

Report to	Planning Committee
Date	8 August 2013
By	Director of Planning
Title of Report	Lewes Conservation Area Management Plan
Purpose of Report	To adopt a Management Plan for Lewes Conservation Area following public consultation and subsequent amendment.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to: Adopt the Final Draft of the Lewes Conservation Area Management Plan, first proposed in the Lewes Conservation Area Character Appraisal, 2007.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Lewes Conservation Area Character Appraisal was prepared by conservation consultants in 2005. Following extensive public consultation, the document was adopted for Development Management purposes by Lewes District Council in late 2007. Conservation Area Appraisals normally adopt a ten year review cycle.
- 1.2 The document identified a large number of perceived issues throughout the Character Areas and formulated interim recommendations for preservation and enhancement, pending preparation of a formal Management Plan. These issues are set out in Section 8 of the Character Appraisal.
- 1.3 In the short term, the Draft Management Plan seeks to address these issues by creating a series of measurable actions for the remaining life of the current Character Appraisal. In Section 5 it sets out a number of broader objectives which may form a foundation for better understanding and co-ordination between agencies, to promote better management of various aspects of the historic environment and the public realm beginning now and projecting into the longer term.
- 1.4 The Draft Management Plan for Lewes Conservation Area is attached as **Appendix I**.

2. Background

- 2.1 A draft of the Management Plan was approved for public consultation in October 2012 and the document was published for comment on the SDNPA website between 9 April and 15 May 2013. Copies were made available at Lewes Library and the reception of Southover House, the Lewes District Council Planning Office. Hard copies were also sent to identified stakeholders, including English Heritage, the County Archaeologist, the Highways Department of East Sussex County Council, Lewes Town Council, the Conservation Area Advisory Committee, the Friends of Lewes, Sussex Archaeological Society, Lewes Buildings Preservation Trust and other interested parties.
- 2.2 Since the consultation draft was written, Friends of Lewes has published a Survey Report and Feasibility Study for the recognition of and care for a town-wide arboretum. This document has considerable relevance to the care of trees and green spaces within the town and some references alluding to its recommendations have been added to the Conservation Area Management Plan.
- 2.3 Consultation responses were received from Friends of Lewes, Lewes Buildings Preservation Trust and the South Downs Society. All respondents support the provision of the

Management Plan and recognise its role as an implementation arm of the Conservation Area Appraisal process.

- 2.4 The Friends of Lewes consider that the principal issues identified in the Character Appraisal have been addressed but that the action points are sometimes vague regarding time frames and responsible bodies. It goes on to make thirty points regarding the detail of the text and specific suggestions related to five of the action points. Some points are fundamental. In particular, their comments on design are quite emphatic and worth quoting in full:
- “It would be unfortunate if we could not hand on to future generations buildings that are good examples of early 21st Century design. The challenge is therefore not only to conserve and enhance what already exists but also to incorporate new buildings which are truly modern in their design whilst respecting the scale, proportions and materials of their surroundings”.*
- The Friends will welcome opportunities to comment upon forthcoming SDNPA design guidance. All their points of detail have been considered carefully by officers and a high proportion have been reflected in revisions to the final text.
- 2.5 The Friends would also welcome an annual meeting of bodies or authorities responsible for works to the public realm. Officers observe that many of the proposals in the Management Plan have been conceived to bring together the many agencies with varied responsibilities for different aspects of the public realm. While this will not happen overnight, it is a goal worth striving for and could help offset the impact of public budget cuts over the coming years.
- 2.6 While the Friends are keen to enhance pedestrian routes to and from the railway station, they were less convinced by ideas expressed in the consultation draft concerning the Prison Crossroads. As most of the land covered by this junction actually lies just beyond the current boundary of the conservation area, it is conceded that these aspirations would be better considered in another forum and reference to them has been deleted from the final draft.
- 2.7 However, the Friends agreed that the small car park beside St Thomas a Becket Church at the corner of Malling Street and Cliffe High Street could be converted into a public garden if other parking spaces can be found nearby.
- 2.8 The Lewes Building Preservation Trust considers that the consultation document is an excellent and comprehensive plan. The Trust makes eight detail comments about the text and suggestions for clarification of three of the action points. Many of these observations are now reflected in revisions to the final draft.
- 2.9 It recommends enhanced signage at the Railway Station to guide visitors to the town centre and other attractions. It also commends the creation of a public garden beside St Thomas a Becket.
- 2.10 The comments of the South Downs Society are of a more expansive nature. Not all are easily encompassed within the confines of a Conservation Area Management Plan, but deserve consideration in a wider policy forum. It considers the most significant issue facing the town to be loss of ground floor retail, due to the value of residential conversion. This is certainly a challenge, though it must be remembered that a considerable number of buildings have fluctuated from use to use on more than one occasion over their lives. Where historic shop fronts have been inserted and where these have an intrinsic historic value, efforts should certainly be made to retain them. However, it is conceded that where these features are screened for residential privacy, this can have an adverse impact on the vitality of the street scene. Guidance and control of these trends probably requires further consideration under the Local Plan process.
- 2.11 An identified threat to traditional street scenes posed by the proliferation of telecommunication cabinets is a real one, exacerbated by recent changes to the control regime. A reference to this has been added to the relevant point in the text.
- 2.12 The Society express concerns about perceived over-development of sites within the town, ‘minor’ in terms of National Park impact, but significant nevertheless and arguably damaging to local street scenes. This observation questions aspects of the delegation arrangements

between the National Park Authority and Lewes District Council and raises concern regarding consistency of approach. These matters are relevant, but beyond the scope of this document.

- 2.13 There is also a concern about the incremental loss of trees over time. As they approach the end of their lives, they can be removed for reasons of natural decline or safety, too often, it is argued, without a subsequent requirement for replacement. Recent diseases affecting horse chestnuts and ash, following on from the depredations of Dutch Elm Disease, exacerbate this issue. These questions concerning arboreal health and resilience are major, Park-wide issues, transcend the scope of this document, but certainly deserve wider consideration.
- 2.14 The Society also raises strong concern about highway maintenance within the conservation area, with particular reference to the regulation of utility contractors, the gradual loss of historic surfacing and locally cast ironwork, poor matching of surfacing materials and kerbs and a general over-reliance on tarmac. Officers hope that improved working relationships and greater understanding between the Highways Authority and other stakeholders within the town may be forged over time, through the annual management meetings.
- 2.15 An interesting point is made concerning the use of semi-sacrificial plinth storeys to protect new development within flood protection areas. Where these developments are proposed against the context of historic development, designed in simpler times to 'take a chance', inevitable problems of differential massing result. These issues can be very difficult to resolve and are probably better addressed in a Local Plan policy context.
- 2.16 Where possible, amendments to the final text of the Management plan have been made to reflect detailed comments of the Society.

3. Other Considerations

- 3.1 The Management Plan cannot and does not take the place of a development brief or a development team approach for major sites which are likely to come forward for comprehensive redevelopment in the coming months and years. Some of these sites are substantial and have the potential to have a significant impact on the character of the conservation area and the town. Innovative management approaches may still be necessary on a case by case basis, in order to guide eventual development proposals in the immediate context of each site.

4. Resources

- 4.1 This Management Plan has been written by the Historic Building Officers of SDNPA. There are costs involved in the implementation of the proposed action points but the majority of these will be absorbed within the existing budgets of the Planning Service. Where this is not the case, external sources of funding will be sought.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 This Management Plan for the Lewes Conservation Area represents a long standing recommendation, first identified by the Conservation Studio in 2005 and incorporated in an adopted appraisal since 2007.
- 5.2 The Management Plan has stimulated interesting observations about the future direction of Lewes. The document is an interim document, with a likely life of around four years, to 2017. It is hoped that it will establish a baseline for future appraisal development beyond that date.

6. Risk management

- 6.1 Physical and environmental risks invoked by the recommendation are not significant.
- 6.2 Risk -were SDNPA to neglect the timely implementation of proposals arising from Conservation Area appraisal recommendations without good cause, a reputational risk could arise from inappropriate levels of control over new development.

Mitigation – agree to adopt the Conservation Area Management Plan

7. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

7.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

8. External Consultees

8.1 None.

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Appendices	Appendix I – Conservation Area Management Plan
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Planning, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer & Legal Services

Background Documents	Lewes Conservation Area Character Appraisal – April 2007 NPPF Friends of Lewes – Lewes Town-wide Arboretum – Survey Report and Feasibility Study Comments by the Friends of Lewes e-mail from the Lewes Buildings Preservation Trust Comments of the South Downs Society
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