

**ST NEOTS CONSERVATION AREA: BOUNDARY REVIEW, CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

(Report by Planning Policy Manager)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the responses to the draft St Neots Boundary Review, Character Assessment and Management Plan Consultation Documents and to consider the Council's response.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 **St Neots Conservation Area Boundary Review:** Section 69 of the above Act 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 St Neots already has three distinct conservation areas, designating discreet parts of the town centre, Eynesbury and Eaton Socon. Under Section 69 local planning authorities has a duty to review their conservation 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 assessment covers the area included within the 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 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:** The Management Plan flows from the requirements of Section 71 and presents a series of proposal which, once implemented, will bring enhancement of the Conservation Area. The Plan makes suggestions for a number of projects which will be taken forward in conjunction with appropriate groups of officers and local people.
- 2.5 Cabinet approved these documents for a period of consultation on 20th July 2006. The consultation commenced on 7th August and expired on

22nd September 2006. During this time, in addition to the consultation with statutory organisations, a week-long public exhibition has been held in the Town Council offices, public notices have been posted and all homes in the St Neots area were leafleted via the free press.

- 2.6 The designation of the revised boundary for the St Neots Conservation Area and the adoption of the Character Assessment and Management Plan as material considerations in planning decisions would be important steps in protecting the historic environment. The guidance contained in the Character Assessment will ensure that any forthcoming development will be of a high architectural merit and urban design quality.

3. THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

- 3.1 On 21st August 2006, the Development Control Panel supported the proposals set out in the draft Boundary Review Document, Character Assessment and Management Plan.
- 3.2 Seven written responses have been received from statutory agencies, local organisations and members of the public. An additional 34 questionnaire responses were completed at the exhibition, some of which contained additional written comments. In all, 34 specific issues have been raised. A summary of the respondents and their comments is contained within Appendix 1. Suggested additional wording is contained with Appendix 2.
- 3.3 The large majority of respondents were supportive of the proposal to amalgamate and extend the conservation area boundaries. Two respondents objected to the inclusion of their property within the new boundary. Further review of the boundary in these areas has concluded that amendments to accommodate the views of the objectors would not be justified set against the Council adopted methodology and English Heritage guidance. Furthermore, omission of these properties would reduce the potential benefits deriving from the proposed boundary position. It is not, therefore, intended to amend the boundary in these locations.
- 3.4 Two further queries related to the inclusion of further land within the extended conservation area. These proposals have been assessed and it has been concluded that inclusion of these areas could not be justified. It is not, therefore, intended to amend the boundary in these locations.
- 3.5 No adverse comments were received in relation to the Management Plan, which was generally considered to indicate a positive approach to the enhancement of the Conservation Area.
- 3.6 If Cabinet agrees to adopt the revisions to the boundary, appropriate notices will be advertised in accordance with the provisions of section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 That the Cabinet considers the responses to comments presented in Appendix 1 and agrees to:

1. Designate the St Neots Conservation Area according to the boundary in the St Neots Boundary Review document without modification;
2. Adopt the St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment (as previously circulated) with the amendments contained in Appendix 1 and 2 of this report, which will become a material consideration in planning decisions.
3. Adopt the St Neots Conservation Area Management Plan as a set of proposals for the enhancement of the Conservation Area and as a basis for further discussion and project work.
4. Authorize the Head of Planning Services to make any minor consequential amendments to the text and illustrations necessary as a result of these changes, after consultation with the Executive Member for Planning Strategy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Conservation Area Boundary Review Policy Document, Huntingdonshire District Council, January 2003.
2. Draft St Neots Boundary Review, Character Assessment and Management Plan July 2006

Contact Officer: Chris Surfleet
Design & Implementation Team Leader
☎ 01480 388476