

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 23 February 2022

Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal Review

Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	10 Morningside
Council Commitments	15

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the revised Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

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Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal Review

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 On [22 August 2018](#) the Committee approved an updated programme of review of the existing conservation area character appraisals. This report presents the revised Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal. The revised appraisal has been the subject of consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 It is a statutory requirement in terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 for local authorities to periodically review conservation area boundaries and consider whether new conservation area designations are appropriate.
- 3.2 The Council completed character appraisals for all the conservation areas in Edinburgh between 1998 and 2007. More recently, appraisals have been approved as part of the designation process for new conservation areas. On [3 October 2013](#), Committee approved a more interactive format for the conservation area character appraisals and a review of the existing character appraisals.
- 3.3 The review was based on a ranking system to allow prioritisation of conservation areas on the basis of their relative need for an updated appraisal. The appraisals for Inverleith, Grange, Portobello, Leith, Queensferry and the Old and New Town Conservation Areas were completed in the new format.
- 3.4 On 22 August 2018, Committee approved an updated programme for review of the existing conservation area character appraisals. This was based on the age of the character appraisal, with the earliest being given priority, and development pressure, based on the number of applications submitted for planning permission and the extent of recent housing development.
- 3.5 The resulting priority conservation areas were: South Side, Marchmont and Meadows, Colinton, Merchiston and Greenhill, West End, Coltbridge and Wester Coates, Craigmillar Park and Morningside. Trinity Conservation Area was added to the priority list due to local community requests for a review of the boundary of the area. The appraisals for the South Side, Marchmont and Meadows, and Colinton have been completed and approved by Committee.

4. Main report

- 4.1 This report presents the revised Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal, which was approved as a priority by Committee on [22 August 2018](#). The appraisal has been the subject of a consultation.
- 4.2 The Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area (map at Appendix 1) was originally designated in May 1986 and the first character appraisal for the area was approved in April 2003.
- 4.3 The statutory definition of a conservation area is an 'area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement on the criteria for the designation of conservation areas specifies that it is the character or historic interest of an area created by individual buildings and open spaces, and their relationship one with the other which the legislation covering conservation areas seeks to preserve.
- 4.4 The principles of selection for designation as a conservation area include:
 - 4.4.1 Areas of significant architectural or historic interest in terms of specific listed buildings; and
 - 4.4.2 Areas of significant architectural or historic interest in terms of building groupings.
- 4.5 Conservation area character appraisals are intended to help manage change. They provide an agreed basis of understanding of what makes an area special. This understanding informs and provides the context in which decisions can be made on proposals which may affect that character.
- 4.6 The revised character appraisal (Appendix 2) rearranges the text of the original appraisal for its final publication as a digital document that will include images, photographs and interactive maps. The review also involved the addition of a Management section.

Consultation

- 4.7 The draft revised Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal was the subject of a consultation. An on-line questionnaire was set up on the consultation hub to capture views on the draft appraisal, and to encourage comments about how well it defines the special characteristics of the Conservation Area. The consultation ran for six weeks from 19 November 2021 and generated five responses (Appendix 3).
- 4.8 The five respondents considered that the appraisal was either very clear or somewhat clear in terms of the issues in the Conservation Area and strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the proposed revised appraisal. The comments received and responses thereto are included in Appendix 3. The comments have not resulted in any change to the appraisal.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Once approved, the Character Appraisal will be published online.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council arising from this report.
- 6.2 The new format for the character appraisals is intended to be viewed online. The Council would not stock a traditional, printed version. However, individual copies could be photocopied on request for customers with difficulties accessing the web version. Demand for this service is expected to be low and the minimal additional costs can be absorbed in existing budgets.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The draft revised Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal was the subject of a consultation from 19 November 2021 to 31 December 2021. An on-line questionnaire was set up on the consultation hub to capture views on the draft appraisal and boundary changes, and to encourage comments about how well it defines the special characteristics of the Conservation Area.

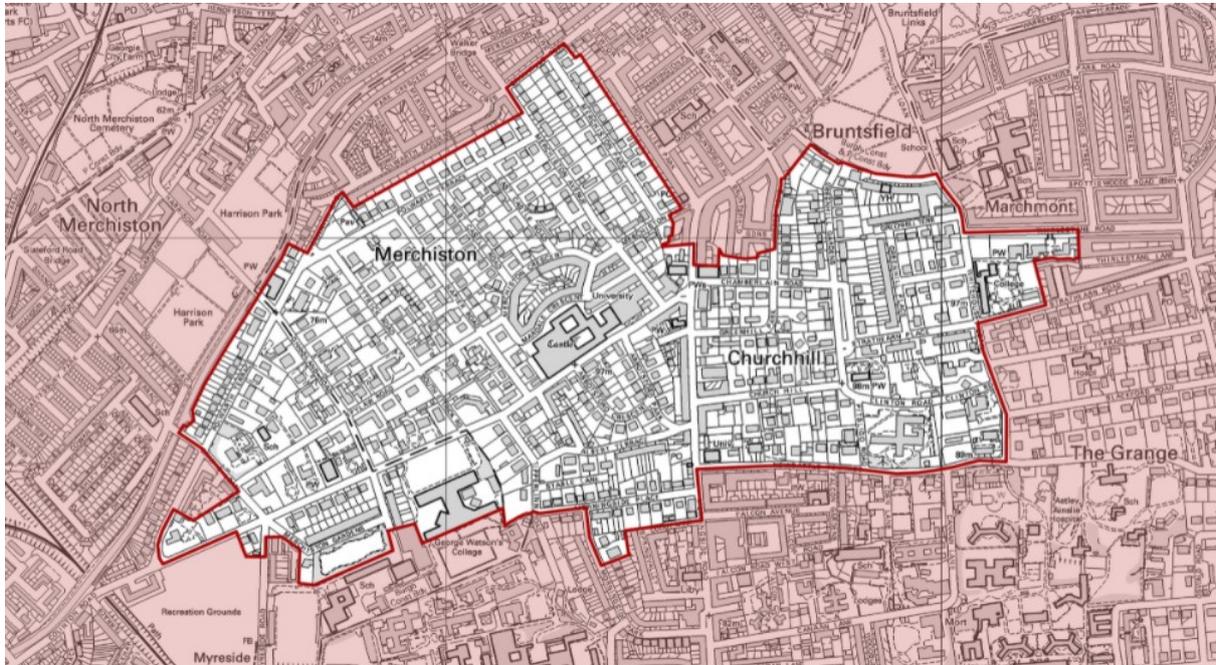
8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 The current [Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal](#).

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Map of the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area.
- 9.2 Appendix 2: Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal.
- 9.3 Appendix 3: Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal: Consultation Results.

Appendix 1: Map of the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area.



Appendix 2: Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

The Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area is situated some 2.5 kms to the south west of the City centre.

The boundary of the Conservation Area follows the line of Newbattle Terrace westwards to Morningside Road, runs south of Morningside Place and George Watson's to Colinton Road. It then turns northwards onto Polwarth Terrace, running to the rear of properties on Colinton Road, turning northwards again on Gray's Loan, then runs to the rear of properties on the west of Polwarth Terrace, turning north on Merchiston Avenue, east along Granville Terrace and south to the rear of properties on Merchiston Park. It then turns east to the rear of properties on Chamberlain Road, northwards on Forbes Road, eastwards on Bruntsfield Crescent and southwards on Whitehouse Loan, to the starting point on Newbattle Terrace.

DATES OF DESIGNATION/AMENDMENTS

The Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area was originally designated on 25 May 1986. The boundary was amended on 29 March 1996 to include the late classical villa properties in Merchiston Park and to exclude the Astley Ainslie Hospital which was included in the Grange Conservation Area. Article 4 Directions were approved in 1996.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The character of the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area is dominated by Victorian villas interspersed with substantial terraces of outstanding quality. The buildings are complemented by a profusion of mature trees, extensive garden settings, stone boundary walls and spacious roads. The villas are in a considerable variety of architectural styles, unified by the use of local building materials.

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISALS

Conservation Area Character Appraisals are intended to help manage change. They provide an agreed basis of understanding of what makes an area special. This understanding informs and provides the context in which decisions can be made on proposals which may affect that character. An enhanced level of understanding, combined with appropriate management tools, ensures that change and development sustain and respect the qualities and special characteristics of the area.

“When effectively managed, Conservation Areas can anchor thriving communities, sustain cultural heritage, generate wealth and prosperity and add to quality of life. To

realise this potential many of them need to continue to adapt and develop in response to the modern-day needs and aspirations of living and working communities. This means accommodating physical, social and economic change for the better.

Physical change in Conservation Areas does not necessarily need to replicate its surroundings. The challenge is to ensure that all new development respects, enhances and has a positive impact on the area. Physical and land use change in Conservation Areas should always be founded on a detailed understanding of the historic and urban design context.”

From PAN 71, Conservation Area Management.
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/12/20450/49052

HOW TO USE THE APPRAISAL

The analysis of the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area’s character and appearance focuses on the features which make the area special and distinctive. These are considered in terms of:

- Historical Origins and Development;
- Structure and Townscape, which describes and draws conclusions regarding the overall organisation and macro-scale features of the area;
- Key Elements, which examines the smaller-scale features and details which fit within the structure; and
- Management: The Management section outlines the policy and legislation relevant to decision-making in the area. Issues specific to the area are discussed in more detail and recommendations or opportunities identified.

This document is not intended to give prescriptive instructions on what designs or styles will be acceptable in the area. Instead, it can be used to ensure that the design of an alteration or addition is based on an informed interpretation of context. This context should be considered in conjunction with the relevant Local Development Plan (LDP) policies and planning guidance.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

‘When the outbound tram car reaches Churchill, before travelling steeply into the valley at Morningside, that fine view of the Pentlands, the scarred flank of Caerketton ahead, opens up before us, with perhaps a plough-man turning a furrow in the middle-distance, and a shepherd with his dogs, driving white sheep across the dark green background.’ (*Auld Reekie*, Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, 1942).

The Conservation Area consists of the former estates of Greenhill, East Morningside and Merchiston which were located on the historic Burgh Muir, an area of woods and marshland to the south of Edinburgh.

In 1586, the western Burgh Muir was feued and the Greenhill Estate was established. The Estate was in the ownership of the Livingstone family during the

seventeenth century, and the name was possibly coined by John Livingston, who acquired the Estate in 1636. The name may be descriptive of the cultivated land contrasting with the adjoining heathland of Bruntsfield Links, and the -hill would have been the slight eminence (between Bruntsfield Gardens and Forbes Road) which became the site of the Livingston's Greenhill House in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The house is depicted as three storeys and attic in traditional style on a stone plaque at the corner of Bruntsfield Gardens and Bruntsfield Place, and is described as a 'gabled manor house'. It was located in extensive grounds at the end of the present-day Forbes Road. The house was demolished in 1884. The mausoleum, reputedly that of John Livingstone, the original owner of the Estate stands within a garden in Chamberlain Road. Churchhill was established after Dr Thomas Chalmers built a house known as Kirkhill (now 1 Church Hill) in 1842.

By 1849, a new road, formed by Bruntsfield Terrace and Greenhill Gardens, connected Bruntsfield Place with the east end of Church Hill. The east end of Chamberlain Road was formed by 1852 and Greenhill Park was developing by 1859. Forbes Road was opened through the policies of Greenhill House in 1864, and the House itself was pulled down in the course of forming Bruntsfield Gardens in 1884. The development of the eastern part of Greenhill began in 1871 with Bruntsfield Crescent and Greenhill Terrace, followed by Strathearn Place and, by 1875, Greenhill Place and St Margaret's Road.

References to Merchiston first appear in the mid-thirteenth century. Alexander Napier, a successful merchant and provost of Edinburgh, acquired Merchiston in 1438, and the Napier family were responsible for the construction of Merchiston Tower in the fifteenth century. John Napier, the inventor of logarithms which made a major contribution to the advancement of science, was born at Merchiston in 1550. The Tower was used as the base for Merchiston Castle School for around 100 years from the 1830s. Following the School's move to new premises at Colinton, the Tower was left unoccupied for most of the period up to its amalgamation into the then Napier College's new building in 1964.

From the 1850s, the Merchant Company sold feus in the land of Merchiston Castle. The development was supervised by David Rhind until 1864, when he was replaced by David MacGibbon. Merchiston Place was begun by 1861, and Merchiston Avenue (1867) replaced an early loan connecting the Burghmuirhead with Fountainbridge. Burghmuirhead was the name applied to the triangle of ground between Colinton Road, Abbotsford Park and Morningside Road. It was feued from the Burgh Muir in 1586 and the name derived from its position at the summit of the Muir.

The Greenhill Estate was feued for building in 1840 and substantial villas were constructed in Greenhill Gardens (1852) and Abbotsford Park (1858). Following the demolition of Greenhill House in 1884, a number of quarries were opened within its grounds, the stone from which was used to construct many of the local tenements.

Whitehouse Loan and Terrace take their names from the ancient Whitehouse estate. The earliest mansion-house was built on the estate in the early sixteenth century, and in the 1830s the house, then dating from 1670, was rebuilt and extended to form St Margaret's Convent. The complex of buildings is now the Gillis Centre. Strathearn Place was originally closed off at its west end by a villa. This was demolished in

1900 when the horse-drawn tramline between Churchill and Marchmont was replaced by a cable car. The sharp corner at Strathearn Place and Greenhill Gardens required a manned set of points, and the small stone building in the garden of 17 Strathearn Place is the attendant's booth. Greenhill Cottage which was located at the east end of Bruntsfield Terrace formed the nucleus for the development of Bruntsfield Hospital in the late nineteenth century, which was converted to flats in 1989.

The spatial layout of the area was well established by the end of the late nineteenth century, affording little opportunity for new development. Change during the twentieth century has mainly been associated with the expansion of educational uses, the conversion of villas into flats, and a degree of infill development and development within garden grounds.

STRUCTURE AND TOWNSCAPE

Essential Character

- The topography accentuates the urban form and landmark buildings.
- Key views to landscape and townscape features throughout the city.
- Solidity, robustness, spaciousness, intimacy and impressive visual variety are derived from the formal and informal layout of blocks of villas, terraces, and other groups of buildings.
- A dominant traditional layout and mature townscape of consistent and human scale.
- The distinctive integration of townscape and landscape.
- Sensitive changes of density and building types, and a consistent domestic grain scale and building mass.
- Generous settings which provide effective separation between changes in urban form, land uses and villa pattern are an important townscape element.
- Permeability and legibility derived from numerous long and short vistas to open spaces, panoramic views, landmarks and focal points.

The Conservation Area has a prominent location situated on a localised ridgeline between the edge of the city centre and the Braid Burn valley. From the edge of the Old Town, the topography undulates, descending to a low point along the edge of the Meadows. From here the land rises through Bruntsfield Links to a high point close to Holy Corner in the heart of the Conservation Area, before descending again through Morningside down to the Braid Burn. Blackford Hill and Craiglockhart Hill rise to the south in the intervening area creating foreground landscape features against the more distant Braid Hills and Pentland Hills.

As a result of this elevated location there are fine views afforded many of the properties and streets in the area, to the Castle, Arthur's Seat, the Braid Hills, the Pentlands, and as distant as the Moorfoot and Lammermuir Hills. The prominence of the ridgeline also reinforces the visibility of landmark buildings within the area.

Two major roads define the structure of the core of the Conservation Area. Morningside Road connects Merchiston with Greenhill while Colinton Road, largely a tree lined avenue, runs between two distinct parts of Merchiston. Both roads provide

the major entry points to the Conservation Area. They meet at Holy Corner forming one of the most striking and well-known townscape features in the city outside of the central area. The corner is part of the 'high street' running along Morningside Road extending towards Bruntsfield. The four impressive church buildings, together with adjacent houses and tenements, present a cluster of landmarks providing focus, vistas and legibility to considerable parts of the surrounding area.

The most regular pattern of development occurs in the predominantly rectangular grid layout on the north side of Colinton Road between Merchiston Park and Gillsland Road. In contrast, the part of Merchiston to the south of Colinton Road, focused around Albert Terrace, is much more organic with curved roads and building frontages.

There are some small lanes and culs-de-sac within the perimeter blocks which contribute towards a feeling of semi-rural seclusion, intimacy and offer contrast and variety. At the south western end of this section, near George Watson's school, there is a change of layout with substantial villas and semi-detached houses fronting Colinton Road and two terraces at right angles to one another behind.

Churchill has its own varied building types and layout character. Some, such as the terrace in Greenhill Place, are more urban while others, as in Pitsligo Road and Clinton Road, are very low density and unmistakably suburban with very large houses in generous landscape. A contrasting part with a semi-rural feel occurs to the southeast between the villas of Newbattle Terrace and Whitehouse Loan. It is formed by a combination of cottages, very secluded houses, gatehouses, high stone walls and prevailing dense mature vegetation.

The spatial layout of the area was well established by the early years of the twentieth century. Although there have been several significant developments of which the university buildings are the most substantial and prominent. Elsewhere the changes have been small scale and incremental, and the overall spatial structure of the area has remained substantially unchanged for a significant period.

There are very few large public open spaces in the area, although Bruntsfield Crescent has its superb setting facing the Links. Greenhill Gardens contains an important private open space with a strong public dimension. The Union Canal defines the western edge of Merchiston while the private gardens in Merchiston Gardens present a secluded local amenity. The large lawn in front of Watson's College adds to the imposing presence of the building and helps to separate its institutional function from the residential environment.

A number of sites have been redeveloped with modern blocks of flats. This is most evident in the area west of Colinton Road, notably in Ettrick Road. In some instances, their bulk and siting contrasts sharply with the more domestic, elegant setting and fine grain of houses prevailing in the area. The provision of traditional generous separation distances between new mansion blocks of flats and original villas nearby is an important factor in retaining the character and appearance of the area. Large rear gardens are also an important feature of the urban structure.

Over the years, changes in the way the land and buildings have been used have mainly been the result of the conversion of villas and terraced houses into flats. There has also been a limited amount of demolition, infill and backland development in garden grounds.

The largest modern buildings are Napier University and George Watson's College. The university is a dominating presence placed hard against Colinton Road, while the college is well set back, less assertive and well-integrated into its surroundings. Other substantial structures are the Gillis Centre in Whitehouse Loan, the Churchill Theatre, and the Holy Corner churches.

Traditional purpose-built flatted development is restricted to a limited number of places, notably Morningside Road and Merchiston Crescent/ Mardale Crescent. The latter group, with its distinct geometrical layout, fine grain, curved facades, and striking grey stonework, presents an imposing tenement form in the area. These buildings contrast in mass, scale and density with the surrounding predominant villa pattern. However, the contrast is not harsh. Human scale is provided by the clear vertical rhythm expressed in the elevational composition, the picturesque roof profile, the widths of bay windows with low sills, continuous individual and shared access doors flanked by a regular pattern of grouped windows and small enclosed front gardens. In the middle of both these crescents semi-detached and terraced villas create a break of scale and add variation to the grouping. The tenements also offer attractive end vistas to nearby streets providing a clear sense of direction. Their compactness, solidity and durability add to their valuable contribution to the townscape.

Within the predominantly villa areas there are also fine two and three storey Victorian and Edwardian terraces. Some, such as Albert Terrace, are quiet and secluded while others, such as Rochester Terrace and Bruntsfield Crescent are boldly urban. The longest terrace is in Greenhill Place. Its frontage is punctuated by a taller pavilion at its centre and by wider plots at both ends. The terrace is an excellent example of closure of vista to St. Margaret's Road with the entrance to and the highest part of the Gillis Centre containing the vista at the other end. The terrace faces a classic low density and heavily landscaped villa area. Although so different in character they sit in attractive harmony. The integration of the contrasting styles is assisted by high stone walls, the number of mature trees, and green open space which flow around the houses.

The care shown in the design of several other terraces is noteworthy. Merchiston Gardens, for example, shows verticality and subtle variety in height and roof detailing in what seems to be, at first inspection, uniformity. The neighbouring terrace in Gillsland Road also has a pleasant scale, detailing and stepped skyline following the topography.

Morningside Road, and its short continuation into Colinton Road, is the only part with a sizeable number of traditional shops, cafes and restaurants. They occupy the ground floor of three and four storey tenements. This is the most vibrant and busy part of the Conservation Area in close proximity to the university, churches, theatre, cinema and supermarket.

KEY ELEMENTS

Architectural Character

Essential Character

- The architectural significance of individually designed villas and terraces in the area.
- The variety of architectural styles that contribute to the overall character.
- High quality stone-built architecture of restricted height, generous scale and fine proportions enclosed by stone boundary walls, hedges and trees which define the visual and physical seclusion of the villas.
- The significant degree of uniformity resulting from the predominant use of traditional building materials: of local sandstone for buildings and boundary walls and Scots slate for roofs.

The architectural character of the area is dominated by Victorian villas interspersed with substantial terraces of outstanding quality. The buildings are complemented by the profusion of mature trees, extensive garden settings, stone boundary walls and spacious roads. The villas are in a considerable variety of architectural styles, unified by the use of local building materials.

Architectural unity is also emphasised by the location of properties within predominantly generous feus which gives the area a generally low density. The stone boundary walls, which typify boundary treatments, contribute to the visual and physical seclusion of the villa development, give definition to the street layout and create a clear distinction between public and private spaces.

Tenement development is restricted to Morningside Road which separates the two main villa areas, and contains the notable grouping of churches at 'Holy Corner', an important part of the area's character. The tenement buildings contrast in mass, density and scale with the main area of villa development. A number of good quality timber shop fronts are included within the tenement group.

The fine collection of spacious and stylish, mainly Victorian villas incorporate buildings of distinguished architectural character. The diversity of styles ranges from restrained classical through the picturesque to the exuberance of Victorian eclecticism. Villa development also afforded the opportunity for architectural enrichment. Finials, trellises, towers, gazebos and campaniles are evident throughout the area and all contribute to the overall character. Despite this variety, a significant degree of unity is achieved by the predominant use of local grey sandstone for buildings and garden walls and natural slates for roofs.

Significant buildings in the area include:

- The succession of elaborate French-style villas by Edward Calvert around Spylaw Road.

- The baronial St Bennet's on Greenhill Gardens with its crowsteps and corner tower which dominates the 'Arcadian formality' of Greenhill Gardens, and is adjoined by the distinctive copper domed Greek-looking archiepiscopal chapel.
- Lammerburn at 10 Napier Road is a two-storey villa designed in 1860 by Sir James Gowans. It is an example of Gowans' eccentric style with a roofscape of strongly projecting bracketed eaves and walls of variegated stonework. Gowans' Rockville, which stood opposite on Napier Road, was demolished in 1966 and replaced with flatted blocks - only the boundary walls now survive.
- The original East Morningside House on Clinton Road, home of Susan Ferrier, the Georgian novelist, which is complete with an old stone lectern dovecote.
- The mid-seventeenth century burial enclosure in Chamberlain Road is the only remaining relic of the Greenhill estate.
- 'Holy Corner' is a crossroads, a well-known local landmark and an architectural focal point within the Conservation Area. The four churches which make up 'Holy Corner' are all category 'B' Listed Buildings of Special Historical or Architectural Interest:

North Morningside Church stands on the corner of south east corner of Chamberlain Road and Morningside Road. It dates from 1879. It is a large Romanesque aisled church with church hall and vestry, orientated to the south with a tower to the north west. It is finished in grey sandstone, squared and snecked rubble with ashlar dressings. It is no longer in ecclesiastical use, having been converted to the Eric Liddell Centre in the early 1990s. It is named for Eric Liddell, the Olympic runner and missionary whose life was featured in the film, 'Chariots of Fire'. The centre is used for a variety of community care and education projects, and has a bookshop and coffee house. The building retains fine quality stained glass work.

Morningside United, originally Morningside Congregational Church, on the north corner of Chamberlain Road and Bruntsfield Place. Designed in an Early Christian Revival style in 1927 by James McLachlan, it replaced an earlier church built in 1863. It is a small elaborately composed Art Deco-Romanesque building finished in a pinkish rough stone with a red pantiled roof, a series of arcades along the side of Chamberlain Road, and an attractive small-scale campanile or bell-tower.

Christ Church dates from 1875 and was designed by Hippolyte Jean Blanc in a cruciform-plan French Gothic style with a tall elegant ashlar spire which dominates the north-west quadrant. It is finished in cream sandstone, and squared and snecked rubble with ashlar dressings. There are low rubble boundary walls, with octagonal ashlar gatepiers and cast-iron railings with fleur-de-lis heads.

The Baptist Church was designed by MacGibbon & Ross in 1872 for the Free Church and opened in 1894. The church, designed in a Gothic style, has a tall pinnacle south-east steeple. The church hall and offices are to the north west, with modern additions flanking to the south and north. It is finished in cream sandstone, and squared and snecked stugged rubble with ashlar dressings. The low rubble wall

to the front has octagonal coped gatepiers. The church was built in the old area of Burghmuirhead within the lands of Greenhill.

Other prominent non-ecclesiastical buildings at 'Holy Corner' include the curved corner tenement block with a mansard French pavilion roof and ground floor shops on the south west quadrant and the Classical building designed by Peddie & Kinnear on the north west quadrant. Beyond, down Colinton Road and visible above the trees, is the modern seven-storey block of Napier University.

Significant public buildings include:

- Napier College which dates from 1962 and is designed around Merchiston Castle, a fifteenth century L-plan tower house which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The eastern block is seven storeys of brickwork with other elevations in quartz-faced slabs.
- George Watson's College on the south side of Colinton Road.
- The Church Hill Theatre was originally built as the Morningside Free Church and dates from 1892. It has a substantial rectangular plan in a Renaissance style finished in red ashlar sandstone, and was converted for use as a theatre in 1962-5.
- The category 'A' listed Gillis Centre complex of buildings on Whitehouse Loan including the neo-Norman chapel and the pink and cream sandstone rubble main Convent buildings with their high coped boundary walls and distinctive ashlar gatepiers with ball finials to Whitehouse Loan.
- The red sandstone former Warrender Church on Whitehouse Loan which was converted to residential use in the 1980s.

Napier House is a rare example in Scotland of the American-influenced mansion flats, designed in the mid-1930s by the Arts & Crafts architect John Jerdan. It is a five-storey block of horizontally proportioned flats in yellow harling with strong red brick string courses, plinth and parapet. Typical 1930's details include the horizontally proportioned modern styling and windows.

Activities and Uses

Essential Character

- The predominance of residential uses within the area.
- The proximity to the Morningside neighbourhood shopping centre.
- The contrast between activity on the through routes and general tranquillity in the main villa areas.
- The concentration of educational establishments in the area.

The area is principally residential with a range of shops and other commercial activities occupying ground floor units on Morningside Road. A limited number of villas are used for non-residential uses such as schools and offices. The area also

contains a theatre and three major educational institutions at Napier University, Gillis Centre and George Watson's College. Morningside Road and Colinton Road act as through routes to the south and west.

The general atmosphere of most of the area is of high amenity and serenity. However, this contrasts with the main through routes which are characteristically places of activity in terms of social and commercial activities, and traffic movement.

Natural Heritage

Essential Character

- Limited public open spaces.
- Private open space as the setting to buildings is essential in maintaining the character of the area.
- Importance of natural heritage features forming the boundary to the Conservation Area, the Union Canal and Bruntsfield Links.

There are few public open spaces within the Conservation Area. Those that exist are formal in nature, bowling greens, gardens etc. Open spaces, although not public, are provided by the extensive private gardens.

Examples of open spaces which are important to the character of the Conservation Area include:

- The ground on the corner of Thirlestane Road and Whitehouse Loan which is bounded by the original high stone boundary wall that formed the boundary to the Gillis Centre.
- The central green space on Greenhill Gardens. It is said that this small garden area was an ancient burial ground for plague victims.
- The bowling green/ tennis courts at the corner of Polwarth Terrace, which form an important green space on the approach to the town centre. It is also on the edge of the Conservation Area and forms an important node/confluence in the surrounding townscape.
- The private gardens on Merchiston Gardens, forming the setting to the surrounding terrace and George Watson's Upper primary School.

Public open spaces influence the boundaries to the Conservation Area, Bruntsfield Links to the north and the Union Canal to the west. These spaces are important to the overall setting of the Conservation Area. The scale of these open spaces and the diverse landscape structure are important for biodiversity.

Significant tree specimens are apparent along Strathearn Place, Clinton Road and Napier Road. These were once tree lined avenues or boundaries to estates in the area that were incorporated into development plots at a later stage. Since then the tree cover in the area has been developed substantially within individual plots and gardens giving an extensive landscape framework to the built development.

Within the majority of the Conservation Area the scale of the plots has allowed trees to become features of both the rear and front gardens. The trees help to integrate the built development throughout the area.

Four Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been applied in the Conservation Area:

- Area TPO 14 Merchiston Crescent
- Individual TPO Napier Road (The Limes)
- Group TPO 9 Merchiston Park
- Woodland TPO Cranley School (Spylaw Road and Colinton Road)

Individual trees within gardens play a significant role in creating the character of the Conservation Area. Particular attention should be given to existing trees when considering changes to any development layout in the area. Opportunities for introducing further trees and replacing trees that are lost to age should be considered throughout the area. The long-term management of trees in these situations is of paramount importance.

MANAGEMENT

Legislation, policies and guidance

Conservation Areas

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that Conservation Areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas.

Special attention must be paid to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area when planning controls are being exercised. Conservation Area status brings several special controls:

- The demolition of unlisted buildings requires Conservation Area Consent;
- Some permitted development rights, which allow improvements or alterations to the external appearance of dwelling houses and flatted dwellings, are removed; and
- Works to trees are controlled (see Trees for more detail).

The removal of buildings which make a positive contribution to an area is only permitted in exceptional circumstances, and where the proposals meet certain criteria relating to condition, conservation deficit, adequacy of efforts to retain the building and the relative public benefit of replacement proposals. Conservation Area Character Appraisals are a material consideration when assessing applications for development within Conservation Areas.

Alterations to windows are also controlled in Conservation Areas in terms of the Council's guidelines. uPVC windows are not considered acceptable in the Conservation Area in terms of the Council's Guidance on Replacement Windows.

Listed buildings

A significant number of buildings within the Conservation Area are listed for their special architectural or historic interest and are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. Listed building consent is required for the demolition of a listed building, or its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its special character.

Planning guidance

More detailed, subject-specific guidance is set out in Planning Guidance documents. Those particularly relevant to the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area are:

- Guidance for Householders;
- Guidance for Businesses;
- Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas;
- Developer contributions and affordable housing;
- Edinburgh Design guidance;
- Communications Infrastructure; and
- Street Design Guidance.

In addition, several statutory tools are available to assist development management within the Conservation Area.

Article 4 Direction Orders

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, amended 2012, (abbreviated to GPDO), restricts the types of development which can be carried out in a Conservation Area without the need for planning permission. These include most alterations to the external appearance of dwelling houses and flats. Development is not precluded, but such alterations will require planning permission and special attention will be paid to the potential effect of proposals.

Under Article 4 of the GPDO, the planning authority can seek the approval of the Scottish Ministers for Directions that restrict development rights further. The Directions effectively control the proliferation of relatively minor developments in Conservation Areas which can cumulatively lead to the erosion of character and appearance. The Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area has Article 4 Directions covering the following classes of development:

- 7 The erection, construction, maintenance, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure;
- 38 water undertakings;
- 39 development by gas suppliers; and
- 40 development by electricity undertakers.

Trees

Public and private mature trees contribute to the character of the Conservation Area. Larger trees are also complementary to the scale of Merchiston and Greenhill's wide streets and large villa grounds. Loss of mature trees and the planting of trees of an inappropriate scale have a significant impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

Trees within Conservation Areas are covered by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning Act 2006. This Act applies to the uprooting, felling or lopping of a tree having a diameter exceeding 75mm at a point 1.5m above ground level. 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 liable to the same penalties as for contravention of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

Tree Preservation Orders are made under planning legislation to protect individual and groups of trees considered important for amenity or because of their cultural or historic interest. When assessing amenity, the importance of trees as wildlife habitats will be taken into consideration. There is a strong presumption against any form of development or change of use of land which is likely to damage or prejudice the future long-term existence of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order. The removal of trees for arboriculture reasons will not imply that the space created by their removal can be used for development.

Appropriate planting is encouraged in areas which have lost a substantial number of large trees or would benefit from such planting, particularly on corner sites where large trees could easily be accommodated. Tree maintenance which preserves the scale, character and outline of the tree will be promoted. Replacement trees should be selected to form appropriate settings for individual houses and contribute to an integrating framework for the whole area. Framework trees should be substantial, long lived, hardy, and interesting in form. They should be in scale with and provide a setting for the buildings.

Trees in the City contains a set of policies with an action plan used to guide the management of the Council's trees and woodlands.

Assessing Development within the Conservation Area

The richness of Merchiston and Greenhill's built heritage is considerable. It is this complexity and diversity which make it attractive yet make these qualities hard to define. It also has a fragility and human scale which often does not sit easily with the demands of present-day development requirements. These are qualities and conflicts that must be resolved if the character of the Conservation Area is to be sensitively interpreted and enhanced.

General Criteria

General issues to be considered in assessing development proposals in the Conservation Area include the appropriateness of the overall massing of development, its scale (the expression of size indicated by the windows, doors, floor heights, and other identifiable units), its proportions and its relationship with its context i.e. whether it sits comfortably. Development should be in harmony with, or

complimentary to, its neighbours having regard to the adjoining architectural styles. Villas set in enclosed spacious garden grounds, which are a feature of parts of the Conservation Area and make a significant contribution to its character should be protected from the loss of boundary walls, additional hardstanding, ancillary buildings and side extensions where they impact on views through to the rear garden. The use of materials generally matching those which are historically dominant in the area is important, as is the need for the development not to have a visually disruptive impact on the existing townscape. It should also, as far as possible, fit into the “grain” of the Conservation Area, for example, by respecting historic layout, street patterns or existing landform. It is also important where new uses are proposed that they respect the unique character and general ambience of the Conservation Area, for example certain developments may adversely affect the character of a Conservation Area through noise, nuisance and general disturbance. Proposals outside the boundaries of the Conservation Area should not erode the character and appearance of Merchiston and Greenhill. The natural environment along the Water of Leith should be protected, conserved, enhanced and managed.

New Buildings

Where new development does not have an adverse impact on the character of the Conservation Area and is considered acceptable, it should be of good contemporary design that is sympathetic to the spatial pattern, scale, massing, proportions, building line and design of traditional buildings in the area. 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. New development should protect the setting of individual buildings and the historic context. The quality of alterations to shop fronts, extensions, dormers and other minor alterations should also be of an appropriately high standard.

The development of new buildings in the Conservation Area should be a stimulus to imaginative, high quality design, and seen as an opportunity to enhance the area. What is important is not that new buildings should directly imitate earlier styles, rather that they should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well-established character and appearance of its own. Therefore, while development of a gap site in a traditional terrace may require a very sensitive design approach to maintain the overall integrity of the area; in other cases, modern designs sympathetic and complimentary to the existing character of the area may be acceptable.

Alterations and Extensions

Proposals for the alteration or extension of properties in the Conservation Area will normally be acceptable where they are sensitive to the existing building, in keeping with the character and appearance of the particular area and do not prejudice the amenities of adjacent properties. Extensions should be subservient to the building, of an appropriate scale, use appropriate materials and should normally be located on the rear elevations of a property. Very careful consideration will be required for alterations and extensions affecting the roof of a property, as these may be particularly detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Definition of ‘Character’ and ‘Appearance’

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

The character of an area is the combination of features and qualities which contribute to the intrinsic worth of an area and make it distinctive. Special character does not derive only from the quality of buildings. Elements such as the historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries, paving materials, urban grain and more intangible features, such as smells and noises which are unique to the area, may all contribute to the local scene. Conservation Area designation is the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and of ensuring that planning decisions address these qualities.

Appearance is more limited and relates to the way individual features within the Conservation Area look.

Care and attention should be paid in distinguishing between the impact of proposed developments on both the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Development opportunities for infill or replacement may arise within the area and will be considered in terms of the relevant guidance. The Edinburgh Design Guidance, Guidance for Householders and Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas explain the Council's approach to design in historic contexts.

The unsympathetic subdivision of garden grounds can erode the quality of a building's form and proportion, and the historic relationship between buildings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

The character appraisal emphasises the more positive aspects of character in order that the future can build on what is best within the Conservation Area. The quality of urban and architectural design needs to be continuously improved if the character of the Conservation Area is to be enhanced. The retention of good quality buildings (as well as listed buildings) and the sensitive interpretation of traditional spaces in development are of particular importance.

Streetscape

Careful consideration should be given to floorscape which is an essential part of the overall appreciation of Merchiston and Greenhill's rich townscape heritage. Repair and renewal work to street surfaces should be carefully detailed and carried out to the highest standards using quality natural materials.

High Buildings

The buildings within the Conservation Area have generally consistent heights and the character of the area is particularly susceptible to buildings that break the prevailing roof and eaves height and impinge on the many important views. It is also important to protect the character of the Conservation Area from the potentially damaging impact of high buildings outside the Conservation Area.

Repair, Maintenance and Alterations

The character of the Conservation Area is maintained through regular maintenance of the built fabric in appropriate quality materials. Alterations should maintain the character and appearance. The reinstatement of boundary enclosures to the original pattern would benefit the overall architectural character of the area.

Boundary Treatments

Stone boundary walls are a key feature within the Conservation Area. They should be repaired and reinstated where appropriate.

REFERENCES

Smith, Charles. Historic South Edinburgh.

Harris, Stuart. Street Names of Edinburgh.

J. Gifford, C. McWilliam & D. Walker. Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh., Penguin, 1984.

Appendix 3: Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal: Consultation Results.

The consultation ran for six weeks from 19 November 2022. Five responses were submitted.

How clearly does the appraisal set out the issues within the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area?

- 1 Very Clear
- 4 Somewhat Clear

To what extent you agree or disagree with the proposed revised appraisal of the Merchiston and Greenhill Conservation Area?

- 2 Strongly Agree
- 3 Somewhat Agree

Comments and Responses

Comment	Response
The Cockburn Association would wish to support this new Character Appraisal and welcomes its updating.	Noted
The appraisal is well structured and easy to understand. I found myself agreeing with the general description and context etc. It reads as a generally satisfactory description of the area and highlights the most important features of it.	Noted
A factual error was noted.	This has been corrected.
<p>We are denied the right to place solar panels on our roof when they cannot be seen from the road. Surely decarbonisation will require some changes to the management of our very special environs.</p> <p>I strongly support the observation that traditional materials should be used for repairs and new build in the area. Sadly, however, I understand that the current City of Edinburgh Planning Department do not share this view and discourage what they describe as 'pastiche' extensions.</p> <p>I am particularly distressed by the fact that a neighbouring 1830s old stone farm house is due to have a replacement extension constructed with significant metal walls. It is good news that the existing extension -</p>	These comments relate to particular applications and are not directly relevant to the contents of the appraisal.

<p>and ugly disproportionate harled 1900 building is being demolished - but sad that it is not being replaced by sandstone to link with the original house and a relatively recent (2010) extension at the other side of the house added by the previous owners.</p>	
<p>The character of our environs has been severely devalued by the vulgar, amateurish and ill thought out modifications to our roads albeit under the dubious reasoning that roads are thereby made safer for a minority of road users (cyclists). Meantime, congestion increases elsewhere and with it pollution, frustration from the trading areas of our area and pointless hazards placed in our already narrow streets threatening the visually challenged and confusing pedestrians as they stagger over numerous kerbs whilst avoiding anarchic cyclists seeking to share ambiguously labelled areas.</p>	<p>This comment relates to a particular Council initiative and is not directly relevant to the contents of the appraisal.</p>
<p>The approach to trees is too open to interpretation and too focussed on trees in private gardens. Protection of trees should be required, not “encouraged” as stated, which would better reflect the statutory protection given to trees in a Conservation Area. For example, on Newbattle Terrace, several trees have been felled with only stumps remaining. It is clear that the design of the street and therefore part of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is the planting layout integrated into the design and construction of the roadway</p>	<p>The appraisal specifies that public and private mature trees contribute to the character of the Conservation Area and should be retained.</p>
<p>The area around Holy Corner is much livelier that it would have been when the previous character appraisal was published. There are a few examples of pavements being appropriated with a deleterious effect. The document should make much stronger statements about what is, and isn't, acceptable, in the streetscape.</p>	<p>The character appraisal notes the contrast between the high amenity and serenity of most of the area and the main through routes which are characteristically places of activity in terms of social and commercial activities, and traffic movement.</p>