

Oldmeldrum



Conservation Area Appraisal



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
Location	4
Definition of a Conservation Area	4
What Does Conservation Area Status Mean?	4
Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal	5
Designation	5
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT	6
Maps	7
TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL	8
Topography	8
Gateways	8
Conservation Area Boundaries and Edges	10
Street Pattern	10
Plot Pattern	10
Open Space	10
Traffic and Movement	12
Views	12
Activities/Uses	12
Architectural Character	12
Building Materials	12
Condition	13
Townscape Detail	13
Landscape and Trees	13
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT	14
Introduction	14
Key Features	14
Key Challenges	14
Positive Buildings and Areas	14
Negative Buildings and Areas	14
BOUNDARY	16
PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT	18
Introduction	18
Opportunities for Preservation and Enhancement	18
ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL PLAN	19
Supplementary Guidance	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES	19



INTRODUCTION

Location

The settlement of Oldmeldrum stands on the side of a hill facing south and west over the Garioch to Bennachie approximately 17 miles north east of the city of Aberdeen.

Definition of a Conservation Area

Conservation Areas were first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 provides the current legislative framework for the designation of conservation areas.

A conservation area is defined as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

All planning authorities are required by the Act to determine which parts of their area merit conservation area status and Aberdeenshire currently has 36 conservation areas varying in character from the centre of Peterhead to the small coastal settlement of Pennan.

What does Conservation Area status mean?

In a conservation area it is not only the buildings but also the spaces between them that are of architectural or historical interest. Planning control is therefore directed at maintaining the integrity of the entire area and enhancing its special character. Conservation Area status does not mean that new development is unacceptable, but care must be taken to ensure that the new development will not damage the appearance or character of the area.

Under current legislation, conservation area designation automatically brings the following works under planning control:

- Demolition of buildings
- Removal of, or work to, trees
- Development involving small house extensions, roof alterations, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior, provision of hard surfaces and
- Additional control over satellite dishes.

Where a development would, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, affect the character or appearance of a conservation area, the application for planning permission will be advertised in the local press providing an opportunity for public comment. Views expressed are taken into account by the local planning authority when making a decision on the application.

In order to protect the conservation areas, designation requires the local authority to formulate and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement.

Local residents and property owners also have a major role to play in protecting and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area by ensuring that their properties are regularly maintained and original features retained.

Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal

Conservation area designation should be regarded as the first positive step towards an area's protection and enhancement.

Planning authorities and the Scottish Executive are required by Law to protect conservation areas from development, which would be detrimental to their character. It is necessary therefore for planning authorities, residents and property owners to be aware of the key features, which together create the area's special character and appearance.

The purpose of this conservation area appraisal is to define what is important about its character and appearance and to identify its important characteristics. It is also a vital tool to enable the active management of the Oldmeldrum Conservation Area. It identifies the area's special features and changing needs through a process which includes researching its historical development, carrying out a detailed townscape analysis and preparing a character assessment.

This information informs consideration of conservation area boundaries as well as providing a context for the assessment of development proposals within the area. It identifies opportunities and priorities for enhancement and sets out the policy framework for the determination of development proposals. This appraisal should be regarded as supplementary guidance to the policies set out in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan.

It is recognised that the successful management of conservation areas can only be achieved with the support and input from all stakeholders, and in particular local residents and property owners. Comments and suggestions received at the draft appraisal stage will therefore be reviewed and incorporated into the final document following consultation with all interested parties.

Designation

The Oldmeldrum Conservation Area was designated by Gordon District Council on 15th June 1976 in order to obtain greater control over the buildings, open spaces, trees, historic street pattern and other features which contribute to the special character of settlement.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

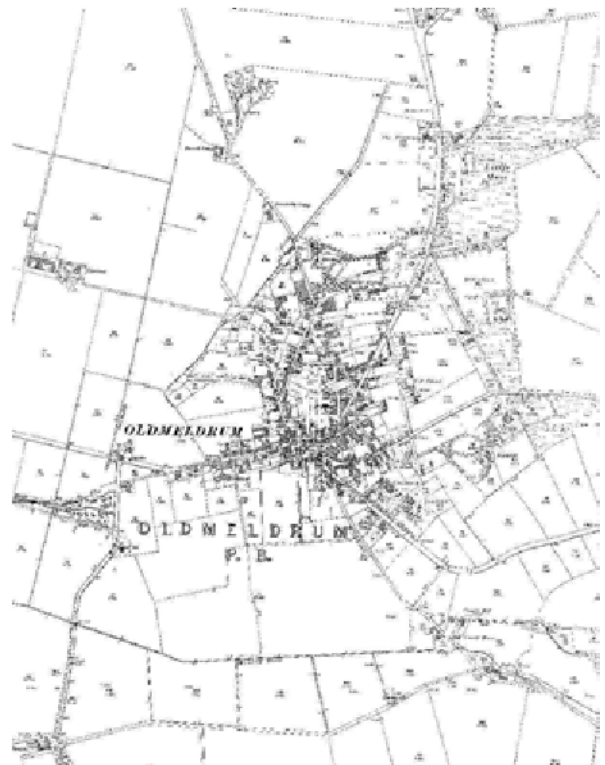
History

Oldmeldrum was once the dominant settlement of the Garioch with sixteen merchants operating out of the settlement in the late 17th Century in comparison with the four based in Inverurie and the two single traders respectively working out of Kintore and Inch. It received its charter as a burgh of barony in 1672 but historic records would appear to suggest that it had been reputedly operating since at least 1634. At this time, visitors to the town entered either from the south by Mill Road or from the north along the Cowgate.

The nucleus of the 18th century town is still visible in the network of lanes and streets emerging onto the Market Square. Indeed, the latter was considerably larger at this time with the original town house and the row of properties that now stand between the Square and Baker Street not constructed until the early 19th Century. It was only with the construction of the canal to Aberdeen and the toll roads did Inverurie supersede Oldmeldrum which was later confirmed by its railway branch line status in 1856.



18th Century



19th Century

The other key part of the conservation area encompasses the ancient and characteristically irregular street pattern centred in and around the predominately residential areas of Cowgate, King Street, Urquhart Road, Kirk Street and Mill Road. This road pattern is typical of an organic style of town growth which tends to be of a more human scale and somewhat more intimate than the later planned configurations. Mill Road and Cowgate were constructed in 1804 and enter at diagonally opposite corners of the Square without breaking its sense of enclosure and served as an important turnpike route to the settlement for the weekly market and agricultural fairs. Kirk Street linked the town with its Parish Church in Tarves and the coast, while King Street was a significant thoroughfare striking northwards to Meldrum House, the former seat of the Meldrum family. The residential properties in this area display many features of the local vernacular architecture with steep slated roofs, cantilevered dormer windows and granite rubble walls.



TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL

Topography

The name "Oldmeldrum" purportedly derives from Gaelic, "meall-droma," which translates into "hill of the ridge" which was a good description of the original settlement that was situated tightly on the hillside. A town greatly shaped by the topography of its surroundings with the various through roads travelling either up or down through the relatively flat commercial core. Indeed, this variance in gradient facilitates unexpected views that add interest through the various gaps and spaces between the buildings.

Gateways

A number of roads converge at the commercial centre of Oldmeldrum but it could be argued that there are only three principal gateways into the conservation area. These are the main vehicular access points that all converge onto the Square along Commercial Road, South Road and Urquhart Road. The routes vary significantly in character which is predominately shaped by the width of the road and the position of the buildings in relation to edge of the carriageway.

Commercial Road

The approach towards the centre of Oldmeldrum along Commercial Road would appear to give the visual impression of enclosure as a result of the buildings being physically located nearer to the carriageway. A series of small boundary walls enclosing front gardens are replaced with buildings situated directly onto the public footpath. This sense of enclosed space is further strengthened by the road incline and the slight camber in the carriageway which gives the initial impression that the former bank is in the centre of the road. A pretence that continues until you've arrived immediately adjacent to the former police houses where the carriageway opens up to create a small open space adjacent to The Square.

South Road

The second principal entrance into the town is by means of South Road whose distinctive quality is shaped by a bank of mature deciduous trees which when combined with a series of native hedges creates a natural screen on the northern side of the carriageway. This treatment contrasts markedly with the southern side of the road where the boundaries are defined by low masonry walls and the buildings set back into their gardens on lower ground. An arrangement that induces a general impression of space until it reaches the residential property located on the junction of Mill Road which is positioned close to the carriageway. At this point, the Meldrum Arms Hotel induces an impression of enclosure which is reinforced by the boundary walls increasing in height and the buildings being positioned nearer to the northern side of the road. The carriageway then opens up as it swings past the Swingle Suite and converges onto the Square along with Kirk Street and Urquhart Road.

Urquhart Road

A wide entrance is formed at the junction with the A947 and this semblance of space is enhanced by the buildings being set back in their respective grounds and the road positioned on slightly higher ground. The carriageway itself slopes down towards the centre of Oldmeldrum and the position of the buildings in relation to the road changes throughout this relatively short journey. The principal elevation facing the street is the initial configuration but this alters to one where the buildings run at an angle to the street which induces a perception of narrowing that is further strengthened by the tall boundary walls and a reduction in the width of the footpath. This irregular pattern of development is then punctuated by Chalmers Flats, Ugie Bank and 14 Urquhart Road that all face directly onto the carriageway as the road meanders forward towards the centre of the town. The pattern reverts back to the buildings positioned at an angle to the street on the eastern side of the road as Urquhart Road converges with King Street which then changes to the gables facing directly onto carriageway. The entrance to the car park located behind Aird House and the other open spaces found between the buildings in this particular area induce a greater awareness of space which is strengthened by the low raise single storey buildings on the western side of the road. This general perception is then realised when the carriageway opens up as the road veers in a westerly direction onto the Square.



Conservation Area Boundary and Edges

It is often stated that the edge of the conservation area should both physically and symbolically denote a clear sense of inside and outside its boundary. Indeed, where the designated area starts and stops is a vital aspect in understanding its value in terms of form and character which should be properly defined and simply not merge into the remainder of the settlement.

The southern edge of the Oldmeldrum Conservation Area clearly adheres to this general principle with the boundary distinguished by physical density which significantly changes after passing the 1970's housing development opposite Cromlet Hill. The large residential properties after this point are predominately set back within spacious gardens that induce a distinctive green entrance to the conservation area.

The border of the conservation area on Kirk Street is defined by a traditional harled property, "Rosedene" which is positioned close to the public carriageway. A traditional one and half storey building sitting opposite two former local authority blocks which are set back within their respective gardens in a similar manner to the other post war properties sited at the entrance to Kirk Street. Indeed, a somewhat irregular pattern of development that continues along Kirk Street and is characteristic of an organic pattern of growth.

The northern boundary of the conservation area is defined by an avenue of mature trees which run eastwards from the former Episcopal Manse to Urquhart Road. A green wedge that effectively follows the route of the principal drive which sits adjacent to a scattering of residential properties and a number of industrial buildings connected with Glengarioch Distillery.

The large rendered residential property sitting opposite the primary school denotes the most westerly point of the conservation area and is distinguished by its distinctive boundary wall which incorporates a combination of decorative wrought iron and granite. A building that sits behind a relatively small garden area close to the roadside, a configuration that is replicated until the buildings are eventually positioned directly on the carriageway when getting nearer to the Square.

Street Pattern

The settlement of Oldmeldrum has a distinctive arterial street pattern with all external routes passing through its central Square. This network of irregular lanes and streets would appear to be the result of a combination of factors relating to its evolution and topography. A design that is typical of an organic style of town growth attributed to the middle ages with winding streets and lanes generating an interesting and varied townscape.

Plot Pattern

There would appear to be no regular plot pattern in Oldmeldrum with properties located in and around the historic core being positioned hard against the carriageway while those residential houses sited along sections of Cowgate, Distillery Road and South Road are predominately set back within their respective gardens. The former appear to follow a similar pattern of having long narrow gardens to the rear of the property which in recent years have somewhat decreased in size to accommodate later infill development. The buildings constructed in the post war period such as the local authority housing schemes at Wyverie Court, Nathalan Court and along a section of King Street generally have smaller regular plots.

Open Space

The amount of public open space is extremely limited in the Oldmeldrum Conservation Area with the only sizeable space outwith The Square and the small car park on Baker Street being the large car parking area located between Aird House and Nathalan Court. The entrance to this particular area as recently been modified to facilitate the conversion of a store into a café which has introduced visual interest to a somewhat bland space. However, the overall impression of this particular area is still somewhat tarnished by the recycling bins sitting against the northern boundary wall which contribute little to the wider appearance and character of the conservation area.



Traffic and Movement

A significant proportion of the motor vehicles entering the central core would appear to be simply passing through the settlement even after recent remodelling works were introduced to impede the passage of such traffic. The majority of these vehicles seem to be travelling on an east west axis along Commercial Road and South Road via The Square. A large volume of traffic also travels along Urquhart Road which is the principal thoroughfare for the bus service connecting the settlement to Aberdeen and Banff. The other roads and streets connected to these three principal routes permeating from the central core would appear to be somewhat less busy and as a consequence more pedestrian friendly because of the limited vehicular movements.

Views

The town hall is undoubtedly the most dominant structure within the heart of Oldmeldrum but distant views of this mid Victorian building are somewhat constrained because of the historic street pattern. Indeed, a sense of enclosure is induced by the density, position and scale of the various properties which greatly impedes any long distance views out of the central core. This visual relationship between the buildings and open space resulting from the settlements evolution significantly shapes its character and greatly influences the views both within and outwith the conservation area. In general terms, the ability to gain outlying views appears to increase with distance from the historic core as the level of open space grows and the concentration of development buildings reduces.

Activities/Uses

Oldmeldrum has a dual role of being both a dormitory settlement and a rural service centre with a post office, butchers, supermarket and a host of other amenities located within the heart of the conservation area. A small number of support services connected with the oil industry and the financial sector can also be found within the centre of the town but the majority of the larger companies linked to the settlement are predominately located outwith its historic core. The exception to this general rule is the Glen Garioch Distillery which is sited on the northern periphery of the conservation area.

Architectural Character

The boundary of the Oldmeldrum Conservation Area was drawn to embrace most of the older part of the town which retains much of its historic character through its buildings and street pattern. The relationship of these two key elements plays a significant role in shaping the wider appearance of the designated area which contains a broad variety of architectural styles and includes all but two of the settlements listed buildings.

Building Materials

The traditional materials found in the conservation area are:-

- Granite
- Slate
- Cast iron
- Timber
- Wrought iron
- Wet harl render

Modern materials are also found in the conservation area, but their inclusion below does not mean that their use is acceptable

- UPVC
- Aluminium

- Brick
- Artificial stone
- Concrete
- Felt
- Corrugated iron

Condition

The overall condition of the conservation area is good with only minor pockets of disrepair. The main problems stem from a lack of regular maintenance and routine repairs would help to eliminate many of the problems and greatly assist in the enhancement of the area.

Townscape Detail

The presence of the following features adds significantly to the character of the conservation area.

- Finials
- Pitched slate roofs
- Chamfered corners
- Stone boundary walls
- Cast iron railings
- Stone skewputts
- Dormer windows

Landscape and Trees

The historic core of Oldmeldrum does not contain any green public open spaces but the large presence of trees, shrubs and hedges in a number of large private gardens still as a significant impact in shaping the wider appearance and character of the conservation area. This visual influence is somewhat strengthened by the topography of the settlement which allows the observer to gain a variety of close and distant views of these green spaces especially when travelling along Distillery Road, Lower Cowgate and South Road. Indeed, these natural features combine well with the many well tended gardens to enhance the wider setting of many buildings located in the settlement and so afforded protection under the Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.



CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Having examined the streetscape of the conservation area it is now possible to identify those features which contribute to its character and appearance as an area of special architectural and historic interest. This will include elements which contribute positively and are worthy of retention as well as features which have a negative impact and impinge on the wider character and appearance of the conservation area.

Listed below are:-

Key Features

Essential elements which define the special architectural and historic character of the area.

Key Challenges

Inappropriate elements which detract from the character and appearance of the area.

Positive Buildings and Open Spaces

These are considered to be buildings/open spaces which contribute positively to the appearance and character of the conservation area and therefore desirable to preserve and enhance. There will be a presumption against the demolition and/or redevelopment of any building or open space which is considered to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Negative/Neutral Buildings and Open Spaces

Neutral buildings/open spaces while not contributing to the visual quality of the townscape are perceived not to erode the appearance and character of the conservation area. Negative buildings/open spaces are those identified to have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the streetscape and undermine the character of the conservation area.

Key features

Architectural quality. The essential character is largely derived from the variety of buildings and detailing which is predominantly domestic in scale, some are recorded on the statutory list as being of special architectural or historic merit and other unlisted buildings which also make a valuable contribution to the wider appearance of the streetscape.

Street Pattern

The position of the buildings in relation to the street varies significantly throughout the settlement and this variance greatly shapes the character of the conservation area.

Key Challenges

Loss of original architectural detail

The original architectural detailing makes a defining contribution to the wider appearance of any conservation area and its retention is therefore extremely important for the preservation and enhancement of an area. For example, the removal of traditional finishes such as a wet harl will clearly change the appearance of a property and seriously erode the wider character of the conservation area.

Use of inappropriate materials

The use of traditional materials is another important element which greatly shapes the character and appearance of a conservation area. Where the original architectural components have been replaced with modern substitutes there will normally be a loss of character. A common example is the replacement of traditional timber sash & case windows with upvc units which not only significantly alter the appearance of individual buildings but also erode the visual quality of the conservation area.

The Public Realm

The quality and upkeep of the public realm is extremely important to the overall impression of Oldmeldrum especially around its central square which has recently been resurfaced as part of an enhancement project. The lamp standards, traffic signage and other hard landscape features have also been replaced as part of this initiative which has resulted in a significant variance in the quality of the streetscape furniture within different parts of the conservation area.

Shop Frontages, Signage and Adverts

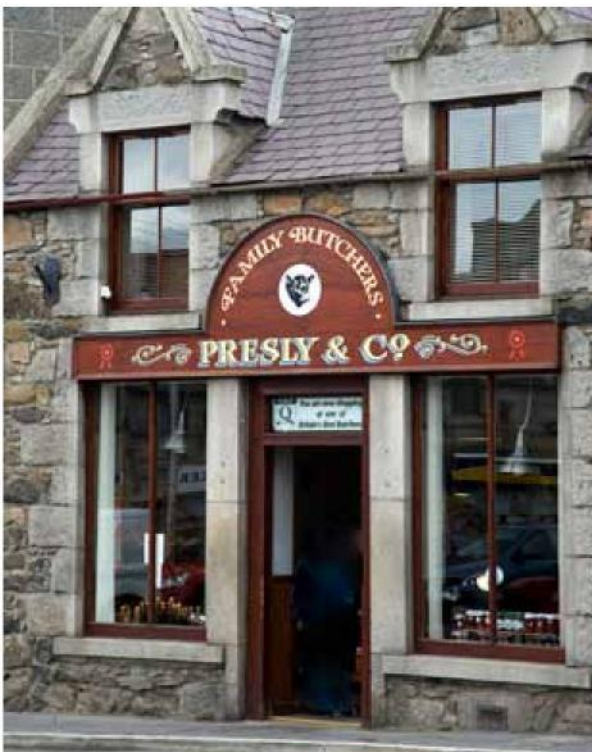
The majority of the shop frontages found within Oldmeldrum would appear to follow a traditional pattern that visually complements the historical and architectural character of the area. It is not envisaged that the number of shops is likely to increase dramatically in the near future but the Planning Service would wish to ensure that any new or replacement business frontages follow this design philosophy rather than being designed in isolation.

Positive Buildings and Areas

The dominant landmark within the central core of Oldmeldrum is undoubtedly its town hall but it would be difficult to discount the contribution of all the other buildings, open spaces and their relationship with one another in shaping the appearance and visual quality of the settlement.

Negative Buildings and Open Spaces

Those buildings and open spaces considered to have a detrimental impact on the appearance and character of the conservation area are relatively low in number and relate primarily to the lack of maintenance or unsympathetic alterations. Fundamentally, a concern was raised about the general appearance of 2 Major Lane, 13 Kirk Street, 30 Market Place, 30 & 30a King Street and a number of the properties backing onto Baker Street.



BOUNDARY

An important element of the conservation area appraisal is the evaluation of its existing boundary. Whilst most of the existing boundary is clearly and logically defined, there are small parts which could be considered for revision. These proposed amendments would strengthen the division between those properties located within and those situated outside of the designated area. The Oldmeldrum Community Council has indicated that it is generally supportive of the suggested modifications which will hopefully better define the conservation area.

- The exclusion of the properties "Craigour" and "Tor-na-Chie" which are located immediately north and west of Webster Court.
- The inclusion of the single storey stone building and a section of the green open space situated to the rear of 2 Union Place and Glen Garioch Distillery.
- The removal of the houses "Fordlea" and "Tradewinds" which are located on the northern periphery of Urquhart Road.
- The omission of 33, 35 and 37 Urquhart Road situated between Distillery Road and Wyverie Court.
- The insertion of 17 Urquhart Road and its substantial rear garden which runs back to Albert Road.



Existing Conservation Area Boundary —————
Proposed Conservation Area Boundary —————



PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT

Introduction

Detailed analysis of the conservation area's character has highlighted opportunities for its preservation and enhancement.

The application of existing planning policies, the introduction of additional control measures and the provision of information and advice encouraging sympathetic maintenance and repair are important tools in the preservation of the area's unique character.

Opportunities for Preservation and Enhancement

Maintenance

The best means of preserving the character and appearance of a conservation area is through the routine maintenance with architectural elements such as dormers, gutters and external railings all need regular attention to not only secure the future of the buildings but also their setting.

Development

The replacement of traditional components with modern unsympathetic styles and materials can have a detrimental cumulative effect of eroding the wider character of the conservation area. The local authority is therefore committed to the preservation of the area's unique character through the application of policies set down within the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan and the Supplementary Design Guide.

Information and Advice

The Planning Service will promote the preservation and enhancement of the Oldmeldrum Conservation Area by preparing and distributing information leaflets explaining the implications of residing in a conservation area. It will also prepare additional guidance notes for those parties wishing to carry out repairs and alterations to their property.

Enhancement Opportunities

Pavements and Roads

The overall quality of the hard landscape surfaces such as the roads and pavements would appear to be in good condition especially in the central core where the recent enhancement works have resulted in the installation of higher quality materials such as granite kerbs and Caithness paving slabs.

Gateways

The boundary of the conservation area is not physically defined on any of the entry points and an opportunity therefore exists for the local authority to reinforce the profile of the designation by introducing a feature or element that not only distinguishes the boundary but also contributes to the character of Oldmeldrum.

Signage

The conservation area is not affected by a proliferation of road signs but the existing signage connected with speed restrictions are still somewhat obtrusive with the streetscape and could be replaced with less prominent signage.

Street Lighting

The current array of uncoordinated lamp standards found in different parts of Oldmeldrum induces a negative image and it would clearly be advantageous to come forward with a long term strategy to standardise the design throughout the whole of the conservation area.

Street Furniture

The current variety of seating, litter bins and other street furniture induces a negative impression of the settlement but presents the local authority with an opportunity to come forward with higher quality more coordinated street furniture that actually makes a positive contribution to the wider appearance of the conservation area.

ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Supplementary Guidance

The general guidance on conservation areas is set down in the Supplementary Guidance Policies of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The document states that the Council will conduct regular appraisals of all the conservation areas located in Aberdeenshire and use them as supplementary guidance in respect of determining development proposals. It is acknowledged that the conservation area appraisals will provide an opportunity for the interpretation of these universal policies at a more local level, allowing for the identification of the individual characteristics of the locality. Indeed, the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan will seek to provide local detailed guidance notes on a variety of works to listed buildings.

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