

TO: ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 3RD FEBRUARY 2004

**SUBJECT: WARWICK DISTRICT TOWNS CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY FORUM
(ANNUAL REVIEW)**

FROM: PLANNING AND ENGINEERING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an annual progress report on the functioning of the Warwick Towns Conservation Area Advisory Forum.

2. BACKGROUND

At the Executive in April 2002 it was agreed to extend the remit of the Royal Leamington Spa Conservation Area Advisory Forum to cover the four towns within Warwick District. It was agreed that after six months the effectiveness of the extended Conservation Area Advisory Forum would be reviewed and this was carried out by a report to the Executive on 10th February 2003. At that time it was requested that a further progress report be prepared a year from that date.

The present arrangement

The purpose of the Conservation Area Advisory Forum is to comment on Listed Building and Planning applications within the Conservation Areas of Royal Leamington Spa, Warwick, Kenilworth and Whitnash. The composition of the Forum is made up by four elected members, one of whom is appointed as Chairman, and representatives of local and national amenity groups and other interested bodies.

In order to maintain the agendas of the Forum to a manageable length, following the incorporation of Warwick, Kenilworth and Whitnash, a two part agenda was introduced whereby applications on Part II would not be open for discussion (unless requested by Forum members).

Recommendations of the 2003 Review

At the time of the review in February 2003, an average number of items for the total agenda was recorded as 26.5 items. For the past year, an average has been calculated of 26.9 items indicating only a very marginal increase in the number of items dealt with. It was recommended in the report of the 10th February 2003 that the number of items on Part II should be increased to include more minor, non-contentious items which would not be discussed at the meeting. Looking at the overall breakdown since the last report, it was recorded last year that an average of 23 items were dealt with on Part I and 3.5 items on Part II. For the past year, this average has changed to 17.18 items being dealt with on Part I and 9.8 items being dealt with on Part II. The recommendation, therefore, has been followed through by increasing the number of items dealt with on Part II of the agenda, thus increasing the overall efficiency of the group by marginally reducing the number of items on Part I.

It was also recommended that the number of items presented photographically could be reduced at the discretion of the Planning Officer and, in this context, although a numerical record has not been kept, it can be reported that there has been a reduction in the number of on site photographs and, where possible, application photographs have been used.

The reduced number of Part I items has also meant that less photographs are required overall to present the items.

Staffing implications

In terms of the staffing time taken to prepare and present the items to the Forum, this has remained stable in terms of the Principal Architect/Planner's time. With the help of new technology, the procedures for obtaining information for the agenda and also preparing the drawings for presentation to the Forum have become more streamlined. This has led to more effective and efficient use of the Conservation Assistant's time.

Financial implications

An assessment was carried out last year of the cost of servicing the Forum by Members Services and the Print Unit who provide the agendas and also the drawing copies for the Forum members. This was recorded as £27.00 per meeting last year and this has not changed.

Membership of Forum

The current membership is made up of four elected members of the Council plus the following representatives of local interest groups – The Leamington Society, The Warwick Society, The Kenilworth Society, The Whitnash Society, Central Leamington Residents Association, The Leamington Chamber of Trade, The Kenilworth Chamber of Trade, The Warwick Chamber of Trade, The Ancient Monuments Society, the local branch of the Royal Institute of British Architects, the local branch of the Royal Institute of Town Planners, The Georgian Group and The Victorian Society.

Sadly, during 2003 David Brown a founder member of CAAF and highly respected RIBA representative passed away.

Forum members have been asked to comment on the current membership and attendance at meetings over the past year. It was noted that there has been consistent support from all of the amenity bodies, however the Chambers of Trade have not been attending the Forum meetings. It was suggested that the Chambers of Trade be approached as to whether they still wished to retain membership of the Forum and in the case of Kenilworth it was suggested that the High Street Traders Association may be a more effective body as they are responsible for business premises within the Conservation Area. It was generally felt that members of the Forum should represent the Forum first and their society or amenity body secondly. It was also recommended that a letter be sent to all members to remind them that a substitute member may be sent from their society when they are unable to attend.

Value and effectiveness of Forum

The Forum provides a level of open discussion on planning and Listed Building applications and other factors affecting the Conservation Area in Warwick District, enabling a collective comment to be passed onto the Planning Committee or to officers dealing with other issues to assist with the decision making process. Although each of the towns has a Town Council, their role is rather different to that of the Conservation Area Advisory Forum whose main concern is with the protection and enhancement of the Conservation Area in each town. Whilst each of the Forum members have the opportunity to comment on behalf of their organisation, as already mentioned the facility to discuss applications openly as Forum members highlights aspects which may not necessarily arise from individual consultations and these can be brought forward as part of the collective responses.

The provision of the CAAF is in line with the recommendations contained both within the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and PPG15 and also fulfils a significant public participatory role in the field of conservation within the district. Members were asked for their views on the effectiveness of the Forum over the past year and it was felt that the Planning Committee do appreciate the comments which are made by the Forum and in most instances use these comments in the decision making process. This year a problem was highlighted where the Forum dates were slightly out of step with the Planning Committee dates, however, this has now been resolved and appears to have arisen from the gap at the end of the Council year between April and June when no meeting was held. It may therefore be necessary to hold a special meeting during this period to avoid this problem arising again at the end of the Council year in 2004.

Concerns were expressed at the quality of drawings of some of the submitted applications. This is an issue which has been passed back to the Planning Committee in terms of acceptable standards of presentation drawings to accompany an application.

During the past year the CAAF have looked not only at Planning and Listed Building applications but have also made comments on the Local Plan Review, the Conservation Area Reviews in Leamington and Warwick, the Court Street Brief, the Leamington Safety Project on the Parade and the Warwick Traffic Management Scheme and other more minor non application related issues concerning the Conservation Areas.

3. **POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

The provision of a Conservation Area Advisory Forum is a direct means of public participation in the planning process.

The present budgeting implications of servicing the CAAF have already been discussed.

4. **CONCLUSION**

The review process has demonstrated that the number of applications on average dealt with has remained constant over the year, however, the number on Part I has marginally reduced with an increased number on Part II, thus demonstrating an effectiveness in terms of both officer time spent on the Forum and the time spent at the Forum meetings. Officer time has remained generally stable for the Principal with some reduction of time taken photographing items. The Assistant's time preparing the agenda and presentation drawings is now utilised more efficiently with the help of improved technology.

There has been no change in the budgetary implications. Members of the Forum have remained reasonably stable with the exception of The Chambers of Trade who have not been attending and a recommendation has been made for concluding this issue. It was generally felt that the effectiveness of the Forum has remained consistent and is still of value in the planning process.

5. **OUTCOMES REQUIRED**

(i) That the contents of this report are noted and that Warwick Towns Conservation Area Forum continues in its present format servicing the four towns within the district.

(ii) That members are approached concerning their attendance at meetings and membership of the Forum as outlined in the report. All members are to be reminded that substitutes can be sent when they are unable to attend.

(iii) That a further report is taken to the Environmental Scrutiny Committee in one year's time.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

See Conservation Area Advisory Forum files.
Constitution of Conservation Area Advisory Forum-Executive Portfolio Holder.

For further information about this report please contact:

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Areas in District Affected: Leamington, Warwick, Kenilworth and Whitnash