

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 3 SEPTEMBER 2013

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING  
AND TRANSPORT

WIDFORD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT  
PLAN

WARD(S) AFFECTED: HUNSDON

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- To enable Members to consider the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal following public consultation.

<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE:</u> That</b>	
<b>(A)</b>	<b>the responses to the public consultation be noted and the Officer responses and proposed changes to the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal be supported;</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>authority be delegated to the Head of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport, to make any further minor and consequential changes to the Appraisal which may be necessary; and</b>
<b>(C)</b>	<b>the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal be supported for adoption.</b>
<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL:</u> That:</b>	
<b>(A)</b>	<b>the responses to the public consultation be noted and the Officer responses and proposed changes to the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal be agreed;</b>
<b>(B)</b>	<b>the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal be adopted.</b>

## 1.0 Background.

1.1 East Herts has a rich environmental heritage which includes 42 Conservation Areas. The East Herts Local Plan commits the Council to review its Conservation Areas, a requirement which is also set out in national legislation.

1.2 The review of Widford's Conservation Area is the first in a series of reviews undertaken in 2011/2012. These reviews can now be presented for Members consideration. In each case a report will be presented when a public consultation exercise has been undertaken in relation to each individual settlement.

1.3 Each document identifies the special character of the respective Conservation Area together with the elements that should be retained or enhanced and those which detract from the identified character. Existing boundaries will be reviewed and, where appropriate, practical enhancement proposals will be suggested.

1.4 Once Members have considered each Appraisal, and the document has been adopted by the Council, they will become a 'material consideration' in the process of determining planning applications.

## 2.0 Widford Conservation Area Appraisal

2.1 Widford's Conservation Area was first designated in 1968 and redesignated in 1981. The Widford Conservation Area Appraisal was completed in 2011. There was a period of public consultation during February and March 2012. A public meeting was held on 19 March 2012 at which about 30 members of the public were in attendance. Responses were received from the Parish Council and from 5 others and other points were raised at the public meeting. The headline issues are set out in the following paragraphs:

2.2 *General content of Appraisal:* The Appraisal sets out a revision to the Conservation Area boundary to exclude a property on the south side of Ware Road and properties at the corner of Abbots Lane and Hunsdon Road. It identifies the key environmental features and the manner in which they can be controlled. In relation to Widford the most relevant ones are: Listed Buildings including structures in their curtilages; non listed buildings of quality worthy of protection; other unlisted distinctive features worthy of protection and important open land and spaces.

- 2.3 *Listed buildings and structures in their curtilages:* These are protected by legislation and have been identified in the Appraisal. Some are in a poor condition and these have also been identified in the Council's recently updated Buildings at Risk Register. It is considered important their condition improves. Potentially this could occur through the planning process or possibly from grant assistance. Officers will approach owners as Members agreed when considering the Buildings at Risk Register in March 2013.
- 2.4 *Non listed buildings of quality worthy of protection:* A small number have been identified that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and these should be retained through the planning process.
- 2.5 *Other unlisted distinctive features worthy of protection:* A number have been identified and include walls and railings. These are important to the rural qualities and character of Widford. Most are protected by virtue of being within the curtilages of Listed Buildings or above prescribed heights (which means that it is necessary to seek consent before demolition is undertaken). However some are unprotected in law from demolition. Protection could formally be achieved through the introduction of an Article 4 Direction. Prior to considering such a course of action, the Council will seek to establish ownership and discuss the matter further with respective owners.
- 2.6 *Important open land and spaces:* The Appraisal has identified a number of such important open spaces that materially contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area that should be protected through the planning process.
- 2.7 *Enhancement proposals to deal with detracting elements:* A number have been identified and include untidy sites, discordant signage and structures in need of repair. It is accepted that such improvements will often only be carried out with the co-operation of owners and other local bodies and organisations. However the District Council may have a role to play in some instances, for example by offering technical advice; by determining applications and where appropriate offering grant assistance.

### **3.0 Consultation Feedback**

- 3.1 The Parish Council 'is in agreement with the great majority of the draft document' and '*support the concept of such an appraisal and*

*believe the final document when adopted will be of considerable value...and help to conserve the environment of the village’.*

Furthermore the PC has expressed support for a number of suggested improvements proposed by the Appraisal and has already taken some action and promised other. The general support of the Parish Council is encouraging and the process of identifying and subsequently achieving physical improvements, implemented at local level, however small, is important,

- 3.2 Other comments received through the consultation process are set out in the table included as **Essential Reference Paper B** arranged in the subject order set out above.
- 3.3 **Essential Reference Paper C** is a copy of the Widford Conservation Appraisal and Management Plan as it appeared at the consultation draft stage with track changes to show how the final document will appear.
- 3.4 In summary it is recommended that the Widford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan be adopted and be used in the process of determining planning applications.
- 4.0 Implications/Consultations Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper A**

#### Background Papers

None

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