

## CABINET

20 October 2020

<b>Title:</b> The Abbey and Barking Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal	
<b>Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> Abbey	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes
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<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ed Skeates, Development Director, Be First	
<b>Accountable Strategic Leadership Director:</b> Graeme Cooke, Director of Inclusive Growth	
<b>Summary</b> <p>Cherishing heritage is a key element of the new Barking Town Centre Regeneration Strategy on the same Cabinet agenda. It recognises the importance of heritage in place making and giving the town centre a strong, distinct identity. Barking has a fascinating but little known history and we want to retain, enhance and raise awareness of it alongside the ambitious regeneration agenda for new buildings.</p> <p>The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham have been awarded £1.15m by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Townscape Heritage (TH) Programme for a £1.7m scheme entitled 'Enhancing Heritage in the Abbey and Barking Town Centre Conservation Area'. Be First are responsible for delivering the project as part of its Business Plan and regeneration objectives.</p> <p>One of the TH scheme's key themes is enhancing heritage spaces and settings which will be carried out physically with improvements to the buildings and public spaces within the Conservation Area (CA). One element of the TH scheme is to ensure planning policies in relation to town centre heritage are up to date and therefore the Abbey and Barking Town Centre conservation area appraisal (CAA) has been refreshed and an associated Management Plan produced. This will maintain and safeguard the improved condition of the Abbey and Barking Town Centre Conservation Area made through the TH scheme.</p> <p>The draft refreshed CAA has reassessed the area taking account of changes since 2009. It proposes making a number of minor changes to the CAA boundary which are set out in the report.</p> <p>The draft document (Appendix 1) has been subject to public and stakeholder consultation with the results set out in this report and Appendix 2.</p>	

## **Recommendation(s)**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Adopt the Barking and Abbey Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Director of Inclusive Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Social Housing, to make any minor amendments to finalise the document.

## **Reason(s)**

- To ensure heritage policy is up to date and fit for purpose. Planning legislation (Section 72 1990 TCPA) requires local authorities to update these policy documents regularly
- To support the retention and enhancement of town centre heritage assets in line with Corporate Policy objectives.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Abbey and Barking Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in 1975 and originally covered only the Abbey precinct and Town Quay. In the 1990s it was extended to include the Victorian town centre to the east and to include the gateway to the town centre from near the station to the Town Hall in 2007. The existing Conservation Area Appraisal was adopted in 2009.
- 1.2 A review of the existing Conservation Area Appraisal has been undertaken by Purcell - experienced Heritage Consultants appointed following a procurement exercise - as part of the Development Phase of the NLHF Townscape Heritage project. The TH project aims to enhance the heritage of Barking Town Centre with improvements proposed to buildings in the town centre and new interpretation and education opportunities. It is intended that one legacy of the project will be maintenance and enhancement of the buildings and fabric across the conservation area and in order to achieve this a clear and helpful Conservation Area Appraisal and robust, tailored management guidance and policies will be necessary.
- 1.3 The review identified that the Appraisal required updating and the material re-presenting in a more accessible and understandable format. It was also noted that the boundary of the conservation area should once again be reviewed.
- 1.4 During the Development Phase some further archival research was undertaken by the archivists at Valance House, which holds LBBD's local archives and revealed further historic photographs of some of the buildings within the TH project area. This material has informed the development of proposals and is incorporated into the updated Conservation Area Appraisal. This material was gathered by volunteers, managed by the Community Engagement Officer during the Delivery Phase of the TH project and incorporated into the updated Appraisal.
- 1.5 The existing Appraisal is now over ten years old and planning legislation (Section 60 1990 TCPA) requires local authorities to update these policy documents

regularly. The existing CAA is largely text-based format with a lengthy account of the special significance of the conservation area, lacking imagery to help navigate the appraisal. The new appraisal has attempted to address this with better spatial and character analysis. The existing management policies are limited with emphasis being on LBBB action to preserve and enhance the conservation area. An opportunity was identified to provide advice and guidance for the owners and occupiers of buildings in the conservation area both with regard to best practice for routine maintenance, simple enhancements, and design parameters for new developments.

- 1.6 The National Planning Policy Framework requires local authorities to set out positive strategies for the conservation of the historic environment in their Local Plan. The updated Abbey and Barking Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal will inform policies on conserving and enhancing heritage assets in the Barking and Dagenham Local Plan 2037 and will be a material consideration in determining planning applications.
- 1.7 Purcell have also produced a 'Business Owners and Residents Guide to Barking Town Centre and Abbey Conservation Area' which gives easy to digest information and guidance about the conservation and what it means if a property owner is looking at making changes.

### **Townscape Heritage Project**

- 1.8 This section summaries the Townscape Heritage project underway.
  - **Improvements to heritage buildings**  
It is proposed to enhance the appearance of a number of heritage buildings along East Street, Station Parade and London Road. A heritage contractor has been appointed and the first phase of works will commence at the end of the year.
  - **Public Realm improvements to area in front of Curfew Tower**  
Planning permission has recently been granted for a public realm scheme in front of the Curfew Tower - helping link East Street to the Abbey Grounds and provide a calm space to relax and learn about Barking's history. It will include a model of the former Abbey. Depending on archaeological investigations, works are due to start late this year/early next.
  - **Volunteers/Engagement work**  
Eight, committed, heritage volunteers have been recruited who have received research training at the LBBB Archives (Valence house Museum) and undertaken extensive research on the history of Barking town centre. This has informed several articles on local heritage have been published in the B&D Post newspaper, in a series of 'Stories behind the Stores' based on the volunteers' research. They have enjoyed guided heritage visits to Rippleside Cemetery and Chapel and a riverside walk from the Quay. During the 'lockdown' period of the coronavirus epidemic, the volunteers reviewed their research, attended Zoom meetings, and made audio recordings which are being added to the local fitness 'app' for mobile devices - 'Street Tag' – this should encourage residents to visit local heritage sites, while they get active. This app will be a key part of forthcoming Town Trails – encouraging locals and visitors to explore the heritage in Barking Town Centre.  
The news stories can be found on the project webpage:

<https://yourcall.befirst.london/barking-heritage>

- **Programme of Activities for schools** – In 2019 approximately 175 Year 5 pupils, from Gascoigne Primary School, experienced Victorian Barking tours with a worksheet of facts, images and activities for pupils covering the Victorian heritage of East Street and the Town Centre. This could hopefully be used in future years for a self-guided tour by teachers. For the workshops Victorian artefacts and replica objects were purchased for the pupils to handle and use during role play activities, following a Victorian Barking themed PowerPoint. Many of the key resources found by the volunteers in their archive research were also included in the themed packs of resources. The pupils were really engaged and fully enjoyed both the tours and workshops using adjectives such as ‘amazing’ when describing the experience. In 2020, two classes of Year 2 pupils from St Joseph’s Primary, participated in a tour of ‘Old Barking’ and workshops recreating the Abbey and old high street stores, such as drapers, tailors, grocers, butchers, bakers, chemist & soda bar etc. The Key Stage 1 pupils had great fun and learned a great deal about Barking’s past. St Joseph’s also participated in a writing/art competition on Barking’s ‘Past, Present and Future’ - the entries will be placed in a time-capsule during the improvements to public realm at the Curfew Tower. They have also booked in more tours & workshops for the coming school year including a new topic on changes to Barking High Street in the twentieth century.
- **BDC/TSA: Work experience placements** – The college’s Construction Department are liaising with the project to place at least 15 students into work experience opportunities during the upcoming phase of renovations to high street buildings and improvements at the Curfew Tower. Students have also been invited to join the planned conservation workshops. BTEC L3 students from the Media & Film department will be working with the project this academic year, to create short video films on the history of Barking, to be submitted as a major part of their course for evaluation. These will also be shown as part of a celebratory ‘Pop up Exhibition’ next summer and will be embedded in future College Induction Weeks, from September 2021, to inform all new BDC college students of Barking’s heritage. Local film producers Bluebird Pictures have agreed to work with the pupils and provide work experience opportunities in 2021 using the project funding.
- **Heritage Wall (41 East Street) and Town Centre Interpretation** - volunteers have helped to produce a selection of suggestions of themes/images for artist’s brief for a mural on the side of McDonald’s.

## 2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 Appendix 1 contains the draft CAA. The Designations Report (Appendix 1a) which forms part of the CAA sets out three minor proposed changes to the Conservation area boundary which are shown on page 5 of that document. The changes are:

- Area A: Numbers 107-119 Ripple Road (Odd): It is proposed to include this terrace as it bears the same character and appearance of the adjacent stretch of Ripple Road. The report recognises however that improvements are required to the shopfronts and build fabric.
- Area B: Excluding Barking Baptist Tabernacle, No 26 Linton Road and Crown House. Crown House is acknowledged as being detrimental to the

Conservation Area. It has planning approval for its demolition. Therefore it is suggested it is removed. Rather than have an island of Barking Baptist Tabernacle and No 26 it is felt the Tabernacle has its own protections by being a Grade II Listed building and therefore does not need to form part of the CAA.

- Area C: Include Town Square. Since the completion of the Town Square it has become a positive and string setting for the Locally Listed Town Hall providing hard scaping amenity.

### **3. Options Appraisal**

- 3.1 The Council has the option to approve or reject the CAA or suggest further amendments to it. Not adopting the CAA means policy will remain out of date and potentially risks NLHF funding for the Town Centre.

### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 The draft CAA has been subject to a 6 week consultation period. Leaflets were delivered to all properties within the Conservation area together with a dedicated website page, social media promotion and local newspaper articles.

- 4.2 Be First also carried out a Heritage survey for the town centre which had over 130 responses to the questionnaire highlighting the local interest in the area's heritage and desire for more information. The survey is informing the TH project.

- 4.3 By the close of the consultation there were over 15 responses. Appendix 2 sets out a summary of the responses and how they have been addressed. Comments have been received from Historic England who commented that the document was "exceptionally clear and comprehensive" and "consider the proposed appraisal and management guidelines will have a positive impact in respect of managing change and preserving and enhancing the areas special interest". They also highlighted the benefits of Appendix C and the assessment of the condition of buildings within the conservation area, this "should prove to be a valuable tool in managing and targeting positive change with the conservation area". However they did highlight the following issues:

- Barking Abbey (Scheduled Ancient Monument) is identified as "at risk" on the Heritage at Risk Register for London 2019.
- A number of tall developments have not, in HE's view, demonstrated the high standard of design required to preserve and enhance the significance of the conservation area. They therefore welcome the guidance on new development set out in Section 7.4.2 and encourage the Council to consider how further design and setting guidance can be developed which secure the standard of new development.
- Area for exclusion of Area B from CA which includes the Grade II listed Tabernacle Church - they acknowledge that the setting and extent of connection to the conservation area has been severely eroded. They stress however that while removal is on balance justified its listed status and the nature of the surrounding site it will require a high standard of design and redevelopment which should preserve or enhance the significance of the assets affected. The listed status of the building should not in itself be a justification for removal of the area from the conservation area, its special

interest normally being a criteria to warrant consideration for inclusion. They state this is clear within the draft documentation but poorly worded in the pdf summary used for the consultation.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: David Dickinson, Investment Fund Manager

- 5.1 This report seeks the adoption of a refreshed Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) for Barking Town Centre. The CAA has been funded via the NLHF grant and the associated S106 match funding with no additional resources required.
- 5.2 The proposed changes do not include any additional Council owned buildings being added to the Conservation area. Whilst the Council owns assets within the Conservation Area and obviously would be expected to follow its own planning policies for any changes requiring planning permission, the buildings already fall within the Conservation area.
- 5.3 Retaining and enhancing heritage assets is recognised as supporting place-making and long-term prosperity within town centres.

## **6. Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Dr. Paul Feild, Legal Practice

- 6.1 A conservation area is 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' (Section 69(1)(a)) Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) 1990. Local planning authorities have a duty from time to time to review the extent of designation, and to designate further areas if appropriate (Section 69(2)). Conservation area designation is the main instrument available to local authorities to give effect to conservation policies for a particular neighbourhood or area. Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 has emphasised the importance of including firm conservation area policies in the local plan, which should in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that special architectural or historic interest which warranted designation in each case.
- 6.2 Designation imposes certain duties on local planning authorities:
  - to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas in their districts, and submit them to public consultation (Section 71)
  - in exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas (Section 72)
- 6.3 Historic England observes that within Conservation areas building costs may be slightly increased, because of particular requirements relating to the repair or alteration of buildings, or because of restrictions on the form of new development where they are needed to maintain the special architectural and historic interest of the area, however the value to amenity of the status will generally outweigh the cost due to the attractiveness of a well-managed area.

## **7. Other Implications**

- 7.1 **Risk Management** – If the refreshed CAA was not adopted there is a risk that the NLHF may not wish to continue to fund the existing TH project or future schemes.
- 7.2 **Contractual Issues** - A contract was entered into for Purcell to produce the revised CAA. This followed a procurement exercise and was funded via NLHF.
- 7.3 **Staffing Issues** – Be First has led on the TH project utilising the NLHF and match funding.
- 7.4 **Property / Asset Issues** - Number 35 East Street is a Council owned property which will benefit from enhancements via the project. The Council owns a number of properties within the CA.

**Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None**

### **List of appendices:**

- Appendix 1: Draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
- Appendix 2: Consultation responses