
PIERCEBRIDGE CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor David Lyonette,
Regeneration and Planning Portfolio**

Responsible Director(s) - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To advise members of the current position in relation to the production of the attached **Character Appraisal** for the conservation area of Piercebridge and to seek Members' approval of the Draft Character Appraisal as a basis for consultation. The report also seeks Members' approval of a process for future conservation area appraisals.

Information and Analysis

2. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 emphasises the need for the local development plan to include firm conservation area policies, based on a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest that warranted designation. PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment stresses the need for local planning authorities to make an assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in their districts.
3. The Environment Scrutiny Review Action Plan adopted by Cabinet highlighted the need for Conservation Area Character Appraisals to be undertaken. Piercebridge is the first in a programme of 16 Conservation Area character appraisals to be undertaken over the next few years. In future it is proposed to carry out consultation on the more straightforward Appraisals prior to reporting them to Cabinet for final approval. It is therefore recommended that the Director of Development and Environment is given delegated authority to approve future Conservation Area Character Appraisals for consultation purposes. Appraisals would still come to Members for approval after consultation.
4. In addition, new Best Value Performance Indicators have been introduced which measure how many Conservation Area Appraisals have been carried out in the last five years. The Council's Corporate Performance and Best Value Plan requires that 3 Conservation Area Character Appraisals be adopted this year. It is anticipated that consultants will be engaged to carry out some of the appraisals, to supplement the limited resources of the Council's Conservation Officer.
5. The draft Character appraisals will be sent out to key stakeholders including English Heritage, Ward members, conservation area residents, Durham County Council's Archaeology Department and any relevant Parish Councils.

6. It is important that special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of the conservation area's character and appearance. This will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for the development plan policies and all future development control decisions.
7. Character Appraisals for conservation areas are seen as a tool to assist in the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. Through the character appraisal, areas (or buildings) of special landscape or historic/architectural character can be highlighted as possessing particular interest, and being worthy of preservation and enhancement. Features of special interest, such as historic walls, stiles, open spaces, trees or historic surfaces, i.e. cobbles, Yorkshire flags or setts – can be particularly highlighted through the character appraisal, which can then be included in future Supplementary Planning Guidance.
8. The publication of a character appraisal will assist in countering threats to the conservation area through inappropriate development and set the context for the type and scope of acceptable proposals. Ultimately designation of an area aims to guide, not prevent, change.
9. The Local Development Framework “Statement of Community Involvement” requires that all supplementary planning documents be subject to a 4-6 week process of public consultation. This process will begin, subject to Cabinet's decision, in September. Representations will be considered and may be included in the revised character appraisal, scheduled to be published later this year.

Legal Implications

10. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

11. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

12. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

13. For the purpose of the ‘call-in’ procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that:-

- (a) Cabinet approve the Draft Piercebridge Conservation Area Character Appraisal as a basis for public consultation;
- (b) the Director of Development and Environment be given delegated authority to approve future Conservation Area Character Appraisals for consultation purposes.

Reasons

15. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) to enable key stakeholders to comment on and inform the Conservation Area Character Appraisal Process;
- (b) to enable the Director of Development and Environment to exercise his discretion as to whether future Conservation Area Character Appraisals warrant Cabinet approval prior to consultation.

John Buxton
Director of Development and Environment

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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