



Elmbridge
Borough Council
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Conservation Areas

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to explain in general terms how the designation of parts of the Borough as a conservation area affects those who live, work or own property in such an area. It is available to download from the Council's website.

What is a Conservation Area?

A conservation area is defined in section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Clearly many different kinds of areas are covered by this definition. They may be large or small and they will often be centred on listed buildings, on groups of fine buildings, terraces of townscape quality, attractive squares and open spaces, trees, an historic street pattern or ancient monuments. It is the quality and interest of an area, rather than individual buildings, which is important in designation.

25 conservation areas have been formally designated in Elmbridge containing in excess of 1800 properties. These include parts of town centres (e.g. Weybridge), village centres (e.g. Thames Ditton), and village greens (e.g. Weston Green). The Council periodically reviews these and other areas for designation as new or extended conservation areas. Plans showing the exact boundaries of all existing conservation areas in Elmbridge can be inspected on the Council website or at the Civic Centre in Esher.



High Street, Thames Ditton

Why are Conservation Areas designated?

Increasing pressure from new development, if not properly controlled, could threaten to overwhelm the environmental quality of those parts of Elmbridge that still retain much of their special character and with it the most tangible remaining link with our heritage. Designation as a conservation area gives statutory recognition and protection to such areas. Whilst recognising the need for change and acknowledging that historic areas should not stagnate, their designation places a duty upon the Council to ensure that their character and appearance are protected and that the design of any new development that does go ahead makes a positive contribution to such areas.

Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans

Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are documents which provide written definition, analysis and appraisal of what makes an individual conservation area special and identifies actions for protection and improvement. The Council has embarked upon a rolling programme to produce these for its conservation areas. Published documents are available to view on the Council's website or can be purchased from the Council.

Implications for Residents

Successful conservation depends on a partnership between residents, other property owners and the Council. Although the Council has additional statutory powers to control many changes in conservation areas, it is equally important that individual occupiers and owners contribute by achieving a high standard of design for alterations and extensions, by maintaining their properties in good condition, and by preserving and restoring any original features wherever possible, e.g. roof materials, timber sash windows, existing brickwork. Designation of a conservation area will give an assurance of support to residents who wish to take pride in the preservation of their properties in this way.

- **Design Control**

All planning applications for new buildings, extensions or alterations to existing buildings within conservation areas or within the setting of such areas will be carefully considered to ensure that they harmonise with and reinforce the architectural and historic character of the particular area. The Council will insist on a higher standard of design than might be required elsewhere, in line with government guidance. Special attention will be paid to scale, height, form, massing, respect for the traditional pattern of frontages and detailed design of development, including the choice of materials. Normally, only fully detailed planning applications will be accepted for sites within the Borough's conservation areas. Additional information, including elevations of adjacent buildings and examples of materials and colours, may be required. The services of a qualified architect are strongly recommended.

Certain minor alterations and additions can be carried out without the need for planning permission to be obtained from the Council provided they conform with the "permitted development" rights set out in the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 and as amended by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (No.2) (England) Order 2008 and the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(Amendment) (England) Order 2013. The "permitted development" rights within conservation areas are more restrictive than those relating to properties outside such areas, particularly in relation to the size of an extension to a dwelling or the erection of an outbuilding that may be constructed without the need for a planning application. Changes to the external cladding of a building or alterations and additions to its roof will also require planning permission. Before carrying out any alterations or extensions affecting the external appearance of a property within a conservation area, it is desirable to seek professional advice to check whether or not planning permission is required.

- **Control of Demolition**

With certain minor exceptions, the demolition of any building in a conservation area greater than 115 cubic metres in volume, and some walls requires prior planning consent. There is a general presumption against demolition but this does not mean that buildings may not be demolished, rather it provides a check to ensure that those buildings which make an important

contribution to the character of the area are not lost without proper justification. Application forms for planning permission are available from the Council website or from the Council's offices.

- **Protection of Trees**

Before any work is carried out to trees in a conservation area, including pruning, uprooting or felling, six weeks written notice must normally be given to the Council. This provides the Council with sufficient time to determine whether or not a Tree Preservation Order should be placed on the trees. Where a tree is already subject to a Tree Preservation Order, the formal permission of the Council is required before any works to the tree can be undertaken. Normally any preserved tree which is removed must be replaced. Application forms and notices are available from the Council website or the Council's offices.

- **Listed Buildings**

Most of the conservation areas in Elmbridge contain listed buildings. These are buildings of special architectural or historic interest which are subject to additional statutory protection. Listed building consent is required for their demolition or for any alteration or extension which affects their character or appearance. Owners of such buildings are strongly advised to seek professional advice and consult Planning Services when contemplating any work involving these buildings.

- **Shopfront and Advertisement Control**

Unsympathetic new shopfronts or advertisements can be highly detrimental to the street scene and will be resisted. Solid security shutters will generally be unacceptable. The Council's leaflet "Shopfronts in Conservation Areas" sets out advice relating to the restoration, alterations or replacement of shopfronts. This can be viewed or downloaded from the Council's website.

- **Enforcement Action**

If building works which require planning permission are carried out without having been approved by the Council, enforcement action might be taken to secure their removal. This will be particularly relevant within conservation areas where unauthorised development has had an adverse impact on the character of the area. This can involve an owner in considerable unnecessary expenditure. It is therefore desirable to check the planning position before the works are begun

Design Policies

Policy CS17: Local Character, Density and Design of the Elmbridge Core Strategy aims to ensure new development delivers high quality and inclusive sustainable design. This policy states that particular attention will be given to the design of development that could have an effect on heritage assets including conservation areas. More detailed design advice on the management of conservation areas is still covered by saved policies HEN9, 11, 13 and 14 in the Replacement Elmbridge Borough Local Plan 2000. These will be replaced by the future Development Management Plan.

Additional guidance can be found in the design guidance section of relevant character appraisal and management plan documents which have been produced by the Council for some conservation areas. These can be obtained from the Council's website or at the Civic Centre.

The following broad design principles are intended to give basic advice to residents on how to alter and extend their properties, without adversely affecting the appearance of their houses or the character of the conservation area. This advice has been taken from the Council's Home Extensions companion guide which forms part of the Design and Character Supplementary Planning Document 2012.

- **Extensions and Alterations**

The design of extensions or alterations should incorporate wherever possible visual characteristics or features from the existing building and seek to enhance the particular qualities of the conservation area. For example, the style of doors and the type and proportion of new windows should reflect those on the main property. Windows should be recessed by the same amount and positioned to conform with existing spacing. Sills, lintels and dripstones should run through at the same level.



Extensions to buildings, including garages, should not dominate existing properties, but should harmonise with their original appearance and scale. Whilst in certain cases they may be integrated into the existing building (e.g detached houses or end of terrace), in general extensions should be subordinate to the existing property and be set back.

Extensions which project above the height of the ridge of the main roof or beyond the existing front elevation will not normally be permitted.

Extensions should generally incorporate a pitched roof and this is particularly important for two storey extensions, side extensions and those in corner locations. The eaves should normally line up with those of the existing property and the roof should match the pitch and style of the existing.



In residential areas, characterised by relatively large spaces between dwellings, extensions should be designed so as to maintain as much space around the house as possible. Within such areas the extension of a property from side boundary to side boundary should be avoided, even in single storey form.

- **Dormer Windows**

The size and position of dormer windows must not dominate the original building. They are often best set back into the roof slope behind the line of the eaves and should be separated from the flank or gable wall, and not project above the height of the main roof. Dormer windows should not wrap round two sides of a hipped roof and should not be formed by building up external walls. Gabled or hipped roofed dormers normally look best, and where used should be similar in design, and line up with, existing windows on the main elevations. Dormer windows to the front and side elevations will normally be resisted in favour of rooflights set flush into the roof slope.

- **Facing Materials**

The type, colour and texture of external facing materials of extensions and alterations should match those on the original building wherever possible. Decorative details such as ridge tiles, brick string courses, soldier courses and patterned brickwork should be repeated where appropriate to maintain the distinct character of a building. In the case of garages, timber doors will usually be more acceptable than metal up-and-over doors.

- **Boundaries**

Original walls and railings and wooden picket fences should be retained and restored wherever possible. Boundaries to gardens and grounds are often lined with trees and shrubs, which are attractive in themselves and enhance privacy. When building works are being undertaken, it is important to keep as much of the existing planting as possible. It will often be necessary to protect existing root systems during construction and augment with extra planting as necessary.



Picket fencing at Weston Green

- **Publicity**

All planning applications for development which, in the local authority's opinion would affect the character of a conservation area, must be advertised in a local newspaper and in a specific notice displayed on the site. In Elmbridge this is supplemented by the normal notification of planning applications to local residents in accordance with the Council's adopted guidelines and provides maximum opportunity for public comment before a decision is made on a particular application.

Conservation Area Advisory Committees

The Council has set up Conservation Area Advisory Committees, comprising a cross-section of local people, including representatives of local residents associations and professional bodies

concerned with the character or appearance of most of the Borough's conservation areas. These Committees also play a very important role in the general care and maintenance of the conservation areas and make positive proposals for their improvement.

Enhancement Schemes

The designation of a conservation area imposes on the Council a duty not only to preserve its character, but also to identify positive actions to enhance the appearance of the particular area. To this end the Council has undertaken a number of enhancement schemes, several of which have been carried out in conjunction with local groups and residents. These schemes have included re-surfacing of paths, tree planting, landscaping and the provision of appropriate forms of street furniture and lighting. Members of the public and amenity societies are invited to suggest further enhancement schemes for consideration by the Council.

Grants

Subject to financial resources being available, discretionary grants may be available from the Council for the repair and maintenance of listed buildings and occasionally for non-listed buildings in conservation areas. Further details of such grants may be obtained from the Council's website and Planning Services

Further Information

If you are unsure if your property is within or adjacent to a Conservation Area, please use the Council website or contact Planning Services. In addition to separate requirements for planning permission, it should be noted that the actual construction of most types of alterations and extensions is controlled by the Building Regulations, and will probably require specific Building Regulation approval. If you require further information in this respect, a Building Control Officer in Planning Services will be pleased to help.

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