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| Meeting Date | 30 th January 2020 |
| Report Title | Swale Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan |
| Cabinet Member | Cllr. Mike Baldock - Cabinet Member for Planning |
| SMT Lead | Emma Wiggins – Regeneration Director |
| Head of Service | James Freeman – Head of Planning |
| Lead Officer | Simon Algar – Conservation & Design Manager |
| Key Decision | Yes |
| Classification | Open |
| Recommendations | 1. To note the content of the draft Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan and feedback any recommended changes as a key component of the current public consultation. |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the content of the draft Swale Borough-wide Heritage Strategy and its accompanying (3 year period) Draft Action Plan, in order that the Local Plan Panel can form a view on whether the documents, as set out, would properly support the current adopted and emerging replacement local plan in providing a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the Borough's historic environment, recognising that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and thus seeking to conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. Feedback from the Local Plan Panel on this key requirement of the National Planning Policy, reflected under the current adopted Local Plan through Core Policy 8 (which commits the Council to the production of a Heritage Strategy) is therefore sought as a key component of the current public consultation on the draft Swale Borough-wide Heritage Strategy and its accompanying (3 year period) Draft Action Plan. Feedback from the Local Plan Panel (and from any other source, including the Policy, Development & Review Committee) will be reported back to Cabinet in the form of a consultation report and will assist Cabinet in deciding whether to formally adopt the strategy (as recommended with any changes arising from the consultation, or otherwise).

2 Background

- 1.2 The adopted Local Plan highlights that Swale's built heritage is one of its greatest assets: the Borough has a wealth of historic areas, buildings and features, reflecting its Roman and medieval legacy, its naval, aviation and associated defence of the realm history, and its maritime, industrial and agricultural past. The number of designated heritage assets within the Borough (22 scheduled monuments, 50 conservation areas, 4 Registered Parks & Gardens and over

1430 list entries – including 37 grade I listed buildings and 88 grade II* listed building) only provides part of the picture in this respect, as there are many more areas, buildings, structures and other types of non-designated heritage that contribute to Swale’s overall heritage and associated cultural offer with a significant number of these managed by local groups and/or individuals and much treasured, e.g. the Fleur de Lis Museum in Faversham, the Sittingbourne to Kemsley Light Railway and the Dolphin Barge Museum in Sittingbourne, which is also the location for the restoration works to the Thames Barge ‘Raybel’.

- 1.3 There is also the strong likelihood of further valuable heritage being revealed or rediscovered as areas of the Borough are necessarily developed or redeveloped to meet planned housing and economic growth.
- 1.4 As such, and in accordance with Policy CP8 of the Adopted Borough Local Plan, the Council commissioned the drafting of a Borough-wide Heritage Strategy.
- 1.5 The draft Heritage Strategy builds on the work carried out in 2015 to produce a Heritage Asset Review document - essentially a base line understanding of the nature and extent of known heritage assets in the Borough - as an evidence base in support of the Local Plan, which has of course since been adopted. The same consultant used to produce that 2015 evidence base document initially worked on drafting a Borough-wide Heritage Strategy at that time, but the document produced was not supported by the Cabinet at that time.
- 1.6 A discussion paper was put forward to members of the new coalition in the summer of 2019 setting out the issues of producing a Heritage Strategy with the same existing, or an increased level of resource. As a result, an additional budget resource of £250,000 for getting the implementation of the Heritage Strategy off the ground was put forward as part of the Cabinet Budget Report for the December 2019 meeting of the Cabinet.
- 1.7 The draft Heritage Strategy document presented to Cabinet at its December 2019 meeting is supported by a draft action plan which covers the first 3 years of what is intended to be a 12 year period Heritage Strategy. At this meeting, the Cabinet agreed (a) that the draft strategy documents (including the initial action plan) was acceptable in principle and could therefore go out to full public consultation without any further changes, and (b) that the proposed sum of £250,000 put forward to support the implementation of the heritage strategy (as part of the Cabinet Budget Report) could indeed be provided for this purpose.
- 1.8 This 3 year action plan focusses on the vision and associated priorities of the Heritage Strategy and what can be achieved within the resource of £250,000. This results in a set of actions which principally centre around the review and appraisal of the Borough’s existing conservation areas and associated heritage at risk, given the urgency of this work, and given that this aligns with the priorities of Historic England, which may be able to support the Council in some of this work.

It also importantly recognises the work that Economy & Community Services are enabling and supporting through the limited resource. The action plan produced applies both to Council-led projects, and to the supporting/facilitation of third party projects led by local groups.

- 1.9 The Cabinet has accepted that the investment of £250,000 will only cover the limited priorities set out in the initial 3 year Action Plan. It will therefore be important to ensure that the available resource is principally focussed on managing the heritage assets in the Borough which are at most risk. Where possible, officers will endeavour to work with other agencies and developers etc. to maximise the scope and benefits of the work to be undertaken, and wherever feasible, to use some of the available resource to act in a pump priming role to help bring in additional funding from external sources, including possibly via the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. The updated local heritage at risk register (produced as part of the Heritage Strategy development work) provides useful baseline data for the start of the planned heritage strategy period, and helps to illustrate and justify the general direction of travel for the Heritage Strategy, its specific priorities and the reflected actions set out in the initial 3 year Action Plan.
- 1.10 The Strategy and associated action plan has been drafted to ensure:
1. Projects are prioritised in on heritage at risk or on heritage anticipated to, or already facing major change – such projects will therefore necessarily include all the main towns in the Borough and their respective town centre areas;
 2. That new development and regeneration proposals where appropriate are used to promote ‘heritage’ improvements;
 3. Partnership working is utilized wherever possible, but in particular, where this would aid in the development of grant funding bids to support project work; and
 4. Solutions will be sought to help maximize the capacity and ability of third parties (including the local community and interest groups) to help deliver projects.

The draft Strategy forms Appendix i of this report whilst the initial 3 year Action Plan and the baseline 2019 Local Heritage at Risk Register form Appendices ii and iii.

2 Proposal

- 3.1 The draft Heritage Strategy’s starting point is a high level vision, from which a set of priorities are derived. This in turn leads to three underlying themes for the Heritage Strategy in terms of how those priorities are considered and addressed.

So the Heritage Strategy in effect has a 3 part structure:

1. Vision → 2. Priorities → 3. Themes

3.2 The proposed high level vision is: *A vibrant and widely-know heritage which is not only valued for its own sake, but also for the long term benefits it can provide to the people, economy and environment of the Borough of Swale.*

3.3 The five proposed priorities are:

1. *To conserve and where possible enhance Swale's heritage buildings, structures and areas as a cultural, economic, community and environmental assets to the area, in particular, by positively managing the Council's own heritage assets and establishing a programme for the review and appraisal of Swale's conservation areas;*
2. *Make use of the Borough's heritage to help achieve and promote sustainable and inclusive growth and regeneration, social and economic wellbeing, and civic pride, in particular by tackling Swale's significant issues of heritage at risk;*
3. *To recognise and promote the role of Swale's heritage in creating or enhancing local distinctiveness and a positive image of the Borough as a place to live, work and visit;*
4. *To ensure Swale's heritage forms an integral part of local strategies and initiatives to promote tourism and the visitor economy, including through the conservation and subsequent positive management of the Borough's internationally significant maritime and aviation heritage on the Isle of Sheppey; and*
5. Raising the historic environment up the agenda by promoting awareness and understanding of Swale's heritage among local residents, businesses and visitors to the area, in particular to help realise the cultural, educational and associated health benefits it can offer.

3.4 The three underlying themes of the Heritage Strategy are:

- A: UNDERSTANDING & DESIGNATION
(Our Heritage and its Significance)
- B: POSITIVE MANAGEMENT
(Identifying the Issues, Opportunities and Solutions)
- C: CAPITALISING AND CHAMPIONING
(Valuing our Heritage)

The consideration of these themes effectively forms the backbone and three principal chapters of the Heritage Strategy, and at the outset of each chapter, it sets the scene and links back to the overall structure of the Strategy by setting out which priorities the particular theme relates to.

Because of the range and scope of the five priorities, there is inevitably some degree of overlapping between them, and this in turn is reflected in the consideration of the main themes. However, a common thread running through this all will be to support wider efforts and measures aimed at improving and revitalising the town centres of Sittingbourne and Sheerness, where a partly heritage-led regeneration approach is clearly appropriate.

- 3.5 The project work links back to the 5 priorities and in turn within those 3 key themes. This is clearly set out in full within the Action Plan provided at Appendix ii.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 One option presented to Cabinet was to not take the Heritage Strategy work any further. This was not recommended however because it would risk the soundness of the next version of the Local Plan being challenged from a heritage management perspective. Furthermore, the Council has already publicly committed to producing such a strategy (as stated in the current adopted Local Plan) so to renege on that commitment now would also likely risk significant reputational damage.
- 4.2 Additionally, significant officer time and consultant fees have already been incurred in taking this work to the current stage, and notwithstanding the implications for the Local Plan review process, there is undoubtedly a need to put some kind of framework in place to identify and prioritise such future heritage management related work as is possible, particularly given the extensive nature of heritage in the Borough, the extent of the Council's own heritage assets and the anticipated role that heritage assets can play in regenerating parts of the Borough, most notably on the Isle of Sheppey.
- 4.3 A second possible option put forward was to move forward with the Heritage Strategy but without the additional resource of the extra £250,000 budget. This was advised as being a little more feasible, but beyond March 2021 (when the extra previously agreed budget for the agency based heritage specialist runs out), the Council only has the budget in place for the permanent, full-time Conservation & Design Manager, along with a small annual consultancy budget of £18,000, some or all of which could be used for heritage related work. Given that heritage input into the development management role of the Council translates into a near full time role, this would mean that whilst there would be scope to engage in some

pro-active project work up to March 2021, beyond that point, the ability to carry out such work would be very limited, probably at best to one or two projects per year. As such, the Council's level of ambition and commitment to the positive management of its heritage would very likely be heavily criticised through the public consultation process. It would also almost certainly mean that the current significant backlog of important appraisal work and unaddressed heritage at risk issues would continue to build up, storing up a bigger problem for the future.

- 4.4 A third possible option presented to the Cabinet was to plan for the additional budget of £250,000 being spread over the proposed 12 year lifespan of the Heritage Strategy, rather than used up in supporting the work of the initial 3 year action plan. It was advised that this represented potentially the most feasible alternative option to the current plan but that it nevertheless shares some of the problems associated with the second option in terms of displaying limited ambition and commitment to the positive management of its heritage. However, on the positive side, it would give a little more certainty over what could be achievable over a longer period of time. Dividing £250,000 by 12 gives you just shy of £21,000 budget per annum. This could be combined with the ongoing annual consultancy budget of £18,000, some or all of which could be used for heritage related work giving a possible annual budget for pro-active heritage work/projects of up to £39,000. This amount could be increased to up to £43,000 per annum were the lifespan of the Heritage Strategy to be limited to 10 years (i.e. from 2020 to 2030).
- 4.5 Having considered these three alternative options, the Cabinet resolved to push ahead with taking the version of the strategy presented at its December meeting out to public consultation (for a 6 weeks period from the 20th December, 2019), and to work on the basis of utilising the additional budget of £250,000 over the period of the initial 3 years Action Plan.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 As agreed at the December meeting of the Cabinet, the draft Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan is now the subject of a 6 week public consultation exercise which commenced on the Friday the 20th December 2019 and will finish on Friday the 31st January 2020. The consultation involves both key stakeholders and the local community.
- 5.2 This presentation of the draft Heritage Strategy to the Local Plan Panel (and a separate presentation to the Policy, Development & Review Committee (PDRC) which takes place on the 29th January) form a key component of the wider consultation process, and any feedback provided from the Panel (and from any other source, including the PDRC), will be taken into account and reported back to the Cabinet, along with any recommended amendments to either the Heritage

Strategy Document, or its Action Plan, in order to allow for formal adoption of the Strategy at the beginning of the 2020/21 financial year.

- 5.3 It should be noted that it will be a matter for the Cabinet to decide whether to formally adopt the strategy (as recommended with any changes, following consultation feedback, or otherwise), and that in the event of the Cabinet deciding to adopt the Heritage Strategy as a corporate strategy, this will also mean that it automatically becomes part of the evidence base/background to the Local Plan review.

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Corporate Plan | Supports the aim for a Borough to be Proud of by protecting and improving the built environment. |
| Financial, Resource and Property | <p>The proposed initial (3 year) Action Plan to support the Draft Heritage Strategy has been drafted on the basis of utilising the existing resources available within the Council and the additional £250,00 injection agreed by members.</p> <p>However, should the Council wish to display a similar level of ambition and thus take forward a similar level of actions for the 2nd and subsequent action plans, then additional resource will be required.</p> |
| Legal and Statutory | There is a statutory obligation on LPA's to consider the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, listed buildings and designated heritage assets in determining development proposals |
| Crime and Disorder | The Borough Council is a founding member of Heritage Watch, which is an affiliation of heritage focussed organisations set up in liaison with the police force to tackle and reduce the growing problem of heritage crime (e.g. theft of priceless artefacts and lead roof sheeting from churches). This issue is covered in the Draft Heritage Strategy document and public consultation on the strategy will involve liaison with the Kent Police and other members of Kent Heritage Watch. |
| Environmental Sustainability | One of the three dimensions of sustainable development is its environmental role: contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment. The other two dimensions are a strong economy and a healthy and socially vibrant community |
| Health and Wellbeing | The health and wellbeing aspects of interaction with heritage assets and heritage related projects are referenced in the Heritage Strategy. |
| Risk Management and Health and | None identified at this stage. |

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| Safety | |
| Equality and Diversity | None identified at this stage. |
| Privacy and Data Protection | None identified at this stage. |

7 Appendices

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

- Appendix i: Public Consultation draft of Swale Heritage Strategy 2020 – 2032
- Appendix ii: Public Consultation draft of Heritage Strategy Action Plan 1: 2020-2023

8 Background Papers

None.