

Planning Policy for the Oxton Conservation Area

The designation of the Conservation Area in 1979 marked a significant step in the evolution of planning policy for Oxton. The current policy framework dates back to the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP) adopted by the Council in February 2000 which includes specific policies for protecting the character of each of the Borough's Conservation Areas. However, the plan is in urgent need of updating as national planning policy has moved forward significantly in the twenty years since it was approved.

Wirral Council is responsible for the preparation and adoption of a new form of Local Plan which at the time of writing (March 2021) is at an advanced stage of preparation and is expected to be approved in 2023. The new Local Plan will have to take on board significant developments in national planning policy concerning the protection of heritage assets (including Conservation Areas) and improving the design quality of new development. This means that until the new Local Plan is approved the content of the National Planning Policy Framework (Sections 12 and 16) will carry particular weight

[MHCLG - National Planning Policy Framework - CP 48 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91262/mhclg-national-planning-policy-framework-cp-48.pdf)

So far as the Oxton Conservation Area is concerned there are three Council planning policy statements of particular significance. **[UDP Policy CH2](#)** sets out the general criteria for assessing development proposals in Conservation Areas, and in **[UDP Policy CH7](#)** there is a statement of the key planning objectives for the Oxton Conservation Area.

More detailed guidance to reinforce Policy CH7 was published in **[Supplementary Planning Guidance Note \(SPG\) 21](#)** which sets out criteria for the design of new development, the design and location of non-residential development, shop front design and control over the demolition of buildings. It also confirms that outline planning applications are not acceptable in the Conservation Area.

It should be noted that the guidance in SPG21 refers to the intention to make an "Article 4 Direction" covering the Conservation Area. This would increase protection for specific elements of the built heritage by removing some "permitted development" rights. The Council has not yet implemented this, although it remains a strong recommendation in more recent reports – see below.

A further strengthening of the planning framework followed in 2010 -2011, to which the Oxton Society made a significant contribution. The **[Oxton Conservation Area Appraisal](#)** was published in January 2010. The Appraisal was undertaken by specialist consultants appointed by the Council, supported by the Society's Planning Group, and it sets out in detail the heritage features which distinguish the Conservation Area.

The Appraisal provides the evidence base for the **[Oxton Conservation Area Management Plan](#)** adopted by the Council in September 2011. This remains the most recent guidance on priorities for managing Oxton's heritage, including through the implementation of planning policies.



OXTON VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

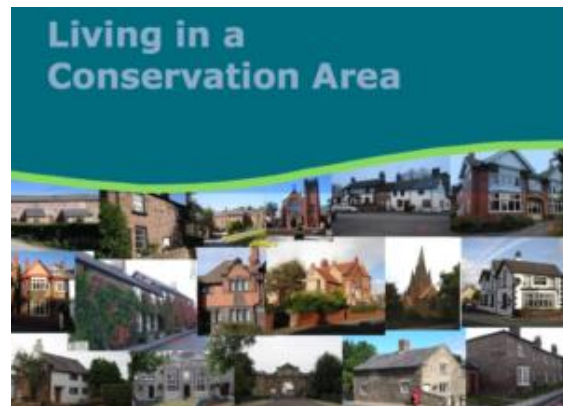
Both the Appraisal and Management Plan repeat the recommendation for the making of an Article 4 Direction to give essential protection to important aspects of the local heritage which are threatened by the absence of adequate planning controls.

How do the policies affect local residents.....?

The Oxton Society is frequently approached by local residents and businesses with questions about how these policies might affect their plans for improving and maintaining their properties. The Society has therefore addressed some of the most frequent topics in a series of [Planning Advice Notes](#) covering:

- How to look after your windows
- Gates, Fences and Walls
- Tree Purchase and Planting Trees
- Satellite Dishes
- Front Garden Parking

Another useful overview is the pamphlet published by Wirral Borough Council on [“Living in a Conservation Area – a guide for enhancing your property”](#).



...And businesses?

There are two additional pieces of Council supplementary planning guidance which are particularly relevant to shops and other businesses in the Conservation Area or planning to locate here. [SPG43 – Shop Front Design Guide](#) the purpose of which “is to illustrate good practice in the renovation of existing shop frontages and in the design of replacement and new shop fronts. It is specifically aimed at shops in older traditional shopping streets..”.

More recently, in 2016, the Council published Supplementary Planning Document [SPD3 - Hot Food Takeaways, Restaurants, Cafes and Drinking Establishments](#) . This is particularly pertinent due to the recent increase in the number of businesses in this category opening in the centre of Oxton Village. The purpose of SPD3 “is to provide additional advice on the development and use of premises...as a café, restaurant, hot food takeaway or as a drinking establishment such as a wine bar or public house”.

Looking Ahead

The Oxton Society has always been an active participant in discussions with the Council’s professional officers and local councillors in the development and improvement of planning policy. That remains the position today, and we are fully engaged with the emerging Local Plan and have submitted detailed proposals on how its new policies could better protect and

enhance the character of Oxton Conservation Area. There is much work to be done to improve not just the policy framework but also its implementation and enforcement.

One of the main outstanding issues, referred to above, is the need for the Council to make an Article 4 Direction to give added protection to specific parts of the local built heritage which is at risk. The Oxton Society has been involved in detailed discussions with Council officers on what would be involved and has offered its full support. However, the severely depleted specialist staff resources in the Council's Conservation Team has been and remains a major obstacle and is a serious concern to the Society and to all Wirral's conservation area advisory committees.

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