholm Burn. Now known as the “old” Benholm Bridge, it was replaced by the “new” Benholm Bridge in 1932. The auld road to the north now provides an alternative attractive route for walkers.



'Old' Benholm Bridge



'New' Bridge on the A92

Views

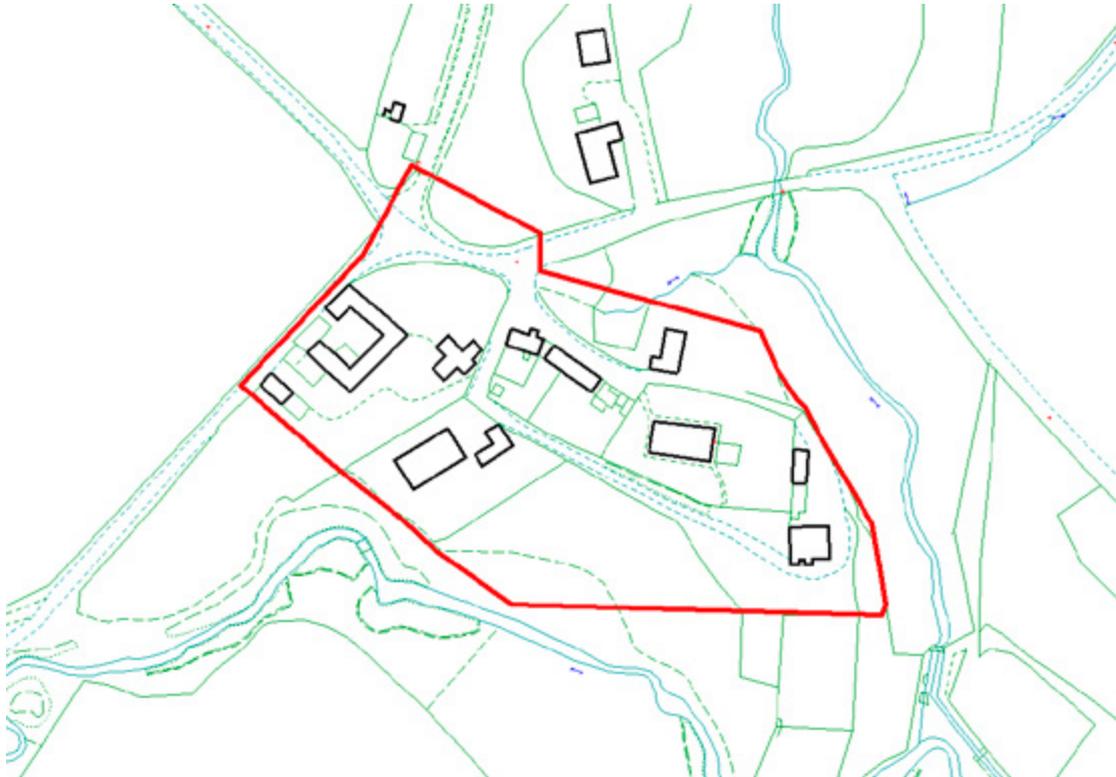
Views within the Conservation Area vary upon actual locality. Within each of the three small groupings, at the Kirktown, Birnie Bridge and the Mill, the small scale and irregular layout give a sense of enclosure. Some visibility and connectivity between the groups of buildings is evident, particularly during the winter months when the trees are not in leaf. However for the most part views of the settlement are completely restricted by mature trees and woodland which are a significant feature of the settlement and its setting. Where they exist, views tend to be localised and intimate. Worthy of protection they provide windows through which the character and form of the area can be appreciated. For example, the view from the Mill towards the Church, and of the Mill itself from surrounding higher ground.



View of Kirk and former manse from south

Boundaries and Edges

An important element of the Conservation Area appraisal is an assessment of its boundaries. The Conservation Area boundary should be properly defined. Where the designated area starts and stops is a vital aspect in understanding its value in terms of form and character.



Proposed Conservation Area Boundary - The Aberdeenshire Local Plan 2006

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The proposed boundary indicated in the 2006 Aberdeenshire Local Plan was largely confined to the Kirktown, the group of buildings and associated lands around the Kirk and the kirkyard. However, the close historical association and physical proximity of the adjacent Mill, along with the cottages across the Birnie Bridge, would suggest that they and the wooded policies, roads and bridges which link them, has now been included within the Conservation Area.

Street Pattern

The original pattern of narrow roads and paths connecting the three groups of buildings has remained largely unaltered primarily due to the restrictive nature of the river valleys and limited access points. Each group of buildings has a single access point off the public road which winds its way up the hill and past the village from the A92. There are no pavements.

Plot Pattern

There is a considerable variance in the size and orientation of land holdings within Benholm. The variety of building forms is evidence of the physical evolution of the village and restrictions imposed by both natural features of rivers and slope and by historic structures such as the kirkyard and the Mill. Earlier properties tend to front directly onto roads. Later 19th and 20th Century expansion and modern infill tend to be set back from access roads and have larger plots.

Buildings and Townscape

The special character of the village largely derives from the strong vernacular quality of many of the buildings there and, in particular, the former Parish Kirk and the Mill. Category A listed, these buildings and associated structures are of national significance. They are both of relatively modest size. In fact nearly all the structures in the proposed Conservation Area are essentially of a domestic scale, which induces a distinctly close knit, intimate atmosphere. It is the interrelationship of these buildings and the spaces between them that give the village visual cogency. The narrowness of the promontory and it's landscape setting contribute to the intimacy and cohesiveness of this small settlement.

The Category A Listed Kirk was built in 1832 after an earlier medieval structure was demolished. It is a simple 4-bay rectangular plan, classic church with pedimented gables and belfry. A number of memorials from the earlier church are now housed inside the 19th century building and fragments of the old foundations also survive. The graveyard surrounding the church incorporates a variety of 18th and 19th century stones. The kirkyard is bound by stone walls and gates. It is of value not only for its built heritage but also for the open space and natural heritage.





To the south east of the kirkyard is the 19th century former Manse, now an imposing private home with walled garden and attractive garden grounds. The adjacent distinctive stable block and conical roofed fruit store are also listed as Category C.





To the north and west lies another Category C Listed Building, in the form of the Old School House. It is an early 19th century two storey building with harled walls and slate roof.





Adjacent to the school house to the south lies the old school. To the north, the farmhouse, originally the coaching inn, is now much extended. These buildings, together with the associated large steading complex and the ruinous lodge house to the north of the public road, provide further historical context.





steading complex



South Lodge

The replacement properties on the sites of the Old Smiddy and the former hall, and the new dwelling house built within the glebe, complete this grouping. These modern additions have introduced a significant change to the traditional style and layout of the historical village. The domestic scale is retained, although materials, finishes and the size and location of window and door opening vary and traditional features such as chimney stacks are omitted.



To the south west of the Kirktown just across the Birnie Bridge, adjacent to the Old Post Road lies Burn of Benholm. A small cluster of four residential properties of stone and slate construction, which largely retain their traditional form and layout.



Below the Kirktown, nestled on the valley floor is the Mill, comprising the Mill building, the former miller's house, and barn. A category A Listed building, the mill is the only surviving traditional water-powered mill in Aberdeenshire. In 1896 a new house for the miller was built above the Mill adjacent to the public road. This is now a private residence. The auld house was then used as a byre. Now fully restored, the strong traditional character of the stone and slate buildings has been retained. The original house was converted to a café; the byre to toilets; the barn a workshop; and the old grain store the Miller's office. The Mill Pond, lade and dam remain as key features of the landscape setting of the Mill.



The Mill of Benholm was officially reopened in July 1995. Until recently it was operating as a local heritage visitor and training centre. Paths through the croft lands and woodland walks link the Mill complex to the Kirktown and to routes across the A92 to Johnshaven and the coast. Adjacent to the Mill of Benholm Cottage just off the A92 is a large car park for the centre from which visitors can access the Mill and the pleasant walks around it.



Building Materials

The traditional materials found in the Conservation Area help to define the special character of the village. Slate roofs predominate with sandstone walls and lime mortar of particular importance. Other materials including lime harl render, traditional brick and clay, cast iron and timber contribute to the character of the area. Traditional features, including chimneys, timber sash and case windows and architectural detail in the form of skew pots, gable wall heads and stone window and door surrounds are also in evidence.



Modern materials are also found in the Conservation Area. The use of uPVC, dry dash render, aluminium, concrete and synthetic stone can be out of character and may be potentially harmful to the character of the historic village.

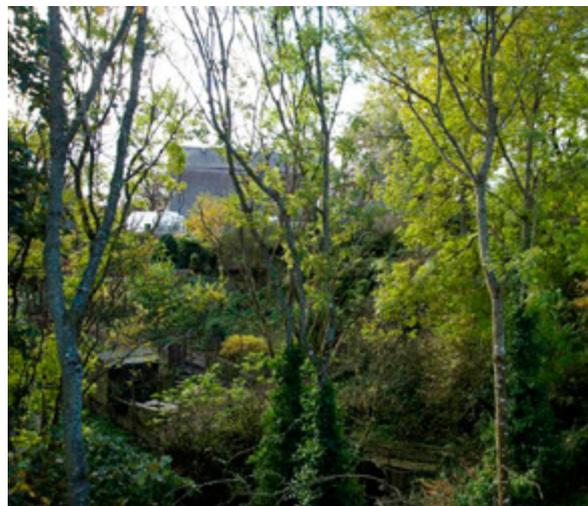
Open Space

The kirkyard is open to the public and provides a quiet contemplative area for visitors to enjoy. There is no other public open space within the Kirktown or within the Burn of Benholm hamlet. However there is open space around the Mill and visitors can make use of the many paths and woodland walks there. Visitors and residents also have the benefit of the Old Post Road and other quiet roads and paths in the area which link the different parts of Benholm and also allow access to the wider countryside and to nearby settlements, such as Johnshaven and Gourdon.



Trees

A striking feature of Benholm is its woodland setting. Ancient semi-natural woodland follows the valleys of the Benholm Burn and the Castle burn down to their confluence below the Kirktown and continues beyond the Mill towards the coast.



As well as screening the village from surrounding views, particularly from the west and south, and providing shelter to the grounds and gardens there, the woodland has an abundance of wildlife and interest. It offers an exceptional resource in this coastal area where large areas of mature woodland are rare.

On the eastern side of the burn adjacent to the Mill, to the north west of the Kirktown and surrounding the Burn of Benholm properties, the mature woodland belt makes way to open croft and farm land. Smaller trees and scattered hedgerows are found along the roads and lanes in the area.



The Burn of Benholm is an important geological site and is of outstanding importance for establishing the sequence of glacial events, ice movement patterns and environmental changes that occurred in Scotland during the Late Quaternary. The narrow den supports an attractive area of lowland woodland with a typical woodland ground flora which is slightly more base rich than other woodlands in the area. Much of the river valley, including the settlement, is proposed as a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS). A smaller area beyond Upper Birnie to the west of the village has been designated as a geological site of special scientific interest (SSSI).

Burn of Benholm SSSI & Proposed LNCS



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Traffic and Movement

The main A92 passes south of the village, and the public road which serves it, although a through route, is predominantly used to access farms and properties in the surrounding countryside. Therefore traffic is not heavy. Within the Kirktown there is no pedestrian segregation, and parking and turning is also restricted. The small number of properties and the winding lanes limit the potential for conflict, although parking for visitors to the Kirk and Kirkyard could be a problem.

Access to the Mill is limited to pedestrians with ample parking in the car park at the top of the access road.

Activities/Uses

The village now has a role as a dormitory settlement. The historic kirkyard is no longer used for burials, however the Kirk remains a place of worship and is used for a number of services each year. It is also used for secular events and its excellent acoustics make it a great music and performance venue. Tourists and visitors are welcome and encouraged. Similarly the grounds around the Mill are open to the public and provide a unique facility for visitors to the area.

Condition

The overall condition of the village is good. Property and land is well maintained, generally enhancing the area. However some traditional buildings and features have fallen into disrepair and some, like the former lodge house, are now in a ruinous state. Recently planning permission has been granted for a replacement dwelling on this site. Parts of the original steading complex associated with Kirktown Farmhouse are also deteriorating. However, their character and the strong vernacular quality of these buildings provide great potential for sympathetic restoration and re-use.

Townscape Detail

The presence of the following features contributes to the cohesiveness of the area and its special interest:

- Traditional roof pitches and building styles.
- Traditional materials such as slate, sandstone walls and lime mortar.
- Traditional features such as chimney stacks, stone boundary walls, cast iron railings and metal sky lights, sash and case windows.

Public Realm

Roads are surfaced with tarmac. There are no pavements or street lighting. Overhead electricity lines cross the area.

CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Key Features

The historical and architectural interest of Benholm devolves from its special character as a very small traditional Kirktown defined by the kirk and kirkyard, an informal group of traditional houses, and its low lying historic Mill complex, all positioned in the rolling agricultural and treed landscape contained by the Benholm Burn.

Key Challenges

The character of this very small traditional Kirktown has been maintained perhaps in part due to its distance from Aberdeen and the major employment centres of the area. Although there has been a significant amount of 20th Century building in the village, and the use of modern materials has to some extent diminished the special character of the village, their impact is limited. However, there is a danger that, over time, the character of the settlement will be changed by gradual additions and alterations more appropriate to a modern settlement, and potentially harmful to the long term conservation of the village.

The main challenges in terms of managing change in the Conservation Area relate to:-

- Sympathetic restoration and re-use of redundant traditional buildings.
- Retention, repair and maintenance of traditional buildings, original historic fabric, architectural detailing and materials, such as chimney pots, stone and wet harled finishes, original doors and windows.
- Protection and enhancement of the historic Kirk and kirkyard, the Mill of Benholm and the village's historic setting and landscape.
- Control of minor modifications such as inappropriate replacement doors and windows, and the erection of poorly designed or sited elements such as garages or satellite dishes.
- Managing of the Mill site and its setting.
- Managing development of any new build.
- Ensuring proposals for demolition and redevelopment are appropriate and justified.

BOUNDARY

Conservation Area Boundary Map

In order to ensure that the boundaries to the Conservation Area are well defined and provide a robust defensible edge to the designated area, existing features such as roads and riverbanks have been used to delineate them, wherever possible. Where this has not been possible, appropriate visual breaks such as a significant change in slope have been used. In the absence of any such features the boundary has been drawn as a straight line between two fixed points.



Conservation Area Boundary Map (not to scale)

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The original proposal was to restrict the designated area to the historic core of the village centred on the Kirk and kirkyard. However, it is felt that this does not properly reflect the important association of the Kirtown with the Mill and also with the Burn of Benholm cottages. Nor does it adequately reflect and protect the important woodland setting of the settlement. Therefore, the following amendments to the boundary of the Conservation Area have been incorporated.

To the north, the boundary follows the line of the old post road between the two listed bridges. As well as the houses and buildings of the Kirktown, it includes the former south lodge to the castle, the adjacent new builds which have replaced former buildings to the north of the road and the cluster of cottages adjacent to the Birnie Bridge. The area extends south from the Kirktown following the line of the public road on the east. To the west the boundary encompasses the wooded valley sides of the Burn of Benholm. The southern boundary is marked by the bridge over the Benholm Burn and the Old Post Office on the A92.



PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Policies

Policies for the protection of the character and amenity of Conservation Areas exist at both National and Local Government level; at national level in Scottish Planning Policy and Scottish Historic Environment Policy and at local level through Development Plans. The policies against which development proposals will be assessed are contained within the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. Development Plan Policies, Supplementary Guidance and Planning Advice will be used to determine applications, guide enforcement action and advise members of the public on how best to alter their properties.

There are no sites within the Conservation Area identified for development in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. However, existing buildings, gap sites and areas of land within the area could be the subject of development proposals.

There is a presumption against any development, including change of use or demolition, which would have a detrimental effect on the special character or setting of a Conservation Area.

Development Management

The day to day work of Development Management provides a primary means to implement policies for preservation and enhancement within Conservation Areas. Only proposals that preserve and, or enhance the character and appearance of a Conservation Area should be approved.

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2011 came into effect in February 2011. The Order extended restrictions on development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse within a Conservation Area.

Conservation Area designation automatically brings the following works under planning control:-

- Alterations or extensions to a dwelling house or flat, including any alterations or extension to the roof
- Stone cleaning or painting of the exterior
- Provision of hard surfaces and restrictions on the size of decked areas or raised platforms
- Additional control over satellite dishes and installation of domestic micro-generation equipment
- Close circuit television cameras
- Additional control over demolition
- Tighter restrictions on the size of extensions to dwelling houses, which may be erected without consent
- Development of sheds, garages and solar panels within curtilage
- Gates, fences, walls and other means of enclosure
- Works to trees

Other minor developments are not automatically restricted. If it is considered that such minor alterations will cumulatively have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of a Conservation Area the Local Authority could seek to introduce additional controls. These are known as Article 4 Directions and would be promoted by the Council and confirmed by the Scottish Government. Any works included in the Article 4 Direction would need planning permission. Where a development would, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, affect the character or appearance of a Conservation Area, the application for planning permission will be advertised in the local press providing an opportunity for public comment. Views expressed are taken into account by the Planning Authority when making a decision on the application.

A list of classes of permitted development which the Council could make the subject of an Article 4 Direction is appended to this appraisal.

Protecting Buildings and Features of Merit.

Benholm's special architectural and historic character should be promoted to help raise awareness of its historical and cultural interest. It is also important to raise awareness of the value of architectural and historic details such as building materials, windows, doors and traditional roof finishes, which all add considerably to the area's distinct local identity. The value of small items such as stone steps and chimney pots is often overlooked. Owners and those responsible for their upkeep will be provided with advice. The removal, alteration, demolition and redevelopment of buildings, features or areas which do not contribute positively to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area will be encouraged.

Focal points, views and vistas which have been created by the historic street pattern and the topography should be protected and enhanced. The character of the open spaces and habitats on the approaches to and around the boundaries of the Conservation Area should also be given careful consideration.

Trees within conservation areas are protected under the terms of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. Six weeks written notice must be given to Aberdeenshire Council prior to carrying out any work. The contribution of the tree to the landscape and to the visual amenity of the village and the character of the Conservation Area will be taken into account when considering any proposed works.

There may be opportunities to enhance biodiversity and interest in some areas, for example verges, and the historic kirkyard as well as woodland and landscaped areas.

There may also be potential to enhance the Conservation Area by careful management of any works carried out in the public realm. For example, the sensitive treatment of road surfaces and verges to provide co-ordinated, safe and attractive features appropriate to the surroundings. If possible, positioning of electricity and telephone cables below ground would improve visual amenity and remove discordant features from the historic streetscape.



Regeneration

Benholm lies within the Kincardine and Mearns Regeneration Area. Aberdeenshire Council made funding available in the last financial year to initiate some enhancement actions. These included the provision of attractive signs and interpretive boards to promote the area and to attract visitors to the area. The repair and refurbishment of the kirkyard gates, and support for woodland management and path improvements at the Mill, were also undertaken. Other small scale environmental improvements will be considered should additional funding become available.

Monitoring & Review

Legislation provides for the regular appraisal of Conservation Areas, which may result in new Article 4 Directions, supplementary guidance or planning advice.

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kincardine & Deeside District Council : The Mill of Benholm

Aberdeenshire Council : Aberdeenshire's Historic Kirkyards

Mearns Leader 31.07.2008 : Benholm through the years

National Library of Scotland: Historic Maps

Front Cover - Postcard reproduced courtesy of Brian H. Watt

Appendix 1 : Listed Buildings

	Location	Category	Date Listed
1	Birnie Bridge over Benholm Burn	C	25 Nov 1980
2	Benholm Bridge over Castle Burn	C	25 Nov 1980
3	Benholm Schoolhouse	C	25 Nov 1980
4	Kirktown of Benholm, Former Parish Church inc. Graveyard.	A	18 Aug 1972 Upgraded to Cat A from B Sept 2005
5	Parish Kirk Manse - Stabled	C	25 Nov 1980
6	Parish Kirk Manse	C	25 Nov 1980
7	Parish Kirk Manse Fruit Store	C	25 Nov 1980
8	Mill of Benholm	A	18 Aug 1972 Upgraded to Cat A from B Oct 2009
9	Benholm Bridge over Benholm Burn	C	25 Nov 1980

Appendix 2: Summary of extra controls which could be sought by means of Article 4 Directions

Class 7 The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure.

Class 8 The formation, laying out and construction of a means of access to a road.

Class 9 The stone cleaning or painting of the exterior of any building or works

Class 20 Works required in connection with the improvement or maintenance of watercourses or land drainage works.

Class 27 Works required for the maintenance or improvement of a private road or way.

Class 28 Works for the purposes of inspecting, repairing or renewing any sewer, main, pipe, cable or other apparatus, including breaking open any land for that purpose.

Class 30 Development by a local authority required in the exercise of their functions including lamp standards, refuse bins, public shelters and similar structures.

Class 31 Works carried out by a roads authority required for or incidental to the maintenance or improvement of the road.

Class 38 Water undertakings, including the laying of underground mains, pipes or other apparatus;

Class 39 Development by a public gas supplier required for the purposes of its undertaking and including the laying of underground mains, pipes or other apparatus.

Class 40 Electricity Undertakings – Development by statutory undertakers for the generation, transmission or supply of electricity for the purposes of their undertaking and including the installation or replacement in, on, over or under land of an electric line.

** For full details of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order visit : www.legislation.gov.uk



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