

19 March 2018

Report of	Assistant Director: Corporate and Policy	Author	Vincent Pearce ☎ 282452
Title	Consultation on Proposed New Conservation Area [North Station Road and environs – Colchester Conservation Area no 4] with Associated Character Appraisal & Management Proposals [CCA4]		
Wards affected	Castle		

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Committee approval to consult with the public on the Draft Colchester Conservation Area no 4 [North Station Road and environs] Appraisal and Management Proposals Document [CCA4]. The CAA4 analyses the key components that contribute to making the area worthy of designation as a conservation area. Included in the document is an assessment of positive and negative features and key issues. It follows an established format for such documents. The need for such consideration has been triggered by: (i) the emergence of the embryonic North Bridge Conservation Enhancement project, [refurbishing North Bridge and other environmental improvements] for which external funding is being sought, (ii) the initial delivered phases of the 'Fixing the Link' project and (iii) the longstanding objectives within the North Station Road Masterplan. All of these have indicated that the area which retains significant special heritage importance is likely to be under considerable positive pressure for change. In this context it is considered necessary to give additional statutory conservation protection to the area by the designation of a new conservation area.

2.0 Recommended Decision

- 2.1 That the Local Plan Committee agrees to the Consultation Draft Colchester Conservation Area Character Appraisal & Management Proposals being subject to formal public consultation for a six-week period; and,
- 2.2 That the results of that consultation be reported to the Local Plan Committee at the earliest opportunity along with any proposed amendments to the content where appropriate with a view to that document being formally agreed to enable the statutory Designation process to be legally pursued.

3.0 Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Local Plan Committee is asked to agree these recommendations in order that the proposed new CCA4 can ultimately be afforded significant weight as a material planning consideration in the determination of development management decisions.

4.0 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to proceed with designating a Conservation Area but with the potential impending pressure for change the option of doing nothing has been rejected as a recommendation. Such an action would be contrary to the Council's duty under S69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, namely:

LA's should "from time to time to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and (para 69 (1) (b) shall designate those areas as conservation areas."

- 4.2 Additional planning controls within a Designated Conservation Area include restricted permitted development rights when compared to other areas and greater controls over works to trees. Both of these reduce the risk of unacceptable alterations being made and development occurring that might harm the areas special character. Such designation also means that those intending to undertake development requiring planning permission have to provide a heritage appraisal to demonstrate that the proposed development will preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area. When considering the merits of any development proposal within a Conservation Area, the Council as local planning authority, must also demonstrate that it has had due regard to heritage considerations when determining such applications.
- 4.3 Officers in proposing the boundaries identified for CCA4 believe them to be logical and comprehensive and sufficient to protect the intrinsic special character of the area. That said the Committee can decide to agree a different conservation area boundary to that proposed here [reduced or enlarged boundaries depending on its own assessment of special character].

5.0 Background Information

- 5.1 The field surveys, condition surveys and associated research for the CCA4 document were undertaken throughout December 2017 and early January 2018.
- 5.2 In undertaking this Appraisal and assessing significance the Council has followed advice in Section 12 of the NPPF and Historic England: Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance. 'Significance' lies in the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because its heritage interest, which may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Archaeological interest includes 'an interest in carrying out an expert investigation at some point in the future into the evidence of a heritage asset may hold of past human activity and may apply to standing buildings or structures as well as buried remains. The determination of the significance of the proposed conservation area is based on statutory designations and/or professional judgements against four values:
- **Evidential value:**[what does it tell us about past human activity]; and,
 - **Aesthetic value:**[how it stimulates the senses and intellect]; and,
 - **Historical Value:** [how it connects what once happened with what happens today]; and,
 - **Communal value:** [how it touches the lives of people today through the lens of their contemporary values]

Taking these as the starting point the significance of the proposed Conservation Area can be summarised as:

5.2.1 Evidential:

With its strong collection of listed buildings including hostelryes, houses and shops, it tells us much about how people lived. It reminds us that the area was once outside of the walled town of Colchester and represented the transition between town and countryside. The Town's main cattle market was situated adjacent to the proposed conservation area and that only disappeared in the latter half of the 20th century. It tells us something about local government in that North Bridge represented the upstream extent of the Borough Council's traditional Fishery rights. The Council remains the owner of the bed of the River Colne and still controls the fishery rights. Something that is important to the world famous Colchester

Oyster Industry. It also provides very strong evidence that the impact of non-horse driven transport transformed the appearance of the town and its economic life. It also demonstrates that the need to accommodate the motor car swept much traditional life away along with parts of the old built form of the town.

5.2.2 Aesthetic:

Within the proposed Conservation Area you find 15-17th century buildings now sitting beside 20th century buildings [and in some cases this relationship is not always an easy one]. Being on what was historically (but less so today) a principal road entrance into the Town there survives a number of traditional garages that retain dilute art deco references. These are potentially future redevelopment sites. Some of the newer infill & redevelopment is sensitive and/or of interest in that they are of their time. Elsewhere others are poor examples even of their time.

Just yards off the main spine that is North Station Road is a real hidden gem in the shape of Morten Road [originally described as Morton] with its polite urban cottages which display some outstanding decorative tile work (nunets). There is a real sense of the influence of the arts & crafts movement.

Being part of the evening economy many of the shops and restaurants in North Station Road flaunt a certain amount of brash and garish signage. Whilst this does little to enhance the area it does demonstrate a resilience to the post-2008 economic crisis which in the grander scheme of things has meant that important buildings have not fallen into complete disrepair following an extended period of vacancy. The framework for revival and restoration therefore remains intact.

5.2.3 Historical:

North Station Road represents a timeline going back some 600 years charting the growth of urbanism and the expansion of Colchester. Being on an important route in and out of the town of Colchester it has seen dramatic change and it provides strong evidence as to how the arrival of the railway to the Town in 1843 sparked a period of expansion that has not stopped since. In this one street you can explain the morphology Colchester.

It is a key location that also charts the impact of public transport and later growth of car travel. North Bridge was widened to accommodate trams. It now contains part of a dedicated bus corridor. It was one of the first parts of the borough to experience major highway works in 1933 with the construction of the first by-pass [Colne Bank Avenue].

It has long been a commercial area and continues to fulfil that function.

It also demonstrates how the Victorian philanthropic movement influenced social change within the town. The first publicly funded primary school (survives) the first public swimming pool [open air] (survives but in alternative use) & The Railway Workers Mission with its strong connection to the railway.

5.2.4 Communal:

It reinforces our typical [and perhaps now much rarer to find in reality] view of the traditional local shopping centre. It also reminds us of how modern society has moved on in terms of improved social mobility and opportunity to access recreational facilities. It is also a reminder of how some enlightened Victorians (perhaps not always motivated by altruism) started to change how society was organised with an increasing sense of social responsibility.

5.3 North Primary School I still open and provides a direct connection with the past and a very strong foot in the present.

5.4 It also demonstrates not just how an expanding urban area is organised and what price is sometimes paid to accommodate economic growth but also how an area can adapt and yet keep its special character whilst evolving new traits.

5.5 Conclusion:

- 5.5.1 The area is on the cusp of potential largescale change and it is clear that there has been little recent investment in property maintenance and many sites represent redevelopment opportunities. This appraisal has recognised that whilst planned change can be potentially be accommodated if approached sensitively the area is vulnerable and does has special historic and architectural merit worthy of greater statutory protection.
- 5.5.2 The Council believes that the fact that North Station Road functions as a major pedestrian corridor into and out of the Town Centre is something that can bring new energy, investment, public spend and a bright future for this largely commercial area on the edge of the Town Centre.
- 5.5.3 Being a conservation area will draw attention the charms and character of the area and will allow the Council to encourage owners of properties to invest in them. The Council will seek to deliver externally funded enhancement projects to reinforce this desire to re-establish itself as an attraction for visitors and residents alike.
- 5.5.4 The defined proposed Colchester Conservation Area no 4 boundary is a logical extension of the adjacent part of Colchester Conservation Area no 1 which was the first in Colchester. Forty-four years have passed since the designation of CCA1 and much has happened in terms of the historic, architectural, economic and social life of the Town. Much has been lost, altered and/or replaced—the natural cycle of urban expansion, decay and renewal.
- 5.5.5 From Roman times the corridor now occupied by North Station Road was a major access into the Town from the north. North Bridge has in a number of guises been the stepping stone to link town and countryside.
- 5.5.6 The arrival of the railway to Colchester in 1843 triggered gradual urban expansion northwards into open countryside. North Station Road charts that growth and is a fascinating mosaic of buildings from across six centuries. It has managed to retain a strong and vibrant commercial character which must in part be due to its obvious function as a conduit along which people pass in and out of town, many by foot having used buses or trains.
- 5.5.7 Despite much change, some of which has not been particularly sympathetic, it is still easy to visualise its past more picturesque character. The area was important in the recreational life of people of the Town in that it once housed the Town's public open air swimming pool which remains as something of a lost gem as it gradually reverts to nature.
- 5.5.8 The route also has strong links with the growth of the railway in that it housed one of the earliest Railway Worker Missions and Colchester's first publicly funded school was built in what is now John Harper Street. That school remains in almost all its original form when viewed externally. It has also been in the vanguard of highway engineering solutions to accommodating growth and the motor vehicle, not always to its advantage from a townscape perspective, but it is important because of that fact.
- 5.5.9 The Council will build on existing initiatives to promote better interpretation of the history of the area and to sensitively signpost other attractions, destinations and nodes in the wider vicinity
- 5.6 It is proposed to describe the new conservation area as Colchester Conservation Area no.4 to reflect the strong links that it has to the Town Centre although it can be described further as North Station Road and environs.
- 5.7 The existing Colchester Conservation Areas comprise of the following;

- Colchester Conservation Area no 1 includes the historic core of the Town Centre,
- Colchester Conservation Area no 2 includes the western edge of the town centre along and around Lexden Road
- Informally known as Colchester Conservation Area no 3, The Garrison Conservation Area effectively functions as an extension to CCA1 in that it abuts it and effectively extends heritage protection southwards.

6.0 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

- 6.1 The designation of a conservation area as proposed will not result in adverse impacts in terms of equality, diversity and human rights as every property owner will be consulted in respect of the draft proposal and responses analysed and appropriate mitigation applied in the event of the proposal moving on to the formal designation process.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The Council's Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 includes Opportunity as a key objective and one of the priorities under this theme is to 'promote and enhance Colchester borough's heritage and visitor attractions to increase visitor numbers and to support job creation.'

8.0 Consultation

- 8.1 It is intended to undertake a six-week public consultation exercise. All properties within the proposed conservation area will be individually notified in writing in advance and the consultation process explained. The Council's website will carry full details of the Draft Document and responses can be made electronically or in writing. All responses will be reported to a subsequent Local Plan Committee meeting and amendments to document content may be proposed as a result.

9.0 Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 The publishing of the report and the draft Appraisal may generate publicity for the Council. Although some property owners may feel the designation of a Conservation Area will restrict what they can do to their land/property, on balance the Council should be seen in a positive light for being proactive in publishing the Appraisal and Management Plan.

10.0 Financial Implications

- 10.1 There are no financial implications for the Council

11.0 Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management Implications

- 11.1 None

Appendices

The BCCA4 document

Background Papers

None