

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 12 APRIL 2012
title: PROPOSED CONSULTATION ON EXTENSION TO LONGRIDGE
CONSERVATION AREA AT STONEBRIDGE MILL
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: ADRIAN DOWD – PRINCIPAL PLANNING OFFICER (DESIGN AND
CONSERVATION)

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To seek Member agreement to a limited public consultation on a proposed extension to Longridge Conservation Area at Stonebridge Mill.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.
- Community Objectives – The Ribble Valley Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2013 has three relevant strategic objectives – maintain, protect and enhance all natural and built features that contribute to the quality of the environment. Ensure that the design of buildings respects local character and enhances local distinctiveness. Sustainably manage and protect industrial and historical sites.
- Corporate Priorities - Objective 3.3 of the Corporate Plan commits us to maintaining and improving the environmental quality of the Ribble Valley. Objective 3.8 of the corporate plan commits us to conserving and enhancing the local distinctiveness and character of our towns, villages and countryside when considering development proposals.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Section 69, states that every local planning authority shall from time to time 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, and, shall designate these areas as conservation areas.

2.2 Section 69 of the Act also states that it is the duty of the local planning authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas.

2.3 There is no statutory requirement to consult prior to conservation area designation or appraisal. However, English Heritage's Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2006, paragraph 3.2) advises that:

"Once a conservation area appraisal has been completed in draft form, it should be issued for public comment. Local consultation can help to bring valuable public

understanding and “ownership” to proposals for the area. Thought should be given to encouraging a wider public debate, drawing together local people, resident groups, amenity groups, businesses and other community organisations, in a discussion about issues facing the area and how these might be addressed. Ideally, consultation should be undertaken generally in line with the local authority’s statement of community involvement (SCI)”.

English Heritage’s Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management (March 2011, paragraph 1.11) advises that:

“Community involvement ... over the last few years local communities have become more proactively involved in identifying the general areas that merit conservation area status and defining the boundaries. The values held by the community are likely to add depth and a new perspective to the local authority view”.

2.4 The idea of including Stonebridge Mill in Longridge Conservation Area was initiated by Longridge Town Council and Longridge Heritage Committee in their response to the Longridge Conservation Area appraisal and review (reported to Committee on 3 April 2007). Following extensive public consultation the present conservation area boundary (encompassing Stonebridge Mill) was designated by the Borough Council on 22 May 2008.

2.5 The report to Committee from 6 March 2008 states:

Stonebridge Mill

The opening of the railway stimulated the growth of new steam-powered mills at Longridge and between 1850 and 1874 four textile mills opened. Stonebridge was the first cotton factory and was built by George Whittle in 1850 on Silver Street (Till, 1993). A date stone (possibly relocated) confirms this build date. Aerial photographs suggest the mill’s largest building, the weaving shed, was demolished some time in the 1940s to 1960s. However, stone/brick building ranges survive in a ‘L’ shape around the perimeter of the former weaving shed site. The southern range also forms one side of a courtyard accessed off the Preston Road (formerly Silver Street) and still retains the mill clock. The surviving mill buildings have been constructed in a combination of sandstone and hand moulded brickwork – this juxtaposition and use of materials suggests a history of alteration and extension. It is likely that the surviving buildings would have been warehousing, offices, engine housing and preparation facilities for the weaving shed. The 1886 Ordnance Survey map shows two terraces of houses on the east side of Silver Street separated by the courtyard entrance. The terraces are constructed in the same hand moulded brickwork as the mill.

2.6 The Lancashire Textile Mills Rapid Assessment Survey (June 2008 – March 2012) was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North for Lancashire County Council (in partnership with English Heritage which commissioned and funded the project). The survey has identified a total of 1661 textile-manufacturing sites in Lancashire. Of these, 619 survive, or are partially extant, which equates to a survival rate of 37.27%.

The rapid assessment report states ‘the borough also contains several interesting examples of weaving mills built during the second half of the nineteenth century. In Longridge, Stonebridge Mill (LTM0761) was erected as a purpose-built weaving factory in 1850 and, amongst other buildings arranged around a central courtyard, the site retains two engine and boiler houses’.

The rapid assessment survey was primarily a mapping exercise to quickly identify what was left of the county’s textile buildings. A second stage has recently begun with the aim to ‘create a typology of the various textile-manufacturing sites in the modern county, and

*produce a consistently thorough record and interpretation of a representative sample of each type'. Fifty sites identified in the county during the rapid assessment will be examined in detail including 'Stonebridge Mill Longridge (early weaving sheds)'. The completed survey will be used to put the rest of the county's mills (619) into context and to address concerns that 'there has been no systematic evaluation of the stock of the county's textile mills, meaning that the basic questions in respect of quality or rarity could not be answered when development proposals were being considered'. The second stage project proposals emphasise that the earlier survey of Greater Manchester (1992) 'was dominated by cotton-spinning mills, and no detailed surveys were carried out of textile-finishing sites or **weaving mills, which were focused largely within the boundary of the modern county of Lancashire**. The proposed Stage 2 Survey would complement this earlier study, enable imbalances to be redressed, and facilitate a more informed understanding of the textile manufacturing industry in historic Lancashire'.*

The author of the report also advised officers on 22 October 2009:

*'Longridge had a number of textile mills, although these do not appear to have fared well in more recent times. Stonebridge Mill, on Kestor Lane, is an exception. This weaving shed, dating to 1850, was the first steam-powered mill in the town, and seemingly **retains many important original features, including the boiler house and single beam engine house**. Elements of the site seem to be occupied, but it is probably one to keep an eye on, as I wonder about the buildings' maintenance regime'.*

- 2.7 Rothwell M, 'Industrial Heritage: A Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of the Ribble Valley' (1990) suggests the brick boiler house ('hidden' within the modern portal frame building) and adjacent brick engine house were the second set of such buildings on the site and were built in 1877 following the introduction of a 350hp cross-compound engine to replace the original 1850 single beam engine (the original engine and boiler houses survive in the same range further to the west). Rothwell suggests that the brick boiler house '*now extensively altered, appears to have been designed for three boilers*'. He also notes that '***along the south side of the mill yard are additional offices and storage buildings, a later weaving shed (c.1910) and a water tower topped with a cast iron tank...the drive for the second shed was carried overhead across the mill yard and the shaft bearing boxes (for oiling) survive along the external wall***'.
- 2.8 Munt M., "Listing our Industrial Heritage" in Context 112: November 2009 discusses the recent change in perceptions of the importance of industrial archaeology (with particular regard to English Heritage's 'Principles of Selection': Industrial Buildings Selection Guide" March 2007).

He suggests that

*"industrial heritage assets have evidential value of past activities and their siting can tell us much about the evolution of a settlement and local landforms. They contributed fundamentally to the local economy. They have **illustrative historical value, especially when machinery, internal spaces and external details survive**.*

*Their associations with local families or craftsmen have resonance. Their **aesthetic value** can range from the adaptation of vernacular building techniques, to polite architecture in brick, iron or glass. Architects were involved in some of the best examples. They can have **communal value**, having once provided social cohesion – a place of work with associated leisure, educational and housing facilities close by.*

Frequently their size, scale and form add much to the diversity of the otherwise low-rise, modest townscapes in villages and smaller towns. They remind us that,

until quite recently, people worked as well as lived in these places that are now dormitory settlements.

... the importance of industrial archaeology has not always been recognised... However, this has now been acknowledged in English Heritage's 'Principles of Selection' last revised in 2007, which sets out the approaches to designating buildings. The emphasis is on national significance. However, the guide for industrial buildings recognises regional factors. It aims to achieve a representative sample for each sector of an industry in each region. It also seeks the identification of regional specialisms, which will often have strong claims to note on a national level. This acknowledgement is welcome news. Prior to 2007, industrial buildings had been assessed largely on architectural merit rather than the other values mentioned above. Thematic surveys had highlighted the importance of particular building types. **But the aspects such as the technical processes carried out, structural innovations and the social contexts were not given as much weight as today.**

The loss of historic industrial buildings can seriously impair the legibility of a place. The principle of change to industrial buildings is now accepted in English Heritage's 'Principles of Selection' as not necessarily precluding them from listing, but as showing their state of almost continuous adaptation".

English Heritage's 'Industrial Structures: Designation Listing Selection Guide' (April 2011) states

'An industrial building should normally reflect in its design (plan form and appearance) the specific function it was intended to fulfil...

the widespread introduction of powered looms in the second quarter of the century that created a novel type of building, the weaving shed with its distinctive saw-tooth roof with north-lights...

in areas that specialised in weaving, the weaving shed with its engine house and suite of warehouses and offices are self-contained. Weaving sheds often cover huge areas and are by their nature highly repetitive...

Other components will be found on a textile factory site. **Engine houses (to house steam engines to power the line shafting or rope drive) and boiler houses were usually internal in the first generation of mills (late eighteenth/early nineteenth century). It is their larger windows that distinguish them: single, tall and round-headed to house the first single-cylinder beam engines (from the 1820s), paired when accommodating the wider double-beamed engines from the mid 1830s. By the 1850s external engine houses become common and after the 1870s, with the widespread adoption of the compound engine with horizontal cylinders, they can be large and architecturally embellished.** Some early twentieth-century textile factories were electrically powered and may contain generator towers in addition to substantial engine houses. Dye houses (usually tall undivided structures with long, louvred ventilators running the length of the roof) and drying houses (often very long buildings with small windows, sometimes built adjacent to or over the boilers) may be found on integrated sites but also occupied specialized sites of their own. Warehouses were often important elements on integrated sites. Administrative offices might form part of a warehouse or the mill building; later in the nineteenth century they were often detached and given elaborate architectural treatment, especially when associated with showrooms".

2.9 The Longridge Conservation Area Appraisal (The Conservation Studio consultants 2005; subject to public consultation) pre-dates the Stonebridge Mill extension but states:

- (i) *'The special interest that justifies the designation of the Longridge Conservation Area derives from the following features: Good example of a Lancashire industrial town; Former cotton mills and local stone quarries were important to the town's development in the C19; Long terraces of mill worker's housing of the mid to late C19'* (Summary of Special Interest);
- (ii) *'The map of 1892 shows how the cotton industry had taken over the town with several large cotton mills in the vicinity; Victoria Mill (1862) to the north off Green Lane; Cramp Oak Mill (1851) off Berry Lane; and Stone Bridge Mill (1850) and Queens Mill (1874) off Chatburn Road'* (Historic Development and Archaeology: Origins and Historic Development). I note that Stone Bridge Mill is the only survival;

2.10 The Pennine Lancashire Northlight Weaving Shed Study (2010) was commissioned by Design & Heritage Pennine Lancashire with the support of English Heritage, Heritage Trust for the North West, Lancashire County Council and the local authorities of Pennine Lancashire. It's objective is to provide a practical guide to all those involved in the conservation and development of the unique north light weaving sheds of the region and to generate enthusiasm for their retention and future use.

The study suggests:

"The key characteristics and benefits of the north light weaving sheds were:

- *Large single storey making it easier to house and supervise large numbers of power looms leading to greater production efficiency.*
- *The single storey, 'modular' nature of the structure enabled it to fit to irregular sites and for the buildings to be readily extended as businesses grew.*
- *The single storey sheds were structurally more secure as they avoided the problems of accumulative weight and vibration induced by power looms in multistorey mills by spreading the loads across the ground floor.*
- *The provision of high levels of north light uniformly distributed across the full extent of the floor area was imperative to the process of weaving as it increased worker's efficiency and removed shadows which could otherwise disguise faults in the quality of the cloth. The uniformity of the lighting enable looms to be distributed freely throughout the floor plan.*
- *The provision of top lighting freed the restrictions on size imposed by side lighting or floor spans in multi-storey building which enable very large deep plan buildings, often housing many hundreds of power looms, to be developed.*
- *Simple and relatively cheap construction using a 'standardised' structural system of cast iron columns and beams, timber rafters, slate roof coverings and glazed timber north lights enclosed within coursed stone outer walls. The cast iron structure offered improved fire resistance over the timber floors of multi-storey mills and the structure incorporated all the bracketry necessary to support the power line shafting and belt drives enabling new companies to set up and establish businesses relatively cheaply.*

Today almost all manufactories' and mills in the region have closed. Many extant weaving sheds have been converted for other uses such as small workshops, light industrial, garage or storage functions. These sheds are often in poor condition and, where altered, the fabric has been modified in the most expedient way with little care for the preservation or repair of the original fabric and structure.

The number and scale of the weaving sheds has had a significant impact on the urban and semirural character of the Lancashire region. As a group of buildings they stand testament to the significance of the textile industry in the region and contribute greatly to our understanding and knowledge of the ways in which the industry transformed the urban and rural life of the area, influencing the development of towns and elevating small villages to important manufacturing centres. As a group the buildings themselves reflect changes in technology, from water to steam power, advances in manufacturing machinery and the consequential effect on the industrial economy.

Despite the survival rate to date, few mills are legally protected and the pressure to demolish and redevelop the large and potentially profitable sites they occupy intensifies.

It is often the case that buildings with unique and interesting historic fabric are perceived to be problematic for adaptive reuse, either through potential difficulties in obtaining consents, the physical difficulties in adapting the buildings for new uses or the expense of retaining or conserving the fabric of the buildings.

However, the problems associated with the reuse of multi-storey historic buildings are not present when considering the reuse of the north light weaving sheds. The historic interest of the sheds lies primarily in the quality of their 3 dimensional space and light, the unique industrial quality of their cast iron structures and the historic significance of the buildings as a group in relation to the development of the weaving industry. The buildings themselves are simple, robustly constructed with little or no ornamentation and their simple open plan single storey structures lend themselves well to numerous types of new use without the need for extensive modification of the core historic fabric.

More often than not the reuse of the weaving sheds will require the incorporation of new building fabric as opposed to the modification or removal of the existing fabric, and with care these new insertions can be designed to exploit rather than obscure the inherent qualities of the sheds.

Where it is deemed necessary to remove parts of the existing fabric or structure, for example to create an open courtyard within the deep plan form, the modular nature of the buildings construction makes this relatively straight forward and, if required, reversible at some future date. Furthermore, the uniformity of the structural system means that one part of the structure is no different to the other and therefore the removal of part of the structure does not risk the loss of 'precious' or unique fabric usually associated with other historic buildings".

The study summary states:

"The weaving sheds of the Pennine Lancashire are an integral part of its landscape and the fabric of its towns. The decline of the manufacturing economy in the region and changing requirements for industrial spaces has left a surplus of unused industrial buildings and many vacant and empty weaving sheds. The loss of these buildings will have a significant impact on the identity of this area and its cultural, social and community life and in the longer term its economic strength.

As a building type this study illustrates the wide range of uses to which weaving sheds can be put and the feasibility of their conversion. It also demonstrates that such development should be as viable as new build development for the same use.

There are already many good examples of how similar buildings have been effectively converted and reused in a viable and sustainable way and provide a demonstration of

how the constraints can be resolved. This precedent should be used to help local owners consider a wider range of development options.

With enthusiasm and commitment from those involved in the care of the historic environment, our economic development and our community life and the encouragement and support of their owners this study has concluded that there is no reason why the unique weaving sheds of the Pennines Lancashire should not have a bright and productive future”.

2.11 The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) states:

“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” (paragraph 127);

“Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 133 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 134, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole” (paragraph 138);

3 PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREA EXTENSION

3.1 On 11 November 2010 the Borough Council's Principal Planning Officer (Design and Conservation) was invited by landowners to discuss the Longridge Conservation Area boundary at Stonebridge Mill which appeared to have excluded elements of interest. The Borough Council's subsequent correspondence is appended and states:

“I would therefore agree that the Longridge Conservation Area boundary does appear to require reconsideration and possible extension at Stonebridge Mill and intend to report the matter to a forthcoming Planning and Development Committee meeting. However, mindful of the commercial considerations discussed at our meeting I would be grateful for your comment and opinion on the extent of any proposed conservation area extension before progression with this matter.

In my officer opinion and without prejudice to any decision of the Borough Council, the modern portal frame building has no interest. However, the brick boiler house, water tower and c.1910 weaving shed and adjoining stores/workshops has architectural and historic interest as part of the evolution, adaption and development of the textile mill site.

I have recently been advised that this letter was not received.

3.2 On 1 February 2012 a further meeting was held at Stonebridge Mill to discuss the historic and architectural significance of the brick boiler house, water tower, c.1910 weaving shed and the adjoining stores/workshops and the implications of conservation area designation and policy. Reference was made to Policy ENV16 of the Local Plan and there already being some control on development outside of the conservation boundary in terms of setting and views.

Policy ENV16 states:

“Within conservation areas development will be strictly controlled to ensure that it reflects the character of the area in terms of scale, size, design and materials. Trees, important open spaces and natural features will also be protected as appropriate. The desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area will also be a material consideration in deciding development proposals outside the designated area which would affect its setting or views into or out of the area”.

- 3.3 The site meetings have enabled officers to consider the historic and architectural significance of the structures outside of the conservation area boundary. Whilst it is clear that some elements of structures are later additions (eg the brick built extension to the rear of the stone built c.1910 north – light weaving shed), it is considered appropriate to initially consult on a proposed conservation area boundary which includes all structures that appear to contribute to the special architectural and historic interest of the area.

4 PROPOSED CONSULTATION

- 4.1 I would concur and welcome the landowners’ identification of the spurious form of the Longridge Conservation Area boundary at Stonebridge Mill and I am sensitive to their commercial considerations which necessitate an early resolution to this issue. I am also mindful of the recent national interest (eg Industrial Heritage was the theme for English Heritage’s Buildings at Risk campaign in 2011) in industrial sites and of the Lancashire Mills Survey’s identification of Stonebridge Mill as an important representative of the County’s weaving industry. I am also conscious that the existing truncated conservation area boundary may not reflect the original expectations of the Town Council of Longridge and Longridge Heritage Committee when they asked for Stonebridge Mill to be included within Longridge Conservation Area as the last of the town’s mills.

- 4.2 The consultation undertaken in 2008, on first proposal of a Stonebridge Mill extension to Longridge consultation area, included all residents and businesses within the proposed extension area. Only two representations (support) were received, from the Town Council of Longridge and Longridge Heritage Committee.

- 4.3 It is therefore considered that a short and targeted consultation be undertaken to ascertain opinions as to a more appropriate and long term boundary for the conservation area at this point. This will include the landowners, the Town Council, Longridge Heritage Committee and Lancashire County Council (Lancashire Mills Survey). The findings of the consultation will be reported to Committee at the earliest opportunity.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 In my opinion the omission of important Stonebridge Mill buildings and structures from Longridge Conservation Area undermines the significance, integrity and legibility of this important site and the character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole. The May 2008 boundary was drawn with principal regard to the appearance of Stonebridge Mill and ignored building elements to the rear of facades, and the end of range boiler house obscured by the modern portal frame building. However, a more thorough inspection of the site, informed by the Lancashire Mills Survey and a better understanding of the significance of individual elements of the weaving mill site, has enabled the full character of the site to be appreciated.

- 5.2 The reassessment of the Longridge Conservation Area boundary at Stonebridge Mill would appear consistent with the duty at Section 69(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to review the past exercise of conservation area designation and to determine whether any further parts of the Borough should be designated as conservation areas.

6 RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – Conservation area designation and extension may result in an increase in planning applications submitted as a result of “permitted development” thresholds being reduced. Whilst the Council currently receives less than 10 conservation area consent applications for the demolition of buildings within conservation areas each year, it should be noted that this type of application carries no submission fee. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires new conservation area designations to be publicised in the London Gazette and in at least one newspaper circulating in the area of the local planning authority.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The main consequences of conservation area designation are:
 1. the Borough Council has a statutory duty to keep conservation area designations under review.
 2. the Borough Council is under a general duty to ensure the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas, and a particular duty to prepare proposals to that end;
 3. notice must be given to the Borough Council before works are carried out to any tree in the area;
 4. conservation area consent is required for the demolition of most unlisted buildings in the area (enforcement action or criminal prosecution may result if consent is not obtained);
 5. the limits of what works may be carried out without planning permission are different;
 6. extra publicity is given to planning applications affecting conservation areas;
 7. the Borough Council is to take into account the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the area when determining applications;
 8. the making of Article 4 Directions, which limit permitted development rights, is more straight forward;
 9. the Borough Council or the Secretary of State may be able to take steps to ensure that a building in a conservation area is kept in good repair;
- Political – N/A.
- Reputation – N/A.

7 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 7.1 Agree to the undertaking of a limited consultation exercise in regard to the proposed extension of Longridge Conservation Area at Stonebridge Mill.
- 7.2 Agree that the results of this consultation be reported to Planning and Development Committee for further consideration.

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1 Referred to in report.

For further information please ask for Adrian Dowd, extension 4513.