

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Townscape Character Assessment		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Officer Management Team	-	Director of Services
	Prepared by	-	Head of Sustainable Development

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the outcome of work on an assessment of the townscape character of the main settlements in South Bucks and recommends that the Council should take the assessment into account in making planning decisions.

## 2 Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1 This issue particularly links to the Council's aim of "sustainable and clean environment, protecting our heritage, protecting our future."

## 3 Background

- 3.1 Work is under way preparing a Development Management Local Plan (DMLP). When adopted, this will replace the saved policies in the 1999 Local Plan and will provide detailed policies in line with the context provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance. The DMLP will also provide more detail in respect of some of the policies in the adopted Core Strategy. It is expected that an Examination into the DMLP will be heard early in 2016 and that the plan will be adopted later that year.
- 3.2 The NPPF advises that local plans should include robust and comprehensive policies setting out the quality of development that will be expected for their areas. Local Planning Authorities are required to evaluate and understand the defining characteristics of the area as part of their evidence base, in order to identify appropriate design policies and to assist in determining capacity for development.
- 3.3 As part of the work on the DMLP, the District Council commissioned work to assess the character of the townscape within the District's main settlements. An initial scoping assessment identified key areas and characteristics, but enormous value has come out of the Part 2 Work and a more detailed [Townscape Character Assessment \(TCA\) by consultancy firm Tibbalds](#). The preparation work included consultation with parish councils, all of whom were invited to attend meetings. Meetings were held with representatives of Beaconsfield Town Council and Gerrards Cross Parish Council and there was a third meeting to which all parish councils were invited, which was attended by representatives from Iver PC and Farnham Royal PC. The meetings took the form of workshops and enabled a discussion of the consultants' early findings, and provided an opportunity to identify local issues and concerns. There were similar meetings with development management staff.
- 3.4 Because preparation of the DMLP has only just commenced and adoption is over two years away, consultees and officers share the view that it is desirable that the TCA should be used as soon as possible. Although it will not have undergone testing by a local plan inspector, it is considered that the quality of the TCA, together with its status as an independently produced report prepared by experts in the field, provides a very good context for making decisions.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the TCA should be adopted and used as Interim Planning Guidance (IPG). The purpose of this would be to provide prospective applicants and other parties with a summary of the existing townscape qualities of the eleven main settlements within the District and eight areas of Special Character and to indicate the issues of importance and concern in these areas whilst detailed policies are being prepared and adopted. The IPG would not establish new policy but would aim to help encourage the type of development that is in keeping with the character of these areas. The IPG would not constitute a Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Local Development Framework. It has however been subject to consultation with local stakeholders prior to its recommended adoption by the District Council. It accords with policies in the Adopted Local Plan and the NPPF. As such, it is considered that the IPG would be a material consideration when determining planning applications.

## 4 Content of the TCA

- 4.1 The TCA outlines the ways in which each of the eleven main settlements in South Bucks have developed, the main points of their character and an indication of their potential for change. The TCA goes on to identify 12 different character typologies such as “woodland roads”, “open plan suburban” and “park edge”. There are elements of many different typologies in each settlement. Each typology is analysed in detail and comments are set out about townscape, built form, hard and soft landscape and vegetation and boundary treatments. Two of the most important elements of each analysis include identification of threats to character and a series of recommendations.
- 4.2 As just one example, here are the threats and recommendations which relate to woodland roads:



Typical Woodland Road

### Threats to Character

- A level of homogeneity in style of new buildings that fails to contribute to the diversity of architecture;
- New dwellings do not relate well to the existing topography, using retaining walls rather than working with existing levels;
- New dwellings have hard surfaced front gardens - this diminishes the green landscape character of this typology;
- 2 storey buildings with a large area of additional accommodation in the roof and/or undercroft parking appear out of scale with the surroundings;
- Use of high, hard boundary treatments such as walls and railings;
- Buildings are too close together or too near boundaries, giving less space for landscape;
- Symmetrical, formal design of new houses, i.e. three bays with central portico.

### Recommendations

- Retain woodland character by retaining trees and hedgerows around buildings and in backdrop and views to and from homes;
- Allow enough space on plot for new landscape to mature;
- Retain existing plot ratios and rhythm;
- Front gardens should generally be planted, not hard landscaped;
- Building heights should be limited to two storeys (including accommodation in the roof);
- Where boundary treatments are tall enough to require planning permission, they should avoid use of hard materials such as walls and railings. Railings should only be acceptable if they are constructed with hedges;
- Buildings should relate well to topography and avoid the use of retaining walls;
- A variety of architectural styles should be encouraged;
- Conserve roadside treatment and avoid over engineered highway design and road markings;
- Where areas are located around edges of settlements, it is essential to preserve them as a soft green edge.

- 4.3 The threats identified and the recommendations that seek to retain and improve the quality of our townscape areas are clearly expressed and it is considered that they could set a very good context for providing planning advice, negotiating on schemes and for making decisions.
- 4.4 Saved Policy H10 of the South Bucks District Local Plan sets out policies for Residential Areas of Exceptional Character (RAECs). Within these areas, proposals for residential development, including house extensions and ancillary buildings, which would have an adverse effect on their exceptional character will not be permitted. In particular, the Council will not permit proposals involving the development of sites which do not reflect the prevailing density of the areas, the conversion of single dwellings into flats or the introduction of backland development. A number of factors are set out to which particular regards will be had when assessing proposals in those areas. The areas currently covered by Policy H10 are:
- Camp Road, Gerrards Cross
  - Gregories Road/Burkes road area, Beaconsfield
  - Penn Road (north part, up to the Chiltern District boundary)
  - Hillcrest Way Area/Woodhill Avenue, Gerrards Cross
- 4.5 In the 2014 Study, Tibbalds have recommended that the Council should consider identifying eight Areas of Special Character, including four areas which are already covered by policy H10, either in part or in full, as follows:
- Camp Road, Gerrards Cross - large houses in large plots amongst mature trees and lush planting - essentially the same area as that in Policy H10
  - Seeleys Road, Beaconsfield - open plan suburban area - new listing
  - Thornbridge/Church Road Iver Heath - formal suburban oval-shaped blocks - new listing
  - The Ridings, Richings Park - small but distinctive pocket of houses at southern edge of Richings Park - new listing
  - St Huberts Close and Meadway Park, Gerrards Cross - open plan suburban - new listing
  - Gregories Road and Burkes Rd Beaconsfield - large house in large plots amongst mature trees and lush planting - already an H10 area
  - Penn Road and Ledborough Lane - woodland road - partly existing H10 area but extended
  - Hillcrest Way/Woodhill Avenue Area green suburban road typology already an H10 area.
- 4.6 The eight recommended Areas of Special Character are shown on the maps on the next two pages. The four new Areas of Special Character will not have the status of the H10 Areas until such time as a new local plan is adopted but it is considered that a resolution to adopt the TCA as interim planning guidance in the context of paragraph 58 of the NPPF would give them greater standing than simply noting them as background evidence.

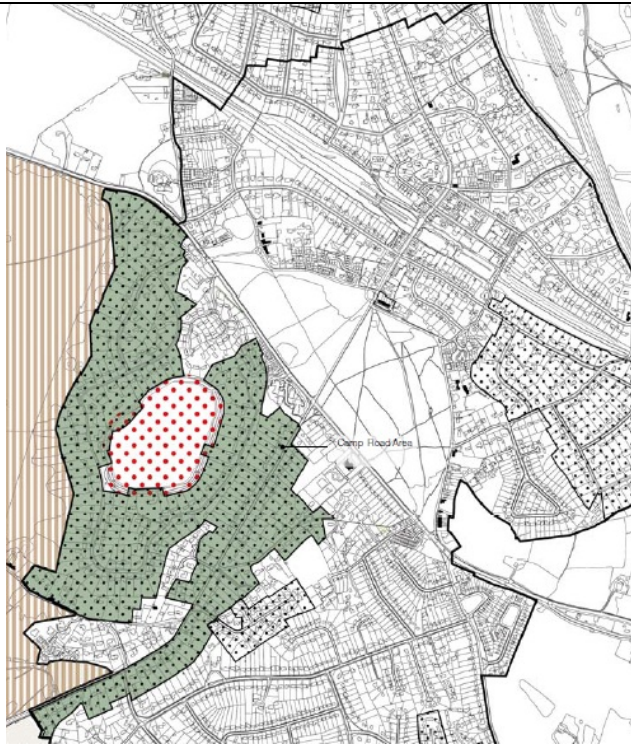
## 5 Resources, Risks and Other Implications

5.1 There are no direct cost implications of this report. The IPG would not be a statutory document and would not form part of the Development Plan for South Bucks. Accordingly there is a risk that Inspectors might take less account of it on appeal than the Council would wish. The alternative of waiting for the TCA to be incorporated in the DMLP arguably carries greater risks of loss of character of the District's residential areas.

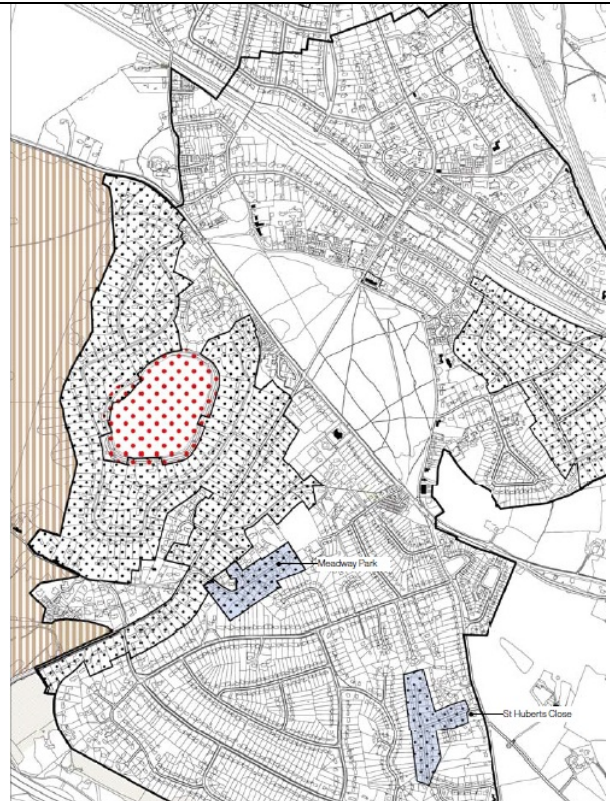
## 6 Recommendation

6.1 It is recommended that the PAG advise the Portfolio Holder to recommend that Cabinet should adopt the South Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2, February 2014 prepared by Tibbalds on behalf of the District Council as interim planning guidance.

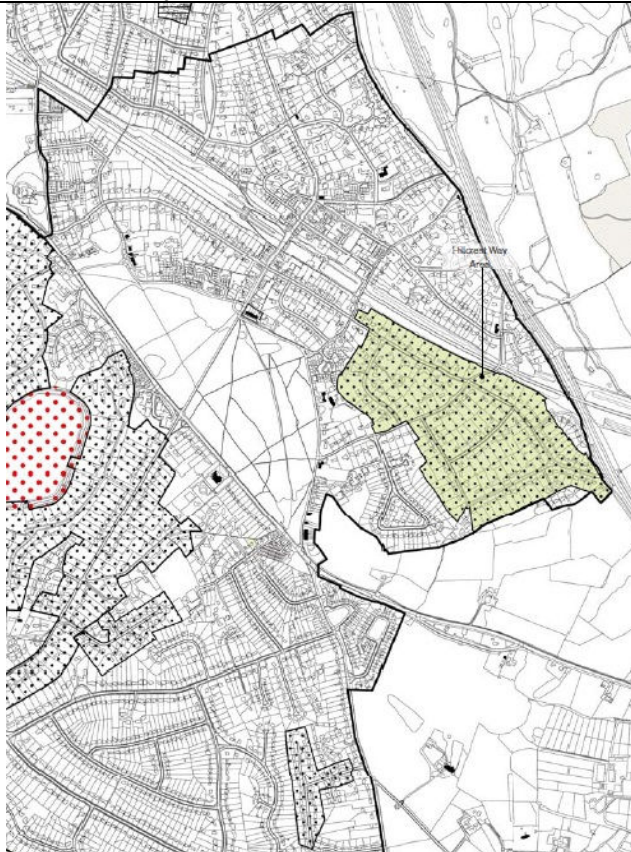
Camp Road, Gerrards Cross



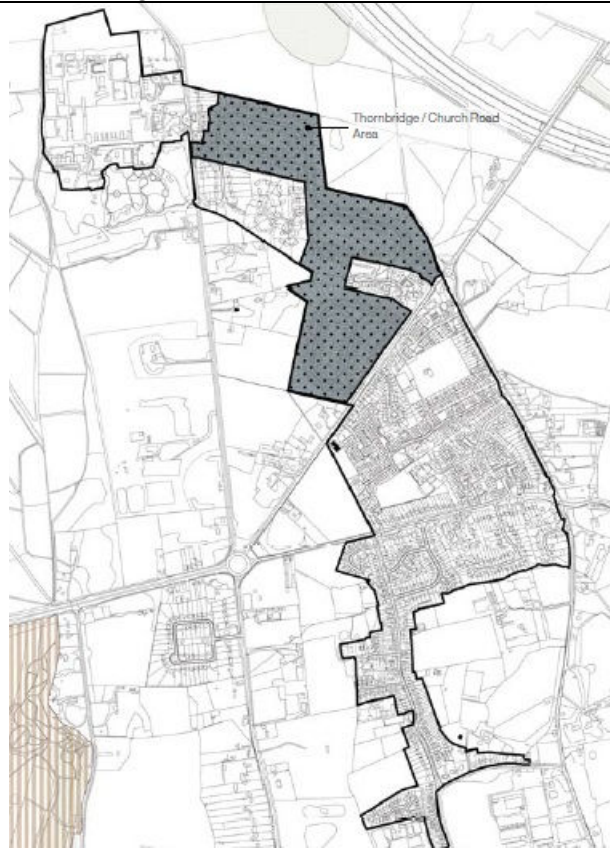
St Huberts Close/Meadway Park, Gerrards Cross

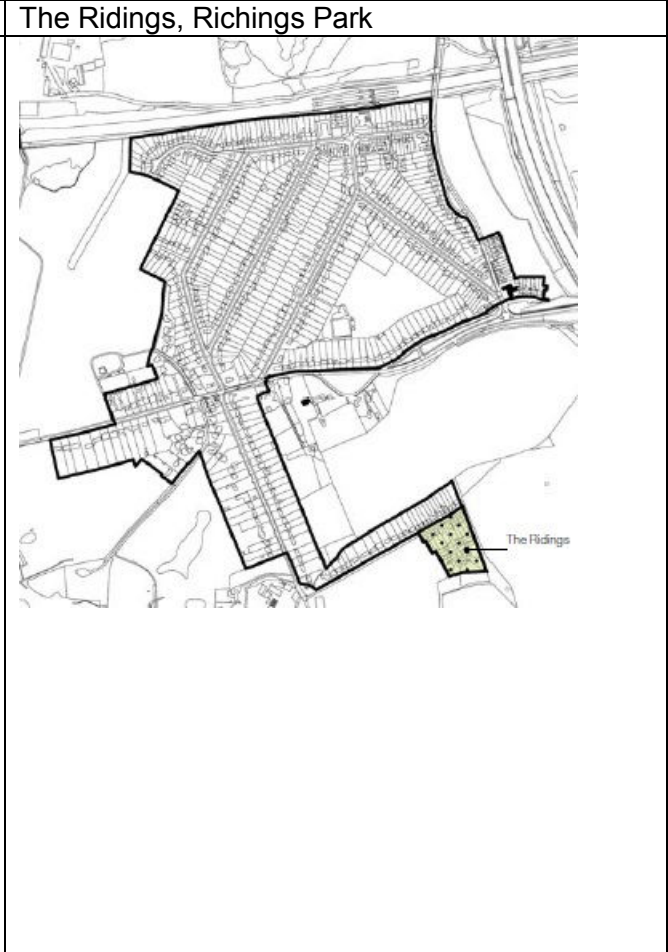
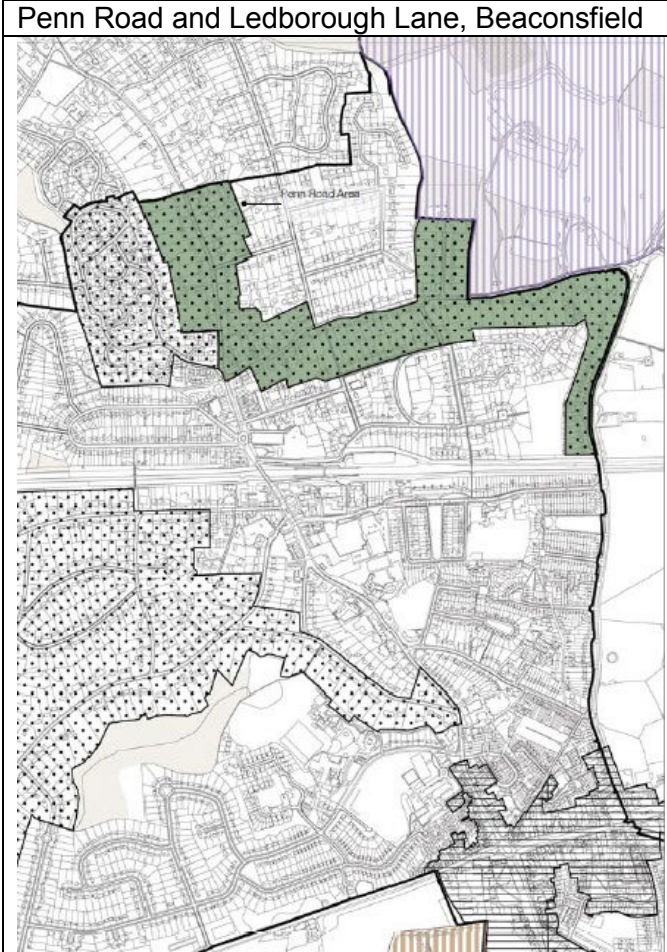
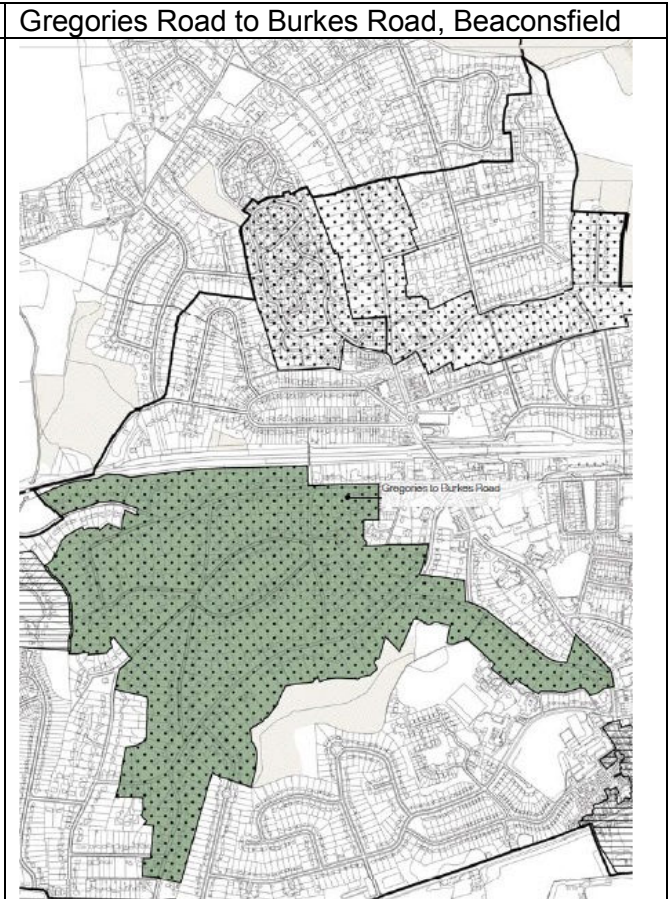
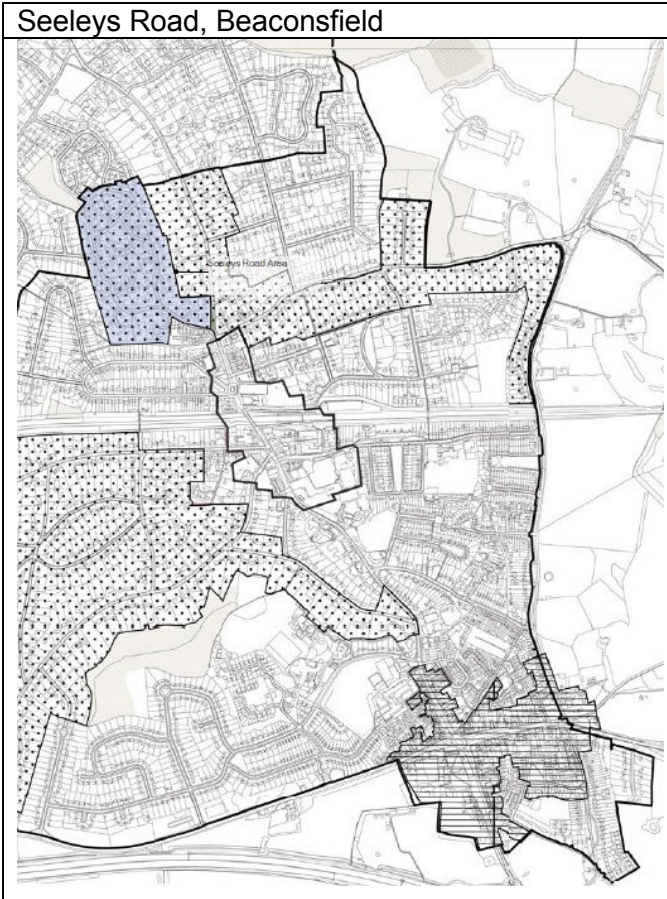


Hillcrest Way/Woodhill Avenue, Gerrards Cross



Thornbridge/Church Road, Iver Heath





<b>Officer Contact:</b>	<b>Paul Geehan, 01895 837298</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>South Bucks Townscape Character Study Part 2</b> <a href="http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=4876&amp;p=0">http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=4876&amp;p=0</a>