

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

20 JUNE 2023

TASK AND FINISH GROUP – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL PROCESS

Report of: Task and Finish Group (Cllrs Butler, Farmer, and Woods)

PURPOSE OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. To review HDCs' support for the parishes to deliver conservation area appraisals.
2. To understand what guidance and advice is published by the Council to explain the processes.
3. To ensure that a clear approval/adoption process is in place, with all parties understanding their obligations.
4. To understand if sufficient information is available and identify potential costs.
5. To ensure that any standard template is flexible and fit for purpose and that everything has been procured in accordance with Council procurement rules.
6. Scrutinise that the Council has in place a flexible arrangement that seeks to minimise cost.

BACKGROUND AD ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN

1. Parishes across the district were approaching their appraisals in different ways and each had a different experience. The Council wants to ensure that going forward, each parish goes through a process which is fair and equitable.
2. Some parishes are relying heavily on consultants, others are going it alone. For some parishes the time taken was 2 years, others in excess of 4 years.
3. The Council wanted to establish how best it could support the parishes, so that each parish had a similar, positive experience.
4. Meetings were held with Parish representatives from Odiham, Crondall, Crookham Village and Hartley Wintney, and with Daniel Hawes.

MAIN ISSUES ARISING

1. Lack of template
2. Difficult to use the template eventually promoted by the Council – inflexible and incurred cost in updating work (it was not clear how the template was procured by the Council or that accessibility issues had been addressed)
3. Slowness of responses from Hart officers (Odiham and Hartley Wintney). In contrast Crookham Village didn't feel the need for officer input and Crondall felt that officers were professional).
4. No single point of contact or named officer at Hart.
5. Timely and consistent input from Hart officers.

TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Clear template as to how the document should be set out. This should set out what exactly must be included and the order in which the different elements of the document should be considered.
2. From any consultation stage and beyond the nationally prescribed accessibility guidelines (Web Content Accessibility Guidance (WCAG) www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag) must be applied to all documents that are to be published. Also, advice should be given on how to label maps, tables and photos.
3. The template should not lock the ability to readily alter, update or simply adjust the template in draft form (the Council should consider going through a proper and open procurement exercise for the template itself).
4. It should be made clear to a parish council that what is required of the Conservation Area Appraisal is a meaty, serious planning document which is evidenced based – not subjective opinion. All appraisal work should have regard to Historic England's best practice advice 'Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation & Management' Historic England Advice Note 1 (Second Edition) published 8 February 2019. [Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management | Historic England](#). It is sensible that the approach to conservation area appraisals in Hart reflect the Historic England best practice.
5. Clear flow chart outlining tasks which need to be undertaken and the order in which they should be tackled.
6. Designated officer to liaise with parishes (the Council needs to consider what resources it makes available to support Conservation Area Appraisals).
7. Parishes are directed to exemplar conservation area appraisals from neighbouring parishes.
8. If the Council is suggesting that parishes use consultants, a shopping list of options should be offered (procurement rules mean that there should be choices and the Council should not promote favoured consultants over others). Parishes should not feel pressurised to use a consultant.
9. The Council should maintain regular contact with the parish council during the process, to ensure that the parish council 'isn't going off on completely the wrong tack'. Good clear and structured communication will reduce the potential for unnecessary abortive costs.
10. Notwithstanding recommendation 8 above, Hart Officers should in principle look to have only 'one bite of the cherry' in terms of a thorough review of the document. Suggestion that this is prior to the public consultation.
11. The Council to advise parishes on how to carry out the public consultation and how to analyse the feedback.
12. All suitable conservation area appraisals to be adopted, not just noted. Noting such documents simply undermines their statutory status and downgrades the valuable input of the community.
13. Parish councils should be warned that guidelines for these documents are prone to change and that they must be able to react to that.
14. Parishes would like an indication at the beginning of the process as to how long it is expected to last.

15. Parishes would like clarity in terms of likely costs.
16. The Task and Finish Group recommends that the Executive Director of Place should return in the Autumn (approx. 3 months' time) to share with members a plan as to how the Task and Finish Group's recommendations have been implemented.