

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **PLANNING COMMITTEE – 21 MAY 2009 ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 JUNE 2009**

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES**

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### **CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN ROCK PARK CONSERVATION AREA**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Donald Insall and Associates were appointed in March 2007 to carry out appraisals and management plans for sixteen Conservation Areas in the Wirral. This report covers the Rock Park Conservation Area. The Appraisal and Management Plan are attached.

#### **2. THE APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

- 2.1 Conservation Area Appraisals have been promoted by English Heritage as useful documents for the understanding of the significance, character and appearance of such areas. Management Plans are intended to follow on from appraisals to provide a focus for action and management of conservation areas.
- 2.2 Conservation Areas were included in the BVPI indicators (219a, b, and c) when the work was commissioned. For the current year BVPI 219c (the percentage of conservation areas with management plans) has been dispensed with, and in future years the indicators 219a and b (number of conservation areas and percentage with character appraisals), will no longer be used as assessments of Local Authority performance. Notwithstanding this, the Council is committed to conserving the Borough's natural and built heritage; and increasing civic pride and public participation, through its Corporate Objectives.
- 2.3 The Conservation Area Appraisals have been carried out in accordance with the advice published by English Heritage (Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals - February 2006). In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been generally used as the basis of the analysis:-
- Location and population
  - Origins and development of the settlement
  - Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
  - Archaeological significance
  - Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
  - Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
  - Character and relationship of spaces
  - Prevalent and traditional building materials
  - Local details
  - Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
  - Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
  - Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
  - Existence of any neutral areas

- 2.4 The Appraisal will act as an audit of the area and give residents, applicants, and others an understanding of the special qualities of the conservation area and any negative factors. The Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, should be adopted by the Council and used as a material consideration in determining any planning applications within or affecting the setting of the conservation area.
- 2.5 Management Plans, on the other hand, are relatively rare and English Heritage advice more amorphous. (Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas – February 2006). The management plan has required some thought to give it structure. At this stage of the process the Management Plan is an agenda for future action and consideration. This part of the document relies on the analysis contained in the appraisal to set out the issues and negative factors affecting both the private and public realm. As such it is the first stage in a management plan process which will refine the plan through further consultation, joint officer working and budgetary request.
- 2.6 Most of the Appraisals have been discussed with the local Conservation Area Advisory Committees in order for local residents and others to give their perspectives on the areas and contribute to the analysis. To have real weight, Management Plans need to be discussed not only with local groups but also corporately in terms of policy and enhancement action having regard to the resources available. These first essays will act as an agenda for detailed policy development for DC purposes; a yardstick for members of the public to comment on planning applications; a stimulus to corporate working in regard to the management of the public realm; and a “wish list” for its enhancement.

### **3. ROCK PARK**

- 3.1 The following is a list of features that are part of Rock Park Conservation Area’s special character:
- Important and relatively early example of a planned speculative estate of upper-middle class housing.
  - Large group of listed buildings, each of individual architectural interest.
  - Most buildings are relatively intact with the majority of their principal features surviving.
  - Buildings are constructed of high quality materials, with the use of sandstone and slate highly prominent.
  - There is an exceptionally high level of architectural detailing, in particular that of carved stonework to window surround and eaves details.
  - Many of the buildings hold a remarkable position overlooking the Mersey and with views towards many of Liverpool’s landmarks
  - Most buildings sit within a very green landscape with many mature trees.
  - Original or good quality and appropriate gateposts and boundary walls exist to most sites.
  - The association of the area with prominent figurehead Nathaniel Hawthorne.

#### **Response from the Rock Park Conservation Trust / Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC).**

- 3.2 The Rock Park CAAC has indicated that they are satisfied with the content of the appraisal and management plan, and in 2007 submitted a list of minor alterations to be integrated into the body of the document. The Conservation Section has accepted these changes and edited the appraisal accordingly.

#### **Management Issues**

- 3.3 Rock Park Conservation Area is characterised not merely by its high architectural quality, but also by problems associated with its location adjacent to an economically

deprived area, its local isolation due to the construction of the Rock Ferry by-pass and the oil depot adjacent. A number of issues have arisen over the last few years which pose challenges for the conservation of Rock Park's architectural heritage:

- 3.4 The social deprivation of neighbouring areas and Rock Park's isolation have possibly depressed investment, with some properties suffering from poor maintenance and neglect. St Margaret's Convent off Mersey Lane South has been vacant for the last few years, and has failed to attract purchasers when marketed recently by a local housing association. The building is in a stable but shabby condition, and is in need of a new use and owner prepared to spend for its renovation. No. 18 Rock Park has been vacant for some years and is now derelict. It has recently been the object of metal stripping by thieves and is having an adverse effect on nearby residences.
- 3.5 The Esplanade is similarly in a dilapidated condition, but of great potential in terms of providing a footpath and views both into the park estate and out over the estuary towards South Liverpool. It is understood that portions of the esplanade are owned by each adjacent house freeholder. The problems of maintenance and observance of the covenants as defined by the Rock Park Company is complicated by the fact that the company is now defunct, being essentially inoperative subsequent to the construction of the bypass and associated demolitions. Individual owners appear to lack the finance to refurbish the sections of esplanade pertaining to their property although small urgent works of stone insertion and pointing to prevent progressive winter storm erosion have been carried out recently. There are no structural funds available for those promenades that lie on the inner part of an estuary – being outside both British Waterways and coastal improvement initiatives. ([check Jed Herby](#))
- 3.6 The appraisal makes adverse comment about the recent development adjacent to No. 1 Rock Park in terms of its bulk and poor detailing. However, the Council did commence enforcement action against the developer in respect of the project's more serious architectural shortcomings seeking the removal of roof and dormers above cornice level. Regrettably, the local authority failed to persuade the Planning Inspector to require removal of the roof, resulting in the continued existence of the wrongly pitched roof and oversized dormers compared to the original proposal. It is understood that the building is now semi-occupied and will hopefully start to contribute more to the life of the park. The lessons learnt from this development must be absorbed so that any further projects in the park are more closely monitored during construction. Subject to the signing of a S.106 agreement there is the potential for a similar scheme to the north of this site. It is crucial that the details and architectural sophistication of the application plans are adhered to. In the meantime the condition of the land is of concern and the scope for the service of S.215 "waste land notices" should be considered
- 3.7 In terms of threats to character, there have been some instances of unauthorised works to listed buildings within the Park, notably the painting of a stone elevation, and the illegal insertion of Velux rooflights not previously in existence. The Council will continue to enforce against such works as a last resort, and where negotiation has failed to secure a satisfactory amelioration of harm.
- 3.8 The Royal Mersey Yacht Club makes use of the slipway at Rock Ferry, and has a boatyard and Clubhouse on Bedford Road East. It provides important activity at the edge of the park and requires investment in order to maintain the listed clubhouse in good order.
- 3.9 The Admiral public house has closed probably due to its isolated location, its surroundings and changing patterns of sociable drinking. This closure creates an additional disincentive to visit the Park, leaves a building in dereliction and affects the perception of the environs of the slipway and the Esplanade.

- 3.10 Open land within the conservation area requires management. Since the construction of the bypass and the consequent demolition of a number of the villas, there has been an increase in land not directly associated with a particular building. There is a deep strip of such land along the eastern and much of the western side of the bypass. This land together with the sports ground, the land around the former site of the hotel and grass near New Ferry Pier is all owned and managed by the council. The lack of funding is evident in the planting and inadequate maintenance. Despite the limitation of the planting in these areas, it does act as an important visual buffer to the bypass and to the oil terminal and industry to the north.
- 3.11 Many of the most obtrusive public realm works are associated with the bypass. The underpass, connecting the two halves of Rock Park was decorated by residents at the same time as the Conservation Area Partnership (CAP) improvements. Since then the underpass was used by youngsters from adjoining areas to move from one side of the Park to the other, to congregate in the evenings and overlay local art with graffiti. As a result of resident pressure the underpass was closed as a right of way. It is now unkempt. Long lengths of concrete walling do not reflect the high quality original natural materials of the park. Immediately alongside the bypass the walling has additional chain-link fencing behind it or in other areas basic aluminium fencing is used. These elements are unacceptable within an area of historic interest and add to the detrimental impact of the modern road itself.
- 3.12 As part of the Conservation Area Partnership Programme (CAP) at the turn of the Millennium front boundary fencing, gatepiers and gates have been restored close to the original pattern and the road surface improved to the unadopted parts of the Park. This has been a considerable enhancement to Rock Park and has helped to counteract some of the pressures facing it.

### **Boundary changes and Article 4 Directions**

- 3.13 The current boundary roughly follows the extent of the original development and covers the vast majority of buildings of interest within the immediate area associated with Rock Park. The boundary is fairly clearly defined by the roads and ownership boundaries, wherever it is practical to do so. Insall's therefore recommended that the boundary does not change.
- 3.14 In the case of Rock Park, there are currently no article 4 directions associated with the unlisted buildings. In order to protect the existing unlisted original buildings and to encourage the reinstatement of lost features, Insall's recommend that article 4 directions are used to withdraw permitted development rights for the following elements:
- Windows and doors
  - Roof coverings and roof features
  - The colour and surface treatment of elevations.
  - Gateposts and other boundary treatments.
  - Solar Panels on front roofs
- 3.15 It is considered that the making of Article 4 directions could have considerable implications for staff resources in the conservation section. As planning applications arising from the withdrawal of permitted development rights attract no processing fee there would be a further case load on development control staff without compensatory funding.
- 3.16 Whilst Insall's recommendations represent a professional assessment, it is considered that, as such recommendations are made for all the Conservation Areas except Flaybrick Cemetery, further consideration needs to be given to this issue after all the 16 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are reported to Committee.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no direct financial or staffing implications arising out of this appraisal. However, the management plan has potential implications for finance and staffing resources if the recommendation of making an article 4 direction were to be implemented. Maintenance of historic lamp standards and conservation grade paving and kerbing may require additional Council investment.

#### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None

#### **6.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None

#### **7.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The Rock Park CA lies within Rock Ferry Ward.

#### **8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are positive benefits in conservation areas in retaining heritage assets and the embodied energy contained in them, thereby reducing the Borough's carbon emissions.

#### **9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan can be used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and can be used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.

#### **10.0 CRIME AND DISORDER STRATEGY / COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

#### **11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 English Heritage - Conservation Area Appraisals – February 2006  
English Heritage – Management Plans – February 2006

#### **12.0 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended to Cabinet that:-

- (1) The Rock Park Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, is adopted by the Council and used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.
- (2) The Management Plan acts as an agenda for further consultation both locally and within the Council to identify priorities for action and the resources necessary for their implementation.

- (3) A further report is prepared for Committee after all 16 Appraisals and Management Plans have been reported to Cabinet regarding the need for and relative priorities for Article 4 directions between areas, boundary changes and the financial and staffing implications arising.

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