

Planning & Environment Committee

Report Title:	Conservation Area Advisory Committee – Terms of Reference
Meeting Date:	19 December 2023
Contact Officer:	Lizzie Fuller, Committee Services & Processes Officer

Action Required

1. To review the Terms of Reference for the Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC).

Background

2. The Terms of Reference for the CAAC were approved by this committee on 6 October 2009, however it is understood that the CAAC have been meeting in some capacity for around 30years. The Town Council created the CAAC although they have always been an independent advisory committee to the council.
3. The ToR have not been formally reviewed since 2009, other than at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 13 May 2014, when the following comment was made:

“Discussion took place regarding the Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC); it was not aligned with or acting on behalf of the Planning & Environment Committee in any formalised way. In reality CAAC was a self-appointed interest group that Councillors would encourage to continue but as an independent group arranging its own meeting facilities rather than by the anomalous arrangement made years ago of having free use of resources from the Council.”

4. Officers met with the Chair and Secretary of the CAAC on 15 November 2023 to discuss:
 - a. Current working arrangements
 - b. Terms of reference
 - c. The future of the CAAC

Current Working Arrangements

5. With the removal of paper planning applications from SODC, CAAC have been reliant on TTC Officers providing a spare laptop to enable them to view the applications. There have been times when this laptop has been unavailable and therefore CAAC have not been able to meet on these occasions. Officers will work with CAAC to find a long-term solution for this as they do not have their own suitable device. The provision of this facility will be subject to availability.

Terms of Reference

6. Some minor amendments were proposed during the 15/11/23 meeting – see Appendix A tracked changes. The P&E committee are asked to review the Terms of Reference as proposed.

Future of CAAC

7. For some time, there has been discussion from Councillors about how – or if – CAAC can continue to operate in a way that is beneficial for all parties.
8. CAAC members hold a significant local knowledge and have effectively been guardians of the Thame Conservation Area through their regular monitoring to uphold standards as per the Thame Conservation Area Management Plan. They provide valuable ‘eyes on the ground’ in that sense, and their observations have resulted in enforcement action, although this is from TTC Officers reporting it on their behalf.
9. Since CAAC were formed (and their ToR last reviewed), the District Council have approved their latest Local Plan and Design Guidance, and the Town Council has adopted a Neighbourhood Plan and employed a Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer. The District Council also employ Conservation / Heritage Officers. All of this combined provides policies and advice that seek to protect the Conservation Area. CAAC are not a statutory consultee on any planning application.
10. Membership of CAAC has been steadily declining. A couple of people have been identified who could be recruited, however CAAC feel unable to do this until the Town Council has confirmed whether they will continue to support CAAC.
11. The CAAC were formed by the Town Council and continue to operate as per the Town Council’s instructions. The Town Council therefore needs to decide the future of the CAAC.

Resource Appraisal

12. A small amount of Officer time every 3-4weeks to facilitate CAAC meetings.
13. Use of Town Council meeting space and facilities.

Risk Assessment

14. There are no risks for consideration.

Legal Powers:

- Local Government Act 1972, Section 102(3-4)

Recommendation:

It is recommended...

- i) To review the Terms of Reference for the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.***
- ii) To consider re-adopting (as amended) the Terms of Reference for the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.***