English Conservation Investigation

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Conservation Areas
Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. They were recognized in England under the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. The Act provided for the first time for the preservation of areas as distinct from buildings. It required local planning authorities to determine which parts of their areas were of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it was desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate such areas as conservation areas.

This provision was later re-enacted as Section 277 of the Town and Country Planning Act in 1971. Policy was set out in ministerial advice contained in development-control policy notes. Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1977 local councils were to designate conservation areas and various councils notably those of Hillingdon and Greater London established their own conservation areas and historic buildings policies.

Conservation areas were first introduced because of the increasing realization that it is not enough to preserve buildings in isolation without providing some overall protection for the whole area. Other important considerations were the relationship of buildings to each other, the blending of old and new, the number and quality of trees, the standard of street furniture, pattern of spaces, general landscaping, care and maintenance, and the impact of traffic on the area. The original concept of conservation areas as relating to "historic" buildings, i.e. those listed by governmental or private organisations as worthy of historic preservation, was thus extended to embrace neighbourhoods or environments which the planning authority considered of sufficient architectural
interest to preserve. This I think is the most important aspect as far as Australia is concerned. There is sufficient legislation and control to protect our historic buildings, but there does not appear to be any legislation or control to protect or improve the quality of the environment surrounding such historic building.

Protecting the character of conservation areas
Within conservation areas it is the duty of planning authorities to pay special attention to the character and appearance of the areas when exercising their powers of planning control. Applications for permission to carry out development that would effect the character or appearance of these areas must be advertised and the views expressed by the public must be taken into account by the planning authorities.

In the UK the Town and Country Amenities Act of 1974 brought all buildings in conservation areas under similar controls to listed buildings, so that they could not be demolished without 'listed buildings' consent. In assessing whether or not demolition consent should be granted, authorities were to take into account the importance of the building to the character of the conservation area. All trees in conservation areas were placed under similar control so that any proposed cutting down, topping or lopping needed to be brought to the notice of the authority who then have the opportunity of making a tree preservation order.

The UK 1971 Act also imposes on local planning authorities the duty to produce proposals for preserving and enhancing the conservation areas and to submit these proposals to a local public meeting for consideration. The overall plan for each area should cover such matters as traffic management and road improvement, provision of off-street parking and pedestrian ways, use of land and buildings and preservation of buildings. The design of new development should be given special consideration where it is considered appropriate to allow it. Historic buildings should be preserved using all available powers and authorities should make use of their powers to preserve or enhance the areas by selecting street furniture of good design, removing unwanted direction signs, unsightly advertisements and miscellaneous clutter and by planting trees and encouraging improvement schemes.
Conservation can be relatively less of a problem in areas where preservation of old buildings and enhancement of the environment are widely accepted and at the same time there are few non-conforming uses or dilapidated buildings. Other areas however, where for instance intrusive industrial and commercial uses flourish, are less easy to control. Their removal is sometimes difficult and costly and may take a long time to achieve.

Inadequate maintenance of buildings and land can give any area an appearance of neglect. All of these ills can be remedied but they require time, money and co-operation from the public.

Sound policy developed with the aid of the Conservation Area Advisory Panel can be used as a guide towards urban regeneration and generation of areas with an enhanced character resulting in gradually building step by step the quality of the urban environment.

Typical conservation area policies include the preservation of all those buildings and features of interest, including open spaces, trees, views and any other aspects of the environment that contribute to the character of the area and to enhance the area by encouraging appropriate development. In order that this general policy can be implemented each designated conservation area and its adjoining areas have to be studied in conjunction
with the Conservation Area Advisory Panel with a view to producing policies and proposals for preservation and enhancement of the particular areas. The conservation studies will include policies on all aspects included in the general policy with special reference to the particular area concerned and when approved by the local planning authority will be included in the local plan for the area.

Conservation Area Advisory Panel

Purpose and Terms of Reference

1. To assist the local planning authority and prepare policy proposals for the development in the conservation areas.

2. To consider and comment upon applications for planning commissions or other forms of development of changes proposed in the particular conservation area.

3. To put forward constructive ideas and suggestions for the care, maintenance, preservation and the enhancement of the conservation area.

4. To consider any works involving changes to listed buildings within the area.

5. To consider any matters outside the area which may affect its character, e.g. in the case of proximity to main traffic routes, airports, etc.

Conservation does not mean that an area should remain frozen in its present form. The best aspects should be preserved and any new buildings or other developments should be carefully designed to recognise, maintain and develop the character of the area including planting and traffic control in particular.

Lists of planning applications should be forwarded regularly by the planning authority to the panel and at least two members of the panel should consider each list in order to decide which applications require detailed consideration and reporting by the panel.

Members should declare their interests in accordance with normal municipal, council and parliamentary practices.