



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
6 JANUARY 2022**

**APPROVAL TO DESIGNATE THE WOODFIELD COTTAGES CONSERVATION AREA
AND ADOPT THE WOODFIELD COTTAGES LOCAL LISTED BUILDING CONSENT
ORDER**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks the Strategy and Resources Committee's approval to designate the Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area and adopt the Woodfield Cottages Local Listed Building Consent Order

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that the Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area is designated
- (ii) that the Woodfield Cottages Local Listed Building Consent Order is adopted.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Nos 116 – 156 Woodfield Cottages, Heybridge, CM9 4BQ, their associated outhouses and two communal water taps were designated grade II listed buildings in 1971. The three terraces of 41 single-storey cottages are of historic interest because they were developed by the industrialist E H Bentall in 1873 as dwellings for the workforce of the Bentall Agricultural Works. The buildings are of national architectural interest for their pioneering use of mass-concrete construction. Originally the cottages had flat roofs, but pitched roofs were added in c.1918.
- 3.2 In terms of conservation, Woodfield Cottages are among the most challenging listed buildings in the Maldon District due to their relatively high degree of modernisation; a process which began before the buildings were listed and continued following listing, in many cases without obtaining the necessary listed building consents. Many of the later alterations – such as replacement windows, doors and porches – have eroded the architectural interest of the listed buildings and their character as a unified group of buildings. Some of the buildings are in a poor condition and one cottage (No. 127) has fallen into a particularly dilapidated state. In 2019 Historic England considered de-listing the cottages but concluded that the buildings remain of national architectural and historic interest despite their alteration. Historic England did, however, acknowledge the challenges the buildings present and offered to work with Maldon District Council (MDC) to develop some positive and proactive measures to encourage the sympathetic restoration of the site.
- 3.3 Two proactive initiatives aimed at improving the character and condition of Woodfield Cottages were approved for public consultation by Strategy and Resources Committee on 16 September 2021. The first initiative is to designate a Woodfield

Cottages Conservation Area. It is a statutory duty under Section 69(1) (a) and (b) of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* that “Every local planning authority shall from time to time determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and shall designate those areas as conservation areas”. The designation of Woodfield Cottages as a conservation area would be justified because it is not only the cottages and outhouses which are important; the lanes, gardens and boundary treatments which surround the original buildings altogether comprise a distinct historic area the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. The *Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area Character Statement (APPENDIX 1)* describes the special character and appearance of the area and the opportunities for enhancement. As the cottages are already listed buildings, the creation of a conservation area will impose very few additional planning restrictions. Designation of the conservation area would open the possibility of entering into a Conservation Area Partnership Agreement with Historic England, through which grant funding could be made available for works which enhance the character of the area . If successful, this would be the first Conservation Area Partnership Scheme in Essex for seven years and the first in the Maldon District for over fifteen years. Woodfield Cottages must first be designated as a conservation area to qualify for the grant funding.

- 3.4 The second initiative which was approved for public consultation was the *Woodfield Cottages Local Listed Building Consent Order (APPENDIX 2)*. Local Listed Building Consent Orders were introduced by section 60 of the *Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013*. As grade II listed buildings, any works of alteration to Woodfield Cottages presently require the submission of a Listed Building Consent application to Maldon District Council. Such applications are free of charge but require a certain degree of paperwork, the preparation of architectural drawings, and usually take 8 weeks to determine. What a Local Listed Building Consent Order does is grant automatic consent for selected types of alteration, as long as they are undertaken in accordance with an approved specification. The proposed order would make it easier for owners of Woodfield Cottages to carry out sympathetic and restorative alterations and to address enforcement issues, by reducing the bureaucratic requirements associated with obtaining Listed Building Consent. If adopted, the Woodfield Cottages Local Listed Building Consent Order would be the first example of its kind in East Anglia. It is hoped that some of the positive enhancement works authorised by the Local Listed Building Consent Order can be supported financially by a future Conservation Area Partnership Scheme. Historic England set out its support for these initiatives in a letter reproduced as **APPENDIX 3**.
- 3.5 Public consultation on the two initiatives commenced on 30 September 2021. Letters addressed to the owners and occupiers were hand delivered to each of the cottages and a site notice was put up. Heybridge Ward Members, Heybridge Parish Council and The Victorian Society were also consulted. A press release was issued, and information was made available on the MDC website and at Maldon Library. The consultation closed on 11 November 2021. Ten written responses to the consultation were received. All responses supported the proposed conservation area designation. **APPENDIX 4** is summary of the consultation responses received. Several respondents complemented the presentation of the documents and the interesting historical information they contain. Most respondents were enthusiastic about the identified enhancement opportunities. Some suggested that undergrounding of electricity cables and the installation of traditional lampposts would benefit the character of the area. In response, these works have been added to the list of enhancement opportunities set out in the Conservation Area Character Statement.

- 3.6 One respondent supported the proposals in principle but raised some concerns. They complained that insufficient information in respect of grant funding was included in the consultation documents. Unfortunately, it was not possible to provide this level of detail at this early stage because the Council can only apply for grant funding from Historic England and establish the parameters for such grants once the settlement has been designated a conservation area. The same respondent expressed concern that grant funding would only be made available to restore the original design of certain features. The scope of any future grants has yet to be agreed with Historic England, but only work which enhances the special character of the area will be eligible.
- 3.7 All but one respondent supported the proposed Local Listed Building Consent Order. One resident suggested that the order as drafted would be too prescriptive. On the other hand, the Victorian Society, the only respondent that did not support the order, was concerned that it would not be prescriptive enough. Care has been taken in drafting the order only to include works which would be sympathetic for all of the cottages, and the order has been drafted in a way that is clear, detailed and specific. If adopted, the implementation of the order will be closely monitored, and residents will be required to notify the Council before undertaking any work. Alterations not included in the order could still be pursued through the normal listed building consent process.
- 3.8 Subject to the approval of this committee for the designation of the Conservation Area and adoption of the Local Listed Building Consent Order, all residents, owners and interested parties will be notified, including the formal notices required under relevant legislation. The Council's digital mapping and website will be updated. The Conservation Area and the Local Listed Building Consent Order will be registered as a Local Land Charge.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Maldon District Council has a commitment to protect and improve the environment of the District which includes built heritage. Policy D3 of the Maldon District Local Development Plan sets out this Council's objective of 'safeguarding, enhancing and promoting the historic environment'. 2023 will be the 150th anniversary since Woodfield Cottages were built. With the proposed positive and proactive measures in place it is hoped that this anniversary could be celebrated with these important historic buildings facing brighter prospects.

5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 The recommendations of this report will support the Strategic Theme for Place by encouraging the protection and improvement of built heritage, which is a valuable component of the local environment.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Positive, because the local listed building consent order will make it much easier for owners to undertake sympathetic alterations to Woodfield Cottages, by reducing the bureaucratic requirements associated with obtaining Listed Building Consent. The conservation area designation would create the possibility of establishing a grant scheme which would support owners who undertake positive enhancement work. The

conservation area character appraisal contains helpful information on the significance and history of the area and guidance on sympathetic alterations.

- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** –. None.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Cost of printing document and notices will be met from the relevant budget.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The preparation of notices and notification of all interested parties will be coordinated by the Conservation and Heritage Specialist with support from Planning Admin staff.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – Positive, due to the enhancement and safeguarding of the built heritage which will ensure its existence for the District now and generations to come.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – Positive, due to the way in which the measures should improve the character of the area, fostering a greater sense of local pride.

Background Papers: None.

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