1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek member approval for the proposed Birch Conservation Area consultation strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Township Committee considers the architectural and historic interest of the proposed conservation area as delineated by the draft conservation area boundary in Appendix 1 and outlined in the report;

2.2 The Township Committee approves the draft conservation area boundary for consultation purposes; and

2.3 The Township Committee considers approves the proposed consultation strategy for the conservation area, after which point a report will be brought to the Township Committee detailing the results of this consultation and a final draft of the appraisal

2.4 The Township Committee considers notes the intention to bring a further report to township committee with a firm proposal for the conservation area following consultation

3 MAIN TEXT INCLUDING ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED/ CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

3.1 The proposed Birch Conservation Area is being assessed as an area of historic and architectural interest worthy of preservation and enhancement as a conservation area
3.2 A request from the ‘Friends of Birch’ local group to consider the designation of the conservation area to support the restoration of Birch Fountain has been received.

3.3 The views of residents and local interest groups will be sought through the consultation strategy as outlined in this report.

**Background**

3.4 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to survey and keep under review their district for *areas which are of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate those areas as Conservation Areas*. This duty is an ongoing requirement of local authorities.

3.5 The following is an outline of the historic and architectural interest of the area. During the consultation period the area will be more fully appraised, taking on board the comments of local people and interest groups.

**Historic Development**

3.6 In its early history, Birch (or ‘Birch-St-Mary’) was an ecclesiastical parish formed from Bury and Middleton parishes. Located approximately 2 miles north-west of Middleton, the small town developed along the line of Whittle Brook and the key route from Middleton to Heywood (now Heywood Old Road).

Built in 1829, the Church of St Mary (vicarage to the south-east) formed one of the early foci for the development of the village. To the immediate west, a small national school was built and around these points a cluster of small cottages, as well as a pub (“Red Lion”, “White Hart” and “Old Three Tuns”) and post office formed to the south west.

As a result of the key location along Heywood Old Road and proximity to the valuable asset of Whittle Brooke, Birch Mill to the north was also built around this time (c.1840). This had the effect of drawing development northward along the line of Heywood Old Road, resulting in the linear form of the settlement still seen today.

Birch Mill was a cotton mill, served by Whittle Brooke and a reservoir to the north-east. Despite numerous fires, the mill underwent a number of extensions throughout the 19th century, ultimately forming a significant and formative part of the townscape. Cottages and managers houses, as well as the nearby managers house, formed along the line between the St Mary’s and the mill, creating a distinctive roadside character that still survives today.

In close proximity to the village, a number of farms, including – Grange Farm and “Top o’ th’ Hill” also resulted in an agricultural emphasis, with produce shows and events being a common occurrence throughout the 19th century.

Towards the end of the century, a number of larger-scale residences replaced the cottages lining the road. Many of these buildings were designed by notable Arts and Crafts architect, Edgar Wood (1860-1935). These well-designed, picturesque residences follow the line of Heywood Old Road from the land south of Birch Mill to Langley Lane. Generally of red brick (some with distinctive diaper patterns) with traditional-style small-paned windows and stylised chimneys and gable ends, these buildings contribute greatly to the character of the conservation area. Also designed by Edgar Wood, a drinking fountain was placed within the town at this time. Following an accident in which two wagons...
collided with the fountain, it was moved to its current location north of The White Hart Inn.

During the 20th century, the village developed further, with Birch Mill undergoing several diverse uses - from silk work to electronics, and finally a business centre. In the later half of the century, The Church of St Mary was demolished and replaced with the simple brick structure seen today. The ruins of the old church can still be seen, sitting amongst the old church yard.

Today, the proposed conservation area remains in relatively good condition. While the Church of St Mary and the small school adjacent have been lost, there remains much within the churchyard which would benefit from conservation area status and a resultant conservation schemes. Birch Mill, still in regular use, is in relatively good condition, as are the Edgar Wood style residences and cottages. The architectural and historic interest of the proposed conservation area, with its roots in the industrial and domestic origins of the village, is significant and survives in good overall condition.

**Summary of Architectural and Historic Interest**

3.7 The architectural and historic interest of Birch lies largely in its association with notable architect Edgar Wood. Born in nearby Middleton in 1860, Edgar Wood was highly influential within the Arts & Crafts Movement, and one the most radical practitioners of the style, later anticipating architectural movements as diverse as Art Nouveau and the Modern Movement. Edgar Wood’s buildings within the village of Birch are fine examples of his Arts & Crafts domestic style, typified by the skillful use of stylized gable ends and traditional features. For more information on Edgar Wood, please see Appendix 3.

3.8 The village of Birch is also of architectural and historic interest as a result of its historic development – initially around the Church of St Mary, and later as a result of the building of Birch Mill. This lead to the linear form of the settlement along Heywood Old Road between the Church of St Mary and Birch Mill, with a diverse selection of buildings along its length – from early 19th century terraced housing, to a middle managers house, pub and Arts & Crafts style residences.

**Alternatives Considered**

3.9 To neglect designating a conservation area (where appropriate) would leave the area of interest vulnerable to the insensitive development of its physical fabric and setting.

3.10 Not consulting would leave local people and groups out of the decision making process.

**Proposed consultation**

3.11 The proposed consultation is informed by the issues outlined above and is proportionate to the scale of the proposed Birch Conservation Area.

3.12 *Consultation of amenity and other groups:* Letters will be sent to relevant groups with a draft copy of an appraisal of the area.

3.13 *Consultation of owners/tenants:* Letters are to be sent out to the owners and directing interested parties to the RMBC website and local libraries at which copies of the draft appraisal will be made available.
3.14 Media: Work with RMBC Communications team to publicise consultation and proposals on the RMBC website, through social media and the press.

3.15 The results of these consultations will be summarised and formulated in a report and brought to the Township Committee.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The consultation for the proposed Birch Conservation Area carries no significant financial implication at this stage and will be carried out within the existing resources of Planning service.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The consultation for the proposed Birch Conservation Area carries no immediate significant legal implications.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The conservation area appraisal is being prepared within existing staff capacities.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACTS

8.1 There are no (significant) workforce equality issues arising from this report.

For further information and background papers: For further information about this report or access to only background papers please contact Christina Sinclair, Project Support Assistant, Planning and Regulation Service, Floor 1, Telegraph House, Baillie Street, Rochdale, OL16 1JH Tel: 01706 924313 Email christina.sinclair@rochdale.gov.uk

Peter Rowlinson
Service Director - Planning and Regulation
APPENDIX 1 – Draft Conservation Area Boundary for Consultation
APPENDIX 2 – Timeline of Events
Early Development: Developed as a result of Mill (with Whittle Brooke & transport route as suburb to Middleton)

1851: Mapping suggests the basis of the townscape is largely present by this date. Birch Mill, St Mary’s Church and terraced housing are all evident along Heywood Old Road, with a larger cluster still evident around the Church of St Mary.

1860’s: The large cotton mill (Birch Mill) had been established in some years previously and resulted in the rapid growth of Birch within this decade.

1865: Birch mills (cotton) enlarged

1866: Birch Mill was further enlarged in order to meet with growing demand.

1879: Birch was still thriving at this time, despite a mill fire in this year.

1883: By this date, the rapid growth of Birch had eased, and there was evidence of some decline in the area. A newspaper article of this year noted, “Birch mills being pulled down for the erection of a weaving shed, it is hoped that this will be the means of reviving ‘poor old Birch’”.

1888: Birch drinking fountain was placed within village centre. This was designed to commemorate the completion of the new weaving shed at Messrs. Woods’ textile factory and donated to the people of Birch.

(6th July) 1889: Birch drinking fountain was provided with gas lighting

c.1890: ‘White Hart Hotel’ present by this date.

1892: Birch fountain was damaged when two wagons collided with it. The repairs following this were completed within the year.

1893: The townscape of Birch was largely developed by this time. Also in this year, there was a “Report on work of Mr Wood to help beatify the Birch village”

1894: Broadfield Mill (Birch) to ‘carry on’ as a cotton spinners and daublers

September 1902: A strike was held at Birch Mill over poor wages.

1906: Gap Farm sold at auction. Another fire occurred at the mill (it was producing silk at this time)

1909: Records show ‘alterations’ of Birch Mill this year (extent not yet known)

1917: Fire at Birch Mill

1937: Sale of Birch Mill

1965: Salford Electronic Company Ltd moved from Birch Mill

1973: Fire at Birch Mill

(June) 1974: Fire at Birch Mill, main section destroyed

(March) 1976: Closure of St Mary’s
APPENDIX 3: Edgar Wood

Overview

Edgar Wood was born in Middleton in 1860; the son of a wealthy local mill owner and Liberal politician. He pursued a career in art and architecture from his Manchester office, first in Cross Street and then King Street. He was highly influential in the Arts and Crafts movement, being one of its most radical practitioners, and was a leader in stylistic developments between 1897 and 1920. He became Manchester and the north’s leading figure in artistic design and set up the Northern Art Worker’s Guild, promoting the Arts and Crafts movement in the region.

Wood was always developing his style, combining Arts and Crafts with an anticipation of later architectural movements such as Art Nouveau, Art Deco and the Modern Movement. His expressionist First Church of Christ Scientist, Manchester and subsequent flat-roofed houses and schools in Middleton and Hale have no equals in England for their originality, other than the few examples he built outside the county. It was Wood’s visionary foresight that made him influential in Britain, Europe and as far as the USA.

Wood’s Modern style was jointly created with another Manchester architect, J. Henry Sellers (1861-1954) who originated from Oldham and had previously held architectural positions in Cumberland and York. Sellers’ returned to Oldham in 1900 and in 1904 struck up a creative partnership with Wood which lasted into the 1920s. Edgar Wood died in Italy in 1935.

Architectural legacy

Edgar Wood (1860-1935), who the eminent architectural historian Pevsner referred to as ‘that remarkable Manchester architect…’ was born, lived and worked in Greater Manchester. He was a pioneering Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau architect who worked at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. He had a genius for design which gained him an international reputation. This was largely based on his output of buildings in the Manchester area which now constitute a remarkable architectural legacy, much of it at the cutting edge of ‘fin de siècle’ avant-garde design.

Wood’s legacy is starting to be rediscovered, mainly in Middleton, the architect's home town, thanks to the proactive Friends of Edgar Wood, Heritage Trust for the North West and Rochdale MBC. As the significance of Wood's work becomes ever more apparent, so is the potential to put Manchester on the international map as a city of Art Nouveau architecture, culture and creativity.

Edgar Wood was part of the European Art Nouveau movement whose architects tended to work in their own localities, leaving a concentrated legacy of buildings. Today, this heritage can be used to enhance the image of these localities as attractive places to invest. Edgar Wood “...stands to Manchester as Mackintosh does to Glasgow” (J. Archer, Manchester University) and the buildings of Charles Rennie Mackintosh have helped transform the image of Glasgow. Similarly, Antoni Gaudí to Barcelona and the Secessionist architects to Vienna. In contrast to this, Edgar Wood and his association with Manchester has remained quiet and undiscovered. This strategy seeks to achieve international recognition for Edgar Wood’s Manchester culminating in a bid for a transnational World Heritage Site based on the distinct national variants of Art Nouveau and the development of modernism.
APPENDIX 4: Conservation Areas Overview

What are Conservation Areas?

1. A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Areas are assessed from a local perspective where the aim is to conserve the familiar and cherished local scene. The most important conservation areas may also be of national importance but there is no separate designation for this.

2. Conservation areas are for areas, not individual buildings. However, what constitutes an area is very wide. For example, the smallest conservation area might be a house and a garden, or perhaps a church and associated vicarage, while the largest conservation area might cover a substantial rural landscape. Many are town or village centres while others cover unique areas, such as model housing estates. The designation of long lengths of canal and railway is common, as is the designation of the best of a particular urban type such as terraced housing or industrial buildings.

3. Most conservation areas support the social cohesion of the particular area through the encouragement of local pride and the care of the environment. Conservation area status is an official acknowledgement that an area has special heritage value. This eventually works its way through the developmental and ownership structure of a place and encourages a virtuous cycle of improvement. For example, it can become easier to achieve better design quality or successful grant applications to outside bodies.

How are Conservation Areas made?

4. Conservation areas are normally made or “designated” by the local planning authority under powers contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The local authority can alter the boundary of an existing conservation area or cancel it altogether. The Council is free to establish its own designation procedure and criteria. The procedure should normally include the consultation of affected properties and interested groups and bodies by letter.

5. Conservation areas should have a strong local flavour and interest and, for this reason, are designated by the Township Committees rather than a borough-wide committee at Rochdale MBC. Nevertheless, it is important to see conservation areas as part of the wider planning of the Borough. They should be consistent with other aims and policies of the UDP and complement other Council initiatives.

Urgent Designation Procedure

6. Occasionally, a proposed development or demolition will have major implications for a possible conservation area. There may not be sufficient time for the normal consultation procedure to take place and the proposal would effectively prevent the conservation area being considered for at least part of the area. In these circumstances, it is appropriate to use the urgent designation procedure under the scheme of delegation.

7. In such circumstances, the Development Control Manager, after consulting the Borough Solicitor, arranges for a meeting of the Delegated Sub Committee of the appropriate Township Committee, to designate a conservation area of the minimum size. A report, within one year of designation, is subsequently presented to the Township Committee, allowing it to consider the matter following reflection, consultation and resolution of any particular planning problems.

The Consequences of Conservation Area Designation

These can be summarised as follows.
a. The local planning authority is under a general duty to ensure the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and has a particular duty to prepare proposals to that end.
b. The local authority may be able to take steps to ensure a building is kept in good repair.
c. From time to time, limited financial assistance may be available for the upkeep of buildings in the area.
d. The details as to the limits of what works may be carried out without planning permission are different (in particular, more limited permitted development rights for householders).
e. The planning authority is to take into account the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the area when determining planning applications and there is extra publicity for applications to this effect.
f. Conservation Area Consent is required for the demolition of any unlisted building in the area and the local authority can take enforcement action or institute a criminal prosecution if consent is not obtained.
g. Notice must be given to the local authority before works are carried out to any tree in the area.
h. The display of advertisements is more restricted than elsewhere.

*Adopted Principles*

There are five adopted principles guiding the Council’s actions concerning the making of new Conservation Areas. These are set out below. Principles 3. and 5. specifically underpin the reasoning of this report, which tries to square the need for public consultation with that of an urgent response to a particular circumstance.

1. Only areas and buildings of special architectural or historic interest should be made conservation areas. Areas or buildings without such special interest should not be designated, no matter how strong other reasons might be.

2. The designation of conservation areas should be consistent with the policies of the Unitary Development Plan and good planning practice.

3. The process of making of conservation areas should be open and fair. It should be responsive to local opinion and allow local people and other interested parties to comment.

4. The process should be efficient and practical. It should encourage the making of good decisions within available resources and practical time frames.

5. The process should be flexible to respond to the range of heritage and planning contexts that may arise. In particular, the process should be able to cater for urgent situations where the special interest or character of an area is under immediate threat.
APPENDIX 5: Photographic record

Birch Mill – decorative wall tie details

Birch Mill – Heywood Old Road facade

Birch Mill – Heywood Old Road facade

Birch Mill – Heywood Old Road façade, door detail
Middle Manager’s House & shop, Heywood Old Road

Birch Drinking fountain (Grade II listed)

White Hart Inn, Manchester Old Road

Church of St Mary (former), Burial Ground
Drywood Cottages, Heywood Old Road, Birch (designed by Edgar Wood)

Doris Terrace, Heywood Old Road, Birch (designed by Edgar Wood)

Doris Terrace, Heywood Old Road, Birch (designed by Edgar Wood)