

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

Policy DM9

Conservation Areas

Proposals for development in a Conservation Area, or for development that affects its setting or important views into, out of, across or through the area, will be required to assess and clearly demonstrate how the special character, appearance and significance of the Conservation Area will be preserved or enhanced. Proposals will be determined in accordance with policy SP9 and will be sensitively designed to satisfy the following criteria:

- a. To respect the overall settlement pattern and its setting as part of the wider landscape;
- b. To reflect the form and layout of the area including views and vistas into and out of it and the shape and character of spaces contributing to the character of the historic environment, including historic street patterns and their setting;
- c. To ensure the scale, height, form, massing, and alignment respects the historic and architectural character, including roofscapes of the area, the relationship between buildings and the spaces between them;
- d. To ensure the nature and quality of materials are appropriate to the locality and complement those of the surrounding area;
- e. To respect locally distinctive design details that contribute to the area's character such as traditional frontage patterns, vertical or horizontal emphasis, pattern of fenestration, window and door detailing, shopfronts, advertisements, historical or traditional street furniture, traditional surfaces, and boundary treatments;
- f. To ensure buildings and streets of townscape character, trees, open spaces, walls, fences or any other features are retained where they contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area;
- g. To ensure it does not generate levels of traffic, parking or other environmental problems which would harm the character, appearance or significance of the area; and
- h. That the use is appropriate to and compatible with the character, appearance and historic function of the area.

Proposals for or involving demolition of existing buildings, walls or other structures which make a positive contribution to the special character or appearance or historic interest of the Conservation Area will not be permitted unless there is clear and convincing evidence that:

- i. The condition of the building (provided that this is not a result of deliberate neglect) and the cost of repairing and maintaining it in relation to its significance and to the value derived from its continued use, is such that repair is not practical; or
- ii. The replacement would make an equal or greater contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area; or
- iii. The development would generate planning benefits that outweigh the harm arising from its loss in accordance with national policy.

Where development is acceptable, a record of the current site, building or structure and its context will be required, prior to or during development or demolition, in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation.

Plans for redevelopment or re-use of an area where demolition is proposed must be agreed and a contract for redevelopment signed before the demolition is carried out.

Supporting Text

10.82 The purpose of this policy is to set out more detailed criteria for development proposals affecting Conservation Areas.

10.83 A Conservation Area is 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' (Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act, 1990). Preservation in this context means not harming the interest in the Conservation Area, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.

10.84 The special character and appearance of a Conservation Area can be derived from many different aspects including its physical features, spaces, landscape, views, the uses of an area, and the relationship between these elements. Other aspects of character may be more intangible perceptions of a place, such as historical or cultural associations with a place or building. Others may be relatively ephemeral or transitory, such as the smells and sounds associated with specific activities, which may occur only at certain times of the day or year.

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10.85 The NPPF clarifies that not all elements of a Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. In these cases the level of harm should be weighed against the wider benefits of the proposal including the potential to enhance or reveal further the heritage significance of the area.

10.86 Demolition is only desirable where the building or structure involved does not make a positive contribution to the area and demolition of certain buildings/structures and/or demolition of the whole or substantial part of any gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure in a Conservation Area still requires planning consent. Information regarding the condition of the building should be based on a sound structural survey carried out by a chartered civil or structural engineer.

10.87 High standards of maintenance and repair are encouraged in Conservation Areas. In cases where disrepair is severe, the Council may consider serving a Section 215 or Urgent Works Notice requiring work to be carried out.

10.88 The Council would be supportive of proposals that would improve upon the condition of heritage assets that are identified as being at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development, as long as it can be demonstrated that there would be no resultant harm to their setting or their significance.