

CABINET

10 MARCH 2020

PRESENT: Councillor A Macpherson (Leader); Councillors S Bowles (Deputy Leader), P Irwin, H Mordue, C Paternoster, Sir Beville Stanier Bt, J Ward and M Winn. Councillor Cooper attended also.

APOLOGY: Councillor P Strachan

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of 11 February, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

2. MENTMORE CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION

As part of an on-going programme, the Conservation Area at Mentmore had been reviewed. The Conservation Area had originally been designated in 1978. The review had been the subject of extensive consultation. A map showing the proposed revised Conservation Area boundary was submitted, together with details of the representations made and the Council's response to them. A copy of the Appraisal document could be obtained on request to the Senior Heritage Officer.

Since the original designation, a greater interest in Victorian architecture and designed landscapes had raised the importance of an estate as a whole and had resulted in the designation of a number of listed buildings and the recognition of the designed landscape as a Registered Park and Garden. Both the existing Conservation Area designation and the supporting documentation were now outdated and did not accord with national guidance as set out by Historic England.

Both Mentmore Towers and its designated landscape were included on Historic England's "at risk" register. This had enabled the Council to apply for grant funding to engage a specialist historic landscape consultant to undertake a Conservation Area review and landscape study of Mentmore so that information about the settlement could be pulled into a comprehensive set of documents.

The study had identified what was significant about the area, namely its history as an estate, which included 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 survived today.

As a consequence, alterations to the Conservation Area boundary had been proposed which adequately reflected this significance.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 defined a Conservation Area as....."an area of special architectural interest, the character and appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance." The Act placed three duties on local authorities:-

- To designate those areas considered to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas.
- To review all Conservation Areas from time to time.

- To formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Areas.

The Conservation Area document for Mentmore:-

- Defined the special interest of Mentmore.
- Identified those characteristics and unique features which made Mentmore of sufficient interest to warrant designation.
- Laid out some settlement specific management proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.

The proposed Conservation Area boundary at Mentmore had been drawn to include those elements and features which were considered to be of architectural or historic interest, or which positively contributed to the special character or appearance of the area as a whole.

The Cabinet report, available to view in full on the Council's website, set out a brief history of the settlement and contained a summary of the inclusions within the proposed revised Conservation Area boundary. The report also referred to a change made to the initial draft boundary following the consultation exercise.

The report summarised the consultation process, from which it was noted that 14 e-mails/letters had been received from local residents, members of the public and other interested parties. Four of the responses had expressed unequivocal support for the proposals. The Parish Council had expressed support and 6 individuals had sought clarification or had asked for further information. There had been three strong objections. As referred to at the beginning of this Minute, all the representations, together with the Council's response to them were summarised in the Cabinet report. The three strong objections were set out in full as Appendices to the Cabinet report.

A letter from the agents acting on behalf of Ascott Estates (Montagu Evans) summarising the Estates' objections had been circulated to all Cabinet Members in advance of the Cabinet meeting. In particular, that letter had asked Cabinet to consider arranging a site visit prior to making any final decision. The Estates Manager made a statement prior to cabinet's consideration of the item, as did a local landowner who also felt that the proposed designation boundary should be re-considered.

The Chairman of Mentmore Parish Council and the Local Member, Councillor Cooper, spoke in favour of the proposed designation.

To summarise, since the original designation in 1978, much of the designed landscape at Mentmore had been recognised as being of national importance and had been designated as a Grade 2* Registered Park and Garden. In addition the Rothschild estates at Waddesdon, Ascot, Halton and Eythrope had also been placed on the Registered Parks and Gardens Register. These designations reflected an increased understanding of the importance of the Rothschild family in shaping the landscape of Buckinghamshire.

In addition, the current boundary and documentation did 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 combined to create a cohesive whole.

Cabinet recognised that the “whole” would be devalued if only some of the fundamental elements were included or if important elements were excluded. In the case of Mentmore, the importance of the designed and functional landscape to the history and development of the estate were fundamental to its significance. These important factors were not reflected in the current Conservation Area boundary and needed to be incorporated in order to secure a robust and defensible designation. Individual Cabinet Members asked technical questions of the officers concerning the conclusions of the review and questioned them about the issues raised by the speakers.

There were two possible options which were outlined to Cabinet with a commentary on their rationale:-

- **Option 1:** To approve the revised boundary as recommended and justified within the draft Conservation Area Appraisal document and shown on the map accompanying the Cabinet report.
- **Option 2:** To defer adoption of the proposed revised Conservation Area boundary.

After careful consideration of all the facts, including the representations objecting to the proposed boundary changes, it was,

RESOLVED-

- (1) That the responses to the consultations contained in the Cabinet report be noted.
- (2) That the Mentmore Conservation Area boundary change (option 1), be approved and adopted.
- (3) That the Management Plan be adopted.