

Appendix IIIc

Swale Borough Local Plan Review

Minutes of Heritage and Culture Workshop Discussion

Committee Room, Swale House, Thursday 28 June 2018

Organisations Represented:

Swale Borough Council	Historic England
Historic Swale Blue Town Heritage	Kent Gardens Trust
Historic Swale	Ideas Test
Sheppey Local History Society	Historical Research Group of Sittingbourne
Centre for Kent History and Heritage, CCCU	Faversham Society
Kent County Council	The Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway

1. Introduction

Swale BC gave an introduction to the Local Plan review and how all Local Planning Authorities must have a Local Plan in place to guide planning decisions which should include policies relating to heritage. The Local Plan will set out policies and development needs to 2038. A Heritage Strategy is currently being prepared separately to the Local Plan, although there will be linkages between them.

2. Strategic Overview of Heritage in Swale

Swale has a very diverse historic environment including a naval dockyard, creeks, ports, a particularly high concentration of listed buildings in Faversham, conservation areas, historical parks and gardens, undesignated heritage assets and areas of potential archaeological importance. There is an untapped potential regarding Swale's history in defense and aviation plus circa 20 bridge and structures (including industrial structures) over some 500+ sites. Swale has a long history in best and most versatile agricultural land and accompanying timber framed farmhouses, historic marsh landscapes, woods and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The A2 forms a Roman route and link to the channel and the local geology (brickearth, chalk etc.) has influenced its railways and industrial location which historically included gunpowder production. With reference to historical parks and gardens, Swale BC does not maintain a local list and KCC's has no statutory weight or protection. This could be picked up in a Local Plan policy. The Faversham Society noted that living culture heritage is also part of Swale's heritage and can be damaged by planning decisions, something which needs policy recognition.

3. Local Plan Review, Future Growth and Strategic Discussion

Swale BC provided a more in depth explanation of the Local Plan review and the future growth scenarios being looked at to deal with a significant increase in housing numbers and asked what the implications the current and future settlement strategy might have for our heritage. An option for new settlements has been included. Historic England raised concern about the prospect of new settlements as they are often in areas where heritage exists and the issue is often not being raised early enough in the process, but noted that they are not in a position to challenge the Government's growth agenda and will continue to support authorities in mitigating impacts.

It was noted that new developments need to be designed well so as to avoid existing problems such as traffic on historic routes, impacts on the settings of listed buildings, noise and air pollution. With regards to the subject of town centres, Swale BC raised the question as to whether we need to move to more non-retail uses, although retail evidence will be fed into the new Local Plan. The Faversham Society considered this to be inevitable but the 'how' will be very important. Previous development to the north of Faversham has been detrimental to the town centre, but something to the south could be better planned.

Heritage led regeneration and heritage quarters would be a good idea and would help to improve the perception of particularly Sheppey and encourage people to live, work and spend time there. Other matters raised were the lack of road signage to navigate heritage attractions.

4. Key Heritage Issues

There are conservation areas at risk as well as buildings at risk, with Sheppey Museums noting that there are many on Sheppey. It was also suggested that the dockyard buildings should be integrated better as they have a strong heritage.

Concern was raised about the lack of local power to refuse development harmful to heritage and the lack of enforcement of Article 4 directions. However, the question was also raised as to whether we need to preserve everything. For example, the paper mill at Sittingbourne was demolished. How should we decide what to keep or let go? Historic England considered that the bar is set deliberately high and we are keeping what we should keep.

Swale BC introduced the question, what does heritage give us economically and culturally and how can we increase visitor spend? We are committed to the Visitor Economy Framework and it values the input from the heritage sector. The Heritage Strategy is important too and involved in a proactive way to promote heritage assets. A concern is the need for a better understanding of any gaps in knowledge and to understand what people are coming to experience. The Heritage Lottery Fund is restructuring and we need to tailor what we do to this. Tourism = experience and heritage and culture should be at the top of the agenda.

The Swale Museums Group noted that the visitor numbers were 56k during 2017 and are increasing year on year. Museums are run by volunteers and need support in things such as marketing. The Faversham Society noted that Faversham attracts a lot of visitors but most attractions do not charge entry, with the spend being on food. The townscape depends on Article 4 directions and conservation areas but there is a concern as to the level of enforcement. This, along with new development and traffic issues in the town centre detract from heritage assets and need management. Tourism itself makes no contribution to supporting heritage, it is a maintenance problem and the public realm requires investment.

Policy needs to recognise that Swale is made of distinctly different areas with different attractions which require different initiatives and The Faversham Society recommended that phraseology is differentiated within policy to reflect the individuality of place. Overall, it is considered that the visitor economy is a key issue and gap.

In terms of a specific planning role, it was noted that focus is required on the competitiveness of town centres – is it currently an advantage or a barrier to a vibrant heritage economy. There is a negative perception of the role of planning and The Faversham Society noted that enforcement can be weak and that new development often degrades heritage assets.

5. Round Table

Other points raised for considerations were:

- Veteran trees, ancient woodland and planting for the future.
- Theatres and music halls.
- Resources to address heritage.
- Music/culture/heritage projects.
- The need for the Local Plan to present heritage in a proactive and positive way.
- Archaeological finds still sitting in crates due to not having a place to display them.