



20 November 2024

Title	Adoption of the 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 responses received during the consultation on the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) be noted.2. That the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 3) be adopted.

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 Committee approved consultation on a Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal on 13 March 2024 (Minute 25 refers). The results of consultation are summarised in Appendix 2. This report recommends the adoption of the final version of the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal attached as Appendix 3.

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'.
- 2.2 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 are specifically referred to as a consideration in policy EN3 of the Local Plan. They can also form a key piece of evidence for the preparation of planning policy.

3. The Proposal

Current position

- 3.1 The Christchurch Conservation Area was originally designated on 19th November 1987. The most recent appraisal was prepared in 2010. That appraisal did not result in any boundary alteration from the original boundary defined in 1987.
- 3.2 A review and the updated appraisal has been carried out as a community-led project by the CAAC, with assistance from RBC planning officers and interested local community representatives. The review made use of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, which was recommended by officers of Historic England. This provided a methodology for preparing assessments of the character of the landscape and built environment of the area, but the methodology has been adapted to local circumstances by the CAAC.
- 3.3 Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 13 March 2024 agreed a Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal for consultation (Minute 25 refers). This draft recommended a number of boundary extensions including properties on Whitley Street, Basingstoke Road, Milman Road, Glebe Road, Christchurch Gardens, Christchurch Road and Cintra Avenue.
- 3.4 Consultation was carried out between 5 April and 31 May 2024. A total of 14 responses were received. The Statement of Consultation in Appendix 2 summarises the consultation undertaken and the representations received. Some of the main points made during the consultation are as follows:
 - Concern that extensions or alternations to properties made previously have detrimentally affected the character of the area;
 - Suggestions to remove various properties on Milman Road and Glebe Road;
 - Suggestions to include New Christchurch School, various terraces on Milman Road and Boults Walk cottages;
 - Calls for the Council to exercise greater enforcement powers in Conservation Areas to prevent further degradation; and
 - Strong support for the reappraisal and recognition of the historic importance of the area, including from Historic England.

Option proposed

- 3.5 Committee is recommended to adopt the revised version of the Conservation Area Appraisal as attached at Appendix 3.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.

Other options considered

- 3.8 The main alternative option to the proposed option is to not adopt the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 3.9 Not adopting the Appraisal will mean continued reliance on an Appraisal from 2010 which is now out-of-date. This will have implications for planning decisions within the area and the degree to which those decisions can respond to an up to date assessment of the area. It will also mean that those areas proposed to be included in the extension will not benefit from conservation area status and will not benefit from the enhanced protection as a result of that status.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The Christchurch CAA, through assessing the significance of the area and proposing appropriate extensions, 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.

6.2 Community involvement exercises were undertaken by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee as part of undertaking the review before the Draft was finalised, as included in Appendix 1 of the appraisal document. Following approval of the draft, a formal consultation was carried out over an eight week period between 5 April and 31 May 2024. There were 14 responses to this consultation, which have been considered in preparing this final version. Details of the consultation are set out in the Statement of Consultation in Appendix 2.

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 The bulk of the work on the draft has been undertaken by CAAC members on a voluntary basis. The Council's work in terms of supporting the production, carrying out consultation and notifying affected occupiers has been met from within existing budgets.

1. Revenue Implications

- 10.2 There are no significant revenue implications.

2. Capital Implications

- 10.3 There are no significant capital implications.

3. Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.4 The preparation of an updated appraisal ensures 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

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

11 Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 Subject to agreement to adopt, the Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal will be adopted as of the date of this meeting, and the extended area will be in effect at that point.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Statement of Consultation on the Draft Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal
3. Christchurch Conservation Area Appraisal (adoption version)