

Heritage Plaques Policy

Overview

Heritage plaques are important in the town for a number of reasons. They re-enforce pride in the town by acknowledging the history and people of the town. They educate and remind the local community of places, people and events as well as attracting heritage tourists to Lowestoft. The plaques introduce them to the wider history and attractions in the town as well as forming an important heritage trail through the town.

What heritage should the plaques celebrate?

There seem to be three categories, places, people and events. The majority of our plaques are currently about places with the people secondary and events running last. There is an obvious reason behind this as a building is the easiest place to put a plaque.

Some areas of the town are densely populated with plaques due to their historic nature and fine architecture however other areas are still likely to have buildings which should have plaques attached to note not only their architectural heritage but their importance to the identity of the town. In the same way heritage plaques should not be limited to centuries old buildings but could be equally applied to, for example, St Peter's Court which is an original, iconic building in the town.

There are some individuals honoured by plaques and this is an area which could be strengthened. There needs to be careful consideration of when an individual merits a heritage plaque, i.e. should heritage plaques be created within an individual's lifetime. There are obviously pros and cons on either side with the concern of an individual's potential future actions embarrassing the town and the plaque. However, plaques can always be taken down, amended or replaced. A recent individual who has raised Lowestoft's profile could be equally important to the town and could attract a new contingent who may then investigate other plaques in the town. This could equally apply to an organisation.

Events are harder to tie down to a location and therefore are the hardest category for which a plaque could be erected as some events, such as the 1953 Flood affected wide swathes of town but even so they are key to the town's heritage and should be recorded.

The Design

Shape & Colour

On the whole the design should continue to be the same which is a 300mm round disc in a grey/green tone. Occasionally this might be varied where there is a lot of information required however this should be an exception otherwise the heritage plaques scheme would lose its identity. If, exceptionally, a change in size or shape is needed then it should still be in the same colour and contain the same images and font as the main set of plaques.

Image

On the whole, three images are used on the plaques and it is recommended to continue with this practice although council has previously suggested differently. Here is the reason the original concept was applied.

The Thinking Behind the Design – David Butcher

The green plaques placed around various parts of the town (concentrated particularly in the High Street area) resulted from a collaboration between me and Celia Webber, a member of the WDC Planning Dept. at the time. I was engaged upon a study of Lowestoft in the Pre-Industrial Era at the Centre of East Anglian Studies, UEA, during the mid-late 1980s, and Celia and I combined our skills (she had art training) to produce a series of plaques giving information on various aspects of the town's past in terms of buildings, people and events.

We came up with the idea of three basic categories, with a defining symbol for each: a cross for anything with a religious connotation, a nineteenth century herring lugger for anything connected with fishing, maritime activity or mercantile trade, and a reduced form of the old town badge showing the symbolic crown and rose (but without the figure of St. Margaret of Antioch, the town's patron saint) for things of general interest outside of the other two classifications.

I would advise against a generalised use of Lowestoft's armorial bearings on its plaques. The town wasn't made a borough until 29 August 1885 and the great majority of plaques both present and future will commemorate people and events well before that date. There will be occasions when display of the borough arms is appropriate, but careful thought needs to be applied to deciding when and in what context.

On occasion alternative images have been used such as the train on the Lowestoft Railway Station Plaques but this is more of an exception. Therefore, if we are going to work with the spirit of the plaques it would be appropriate to continue with the original concept as far as possible.

Font

At present there is a mixture of fonts which have been used. In future, there should be a standard font used across the plaques which should be a of a “sans” format. Comic Sans is the most universally readable font especially for people with dyslexia. Key information may be displayed in a larger font but bold fonts will be avoided. The font will be white on the dark green background.

Annual Review of Plaques

In the annual survey of the town, residents will be asked to nominate places and reasons for new plaques via a specific page on the LTC website about the heritage plaques. Residents will be able to nominate all year around.

In October of each year a working group will meet to discuss additions to the town’s portfolio of plaques. The group will consist of representatives of the town council, town historians, heritage societies and a member of the Waveney Youth Council.

Each year the council will budget for ten plaques although this does not mean that ten plaques will be erected as the plaques should only be erected if there is genuine merit to their inclusion.

The working group will decide on the which plaques it is recommending and what the wording/image on each plaque should be and prepare a report for the Town Council. The working group may include reserve recommendations in case one of the primary recommendations is not successful.

The working group will send its report as a recommendation to the first January AID committee who will have delegated responsibility to approve the plaques as long as the budget has been allocated.

At this point, the owners of the buildings/locations concerned will be contacted for permission using a standard letter and form. A period of two months should be allotted to this process. Any non-agreement in that time will then result in a reserve being offered a plaque.

This timetable will enable the design and agreement to be in place so that the plaques and be ordered in March of each year ready to be erected in April to ensure that they are on display for the main tourist season and hopefully attract repeat heritage visitors.

Insurance and Agreements

The Town Council will ensure that the plaques are covered by insurance and that necessary permission/agreements are held.

Publicity

The town council in liaison with the Heritage Centre will maintain a page on the Town Council website about the Heritage Plaques and will work with the Heritage Centre on maintaining a booklet on the plaques and heritage plaque trail.