

Part I

Main author: Elizabeth Burnham

Executive Member: Cllr Stephen Boulton

Welwyn West

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 19 JANUARY 2023
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

LEMSFORD VILLAGE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Under national planning policy and advice by Historic England, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are required to review their areas and formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. LPAs should also consult the public and take account of views expressed.
- 1.2 A review of the Lemsford area has taken place. The review has been undertaken by the Council's heritage consultant, Essex Place Services. The Character Assessment is included as Appendix A. The assessment identifies areas of special architectural or historic interest within the Lemsford area and includes a discussion on the suitability of conservation area designation as well as a suggested conservation area boundary.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) recommend to Cabinet that the Draft Lemsford Character Assessment undergo public consultation for a period of six weeks, with the view to designate Lemsford as a conservation area.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Lemsford does not currently benefit from conservation area designation. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has appointed Place Services to assess the suitability of the Lemsford area for conservation area designation.
- 3.2 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) stresses that 'local planning authorities must review their conservation areas from time to time... and determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas' (section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). Resources permitting, it is advised that every five years is ideal, but review frequency will vary according to the development pressures in the local area. The Character Assessment provides baseline information for consideration of whether to designate the area as a conservation area.
- 3.3 The assessment that has been undertaken follows best practice guidance, including Historic England's revised Historic England Advice Note 1 for Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2nd Edition 2019) and The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition 2017).
- 3.4 The character assessment seeks to identify the special architectural and historic interest of the Lemsford area, includes a discussion on the suitability of conservation area designation, under the provisions set out in the Planning (Listed

Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and suggests a boundary for potential conservation area designation.

- 3.5 The assessment of the Lemsford area and the production of the Lemsford Character Assessment are part of a wider aim by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to preserve or enhance the special character and appearance of areas of historic interest as required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It will also enable sustainable decisions to be taken about the future management of the area and any heritage assets.

Analysis and proposal

- 3.6 Section 1 of the Draft Character Assessment sets out the scope of the report and policy background.
- 3.7 Section 2 looks at the Lemsford area in more detail, focusing on the extent of the area, and its origin and evolution. In particular, the following buildings and features are included as contributing to the character of the area:
- The Mill
 - Brocket Hall and Park
 - Lemsford Bridge
 - The Great North Road
 - Lemsford Springs and the Watercress beds
 - Church of St John the Evangelist
- 3.8 This section also looks at existing designated heritage assets (Listed Buildings) and identifies non-designated heritage assets which are considered to contribute positively to the character of the area. A map to show the location of these designated and non-designated heritage assets is included on page 19 of the assessment.
- 3.9 Section 3 sets out key elements which define the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This includes:
- Settlement Pattern and Building Uses
 - Building Styles and Materials
 - Streetscape
 - Landscaping and Open Spaces
 - Negative Elements
- 3.10 Identification of the negative elements of the area is an important part of the assessment as it highlights the threats to the area from poor development, and adds weight to the reasons for conservation area designation.
- 3.11 In particular it has been highlighted that the loss of original windows and doors and the use of incongruous building materials has already negatively impacted heritage assets in the area. The addition of late twentieth century development, such as Mill Close, whose design has little in common with the character and appearance of the area, is also highlighted as a threat to the heritage of the area.
- 3.12 Section 4 summarises the findings of the assessment and includes a recommendation for Lemsford to be designated as a conservation area.

- 3.13 The NPPF (2021) states that “When considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest”.
- 3.14 Justification for the inclusion of certain areas within the proposed conservation area boundary, and also for some areas to fall outside the boundary, is included in this section.
- 3.15 A map of the proposed conservation area is included on page 4 of the assessment and is also attached as Appendix B to this report.

4 Proposed Consultation

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Draft Lemsford Character Assessment undergo public consultation for a period of six weeks. The consultation will take place online using the Council’s consultation portal and notification letters will be issued to key stakeholders and residents, as per the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 4.2 The consultation seeks to gain public opinion on whether the area should be designated as a conservation area, and whether the suggested boundary is appropriate.
- 4.3 The results will be presented to Council prior to any decision on designation being made.
- 4.4 Undertaking consultation will increase the weight attached to the Character Assessment as it will allow the communities views to be considered and any necessary revisions made prior to adoption of the document and any subsequent designation of the conservation area.
- 4.5 **Next Steps**
- 4.6 Following the consultation, the assessment will be amended as required and together with a summary of the representations received be reported to CPPP ahead of progressing to Cabinet and a meeting of Council.

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.ⁱ The Character Assessment and any subsequent conservation area designation will be a material planning consideration. Following public consultation, should the Council decide to designate Lemsford as a conservation area, it is a legal requirement to notify both the Secretary of State and Historic England and publicise the designation in the London Gazette and local newspaper. (Section 70(8) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

6 Financial Implication(s)

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly in relation to this report. The cost of consultation will be met through existing budgets.

6.2 Consultation on designation of a new conservation area is proposed. Should the conservation area be designated, the areas within the conservation area would, in some cases, lose permitted development rights. This would mean certain works would require planning consent or consent for tree works. Although this may have some impact in terms of the number of applications received/officer workload, this is unlikely to be significant.

7 Risk Management Implications

7.1 There are no risk management implications arising directly in relation to this report. However, having an up to date Character Assessment and designation as a conservation area helps to protect areas of special architectural and historic interest from inappropriate development.

8 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly in relation to this report.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

9.1 There are no procurement implications arising directly in relation to this report.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 No climate change implications have been identified resulting from this report.

11 Human Resources Implication(s)

11.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising directly in relation to this report. Consultation will be managed by the planning policy and communications teams.

12 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

12.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications associated with this report.

13 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

13.1 This report seeks approval to consult on the Draft Lemsford Character Assessment. The consultation will take place online using the Council's consultation portal. The Planning Policy Team will work with the Communications Team to manage the consultation process.

14 Link to Corporate Priorities

14.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Plan, in particular Priority 4: A sense of community where people feel safe - Design and maintain attractive neighbourhoods which our communities can enjoy and take pride in.

15 Equality and Diversity

15.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

30 November 2022

Elizabeth Burnham
Planning Officer

Matthew Wilson
Planning Policy and Implementation Manager

Background papers: None

Appendices

Appendix A: Lemsford Character Assessment

Appendix B: Map of potential conservation area boundary to be consulted upon

ⁱ The designation of any area as a conservation area shall be a local land charge (section 69(4) of the 1991 Planning and Listed Buildings Act). A local land charge is an obligation that goes with owning a particular parcel of land or property. Local land charges may be of a financial or non-financial nature. It may secure the payment of a sum of money or limit the use to which the land may be put. Charges are binding on successive owners or occupiers.