

**ST NEOTS CONSERVATION AREA:
BOUNDARY REVIEW, CHARACTER STATEMENT AND MANAGEMENT
PLAN CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS**

(Report by Head of Planning Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the attached draft documents and approve them for consultation purposes. Once representations have been received and considered, it is intended to seek Cabinet's endorsement of the documents for use as material considerations in the context of planning proposals.
- 1.2 The Boundary Review proposes the amalgamation of the existing Conservation Areas in St Neots, Eynesbury and Eaton Socon in line with English Heritage's general guidance on the management of conservation areas. This recognises that many existing conservation area boundaries are too tightly drawn.
- 1.3 The conduct of the boundary review has followed the methodology contained in the Huntingdonshire Conservation Area Boundary review Guidance Document, which was approved by Cabinet in January 2003.
- 1.4 The Character Assessment is for the enlarged area and once approved (following consultation) this document will carry weight as a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 1.5 A Conservation Area Management Plan has been produced to clearly identify, co-ordinate and programme a series of specific projects for the enhancement of the Ramsey Conservation Area.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any "areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Planning Policy Guidance 15 (4.2) makes it clear that it is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas.

- 2.2 In addition to its statutory obligations under the Planning Act, Best Value Performance Indicators 219a, b and c also require local authorities to deliver and review their policy and documentation associated with Conservation Areas over a rolling five year period.
- 2.3 **St Neots Conservation Area Boundary Review:** Parts of St Neots, Eynesbury and Eaton Socon are already designated as conservation areas. St Neots was the first, on 30th November 1971, Eynesbury next on 16th February 1976 and Eaton Socon most recently on 20th May 1991. Under Section 69 local planning authorities also have a duty to review their areas from time to time. This review is part of the ongoing programme previously approved by Cabinet and has been conducted according to the Council's Review Policy adopted in January 2003.
- 2.3 **St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment:** This document covers the area included within the new proposed conservation area boundaries. Section 71 of the 1990 Act places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas. This document fulfils this requirement and links policy for St Neots to other existing Local Planning Guidance for Huntingdonshire, notably the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPG (2004) and the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPG (2004).
- 2.4 **ST Neots Conservation Area Management Plan:** This document takes the form of a strategy plan and a schedule of projects. The intention being to progress each project in more detail following the consultation period. The schedule of projects is divided into distinct areas of work. These will require the contribution of a range of officers and interest groups but they are all intended to respond to the deficiencies identified in the character statement. The intention of the plan is to coordinate projects being carried out and to avoid a piece meal outcome – thereby maximising benefit.

3. THE PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The Boundary Review document establishes the extent of the historic settlements of St Neots, Eynesbury and the Eatons prior to the building of the peripheral housing estates in the 20th century. It takes a pragmatic view of how far the settlements can be preserved and enhanced for the future and includes the setting where this is essential to the specialness of the whole.
- 3.2 The St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment reflects the complexity of the area as an historic settlement. The document explores its essential elements and includes:-
- A Statement of Significance, outlining important historic and natural features;
 - A brief history of the town's development that shows the contribution of each phase to the overall historic nature of the settlement;
 - A breakdown of the town/villages into their neighbourhoods, which forms the basis of an assessment of its character;

- A design code to help and guide prospective developers and homeowners to make design decisions in keeping with the historic nature of the traditional built environment;
 - Opportunities within the boundaries of the conservation area open to future enhancement or development.
- 3.3 The format of the Character Assessment differs from previous character statements and reflects the special needs of St Neots and recent work undertaken by this Local Authority in the development of planning guidance.
- 3.4 The Management Plan presents the following areas of work as a strategy for the improvement of the Conservation Area:
- Urban Design Frameworks: creating a set of planning principles for the re-development or enhancement of a wide area.
 - Development Briefs: presenting a site analysis and concept ideas for the re-development of specific sites.
 - Enhancement Areas: an inventory of specific enhancement projects and/or improvements within a defined area.
 - Buildings at Risk: co-ordinating a strategy for the improvement of poorly-maintained listed buildings.
 - Negative or neutral areas: identifying locations where poor design detracts from the townscape.
- 3.5 The contents of the Management Plan are not exhaustive and present a series of proposals as a starting point for the enhancement of the Conservation Area over the next five years. The intention is for the Plan to be taken forward in conjunction with an Advisory Group comprising local people and interest groups.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Production of the Boundary Review, Character Assessment and Management Plan for St Neots contributes to the legal obligations of Huntingdonshire District Council as the local planning authority, and reflects the Authority's support of the local community.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That the Cabinet approves the three documents as a basis for further discussion and public consultation.

Background papers

1. Conservation Area Boundary Review Policy Document, Huntingdonshire District Council, January 2003.
2. Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPG 2004
3. Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPG 2004

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