



Report of the Director of City Development

Scrutiny Board: City Development

Date: 8 December 2009

Subject: Review of the Conservation Team

Electoral Wards Affected: ALL

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

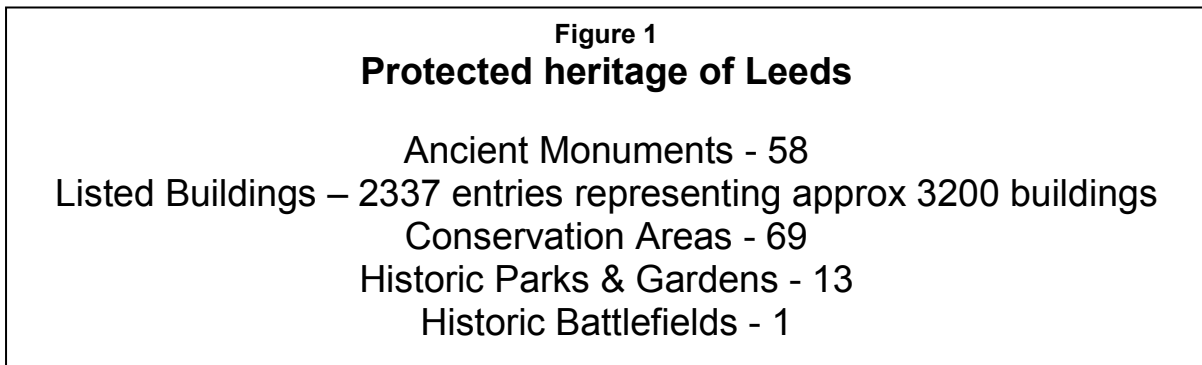
- 1.1 To update the Board at its request on the work and priorities of Conservation Team following an initial report considered at the meeting on 22 January 2008.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Conservation Team provides a service through the planning system for the management of the historic environment of Leeds. As such it is part of the Council's work as local planning authority. Operationally the Team is part of the Sustainable Development Unit headed by Dr Tom Knowland and lies within the Planning & Sustainable Development division of City Development Directorate.

3 THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT OF LEEDS

- 3.1 The January 2008 report outlined the main features of the designated historic environment. It showed that following work with English Heritage to recognise the rich heritage of Leeds, the city now has more designated historic assets than any of the other Core Cities.
- 3.2 The picture has altered only marginally since then. The headline figures are given below.



4 THE WORK OF THE TEAM

4.1 The Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) leads the City Development Directorate’s role in promoting sustainable development within the Council and at city-wide and regional levels. Conservation Team contributes to this by protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment through all aspects of SDU’s work.

4.2 The Leeds Strategic Plan 2008-11 includes as Improvement Priorities

- Improve the quality and sustainability of the built and natural environment.
- Increase the sense of belonging and pride in local neighbourhoods that help to build cohesive communities.

Conservation Team’s work in SDU is squarely in line with delivering these improvements.

4.3 The following is extracted and adapted from the current SDU Service Plan:

CONSERVATION TEAM provides	
<p>Legal controls over</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated assets in the historic environment including conservation areas <p>Monitoring and stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing input to Heritage Counts and other national datasets • Buildings at Risk work with Compliance and Building Control <p>Raising awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing guidance and advice • Researching and sharing information • Involving local communities and stakeholders 	<p>Finding creative solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input to regeneration including THI projects • Input to townscape and landscape improvements in heritage areas • New uses for old buildings <p>Influencing others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and interpreting local and national policy • Assessing and advising on the impact of development • Working in partnership

4.4 Five areas have dominated the work of the Team over the last two years.

4.4.1 Policy and monitoring The Team provides a conservation input to national, regional and local policies, practices and monitoring. These have included contributions through

- Wording for the Core Strategy of the LDF
- Consultation response on the (ill-fated) Heritage Protection Bill
- Consultation response on the draft PPS 15 on Planning for the Historic Environment which included raising concerns about the need for central government funding to meet the expected higher demands on the Council's historic environment service. The new PPS is expected to become operational in the Spring if not deferred because of the general election.
- Consultation response on the Regional Heritage Strategy
- Information for Heritage Counts 2009 but not unfortunately for the English Heritage Conservation Areas at Risk 2009 assessment due to lack of staff time. It is hoped to contribute to the 2010 equivalent however.
- Contribution to the forthcoming SPD on Sustainable Design & Construction. This will reinforce the message that keeping existing buildings in use is directly beneficial to tackling climate change.

4.4.2 Regeneration and partnership working are most successful when the heritage dimension is added. The Team has advised on several major regeneration projects such as The Holbeck Urban Village and The Lower Aire Valley. It is contributing too to development work on the Flood Alleviation Scheme and the NGT. More directly significant has been the Team's work with Environment & Neighbourhoods Directorate on securing approval of £1.9 million of external funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for Townscape Heritage Initiative schemes at Armley and Chapeltown. The schemes are now up and running and will deliver grants for conservation-based regeneration over the next five years. Already the Armley THI has topped up spending on the Town Street enhancements to allow paving to be done in natural stone befitting the conservation area. In Chapeltown the THI is grant-aiding enhancements to a parade of shops which will house amongst other things a studio and gallery as an outreach project by the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Royal College of Art. The Team is now developing a further bid to HLF for a THI at Lower Kirkgate in the centre of Leeds with the full support of English Heritage. If successful this would enable grants to be made for five years from 2012 for works including the restoration of the First White Cloth Hall, the region's oldest surviving cloth hall. Discussions are also underway with English Heritage to assess the scope for further partnership working including a possible conservation area grant scheme in part of the centre.

4.4.3 Conservation Area Reviews have been carried out in line with the duty on the Council to review from time to time those areas which it considers worthy of conservation area status and to bring forward proposals for their enhancement. The Team has sought to find more resources for this and has secured funding from several of the Council's Area Committees. This has allowed three temporary posts to be created and these Community Conservation Officers are now in their second year of the programme. To date 23 of the current total of 69 Conservation Areas have up-to-date conservation area appraisals, most with management plans to guide their future. 16 more are programmed for the rest of the year and discussions are underway with several of the Area Committees to continue the review next financial year. Results so far show that the conservation area work has been well-received by local communities and that it has brought real results from positive outcomes in planning work including a strong contribution to winning planning appeals. The City Centre Characterisation Project funded jointly with English Heritage and undertaken by Jacobs under the Strategic Design Alliance produced a further 10 draft conservation area appraisals within the city

centre. Unfortunately it has not proved possible to advance these to public consultation because of lack of staff time and this situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

4.4.4 Listed building work includes action to try to secure a future for those deemed At Risk and those vulnerable through neglect. Persuasion is used to try to encourage owners to act but in last resort legal action is taken to safeguard the most threatened buildings at risk (BARs) as happened at Seacroft Grange. In the last year the most high-profile BAR has been the Grade I Temple Works in Holbeck which has partially collapsed. The owners have carried out initial work to stabilise the building but need to demonstrate that the building is being made weathertight and that restoration work is intended before long. This case is one of several under review with the support and encouragement of English Heritage. There are now 96 buildings on the Leeds BAR Register representing 4% of the district's total. This compares with 3.3% in 2007, perhaps a reflection of the current economic situation. Twelve of the BARs are in the higher grade categories which place them also in the Heritage at Risk register compiled by English Heritage. There have been successes. The Team has helped to secure the restoration of Harewood Castle and is working to find planning solutions for most of the high grade BARs along with opportunistic work on some of the rest.

4.4.5 Development cannot be successful without an acknowledgement of its context and the Team works hard to try to ensure that all development is shaped by an understanding of local distinctiveness. Government policy increasingly stresses the need for this as demonstrated in Planning Policy Statement 1 and in the draft PPS 15 on Planning for the Historic Environment. Most listed building applications, conservation area applications and planning applications affecting designated heritage assets are referred to the Team for specialist advice to Planning Services. The Team has provided inputs to planning and development briefs and to planning appeals. It has also helped to demonstrate the benefits of finding solutions to the apparent conflict between heritage conservation and retrofitting old buildings to meet climate change requirements.

5 RESOURCES

- 5.1** Conservation Team currently comprises six staff. The Team Leader works a reduced-hours week giving a staffing level of 5.8 FTE. Of these, the Team Leader and the two Senior Conservation Officers are qualified as planners and two have postgraduate diplomas in building conservation. The three temporary Community Conservation Officers have a variety of planning and archaeology backgrounds.
- 5.2** The conservation area review work has been possible only because temporary additional resources have been funded by the Area Committees at a cost of £110,000 annually. The work will cease if the funding is not renewed from 1 April 2010.
- 5.3** The percentage of the district covered by conservation areas grew from 4.12% in September 2004 to 5.18% in October 2009, an increase of 26%. Although the conservation area reviews do not result directly in increased expenditure by the Council there are knock-on effects which result in some increased pressure on staff for example in dealing with conservation area applications and tree works requests. There are also raised public expectations of higher standards of maintenance for highway surfaces and street furniture.

5.4 The Leeds Heritage Fund which was available to promote action on threatened buildings was abolished inc. 1990. A Listed Building at Risk Grant which operated in the 1990s was discontinued c.1995. There is now no budget for any proactive grant aid work other than that for the two THI schemes at Armley and Chapeltown.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 That Members consider this report.

Background Papers

Leeds Strategic Plan 2008 - 2011

Planning Policy Statement 1 and in the draft PPS 15 on Planning for the Historic Environment