

Agenda Item 08

Forward Planning
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Report

Subject : Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
Report to : Southern Area Committee
Date : Thursday 06 November 2008
Author : Principal Conservation Officer

Report Summary:

This report sets out the background to the task of carrying out conservation area appraisals and management plans by the conservation team, the process that has been undertaken, and presents the final draft of the Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan with a request that the Southern Area Committee support a recommendation to Cabinet to approve the document.

Background to the Appraisal and Management Plans

There are 70 conservation areas in Salisbury District covering historic settlements and small villages. A conservation area is described in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

Conservation areas are designated by the local authority and designation is the recognition of an area’s special qualities, which the council intends to safeguard as an important part of the district’s heritage. It is the accumulation of an area’s positive architectural or historic attributes, rather than the quality of its individual buildings, which makes it worthy of conservation area status. The attributes might include: the landscape setting of the area; the grouping of traditional buildings and the resultant spaces and sense of enclosure; the scale, design, type and materials of the buildings; historic boundaries; public realm; landmarks, views and vistas; and the present and former pattern of activities or land uses.

Conservation area designation allows for strengthened planning controls, gives protection to trees, and provides control over the demolition of unlisted buildings.



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Planning Policy Context

The local planning authority is required by the legislation to periodically review their existing conservation areas. An appraisal of each area is therefore required in order to identify the particular attributes that make each conservation area special. Guidance is provided to the local authority in carrying out this task in the English Heritage publication *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* and its companion document *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, both published in August 2005.

There is also guidance from central government in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994)*, which advises that the local authority should formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. This is achieved by producing management plans for each conservation area.

Salisbury District Council has encapsulated the broad principles of the government guidance in its existing local plan policies (policies CN8-CN17). This will shortly be reviewed as the council starts to produce new policies through the local development framework. Planning applications that affect the character of the conservation area should be considered on their individual merits, in the light of the Local Plan policies, and taking into account all other material considerations. The appraisals and management plans are used to guide and inform the decision-making process.

Conservation area appraisals and management plans and are seen as the first steps in a dynamic process, the aim of which is to seek the preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of conservation areas and to provide a basis for making decisions about their future management.

Purpose and Scope of the Documents

Each appraisal and management plan aims to:

- Identify those elements of the conservation area which contribute to its character;
- Identify elements which detract from the character;
- Propose measures to maintain or improve the positive character, local distinctiveness and sense of place of the conservation area.

The importance of conservation area appraisals and their associated management plans is expressed in Central Government Best Value Performance Indicators BVPI 219a, b and c. These indicators measure the number of conservation areas, the number of conservation areas that have published appraisals, and the number of conservation areas that have published management plans respectively.

So far Salisbury District has no published appraisal or management plans. The first batch of nine conservation area appraisals and management plans are currently being presented to the relevant area committees.

The process that has been undertaken in producing these final documents is outlined later in the report. It has been a lengthy process of preparation, consultation and redrafting. Whilst the draft documents have carried some weight to date to assist with the determination of planning applications and for use in appeals, it is hoped that the reports will obtain the committee's approval, and enable them to become a material consideration as part of the planning process.

Methodology and Public Consultation

Conservation consultants were employed by the council to produce draft conservation area appraisal and management plans, and began carrying out surveys of twelve conservation areas across the district from September 2005 onwards. The survey work was carried out in accordance with the guidance mentioned above. The draft documents, once presented by the consultants, were reformatted and illustrated in-house in preparation for public consultation.

It is central government advice that conservation area appraisals and management plans should form part of the evidence base of the Local Development Framework, therefore, the consultation exercise followed the procedure for evidence base as set out in the approved Statement of Community Involvement.

The first stage of the public consultation exercise, involving four conservation area appraisals and management plans (Amesbury, Dinton, Steeple Langford and Hindon), was undertaken in July/August 2007, and ran for six weeks. Letters and cds, containing copies of the documents were sent to a number of people, including the chair and vice chair of the area committee, ward members, portfolio and deputy portfolio holder, parish and town councils, and local organisations. Copies of the documents were placed on the council's website. An advert was placed in the Salisbury Journal and site notices were displayed in the conservation areas. A presentation was made to the parish and town councils, and exhibition panels were produced.

A second consultation exercise was carried out in February 2008 for a further five conservation area appraisals and management plans (Broad Chalke, Wylye, Durrington, Tisbury and Downton).

Following the main consultation exercise, a further consultation was carried out directly with owners/occupiers affected by the proposed changes to the boundaries of the conservation areas. This process finished on 25 September 2008.

A summary of the responses received for the consultation on the Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan can be found in Appendix 2. Officers examined all of the responses received in conjunction with the consultants, and amended the document as necessary. The table in Appendix 2 shows the actions that were taken to address the issues that were raised.

The Completed Documents

Nine conservation area appraisals and management plans have been through the consultation process and have been produced in a finished format. Each document contains an executive summary at the beginning. The first part of the document contains the appraisal, which attempts to explain the character of the conservation area, and identifies such things as the architectural qualities of the buildings, prevalent local materials, the importance of open spaces and views, as well as the negative elements that exist.

The second part of the document contains the management plan, and this identifies such things as buildings at risk, proposals for enhancement, and suggested changes to the boundaries of the conservation areas (NB. Most of the conservation areas were designated more than 20 years ago, and it was necessary to propose changes to the boundaries to take account of the changes that had taken place over the intervening period).

Summary of Recommendations for Downton Conservation Area

The summary of recommendations arising out of the Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan includes:

- Amendments to the boundary of the conservation area to remove some areas and to include other areas;
- The identification of a building at risk;
- The highlighting of unlisted buildings of local importance;
- Suggestions for the improvement of the public realm.

Article 4 Directions

The management plan also includes proposals for Article 4 Directions, i.e. the removal of certain householders' permitted development rights. At present, there are a number of alterations that householders can make to their properties without the need for planning permission, even in conservation areas, for example replacement windows. The character of conservation areas can be completely eroded by piecemeal, uncontrolled changes to domestic properties. Each conservation area has been assessed to determine what the potential threats are, and whether the conservation area would benefit from such alterations being controlled.

It should be noted that the proposals for Article 4 Directions must undergo a separate, legally-prescribed consultation with individual landowners, which needs to take place within a six-month period. Due to current resource issues and changes brought about by local government reform, it is not being proposed to take this part of the document forward at present.

Recommendation:

That the Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan be presented to Cabinet with a recommendation to approve the document, including the proposed boundary changes to the conservation area.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, September 2008

Appendix 2: Downton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan Consultation responses table

Implications:

Financial: There are no financial implications in respect of this report. All the work has been completed, and the costs already contained within existing budgets.

- **Legal:** A further report would need to be brought before committee and cabinet in respect of the Article 4 directions which have their own statutory procedures (and human rights implications).
- **Human Rights:** Consultation has been undertaken in accordance with the Council's own consultation procedures.
- **Personnel:** N/A
- **Community Safety:** N/A
- **Environmental:** N/A
- **Council's Core Values:** Being environmentally conscientious.
- **Wards Affected:** Downton.