

<b>Cabinet Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Item: 9</b>
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<b>Meeting Date</b>	18 March 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Swale Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Mike Baldock - Cabinet Member for Planning
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins – Regeneration Director
<b>Head of Service</b>	James Freeman – Head of Planning Charlotte Hudson – Head of Economy and Community Services
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Simon Algar – Conservation & Design Manager
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the extent and range of consultation responses received in relation to the public consultation for the Heritage Strategy.</li> <li>2. To agree the final version of the Heritage Strategy for adoption and publication. *</li> </ol>

\* *Due to factors including the short lead-in time between the February SMT meeting and the report deadline for Cabinet Meeting reports for the 18<sup>th</sup> March Cabinet meeting, the fully re-drafted version of these documents will not be available for members to review at the Cabinet meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March. However, all of the changes to the text are included in the agenda pack related to this report. The fully completed version of each Heritage Strategy document (properly formatted and with all illustrations included) will be circulated to members for information as soon as the remaining photography and desk top publishing work has been completed. It is estimated that this will be towards the end of March or early April due to staff leave commitments and a temporary staff shortage in the Council's Communications Team. The red text shown in the strategy documents in the agenda packs relates to changes made in relation to the significant consultation feedback provided, much of it quite detailed in nature.*

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to note the extent and range of consultation responses received in relation to the public consultation for the Heritage Strategy and what impact this could have on the final form of the Strategy to be taken forward to adoption.

## **2 Background**

1.2 The consultation draft version of the Swale Heritage Strategy was agreed at the December 2019 Cabinet.

1.3 The Strategy and associated action plan was drafted to ensure that:

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. New development and regeneration proposals where appropriate will be 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.
- 1.4 As agreed at the December 2019 Cabinet meeting in accordance with the report recommendation, public consultation commenced on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and ran for a period of 6 weeks until Friday the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020. Reminder letter were sent out to consultees in early January given the timing of the consultation beginning just before the Christmas break.
- 1.5 A wide range of parties were consulted on the Strategy ranging from statutory government agencies such as Historic England, the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency, Kent County Council, the national and local amenity societies, adjoining local authorities, Historic Swale and those businesses/individuals, etc. that had previously registered to be consulted in relation to Local Plan documents.
- 1.6 A total of 88 responses were received from 86 different respondents (two submitted an initial response and a follow up response). The make up of responses was as follows:
- Private individuals: 44
- Local amenity groups/societies: 15
- Parish/Town Councils: 9
- Government and other national advisory/regulatory bodies: 4
- Utility companies and other infrastructure providers: 2
- Kent County Council and other local advisory and regulatory bodies, including adjoining local authorities: 4
- Local businesses/landowners, or companies with local business/property interests: 10

2.6 The range of issues raised is wide and many of the responses were long and detailed, in particular from some of the private individuals, amenity groups and the key consultees of Historic England and Kent County Council. However, whilst the broad majority of respondents expressed positive comments about the Strategy in general, and in particular for the high level vision and derived set of 5 priorities, there are 7 key themes which can be picked up from a review of the responses and these are as follows:

1. A particular desire to see the current collection of small museum/heritage study facilities in Sittingbourne re-homed together in a centrally located larger facility with more space for display, research, workshop/learning events, archive storage and ideally a café facility.
2. More officer and financial support to be given to the local groups running heritage sites and museums.
3. A requirement that moveable/portable heritage (\* see below) be referenced in the types of heritage the Strategy priorities relate to.
4. That the development of a 'local list' (i.e. a list of buildings, structures and/or natural/manmade features of local heritage interest) be fully committed in the Strategy and brought forward as an action for the initial 3-year Action Plan.
5. That natural heritage is considered as part of the Heritage Strategy.
6. That planning enforcement around securing the conservation of heritage assets is made more effective; and
7. Concern that the additional resources being put into the implementation of the Strategy will not be adequate to achieve the desired aims, particular over the longer term.

\* Portable/moveable is not specifically defined by the respondents that have referred to this point, but it is clear that it includes archaeological finds, museum items (paintings/ceramics, etc.), archive documents and information and structures/machines that were designed to move, including trains and planes.

2.7 There were also, perhaps not surprisingly a range of comments (principally from private individuals) criticizing the Council's past track record on heritage conservation, some businesses (notably Shepherd Neame) expressing concern regarding the possibility of new or strengthened heritage designations, a wide range of local groups expressing a general willingness to work with the Council in developing heritage projects relevant to them, and some requests to re-consider the priorities of the Strategy and the associated order of items in the initial 3-year Action Plan.

2.8 A total of 181 different points has been noted and set down in the consultation response table forming **Appendix A**. Whilst some of these points overlap to some degree, they are all included as they come from different groups with different emphases. The points set out in relation to private individuals responses represent the collective themes that are drawn from this group. In relation to the other types of respondents, the table clearly shows where different organisations making responses are making the same or a very similar point.

- 2.8 In relation to key response themes 1 and 2, the feedback in this respect has been noted and consideration into how this could be delivered will feed into various separate but related work streams including the Visitor Economy Framework and the Sittingbourne Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document.
- 2.9 In relation to key response theme 3, this is something which the Council already does to some degree and it can be made clear that we will continue to do so as far as possible in a context of very limited resources. The Council can also reference the fact that conservation accredited organisations (such as the Faversham Society) have shown that they can pull in more external funding towards the area because of the greater level of professionalism/expertise that this accreditation signifies. The Council has repeatedly tried to assist other groups in working towards this important accreditation.
- 2.10 In relation to key response theme 4, it was always the intention to produce a local list, particularly given the stated commitment to this in the current Local Plan and following the ministerial announcement on this matter late in 2019, albeit that it was originally considered this would be something to work on during the second 3-year action plan. However, it is clear from the number of responses specifically referencing this matter, that earlier consideration would have a number of benefits, not least of which would be early positive engagement of local groups, societies and residents, etc., along with the opportunity to identify and protect (to some limited degree) what in reality would make up a significant proportion of, if not the bulk of Swale's heritage asset portfolio in overall terms. It is therefore planned to commence work on this in 2020, but to spread this out over the duration of the initial 3-year action plan to take into account the complexities/logistics of putting in place such a list with full support, including that of the majority of affected property/landowners. Adding a further layer of protection above and beyond what can realistically be achieved through a Local Plan policy could, as things stand, only be done through the making of one master, or a series of individual Article 4 Directions, but the making of such Directions would require acceptance from the Secretary of State before it/they could be confirmed. This could be the final element of the action in the initial action plan, or depending on the complexity and anticipated level of support (something to be tested via public consultation), might be an element of the overall work that would need to be carried into the subsequent action plan.
- 2.11 In relation to key response theme 5, this has also already been discussed internally with the Cabinet Member for Planning, and whilst it has been agreed that it would be appropriate to include a themed section on historic landscapes (as well as necessarily strengthening the recognised weaker section on archaeology – with the assistance of KCC's Principal Archaeologist), the wider issue of hedgerow and tree recognition and protection is beyond the remit of the

Strategy and something which is/will be effectively dealt with in other Local Plan documents.

- 2.12 In relation to key response theme 6, this has also already been discussed internally with the Cabinet Member for Planning, and it is anticipated that the Planning Enforcement Team will be strengthened later this year by some additional administrative support. The charter is also due to be reviewed before autumn this year (in relation to auditing of the function) and will be re-drafted to make adequate reference to enforcement of controls around the area of buildings/historic areas in poor/declining condition.
- 2.13 In relation to key response theme 7, the Council is aware that further funding will be needed to support the vision and priorities of the Strategy over the Strategy period, and this will be reviewed over time.
- 2.14 Whilst there are limitations on the funding available for this program, there are many valuable points that have been put forward as a result of the consultation process that can be incorporated into the Heritage Strategy and Action Plan without impacting on the available resource.
- 2.15 In conclusion, it is therefore proposed to take the Strategy forward absorbing much of the constructive feedback provided, which will strengthen the Strategy and add value to it in the widest sense.

## **2 Proposal**

- 3.1 That the extent and range of consultation responses received in relation to the public consultation for the Heritage Strategy be noted.
- 3.2 To agree the final version of the Heritage Strategy documents for adoption and publication based on the background information and conclusion set out above. Note that due to factors including the short lead-in time between the February SMT meeting and the report deadline for Cabinet Meeting reports for the 18<sup>th</sup> March Cabinet meeting, the fully re-drafted version of these documents will not be available for members to review at the Cabinet meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March. However, all of the changes to the text are included in the agenda pack related to this report. The fully completed version of each Heritage Strategy document (properly formatted and with all illustrations included) will be circulated to members for information as soon as the remaining photography and desk top publishing work has been completed. It is estimated that this will be towards the end of March or early April due to staff leave commitments and a temporary staff shortage in the Council's Communications Team. The red text shown in the strategy documents in the agenda packs relates to changes made in relation to the significant consultation feedback provided, much of it quite detailed in nature.

## 4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are a whole range of possible alternative options taking into account the wide range of asks of the Council submitted via the consultation exercise. However this can sensibly be whittled down to two main alternative options:
1. Leave the Strategy and Action Plan as it stands without any further changes. This would not be unacceptable given the generally positive feedback provided, and in particular the comment from Historic England that the draft Swale Heritage Strategy is viewed by it as ‘...a relatively good document of its kind and compares well with other Kentish examples, currently existing or in production’. However, in spite of the significant extra officer time that would be required to re-draft the Strategy documents to take on board the cost-neutral constructive feedback, it is considered on balance that this would in the longer term represent time well spent, particularly if it assists in strengthening important professional relationships with stakeholders and supporting future bids for funding from heritage bodies including Historic England and the Heritage Lottery Fund.
  2. Taking on board all of the key asks set out in 2.6 above. This would result in the Council essentially making commitments to work that would require extra resources, and carrying out additional work for the Heritage Strategy, already partly actioned under other work streams, and planned for other work streams in the future.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 This is as set out in section 2 of this report with the resultant feedback set out in the consultation response table at **Appendix A**.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Protecting and improving the built environment are priorities in the emerging Corporate Plan.
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. Therefore, it is not proposed that any growth bids be made. This remains unchanged as a result of the public consultation.</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 2<sup>nd</sup> and subsequent action plans, 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). The Kent Branch of Heritage Watch (where the key mover behind this initiative is based) is interested in the possibilities that the Swale Heritage Strategy has for improving effectiveness in both deterring/preventing and tackling heritage crime when it happens. This issue is covered in the strategy document and public consultation on the strategy involved 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 Safety	None identified at this stage.
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 A: Consultation Response Table (also including full copies of responses from key consultees, Historic England and Kent County Council)
- Appendix B: Draft re-worked version of the Swale Heritage Strategy \*
- Appendix C: Draft re-worked version of the Swale Heritage Strategy Initial Action Plan \*
- Appendix D: Draft re-worked version of the Swale Heritage Strategy Baseline 2020 Local Heritage at Risk Register \*

- \* Please note: due to factors including the short lead-in time between the February SMT meeting and the report deadline for Cabinet Meeting reports for the 18<sup>th</sup> March Cabinet meeting, the fully re-drafted version of these documents will not be available for members to review at the Cabinet meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March. However, all of the changes to the text are included in the agenda pack related to this report. The fully completed version of each Heritage Strategy document (properly formatted and with all illustrations included) will be circulated to members for information as soon as the remaining photography and desk top publishing work has been completed. It is estimated that this will be towards the end of March or early April due to staff leave commitments and a temporary staff shortage in the Council's Communications Team. The red text shown in the strategy documents in the agenda packs relates to changes made in relation to the significant consultation feedback provided, much of it quite detailed in nature.

## **8 Background Papers**

None.