

WIRRAL COUNCIL

**PLANNING COMMITTEE – 21ST MAY 2009
ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
15th JUNE 2009**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN CALDY CONSERVATION AREA

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Donald Insall and Associates were appointed in March 2007 to carry out appraisals and management plans for sixteen Conservation Areas in the Wirral. This report covers the Caldý Conservation Area. The Appraisal and Management Plan are attached.

2. THE APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 2.1 Conservation Area Appraisals have been promoted by English Heritage as useful documents for the understanding of the significance, character and appearance of such areas. Management Plans are intended to follow on from appraisals to provide a focus for action and management of conservation areas.
- 2.2 Conservation Areas were included in the BVPI indicators (219a, b, and c) when the work was commissioned. For the current year BVPI 219c (the percentage of conservation areas with management plans) has been dispensed with, and in future years the indicators 219a and b (number of conservation areas and percentage with character appraisals), will no longer be used as assessments of Local Authority performance. Notwithstanding this, the Council is committed to conserving the Borough's natural and built heritage; and increasing civic pride and public participation, through its Corporate Objectives.
- 2.3 The Conservation Area Appraisals have been carried out in accordance with the advice published by English Heritage (Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals – February 2006). In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been generally used as the basis of the analysis:-
- Location and population
 - Origins and development of the settlement
 - Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
 - Archaeological significance
 - Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
 - Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
 - Character and relationship of spaces
 - Prevalent and traditional building materials
 - Local details
 - Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
 - Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
 - Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
 - Existence of any neutral areas

- 2.4 The Appraisal will act as an audit of the area and give residents, applicants, and others an understanding of the special qualities of the conservation area and any negative factors. The Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, should be adopted by the Council and used as a material consideration in determining any planning applications within or affecting the setting of the conservation area.
- 2.5 Management Plans, on the other hand, are relatively rare and English Heritage advice more amorphous. (Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas – February 2006). The management plan has required some thought to give it structure. At this stage of the process the Management Plan is an agenda for future action and consideration. This part of the document relies on the analysis contained in the appraisal to set out the issues and negative factors affecting both the private and public realm. As such it is the first stage in a management plan process which will refine the plan through further consultation, joint officer working and budgetary request.
- 2.6 Most of the Appraisals have been discussed with the local Conservation Area Advisory Committees in order for local residents and others to give their perspectives on the areas and contribute to the analysis. To have real weight, Management Plans need to be discussed not only with local groups but also corporately in terms of policy and enhancement action having regard to the resources available. These first essays will act as an agenda for detailed policy development for DC purposes; a yardstick for members of the public to comment on planning applications; a stimulus to corporate working in regard to the management of the public realm; and a “wish list” for its enhancement.

3. CALDY

- 3.1 The following is a list of features that are part of Caldyc Conservation Area’s special character, as reported by the consultants, which the consultants have divided into two distinct character zones, the historic village core, and the surrounding C20th planned estate:
- **The historic village** is characterised by the following:
 - Winding roads with sandstone walls
 - properties enclosed by high walls with private yards or gardens
 - well maintained public or semi-public spaces with shrubs and herbaceous plants
 - few mature trees
 - Relatively high density
 - Low buildings heights
 - ‘single material’ houses
 - use of natural stone, pale brown brick or ‘black and white’
 - many houses have eaves dormers, mullioned windows and kneelers on gables
 - **The C20 planned development** is characterised by the following:
 - A mixture of winding and long straight roads overhung with mature trees
 - Vertical boarded timber front fences
 - Plain clay tiled roofs (and less often slate) at steep pitch with dormers, gables and prominent chimneys enlivening the roofscape
 - Low density (originally 1 dwelling / acre)
 - 1.5 or 2 - storey height including some houses with attics
 - Houses often have differing materials at each storey level (usually rendered first floor over brickwork ground floor)
 - In many cases there are ‘catslide’ roofs (i.e. from main ridge across an extension to ground floor door-head height)

- ‘Additive’ and irregular plan forms (i.e. complex plans with extensions for bays, porches, outbuildings, garages, rather simple rectangles and symmetrical layouts)
- **Threats to character and Key Issues for the future**
 - Most of the threats occur in the Caldy Manor Estate and the C20 planned development areas. Whilst the Interim Housing Policy of October 2005 has reduced pressures for new dwellings in the extensive grounds of existing houses there are continuing pressures for the redevelopment of existing modest houses with substantially larger dwellings with multiple car garages and games rooms which appear overlarge for the curtilage. Where redevelopment fails to proceed, plots are left vacant and neglected post-demolition.
 - Incursion of bungalows and houses of alien character and inappropriate materials
 - Unsympathetic extensions partially screened by the verdant landscape
 - Unsympathetic alterations such as inappropriate windows and balconies
 - Changes to gates, boundaries and fencing
 - Loss of original structures in the street such as stone kerbs and early lamp standards.

Response from the Caldy Conservation Society / Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC).

3.2 The Caldy CAAC has indicated that they are broadly satisfied with the content of the appraisal and management plan, and in 2007 submitted a list of minor alterations to be integrated into the body of the document. The Conservation Section has accepted these changes and edited the appraisal accordingly.

Management Issues

3.3 Caldy is characterised by a verdant landscaping setting, generally high architectural quality and wealthy inhabitants. There are few problems of poor maintenance and neglect. However, issues arise with development pressure and changing perceptions of security and privacy.

3.4 There are conservation challenges resulting from recent easy credit and high investment in alterations, extensions and rebuilding of property. With competition to move into such a desirable area land values have risen and modest dwellings on often large plots have been considered as inadequate to the desires of the purchaser. Potential sellers have applied for permissions for substitute dwellings in order to enhance land and sale value. With restraint on new housing in West Wirral pressure on the environment of the conservation area has resulted from significant enlargement of dwellings or the substitution of modest houses with proposals which consistently explore the boundaries of acceptable size in relation to plot width, depth and tree protection.

3.5 The appraisal contains within it a full survey of properties within the CA, and each house is graded according to its contribution to the area. Only those properties considered as poorly neutral or harmful to the character of the conservation area may be considered for redevelopment. Permission been granted for redevelopment on plots which contain dwellings neutral or harmful to the character of the conservation area, and construction has failed to follow on. This has caused gap sites to appear, which are over grown and neglected. Although empty dwellings can disfigure the character of a conservation area, on balance they are preferable to empty sites. Accordingly, future permissions for conservation area consent should be conditioned so that the demolition of the existing building should not proceed until there is a contract in place for the replacement dwelling for which the accompanying planning permission provides. This gives some measure of control.

- 3.6 Other adverse developments in recent years have included over-sized garages with playrooms above out of proportion with the main dwelling, and the installation of roof dormers in both the main dwelling and outbuildings. Extensions above garages close to side boundaries have contributed to too great a bulk across the width of the site leading to a “terracing” effect and diminishing the appearance of houses in individual grounds and leading to loss of side boundary trees.
- 3.7 Development and alterations to plots are governed by covenants that date back to the establishment of the Caldý Estate Company. These covenants still try to provide uniformity and harmony within the built form of the estate, despite the fact that the company itself is now of indeterminate status. Although covenants are separate and independent matters from planning control, in so far as they contribute to the character of the conservation area regard should be taken of their intentions.
- 3.8 One of these covenants stipulated the height and form of boundary fencing, indicating that it should be four feet six inches high, in a hit-and-miss, long-and-short pattern, in timber. Over the years, there has been a fashion for installing much higher close-boarded fencing, often approaching 2m in height. Possibly concerns regarding security and privacy underlie this trend, but it does have the effect of altering the character of the conservation area, substituting vegetation for solid structure. Subject to position within the conservation area, hedging rather than solid fencing should be encouraged and any fencing kept to a lower height.
- 3.9 Gates and gateposts are an associated problem, there being a current fashion for tall and highly decorated mild steel motorised gates with flank walls, out of character with the conservation area. These elements formalise entrances and clearly delimit the private from the public realm as well as interrupting restrained boundaries of hedging and wooden fence which are characteristic of the conservation area. Timber gates are always preferable and in character with the original Arts and Crafts design intentions for the area
- 3.10 Some recent development has been of poor quality in architectural terms, and it is hoped that the Council is able to raise the standard of new design by promoting the role of the qualified architect, experienced in contextual design.
- 3.11 The appraisal is unlikely to prompt any direct requirement for additional resources, although it does highlight the value of traditional details such as historic lamp standards (which may provide a standard for new columns), signposts, paving and kerbs and pedestrian surfaces/crossings which could require the allocation of greater resources to achieve higher standards.
- 3.12 Mature landscaping within Caldý is obviously essential to its character, and care must be taken to ensure that green boundaries and landscaped buffers between adjacent buildings are protected. The majority of the vegetation within the village lies within private gardens. However, there are some small open green spaces in and around the designated area that may demand particular attention in terms of preservation and enhancement, e.g. the grassed and landscaped areas adjacent to the church.
- 3.13 Caldý contains a small number of listed buildings within the village core, but no scheduled monuments, although some limited archaeology may survive. Some of the houses within the area may prove difficult to upgrade in terms of their thermal performance, without risking damage to their special character. Proposals for microgeneration may prompt dilemmas regarding the preservation of essential character.

Boundary changes and Article 4 directions

- 3.14 The Management Plan recommends that an extension of the boundary be made in order to include the properties on Shore Road and part of the Wirral Way adjoining. Other extensions, such as the one mooted to include the Art Deco building on Telegraph Road, may be less advisable, local listing and tree preservation orders offering a more discriminate type of protection.
- 3.15 In the case of Caldy Conservation Area, there are currently no Article 4 directions withdrawing permitted development rights associated with the unlisted buildings. In order to protect the existing unlisted original buildings and to encourage the reinstatement of lost features, Insall's recommend that article 4 directions are used to withdraw permitted development rights from all category A and B buildings to protect them from loss or change without consent for the following elements:
- Windows and doors
 - Roof coverings and roof features
 - The colour and surface treatment of elevations.
 - Boundary walls.
 - Solar Panels and Microgeneration

This approach is different from the other conservation areas in that it is limited to the two best categories of existing buildings within the conservation area rather than to the area as a whole. This may be justified because of the suffusion of landscaping throughout the area but would be more complex for officers, owners and the public to understand and be more difficult to administer.

- 3.16 It is considered that the making of Article 4 directions could have considerable implications for staff resources in the conservation section. As planning applications arising from the withdrawal of permitted development rights attract no processing fee there would be a further case load on development control staff without compensatory funding.
- 3.17 Whilst Insall's recommendations represent a professional assessment, it is considered that, as such recommendations are made for all the Conservation Areas except Flaybrick Cemetery, further consideration needs to be given to this issue after all the 16 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are reported to Committee.

4.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial or staffing implications arising out of this appraisal. However, the management plan has potential implications for finance and staffing resources if the recommendation of making an Article 4 direction were to be implemented. The drafting of legal agreements in respect of redevelopment proposals for the architecturally inferior dwellings is likely to be time consuming, and work resources may have to be adjusted to cover this. Maintenance of historic lamp standards and conservation grade paving and kerbing may require additional Council investment.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

6.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None

7.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Caldy CA lies within the West Kirby and Thurstaston Ward.

8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are positive benefits in conservation areas in retaining heritage assets and the embodied energy contained in them, thereby reducing the Borough's carbon emissions.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan can be used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and can be used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.

10.0 CRIME AND DISORDER STRATEGY / COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None

11.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 English Heritage - Conservation Area Appraisals – February 2006
English Heritage – Management Plans – February 2006

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended to Cabinet that:-

- (1) The Caldy Appraisal, as an audit of the Conservation Area, is adopted by the Council and used to inform the evidence base for the preparation of future planning policy in the forthcoming Local Development Framework and used as a material consideration in determining future applications for planning permission, listed building and conservation area consent.
- (2) The Management Plan acts as an agenda for further consultation both locally and within the Council to identify priorities for action and the resources necessary for their implementation.
- (3) A further report is prepared for Committee after all 16 Appraisals and Management Plans have been reported to Cabinet regarding the need for and relative priorities for Article 4 directions between areas, boundary changes and the financial and staffing implications arising.

**DAVID GREEN,
DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES**

This report was prepared by Matthew Crook of the Built Conservation Section,
Tel. 606 2485.