

# Understanding Shared Places

**Making the right decisions about conservation areas depends on expert knowledge and understanding of the particular qualities that make them special.**

There are more than 9,300 conservation areas in England covering town and city centres, suburbs, industrial areas, rural landscapes, villages, cemeteries and residential areas. Their designation by local authorities is an explicit acknowledgement of their cultural significance and a positive commitment to actively managing their future. Designation is not intended to prevent adaptation or change, but to ensure that when new development is planned it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area. That test – of preservation or enhancement – is enshrined in legislation. *Preserve* means to maintain the existing character, and *enhance* to reinforce the qualities which warranted the original designation of the area.

So if the right decisions are to be made, it is essential that they are underpinned by expert knowledge and understanding of the particular qualities which make an area special. Our *Conservation Principles* have a vital role to play by providing a framework of cultural values against which an area can be evaluated, and the potential impact of change assessed before decisions are made. We will only get the right buildings in the right places if they emerge from a fundamental understanding of their context. But knowledge and understanding must be nurtured.

Henry Tzu-Ng and Jonathan Foyle offer a fascinating international perspective through the prism of the World Monuments Fund. Closer to home, Joanna Smith explains how characterisation and historic area assessments can be deployed to aid understanding; Mike Brown looks at the identification of character at local level through local lists and village design statements; and Jenifer White reveals new approaches to the conservation of historic landscapes by quantifying the economic value of trees in historic areas. Finally, Lucian Cook provides powerful evidence that by protecting local character conservation areas are key to maintaining economic value. ■

## **Conservation areas in China: the case of the Juanqinzhai in Beijing**

Henry Tzu-Ng, *Vice-President, World Monuments Fund*  
Jonathan Foyle, *CEO, World Monuments Fund Britain*

*Conservation areas are gaining currency in Asia through the dialogue of East and West. While the concept of conservation areas more routinely relates to the natural world, Unesco's World Heritage Sites have done much to establish common values and standards across the globe for both natural and built sites. During the last 25 years, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage has come to identify zones worthy of coherent protection, with impressive case-studies such as Pondicherry, spurred on by the late Françoise l'Hernault (1937–99) of the Ecole française d'Extrême Orient. Recently, the Getty Conservation Institute facilitated the China Principles, which sought to formulate best practice in conserving the country's cultural sites and augment the role of ICOMOS China. Since the first workshop in February 1998, Chinese delegates have visited conservation areas in Australia and New Mexico as case studies, emphasising the importance of combining Eastern and Western cultural perspectives.*

*World Monuments Fund (WMF) is a key partner in global conservation. WMF was created in 1965: its first affiliate office in the UK was set up in 1995. WMF works to secure the future of cultural sites through partnership building, using conservation to generate the social and economic benefits upon which sustainable care depends. WMF has worked in 156 countries, but one of its notable recent successes is in China: the Juanqinzhai, or Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service, in the Forbidden City at the heart of Beijing, overseen by Henry Tzu-Ng.*

In sharp contrast to the upheaval in the Western world during the later 18th century, China endured as the world's largest, richest and most stable kingdom under the rule of that century's longest-reigning monarch, the Emperor Qianlong. His 60-year reign (1736–95) was essentially a last flowering – a period of peace and prosperity that China would not experience again for another 200 years.

Qianlong's most personal project was his long-anticipated *Ningshougong* – an extravagant retirement area that he created between 1771 and 1776 on 4.9 hectares (12 acres) of the Forbidden City's 73 hectares (180 acres) in the North-East quadrant of the imperial complex.

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The *Ningshougong* largely mimicked the Forbidden City with a central axis of large-scale ceremonial buildings, a rear section with private quarters as well as separate areas for recreation and leisure. Various sections of the complex, most of which survives, have been open to the public as exhibition galleries. One section of this retirement complex, however, remained mostly hidden away – the private garden that the emperor designed for himself.

The garden covers nearly a hectare (2 acres) and has 27 buildings and structures strewn over 4 courtyards as well as some of China's most elaborate rockeries and grottoes. Its significance stems from the provenance of its design, the extravagance of its execution and the fact that the garden and the exquisite interiors of its buildings remained relatively unchanged throughout its 200-year history.

Qianlong issued an imperial edict that ordered that his new district should remain as a retirement district for emperors: effectively, it was designed as a conservation area. The intact site was revealed only a decade ago when the Forbidden City (the Palace Museum) and WMF agreed to form an international collaboration. The first of the garden's 27 buildings, the exquisite *Juanqinzhai* (Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service), lined with painted silk, was conserved from 2002 to 2008, and the approach set the template for conservation of the garden's remaining buildings, rockeries, and courtyards to be completed over the next decade.

Both the high quality of the original design and construction, and its unique survival framed the central conservation challenges to the site, which were twofold: the first was how to develop the approach and methodologies to conserve a complex of historic buildings and interiors when the traditional craftsmanship and many materials used in its original construction 230 years earlier – and which represented the highest imperial quality and extravagance of its time – were no longer readily available in modern China; and the second was how to marry traditional Chinese craftsmanship with modern conservation methods.

The field of modern conservation science as we know it in the West was largely developed only in the past quarter to half a century. During that time China was isolated from much of the international community at all levels and was absent from advances in the conservation field. Meeting the first challenge required partnerships to be built within China's traditional artisan community throughout the country, and meeting the second challenge required partnerships with international



Beijing: the exquisite *Juanqinzhai* (Studio of Exhaustion from Diligent Service) was the first building in the Emperor Qianlong's magnificent retirement garden to be restored in a joint partnership between the Palace Museum and World Monuments Fund.

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conservation resources. The solution for this elite example could provide a model for the planning issues and technical approaches to emerging conservation areas throughout China.

When conservation work began in 2002, the Palace Museum and WMF announced the project in an international press release that highlighted the need to find artisans who still practised some of the exotic decorative techniques used in the construction of the *Juanqinzhai*, such as mulberry-bark paper work, inner-skin bamboo carving and



Conservation of the sumptuous and intricate interiors of the *Juanqinzhai* depended on finding artisans who still practised some of the exotic decorative techniques used in its original construction. © WMF



Mural painting of a crane in the theatre room of the *Juanqinzhai* – a key challenge for the restoration project was how to marry traditional Chinese craftsmanship with modern conservation methods. © WMF

double-sided embroidery for freestanding screens.

After a long search, practitioners of these traditional crafts were located in many of the same provinces that provided the original works to the Qianlong court more than 200 years ago. Zhejiang province is still the centre of fine bamboo and woodcarving; Nanjing and Suzhou remain centres for traditional brocade and embroidery and were the sources of the original textiles made for the Forbidden City during the centuries. These new working relations with artisans from remote provinces have provided a fresh source of fine traditional craftsmanship that the Palace Museum can apply to the site as a whole: the interiors of the remaining 26 buildings in the Qianlong Garden, and into the broader conservation field in China.

Partnerships in the area of modern conservation approaches and science were largely formed with institutions and experts in the US as a result of a technical mission that WMF sponsored for the Palace Museum to see how US museums handled conservation and interpretation of Chinese artefacts. The Palace Museum, as the national museum of China, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research and Education, and secured the cooperation of both Shin Maekawa of the Getty Conservation Institute in the area of climate control and Nancy Berliner, the Curator of Chinese Art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem Massachusetts, in the area of site interpretation.

But partnerships are, by definition, two-sided. Every specialist from the West who has worked on the Qianlong Garden has walked away deeply enriched professionally through experiencing materials and methods that they had not known about before, and has come to better understand traditional architectural craftsmanship in a country that was inaccessible to the West for most of the last century. The opportunity to work on cultural artefacts and historic architecture *in situ* greatly added to the professional knowledge they may have obtained through selected objects in foreign museum collections, and offers fresh considerations for our approach to both the entirety and elements of conservation areas closer to home. ■

### Approaches to assessing areas

Joanna Smith

*Senior Architectural Investigator, English Heritage*

Central to the concept of conservation areas is the idea that particular places can have special historic or architectural interest. But how can this ‘special interest’ be assessed? In its guidance on conservation area appraisals (CAAs) English Heritage advocates using the approaches often grouped under the term ‘characterisation’: that is the mapping, describing, analysing and understanding of the existing townscape or landscape character (English Heritage 2006). Developed to serve a broad range of purposes, the various methods enable historic landscapes to be studied at different scales and resolutions, from large areas described in broad terms to detailed analyses of specific localities. Each approach shares common techniques, such as the utilisation of historic maps, but there are also differences. Some focus on synthesising existing data while others combine the interpretation of information sources with observation on the ground. The presentation of results can also vary: for some methods GIS is the most appropriate means of dissemination, while for others, an illustrated synthesised report is most suitable.

The broadest approach is historic landscape characterisation, which seeks to define the distinctive historic and archaeological character of landscape over substantial areas, typically at the level of a whole county (Clarke 2004). This essentially desk-based approach identifies broad variations in historic character. While it can provide the wider context for a conservation area and may be helpful in defining boundaries, it cannot really address questions of value and significance. However,

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historic characterisation techniques can be applied to smaller areas, including towns and cities, such as the Lincolnshire Townscape Assessment. It can also be used to assess below-ground remains and is therefore relevant to the components of CAAs that address archaeological potential. But the method that has the greatest relevance for conservation areas is historic area assessment (HAA). This aims to understand and explain the character of a discrete area or neighbourhood such as a suburb, a small town or a village. In order to do this, it addresses historical and architectural development as well as factors such as distinctiveness, significance and the integrity of the historic environment.

An area-based approach to understanding has many precedents, including the well-established *Survey of London* parish volume series. But in recent years assessing the significance of historic areas has become increasingly important as a means of guiding and informing change in the built environment. Major planning and regeneration proposals such as the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, as well as significant development pressures on nationally important urban areas and the metropolitan city fringe, have had a key role in stimulating the development of techniques such as HAAs. This has resulted in a number of area studies, including Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter (Cattell and Hawkins 2000), Anfield and Breckfield, Liverpool (Menuge 2008) and South Shoreditch, London (Rogers and Smith 2007). Additionally, the historic landscape characterisation of the Thames Gateway, undertaken in 2001, has been supplemented with area assessments of Queenborough, Kent and East Tilbury, Essex.

These assessments all provide a summary of how and why the areas developed, discuss the range of buildings types, dates and forms and identify their distinctive characteristics, including, where appropriate, the definition of smaller character areas. Their findings are derived from a combination of field observation, including, in some instances, internal inspection of certain buildings, and documentary research, encompassing historic maps and photographs, planning records and published sources. The experience gained on these projects has enabled the methodology of area assessments to be refined. For example, because HAAs need to be both timely and at an appropriate resolution, three levels of assessment have been devised. These range from quick outlines to detailed studies, as time constraints, resources and the complexity of the subject area dictate.

In their aims and methods there is much

common ground between HAAs and CAAs. Both are likely to incorporate elements of spatial analysis, given the increased importance attached to the skyline and views, to assess the physical and economic state of the historic environment and to note the problems and pressures to which it is subject. The significance of particular places, uses or features will also have been considered. But a CAA has a specific role to play in protecting and controlling the area's character, is tailored towards specific management needs and may result in further detailed guidance, whereas area assessments can be undertaken for many reasons, perhaps in response to planning or infrastructure projects, as an audit of the historic environment or for academic or educational study, and can be proactive as well as reactive. Furthermore, the technique can be applied to sizeable areas, much larger than that of most conservation areas, and can therefore be extended to relatively uncharted 'ordinary landscapes'.

There are a number of ways in which conservation areas can benefit from area assessments. One of the aims of an assessment might be to determine the potential for enhanced or new designation of buildings, landscapes or areas. With established



A team from English Heritage's Architectural Investigation Unit carrying out a historic area assessment of central Peckham, London Borough of Southwark, in 2008-9. This was done partly to assess the area's potential for designation as a conservation area. Derek Kendall © English Heritage

Manningham, Bradford, a once-declining urban district contains five conservation areas. Their regeneration is benefiting from historic area assessment – a powerful method for understanding and explaining the character of a neighbourhood, whether it be in the heart of a city, small town or village.  
© English Heritage



conservation areas, assessments can contribute to the refining of the boundaries and assist in framing supplementary planning documentation, as proved to be the case with the Birmingham and South Shoreditch studies (Cattell and Hawkins 2000; Rogers and Smith 2007) More broadly, the understanding contained within an assessment, which may include the discussion of regional, or even national, context as well as information on individual buildings, can be used to inform a new CAA or to amplify an existing one. And by elucidating how the built environment of an area has developed and what now constitutes its most significant elements, an HAA can contribute some answers to that essential question: what is the special interest? ■

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**Identifying and understanding local heritage**

Mike Brown

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While the protection of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments is well established in the minds of the public and benefits from the expertise of the national agencies, the position with local heritage is less certain and its identification and protection varies considerably. The commitment of differing local authorities to their local heritage together with the degree of pride and activism of local people are important determinants in this regard. I am fortunate to work for a borough where strong support from local councillors for local heritage and vocal local amenity groups co-exist. The clamour for new conservation areas is a direct result. In this context we have developed a structured approach to identifying and understanding the area's local heritage and, derived from this, carefully prioritised and resourced proposals for their preservation and enhancement.

**Local development frameworks**

All core strategy policies must meet demonstrated local need and not repeat national or regional policies. A well-researched evidence base for each policy is essential if it is to be upheld at the 'independent examination in public'. This is as true for heritage policies as any other. We therefore

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commissioned a borough-wide characterisation study to identify the character and relative merits of areas. We then commissioned a series of conservation area character appraisals. Together these formed a substantial body of evidence, not just of what we aim to protect but also what might potentially be designated in future. We then developed and consulted on Section 71 management proposals for each conservation area and have designated four new conservation areas.

### Local list

We have a list of buildings of local architectural or historic interest that stems from the removal from the national list of many Grade III buildings during the Greater London Council survey carried out in the 1980s. There have been a number of additions since then, the criteria for selection being a watered-down version of the then-English-Heritage criteria for selection for the national list. We are presently engaged with English Heritage in developing a pilot for a new set of criteria for selecting local heritage assets. The definition of 'local heritage asset' will expand to mirror the national unified list detailed in the delayed Heritage Protection Bill.

Of course local heritage assets will not enjoy the protection that national assets do. The wording of core strategy policies will be vital if we are to improve on the present, weak position under Section 6.16 of Planning and Policy Guidance Note 15. The draft new Planning Policy Statement 15 and supporting English Heritage guidance (out to consultation at the time of writing) would benefit from being more explicit about how local authorities should seek to preserve and enhance locally listed heritage assets. It has long seemed to me an extraordinary anomaly that a modest building within a conservation area (a local designation of local heritage special interest, let us remember) is much better protected than a perhaps superior building on the local list. Further, Section 6.16 allows for local policies to protect buildings on a local list from adverse change (eg plastic windows) but no local planning authority under its normal powers can prevent the building being demolished! Clearer thinking about local heritage is urgently needed.

### Article 4 Directions

With the strong support of our cabinet member Article 4 (2) Directions have been made for each of our residential conservation areas. These have the power to remove the kind of permitted develop-



Abbotshall Avenue, Enfield – an example of a locally listed modern building that adds significant value to its neighbourhood. © Enfield Council

ment rights normally exercisable by householders to extend and alter roofs, add porches, knock down boundaries to facilitate off-street parking and replace doors and windows – all the things that cumulatively are eroding the special architectural character of much of urban and suburban England. However, most local authorities are deeply wary of introducing Article 4s; there is anxiety that they will dramatically increase development control workloads and it is feared they will open up an avalanche of compensation claims from aggrieved householders – who, lest we forget, vote. Happily, I can report that none of this has ensued; Article 4s appear largely self-regulating. There has been no substantial increase in casework – residents respond well to advice on the most sustainable products to use and a flexible customer-friendly approach – and, in line with the historic evidence from across the country, there have been no claims for compensation. Only a tiny minority objected to their 'loss of freedom' (there are always some) – the huge majority embraced enthusiastically the new controls to protect their area. Fired with this I am now instructed to seek the Secretary of State's approval for an Article 4 (1) Direction – this time to control photo-voltaic and solar panels on street-facing roofs within conservation areas, a dismal relaxation allowed under the General Permitted Development Order Amendment 2 of October 2008 (the regulation having been introduced in only the previous April!). Again a flexible approach will be taken to administering this new direction



The Town, Enfield – Enfield Council and English Heritage are developing a pilot for a new set of criteria for selecting local heritage assets. © Enfield Council

that balances the needs of both heritage and the planet to produce a sustainable solution.

### The future for local heritage

The move from development control to development management is now well under way and conservation has a leading role to play in this evolution. We have long-since understood the inevitability of change (if only as entropy and rot!) and our role as change managers. For local heritage, the challenge will be to carry the day with too few planning powers. We will have to be persuasive, flexible and have garnered around us public and political support. Perhaps the delays in bringing forward the Heritage Protection Bill will afford a further opportunity to press further for some of the more obvious reforms:

- the same level of protection from demolition for locally listed buildings as those within conservation areas
- automatic removal of permitted-development rights upon designation of conservation areas or addition to a local list
- requiring local planning authorities when exercising their planning functions to be mindful of the need to preserve *and* enhance (rather than the present preserve *or* enhance)

- requiring applicants to submit a statement on the heritage merits of the asset and detailing the steps taken with the proposal to avoid harm (included on the draft Planning Policy Statement)
- greater support for local amenity societies.

The challenge for the protection of local heritage is ever present. Let us hope that the groundswell of public support for local heritage can be heard in Westminster. ■

### Protecting landscapes through conservation areas

Jenifer White

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Among the conservation areas marking their 40th anniversary is the New Walk in Leicester. Laid out in 1785, this tree-lined promenade is a rare survivor. It is interesting that one of the earliest conservation areas was actually a designed landscape. The New Walk is also registered as a park and garden of special historic interest.

Even though there are other conservation areas like New Walk, the argument that conservation-area designation is not appropriate for parks and gardens has rumbled on for more than 10 years (Dingwall and Lambert 1997). The character of many conservation areas is shaped by open spaces and trees. Planning and Policy Guidance Note 15 clearly stated that historic parks and gardens should be treated as an exception in conservation-area designation, and English Heritage's guidance endorses this approach. By 2008, more than 70 per cent of registered sites were covered to some extent by conservation areas (Lambert and Lovie 2006) but relatively few, and especially rural sites, are protected in their entirety this way. Some councils, like those in Norfolk, have used conservation areas for all registered landscapes, urban or rural. In contrast to the national Register, which does not confer any restrictions, conservation areas offer valuable controls to help preserve or enhance features such as garden structures and trees, and stop inappropriate new developments and tree works. The new draft Planning Policy Statement 15 guidance encourages the use of Article 4 Directions for parks and gardens.

There are many more designed landscapes that are of local significance and importance for a host of reasons. As a nation of gardeners, it is perhaps surprising that we do not have a more

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comprehensive appraisal of our local green heritage. The county gardens trusts play an important role in raising awareness of this heritage. Their Parks and Gardens UK project ([www.parksandgardens.ac.uk](http://www.parksandgardens.ac.uk)) aims to be the authoritative database. The database is still very much 'work in progress' but there are already more than 6,500 records and the project is developing links with the Heritage Gateway and local Historic Environment Records. Trusts such as Hampshire have a long record of working with communities and owners on landscape management, research and projects. The London Parks & Gardens Trust has been championing the capital's garden-square heritage through its highly successful annual Open Garden Squares Weekend ([www.opensquares.org](http://www.opensquares.org)) and is keen to share its know-how to help other communities set up similar events.

Some street and garden trees are legacies from former landscapes. Such trees have biodiversity value as well as historic interest. Curiously the veteran trees rarely get any special recognition or care even though they are the most venerable of urban citizens. They often fall foul of the exemptions for Tree Preservation Orders. The Woodland Trust and partners are campaigning to raise awareness of our tree heritage and compiling an inventory funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund ([www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk](http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk)).

One of the threats to conservation areas identified in Heritage at Risk 2009 are problems in green spaces. From now on, street trees and urban green spaces will play an increasingly important role in tempering the effects of climate change by improving air quality, providing shade and reducing water run-off. At exactly the time we should be allowing trees to mature to reap their full benefits, London councils felled almost 40,000 street trees between 2002 and 2007, including some that were more than 100 years old. Many were removed because of insurance claims but only 1 per cent of the fellings were justified. The net effect is that London has seen its tree-scape change from large long-lived forest species like London Plane to smaller, short-lived trees like silver birches and flowering cherries. Tree officers around the country report similar trends. And on top of such issues, the government's *Trees in Towns II* (Britt and Johnston 2008) highlights that many local authorities lacked basic information about their trees, and staff, budgets, strategies and management systems did not match needs.

Character statements like that prepared for the Leicester's New Walk highlight some of these issues. *Ad hoc* planting and a variety of species with



Queen Square, Bristol – this important civic square with attractive tree-lined walks was recently restored with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

© English Heritage.NMR

different forms and life-spans have changed the designated area's character. Similarly Nottingham City Council's Forest Grove appraisal focused attention on the problem of perpetuating the tree-scape when gardens are neglected or abandoned, and trees are removed because they are causing structural damage or are just in poor physical condition.

Attitudes to trees and green spaces are being challenged by new evaluation techniques. Street trees should be seen as valued between £8,000 and £12,000 and exceptional veterans – like the Berkeley Square planes – as £750,000 each (Neilan 2008). Councils generally assume their parks are only worth a nominal £1, but CABE recently reassessed the value of Liverpool's Sefton Park at £105 million (CABE 2009), and properties in Queen Square, Bristol, another conservation area, are 16 per cent higher than comparable ones because of its green infrastructure (Trees and Design Action Group nd). Such figures do not even include benefits such as climate-change mitigation. The multidisciplinary Trees and Design Action Group is working to improve guidance on urban trees. These initiatives could be used to push for better management of conservation areas.

With the new Planning Policy Statement out for consultation, it would be timely to review the relationship between conservation areas, gardens and parks, and the controls and tools. As well as



Victoria Park was developed by the Leicester Corporation in 1883 as an extension to the city's New Walk. The large trees create a shady canopy for promenading, an activity perhaps to be rediscovered as climate changes? © English Heritage.NMR

being of historic interest landscapes are important in defining conservation area character, and have a vital role to play as the climate changes. ■

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**The economic value of conservation areas**

Lucian Cook  
Savills L&P Ltd

Pick up any set of estate agents' particulars for a 'desirable character property' and the dwelling's listed status will feature prominently as a cast-iron endorsement of its heritage credentials. Yet it would be far more typical to find reference to a property being located in a conservation area hidden somewhere in the small print.

At the risk of alienating the reader, it is worth noting that for many prospective home-buyers the term 'conservation' conjures unwelcome images of unduly restrictive planning policy and interference from officious local government employees. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that many in the industry do not see a conservation-area designation as a major selling point.

It would therefore be easy to dismiss the potentially positive effect that being within a conservation area has on house prices. The hard facts tell a rather a different story.

Whatever the connotations of the designation, our research shows that the quality of the built environment of an area – which conservation areas essentially seek to protect – can dramatically affect the value of house prices in the surrounding area. This goes some way to quantifying how, as a society, we value the heritage qualities of the built environment in which we live.

In the absence of house-price data specific to conservation areas, the number of listed buildings relative to the number of dwellings at a postcode-sector level gives us the most reliable assessment of the quality of the built environment within areas for which we can accurately determine average house prices. This enabled Savills' research department to look at the relationship between the density of listed buildings and the average house price as part of a commissioned project last year.

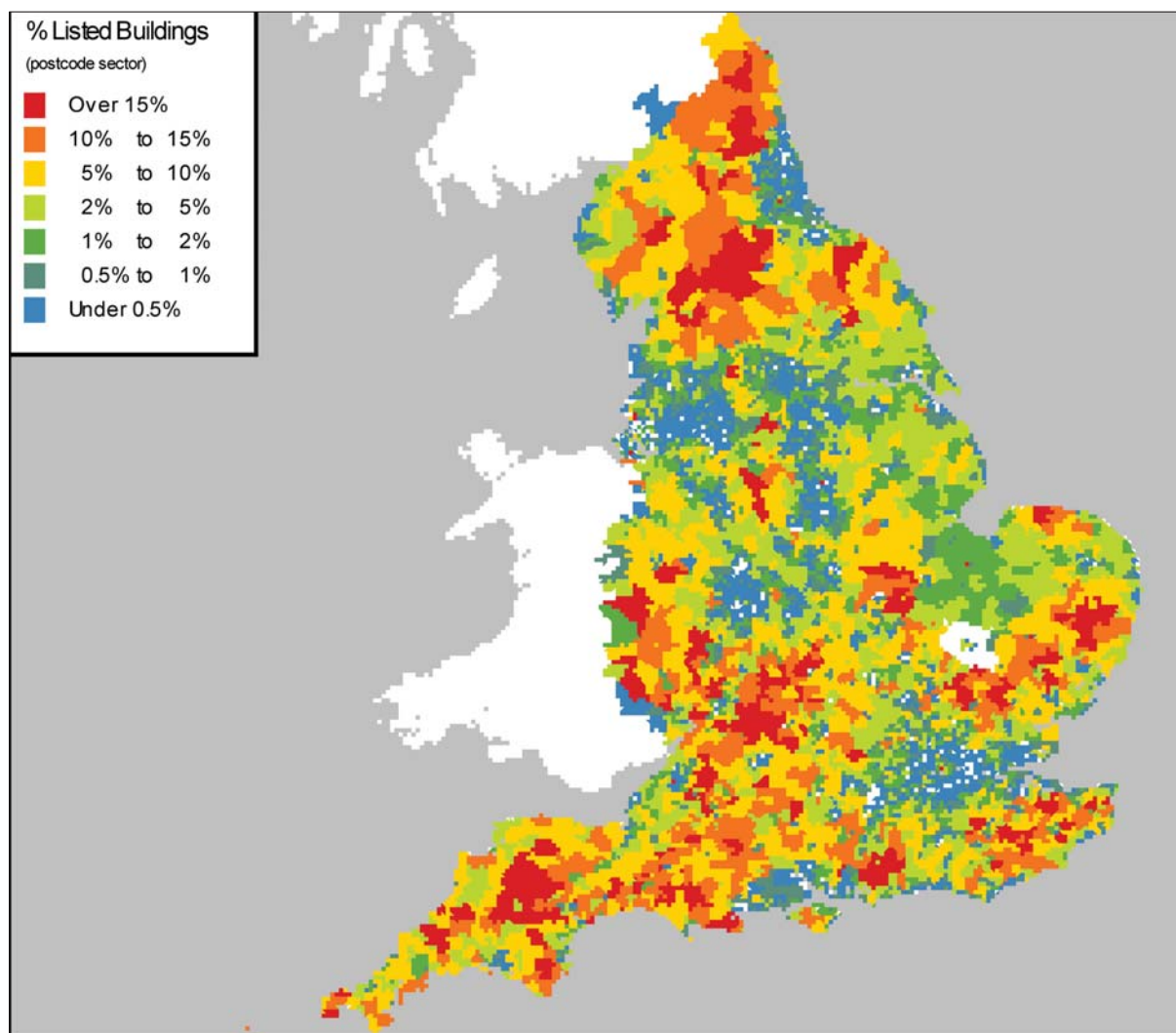
This analysis told us that only 6.6 per cent of all locations had more than 1 listed building for every 10 dwellings. More interestingly, it told us that within these areas prices were on average 29 per cent higher than those of the local authority in which they were located. Not only that, but it demonstrated that there was a correlation between listed-building density and prices even at lower densities.

When we produced the statistics we were keen to point out that this was not the premium that listed-building status conferred, but instead was the house-price premium that areas with a rich architectural heritage could command.

To put this in simple terms, the architectural credentials of an individual dwelling mean very little if the property looks out over a 1960s' multi-storey car park. By contrast, a reasonably sympathetically designed modern dwelling located within an area that has retained a sense of place by virtue of the quality of its overriding built heritage will in all likelihood carry a significant premium over the same dwelling within a modern housing estate.

It should then come as no surprise that within

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Some post code areas have much higher proportions of listed buildings than others – and as a consequence higher average house prices. © Savills

the spa towns of England and Wales, including Bath, Cheltenham, Buxton and Harrogate, prices are 26 per cent higher than the average for their county. Furthermore, within the other trophy towns of England and Wales – such as Marlborough, Petworth, Chipping Camden and Henley-in-Arden – there is one listed dwelling for every seven properties on average. Here, again, house prices are 27 per cent higher than the average for their local authority.

In London the effect is magnified. In areas where there is more than 1 listed building for every 20 households average prices are as much as 54 per cent more than the average for the borough. London is, of course, an extreme – a world city not necessarily representative of the rest of Britain.

It is useful, therefore, to look at a different case study to see how built heritage can influence prices at a localised level within a single conurbation. For

the purposes of this article, the city of Winchester would seem a reasonable example, not least because it is a city I know well and can comment upon with some confidence, as I live just five miles away.

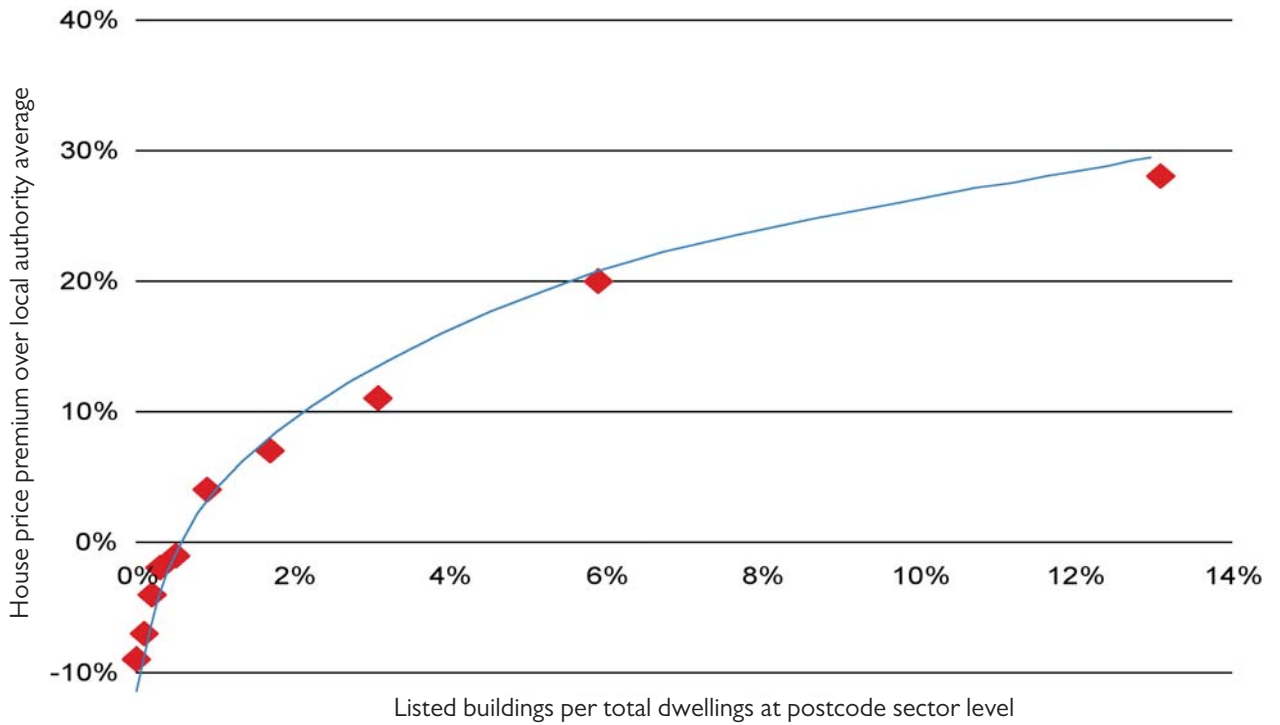
Here within the postcode sector SO23 9–, which comprises the residential streets surrounding the cathedral and the district of St Cross, house prices are 32 per cent higher than the average for the city. The bulk of the properties are within a conservation-area designation and there is 1 listed building for each 10 houses.

Our analysis of the prime property market indicates that during the downturn, prices of property that can be described as best in class – by virtue of their location, setting, architectural appeal and standard of accommodation – were much less affected than the merely average or, even worse, blighted property. Whereas best in class had fallen by 11.8 per cent by April 2009, average properties had

witnessed price falls of 17.9 per cent. The same principle applies to prime areas, with agents in Winchester reporting that prices have suffered less in the high-value conservation areas of the city during the acute downturn of 2008 and the early part of 2009.

Perhaps, then, the time has come to talk more widely about the inherent value of conservation

areas. While the designations in themselves do not create value, their role in protecting the character of an area is key to maintaining value. Conservation-area status may not be at the forefront of estates agents' marketing campaigns, but even they acknowledge the benefit of maintaining the quality of our built environment. ■



Throughout England there is a direct relationship between average local house prices and the percentage of listed properties in the building stock. © Savills (using Land Registry and English Heritage data)