



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL



BEDFORD CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

March 2011



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

- 1.1.1 The purpose of this plan is to provide a clear strategy for the management of Bedford Conservation Area in a manner that will safeguard and enhance its character and appearance. It follows on from, and should be read in conjunction with, the *Bedford Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2009)*, in which the special character and visual qualities of the area are identified, along with a number of key issues, problems and opportunities that are currently affecting the area.
- 1.1.2 As the Local Planning Authority, the Council is placed under a duty, by Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas. The Management Plan is intended to assist and guide all those involved with development and change not only within the boundaries but also within the setting of the Conservation Area. It sets out a framework for preserving special interest, makes proposals for enhancement, outlines the resources needed for implementation and provides for monitoring and review. The structure and content of the Management Plan follows the guidance set out in the English Heritage document '*Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*' (2006).
- 1.1.3 This Management Plan is an update to the previous plan dated March 2009. It has been updated to take account of the Council's bid for Townscape Heritage Initiative funding to secure the regeneration of Bedford High Street.

1.2 Public Consultation

- 1.2.1 The consultation exercise on the draft Management Plan was undertaken over a 4 week period from the 15th November to the 12th December 2010 and was conducted in accordance with the Local Development Framework *Statement of Community Involvement*. During this period the draft documents were available to view at the Town Hall, Bedford Central Library and other local libraries during opening hours, and on the Council's website www.bedford.gov.uk/planning. Letters were sent to 477 consultees outlining the consultation process and issued an invitation to an exhibition and public meeting. In addition, a press notice announcing the public consultation was placed in the Beds on Sunday and an article included in the November edition of Bedford News. A public exhibition on the draft documents was held in Bedford Library from Monday 15th November to Saturday 20th November and a public meeting held on Wednesday 1st December at the Harpur Suite in Bedford. A questionnaire form for comments was made available both as a download and online questionnaire, and in paper copy at each deposit location as well as at the exhibition and meeting. Responses could be submitted via the Council's website, by freepost or returned via a drop in the Town hall reception area. A report on the public consultation, including a summary and evaluation of the responses received along with an indication of how the views expressed have been incorporated into the final document has been prepared and can be inspected on request at the Council's offices.

1.3 Status

- 1.3.1 The Management Plan will be used as a technical document to provide guidance for owners and businesses in the Conservation Area; to inform and guide the development control process and policy formation; and to assist with the implementation of the Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme on High Street. It was formally adopted by the Council on 16th March 2011.

2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The Management Plan lies within a framework of local and national planning policy for the historic environment. General planning objectives, policies and proposals for the control of development and use of land in Bedford town centre are found in the emerging Bedford Development Framework (BDF) and in 'saved' policies from the adopted Bedford Local Plan (BLP).

2.2 Key objectives within the BDF *Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan* (adopted April 2008) that are relevant to the Conservation Area are:

- to reclaim Bedford's role as county town, building on its distinctive personality;
- the revitalisation and regeneration of the town centre;
- high quality design that takes account of local character and local distinctiveness;
- the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure;
- the protection and enhancement of built and cultural assets; and
- fostering the development of heritage and cultural tourism.



2.3 Key policies relevant to the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the Conservation Area are CP20 (Retail Hierarchy), CP21 (Designing in Quality), CP22 (Green Infrastructure), CP23 (Heritage) and CP28 (Local Transport Plan). Copies of the Core Strategy document are available to view on the Council's website (www.bedford.gov.uk/planning) or can be purchased from the Town Hall, price £5.00 or through the post by sending a cheque for £5.50 to Planning and Housing Services, Bedford Borough Council, Town Hall, St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SJ.

2.4 The *Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan* (adopted October 2008) forms part of the BDF and provides a framework for the regeneration of the town centre, identifying key areas of change, along with detailed policies and proposals. The draft proposals map shows four key areas of change within the Conservation Area and a further four located within its immediate setting. This plan is also available to view on the website or can be purchased from the Town Hall, price £10.00 or through the post by sending a cheque for £12.00 to the above address.



2.5 For a transitional period, a number of policies from the old style *Bedford Local Plan*, adopted in 2002, have also been saved and remain in force. Of specific relevance to the Conservation Area are policies BE9, BE11, BE13, BE15, BE16 and BE26. In addition, policies BE18, BE19, BE20, BE21, BE22, BE23, BE24 and BE25 are relevant to issues concerning listed buildings and sites of archaeological interest. Copies of these policies can be found at Appendix 3 of the Appraisal.

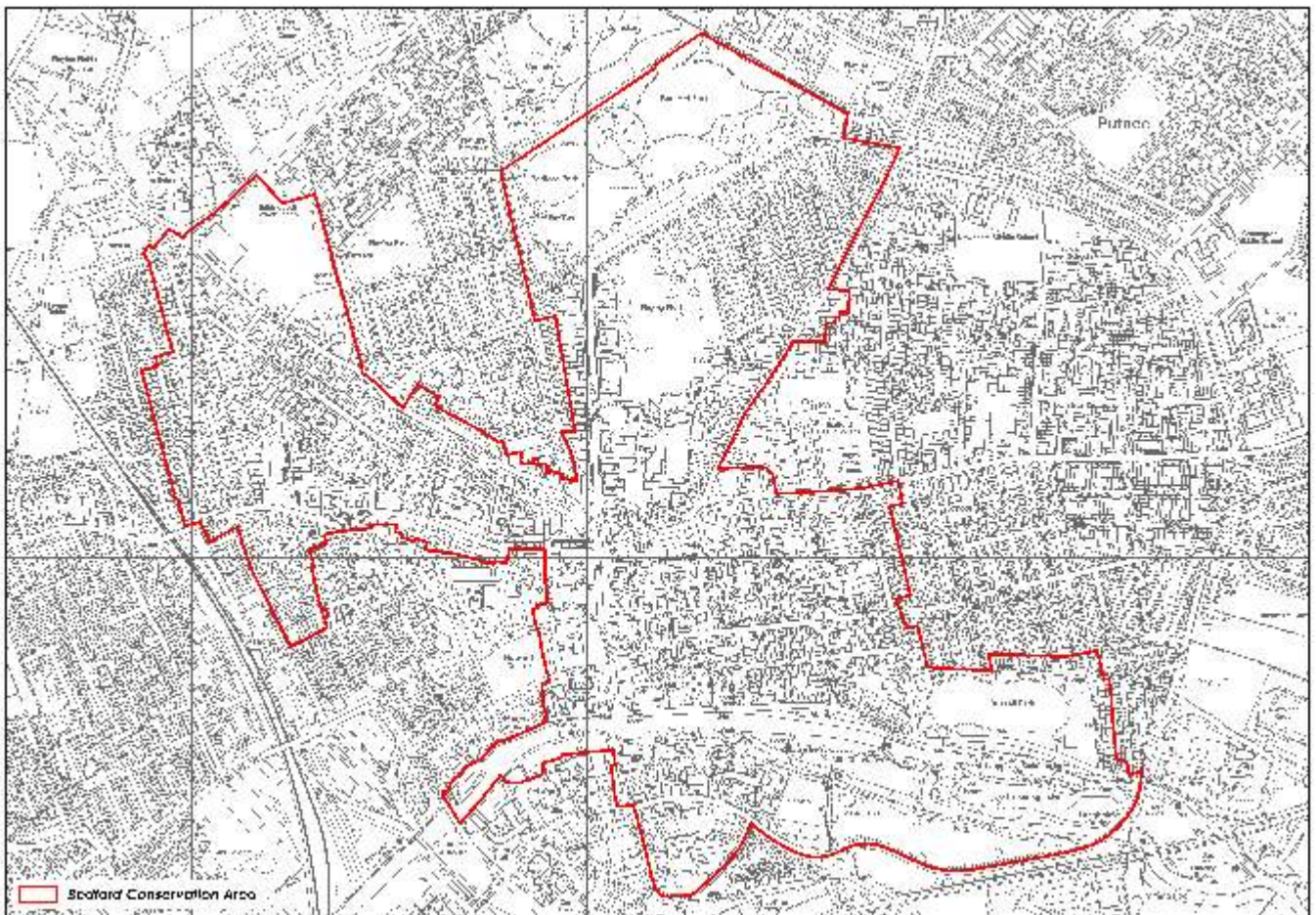


2.6 In 2005, the Council adopted a supplementary planning document entitled 'Shopfronts and Advertisements in Conservation Areas' as part of the LDF scheme. The aim of this guidance is to encourage shopfront design that respects the character both of individual premises and of the setting within the Conservation Area. This plan is also available to view on the website or can be purchased from the Town Hall, price £1.50 or through the post by sending a cheque for £3.00 to the above address.



2.7 In July 2010, the Council adopted a supplementary planning document entitled 'A Strategy for Bedford High Street'. This document sets out a vision for Bedford High Street over the coming years. This plan is also available to view on the website or can be purchased from the Town Hall, price £1.50 or through the post by sending a cheque for £3.00 to the above address.

2.8 This policy framework, along with national policy guidance, contained primarily in *PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment*, will be used to further the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.



Bedford Conservation Area

3 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Special Interest

3.1.1 As identified in the Appraisal, the distinctiveness of the Bedford Conservation Area derives from:

- its location at the heart of an historic market town, with a rich legacy of historic structures, particularly from the C18 and C19, including 114 listed buildings;
- its relationship with the River Great Ouse as a primary topographic feature in an unaccented valley landscape, as an east-west axis and anchor of built form and also as an historic source of trade and sustenance and with a present function as a key amenity space;
- the survival of a medieval street pattern based upon an even older north-south route to and from the river crossing point and upon the layout of two fortified Saxon burh's protected by ditches, including the surviving King's Ditch;
- the continuing significance of the river crossing point, which is marked by Town bridge, a listed structure and part of a scheduled ancient monument;



- the survival of ancient sites, including the Castle mound and early church buildings, and a legacy of archaeological potential;
- its ability to tell a coherent story of settlement from the Saxon period to the present day;
- its long term civic and educational role and the associated range of historic buildings and spaces;
- the consistency of plot layout, building lines, building scale and proportion and an intricate but accessible skyline;
- enclosure of the private realm;
- building and tree framed views, with subtle accents such as St Paul's spire and the suspension bridge;
- the consistent quality of its Georgian and Victorian architecture and the presence of mature public space and tree planting;
- the predominant use of red and soft yellow-grey stock brick, slate and red clay tiles and timber sash windows, in variety, and often with richly detailed entrances, recessed porches and decorative features but also with an important vein of ashlar and stucco;
- the unifying presence of stone kerbs and stone sett detail to carriageway margins.



3.2 Issues and Opportunities

3.2.1 As identified in the appraisal, current issues and opportunities within the Bedford Conservation Area relate to:



- legibility, sense of place and urban grain;
- safeguarding the legacy of historic buildings/structures and archaeological potential;
- vacancy/buildings at risk;
- erosion of character through inappropriate alteration, inappropriate maintenance or loss of architectural/other historic detail;



- the loss or modification of historic enclosure and securing appropriate enclosure;
- the impact of new development;
- the installation of inappropriately designed shopfronts, canopies, signage and security shutters;
- traffic and the quality of the public realm;



- car parking; and
- the management of trees and opportunities/need for new planting.

4 MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The following measures have been identified as ways in which to safeguard and enhance the distinctive character and appearance of the Conservation Area and to address the issues and opportunities identified above.
- 4.1.2 The measures are in accordance with national policy guidance and relevant local policies and complement the *Conservation Area Appraisal*.

Bedford 1610 (John Speed)



4.2 Urban Grain

- 4.2.1 The stages of development within the Conservation Area, from the town's medieval origins through to the Victorian period and beyond, can be clearly identified and are fundamental to its character and appearance. Examples include the tightly confined streets of the medieval core and the more orderly layout of streets and plots throughout the areas of later residential expansion. Street trees and treed spaces emphasise the hierarchy of spaces and provide an important counterpoint to buildings.



Bedford 1910

- 4.2.2 In places, this spatial organisation has been disrupted by redevelopment, whether involving the subdivision or amalgamation of original plots or development within the grounds of an original building. Characteristic spatial organisation has also been adversely affected by the loss of significant gaps between or around buildings, by loss of frontage definition and by some intermittent loss of street trees.

4.2.3 Proposed Measures:

- In accordance with saved Local Plan Policy BE13, there is a presumption against the demolition of historic buildings of townscape merit.
- The Council will require that proposals for new development are based on careful historical research and analysis in line with PPS5 Policy HE6 so that, where opportunity arises, the spatial characteristics of the Conservation Area are restored. This would pay regard to the English Heritage and Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) principles of good urban design in an historic context.
- The Council will seek to encourage the reinstatement of appropriate front boundary enclosure through the publication of information and/or through the planning process.
- The best practice maintenance and ongoing replacement or re-introduction of street trees and those within highway boundaries to maintain historic avenue and other planting will, where technically feasible, be a priority.
- The Council will seek to encourage the sensitive management of existing trees and the introduction or reinforcement of planting in private gardens and spaces.

4.3 Historic Buildings and Archaeological Potential

4.3.1 There are a significant number of historic timber framed buildings remaining in the Conservation Area. The majority of these are listed, though there is a possibility that others remain that do not currently benefit from statutory protection. Albion Archaeology's Archaeological Assessment of Bedford (2001, Ed. 2005) has also revealed the considerable archaeological potential of the Conservation Area.

4.3.2 Proposed Measures:



- In accordance with saved Local Plan Policy BE24, where a proposed development may affect a site or area of archaeological interest, any application for development should be accompanied by an archaeological desk based assessment.
- The Council will seek to identify and explore the availability of possible funding sources to commission a study to identify and assess remaining timber framed buildings within the Conservation Area.
- Subject to further investigation and resources, applications for statutory listing will continue to be made to English Heritage in respect of those buildings identified in the appraisal as having potential for statutory listing.
- The Council will consider the production of a list of locally important buildings to increase the focus of conservation policies on relevant buildings.

4.4 Buildings at Risk

4.4.1 The Council has recently completed its re-survey of statutorily listed buildings at risk in the Borough. The current list is available to view online on the Council's website or a copy may be viewed on request in Planning Reception at the Town Hall. The survey has highlighted several buildings at risk within the Conservation Area, notably on High St and St Paul's Square.

4.4.2 There are other non-statutorily listed buildings in the Conservation Area which are of positive merit but are suffering due to vacancy and/or a lack of maintenance.

4.4.3 Proposed Measures:

80 High Street



- The Council will contact the owners of those buildings in the Conservation Area, both statutorily listed or of positive merit, considered to be 'at risk' in order to discuss ways in which the safe upkeep and future preservation of those buildings may be safeguarded. The Council will also consider, where appropriate, the use of available statutory powers to ensure the preservation of listed buildings and buildings of positive merit.

4.5 Building Repair, Maintenance and Alteration

- 4.5.1 The preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of a Conservation Area is dependant, to a substantial degree, upon the retention and appropriate maintenance of its historic buildings and upon the nature of any alteration to the built fabric.
- 4.5.2 Many building works within the Conservation Area require planning permission, while those to listed buildings (See Appraisal: Appendix 4) may also require listed building consent; and the Council is under a duty to allow only development that will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 4.5.3 A number of buildings within the Conservation Area are suffering from inadequate or ill-advised maintenance and many more have been the subject of poorly conceived alteration. The original roof coverings and ridge details of many properties within the Conservation Area have been lost and replaced with profiled concrete tiles; chimney stacks have been demolished; natural stone dressings have been painted or cement rendered; windows have been replaced in altered styles and, increasingly, with UPVC frames; historic doors, door furniture and decorative ironwork features have also been lost. This loss is significant because the size, type, detailed design and fitting of windows and doors and other original details reveal a good deal about the age of a property, are of intrinsic interest and add value to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The retention of original materials is also more sustainable than their replacement.
- 4.5.4 In places, well composed architectural elevations have been disrupted, for instance, by the removal of bay windows or the introduction of integral garages. This is especially harmful where there are pairs or groups of matching buildings that bear witness to the involvement of a single builder/designer. Elsewhere, alterations and extensions have disrupted the regular rhythm of buildings and spaces.
- 4.5.5 It is considered that an Article 4(2) Direction would have clear and tangible benefits in safeguarding the Conservation area from the further erosion of its character and appearance.

4.5.6 Proposed Measures:



- The Council will seek to introduce an Article 4(2) Direction to prevent further harm due to the loss of original architectural features and/or inappropriate alteration. The Direction may cover the following classes of development:
 - Enlargement of a dwelling;
 - Removal, replacement or other alteration of a window or door;
 - Material alteration to the shape, appearance or volume of a roof;
 - Removal, replacement or other alteration of a roof covering;
 - Demolition or alteration of a chimney;



- Demolition, erection, improvement or alteration of a gate, wall, fence or other means of enclosure;
 - The alteration, removal or introduction of hard surfacing within gardens fronting onto a highway;
 - Cladding any part of the exterior;
 - Installation, alteration or replacement of a satellite antenna/dish which can be seen from a public viewpoint;
 - Rendering or painting any exterior masonry or brickwork.
- The Council will produce design guidance to assist owners with the care and repair of their properties. This guidance will be made available to owners at no cost both online and in paper form.
 - When determining applications for planning permission for alterations to buildings in the Conservation Area, the Council will permit only those proposals considered to preserve the character of the Conservation Area. The issues to be considered in assessing such applications will include proportion, height, massing, bulk, use of materials, use, relationship with adjacent assets, alignment and treatment of setting.
 - Before building works are put in hand within the Conservation Area, the Council should be consulted to establish whether formal permission is required. There are formal procedures to give owners certainty about the need for formal permissions.

4.6 Boundary Enclosure

4.6.1 Increasing car ownership together with an increase in demand for car parking space generated by the subdivision of single houses to flats, by other changes of use and by redevelopment within the Conservation Area is a major problem. It has led and is still leading to the loss of front and rear gardens, the loss of front boundary enclosure and the introduction of unattractive parking areas or garage courts that conflict with the urban grain of the area. These changes erode the character and quality of the townscape.

4.6.2 Proposed Measure:

- The introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction will be considered by the Council (see 4.5.6 above) to protect all authentic boundary walls/other means of enclosure from the creation of hardstandings in place of gardens.

4.7 New Development

4.7.1 The appraisal has identified the way in which the layout, scale and visual qualities of buildings contribute to the distinctive character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Where opportunities for enhancement by redevelopment exist, the Council is under a duty to allow only development that will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. The aim is therefore to achieve a successful juxtaposition of old and new that respects the historic context.

4.7.2 Proposed Measures:



- Any new development should comply with relevant planning policy and be based on sound urban design principles;
- Development proposals likely to affect the historic skyline and/or significant views within, into or out of the historic townscape should be accompanied by visual material, including verified views, to illustrate the likely visual impact.
- In the interim, the following guidelines should be followed:



- All forms of new development in the Conservation Area or affecting the setting of the Conservation Area should be contextually appropriate in respect of proportion, height, massing, bulk, use, relationship with adjacent buildings, alignment and treatment of setting;
- Carefully chosen materials should be used in order to exactly match or convincingly complement those used in the immediate setting;
- Careful attention should be paid to detail, including roof pitch and the distribution, proportions and detailing of openings;
- Boundaries should be carefully defined and the visual impact of parking and servicing space minimised.
- A bat assessment may be required where works to any historic building requires planning permission, listed building or Conservation Area consent.

4.8 Shopfronts, Canopies and Signs & Security Shutters

4.8.1 The Council's design guidance on shopfronts and advertisements in Conservation Areas underlines the vital role that shopfronts, signs and canopies play in contributing to the character and interest of the Borough's historic areas. It is considered that shopfronts, canopies, advertisements, signs and security shutters all have an adverse impact.



4.8.2 Proposed Measures:

- The Council will continue to operate the principles and practice described in the adopted design guide: *Shopfronts and Advertisements in Conservation Areas*.
- Where there is a demonstrable need to enhance security, there will be a presumption against externally mounted solid shutters. Detailed policy is contained within the Council's Supplementary Planning Document *Shopfronts and Advertisements in Conservation Areas*.
- Where works are undertaken without the necessary permissions/consents, the Council will seek to remedy the situation and this will, where necessary, involve enforcement action. (see also the Council's design guide *Shopfronts and Advertisements in Conservation Areas*).

4.9 Highways, Traffic Management and the Public Realm

4.9.1 Highway design and traffic flow both impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the adverse impact of highway improvements can be seen in several locations.

4.9.2 Traffic management measures are equally functional but pay insufficient regard to the historic townscape. Examples include signage and other paraphernalia associated with pedestrian crossings, road closure and speed reduction. These frequently detract from the appearance of the Conservation Area.

4.9.3 The design of lighting, surfacing and other street furniture is also influential. The approach taken to the public realm has in many cases been functional, resulting in an incoherent, though fairly limited, range of modern materials and design detail used for surfacing, railings, light columns, bollards and other street furniture.

4.9.4 The most consistent historic details across the Conservation Area are the stretches of original stone kerbs and the repetitive sett detail found along most carriageway edges. There are also a good number of historic light columns, albeit modified and poorly maintained. The retention and enhancement of all these historic features should be seen as an important priority.



4.9.5 Proposed Measures:

While it is recognised that there will inevitably be tension between issues of cost, quality and ongoing maintenance, the following measures are put forward to safeguard the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area:

- The Council will ensure that the replacement and maintenance of existing street works or new street works across the Conservation Area is undertaken in agreed materials and designs in order to produce a unified, consistent and high quality public realm that is consistent with the historic context;
- The Council will ensure the retention of all existing constructional and surfacing materials and street furniture which contribute positively to the character of the Conservation Area.
- The Council will ensure that new street furniture, including signage, is sympathetic to the particular character of its location.
- The Council will engage with stakeholders to achieve a unified design approach to works in the public realm in the Conservation Area, in line with national guidance.

4.10 Open Space and Trees

4.10.1 The grand open spaces of Bedford Park, Russell Park and The Embankment/Mill Meadows make an enormously important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The treatment of certain boundaries and entrances into the parks from neighbouring streets offers opportunities to strengthen the historic landscape.

4.10.2 Many modest open spaces, including gardens, and trees in both the public and private realm, make a vital contribution to the urban grain and visual quality of the Conservation Area and should be carefully managed and enhanced.



4.10.3 Proposed Measures:

- The Council will seek to ensure that management programmes for the historic parks reflect the guidance in this document;
- The Council will encourage stakeholders and the local community to produce management plans for smaller spaces to preserve and enhance their character and appearance (for example, spaces in Dynevor Road, Linden Road and Rothsay Gardens, to the Rothsay Road circus and the area around St John's Church and Hospital);
- In partnership with other stakeholders, the Council will ensure that the tree population of the Conservation Area is protected in accordance with government guidelines.



5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TRAINING

5.1 Community Engagement

5.1.1 The Council will undertake a number of initiatives during the life of the plan to ensure stakeholders and the community are engaged in decisions affecting their community.

- This Conservation Area Management Plan will be reviewed every four years to ensure it contains current issues and relates to any changes in legislation or policy which may occur. The consultation on the plan will include a public meeting and exhibition, following engagement with key stakeholders at the time of the review.
- The Council will ensure that all planning and associated applications are available online for ease of access to information. This will enable the community to engage at a deeper level.
- The Council will seek to designate an elected member of the Borough Council as a Design and Heritage Champion. These champions are supported by the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment and English Heritage. They will receive the relevant free training and ensure that design and heritage issues are considered in all areas of the Council's business.
- The Council will ensure that at least one relevant question on the Bedford Conservation Area is included on the biennial questions set for the Citizens' Panel.

5.2 Training

5.2.1 The Council is committed to widening and deepening local knowledge and practice of heritage education and skills.

- When appropriate, and subject to resources, the Council will develop, with stakeholders and the local community, a Heritage Training and Education Plan. Many activities within the Plan would establish a legacy of materials for future use.
- The Council will take advantage of the free training provided for its planning staff through the Historic Environment Local Management Initiative: www.helm.org.uk
- The Council will widen and deepen awareness of heritage issues through the annual Heritage Open Days programme, held in September each year.

6 PUTTING THE PLAN INTO PRACTICE: RESOURCES, MONITORING AND REVIEW

6.1 Resources

- 6.1.1 Significant expenditure will be required for some of the proposals put forward and the Council will continue to pursue opportunities for funding, for example through the Heritage Lottery Fund or by planning obligations. Some, however, can be secured by influencing and encouraging investment decisions made by individual property owners, at no public cost.

6.2 Monitoring

- 6.2.1 The monitoring of the condition of the Conservation Area over the lifetime of the Conservation Area Management Plan and beyond will be essential to the success of the Plan. A number of measures are proposed:
- The Council will ensure that through the conveyance process new owners are advised of the Council's responsibilities to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the character of the Conservation Area and appropriate maintenance and repair of buildings within the Conservation Area.
 - The Council will actively work with building owners in pre-planning application discussions to achieve the most appropriate design solution for its context.
 - The Council will ensure that appropriate enforcement action is taken, to preserve the character of the Conservation Area. Such action will proceed according to tightly defined timescales.
 - The Council will produce an Annual Monitoring Report to include the statistics on the number of enforcement cases investigated, number of enforcement breaches and number of successful enforcement cases in the Bedford Conservation Area.

6.3 Review

- Where resources allow, the Conservation Area will be reviewed on a four yearly basis and the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan will be updated where necessary.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The successful management of the Conservation Area will depend on the joint commitment of the local planning authority and other stakeholders, including those living and working in the area.
- 7.2 General advice about matters related to the historic environment, including Conservation Areas and listed buildings can be sought from the Council's Historic Environment Team, which is part of Planning Services at the Town Hall. The team are happy to provide advice on any aspect of the built environment within the Bedford Conservation Area and to receive further ideas concerning its preservation and enhancement.

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