

7. HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TOPIC AREA

THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

7.1 North Wiltshire District is fortunate to have a wealth of historic features, such as conservation areas, historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and archaeological features. The aim of the following policies is to ensure that the District's heritage is preserved, protected and where possible enhanced for the enjoyment of future generations.

Conservation Areas

7.2 A Conservation Area is defined as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Statements and planning briefs for individual areas and sites will be prepared by the District Council, as appropriate, which will describe the special character and appearance of Conservation Areas and provide advice and guidance on the enhancement of areas and the design of new development. These are available as Supplementary Planning Documents.

The designated Conservation Areas in North Wiltshire are shown on the Proposals Map, but it should be noted that this is for guidance only and is not definitive, as they are subject to a rolling programme of review and are subject to alteration through the plan period.

HE1 DEVELOPMENT IN CONSERVATION AREAS

In Conservation Areas, proposals for development, advertisements and other works will only be permitted where the proposal will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area. Open spaces, village greens, gaps between buildings, fields, gardens and trees that provide attractive views and vistas to, from and within public areas will be protected from development that would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

When permitting development in Conservation Areas, the established historic streets, building lines and frontages, burgage plots and boundaries, the plan form of buildings, and other historic physical and landscape features will be conserved and incorporated into the proposal where appropriate.

7.3 In order to protect the special character and appearance of Conservation Areas, there is a need for strict control over development, this does not preclude the possibility of new development, but any development should be designed to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

7.4 Existing open spaces, village greens, fields, gaps between buildings, private gardens, and other parcels of land can make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of Conservation Areas in particular, and such features often need to be preserved. The loss of just one site to development in environmentally sensitive areas can make it extremely difficult to resist further development in an area, resulting in the loss of an attractive setting or feature, and can erode the rural and open character of an area. Care will also be taken to ensure that views and vistas, including familiar and cherished scenes such as open views of a church tower, the local village green, any surrounding hillsides and river valleys, remain unspoilt.

7.5 In preserving and enhancing the townscape of areas, regard will be had to the historic layout and building lines which provide the opportunity to maintain a record of the evolution

of such areas and which endow such areas with a special character of their own, in relation to the spaces between buildings, as well as the buildings themselves. Retention of burgage plots, historic street patterns, plot boundaries, building frontages, and the plan form of buildings, is considered particularly important. New development in streets with a continuous frontage of buildings, situated with their front walls on the back edge of the pavement, needs to respect established building lines and avoid incongruous gaps and set-backs. Where such considerations are not satisfactorily dealt with, in connection with a particular proposal, the development will not normally be permitted, whether or not the proposal complies with any other policies as set out in the Development Plan.

HE2 DEMOLITION IN CONSERVATION AREAS

Development will not be permitted involving the demolition of buildings or structures that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Development involving the demolition of buildings, including parts of buildings and structures, such as boundary walls, will only be permitted in conservation areas where:

- i) The proposals would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, such as removing unsightly, alien and modern features; and**
- ii) The form of any necessary replacement has been approved, and where a contract has been made for the carrying out of the works of redevelopment.**

7.6 Conservation Area Consent is required in general to demolish or remove buildings (including parts of buildings), or walls in a Conservation Area. Unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas will be assessed against the same criteria as listed buildings. Consideration will be given to the desirability of retaining any building or site as existing. Buildings and features of value, either in their own right, or because of the contribution they make to a pleasant townscape or village scene, cannot be replaced once lost.

7.7 Under Section 76 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, English Heritage may direct that the Section 54 powers, referred to below in 7.13, should apply where the preservation of a building in a Conservation Area is important for maintaining the character or appearance of the area. Such powers therefore enable the authority to seek to carry out urgent works to preserve unoccupied unlisted buildings in a Conservation Area, and to recover any expenses from the owner of such a building.

HE3 HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS

New development and advertisements within or adjacent to Historic Parks and Gardens which do not respect their character, appearance or setting, will not be permitted.

7.8 In preserving and enhancing Historic Parks and Gardens the impact of development and advertisements within and also adjacent to them will need to be considered. The register of gardens and other land of special historic interest, produced for North Wiltshire in 1987 by English Heritage, is as follows:

Table HE3: Register of gardens and other land of special historic interest.

Bowood	Grade I	of Exceptional Interest
Corsham Court	Grade II*	of Great Quality
Lacock Abbey	Grade II	of Special Interest
Sheldon Manor	Grade II	of Special Interest
Hazelbury Manor	Grade II	of Special Interest

Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest

7.9 North Wiltshire is fortunate in having an unusual diversity and number of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, including a great wealth of fine stone, brick and thatched buildings. This mixture of historic buildings gives a special character to the towns, villages and countryside. However, there is only a limited number of historic buildings and those surviving need to be carefully and responsibly preserved. For this reason, buildings placed on the Statutory List enjoy legal protection and cannot be altered, extended or demolished without prior Listed Building Consent.

LISTED BUILDINGS

HE4 DEVELOPMENT, DEMOLITION OR ALTERATIONS INVOLVING LISTED BUILDINGS

Development or alteration affecting a listed building will only be permitted where it preserves or enhances the building, its setting and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

7.10 Listed Building consent is required prior to executing, or causing to be executed, any works for the demolition, alteration or extension of a listed building which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest. A listed building includes any object or structure within its curtilage and any object or structure fixed to the building. PPG15 (Planning Policy Guidance Note 15) sets out the considerations relating to demolition and alterations of listed buildings.

7.11 Where a planning application is made for development within the curtilage or vicinity of a listed building, the planning authority will take into account the effect of the proposal on the setting of the listed building.

7.12 In considering applications for development which involves a change of use, the District Council will seek to secure the retention, restoration, maintenance and continued use of the buildings and structures. The historic use will be the first option, but if it is clearly demonstrated that the historic use is no longer appropriate, alternative uses that are compatible with the building will be considered.

The need to secure the continued use of historic buildings is paramount to their retention, restoration and long-term viability and thus will be an important factor in assessing planning applications.

7.13 Under Section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990, a local authority may execute any works which appear to them to be urgently

necessary for the preservation of a listed building in their area. Such works may consist of or include works for affording temporary support or shelter for the building, but such works can only be carried out to unoccupied listed buildings, or those parts of the building which are not in use.

ARCHAEOLOGY

7.14 North Wiltshire has a wealth of archaeological features, which vary from isolated visible remains, such as earthworks, to broad tracts of countryside where the range of ancient features creates an archaeological landscape. Important features include barrow groups, ancient trackways, Iron Age Hill-forts, and the archaeological features of the North Wessex Downs and Upper Thames Valley. Although much of the area is famous for its ancient landscape, it also has many features representing later periods. Saxon and mediaeval settlements and their field systems and post-mediaeval features such as water meadows, parliamentary enclosures and chalk carvings, including the famous white horses. In the field of industrial archaeology there are a number of important features, such as the Canals. The District also has a large number of settlements and buildings of historic or architectural interest.

HE5 SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND NATIONALLY IMPORTANT FEATURES

Permission will not be granted where a proposal would have an adverse effect on a scheduled ancient monument or other nationally important feature of archaeological or historic interest or their setting.

There will be a presumption in favour of the physical preservation in situ of nationally important archaeological remains and their settings, whether the site is scheduled or not.

7.15 The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning or other applications, whether a monument is scheduled or unscheduled. Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by development, there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation. Preservation in situ of important archaeological remains is nearly always to be preferred. North Wiltshire's Sites & Monuments Record is maintained by Wiltshire County Council's Archaeologist.

HE6 LOCALLY IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Development in defined areas of special archaeological significance, or in other locally important archaeological sites, will only be permitted where:

- i) Any archaeological remains would be unaffected by the proposals; or**
- ii) Satisfactory measures are taken to ensure the physical preservation of any archaeological remains in situ; or**
- iii) In cases where the significance of any archaeological remains is outweighed by the need for and benefits of the development, satisfactory measures are taken to excavate and record the site and its remains.**

7.16 Archaeological remains are a finite and non-renewable resource, highly fragile and vulnerable to damage and destruction. They form part of the national heritage and are valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism. The satisfactory measures that will need to be taken to excavate and record any site and its remains will need to be defined on a case by case basis, and in certain instances may be the subject of planning conditions.

7.17 Areas of Special Archaeological Significance: The term was first referred to in the Structure Plan and indicate the areas of greatest interest containing, for example, whole barrow groups, field systems, settlements, complex crop mark sites and other sub-surface features. A number of towns and villages also have known or suspected areas of archaeological significance, which broadly coincide with designated Conservation Areas. Only Cricklade and Malmesbury have so far been identified in the list of towns as Areas of Special Archaeological Significance, since this reflects the extent and depth of present day archaeological knowledge acquired from site investigations, as well as pressures for development or redevelopment. As the extent of information increases, it may be possible to identify more settlements as Areas of Special Archaeological Significance.

7.18 The policy will also be applicable to other locally important archaeological sites, which includes those defined by the County Sites and Monuments Records, or other sites as identified from time to time through site evaluation or excavation such as to justify their inclusion in the Records.

7.19 Ten areas in North Wiltshire have been defined by the County Council's Library and Museum Service and are shown on the Proposals Map and in Appendix 2. The defining of broad zones recognises that protection is possible in only a proportion of cases. Each individual case will need to be assessed on its own merit, with an archaeological evaluation being required to be undertaken to assess this.

HE7 ENABLING DEVELOPMENT – HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Proposals involving enabling development will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances where:

- a) The scale of the proposed enabling development does not exceed what is necessary to support the principal development; and**
- b) The proposal (the principal development) to be subsidised by the proposed enabling development is in the national interest.**

7.20 In order to maintain nationally important listed buildings, or other 'heritage' resources such as historic parklands, the local planning authority may consider granting planning permission for financially beneficial development, the profit of which will be used to fund major repair work to the resource which it is important to preserve or restore. The development would generally not be permitted, for example, because the site is in the open countryside, where new build is contrary to Government guidance and adopted Local Plan policy. The local planning authority will consider such proposals only in exceptional circumstances. Where listed buildings are involved, it must be demonstrated that the proposed enabling development does not detract from their fabric or setting. A legal agreement will be sought to ensure the proposal, to be subsidised by the enabling development, is carried out within an agreed period of time following the implementation of the whole or part of the enabling development itself.

HE8 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Where any nationally or locally important archaeological site or historic building is likely to be affected, applicants will be requested to submit an archaeological evaluation before planning permission is granted.

Where necessary, adequate archaeological investigation and recording will be required before, and / or during, building or other operations, in order to safeguard important evidence which might otherwise be destroyed without record.

7.21 Where important archaeological remains may exist, it is reasonable for the Planning Authority to request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological evaluation to be carried out before any decision on a planning application is taken. Such sites are entered on the County Sites and Monuments Record. The purpose of an evaluation is to define the character and extent of any remains, thus indicating the weight, which ought to be attached to their preservation and the options for minimising or avoiding damage. The Local Planning Authority may also require that a “watching brief” is undertaken by a nominated archaeologist during any construction period, or a condition is sought that more excavations take place.

7.22 Whilst preservation of remains in situ is preferable to excavation and recording, the extent to which remains can or should be preserved will depend upon a number of factors, including the intrinsic importance of the remains. Where it is not feasible or reasonable to preserve remains, the local planning authority may require, by the imposition of conditions, the excavation of the site, together with its recording and eventual publication, prior to development commencing.

7.23 There may be similar requirements for archaeological appraisal and recording in respect of works to a listed building and its setting.