

OFFICER REPORT FOR COMMITTEE

DATE: 15/09/2021

**P/21/1358/FP (CONSULTATION ONLY)
CASTLE STREET, PORTCHESTER**

**PORTCHESTER EAST WARD
AGENT: SSEC CONTRACTING LTD
HAMPSHIRE PFI**

CONSULTATION ON WORKS TO EXISTING STREET LIGHTING COLUMNS.

CASTLE STREET CONSERVATION AREA, PORTCHESTER

Report By

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1.0 *Introduction*

1.1 This Council has been consulted on a proposal by SSEC propose to replace the existing street lighting columns in the Portchester (Castle Street) Conservation Area.

2.0 *Background*

2.1 SSEC are the Operating Sub-Contractor for the Hampshire Street Lighting PFI, who oversee and maintain the Borough's streetlighting. SSEC are under contract by Hampshire County Council and benefit from permitted development rights in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended), Part 9 (relating to highway works) and Part 12 (development by Local Authorities). They benefit from permitted development rights to undertake repairs and replacement of streetlighting without the need to obtain planning permission.

2.2 SSEC has written to inform the Borough Council of works to replace the existing streetlighting columns in Castle Street, Church Lane, Waterside Lane and Hospital Lane. These roads lie within the designated Portchester Castle Street Conservation Area. The works include the replacement of the existing green cast iron columns with traditional formed black columns to a 'Gainsborough' design. SSEC consider the existing columns as not fit for purpose or structurally safe, being at the end of their useful life.

2.3 Some columns in the Borough have previously been changed to match the structurally safe cast columns and more recently Column No 22 in Castle Street with the 'Gainsborough' Design, which is the default embellishment kit to be used as part of the works proposed under this consultation. Details of the existing, proposal and suggested alternatives will be shown during the Committee Presentation.

- 2.4 During the consultation process an email was sent to SSEC requesting them to use the Norwich Column by DW Windsor Lighting as the design is similar to the existing green cast iron street columns in Castle Street.
- 2.5 The Norwich Column was however considered by SSEC to be unsuitable for Castle Street due to the column having a *flange mounted wall mounted kit*. An alternate design has however now been offered by SSEC as the Chandler Design. A further request has been sent to SSEC regarding the suitability of using the root plate Norwich Column which does not have flanges, *a response is yet to be received*.
- 2.6 If the existing green columns are retained in situ, the units will be removed from SSEC's PFI contract with Hampshire County Council. As a result of this their future liability and maintenance will be passed over for the responsibility of Fareham Borough Council.
- 2.7 In the event the Borough Council undertook to maintain the cast iron columns along Castle Street, Portchester privately (i.e., outside of the HCC PFI Contract) the County Council has confirmed Fareham Borough Council's responsibilities would fall into four main categories:
- a) *Payment of energy. FBC most likely already have Unmetered Energy Agreements for other assets which these units could be added to. As a rough estimate the cost per unit per annum would be in the region of £30. As these lights would no longer be subject to HCC's dimming or part-night lighting policies they would return to 100% all-night operation.*
 - b) *Emergency Response: Arrangements would need to be in place to attend any emergency on a 24hr basis. Again, the Council most likely already have similar arrangements for other assets.*
 - c) *Reactive Maintenance. Arrangements would need to be made for the fixing/replacement of faulty or damaged equipment. This would require a regular inspection regime as the equipment would no longer be checked by HCC's monitoring systems.*
 - d) *Routine Maintenance. There is a legal requirement to undertake electrical and structural inspections on a regular basis to ensure equipment is operating safely. Routine maintenance may also include bulk lamp change and cleaning.*

3.0 Site Description

- 3.1 The application site (Castle Street) is located within the Urban Area Boundary and Portchester (Castle Street) Conservation Area. In addition, Castle Street

merges into Church Path located within the castle grounds which is classified as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

- 3.2 The green cast iron lampposts subject to this application are identified by Fareham Borough Council as being ...'*important to the street in terms of their scale and appropriate design*' and acknowledged as a key feature to conserve and enhance as part of the historic and architectural character and appearance of Portchester (Castle Street) Conservation Area.

4.0 Description of Proposal

- 4.1 The SSEC seek to replace the existing green cast iron lampposts with modern steel lampposts to the Gainsborough design. SSEC consider the existing columns as not fit for purpose or structurally safe, being at the end of their useful life.

5.0 Policies

- 5.1 The application was undertaken as a consultation **only** as the proposed works by SSEC, who are undertaking the works on behalf of Hampshire County Council as a rolling programme across the Hampshire.
- 5.2 Works relating to roads by highway authorities, or a strategic highway company on their behalf under the Highways Act 1990 are classed as permitted development through The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, Part 9, Class B. The replacement of lamp standards is also granted by Development by Local Authorities under Part 12, Class A

National Legislation and Guidance:

- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, Part 9, Class B, and Part 12 Class A.

6.0 Relevant Planning History

- 6.1 The following planning history is relevant:

The existing 1907 Edwardian green cast iron lamppost were introduced to Castle Street as part of an enhancement scheme in early 2000.

7.0 Representations

- 7.1 One hundred and forty-five addresses were consulted on the proposals which resulted in three representations being received. The representations raise objections to the proposed works. The areas of concern regarding the proposal comprise:

- Concerns over the change of colour from green to black, as per No 22 a recent replacement column.
- Existing cast iron columns installed in 2002/3 and are appropriate to the area.
- Raised concerns over the unnecessary expenditure.
- The Gainsborough Design as per No 22 is unattractive.
- Would prefer colour to be 'Buckingham Green'.

7.2 Two responses from four amenity and statutory societies consulted. The areas of concern regarding the proposal comprise:

Historic England

- The Victorian cast iron lampposts are important elements and contribute to the quality of the streetscene.
- The applicant should provide an accurate condition survey on the state of repair of the Victorian cast iron lampposts intended for replacement to establish whether there is scope for a more sympathetic and opportune refurbishment.
- We urge your Planning Authority to address the above issues in order for the application to meet the requirement of paragraph 200 of the NPPF (2021) and recommend that this application be determined on the basis of your expert conservation advice.
- Your authority should take these representations into account and seek further information as set out in our advice.

Portchester Civic Society

- These historic posts were erected during the work done to enhance the Conservation Area, which also included new granite kerb stones and a consistent chip stone pavement surface throughout.
- We see no visible or written proof that these lampposts have been inspected below ground and find the excuse to replace them because of the 'likelihood' of failure, pathetic.

8.0 Planning Considerations

8.1 It is important to reiterate that this is only a consultation to the Planning Committee on the streetlighting in the Castle Street Conservation Area. SSEC consider the existing columns are not fit for purpose or structurally safe, being at the end of their useful life, and can be replaced without planning permission.

Protecting and Enhancing the Historic Environment

- 8.2 In considering the impact of proposals great weight is given to policy NPPF 206 requires that new development within the setting of a heritage asset(s) and / or a conservation area, should look for opportunities to preserve, enhance or better reveal the significance of the heritage asset(s).
- 8.3 The key characteristics of Castle Street that should be preserved, enhanced or better revealed is found in the unchanged historic alignment of the street pattern which is still evident....

'The older buildings generally face onto the street to form an urban frontage behind which is a related pattern of often deep open gardens which vary in size. Older buildings generally sit close to the pavement edge; some abut directly, and others are set back producing subtle variation in the building line; low walls and railings maintain the continuity of the street forming small front gardens. This historic pattern is fundamental to the character of the street and differs materially from the more formal regimented arrangement of surrounding post war suburban development. Variety has evolved in the individual buildings with constant and often subtle variation in height, scale and architectural detail. This gives the street unique character. The height and scale of the buildings fluctuates but with few exceptions remains two storeys. This limited variation provides continuity to the street frontage.

Boundary walls and railings, particularly at the back of the pavement, are an important characteristic and where there are gaps in the built frontage, their presence provides important continuity. Pressure for off street parking has resulted in loss of front boundary enclosures and front gardens which is harmful to character.

The existing cast iron street columns are appropriate, contribute to the character of the street and should be retained.'

- 8.4 In context of the character of the conservation area, the green cast iron street columns were a later introduction Castle Street as part of an enhancement programme in the early 2000's. The columns were sourced from various locations to match and some include the date stamp of 1907 and identified through the appraisal as contributing to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 8.5 The statutory weight of protection the Conservation Area Appraisal offers the columns through planning legislation is as guidance only, as the green cast

iron Edwardian street columns are not designated (listed) or non-designated (locally listed) heritage assets.

- 8.6 In this respect and being mindful of Historic England's comments an assessment of significance has been undertaken on the cast iron columns to ascertain their actual historic value in context of the historic environment.
- 8.7 An assessment of significance has been undertaken using the value method, which is advocated by Historic England, where the sum of the evidential value, historic (illustrative and evidential) value, architectural value and communal value equal the level of significance.
- 8.8 The values associated with the significance are then balanced against the harm and justification or need for the works, taking into account the principles of conservation which includes the historic interpretation of an asset for future generations.
- 8.9 The existing lighting columns do contribute towards the overall character and appearance of the conservation area, and it is Officers consideration that they should be retained. This is in spite of the limited weight on heritage grounds for their retention due to their age as early 20th Century columns. SSEC's view on their suitability in respect of the corrosion of the cast iron at the base and potential health and safety issues has not be evidenced, and therefore it is unclear on what basis they consider them to be at the end of their life.
- 8.10 An alternate steel column has been presented and offered as the Gainsborough or Chandler design. These can be painted green on request as per the existing columns. A view on the acceptability of the Newton root plate column is yet to be confirmed by SSEC. Officers consider that if it can be evidenced that the columns have to be replaced, their replacement should be at a higher quality than the Gainsborough or Chandler design suggestion.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 In summary, as stated above SSEC under their agreement with Hampshire County Council have permitted development rights to replace the existing lighting columns within any form of consent of the Borough Council. However, given the location within the Castle Street Conservation Area they have sought to engage with the Council on the options for their replacement. SSEC consider the existing columns as not fit for purpose or structurally safe, being at the end of their useful life. However, no evidence has been provided by SSEC to clarify why they are structurally unsafe and therefore at the end on their useful life. Without this information, Officers consider that the existing lighting columns should be retained.

9.2 In the event that evidence can be provided to support the opinion of SSEC regarding the state of the columns, SSEC and Hampshire County Council should seek to replace the columns with a higher quality alternative than those originally suggested.

