

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

**ALL AREA COMMITTEES
EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**August and September 2005
10 October 2005**

Report of: Planning Business Manager

Title: Conservation Area Appraisals: Process and programme

Ward: All wards

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Key Decision: No

Lead Member: Councillor John Tanner

Scrutiny responsibility: Environment

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Area Committees support the conclusions of the report and recommendation to Executive Board
2. That the Executive Board agrees to:
 - a) Note and endorse the aims and objectives of conservation area appraisals
 - b) To support the consultation proposals and process
 - c) Agree the priorities as set out in **Table 1**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 There are 16 conservation areas in Oxford, designated to recognise their special architectural or historic interest. To fully understand the significance and value of these areas and to inform decisions about future change, a conservation area appraisal that identifies and evaluates the character and appearance of each area should be prepared. This work would progress the work and conclusions of the *Oxford Landscape Character Assessment*, carried out by Land Use Consultants in 2002, and would be included in the local development framework being prepared under the new planning system.
- 1.2 Undertaking appraisals has been identified by central government as an indicator of Best Value, but within the resources available there needs to be a programme of work with priorities for action. Each appraisal is expected to take, on average, a year to complete, but by working with local communities and consulting early in the process it may be possible to tackle more than one appraisal at a time. Appraisals will help to improve the understanding of what is special about our historic areas and how local communities value those areas. The process of undertaking the appraisals, with local communities, is as valuable as the finished publication in facilitating involvement in, cooperation in and understanding of the management of historic areas.

2.0 This report explains

- A summary of the key conclusions of the '*Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting*' and how it contributes to the appraisal process.
- What a conservation area appraisal is and why it is needed.
- What the priorities are in determining the programme of appraisals.
- How the public will be involved and the appraisals used.

3.0 Council Vision and Priorities

The production of conservation area appraisals supports the Council's strategic priority to improve the quality of the environment and links to the strategic priorities

- to dialogue and consultation
- working in partnership to develop a long-term vision.

4.0 Landscape Character Assessment

- 4.1 Characterisation studies have become essential tools in recognising the changes that have taken place over time. Primarily introduced to define the historic elements of the landscape, characterisation is now carried out for the entire landscape. It is recognised that all aspects of the landscape, old and modern, special and ordinary, contribute to the overall character of an area.
- 4.2 The character assessment of Oxford and its setting was undertaken in recognition of the importance of the landscape and townscape and the changes that it faces. Oxford has a rich heritage and landscape and is particularly sensitive to change. Its historic environment is a valued resource and it is vital that future changes are appropriately managed in order to maintain the qualities that contribute to the special character of the city.
- 4.3 The study divided Oxford into 52 character areas (Appendix 1) and provided an analysis of each.
- 4.4 The findings of the character study provide the basis for the more detailed conservation area appraisals. The report categorised the character areas in to groups of *high*, *moderate* and *low* sensitivity to change. The 16 conservation areas incorporate many of the highly sensitive areas and the appraisals will provide a more thorough investigation into elements that combine to create the special character of the areas and to devise policies for future management. What was important and useful is the methodology utilised by Land Use Consultants that allows us to continue the work in a more detailed appraisals.

5.0 Why have a conservation area appraisal

- 5.1 Central Government advises that local authorities produce appraisals for all designated conservation areas. An appraisal will enable all concerned to develop a clear understanding of an area's needs, enable informed decisions to be made and ensure consistency. The historic environment is the result of

evolutionary change creating a rich architectural and historical resource. It is important that further changes **add** to this resource rather than depleting it and therefore change needs to be managed and decisions based on sound sustainable reasons to ensure this happens.

6.0 Council responsibility

6.1 Central Government expects the City Council to take a leading role in helping to look after the historic environment for both the present and the future and has provided legislation and advice to enable planning authorities to do this.

6.2 At present, the Council protects the historic environment by:

- Using the planning process to guide and control development
- Encourage and enable the re-use of redundant buildings
- Offering small grants to encourage repairs
- Offering advice and information to improve the understanding of the historic environment and the City Council's role in managing change.

6.3 The government, this year for the first time, is introducing a new Best Value Performance Indicator for preserving the special character of conservation areas, and will be measuring local authorities' performance on the production and content of conservation appraisals and the extent of community involvement.

7.0 Sustainable Development

7.1 Government advises that sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning and at the heart of sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations. Government's aims for sustainable development need to be pursued in an integrated way to deliver a sustainable economy, social inclusion and sustainable communities in ways that protect and enhance the physical environment and optimise resource and energy use.

7.2 PPG 1 *Delivering Sustainable Development* advises that plan policies and planning decisions should be based on information on the environmental characteristics of an area, its environmental capacity and should seek to enhance the environment as part of development proposals. The preparation of conservation appraisals will help to inform those decisions for the short and long term and by involving and consulting local communities during their preparation will ensure that their views are properly considered.

8.0 Prioritising appraisals

8.1 The constant demand for change is placing particular pressure upon the historic environment all around the City. Some areas will be more affected than others from development pressures and prior to undertaking the appraisals, each conservation area will need to be assessed in terms of priority. There are not the resources to undertake all the appraisals at once and those areas that are most under threat from development and change, and are most sensitive to change will be considered first. However, it may be possible to commence on some of the other areas if there is local

commitment ready and willing to contribute and the appropriate local skills and knowledge are available.

- 8.2 The Land Use Consultant's study and analysis of sensitivity is insufficient on its own to determine the priorities.
- 8.3 As each conservation area varies in size and density, the number of planning applications¹ received provides an indication of development pressure but they cannot be looked at in isolation. Applications should be considered in relation to the number of properties in each area. Table 1 below sets out the percentage rate of change based on application to building ratio.

Conservation Area	Landscape Sensitivity (LUC)	Development Pressure Index (Buildings v Applications received in 2004)	No of listed buildings (approx)	Priority of appraisals
Bartlemas	High	High	3	Sep 2005
Central	High	High	940	Apr 2006
St Clement's and Iffley Road	High	High	46	Sep 2005
Headington Hill	High	High	9	Apr 2006
Littlemore	High	High	15	Apr 2006
North Oxford	High	High	125	Sep 2005
Marston	High	Medium	14	Sep 2006
Temple Cowley	Moderate	Medium	4	Sep 2006
Iffley Village	High	Medium	23	Sep 2006
Osney ²	High	Low	5	Sep 2005
Walton Manor	High	Low	14	Apr 2007
Old Headington	High	Low	39	Apr 2007
Beauchamp Lane	High	Low	7	Apr 2007
Headington Quarry	High	Low	2	Apr 2007
Binsey	High	Low	6	Apr 2007
Wolvercote with Godstow ³				

Table 1

9.0 Consultation process

¹ Planning applications in general, not taking into account the type of building work proposed.

² Osney has been subject to an Article 4 Direction, which will be updated to form the appraisal for this conservation area.

³ Wolvercote with Godstow has been excluded from priority assessment as the appraisal for this area has already been carried out and is now in the process of consultation and adoption.

- 9.1 The planning system has recently seen changes to the process of producing development plans with the introduction of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The aims of the new Act are to speed up the preparation of plans, be more responsive to changing circumstances and enable more input from the local community.
- 9.2 All local authority documents must go through a process of consultation if they are to be adopted as planning policy. Conservation Area Appraisals are to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's) strengthening the policies relating to the historic environment as set out in the development plan. The process of consultation, preparation and adoption of the conservation area appraisals is set out in **Appendix 4**.
- 9.3 From the outset, it is intended that the community will be involved with the preparation of conservation area appraisals. They will be invited to make contributions to its content and have the opportunity to comment upon the draft.
- 9.4 The second draft will be submitted to Area Committee, the Executive Board and the Council for ratification. The draft appraisal document will then become subject to a statutory 6-week public consultation period. Following consultation, amendments will be made and the final draft will be submitted again to the Area Committees, Executive Board and Council for their approval and will then become an adopted document.
- 9.5 Dependent upon the conservation area, it is expected that each appraisal will take between six and twelve months to become an adopted SPD.

10.0 The next step

- 10.1 **Agree priorities.** Table 1 shows 6 conservation areas as high priority with proposed start dates. Of these two are a significant size (North Oxford, Central) and will not be easy to tackle. In fact the City Central conservation area most probably will have to be divided into sub-areas to provide manageable study areas. The North Oxford conservation area is less complex and is very well studied and documented. English Heritage are in the process of finalising the review of the statutory list of listed buildings for North Oxford and it would be sensible to support such a review with an appraisal of the area. It is proposed that work on conservation area appraisals is carried out in accordance with the priorities identified
- 10.2 **Approach local communities.** Explain conservation appraisal process to business and residential communities and invite involvement (working with other City Council departments and external organisations). It is important to get this part of the process right and officers will explore how best to engage with those communities and will make use of any external community facilitators wherever possible.

11.0 Financial Implications

- 11.1 The costs of this work is within existing staff resources up until January 2007. There will be a review of progress in Summer 2006 to assess the need for any further funding.
- 11.2 External funding has been secured, from English Heritage and Oxford Preservation Trust, towards the costs of this work.

Conclusion

The production of conservation appraisals is long overdue. However, we are able to learn from the experiences of other authorities and it is timely to be undertaking this work as a part of the new regime for local plan preparation. Priorities are essential to allow progress and it will mean that some areas will not be tackled for some time. This does not mean that those areas are of less value or that new development can be of a lesser quality.

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Extension: 2104

Date: 23rd July 2005

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:

Portfolio Holder: Environment	John Tanner
Strategic Director:	Sharon Cosgrove
Legal and Democratic Services:	Lindsay Cane
Financial Management:	Claire Reid
Strategy and Review	Jan Banfield

Background papers:

Land Use consultants, March 2002, *A Character assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting*.

English Heritage, 1997 *Conservation Area Appraisals*,

Appendix 1: Landscape Character Assessment of Oxford – Character Areas

<p>Areas highly sensitive to change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic city core • Western historic fringe • University fringe • Old Marston Village • Old Headington • Littlemore Village (historic core) • St Clement's and The Plain • Church Cowley • Iffley Village • Lower Wolvercote • Upper Wolvercote • Headington Quarry • North Oxford (Victorian suburb) • Jericho • New Osney • New Hinksey • Headington Hill • North Thames Floodplain • Cherwell Valley Floodplain • South Thames Floodplain • Hinksey & Bulstake Streams • St Clement's open river terrace • New Hinksey open river terrace • Headington Hill garden suburb
<p>Areas of moderate sensitivity to change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandpont • East Oxford • Summertown • North Oxford fringes • Botley Road • Sandhills and Risinghurst • Wood Farm • Southfield Park and Hospital complex • John Radcliffe hospital complex • Bayswater Brook • North Oxford open river terrace • Peartree open river terrace

Areas of low sensitivity to change

- Temple Cowley
- New Headington Village
- New Marston Village
- Rose Hill
- Cowley residential suburb
- Florence Park and Cowley Marsh
- The Slade
- Cutteslowe & Sunnymede
- Barton
- Littlemore
- Blackbird Leys
- Horspath Road area
- Cowley Motor Works
- Littlemore Business & Science Parks
- Botley Industrial and Retail Parks
- Marston open river terrace

Appendix 2

What is a conservation area appraisal?

A conservation area appraisal is about the understanding of the links and relationships, the obvious and the subtle, between buildings, people and landscape. It is about keeping in touch with our past. It is about managing change, reconciling the needs of the environment with those of the local and wider community, for the present and the future.

There are three parts to a conservation area appraisal:

1. Defining the special interest

- **Origins and Layout:** history of the development, survival of elements that have determined the layout of roads, plot boundaries, estate boundary walls, ancient defensive lines, watercourses, grouping of buildings.
- **Archaeology:** sites of archaeological interest and scheduled ancient monuments
- **Architecture:** general description of quality and character, building types and period of building. Identify key features and buildings.
- **Building materials:** the range of building materials for buildings, walls, surfaces, noting in particular colour and texture.
- **Spaces and trees:** contribution of spaces, greens and hedgerows, woodlands, hedges or individual trees.
- **Uses:** prevailing and past uses that influence or have determines the character eg. farming, mills, industry.
- **Neutral areas:** features, buildings and spaces that neither detract nor contribute to the area.
- **Negative features:** features, spaces and uses that detract from the character.
- **Landscape:** relationship of the built environment to the surrounding landscape, landmarks, distant views.

2. Awareness and understanding

- **Local issues:** is anything happening locally that impacts on the environment and the community.
- **Local needs:** are there any local community needs that may impact on the historic environment.
- **Local character:** how sensitive is the area to change?
- **Local opportunities:** for enhancement, for funding projects, for community involvement.

What will the appraisal look like?

It will be produced as a booklet or handbook, A4 size, including photographs, drawings and maps to describe the character of the area and identify special features. The booklet will contain written text to explain the key local issues and concerns and include management proposals for addressing these matters. Attached at **Appendix 3** is a sample page from the Wolvercote and Godstow Conservation Appraisal.

Appendix 3

Excerpt from the Wolvercote with Godstow Conservation Area Appraisal

Summary of significance

1. Three settlements, each with its own distinct character.
2. Vast expanses of open meadow land which has been unharmed by modern day farming practices.
3. Upper Wolvercote has retained many of its rubble stone boundary walls creating a sense of enclosure and retaining his historic character.
4. Godstow Abbey was the main force behind the development of Wolvercote, the remains of which are now a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
5. Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common provide important views to the city.
6. The meadows and commons are important areas of unimproved alluvial grassland, being designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
7. Open undeveloped nature of the settlements has been retained.
8. Historical grazing rights to the meadows have been retained and are still exercised. The historic practice of the Sheriff of Oxford rounding the animals up and fining unauthorised owners for grazing their horses on the commons is still carried out on an annual basis.
9. The river played an important role in the development of the mill by being an original source of power and transportation.
10. Although Port Meadow is not within the boundary of the conservation area it provides an important physical and historical setting to the settlements.
11. Many of the properties in both Upper Wolvercote and Lower Wolvercote date from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and have retained many of their original features.

Vulnerability

12. Vast amount of open and unspoilt space provided by the commons and meadows.
13. High level of greenery contributing to the character of the area.
14. Wolvercote Common and the floodplains provide a green edge to the built environment.
15. Traditional village image of low rise, stone built cottages and farmhouses being replaced by unsympathetic large-scale modern developments.
16. Traditional low boundary stone or brick walls being replaced with high fencing altering the nature of the street scene resulting in a loss of openness.
17. Proximity to an ever increasing city places demand on open spaces for development purposes.

Opportunities for enhancement

18. Improve existing street furniture. Uniformity of street lighting styles would enhance the area.
19. Improve the quality and condition of road surfaces and kerbstones. Where appropriate, replacements should be in traditional materials that are in keeping with the character of the area.
20. Damaged areas of boundary walls should be carefully repaired with appropriate materials.
21. Reinstatement of low boundary walls to retain the open character of the area.
22. Signage on buildings should be in keeping with the historic village character.
23. Rationalisation of sign posts, removing any unnecessary signage to prevent cluttering of pavements.
24. Trees are an important characteristic of the conservation area. Old or dying trees should be replaced and opportunities for further tree planting should be investigated.

Appendix 4

Process of consultation

