

Committee: Cabinet

Agenda Item

Date: 13 December 2012

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Title: Conservation Area Appraisal, Saffron Walden

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Barker

Key decision: **No**

Summary

1. This report has been prepared and discussed with Saffron Walden Town Council who support its general content. The draft Conservation Area Appraisal for Saffron Walden was made available on the council's website and as printed copies. A public exhibition on 1 October 2012 was attended by officers who presented the findings and answered questions. This report summarises and comments on the representations made at the exhibition and subsequent to it in the consultation period which lasted from 24 September until 4 November 2012.
2. Saffron Walden Town Council welcomed the Conservation Area Appraisal in principle and considered it a worthwhile document which is likely to strengthen the control of development. This comment is valuable and is one shared by officers. The experience of the Conservation Area Appraisals so far undertaken indicates that the process is both important and popular with the local communities.

Recommendations

3. That the Conservation Area Appraisal be approved and used to assist in the process of determining planning applications and for implementing Management proposals.
4. That the Saffron Walden Conservation Area boundary be formally amended.

Financial Implications

5. The recommendation would require the advertising of the boundary changes which would cost in the region of £500 - 600. This can be met from existing budgets for Conservation. Publication of the document will be via the website.

Background Papers

6. Notes of the public exhibition held on 1 October 2012 and all representations received.

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	Full consultation undertaken.
Community Safety	Not affected
Equalities	Not affected

Finance	Advertising costs can be met from existing budgets. The document will be disseminated through the website.
Health and Safety	Not affected.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Not affected
Sustainability	The report focuses on environmental issues seeking to preserve the environment of the respective communities, including their buildings and open spaces.
Ward-specific impacts	Saffron Walden Audley, Saffron Walden Castle and Saffron Walden Shire - various proposals as amended and as contained in report.
Workforce/Workplace	Existing staff resources.

Situation

8. The Saffron Walden Conservation Area was first designated in 1968 and revised in 1991. The council has a duty within section 69 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Act 1990 to consider the designation of Conservation Areas and to undertake periodic reviews. As part of this work the Council has undertaken a number of Conservation Area Appraisals of existing Conservation Areas.
9. This report sets out the key issues within the attached Conservation Area Appraisal and sets out the results of the consultation exercise and the changes proposed.
10. The principal issues and recommendations set out in the document are:

Changes to the existing Conservation Area boundary. Alterations to the Conservation Area boundary are proposed.

Inclusions:

- (a) Extend the Conservation Area to include the historic frontage area of the Radwinter Road Cemetery.
- (b) Extend the Conservation Area to include Elm Grove Lodge on Audley Road.

Exclusions:

- (a) Revise the Conservation Area boundary to exclude that part of the Swan Meadow car park that currently lies within it.

Note: As a result of the consultation, respondents, including Saffron Walden Town Council, have responded to the above alterations to the Conservation Area. A number of other points were raised by respondents relating to issues raised in the Appraisal report. These representations are included in the table below with appropriate officer comment.

General notes:

Planning Control and Good Practice: Listed Buildings and buildings at risk.

Within the Conservation Area there are two Listed Buildings currently defined as being at Risk. These are the Castle Keep and 12 Market Hill. This Appraisal has identified five other potential Listed Building candidates that Officers should examine further and if appropriate, also consider them for inclusion. These are Moore's Garage, Bridge Street; no. 31 Castle Street, garden wall to The Grange, Church Street; The Folly, Elm Grove and no. 5 Bridge Street. The District Council considers the resolution of these issues as being of importance. The loss of these buildings/ structures would be entirely unacceptable.

Planning Controls and Good Practice in Respect of Other Buildings that Make an Important Architectural or Historic Contribution. A number of such unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area have been identified. The council should seek to ensure that these are retained and these are set out in the Appraisal.

Proposed Article 4 Directions. There are other distinctive features that are integral to some of the unlisted buildings identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal for Saffron Walden that make an important architectural or historic contribution, including selected chimneys, windows and other architectural detailing. In some situations protection already exists through existing planning controls but in other cases protection could only be provided by removing Permitted Development Rights via an Article 4 Direction. Should the Council consider such a course of action appropriate there would be a process of notifying the affected owners separately at a later date. This would be associated with further detailed consideration and possible refinement of the general proposals set out earlier in this Appraisal.

Planning Controls and Good Practice in Respect of Other Distinctive Features that Make an Important Architectural or Historic Contribution. The Appraisal identifies a number of features including walls and or railings that make a particular contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. The walls/railings are protected from demolition without prior consent by virtue of exceeding the specified heights relevant to the Conservation Area or by Listed Building legislation.

Planning Control and Good Practice, Important Open Spaces, Trees and Groups of Trees.

Important open land, open spaces and gaps. Open spaces are particularly important in a densely populated historic urban area such as Saffron Walden. Frequently such spaces provide a setting for important groups of Listed Buildings and they may be also associated with well used pedestrian footpaths. Within the Conservation Area the existing Local Plan identifies the following open spaces to be 'Protected Open Spaces of Environmental Value' namely the green sward corner of Little Walden Road/ Catons Lane, the Castle Grounds, St. Mary's churchyard together with the Close Garden and site of former Dorset House, the grounds to Walden Place, Jubilee Gardens and the Common. This Appraisal considers these open spaces have been appropriately designated and has also identified several others for consideration to be included in the replacement Local Development Framework. These are open land adjacent to Freshwell Gardens and green swards providing the setting to King Edward VI Almshouses at Abbey and the Bowling Green near Hanover Place off Abbey Lane. All these open spaces represent landscape features that materially contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and should be protected.

Enhancement Proposals to Deal with Detracting Elements. The Appraisal identifies a number of detracting elements together with a proposed course of action.

It is recognised that such improvements will frequently only be achieved with the co-operation of owners and other bodies as appropriate.

10 Consultation results

The comments received at the public exhibition and during the consultation period are set out in the table arranged in the subject order above. Those responses which noted minor inaccuracies in the text of the Draft Conservation Area Appraisal, such as the misspelling of building names, are not included here.

Issue	Representations made	Officer comment
Changes to the Conservation Area	<p>The Town Council supports the proposals to extend the Conservation Area to include Elm Grove Lodge and to exclude Swan Meadow car park.</p> <p>The Town Council objects to the proposal to include the historic frontage area of Radwinter Road cemetery.</p> <p>A Saffron Walden resident suggests the old Training College on South Road should be included in the Conservation Area.</p>	<p>Officers consider the grouping of listed buildings, 19th century tombstones, flint walls, trees and open space to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant inclusion within the Conservation Area.</p> <p>Officers consider the building, now converted to residential use, to not retain sufficient interest for inclusion in the Conservation Area.</p>
Buildings that make an important contribution to the Conservation Area	<p>A Saffron Walden resident approves of the strengthening of policies designed to protect the architectural features of properties in Mount Pleasant Road.</p> <p>Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) approves the proposed use of Article 4 Directions.</p> <p>Churchill Retirement Living note that the identification of the flint building at Lodge Farm, Radwinter Road as being of note is not appropriate.</p> <p>Churchill Retirement Living note that the current application proposal for the tall flint boundary wall seeks to reduce this feature in height.</p>	<p>Officers consider the wall to be of sufficient historical interest to make a positive contribution to the street scene. The reference to the building should be removed.</p>

<p>Detracting elements</p>	<p>The Town Council comment with reference to poor quality public realm outside shops in George Street that they would wish to be in control of any plans here.</p> <p>SPAB and a Saffron Walden resident note that the Appraisal neglects to mention the inappropriate yellow kerb markings that have recently been applied along much of Church Street.</p>	<p>The Town Council would be a statutory consultee on any future planning application.</p> <p>The local community and the Town Council could contact Essex County Council Highways to seek less intrusive markings in respect of Church Street. Considerable improvements have been made over recent years. Agreement has been reached for further improvements in the future and minor works are now authorized by the Highways Panel.</p>
<p>Management proposals</p>	<p>The Town Council and two Saffron Walden residents note that the planting an Ash tree in the centre of the Turf Maze may need further investigation.</p> <p>Saffron Walden residents (three representations) consider the speed of traffic on residential roads the use of the High Street and Bridge Street by buses and HGVs to be a significant problem. They suggest that the Appraisal should make further recommendations to deal with traffic management, parking and design.</p> <p>SPAB notes that the brick wall alongside the path at the entrance to Emson Close from the Common (i.e. on the north side) is in poor condition.</p> <p>A Saffron Walden resident suggests careful thought should be given before moving forward with any proposal for land between New Pond/Freshwell Gardens as a wildlife site.</p> <p>A Saffron Walden resident agrees that shop signs should be kept in character.</p>	<p>Further consideration should be given to this proposal subject to specialist advice</p> <p>Officers have surveyed the Grade II Listed wall and consider it appropriate to note in the Management Proposals</p> <p>In short term seek owner's co-operation to remedy untidy nature of site.</p> <p>As noted in the management Proposals</p>
<p>Other</p>	<p>GeoEssex suggest that two Local Geological Sites (LoGS) within the</p>	<p>Both sites have been noted in the revised draft</p>

	Conservation Area should be noted these being Elm Grove Summer House and the Gibson Boulders, Gibson Gardens.	Appraisal.
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11 Conclusion

The public consultation raised a number of useful points which have been incorporated into the Conservation Area Appraisal. The document should be amended to incorporate the above comments and the use of the document should commence immediately to assist in the determination of planning applications and for implementing the management proposals as set out.

Formal changes to the Conservation Boundary will need to be advertised prior to them coming into force. It is necessary to inform the Secretary of State and English Heritage and place an advert in the London Gazette and local newspapers. The owners of affected properties will also be notified of the changes.

Risk Analysis

11.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Revisions to the Conservation Area	1 There is some risk that revisions will be approved which cannot be justified by the guidelines provided by English Heritage.	2 If revisions to the Conservation Area are approved which the council cannot justify through good practice guidelines, the report and its recommendations will be unsound. Planning officers and applicants will then be without any up to date guidance and applications will be determined against out of date resources.	The report has been carefully produced and amended where any inaccuracies were noted. Consultation has been carried out with the Town Council, local historians and Saffron Walden residents and advice sought from specialist officers and experts to support the findings.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

