



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Baits Bite Lock conservation area

Draft council policy (Ref: DCV 0040)



2006

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Baits Bite Lock Conservation Area was designated on 8 November 1990. QuBE Planning Ltd were asked by South Cambridgeshire District Council to advise on the potential for extending the Conservation Area as part of a review of the Fen Ditton Conservation Area. This appraisal sets out the special architectural and historic interest of Baits Bite Lock and the surrounding river frontage including Biggin Abbey to support an extended Conservation Area. This document also aims to fulfill South Cambridgeshire District Council's duty to 'draw up and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement' of these areas as required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the commitment made by policy EN29 in the adopted Local Plan.

1.2 This section to report on public consultation and confirm the status of the appraisal as supplementary planning guidance / document.

2.0 WHAT ARE CONSERVATION AREAS?

2.1 Conservation Areas are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

2.2 When a Conservation Area has been designated, it increases the council's powers, with planning applications judged by their impact on the character and appearance of the area. Greater controls over the demolition of buildings and structures are imposed whilst the rights that owners have to do works to their properties without the prior need to obtain planning permission (known as 'permitted development rights') are reduced or may be taken away. Stricter controls are also exercised over the design of new buildings, and owners must give the council six weeks' notice of their intention to carry out works to trees. Planning applications affecting a Conservation Area must be advertised on site and in the local press to give people the opportunity to comment.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF THE AREA

3.1 Watermeadows with drains and flat fenland now in agricultural use characterise the open countryside that comprises much of the Conservation Area. The River Cam and the trees that line its banks divide the area in half and form

the boundary between Fen Ditton and Milton.

3.2 Baits Bite Lock is the centre-piece of the Conservation Area with most of the few buildings within the boundary clustered around it. The exception to this is Biggin Abbey, which stands in isolation on the eastern side of the River Cam.

3.3 The lock retains a working appearance and harks back to a bygone era when the lock keeper's cottage was still inhabited. This character is however eroded by the somewhat utilitarian feel of some of the lock workings that are now electronically controlled.

3.4 The river frontage is a very pleasant and quiet route that leads to Cambridge City. The A14 road bridge is an unfortunate intrusion into this peaceful rural idyll, although its impact is lessened by the tree belts that line its route.

4.0 A BRIEF HISTORY

4.1 The Cam was used for waterborne transport during the Roman period through to the Middle Ages when its route was drastically changed. However, with no official governing body to look after it, the River Cam was in a poor state by the early C17 and had many navigational problems. In 1699 an Act of Parliament led to the construction of four sluices, including one at 'Baitsbite', to regulate the water flow.

4.2 In 1700 a series of locks were constructed beginning at Bates lock and ending further north at Clayhithe. As part of the 1699 Act, a new governing body, the River Cam Conservators, was set up to look after the river from Bottisham Lode to Cambridge.

4.3 Over the 90 years from 1748, traffic on the River Cam continued to grow steadily and all the sluices had pubs alongside which were owned by the Conservators. Wildfowl Cottage has probably always been associated with river traffic and in the C19 and early C20 it was a public house known as the Pike and Eel, no doubt serving barge traffic.

4.4 In the C18, Wildfowl Cottage appears to have been part of the lands owned by the Wollard family, including Biggin Abbey which dates to the C13. Biggin Abbey was never occupied by monks, but was the summer residence of the Bishops of Ely. Today it comprises a farmhouse formed from within the surviving part of the complex, which was visited by Kings Henry III, Edward I and Edward II.

4.5 The land surrounding Baits Bite Lock on the

west side of the Cam was the marsh of Milton, mentioned in 1286, and used as permanent common pasture in the late C16. In 1600 it was divided into three areas – Land fen, Island field and Baitsbite field – but continued as common pasture until 1800.

4.6 Undrained fenland lay on the eastern side of Baits Bite Lock until the early modern period when, in the early C19, pump engines and a watercourse drained the fenland in the Fen Ditton, Horningsea and Stow parishes.



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Extract from 1903 Ordnance Survey

5.0 GEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

5.1 The Baits Bite Lock area sits some 6m above sea level and lies upon a continuation of the tongue of lower chalk that stretches northwards from the north end of the Fleam Dyke. Along the banks of the River Cam there are alluvial river gravels.

5.2 This area lies in the Cambridge Green Belt and within the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands Landscape Character Area and the West Anglian Plain Natural Area. It is surrounded by good agricultural land. Coprolite was extracted from pits dug in the area during the second half of the C19.

5.3 Flat fenland with scattered trees, characterises the open countryside surrounding the Conservation Area which means that, especially in views east from the river, Biggin Abbey is very prominent. Other buildings are generally hidden by trees and are much less visible.

5.4 The river corridor has strong tree belts, mostly of willows that line the river edge. Other indigenous species form lines of trees following the routes of the drains that criss-cross the landscape.

6.0 ARCHAEOLOGY

6.1 The river valley in this area was too low lying to be attractive for early settlement and evidence for pre-historic settlement is therefore not common, although scatters of flint flakes and several bronze implements have been found near to the fen-edge in the north of Fen Ditton Parish.

6.2 The Roman pottery industry centred at Horningsea also extended across to the western banks of the Cam and through much of the parish of Milton. Most of the evidence was, however, discovered and destroyed in great quantities when extensive quarries were dug for the post World War II building boom.

6.3 Biggin Abbey is an Area of Archaeological Interest. It was built in the mid C13 in a palatial style, possibly using an earlier occupied site (early prehistoric finds have been discovered in the area), and was used as a residence by the Bishops of Ely from where they could observe events in Cambridge. By the mid C14, however, the complex was in a poor condition and its use declined to that of a manor house in the later C14. Much of the present construction dates from this period.

7.0 DETAILED ANALYSIS

Westside of River Cam

7.1 Fen Road forms the northern boundary on the Milton (west) side of the River Cam and Conservation Area. It is one of the oldest routes in Milton village, dating from at least the C13. Looking north from where the road meets the river, the view out of the Conservation Area is over freshly levelled ground towards the open flat fens of the surrounding countryside.



View out of the Conservation Area

7.2 Moving southwest along a narrow tarmac continuation of Fen Road, which gives vehicular access to the lock and adjacent properties, a view of the river upstream to Baits Bite Lock is gained. Views south towards the other side of the river, are of Biggin Abbey and the traffic of the A14.



View of Baits Bite Lock

7.3 The road is lined with indigenous trees, mostly willows, with gaps allowing glimpses of the watermeadows behind. Beyond the drain which marks the Conservation Area boundary is the railway line which sits upon a raised bank and beyond this, on the horizon, is a large group of mature trees.



Thatched cottages



The lock keeper's cottage

7.4 At the lock, a pair of semi-detached thatched cottages sit behind a hedge and large tree which partially obscures the properties from view (map: A). They date from the mid-C20 and are of painted brickwork. The C19 lock keeper's cottage is a small single storey gault brick property that sits in front of the thatched cottages. It has a shallow hipped slate roof with a small chimneystack and is raised up above ground level on a high plinth, with steps up to the front door (map:B).



The lock

7.5 The lock itself is now automated and has metal upper gates with wooden lower gates. Rather utilitarian, unpainted safety railings have been installed in order to provide safe public access across the lock, and these contrast with the older, black railings. A white painted concrete footbridge spans the weir and connects the lock and sluice gates to the east river bank.



View to timber-boarded boathouses

7.6 Wildfowl Cottage is just visible on the other side of the river through a scattering of mature trees, in front of which are moored riverboats. To the south, beyond a line of trees, is a lawned area bordered by a timber fence and some more mature trees. Within this area are three timber-boarded boathouses with their associated riverboats moored alongside. Looming through a gap in the bordering trees is Biggin Abbey; its large, red, tiled roof is particularly prominent.



View south along the river

7.7 Once past the lock, the line of trees returns on the west side of the river, which is edged by a grassy 'verge'. The path is pedestrian access only from this point onwards and has been recently surfaced with an appropriate gravel covering. It

follows the river's course upstream and through the underpass beneath the A14.

Eastside of River Cam



View to Wildfowl Cottage

7.8 Crossing over the river at Baits Bite Lock, the public footpath becomes a very narrow track to the south of Wildfowl Cottage, a view of which is gained through a break in the hedgeline adjacent to the river. Wildfowl Cottage is Grade II Listed (map:1) and dates from the late C17 with later additions. It is timber-framed, now faced in white painted brickwork, with a plain tiled roof laid in bands of contrasting colours and a large central stack. (It is currently under renovation.)

7.9 Emerging from the enclosed, hedge-lined track, a wooden footbridge spans one of the many drains that criss-cross the riverside fields. The track is now wide enough to allow vehicular access to Wildfowl Cottage and leads out towards Biggin Abbey and Horningsea Road. A wide panorama is gained from this point; to the northeast Horningsea village can just be glimpsed, eastward are views of Horningsea Road and its traffic, to the southeast Biggin Abbey is very prominent, whilst views south are of the A14.

7.10 Vast electricity pylons and smaller telegraph poles with their associated wires are strewn across the horizon. Scattered lines of trees indicate the lines of drains in the agricultural fields. Thicker tree belts line the route of the A14 and significantly deaden the sound of the constantly heavy traffic.

7.11 Biggin Abbey, which is listed Grade II*, is a late C14 farmhouse with C17 additions and alterations, although its present appearance is mostly due to C20 interventions such as the cement rendered walls and modern red pantiled roof (map:2). Underneath the cement, its walls are of limestone

and clunch with a local C17 brick. The main range is of 2 storeys with a single storey and attic extension to the southwest. The southeast elevation has lateral buttresses of three stages and a rendered plinth. The complex of buildings is surrounded by a line of trees and hedges of varying heights and thickness.



View to Biggin Abbey



View downstream towards the lock

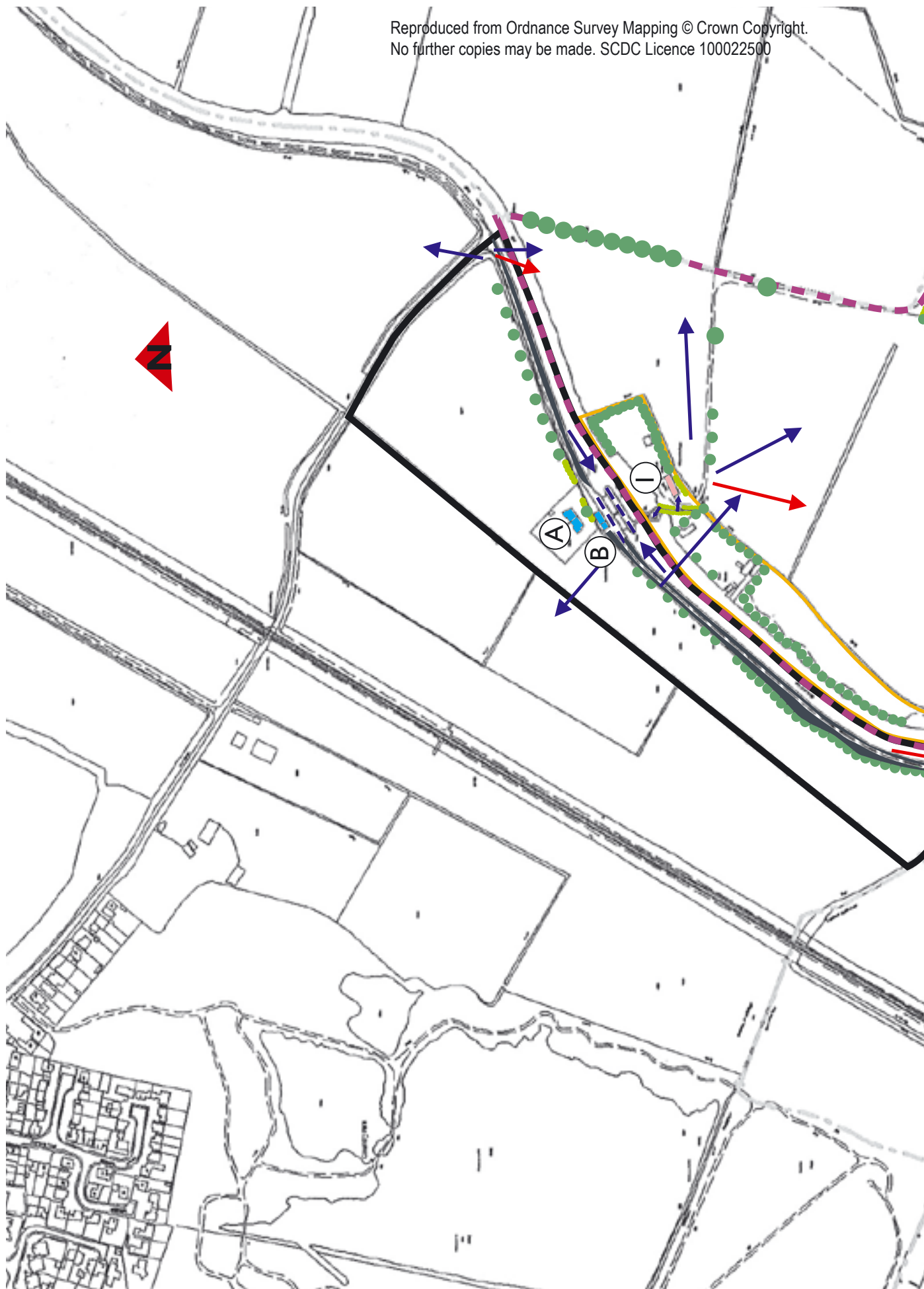
7.12 An almost continuous belt of trees line the river frontage of the Conservation Area, starting from the boathouses (adjacent to Wildfowl Cottage) south to the A14 underpass. Looking across from the other side of the river, glimpses of Biggin Abbey can be seen through this tree belt. Views back downstream are of the lock and the lock keeper's cottage.

8.0 KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Landscape: Most of the Conservation Area is an undeveloped, open rural space, of characteristically flat agricultural fields or watermeadows, with drains cut across them.

Trees: Large numbers of trees line the riverbanks and drains. Hedges, shrubs and smaller numbers

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of trees surround the few properties within the Conservation Area. The natural river edges and gravel footpaths maintain the leisurely rural feel of the area.

Buildings: These are very few in number and mostly centred around the lock; the exception being Biggin Abbey. They are all of different periods and are very different in detailing and scale. They range from the tiny gault brick and slate roofed lock keeper's cottage, to the substantial Biggin Abbey complex, with the vast tiled roof and rendered walls of the main range.

Views: Due to the open character of the Conservation Area, views tend to be long with only trees and bends in the river curtailing them. Biggin Abbey is visible from most points around the area with Baits Bite Lock forming the focal point of views up and down the river.

9.0 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

Additions

9.1 As part of a review of the Fen Ditton Conservation Area, it is suggested that the northern stretch, from the A14 to Baits Bite Lock, is included into an enlarged Baits Bite Lock Conservation Area, which would be further extended east to encompass Biggin Abbey. The above proposal would bring both banks of the river frontage and all the buildings related to the lock into one Conservation Area as well as providing additional protection to the Biggin Abbey Area of Archaeological Interest.

Removals

9.2 None

10.0 ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

10.1 Some of the most intrusive features in the landscape are the vast electricity pylons that are extremely visible across the open, flat countryside, with further additional pylons still to be implemented. Their removal or mitigation measures to reduce their impact would greatly enhance the area. However, it is virtually impossible to foresee this happening in the near future.

10.2 In addition to the electricity pylons there are several runs of telegraph poles and associated

wires. A major enhancement opportunity would be the removal of these telegraph poles and overhead wires. If wires could be run underground, this would significantly enhance the rural character of the area and remove some skyline clutter. The re-routing of cables underground would need to be undertaken with care so as not to damage tree roots, and with proper reinstatement.

10.3 The safety railings around Baits Bite Lock are of a rather utilitarian design, with the galvanized steel giving the lock a rather stark appearance. They could be replaced with a more appropriate railing style and painted black, in keeping with the traditional black painted railings that also survive at the lock.

10.4 The District Council may seek to make 'Article 4 Directions' to retain traditional detailing on the exterior of non-listed buildings within the Conservation Area, where such details have not already been lost.

10.5 Subject to the availability of funding, the District Council may make discretionary grants available towards the repair of certain historic buildings and structures within the district. These grants are made to encourage the use of traditional materials and craft techniques and are generally targeted at Listed Buildings, though visually prominent non-listed buildings within Conservation Areas may also be eligible for grant aid. More specific advice on the availability of grants, as well as on appropriate materials and detailing, is available from the Conservation Section within Development Services Directorate at the District Council.

11.0 POLICIES TO PRESERVE THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA

11.1 These policies should be read in conjunction with those in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan. Summaries of relevant policies are provided in Appendix A, but it is advisable to consult the Local Plan itself.

11.2 The open and rural character of the Cam riverbank is an important characteristic of the Conservation Area and should be preserved. Development on the riverbank will therefore be resisted.

11.3 In considering the design of extensions to the existing buildings, the council will take into account the impact of the proposal on the setting of Listed Buildings and the character and appearance of the

Conservation Area. Section 8 of this document sets out some of the key characteristics which need to be considered if the design of an extension is to be acceptable.

11.4 The riverside path has recently been resurfaced with a low-key bound gravel surface that is in keeping with its rural setting. It is important that any future works to the path and track surfaces in the area maintain this simple treatment, and therefore the District Council will encourage the Highway Authority and statutory undertakers to reinstate and resurface materials correctly and appropriately.

11.5 Signage and street furniture is currently relatively discreet and minimal. Where future signs are needed, their size should be kept to the minimum allowable and, wherever possible, they should be fixed to existing features rather than being individually pole-mounted. Appropriate designs and colours for street furniture will be encouraged and necessary but unattractive plant related to the lock should be appropriately screened.

I.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

Cambridgeshire Structure Plan (adopted October 2003)

PI/2 Protection of sites of archaeological, historical or architectural value.

P7/6 Local authorities will protect and enhance the distinctiveness of the historic built environment.

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted February 2004)

This section summarises the main Local Plan policies that are relevant to Conservation Areas.

SE10 Protected Village Amenity Areas

HG10 The design and layout of residential schemes should be informed by the wider character and context of the local townscape and landscape.

HG12 Extensions and alterations to dwellings should be in keeping with local character.

EM6 Small scale employment in villages.

SH6 Resistance to loss of shops in villages.

CS7 Utility companies to be urged to place pipes, fibres, wire and cables underground where this would not have unacceptable environmental impacts.

CS8 Location of telecommunications installations to minimise visual impact.

CS9 Protection of village pubs and recreational facilities.

EN1 Importance of maintaining character and distinctiveness.

EN4 Protection of the historic landscape, whether or not they are statutorily designated.

EN5 Retention of trees and hedges in new developments.

EN15 Protection, preservation and enhancement of known and suspected sites of archaeological importance.

EN16 Public access to archaeological sites and records.

EN17 Building preservation notices and spot listing of buildings of archaeological or historic interest to protect unlisted buildings.

EN18 Presumption against demolition of Listed Buildings.

EN19 Recording and salvage if consent for demolition is granted.

EN20 Unsympathetic extensions to Listed Buildings.

EN21 Preservation or salvage (including public record) of fabric or features of Listed Buildings where consent for extensions or alterations is granted.

EN22 Imposition of conditions to protect the fabric and character of buildings.

EN23 Preservation of the character of roofs of Listed Buildings, in particular long straw and gault clay roofs.

EN24 Use of planning powers to secure the sound repair of Listed Buildings.

EN25 Maintenance of register of 'buildings at risk'.

EN26 Considerations to be applied when considering the conversion of Listed Buildings to new uses.

EN27 Applications for planning permission and Listed Building consent will not be considered separately. Requirement for the consideration of Listed Building applications and planning applications, including the need to consider the full effects of proposals on the building and its setting.

EN28 Requirement to submit illustrative and technical material to allow the impact of proposals affecting a Listed Building, its curtilage and wider setting.

EN30 Requirement for applications for planning permission in Conservation Areas to be accompanied by

sufficient details to allow their impact to be assessed.

EN31 High quality of design, planting and materials connected with landscaping of developments in Conservation Areas.

EN32 Controls over consent for demolition of buildings in a Conservation Area.

EN33 Salvage of materials and pictorial record if consent for demolition in a Conservation Area is granted.

EN34 Retention of the character, materials, features and details of unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas.

EN35 Restrictions of permitted development rights to safeguard elements of the character of Conservation Areas.

EN36 Control over external cladding which affect the character of Conservation Areas.

EN37 Control over location and design of meter boxes on Listed Buildings.

EN38 Need to retain traditional shopfronts and their details.

EN39 Controls over design of advertisements and signs on Listed Buildings and in Conservation Areas.

EN40 Controls over design of advertisements and outside Conservation Areas. Area of Special Control is in place.

EN41 Coordination of planning permissions and consent for demolition or felling of trees in Conservation Areas.

EN42 Promotion of enhancement schemes in Conservation Areas.

EN43 Statutory undertakers and utility companies should consult and seek to agree works in Conservation Areas.

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