

| Policy & Resources Committee Meeting | |
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| Meeting Date | 7th February 2024 |
| Report Title | Sheerness - Mile Town Conservation Area review |
| EMT Lead | Emma Wiggins - Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods |
| Head of Service | Joanne Johnson – Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning |
| Lead Officer | Jhilmil Kishore - Senior Conservation & Design Officer (Projects) |
| Classification | Open |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which are set out in the report appendices. 2. To agree the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make the Policy & Resources Committee aware of updated appraisal and some proposed boundary changes to the Sheerness- Mile Town Conservation Area and to recommend that the conservation area be formally re-designated under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. The proposals include a detailed character appraisal and associated management strategy in line with current good practice for the management of conservation areas. Officers recommend that the Policy & Resources supports and agrees the changes to the review document set out in **Appendix i** and as reflected in **Appendix ii**.

2 Background

- 2.1 Sheerness- Mile Town Conservation Area was first designated in June 1976. An appraisal document and minor boundary (judicious) changes were adopted in 2000. It has not been systematically reviewed since 2000 and until now there has been no published management strategy. There is a formal requirement under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for Conservation Areas to be reviewed from ‘time to time’.
- 2.2 The Swale Heritage Strategy, adopted in March 2020, has resulted in a stronger commitment by the Council to ensure its conservation areas are reviewed more

regularly and possible new conservation areas also given consideration. The review of Sheerness- Marine Town Conservation Area is part of the work programme of the initial 3-year action plan forming part of the adopted Swale Heritage Strategy 2020 – 2032. The focus on conservation areas in the initial action plan has given priority to those conservation areas in the Borough classified locally and nationally as ‘at risk’ – of which there are 8 – Sheerness- Mile Town Conservation Area is one of them.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The proposal is to re-designate and amend the boundary of the conservation area and to equip it with a detailed character appraisal and a complementary management strategy which will assist with development management and heritage conservation purposes over the next decade or more. It will be a matter for the Policy & Resources Committee to decide whether to formally adopt the Sheerness- Mile Town Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy (as recommended and set out in **Appendix ii**, following consultation feedback, or otherwise).
- 3.2 Part of the review process involved an assessment of whether the area should be extended or reduced in size. In this regard particular consideration was given to extending the conservation area. Two specific areas are identified in the document as Boundary A, to include Old Jew's Burial Ground upto and including Invicta works along Hope Street and Boundary B to include the entire curtilage of the Water Works, current Conservation Area boundary cuts through the site of the Waterworks. In addition to these two extensions, Historic England has recommended that consideration be given to extending the boundary to include the former County Library, an attractive building with some historic and architectural value, and a 19th century former house marked as Towers Hall on historic OS maps. In addition, they have recommended that it would be beneficial to consider extending the boundary to include High Street buildings up until the junction with the A250. Though the historic buildings on the High Street are altered, they are of a similar quality to those directly to the west and within the conservation area.
- 3.4 The recommendation is:
- Members note the content of the public consultation draft of the character appraisal and management strategy document produced for the review, and the representations made on this by interested parties, the details of which are set out in the report appendices; and
 - Support and agree the changes to the review document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 One option would be to not take this review work any further. This is not recommended because it would risk the justifiable continuation of the designation and/or the appropriately sensitive and positive management of the conservation area and its wider setting moving forward.
- 4.2 A second possible option would be to disregard some elements, or all of the feedback received, in terms of the suggested boundary change(s). However, whilst it is considered that the appraisal and management plan (to support the redesignation of the conservation area) is essentially sound, the feedback provided from the local community is valuable and to ignore any of this feedback without sound reasons would call the value of the consultation process into question and potentially deliver reputational damage to the Council.
- 4.3 A third possible option would be to suspend the work on this review until some point in the future. Whilst this option would not result in wasted officer time, it could still lead to (a) the designation being challenged, (b) reputational damage to the Council and/or (c) development and associated infrastructure provision decisions being made for the locality without an appropriate understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of the Bredgar Conservation Area.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 A 6-week public consultation ran from Thursday 10th August 2023 upto and including Thursday 21st September 2023. Due to poor response to the consultation and on Historic England's request, it was further extended by 10 days and finally concluded on Friday 6th October 2023.
- 5.2 All those parties with property within or overlapping the current conservation area boundary were notified in writing of the review and were invited to comment on it, as were key relevant organisations including Kent County Council and Historic England.
- 5.3 Hard copies of the review document were made available at the Sheerness Library and was available to view/download on-line via the Council's website for the duration of the 6-week (including the extended) public consultation period.
- 5.4 A total of 3 consultation responses have been received. 2 from local residents and a very detailed response from Historic England. The officer's response to these responses (as summarised) is attached as appendix i.
- 5.5 Kent County Council in its function as the Highway Authority was consulted on the conservation area review but provided no feedback.

- 5.6 A written update was sent to Sheppey Area committee highlighting the main aspects of the Sheerness- Mile Town Conservation Area Review.

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
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| Corporate Plan | <p>Priority 2 of the Plan is: 'Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges'. Objectives 2.1, 2.4 and 2.5 of this priority are respectively to:</p> <p>(2.1) 'Develop a coherent strategy to address the climate and ecological emergencies, aiming for carbon neutrality in the council's own operations by 2025 and in the whole borough by 2020, and pursue all opportunities to enhance biodiversity across the borough'.</p> <p>(2.4) 'Recognise and support our local heritage to give people pride in the place they live and boost the local tourism industry.'</p> <p>(2.5) 'Work towards a cleaner borough where recycling remains a focus and ensure that the council acts as an exemplar environmental steward, making space for nature wherever possible'.</p> <p>The character appraisal and management strategy document, once amended as appropriate and subsequently adopted would support all 3 of the above-stated objectives from the Corporate Plan.</p> |
| Financial, Resource and Property | <p>Implementing some aspects of the proposed Management Plan may have financial and resource implications for the council, particularly if it is decided to proceed with an Area of Special Advertisement control review or/and signage review. These costs are not yet budgeted for and may need to be considered within any future Heritage Strategy Action Plans.</p> |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | <p>The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on every local planning authority to "<i>determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance</i>" and, from time to time, to review the functioning existing conservation areas.</p> |
| Crime and Disorder | <p>None identified at this stage.</p> |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | <p>One of the three dimensions of sustainable development is its environmental role: contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.</p> |

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| Health and Wellbeing | The health and wellbeing aspects of interaction with heritage assets and heritage related projects are referenced in the adopted Heritage Strategy which underpins this review work. |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | None identified at this stage. |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | None identified at this stage. |
| Equality and Diversity | None identified at this stage. |
| Privacy and Data Protection | None identified at this stage. |

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix i: Public consultation – table of representations (in summary form), and the council’s response to them.
- Appendix ii: Public consultation version of the 2023 draft Sheerness- Mile Town character appraisal and management plan document.

8 Background Papers

A Heritage Strategy for Swale 2020-2032 Adopted March 2020