

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 EASTHAM VILLAGE 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 Eastham Village. 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. EASTHAM VILLAGE

- 3.1 The following is a list of features and information that are part of the Conservation Area’s special character:
- Historic village dating back to before the Domesday Survey.
 - Village centred around church dating from the late 13th or early 14th centuries.
 - Wider village important as an 18th century recreational destination, with many of the buildings in the village centre built or used to support travellers.
 - The village has grown up gradually over time, with no one architectural style or historical period dominating.
 - The historic village has retained a degree of separation from neighbouring suburban areas by means of a green ‘buffer’ of playing fields, landscaped grounds and agricultural areas.
 - Roads are narrow and slightly winding, following a medieval street pattern.
 - There is a mix of building types throughout the village with smaller cottages amongst more opulent villas.
 - The intensity of buildings increases towards the village centre
 - Primary views are towards and featuring the church, however a few secondary vistas towards other groups of historic buildings are also important.
 - Most buildings are of two storeys with the building’s original social status determining their height.
 - Buildings are general simple in character, but there is very little repetition of building forms, other than within individual terraces.
 - Sandstone boundary walls are an important feature within the area and along the roads leading to it.
 - Red Cheshire sandstone is the most prominent building material in the village, however red brick is also widely used. A number of buildings are either painted or rendered. Most roofs with historic coverings are slated.
 - Openings and features such as chimneys are generally simple in character. Horizontal sliding sash windows are a common feature with vertical sashes in the higher status buildings. Many simple multi-paned timber casements are old and visually appropriate.

- In the few areas where modern housing exists it is of a limited scale and is not visually prominent. Extensions to buildings that are detrimental to the character of historic buildings are fortunately few in number. However a greater problem is in the extensive loss of historic features such as windows and in the poor repair of original fabric.

Management Issues

- 3.2 The closure of the Primary School at the heart of the village raises concerns for its future. It could be considered as a potential listed building at risk.
- 3.3 As the village is within the Green Belt the prospect of further development within it affecting the village character is extremely unlikely. Previous schemes at Eastham Mews and Vicarage Road identified in the appraisals will not be repeated. Eastham Mews is separated from the village core in a sylvan setting well located behind a stone boundary wall; whilst Vicarage Row has a considerable impact on the streetscape at a prominent corner of Ferry Road and Vicarage Road and has few redeeming features.
- 3.4 Eastham Hall, though set back from Rivacre Road, has been unsympathetically extended in the past losing its symmetry and acquiring a mansard roof adversely affecting the proportions of its façade. Both it and the large car park might be screened from the road by the judicious use of further landscaping.
- 3.5 With other buildings in the village comprising mainly terraced houses fronting the street the scope for extensions affecting the character of the conservation area is limited except for porches erected as permitted development.
- 3.6 The character of the village, with considerable numbers of terraced property at the back of pavement, makes it susceptible to small scale alterations. The appraisal identifies the types of alterations
- Changes of windows from timber to uPVC
 - Changes in size and proportion of window openings
 - Modern tiles and rooflights
 - Reduction of chimneys and loss of pots
 - Rendering of brick and stonework
 - Hard impermeable pointing of stonework which accelerates the decay of soft sandstone
 - Insertion of damp proof courses into stone work
 - Painting of Victorian brick

Terraced property is particularly sensitive to these types of alterations. Relatively minor changes to an individual unit can be detrimental to the rhythm of the group and affect the way each one relates to the others. The most notable example in the village is the terrace by the War Memorial at the junction of Stanley Lane and Eastham Village Road.

Boundary Changes and Article 4 Directions

- 3.7 As a general rule, the existing Eastham Village Conservation Area boundary represents a true reflection of the extent of the character it defines, with a small buffer zone of green space around it which protects its setting.
- 3.8 It is important however, that the boundary of a conservation area can be readily comprehended by residents and landowners and therefore wherever possible it must relate to physical land features. The current boundary has a number of oddities, where this does not happen. As shown on the map at Appendix D it is therefore recommended by Insall's that the following changes are made for clarification purposes:

- The triangular 'notch' out of the New Chester Road boundary does not relate to the garage forecourt and cuts through the building. It is recommended that the boundary is adjusted to follow continuously along the road.
- The boundary has an irregular shape between the village and the oil refinery which makes no reference to historic or current features. It is therefore recommended that it is extended to follow the refinery fenced boundary.
- Although the south-eastern boundary does not follow any field lines, there are no sensible points of reference, and as a straight line, it is simple to map. It is therefore recommended that it is left in its current position.

3.9 The following additional area is recommended by Insall's for inclusion:

- Extended area along Ferry Road, to include the former Carlett Cottage. The exterior of this building is in exceptionally good condition, with original (or good replacements) materials to the roof, windows, front wall and gate posts. The chimneys and stonework detailing are particularly attractive. This building, constructed in 1870, contributes positively to the character of the area, but is not currently protected by listing or inclusion within the designated conservation area.

3.10 The recommendations regarding changes for clarification purposes are acceptable but perhaps further consideration should be given to delineating the south eastern boundary with reference to field boundaries tree groups and the inclusion of the whole of the land within the curtilage of Eastham Mews.

3.11 Article 4 directions are not just automatic consequence of conservation area designation, but should be borne out of a careful assessment of what is of special interest within an area and should be preserved. Permitted development rights should only be withdrawn where there is evidence to prove that such development would damage the character of a conservation area and is currently taking place.

3.12 In the case of Eastham, the following items have been identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal part of this document as being important to the character of the area and therefore it is suggested that Article 4 directions are assigned to all category A and B buildings protect them from loss or change without consent:

- Windows
- Doors
- Roof coverings
- Front boundary walls
- Solar Panels
- Microgeneration Equipment

3.13 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.

3.14 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 COMMENTS OF THE EASTHAM VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAAC)

4.1 The Eastham Village Preservation Association through the CAAC have made comments on two drafts and have submitted a detailed response on points of fact which have resulted in the documents being amended.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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. Maintenance of historic lamp standards and conservation grade paving and kerbing may require additional Council investment.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None

7.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

8.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Eastham Village Conservation Area is within Eastham Ward

9.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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.

10.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

11.0 CRIME AND DISORDER STRATEGY / COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 None.

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

13.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended to Cabinet that:-

- (1) The Eastham Village 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 boundary changes and Article 4 directions between areas, and the financial and staffing implications arising.

**DAVID GREEN,
DIRECTOR TECHNICAL SERVICES**

This report has been prepared by Graham Arnold of the Conservation Section who can be contacted on 0151-606-2157.