



KNEBWORTH

REVIEW BACKGROUND PAPER

1.0 INTRODUCTION

What are Conservation Areas?

- 1.1 Conservation areas are very special places. Each one is of 'special' architectural or historic importance, with a character or appearance to be preserved or enhanced. Conservation areas are an important part of our heritage and each one is unique and irreplaceable. Their special qualities appeal to visitors and are attractive places to live and work. They provide a strong sense of place and are part of the familiar and local cherished scene.
- 1.2 Conservation areas are based around groups of buildings, and the spaces created between and around them. It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings that are the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. Each area is different and has a distinct character and appearance.

Conservation Area Legislation, Government/English Heritage Guidance and Conservation Area Policy

Conservation Area Legislation

- 1.3 Conservation areas are defined in The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The Act specifically places the following duties on local planning authorities:
- To identify and designate areas of special architectural or historic interest as conservation areas (Section 69).
 - To review the extent of conservation area designation from time to time and designate further areas if appropriate (Section 69).
 - To formulate and publish proposals for the preservation or enhancement of conservation areas, clearly identifying what it is about the character and appearance of the area which should be preserved or enhanced (Section 71).
- 1.4 Within a conservation area the usual planning requirements apply. In addition, there are further restrictions designed to aid in the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of the area. A leaflet entitled 'Conservation Areas' is available from the District Council and explains in more detail about conservation areas and the methods in place for preserving or enhancing their special character and appearance.
- 1.5 The legislation is designed to provide for the management of change not its prevention. It is designed to allow areas to remain alive and

prosperous yet ensuring that we do not sacrifice the quality of our environment and individual buildings for short-term gains. It aims to preserve the quality of our heritage, safeguarding the past for the future.

Central Government and English Heritage Guidance

- 1.6 Government also provides guidance for local authorities on Conservation Areas in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15, 'Planning and The Historic Environment', (PPG15). The contents of PPG 15 must be taken into account in preparing development plans and the guidance is material to decisions on individual development proposals.
- 1.7 In February 2006, English Heritage produced two consultative documents entitled 'Guidance on conservation area appraisals' and 'Guidance on the management of conservation areas'. The former offers advice to those undertaking, or commissioning, conservation area appraisals. It complements and should be read in conjunction with the second document, which describes the legislative and planning policy framework and deals with most aspects of conservation area designation, control and enhancement. English Heritage intends reviewing both documents within the next two years.

Conservation Area Policy

Development Plans/ Local Development Frameworks

- 1.8 Development plans are prepared both by county and district councils. The County Council prepares the Structure Plan, part of which establishes a broad strategy for conservation. The District Local Plan was prepared by the District Council and adopted on 23rd April 1996 and sets out site specific and detailed policies based on the framework of the Structure Plan. Prior to 27 September 2007, Policy 20 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan No 2 with Alterations provided the District's Local Plan Policy regarding Conservation Areas. On this date, Policy 20 expired and proposals in the District's Conservation Areas are now assessed against Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 1.9 Local planning authorities now produce Local Development Frameworks (LDFs), a portfolio of local development documents: Development Plan Documents (DPDs), Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and a Statement of Community Involvement (SCIs). North Herts' LDF is being prepared in which their will be a core strategy on how its broad strategy for conservation is integrated with other policies and then locally applied in the building of specific local sustainable communities and places.
- 1.10 A conservation area character statement, with or without a related management strategy, cannot itself be a SPD, therefore, **this document will be adopted for Development Control Purposes and may support future SPD.**

Conservation Area Character Statements

Why Produce a Character Statement?

- 1.11 The statutory requirements are laid out in 1.3 above. In addition, and prior to 18 May 2007, local authority's performance in designating conservation areas, defining the special architectural or historic interest that warrants designation through up-to-date character appraisals, and publishing management proposals for the areas based on the character appraisals was the subject of a three-part heritage "Best Value Performance Indicator" (BV219).
- 1.12 On 18 May 2007, The Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to all local authority Chief Executives to confirm that with immediate effect, BVPI219a : Total number of conservation areas and BVPI 219c : Percentage of conservation areas with published management proposal have been deleted from the national indicators. BVPI 219b : Percentage of conservation areas with an up to date character appraisal remains as a conservation area performance indicator for 2007-08.
- 1.13 Character statements are a means of ensuring that the importance and special interest of a conservation area are recognized and understood and the reasons for its designation are clearly justified. This enables informed decisions on how this special character or appearance can be preserved or enhanced when changes are proposed within the area. A conservation area character statement looks at the quality of an area in its broadest sense and identifies the special interest, character and appearance.

Who Uses a Conservation Area Character Statement?

- 1.14 A character statement is designed to be used by anyone with an interest in a conservation area, such as homeowners, builders, architects, inspectors at appeals, voluntary groups and the local authority when considering planning applications, etc. It is therefore important that any change is assessed with reference to the special interest, character or appearance of a conservation area as described within the statement to ensure that it is preserved or enhanced.

How the Character Statement is designed and how it should be used?

- 1.15 This Character Statement broadly follows English Heritage's current consultative guidelines. It will play a key role in ensuring that changes within the conservation area preserve or enhance its special character or appearance. The Statement is designed not to be prescriptive but to enable flexibility and creativity.

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