Sevenoaks
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Sevenoaks District Conservation Areas:

Conservation area design guidance

Revised in 2023

1.0 Introduction: purpose, other advice, requirements

This document provides guidance to homeowners, as well as architects, developers and others who are considering or making planning and listed building consent applications in the District's conservation areas. It should be read in conjunction with:

- Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2011 Policy SP1 (see section 5.1)
- The relevant conservation area appraisal for a description of the conservation area's special character and appearance, which should be conserved or enhanced through your proposals. The appraisals contain more information about the architectural and townscape character of individual conservation areas. They can be downloaded from planning pages of the Council website.

Where a proposal is in a conservation area or may affect its setting, the Council's planning application checklist requires applicants to prepare a Conservation Area Assessment to:

- Assess the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the conservation area,
- Assess the impact of the proposal of the development on the setting of the listed buildings.

The Assessment may form part of the Design and Access Statement. If the building is listed, this report is called a Heritage Statement and also needs to consider the impacts on the listed building itself.

The planning checklists can be downloaded from the 'Apply for planning permission' section of the planning pages of the Council website: Planning validation checklists | Sevenoaks District Council.

Historic England provides advice about preparing these kinds of assessments which can be downloaded from its website:

- *Statements of Heritage Significance*, Historic England Advice Note 12 (2019)
- *Listed Building Consent*, Historic England Advice Note 16 (2021)

2.0 Understanding and reflecting character

As a governing principle, the Council expects development proposals – whether new build or alterations to existing buildings – to reflect an understanding of the character of the chosen site and its setting and context, the age and type of the existing buildings, and so on. This approach should be applied to everything from the detailing of, say, a roof or window, through to the arrangement, character and materials of large and perhaps more complex sites such as farmsteads.

In each case, applicants are expected to use this guidance document, the specific conservation area appraisal and — should the nature, scale or complexity of the site warrant it — other sources of information and specialist expertise, to understand the character and qualities of the historic environment in which the proposal is situated. All applications should demonstrate how the proposals reflect and respond positively to this context — be it in function, style, form, massing, materials, details or landscaping.

3.0 New buildings

Conservation area appraisals identify buildings that detract from the character of conservation areas. On these sites, a replacement building is an opportunity to enhance a conservation area's character and appearance. This can be achieved by high quality design that respects the conservation area's townscape and architectural character, the building scale, forms and alignments, and the setting of green spaces and other buildings.

Guidance

When designing a new building in a conservation area, consider:

- materials, colours and textures that reflect the traditional building materials and architectural character of the conservation area;
- the scale and character of surrounding buildings. The predominant building form in most of the District's villages is the simple rectangular shape of two-storeys and (mostly) steeply pitched roofs, with the roof generally spanning a width of five to six metres;
- how buildings relate to the street: are they set back behind gardens, or front directly on to the pavement
- the design of the side and rear elevations, which are no less important than that of the front; and,
- views across, into and out of the conservation area in which the proposed building may be visible.

Any proposal for an extension or new building need to consider how it will be viewed from streets, public rights of way and across open space

4.0 Extensions

Location, scale, detailing and materials are important considerations when designing a new extension to an existing building in a conservation area. Successful extensions will be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the building, its setting and the conservation area. Please consider the following guidance when considering extending your property.

Guidance

New extensions should:

- respond positively to the character and integrity of the existing building;
- use materials that are appropriate and harmonise with the existing building;
- in most cases, be located at the rear of the existing building. This is an especially important consideration when the main elevation has been designed to be symmetrical;
- respect the character identified in the conservation area appraisal, for example by retaining important views from open spaces or streets and respecting gaps and other spatial characteristics; and
- recognise and follow the unity of a terrace or other group of adjoining buildings.

A terrace, note the rhythm of windows and chimney stacks and the continuous roofline

5.0 Materials

Before the advent of the railways in the nineteenth century, buildings were normally only made from materials that could be found locally. This has resulted in locally distinct building traditions and vernacular detailing that shape the appearance of the District's rural settlements; many exemplify the image of the traditional Kentish village.

A wide range of such traditional building materials have been employed in the District. For walls, timber-framing was widespread until the seventeenth century, with plastered or brick infill or later clad in weatherboarding, brick or tile hanging, or rendered in lime and painted.

Brick (mostly red) is common, either for alterations or new build from the seventeenth century. Other materials include flint walling and, where available, ragstone or sandstone.

Traditional roofing materials are clay plain tiles (known as Kent peg tiles) and, on occasions, thatch. Slate was rarely used before the nineteenth century. Very rarely, pantile roofs can be found, but these tend to be limited to outbuildings or agricultural buildings.

The texture, colour and durability of traditional materials are intrinsic to the character of historic buildings and the patina of age they acquire with time: the weathering of natural materials results in an appearance that improves with age, an effect which many modern artificial alternatives fail to achieve. This make these unsuccessful in most historic contexts.

When selecting materials for new development or alterations to existing buildings, consider the following guidance. A range of detailed advice notes has been produced by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and can be found on their website.

Kentish vernacular - timber framing, local red brick, tille-hanging, peg tiles on the roof and leaded casement windows

'Vernacular Revival'. Note the materials, white painted timber windows and the lively roofline

5.1 Guidance: brick

- The type, size, texture and finish of traditional historic bricks on the relevant building or the surrounding area in general.
- The type of brick bonding. The prevalent historic brick bond in the district is either Flemish or English bond, or English garden bond for boundary wall. Stretcher bond is overwhelmingly found in buildings dating from the early 20th century as cavity walling became prevalent. It is monotonous in appearance and will be only appropriate for buildings of that period.

5.2 Guidance: pointing

- In accordance with traditional techniques, pointing should be *flush* or slightly recessed and not projecting (such as 'beaded', 'extruded' or 'ribbon').
- Avoid the use of cement-based pointing when re-pointing historic brickwork or rendering. Cementitious pointing is hard, inflexible and impervious to water so it is damaging to historic brickwork and stonework - trapping moisture and causing damp and rot.

Lime render has been applied to buildings for centuries, in this case to a timber-framed house

Handmade brick, with flush lime pointing

5.3 Guidance: timber

- Oak was used for timber-framing and joinery up to the eighteenth century and was generally left to weather naturally, or limewashed.
- Weatherboarding is a common traditional material, particularly but not exclusively for outbuildings and agricultural buildings. When oak is used, the traditional approach is to let it weather naturally. If softwood is used (as it has been since the eighteenth century) then because it is less robust it is traditionally painted in white or cream, or tarred (black).
- Softwood windows were always painted. Staining or varnishing are not historical finishes and are unlikely to be in keeping with the special character and appearance of the conservation area.

The District has a tradition of buildings made of oak frames, with painted plaster panels

Weatherboarding is sometimes used to clad houses, and usually then painted a pale shade; more often it is employed to clad ancillary or farm buildings, when it is traditionally tarred black if softwood is used

6.0 Windows and doors

Windows and doors make a major contribution to the appearance of buildings and the wider historic streetscape. The type, detailing and materials reflect the architectural style and the period of construction. In broad terms, timber 'casement' windows (with lights that swing open) were normal until the eighteenth century, when sash windows started to become predominant. Doors evolved from vernacular 'plank' designs to the classically-inspired panelled doors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

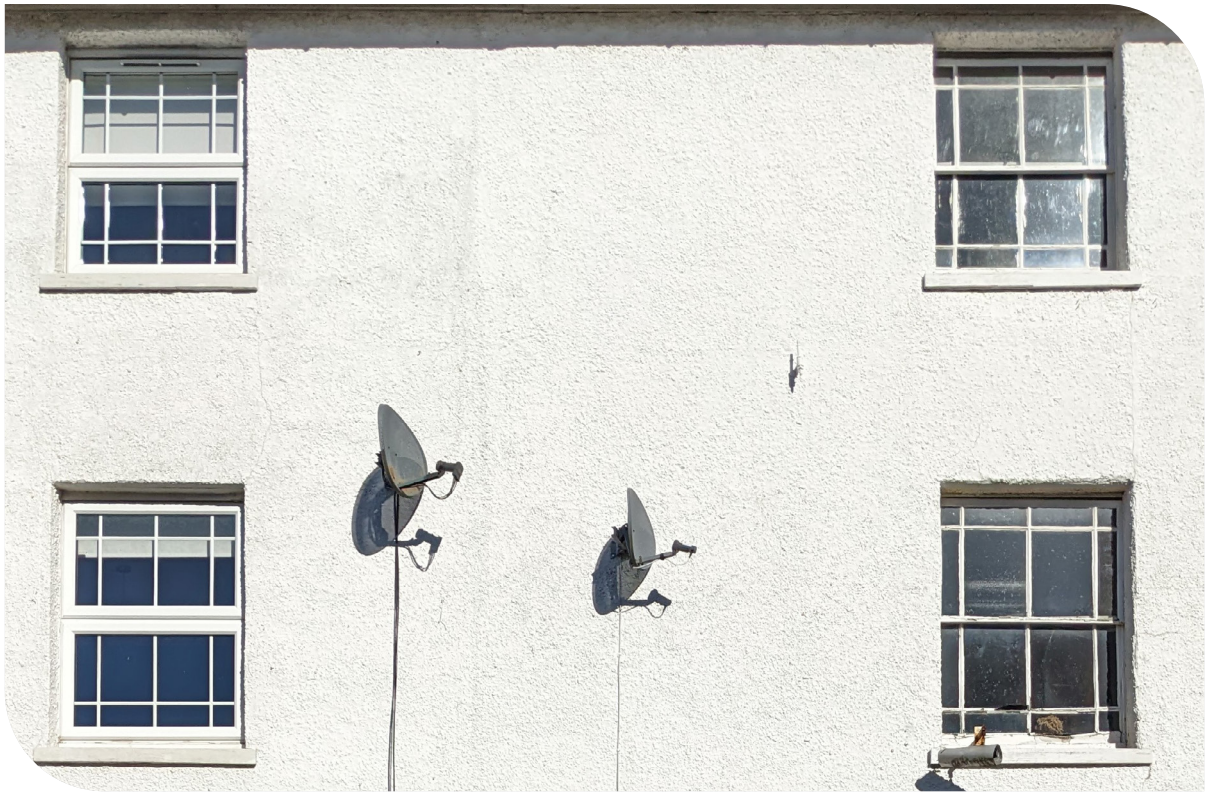
In recent decades they have become particularly vulnerable to alteration and or replacement due to a variety of factors including a lack of maintenance and concerns over energy efficiency.

Guidance: windows

- Original or historic windows can be often be repaired and refurbished. If the glass itself is not historic (often indicated by whether it distorts the view or not), it is sometimes possible to install slimline double-glazed units into the historic timber frame.
- If replacement is necessary, match the original window in style, material, opening pattern, and detailing.
- Where window shutters survive, they should be retained for their historic interest and contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Extensive technical guidance on these topics and other aspects of the care, repair and thermal upgrading of traditional windows is set out in guidance that can be downloaded from Historic England's website: Traditional Windows: their care, repair and upgrading (Historic England, 2017)

Softwood timber casement window

- Window surrounds require careful thought too: in timber-framed buildings window lintels and cills are oak, and sometimes part of the frame. In brick buildings, a shallow brick arch spans across the window and is usually attractively constructed of special ‘cut and rub’ bricks and fine jointing; cills are either wood or sometimes stone, and detailed with a slope or ‘fall’ to shed water.



Historic timber sash window, right, and replacement uPVC windows, left. The pebble-dashing and satellite aerials are also non-traditional elements that harm character and appearance

Guidance: doors

- Like historic windows, historic timber doors can usually be repaired and refurbished. If the door is a modern style or material, it could be enhanced by replacing it with one in keeping with historic character of the buildings and its context, taking inspiration from buildings of similar age and style in the conservation area (and taking into account whether it is a front door, or a secondary door – whose lower status is normally indicated by simpler design).
- Historic door surrounds are integral to their architectural character and appearance and should be retained, including any wooden or leaded overwindows (often called fan lights though they are not always fan shaped). As with new doors, new door surrounds should take inspiration from buildings of similar character, age and style in the conservation area.

Traditional vernacular planked door

Classical Georgian door and doorcase

7.0 Roofs

The undulating roofscapes with handmade peg (or plain) clay tiles are one of the most attractive features of the District's historic settlements. The width of buildings and the roof pitch indicate the covering that was originally installed on the building: thatch needs to be laid at a pitch of at least 55°; peg tile roofs are also steeply pitched, normally between 42° and 50°; slate and pantiles have a lower pitch of at least 30°, usually between 35° and 40°.

The roof slopes of traditional buildings tend to be unbroken. Rooflights and dormer windows interrupt the simplicity of the form and may have a detrimental effect on the character of the building and the conservation area.

Sympathetic roof design will follow local tradition and relate to existing historic roof details. In designing and detailing new roofs please follow the following guidance:

Guidance

- When designing a new extension to an existing building, the pitch of its roof should usually reflect that of the existing buildings. Roofing materials should copy the existing roof or potentially an earlier material on the roof, if its existence can be proven.
- For new buildings, traditional local materials should be used – typically in the District these are peg tiles or sometimes thatch.
- On both extensions and new buildings, tiled roof gables should have simple verges with tile or timber 'undercloaks'. Verges formed by bargeboards should normally be avoided unless the building is rendered or weatherboarded.
- The traditional peg tiles found on historic buildings were hand-made; the small differences between individual hand-made tiles give historic roofs an attractive uneven appearance. For this reason, new hand-made tiles are preferable in most situations in conservation areas to the uniformity of machine-made equivalents.

- Rooflights should be discreetly located to minimise the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and important elevations of the host building. For example, by concealing them behind existing parapets or in roof valleys, or placing them in a rear roofslope where they are not visible from public places or in views of the main elevations of the building.
- Additionally, rooflights should sit flush to the roofscape because this minimises their prominence on the roofscape.
- Dormers are not preferred on principal elevations or elevations visible from public areas. Where they are appropriately located they should be designed to match the character of surrounding buildings and should be carefully but simply detailed. They should not dominate the roofscape or be set close together.

Kentish 'peg tiles', irregular roof line and dormer window. Traditionally, where they are used, dormer windows are small and visually subservient

8.0 Chimneys

The vertical accent of chimney stacks makes an important contribution to the skyline of conservation areas. They are also an integral functional element of the design and appearance of historic buildings, and their location and form provide clues about the layout, history and age of the building. As well as being functional, they were often designed for visual effect.

Chimney pots are essential for the effective operation of stoves and most modern open fires. They were introduced in widespread numbers towards the end of the eighteenth century. Before that, chimneys did not normally have pots.

Guidance

- Chimney stacks should always be retained, and where necessary repaired. Where they are no longer required for heating, consider using them for boiler flues, extractor or ventilation ducts.
- Where chimneys have been capped-off or truncated, they should wherever possible be reinstated to their original height and detailing.
- The removal of internal chimneybreasts to create additional internal space in unlisted buildings should retain the external chimney stack. It is usually possible to provide internal structural support to achieve this.
- Houses dating from the eighteenth century onwards retain historic chimney pots, these should be retained and re-bedded. Where replacement is necessary, or chimney pots have been lost, they can be reinstated with a suitable pot: many of the traditional chimney pot models are still manufactured today.
- Chimney stacks erected before the eighteenth century that have lost their pots do not need to be reinstated unless they are needed for the operation of an open fire or stove.

Chimneys make a strong contribution to the character of roofcapes and skylines

9.0 Boundary treatments

Historic boundary walls, railings and fences are a cherished part of the District's historic environment that make an attractive and significant contribution to the setting of buildings and to the character and appearance of conservation areas; there are examples of walls and railings that are statutory listed in their own right.

Traditional boundary materials include handmade red brick, flint, rag or sandstone walls, wooden 'picket' or 'paling' fences, iron railings and hedges. By using these traditional forms and materials, the repair of an existing boundary treatment or the reinstatement of or addition to a new one can enhance the conservation area.

The type and detailing (including height) of boundary treatments is influenced by factors including:

- The location of the boundary in relation to the building to which they define the curtilage e.g. front or rear;
- The type of property;
- The construction date of the building;
- The type and character of the wider streetscape (such as: rural or urban).

Boundary wall of handmade brick, with knapped flint base and decorative copers

Knapped flint wall with brick detail and a wrought-iron gate

Guidance

- Historic boundary walls and fences should be retained.
- The replacement of modern boundary treatments and boundaries for new buildings should use traditional materials and detailing as found locally in the conservation area.
- Boundaries fronting the street traditionally tend to be low, rarely exceeding 90cm in height.
- The choice of the type and design of boundary treatments and gates should reflect the type and status of the building they belong too. For example, boundaries to vernacular buildings are modest in character. Some grander Georgian and Victorian properties may have had wrought and cast-iron railings on low brick boundary walls.
- Depending on the historic precedents in the conservation area, wooden picket fences or traditionally-detailed low brick, flint or ragstone walls are appropriate choices in villages, and could enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Post-and-rail timber fencing, simple metal 'estate' railing, field gates and hedges may be suitable on the fringes of settlements, providing a transition into the countryside.
- Where buildings are part of a group, boundary treatments should take account of their visual relationship with neighbouring boundary treatments.

Timber paling

Nineteenth century cast-iron railings and gates

10.0 Shopfronts

Historically, all villages except small hamlets had shops to serve the local community. Although many of these have now closed, architectural evidence often survives in the form of shopfronts. Whether still operating or closed, surviving historic shopfronts or shopfront elements should be retained for their historical and architectural interest and contribution to the character and appearance of conservation areas.

Guidance

The following are typical details of historic shops that should be retained and maintained where they survive, whether the shop is still operating or closed:

- Shop windows: normally these are large plate glass windows from the mid-nineteenth century onwards; any windows with small panes and wooden glazing bars are likely older, rare and therefore of considerable historical interest;
- stallrisers: the timber or brick panel beneath the window;
- shop door: often partially glazed unlike a domestic door;
- fascia: the board above the window and door that carried the shop signage. Where historic lettering or decorative materials survive these should be conserved too;
- consoles: the brackets at either end of the fascia;
- awnings, awnings boxes and associated ironwork; and
- projecting or hanging signs: where historic lettering or images survive, these should also be retained.

Elements of a historic shopfront

Historic shopfront, carefully retained

11.0 Energy efficiency, carbon reduction and climate adaptation

Sevenoaks District Council has declared a climate emergency. Over time, carbon emissions must be reduced and our towns and villages need to be adapted to changing weather, such as more frequent flooding and hotter summers.

Advice is available from a number of sources to help homeowners improve energy efficiency in the historic built environment and adapt historic buildings to address different weather patterns whilst at the same time conserving the character and appearance of the District's conservation areas:

- Historic England website
- Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings website
- The responsible retrofit knowledge centre by the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance, available at STBA | Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (responsible-retrofit.org)

The Council has prepared the advice note 'Improving energy efficiency in the historic built environment' which is available from the Conservation Team (see contact details overleaf).

12.0 Aerials and satellite dishes

TV aerials and satellite dishes along with associated wiring are not consistent with the historic character and appearance of conservation areas (see image above). Please consider the removal of any redundant aerials and equipment when no longer in use.

Where they are still required, their impact can sometimes be minimised, for example, by finding a location to the side or the rear of the property. It also may be possible to locate the equipment away from the building.

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