

## West Wiltshire District Council

### Cabinet

30 June 2004

### West Wiltshire District Council Draft Historic Environment Conservation Strategy

#### 1 Purpose

To adopt a new Historic Environment Conservation Strategy for the District.

#### 2 Background

2.1.1 In November 2003 Cabinet agreed that a period of consultation should be undertaken on the draft Discussion Paper on the Conservation Strategy for the District. A period of consultation was held between 5<sup>th</sup> March and 16th April 2004. All town and parish councils were consulted together with town and County Preservation Trusts, the County Council and English Heritage. Responses were received from eleven organisations. A summary of their comments appears in **Appendix 2** of this report.

2.1.2 At the Cabinet in November it was also agreed that a future report to Cabinet should incorporate the outcome of the Department of Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS) consultation results on the Draft document entitled *Protecting the Historic Environment*. Members will recall that the consultation document on this subject was published last summer and there are potentially some fundamental changes to the present system of historic environmental management. To date DCMS has not published the promised White Paper or the amalgamated PPG15 and 16. It is therefore recommended to progress the Conservation Strategy now and to review it when the new legislation and guidance comes out.

2.1.3 Cabinet now need to consider the comments received, particularly in respect of the historic building grants, and in the light of these comments to decide which of the options set out in this report to adopt.

#### 2.2 Listed Building Statistics

2.2.1 **Appendix 1** summarises the historic environment statistics of each town in terms of their historic building stock, known buildings at risk and grant information. This should be helpful in identifying where financial assistance is most likely to be needed. The figures are based on listed building entries from the Statutory Lists, not on the number of properties. For example, one entry in the Bradford Statutory List is for Numbers 1-25, Tory. This counts as a single entry but it relates to twenty-five listed houses. Bradford has **341** in the List, but the number of listed buildings is **498**. However as the database used for these statistics is based on number of entries, so these figures have been used for consistency.

2.2.2 The total number of entries for the District is **2,555**. This can be broken down into **1,220 (48%)** in the five historic towns and **1,335 (52%)** in rural areas. This is an almost equal division, but it should be noted that the actual numbers are likely to be higher in the towns where groups of property are listed in one entry. Beside this figure is the current number of Listed Buildings at Risk identified to date. These are a fairly small proportion of the total number of entries for each area. However, they represent only the known at risk structures,

and there are likely to be more not yet identified which will increase the number once the survey work has been undertaken.

## 2.3 *Discussion Paper*

2.3.1 The consultation discussion paper focused on a number of key areas that need to take priority in the Conservation Strategy in the future. The main areas considered were;

- reviewing the grant regime now operating in the District through the Historic Building Joint Committees (HBJCs) and a stand-alone grant for all the remaining areas.
- identification and monitoring of the Buildings at Risk Register including the need for a comprehensive survey.
- more efficient management of conservation areas and where the priorities for this area of work should be.
- Policy and guidance formulation, including work on the Local Development Framework and the continuation of the Design Awards in 2004.
- Continuing to act as archaeological co-ordinator for the District and maintain up-to-date records.

## 3. **Results of Public Consultation**

3.1 Set out in **Appendix 2** is a schedule of all the comments received during the period of consultation. The schedule includes a summary of the comments and a recommended Council response to each of them, including views on the grants. The area of grant review generated the greatest number of responses.

3.2 The responses were generally positive, and they all support the principle of grant aid for Historic Buildings. Three of the Town Councils; Bradford, Trowbridge and Warminster supported retaining the present grant system of Historic Buildings Joint Committees (HBJC) for each of their areas (Option 1). Westbury Town Council, which at present does not have an HBJC for Westbury, is considering an option to work with Warminster and has indicated that it would like to do this. Melksham Town Council supported a more informal arrangement under which the District Council would operate its own grant funding system and applicants could apply separately to the Town Council for additional funding. Melksham Without Parish Council supported Option 2, centralising the system to a single HBJC, but wished to see Parish Council representatives on the Committee.

3.3 The original table of the 4 options on future organisation of grants is attached as **Appendix 3** together with a fifth option.

## 4. **Key Issues**

### 4.1 *Grant Review*

4.1.1 Four options have already been put forward. They are:

- Option 1- to retain the existing arrangement. This received the most support overall.
- Option 2- to form a single Historic Building Joint Committee for the whole District. One Parish Council supported this proposal on the basis that they considered there would be opportunity for more involvement by parishes in the administration of grants.
- Option 3- to have one centralised grant system in the District Council administered under delegated powers. There was some indication that if this was adopted the Town Councils might operate their own system of financing independent grant schemes.
- Option 4 - to remove WWDC grant budget. There was no support for this option.

As a result of the consultations received, a new **Option 5** is now proposed, to reflect the views of the consultees, as follows:

- Retain Bradford and Trowbridge HBJCs, where the partners presently match-fund the District Council's contribution. This would allow the present arrangements to continue for these two towns and reflects both the high density of listed building stock and the number of listed buildings known to be at risk. Grants will therefore be allocated on the basis of the buildings at risk register, once it has been updated and the criteria for the allocation of grant aid have been developed.
- Retain Warminster HBJC, but with a reduction in contribution from WWDC. Warminster presently does not match-fund the District Council's contribution but like Bradford and Trowbridge wishes to remain unaffected by the review. There is also a possibility of bringing Westbury into the scheme, thereby gaining further funding towards the HBJC. Westbury have indicated that they are interested in joining forces with Warminster and matching Warminster's contribution, subject to budget bids for the next financial year. The District's contribution may be reduced to match the contributions by Warminster and/or Westbury. The saving of £2,000 here will be reallocated to the main grant budget operating for the remaining areas of the District.
- Discontinue the present Melksham HBJC. A successful Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS) in Melksham operated between 2000 and 2003 and resulted in the priority buildings at risk in the town being restored. In addition, the Town Council is unable to match-fund the District Council contribution. Discontinuing the Melksham HBJC would free a further £10,000 from the WWDC budget to be added to the present £5,000 general grant fund for the rest of the District, including Melksham, giving a total of £17,000. This would benefit other areas and offer more resources for the buildings at risk in the rural areas.

4.1.2 It is therefore considered that Option 5 would be the best solution. As there is a strong commitment by the Council to promote the regeneration of market towns, these areas should have priority for grant allocation and the most at risk historic buildings should be brought forward for grant assistance. This will be helped by the detailed survey of the District outlined in the next section of this report, *Buildings at Risk*, and the register will form the basis of the new Constitutions of the HBJCs. Following adoption, the revised system should be in place by April 2005. The constitutions and criteria for grant allocation will be updated and will form part of the revised grant system. WWDC will also investigate with the HBJCs the possibility of more assistance in their administration.

## 4.2 *Buildings at Risk*

4.2.1 In order to support the revised system of criteria for the HBJCs and grant assistance within the remaining District, a detailed field survey of the historic building stock in the District is proposed. The information from this will then be fed directly into the new HBJCs and will form the basis of future grant allocation. This will also be tied into other work in different areas of the Council, including the Vacant Housing Survey, the regeneration initiative in the five market towns and the emerging Community Strategy, in which the historic "public realm" will feature. As previously agreed, a monitoring report on the Buildings at Risk will be available on the Council's web site with regular reports to Members.

## 4.3 *Conservation Areas*

4.3.1 Three consultees responded on Conservation Areas, with two of them proposing that their own area should have a priority. It is recommended that the best approach to this area of the

service is to carry out a review of the existing conservation areas and to prepare and publish conservation area character assessments for each of them, with the historic towns taking priority. It is therefore unlikely that any new conservation areas will be designated until at least the major urban areas have been reviewed. The holder of the new post in Planning Policy and Conservation will also be involved in this work, which will link with the Buildings at Risk survey work and the Council's Priorities for the Regeneration of the Historic Towns.

- 4.3.2 Members will be aware that the new Planning and Compensation Act 2004 has brought in the new Local Development Framework process. As part of this new system, it is foreseen that any Conservation Area character assessments should be approved as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and become part of the Local Development Framework. It is anticipated that the first tranche of reviews and assessments will be completed by 2007.

#### 4.4 *Other Work Areas*

- 4.4.1 Views on the remaining areas of the strategy were mainly supportive. It is therefore not proposed to amend any of those areas for the service and strategy.

### **5. The Next Steps**

- 5.1 The Conservation Strategy will provide a more focused basis for the conservation service. The Portfolio Holder for Planning will act as Heritage Champion and will oversee any strategic conservation matters. In addition, the service will be more focused on the following key areas;

1. A detailed survey of the Listed Building stock in the District to be undertaken, identifying those buildings and structures at risk and linking this information to the revised grant system to operate from 2005. (This will be assisted by the new post in Planning Policy and Conservation and should also link into the market town strategy for regeneration and Vacant Housing Strategy.)
2. A regular Buildings at Risk bulletin for Members, focusing on the highest priority cases, with internal working group involvement, and in partnership with the historic towns where the HBJCs remain in operation.
3. New constitutions and criteria for the revised Grant System for implementation in April 2005.
4. Prioritisation of the area of work on reviewing Conservation Areas and production of conservation area character assessments for each of the historic towns by 2007 for inclusion as SPDs in the Local Development Framework.
5. Implementation of the rolling programme for enhancement schemes in historic areas approved at Cabinet in October 2003 as part of the 5-year programme.
6. Updating the records for Schedule Ancient Monuments, acting as co-ordinator in this area, with external specialists.
7. Continued consultations and advice to Development Control, in line with the criteria set out in the Discussion Paper.
8. Design Awards for quality development within the District to be awarded every two years.

## 6. Options

Cabinet is recommended to approve this strategy. The service requires transparency and a more focused direction that this formal strategy will provide.

## 7. Conclusion

The *Next Steps* section sets out what the Conservation Strategy will aim to achieve, and the service will be focused on that.

## 8. Financial Implications

Any changes to the grant system could have financial implications in the future. However, none of the five options identified in this report proposes any change to the total allocated to grants. The different options divide the total of £45,000 in different ways, as follows:

Option	WWDC contribution to towns.	WWDC contribution to rural areas.	WWDC contribution to District-wide system
1	£40,000	£5,000	N/A
2	N/A	N/A	£45,000
3	N/A	N/A	£45,000
4	£0	£0	£0
5	£28,000	£17,000	N/A

If Option 5 is agreed, it will allow greater flexibility and more resources for the rural areas of the District, while maintaining three of the four existing HBJCs.

## 9. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications in the strategy other than the need to amend the HBJC Constitutions and criteria if Option 5 is adopted.

## 10. Human Rights Implications

The Human Rights implications of the actions recommended in this report have been considered and are acceptable and the checklist has been addressed.

## **11. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- **Approves the adoption of the Historic Environment Conservation Strategy, including the focusing of the work of the conservation service on the key areas set out in paragraph 5.1 above.**
- **Supports Option 5 for a revised grant system; and**
- **Calls for a future report setting out in detail the necessary changes to the HBJC constitutions.**

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