

Three Rivers District Council

# Committee Report

Date: 19 March 2024

# GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

## PART I

### CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL PROGRAMME AND CONSERVATION SERVICE UPDATE (EID)

#### 1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' approval for two Conservation Area Appraisals to be completed in the 2024/25 financial year and provides an update on the conservation service currently outsourced to Place Services.

#### 2 Details

- 2.1 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.

- 2.2 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.

- 2.3 Best practice guidance from Historic England suggests that the Council reassesses the boundaries of conservation areas every five years. This should form part of the process of updating the relevant conservation area character appraisal.

- 2.4 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.

- 2.5 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.

- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 Work on updating the Rickmansworth Town Centre conservation area appraisal was started in 2014, and still needs to be completed. Sarratt (The Green), Sarratt (Church End) and Croxley Green conservation areas are the three remaining conservation areas that have not had an appraisal since the mid-1990s, and are therefore highest priority for new appraisals.
- 2.8 The appraisals proposed to be updated in the 2025/26 financial year are the Sarratt (The Green) and Croxley Green Conservation Area Appraisals.
- 2.9 The table below sets out the current status of the Conservation Area Appraisals in Three Rivers and when the last appraisal was undertaken for each area.

**Table 1 Conservation Area Appraisal Status**

<b>Conservation Area</b>	<b>Designated</b>	<b>Conservation Area Appraisal</b>
Rickmansworth Town Centre	1996	1993
Sarratt (The Green)	Pre 1974	1994
Sarratt (Church End)	1980	1994
Croxley Green	1980	1996
Chorleywood Station Estate	1990	2005
Moor Park	1995	2006
Cedars Ave/Nightingale Rd/Upper Nightingale Rd	2006	2007
Outer Loudwater Estate	2006	2007
Oxhey Hall	2006	2007
Hunton Bridge	1984	2008
Frith Wood	2007	2008
Chorleywood Common	1976	2010
Grove Mill Lane	1973	2012
Heronsgate	1993	2012
Batchworth Heath	1994	2013
Loudwater Estate	1998	2013
Stockers Lock and Farm	1993	2013
Abbots Langley	1969	2014
Dickinson Square	1994	2014
Coppermill Lock	1980	2016

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 In terms of costings Place Services have provided the following guide for preparing Conservation Area Appraisals.
- Small Conservation Areas: £5,000 - £7,000 (e.g. Hunton Bridge)

- Medium Conservation Areas: £7,000 - £9,000 (e.g. Croxley Green, Heronsgate)
  - Large Conservation Areas: £9,000+ (e.g. Moor Park, Loudwater)
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 Officers propose that The Rickmansworth Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal be prepared first as it is the oldest appraisal in the District. As the Rickmansworth Town Centre is a large appraisal Officers then recommend preparing the Sarratt (Church End) appraisal next as this is a smaller appraisal and will reduce the costs for this financial year.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 The Senior Conservation post has been very difficult to fill in the past and the use of external consultants adds resilience as we are not reliant on one officer covering all the conservation work. Officers are happy with the quality of conservation comments received from Place Services.
- 2.16 As the Senior Conservation Officer post is only part time its salary can only cover a limited amount of work by Place Services. This means that not every planning application that may impact on heritage assets can receive detailed conservation comments.
- 2.17 We therefore need to review the scale and nature of an application at validation stage to determine those where a formal written response is considered necessary. We have a weekly conservation surgery where officers discuss applications with the Conservation Officer and obtain a verbal response for those applications that will not receive a written response. Written comments are required for all applications going to committee.
- 2.18 A request has been received that applications in the Moor Park Conservation Area which attract objections should require written comments from the Conservation Officer prior to determination. This would need to be applied to all the conservation areas across the District and would result in an increase in work for the consultants providing these comments. Any increase in workload would result in an increased cost to the Council.
- 2.19 Following the budget being agreed at Full Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024 some additional budget has been agreed to support the conservation service. Officers consider the priority is to use this to help deliver updated Conservation Area Appraisals. Therefore to increase the number of written conservation comments on planning applications to include all applications with objections would either require further money being released to support this or only producing one (or none) conservation area appraisal in the year.
- 2.20 Officers propose to undertake two Conservation Area Appraisals a year. Budget for future years will form part of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

### **3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 As stated above an alternative option to the recommendation would be to use the additional funding for the conservation service on providing more written comments from the Place Services conservation officer on planning applications with objections. This would mean that we would only be able to cover the costs of one (or possibly none) Conservation Area Appraisal in the year.
- 3.2 Officers are recommending Rickmansworth Town Centre and Sarratt (Church End) to be the first two conservation area appraisals to be completed. This is due to them being two of the oldest existing appraisals with one being larger in scale and one smaller. Alternatively other appraisals could be prioritised.

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

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

#### **Financial, Legal, Staffing, Equal Opportunities, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

None specific.

### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The costs of producing the Rickmansworth Town Centre and Sarratt (Church End) Conservation Area Appraisals would be £16,000 to £20,000. Additional budget has been agreed to cover this.
- 5.2 The cost for conservation comments on planning applications is offset against the vacant Senior Conservation Officer (part time) post which has a salary of £30,222. All of this is used each year so there is no additional budget for more comments to be provided by Place Services.

### **6 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 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.

### **7 Staffing Implications**

- 7.1 The conservation area appraisals will be produced by external consultants whose work will be managed by the Head of Planning Policy & Conservation.

### **8 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 None specific

**9 A sustainability impact assessment has been undertaken resulting in a score of:**

<b>Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary</b>	
Homes, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and energy	
Travel	
Goods and Consumption	
Ecology	
Adaptation	
Engagement and Influence	
<b>Total Overall Average Score</b>	

**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 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.

<b>Nature of Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response (tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</b>	<b>Risk Rating (combination of likelihood)</b>

				<i>d 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 ----- Remote	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			
	Low	----->		Unacceptable

**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.

**15 Recommendation**

15.1 That:

- Members agree to prioritising the preparation of the Rickmansworth Town Centre and Sarratt (Church End) Conservation Area Appraisals in

the 2024/25 financial year rather than increasing the number of written conservation comments on planning applications.

- Members note that it is not possible to increase the number of written conservation comments being provided on planning applications without agreeing additional budget to cover this.

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