Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal

23/11/2026

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

PART I

RICKMANSWORTH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL UPDATE (DoF)

1 Summary

1.1 This report seeks Member agreement of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, and that Members recommend the appraisal for adoption at Full Council.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That:

2.2 Members agree the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and recommend to Full Council for adoption.

Report prepared by: Marko Kalik, Head of Planning Policy and Conservation

3 Details

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 The council consulted on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal from 1 July through to 12 August. This included an in person event at Three Rivers House visitor's Centre on Thursday 16 July where residents and other stakeholders had the opportunity to learn more about the appraisal and to discuss it with the conservation consultants and Three Rivers Planning Policy Officers.

3.6 The consultation on the draft Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan attracted responses from local residents, community organisations and Batchworth Community Council. There were 49 responses through the council's Have Your Say consultation platform (Appendix 2) and one response received by email from Batchworth Communtiy Council (Appendix 3). The conservation specialist's responses to the consultation can be viewed in Appendix 4. These include the proposed changes to the consultation version of the appraisal.

3.7 There was general support for protecting and enhancing the historic character of Rickmansworth, particularly its High Street, Church Street, historic buildings and residential streets. Respondents also emphasised the importance of the town's waterways, green spaces and wider landscape setting. The principal concerns related to the potential impact of inappropriate development, building heights, the loss of historic features, the condition of the public realm and the effectiveness of existing conservation controls. The conservation consultants' responses acknowledge these concerns and confirm that the Appraisal provides an evidence base for managing change and ensuring that development preserves or enhances the special architectural and historic interest of the Conservation Area.

3.8 A significant number of representations sought changes to the Conservation Area boundary, particularly to include the Mill Stream, sections of the River Colne, Batchworth Lock, the canal corridor and other areas beyond the historic town centre. The consultants' response recognises the historic and environmental importance of these locations but concludes that extending the boundary to include geographically separate areas would not be justified solely on that basis. The Conservation Area should remain focused on areas demonstrating a coherent special architectural or historic interest, consistent with the statutory designation criteria.

3.9 Concerns were also raised about the scale and design of new development, including requests for stronger restrictions on building heights and greater protection of historic views and the existing townscape. The consultants' response instead emphasises the need for development to respond to context, including prevailing building heights, heritage significance and important views. These principles are reflected in Sections 5 and 7 of the revised Appraisal, which provide guidance on assessing new development and managing future change. The document also identifies opportunities to improve the High Street, including better-quality shopfronts, signage, street furniture, paving and pedestrian connections.

3.10 A further theme was the need for a stronger and more effective Management Plan, with clearer arrangements for maintenance, enforcement and the consistent treatment of historic materials and architectural features. The responses acknowledge these concerns while recognising that detailed implementation programmes, highways specifications and wider regeneration initiatives extend beyond the scope of the Appraisal. The revised document

addresses these matters through its management recommendations, including the potential for further Article 4 controls subject to robust evidence gathering, the use of planning enforcement powers, and guidance on alterations to buildings and their rear service areas. Additional wording has also been incorporated into Section 7.5 to recognise the importance of cooperation between the Planning and Highways Authorities in conserving the character of the public realm.

3.11 Batchworth Community Council also requested stronger references to the emerging Local Plan, the Batchworth Neighbourhood Plan and associated design guidance, together with clearer advice on balancing heritage protection with sustainability objectives. These comments have resulted in amendments to the Appraisal, including updated planning policy references, recognition of the Neighbourhood Design Code and Rickmansworth Town Centre Concept Plan, and revisions to the information on locally important buildings. Section 7.4 has also been expanded to address renewable energy technologies, including heat pumps, solar panels and electric vehicle charging infrastructure, with an emphasis on sensitive siting and design. Overall, the proposed amendments respond positively to the principal matters raised through consultation and strengthen the Appraisal as a practical tool for the conservation and enhancement of Rickmansworth's historic environment, whilst distinguishing between matters appropriately addressed through the Appraisal and those requiring separate policy or implementation mechanisms.

3.12 It should be noted that the consultation has resulted in targeted improvements to the document, rather than agreement to every suggested boundary extension or to additional management commitments beyond the Appraisal's remit.

3.13 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.

4 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 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.

4.2 The adoption of an updated Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan will provide a robust and up-to-date evidence base for identifying and protecting the area's special architectural and historic interest, whilst establishing a clear framework for managing future development and identifying opportunities for enhancement. The Appraisal has been informed by public consultation, with appropriate amendments made in response to representations received. Its adoption will support consistent and well-informed planning decisions.

5 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

5.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council’s agreed policy and budgets.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 £50,000 has been budgeted for preparation of Conservation Area Appraisals in this financial year.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 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.

8 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

8.1 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.

8.2 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	Deterioration and loss of the district's historic environment	Keep the conservation area appraisal as up to date as	Tolerate	3

development proposals		possible		

8.3 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.

Likelihood				
Very Likely	Low 4	High 8	Very High 12	Very High 16
	Low 3	Medium 6	High 9	Very High 12
	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
Remote	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4
	Impact			
	Low ----------▶			Unacceptable

Impact Score	Likelihood Score
4 (Catastrophic)	4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
3 (Critical)	3 (Likely (21-79%))
2 (Significant)	2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
1 (Marginal)	1 (Remote (≤5%))

8.4 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.

APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

APPENDIX 1 – Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal
APPENDIX 2 – Have Your Say Representations
APPENDIX 3 – Batchworth Community Council Response
APPENDIX 4 – Place Services responses to representations

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