
CONSERVATION AREAS

A HOUSEHOLDER'S GUIDE



A guide for people who live in a Conservation Area, produced by St. Albans City & District Council's Enterprise and Civic Environment Department.

CONSERVATION AREAS

A Householder's Guide

St. Albans District has a wealth of historic and architectural character which local people are increasingly proud of. There is growing public interest in protecting 'familiar and cherished scenes' from unsympathetic development. However, today's rate of change means that careful planning is needed to ensure the survival of this heritage.

To this end, many of our towns and villages are now designated conservation areas.

This leaflet explains how this affects you as a local resident or property owner, and how your actions can help preserve the character of these special areas.

What are conservation areas?

These are areas which the local planning authority consider to be of **'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'**.

Conservation areas are aimed at protecting the overall character, not just particular buildings, so attractive residential areas can be just as important as historic town centres. Open spaces, historic street patterns, and landscaping are also important.

There are 18 conservation areas in St. Albans District at present. These are shown on the back of this leaflet (more detailed maps can be seen at the District Council offices). The Council's planning policies for conservation areas are contained within the District Local Plan, but this leaflet goes further by offering 'best practice' advice on issues which are not all covered by these policies.

Your role in the conservation area

The District Council feels the character and appearance of your area deserves protection. However, to help keep its special qualities we rely on you to play your part.

Individual houses contribute greatly to the overall character of the area. Yet, unfortunately, these may suffer greatly from alterations which do not always need planning permission. **It is therefore important to avoid unsympathetic alterations which can be damaging to the historic street scene.**

Some common, yet damaging alterations can be;

- Changing original windows and doors
- Re-roofing with different materials
- Poorly designed new extensions and porches
- Inappropriate frontages, eg. walls, fences, hedges, or loss of these features
- Covering front gardens with hard standing

The District Council does not always have control over these changes, (unless you live in a listed building or a flat, occupy commercial premises or live in an Article 4 Area). **We therefore rely on you to adopt 'best practice' with your property.**

The following Sections I-II will begin to explain more of what we mean by 'best practice', but first;

What's in it for you?

Estate agents now agree that where original features like windows and doors are retained, houses will hold their value to a much greater extent. Unsympathetic alterations can reduce the value of your property.

I. Windows

Original sash or casement windows are very important to the appearance of your property and should be retained wherever possible. The most common reasons for wanting new windows are a desire for better insulation, draught proofing or replacement of rotten wood.

Installing secondary internal glazing provides effective insulation for much less than the cost of a new double glazed window, and helps retain the character of your home. However, most heat loss is around the edges of the opening sections and can largely be eliminated by draught proofing. Several simple and inexpensive methods are available and there are companies which specialise in draught proofing historic windows.

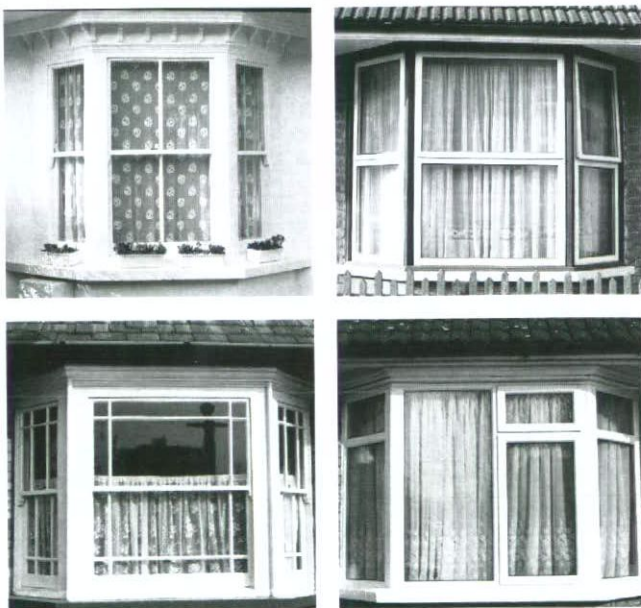
If you think that a wooden window is rotten please check all the wood - often only a small lower section needs replacing, not the whole window. Replacement of windows (and doors) is often carried out unnecessarily when they could easily be repaired. Always get at least one quote for **repair**, it usually works out cheaper. Specialist companies are available who refurbish and repair sash windows in-situ or offsite. Original metal windows are just as important and can also be repaired by specialist companies.

Please note that modern PVC-U 'plastic' or aluminium windows are not sympathetic replacements for

traditional painted wooden windows; they lack the fine detailed mouldings which give a quality appearance and PVC-U glazing bars are flat and lifeless. New casements often also have unbalanced glass panes ie. the opening panes are a different size to the non-opening, or 'fixed' panes (see diagram). Please also avoid using stained wood which is not a sympathetic replacement material for painted wood.

If a new window really is necessary it would be helpful if you follow these guidelines:

- do not change the overall size and *shape* of window opening eg. replace a vertical window with a wide horizontal window. A common example is changing a sliding sash with a hinged casement.
- choose a *style* which matches the original.
- choose a *material* and *finish* which matches the original (usually painted timber).
- try to match the *width* and *profile* of the original window frames and glazing bars. Historic windows often have narrow, finely moulded glazing bars giving a delicate and high quality appearance.
- do insist that opening lights in casement windows have equal sized panes which are balanced (see below).
- ensure new windows have the *same opening method* eg. do not use a modern top or bottom hung sash to replace a vertical sliding sash.
- avoid using 'bull's eye' glass, modern frosted glass or stick-on leaded detail if it is not original to the house.



Original sashes (left) and unsympathetic aluminium and PVC-U replacements (right)



These points are especially important if you live in a terrace or group of similar houses because changes in one house can destroy the regular window pattern of the street (below).



Please be aware that PVC-U double glazing companies can be more interested in selling their product than in what you actually need. Unlike timber, PVC-U windows are not repairable - you must replace the whole unit if a part fails, and the longevity of this product, compared with timber, has not been proven.

If your windows have already been changed and you want to reinstate traditional windows, the Council's Conservation team will be happy to offer advice on the best type. Painted softwood sashes or casements are usually most appropriate in this District.

Remember too that many windows were originally set back in their openings. This part of the house design is lost if replacement windows are installed flush with the outer face of the wall. Bow windows are not generally part of the local tradition (they also often need planning permission).

Where old glass survives it should be retained or reused in a replacement window. Old glass gives a building a lively appearance compared with the dead, flat appearance of modern glass.



The lively appearance of old glass



2. Doors

Many different door styles are now mass-produced. Whilst some may look 'olde-worlde' most are incompatible with all but very modern houses. In the past, each period had specific styles of door, and these should be carefully respected in any replacement.



Original Victorian and Edwardian doors (top) and unsuitably-styled replacements (below).

Note also inappropriate use of aluminum, PVC-U, bull's eye glass and stick-on leaded detail.

Painted panelled or boarded doors based on original designs are normally best (not stained). Please also avoid 'off the peg' modern styles with integral fanlights or non-original panelling - they usually look out of place. As with windows, PVC-U and other non-wood doors cannot match the detailing and overall appearance of traditional painted wooden doors. Original doors are very important historically and architecturally, and should not be replaced unless absolutely beyond repair. Again, door repair is effective and usually cheaper than a replacement. Please retain your original door furniture, i.e. door knobs, handles, letter boxes, etc. as these are often attractive and irreplaceable.

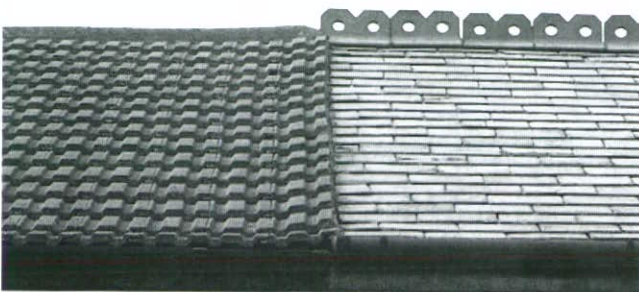
Again, if your original door has been lost, several companies now manufacture a range of traditional doors. Alternatively, reclaimed second-hand doors are widely available from salvage companies and most traditional styles can be found.

3. Roofs

Most pre-war properties in your area originally had natural slate or clay tile roofs. These are very longlasting and attractive materials which greatly add to the overall street scene. If your roof needs repairing or recovering it is always best to match the original material. This retains the character of your house and may well outlast cheaper concrete tiles or 'artificial' slates. Also, if your roof structure was built to take slates, then heavier replacement concrete tiles may cause structural problems.

Any replacement tiles should normally be 'plain' i.e. have a more or less flat shape, not a 'profile' like a pantile (unless these are original). Please also avoid using 'artificial' slates on your roof (made from concrete, asbestos or slate dust and resin). Some have a dull, lifeless appearance whilst others appear shiny as if permanently wet. All lack the depth of colour, attractive variation and weathering qualities of natural slate.

Both natural slates and clay tiles are known to last well over 100 years when correctly laid - they often only loosen because the fixing nails rust through. In this case, careful re-fixing with non-rusting nails or pegs can give a new lease of life. Always re-use as many slates or tiles as possible - it is cheaper than buying new.



Profiled concrete tiles (left) cannot match the attractiveness of natural slate (right) or clay tiles (below).



4. Brickwork

Our conservation areas have a wealth of historic and attractive brickwork. Some of the finest is found on quite modest properties which often display beautiful decorative detailing. To paint, render or clad your house means permanently losing attractive brickwork and can, with terraces or rows of houses, destroy the unity of the whole street. Painting the brick arches over windows and doors should also be avoided.

N.B. Please note that cladding your house in stone, artificial stone, timber, tiles, or plastic requires planning permission.



Re-pointing of historic brickwork in the wrong kind of mortar can be disastrous, particularly if you have traditional local 'soft' red bricks or any 'soft' brick typically found on pre-war and many inter-war properties, eg 'Luton Grey' purples or browns. Modern 'hard' cement mortar traps moisture within the bricks and causes irreparable decay of the brick surface. Hence, **lime-based mortar** should always be used for re-pointing such brickwork. You should make sure your builder knows this. The Council's Conservation team will advise you or your builder if you are in any doubt. Please note that re-pointing is often recommended unnecessarily, e.g. as a standard mortgage condition.

Repointing: old bricks often have slightly worn corners, so care must be taken with repointing;



Slightly recessed, flat pointing is best



Flush pointing gives a 'battered' appearance (see photo over page)

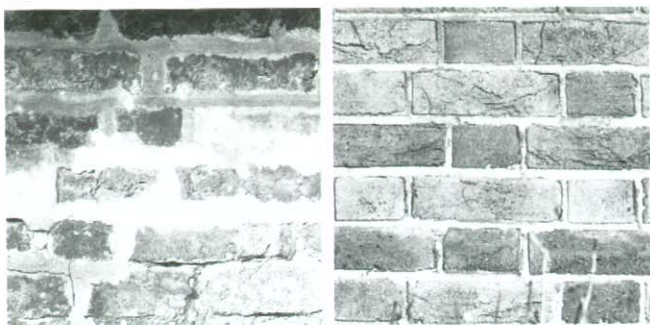


Raised strap or ribbon pointing is a modern decorative technique very harmful to bricks



Weatherstruck pointing is not contemporary with historic brickwork

Pointing: Left: careless pointing leaves a 'battered' effect
Right: careful pointing leaves the brick outline distinct



5. Extensions

These may require planning permission depending on their size and location. The Council's Enterprise and Civic Environment Department welcomes initial discussions on a proposal. Generally, roofs, windows and external materials should match your main house, and, with brick, attention paid to the bonding, mortar and pointing style. These details can make all the difference to the appearance of your extension. A design guide, 'Extensions in Residential Areas' is available from the Council.

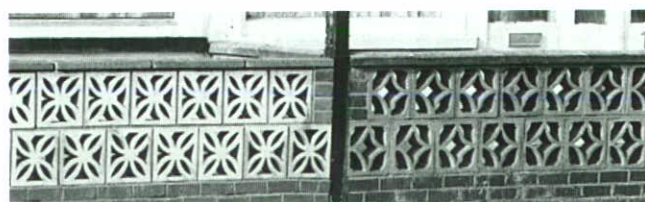
6. Porches and Canopies

These often require planning permission depending on their size. In many roads there is no precedent for porches or canopies and their addition can have an adverse effect on the street scene. Where new porches or canopies are appropriate they should match existing original designs on similar properties. Great care should be taken with their proportions, detailing and materials.

7. Frontage Boundaries



A jumble of different walls and fences on front boundaries creates an untidy street scene. Also walls and fences built higher than neighbouring ones can give an unattractive fortress-like appearance. If the original style of wall or fence is still prevalent, please try to match it. Otherwise, simple boundaries of quality materials which respect the existing character of the street are best. Please avoid using pre-formed concrete screening as this is out of keeping in a traditional street scene (below).



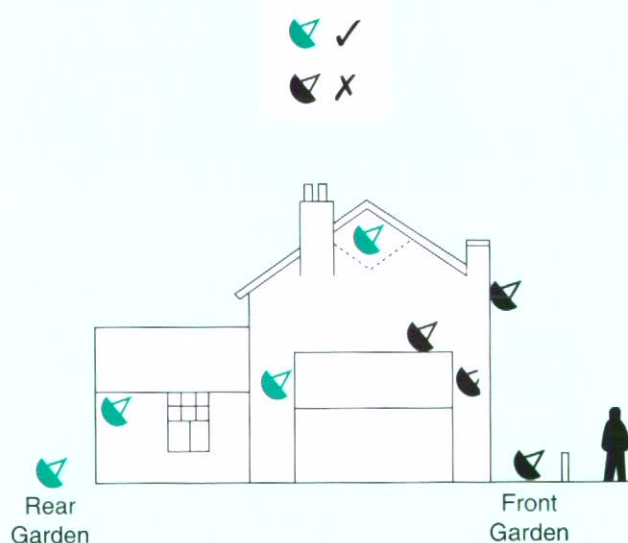
8. Conservatories

Conservatories need planning permission in the same way as an extension. In conservation areas, one of the Council's planning policies is that natural materials should normally be used. This means that traditionally designed timber conservatories are most likely to be acceptable. Metal may be appropriate in some cases. PVC-u structures may be refused, especially in Article 4 Areas. Please beware of conservatory companies who ask for a deposit before planning permission is obtained - if permission is refused you may find it difficult to reclaim your deposit.

9. Satellite Dishes

These should be as inconspicuous as possible in terms of position and colour. Dark coloured mesh dishes on rear facades tend to be least obtrusive. Please avoid solid white dishes and never put your dish on the front facade. A detailed DTLR guidance leaflet covering siting, good practice and when permission is required is available from the Enterprise and Civic Environment Department of the Council.

Location of satellite dishes



10. Hard Standing

Removal of the frontage boundary and provision of hard standing for cars can be very damaging to the appearance of the conservation area, and should be avoided. Also the advantage may be minimal, since to gain access to the hard standing often means losing an on-street parking space.

11. Burglar Alarms

More and more people wish to install burglar alarms on their houses. Whilst this concern for security is understandable, a multitude of alarms on front facades can be very damaging to the street scene.

On semi-detached or detached properties alarms can still act as a deterrent if placed directly under the eaves on the side elevation, or on terraced houses, under the eaves at the front.

In all cases the colour of the box can be as damaging as the location. Please use a neutral colour eg. black or brown (not white against brickwork) or paint it to match your house colour. It will still be visible to a potential burglar! Bright red, yellow and other coloured boxes are particularly damaging to the street scene.

For further guidance see Enterprise and Civic Environment Department "Tree Information" leaflet available free from the Council.

Article 4 Areas

Some parts of conservation areas are also 'Article 4 Areas'. Within these, planning permission is needed for work that previously did not need it.

The aim of Article 4 Areas is to retain and/or reinstate historically correct features of the street. They are designed to protect particularly vulnerable parts of conservation areas from potentially harmful alterations.

THE FUTURE FOR CONSERVATION AREAS

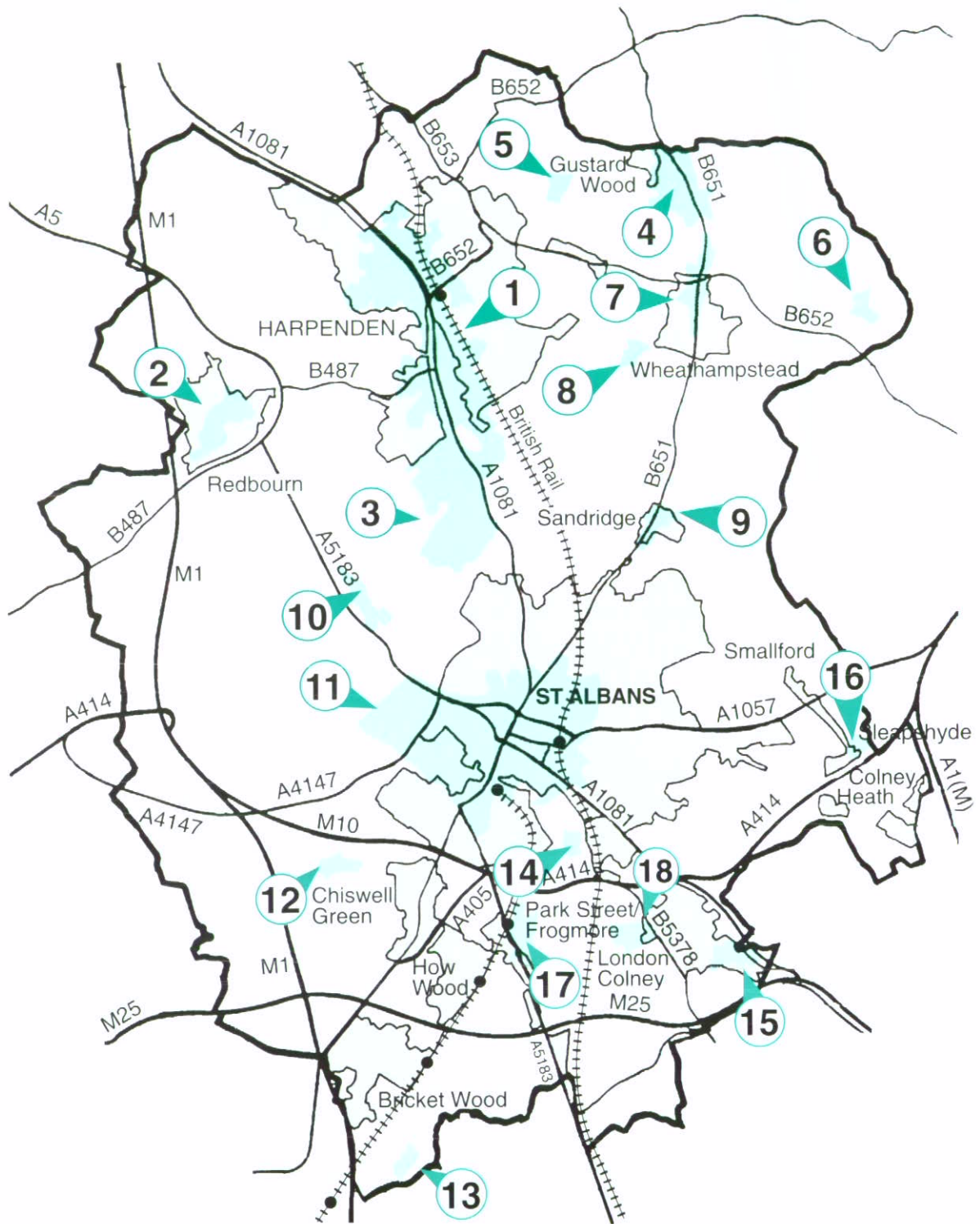
Preservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of conservation areas must be a combined effort between the Council and yourselves. If unsympathetic alterations are carried out to such an extent that the character of the area is seriously eroded, the Council may have to consider de-designation of some areas.

**IT'S UP TO YOU - YOUR
CONSERVATION AREA IS
IN YOUR HANDS!**

Trees

Trees have legal protection in conservation areas. This means before you top, lop, fell, or uproot any but the smallest trees you must give the Council's Trees and Woodlands Officer at least six week's written notice. Permission may be refused and anyone damaging a protected tree can be liable for a fine of up to £20,000.

Conservation Areas



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|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Harpenden | 6 Water End | 11 St. Albans | 16 Sleepshyde |
| 2 Redbourn | 7 Wheathampstead | 12 Potters Crouch | 17 Park Street & Frogmore |
| 3 Childwickbury | 8 Amwell | 13 Old Bricket Wood | 18 Napsbury |
| 4 Gustard Wood | 9 Sandridge | 14 Sopwell | |
| 5 Mackerye End | 10 Shafford Mill | 15 London Colney | |