

DESIGNING FOR LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS IN WEST LANCASHIRE



Produced by

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In association with the West Lancashire Conservation Areas Advisory Panel

1. Introduction

West Lancashire has 28 Conservation areas and over 600 listed buildings where special care should be taken to maintain and improve their attractive character.

West Lancashire District Council has a statutory duty to ensure that the historic buildings within the District are properly preserved and enhanced. West Lancashire Areas Advisory Panel assists the Council in considering planning applications which will have a significant effect upon listed buildings and conservation areas. Buildings within conservation areas are protected from demolition and trees are protected from topping, lopping or removal without specific consent. Listed buildings require listed building consent before works can be carried out for their alteration, extension or demolition.

N.B. It is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised works to a listed building.

This Design Guide is intended to help owners and designers of buildings and other developments in any conservation area, where overall planning considerations make development acceptable. It also applies to those developments which affect either a listed building or its setting.

Experience has shown that the approach outlined here leads to successful design and more rapid approval of designs submitted for planning permission. Best results are likely to be achieved by employing professional advice. Assistance in selecting a registered architect can be obtained from the Royal Institute of British Architects, N.W. Region, 46 King Street, Knutsford, Cheshire (Tel. 01565-52927).

2. Before You Put Pen To Paper

- (a) Get to know the conservation area - visit the site, appreciate and assess both its character and that of its surroundings.
- (b) Talk to the Conservation Officer and/or Planning: knowledge of the area and site can help you to define opportunities and limitations.
- (c) Discuss with them the appropriate form of development - seek to agree on an acceptable form and scale of development and its essential characteristics at this early stage.

3. What Is An Appropriate Type Of Development

- (a) Existing buildings and features which are of value should generally be retained. Proposals to demolish listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas and to prune, top, lop or cut down trees in conservation areas should be made clear on plans. Retaining, extending or adapting an existing building in a manner which respects its character may well be the answer. Even if some demolition is

allowed, it is preferable to retain the facade or other notable features of a building. Salvage as much as possible of the existing materials for re-use - it helps your development or other buildings elsewhere.

- (b) Harmonise your new work with the surroundings. Where redevelopment is necessary, faithful reproduction of an elevation, massing or fenestration of the original building may be justified. The freedom of developing a cleared or greenfield site must be balanced against the need to preserve and enhance the character of the wider area. Before you commit yourself or your client find out the limitations which conservation considerations impose.

4. How Does The Setting Affect The Design?

No building is viewed in isolation from its site and setting. The space around it can be as important as its plan, elevations and mass.

- (a) Retain existing trees, boundary hedges, fences and walls and other features of the site to assimilate the new building within its environment.
- (b) Be influenced by the pleasant character and detailed design of existing hedges, fences and walls in stone and brick. New boundaries and surface treatments for hardstandings, driveways, paved areas and paths should match in with existing materials.
- (c) Select new trees, shrubs and hedges of species which are appropriate to the area to improve the building's setting. The Planning Service can give advice on species and their location to take account of their growth into maturity.
- (d) Urban sites demand urban designs and rural sites demand rural designs.

5. What Aspects Should You Consider In The Design?

It is important to take account of planning and conservation criteria at an early stage in defining the field of feasible design solutions.

- (a) Relate your design whether it is modern or traditional in concept to the existing features such as trees, walls and site levels.
- (b) Site your building and engineer its plan to take account of existing features such as trees, walls and site levels.
- (c) Relate the skyline of your proposal to the roof profiles in the area by avoiding 'gap-toothed' effects in built-up frontages. Avoid long straight lines where existing elevations are heavily modelled.

- (d) Consider the rhythm, scale and details of doors, windows, roofs and balconies etc. to respect the established character of a built-up street frontage or surrounding buildings.
- (e) Ensure that the materials of new buildings are compatible with their neighbours. If these are varied, always endeavour to use materials which best suit the local distinctiveness of the area.

6. Get The Details Right

Your design and well-intentioned refurbishment can be spoilt by inappropriate or poor details. Existing details in the area may be a source of inspiration:

- (a) Combine new materials together to harmonise with the existing character. Bonding, pointing and mortar colour in brick and stone must be carefully considered to match existing work.
- (b) It is usually preferable to step extensions back from existing walls to prevent awkward bonding of old and new, and so that the extension is honestly expressed as an extension.
- (c) Take care over the junctions between elements of the building so that eaves and gables of roofs, heads, cills and reveals of windows and doors all relate to other buildings in the area.
- (d) Choose and locate signs, lettering, external lighting, gutters, drainpipes and other fittings in sympathy with the surroundings, in design and materials. Internal illumination of signs is generally resisted.
- (e) Select suitable colours for walls, roofs, windows and fascias. Lettering should be of a dignified typeface and should be modified in size and scale to at least match the best in the particular area and if possible set a better standard. Painted surfaces should generally be “off-white” rather than “bright white”.
- (f) Use traditional natural materials for windows (i.e. not UPVC, aluminium or stained hardwood) and the traditional form of window and method of opening which is predominant in the locality.
- (g) Avoid the use of plastic rainwater goods, soil vent pipes, man-hole covers etc.

7. Present The Proposals Clearly To Convince The Planning Officer, The Conservation Area Advisory Panel And The Committee

If you provide insufficient information your design cannot be properly assessed. Are the following items relevant to your application?

- (a) Where your building is to be altered, provide drawings fully illustrating it as 'existing' and 'proposed' with notes on materials in each case.
- (b) Where your building relates to adjacent buildings and features, extend your plans and relevant elevations to encompass them. This is essential in built-up frontages or infill schemes. Shop front proposals must include the whole height of the facade and adjacent premises in full detail.
- (c) Include a site plan of adequate scale to show how your proposals relate to all existing features on the site and to show all new planting, boundaries and hard ground surface treatments. If it is relevant a full tree survey will be required showing tree species, location and branch spread. Where site levels are important, details of the existing and proposed levels will be necessary. Construction details and materials should be shown on the plans for new site roads, etc.
- (d) Include specification notes; fuller and accurate notes will make it easier to assess the quality of the design. Materials, finishes and colours should always be specified by manufacturer's brand name and type. Accurate descriptions of bonding and pointing for walls are important.

The Conservation Officer will advise you on the Council's requirements for any particular submission. He welcomes being consulted before you submit an application; this can also save you time and money in preparing drawings.

Developers, property owners and their advisers perform an essential role in maintaining and enhancing conservation areas and listed buildings. Remember that although Planning Officers will always inspect the site the Planning Committee may not always do so. It is helpful to submit a proposal in its best possible form.

Although there are 'bad' examples of past development in conservation areas, these should not justify inadequate designs now as the Council seeks to enhance the quality of development throughout the District and especially in Conservation Areas and at Listed Buildings. The Council hopes that those who design proposals for such areas will regard it as a unique opportunity. This guide together with the advice of the Conservation Officer and the appointment of a suitably experienced architect should help you to make the best possible contribution.

8. Archaeological Recording

If your proposal is likely to affect a known or suspected site of archaeological interest or historic fabric of a listed building, the Council may require an archaeological investigation, watching brief or recording to be carried out either before determining the application or before development commences, as recommended by Planning Policy Guidance Notes 15 (Planning and The Historic Environment) and 16 (Archaeology). Any such archaeological investigation or recording will normally need to be carried out at the developer's expense. By their very nature, conservation areas and listed buildings are often on ancient sites. There is therefore a strong possibility that alterations may reveal previously unknown features. Prospective developers should be prepared to amend their plans to protect such features, or pay for their full recording.

9. Justification Of Proposal

PPG15 advises that applicants must be able to justify why proposals which would affect the character of a listed building are desirable or necessary. The Council may therefore ask the applicant to submit a statement of justification as part of an application for Listed Building Consent.

10. West Lancashire Local Plan

The Council's Policies in relation to The Historic Environment are set out in the West Lancashire Local Plan (Adopted 1999) and all proposals will be assessed against those policies.

11. Outline Applications

If the Council is in any doubt about the desirability of allowing the principle of development in a conservation area, or adjacent to a listed building, outline applications will not be accepted, and full applications with detailed drawings will be required.

12. Conservation Area Appraisals

The Council is carrying out a programme of preparing Appraisals of, and Proposals for all of the Conservation Areas. The Appraisals identify what is important about each conservation area, and provide justification for the Proposals which include reviewing boundaries, considering Article 4(2) Directions to remove Permitted Development Rights and proposing environmental improvements. The Appraisals and Proposals will be a material consideration in determining applications for planning permission and conservation area consent.

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