



13 March 2024

Title	Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Mark Worringham, Planning Policy Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) be approved for consultation.2. That the Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets, prior to the start of consultation on the draft document.3. That the Conservation Area Advisory Committee's 2023 Progress Update (Appendix 3) be noted.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Christchurch Conservation Area was designated on 19th November 1987 under the Town & Country Planning Act 1971 (as amended) and the most recent full conservation area appraisal was produced in 2010. Following discussions over the Council's approach to the historic environment, the Council agreed to support the setting up of a Reading Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (CAAC). One of the primary concerns of the CAAC was the length of time since many conservation area appraisals had been prepared and adopted. According to best practice appraisals should be updated every 5-10 years and many of these appraisals are now in need of review. It was subsequently agreed that the CAAC would lead on reviews of conservation area appraisals in consultation with local communities.
- 1.2. The Christchurch appraisal is the third review to be completed, following St Peters in 2018 and Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road in 2020. This report seeks approval of the draft review of the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal. Committee is asked to approve the draft appraisal for consultation between March and May 2024.
- 1.3. Appendix 2 contains a copy of the draft appraisal and associated documents including maps showing the proposed boundary extensions. The results of the consultation will feed into a revised appraisal to be adopted later in 2024.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 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'.

- The addition of 1-81 (odd) and 70-72 Whitley Street, comprising mainly the shop units making up Whitley Street local centre – the reason for this is due to the presence of buildings of architectural merit, including late Georgian and well-preserved Victorian buildings bordering the site of a spring used to supply water to the Abbey;
- The addition of the mainly terraced properties at 114-128 (even) Whitley Street and 2-34 (even) Basingstoke Road, Victorian terraces associated with the southward expansion of Reading and featuring characteristic patterned brickwork;
- The addition of Reading Hindu Temple on Whitley Street (a significant early 20th Century building, formerly Whitley Hall) and properties to the rear known as Prospect Cottages which are mid 19th century buildings surviving from an hilltop cluster of buildings and garden land and which now have a distinct courtyard character;
- The addition of 2-40 (even) and 1-27 (odd) Milman Road, a mix including a number of significant larger 19th Century buildings;
- The addition of 1-11 Glebe Road (odd) and 23-25 (odd) and 12 Christchurch Gardens, an area which features two significant buildings designed by local architects of note, with remaining buildings included to ensure a comprehensive boundary that incorporates the setting of Christchurch; and
- The addition of 8-26 (even) and 11 Cintra Avenue as well as the green to the east and 32-34 Christchurch Road, an area which includes the gatehouse to the now demolished Cintra Lodge and an area of green space once part of the grounds of Cintra Lodge that is important to the setting of surrounding properties.

3.5 The updated appraisal identifies issues and vulnerabilities (page 10), including:

- Traffic noise and pollution;
- Loss of original architectural details;
- Inappropriate modern materials and details;
- Street clutter;
- Waste and litter;
- Requirements of traffic management and public amenities;
- Utilities work;
- Maintenance of buildings and gardens; and
- The condition of the replica Whitley Pump.

3.6 Recommended measures (within the Action Plan, section 8) include:

- Implement the boundary extension (as shown in Figure 1);
- Address poorly maintained buildings;
- An Article 4 direction to prevent loss of original features;
- Address trade bins, domestic bins and fly tipping; and
- Address signage, street clutter, cables and aerials.

3.7 CAAC will manage the action plan but responsibility for some of these actions can only rest with RBC. Other actions can be undertaken by local volunteer organisations and community groups (e.g. CAAC) with limited support from council officers.

- 3.8 A consultation exercise on the review of the Conservation Area, carried out by the CAAC in 2022, attracted 30 responses. However, the proposed boundary extension has changed significantly since that consultation was carried out
- 3.9 Committee is recommended to approve the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) for further consultation.

Other options considered

- 3.10 The two alternative options considered are;
- Not to progress the draft conservation area appraisal; and
 - To undertake a lighter-touch review of the appraisal that does not result in an extension.
- 3.11 To not progress the appraisal at this stage would fail to capitalise on the good work done by volunteers of the CAAC, and would mean that the appraisal for the conservation area is somewhat out of date and is of less use for decision making on planning applications, as well as failing to take the opportunity to protect the character and interest of a wider area not currently falling within the conservation area.
- 3.12 The lighter touch review could pick up on some of the recent changes in the area but would not be able to include any substantive changes to the boundary, meaning that the significant heritage interest outside the conservation area boundary would have no recognition in planning documents, or statutory protection.

CAAC Progress Update 2023

- 3.13 Alongside the work in preparing the Conservation Area Appraisal, the CAAC has produced a Progress Update for 2023 that is also available on its website. This is attached as Appendix 3. Committee is asked to note the update.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Christchurch CAA, through setting out the way Reading will develop to 2036, will contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2022/25 (2024/25 refresh):
- Healthy environment: through retaining and potentially enhancing the quality of the built environment within the conservation area, in addition to retaining valuable trees and green areas; and
 - Thriving communities: through empowering local communities to engage with their local areas and contribute to securing their future protection and enhancement.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There are a variety of ways in which the appraisal, in particular the effect of extending the conservation area, could have environmental and climate implications.
- 5.2. Bringing more buildings within the conservation area exercises greater control over demolition, which in turn makes it more likely that buildings will be reused rather than demolished and redeveloped, albeit that this will be a matter to consider site by site through the planning application process.
- 5.3. 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.
- 5.4. The inclusion of new areas within the extended conservation area could have implications in terms of the ability of those premises to make physical alterations to improve their environmental performance without needing planning permission. In particular, there are greater restrictions on solar panels and equipment, wind turbines, air source heat pumps and flues associated with biomass heating or combined heat and power where they would face the highway or be closer to the highway than the existing building. This would need

to be addressed on a site by site basis through the planning application process, taking account of policies in the Local Plan.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. 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. Community involvement exercises have been undertaken by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee as part of undertaking the review. Details of community involvement on the initial stages are set out in Appendix 1 of the appraisal document. These included a public consultation event on 16 July 2022, a questionnaire at the event and online and a letter to addresses within the proposed extension.
- 6.2. A formal consultation led by the Council is expected to begin in late March and will last for a period of eight weeks until late May. Responses received will be considered in preparing a final draft appraisal for adoption. The draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal consultation will be based around making the document available for comment.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. 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.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are none.

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 are sufficient for the publication of the final documents and to notify occupiers affected. The bulk of the work on the draft has been undertaken by CAAC members on a voluntary basis.
- 10.2. Consultation exercises can be resource intensive. However, the Council's consultation process is based mainly on electronic communication, which helps to minimise resource costs.

1. Revenue Implications

- 10.3. There are no significant revenue implications.

2. Capital Implications

- 10.4. There are no significant capital implications.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.5. 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, particularly given that it was largely produced on a voluntary basis.

4. Risk Assessment

- 10.6. There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. The expectation is that, subject to the results of consultation on the draft, a final version of the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal will be adopted later in 2024.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal
3. CAAC 2023 Progress Update