

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR PLANNING AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY
TO THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
21 APRIL 2008

Conservation Area Appraisals.

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the work that has been carried out to review the conservation areas at Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham. It outlines the consultation process and methodology for the three appraisals, responds to the comments received and recommends the adoption of the appraisal documents and the extensions to the boundaries of all three areas. The future programme of work is also set out.
- 1.2 Appendix 1 contains a schedule summarising the comments received during consultation together with officer observations and recommendation made in response to the comments. Appendix 2 includes copies of the appraisals for Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham incorporating the amendments recommended in Appendix 1. Deletions are struck through and additions are underlined.
- 1.3 In addition to the recommended changes made in response to public consultation, other changes have been made to the text including factual information and editorial changes. In particular each document contains new sections on the effects of designation and the future management of the areas.
- 1.4 The contact officer for this report is Grant Audley-Miller, Section Head (Environmental Planning and Conservation), telephone (01235 540343). Email address Grant.Audley-Miller@whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

2.0 Recommendations

- (a) *Members note the steps that have been taken to involve the community in the appraisals of the Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham conservation areas and confirm these steps as appropriate for involving communities in future appraisals .*
- (b) *Members are asked to note the responses that have been made to the appraisals of the Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham conservation areas as set out in Appendix 1 of this report and agree the officer's observations and recommendations.*
- (c) *Members recommend the Executive and the Council to adopt the Conservation Area Appraisals for Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham as set out in Appendix 2 to this report and extend the conservation areas as set out in Map 4 of the Northcourt appraisal, Map 4 of the East Hendred appraisal and Map 4 of the Wytham appraisal.*
- (d) *Members are asked to note the current programme of conservation area appraisals for Cumnor, Bourton and Sutton Courtenay.*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- 3.1 This report supports aims A,B,C,D,E and F of the Council's Vision and concerns the first steps in the review of the Council's conservation areas.
- 3.2 The Council is required to review existing conservation areas. Not to progress this work could place the Council at risk of being in breach of one of its legal duties.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 Section 69 (1) of the Planning(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Council to not only designate new conservation areas but to review existing ones. In the Vale there are currently 52 conservation areas. The majority were designated between 1969 and 1971, although a limited number of reviews have been carried out and variations to the boundaries have been made since then. In 1990 a limited review of all the rural conservation areas was carried out which resulted in amendments to the boundaries of the existing conservation areas at Appleton, Blewbury, Cumnor, East Hanney, Kingston Bagpuize, Pusey and West Hanney and the designation of three new ones at Goosey, Kingston Lisle and Littleworth. The majority of the Vale's conservation areas do not have a formal assessment setting out the reasons for their designation.
- 4.2 The current review of conservation areas is currently being progressed by undertaking conservation area appraisals which will identify the special character of the areas that justified their designation. They also highlight the elements and features that are worthy of retention or enhancement and those that detract from the special character.
- 4.3 The information in the appraisals will be helpful to householders and developers and will assist them in drawing up their development proposals prior to submitting planning applications. They will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development control decisions and will be taken into account by the Secretary of State when considering appeals for the refusal of planning permission and conservation area consent.
- 4.4 The appraisals will also be an important tool in promoting the enhancement of conservation areas as they will put forward or propose specific suggestions for enhancement such as tree planting, rubbish clearance and specific building repair and restoration methods. Beyond their use as planning tools, appraisals have a much wider application as educational and informative documents for the local community.
- 4.5 The current programme of work focuses on the production of character appraisals of existing conservation areas rather than the designation of new ones. It did so in order to meet the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) introduced in 2006/07
- BVPI 219a conservation area designation,
 - BVPI 219b publication of conservation area character appraisal and
 - BVPI 219c publication of conservation area management plans.
- In order to reflect these targets the department appointed a Conservation Area Appraisals Project Officer, using Planning Delivery Grant, to commence a programme of character appraisals for the existing conservation areas.

5.0 The Review of Conservation Areas

Methodology

- 5.1 Three conservation areas were selected in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder for review in 2006/07 – Northcourt in Abingdon, East Hendred and Wytham. They were selected to be representative of the three landscape character areas in the Vale. Northcourt was selected as a small historic area in an urban context where there is considerable pressure for development and served as a pilot study and helped to refine and confirm the methodology for the appraisals. Wytham is an example of a village on the Corallian Ridge and East Hendred is a downland village where its loose knit form is under constant pressure from development proposals.
- 5.2 Prior to commencing the programme of appraisal work officers met with the Historic Areas Advisor from English Heritage to ensure that the approach taken was consistent with the advice in 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (English Heritage, August 2005). Taking into account this advice work commenced on a pilot appraisal of the Northcourt Conservation Area in Abingdon. Further consultation was carried with English Heritage once the draft appraisal had been prepared, and based on their advice, the model for the conservation area appraisals was agreed.
- 5.3 The appraisal process included historical, archaeological and architectural desktop research using the the County Council's Local Studies Heritage Search facility, archive and map research at the Local Studies Centre in the Westgate and contacting local historical groups, individuals with relevant expertise and other appropriate organisations. Field work includes a walking survey, mapping and photographing the features of the conservation area and its setting to assess the historic development of the area, important trees and groups of trees, open spaces, individual buildings, walls and other features. The surveys also include a review of the boundaries and identification of character areas. The draft appraisal documents draw together all this work and define the special character of the areas and make recommendations to change the boundaries and put forward specific enhancement proposals.

Consultation

- 5.4 The draft appraisals were first distributed to local members and then to the parish or town council before leaflets were distributed to all properties in and close to the conservation areas inviting residents to a public meeting and stating where the appraisal document could be viewed. East Hendred Parish Council and Wytham Parish Meeting assisted by distributing the leaflets. The appraisal documents were made available for inspection at local shops, the town and parish council offices and on the Councils' website. At the public meetings the Project Officer gave a slide presentation of the appraisal work and other officers of the council were available to respond to questions from the public.
- 5.5 Oxfordshire County Council as the highway authority and public utilities such as BT and Southern Electric were consulted on the appraisals as well as the Council's Development Control Teams.
- 5.6 The responses to the consultation were varied but consisted mainly of points of detail such as descriptions of individual features, details of addresses and street names. More substantial comments relate primarily to the definition of the boundaries.

5.7 The most significant point to emerge from the appraisal work was the need to make significant extensions to each of the conservation area boundaries and it is only in East Hendred that it is also recommended that a small part of the boundary is reduced. What is also significant is that the appraisal process draws together a wide range of information and expertise to produce planning documents that are informative and of educational value. Finally the appraisal process shows that there is continuing support for the concept and role of conservation areas as important tools in preserving and enhancing areas of special architectural or historic interest. What has been satisfying is that the local communities have been very willing to pass on to the Project Officer their understanding and knowledge of the history and development of their communities.

5.8 This year work is progressing on the conservation areas in Cumnor, Bourton and Sutton Courtenay.

RODGER HOOD
DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PLANNING AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY)

Background Papers: Guidance on conservation area appraisals (English Heritage, August 2005)