

Cabinet

18 December 2013

Boundary Amendments and Character Appraisals for Gainford Conservation Area



Report of Corporate Management Team

Ian Thompson, Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development

Cllr Neil Foster, Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To approve an amended boundary and character appraisal for the Gainford Conservation Area. Boundary amendments can now be authorised by the Head of Planning and Assets under delegated powers, however in this case recorded public expectation of a Cabinet decision warrants member consideration of the proposed changes.

Background

- 2 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.
- 3 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 our proactive management of the historic environment.
- 4 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. This supports objective G7 of the RED Service Plan to enhance, conserve and maximise the value of Durham's built environment.
- 5 The County Council has produced 33 appraisal documents which have been approved by Cabinet since the Local Government Reorganisation in 2009. This report seeks approval for an amended boundary to the Gainford Conservation Area and approval of the accompanying character

appraisal. Copies of the appraisal and revised boundary map are attached as Appendices A and B.

- 6 The character appraisal is an individual evidence based document that investigates, evaluates and records the unique significance of the conservation area by assessing the diverse individual architectural and historic features that contribute to its overall special character. It also considers whether the boundary remains appropriate. Through this it increases our understanding of the designated area; guiding proposals for future management of change and aiding consistent decision making. The appraisal process has been undertaken with reference to the English Heritage publication Evaluating Place.
- 7 The Gainford Conservation Area was originally designated on 5 May 1971 by Durham County Council. The proposed boundary amendments would add an area of land to the west of the village along the riverside and extend the boundary to the north of the village to include East, South and West View. The riverside area has historic land use, ecological interest and contributes to the setting of the conservation area and views to Gainford Hall - the proposed boundary extension was expanded in response to public consultation comments received. East, South and West View are proposed for inclusion within the conservation area boundary because of the architectural and historic interest of the properties and surviving historic features. An additional area of open space opposite West View is also proposed to be included within the conservation area in response to public consultation comments received.
8. 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 our public meetings which were attended by approximately 80 local residents. Formal objections to and/or concerns regarding this proposed extension have been received from the Gainford and Langton Parish Council, one of the landowners and 16 local residents. A letter of support from the second landowner and supportive comments from 3 local residents were also received.
9. Our 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, rather than to prevent or hinder any options for redevelopment in this location. 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.

10. Para 140 of the NPPF allows the local planning authority to balance the public benefits of securing the conservation of a heritage asset, against the disbenefit of departing from other policies. 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.
11. 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. On balance it is therefore considered that the amendment to the conservation area boundary to include the St. Peters site should be taken forward for consideration by the Cabinet.
12. A copy of Gainford Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been deposited in the Members' Library.

Recommendations and reason

Approval is therefore sought for the proposed amended boundary and character appraisal for the Gainford Conservation Area.

When future character appraisals raise very exceptional public interest a report will similarly be prepared for Cabinet level consideration of critical issues. This serves as a clarification of the current delegated powers.

Background papers

Appendix A: Gainford Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Appendix B: Proposed amended boundary map for the Gainford Conservation Area

Appendix C: Summary of consultation responses

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance –

The cost of preparing and advertising the change to the boundary of the conservation area is being met by the existing Heritage, Landscape and Design Team budget.

Staffing –

None

Risk –

The ongoing review of conservation areas and production of character appraisals and management proposals ensures that we have a statutorily compliant planning service.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty –

None

Accommodation –

None

Crime and Disorder –

None

Human Rights –

Inclusion within a designated conservation area affects a homeowner's permitted development rights.

Consultation –

A formal public consultation on the proposed changes to the conservation area boundary and the draft character appraisal was completed on 26 July 2013. As part of this process two information sessions were held in the Gainford Montalbo Village Hall to publicise the proposed boundary changes and gather comments on the appraisal documents. Local councillors, Area Action Partnership members, the Gainford and Langton Parish Council, and English Heritage were also consulted on the proposals. Information on the proposals was included on the County Council website for the general public and individual responses were sent to all written comments. Officers also gave a follow up presentation on the proposals to the Gainford and Langton Parish Council in September. A summary of the consultation responses received is attached as Appendix C.

Procurement –

None

Disability Issues –

None

Legal Implications –

The Council has a statutory obligation to review existing conservation area designations and prepare proposals for their preservation and enhancement. This report supports those statutory functions.