

Community Involvement in the Production of Conservation Area Appraisals

May 2020

West Berkshire is a district with an impressive heritage legacy. Reflecting this, there are 53 conservation areas in the district, most designated in the 1970's or 1980's. However, West Berkshire Council has a duty under legislation, to define why an area has been designated as a Conservation Area, and to do this it is looking to the parish and town councils, and local amenity societies for assistance. Conservation Area Appraisals act as a framework to guide future development in the conservation area, and help parish and town councils to recommend ways to preserve and enhance their special architectural and historic characteristics. They are invaluable too, for parish and town councils working to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Unfortunately, West Berkshire Council does not have sufficient resources to carry out 53 individual appraisals quickly, but it is hoped that the parish and town councils and local residents (the people most involved in, and concerned with, the preservation of their own area of the district), will be able to carry out the initial work.

Working with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, West Berkshire Council is developing a 'Toolkit', which contains a variety of guidance, list of resources, and an appraisal report template, to assist parish councils and volunteers in undertaking a Conservation Area Appraisal. The West Berkshire Heritage Forum and West Berkshire Council are also offering all parish and town councils, and any volunteer groups working with them, free training sessions to help them understand how to carry out the appraisal, and complete the template.

The work will be supported by West Berkshire Council, in terms of printing and publication, and help and advice throughout. The final document can then go forward for consultation and Council adoption for use in planning matters.



Parish and Town Councils can join in by forming an Appraisal Group (where a Heritage Working Group already exists, or the parish is working on a Neighbourhood Development Plan, such a group may already exist in embryo). Such groups can ask for volunteers; local historical and heritage societies may already hold useful information which can be included, so their volunteers should be sought.

The Council's Conservation Officer will provide relevant local maps, a copy of any existing Conservation Area information, a list of designated assets, and the conservation area appraisal 'Toolkit'.

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The work required will be a mixture of desk top research, practical field trips to walk round the area and take notes, and report writing.

Support, including training and practical support from West Berkshire Council and the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, will be available throughout.

Once completed, Conservation Area Appraisals help to inform decision-making in the determination of planning applications by the local planning authority and at planning appeals. Their objectives can be summarised as following:

- provide a clear definition of the area's special architectural and historical interest;
- provide a framework against which future development can be assessed;
- review the existing boundaries of the conservation area;
- identify buildings, structures, and green spaces that are desirable to protect, preserve or enhance;
- identify and map archaeologically sensitive areas;
- develop recommendations and a management plan for the area;
- empower local communities to explore the sense of their place;
- alert local communities to the cumulative effects of minor change on an area's character;
- identify potential Assets of Community Value.

The format, style and content of Conservation Area Appraisals produced by different Local Planning Authorities varies considerably. The template for West Berkshire Council appraisals has been drafted taking account of Historic England guidance. While it is anticipated that the appraisals published following this template will set a 'house style' for Conservation Area Appraisals in West Berkshire, there will be some scope for

variation, dependent upon individual circumstances.

Two Conservation Area Appraisals have already been carried out, for Streatley and Peasmore. They can be found at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/28789> or by entering "Conservation Area Appraisals" on the West Berkshire Council web site.

We look forward to working with you on this important project.

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