



# Historic Environment Evidence Report

February 2013

# 'The Historic Environment' Evidence Report

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## **1.0 Introduction and Policy Context**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 Fenland District Council is producing the Fenland Core Strategy, which sets out the framework for how development will be considered across the District to 2031.
- 1.2 This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for policy CS18, which deals with the Historic Environment.

### **National Policy**

- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012.
- 1.4 Section 12 of the NPPF concerns “conserving and enhancing the historic environment” and there is a separate section on “Plan-making”. The following points are particularly relevant:
- Paragraph 126 - Local planning authorities should set out in their local plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.... They should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance....In developing this strategy they should take into account:
    - the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
    - the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
    - the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
    - opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.
  - Paragraph 156 - The local plan should include strategic policies to deliver the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.
  - Paragraph 169 – Local planning authorities should have up-to-date evidence about the historic environment in their area. They should either maintain or have access to a historic environment record.
- 1.5 The above NPPF guidance has been taken into account in preparing the Core Strategy as a whole, and policy CS18 in particular.

## **2. Fenland Context**

- 2.1 Fenland has a unique environmental character, with its flat, open landscapes, big skies and complex network of drainage channels and watercourses. Although much of the land outside settlements is intensively farmed, there are areas which remain important for their heritage value. Each of the four market towns in the district has its own individual character which has evolved over time in response to key changes in history – the drainage of the fens, the arrival of the railways and the growth of the motor car.
- 2.2 There are 20 scheduled monuments, 10 conservation areas and over 650 listed buildings of special architectural or historic interest in the District. The gardens of Peckover House in Wisbech are included in English Heritage’s register of parks and gardens of special historic interest

- 2.3 All of the conservation areas have a conservation area appraisal in place. Six of these are up to date and there is a programme to refresh the remaining four.
- 2.4 The Council has developed criteria for the identification of buildings of local importance and has prepared a list of buildings that meet the criteria. These will be included in a forthcoming supplementary planning document which will be published for public consultation in 2013.
- 2.5 The Council has access to the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record, which is maintained by the Historic Environment Team at Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 2.6 Key issues facing the Council are the requirement to strike an appropriate balance between the need for growth and development and the protection of the historic environment; the need to encourage re-use of empty historic buildings in order to avoid them falling into disrepair or neglect; the need to protect the fabric and structural soundness of historic properties which have been built in an area of shrinking soils and changing water tables; and the need to ensure all renovation and alteration works to listed buildings and other buildings in conservation areas are undertaken in a sympathetic manner, using traditional design solutions and materials wherever necessary.
- 2.7 The Council responds to these issues in a variety of ways, working with English Heritage and the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team when appropriate. The main mechanism is through the normal operation of the development management and delivery function, but the Council also operates three small grant schemes (for as long as resources allow) and can use planning obligations and Article 4 Directions if necessary.

### **3. Core Strategy Policy**

- 3.1 In the Draft version of the Core Strategy (published for consultation in July 2011) and in the Further Consultation Draft (published for consultation in July 2012) there was no separate policy on the historic environment. Protection of the historic environment had been built into various development policies throughout the Plan and the Council took the view that there was sufficient policy and advice in PPS5 "Planning for the Historic Environment" and its accompanying Practice Guide to enable it to carry out its responsibilities towards the historic environment in a satisfactory way.
- 3.2 However, with the publication of the NPPF in 2012 (deleting and replacing PPS5), it became clear that a positive strategy for the conservation of the historic environment would need to be incorporated into the Plan.
- 3.3 This was reinforced by the comments of English Heritage, received in response to the Further Consultation Draft. They pointed out the need for an overall policy and places throughout the Plan where recognition of the need to conserve and enhance various aspects of the historic environment would be advisable.
- 3.4 The response of the Council was firstly, to make changes throughout the Core Strategy, so that there is now proper recognition of the heritage and distinctive character of different parts of the area; and secondly, to include a separate policy (CS18) setting out our overall strategy and the requirements that would need to accompany any development proposals that would affect a designated or non-designated heritage asset. The policy does not attempt to re-write national policy or impose any additional burdens, and simply makes it clear that all development proposals that would affect a heritage asset will be determined in accordance with national policy in the NPPF.
- 3.5 The policy is supported by an implementation and monitoring table in chapter 7.
- 3.6 Aside from the NPPF, the evidence to support the policy comprises all of the information from the national List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest; the national List of Scheduled Monuments; English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest; the Fenland Conservation Areas and the Conservation Area Appraisals for each one; the selection criteria and list of buildings of local importance; and the entries for Fenland on the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record.

#### **4. Alternative Reasonable Options**

- 4.1 Option 1: No separate policy on the historic environment: This was the option that the Council pursued in earlier versions of the Core Strategy (as explained in paragraph 3.1 above). However, with the publication of the NPPF in 2012, this approach has since been rejected. It is clear that the NPPF expects Plans to include strategic policies to deliver the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment. The Council has responded to the NPPF by amending various policies (in particular, those relating to urban extensions and development around each of the market towns) and including one specific policy on the historic environment.
- 4.2 Option 2: A detailed policy to explain the circumstances in which planning permission would and would not be granted for development that would affect any heritage asset (whether designated or non-designated). This was rejected as it would simply repeat (or worse, misinterpret) national policy in paragraphs 126 to 141 of the NPPF.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 This Evidence Report demonstrates that Fenland District Council's Core Strategy policy for the Historic Environment is an entirely reasonable and appropriate response to the requirement of the NPPF, and is supported by a genuine and comprehensive evidence base. Alternative options have been considered, but rejected.
- 5.2 Overall, the Council considers its Historic Environment policy to be sound.