

Conservation Consultation

Date: 17th November 2014

Introduction

A motion was put to Council on 27th February 2014 to designate further Conservation Areas in Cliftonville. Officers recommended that potential Conservation Areas in Cliftonville should be designated, beginning with those areas most at threat from detrimental change.

A report was submitted to Cabinet on 31 July where it was agreed that the Ethelbert and Athelstan Road areas could be progressed for adoption as a designated Conservation Area, subject to public consultation. Officers were also asked to prepare, consult and undertake the formal designation of an Article 4 Direction in respect of the proposed area.

It was agreed the remainder of the areas would be progressed as part of an overall Conservation Area management plan, subject to public consultation: Edgar Road and Sweyn Road; Norfolk Road, Warwick Road and Surrey Road; Clifton Place and Grotto Gardens; Northdown Road and Clifftop. Part of the process would include consultation on introducing an Article 4 Direction.

Methodology

For this consultation we used a digital campaign, comprising an online survey and consultation webpages providing further information on the consultation and Conservation Areas. We contacted local community groups, elected members and the local MP to inform them of the consultation and encourage them to circulate the information to interested residents. The consultation email was also available to anyone who wished to submit their comments separately.

We organised a mail out, sending over 400 letters to owner/occupiers and the landlords of the affected areas, directing them to the online information and survey, which included a summary leaflet of the main consultation document. We also gave a copy of this letter to all the letting agents in Northdown Road.

The Communications Team sent out two press releases during the consultation period and placed two adverts in the local paper. Hard copies of the documents were also produced and made available to the Gateway and Cliftonville Library for the public to view.

Two drop-in sessions were arranged and held at the Resort Studios (formerly known as the Depository Building) in Ethelbert Road, which was one of the areas that would be affected by the proposed conservation designation. Posters were produced to advertise these drop-ins, along with maps, photos and other conservation materials produced for residents to view and hand out to those who were interested. These included the Draft Management Proposal, summary leaflet, hard copy surveys and comment cards; these were available to residents who wanted to put forward comments that were related to the consultation or other topics that were brought up.

The consultation was also advertised in the staff briefing slides to raise awareness of the consultation internally.

Data Received:

Online Survey

23 responses were received through the online survey. 19 people agreed that the draft character appraisal document accurately describes the character and qualities of the proposed Ethelbert Road and Athelstan Road Conservation Area; with one person disagreeing and 3 partially agreeing.

The comments that were put forward were in partial agreement that the document accurately describes the character and qualities of the proposed Conservation Area, however there were suggestions that certain areas of these roads were more important than stated in the document and that these should be better maintained, such as No 22 and 23 Ethelbert Road; a Dairy and a Grocer.

Other comments highlighted that so much had already been done to the properties that there was not much left in terms of original features, as they had already been stripped out.

Another comment suggested that many properties' facades have been ruined by unscrupulous landlords. They feel that, even with an Article 4 Direction in place, there is insufficient enforcement of breaches, for example property owners only being obliged to replace windows with more UPVC, rather than revert back to their original splendour.

All 23 people agreed with the summary of special interest of the Conservation Area contained within the draft Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Some comments were submitted relating to the significance of the direct sea view running at the end of the road and how the area needs to be helped back to its former glory. It was pointed out that this kind of change to the environment has a positive impact on the people in that community.

Another comment suggested that Athelstan Road appears to be mentioned less in the document in terms of residential houses, although it is just as special as Ethelbert, being grand and impressive in its own right.

22 people agreed with the various measures put forward in the Draft Management Plan Proposals and 2 people disagreed. The comments indicated that there is agreement with the designation, however it needs to be rolled out much more quickly to the other streets in Cliftonville and should be implemented in one go. It was stated that insensitive building work has already taken place in these roads, undermining the idea of conservation and the visual impact on these streets – Edgar Road in particular which was considered more at risk and a priority – and therefore what remains should be safeguarded.

Other comments also suggested that they would like to see the conservation designation implemented in the other areas more quickly or simultaneously, building on the positive momentum for change in all areas of architectural significance. It was felt that this would be a positive step for everyone.

Of the two people that disagreed, one suggested that they did not agree that one of the properties in Athelstan Road should be allowed to remain the same and further measures should be taken, such as returning the property to a cream colour, mirroring the adjoined property.

The other comment stated that they would be in agreement with the Management Proposal, subject to there not being any additional costs to landlords, as in the Selective Licensing Scheme. They would much prefer improvements to be made to the seafront area, including quaint cafés with pavement seating, rather than arcades.

21 people said they would support measures to control certain developments and alterations within the area, by making an Article 4(2) Direction. 1 person said they would not support an Article 4(2) Direction and 1 person partially agreed. No comments were put forward in this section.

Drop-in Session Comments

30 people attended the drop in session held, with 15 coming to the first session and 15 to the second. The attendees were a combination of home owners and landlords and were from the two main affected roads and from the surrounding areas, which had been identified as potential Conservation Areas.

At the drop-in sessions, several people filled out comment cards. These comments suggested that conservation grants would help owners to restore their property's character; others complained that the red brick church in Ethelbert Road had been demolished in 2013 with no consultation.

Other comments given were regarding No.26 Ethelbert Road being a dangerous eyesore, which should have a compulsory purchase order put on it and auctioned to someone who would restore and care for it.

Consultation Email Comments

These were a mixture of those in favour of the designation and those against. The more negative comments suggested that they have seen the general condition and desirability of the area rise and fall over the years, and that designation would add little value to improving the quality of the area. It was suggested the council should focus its efforts and invest in resources that would improve the quality of life of the residents in Ethelbert and Athelstan Road, in terms of safety and security in the area. It was suggested that there was no building or property of special interest from these roads, that was above and beyond any other road in the area and they would like the council to confirm its proposed funding budget to preserve and enhance the street scene.

It was suggested that housing people from outside Thanet has resulted in the deterioration of living standards in this area, which has had a significant impact on the value of properties. Landlords feel they have lost good tenants, and owner-occupiers have moved out of the area when the crime rate has soared. It is felt that current tenants have no desire to improve their quality of life.

Another resident believed there were many supporting factors in favour of a Conservation Area, however the council would need to fund the improvements and enforce the restrictions that result from it being declared a Conservation Area. This resident had little confidence in the desired improvements actually happening.

The more positive comments received centred around residents from the neighbouring roads; specifically Warwick Road, who were greatly in favour of the proposed designation and want to be part of it. They want to ensure the conservation status happens quickly, to enable all Cliftonville residents to benefit from the conservation designation. It was felt that enforcing the conservation designation now will protect more buildings from disappearing or being disrespectfully treated.

One resident indicated that they have recently moved to Cliftonville from the Dalston area in London, where a successful conservation scheme had been in place for over thirty years and therefore they strongly support the proposed scheme.

Some residents partially agreed with the Conservation Area designation, suggesting that although they support the measures that will slow or stop the degradation of the historic town, they would like to express concerns as to the effectiveness of the proposal. They were concerned at the wording used in the consultation document action plan, such as "Review", "Update", "Consider" and "Prepare", which were not words that proposed action.

These residents have also suggested that they believe many local people will support the intention of this document in an effort to maintain the history and character of Cliftonville. They feel action should be taken to stop unscrupulous landlords, property owners and tenants making changes to the outside of the properties, which have a visually detrimental effect.

Another positive response stated the Conservation Area designation was an excellent idea and would hopefully protect these houses from inappropriate alterations, development and importantly their position on or near the seafront. It is felt the views to the sea should be protected from any development or buildings above the cliffs edge. This particular resident believes protecting Margate's wonderful array of architecture could help bring in visitors to Margate and Cliftonville.

Another resident asked for the proposed conservation to be implemented as soon as possible, as they wholeheartedly support this initiative. However, they did believe that the phased approach was damaging to the rest of the proposed Cliftonville Conservation Areas, as these areas will continue to suffer from poor development and potentially attract more developers who will see there is a limited time from in which to get inappropriate development approved. There were also concerns raised that the assessment reports and appraisals were written in 2010/2011 and that the years of delay in implementing the conservation areas was unacceptable.

Another resident is in favour of the proposal, however they are concerned about the levels of antisocial behaviour from tenants and slumlords neglecting their properties and feel the abandoned vehicles in this area were overshadowing any good that can be done there as a residential area. The resident understands they are desperately needed in order to improve the environment, however feel the owner-occupiers are being driven out by these issues.

Other issues not directly related to the conservation consultation:

There were some suggestions and issues that arose during the consultation that were not directly related to the conservation proposal; one of these was the subject of CCTV. Some residents felt there were certain issues in these two roads, for example vandalism and youths congregating in large groups. They suggested introducing CCTV to help with this situation.

There were also some concerns regarding street cleansing and how these streets always appear to be messy. Providing bins and increased street cleaners in this area was a suggestion put forward.

There were a number of landlords concerned about the Selective Licensing Scheme and how the money raised by it has been spent. There were suggestions that it had been a Stealth Tax, as there were no clear indications as to what the money had been used for. The landlords' understanding was that the Selective Licensing Scheme was to help improve living conditions; however they feel there have been no improvements seen.

It was also highlighted that parking was difficult at night in Athelstan Road and additional parking nearby would greatly help the residents who live there.

Conclusion Summary / Recommendations:

Overall support was particularly high in favour of the proposed Conservation Area designation. Residents from both Ethelbert and Athelstan Road and the surrounding areas said they found this consultation topic an uplifting prospect and were keen to protect and preserve original features of the buildings within the Conservation Area and support improvements.

It is clear that these residents have great pride in their homes and showed concern for the properties and their future. It was evident, however, that although the residents greatly support the designation and what it represents, they are concerned that it will not go ahead, or will never reach its full potential. Furthermore, many residents feel let down by landlords who are not doing anything to make the living conditions here better. A great deal of encouragement was therefore needed at the drop-ins, to get the residents to complete the survey, email their comments though or submit comments on the cards available.

The landlords that responded to the consultation and were greatly in favour of the Conservation Area designation, were apprehensive that they would need to provide more money to the council, as they did with the Selective Licensing Scheme and then nothing more would happen, indicating a lack in confidence in the end result.

The home owners who were in favour of the proposed designation also had concerns about the Conservation Area designation going ahead due to the levels of criminal activity in the area. They felt strongly that until this is properly addressed, the designation will have little impact.

The other main concern expressed was in relation to the timing of designating the conservation area, and they all wanted it to proceed immediately and without further delays. They believed that a phased approach could be potentially damaging if a separate consultation was held each time, as this would allow landlords a window of opportunity to make further changes to their properties outside the conservation guidelines. Many residents felt the constant delays had led to the special features of this area becoming needlessly damaged or lost.

Along with the support for the Conservation Area designation and willingness to preserve original features, there is a current perception that this area houses run down eyesores and has 'no-go zones' in the evening and this lead to many other topics being brought up that were not directly linked to the conservation consultation. The comment cards were beneficial for these other comments that needed to be addressed.

When looking at the Article 4(2) Direction specifically, support was high to remove some of the permitted rights and make the restrictions more enforceable. There were residents who felt that under the current circumstances, further measures should be taken to enforce the Conservation Area regulations and that some properties should revert back to their original features. These residents were concerned that the Article 4(2) Direction would not be enough.

In terms of location for the public drop-ins, it was a success. Residents found the Resort Studios building easily accessible and in-keeping with the conservation topic. The attendance may have not been as high, if the consultation for these two roads in particular, was not located close by.

It is evident when considering all the responses generated by the consultation and especially when speaking with the residents directly at the drop-in sessions, that although residents are widely in favour of the proposed designation, they have reservations. These primarily focus on how much the Conservation Area designation will cost homeowners to implement, what funding would be available to help preserve and protect the properties and, if designated, would the Conservation Area actually reach its full potential when taking into account the current high crime rate in the area, the look of the area and the people who reside here. It is clear that many of the residents have misunderstood the Conservation Area concept and once they were given the correct information, their understanding and perceptions changed.

It is recommended that for any future Conservation Area designation proposals, the correct information and reasons for why certain things are done, should be communicated to the residents at the first opportunity, enabling the residents to fully understand what a Conservation Area is and how it will affect them – both positively and negatively.

It is also recommended that future Conservation Area designation proposals be rolled out as one exercise, in response to residents' feedback and supported by the fact that further damaging alternations could be made to other properties within the other proposed Conservation Area roads, whilst they are waiting for the designation to be approved.