



# The Deal Society

## Conservation Area Appraisal Glossary

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## 1. Introduction

This glossary contains definitions and explanations of terminology used in the character assessment toolkit and provides questions as prompts when using the forms.

The characteristics of an area are grouped into five broad themes:

- Buildings
- Landscape
- Spaces and Views
- Streets and Paths
- Ambience

Those themes are then broken down into features to be appraised. The features are designed to apply to a variety of areas – in some cases a specific feature may be of great significance whereas some features may not be relevant and should be left blank.

Features should be assessed within their wider context e.g. how a building sits within a street or a street within an area. The setting and interrelationships between the single element, such as a building, and the wider context, such as the street, are just as important as the quality of the buildings themselves.

When analysing an area, individual buildings do not require a detailed description, it is their collective character and contribution to the area that is being considered.

Throughout the assessment, only features visible from the public realm (streets, paths, rivers and open spaces) are to be appraised.

It may be necessary to visit the area at different times of the day, on different days of the week and envisage whether there may be seasonal changes in the character of the area.

## **2. Features**

### **Buildings**

**A building is any human-made structure used or intended for any use or occupancy.**

The variety of building types and forms as well as the materials used in their construction, their finer details, their use and their relationship with each other can have a significant effect on the character of an area.

- *Do buildings make an important contribution to the character of the area and if so what features are significant to their contribution?*

#### **Size / Scale / Density**

- *Is there a uniform scale and size to the buildings in the street or does it vary?*
- *Is there any conflict between buildings in terms of scale and size?*

#### **Coherence**

This is the extent to which buildings have a common design. Some areas have typically been built at the same time and the uniformity of design is a significant feature whereas other areas are characterised by diversity of design and materials.

- *Do the buildings form a single development with shared architectural detailing?*

#### **Age**

Any historic importance connected to a specific building or group of buildings that increase contribution and significance through associative value.

- *Do buildings reflect an important period in the area's history and is this reflected in their past or current use?*
- *Do they appear historic or modern or a variety of ages?*
- *How does this influence the character and appearance of the street?*
- *Is the street a historic routeway but the buildings more recent?*

#### **Materials**

- *Is there a predominant building material or a wide ranging palette of materials?*
- *Do the materials complement each other?*
- *Any distinctive construction methods e.g. a brick bond or polychromatic brickwork or use of a distinctive material?*

#### **Windows**

Windows are often described as 'the eyes' of a building and make a significant contribution to a building's design and character.

The main window types are:

- Sash – frames that slide up and down (or occasionally side to side)
- Casements – Hinged windows that open outwards
- Fixed
- *Do styles of windows add to the visual interest of the buildings, reflect their origins and use, or form part of a designed scheme?*
- *Do they appear to be original/traditional windows?*
- *Timber framed, UPVC, metal framed, stone mullions?*
- *Traditional shop window or modern replacement?*

## **Doors**

Doors also add or detract from a building and a streetscape as a whole. Original doors may have been replaced with inappropriate styles or 'mock' designs. The degree of contribution can depend on the use and design of the building, its age, location, whether the building is part of a group and the relationship between building and road.

- *Do they appear to be original/traditional doors?*
- *Uniform or varied styles?*

## **Roofs / Chimneys / Gables**

- *Are roofing materials similar (e.g. slate or tiles)?*
- *Does the roofscape make a significant statement to the area?*

## **Uses**

- *Is the building occupied or vacant?*
- *Is there a predominant use e.g. commercial, retail, academic, residential, or a mix of uses?*
- *Do the uses contribute positively to the character of the area?*

## **Historical development**

Some alterations are not immediately apparent e.g. differing windows, door openings and facades but others are more obvious and can impact upon the individual building as well as the street scene as a whole.

- *Are previous uses of the buildings identifiable?*
- *Have those changes affected the character of the area?*

## **Condition**

Well maintained buildings usually make a more positive contribution than rundown and inappropriately maintained properties.

Specific mentions of the condition of a particular building should be avoided because their condition can change in the short term and the appraisal should be looking at long term features. It is, however, relevant to comment on the overall condition of the area being studied because this will usually only change slowly.

- *What condition are the buildings in (paintwork; windows; roofs etc.)?*

## **Landscape**

**Landscape refers to the overall effect of the built environment and natural features.**

- *What landscape features contribute to the area's character and how do they affect it?*

### **Streetscene**

The streetscene is made up of the visual elements of a street that combine to form the street's character including how the buildings work together, the architectural design, feature, materials, streets, parking, street furniture, trees, use, etc.

### **Roofscape**

The landscape of roofs can have a significant impact on the character of a street.

- *Are the roofs visible from street level, if so, how do they contribute to the character of the area?*
- *Do the roofs have a variety of interest in materials and shapes, or do uniform roof slopes and materials contribute to the cohesion of groups of building within the view?*
- *Have chimneys been removed or alterations made?*

### **Trees and gardens**

Key trees or groups of trees may make a significant contribution to the varied character of the area.

The time of year may have an influence, with seasonal changes affecting the character of the area.

There may be areas where trees and other greenery makes little or no contribution to the overall character but this is not necessarily a detracting factor and is reflective of the type of area being analysed.

A green character is not only formed by trees planted within a public space. Trees within private spaces can add to the public character of a place. Trees in private spaces may overhang into public spaces or be planted in openly visible private spaces contributing to the wider character of the area.

- *Is there a prevalent green and leafy quality to the space?*
- *Are the visible gardens well maintained?*

### **Water features**

- *Is a river, canal, lake or sea a significant feature in the area?*
- *Does it form part of the setting to the space, impacting upon its character – if so, how?*

### **Topography**

- *How level is the land? Is it flat, a hill, or does it include a combination of levels? Does it follow a slope and if so what direction does it face?*
- *Do street lines or other paths run up or along a slope?*
- *Is there a step down from the street level into adjoining spaces?*

## **Spaces and Views**

### **A space is the gap between the built elements**

Spaces may be formally designed or develop informally over time.

Spaces will create views within and out of the area.

#### **Types of space**

Spaces may be:

- Formal / Informal
- Wide and open / Narrow and enclosed
- Winding / Straight

A formal space is a designed feature, such as a town square, an architecturally uniform street, a formal garden, or the forecourt of a building.

An informal space is one that has evolved in an organic manner with no planned layout, incorporating a wide range of features that may not have a strong connection with each other and can be used in a variety of ways e.g. a space that has no uniformity in building lines, building styles and positions, height of walls, materials or road widths.

Wide and open spaces may be a wide road or green space. The space may be broken up into sections but the overall character is of a wide airy space.

Narrow and enclosed spaces are usually formed by a confined space between the building lines, often accompanied by tall buildings. A continuous building line emphasises the enclosure.

An enclosed space is not just created by a narrow gap between two building lines, the space can be more substantial but due to a continuous building line and uniform scale of property, there is a clearly defined sense of enclosure to the space.

An enclosed space may be an intentional part of an historic design, or the result of pressure for development of available land.

– *What is the layout of the space?*

#### **Relationship of the space to the buildings**

– *Do buildings form a major component of the space, creating a clear sense of enclosure or acting as a focal feature?*

– *Are buildings a secondary feature to the space or features within the space?*

#### **Means of enclosure**

Enclosure can be defined as anything that encloses a space, i.e. giving definition to a place and can include buildings, walls/railings/fences, planting, etc.

It is also possible to have various forms of enclosure within the same place adding to an area's more diverse character.

#### **Building plots**

Building plots refers to the land the structures sit within. How buildings are positioned on their plots will affect the character of the area.

– *Are they built up to the frontage of the plot or set back?*

– *Do they fill the entire width of the plot?*

– *Do buildings along the street fill the plot in a uniform way e.g. a continuous built frontage, a more spacious layout or a combination of layouts?*

## Uses

The way the buildings are used can impact upon the character and appearance of a place. Buildings with active frontages such as shops, cafes and evening uses including pubs and theatres can create a vibrant and bustling street scene.

Commercial streets can be busy during the day but quiet at night.

Residential areas have changeable characters depending on time of day, time of year, location etc.

## Accessibility

- *How easy is the space to use?*
- *Is it a shared use space? Does this impact on the way and ease with which the space is used?*

## Types of view

All spaces have a view although the form and combination varies from space to space. Often it is a cumulative combination of views that influence the character of a space rather than a single defining vista.

Views may be: Short / Long / Unfolding / Glimpsed / Channelled / Wide / Open / Historic / Popular / Urban or Rural

Unfolding views are the result of the layout of the space creating a series of linked short views that emerge as you progress through the space.

Glimpsed views give a hint of something which gradually reveals itself with progression through the space.

Channelled views are created by drawing your eye to a specific point within or beyond the space. These may be formed by the location of the enclosing architecture that gives the optical illusion of the space between narrowing with distance. Or a specific architectural feature such as an archway may channel the view.

- *Are there views of interest and distinction?*
- *Are views glimpsed through gaps between buildings, channelled by lines of trees or buildings, or open and expansive?*
- *Is a view well known because of a historical event, painting, prose or poetry, or is it popular with local residents as a part of a public place?*
- *Does the shape of a street create a series of views, or is a single viewing point particularly important?*
- *Does the view include an attractive frontage or roofscape?*
- *Is the view short, does this give an intimate feel to the space?*

## Focal points

This is a feature that draws attention to itself by virtue of its scale, design or prominence. Focal points often dominate a view but are not necessarily the end of the space, with views continuing into the background.

- *Does a landmark, such as a building or group of trees, form a focal point?*

## Views out of the area

Views out of and into the space create a context by linking one area to another, highlighting the interrelationships between spaces. This may be between adjoining streets or may feature distinctive elements of the skyline or that of the surrounding countryside.

## **Streets and Paths**

**Streets and paths form the connection between buildings and spaces.**

### **Road surface**

- *Does the road surface preclude access to certain users e.g. wheelchairs, prams, cycles etc.*

### **Paving materials**

Road and pavement surfaces may form a significant proportion of a space and can have a strong impact upon the character of an area depending on the type and condition of surface.

A pot-holed and patched tarmac road suggests lack of care and can be negative whereas a cobbled street may be seen as a more positive element with a historic character.

Materials have changed over the centuries but points to consider include:

- Predominant surfacing material – tarmac, cobbles, flagstones
- Condition
- Type of kerb – stone, concrete, granite, iron

### **Street furniture**

Street furniture can include road signs, road markings, street lamps, telegraph posts, telephone boxes, post boxes, seating, cycle racks or any other objects on the streets and paths.

- *Is the furniture an historic feature of the place?*
- *Does the space appear cluttered due to over provision of street furniture and signage?*
- *Is it of an appropriate design/colour?*
- *Is it located in such a position that it impacts upon the usability of the space?*
- *Are there obstacles along the pavements that hinder use; e.g. cycles locked to railings, advertising boards etc?*

### **Parking**

- *Does car parking have an impact?*



## **Ambience**

**An area is not just characterised by physical elements but by more intangible aspects such as its feeling or ambience.**

These features may only be temporary but they can influence the way a person responds to a place and can add or detract from the character of the area.

- *How does the area change between day and night?*
- *Do dark corners or alleyways feel unsafe at night time?*
- *What smells and noises are you aware of and is the area busy or tranquil?*
- *What affect, if any, does vehicle traffic have on character?*

### **Types of activity**

The way a space is used and how busy it is can significantly influence the character of an area.

- *What activities are evident?*

### **Level of activity**

Busy areas may seem vibrant while a lack of activity may be seen as peaceful. Conversely a place may be too busy or the activity within it at odds with its built character. Quiet areas may also be seen as inhospitable, particularly at night.

- *How much activity is there?*
- *Does this change, for instance at different times of day?*

### **Traffic**

Cars and vehicles, moving or parked, can have a significant influence on the character of an area. The type of vehicle, volume of traffic or speed can also have an influence.

- *Do traffic and associated traffic management measures impact on the character, significance and enjoyment of the space?*
- *Is it a main traffic route?*
- *Is there a traffic management scheme that impacts upon the appearance of the space? e.g. road humps, markings, cycle & bus lanes etc?*
- *If it is a pedestrian only route, with vehicles having limited access, is there an absence of movement after the end of the working day that changes its character?*

### **Light and dark**

The amount of light or presence of shade can make a stark difference to the character of a space. This may vary through the day or be influenced by the weather.

Dark or shaded characteristics can arise from:

- Narrow width of space
- Height and density of buildings, or continuous building line
- Trees

Where light can enter a space, a series of shadows/silhouettes may form on road and building surfaces adding an extra dimension of character

Light and airy characteristics can arise due to:

- Wider spaces
- Lower buildings
- More spacious development pattern/gaps between buildings

## **Day and night**

Time of day can have an impact on the character and appearance of a place both in terms of lighting and vitality.

There may be seasonal variations in lighting conditions as well as the changing position of the sun during the day.

Lights from buildings at night can add to the atmosphere and lighting of an external space.

## **Smells**

Smells that are part of an area's character may make a positive or negative contribution to its quality and interest. They often reflect the uses of an area and can be highly emotive.

- *Are there attractive smells in the area such as fragrant planting and trees, general 'freshness' of the air, or cooking smells (very dependant on personal inclination), or are the smells unattractive, such as engine fumes or blocked drains?*

## **Noises**

Noise, or its absence, can have an impact on the character of an area. A busy road may create a lot of traffic noise that detracts from an otherwise attractive location, whilst in a tranquil residential area the sounds of bird song or children playing can make a positive contribution to the impression of an attractive living space.

- *What noises do you hear in the area and how do they affect your impression of the place?*

### **3. Terminology**

Here is a list of terms commonly used in public documents to identify or describe elements of the historic environment.

#### **Archaeological Interest**

An interest in carrying out an expert investigation at some point in the future into the evidence a heritage asset may hold of past human activity. Heritage assets with archaeological interest are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of places, and of the people and cultures that made them. These heritage assets are part of a record of the past that begins with traces of early humans and continues to be created and destroyed.

#### **Architectural and Artistic Interest**

These are interests in the design and construction aesthetic value of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills like sculpture.

#### **Conservation**

The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and where appropriate enhances its significance.

#### **Designated Heritage Asset**

A building, place, landscape, etc identified through legislation such as, A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated as such.

#### **Enabling Development**

Development that would be unacceptable in planning terms but for the fact that it would bring heritage benefits sufficient to justify it being carried out, and which could not otherwise be achieved.

#### **Heritage Asset**

A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions. Heritage assets are the valued components of the historic environment. They include designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority during the process of decision-making or through the plan-making process.

#### **Historic Environment**

All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora. Those elements of the historic environment that hold significance are called heritage assets.

#### **Historic Environment Record (HER)**

Historic environment records are information services that seek to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use. Typically, they comprise databases linked to a geographic information system (GIS), and associated reference material, together with a dedicated staffing resource.

**Historic Interest**

An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide an emotional meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

**Setting**

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

**Significance**

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.