

English Heritage: Saving Nation's Neighborhood Heritage

England has some 9,300 conservation areas, places designated by local councils to protect their special character and appearance, but the latest edition of English Heritage's annual Heritage at Risk register, launched in June reveals that 1 in 7 is at risk of neglect, decay or damaging change and many more give cause for concern.



The results of English Heritage's first ever survey of the condition of conservation areas shows the top threats to be:

Plastic windows and doors (83% of conservation areas affected) Poorly maintained roads and pavements (60%) Street clutter (45%) Loss of front garden walls, fences and hedges (43%) Unsightly satellite dishes (38%) - the effects of traffic calming or traffic management (36%) Alterations to the fronts, roofs and chimneys of buildings (34%) Unsympathetic extensions (31%) Impact of advertisements (23%) Neglected green spaces (18%)

Based on the findings of the survey, English Heritage has launched a Conservation Areas at Risk campaign to get residents, local groups and councils working together to improve these special places before it is too late.



Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, said: "To find out for the first time ever what condition the nation's conservation areas are in, we asked every local authority to complete questionnaires for each of its conservation areas. We are delighted that 75% responded, a heroic effort on behalf of council conservation teams."

"Analysing the results it is clear the problems fall into two main areas: what owners do to their properties and what councils do or fail to do to the streets, pavements, parks and public spaces. So, we are asking for three things. First, we want councils to make more use of Article 4 Directions - only 13% of conservation areas currently have one - to protect small but important original details such as windows, doors and front gardens. Lose these and slowly but inevitably you lose the character and the history that made the area special in the first place. And where there are neglected or derelict buildings, councils should use their powers to encourage owners to repair or sell them."

"Secondly, we want council departments to work together to take better care of the public areas. Highways and Environmental Services teams, even Health and Education departments whose buildings often dominate a conservation area, they all need to co-operate to save the public parts of conservation areas from decay. Conservation areas should not just be the responsibility of the council's Conservation Officer. Thirdly, we want local people to get involved. Our survey shows that conservation areas with community support are more than twice as likely to have improved over the last three years as those without. And there are countless instances where civic societies and residents groups are helping councils by finding out what local people value, by doing street clutter audits, commenting on planning applications or helping to prepare local lists of historic buildings."



There are also financial reasons why caring for your conservation area makes sense. An English Heritage poll of estate agents reveals that 82% think original features add value to a property and 75% think being in a well-kept conservation area enhances house prices.

Dr Thurley continued: "Millions of us live in, work in, pass through or visit conservation areas. They are the centres of historic towns and villages, 1930s suburbs, rural idylls or estates of industrial workers' cottages: the local heritage which gives England its distinctiveness. These are difficult economic times but our research shows that conservation areas do not need time-consuming or costly measures, just prioritising as places people cherish, the commitment of the whole council and good-management by residents and councils alike. Well-cared for they encourage good neighbourliness, give a boost to the local economy and will continue to be a source of national pride and joy for generations to come."

Our Conservation Work

English Heritage is probably best known for the historic sites in our care which are open to the public. Less well known is our role in looking after the historic environment as a whole, including historic buildings, monuments and areas, and archaeological remains. We aim not only to ensure the preservation of our historic surroundings for the future, but also to encourage people to appreciate and enjoy this heritage today.

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