

Harborough District Council

Report to the Cabinet Meeting of 6 February 2023



Report Number:	4
Title:	Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	No
Report Author:	Sally Hartshorne, Heritage and Conservation Officer s.hartshorne@harborough.gov.uk 07935502967
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Bateman
Appendices:	Appendix A - Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan Appendix B – Consultation Responses

Executive Summary

- i. The statutory definition of a conservation area is an area of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Although conservation areas are protected by national legislation, they are designated at a local level to ensure that they reflect and protect the cherished local scene.
- ii. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities, from time to time, to review existing conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and consult the public in the area in question, taking account of views expressed.
- iii. The purpose of this appraisal is to review, update and record the factors that give Bitteswell conservation area its special interest and justify its designation. This will help improve understanding of the historic importance of the area and how this has shaped its unique character. The management plan informs its future development.
- iv. No changes are proposed to the boundary of the conservation area. It is proposed that the management plan reflect concerns such as:
 - a. management of the public realm (e.g. unsympathetic street furniture)
 - b. choice of materials used in maintenance (e.g. double glazing and highway maintenance / repair);
 - c. loss of features of value.

Recommendations

That Cabinet recommends to Council the adoption of the Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan attached as Appendix A.

Reasons for Recommendations

- i. Bitteswell is one of 63 designated conservation areas within the Harborough District. It was designated in 1972 and amended in 2005 due to boundary changes.
- ii. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities, from time to time, to review existing conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and consult the public in the area in question, taking account of views expressed.
- iii. The conservation areas were last appraised between 2005 and 2007. The Council is therefore now reviewing all existing conservation areas to ensure the designation remains appropriate and that the management plan is effective.

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval of the Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan being proposed to Council for adoption.

Background

2. The concept of 'conservation areas' was first introduced by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 which defined a conservation area as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' Conservation area designation is not intended to prevent change but to manage change in ways that maintain and strengthen an area's special qualities. The definition remains unchanged in current legislation, set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Act places duties on local planning authorities to:
 - a. Identify those parts of their area that are of special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas;
 - b. Review past designations from time to time;
 - c. Prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas; and
 - d. Pay special attention to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas when determining planning applications for sites within areas.

3. Conservation area status must be justified on the grounds of the special architectural or historic interest of the area. The purpose of this appraisal is to define and record the factors that give Bitteswell conservation area its special interest and justify its designation. This will help improve understanding of the historic importance of the area, how this has shaped its unique character and how it can guide its future development. The appraisal will help inform the consideration of relevant planning applications, conservation area and listed building consents as appropriate.
4. Bitteswell is one of 63 designated conservation areas within the Harborough District. These conservation areas were last appraised between 2005 and 2007. As such, a programme of appraisal has been put in place to ensure the conservation areas remain up-to-date and supported by appropriate appraisals. Due to the high number of conservation areas this is an on-going programme of work. The methodology was tested on Shearsby conservation area, and the resulting Shearsby Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was adopted by Council in February 2022.
5. Bitteswell was awarded conservation area designation in 1972 and was re-appraised in 2005 when a boundary amendment was made. The reasons and evidence to support the boundary remain valid. There are no proposals to amend the existing conservation area boundary.

Details

6. The purpose of this appraisal is to define and record the factors that give Bitteswell conservation area its special interest and justify its designation. This will help improve understanding of the historic importance of the area, how this has shaped its unique character and how it can guide its future development. The document (Appendix A) presents this information using the following format:
 - a. Map of Bitteswell Conservation Area
 - b. Summary of Special Interest
 - c. Introduction
 - d. Policy and Legislation
 - e. Living and Working in a Conservation Area
 - f. Character, Location and Uses
 - g. Definition of Special Interest
 - h. Historical Development
 - i. Assessment of Special Interest
 - j. Opportunities for Enhancement
 - k. Management Plan
7. The appraisal included undertaking a review of the existing Bitteswell Conservation Area boundary. It has confirmed the appropriateness of the existing boundary.
8. Bitteswell is a traditional farming village. Much of its historic character comes from the relationship of farms and fields to the traditional housing and other buildings which form the settlement. The draft Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal (set out at Appendix A)

sets out a summary of the special interest of the conservation area which is derived from the following key characteristics:

- a. The medieval settlement pattern
 - b. The strong agricultural character of the village and the relationship of the fields and farms to the traditional housing and other buildings
 - c. The open spaciousness of the village
 - d. The role of the village greens in the character and daily life of Bitteswell
 - e. The variety of building styles and the use of thatch, brick and slate for buildings, especially for traditional housing and farm buildings
 - f. The relationship between the built environment of the settlement and the natural environment both within it and surrounding it
 - g. The public footpaths which relate the village to its hinterland.
9. The Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal provides a detailed description of the historical development and the unique character of the conservation area. It highlights the continued importance of Bitteswell's agricultural heritage to the character of the conservation area. It describes the contribution certain buildings have made to the development of the settlement over time. Bitteswell conforms to Natural England's description of rural villages in south Leicestershire whose settlement patterns formed in medieval times remain evident with 'separate villages clustered around a tall church spire' and having a long history of agricultural land use. The development of Bitteswell is intertwined with the farmland that surrounds it. This is evident in the relationship between the farms, fields and traditional housing and farm buildings and is reflected in the names of properties in the village (e.g. West End Farm, Green Farm). The relationship between the built environment of the settlement and the natural environment both within it and surrounding it are integral to its rural character which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
10. The appraisal provides descriptions of both the setting of the conservation area and the buildings and natural environment within it which are of particular significance to the special interest of Bitteswell and its historic character. These are supported by photographic and historical sources of evidence to provide greater understanding of the historic development of the settlement and to guide the determination of relevant planning applications. Such detail will help those submitting and those assessing planning applications to understand the historic importance of the area, how this has shaped its unique character and how it can guide its future development. The appraisal will also inform the consideration of planning applications, conservation area and listed building consents in the conservation area as appropriate.

Implications of Decisions

Corporate Priorities

11. HDC's 'Corporate Plan 2022-2031' sets out the Council's priorities and ambitions for the next decade. This contributes to the following two priorities:

Place and Community – 1. Community leadership to create a sense of pride and belonging (CO3, CO4).

Economy – 4: Supporting business and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy CO21.

Financial

12. Beyond staff time, there are no financial implications.

Legal

13. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities, from time to time, to review existing conservation areas (section 69) and to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and consult the public in the area in question, taking account of views expressed (section 71).

Policy

14. Supports delivery of the Local Plan by contributing to the following policies:

Tourism and Leisure RT4 -1.c

Heritage and Community Assets HC1.

Environmental Implications including contributions to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030

15. This document relates to the historic environment of the Harborough District so has implications for the built environment but will have no impact on the carbon footprint of the Council.

Risk Management

16. The risk of not undertaking Conservation Area Appraisals would be the lack of recognition and potential loss of a heritage asset which is valued by residents and is part of the unique historic environment of the district.

Equalities Impact

17. This document relates to the historic environment which benefits all residents, businesses and visitors.

Data Protection

18. None as far as this report is concerned.

Summary of Consultation and Outcome

19. The Bitteswell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was subject to public consultation from 24 October to 5 December 2022. A drop-in event was held in Bitteswell Village Hall on 2 November 2022. A summary of the consultation responses is attached at Appendix B. Each consultation response has been considered, noted, any resulting actions taken and outlined at Appendix B.

Alternative Options Considered

20. If the Council chose not to accept the appraisal, or adopt the proposed amendments to the Management Plan, the Bitteswell Conservation Area would remain as designated in 1972 and amended in 2005 but not reflect the evolution of the area since then. This would risk undermining the value and effectiveness of the designation, to the detriment of the local heritage.

Background papers

- a. Original 1972 designation
- b. 2005 review of the designation