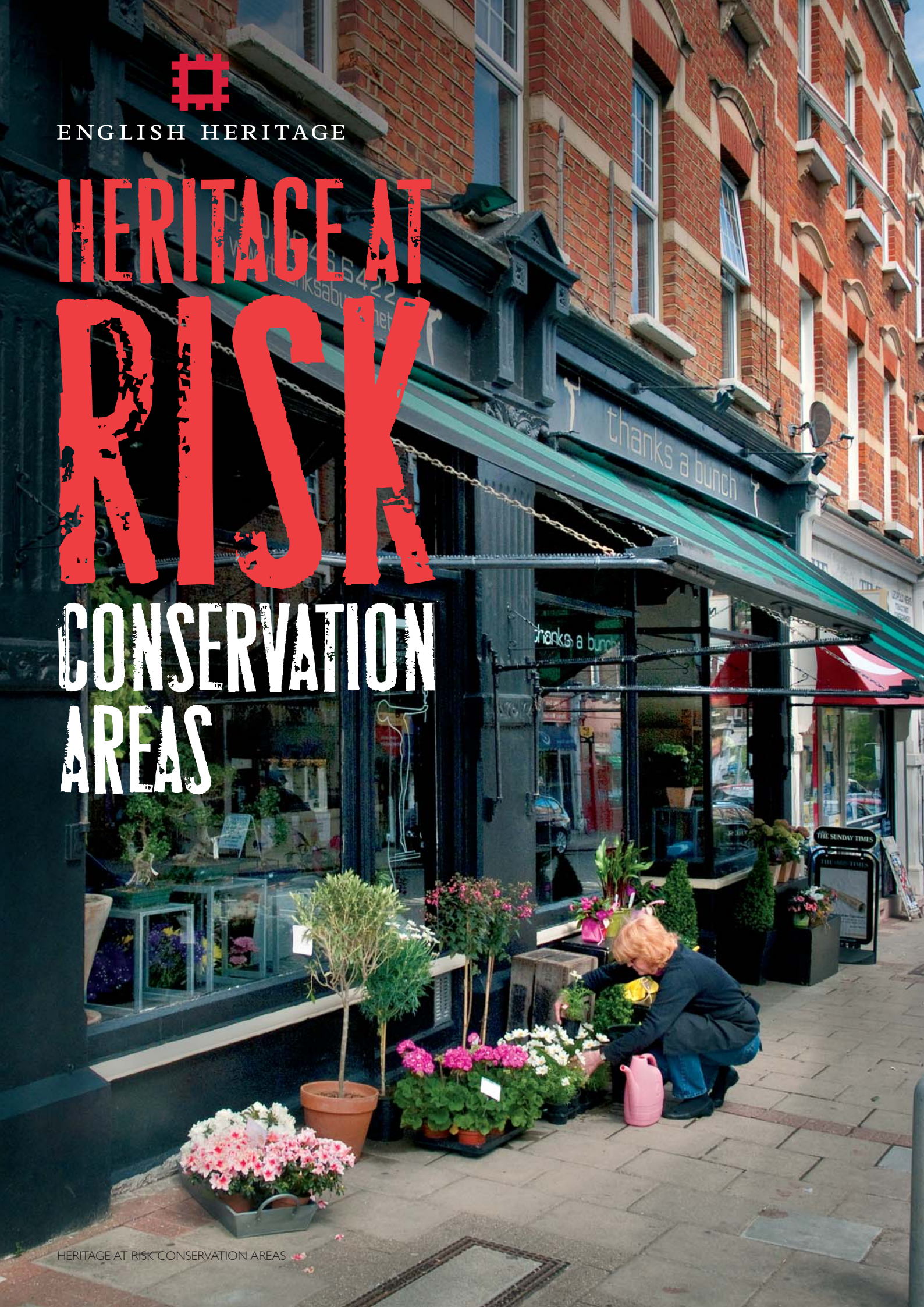




ENGLISH HERITAGE

HERITAGE AT RISK

CONSERVATION AREAS



CONSERVATION AREAS AT RISK

For 40 years conservation areas have helped to protect 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 irreplaceable distinctiveness. In fact without conservation areas, it is almost inconceivable that we would all enjoy historic settlements in the way that we do. This year English Heritage has for the first time included endangered conservation areas in its register of Heritage at Risk – the national database of buildings, monuments and landscapes that need to be protected, not only for the future but for the huge contribution they can make to the communities of today

Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Since then, more than 9,300 have been designated by local authorities across England.

Their designation is about recognising the significance of an area – what gives it its special character – and then about managing its future. Designation is not intended to prevent change or adaptation but simply to make sure that their effects on what people value about a place are properly considered.

ESTABLISHING THE FACTS

As the starting point to our Conservation Areas at Risk campaign we asked every local authority in England to complete a questionnaire about the condition of each of the conservation areas in its district. 75% responded and in doing so helped lay the foundations for a powerful new partnership between local councils and English Heritage's Heritage at Risk campaign. The key findings are that 1 in 7 conservation areas are now at risk, but that there are some simple practical steps that can be taken to halt this worrying trend.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

The pressures that face conservation areas come from many different sources. Sometimes they reflect the general economic weakness of the neighbourhood, but in other situations it has been the demands of prosperity that have caused the problems.

Across the country, the most significant threat to the character of conservation areas comes from the simple loss of historic building details such as traditional windows and doors, boundary walls and roof coverings.

9% OF CONSERVATION AREAS ARE EXPECTED TO DETERIORATE OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

Commercial properties may have unattractive shopfronts and signs or the area may suffer from vacant and derelict buildings. It is not only the state of individual buildings that is endangering conservation areas. Just as important can be the degraded condition of the streets and open spaces between them – the clutter of street furniture and signs, poorly maintained pavements or intrusive traffic calming. For some areas, the decline of land uses that are fundamental to the character of an area can be a significant loss, such as sail-making or jewellery manufacture.

The bad news

1 in 7 of the conservation areas surveyed has deteriorated in the last three years

9% are expected to deteriorate over the next three years

Urban conservation areas are twice as likely to be at risk than rural ones

Public realm problems are 10 times worse in urban conservation areas than rural ones

48% of conservation areas still lack character appraisals

The good news

In the past 10 years English Heritage has spent over £60 million on conservation area grant schemes

Having a local authority Heritage Champion halves the number of conservation areas at risk

Conservation areas are 2½ times less likely to be at risk if a Conservation Officer is in post

Conservation areas with active community support are 40% more likely to have improved

Conservation areas with Article 4 directions are twice as likely to improve than those without



1 BERWICK-UPON-TWEED, NORTHUMBERLAND

Berwick-upon-Tweed is noted for its rich architectural and archaeological heritage but was struggling economically and needed a long term vision and strategy to take it forward. Developed in partnership between the regional development agency, borough and county councils, the sub-regional and local strategic partnerships, the Government Office for the North East, English Heritage, Berwick Town Council and the Berwick Community Trust, the new masterplan for the town was firmly rooted in its vibrant historical past.

Following a rapid character assessment of Berwick's three existing conservation areas by English Heritage, the North of England Civic Trust was commissioned to produce Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Strategies with full involvement of the local community. Workshops and meetings were held at which local people identified what was important to them within the local area and identified opportunities for positive change. These documents then informed the wider masterplan and subsequent Regeneration Strategy.

Since the development of the character appraisals, the Conservation Area Advisory Group has provided direct advice to the Council on management issues and a local Building Recording Group is creating accurate surveys of historic buildings in the town. Image Boris Baggs © English Heritage

2 RICHMOND, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Richmond is an ancient market town and tourist centre dominated by its castle and located in a dramatic, defensive position above the River Swale. However, confidence to invest in the town had been declining and in 2001 Richmond's economy was hit badly by the foot and mouth crisis.

The Swale Valley Initiative was a partnership of the town, district and county councils, Yorkshire Forward and English Heritage. It developed a heritage-led vision statement for enhancing the town's best assets – its community, its businesses and its heritage. Successful projects have included the restoration of the former railway station for an arts and community project and the establishment of an English Heritage funded Heritage Partnership Scheme to repair key buildings and public spaces. In recognition of this powerful alliance of the local authority, the community and heritage, Richmond has just been awarded the Academy of Urbanism's *Great Town of the Year Award 2008*.

Image © Catherine Dewar, English Heritage

3 UPPER TEAN, STAFFORDSHIRE

Upper Tean is an industrial village in North Staffordshire. Between 1998 and 2001 English Heritage funded a 'Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme' that proved the trigger for a remarkable collaboration with the local Great Wood Primary School and its inspiring staff and pupils.

Building on the National Curriculum requirements for education in citizenship, for half a term the school used the village conservation area and its buildings as source material for its maths, art, geography, history and science teaching. Younger pupils made a model of the High Street, older ones built up a map of village residents based on the 1881 census. Year 6 developed a keen critical understanding of the possibilities for new uses of buildings in the village – a sometimes challenging experience for professionals who visited the school to help with the programme.

The effects of the Upper Tean programme were not confined to the school. Later in 2001 the wider community took part in workshops to form and evaluate aspirations for the future of the village. What started as an educational programme became a vehicle for real community engagement and empowerment. Image © Mike Taylor, English Heritage

REGENERATION AND CONSERVATION AREAS

The benefits of conservation areas to local authorities, and to the areas they serve, can be proportionately much greater than the resources required to look after them:

- as some of the highest quality environments in the Council's area, conservation areas project a positive image to visitors and inward investors;
- they can be the focus of community aspirations and raise the bar for environmental quality beyond their boundaries;
- good conservation area management can lead to better shopping areas, parks and gardens and residential neighbourhoods;
- the specialist building and craft skills they need can be a powerful catalyst for raising the skills base in the local economy.

Maintaining the character of conservation areas does not usually require special or costly measures – most of it is about good and pragmatic environmental management. But it does call for a commitment from all of a local authority's elected members and departments, not just the planning service.

MANAGING CONSERVATION AREAS

80% of the building stock we will be using in 30 years time exists today. With the spectre of climate change and the need to maximise the use of existing resources, and the embodied energy they contain, responsible stewardship is essential – to ensure that buildings are well-maintained, reusable and flexible to future needs.

24% of all our waste comes from the demolition and construction industry, so we need to start managing the built environment in a way which nurtures and enhances the investment of previous generations, not squander it. The active management of conservation areas can form a key part of local authorities' strategies. Careful active management and enhancement can help to sustain economic values and underpin local prosperity. They are also central to a sustainable future and successful placemaking.

Local authorities have a vital role to play by:

- including policies in local development documents to safeguard the character or appearance of conservation areas;
- understanding the significance of historic places through the use of English Heritage's Conservation Principles as part of Conservation Area Character Appraisals;
- developing active conservation area management strategies in conjunction with the local community to provide clear policies and guidance, including Council works to the public realm;
- ensuring in their decision-making that all new development reinforces rather than diminishes the qualities that make an area special;

- creating multi-disciplinary teams from all relevant Council departments to ensure that public spaces and highways are managed in an integrated way;
- taking concerted action to tackle heritage at risk;
- ensuring that an adequate regime of planning control is in place to manage pressures for unsympathetic change through Article 4 directions reinforced by prompt action against unauthorised changes.

HAVING A LOCAL AUTHORITY HERITAGE CHAMPION HALVES THE NUMBER OF CONSERVATION AREAS AT RISK

Article 4 Directions

Article 4 directions are well-established tools that enable local planning authorities to manage change in conservation areas that otherwise would be harmful to their special character. They are particularly effective when used as part of a well-considered management plan supported by guidance to local owners.

Article 4 directions are justified when there is firm evidence that permitted development is damaging the character or appearance of a conservation area, or is likely to. An Article 4 direction is therefore a targeted response to specific types of alterations and changes that cumulatively can undermine local character. When used in conjunction with design guidance they can provide clarity and certainty for owners when they are considering proposals for change.

Some authorities have been discouraged from using Article 4 directions on the basis of three common misconceptions:

Q: Don't Article 4 directions require huge resources?

A: No. Because Article 4 directions should be selective as a response to harmful change, the evidence to justify a direction should be available already as part of a Conservation Area Character Appraisal. The appraisal process also offers the opportunity for consultation on Article 4 directions. Detailed guidance on Article 4 directions can be found in DoE Circular 9/95.

Q: Don't Article 4 directions result in a huge increase in planning applications?

A: No. Clear, concise controls backed up by guidance can encourage like-for-like repair in matching materials, which does not require planning permission. Research on the impact of Article 4 directions has identified that an authority can expect to receive at most 1 or 2 additional applications per week.

Q: Is there a risk of compensation payments?

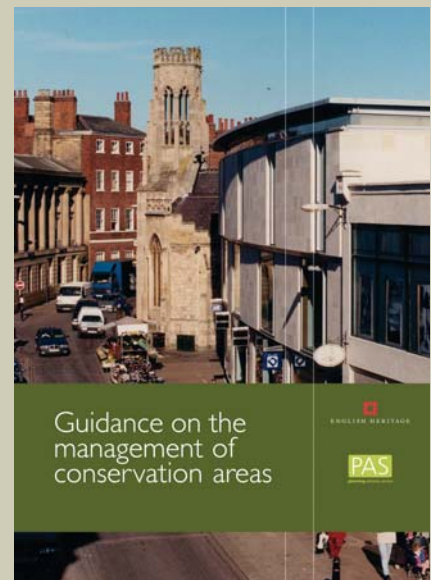
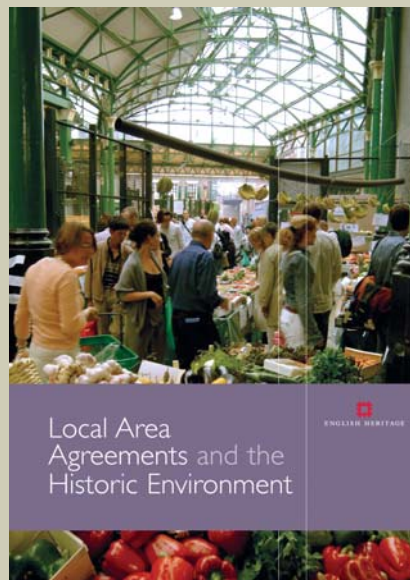
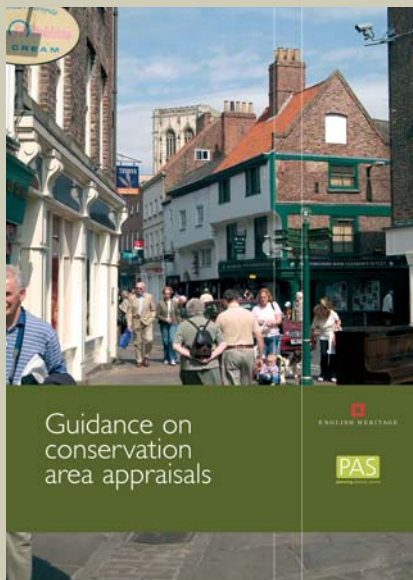
A: A claim for compensation can only be made in very specific circumstances. (see Section 108 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990). Recent research into this issue has found no evidence of any payments related to the withdrawal of permitted development rights for householders in conservation areas.

How conservation areas help councils meet their targets

Local authorities have a statutory duty to publish proposals for the enhancement of their conservation areas. This provides a real opportunity to involve the local community in developing a strategy for the management of their local area.

Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements present a shared vision for a neighbourhood. Conservation areas can help support this vision and achieve genuinely sustainable outcomes for local communities. They can positively influence a wide range of priorities for regeneration, housing, education, economic development and community engagement, and can help deliver the community's LAA targets. For example, communities value their conservation areas and the historic characteristics that make them special places. This contributes to their satisfaction with the local area and to the delivery of LAA target NI 5. (See our published guidance at www.helm.org.uk.)

Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Area Management Strategies are well-proven tools for managing the condition of designated conservation areas. They are based on a rigorous understanding of their character and significance and provide clear policies guidance for making decisions affecting conservation areas. Community involvement in developing Conservation Area Management Strategies can help to deliver LAA target NI 3 for civic participation. (See our published guidance at www.helm.org.uk.)



How can you get more from your conservation areas?

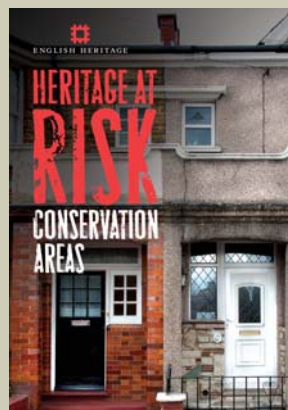
- Funding is available for projects involving the repair and reuse of historic building in conservation areas.
- Conservation areas can help to deliver **Local Area Agreement** indicators.
- Conservation areas are the responsibility of the **whole council**, not just the planning department.
- Appoint an elected member as **Heritage Champion**.
- Set up a **Conservation Area Advisory Panel or Committee** to positively manage your conservation areas.
- Make sure each of your conservation areas has a **Character Appraisal and Management Strategy** which is 'owned' by the community and whole council.
- Use the guidance of English Heritage's *Streets for All* to make sure that council departments manage the streetscape in an integrated way (www.english-heritage.org.uk/streetsforall).
- Identify historic buildings at risk and prepare an action plan for their repair and reuse in the context of wider programmes of regeneration, if necessary through the service of statutory notices.
- Make sure that adequate regimes of development management are in place through Article 4 directions tailored to meet the needs of the area. Some help on serving an Article 4 direction is given overleaf.

“ Designation of a conservation area is very much the beginning of the process, not the end. If designation is to result in real improvements to the character or appearance of an area then it must be matched by a commitment to positive management and the use of additional controls where appropriate, including Article 4 directions. ”

**Sam Howes, Deputy Chief Executive at Chichester District Council
and Chair of the Historic Towns Forum**

Conservation areas are for everyone – and they need your council's support. As English Heritage's new national survey shows, one in every seven conservation areas is now believed to be at risk of permanent decline unless urgent steps are taken to stop the rot. We are all responsible for maintaining the condition of our conservation areas – home-owners, businesses and visitors – but there are some key ways in which local authorities can help to manage the areas that they have designated as being special.

As part of its Heritage at Risk 2009 campaign English Heritage has produced a popular booklet highlighting the key findings of the Conservation Areas at Risk survey. This includes a special postcard for people to send to their ward councillor about issues relating to their own local conservation area. No contact name or address would be provided so there would be no need to reply – the aim is simply to encourage local communities to become more interested in the management of conservation areas.



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.

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