

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMITTEE
24 March 2011

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

8

TITLE OF REPORT: OLD KNEBORTH CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING CONTROL

1. SUMMARY

1.1 On 22 January 2009, Southern Rural Committee resolved:

That the Old Knebworth Conservation Area be retained as marked Option 1A.

1.2 Option 1A proposed no change to the existing conservation area boundary and the Committee concluded that that there was no justification to change the boundary previously designated (see Appendix A).

1.3 Since this date, however, there has been further discussion between officers and Knebworth Estates and following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Enterprise, a revised boundary was drawn and has been the subject of recent public consultation (see Appendix B). At this stage only the revised boundary is under consideration following which the appraisal document will be amended prior to being reported to Cabinet.

2. FORWARD PLAN

2.1 This Report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 1st March 2008.

3. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

3.1 Details of public consultation were reported to Southern Rural Area Committee on 20 February 2008. A further round of public consultation was undertaken from 4 February to 4 March 2011, details of which can be found at Appendix D.

4. ISSUES

Legislative and planning requirements

4.1 These matters were reported to Southern Rural Area Committee on 20 February 2008. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 remains in force and imposes a duty on local authorities to review their conservation areas from time to time.

**Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment
(published March 2010)**

- 4.2 Significance is a key term within the PPS policies. Along with 'historic environment' and 'heritage asset', it is defined in the annex to the PPS. It is used as a catch-all term to sum-up the qualities that make an otherwise ordinary place a heritage asset. The significance of a heritage asset is the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest. Listed buildings, Registered Park and Gardens together with Conservation Areas are now referred to as Designated Heritage Assets .
- 4.3 At paragraph 14 of the Practice Guide accompanying PPS5 it states that '*Conservation areas will be designated if they are of special historic or architectural interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*'. In considering such areas, officers have considered the nature of the interest or significance that defines the designation and the relative importance of that interest or significance.

**English Heritage 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals'
(Consultative Document published February 2006)**

- 4.4 This document has been referred to in previous reports to this committee.

5. OLD KNEBWORTH CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW

Summary of responses

- 5.1 Knebworth Estates have raised an objection to the proposed boundary where it relates to i) Old Nursery School Play Area and Car Park, ii) St Mary's Churchyard and iii) Knebworth Park Barns, Compound and Car Park (letter dated 14 February 2011 with enclosures). A representation has been received from Lord Cobbold supporting Knebworth Estates' letter and a representation has also been received from the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry expressing concern at the proposed boundary where it affects ii) and iii) above.
- 5.2 Knebworth Parish Council raise no objections, Rev J Pye has written in supporting the proposed boundary around St Mary's Churchyard whilst a further representation was also received requesting an explanation as to *why 'all of the remaining houses in Park Lane, Old Knebworth (including old estate houses and farmland , circa 1918) have not been considered in the plans'*. With regard to the latter point, the Conservation Officer's response can be seen at Appendix D and no subsequent response has been received.

Old Nursery School Play Area and Car Park

- 5.3 Knebworth Estates have stated that the boundary proposed by officers in 2008 indicated this area to be excluded. This was not the case. In 2008, officers proposed that part of a field to the east of the play area and car park was excluded (referred to at the time as Area 2) but for the roadside hedgerow to remain within the conservation area. Twenty-nine questionnaire responses were received: 8 supporting the subtraction of Area 2, 13 supporting the retention of Area 2 within the conservation area and 8 answered 'Don't know'.

5.4 The Conservation Officer wrote to Knebworth Estates on 27 January 2011 outlining the reasons for keeping the Old Nursery School Play Area and Car Park within the conservation area and it is proposed that this part of the proposed boundary remains as shown.

St Mary's Churchyard

5.5 It is proposed that the boundary be drawn to the south side of the park road which is to the north and west of the church. Following consultation between Rev J Pye and the St Alban's Diocesan Office and following a meeting of the Parochial Church Council Standing Committee, no objection has been raised by these parties to the proposed boundary.

5.6 On the other hand, Knebworth Estates has concluded that the boundary around St Mary's is *'not as robust as the "closed churchyard" boundary, dissects our Entrance Avenue, and adds unnecessary burden to our management, maintenance and preservation of the Park'*. In fact, this area has formed part of Old Knebworth Conservation Area since designation in 1969. The part of the Historic Park between the churchyard and the road (including the existing trees), is considered to contribute positively to the close setting of Knebworth House and St Mary's Church and the proposed boundary would follow a robust, well-defined boundary on the ground.

5.7 For the above reasons, it is proposed that this part of the proposed boundary remains as shown.

Knebworth Park Barns, Compound and Car Park

5.8 As part of the process of reviewing the conservation area boundary and following Southern Rural Committee in 2009, officers have looked at providing a rationale for a much reduced area and *'...focus has been given to the built environment of Old Knebworth, in particular those buildings that contribute to the significance of the area. In addition, where the Park and Gardens contribute to the immediate close setting of the village, such as Jubilee Park, this has also been included in a proposed revised area....'*

5.9 Whilst officers considered both the rationale and proposed boundary to be robust, an objection has been received from Knebworth Estates to the inclusion of the above within the conservation area on the basis that:

- The Barns were never part of the Gardens or the environs of Knebworth House,
- The Barns face inwards, into the Park,
- The Barns do not form part of the village-scape, and
- The Barns extensions, compound and car park are clearly part of the commercial operation of Knebworth House, and
- The proposal would introduce 'further regulatory designation'.

5.10 Consequently, in light of the above and also having regard to the representation by the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce & Industry, officers propose that the conservation area boundary is re-drawn to the north of Knebworth House and omitting The Barns, compound and car park but still following the southern edge of the park road to the north of the church (see Appendix C).

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Significant amendments to the existing documentation (map and appraisal) may have financial implications but the cost of undertaking a re-consultation has been absorbed 'in-house'. In addition, without an up-to-date character appraisal and without a rational and defensible conservation area boundary, there are risk implications in that more appeals may be allowed.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 See public consultation above.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Officers propose that Southern Rural Committee support the following recommendation:

That Southern Rural Committee supports the proposed boundary as indicated at Appendix C.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To enable the Council to adopt an up-to-date review of Old Knebworth Conservation Area with appropriate documents to inform future planning decisions.

11. APPENDICES

The following appendices are attached:

- 11.1 APPENDIX A – Old Knebworth Conservation Area Existing Boundary
- 11.2 APPENDIX B – Old Knebworth Conservation Area Consultation Plan
- 11.3 APPENDIX C – Old Knebworth Conservation Area Proposed Boundary
- 11.4 APPENDIX D – Results of public consultation (4 February to 4 March 2011)

12. CONTACT OFFICERS

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13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 All previous documentation relating to the above can be viewed on the Council's website at www.north-herts.gov.uk The relevant web page is Planning Services/Planning Control and Conservation/The Conservation & Heritage Team. The documents can also be viewed at the Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City or by contacting the officers referred to above.

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