

MOTION - BUILT ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION IN FENLAND

Full Council notes that Members of local Councils have responsibility for setting policy, within legal limits, concerning all areas of Council activity, including Conservation.

Members, in determining Conservation policy, need to determine an appropriate local balance between preserving what is good from the past as against providing necessary flexibility to address current and future economic and residential needs. A majority of Members, in seeking to determine that balance, would like to commission an external partner to provide guidance and recommendations on how the Council can amend current Conservation policy and practice in Fenland to achieve this aspiration within the following scope:

1. To provide recommendations as to how we may review the geographical extent of every conservation area in Fenland, including whether each conservation area should continue to be so designated. In respect of each conservation area, no such review should be commenced without the prior agreement of the relevant Town or Parish Council. In respect of each review, no change should be implemented without the agreement of the relevant Town or Parish Council. Involvement and consultation with the relevant Town or Parish Council must be integral to this whole process.
2. To provide recommendations as to how each Town and Parish Council could initiate an external professional appraisal of any conservation area within their area, subject to no such appraisal having taken place within the previous five years, and subject further to the Parish or Town Council sharing the cost of any such appraisal equally with Fenland District Council.
3. To review and provide recommendations as to how the current approach to the local validation list requirements and materials requirements for listed buildings, conservation areas (and buildings that have a relationship with the setting of these) and non-designated heritage assets may most appropriately be changed given the pro-growth agenda of the Council in the context of challenging property values and the changing dynamic of town centres.
4. With respect to materials requirement in conservation areas and for non-designated heritage assets, Members seek guidance and recommendations as to how the Council can be more flexible than at present in requiring specific building materials for the construction and repair of buildings, specifically, but not exclusively, including recommendations as to how the Council may facilitate, in new build, renovations, improvements and repairs, the use of high quality compatibly designed UPVC windows, and a less onerous specificity in the selection of building materials such as bricks and mortar.

5. To provide recommendations as to how the Council can be more flexible than at present in requiring specific building materials for the repair, renovation or improvement of Grade II listed buildings, specifically but not exclusively including the use of high quality compatibly designed UPVC windows, and the selection of building materials such as bricks and mortar.

6. To provide recommendations as to how the Council could legally cease planning-related conservation assessments outside conservation areas, except for Grade I, Grade II* and Grade II listed buildings, and except where any planning application relates to a location immediately adjacent to a listed building or a conservation area.

7. To review the draft conservation policies in the emerging local plan and provide recommendations as to how these policies might be drafted to best serve the Council's pro-growth agenda whilst appropriately conserving heritage assets in the District as envisaged in the recently published Planning White Paper.

8. To provide recommendations as to how the Council can provide enhanced protection for and preservation of Whittlesey's iconic mud walls.

Full Council resolves that an appropriately qualified external person be engaged to consult with Members and others as to how the aspirations listed above may be practically, legally and expeditiously implemented.

Proposed: Dee Laws

Seconded: David Connor