Bulwell Conservation Area - Interim Character Appraisal

Policy background

Local Authorities have a duty under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. From 'time to time' they must also review their Conservation Areas and determine whether any additional parts of their area should be designated.

Paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework states: "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." The onus is therefore on the Local Authority to prove that an area is of special interest prior to designation.

The adopted Local Plan encourages the Council to review Conservation Areas and seek ways to preserve or enhance their character. The emerging Aligned Core Strategy (Policy 11) supports initiatives where heritage assets are conserved. The designation of a Conservation Area in Bulwell accords with these policies in contributing to the unique identity of an area and its sense of place. It is felt that the designated area is of sufficient historic and architectural interest to be worthy of Conservation Area status. The designation is seen as a starting point for improving the management of the town's built environment and is expected to provide a stimulus for investment by making the town eligible for heritage grant funding.

Historic Development

Bulwell's history as a settlement extends back to the Anglo Saxon period (around 800 AD). A toll bridge, built at a convenient crossing point on the River Leen provided the focal point for a small trading post which was classed as a village by the time of the Domesday Book of 1086. The market established by roaming salesmen serving the needs of travellers on the road continues to trade from the same location to this day. By the 13th century the town had a church, built on the highest point in Bulwell where the current Church of St Mary the Virgin and All Souls (completed in 1851) now stands.

The availability of good local building materials and coal ensured that Bulwell continued to thrive during the middle ages when commercial mining and quarrying operations became well established. The distinctive magnesium limestone, now known as Bulwell Stone, was found to be durable, easy to quarry and easy to carve. Many high status buildings in the town are constructed from the stone, but it was also used extensively to construct more humble buildings such as terraced houses and boundary walls. The layer of clay that covered the stone was used for manufacturing bricks and earthenware while the easily accessible coal seams beneath it saw commercial mines established by 1500, the first in Nottinghamshire.

The quarries, clay pits and coal mine, extended over an increasingly large area to the north west of the town centre and supported an ever growing population of

workers. Brewing and lace manufacturing were also important industries in the town.

By the nineteenth century overcrowding had become a serious concern; a steep decline in the infant mortality rate lead to rapid population growth and further housing pressure. The land scoured by quarrying to the north west of the centre was used for the construction of new terraced housing and in the 1870s and 1880s new schools and the church of St John the Divine were built to serve this new district of the town. The church and the terraced houses on Commercial Road, Mersey Street and Thames Street are now all that remains of this stage of the town's development following extensive slum clearances in the 20th century.

Architectural Character

The proposed boundary of the Bulwell Conservation Area encompasses the historic street layout of the town. This can roughly be divided into 5 character areas: (1) the Market Place and town centre, (2) the Commercial Road corridor, (3) Highbury Road and Station Road, (4) north Main Street and (5) Bulwell Bogs and the River Leen.

1) **The Market Place and town centre.** Bulwell's commercial and historic heart is focused around the Market Place and Main Street. The area is characterised by its mixture of two and three storey commercial buildings, many of which date to the mid to late 19th and early 20th centuries. They are built in a variety of architectural styles including Renaissance Revival and Edwardian Baroque most often from brick with stonework dressings. Many have retained their traditional timber sash windows and upper floor features, but the lack of surviving traditional shopfronts is a noticeable problem. Just off Main Street, the quiet residential cul-de-sac of Montague Street, with its Victorian brick terraced houses, is worthy of mention.

2) **The Commercial Road corridor.** This character area includes the western edge of the original settlement and the 19th century infill development that grew up between the towns centre and the quarries and mine to the north west. It includes some notable historic buildings such as Strelley House, (a remarkable example of a purpose built school dating to 1667), a late 17th century Bulwell Stone dovecote, and terraces of Bulwell Stone and brick workers houses. Before the construction of Bulwell High Road, which now defines the western limit of the town's shopping centre, this area was a vibrant commercial area. Virtually all of the former shop units on Commercial Road have now been converted to residential use.

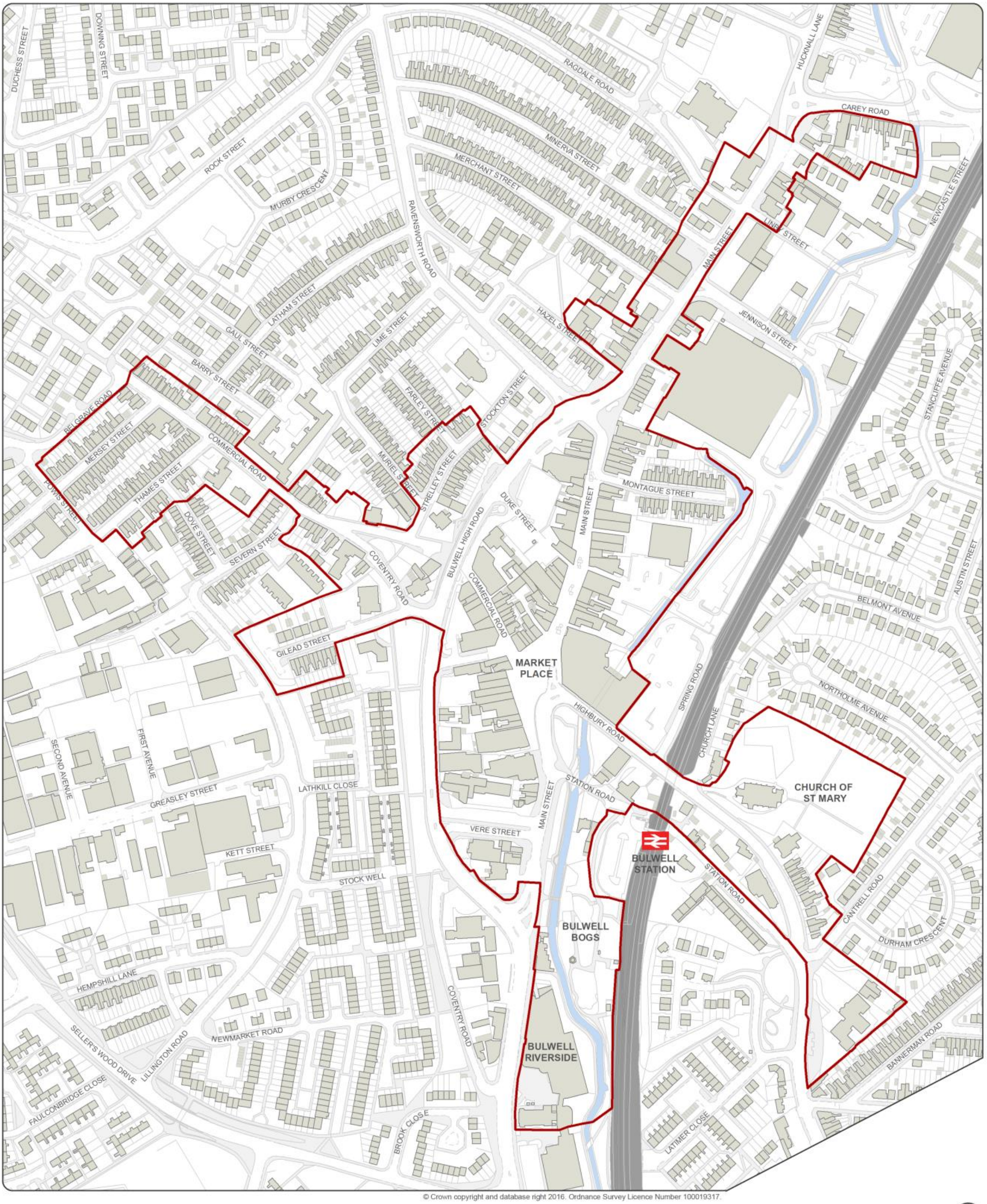
3) **Highbury Road and Station Road.** To the east of the River Leen the ground rises to the highest point of the town where the Bulwell Stone Church tower and churchyard of St Mary's act as a key focal point. Other key public buildings of townscape merit include the Old Town Hall (1894) and the former Public Library (1923), both on Highbury Road. The area also has a mixture of Victorian terraced houses, semi-detached villas, detached houses and a Pub. Most of these are built from brick with stone dressings. Bulwell stone boundary and retaining walls are a particularly noticeable characteristic of this character area, as is the number of attractive mature trees.

4) **North Main Street.** The section of Main Street to the north of the junction with Bulwell High Road is slightly disjointed mixture of public, residential and commercial buildings. Nevertheless it includes some fine individual buildings such as the Gothic Revival St Mary's Primary School, the Neo-Classical former Methodist Church, the former Three Crowns, Scots Grey and Framesmith's Arms Public Houses and 202 Main Street, a fine late Victorian house in Bulwell Stone. The mix of materials and architectural styles produces a varied streetscene with an eclectic character. Vacant sites are currently a noticeable problem.

5) **Bulwell Bogs and the River Leen.** The public park known as Bulwell Bogs has served as a place of recreation for the people of Bulwell for generations past. This attractive tree lined stretch of the River Leen sits at the heart of the town centre and includes the three bridges over the river, two of which are grade II listed. The proposed boundary of the Conservation Area extends southwards from the Bogs to incorporate the modern Bulwell Riverside Centre and the Baptist Church on Coventry Road, built of Bulwell Stone.

This initial assessment of the town's history and character demonstrates that it possesses sufficient historic and architectural interest to warrant designation as a Conservation Area. A more detailed Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan will be produced to more thoroughly describe the area's character and provide guidelines for its future maintenance and development. This document will be subject to consultation with local residents before its formal adoption.

Bulwell Conservation Area



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Metres
0 20 40 80

Key

Conservation Area Boundary

Nottingham City Council