

Three Rivers District Council

Policy & Resources Committee Report

21 July 2025

PART I

**Draft Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal
(DoF)**

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Member agreement of the consultation draft of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

2 Details

- 2.1 Three Rivers District Council has a duty under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (The Act) to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” The Act also requires the Council to keep conservation areas under review and to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for their preservation and enhancement.
- 2.2 There are 22 conservation areas in Three Rivers, which were designated due to having been deemed to have a special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- 2.3 The aims of a conservation area appraisal are to:
- set out the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area and to describe the special character and appearance that it is desirable to preserve or enhance;
 - examine the existing boundaries of the conservation area and consider the potential for other areas to be included and, if appropriate, where existing areas should be excluded; and
 - identify areas subject to pressure for change that would be adverse to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a result of permitted development and identify any areas where the removal of permitted development rights would safeguard the essential character and appearance of the area.
- 2.4 The process for undertaking a conservation area appraisal involves several stages. Initially the existing document needs to be reviewed, followed by a survey of the conservation area involving looking at recent planning applications, what has changed in terms of development, what are the pressures for change, and whether the boundaries of the conservation area need to be renewed. There would then be a consultation period for the appraisal document. The final document then needs to be approved by Members.
- 2.5 At the General Public Services and Economic Development Committee on 19 March 2024 it was agreed that the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal would be the first appraisal to be updated under the conservation area appraisal programme as it was the oldest appraisal in the District.

- 2.6 The consultation draft was initially timetabled to be brought to committee in October 2024, however due to work on the Local Plan being prioritised and availability of consultants this has been delayed.
- 2.7 As the conservation service is outsourced to Place Services, it is they who were commissioned to undertake the appraisal as agreed at committee in March 2024.
- 2.8 The draft Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal can be viewed in Appendix 1. It considers how Rickmansworth developed its building styles, forms, materials, scale, density, roads, footpaths, streetscapes, open spaces, views, landscape, landmarks, and topography. These qualities form the key characteristics of the area and help us to understand the potential impact future developments may have upon the significance of the heritage assets and the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 2.9 An important aspect of the appraisal process is considering where conservation area boundaries should be drawn. Through this process there are proposed additions to be included within the boundary as well as some removals that are no longer proposed to remain within the boundary. The proposed boundary changes can be viewed in the appraisal (Appendix 1)
- 2.10 Proposed additions:
- The Telephone Exchange, Rectory Lane. Telephone exchanges have recently been the subject of greater consideration by the C20 Society, and architect's drawings of the building dating to 1937 are held at the BT Archives. This building is of historic and architectural interest, and so is considered worthy of inclusion within the boundary.
 - There are three locally important buildings at the station, highlighting the important role these buildings and structures played in the development of Rickmansworth and Metro-land urban expansion. The station and its associated buildings are of historic and architectural interest and merit inclusion within the conservation area.
- 2.11 Proposed reductions:
- The reduction of the boundary was proposed to exclude The Cloisters, developed in the 1920s/30s, would benefit the special interest of the conservation area by removing buildings that make a neutral contribution. This area is a pleasant residential side street, with wide grass verges and mature trees lining the streets. The buildings are of mixed date and architectural styles, with mock Tudor and 1920s/30s styles, and some later infill. The historic character has been compromised due to small cumulative changes over time. The inclusion of the Cloisters would therefore dilute the special interest of the conservation area. At this stage the Cloisters has not been removed and the consultants have added this as an additional character area within the appraisal.
 - The northernmost area of the High Street is recommended for reduction to exclude modern flats Cloisters Court, Fellowes House, Middlemarch Lodge, Walkers House, Woodman House, 14-16 High Street, and modern development relating to the St Joan of Arc School. These buildings are larger scale modern flats and educational buildings and make a neutral contribution to the historic character of the High Street.

Including them within the boundary creates a diluted sense of place at a key gateway into the conservation area, and it is not until reaching the listed school and locally important building Number 18 High Street that you see a historic building to mark the historic character.

- The Council Car Park is of no historic or architectural special interest and so is recommended for exclusion.
- The maisonette flats at 1-4 Salters Close have replaced an earlier building on the same plot. They are modern neutral buildings, located on the edge of the conservation area boundary, and are therefore recommended for removal.
- Batchworth House and Riverside Lodge are two large scale modern developments. They make a neutral/negative contribution to the special interest of the conservation area and are located on a prominent gateway into the area. Therefore, it is recommended that their removal would create a stronger entrance to the area, beginning instead at the Grade II listed St Mary's Church.
- The area of woodland to the south of Taylor's Cut is recommended for removal. Paragraph 72 of Historic England's Advice Note 1 states that "*conservation area designation is not generally an appropriate means of protecting the wider landscape*"; it is considered that the woodland forms part of the wider landscape setting of the conservation area. It is proposed that the boundary is drawn tightly around Taylor's Cut, which holds interest as a historic man-made cut, forming part of the water network connecting Rickmansworth to the River Colne and Grand Union Canal, and the grounds of Grade II listed The Bury. At this stage the land south of Taylor's cut has not been removed from the appraisal as it is considered to contribute to this part of the conservation area.

2.12 The appraisal identified several buildings that could potentially be considered for inclusion on the council's list of locally important buildings (often referred to as the 'local list'). These were included on the basis of a combination of the following criteria: architectural style, streetscape quality, landmark quality, function and historic interest. The buildings identified for consideration on the local list were:

- Western Pub, 205 High Street
- Baptist Church, High Street
- Telephone exchange, Rectory Road
- Gable House, 40 High Street
- 163 High Street
- 28 Church Street
- Former Barclays Bank, 6 Church Street

2.13 Whether these buildings are included on the local list will form a separate exercise and is not the role of the conservation area appraisal to determine.

- 2.14 The public consultation will be for 6 weeks hosted on the Council's 'have your say' platform. Place Services will support the consultation by attending an in person event/exhibition where residents can drop in and view posters about conservation areas in general and about Rickmansworth together with hard copies of the appraisal and corresponding maps. They will have the opportunity to ask officers and consultants questions.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 enables Local Authorities to draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas in their Districts, and to consult the local community about these proposals. Public support for Conservation Areas as places that give identity to people and communities is well established.
- 3.2 The 19 March 2024 General Public Services and Economic Development Committee agreed that the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal be updated.
- 3.3 As part of the consultation process, Place Services will write to all properties within and adjacent to the Conservation Area asking for comments on the contents of the appraisal. The Council will take into account any comments received and amend the appraisal as appropriate. The comments, together with the final versions of the appraisal will be presented to a future meeting of the General Public Services and Economic Development Committee for adoption. Once adopted the appraisal will be used by the Council as a material consideration when determining planning applications and may also be used by the Planning Inspectorate in the case of appeals.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators:
- ESD05: Percentage of conservation areas with an up to date character appraisal.
- 4.3 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is: It will increase the number of conservation areas with up to date character appraisals.

Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website Implications

None specific.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 £20,000 in reserves has been agreed to cover the Rickmansworth and Sarratt (Church End) conservation area Appraisals.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Conservation Areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. The power to designate is now included in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It is the duty of the Local Planning Authority to decide which parts of the area they administer are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which is desirable to enhance through formal designation. The Act also requires the Council to keep conservation areas under review and to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for their preservation and enhancement

7 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

- 7.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.
- 7.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Planning Policy and Conservation service plan(s). Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of likelihood and impact)
The area of special architectural and historic interest would be under threat from unsympathetic development proposals	Deterioration and loss of the district's historic environment	Keep the conservation area appraisal as up to date as possible	Tolerate	3

- 7.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely Likelihood	Low	High	Very High	Very High
	4	8	12	16
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
3	3	6	9	12
	Low	Low	Medium	High
2	2	4	6	8

	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4
	Impact Low -----> Unacceptable			

Impact Score

4 (Catastrophic)
3 (Critical)
2 (Significant)
1 (Marginal)

Likelihood Score

4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
3 (Likely (21-79%))
2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
1 (Remote (≤5%))

- 7.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

8 Recommendation

- 8.1 That: Members agree the draft Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal for consultation.

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APPENDIX 1 – Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal

