

PLANNING COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2016

STAR HILL TO SUN PIER CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director, Regeneration, Culture,
Environment and Transformation

Author: Martin McKay, Senior Design and Conservation
Officer.

Summary

This report introduces a draft Medway Council 'Star Hill to Sun Pier Conservation Area Appraisal'. The Planning Committee is asked to note the Appraisal.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as '*an area of special architectural and historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is important to preserve*'. The Star Hill to Sun Pier area was designated as a conservation area by the City of Rochester upon Medway Council in in 1995.
- 1.2 The *Star Hill to Sun Pier Conservation Area Appraisal (the Appraisal)* constitutes a comprehensive assessment of Star Hill to Sun Pier's special architectural and historic interest. In doing this it expands upon saved Local Plan Policies BNE 12, 13 and 14. These state that '*special attention will be paid to the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of Conservation Areas*' and that, with regard to this, criteria on building features, street patterns, scale, height , and mass (amongst others) will be applied. The policies also state that permission for the demolition of historic buildings will not be forthcoming unless certain criteria are met.
- 1.3 The publication of the Appraisal constitutes part of the Council's statutory duty under the Planning (Listed buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to publish proposals for the improvement of conservation areas.

2. Background

- 2.1 The SH-SP Conservation Area Appraisal is the first full appraisal of the area's special qualities since designation. By laying out what is important about the area, this appraisal will:

- assist the Council and others in judging whether development proposals *preserve or enhance the character or appearance* of the area; and
- help to ensure that the architectural and historic significance of the area is taken into account when considering development proposals.

A management plan accompanies the appraisal. This sets out a strategy for preserving and enhancing the special character of the area.

3. Options

- 3.1 A less detailed document could have been written but would not be in line with the standard format for these documents as laid down by Historic England.
- 3.2 In line with the 1990 Planning Act and published good practice, public consultation should be carried out with regard to the appraisal before it is adopted as Council guidance and policy. This has yet to be organised. At this stage the Appraisal is being presented as an information item for the Planning Committee.

4. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 When adopted by the Council following consultation, the Appraisal will carry considerable weight when making decisions over development in the area. By defining what is special about the area, and requiring this to be taken into account when developers and architects formulate proposals, it will shape development.
- 3.2 At this pre-consultation stage the Appraisal carries less weight. However, its comprehensive analysis of the historic and architectural importance of the area will mean that it still carries some weight.
- 3.3 The appraisal highlights the historic and architectural importance of the High Street and St Margaret's Banks part of the Conservation Area. It also highlights the importance of the former industrial area between the High Street and the river and encourages the re-use of riverside commercial/ industrial buildings for small businesses, artists and others. In this respect the Appraisal is fully compliant with the Council's Cultural Strategy which dubs the area 'the Creative Quarter'.
- 3.4 However, and although the area is much improved as a result of a major grant scheme, empty and derelict buildings remain a significant problem. There are also underused sites given over to secondary uses such as second hand car lots. Overall, the area remains in need of significant regeneration. Achieving this whilst preserving the special qualities of the area may be a challenge.
- 3.5 The Appraisal will replace the current Supplementary Planning Guidance note for the area (the Star Hill to Sun Pier Planning and Design Framework, 2004).

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
<p>Developers and landowners see the appraisal as an obstacle to the comprehensive redevelopment of the area.</p>	<p>The Appraisal advocates that new development is sympathetic to the small scale traditional character of the area. It also requires that modest historic buildings are retained as a part of development proposals.</p> <p>Development of the scale advocated may be less viable than large scale development, particularly given the need for flood defences and other expensive infrastructure. Regeneration of the area could therefore stall.</p>	<p>Comprehensive redevelopment may well be incompatible with the historic character of the area. A clear steer on this will allow developers and landowners to investigate alternatives.</p> <p>The appraisal encourages high quality development at an appropriate scale.</p> <p>Council officers are investigating the possibility of business incentive schemes and grant schemes to encourage building owners to bring currently disused buildings back into use and to encourage creative industries to the area.</p> <p>The issue of infrastructure is considered in an accompanying document – The Star Hill to Sun Pier Public realm Design Guide.</p> <p>This issue can be discussed more thoroughly at the consultation phase.</p>	<p>N/a</p>

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Historic England has been consulted on an earlier version of the Appraisal. The current text reflects their comments.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are minimal financial implications associated with the introduction of the *Appraisal* itself. Planning applications may be refused on the basis that they do not preserve and enhance the special character of the area as defined by the Appraisal. This may lead to the expense of appeals. However, and irrespective of the Appraisal the Council still has a duty to consider all applications against the statutory requirement to ‘preserve or enhance’.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The introduction of the Appraisal as a detailed place specific guide to Policies BNE 12, 13 and 14 will help ensure compliance with these policies. It will also strengthen the Council's case at appeal against the refusal of planning permission for inappropriate development.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 The Planning Committee should note for information the production of a draft Star Hill to Sun Pier Conservation Area Appraisal. Approval will be sought in due course to consult the public and stakeholders over the document.

Lead officer contact

Martin Mckay, Senior Design and Conservation officer
Tele no. 01634 331721
Email: martin.mckay@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Star Hill to Sun Pier Appraisal

Background papers

None