

Sion Meeting House and Chapel St Michael's Lane, Alnwick

Proposed Conversion to Boutique Hotel

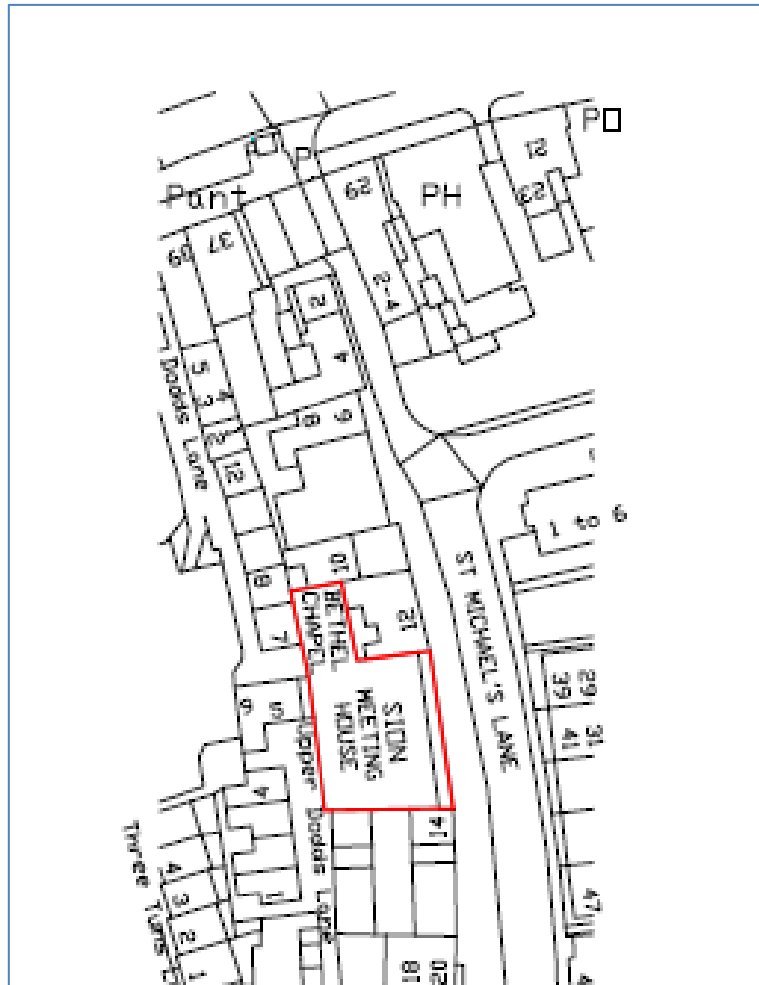


Heritage Statement

August 2020

Argyle Planning Consultancy LTD

Site Location Plan



CONTENTS	Page
1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Context	4
3.0 Planning Policy Context	6
4.0 Heritage Appraisal	6
5.0 The Significance of the Heritage Assets	9
6.0 The Proposed Development	12
7.0 The Impact of the Project on the Significance of the Asset	12
8.0 Conclusions	14
Appendix 1 – Statutory Listing	15
Appendix 2 – Keys to the Past Extract	16
Appendix 3 - Alnwick Conservation Area	17
Appendix 4 - List of Sources Consulted in Preparing Heritage Statement	19

1. Introduction

1.1 Argyle Planning Consultancy Ltd was commissioned by the owner of the Former Sion Meeting House and Chapel to prepare a Heritage Statement to support a planning and listed building consent application for the conversion of the former meeting house and chapel to a boutique hotel.

1.2 The purpose of this Heritage Statement is to assess heritage significance and guide proposals for change in a manner that conserves significance and avoids harm to the heritage assets, in this case principally the Sion Meeting House itself, a Grade II listed building and the Alnwick Conservation Area.

1.3 The approach follows the principle of managing change intelligently, which lies at the heart of national planning policy for conservation of the historic built environment. The methodology employed involves the following steps:

- Identify any designated and/or non-designated heritage assets potentially affected by proposals for change
- Evaluate the heritage values and significance of the heritage assets, placing particular focus on values and significance that might be affected by the proposed changes.
- Establish the nature of the proposed changes, including the overall aim of the change and any emergent design proposals.
- Analyse the potential impact of the finalised design upon the significance of the heritage assets.

1.4 The statement has been prepared in accordance with the general guidelines set out in the Historic England publications 'Informed Conservation' and 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' and in particular responds to heritage policies outlined in Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019). The legal context is set by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990.

2. General Description and Context

2.1 The Sion Meeting House, sits on the west side of St Michael's Lane about half way down the lane which runs from Green Batt to Market Street in Alnwick. It is a Grade II Listed Building and the list description is set out in Appendix 1. Attached and connected to it to the rear is the unlisted Chapel.

2.2 The site sits within the Alnwick Conservation Area and the property dates, according to the Historic England listing from 1813. However, Keys to the Past information for the property (see Appendix 2) puts the original meeting house earlier at 1729 with an enlargement in 1798 and again in 1816 when the dedication stone on the frontage stating 1815 may have been erected. At that time it was reputed to be the largest building in Alnwick after St Michaels Church.

2.3 As with the majority of the older heritage buildings in St Michael's Lane it is fronted in Ashlar stonework with the stonework to the rear facing Dodds Lane also Ashlar. Its roof is covered in Welsh slate. According to the listing description the main windows to the hall, which are in pointed arch reveals symmetrically set in the frontage are not thought to be original. The Gothick style window at the north end of the frontage over the entrance is thought to be the original window

style.

2.4 To the rear the building has been badly and unsympathetically altered in modern times with a flat roofed infill extension over what would have been the rear courtyard and the blocking up of original windows.

2.5 It is not known when the use for religious purposes ceased although it is likely to have been early post war. Keys to the Past also suggests the 1950s. Since that time, although not necessarily for the whole of the period, the building has been used as warehousing and as a base for a motor factor's business. This last use relocated and vacated the building some years ago. The building has been reasonably well maintained with the exception of the rear flat roof extension and has undergone internal works over time to allow it accommodate its various uses.

2.6 The immediate surrounding land use is residential, interwoven with business accommodation as a small number of commercial premises are located nearby. Residential properties adjacent to the building on the west side of the lane are of the same listing in terms of heritage assets. Surrounding residential and commercial buildings on the west side date from the same architectural period as the Meeting House.

2.7 Because of its scale and location the property is prominent within the Alnwick Conservation Area (The Conservation Area Boundary is at Appendix 3)



St Michael's Lane frontage showing Chapel rooflights to rear



Upper Dodds Lane elevation again showing the Chapel to rear

3. Planning Policy Context

3.1 The NPPF requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting and assess the impact of the proposal on the heritage asset.

3.2 In determining planning applications, the NPPF states that local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable use consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- the extent to which the significance is harmed by the proposal.

The NPPF makes it clear that proposals which preserve or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.

3.3 Within the Alnwick Local Development Framework Core Strategy which currently remains the adopted Development Plan for the area policies of relevance to the proposal are:

S15- Protecting the built and historic environment to conserve and enhance a strong sense of place. All development involving built and historic assets will be required to preserve and where appropriate enhance the asset for the future.

S16 – General design principles – all development will be expected to achieve a high standard of design, reflecting local character and distinctiveness in traditional or contemporary design and materials.

3.4 The Northumberland Local Plan although not yet adopted is at an advanced stage and its policies carry weight. Policy ENV1 seeks to protect the natural, built and historic environment from impacts of development. Policy ENV7 looks to protect heritage assets both designated and non-designated and policy ENV9 requires development to preserve or enhance conservation areas.

4.0 Heritage Appraisal

4.1 The following appraisal adheres to guidance published by English Heritage (2008) and relates specifically to the requirement contained in paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), given in extract below:

“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.”

4.2 The appraisal begins by identifying and assessing any heritage values that might be affected by the proposals, before evaluating these values and expressing them concisely within a 'Statement of Significance'. The essential purpose of this Statement is to set priorities for conservation of significance and enable an objective assessment on the likely impact of the proposals.

Heritage Values

4.3 The heritage values are explored under the following headings: *evidential value*; *historic value*; *communal value*; *aesthetic value*. The exploration focusses specifically on those values deemed of relevance to the proposals.

Evidential Value

4.4 Historic England (2008) suggests that "Evidential value derives from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity".

4.5 The St Michael's Lane part of the Alnwick Conservation Area retains strong evidence of the medieval plan form of Alnwick where the lane runs south from the town centre between former burgage plots. It is likely that earlier rudimentary buildings pre-existing along the lane were cleared and redeveloped particularly on the west side in early Georgian times to create more desirable town houses and facilities like the meeting house and bank building further north on the lane. The evidential value of the area therefore rests with its authentic period buildings (including the application property) lining the lane.

4.6 The Sion Meeting House also has evidential value in marking the expansion of community buildings at the time.

Historical Value

4.7 Historic England (2008) suggests that - "*Historical value derives from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative*".

4.8 The Conservation Area holds illustrative historic value through the manner in which it helps depict both the life and development of the medieval town and that of its subsequent growth and development. Value is derived from the authentic Georgian buildings on the west side of the lane.

4.9 The proposal site makes a positive contribution to the historic values of the Conservation Area, in general and in particular as it is a record of the growth of non-conformist chapels and small religious meeting houses like this which became common in the town in the Georgian period.

4.10 No specific records have been found identifying any associative historic value to the building although this is not to say there are no historical figures who have not been closely associated with the building.



Woods map of Alnwick 1827 showing the Meeting House

Communal Value

4.11 Historic England (2008) suggests that: “Communal value derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory”.

4.12 The listed building and Conservation Area possess varied communal heritage values owing to the role which this area has played in the life of the town as a key route south from the town centre to surrounding countryside. The property being in a prominent position and well used over the centuries as a meeting place has communal value in building a sense of place.

Aesthetic Value

4.13 Historic England (2008) suggests that: “Aesthetic value derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place”.

4.14 This part of the Conservation Area and the property itself, as stated, forms part of an attractive, Georgian redevelopment of the west side of St Michael’s lane which

survives largely intact all the way between Market Street and Green Batt, where the blend of period buildings of similar scale, massing and design all contribute to a strong aesthetic value.



First Edition Ordnance Survey 1860 Showing site

5. Statement of Significance

5.1 Having assessed the heritage values associated with the site, it is now possible to take a more informed approach to the assessment of site significance. This will give specific consideration to prioritising conservation, in light of the proposals for change. In this context, a statement of significance is given below.

5.2 This part of the Alnwick Conservation Area along the west side of St Michael's Lane possesses appreciable heritage value, demonstrated by the listed buildings, that stems from the redevelopment of earlier more rudimentary buildings lining St Michael's Lane in the early to mid-Georgian period. The primary significance of this part of the Conservation Area lies in its authentic period buildings.

5.3 The listed building has been specifically assessed to determine to what extent it contributes to the significance of the Conservation Area. The findings of this assessment are that, the Sion Meeting House in terms of its exterior form and design, holds appreciable heritage value across the range of values due to its position, scale and prominence in St Michael's Lane and is of high significance.

5.4 The listed building complements the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and in turn the Conservation Area provides an unrivalled quality streetscape setting to the listed building.

5.5 No records of the property exist in the Heritage Environment Record and no early

photographs of the Sion Meeting House itself have been sourced although the photograph below shows St Michaels Lane from around the turn of the century looking down towards the Sion Meeting House.



Extract from 'Keys to the Past'. View looking down St. Michaels Lane from Green Batt. Sion Meeting House is just beyond the building with the sign on the wall, on the left-hand side.

5.6 Externally the listed building retains its significance keeping the overall form to St Michael's Lane although there is evidence to suggest there were formerly frontage railings along the dwarf front wall probably removed during the second world war for the war effort.

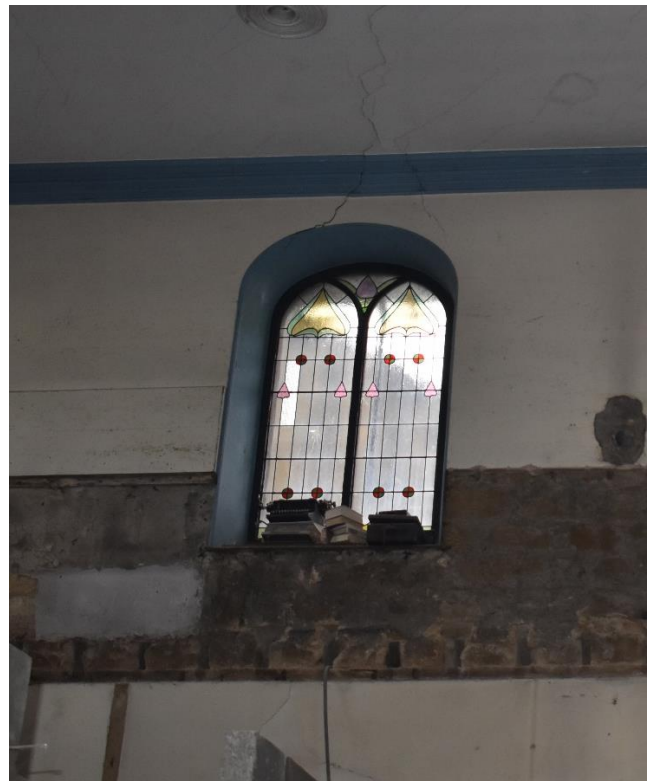


5.7 Original fenestration which took the form of Gothick arched 8 over 8 sash windows have been replaced at some point in the past (all apart from two remaining - one over the north entrance and one to the rear - currently blocked in). The replacements have a part

stained glass design of leaded lights. It is the latter design that is being retained in the conversion.



Original Gothick arched 8 over 8 window design



Existing South end window design

5.7 The elevation to Dodds Lane has been substantially changed and its value severely compromised by a rear flat roof extension infilling between the hall and the lane obstructing the original rear windows to the hall and as a result the significance of the building from Dodds Lane is low but as discussed below has the potential through the development to be significantly enhanced.

5.8 The majority of the interior to the hall has been removed to accommodate previous uses in particular the motor factor's business and the only original features, other than the fenestration, is cornicing and a rather fine plaster ceiling rose which would have framed a large pendant chandelier in the hall. Similarly, the Chapel (unlisted) has been significantly altered although probably not in overall form.



Central Ceiling Rose – the crack is not thought to be structural and is repairable.

5.9 Previous permission has been granted to subdivide the combined space into 5 flats which has been commenced. Stripping out the former racking for the motor factors, roof work on the two properties and construction of new window framing for the stained glass windows has all been completed.

6. The Proposed Development

6.1 In terms of the exterior, the proposals involve mainly stonework repairs, re-roofing in slate (already complete) replacement main hall windows to the same design (already complete), reconstruction of the low boundary wall and pillar detail and reinstatement of wrought iron railings to the front of the building. The Gothick styled 8 over 8 sash window on the east side of the building over the north entrance and that matching to the west (currently walled in) will be refurbished. The proposals to the rear on Dodds Lane will see the removal of the flat roof infill extension in its entirety and the re-opening of blocked windows in their original positions and to the same design as the frontage. The applicant wishes to provide a flagged courtyard area to the rear of the hotel reinstating a gated and stepped pedestrian access into the courtyard from Dodds Lane. The courtyard will provide much needed outdoor space for refuse and cycle storage and landscaping.

6.2 The proposal, as with the already permitted scheme for the conversion to flats, will subdivide the internal space of the hall at two levels (ground and first) to create the bedrooms for the hotel. Unlike the residential conversion, the bedrooms will be served off central spine corridors running the length of the hall at ground and first floor and unlike the residential scheme, which involved the insertion of internal stairs in each unit, the conversion to the hotel will have only one main centrally placed staircase in the original hall of the Meeting House.

6.3 In view of the use proposed it is important that there is lift access to the first floor to allow access for mobility impaired guests and indeed staff and given the existing open form of the interior of the building there is no reason why a lift cannot be provided. A platform lift to minimise impact on the building is therefore being proposed at the south end of the spine corridors.

6.4 Externally, the building is in good condition, such that the external materials of the building will be left largely untouched apart from roof renovation that will re-use existing slate supplemented with new Welsh slate (already complete) and repointing and localised stonework repair on a like for like basis as necessary. Hand tools will be utilized throughout the works.

6.5 The works to be undertaken are relatively straightforward and involve little interference with the original structure. Local experienced tradesmen will undertake the work.

7. Impact of the Development on the Significance of the Listed Building and Conservation Area.

7.1 The impact of the conversion externally will be positive for the building and the Conservation Area. To the frontage there will be very little change in appearance with features, repaired, refurbished or, in the case of the hall windows, frames replaced to the same design. The principle of replacing the window frames to the same design incorporating the stained glass leaded panels has already been agreed through the residential conversion scheme and indeed most have been fitted or at

least made. There will be a need for sensitive signage for the hotel but this will be the subject of a separate application when branding has been decided but will likely take the form of small fascia signs and hanging signage to the lane. The proposal to restore the low boundary wall and pillar detail to support wrought iron railings would be similar to the original thought to have been removed during WWII, this will visually enhance the entrance to the building. The applicant is content to see the detailed design of the railings conditioned to ensure the selection of an appropriate design.

7.2 To the rear on Dodds Lane the impact of the proposals will be a substantial benefit to the significance of the listed building and the Conservation Area. The removal of the flat roof infill extension will allow the original form, scale and design of the building to be appreciated from Dodds Lane. In particular the opening up of blocked windows and the replacement of windows to the original design of those in the hall will substantially improve the appearance of the Sion Meeting House, restoring its significance from Dodds Lane. The introduction of the courtyard area to the rear of the hotel and reinstating rear access takes the form of the building back to its origins when it was understood there was a rear gated access from Dodds Lane into the rear courtyard. Subject to appropriate control through a condition over the design of a cast iron gate as on the frontage, this in itself will be at least a neutral change in terms of the impact on significance and probably positive.

7.3 Internally, the principle of internal subdivision to the hall space has already been established by the previous permission. However, changes to the listed building will work within the overall form of the Sion Meeting House and its entrances and the form of the Chapel to the rear. The pattern of rooms will align with and allow the retention of all the fenestration and as stated above will allow the reopening of fenestration to the rear. The proposal to incorporate central spine corridors and central staircase to serve the hotel bedrooms has the advantage over the previously approved residential conversion in that the upper spine corridor will be positioned below the plaster ceiling rose and allow that to be retained in view and repaired and restored as necessary.

7.4 The key architectural and historic feature of this asset is its external appearance. The application proposal will retain and preserve the external façade of the building and therefore retain the key significance of the asset.

7.5 The proposal secures a viable use for the building consistent with its conservation and which will contribute to economic vitality of the town. The adaption of the listed building will benefit Alnwick through the provision of high-quality tourist and visitor accommodation within the town itself bringing hospitality jobs to the town and tourism and visitor spending in the town helping support other tourism services and facilities in and around the town.

7.6 The proposal is to a high standard of design that will help preserve the significance of heritage assets in the form of the listed building and complement surrounding development. It therefore meets the policy tests set out in the NPPF and accordingly should be treated favourably.

7.7 For the same reasons, the proposals are in accordance with policies S15 and S16 of the Alnwick District Local Development Framework Core Strategy which are consistent with the Framework and with Policies ENV 7 and 9 of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

8. Conclusion

8.1 This Heritage statement together with the Design and Access Statement demonstrates that the proposed development is acceptable in terms of its impact on the significance of the heritage assets involved.

8.2 No harm to the historic and architectural significance or setting of the listed building or to the historic and townscape character of the Alnwick Conservation Area is likely to be caused by the change of use proposals. Indeed, the proposal will preserve and enhance the significance of both.

8.3 The proposed conversion should therefore be granted listed building consent and planning permission.

PDB – Argyle Planning August 2020

Appendix 1 Statutory Listing for Sion Hall (Source Historic England)

DESCRIPTION: Former Sion Meeting House

GRADE: II

DATE LISTED: 25 August 1977

ENGLISH HERITAGE BUILDING ID: 235845

OS GRID REFERENCE: NU1863413174

OS GRID COORDINATES: 418634, 613174

LATITUDE/LONGITUDE: 55.4121, -1.7072

LOCATION: St Michael's Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1TW

LOCALITY: Alnwick

COUNTY:Northumberland

COUNTRY: England

POSTCODE: NE66 1TW

Listing Text

ST MICHAEL'S LANE 1.

5330

(West Side)

Former Sion Meeting House NU

1813 SE 1/109

II GV 2.

Dated 1815, Two storeys, 4 windows with 2 storeys, one window wing to right and single storey, 2 window wing to left. Ashlar with eaves band. Hipped slate roof.

Segmental headed windows with late 2 light 'Y' glazing. Only one original window with 'Gothick' glazing (in right hand wing on 1st floor); the rest have sub-art nouveau style coloured glass. Two doors, one in each wing with later ledged doors having heavy hinges and depressed arch light above. Oval panel with "Sion Meeting House Erected 1815" in centre of main part. Now a warehouse.

Listing NGR: NU1863413190

This text is a legacy record and has not been updated since the building was originally listed. Details of the building may have changed in the intervening time. You should not rely on this listing as an accurate description of the building.

Source: English Heritage

Appendix 2 – Keys to the Past Listing

Sion Meeting House (Alnwick)



Sion Meeting House, Alnwick. Photo Northumberland County Council, 1971.

The Sion Meeting House, St Michael's Lane, was originally built in 1729, and it was enlarged in 1768 and again in 1816. The church was still in use in the 1950s. The original gallery on three sides was replaced in 1866. Small religious meeting houses like this became common in the 18th and 19th centuries. This is a Grade II [Listed Building](#) protected by law.

Reference number: **N4542**

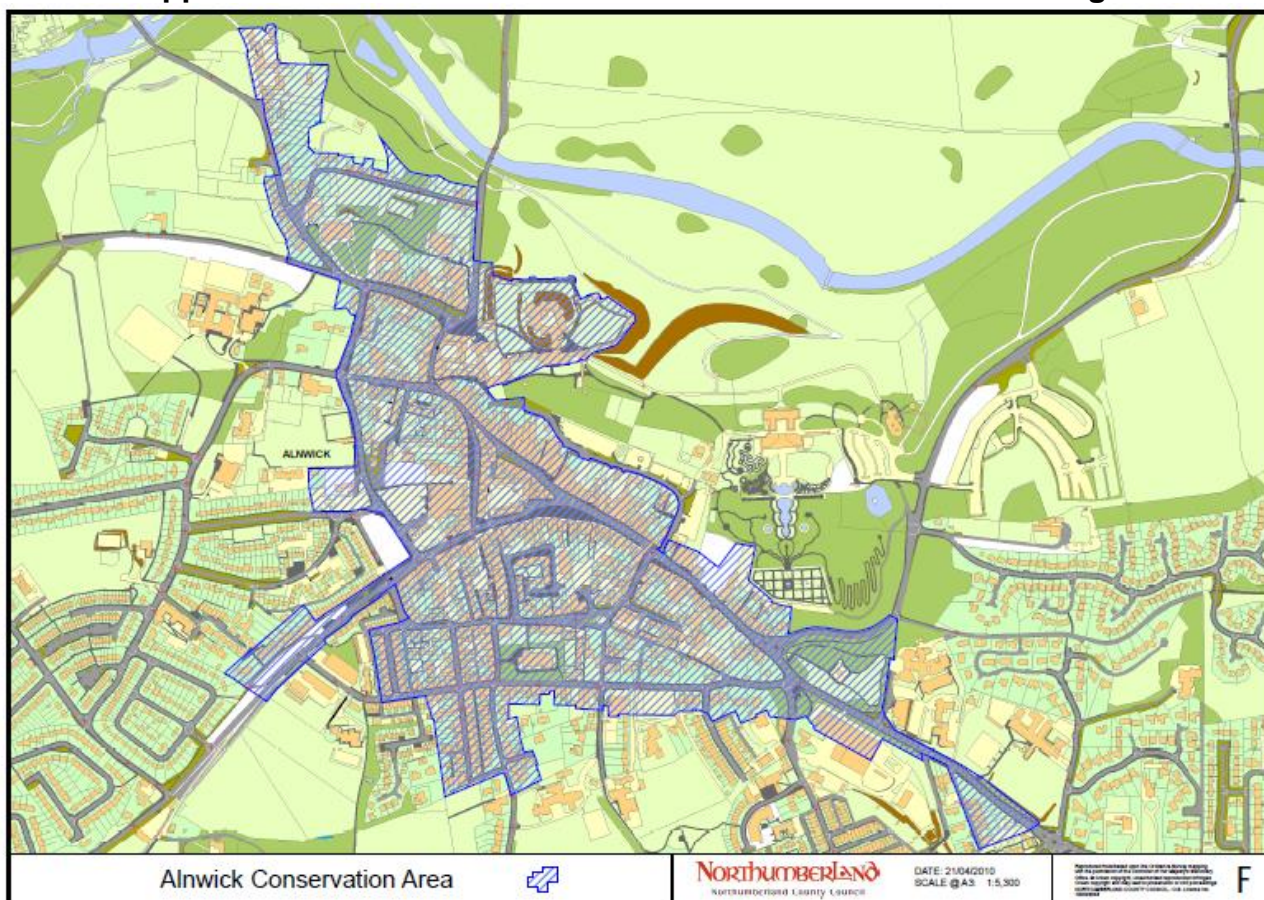
Historical period: [Georgian \(1714 to 1830\)](#)

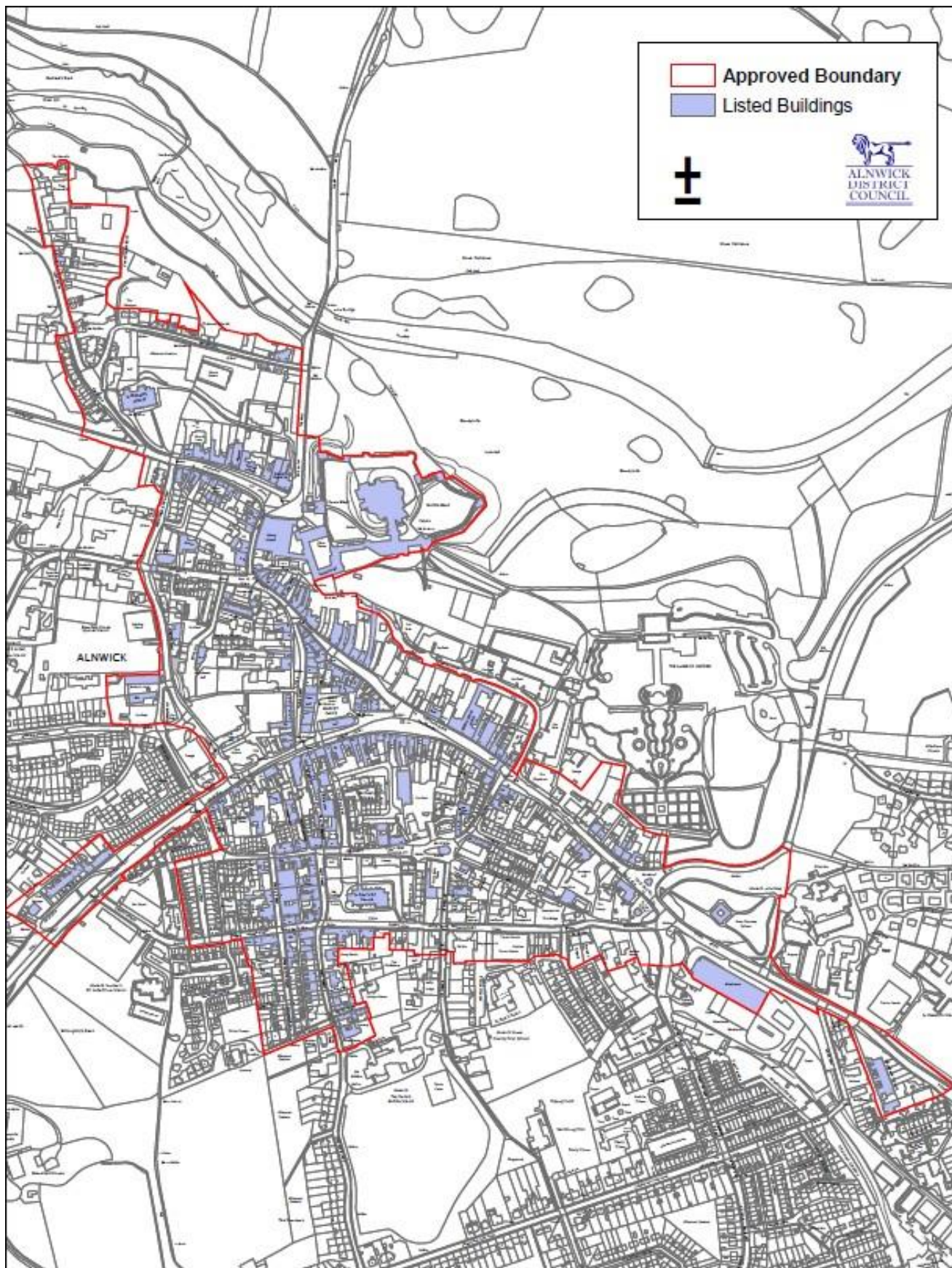
Legal status: [Conservation area / Listed Building](#)

Chapels in Alnwick

CHAPELS. - THE BETHEL CHAPEL, in Chapel-street, belongs to the Methodist New Connexion, and has a small library attached to it. The INDEPENDENT CHAPEL, situated in St. Michael's-lane, was erected in 1816, but the congregation has existed since 1731. The PRESBYTERIAN MEETING HOUSE, in Pottergate, was rebuilt in 1780, by a congregation which had existed from a period anterior to the Revolution of 1688. Rev. John Walker, minister. THE UNITARIANS have a small chapel in Correction House Yard, in which they have assembled since 1817. There is also the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL, Clayport-street, the Rev. William Leamont, minister; the UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL, Lisburn- street, Rev. William Donaldson, minister; and the WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL, Old Chapel-lane, Rev. James Dunbar, minister.

Appendix 3 - Alnwick Conservation Area and its Listed Buildings





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Appendix 4 - List of Sources Consulted in Preparing Heritage Statement

- Alnwick Conservation Area Appraisal – Alnwick District Council 2005
- Northumberland Historic Environment Record
- Sense of Place Northeast
- Historic England - Listed Buildings Search
- Keys to the Past
- Google Images
- Old-Maps.co.uk - Historic Mapping
- Pevsner, N - *The Buildings of England, Northumberland*, Penguin Books, 1992