

## Boscombe Conservation Area

The emergence of Localism in recent years has seen significant growth in communities taking an interest in their historic areas and an increasingly active role in their protection and enhancement. This is most widely reflected in the development of Neighbourhood Plans. Of the hundreds being prepared in the South West the majority have locally specific policies for the protection of the historic environment. These range from defining criteria for new development to actions for improved management such as pursuing conservation area designation, appraisals and management plans. All are keen to ensure that growth is “good growth”.

Boscombe is a distinct district within the wider Bournemouth area and while closely adjacent to the town centre and forming part of the continuous seafront it displays contrasting physical and dynamic qualities. Although it grew with the rest of Bournemouth as a late C19/early C20 seaside destination its historic estate is generally more modest in scale and pretension, with residential streets or avenues feeding off the main commercial area running linear and parallel to the coast.

Boscombe possesses particularly severe signs of deprivation, derived from housing, employment and social problems affecting the area. Associated environmental problems extend to a dilution of Boscombe’s distinctive historic character, the consequence of reduced resources available for investment in the maintenance of built fabric and physical changes which have resulted in the loss of features of defining heritage interest.

In recognition of Boscombe’s need a regeneration strategy has been prepared, the delivery of which is overseen by a partnership Board, instigated by Bournemouth Council and comprising representatives of key sectors drawn from the area’s community. A multifaceted programme of activity has been agreed, one of which is the community’s decision to produce a neighbourhood plan.



A property at Churchill Gardens – before and after. © Bournemouth Borough Council

Boscombe's only conservation area is Churchill Gardens – also the only conservation area in Bournemouth on the national Heritage At Risk Register. Distinct from its context the area is a late Victorian square of terraces set around a generous area of soft landscaping, with many of the buildings in use as Houses of Multiple Occupation. Only recently has a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan been produced, setting out actions to enhance the area and complement investment in the Gardens and wider regeneration activity.

In its scoping of the issues which a neighbourhood plan might address the community has identified the need to raise awareness of the heritage interest of Boscombe, and promote its value in fostering an enhanced sense of civic pride and boosting environmental quality linked to economic uplift. Although the Plan preparation process is still at an early stage, preliminary exercises have identified buildings and sites of local heritage value together with suggestions for more extensive conservation area designation.

In recognition of this work, funding approval has recently been given to the development of a Cultural Heritage Strategy for Boscombe (and neighbouring Pokesdown). This has a broad and ambitious agenda, aimed at adding value to the key objectives which underpin the regeneration strategy including improving housing, reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, boosting employment and tackling health inequalities.

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