

YOUR BUILT HERITAGE IN KENT

Notes of the meeting organised by the CPRE Kent Historic Buildings Committee to discuss the compilation of Local Lists for every town and village in Kent. The notes are a précis of the proceedings and of the contribution made by the attendees.

Date of meeting: 13.11.14

Venue: Charing parish hall

Attendees:

Valerie Kirchner – Margate Civic Society

Simon Algar – Canterbury City Council

Jan Pahl - Canterbury Society

David Collard – Cranbrook & District Local History Society

Paul Donovan – Cranbrook & District Local History Society

Ian Williams – Addelam History Research Group

Tom Foxall – English Heritage

Susan Pitman – Farningham & Eynsford Society

Sylvia Golding – Hawkhurst Local History Society

Wilf Golding – Hawkhurst Local History Society

Alan Joyce – Hythe Civic Society

John Walker – Kent Federation of Amenity Societies

Geoff Orton – Margate Civic Society

Keith Roberts – Shepherdswell & Coldred History Society

Jacob Amuli – Thanet District Council

Jocelyn McCarthy – The Ramsgate Society

Joseph Dance - The Ramsgate Society

John Weller – Tenterden Local History Society

David Gamble – Sevenoaks Society

Sir Michael Harrison – Sevenoaks Society

John Stambollouian – Sevenoaks Society

Bob Baxter – Kent Historic Buildings Committee

Christine Drury – CPRE Kent

Bill Ware – CPRE Kent

Brian Lloyd - CPRE Kent

Bob Baxter– Kent Historic Buildings Committee

Graham Horner – Kent Historic Buildings Committee

Bernard Davern – Kent Historic Buildings Committee

Richard Filmer - Kent Historic Buildings Committee

Jane Davidson - Goudhurst & Kilndown Local History Society

Apologies:

Tony Smith - Barham Downs History Society

John Osborne - Hythe Civic Society

Introduction

Bob Baxter the Chairman of the Kent Historic Building Committee (KHBC) thanked the audience for their attendance and he expressed hope that the focus of the meeting on the compilation of Local Lists and that the talk by the Sevenoaks Society will spark the interest of other historic & civic societies to follow their example and proceed with the task of compiling their own list of heritage buildings in their community so that over time the resultant data will be a valuable asset to help protect heritage buildings and amenities at risk.

Christine Drury the chairman of Kent CPRE reinforced the point that one of the aims of the CPRE is to protect our heritage environment and that as the meeting attendees had similar aims it would bring added weight to our campaign if we joined forces and to this end she urged the attendees to become members of the CPRE if they weren't already.

Graham Horner the secretary of the Kent Historic Buildings Committee summarised the reasons why local lists are an important tool in the protection of heritage assets. He noted some examples of worthy buildings such as the Paper Mill in Sittingbourne, the Tannery in Ashford, and the Blue Boys pub in Matfield which have all been recently

demolished or have approval for demolition where the existence of an active local listing process would, he thought, have affected the outcome.

Graham highlighted that we already have a degree of statutory protection available for buildings of significant historic or architectural interest via the Grades 1 & 2 Listings which is fine, but these need to be reinforced by the Local Lists which have effect in applications for planning permission and demolition notices. Planning authorities can also issue "Article 4 directions" for buildings on a local list which could, for example, prohibit demolition without planning approval.

He said the National Planning Policy Framework which is the key document in the review of planning applications covers heritage in section 12, in particular paragraphs 128 & 129 under which applicants and planners have a statutory obligation to take into account the heritage value of properties they are reviewing. These paragraphs seem to be widely ignored, however.

He said there is now an obligation to notify planning authorities of any demolition, at which the authority does have the power to demand an application for planning permission via an Art 4 direction.

Graham showed a map showing the present state of play in communities across England in compiling Local Lists and it was clear that there is still a long way to go and we hope that Kent can be a shining example.

The Sevenoaks Society – Sir Michael Harrison Society President

Sir Michael gave the meeting an introduction into the work of their society in compiling their Local List for the town centre of Sevenoaks. The project started with a successful campaign to get a local list mentioned in the Core Strategy as an aspiration. He explained that they organised a working group whose first task was to investigate existing historical documentation and records including those already compiled by a consultant previously employed by the Sevenoaks District Council. The latter data was incomplete as the District Council did not have the resources to continue to employ him. Another significant document used by the group was the English Heritage Good Practice Guide for the Local Listing which they found was particularly useful when developing the criteria against which the surveyed and selected heritage buildings in Sevenoaks were to be judged.

Sir Michael noted that at the start of the process they met with Sevenoaks District Council representatives and it was obvious that the council did not have the resources to undertake the production of a Local List. After discussion they agreed that the Sevenoaks Society should undertake the task but with the full support of the council, and the selection criteria were agreed. In addition, it was agreed that the completed Local List would be incorporated into a Supplementary Planning Document so that it became a material planning consideration during the planning process. It was also agreed with the Sevenoaks District Council that the Sevenoaks Society would keep the District Council informed of the progress and timetable of the local listing process, and that the District Council would undertake the public consultation process on the first tranche of heritage assets once it had been completed.

The cooperation of the Sevenoaks Town Council has turned out to be advantageous to the Society in that the council offered their Council Chamber for use by the Sevenoaks Society for their meetings with the Selection Panel and with the volunteers, and the council also offered a grant of £500 to the Society to cover some of the related expenses.

The compilation of the Local Lists is ongoing and is likely to take at least three years to complete. Sir Michael noted that the process is currently on programme.

The Process adopted by Sevenoaks Society in compiling their Local Lists – John Stambollouian Survey Coordinator

John explained that the selection criteria considered the following:

- The building or heritage asset's age in relation to its condition. Those more recent than 1945 had to be of exceptional quality and design.
- Other architectural criteria relate to whether the building was designed by an architect of national or local significance; whether it had received any award; whether it was a style of building unique to the local area or one particularly associated with Kent; whether the building stands out as a result of important decorative features or use of materials, or whether it provides an example of technological innovation.
- Did the building or asset have national or local historical relevance.
- Whether the building is a significant landmark;

- whether the building individually or as part of a group contributes significantly to townscape or street scene and
- in the case of old surviving street furniture such as lamp posts and street paving, whether they contribute positively to the local area.

John explained that developing the selection criteria was key to the success of the process. But given the amount of data that would be assembled, data management would be an important component of the project. The IT system had been designed so that it could be interrogated to highlight for example all commercial buildings, Victorian buildings etc. as a check on consistency in the selection process. John explained that IT and data management was important and in their experience it was essential to co-opt the necessary expertise onto the team at an early stage.

The survey teams are made up of volunteers, many of them without a background in building design and history. They have five teams of three people who carry out their surveys approximately twice during a three month period recording their field data onto survey sheets and then inputting it onto the IT spread sheets. Volunteers were sourced from the society's 800 members and from U3A. It is important that the historical research is available to surveyors before they survey each street.

John noted that at the start of the process they ran a number of training sessions so that there was unity of purpose within the group. In addition it was found to be advantageous to hold follow-up workshops once the initial surveys had been completed so that the results could be checked for quality. It was noted that in the Sevenoaks town council area there are 120 local roads with properties built prior to 1945 which illustrates why the process takes such a significant period of time to complete. Buildings on roads built after 1945 are treated on an exception basis.

Once the survey data has been part compiled a series of workshops were held with the Selection Panel who have the final say on which buildings or assets are to be integrated into the final Local Lists. The panel is made up of volunteers with a varying range of expertise in building design & construction, of urban landscape design and it also has representatives from Sevenoaks DC and Town Council as well as Kent County Council and English Heritage. This group ensures that the survey data is faithful to the research criteria and is also consistent. The project has been divided into two tranches. Once the first tranche of local listing is complete then this will be passed to Sevenoaks District Council for public consultation and

their sign off and this process will continue until the Local List for the Town as a whole has been completed.

It was stressed that the Local List was being compiled for Sevenoaks Town Council area only and that the local councils and/or the village historic society for each outlying village in the district may subsequently decide to complete their own Local List following a similar principle to that described by the Sevenoaks Society at the meeting.

Examples of the Sevenoaks Society survey results and the IT spread sheet are attached to these notes.

Funding – By David Gamble Sevenoaks Society Chairman

As stated earlier, the Sevenoaks Council has contributed £500 to the Sevenoaks Society to cover a proportion of the expenses incurred in compiling the Local List. The expenses involved including IT and data system development, printing, and purchasing of previously published historic books to aid the initial research and the compilation of survey criteria. They have also allocated some funds to entertainment for volunteers to thank them and keep spirits up.

David stressed that additional funding will be required and they intend to approach Sevenoaks Council again in an effort to obtain an additional grant, and they are also exploring the possibility of securing funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other bodies in the Heritage Protection world.

Questions & Answer Session

The following questions were raised by the meeting attendees and answered by the Sevenoaks Society and the CPRE committee members present:

Question 1:

Please explain what training was given to the Sevenoaks Local List survey teams prior to them starting and their work?

Answer:

John Stambollouian stressed that accuracy and consistency was defined from day 1 as being important, and that once the survey criteria had been signed off by the Sevenoaks District Council a series of workshop sessions were held with the 15 surveyors involved to ensure that they clearly understood what their role entailed. In addition there were additional meetings held to allow the Selection Panel to interrogate the first tranche

of survey data and as a result inaccuracies were sometimes found and these were either corrected if insignificant, or if necessary the buildings were re-surveyed. As an example of the usefulness of the training workshops John noted that the first survey results had an average 40% endorsement by the Selection Panel whereas in the most recent surveys around 60% were accepted by the Panel. It is hoped to steadily improve the pass rate as the work continues.

Question 2: A question was asked about the source of the historic data utilised by the Sevenoaks Society when deciding which buildings and assets were to be included into their Local List.

Answer: It was noted that a whole range of books and documents were reviewed including the Pevsner Architectural Guides, English Heritage records, the Sevenoaks Library historic data, the Kent Historic Buildings Index, local maps, the Sevenoaks Council records and many more sources. A valuable resource has been "Sevenoaks - an historical dictionary". This research highlighted photographs which enabled the Survey team to determine recent changes to buildings older than 100 years and to determine whether these changes have compromised the original design to an extent that the building in question should be excluded from the Local List.

Question 3: Will the Sevenoaks Society research data be uploaded onto the web to enable interested parties to make use of it?

Answer: Yes the data will be uploaded but only when it is a complete and approved state.

Question 4: Susan Pitman of the CPRE and a councillor for Crockham Hill noted that in 2012 SDC approached her council asking them to compile a Local List of their village, which she did, but she has heard nothing further. She asked the meeting whether they were aware of the Sevenoaks Council action.

Answer: The Sevenoaks Society stated that it was news to them and they queried whether this was unique to Crockham Hill and wondered whether it was an early attempt by the Sevenoaks Council to off-load the survey work onto their village councils. The conclusion reached was that whatever the motivation it had come to nothing.

Question 5: John Walker of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies noted that English Heritage had set aside £15k to distribute to the Local List research groups. This source of funding needs further research to determine what strings are attached and how it will be used particularly as it is thought that competing historic groups or councils will have to bid for it in a similar way to the money from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Answer: It was agreed that the groups at the meeting would research this issue.

Question 6: It was noted that the English Heritage Local Listings Guide was a very useful document to educate Civic Societies on how the Local Lists should be compiled. It provides a framework for the related research but requires the users to integrate their own sourced historic data to make the process workable.

Answer: Noted

Going forward – By Graham Horner KHBC

Graham thanked the Sevenoaks Society for their valuable talk and he stressed that it hoped that it was a spur to other groups to start their own Local List without delay.

Graham showed a series of flow diagrams illustrating the process involved in compiling a Local List. He started with his interpretation of the local authority-led processes envisaged in the English Heritage Guide and then highlighted the differences in the community-led process as exemplified by the Sevenoaks Society. In the discussion which followed, Graham suggested that only two things are needed before draft local lists can start to be prepared:

- agreement between the Authority and the Community on the selection criteria for a local list; and
- some expert advice to volunteer surveyors and historians on how to record their research.

In this, “Community” would likely be in the first instance an amenity society big enough to claim to represent the public in each district, although the resulting criteria should be put to public consultation at

some stage. Following these two steps, there is no reason why amenity societies, large and small, should not be able to work on "long lists" of candidate heritage assets in their geographical area or area of interest.

Graham also suggested that the research done in preparing long lists is submitted to the Historic Environment Record as soon as possible as long as it has been rigorously prepared under expert guidance. This research might then be considered a "material consideration" in planning matters even before an authority gets round to adopting a local list.

Copies of the diagrams are circulated with these notes.

Speakers from the floor confirmed that Thanet is moving ahead with preparing a local list and Canterbury will be updating theirs. There is some frustration in Tunbridge Wells that the process has stalled, but it is understood the delay relates to funding which has recently been secured. Concerns were also raised about the attitude of building owners, who might find it in their interest to demolish a building before it can be listed. Apparently, in Sevenoaks, most building owners had been co-operative, some contributing information to surveyors. Surveyors need to carry with them documents identifying them and explaining the project.

Closing

Bob Baxter thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them well in their endeavours in compiling their Local Lists. He also stressed that Kent Historic Buildings Committee and CPRE in general were always available to answer any related questions that may arise.