

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL  
(ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING)  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PANEL  
CABINET

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**THE HOUGHTON AND WYTON CONSERVATION AREA  
CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND BOUNDARY REVIEW**

**(Report by Head of Planning & Housing Strategy)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to describe the technical and consultation processes that have informed the proposed Boundary Review and Character Assessment of the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area, and recommend to Cabinet that both documents are supported for formal adoption.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The key current legislative and policy background that underpins the process of undertaking a Conservation Area boundary review are set out in:

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- The National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

2.2 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places duties 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*” (Section 69).
- To “*from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas.*” (Section 69 (2)).
- To formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas (Section 71).

2.3 Paragraph 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) states that “*when considering the designation of Conservation Areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.*”

- 2.4 In 2011 Huntingdonshire District Council received a request from Houghton and Wyton Parish Council to undertake a review of the existing Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area (see Appendix 1). This review required an analysis to identify the extent and special interest of the area, which was considered through the preparation of a Conservation Area Character Assessment and related Boundary Review proposals.
- 2.5 The analysis considered the whole of the existing Conservation Area, and also included additional areas, particularly in the context of St Ives West strategic direction of growth identified in the Core Strategy (adopted 2009).

### **3. THE CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND BOUNDARY REVIEW**

- 3.1 The Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area was originally designated on 14 October 1974. The boundary of the area was drawn tightly around building groups and did not reflect a thorough or justified examination of the wider area's historic merit or development. It was consequently amended on 18 February 1980.
- 3.2 In 2003, the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area boundary was considered as a case study under criteria established within the District Council's adopted "*The Review of Conservation Area Boundaries in Huntingdonshire*" document. The case study concluded that the Conservation Area boundary could be amended to include areas of special interest to the north of the A1123 to include historic fields to the south of Thicket Road and parts of Houghton Hill to the north of Thicket Road.
- 3.3 In 2011, at the request of Houghton and Wyton Parish Council, the case study was re-examined in reference to current best practice, and to take account of potential new development in the area. A thorough re-examination of the earlier Conservation Area boundary review concluded that the 2003 case study had accurately identified the special interest of areas intended for inclusion within any revised boundary. The case study was therefore taken forward through a formal boundary review process, leading to the creation of the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area Boundary Review document which has been subject to public consultation.
- 3.4 The enlarged area proposed within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area Boundary Review document (see Appendix 2) reflects the findings of an updated Conservation Area Character Assessment that was prepared as part of the boundary review process. A Conservation Area is defined as a 'Designated Heritage Asset' and the policies related to these are a material consideration which must be taken into account in development management decisions. The Conservation Area Character Assessment describes the nature, extent and importance of the historic environment. It provides guidance to residents, developers and agents to assist them to prepare development proposals that seek to sustain and enhance the Conservation Area.

- 3.5 The content of the Character Assessment complies with the 2011 English Heritage guidance and seeks to convey the special architectural and historical interest of the Conservation Area through maps, photographic illustrations and written text. Specific references are made to:
- The essential characteristics of the Conservation Area including settlement pattern, important views, focal points and landmark buildings.
  - Detailed assessments of the character of distinct areas or zones within the conservation area.
  - The historic development of the villages and their listed buildings.
  - The contribution of green open spaces, trees and gardens to the special interest of the Conservation Area.
- 3.6 The amended Conservation Area boundary addresses the historic interest of the settlement, as well as reflecting the setting of the villages and significant views and vistas. It is proposed that some areas of more recent development within the village should be excluded from the Conservation Area as these do not meet the criteria for continued inclusion. The proposed new Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area boundary is shown in Appendix 2.

#### **4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The District Council consulted on the draft Conservation Area Character Statement and Boundary Review proposals for 8 weeks from 6 July to 31 August 2012. The consultation commenced with a staffed exhibition at the Houghton and Wyton Village Fete on Saturday 7 July 2012. Consultation letters were sent to the residents at 65 addresses affected by the proposed boundary changes, and 13 stakeholder consultees including local Members.
- 4.2 The District Council's Conservation Team ran two public exhibitions in the Houghton Memorial Hall on 17 and 18 of July 2012. These were advertised by the Parish Council and through the HDC website. The events were based on the consultation documents, and also exhibited historic maps and other relevant information.
- 4.3 The consultation documents were advertised and posted on the HDC website, and responses could be made through the District Council's website based consultation portal, which further advertised the consultation documents to some 3,500 correspondents and statutory consultees. Hard copies of the draft documents and consultation response forms were placed in the Huntingdon Customer Service Centre, Huntingdon and St Ives Libraries.

## **5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

5.1 The consultation process generated 26 responses which were received via telephone, letter, email and through the Councils' website consultation portal. A summary of all the feedback received may be found as Appendix 3 at the back of this report. A Map indicating the areas suggested by respondents for addition or omission from the revised conservation area is Appendix 4. All the responses have been reviewed and suggested amendments to the proposed boundary assessed against the criteria for inclusion within a conservation area:

5.2 Many respondents suggested more than one amendment to the conservation area boundary. Ten additional areas and two lanes (see Appendix 2) were put forward for inclusion within the conservation area. These areas were once again re-assessed to establish whether they met the criteria for inclusion within a conservation area, the test being whether those areas possess special historic or architectural interest or contribute to the special historic or architectural interest of the Conservation Area.

### ***Proposed Additional Areas – results of re-assessment***

#### **Area One: The How, St Ives**

5.3 One response proposed that The How and its grounds be included within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area. The How is a small country house set within extensive grounds just north of what were previously the clay quarries of The How Brick Works.

#### ***Response to Representation***

5.4 The building is not listed and was previously determined to have insufficient special interest for inclusion within the St Ives Conservation Area. No special historic relationship between The How and Houghton and Wyton could be found and therefore it shall not be included within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area.

#### **Area Two: Field to the east of Houghton Grange (BBSRC field)**

5.5 Eight responses proposed that the former BBSRC field should be included within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area. This field was formerly located within the St Ives town boundary and was assessed in 2007 in respect of inclusion within the St Ives Conservation Area. Although it was proposed for inclusion in the draft proposals, this was challenged during the consultation phase of the St Ives boundary review because respondents argued that it did not have special interest or make a significant contribution to the setting of St Ives. Upon re-assessment at that time it was agreed that there was insufficient special interest and therefore the decision was made not to include this field within the St Ives Conservation Area.

### *Response to Representations*

- 5.6 The significance of this field has been re-assessed for inclusion within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area. The field now lies within the Houghton and Wyton parish boundary as a result of a change in the parish boundaries following the creation of the Wyton on the Hill administrative area in 2009. The field has historically been farmland in the parish of St Ives but was developed in part as a Poultry Research Station in the late 1950s.
- 5.7 No new evidence to support an assessment of special interest has been put forward by respondents, or revealed in the investigations of District Council's Conservation team. The question is therefore whether the land makes a significant contribution to the setting of the Conservation Area, which is one of the key criteria in assessing whether boundary changes can be justified. This is principally assessed by identifying views from within the Conservation Area which include the land under consideration. The BBSRC field is shielded from the Conservation Area by The Thicket to the south and by the deep hedgerows of the Houghton Grange estate. The land is not visible from the Great Ouse valley or from Thicket Road.
- 5.8 It is therefore considered that, under the criteria required within the Conservation Area boundary review process, the field does not contribute to the special interest of the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area and should not therefore be included within the boundary.

### **Area Three: The Thicket**

- 5.9 Three responses suggested that The Thicket be included within the Conservation Area.

### *Response to Representations*

- 5.10 The Thicket is already included within the St Ives Conservation Area reflecting its historic connection with St Ives. It is considered that The Thicket should remain a part of St Ives Conservation Area.

### **Area Four: Field north of Houghton Grange**

- 5.11 One response suggested that the field located opposite Houghton Grange should be included in the Conservation Area. This field is now situated within the parish of Wyton on the Hill; the eastern boundary of this field marks the historic boundary between Houghton and Wyton and St Ives. The western boundary is characterised by the trackway and approaches to Houghton Hill Farm.

### *Response to Representation*

- 5.12 Historic map evidence suggests that the field, which was previously sub divided into three, has been farmland since the late 1700s. Crop marks indicate the presence of former ridge and furrow earthworks in the south eastern corner but these have long since been ploughed out. The field has

no special interest that would justify its inclusion within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area.

**Area Five: Triangle of land centred on the site of the former Black Eagle Windmill**

- 5.13 Five responses suggested that the site of the former Black Eagle Mill and surrounding fields bounded by the A1123, B1090 and Cottage Lane be included within the Conservation Area. The Black Eagle Windmill was a post mill situated on the crest of Houghton Hill. One door lock from the Black Eagle Windmill bearing the date of demolition (1902) is kept in the National Mills Archive reference collection and a second lock and key is held in the Norris Museum post-medieval collection. The mill was painted by the artists Henry Woods and David Woodlock.

*Response to Representations*

- 5.14 Apart from the mill mound, nothing remains of the windmill itself. The miller's house and a small barn survive, the house being Grade II listed. The surrounding land is farmland of no special interest. The building is listed and therefore has special interest in itself, but the loss of the windmill has removed the special interest of its historic context to the conservation area and therefore, on balance, the mill house should not be included within the Conservation Area.

**Area Six: Hill Estate**

- 5.15 One response suggested that The Hill Estate should be included within the Conservation Area due to historic interest, trees and green space worthy of protecting. The estate was built between 1949 and 1965 and is of a typical post war character and appearance. The grassy central area and mature trees are a valuable amenity resource for residents.

*Response to Representation*

- 5.16 The Hill Estate is an interesting survival from the post war period but it stands separate from the principal historic area of Houghton and does not have the special interest that would contribute to the character and appearance of the wider conservation area. The area is not suitable for inclusion within the Conservation Area boundary.

**Area Seven: Former gravel quarries, now lakes, to north of A1123**

- 5.17 Two responses suggested that these ponds should be included within the Conservation Area for their landscape value.

*Response to Representations*

- 5.18 Although the lakes provide general habitat and landscape value they were created from gravel workings less than 5 years ago and have no special

historic interest that would justify their inclusion within the Conservation Area.

#### **Area Eight: Common land to the south west of Houghton Hall**

- 5.19 One response suggested that the area of common land to the south west of Houghton Hall should be included within the Conservation Area. The common land and meadows to the south east of Houghton Hall are already proposed for inclusion within the Conservation Area due to their contribution to the special interest of Houghton and Wyton.

##### *Response to Representation*

- 5.20 Upon re-assessing this area it became apparent that the land corresponds to a shared 'common' marking the convergence of Ware Lane, St Ives Road, Ruddles Lane, Mere Way and Meadow Lane. This important historic gateway to Houghton and Wyton, and the associated meadows to the south, remain identifiable to travellers along the A1123 as an area of green space incorporating wide grassy verges and mature hedgerows. The common land contributes to the special interest of the Conservation Area and is therefore proposed for inclusion within the Conservation Area boundary.

#### **Area Nine: Common Land to west of Splash Lane**

- 5.21 One response suggested the inclusion of a small area of common land to the west of Splash Lane which has an historic link with the villages but which has been separated from Wyton by the A1123.

##### *Response to Representation*

- 5.22 Unfortunately, the historic and physical relationship to the village has been lost and there is not a justification for it to be included within the Conservation Area.

#### **Area Ten: North bank of the River Great Ouse, west of Wyton**

- 5.23 Five responses suggested that the north bank of the River Great Ouse west of Wyton should be included within the Conservation Area. The southern bank and water meadows are included within The Hemingfords Conservation Area.

##### *Response to Representations*

- 5.24 There are long views across the meadows from The Hemingfords but from the southern bank of the river the character of the land beyond the north bank is of arable land mostly screened by willow trees and natural vegetation. The river bank landscape forms part of the setting to the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area but it has insufficient special interest in its own right to be included in the Conservation Area.

### **Ruddles Lane and Splash Lane**

- 5.25 One response suggested that Ruddles Lane and Splash Lane should be included within the Conservation Area.

#### *Response to representation*

- 5.26 Splash Lane is an historic trackway which has been separated from Wyton by the A1123 and its physical and contextual relationship to the village has been lost. Ruddles Lane is also an ancient trackway that has also been severed from its historic context by the A1123. However, it retains a physical relationship with the common land north of Houghton and contributes to an understanding of the significance of Ware Lane which makes an important contribution to the historic development of Houghton and Wyton. Due to this significance, a 60m length of Ruddles Lane which abuts the common land north of Houghton is proposed to be included within the Conservation Area.

### **Areas Proposed For Exclusion – results of re-assessment**

- 5.27 Two responses suggested that the proposed Conservation Area boundary should be reduced in size to exclude Houghton Grange, and Houghton Hill in its entirety.

#### **Houghton Grange**

- 5.28 One respondent suggested that Houghton Grange and its grounds should not be included for the following reasons:
- The site adds no appreciable spatial quality from a longer distance due to screening from belts of trees on three sides
  - The site does not form part of a key settlement edge
  - The existing trees are already protected with Tree Preservation Orders
  - Much of the historic quality of the site has been lost through the piecemeal development of outbuildings and laboratories which are now in disrepair
  - The site has no archaeological significance
  - Opportunities for economic regeneration and character enhancement are already fully covered by the approved residential development



### *Response to Representation*

- 5.29 Having re-assessed Houghton Grange and its grounds it has been concluded that it should remain as part of the proposed Conservation Area for the following reasons:
- The belts of trees surrounding Houghton Grange are part of a planned landscape which defines an historic estate and contributes to the special interest of the Conservation Area.
  - The site marks the furthest eastward expansion of Houghton when wealthy Victorian and Edwardian patrons bought large parts of Houghton Hill to establish their country houses and estates. This makes an important contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area.
  - The Conservation Area designation is not being made solely to protect veteran trees. The protection afforded by the designation will allow future management of the site to better reveal the significance of surviving heritage assets.
  - A recent Archaeological Evaluation Report<sup>1</sup> suggests limited survival of cut features due to landscaping for the Houghton Grange gardens and due to later BBSRC activity. This does not lessen the special interest of the estate as a whole.
  - Designation will continue protection of the character and appearance of the historic environment after the approved development is complete.

### **Houghton Hill**

#### *Response to representation*

- 5.30 Houghton Hill has been shaped by the eastward expansion of Houghton in the 19th Century when wealthy Victorian and Edwardian patrons bought large parts of Houghton Hill to establish their country houses and estates. The estate grounds were planned and modified to enhance the natural landscape. This makes an important contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area and therefore the proposed part of Houghton Hill shall be included.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Archaeology East, unpublished archaeological evaluation report No 1046. HER Event No.ECB 2283 (2008).

## **Consultation feedback - other matters for consideration**

### **County Wildlife Sites**

- 5.31 The Wildlife Trust expressed concern that including Wildlife Trust managed land in the Conservation Area would result in unnecessary bureaucracy and disrupt day to day running of the sites, due to the additional protections afforded to trees by the designation of a Conservation Area. The Wildlife Trust asked the Local Authority to consider whether there were any additional benefits to having the County Wildlife Sites included within the Conservation Area.

#### *Response to Representation*

- 5.32 The District Council's Trees and Landscape Team confirms that long term agreements which allow for a five year management plan for coppicing tree works would be acceptable. The Wildlife Trust land proposed for inclusion within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area has special interest in its own right but is also important in providing the historic landscape setting for the built environment. It shall therefore be included within the Conservation Area as proposed.

### **General feedback**

- 5.33 Invaluable feedback was provided by local historians and other consultees who made suggestions regarding aspects of the historical content of the draft Conservation Area Character Statement and Boundary Review documents, which have been amended and refined as a result.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The production of the Character Assessment and Boundary Review documents for the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area contributes to the legal obligations of Huntingdonshire District Council as the local planning authority, and reflects the Authority's support for local heritage assets and their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.

## **7. RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 That Cabinet endorses the revised Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area Character Assessment and Conservation Area Boundary Review and recommends that both documents are supported for formal adoption.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPG 2007

Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPG 2007

Conservation Area Boundary Review Policy Document, Huntingdonshire District Council, January 2003.

National Planning Policies Framework, DCLG, 2012.

Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation Appraisal and Management, English Heritage, 2011.

HDC Internal Conservation Team Document: Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area Review Ranging Survey, 2003. (Full text in Boundary Review document, annex 1).

HDC Internal Conservation Team Document: Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area Review Site Survey, 2003, revised 2011. (Full text in Boundary Review document, annex 2)

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