

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Planning, Building Standards and Environmental Health Manager****Planning Committee: 21 September 2022**

Subject: Proposed Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To seek approval to publish the draft Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal for public consultation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the draft Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal for publication and public consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 states that conservation areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Local authorities have a statutory duty to identify and designate such areas. They are also required to review existing conservation areas to ensure they are being managed effectively.
- 3.2 Conservation Area Appraisals should be prepared by authorities as a management tool which help to identify the special interest and changing needs of an area. An appraisal provides the basis for the development of a programme of action that is compatible with the sensitivities of the historic area and enables local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties to protect and enhance conservation areas. Appraisals also inform policy and assist development management.
- 3.3 The Planning Committee of 28 August 2019 approved the final boundaries of the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area and also the commissioning and preparation of a full Conservation Area Appraisal for the new Conservation Area. The Conservation Area was designated with effect from 11th October 2019. There are now 6 conservation areas in West Dunbartonshire.
- 3.4 Following a procurement exercise, an accredited heritage consultant was selected to undertake the Conservation Area Appraisal. During the winter of 2021/22 a successful initial round of public engagement was undertaken to raise awareness of the project. This included a town centre walkabout for groups of pupils from local schools, a dedicated Council webpage and online quiz seeking people's views on the town centre, which received over 60 responses, and a series of 'Did You Know' posters and art around the town centre to draw attention to key heritage features.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The draft Conservation Area Appraisal for Dumbarton Town Centre is attached for approval at Appendix 1. It is considered that the draft Conservation Area Appraisal complies with the recommended structure set out in the Scottish Government's Planning Advice Note 71: Conservation Area Management.
- 4.2** The Appraisal includes detailed sections on the historical development of the town, a townscape appraisal, character assessment and an assessment of the current Conservation Area boundaries with recommendations for potential boundary amendments. It also includes recommendations for the future management, preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.
- 4.3** The 'townscape appraisal' section notes the 'peninsular quality' of the town centre, being shaped by the course of the River Leven and A814 dual carriageway. Despite the redevelopment of the 1960s and 1970's, the key street routes and building frontages remain in the High Street, Church Street, College Street and Station Road. The twin church spires anchoring both ends of the High Street are highlighted, as well as the surviving 'burgage strip' pattern and vennels through to the River, at the rear of the High Street. The appraisal notes the high number of 'stand-out' buildings from the medieval period through to the 21st century, including the unexpectedly good collection of Art Deco frontages. The poor condition of a number of buildings are also noted, with stone-work and roof repairs needed in addition to vegetation removal. Three buildings are identified as being on the 'Buildings at Risk' Register.
- 4.4** The Appraisal identifies four distinct Character Areas: High Street (including the medieval core of town and the waterfront), Church Street up to the A814 (which provides a pedestrian and vehicular link north from High Street but also contains a number of important historic buildings), Station Road (predominantly late Victorian/Edwardian), and Strathleven Place (which is residential, and quieter in nature).
- 4.5** Key positive buildings and features are described, including listed and unlisted buildings. The surviving medieval street pattern, attractive riverside setting and the quality and unexpected range of architectural styles are noted as positive features. A number of buildings are also recommended for listing, including the Public Library, Hiram Walker Headquarter building, No. 22 High Street (former Bank of Scotland) and the Church Street/Castle Street tenements.
- 4.6** Key challenges are also highlighted including loss of original architectural details, use of inappropriate materials and repair techniques and modern additions. Poor quality shop fronts, unsightly gap sights and backlands, high shop vacancy rates and poor north-south connectivity are also noted.
- 4.7** There are several recommended boundary changes to the Conservation Area to include: a) Dumbarton Bridge- due to it being an important architectural and historic feature of Dumbarton and to connect the Town Centre and Kirktonhill conservation areas and b) The Scottish Maritime Museum, adjoining terrace and former railway goods station, for architectural, historic, archaeological and townscape reasons. A review of the boundaries of the conservation area is part of the remit of a Conservation Area Appraisal, and the inclusion of these suggestions within the draft Appraisal document gives the Council the opportunity to consult on these on a non-statutory basis, before formally deciding to make any changes through a statutory process e.g. through the preparation of the next Local Development Plan.

- 4.8** The Appraisal suggests that the area would benefit from an overall management plan to aid in the prioritisation and co-ordination of preservation and enhancement initiatives, as well as the identification of resources. It also emphasises that conservation area status is an opportunity to engage with the local community and foster a sense of ownership, responsibility for the historic environment, and pride in the town centre.
- 4.9** Finally, a broad set of specific initiatives are suggested to improve the town centre, including greater control of changes to unlisted buildings, improvements to backland areas, gap sites and the riverside frontage, comprehensive improvements to shopfronts and reviewing car parking provision to create more useable greenspace in the town centre.

Next steps

- 4.10** The draft Conservation Area Appraisal will be published for consultation. This is currently scheduled for October and will run for at least a month – there is no statutory minimum term for consultation on a conservation area appraisal. The format of the consultation is still being discussed with the appointed consultants, but in addition to making the document available online, an exhibition in a venue in Dumbarton town centre is being investigated. Following consultation, a finalised version of the document will be brought back to Committee for approval, at which time next steps in relation to some of the proposals/recommendations of the Appraisal will be recommended.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no personnel issues associated with this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The cost of preparing the Conservation Area Appraisal will be met from existing budgets.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** It was not considered necessary to carry out a risk assessment on the matters covered by this report.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** The Conservation Area Appraisal has been screened and it is not relevant to any of the impact assessment areas.

9. Environmental Sustainability

- 9.1** A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) pre-screening notification has been prepared and submitted to the Scottish Government SEA Gateway. It is considered that the Conservation Area Appraisal will not have any significant environmental impact in its own right, and any impacts (e.g. through decision-making) are likely to be positive.

10. Consultation

10.1 Details of the consultation already undertaken are set out in paragraph 3.4, and details of the consultation on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal are set out in paragraph 4.10.

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal does not have a direct impact on the Council's strategic priorities.

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Date: 21st September 2022

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Appendices: Appendix 1 –Draft Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal.

Background Papers: Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal Report by Austin Smith Lord July 2018

Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening.

Strategic Environmental Assessment Pre-Screening Report

Wards Affected: Ward 2 – Leven
Ward 3 – Dumbarton