

Conservation areas – planning advice and guidance

Author: S Farr

Contact: localplan@luton.gov.uk

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to give advice and guidance to owners and occupiers of properties within one of Luton's designated Conservation Areas.

Luton has three primarily commercial use conservation areas:

- The town centre
- Plaiters' Lea: the Hat District
- High Town Road (the core of Luton's earliest suburb)

We have also two primarily residential conservation areas:

- Rothesay Conservation Area
- Luton South Conservation Area

Please see the Luton council website for more details on each conservation area:

www.luton.gov.uk/

What is a conservation area?

Conservation areas can be defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.

We are fortunate in having many fine buildings and areas which are distinguished by their architecture, landscape and history, creating an attractive environment that often is the product of several different eras. These areas are important examples of our social, cultural and aesthetic history and must be safeguarded from indiscriminate or ill-considered change. These areas often contain listed buildings.



Photo 1 - buildings in Plaiters' Lea - the Hat District Conservation Area

However, it is not always enough to protect these buildings in isolation. Their surroundings and general environment are often of equal importance and conservation areas are intended to protect that environment. We have a responsibility to ensure that the character of these areas is not diminished in our lifetime.

How are conservation areas chosen for designation?

Conservation areas vary, ranging from historic town centres to industrial and rural villages. They are designated usually because of their buildings but they can also be designated for several reasons:

- their history
- architecture
- layout or private spaces, such as gardens, parks and greens
- trees
- street furniture.

However, in some instances, areas which either contribute little, or are even detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area, are included within the boundary because of their potential for enhancement. However, it is important that the benefits of potential enhancement are carefully balanced against the possibility that the inclusion of such areas may be perceived as devaluing the status of the Conservation Area as a whole.

Conservation areas give broader protection than listing individual buildings and all features within the area, listed or otherwise, are recognised as part of its character.

What does a council normally do in conservation areas?

We consult widely on proposals affecting a conservation area. This might include periodic enhancement schemes, including proposals to:

- prepare development briefs for sites in conservation areas
- ensure that new buildings harmonise with their neighbours
- make environmental improvements
- control advertisements and shop signs
- ensure that traffic control measures harmonise with the character of the area
- make grants available for the repair of buildings.

What policies are used to control development?

Our main body of conservation policy is in the [Luton Local Plan](#), which includes conservation policy with wider planning policies for the area. Policies in the conservation section generally presume against the loss of features which add to the special interest of the areas. These policies are used in the determination of planning applications in conservation areas.

Living in a conservation area

The designation of a conservation area indicates our positive commitment to these areas and our intention to preserve and enhance the quality of the environment. However, conservation areas are not open-air museums but living communities which must be allowed to change over time in order to remain vital and prosperous.

Consequently, the emphasis is to guide and control development rather than to prevent it. It is important though, that all new development should be sympathetic to the special architectural and aesthetic qualities of the area, particular in terms of scale, design, materials and space between buildings.

We have statutory powers to control changes within conservation areas and these are summarised as follows:



Photo 2 - Houses in Luton South Conservation Area

Demolition of buildings

Planning permission is required for the demolition in whole or part of most buildings and structures, including walls and outhouses. If demolition is being considered then advice should be sought from the council.

Extensions

If you wish to add an extension of two or more storeys that extends to the rear, or any extension that extends to the side of a building within the conservation area, planning permission must be sought.

Trees

If you wish to fell, lop or top or uproot trees within a conservation area, you must give the council six weeks notice in writing. It is an offence to carry out the work within that period without the consent of the council.

Satellite dishes

The siting of a satellite dish on the chimney stack or on the roof slope or elevation fronting the road requires consent from the council.

Minor developments

In a conservation area you need planning permission for some changes to buildings that would normally be allowed under 'permitted development rights'; this is to ensure the special character of the area is respected.

Changes requiring consent include alterations to roofs, cladding a building, inserting dormer windows, or putting up a satellite dish visible from the street. This list is not exhaustive, so you should always check with the council before going ahead.

Design of new development

We have the power to require a very high standard of design which is sympathetic to the existing environment. New developments must make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

In view of this, we can require additional information in support of any planning application showing how the proposal will relate to the conservation area. This can mean the submission of elevations of adjacent buildings, full details of the proposal and examples of materials and colours. Usually only a fully detailed planning application will be considered which should be accompanied by a design statement.

We must advertise all planning applications affecting the character of conservation areas both on site and in the local paper.

More information, including consent forms can be found on the [Development Control pages](#) of the Luton council website: [\(see planning application forms and validation guidance page\)](#)

The success of the conservation areas

The ultimate success of conservation areas will depend upon the care which individual owners take with the maintenance and repair of their properties and in any alterations or extensions they make.

For example, original windows and doors should be repaired where possible, or replaced with new ones to match the originals in terms of materials used and details of their design. Cumulatively, even small changes can detract from the special character of an area.

Some conservation areas have additional controls to the ones described here and information on this can be gained from the contact details provided.

If you would like to make any changes to your property or require further information please contact us.

Photo 1 – Plaiters’ Lea: the Hat District Conservation Area © Urban Vision, 2019

Photo 2 – Luton South Conservation Area © Luton Council 2009

Further information on Conservation Areas

Further information on conservation areas can be found at the sites listed below.

Luton:

- [Conservation area pages](#)
 - Plaiters’ Lea : the Hat District Management Plan (when published)
- [Luton Local Plan 2011-2031](#)
 - Section 10 – Natural and historic environment, and
 - Policy LLP30 – Preserving the historic environment

National guidance:

- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
 - Section 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, paragraphs 189 – 202
- [National Planning Policy Guidance](#)