

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Conservation Advisory Group held on
Wednesday, 28 May 2003

PRESENT: Councillor SJ Agnew – Chairman
Councillor NN Cathcart – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: Mrs MP Course Dr JA Heap
Dr JPR Orme RGR Smith

and Councillor Mrs DSK Spink MBE (Conservation Portfolio Holder).

Councillors RF Bryant, CJ Gravatt, Mrs SA Hatton and Mrs JA Muncey were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor AW Wyatt MBE.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Mrs MP Course proposed that Councillor SJ Agnew be elected Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Group for the coming year. This was seconded by Councillor Dr JA Heap and, there being no further nominations, it was

RESOLVED that Councillor SJ Agnew be elected Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Group for the coming year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Dr JPR Orme proposed that Councillor NN Cathcart be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Group for the coming year. This was seconded by Councillor Dr JA Heap and, there being no further nominations, it was

RESOLVED that Councillor NN Cathcart be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Group for the coming year.

3. CONSTITUTION OF THE CONSERVATION ADVISORY GROUP

The Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation support a proposal to increase the number of Members on the Conservation Advisory Group from seven to nine, and that the Cabinet identify two Members who had expressed an interest in Conservation-related issues.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In connection with Minute no. 6 (Preserving and Enhancing our Heritage Resources: A Conservation Strategy for South Cambridgeshire):

- Councillor SJ Agnew declared a personal interest as Chairman of The Friends of Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, and as a result of his involvement with museums and the Green Belt Project.
- Councillor NN Cathcart declared a personal interest as Trustee of the Farmland Museum.

- Councillor Mrs MP Course declared a personal interest as a Trustee of both the Folk Museum and the Farmland Museum.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Group authorised the Chairman to sign, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2003.

With regard to Minute 3 (Archaeological Initiatives), the Conservation Manager updated Members on progress made so far, indicating that specific sites would be identified in due course and that articles would be prepared, as appropriate, for inclusion in future editions of the South Cambs' Magazine.

With regard to Minute 4 (Archaeological Training Excavation at Fulbourn), the Conservation Manager confirmed that the exercise had not been adversely affected by the District Council's decision to limit its financial support of it. Such financial support had now been budgeted for, but a formal offer of grant aid would not be made until the Council had received a copy of the intended programme of excavation work.

With regard to Minute 5 (Horningsea Jubilee Garden), the Conservation Manager reported that agreement had been reached in connection with the making of a Council grant drawn proportionately from budgets maintained by the Conservation- and Community Development Departments.

With regard to Minute 7 (Conservation Award Scheme), the Chairman and Conservation Manager agreed that the sub-Group should hold its first meeting as soon as possible, preferably before the end of June.

With regard to Minute 9 (Design Guide), Margaret Gustafsson, Conservation Area and Design Officer, updated Members on progress to date. A general press release about the project was issued by South Cambridgeshire District Council at the beginning of May. The formal consultation of Design Guide stakeholders, including all Parish Councils, Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, English Heritage and so on. has started. The consultation process will continue during the entire project. Tenders for the external chapters are due to be opened on 30th May. The internal production of different chapters, including New Major Development Schemes is well under way.

The Advisory Group conveyed its good wishes to Margaret Gustafsson, Project Leader, who was shortly to take up her new responsibilities as an Urban Design Consultant with a private consultancy firm in London.

6. PRESERVING AND ENHANCING OUR HERITAGE RESOURCES: A CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Advisory Group considered a draft Conservation Strategy as part of the process for producing a corporate statement on the preservation and enhancement of the natural and historic built environment.

The Portfolio Holder for Conservation commended the draft document as demonstrating the Council's positive vision for conservation issues in the District.

Members said that the final version should also emphasise the Council's commitment towards:

- enhancing ponds
- promoting good design
- the protection of roadside verges
- training
- the maintenance of churchyards
- the provision of accessible public footpaths
- value for money in the context of tree planting

Noting that there were instances in which South Cambridgeshire District Council had to act alone, Members asked that the Introduction to the Strategy be revised so as to state “.....the Council’s conservation objectives can better be achieved.....” rather than “.....can only be achieved.....”

Councillor Dr JA Heap suggested a summary of objectives should be to regulate, enable, instruct and pay.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the draft as a practical tool, but added that the most important aspects would be its impact on, and influence over, those individuals and organisations seen as the major targets for such a strategy. The Portfolio Holder added that a short guide to the Strategy would be a useful leaflet for public consumption.

The Conservation Advisory Group endorsed the draft Conservation Strategy in principle, and **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation support its further development on the basis of the framework contained in Appendix 1 of the report, and comments made by Members, with a view to publication in due course.

7. **DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE BIO-DIVERSITY POLICIES**

The Ecology Officer presented a report on, and first draft of, the local bio-diversity Policy.

The Portfolio Holder said that the interests of bio-diversity along riverbanks must be balanced against the need to ensure rivers’ effectiveness in minimising the adverse effect of flooding.

Those present discussed the relationship between the built- and natural environment, noting how the sympathetic design of housing developments (with appropriate landscaping schemes) could actually enhance bio-diversity locally.

The Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation

- (1) authorises the development of detailed biodiversity policies, based on the draft consultation document attached as Appendix 1 to the report; and
- (2) instructs the Ecology Officer to report back to the Conservation Advisory Group on the results of the consultation.

8. **DESIGNATION OF EVERS DEN AND WIMPOLE WOODS AS AN SSSI AND CANDIDATE AS SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION - UPDATE**

Further to its meeting on 25th March 2003 (Minute no.10 refers), the Advisory Group considered a further report on the proposals from English Nature to modify and re-designate Eversden and Wimpole Woods as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and to support their designation as a Special Area of Conservation for the barbastelle bat.

In response to concern expressed by Members in March, the Ecology Officer reported that English Nature had no intention to prohibit, or even restrict, on a permanent basis, public access to the woods, were the designation to proceed. Public access might have to be withdrawn on a temporary basis, from time to time, in order to carry out essential tree- and other management work without creating a health and safety hazard for members of the public.

Members acknowledged that designation would offer protection to the surrounding countryside as well as the woods themselves, but stressed that they would only support it so long as there was no adverse recreational impact. The Portfolio Holder for Conservation urged the National Trust and English Nature to co-operate fully with each other on this issue, and regretted that the Council could not intervene on this point. She added that nothing should be allowed to happen to the detriment of local people.

Councillor Dr JA Heap expressed the hope that the Council would be consulted on the Management Plan which, he said, should be a condition of its support for designation. However, the Ecology Officer urged caution, pointing out that English Nature had the power to impose such a designation, should it wish to do so.

The Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation

- (1) support the proposed designation of the Special Area of Conservation in responding to English Nature's consultation letter, on the understanding that there would be no restrictions to existing rights of access or public enjoyment of the woods; and
- (2) Instruct the Ecology Officer to draft appropriate planning guidance for use by Members and staff.

9. HISTON POND - A REVISED ENHANCEMENT PROPOSAL

Further to its meeting on 27th November 2002 (Minute no. 8 refers), the Advisory Group considered a report on the revised habitat enhancement scheme for the pond on the village Green at Histon.

Members examined, with approval, a section of nico-span material, which would be used to create a barrier, behind which silts could be deposited. Marginal plants could then become established on top of these silts to create an ecologically-diverse habitat. Councillor NS Davies (a local Member) had indicated his support for this proposal.

The Ecology Officer circulated a plan indicating the extent of the works proposed by the new scheme. Members accepted that, while they would have preferred to complete the refurbishment in one stage, the financial implications were such as to make this impossible. By utilising the experience of the Council's in-house Land Drainage team, costs would be lower and there would thus be scope to revisit this matter at a later date, and assess the chances of completing the work at that stage.

The Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation support the scheme outlined in the Ecology Officer's report, and authorise officers to arrange an appropriate presentation to, and discussion with, Histon Parish Council in due course.

10. ST DENIS CHURCH, EAST HATLEY

The Advisory Group considered a report on the conclusions reached by consultant Architects Messrs. Purcell Miller Triton, and five options for managing St Denis Church in the future.

Those present discussed the following points:

- potential for the Council to acquire the land immediately surrounding the church in order to secure access to the Grade II* Listed Building
- the feasibility of negotiating with the current owner of that land with a view to disposing of the church to him
- temporary repair, as outlined in paragraph 11 of the Conservation Manager's report, with a view ultimately to demolishing all but the 14th century elements of the building
- the investigation into a possible small-scale commercial- or community use for the building
- the degree to which St Denis Church is succeeding in its use as a nature reserve and for the study of natural history, a use envisaged by the Council when it bought the structure in 1983
- the need to consider the longer-term implications

The Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Portfolio Holder for Conservation:

- (1) urges Cabinet to authorise officers to draw up a specification and invite tenders to implement Option E as set out in the Conservation Manager's report, allowing short-term repairs to stabilise the structure, subject to (3) below;
- (2) authorises the Conservation Manager to explore options for additional grant funding to support possible implementation of Option F contained in the report, with a view to securing the long-term fabric of the building such that it may be available for a new use; and
- (3) instruct the Conservation Manager to consider, as alternative options, disposal of the church either to the owner of the surrounding land or to an individual or organisation interested in using the building for small-scale commercial or community purposes.

11. **TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS - DISTRICT-WIDE REVIEW**

The Trees and Landscape Officer and Trees and Landscape Assistant updated the Advisory Group about the ongoing Review of Tree Preservation Orders throughout the District. The purpose of the Review was to assess and, where necessary, redefine current Orders, and to revoke Orders and make new ones in those cases where circumstances had changed over the years.

It was anticipated that the Review would take about five years to complete, and the aim was to ensure that all of the mapping information could be accessed digitally in due course.

Councillor Mrs JM Healey welcomed the Review, and acknowledged the commitment shown by officers in progressing it. The Advisory Group endorsed this view, and conveyed its good wishes to Wendy Lawson (Trees and Landscape Assistant), who was shortly to take up her new responsibilities with a local authority in Gloucestershire.

The Meeting ended at 4.50 p.m.
