



The Report
Panel Sitting – 20th June 2018
Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area

Status of Proposal: Dumbarton Town Centre – Proposed Conservation Area
Project Sponsor: Antony McGuinness, Forward Planning Team Leader, WDC
Introduced by: James Hall – Policy Planning Officer, Forward Planning, WDC



Project Background:

The 2014 Dumbarton Town Centre and Waterfront Revised Urban Strategy identified the potential for a town centre conservation area, based on the heritage quality and future funding opportunities for improvement work.

It would build on recent investment by the Council at 16 Church Street and the Municipal Buildings and enable further improvement of the town centre.

Austin-Smith:Lord have undertaken an initial appraisal of the heritage, architecture and townscape of Dumbarton Town Centre to underpin the potential for the designation of a new conservation area within the town centre; Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal: June 2018

This document notes the legislative framework to the introduction of Conservation Areas by the Civic Amenities Act 1967, The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 within which Conservation areas are defined as;

'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'

All planning authorities are required by this Act to determine which parts of their townscape merit Conservation Area Status.

In a Conservation Area the buildings and the spaces between are considered as having special architectural or historical interest. Planning control is directed at maintaining the integrity that this combination gives to an area and enhancing it's special character.

Application of Conservation Area Status does not mean;

- new development is unacceptable
- That planning matters are more onerous for property owners and commercial property owners.



Project Background:

Application of Conservation Area Status does mean;

- An insistence that new development must be of the best quality and in keeping with the character of the area.
- Suitable scale of development, selection of materials aiding redevelopment leading to property value stabilisation or gain.
- A rise in property values and prestige to the area, which in turn can draw more investment, occupiers, expenditure and vitality
- The following works would come under Planning control; Demolition of buildings, removal of/work to trees, Development involving small house extensions/roof alterations, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior and provision of hard surfaces, and additional control over satellite dishes.
- Detailed consideration as to how a proposal; affects a street pattern and spaces and existing building lines; how it affects the distinctive areas, groups of buildings and trees and other features important to the character of the area; how it relates to the scale, proportions, materials and character of adjacent buildings and other features in the area; and how it will secure the retention or reinstatement of traditional detailing and architectural feature.
- Local residents and property owners have a role in protecting and enhancing the character of the Conservation Area by ensuring their properties are regularly maintained and original features are retained, restored and repaired wherever possible.

Additional benefits of Conservation Area Designation;

- Tool for promoting or 'rediscovering' heritage, history and architecture of an area;
- Becomes a catalyst and focus for further investment, policies, regeneration projects;
- Economic benefits as it raises the profile and prominence of the area locally, nationally and internationally – in turn this can increase footfall, tourism, spending/income – attracting people from a further afield, and hopefully boosting town centre retail and leisure
- Can help generate civic pride and greater community engagement in the future of the area
- The Council may be able to unlock grant funding through the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) set up in 2007 by Historic Environment Scotland (HES). Funding is provided over a five year period to support the set up of a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme contributing to building repairs to priority projects, smaller grants scheme, public realm improvements and skills training opportunities.
- In certain circumstances the availability of funding for repairs and shop front improvements. A CARS scheme will assist owners and encourage redevelopment.



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Presentation to the Panel;

The project was presented to the Panel by James Hall, Policy Planning Officer and project lead. In advance of the sitting the Panel were provided with the draft Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area Proposal compiled by Austin Smith:Lord; June 2018.

The Panel sitting was preceded by a brief introduction to set out the background and an outline of key points to consider during the walking tour of the two possible Conservation Areas that the Report is proposing;

- Town Centre North – around Dumbarton Central station; and
- Town Centre South – High Street, Church Street and the riverside. The presentation set the following questions for the Panel to consider.

Key Town Centre Features highlighted during the tour included;

- The medieval layout that the High Street retains, with strong frontage, listed buildings and good unlisted buildings. This included areas where improvement were required.
- The northern part of the town centre containing the recently restored B-listed Municipal Buildings, A-listed Dumbarton Central Station, Carnegie Library and listed tenement blocks on Station Road.
- The modern A814 and post war redevelopment severing the two historic areas which diminishes the line of College Street.
- Strong links from the High Street to the attractive River Leven frontage with its landscaped waterfront path leading to the B-listed Dumbarton Bridge.

- To the east, the planned waterfront path, through new residential and commercial areas, will link the Town Centre to Dumbarton Castle and Rock.

The Austin Smith:Lord report recommends (possibly through CARS funding);

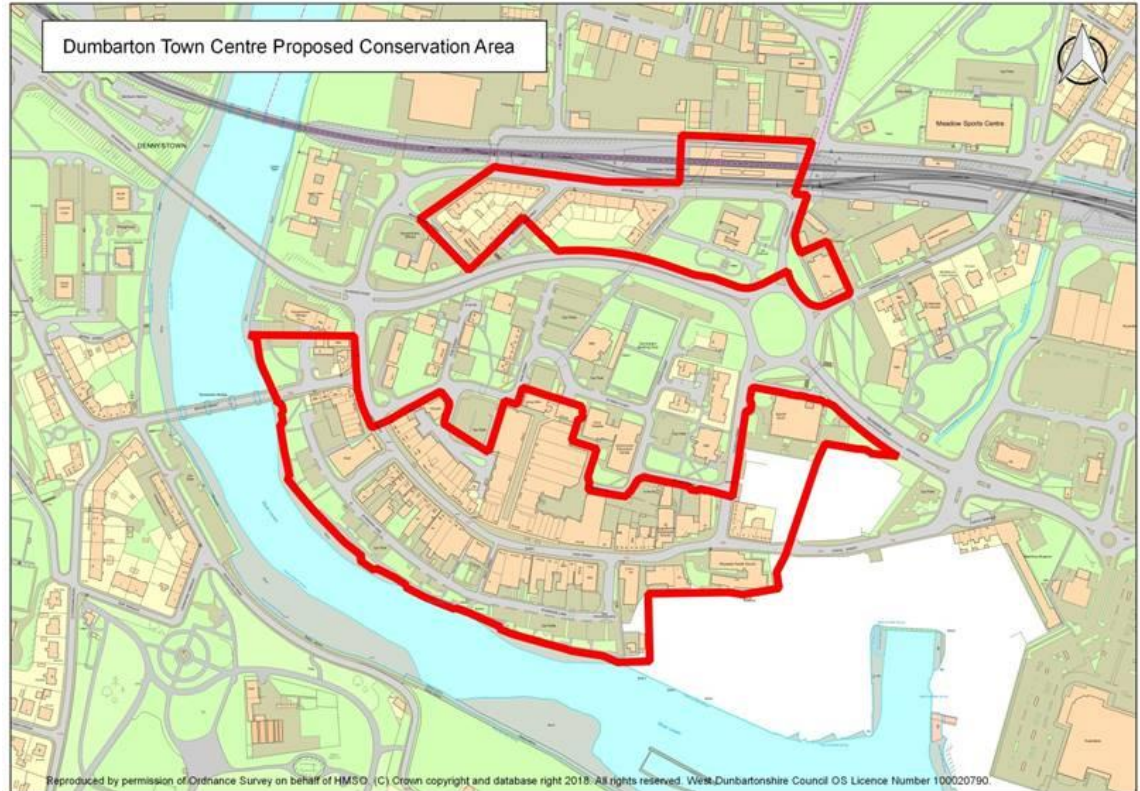
- Public space improvements/shop front regeneration
- Key historic buildings – listed and unlisted
- Re-establishing connections; re-establishing and enhancing College Street connection across the A814 and into the High Street
- High Street Vennels; re-tracing the historic network of vennels between High Street and the River Leven.
- Waterfront public space improvements; the riverside area and rear elevations of the south side of the High Street
- Redevelopment of unattractive buildings within the proposed conservation areas.



Presentation to the Panel;

The questions posed to the Panel were as follows;

- Should the 2 proposed Conservation Areas be joined or remain as individual areas?
- Should the modern Artizan Centre on the High Street be included?
- Should the North area be extended to include the south side of Strathleven Place (including St Patrick's Church)
- Should South area extend further east to include A-listed Maritime Museum (Denny Tank Building) on Castle Street?
- Any other areas or buildings of historic/architectural character to include?
- Do you agree with the identified improvements?
- What other opportunities does Dumbarton present?
- What are the key buildings, street sections, areas of public realm that could be enhanced?
- How can the built heritage be best linked to the economic/retail regeneration of the town centre?





Panel Discussion

Should the 2 proposed Conservation Areas be joined or remain as individual areas?

Should the North area be extended to include the south side of Strathleven Place (including St Patrick's Church)?

Should South area extend further east to include A-listed Maritime Museum (Denny Tank Building) on Castle Street?

It was recognised by the Panel that the A814 dissects the town and disrupts the flow that medieval towns normally have. Dumbarton is missing this flow and this can be established in finding context through green spaces, community activities and spaces to join up.

While St Patrick's Church and the half dozen surrounding buildings on Strathleven Place are not thought necessarily as having a town centre character they provide a good balance and would strengthen the overall quality of the Conservation area.

It was further suggested that the green areas south of St Patricks Church should be included and used to join the north and south areas, with the reorganisation of the footpath network to enhance the connection. Additional required improvements to the pedestrian linkages were identified around the Station and Municipal buildings.

On consideration of this , the Panel agreed overwhelmingly that in order to give clear over-all context to the town, the 2 proposed areas should be joined. Keeping these distinct from each other furthers the disconnect of this medieval town. When brought together by the area south of Strathleven Place, an over-all context to the town becomes clear.

It was agreed also that the area (between the north and south

proposed conservation areas) that includes post war housing stock, Denny Theatre and Dumbarton Bowling Club, is by nature of its development pattern and the quality of the architecture, difficult to connect and therefore should not be part of the appraisal.

The Panel felt strongly that the area south of Strathleven Place that includes buildings such as St Patrick's Catholic Church and presbytery, Dumbarton's Carnegie Library and the B-listed Drumoyne building should be included within the extended boundary of the Conservation area. They did not feel the area boundary should be extended to cover the Denny Tank Building/Maritime Museum. The building stands remote from the conservation area, separated by a re-development site and does not sit in the traditional medieval street pattern.



Panel Discussion

Should the modern Artizan Centre on the High Street be included?

It was agreed that the Artizan Centre should remain part of the Conservation Area for a number of reasons.

The route through the Artizan Centre that begins by linking the waterfront to the High Street, through Quay Street and up towards College Street to Dumbarton Central Station, is a key historical route. The route is present on the historical maps and should be preserved, with the character of this route enhanced with provision of quality street landscaping/cobbles in key areas, such as College Street as an indication of the historical/geographical importance. Building on historical links to bring the train station 'into' the town.

There was discussion around possible next steps for the Artizan centre which included removing the end building block to open the route up further and to reinstate the former square to punctuate the route. The Panel discussed the challenges with the Artizan Centre in relation to the apparent decline of High Streets as shopping centres. There are a number of vacant shops in the Centre and there was support for the possibility of widening the scope of allowed uses within the shop units in order to bring in unique, independent shops, studios, cafes etc.

The architectural character of the centre was not thought to be an issue. The building is of a modern design and requires some upgrading, however, it is sympathetic to the traditional height, scale and use of the High Street setting. While conservation area status would not prevent change to the centre and the Artisan Centre itself would not become a listed building, it does give more control and protection to the formal historic route from the Waterfront to the station and prevents unsympathetic additions to the historic context.

Any other areas or buildings of historic/architectural character to include?

The Church at 143/145 High St where the Bell Centre operates was thought to be a good candidate for fabric improvements to carry out repointing, removal of vegetation and provide bird screening. The building above CUBE Housing was also thought worthy of consideration as a listed building.

Waterfront public space improvements; the riverside area and rear elevations of the south side of the High Street? Vennel reinstatement?

The Panel noted the flood risk on the river side and discussed how coastal cities handle flood prevention undertaken in such a way as to enhance the riverside.

In Dumbarton commercial activity turns its back to the river however the greenspaces, parking and river side walks automatically create regenerative purpose to face the river. Activities here will make shops and businesses respond automatically. Reinstatement of the Vennels, where possible would improve the permeability and access to the frontage to increase activity.

Trees along the river side are coming to the end of their practical life and if investment was made to improve the landscape the neighbouring properties and businesses would turn to embrace the river and the character here.



Panel Discussion

How can the built heritage be best linked to the economic/retail regeneration of the town centre?

It was highlighted that while the High Street has potential to be a good high street, there are a lot of empty shops, as with many town centres. Sustainability of the Town Centre is reliant on what happens with empty units. The Panel suggested that this is an opportunity to demonstrate what can be done in a Town Centre to combat the demise; if you fix the fabric people and businesses will move in.

There could be a series of compulsory improvements; roof repairs, removal of foliage growth on buildings, improvements to building fabric, windows, doors, shop fronts and rainwater goods.

There was a suggestion of the Council taking ownership and therefore control of the Town Centre's built fabric (with involvement from the land commission).

Consideration of changes of permitted uses in the town centre to see the shops fill up. It was noted that Princes Street in Edinburgh had to carry out a similar exercise recently.

Council would need to demonstrate they are serious by treating buildings as listed, to keep control of internal and external elements of buildings depending on what is seen as important from a heritage perspective.

It was noted that the Forward Planning team will consider applying for CARS funding, which could allow for grants to improve the shop fronts and poor fascia's after the appraisal exercise.



Panel Summary/Consensus;

Conclusion;

The Panel strongly endorsed the idea of designating a Conservation Area for the town centre to build on the momentum of the improvement work being undertaken in Dumbarton.

They felt that Dumbarton was a prime candidate for CARS funding and other potential avenues of funding that Conservation Area Status unlocks. Combined with the heritage character, it has clear regenerative and economic need for improving an area of historical importance.

The Panellists commended the move by WDC to react positively to the heritage quality of the area with significant investment in 16 Church Street and the Municipal buildings, which have enhanced the environment and are catalyst projects in their locations and also symbols of the quality of development expected in West Dunbartonshire.

The Panellists acknowledged the scale of the work that needs to be undertaken to bring the town centre up to a high standard and agreed that such a designation would contribute positively to changing the status and perception of the area and increase opportunity to regenerate the Town Centre.

Advice was offered on possible next steps and on the application for CARS (and other) funding;

Next steps which are of particular importance at full Appraisal stage would include;

- Defining historical routes with a view to redeveloping to retain and improve these.

- Improving first impressions
- Establishing a 'Vision' and spatial strategy for the area
- Identifying what gives the place character? One large area with smaller character areas within
- Being clear about which are the key buildings
- Riverside improvements strategy
- A clear indication of where the improvement projects will be.
- A public realm improvement strategy.
- Seeking good, comparable examples for demonstration; Falkirk was cited as an example of a heritage site where a high standard of work was carried out.
- The development of a staff training/Tool kit; Succinct conservation area guidance for consideration during the planning approval process. Removing the risk of differing approaches from officers.

The Panel thought it would be useful if the Appraisal included: annotated drawings, examples of good shopfronts, a list of 'do's' and 'don'ts' with examples to make it easier to carry out work and also to assess from an officers point of view, rhythm of the street, scale etc.

Undertaking an exercise in communicating the positive message and value in having Conservation Area Designation to the people in surrounding residential areas. This would entail building on the existing support demonstrated through Charrettes, the evidence from using the Place Standard and the Community Council and Town Centre Forum support.

The activities of the Place and Design Panel are advisory and do not prejudice full consideration of additional issues being raised through the formal Planning Process