

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 MARCH 2020	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	ADOPTION OF THE CASTLE HILL/RUSSELL STREET/OXFORD ROAD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ABBEY, BATTLE AND MINSTER
LEAD OFFICER:	MARK WORRINGHAM	TEL:	0118 9373337
JOB TITLE:	PLANNING POLICY TEAM LEADER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) was set up, partly to bring the conservation area appraisals across Reading up to date, as it has been some time until most of these appraisals have been prepared. It was agreed that the CAAC would lead on reviews of conservation area appraisals in consultation with local communities.
- 1.2 Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in November 2019 approved a draft Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal for public consultation, which included proposed extensions to the conservation area. Consultation was held between November 2019 and February 2020, and a final version taking account of responses received is now proposed for adoption.
- 1.3 In addition, changes to the Terms of Reference for the CAAC, which are necessary for its operation, are also proposed for approval.
- 1.4 Appendices:
 - Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment Scoping
 - Appendix 2: Statement of Consultation
 - Appendix 3: Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal
 - Appendix 4: Amended Terms of Reference for the Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee (Tracked Changes Version)

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1** That the results of the consultation on the Draft Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal, undertaken between December 2019 and February 2020, as set out in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 2, be noted.
- 2.2** That the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 3) be adopted.
- 2.3** That the amended Terms of Reference for the Conservation Area Advisory Committee (Appendix 4) be agreed.
- 2.4** That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services be authorised to agree any further amendments necessary to the Terms of Reference for the Conservation Area Advisory Committee in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1** Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework impose a duty on local planning authorities to review their existing conservation areas and designate as conservation areas any ‘special areas of architectural or historic interest’.
- 3.2** Although not required by law, Historic England recommends that Conservation Area Appraisals are reviewed and updated regularly, every five to ten years. Conservation Area Appraisals are material considerations in the determination of relevant planning applications, and can form a key piece of evidence for the preparation of planning policy.
- 3.3** The new Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted in November 2019, contains a much strengthened section on heritage. Policy EN3 of the Local Plan contains priorities for enhancement of conservation areas, which broadly align with many of the enhancement priorities that arise in Conservation Area Appraisals, and make clear that adopted appraisals will be a material consideration in dealing with planning applications.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1** The most recent conservation area appraisal for the Russell Street/Castle Hill area was prepared and adopted in 2004, and a review of the appraisal was required.

- 4.2 A review and updated appraisal was carried out through a community-led project by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) in conjunction with the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association (BSANA), with assistance from RBC planning officers, officers of Historic England and interested local community representatives. The appraisal recommended extensions to the conservation area to take in areas around parts of Oxford Road, Prospect Street, Anstey Road, Body Road, Coley Place and Mansfield Road. A map showing the extensions is within the appraisal itself, in Appendix 3. Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee approved the Draft Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal for consultation on 20th November 2019.
- 4.3 Consultation was undertaken between 13th December 2019 and 7th February 2020, a total of eight weeks. The Draft Appraisal was placed on the Council's website, and all of the contacts on the Council's planning consultation list were written to advising them of the consultation. The document was made available in Central and Battle libraries and the Civic Offices. In addition, the Council wrote to all addresses within or adjoining the proposed extension to the conservation area.
- 4.4 A total of 11 written responses were received, although four of these were from general consultee bodies to state that there were no comments. The main points raised are summarised below.
- Some respondents, including Historic England and the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, welcomed the appraisal, including the amount of work that had been undertaken in preparing it.
 - A suggestion for an amendment to include the northern end of Lorne Street was made, whilst another respondent noted opportunities for extensions without specifying them.
 - The Conservation Area Advisory Committee made a number of detailed comments on the wording.
 - Specific suggestions were made for enhancements, including relating to lampposts, litter bins, pavements and the layout of the highway.
 - One response objected to the extension to the conservation area, arguing that it would make it more difficult to respond to the climate emergency, and also that parts of the extended area did not merit conservation area status.
 - One response considered that the document was too lengthy and was in need of an executive summary.
- 4.5 A full Statement of Consultation, detailing the consultation measures and the responses received, is included as Appendix 2. Proposed Council responses to each representation are also included within the Statement of Consultation.

(b) Option Proposed

4.6 Committee is recommended to adopt the revised version of the Conservation Area Appraisal as attached at Appendix 3.

4.7 The main changes that have been made to the Appraisal compared to the version that was consulted upon are detailed wording changes. The Statement of Consultation in Appendix 2 highlights the changes that have been made in response to the comments.

4.8 Adoption of the Appraisal will result in the recommended extensions to the conservation area being confirmed. This will have implications for the operation of planning powers in the area, as it will alter the permitted development rights that will apply. The Appraisal will also be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in the area. The recommendation of the Appraisal is also that the name of the conservation area be changed to the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area.

Conservation Area Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

4.9 On 5th April 2016, this Committee endorsed the establishment of a Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC), including a draft framework for its constitution (Minute 36 refers), which have until now served as the Committee's Terms of Reference.

4.10 The CAAC has now identified the need for changes to the Terms of Reference. The proposed Terms of Reference are set out in Appendix 4, in a tracked changes format from those agreed in April 2016.

4.11 The main changes can be summarised as follows:

- Inclusion of aims to stay abreast of national policy, advice and best practice, and around means of communication with the public and CAAC members;
- Addition of a specific planning and policy liaison officer, and definitions of the names roles within the Terms;
- Changes to enable temporary members to be co-opted, sub-groups to be formed, and those interested in Committee membership to apply;
- Introduction of a procedure to agree comments on planning applications outside Committee meetings;
- Introduction of the ability to request ward Councillors or the heritage champion to call a planning application into Planning Applications Committee;
- Inclusion of an introductory summary paragraph; and
- Various detailed wording changes for clarification.

4.12 As the Terms of Reference were originally set by this Committee, this report recommends that the proposed changes be agreed. However, it

was not originally anticipated that changes would need to be agreed by this Committee each and every time, and the report therefore recommends delegating agreement of changes to the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.13 The main alternative option to the proposed option is to not adopt the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 4.14 Not adopting the Appraisal will mean continued reliance on an Appraisal from 2004 which is now out-of-date. This will have implications for planning decisions within the area. It will also fail to implement the actions necessary to remove the conservation area from the at-risk register, and would potentially affect the award of High Street Heritage Action Zone funding that the Council has secured for part of this, and other, conservation areas.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Adoption of an updated appraisal and boundary extension will contribute to achieving the Council's priorities set out in the Corporate Plan through the protection and management of heritage assets that will contribute to 'Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active' and 'Providing infrastructure to support the economy'. This updated appraisal with amended boundaries would ensure that the historical and architectural character is preserved and enhanced. It would also ensure that future development is appropriate to the character of the area and that development would not have a detrimental and therefore unsustainable impact.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Extending the conservation area, and providing an updated appraisal, will give further protection to the trees within the area, which play an important role in terms of air quality and adapting to climate change.
- 6.2 Extending the conservation area would increase the number of properties to which conservation area restrictions apply. Certain permitted development rights which apply elsewhere do not apply in conservation areas, and in some cases there may therefore be additional obstacles for property owners in adapting their properties, for instance in fitting solar panels or replacing windows. A balance will need to be struck in dealing with resulting applications in conservation areas to ensure that the climate priorities of the Council are met in a way that does not compromise the heritage priorities.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The Council's consultation process for planning policy, as set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI, adopted March 2014), is that the widest and most intensive community involvement should take place at the earliest possible stage, to allow the community a genuine chance to influence the document. Although the SCI deals mainly with development plan documents, the general principles are useful for documents such as a Conservation Area Appraisal.

7.2 Community involvement exercises have been undertaken by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee as part of undertaking the review. Details of community involvement and the consultations in 2016 and 2017 are set out in page 16 of the appraisal document. These included:

- A guided walk and visual audit of the CA in March 2016, during which attendees were able to ask questions and give feedback for the review;
- An additional walk in March 2017 and Q&A;
- An online survey during April and May 2017, during which residents and landowners in the area were asked for input; and
- Local landlords being written to.

7.3 A formal consultation led by the Council began on 13th December 2019 and lasted for a period of eight weeks (to allow for the Christmas period) until 7th February 2020. The draft Conservation Area Appraisal was made available online and in Central and Battle libraries. The Council wrote to all of those on the planning consultation list advising them of the consultation. The Council also sent letters to every property within the proposed extensions, as well as to any adjoining property that was not already within the conservation area. This exceeded the minimum legal consultation requirements.

7.4 Responses received have been taken into account in considering changes to the appraisal. These are summarised in the Statement of Consultation in Appendix 2, along with a proposed Council response to each.

8. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

8.1 It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief. An equality scoping assessment is included in Appendix 1 of this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The proposed extensions to the conservation area, once agreed, will benefit from the controls set out within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The legislation would control the

demolition of buildings as well as ensure a closer control over new development in the area.

9.2 The following would apply:

- (a) In the exercise of planning powers the Secretary of State and planning authorities are under a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character or appearance of the area;
- (b) the demolition of buildings within the conservation area now requires planning permission;
- (c) “Permitted Development” rights are more restricted in Conservation Areas, and Article 4 Directions restricting “permitted development” rights in Conservation Areas do not (as is the case elsewhere) have to be referred to the Secretary of State for consent;
- (d) more controls exist in relation to works to any trees, not necessarily just TPO trees;
- (e) more exacting standards of advertisement control should be applied to advertisements in the Conservation Area, so long as the authorities are sensitive to the needs of businesses within the Conservation Area;
- (f) development proposals within conservation areas should either make a positive contribution to the preservation of the character or appearance of the area, or leave the character or appearance unharmed.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Existing budgets have been sufficient for the publication of the final documents and to notify occupiers affected.
- 10.2 There are no financial implications relating to changes to the Terms of Reference of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.3 The preparation of an updated appraisal will ensure that developments are appropriate to the area, that significant effects are mitigated and that there are no harmful effects to the historic environment within the Conservation Area. Production of an updated appraisal is in line with best practice, therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

- 10.4 There are no direct financial risks associated with the adoption of the Conservation Area Appraisal.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCOPING

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area Appraisal

Directorate: Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Planning

Name: Mark Worringham

Job Title: Planning Policy Team Leader

Date of assessment: 08/02/19

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

To update the existing Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

The Council will benefit from having an up to date appraisal for use as a material consideration in planning decisions. Stakeholders, including members of the public and the development industry, will benefit from more certainty.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

Adoption of an updated appraisal and boundary extension will contribute to the protection and management of heritage assets.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Developers/landowners, the public and community groups. All parties want an updated appraisal so as to best protect and enhance the historic environment in the area.

Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than

others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because the updated appraisal is not expected to have equality impacts on particular groups. The document simply updates details regarding the historic environment in this particular

Signed (completing officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 8 th February 2020
Signed (Lead Officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 8 th February 2020