



## Heritage Asset Review

### Executive Summary

On behalf of:  
**Epping Forest District Council**

Date:  
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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

DPP Heritage & Design were instructed by Epping Forest District Council to undertake a Heritage Asset Review. The purposes were to review the existing local list and conservation areas and to determine whether any further areas or buildings or structures warranted designation. As part of the survey process a comprehensive record would be compiled of each asset. This data would then be analysed to determine whether any amendments to existing designations are warranted and to highlight those structures or areas which are considered to be 'at risk'.

The team are grateful for the assistance of officers of the Local Authority, particularly Maria Kitts, as well as the time and effort given by the stakeholders in providing input into the review. This feedback was invaluable in completing the report.

## Desk Based Review

The desk based assessment was a targeted exercise to identify the significance of the existing conservation areas and locally listed buildings. The exercise also allowed the identification of other buildings and sites which could warrant designation. In order to validate this documentary resource, all the potential additions to the local list or areas that may warrant designation as conservation areas were investigated as part of the site survey process. This was an iterative process which allowed sufficient flexibility to research potential heritage assets identified as part of the site surveys in a responsive manner.

The research programme identified sources of information available and allowed targeted analysis of these sources to identify the significance of both existing and potential heritage assets. In addition this process has identified and noted potential archive sources for heritage assets for further research if required in the future.

## Survey Process

The site survey process was the most intensive phase of work of the review. All existing locally listed buildings and conservation areas were visited and survey sheets completed. An

accompanying comprehensive photographic record has also been prepared in line with the project brief. A unique reference system has been developed for both conservation areas and locally listed buildings and is sufficiently flexible to allow for future amendments.

During the site survey phase suggestions for designation arising from the engagement process (those that were received prior to the end of the agreed survey period) were also reviewed. As noted, the survey process was iterative and worked in conjunction with the desk based research. This ensured that the survey process was as comprehensive as possible given the project programme.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

DPP Heritage and Design worked closely with officers of Epping Forest DC to prepare the engagement website and questionnaires.

The stakeholder engagement website went 'live' on 11/04/2012 and closed on the 27/04/2012. A total of 96 stakeholders were consulted through the website, emailed questionnaires and telephone. In total there were 59 completed responses to the engagement process, split on the following basis:

- Conservation Areas: 35 responses; and
- Local List: 24 responses

It should be noted that there is some overlap in these figures as some respondents completed both the conservation area and local list questionnaires. Notwithstanding this caveat this is a response rate of 36% which is significantly higher than the 10% normally expected for questionnaires.

The majority of responses received came from local bodies, particularly Town & Parish Councils, local residents' groups and interest groups such as local history societies. There was a limited response from adjoining authorities or statutory bodies such as English Heritage.

## Amendments to Existing Conservation Area Boundaries

The results of the survey show that the majority of the existing conservation areas do not require any substantial amendments to current boundaries. In our view only minor amendments are required to rationalise designations, to include buildings which are of a comparable quality to those within the conservation area and to exclude harmful sites/buildings. Plans outlining the suggested amendments to the existing conservation areas are provided at the end of this summary (at **Enclosure 1**) while the table below lists the suggested amendments:

Conservation Area	Extension?	Reduction?
ABBR (Abdess Roding)	Yes	-
AB (Abridge)	-	Yes
BA (Baldwins Hill)	-	Yes
BC (Bell Common)	Yes	-
CH (Copped Hall)	Yes	-
EP (Epping)	Yes	-
M (Matching)	Yes	-
MG (Matching Green)	Yes	-
MT (Matching Tye)	Yes	-
R (Roydon)	Yes	Yes
UP (Upshire)	Yes	-
WA (Waltham Abbey)	-	Yes
YH (York Hill)	Yes -	-

The most substantive suggested change relates to the South Roydon and Nazeing conservation area, which it is suggested should be split into two separate conservation areas: the Nazeing conservation area and South Roydon conservation area. The suggested boundary would remove the glasshouses as well as piecemeal infill development whilst also ensuring that the boundaries are robust and appropriate. A plan outlining this suggested boundary is included at the end of the Executive Summary.

## Conservation Areas at Risk

When taken as a whole the majority of conservation areas in the District are in a fair to good condition. There are, however, two conservation areas at risk: Nazeing & South Roydon and Waltham Abbey.

There is a broader trend within most conservation areas in the District where individual buildings are 'at risk' through vacancy, lack of maintenance and/or inappropriate alterations. The review highlighted that there is a concentration of 'buildings at risk' within the following conservation areas:

- Abridge;
- Royal Gunpowder Factory;
- Roydon; and
- Waltham Abbey

### **Suggested Conservation Area Designations**

The HAR identified two further areas within the District which warrant consideration for designation as conservation areas (plans of these areas are included at the end of this summary at **Enclosure 2**):

1. Around St John's Church, pond and 'Green' in Buckhurst Hill (SJBH); and
2. Theydon Bois (TB) – including the central 'Green', historic development surrounding it, the Parish church and old school house, as well the substantial and high quality Victorian development on Piercing Hill.

### **Suggested Area Designations Provided By Stakeholders**

A number of conservation areas were proposed by stakeholders as part of the engagement process with a particular concentration in the Loughton and Buckhurst Hill area.

When considering these proposed conservation area designations, we have been mindful of the high thresholds for designation set out in s.69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In addition we have had regard to the guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework which notes at paragraph 127 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."*

These areas were reviewed in detail as part of the HAR process and it is our view that only one, the suggested St John's conservation area in Buckhurst Hill outlined above, would justify designation as an area of special architectural or historic interest.

Generally the areas proposed for designation are pleasant suburban streets with housing that dates from the early 20th century to the interwar period. Whilst the building stock is attractive and there are isolated examples of individual or groups of buildings of better quality or attractive landscaping of note there is not, in our view, enough consistency or intrinsic interest in those areas examined to warrant designation as a conservation area of special architectural or historic interest.

Irrespective of our view that these areas do not meet the high threshold for designation by virtue of an inherent lack of special interest or an incoherent mixture of architectural merit, it should be noted that the majority of these areas have undergone significant incremental change in the form of replacement windows, doors, roofing materials, the loss of traditional boundary treatments and front gardens to hardstanding. The cumulative effect of this change is significant and has further undermined claims to any architectural or historic interest these buildings may have.

### **An Alternative Approach to Conservation Area Designation**

Whilst the majority of the areas suggested by local stakeholders do not warrant designation as conservation areas they are, for the most part, attractive and cherished streetscapes. The character and appearance of these areas is generally pleasant. It is our view that the plan making process should recognise the particular townscape qualities that create these successful streetscapes to ensure that these characteristics are retained, and where possible, enhanced.

This view is reinforced by the number of responses which were received as part of the stakeholder engagement process. It is apparent that there is strong communal value associated with these cherished streetscapes. Whilst these areas do not, in our view, warrant designation as a conservation area they could, perhaps, be subject to a different tier of protection at the local as opposed to national level.

One potential approach would be a local area designation that is similar to local listing for individual properties. This could, for instance, be designated as areas of 'Local Townscape

Merit'. The NPPF continues the idea of designated and undesignated heritage assets set out in PPS5 and a robust justification could be made to apply the principle of undesignated heritage assets to areas of townscape. The plan making approach advocated by the NPPF would allow for a flexible and creative response that protects cherished local townscapes. As such it is our view that such a designation would be entirely in accordance with the NPPF.

As the Council is in the process of plan making there may be the opportunity to designate some or all of these areas as undesignated heritage assets of 'Local Townscape Merit' with a summary of the key characteristics, or significance, as well as key policies to guide development in the areas. This could, in time, be supplemented by more detailed guidance in the form of Supplementary Planning Documents or Design Guides which could be prepared in conjunction with the relevant town or parish council.

This suggested approach would allow those areas of local interest to be recognised in the development management process and ensure that their important characteristics are maintained. This would mean that the weight and importance attached to conservation area designations elsewhere in the District would not be devalued.

### **Summary of Findings - The Existing Local List**

In general the local list is a thorough record of the local heritage assets within the District. It encompasses a representative range of building types and age and for the most part the existing list is robust and there does not seem to be a need to suggest de-listing of significant numbers of buildings.

An assessment of significance of the existing and suggested additions to the local list has been prepared together with an analysis of the condition and risk of these buildings/structures. In preparing the brief summaries of significance, we are grateful for the assistance of stakeholders in offering their local knowledge so willingly.

### **Suggested Amendments to the Local List**

A total of 93 buildings and structures have been suggested for addition to the local list with a concentration in Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Epping as the most densely developed parts of the District. There are, in total, a suggested 11 entries that we think should be removed from the local list.

### **Locally Listed Buildings 'At Risk'**

There are 16 locally listed buildings which are considered to be at risk within the District. In determining whether this we have used the definitions provided by English Heritage in the national 'Heritage at Risk' register. These range from buildings in fair condition awaiting a new use to functionally redundant buildings with no potential occupier and in an advanced stage of decay.

There are, in our view, two critical cases which require urgent attention. These are the Engine Sheds at Roydon and the Operations Block & brick store on Norton Heath Road. As redundant structures, with no end user identified and in advanced stages of decay, urgent action is required to stabilise or record the buildings.

### **Article 4 Directions**

It has been noted that generally the biggest threats to preserving the character or appearance of conservation areas within the District is the prevalence of incremental changes which can have a significant adverse cumulative effect. The most pervasive and harmful of these incremental changes are the loss of historic windows and doors as well as the loss of boundary walls and gardens to form car parking spaces. Such boundary treatments can in suburban and rural areas often form an integral part of an area's aesthetic significance.

It is our view, on the basis of their current condition and particular significance, that the following conservation areas could benefit from the introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction to control minor incremental changes allowed as 'permitted development':

- Baldwins Hill;
- Bell Common;
- Chipping Ongar;
- Epping; and
- Waltham Abbey.

With regards to locally listed buildings the need for an Article 4 Direction is less clear and needs to be determined on a case by case/building by building basis in light of the particular significance of the building(s)/area(s) in question. This would entail a detailed evaluation of



which permitted development rights, if any, could lead to undesirable alterations and therefore would warrant the introduction of Article 4 Directions.

In order to prevent the pre-emptive demolition of locally listed buildings outside of conservation areas, which can be undertaken as 'permitted development' subject to certain conditions, we suggest that it would be worthwhile having a protocol in place that would allow the rapid issuing of an Article 4 Direction preventing demolition without the need for a full planning application, to consider the merits of the case in detail.

### **Area of Special Advertisement Control**

The one area which may benefit from the imposition of additional controls over advertising is The Maltings, Lower Sheering (and adjoining roads). The multiple occupancy of this building complex by commercial firms has led to an unsightly plethora of advertising on the verges, in the curtilage, and on the building itself. The cumulative effect of these adverts on the significance of the conservation area and the parent building is significant and harmful. In our view, the merits of imposing an Area of Special Advertisement Control warrants further consideration.

### **Thematic Review**

The HAR has demonstrated that the District has a rich and varied historic environment. The last comprehensive re-survey of the District is likely to date from the 1970s with later efforts focussing mainly on 'spot listing' requests for particular buildings and thematic reviews of particular building types e.g. hospitals. This ad hoc approach means that a number of buildings which appear to be of listable quality have not, as yet, been assessed. We have provided a full inventory of locally listed buildings, which we consider to be of potentially national significance, at **Appendix 10**.

Notwithstanding this element of the HAR it is our strong view that a District-wide thematic survey of particular building types which are well represented in Epping Forest would be an invaluable tool in managing the District's heritage.

