**Heritage Statement for the Improvement to Woodland adjacent to St George's Church, Front Street, East Boldon**

This statement is prepared on behalf of the Joint Benefice Council of the Boldons for their proposed development to improve the woodland adjacent to St George's Church, Front Street, East Boldon.

The Site

The site is 0.24 ha in size comprising of woodland in the ownership of the Council. There are 40 trees on site comprising of 21 mature and 15 semi -mature trees. Part of the site has undergrowth of brambles, snowberries and other bushes. There are some spring daffodils and a large amount of summer season cow parsley. A rookery is present in some of the mature trees.

The site has been fenced off with wood palin to the front and side, some of which blew down in the 2021 winter's gales. The western boundary adjoins the driveway to the church and the southern boundary has a vehicle access gate for maintenance.

The site lies immediately to the north of the church and provides a visual and physical barrier to viewing the church from Front Street.

Description of the Proposal

The proposal involves the construction of boardwalk pathways throughout the site to allow access by wheelchairs and prams/ buggies with two access points on to the footway adjoining Front Street. The fence line would be brought back from the edge of the footway by 1 foot. There would also be access from the path to the church driveway. All access points would have barriers to prevent access on to the highway or driveway. Bench seating would be provided in two locations. New low level planting areas are proposed with plants suitable for under tree canopy growth.

Site History

The East Boldon Conservation Area Character Appraisal published in 2006 shows the history of the site in map form.

In 1876 the map shows an "old quarry" along the western boundary of the site. This remained the same in 1898 with the school shown on the adjoining land.

In 1919, the application site is shown as open space with tree planting with the land to the south as a field. In 1922 the church was built on this land to the south of the application site.

The East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan, Community Character Statement, 2019 shows a map of 1939 with the application site with its current boundary but extending further east with a small field entrance dividing it from the woodland surrounding the war memorial. The map denotes woodland on the application site.

The map of 1959 shows the development of the Gordon Drive housing immediately to the east of the

application site and the present day boundary is established.

St George's Church

The East Boldon Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the church as follows:

"St George's Church is typical of red-brick churches of the 1920s and 30s, adopting a simple, plain Romanesque style with a square bell tower in the style of a campanile. Its buttresses, roundheaded windows, clerestory windows, large circular window are attractive features whilst the later classical porch extension has mock-Georgian timber windows. The church site is set back from the street behind a thick verge of trees, shrubs and a picket fence, retaining some sense of a former field boundary."

East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan Community Character Statement adds:

"A larger adjoining extension in basilican classical style was added in 1934. The original building then acted as the Lady Chapel "

In 1986 part of the building was converted to a nursery and ancillary accommodation.

In 2011, the Council adopted the Locally Significant Heritage Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).It sets out objectives for the protection and enhancement of locally heritage assets.

The document describes East Boldon as follows:

East Boldon also retains its historic core, and has seen mainly gradual, organic change with a diverse mix of architectural styles stretching from the 17th century to the present day. Until the middle of the 19th century, East Boldon remained small and rural. Early buildings were in rubble or course squared local magnesian limestone. Substantial change began with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the region and a catalytic development was the construction of Brandling Junction Railway between Newcastle and Sunderland, one of the first ever passenger railways. Consequently the village was used as a commuter settlement, with Victorian and Edwardian buildings introducing warm red brick throughout the village. Whilst there has continued to be much development here in the last few decades, the village has held on to its traditional character and appeal.

St George's Church was included as number 22 for Character Area 3 – The Boldons on the Local List in this document.

Trees in the Conservation Area

There are 40 trees on the application site comprising of 21 mature and 15 semi-mature trees. These trees are protected as they are within the Conservation Area and are within the ownership and control of the Council. None of the trees are subject to a Tree Preservation Order; however there is a TPO in the garden of Number 8 Gordon Drive.

The East Boldon Conservation Area Management Plan was adopted in 2009 proposed a detailed condition survey of existing trees and hedgerows and outlined a management plan to ensure continued

tree coverage.

A full survey of all trees on the application site was undertaken for the Council in 2018, which indicated at that time no trees needed to be removed. The maturity of the woodland provides an important setting to St George's Church.

Policy Context

Development within East Boldon Conservation Area is subject to current Development Plan Core Strategy policies EA 1 and EA 4 and Development Management policy DM6.

East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan Policy EB 4: Heritage Assets requires that where a development may impact on a heritage asset that applicants should provide information including any contribution made by their setting.

It goes on to state that development within or affecting the setting of the East Boldon Conservation Area will be supported where it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Conservation area and its setting.

One of the key considerations of the Policy EB4 is "Maintaining the spacious character of the area by protecting open space, including gardens and trees from unsympathetic development."

The proposals by the Joint Benefice of the Boldons subject to this application would provide an area of open space for users of the church building and residents of the village and visitors. They would also provide pedestrian access to the church and the Little Acorns Nursery.

East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan also allocates the application site as Local Green Space under Policy EB16. A Local Green Space and protected Open Space Background Paper was prepared which shows the reason why the site is of particular importance to the local Community.

Conclusion

The proposals by the Joint Benefice of the Boldons will create an area of public open space at the centre of East Boldon Conservation Area. It will enhance the setting of St George's Church and improve access to the building.

The proposals meet the requirements of the heritage policies in the current Development Plan and East Boldon Neighbourhood Plan.