



**NORTHAMPTON  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Item No.

**8**

**Name of Committee  
CABINET**

**Directorate: Governance and  
Resources**

**Corporate Manager:**

**Date: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006**

**Report Title**

**Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan**

**Key Decision**

**NO**

## **1. Recommendations**

**1.1 That Members note the identified historic significance of Delapre Abbey both nationally and locally and the conservation policies and recommendations identified as necessary to secure the future of this Grade II\* Listed Building.**

**1.2 That Members approve the adoption of the Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan as drafted.**

## **2. Summary**

**2.1. At its March 2005 meeting Members approved the setting up of the Delapre Abbey Building Preservation Trust to commission an Options Appraisal Study to identify how the future of the Abbey and its setting could be secured.**

**2.2 Before any work could be undertaken in this respect it was essential to understand the historic development of this asset and its sensitivity to change. To achieve this a Conservation Plan was commissioned by Regeneration and Growth and the purpose of this report is to bring this document to Members attention and seek their approval to its formal adoption by the Council.**

### **3. Report Background**

**3.1 The Delapre Abbey Consultation Group was established by the Council following concerns being expressed by the local community and other interested organisations and individuals regarding the long term future of the Abbey complex. Following the group discussions with members of The Architectural Heritage Fund, the setting up of a Building Preservation Trust was considered to be a potential way forward worthy of exploration.**

**3.2 As a result of this a report was brought before Cabinet in March 2005 where approval was given to the setting up of a Building Preservation Trust and the commissioning of an Options Appraisal study to inform the most appropriate way forward to restore the Abbey and bring it back into sympathetic and sustainable use.**

**3.3 In order to understand the value of this heritage asset it was essential to have a conservation plan in place to inform the historic development of the site and how the asset may be sensitive to change. This information is critical to the Options Appraisal process and needed to be undertaken prior to any appraisal being commissioned.**

**3.4 The Conservation Studio were appointed by the Council to undertake the conservation plan work which has now been completed and the final draft document submitted before Members for formal adoption by the Council. The plan has been subject to public consultation with the local community and other interested parties.**

**3.5 The conservation plan requires adoption by the Council as owner and planning authority and upon approval will be a material consideration when making decisions which affect the building complex and its surroundings in both Planning and management and maintenance terms.**

#### **3.6 Implications of the Conservation Plan**

- a) The plan proposes a number of policies and recommendations, many of which are already implemented by the Council. Others seek to strengthen and broaden the Council's existing commitment to the building complex. Adoption of the policies will require an ongoing maintenance and repair commitment by the Council until the Options Appraisal process is complete and the Delapre Abbey Building Preservation Trust fully established which could be in the region of 12-18 months.**
- b) From a planning point of view the proposed policies largely reinforce those in Northampton Local Plan and other established local plan policy and good practice guidance. It is also proposed to commence the initial stages of appraising the areas suitability for Conservation Area status in support of the recommendations within the Conservation Plan.**

- c) In respect of the Borough Council's liabilities as owner of the building many of the recommendations are already in place or in the process of being adopted. With respect to the condition of the building the Borough Council already adopts a policy of keeping the building 'wind and watertight' and carrying out repairs with minimal intrusion of the integrity of the building in order to protect its historic significance. It is therefore felt that the document will probably impose little further repair or financial obligation in this respect than already exists from its listed status.

### **3.7**

- a) A summary of the policies and recommendations included within the Conservation Plan are attached to this report.
- b) Full copies of the Draft Conservation Plan are available for perusal in the Members Room, from Frazer McGown, Committee Clerks Office and Caroline Percival within Estates & Asset Management.

## **4. Options and Evaluation of Options**

### **Options and Evaluation of Options:**

4.1 If the Borough Council does not adopt the conservation plan and its recommendations it may be difficult to progress the subsequent steps necessary to secure the future of the Abbey which are dependent on the contents and findings of this plan. Additionally, not to adopt plan which was commissioned by the Authority and subject to much public participation would raise significant doubts about the Authority's commitment to the building and undermine the agreed way forward established with the many groups represented on the Delapre Abbey Consultation Group set up by the Authority and recommendations of The Architectural Heritage Fund.

4.2 The adoption of the Conservation Plan would enable the commencement of the Options Appraisal process already approved and the wishes of the Delapre Abbey Consultation Group and other parties including The Architectural Heritage Fund who have all fully endorsed the Borough Council's current proposals for securing the future of the Abbey.

## **5. Resource Implications (including Financial Implications)**

It is not anticipated that any further significant resource implications will necessarily arise from this report or the adoption of the plan in that the Authority already has existing policies in the protection of Listed Buildings and the Borough Council already has an existing maintenance and repair responsibility for the building which would in any event be ongoing irrespective of the adoption of the plan.

## **6. Risk and Opportunity Issues**

**6.1 Not to adopt the Conservation Plan would severely undermine the public's perception of the Borough Council's intentions for the property.**

**6.2 The carrying out of an Options Appraisal Study is dependent upon the adoption of the Conservation Plan.**

**6.3 The Borough Council and Delapre Abbey Preservation Trust would find it very difficult to attract funding to assist any plans, policies or initiatives that may be proposed for the premises.**

**6.4 The adoption of the plan endorses the guidance and support received from The Architectural Heritage Fund and English Heritage together with the actions approved by Cabinet on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2004. Adoption of the plan will reaffirm the Council's commitment to securing the long-term future of the Abbey.**

**6.5 If the plan is adopted and the long term future not secured implementing some of the recommendations could incur extra costs to the Borough Council in the future.**

## **7. Consultees (Internal and External)**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>Internal</b> | <b>Legal Services<br/>Carl Grimmer</b>  |
| <b>External</b> | <b>A public consultation exercise formed part of the Conservation Plan process.</b> |

## 8. Compliance Issues

### A: How Proposals Deliver Priority Outcomes

|   |
|---|
| <b>Recovery Plan</b>  |
| No direct implications  |
| <b>Corporate Plan</b>   |
| Priority 1 – The Conservation Plan takes account of local and wider community views.<br>Priority 3 – The adoption of the plan will assist in securing the regeneration of a historic Grade II* Listed Building. |

### B: Other Implications

|   |
|---|
| <b>Other Strategies</b>                             |
| Reflects the policies of the Northampton Local Plan |

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| <b>Finance Comments</b> |
| Not Applicable          |

|                       |
|-----------------------|
| <b>Legal Comments</b> |
|                       |

## 9. Background Papers

| Title | Description  | Source                                      |
|-------|--|---|
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relevant Estates &amp; Asset Management and Conservation files</li><li>• Draft Delapre Abbey Conservation Plan</li></ul> | Estates & Asset Management and Conservation |

[Report Author, title and extension]

| Name  | Signature                     | Date  | Ext. |
|---|-------------------------------|-------|------|
| Author  | <i>[Signature]</i> pp DPlekle | 21/11 | 5    |
| Corporate Manager<br><i>Finance Director</i>            | <i>[Signature]</i>            | 21/11 | 8744 |
| Director  |                               |       |      |
| Monitoring Officer<br>or Deputy<br>(Key decision only)  |                               |       |      |
| Section 151 Officer<br>or Deputy<br>(Key decision only) |                               |       |      |

# **DELAPRÉ ABBEY CONSERVATION PLAN**

**Summary of Policies and  
Recommendations**

## Summary

This Conservation Plan has been commissioned by Northampton Borough Council ("the Borough Council"), the owner of Delapré Abbey, a grade II\* listed building situated within a large landscaped park on the south side of Northampton.

### It recommends that:

1. This document is approved by Northampton Borough Council and adopted for planning control purposes.
2. The Borough commission an Options Appraisal and a Management Plan for Delapré Abbey
3. The following work is required, once a future use for the site has been agreed:
  - The preparation of a detailed scheme for the restoration of the historic interiors
  - The preparation of a scheme to rebuild the Conservatory
  - The preparation of a scheme to reuse the Orangery
  - The provision of improved visitor facilities including public toilets and a café
4. A full archaeological evaluation of the buildings and the immediate site is undertaken.
5. An assessment of the site's ecological significance is undertaken.
6. The Borough Council ask for the site to be added to English Heritage's Register of Historic Park and Gardens
7. The Borough Council designate Delapré Abbey, its gardens and part of the park as a Conservation Area
8. The Borough Council consider applying to outside organisations, including the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, for grant aid.
9. Immediate improvements are made to visitor interpretation, access, and facilities.
10. Regular quinquennial reviews of the buildings' condition are carried out.





## 6 CONSERVATION POLICIES

This section of the Delapré Abbey Conservation Plan sets out general and specific policies to ensure that the Abbey and its surrounding parkland are maintained and managed in accordance with the principles as advocated in the body of the Plan.

They complement and form a development of the policies already set out in Northampton Borough Council's Local Plan and in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, which contains central government's advice on the management of conservation areas and listed buildings.

The policies have been arranged in four groups, dealing respectively, in:

- 6.1 General conservation policies
- 6.2 Policies to protect the amenity and historical integrity of Delapré Abbey
- 6.3 Policies for the protection of Delapré Park and gardens
- 6.4 Policies to enhance the public's understanding of the site and its setting
- 6.5 Policies to provide for the future management of Delapré Abbey buildings.

### 6.1 General conservation policies

*Policy 1.1 To repair, develop and maintain the Delapré Abbey site in accordance with international, national and local authority conservation principles and policies.*

The statement of historical and cultural significance should be accepted by Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council, English Heritage, and any other interested statutory organisations, as one of the bases for future planning and work.

The policies recommended and options discussed throughout this document should be endorsed as a guide for future planning work.

*1.2 To ensure that all statutory and legal requirements are met.*

Listed buildings:

Delapré Abbey is grade II\* listed, and most of the other buildings within its immediate vicinity are also listed grade II. It is the responsibility of Northampton Borough Council to apply for all necessary permissions, after first discussing any proposals with English Heritage.

Equal Opportunities:

Compliance with MCC Equal Opportunities policies and strategies, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Health and Safety Issues:

All health and safety issues should be resolved bearing in mind both the need to maintain and preserve the historic appearance of Delapré Abbey, its gardens, and the adjoining parkland, and at the same time achieve the preservation and enhancement of the listed structures.

All construction works on the site should comply with the CDM Regulations (1994).

*Policy 1.3 Sustainability: The Delapré Abbey site should be managed in a sustainable way, and should enable present and future generations to appreciate and conserve the area's picturesque and sublime qualities*

Any repairs, improvements or alterations to the Delapré Abbey buildings, its gardens and its parkland, should be carried out using sustainable methods and materials, appropriate for the site and its particular location.

*Policy 1.4 Local communities: The future management of the Delapré Abbey site should be responsive where appropriate to the needs of both local communities and visitors.*

Increasing public access to Delapré Abbey, its gardens and its parkland, could have a detrimental impact on the amenity of local residents including those tenants who occupy properties within the site, for instance, by increased traffic generation. The impact of developing the site, including with additional facilities for tourism such as the provision of additional car parking and toilets, will need to be assessed not only in relation to the requirements of the local community but also of the tenants occupying properties in the park.

## **6.2 Policies to protect the amenity and historical integrity of Delapré Abbey**

*Policy 2.1 To ensure that wherever and whenever works are executed at Delapré Abbey (including its surrounding buildings), those works should aim to preserve, enhance or promote the special archaeological and historical qualities and significance of the site and its individual structures and features.*

All building, maintenance and landscape works must aim not only for the careful retention and repair of historic elements, but also for the removal of the historically insignificant in order to enhance the significant. Great care needs to be taken when considering what is "historically insignificant" to ensure that no features of interest are lost due to demolition or removal. The use of the gazetteer provided within this Conservation Plan will help to protect those features.

*Policy 2.2 Protecting the asset: All work to the Delapré Abbey buildings and the adjoining gardens and parkland should be carried out with reference to the detailed information provided in the document "Delapré Abbey", prepared by Joan Wake, published by Northampton Record Society in 1975, and in any other documents approved by Northampton Borough Council, including future archaeological surveys and the gazetteer included within this Conservation Plan.*

Dr Wake's document describes the history of the Delapré Abbey site in great detail and provides extremely useful information about the buildings and their development. This Conservation Plan suggests that further archaeological investigations are carried out to help analyse the historical development of the site. Any future work on Delapré Abbey must refer to Dr Wake's document, this Conservation Plan, and any archaeological reports subsequently produced.

*Policy 2.3 All work to the Delapré Abbey buildings must be subject to an archaeological watching brief and all work to the buildings must be carried out by qualified and experienced craftsmen, using traditional materials.*

In the past, Delapré Abbey has been repaired on an *ad hoc* basis as funding became available. Any future repair and restoration schemes must be fully specified and priced, and tenders sought from appropriately qualified and experienced craftsmen or contractors. All future work must therefore be carried out using the appropriate personnel, with carefully drawn up plans and specifications.

*Policy 2.4 To establish and maintain a regular programme of inspection supported by careful maintenance and repair.*

Regular, prompt and efficient maintenance has been proven to be a successful and prudent method of preserving the national heritage including buildings such as Delapré Abbey. One way of

instigating an effective regime is to undertake quinquennial inspections of the site so that relatively minor problems can be identified and resolved before more expensive and radical solutions are required.

*Policy 2.5 To pursue a policy of minimum intervention to the existing buildings and the below ground archeology.*

Any proposal to repair, consolidate or alter the buildings at Delapré Abbey should be assessed to see if it affects historic fabric. If the removal of original or significant fabric is deemed to be unavoidable, it should further be ensured that there is not a more appropriate and less intrusive alternative.

*Policy 2.6 To employ conservative repair/consolidation methods to ensure the proper maintenance of the buildings and to arrest progressive dilapidation.*

Priority should be given to works of repair or consolidation where the material or element is at risk from progressive deterioration, and judicious repair can arrest or slow that decline.

### **6.3 Policies for the protection of Delapré Park and gardens**

*Policy 3.1 Any repairs, improvements or alterations to the Delapré Abbey buildings and their setting should safeguard, and where possible, seek to enhance and promote, the historic environment of the site*

Delapré Abbey park and gardens contain the remains of human activity from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, of proven historic significance. Any changes to the site must reflect this sensitive location.

*Policy 3.2 Local designations: Locally Important Landscape Area, an area of Acknowledged Nature Conservation Value, and a Local Nature Reserve*

*All repairs, improvements and alterations to the Delapré Abbey site should conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the gardens and surrounding parkland.*

Delapré Abbey park is a Locally Important Landscape Area. The ornamental garden and margins of the lake to the east of Delapré Abbey are a site of Acknowledged Nature Conservation Value. The old course of the River Nene is a Local Nature Reserve

*Policy 3.3 English Heritage Battlefields Register:  
Any changes to the parkland surrounding Delapré Abbey should safeguard, and where possible, seek to enhance and promote, the battlefield site.*

The whole of Delapré Park and further land down to and beyond the River Nene is designated on the English Heritage Battlefields Register as the site of the Battle of Northampton 1460 (see Appendix 2)

*Policy 3.4 The Queen Eleanor Cross.  
Any changes to the parkland surrounding Delapré Abbey should safeguard, and where possible, seek to enhance and promote, the Queen Eleanor Cross.*

The Queen Eleanor Cross (Appendix 2) is located next to London Road on the edge of Delapré Park. It is a Scheduled Monument and a grade I listed building and therefore its setting must be preserved or enhanced.

*Policy 3.5 Natural resources:*

*Any changes to the Delapré Abbey site should be sensitive to the area's special qualities and should preserve or enhance the outstanding natural resources of woodland, parkland and water courses.*

Delapré Abbey lies within a parkland setting largely contrived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The more recent use of part of the parkland as a golf course has resulted in a number of changes to the topography which have detracted from the character of this historic parkland. Further changes should be avoided, unless they are reversible.

*Policy 3.6 Bio-diversity.*

*Any works to the Delapré Abbey site should conserve, and where appropriate restore or enhance, the bio-diversity of the parkland area.*

Delapré Abbey park contains a range of animals and plants which have not been recorded. However, it is likely that a number of protected species such as badgers, bats and snakes all live in parts of the woodland. A survey to enable a fuller understanding of the site's ecological significance is required..

#### **6.4 Policies to enhance the public's understanding of the site and its setting**

*Policy 4.1 On-site interpretation:*

*On-site interpretation should ensure that visitors to the site understand:*

- The historical development of the buildings
- The relationship of the buildings with the historic parkland
- The significance of the Queen Eleanor Cross and the Historic Battlefields site
- Connections with the various families who lived at Delapré Abbey and the town of Northampton

*Policy 4.2 Access:*

*Access routes and interpretive features should provide a coordinated and coherent experience for the visitor as follows:*

- Interpretative media should be designed to be accessible to visitors with all abilities and be in accordance with current best practice.
- Generally, visitors should be allowed access to as much of the site as possible and only excluded from areas considered to be unsafe or particularly vulnerable to damage. It should be clear to visitors on site where these restricted access areas are and why access is restricted.
- Access barriers and features should be visually unobtrusive and secured by methods that do not impact on the historic building, its gardens or its parkland

#### **6.5 Policies to provide for the future management of Delapré Abbey buildings.**

*Policy 5.1 The future management of Delapré Abbey.*

*The future management of Delapré Abbey should include the following:*

- The minimum of intervention is desirable, balancing cultural and environmental considerations with economic constraints;
- There is a general presumption against unsympathetic restoration, which can diminish the authenticity and thus the historic value of the buildings – this is especially important with regard to the possible work to the interiors of Delapré Abbey;

- Any work should be supervised by an experienced and qualified professional, with the use of experienced and proven contractors, tradesmen or conservators;
- Establish a "Log Book" system tied to regular maintenance, including checking, testing and servicing services installations, and cleaning gutters and checking roofs, rainwater disposal systems and drains;
- Checking all rooms, particularly little frequented areas such as attic, cellar, roof spaces and other voids; and checking under floor vents and other natural sources of ventilation;
- Ensure the buildings have adequate fire protection and these are regularly maintained;
- Protecting the buildings against other natural disasters such as flooding;
- Ensuring that the buildings are adequately insured;

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Adoption of this Conservation Plan**

Following full public consultation, this document should be approved by Northampton Borough Council and adopted for planning control purposes.

### **2. Options Appraisal and Management Plan.**

Following the adoption of this document, it is proposed that the Building Preservation Trust commission an Options Appraisal, to consider suitable future uses for Delapré Abbey, and a Management Plan, to take forward the various recommendations contained within this document.

Once a future use for the site has been agreed, other work could be undertaken, such as:

- The preparation of a detailed scheme for the restoration of the historic interiors
- The preparation of a scheme to rebuild the conservatory
- The preparation of a scheme to reuse the Orangery
- The provision of improved visitor facilities including public toilets and a café

### **3. Archaeological evaluation.**

It has been noted that a full analysis of the historical development of the site cannot be provided until more detailed archaeological evaluation is carried out. This can only be undertaken by an experienced and qualified archaeological team. A detailed Brief for this work would have to be agreed between the Borough Council and English Heritage, and would be based on the recommendations contained in section 3.3 *Assessment of building phasing*. Although not required within the Scoping Report, it is also recommended that further archaeological evaluation of the parkland and battlefield site would be advantageous.

### **4. Assessment of the site's ecological significance.**

To date, no detailed assessment of the flora and fauna of the Delapré Abbey buildings and the surrounding gardens and parkland has been carried out. Before major works are planned, this should be carried out by a professional qualified organisation.

### **5. English Heritage's Register of Historic Park and Gardens**

The Borough Council should ask English Heritage to add Delapré Abbey, its gardens and part of the park (excluding the golf course) to its Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The designation of the park as an Historic Park and Garden will help to assure its future protection and will provide the possibility of additional funding, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund's Historic Parks grant scheme.

### **6. Designate Delapré Abbey, its gardens and part of the park as a Conservation Area.**

This can be carried out by the Borough Council. Designation as a conservation area would help to protect the building and its setting, and add to its significance. It would also provide further opportunities for grant aid from English Heritage.

## **7. Grant aid from English Heritage.**

Delapré Abbey is included on English Heritage's Buildings-at-Risk Register, although it was at the time of survey not considered to be seriously "At Risk", and this grading has continued to the present. However, since then further deterioration has taken place and as the building is only partially in use, it may be possible at some stage in the future to get the building considered for grant aid from English Heritage for works of repair and restoration, although it is understood that no funds are currently available.

It is also understood that English Heritage may be prepared to upgrade or specifically list some of the buildings within the site as part of an overall review. This has apparently not been progressed due to resource shortages but the Borough Council could consider approaching English Heritage, once this Conservation Plan has been adopted, to see if further designations (all of which would add to the "heritage value" of the site) could be progressed.

## **8. Improve visitor interpretation, access, and facilities.**

Currently there is one board next to the house which provides some information about the site. This could be greatly improved with better graphics and further boards provided in the grounds and possibly in the house, at least as a temporary solution until the building is fully restored and back in full use.

There is no disabled access to Delapré Abbey at present, although informal arrangements are possible. This will need to be urgently considered if the building is to pass into some form of more permanent public use.

There are no visitor facilities at the site apart from the informal arrangements provided on a part-time basis by the Friends of Delapré Abbey. There are some toilets in the house, but the public toilets in the outer stables area are currently closed awaiting refurbishment. Improved if temporary facilities, including perhaps a café, would be welcome by the many people who visit the park.

## **9. Quinquennial review.**

Once the building is properly repaired and put back into regular use, a quinquennial review, similar to that required for historic churches, should be undertaken by a qualified architect or surveyor. The buildings should therefore be fully inspected every five years to ascertain its condition.