

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL FOR LEOMINSTER CENTRAL CONSERVATION AREA

Report By: Head of Planning and Transportation

Wards Affected:

Leominster North and South.

Purpose

1. To recommend the draft conservation area appraisal for Leominster Central Conservation Area to the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) for consultation with relevant parties.

Financial Implications

2. Minor costs for printing and publicity to be met from existing budgets.

Background

3. Planning Committee, 21st April 2006, recommended a programme for the preparation of character appraisals and management proposals for 16 conservation areas. Fourteen draft appraisals have been approved for consultation. Hereford City centre is currently being surveyed which will be the last in the first phase.
4. This appraisal is for Leominster Town Centre. The major part of this document comprises a factual assessment of the special architectural and historic character and appearance of the conservation area, together with its setting. The form and content of all the appraisals follows guidance recommended by English Heritage and endorsed by the Government.
5. Only areas that have special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which the Council wishes to preserve or enhance should be designated as conservation areas. The appraisal has identified minor areas for exclusion and inclusion. Criteria forming the basis for determining such are set out in Herefordshire UDP policy HBA5.
6. The implications arising from designation are that the Council is required by Statute to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area when determining planning applications. Applications have to be advertised and the Council must take account of comments received. Conservation area consent for the demolition of buildings is required and additional planning controls apply which would normally be permitted in other areas. These primarily relate to the size of freestanding buildings that require planning permission, the size and position of extensions, the type of external cladding, insertion of dormer

windows and satellite dishes. Proposed works to trees require prior notice to the Council to enable it to consider the desirability of serving a Tree Preservation Order.

7. The Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) will be asked to confirm the appraisal document including issues that might form the basis for conservation area management proposals. It is intended that some initial consultation upon the draft appraisal and issues will be undertaken although formal comments will be sought at a later stage when management proposals have been developed. The final document for adoption will be prepared for Council approval having regard to all material comments being taken into account.
8. The issues identified for this conservation areas falls into three categories:
 - Features such as non-listed buildings that significantly contribute to the area because of their local architectural or historic interest.
 - Features which detract from the special interest of the area such as
 - i. Historic buildings in poor condition building.
 - ii. Inappropriate alterations to historic buildings such as modern windows.
 - iii. Modern buildings that do not relate to the character of the area.
 - iv. Open gaps where street enclosure is desirable.
 - v. Untidy land.
 - vi. Street clutter and signage.
 - Changes to the conservation area boundaries
 - i. To include areas that are considered to contribute to the special historic or architectural character of the area
 - ii. Rationalisation of boundaries so that they relate to defined edges of property curtilages, field boundaries, roads and lanes or other notable features.

The full detailed text for the conservation area appraisal is included in an Appendix to this report and the principal features are summarised below. A selection of diagrammatic plans will be displayed at the committee meeting.

9. The Ward Councillors have been briefed on the appraisal and the consultation process involved in producing a management plan and policies.
10. Leominster Conservation Area was designated in 1969. The town dates back to at least the 7th century when a religious building was in place. In 12th century King Henry 1 established the Benedictine Priory. By the 15th Century, the medieval borough had a thriving market and a number of guilds, and the Priory was the centre of extensive manorial estates. Following the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII, most of the monastery buildings and part of the Priory Church were demolished. During the 18th Century, many timber-framed structures were replaced (or refronted) by brick-built Georgian townhouses with Classical front elevations. Elegant examples can be seen throughout the conservation area, particularly in Broad Street, Church Street, Etnam Street and South Street. Moreover, many of these

houses conceal earlier timber-frames. Shopfronts of 19th and early 20th Century date, with classically inspired architectural details, were inserted into earlier buildings and can be seen throughout the conservation area.

11. Today, the character of Leominster Town Centre Conservation Area is that of an historic market town with well-preserved medieval, Georgian and Victorian elements. The adjacent open green spaces of the Priory precinct complement the narrow streets and lanes, and wide thoroughfares of the historic town.
12. Heritage assets within the conservation area include two Scheduled Monuments, one Grade I Listed Building, four Grade II, and 159 Grade II Listed Buildings. In addition, twelve Buildings of Local Interest have been identified during this appraisal. Thirty-nine selected sites entered on the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record are also listed here.
13. Six character areas have been defined for the conservation area. These include:
 - The Priory Precinct
 - The Central Core
 - Broad Street/Church Street
 - Etnam Street
 - South Street/West Street
 - West Central Area

An analysis of each describing the particular characteristics is set out in the appraisal.

14. Positive areas and features considered to be of particular importance to the town include:
 - The plan form of the medieval borough (including burgage and tenement plots) and the priory precinct.
 - The narrow streets and lanes of the central core.
 - The environs of the Priory Church.
 - The site of the Benedictine monastery and the earlier Saxon occupation.
 - Grange Court and the open space of The Grange with boundary features of walls and earthworks.
 - The architectural heritage of the central core that ranges from medieval to Victorian.
 - The 15th and 16th Century townscapes of Corn Square (south side)/School Lane, and Etnam Street.
 - The Georgian townscapes of Broad Street, Church Street, Etnam Street and South Street.
15. The appraisal also lists those areas or features considered to detract from its character. In addition it possesses some 5 important buildings that are highlighted as being potentially at risk or vulnerable because of their condition.
16. Particular issues that need to be addressed within any management proposals for the conservation area are considered to be:

Priory Precinct

17. During the late 19th and 20th Century, significant development has taken place within the medieval priory precinct in the north-west quadrant (a residential home, and a car park on the site of a medieval fishpond) and in the south-east quadrant at Pinsley Road (residential). The residential home is within the boundaries of Leominster Town Conservation Area, the car park is in the River Meadows Conservation Area; the Pinsley Road development is on the edge of the conservation area.
18. This medieval precinct is an important part of Leominster's archaeological and historical heritage; the site of the Benedictine Priory is recognised as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Further encroachment or development within the priory precinct boundary should be discouraged.

Burgage Plots

19. Burgage and tenement plots are an important component of the medieval borough of Leominster. Many have been destroyed or truncated, particularly in the central west area (New Street, Burgess Street and West Street) and on backland sites at Etnam Street, as a result of 20th Century development. The survival of existing medieval plots is under threat from further development.

Shopfronts

20. Shopfronts of 19th and early 20th Century design contribute to the historic character of the conservation area and to the vertical rhythm of the streetscape. Where dominant or continuous fascias are introduced, particularly across the front of several adjacent buildings, there is a loss of rhythm as a result of the imposition of horizontal emphasis, and an erosion of the historic character of the conservation area. This is particularly applicable to streets and lanes in the central core, South Street, West Street and Rainbow Street.

Street Scene

21. Street furniture, in the form of advertising boards, tables and chairs for customers' use and goods offered for sale, can be part of an attractive street scene in urban open spaces. Corn Square is an attractive urban open space at the hub of the commercial centre, linked to the periphery by narrow streets and lanes lined by shops and services. It has been considered as an area for pedestrianisation in the past. However it does operate as a form of shared space, a concept that is developing in many towns and cities. A co-ordinated approach to 'street scene' is also being promoted and the shopping streets in particular might benefit from such an approach.
22. Some boundary changes are suggested:

Proposed Inclusions

- On the west side of The Priory, nos. 5 to 13 (odd), a terrace of mid 19th Century brick houses (Grade II); nos. 15 and 17, two 17th Century timber-framed houses (Grade II): these houses are currently within the River Meadows Conservation Area but represent aspects of the post-Dissolution secular development of the priory precinct.

- On the west side of Broad Street, extending north from the present conservation area boundary to the south bank of the River Kenwater, nos. 29 to 45 (odd), a row of nine Georgian (18th/early 19th Century) houses (all Grade II); on the east side of Broad Street, immediately north of the conservation area boundary, no. 46, a Georgian (18th Century) house (Grade II) set on a former burgage plot abutting the boundary of the Priory Precinct: these buildings represent the continuing Georgian development of central Leominster on earlier occupation sites.

Proposed Exclusions

- No. 32 Hampton Gardens, a 20th Century bungalow: the building is not of specific architectural merit and is not in character with adjacent buildings, i.e., Brook Hall, a former house converted to a meeting hall (Grade II) and ancillary buildings (orangery and coach house).
- On the north side of the conservation area, a stretch of the River Kenwater, the conservation area boundary to follow the south bank of the river rather than the north bank, but the footbridge (Grade II) to remain in the conservation area: this section of the river to become part of the River Meadows Conservation Area which already includes other sections of the Kenwater and the River Lugg.

Proposed New Boundary

The following boundary is proposed, based on the above inclusions and exclusions:

At the north east corner of the conservation area, west along the south bank of the River Kenwater to the footbridge; include the footbridge; continue west then south and east along the property boundaries of nos. 15 and 17 The Priory; south along the west side of The Priory; west then south along the property boundaries of nos. 5 to 13 (odd) The Priory; rejoin the present conservation area boundary.

At the boundary of the Priory Precinct, north then west along the property boundary of no. 46 Broad Street; cross Broad Street; north along the west side of Broad Street to the south bank of the River Kenwater, west then south and east along the building edge of no. 45 Broad Street; south along the property boundaries of nos. 43 to 29 (odd) Broad Street; cross Vicarage Street; west along the south side of no. 32 Hampton Gardens; rejoin the present conservation area boundary.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Planning Committee recommends the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) to approve the appraisal for Leominster Central Conservation Area and the issues raised in association with this for consultation with interested parties.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Bill Bloxsome on 01432 261783

None Identified