

# Neighbourhood *Planning*



## Guidance note on the Historic Environment<sup>1</sup> within a neighbourhood plan

What historic environment issues need to be addressed in neighbourhood plans?

- Are there any heritage assets within the area?

At the start of the plan-making process, it would be useful to identify any **Nationally Designated Heritage Assets**, such as Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, or Registered Parks and Gardens and **Locally Designated Heritage Assets**, such as Conservation Areas, locally listed buildings or structures, or areas of archaeological potential. In addition, the area may also include **Non-designated Heritage Assets** of local importance, such as sites of archaeological interest which will help to inform the decision-making process. A brief description of the character of an historic area or historic landscape could also be included to supplement the record of heritage assets. The most comprehensive source of information is the Cheshire Historic Environment Record and this should be consulted as part of the plan preparation. Email: [HBSMRAdmin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:HBSMRAdmin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

- Is this information based on sound evidence?

All historic environment data could be gathered as part of the evidence base, to provide a proper understanding of the place to which it relates. This may include documents such as conservation area appraisals, the Cheshire Historic Landscape Characterisation Study, and the Cheshire Historic Towns Survey (See <http://www.cheshirearchaeology.org.uk> or email: [HBSMRAdmin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:HBSMRAdmin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)).

Experience has shown that, in the neighbourhood plan context, heritage is best addressed in an holistic way and that sufficient information must be provided to demonstrate that any future decisions which may affect the historic environment are based on sound evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 (NPPF 2012 Annexe 2: Glossary p.52)

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- **How can this information be presented?**

A summary of, and a map locating, heritage asset designations could be included. A list of designated heritage assets and/or the key characteristics of an historic area could be added as appendices to the plan.

- **How can this information be used?**

The historic environment data can help to identify the implications which heritage asset designations will have for the themes of the plan. Through this approach, historic environment issues may be revealed as a priority which can then be addressed with appropriate policies.

- **What aspirations do the local community have for their historic environment?**

As part of the plan-making process, it is important to understand what it is the community likes and dislikes about their local area. Placecheck ([www.placecheck.info](http://www.placecheck.info)) is a user-friendly tool designed to help communities articulate what it is about their local area they want preserved or changed, and it provides a good starting point for assessing the historic environment at neighbourhood level. Assessment can be carried out by local people without additional support and provides the community with an opportunity to identify buildings, structures, spaces, etc. which are important to them. These may be local landmarks which, whilst not of sufficient quality, rarity, etc. to warrant designation, nevertheless have strong local associations.

- **What opportunities does the historic environment provide?**

Designated and non-designated heritage assets enhance local distinctiveness and the historic environment often presents opportunities for improving the attractiveness of an area for the community, business and visitors. When used successfully, the qualities of the historic environment can help to inform the design of new buildings and spaces, promote town centre viability and stimulate economic development. A consideration of the historic character of the landscape can enhance the local

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distinctiveness and attractiveness of developments and is a key element in achieving sustainable development.

- **What can threaten the character and fabric of the historic environment?**

The character and local distinctiveness of an historic area can be derived from wide-ranging influences. These include archaeological context, historic setting, former land-uses, types of buildings, the materials of construction, the fenestration patterns, decorative/repetitive details, etc. Character and local distinctiveness can be due as much to the numerous small, repetitive details as to individual or collections of buildings. Thus, the character of an historic environment can be undermined and compromised by the cumulative negative impact of small-scale development (such as extensions, window replacement, etc), which can destroy the uniformity and commonality that makes an area more than a collection of individual buildings, as much as by large-scale new-build development. Many of these small-scale changes are classed as 'permitted development', which allows property owners to undertake certain alterations without the need to obtain planning consent. Recent changes in legislation have extended the scope of this, increasing the threat which 'permitted development' poses to historic townscapes.

- **How can the Neighbourhood Plan protect the historic environment?**

Well-drafted plans can provide a sound policy basis from which to manage future development, including both new-build and change to existing stock. Once adopted, a neighbourhood plan will form part of the Local Plan and future development decisions will be made in accordance with it. Its policies need to be robust, as planning applications, (including smaller-scale development such as alterations and extensions), will be assessed against them and they will be relied upon to rebut challenges at appeal. Furthermore, the neighbourhood plan is an opportunity to inform and engage the local community, providing guidance to property owners and promoting best practice.

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- **Things to consider for inclusion within the Neighbourhood Plan:**

- ❖ The neighbourhood plan can seek to protect and enhance its heritage assets and promote an overall high quality setting for them;
- ❖ The plan can sustain and enhance the significance of its heritage assets and historic landscape character for the enjoyment of the local community and visitors alike;
- ❖ The plan can put in place measures to avoid or minimise impact, or mitigate damage to its heritage assets;
- ❖ The plan can recognise the contribution which small elements make to the local character and distinctiveness of an area, and seek to protect them;
- ❖ The plan can identify the key characteristics, design details and materials of construction which would enable new development to complement and enhance the existing historic environment; and
- ❖ The plan can direct, inform and control new larger-scale development, ensuring its suitability and appropriateness within the context of the historic environment.