

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Conservation Advisory Group.
Conservation, Sustainability &
Community Planning Portfolio Holder.

AUTHOR/S: Conservation Manager

20th July 2005

THATCH AND THATCHING IN SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE – OUTLINE OF PROPOSED PLANNING GUIDANCE.

Purpose

1. To present an outline of a draft supplementary planning guidance note on Thatching policy for the consideration and approval of members to guide the direction and final drafting of the proposed document.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. Quality, Accessible Services	The draft "Thatch and thatching planning policy guidance document" will be a useful planning tool which will assist in the implementation of the Council's planning policy and the conservation of key elements of the historic environment.
Village Life	Thatched cottages are a feature of many of the district's village and their retention in a form which preserves locally distinctive patterns will support the efforts to maintain local heritage.
Sustainability	The preservation of historic buildings and the use of traditional, renewable materials is a fundamental component of the achievement of sustainability.
Partnership	The achievement of the viable preservation of historic buildings and techniques requires a series of effective partnerships between the local authority and both property owners and local craftsmen.

Background

3. It is generally acknowledged that thatch is a distinctive feature of the English landscape, particularly the south and east, and should be conserved as part of our built heritage. The materials and the methods by which they are applied reflect both the broad geographic and economic character of their areas over time. The survival of regional diversity in thatching is, therefore, a central aim of conservation policy in those areas where the character can be firmly identified.
3. South Cambridgeshire is a predominantly arable area and historically wheat straw has been the most widely available thatching material, although some water reed has always been used on the fen-edge.
4. In more recent times there has been an increase in the use of reed over long straw, due to the perceived greater longevity and availability of reed and the promotion of this material by the Rural Industries Bureau in the first decades after the Second World War. The Bureau encouraged the use of water reed in order to stop the wide scale removal of thatched roofs following the introduction of the combine harvester, which rendered straw unusable for thatching.

5. In the 1970s combed wheat reed was introduced from the West Country and has been replacing the traditional longstraw thatch. Combed wheat reed is basically wheat straw but it is prepared and applied to the roof in a different manner, resulting in a change in the character and appearance of traditional longstraw thatch.
6. The existing local plan policy is embedded in Part 1 - South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 and focuses on the Retention of Thatch as follows :

Policy EN23 : The District Council will use its planning powers and grant schemes to preserve the character of the roofs of Listed Buildings which are made of traditional materials. In particular it will resist applications for consent which:

(1) imply the loss of traditional longstraw roofs and their ridge, barge and dormer details.

Considerations

7. Officers are in the process of drafting a supplementary planning document to provide guidance on the implementation of the adopted local plan policy and promote best practice. This is intended to be presented for adoption initially as Council Policy prior to subsequently being adapted to become a Supplementary Planning Document supporting the Local Development Framework.
8. The below text forms the fundamental elements of the proposed policy and are, therefore, presented for consideration by members, prior to being finalised in the draft document.
9. The following policy guidance notes are intended to ensure that surviving regional characteristics and actual historic fabric is not compromised or lost by proposed alterations or ill-considered repairs. They relate to the fact that complete stripping of a thatched roof is rarely needed and the English Heritage guidance (and historic practice) that defective thatch should simply be removed to a sound base.
10. ***Change in Thatching Materials, Methods or Detailing***
 - a. Listed building Consent is required for a change in roof materials and the Council will resist such applications for an alteration in thatching material or thatching detailing which is not traditional to the specific location or landscape character of the property.
 - b. The Council will resist listed building consent applications which result in a change to the external appearance of the historic building by introducing a different material, method of thatching or detailing.
 - c. Listed Building Consent will not normally be granted for the removal of original base layers and material of archaeological or historic importance, such as medieval smoke-blackened thatch or timbers surviving from the time prior to the erection of a chimney stack, or the remains of the original louvre
 - d. As with all listed building applications, applicants will be expected to justify their proposals, to demonstrate why works, which would affect the character of the listed building, are desirable or necessary in terms of the preservation or enhancement of the historic building. Short-term economic arguments will not be considered as sufficient justification.

11 ***Reinstatement of Thatch***

- (i) The Council will use its planning powers; grant schemes and advisory role to secure the reinstatement of the original thatching material on historic buildings, where there is photographic or physical evidence for the particular material originally used on the building (either longstraw or water reed).
- (ii) The Council will discourage the use of materials and methods of thatching which are not traditional to the district.
- (iii) The Council will encourage the retention of 'reed fleeking', which is a woven mat visible between the rafters of early roofs, where it exists, to form the base coat for the new thatch.
- (iv) The Council will discourage the use of felt underlay or polythene sheeting when re-instating thatch as it will inhibit drying out and may cause decay from condensation.
- (v) The use of anti-fire devices should be visually appropriate to the building and should be discussed with the Historic Buildings Officer.
- (vi) Listed Building Consent will always be required for a re-instatement of thatching material, in order to ensure that material appropriate to the individual building and landscape character area is utilised.

12. ***Traditional Repair***

- (i) In order to ensure that locally characteristic features are not lost the Council will encourage the employment of an experienced thatchers who works in accordance with local tradition.
- (ii) Complete stripping is rarely needed; therefore the Council will aim to ensure that only defective thatch is removed to a sound base. The Council will therefore encourage the tradition of small-localised repair and resist total re-thatching where repairs may be more appropriate.
- (iii) Localised repair should match the topcoat in both method and material where possible.
- (iii) Where a 'reed fleeking' exists (the woven mat visible between the rafters of early roofs) it should be retained to form the base coat for the new thatch.

13. ***New Buildings***

- (i) In accordance with the Design Guide, the Council may encourage new thatched buildings in villages where there is a thatching tradition and where roofs comply with Building Regulations and meet Fire Regulations in terms of isolation from one another and from their boundaries.

14. Members comments are therefore sought on the above in order to guide the policy direction of the document.

15. It is intended that the proposed policy guidance, will be completed by the inclusion of the following technical specifications and informative material :

- (a) Revised specification for longstraw

- (b) Specification for water reed
- (c) Revised Short Guide for Thatch Owners
- (d) Comprehensive survey of thatched buildings in the District, listed and unlisted.

Options

16. The Conservation Advisory Group are requested to either :
- (a) Support the direction and proposed content of the “thatching planning policy guidance document” and recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises officers to complete the draft of the document and undertakes an appropriate consultation exercise, reporting the results back to the Conservation Advisory Group for consideration prior to presentation to Cabinet for initial adoption as Council Policy.
 - (b) Suggests an alternative direction and proposed content of the “thatching planning policy guidance document” and recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder requires officers to re-consider the draft of the policy guidance document and reports the results back to the Conservation Advisory Group for consideration.

Financial Implications

17. None specific.

Legal Implications

18. Once adopted the guidance note would have the status of Council Policy. It will then be subsequently adapted to become a supporting document to the Local Development Framework.

Staffing Implications

19. None specific.

Risk Management Implications

20. None specific

Consultations

21. This report is the first stage of the Consultation exercise. The document will subsequently be subject to the statutory consultation process.

Conclusions/Summary

22. The above outline policy guidance is the first stage of developing the required policy guidance which will both help guide property owners and assist in the managements and maintenance of these historic buildings and which will eventually become part of the Local Development Framework as a SPD. Members direction is south at this

formative stage in order to ensure that the direction of the policy is both clear, unambiguous and appropriate.

Recommendations

23. That the Conservation Advisory Group support the direction and proposed content of the "Thatch and thatching planning policy guidance document" and recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises officers to complete the draft of the document and undertakes an appropriate consultation exercise, reporting the results back to the Conservation Advisory Group for consideration prior to presentation to Cabinet for initial adoption as Council Policy.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Draft "*Thatch and thatching planning policy guidance*" document – SCDC July 2005

Contact Officer: Nick Grimshaw - Conservation Manager
Telephone: (01954) 713180