

Appendix 5 – Draft Minutes of Planning Policy Working Group meeting (extract)

Planning Policy Working Group

[DRAFT] Minutes of Meeting held on 7 January 2016, 6:30 pm

Present:

Chair: Councillor Keith Ferry

Councillors:

Glen Hearnden
Graham Henson
Anne Whitehead (arrived 7:15 pm)

Marilyn Ashton
Stephen Greek
June Baxter

Officers:

David Hughes – Planning Policy Manager, Lucy Haile – Principal Conservation Officer

[EXTRACT]

Item 4: Harrow Weald Conservation Areas Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) – Consultation Outcomes and Proposed Version for Adoption

The Group received the report of the Divisional Director – Regeneration and Planning which introduced the amended draft Harrow Weald Conservation Areas Supplementary Planning Document (including the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategies) and the outcomes of the public consultation held over summer 2015.

One Member expressed the view that the overwhelming opinion of residents is that they are satisfied with the current West Drive Conservation Area boundary (despite constraints living within a conservation area may place), but that there was no need for an Article 4 Direction. This view was evident in the consultation responses and he considered that if the recommendation to remove West Drive and Bellfield Avenue from the Conservation Area was agreed, this would be the least popular planning policy change. He felt that residents' responses had sought to address the criteria for inclusion within a conservation area and raised many good points. He also felt that the decision to designate in 2006 meant that the area had been considered to meet at least two of the criteria at the time and that there should be very strong reasons as to why the original designation should be removed, having regard to what had changed in policy and physical terms since 2006. He considered the best proposal would be to retain the current areas and to include the proposed additional areas. He strongly recommended that Cabinet leave the current West Drive Conservation Area in place, omit it from the scope of the SPD and look to include it and the additional areas in the SPD at a future date. He considered there was no additional cost implications of retaining the current areas.

Another Member expressed her dismay and strong objections to the proposed amendments and felt that the areas to be removed met two or three of the criteria for being included in a conservation area. She explained that she had been involved in agreeing the original conservation area, to preserve the character and attractiveness of the area and block inappropriate, unsympathetic and unrestricted development. The report at the time had acknowledged that these areas were marginal, but at the time there had been cross-party and unanimous support for the defined area to preserve greenery, roof lines and such like. She questioned the need to amend the boundaries and the motivations behind the proposed changes, noting that nobody was asking to the boundaries to be amended, nor was a new conservation area being proposed. She also noted that the appeals within the area had been successfully defended since its inclusion. She also felt that other, similar parts of the borough had been included within a conservation area, citing Canons Park as an example.

The Principal Conservation Officer advised that under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, conservation areas are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance'. Local planning authorities are obliged to from time to time review previous processes of identifying areas for designation as conservation areas to determine whether any parts or further parts of the borough should be designated or whether any should be de-designated / cancelled. She noted that the West Drive Conservation Area was first designated in 1998 as it was considered as a well-maintained fragment of the historic Harrow Weald Park Estate. She also informed the committee that this was the first Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy for the West Drive Conservation Area and this proposed the removal of those streets which did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the Conservation Area (CA). She advised the Group that there were distinct differences between the streets proposed to be removed, and those included in the West Drive conservation area as originally designated and the Canons Park Estate Conservation Area. She also indicated that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) required that inclusion of an area within a conservation area should be justified, so as to not diminish the value of conservation areas. She advised that Historic England responded to state that the Council had made a strong case for removing these areas from the conservation area. She also advised that much of the same area had been considered for inclusion in the conservation area in the 1980s by the Local Planning Authority and rejected against the same 6 criteria used today as the addresses along West Drive do not have 'enough distinguishable or unique features, either architectural or otherwise to justify designation as a conservation area.

One Member stated that he considered that the area to be removed did not meet any of the six criteria and that if de-designation of an area was not envisaged, there wouldn't be a review mechanism under the Act. He indicated that he felt that the original decision in 2006 to include the streets was wrong; another Member did however note that the 2006 decision had been unanimous. The Member noted that whilst residents had sought to address the six criteria in their representations, the report provided officers' responses to these, indicating they did not demonstrate how the criteria were met.

A further Member noted that the 2006 report had been marginal with respect to the areas proposed to be removed meeting any of the six criteria and that any decision at the time should have erred on the side of caution. He felt that the reasons given by other Members at the current meeting as to why the streets should be retained within the Conservation Area would apply to a large number of streets within the borough and to retain the streets would devalue other conservation areas.

A final Member observed that if inclusion was allowed without meeting the criteria it undermined the principles governing CA status and the fact that an area was currently included doesn't make it right nor is it reason to retain it within a conservation area. She felt that if the area didn't meet the criteria, then it should be included and that the criteria should be adhered to.