



Lemsford Draft Character Assessment

Consultation Report

Introduction

- 1.1 In January 2023, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Cabinet gave approval to consult on the Lemsford Draft Character Assessment.
- 1.2 This document was produced as a result of a review of the area by the Council's heritage consultant, Essex Place Services. 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.
- 1.3 The Character Assessment undertaken for Lemsford is part of a wider review of heritage assets within the borough.

Process Followed

- 1.4 Following approval by the Cabinet, public consultation was undertaken for a six week period between 1st February and 15th March 2023, in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.
- 1.5 Consultation letters were sent to addresses within the wider Lemsford area, local resident/interest groups, and emails sent to statutory consultees. Adverts were placed in two local newspapers and on the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website.
- 1.6 During the consultation period, respondents could complete an online survey, email comments to a specified address or respond by post. For consistency and to enable collation and analysis, all such responses were then entered online.
- 1.7 All responses are available in full on the Council's consultation portal available at: <https://welhat-consult.objective.co.uk/kse/event/37280>

Responses

- 1.8 During the consultation period, a total of seventeen responses were received; nine from individuals who lived or worked in the area, two from agents/trustees representing landowners, and six from consultees/organisations.
- 1.9 Of the six consultees/organisations who responded, two were merely acknowledgements and had no wish to comment.

1.10 The online questionnaire asked respondents:

- whether they had any comments on the content of the draft character assessment;
- whether they agreed with the proposal to designate Lemsford as a conservation area;
- whether they agreed with the proposed boundary for the conservation area; and,
- whether they had any other comments.

1.11 A summary of the views expressed regarding whether the Lemsford area should be designated as a conservation area and whether there is agreement over the proposed boundary is presented in the below table.

	Yes/ Generally Supportive subject to comments	No	No comment
Do you agree with the recommendation that Lemsford should be designated as a conservation area?	13	1	3
Do you agree with the proposed boundary for the conservation area?	1	9	7

Response to views on whether to designate

1.12 Out of the seventeen respondents, thirteen agreed that Lemsford should be designated as a conservation area, three did not comment/respond to this question, and only one disagreed.

1.13 This is considered to represent support for the proposal to designate the Lemsford area as a conservation area.

Response to comments concerning the proposed boundary

1.14 Regarding the proposed boundary, one respondent stated their agreement with the proposed boundary, seven did not comment on the boundary/respond to this question, and nine suggested alterations to the boundary.

1.15 The majority of those suggesting boundary alterations suggested it be extended to a wider area, but some (including a key statutory consultee) recommended a tighter boundary.

1.16 Regarding conservation areas and their boundaries, paragraph 191 of the NPPF notes 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.'*

- 1.17 The heritage consultant, Essex Place Services, has considered the comments received regarding the boundary and made adjustments where appropriate.
- 1.18 Justification for the proposed boundary and whether or not areas are included or excluded is set out in the Final version of the Character Assessment.
- 1.19 Where areas have been excluded from the boundary, it is noted that they may still contribute to the special interest of the area in terms of the setting of the conservation area.

Response to comments regarding the content of the Draft Character Assessment

- 1.20 Comments received relating to the content of the Draft Character Assessment included queries over the process of assessing the existing built form, particularly in identifying key buildings and consideration of non-designated heritage assets; the need to make greater reference to archaeology and below ground heritage assets; and some clarification of details within the document, such as descriptions of buildings or dates.
- 1.21 The heritage consultant has considered these comments and, where necessary, amendments have been made to the Final version of the Character Assessment.

Response to other comments received

- 1.22 Comments received also covered a range of other matters. For example, relating to highways such as speed limits, traffic calming measures, parking, reopening of footpaths, width of pavements; or ecology such as consideration of wildlife, nature reserves in the local area, grass verges and the River Lea chalkstream.
- 1.23 Some of these matters are included in the Character Assessment as positive, neutral or negative contributors to the area. More detailed consideration of highways matters or the ecology of the area falls outside the scope of the assessment, which is to consider the heritage of the area and whether conservation area designation is appropriate.
- 1.24 However, it may be possible to consider such matters to some extent at a later stage in the process, in relation to the management of the conservation area (should it be decided to designate). Production of a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) is a recommendation of the Character Assessment. A CAAMP is a more detailed heritage document and would be subject to further consultation and public engagement prior to adoption.

Response to concerns raised

- 1.25 A small number of the responses received raised concerns (including one response which did not support the proposal to designate).
- 1.26 Concerns centred around:
 - whether conservation area designation was appropriate to protect local heritage assets in the Lemsford area;

- that designation would sterilise the area from future development or prevent alterations to properties (including energy saving measures or changes to doors/windows);
- that the Character Assessment lacked sufficient detail or was not robust enough to meet the appropriate tests (particularly with reference to non-designated heritage assets); and
- that insufficient consultation had been undertaken.

- 1.27 These comments have been carefully considered and in response to the concerns raised, additional wording has been included in the final version of the Character Assessment to explain why conservation area designation is considered appropriate to protect local heritage assets in the Lemsford area.
- 1.28 The Character Assessment has been updated to clarify the implications of designation (which would help shape rather than prevent future development in the area). Many of the nationally permitted development rights still apply in conservation areas but in some cases are subject to some additional restrictions. This was set out in the FAQs document, but for further clarification a summary of national permitted development rights in conservation areas has been produced (see Appendix 3). Where permitted development rights are more restricted, applications for planning permission can still be considered.
- 1.29 The Character Assessment has followed the relevant legislation and best practice guidance from Historic England, and contains sufficient detail for designation. The section on identification of non-designated heritage assets has also been updated. Production of a more detailed Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is a recommendation of the Character Assessment.
- 1.30 According to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, consultation is not a requirement for designation, but has been undertaken in the interests of following best practice. Details of the consultation are set out above and are in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.

Conclusion

- 1.31 The responses received from the consultation have been fully considered and the Character Assessment and the proposed conservation area boundary have been updated in light of these comments, where appropriate.
- 1.32 The final version of the Character Assessment recommends the Lemsford area is designated as a conservation area. Production of a more detailed Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) at a later date is also recommended.