

Blaby District Council Officer Response to Consultation on the Proposed Extension to Braunstone Village Conservation Area

1. Thank you for consulting Blaby District Council on the proposed Conservation Area in Braunstone Town and agreeing to an extension of time for Council Officers to provide a response. We are seeking technical advice from Leicestershire County Council on the details of the proposals and are currently in a position to comment on the general principles of proposing the designation of a Conservation Area in this location. We would welcome a meeting with the Town Council to explore their interests in pursuing a Conservation Area designation in this area of Braunstone Town.
2. These comments are made having had regard to the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Practice Guidance and guidance issued by Historic England (formerly English Heritage). It is acknowledged, as set out in the consultation, that Leicestershire County Council declined to make a conservation order in 1973 on the Blaby District-side of Braunstone Lane because it was not considered to be of sufficient architectural merit to warrant preservation.

Background

3. A motion was proposed at a meeting of Blaby District Council on Tuesday 23 November 2021 to request a Conservation Area for 'Braunstone village'. The motion was carried and consisted of: the District Council to consider the merits of a Conservation Area in the area of Braunstone between no. 198 and 306 Braunstone Lane and any adjacent and adjoining areas within Blaby District deemed of historical or archaeological interest, and to follow due process which may include consultation. The proposed Conservation Area would, if granted, join and complement the existing Leicester City Conservation Area. The District Council would also work in partnership with Braunstone Town Council to assist and support, where necessary, the public consultation and preparation of the Character Appraisal.
4. Before commenting on the consultation material, it is important to understand the legislative framework in which Conservation Areas can be designated. Section 69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) states that every Local Planning Authority (LPA) shall from time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and the local planning authority shall designate those areas as conservation areas. LPAs are required to prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas when determining planning applications for sites within such areas.
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies and how they are expected to be applied. Section 16 provides guidance on how to conserve and enhance the historic environment. In relation to Conservation Areas, paragraph 191 states that: "When considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.". When considering the potential

impacts of development proposals on the historic environment, LPAs should look for opportunities for new development in Conservation Areas, and in the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance (paragraph 206) and it is important to note that not all elements of a Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance (paragraph 207).

6. Historic England guidance (Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second Edition)) advises LPAs that when appraising an area, they should consider whether an area has: sufficient architectural or historic interest for the area to be considered 'special', whether this is experienced through its character or appearance, and whether it is desirable for that character or appearance to be preserved or enhanced, and what problems designation could help to solve. A management plan should be prepared that reinforces the positive character of a historic area and avoids, minimises, and mitigates negative impacts identified as affecting the area.

The Proposed Conservation Area

7. A Conservation Area Character Appraisal (October 2021) has been prepared by the Town Council to support the proposed designation of the Conservation Area. The Appraisal sets out that the three statutory listed buildings and three dwellings north of the Grade II listed building at no. 266 Braunstone Lane positively contribute to the character of the area. There are parts of the Appraisal that review buildings or features that have been demolished and of which there are only one or two examples remaining on buildings that are not protected as Listed Buildings, or of features found in the Leicester City-side of Braunstone Lane. It is noted that the Appraisal identifies the area around the Bidford Road and Braunstone Lane junction as detracting from the character in the area.
8. Section 13 Capacity for Change considers that there is limited scope for new development in the area and that any alterations to properties should be sympathetic to their context, aiming to preserve or enhance the character and street scene of the locality, be compatible with the existing building stock, the local townscape and provide further opportunities for further archaeological investigation. The Appraisal fails to identify what the prevailing character in the area is. It is considered this is an essential component that will be needed to develop a Management Plan, should the area be designated as a Conservation Area.

Extent of the Proposed Conservation Area

9. Aside from the fact that the extent of the proposed Conservation Area mirrors the existing Conservation Area in Leicester City, it is not clear what the justification is for the proposed Conservation Area to extend from the junction of Braunstone Lane and Shakespeare Drive to the south to 306 Braunstone Lane to the north. On reading the Appraisal, it appears to argue that the whole of the proposed Conservation Area does not merit protection because significant change has already occurred, for example section 12 of the Appraisal critiques the development around Bidford Road which is in the centre of the proposed Conservation Area and the 1960s housing on the edges of the proposed Conservation Area. It is not clear why this part of Bidford Road is proposed to be included in the proposed Conservation Area if its architectural features are criticised and identified as a weakness. In addition, many of the residential dwellings to the north of 276 Braunstone Lane have been altered and their character gradually eroded through these changes. Has

consideration been given to focusing the extent of the Proposed Conservation Area to the areas which the Appraisal notes are of value?

10. We hope that you find our preliminary comments helpful, and we would welcome a meeting with the Town Council to explore and further scope the potential to designate a Conservation Area in this location in more detail.

Dated: 20 January 2022