

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT)**

SUBJECT: **GWAENYSGOR CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL
AND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 To seek Cabinet approval of the Gwaenysgor Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan attached to this report as appendix 1.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest. The local planning authority has a statutory duty to designate them and to preserve and enhance their special character or appearance. Permission may be needed before undertaking works to any property within a conservation area.
- 2.02 A number of features may make up the character of a conservation area, such as the predominant use of certain building materials, architectural styles and features, a particular road layout or development pattern. Archaeology, the local topography, trees, landscaping, the wider landscape, views and vistas are also important.
- 2.03 There are currently 32 conservation areas in Flintshire:
- Centres of historic market towns (3): Flint, Holywell, and Mold.
 - Parts of villages (18): Cadole, Caergwrle, Caerwys, Cilcain, Ffynnongroyw, Gorsedd, Gwaenysgor, Gwespyr, Halkyn, Hawarden, Llanasa, Nannerch (2), Nercwys, Northop, Trelawnyd, Whitford, and Ysceifiog.
 - Smaller designations (11): Gladlys, Glan yr Afon, Kinsale Hall, Leeswood Hall, Lygan y Wern, Oakenholt Hall, Pantasaph, Plas Bellin, Plas Onn, Talacre Abbey, and The Wern.
- 2.04 The planning authority is required by law to give special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of each conservation area under its jurisdiction. It is a duty of that authority to formulate and publish guidance as to what that character is and to make recommendations on how it can be

preserved or enhanced. The guidance attached to this report for Gwaenysgor begins a process to update the appraisals of all of Flintshire's conservation areas to align them with policies to protect their special character in the adopted UDP. This guidance was drawn up with the help and assistance of the local village community, the Community Council, and the Local Member. It is intended to assist in:

- Formulating and assessing development proposals;
- Protecting important heritage assets such as historic buildings and walls;
- Promoting beneficial change to enhance the special character.

2.05 The law requires that local planning authorities pay special attention in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. This means that they must take account of this in the adoption of planning and other Council policies, development control decisions, enforcement, controls relating to trees, advertisements, properties in need of maintenance and in exercising their highway powers. The Act also places a continuing duty on the Council to consider whether they should designate new conservation areas or extend existing ones.

2.06 Gwaenysgor is one of eight villages with conservation areas that had been previously selected for initial appraisal and public engagement work. These conservation areas were selected as they were all within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) providing an additional context to ensure that the special character of these villages was assessed and maintained. Due to its compact size, the fact that Gwaenysgor has one of the earliest designated conservation areas, and the fact that public expectation had previously been raised as part of earlier community consultation, Gwaenysgor was selected as the first to bring forward a management plan for, with others to follow on in future.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Gwaenysgor conservation area was designated in 1970 and includes most of the village centre but omits the newer developments to the North and east as well as some historic buildings and spaces. Within conservation areas there is substantial control over the demolition of houses and on the removal of features such as chimneys. Proposals for removal of trees within conservation areas must also be submitted to the planning authority.

3.02 The appraisal is supported by a management plan whose purpose is to identify actions and policies that can protect and in some cases strengthen the special local character of the village and protect it for many years to come. Members will have noted that not only has the appraisal looked at the status of the buildings within the existing conservation area, but it has also identified changes by way of

extensions to the boundary first drawn up in 1970.

3.03 The appraisal undertaken used a set of defined reference points to assess the positive character of the conservation area, and the degree to which this had either remained since designation, or had been eroded. The positive character is the sum of the following features:

- The quality of the spaces shaped by the traditional road and building pattern;
- The relationship of the traditional buildings clustering around these routes;
- The predominant building style and materials;
- Long views into and out of this elevated village;
- The rural character of the traditional street scene.

3.04 As part of the appraisal and particularly with the involvement of the village and Community Council and Local Member, a number of negative factors were identified. Those aspects which were found to detract from the special character are:

- The ubiquitous styles, form and detailing of newer buildings, even where traditional materials are used;
- The introduction of modern window frames, doors and finishes on heritage buildings;
- The impact of increased vehicular use and introduction of signs and road markings;
- The loss of some views towards or over the village which have been obscured by overgrown hedges;
- The oddly low key presence of the church despite it being the former focal point of village life;
- The management of part of the churchyard as a nature reserve is considered by some to be unsightly and disrespectful of its role as a burial ground;
- The loss of open space and a possible archaeological site to new development.

3.05 The survey carried out for this appraisal has identified serious erosion of the character of the area resulting from development which is normally permitted without the need for planning permission. Given this, it is considered important to exercise control over the future replacement of features such as windows and doors in order to reinstate the lost architectural character. To achieve this control, officers consider that an Article 4 Direction should be introduced through the planning process to put tighter restrictions on the usual householder permitted development rights in order to control such small-scale changes. During the public consultation period some residents expressed concern at the high cost of installing replacement timber windows compared with that of plastic framed windows.

- 3.06 However, an Article 4 Direction will usually only affect the parts of a property that front onto a highway - such as restricting the replacement of windows, doors and controlling roof extensions, which is not considered to be particularly onerous given the overriding principle of maintaining and enhancing the quality environment of the conservation area.
- 3.07 Members are therefore requested to endorse the principle of making an Article 4 direction for the Gwaenysgor Conservation Area which will then need to be the subject of a separate report to the Cabinet. It is proposed to introduce restrictions to householder rights covering changes such as the replacement or alteration of windows and doors on the principal elevation facing a road, and the removal or alteration of parts of boundary walls facing the highway.
- 3.08 Where permitted development rights are removed by an Article 4 Direction, planning permission will be required for the work. That means the local planning authority will be able to make sure that alterations are made in a way that is in keeping with the character of the conservation area. The planning authority will require genuine vertical sliding sash and case windows which are traditionally proportioned where the Article 4 applies. However, in recognition of some residents concerns about the relatively high cost of timber windows, the Article 4 will be restricted to the principal elevation of each building only rather than all road facing sides. This elevation is normally the one containing the front door. There is no fee for the planning application if the work would ordinarily have been permitted development.
- 3.09 This Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan represents the first of a planned programme of work to review and assess all of Flintshire's 32 designated areas. This may lead for example to further requests to make Article 4 Directions in order to prevent the erosion of special character in an area, but equally it may also lead to recommendations to de-designate certain conservation areas where the character has been eroded to such an extent that the designation is no longer appropriate or relevant.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That Members endorse the Gwaenysgor Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan contained in appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.02 That Members endorse the principle of making an Article 4 Direction as set out in paragraphs 3.05-3.07 of this report.
- 4.03 That delegated authority is given to the Chief Officer Planning and Environment to make necessary changes to allow the report to be finalised for publication.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 None.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 The meeting of the Planning Strategy Group held on 6th November 2014 and the final draft has subsequently been distributed to the community, Community Council and Local Member.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Several engagement sessions with the community including a 'walk around' site visit with community representatives and a public meeting in the village hall.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Gwaenysgor Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Contact Officer: **Andy Roberts**
Telephone: **01352 703211**
Email: andy.roberts@flintshire.gov.uk