

# Conservation Area Appraisal Programme 29/06/2026

# POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

## PART I

### CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL PROGRAMME (DoF)

#### 1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' agreement of the updated Conservation Area Appraisal Programme. The programme prioritises the oldest appraisals first, however, Members are provided with the option of prioritising the Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal update due to lack of evidence of formal adoption in 2012.

#### 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members agree one of the following options:

##### 2.2 Option 1:

Agree the draft Conservation Area Appraisal Programme based on chronological order in Appendix 1.

##### 2.3 Option 2:

Agree the Conservation Area Appraisal Programme in Appendix 1 with the Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal update being prioritised to follow after the ongoing Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal update.

##### 2.4 Option 3:

Agree the Conservation Area Appraisal Programme in Appendix 1 with the Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal update prioritised to follow after the two Sarratt Conservation Area Appraisal updates.

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#### 3 Details

- 3.1 Three Rivers District Council has a duty under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (The Act) 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." The Act also requires the council to keep conservation areas under review and to formulate and publish from time-to-time proposals for their preservation and enhancement.
- 3.2 There are 22 conservation areas in Three Rivers, which were designated due to having been deemed to have a special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- 3.3 Best practice guidance from Historic England suggests that the council reassesses the boundaries of conservation areas every five years, resources permitting. The actual frequency should depend on development pressures and

local circumstances. Members of the Policy and Resources Committee have previously agreed to update the Conservation Area Appraisals every ten years.

- 3.4 The aims of a Conservation Area Appraisal are to:
- set out the special architectural and historic interest of the conservation area and to describe the special character and appearance that it is desirable to preserve or enhance;
  - examine the existing boundaries of the conservation area and consider the potential for other areas to be included and, if appropriate, where existing areas should be excluded; and
  - identify areas subject to pressure for change that would be adverse to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a result of permitted development and identify any areas where the removal of permitted development rights would safeguard the essential character and appearance of the area.
- 3.5 It should be noted that the Conservation Area Appraisal process may result in the conservation area being recommended to be reduced in size or removed altogether.
- 3.6 All of the conservation areas in Three Rivers have been appraised, with the last appraisal, Coppermill Lock, being completed in 2016. Although some of these appraisals date back to the 1990s, there are many conservation areas across the country that have never been appraised and are merely protected through Local Plan policies.
- 3.7 Conservation Area Appraisals are evidence and guidance documents. They support the implementation of Local Plan policies relating to heritage assets and conservation areas but are not development plan policies in themselves. Their purpose is to identify and describe the character, appearance, significance and key features of conservation areas and assist in the consistent application of adopted planning policy.
- 3.8 The process for undertaking a Conservation Area Appraisal involves several stages. Initially the existing document needs to be reviewed, followed by a survey of the conservation area involving looking at recent planning applications, what has changed in terms of development, what are the pressures for change, whether the boundaries of the conservation area need to be renewed, and whether an Article 4 Direction is required. There would then be a consultation period for the appraisal document. The final document then needs to be approved by Members.
- 3.9 Although a number of Conservation Area Appraisals are now dated, officers are not aware of any planning appeal decisions being overturned due to the age of an appraisal. Consequently, officers consider the risk arising from older appraisals to be low, although there remains a benefit in updating them to reflect current conditions and best practice.
- 3.10 Work on the Rickmansworth Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal is nearing completion and is expected to be published for public consultation shortly. Progress has been slower than originally anticipated due to competing Local Plan priorities and statutory deadlines.

- 3.11 In 2024, Members agreed to the council completing two Conservation Area Appraisals per year. Following the recent increase in budget approved by Members, there is potential to complete up to three appraisals during 2026/27, and a further three appraisals in 2027/28. Officers consider that this would realistically comprise Rickmansworth Town Centre, Sarratt (The Green) and Sarratt (Church End). Delivering more than three appraisals is not considered achievable due to officer time required to complete the Local Plan, which remains the council's priority project, together with limitations on consultant availability.
- 3.12 Members have requested that Heronsgate Conservation Area be prioritised due to a lack of evidence that the 2012 appraisal was formally adopted by the council. Place Services have suggested that the detail on the architectural interest (including contribution made by buildings etc.) and on setting needs to be updated to reflect changes. There have also been changes in guidance since 2012 including *Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (Historic England 2019)* and *The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England 2017)*. Place Services have advised that whilst the existing appraisal does not necessarily contradict this guidance, it would benefit from being updated.
- 3.13 Officers are therefore happy to bring Heronsgate forward in the programme, either immediately following Rickmansworth Town Centre or following completion of the two Sarratt appraisals.
- 3.14 The draft Conservation Area Appraisal Programme can be viewed in Appendix 1 to this report. It is currently set out in chronological order with the oldest appraisals being prioritised. Should Members agree to prioritise the Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal update then the programme will be updated accordingly.
- 3.15 The conservation function in terms of comments on planning applications is currently outsourced to external consultants Place Services. The work is funded through the vacant Senior Conservation Officer (part time) post salary. The scope of work is defined through an SLA and covers conservation comments on planning applications that impact heritage assets.
- 3.16 As the conservation service is outsourced to Place Services, it would be Place Services that prepare any new Conservation Area Appraisals. This work would be in addition to the conservation comments provided on planning applications and would therefore come at an extra cost. The costs are set out in the financial implications section of this report.
- 3.17 All Conservation Area Appraisals need a period of formal public consultation including an event/exhibition. Depending on the level of engagement this can add up to £2,000 per appraisal. The consultation is administered by the council, but any events/exhibitions will be hosted by Place Services.

#### **4 Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 The options provide Members with an opportunity to decide whether they wish to prioritise the Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal update rather than follow a purely chronological approach to the programme.

#### **5 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report are within the council's agreed policy and budgets.

5.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators:

5.2.1 PPC10 – Produce 2 Conservation Area Appraisals a year

5.3 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is:

5.3.1 That it will help the council achieve these performance indicators.

## **6 Financial Implications**

6.1 Conservation Area Appraisals cost in the region of:

- Small-scale CAA: £6500 - £8500 (such as Sarratt (Church End))
- Medium -scale CAA (such as Sarratt Green (The Green) and Croxley Green): £8500 - £10500
- Large-scale CAA: £10500+ (such as Rickmansworth Town Centre)

6.2 Consultation events / exhibitions will cost circa an additional £2,000 per event.

6.3 £50,000 has been set aside in reserves to help progress the Conservation Area Appraisal Programme.

## **7 Legal Implications**

7.1 Conservation areas were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967. The power to designate is now included in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It is the duty of the Local Planning Authority to decide which parts of the area they administer are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which is desirable to enhance through formal designation. The Act also requires the council to keep conservation areas under review and to formulate and publish from time-to-time proposals for their preservation and enhancement.

## **8 Staffing Implications**

8.1 The Conservation Area Appraisals will be produced by external consultants whose work will be managed by the Head of Planning Policy & Conservation.

## **9 Environmental Implications**

9.1 None specific.

## **10 Community Safety Implications**

10.1 None specific.

## **11 Public Health implications**

11.1 None specific.

## **12 Customer Services Centre Implications**

12.1 The CSC will be briefed to advise on whom to contact regarding policy applying to heritage assets.

### 13 Communications and Website Implications

13.1 Information about policies affecting conservation areas will be available on the council's web site.

### 14 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

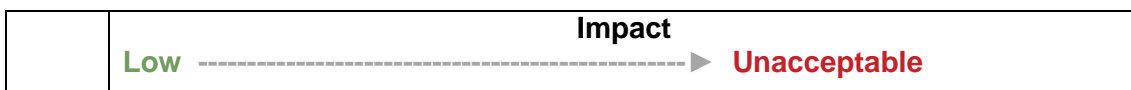
14.1 The council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

14.2 The subject of this report is covered by the (Planning Policy & Conservation) service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
The area of special architectural and historic interest would be under threat from unsympathetic development proposals	Deterioration and loss of the district's historic environment	Keep conservation area appraisals as up-to-date as possible	Tolerate	3

14.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely Likelihood ↓	Low 4	High 8	Very High 12	Very High 16
	Low 3	Medium 6	High 9	Very High 12
	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4



**Impact Score**

- 4 (Catastrophic)
- 3 (Critical)
- 2 (Significant)
- 1 (Marginal)

**Likelihood Score**

- 4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
- 3 (Likely (21-79%))
- 2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
- 1 (Remote (≤5%))

14.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

**Background Papers**

- National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
- Historic England Advice Note 1 (second edition) (2019)
- Planning Practice Guidance, Historic Environment (2019)

**APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix 1 – Draft Conservation Area Appraisal Programme

Appendix 2 – Heronsgate Conservation Area Appraisal (dated April 2012)

