Proposed Conservation Area at Firbeck

Consultation Statement

February 2018

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Background
1. Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 every Local Planning Authority has a duty to consider designating new Conservation Areas.

2. The settlement of Firbeck has for many years been on a shortlist of potential new Conservation Areas and was included in the Unitary Development Plan as warranting further investigation. The Council has also been asked by the Parish Council on a number of occasions to consider a Conservation Area designation. An appraisal of Firbeck village was carried out as per the advice contained in the Historic England document “Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management”. From this exercise, it was clear that the historic core of the village warranted further investigation.

Consultation Exercise
3. Historic England’s advice states: “There is no obligation to carry out a public consultation prior to designation and in cases of urgency there will be no time to do so. However, it is highly desirable that local consultation should take place as the greater the public support the more likely it is that policies will be implemented voluntarily.”

4. The Council’s Statement of Community Involvement (Adopted June 2015), in particular pages 9-10, provides guidance on consultation exercises to involve communities in planning decisions.

5. A formal consultation exercise on the proposed Firbeck Conservation Area took place from 10 October 2017 to 3 November 2017. The consultation exercise entailed:
   - An e-mail sent to the Clerk to Firbeck Parish Council explaining both the proposal and the forthcoming consultation exercise.
   - A letter to all residential properties and businesses included within the proposed Conservation Area boundary (33 in total) The letter included an explanation of the proposal along with a copy of the proposed boundary and a guide for owners and occupiers explain the implications of Conservation Area designation.
   - A press notice published in both the Rotherham Advertiser and the Dinnington and Maltby Guardian on Friday 13 October 2017.
   - Various site notices (9 in total) strategically placed around both the centre of the village and the main approaches into the village. Again, the site notices pointed interested parties towards the website (including a relevant QR code) but also invited comments via e-mail or letter for those without internet access.
   - An e-mail explaining both the proposal and the consultation exercise to the three local ward members for Dinnington along with Councillor Lelliott (Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy)

6. In addition to the above an online consultation website with associated questionnaire was set up. To assist people, the website also included an appraisal of the Firbeck Conservation Area along with a link to Historic England’s website providing comprehensive background information on Conservation Areas and their designation.

Results of the Consultation Exercise
7. Considering the relatively small nature of the settlement and the proposed Conservation Area, the response level has been healthy. Encouragingly, the vast majority of respondents chose to use the online portal and questionnaire.

8. 17 responses came via the online questionnaire with an additional 6 choosing to respond by e-mail. No responses were received by letter. Of these responses all but three were residents of the village.
9. Of the 23 respondents, 17 rejected the proposal to designate a new Conservation Area in the village. Of the 6 respondents who agreed with the proposal, 3 of these were from outside the settlement.

10. In view of the interest generated by the proposal, the Parish Council chose to call a public meeting which took place on 26 October 2017. The Council understands that the meeting was well attended and that several people spoke against the proposal. The majority considered the village already policed itself well and, because of its washed over Green Belt status there was little scope for adverse development anyway. There was no formal show of hands as the Chairman stated that the Parish Council were elected to give a view on behalf of the whole village not just the ones who took the trouble to attend the meeting.

Appraisal

11. In light of the representations received following the public consultation exercise the Council have considered three possible options;
   - Option 1. Designate a new Conservation Area at Firbeck with the boundary centred on the historic core of the village along New Road as per the Conservation Area appraisal outlined above.
   - Option 2. Designate a new, much larger Conservation Area at Firbeck, as suggested by Firbeck Parish Council, to include the majority of the village including many of the properties constructed during the 20th century further west along New Road.
   - Option 3. To not designate Firbeck as a new Conservation Area.

12. The Council’s own appraisal, based on Historic England advice, shows that the historic core of Firbeck meets the criteria for Conservation Area designation. However, it has long been understood, both locally and nationally, that for Conservation Areas to be successful, they need the support of the local community. It is clear from the response to the consultation exercise that, in the case of Firbeck, the proposed Conservation Area is not supported.

13. Option 2 to extend the Conservation Area to cover the majority of the village is not supported. As indicated above, it is the historic core of the village which meets the criteria for Conservation Area designation and not the wider village. Whilst this approach is supported by the Parish Council it is considered that a larger boundary including more 20th century properties is likely to attract further local opposition from residents.

14. Taking account of the above it is considered that option 3, to not designate a Conservation Area at Firbeck, is preferable. It is important to note, as pointed out by some of the objectors, that the village already has a great deal of protection from inappropriate development proposals by virtue of its washed over Green Belt status in Rotherham’s Local Plan combined with the fact that many of its key buildings and their settings are protected by their listed building status.

15. It is also noted that Historic England currently advises local authorities, particularly those with restricted resources, to focus their efforts on appraising and looking after existing Conservation Areas before looking to designate additional areas.

Conclusion

16. In view of the above considerations the outcome of this consultation exercise is that the Council will not designate a new Conservation Area at Firbeck.