



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
14 JULY 2022**

**APPROVAL TO APPLY FOR GRANT FUNDING FOR WOODFIELD COTTAGES,
HEYBRIDGE, THROUGH HISTORIC ENGLAND'S PARTNERSHIP SCHEMES IN
CONSERVATION AREAS (PSiCA)**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks the Strategy and Resources Committee's approval to apply for grant funding through Historic England's Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (PSiCA).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that approval is given to apply for Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas funding from Historic England to support the restoration of Woodfield Cottages, Heybridge;
- (ii) that approval 'in principle' is given to contribute match funding between circa £55k and circa £95k towards a grant scheme if an application for match funding from Historic England is successful.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Officers at Historic England (HE) have encouraged Maldon District Council (MDC) to apply for funding from Historic England's 'Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas' (PSiCA – pronounced 'seeker') to improve the condition and appearance of the Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area in Heybridge. These schemes are run on a day-to-day basis by local authorities and are designed to target funding for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. They are based on a partnership between Historic England, the Local Authority and, in some cases, other funding bodies. They run for a fixed term of up to five years. There is further information on the grant scheme on Historic England's website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/grants/our-grant-schemes/partnership-schemes-in-conservation-areas/>
- 3.2 Comprising three terraces of 41 houses, Woodfield Cottages were built in 1873 as homes for the employees of Bentall's Agricultural Works and are a pioneering example of mass-concrete construction. They were designated as grade II listed buildings in 1971 in recognition of their special architectural and historic interest.
- 3.3 The cottages are the most challenging statutorily listed houses in the Maldon District and are on the Council's Heritage-At-Risk Register. Later this year the buildings are due to be added to Historic England's national Heritage-At-Risk Register. This is due to the poor condition of some properties, the high volume of unauthorised alterations

and the limited means of some occupants to undertake restorative alterations. Listed building enforcement notices can require buildings to be returned to the condition they were in immediately prior to unauthorised works. But in many cases the condition the building was in immediately prior to unauthorised work was not much better (for example, having similarly unsympathetic windows), which makes enforcement action problematic.

- 3.4 The cottages are among the smallest houses available locally. They tend to attract first-time buyers and pensioners, often with limited disposable income. Many of the residents are elderly and some are vulnerable. Enforcement action has been taken in some instances, but such cases are usually very difficult to resolve and can cause considerable distress to vulnerable occupants.
- 3.5 Historic England has acknowledged the unique challenges that the cottages present. The Regional Director of the Eastern Regional branch of Historic England suggested that if the cottages were designated a conservation area, the area would become eligible for funding from Historic England through a PSiCA scheme, which could be used to tackle some of the challenges in the area.
- 3.6 The Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area was formally designated on the 6 January 2022 alongside an innovative Local Listed Building Consent Order which grants automatic consent for restorative alterations. Details of the conservation area are available on our website: https://www.maldon.gov.uk/downloads/download/9458/woodfield_cottages_ca_boundary_map. The Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area Character Statement identified various enhancement opportunities, such as restoration of the original design of windows and doors (albeit including thermally efficient double glazing), the removal of over-scaled and poorly detailed brick porches, and the replacement of unsympathetic prominent boundary treatments.
- 3.7 To assess roughly how much funding is needed to make a difference, estimates were sought from three joiners in 2020 / 2021 for the most common enhancement opportunities. Based on these quotes the estimated cost of all enhancement opportunities to individual cottages identified in the Conservation Area Character Statement is £337,340 (see **APPENDIX 1**). Attempting to implement all enhancement opportunities is probably unrealistic.
- 3.8 Individual properties have been considered in terms of whether the identified enhancement opportunities represent a high, medium or low priority, based on the prominence of the cottage, degree of unsympathetic alteration, and owners' expressed wish to undertake enhancement work and apply for grant funding if it became available. Thirteen properties have been identified as high priority, 8 as medium priority and 18 as low priority.
- 3.9 The estimated cost of targeting just medium and high priority cases (21 cottages) is £232,090. If owners were required to contribute 20% towards the cost of the work, the total required from HE and MDC would be £185,672 (or £92,836 each, assuming a 50-50 split between HE and MDC). Spread over three years, that would work out on average as £30,945 per year from both HE and MDC.
- 3.10 The estimated cost of targeting just high priority cases (13 cottages) is £136,700. If owners were required to contribute 20% towards the cost of the work, the total required from HE and MDC would be £109,360 (or £54,680 each, assuming a 50-50 split between HE and MDC). Spread over three years, that would work out on average as £18,227 per year from both HE and MDC.

- 3.11 Historic England's Eastern Regional Management Team, and Director Tony Calladine, have confirmed in writing their support for the principle of a Partnership Scheme for Woodfield Cottages. They have indicated that they would be willing to contribute 50% match funding based on the 'High and Medium' priority assessment outlined above in paragraph 3.9 above (see **APPENDIX 2**).
- 3.12 Historic England have also indicated they would be able to contribute towards the extra costs of a part-time project officer for the full five years, as well as administrative costs involved in publicising the scheme and preparing publications.
- 3.13 In terms of spend, a PSiCA is a five-year scheme, operating with a three year "offer period" in which applications to the scheme would be made, grants offered, and projects started. The "spend period" is usually a total of five years, which allows for those schemes that apply and get offered a grant at the end of the three-year application/offer period to actually undertake the work and claim for it. This means that the average annual figures suggested above in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 would almost certainly be lower.
- 3.14 The actual spend for a grant would be weighted towards the end of the programme, because it usually takes some time for the projects to gather momentum even if there are interested parties at the beginning.
- 3.15 The Partnership Scheme funding would in theory be available to all buildings within the identified area that met the eligibility criteria in terms of the works. The scheme as a whole would (following a successful application) be subject to the preparation of a Delivery Plan, which would set out the context and justification for the scheme and identify priority buildings within the wider area (based on agreed criteria, but usually related to condition, or the negative effect on the historic character of the area / building in question and the impact enhancements would make to the area). The Delivery Plan would also set out the desired phasing of the scheme across the years of delivery.
- 3.16 If the Committee support the recommendations of this report, Historic England will send Maldon District Council a formal "request for application" letter. Officers would need to obtain up-to-date estimate of costs, including any scheme management consultancy, to inform the formal application. The intention is that the scheme would open for applications from April 2023.

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'. The Woodfield Cottages Conservation Area is on the Council's Heritage at Risk Register. The cottages are the most challenging listed buildings in the District due to their poor condition and alteration. 2023 will be the 150th anniversary since Woodfield Cottages were built. With the proposed grant scheme in place 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 grants would help owners to undertake enhancement work to Woodfield Cottages, addressing many of the long-standing conservation issues in the area.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – None.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Match funding for the grant scheme from Maldon District Council would be required at a cost of circa £55k to circa £95k. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy currently projects a budget gap in each financial year and if match funding was approved this would further increase the budget gap and the savings that would be required to fund it.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The scheme would be overseen by the Conservation and Heritage Specialist, although Historic England would be able to provide funding for a temporary part-time project officer to administrate the grant scheme.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – Positive, due to the enhancement and safeguarding of the built heritage which will ensure its survival for the District now and for generations to come. Enhancement opportunities include the installation of thermally efficient double-glazed windows.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – Positive, due to the way in which the measures would revitalise and improve the historic character of the area, fostering a greater sense of local pride.

Background Papers: None.

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