

SEDFORD

CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT CHARACTER STATEMENT



SEDFORD, a parish and scattered village, in the vale of a small rivulet, between Heacham and Docking, 13 miles N.N.E. of Lynn. In the parish was anciently a hamlet, called Gnatyngdon, or Nettington, held by Godwin Haldon, one of the few Saxons who was allowed to keep his land by the Norman Conqueror.

WILLIAM WHITE 1845

DESIGNATED: October 1990

**PLANNING
POLICY**

INTRODUCTION

A Conservation Area – “An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

The conservation of the historic environment is part of our quality of life, helping to foster economic prosperity and providing an attractive environment in which to live or work. The Borough Council is committed to the protection and enhancement of West Norfolk's historic built environment and significant parts of it are designated as conservation areas.

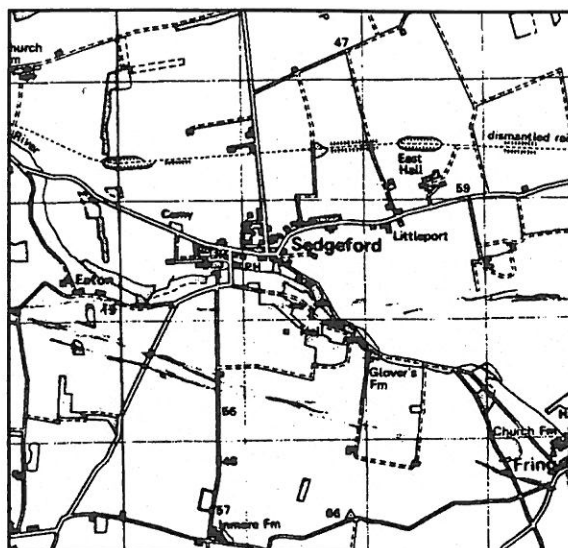
Conservation areas were introduced by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act. Local Authorities were required to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate them as conservation areas. This duty is now part of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act which also requires the review of existing conservation areas and, where appropriate, the designation of new ones. The quality and interest of a conservation area depends upon a combination of factors including the relationship and architectural quality of buildings, materials, spaces, trees and other landscape features, together with views into and out of the area.

The Sedgeford Conservation Area was designated in October 1990. This document highlights the special qualities which underpin the character of the conservation area, justifying its designation. It also seeks to increase awareness of those qualities so that where changes to the environment occur, they do so in a sympathetic way without harm to the essential character of the area. This type of assessment has been encouraged by recent Government Advice (PPG15) and it will eventually form supplementary planning guidance to those policies in the King's Lynn & West Norfolk Local Plan aimed at protecting the overall character of conservation areas. In particular, the guidance will supplement the Local Plan policies which deal with demolition and new development within the conservation area and new development on land adjoining the conservation area which might affect its setting or the views in or out of the area.

This character statement does not address enhancement proposals. Community led enhancement schemes will be considered as part of a separate process.

SETTING AND LOCATION

Sedgeford is located in the north-west corner of Norfolk and lies approximately 4¾ kilometres (3 miles) from the west coast. The main north-south route along this coast is the A149 road, which connects Kings Lynn with Hunstanton, and Sedgeford lies approximately 3 kilometres (2 miles) west of it. The setting of the village is one of a riverside valley settlement the surrounding landscape is an important contributor to village form.



The settlement lies along and to the south of the main east-west connecting route, the B1454, which leads to Heacham 4¾ kilometres (3 miles) to the west and Docking 6½ kilometres (4 miles) to the east. Hunstanton (via the A149) is around 8 kilometres (5 miles) away to the north-west and Fakenham approximately 24 kilometres (15 miles) to the south-east.

The pattern of communication routes is typical for villages in this part of Norfolk with roads radiating from the settlement like spokes of a wheel. In addition to those mentioned above, minor routes lead to Ringstead 3½ kilometres (2¼ miles) to the north and Fring 4 kilometres (2½ miles) to the south-east.

In terms of soil classification Sedgeford lies to the north of the 'West Norfolk Lowland' between the 'coastal marshland' further west and the higher 'chalk scarp' to the east. This 'lowland' soil is mostly sandy with well drained swells and wet hollows. It includes the orange/brown sands on the carstone and heavy soils on boulder clay.

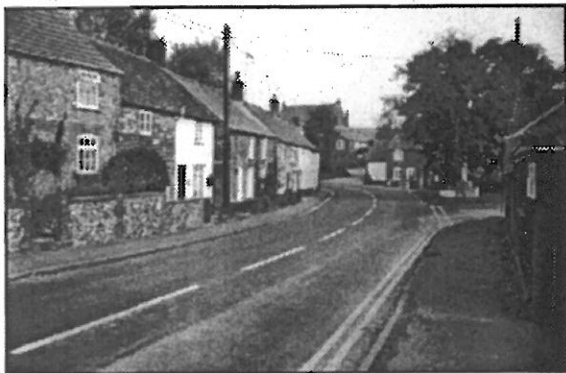
The local topography also gives the settlement its unique character and helps to create several

distinct areas. The original settlement around the Church is just higher than the river further south, but the valley continues to rise to the north quite steeply, as evidenced by the Ringstead Road. There is a noticeable 'low point' around Coles Green before the land rises again to the east along the Docking Road.

Mention has also been made of Peddars Way, the Old Roman Road which lies to the east of the settlement.

ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

'Sedgeford' can be translated as a 'ford where sedge grows' (Old English 'seg' (sedge) and (ford), and the place name gives an immediate clue as to the nature of the origins of the settlement as one generated by a proximity to and crossing over, water. In this case the river is the 'Sedge' although it is known by various other names as it passes through other nearby settlements such as the 'Fring' and the 'Heacham' River. The river empties into The Wash approximately 4³/₄ kilometres (3 miles) to the west at Heacham and Sedgeford was clearly an ideal place for settlement in a fertile river valley close to the coast.



The earliest known settlement was that of the Iron Age (650 BC) and there is also evidence of occupation in Roman, and Anglo Saxon times and then continuously right up to the modern day. Its importance in Roman times would have been quite significant, located as it was under a mile from Peddars Way, a main north/south communication route from Thetford to the coast.

A thriving local archaeological group has made several important discoveries about the nature of the early settlement and this has been published. The location of natural springs adjacent to the line of the river had great significance in pre and early Christian symbolism and the digs in the Saxon Cemetery ('the boneyard') have produced evidence of Viking and Saxon pagan ritual.

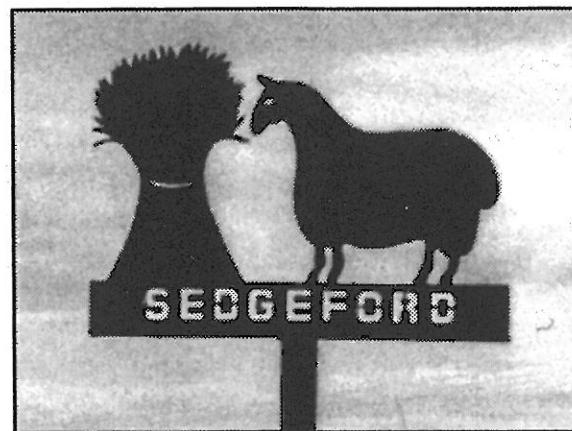
Medieval times saw the emergence of the manorial system with monastic ownership of key areas of land, so typical of this era, which were gradually passed on to powerful secular families, a trend which has continued unabated up to the 20th century.

The basis of the settlement was agriculture adjacent to a good water supply, although the harvesting of sedge was clearly of great importance to the local economy and generated huge profits for the landowners. Man-made methods of controlling the flow of the river were an early feature and culminated in the formation of 'reed dams' which encouraged the growth of the sedge.

Early settlement was probably centred around the church area and was based around the Church itself and associated farmsteads, West Hall Farm being a remnant of this form.

The early village was located on land just high enough to the north of the river to avoid flooding, but the land continued to rise steeply to the north and a major east/west connecting route became identified further to the north, which linked Sedgeford to Heacham in the west and Docking in the east, where the land rises again to form one of the highest points in Norfolk.

The location of this route generated further settlement along it and led ultimately to the rather dispersed nature of the current village form.



A further 'nucleus' was generated around the junction of the east/west route with the connecting road leading to the village of Fring in the south-east. A small village green was formed at the junction, Cole Green.

Additional major buildings were developed namely Sedgeford Hall itself to the south-east of the 'core' and Wethered Manor located to the

north of the Docking Road as it sweeps round from a dramatic north/south bend. The latter was built by ecclesiastical owners and again must have encouraged the location of the smaller scale settlement on Docking Road.

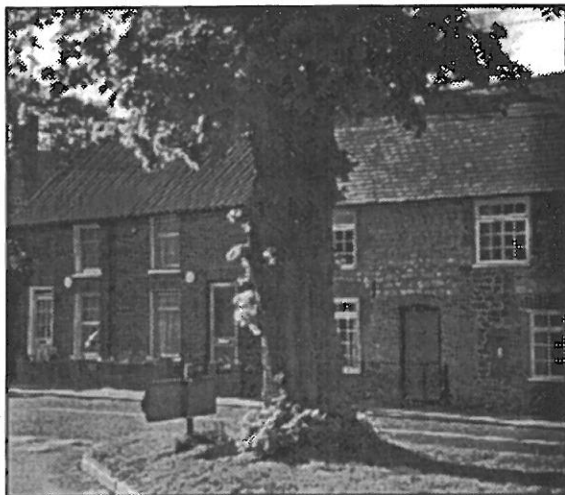
Land ownership has always been a key component of settlement form and Sedgeford is no exception. Mention has been made of the importance of ecclesiastical ownership within the village and its immediate environment. Other important family owners have been the Glovers (Glover Farm), the de Sedgeford (Seckford) family itself, and the Le Strange family, later to become owners of Hunstanton Hall and a well known family in this part of West Norfolk. These owners dominated the sale, purchase and disposal of land in the village and has contributed greatly to its current settlement form.

Settlement pattern has also been influenced by the major shifts in society and the economy as a whole, such as enclosure, the gradual diminution of agriculture in the 20th century, and rise of non-conformist religion in the 19th century.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

Sedgeford Conservation Area is divided into two distinct parts which will be referred to as the eastern and western areas.

The western, and perhaps most historically important area is that centred on the Church and encompasses all the historic buildings associated with it and the important surrounding landscape elements up to and including the river, together with the upper historic fabric located either side of the Heacham Road to the north. The character of this area is generated by the old buildings, the intimacy of the spaces



and sense of enclosure provided by the surrounding landscape, particularly near the Church.

The eastern area is essentially that part of the historic settlement centred around the nucleus of Cole Green and then the linear settlement, primarily on the northern side of the Docking Road. Each area again has its own character although the Docking Road part is unfortunately dominated by through traffic.

SPACES AND BUILDINGS

Sedgeford Conservation Area is, as mentioned above, separated into two distinct parts – west and east.

Western Section

The conservation area boundary is irregularly shaped in profile here. The northern boundary encompasses the few ranges of historic cottage buildings north and south of the Heacham Road which forms a strong northern 'edge' to the conservation area. To the west, the northern boundary drops further southwards to contain the historic buildings to the north of Church Lane and their rear curtilages. The western boundary is aligned to enclose the lovely and archaeologically important meadow, which falls from Church Lane southwards to the river and the strong hedgerow / tree line on to the west.



The southern boundary is also irregular in profile. In essence it follows the line of the river as it flows westwards towards Heacham, and includes the southern bank and tree line. Further eastwards it drops to the south to encompass the curtilage of West Hall Farm and its boundary with the minor road connecting Sedgeford with Snettisham to the south-east.

The eastern boundary of this part of the

conservation area encloses the historic cottage buildings associated with West Hall Farm and the curtilages of the historic built fabric lining the south side of Heacham Road. It ends at the eastern edge of the King William public house. In general terms the special character of this part of the conservation area is given by the series of intimate spaces created by the historic buildings, the sloping topography (the land falls quite dramatically from north to south) the dramatic treed, river valley landscape, and the series of attractive screen walls which link these components together.

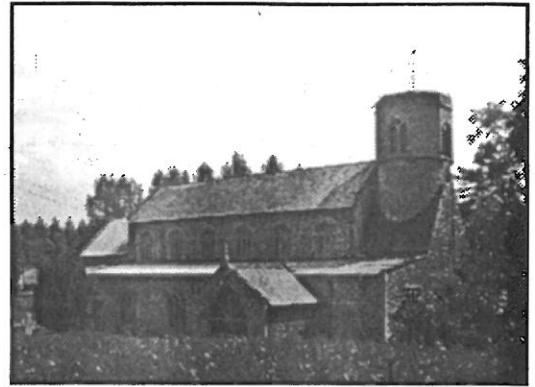
Church Lane itself provides a delightful sequence of views and vistas both along it east and west and also southwards towards the river and landscape associated with it.

All the buildings on its northern side are important from a townscape point of view although none are listed. Several buildings are undergoing alterations and it is important that the outbuildings associated with them are retained, as they also contribute greatly towards the unity of character of the area.

These buildings are effectively cut into the hillside and the dramatic slope northwards can be seen from the access track (which leads to agricultural country northwards) located at the extremity of the conservation area. Luckily the farm buildings at the end of the track are all in one ownership and the presence of chickens, geese and other animals adds to the pleasant rural agricultural feel.

The meadow to the south has also been purchased by the landowner and includes some delightful ponds with natural springs adjacent to the river which runs at the bottom edge of it. This meadow which extends eastwards to the south of 'Grey Friars' is also important archaeologically and is believed to contain the site of the original manor house associated with the early settlement. An archaeological 'dig' will hopefully shed more light on this. The trees surrounding the river banks and meadow further south provide an important visual stop to the area and provide a sense of enclosure. 'Grey Friars', the Old Church Rectory, a listed and recently restored Victorian building lies to the south of Church Lane and west of the Church. It is set in a mature treed landscape and has a strongly defined screen wall to its northern boundary, permitting only the odd (but attractive) glimpse of the building and landscape beyond.

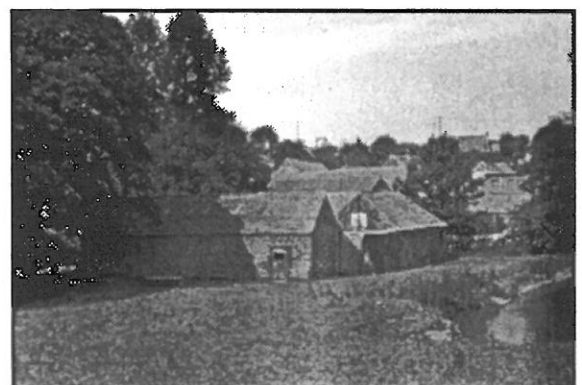
A curious sunken path divides the Church from the Old Rectory, which provides an attractive



route to the river and a pedestrian bridge over it to the south. There is anecdotal evidence (and probably true) that the path was sunk by an incumbent who did not want to be seen by his parishioners. The screen / retaining walls each side of its northern section were apparently even higher at one time. Further south the walls are replaced by mature hedges each side with treed landscape beyond. Occasional and attractive views of the West Gable of Old Hall Farm are seen to the east.

The Church, its Churchyard, containing walls, and mature landscape again provide a very attractive series of spaces best summarised as a 'quiet oasis'. The southern half of the Churchyard has been designated a Wildlife Conservation Area in its own right.

West Hall Farm occupies the south/east corner of this part of the conservation area. The Farmhouse is listed, and regrettably farming is no longer carried on from the site. The extensive and attractive outbuildings to the north have been, or are being, converted for residential use. The buildings are screened by walls to the north and east, the latter also containing a mature hedgerow as it borders the minor road to Snettisham. A new house has been inserted on the north-east corner of the site. The design is sympathetic to context although the site would benefit from a stronger sense of enclosure. This openness does permit attractive views to the river, its associated ponds, and green meadow landscape beyond.



An interesting series of spaces is experienced further north of West Hall Farm generated by the grouping of historic cottages and a previous inn (The Buck), now a listed building. Green spaces, or 'heaters', small triangles of land surrounded by tracks form an important landscape component to this area which is characterised by steeply sloping land rising to the north. Most of the buildings are historic and designated as being of townscape significance. There has been some inserted infill housing to the east which being relatively 'early modern' pays little respect to 'place'. The best that can be done is for the enclosing landscape to be strengthened.

A further delightful space is located in the middle of the eastern conservation area boundary where the bridge over the river is located. This is the old wash pit area and is now an attractive green space with cottages to the north and tree landscape to the south.

The northern, 'uphill' part of the conservation area contains the historic built fabric either side of the Heacham Road. There are interesting ranges of buildings including the old forge and buildings seemingly randomly placed on their plots which adds to the picturesque village scene. The 'Voss', a converted chapel, looks 'tired' and in need of further refurbishment and the site immediately to the west is subject to proposed development. It is an important site for restitching the village street together.

New infill housing has been inserted to the north/west and whilst an attempt at 'contextual' design has been made the result is over fussy and the challenge of level change has not really been successfully grasped. New housing has also been inserted to the west of the King William pub and is much more successful architecturally, with good enclosure to the road frontage.

The pub, after being vacant for several months is thankfully flourishing again, a vital part of any village's infrastructure.

Eastern Section

Moving now to the eastern part of the conservation area, two distinct areas are experienced, each with its own character. The western section has a nucleated character centred around Cole Green which marks the junction between the Heacham / Docking Roads and Fring Road which travels off to the south-east.



The conservation area boundary encompasses the historic fabric to the south of Heacham Road and to the north, the Victorian Primary School and its curtilage playing field behind.

The grouping of buildings around the Green is particularly attractive and a range of vistas and views are generated by the changing alignments of the roads coming into it. Docking Road leaves the Green travelling almost directly north before taking a more easterly route again, presumably due to ownership of land each side. The southern boundary is formed by the Lodge building at the entrance gate to Sedgeford Hall and contains a very strong treed landscape element, the many mature trees of the park providing a visual stop to the whole area. Dominant landscape again forms a backdrop to the northern edge along both sides of the Docking Road with screen wall and railings to Wethered Manor additional attractive townscape features.

The Village 'Green' itself is an important component of the conservation area's character containing as it does several mature trees and the village war memorial.

The remaining, easternmost part of the Conservation Area is dominated to the west by the important Wethered Manor, its lovely screen walls and mature landscape beyond. Its outbuildings, further to the east are now all demolished and the site is being developed for



new barn-like residences, a major site of 'infill' housing for the village which should be more successful than the earlier post war development in design terms.

Moving eastwards, the conservation area boundary encompasses the long line of historic buildings to the north and the two ranges to the south. The remainder of the southern boundary contains the hedgerow and bank which forms a defined 'edge' to the agricultural land beyond.

It is interesting that the land now slopes not only to the east but also upwards to the south. The road therefore has the feeling of being located within a 'cut'. This part of the conservation area is unfortunately dominated by fast moving traffic which threatens the pedestrian (footpath to the north only). The ranges of buildings are however interesting and vary from several ranges of attractive cottage buildings to a nice Non-Conformist Chapel and one or two more grandiose dwellings, e.g. 'The Chimnies' and The Long House. All these historic buildings provide a picturesque sequence of forms as they come forward onto the street or step back to generate attractive forecourts. Again, several modern houses have been inserted on both sides of the road, with a further small modern estate to the west of the Chapel.

LISTED BUILDINGS

There are a total of six listed buildings within the Sedgford Conservation Area. The statutory list was revised in 1984 and there have been no further additions.

Listed Grade I

- **Church of St. Mary**, Church Lane. 12th Century Parish Church with later additions. Flint with stone dressings, clunch rubble and stone dressings to chancel, slated nave and porch roofs, leaded aisle and chancel roof. Round tower at west.

Listed Grade II

- **Greyfriars**, Church Lane. Former Rectory House circa 1840. Carstone, stuccoed brick dressings and slated roofs. Tudor Gothic style.
- **Buckland**, Church Lane. House, formerly the Buck Inn. 17th century. Whitewashed clunch with brick dressings, red pantiled roof. 2 storey with attics.
- **West Hall Farmhouse**. Farmhouse. 16th century to east, 1800 to west. Earlier house in carstone with brick dressings, circa 1800

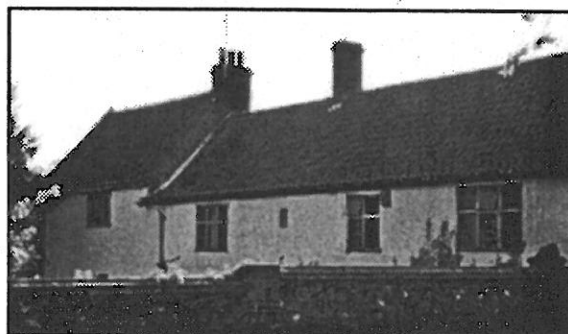
addition brick, both with red pantiled roof.

- **Lych Gates**, (25m N.E.), Church of St. Mary, Church Lane. 2 leaf lych gates, gate piers and abutments. Dated 1852. Coursed, squared carstone with stone dressings, wooden and cast iron gates.

- **Wethered Manor**, Docking Road. Farmhouse. Some 17th century evidence but rebuilt / altered in first half of 19th century. Porch and west front to north of porch rubble tiled carstone with brick dressings, house to south of porch of squared and coursed carstone with galletting and brick dressings, smut pantiled roof.

IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS

The character of Sedgford Conservation Area benefits from several important listed buildings but a good deal of the townscape character rests on the vernacular styles of its unlisted buildings, their outbuildings and the way they are grouped, as shown on the map. They have been identified because of their prominent position, use of traditional materials, their character is substantially intact, and because they often relate to other historic buildings close by.



POST WAR DEVELOPMENT

Most post war development in Sedgford Conservation Area comprises infill housing either on single plots or grouped together in small 'estates'. In general terms, the earlier housing is of uninspired 'anywhere' design which so typified residential building of this era. Gradually, an awareness of the importance of conservation and the need for a more sensitive design approach to inserting or adapting buildings within a conservation area has led to a more sympathetic approach, examples of which can be seen in several new housing schemes in Sedgford. The architectural styles and materials used generally now attempt to reflect those of the traditional fabric of the village.



Modern building in Sedgeford has responded to the forces fuelling such development. The dramatic decline in agriculture has effectively destroyed the basis of the original community and is now one based generally on car ownership and employment in large urban centres. Again this trend is seen on a national basis but it is encouraging to know that this community clearly cherishes its historical past and is doing much to protect it for future generations. It is also encouraging to see the Church, Post Office, School and pub in use. Such infrastructure is all too easily lost in modern village settlements which then effectively become merely places to live. In this sense, the modern infill housing has encouraged much continued vitality in the village which remains an extremely attractive place to live.

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The character of Sedgeford Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of local traditional materials in the construction of its historic buildings. These materials include:-

- Chalk (clunch)
- Random and coursed field flint
- Rubble flintwork
- Carstone in most of its forms i.e. random rubble, coursed ashlar work, sometimes galletted.
- Norfolk red brick
- Clay pantiles, both natural red and black glazed
- Welsh slate
- Colourwashed brick flint or render

Local chalk and clay pits traditionally provided building material and evidence of their location is still seen 'on the ground'.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Sedgeford although a flourishing archaeological

body 'the Smithdon Group', exists and has provided a wealth of important information on the early settlement in and around Sedgeford.

In view of its ancient history it is recommended that a watching brief be attached to any 'permission to develop' whether new build or adaptation to existing fabric within the conservation area.

DETRACTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The special quality of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor alterations such as unsuitable replacement windows and doors, inappropriate materials or unsympathetic paintwork, removal of walls, railings, trees and hedges.

Examples of the above are all present in Sedgeford and the following are additional items, which could hopefully be addressed in the future:

- Car parking around Cole Green.
- 'Wirescape' generally – overhead wires etc.
- The impact of traffic – some traffic calming measures could usefully be considered.
- Improved forecourt to the King William Public House.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The overall conservation objective is to protect and reinforce the established special character of Conservation Areas and their setting.

This will be achieved by:

- encouraging the retention and maintenance of buildings which contribute to the overall character of each conservation area, whether listed or not
- ensuring that new development is sympathetic to the special qualities and character of each conservation area
- protecting the setting of the conservation area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area
- the retention, maintenance and locally appropriate new planting of trees
- maintaining and enhancing local features and details which contribute towards an area's local distinctiveness
- working with the community to prepare schemes of enhancement
- encouraging the removal of detractors to the special character of each conservation area

CONTACTS AND ADVICE

Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alterations, extensions, installations, demolition or work to trees should seek advice from the Planning Policy at an early stage. A leaflet summarising these issues and including general information on conservation areas can be obtained from the Planning Policy free of charge.



**PLANNING
POLICY**

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