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Report of the Directors of City Development and Environment and Neighbourhoods

(Insert Name) Area Committee

Date: (Insert)

Subject: Conservation Area Reviews

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council
Function

Delegated Executive
Function available
for Call In

Delegated Executive
Function not available for
Call In Details set out in the
report

Executive Summary

The report provides information about Conservation Areas and recommends an approach to Conservation Area reviews.

Each Area Committee has been allocated an additional £50,000 this year from General Fund Reserves for 2007/08. One of the areas identified by the Executive Board that they would like Area Committees to consider when deciding how to spend this extra money was on carrying out Conservation Area Reviews.

The report provides information about Conservation Areas and notes that Leeds now has 64 Conservation Areas but so far only 5 of these have up-to-date appraisals.

It is suggested that the Committee considers allocating an amount from this year's well being allocation (estimate of £15,000 per Conservation Area review at this stage) to support a review of a Conservation Area. This would then allow a programme to be developed and implemented over the next 12 months in a consistent manner which follows planning guidance.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

The report provides information about Conservation Areas and recommends an approach to Conservation Area reviews.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Each Area Committee has been allocated an additional £50,000 this year from General Fund Reserves for 2007/08. One of the areas identified by the Executive Board that they would like Area Committees to consider when deciding how to spend this extra money was on carrying out Conservation Area Reviews. This is a Best Value/Comprehensive Performance Assessment indicator for the Council. Executive Board would like to make progress in this area and feel there is an opportunity for the Area Committees to influence how this work goes forward.
- 2.2 A Conservation Area for this purpose is one designated by a local authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Act defines it as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.
- 2.3 Central government policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15). The government expects local authorities to review “from time to time” which areas it has chosen to be Conservation Areas and to bring forward ideas for their conservation through appraisals/management plans. Designating and reviewing Conservation Areas is a planning function carried out by the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) in City Development.
- 2.4 Leeds now has 64 Conservation Areas but so far only 5 of these have up-to-date appraisals. The requirement for current appraisals has become a Key Performance Indicator under the Best Value/Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Although national targets are yet to be set, a poor performance in this area of work could clearly lead to loss of future government funding support. It may also lead to a number of out dated Conservation Area appraisal documents over time if action is not taken to do further reviews.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 City Development have developed a modified version of the appraisal and management plan system outlined in PPG15 and set out in English Heritage Guidance. Normally the management proposals are incorporated into the appraisal rather than being published separately. Three principles are followed.
- an appraisal must also include a review of a Conservation Area’s boundaries as these are inevitably out-of-date as notions of what is worth conserving change over time.
 - the local community must be involved in the process to ensure that there is support for the appraisal and that it can be treated as a “material consideration” in the planning system.
 - the published appraisal should be to a common format which is short, practical and available on the web.

- 3.2 The whole process takes about 15 weeks per area on average. Work can be divided into three areas:
- Professional – management and survey/analysis/appraisal writing
 - Graphical/IT – preparing documents, exhibition and publicity material, web publishing
 - Admin/logistical – progress chasing, leafleting, meeting.
- 3.3 Some of the steps could be handled in-house by SDU (through temporary posts and with possible help from Area Management with local contacts and consultation) but the piloting through the planning system can be done only by SDU. The meat of the work could be done by either SDU (again through temporary posts) or by consultants.
- 3.4 As part of the City Centre Area Action Plan in the Leeds Development Framework, the 10 Conservation Areas in and around the city centre (UDP boundary) are currently under review as part of a characterisation project being developed with English Heritage and part-funded by them. The work is being done by Jacobs under the Strategic Design Alliance. This GIS-based project aims to give a better understanding of the character areas which make up the city centre and from this to review and appraise the Conservation Areas there. This has the benefit of rooting the Conservation Areas in their wider area. It also brings economies of scale in reviewing the Conservation Areas in a batch. This is suggested as a useful model for the rest of the City.
- 3.5 Where communities have already undertaken conservation area studies these can be picked up and used where appropriate. For the majority however no recent work has been done and it would be more practical to set up a team to carry out around 10 reviews in an overlapping rolling programme which will require careful timetabling. This would aim to deliver in approximately 12 months a consistent set of appraisals embedded in GIS.
- 3.6 Based on recent experience an indicative cost for 10 scattered Conservation Area Reviews (one per Committee area) would amount to about £100k for professional work . To this would need to be added £50k for additional SDU project management giving a total of £150k. If more than 10 reviews took place there might be further economies of scale.

4.0 Proposals

- 4.1 Attached to this report are two appendices. The first is a map which shows the 64 designated Conservation Areas and Area Committee boundaries. The second appendix is a table highlighting the Conservation Areas in each Committee's area.
- 4.2 It is suggested that the Committee considers allocating an amount from this year's well being allocation (estimate of £15,000 per Conservation Area review at this stage) to support a review of a Conservation Area. This would then allow a programme to be developed and implemented over the next 12 months in a consistent manner which follows planning guidance. Once the details about the number of reviews to be supported has been collated this will enable officers to put

together a programme and finalise the financial contributions required from each of the Committees.

- 4.3 It is recognised that the number of Conservation Areas varies across the different Area Committee areas. In some areas Members may wish to progress more than one review and this may be feasible but will depend on capacity within SDU to progress a large number of reviews in a rolling programme. If the Committee wants to put forward more than one area for review it is suggested that a priority is given to them if possible to assist with programming of work.
- 4.4 In terms of selecting which area(s) to review at this time, the Committee might wish to consider those Conservation Areas which:
- Are subject to the most development pressure/regeneration effort and where up to date boundaries and appraisal will therefore have the most impact
 - Are in communities already expressing interest in their future development which would allow the Conservation Area Review work to be part of wider community led initiatives such as Village Design Statements

5.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance

The proposals outlined in this report fit with existing Council policy and address an area which will have an impact on Best Value/Comprehensive Performance Assessment indicators.

6.0 Legal and Resource Implications

As indicated in Section 4, there is an estimate of £15,000 per Conservation Area review at this stage. Corporate Finance have confirmed that a programme of reviews as suggested in the report would be an acceptable way to utilise the funding available to the Area Committees. Any spend from a co-ordinated programme of reviews from this year's allocation which slips into the next financial year would not present a problem.

7.0 Conclusions

In making the additional £50,000 allocation to each Area Committee in 2007/08 the Executive Board had an expectation that Area Committees would spend some of this on carrying out Conservation Area Reviews. It is suggested that the Committee considers allocating an amount (estimate of £15,000 per Conservation Area review at this stage) to support a review of one or more Conservation Areas. This would then allow a programme to be developed and implemented over the next 12 months in a consistent manner which fits with planning guidance and can be incorporated into the work programme for the Sustainable Development Unit.

8.0 Recommendations

The Area Committee is asked to consider the proposal in the report and agree an allocation and priority for conservation area reviews in its area.