

# Interim Planning Guidance

Town Centre Conservation Area  
Statement of Designation  
& Reasoned Justification

## INTERIM PLANNING GUIDANCE

As part of the Local Plan process, supplementary planning guidance was prepared to supplement policies and proposals in the Local Plan. The Borough Council consulted the public on the guidance at the draft deposit and revised draft deposit stages of the Local Plan preparation process. Some of the comments on the Draft Deposit Guidance were taken into account in formulating the Revised Draft Guidance.

It was not appropriate for the Borough Council to adopt the guidance as supplementary planning guidance because this can only supplement an adopted local plan and the Tamworth Local Plan 2001-2011 will not be adopted until 2006. Furthermore, under the new development plan system, supplementary planning guidance has been replaced with supplementary planning documents.

This guidance was approved as interim planning guidance by the Borough Council's Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2005. It contains information about the special character of the Town Centre Conservation Area, a justification for its designation and guidelines for development. Appropriate guidance will be replaced with supplementary planning documents in due course. This is in accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme that came into effect in March 2005.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is important to preserve or enhance. Tamworth Borough Council has a duty to decide which areas are special and fall into this category, and these are then designated as conservation areas. It is not only the individual buildings but also the way in which they are situated and the surrounding land that gives an area its special character.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides the legislative backing for such designations stating that:

*'Every local planning authority should from time to time, determine which parts of their area are of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and shall designate those areas as conservation areas.'*

It also imposes a duty on Local Authorities to review their areas from time to time. The original Town Centre Conservation Area was designated in 1976. In addition to the commercial heart of the town, it also included the more residential areas of Victoria Road and Albert Road. In more recent times changes to the whole character of the town resulted in the need review the original boundary.

A comprehensive review of the boundary and the reasoned justification for the designation was carried out. It was decided that the fundamentally different character of the two areas should be recognised by the designation of two separate conservation areas. The needs of each area differ and with separate designations these needs can be identified and considered on their own merits through separate Conservation Strategies.

The revised designations were presented to and approved by the Borough Council's Planning Committee on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1994.

## 2. THE NEED FOR CONSERVATION

The Town Centre is formed from a combination of both small and large-scale elements of architecture, all of which integrate to give the town its special character. The Castle and St. Editha's Church are examples of the larger listed buildings that can be considered as architectural set pieces. Their grounds provide pleasant breaks in the otherwise compact streetscape.

The architectural and townscape qualities of the town centre are evident to all that know it. At the same time business activity and hence pressure on the physical and architectural quality continue to grow.

The aims of conservation are not confined to keeping areas and buildings pleasant to

look at, or as a record of some aspect of history. They must also involve the continuing life and function of the area and be receptive to change. Much of the intrinsic quality of the town centre is the product of changing social and economic attitudes spanning a considerable period of time. To interrupt this process by curtailing new development or insisting on rigid limitations of traditional designs will only serve to call into question the future validity of such areas for residents and commercial interests alike.

In designating the Town Centre Conservation Area, the Borough Council has therefore recognised the demands of progress and preservation. Conservation to be effective requires not only the support of the Borough Council, but also the commitment of a wide range of interests in the community. In this respect the Borough Council welcomes the enthusiastic works of local community groups.

### **3. CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES**

The Conservation Area is located within the Town Centre of Tamworth incorporating most of the commercial heart of the town and the major architectural set pieces including the Castle and St. Editha's Church.

To the south the boundary is drawn around the Castle Pleasure Grounds and includes Ladybridge and the land associated with the Castle. At Silver

Street, the boundary is drawn west to include Lichfield Street, and then along Aldergate to the junction with Hospital Street. From here it takes a line to the rear of properties along Lower Gungate down to Bolebridge Street, incorporating a small section of Victoria Road. It then returns to the Castle Pleasure Grounds via Ankerside.

### **4. REASONED JUSTIFICATION**

The Town Centre Conservation Area is based around the historical thoroughfares into the town, principally Aldergate, Gungate, Lichfield Street and Holloway, all of which converge on the Castle and church, which in turn form important focal points within the town. Although much new development has occurred in and around the area, the centre remains compact and its various stages of development are visible through the various styles of building.

The boundary has been designated to preserve the historic street pattern and include those properties that provide an important historical record of the towns development. The designation emphasises the importance of the original centre of Tamworth and illustrates the acceptance of the individual character of the buildings and their setting, and goes some way to promoting the area as a separate entity from the later Victorian development which dominates the surrounding area.

Designation gives a positive context to the restoration of older properties of character, and owners and occupiers should be more confident that retention, repair and restoration of the original buildings are worthwhile.

Conservation Area status also justifies the formulation of stricter policies to control the design and form of any new development. It protects the original street pattern while many of the important buildings are protected under listed building legislation.

## 5. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whilst the origins of Tamworth are uncertain, it is clear that in the early centuries it was a centre of communications and strategic defensive point. Earliest settlements were sited on high ground above the flood level on the northern bank of the River Anker close to where it joins the Tame. The settlement therefore controlled two important river crossings and was close to the Roman Road of Watling Street.

In AD 913 Aethelflaed, known as the Lady of the Mercians, rebuilt the burgh and constructed a stockaded mound on the site of the present Castle. The town developed inside the defences and by the reign of Aethelstan a mint was operating and there was probably also a market.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a stone church and a religious community. Shortly after the Norman Conquest, Tamworth Castle was built in a dominating position on the southern entrance to the town. At about this time the Borough was divided between the counties of Staffordshire and Warwickshire, the boundary running through the centre of the town along the main streets. This division remained until the Local Government Act of 1888.

Medieval Tamworth was essentially a rural market town catering for a local trade. Weekly markets were held on Saturdays in Warwickshire 'before the Castle gates' giving its name to Market Street, and in Staffordshire near the Church. It was not until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century that the town began to prosper and it was at this time that the church and castle underwent considerable alterations and repairs as did the bridges. Indeed Ladybridge was wholly rebuilt. Streets previously unfinished were completed and improved and by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the character of the town had changed to Georgian with substantially built red brick dwellings and shops gradually replacing most of the timber framed cottages.

As a parliamentary borough, the influence of families active in politics has left its mark on Tamworth. In 1701 Thomas Guy, member of Parliament for Tamworth and founder of Guy's Hospital erected the present Town Hall to replace the two halls which served the Staffordshire and

Warwickshire sides of the town. Almshouses were founded and endowed and an adequate workhouse added. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tamworth benefited as a centre of communication. Coach roads from London to Liverpool and from Birmingham to Nottingham crossed in the town. The coming of the railway maintained the town's strategic importance, and in 1893 the Birmingham / Derby Junction railway was completed.

The development of the extractive industries, with all associated mining, and brick and terracotta works were also extremely important in the growth of Tamworth as a whole.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up until the early 1960's the town remained little more than a market town serving a population of 15,000. In 1965 the administrative boundaries were extended, resulting in a doubling of the population. At the same time the town embarked on a period of rapid development to cater for overspill population from Birmingham and the rest of the West Midlands conurbation. Between 1965-1981 when the overspill agreement ended, the population doubled from 32,000 to 64,250.

Despite this rapid growth the town has retained much of its historic character, and there is now a new emphasis based on attracting industry and improving the physical and natural environment throughout the Borough.

## 6. EXISTING CHARACTER OF THE TOWN CENTRE

Tamworth developed in a form of tightly knit buildings clustered along narrow streets. This form can be appreciated today when the town is approached from the south. The Castle dominates this approach and is seen against a backdrop of pitched roofs and chimneystacks. Following the line of Market Street, George Street and Bolebridge Street, the frontage properties build up towards the Castle with their ridges parallel to the street whilst rows of outbuildings step down to the river at right angles. This seemingly haphazard jumble of buildings contrasts with the open river plain and epitomises the historic character of Tamworth.

Recent excavations revealed a Saxon Water Mill, the footings of the gateway which gave access to the Castle Bailey and the evidence of substantial pre-Norman Conquest timber halls in the vicinity of the Church.

The most important remaining historic fabric of the town is the street pattern. Nay the time of the Norman Conquest the street pattern of the settlement which its rectangular defences was already taking shape. The north entrance at Bell Corner, the south west entrance of Holloway, south east at Bolebridge and the Lichfield Street entrance from the west resulted in the principal thoroughfares taking on the

form of the letter 'A' which has remained substantially unaltered to the present day. Whilst this simple street pattern has remained, the role of various streets has changed throughout the centuries. Church Street, Gungate and Bolebridge Street have always been important thoroughfares. In medieval times Market Street and George Street were only developed on their northern sides and Lichfield Street was divided into two by outer fortifications of the town. Aldergate was a narrow track giving access to the countryside with its fields and orchards.

The majority of streets were narrow with the exception of Lichfield Street and the main streets that run east to west were linked by narrow alleys north to south, such as King Street, Middle Entry and College Lane.

The narrow alleys originally provided access to enclosed gardens. As the town centre grew commercially, they fulfilled another role by serving the many small breweries, bakeries, stables and the various Victorian industries that developed in these confined backland spaces. Thus as the street pattern was influenced by change, so the need of the trades and the private owners changed the character of the town.

## **7. EXISTING LAND USES AND CHARACTER**

There are a number of main land uses within the Town Centre Conservation Area.

### **1. The Shopping Area**

This extends from the northern boundary of the designated area along the main thoroughfares into the central area down Aldergate and Gungate. The primary shopping streets are focused around St. Editha's Church and those streets that historically provided the heart of Tamworth as a market town. The development of the two shopping centres of Middle Entry in the 1960's and Ankerside in the 1980's provided a new focus for retailing along George Street, Church Street and Market Street. The predominant architectural style is one of small domestic scale retail outlets interspersed with public open spaces and larger architectural set pieces.

### **2. Small Businesses And Offices**

Surrounding the retail core there is a transition towards office use and small businesses. The areas included here are Lichfield Street, and the upper parts of Aldergate and Gungate. Here again the main architectural styles are of a small scale typical of small market towns in the area.

### **3. Open Spaces**

To the south of the town centre the Castle Pleasure Grounds provide the largest

public open space. When the town is approached from the south, these gardens provide an impressive setting for the Castle and an interesting contrast to the compact architecture of the shopping streets.

Within the town centre itself, the grounds of St. Editha's Church and the Gardens of Rest at Corporation Street provide important opportunities to improve the townscape quality of the town centre.

## 8. DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

The need to appreciate and conserve the existing built environment does not preclude new development. Potential exists to extensively redevelop some parts of the Conservation Area. The intention of this section is therefore to provide guidance that will accommodate flexibility in design while maintaining the essential character of the Conservation Area

### 1. New Development

It is not practical here to give design guidance relating to every situation which might arise. However broad principles can be established. The general principle is that new development should seek to compliment the existing in terms of scale, form, proportion, massing and elevational treatment.

### 2. Refurbishment And Conversion

The refurbishment and conversion of existing properties can increase the range

and variety of land uses in the conservation area. The Borough Council would therefore seek to encourage the retention of characteristic buildings that are important in the street scene. Emphasis should then be placed on the retention and restoration of individual character.

### 3. Shop & Commercial Fronts

Attractive building facades and shop fronts are often themselves an important advertisement for an area and can enhance its overall character. In its consideration of commercial frontages, the Borough Council will seek to promote the individual character of buildings. Every effort will be made to achieve a proper balance between the visual amenity of the area and the needs of businesses to advertise effectively.

Without careful attention, the introduction of a new shop or commercial frontage can give visual dominance to the ground floor of a property in a way which separates this part from the rest of the building and degrades the overall architectural value. In order to avoid this, the Borough Council will seek to ensure that the design of commercial fronts and fascias do not obscure any noteworthy structural or architectural elements. The new elements should compliment the existing elevation in terms of materials, their quality and in the use of colour.

If commercial fronts and signage are framed within the main architectural components of the building's elevation and respect its character, then variety in frontage treatments with differing window design, fascia board, and stall riser height can also add to the visual interest of the area.

#### **4. Car Parking**

It is evident that the general area of the town centre conservation area is a substantial generator of both shopper and business traffic. The adverse impacts of saturation car parking which encroach into rear yards and all available land surrounding individual properties car considerable and need addressing. There should be a presumption against ad hoc parking, and encouragement should be given to make full use of public car parks.

#### **5. New Materials**

The use of new elevational elements and materials can have an interesting effect on building elevations and often determine whether a new frontage or sign fits into the existing façade, or dominates and disrupts it. The colour, pattern and texture of materials in many cases make the difference between success and failure in any design. The use of modern materials that are brightly coloured or strongly moulded are rarely appropriate. Materials which contrast with traditional materials used in older buildings should also be avoided.

Where security is of concern, laminated glass should be used as a first option. Roller shutters will only be acceptable where they are made of wood, or where they are perforated/lattice in design. Aluminium security shutters should preferably be located internally between the window and the display, and painted to compliment the shop façade. Shutter boxes must be concealed within the elevation and guide rails recessed into window reveals. Projecting shutter boxes will not be permitted.

#### **6. Advertisements & Signs**

Both advertisements and signs have a significant effect on visual amenity. The number and type of signs and their degree of illumination all affect the appearance of the building. The proportions of a sign must relate to the elevation on which it is mounted. Visual dominance caused by an overly large sign can disturb the balance of an elevation and the relationship of one building with another.

The amount of information on a sign and number of advertisements on individual premises should be strictly limited to avoid clutter and confusion. Illumination must also be carefully dealt with. Lighting brackets or wash lighting will be considered more acceptable than internally illuminated fascia signs.

While hand painted signs are preferable signs consisting of halo illuminated individual letters on an opaque or solid

background will normally be acceptable. With hand painting, gold leaf or light colour applied to a dark background will reflect light and can be more easily read.

Signs on brickwork and stonework are most satisfactory when individual wall mounted letters of appropriate height, colour and style are used. If such letters are backlit, a three dimensional effect is created.

As a general rule, advertising signs will not be permitted above ground floor level unless relating to the use of upper floors. On upper floors, gold leaf or black lettering applied directly to windowpanes is effective. Where signs concerning uses on upper floors are required, the Borough Council would encourage the use of nameplates at the entrance door. In circumstances of multiple use, all occupants should use a standard size and shape of nameplate.