

CONSERVATION AREA REVIEWS

SUMMARY:

This report is to be presented to SHLP on 27 March 2019 for input into proposals for a programme of review, preparation and publication of appraisals for the eight designated Conservation Areas in the Borough.

It is proposed to prepare a scoping report based on an initial assessment of the current designated Conservation Areas, together with a detailed work programme and an assessment of priorities and financial implications for the consideration of members.

In order to achieve maximum input from members, the proposed route is via Strategic Housing & Local Plans Group (SHLP) on 27 March and Policy & Project Advisory Board on 3 April 2019 potentially followed by Cabinet in May 2019.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The historic environment is protected from potentially harmful development by both statutory provision (there are separate planning consent regimes for listed buildings and scheduled monuments) and by national and local planning policy. Listed buildings, scheduled monuments and historic parks and gardens are designated nationally by Historic England. They are recorded on a national register as Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II depending on their historic importance. Conservation Areas and Buildings of Local Importance (BLI's) are designated by local planning authorities.
- 1.2 The Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out how 'designated' and 'non-designated' (i.e. BLI's) heritage assets should be conserved and enhanced. The NPPF also requires Local Plans to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. The 1990 Planning Act¹ places a continuing duty on councils to keep Conservation Area status under review. The Rushmoor Local Plan sets out a commitment to review the Borough's Conservation Areas and develop character appraisals/management plans so that any opportunities for beneficial change or the need for additional protection can be identified.

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 1.3 There are currently eight Conservation Areas designated within the Borough of Rushmoor as follows:
- Aldershot West (designated 1980 and amended 1982, 1989)
 - Basingstoke Canal (designated 1977)
 - Cargate Avenue (designated 1980 and amended 1982, 1989)
 - Farnborough Hill (designated 1977 and amended 1989)
 - Manor Park (designated 1980 and amended 1989)
 - Saint Michael's Abbey (designated 1977)
 - South Farnborough (designated 1987)
 - Aldershot Military Town (designated 2003)
- 1.4 Work on the review and appraisal of six of these Conservation Areas started in 2005. This generated proposals to amend boundaries and in some circumstances remove areas or buildings from Conservation Areas. For example, there was a proposal to split the St Michaels' Abbey and Farnborough Hill designations, creating two new Conservation Areas around Farnborough Street and St Peters Church. Public consultation was carried out on associated character appraisal documents, management plans and proposed boundary changes. No changes were made to the boundaries of existing Conservation Areas and the work was not completed. The Council therefore does not have any substantive documentation which is published and in the public domain, on the character, historic context or the reasons for designation of its conservation areas. This has implications for the determination of planning applications and the defence of refusals of planning permission at appeal, in that any heritage based reason for refusal is weakened.
- 1.5 This report sets out a potential work programme and considers the resource implications for implementing the commitment, set out in the new Local Plan, to reviewing the existing eight conservation areas and publishing new appraisals and management plans.

2. Background

- 2.1 The statutory definition of a conservation area is *“an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”*.²
- 2.2 The Revised NPPF states that *“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.”*
- 2.3 The designation of conservation areas does not prohibit development and the NPPF requires local planning authorities to look for opportunities for new development *“to enhance or better reveal their significance”*.
- 2.4 The criteria for designation is different from that for listed buildings, which concentrate primarily on the merits of individual buildings. Conservation Areas cover wider geographical areas, focussing on places of special character, appearance and communal value which can include open

² P(LBCA)A 1990 S69(1)

spaces, parks and trees. Historic England has published detailed guidance on carrying out conservation area appraisals, designation and management, most recently in March 2018 (consultation draft). The guidance recognises that change is inevitable and sets out ways in which this can be managed in a way that conserves and enhances historic areas.

- 2.5 The implications for those living within a conservation area are that property values can be slightly higher but that there are greater controls over future development. For householders, this means that some permitted development rights are not available and planning permission must be sought – for example, works to trees and the demolition of unlisted buildings. Permitted development rights may be further reduced by the making of Article 4 Directions, for example the recent proposal for an Article 4 Direction affecting Church Circle, within of the South Farnborough Conservation Area.
- 2.6 The Council has published the List of Buildings of Local Importance SPD in 2012, which designates over 150 buildings, many of which are located within existing conservation areas. The SPD provides these buildings with a level of closer scrutiny and protection against undesirable alterations and/or irreplaceable loss.
- 2.7 The legislation requires that the authority's proposals for the preservation and enhancement of a conservation area should be submitted for consideration at a 'public meeting'. NPPG states that residents, amenity societies, businesses, public utilities and the highways authority should be invited as 'it is important that conservation area policies are fully integrated with other policies for the area, such as traffic management'. This does not preclude other forms of public participation.

3. **Work Programme**

- 3.1 The work carried out in 2005/06 on six of the existing Conservation Areas (CAs), including surveys by the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust is now out of date. For example the Wellesley development has commenced leading to extensive redevelopment within the Aldershot Military Town CA and many developments have taken place in others. There has never been an appraisal of the Basingstoke Canal CA and Aldershot regeneration proposals are likely to have a significant impact on parts of the Aldershot West CA.
- 3.2 A comprehensive review and the production of up to date appraisals and guidance would therefore entail a substantial amount of work which could include:
 - reviewing the initial work developed in 2005/6
 - updating the Aldershot Military Town CA in the light of the Wellesley development;
 - reviewing the designation of the Basingstoke Canal CA in the light of other environmental designations;
 - reviewing the boundaries of each of the eight CAs in the light of the most recent national guidance and consider any changes;

- reviewing and, where necessary, developing management plans for each CA in partnership with other interested parties, including possible Article 4 Directions;
 - reporting to Cabinet on the results;
 - carrying out public consultation as appropriate;
 - seeking approval from Cabinet for any changes;
 - publishing the information on the Council's website.
- 3.3 In order to ascertain the level of resourcing required, an in-house 'pilot' appraisal was carried out on Cargate Avenue CA in December 2018. Overall, the appraisal concurred with the 2005/06 work in identifying areas of modern housing development built in the 1990's which are not considered to be of special historic or architectural interest and do not contribute to the character of the rest of the CA. The attached map sets these out. The map shows the boundary of the existing CA, the ages of the buildings in and around the CA and the two areas which are proposed for deletion (shaded in blue).
- 3.4 It is likely that similar issues will arise with other CAs, leading to proposals for boundary changes. It is understood that the issue of boundary changes and de-designation of some areas attracted considerable public interest and objection during the earlier exercise, and that the 2005/06 proposals for the South Farnborough CA in particular may have had some bearing on the subsequent lack of progress with the review. However any meaningful new appraisal work will have to accord with the legislative purpose of CA designation and this may involve robust and difficult decisions with regard to whether some parts of the existing designations should remain.
- 3.5 The Planning Policy and Conservation Team has a wide-ranging work programme and limited resources. The Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust no longer carries out surveys but other providers of this kind of independent research have been contacted for details of costs and capacity. Historic England has also been approached and it has suggested involving the local community. However, this approach will need careful consideration.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Some initial approaches to external consultants with regard to carrying out appraisals on behalf of the Council has given rise to quotations in the region of £8,000 for each CA. However, the format and extent of the documents produced as examples of this work consist of extensive studies, written histories, discussion of legislation and detailed character appraisals and management plans. This is not considered to be the type of approach (or expenditure) necessary to Rushmoor at this stage.
- 4.2 A second option would be to take no action currently. This would prolong the vulnerability of the Council's heritage assets and fail to deliver an important objective of the new Local Plan.
- 4.3 A third option would be to take a more bespoke approach to the issue. This could commence with an initial scoping review of all the designated CAs. This would establish in principle whether recent changes within the CAs lead

to the conclusion that certain parts should be added or removed, or whether some CA should be de-designated altogether. Subsequent to a decision on the principle of this, a priority list could be drawn up to establish which CAs should be considered first. The next step would then be to carry out character appraisals based on an assessment of the special interest of each CA and to produce streamlined appraisal documents following the format of the attached draft for the Cargate CA.

- 4.4 The suggested product could contain a brief history and background of the CA, information on the designation and the reasons for it, a map identifying the area and its main characteristics, a character appraisal, conclusions and a management plan, including decisions on and reasons for boundary changes, Article 4 Directions and other measures for protection or enhancement. These could then be the subject of public consultation, amendment and publication. In addition, in order to avoid duplication, there would be an overarching Rushmoor CAs document setting out issues common to all the CAs i.e. the legal and policy position and general history of Aldershot and Farnborough.
- 4.5 Current resourcing levels suggest that a maximum of two character appraisals could be undertaken per year 'in house'. Taking into account the complexity and likely levels of public interest, the following indicative work programme is suggested, which will enable experience to be gained and applied over the whole period. This assumes all 8 CAs will be appraised and avoids May (elections) and August (holiday season). The work programme will be set out in more detail in the scoping report.

Activity	Review	Cabinet	Consultation	Designation
Scoping report	Feb/March 2019	May 2019	N/A	N/A
Cargate Avenue and Manor Park	July/Oct 2019	Dec 2019	Jan/Feb 2020	April 2020
Aldershot West and South Farnborough	April/July 2020	Sept 2020	Oct/Nov 2020	Jan 2021
Farnborough Hill and St Michaels Abbey	Jan/April 2021	June 2021	July/Sept 2021	Nov 2021
Aldershot Military Town and Basingstoke Canal	Nov/Feb 2022	April 2022	June/July 2022	Sept 2022

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The initial scoping exercise will provide more insight into resources needed to complete a programme. At this point we should be in a position to determine what balance between in-house and external resources is necessary and to give consideration to resourcing consultancy services should this be required.

6.0 Recommendations

That Members' input is sought from Strategic Housing & Local Plans Group (SHLP) on 27 March and Policy & Project Advisory Board on 3 April and dependent on these discussions potentially followed by the Cabinet in May (after the local elections).

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