

Application No:

Town/Parish Council: District-wide
Case Officer: Nick Corbett

Registration Date:
Expiry Date:

Review of the WDC Conservation Advisory Forum (CAF)

This report updates Planning Committee on the recent review of the Warwick District Conservation Advisory Forum (CAF), and makes recommendations for minor revisions to the way in which CAF operates.

CONSULTATION

The Head of Development Services, the Development Manager, and the Principal Conservation Officer, have held two meetings with Members of CAF, as part of the review process. The consultation responses are included in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Committee notes the responses to the consultation on the operation of Warwick District Conservation Advisory Forum (as set out at Appendix 1).

Planning Committee is recommended to agree the following amendments to the operation of CAF and its Constitution:

That CAF meetings remain linked to the Planning Committee cycle, currently every four-weeks, and the Constitution of CAF is amended to reflect the meetings taking place once every four weeks, with a revised start time to be in normal office hours of Warwick District Council, normally starting at 2.30 PM.

That the meetings will be held in a room, provided free of charge by the Council, normally at Riverside House (Room 2.37).

Meetings will not normally last longer than two hours and the number of schemes considered will be managed to fit within this time scale.

That the Council will no longer pay for sandwiches and other refreshments at CAF meetings.

That appropriate District Council officers will continue to attend CAF meetings and will provide the agenda, presentation of cases, and the minutes, but this will be monitored over the next 12 months and impact on resources will be reported as part of the next Annual Review.

That Planning Committee confirms the remit of Warwick District Conservation Advisory Forum as set out in the revised Constitution of CAF at Appendix 2.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Warwick District Council benefits from the free expert advice provided by CAF, and CAF enables the Council to work collaboratively with a range of community and professional organisations with specialist conservation knowledge. In return, the Council meets CAF's operational costs, including officer time to attend and administer their meetings (preparation of agenda, assembling a presentation of schemes, and writing up the minutes), room hire, and provision of sandwiches and refreshments. Given the challenging financial climate which has impacted across all areas of the Council, various options have been considered to reduce the Council's costs incurred in supporting CAF. Three possible options were identified:

- 1: No change; CAF continues to operate as existing
- 2: The Council withdraws its financial support, such that CAF would continue on an independent basis
- 3: The Council continues to support CAF in a more streamlined way and with reduced costs

Consultation was undertaken on the work of CAF and its remit. The responses to which are set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

CAF is a working party established by the Planning Committee and therefore any changes to its remit (as defined in the CAF Constitution) must receive approval by Planning Committee.

The amendments to the Constitution of CAF regarding the frequency of its meetings is required to confirm the actual working practice of CAF since the Planning Committee moved to meetings every four weeks.

Following detailed discussion with Members of CAF, Councillors, and officers, potential cost savings have been identified if Riverside House is used for CAF meetings rather than the Town Hall, and if meetings are restricted to two hours, held within normal Council office hours; and if sandwiches and refreshments are no longer provided at the Council's expense, thus reducing cost.

It is important that the level of officer support is closely monitored, recorded and reviewed to ensure the Council is achieving value for money from this work. Therefore this will form a key part of the review in 2017.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The purpose of CAF is to assist in protecting and enhancing the District's special historic and architectural character, (see Appendix 2), which supports the Council's Corporate Fit for the Future policy and its vision for making Warwick District a great place to live work and visit; it also supports the heritage protection policies in the adopted Development Plan.

The Constitution for CAF requires that the Council's Development Manager will measure the effectiveness of CAF in delivering its purpose, and undertake an Annual Review of its membership and operation. The purpose of the Annual Report is to demonstrate the Forum's performance over the previous year.

BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

The Council currently provides the Council Chamber in Leamington Town Hall, free of charge, for CAF meetings, foregoing potential commercial booking income of £43.50 per hour. There will be no cost to the Council in holding meetings in Riverside House nor impact on any potential income.

Sandwiches are currently provided at a cost of £5.25 per head, (£52.50 per meeting), and drinks at £1.75 per person (£17.50 per meeting), which will be discontinued as a result of the revised start time. This will provide a saving to the Council of £840 per year.

The Chair of CAF is eligible for a special responsibility allowance of £1,115. This is currently under review, as are all Special Responsibility Allowances as part of the Independent Review of Member's Allowances.

RISKS

There is a risk that if CAF meetings are no longer held in the convenient and relatively prestigious environment of the Town Hall, and if refreshments are no longer available, members of CAF may feel undervalued and disinclined to volunteer their time. However, the proposed venue of Riverside House is just outside of the town centre, includes free visitor car parking for two hours, and refreshments can be purchased, by individuals, in 'The Space'.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Two alternative options have been identified:

1: No change; CAF continues to operate as existing, this was disregarded because of the need to make efficiency and cost savings.

2: The Council withdraws its financial support, such that CAF would continue on an independent basis, this was disregarded because of the valuable service the council receives from members of CAF volunteering

their time, and because of concerns expressed by CAF members during the consultation exercise.

BACKGROUND

The last review of CAF was undertaken in April 2012. The requirement is that reviews are carried out annually. Given the time that has elapsed since the last review and the need for all services to consider how cost-savings can be made, challenging questions have been asked as to whether CAF should continue in its present form.

CAF met on ten occasions during the last year (April 2015 – March 2016) and provided advice on 49 schemes (43 submitted applications, and 6 pre-application schemes). All meetings were held within Leamington Town Hall.

The following representatives are members and regular attendees of CAF:

Councillor Mrs P Cain (Chair), (WDC)
Councillor G. Illingworth (Vice-Chair), (WDC)
Mrs R Bennion (CLARA)
Mr P Edwards (Leamington Society)
Mr M Sullivan (Royal Town Planning Institute)
Mr M Baxter (The Victorian Society)
Cllr G Cain (Kenilworth Society)
Mr J Mackay (Warwick Society)
Dr C Hodgetts (Warwickshire Gardens Trust)
Mr A Pitts (The Twentieth Century Society)
Mrs Kimberley (CPRE)
Mr R Ward (RIBA)

The following organisations are invited to attend CAF but did not attend in the last year; efforts will be made to understand why they did not attend, and they will be encouraged to attend in the future:

The Whitnash Society
Warwick Rural West
The Georgian Group
Leamington Chamber of Trade
Warwick Chamber of Trade
Kenilworth Chamber of Trade
The Rural Community of Forums
Royal Leamington Spa Chamber of Trade

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

It was initially proposed in the consultation that the administration of CAF meetings (setting the agenda, preparing the presentation, taking the minutes, etc.), be taken over by members of the group, rather than being done by officers, and the following responses were received in response to this:

From James Mackay, CAF member representing the Warwick Society

- 1) The document (an earlier version of this report, which proposed transfer or responsibilities from officers to members of CAF) provides no evidence that the review required by the Constitution – of the CAF’s effectiveness, membership, operation and performance – has been carried out, nor that the recommendations are based on any evidence from it. Nor does it deal with the role of CAF as part of the Council’s Heritage Strategy.
- 2) The CAF’s main purpose is to act as a ‘critical friend’ and adviser to the Council, helping to improve the quality of its decisions about the historic buildings and landscapes which contribute both beauty and value to the District, its people, and the nation.
- 3) The CAF should meet each four weeks, tied to the cycle of Planning Committee meetings. The old schedule of each three weeks was changed when the Planning Committee meetings did. Calendar monthly meetings would not allow the CAF to function effectively in the lead times of applications and committee meetings.
- 4) The agenda of the CAF should continue to include all significant Listed Building and Conservation Area applications, and, when appropriate, pre-application discussions on forthcoming developments. It should not be limited arbitrarily to four items, rather it must be able to give advice on whatever comes forward. Its agenda should continue to be drafted by the Principal Conservation Officer, with additional items put forward by other participants when they see a need.
- 5) It should correspondingly not be unduly limited in time. Everyone supports being efficient, but the maximum time allowed must have regard to the number of applications which might be on the agenda.
- 6) There may be an advantage in the meetings starting at 2pm or 4pm on Thursdays, so that there is sufficient time within the ordinary working day for the Principal Conservation Officer’s attendance. The argument that they should be in Riverside House rather than the Town Hall, based on hypothetical income that might be earned should the Town Hall room be hired for another purpose, is spurious. There would be advantages of access and convenience if the meetings continued to be held in the Town Hall.
- 7) The minutes should remain the responsibility of the Principal Conservation Officer, for four reasons:
 - consistency;

- so that any queries from his case officer colleagues can be dealt with directly;
- so that the CAF's advice is integrated and consistent with his own advice to case officers;
- and so that they are 'owned' by the development department, rather than being seen as external intrusion

Comments from Mr. Archie Pitts, CAF member representing the Twentieth Century Society

1. The meetings of CAF should be aligned to those of the Planning Committee so that CAF's views can be relayed to the Committee in good time to be incorporated in the report to the councillors. The timing and number of meetings of CAF should match those of the Planning Committee.
2. While meetings of CAF should always be conducted with reasonable speed, they should not be curtailed by the closure of Riverside House at 19.00. No one wants prolonged meetings. Volunteers' time is also valuable, although not a cost to WDC.
3. Minutes reflecting the collective view of CAF should be taken by the Conservation Officer. This has always been the case. At present he does this at the meeting, typing them up case by case, and agreed by all present. This is done well and expeditiously; it is hard to see any way to improve this procedure.
4. Minutes produced by the WDC Conservation Officer have greater authority than those of the individual members of CAF which could be accused of bias in favour of the organisations they represent.

Comments from Ms. Cathy Kimberley, CAF member representing the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

I note that no changes are proposed to the Purpose and role of CAF, nor its membership, and the stated aim of the proposed amendments is to continue to support CAF in a more streamlined and cost-effective way:

1. I believe the stated benefits of using Riverside House as the meeting venue are outweighed by the potential impact on the effectiveness of the service CAF provides by a proposed limitation of the meeting time to 1.5 hours between 17.30 hrs and 19.00 hrs, and the restriction of the number of schemes for consideration to fit within the time allocated.

I think the inclusion of items on the Agenda should depend on their relevance to the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. However, apart from the number of Agenda items, the particular issues arising during the discussion for each scheme under consideration would remain somewhat unpredictable. The Report refers to the fact that meetings can currently take up to 3 hours, so 1.5 hours (due to the 7.00 p.m. closure time) appears to be too short to meet the CAF objectives.

For the reasons above, I think that meetings should begin at 4.30 p.m. or earlier. However, if this is not possible on particular occasions, then the alternative of the Town Hall should, perhaps, be used to allow a later meeting time.

2. I do not see that the proposal to undertake the minutes on a rota basis is a practical arrangement as Nick Corbett, in effect, centrally co-ordinates the distribution of the advice provided by CAF, which is currently summarised at the meeting itself by agreement and forms the basis for the minutes. This is currently a timely and efficient single process arrangement, and an alternative one for members of CAF to produce the draft minutes on a rota basis could result in inconvenient delays. It may also be the case that Nick Corbett would continue to make notes for his own use, which may mean there would be unnecessary duplication.

Warwick District Council
Conservation Advisory Forum Constitution

Purpose & Role

The purpose of the Conservation Advisory Forum is to assist in protecting and enhancing the District's special historic and architectural character

The role of the Conservation Advisory Forum is therefore:

1. To provide expert, constructive, impartial advice on historic buildings and their use, historic landscapes, and Conservation Areas to:
 - a. potential applicants and the Council at the pre-application stage (before submission) of an application that may affect the historic environment;
 - b. applicants and the Council (including the right to speak at Planning Committee on any item) by commenting on planning, listed building, conservation, advertisement, and tree applications that may affect the historic environment;
 - c. the Council and other bodies, such as Town and Parish Councils, on the designation of the historic environment, and formulation of policy and guidance relevant to the historic environment;
 - d. the Planning Inspectorate when determining appeals for planning and listed building applications that may affect the historic environment; and,
 - e. the Council and other statutory bodies when undertaking works under their statutory powers that may affect the historic environment.
2. To draw the Council's attention to possible unauthorised works to the historic environment; and,
3. To provide a forum for the sharing of knowledge and experience of best practice in relation to the historic environment between members of the Forum, officers of the Council and developers.

The Forum is an informal consultative body organised by Warwick District Council.

Membership & Roles

The Forum will consist of the following members:

1. Two elected Members of Warwick District Council who have an interest in the historic environment and planning matters.

Their role is to Chair and Vice Chair the Forum, give legitimacy to the Forum, inform its views through sharing their knowledge, and help develop their experience of the historic environment and planning matters.

The Chair of the Forum shall also act as the Council's Heritage Champion in promoting the historic environment both within the Council and the wider community. The Vice Chair shall be a Member with a desire to have a future involvement in Planning matters.

Elected Members may feedback the views of the Forum to District Council Ward Members as appropriate to individual cases.

2. One representative from each of the following organisations who will be invited to represent the views of that organisation on the historic environment at the Forum:

- a. Leamington Society
- b. Warwick Society
- c. Kenilworth Society
- d. Whitnash Society
- e. Victorian Society
- f. Georgian Group
- g. Twentieth Century Society
- h. Warwickshire Gardens Trust
- i. Central Leamington Area Residents Association
- j. Royal Town Planning Institute
- k. Royal Institute of British Architects
- l. Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- m. Royal Leamington Spa Chamber of Trade
- n. Warwick Chamber of Trade
- o. Kenilworth Chamber of Trade
- p. Campaign to Protect Rural England
- q. Representative of the Rural Community Forums

Elected Members and representatives will be allowed to nominate a substitute to carry out their duties in the event of them being unable to attend a Forum meeting. A meeting will only be considered quorate if at least one elected Member and five representatives are in attendance.

Operation of the Forum

The Forum will normally meet every four weeks normally at the Riverside House, Royal Leamington Spa, normally starting within the usual business hours of Warwick District Council.

The Forum is not a public meeting and members of the public will not be allowed to attend.

The Forum will be facilitated by officers from Development Services who will:

- a. prepare and distribute an agenda for each meeting;
- b. arrange for any invited participants to attend the Forum to present items, in accordance with criteria a, c and e of the agreed purpose and role of the Forum above;
- c. present items to the Forum for their consideration;
- d. record the consensus view (or opposing views where there is no consensus) of the Forum and feed this back to the Council or other relevant organisation as appropriate; and,
- e. publish the agenda and record of the meeting on the Council's website.

The more detailed operation of the Forum shall be agreed by the Chair and Vice Chair, in consultation with the Forum and the Development Manager.

Annual Review of the Forum

The Development Manager will measure the effectiveness of the Forum in delivering its purpose, and undertake an annual review of its membership and operation with the Forum.

An Annual Report demonstrating the Forum's performance over the previous year and the output of the above review will be reported to the Forum, before being reported to the Planning Committee. Any amendments to the Constitution must receive approval by the Planning Committee, or its successors.