



Addendum to
Planning Policy Statement 6
Areas of Townscape Character



An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

www.doeni.gov.uk



Addendum to Planning Policy Statement 6

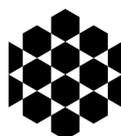
Areas of Townscape Character

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) set out the policies of the Department of the Environment on particular aspects of land-use planning and apply to the whole of Northern Ireland. Their contents will be taken into account in preparing development plans and are also material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

This document is an addendum to PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage' and must be read in conjunction with the policies contained within this PPS. The Addendum provides additional planning policies relating specifically to Areas of Townscape Character, for demolition of buildings, new development and the control of advertisements. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

Planning Service Headquarters
Millennium House
19 – 25 Great Victoria Street
BELFAST
BT2 7BN

August 2005



An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

www.doeni.gov.uk



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Contents

	Page No.
Preamble	3
1.0 The Importance of Areas of Townscape Character	5
2.0 Planning Policies	6
Policy ATC 1 Demolition Control in an Area of Townscape Character	6
Policy ATC 2 New Development in an Area of Townscape Character	8
Policy ATC 3 The Control of Advertisements in an Area of Townscape Character	10
Annex A: Excerpt from PPS 6	11

Preamble

The Department of the Environment is responsible for planning control in Northern Ireland. The Planning Service, an Agency within the Department, administers its planning functions.

The Department has a statutory duty, laid down in Article 3 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, to formulate and co-ordinate policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land and the planning of that development. The Department is required to ensure that such policy is in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy.

The Department's planning policies are normally issued through Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and PPS 1 'General Principles' advises that:
"Planning Policy Statements set out the policies of the Department on particular aspects of land-use planning and apply to the whole of Northern Ireland. Their contents will be taken into account in preparing development plans and are also material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals."

This document is an addendum to PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage' and must be read in conjunction with the policies contained within this PPS. The Addendum provides additional planning policies relating to Areas of Townscape Character, for demolition of buildings, new development and the control of advertisements. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship. To complement this Policy Statement, development plans may incorporate local policies and/or guidance to protect the character of specific Areas of Townscape Character.

For the purpose of this Policy Statement and other planning policy publications all references to Areas of Townscape Character should be read as including Areas of Village Character.

The Addendum has been subject to an equality impact screening exercise, in line with the statutory obligation contained in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The outcome of this exercise indicates that the Addendum is unlikely to have any significant adverse implications for equality of opportunity or community relations.

Nothing in this document should be read as a commitment that public resources will be provided for any specific project. All proposals for expenditure by the Department are subject to economic appraisal and other relevant assessments will also have to be considered having regard to the overall availability of resource.

1.0 The Importance of Areas of Townscape Character

- 1.1 Many of our cities, towns and villages contain areas which exhibit a distinct character and intrinsic qualities, often based on their historic built form or layout. Some of these have merited statutory designation by the Department as Conservation Areas by virtue of their special architectural or historic interest. For others, recognition as Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) has been judged to be more appropriate.
- 1.2 The importance of ATCs is recognised in Strategic Planning Guidance ENV 3.3 of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland which advises on the need to:
“protect designated Areas of Townscape Character where the inherited mix and layout of buildings of different ages, styles and functions adds to the quality of life of the local community and keep under review the merits of extending Conservation Area status to townscapes of distinctive character.”
- 1.3 In recognition of their importance, planning permission is now required for the demolition of an unlisted building in ATCs as a consequence of a Departmental Direction issued under Article 11 (2) (f) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991.
- 1.4 In processing planning applications within ATCs, the key consideration for the Department will be to ensure that development proposals respect the appearance and qualities of each townscape area and maintain or enhance their distinctive character.
- 1.5 It is acknowledged, however, there may be exceptional cases where this consideration may be overridden in favour of development which is desirable in the public interest.

2.0 Planning Policies

In exercise of its responsibility for planning control in Northern Ireland the Department of the Environment assesses development proposals against all planning policies and other material considerations that are relevant to it.

The planning policies of this Addendum to PPS 6 must therefore be read together and in conjunction with the relevant contents of the Department's development plans and other planning policy publications, including the Regional Development Strategy. The Department will also have regard to the contents of published supplementary planning guidance documents.

The following policies set out the main planning considerations that the Department will take into account in assessing proposals within Areas of Townscape Character. The provision of these policies will prevail unless there are other overriding policy or material considerations which outweigh them and justify a contrary decision.

Policy ATC 1

Demolition Control in an Area of Townscape Character

There will be a presumption in favour of retaining any building which makes a positive contribution to the character of an Area of Townscape Character. The Department will normally only permit the demolition of an unlisted building in an Area of Townscape Character where the building makes no material contribution to the distinctive character of the area.

Where permission for demolition is granted this will normally be conditional on prior agreement for the redevelopment of the site.

Justification and Amplification

- 2.1 Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) exhibit a distinct character normally based on their historic built form or layout. For the most part this derives from the cumulative impact of the area's buildings, their setting, landscape and other locally important features.

- 2.2 The demolition of a building or buildings in an ATC can significantly erode the character, appearance and integrity of such areas. Demolition can be particularly damaging in cases where it is proposed in isolation, that is, where there are no proposals for the redevelopment of the site. In order to prevent demolition damaging the distinctive character and appearance of an ATC, the Department will operate a presumption in favour of retaining any building which makes a positive contribution to the character of the area.
- 2.3 To help secure the upkeep, vitality and appearance of ATCs the Department will permit proposals for the appropriate renovation and refurbishment of existing buildings for their continued use, or for alternative uses which accord with the Department's policies for the area. Any external alterations associated with such proposals will be required to maintain or enhance the overall character of the area and respect the built form of the ATC (see Policy ATC 2).
- 2.4 Where the demolition of an unlisted building in an ATC is proposed the key considerations that will be taken into account are:
- the contribution of the building to the ATC and the effect of its demolition on the distinctive character of the area; and
 - whether the quality of proposals for the redevelopment of the site will maintain or enhance the distinctive character of the area.
- 2.5 Where the Department decides to permit demolition conditions will normally be imposed:
- requiring the redevelopment of the site to be based on previously agreed detailed proposals; and
 - prohibiting demolition of the building until contracts have been signed for the approved redevelopment of the site.

Policy ATC 2

New Development in an Area of Townscape Character

The Department will only permit development proposals in an Area of Townscape Character where the development maintains or enhances its overall character and respects the built form of the area.

The Department will also require that any trees, archaeological or other landscape features which contribute to the distinctive character of the area are protected and integrated in a suitable manner into the design and layout of the development.

Justification and Amplification

- 2.6 It is important to protect the distinctive character and intrinsic qualities of Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs). Sensitive planning controls are therefore necessary to ensure that both the individual and cumulative effects of development do not detract from the character, appearance and quality of these areas.
- 2.7 Designation as an ATC puts an onus on prospective developers to produce a high standard of design, which respects and is sympathetic to the particular qualities of the area in question. Notwithstanding the acceptability of proposals in terms of other planning issues, the Department will operate a presumption against development that would detract from or fail to maintain the character of the distinct townscape displayed within an ATC.
- 2.8 In effect, new development in an ATC should seek to reinforce local identity and promote quality and sustainability in order to respect and, where possible, enhance the distinctive character and appearance of the area. In assessing the acceptability of proposals, the Department will have regard to the same broad criteria outlined for Conservation Areas in paragraphs 7.6–7.10 of PPS 6 (these are reproduced in Annex A).

- 2.9 The Department will give sympathetic consideration to development proposals within an ATC for people with disabilities or others whose mobility is impaired. If imaginative and innovative design approaches are fully explored the Department believes it is possible to provide satisfactory solutions to such proposals, without compromising the character and built form of these areas.
- 2.10 Proposals for residential development are also subject to the provisions of Policy QD 1 of PPS 7 'Quality Residential Environments'. This includes specific reference to ATCs and advises that in such areas:
"housing proposals will be required to maintain or enhance their distinctive character and appearance. In the primarily residential parts of these designated areas proposals involving intensification of site usage or site coverage will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances."
- 2.11 As each ATC has its own distinct character and intrinsic qualities, the Department will draw up supplementary planning guidance for individual ATCs. This, together with any local policies formulated, will normally be incorporated into the relevant development plan and will be taken into account as a material consideration in assessing development proposals.
- 2.12 In addition, the Department would draw attention to other best practice conservation guidance and codes that can assist developers and their professional advisors in preparing proposals affecting buildings within an ATC. For example, British Standards (BS) 7913: 'The Principles of the Conservation of Historic Buildings'.
- 2.13 In view of the potential impact a development proposal may have in an ATC, the Department will generally require detailed drawings to accompany all planning applications. Where appropriate, the Department will use its powers contained in the General Development Order to request applicants to supply such additional information on the proposed development as is considered necessary to allow proper determination. This may include a design concept statement.

Policy ATC 3

The Control of Advertisements in an Area of Townscape Character

The Department will only grant consent for the display of an advertisement in an Area of Townscape Character where:

- (a) it maintains the overall character and appearance of the area; and
- (b) it does not prejudice public safety.

Justification and Amplification

- 2.14 Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs) may contain commercial areas or individual business premises where outdoor advertising is essential to their activities. It is important however to exercise appropriate control over advertisements to ensure they do not detract from the distinctive characteristics and amenity of these areas or prejudice public safety.
- 2.15 In assessing the impact of an advertisement or sign on amenity within an ATC, particular regard will be paid to the scale, size, proportions, dominance and siting of the sign, the materials used, whether it is illuminated and whether the proposal will result in clutter. An advertisement should also respect the building onto which it is to be fixed and in particular have regard to any architectural detailing.
- 2.16 Supplementary guidance drawn up for ATCs may include advice on the display of advertisements which will be taken into account in assessing proposals. General policy guidance on advertisements is set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 17 'The Control of Outdoor Advertisements'.

Annex A: Excerpt from PPS 6

General Criteria

- 7.6 General issues to be taken into account in assessing development proposals in a conservation area include the appropriateness of the overall massing of the development, its scale (the expression of size indicated by the windows, doors, floor heights, and other identifiable units), its proportions and its relationship with its context i.e. whether it sits comfortably. Development should be in harmony with, or complementary to, its neighbours having regard to the adjoining architectural styles. The use of materials generally matching those which are historically dominant in the area is important, as is the need for the development not to have a visually disruptive impact on the existing townscape. It should also, as far as possible, fit into the “grain” of the conservation area, for example, by respecting historic layout, street patterns or existing land form. It is also important where new uses are proposed that these respect the unique character and general ambience of a conservation area, for example certain developments may adversely affect the character of a conservation area through noise, nuisance and general disturbance.

New Buildings

- 7.7 The development of new buildings in a conservation area should be a stimulus to imaginative, high quality design, and seen as an opportunity to enhance the area. What is important is not that new buildings should directly imitate earlier styles, rather that they should be designed with respect for their context, as part of a larger whole which has a well-established character and appearance of its own. Therefore while development of a gap site in a traditional terrace may require a very sensitive design approach to maintain the overall integrity of the area in other cases modern designs sympathetic and complementary to the existing character of the area may be acceptable.

Alterations and Extensions

- 7.8 Proposals for the alteration or extension of properties in a conservation area will normally be acceptable where they are sensitive to the existing building, in keeping with the character and appearance of the particular area and will not prejudice the amenities of adjacent

properties. Extensions should be subsidiary to the building, of an appropriate scale, use appropriate materials and should normally be located on the rear elevations of a property. Very careful consideration will be required for alterations and extensions affecting the roof of a property as these may be particularly detrimental to the character and appearance of a conservation area.

Change of Use

- 7.9 In assessing applications for the change of use of a property within a conservation area consideration will be given to both the general land use policies of the Department and the impact of the proposed use on the character and appearance of the conservation area. New uses will normally only be acceptable where any associated external alterations, for example new shopfronts, are sympathetic to their setting and relate in scale, proportions and materials to the remainder of the building and the local street scene.

Trees

- 7.10 Trees often make an important contribution to the appearance and character of conservation areas. In assessing development proposals affecting a conservation area the Department will therefore take into account their potential impact on existing trees. Where such trees make an important visual, historic or amenity contribution to the area and should be retained the Department will seek appropriate protection measures through the imposition of planning conditions or may consider making a tree preservation order. In some instances development may be acceptable subject to conditions requiring new tree planting or re-planting.

