

**CABINET
26 JANUARY 2021**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: CONSERVATION AREA SUMMARY REPORT AND NEXT STEPS

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: BUILD THRIVING AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES / RESPOND TO CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT / SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF GOOD QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HOMES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2019 consultants prepared character statements for those conservation areas in North Hertfordshire without supporting evidence. These were endorsed at Cabinet meetings during the 2019/2020 cycle as part of the Strategic Planning Matters reports. The consultants were also asked to prepare a Summary Report recommending any further work for the conservation areas such as boundary changes or more detailed appraisal work. This is part of our statutory requirement to review conservation areas from time to time. This report deals with the findings and recommendations of the Summary Report.
- 1.2 This report sets out a draft programme of work, for conservation areas and other heritage assets, based on current priorities and on budget and resource availability.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the findings of the North Hertfordshire Conservation Area Summary Report, attached as Appendix A to this report, as part of our statutory requirement to review conservation areas from time to time.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agree the way forward as set out in the draft programme of work identified within this report at Table 1.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure conservation areas, historic assets and buildings of local importance within North Hertfordshire are appropriately assessed and designated to inform decision making for planning applications and the preparation of Local and Neighbourhood Plans.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Council could refrain from undertaking any further work on conservation areas or local assets, but this would not reflect national policy and legislation which requires local authorities to review and monitor our conservation areas from time to time and conserve our local and designated assets.

- 4.2 The Council could delay work on the recommended projects set out in this report until in-house resources become more available, or it could proceed more slowly by undertaking less work each year spreading the projects over a longer time period. However, this would mean that the work would not be able to be used by officers in carrying out their responsibilities and will not be available for others to use. Also, there is no guarantee that in-house resources would be available in the future given the specialist nature of the officer roles and the time commitment required to undertake this work.
- 4.3 The Council could undertake more of the project work each year, completing it in a shorter timescale, allowing the completed projects to be used by officers in the assessment of applications and be available for use by others earlier. However, this would require more in-house resources in order to manage the greater amount of consultants' work and also to undertake the work identified to be done in-house. This would have implications on other workloads and priorities within planning services.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member and Deputy for Planning and Transport have been briefed on the findings of the Summary Report.
- 5.2 Relevant officers within Development & Conservation Management have been involved in the formulation of the programme of work resulting from the findings of the Summary Report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 12th October 2020.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Conservation areas are normally designated by the Council in its role as the local planning authority. They exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place. Local planning authorities have a duty to review past designations from time to time to determine if any further parts of their area should be conservation areas or no longer merit that designation.
- 7.2 Many of North Hertfordshire's 44 conservation areas were designated in the 1960s and 1970s. Conservation Areas within the towns and some other areas have been reviewed in the past few years and are available on the North Hertfordshire District Council website. Consultants were commissioned to create character statements for the 33 conservation areas in North Hertfordshire that were without information to support the designation. This work was undertaken in 2019/2020 and the final character statements have been endorsed by Cabinet. These character statements are also available to view on the Council's website. <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/conservation-and-heritage/conservation-areas/conservation-areas-villages>
- 7.3 As part of the consultants' conservation area project, they were asked to prepare a Summary Report to identify any boundary reviews or detailed appraisal work that may be required. Of the 33 conservation areas assessed by the consultants only two were not recommended for any boundary changes or any further assessment work. The two are Ayot St Lawrence and Gustard Wood which are cross-boundary conservation areas with only a small part lying within North Hertfordshire. The majority of Ayot St Lawrence lies within St Albans City and District and Gustard Wood lies mainly within Welwyn Hatfield Borough.

Therefore, a Technical Note was prepared for these areas rather than a character statement.

- 7.4 The findings of the Summary Report have resulted in a programme of future work which is set out in the following section. The full Summary Report is attached as Appendix A to this report.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Conservation Area Summary Report recommended five further areas of work covering projects dealing with detailed appraisal work, potential boundary changes, potential national designations and a register of buildings of local importance. The process for amending conservation area boundaries is the same for minor or major changes. Appendix C in the Summary Report sets out the process set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which requires advertisements and consultation to be undertaken on the amendments. The first stage is appraising the potential amendments to the conservation areas, the second stage comprises the consultation process on those amendments followed by endorsement by Cabinet on any agreed changes.

Detailed Conservation Area Appraisals

- 8.2 Five conservation areas, Ashwell, Barkway, Kimpton Village, Pirton and Whitwell, are recommended for a more detailed appraisal than the existing character statement, due to their size and complexity. This is in order to fully describe their special architectural and historic interest. These conservation areas are in some of our larger villages and a more detailed appraisal would be beneficial in managing change in response to any development proposals.

Substantial Boundary Changes

- 8.3 Six conservation areas, Codicote, Great Offley, Hinxworth, Sandon, Weston and Willian, were recommended for boundary changes, either a reduction or extension in size for the following reasons:
- where an area immediately adjacent to an existing boundary is of sufficient special architectural or historic interest for designation and has a character considered desirable to preserve or enhance; or
 - where a defined area within an existing conservation area can be shown to have changed its character so that it is no longer considered to be of special architectural or historic interest, or no longer worthy of preservation or enhancement.

Codicote is considered to require a reduction in size, where the housing estate at Old School Close appears to date to the 1980s or early 1990s and is of a different character to the remainder of the conservation area.

Great Offley is recommended for an extension in size to include The Vicarage, a building making a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. It is also recommended that the boundary is extended to include the Offley Stores property which is currently divided by the conservation area boundary.

Hinxworth is recommended for an extension that would bring into the conservation area a moat and parcel of land that is potentially of Saxon origin and likely to be the original settlement core.

Sandon is recommended for an extension that would bring into the conservation area a 1920s housing estate at the west side of the settlement that would preserve a group of well-spaced and characterful cottages as well as aspects of the pre-estate landscape.

Weston is recommended for an extension at the west end of the settlement that would bring into the conservation area a series of historic property boundaries behind Fore Street, some workers housing and Addison houses on Hitchin Road, and the older part of the 1920s estate at Friars Road.

Willian is recommended for an extension that would bring into the conservation area the Willian Arboretum.

- 8.4 These more substantial suggested amendments to the boundaries of conservation areas should be fully appraised to confirm their suitability for changes to their respective conservation areas.

Minor boundary changes

- 8.5 Twenty conservation areas are recommended as requiring minor boundary changes to conform to existing property or ownership boundaries for clarity and ease of administration. These are Barley, Bendish, Charlton, Croft Lane (Letchworth), Gosmore, Graveley, Great Wymondley, Hexton, Ickleford, Kimpton Bottom, Lilley, Norton (Letchworth), Preston, Reed, Roe Green, Rushden, St Ippolyts, Southern Green, Therfield and Wallington.

Potential National Designations

- 8.6 The Summary Report identified two buildings / structures as being potentially suitable for national designation as Listed Buildings. In each case, further appraisal work would need to be undertaken with a view to presenting the information to Historic England with a request for listing.

The two identified structures are:

- Great Wymondley Village Hall, Arch Road, Great Wymondley
Great Wymondley Village Hall appears to date from the first half of the 20th century, constructed in timber and corrugated tin with a slate roof and is an attractive addition to Great Wymondley village
- Barkway Wagon Wash, Church Lane, Barkway
The Wagon Wash is a distinctive structure related to Barkway's history as a stopping point on a coaching route. It comprises a short, straight stretch of open water, lined on both sides by brick walling and coaches would be driven through the water to clean their wheels and name plates.

- 8.7 Designation of Listed Buildings is undertaken by Historic England. However, compilation of background supporting information, including report, maps and photographs could be done in-house prior to submission to Historic England for assessment. Guidance on the process of designating heritage assets can be found in Appendix C of the Summary Report.

Register of Buildings of Local Importance

- 8.8 Each conservation area character statement contains a list, in section 3.2, of non-designated buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the respective conservation area. In total, 315 non-designated buildings were noted for their positive contribution to the character of their respective conservation areas. These should be considered for entry onto a Council's Register of Buildings of Local Importance. A list of all 315 non-designated buildings can be found in Appendix B of the Summary Report. Guidance on local listing is in Appendix C.

- 8.9 The Council currently has Registers of Buildings of Local Interest for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, Newnham, Knebworth and Royston. These are available to view on the Councils website.

8.10 The buildings on the Council's existing Register of Buildings of Local Interest were selected according to the following criteria:

- Good quality work of a well-known local architect or craftsman;
- Buildings of particular local architectural interest, which are important locally for their special architectural design, decoration, craftsmanship or construction including technical innovation and particular important local building types;
- Buildings of particular local historic interest which clearly illustrate important aspects of local social, industrial, cultural or military history or the historic development of the town;
- Buildings which act as an important architectural feature or landmark within an historic street scene or setting;
- Buildings which are well documented to have a close historical association with important and significant local historic events or people.

These criteria could be used to assess the suitability of the buildings identified in conservation area character statements.

Capacity for undertaking the projects

8.11 The Council currently has a single Senior Conservation Office whose workload primarily deals with advice on planning applications on Listed Buildings and development within conservation areas. There is limited capacity within their role and limited capacity and specialist expertise within the wider planning teams to take forward all the recommended programme of works in-house. However, there may be opportunity to undertake certain projects such as identifying Buildings of Local Interest and providing supporting evidence for some projects such as national designations. This work may also be able to be undertaken jointly with town and parish councils when preparing Neighbourhood Plans. Therefore, due to lack of dedicated in-house resources it is proposed to procure most of the project work through consultants. These could be done as discrete projects over a number of years or a larger, combined project depending on the task, economies of scale and budget.

8.12 Programme of potential work

It is anticipated that some projects will be able to be carried out in-house due to their scale and nature. Work on other projects will require consultants to be procured as they require greater resources to undertake the work. Estimates for the various projects are set out in Table 1 below. Funding for consultancy work is addressed in Section 10 Financial Implications.

Table 1 Proposed projects

Project	Undertaken by	Estimated cost	Priority Timescale
Gathering supporting evidence for two Listed Building National Designations: Great Wymondley Village Hall, Arch Road, Great Wymondley	In-house (subject to resources)	Within existing resources	Medium priority 2022/2023

Barkway Wagon Wash , Church Lane, Barkway			
Gathering supporting evidence for compilation of Register of Buildings of Local Interest	In-house (subject to resources) jointly with Parish or Town Councils	Within existing resources and possible input from Parish or Town Councils	On-going
Full Conservation Area Appraisals , due to their complexity and size, for: Pirton Ashwell Barkway Kimpton Village Whitwell	Consultants	£20K + VAT per appraisal	High priority Two per year starting 2021/2022
Boundary changes due to changes in special architectural or historic interest, either within or adjoining, the Conservation area for: Codicote (omission) Great Offley (addition) Hinxworth (addition) Sandon (addition) Weston (addition) Willian (addition) Consideration will be given to undertaking a full appraisal at the same time in order to maximise resources.	Consultants	£20k + VAT per appraisal	Medium priority Two per year following on from completion of full Conservation Area Appraisals above starting 2023/2024
Minor boundary changes to Conservation Areas for: Barley Bendish Charlton Croft Lane (Letchworth) Gosmore Graveley Great Wymondley Hexton Ickleford Kimpton Bottom Lilley Norton (Letchworth)	Consultants	Cost to be estimated nearer time of project date.	Low priority

Preston Reed Roe Green Rushden St Ippolyts Southern Green Therfield Wallington			
Other recommendations within the Summary Report for future consideration are set out in paragraph 8.13 below. Costs, timescales and resources to be investigated at the appropriate time.			
Related conservation matter regarding potential new conservation area is set out in paragraph 8.14 below. Investigations to be undertaken now to ascertain costs, timescales and resources.			

Other recommendations within the Summary Report

8.13 As well as the detailed recommendations, set out in Table 1 above, the Summary Report identified other recommendations for future consideration that could be undertaken as part of or following other project work.

i) Undertake a review of North Hertfordshire town conservation areas to ensure they reflect national policy and guidance and emerging local policy. This could be considered following Town Centre Strategy review work.

ii) Publish an over-arching conservation area policy document for North Hertfordshire to reflect national policy and guidance and emerging local policy. This could be undertaken as part of the Local Plan review.

iii) Publish a Register of Buildings of Local Importance, covering buildings both within and outside of conservation areas to be in line with current Historic England Guidance (Historic England Advice Note 7, 2016). There is potential for partnership working with Parish and Town Councils and in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

Related conservation area matter

- 8.14 Although not part of the work recommended within the Summary Report there is a related Conservation Area matter which would be beneficial to address at this time. In June 2016, Amec Foster Wheeler, now Wood (who undertook the Conservation Area Summary Report), prepared a Heritage Assessment of North Stevenage (NS1), a strategic housing allocation site in the emerging Local Plan. This Heritage Assessment looked at the potential impact of any development on the surrounding heritage assets and identified a number of recommendations including:
North Hertfordshire District Council should consider designating a conservation area based upon Chesfield Park and Chesfield Church to adjoin the St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area in Stevenage and preserve the significance of Chesfield Park.
Work to assess whether Chesfield could be designated as a Conservation Area is outside the scope of the Summary Report however it is considered pertinent that preliminary investigations are carried out to ascertain an estimated timescale and cost to undertake the assessment work required.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, applications for, approval/designation, consultation/referendums revocations (or recommend revocation) of neighbourhood plans and orders, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).
- 9.2 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the local planning authority's duty to review conservation areas and their boundaries from time to time and designate new conservation areas where appropriate.
- 9.3 Section 69 (4) provides that designation of any area as a conservation area shall be a local land charge.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Estimated costs for the projects are set out in Table 1 in section 8. £40k has been earmarked for conservation work for each year from 2020/21 to 2022/23, so a total of £120k over the next three years. This money is coming from the planning fee earmarked reserve. As the money is in an earmarked reserve, if planned work means that more than £40k needs to be drawn down in one year, this can be accommodated as long as the total amount of works do not exceed £120k.
- 10.2 There are no specific revenue implications arising from this report. The costs for using in-house resources within planning services for aspects of the work identified in Table 1 will be met within existing staffing budgets.
- 10.3 However, it is acknowledged that costs may increase and that in-house resources may not be available so that additional consultancy costs are incurred. As such, work will be prioritised and spend will be monitored by the relevant manager. Should additional funding be required then a growth bid will be identified for specific workstreams that can then be considered as part of the budget setting process.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no new risk implications arising from this report. This report is not considered to present a corporate risk in itself.

11.2 Nonetheless, the risks associated with not preparing the recommended detailed conservation area appraisals, not amending further conservation area boundaries, not submitting two local heritage assets to Historic England for designation, and not preparing a Register of Buildings of Local Importance include:

- lack of clarity and uncertainty to case officers and applicants when preparing, negotiating and determining planning applications;
- lack of consistency with the emerging Local Plan as well as national planning policy and guidance; and
- a risk of not securing high quality development that contributes to the character of North Hertfordshire.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the actions in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report. Any work carried out in-house will be undertaken within existing staff resources.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A - North Hertfordshire Conservation Areas - Summary Report

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management: Historic England Advice Note 1, 2019. <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1>

18.2 Local Heritage Listing: Historic England Advice Note 7, 2016. <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7>

18.3 Heritage Assessment of North Stevenage (NS1), June 2016 <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/files/nhe7-heritage-assessment-north-stevenagepdf>