



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30 November 2023

Report of Councillor Ashley Baxter,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Finance and Economic
Development

Update on the review of a district-wide heritage plaque nomination scheme and information trails

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on Government plans to extend the blue plaques scheme outside of London. Member support is sought to launch a consultation exercise, in collaboration with the local Civic Societies, Town Councils and other stakeholders, to identify notable figures with connections to buildings across South Kesteven in readiness for an extended national scheme, a Council Blue Plaque Scheme or both.

Recommendations

It is recommended Committee:

- 1. Endorses Officers collaborating with Civic Societies, Town Councils and other stakeholders, in creating a list of figures who have shaped their community via a consultation exercise targeted at residents and local groups which allows people and buildings from across South Kesteven to be nominated.**
- 2. Endorses raising the profile of Grantham, by encouraging residents to download the TrailTale app.**
- 3. Endorses the Council's Economic Development Team and Planning Conservation Officers to engage in an audit of existing heritage plaques in South Kesteven to inform future recommendations regarding levels of existing representation and future additions to the TrailTale app.**

4. **Agrees to receive a further update on the plans to expand the official blue plaque scheme beyond London when this becomes available.**

Decision Information	
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	• Growth and our economy • Healthy and strong communities
Which wards are impacted?	All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 It is anticipated the costs associated with the proposed expansion of the Blue Plaque and Information Trails could be met from approved budget within the Growth and Culture Directorate.

Completed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Deputy Director (Finance & ICT) and Deputy S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no legal and governance implications arising from this report.
- 1.3 According to English Heritage, plaques do not create any legal protection for a property, however, can help raise awareness of its historical significance and in turn help to preserve it.
- 1.4 Listed Building consent would be required for any plaque installed on a Listed building and there may also be constraints where the building is in a conservation area.

Completed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive
Climate Change

- 1.5 It is widely reported, walking can help reduce physical inactivity and air pollution, save lives and mitigate climate change. By walking shorter journeys instead of driving a car, individuals are helping to reduce emissions. The aim of trail apps is to turn commuters and visitors alike into urban explorers, encouraging pedestrians to discover new areas of towns, rather than speed walk on by. Additionally, trail apps help people have a healthier more interesting walk.

Completed by: Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 Under the Healthy and Strong Communities theme within the South Kesteven District Council Corporate Plan (2020-2023), there is an ambition to build upon and celebrate the rich heritage and culture of the District. Delivering growth of the economy is seen as fundamental to the success of South Kesteven, its businesses and residents. Key achievements include securing High Street Heritage Action Zone funding to restore the cultural heritage of buildings in Grantham town centre (an update on this successful scheme forms part of the agenda for today's meeting).
- 2.2 On 6 September 2022, a report was presented to the former Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which provided an overview of the London Blue Plaque Scheme run by English Heritage. The report went on to confirm outside of London, similar plaque schemes are run by local councils, civic societies and other organisations, using their own selection criteria. Reference was made to Grantham's Blue Plaque and Information Trail, which can be accessed online at: <https://irp.cdn-website.com/f8bc0210/files/uploaded/Blue-Plaque-Information-Trail-A5-web-version.pdf>
- 2.3 For ease of reading, the remainder of this report is separated into three sections, as follows:
- A. Heritage plaques
 - B. Government plans to extend the existing blue plaque scheme outside London
 - C. Information trails

(A) Heritage plaques

- 2.4 The stringent criteria for a blue plaque which is set by English Heritage states '...the people or events commemorated are of sufficient local historic importance or eminence to warrant recognition' (see **background papers** section of this report).
- 2.5 In early 2019, a Blue Plaque Guide was produced to commemorate remarkable individuals associated with Grantham. The guide and information trail, produced by South Kesteven District Council in conjunction with Grantham Civic Society, lists 16 people including scientists, writers, philosophers and war heroes.

- 2.6 Elsewhere in the District, Stamford Civic Society will erect plaques on buildings associated with famous people in cases where their requirements are met. In The Deepings, Deepings Heritage have installed boards showing various sites of historical interest outlining key events and personalities. All Civic Societies across the District (including the Bourne Civic Society) run activities including lectures, tours and visits.

(B) Government plans to extend the blue plaques scheme outside of London

- 2.7 During 6 September 2022 meeting, elected Members agreed there would be merit in complementing the existing and valued efforts of Civic Societies, by exploring the introduction of a District-wide blue plaque guide and information trails. The intention being, once the review had been undertaken, any necessary recommendations would be made to Cabinet.
- 2.8 Shortly thereafter, Government's intention to agree to an expansion of the blue plaque scheme currently operated by Historic England in London, was widely reported. However, the timing of this proposed expansion and more detail have been rather scant. That was until 6 September 2023, when the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Parliamentary Under Secretary Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, published a press release highlighting the proposed national expansion.
- 2.9 The plan sees DCMS, Historic England and English Heritage work together to develop an England-wide scheme. English Heritage has run the scheme since 1986. In 1998 English Heritage initiated a trial national scheme which saw 34 plaques installed in Birmingham, Merseyside, Southampton and Portsmouth. The scheme was discontinued in 2005 (please see **Key Considerations** section of this report).
- 2.10 What is now known is the new scheme has been enabled by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 which was given Royal Assent on Thursday 26 October. LURA provides the legislative basis to allow the blue plaque scheme to be extended to the whole of England from 26 December 2023.
- 2.11 Historic England will now come up with a plan to facilitate it. Whilst it is proposed no further work on expanding the District-wide Blue Plaque Guide and Information Trails takes place until there is more certainty of the England-wide scheme, it is being recommended in the meantime, people could be asked to think about who has helped define their community and makes them proud of where they live so their impact on their home area, as well as the wider world, can be recognised and celebrated.

(C) Information trails

Grantham's Hidden History on the Trailtale app

- 2.12 Since 6 September 2022 meeting, an app to guide visitors through Grantham's landmarks and history has been launched. The TrailTale app is a guided walk where users can choose what to explore by following a set route or picking a series of highlights.
- 2.13 The content on the app was developed through the High Street Heritage Action Zone, funded by Historic England and South Kesteven District Council. Grantham's Hidden History is a popular trail with the route covering almost two miles, which should take around two hours should people choose the entire trail. What makes the app worthwhile, is users can dip in and out, choose to learn about only the street they are on, or pick personal highlights to learn more about places they already know.
- 2.14 The content was put together thanks to individuals with specialist local knowledge, shedding light on fascinating local tales, with a focus on the streets which fall within the High Street Heritage Action Zone. Users of the TrailTale app are guided around the town centre and can see historic photographs, old maps, learn about what place names mean while also listening to an audio history as they enjoy what the town has to offer in the present day. Sites on the tour include Dawson's and Hurst's Almshouses, the King's School, the town's Witham walk, Grantham House, St Wulfram's, the story of the Blue Pig and Beehive Inn and much more. The TrailTale app can be downloaded from usual providers, including the App Store and Android.
- 2.15 The recommendation is for Members to support the work of Officers in raising the profile of Grantham by encouraging residents to download the TailTail App to access Grantham's Hidden History trail.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 London's blue plaques are world-renowned. For over 150 years they have helped to celebrate the rich and diverse heritage of the capital city and the people who have passed through it.
- 3.2 Many believe that people everywhere should be able to celebrate the figures who have shaped their communities, which is why the Government seek to extend this opportunity across the country to allow people and buildings from anywhere in England to be nominated.
- 3.3 One of the key benefits of the planned national expansion is the potential to boost local connections and pride among residents. Standing in a historic place and finding a blue plaque, or historical place marker, brings people face to face with shared history. As more people become aware of their local history, it can lead to

economic growth in these areas, drawing visitors interested in exploring and learning about their heritage.

- 3.4 Currently, Historic England are referring to their existing criteria for selection, indicating this will continue to be what is used going forward into an extended scheme. The criterion is quite strict, much more so than the processes currently used by the various civic societies who install Blue Plaques in South Kesteven. For example, there are several plaques in Grantham which it is believed would not have met the criteria of the Historic England scheme.
- 3.5 It is not easy to successfully apply for a Historic England blue plaque. As detailed in paragraph 2.12, a previous pilot scheme which took place in the early 2000's was scrapped because it determined most of the applicable figures were already commemorated by plaques which had been installed by local organisations.
- 3.6 With regards to blue plaque guides/trails – the only one which currently operates relates to Grantham's blue plaques. It was funded by InvestSK Ltd and produced in collaboration with the Grantham Civic society. A limited number of paper copies were produced, however given the passage of time, is now only available online. It is out of date, as the civic society have installed a couple of additional plaques in the interim.
- 3.7 Currently blue plaques in South Kesteven are entirely the preserve of the Town Councils and Civic Societies. Grantham has the most (in the region of over 20), Stamford has six, Bourne has five, and there are a few in The Deepings.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The expansion of the London scheme will build on local efforts and help people feel a stronger connection to the history all around South Kesteven. It is likely, even with the planned expansion of the Historic England scheme, local organisations will still choose to install their own plaques. It is for this reason, the do nothing option has been discounted.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 More plaques across South Kesteven will help people better understand the history of the places they live and visit.
- 5.2 Trails can add value to the visitor experience and when digitised (operating on smart devices such as tablets, phones and the Apple Watch) have advantages over paper-based trails as solutions can be feature rich, easy to use and are not intrusive as visitors use their own smart devices, thereby greatly reducing the technology learning curve.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 *Inspirational Women of South Kesteven*, Report of Culture and Visitor Economy overview and Scrutiny Committee, published 6 September 2022, available online via the following link:
<https://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s35413/Inspirational%20Women%20of%20South%20Kesteven.pdf>
- 6.2 *Criteria used in the evaluation of suggestions for commemorative blue plaques in London*, published by English Heritage on 25 November 2013 and available online via the following link:
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/siteassets/home/visit/blue-plaques/propose-plaque/blue-plaques-criteria-june-2019.pdf>
- 6.3 *National expansion of blue plaques schemes*, press release from the department for Culture, media and Sport and Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, published 6 September 2023 and available online via the following link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-expansion-of-blue-plaques-schemes#:~:text=Currently%20the%20official%20blue%20plaques,blue%20plaques%20are%20world%2Drenowned.>
- 6.4 *Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023* available online via the following link:
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/pdfs/ukpga_20230055_en.pdf