



INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 19 June 2008

Title: City Centre Conservation Area

Report of: Director of Development Services

Report reference: DS.79/08

Summary:

This report sets out the review of Carlisle City Centre Conservation Area as a basis for public consultation

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

To consider whether the review information and areas highlighted are an appropriate basis for consultation.

To consider whether there are any other issues that should be taken into account

Recommendations:

That Executive be informed of Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny observations on the review of the conservation area and proposed consultation

C Elliot

Director of Development Services

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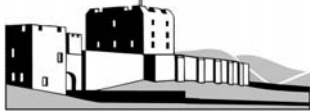
Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

- 1.0 Executive received report DS.23/08 on the review of Carlisle City Centre Conservation Area. Carlisle City Council has a duty to review all its conservation areas. This has been undertaken with a review of Brampton Conservation Area already completed and Dalston Conservation Area recently the subject of consultation (closed at the end of May), the results of which will be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the autumn. Through the work of Carlisle Renaissance the City Council made an obligation to review the City Centre Conservation Area.
- 1.1 The Executive report is attached which details the background to the review and the areas under consideration.
- 1.2 It is intended that the document attached detailing the review and potential areas to be considered form the basis of a six-week consultation, which would include an exhibition. The results of the consultation and officer consideration of those comments will be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.0 Recommendation

That Executive be informed of Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny observations on the review of the conservation area and proposed consultation

Attach pdf report DS.23/08 incl map



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: Environment and Infrastructure

Date of Meeting: 29 May 2008

Public

Key Decision: No

Recorded in Forward Plan:

Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: CITY CENTRE CONSERVATION AREA

Report of: Director of Development Services

Report reference: DS.23/08

Summary:

Issues raised by work done for Carlisle Renaissance, including the consultants report on the Historic Core and development proposals around the City Centre, as well as local campaigns concerning the Lonsdale Cinema and Rickergate, have prompted a review of the current boundary of the City Centre Conservation Area.

This report consists of an examination of the present boundary together with its adjacent areas, identifying the quality and character that exists and making suggestions on possible additions or exclusions. It is recommended that these suggestions are put out to public consultation with the results of this exercise being the subject of a further report to Council.

Recommendations:

The content of this report be the subject of a public consultation exercise and that the views of the public be reported back to the Council with, if appropriate, recommendations to alter the City Centre Conservation Area boundary.

Catherine Elliot

Director of Development Services

Contact Officer: Peter Messenger

Ext: 7195

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 Conservation Areas are defined as “Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”. Once a local authority has designated such an area Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990 places a statutory duty on that authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas.
- 1.2 The City Centre Conservation Area was last reviewed in 1986 when three central conservation areas were amalgamated, The current boundary is shown on the attached Map and takes in most of the medieval walled city except for the north end of Lowther Street through to Scotch Street, an area covering the Lanes Shopping development. The boundary keeps fairly close to the foot of the City Walls except for the southern end of Lowther Street, where it expands to take in Earl Street, part of Warwick Road, the Crescent and Court Square.
- 1.3 The Botchergate Conservation Area and the Portland Square/Chatsworth Square Conservation Area abut the City Centre Conservation Area to the south and east respectively but there are gaps, such as the Lonsdale Cinema block. This report examines these spaces to identify any historic townscape merit they may have for inclusion in a revised conservation area boundary. Other areas examined for significance include: north of the Lanes; Rickergate; the Saucerries and Bitts Park; as well as land to the west of the medieval city; and the Citadel Station. For convenience the survey is divided into seven character areas, which are shown on the attached Map.

2.0 CONSULTATION

2.1 Consultation to Date

None

2.2 Consultation Proposed

A six week public consultation is proposed which will be programmed following approval by Committee.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The content of this report be the subject of a public consultation exercise and that the views of the public be reported back to the Council with, if appropriate, recommendations to alter the City Centre Conservation Area boundary.

4.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to review its conservation areas, together with the existing boundaries and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. The current work of Carlisle Renaissance has raised issues concerning this area and it was therefore considered appropriate to make an early review of the City Centre Conservation Area.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – No additional staffing or resources are required.
- Financial – The consultation work will be done within existing budgets.
- Legal – There is a statutory duty to carry out this work under S.71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.
- Corporate – This may have significance with regard to the Carlisle Renaissance proposals.
- Risk Management – That the City Council will not be fulfilling its statutory obligations to review the Conservation area.
- Equality and Disability – No issues raised.
- Environmental – The report raises issues for the protection and preservation of the historic and architectural heritage of the City and a recognition of its special character.
- Crime and Disorder – None.

- Impact on Customers – The consultation will be done electronically and with hard copy so that all customers will be able to participate.

Catherine Elliot
Director of Development Services

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1 The Saucerries and Bitts Park

Character and Features

This area to the north of the Castle is part of the flood plain of the Rivers Eden and Caldew. The two rivers meet at the north-west corner of what is now a very attractive and useful space. The course of the Eden has meandered across this area since before the Romans established a fort on the adjacent sandstone bluff. The Roman Wall crossed the Eden close to the confluence of the two rivers. Some of the masonry from this structure has been dragged from the river and can be seen on the riverbank. A bridge was also built by the Romans across the Eden, close to where the current Eden Bridge stands to link the fort on Hadrian's Wall at Stanwix with the fort south of the river.

This low-lying area was similar to Willow Holme in character and the name Saucerries may come from the French for Willow Plot (Saussaie). An alternative explanation is that it might be derived from William de la Saucere, who held land in Carlisle and who made sauces for Edward I. The land was always liable to flooding and the embankments that can be seen today are the results of many years of concerted effort to reduce this risk. The building of the embankment for the Bitts began in 1819 and the material used to raise the ground level was frequently local refuse. Despite this the Saucerries were the location for the Royal Agricultural Show on three occasions. It was in the late nineteenth century that calls to create a public playground were rewarded when the Mayor's Committee, in March 1897, agreed to extend Victoria's Jubilee celebrations by making a public park on the land known as the Bitts and the Saucerries. The lodge was completed in 1900 and the Victoria Park, which included a statue of the Queen, was opened officially during the Royal Show in 1902.

South of the Saucerries and to the west of the Castle is the area formerly known as Irish Damside. The name refers to that part of the mill-race closest to the Irish Gate which began at the Corporation Dam on the Caldew in Denton Holme. The mill-race cut across the Saucerries until it joined the Eden. The water provided power for a variety of small industries. The many buildings that existed here have now gone. In 1847 the railway came in from the north through the narrow neck between the Caldew and the Castle. The area remained industrial for a further century with a considerable portion being used as public slaughter houses. The area is now used as a coach and car park. Fortunately the low ground levels mean that the impact of the vehicles parked here is fairly modest on the setting of the Castle Walls. This is further reduced by the trees that line Devonshire Walk (which becomes Dacre Road on the north-eastern side of the Castle).

Townscape Significance

This is an attractive area which is well wooded along the river banks. It has a significant history and, most important of all, it forms an excellent setting for the massive ramparts on which the Castle sits. Mayor's Drive and Weavers Bank provide significant pathways through this area, which are incorporated into the Hadrian's Wall Path.

The loop of land from Caldew Bridge, around the Castle, to Eden Bridge provides an impressive setting for the Castle as well as providing attractive spaces of parkland for passive and active leisure pursuits. As such they add considerably to the character and amenity of this area and should be considered for possible inclusion within the conservation area.

2 Caldew Bridge to Victoria Viaduct

Character and Features

The character of this area is similar to that north of the Caldew Bridge; low-lying ground between the river and the City Wall which contained the Corporation Dam mill-race, mentioned in Section 1. There was a watermill on the mill-race near Caldew Bridge as early as 1434. As this area was nearest the English Gate it became known as the English Damside. Part of the original intention of the mill-race was to fill the wet ditch that completely enclosed the City Walls. This was the Town Dyke and its name is retained in the former Town Dyke Orchard beneath West Walls. It was on these boggy grounds that William Wallace and Robert the Bruce laid siege to Carlisle.

The character of this area changed drastically when the railway arrived. The railway viaduct ran alongside English Damside up to Caldew Bridge leaving Town Dyke Orchard on its eastern side but everything on the west eventually became a large goods yard as far as the Caldew. The LM &SR Viaduct Goods Station was near the southern end of this area under review, with the last section being occupied by the Corporation Gas Works next to the Nelson Bridge. All of this land was cleared and has been developed with modern buildings for car showrooms and other commercial and leisure uses.

Between West Walls and the railway viaduct, towards the southern end of this area, there was a concentration of buildings including Mills and Warehouses. Some of these still remain on Backhouses Walk and give an indication of the 19th Century character of this part of the City. Eventually the railway expansion became too much of an obstacle and drastic measures had to be taken to re-join the City with its western suburbs. The Victoria Viaduct was completed in 1877, paid for by the railway companies and the Corporation, and is half a mile long from English Street into Denton Holme, including its extension onto the enlarged Nelson Bridge. Part of this is included in the existing conservation area but the majority of it was omitted.

Townscape Significance

The railway line is a considerable engineering feature in its own right and has the advantage of demarcating the western edge of this area. The Town Dyke Orchard, now a car park, forms a significant space that acts as a buffer against the City's West Walls. Between this car park and the Victoria Viaduct there are a number of modern buildings with no architectural pretensions and constructed of modern materials. Beyond these, however, are some of the tallest Victorian buildings in the City. These line Backhouses Walk and the Victoria Viaduct. The Central Plaza Hotel and the Caledonian Mill are both listed buildings and in need of refurbishment. These buildings, together with the Victoria Viaduct, have significant architectural and historic interest which merit consideration for inclusion in the conservation area. Future pressure to redevelop parts of this area, particularly the replacement of the modern sheds, could have an adverse impact on the setting of the medieval walls. Inclusion within the conservation area could ensure that this is done in a sensitive manner. Again the railway viaduct creates a physical boundary which separates off the modern development on Viaduct Estate Road and creates a boundary that would be appropriate to follow.

3 Victoria Viaduct to Crown Street

Character and Features

The current boundary of the conservation area here turns back in towards the City and then turns down Bush Brow along the edge of the Woolworth's building and then travels straight on to the western tower of the Citadel. It leaves out Bush Brow and the arch of the Viaduct over Backhouses Walk and the Bridge over English Damside. Also omitted are the retaining wall of the former County Gaol on Borough Street, the rest of the railway viaduct and the northern curtain wall of the Citadel Station. Only the frontage building of the station has been included in the conservation area.

The exclusion of the former County Gaol site may have to do with the over-use of unattractive, flat roofed portacabins. At two storeys high they add nothing to the quality or character of the area, but they represent a part of the city that is of historic interest and deserves to be better treated. Similarly the Citadel Station is a fine piece of engineering work and has its own architectural attractions. It is not only its main elevation onto Court Square that has significance.

At the western end of the Viaduct at James Street is a fine, late 19th century building constructed to provide electricity for the City's street lighting. Next to it is the Metal Box Factory of which only part of the 1887 building remains. It had its roof removed and additional floors added. Opposite is the Turkish Baths, which has much of its interior tiling surviving. Beyond this area are new commercial and retail premises of little merit. They back onto the long western curtain wall that formerly supported a roof over the remainder of the railway station. It is an extremely important feature and is listed separately. The area contains small industrial units and some of the few remnants of Carlisle's stock of back to back housing. These are significant in terms of Carlisle's social history but of little townscape interest. At Crown Street again most of the development around the southern end of the station is modern commercial and industrial. Some earlier buildings survive, for example, the Maryport and Carlisle Goods Depot, which is now occupied by Storeys retail warehouse. The railway bridge over Crown Street with its decorative panels is the point at which the Settle to Carlisle Railway Conservation Area ends and this structure falls within it.

Townscape Significance

This area is dominated by the Citadel Station and the structures associated with it and the expansion of the railway. There are also some other surviving buildings that have a significant contribution to make to the character of the area. In particular the former Electric Lighting Station, the former Metal Box factory and the Turkish Baths. The rest is largely modern development and is not exceptional.

It is suggested that the Victoria Viaduct and the northern end of James Street could be considered worth including in a revised conservation area. As for the rest it is suggested that the whole of the Citadel Station should be included. This would include the outlying curtain walls and the perimeter walls on the west in Mill Street, Crown Street and in Collier Lane, to the east.

4 Portland Place, Mary Street, Cecil Street and Warwick Road

Character and Features

This area is one of the gaps sitting between the Botchergate and the Portland Square/Chatsworth Square Conservation Areas. These have been designated relatively recently and clearly some consideration was given to the area under review. The eastern boundary of the Botchergate Conservation Area reflects the alignment of properties that have now been demolished to accommodate the new development, which covers much of the area from Tait Street up to Mary Street. In view of this it is felt that this area should be discounted, as there are no significant structures or townscape features that need to be considered.

The north side of Mary Street includes land used by the County Hotel and the Post Office, as well as the former cinema, which is of fairly recent construction. Although there are no buildings of interest the site may in the future come under some development pressure. If this land is included within the conservation area it would provide an opportunity to ensure the design and materials of any proposal did not harm the area's character.

The next block is largely occupied by the former Lonsdale Cinema with some commercial premises occupying the north-eastern section on Warwick Road. The recently listed Lonsdale has a reasonable presence onto Warwick Road but the three elevations to the surrounding streets are plain brick facades (in the main) and add nothing of quality or character to the area. The elevations of the commercial premises are typical of this area in size, scale and detailing and would be worthy of inclusion in a revised conservation area. The future of the Lonsdale is still a live issue and whether it stays and is refurbished or is ultimately replaced, the inclusion of this site in an enlarged conservation area could help to inform proposals to ensure the character of the area is not harmed but improved.

Townscape Significance

From the discussion above it is clear that the significance of the surviving structures is limited. However this is an area where future proposals would have a significant impact on the adjacent conservation areas, particularly on Warwick Road and Cecil Street. With this in mind it might be appropriate to include the north side of Mary Street within a revised City Centre Conservation Area.

5 Warwick Road/Crosby Street/Lonsdale Street/and Lowther Street

Character and Features

This area lies between the City Centre and the Chatsworth Square/Portland Square Conservation Areas. On the north side of Warwick Road the conservation area extends to the church but excludes the adjoining manse. The remainder of this block consists of buildings with either little or no merit architecturally or historically. The same must be said of the property facing onto Spencer Street. Along Crosby Street there are some modest 19th century buildings but a large portion is now part of the Crown Court development with much of the street being left open. Beyond this is a block of 19th century buildings which front onto Lonsdale Street. These include the former Thurnams building, as well as shops and restaurants. All have interesting architectural detail and their scale and character add to the quality of this area.

Townscape Significance

There are some elements of this block which are of interest and others which are crude and of no interest whatsoever. The interest lies on Crosby Street and Lonsdale Street close to the existing boundary. Of the rest only the Manse on Warwick Road is worth considering for inclusion into a revised conservation area. It might therefore be appropriate to add the area from Lonsdale Street through to Warwick Road, including the Crown Court but exclude the remainder.

6 Lonsdale Street to Spring Gardens Lane, including the Lanes

Character and Features

Lowther Street (together with West and East Tower Street) mark the line of the eastern City Wall which was demolished early in the 19th century to allow the City to expand eastwards. Before this the route was a drovers lane used when taking cattle north to the Sands or south to other markets. Development had occurred here from the 17th century; there was a bowling green here from before 1745 and one of the few thatched ale houses to survive into the photographic age, the Shakespeare Tavern, was situated here. The earliest buildings after the walls came down occurred in Chapel Street and Victoria Place. The Carlisle Dispensary, for example, moved to Chapel Street from the Tithe Barn, in 1857.

This section deals with those areas excluded from the existing conservation areas, principally the Bus Station, The Lanes and the area north of Chapel Street. The west end of Lonsdale Street is included within City Centre Conservation Area and the east end together with Spencer Street, Victoria Place and Chapel Street are in the Chatsworth Square/Portland Square Conservation Area.

The bus station together with the adjacent modern buildings have little interest and could be excluded from any revised boundary. The terrace of properties to the west of the station on Lonsdale Street are well built and of some significance, similar to the properties opposite. The properties within this block that face Lowther Street are relatively modern and are of little merit. Opposite these buildings is The Pippins Public House (formerly The Apple Tree), which is a Grade II listed building. There are also other listed buildings on the western side of Lowther Street, including The Howard Arms. These have been excluded from the City Centre Conservation Area probably because of their close relationship with the Lanes development. The question arises as to whether The Lanes should be excluded from the review. The development is accepted by most people to be a well designed scheme that fits well with the historic character of the City. Its scale, massing and detailing is, on the whole, in harmony with its surroundings, but all of The Lanes development in Lowther Street and Scotch Street has been omitted. Even the extension to The Lanes, (including Debenhams, where the scale and massing are out of kilter), has the advantage of materials and detailing that fit within the palette found in Carlisle.

The northern end of Lowther Street, from Chapel Street to Spring Gardens Lane, is mostly open ground used for car parking. The exceptions are the Hostel and Georgian House, which are of moderate interest in terms of quality and character.

Townscape Significance

The most significant areas here are the small section of Lonsdale Street and the buildings along the western side of Lowther Street. As is mentioned above, the western side of Lowther Street at this point has been replaced with the modern Lanes. Its character, however, has largely been retained due to the retention of some of the late 19th and early 20th century buildings. The eastern side at Argos is poor but this site could be redeveloped and if this occurred, its location within the conservation area, could add leverage in obtaining a proposal that maintained the character of Lowther Street. A similar situation arises with the open parking areas and Iceland further up the street. The existence of Georgian Way suggests that this already forms a significant barrier and at the same time a realistic boundary to any extended conservation area.

It is suggested that the Lanes could be absorbed into the area together with the eastern side of Lowther Street, near Argos, and beyond Chapel Street to take the boundary as far as Georgian Way.

7 Rickergate

Character and Features

East and West Tower Streets are built along the line of the City Wall. Where they meet at Scotch Street was the location of the Scotch Gate and outside the walls the road to the Eden Bridge was lined with small properties from medieval times. They were very vulnerable and usually suffered when the City came under attack. During sieges the cottages could be completely destroyed. 17th century plans of the City show that two bridges were required to cross the Eden. This was as a result of the flooding of 1571 when the Eden re-occupied the northern channel that had formerly been the Priest Beck. By 1746 the suburb had started to expand along the drover's lane which skirted the City Walls and went past what had become the Spring Gardens Bowling Green by 1794. The map of that date shows Rickergate to be well developed and included gardens alongside the Walls and at the rear of Rickergate. The City Walls were removed at the beginning of the 19th century and on a plan of 1816 a new road is shown extending from Finkle Street to the foot of Rickergate and the causeway that formed part of the crossing of the Eden. This eventually became Corporation Road and ran close to the piece of land known as Hangman's Close.

By 1850 the eastern side of Rickergate had become very similar in character to the Lanes, with dense development, in the form of narrow lanes, and courts, that was occupied by small factories, warehouses, craft workshops and dwellings. Peter Dixon by this time had already established a factory at the corner of Peter Street and West Tower Street. By this time more comfortable and attractive terraced housing was being constructed on Solway Terrace, Clifford Street and Dixon Street. Much of this housing would be cleared away by the Castle Way road scheme that was intended to create an inner ring road. Two sections were built, this and Georgian Way, before the project was halted but not before property in Botchergate and Charlotte Street was demolished. In the 1930's a scheme was proposed which involved the clearance of property north and south of Warwick Street to allow for the construction of a new Fire Station, Police Station and Magistrates Court. These fine buildings were badly damaged in the 2005 floods and are now considerably underused.

In the 1960's the eastern side of Rickergate was cleared from Drovers Lane northwards to make way for the new Civic Centre. This is the tallest building in the City and occupies a prominent location to those who travel in to the City from the north and east. In form, scale and detailing it has nothing in sympathy with any other part of the City but its existence has encouraged similar developments of this form.

Townscape Significance

Although this area is dominated by the Civic Centre the most appealing buildings are the Magistrates Court/Police station /Fire Station group. The buildings north of this group are modern or have been modernised. For example, the Malt Shovel (now Adriano's), built in 1928 by the State Management Scheme, has little of its internal fabric surviving, its windows have all been replaced with PVCu and the City Toll sign has been removed.

Recent requests to list a number of buildings in Rickergate have been refused but they are still considered to be of merit and of sufficient interest to be added to the Council's Local List as defined in Policy LE17 of the CDLP. In addition this area has been identified as a focus for possible regeneration and redevelopment but as yet the extent of this has not been determined. Policy DP2 of the CDLP, as set out in the Inspector's report, states that proposals for this area will be developed in conjunction with Carlisle Renaissance and a detailed brief will be prepared.

Extending the Conservation Area to take in the Magistrates Court group of buildings is worthy of consideration as these have significant townscape value. Such action would not preclude redevelopment or regeneration but it does add a further significant element which the Council must consider. This is the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.

Conclusion

This assessment has examined the edges of the designated City Centre Conservation Area. There has been no suggestion that there should be any reductions in the area and so the report concentrates on the surrounding townscape, its quality and significance. It tries to weigh the architectural and historical contribution of each part and assess the merit of adding it to the Conservation Area. At this stage these are suggestions that must be part of a public consultation.

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