



The Deal Society

Conservation Area Appraisal Guide

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1. Introduction

What is an appraisal?

Conservation Areas are defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (clause 69(1)(a)) as “*areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”.

A Conservation Area Appraisal is an assessment of the current condition of the built environment and character of the landscape within a designated Conservation Area. The resulting report leads to a Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Planning Authority. That document will be used in considering development and planning matters and will inform decisions about managing the environment of the area.

The historic environment makes an important contribution to the character of the district as a distinctive, interesting and special place. The buildings, spaces, associations and history that combine to create places mean different things to different people.

While there is an accepted need for change, proposals for change should be measured against their existing significance and values. This should ensure that change enhances and sustains the value of the historic environment for ourselves and future generations. The evidence and understanding provided by this process will enable management of change in an effective and positive manner.

What are the aims?

The aim is to identify the characteristics of a specific area and to identify their significance. By documenting the most important features of the character of an area and identifying any vulnerabilities that detract from its amenity a local group can put its knowledge into a structured format.

What makes up character?

Elements of character include both the uses of an area and its physical features, such as styles of building, construction materials, architectural details or landscape features. Others elements 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 transitory, such as the smells and sounds associated with specific activities, which may occur only at certain times of the day or year.

The characters are grouped into five broad themes:

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

Those themes are then broken down into features to be appraised.

Who authorises it?

A district council Planning Authority is required by the Town and Country Planning Acts to keep conservation areas under regular review. The Dover District Council Heritage Strategy has recognised that responsibility and made several recommendations for Conservation Area Appraisals in the district’s conservation areas. The Heritage Strategy also recognises the important role that local civic and amenity groups can play in performing the appraisal.

The Planning Authority authorises an appraisal, the suggestion for such an assessment may come from the Planning Authority, local councils, residents’ groups or amenity societies.

Who carries it out?

Type of organisation / group

The appraisal team should ideally be formed from a group or society recognised as having an interest and knowledge of the built environment in the area to be assessed.

Makeup of the appraisal team

A good size for a group is up to six people, there is no need for them to have any specific professional knowledge but they should have an interest in the process and an ability to work as a team within the structured format of this toolkit.

Amongst the group members there should be some knowledge of the following areas:

- The character and usage of the area
- Planning law
- Architecture, building styles and construction techniques
- Historical research
- IT skills sufficient to draft the report and provide accompanying photographs

What is the process?

Stage	By	Description
Initiation	Planning Authority	The appraisal team is appointed to report on a specified area.
Preparation	Appraisal Team	The team is formed and prepares for the appraisal, this is detailed in section 2.
Communication	Appraisal Team	The local community is advised of the appraisal and invited to give their views on the area, this is detailed in section 2.
Survey	Appraisal Team	The team uses the toolkit to perform the survey as detailed in section 3, using the forms in section 5.
Report preparation	Appraisal Team	The team uses the template to prepare the report as detailed in section 4.
Report submission	Appraisal Team	The report is submitted to the Planning Authority for their consideration as detailed in section 4.
Cabinet approval	Planning Authority	After any revision of the report it is submitted to the District Council Cabinet for a public consultation to be authorised.
Public consultation	Planning Authority	The public consultation is advertised.
Final report	Planning Authority	When the consultation period is complete any comments by parish councils and private individuals are considered by the Heritage officers and the report is finally revised.
Report approved	Planning Authority	The final report is submitted to the District Council Cabinet for authorisation as a Supplementary Planning Document.

What is the toolkit?

The toolkit provides the components you need to perform an appraisal in a structured way in order to identify the features that contribute to an area's distinctiveness, interest and amenity. It provides a framework for judging the significance of different elements within the area. It also provides opportunities to identify features or issues that detract from the character of the area.

The toolkit comprises the following components:

Component	Description
Guide	This document, which explains the process
Glossary	Explains the terminology used in the toolkit
Forms	Forms to be filled in during the survey
Report Template	A template in Word format, which should be used to write the report for submission to the Planning Authority

2. Using the toolkit

Preparation

The initial meeting(s) to prepare for the appraisal should be in a comfortable environment, they do not have to be in the area to be appraised. The relevant skills of the team should be understood at this stage and roles such as the recording on the survey forms determined.

A detailed map clearly showing the area and its borders should be obtained, either from the Planning Authority or from online mapping. The map should be studied in order to decide on the breakdown of the area into manageable parts for the detailed survey. The individual parts should each be small enough that the detailed survey can be performed within about two hours, they should ideally be coherent geographically and in their character.

The map will give an estimate of the number and type of buildings. The National Heritage List for England will enable listed buildings within the area to be identified.

The map, and local knowledge, will also give a preview of the character of the area – whether it is rural or urban, quiet or busy etc.

A brief overview of the historical development of the area will be useful to understand the area at this stage.

A timescale for the appraisal should be agreed and the initial survey date agreed.

Communication

The local council, any residents' groups and any other relevant local organisations should be contacted.

It may be useful to use parish newsletters and the local press to make the general public aware of the appraisal.

Every resident in the area should be informed by letter that the appraisal is to be carried out and invited to contribute their views of the area. The letter should contain:

- The reasons for the assessment
- What the assessment will achieve
- That there will be consultation with residents on the appraisal report
- Who has authorised the assessment
- Who will be performing the assessment
- Brief questions to focus their feedback
- Who to provide feedback to

The Planning Authority may be able to assist in identifying the occupation of properties in the area, of particular importance if the area contains buildings with multiple occupants.

Further Research

A visual study may only go so far in understanding what is special about an area. By researching its history, a better understanding can be found of how the buildings and spaces reflect its evolution and its unique character.

Some of the information may be readily accessible as online resources, whilst others may require visiting a local studies library, record office or other archives.

The resulting Historical Development will be included as an appendix to the appraisal. Historic maps can assist readers of the report in understanding the development of the area.

Help and assistance

The Conservation / Heritage department of the Planning authority will have authorised the appraisal and can provide further advice as to what is required.

Other teams who have performed appraisals can also provide useful guidance on the process.

The DDC Conservation page, including a link to an interactive map of conservation areas, is at www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Conservation.

The National Heritage List for England, which shows listed buildings, is at www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list.

The Planning Portal, with information on planning law, is at www.planningportal.co.uk.

3. Performing the survey

Phases

There are three phases to the survey:

Phase	Description
Initial reaction	The initial reaction is a summary of what is seen and felt when first visiting the area being appraised. The overview sheet should be completed during this visit to the whole of the appraisal area. The breakdown of the area into the detailed survey parts should be reviewed and amended if necessary after this visit.
Detailed survey	A separate 'Detailed Survey' form should be completed for each part of the area. These prompt a finer level of analysis of each of the character themes.
Review	In the light of the detailed survey, the overview sheet should be reviewed to ensure that the initial reaction was correct. This need not involve another visit to the area being appraised.

Method

Each survey should be capable of being performed within about two hours as it may be difficult to maintain the required concentration for longer than that.

The appraisal team should visit the area being surveyed together. They should all be aware of the stage being performed, the area to be surveyed and the features to be observed. They should each have a copy of the survey forms to refer to.

Taking photographs during the survey visit is strongly recommended as they can illustrate and visually explain any comments made on the questionnaire. They are also useful to look back over after the survey has been completed.

A detailed map of the area should be taken on the survey and can be used to annotate certain features e.g. direction of views, location of key buildings, spaces, etc.

Notes should be made on the survey form during the visit. When the visit is complete, the team should review the notes and assign numerical values.

As soon as possible after the survey, the notes should be written up in the format of section 2 of the template (The Character Appraisal). That text can then be copied into the report when it is prepared.

Using the forms

The forms are used during the survey to record the contribution of different features that might make up the character of the building or space. They should be used in conjunction with the glossary which explains the terminology used and give guidance as to the features to be surveyed.

Not every feature in the list may be relevant and a comment and a numerical value should be entered only where applicable.

Assigning numerical values to the significance of features

A numerical score should be assigned to reflect your perception of the significance of each feature to the character of the asset. Assigning a numerical value provides a mechanism for analysing and interpreting results within the area and between areas. Without scoring, consistent interpretation and evaluation of text and written comments can be difficult.

- 0: Features that do not add to the character of the area.
- 1 to 5: Features that add to the character or special nature of an area, ranging from 1 (slightly adds to the character) to 5 (significantly adds to the character).

4. Preparing the report

Using the template

Use of the template will ensure that the report is in a standard format suitable for public consultation and approval as a Supplementary Planning Document. It contains standard text required in the report and is structured in a way that the results of the survey can easily be put into it.

The template contains guides as to what should go in each section but it is recommended that examples of previously submitted assessments are studied to get ideas of the content and language expected.

The template uses styles extensively to ensure a coherent look to the document. Anyone editing it should be aware of how to use styles to ensure that they do not spend unnecessary time formatting it.

Submission

The report should initially be submitted without photographs for Cabinet approval. The version put out for public consultation will need to be illustrated, so photographs will need to be separately submitted with captions and description of where in the report they should be placed.