

**To: West Area Planning Committee**

**Date: 7 November 2012**

**Report of: Head of City Development**

**Title of Report: Oxford Heritage Assets Register, Criteria and Process**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To outline the methodology and processes involved in the preparation of a city wide register of local heritage assets and to seek the Committee's comments and recommendations for consideration by the City Executive Board.

### **Key Decision: No**

### **Report approved by:**

**Finance: David Watt**

**Legal: Michael Morgan**

### **Policy Framework:** (NPPF) National Planning Policy Framework

Oxford Core Strategy 2006 – 2026

Adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001 – 2016

English Heritage Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing

**Recommendation(s): To endorse the proposal for a Heritage Assets Register for Oxford and to recommend that the City Executive Board adopt the proposed criteria and selection process.**

## **Summary**

1. With external funding from English Heritage the Council is creating a register of locally significant heritage assets to support national and local planning policy in the management of the historic environment. Draft criteria have been developed to assess buildings, monuments, places and landscapes for inclusion on the register. The committees' comments on and endorsement of these draft criteria are sought prior to consideration by the City Executive Board.
2. The process of identifying, reviewing and either including or rejecting candidate heritage assets has also been developed. The committee's comments on this process are sought.
3. Finally, the process of developing the register will be informed by preparation of character statements for neighbourhoods within the city. A sample character statement is included in appendix B to this report.

## **Background**

4. The Oxford Core Strategy includes a commitment to produce a 'local list' of heritage assets for Oxford, to support the implementation of Policy CS18. The saved Local Plan policies provide guidance for considering Buildings of Local Interest (Policy HE.6) and Important Parks and Gardens (Policy HE.8). However, at present there is no formal list that has been subject to review or public consultation to give weight to these policies.
5. Heritage Assets are the features of the historic environment "identified as having a degree of significance that merits consideration in planning decisions" (NPPF, Annex 2). These may be 'designated heritage assets', including listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled monuments, which are assessed against criteria set nationally. Local planning authorities are able to identify other heritage assets through preparation of local lists as a part of plan making or as a part of development management processes. This provides an opportunity to identify elements of historic environment that are valued locally but that may not meet the criteria for national designation. To ensure the register is robust there is a need to ensure that locally valued heritage assets have the required degree of significance for inclusion. Understanding the particular points of their significance will also be essential to making decisions affecting them in future.
6. English Heritage has provided funding to run a series of pilot studies across the city to develop this 'local list'.

## **Implications of registering local heritage assets**

7. The preparation of a formal list or register of locally significant heritage assets (using sound and transparent criteria and procedures) and the accompanying character statements will provide robustness to planning decisions that affect these elements of the historic environment and will raise awareness of the potential sensitivity of heritage assets to property owners and developers at an early stage in the planning process. It will help local communities to identify and articulate what is valued locally and help in their engagement in the planning process. A register does not introduce any additional legal protection or requirements for owners, but it will facilitate understanding and is a material consideration in planning decisions. It will also help to ensure the effective use of appropriate planning controls to manage change (for example the removal of permitted development rights).

## **Development of the criteria**

8. English Heritage's guidance on preparing local heritage assets lists recommends using appropriate criteria to ensure they have the necessary degree of significance. They recommend the criteria are consulted on publicly to ensure they are suitably robust. Officers established a steering group of local community representatives to help develop these criteria including representatives of Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford Civic Society, Oxford Gardens Trust, Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, a local planning consultancy, Oxford University Estates Directorate and a representative of Oxford University Students Union, as well as City Council Officers. A Project Board that includes the Council's Heritage Champion and Portfolio holder for Planning (Councillor Colin Cook), English Heritage and officers is managing the project. The list of proposed criteria is included in **Appendix A** to this report. The criteria have been subject to public consultation between August and October 2012 using the Council's online consultation process.
9. The criteria have been designed to be simple and to provide a process of building understanding of the asset's heritage significance by separating out what is of interest, how this is valued and why this is of particular local significance. The draft nominations form provides guidance as to how candidate heritage assets may meet each of the criteria. They provide a means of identifying whether the proposed asset has features that merit its consideration in planning and how it contributes to the locally distinctive conditions of each area of the city.
10. A main comment received was to make greater reference to the suggested criteria provided by English Heritage in their published guidance. These criteria are indeed incorporated in the draft nominations form, to guide users in how their asset may fulfil the four main criteria. However, the steering group's finding was that these 'inclusive' criteria required accompanying 'exclusive' criteria to provide a critical control and measure of significance for additions to the register.

## **The nomination, review and registration process**

11. As an evidence base to support the City Council's planning policies and as a tool to inform planning decisions the process for compiling the list needs to be robust, transparent, consistent and approved by the Council. English Heritage recommends that this follows a process of consultation and review. It is an aim of the pilot studies to ensure this is an inclusive process encouraging the engagement of local communities in proactive management of the historic environment. The approach developed is described in **Appendix B**. A key strand is public consultation followed by

review of proposed heritage assets by a panel of City Council Ward Members and the Portfolio holder, supported by Council officers and local heritage experts. In certain circumstances, for example where there is a significant level of public interest or where a heritage asset is revealed in the consideration of a planning application, it may be appropriate for a decision on the registration of Heritage Assets to be made by Area Planning Committees.

### **Preparation of Character Statements**

12. The Heritage Assets Register will be supported by a series of statements describing the valued features of local character within the neighbourhoods covered by the study. These will form an addition to the City Council's Heritage evidence base and will be used to assess the contribution of heritage assets proposed for registration to the character and identity of the local area and community.
13. We are preparing character statements in partnership with local community groups, including the Neighbourhood Forums and local residents' associations using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit. The latter has been developed to provide groups who want to participate in managing the City's heritage with a sound methodology for assessment and recording of local character, from which they can prepare a written statement describing the valued characteristics of their area. A draft character statement for Iffley Fields as an example of the form one of these statements might take is included in **Appendix C**. To form part of the Council's historic environment evidence base these will have to be subject to public consultation, with a full report of consultation prepared and subsequently amended where necessary prior to publication.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Committee's comments on the proposed register, the criteria and process of compiling the list are invited.
2. To recommend any amendments
3. To endorse the proposal for a Heritage Assets Register for Oxford and to recommend that the City Executive Board adopt the proposed criteria and selection process (with or without recommended changes).

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**Background papers:**

English Heritage, *Conservation Principles*, 2008

English Heritage, *Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing*, 2012

Land Use Consultants, *A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting*, March 2002

NPPF: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012, National Planning Policy Framework

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