

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

AUTHOR/S: Conservation Manager

8th December 2004

Historic Environment Champion for South Cambridgeshire

Purpose

1. To seek members views on the formal designation of a "Historic Environment Champion" to represent the district within the Cabinet.

2. **Effect on Corporate Objectives**

3. Quality, Accessible Services	The role of the Historic Environment Champion (HEC) may enhance the departmental working relationship across the Council's responsibilities.
Village Life	The role of the HEC is to support the preservation and enhancement of local heritage which is fundamental to village life.
Sustainability	The protection of the historic environment is fundamental to achieving sustainability.
Partnership	The proposed role may open enhanced partnership working with Government and the heritage sector

Background

4. The Minister for Housing & Planning and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has written to all local authorities to urge them to formally appoint a champion for the historic environment, preferably at Cabinet level.
5. It is evident that in a district such as ours the historic environment makes a fundamental and character defining impact on villages, hence the Council's focus on conservation issues over many years.
6. The ODPM suggest that the role of the Champion is to ensure that the historic environment is at the heart of the council agenda, as a catalyst for regeneration for : environmental enhancement; regeneration; learning; community cohesion and economic development. The ODPM particularly note the need to emphasise the value of the historic environment as acting as a focus for area revitalisation or enhancement (by retaining features that make places special and by offering attractive and distinctive places to live and work). In particular they note the importance to local distinctiveness afforded by the historic environment.
7. Further, the Government emphasise that the historic environment should not be seen as an obstacle but rather a valuable tool to enable Council's to achieve their objectives. The Government thus suggest that the role of the local Historic Environment Champion should be to :

- Help unlock the untapped potential of the local historic environment.
- Provide leadership for heritage issues within the local authority.
- Ensure co-ordination of heritage issues across the local authority's departments and ensure that the historic environment is taken into account in all of the Council's policies and strategies.
- Develop a close working relationship with the local Design Champion to develop a seamless approach to the built and natural environment.
- Identify opportunities for the authority to use the historic environment in the pursuit of its objectives.

Considerations

8. Members will be aware that SCDC has long recognised the value and importance of the historic environment and has equally taken its responsibilities seriously, via the former Conservation Committee and now by having a Cabinet member with a portfolio which includes the preservation, enhancement and promotion of the historic environment as a key component. It would appear that the role recommended to be established by the Government is one which is already established at South Cambs, within the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning portfolio.
9. It is, however, considered important in terms of working with key Government and heritage partners that the Council promotes support for the role of "historic environment champion" within the authority so that the opportunities presented by the enhanced partnership working with the ODPM and English Heritage can be fully realised.

Options

10. That at the Conservation Advisory Group either :
 - (a) recommend that Cabinet formally recognise and promote the 'historic environment champion's' role currently performed by the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning portfolio so that the opportunities presented by the enhanced partnership working with the ODPM and English Heritage can be fully realised.
 - (b) recommend that the role of "Historic Environment Champion" is designated to a 'back bench' member with responsibilities to report direct to Cabinet so that the opportunities presented by the enhanced partnership working with the ODPM and English Heritage can be realised.
 - (c) decline to recommend that that the role of "Historic Environment Champion" is defined as this is adequately designated as part of the existing portfolio holder's brief.

Financial Implications

11. None specific, although the role may open potential funding support options.

Legal Implications

12. None - the role is entirely discretionary but is 'encouraged' by the ODPM.

Staffing Implications

13. None specific.

Risk Management Implications

14. None specific

Consultations

15. None specific.

Conclusions/Summary

16. It is considered both appropriate and important to recognise the role of “Historic Environment Champion” within the district in order to take full advantage of the possibilities for enhanced working with English Heritage and the ODPM.
17. It is considered that the current portfolio holder’s brief contains the necessary responsibilities and is actually performing the role with distinction. Consequently it is recommended that the members recommend that the role is formally recognised and confirmed by Cabinet

Recommendations

18. That the Conservation Advisory Group recommend that Cabinet formally recognise and promote the ‘historic environment champion’s’ role, as a key component of the Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning portfolio holder’s role, so that the opportunities presented by the enhanced partnership working with the ODPM and English Heritage can be fully realised.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Letter from Keith Hill - Minister for Housing & Planning, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – 18th August 2004.

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