



RISE

Retrofit information,
support & expertise

Conservation Areas

Quick guide

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www.riseretrofit.org.uk



Contents

Contents	2
Summary	3
What is a conservation area?	3
Why are they protected?	4
Key challenges	5
How can we overcome these challenges?	5
Next steps.....	6

Summary

How to use this quick guide?

This quick guide has been prepared to assist local authorities and registered providers that are considering making buildings in conservation areas more energy efficient. It is an introduction to the subject and those wishing to pursue this should refer to the other planning constraints and heritage documents on the RISE website.

What is a conservation area?

A conservation area is a designated area of natural, cultural, or ecological significance, which is desirable to conserve or enhance. As this guide is aimed at those working with buildings, the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage significance is likely to be the greatest concern.

A conservation area can be created where local planning authorities identify an area of special architectural or historic interest, which deserves careful management to protect its characteristics. Most local authorities have conservation areas within their boundaries, and they can be very varied. Types of conservation area include:

- Residential and commercial areas in towns and cities
- Fishing, mining and rural villages
- Industrial areas
- Country houses set in national parks



Figure 1: Holy Trinity Church in the Holmfirth Conservation Area, West Yorkshire. Source: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/protecting-heritage-beyond-list/>



Figure 2: A suburban road in Chapmanslord Conservation Area, Essex. Source: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/protecting-heritage-beyond-list/>

Why are they protected?

Conservation areas in the UK are protected through legislation. The purpose of this protection is to preserve biodiversity, maintain ecological balance, safeguard cultural heritage, enhance climate resilience, and support sustainable development. Protecting buildings in conservation areas serves several key purposes:

- **Heritage preservation:** Conservation area designation helps safeguard the nation's heritage for future generations by recognising the importance of historical buildings.
- **Legal protection:** Planning permission is required for the demolition of buildings in conservation areas. In addition, local authorities can use article 4 directions to withdraw permitted development rights so that permission is needed for specific alterations. This helps ensure that the buildings' character and integrity are maintained.
- **Cultural significance:** Many conservation areas reflect the architectural styles, historical events, or notable figures associated with a particular area, contributing to the local identity and culture.
- **Encouraging conservation:** Conservation area designation encourages the protection and reuse of older buildings, promoting sustainable practices by repurposing existing structures rather than building anew. This includes the conservation of embodied energy.
- **Public awareness:** Conservation area designation raises awareness about the importance of historical buildings and encourages public and community engagement in heritage conservation efforts.

Key challenges

The protection of conservation areas can make introducing energy efficiency improvements challenging for various reasons:

- **Regulatory restriction:** Regulatory guidelines can limit the types of modifications that can be made to buildings in conservation areas, making it more difficult to implement energy efficiency solutions.
- **Design constraints:** There can be requirements to maintain the original appearance and structure of buildings within conservation areas, which can restrict the usage of certain energy efficient technologies.
- **Material limitations:** Traditional materials may be required for repairs and upgrades in conservation areas but might not be as energy efficient as modern alternatives.
- **Cost:** The specialist materials and techniques sometimes required to protect conservation area buildings can make energy efficient upgrades less financially viable.

How can we overcome these challenges?

Whilst the protection of conservation areas can provide challenges in improving energy efficiency, carefully considered retrofit options can conserve sites whilst enhancing sustainability.

Knowing which energy efficiency measures to implement in a conservation area requires a careful approach. To help with this it may be valuable to engage with your local authority conservation officer, as well as an energy auditor to identify the most effective improvements that adhere to the conservation areas specific regulations.

Here are some measures that can be considered:

Type of measure	Specific installation	Detail
Improved Insulation	Internal Insulation	Adding insulation to walls, ceilings, and floors without altering the exterior appearance can improve thermal performance. This may also include the insulation of pipes and hot water tanks to minimise heat wasted.
	Draught Proofing	Sealing gaps around windows, doors, and floors helps reduce heat loss without compromising the building's character.

	Secondary Glazing	Installing secondary glazing can enhance insulation while preserving the original windows.
	Window Films	Applying solar films can improve thermal performance without changing the window's exterior appearance.
Heating Systems	Smart Thermostats and building management systems.	Installing programmable thermostats can optimise heating schedules for better energy use.
	Solar Panels	In some cases, solar panels can be installed on less visible parts of the building, such as roofs.
	Heat Pumps	Air or ground source heat pumps can be integrated with careful planning, especially if they do not alter the building's external appearance.
Energy-Efficient Lighting	LED Lighting	Switching to energy-efficient LED bulbs can reduce energy use while maintaining appropriate lighting levels.

Source: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/energy-efficiency/making-changes-to-save-energy/>

Next steps

Anyone considering energy efficiency measures in a conservation area should familiarise themselves with the planning constraints and heritage content on the RISE website. The comprehensive series of toolkits, quick guides, and case studies available contain fundamental information relevant to conservation areas, such as defining the significance of your asset.

Additionally, contacting your local authority may be useful to discuss potential changes you are considering, whether there are special controls in place, and the permission you will need.

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