

**MENTMORE CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION**  
**Councillor Strachan**  
**Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement**

**1 Purpose**

- Approve the Management Plan within the appraisal and the revised Conservation Area boundary at Mentmore as recommended in this report and justified within the Draft Conservation Area Appraisal.

or

- Having noted the representations received during the period of public consultation, defer for further assessment and consideration of alternative options.

**2 Recommendations/for decision**

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| 2.1 | That the responses to the consultations contained in this report (Appendix 2) be noted.                            |
| 2.2 | That the Conservation Area boundary (Appendix 1) be adopted.   |
| 2.3 | That the Management Plan be adopted.   |
| 2.4 | If the decision is taken not to adopt the proposed boundary, to decide what further action to take (paragraph 5.2) |

**3 Executive summary**

- 3.1 As part of the ongoing programme of Conservation Area reviews, Aylesbury Vale District Council has reviewed the designation at Mentmore. The Conservation Area at Mentmore was initially designated by Aylesbury Vale District Council in 1978 and has not been reviewed since. Since designation, a greater national interest in Victorian architecture and designed landscapes have raised the importance of the estate and resulted in the designation of a number of listed buildings and the recognition of much of the designed landscape as a Registered Park and Garden. Both the existing Conservation Area designation and the supporting Conservation Area Appraisal document are now outdated and do not accord with national guidance as set out by Historic England.
- 3.2 Both Mentmore Towers and its designed landscape are included on Historic England's 'at risk' register. This allowed AVDC to apply to Historic England for grant funding to undertake a Conservation Area review and landscape study of Mentmore so that information about Mentmore could be pulled into a comprehensive set of documents. AVDC used the grant funding to employ consultants who are specialists in historic landscapes, to produce a detailed appraisal of Mentmore. This identifies what is significant about the area, namely its history as an estate, which includes not only the towers and the surrounding village buildings, but also the designed landscape and the areas around this which were connected to the estate visually or in terms of function; the understanding and character of which survives today. As a consequence alterations to the existing Conservation Area boundary are recommended which adequately reflect this significance. A copy of a map showing the proposed Conservation Area boundary is contained within Appendix 1 of this report. Copies of the draft appraisal document are available within the Members Lounge and on request from the Conservation Areas Officer.

- 3.3 Comprehensive public consultation was carried out on the proposed boundary and the draft appraisal document. This included the standard 8 week public consultation with the Parish Council, residents and other stakeholders as well as a series of public meetings with members of the community. Written responses received as part of the consultation are included as part of this report, in appendix 2.
- 3.4 Officers have carefully considered representation made and as a result, as outlined later in the report, suggested some minor changes to the text and one boundary change in light of new evidence presented. In the case of all representations they have outlined their responses below and their justification for the recommended boundary shown at appendix 1.

## **4 Supporting information**

### *Legislation and Guidance*

- 4.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 (P(LBCA) Act 1990) defines a Conservation Area as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.”
- 4.2 The P(LBCA) Act 1990 places three duties on Councils in relation to Conservation Areas:
- To designate those areas considered to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas.
  - To review all Conservation Area designations “from time to time”.
  - To formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Areas

### *Review of Conservation Area at Mentmore*

- 4.3 The Conservation Area Appraisal document for Mentmore:
- Defines the special interest of Mentmore.
  - Identifies those characteristics and unique features which make Mentmore of sufficient interest to warrant designation and
  - Sets out some settlement specific management proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area
- 4.4 The proposed Conservation Area boundary at Mentmore has been drawn to include those elements and features which are considered to be of architectural or historic interest, or which positively contribute to the special character or appearance of the area as a whole.
- 4.5 The general principles used to define Conservation Area boundaries are laid out in the AVDC Conservation Area SPD (March 2011), section 2.5. The detailed reasoning for the proposed boundary and the special interest of Mentmore are set out in the Mentmore Conservation Area Appraisal Document.
- 4.6 Subject to approval of the Conservation Area boundary, the full Mentmore Appraisal Document will be finalised and published on the Council’s website.

### ***Mentmore***

- 4.7 Prior to the 1840s, Mentmore was a small agricultural settlement with no single major landowner. During the 1840s Baron Meyer Amschel Rothschild bought up many individual parcels of land around Mentmore in order to create what is now considered to be a nationally significant example of a Victorian country house

estate. On a local level Mentmore is also significant because it forms one of a number of prestigious country house estates created by the Rothschild family within Buckinghamshire including Waddesdon, Tring and Halton. The family's influence and patronage can also be seen in many estate cottages and public buildings throughout the District.

4.8 Mentmore Towers, which is prominently positioned on a hilltop to the west of Mentmore village was built between 1850 and 1856 to designs by the famous Victorian architect Joseph Paxton and his son-in-law G.H. Stokes. The building is Grade I listed, denoting its importance as this is the highest level of designation. Joseph Paxton was also heavily involved in the designed landscape and many of the plants were provided by the famous Veitch nurseries. The garden and grounds of the estate are listed Grade II\* in the national Register of Parks and Gardens.

4.9 The existing 1978 Conservation Area boundary was drawn very narrowly to include Mentmore Towers, its immediate environs, St. Mary's Church and the historic core of Mentmore village. Following detailed research into and analysis of, the Mentmore estate and its wider setting during the course of the production of the draft '*Mentmore Conservation Area Appraisal*' and the '*Mentmore Park and Village*–

*Assessment of the Significance of the Setting*' documents, both the national and the local importance of the wider Mentmore estate has been demonstrated, and it is therefore proposed that the existing Conservation Area boundary be extended to include the whole of the Registered Park and Garden, some additional properties around the fringes of the estate and village and other intrinsic areas of ornamental landscape.

*Summary of inclusions within the proposed Conservation Area at Mentmore.*

#### 4.10 Registered landscape not already included in the Conservation Area

This forms the majority of the nationally significant Grade II\* Registered mid- late 19<sup>th</sup> century designed landscape. It is integral to and contiguous with the existing Conservation Area and the Grade I listed mansion. Some modern alterations have occurred, including the development of a golf course and club house which overlie part of the park, as well as relatively small and localised development around Wing Lodge and in the former glasshouse yard by the old Manor House. Some areas of original planting have also been degraded. Despite this, the historic boundaries and much of the historic fabric survive. This includes the kitchen garden, which despite its derelict condition retains the majority of the original framework. The original plan of the estate is still clearly recognisable. Whilst changes to the park have taken place over time, there is still a clear and recognisable sense of the land's former use and there remains opportunity to reverse or indeed reinstate the parkland where it has been eroded.

#### 4.11 The North Avenue

The North Avenue runs from the Mentmore crossroads to Wing Lodge. It is thought to have been in place by 1879 and thus forms part of the original ornamental concept of the park. It was designed as a significant public approach to the park (from Wing and Aylesbury) and echoes the more significant public approach along the Grand Avenue to the south (from the direction of London).

Some of the avenue trees were probably replanted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but original areas of planting survive at each end of the avenue. The avenue retains a high visual and design connection with the Registered Park.

#### 4.12 North Park

The north park is an extensive area of ornamented agricultural land which formed an integral part of the Estate's mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century model agricultural regime,

as denoted by its inclusion as part of the estate historically, rather than being tenanted out like some of the other areas outside of the proposed boundary. The slope up to the village was and remains an important element in views from the main approaches and from the nearby Rothschild Ascott House and grounds. It is an integral part of the north and west approaches to the village and the main park entrance. Its bowl-like curved topography is visually pleasant when seen from the village green and from the approach from the west from where it provides the foreground for important views of Wing and Ascott.

This area survives as open agricultural land divided into several fields without later development. Although the historic trees (elms) are largely gone, the landform and boundaries are unchanged

#### 4.13 Gas and Electricity Plants

These buildings represent the most innovative technology available to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century country house estate. They are detached from the core of the village buildings but their prominence in treed enclosures on the approach from the north heralds the estate character of the village, its significance as a model estate community and its integral relationship with Mentmore Towers and its park. Although the gas holder and industrial equipment have gone and the buildings have been converted to residential use, much of the fabric and character of the buildings survives.

#### 4.14 Stud House and Howell Hill Close

Both buildings date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and appear to have replaced earlier buildings on the site. Mentmore Stud (now Howell Hill Close) functioned as a purpose-built commercial stud facility and although it was not the location where the Rothschilds and the Earls of Rosebery bred their famous racehorses (which was at Crafton, west of the park), it was still a purpose-built commercially operated facility that reflects the many facets of the estate and the continued interest of the Roseberys and Rothschilds in equine matters. The building itself is distinctive and prominently located and makes a positive contribution to the visual character and historic interest of the proposed Conservation Area.

*Change made to initial draft boundary following consultation*

- 4.15 Stud fields below/south east of Stud House / Howell Hill Close Following the provision of additional information by a local resident of Mentmore, there is now no physical or documentary evidence of either a functional or aesthetic connection between this area of land and the former Mentmore Stud (now Howell Hill Close) as had originally been thought.

Therefore this area of land has been removed from the proposed Conservation Area boundary.

*Process of Public Consultation for Mentmore:*

- 4.16 The draft Mentmore Conservation Area Appraisal (including the proposed boundary) was subject to an eight-week period of public consultation between Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019 and Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Following a request from an interested party, the period of consultation was extended by an additional week until Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> November.
- 4.17 The public consultation was run in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Each household within the village and estate affected by proposed changes to the boundary was consulted by letter. A poster regarding the review was displayed on the Mentmore Parish Council noticeboard and the full appraisal document was published online via the AVDC website.

4.18 On the evening of Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 and the afternoon of Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the Conservation Areas Officer and the consultant Sarah Rutherford attended a Parish Council meeting at Mentmore to present the proposed Conservation Area boundary to the community, to explain the designation process and to answer any questions.

4.19 During the nine-week period of public consultation 14 emails/letters were received from local residents, members of the public and other interested parties.

- Four of these responses expressed unequivocal support for the proposals,
  - the Parish Council expressed support, but raised concerns regarding the potential for additional bureaucracy,
  - Six asked for points of clarification or provided information and •
- Three strongly objected to the proposed changes.

All comments received, along with the Council's response to them have been included in a table contained in Appendix 2. The three resident/organisations that strongly objected to the proposed alterations to the Conservation Area Boundary as well as writing their own letters, employed the Planning Consultancy, Montagu-Evans and the Solicitors, Thrings to write representations on their behalf. These two documents run to many pages, as do the Council's response to them and therefore have not been included in the table in Appendix 2. Instead they are contained in Appendix 3. Full copies of all responses to the consultation have been made available to Members prior to the Cabinet Meeting.

#### *Summary of Management Plan for proposed Conservation Area at Mentmore.*

4.20 The following site specific issues were raised within the Mentmore Conservation Area Management Plan and during the period of public consultation. These proposals should be considered in addition to those contained within Aylesbury Vale's Conservation Area Management Plan - District Wide Strategy

- Maintain the integrity of the designed landscape and its setting.
- It is also important to maintain the connection between the village, designed landscape and surrounding countryside, gained in part through views.
- Maintain the character and setting of the conservation area, especially through the preservation of the hedges, trees, open spaces, boundary treatments and verges.
- Maintain all heritage assets and encourage the retention and restoration of historic features within the conservation area.
- Where new development is deemed acceptable ensure that its form, layout, massing, materials and design reflect and respect the key characteristics of the built historic environment of the conservation area as identified within this document.
- Maintain the character of the village through the rationalisation of signage, street furniture and overhead wiring (refer to the Aylesbury Vale Highway Protocol: <http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/highway-protocol>)

## **5 Options for Members to consider**

5.1 In light of the statutory requirement under section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed

Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990 to review designated Conservation Areas and to consider the designation of new areas; the option of not reviewing and updating the 1978 Conservation Area boundary and Appraisal document Mentmore Conservation Area has been rejected.

- 5.2 Having considered all representations received during the consultation process; two options are being presented to Cabinet for consideration:

Option 1: Approve the revised boundary as recommended and justified within the draft Conservation Area Appraisal document and shown on boundary map (Appendix 1).

Option 2: Defer the adoption of the revised Conservation Area boundary. Cabinet to offer guidance to Officers regarding further work required.

#### 5.2.1 Option 1

The justification for approving the boundary in Appendix 1 is contained within the draft Conservation Area Appraisal document and in paragraphs 4.7 to 4.15 of this report.

To summarise; since the original designation in 1978 much of the designed landscape at Mentmore has been recognised as being of national importance and has been designated as a Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden. In addition the Rothschild estates of Waddesdon, Halton, Ascott and Eythrope have also been placed on the Registered Parks and Gardens Register. These designations reflect an increased understanding of the importance of these historic Victorian and Edwardian landscapes as well as an appreciation of the importance of the Rothschild family in shaping the landscape of Buckinghamshire. In addition, the current boundary and documentation do not reflect current national advice regarding the significance of the relationship of individual elements such as planform, buildings, archaeology, spaces, trees, views and setting and how these elements combine to create a cohesive whole. It therefore devalues the whole if only some of the fundamental elements are included or indeed if important elements are excluded. In the case of Mentmore, the importance of the designed and functional landscape to the history and the development of the estate are fundamental to its significance. These important factors are not reflected in the current Conservation Area boundary and need to be incorporated in order to secure a robust and defensible designation.

#### 5.2.2 Option 2

If Cabinet are minded to defer the revised boundary as set out within Appendix 1; Officers require a steer regarding any further work that needs to be undertaken.

Officers will seek to prioritise any further assessment required and ensure the relevant Portfolio Holder and Local Member is kept informed of this process.

Please be aware, any deferral would result in future work being brought back before the emerging Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority.

## **6 Reasons for Recommendation.**

- 6.1 The review of a Conservation Area accords with the Council's responsibilities under section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Conservation Area designation and is an effective means of helping the Council to identify and manage change of the District's cultural heritage.

- 7 While the recommendation to approve the revised Conservation Area shown on the proposed boundary map contained within Appendix 1 is comprehensively

justified within the Conservation Area Appraisal document, it should be noted that Local Authorities rely on the support of local communities to help successfully manage Conservation Area designations. It is always desirable to have the support of the local community and their concerns and objections should be carefully considered. The community response to the proposed boundary is outlined elsewhere in this document. Resource implications

7.1 Budgetary provision is already made for the completion of this project.

## **8 Response to Key Aims and Objectives**

8.1 Directly meets the key aim of the AVDC Corporate Plan 2011-2015 to “protect and improve the living experience of the Vale” (Enhance our natural and built environment-deliver a programme of Conservation Area Reviews).

Contact Officer

Background Documents

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Conservation Area SPD

District Wide Strategy for the Management of  
Conservation Areas

Draft Mentmore Conservation Area Review and supporting  
documents; Setting Study (Place Services) Mentmore Historic  
Landscape Appraisal (Volumes 1-3)