

CONSERVATION AREAS

What is a conservation area?

Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation areas) Act 1990 local authorities have the power to designate as conservation areas, any areas of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.'

The first conservation areas in Stafford Borough were made in 1969 at Bradley, Eccleshall, and Great Haywood and Shugborough. There are now 30 conservation areas in the Borough.

Stafford Borough's conservation areas vary greatly in size and character. They include the historic market towns of Stafford, Eccleshall and Stone, the designed landscapes of the Trentham and Shugborough Estates, stretches of the Trent and Mersey, Shropshire Union, and Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canals, and many rural village cores such as Chebsey, Hilderstone and Church Eaton.

The special character of conservation areas does not come from the quality of their buildings alone. The historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries; characteristic building and paving materials; a particular mix of building types; public and private spaces, such as gardens, parks and greens; street furniture; and trees, all contribute to the particular character and appearance of these areas.



Conservation areas therefore give broader protection than the listing of individual buildings: all aspects of the historic landscape within the area are recognised as part of its special character.

How are conservation areas designated?

Conservation areas are designated by the local authority, i.e. Stafford Borough Council, in consultation with local interest groups and residents.

The 'specialness' of conservation areas is judged in terms of local rather than national criteria. Though there are no strict guidelines, the following questions are asked when assessing areas for designation:

- ◆ *Is the area a good example of a particular settlement or built landscape type of historical significance within the Borough?*
- ◆ *Is there a high rate of survival of building elements, including paving, walls, railings, street furniture, as well as individual building elements such as windows, doors and chimney stacks?*
- ◆ *Is the historical layout or street plan still in evidence, including its open spaces, such as parks and greens?*
- ◆ *Is there a low proportion of 20th century or later development, or development that is otherwise 'out of character' with the area?*
- ◆ *Is there a unity of character and appearance within the area?*

Although the natural landscape and buried archaeology all contribute to the character of a conservation area, it must be designated on grounds of the surviving historical built or designed environment.

What is the effect of designating a conservation area?

The designation of a conservation area gives the local authority extra controls under the planning system in order that it may safeguard the special character and appearance of the area. Certain classes of demolition, development and works to trees receive additional control.

Demolition

- ◆ 'Conservation Area Consent' is required for works of total or substantial demolition of :
 - Any building within a Conservation Area exceeding 115 cubic metres in volume
 - A boundary wall or fence over 1m in height adjacent to a highway, or 2m in height elsewhere.
- ◆ Applying for conservation area consent gives the Council the opportunity to assess whether the loss of the building would enhance or detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- ◆ Consent for demolition may be made conditional on an approved new development on the site going ahead.
- ◆ Generally there is a presumption in favour of retaining any building that makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area, and the tests for Conservation Area Consent are as rigorous as they are for the demolition of Listed Buildings.

Demolishing a non-listed building within a conservation area without the necessary consent is a criminal offence.

Conservation Area Consent is only required for works of *demolition*. New development within conservation areas falls under the usual system of planning permission

Permitted Development

- ◆ The alterations and extensions you can make to a domestic property without needing planning permission are more limited in a conservation area than elsewhere.
- ◆ This applies not only to building new extensions and outbuildings, but also to such alterations as: external cladding of elevations, inserting dormer windows, alterations to chimneys, inserting soil vents or flues, erecting solar panels or wind turbines, and putting up antennae or satellite dishes.
- ◆ In parts of the Stone and Eccleshall Conservation Areas additional controls are in force under 'Article 4 Directions' (see below).

You are advised to contact the Development Control Team for advice as to when planning permission is required.

You may also need approval under the building regulations even if you do not need planning permission. There are also additional controls for listed buildings.

Control of Development

- ◆ New development in conservation areas is not prevented but regulated. This allows the area to change whilst ensuring that the visual or historic character of the area is not harmed.
- ◆ It is important that new buildings or extensions are designed to be in sympathy with the established character of the area. Attention should be paid to height, form, location and density, as well as choosing appropriate materials and design details to harmonise with the locality.
- ◆ The most common problems are proposals that are too big, out of scale, in the wrong place, or use unsympathetic detailing or materials. Gap sites need extra special care and may need to be completely protected from development.
- ◆ The Stafford Borough Local Plan contains planning policies specifically relating to conservation areas against which applications for planning permission, conservation area consent and advertisement consent are assessed.

Initial design advice for developments in conservation areas is available from the Development Control Office, who welcome involvement at an early stage in the design process.

You are strongly advised to use the services of an architect experienced in designing for conservation areas, as very close attention to the detail of the design is essential.

Works to Trees

- ◆ Trees make an important contribution to the character of the local environment.
- ◆ Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, whether or not it is covered by a tree preservation order, must give 6 weeks notice to the Arboricultural Officer at Stafford Borough Council. Forms are available for this purpose from the telephone number below.
- ◆ This gives the Borough the opportunity to consider the contribution the tree makes to the character of the area, and if necessary make a tree preservation order to protect it.
- ◆ If you do not hear from the Council after the 6 weeks, then you may go ahead and carry out the works.

It is an offence to fell or prune a tree within a conservation area without giving the appropriate written notice to the Council.

If you believe a tree to be in a dangerous condition and in need of urgent works, then you should seek advice from the Arboricultural Officer as soon as possible.

Article 4 Directions



- ◆ Parts of Stone and Eccleshall are also covered by what is known as an 'Article 4 Direction'. This means that further restrictions are made on the type of alterations that can be made without planning permission. This generally applies to porches, alterations to roof-lines such as removing chimneys, changing roofing material, alterations to boundary walls or gates, altering doors or windows, or painting a house a different colour.
- ◆ *Booklets explaining the implications of the Article 4 Directions in Stone and Eccleshall are available from the Planning and Engineering Department.*

What are the benefits of living in a conservation area?

Most people are pleased that they live in a conservation area and are proud of their historical significance.

- The character of these areas generally improves property values. By keeping and enhancing building features that make the area special, your property's value can only benefit.
- Most properties have a quality of detailing which cannot be matched by modern development.
- You will continue to enjoy a unique residential area.
- You will have your own visible historic link with the local history of the conservation area.

Protecting the character of conservation areas

Although in a conservation area you can make certain changes without planning permission, it makes good sense to make sure that any changes are in character with the area. This helps maintain the value of your property as well as avoiding loss of character to the area as a whole. Even small changes can cumulatively transform a whole area – for better or worse!



Minor works that can gradually erode the character of an area include the following:

- ◆ Unsuitable replacement windows, particularly in UPVC, with 'stuck-on' glazing bars, or large sheets of glass.
- ◆ New doors of pseudo-historic design.
- ◆ Polished hardwood finishes to windows and doors. A painted timber finish is the tradition in this area.
- ◆ Painting or rendering brickwork.
- ◆ Removing historic boundaries such as brick walls, gates and fences, or making inappropriate replacements.

You can do a great deal to help preserve the character of your area when looking after your property:

- ◆ Retaining and repairing original features rather than replacing them not only retains historic detail, but is also more cost-effective and environmentally "sustainable".

- ◆ Regular maintenance such as re-painting external woodwork and clearing gutters will reduce the risk of loss or damage to the historic fabric.
- ◆ A conservation area can be enhanced by replacing lost features and restoring a building to its original appearance.
- ◆ Look around the area at similar houses for clues as to lost detail and invest in reclaimed or custom made fittings.

Guidance Notes covering such issues as historic doors and windows will be prepared by the Borough Council.

What is the character of my conservation area?

No two areas are the same in character. It is therefore important to identify the special character of each: to evaluate which features define the character of the area, determine whether any areas are in need of enhancement, and to guide future developments. This is achieved through the production of 'Conservation Area Character Appraisals'.

The Borough Council is producing appraisals for each of the Conservation Areas. The task of producing all the assessments will take some time and you are advised to contact the Planning and Engineering Services Department to ascertain which are currently complete.



Further Information

There are many excellent books published on the architectural history and correct repair of historic buildings. A few are listed below, and many more can be found in your public library's Architecture section.

- ◆ *The Buildings of England: STAFFORDSHIRE*
Nikolaus Pevsner. Second Edition 1975. Published Penguin Books
- ◆ *Practical Building Conservation:*
 - *Volume 1: Stone Masonry*
 - *Volume 2: Brick, Terracotta, Earth*
 - *Volume 3: Mortars, Plaster, Renders*

- *Volume 4: Metals*
 - *Volume 5: Wood, Glass, Resins*
- English Heritage Technical Handbooks 1988
Published: Gower Technical Press
- ◆ *The Repair of Historic Buildings*
Christopher Brereton. Second Edition 1995. Published: English Heritage

Contacts

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Conservation Officer: 01785 619345
Arboricultural Officer: 01785 619344***

Department of Culture Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London, SW1Y 5DH
Telephone 020 7211 6200
www.culture.gov.uk

English Heritage
Customer Services Department
P.O. Box 569
Swindon SN2 2YP
Telephone 0870 333 1181
www.english-heritage.org.uk

The following organisations have specialist interests and publish useful booklets on various aspects on the care and repair of historic buildings:

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)
37 Spital Square
London E1 6DY
Telephone: 020 7377 1644
www.spab.org.uk

The Victorian Society
1 Priory Gardens
Bedford Park
London W4 1TT
Telephone: 020 8994 1019
www.victorian-society.org.uk

The Georgian Group
6 Fitzroy Square
London W1P 6DX
Telephone: 020 7529 8920
www.georgiangroup.org.uk

The 20th Century Society
70 Cowcross Street
London EC1M 6EJ
Telephone: 020 7250 3857
www.c20society.org.uk

Royal Institution of British Architects
66 Portland Place
London W1B 1AD
Telephone: 020 7580 5533
www.architecture.com

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Coventry Office Surveyors Court
Westwood Way
Coventry CV4 8JE
Telephone: 0240 7669 4757
www.rics.org.uk