



CABINET

21st July 2003

St George's Conservation Area Character Statement

Report of the Service Director, Planning & Sustainable Development

1 Purpose of Report

To seek Cabinet approval to adopt the St George's Conservation Area Character Statement as supplementary planning guidance to the City of Leicester Local Plan.

2 Summary

St George's Conservation Area presently covers an area of 5.7 hectares and stretches from Humberstone Gate in the north to Charles Street Police Station in the south. The buildings on the west side of Rutland Street define the western boundary and the eastern boundary follows Morledge Street and part of St George Street. The conservation area was designated in May 1989.

Advice in Planning Policy Guidance 15, 'Planning & the Historic Environment', identifies the need for local planning authorities to prepare statements which identify those factors which make a conservation area an area of special architectural and historic interest. This will help ensure that soundly-based decisions are made on planning applications that are likely to affect the character and appearance of the area. Increasing emphasis is being placed on character appraisals by both planning inspectors and English Heritage.

Statements are to be prepared for each of the City's 23 conservation areas; to date 6 have been adopted and 6 others are in preparation.

As part of the appraisal of the area it is proposed that five additional areas be included within the conservation area boundaries. These are shown on the attached plan.

The draft character statement for St George's Conservation Area is attached as part of the Supplementary Information where the results of the consultation exercises are also described.

3 Recommendations

CABINET is recommended to:

- 1) ADOPT the St George's Conservation Area Character Statement as supplementary planning guidance to the City of Leicester Local Plan.
- 2) APPROVE the extension of the conservation area to include the 5 areas shown on the accompanying plan.

4 Headline Financial and Legal Implications

There are no direct financial or legal implications.

5 Report Author/Officer to Contact

David Trubshaw, Building Conservation Officer, Urban Design Group, Extension 7217

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Report

- 1.1 This report advises members of the results of a consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the preparation of a character statement for St George's Conservation Area.
- 1.2 The St George's Conservation Area was designated in May 1989. It covers a large area ranging from the shops on Humberstone Gate, the office and residential quarter around Charles Street and the Council's Cultural Quarter centred around Rutland Street. It also includes St George's Church, the former Odeon Cinema and the police station at the south end of Charles Street. A location plan is attached.
- 1.3 The character statement identifies those factors that make this part of the city centre worthy of its special status as a conservation area. The Council is required to periodically review the boundaries of conservation areas and in this respect it is proposed to extend the boundaries to include five new areas (shown by dotted lines and marked 1 to 5 on the attached plan). The reasons for the proposed extensions are given in Section 12.0 of the Character Statement.
- 1.4 If Cabinet approves this proposal, notification will have to be given to the Secretary of State and details advertised in the London Gazette and Leicester Mercury. There is, however, no further need for consultation or recourse for objection.

2. Consultations

- 2.1 Ward councillors were provided with a draft of the character statement and no comments were received.
- 2.2 Service Director (Property) – There is a need to encourage continued use and occupation of properties, particularly in the light of the Council's forthcoming Heritage Strategy. The proposed extension (Area 2) includes a variety of uses and concern was expressed about whether conservation area status would help secure improvements in the area.

2.3 Director of Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal - The City Archaeologist provided background information.

2.4 Conservation Advisory Panel

The Conservation Advisory Panel suggested two amendments to the text and the need for careful consideration of landscaping proposals so as to avoid inappropriate tree and shrub planting. They had no objections to raise in respect of the adoption of the character statement.

2.5 Owners, occupiers and other interested parties

2.5.1 The St George's Regeneration Company expressed disappointment about the lack of enhancement proposals in the character statement and saw a need to avoid conflict with the regeneration schemes currently being developed. It also considered that the mass and density of trees in the churchyard was an issue that needed to be addressed and that the omission of proposals for the churchyard appeared to oppose the concept of 'opening up' the space. There was no mention of the tremendous opportunities that a major new regional theatre would throw up for creating a sense of arrival and a major public landmark. Generally it considered that there must be a balance between "preserving in aspic" and responding to the needs of the twenty-first century.

2.5.2 A letter was sent to all owners and occupiers within the existing and proposed boundaries of the Conservation Area inviting them to visit the exhibition held in the foyer of the Leicester Mercury building between the 2nd and 6th June 2003. The exhibition was also subject to a Press Release inviting members of the public, local employees etc to visit the exhibition. Information about the Character Statement and details of the exhibition were given in a Radio Leicester interview on 2nd June. Comments about the conservation area were invited and copies of the draft statement offered.

2.5.3 It is not known how many people attended the exhibition as only 11 people signed the Attendance Sheet. The Leicester Mercury's foyer is, however, a busy place so there may have been many more visitors who did not record their visit. One person recorded their support for the proposed extensions to the conservation area boundaries and five other written representations were received. These are summarised below:

- 1. The churchyard is very dark and feels unsafe. It should be made more welcoming. The Odeon is in very poor condition;
- 2. One owner wondered what effect designation would have on his ability to develop his property in the future (for example would the external appearance have to be retained) and enquired about what grants were available;
- 3. Charles Street should be included because of the regeneration interest;
- 4. There is too much parking on the footway around Wigston Street, a street light needs to be repositioned following removal of street trees, replacement tree species should be considered to include a 'low level decorative feature',

commercial waste bins positioned on Wigston Street are overflowing, unsightly and attract vermin;

- 5. The conservation area should be extended to include the Salvation Army building on Kildare Street, Hannam Court on Charles Street and 27 Wharf Street South (the former Hippodrome Theatre and cinema);
- 6. Age Concern expressed pleasure in the proposed extension to the conservation area to include their building on Humberstone Gate.

2.6 Responses to the issues raised.

- 2.6.1 The issues raised at 2.5.3(4) above have been forwarded to the relevant sections of the Council for appropriate action. The waste bin problem will be raised with the relevant property owner to see if a solution can be achieved.
- 2.6.2 With regard to the concern about whether conservation area status would help secure improvements in the proposed Area 2 extension I feel that there is a strong argument in favour of conservation status. It can encourage pride and care among building owners (such as expressed by Age Concern) and it is now generally recognised that conservation-led regeneration can be and has been highly successful.
- 2.6.2 Many of the trees in the churchyard are protected by Tree Preservation Orders and their removal would therefore require careful consideration. A new design and layout of the churchyard is under consideration and the respondent's view will be taken into account in the development of improvement proposals.
- 2.6.3 Local authorities are under a duty from time to time to 'formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of...conservation areas'. A Character Statement is the first stage in that process, to show what characteristics make an area special and thus worthy of conservation area status. It is not therefore appropriate to include enhancement or future development proposals within a character statement itself. In the case of the St George's area, I recognise the need to draw up a scheme of enhancement in view of the development pressures in the area. The Council works closely with the regeneration companies at all times and I will ensure that they are actively involved in the formulation of future improvement proposals.
- 2.6.4 Grants are available in the conservation area under the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme and will be available for all properties up to March next year, although the range of eligible works is restricted to the restoration of original features. The owner who made the enquiry has been contacted direct.
- 2.6.5 The issue of the condition of the Odeon cinema will be raised with the owner.
- 2.6.6 The request for further extensions of the conservation area boundaries into Charles Street, Kildare Street and Wharf Street North has been considered. I do not, however, propose to include these additional properties as they are not of sufficient architectural merit and, in the case of Wharf Street South, the buildings have been so radically altered as to have lost any architectural or historical value.

3. Equal Opportunities

The aim of the character statement is to maintain the quality of the environment of the Loughborough Road Conservation Area to the benefit of all residents.

4. Sustainability and Environmental Implications

The character statement is intended to reinforce the attractiveness of the area as a place to live and work and thereby encourage the upkeep and use of buildings.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

1. Financial Implications

None

2. Legal Implications

None

6. Other Implications

| OTHER IMPLICATIONS | YES/NO | Paragraph References Within Supporting information |
|-------------------------------|--------|---|
| Equal Opportunities | Yes | 6 |
| Policy | No | |
| Sustainable and Environmental | Yes | 7 |
| Crime and Disorder | No | |
| Human Rights Act | No | |
| Elderly/People on Low Income | No | |

7. Background Papers - Local Government Act 1972

St George's Conservation Area draft character appraisal, June 2003

City of Leicester Local Plan, 1994.

8. Officer to contact

David Trubshaw, Building Conservation Officer, Urban Design Group, Extension 7217