



# **West Lancashire District Council**



## **HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION STRATEGY**

### **CONSULTATION DRAFT**

**MARCH 2009**

# **West Lancashire Heritage and Conservation Strategy**

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# **West Lancashire Heritage and Conservation Strategy**

## **Draft update**

### **1. Introduction**

This consultation draft has been prepared as an addendum to the existing Heritage and Conservation Strategy, which was approved by Council on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003.

The document has been developed to ensure that the changes in legislation, national planning policy and guidance, which have taken place in the heritage and conservation fields since 2003, are adequately reflected in the strategy. This will ensure that the strategy remains relevant and is still focused on the key issues, which affect heritage in our District.

### **2. Background to the Strategy**

Our built heritage provides a huge resource that can play an important role in the future of West Lancashire. Heritage can be an important stimulus to regeneration, be used to promote tourism and visitors into the area, provide a sense of local pride and importantly by preserving it we are contributing to a more sustainable future.

West Lancashire has a wealth of historic buildings and places, which contribute greatly to the character and appearance of the local environment and which form part of a distinctive and cherished local scene. We are however aware that the historic environment is a fragile resource and one which is an irreplaceable and unique record of our past which when lost is gone forever.

Local authorities are often seen as the 'managers' of the historic environment and have a statutory duty to ensure that the best architectural and historic buildings and historic areas are properly preserved and wherever possible are enhanced. However, the responsibility of stewardship of our heritage is shared by everyone and is not just a task undertaken by the Council. To truly succeed it is acknowledged that there needs to be broad level of public support and understanding of the issues relating to the preservation of our historic environment.

In order to carry out our role effectively and efficiently it is important that the Council maintains a coordinated strategy, which sets down its vision for

preserving the District's built heritage. Good conservation practice is crucial to the long-term well being of the area's historic buildings and places.

The updated draft document sets down the Council's aims and objectives with regard to conservation and establishes a framework on which conserving and the historic environment can be realistically achieved.

### **3. The National Position**

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*".

Since the original heritage strategy was published in 2003 the Government's advisors, English Heritage have been looking at the national system of heritage protection within England and Wales and in particular how it could be changed to ensure it remained 'fit for purpose'. The Government published its White Paper entitled *Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* in March 2007. The White Paper contained three core principles, which can be summarized as:

- To develop a unified approach to heritage protection.
- Maximize opportunities for inclusion and involvement in heritage.
- To put heritage matters at the heart of the planning system.

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 also focus on ensuring that local authorities have the proper skills and capacity in place to deliver the heritage agenda. It aims to encourage local authorities to further develop a wider skill base and understanding in heritage issues, introduce better inter department working practices and to benchmark themselves against other authorities to learn from 'best' practice.

The *Draft Heritage Protection Bill*, which was published in April 2008 aims to bring about the legislative reform highlighted in the earlier White Paper. Whilst originally timetabled for implementation in 2010/11 due to a lack of Parliamentary time the legislative reforms have been delayed. English Heritage has nevertheless confirmed that they will continue to work to bring forward some of the reforms put forward in the *Bill* and will work to provide updated guidance to those working within the heritage profession.

In April 2008 English Heritage published a guide entitled *Conservation Principles - Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*. The guidance document sets down a logical approach to help in making decisions and to ensure consistency when working in an advisory role within the historic environment.

The document identifies six key principles in its framework, these are:

1. The historic environment is a shared resource.
2. Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment.
3. Understanding the significance of historic buildings and places is vital.
4. The historic environment needs to be properly managed to sustain its value.
5. Decisions about changes affecting our heritage should be reasonable and consistent.
6. Documentation and learning from decisions is essential.

The document, whilst written primarily for its own staff and to strengthen the credibility and consistency of decisions taken by English Heritage, is nevertheless a sound framework for other organizations, working in the heritage field, to take forward and embed in their own service. In this respect the six key principles (pages 19-24 of English Heritage document *Conservation Principles - Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*) are relevant to our own service and how we deal with heritage in the District.

#### **4. The Local Perspective**

West Lancashire is a distinctive place, which has been defined by its unique position on the Lancashire coastal plain and the effects of glacial ice. Historically much of its wealth came from the fertile soils and the ability to produce food and this helped shape the pattern of villages and settlements, which can be seen today. This early wealth is reflected in the legacy of historic buildings and places, which are so important to the identity of West Lancashire.

West Lancashire contains a wealth of historic buildings and places, many of which are recognised as being of outstanding national importance and therefore require protection. West Lancashire currently has 612 statutory Listed Buildings (506 entries), 28 Conservation Areas, 11 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 1 historic park included on the National Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The area covered by the Authority contains more nationally recorded *heritage assets* than most of its Lancashire neighbour's and ranks in the top half of all the authorities in the North West, including the conurbations of Merseyside and

Greater Manchester, in all aspects except the number of registered parks and gardens. More information on the designated heritage assets of the District is included in Appendix 1.

## **5. The Purpose of the Strategy**

The update of the existing 2003 strategy aims to re-affirm the Council's commitment to the historic environment and build on the work already carried out in delivering its heritage function. It will also provide a new focus for the management of the Council's involvement in heritage for the future. The strategy is intended to be a framework for heritage based activity and will guide planning policy and decision making within the Council's planning function.

We also need to acknowledge the general level of public support for heritage protection and the proper management of the historic environment, evidenced by our engagement with residents through our customer satisfaction surveys, meetings and regular exhibitions and this needs to be valued and embedded into the strategy.

Our vision for heritage in West Lancashire, is:

***“To raise awareness of the value of heritage in peoples lives and the need to ensure the preservation and proper management of our historic environment.”***

To help achieve this, the Council feels the broad aims of the 2003 Strategy remain relevant and should be used in the updated strategy. Work undoubtedly needs to focus on the need to properly manage the historic environment, broaden awareness and understanding and ensure heritage is adequately identified and protected.

## **6. The Work already Undertaken**

Since 2003 the Council has been focusing the heritage service on delivering the three broad aims of the strategy, namely, to preserve and enhance the areas heritage, to promote public awareness and to manage changes in the historic environment.

To achieve the broad aims we identified five main objectives within the strategy. These where;

- A. To maintain an up to date record of our historic environment.
- B. To provide the appropriate level of protection to our heritage assets.

- C. To provide professional advice and to promote an understanding of heritage.
- D. To encourage partnership working.
- E. To seek funding opportunities where ever possible.

Appended to this document is a record of the work we have undertaken, under each of the three stated aims. Reference is also made to how the actions support the five main objectives listed A-E above.

## **7. Up dating the Strategy**

Without overcomplicating the message the six principles, identified recently by English Heritage in their own policy document, can be adequately accommodated by maintaining three broad key aims or *themes* in the revised 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.*

The format of the draft strategy is *action plan* based and includes information regarding the heritage work that the Council has already undertaken in the 5 years since the existing strategy was introduced and what might still need to be done to meet our broad aims in the future.

It is however important to stress that conservation and the protection of the historic environment should not be seen only as the preserve of the Council and that there are many partners involved in its stewardship. The benefits of heritage is enjoyed by all and everyone has a stake, to some degree or other, in its preservation and where ever possible its enhancement. It is recognized that the historic environment cannot be preserved without broad public support, whether this is from owners of buildings, voluntary organizations and local groups or visitors and users of the historic buildings or places. As custodians of our historic environment its stewardship is shared by all of us.

**Theme 1 - Looking after our heritage – the need to manage and sustain its value.**

## **Preservation of our heritage**

The fragile nature of our heritage should not be underplayed. Once a historic building is demolished or unsympathetically altered it cannot be replaced. It is lost forever. The effective preservation of historic buildings, places and landscapes and their stewardship is fundamental to the Council's role.

Work on identifying and recording West Lancashire's heritage is important. It provides an information base, which helps us understand our built heritage and also importantly provides a record of the changes, which have occurred in the past. The activity plays a key role in conserving our heritage and underpins much of the work carried out within the Heritage and Environment Team.

The Council is committed to ensuring that all listed buildings are properly preserved and that their character is not adversely affected because of neglect, unnecessary demolition, works which affect their setting and/or alterations and extensions.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure the proper preservation of all listed buildings within the District. An up to date record of the condition of listed buildings in the District is maintained through a programme of regular inspection and monitoring of the listed buildings. The survey mechanism provides a standard approach for the assessment of the physical condition of the building and identifies its use and importantly whether it is occupied or not. The work follows the 'best practice' guidelines set down by English Heritage and currently runs on a five yearly review cycle. Importantly the review work allows us to identify listed buildings as being 'at risk' and to include them on a register of *Buildings at Risk*.

The Council has, as part of this role, at its disposal a wide range of powers, under the existing 1990 Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act to require owners to provide adequate repair for listed buildings. Under such powers the Council can require urgent works to the building to be carried out to make it wind and weather proof or can require more extensive repair works to be undertaken. In extreme cases the Council can compulsorily purchase the property or seek to prosecute those responsible for causing damage to listed buildings.

## **Keeping the unique 'character' of the area**

West Lancashire has a diverse historic environment, which is important to us. Many of the villages and settlements have been designated as conservation areas the character and appearance it is important to preserve and wherever possible enhance. In total West Lancashire have 28 conservation areas the 2nd highest of the Lancashire authorities and the 8th highest total in the North West region. In conservation areas, whilst controls exist over the demolition of buildings many physical changes to the environment can still take place, which do



not require planning permission. The pressure to develop buildings and sites and to extend and alter the housing stock across the district is not a new problem however in the more sensitive areas like conservation areas even minor changes can, over time, severely erode their special character and result in a loss of the areas distinctive character. To overcome the threats to an areas character and appearance it is important to identify what aspects of an area are important and what makes it distinctive. Appraisal work identifies the typical form and detailing of buildings, the commonly used materials and their scale and mass. Regular conservation area reviews enable changes and potential threats to an areas character to be recognized and monitored and where appropriate measures put in place to protect harm from occurring.

As part of the conservation area appraisal process, areas which have been identified as being sensitive to changes to their character and appearance have been afforded additional protection by the designation of Article 4(2) Directions which control unwarranted alterations on the front of buildings in conservation areas. This process will continue to be applied, where necessary, to preserve the character and appearance of the District's most historic places.

### **Ensuring a level of conservation expertise**

Conservation of the historic environment is the process of managing the inevitable changes that will take place, to an area or heritage asset in a way, which best sustains its historic value for the present and future generations. It is important to have the appropriate staff skills and capacity in place to ensure the proper conservation management of heritage assets can be achieved. The capacity to influence owners of buildings, members of the public, architects and other professionals with influence over the historic environment is crucial as is the knowledge of traditional building techniques and the care and repair of historic assets.

The provision of specialist conservation advice is an essential service for the preservation of our built heritage. Heritage advice is currently provided to owners and occupiers of listed buildings and to those living in conservation areas on a whole range of issues, ranging from whether planning permission or listed building consent is required, to how to sensitively repair buildings and/or help on the design of extensions and alterations to historic properties. To complement this service the availability of written guidance aimed at the promotion of good conservation practice, has the benefit of fostering owner responsibility and stewardship.

Within the Council in 2007/08 just over 300 planning proposals affecting historic building and conservation areas were assessed and comments and advice provided to the planning authority.

The Council recognizes that good design is important in all aspects of development, especially when related to historic buildings and places, which are sensitive to inappropriate change. The Council is seeking to promote the need for building design to be of the highest quality and the need to place an emphasis on new development, which contributes to the local distinctiveness of the historic environment of West Lancashire. To support this role the Council runs the West Lancashire Conservation Areas Advisory Panel, which provides comments on applications affecting the historic environment.

**Theme 2 - Heritage is for everyone – promote a proper understanding and enjoyment of our heritage.**

### **Enjoyment of our heritage**

Each year, historic sites and buildings throughout the region, get large numbers of visitors who enjoy learning about the history of a place, the attractive building features and/or the historic landscapes. Even on a local level many people enjoy the historic environment, whether just walking within it or visiting Ormskirk and its market or one of West Lancashire's many historic villages. Heritage undoubtedly plays a vital role in attracting people and visitors in to West Lancashire benefiting local businesses and communities. It is important to ensure that these areas remain their attractiveness and that footpaths, car parks and public facilities like streetlights and litterbins are well maintained and renewed where necessary.

### **Improving the awareness of heritage**

Getting people involved in heritage within local communities is important. It strengthens our understanding of heritage and the role it plays in our cultural. The Council is involved in delivering educational material through community exhibitions and talks and provides an educational resource (*Heritage Teacher Pack*) to local schools to enable children to become more aware of their own local heritage. The Council also acknowledges that local groups and heritage organizations provide valuable opportunities to participate and learn about our heritage through individual projects or group activities.

The review of the Council's conservation areas provides opportunities for local residents to become involved in looking at what enhances the areas character and what buildings, sites and features may detract from it. Providing local exhibitions and public consultation allows owners of properties to engage with the Council in understanding the reasons why the preservation of conservation areas and managing changes within these areas is important.

The conservation area appraisal program has also enabled the Council to publish the *Conservation Areas of West Lancashire - a Brief History*, which is a collection of the historical research undertaken to date on the districts 28 conservation areas.

Providing and sharing information relating to the historic environment and the care of our heritage is vital to enable people to make the right choices. The Council will continue to provide advice on heritage matters through direct contact with home and property owners and the production of relevant advice leaflets.

The use of the Councils Web site as a tool to provide information has greatly increased over the period since the existing heritage strategy was approved. We recognize the benefits of increasing the types of relevant information on the Heritage and Environment Web pages and ensure it is kept up to date. We do however acknowledge that other ways of communicating with residents need to be maintained to maintain our service. The Heritage and Environment Newsletter is sent out to all residents living in listed buildings and conservation areas and is also made available through the Lancashire library service and as a download from our Web site. The newsletter, which has 3 editions a year, provides a useful way of passing on information and issues relating to heritage issues. Recent customer surveys suggest that it remains a popular way of relaying information to our customers.

### **Partnership working**

The preservation and management of the historic, built environment is a complex subject, which aims to balance the needs and wishes of many agencies and bodies all of which have a stake in heritage. Work on heritage assets, whether individual listed buildings or historic places is therefore rarely undertaken in isolation and involves the need to work in partnership with others. It is essential that in such circumstances everybody concerned is aware of the need to preserve our heritage and the benefits that can be achieved in doing so.

It is also important that the views and issues affecting conservation, within the District, are put forward in a whole range of forums to ensure that influence can be made on the decisions taken especially where they may affect the implementation of the strategy's key objectives.

Within the region the Council will continue promote and participate in partnerships with Parish Councils, other Local Authorities including Lancashire County Council and heritage organizations i.e. English Heritage and the Civic Trust.

## **Theme 3 - Identifying our heritage and making a case for its retention.**

### **Local heritage**

The Council is keen to continue to develop a comprehensive database of all the heritage assets within West Lancashire to ensure the appropriate level of

protection is afforded to it. Much of the West Lancashire's built heritage is not formally protected through statutory designation and yet many of these buildings provide an important and cherished backdrop for our villages and communities and help define their distinctive character.

As well as continuing to put forward new buildings for inclusion onto the statutory lists as nationally recognized 'listed' building we also support our own list of locally important buildings. The recent Government White Paper - *Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* promotes the use of more local designations to ensure adequate protection is given to buildings, which provide communities with a local identity. Legislation proposed through the *Draft Heritage Protection Bill*, would allow local authorities to build on existing initiatives to produce a more open and comprehensive heritage protection system, including identifying and protecting buildings, which have a local value. The Council's existing 'Local List' was introduced in 2005 and undated in September 2007 and currently includes 123 buildings. I envisage that work in identifying and protecting locally recognized heritage, with the help of local communities, will continue to grow in the future. It should be recognized that West Lancashire is one of a only a small number of authorities in the North West which already has and maintains a 'Local List'.

## **Archaeology**

The importance of the need to protect archaeological remains has been recognized nationally through the Governments Planning Policy Guidance *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16). It advises that early consultation is required to ensure reconciling the needs of development with the likely affect on any important remains. It is vital that the appropriate professional advice is sought and that the recording of sites and buildings is undertaken where necessary. The Council will continue to support the role of the Lancashire County Council Archaeology Service, or any other archaeology body, in providing information relating to the preservation and recording of important archaeology. We will also assist the County Archaeologist in maintaining and providing access to the historic environment records.

## **8. Implementing the Strategy**

The management of the historic environment is a long-term commitment, which involves a mix of statutory and non-statutory controls and powers. Because heritage is unique and irreplaceable we need to co-ordinate our efforts to maximize its effectiveness and ensure that we protect it for future generations to enjoy.

There is no doubt that we need to work in partnership with other agencies to fully secure the aims and objectives of the strategy. We will continue to maintain

close links with English Heritage, other regional bodies working in the heritage field, and the voluntary sector to help deliver projects. Other similar funding partnerships will be investigated and encouraged.

Many of the actions outlined in the above strategy relate to ongoing work in which the Council is already involved. It is important that work continues in these subject areas and that improvements in the delivery of the service are achieved wherever possible, to realize the principal aims of the strategy. However it needs to be recognized that issues relating to the capacity of available staff resources could ultimately be a barrier to delivery. Some actions rely on others and their implementation is not directly under the control of the Local Authority.

## **9. Monitoring its Success and Review**

As a strategy document it is important to provide a timetable to measure progress in meeting its aims and objectives. As with the previous strategy a five year period will provide a suitable timescale on which progress can be judged. Given the above time-scale it is also proposed to monitor progress of the action plan on a yearly basis to allow new work priorities to be set and/or new projects/initiatives to be identified.

Ian Bond  
Heritage and Environment Manager

March 2009  
**Appendix 1.**

**West Lancashire Historic Environment – Data Set**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>West Lancashire (1)</b>	<b>Lancashire 2008 (1)</b>	<b>North West 2008 (1)</b>	<b>Ranking in North West (2)</b>	<b>Ranking in Lancashire (3)</b>
<b>Understanding the heritage asset</b>					
Listed Buildings	506	5450	25 420	15 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Total No.of entries	5	71	486	20 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Grade I	21	275	1526	19 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
Grade II*	480	5104	23401	15 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Grade II					
Scheduled Monuments	12	146	1316	15 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
Registered Parks and Gardens	1	38	129	28 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>
Conservation Areas	28	202	859	8 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Up to date Conservation Area appraisals	16	83	309	5 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Conservation area management plans	28	82	164	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Listed Building Consents	31	502	1923	22 <sup>nd</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Conservation Area Consents	5	55	275	19 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
Registered Locally Listed	123	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Buildings					
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- (1) Figures taken from English Heritage report *Heritage Counts 2008 Lancashire and North West* data set and relate to 2007/08 figures.
- (2) Ranking is based on 44 authorities in North West region.
- (3) The figure is the ranking based on the 14 Lancashire authorities (12 plus 2 unitary authorities).