



AGENDA ITEM: 11

**CABINET:
24 March 2009**

**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE :
8 April 2009**

Report of: Interim Policy Services Manager

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Forshaw

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SUBJECT: WEST LANCASHIRE HERITAGE STRATEGY – UPDATE

District wide interest.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the West Lancashire Heritage Strategy and to request approval of an amended document, which will be used for consultation purposes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.1 That the West Lancashire Heritage Strategy be approved for the purposes of public consultation.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

3.1 That subject to approval by Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee the revised draft West Lancashire Heritage Strategy be approved for the purposes of public consultation.

3.2 That delegated authority be given to the Interim Policy Services Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation to make the necessary arrangements for consultation.

3.3 That the results from the consultation exercise be referred back to Cabinet to consider, prior to publication of the document.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 West Lancashire has a wealth of historic buildings and places, which contribute greatly to the character and appearance of the local environment and form part of a distinctive look and feel to the local scene.
- 4.2 The historic environment is, however a fragile resource and one which is an irreplaceable and unique record of our cultural heritage. The preservation of our built heritage is important not only as it provides a link with the past, but because the buildings themselves enhance the appearance of most of our towns and villages, giving a sense of local pride and providing a valuable leisure and recreation resource.
- 4.3 The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that the best architectural and historic buildings and historic areas are preserved and wherever possible enhanced. However, the responsibility of stewardship of our heritage is shared by everyone and it is recognised that there needs to be broad public support and understanding of the issues relating to the preservation of historic buildings and places.
- 4.4 Government guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 'Planning and the Historic Environment' (PPG 15) states that one of the objectives of the planning process is to reconcile the need for economic growth with the need to protect the natural and historic environment. Local Authorities in this respect need to "*maintain and strengthen their commitment to the stewardship of the historic environment*". Therefore in order to carry out its function effectively and efficiently it is important that the Council has an up to date and co-ordinated strategy to set out its long-term goals for preserving the District's built heritage.
- 4.5 The Council's existing Heritage Strategy was approved in June 2003 after a draft document was produced for public consultation. The document set down three principle aims based around the need to expand on the Council's statutory duty to preserve the Districts heritage, to provide a framework to promote public awareness and to manage changes in the historic environment in a sustainable way.
- 4.6 This strategy was always intended to complement planning policies and guidance both nationally and locally and it is essential that it remains up to date and relevant. As part of this monitoring process it was envisaged that the strategy would be reviewed after a 5 years to consider up dated guidance, look at progress, highlight possible changes and the potential for new priorities. This review is part of the expected monitoring process.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Since the original heritage strategy was published in 2003 the Government through its advisors English Heritage has been looking at the whole issue of heritage protection within England and Wales. This has culminated in the publication of two major documents, which need to be considered as part of our own review process.
- 5.2 Firstly, a Government White Paper entitled *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century* was published in March 2007. The White Paper was based around three core principles; developing a unified approach to heritage protection, maximising opportunities for inclusion and involvement in heritage and putting heritage at the heart of the planning system. At the time the White Paper was published a report and discussion paper was presented to Members in May 2007.
- 5.3 The White Paper recognises the value that heritage plays in understanding our environment and the need for a unified and simpler heritage protection system. The proposals focus on ensuring that local authorities have the proper skills in place to deliver the heritage agenda. It aims to encourage local authorities to further develop a wider skill base in heritage issues, introduce cross tier/boarder working and to measure themselves against other authorities to learn from 'best' practice. The Draft Heritage Protection Bill, which was published in April 2008 and aims to bring about the legislative reform highlighted in the White Paper, has been delayed.
- 5.4 The second document was the publication of the English Heritage guide *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* in April 2008. This sets down the framework for the sustainable management of the historic environment and uses six key principles:
- The historic environment is a shared resource.
 - Everyone should be able to participate in enjoying our heritage.
 - Understanding the significance of historic buildings and places is vital.
 - The historic environment needs to be properly managed to sustain its value.
 - Decisions about changes affecting our heritage should be reasonable and consistent.
 - The proper documentation of our heritage assets is essential.
- 5.5 In order to ensure conformity the same broad principles run through the revised draft strategy (a copy of which is appended to this report) but I have retained three key aims or 'themes' of the strategy. These are;

- Theme 1 *Looking after our heritage – the need to manage and sustain its value.*
- Theme 2 *Heritage is for everyone – promote a proper understanding and enjoyment of our heritage.*
- Theme 3 *Identifying our heritage and making a case for its retention.*

5.6 The format of the draft strategy is *action plan* based and includes what work we have already done and how we might better achieve our broad aims in the future.

5.7 To help the Council in the production of the final strategy document I intend to consult with English Heritage, local amenity groups, Parish Councils, relevant public bodies and stakeholders with an interest in the Districts Heritage. Any comments and views received will be reported back to Members prior to the strategy being adopted.

6.0 ISSUES

6.1 The main issue for delivering the strategy is one of capacity and in particular staff resources. West Lancashire has a wealth of identified heritage assets (see data set appended to strategy document), which puts it in the upper quartile in Lancashire and in relation to designated conservation areas the upper quartile in the North West. In order to fulfil its duties laid down in planning legislation and the commitments highlighted in PPG 15 and the Draft Heritage Protection Bill it is essential that adequate staffing levels be retained.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

7.1 The need to continue with efforts to protect and improve the quality of the District's environment including the streetscene, natural and built heritage of our towns, villages and countryside has been identified as a key issue in the *Sustainable Community Strategy for West Lancashire 2007-2017*.

7.2 This project supports the Council's sustainability objective by promoting and enhancing the quality of the Districts environment.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Heritage work is currently supported by funding under the Conservation Area Enhancement and the Buildings at Risk budgets set within the Capital Programme 2005/2008.

8.2 However, no capital resources have been allocated or committed to this budget after the end of the financial year 2008 / 2009.

8.3 There are no direct financial and resource implications arising from this report.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 There are no risk assessment issues arising from this report.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this report.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Document</u>
1999 to present	Heritage Strategy

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups.

Appendices

Draft West Lancashire Heritage Strategy