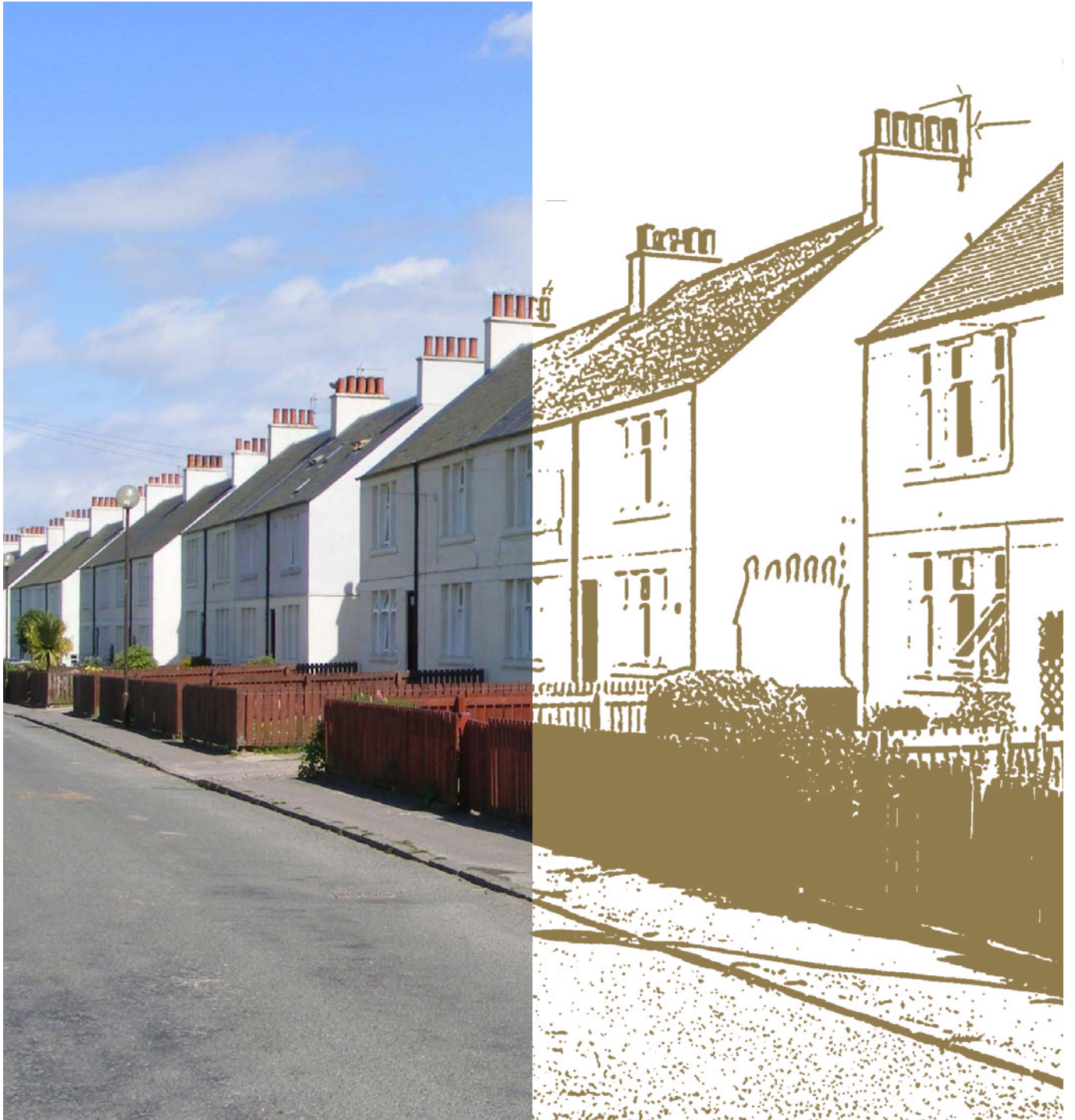


Letham

conservation area appraisal



March 2010



Falkirk Council
Development Services



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Letham Conservation Area

1.1.1 The former mineworkers housing at Letham is located in countryside between the village of Airth to the north and Larbert - Stenhousemuir. Letham Conservation Area was designated by Falkirk District Council on the 25th July 1978. Map 1 attached shows the existing boundary.

1.2 Conservation Areas

1.2.1 Since 1967 local authorities have been able to designate conservation areas i.e. "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". The current legislation is laid down in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997.

1.2.2 The immediate effect of designation is to confer powers on the local authority requiring that planning permission be sought for the demolition of any building and the removal of, or works to, any tree within the area and certain external works which are considered to affect the character or appearance of the conservation area i.e. painting/cladding, utility storage, telecommunication apparatus, hard standing and built extensions beyond certain limits.

1.2.3 Supplementary legislation under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, Article 4 Direction (Appendix A) ensures, where necessary, that planning permission will also be required for other minor works normally considered "permitted development", e.g. window and door replacements and fence heights.

1.3 Reasons for Appraisal

1.3.1 Planning authorities are required by the Act to review their conservation areas from time to time and to consider also proposals for their preservation and enhancement to complement the statutory planning controls.

1.3.2 In addition, Planning Advice Note (PAN) 71 Conservation Area Management (Scottish Government best practice guidance) advises that conservation areas be appraised from time to time in order to:

- confirm the current status and value of the conservation area,
- establish an appropriate area boundary,
- clarify planning controls and guidance to ensure that future, developments are sympathetic to the character of the area,
- identify opportunities for physical enhancement,
- engage with stakeholders through public consultation.

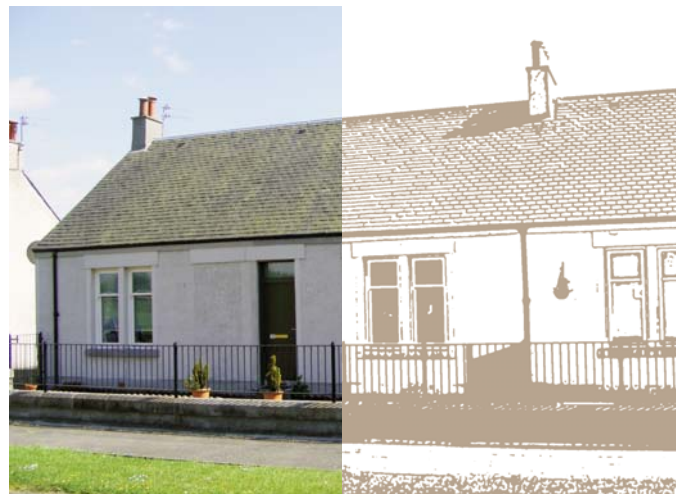
1.3.3 The finalised draft of the Falkirk Council Local Plan (April 2007) endorses this in Policy EQ12 Conservation Areas which states that: "The Council will prepare Character Appraisals of individual Conservation Areas"



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 The conservation area comprises Letham Cottages, Letham Terrace, the former Miners Welfare Hall and recreation ground, the former pit manager's house (Crooklandgate Cottage) and the site of the former colliery.
- 2.1.2 Letham represents one of the few examples of a community exclusively based around a colliery. The mine commenced operation in 1912 and Letham Cottages, immediately to the south, was built the following year, the last complete example of a miners' row in the district. Letham Terraces, on the northern side of the colliery, was built circa 1923. Carron Company owned and built the mine, the houses and the railway which supplied coal to its world famous iron foundry, a few miles to the south.
- 2.1.3 The mining operation ceased before World War 2 and the site containing the structures and bing was cleared and rehabilitated by the early 1990's leaving the agricultural field and tree planting evident today between the 2 housing groups.
- 2.1.4 A former tarpaulin works immediately to the north of Letham Cottages and on the main road, later the Village Hall, was replaced by new terrace housing in the 1990s. The adjoining changing facilities with a meeting room have been constructed and extended to serve the playing field.
- 2.1.5 Maps 2 and 3 attached show the historical development of the area.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.2 Setting

Area Configuration

2.2.1 The current Letham Conservation Area boundary encloses an elongated wedge of land running north/south of about 10.2 hectares, averaging 150m.wide by 600m long. The narrow strip of Letham Terraces projects west (by 250 metres) at the northern end of the area. Letham Cottages is located at its southern end. A large part of the conservation area is the open landscaped area between.

Main Edges, Views, Open Areas and Focal Points

2.2.2 The adjacent link road (A88-A905) defines the eastern boundary of the conservation area and provides its most public edge. Letham Cottages is located along this route with prominent views evident on approaching from the south. An equally striking image is available from the M876 motorway, further to the south, heading for the Kincardine/Clackmannanshire Bridges.

2.2.3 Letham Terraces fronts the country road serving the farmland to the north and west from which it creates a prominent landmark. The rear portions are naturally less formal but the low level boundary treatment helps to integrate it better with the adjoining countryside. Views from this area to Letham Cottages reinforce the sense of the close proximity of the two housing groups.

2.2.4 A dense tree planted swathe defines the northern edge of the former colliery site, dividing it from the vacant land adjoining Letham Terraces. A similar swathe to the south provides an appropriate buffer between the grassland to the north and the playing fields to the south. Avenue planting defines the main road edge to these open areas, being more open along the front of the playing fields. A public path runs up the west side of the green space and links the two housing areas.

2.2.5 Crooklandgate Cottage, the former pit manager's house provides a minor focal point, at the northern tip of the conservation area.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.3 Building Groups

Letham Cottages Front

- 2.3.1 Terraced blocks, with doors entered off the street, contain three sides of the rectangular site, the fourth, western side open onto the communal courtyard/green at the rear. 1 ½ storey dormered units (single width) are located along the prominent southern frontage with single storey buildings (double width) to the main road and the northern edge. Chimneys and downpipes are located tidily between each semi unit. Vertical proportions and sash-and-case windows characterise the symmetrically arranged elevations and small front gardens with low enclosure define the street edge.

Letham Cottages Rear

- 2.3.2 Elevations are less formal to the rear and the variations in height of the different frontages are reflected by the differing garden layout arrangement immediately adjacent. To the north and east enclosed gardens abut the continuous single storey building line whilst to the south, single storey extensions from the 1 ½ storey terrace to create small shared open courts. A continuous public footway runs alongside with further garden enclosures/drying greens across from the housing. To the rear of this and central to the rear area is the extensive communal courtyard/green. One or two footpath links connect within this green and link to the perimeter footway.

Letham Terraces Front

- 2.3.3 These 2 storey 4-in-a-block units are by definition semi detached, but with identical street elevations on the same continuous building line they give a clear impression of terraces. The gaps between the twinned units allow pedestrian and vehicle access to rear parking thereby freeing the street of cars. Gardens are deeper than for the Cottages, again with a low enclosure to the frontage.

Letham Terraces Rear

- 2.3.4 Some units have hipped roof rear extensions, also 2 storeys in height. It may be that these provided the additional stair access to serve what were originally 3 storey buildings. Individual gardens/ drying areas are located to the rear of the backcourt which provides a fenced edge to the countryside as described above.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.4 Architectural Detail

2.4.1 The external components and features in Letham Cottages and Letham Terraces are fairly standardised:

Roofs: Grey Scottish slate.

Wall Surfaces:

Faced in a single white/cream painted wet dash render with raised lintels and smooth band around window openings and below the eaves, sometimes in a subtly different hue.

Windows:

These are exclusively set into single or twinned vertically proportioned openings with central masonry mullions dividing.

Dormer Windows (Cottages):

The neat rectangular dormers on the south elevation include windows which match those below.

Doors:

These are standardised, solid lined at Letham Cottages and panelled with a tripartite glazed upper portion at Letham Terraces. Different colour schemes within the National Trust range are evident within the separate portions of housing.

Chimneys:

Stacks and pots are generally intact.

Rainwater Goods:

Black painted cast-iron gutters and downpipes.

Front Garden Enclosure:

At Letham Cottages the railing over plinth convention used on the main road has been recently extended along the northern frontage. Enclosure to the southern edge is piecemeal. At Letham Terraces the current enclosure is 1metre high hit-and-miss stained timber fencing.

2.5 Other Buildings

2.5.1 Within the conservation area there are three additional buildings which are briefly described with conservation merit.

Crooklandgate Cottage

2.5.2 This historic house is now a private residence. Some unsympathetic alterations to windows and other external features appear to have taken place during the 30 years of conservation area designation. A newly built house lies alongside.

43-48 Letham Cottages

2.5.3 This new terrace seeks to reflect the design of the adjoining miners' rows. It presents a unified form and prominence to the rear.

Changing Facility/ Community Room

2.5.4 This existing building is functional and modern adding little to the character of the village.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.6 Conservation Merit

2.6.1 The special historic character of the area has already been noted i.e. its uniqueness as a former colliery community. The merit of its architectural character is summarised as follows:

Letham Cottages

2.6.2 The 3-sided terraces enclosing the communal courtyard/green demonstrate the philanthropy of the time and create an elegant balance of dense building and communal open space.

2.6.3 The street frontages are clearly the most important character features. Terrace forms, slate roofs, proud chimneys and tidy repeating elevational patterns are given charm by the uniform white sash-and-case window profiles and the simple lined doors in subtle dark colours. The south facing dormer frontage is particularly attractive.

2.6.4 The rear elevations are clearly lesser but are a necessary part of the whole and connect the housing to the communal green behind.

Letham Terraces

2.6.5 The single continuous terrace is less striking but nonetheless includes many of the positive features which characterize Letham Cottages. Its prominent frontage to the countryside has a picturesque quality, quite in contrast to many modern developments which turn their backs to the rural area. Even where the rear areas are exposed to the countryside a low enclosure satisfactorily beds these in. The provision of parking to the rear leaves an uncluttered street setting to these buildings.

2.6.6 Letham is unusual within the Falkirk Council area in being a conservation area with no listed buildings. It is clear that Letham Terraces and Cottages as a group have significant architectural and historic interest which may merit listing.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.7 Character Erosion

2.7.1 The uniform character of the terraced housing at Letham is diminished by the cumulative effect of any unsympathetic alterations to the architectural detail i.e.:

Window Replacements

2.7.2 The comprehensive replacement of the original sash-and-case windows is regrettable as they represented the true history of the village and were a guide to appropriate design.

2.7.3 To date very few of the replacement tilt-and-turn units have been replaced like-for-like. The very few examples are UPVC replacements which give reason for concern as none, in the event, were able to recreate the desired profile of the sash-and-case. Essentially the sub-frame is too dominant and covers over the sliding portion and the dormer mullion is too wide.

2.7.4 Minor as these alterations may seem they are important enough to disturb the uniform character of the cottage/terrace buildings where they have been implemented.

Letham Cottages:
Front Garden Enclosure

2.7.5 The piecemeal replacement of the garden edge along the prominent south elevation is regrettable in comparison with the eastern and northern frontages where comprehensive replacement with a railing has been recently implemented.

Letham Terraces:
Front Garden Enclosure

2.7.6 The original front garden enclosure was probably formal hedging. The current enclosure is 1 metre high hit-and-miss stained timber fencing which remains substantially intact. Concerns relate to possible piecemeal replacement and optimum design.

Letham Cottages:
Communal Green and Fence Enclosure

2.7.7 Historically, the feudal overlord would have ensured that all garden enclosures were low, attractively designed, unified and maintained to a high standard. Unfortunately over time, the aspiration for screened privacy from adjoining private and communal space has led to more piecemeal and barrier-like enclosure being erected. This applies to boundary treatment of the green itself as well as to the edges to the private garden/drying areas. Some of the small shared courtyards on the southern edge also suffer from inappropriate fenced subdivision and hard surfacing.



2.0 APPRAISAL of CHARACTER and APPEARANCE

2.7.8 To the rear of the southern terrace area single storey extensions frame a paved space shared by two houses. In certain locations high fencing has been added at the boundary to privatise this space which removes the intended open character of the space and appears intrusive.

Other Issues

2.7.9 Disabled Access:

A few examples exist of disabled ramp structures, none of which are sympathetically integrated into the front garden space, footway or and boundary enclosure. Temporary structures are by definition less intrusive.

2.7.10 Satellite Dishes:

Adherence to conservation area restrictions have minimised intrusion from satellite dishes although still prominent in some instances. Hidden locations or integrated garden sites would be preferred whilst the size of the equipment remains visually intrusive.

2.8 Conservation Area Boundary

2.8.1 The architectural and historic integrity of the present conservation area boundary remains in spite of the character erosions noted above, which are relatively limited in number. No change is therefore proposed.

2.9 New Development Potential

Major Site to West

2.9.1 An extensive area promoted through the Local Plan remains a possible future opportunity for residential development. Such development should follow a clear design brief to ensure that the setting of Letham Conservation Area is not compromised and that the open outlook from the area is retained where possible.



3.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN PROPOSALS

3.1 Planning Permission and Design Advice

3.1.1 It is an offence to carry out certain works without planning permission in a conservation area i.e. any demolition; alterations to the outside of buildings - including painting, replacement of roof coverings, rainwater goods, windows and doors, erection of a satellite dishes, or; alterations or enclosures of outside ground areas, including work to trees.

3.1.2 In the case of windows, doors and garden enclosure the following specific suggestions are included for consultation:

Street Frontage

- 1 Central window mullions (vertical structural divisions: masonry in wall, timber for dormer) should be retained or replaced like-for-like.
- 2 Traditional timber sash-and-case windows (painted white) are preferred, other timber windows may be conceded where exact replication of proportion, subdivision and profile is achieved.
- 3 Doors should replicate exactly the original painted units on the frontage, different for Letham Cottages and Letham Terraces. Variations in colour may be considered but within a muted National Trust range.
- 4 Railings and Fences should exactly match the existing and adjacent conventions.

Rear Areas

- 1 Window openings and central masonry divisions should be retained. Windows should replicate the original window frame sizes and divisions and be in white.
 - 2 Fences: Letham Cottages Southern terrace - shared yard boundary and sub-divisions should be a maximum 1 metre in height. Garden enclosure - should be a maximum 1.2 metres in height.
 - 3 Fences: Letham Terraces Garden enclosure - should be a maximum 1.2 metres in height.
- 3.1.4 In general terms the aim should be to preserve the architectural integrity of the conservation area, and where some integrity has been lost, encourage its restoration.

3.0 MANAGEMENT PLAN PROPOSALS

3.2 Enhancement Opportunities

3.2.1 Improvement works to enhance the conservation area, or address the erosion of character, may be possible to complement the legislative controls. The following are some possible opportunities:

Letham Cottages

- 1 Installation of plinth/railing to enclose southern frontage gardens to match the northern and eastern frontages.
- 2 Reorganisation of footpath links and fence/hedge perimeter treatment at communal courtyard/green area.

General

- 3 Provide incentives to install timber sash-and-case windows on all frontages.
- 4 Provide improved landscaping, pedestrian access and historical interpretation at former colliery site.
- 5 Ensure integration of any new development to the west with the character and design merits of the existing conservation area building groups. Open outlook to be retained where possible.



4.0 SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 This appraisal has examined the historical, architectural and urban design factors relating to Letham Conservation Area and has concluded that it retains the special character which justified its designation in the first place. Consequently the recommendation is to retain the conservation area and its existing boundary.
- 4.2 Letham is unusual within the Falkirk Council area in being a conservation area with no listed buildings. It is clear that Letham Terraces and Cottages as a group have significant architectural and historic interest which may merit listing. This appraisal therefore recommends that Historic Scotland be consulted on the possible listing of some or all of these buildings.
- 4.3 Some erosion of the quality and character of the conservation area has however been noted. The main concern is with Letham Cottages, the most focal building grouping, where there are examples of unsympathetic window replacements on the main frontages and piecemeal erection of fencing to the rear around the communal green.
- 4.4 To address these factors this document confirms the works to buildings and associated garden ground which will require planning permission. Guidance on appropriate design solutions is also offered to facilitate such permissions. Locations where standards might be less strictly applied are also identified, notably where concealed from any street/public area to the rear. Lastly, to complement the planning restrictions, some opportunities for the enhancement of the conservation area are suggested, for which project funding could eventually be sought.
- 4.5 The information on planning permission, design standards and enhancement opportunities will form the basis of a Conservation Area Management Plan in due course.



ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

The Article 4 Direction for Letham Conservation Area removes “permitted development” rights from certain classes of development additional to the automatic powers granted by conservation area designation.

These classes from the Town and Country Planning (General Development) (Scotland) Order 1975 are as follows:

- Class 1 development within the curtilage of a Dwellinghouse
- Class 11 sundry minor operations
- Class X1 development by Local Authorities

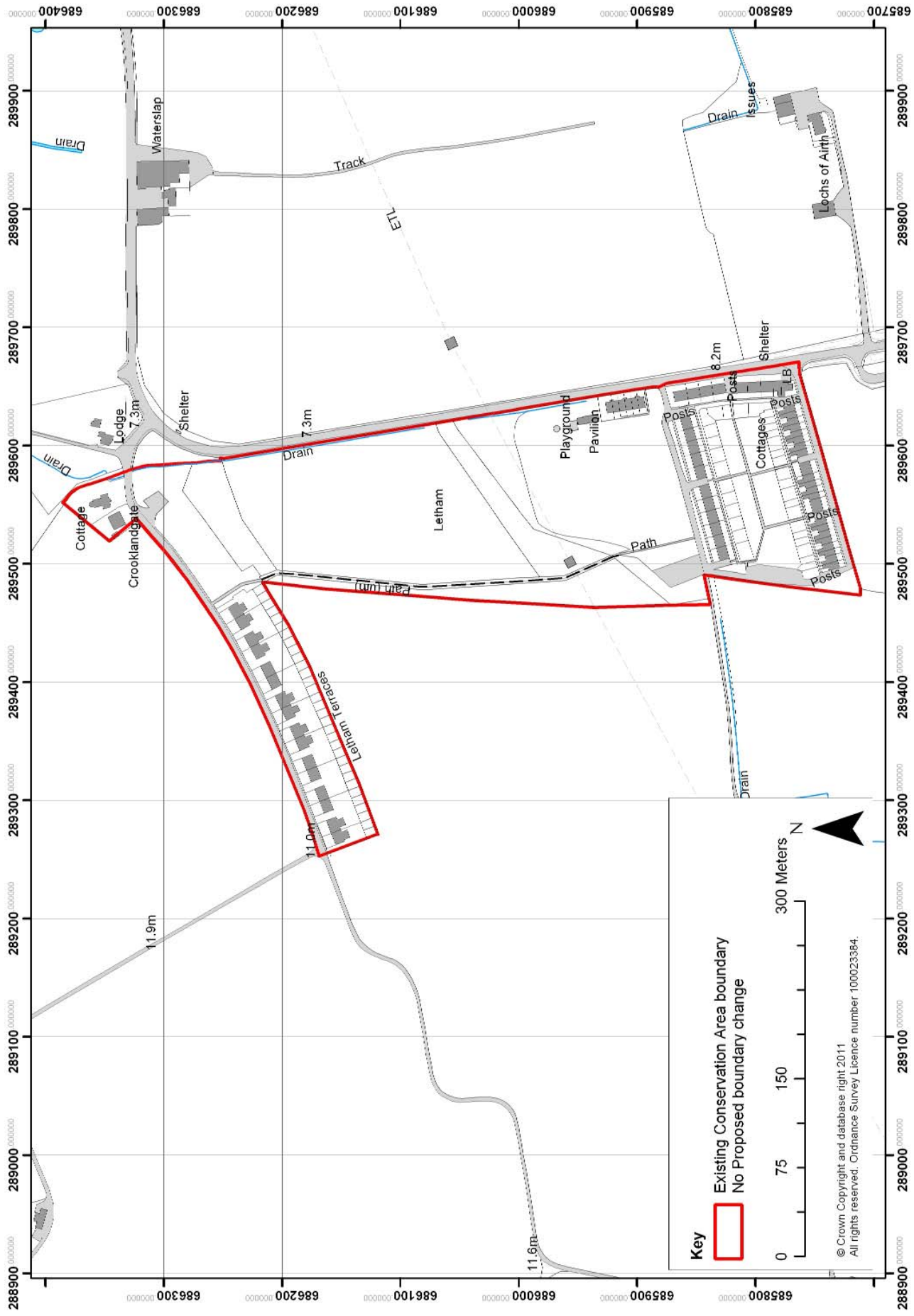
Under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 these classes are re-numbered as follows:

- Class 1-6 development within the curtilage of a Dwellinghouse
- Class 7-9 sundry minor operations i.e. the height of a gate, fence, wall etc.
- Class 30 - 33 development by Local Authorities

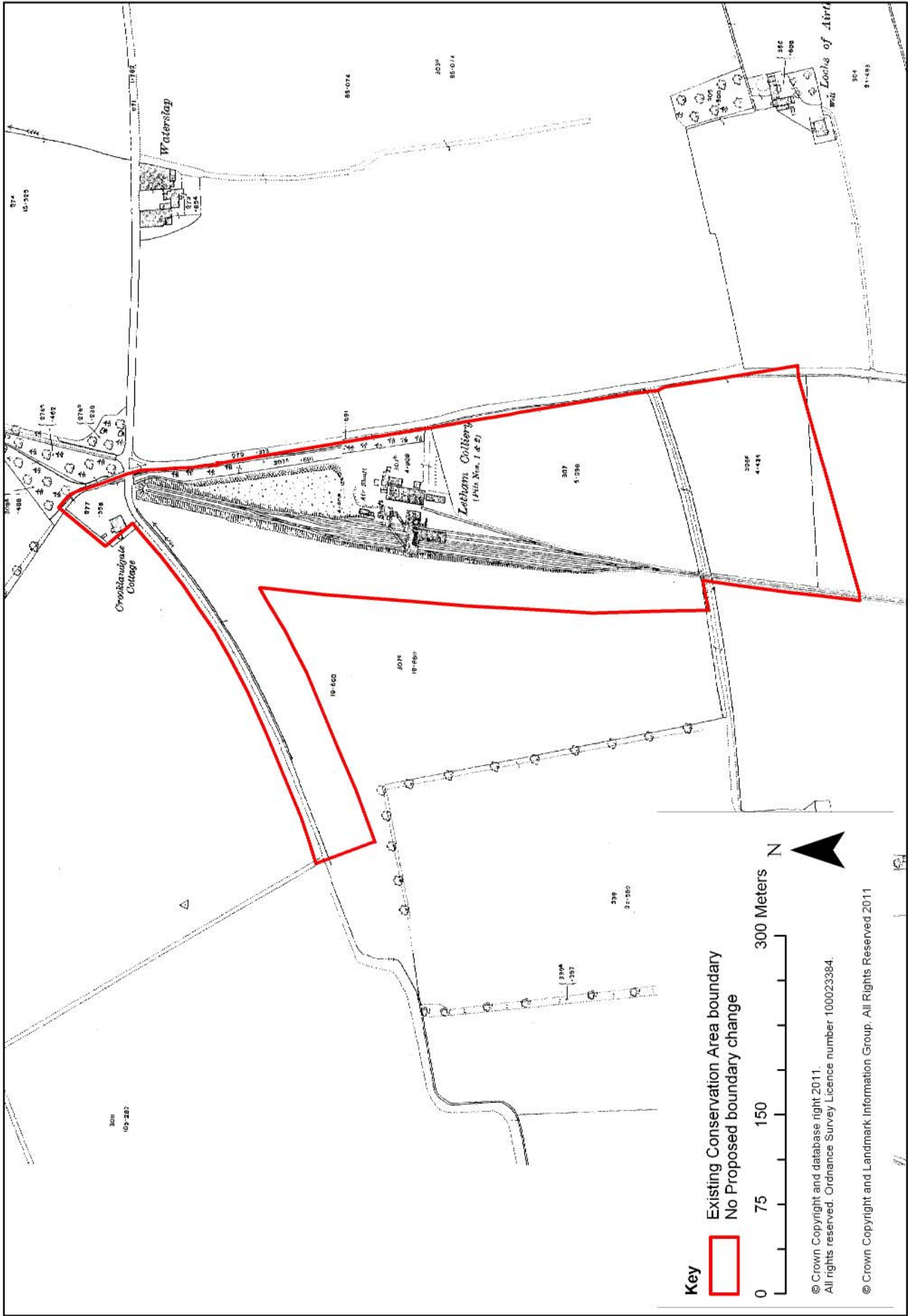
It is not proposed to change these Classes in bringing the Article 4 Direction up to date with the new legislation.

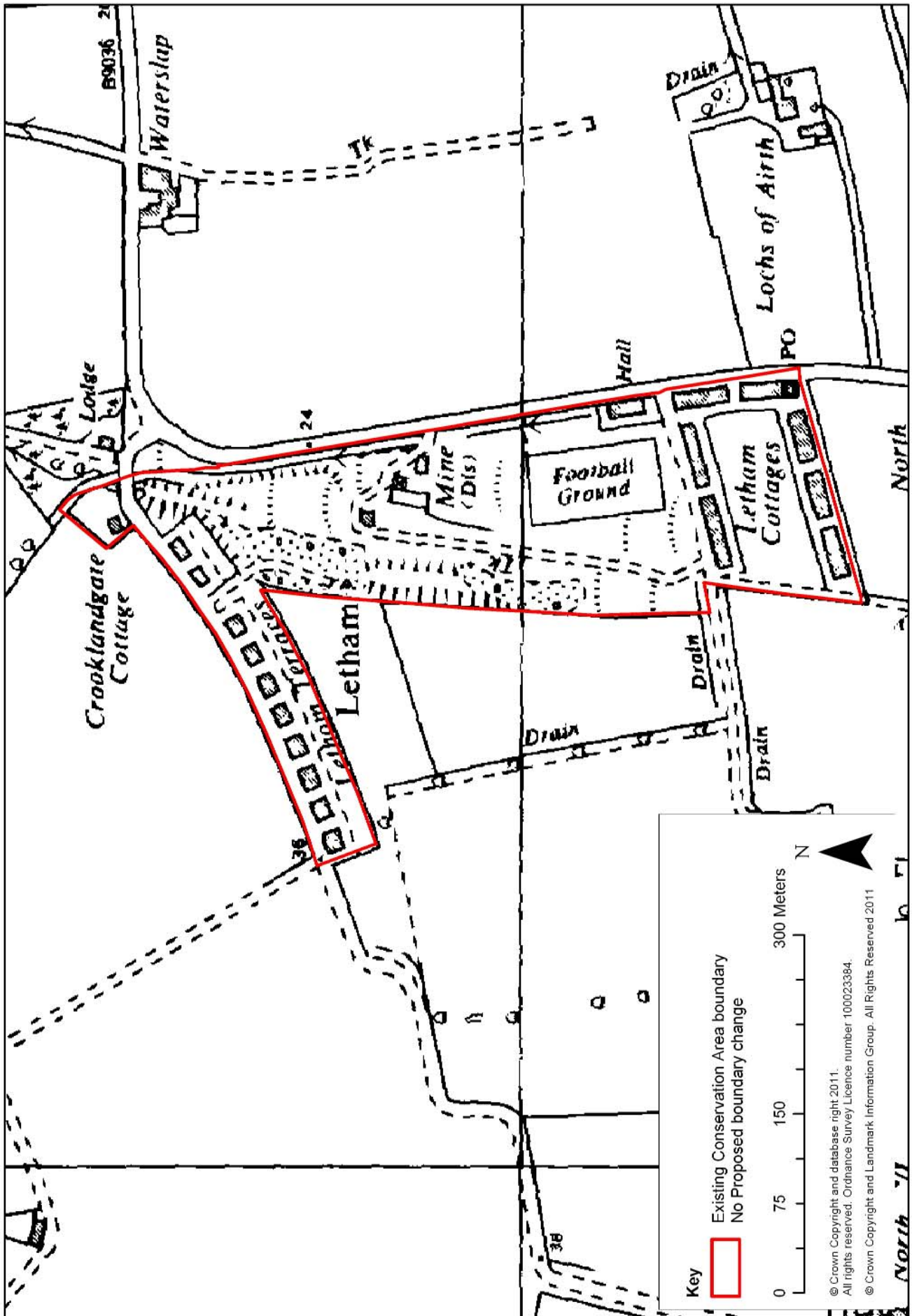


Map 1 Letham Conservation Area : Existing Boundary 2010



Map 2 Letham Conservation Area : 1914 - 1918 Historic Development









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