

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Conservation Advisory Group held on
Wednesday, 8 December 2004 at 10.00am

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

Councillors: Dr JA Heap Mrs CA Hunt
Dr JPR Orme JA Quinlan
RJ Turner NIC Wright

and Councillor Mrs JM Healey (Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder).

Councillors RF Bryant, Mrs A Elsby, Mrs DP Roberts and Mrs DSK Spink MBE were in attendance, by invitation.

There were no Apologies for absence.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor SJ Agnew reaffirmed his personal interest in Minute 7 of the Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2004 as Chairman of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, and declared a personal interest in Minute no. 4 below (Outline of the work of the Wildlife Trust) because of his involvement with the Green Belt project.

Rob Mungovan, Ecology Officer, declared a personal interest in Minute no. 3 below (Foxton Dovecote Meadow) because a close relative had once leased the land concerned from Cambridgeshire County Council.

Councillors Mrs CA Hunt and RJ Turner declared personal interests in Minute no. 8 below (Duxford Imperial War Museum - potential designation of a Conservation Area), Councillor Hunt as a member of the Cambridge Airport Consultative Committee and Councillor Turner as that Committee's chairman.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Conservation Advisory Group authorised the Chairman to sign, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2004, subject to the word "National" in the first line of the fourth paragraph of Minute no. 3 being corrected to say "Natural". The Conservation Manager added that site visits in respect of the Natural Heritage Awards scheme would be arranged in the early part of 2005.

3. FOXTON DOVECOTE MEADOW, VILLAGE GREEN SPACE - CONSIDERATION OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report on the Foxton Dovecote Meadow Management Plan, intended to form the basis for the future development of the site as a Village Green Space to be maintained by Foxton Parish Council.

Mr D Pusey, Chairman of Foxton Parish Council, and the Ecology Officer made a joint presentation to Members, highlighting, among other things, likely costs, the funds already secured from the Local Heritage Initiative, and the extensive level of local support for the

project. The local Member, Councillor Mrs DP Roberts, attended the meeting and spoke in support of this proposal.

In response to a Member's question, the Ecology Officer stated that the lack of screening between the Dovecote Meadow and the adjacent housing development added to the amenity of the people living in those houses, and helped provide some informal security for the meadow, which consisted of about four acres. Members were informed that the permissive footpath would provide access (including disabled access) to other parts of the village, and re-establish a link that probably existed pre-enclosure.

The encouragement of dog walking in the meadow, and the inappropriateness of the fencing, meant that, at this stage, there could be no possibility of introducing sheep onto the meadow as a means of grass management.

Once the project had been completed, a site visit for Members would be considered.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises adoption of the *Foxton Dovecote Meadow Management Plan: November 2004* as the basis for the development of the Foxton Village Green Space;
- (2) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises release of funding of up to £5,000 from the Heritage Initiative Fund to Foxton Parish Council to support the implementation of the Management Plan, on completion of the lease of the site to Foxton Parish Council.

4. OUTLINE OF THE WORK OF THE WILDLIFE TRUST IN SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND CONSIDERATION OF POSSIBLE ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report outlining the activities of the Wildlife Trust within the district, a proposal for enhanced partnership working with South Cambridgeshire District Council, and a request for funding to support the Trust's work.

Martin Baker, Senior Conservation Officer with the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough made a PowerPoint presentation to Members highlighting, among other things, the Trust's relationship with the Green Belt Project.

Members established that

- While the Wildlife Trust did not have the statutory status of English Nature, many of its responsibilities were of a comparable standard
- The Wildlife Trust was positive about changes in the Common Agricultural Policy that would seek to enhance land management through new ways of paying subsidies to farmers

Members asked officers to arrange a presentation once changes to the Common Agricultural Policy had been clarified early in 2005.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder expresses support for the work of the Wildlife Trust, and establishes a prioritised one-year pilot study of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) from 2005-06, funded from the Heritage Initiative Fund, with results reported to the Conservation Advisory Group before February 2006; and
- (2) That, subject to the results of the pilot CWS study, the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks additional funding within 2006-07 (through the Continuous Improvement Plan process during 2005-06) to support an appropriate three year Service Level Agreement to support the Wildlife Trust's work on both managing wildlife sites and surveying County Wildlife Sites.

5. MANAGEMENT OF ROADSIDE VERGES FOR BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT.

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report on the management of roadside verge (RSV) and a number of options for the future biodiversity enhancement of these sites.

Susanah O'Hanlon, Biodiversity Officer with Cambridgeshire County Council, attended the meeting to assist officers in addressing issues raised by Members.

After the Chairman explained how RSV management was dealt with in some neighbouring local authority areas, Members noted the importance of such sites to wildlife and made the following points:

- It was important to prioritise the interests of biodiversity, the demands of highway safety, and the utility of cycle tracks
- Methods of management were often dictated by different soil types
- Greater liaison was needed between local authorities and local farmers in order to establish a framework of management that benefited everyone. The issues here were ones of communication, timing and awareness.
- The County Council should consider inserting a financial penalty clause into the new contract to encourage better RSV management by contractors
- Efforts were needed to minimise any possible adverse effect on Protected Road Side Verges from the positioning there of road signs

Susanah O'Hanlon doubted the need for any additional tier of designation for Road Side Verges. Responding to a point made by a Member, she acknowledged that leaving grassing clippings on the verge was far from ideal, but pointed out that removal of same was a costly exercise.

Members discussed how best to convey to the County Council and the Highways Agency the strength of the Conservation Advisory Group's feelings about the management of Road Side Verges. They considered that parish councils could be instrumental in identifying areas in need of attention, but the Ecology Officer urged Members to think about available resources before raising expectations. He suggested that selection of a small number of sites in most need of attention was a realistic approach to take.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder initiates further action by officers to :

- (1) Consider the potential enhancement of maintenance regimes for protected roadside verges with the Biodiversity Partnership, as a basis for the

development of future revised management regimes with the Assistant Director of Environment and Transport at Cambridgeshire County Council ;

- (2) Explore alternatives for the potential biodiversity enhancement and revised management procedures for non-protected RSVs with the Director of Environment and Transport at Cambridgeshire County Council, where there is an opportunity through local partnerships to change the current management regime without compromising highway safety; and
- (3) A small group consisting of the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder and the Chairman and one other member of the Conservation Advisory Group take responsibility for highlighting the Council's concerns about the management of RSVs, and identifying areas in need of most attention through engagement with a selected group of parish councils each year.

6. **CONSULTATION ON THE IMPLICATIONS FOR BUILT AND NATURAL HERITAGE OF THE PROPOSED HOTEL DEVELOPMENT AT SAWSTON HALL**

Having visited the site on 7th December 2004, the Conservation Advisory Group considered the conservation implications of an application to develop a hotel at Sawston Hall to enable the Conservation Advisory Group and Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder to formulate a consultation response to the Development and Conservation Control Committee.

The Trees and Landscape Officer raised the following further issues for debate:

- Impact of the car park on the existing tree belt
- The potential adverse effect on the integrity of the tree belt should it become necessary to remove a number of Yew trees in order to realign the driveway
- The retention of a mature beech tree that could be compromised should attention to detail not be given to the development of the accommodation blocks

Having noted that restaurant ventilation and fire regulation issues had been addressed satisfactorily, Members discussed the following:

- Design
- The need for harmony between new and old
- The driveway, and the importance of "first impressions"
- The opportunities provided by this proposal to protect and enhance the historic landscape
- The preference for new buildings to be "of their time" rather than pastiche
- Use of materials
- Swimming pool

Members noted that the Architects Panel would be considering this proposal as well.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder support the proposals in principle, subject to final agreement on a number of specific issues including design, materials and impact on the tree belt.

Councillor JA Quinlan informed the Conservation Advisory Group that he had previously advised clients who were prospective purchasers of the Hall but who had not proceeded to complete the purchase. These clients had no connection with the current Hotel operator and, accordingly, he did not consider it necessary to declare a personal interest.

7. PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP (P3) - PROGRESS AND SUPPORT IN 2005/06.

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report seeking continued financial support for the Parish Path Partnership (P3) scheme within South Cambridgeshire for a period of three years from 2005-06.

Members received copies of the *Parish Paths Partnership News Bulletin 2003-2004*.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises continuation of funding support for the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme for a further 3 year period from 2005-06 at the 2004-05 grant sum levels, suitably adjusted to reflect inflation, subject to establishment of the Council's mid-term financial strategy; and
- (2) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder instructs the Conservation Manager to establish a link between P3 schemes and strategic open space projects that would enhance the Public Rights of Way network and meet the objectives of the Community Strategy.

8. DUXFORD IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM - POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF A CONSERVATION AREA

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report on the historic and architectural value of Duxford Airfield, in the context of possible future development there, which would pose a threat to the future wellbeing of the buildings and their setting. The Conservation Area and Design Officer gave a short presentation of the major considerations in seeking the designation of a Conservation Area at Duxford, including options for its extent.

A Member argued that the area was of such a high significance and quality that it needed protecting in its own right, regardless of development that may or may not happen there in the future. It was noted that the Council had been contemplating a Conservation Area in Duxford for over four years, and it was clear therefore that it was not now reacting to potential development, but simply progressing an ongoing aspiration. Care was needed to ensure that the two issues of the Conservation Area and possible development were not allowed to obstruct each other.

The Government had been considering for some time applications to list more buildings at the Imperial War Museum. However, a Member urged the Council to proceed with the Conservation Area as a separate issue, given the wider character of what was probably the best preserved example of a Second World War RAF Fighter station.

It was reported that the Imperial War Museum had been consulted.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder instruct officers to designate a Conservation Area for Duxford as a matter of urgency.

9. BUILDINGS AT RISK - PROGRESS AND PROPOSED ACTION

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report setting out the current position with regard to Historic Buildings at Risk and seeking support for the actions proposed in Appendix 1 of that report.

The Conservation Manager stressed the importance of publicising the list on the Council's website, and ensuring that the information contained therein is kept as up to date as possible. Publicity could also be carried by the *South Cambs Magazine*.

Some Members requested that legal advice be sought first in order to avoid the publication of inaccurate or unfair information that might lead to the Council being challenged in the courts.

The Conservation Advisory Group **ACCEPTED** the role of scrutinising the proposed action set out in Appendix 1 of the report from the Conservation Manager, addressing the Historic Buildings at Risk list and requiring six-monthly reports, to enable it to recommend that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder intervene where necessary.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED**

- (1) that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder authorises the publication of South Cambridgeshire's Historic Buildings at Risk List on the Council's website, on a six-monthly basis, to identify vacant buildings and encourage wider interest in their restoration and re-use; and
- (2) That the Conservation Advisory Group recommends that the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder seeks to maintain appropriate budgetary resources to enable the authority to intervene where necessary and meet its responsibilities under the legislation.

10. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT CHAMPION FOR SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Conservation Advisory Group considered a report on the formal designation of a "Historic Environment Champion" to represent South Cambridgeshire District Council on the Cabinet.

The Conservation Advisory Group **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet formally recognise and promote the 'Historic Environment Champion', as a key component of the Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder's role, so that the opportunities presented by the enhanced partnership working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and English Heritage can be fully realised.

11. ST. DENIS CHURCH, EAST HATLEY - GRANT APPLICATION RESULTS

The Conservation Manager updated Members verbally on the latest situation relating to St Denis Church, East Hatley.

The Meeting ended at 1.20 p.m.
