



**Cornforth, County Durham
Conservation Area Management
Plan**

**Prepared for Sedgfield Borough
Council**

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Cornforth Conservation Area Management Plan

1.0 Introduction

The designation of a conservation area is not intended to prevent any new development from taking place within the area. However it is the purpose of the Cornforth Conservation Area Appraisal together with the management plan to inform and manage planning decisions so that new development can take place within the conservation area without harming its special character and appearance.

The character appraisal, covered in the first part of this document, describes the historical development of the area and its special architectural, archaeological and historical interest that warrant its designation as a conservation area.

The aim of the Management Plan is to establish the means by which the objectives of preserving and enhancing the unique character and appearance of the conservation area can be pursued through the planning process and the remaining life of the Cornforth Conservation Area Partnership.

This Management Plan seeks to address these and other issues by setting out broad planning guidance that can be used by local residents, developers and council officers alike in considering new development proposals in the conservation area, supported by the local and national policy framework.

The management plan was written after a public consultation even held in Cornforth on 30th September 2008. The views arising from this consultation have been taken into account.

2. Cornforth Conservation Area – the Planning Background

Cornforth Conservation Area was designated in July 1993 along with other areas in the Borough as part of the preparation of the Sedgfield Borough Local Plan, which was adopted in October 1996. Policy E18 in the Local Plan is the principal policy operated within the conservation areas. This policy has two specific aims:

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(a) To preserve important buildings and features from harmful development or change, in particular listed buildings, village greens, historic parklands and other important open spaces.

(b) To enhance the appearance of its conservation areas, particularly by ensuring appropriate standard of design for new buildings and alterations to existing buildings, and by environmental improvements.

Other policies concerning listed buildings and environmental improvements in conservation areas are set out in Policies E19-21 and E23 of the Local Plan. In addition Supplementary Planning Guidance Note 1 sets out design guidance for various types of development proposals in conservation areas and defines the essential characteristics and main features of the conservation areas, which are desirable to preserve and enhance.

Nationally, Conservation Areas are defined as places where buildings and the spaces around them interact to form distinctly recognisable areas of special quality and interest. These places are protected under the provision of section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which defines them as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. It follows therefore that consent will not be given for any proposals that are likely to harm the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15) notes the requirement that special attention should be paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Furthermore special interest and the character and appearance of conservation areas should be reflected in an assessment of the area, which is a factor to be taken into account in considering appeals against refusals of planning permission and of conservation area consent for demolition.

The main planning policy guidance note dealing with the protection of archaeological remains is Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16). PPG16 recognises that archaeology is a finite resource and is easily destroyed by development. It establishes the principal that nationally important archaeological

remains and their settings, whether scheduled or not, should be preserved. For sites of lesser importance, the need to preserve archaeology will be weighed against the need for the development; where development is permitted it may be subject to conditions which require the recording and publication of the archaeological remains affected. PPG16 sets out procedures for establishing the presence and importance of archaeological remains on site. Of particular relevance is the requirement to understand the historic importance of buildings (and sites) before considering applications for alteration or demolition and that this information may be requested in advance of an application being considered or as a condition of consent. In such instances the local authority conservation officer may request that buildings be recorded before or during works.

3. Future Management and the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme

The guidelines which follow arise from the Conservation Area Appraisal and community consultation. Management guidance is initially based on features within Cornforth, but is also prioritised to ensure the best use of limited funds. The management plan has two objectives:

1. to implement sufficient improvements and enhancements to the public realm and private housing to encourage further long term private investment in the quality and design of the building stock and thus restore historic character
2. to provide advice on the longer term maintenance of the historic fabric and new development design guidance so that once the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme has ended, the investment can be protected and the process of enhancement continued.

Open Space – the Green

The main open space within the Conservation Area is the L-shaped green consisting largely of mown grass and a few trees. It is currently managed by the parish council.

“The green is well used and people who visit are amazed at its beauty”¹

- Street furniture

The green is well maintained and retains its sense of open space which is a key characteristic of the village. However the open space is cluttered along the perimeter by a large number of overhead wires and to a lesser extent, by grit bins, road signs

¹ Quotes in red boxes relate to comments received as part of the public consultation in September 2008

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and waste bins. While recognising the need for road signs, it is important that they are rationalised so that they are not spread around too many posts and pillars. Grit bins are also essential, but could be located in less prominent places (off green), or in more attractive containers.

New seating has been provided in glossy black modern materials in the Conservation Area. The style of the seating was a subject of early consultation and so far only one person has suggested that the style of seating is incompatible with the village.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Rationalise road signs and reduce street clutter	DCC	Carry out as part of CAPS improvements to road surfaces

- Overhead Wires

There is general disappointment amongst the local community that it has not been possible to underground the overhead wires which cut across the green. These are unsightly and unite the residents in their dislike of them.

In the light of these consistent comments, costs should be obtained from NEDL to underground the cables so that an informed decision can be made regarding the affordability of going down this route in the lifetime of the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme. It may also be possible to renegotiate their route as part of an existing proposal to realign nearby pylons.

"It would be lovely to see the overhead wires gone"

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Obtain costs to remove overhead wires	SBC	Immediate

- Parking on the green

In order to keep cars off the green, concrete posts have been placed around the perimeter, but these are in the process of being removed. This leaves management issues around parking in the village which is a matter of much debate. The village layout was not designed around cars, but they have to be accommodated today.

"I like the mounds much better than the dragon's teeth which we had."

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Strategic replacement of the concrete posts with a combination of gentle mounding, cleverly placed seating and natural rock features was supported at the public consultation event. This process should continue.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Continue with the removal of the bollards and replace with soft landscaping	CAP	On-going during CAPS

- Uplighting of trees

The uplighting of trees was less well supported. Concerns were expressed about the light pollution this created, effects on wildlife and more specifically regarding the costs to the tax payers to pay for the energy costs. In the light of these comments, no further uplighting should take place and consideration given to using energy efficient lighting.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Carry out no additional uplighting of trees. Consult the County ecologist regarding its appropriateness Investigate the use of energy efficient light bulbs	SBC/DCC	Immediate

Floorscape

The majority of roads in the village are of tarmac, but recent conservation works have sought to replace some tarmac with a combination of scoria blocks, granite setts and sandstone paving flags. This combination of materials creates an aesthetically pleasing surface with some historic authenticity (mud is probably more authentic!), but some residents have expressed concern that the surface becomes slippery in frosty conditions and is difficult to walk on. However it was also accepted that no surface is entirely frost proof and that the scheme had considerably enhanced the appearance of the village. There is a real consensus that the work done is to a high quality and there were requests for it to be extended.

"I just love it. I'm really pleased with what they've done."

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Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Continue with successful road surfacing along remaining tarmaced areas.	CAP	On-going during CAPS
Issue a letter two weeks in advance of road resurfacing works to residents so they can make alternative parking arrangements for the duration	SBC	As required
Liaise with residents in north-west corner to discuss how access for emergency vehicles will be arranged during the works	SBC	Immediate
Introduce a resurfacing scheme to the church entrance.	CAPS/church/DAC	Within the lifetime of the CAPS

New Development

The designation as a Conservation Area is not intended to prevent new development, nor should it mean that new development must be a pastiche of earlier architectural styles. However the established character of the conservation area must be protected (and where the opportunity arises, enhanced) in order to maintain its special architectural and historic interest. The village as a whole has seen some erosion of historic character and this is currently being reversed through a Conservation Area Partnership Scheme which makes grant aid available to home owners to restore historic character in their homes. However a considerable amount of new development has taken place which neither reflects the architectural styles of the existing buildings, nor does it respect the medieval layout and cuts across burgadge plot boundaries.

In order to prevent a further loss of character new development must reflect the character of the existing historic buildings and the layout of new development needs to take the linear nature of the property boundaries into account. Cul-de-Sac

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development is not in keeping with the character of the village. The emphasis must be on high quality design and it should not block any of the significant views. There may be scope for innovative modern design providing that it is of a high standard and that it respects the character of the Conservation Area, including scale and attention to detail.

Infilling is acceptable providing that the design is of a high standard and reflects the character of the village and the earlier medieval property boundaries.

The extension of existing dwellings may also be acceptable providing that it reflects the scale, form and design of the original dwelling and does not dwarf it.

The new house adjacent to the inn is currently not popular. Some residents feel that it is too large, but people's perceptions of this house are also tied up with the loss of car parking that has resulted. In fact the house conforms to design guidance and once it is complete and settled in, the 'shock of the new' should give way to a more ready acceptance.

In the Conservation Area, where the quality of the general environment is already acknowledged by designation, the council will seek to secure high quality schemes that respond positively to their historic setting. The designs will be expected to adopt features and materials which will help to make the new development fit in. Buildings should be no more than two storeys, be between one and three bays wide, use render, stone or brick or a combination of both, slate or pantile roofing with chimneys, stone lintels and sills to windows and sash windows with or without bays.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
New development must take this appraisal and management plan into account; in order to do so both the management plan and the appraisal need to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the new DCC	DCC/SBC	Immediate

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Repairs to older buildings

Render should be limewash, not cement or pebble dash as this may encourage damp in older properties; grant aid can be used in the short term to remove cement based renders. Brick and stone built houses will need repointing at times. Where render is being removed from walls, the walls will need repointing before the render is replaced. The mortar used in repointing must be a lime rich. Cement on its own should never be used as it damages the stonework and encourages damp. Pointing should be set back from the arris- ribbon pointing which sits proud of the stonework should never be used as it damages the stonework and leads to damp problems. The use of an article 4 direction should be considered as a means to protect the investment that has been made in Cornforth and to encourage more informed long term maintenance.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Remove cement renders and pebble dashing from older properties. Where the building was designed to be rendered, use limewashes only. Advice on appropriate pointing should be made available to homeowners via the new DCC	DCC	Within two years

Rainwater Goods

The traditional rainwater goods in the village were of cast iron, sometimes with ornate hoppers. Where they survive, they should be retained, grant aid where it exists should seek to replace plastic with cast iron, particularly to the frontages, however new development may not be required to use cast iron rainwater goods.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Replace plastic with cast iron rainwater goods as part of on-going grant aid packages.	CAPS	On going

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Alterations to windows and doors

The loss of traditional windows and doors has seen the major loss of historic character in the village and a subsequent loss in market value. Consideration needs to be given to withdrawing permitted development rights to prevent the use of inappropriate replacement windows and doors and to protect the investment in grant aid which has already been made. Longer term, traditional windows and doors need to be painted every three to four years and occasionally they need stripping back to prevent clogging. However if well maintained they will outlast plastic windows and doors and should survive for over a hundred years. Some modern traditional windows are designed with a ready cut scarf joint so that if the timber becomes rotten along the sill it is easily replaced.

Windows

Windows have traditionally been vertical multi-pane sashes in pre 1860s windows, but post 1860s are more likely to be four pane vertical sliding sashes; some set into bays at ground floor level. It is this style of window that is most appropriate for the majority of houses in the village. It is easy to distinguish from 'dummy' sashes when open. Windows should be painted and not stained and the use of bull's eye glass should be restricted to outbuildings and cellars if used at all. Stick on glazing bars should be avoided. There are modern craftsmen in the area that can make modern timber sash windows which are also double glazed and can therefore improve energy efficiency. Where the original sash windows still exists, secondary double glazing is more appropriate. If original glass exists within windows it should be retained for its attractive iridescent qualities.

The approach to building regulations can be flexible where historic buildings are concerned and it may be advisable to involve the local authority conservation officer in any negotiations. For example the modern requirement to have trickle vents can detract from the craftsmanship of the sash and alternative solutions are possible. Joinery details should be submitted with any planning applications or listed building consent including the depth at which the window will be set within its aperture. Many modern windows are set too far forward within the aperture which spoils the elevations and reduced energy efficiency.

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Plate 1. The sash window on the left is a style used prior to the 1860s. This was gradually replaced by the popular four or two light sash, made possible by advancements in glass technology. The two drawings are indicative of styles likely to be recommended in Cornforth. The tripartite sash window (second from right) is particularly useful for inserting into large window openings that may have once had a bay window, but where resources do not permit a new traditional bay. ‘Dummy’ sashes which open outwards are not appropriate.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Prioritise the replacement of modern windows with traditional styles through the continued offer of grant aid	CAPS	Ongoing
Withdraw permitted development rights to ensure that replacement windows do not detract from historic character	DCC/SBC	Within 6 months
Provide advice to homeowners on suitable window styles	DCC	Within two years

Doors

Doors should be in painted timber; UPVC and aluminium spoil the appearance of an historic building. Where an overlight exists the original door was probably solid with four (Victorian) or six (Georgian) panels. Cheaper houses and outbuildings or garden entrances could use the simple plank and batten type of door. The more flamboyant style of Georgian door with pediment or Baroque style hood was not apparently typical of Cornforth. Colour schemes can be informed by the period fashions, but in Cornforth, Georgian buildings probably favoured black or dark green and 19th to early 20th century buildings often had dark blue, chocolate brown or olive green. After the 1870s off whites became popular. Matt or semi-gloss finishes are more appropriate than high gloss finishes. Furnishings of Georgian doors were usually of black cast iron and rarely polished brass. Door handles were simple, sometimes at waist height

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in the centre of the door and consisting of a knob or ring. Victorian door furniture also favoured unassertive styles, usually in black or the same colour as the door, but never in shiny brass. Fittings should be attached to the structural members of the door, never into the panels. Internal fanlights and glazed doors should be avoided. Where overlights have traditional house names written in gold, these should be retained.



Plate 2. A range of traditional doors in Cornforth. Note the three on the left have no inbuilt lights. Hallways were lit by the overlight. However by the 1930s inbuilt door lights were being used (right). The four panel door (second from left) was the most common Victorian design. The door on the left is typical of the Gothic and Tudor styles revived in late Victorian times.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Replace modern style doors with traditional styles appropriate to the age of the property.	CAPS	On-going
Protect the enhancements already made by the removal of permitted development rights	DCC/SBC	Within 6 months
Provide advice to homeowners on suitable door styles	DCC	Within two years

Demolition of buildings and structures

Where the demolition of a structure or building is proposed it must be accompanied by a detailed proposal (outline planning applications are not acceptable) of what will replace it. Where modern buildings have failed to take the historic character of the village into account, the local planning authority is unlikely to object to its demolition providing that the replacement enhances the Conservation Area. The local planning

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authority is however likely to object to the demolition of any buildings which are Edwardian in date or earlier.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Outline planning applications will not be acceptable within the Conservation Area	DCC	Immediate

Car parking

Most historic settlements were not designed with cars in mind therefore there is no provision for them within the village. However some formalised additional parking has been provided close to the Square and Compass and most residents manage to park outside their houses. However the former pub car park has been lost to new development. This was an outcome of the existing partnership scheme as the car park created an untidy open space which could be better filled with housing. However the loss of car parking here has created problems for the local community particularly on those days when the church is holding an event. The narrow roads can become blocked with parked cars making access to and from Cornforth village impossible by car.

Parking on the green is not acceptable as it will lead to erosion and loss of grass and spoil the sense of open space. Lay-bys have been created in the north east corner of the green made of Lakeland cobbles with grass seeded in between. This has blended in well and manages to provide a couple of parking spaces without visually detracting from the green. However those residents who use them have not been happy with the surface over summer. The heavy rainfall has turned the parking spaces into muddy areas which are difficult to walk on. Their performance needs to be monitored over the next summer and winter to assess if this rainfall is exceptional or normal for the future and if the lay-bys will become less muddy once they settle in.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Monitor the condition of new lay-bys over the winter of 2008-9	SBC	Immediate

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Boundary Treatments

Boundaries vary throughout the village. In front of the higher status houses such as no.53, no.11, the church and the inn, there are dwarf walls with recently replaced railings. However the majority of houses have traditionally been green fronted and where that exists it should be retained. Existing boundary walls are in brick or a combination of brick and stone. On the main road the mix of limestone and brick is used in front of Pear Tree House. Generally, on the village green no boundary wall should be used apart from a combination of railings and dwarf walls which do not break up the sense of space provided by the open green. Modern replacements such as concrete blocks or timber fences are not acceptable. The existing boundaries are an unsightly combination of styles and a second or later phase of grant aid could seek to introduce some harmony along the street frontages by removing mid 20th century block walks and replacing them with brick or railing as appropriate.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Target boundary treatments towards the end of the CAPS to reintroduce harmony to house frontages	CAPS	Within one year

Priorities for grant aid

The scheme has so far been successful in enhancing the public realm within the village by resurfacing tracks and roads in traditional materials and the gradual removal of concrete bollards from the perimeter. This has been successful and popular and should continue until completion.

For the remainder of the scheme, grant aid should seek to tackle the two main areas of character erosion, namely the overhead wires, the loss of traditional windows and doors and the inappropriate use of pebble dash. While there are other areas which would benefit from funding (rationalisation of street signs, boundary walls, rainwater goods) these two areas have the potential to make the greatest impact and will hopefully encourage others to use traditional materials in the future. They should therefore be prioritised.

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Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Continue with road resurfacing (and removal of bollards) until completion	CAPS	Immediate
Prioritise the funding of traditional windows, doors and renders as they have the greatest impact on historic character	CAPS	Immediate
Towards the end of the scheme set up 'quick fix' packages to quickly target small scale enhancements with the remaining budget, covering property boundaries, street signs, rainwater goods.	CAPS	Within eighteen months

Conservation Area Boundary Review

The boundary currently excludes two areas of burgage plot leaving the medieval layout incomplete. In due course the boundary should be revised to include the missing area of burgage plot and the approach to the village from Money Buildings.

Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Expand the Conservation Area to include Moneys Buildings and the north west corner of the green	DCC	Within 5 years

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Summary of management recommendations (highest priority for funding shaded)		
Enhancement	Lead authority	Timetable
Priorities:		
Continue with road resurfacing (and removal of bollards) until completion	CAPS	Immediate
Prioritise the funding of traditional windows, doors and renders as they have the greatest impact on historic character	CAPS/residents	Immediate
Towards the end of the CAPS scheme set up 'quick fix' packages to quickly target small scale enhancements with the remaining budget, covering property boundaries, street signs, rainwater goods.	CAPS/residents	Within eighteen months
Street furniture:		
Rationalise road signs and reduce street clutter	DCC	Carry out as part of CAPS improvements to road surfaces
Overhead wires:		
Obtain costs to remove overhead wires	SBC	Immediate
Bollards:		
Continue with the removal of the bollards and replace with soft landscaping	CAP	On-going during CAPS
Trees:		
Carry out no additional uplighting of trees.	SBC/DCC	Immediate
Consult the county ecologist regarding impact of tree lighting on wildlife	SBC/DCC	Immediate
Investigate the use of energy efficient light bulbs	DCC	Immediate
Resurfacing works:		
Issue a letter two weeks in advance of road resurfacing works to residents so they can make alternative parking arrangements for the duration	SBC	As required
Liaise with residents in north-west corner to discuss how access for emergency vehicles will be arranged during the works	SBC	Immediate
Introduce a resurfacing scheme to the church entrance.	CAPS/ Church	Within the lifetime of the CAPS
New development:		
New development must take this appraisal and management plan into account; in order to do so both the management plan and the appraisal need to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the new DCC	DCC/SBC	Immediate

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<i>Wall coatings:</i>	Lead authority	Timetable
Remove cement renders and pebble dashing from older properties. Where the building was designed to be rendered, use limewashes only. Advice on appropriate pointing should be made available to homeowners via the new DCC	DCC	Within two years
<i>Rainwater goods:</i>		
Replace plastic with cast iron rainwater goods as part of on-going grant aid packages.	CAPS	On going
<i>Windows:</i>		
Prioritise the replacement of modern windows with traditional styles through the continued offer of grant aid	CAPS	Ongoing
Withdraw permitted development rights to ensure that replacement windows do not detract from historic character	DCC/SBC	Within 6 months
Provide advice to homeowners on suitable window styles	DCC	Within two years
<i>Doors:</i>		
Replace modern style doors with traditional styles appropriate to the age of the property.	CAPS	On-going
Protect the enhancements already made by the removal of permitted development rights	DCC/SBC	Within 6 months
Provide advice to homeowners on suitable door styles	DCC	Within two years
<i>Outline planning applications:</i>		
Outline planning applications will not be acceptable within the Conservation Area	DCC	Immediate
<i>Lay-bys:</i>		
Monitor the condition of new lay-bys over the winter of 2008-9	SBC	Immediate
<i>Boundary treatments:</i>		
Target boundary treatments towards the end of the CAPS to reintroduce harmony to house frontages	CAPS	Within one year
<i>Conservation Area boundary:</i>		
Expand the Conservation Area to include Moneys Buildings and the north west corner of the green	DCC	Within 5 years

Conclusion

The success of the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme depends on the joint commitment of the local planning authority, English Heritage and in particular those living and working within the area, working to preserve and enhance its character.

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This document sets out some of the ways this can be achieved and further guidance can be obtained from the local authority conservation officer. The aim of the remainder of the Conservation Area Partnership scheme must be to enhance the historic character of Cornforth sufficiently to trigger privately funded, well-informed enhancements beyond the lifetime of the project. This will be best achieved by targeting the replacement of inappropriate windows, doors and wall coverings. The upgrading of public realm works such as floorscaping and the removal of overhead wires provides the infrastructure around which other improvements can take place. Because the timetabling and budgets of such works can be controlled they have an excellent chance of being implemented and are therefore a priority.

As the scheme comes to an end, a series of 'quick fix' packages could be offered to use up any surplus funds. These would target items in the management plan such as property boundaries but would not commit house owners to larger schemes of work. It will also be necessary to protect the considerable investment that has taken place in Cornforth by withdrawing permitted development rights. This will ensure that the process of decline does not start as soon as the scheme has finished. For the same reason house owners and potential developers may reasonably expect some more detailed design guidance and maintenance tips on the appropriate styles of architectural features which will sustain Cornforth's revived historic character through the 21st century.

It was clear from the public consultation event that there was considerable support for the scheme and while there were reservations about parking, the overhead wires and light pollution, the overwhelming view was of support and that the scheme has thus far been a success. In the word of one respondent:

“They've done a brilliant job”

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Finding out more

There are a series of useful guides produced by a range of organisations on maintaining historic properties. Many are available from the internet.

The Victorian Society produces a range of leaflets on caring for Victorian houses.

These can be ordered from:

The Victorian Society

1 Priory Gardens,

Bedford Park,

London W4 1TT

Tel: 020 8994 1019

www.victoriansociety.org.uk

The Georgian Group produces a similar range for earlier houses:

The Georgian Group

6 Fitzroy Square

London W1T 5DX

Tel: 020 7529 8920

www.georgiangroup.org.uk

English Heritage also provide guidance on energy efficiency in historic homes. Modern materials such as double glazing, damp proofing and cavity wall insulation is not always the best solution if your house was built before the 1950s.

<http://www.climatechangeandyourhome.org.uk/live/>

Equally useful are a range of free leaflets called the INFORM series published by Historic Scotland and downloadable from their web site at www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Relevant Planning Policies – National and Regional

- Planning Policy Guidance – PPG 15 (Planning & the Historic Environment)
- Regional Policy Guidance – Environment Chapter
- Durham County Structure Plan – Policy 65

Existing Local Conservation Policies

- Sedgefield Borough Local Plan – Policy E18

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