Historic Environment

Background

Herefordshire possesses a rich historic environment which includes numerous Iron Age hill forts, sites of Roman towns, defensive features such as Offa's Dyke and the border castles, together with some of the best preserved traditional timber framed buildings in the country. The richness of the historic environment is reflected in the number of designated heritage assets encompassing a wealth of listed buildings, registered historic parks and gardens, scheduled ancient monuments and conservations areas. These add to the special built quality and environmental character of many areas of the county and their protection and enhancement is recognised as an important ingredient for economic and neighbourhood renewal.

The county's archaeological heritage is a valuable but fragile part of our historic environment. The city centre of Hereford is designated as an Area of Archaeological Importance. This is one of only 5 nationally.

The wider value of historic landscapes is recognised through the designation of conservations areas, which vary in character and size from tiny hamlets to villages to country house estates, market towns and Hereford's historic centre. Rather than one vernacular building style, Herefordshire has a diverse range of buildings of which perhaps the most well-known and distinctive is the 'black and white' timber framed traditional buildings of the northern half of the county.

Herefordshire County Plan

A key economic ambition of Herefordshire Council's adopted County Plan (2020-2024) is '*to protect and promote the county's heritage, culture and natural beauty to enhance quality of life and to support tourism*'. The environment ambition of the County Plan to '*Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live*' also needs to be considered in regards to the Historic Environment.

Local Plan Draft Vision

The Local Plan 2021-2041 has an environmental vision which is crucial to this policy option in that:

The rich landscape and cultural heritage will continue to be protected and valued for all to enjoy.

Local Plan Draft Objectives

Protection and conservation of the historic environment is highlighted within the environmental objectives of the Local Plan namely:

- To protect the natural environment and heritage of the county.
- To conserve and, where possible, enhance heritage assets and their settings through carefully managed change, and to recognise and elevate the role these assets play in providing a sense of place and local distinctiveness.

National Guidance

National guidance states that Local Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. It also states that Local Planning Authorities should make information about the historic environment, gathered as part of policy-making or development management, publicly accessible.

The delivery of the strategy may require the development of specific policies, for example, in relation to use of buildings and design of new development and infrastructure. Plan-making bodies will need to consider the relationship and impact of other policies on the delivery of the strategy for conservation.

Government guidance identifies three levels of harm in relation to considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of designated heritage assets. These are total loss, substantial harm, or less than substantial harm. The guidance sets out how planning authorities should respond when a proposal may result in one of these levels of harm.

Historic England has produced a Good Practice Advice Note that sets out information to help Local Planning Authorities make well informed and effective Local Plans and provides examples of good practice.

Local Considerations

Herefordshire's historic environment and heritage assets are significant contributors to sustainable development. Together they contribute to the distinctiveness of the county and help to create a sense of place. Important local buildings, whether designated or not, can have a social and cultural value and can act as focal points for local communities.

A well cared for historic environment is key attractor for tourism and investment and generally contributes to a good quality environment. The sustainable re-use of existing buildings can also help mitigate climate change and resource use through reducing development pressures on greenfield sites, reducing demand for construction energy and materials and by minimising construction waste.

Despite having such nationally recognised heritage at its core, the great extent of Herefordshire's archaeological resource is not well surveyed or assessed. Opportunities associated with developments and externally funded projects will continue to be secured to gain a better understanding of our archaeological heritage. The Archaeology and Development Supplementary Planning Document will be reviewed in due course in line with current policy.

Evidence Base

- The Herefordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) is the most comprehensive available dataset on Herefordshire's historic environment. The HER is based around a Geographic Information System (GIS) database and consists of paper and digitised records of all known heritage sites in Herefordshire, spanning the full range of human activity in the county; from the Palaeolithic to modern heritage;
- Rapid Town Centre Assessments were carried out in 2010 for Hereford, Ross on Wye and Leominster;

- A conservation area appraisal of Leominster is being carried out as part of its High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme. It is anticipated that appraisals of other conservation areas in the county will follow;
- A Hereford Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document is being prepared that will to provide design guidance and good practice advice to help developers, applicants and officers improve the quality of design in new development, public realm and movement projects across Hereford. It will include a study of the historic character of the city.

Existing Policy

The Historic Environment is currently addressed in the existing Core Strategy through a dedicated policy, LD4, but is also covered in the Landscape and Townscape policy as well as individual policies relating to the development of Hereford and the market towns. There are also other related policies that focus on landscape, townscape and the re-use of rural buildings.

The current policy framework for the historic environment is considered to be broadly effective. However, there is scope to update the historic environment policy to strengthen the approach and reflect current national guidance on this issue. The currently policy needs review because there is a need to:

- Encourage a better quality of supporting information to accompany planning applications. A thorough Heritage Impact Assessment is a very useful tool in identifying the impact of a proposal on the historic environment and an assessment of the significance of the historic asset. Therefore it is suggested that the policy and supporting text is amended to make it clear that a robust assessment of the significance of the asset as well as proposal's impact will be required to support planning applications.
- Address the issue of when a proposal may cause harm to the heritage asset. The National Planning Framework (NPPF) sets out a series of criteria to take account of when a proposal will lead to some degree of harm to a designated heritage asset and it is considered that these should be reflected in the updated Local Plan.

Neighbourhood Planning

All neighbourhood plans make reference to the protection of the historic environment and local heritage assets. There are often policies that seek to protect and enhance locally significant buildings. A couple of neighbourhood plans have designated local 'heritage areas', these are in places without a formal conservation area designation but the local community consider are worthy of future status.

Historic Environment Policy Options

Option HE1- Continue with existing policy, but update supporting text

Retain policy as is currently worded but update supporting text to include reference to the updated national guidance in relation impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset.

Option HE2- Redevelop the policy

Update and amend policy to better reflect the up-to-date national planning policy and guidance, and the draft vision and objectives, these amendments could also include:

- The requirement for Heritage Impact Assessments (or similar) to accompany certain planning applications;
- A strengthened requirement for the recording and understanding of the significance of any heritage assets that are harmed or lost.