

MANAGEMENT PLAN CHURCH STREET CONSERVATION AREA



1. INTRODUCTION

Conservation areas in Hartlepool are intended to add to the quality of life of those living in and visiting the town.

These areas are special quality places in which to live, to establish a business, to work and provide a link to Hartlepool's past through the buildings, coastline and countryside.

Conservation areas are attractive to those visiting the area and provide a stage to show Hartlepool at its best.



The following report provides a basis for managing the Church Street Conservation Area. Change in a conservation area is inevitable and the purpose of a management plan is to direct this change in such a way that it strengthens rather than undermines the conservation areas special quality. It will ensure that the characteristics that contribute to make the area attractive and of high quality are kept and reinforced to ensure that Church Street Conservation Area continues in the future to add to the quality of life of Hartlepool.

The Church Street Management Plan should be read in conjunction with the Church Street Conservation Area Visual Appraisal completed in June 2009. The Appraisal, in summary, identified some particular issues affecting the quality of the Church Street Conservation Area which needed specific management to protect the appearance and quality of the area.

2. KEY ISSUES WITHIN CONSERVATION AREA

The Key aims of the Management Plan are:

- To raise awareness of the importance and value of local heritage
- To provide guidance and set out objectives to preserve and enhance buildings, structures and public spaces within the conservation area.
- To provide design guidance on key development issues within the conservation area.
- To outline key statutory requirements with respect to development within the conservation area.

The Visual Appraisal identified some very particular issues affecting the quality of Church Street Conservation Area which needed specific responses to manage the area. These were:

- vacant and under used buildings.
- building maintenance.
- inappropriate alterations to shop fronts including roller shutters and signage
- maintenance of the street environment.



Each of these subjects are dealt with on the following pages. An in depth analysis of each of the issues is provided alongside solutions to tackle these problems.

3. SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AND POLICIES



The Visual Appraisal of Church Street indicated the progress that had been made in improving the functioning and appearance of Church Street.

The occupancy of buildings in the area is mixed although there is a reliance on the night time economy with the majority of uses being nightclubs, restaurants and public houses. During the day time there are a small number of commercial premises open including offices, sandwich shops and hairdressers. There is a small residential presence in the area in the form of flats. Such a reliance on night time uses in the area could create issues in the future if such uses look to move else where in the town however at the moment they provide continuous occupation of a number of buildings thereby ensuring their security in the medium term.



In Church Street and the adjoining streets the proportion of derelict or under used properties in 1992, (just before major public investment commenced under Urban Programme and City Challenge) was very high, possibly near 50%, with a lack of confidence by private building owners that any investment, even in basic maintenance, would be worthwhile. The public investment addressed the problems by means of grant to building owners and by investment in the street scene, car parks, security measures and infill sites.



The effects of this public investment after more than 10 years has been long lasting with high levels of building occupancy and owner confidence indicated by the well maintained appearance of properties.



More recently with a change in the economic climate a number of properties have become vacant. This situation has been addressed by providing grant assistance to encourage the re-occupation of properties along with smaller grants for maintenance works. This financial assistance has helped in maintaining the continuity of well maintained properties in the area and gone some way to reduce the number of vacant buildings in the area. This also reinforces the need to encourage a variety of uses within the area to ensure that the area remains vibrant and the majority of the buildings are occupied.

3. SUMMARY OF THE CURRENT CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA AND POLICIES CONTINUED



The recent development of a transport interchange directing buses to a new development on the edge of the area in conjunction with a refurbished station has breathed life into the public transport links in the area.

Despite this there is still a reliance on car access. In more recent years this has been restricted with the introduction of parking permits in the area and shorter on street waiting times. Commercial properties in the area who rely on visitors rather than passing trade have indicated that this has posed some difficulties for them. Although not an issue that can be addressed in this plan the strength of feeling that there is in the area regarding this issue is worth noting and it is a issue which could effect occupancy of properties in the long-term.



The public environment in the area is to a high standard although the piecemeal investment over a number of years has led to a lack of continuity in the pallet of materials used in the area.



Recent changes in the area with the Art College occupying buildings on the opposing sides of the pedestrian area mean that there are links between buildings which previously weren't present. As a result the use of the space between the two buildings is being re-considered.

There is only one small, green space in this area which is located around Hartlepool Art Galley. This is the main focus for those occupants of the area who wish to spend time outdoors with seating available. The scheme is somewhat dated now and there are proposals to reconfigure this area to reinforce the use as a public space.



The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and other relevant planning legislation provide for various powers that enable local planning authorities to discharge their responsibilities to preserve the unique character and appearance of conservation areas. At a local level the current development plan for Church Street is the Local plan adopted in April 2006. Relevant policies from this plan can be found in appendix 1 of this document.

4. VACANT AND UNDER USED BUILDINGS

Objective — To secure the occupation and restoration, where necessary, of vacant buildings within the Church Street Conservation Area



Overall, as the Visual Appraisal identifies, the number of current empty properties' is low compared to the position in the early 1990s, but the Appraisal did identify a possible emerging problem at the buildings at the southern end of Church Street (66 to 80 Church Street) backing onto the railway.

Since the Appraisal there has been specific management action to address vacant properties and poor maintenance with a grant scheme aimed at both issues to improve the appearance of Church Street.

A budget of £55,000 has provided grants of up to £10,000 per building to encourage re-occupation of long standing empty properties.

Previously vacant properties at Whitby Street are now either completely or partly re-occupied, a number of properties in Church Street are re-opening as public houses or night clubs and others have used the grant to undertake structural repairs to ensure continued long term use of the building and the rented office space that it accommodates.

A substantial number of properties are still empty, with potentially new properties falling vacant.

A key regeneration priority for this area is the creation of an Innovation and Skills Quarter as part of a wider regeneration strategy for the central area of town. An aim of the Quarter is to build on the existing assets and heritage character of the area.

Actions

- 1. The Council will investigate the use of statutory powers where appropriate to bring buildings back into use and encourage owners to keep them in a good state of repair.**
- 2. The Council will give favourable consideration to a wider range of uses than might normally be appropriate to help bring otherwise vacant buildings back into beneficial use, providing these do not adversely affect the architectural character or setting of the buildings or amenity of nearby properties.**
- 3. The Council will investigate grant budget to encourage empty properties to be re-occupied.**

5. BUILDING MAINTENANCE

Objective — To continue to maintain and enhance the properties in the Church Street Conservation Area

A number of measures have already been put in place to address the issue of building maintenance in Church Street Conservation Area

A grant budget of £55,000 has funded grants of up to £3,000 per property for decoration (which included the cost of scaffolding and some basic repairs to joinery and render to allow decoration to occur). Besides those properties who have benefitted from grant other owners have responded by decorating their buildings without any grant help.

The high take up indicates how supportive to owners this has been. The decoration grant has also provided a palette of colours appropriate for the conservation area, to achieve a greater overall positive affect. This relatively simple grant assistance has addressed the problem of maintenance identified in the Appraisal, though some properties still lack a consistent maintenance regime.

The purpose of the decoration grant was not to fund maintenance works, which are essentially the responsibility of the owner, but to reach a state of repair after which the owner could then afford to maintain the property in the future by reducing the cost for each subsequent decoration. To achieve this re-decoration needs to be carried out on a regular basis.



Actions

1. The council will produce guidance documents to advise owners of best practice in maintaining their properties.
2. The council will investigate the potential for grant funding for building maintenance aimed at encouraging decoration of buildings.

6. SHOPFRONTS

Objective — To secure the preservation, restoration or improvement, as appropriate, of shop frontages in Church Street Conservation Area.



The Appraisal identified the installation of roller shutters to shop fronts and how the business operating from the property is advertised to the public, as issues which need to be managed to protect the character of Church Street as a conservation area.



A number of properties within the conservation area have retained their original shop fronts. These often have highly decorative features such as moulded corbels above pilasters, cornice moulding to fascias, and decorative mullions and transoms. Most incorporate an independent secondary doorway to upper floors.



Some of the buildings in the conservation area have undergone unsympathetic alterations which have affected the quality and character of the area.

Alterations often include the introduction of roller shutters. It is important to note that any decision regarding attempts to restrict the use of shutters to shop fronts has to consider the need of owners to protect their properties. To achieve a balance between properties and protecting the quality and character of the conservation area the council could consider less intrusive means of ensuring the security of the properties in the conservation area. CCTV operates in the Church Street Conservation Area which could be used as a way to reduce the need for shutters.

Action

1. The council will produce a document to inform owners of the preferred shop front designs within the conservation area.
2. The council will encourage the reinstatement or repair of original doors, windows and features that reflect the original shopfronts of the area.
3. The council will take enforcement action against unauthorised change of use or removal of a shop front where there is a negative impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area.

7. ADVERTISING ON SHOPFRONTS

Objective — To encourage the use of traditional signage on commercial properties in Church Street Conservation Area.

The Appraisal identified how businesses operating from properties in the conservation area advertised to the public, as an issue which needs to be managed to protect the character of Church Street as a conservation area.

The quality of business advertising is most problematic in the area of Church Street where there is also the highest number of vacant properties i.e. 66 to 80 Church Street indicating a link between the levels of vacancies and how the conservation area is managed in terms of the quality of advertisements.

Issues around signage include:

- Large modern signage installed over timber fascia to shop.
- Internally illuminated box signs used on properties.
- Modern, internally illuminated projecting signs used.

Poor quality signage can dramatically change commercial areas such as Church Street.



Action

1. The council will produce guidance documents regarding appropriate forms of shop front advertising.
2. The council will exercise control over the display of advertisements in Church Street Conservation Area to ensure that signs are designed and located to respect the character and appearance of the host building and historic street scene.
3. The council will consider making a direction under regulation 7 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of advertisements) Regulations 1992 to control advertisements within the Church Street Conservation Area.

8. THE STREET ENVIRONMENT

Objective — To maintain and enhance the public realm of Church Street Conservation Area



The immediate response to the Conservation Area Appraisal was decoration of street furniture consisting of mostly bollards, lighting columns, a canopy over 49 to 53 and 56 to 58 Church Street and entrance features over Whitby Street, Lynn Street and the Station Approach. This simple decoration produced an immediate improvement to Church Street and provided encouragement to building owners to do the same to which a substantial number responded with the help of grant.

Other improvements connected with the Transport Interchange and the Tall Ships event created further improvements to the street scene. Following on from the Transport Interchange the area of Church Square around Municipal Buildings and Christ Church which links the Interchange to the town centre is being considered for environmental improvements with a draft design being undertaken. The scheme is a key part of the regeneration strategy for the area. One of the main aims of the scheme is to create a pedestrian friendly environment that will provide good access to the wider town.

Action

- 1. The council will encourage the retention/reinstatement of traditional paving and hard landscaping.**
- 2. The council will encourage like-for-like replacement in appropriate materials where damage to street surface occurs.**
- 3. Where wholesale replacement is required the council will coordinate with appropriate sections to ensure consistency and quality of alternative materials.**
- 4. The council will encourage good maintenance of street furniture, and, where replacement is required that they are of an appropriate design.**
- 5. The council will encourage the reduction of clutter including signage and street furniture, where appropriate.**

APPENDIX 1

EXISTING NATIONAL AND LOCALLY BASED CONSERVATION AREA POLICIES

1. Existing national legislation and policy advice in the form of the “**Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990**” and “**Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment**” (including the Practice Guide published by English Heritage to interpret PPS5) provide guidance and advice on how to manage development in conservation areas. They provide specific advice on the decision making process and issues to be considered as regards listed buildings, non listed buildings in conservation areas and conservation areas themselves.
2. Many of these national policies and advice are translated specifically to Hartlepool via the Local Development Framework (previously the **Hartlepool Local Plan**) which provides specific policies to manage listed buildings and conservation areas. The relevant local plan policies and guidance are listed below:

HE1: Protection and Enhancement of conservation Areas

HE2: Environmental Improvements in Conservation Areas

HE3: Developments in Vicinity of Conservation Areas

HE8: Works to Listed buildings Including Partial Demolitions

HE12: Protection of Locally Important Buildings

Supplementary Note 5: Design Guidance for Development in Conservation Areas and for Works to Listed Buildings.

New Local Development Documents within the Hartlepool Local Development Plan will replace the Hartlepool Local plan over time.

The Council will follow the guidance under the current Local Plan and the Local Development Framework once it is adopted when considering applications.

APPENDIX 2

EXISTING STATUTORY POWERS

Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- Powers are available under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act to make an **Urgent Works Notice** (Section 54) for the urgent preservation of an unoccupied (or partly unoccupied) listed building to prevent further deterioration of a building.
- Under Section 48 of the same Act a **Repairs Notice** can be served on an empty listed building to carry out physical works of preservation. If the owner declines to undertake the works specified, then compulsory acquisition powers can be invoked to acquire the building. With CPO powers “back to back “ deals can be considered with a building preservation trust (like the Cleveland Building Preservation Trust operating locally) as a development partner, giving access to grant for feasibility studies and loans of up to £500,000 for development works from the Architectural Heritage Fund. The costs associated with this type of action are staff time which will have been budget for. The willingness of the authority to use the powers described may be enough for the owner of a listed building to sell to an owner more willing or able to re-use a building.
- Some of the above powers also apply to non-listed buildings in conservation areas. Section 76 of the 1990 Act allows the local planning authority to invoke Section 54 (outlined above) with the agreement of the Secretary of State allowing an **Urgent Works Notice to be served on an unlisted building**. Powers are not available to invoke Section 48 to serve a Repairs Notice on an empty non-listed building. There are further alternative powers relating to public safety (1984 Building Act), or to provide residential accommodation under Section 17 of the 1985 Housing Act by acquiring buildings.

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

- Other relevant powers are provided by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Under this legislation a **Section 215 Notice** is a notice that is served on the owner or occupier of a property when the poor condition and the appearance of the property or land are detrimental to the surrounding areas or neighbourhood. The notice requires proper maintenance of the property or land in question, and it specifies what steps are required to remedy the problem within a specific time period.