
Meeting: Executive

Date: 8 June 2010

Subject: Conservation Area Reviews

Report of: Cllr Tom Nicols, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development

Summary: The report considers a three-year timetable for the review of the Central Bedfordshire's Conservation Areas; including a review of the boundaries, production of Conservation Area Character Appraisals with a view to adoption of such statements as Guidance for Development Management purposes

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Fiona Webb, Team Leader Heritage & Design

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Executive

Key Decision Yes

**Reason for urgency/
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)** N/A

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Assist in ensuring that high standards of conservation and design will help improve the quality of life for all in Central Bedfordshire and enhance the sustainability and unique character of our communities and environment and ensure that development is managed effectively.

Financial:

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The costs of carrying out the reviews including consultation, printing and publicity are contained within the existing Development Management budget. This activity is delivered by members of the Heritage & Design Team as a small part of their overall duties. Should the annual budget round reduce resource in this team then the programme would be re-profiled accordingly using the methodology set out in this report.

Legal:

Sections 69(2) and 70(5) of Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require the Council to designate (and subsequently keep under review) those parts of its area which are of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. This is a statutory duty to which the Council must adhere.

Risk Management:

Conservation Area Reviews are being prepared to preserve and enhance the quality of the historic built environment in accordance with the Local Planning Authorities statutory responsibilities. This is a statutory duty to which the Council must adhere.

The Council has a duty to monitor the condition of heritage assets. In addition, Conservation Area Reviews need to be up to date in order to accurately assist the Local Planning Authority in the determination of Development Management decisions.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

This involves no extra staff resourcing.

Equalities/Human Rights:

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment encourages local planning authorities to set out a positive and proactive strategy for increasing opportunities for the enjoyment of the historic environment by all members of the local and wider community, with particular consideration being given to socially excluded groups. It strongly advises the removal of physical and perceived barriers to access in order to increase participation.

In preparing the Conservation Area Appraisals full consideration will be given to best practise guidance from English Heritage (including English Heritage's guidance on increasing participation in the historic environment - Easy Access to the Historic Environment (2004), Easy Access to the Historic Landscapes (2005) in order to improve the quality of the historic environment and promote its preservation, enhancement and value for all.

Community Safety:

Whilst the report has no direct Community Safety implications the Councils statutory duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area will be considered in relation to conservation areas.

Sustainability:

Ensuring the special character and appearance of conservation areas are taken into account in policy and development control decisions

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

The report has not been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

that the proposed three-year programme for conservation area reviews set out in Paragraph 20 of this report be approved.

<i>Reason for Recommendation(s):</i>	To meet the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and policies CS15: Heritage and DM13: Heritage in Development of the Local Development Framework for the North area (the former Mid Bedfordshire area) Adopted 2009 and policies of the South Bedfordshire Local Plan Review Adopted 2004.
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Executive Summary

The Conservation Area Reviews for Central Bedfordshire have been produced to underpin the Council's commitment to maintaining and improving the quality of the built environment and promoting sustainable development and healthy communities. The Conservation Area Reviews reinforce the Government's commitment to the historic environment and its heritage assets through the following objectives:

- To deliver sustainable development by ensuring policies and decisions concerning the historic environment;
- To conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance
- To contribute to our knowledge and understanding of our past by ensuring that opportunities are taken to capture evidence from the historic environment and to make this publically available.

Background

1. Through the preservation and enhancement of the built environment within Conservation Areas, the Council actively seeks to conserve the special character of the area and improve the quality of life in Central Bedfordshire. There are currently 61 designated Conservation Areas in Central Bedfordshire. The Council is under a continuing duty to consider whether it should designate new conservation areas or review the boundaries of existing conservation areas. The Council is also under a duty to "formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of its area which are conservation areas".
2. As Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 paragraph 69(2) makes clear - It shall be the duty of a local planning authority from time to time to review conservation areas. This is reinforced in the recent publication Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment.

3. This guidance is reflected in policies CS15: Heritage and DM13: Heritage in Development of the Local Development Framework for the North area (the former Mid Bedfordshire area) Adopted 2009. The conservation area policies for the South area (the former South Bedfordshire area) were deleted as part of the South Bedfordshire Local Plan Review as they reflected national planning policy guidance.
4. In fulfilment of the above requirements, newly designated Conservation Areas should have a Character Appraisal which has been subjected to public consultation and adopted as guidance for development control purposes. Those existing Conservation Areas that do not have Character Appraisal should have them provided. The necessary reviews also present an opportunity to review the boundaries of the Conservation Area and to identify areas for enhancement.
5. Under Central Bedfordshire Council's Sustainable Communities Performance Indicator DM24 Conservation Areas: Character Appraisals, the target of the Local Planning Authority is to provide 55 percentage of conservation areas in the area with an up to date character appraisal. Up to date for the purposes of this indicator means within the last 7 years from today's date. Areas reviewed more than 7 years ago no longer count towards this percentage. The Council has to date performed very well in this indicator and in 2009/10 met this performance target.

Conservation Area Reviews To Date

6. In 2009/10 eight Conservation Area Character Appraisals were completed; these were Barton Le Clay, Eggington, Heath and Reach, Linslade, Millbrook, Shefford, Streatley and Toddington. These documents are of a consistent standard with the other statements which have been produced.
7. In total Central Bedfordshire has 35 Conservation Area Character Appraisals which have been reviewed, these are set out in Appendix A.
8. It is proposed that future statements will be produced to the same accessible format.

Developing A New 3 Year Programme of Reviews

9. Unfortunately some of the conservation areas in Central Bedfordshire that have yet to be considered as part of the programme have had no review carried out since designation in the early 1970s and have no character appraisal. Other conservation areas were reviewed in the late '80s/early '90s and have an accompanying written statement which is in an old style format that does not conform to current good practice.
10. In order to consider the future programme of conservation area reviews, it is necessary to carry out a prioritisation exercise to align the programme with the limited resources available to undertake the reviews. This is to ensure maximum added value from the process.

11. Two criteria have been identified to assess conservation areas most in need of review over the next 3 year period:

Criterion 1: Development Pressure – this is based on the number of planning applications in the conservation areas between April 2005 and March 2010. Clearly giving priority to those areas experiencing most development aids the most applicants as well as the Development Management Committee and Planning Officers.

Criterion 2: Conservation Area Review Status – this is based on:

- (a) Conservation areas where town centre regeneration projects are being carried out
 - (b) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2010/11
 - (c) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2011/12
 - (d) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2012/13
 - (e) Conservation areas designated with map only and having no review since designation
12. Given the number of existing conservation areas still requiring a review, new conservation area designations have been accorded a lower priority and have not been included within this 3 year programme.
13. Criteria 1 and 2 are set out in a detailed matrix in Appendix A of this report. This shows all existing conservation areas, date of designation, date of review (if any), number of planning applications received in each conservation area between April 2005 and March 2010, type of planning application, and review status.
14. In order to prioritise the conservation areas in a new 3 year work programme, a scoring system has been devised to numerically rank and give weight to Criteria 1 and 2 for conservation area assessment. The scoring system is set out below:

Scoring System For Assessing The Need For Review

15. **Criteria 1: Development Pressure** (based on number of applications)

None=0 1–10 = 1 11-20 = 2 21-30 = 3 31-40 = 4 41-50 = 5

51-60 = 6 61-70 = 7 71-80 = 8 81-90 = 9 91 and above = 10

This scoring system is a sliding scale with the highest emphasis (pressure) afforded to conservation areas experiencing the greatest number of planning applications, e.g. the higher the number of applications, the higher the score.

16. **Criteria 2: Conservation Area Review Status**

- (a) Conservation areas where town centre regeneration projects are being prepared = 25
- (b) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2010/11 = 20
- (c) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2011/12 = 15
- (d) Conservation areas where renewal of the statement is due 2012/13 = 10
- (e) Conservation areas designated with map only and having no review since designation = 10

17. This scoring system is a sliding scale with the highest emphasis on conservation areas where the Council are carrying out or promoting regeneration initiatives and where conservation area statements are due to expire and do not satisfy the Council's local performance indicator.

18. In order to prioritise the conservation areas in a new 3 year work programme the scoring system for Criteria 1 and 2 are added together to give a priority score and identify priority areas for action.

19. A summary list of the final Priority Scores for conservation areas is contained in Appendix B of this report. This list identifies those conservation areas with the highest priority score, i.e. those in greatest need of review. Conservation areas in Biggleswade, Sandy, Leighton Buzzard and Clifton are highlighted as having the greatest need of review.

3 YEAR CONSERVATION REVIEW PROGRAMME 2010/11 - 2012/13

20. Taking into account the development pressure and review status of the 61 conservation areas in Central Bedfordshire, and resources available to carry out the reviews, the following three-year work programme is proposed:

Year One (April 2010 - March 2011)

Biggleswade
Leighton Buzzard
Sandy
Dunstable – see paragraph 21 of this report below

Year Two (April 2011 - March 2012)

Clifton
Amphill
Northill

Year Three (April 2012 - March 2013)

Silsoe
Harlington
Pulloxhill
Ickwell
Old Warden
Steppingley

21. Please Note: Dunstable Conservation Area review is currently in progress and will conclude in 2010/11 as part of the town centre regeneration framework.

Conclusion

22. Members are requested to support the methodology for assessing the need and priority for conservation area review set out in this report and approves the three year programme for conservation area reviews set out in Paragraph 20 above. The above programme will maintain the 55% target of Central Bedfordshire Council's Sustainable Communities Performance Indicator DM24 Conservation Areas: Character Appraisals.

Appendices:

Appendix A – List of Conservation Areas with Character Appraisals

Appendix B – Matrix of Conservation Areas Statistics (date of designation, date of review, number of planning applications)

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment, March 2010

Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage February 2006

Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas English Heritage October 2006

Location of papers:

Heritage & Design Team, Priory House, Chicksands