Criteria for Conservation Area Character Appraisals

The following information on the background and criteria for conservation area character appraisals is based on a report to Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Conservation Working Party, on 9th December 2002, and agreed by the Council’s Cabinet on 7th January 2003. It sets out the basis for carrying out character appraisals for existing and proposed conservation areas, and establishes consistent criteria for designating conservation areas.

The consultation documents on the character appraisals for each area should be read in conjunction with this information.

1. Background

1.1 Conservation Areas are ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’ (Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.


1.3 Local authorities are advised to review their Conservation Areas from time to time and to ensure that they have up to date character appraisals which set out their special interest and provide the basis for development control and enhancement proposals. English Heritage advises:

‘it is essential for local authorities to regularly re-evaluate and confirm the importance of the conservation areas in their districts, to be clear about the special interest which it is sought to preserve or enhance in those areas, and to adopt a firm framework for their management in order to achieve this.’ (Conservation Area Practice, 1995, para. 4.1).

1.4 All the Borough’s thirteen Conservation Areas are being reviewed in order to produce up to date character appraisals, to confirm or amend their boundaries and to include those boundaries in the RBLP. Other areas which might be suitable for designation are also being assessed. In each case the character appraisal will:

- identify the area’s special interest
- review existing or propose new conservation area boundaries and make recommendations
- assess the need for enhancement proposals
- review the need for Article 4 Direction controls
- assist preparation of the Replacement Borough Local Plan
- provide a basis for implementing policies and making informed development control decisions
2. Consistent Criteria

2.1 Conservation areas vary greatly in character and there are no standard national criteria for designation nor standard factors for analysing their special interest. Nevertheless, each local authority:

should seek to establish consistent local standards for their designations and should periodically review existing conservation areas and their boundaries against those standards: cancellation of designation should be considered where an area or part of an area is no longer considered to possess the special interest which led to its original designation. (PPG15, para. 4.3)

2.2 The RBLP should set out the Council’s broad criteria for designating new conservation areas and the review of existing conservation area boundaries. (PPG15, para. 2.9).

2.3 It is, therefore, necessary to establish agreed criteria at the outset to enable consistency in the appraisals, to ensure each conservation area genuinely has the necessary level of special interest to merit designation, and to ensure that their special interest is fully identified and assessed.

2.4 Table 1, below sets out the suggested criteria for designating conservation areas in the Borough. Paragraph 2.6, below, sets out factors which should be considered in the analysis of the area. These are based on PPG15, on ‘Conservation Area Practice’ and on previous assessments of the Borough’s conservation areas. Advice from English Heritage on the factors which might be covered in ‘Conservation Area Practice’

Table 1. Designation Criteria

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Special interest relates to an area (not merely to individual building/s)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The area has special architectural interest, because:</td>
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<td>i.</td>
<td>It has good surviving architecture of a significant period or style; or</td>
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<td>ii.</td>
<td>It has significant good quality architecture which contributes to local distinctiveness; or</td>
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<td>iii.</td>
<td>Its buildings have a layout or townscape which contributes to local distinctiveness.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Or the area has special historic interest, because:</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>It illustrates a significant phase of the borough’s history or its development; or</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>It has associations with historic event/s, uses, movements or people of more than local significance; or</td>
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<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>It has archaeological significance for which the physical setting (buildings and landscape) is important.</td>
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4. It is desirable to preserve features in the area of special interest

5. Or It is desirable to enhance features in the area of special interest

2.5 The Criteria in Table 1 identify separately those relating to architectural interest and to historic interest. They will enable the appraisals to clearly identify the criteria on which conservation areas are designated. The factors to be considered are listed separately in paragraph 2.6, below. To merit designation, the area must satisfy the criteria in 1, at least one of the criteria in 2 or 3, and either of the criteria in 4 or 5 in Table 1. Based on these criteria, it is likely that some existing conservation areas will need to be amended or de-designated whilst other areas may come forward for designation.

2.6 Factors which will be included in the assessment of the area will include:

Factors which will be included in the assessment of the area will include:

- Scheduled ancient monuments in area.
- Archaeological potential of more than local significance.
- Evidence of historic topography eg. Ancient boundaries, street alignments, open spaces.
- Historic development of the area and its relationship to Southend’s development.
- Historic uses in the area and how they have influenced its development.
- Present day uses.
- Historic buildings in the area and their architectural quality (listed, locally listed and unlisted).
- Architectural styles and periods and notable architect/s.
- Coherence of architecture in the area and significant groups of buildings.
- Building materials and their importance for the area’s character.
- Buildings which contribute positively to the area’s character.
- Other built features and materials in the area, eg. street surfaces and furniture, boundary walls.
- Trees, hedges and landscaping and open spaces.
- Townscape quality – street layout and building lines, open and enclosed spaces, views within the area, views into the area from outside and views out of the area, landmark buildings / features.
- Positive, neutral and negative features of the area and the need for their preservation, restoration and enhancement or for development.
- Uniqueness of the area’s history and architecture.
- Overall importance and quality of the area’s history and architecture.
- Planning context.
- Resource implications.

3. Consultation & Procedures

3.1 Whilst the designation criteria and the findings of the Appraisals will feed into the Replacement Borough Local Plan, the actual process of carrying out the Appraisals and making any consequent designations or boundary amendments should be separate from that of the local plan (PPG15, para. 2.9). This is because designations, etc., are by Council resolution and not by the local plan process which is likely to include a public inquiry.
3.2 There is no statutory requirement to carry out public consultation on Appraisals or any consequent designation or amendment of conservation areas. But consultation is nevertheless advisable.

3.3 One function of Appraisals is to support development control decisions. Although not explicit in PPG15, the implication is that they should function as supplementary planning guidance (SPG). If adopted as SPG, appraisals will be given greater weight if they have been subject to public consultation (PPG1 ‘General Policies & Principles’, paras. 17 & 18).

3.4 Where Appraisals show a need for Article 4 Directions* public support should usually be demonstrated before a Direction is made and that will usually require public consultation (PPG15 para. 4.23). (Article 4 Directions are made to control minor development, such as alterations to windows and roofs of houses, which could normally be carried out without planning permission from the Council.)

3.5 In respect of designations, etc., extensive local consultation is encouraged. English Heritage suggests that this is done initially prior to the local plan going on deposit. Any consequent designations or boundary amendments should be shown in the deposit local plan as well as those areas remaining unchanged (‘Conservation Area Practice’, para. 2.5).

3.6 The suggested process is indicated below

- Draft Appraisals reported to the Council’s Conservation Working Party.
- Recommendations to Cabinet.
- Public consultation on draft Appraisals and recommended boundaries.
- Report the results of consultations to the Conservation Working Party.
- Recommendations to Cabinet on designations / de-designations and on adopting Appraisals as supplementary planning guidance.