



ENGLISH HERITAGE

HERITAGE AT RISK

CONSERVATION AREAS

Introduction

For 40 years conservation areas have been helping to preserve the special character of places – not only at the heart of our historic cities and market towns but in the suburbs, former industrial quarters and rural villages that give this country its glorious distinctiveness. Since being introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act some 9,300 conservation areas have been designated across England meaning that we all live in or near to one or visit one regularly for work, shopping or relaxation. They are the element of England's heritage that is all around us and which touches all our lives.

So, what condition are they in? To answer this, English Heritage asked every local authority in the country to fill out a census form for each of its conservation areas. Heroically, nearly two-thirds of conservation officers rose to the challenge, despite the fact that some had more than 100 conservation areas to report on. The results of this first ever national survey of *Conservation Areas at Risk* are published in our *Heritage at Risk* register 2009 and have been used to inform the campaign of which this booklet is a part.

ONE IN SEVEN CONSERVATION AREAS IS AT RISK

Conservation areas are designated by local authorities, not to prevent but to 'manage' change in places local people want to protect from neglect, decay or inappropriate development. Our survey found that 1 in 7 is at risk and many more have serious problems. The problems fall into two categories: what owners and residents do or fail to do to their properties and how the council maintains the streets and public spaces.



Foregate Street and the Tything Conservation Area, Worcester

Since being introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, some 9,300 conservation areas have been designated across England meaning that we all live in or near to one, or visit one regularly for work, shopping or relaxation.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If we were to ask for just two things from this campaign, they would be these. First, that councils use the powers they already have to apply Article 4 Directions in conservation areas, giving them control over small changes to things like doors, windows, roofs and fences, which, unchecked, lead to slow but irreversible decline. Does a row of Victorian villas with plastic windows lift your spirits? I doubt it. Second, that councils pay more attention to the public elements. Cluttered streets, patchwork pavements, intrusive traffic-calming, abandoned buildings, an unkempt park, these soon add up to a pervasive air of neglect.

BY WHOM?

Keeping our conservation areas in a well-maintained condition is not just the job of the council's conservation officer. Everyone must work together – the council and the community as a whole. Article 4 Directions need local community backing and dealing with streets and open spaces should involve all parts of the council, not just Planning teams, but the Highways, Environmental Services, Health and Education departments whose buildings and maintenance programmes are crucial to the appearance of conservation areas.

Conservation areas help to underpin community cohesion. They are the local heritage that local people pass on. Join our campaign to improve England's conservation areas and you will be helping not only yourselves, but your neighbours, your children and your children's children.

Dr Simon Thurley
Chief Executive, English Heritage



Keeping our conservation areas in a well maintained condition is not just the job of the council's conservation officer. Everyone must work together – the council and the community as a whole.



Holmfirth Conservation Area, West Yorkshire; Chaldon Herring Conservation Area, Dorset; Stockton Town Centre Conservation Area, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland.



Barnsley Road Conservation Area, Birmingham

A PLAGUE OF PLASTIC ON ENGLAND'S HOUSES?

According to the English House Condition Survey (2006) run by the department for Communities and Local Government more than 40% of houses built between 1850 and 1899 now have PVCu double-glazed windows and all the evidence suggests that the proportion of historic houses with PVCu windows will continue to rise significantly.



The bad news

1 in 7 conservation areas is 'at risk', meaning it has deteriorated over the last three years, or is expected to do so over the next three years.

THE TOP 10 THREATS FACING CONSERVATION AREAS ARE:

- unsympathetic replacement doors and windows (83% of conservation areas)
- poorly maintained roads and pavements (60%)
- the amount of street clutter (45%)
- loss of boundary walls, fences or hedges (43%)
- unsightly satellite dishes (38%)
- the effects of traffic calming or traffic management (36%)
- alterations to front elevations, roofs and chimneys (34%)
- unsympathetic new extensions (31%)
- the impact of advertisements (23%)
- neglected green spaces (18%).

ACCORDING TO THE 272 CONSERVATION OFFICERS WHO TOOK PART IN OUR SURVEY:

- only 15% of conservation areas have actually seen an improvement since 2006
- only 54% of conservation areas have an Appraisal, or one in the making. These identify what is special and needs protecting and help in the area's management
- only 13% of conservation areas have an Article 4 Direction that can prevent plastic windows and doors and other small-scale but damaging changes that would otherwise not need consent
- 45% of conservation areas have no formal community support
- urban and suburban conservation areas are twice as likely to be at risk as rural ones.

The good news

Past experience proves that a conservation area is much more likely to improve over the next three years if there is a Heritage Champion in the authority.

Conservation areas with Appraisals or Article 4 Directions are almost twice as likely to improve in the next three years as those without.

Conservation areas with community support are more than twice as likely to have improved over the last three years as those without.

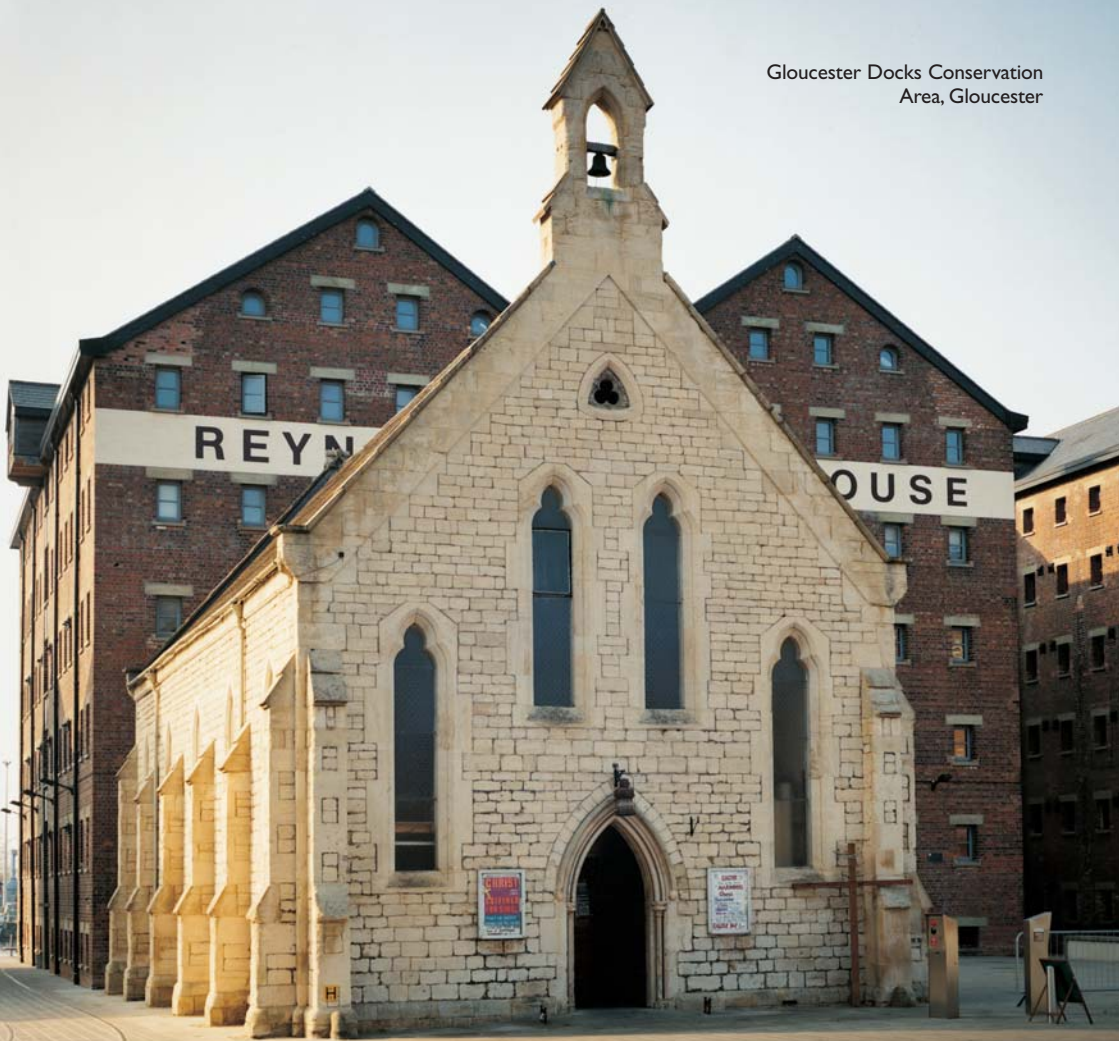
Since 1999 English Heritage has given over £65 million to improve conservation areas across the country.

82% of estate agents feel that original features tend to add financial value to properties and 78% think they help a property to sell more quickly.

CONSERVATION AREAS ADD VALUE

A recent survey of estate agents carried out by English Heritage reveals that:

- unsympathetic replacement windows and doors, particularly plastic/PVCu, is the single biggest threat to property values in conservation areas
- poorly maintained highways or paving and unsympathetic extensions and alterations are also considered to be particular problems
- 82% feel that original features tend to add financial value to properties and 78% think they help a property to sell more quickly
- three-quarters believe that a well-maintained conservation area adds to the value of the properties within it. Confidence in the area keeping its character and the attractive environment are the two key reasons
- residential properties within conservation areas sell for more than equivalent properties not in a conservation area
- 82% of estate agents feel that only a minority of their clients have a reasonable understanding of the additional controls in conservation areas.



“ In areas of industrial decline, conversions of buildings in conservation areas can provide flexible, low-rental floorspace, essential for small businesses and creative industries. Think of all the lively historic areas on the outskirts of big towns and cities where shops selling ethnic food and fashions, affordable IT and vinyl records rub shoulders with cafes and artists’ studios, all accommodated in a rich variety of Georgian and Victorian buildings. ”

Dave Chetwyn, Chair, Institute of Historic Building Conservation



Word on the street

Does living in a conservation area mean there are things I can't do to my home?

You should always check with the local council before carrying out any works to your property. In a conservation area, some works (alterations or extensions) may not require consent as they will be permitted, however other works may require planning permission due to their size, or because there is an Article 4 direction in place. Demolition of a building within the conservation area will require what is known as "conservation area consent".

How do I get a conservation area designated?

Local authorities have a duty to review areas of special historic or architectural interest for designation. You are more likely to be successful in asking for your area to be designated if you have identified what makes it special and have gained local support.

What sort of places are designated as conservation areas?

While it is true that some conservation areas protect highly desirable neighbourhoods, others protect gritty industrial heritage, town centres, suburbs and areas of modest housing. There are conservation areas that cover coal mining villages and 20th century council estates, as well as leafy London squares. Research on conservation areas in South East England shows that conservation areas have one third more properties in the lowest Council Tax Band (Band A) than in undesignated areas.



What can be done about street clutter?

Public spaces are often the least-loved part of a conservation area, despite the fact that local authorities are supposed to include plans to enhance these as well as buildings when they designate an area. Our *Save Our Streets* campaign will tell you more about what councils should be doing and how you can help.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets

How do I find reputable tradesmen?

Good tradesmen will usually be well-known in your area. Begin by asking people who have had similar work done. Local architects and surveyors who specialise in conservation work will also know. When you speak to a tradesman ask how they would tackle the job and for examples of similar work carried out.

What's wrong with plastic windows? Won't they save money and energy?

Repairing existing timber windows rather than replacing them with PVCu is not only greener but makes better economic sense. Because of the large amounts of energy it takes to make PVCu windows, it takes 60-100 years before this is outweighed by saving on heating. Meanwhile, the loss of authentic Georgian or Victorian windows can significantly reduce the market value of a property.

Are there other ways to make older homes more energy efficient?

Yes. Invest in draft-proofing, insulation, lined curtains and condensing boilers which repay their costs much more quickly than PVCu windows – and for which there is usually no need for planning permission or listed building consent. Visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/climatechangeandyourhome to find out more.

See how your local environment can be improved by using our interactive streetscape at www.english-heritage.org.uk/conservationareas

What English Heritage will do

To help local authorities and local communities to manage their conservation areas in a sustainable way English Heritage will:

- aim for 100% coverage in our monitoring of the condition of conservation areas and publish the results in our annual *Heritage at Risk* register
- encourage every local authority in the country to participate in our *Conservation Areas at Risk* survey and act on the results
- provide national advice and guidance to local authorities about the best ways of managing conservation areas (www.helm.org.uk)
- help local authorities and other regional partners to make the improvement of conservation areas an integral part of their economic and regeneration strategies
- give priority to making grants to conservation areas at risk and closely coordinate our grant programmes with those of the Heritage Lottery Fund and other agencies
- work with government and local authorities to make sure that existing conservation area regulations and procedures remain effective and fit for purpose.



Holmfirth Conservation Area, West Yorkshire

STOPPING THE ROT

Local amenity societies and groups can identify neglected buildings in conservation areas, and, where appropriate, invite the local authority to take statutory action.

Urgent Works Notices allow councils to carry out emergency work on neglected listed buildings in conservation areas. They can also use Repairs Notices to force an owner to carry out emergency works to preserve a listed building.

Amenity notices can be another useful way for councils to take action in conservation areas. Because they apply to 'any land' and not just buildings they can be used to deal with other problems such as broken walls and fences, accumulated rubbish or overgrown gardens and hedges. For information on Urgent Works and Repairs Notices, consult English Heritage's *Stopping the Rot* guidance.

www.helm.org.uk



Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area
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Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area, Greater Manchester



“ It’s hard work trying to ensure that our conservation areas meet the expectations of the many people who live, work and just enjoy visiting them. Often, people are dismayed at the poor levels of protection available for the village and market town conservation areas they treasure and are confused by the differences in protection between one conservation area and another. ”

Robert Walker, Conservation Officer,
East Lindsey District Council

What local authorities can do

Local authorities are responsible for designating conservation areas. By working with local voluntary groups, they can mobilise the community to make sure good practice becomes common practice. Important things they can do are to:

- make sure that Article 4 Directions are being used where they can help protect the local character
- take rapid enforcement action against unauthorised development to maintain standards and consistency
- make sure each conservation area has a Character Appraisal which will identify clearly and specifically which buildings and features positively contribute towards the area's character and which do not
- provide each conservation area with a Management Plan that includes policies for its streetscape, highways, landscapes and public spaces. They help ensure that the special character is protected when making decisions on planning applications, or in identifying enhancement projects for public spaces
- use the guidance in English Heritage's *Streets for All* publications to make sure the street-scape is managed in an integrated way with multi-disciplinary teams working across council departments
- identify historic buildings at risk within the conservation area and prepare an action plan for their repair and reuse including the service of statutory notices, where necessary
- make sure they appoint an elected member as a Heritage Champion and listen to the views they gather from meeting local people
- give residents and local businesses information about the benefits and restrictions that come with conservation area designation and work with local groups on the long-term stewardship of the area.

HISTORIC STREET FURNITURE

Historic street furniture such as drinking fountains, cattle troughs, lamp columns, post boxes, milestones and rural fingerposts, together with monuments and memorials, make a major contribution to local identity. Local authorities have an important role to play in identifying examples and can work with local groups to ensure their long-term preservation and routine maintenance.

What you can do

Local knowledge and expertise can be of enormous help to local authorities in the active management of conservation areas. Whether your own conservation area is in the heart of an historic town, in the suburbs of a big city or in a country village, there are lots of important things you can do help keep it special:

- make sure your local authority has an adequate regime of development control (using Article 4 Directions) and is willing to take rapid enforcement action against unauthorised work
- join or start a residents' association, civic society or local amenity group to comment on planning applications and tell the local authority about other local concerns
- start a local newsletter to provide news and advice on planning, conservation and neighbourhood issues
- encourage your local authority to appoint a Heritage Champion
- encourage all local residents to follow English Heritage's good practice guide for householders *Looking After Your House* (see insert in pocket of this booklet)
- provide all new residents with a welcome pack that explains the history of the area and how to follow good practice when planning alterations to their homes
- help the local authority to prepare a local list of buildings of architectural or historic interest and lobby them to deal with those at risk
- get involved in preparing a Village or Neighbourhood Design Statement and then agree a strategy for putting it into action. These community-led projects identify what is special about a neighbourhood and how new development needs to complement what is already there
- carry out regular audits to identify street clutter and other local eyesores, including poorly maintained pavements, memorials, street furniture and public spaces – and then talk to your local authority about what needs to be done. Download an audit form from www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets

LITTER ABATEMENT NOTICES

Under Section 91 of the *Environmental Protection Act 1990* anyone concerned by litter can apply to the Magistrate's Court for a litter abatement notice.

Local amenity societies and groups may find this a useful tool for encouraging landowners to clean up neglected road verges and railway embankments where accumulated litter has become a damaging eyesore.

A group of five people and a dog are standing on a stone bridge in Berwick-upon-Tweed. From left to right: an elderly woman in a patterned jacket and red scarf, a woman in a brown jacket, a man in a brown jacket and hat, an elderly woman in a dark jacket, and an elderly woman in a plaid jacket and orange scarf. A brown dog is sitting in the center. In the background, there is a stone bridge over a river, a modern bridge, and wind turbines on a hill under a blue sky. A black street lamp is in the foreground on the left.

“ The Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society cares passionately about the future of Berwick. We try to work alongside the local planning department and the conservation officer to preserve what it best about our town. On some projects we have been able to influence the final design of particular buildings for the better. We’re also very concerned to preserve and maintain the best of our existing buildings and with this in mind are developing a programme to study the detail and particularities of Berwick’s built heritage. ”

Do Shaw, Chairperson of the
Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society

CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

AMENITY SOCIETIES

Ancient Monuments Society
(deals with buildings of all ages)
www.ancientmonumentsociety.org.uk
T: 020 7236 3934 E: office@ancientmonumentsociety.org.uk

Council for British Archaeology
www.britarch.ac.uk
T: 01904 671417 Email via website.

Georgian Group
www.georgiangroup.org.uk
T: 087 1750 2936
E: info@georgiangroup.org.uk

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)
www.spab.org.uk
T: 020 7377 1644 E: info@spab.org.uk

Twentieth Century Society
www.c20society.org.uk
E: caseworker@c20society.org.uk
T: 020 7250 3857

Victorian Society
www.victorian-society.org.uk
T: 020 8994 1019
E: admin@victoriansociety.org.uk

OTHER CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS

ASHTAV (Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages of the UK)
www.ashtav.org.uk
Director & Helpdesk: Ela Palmer
T: 01435 865846 07969 698290
E: director@ashtav.org.uk

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
www.cpre.org.uk/contact
T: 020 7981 2800 E: info@cpre.org.uk

Historic Towns Forum
www.htf.org.uk
T: 0117 975 0459 E: htf@uwe.ac.uk

Living Streets
www.livingstreets.org.uk
T: 020 7377 4900 E: info@livingstreets.org.uk

National Parks
www.nationalparks.gov.uk
T: 029 2049 9966 E: info@anpa.gov.uk

SAVE Britain's Heritage
www.savebritainsheritage.org
T: 020 7253 3500
E: office@savebritainsheritage.org

Trades and craftspeople
To find reputable trades and craftspeople talk to local architects and surveyors or the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) www.spab.org.uk
T: 020 7377 1644 E: info@spab.org.uk

To find out how older homes can be made more energy-efficient visit
www.climatechangeandyourhome.org.uk

English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk/conservationareas
Customer Services: T: 0870 333 1181 Email: customers@english-heritage.org.uk

Conservation areas benefit everyone – and they need your support

For 40 years England's 9,300 conservation areas have been helping to preserve the special character of the nation's best-loved places – not only at the heart of our historic cities and market towns, but in the suburban neighbourhoods, former industrial quarters and rural villages that together give this country its extraordinary and irreplaceable distinctiveness.

But alongside the many success stories there are more serious causes for concern. As English Heritage's new national survey shows, 1 in every 7 conservation areas is now believed to be at risk of permanent decline unless urgent steps are taken to stop the rot.

Join the campaign and find out how to help a conservation area near you.
www.english-heritage.org.uk/conservationareas

For the wider picture, see the English Heritage *Heritage at Risk* Register.
www.english-heritage.org.uk/risk



As a leading heritage insurer of historic buildings, Ecclesiastical has been working with English Heritage for more than 20 years. We are therefore delighted to be supporting English Heritage in its campaign to save conservation areas which enrich the lives of so many people who visit or live within them.

www.ecclesiastical.com/heritageinsurance
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