

ALDERSHOT MILITARY CONSERVATION AREA - ADOPTION

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is committed to reviewing the borough's conservation areas. On the 16th December 2019 cabinet (report No EPSH1950) were presented with a draft conservation area and appraisal for the Aldershot Military Conservation Area to approve for public consultation. This document proposed the removal of some areas of the current conservation area and the inclusion of an area of recreation land (playing fields) and open space to the West of the A325 Farnborough Road. The Cabinet decision required the removal of the playing fields from the draft conservation appraisal and management prior to consultation.

The Council consulted on the draft Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal between 31 January and 14 March 2020 and six responses were received. Savills on behalf of Grainger Plc were one of the respondents to the consultation and their response identifies that exclusion of the playing fields from the conservation area boundary is at odds with the appraisal which identifies the importance of open spaces as a key feature of the conservation area. The response requests that the conservation area boundary is amended to include the recreation ground and sports pitches located between Fleet Road and Rushmoor Road.

Recommendation: That Cabinet approve the Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (Appendix 1) that will include the historic playing fields to the West of the A325 Farnborough Road within the Conservation Area.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the comments received during the public consultation on the draft Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, including the response from Grainger Plc in relation to the exclusion of the playing fields to the West of the A325 from the proposed conservation area boundary.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On the 16th December Cabinet were presented with a draft Aldershot Military Town Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan to approve form public Consultation (along with some other heritage documents). The character appraisal and management plan provides an update on work carried out in the early 2000s prior to the disposal of the southern part of the military land to create

an urban extension for Aldershot, now known as Wellesley.

- 2.2 The draft document proposed a number of boundary amendments to reflect development that has occurred / been consented since the conservation area was first designated in 2003, and the inclusion of the playing fields to the West of the A325.
- 2.3 At the Cabinet meeting, in discussing the revised boundaries of the Aldershot Military Town Conservation Area, the Cabinet was keen to ensure that future development in respect of the Wellesley site would not be hindered by any changes. The Cabinet subsequently resolved to approve the Aldershot Military Town Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for public consultation subject to the removal of the playing fields / recreation land to the West of the A325.
- 2.4 Public Consultation on the amended draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was undertaken for a period of six weeks between 31 January 2020 and 14 March 2020. During the consultation six consultation responses were received all of which are detailed in the Consultation Statement (attached as Appendix 2). Two of the responses recommended additions to the Conservation Area boundary which are detailed below along with officer comments.

Grainger Plc response

- 2.5 Savills on behalf of Grainger Plc note that the consultation draft character appraisal identified the importance of open spaces as a key feature of the conservation area that contributes towards the area's special character. Grainger suggest the inclusion of the playing fields west of the A325 as the land, along with the setting it provides, is an important open space feature which, when considering its position within the Wellesley development area and its history, should be afforded the same levels of protection as the neighbouring land, including the army athletic ground and pitches. In addition, they consider the land serves to protect open views to the west.
- 2.6 The draft character appraisal and management plan presented to Cabinet in December 2019 for approval to consult included the playing fields to the west of the A325. As with the other open spaces within the Conservation Area, the purpose of designation is to assist in protecting and enhancing the open green character and historic significance and use of this area in line with other initiatives in the Local Plan. It would not preclude development which, in accordance with the established and historic pattern of use, would improve and enhance the variety of sport and recreation facilities available. It would however require any such proposal to be tested in order to establish that its impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area would be acceptable.

Friends of Aldershot Military Museum response

- 2.7 The Friends of Aldershot Military Museum: suggest that the conservation area be extended south down Hospital Hill to prevent this area becoming over-developed.

- 2.8 Officers have considered this suggestion and consider that the main historic asset in this area is the Old Union Poor House which is a listed building and has recently been refurbished and converted into residential units. The setting of this building is protected by Local Plan policy HE1 and therefore the inclusion of additional land along Hospital Hill within the Conservation Area is not recommended.
- 2.9 The Friends of Aldershot Military Museum also suggest that the conservation area should be retained as wide as possible along the length of Queen's Avenue to ensure that the vista, which includes the road, trees, and open spaces either side before any buildings, is maintained along the whole road.
- 2.10 Having reviewed the boundary officers agree that the conservation area boundary could be amended in several locations along Queens Avenue to include the green infrastructure and the boundary has been amended to reflect this.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1 Officers have considered the responses received during the consultation period and consider that there is a strong argument for the conservation area boundary to include the sports pitch land to the West of the A325 prior to adoption. The Conservation area appraisal and management plan (Appendix 1) has therefore been amended to reflect this.
- 3.2 The 16th December 2019 Cabinet decision delegated to the Head of Economy Planning and Strategic Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy, to make any necessary factual and/or non-substantive minor amendments to the documents prior to consultation and adoption.
- 3.3 The designation of the playing fields to the West of the A325 within the Conservation Area is not considered to be a 'non-substantive minor amendment' following public consultation which is why the conservation appraisal and management plan is being presented to Cabinet for adoption.
- 3.4 The sports pitches were laid out and terraced in the late 19th and early 20th century in association with the officers' club to the North. The character of this area is publicly accessible open space bordered by woodland and its historic importance is as a sports ground for Military officers based at the Garrison. Historic maps indicate the area was, among other things, used and adapted at various times for football, rugby and cricket pitches, tennis courts and equestrian activity, and that these activities were supported by ancillary structures such as pavilion buildings and stables.
- 3.5 The playing fields in question are due to transfer to the Council's ownership in the near future as part of a legal agreement associated with the Wellesley planning permission, however this has been delayed. Plans for a new sports pavilion, also funded by the Wellesley Development, are in preparation.

Alternative Options

Do not adopt the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

- 3.6 An alternative option would be not to adopt the Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. However, this would mean the Council will have failed both to carry out its statutory legal duty and to implement the commitment set out in the adopted Local Plan. In addition, the lack of an up to date character appraisal and management plan increases the risk of unsympathetic development within the Conservation Area.
- 3.7 An additional consideration is that modern developments forming part of the consented Grainger development have been carried out within the Conservation Area boundary that was defined in 2003. This could potentially undermine the Council's ability to resist any unsympathetic development affecting features of historic significance within the Conservation Area.

Remove the playing fields to the West of the A325 from the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

- 3.8 Officers consider that this option will undermine the confidence of stakeholders and residents in the Conservation Area Review process that is taking place in the borough, and in the value of public consultation. In addition, the provision and funding of the playing field area for public sport and recreation and its protection as a heritage asset and part of the borough's green infrastructure are dependent on Grainger Plc completing the transfer. Their view on its inclusion should therefore be afforded significant weight.

4. IMPLICATIONS

Risks

- 4.1 There are not considered to be any risks associated with the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

Legal Implications

- 4.2 There are not considered to be any legal implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.3 There are not considered to be any financial implications arising from the decision, other than minor costs associated with production of hard copies of the documentation, which will be met from existing budgets.

Equalities Impact Implications

- 4.4 The adoption of the documents is unlikely to lead to equalities implications.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The Aldershot Military Conservation Area Review has been carried out in line with the Council's statutory duty, to fulfil a commitment in the recently adopted Local Plan and in support of Policy HE3 of the Local Plan. The progression of reviewing the Borough's conservation areas are a service priority that feature in the Business Plan.
- 5.2 It is recommended that the historic playing fields to the West of the A325 are included within the conservation area, and that Cabinet adopt the Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (Appendix 1) to assist in preserving and enhancing the historic character of the conservation area, by providing a framework for determining planning applications and ensuring that development proposals are of high quality.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Appendix 1 – Aldershot Military Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

Appendix 2 – Aldershot Military Conservation Area Consultation Statement

Appendix 3 – Grainger Plc full response to consultation.

The adopted Local Plan is available to view at:

<https://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/rushmoorlocalplan>

Information on the Borough's existing conservation areas is available to view at

<https://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/conservationareas>

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