

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL CONSERVATION AREA REVIEWS



Report Reference C-21-33
Meeting Date 7th March 2022
Agenda Item 9
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

Following the adoption of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan in 2019, the Town Council set out to meet its commitment to:

Work with Cheshire East Council and local heritage groups and organisations to review all of the Town's Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans and Article 4 Directions in order to ensure that all are up to date, are reflective of the existing built environment and are relevant in the continued protection and enhancement of these heritage assets.

In 2019 the council sought quotes to appoint a consultant to undertake reviews of the conservation areas and prepare an updated appraisal document and management plan. A consultant was chosen at a cost of £12,375 for reviewing the five conservation areas and the first review, for the Legh Road Conservation Area, commenced in 2020.

The review was impacted by COVID affecting access to the county records office and by a lack of engagement from Cheshire East Council. A draft of the appraisal was completed in 2021 by which point engagement from Cheshire East Council had improved with the return of a member of staff who had been on maternity leave. Cheshire East Council has committed resource to progressing the formal consultation and adoption of the reviews for the Legh Road, St John's and Town Centre conservation areas over the next year. The Legh Road Conservation Area appraisal and management plan will be progressed for public consultation by Cheshire East Council shortly.

In November 2021 the engaged consultant, who had initially only been appointed to undertake a review of the Legh Road Conservation Area, advised the council that they did not wish to continue the commission. The consultant cited the reasons as the project taking significantly longer than anticipated and requiring more hours than the original quotes had been based on due to the lack of engagement from CEC early in the process and latterly (and the primary frustration cited at the termination of the commission) issues with Town Council processes.

The Town Clerk obtained quotations from alternative consultants to continue the reviews. These were reviewed by the Planning and Licensing Committee at its meeting on 21st February. The committee resolved to recommend to Council that budget be provided in the 2022/23 financial year to undertake the reviews of the St John's and Town Centre conservation areas and agreed that Council determine the consultants for each review.

The St John's Conservation Area does not have an appraisal document which is the reason it is a higher priority review. The Town Centre Conservation Area is the most active area with frequent planning applications affecting the character of the area.

2.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Town Clerk approached a number of companies specialising in the field; this included one company which submitted a quotation in the original procurement process. The quote submissions have been circulated by email along with references received for the companies.

	Company A	Company B	Company C
St John's Avenue	7,500.00	9,093.75	4,950.00
Heathfield Square	5,000.00	9,093.75	4,850.00
Crosstown	5,000.00	9,093.75	4,750.00
Town Centre	15,000.00	12,909.38	19,500.00
Total	32,500.00	40,190.63	34,050.00

Company A would discount the total commission to £24,375 if appointed to do all reviews. Likewise, company B would discount the total commission to £36,171. Company C did not provide this option although they did in the original procurement.

The budget allocated to undertake the reviews was originally £12,375, of which £4,192 has been spent leaving £8,183 available. It is notable that the quoted costs are significantly higher than the budget originally allocated.

To undertake the two priority reviews (St John's and Town Centre) would require at least £17,859, requiring an additional budget allocation of £9,676. This would use Company C for St John's and Company B for Town Centre.

Council could determine to make the appropriate budget available in the 2022/23 financial year. Whilst it would be unfunded (in terms of the council having just set its 2022/23 budget) it would initially be drawn from the general reserve and be replenished through the 2023/24 budget process.

3.0 OPTIONS

The primary options are to:

- a) Undertake the reviews of both the St John's Avenue and Town Centre Conservation Areas using the current year budget with a planned draw down from the general reserve to enable the reviews to be undertaken in 2022 and look to make budget provision for further reviews in a future budget (as recommended by the Planning and Licensing Committee)
- b) Undertake the review of the St John's Avenue Conservation Area using the current year budget and consider making budget provision for further reviews in setting the 2023/24 budget.
- c) Undertake the review of the Town Centre Conservation Area with a planned draw down of from the general reserve to enable it to be undertaken in 2022 and consider making budget provision for further reviews in setting the 2023/24 budget.

3.0 DECISION REQUIRED

Council should consider the recommendation from the Planning and Licensing Committee and determine which reviews to undertake at what stage.

Council should also determine which contractor to use.