



Agenda item: 13

Summary

Report for:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	24 November 2015
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Conservation Strategy 2014-2019
Contact:	<p>Cllr Graham Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration</p> <p>Author/Responsible Officer</p> <p>James Doe, Assistant Director – Planning, Development and Regeneration</p>
Purpose of report:	To seek final approval of the Conservation Strategy for the Borough of Dacorum following public consultation.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Conservation Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to this report which sets out the Borough Council's corporate approach to Conservation matters in Dacorum be adopted. 2. That authority is delegated to the Assistant Director (Planning, Development & Regeneration), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration, to approve the rolling Action Plan.
Corporate objectives:	<p>Regeneration – the Strategy will be instrumental in helping to guide new developments where heritage considerations are important</p> <p>Dacorum Delivers – the Strategy provides a corporate framework for best addressing Conservation and heritage issues across the organisation</p> <p>Building Community Capacity – the successful implementation of the Strategy will be enhanced by the engagement of external organisations.</p> <p>Safe and Clean Environment – the Strategy is aimed at making</p>

	the best of the Borough's rich built heritage.
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The proposed Strategy makes use of established budgets to deliver the core Conservation service and provides a platform and direction from which to consider future actions which might require non-recurring expenditure.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>The proposed Strategy provides a basis from which to prioritise expenditure; it provides a basis for seeking external funding, should opportunities arise; it takes a balanced approach to assessing matters of heritage value without committing the Council to excessive expenditure.</p>
Risk Implications	To be completed as part of the forthcoming Action Plan to support the Conservation Strategy.
Equalities Implications	Not directly applicable for the Conservation Strategy. The detailed action plan to follow will require the completion of an Equalities Impact Assessment.
Health And Safety Implications	None arising from this report.
Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer Comments	<p>Deputy Monitoring Officer:</p> <p>The strategy sets a framework to guide council decision making in relation to conservation matters and should assist informed and consistent decision making.</p> <p>Deputy S.151 Officer</p> <p>There are no direct financial implications of this report. Any resource allocations made consequently will need to be determined by the budgets allocated through the MTFs and annual budgeting process.</p>
Consultees:	<p>Cllr Graham Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration</p> <p>Sara Whelan, Group Manager – Development Management & Planning</p> <p>Chris Taylor, Group Manager – Strategic Planning and Regeneration</p>
Background papers:	<p>DBC Conservation Strategy</p> <p>Dacorum Local Planning Framework Core Strategy 2013</p>

	National Planning Policy Framework 2012 National Planning Policy Guidance 2014
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	A full Glossary is set out within the Conservation Strategy

Background

1. Approval of the proposed Conservation Strategy 2014-2019 for the Borough of Dacorum for the purposes of consultation was given at the Cabinet meeting of 21 October 2014.
2. Conservation of the built heritage of the Borough of Dacorum is an important issue for the Council, the Borough's residents and businesses. Dacorum is rich in heritage with some 2000 listed buildings and 25 Conservation Areas. Recently, the Council has invested £1.2 million into the Hemel Hempstead Old Town High Street public realm scheme, which has considerably improved this historic part of the town and will hopefully lift business activity and vibrancy. It is a good example of where an enhancement and celebration of the Borough's heritage can lead to wide-ranging improvements.
3. To sensitively manage the Borough's built heritage, it is important that the Council has in place a strategy to guide its activity, the deployment of resources and engagement of external bodies in the field of conservation.
4. The time is right for a new Conservation Strategy. The last version was produced in 2008, largely to set a programme for carrying out reviews and character appraisals of Conservation Areas. Though many such reviews have been completed since then, this programme has to be completed. Furthermore there have been changes to legislation and Government policy which ought to be properly reflected in the Council's forward programme of work in this field. Importantly, the new strategy should be comprehensive and cover all relevant aspects of conservation work.
5. The draft before Members in this report, included at Appendix 1, aims to do this. It will serve as the Council's corporate statement on, and commitment to, conservation matters as they relate to built heritage.
6. To elaborate, the Strategy covers the following areas (in no order of priority):

1.	Development Management	Taking a major part of the capacity of the Council's conservation staff, this is critical for the determination of submitted proposals and the defence of refusals at appeals and inquiries.
2.	Photographic database of Listed Buildings	To ensure that the Council has an up to date visual record of the Borough's Listed

		Buildings
3.	Listed Building Survey	Proposals for an assessment of buildings as they come to light where listing is justified
4.	Buildings at Risk	Where historic buildings are at risk of deterioration or failure, use of statutory powers to enable repairs to be carried out by the owner
5.	Conservation Area Character Assessments	The completion of the programme of CA reviews; 17 areas remain to be done
6.	Locally Listed Buildings and non-designated Heritage Assets	To set a mechanism for how assets of heritage value that are not already covered by a formal designation (e.g. Listed Building, Conservation Area, Scheduled Ancient Monument etc) can be identified and recorded.
7.	Article 4 Directions	These are designations the Council can make to withdraw rights over 'permitted development' that the landowner could otherwise do without the need to apply for planning permission.
8.	Enhancement projects	A key role here for the Council's Corporate Regeneration Group, to consider how key historic features of the Borough can be enhanced (such as Hemel Old Town and the Water Gardens).
9.	Guidance	The production of specific guidance for developers, where necessary and when it is not available from another source, such as English Heritage. This includes the development of Conservation-related policy in the emerging Local Planning Framework.
10.	Planning Enforcement	Specialist support for the enforcement function when formal action has to be taken over breaches of planning and listed building control.
11.	Promoting Heritage	A general activity to develop the heritage offer of the Borough, which is particularly important for the promotion of Dacorum through the Dacorum: Look No Further programme.

12.	Archives	There is a need to assess, record and relocate the Council's historic assets contained within the Civic Centre ahead of the move to The Forum.
13.	Changes to Legislation	There is a need to stay on top of legislative change as it happens. Since the last strategy, for example, Government has introduced the concept of Heritage Assets, and made changes to the approval regime around developments within Conservation Areas.

6. The involvement of outside agencies is an important part of any strategy for built heritage. Members will be familiar with the Council's engagement of the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has supported and is funding in large part plans for the restoration of the Jellicoe Water Gardens; of the Dacorum Heritage Trust, which the Council provides funding for, and which it works on a number of projects such as the Bury Museum and Art Gallery and production of the Hemel Old Town heritage trail; and of regular liaison with English Heritage on a range of cases, to name just a few bodies.

Public Consultation

7. Consultation took place with heritage organisations, local interest groups and Town and Parish Councils between 17 February and 9 March 2015. In total 9 responses were received. These responses, and Officers comments on these responses, are set out in the table included in Appendix 2.
8. Members should note that the Strategy has been amended in response to the comments received and that these are shown highlighted at Appendix 1 and listed at Appendix 3.
9. Many of the critical points raised through the consultation process have already been acknowledged in the October 2014 and October 2015 Cabinet Reports in the 'Implications' section. It is crucial to point out here that the proposed Conservation Strategy is an overarching strategic document for the whole Council and not simply a work programme for one service within it. The Strategy provides a platform and direction from which to consider future actions and a basis from which to prioritise expenditure. It is a flexible framework within which specific activities can be done as resources and priorities allow.
10. The Conservation Strategy is clear in setting out the areas for action, provides a firm timetable for the completion of the Conservation Area Character Appraisals and outlines a clear process for the assessment of Heritage Assets. It is also expected that a key task of Conservation Officers will be to support the Development Management function through their work on planning applications, consultee responses, enforcement action and appeal cases.
11. The exact detailing of this work, as well as the other areas for action outlined in the Conservation Strategy, will be set out in the Action Plan. This will be a rolling 12 monthly document to reflect the fact that priorities and budgets can

change over the period of the Strategy. The role of the Action Plan(s) has been added to the revised Conservation Strategy.

12. Comments were received during the consultation that the Strategy is 'Hemel-centric' in nature. However, these comments appear to have been generated by the use of examples from Hemel Hempstead within the Strategy. However, the Strategy is a Borough wide document and the Areas for Action cover the whole Borough and can clearly be read as such.
13. A couple of respondents also highlighted the lack of a 'design' emphasis within the Conservation Strategy. In response to this it is important to note that the importance of design is mentioned in the CEO comment at the front of the Strategy. The NPPF states that good design is indivisible from good planning. Therefore all Planning and Conservation officers should, as a matter of course, put good design at the heart of their considerations.
14. It is also important to emphasise the positive feedback received during this consultation process. It worth highlighting that the two national bodies who responded to the consultation are supportive of the Strategy. English Heritage (now known as Historic England) considers that the Strategy, "*should help with a number of the Council's planning and conservation activities, including planning policy and proactive interventions*". English Heritage also state that, "*the Strategy will be a useful planning and development management tool*". Meanwhile The Twentieth Century Society are, "*pleased to see that the Council are committing to a new strategy and are considering pro-active measures to conserve and enhance the historic environment in the Borough*".
15. In light of the consultation responses it has been considered necessary to make a number of changes to the draft Conservation Strategy that Members considered in October 2014. The full list of changes are contained in Appendix 3 to this report. In summary, however, the key changes relate to the explicit explanation of the role of the rolling Action Plans, a new section of archiving and the opportunities for community involvement, further information regarding the work being undertaken for the 'Buildings at Risk' register, and further information regarding the role of Conservation officers in Development Management and their potential for conflict resolution.

Next Steps

16. Members are invited to adopt the Conservation Strategy 2014-2019.
17. Once approved, an action plan to commit the deployment of resources to deliver the constituent parts of the Strategy will need to be developed.
18. Members should note that the Strategy has been drafted to work within current budget constraints, but provides the opportunity for further work to take place if resources (such as grant funding) become available. Decisions on the specific deployment of resources, both staff and finance, will be taken through the consideration of the Action Plan, which would be a rolling 12 monthly document.
19. As set out under the recommendations to the report, it is considered that the approval of the rolling Action Plan be delegated to the Assistant Director

(Planning, Development & Regeneration) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration.