

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 7 March 2016
Report of: Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Title: Management of Conservation Areas Task Group – final report and recommendations

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with the Management of Conservation Areas Task Group's final report and recommendations.
- 1.2 Cabinet is asked to review the report and comment on the recommendations, which is attached as Appendix A.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Communication

- 2.1 Include information about conservation areas in annual council tax and business rates notices for properties with postcodes in these areas.
- 2.2 Introduce a symbol on lamp columns or existing street furniture to show that the street or neighbourhood is in a designated conservation area.
- 2.3 Improve access to comprehensive information about conservation areas on Watford Borough Council's website, including guidance to residents about living or owning property there.
- 2.4 Encourage Councillors to play an active role in raising awareness of conservation areas, for example through public meetings, promoting local history projects, arranging for officers to speak at local meetings etc.
- 2.5 Consider alternative ways to engage with residents and businesses about the need for planning permissions for certain alterations in conservation areas. This might include utilising social media to sign post them to the Council's website for comprehensive information.

Legislation, Council policy and procedures

- 2.6 Review current Article 4 directions to reflect changes in the General Permitted Development Orders and consider whether other classes should be included.
- 2.7 Ensure that procedures remain in place to undertake regular reviews of Watford Borough Council's Article 4 directions in order to address the potential impact of

changes in technology or legislation.

- 2.8 Continue with the regular review of Watford Borough Council's toolkit of documents ensuring that these remain relevant.
- 2.9 Ensure that Watford Borough Council's development management officers continue to consult with the conservation and policy team when considering applications adjacent to conservation areas, in order to minimise the impact of new developments on properties within those areas.

Council resources

- 2.10 Continue to assign conservation area management responsibility to a designated officer and commit to providing adequate council resources to continue the excellent work that has been done to manage Watford's conservation areas and protect the character of Watford's built environment and street scene, particularly within designated conservation areas.

Training

- 2.11 Include conservation, design and enforcement issues in the induction and development management training for Councillors to establish a comprehensive training programme.

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Report approved by: Carol Chen, Head of Democracy and Governance

3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 In May 2015 Councillor Martins submitted a scrutiny proposal form requesting a review of the town's conservation areas.
- 3.2 In accordance with normal practice the proposal was submitted to the relevant Head of Service for their views. The Head of Regeneration and Development in turn forwarded the proposal to the Planning Policy Team for their comments.
- 3.3 The Senior Planner (Design and Conservation) responded and he suggested that many aspects of the original proposal were already in place.
- 3.4 It was then suggested that a meeting be arranged to discuss the suggestion and to consider whether there were any aspects that could be developed into a review.
- 3.5 A meeting was arranged for 29 June 2015, Councillor Martins, the Head of Regeneration and Development, Senior Planner (Design and Conservation) and

Committee and Scrutiny Officer attended the meeting. An updated proposal was agreed and forwarded to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Members to consider whether a Task Group should be established.

- 3.6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the suggestion at its meeting on 20 July 2015. Following a discussion it was agreed that a Task Group should be set up and all non-Executive Councillors should be invited to participate. Due to the timings of the meetings it was agreed that the Task Group's membership would be delegated to the Head of Democracy and Governance in consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.7 Initially six Councillors expressed an interest in participating in the new Task Group, however Councillor Joynes agreed to remove her name from the list, as Task Group's were limited to a maximum of five Members. At Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting on 24 September, Members were informed that the Task Group would comprise Councillors Martins, Collett, Dhindsa, Haley and Topping. Prior to the Task Group's first meeting Councillor Dhindsa advised that he would no longer be able to participate. Councillor Joynes was informed and offered the opportunity to join the Task Group, which she accepted.
- 3.8 The Task Group has met on four occasions, the last of which was on Tuesday 2 February 2016. At that meeting the Members discussed their recommendations. Since then the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer and Committee and Scrutiny Officer have worked on putting together the final report, which is attached at Appendix A. The Task Group have been kept informed about the final report and forwarded the final draft.

Community Engagement

- 3.9 Early on the Task Group decided it wanted to gather views from local residents about conservation areas and their understanding of any implications on them. It was agreed that a drop in session would be arranged and an online survey developed.
- 3.10 The Committee and Scrutiny Officer and Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer worked with the Communications Team on developing a poster and leaflet. The leaflet was distributed to all those residents living in a conservation area, setting out details of the drop in session at the Town Hall and the online survey. The identical poster was initially distributed to Ward Councillors with a conservation area and the Task Group Members asking them to promote the survey to their residents and displaying the posters where possible. Following a request from Councillor Dhindsa the poster was later distributed to all those Councillors who had not received a copy.
- 3.11 Eleven residents attended the drop in session on 26 January 2016. They spoke to the Task Group and provided their views about conservation areas and the impact of developments just outside the designated boundaries.
- 3.12 The online survey, which ran from 13 January until 1 February, had 131 responses. In order to increase awareness of the survey it was referenced in the Mayor's newsletter and officers paid to have a Facebook boost. On each of these occasions there was a spike in the number of responses. This has provided officers with useful ideas on how to promote events and surveys in the future and how long the preparation can take to

ensure it is carried out properly.

- 3.13 The Task Group's report will have been presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 3 March for its consideration.
- 3.14 Cabinet is asked to review and comment on each of the recommendations, which will then be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting in the new Municipal Year, Thursday 23 June 2016. Councillor Martins will be attending Cabinet to answer any questions and provide reasons for recommendations if requested.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that it is anticipated that the costs can be contained within the existing budget, but if additional resources are required then these will need to be approved through the Council's budget process.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the report.

4.3 **Equalities**

- 4.3.1 No equality issues have been identified in the Task Group's report and recommendations.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

- 4.4.1 None have been identified as a direct result of the Task Group's report and recommendations.

4.5 **Staffing**

- 4.5.1 The Task Group's report and recommendations make reference to the need to retain adequate resources to ensure the current work can continue.

Appendices

Appendix A Management of Conservation Areas Task Groups final report and recommendations

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None