

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 NOVEMBER 2019	AGENDA ITEM:	12
TITLE:	DRAFT RUSSELL ST/CASTLE HILL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ABBAY, BATTLE AND MINSTER
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JOB TITLE:	PLANNING POLICY TEAM LEADER	E-MAIL:	Mark.Worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area was designated in 1974 under the Town & Country Planning Act 1971 (as amended) and a full conservation area appraisal was adopted in 2004. 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 Russell St/Castle Hill appraisal is the second review to be completed, following St Peters in 2018. This report seeks approval of the draft review of the Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal. Committee is asked to approve the draft appraisal for community involvement between December 2019 and February 2020.
- 1.3 Appendix 2 contains a copy of the draft appraisal and associated documents including maps showing the proposed boundary extensions. The results of community involvement will feed into a revised appraisal to be adopted by the Council during 2020.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Draft Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2) be approved for community involvement.**
- 2.2 That the Deputy Director of Planning, Transport & Regulatory Services be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Draft Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, prior to the start of community involvement on the draft document.**
- 2.3 That the Committee agrees that while it supports the proposed management plan actions set out in the report, it endorses the qualification in the management plan that indicated that actions can only be carried out as and when sufficient resources become available to undertake the work required.**
- 2.4 That Committee agrees that it will closely scrutinise and reconsider the proposed extensions to the boundaries of the Conservation Area in the light of consultation responses.**

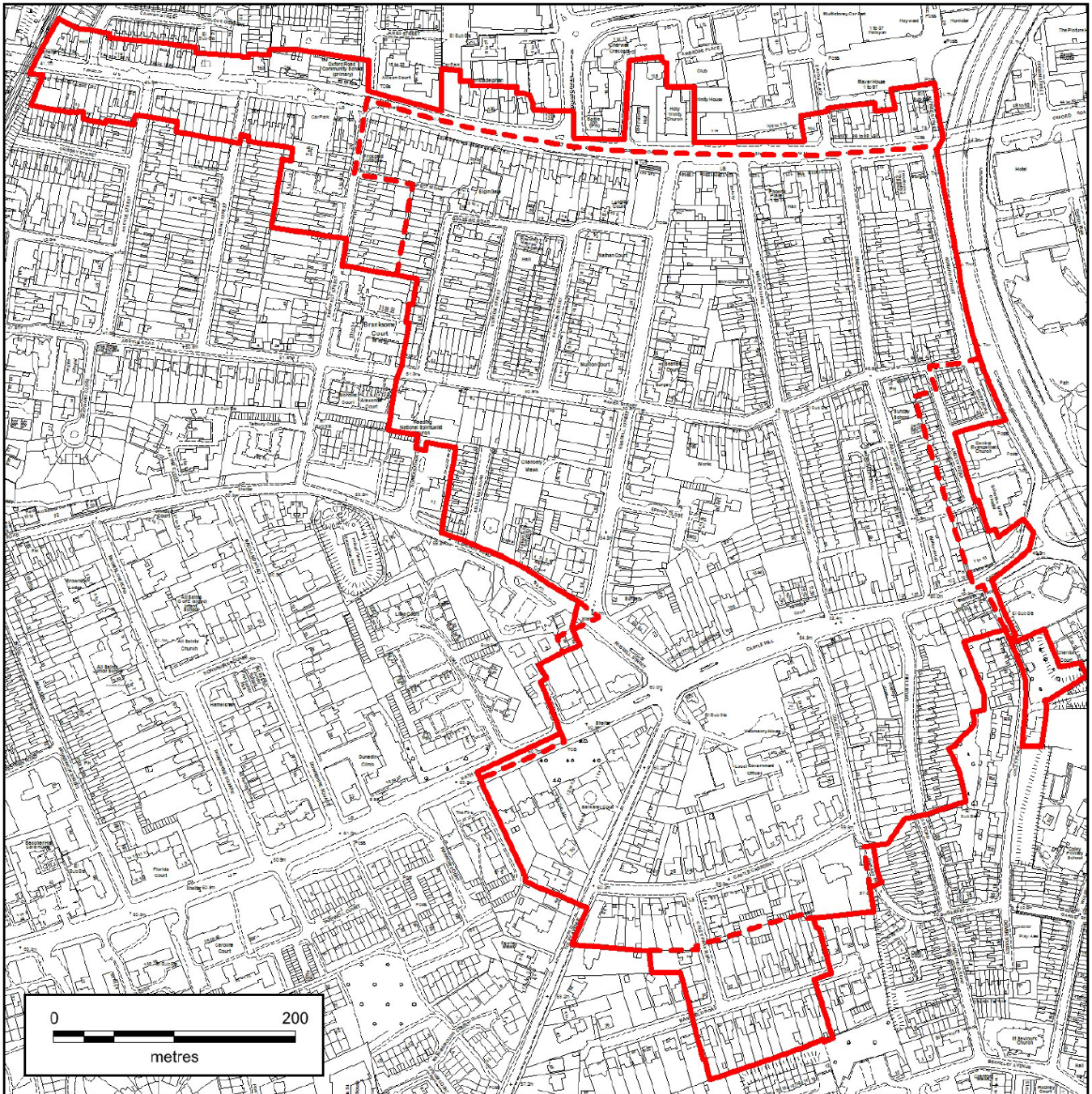
3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 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.**

4. THE PROPOSED ALTERATIONS

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 The existing appraisal was prepared in 2004. It recommended various boundary changes, a new Article 4 Direction and various improvements to the public realm. The Council approved the appraisal in 2004.**
- 4.2 The existing boundaries of the conservation area (along with the now proposed boundary extensions) are provided in the plan below, which is copied from page 11 of the appraisal (see Appendix 2).**



— Proposed Conservation Area boundary 2019

- - - 2004 Conservation Area boundary

- 4.2 The production of the Conservation Area Appraisal ties in with other elements of work that Reading is involved in, notably the visit of the Historic Places Panel and the bid for a High Street Heritage Action Zone.
- 4.3 The panel visit is a prestigious event offered to areas that Historic England believe have opportunities for regeneration, development and community development where the historic environment can be a significant catalyst. Historic England only runs three of these events across the country each year and the panellists are each acknowledged experts in their fields.

Historic England bear the financial cost of the visit and it has been estimated that the actual value of the visit is in the tens of thousands of pounds to the host authority. Many previous visits to other towns have preceded subsequent significant investment in the host area by Historic England and their partner organisations.

- 4.4 It is perhaps because the Historic Places Panel is visiting Reading on 14th and 15th November that Reading's bid to designate part of the town centre area, including parts of the proposed enlarged Castle Hill/Oxford Road Conservation Area, as a High Street Heritage Action Zone has been accepted. Our commitment to reviewing this conservation area and getting it off the 'conservation areas at risk' register as part of a wider programme of investing in the public realm and heritage assets of the town centre could benefit from funding of up to £850,000 (£1.6 million with match funding) over the next 4 years. Officers are preparing a draft Programme Design to show how this will be carried out and HE has confirmed that the Programme Design should include allocating part of the funding for a feasibility study to improve the high street elements of this revised conservation area and for financial incentives to owners to maintain and improve their buildings.

(b) Proposed Option

- 4.5 The review and the updated appraisal is the result of a community-led project carried out by the 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 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. The appraisal has been updated partly as a result of that assessment.

- 4.6 The review has resulted in various recommendations for boundary extensions, namely:

- Both sides of the Oxford Road from the IDR to the railway bridge over Oxford Road;
- Parts of the Mansfield Road area;
- Additional properties along Prospect Street close to the Oxford Road; and
- Additional properties at the foot of Castle Hill, including several terraced houses on Coley Place and open park to the south.
- The review also proposes that Body Road and Anstey Road, and 3-11 Baker Street which were removed from the CA in 2004, are reincorporated within the boundary.

- 4.7 The updated appraisal identifies issues and vulnerabilities (page 8), including:

- Poor maintenance and intensified use of private properties;

- Streetscape environment and public realm;
- Crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB); and
- Threats to views and vistas in and out of the Conservation Area.

4.8 Recommended measures (SS4, page 10) include:

- A change of name to the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road Conservation Area;
- Seeking funding for improvements to the public realm, streetscapes and properties;
- Establishing management plans with the Council and community groups; and
- An expansion of Article 4 Directions with Local Development Orders (LDOs).

CAAC and BSANA 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. BSANA, CAAC) with limited support from council officers.

- 4.9 A consultation exercise on the review of the Conservation Area, carried out by the CAAC in April and May 2017, attracted 40 responses with overwhelming support for the proposals to extend the Conservation Area.
- 4.10 Committee is recommended to approve the Draft Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal (Appendix 2), including the map on page 11 illustrating the proposed boundary extensions, for further community involvement.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Adoption of an updated appraisal and boundary extensions 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." 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. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 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 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.

6.2 A formal consultation led by the Council is expected to begin in mid-December and will last for a period of eight weeks until early February. Responses received will be considered in preparing a final draft appraisal for adoption. The draft Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal consultation will be based around making the document available for comment.

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

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. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 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. There are not expected to be significant adverse implications for the climate change agenda.

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.
- 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.
- 10.3 The extension of the conservation area to include areas such as additional parts of the Oxford Road will contribute to Reading’s bid for up to £850,000 (£1.6 million with match funding) for improvements to this and other conservation areas as part of a High Street Heritage Action Zone, as referred to in paragraph 4.4.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 10.4 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

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- National Planning Policy Framework

- Planning Guidance - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment
- Section 69, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Draft Russell St/Castle Hill Conservation Area Appraisal

Directorate: Environment and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Planning and Regulatory Services

Name: Sarah Burr

Job Title: Planning Policy Officer

Date of assessment: 05/02/2018

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 area.

Signed (completing officer)	Sarah Burr	Date: 16 th October 2019
Signed (Lead Officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 16 th October 2019