Kirkliston Conservation Area Character Appraisal
THE KIRKLISTON CONSERVATION AREA
CHARACTER APPRAISAL WAS APPROVED BY THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2000

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**Introduction**

**Conservation Areas**

Section 61 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, describes conservation areas as "...areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". The Act makes provision for the designation of conservation areas as distinct from individual buildings, and planning authorities are required to determine which parts of their areas merit conservation area status.

There are currently 38 conservation areas in Edinburgh, including city centre areas, Victorian suburbs and former villages. Each conservation area has its own unique character and appearance.

**Character Appraisals**

The protection of an area does not end with conservation area designation; rather designation demonstrates a commitment to positive action for the safeguarding and enhancement of character and appearance. The planning authority and the Scottish Executive are obliged to protect conservation areas from development which would adversely affect their special character. It is, therefore, important that both the authorities and other groups who have an interest in conservation areas, and residents are aware of those elements which must be preserved or enhanced.

A Character Appraisal is seen as the best method of defining the key elements which contribute to the special historic and architectural character of an area.

It is intended that Character Appraisals will guide the local planning authority in making planning decisions and, where opportunities arise, preparing enhancement proposals. *The Character Appraisal will be a material consideration when considering applications for development within the conservation area and applications for significant new developments should be accompanied by a contextual analysis that demonstrates how the proposals take account of the essential character of the area as identified in this document.*

NPPG 18: Planning and the Historic Environment states that Conservation Area Character Appraisals should be prepared when reconsidering existing conservation area designations, promoting further designations or formulating enhancement schemes. The NPPG also specifies that Article 4 Direction Orders will not be confirmed unless a Character Appraisal is in place.
Kirkliston Conservation Area

The Kirkliston Conservation Area was designated on 13 October 1977.

The village of Kirkliston lies ten miles west of the centre of Edinburgh. The conservation area is based around the medieval church and the surrounding historic core of the village, extending south to include the riverside setting of the old village.

The boundary of the conservation area runs south behind 17 to 49 Station Road, then along the disused railway line across the River Almond, turning southwards along its east bank, recrossing the river south of Breast Mill. The boundary then turns northwards along New Liston Road taking in the Manse, houses in New Liston Road and part of the distillery complex before turning eastwards to take in the parish church, including the historic cemetery, then northwards as far as Kirkstyle. From here, the boundary returns eastwards along Bowling Green Road back to Almondbank, off Station Road.

The conservation area falls within the ward boundary of Dalmeny/Kirkliston.

*General view to Kirkliston*
Origins

The original name of the parish was Liston recorded in various forms. Listona, Listun and Listone occur between 1163 and 1218. The prefix “Kirk” was attached to Liston during the 14th century.

It is not known when the first church at Kirkliston was built, but the present parish church dates from the late 12th century.

Agriculture is the oldest industry in the parish, with the earliest written accounts dating from 1670. Around 1767, the scattered rigs of the small tenants were arranged into fields and enclosed with strips of trees, hedges or dykes. Drainage, new crops and new methods of farming followed.

Development

The village developed round the medieval Parish Church and is detailed on a map of 1680. The map of 1773 shows the village grouped to the south and east of the church along the current High Street and Station Road. Station Road led to Queensferry, as it still does today, and the High Street was on the main route between Winchburgh and Edinburgh. A further route to the northeast ran from Station Road, on the current line of Main Street. At this time, New Liston Road ran south from High Street towards the Broxburn-Edinburgh route.
A comparison with the map of circa 1845 illustrates the growth of the village between 1773 and circa 1845. The most significant changes during this time were the building of the distillery to the west of the village at the end of the 18th century and the construction of the turnpike road in 1810, linking Linlithgow and Edinburgh. This route was curtailed by the construction of the new runway at Edinburgh airport in 1976.

By 1812, there was a toll bar and some buildings on the south side of the new toll road, buildings on the north side followed soon after, including a school and a post office. The names Market Street and Main Street began to be used, the latter becoming the official name in 1920.

The map of circa 1845 also indicates the Free Church (1843) and the manse to the north of the church (now demolished). To the east of the Manse was Kirkstyle. This was the name of the approach to the kirk from the east and also latterly from the north, following the development of the village around Main Street after 1810.

The railway was constructed in 1842 and the gasworks to the east around the same time, although neither were mapped until 1852.
Around 1900, the eastern entry of Gateside Road, leading into the High Street was altered to permit expansion of the distillery (map of 1975), although its old alignment leading straight westwards is still discernible.

During the next 60 years, the expansion of the village had a minimal impact on the historic core of the village. However, the 1960s saw the construction of two large housing estates (The Glebe, 1962 and Gateside, 1968) adjacent to the historic core.

Despite the construction of these estates it can be seen from the map of 1975 that, at the time the conservation area was designated in 1977, the historic core had undergone little change since 1852.

Significant intrusions into and around the edge of the historic core began in the 1980s with the development of Auldgate in 1982, partly on the site of the old railway station. The development continued with Kirkstyle Gardens in 1986, and other housing development, including the 1990s housing association development on High Street/Station Road.
**Topography and Natural Environment**

The core of the village is located on a hill, which slopes down steeply to the River Almond with the land gradually leading out to the flat valley and fields beyond. The river appears like a moat surrounding the village, with links out to the countryside over Maitland Bridge, the railway bridge and the smaller bridges over the burn which flows into the river. The disused railway embankment, raised up from the surrounding fields and running in a straight line, contrasts with the sinuous nature of the river. The angles of the embankment and main road exaggerate the perspective, emphasising the village’s rural setting. The industrial character of Newbridge and the airport, only a mile away, seem much more remote than they actually are.

**Approaches**

Distant views to the conservation area show the historic core clustered on the hilltop with the Parish Church and spire of the former Free Church, surrounded by mature trees, dominating the skyline. From the A8 approach, the predominance of the two churches is accentuated by the low single storey cottages at their base and the steep bank down to the river. The rear elevations of the buildings face out to the countryside and the frontages look inward, giving the appearance of a self contained settlement. The distillery complex is lower down but due to its scale, it still visually competes with the historic core. From the north and the bypass, views to the conservation area are now obscured behind suburban housing development. The M9 also dominates the approach from the A800.

**Essential Character**

- a green open approach with uninterrupted views along the river, which separates the village from its industrial hinterland and reinforces its rural setting;
- focused views over the wide river and open valley towards the historic village with prominent hilltop core; and
- a dramatic skyline created by the church tower, spire and distillery chimney.
Spatial Pattern and Townscape Analysis

A significant proportion of the conservation area is green open space, including a section of the River Almond. The river is a natural environment that forms an important wildlife corridor and habitat for many species.

New Liston Road follows the line of the river and along this road, there is a linear spatial pattern with scattered cottages that are set back with gardens to the road. Together with the river and fields either side there is a sense of a green wedge narrowing as the village is approached.

This southern entrance to the conservation area is marked by the Breast Mill buildings set amongst trees and sitting adjacent to the River Almond. On leaving the village towards the A89, the complex terminates the vista out of the conservation area. On passing the mill, the view opens to reveal the Manse on the left. Located on a hillock, it is a prominent building on the approach to the village. This is followed by two groups of small cottages. The smithy building is another visual feature because it sits forward from the adjacent cottages.

The spatial pattern changes on the corner with Path Brae with the distillery complex, as it consists of a cluster of buildings in a variety of heights, styles and materials. The prominence of the distillery is magnified by the unexpectedly large scale and the utilitarian and intensive layout of the units. The number of geometric shapes reflects the various industrial processes and the piended roofs and pagoda ventilators of the maltings and kilns create an interesting skyline.

The steep ascent to the High Street provides dramatic views up to the churches, giving the effect of drawing one up the hill into the main village. The Square provides a sense of arrival into the village and acts as a transition from the looser, less defined pattern of the approach to a denser, more enclosed, harder, almost urban environment, which is continued along the High Street and Station Road. The Square provides the setting for the two churches beyond, and is framed by housing either side.
The two churches dominate the conservation area and their large scale and mass contrast with the surrounding domestic architecture, although, the building of Kirkstyle Gardens has had an adverse impact on the immediate setting of the Parish Church. The upper and lower kirkyards include a number of tall mature sycamore trees and are a reminder of the open lands that originally surrounded the church. This has been lost on the eastern slope due to recent development. The topography here falls away more gently than on the other sides of the hill in a series of platforms that rise up again to Main Street. The new development has been restricted to one or two storeys and, although the boundary walls hide the modern elevations, the sloping ground level does give prominence to the roofs. Due to the topography of the area, the roofscape is a strong element throughout the whole conservation area.

The older housing within the village is located on the High Street opposite the former Free Church. The properties are built to the heel of a very narrow pavement and, despite their small scale, there is a sense of enclosure that is reinforced by the short vistas along the street.

The main road, especially on the corner, with its modern radius and banking, is set higher than the floor levels of the cottages and almost completely fills the space between buildings on both sides of the street. It dominates the space and, with busy and rapid traffic, is an intrusive element within the historic core.
Along Station Road, the predominantly single storey cottages give way to a series of two storey houses, generally semi-detached with side passages, providing access and glimpses to the rear gardens. The sense of enclosure is maintained along this side of the street, but reduces at the corner with a new housing development set back to provide a small garden. The large opening at the library car park provides no real sense of enclosure and reveals the wide library gable and roof form, which is out of scale with the more traditional development.

The cottages on the High Street terminate the view down Station Road with wider views out to the Pentlands. The view up Station Road is towards the junction with Main Street and the War Memorial.

There is a distinctive network of pathways within and into the village from the surrounding countryside. The routes at first have a random appearance but they do follow desire lines that have been established over time, with paths to the parish church and links between the original village to the later Main Street. These paths provide glimpsed views into small courtyards and gardens, of the spire and tower, and views out of the conservation area into the wider landscape.

Stone boundary walls are a prominent feature within the conservation area, along the paths, roads and gardens.

In general, the village retains a defined spatial pattern and townscape that reflects the historic development of the village and maintains its rural setting.
Essential Character

- A significant area of green open space which contributes to the rural character of Kirkliston and provides a setting for the village;

- rural village with scattered linear development leading to a central core;

- a balance of open spaces behind the village core contrasting with the sense of enclosure in its principal streets;

- glimpsed views to key buildings and views out to the wider landscape;

- contrast of mass and scale in building types emphasising a sense of dominance of churches and the distillery;

- a variety of building groupings representing different uses and building types;

- the natural topography of the landscape resulting in a prominent roofscape; and

- A distinctive and extensive pathway network along desire lines within and into the village from the surrounding countryside.
There is a strong representation of vernacular and Victorian buildings throughout the conservation area, creating a general uniformity in appearance.

On New Liston Road, Breast Mill, dating from 17th century, was one of the last meal mills on the River Almond, operating until 1928 but now in residential use. It is a substantial three storey rubble building with crow stepped gables. It is part of a group of buildings, which includes Breast Mill House, dating from the 18th century, and various outbuildings. Maitland Bridge, hidden from the road, is a late 19th century three-span sandstone structure.

The Manse was built in 1850 for the ministers of the Free Church. It is one of the very few grand buildings within Kirkliston and the only example of the Tudoresque style.

The cottages along New Liston Road are a mix of domestic vernacular and Victorian cottages, either one or two storeys with a predominance of dormers. The early 19th century smithy is significant, as it is one of the few remaining working smithies in Edinburgh. The row of cottages adjacent to the distillery was built for its workers. With the overhanging eaves and decorative bargeboarding, their style resembles rural estate cottages rather than the vernacular tradition generally found in this area.

The distillery site dates from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, with later additions. One of the most prominent buildings is the painted sandstone production block with its industrial chimney. The other significant stone buildings are outside the conservation area.

Within the historic core of the village, the Parish Church is the earliest and most prominent building. It is sandstone and rectangular in plan with a west tower and an ornate Romanesque door on the south elevation. The upper kirkyard contains a number of 18th century monuments and the watch-house was built in the early 19th century due to the prevalent fears of grave robbery.
The Square contains two storey Victorian houses with bay windows and an early 20th century property in an English mock-Tudor style that contrasts with the surrounding properties. The former Free Church built in 1843 with a later prominent spire dominates the Square and the High Street.

The High Street includes a row of single storey and two storey rectangular plan houses, dating from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. The low cottages typify the domestic vernacular tradition found in agricultural communities. There have been numerous unsympathetic alterations, but the properties still characterise the old centre of the village. One of the houses was occupied by a shoemaker, giving the rear close the name ‘Cobbler’s Close’. Castle House, dating from 1682, is three storey with a prominent projecting semi-circular stair tower on the front elevation.

The east side of Station Road consists of one and two storey Victorian cottages and houses, which are generally simple but well proportioned in their style, some with small gardens to the front.

There are a few modern houses intermingled with the older properties throughout the conservation area, but most of the later development is concentrated along Station Road and east of the Parish Church. The new housing, apart from the more sympathetic housing association development on the High Street, is generally suburban in nature with integral garages, front porches and detached houses. Other later developments include the single storey flat roofed bowling club with its prominent concrete wall, and the library building. These modern elements undermine the historical character and integrity of the conservation area.
The predominant building material within the conservation area is buff coloured sandstone, but a number of traditional buildings have been harled or cement rendered with a coloured finish. The natural stone boundary walls give uniformity to the village. The use of brick is limited to the bowling club, distillery complex and the mock-Tudor house. In the new developments, the materials tend to be wet dash render finish with limited use of artificial stone.

The most widely used roof covering is Scots slate but other dominant materials include Welsh slate and red pantiles, particularly within the new developments. There are instances of concrete pantiles and tiles in both the older and new properties. Given the importance of the roofscape within the village, the use of non-traditional roof materials detracts from the overall appearance of the village.

The original windows are timber sash and case with a mixture of small and large panes.

There are no traditional street or pavement surfaces remaining within the village.

\textit{Essential Character}

- A limited number of key architectural and historical buildings which add focus to the conservation area;

- predominant building form of small-scale, mainly symmetrical vernacular cottages and houses with simple pitched roofs, providing a unified character;

- key original architectural features including timber sash and case windows, timber doors, stone chimneys, traditional style dormers and stone boundary walls; and

- consistency in the use of traditional materials (stone, harl, Scots slate and pantiles) which are unifying elements within the townscape.
Activities and Uses

The conservation area is predominantly residential.

The distillery remains a significant industrial use within the village. With the current business, certain malt extract processes can produce a strong smell within the village, highlighting the partly industrial character to the conservation area. The smithy is a more small-scale business, which maintains links with Kirkliston’s traditional past.

Within the historic core, there are a number of community uses: the library, Parish Church and church hall (former Free Church). Station Road is a focus of activity with the library, its associated car park and the Council’s local office. The bowling green and its club is an important leisure use. However, the focus of commercial activity is outside the conservation area, along Main Street.

The natural environment within the conservation area provides recreational and amenity open space.

The main road through the conservation area is subject to a heavy volume of traffic, as it is a route avoiding the motorway and the main bus route through the village. The remainder of the conservation area is significantly quieter with only pedestrian and cycle movement. Part of the cycle route along the disused railway is included in the conservation area.

Essential Character

- prevalence of residential use;
- tranquillity around the parish church and along the River Almond;
- focus of activity along Station Road; and
- intense industrial use on the distillery site.
KIRKLISTON CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

The conservation area has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths are the identifiable historic plan form and spatial pattern, buildings of both historic and architectural character and the quality of the surrounding natural environment.

The scale, design and materials of the modern developments have often failed to reinforce the particular character of the area. Close attention must be given to encouraging developments that reinforce those features that give Kirkliston its special character. It is also important that any new development protects the existing elements. There have been extensive alterations to the older properties that have significantly eroded the detailed character of the conservation area. Parts of the village would benefit from environmental improvements.

New Development

New development should take into consideration the spatial pattern, scale, proportions and design of the traditional properties. Any development, either within or outside the conservation area, should be restricted in height and scale in order to protect the key views of the conservation area, especially to the parish church. New development should protect the setting of individual buildings and the historic village as a whole.

Use of Materials

Traditional materials, notably for roofing, have not always been used in new buildings, extensions and alterations, notably in the roofing materials. Modern substitutes such as concrete tiles have generally failed to respect the character of the area.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

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Window and door alterations/dormers

There have been a number of inappropriate window alterations, notably the use of uPVC, which fails to match the original window proportions, design or opening methods. Many doors are also non-traditional, incorporating slipped fanlights or uPVC. These alterations have a cumulative effect on the appearance of the area. There are also a few modern dormers, which detract from the appearance of individual buildings and their roofscape.

Floorscape

The Square would benefit from an environmental improvement scheme as the poor ground surfacing and surrounding walls do not give a sense of the expected formality. Further traffic management would allow improvements to the layout and surface treatments of the road and pavement, particularly on the High Street.

Boundary Treatments

The stone boundary walls are a key feature within the conservation area. It would be desirable to repair and reinstate the walls where appropriate. A stone wall along the boundary of the library car park and Station Road would continue the sense of enclosure along the street. The concrete wall around the bowling club is a detracting element that would benefit from being in stone or harled.

Green Environment

The mature trees within the village core are an important feature that should be maintained. A tree survey would establish the life span of the existing trees and identify any necessary replacement and replanting scheme. It is important that the green appearance of New Liston Road is maintained and any new development is restricted in order to maintain the existing spatial pattern. The natural environment along the River Almond should be protected, conserved and enhanced.
There is uncertainty regarding the future intentions of the company currently occupying the former distillery site. The site is prominent on the southern approach of Kirkliston, and any redevelopment should respect the character of the conservation area and protect the setting and views of the historic core. A development brief has been produced for the site. The retention and inclusion of the entire distillery site in the conservation area would be beneficial to control any redevelopment.

Main Street

This street is currently outside the conservation area, but the street is an important area in terms of the development of Kirkliston. There are also a number of older properties that are of historic and architectural interest. Boundary changes to include parts of the Main Street would help to preserve and enhance the townscape.

Scope for Change

The essential character of many conservation areas has remained stable over decades due to limited new build in the historic core and relatively little demolition. Policy in conservation areas focuses on conserving and enhancing what exists and introducing new development in a sensitive manner. The historic core of Kirkliston is largely discernible, but there are has been substantial redevelopment with the addition of housing on the boundary of the conservation area.
Any future development in the conservation area and its immediate surroundings must be sensitively handled to protect the area and to ensure its upgrade. Alterations to existing housing must be carefully monitored and the reinstatement of original features and materials should be strongly encouraged.

The Role of the Public

It is essential that property owners accept their maintenance responsibilities. The emphasis should be on the repair rather than replacement of original features, as these contribute to the conservation area as a whole. Alterations or additions should be sympathetic to the original style and of an appropriate scale.

Statutory Policies relating to Kirkliston

The Approved Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan identifies Kirkliston as lying within an Area of Housing and Compatible Uses. Part of the conservation area is within the Green Belt, whilst the area around the river is classed as a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation.

The Local Plan contains relevant policy advice on a range of matters. In relation to proposals within the conservation area, for example, developments will only be permitted where all features which contribute to the special character and appearance are retained. Development proposals in the conservation area should take into account the area’s special interest and how its character and appearance may be preserved or enhanced.

There are a number of listed buildings within the conservation area and the local plan also incorporates policies which seek to ensure that proposals affecting listed buildings are considered for their effect on their character. An important consideration is that alterations, extensions or changes of use should not diminish the architectural integrity of the building.

The Local Plan also contains relevant policy advice on a range of additional matters. Copies of the Local Plan can be obtained from the City Development Department.

Supplementary Guidelines

The Council also produces supplementary planning guidance on a range of development control issues. These are contained within the Development Quality Handbook.
Implications of Conservation Area Status

Designation as a conservation area has the following implications:

- Permitted development rights under the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order)(Scotland) Order 1992. are restricted. Planning permission is, therefore, required for stonecleansing, external painting, roof alterations and the formation of hard surfaces. The area of extensions to dwelling houses which may be erected without consent is also restricted to 16m² and there are additional control over satellite dishes.

- Under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, the planning authority can seek approval of the Scottish Ministers for Directions that restrict permitted development rights. The Directions effectively control the proliferation of relatively minor alterations to buildings in conservation areas which can cumulatively lead to erosion of character and appearance. Development is not precluded, but such alterations will require planning permission and special attention will be paid to the potential effect of proposals. The Kirkliston Conservation Area is currently covered by the following Article 4 Directions:

  - Class 1 enlargement, improvement or other alteration to a dwelling house
  - Class 3 provision or alteration of buildings or enclosures within the curtilage of a dwelling house
  - Class 6 installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite dish
  - Class 7 construction or alteration of gates, fences, walls or other means of enclosure

The following range of permitted development classes are also proposed in the Finalised Local Plan for restriction under an Article 4 Direction:

  - Class 18 agricultural buildings and operations
  - Class 30 local authority development
  - Class 33 local authority development
  - Class 38 water undertakings
  - Class 39 development by a public gas supplier
  - Class 40 development by electricity statutory undertaker
  - Class 67 development by telecommunications code system operators
Special attention must be paid to the character and appearance of the conservation area when planning controls are being exercised. Most applications for planning permission for alterations will, therefore, be advertised for public comment and any views expressed must be taken into account when making a decision on the application.

Buildings which are not statutorily listed can normally be demolished without approval under the Planning Regulations. Within conservation areas the demolition of unlisted buildings requires conservation area consent.

Trees within conservation areas are covered by Section 172 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. This section applies to the uprooting, felling or lopping of a tree having a diameter exceeding 75mm at a point 1.5m above ground level, and concerns the lopping of trees as much as removal. The planning authority must be given six weeks notice of the intention to uproot, fell or lop trees. Failure to give notice will render the person responsible liable to the same penalties as for contravention of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

The Council runs a conservation grant scheme. Such grants are normally dependent on the repair and restoration of original features.
**REFERENCES**

The Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh  

Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas:  

Development Quality Handbook:  

Kirkliston: A Parish History:  
*Donald Whyte.*

My Town, Your Town - Kirkliston: A Walk Down Memory Lane:  
*Kirkliston Community Association.*
This document is available on request in Braille, tape, large print various computer formats and community languages. Please contact ITS on 0131 242 8181 and quote ref. 01223.

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