

REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AREAS WITHIN HEREFORDSHIRE

Report By: Head of Planning Services

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To approve a programme for the review of conservation areas within the County in years 2005 and 2006.

Financial Implications

- 2.1 The recommendation proposed within this report is put forward on the basis that the programme of review is undertaken by existing staff
- 2.2 Should a more intensive programme of review be required a further report, describing the implications of this and its cost, will be required.

Introduction

- 3.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to determine which parts of their area shall be conservation areas. This task should be undertaken "from time to time". However the period is not specified although there is a suggestion in Government guidance that it should be in association with the review of local plans (or UDP).
- 3.2 Such reviews need not only look at new areas for designation. They might consider boundary revisions or even removal of any designation in its entirety. Furthermore, the preparation of conservation area appraisals should form part of the review process.
- 3.3 Up until now neither Government nor the Audit Commission had set any national performance indicators or related advice upon targets for the historic environment. However, ODPM is in the process of consulting local authorities upon a range of new Best Value Indicators including one for conservation areas. That suggested in this instance is:

Percentage of conservation areas which have been subject to a character appraisal, or its review, within the last 5 years, as a proportion of the total number of conservation areas in the local authority area.

The target for this indicator would be set locally.

- 3.4 In addition Department of Culture Media and Sport are currently engaged in revising the approach to historic environment designations. Members were

advised upon the issues that were being suggested at the Planning Committee meeting on 30th October 2003. A report also appears elsewhere on this agenda upon interim proposals. It is unlikely that this will affect any indicator within the short term.

- 3.5 The County has 63 conservation areas and these are listed in Appendix 1. Their coverage ranges from city/town centres and their suburbs to villages, both large and small. Herefordshire Council has designated 4 new conservation areas since 1998. All were identified for consideration by their predecessor local authorities.
- 3.6 Both Government¹ and English Heritage² provide guidance on the assessment and designation of conservation areas. English Heritage also provides guidance on the content of conservation area appraisals³. They place emphasis upon the need to set consistent local standards for assessing whether a conservation area should be designated. Furthermore areas should justify their designation and the concept should not be devalued by designating areas lacking any special interest. Designation should take into account the resources available not only for administering conservation area controls, but also consultation and the formulation and implementation of policies and proposals.
- 3.7 The approach advocated for this County, given its size, character and the number of existing conservation areas is that a set of designation criteria be adopted through the UDP process. A programme identifying priorities for review should then be developed. UDP policy HBA5 is the relevant policy (see Appendix 2). No objections were received specifically upon its content when the consultation draft UDP was placed on deposit and hence it should carry significant weight.
- 3.8 With regard to conservation area appraisals, a number of areas have some form of brief description, either published or in draft, prepared by predecessor authorities, although it is debatable whether these would meet English Heritage's guidelines. The most recently prepared appraisal statement by this Council covers Colwall Conservation Area: this is fairly close to meeting that standard and could be suitably and relatively easily enhanced. However the approach proposed is not to produce a very detailed and unwieldy document but one that is both informative to the public while serving the purposes of development control.
- 3.9 The Cabinet Member for the Environment recently agreed changes within the structure of the Conservation section. This should enable staff resources to be made available to carry out some reviews and appraisals of conservation areas. Nevertheless it will not be possible to undertake an intensive programme. A target of no more than 4 conservation area reviews per annum is realistic within the resources available. Even that target would be difficult to achieve if a town or city centre conservation area were included. Any requirement beyond this would be either to the detriment of development control work or need an increased resource to be made available.

- 4.1 Determining which existing conservation areas should be reviewed first and where new ones might be designated requires some process to be devised to enable priorities to be identified. The potential for new stand-alone conservation areas to be brought forward is considered limited although some further areas are considered worthy of appraisal. Of far greater concern, however, is the quality and consistency of the large number of existing conservation areas that have been designated over the last 30 years or so.
- 4.2 The following criteria might usefully indicate which conservation areas should be reviewed as a matter of priority: Efforts ought to concentrate upon reviewing and appraising those identified using these criteria in the short to medium term before looking for further new conservation areas.
- a) Age of conservation area – the older the conservation area the more likely that it needs to be reviewed against the criteria set out for designation in the UDP.
 - b) Anomalies and inconsistencies within boundaries – development may have taken place that could affect boundaries, inappropriate areas might now be included that devalue the status, or important areas may have been omitted. New development pressures may also be relevant.
 - c) Availability of a sufficiently detailed supporting statement – such statements need to contain sufficient justification for designation in order to be a factor that the Secretary of State will take into account in appeal decisions.
- 4.3 These criteria have been used to give an initial indication of relative priority for reviewing each conservation area (see again Appendix 1). The scale of priority ranges from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest). Some 17 (approximately 25 %) conservation areas fall within priority categories 1 and 2.
- 4.4 The process of review might also be assisted if efforts are concentrated on appraising similar types of conservation areas. An analysis suggests there are seven types of conservation area within the County:
- 1 Urban Centre (6)
 - 2 Suburban Villa/Planting (12)
 - 3 Large Village with Castle (3)
 - 4 Linear Village (12)
 - 5 Linear Village with Ancient Monument (13)
 - 6 Cross Road Village (4)
 - 7 Rural Hamlets (13)

- 4.5 Appendix 1 also shows which of these categories each conservation area falls into. Appendix 3 provides the broad definitions for each of the categories. Of those conservation areas falling within priorities 1 and 2, the largest numbers (4 each) are within the types Urban Centres and Linear Villages with Ancient Monuments.
- 4.6 It is recommended that the initial programme concentrate on these eight conservation areas over the two years 2005 and 2006. However, in the immediate term a review of Colwall Conservation Area appraisal statement should be undertaken such that it might usefully be amended as necessary and form the template for subsequent appraisals.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet Member for the Environment be advised that:

- a) **the Conservation Area appraisal statement for Colwall be reviewed and subsequently used as a template for appraisals of other areas;**
- b) **that a programme for undertaking conservation area reviews and appraisals for 2005 and 2006 should comprise:**
- 2005- Almeley, Dilwyn, Ross and Kington**
- 2006- Bosbury, Much Marcle, Leominster Town Centre and Central Hereford**
- c) **the programme beyond this be set in the light of the experience gained over the first two years.**

Background Papers

¹ **PPG 15 - Planning and The Historic Environment, Sept 1994**

² **Conservation Area Practice, English Heritage, October 1995**

³ **Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1997**