



RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The following is a record of the decisions taken at the meeting of **CABINET** on **WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2013**.

The decisions will come into force and may be implemented from **TUESDAY 7 JANUARY 2014** unless the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or its Committees object to any such decision and call it in.

Calculation of Council Tax Base 2014/15 [Key Decision: CORP/R/13/04]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Resources to determine the Council's Council Tax Base for all domestic properties liable to pay council tax.

Regulations made under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended)) require each billing authority to calculate its 'Council Tax Base' for each following financial year. The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012:2914) provides amended statutory guidance to incorporate the changes as a result of the introduction of Local Council Tax Support Schemes (LCTSS's) from 1 April 2013. The Council Tax Base is a measure of the County Council's 'taxable capacity', for the purpose of setting its Council Tax. Legislation requires the Council to set out the formula for that calculation and that the tax base is formally approved by Cabinet.

Section 84 of the Local Government Act 2003 enables authorities to set their Council Tax Base, other than by a decision of the full Council, therefore, allowing Cabinet to take the necessary decisions to determine the Council Tax Base for 2014/15.

Council on 4 December 2013 resolved to continue with the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme into 2014/15, which retains the same level of support to all council tax payers as the previous Council Tax Benefit Scheme, which was abolished on 1 April 2013.

The extension to the LCTSS is initially for one more year and the Scheme will be kept under continuous review with a further decision to be considered by Cabinet in September 2014 and Council by January 2015. There are no other discount changes impacting on the Tax Base for 2014/15.

At 31 October 2013 there were 236,957 dwellings in County Durham. Some of these properties are exempt from council tax (e.g. dwellings occupied solely by

students), whilst in single person households only 75% of the tax is payable. Following decisions taken last year, empty properties no longer receive any discount, neither do second homes and long term empty properties (those empty for more than two years) attract a 50% premium.

The number of dwellings, therefore, needs to be adjusted to reflect these discounts and exemptions, giving a net property base (chargeable dwellings) for each Council Tax band. Council Tax for a Band A property is 6/9ths of the Band D council tax; Band B is 7/9ths and Band C is 8/9ths. Prior to consideration of the impact of the LCTSS, there are 209,962.6 chargeable properties in County Durham. 84.7% of these are within bands A to C, with 59.6% of all properties being in Band A. The Council Tax levied varies between the different bands according to proportions laid down in legislation. These proportions are based around Band D, and are fixed so that the bill for a dwelling in Band A will be a third of the bill for a dwelling in Band H.

In determining the Council Tax Base for 2014/15, two further issues were factored into the calculation:

- Forecast reductions in the tax base as a result of the move to the LCTSS, which is a discount rather than a benefit payment - including a prudent 2% assumed increase in caseload / costs in 2014/15 over the 2013/14 year to date costs of the current LCTSS; and
- Provision for non-collection

In 2013/14, the provision for non-collection was 1.5%, giving a forecast collection rate of 98.5% and based on actual collection performance, it is proposed to retain the same collection rate for 2014/15. In determining the tax base, no provision has been made for new build or other changes in the quantum of discounts and exemptions. This is a prudent approach.

Taking into account the forecast collection rate and factoring in the adjustments to the Band D Equivalent properties as a result of the LCTSS next year, the Band D Equivalent Tax Base will be 129,047.4 in 2014/15, which compares to the current 2013/14 tax base figure for the County of 128,205.0 – an increase of 842.4 (0.65%).

The council tax base for the County Council will be used by the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority to set their council tax precepts for 2014/15, which will be included in the council tax bills sent to every council tax payer in the County.

The parish and town councils and the Charter Trust for the City of Durham, council tax bases will be used to calculate the parish and town councils and the Charter Trust for the City of Durham precepts in 2014/15. These will also be added to the council tax bills and sent to every council tax payer in the respective parish and town council areas.

Officers will continue to carefully track and monitor the Council Tax Base and Collection Fund performance. The quarter 2 forecast of outturn report (based on the position to 30 September 2013) includes details of the Collection Fund performance. For budget setting purposes the Collection Fund is assumed to be balanced at 31 March 2014, i.e. no surplus or deficit on the Fund to be taken into account at Council Tax setting. The major precepting bodies (Police & Fire) have been notified of this.

In continuing with the current LCTSS next year, members have committed to a full review of the Scheme in early summer of 2014. This review will draw on experiences elsewhere and the impact of the wider welfare reforms in County Durham during 2013/14 and put forward options for consideration by Cabinet in September next year, with a view to consultation on any changes for 2015/16 being in the Autumn of 2014 and a report being presented to Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation in December 2014. The 2015/16 LCTSS scheme will need to be endorsed by Council before 31 January 2015.

Decision

The Cabinet approved the Council Tax Base for the financial year 2014/15 for the County, which has been calculated to be 129,047.4 Band D equivalent properties.

2014/15 Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan(4) 2014/15 – 2016/17 and Service Plans [Key Decision: CORP/R/13/02]

Summary

The Council considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Resources and the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the 2014/15 Budget, the Medium Term Financial Plan up to 2016/17, the Council Plan and Service Planning process.

The MTFP(4) update report to Cabinet on 9 October 2013 identified the council faced £222m of savings across the period 2011 to 2017. Although the council will have delivered £113m of the required savings by the end of 2013/14 there was estimated savings of £63.1m still to be delivered in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Since the last MTFP(4) update report to Cabinet the Government has published its Autumn Statement on 5 December 2013, whilst the review of the council's budget has continued. The Autumn Statement did not announce any further Revenue Support Grant cuts for the council in addition to the 11.5% and 16.1% already announced for 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively. The council will await the Government's Local Government Finance Settlement on 18 December 2013 to determine whether additional funding reductions could be made to specific grants.

The Government have reacted to the strong response from local authorities to the draft Local Government Finance Settlement consultation in July 2013 in relation to New Homes Bonus which will now be retained by local authorities in 2015/16 rather than being transferred to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

A major concern for local authorities however is the Institute for Fiscal Studies report that additional public expenditure cuts/tax rises of £20bn are still required nationally to balance the national budget deficit by 2018/19.

The review of Durham County Council budgets has enabled a balanced budget position to be achieved at this stage for 2014/15. The report identifies that savings of £223m are required in total over the 2011-2017 period with a £63.6m savings shortfall in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Previous reports to Cabinet have identified the need to replenish the MTFP Redundancy and Early Retirement Reserve which is forecast to have a £2.5m balance at the end of 2013/14. It is recommended that a transfer of £15m is made from Cash Limit Reserves (£10m) and the General Reserve (£5m) to replenish the MTFP Redundancy and Early Retirement Reserve.

The Autumn Statement was published on 5 December 2013. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a slight improvement in the public finances for 2013/14 with borrowing expected to reduce from the forecast £120bn to £111bn. Economic growth is also improving with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expected to be 1.4% this year against the forecast of 0.8%. The Government's aim is to achieve a balanced budget by 2018/19. Analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) has identified however that to achieve financial balance by 2018/19 would require additional public sector budgets cuts or tax increases of £20bn per annum.

The forecast grant reductions for the council in the next two years are as follows:

	% Funding Reductions
2014/15	11.5%
2015/16	16.1%

The Autumn Statement announced that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) would not face additional cuts in 2014/15 and 2015/16. The council may face additional cuts however, via cuts to funding streams received from other Government departments such as the Department for Education. Clarity in this regard should be received via the Local Government Finance Settlement on 18 December 2013 which should cover both 2014/15 and 2015/16.

The Government announced a range of policy changes in relation to business rates. Any such policy change has an impact upon the council due to the retention of 50% of all business rates collected under the Business Rate Retention (BRR) Scheme. The policy changes are as follows:

- The doubling of Small Business Rate Relief will continue in 2014/15.
- The 3.2% RPI increase for business rates in 2014/15 will be limited to 2%.
- There will be a £1,000 discount for all retail, pubs, and cafes with rateable values below £50,000 for two years.

Each of these policies will result in reduced income for the council. The Government has confirmed however that there will be a cost neutral impact upon local authorities. It is not clear in practice how this will be actioned. On that basis, the MTFP(4) model has been left unchanged.

The Government had previously announced that £400m of New Homes Bonus was to be top sliced from local authorities in 2015/16 and transferred to the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) as part of the Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF). The Government has indicated however that local authorities will now be allowed to retain the New Homes Bonus in 2015/16.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- a. Noted the update in relation to the Autumn Statement announcement on 5 December 2013 and the Local Government Finance Settlement.
- b. Agreed the adjustments in relation to the 2014/15 budget.
- c. Agreed the amount of 2014/15 savings required to achieve a balanced budget.
- d. Noted the estimated £63.6m savings shortfall for the period 2015/16 to 2016/17.
- e. Approved the transfer of £15m from General Reserve (£5m) and Cash Limits Reserves (£10m) to the MTFP Redundancy and ER/VR Reserve.
- f. Noted the update in relation to the MTFP(4) consultation process.
- g. Noted the update on the development of the Council Plan and Service Plans.

Draft Tree Management Policy [Key Decision: NS/25/13]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services and the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development on a draft countywide tree policy for the management of all trees under Durham County Council's ownership and those trees in private ownership that pose a safety risk to the public highway.

As a tree owner, Durham County Council have a direct responsibility for ensuring its trees do not pose a danger to the public or property and are managed appropriately. Furthermore, Durham County Council has a duty under the Highway Act to ensure that those trees in private ownership adjacent to the highway do not pose a danger to its users.

Whilst the Councils owned woodlands have management plans governing their day to day maintenance, there is currently no written countywide policy to guide management decisions on trees within open spaces. The arboriculture teams have been guided by the broadly consistent practices inherited from the former Councils that healthy trees would never be removed or heavily pruned without good reason. The absence of an adopted policy does however expose the Council to risks of inconsistent responses and challenge. Such a policy would seek to balance the risk and nuisance to individuals sometimes posed by trees in specific circumstances against the public and environmental benefits they bring. A policy will also be of use in relation to proactive work, in particular the surveys of tree stock that have recently commenced in highways. It is proposed, subject to approval, to consult widely on the draft policy, allowing Members to consider any amendments or revisions that are required before formal adoption.

The Durham County Council draft Tree Management policy was attached to the Cabinet report at Appendix 2. It has been developed involving a wide range of officers, for example specialist Tree Officers, Clean and Green Teams, Highways and Planners. It takes into consideration the previous tree management frameworks/practices inherited from the former Councils. It is important to note, that there are no significant changes to current practice as a result of these new policies.

Engagement with stakeholders will be necessary for this policy. An engagement plan has been drafted in conjunction with the lead officer. The plan will then be approved by the Consultation Officers Group and the actions implemented. The activities carried out, and the results of the consultation, will be included in a consultation summary document, as part of a future report on this subject.

Decision

The Cabinet approved proposed consultation on the draft Tree Management Policy.

Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan [Key Decision: R&ED/12/13]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development on the progress of the Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan.

In December 2009 the Council set a county-wide carbon dioxide reduction target of 40% by 2020 which was taken forward by means of a low carbon masterplan, agreed by Cabinet in 2010. In light of the strategic context of carbon reduction as a corporate priority, this activity was reviewed in 2011 and an all encompassing approach that included partners and community wide activities was introduced in the form of a County Durham Climate Change Strategy and Delivery Plan. This would also take into account likely impacts arising from the forthcoming County Durham Plan.

Within the County Durham Partnership, as part of the Altogether Greener theme, the Climate Change Strategy Group has overseen preparation of the Strategy and Delivery Plan, engaging with key stakeholders such as AAPs, Parish Councils and local groups. The resulting further actions and examples of local initiatives that are taking place within the County are detailed in the Delivery Plan.

The Strategy sets out a clear vision and objectives to become established as a low carbon county. It acts as a bridge between the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Climate Change Delivery Plan. The aims of the Strategy are:

- (i) to reduce the county's emissions by 40% by 2020 from 1990 levels
- (ii) to adapt to a changing climate stating:

The aims are assigned in more detail across seven themes:

- Public Sector Performance
- Low Carbon Economy
- Built Environment
- Natural Environment
- Transport and Infrastructure
- Community Engagement
- Impacts Beyond our Boundaries

Durham County Council has set two targets for reducing carbon emissions.

- By 2020, reduce carbon emissions (from domestic, commercial, and transport sources) across County Durham by 40% from a 1990 baseline. This was adopted first and is above the UK target of 34%. It is worth pointing out that the UK Government also has an 80% reduction target by 2050 so additional goals and targets will need setting to move towards this overall objective.
- By 2020, reduce carbon emissions (from domestic, commercial, and transport sources) across County Durham by 22% from a 2005 baseline. This was adopted later as a condition of signing the Covenant of Mayors. This represents a greater reduction in emissions.

It is proposed to undertake a public consultation on the Strategy and Delivery Plan in January and include any amendments to performance and targets in the final version. The consultation will be used for feedback on the documents but will be a first step in engaging with the wider community across Durham. The final version will be presented to Cabinet and the Altogether Greener Board in the first quarter of 2014/15 and will be updated annually.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- (i) acknowledged progress towards the targets and proposed to retain the current targets for the initial publication but review them by April 2015. It is also proposed to track progress on a per capita basis to take account of the planned developments.
- (ii) agreed to formalise a medium term 2031 target to link into the timescale of the County Durham Plan. A target of a 55% reduction (from 1990 levels) would be a suitable mid-point to initially aim for.
- (iii) agreed to consider relevant projects that the authority and its partners are engaged in that will influence progress towards the targets and feeds this back for appraisal.

Proposals for the Development of Market Rent and Market Sale Housing in Durham [Key Decision: R&ED/18/13]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development detailing a proposal for the Council to develop its own market rent and market sale housing on County Council owned land and considering how best this can be delivered. The report proposed the establishment of a new company that will help the Council achieve its growth ambitions through the delivery of both housing for rent and sale, offer an alternative route to that of the private sector and help to meet housing need and demand across the county. It also offers an opportunity for the Council to maximise capital receipts from the development and sale of housing and introduce a new source of revenue from rental income streams. The private rented market has expanded significantly over the last 10 years (from 7.9% of the market in 2001 to 13.8% in 2011 (Census 2011)) and is now recognised as playing an important role in meeting people's housing needs as well as increasing mobility. It helps to stimulate and respond to economic growth. By contrast, the proportion of houses in owner occupation has declined slightly.

Overall, housing completions are currently below 1,000 per annum. There is a need to increase delivery in order to meet identified need. The County Durham Plan identifies locations for this development to take place; this report identifies a way to deliver some of these housing units in locations that conform with the County Durham Plan and in forms of tenure that meet identified housing need.

The present government has encouraged growth in market rent housing. Durham's 2013 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) identified that a high proportion of 'in migrants' (45.1%) chose the private rented sector for their first home in Durham. Over half of all households (50.2%) who had previously lived in Durham with family and friends (i.e. newly forming households) chose the private rented sector for their first home.

Whilst the Durham housing market has a strong supply of low value housing (often pre-1919 terraced housing), there is little rented housing in the private market that is of high quality and which matches the aspirational life styles of many newly forming households. There are relatively few examples of new build for rent in Durham (other than the affordable housing products provided by Registered Providers).

Furthermore, there are many newly forming and existing households who are seeking a home but who cannot access owner occupation at the present time and yet do not consider the social rented sector as an option either. This group of households are at a disadvantage in that they are not able to easily identify any particular housing solution to meet their needs. They are usually economically active but may be on average or below average incomes.

The County Council has the opportunity to use its own land to support the delivery of housing to meet identified need for market rent and housing for sale. The route described in the report is designed to maximise the delivery of housing units in the shortest timeframe and deliver revenue income to the County Council.

A further report will be presented to Cabinet in spring 2014 which will set out the detailed way forward, including proposals to ensure efficient delivery.

Decision

The Cabinet agreed:

1. To further explore the proposals for the development and management of market rent housing and housing for sale.
2. To the commencement of procurement for technical advice and a contracting partner to aid the production of the Business Plan.
3. To the establishment of a Project Board and to delegated decision making on the project to the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development and the Corporate Director of Resources, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Rural Issues and the Portfolio Holder for Resources.
4. To receive a further report setting out a detailed Business Plan including project plan, a resource plan for the programme, governance and staffing arrangements and arrangements for the establishment of a new company.

Review of Care Connect [Key Decision: R&ED/23/13]

Summary

The Cabinet considered a joint report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development and the Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services on the review of the Care Connect services and options available to meet the MTFP savings proposal to reduce their expenditure on the Care Connect service from £3.3m to £2.3m from 2014.

Care Connect is the council's community alarm and telecare/telehealth provider. It provides a range of additional preventative services to a variety of client groups who can be mainly described as elderly or vulnerable. These services are complementary and additional to other assessed and eligible care services provided by DCC.

Supporting People grant was a ring fenced grant paid to local authorities to commission 'housing related support services' from 2003. Community alarm services were funded from the public purse as part of that grant. In 2003 the grant was initially £15.0m. The grant amount was reduced on several occasions after 2003 and the ring fence was removed in 2010. Thereafter the funding was absorbed in general funding for local authorities and has been subject to the full range of reductions in the government's successive settlements for local government.

In order to address the reduction in funding support the Council's MTFP includes a proposal to reduce expenditure on Care Connect services by £1m from April 2014.

A joint service review has examined the wider functions of the care connect service and investigated alternative procurement options for these services. The review identified the complexity and diversity of the Care Connect service and recognised both its economies of scale and the added value to the wider council and other

agencies in the provision of additional services to vulnerable people, CCTV and 'out of hours' services.

The review concluded that there was no immediate appetite in the private sector for the services currently offered and recommended that a joint operational review be carried out to identify options to accommodate the planned £1m reduction in funding.

In addition the RED service has been reviewing its own budget position for the MTFP going forward with all services being required to review their cost envelope and develop proposals for additional savings.

A task and finish group was established to develop options to meet the CAS savings target together with any further cost reductions required by RED and to explore the implications of these reductions on the services offered.

The group has looked at a range of options, large and small that will deliver a reduced service cost as well as options to improve the service, increase efficiency and increase revenue. In order to deliver the required level of savings it will be necessary to make more fundamental changes in relation to the way in which the service is delivered, the level of service provided and to consider the introduction of charges for service users.

The group also identified that the provision of Telecare as part of an assessed care package is one of the key elements in the transformation of adult social care. The number of Telecare users has already significantly increased within the last 6 months and this trend is likely to continue. The review of options has therefore considered assessed Telecare as a priority area for development and for allocation of CAS funding both now and in the future.

The work to date has identified the following two savings options as being the most appropriate to be developed.

- Changes to support planning function (estimated saving £839k pa)
- Income Generation (estimated income from £177k to £354k pa)

Any proposal to reduce the level of service or introduce new charges would require discussion with service users, staff and unions. In addition, discussion will be necessary with housing organisations and response agencies (Police, Fire, Ambulance) as some of the changes could have significant impacts for these services.

The report recommended that the following three options are developed in order to meet the required savings target.

Delivered Improvements and Efficiencies £78K

That the Care Connect service management implement the range of minor improvements and efficiencies.

Changes to Support Planning Function £839K

The 13 week support plan review is replaced with an annual review which is in line with other social care assessments. An exercise will be undertaken with all service users to clearly explain the change in delivery model as well as reassuring all users that the response service can still be accessed 24/7. The exercise will be undertaken sensitively and will be key to retaining service users.

As this option will see a reduction of 26 FTE Wardens and associated staff. Requests for ERVR will be sought. However, re-engineering of the service structure will still need to be undertaken.

Income Generation £83K

The current contribution for 'self-payers' is increased from £4.10 to £4.50 per week.

Some users may choose to leave the service rather than pay the additional contribution, which would have an impact on the savings. Any shortfall in the anticipated income/savings target would be met from cash limits until exact numbers, costs and savings levels have been established.

No other charge is introduced for the next two financial years effectively protecting current users from charges.

Decision

Cabinet agreed the MTFP proposal to deliver £1m savings from the Care Connect service through the following actions:

- Replacing the current quarterly support planning visits with an annual review
- Increasing the charges to self-payers from £4.10 to £4.50 per week
- Undertaking efficiency and improvement activity within the service

World War 1 Centenary Activity Programme

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services providing details of an overview of activity being arranged across the County to mark the Centenary of World War 1 (WW1-100). The report also sought Member involvement in the planning process.

The government is working alongside partners, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Imperial War Museums, on a series of national remembrance events, together with an extensive cultural programme and educational schemes.

The Government's Centenary activity will focus on three key dates:

- August 4, 2014 - the centenary of the day Britain entered the war;
- July 1, 2016 - 100 years after the Battle of the Somme; and
- November 11, 2018 - the anniversary of the day the guns fell silent.

The region is only now starting to publically announce its major WW1 Centenary signature events for the next four years. The HLF have commented that there is potential for Durham (home of the DLI) to take the lead and become the regional hub if we have the ambition to do this. HLF have identified that the DLI could be the region's hub for commemorative activity and the focus for all visitors to the region seeking information relating to WW1.

The centenary is particularly important in County Durham due to the strength and reputation of the Durham Light Infantry and the contribution of the mining industry both in the front line and on the home front.

The presence of the DLI Museum, DLI collection and the DLI Archive (stored in the CRO) provides a major resource for the public and professional researchers. The DLI Museum is still acknowledged as one of the leading regimental museums in the UK. However, the exhibitions were launched in 2000 with an expected lifespan of 10-12 years. They are now tired and elements have ceased to function. The existing display does not allow for easy changes in its content.

Whilst preparations and discussions are in their early days there is already an emerging programme. Appendix 3 of the report sets out the emerging programme

In considering a DDC programme of activity there are a number of opportunities for funding any potential programme namely:

- a. National funding opportunities
- b. Existing revenue funding
- c. Outside cash limits requests (including capital)

In continuing to plan for the commemorations it is now vital that an events and activities calendar for all activities across the County is established through the Cultural Partnership to ensure coordination of activities. The commemoration period spans a five year period and sustaining a comprehensive programme throughout will only be achieved through a partnership approach. Similarly decisions around the focus point(s) of the county's efforts will need to be made.

Decision

The Cabinet:

- Endorsed the approach to arrangements for WW1 Centenary
- Agreed that the Portfolio Holders for Heritage & Culture and Education join the Durham County Council WW1 Working Group
- A further update report is presented to Cabinet in the summer 2014

Boundary Amendments and Character Appraisals for Gainford Conservation Area

Summary

The Cabinet considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development to approve an amended boundary and character appraisal for the Gainford Conservation Area.

The Council has a statutory duty under s69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate any areas which they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest as conservation areas, and to review these from time to time. The Council has a further duty under s71(1) to formulate and prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of those areas.

There are currently 93 designated conservation areas within County Durham, many of which have not been reviewed since their original designation. The Heritage, Landscape and Design Team has therefore been undertaking a programme of reviews of all the existing areas, and preparing character appraisals as part of the proactive management of the historic environment. The Gainford Conservation Area was originally designated on 5 May 1971 by Durham County Council.

The appraisal process allows for a review of whether designation is still warranted, and whether any extensions or amendments to the designated boundaries are required to strengthen the special interest of the area.

An eastern extension to the conservation area boundary is proposed to include the former St. Peters School buildings and land which is now split into two ownerships. This proposal has generated a substantial level of local interest, and was the main focus of discussions during public meetings.

The intention behind this proposed extension is to promote the retention and reuse of the main school building to the north of the site which dates from 1900 and has clear architectural interest. The historic buildings have been assessed as worthy of inclusion within the conservation area by several members of the Heritage Landscape and Design Team, and have also been acknowledged as having architectural interest by a private consultant from Purcell commissioned by the Gainford and Langton Parish Council who highlighted the obvious condition issues and negative social history of the site.

At present the site has been assessed as unsuitable for residential development because of its unsustainable location in terms of relationship to the settlement and distance to services, and the additional challenge of being within flood zone 2 and 3. Retaining and reusing some of the historic buildings on the site as a public benefit could help a developer mitigate against these planning constraints. The inclusion of the site within the conservation area boundary would also set a higher benchmark for design quality of any new development and ensure that it relates positively to the established character of the village.

The objections and negative comments received regarding the proposed St. Peters extension have been carefully considered as part of the review process, however the positive effects of including the site within the conservation area and increased opportunities to secure a viable and positive reuse of the site also carries significant weight.

Decision

The Cabinet approved the proposed amended boundary and character appraisal for the Gainford Conservation Area.

Colette Longbottom,
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

20 December 2013