

MANAGEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS TASK GROUP

10 NOVEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor R Martins (Chair)
Councillors K Collett, M Haley, A Joynes and L Topping

Officers: Urban Design and Conservation Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR/TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Martins was elected chair.

The membership of the Management of Conservation Areas Task Group was confirmed. This included a permanent change in membership, with Councillor Joynes replacing Councillor Dhindsa, which had been agreed prior to the start of the review.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Martins be elected Chair of the Task Group.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

3 DISCLOSURES (IF ANY)

It was noted that each of the Councillors had at least one conservation area in their ward, with the exception of Councillor Joynes in Leggatts ward.

4 SCOPE AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Task Group had a tight timetable. Work needed to be completed before the end of the Municipal Year.

The Task Group's findings would need to be concluded in the week beginning 1 February in order to allow reporting to:

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2016
- Cabinet on 7 March 2016 (Chair to attend).

Councillor Martins argued that the review of the effectiveness of the Watford Conservation Areas Management Plan was an important piece of work. It might not be possible to cover all the issues within the time allocated. In that event, one of the recommendations might relate to further work that should be undertaken.

Watford was a small town but had a number of locally and nationally listed buildings. Although several areas across the town had been marked for conservation, the character of these was beginning to suffer through inappropriate modifications to buildings without reference to the Council.

The Task Group should review the current management of conservation areas in Watford and establish what more could be done to protect them in the future.

Councillor Martins invited views on what steps the Task Group might take. During discussions the following ideas were raised:

- comparisons should be made with a neighbouring authority e.g., Dacorum Borough Council or St Albans City and District Council
- residents' views should be sought on their experiences and issues about living in a conservation area. This might be undertaken in an informal drop-in session arranged at the Town Hall
- some focus should be given to shop fronts and whether more could be done to protect their appearance
- the Council might consider charging for its services after non-compliance by residents or businesses following earlier notifications
- the Task Group should invite the Council's enforcement officers to speak at one of the meetings to outline their powers and rates of success.

Members were encouraged to write in with any further thoughts to the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer.

5 **NEXT STEPS**

Summing up the Task Group's suggestions, the Chair proposed the following actions to be undertaken:

- update the 13 action points (G1 – G13) in the Conservation Areas Management Plan to provide a status report for the Task Group
- examine the issues around the rules governing shop fronts to establish how these might be protected better
- examine the effectiveness of Article 4 Direction (providing additional planning control in a particular location by removing "Permitted

Development" rights over certain alterations e.g., new porches, replacement windows and doors) to see if it is sufficiently robust to tackle new threats to conservation areas such as the siting of solar panels

- study current Council enforcement practices to understand the processes undertaken, including examples of proactive work, formal action and the time-scales involved (to be discussed at 2 December meeting)
- gather information and views from individual residents, residents associations and other interested parties e.g., architects (Joe Kent), Mary Forsythe, Oxhey Village Environment Group. This could be by way of a drop-in session to the Town Hall which should be publicised as widely as possible. Councillors would be asked to help publicise the event to interested parties by contacting individuals and residents associations in their wards [the survey undertaken for the housing trust task group would be used as a template]
- look at Dacorum Borough Council and/or St Albans Council to see if lessons could be learned.

6 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Three meeting dates were agreed:

- Wednesday 2 December
- Tuesday 5 January
- Tuesday 26 January

(The topics for each of the meetings to be agreed by the Chair and officers.)

Further meetings could be arranged as required.

Chair
Management of Conservation
Areas Task Group

The Meeting started at 6.30 pm
and finished at 7.35 pm