INTRODUCTION

Location

The Royal Burgh of Portsoy is a small town on the coast of the Moray Firth, on the northern edge of Aberdeenshire, in the Council’s Banff and Buchan administrative area.

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 such status and Aberdeenshire currently has 36 conservation areas varying in size and character from the centre of Peterhead to the small coastal settlement of Pennan.

Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal

Conservation area designation should be regarded as the first positive step towards an area’s protection and enhancement.

Planning authorities and the Scottish Executive are required by Law to protect conservation areas from development, which would be detrimental to their character. It is necessary therefore for planning authorities, residents and property owners to be aware of the key features, which together create the area’s special character and appearance.

The purpose of this conservation area appraisal is to define what is important about the character and appearance of Portsoy. It is also a vital tool to enable the active management of the Portsoy Conservation Area. It identifies the area’s special features and changing needs through a process which includes researching its historical development, carrying out a detailed townscape analysis and preparing a character assessment.

This information includes consideration of conservation area boundaries as well as providing a context for the assessment of development proposals within the area. It identifies opportunities and priorities for enhancement and sets out the policy framework for the determination of development proposals. This appraisal should be regarded as supplementary guidance to the policies set out in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan.

It is recognised that the successful management of conservation areas can only be achieved with the support and input from all stakeholders, and in particular local residents and property owners. Comments and suggestions received at the draft appraisal stage are, therefore, reviewed and incorporated into final documents.
Purpose and Justification

Portsoy conservation area designated in 1972 was extended and confirmed outstanding in 1989. It covers most of the settlement. It includes significant landscape setting from the coastline in the north, to open space around the Durn Burn and open countryside to the East and South. It includes the B – listed Durn House at its southern edge.

A full appraisal of its designation, quality and boundary is justified following a successful bid by Aberdeenshire Council to implement a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) in Portsoy and an award of £500,000 CARS grant from the Scottish Government/Historic Scotland. This investment and that by the council in resourcing and developing this scheme along with the commitment of owners of historic properties means that all matters concerning the quality, preservation and future management of Portsoy’s conservation area now need careful examination. Comprehensive Article 4 Directions to control permitted development may be justified and needs considered in consultation with the community. A direction limited to a single class of development currently applies.

Portsoy provides a wonderful legacy of historic buildings and a unique built character fanning out from an historic harbour built in 1649. Clearly, a much earlier settlement existed as a port where the Soy burn entered the Moray Firth, but information before its designation as a Burgh of Barony in 1550, granted by the child sovereign Mary Queen of Scots, is limited. Subsequently it experienced many changes, notably the growth and collapse of foreign trade, the boom and bust of herring fishing and the arrival of the railway.

A concern to preserve Portsoy’s built heritage builds upon the work of earlier generations and institutions, notably the efforts of the Town Council in the late 1960’s that prevented slum and derelict property from being demolished in preference to restoring this as social housing. This legacy remains at the heart of what is historic Portsoy.

Location Map & Conservation Area (shaded)
LOCATION, HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Timothy Pont Maps 1580-1590 & the Portsoy Manuscript of 1843
Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland collection

The Timothy Pont map No. 9 from 1580 – 1590 clearly identifies Portsoy, but it receives only minor attention. This, after it had received Burgh of Barony status in 1550 and a Royal Charter in 1554 giving powers to elect a Magistry and impose local taxes. An opportunity never enacted. The town's origin before this is vague, but assumed to have been borne out of its natural ability to permit vessels a safe berth at the end of the Soy Burn (Port-soy). Significant development followed the building of the old harbour in 1693 and the town developed as a commercial trading port. Merchant trade and pirate activity operated side by side to bring prosperity to those who aspired in business. Later, a herring fishery brought new prosperity and with the arrival of the railway servicing this, a new period of growth followed, with better connectivity through this developing transport network. Properties for wealthy merchants, for trade and industry and lesser homes for those eking out a living from the sea remain part of the historic fabric of the town.

Development of a new harbour in 1825 additional to the old one, that permitted entry when the old did not, at the expense and promotion of the Earl of Seafield, helped confirm the town's position. It promoted other development as industrial needs demanded the relocation of fisher homes. It is admirable that the harbour company chose to replace poor accommodation with purpose built development to house eleven families. It is also beneficial that restoration of property, including Harbour Buildings, was undertaken in the 1960's, to provide social housing and that in the twenty-first century these remain part of the town's built heritage still providing residential use. This is development sustained since 1883 and “sustainable development” in the service it has provided the community over generations.

Extract from Banffshire Reporter, Saturday September 1st 1883

“Harbour Buildings – The building which has been erected by the Portsoy Harbour Company to compensate for houses in the Old Seatown which they required to clear away, has been roofed and slated. It has a very imposing appearance as seen from the shore, being on that side three storeys high. It is meant to accommodate eleven families, each of which will have a self-contained house, and a door to themselves.”

The Portsoy Manuscript of 1843 discovered during the restoration of the house at the Church of the Annunciation and published with historic photographs in 1993 provides a fascinating documentary of the town to that date.
Map of 1767-1874 with reference to clearance and replacement development.
Rewards for Restoration

In the 1960's, Portsoy Town Council, spurred on by Provost George Wood, Mr. James McLeod, Town Clerk, and Mr. John Meldrum, the town architect, undertook a programme of restoring old properties in the town. Portsoy has several historic houses: the Harbour Buildings, (or Barracks), Soy House, thought to be the oldest building, and the Star Inn (1729). These, with other houses on the Shore have been renovated with most of the original features retained. This work gained Portsoy an award for design from the Saltire Society: a plaque was presented in 1967, and this can be seen on the gable end of a house at the Shore, near the Old Harbour.

Portsoy gained another honour in 1978. This was won in a contest organised with the BBC in their "Nationwide" programme, entitled, "Pride of Place". On that occasion Portsoy won fourth place in the competition.
Much of the built form of the town, as shown in this historic view, remains. Harbour Buildings 1883, saved in 1960’s and now

Significant parts of Church Street and Low Street remain instantly recognisable

CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

Setting

The setting of Portsoy is dominated by its coastal location on the shores of the Moray Firth. It sits on a bold, rocky coastline adjacent a deep bay marked by two promontories, the Eastward and Westward Heads. The land quickly rises from the shore with added irregularity carved by the Soy and Durn Burns making their way to the Moray Firth via a Mill Pond (Loch Soy) around which an attractive amenity space exists, promoted by the Town Council in 1969. This small body of water sitting in an elevated part of the town once drove several mills and was a source of ice for fishermen when frozen in winter. The rise and fall of the land, the inlet that provides access to the harbour, the adjacent round hill named The Downie and the curve of Links Bay all contribute to its unique setting, as does the surrounding agricultural land that rests against all its boundaries, except that of its Northern coastal edge. The built form is largely that established from the seventeenth to nineteenth century with later additions, most recently, residential development along its Eastern fringe. Portsoy has a resident population of 1,734 (census 2001) and whilst a few agricultural and fishing related businesses still operate within the town, a growing second holiday home or seasonal letting sector in traditional property exists and could develop further. The retail and service sector in Portsoy has suffered in recent years and future prosperity may rest on a better developed tourism or day visitor offer. Portsoy hosts an annual weekend Boat Festival that takes full advantage of its historic character to offer a unique visitor experience.
Activity and Movement

Activity and movement by both pedestrian and vehicle is now dominated by flows East and West along Seafield Street on a through route, the A98 Fraserburgh to Inverness trunk road. Almost the entire retail offer in the town has chosen to locate along its length. On street parking is available here. Even then, some retail premises lie vacant or have suffered conversion into residential use. Traffic signs highlight the existence of and direct you to the historic harbour and core of the town. Its current visitor profile and signage does not bring the desired level of movement to this area via what is now a very dead square to locate businesses that seek to serve visitors and operate within this historic setting. The Shore Inn, Portsoy Marble and Pottery and a coffee shop operating at Shorehead are remote from the main traffic flow and pedestrian movement.
Street Pattern and Topography

The street pattern is that, largely set out originally in response to the local topography. Changes have largely resulted from industrialisation and progress over time. The Square was once at the heart of movement and activity through the town with the road from the East and Banff bridging the Durn Burn arriving uphill along Culbert Street into the Square and then out the Cullen Road. Better road transport links and the arrival of the railway carved new routes through the town with subsequent alteration of streets, notably defining Bridge Street linking Church Street to Low Street.

Buildings and Townscape

Numerous listed buildings contribute to the character of the conservation area. A, B and C listed buildings are present with notable groups and the central character piece, the A-listed harbour dated 1649. Seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings contribute to its historic character and much of what is present today can be identified on historic maps that provide clues to the phased growth of the town.

The condition of the majority of properties listed is good with some inappropriate development evident and some requiring early intervention to secure their long-term future and return to serve an active use, or prevent complete loss, such as at Back Green (B-Listed).

Distinctive periods and patterns of development are evident within the town. A tightly developed core and grain exists at the old harbour into the square and flanked by Church Street. The fisher town or Seatown on a Hill adjacent the Salmon Bothy is distinct and appears an extension of what was probably a settlement of original fisher cottages adjacent the New Harbour on lower ground cleared away as the scale of fishing activity developed requiring space for processing and other operations. Today, a single fish processor remains in premises located beside the later B-listed harbour.

Buildings are often modest in scale and detailing, sometimes more striking and imposing, perhaps reflecting the wealth of the many merchants who lived and traded from Portsoy. With improved transport links and the arrival of the railway later development on Seafield Street is more imposing and refined in architectural form. Stone from a variety of local sources dominates wall construction in mostly random or coursed rubble. This was almost definitely lime harled with some remnants of this treatment existing at Shorehead and at the Episcopal Church on Seafield Terrace. This appears to have been replaced by cement based wet harl, that may hark back mainly to the 1960’s restoration programme that saved much of the historic heart of Portsoy from complete loss. A more recent fashion has been to apply paint to the walls of properties in a variety of colours giving Portsoy much of what is now its established character. Some examples of Portsoy harl using red rock from a local source but also containing aggregate giving a dry dash semi-reflective effect exist. Some sandstone ashlar work exists in Seafield Street and modern dry dash harling has appeared on a variety of buildings at various locations. Roof finishes are predominantly of Welsh slate with some original and remnants of Scots slate roofs evident. Some original pantile roofs remain and new ones have been encouraged in the conservation area. Original window detailing remains and a significant number of buildings exhibit traditional timber sliding sash and case windows in proportions, sash and pane sizes that are sympathetic, if not entirely representative of the original design.
and architecture. Generally, the townscape still reflects a character from earlier times that hasn’t been entirely sacrificed to modern development, materials and fashion. A major gap site exists where a former mill stood. Redevelopment is approved at this location.

**Spaces**

Notable spaces are evident at its harbours, particularly at the old harbour and Shorehead, but also at other places in proximity to the coast and at vantage points looking out to sea. The Wally Green and former bleaching fields and the amenity space afforded by Loch Soy are important. The long vista created by the length of Seafield Street defined by the buildings at its edge and The Square are two important enclosed spaces. Sadly, The Square is much diminished through lack of movement and activity, with most of its retail offer lost it has succumbed to passive roles of car parking and residential use.

**Trees and Landscaping**

Individual and groups of trees contribute to the quality of the conservation area in small isolated areas. Loch Soy and the footpath link along the old railway line in the heart of the town and at the Wally Green are more distinct green spaces where trees add character. The wooded countryside to the south of Loch Soy, planted gardens and boundary hedging along Durn Road are significant semi natural wooded areas.

**Character Areas**

It is evident that the important historic core in the immediate vicinity of the old harbour is critical to the designation of the conservation area, moving uphill along North High Street into The Square, along Cullen Street and downhill into Culbert Street and Church Street to Aird Street. The link created by Shore Street from the old to the later harbour and development on the high ground behind this, including the C-listed Coastguard Cottages and the elevated Seatown in the vicinity of Salmon Bothy are of distinct associated character, whilst Schoolhendry Street is perhaps less significant or of diminished character. Being elevated, this part of the town still forms part of the setting for core built heritage

The coastal edge from the Seatown to Back Green and the headland beyond has significant setting value, whilst that around Marine Terrace and Barbank Street differs in character, but is also important.

Of separate character and importance are the later properties in Seafield Street into South High Street, Seafield Terrace and to the South. This much later development phase and character, was a response to the arrival of the railway. Some buildings carry date stones such as 1878 and 1879.

These character areas simplify the pattern of historic development of Portsoy having reference to topography, the perceived significance and quality of its built heritage or important spaces at the date surveyed (September 2011). This provides a simple classification and reference point for a more detailed assessment of its conservation area and constituent parts. The location and spread of buildings listed by Historic Scotland provide further evidence of core built heritage and significant groupings of buildings.
Street and Building Analysis

1) Old Harbour, North High Street and immediate environs

Old Harbour and Shorehead – A Listed (Group)

Shorehead B & C Listed properties looking up North High Street

Low Street C & B Listed properties with notable window and door detailing

B – Listed character part of the 1960’s regeneration

Portsoy (red rock) harl, one of three examples found, A Listed

Another 1960’s salvaged property retains an external stair
Looking down North High Street at what is thought to be the former Star Inn, reclaimed in the 1960’s and converted to social housing. A-Listed, with a traditional forestair, but inappropriate cement harl on walls. An original roof structure now requires further restoration and replacement of the failing slate finish. The gable on the left shows signs of original lime harling and later Portsoy (red rock) finish. It is assumed that most traditional properties would have original been lime harled with many now “restored” using cement, many then painted and some left as pointed exposed stone. Similarly very few Scots slate roofs laid in diminishing courses remain with mostly single size Welsh slate replacing these and becoming the established character roof finish.

An earlier record of the Star Inn, as viewed from Low Street.
10 Shorehead is A-Listed with an adjacent vacant, but partly restored C-Listed former warehouse on the extreme left. Evidence of original lime harl exists on this property. It is on the Buildings at Risk Register whilst a new use is found to secure its long-term future. With the exception of the few retail/commercial uses operating in this area, properties are in residential use. Some are seasonal holiday lets, some may be second homes. This restricts occupation, activity and movement to less than that of a permanent population. It may in some cases have restricted investment, but on the other hand, its effect may have been to help preserve the original character and unique sense of place.

No 4 North High Street shows signs of modern interventions to its architectural detailing, but it retains its “Portsoy” (red rock) harling and still contributes to the overall character of North High Street.

From Shorehead into North High Street and Low Street the immediate backdrop to the A Listed Old Harbour demonstrates a high number of properties listed by Historic Scotland and an interesting range of architecture and historic character that defines this unique historic place. A genuine effort to retain original detail as far back as the regeneration efforts noted in the 1960’s even in window detailing that is frequently first lost, or at least incorporating detail sympathetic to an original character is largely evident. Cement render may have replaced original lime harl and colourful paint treatments are readily being applied to this in what is becoming an ever more important aspect of the character of the conservation area, but generally, this area amounts to a high quality historic core that requires vigilant protection and effort to restore the parts that are derelict, underused or under pressure for unsympathetic change. A key aim, in managing the conservation area would be to preserve and enhance this core.

2) The Square, Cullen Street and Culbert Street

On leaving North High Street at the Boyne Hotel and arriving into The Square, a noticeable deterioration of quality, particularly in detail, such as in window pattern and materials occurs. The Square has become empty and devoid of all meaningful activity in its role as hosting the essential services and shops once provided to the community. Subsequently, change to the original built form has been an inevitable consequence as retail premises find new residential uses. Conversion provides mixed results but the biggest loss is the lack of activity and movement generated through trade in this area and the opportunity for visitors to venture from here down to the harbour.
Several properties around the square are diminished in quality through a lack of use and proper maintenance, change of use and alteration, including replacement glazing to inappropriate patterns and opening styles using foreign materials, in particular, PVCu. The C Listed properties at 13 & 14, The Square, retain their built form but the token gesture of small pane glazing is wasted by a non traditional opening style or use of the correct material, being painted timber, appropriate to the preservation of the building's original character. The Square is the start of a weakening of the overall quality of the built fabric of the conservation area and sets a trend observed in other parts, discussed below.
The Newsagent is almost the sole representative of retailing in The Square.

A closed former convenience store with the former Bank adjacent.

The C-Listed former Bank (left) is now in residential use/to let, but it retains its character.

The most recent closure in The Square, the Baker including a production facility at the rear resulted in a major loss in local employment although a new retail outlet was opened in a vacant unit in Seafield Street. An adjacent house may also be included in its sale. The future for these properties is uncertain and the quality of The Square is diminished through their lack of use.

The view up Cullen Street an historic through route

Historic Culbert Street – several properties are listed
B Listed properties are prominent at the foot of Culbert Street leading up to The Square an historic arrival point and through route.

Refurbishment of B Listed 11-19 Culbert Street (above right) has successfully retained original character with replacement six over six sliding timber sash and case windows. These have successfully introduced sealed double glazed units to improve energy efficiency. The cement harling to the walls is inappropriate. This is failing in parts, but is also detrimental to the fabric of the building. Replacing this with a breathable lime harl would benefit the property and restore the probable original finish.

3) Church Street to Aird Street.

84 – 88 Church Street, C Listed

Church Street displays a range of architecture and listed buildings
Original detail sits adjacent to modern intervention components and materials

Perhaps the oldest property in Portsoy? B Listed

Traditional cottages (not listed) show modified original character

More recent development (right) in scale and materials sits comfortably with the B Listed property opposite (left) as you look down this long vista

Listed properties on the corner of Church Street and Shillinghill mostly demonstrate strong retention of original character. On either side of these, infill development to provide social housing respects these in scale, in roof finish and the established building line, whilst exposed brickwork and window openings accentuating width, rather than height, bring obvious contrast to traditional buildings.
Closer examination at this location reveals inappropriate PVCu top hung opening windows with false glazing bars and a factory produced front door in a reduced door frame with a modern lever handle. The application of paint to walls is now an established part of the character of Portsoy, but it is a further departure from historical architecture and aesthetics. Here, the built form remains intact, but significant changes to the original character of this C Listed property have occurred. This is not an isolated example.

4) The link, Shore Street from Old to New Harbour and development on the high ground behind this, Seatown and Schoolhendry Street.

This remains an important part of the conservation area, although fragmented and diminished in places, with some dereliction and loss of character evident. Redevelopment and change of use is happening in parts, whilst inappropriate extension development and harling, including dry dash harling, along with unsympathetic replacement windows and doors, has reduced the quality of this area. Schoolhendry Street is significantly diminished. This said, the built form at this elevated location, along with the distinctive pattern of development of Seatown, with other individual buildings, such as Coastguard Cottages together still provide valuable assets that are distinctive components of the conservation area.
Harbour light and 2-4 Shore Street, (left) C Listed with inappropriate windows

71 Lodging Brae retains character

Old Coastguard Houses, C Listed but inappropriate alterations

Redevelopment, historic development and business use

Schoolhendry Street shows significant loss of original detail

The original character of Seatown has been compromised

3 Wood Street, C Listed (front elevation)

Rear elevation

This property that sits adjacent to the recently restored Salmon Bothy has lost much of its original character and its contribution to the conservation area is very much reduced.
5) Back Green to Seatown (Setting Value)

This part of the conservation area provides a natural landscape contribution and setting aspect to the built heritage of Portsoy including at its extremes, the listed property at Back Green, a priority project for the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) 2011-2016 and the recently refurbished Salmon Bothy visitor attraction and community facility. Modern industrial use and development sits a little uneasily with heritage and visitor value or its promotion. The historic street pattern is not conducive to H.G.V. movement to and from this location.
This area is defined by an elevated rocky coastal strip bounded by Marine Terrace, part of Cullen Street and Barbank Street. Views over and towards the historic Old Harbour are evident and whilst only a few listed properties exist on Cullen Street at the junction with Marine Terrace, the built form here is interesting with other traditional properties and the street pattern well defined on 19th Century maps. Whilst some new development and altered character is evident, significant built form and historic detail remains. The area is significant in terms of its own pattern of development and distinct character, as well as forming an edge to the historic core around the A-listed old harbour contributing to its setting.
View over Old Harbour from the Northern end of Barbank Street

Tower House at the Southern end of Barbank Street/Cullen Street

Tower House displays a range of historic architectural features

7) Seafield Street and into South High Street, Seafield Terrace and development to the South.

Seafield Street provides a route for through traffic (A98) on arriving at Portsoy. It has become the main focus for retail and service provision, having considerable on street parking available. Development of Seafield Street is closely linked to the arrival of the railway in 1884. Notable 19th Century architectural pieces remain, but some dilution of original quality is obvious through inappropriate alteration, of, for example windows, or through change of use. Lack of retail activity in the town, is indicated through a high number of vacant premises both in The Square, South High Street and Seafield Street.
View westwards along Seafield Street

B Listed Bank Building

Inappropriate alterations to original character are evident diminishing the quality of this part of the conservation area

19th Century development shows minor loss of traditional character and original use

A clothes shop recently operated at South High Street.

Vacant retail space in Seafield Street
Notable historic architecture is evident in Seafield Street.

South of Seafield Street the open space around Loch Soy and in the vicinity of the C Listed former branch line station building now provide excellent amenity space and connection to open countryside beyond that adds a different aspect to the conservation area.

8) The remainder of the Conservation Area including Durn Road, Aird Street towards the edge. Wally Green and other notable corners including the individual character buildings.

The Southern and Western boundaries of the conservation area include open countryside, mature trees and hedgerow, modern and historic development.
Durn House, Doocot and Stables. Listed buildings that stand isolated from the town.

Durn Road displays some substantial period properties probably dating from the early 20th Century. These are detached from heart of the historic town and do not appear on the 19th Century (1867-1874) map.

Arrival in Portsoy from Banff to the East, was once over this bridge, now, along Aird Street.
Aird Street shows differing and distinct character elements

The Wally Green provides a versatile amenity space with mature trees in its vicinity. This is the general location of former bleaching fields, saw, grain and thread mill activity. The most recent mill development to stand here is now a cleared site with residential development approved that will clearly impact upon this location. Adjacent, the former railway line provides a green route to the harbour from Loch Soy running alongside the original terminus building that remains intact with a fine Scot’s slate roof laid in diminishing courses.

The original railway terminus for Portsoy, with the platform used by a local coal merchant long after the trains had stopped (left). Today, used for storage with walls buttressed in concrete and rooflights sheeted over.
Buildings at Risk Survey

The register of buildings at risk identifies seven properties within the conservation area. Durn House doocot does not appear of immediate concern and conservation works may have been carried out in recent years. It remains in the grounds of Durn House Stables, also identified at risk. Preservation and sympathetic redevelopment of this property at an early date would be desirable to secure the future of both B-listed properties. Partial redevelopment is underway at 22a-24 Shore Street and this may promote further preservation of original fabric at this location. The Gig House, Hill Street had its roof finish and roof structure removed recently. Restoration of the original roof finish is intended and would be appropriate for consideration of support from the CARS. Back Green is a priority project under the CARS and 3 Seafield Place is a development opportunity to restore residential use whilst retaining original character. Support from the CARS should be considered.

Buildings listed by Historic Scotland

Portsoy contains two listed harbours and a further one hundred and twelve listed properties. Several are A-listed and an important A-list group exists in conjunction with the Old Harbour at Shorehead.

This group comprises; No 10 Shorehead (café on ground floor); No 10A, warehouse immediately East of this (at risk); Corf Warehouse (Portsoy Marble Shop); Former James Watt’s Warehouse (Portsoy Marble Workshop), Former Co-operative Grain Store (CARS priority project) and the Old Harbour.

Other A-listed properties are located in North High Street and a significant proportion of the remaining property is listed B. Whilst C-listed property makes up the balance it should be noted that legislation applies equally to all categories and differentiation merely recognises particular historical or architectural importance.

Both the spread and notable groupings of listed buildings found in Portsoy helps define core heritage and the reason for designating a conservation area. The cumulative impact of this legacy of built heritage is of prime importance to the uniqueness of place and the possibilities for economic benefit to accrue from this in terms of Portsoy being a destination for visitors and even in supporting its resident population. The character and distinct quality of the built environment is a significant attraction to both visitor and resident alike and the future prosperity of the town is likely to be based, in part, on its positive promotion. The success of Portsoy Boat Festival appears to clearly indicate this and potential for its built heritage and coastal location to underpin economic growth.

Appendix 1 identifies some key listed properties and core built heritage lying at the heart of the conservation area.

Public Realm Audit

The public realm is generally of appropriate quality and well maintained. Where detail, such as cobble setts or stone steps are retained, this helps define the built heritage. Where this has given way to modern interventions such as tubular railings, inconsiderate signage or finish,
this detracts from and diminishes the quality of historic spaces. Managed green spaces and public areas around the harbours are well maintained and contribute greatly to the character of the conservation area. Where mature trees occur, in either public space or managed garden ground, these also add to its character and quality. These aspects combine with strong coastal features to provide a diverse and high quality public realm that defines this special place. Pedestrian links between the old harbour, between and around historic buildings directing the public along a coastal path would benefit from improving in association perhaps with the relocation and redevelopment of the Council’s landscape services depot and in association with adjacent listed properties. Vehicle movements at this location may be unhelpful to the visitor experience and amenity provided by historic properties and businesses that operate or may wish to operate in this vicinity.

**Specific Issues**

The main issues noticeable as impacting upon the quality of the conservation area are:

- The presence of vacant and derelict properties;
- Changing patterns in the use of buildings;
- Loss of character and quality following on from these and from minor forms of development, such as replacement glazing and the introduction of modern materials and components, usually permitted development under the General Permitted Development Order, but not exclusively as many listed buildings were noted with inappropriate alterations;
- Increasing use of paint treatments to external walls of properties. This may not be negative in its impact. It has become part of an established character and it may require the promotion of detailed guidance or control to avoid inappropriate applications.

**Vacant and Derelict Property**

Several vacant or derelict buildings are present, at key locations in the conservation area. These significantly diminish its quality and should be considered as opportunity sites. Any regeneration initiative for the Portsoy conservation area would wish to target these to conserve its built heritage, but also to establish active and viable uses there, to encourage economic growth and realise benefits.

The B – Listed buildings at Back Green remain a long standing problem in finding a redevelopment solution that is both viable and mindful of a flooding risk. Most recently North East Scotland Preservation Trust commissioned a feasibility study towards realising preservation and redevelopment. It is anticipated that investment delivered through the CARS will help deliver its proper conservation and a viable new use.
Two derelict former industrial buildings at the historic harbour adjacent the popular Shore Inn find only a temporary use during Boat Festival activities. Sympathetic conservation and redevelopment of these is proposed. This will provide a boat building shed for a social enterprise and training facility based on traditional craft skills, providing a new use that will deliver both environmental and social benefit. The opportunity to attract further visitor interest at this location and link this to other facilities such as the Salmon Bothy and Portsoy Marble Shop & Pottery are other opportunities. These buildings are at a key location in the conservation area and are a target for restoration and a new use through the CARS.

The former Co-operative grain store forming part of a group of buildings A-listed for their combined value, suffers from a poor quality replacement roof that appears to be causing structural damage to its walls.

A limited commercial stone cutting operation exists within the building but this makes poor use of the internal space that previously had two internal floors. Restoration and redevelopment could provide a variety of uses above the existing ground floor use. Of immediate concern, is the early investment required to restore its original character, preserve the building and enhance the conservation area.

Major cracking of the masonry is apparent on one corner and appears to stem from an inadequate roof structure, sagging rafters that are too widely spaced and the loss of its intermediate floors providing restraint to the walls. The lack of any rainwater installation is of further concern and water may be entering at the wall heads. This is another target for financial investment and conservation-led redevelopment through the CARS.
The partially restored warehouse adjacent to No 10 Shorehead (left picture) requires investment to return vacant floor space to a viable use and fully conserve the property. Proposals for the redevelopment of 22a & 24 Shore Street exist and are slowly being realised.

**Changing patterns in the use of buildings**

The number of former retail units lying vacant or in the process of being changed to a more passive residential use is very noticeable. The impact that this is having on the quality of the historic environment, on individual properties and the resulting lack of activity and opportunity to enjoy parts of the conservation area is significant. The effect has risen in pace in recent years and The Square has become empty and devoid of all meaningful activity in hosting the essential services and shops once deemed essential to this community.

The Newsagent is almost the sole representative of retailing in The Square, the adjacent property having been altered to provide a residential use. A former hall providing a Day Care centre (C-listed) now lies vacant with no apparent immediate or viable use. During consultation with the community as part of this review, some expressed a desire to relocate the library here.
Vacant floor space in historic properties and difficulties in providing any viable or sympathetic new use for these is general to Portsoy, as seen in Seafield Street and again in Aird Street.

There remains much to be positive about regarding the built heritage of Portsoy and the quality of its conservation area. Recent benefits, such as those derived from the restored and revitalised Salmon Bothy need repeating and encouraged elsewhere. They can, in part, be a response to the retraction of retailing from former strongholds such as The Square by providing new active uses and the movement of people through the historic environment permitting it to live again and be at the heart of the community. Finding a new viable use for the former vacant Day Care centre could bring similar benefit to The Square and help mitigate the recent loss of activity here. The CARS could assist in its refurbishment to provide a new use.

Other Character

The following reflects some good and poor aspects of quality found in the conservation area. These offer opportunities for intervention to conserve or improve on current quality and thereby enhance the conservation area. One legacy is that of former railway buildings.

The timber clad C-Listed former branch railway station now acts as the local Scout Hall but it requires investment to make it fit for purpose and to properly conserve it. Plans to extend and develop this property and enhance its use may offer opportunities to support conservation of the original structure through the CARS. The terminus building for the original railway line shows an expanse of slate laid in diminishing courses demonstrating a craftsmanship that will not be repeated when it needs replacing. Advice will be sought from Historic Scotland as to whether it merits being listed.
Other buildings retain most of their original qualities but without some additional effort these are likely to be lost. The old sits next to the redeveloped in Seafield Place (centre). Directly opposite, a property which is C-Listed lies empty, stripped out and missing its guttering. A 30mph sign adds clutter, set against original stone steps onto the street.

Minor development, generally “Permitted Development”, diminishes historic character as here at Church Street (left). A random approach to glazing patterns is evident in Seafield Street (centre) while aspects of South High do not impress (right).

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT**

Opportunities to enhance the conservation area exist. They will only be delivered by engaging with the community, with education initiatives, investment and better control exercised by the Council as Planning Authority. There is much about Portsoy’s conservation area to be proud of, but more could be done to maximise the environmental, social and economic benefit that its historic legacy, can provide.

Establishing a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) with a grant of £500,000 made available by Scottish Government/Historic Scotland will allow the targeting of derelict and important properties deemed at risk and will be a major response to the need for heritage-led regeneration in Portsoy. Portsoy’s built heritage provides a distinct sense of place that needs protected, conserved and developed, to provide the social and economic benefits necessary to help sustain the community. The historic environment already generates interest, activity and economic benefit. This is typified by its use as the stage upon which the Portsoy Boat Festival is set on an annual basis. It could provide more, but it requires investment and better management to achieve its best quality and thereby offer the opportunity to maximise benefit.

Implementation of the Portsoy CARS provides a basis for addressing all matters necessary to improve its quality and promote a better understanding of the importance of the conservation area and benefit of properly preserving built heritage.
This appraisal of the conservation area and review of its boundary in consultation with the community is the start of a process of delivering this ambition. Implementing the Portsoy CARS from 2011 to 2016 will drive this initiative forward providing major financial investment in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council and participating property owners. A more detailed strategy for the conservation area will evolve from this.

**Sensitivity Analysis**

Vulnerable buildings have been identified through survey work for this appraisal and by reference to the Buildings at Risk register. The CARS will significantly address some of these as priority projects. Ways to assist the redevelopment and conservation of the C-Listed former railway station at Loch Soy should be considered, as should fostering completing the restoration and redevelopment of 10a Shorehead to return it to viable use. The future for and meantime, any major deterioration of Durn House Stable block needs carefully monitored and if appropriate, action taken by the Council to preserve it. A future use for the C-listed former Day Care centre in the Square needs found to avoid its deterioration.

More generally, Portsoy’s stock of listed buildings that significantly form its core heritage, particularly around it’s A-listed, Old Harbour, Shorehead, North High Street, Culbert Street, Low Street but also Church Street need properly safeguarded with any change in historic character closely controlled.

Elsewhere, individual or groups of listed properties that also make important contributions to the quality of the conservation area cannot be diminished or they could become vulnerable to further change. A group of C-Listed properties at Aird Street and a group of B-listed properties including two church buildings at the opposite end of Seafield Street are two examples. These properties are akin to book ends of distinct character when progressing into Seafield Street from both East and West. Individual properties along Seafield Street including the former church, now a hall with dominant clock tower set back from the main building line and the Bank diagonally opposite, both B-listed, are extremely important contributions to the built heritage, particularly as around these, quality diminished.

Inappropriate replacement windows and doors and disappointingly even in buildings listed by Historic Scotland is an issue that needs addressed immediately to avoid further decline in the quality of Portsoy’s built heritage.

One area particularly vulnerable to further decline through a variety of factors is the Square and South High Street. Inappropriate development and development without consent or appropriate statutory permission, change of use, vacant property, lack of activity and movement and a decline in its traditional role and function have resulted in this area being in danger of its quality being further eroded. It is, however encouraging that some properties are being sympathetically redeveloped with care being taken to reflect traditional character by installing timber sliding sash and case windows in appropriate proportions and glazing patterns whilst taking this opportunity to incorporate double glazed units within casements to meet the demands of a change of use for the property. Such effort needs encouraged in every possible way through education, training, financial assistance in schemes such as CARS and by the effective control of development.
Opportunities for Planning Action

Minor revisions to the boundary of the conservation area are proposed as detailed in Appendix 2.

Development Management decisions regarding listed buildings will, in future, adhere to established policy and guidance, noting that any failure to do so undermines the quality of Portsoy’s core heritage, diminishes the character of individual buildings identified by Historic Scotland for their historic or architectural importance and the overall character and quality of the conservation area that the Council itself, chose to designate.

A condition of the CARS award is that the Council review existing Article 4 Directions, being particularly mindful of how some “permitted development” such as inappropriate replacement windows and doors can steadily erode the quality of the conservation area.

However, on 6th February 2012 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development (Scotland) Amendment Order 2011 effectively negated this obligation. Previously permitted development rights enjoyed by a dwellinghouse such as, “any improvement, addition or other alteration of the external appearance” now requires that a planning application be submitted and determined in accordance with policy and advice.

Consideration will be given to exercising greater control over the painting of properties in Portsoy and the need for detailed guidance regarding a palette of appropriate colours to maintain its established character, or to enhance this and avoid the introduction of any inappropriate application of colour to walls.

The Council will seek to support identified CARS projects through all of its statutory and additional functions including those of Development Planning, Development Management and Economic Development in order to foster regeneration and sustainable economic growth in he community.

Aligning CARS objectives and proposals for the future management of Portsoy Conservation Area through the process of “Making it Real” and setting out and delivering a community action plan in Portsoy is a further opportunity to realise planning and regeneration aspirations in partnership with the community. As part of this process and in discussion with the Council’s Policy and Local Development Plan team, opportunities for redevelopment and improvement in the conservation area should be considered in the vicinity of the Council depot at Shorehead and in the vicinity of industrial premises adjacent to the Seatown and the restored Salmon Bothy.

Conservation Strategy

A strategy for better management and enhancement of Portsoy conservation area will be informed by this appraisal. Primarily it will have as its foundation:

• Retention of the conservation area with minor boundary changes;
• Aberdeenshire Council’s commitment to the protection, enhancement and preservation of its built heritage;
• Appropriate policies for and effective control of development within the conservation area;
• Financial investment and support for regeneration and sustainable growth complimentary to the preservation and enhancement of its conservation area.
• Promoting education, training and skills development that will support the proper maintenance of historic assets.

Delivering the CARS 2011-2016 will play a major role in defining the management strategy and in delivering positive change.

The strategy will be endorsed by Aberdeenshire Council as Planning Authority and through reports provided to the Council’s Banff & Buchan Area Committee.

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Supplementary Guidance

The general guidance on conservation areas is set down in the Supplementary Guidance policies of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The aim of this supplementary guidance is to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of conservation areas, in order to safeguard the long term management of these areas in accordance with current guidance and legislation.

Conservation area legislation provides for their regular appraisal and Aberdeenshire Council is committed by its Historic Environment Strategy to deliver these and thereby provide particular additional planning advice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES

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Images from historic postcards courtesy of Portsoy Library collection and comment gathered from the collated research of Findlay Pirie of Portsoy, held at the library.
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APPENDICES

1. Significant listed buildings and core heritage;

2. Original and proposed Conservation Area boundary;

Appendix 1: Significant listed buildings and core heritage
Appendix 2: Original and proposed Conservation Area boundary
Appendix 3: Summary of Portsoy Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) 2011-2016

Portsoy Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL (Environment Team, Planning and Building Standards) has been awarded funding to deliver a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) in Portsoy over five years (ending March 2016). The scheme will help fund restoration and conservation works in the Portsoy Conservation Area. Portsoy is fortunate to have this status and a legacy of historic buildings particularly those clustered around its 17th Century A-listed harbour.

£500,000 is available to help conserve the historic environment and foster environmental, social and economic regeneration. Funding and support comes from the Scottish Government through Historic Scotland and Aberdeenshire Council working in partnership with private owners, Portsoy Boat Festival and North East Scotland Preservation Trust.

The emphasis is on returning derelict or vacant historic property back into active and viable use. This is the best way to ensure that our historic environment is preserved for future generations.

Priority Projects

The Portsoy CARS will be developed around four priority projects. We will target derelict buildings at Back Green, a former rope works; two derelict industrial buildings at Shore Street; the former Co-operative grain store at Shorehead and an A-Listed property at 16-20 North High Street, the former STAR INN, once frequented by pirates!
Project 1 -

Back Green, Portsoy, (B-Listed)

A derelict property will be brought back into use. Proposed conservation works will include roof reconstruction, timber and slate; consolidating walls, structural pointing; traditional joinerwork detailing to windows and doors; internal floors and cast iron rainwater goods.

Partial restoration and redevelopment to provide environmental, community and economic benefit through the provision of a seasonal Bunkhouse in association with other tourism-led initiatives is envisaged.

Owner: North East Scotland Preservation Trust
**Project 2 - Boat Building Workshop**

This derelict property will be brought back into use on completion of conservation work including gable and roof reconstruction of stone, timber and slate with cast iron rain water goods; consolidating and repointing the walls; replacement of windows and doors with traditional joinery and replacement of internal floors.

Planned use includes a ground floor workshop with bunk house accommodation above. The building will be operated by PORT (Portsoy Organisation for Restoration and Training), part of the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival, which teaches the skills involved in restoring traditional boats and building new craft for sail training. The training also sets out to develop the all-important social skills involved in team work.

The activity will be carried out throughout the year and the accommodation will allow for training courses to be offered to participants from all over Scotland and abroad.

*Owner: Portsoy Boat Festival Group*
Project 3 -

Former Co-operative Grain Store, Shorehead (A-Listed, Group)

Proposed conservation works will include roof restoration including the removal of an inadequate roof structure of inappropriate asbestos sheet finish promoting movement in the structural walls; the replacement of internal floors to restore structural and historical integrity and to provide new usable space. This property is a key element of the A-Listed harbour environment and is significantly diminished through its previous alteration. The owner is keen to participate in its restoration to provide possible commercial space in the restored upper floors.

Project 4 -

16 - 20 North High Street (A-Listed), former Star Inn

A complete restoration of the roof is proposed to support the retention of residential use and preservation of this A-Listed property.