

Report to Cabinet

17 January 2024

Subject:	Wednesbury Conservation Area Appraisal, Management Plan and boundary review
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Peter Hughes Cabinet Member for Regeneration & WMCA
Director:	Tony McGovern Director of Regeneration & Growth
Key Decision:	Yes Type (c) - an executive decision which is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Mark Stretton, Conservation Officer mark_stretton@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to Wednesbury's Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan contained at Appendix A, and that the conservation area's boundaries are extended in accordance with the recommendations contained in the appraisal.




2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are a recognised way of putting in place additional planning guidance and a material consideration in determining planning applications, providing a greater level of protection for heritage. The documents should assist both applicants, when making relevant planning applications, and the Council in determining them.



2.2 The designation of adjacent areas that have been identified as meriting inclusion will promote the conservation of the character and appearance of the area through greater protection for historic features and buildings and resisting inappropriate change/redevelopment.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan

	<p>Strong Resilient Communities Conservation areas afford a greater degree of protection to the character and appearance of places that local people care about.</p>
	<p>Quality Homes in Thriving Neighbourhoods Conservation Areas promote the protection of buildings and structures that contribute positively to the character and appearance of neighbourhoods.</p>
	<p>A Strong and Inclusive Economy The conservation, use, and re-use of heritage assets exemplifies the fundamental principles of the circular economy.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty on local planning authorities to draw up proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to reappraise them.
- 4.2 Local authorities are expected to ensure that an area justifies designation as a conservation area because of its special architectural or historic interest, so that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.
- 4.3 Appraisal is an objective analysis of the features within the conservation area, which collectively define its special architectural or historic interest. It also identifies negative factors that may detract from the area’s special interest and can make recommendations to encourage the protection and enhancement of its character and appearance
- 4.4 Wednesbury Market Place was designated as a Conservation area in 1980 because of its special architectural and historic interest.



- 4.5 A reappraisal of the area was carried out in 2013. This was updated in 2017 in preparation for a successful application to Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme.
- 4.6 This Conservation Area Appraisal and associated proposals augment heritage-focussed regeneration works carried out as part of the Wednesbury HSHAZ.
- 4.7 Specialist historic environment consultants TDR Heritage have reappraised Wednesbury's existing Conservation Area on behalf of the council against criteria for conservation area status laid down in statute, Historic England guidance and in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 4.8 As part of these works a technical assessment of the historic character and appearance of adjacent areas was undertaken to evaluate suitability for inclusion of those areas into Wednesbury's Market Place conservation area.

Having established that the existing area continued to merit designation, the appraisal also reviewed the conservation area boundary to consider the following areas for inclusion; Upper High Street; the former Gaumont Cinema; Spring Head; the Holyhead Road and Masonic Lodge; Brunswick Terrace and Squire's Walk.

- 4.9 Of these, it was recommended that the boundary be extended to include; Upper High Street (up to and including the Lamp Tavern); the Gaumont Cinema and Spring Head (nos. 12-15).
- 4.10 Other areas were not considered to naturally fall within the Market Place Conservation Area boundary and some elements are in any event variously designated as listed, locally listed buildings or High Historic Townscape Value.
- 4.11 Further work was also carried out to develop a Conservation Area Management Plan to provide guidance to developers, property owners and policy makers in managing change to ensure significance is retained.



- 4.12 It is good practice when appraising and reviewing conservation areas to consult with interested parties - local communities and owners will also be helpful in providing proactive assistance in identifying the general areas that merit conservation area status and defining the boundaries.
- 4.13 Following endorsement by Cabinet at its meeting on 21/06/23, the Council invited interested parties and the public to comment on the proposals, which were accordingly publicised on the Council's website from 7th November until 19th December.
- 4.14 Two 'in-person' public consultation events were held; in the conservation area on Saturday 11th November (a market stall at the junction of Union Street/Market Place) and again at Wednesbury Town Hall on Thursday 16th November. Hard copy copies of the draft documents have been displayed at Wednesbury's Library and Town Hall and flyers inviting responses to the proposals were delivered by hand to all properties both within the conservation area and within areas recommended for designation in the appraisal.
- 4.15 A total of 15 responses were received from members of the public through the Consultation Hub. The responses were generally very supportive of the Appraisal and Management Plan and universally supportive of the proposed extensions. This reflects feedback from the face-to-face consultations.
- 4.16 Historic England observe that the appraisal "...follows a format that is fully in line with national guidance. There is a clear articulation of the conservation areas special interest and a succinct and insightful analysis as to how this currently contributes to the area's character and appearance. Clear prescriptions for management are suggested". Historic England further consider that the proposed boundary changes suggested have "clearly been arrived at after thoughtful analysis and appear well justified".



4.17 In conclusion, the Appraisal and Management Plan fulfils the duties of the Council to define such areas of special architectural or historic interest and – in this instance – to consider the boundaries of and to preserve or enhance the character and the appearance of Wednesbury’s Market Place conservation area.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 The Council could choose not to adopt the Conservation Area Appraisals or Management Plans. Any relevant planning application would continue to be assessed against existing planning policies (including the existing Wednesbury Conservation Area Appraisal. However, this would not allow the Council to provide additional protection to the proposed extension areas nor give enhanced practical guidance or greater clarity to the approach that should be employed applicants and decision makers.

6 Implications

Resources:	Conservation area status would be a ‘material planning consideration’ when planning consent is sought. This applies irrespective of ownership – including Council-owned assets.
Legal and Governance:	Local Authorities are empowered by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation areas) Act to designate conservation areas and required by the National Planning Policy Framework to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.
Risk:	Erosion of the character of an area risks reputational damage and decline. Conservation area designation mitigates this risk
Equality:	There are no Equality issues arising from the contents of this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	There are no Health and Wellbeing implications arising from the contents of this report.
Social Value:	There are no Social Value issues arising from the contents of this report.



Climate Change:	Conservation of the historic built environment may reduce CO2 emissions through the re-use of 'embodied carbon'.
Corporate Parenting	No Corporate Parenting Implication directly arising as a result of this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix One – Draft Wednesbury Conservation Area Management Plan 2023

Appendix Two - Draft Wednesbury Market Place Conservation Area Appraisal 2023

8. Background Papers

Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management
Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second Edition)

