

August 2025



St James Allotments,
(with thanks to Lynda Wearn)

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For your diary:

12th September: "My first year as your MP", with David Smith MP. St James's Church. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. for a 7:30 start.

12th - 21st September: Heritage Open Days (see page 3).

28th October: M. R. G. Conzen's study of Alnwick: the lasting legacy. With Dr Michael Barke. This is a joint meeting with Alnwick & District Local History Society. It will be held at Alnwick Cricket Club on Weavers Way (NE66 1BX) starting at 7:30 p.m.

November: Any Questions - a civilised discussion of topical local issues. Watch for details.

The refresh of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan is ready for the next public consultation. Make sure that you have your say.

See back page for more on Book talks at Alnwick Castle, Newcastle City Guides, Woodhorn Museum and the HospiceCare North Northumberland Open Gardens Scheme.



"A powerful catalyst for future growth"

Historic England has published an independent evaluation of their High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme.

Led by Historic England, in partnership with Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the £103m High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme aimed to revitalise high streets. It ran from 2020 to 2024 in 67 historic high streets across England. AMION Consulting were commissioned to assess the programme's achievements and the potential longer-term impact. AMION's full report can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/yaxc363n>.

The programme had three distinct but interrelated strands:

- Capital strand; to support restoration of buildings and public realm
- Community strand; to increase local heritage involvement and capacity
- Cultural strand; to support events celebrating local stories, history and tradition.

Not all of the original targets were achieved. In retrospect some were always unrealistic, but the programme also faced unprecedented challenges (Covid Pandemic, Ukraine War, rising inflation, material shortages and economic pressure on Local Authorities). Nevertheless, significant outcomes were delivered. These included leveraging £144m of additional funding; a number of heritage assets conserved, enhanced and removed from the at-risk register; some new residential units; vacant buildings brought back into use; shopfronts restored.

"loosening the grip of retail on the high street can be an opportunity to reimagine it as a vibrant centre of the community"

Semi-detached housing

Semi-detached housing is England's most prevalent type, representing around a third of all homes in England.

The origins of the semi-detached house go back centuries but the greatest concentrations in England were built between the First and Second World Wars.

Following the First World War the government needed to address a housing crisis. Guidance emphasised semi-detached designs for state-aided council housing, while cheap mortgages allowed the middle classes to buy their own semi-detached homes. The semi-detached house became a popular and aspirational residence for both the middle class and the working class.

In the Second World War half a million homes were destroyed by aerial bombardment, and hundreds of thousands of others were



The programme also resulted in a number of public events, workshops, education visits, and training activities.

Overall value for money was assessed as acceptable, with the cultural strand performing slightly better than the capital strand.

Historic England want to learn lessons that will inform future heritage-led regeneration programmes. So the report analyses features of the most successful projects that will be of wider interest. The themes include: Community Engagement, Heritage and Cultural Impact, Programme Management and Governance, Financial Sustainability, Economic and Social Impact, Scalability, Communication and outreach, Innovation and learning.

Also of interest to a wider audience will be the conclusion of the full report. Here questions are considered that have important implications for national policy. But the impact of the answers will perhaps be felt more profoundly at a community level.

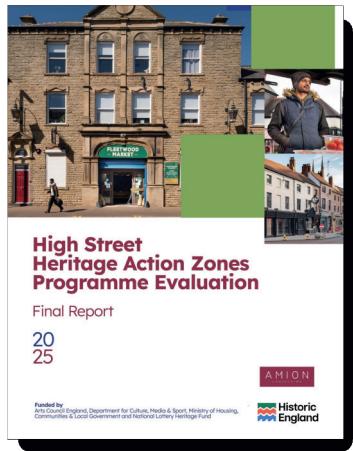
- Who is heritage for?
- How can local communities have more of a voice in regeneration projects affecting their neighbourhoods?
- How to mitigate negative aspects of regeneration (or gentrification)?
- What is a good investment?
- How can regeneration support climate change and sustainability goals?
- How can regeneration be resilient to Future Shocks?
- How to harness changes in identity and pride created by historic-led regeneration?

damaged. Britain again suffered an acute housing shortage. The provision of new council housing was a priority, while new Towns offered both employment opportunities and new homes. In both cases many of the designs were semi-detached.

It wasn't until the 1960s that semi-detached housing started to decline as a primary style in favour of greater variety. Private developments now often centred on small estates, with a mix of semi-detached and detached housing and short terraces. Cities featured high-rise private apartment blocks. Providers of social housing offered a mix of flats, maisonettes and houses. Yet, semi-detached housing still remains the most prevalent type.

Explore the story with "A Brief Introduction to Semi-Detached Housing" by Historic England.

<https://tinyurl.com/58hy866m>



Heritage Open Days



Heritage Open Days is England's largest community led festival of history and culture, involving thousands of local volunteers and organisations.

Nationally, Heritage Open Days this year will run from 12th - 21st September. Last year more than 2,350 organisations, individuals and community groups were involved and over a million people took advantage of the free events and activities that they organised.

Again this year, there are opportunities for a free visit to heritage that is not normally open to the public and learn something new about the local area.

There are activities planned during the week, but in Alnwick the busiest day will be Saturday 20th September. Find full details and latest updates at: <https://tinyurl.com/yfhjrs46>

Heritage open to the public

Alnwick Masonic Centre: A glimpse into the history and traditions of Freemasonry. Home to Alnwick Lodge of Freeasons since 1881 the building was originally a Sunday School. It contains a magnificent example of C19th carving: the Chevy Chase sideboard, and a collection of Masonic artefacts dating back to the C17th.

Alnwick Playhouse: look behind the scenes as our arts centre, theatre and cinema celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Alnwick Youth Hostel: Once Alnwick's Courthouse, Police Station and House of Correction.

Bailiffgate Museum: an award-winning people's museum, where fascinating stories of the past are told about Alnwick and District.

St Mary's Chantry House: a rare opportunity to see inside a significant medieval ruin, once Alnwick's first school.

Narrowgate House: an opportunity to step inside one of Alnwick's best-known buildings. Once home to John Lambert, a prominent solicitor and a generous philanthropist. Better known as the offices of solicitors Dickson, Archer & Thorp who occupied the building until 2003. With oral history memories of the practice.

Alnwick Trades

Alnwick's Independent Shops are among our most popular attractions. Explore the town centre to discover the stories behind many of our high street businesses.

Alnwick's Christian Heritage

Baptist Church: a place of worship for almost 200 years and home to Alnwick Baptist Community since 1888.

St James's Church: Now home to the United Reformed Church, the building dates from 1895 but marks 300 years of the English Presbyterian tradition.

St Michael's Church: With origins in Saxon times, and handsomely rebuilt in the 14th and 15th centuries, St Michael's Church is one of the architectural gems of Northumberland. Includes medieval bells, and an exhibition of historic graffiti.

St Paul's Church: A "serious-minded essay in Decorated style" by Salvin, built in 1845-6 and acquired for Catholic use in the 1980s. Includes a remarkable East Window.

Exhibitions

Memories of Dixon, Archer and Thorp: an Audio-visual oral history display at Narrowgate House

And on the ground floor of Northumberland Hall:

What lies beneath? Stories of Alnwick Cellars. Are there secrets that you can share?

Remember Alnwick's Prefabs? An exhibition about post-war reconstruction.

Architects who left their mark on Alnwick: Who were they? What is their story? And where can their work be seen?

Memories of the Duke's School: Photographs and memories of former pupils. An audio-visual display.

Walks

All walks start at 10:30 in the Marketplace on Weds 17th Sept. Booking required (through Eventbrite).

Built Heritage Walk: Join members of Alnwick Civic Society to discover how the town's character was shaped by early settlers, medieval conflict, powerful families, Georgian taste and Victorian innovation.

Sporting History Guided Walk: Led by a local sports historian, the sites of early pastimes - bull baiting, archery, cock fighting, curling and horse racing will be visited as well as those of early rationalised athletics, bowling, cricket, football, golf, rugby, swimming and tennis.

Walking Tour of Alnwick's Lost Pubs: This tour will show the visitor the location of Alnwick's lost Beer Houses, Taverns and Inns. It will also provide a summary of their history and that of some interesting surviving examples.



Country Carriers

There were different types of carrier in the nineteenth century and it is important to distinguish between them. A country carrier had a very different role from the long distance carriers who moved goods between towns.

In the nineteenth century a “Country Carrier”, or “Village Carrier”, fulfilled several roles in the rural economy. They delivered bulky items to the village from the nearest town. They acted as a shopping agent for villagers: purchasing and paying for goods in town, then adding a few pennies for their trouble when they returned to the village. They provided passenger transport: carrying people between the village and town. And they took village produce to the nearest market. In addition they brought news about the world beyond the village. (see text box opposite).

Each rural service centre had its own network of village carriers. The map (opposite) shows the extent of the Alnwick network in 1894. But Alnwick wasn’t the only centre in North Northumberland. There were similar networks around Berwick and Morpeth. And there was some overlap. Residents in villages and towns like Felton, Rothbury and Wooler had a choice of carriers visiting different centres.

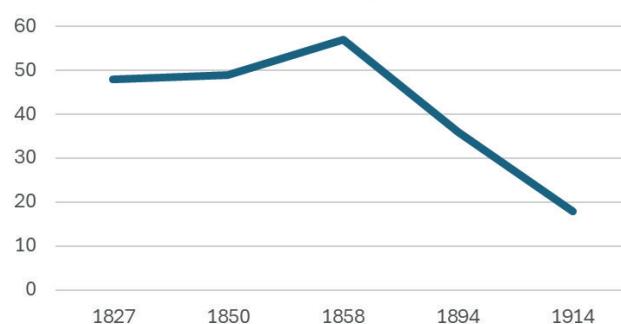
Typically a village carrier would travel to Alnwick and back on one day a week. Very few provided a more frequent service. Before the coming of the railway different carriers chose different days, though 75% preferred a Saturday. By 1858 almost all visited Alnwick on a Saturday. The direct journey from their home village was typically around 12 miles. Most, though, were servicing more than one settlement around their home village. Some were servicing a dozen or more. For those travelling from a remote location to visit every hamlet would have meant covering distances of up to 50 miles in a day. At walking pace, that would make a long day for the carrier, and for their pony. They must have had some way of arranging visits to their more remote clients only when needed.

The carriers that we have been able to identify sometimes list their principal occupation simply as “Carrier”. However, this was not normally a full-time occupation and it is common in 19th century directories for a carrier to list their principal occupation as something different. For those around Alnwick these might involve agricultural work (“Farmer”, “Cow-keeper”). But more often it was associated with the village shop (“Shopkeeper”, or “Grocer”). Some carriers share the surname of the village shopkeeper (perhaps they were the father, husband or son?).

Each carrier needed a base in Alnwick, and these were almost always an inn. They would arrange their journey to arrive

between noon and 3:30 p.m.. The preferred inns varied over time. During the 19th century various carriers used the Half Moon, King’s Arms, Three Tuns, Blue Bell, Queen’s Head, Star Inn and Grey’s Inn. But the Turk’s Head, White Hart, Nag’s Head and Four Horseshoes were the most popular. All were close to the centre of town, so the direction of travel doesn’t seem to have been an important consideration when choosing a base. The Star on Fenkle Street and the White Hart on Market Street seem to have been preferred by carriers with longer journeys. Perhaps they had better stabling. And the Northumberland Arms and Fleece fell out of use by carriers after arrival of the railway. They were closest to the station and maybe looking to attract a different type of clientele.

Number of carriers visiting Alnwick Weekly

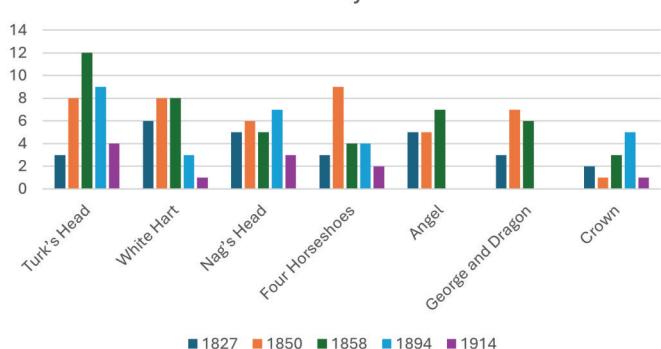


Once the railway arrived in 1850 the work of long-distance carriers declined rapidly. However, the impact on Country Carriers was very different. If anything, their workload seems to have increased after Alnwick Station opened. However, by the time the Cornhill Branch opened in 1887 the number of Village Carriers around Alnwick had started to decline. Nevertheless, after seven years of being connected by rail, Edlingham, Whittingham, Glanton, Powburn and their surrounding settlements were still being serviced by Country Carriers who visited Alnwick once a week. The carriers must have been meeting a need that the railway was unable to satisfy. They continued to play a part in the rural economy into the 20th century. At the start of the first world war, eighteen were still visiting Alnwick on a weekly basis. Some of the village carriers recorded in 1914 were the same names that had appeared 20 years earlier in the 1894 directory. It must have been hard for them to adapt as motor vehicles started to dominate rural transport between the wars. By 1949 Country Life remarked on how quickly the Country Carrier had disappeared and by 1956 the same magazine was hoping they might be revived (see opposite).

Over the last three years we have seen the volume of traffic in Northumberland increase by 26% and we hear frequent complaints about the condition of our roads. Concerns about environmental impact, the cost of living, and national security have all emerged as reasons to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. The decline in public transport is cited as a factor in the increasing isolation of rural communities, loneliness and associated concerns over mental well-being.

Are we relying too heavily on the internet for social interaction? And on Amazon, DPD, Evri (and others) for delivery? Or is it time to take a fresh look at how the network of Country Carriers used to work, and the benefits that used to flow?

Inns used by carriers



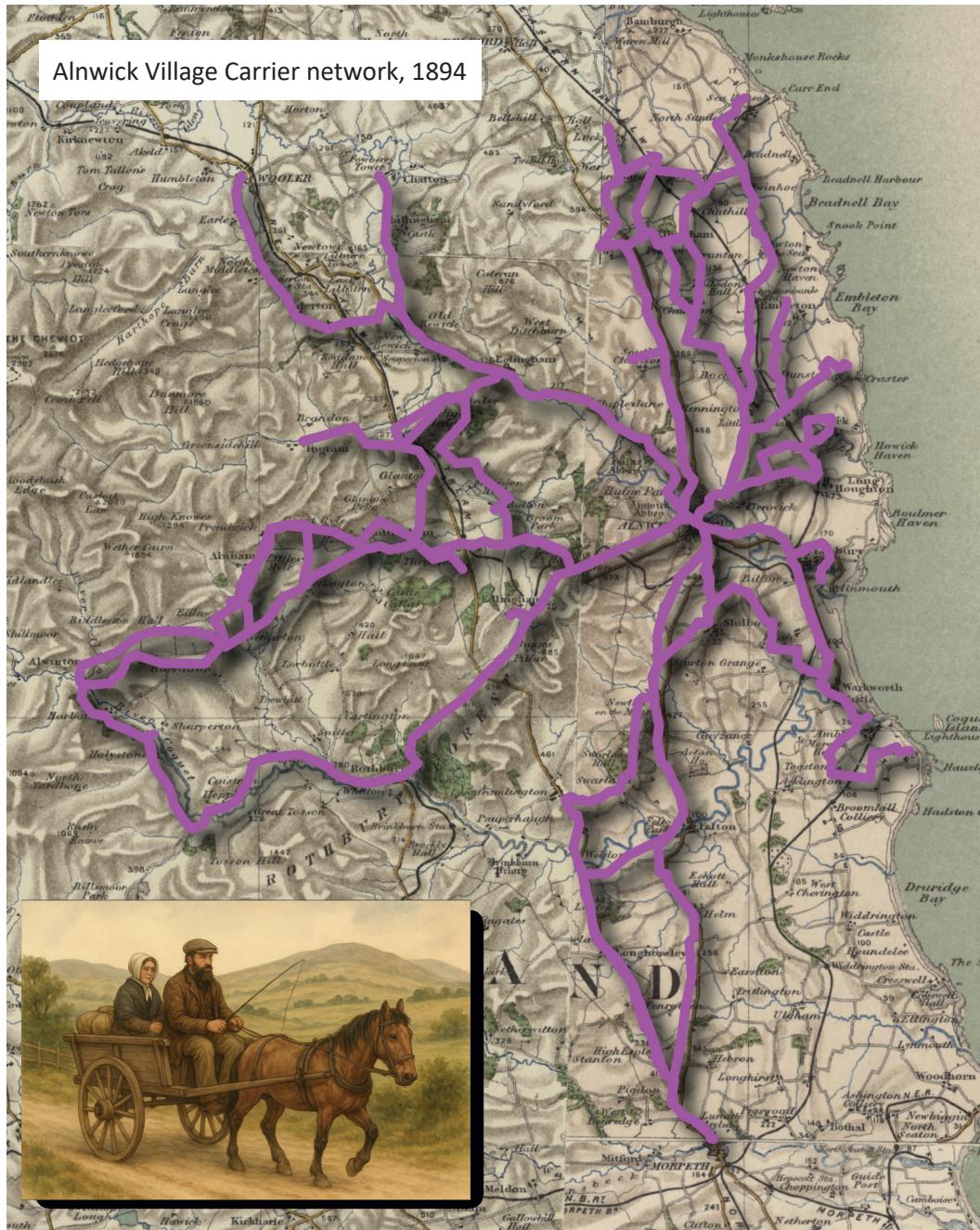
...Country Carriers, continued

A personage in the land

For folks who live in the world, it is difficult to realise the importance of the functions performed by the village carrier for those who live out of it. He is, in fact, for them virtually the only link between the world and them-selves. Incidentally he takes their butter and eggs and things to the nearest big town, and brings them back all that cannot be had at the village store in exchange for them. But, much more than that, he is the medium through which all the local gossip is communicated. He knows more of what is going on in the country-side than any other three men - or even women. He is a sort of Ulysses in his knowledge of men and things, and only needs his Homer to make him famous, to do him justice. He has the right word and generally the right counsel for every heart - of the young man and maiden, of the old crone and gaffer. Moving as he does among folks of all ages and conditions,

he is gifted with perpetual youth and perpetual age. He is of the same age as him with whom he talks, whosoever it may be, and of the same social station, equally at his ease with the squire or the squire's lady as with the village folk. In a consummate sense he is a man of the world. And he moves about in this world of his with sufficient sense of his own importance. He knows that his coming means a deal to all who hear, and by long practice readily recognise, the wheels of his approaching car and the footfall of his horse, that is only a little less wise than himself. He knows that hearts beat the quicker for his coming, and knows that he is a person of wider experience than those amongst whom he comes. Perhaps the time of his practical abolition, together with other good old survivals of the days before steam was a motor, is at hand; but in the meantime he remains *A PERSONAGE IN THE LAND.*

Country Life, August 1899.



The village carrier once played his regular part in every rural community and life in the country has often been the poorer without him and that not only on traditional and romantic grounds, But on eminently practical ones. It is not easy to get from point to point in many country districts. More and more local railway lines have ceased to function and buses are often filled up at their starting points and have no room for passengers at intervening villages. So suggestions are to be made to the Minister of Transport whereby an alteration of the law should allow for the revival of the village carrier in districts that so palpably need him. There are many purposes in the country for which people need transport. Markets are the most obvious ones, but there are also the less strictly businesslike such as races or football matches. It is hoped to encourage people in a village who habitually attend such doings to run a vehicle which shall secure their own purposes and at the same time be available for their neighbours. Such a vehicle would be a valuable connecting link between points whence bus services are available. Here is a scheme for which there is much to be said.

Country Life, 2 Feb 1956

Benches in the market place

Until 1998 Alnwick market place was a sea of tarmac used as a car park. It was transformed by an award-winning environmental improvement scheme undertaken by the Alnwick Conservation Area Partnership.

The project involved resurfacing of the square and the approaches with stone setts and yorkstone paving; new benches; increased space for outdoor café seating; some new shopfronts; installation of an information panel; restoring the railings on Northumberland Hall and repair of the market cross. The design of the paving highlights the Freeman's Way, which runs diagonally across the square.

At the time, the loss of car parking was controversial in the town, but the

scheme gained national recognition in 2001 with a Civic Trust Award. The judges described it as: “*the regeneration scheme that has most strengthened the town's role as a service centre while respecting and enhancing its character. This beautifully designed and thoughtful improvement scheme was the result of a successful partnership between many local organizations*”.

More benches have since been added. Each uses different materials and each design is based around a different theme. They were all designed and built by local blacksmith and artist, Stephen Lunn. Alnwick schools contributed to the designs, which were initially inspired by stories drawn from local history by Adrian Ions.

Other works by Stephen Lunn in Alnwick include the arch linking the established Alnwick Cemetery with the newly consecrated area; a musical gate at Alnwick Garden that incorporates stained glass flowers and birds that sing when someone walks by; and the gates and a steel tree at the Percy Burial Ground in Hulne Park.

See: <http://anvilman.co.uk/> for more on Stephen's work.

The Conservation Area Partnership Scheme was initiated by English Heritage to support heritage-led regeneration in different locations. For an assessment of the more recent High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme see page 2.

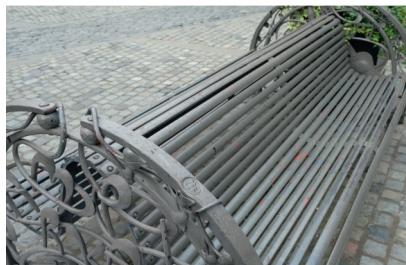


Market place of the present: with seating that is reminiscent of a market stall and a frame decorated with market produce. Dating from 1998 and based on designs by the Duke's Middle School.

Market place of the past: Two Bull-rings represent the bull-baiting that used to take place in the market place. The seat is in the form of a water trough for animals. Dating from 1998, and based on designs by Lindisfarne Middle School.



Market place of the future: a place of relaxation and pleasure, indicated by a glass of wine and a guitar. Dating from 1998 and based on designs by Thomas Percy Middle School.



Different schools were involved when the newest bench was commissioned by Alnwick Town Council to mark the end of World War I. It was installed in 2024, and the design incorporates poppies as a symbol of remembrance and doves as a symbol of peace.



Malcolm Canmore, or Malcolm III of Scotland was killed in 1093 while besieging Alnwick Castle. An English soldier brought the castle keys to the Scottish camp on the end of a spear. When Malcolm reached for the keys he was stabbed in the eye. In the confusion the soldier escaped. Can you find the spear, the keys, the castle, and the soldier escaping? From 2005, based on designs by the Duchess's Community High School.



Dragon Boat. Shortly before it closed St Oswald's School chose to theme this bench around the life of St Cuthbert. It incorporates his cross and the characters Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the greek alphabet) to symbolise a beginning and an end. Underneath is an inscription in braille. The bench dates from 2005.



News in Brief

Britain is often described as one of the most centralised countries in the western world, with too many decisions taken far away from the people affected. 84% of UK adults say they have 'not much or no' say over key decisions affecting their local community.

The *We're Right Here* campaign advocates fostering community power through the English Devolution Bill. It highlights the need for meaningful community involvement in decision-making and proposes a Community Right to Shape Public Services, alongside new Community Covenants, to strengthen local governance and enhance public service outcomes.

There's more about the campaign in an article from the Local Government Information Unit. Here:

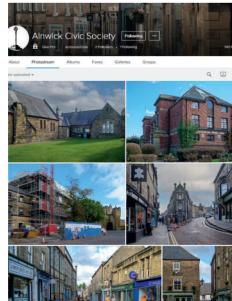
<https://tinyurl.com/26tka867>

Historic England has launched a new Local Heritage Hub. According to polling carried out for them by Savanta, 71% of people want to see more recognition of heritage in their area and 58% agree that local heritage enhances their daily lives. So they hope that people will use this hub to explore hidden histories, reconnect with their surroundings, and feel a sense of pride in their local area. It offers a range of content, including aerial photographs, selected listed buildings, videos, blogs, and podcasts. We are invited to discover our local area and see familiar places in unfamiliar ways. The promise is that the new service will continue to expand with new places, information, and sections added over time, "*inspiring conversations, unlocking memories, and sparking new interests*". However, if every community the size of Alnwick had just one page the hub would need over 7,000 pages. So far there are 400. So there's some way to go. Northumberland is here: <https://tinyurl.com/499z6u4n>

We congratulate all who were recognised in the Mayor's Civic Awards this year. But we particularly appreciate the way that those who contributed to the work of the Civic Society were highlighted. Sue Smith's planning background and local knowledge have helped to give the community a voice in the planning system: shaping responses to planning consultations, development proposals and the refresh of the Neighbourhood Plan. Gill Parker has made a

lasting impact on the town, and her determination to protect the character of Column Field continues to reflect the spirit of Alnwick. Richard and Jackie Stent spearheaded the Camera Club's *'Alnwick Through The Lens'* exhibition which produced a lasting snapshot of the town in 2024 that future generations will be able to access.

The "Alnwick through the lens" exhibition by Alnwick and District Camera Club is now closed. However, the full set of more than 700 images is preserved for posterity by Northumberland Archives, and can also be seen online:



<https://tinyurl.com/3bk5h8by>

Northumberland County Council figures on the economic impact of tourism show that Northumberland's visitor economy was worth £1.443 billion in 2024. That's a 9% increase on 2023 and a 3.2% rise compared to the previous record in 2019 (inflation adjusted). The number of overnight visitors increased slightly, but they are tending to stay for longer. With the result that they spent 7,874 million days in Northumberland: an increase of 2.8%.

Meanwhile, the number of day visitors grew by 4.1% to reach 8,601 million. Food and drink represents 45.9% of the total economic impact, or around £662 million. Direct employment stands at 11,594 Full-time-equivalents, of which 5,018 is in Food and Drink.

The Red List of Endangered Crafts was first published in 2017 and has recently been updated for 2025. The list ranks 285 traditional crafts by the likelihood they will survive to the next generation. Each craft is assigned to one of four categories using a combination of objective and subjective criteria. No craft has become extinct since 2023, but the number that are critically endangered is up from 62 to 72 and the number endangered is up from 84 to 93. The full report can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/4t7fy85m>

Northumberland County Council want to ensure that residents and visitors can

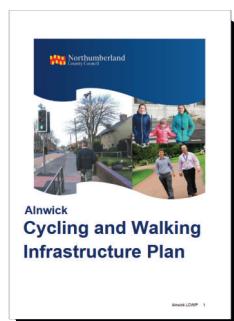


enjoy walking and cycling, whether for commuting, the journey to school or for leisure. So do we. Encouraging active forms of transport will benefit the local environment, improve the streetscape, reduce congestion, reduce carbon emissions, improve local air quality and enable residents to enjoy a more active lifestyle.

Local Cycling and Walking

Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements. They are no short-term fix, but they should help ensure that we are well-placed to make the case for investment in future. All of the Northumberland LCWIPs follow the approach recommended by the Department for transport.

The Alnwick Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan explains the analysis for Alnwick, proposes a network of walking and cycling routes and a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for investment in future. It has been a long time coming, but has now been adopted by the Council.



See: <https://tinyurl.com/pdv6kc5f>

Congratulations to Beamish Museum on winning the prestigious Art Fund museum of the year award, worth £120,000. Judges described Beamish as a "*joyous, immersive and unique place shaped by the stories and experiences of its community*". But they failed to mention the origin of the Beamish Goods Shed!

The world's first public railway, the Stockton and Darlington, opened on 27th September 1825. Railway 200 is a year-long, nationwide campaign to celebrate 200 years of the modern railway. See <https://railway200.co.uk/> for events across our region.

Should Civic Societies be Statutory Consultees in the planning system?

A recent survey by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) found that most planners feel the public holds deep-rooted misconceptions about planning and planners: fewer than 14% of planners believe the public understands the purpose of planning; 85% feel the public views planning as a hindrance rather than a benefit; six in ten believe the public neither knows when nor how to engage with planning.

A lack of public understanding undermines trust in planning decisions and weakens confidence in the system. This is especially damaging at the local level, where public involvement is essential to achieving fair and effective planning outcomes.

The government wants to speed up the planning process and avoid delays to house building. Their proposed reforms will reduce the role of some Statutory Consultees* and re-ignited a question that is often been debated in the Civic Movement.

Arguments for:

1. Local expertise

Knowledge and understanding of the community helps ensure that decisions reflect local needs & values.



2. Transparency and accountability

Formalising community involvement should make the system more open and counter the perception is that planning decisions are imposed on local people.

3. Improved outcomes

Bodies advocating for sustainability, conservation and high standards should lead to better quality of decisions and developments that are more sensitive to local character.

4. Democratic engagement

Statutory status would encourage wider public participation in planning and in civic activity.

5. Consistency

Formalising the role of community bodies would drive them to adopt clear processes, and lead to more consistent responses.

6. More balanced decisions

Raising the status of community bodies would act as a counterbalance in a system that is often seen as favouring developers.

Where have all the children gone?

Recent estimates by the Office of National Statistics suggest the population of Alnwick has changed little in the last ten years (it grew by just 1%).

But changes for different age groups are more noticeable. In the last ten years the number of residents of working age has fallen by 7%. The number of school age is down by 10%. However, the number of residents aged 65 and over has increased by 35% (and almost 50% for those aged between 65 and 75).

Meanwhile, the number of children below school age has fallen by 35%. It's a similar picture across North Northumberland. The decline among those aged under five has not fallen as steeply as it has within Alnwick, but that age group already represented a smaller proportion of the population.

Should we be encouraging young people to stay in Alnwick? If these trends continue for another ten years then the response is likely to be: "what young people?"

Should Civic Societies (and similar community bodies) be treated as Statutory Consultees in the planning system?

Anyone is entitled to comment on a planning application, including community bodies like Civic Societies. We reviewed 178 planning applications last year and responded on 25. But we are not a Statutory Consultee. The Town Council is. Others include National Highways, Historic England, Natural England, the Environment Agency and Northumberland Water.

Below is a summary of some of the arguments.

What do you think?

* The full list of Statutory Consultees is too long to include here, but can be found online: <https://tinyurl.com/svpv2xph>.

Arguments against:

1. Lack of Democratic Legitimacy

Unelected bodies represent the views of a narrow segment of the community, not the broader population.



2. Bureaucratic burden

Further consultation would overwhelm planning authorities, slow the process, add complexity and delay.

3. Lack of capacity

Voluntary groups lack resources and expertise. They cannot be expected take on responsibility for scrutinizing every planning application.

4. Potential for NIMBYism

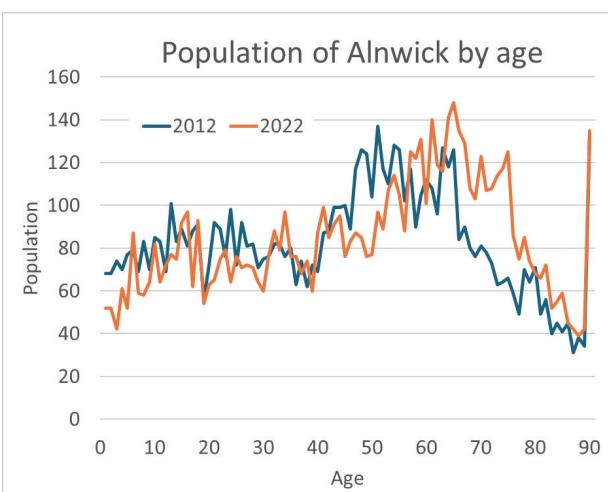
Community bodies tend to oppose change, and try to preserve the status quo rather than addressing urgent needs like a shortage of housing.

5. Lack of consistency

Community bodies vary in size, skill, and professionalism. Local variations will lead to uneven influence and bias in planning outcomes.

6. Opportunities already exist

Communities already have a right to comment. There is no need to elevate their status or duplicate the work of others.



Summer outing to Felton

On our summer outing this year it was a privilege to be shown round the Felton Park Greenhouse and the Parish Church of St Michael and all Angels by Tim Maxwell and Eleanor George.

The greenhouse and potting shed at Felton Park is set within a walled garden of 1774 and dates from about 1830. It is one of the earliest surviving buildings to use slender, curved wrought iron glazing bars and fish scale glass. At the time this was a highly innovative design that followed theories on the optimum design of horticultural structures by John Claudius Loudon, the great garden designer and “hothouse” expert.

The Parish church of St Michael and all Angels has been described by Pevsner as “*a happy puzzle for the antiquarian and an impressive, if a little incongruous, sight for the layman*”. Peter Ryder rates it as “*one of the most interesting examples of the development of a medieval church in the county*”.

Some fascinating stories of former residents left us wanting to return and learn more from Eleanor's booklets of walks around Felton and Thirston.

We are most grateful to Tim and Eleanor for their hospitality, and for helping us to appreciate two remarkable buildings.



Thanks also to Trish Jones for organising a most enjoyable and informative afternoon.

The role of Alnwick's heritage in national policy

On 12th September David Smith will join us to talk about his first year as our MP. Part of the Civic Society's charitable purpose is to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic interest in Alnwick. It seems timely to consider whether that purpose is aligned with the national agenda.

We can draw on thinking from The Heritage Alliance, and research commissioned by Historic England from the Centre for Economics and Business Research (and others) to focus on three of the government's missions.

Economic growth

The direct contribution of the heritage sector is estimated at 0.8% of the economy and 0.72% of the workforce. Roughly half of that is in construction, around one fifth in related services (like libraries, archives, and museums). The remainder comes from supporting services (architecture, public administration, membership organisations, education, etc.). For every £1 directly generated by heritage, there is also a contribution of £0.96 through supply chains (the indirect impact), and another £0.97 induced through wider spending. Add that together and heritage contributes £44.9 billion of GDP in England.

This is not currently a high growth sector. Heritage is distributed across the country, but the economic impact and employment are both heavily weighted towards London. The North-east is under-performing. Does that mean there's opportunity for more growth in our region?

These figures do not include heritage-led tourism, which has rebounded strongly since the pandemic. Tourism in Northumberland experienced a record year in 2024, with almost 10.5 million visitors bringing £1.443 billion of spend into the county.

Advancing to Net Zero

The most sustainable building is one that already exists but buildings must evolve if they are going to remain fit for purpose. Repurposing a historic building uses just 8% of the carbon required by new construction.

Re-use of heritage is critical to achieving our climate goals. 20% of Alnwick's housing dates from before 1919, and two-thirds of that is in the lowest council-tax bands. We have a shortage of affordable homes, a northern climate, and a highly-skilled local

work force. Energy efficiency retrofit is an area, surely, where Alnwick should be showing leadership.

Removing barriers to opportunity

If we scale estimates of the national heritage workforce to the size of Alnwick we would expect to find about 75 people working on heritage in trades such as stonemasonry, carpentry, plastering, and roofing. We should find a couple of dozen working in heritage management and curation. Each year of energy efficiency retrofit across Alnwick will require a couple of dozen specialists. We can only speculate about the potential demand for emerging skills in cutting-edge technologies such as 3D scanning, Building Information Modelling, and digital archiving.

Looking more widely, heritage brings further potential opportunity. We already see film and TV drawing inspiration from our familiar surroundings. Alnwick's historic venues host a variety of different concerts and festivals.

Furthermore, there are sound economic reasons why creative industries tend to concentrate in areas with a high density of built and natural heritage. Recent analysis has found that links between culture, heritage and creativity have a positive impact on the wider economy. Innovation flourishes in areas like ours.

We also know that heritage helps to strengthen the bonds between people, their local community and the wider world. There is a growing body of evidence that heritage contributes to health and well-being. By attracting global visitors, Alnwick is even contributing to national security by helping to project a positive image of Britain and bolstering our soft power.

Are we pulling our weight?

Consider the contribution that Alnwick's built heritage could make: to climate action, economic prosperity; career opportunities around heritage conservation, management, curation, heritage tourism, visitor engagement, event management, creative industries, community engagement, health and well-being...

Can we claim to be pulling our weight?

Are we even scratching the surface of what's possible?

See: <https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/> and <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/>

Planning Matters

Amended plans address a number of issues at 11 Marketplace (the flat above Melvyn's). It is good to see issues with this important listed building being addressed but we decided that no comment was required. The approach looks thorough and professional, and any effects on external appearance have been minimised. The application has been approved.



Plans have been submitted for installation of plant and extract equipment alongside minor external alterations at 20 Bondgate Within (formerly Barclays Bank). This is to enable conversion to a Loungers café / bar and restaurant.

This building incorporates an early C18th house. The extended front was added in 1883 for Messrs Woods and Company, a Newcastle bank, founded in 1859. They had opened the Alnwick branch in 1875. When they amalgamated with Barclays in August 1897 Woods became the Newcastle Regional Office for Barclays, and Barclays gained a presence in Alnwick.

So, although it is not listed, this is a historically significant building at a prominent location in the Alnwick Conservation Area. Visual amenity therefore needs to be considered alongside control of odour and noise. A 1.5m high fence is proposed to enclose the external ventilation elements on the roof and screen visual appearance. We did not object, but commented that consideration should be given to whether this is the best option.

The application has been approved with conditions added requiring that the design and materials of the proposed window and screening fence are specified and approved by the Local Planning Authority before installation.

Last October NCC refused listed building consent for the new shopfront at 19a

Clayport (Leo's, next to the Laundrette). The applicant appealed and the inspector's reasons for dismissing the appeal have now been published. In summary the inspector concluded that: *The works do not preserve the Grade II listed building or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses; nor do they preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Alnwick Conservation Area. As such, they harm the significance of these designated heritage assets, and this is not outweighed by the public benefits of the works. Consequently, there is conflict with the statutory presumptions set out in sections 16(2) and 72(1) of the Act; and the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance the historic environment. There is also conflict with: Policies ENV 1, ENV 7 and ENV 9 of the Northumberland Local Plan; Policies HD5 and HD7 of the Alnwick & Denwick Neighbourhood Plan; and guidance in the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide. This is in so far as these policies and guidance seek that the character and/or significance of Northumberland's distinctive and valued natural, historic and built environments, will be conserved, protected and enhanced; that the significance, quality and integrity of Northumberland's heritage assets and their settings will be conserved and enhanced; that the local distinctiveness of conservation areas will be enhanced and reinforced; and that new development within the historic centre of Alnwick conforms to specific design principles, including those for shopfronts and its individual components which form the finished design.*

At the Black Swan the town council asked Conservation Officers to comment on a retrospective application for new "Hairy Lemon" signage. Conservation Officers concluded that the signage harms the significance of the listed building, and detracts from the character and appearance of this part of Alnwick Conservation Area. As the signage is attached to a listed building, an application for Listed Building Consent was also required. That has since been raised, and received a similar response. We agreed, but as we had nothing to add we decided not to submit an objection.

The Built Heritage and Design team also assessed proposals for new signage and colour scheme at the Queen's Head in relation to the significance of the listed building and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. They

concluded that the proposals conserve the significance of the listed building. In relation to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area they considered the colour scheme but not the materials used. We did not object, but commented to draw attention to the relevant sections of the Alnwick Shopfront Design Guide. That reads "Vinyls are unlikely to be allowed on any listed building" "Vinyls on non-listed buildings could require consent and are usually not appropriate in the Conservation Area" and "A painted timber fascia is normally the most appropriate solution for historic buildings in the Conservation Area, with letters either painted or applied individually in timber or metal". The application has since been approved.



We objected to an application to replace sash windows at 24 Upper Howick Street. It is important that owners are encouraged to invest in improving the energy efficiency of Alnwick's built heritage. If it can be shown that these historic windows are beyond repair then this application is an opportunity to set an important example to neighbours in the Howick Street area, and we would encourage the authorities to support like-for-like replacement. However, the application does not demonstrate that the windows are beyond repair, and to approve without clear evidence would set a damaging precedent.

It has been obvious for some time that the A1068 / Shilbottle Road junction at the A1 was operating beyond capacity. We have often raised concerns about the cumulative effect on traffic volumes as additional developments were approved on Lionheart Enterprise park and Cawledge Business Park. So we now welcome the junction improvements that Northumberland County Council is putting in place.

Quiz: Railing against the past

“Railing against the past will not heal us. History has happened. It’s over and done with. All we can do is to change its course by encouraging what we love instead of destroying what we don’t.”

Arundhati Roy

Suzanna Arundhati Roy is an Indian author best known for her novel *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997. She is also a political activist involved in human rights and environmental causes.

At some other time we can discuss whether or not we agree with the sentiment of this quotation. The immediate question is how many of our readers recognise the railings and the background in each of these images. All can be found in the Alnwick Conservation Area. The answers are on the back page.



For your diary

12th September: "My first year as your MP", with David Smith MP, St James's Church. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. for a 7:30 start.



12th - 21st September: Heritage Open Days (see page 3).

28th October: M. R. G. Conzen's study of Alnwick: the lasting legacy. With Dr Michael Barke. This is a joint meeting with Alnwick & District Local History Society. It will be held at Alnwick Cricket Club, on Weavers Way (NE66 1BX) starting at 7:30 p.m.

November: Any Questions - a civilised discussion of topical local issues. Watch for details.

And more

ADNP consultation

The refresh of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan is ready for the next public consultation. Make sure that you have your say.

Book talks at Alnwick Castle

For details see <https://www.alnwickcastle.com/whats-on>

29th August: art critic and arts TV presenter Andrew Graham-Dixon comes to Alnwick Castle with his lecture 'Who Killed Caravaggio?' based on years of research into this intriguing Renaissance murder mystery.



ALNWICK
CASTLE

23rd September: historian and broadcaster Tracy Borman returns to Alnwick Castle to speak about The Stolen Crown: Treachery, Deceit and the Death of the Tudor Dynasty. The book explores the secret truth behind the end of the Tudor period.

8th October: Royal expert and TV historian Kate Williams speaks about her latest book, The Royal Palaces, revealing the history of palaces past and present – from the medieval Tower of London to the Victorian Buckingham Palace.

Newcastle City Guides

Did you know that Newcastle City Guides don't just guide walks in Newcastle? The programme this year includes walks in North Shields and Seaton Sluice.

See <https://tinyurl.com/mrxk2teu>

HospiceCare North Northumberland Open Gardens

For details see <https://tinyurl.com/3jknzmk6>



2nd August: The Friary Alnmouth (1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

14th September: Adderstone House Belford (11:00a.m. - 4:00 p.m.)

5th October: Blagdon Hall (1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.)

Woodhorn Museum

A new gallery dedicated to the photographer Mik Critchlow is now open. More than 100 images from the "Coal Town" collection chronicle the town and people of Ashington.

About Alnwick Civic Society

Alnwick Civic Society was formed in 1974, following the defeat of proposals to re-develop the town centre with a modern shopping area and amid growing concerns about the future of our town. Since then we have sought to influence developments, especially in the town centre and conservation area, to ensure that proposals protect and enhance our heritage.

The Society pursues its objectives through a variety of activities. We provide a voice for members through dialogue with planning and conservation professionals and like-minded organisations. We offer advice, scrutinise and comment on development proposals; recognise excellence; and organise public meetings. Members were heavily involved in development of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan, and we work with local partners to influence policy at a county level. We seek to influence national policy by co-operating with other bodies in the civic movement, and the Society was a founding member of Civic Voice.

All who share our aims can support the work of the society: by joining as an individual, family, student, or business member; by participating in activities, sharing ideas, raising areas of concern and pointing out examples of good practice. Or simply by demonstrating pride in our town, and spreading the word about the value of our work.



Who's Who?

President: Peter Ennor

Trustees: Chair: Peter Reed; Membership: Gill Parker; Honorary Secretary: Sue Smith; Treasurer: Tim Smith.

Web: www.alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Email: contact@alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk

Bluesky: [@alnwickcivicsoc.bsky.social](https://alnwickcivicsoc.bsky.social)

Twitter: [@AlnwickCivicSoc](https://twitter.com/AlnwickCivicSoc)

Facebook: [AlnwickCivicSociety](https://www.facebook.com/AlnwickCivicSociety)

Instagram: [@alnwickcivicsociety](https://www.instagram.com/alnwickcivicsociety)

Substack: alnwickcivicsociety.substack.com

Charity registration number: 1197235

Heritage at risk: report your concerns here:

<https://alnwickcivicsociety.org.uk/heritage-at-risk/>

Quiz Answers

- A) View along Bondgate Within from inside the Fish Market on Northumberland Hall
- B) The railings at the front of Narrowgate House, a.k.a. General Lambert's House on Narrowgate
- C) Bailiffgate Museum railings, on Bailiffgate
- D) Barter Books, viewed from the approach
- E) Marketplace seen from the Town Hall steps
- F) Alnwick Castle from the point where the Peth meets Bailiffgate
- G) Bondgate Without and the railings around the Percy Tenantry Column viewed from Column Field

