

Policy and Resources Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	4 th February 2026
Report Title	Bexon Conservation Area - Designation
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins - Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson – Head of Place
Lead Officer	Jhilmil Kishore – Principal Heritage Officer
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. To note the character appraisal and management strategy document (public consultation draft) for the proposed new Conservation Area, and representations made by interested parties, as set out in Appendix I. 2. To agree the changes to the assessment document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation. 3. To resolve that the area within the boundary shown is of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and that as such, that it should be designated as a Conservation Area in accordance with section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. 4. Adopt the Character Appraisal and Management Strategy subject to any minor editorial amendments and formatting.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report recommends adoption of a new Conservation Area within the Parish of Bredgar, known as Bexon, which has undergone formal public consultation and been amended to take into account consultation comments. Formal designation is under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and once adopted is material to planning decisions.
- 1.2 The character appraisal and associated management plan provides a clear understanding of the character and context of the area in line with current good practice for the management of Conservation Areas as outlined in Historic England Advice Note 1. It is recommended that the Committee agrees the changes to the review document set out in Appendix I (consultation response table) and as reflected in Appendix II (tracked changes version of the character appraisal and management plan document).

2 Background

- 2.1 Bredgar Conservation Area was first designated in November 1973. Following several reviews between 2000 and 2006, Bredgar Conservation Area was re-designated and adopted with an updated Character Appraisal and Management Plan along with amended boundaries in 2023.
- 2.2 In reviewing the Bredgar Conservation Area and giving consideration to its wider setting, it became apparent that the historically significant but small hamlet at Bexon, developed from subsidiary manors originating from early farmstead settlements, was of heritage interest and worthy of Conservation Area designation, but is also too distant from the nearest point of the former to be considered as a possible extension to its boundary. Bexon is located approximately 2km southeast of the village of Bredgar. Whilst there is little visual link between Bredgar and Bexon, the significance of the historical connection is demonstrated by the extensive network of lanes and footpaths, formed long before the advent of motor transport. Focussed along Hawks Hill Lane, Bexon has 8 statutory listed buildings and retains much of its historic significance.
- 2.3 The Swale Heritage Strategy, adopted in March 2020, committed the Council to more regular Conservation Area reviews and to consider designating new Conservation Areas. The review of Bexon Conservation Area is part of the work programme of the second 3-year action plan forming part of the adopted Swale Heritage Strategy 2020 – 2032. An external consultant (Place Services) was appointed to undertake the review.
- 2.4 The proposal is to designate and draw the boundary of the Conservation Area and to equip it with a detailed character appraisal and a complementary management strategy which will assist with development management and heritage conservation purposes. It will be a matter for the Policy and Resources Committee to decide whether to formally adopt the Bexon Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy (as recommended and set out in **Appendix II**, following consultation feedback, or otherwise).
- 2.5 This assessment aligns with guidance provided in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

NPPF para 204 advises, *'When considering the designation of Conservation Areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.'*

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The recommendation is:
 1. To note the character appraisal and management strategy document (public consultation draft) for the proposed new Conservation Area, and representations made by interested parties, as set out in appendix I.

2. To agree the changes to the assessment document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation.
3. To resolve that the area within the boundary shown is of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and that as such, that it should be designated as a Conservation Area in accordance with section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.
4. Adopt the Character Appraisal and Management Strategy subject to any minor editorial amendments and formatting.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 One option would be to not take this review work any further or suspend the work on this review until some point in the future. Whilst this option would not result in wasted officer time and loss of cost to the consultant, it could still lead to (a) the designation being challenged, (b) reputational damage to the Council and/or (c) development and associated infrastructure provision decisions being made for the locality without an appropriate understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of the Bexon Conservation Area. This is not recommended because it would risk the justifiable continuation of the designation and/or the appropriately sensitive and positive management of the Conservation Area and its wider setting moving forward.
- 4.2 A second option would be to disregard some elements, or all of the feedback received, in terms of the proposed designation. However, whilst it is considered that the appraisal and management plan (to support the designation of the Conservation Area) is essentially sound, the feedback provided from the local community is valuable and to ignore any of this feedback without sound reasons would call the value of the consultation process into question and potentially deliver reputational damage to the Council.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 An 8-week public consultation exercise ran from Wednesday 15th October 2025 upto and including Wednesday 10th December 2025.
- 5.2 All those parties with property within or overlapping the proposed Conservation Area boundary were notified in writing of the review and were invited to comment on it, as were key stakeholder organisations including Kent County Council and Historic England.
- 5.3 Hard copies of the review document was made available at the Sittingbourne Library and with the Parish Council and were also available to view/download on-line via the Council's website for the duration of the public consultation period.
- 5.4 A total of 7 consultation responses have been received. 1 from Historic England, 1 from Tunstall Parish Council, 1 from Bredgar Parish Council, and the remaining from local

residents. The officer response to this consultation feedback (as summarised) is attached as Appendix I.

- 5.5 Historic England responded to say that *‘Our specialist staff have considered the information received and we do not wish to offer any comments on this occasion.’* HE have recommended, *‘This application (proposed Conservation Area designation) should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your expert conservation advice.’*
- 5.6 Kent County Council in its function as the Highway Authority was consulted on the Conservation Area designation but provided no feedback in this respect. No response was received either from the county’s Ecology Team (which was also consulted). Highways and Ecology at Kent County Council are consulted because Conservation Area designation affects land use, access, and environmental protection. Their specialist data and statutory responsibilities ensure the designation is evidence-based, legally sound, and aligned with wider county strategies.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposed designation of Bexon Conservation Area would support the Economy priority from the Corporate Plan: <i>‘To develop the borough’s second Heritage Action Plan that reflects in-house and partnership capacity, to support and promote our outstanding assets.’</i>
Financial, Resource and Property	Implementing some aspects of the proposed Management Plan may have financial and resource implications for the council, particularly if it is decided to proceed with an Article 4 Direction review. These financial impacts will be considered if / when these further reports are brought forward. Note: Article 4 review is being considered within Action Plan 3 (2026-2028) of Heritage Strategy.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on every local planning authority to <i>“determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”</i> and, from time to time, to review the functioning existing Conservation Areas.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	One of the three dimensions of sustainable development is its environmental role: contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

Health and Wellbeing	The health and wellbeing aspects of interaction with heritage assets and heritage related projects are referenced in the adopted Heritage Strategy which underpins this review work.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.
Local Government Reorganisation	No Impact on Local Government reorganisation, because Conservation Area designation comes under management of the area's heritage and is guided by best practices as set out by Historic England and NPPF.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Public consultation – table of representations (in summary form), and the council's response to them.
- Appendix II: Public consultation version of the 2025 draft Bexon Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan document.

8 Background Papers

A Heritage Strategy for Swale 2020-2032 Adopted March 2020