

PROGRAMME FOR THE REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AREAS

Report By: Head of Planning Services

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To advise the Cabinet Member for the Environment of a revised 2-year programme for the review of conservation areas to include the preparation of character appraisals and management proposals.

Financial Implications

2. The extra funds required to undertake the proposed two-year programme are to be met from Planning Delivery Grant (see also paragraph 18).

Background

3. Planning Committee received a report on an initial programme for the carrying out of Conservation Area reviews at its meeting on 1st October 2004. This suggested a programme comprising 4 reviews in each of the calendar years 2005 and 2006. It was advised, however, that progress depended upon the availability of staff resources. In the event the Building Conservation team was a member of staff short during 2005 through a combination of circumstances and no progress towards the target was possible as staff time was necessarily concentrated on supporting the development control process during a period of considerable pressure.
4. Towards the end of 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published a set of new Best Value Indicators, one of which related to Conservation Areas. This indicator, BV 219, covers the following:

BV219a – Total number of conservation areas within local authority area.

BV219b – Percentage of conservation areas with up-to-date character appraisals.

BV219c – Percentage of conservation areas with published management proposals.

Government intends that local targets should be set for these. Furthermore guidance on the indicator advises that assistance should be sought on archaeological and historic landscape matters related to conservation areas and that Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) be used to fund additional staff resources to help with this work

BV219a – Total Number of Conservation Areas

5. Presently there are 64 conservation areas within the County. At this stage it is proposed that the Council should maintain its policy that no new conservation areas

be designated for the time being while efforts are concentrated on carrying out reviews and appraisals for existing areas. As a consequence there would be no target for the designation of further conservation areas.

BV219b – Percentage of conservation areas with an up-to-date character appraisal

6. An up-to-date character appraisal is defined as one prepared or reviewed within the past 5 years. The character appraisal for Colwall conservation area is the only one that falls within that definition (equivalent to 1.6% of all conservation areas). Even this may have to be reviewed to meet new English Heritage advice upon what such appraisals should comprise. However this is not thought to be a major task and is expected to involve minimal additions.
7. Conservation area appraisals should be undertaken to assess whether existing areas might be retained, enlarged or reduced in area, as well as to provide the basis for determining policies and proposals for their conservation and enhancement. Some initial pilot work has been undertaken in order to estimate what is realistic in terms of timescale for undertaking a range of appraisals. It must be realised, however, that conservation areas vary in size and the extent of their respective attributes.
8. When the matter was considered previously an assessment was prepared indicating the priority that might be given for the review of each conservation area (see Appendix 1). This assessment remains valid and it is advised that the Council should set an objective to review priority categories 1 and 2 over the next two years. This would cover 16 conservation areas. Appendix 2 lists the targets for completion of character appraisals proposed by your officers for 2006 and 2007.
9. The targets for completion of character appraisals for Central Hereford and Leominster conservation areas can only be indicative at present for reasons explained in paragraph 12.

BV219c – Percentage of Conservation areas with published management proposals

10. Currently the Council has no conservation areas for which management proposals have been published in accordance with best practice guidance issued by English Heritage. Furthermore it has not been possible to gauge timescales required to produce such management proposals as these are expected to flow from the appraisals and again may vary from area to area. Their preparation is likely to involve discussions with a range of divisions within the Council and also outside organisations. As a consequence it may be more effective to approach these discussions for groups of conservation areas rather than separately in every individual instance.
11. There is a requirement upon the Council to consult the public on management proposals through public meetings. This will add to the timescale for completion of their preparation. With an early emphasis being placed upon the preparation of character appraisals it is unlikely that the preparation of any management proposals will reach a conclusion within 2006. These will begin to come forward in earnest during 2007. Furthermore management proposals will be more complex within the urban areas so it is expected that they will take longer to prepare. However, Appendix 2 includes indicative targets for publication of management plans.

12. Reference has already been made to the tentative nature of the target for completing the conservation area character appraisals of Central Hereford and Leominster. Furthermore it will be noted that no target has been set for the publication of management proposals for these in Appendix 2. Archaeological data will inform the appraisals and management plans for all the market towns. It is possible to timetable the collation of archaeological data in relation to Ross and Kington early within the work programme of the officer who will undertake this task. However the officer's main task is to prepare Hereford Urban Archaeological Database (UAD). This is anticipated to take around 18 months. The UAD work is part funded by English Heritage with whom targets that work have been agreed. Although the archaeological database for Leominster will not be so complex, its production will need to fit into the timescale for the preparation of Hereford UAD.

Public Consultation

13. Reference has already been made to the requirement to hold public meetings upon management proposals. Even greater emphasis is now placed upon consulting local communities and interested bodies and organisations. PPG 15 – 'Planning and the Historic Environment' indicates that although there is no statutory requirement to consult the public, it is highly desirable in order to achieve the greatest public support. Advice on BV219 states that community involvement with designation and management of conservation areas represents best practice and should be consistent with the Authority's Statement of Community Involvement. This is confirmed in advice from English Heritage, which indicates that the appraisal document should include a report upon how community involvement and public consultation has been undertaken.
14. It is proposed that the consultation process that should be followed for conservation area appraisals and management proposals is that set out in the Statement of Community Involvement for Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD). There is no requirement for an independent examination for such documents.
15. There is a three-stage consultation process for SPDs:
- i) Preparation of draft proposals
 - ii) Consultaion on draft proposals
 - iii) Report on consultation, amend as necessary and adopt
16. However, there are two distinct tasks in terms of the work to be undertaken for each conservation area (i.e. first to prepare the character appraisal then prepare management proposals). It is proposed that the three-stage consultation process be undertaken for each of the two tasks. For example, it will be necessary to utilise the character appraisal to determine whether any changes to the particular conservation area boundary are made. Only when this is decided will it be possible to determine the extent to which managemenmt proposals are necessary.
17. Furthermore, there is a statutory requirement to hold a Public Meeting upon any management proposals advanced for a conservation area and therefore the type of consultation arrangements followed within the two tasks may be different. There are also specific requirements in relation to the advertisement of conservation area designation and boundary changes that must be followed.

Resources

18. This report has already referred to the availability of staff resources to undertake the programme of reviews proving to be a problem in the past. Recruitment authorisation was recently granted to appoint a Project Officer (temporary for 2 years) to assist with character appraisals and management proposals to meet BV219. This is to be funded partly from Planning Delivery Grant and partly by savings elsewhere. Historic landscape and archaeological analysis in relation to the market town appraisals is also to be funded through the same means utilising a temporary member of staff within the archaeology team. A restructuring within the Building Conservation team should also assist through making more time available for this work. However the loss of two experienced members of staff through retirement will have an impact upon any programme but it is felt that the targets set within Appendix 2 are realistic and have taken this factor into account.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Cabinet Member for the Environment is recommended to adopt the programme for the preparation of conservation area character appraisals and management proposals set out in Appendix 2.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 – Planning and the Historic Environment
- Report to Planning Committee dated 1st October 2004 and titled 'Review of Conservation Areas within Herefordshire.'
- Best Value Performance Indicators 2005/6 – ODPM, April 2005
- Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals - English Heritage et al
- Guidance on the management of Conservation Areas – English Heritage et al