

Agenda Item IMD9

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2017/09

TITLE	Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration, Councillor Mark Ashwell
DATE AND TIME	7 April at 11:30
WARD	Sonning
DIRECTOR	Director of Environment (Interim), Josie Wragg
REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON	30 March 2017
VENUE	SF1

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The adoption of the document will assist the understanding and the protection of the special historic and architectural character and appearance of Sonning Conservation Area and in the assessment of planning applications for proposed development.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration

- a) approves the amendments made to the document in response to the public consultation
- b) adopts the document as an evidence base and material consideration in future planning decisions

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Conservation areas (CA's) are areas of special architectural or historic interest. Local planning authorities (LPA's) have a duty to designate these areas and from time to time' to review them and formulate proposals for their preservation and enhancement.

Since 2012, the Council has been working with the Parish Council and Sonning & Sonning Eye Society in the production of an appraisal document for Sonning CA. The Parish Council and Sonning & Sonning Eye Society have carried out the research and produced the draft document. This has been passed to the Council to finalise, consult on and adopt.

This paper follows a 6 week public consultation which has resulted in changes to the assessment. It is now proposed that the Appraisal document is adopted and that it will be a material consideration in planning decision making.

Background

Conservation areas (CA's) are areas of special architectural or historic interest. Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) have a duty to designate these areas under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and 'from time to time', to review the boundaries and to formulate proposals to preserve and enhance their special historic and architectural character.

The Council has 16 CA's. These have been designated at various times between 1970 and 2004. Sonning CA was designated in September 1971 and revised in 1980 and in June 1996. At the time of the 1996 revision, an appraisal of the character of the area was published. Since that time no further appraisals of the CA have been carried out.

Since 2012 the Council has been working with the Parish Council and Sonning & Sonning Eye Society in the production of an appraisal document for Sonning CA. The Parish Council and Sonning & Sonning Eye Society have carried out the research and produced the draft document. This was passed to the Council to finalise and consult on. A 6 week public consultation has been undertaken and amendments have been made to the appraisal to reflect consultation responses (see table of Summary Consultation Responses at the end of this report). It is now proposed that the document is adopted by the Council and will constitute a material planning consideration in assessing planning applications.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

The purpose of this Appraisal is to assist the LPA in fulfilling its statutory duty to have special regard to preservation or enhancement of the character/appearance of the Sonning Conservation Area.

The Appraisal assesses the special architectural and historic significance of the conservation area through considering issues such as the layout, open spaces, trees and landscape, focal points and important buildings. The Appraisal identifies both positive features and those which are considered to detract from its special interest of the area. It also highlights vulnerabilities and opportunities for enhancement.

Main issues

The designation of a conservation area gives the LPA additional controls over the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees, restricts some permitted development rights and tightens regulations on advertising.

Once designated, the LPA has a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of their conservation areas in undertaking their planning duties. In providing an up to date assessment of the character of the conservation area, this Appraisal is a material planning consideration.

It should be noted that this Appraisal does not propose any changes to the boundary of the conservation area or any additional planning controls beyond those already in place.

The Appraisal does not contain a detailed management plan or site-specific policies and as a result is not considered to be a Supplementary Planning

Document.

Consultation

This local engagement and collaboration and appraisal methodology is consistent with guidance from Historic England ([Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management \(Historic England Advice Note 1\)](#))

This paper follows a 6 week public consultation. 13 responses were received to the consultation document, some making numerous points. Responses to the consultation and actions taken are summarised in the Summary of Consultation Responses table at the end of this report.

The main changes made to the consultation draft Appraisal were to alter the status of the document (from consultation draft to adopted), to clarify the planning status of a number of areas/features, and to strengthen the objective assessment of the character of the area. In addition to these changes, some minor alterations/typos were also made/corrected.

This paper requests adoption of the amended Appraisal as a material planning consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
None

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Finance and Resources	None
Monitoring Officer	None
Leader of the Council	I fully support the recommendations

List of Background Papers
Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal – final version for adoption

Contact Clare Lawrence	Service Development Management & Regulatory Services
Telephone No 01189 746444	Email Clare.Lawrence@wokingham.gov.uk
Date 8/2/17	Version No. 1

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Respondent	Relevant Section	Response Summary	WBC Response
Mike Hart	Appendix VII	... omission in Appendix V11 regarding John Edmonds...Please correct his name to read The late John Edmonds.	Correction made.
WBC	Appendix IV	Sentence amended in final paragraph to include MDD policy reference.	
Duncan Fisher	Appendix V	<p>All the species and habitats mentioned match our records and are what I would expect to be present. The Ali's Pond Local Nature Reserve is formally designated but the Sonning Field extension is not. I don't know if both parts have previously been assessed as to whether they would qualify as Local Wildlife Sites (perhaps Andy could advise) but this is something that could also be considered - though not necessarily as part of this process.</p> <p>I've checked the Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory and it shows two habitat types in the conservation area:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Deciduous woodland – this mainly corresponds to the woodland already mentioned in the SW corner of the conservation area but also highlights the thin strips either side of Sonning Lane and the woodland in the SE corner adjacent to the school. It may be appropriate to recognise the woodland areas as Priority Habitat, even if it is not ancient woodland. ii. Traditional orchards – in several of what are now gardens are the remnants of traditional orchards. In the conservation area these are small in scale but with mature trees and could well support a number of important wildlife species. It may be appropriate to include a line or two on these orchard fragments. <p>Although our records on bat roosts in this area are not comprehensive, we do know of Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared roosts in some buildings already. The types of building and traditional building materials used in the conservation area increases the likelihood that bat roosts are present and I suspect that other species could well be using the buildings, bridge and ice-house. All species of bat are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) but of those likely to be present in this area only Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared, and Noctule bat are considered Priority Species. I think that the wording currently given in the Natural Environment section does reasonably recognise the importance and relevance of bats in this area but it could be tweaked slightly to use more accurate terms, if necessary.</p> <p>Notable species for this area (from TVERC records) that are not mentioned are Harvest Mouse (a Priority Species) and Swift (amber list for birds). I</p>	<p>Sentence inserted in second paragraph in recognition of Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory habitat types (Deciduous woodland and Traditional Orchards).</p> <p>Sentence inserted in fifth paragraph in recognition of additional notable species recorded within CA (Swift and Harvest Mouse).</p>

		think that Song Thrush is the only bird species given that is a Priority Species but the others given are notable or listed elsewhere and it is appropriate to recognise their importance here.	
WBC	Appendix V	Text amended to clarify designation status of land.	Amended
Diana Coulter	Page 6, 1.4, Para 3	Since the publication of the Sonning Design Statement, extensive and rapid changes to planning legislation have been implemented nationally making it timely and appropriate to re-evaluate our Conservation Area. Suggest changing “our” to “the”	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter		I guess there’s no point in burning about it, but wherever XXth century is used adjectivally, it should be hyphenated. There are probably too many to change (apologies for the pedantry!).	Point noted but no changes made
Diana Coulter		Timber-framed likewise!!	Suggested changes made to body of text. No changes made to statutory list descriptions
Diana Coulter	Page 15, Para 3	The Deanery: The street view of this Grade I listed building is modest as the principal elevations of the house are built away from perimeter wall to respect the scale of surrounding buildings. Suggest inserting “the” before “perimeter wall”.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 18, Para 3	Last word should be “unmistakable” not “unmistakeable”.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 19, Para 1	Accordingly they have particularly great importance to the nations built heritage. Insert apostrophe in “nations” to read “nation’s”.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 19, Para 1	The remaining 43 buildings are all Grade II Listed and whilst of lesser significance individually do exhibit in several circumstances a high ‘group value’ due to their proximity to each other and the character that they add to the Conservation Area. Insert a comma either side of the phrase “whilst ... individually”.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 20, Bullet 3	• Tranquility characterises the area west of the lock with views across the river to the Oxford-shire bank that can be glimpsed through the trees. Remove hyphen in Oxfordshire.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 21, Bullet 3	Of course the church building is now almost complete!	Noted
Diana Coulter	Page 22, Bullet 5	Pre-Raphaelite should have capitals.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 22, Bullet 6	Proposed re-wording of the following sentence for clarification: • The three cottages facing the northern exit from the High Street include The Old Dairy form one group, Elm Cottages another and Greendown Cottages likewise as well as Thames Terrace.	Noted but no changes made
Diana Coulter	Page 24	Traffic is a particular negative in the High Street.	Suggested point added
Diana Coulter	Page 28, Bullet 3	- lost in translation? Spring Cottage sets the tone for the conservation area as a whole surely?	Noted but no change made. The following sentence suggests these cottages establish the character of the village as a whole.
Diana Coulter	Page 29, Bullet 1	18th -century!! Also in Bullet 7 “north- west”.	Typos noted and amended
Diana Coulter	Page 32, Appendix 1, Para 1	Proposed re-wording: The improvement in transportation of materials made standardised building materials available all over the country and therefore encouraged the loss of vernacular style	Suggested change made

		and locally-sourced materials.	
Diana Coulter	Page 37, listing for the pump	NB, Gift of Rt (for Robert) Palmer.	Noted – typo amended
Diana Coulter	Page 50, Laundry Cottage	Incorrect details (just copied from the entry above). Should read: 18th- or early 19th-century two-storey and lofty as it was the drying area. Former wash-room, now the kitchen, accessed via steep stairs beside fireplace. Original casement windows to front.	Suggested change made
Diana Coulter	Page 51, listing for The Gatehouse	"19th-century maps" not "19th century maps".	Noted – typo amended
Diana Coulter	Page 54, Appendix IV, Par 4	Animal bones in the plural.	Noted but no change made as it is not clear whether these were fragments of animal bone or several complete bones that were found
Diana Coulter	Page 55, Appendix IV, Para 2	Ditto	Noted but no change made as it is not clear whether these were fragments of animal bone or several complete bones that were found
	Page 50	Hill Cottages date from late C 18 th not late C 19 th	Suggested change made
Christa and Mike Dyson		<p>We trust the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal document will be adopted. A sterling amount of work has gone in to the research and publication of it.</p> <p>Much of Sonning's charm lies in its diverse buildings but their appreciation is lost because of traffic and lack of safe pavement access - width, maintenance and dropped curbs.</p> <p>The Conservation of this village would be much improved with a bypass road.</p> <p>We are concerned about the seeming lack of provision of parking to support the newly built church hall and how this will be addressed.</p> <p>We note that pollution is not addressed in this Appraisal, be it street rubbish, air quality esp. along Thames St, noise from Heathrow flights and water quality of the Thames itself. We wonder if these might receive mention as to their management as they all directly, and indirectly, affect and support the ethos of wider good Conservation management practises. ... merely a suggestion!</p>	<p>Comments on traffic, parking and pavements noted.</p> <p>Comments on wider issue of pollution, air/river water quality and flight noise also noted. Whilst clearly important, the management of these issues falls outside the scope of this appraisal.</p>
Daphne Payne		<u>Parking</u> major problem both in the High St and Pearson Rd. No disabled parking spaces for residents who may need it (and have disabled card). The 20mph speed limit in Pearson Road is frequently ignored – again a danger for the elderly residents of the Robert Palmer Cottages – four out of six of us do have cars.	Comments on parking and speeding noted
Paul Etherington		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider pavements would be great, if impractical; this would work if there was a new river crossing reducing the amount of traffic in the 	Comments on wider pavements, parking and need for another river

		<p>CA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils/churchgoers in Sonning Lane parking cars on street at least afford a degree of traffic calming • There are some curious extensions already in the CA. Don't understand how some of these got planning – poor precedent • More could be made of CA history/architecture – I learnt a lot from the appraisal document which I would have liked to have known before • I'd like better/more consistent street lighting albeit in authentic 'aged' style...Pound Lane difficult to walk down safely at night as such large gaps in light layout 	<p>crossing noted.</p> <p>Comments on the potential to write more on the history/architecture of the CA also noted. Clearly more could be written, however a balance needs to be struck between providing a detailed account of the history/architecture of the village and the limitations of a character appraisal document to be used in planning decision making.</p>
Carol McDiarmid		<p>Excellent document.</p> <p>Wanted to add to comments about traffic. Living on the corner of Pearson Road and Sonning Lane for 10 years, we have seen (and been directly affected by) damage to cars parked on the road by passing traffic. This has involved cars shunting into parked cars, and most recently (1 month ago) our visitors car scraped by cars pulling in to let other traffic past. I estimate at least one car is damaged on this corner every year.</p>	<p>Comments on the risks arising from street parking within the relatively narrow historic streets noted.</p>
John Sandall		<p>Aspects of conservation should be mindful of people safety e.g. footpaths, access to buildings.</p>	<p>Comments noted.</p>
Gillian Freeman		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very infrequent bus service (128 is hourly, 850 is hourly but both arrive and depart at around the same time so the service is effectively hourly) is a real problem in Sonning. The service doesn't run evenings or Sundays – it's almost impossible therefore to live in Sonning without a car. • The pavements are really a little inadequate. • The lack of anywhere to get provisions in the village is a shame. • Overall Sonning is a lovely picturesque village but enabling residents to get in and out and visitors to visit by foot (the roads can't really cope with traffic) would be an advantage. 	<p>Comments on phasing of bus arrivals/departures and lack of Sunday service noted.</p> <p>Comment on narrow pavements noted and recognised as an issue within the document.</p> <p>Comments on lack of provisions within the village also noted. The viability of local shops within rural villages is a longstanding issue nationally.</p>
Ronald Atkins		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Street should be one way throughout (Pearson Rd to Thames St.) as there is always parked cars against the Deanery wall. • Sonning Lane should be free of parked cars during the day if more parking room can be found in Blue Coat School. 	<p>Comments on one-way traffic and idea of providing parking on the periphery of the village noted.</p>
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society and Sonning Parish Council		<p>Reference is made in Para 1.1 that the SCAA has been produced using the Guidance set out by Historic England in their document "Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal & Management (2011)". Please note that this</p>	<p>Yes, this new document contains very similar advice. It is correct however to say the Appraisal was</p>

		document has been superseded by a document published in February 2016 with the same title but now called Historic England Advice Note 1. A copy of this document is attached and reference is made to it to illustrate the following points.	largely produced using the earlier guidance as this was current during the period most of the work was carried out. It was suggested at our meeting that, as the HE Guidance changed during the production of the document, that the latest name is included in brackets i.e. "Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal & Management (2011) (now replaced by Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management: Historic England Advice Note 1)". This is worth doing not least because the old guidance has now been archived by Historic England.
		On page 5 and elsewhere in Advice Note 1 there is mention of the need to describe both the positive and negative aspects when carrying out a Conservation Area Appraisal. We have noted that there are several cases where WBC have removed references in the draft to developments that the Society and SPC consider to have been inconsistent with the character of the setting in which they have been built. Whilst we understand that WBC is sensitive to criticisms of planning approvals that have subsequently turned out to be less than desirable, and whilst we are willing to see the wording modified, we feel that removal of the comment altogether implies that the developments are considered to be of a character that is acceptable for future applications, which we do not feel is the case.	Yes, it is certainly the case that both positive and negative aspects of an area need to be highlighted in order to understand what special historic/architectural interest should be preserved and vice versa. We do acknowledge the strength of feeling about certain developments but cannot criticise specific planning decisions. Having said this, we did discuss the fact that references are still contained within the document, particularly in the Key Negative Characteristics/Issues section on Pearson Road Character Area (Page 25).
		The above comment also applies to the impact of traffic on the Conservation Area. On page 17 of Advice Note 1 mention is made of the impact of heavy traffic. In the public consultation which took	Yes, although traffic-related issues are still mentioned throughout the document, we

		place in 1996 on the previous CAA, the effect of traffic was the most significant impact noted by attendees to the exhibition. We therefore feel that the changes that WBC have made to paras 7.1 & 7.2 of the draft are inappropriate.	agree that the initial editing was over zealous in removing a sentence in 7.1. We suggested putting back the following sentence as point 4 in section 7.1: 4. High levels of peak-hour traffic on weekdays, the school run, weekend sporting and other leisure-based events; traffic humps have been in place for some years now: two in Thames Street, one in Charvil Lane and two in Pound Lane. However these treat only the symptoms of forcing traffic to enter the narrow streets of a historic village when by all measures a bypass and new Thames Bridge is the only cure.
		We understand that WBC has many other pressing cases to deal with but we feel that the latest changes have been made at the 11th hour in a document that has already taken 5 years to evolve from its inception in October 2011.	Yes, some of the changes were made late in the day as part of consultation with the senior management team. These review steps are necessary prior to the document going before the Executive Member for approval. Ideally these review steps would have been undertaken earlier, but time pressures inevitably force people to work to deadlines of the approval cycle.
WBC	Section 1.3 Status of Document	Text updated to reflect the fact that the document is no longer in draft format for public consultation but in its final format for adoption. Sentence added to confirm that no changes to the conservation area boundary are proposed.	
WBC	Front cover photograph	Photograph highlights and may be perceived to promote an individual business.	Photograph changed
WBC	Appendix II Listed Buildings	Concern over copyright of photograph of The Deanery	Photograph replaced with alternative.
WBC	Sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4	Additions to text for clarification.	
WBC	Section 3, penultimate	Text shortened for clarification.	

	paragraph		
WBC	Sections 4.2 and 4.5	Text additions/amendments for clarification.	
WBC	Section 6	Text additions/amendments for clarification and to strengthen the objective assessment of character.	
WBC	Section 7.1 and 7.2	Text additions/amendments for clarification.	

This page is intentionally left blank