

Conservation of the built environment: an assessment of values in urban planning

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Edward Hobson

Department of Town and Regional Planning
University of Sheffield

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Summary

The ethos and practical application of conservation has evolved from a concern with preserving isolated fragments of archaeological importance to enhancing the general urban fabric through land use planning. Responding to successive threats and pressures for change has furnished professional practice with a cumulative accretion of justificatory principles and values which are often taken as self-evident norms supporting the formation and application of policy. While some perceive this as a strength, others highlight the weakness engendered by such a diverse and potentially contradictory set of values.

It is the exposition of these underlying tensions which forms the basis for this thesis. Approaching the study of conservation planning holistically, a conceptual framework of ten themes was developed from the existing literature to provide both a theoretical and a practical strategy with which to analyse the subject. A two-tier empirical study explored the value directions underlying the national policy climate and those manifest in the practical implementation of conservation in two local planning authorities' practice.

The findings challenge many of the assumptions supporting conservation. There is cogent evidence to suggest that conservation is suffering marginalisation in planning, through professional attitudes, procedural emphases and a lack of strategic support for conservation's added value. These perceptions are influenced by the interpretation of value in the built environment, whereby the recognition of environmental and cultural context remains under-developed against a concentration on valuing independent artefacts. Furthermore, whilst relying on widespread popular support for conservation, this focus divorces conservation from lay perceptions of broader environmental value. Such a relatively exclusive practice may have undermined active political support for conservation. Ironically at a time when national policy emphasises conservation's contribution to sustainability and urban regeneration, the practical exclusivity of conservation may actually hamper realising its wider potential.

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Glossary

CABE	Commission for Architecture and Built Environment
CAPS	Conservation Area Partnership Scheme
CUD	Conservation & Urban Design
DC	Development Control
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sports
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DNH	Department of National Heritage
DOE	Department of the Environment
EH	English Heritage
EHTF	English Historic Towns Forum
GPDO	General Permitted Development Order
HERS	Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
LPA	Local Planning Authority
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MTCP	Ministry of Town and Country Planning
NAS	National Amenity Societies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PPG15	Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment
RTPI	Royal Town Planning Institute
SPAB	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
TCRA	Town Centre Residents' Association
UDP	Unitary Development Plan

Preface

The reasons for starting a PhD may vary significantly but the effort for continuing and completing it, other than dogged persistence, depends on a strong personal interest in the subject. Unfortunately the fervour of this motivation may affect the requisite neutrality of the social scientist, which is why I felt it necessary to make this explicit at the outset of the academic process.

Four years ago, this research project constituted a blank piece of paper. I had no specific ideas about what I was going to study or how this would be achievable. Indeed the original dimensions and orientation of study were totally unrealistic and in effect comprised three or four separate theses. However whilst a definite research proposal remained intangible, my own interest in conservation lent this blank piece of paper a certain coloration and watermark reflecting my personal opinions and experiences. I hope to have conducted this thesis as objectively as possible, but it is impossible to exclude bias in research work. It is therefore essential to acknowledge and identify the potential influence of latent interests.

In terms of a personal interest in conservation, as opposed to any other subject, I find the past a fascinating realm. Casting an eye over my formative years, as an only child I was more subject to my parents' interests without the distraction of siblings. Weekends were sometimes an endless procession of antique fairs and shops: once my mother became a life member of the National Trust, holidays were even more an intensive educational experience! Fortunately these were at least preferable to garden centres and over time a little acorn of interest grew regarding relics of the past and the history associated with them. I remember two unrelated childhood experiences which in retrospect quite deftly illustrate my interest and fascination for this subject.

Visiting Beamish Open Air Museum in County Durham, it was evident that the buildings had been moved from their original locations and reconstructed to resemble turn of the century shops, houses and so on. However when on a tour of the 'colliery area' and standing before the opening to a supposed driftmine, we discovered that our guide, in his late sixties, with 'coal' blackened face and overalls, was not an actor, like other employees, but had himself been a deep pit miner locally. He had been made redundant with the mines' closure, though we were

hearing his real life experiences of the mining community as if this was part of suspended reality of stepping back to the turn of the century. At the time I couldn't correlate his real life experience with its presentation outside reality, as something relegated to history.

Once I accompanied my mother, then co-ordinator of the Clwyd Historic Buildings Survey, on a site visit to Nantclwyd House, a vacant and neglected grade I listed building in Ruthin. The earliest section of this hallhouse had been dated c.1415 and had seen a variety of owners, later passing to the influential land-owning Wynne dynasty in 1721 in whose family it remained until the twentieth century; it was later purchased by the County Council in 1984. Whilst presenting an impressively aged elevation, the house was empty and bore the traces of various occupants' tastes in decor and unsympathetic additions. If the National Trust had opened this property no doubt the fabric, structure and the historical narrative would all be in good order. However this eclectic mix throughout the house of exposed wattle and daub plasterwork, seventeenth century graffiti, labyrinthine Victorian pantries and outbuildings, seemingly ubiquitous 1930s 'battleship blue' paintwork and a brutal 1960s red-brick fireplace were all linked by the people who had made this building their home. It created a historical prism refracting the light of the present, exposing your fleeting involvement in this longer cultural evolution. Without the unpleasant realisation of mortality, it offered a window of spatial and temporal orientation by reference to the limits of your own lifetime.

The ardour of these memories - connecting experience, space and time - definitely fuelled my desire to attempt this thesis. However this appears to be some way from planning - their fascination for me would have suggested studying history: instead I chose to read Law at university!

During my law degree, I became increasingly aware of a disparity between the courts' interpretations of legal precedent, statute and caselaw and the practical effect of these decisions to resolve larger conflicts. This seemed more acute in one particular sphere, Planning and Environment Law, where established legal concepts - such as property, private ownership, causality - and practical measures - proof, enforcement, redress - were struggling to address the social, economic, political and ethical issues raised by emerging environmental problems. In considering whether this was creating a new branch of law, or simply applying existing concepts to a new situation, it questioned the law's relevance. It exposed the inadequacies of legal measures based on private property rights to uphold

concepts of equity and justice concerning the provision and control of public goods. This is a conflict in planning law succinctly highlighted by McAuslan (1975, 1980) whose work was prominent in the early development of ideas for a research proposal. This legal contrast, between private and public interest, offered a good starting point to pursue an unrequited passion, as a frustrated architect, to study the built environment.

Approaching the thesis from a legal perspective, a primary concern was the relationship between legislation and policy and the correlation between legal and planning concepts. As time progressed, the initial focus shifted along a line of implementation - from the intentions supporting legislation and court decisions, to policy statements, to the practical use of these measures. A fundamental question from this legal background concerned the contemporary relevance of the law on conservation. The legislative criteria for conservation's 'interest' were unchanged and unreviewed since their introduction, yet in policy terms conservation was being supported by far broader justifications. The focus moved considerably from addressing the scope of legislation, to its application within planning practice.

Hopefully this illustrates the main influences on my work. In writing this preface I am mindful of my own education, particularly having noted during the fieldwork that respondents' own training and background influenced their personal outlook and values. Whilst I have attempted to canvas a wide range of views, I am aware that I am continually 'looking in' at other professional cultures. I am neither a conservationist, an architect, a planner, a historian, nor a cultural geographer but I seem to cover all these disciplines in this thesis as well as attempting to appreciate the lay person's view. Whilst I could be criticised for not appreciating the issues involved in these separate fields, I hope my external vantage point provides some distance and neutrality in contributing a fresh perspective to the study of conservation.

Edward Hobson, Sheffield, 26th of June 2000

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Finally, I would also like to thank all the respondents who graciously devoted time and interest to realise this thesis, particularly the officers and Members in my two local planning authority case studies.

This thesis is dedicated to my Grandparents

Part I

'To be is to have been'

(Lowenthal 1985: xxv)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Societies' attitudes to the past encompass a curious mix of reverence and sanctity, abrogation and destruction. Despite being temporally over, the past is as mutable and indefinable as the contemporary circumstances in which its relics are received. Though we inherit a wealth of remains built in preceding centuries, their value remains an open realm for our construction.

Whilst conservation may appear anachronistic to a perpetually evolving urban form, it embodies a significant manifestation of cultural attitudes towards these changes. For instance, the eighteenth century practice of re-facing properties in the latest architectural style using brick, stone or render sought to disguise an outmoded timber construction. The motivation may have been aesthetic but was also a purposeful display of the owner's personal wealth and ability to match the dynamism of the town or city. In contrast, performing such an act on a historic building today would be decried as wanton vandalism by perhaps the same property-owning sections of society. A display of wealth now is the ability to step outside the pace of change and laud the old; ironically that 'original' eighteenth century, period property.

Although the conservation urge has arguably influenced the 'civilised' conscience over thousands of years, the state's involvement is a little over a century old in the UK. Even during that short time, attitudes towards the past have changed beyond recognition, reflecting broader cultural shifts. Conservation has become an established function in planning, attracting considerable public support, often reacting against increasingly rapid processes of urban renewal. The statutory mechanisms representing these concerns, listed buildings and conservation areas, are thus subject to a barrage of competing interests regarding the intrinsic quality of these features, surrounding environmental concerns, owners' needs and broader social expectations. The scale of concern relative to local or national interest and the attendant economic and political circumstances in which conservation confronts

development are further complications. Fundamentally the social weight behind conservation is vested in relatively few professionals, who bear a significant responsibility for mediating these conflicts both at practical and policy levels. Whilst their expertise is indispensable, their professional agenda is another filter on these cultural value-laden negotiations.

Conservation is not a single entity, nor does it comprise just one approach: arguably there is still no definitive purpose or conservation ethic (Worskett 1982; Larkham 1996). The cumulative range of policy justifications for conservation is incredibly diverse, reflecting the growth of practice. Antiquarian concerns with preserving the fabric of isolated artefacts for their didactic interest is certainly far removed from regeneration pressures to reinvent the role and uses of ageing buildings. While these potential justifications allow conservation to perform a variety of roles, they inevitably create a wealth of contradictory positions. It is this confusion at the heart of conservation which has led to criticisms of its burgeoning scope and potential restrictions. This thesis seeks to explore these conflicts by examining perceptions of the values and justifications underlying conservation practice. Though national conservation policy has become more centralised, the inherent discretion of British civil administration ensures that conservation remains as varied as the individuals interpreting it. Contrasts in value perception arise not only through the intrinsic diversity of conservation policy justifications but also through the nature of the system whereby different pressures and agendas impinge on local and national decision-making. It is therefore essential for the thesis to adopt a holistic approach in examining the values present in conservation.

1.2 Conserving the built environment

The processes, principles and practice of 'conservation' occur amongst a diversity of contrasting professional disciplines, from fine art to ecology. However in terms of definition and application, the various spheres in which conservation operates occlude, rather than highlight, a common approach. This thesis will examine one field in particular - conservation of the built environment. Though there are various qualitative differences between types of built environment, the study will focus predominantly on the urban environment as providing the most intense expression of the issues facing development and conservation.

In the UK, conserving the built environment is performed through statutory land use planning; generally through sensitive land use policies and specifically through separate consent systems relating to listed buildings and conservation areas. Although conservation is equally concerned with archaeology, this discipline is excluded from this thesis since it has a separate policy (PPG16) and legislative framework (Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979). Moreover the type of interest and the administration of these controls is quite distinct from that for listed buildings and conservation areas (Jewkes 1993; Pickard 1996).

Policy justifications

Whilst other sources provide a comprehensive account of the conservation framework (Mynors 1995; Pickard 1996; Ross 1995; Suddards 1996), a brief outline of its operation is required. Government conservation policy is stated in *'Planning and the Historic Environment: PPG15'* (DOE/DNH 1994). The justifications for conservation activity are broad and varied though only receive a brief exposition:

It is fundamental to the Government's policies for **environmental stewardship** that there should be effective protection for all aspects of the historic environment. The physical survivals of our past are to be valued and **protected for their own sake**, as a central part of our **cultural heritage** and our sense of **national identity**. They are an **irreplaceable record** which contributes, through formal education and in many other ways, to our **understanding of both the present and the past**. Their presence **adds to the quality of our lives**, enhancing the **familiar and cherished local scene** and sustaining the **sense of local distinctiveness** which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance and of towns, villages and countryside. The historic environment is also of immense importance for **leisure and recreation**. [author's emphasis]

(DOE/DNH 1994 para. 1.1)

Highlighting these justifications, conservation contributes to:

- environmental sustainability;
- maintaining relics' physical presence and visual appearance;
- a didactic role in education & understanding the past;
- the cultural significance of places' identity and distinctiveness;
- provide orientation and familiarity in the environment;
- leisure & recreation uses.

Though a wide range of justifications is appropriate, their diversity questions whether they are all of equal importance or whether there are certain imbalances, exclusions or even direct conflicts in their realisation. The practical relationship between conservation and planning is stated in paragraph 1.3:

We must ensure that the means are available to identify what is special in the historic environment; to define through the development plan system its capacity for change; and, when proposals for new development come forward, to assess their impact on the historic environment and give it full weight alongside other considerations.

(DOE/DNH 1994)

Following the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, partly in response to the emerging sustainability agenda (Brindley 1996), PPG1 (DOE 1987; DETR 1997) emphasises the development plan as the principal planning policy instrument to lead all local authorities' development decision making. To accompany this 'plan-led' system, Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) are published by central government to provide some coherence across local authorities in forming and implementing the policies contained in their respective development plans.

In replacing Circular 8/87 (DOE 1987), PPG15 responds to this change by stating conservation ought to be fully represented at all levels of the development plan (para 2.1 - 2.26). This may be a realisation of conservation's rightful place at the heart of planning (CBA 1966; Dobby 1975). However conflict and tension are equally evident between conservation and development interests (Cantell 1975; Mynors 1984). Despite listed building consent and conservation area consent policy being excluded from the development plan (PPG15 para 2.4) these form the principal control mechanisms to protect the historic environment.

Complementary systems

It has been suggested that the presence of a uniform legal system leads to a uniform operation of conservation activity (COI 1993). Certainly the two regimes of listed buildings and conservation areas utilise the same legislative criteria - '*special architectural or historic interest*'. Although the systems share this basis, there are intrinsic differences in the systems' operations which can impart different values in the consideration of this special interest (Shelbourn 1996).

Listed buildings

Listing buildings is an administrative process whereby structures are nationally surveyed and evaluated on the statutory criteria of 'special architectural or historic interest' (PPG15 para 3.3, 6.10). By receiving a grade - I, II* or II - a structure is identified as being of national interest (PPG15 para 6.16) and requires a special consent to be obtained prior to the execution of any works or alterations to the structure. Listed status is not an award or a prohibition on change, merely a recognition of features' special interest.

The identification of listed buildings is a centralised process, with English Heritage (EH) advising the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS). Ministerial approval is required to ensure a fair balancing of the public interest in protecting the building with the restrictions which listed status places on the owner of a listed property. Though there are different processes of listing - survey, schematic, spot - it is a rigorous process administered by civil servants and historic building experts. This rigour is to guarantee a relatively objective and neutral process of evaluation, outlined in PPG15 section 2. Recently EH admitted the need for greater public support for these abstract decisions and introduced public consultation in the decision to list post-war buildings (Cherry 1996).

In contrast, the control of changes by listed building consent is predominantly the responsibility of the local planning authority - though there are call-in powers and special provisions regarding consultation and notification (DETR/DCMS 1997) for the respective grades. Whilst the upkeep of listed buildings depends largely on their owners' co-operation, carrying out works in breach or in ignorance of a listed building consent is a criminal offence.

Conservation areas

Since their introduction in 1967 conservation areas have operated under the complete discretion of local planning authorities who have a duty:

...to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

(DOE/DNH 1994 para 4.1)

Unlike listing, there are no specific criteria or a recognised process to identify areal character, though PPG15 (para 4.4) and EH guidance (EH 1995a) do provide some direction. The intention behind the original legislation was to encourage planning authorities to recognise the distinctiveness of their own locality free from central

Government inhibition (Kennet 1972). There is no compulsion to designate conservation areas, simply to consider the potential of the area for protected status: similarly there is no requirement to implement preservation or enhancement strategies, merely to prepare them following conservation area designation (PPG15 para 4.3).

In comparison with listing, conservation area consent is much weaker. Following the Shimitsu decision, the consent only covers alterations so extensive as to constitute a near total demolition (Brainsby & Carter 1997). Though an Article 4 Direction may be approved locally narrowing or removing permitted development rights within conservation areas, relatively few have been implemented (Larkham & Chapman 1996).

1.3 Criticisms of conservation

Despite conservation's success in preventing demolition of buildings and becoming a component of mainstream planning, it has always attracted criticism. Recently that criticism has appeared more forceful, questioning the scope, processes and justifications of conservation.

The scope of protection control has increased both spatially and temporally, exceeding original intentions for its breadth. In 1967 there were approximately 100,000 listed buildings and it was estimated that a mere 1,250 conservation areas would suffice to protect all the important sites in the country (Larkham 1996). Latest figures indicate approximately half a million listed buildings and approaching 10,000 conservation areas (ETB/EH 1998) - around 5% of England's total building stock - are subject to some form of conservation control. Apart from creating administration problems not envisaged at the introduction of these systems, the sheer scale of this responsibility has questioned the desirability of conservation.

Listed buildings

Listing controls restrict property owners' development rights, inhibiting both private householders and commercial organisations alike from autonomously altering and using their buildings. In relation to domestic owners, who have traditionally supported conservation, it seems the restrictive application of these controls or the fastidiousness of their detail, for example specifying the correct colour for window

frames, has caused a counter-reaction amongst the traditional middle class support (Clark 1999; Corval 1995). A listed building is not necessarily an entirely desirable property but may in fact be seen as a liability (Rowland 1997). Despite listed building consent protecting buildings' quality, the mentality persists that an Englishman's home is his castle, over which the state ought reduce rather than increase its incursion (James 1994).

Before such potentially onerous restrictions are imposed, property owners may feel the merits of conservation designation require close scrutiny. Listing modern buildings has been criticised, as some feel this is inappropriate for conservation's attention (Bevan 1996). With buildings such as Park Hill estate in Sheffield recently being grade II listed, this presents a significant collision of value interpretation with a stereotypical image of a 'listed building', creating confusion over conservation's purpose and direction. Although EH guidelines accommodate the different uses and issues involved with listing modern buildings (EH 1995b), owners, particularly in the commercial office sector, have argued that listed status makes a building too inflexible to accommodate their rapidly changing requirements (Harding-Roots 1997).

Conservation areas

Criticisms of listing pale in comparison with the attacks on conservation areas in the last ten years. Whilst the expansion of listed buildings has been presented as recognising the contribution of under-represented architecture (e.g. vernacular, industrial), the expansion in conservation area designations has been portrayed as the profligate indiscretion of local planning authorities. Designation without due consideration of local qualities and characteristics has led to comments of '*debasement of the coinage*' from the original intentions to protect areas of special architectural or historic interest (Morton 1991; Suddards and Morton 1991). It would appear that local authorities' application and management, rather than the concept or provisions for areal protection, are at fault. Sadly a national survey (Jones and Larkham 1993) echoed similar findings to a smaller survey 20 years previously (Gamston 1975). Local planning authorities were criticised for not utilising the available controls and lacking a strategic framework capable of managing and responding to the local characteristics which defined their conservation responsibilities. 'Townscape in Trouble' (EHTF 1992) highlighted the physical results of local authorities' inconsistency and malaise in ensuring sensitive

development. Tolerating a high degree of minor changes to the built environment was cumulatively eroding the overall quality and character which conservation area designation was intended to 'preserve'.

Fundamental problems

The specific criticisms of these protection regimes are largely concerned with efficacy and internal conservation practice. Indeed these procedural questions have largely formed the main considerations in all national policy reviews to date. Delafons (1997b) considers the lack of substantive reform proposals in the face of tangible development pressures is evidence that conservation has lost its impetus. It is arguable that conservation practice has drifted somewhat from the 'original intentions', but Maguire (1998) argues that current conservation thinking has become too preoccupied with preservationist attitudes which his generation had attempted to reform with the introduction of the conservation area. Reade (1991) has argued that the administrative process of conservation creates results which bear little relation to improving environmental quality. The whole process operates independently of the socio-economic circumstances which create disparity in the environment quality whilst consequently ignoring socio-economic consequences of its own resource distribution.

The exclusivity of the conservation profession has also been noted, though such critiques are not necessarily new. Eversley (1975) attacked the bias towards favouring the interests of middle class property owners, not only in terms of ensuring their pleasant amenity through conservation areas but also in the grant regimes which contributed to the costs of repairing their listed buildings. More recent writings have identified a distinction between the professional and general public's awareness and interpretation of conservation value (Townshend & Pendlebury 1999; Larkham 2000). Whilst the profession operates under the auspices of 'public interest', it is possible that the public's conception of conservation is wider than the professionals' relatively academic determination. This diversity also questions the legitimacy of professionals identifying a single conservation value when there is a plurality of competing interpretations which currently may be excluded.

This is of particular concern in the heritage literature which, in acknowledging the political conflicts which underlie value representation, is more advanced than that of conservation planning. Selecting features for conservation involves a conscious

process which far from being a neutral choice, inflates or rejects particular features as much for their socio-political association as their architecture quality. Indeed the criteria of authenticity, a touch-stone for conservation, is similarly open to criticism as reflecting not so much the original and pure state of a feature, as its good fortune to survive and be shaped by circumstances through time (Ashworth 1997). Basing conservation on authenticity does not protect a representative sample of history, it removes these features from the inevitable process of decay and mutation.

It is partly this removal from the natural progression of time which has led some to criticise other manifestations of 'heritage' as detrimental to conservation. Hewison (1987) argues heritage commodification has prioritised appearance over content, the superficiality of reproduction imagery blunts sensitivity to genuine, objective evidence of the past. That heritage attractions find an enthusiastic audience is cited as an obsession with the past, a cultural preoccupation with a retrospective vision (Wright 1985) . Some consider it a constraint on being able to accurately review the development of contemporary society (Ascherson 1987).

Perhaps more sinister though is the accusation that the representation of the past in the form of 'national heritage' can be used as a tool of political obfuscation, to present an image of unity and established order, despite a period of significant socio-political changes (Wright 1985; McGuigan 1996). Given conservation's basis on professional values and neutrality, it struggles to answer accusations of a political nature - even where they relate directly to the exercise of conservation control (Graves and Ross 1991).

1.4 Reasoning for this thesis: research aims

The conservation movement creates what it wants to conserve...

(Ashworth 1991: 25)

Despite these criticisms, conservation retains much of its popular and therefore political appeal. From the introduction of listing, conservation has enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy and relative seclusion in contrast with other spheres of public policy (Hunter 1996). The last significant addition to conservation's legislative armoury was in the early 1970s (Delafons 1997a) and there appears to be little prospect of further legal controls. Conservation practice

and policy has been developed largely through the efforts of committed professionals.

With PPG15 emphasising the integration of conservation in the development plan and its general contribution to environment stewardship, conservation is exposed to a much wider range of conflicting policy values. Whilst these wider pressures are not new, conservation must engage with them to a greater extent than before. Since conservation traditionally has been a more esoteric, art-historical profession, this exposure may create significant internal friction over value priorities (Smith, D 1974; Ashworth 1997).

Conservation has tended to emphasise that its benefits are 'self-evident', indeed current popular opinion would agree that conserving a historic building is preferable to demolishing it. This has not always been the case; the underlying justifications for conservation have developed over a hundred years in response to direct threats and cultural sea changes in attitudes towards the past. Each successive wave contributes and influences the existing approach and values resulting in their gradual coalescence. This residual diversity of values which supports conservation can be easily conflated in broad policy statements but offer a range of different approaches in actual decision-making. Such flexibility may be requisite but in assuming that conservation's contribution is not only self-evident but also operates in the 'public interest', these claims mask the fundamental questions of why conserve, conserve what, and for whose benefit.

This study aims to examine these 'self-evident truths' that underlie conservation policy and practice. Evidently value perceptions will have percolated differentially across the breadth of the conservation system, between national and local levels. Thus it is important for the research to cast a broad a net as possible to study the consistency or dominance of identifiable conservation values. In pursuing this agenda, it is hoped to highlight the contemporary relevance of conservation and its contribution to the planning system. The thesis is not a critique of any particular individual or organisation contributing to this research, nor their practice or policy. The examples studied highlight certain concerns, the implications of which are considered in the abstract.

Thesis' structure

The thesis has been written thematically, illustrating the development of particular concepts through the research. There are three parts:

- 1. Defining the problem, identifying values and developing a theoretical and practical framework in which to explore their interpretation.**
- 2. Presenting the data from three spheres of fieldwork investigation and analysing the emerging issues in relation to that framework.**
- 3. Comparing the issues in the spheres investigated and relating these concerns to the fundamental questions posed at the start of the research process.**

In Part 1, Chapter 1 provides a brief outline of conservation policy and practice and in addressing the criticisms levelled at it, formulates the research aims. Chapters 2 and 3 review the literature relating to conservation, planning and broader cultural heritage issues. The significance of these values underpinning contemporary conservation is highlighted in Chapter 2 by discussing the influence of seminal periods in the historical development of conservation within planning. This reveals a wealth of embedded values as professional practice has periodically responded to various threats and opportunities. In moving closer into the planning mainstream, conservation has also been influenced by shifting planning paradigms. In the absence of a specific theoretical perspective to unify the diversity of issues raised, Chapter 3 develops a unique conceptual framework of ten themes, which provides a robust methodological and theoretical tool for the thesis' analysis and conclusions. Developing appropriate strategies for data collection to address these themes and the methodological issues involved is discussed in Chapter 4.

In Part 2, by testing the values and issues raised in the preceding chapters, the fieldwork seeks a broad perspective on the relationships in conservation by investigating both national and local levels of conservation activity. Chapter 5 presents a qualitative survey of national organisations' representatives; it is oriented to exploring conservation's normative standards. Chapters 6 and 7 address the micro-scale of conservation practice using two contrasting local planning authorities as case studies. Following an account of the history, context, organisation and attitudes contributing to the culture of the authorities' conservation activity, eight developments are examined in detail. These are not only to test the

correspondence of principle with practice but also to identify and canvas wider opinions of conservation from parties outside the local planning authorities.

In Part 3, whilst the analysis has been developed alongside the presentation of issues in the fieldwork section, Chapter 8 compares and contrasts these three spheres' findings in relation to the ten themes of the conceptual framework. The ensuing discussion continues into Chapter 9 which concludes the thesis by considering the overall picture of conservation in relation to broader issues affecting land use planning, the interpretation of conservation value and the external influence of economic and political agendas. In summary, implications and pointers for future conservation research and practice are highlighted before presenting the final conclusion.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

To understand the variety of conceptions that exist in the contemporary realm of conservation, it is essential to examine its evolution. Whilst this may be criticised as unnecessary historicity, it is justifiable since just as conservation protects the relics of preceding societies, so the ideas prevalent in its own history are equally maintained, protected and reproduced in the present justifications.

An understanding of the motivation is needed to explain the origins and nature of the conserved historic city, not least because the sort of motive is a determining influence upon the criteria and thus the selection of what is to be conserved, as well as upon the interpretation of the past to its users...

(Ashworth 1991: 8)

In response to threats exposing the inadequacies of the existing order of control, the creating of new values does not sweep aside former ones but merely overlays them with new interpretations. The current system is the cumulative result of these successive waves of response. Furthermore, there has been ample opportunity for individual personalities to fundamentally shape its development. Several writers have commented (Hunter 1996) on the influence of key players in the formation of legislation and policy, officially and through successful lobbying, imparting their own personal values and zeal in the process. Hall (1988) notes how the intellectual justifications behind planning ideology were formulated decades prior to their manifestation in practice, shaped often in periods of different socio-economic pressures. It is not necessary to comprehensively chart the development of the conservation movement as other works cover this history admirably (Delafons 1997a). Rather, seminal periods of interaction with planning are given closer attention, illustrating the circumstances and attitudes which have informed values subsequently. It is recognised that distinguishing any historical period is fraught with difficulties, not only in attempting to define causal links between circumstances but more fundamentally in abstracting issues from their longer development over time. Those periods identified as being of greater significance are:

- antiquarianism confronting early twentieth century concerns to protect amenity;
- the post-war introduction of listing complementing modern planning; and,
- dissatisfaction in the 1960s with conservation protection in planning.

Such a periodic treatment of more contemporary issues is not appropriate. Instead these are examined as a variety of themes following:

- the schismatic effects of Thatcherism;
- regeneration and planning; and,
- the influence of heritage on conservation.

Reviewing conservation's development and the issues it currently faces carries the research aims forward to present a series of issues which will inform the development of the subsequent conceptual and analytical framework.

2.2 A review of conservation - continuity and change

Wright (1985) has observed that objects are protected and valued when threatened by change. Indeed it is the very agent of change, according to Lowenthal (1985), which makes us aware of the past and necessarily, of the future. To understand a society's valuation of the past at any particular era, the perceptions of change and relations in time in that society during that time ought be examined (Fawcett 1976). Falk (1988) notes three perspectives characterising a society's relations with its past and future: naturalistic, progressive and regressive.

In the naturalistic perception, the past flows in to the future through the present. History is perceived as a continuum in which the past possesses the same values as the present. Protecting physical relics is irrelevant as they are subject to decay in the present - the emphasis was on applying the knowledge bestowed by antiquity to inspire the present (Lowenthal 1985). However following the Enlightenment, historical scholarship identified differences rather than continuity between ages. The implications for the relics of the past were considerable - physical remains were unique and irreplaceable, being genuine artefacts which could assist objective historical knowledge (Plumb 1969).

The progressive perspective of a society sees the present as the first step to the future, the past is a defunct realm whose presence can only inhibit this realisation.

Whilst Victorian society had a strong belief in their ability to improve on the past (Samuel 1994) modernism shares this trait - change meant progress. In contrast, the regressive perspective sees a future of uncertainty and anxiety. The past is resurrected as an alternative, embodying qualities which society finds lacking in the present, - stability, continuity and identity. Indeed Merriman (1991) concludes that people perceive the value of the past as its ability to illustrate the contrast with their everyday lives. Moreover the 'past' was becoming more recent; the 'childhood' golden age of our times subsuming the medieval 'golden age' of Victorian nostalgia (Wright 1985; Hunter 1981). It is important to bear in mind these broader currents in society's relations with the past when examining the development of measures specifically protecting its remnants.

2.2.a Antiquarianism and amenity

Establishment protection

In noting an emerging state involvement in land use planning as a distinct concern from established housing and public health measures (Smith, D 1974), the effects of nineteenth century antiquarianism are considerable. Ruskin and later Morris, for Miele (1996) the '*first conservation militants*', left a complex legacy. Practically their efforts prevented the destructive restoration of medieval structures, although their motivations equally related to moral and temporal authenticity as aesthetic concerns. Of monuments, Ruskin stated:

We have no right whatsoever to touch them. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who have built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us. The dead still have their right in them.

(Quoted in Binney 1981: 205)

Victorian society was torn between a strident belief in the progress of science and technology to deliver the future and a dewy-eyed sentimentality of the arts to a lost social order (Lowenthal 1985). Artistic culture in Victorian Britain was particularly strong and the values of an élite minority influenced a great swathe of the middle class social conscience (Weiner 1981). Indeed SPAB set its agenda by what '*educated, artistic people*' would protect on account of its '*artistic, picturesque, historical [or] antique... merit*' (SPAB 1877). Much concerned the search for a genuine representation of the spirit of the age: manufactured artistry was shallow and banal in comparison with the great achievements of 'antiquity' or medieval craftsmanship (Kennet 1972). Many, as Morris did, looked to return to a utopian

'golden age' of medieval rurality. However both Morris and Ruskin, whilst posthumously critiqued for their obsession with the past, were not interested in the past *per se*. They believed the separation of art and beauty in industrialised society was a cause of many urban social and environmental problems. Morris in particular sought more radical aspirations for social transformation - the integration of spiritual transcendence through art being as much a social goal as an aesthetic one (Chitty 1998). Indeed Macmillan (1993) notes that Geddes' approach of planning the environment as an organic whole echoes these earlier socialist sentiments.

Early monumentalism

Despite the social goals of these pioneers it is lamentable that their focus remained on the built fabric to the total exclusion of people's needs or desires (Townshend & Pendlebury 1999). Historical understanding held the authenticity of relics' fabric as sacrosanct: Binney (1981) lampooned Ruskin's influence for the strait-jacket in which protection measures are now dressed. Prince (1981) characterised this approach as scholastic and paternal, a powerful combination of political interests amongst the Arts and Crafts movement, SPAB and the National Trust. Smith (D, 1974) and more critically Reade (1987) identify shared weaknesses with broader socio-political movements such as the emergent Garden Cities movement, collectively comprising varieties of environmental determinism on which much early planning activity was justified.

The early legislation characterised this exclusion of 'life' in the isolated archaeological features it protected. The uninhabited relics scheduled under the Ancient Monuments Act 1882 were the responsibility of the Office of Works, a separation permitting the over-riding continuity of SPAB's antiquarian and academic preferences (Saint 1996). Any justification in the public interest could be said to be merely paternal and cursory (JPEL 1989). Protection was far removed, conceptually and physically, from the pressures felt by rapidly industrialised urban areas (Kennet 1972) and the emerging ideas of planning 'seers' as Hall (1992) terms them.

Some middle class similarities existed; Reade (1987) commented on early planning values sharing a similarity to those of early protectionists - a distinctly anti-urban, anti-metropolitan attitude, and reverie for the unspoilt countryside. A critical link is that although the problems facing urban areas were recognised as economic and

social, planning ideas were oriented to physical solutions, changing the squalid urban environmental to resemble the more pleasant rural one.

In doing so, 'amenity' was a '*key concept*' (Cullingworth & Nadin 1994) which dominated state planning until the 1930s (Punter 1986b). As Punter (ibid.) notes, though amenity was sparingly used in planning legislation it has always been invoked as a material consideration and a very useful cover-all. In Smith's (D, 1974) analysis, amenity as a planning concept consists of three environmental heads: health (previously accomplished by legislation); pleasantness (implicit in all planning decisions); and preservation which has been taken as a narrow legislative concern. Foley (1973) too has identified this '*improvement of the environment as an end in itself*' as a dominant ideology in planning. Thus being intrinsically linked with amenity, protection is a bastion of the traditional physicalism which dogs planning (Reade 1987).

Early planning schemes

Saint (1996) contends it was this care for amenity which characterised early planning legislation and secured acceptance for later protection measures. There was no separation between protecting buildings or areas merely an all-encompassing desire to see that new development was pursued with regard to the existing qualities of the surroundings. 'Amenity' involved protecting the beauty of the natural and urban environment. The progress of this early legislation regarding town schemes, from 1909 to 1932, is traced in detail by Delafons (1997a). Significantly there appeared to be little debate surrounding the introduction of the term 'special architectural, historic or artistic interest' to define the features subject to possible protection, '*...as though there were a mole in the Ministry of Health, an early conservationist perhaps, who contrived... covertly to insert these provisions.*' (Delafons 1994: 511). Cocks (1998) traced this 'mole' to a group of committed civil servants and lawyers interested in saving their Oxford *alma mater* from encroaching development. Similarly bemusing is the narrowing of statutory terms from the Housing Etc. Act 1923 to the Town and Country Planning Act 1932 which become increasingly less oriented to general amenity and more focused on specific building protection. Unfortunately the lack of any guidance and the spectre of financial compensation against local authorities deflected enthusiasm for conservation using 'town schemes'.

Positively, town schemes presupposed a relatively broad approach to conservation as an integral planning tool. More importantly, national responsibility for this new category of protection was vested in the then Ministry of Health (the forerunner to later Planning Ministries) rather than the Office of Works (responsible for the state preservation of ancient monuments). In the Parliamentary debates regarding local authorities' ability to schedule buildings of interest under the 1932 Act;

...some legislators viewed [it] as just a way of tacking historic country houses on to the ancient monuments legislation. But others saw it as a prelude to surveying the whole country, not so much for the historic buildings per se as for everything of amenity and beauty, natural or man-made.

(Saint 1996: 118)

These Acts first established that planning and conservation exhibited overlapping spheres of interest. However the phrase 'special architectural or historic interest' remained an unscrutinised and omnipresent term even though it received singularly little elaboration of its meaning or effect prior either to enactment or in subsequent policy (Delafons 1997a).

2.2b The modern planning system - the introduction of listing

Although planning was changing during the 1930s, the destruction and necessary rebuilding after WW2 provided an opportune catalyst. Hall (1992) notes the style of planning very much reflected the emerging confidence of the age. The policy structure was a legacy of Geddes' *'survey-analysis-plan'*; a comprehensive collection of information, producing a 'once and for all' master plan for decision-making. In this mould, early predictions for a country-wide survey for historic buildings perceived a two year programme to be adequate (Delafons 1997a).

It is clear that there was an idea implicit in much of the legislation that the urban architectural heritage existed in a fixed quantity and that the task of government was to define, locate and preserve it. Practice has shown that this was a misconception.

(Ashworth 1991: 25)

Though the later groundbreaking Town and Country Planning Act 1947 established the modern planning system, the earlier 1944 Act was of greater conservation importance as it introduced the concept of listing. Prior to the Act, the potential of a single Ministry of Works and Planning offered to incorporate ancient monuments into the prospective planning mainstream. However the impetus to establish planning led to two separate Ministries - one of Town and Country Planning - and one of Works - being created in 1943. This administration divorced responsibility

for listing, which followed ancient monuments into the Ministry of Works, from the new planning agenda.

People were distressed by the historic destruction caused by bombs. And yet scholars and sentimentalists apart, their distress was less than some might now be to project back upon them. Many welcomed the prospect of a fresh, post-war recasting of communities. To expedite this, they sought a guide - a list - to what ought be kept and, where necessary, reinstated. In that way, when the experts came to lay their plans they would know without ambiguity or delay what to incorporate or skirt around... ..lists were conceived as a workaday tool which official planners could have by their side as they refined their approach to the urban... landscape.

(Saint 1996: 121)

The first drafts of the 1944 Bill were woefully underdeveloped though offered an opportunity for certain influential members of the Georgian Group to steer the new conservation proposals towards a comprehensive listing system (Saint 1996; Stamp 1996). Barely a decade earlier the Georgian Group had broken away from its parent body, the SPAB. Saint (1996) describes this rift between the Georgians' modern and metropolitan membership, snobbish but politically astute collided with the SPAB's 'tweedy', Arts and Crafts traditions, the rural predilection of the middle class. Despite a great loss of Georgian buildings during the 1930s, the Georgians were more progressive and eager to support listing's incorporation within the emerging planning framework. As Saint (1996: 127) quotes Acworth, their Secretary in 1944; '*...preservation in general is only of value when it is co-ordinated and related to a plan of positive development*'. Abercrombie, a member of the Georgian Group, embraced this progressive interest for historic protection vis-à-vis areal planning. Apparently Parliamentary debates regarding the 1944 Bill centred more so on protecting places, rather than buildings (Saint 1996).

However the Maclagan Committee, appointed to formulate the terms of reference for listing, displayed distinct preferences towards SPAB-ish antiquarianism and scholarship in their recommendations, exemplified by the grading of listed buildings '*not unlike academic degrees*' of I, II and III (Saint 1996: 129). The Committee was a distinct contrast from the type of modern planning oriented approach which had received support in previous Parliamentary debates.

The lengthy process of listing buildings was hindering its realisation as a useful planning tool. Saint (1996) observes that this proposal split the Committee members down a familiar cleavage line between those of a SPAB, antiquarian approach and the more modern, pro-planning Georgians.

Planning and listing were going separate ways again; and little more seems to be heard of the incorporation of lists in to the local development plan... This shaky start to the listing process had major consequences. The whole conception of listing drew gradually away from the urgencies of planning that had brought it to maturity. It became an end, and eventually a little industry, in itself, with its own cultural frame of reference, art-historical criteria and programme.

(Saint 1996: 130)

Whilst protection was recognised as a legitimate concern of government, listing was never integrated into either the development plan or development control: even a leading property lawyer consigned listing to the '*Backwaters*' section of his book detailing the Act (Megarry 1949)! Listing developed in a narrower vein, the proactive guide to local planning authorities conflicting with the artistic concerns of those charged with identifying buildings of interest. The general concept of amenity was '*...recognised as one of the main purposes of planning legislation*' (MTCP 1951:138), however it was not conceptualised as the protection of historic areas.

The instructions issued to listing inspectors in 1946 reveal a certain breadth in scope yet constraint in practice (Earl 1997). In terms of relating the value of individual buildings and their context, the instructions recognise and highlight the importance of 'character'. However they presumed '*the normal exercise of planning control*' would be sufficient to protect all other features not of intrinsically listable quality. This advice and the earlier down-grading of grade III status effectively condemned a great many buildings, leaving only isolated fragments protected. Saint (1996: 133) similarly observes that although group value is today recognised under the listing rubric, it is;

...by any standards a poor and insufficient rubric under which to address the architectural and historic problem of place - of the cultural value of total built environments...

The finite life of finite planning?

For all planning's grand schemes, the system needed to establish itself as a legitimate state activity, as a new profession distinct from the established ones - architecture, surveying and civil engineering - which fed its ranks (Glass 1973). It did this by several devices which ultimately proved to be fundamental weaknesses. It strove for a comprehensive appropriation of expertise concerning all things relating to the environment (Brindley et al 1996). This holistic attitude as Reade (1987) calls it, pervaded all aspects of the system both substantively and procedurally. It perhaps was most evident in the justification of planning in the 'public interest'. This concept reflected the post-war consensus in the rebirth of Britain. Yet rather than represent public opinion, Glass (1973) amongst others,

noted that the 'public interest' was more of a political construction drawn up by those élites who wished to legitimate the existence of planning. It was characteristically vague so that even conflicting interests could interpret it favourably, and their support presented as a resounding consensus in favour of planning (Reade 1987). As planning was the land-use aspect of the Welfare State, the public interest was presented as a self-evident truth, criticism would have amounted to heresy in Bevan's 'New Jerusalem'.

Thus rather than clarify the public interest in protection, the influence of planning did precisely the opposite. The ambiguity surrounding the 'public interest', its breadth allowing a variety of interpretations, meant that the scholarly historicist and architectural values held by a paternal minority could pass quite effortlessly to justify this public function, quite irrespective of the benefit which the public could obtain from the protection of such relics. At the time the National Trust, later under the chairmanship of James Lees Milne, was busy acquiring Country Houses 'for the nation'. Quite remarkable then that in his mission to protect the relics of the aristocracy he later commented of the period:

A whole social system has broken down. What will replace it beyond government by the masses, uncultivated, rancorous, savage, philistine, the enemies of all things beautiful? How I detest democracy.

(quoted in Hewison 1987: 61)

Such values continuing in protection could hardly be further removed from the egalitarian aims of the Welfare State. Protection remained separate from the functions of planning as the controlling élites were diametrically opposed. Thus while country houses were being saved for the nation through Hugh Dalton's National Memorial Fund, planning was clearing their urban counterparts to make way for the new.

2.2.c The introduction of conservation areas

Falk's (1988) progressive interpretation of society's views may be identified in the dramatic changes introduced by planning such as comprehensive redevelopment, 'slum' clearance and car transport priorities (Tarn 1985). The sentiment of societal progress may be well illustrated by the historian J.H. Plumb (1969: 60);

...the need for personal roots in time are so much less strong than they were a mere hundred or even fifty years ago.

Planning, a creation of modernism, continued to pursue its tenets although sections of society were becoming uneasy over its effects. Its success became increasingly tenuous as it still concerned itself with the physical aspects of land-use, neglecting the socio-political problems in the environment (Reade 1987). Its confidence in progress was sweeping away familiar environments and buildings which were conceived as 'old-fashioned' and ripe for replacement (Hewison 1987). This may have been appropriate but the 1960s clearance policies have been subsequently criticised for destroying the very community essence they were attempting to foster (Smith, D 1974). It created social amnesia, a loss of identity and place - a traumatic experience comparable to bereavement (Marris 1993).

In attempting to maintain a veneer of social responsibility planners increasingly adopted natural and social science theory to assist planning policy and theory (Kirk 1980). However as the planning profession strove for a non-political role, rather than informing and enlightening planning's values the social sciences were used more to furnish greater theoretical technicism and legitimate planning's decision-making processes (Kirk 1980). The substance of planning was further removed from the everyday reality of those for whom planners were planning (Reade 1987). Such was the unpopularity and adverse effects of many planning actions that this abstraction and impenetrability required reform. The criticisms bore fruits in the late 60s accompanying the general tide in planning towards more social, environmental and participatory planning heralded by the Planning Advisory Group, the Skeffington Report and the reform of development plan in the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1968, 1971 and 1972 (Hall 1992).

The threat to historic towns

Throughout the 1960s these concerns were highlighting a particular threat to the centres of England's more precious historic towns by unsympathetic and mediocre new development:

Since the war the machinery for preservation has not been markedly successful. Historic areas have at best been regarded as aggregates of individual buildings...

(Smith 1969: 149)

The creation of the Civic Trust in 1957 may be viewed as a reflection of growing unease about the form of new development. The modernist approach prevalent in architecture at the time consciously made little reference to the existing surroundings, an arrogance which Nairn (1955) vehemently rebuked. Listing could

only identify particular buildings rather than whole areas, which as the Government themselves later noted was becoming essential (MHLG 1967a). Indeed it could be argued that until the mid 1960s there was a complete lack of any Government policy regarding conservation within planning (Delafons 1997a).

At an official level, historic towns were still regarded as 'problems' and preservation was regarded as not merely unrenumerative, but positively burdensome on owners.

(Andreae 1996: 140)

The encroachment of development and the absence of protection for the urban fabric, street plan, open spaces and lesser features raised widespread concern. Even listed buildings were still vulnerable: Wayland Kennet, Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, described the administration of Building Preservation Orders as '*byzantine*' and the progress of listing as '*glacier-like*'. He was amazed by;

...the willingness of Parliament to set up, and the civil service to operate, a system designed to have a certain effect without ever checking whether it was having that effect, or another, or none.

(Kennet 1972: 53)

With the displacement, or at least questioning, of progressive 'master' planning's dominance, the protection lobby caught planning reform on the crest of a wave, its emphasis on planning for people and place reflected a united criticism of the previous destruction of the existing urban fabric. Yet the pressure for protection could be seen in another dimension. Samuel (1994) noted that the introduction of conservation areas was the response of Government to placate a significant middle class property interest who wished to secure the pleasant environs of their residences. It was associated with a rise in property ownership and a sea-change in cultural fashions to 'renovate' rather than 'modernise' property.

Perhaps it was a combination of these sentiments which ensured the Civic Amenities Act 1967, introduced as a private members Bill by Duncan Sandys, received unanimous support through Parliament (Smith, D 1974). In the concept of the conservation area, planning was re-linking specific protection measures with its broader amenity conception. As Delafons (1997a: 97) notes of the mould-breaking policy publication 'Historic Towns: Preservation and Change' (MHLG 1967a), it sought '*to integrate conservation into the planning process as had never been done before*'.

The concept of areal conservation

Superficially it would seem logical to unify conservation areas with listed building protection by using the same criteria to identify them both. Its use reveals that essentially, conservation areas were directed towards the same values as listing at the time.

It seems rather odd that the draftsman should have used the terminology of listed buildings to define areas which were clearly not intended to be limited to such buildings.

(Delafons 1997a: 96)

Thus '*special architectural or historic interest*' defined broader notions of the 'character' and 'appearance' of an area. However as listing was introduced in a period of planning dominated by architecture, conservation areas were introduced in a period of planning oriented to social science. Public participation was encouraged through the creation of conservation area advisory committees (MHLG 1968: s18-22). Areal conservation was subject to greater societal influences yet their identification still relied on mainly architectural criteria through the inertia of legislative drafting. Significantly the whole process was devolved to local planning authorities to implement and manage. Contrary to quality control expectations (Smith, D 1974) there was no central intervention, no duty to consult the Ministry and no call-in powers. '*The entire edifice rested on the discretion of individual planning authorities.*' (Gamston 1975: 1).

However there was little explanation at the time regarding the meaning of 'special architectural or historic interest' as it applied to areas, in contrast to the more co-ordinated guidance for defining special architectural or historic interest in the listing process (Kennet 1972 appendix 1). Despite commissioning the celebrated but esoteric Four Towns studies (Buchanan 1968; Burrows 1968; Esher 1968; Insall 1968), this lack of guidance was a continual glaring omission, since identifying areas ought account for a host of societal factors that are of less significance when identifying buildings alone. Circular 53/67 (MHLG 1967b) accompanying the Civic Amenities Act 1967 contained only a brief mention of any criteria:

Clearly there can be no standard specification for conservation areas... [they] will naturally be of many different kinds... It is the character of areas, rather than individual buildings that section 1 of the [Civic Amenities Act 1967] Act seeks to preserve.

(MHLG 1967b memorandum para. 2)

As Smith (D, 1974) noted, wider considerations of 'amenity' were left undefined and implicit in the guise of areas' special architectural or historic interest. Gamston (1975) too noted that national policy was inadequate to guide inexperienced local planning authorities in identifying areas of 'special' interest. Moreover, there was

little time to consider the 'special architectural or historic interest' of areas as Government policy emotively stated designation ought be expedient;

...starting with areas in which conservation measures are most urgently needed because of pressures for redevelopment or because of neglect and deterioration, instead of waiting until they are ready to move on to a broad front. The need is very urgent in many historic towns.

(MHLG 1967b memorandum para. 2)

Kennet, favoured this approach as he;

...wanted the local planning authorities to designate many and large areas, which they probably would if they did so before thinking out what had to be done...

(Kennet 1972: 66)

He admitted it was a political move to satisfy public concern for *action* in protecting historic towns and villages. It was anticipated that a body of wisdom would coalesce out of local planning authority experience to guide future practice (Smith, D 1974), though arguably it is only just emerging (EH 1995a; EHTF 1998). The potential breadth of interpretations of the new provisions would inevitably create differences. At the time it was considered in many areas of the architectural and planning professions that 'conservation' was to signify a distinctly new approach from the previous ethos of 'preservation'. As Maguire (1998) reflects, it indicated a fresh, creative use of the past permitting new ways of utilising these buildings and incorporating them into a renewed urban fabric. Contemporary policy included this message (MHLG 1967b: s4) that conservation areas were to '*represent a shift of emphasis from negative control to creative planning for preservation.*'

Although the policy was enthusiastically received, there were no extra resources or financial backing for local authorities supporting this rhetoric (Larkham & Jones 1993). Remarkably this policy was intended as a watershed in revising 'acceptable change', yet it would appear to conflict with the policy ethos introducing listed building consents with the Town and Country Planning Act 1968:

Circular 61/68 introduced an entirely new doctrine - 'the presumption in favour of preservation'. This doctrine was expounded in the exaggerated terms that came to typify conservation policy as it moved rapidly away from the balanced approach reflected in Preservation and Change.

(Delafons 1997a: 101)

However the consequences of this early policy malaise and lack of definition led to local planning authorities unilaterally identifying special architectural or historic interest often with little justification on an *ad hoc* basis (Gamston 1975). There was no model policy or good practice guidance. Designations were often made with little analysis or survey of the qualities or interest of the area. Designation was as much an attempt to cling onto a fragment of character against new mediocre development as it was to protect genuinely special areas. Gamston (1975) also

found that planners used the conservation area as a flag waving exercise - an indicator of intent (yet inaction) to satisfy vociferous local conservation groups. Samuel (1994) also notes that many conservation areas came into existence due to the class of people in them and reflected their aspirations rather than any historic quality of the area. Ashworth (1991) poignantly stated that conservation areas were designated according to pre-subjective notions of a received image of 'historical' areas clustering around existing listed buildings. Thus the legacy of the preservationist lobby initially narrowed the potential of conservation areas to value new aspects of the past.

Government policy, though characteristically vague, later changed when Circular 46/73 (DOE 1973) introduced the idea that conservation areas were applicable to protect the *'familiar and cherished local scene'*. Delafons (1997a: 105) commented that conservation *'had now billowed out to embrace the conservation of 'existing communities' and 'the social fabric'*. Gamston (1975) noted this was straying away from strict 'special architectural or historic interest' and admitting broader socio-political factors. Mynors (1984: 145) later reflected that;

...the meaning of the critical word "special" in the definition is being inevitably widened - every local scene is "familiar" to many, and most are "cherished" by some.

Such criticisms reveal that conservation areas, originally considered to pursue the same principles as listed buildings, had been contorted to take on board wider societal interests in their definitions of 'special'.

2.3 Contemporary issues affecting conservation

Economic influences on conservation

If the amount of published literature indicated public interest, there was an explosion of concern in the 1970s over the destruction wrought by new development in historic towns and cities, polemically illustrated in a variety of emotive tracts, *'The Sack of Bath'* (Fergusson 1973), *'The Rape of Britain'* (Amery & Cruickshank 1975), and *'Goodbye Britain'* (Aldous 1975).

The depressed economic situation of the decade perhaps halted the pace of development and rocked the commitment to the modernists' future. In this depression, necessity required the re-use of resources and with the rise of the environmental agenda, building conservation took on a new mantle, not as an

obstacle to development but as renewable alternative to building anew (Kain 1981; Mageean 1999). Andreae (1996: 149) notes Jennifer Jenkins' directorship of the Historic Buildings Council in 1975/6 zealously promoted this message to Ministers - 'a clarion call for a change of heart'. Similarly in 'Preservation Pays' (1979) and 'Preserve and Prosper' (1983) SAVE pushed these economic arguments for protecting existing features. The impetus was so strong that an editor commented that; 'conservation was now the received wisdom behind planning' (Built Environment 1975). Such an economic justification for protection was unprecedented (Ashworth 1991) although it became used for different ends during the 1980s.

2.3.a The ideological impact of Thatcherism

Planning under the New Right

The influence of Thatcherist monetarist policies directly conflicted with the traditional Keynesian model of land use planning. Despising the ideological 'muddle' of the Welfare State, the administration dismantled the planning apparatus leaving only the bare essentials in the brave 'New Right' world of economic liberalism (Thornley 1993).

Whilst many have written on the fragmentation of planning (Brindley et al 1996), there is some discrepancy as to the effects of these ideological changes (Allmendinger & Thomas 1998). Reade (1987) argues that planning was 'consolidated' during the 1980s - its latent deference to the market was made explicit. Thornley (1993) disagrees since the nature of planning was changed beyond recognition from a regulative to a facilitative role for the land market. Nevertheless, planning has since become more tightly controlled by central Government. The discretion afforded to local planning authorities was tolerable insofar as their policies conformed to implementing Thatcher's economic programme (Thornley 1993). Traditional or '*market critical*' planning as Brindley et al (1996) have termed it, became less feasible as central policy initiatives gained supremacy.

Moreover the basis on which traditional planning had been justified, the 'public interest', with its socialist overtones, did not accord with free-market principles. Planning was overwhelmed partly because this fundamental justification was

formed by such insubstantial knowledge and a false consensus which disguised a multitude of conflicting sectional interests. As Thornley (1993) has commented, the transference from 'public interest' to 'customer' and 'corporate' interest has effectively seen the rejection of social and community values in Thatcherist planning ideology.

The sanctity of conservation?

However, the Omega Report 1982 (quoted in Thornley 1993), the basis of much of the 'new right' planning politick, identified the protection of historic buildings as a sphere in which regulative state planning may be advantageous.

...at a time when the Government had for nearly ten years been pursuing de-regulatory policies and seeking ways of simplifying the planning process, a different attitude was taken towards conservation.

(Delafons 1997a: 167)

Thornley (1993) identifies a dual planning system in the 1980s. Pursuing a 'market-led' approach (Brindley et al 1996), central Government relaxed planning guidance, undermining local planning authorities' power to challenge developers applications, irrespective of their merit. The imposition of standards, or upholding community objectives was perceived as creating delays for development - the role of the planner was dramatically altered. Forever a contentious area, aesthetic control suffered particularly badly following the ideological preference towards market creativity (Punter 1986a).

However de-regulation resulted in a backlash from 'middle England' as new development encroached on their pleasant surroundings. Voters in Tory heartlands could not be too antagonised for fear of losing their political support: protecting their amenity was an area in which more regulatory planning may be suitable. While it may prove critiques of planning protecting the amenity of those enjoying the benefits of private property ownership (Foley 1973), arguably the emphasis on amenity favoured the conservation lobby. It is ironic that given the popular concern over new development (HRH 1989) conservation offered planning a solitary haven (RTPI 1990) in the face of such a widespread assault.

During this time the Conservative Government maintained enthusiastic support for the heritage. Whilst Heseltine (then Secretary of State for the Environment) promoted the accelerated re-survey of listed buildings, the Government maintained active support for conservation. The creation of English Heritage (EH) in 1983 to advise the Government over heritage matters, encompassing the responsibilities of

the former Historic Buildings Council, could be seen as a further measure of deregulation and was initially greeted with some scepticism in the profession (Larkham & Barrett 1998; Andreae 1996). A new consolidating Circular 8/87 (DOE 1987), at the height of the 1980s property boom, retained the all-important presumption in favour of preservation of listed buildings and emphasised the *'overwhelming'* public opinion in favour of conservation. While planning was remoulded, conservation escaped relatively unscathed (Allmendinger and Thomas 1998).

However in practice, conflicts remained as stricken local authorities were criticised for misapplying conservation in an abortive attempt to control development pressures and exercise local autonomy over central Government policy (Morton 1991). The tighter controls which conservation provided were seen by some to enable local planning authorities to 'plan' rather than 'respond' and restate their local agenda on developers (Thomas 1994; Graves & Ross 1991). However it has been used to both positive and negative ends. It has proved a particularly useful tool in city centres, enabling the councils to control development and create a city image through a closer control of the centre's appearance (Tarn 1985). However Morton (1991) laments that whilst it offers local councils the opportunity to enhance areas, many merely use it to prevent change. Conservation could be criticised for compensating the shortcomings of a revised planning system and thus straying further from the original justifications for protection.

2.3.b Regeneration planning: partnership in the 90s

Sustainability and the plan-led system

If planning were ever in need of a white knight following the 1980s, perhaps it arrived in the form of the sustainable development agenda. Whilst it was arguably nothing new for planning as a discipline of environmental management (Millichap 1993) the advent of 'plan-led' planning in the 1990s arguably provided fresh impetus for planning activity, though opinions remain split over its practical results. The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and PPG1 (DOE 1987; revised DETR 1997) signified a strong, inclusionary framework for the production and enforcement of planning policies. By strengthening the status of the development plan, it would appear conservation could benefit from an increasingly close relationship with statutory planning.

However early debates focused on the suitability of incorporating the minutiae of conservation controls for example in local listing consent policy and conservation area designations in the local plan (Larkham 1994; Morton and Ayers 1993).

Despite the closer policy integration later envisaged in PPG15, a new Department of National Heritage was created in 1992 with responsibility *inter alia* for conservation and 'heritage', while responsibility for mainstream planning remained in the DOE. A new policy flagship emerged in 1994 expounding this joint ethos. PPG15, far in advance of its predecessors, emphasised the mutual goals of conservation and planning (DOE/DNH 1994). However as Delafons (1997a) notes it is essentially rather difficult to 'square the circle', for planning '*to reconcile the need for economic growth with the need to protect the natural and historic environment*' (DOE/DNH 1994: para 1.2).

Sustainability provided a principle, if not practice, to realise some of this common conservation language. However the two documents to guide planning authorities' formation of regional, structure and local plans (EH 1993; 1996b) were more oriented to natural environment conservation. It is questionable how far this advice broadened the approach to the historic environment beyond the archaeological discipline which has to date led the interpretation of sustainability in conservation practice. In contrast though, a later discussion document about sustainability (EH 1997) appeared to revise the emphasis on conservation - sustainability involved taking a more holistic approach to the built environment, encouraging wider public interest and participation in identifying the meaning and symbolic importance of all elements in the historic environment, not just the efficient use of listed buildings.

Specific issues in conservation practice

Generally the state of conservation remains healthy - there has been a marked increase in the features subject to conservation protection throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The abolition of the 30 year rule has drawn post-war modern buildings into listing's frame of reference (EH 1996a). The renaming of The Thirties Society to the Twentieth Century Society is reflective of the ever quickening realisation of value in the immediate past (Stamp 1996). Indeed age could be seen as irrelevant as even the protagonists of recent modern architecture wish the representations of their movement protected before their natural obsolescence calls forth pressures for redevelopment (Cunningham 1998). Such post-war listings were, without precedent, opened to public consultation. EH ran several 'hearts and minds'

campaigns to raise public awareness and smooth the path for their listing: without a public understanding of the value of these features, there would be little popular support to justify these listings (Cherry 1996). Despite greater openness, the short-listed candidates were still received with incredulity by many of the broadsheets (Bevan 1996; Mellis 1998). Most of these buildings are now listed despite initial reactions: listing continues to lead public taste rather than react to it.

Although listing has been criticised for a lack of accountability and monitoring (Griffith 1989), conservation areas were also subject to a welter of criticism regarding their management. While listing has retained its legitimacy in pushing out the boundaries of 'special' interest in more diverse features, conservation area designation has suffered criticisms of undermining the original intentions of the practice. While local authorities' autonomy to interpret local values and priorities is seen as conservation areas' main strength (Skea 1996), it permits hugely differing standards in practice.

The RTPi study 'The Character of Conservation Areas' (Jones and Larkham 1993) worryingly echoed many of the conclusions of Gamston's (1975) smaller study nearly 20 years previously. A lack of systematic designation, poor awareness and analysis of areas' character, a lack of policies for their enhancement and management and a negative application of the available controls characterised many local authorities' practice. Without a clear knowledge base for the value of a conservation area, the study observed that this engendered a more preservationist attitude in controlling change in conservation areas. Morton (1991) indicated that the local planning authority's role of judge and jury allowed them to dictate protection measures without scrutiny and lambasted their negative, preservationist attitudes (Morton 1998; Barrett 1993). Even the law is uncertain of the actual duty of local planning authorities to positively improve their conservation areas (Hughes 1995; Larkham 1996). There has been mounting criticism on the ethos surrounding conservation areas that they stifle modern design and instead harbour some of the worst examples of pastiche reproduction (Taylor 1998; Fairs 1998).

There appears to be simultaneous condemnation of the breadth of conservation's attention yet frustration with the toothlessness of controls to protect these 'special' features (Mynors 1984). The actual conservation area controls available to local authorities have been continually criticised for their weakness (EHTF 1992). Without an Article 4 Direction, small incremental changes, the ubiquitous satellite dish and plastic window, slip through conservation area control. The recent

Shimitzu case (Brainsby & Carter 1997) which interpreted 'demolition' as 'complete demolition', meant conservation area consent was rendered inapplicable to most cases concerning destructive 'alterations' in conservation areas. EH and the National Amenity Societies (NAS) have mooted a revision of conservation area consent (Saunders 1998). Instead of an express consent over demolition, the withdrawal of Permitted Development Rights in conservation areas would allow local authorities greater control over the incremental changes that have assaulted much of the original character which designation was meant to highlight.

Such a move corresponds to Mynors' proposals (1998) to review the whole legislative framework of conservation areas and listed building consents, incorporating them into a single planning permission. Contending that the whole framework has become muddled and creates undue repetition, this would integrate conservation culture into planning, rather than it remain a marginalised activity (Aldous 1997).

English Heritage - the 'lead body'

Emerging from its formative years and an apparent preoccupation with managing the state's own properties, EH formed strong associations with the conservation movement and may be in the questionable position of acting as an advocate for, rather than an advisor on conservation matters (Delafons 1997a). However EH experienced a distinct change following Sir Joscelyn Stevens' appointment as Chair in 1992. Stevens' forthright leadership had an immediate impact in the publication of a new agenda (EH 1992). The document indicated a retreat from an all-embracing patronage of conservation to a strategic re-focusing of resources on high priority cases and acting more as an enabling body with local authorities taking greater responsibility for their conservation assets. Whilst this created a violent response from other conservation organisations, it was to be welcomed in certain respects as the first clear strategic response to the problems of managing such a large number of listed buildings and conservation areas (Delafons 1997a).

Realising the economic benefits and marketability of re-using historic buildings brought EH into contact with regeneration agencies - English Partnerships in particular - and the general scope of the Single Regeneration Budget. EH needed to revise its sphere of influence and overcome the difficulty of functioning from the margins of the Department of National Heritage. The change of Government in

May 1997 was to prove decisive, particularly the new administration's support of urban regeneration. Soon after EH announced;

[a] radical role change... to become much more of a planning watchdog as well as a 'front-line regeneration agency' in a move away from its traditional conservation role... English Heritage can no longer think just of 'conservation' but rather must consider 'environment quality'.

(Rogers 1997: 3)

Whilst EH have always been involved in promoting the re-use of buildings, it may be survival instinct that drives their pursuit of the wider urban regeneration agenda. The threatened reduction of heritage bodies following the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review saw English Heritage become the lead body in the sector, incorporating the functions of the RCHME. However the new administration presented a different playing field for heritage, where once there had been support, there now appears to be apathy (Venning 1998). In promoting the modernisation of public administration, 'heritage' appears anathematic to New Labour. At one level changing the Department of 'National Heritage' to 'Culture, Media and Sport' may appear superficial. At another, the terms of reference for the Urban Task Force (1999) and its recommendations maintain a cursory treatment of the positive contribution of conservation-based approaches.

EH has lost its lead role in providing grant assistance to projects. Though retained as advisers to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a new funding agenda has replaced EH's previous monopoly. The re-assessment of the short-lived Conservation Area Partnership Scheme (CAPS) and the creation of the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS) sees priorities and application criteria change from purely a concern with the historic fabric to equally promoting investment in jobs and business in more neglected areas (Antram 1999). Meanwhile the Townscape Heritage Initiative run by the Heritage Lottery Fund would appear to be stalking English Heritage's traditional ground, though again the emphasis is on economic regeneration (Johnston 1998).

The political shift towards an emphasising large-scale urban regeneration at the expense of contextual conservation was criticised by Dame Jennifer Jenkins as being as potentially destructive as the comprehensive clearance schemes of the 1960s (Bateson 1998). Other conservation bodies, endorsing this reaction have lobbied under the joint auspices of their report, '*Catalytic Conversion*' (1998) which stresses the re-use of listed buildings and empty premises to meet development pressures (Binney 1998). Similarly two English Heritage reports, '*Conservation-Led Regeneration*' (1998) and '*The Heritage Dividend*' (1999) also highlight their

successful grant funding for the progressive re-use of old buildings. The language and presentation, of the latter particularly, reflects the political preferences for strategies promoting economic regeneration and social inclusion, environmental quality and sustainability. As Sir Joscelyn Stevens notes: *'The role of the built heritage in the regeneration of communities, however, has not always been fully understood.'* (ibid.: 5). The extent to which the political consensus supporting conservation has been undermined or at least altered by this change of priorities remains to be seen.

Professionally, the distinctions between the rhetoric of conservation, urban regeneration and design quality may be disappearing (Worthington et al 1998). Indeed many in the urban design professions believe the aims of conservation increasingly correspond with their own (Stones 1998). Similarly the conversion of old buildings has become a defining architectural expression of the late twentieth century (Powell 1999: Brolin 1980). As part of its remit, the new Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) includes not only the promotion of good modern design but also the reciprocal concern about the preservation of modern architecture (Lewis 1999). However another reason may be the anomalous position of EH commenting on modern design issues whilst maintaining no professional architectural representation in the upper echelons of the organisation (Bateson 1999).

Irrespective of the relationship of planning, conservation and architecture, there is no denying the ballooning scope of 'value' that conservation identifies in the built environment. The statutory framework for conservation cannot be discussed without reference to this increasing interest in the past and the emergence of 'heritage'.

2.3.c The rise of 'heritage'

Aside from the burgeoning official heritage, in listed buildings and conservation areas, the last 25 years has witnessed a dramatic rise in interest in the past; huge increases in National Trust membership, various *'retrochic'* fashions (Samuel 1994), period homes, antique collecting, 'heritage' attractions and museums, TV costume dramas, family history societies... the list is endless (Fowler 1992). It is convenient to label this phenomenon 'heritage', yet;

...heritage is a slippery concept. The word alludes to ownership being passed on, but it is perhaps more accurate and useful to recast the heritage idea to stand for things created, maintained and held within a community which it wants to continue to maintain and hold.

(Thomas 1994: 70)

This increased use of the past raises some fundamental questions: is this rise a reflection of genuine interest in the past or is it an artificial manipulation of circumstances for ulterior purposes? Is this less orthodox and more popular use of the past debasing credible historic interpretation or is it a creative economic phenomenon which makes the past a more vibrant and useful resource? Heritage has influenced conservation in two inter-related ways: 'commodification' of the past and its political manipulation.

'Commodification'

Conserving relics has traditionally been justified by their intrinsic historical or artistic value. However commerce's realisation of a distinct market of heritage consumers exploits the use and interpretation value of features and their environments. Wright (1985) observed that the rise of a heritage enterprise culture in the mid-1980s coincided with the market-oriented heritage programme of the Thatcher administration: encouraging private commerce was to replace the reliance on state subsidy to maintain the nation's cultural heritage. Moreover the social prestige associated with 'old things' made previously unloved relics into profitable assets: for example, the restoration of old buildings for office use, lent an immediate image of tradition and status.

The effects attracted criticism, Hewison's (1987) attack on this heritage 'industry' being one of the most acerbic. Perceiving Britain to be a spent industrial force, he lambasted the recycling and reconstructions of the past in museums and 'heritage attractions' the country over. Rather than '*innovate*' a way out of socio-economic decline, factory museums preserved out-moded production. The heritage industry, exploitative and voyeuristic, spoon-fed tourists a processed view of the once 'Great' Britain, accompanied by 'authentic' merchandising. Whilst echoing Davis' (1979) exploration of resurgent social and personal nostalgia for the past, he concluded heritage is a media creation.

However as Corner & Harvey (1991) note, these critiques were written in a time of industrial economic decline. Arguably the 1990s have witnessed a more creative use of heritage resources. The economic benefits of heritage are well documented in relation to tourism and leisure industries (Fowler 1992; Urry 1990, 1995).

Ashworth (1994), amongst others, notes the potential conflicts created between different heritage markets when the distinctiveness of the local historic environment is marketed according to a homogenising pre-subjective image of an historic attraction. However the revenue generated by tourism is an important multiplier in the local economy. Commodification occurs at another level when the historic fabric is used to project an attractive urban image. In the competition for mobile capital and investment, the use value of the heritage may be paramount in local political economic priorities (Strange 1996).

The 'National Heritage' and 'National Past'

Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.

(Orwell 1989: 37)

The second change was the political or ideological use of the 'national identity'. There is no denying 'the past' is far from a static and immutable certainty (Wright 1985). The past only exists as the politics and culture of the present construct it through a process of selective representation (Fowler 1992). Thus although temporarily passed, the past is continually re-written, a product and reflection of contemporary society (Lynch 1972).

The 'national past' and the 'national heritage' were concepts implicitly nurtured by Conservative Party, and arguably exploited by the Thatcher administration, to ease society's acceptance of the drastic economic transformation of Britain. Wright (1985) observed that relics from the past, old buildings and monuments, represented a physical and tangible arena to which the abstract 'national past' could attach. The 'national heritage' was politically constructed, events and characters were selected to legitimate the current situation. Such 'national' visions invoked past grandeur and glory, of military and political success (against communism and socialism), of state pomp and aristocratic luxury.

Through selective representation, a dominant, narrow interpretation of Englishness could be used to promote and legitimate Conservative values of tradition and continuity (McGuigan 1996). These values were essential to maintaining the popularity of the Conservatives' mandate as perversely their new economic and social order was destroying regional and class traditions and social customs which lay outside this 'essential' heritage. The superimposed projection of an oligarchic

class conception of the past excluded personal and community interpretations of the past. Instead of plurality, the emphasis lay on the great events in state history.

Displacing history

Antagonists claim that while heritage pervades as educative, it actually '*draws a screen between us and our past*' (Hewison 1987: 10). It is sanitised, stripped of its authenticity and in its pre-processed nature offers no scope for reflective criticism or personal awareness. Popular it may be but this is no sign of historical quality (Beazley 1981).

Similarly the success and legitimacy of a 'national heritage' is dependent upon a history which commemorates grand events and characters at the level of state importance. This history is entropic, the story is presented as definitive - complete and unassailable (Wright 1985). Though the 'national heritage' is dependent on historical fact, its nostalgic and mythical aura 'floats' above objective history. Yet the whole idea of objective history was to emancipate individuals from the mythical and pseudo-religious hold which subservience to the past engendered (Plumb 1969). By constructing a theory of history rather than an emotional reverence to it, society would be free of its constraints. Though as Wright (1985) and Lowenthal (1985) note, the past cannot be burned away by historical objectivity - it resides in the personal, emotional and localised experiences of individuals.

Citing the credence of the Enlightenment (and Modernism) in abstract technical rationality, the emotive world of everyday experience and the personal and social values therein were neglected in historical inquiry and legitimisation (Wright 1985). However as Samuel (1994) has noted, the rise of 'heritage' has brought new interpretations of the form and content of historical knowledge. Through heritage, the abstract and general nature of history is replaced with a more inter-subjective use of the past according to the specific and emotional way in which people relate to their own past. The 'establishment mode' of history is displaced by the more socially-oriented historiographic approach which offers a more conciliatory relationship with heritage.

Heritage as a broader concept

Critiques of heritage generally follow a consumerist or a structuralist perspective. Yet Samuel (1994) perceives heritage as a field of agency or individual expression.

Rather than a phenomenon emanating from top level political and commercial interests, heritage is the pluralist representation of interest, perception and use of the past. Arguably, Wright and Hewison were premature to align heritage to Thatcherism since its economic liberalism still allowed private property interests to destroy valuable aspects of the built heritage. By setting heritage in a longer time frame and broader context, Samuel argues the term 'heritage' is no more right-wing than it is left. Heritage is history outside the confines of archival historical study, it is access to the living past and a creative, personal interpretation of it (Macmillan 1993). Features' value emanates from personal assimilation, not one imposed by didactic politics. Such interactive use of the relics of the past can be a powerful tool to deconstruct more conservative notions of heritage (Lowenthal 1981).

Lord Clark noted that civilised man needs a '*sense of permanence*' and '*must feel that he belongs somewhere in time and space...*' (Cantell 1975: 8). It is this realm in which the separate theses of Lowenthal, Wright and Samuel coalesce:

The surviving past's most essential and pervasive benefit is to render the present familiar.

(Lowenthal 1985: 39)

Lowenthal (1985) categorises the benefits of the past's relics providing familiarity, reaffirmation and validity, identity, guidance, enrichment and escape. The past provides personal, social and spatial identity: such reference points are necessary to live in the '*temporal collage*' of the built environment (Lynch 1972). It reaffirms and validates the uncertainties of the present. Wright (1985) has commented that the capitalist economy has created increasing spatial and personal dislocation by demanding a mobile work-force and the development of areas with minimal reference to their existing character. By consciously filling our environments with relics of the past, their presence is a source of enrichment lost in this change (Hareven & Langenbach 1981): their value lies beyond our human timescale (Lynch 1972). In their possession and use, the search for temporal and spatial roots accounts for the rise of interest in personal and group heritage which Samuel (1994) identifies.

Wright (1985) explains this phenomenon by the concept of 'everyday historical consciousness' which rests on;

...the sense of historical existence and attributes not to any special knowledge of history or the past but to the everyday consciousness of 'practically everyone who reflects upon his/her life experience in our world'.

(Wright 1985: 143)

Put simply, the past is not defined by history, particular taught knowledge or the state: the past exists within the individuals' interpretation of the qualities of age in the environment surrounding them, and in the use of those qualities to improve their understanding and enjoyment of the present. The heritage thus potentially rises in everything predating the present moment but the defining characteristic is the active and creative use of the qualities of that 'relic', not merely its physical preservation *per se* (Macmillan 1993).

Heritage - a new paradigm for conservation?

While 'heritage' has been much discussed in history and cultural studies, it often falls between established protagonist and antagonist positions regarding conservation planning. Those who oppose the politicisation of state protection, see heritage extending the hand of the dead over the living (Ascherson 1987). Innovation and progress are stifled in this dogmatic reverence to the past as society becomes resentful of any change (O'Rourke 1987). Those who support conservation on the traditional criteria of special architectural or historic interest generally view the wider heritage as undermining the status afforded to special features in the built environment for which conservation was originally intended (Mynors 1984).

However there are very poignant questions raised by 'heritage'. Ashworth (1991, 1994, 1997) perhaps goes furthest in his re-appraisal of conservation. Fully accepting the commodification of features that heritage engenders, he concludes that this new relationship of multiple users or consumers of the past is the most helpful way of recasting a protection system. Arguing that protection has not escaped the preservationist legacy or its origins, (despite counter claims that 'conservation' is a progressive art) he sees the preservationist monopoly becoming increasingly untenable.

The preservationist paradigm exudes an unquestionable, self-evident belief that the past ought be preserved in the public interest. Further analysis is deflected through generalised norms which lack any evidential support. In contrast the heritage paradigm, being more open and pluralist actively acknowledges the variety of heritage users and their requirements.

The concept of 'authenticity', on which the current criteria for defining special interest rest, is presented as objectively definable and recognisable with

appropriate professional training. However this creates two fundamental problems. Firstly it secures the legitimate determination of these features in the hands of an expert minority. Secondly the concept of authenticity itself as Lowenthal notes is 'a *dogma of self-delusion*' (cited in Ashworth 1997: 97). By the time features become considered for protection they have already become '*sacralized*' into potential monuments by surviving the natural processes of erosion and obsolescence. Once selected for protection they become further '*fossilised*' by halting the natural processes of decay to which the rest of the environment is subject.

Selection for preservation is further likely to favour the spectacular over the mundane, the large over the small, the beautiful over the ugly and the unusual over the commonplace.

(Ashworth 1997: 97)

Since this produces an end state which is neither authentic nor capable of evolution, Ashworth argues that rather than concentrate on the object the heritage paradigm focuses on the quality and authenticity of experience felt by the user of these features.

Thus heritage emancipates protection so that value is not solely the universal, objective and academic interpretation but allows a flexible and diverse interpretation. Since the preservationist legacy sees value as intrinsic and obvious to the expert, '*the idea that interpretations of the past should play contemporary political or social roles will be denied, or at least distanced as mere propaganda*' (Ashworth 1997: 98). A heritage interpretation involves polysemic and continually evolving meanings which allow the relationship with pressures for land-use development to be mediated since it applies throughout the whole environment and not just those defined as 'special'.

2.4 Emerging relationships

In Chapter 1, the general research aim was stated as exploring the 'self-evident truths' underlying conservation. Having reviewed the development of conservation, concentrating on particularly significant periods in value construction and also contemporary challenges, it is clear that conservation's justifications have been shaped by responding to wider social, economic and political circumstances.

In these value constructions, certain relationships are emerging which highlight particular fractures in the continuity of conservation's justifications. By focusing on these relationships, they provide a convenient interface to identify the conflicts and

latent tensions in conservation. These relationships are not between specific processes or objects of conservation concern but are more accurately considered in the abstract. They comprise:

- the gradual coalescence between planning and conservation practices;
- an increasing emphasis on conserving environments as well as buildings;
- various professional and lay involvement;
- the experience and use of conservation resources; and,
- the influence of national and local interest and agendas.

Though these relationships are still very general, they provide a starting point for mapping out conservation's intricacies. The following chapter expands these issues, treating the reviewed literature thematically and further exploring important aspects.

Chapter 3

Conceptual framework

3.1 Introduction - developing a distinct framework

It is evident that protection has developed many facets, implicit and explicit, with the potential to illuminate or indict the received wisdom about protection in planning. However the distribution, use and interpretation of these values is far from uniform, with different systems and levels of conservation pursuing potentially contradictory objectives. Having presented the range of influences and values affecting protection over the past century, Chapter 2 concluded by identifying a number of significant relationships. This chapter considers specific themes arising from inherent tensions in these relationships - for their fundamental importance and to develop an analytical basis for empirical study.

In developing a conceptual framework, various established theoretical positions offer different perspectives for analysis. However from the outset the intention was to study the 'big picture', embracing all aspects - principles and policies, processes and practice, personnel, subjects and objects of conservation. Thus while a certain theoretical perspective may prove illustrative in one area, perhaps considering public participation, or a postmodern conceptualisation of values and 'reality', they will ever only be relevant to one particular area. No single theory could provide a comprehensive analytical tool for the whole of this study. Thus in developing the conceptual framework, rather than draw exclusively on one or two areas, a broader approach to theory is required, especially given the diversity of values highlighted and the lack of a single conservation ethic.

Other writers have concluded studies with a similar thematic dissection and exposition of value relationships in conservation (Larkham 1996; Mageean 1999). Considering their consistency and cogency highlighting particularly significant issues, an analysis using these self-referencing themes is particularly appropriate for this conservation study. Extrapolating the tensions arising from the relationships already identified forms the basis of the conceptual framework.

To examine the 'self-evident truths' underlying contemporary conservation of the built environment is an enormous task requiring a flexible but comprehensive structure. The reasons are threefold: to inform specific research issues, to develop a suitable methodology to address them and to create an integral analytical framework with which to process and reflect on the empirical data.

The main relationships highlighted in the literature review were:

- the gradual coalescence between planning and conservation practices;
- an increasing emphasis on conserving environments as well as buildings;
- professional and lay involvement;
- the experience and use of conservation resources; and,
- the influence of national and local interest and agendas.

As these relationships were expanded, they were initially considered as a series of inter-related spectra identifying extremes in the inherent tensions found in attitudes towards conservation. The presentation of these spectra or polarities of interest in the following table are not two distinct and unified perspectives in conservation. Rather the headings identify the extreme poles of a particular tension, which affects the various levels and regimes of conservation differentially.

Separate from Planning Structure Specific Preservationism Minority Interest Architectural & Historic Special, National Importance Expert Opinion Objective Historical Knowledge Intrinsic Value Purity Of Choice	Integral to Planning Environmental Conservationism Popular Interest Societal & Cultural Familiar, Local Interest Lay Opinion The Past as a Cultural Collage Commodity Value A Political Tool
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Table 3.1 Tensions in conservation

Although these categories' success in providing a relevant and robust framework throughout the thesis justifies their definition, they remain heuristic interpretations. During the fieldwork, the original framework underwent four significant revisions. Most importantly, representing definitive polarities or 'spectra' was limiting the intellectual development of the analytical framework. There arose further issues not necessarily represented in the literature, or under-represented in the existing

ten spectra chosen. For example, the specific tension between 'expert and lay opinion' did not accommodate the notable differences between professionals' interpretations of value. The spectra were recast into broader categories which encompassed the idea of conflicting tensions while also widening the relevant interest to encompass hitherto less considered issues.

Secondly, a further category, representing the influence of political agendas and motivations within conservation decision-making was added. Thirdly, two initial categories of special interest/familiarity and national/local interest were later merged into one as they focused on different aspects of significance. Fourthly, a category contrasting the motivations behind public administration of conservation with private and voluntary conservation was omitted as these issues could be considered under the other categories.

The final ten themes used throughout the fieldwork and subsequent analysis are as follows.

<p>The relationship between conservation and statutory planning The spatial focus of conservation controls The extent of acceptable change The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy The interpretation of features' interest The level of significance The influence and variety of knowledge and experience Aspects of heritage valuation Economic pressures and their impact on conservation The influence of political agendas</p>
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Table 3.2 The conceptual framework

3.2 The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

Separate from planning . . . Integral to planning

Emerging from different interests and pressure in the last century, conservation and planning have gradually coalesced up to the present day, subjected to the same political, economic and social conditions prevalent during their formation and subsequent interpretation. Two questions may be asked of their relationship. Firstly, the extent to which these systems benefit by closer integration. Secondly

the extent to which their principles, policies and procedures tessellate with one another.

It appears the norm to describe the progress of this relationship in cyclical terms of development threats and reactionary politics establishing new regimes and values of protection control, the net result being the contemporary system. It is generally characterised by an ever closer relationship between planning and conservation, the former providing the means and muscle previously lacking to prevent the last lamented demolition of a valuable historic feature. Whilst the majority of the literature presents this as a natural unfolding order, there was *'no implied progression in the sense of either logical inevitability or desirability'* (Ashworth 1997: 94). Certain events may have catalysed legislative or other responses, drawing on (or even forming anew) a ground-swell of opinion but often produced knee-jerk responses rather than a definite principled agenda. Whilst this shaped a closer relationship between planning and conservation, there has been little in terms of actual foresight to ever achieve this. Mynors (1998) concludes that the legal framework this has created is totally illogical and requires drastic simplification.

In its development, conservation has been influenced by prevailing attitudes towards planning administration. The first legislation, the Ancient Monuments Act 1882, was introduced at a time when the absence of any co-ordinated planning system allowed the ethos of protection to develop quite freely from other issues. Early planning legislation in the early twentieth century was mostly concerned with ensuring the amenity of new development.

Although listing was maybe considered a backwater in the 1947 planning system, it was originally intended to be of integral assistance to plan and strategy formation. The planning culture that espoused finite master plans and once and for all surveys influenced the approach to compiling statutory lists of features of special interest even though the listing process was carried out quite independently (Ashworth 1997). It also reflected the physicalism and comprehensivism dominating the planning profession. However listing's operational separation continued the distinction between considering building development and buildings' artistry.

As planning was criticised for its sloth and inflexibility to react to social and economic change, so too listing inadequately protected individual morsels whilst their characteristic surroundings were redeveloped. Despite the introduction of listed building consents in 1968, conservation required a broader concept of areal protection. Although the early rapid designation of conservation areas was

imperative and meant the omission of many recognised planning requirements (Gamston 1975), it gradually resembled planning more with the introduction of tighter consent procedures for alterations and demolitions in conservation areas in 1971 (DoE 1972). Yet Rock (1974) observed that protection was internally confused over its direction: protection concerned much more than buildings alone yet planning legislation was lagging behind. From the early 1970s the conservation area and listed building consent procedures have paralleled the procedural decision-making of general planning permission cases (Ross 1995).

Following Circular 8/87 (DOE 1987), PPG15 further emphasises that conservation is integral to planning through the development plan. It seems that conservation has fully achieved integration with such official statements as:

Conservation in the built environment is most emphatically not something separate from mainstream town and country planning.

(RTPI 1993: 1)

Conservation is moving into the mainstream of national life and planners are helping to put it there.

(Planning 1998: 15)

Some observers doubt how practical the generalised nature of development plan policy will be for the specific requirements of discrete area management (Larkham 1994). Indeed continuing calls for local authorities to embrace conservation plans beyond their planning responsibilities (Clark 1998) and the unresolved lack of protection for many locally important unlisted buildings (Boland 1999) would indicate that statutory planning is still not as effective as many would wish to see it. However the official recognition that protection is a significant component in planning is welcomed (Barrett 1993). It ought be recognised though, that in pursuing integration, conservation becomes equally susceptible to the political conflicts inherent in planning.

The protection of environmental quality may be too important an issue to be dealt with in 'discrete area' conservation planning. Some have commented that listing and conservation areas are proof that planners do not have the necessary skill and appreciation to protect the 'historic' environment without it being specifically highlighted (Ayers 1977). Reade (1991) goes further, criticising the administrative segregation of conservation which reduces the importance of conservation as a general planning principle. Punter (1987) also criticises this two-tier system of conservation since it relegates the features and areas not on administrative lists: they receive perfunctory standards of design control thereby eroding the identity of less 'pretty' areas. Proposals to incorporate conservation controls into planning

permissions may solve this marginalisation (Mynors 1998) but there still exists a professional distinction between conservation and planning exposed by the creation of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation at a time when the RTPI was attempting to embrace conservation.

3.3 The spatial focus of protection controls

Structure specific . . . Environmental

Conservation has evolved from protecting isolated sites of ancient archaeological interest to encompassing whole sections of the urban environment. Within this huge spatial range, the respective controls' strengths and weaknesses reveal the inherent priorities and values in the system.

On one level, the relative strengths of controls and the development of concepts for their implementation reflect the political support behind them. Similarly, funding for the various conservation regimes indicates where priorities lie. On another level, the breadth of conservation's focus involves different conceptual and professional approaches. Comparing minute details in a building's construction with the environmental capacity of the historic environment encompasses professional approaches with differing languages and philosophies, from architectural historians to environmental conservationists. Any relative strengths of one scale of protection over another is also reflective of the dominant professional values in conservation; the question is the extent to which any potential differences create conflict and tension.

The resilience of private property rights in the face of any state intervention has moulded statutory conservation control, the Ancient Monuments Acts of 1883 and 1913 being classic examples. Contrary to the prevailing attitude for listing before its introduction, subsequent listing practice shunned a more holistic view of protecting places, the professional preference and administrative direction for listing was to concentrate on individual buildings (Earl 1997). Contextual value was considered more appropriate for general development control, though the influence of private property rights persisted in case law, refining the introspective concepts of curtilage, fixtures and fittings: considering the building in isolation rather than in its context (Mynors 1995; Suddards 1996).

The focus on individual features in the environment became more apparent when new development, often dramatically, changed the context of these isolated 'gems'. Introducing areal conservation heralded a new realm of perceiving the value of features:

If the townscape or cadastral unit is the object of concern then this has implications for the functioning of such areas which were not so obvious when monuments could be treated as isolated islands.

(Ashworth 1991: 21)

Whilst the conservation area was a major triumph for lobbyists, its legislative phrasing continues to provoke criticism. Firstly whilst broadening the physical scale of protection, it extended concepts of 'value' far wider than could be realistically accommodated within the existing listing criteria of 'special architectural or historic interest': this shall be dealt with in greater detail below (3.6).

Secondly, areal conservation involved not only buildings of minor interest but also the spatial relationship between built elements. A renewed discipline emerged through the townscape analysis work of Worskett (1969) & Cullen (1971) among others. Although later criticised for its pictorial simplicity (Hubbard 1994), it started to blur the professional distinctions separating conservationists, urban designers and planners. Moreover in addition to the spatial expansion of value, the 'character' of an area was not definable solely by its buildings. The uses and users of these areas, the social and less tangible cultural dimensions of character, were not represented in conservation practice, despite the Civic Amenity Act's introduction during a period of planning characterised by a strong public participation agenda. Ironically, strengthening building specific controls has been mooted to prevent the erosion of areal character in conservation areas (EHTF 1992).

Thirdly, despite the introduction of the conservation area consent in 1972 and its extension in 1974 to cover all demolitions of unlisted buildings in conservation areas (DOE 1974), the controls accompanying designation have remained fairly weak. The lack of clear areal concepts and the reticence of central Government policy to direct local authorities' initiatives in this field have not supported conservation area controls. Listing, by contrast, enjoyed an introduction in a period of planning characterised by strong regulatory controls (Saint 1996).

The combination of weak areal concepts and controls, leaving context poorly understood and protected, has created a '*critical cultural gap that remains to be filled*' (Saint 1996: 133). The contribution of more intensive urban townscape and

morphological analysis has not been fully realised in planning practice (Barrett 1993; Larkham 1996; Mageean 1999). This lack of a more holistic, contextual management has led to criticisms that the British system places *'its emphasis on preserving individual buildings as monuments, while, as a nation, we treat our historic towns, cities and villages badly.'* (Powell 1992).

Though 'character' and 'appearance' were inevitably criticised for introducing amenity *'by the back door'* into a purists' realm of protection (Mynors 1984), there appears to be a growing concern to address context. Whilst 'place' is not a new academic concept (Relph 1976; Johnson 1991; Urry 1995), it has emerged in practice after modernist planning's proclivity with universal 'space'. Indeed Worthington (1998) concludes that *'placemaking is now at the heart of conservation'* (p177). Certainly the EHTF is promoting place management as a central component of good practice for local authorities (EHTF 1998). It is also having an impact on official conservation thinking - providing a 'sense of place' has appeared in Government policy as a justification for conservation, however its meaning receives scant elucidation (PPG15 para 6.1-6.2). Embracing concepts of 'place' and promoting sustainable environments are perhaps the two main challenges facing conservation practice (Dean 1992). Particularly given the political ascendancy of sustaining the natural environment (Mageean 1999), it questions whether built environment conservation has been *'left behind'* (EHTF 1992: 5).

3.4 The extent of acceptable change

Preservationism . . . Conservationism

Owen (1976) commented that protection is located at one end of the spectrum of appropriate techniques for development. Despite the philosophical and practical confusion between the various interpretations of preservation and conservation, they are defined by the same root: the management of change. 'Preservation' and 'conservation' have almost become self-parodying defences erected by different groups - architects confronting planners or conservationists against developers - from which they can cast aspersions on the others' interpretations of 'acceptable' change.

Ashworth (1997) considers the preservationist legacy has monopolised protection control in Britain for the past century. With an antiquarian bias, preservation halts the temporal decay of a relic, preserving it as an archival record. This initial ethos could not foresee how protection was to evolve; *'...the more successful the movement the more is created to preserve.'* (Ashworth 1991: 25). Relying on the ability of the owner to pay the maintenance costs, preservation became increasingly untenable since prohibiting change restricted a building's capacity to generate income: preservation was perceived as a liability by owners.

During the 1960s however, the introduction of conservation areas increased the number of buildings subject to protection control. A professional desire to break from the preservationist mould accompanied promoting a more creative use and integration of these old buildings; the 'enhancement' of areas (Maguire 1998). Government policy emphasised conservation as a positive responsibility, tolerant of appropriate new additions and revitalising buildings (MHLG 1967b).

However, conservation areas have not been characterised as a progressive approach (Morton 1998; O'Rourke 1987). Irrespective of local planning authority management, the reluctance to be progressive is often cited as a fear of change, a continued reaction against the decades of de-sensitising modernist post-war urban re-development (Relph 1987). Some writers highlight the limits of the human capacity to actually deal with extensive environmental change (Toffler 1970; Marris 1993). Arguably the architectural profession's candour for building a bold future is not always shared by the general public (Stamp 1996). It places the planning profession in a particularly difficult position balancing the 'public interest' over acceptable change, whilst wishing to avoid accusations of repeating previous mistakes.

Despite such criticisms, two agendas have influenced the perceived degree of acceptable change over the last 20 years. The first has been the increasing emphasis on sustainable conservation. In most interpretations this provides a resource-based economic rationale for bringing old structures back into use. The second may be partially due to the success of the first's changing attitudes. If the economic argument for conversion was proven, developers have been more eager to pursue conversion rather than new build, particularly if the associated 'heritage' value of an old building adds to the commercial profit. The message of re-inventing buildings and areas rather than re-creating them is percolating the profession (Latham 1999). Such conversions and their contribution to urban regeneration

schemes have been stressed recently by EH (1999). This document, along with recent press statements about EH's role (Rogers 1997), may indicate the direction in which conservation practice is headed. If this is the case then conservation rather than being a desirable end in itself would be further applied as a tool of economic regeneration, driven by an urban economic agenda rather than an art-historical, cultural one.

3.5 The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

Minority interest . . . Popular interest

The early preservationist pioneers are too easily characterised as an elitist minority of upper middle class intellectuals. Their evangelical concern for saving ancient monuments were of a romantic and historicist nature, for their connection to a lamented 'golden age' (Kennet 1972). However for some, this concern accompanied a radical social agenda which drew inspiration from the spiritual and aesthetic beauty and continuity provided by these features (Macmillan 1993). Considering this emancipatory agenda motivated some conservationists, the contrast with the present situation is all the more startling whereby conservation appears part of 'the establishment' and is generally accepted as a good thing by the majority of people.

On the face of it this consensus appears so widespread to be beyond reproach; Delafons (1997b) notes the lack of ardent criticism levelled at the conservation process. It may be so 'accepted' that it is beyond politics and enjoys intimate cross party support - even the Thatcher administration did not assault conservation controls. Its political legitimacy rests on its popularity.

The literature tends to present conservation's broadening appeal as a cycle of increasing public awareness as certain important buildings are threatened with demolition: the reaction to protect them raises the value and profile of a particular style or period of architecture. It is an educative process as certain 'taste-leaders' transform public preferences (Stamp 1996). The formation of various interest groups (now the statutory amenity societies) in response to these watersheds provides convenient pegs on which to hang an analysis of the broadening appreciation and appeal of conservation.

However such an approach focuses on the evolution and appreciation of architectural taste, of legitimating ever more recent pieces of architecture for conservation's attention. It neglects the wider cultural appreciation of the past outside these architectural manifestations. Not since the Victorian explosion in the provision and visiting of civic museums has society been so actively interested in the past as we are today (PSI 1995). The rise of heritage has undoubtedly seen, be it a cause of or a reaction to, a broader and more popular appreciation of the relics of history. The interest is not necessarily academic or confined to the built environment and presents a fresh perspective to valuing the past (Merriman 1991). The broader heritage can be viewed as a democratisation of history, the élitist attitude which formed the preservation lobby must contend with stronger, populist attitudes (Samuel 1994). However there remains a cultural or even class distinction surrounding 'the heritage'. Samuel (1994) has criticised the heritage-baiters of snobbery in their pillorying of heritage as 'low-brow' mass culture. Yet conversely Hewison (1987) cites heritage as snobbish on account of the bias of local museums, conservation areas and heritage shops to the traditionally middle-class ghettos of England.

The extent to which popular interest resides in this more heritage-oriented sphere rather than an architectural one may be quite anomalous for the 'consensus' supporting conservation. A distinction must be recognised between an interest in the past, an interest in the past manifest in the built environment and an interest in the past which can be accommodated or expressed through conservation controls. The consensus may be questionable if its popularity is due to a wider interpretation of interest in the past than those factors which conservation planning recognises. Furthermore if this is the case then it begs the question, who defines the consensus or public interest.

National policy cites *'processes of consultation and education to facilitate'* broad public support being a *'key element'* (DOE/DNH 1994 para. 1.7). Tracing participation back to the Civic Amenities Act, policy encouraged local authorities to involve the public in conservation area designations (MHLG 1968). However the continuing vitriol against development pressures over-riding local objections questions conservation's responsiveness towards popular concerns. Recent research suggests that although conservation is well supported, public understanding of conservation controls, justifications and presence is low or misinterpreted (Townshend & Pendlebury 1999). Though conservation officers believed in engaging local opinion, confusion arose over whether this process was

to educate the public or to learn from them (Pendlebury & Townsend 1999). Conservation may be popular, but does its statutory incarnation necessarily represent a popular interpretation of values?

3.6 The interpretation of features' interest

Architectural and Historical . . . Societal and Cultural

The long development of architectural restoration has provided the theoretical and practical support for urban conservation since the last century.

(Zanchetti & Jokilehto 1997: 38)

The term 'special architectural or historic interest' has enjoyed a long established primacy as a central definition of conservation's attention (Delafons 1997a). There appears to have been little criticism of the phrase as it has successfully accommodated shifting interpretations: PPG15's definition of 'interest' is certainly far broader than previous policy under the same legislative criteria (DOE/DNH 1994 s.6). Yet the established nature of the term's value merits review precisely because of its continuity. It is arguable that the ethos pervading the whole urban conservation system is based on an architectural understanding of value, to the relegation, if not exclusion, of other types of value perception. To not at least highlight its shortfalls or any alternatives would be to accept it as the dominant ideology of conservation. The issues raised loosely fall into two arguments. The first involves the different scope of architectural and historic interest and the second the extent to which the extrinsic value of features is recognised or is even compatible with the statutory framework.

Whilst the term is cited as one indivisible term, 'architectural interest' and 'historic interest' have been developed and interpreted in different ways, involving not only different standards but also potentially conflicting philosophies. Although the original 1946 'Instructions to Inspectors' were remarkably broad in recognising the social dimension of historic interest, subsequent listing practice has;

...concentrated heavily on architectural interest and... it has always been easier to defend buildings whose interest can be described principally in terms of their architectural interest.

(Earl 1997: 115)

PPG15 continues to emphasise architectural over historic interest. Features of architectural interest are more likely to be listed irrespective of other similar examples, whereas features of historic interest require a more selective

consideration against similar examples (para. 6.13). Whereas architectural considerations may justify a listing irrespectively, historic interest is a contributory factor which although may raise the grade awarded, in itself is usually insufficient to merit listing (para. 6.15).

Historic interest, in contrast to the objective professional recognition that determines architectural interest, is a less tangible concept. It is characterised by relative judgements and the consideration of historical circumstances which, by definition, are unique and therefore difficult to compare. Despite clear evidence that the original listing Instructions considered the importance of reflecting social history, some commentators see protection being undermined by including features whose historic interest is best recorded in paper archives not their physical preservation (Morton 1997).

Undoubtedly there has been an expansion in the importance and consideration of historic interest. Powell (1992) noted Pevsner's dicta - a cathedral is architecture, a bicycle shed is a building - in reporting EH's intentions to list war-time domestic prefabricated chalets. The interest relating to the social history of this structure far outweighs its architectural value and so with the thematic listing of twentieth century buildings, the interpretation of 'historic' has significantly changed, with legitimate status given to social values. This leads onto the second set of considerations affecting the perception of value from an extrinsic perspective.

Although there is a need for objective methods in the definition and assessment of the urban structure, there is equally a need for a new consciousness of heritage values. After all conservation of cultural heritage is fundamentally a cultural problem.

(Zanchetti & Jokilehto 1997: 38)

Despite the broadening appreciation of features in the built environment, the institutional framework remains tied to this academic, architectural orientation (Cantell 1975). The recognition of a feature's value has traditionally followed a formal aesthetic approach whereby the interest is intrinsic to the object - it possesses qualities and characteristics presented as universally recognisable. However the value of a feature may also be extrinsic, residing in people's experiences of these environments (Punter 1994; Ashworth 1997). The established appreciation of value in conservation whilst acknowledging this socio-aesthetic has never ventured to include this type of value; it is perceived as too subjective and diverse.

By turning attention to the experience of the object rather than the object itself, the apparent objectiveness of assessment and the expert's knowledge required to

assess value are dealt a hefty blow. As Jones (1993) notes, as existing disciplines define value in the cultural landscape, the process becomes an end in itself, cataloguing and selecting valued features to serve the purposes of planning and administration. In contrast, when landscape value is seen as comprising different meanings and symbols for various cultural and socio-economic groups in society, the role of the professional then alters to facilitate the comprehension of these extrinsic interpretations - it becomes a tool of cultural analysis.

The introduction of conservation areas illustrated this point by limiting their identification to architectural or historic interest alone. Though townscape analysis was lauded as the more holistic approach, it suffered from concentrating solely on the physical relationship between buildings and spaces. In listing buildings as an *aide memoire* to planning, such a scant exposition of value in describing architectural features sufficed. However attempting to define the 'character' of an area involves wider contributions from visual and social factors, the use and function of areas and their cultural significance (Suddards & Morton 1991). Evidence suggests that character analysis is poorly addressed in local development plans (Punter & Carmona 1997). Character requires considering issues which planning, bounded by physical land use concerns, may be unable to address. However conservation ought not neglect these issues simply because it can't directly control them, though it is only fairly recently that addressing character has been officially tackled by EH (1995a). Protecting the palimpsest is the weakest area of English conservation practice (Earl 1997) when compared to international approaches.

Perhaps this is endemic of a peculiarly English approach to culture. Though suggestions to widen the compass of protection to include a cultural dimension have been made from the top of the profession (Page 1990), it seems the profession's response has been relatively lukewarm. In contrast, the Burra Charter (Earl 1997 appendix 4) is perhaps the most progressive recognition of the cultural significance of, and need for conservation. Similarly UNESCO has displayed a tradition of maintaining and promoting the continuity and stability of cultural significance through place identity and association (Shankland 1975).

To achieve this, conservation must recognise such personal, social and cultural appreciation of meaning and symbols. It involves understanding elements of behavioural psychology (Hubbard 1993) and environmental perception (Lowenthal 1985) to justify protection on the grounds of psychological needs for indicators of

stability and continuity in the environment (Lynch 1972). The more recent literature approaching the concept of 'place' observes that understanding the cultural symbolism and representation in features is essential for strategies of conservation (Hayden 1995; Boyer 1994).

3.7 The hierarchy of significance

Special, National interest . . . Familiar, Local Interest

...the identification of cultural values in relation to urban structures happens mainly through the use of symbolic systems of reference, such as history, aesthetics (art), or, quite simply, age... and is thus related to political power games associated with the process of forming images, memories and representations in a given society.

(Zanchetti & Jokilehto 1997: 41)

Since features (and processes) in the urban environment are vehicles for transferring social meanings, whether conservation emphasises national or local agendas reflects the power to replicate certain values and preferences over one another. Ashworth (1991) has noted that the strength and priority given to the level of protection measures (national, regional, local, site specific) are the main differences between various countries' approaches. It reflects the value that society places on the contribution of the past towards a local and more reflexive or a national and official use of those resources. Inevitably the distinction between national and local interest is partly a control issue - with different bodies responsible for national and local concerns there is a power relationship which determines who sets the agenda for conservation objectives - this aspect will be dealt with more specifically below (3.11).

However this power relationship, through the definition of 'special' interest, determines the boundaries of legitimate concern for conservation control. Arguably, 'special' represents a quality control mechanism, particularly necessary in the light of the burgeoning mass of stock already protected. The literature highlights two main interpretations of 'special' - national importance and the concept of authenticity.

Policy emphasises that listing buildings is based on their '*national significance*' (DOE/DNH 1994 para. 6.16). The apparent objectivity, centralised scrutiny and rigour of listing in addition to the subsequent strength of listed building controls have consolidated listing's valuation of 'specialness'. In contrast conservation areas were devolved to local authorities' interpretation of the special architectural or

historic interest in the character or appearance of their areas. The diversity of recognising this 'specialness', the lack of suitable concepts to define special areal character/value and weak areal controls have produced intense criticism of conservation areas. Since policy considers local interest is more appropriately dealt with by conservation areas or local lists it places local interest into schemes which have not been given as broad an opportunity to develop the concepts of specialness. Therefore the approach of listing and national significance will continue to distinguish what is 'special' in the urban environment (Shelbourn 1996).

Although it is opportune to stress 'national significance' when conservation is supported by the tourist potential of exploiting national heritage, to describe listed buildings as being of active national interest is something of a falsehood. Apart from the initial identification of national interest from an academic perspective, it is local authorities, not national organisations who have the greater influence over features' care and management.

Yet this is just one interpretation of specialness, pre-determined by one group in society, based on one particular set of architectural and historical criteria. As Ashworth (1997) notes, the basis for those criteria is the authenticity of the feature. From this fairly academic perspective, the whole aim of protection is to save relics' element of authenticity: the genuine features which have survived the years are thus 'special'. Though it is acknowledged that survival of one relic has been at the expense of many others, this previous 'natural selection' by use and obsolescence is actually serendipitous. The feature could not be accurately described as authentic before it was 'sacralised' by a political selection of such 'special' relics considered worth protection. Such distortions by chance and later conscious selection has led Lowenthal to conclude that authenticity is '*a dogma of self-delusion*' (quoted in Ashworth 1997: 97). It raises the question that *if* authenticity is as weak a basis for protection criteria as some argue, what could other interpretations of 'special' contribute?

If conservation of the urban environment is seen as the management of place identity, to provide stability and continuity, recognising the cultural association and meaning of place are concepts which do not make a distinction between what is special and what is ordinary. Both are capable of making equal contributions to these types of value concepts.

As Wright (1985) has noted, the more institutional view of the past and history emphasises protecting the state or national type of relic. Consider the influence of

tourism on conservation. Urry (1990) proposes that the tourist's gaze settles on historic scenes or features which conform to a pre-determined conception of the picturesque, contrasting to or removed from the everyday environment: a stereotype. However the non-tourist does not perceive that same environment in this way. In contrast, their '*everyday historical consciousness*', whose strength Wright advocates, identifies 'familiar' elements in the environment as equally valuable. Smith (PF, 1974) has stated that protecting familiarity is such an emotive force that it shapes public hostility or approval of new planning developments. The ordinary and commonplace serve equally as symbols and carriers of meaning in this environment, they equally comprise the character of the area and any assessment must address the whole palimpsest (Bold & Guillery 1998).

3.8 The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

Expert opinion . . . Lay opinion

Whilst legislation and policy lay down the guidelines and criteria for conservation, they are shaped by and are subject to the interpretation of the people implementing these processes. Through their opinions and judgements, particular interpretations and values are consolidated as the legitimate scope of conservation. Though there is evidently a conceptual difference between 'public interest' and 'public preference', the evidence of having explored either in relation to conservation is conspicuous by its absence (Hubbard 1994). Considering that 'public interest' is a nominal basis for conservation intervention, it is desirable that those people involved in conservation recognise and include any commonly shared values.

Fowler (1981) amongst others, has identified the spheres of interest and opinion in society relating to peoples' 'sense of past'. This ranges from a minority core interest of scholars, through popular interest, apathy and neglect. Although this may be stating the obvious, it is important to recognise the validity of each perspective and to ensure that control is as representative of many opinions rather than just those of a paternal minority.

Conservation is pursued within a distinct philosophy to which many may subscribe, yet only a few are engaged in establishing and implementing the necessary rules.

(Smith, D 1974: 133)

Professionals may happily operate under a notional public interest which widens the disparity between their professional perceptions of values and those held by

non-professional conservationists, the public. It questions not only the relationship between the conservationist and the public but also between the conservationist and planning officers.

The professional perspective as Ashworth notes (1997) reflects a formal aesthetic approach whereby the value of the feature is inherent in the object. Given sufficient training and knowledge, experts receive value as the building can 'speak for itself' (Earl 1997), value is seen as self-evident. However Hubbard (1994) comments that the professional socialisation of groups, through a shared professional language, background and values implicitly exclude others from contributing to the realisation of legitimate values. It is an exclusive and exclusionary practice. Macinnes (1993) stresses the artifice accompanying the various academic and professional value distinctions constructed over the same environment actually hampers integration and co-operation. Maguire (1997) even cites academic research as contributing to the severance of these features from an everyday existence by treating them as archival 'documents' instead of stimuli of emotional responses. It is an important distinction that may arise as between conservationists and planners as vis-à-vis the public.

Where public involvement or contributions are cited it is usually anecdotally. Often design professionals generally claim that the public do not understand or have no taste appreciation anyway: *'such an appreciation gap is frequently used as a justification for excluding the public from the design process'* (Hubbard 1994: 271). However as regards the non-professional's interpretation of conservation value there has been little qualitative evidence (Datel & Dingemans 1984). Comparisons may be sought from other areas though such as environmental perception (Tuan 1974, 1977) or sociology (Marris 1993; Merriman 1991). As regards design control, Hubbard (1994) concludes that there are consistent and identifiable aspects of lay appreciation of the built environment which planners do not account for. Rather than appreciating the relics for specific architectural qualities, mere visual stimulus is of equal importance (Hubbard 1993). Bourassa (cited in Hubbard 1994) has suggested that a planner's perspective is comparable to a tourist's, an external and detached view with less appreciation of the inter-action between local users and their environment. Like Urry's (1990) 'tourist gaze', their valuation of elements can focus on a pre-formed stereotype and does not include the familiar and common features that may carry equally valuable meanings and associations for the users of that environment. Jones (1993) comments that current professional practice remains rooted in identifying value irrespective of the cultural analysis which is

required to understand the variety of meanings perceived in the landscape by social groups.

Turning attention to practice, further distinctions can be drawn. Listing is long established as a national and centralised operation, well-resourced and comprehensive. An informed body of knowledge and a process of quality verification ensure that all listed buildings are systematically defined (Grant 1996). Conservation areas contrary to presumptions that their introduction would follow the centralised listing process, saw local planning authorities receive unfettered discretion in the process. Moreover, conservation areas accompanied a new planning era of greater responsiveness to, and inclusion of, local peoples' opinion through such measures as conservation area advisory committees. However rather than see increased public participation as a positive step, some have felt that such '*government by plebiscite*' (Heap 1975: 36) would open protection to the fickle nature of public opinion (Cherry 1974). Although there are mechanisms available for the public to contribute to local conservation decision-making, their perceptions, values and language may be seen as incompatible with the professional and thus 'legitimate' scope of conservation. There have been revisions to make conservation more open, for example the public consultations on post-war thematic listing (Cherry 1995). However it is open to question whether such moves represent expansionist attempts to gain public acceptance of the professionals' values or whether it is an opportunity to acknowledge some of the wider conservation values that may reside in non-professional interpretation.

Townshend and Pendlebury (1999) acknowledge this discrepancy between the public's holistic perception of environmental value and the professionals' 'elitist didactic' orientation. The exclusivity of such expert interpretations create a widening gulf between the popular and professional aspirations for protection. Studies have illustrated the variance between these preferences (Hubbard 1994; Morris 1981) and it has been suggested that practice ought become more responsive to grass-roots interpretations of, and association with, place. However these studies also illustrate a low awareness amongst the public regarding conservation's aims and provisions (Larkham 2000).

3.9 Aspects of heritage valuation

Formal 'Historical' knowledge . . . The past as a cultural collage

Pilloried in some quarters yet praised in others, the impact of 'heritage' cannot be understated, partly for its breadth of interpretation but moreover for its consequent revision of conceptions of the past and 'pastness'. As regards to conservation value there are arguably two main issues; the first concerns the positive or negative nature of heritage; the second the orientation from object to subject value. The heritage debate has also involved more discussion about the temporal relations that exist for individuals and for society between the present and the past.

Perhaps because it is not strictly an architectural debate, conservation has not fully addressed heritage's impact to the extent that other cultural conservation disciplines have, such as museum curatorship (Merriman 1991). The use of architectural or historic interest to evaluate listed buildings and its use in earlier planning legislation owes much to interpreting these relics' use as academic references for objective historical inquiry. The preservation of the relics' authenticity was paramount for a 'genuine' representation of the past's survivors. However personal association with 'pastness' is irrespective of the actual age of the relic, rather as Wright (1985) notes, it is due to everyday experience and associations with familiar themes and elements in the social environment. The 'authenticity' of the relic as vaulted by an academic view, is of less concern to everyday experience which values the representation the relic provides - the past is more a resource to be used rather than preserved for authenticity. Both Lynch (1972) and Ashworth (1997) note that the survival of such relics is due to their good fortune in the face of contemporaneous economic or political circumstances. Thus the 'historic environment' portrayed by preservation policy is far from an accurate representation of that age, since areas have changed differentially over the subsequent years. Lynch (1972) prefers the term '*temporal collage*' to describe past relics in the present, particularly as 'historic environment' suggests something static, pre-determined and separate from an everyday experience of the environment.

This temporal collage is the juxtaposition of past and present in a complementary relationship, not merely architecturally but the mental associations and layering of meanings created by that context (Jones 1993). Wright (1985) too stresses that the eclectic context surrounding a relic provides more emphatic interest than the

relic itself. Such symbolism and representation is used in post-modern architecture as a creative resource, in contrast to modernist rejections of the past (Jencks 1991). Lowenthal (1985) advocates this ought to be leading us to a more creative use of the past, rather than just preserving it. It is argued by some that such uses are heralding a significant change in attitude towards perceiving the past as a creative cultural resource rather than one so venerated it becomes untouchable (Thomas 1994).

It is indisputable that the 'past' is far from static. The veneration for classical antiquity or the golden medieval age, has been equalled by a nostalgia for Victoriana, the golden 'inter-war years', the war-time spirit; even the culture of the 1960s is being engulfed by these sentiments (Samuel 1994). The valuation of the past is increasingly protecting features that are decades, rather than centuries, old. This is led by the legitimation and inclusion of personal history through more diverse sources such as family association, stories and memories (Merriman 1991). As the past catches up with the present, some argue that heritage is (and always was) an emancipatory tool which challenges the homogeneity of objective history. In being able to re-use, re-invent and revitalise present areas and people's lives through the use of 'historic' buildings, resources or themes, a heritage based approach moves away from authenticity of the object to the authenticity, or quality, of experience evoked in the user. As the value of the built heritage is its variety and juxtaposition of components (Bold & Guillery 1998), so the scope of heritage allows a diversity of interpretation beyond its traditional confines. By treating features as carriers of contemporary cultural meaning (Jones 1993) heritage is about the renewal and adaptation of value. No longer the transmission of stable 'self-evident' values, the recognition of heritage values is as much a discourse of the present as of the past (Merriman 1991).

3.10 Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

Intrinsic value . . . Commodity value

It is only relatively recently that the literature has explicitly addressed the prevailing economic and political climate affecting conservation. Whilst political support and economic circumstances have inevitably influenced the success of conservation, the literature has traditionally seen these as separate from the concerns of

professional conservation. As such there is less literature exploring these realms' effect on conservation, but considering the wider picture is imperative.

Although conservation of the built environment may isolate certain aspects for their cultural interest, it is not as easy to isolate these features from their necessity to generate revenue. The artifice of conservation controls over natural obsolescence in the face of development pressure has been noted elsewhere (Larkham 1992; 1996), however changing economic forces have introduced significant revisions to the traditional perception of conservation.

In the literature, the effects of economic considerations were generally treated in relation to direct costs of the purchase, repair and sale of buildings. More specifically the availability of repair grants and their respective tax regimes warranted attention. The orthodox view saw conservation, a regulatory mechanism as an inevitable obstacle to development, an additional cost which prevented profit maximisation. This necessarily implied that without an extra layer of control to protect such features, the market would not recognise or respect their conservation value.

Indeed as evidence from empirical studies has shown (Larkham 1996), balancing or even demonstrating the tangible value of conservation against hard economic forecasts of profitability is difficult. Conservation value is relatively amorphous and resides in more diffuse community benefits. In actual development decision-making conservation issues often require strengthening by additional, cogent economic arguments.

Attempts to define the economic benefits/value of conservation have largely remained either academic exercises or isolated case-studies recommending further qualitative research (Scanlon 1994; Allison 1996). Garrod et al (1996) note the practical extent of the public's commitment to conservation by their willingness to pay for it through indirect taxation. Lichfield (1988, 1997) has been more comprehensive in defining a method for such analysis yet it remains under-represented in national policy guidance let alone local planning authority practice. One common problem has been the inadequacy of methods (such as the contingent valuation method (CVM)) developed in relation to identifiable visitor sites/attractions to reveal the complexity and subtlety of economic value to a community whereby conservation encourages investment in a higher quality environment.

The most significant change affecting the consideration of economic factors has been the move away from perceiving the cultural built heritage (CBH) as a resource to be conserved solely for economic prudence (e.g. SAVE 1979). It is equally exploitable in generating its own income solely due to the fact of its conserved existence. It is a tradable resource which town and city authorities are employing in the competition to attract investment and development (Urry 1995). The evidence for such conservation based economic regeneration is overwhelming (EH 1998; Skea 1996) As Strange notes (1996, 1997), changing patterns of local economic development necessarily require urban regions to emphasise their distinctive qualities over other similarly attributed competitors. Though Ashworth (1991, 1997) considers such a heritage use-value offers the potential to consolidate conservation and development pressures, the demands of tourism and heritage exploitation result in acute conflicts with more traditional interpretations of conservation (Barrett 1993). Indeed the saleability of 'pastness' can result in the creation of historic imagery through appropriate marketing, imagery and pastiche reproduction. As this use value dominates, the value of historical image subsumes features' intrinsic qualities - the protection of the past is no longer a cause in itself but a means for ulterior motives. Exposing winners and losers in the community is contrary to received apolitical assessments of conservation yet is essential to perform an accurate cost-benefit analysis (Lichfield 1997). It draws conservation into a more politically sensitive area.

3.11 The influence of political agendas

Purity of choice . . . A Political Tool

Throughout the statutory development of conservation, from 1940s Parliamentary debates regarding listing to the Thatcher administration's support of heritage, there appears to have been a tacit political consensus for conservation with appreciable mutual benefits for both. Conservation enjoyed a degree of political tolerance which furthered its cause, whereas politics could trade off conservation's popularity. However the ease of conservation's political acceptance has been a double-edged sword. Based on professional art-historical objectivity and afforded the luxury of taking the high moral ground under an apolitical guise, Delafons considers (1997b) conservation has neatly avoided scrutiny over its inherently political social and economic consequences.

Conservation, like planning, involves the management of finite resources and a political consideration of the development and conservation merits. However while conservation may claim a feature's value is intrinsic and objective, the threat of development can often distort this evaluation. It is increasingly difficult to sustain 'pure' conservation arguments without reference to the local and national political agendas which shape their outcome. Worskett (1975, 1982) notes that conservation is not an end in itself and must operate in tandem with broader socio-economic policies. To successfully secure financial assistance for conservation (a more robust indicator of political support), the aims and objectives must be directed towards fulfilling the wider political objectives of the relevant institutions. The important issue is the extent to which conservation must 'progress' or stray from its traditional concerns to fulfil a political agenda, which may create conflict between the two.

This process may be seen at two levels. The first is competition within organisational structures - the power relationship between central and local government. National conservation advice in line with much planning policy is becoming increasingly centralised, allowing for little autonomy and discretion by the implementing local authorities (Allmendinger & Thomas 1998). Funding regimes and competitive bidding for national moneys along strictly defined criteria reduces responsiveness to local priorities in favour of matching any local circumstances to criteria that will attract funding. State and economic restructuring has affected local governance to a significant degree yet as Strange observes (1996, 1997) relatively little is known about the effects of enforced privatisation and partnership on the local political economy in historic towns.

The second aspect is the potential differences that may arise between local and national policy objectives. Under New Labour's administration, since 1997 there has been a distinct shift in conservation politics, away from the 'National Heritage', tourism enterprise of the Conservatives, towards an ethos of urban regeneration and social integration (Larkham & Barrett 1998). As national resources are arguably directed away from conservation, EH has been quick to portray itself as a regeneration, rather than a conservation, organisation. Similarly the devolution of economic planning to the Regional Development Agencies has persuaded EH to reorganise along similar lines. Whilst EH may stress that it is merely re-iterating the importance of one aspect of its continuing work, conscious manoeuvring to gain political headway in terms of ensuring vitality and a continuing rationale for funding may set up potential conflicts within conservation activity.

Whilst there is a distinct emphasis on regeneration at a national policy level, it is to be seen whether local authorities - their Members and officers - perceive the position of conservation in the same way. Much as EH has had to reposition itself to align with strong political directions, so at a local level conservation officers will be subject to the political directions of Members who may or may not support conservation. It may place success in the hands of those officers who are more politically astute than those who necessarily concentrate on the traditional work of conservation.

As mentioned at the outset, there has generally been tacit political support for conservation. This is no place for complacency especially since the evolution of statutory protection can be seen as a series of cumulative policy responses to successive threats. The last 20 years has not experienced any major upset to test this again: it is not inconceivable that the shift towards regeneration may represent such a re-orientation to consider a new conservation paradigm.

3.12 Concluding section: research issues

The literature has provided ample evidence of the many tensions in conservation. Examining the self-evident truths has resulted in a framework of ten themes which highlight particular issues of contemporary concern.

In pursuing an examination of the 'big picture', it would be inappropriate to concentrate on answering specific questions raised within the context of this review. Indeed the themes noted are heuristic and many issues embrace several aspects of this categorisation: it is essential to maintain a holistic approach. It is notable though that the emphases of these themes can be assimilated into three sections of interest.

1. The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

The spatial focus of protection control

The extent of acceptable change

The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

2. The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The interpretation of features' interest

The level of significance

The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

Aspects of heritage valuation

3. The extent to which external pressures, e.g. politics and economics, affect the issues presented above

Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

The influence of political agendas

It would appear appropriate to continue this broad tripartite to define the research issues. The term 'issues' is used in preference to research 'questions' as the point of the study is explorative rather than necessarily seeking definitive answers. Inevitably each research issue comprises a further raft of more specific questions. The research shall address the following issues:

- 1. How does conservation control relate to planning in principle and practice?**
- 2. How is value in the built environment perceived and interpreted for conservation purposes?**
- 3. How do economic and political pressures contribute to or undermine conservation?**

Having developed the conceptual framework to explore the values and justifications underlying conservation, the following chapter develops and discusses the methodological approach used to address these research issues.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

It is clear from the literature review (Chapter 2) that conservation can be characterised as a series of potentially contrasting value positions. As conservation has responded to successive threats, new policies and value justifications were placed alongside existing ones, forming an increasingly complex web of principles. It was also clear that inconsistency equally characterised the various practical operational levels in conservation. These polarities provided the basis for developing the relationships that comprise the conceptual framework in Chapter 3. Identifying the tensions in these themes is the prime focus of the research issues. To this end, these themes *prima facie* indicate appropriate directions for the methodology to address potential conflicts therein.

This chapter charts the development of the methodology in attempting to answer the research issues in as appropriate, valid and coherent manner as possible. Following an outline of the initial structure of the fieldwork, appropriate qualitative research methods are discussed. An appropriate framework is then developed, involving a two tier study of national and local conservation perceptions. The former is an interview survey of representatives from national conservation organisations, the latter involves two local planning authority case-studies. The close proximity of the relationship between the methodology and the conceptual framework is evident throughout. The conceptual framework indicates the most suitable areas for investigation and also later provides the abstract complexity with which to analyse the fieldwork data.

4.2 General strategy

Structure

It is a common criticism of conservation research that there exists a lacunae between discussing abstract generalities and investigating the minutiae of specific, methodologically isolated locales (Larkham 1993, 1996). This study seeks to address this concern by exploring the variety of justifications throughout the conservation system, from top to bottom. Two operational levels appear particularly relevant - the national and local - and the distinct but inter-related considerations of policy and practice. While this approach attempts to be holistic, it was acknowledged from the outset that it cannot claim to comprehensively represent the whole of conservation practice.

These two levels provided an immediate structure to explore value perceptions: to consider those organisations contributing to a culture of national conservation policy; and the local planning authorities, vested with the responsibility of managing the conservation resources. The division was intended to access both the normative, principled orientation of standards and the interpretation of these ideas applied by a local decision-making authority.

Before describing the specifics of the methodology, it is necessary to re-state the purpose of the data collection. The conceptual framework distilled themes of concern from the literature: the fieldwork constitutes an exploration of these ideas - an inductive approach rather than a deductive testing of hypotheses.

A focus on individuals' perceptions

Identifying the values and justifications underlying conservation requires exploring policy and practice to greater depths than documentary evidence alone could provide. Whilst mission statements, annual reports and development plans illustrate formal conservation responsibilities, it is the people involved in the system who create, interpret and reinforce the norms. Certainly much of the heritage literature (Lowenthal 1985; Samuel 1994; Wright 1985) concentrates on the personal and individual reactions to the past which are seen to coalesce in institutional behaviour. Rather than structural forces prevailing to determine the interpretation of conservation, it is fundamentally the agency perspective which is of greater importance. It is these agents' attitudes which influence the orientation of

conservation since their opinions act as a filter and conduit for the information and knowledge legitimating conservation activity. Concentrating on individual agents forms the basis of the methodological considerations. However this is not to disregard the effects of larger scale economic and political forces against which the individual appears powerless.

The interview approach

The methods chosen must be appropriate at all levels of the study to provide a consistency of inquiry throughout. Exploring personal attitudes can be approached in two distinct ways, explicitly and formally, or by less conspicuous and informal methods. Each option involves a different set of considerations and implications for the results produced.

The less explicit route involves observing agents in their everyday work, observing how their interpretation of conservation influences their actions. Such a passive research role has the advantage of minimising potentially distorting effects of the researcher. Whilst this perhaps provides a more representative picture of ordinary practice, there were several drawbacks. Firstly, to provide sufficient data indicating the range of values operating, the length of time required to observe a single agent would be considerable. Since this process would have to be repeated many times for each individual agent in the study, the time constraints proved insurmountable. Secondly it is doubtful whether the identifying causal relationships from agents' actions would accurately reflect their personal values. Since this would appear to require further intervention by the researcher, it was considered that the role of observation was more appropriate to supplement express questioning. Indeed some non-participant observation, particularly in the local authority case studies, contributed to an understanding of the culture and relationships which inevitably had a bearing on the interpretation of the explicit research data.

Express questioning is best conducted with the undivided attention of the agent in an environment which allowed as free a reflection of their personal opinions as possible. A formal approach involves choosing between one-to-one interviewing or focus group discussions. Considering the desire for unlimited reflection, the open forum of a discussion amongst peers may inhibit respondents expressing their personal attitudes about conservation and the organisations in which they operated. The privacy of an individual interview is more suitable to target these concerns. Certainly in terms of ensuring confidentiality to respondents, the

interview approach is indispensable. Many respondents did express such sensitive information that an open forum discussion would have rendered this information inaccessible. The practical considerations of co-ordinating respondents to attend a focus group discussion would have been creating unnecessary problems, especially at the national level where respondents were difficult enough to access.

Questioning techniques

Face to face interviewing offered the flexibility to address each respondent's unique position and role, their values and opinions. However there are issues of consistency in comparing interviews and also how to quantify the results. The form of the desired outcome from respondents somewhat determined the approach taken in conducting the actual interview. An entirely structured interview was considered inappropriate since the essence of the exchange was to allow the respondents an opportunity to reflect on their own perceptions of conservation with a minimal imposition of pre-determined directions.

The type of questions asked of respondents were influenced by the potential analysis of their answers. Although specific methods such as Likert attitudinal scaling and semantic differential scaling (Robson 1993: 264) could be used, it was felt that the fixed type of questioning required by these methods would unduly restrict the scope of the interview. In addition the study was to explore the values informing attitudes and the interpretation of concepts. If respondents had multiple interpretations of a concept, a fixed response question may actually mask or inhibit this variety. In contrast, open questions were more suitable, allowing the interview to develop akin to a natural conversation with the respondent free to associate and express ideas within parameters relevant to the study's central themes. Such a semi-structured method inevitably required a coherent framework to ensure consistent coverage of core themes both within and between interviews.

The conceptual framework, highlighting tensions in relationships in conservation, provided a robust and practical tool on which to base the interview schedule and the subsequent analysis of ideas. The themes could not directly and explicitly be used as an interview schedule for the risk of introducing a significant degree of bias in pre-disposing respondents to answer along these set lines. Rigorously following a series of questions specifically addressing all the issues in the conceptual framework also appeared too prescriptive if the interview was to flow as a conversation allowing the respondent to take the initiative to elucidate their own

views. Consequently the themes were addressed under the specific research issues - relating to land use planning, the interpretation of value in the built environment and the extrinsic factors which influence the aforementioned two groups. This three way categorisation provided not only a convenient mask behind which the interview agenda could be hidden from the respondent, but also provided enough flexibility to cover the various issues within these groups without the need to determine or follow a specific order of questioning. From this basis, specific questions and statements relating to the issues identified in the conceptual framework were formulated as initiators and prompts in the interview schedule (Appendix B). The schedule ultimately became more of a checklist to ensure that all the relevant angles had been covered, rather than a template by which to conduct identical interviews.

Although the intention had been to pilot the interview schedule, identifying suitable candidates proved extremely difficult. The target respondents comprised a very specific and relatively small group of people; finding an individual outside this sphere who possessed the knowledge and experience of the policy world to realistically test the pilot schedule was difficult. Whilst a suitable candidate accepted the undertaking, his late response meant that the practicalities had overtaken the situation - the first interviews had already been conducted. In the event, the schedule stood up very well and only minor modifications were necessary as the interviews progressed.

4.3 Survey of national respondents

Selection and access

In order to establish the normative and strategic underpinning to conservation, the national policy culture was the first section of fieldwork undertaken. Evidently not all bodies with an interest in conservation could be accommodated since this would extend to many diverse fields. The sampling strategy was to consider the body's influence on the national policy direction of conserving the built environment. The national relevance of these bodies' is reflected in Appendix A of PPG15 which lists '*key bodies and organisations*' (p38-43). Whilst some could be omitted for their esoteric concerns, this list formed the basis for selection. In addition, it was felt that the thesis' concern with the attendant planning issues necessitated including

the RTPI's views on conservation. The following table lists all the representatives interviewed.

<p><i>All organisations were represented by one respondent unless otherwise indicated</i></p> <p>Government and partnership organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• English Heritage - (five respondents)• Department of Culture, Media and Sports (two respondents)• Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions <p>NGO's - Voluntary Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancient Monuments Society• Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings• Georgian Group• Victorian Society• Twentieth Century Society• Civic Trust• Royal Fine Art Commission <p>Professional bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Royal Town Planning Institute• Institute of Historic Building Conservation (former Association of Conservation Officers)• English Historic Towns Forum
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Table 4.1 Interviews with national conservation bodies

Once the organisation had been targeted, a further difficulty was unravelling the internal structure to discover the most appropriate respondents. For the Government departments, the Civil Service Yearbook (HMSO 1996) provided relevant names and direct contact details. At the time, EH was less transparent and penetrating the intricacies of its hierarchy proved difficult. The problem of identification, and moreover access, was overcome by approaching the Director of Conservation who provided names of staff and access to them. Though utilising a sample selected by the head of the organisation may have provided a potentially biased sample, the unlimited access from his support opened doors which were commonly barred to external researchers. Whilst these respondents may have presented a particularly favourable or corporate view of conservation, this was not borne out by the interviews. It was important to obtain a range of views in EH given its prominence in the field and the potential for diversity within such a relatively large body. Selecting a diagonal slice of respondents through the organisation attempted to cover the various internal roles and responsibilities.

For the smaller organisations concerned, a single respondent was chosen from each to represent their respective views: these respondents were generally people in senior, if not the head, positions. It was notable throughout this echelon that respondents often played several roles over different sectors. When interviewing

these respondents, it was therefore not entirely clear whose loyalties and agendas they were expressing; for example several respondents at EH were also major players in the Institute of Historic Building Conservation; some involved in the national amenity societies (NAS) had previously worked for EH. This problem of representing the institution's view proved difficult to separate out in practice, except when respondents made it explicit. The respondents mostly represented their own personal view but their institutional background and current role inevitably influenced their opinions. Thus identifying one clear institutional view proved difficult and perhaps unrealistic for later analysis, both at this level and also the local authority case studies.

The interviews were conducted from the end of November 1997 to February 1998 predominantly in the respondents' workplace, in private to reduce respondents' inhibitions of being overheard by colleagues. Each interview lasted just over an hour on average and was taped to provide a full record of the discussion. This would later prove invaluable in the analysis of attitudes and opinions whereby the non-verbal content, ordering of issues and the particular vocabulary used would reveal as much as the spoken expression. A full transcript was produced noting where any inflexion or emphasis, gesture or manner appeared significant to understanding the levels of meaning in their response.

Limitations

It ought be noted that all these interviews were conducted with officers (paid professionals) of these organisations (except the RTPI respondent). However there is another potential value perspective present, amongst those people on various governing executive committees. Whilst it would have been most instructive to explore these avenues too, it was considered that these agents, being interested parties from a wider variety of backgrounds, would not necessarily convey the professional values present in the organisation since they, by definition, sat above the institution.

Several other organisations were also contacted but did not appear to be particularly amenable to discussing conservation issues, through either a lack of response or not being able to identify a suitable respondent therein. Two such organisations were the Local Government Association and the Royal Institute of British Architects. Whilst *prima facie* there was good reason to believe these bodies would be of some influence in national conservation, further investigations

revealed that time and resources may be better deployed pursuing other avenues. This lack of identifiable conservation interests in these groups is in itself significant. Furthermore, since the fieldwork was undertaken, several bodies have become more prominent in national conservation. In particular, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has obtained direct control of conservation grant aid from EH and following the creation of its Townscape Heritage Initiative has gained far more influence. In hindsight perhaps there were also one or two other organisations that would have been interesting to approach, SAVE England's Heritage and perhaps English Partnerships given the emerging emphasis on heritage regeneration. However the omission of these bodies does not undermine the strength or validity of the research findings.

4.4 Omission of a postal survey of local authorities

A connecting tier of investigation was initially envisaged via a survey of local planning authorities' conservation operations and attitudes. This was to link the national level interviews with the specific local authority case studies, not only to address problems of generalising research findings from these discrete localities but also to assist in the selection of suitable authorities to act as case studies. However as the fieldwork progressed, it became clear that the results from the national interviews' exploratory, open response questions would be difficult to replicate in a postal questionnaire form. Since a similar style of questioning was to be used for the local authority case studies, the survey methodology did not equate with the overall scheme, certainly insofar as corresponding to a similar type of analysis.

It was also the intention to use the questionnaire to situate the case studies in an overall picture of practice and attitudes. This basic premise became increasingly untenable as it would be comparing quite different sets of data. To provide a comprehensive picture of practice, there was a strong argument for sending questionnaires to every planning authority in England. However given the comprehensiveness of the sample, only one person from each authority, presumably the conservation officer or equivalent, would be targeted to complete it. The different methods could also have had a significant effect on the type of response to the same question, it being easier to portray a more consistent and

positive approach in a questionnaire than in a face to face interview. The view of the authority, represented by one officer's interpretation, was too great a contrast with the case studies where approximately 40 interviews with respondents inside and outside the authority would form a composite picture.

Whilst this in itself may not have been an insurmountable problem, a question mark remained over the added value this survey would contribute to the thesis, beyond the existing body of knowledge. There were several surveys covering similar ground which would certainly suffice for the purposes of identifying suitable local planning authority case studies. The national surveys of conservation areas and local authority practice by Pearce et al (1990) and Jones and Larkham (1993) certainly provided a base for assessing the responsibilities of particular local authorities. Furthermore the English Historic Towns Forum's (1996, 1997) internal surveys of its local planning authority members provided a wealth of indicators on which to create a short-list of suitable local authorities.

4.5 Local planning authority case studies

Case study methodology

For exploring value perceptions of conservation at the local level, the most obvious approach was a case study methodology. As explained by Yin (1994) and specifically in relation to planning by Punter (1989), the case study offers an ideal vehicle for explanatory research. The holism and depth of analysis it provides is essential to satisfy the research issues stated above (3.12).

In order to explore the interpretation of national conservation policy, the study needed to address the practical implementation and decision-making in a local planning authority. The case study focuses on the local conservation culture, gathering data at two levels. Initially, using documentary evidence and interviews to explore the contextual background of the local authority's conservation operations and secondly, through planning files and more extensive interviewing, researching specific planning applications involving conservation issues.

It is generally accepted that while there are disadvantages of a case study approach, these can be circumvented by appropriate research design. These problems are specifically generalisability and consistency between and within cases

- the validity of findings. These problems are addressed throughout the following design strategy.

Contrasting images

Originally one in-depth case study was envisaged to explore the variety of perceptions about conservation in a particular locality. However a single case study presented problems of determining whether issues and influences were specific to that case or indicated more generalisable trends and themes. Though three local authorities were considered, providing a more representative spread of practice, due to time and resource constraints, two cases were finally chosen.

The literature review of heritage culture highlighted people's responses to different types of heritage and the legitimacy perceived in protecting certain features over others (Morris 1981; Merriman 1991). The case study selection was to contrast a town with a traditional historic image with a town comprising similar conservation responsibilities and resources yet whose image was far removed from the orthodox 'picture postcard' heritage. Inevitably the historic town would have a greater density of listed buildings and to achieve the same numbers of listed buildings a larger non-traditional historic town may have to be selected to provide an equivalent number of listed buildings. However too large a contrast in size, for example between towns of 25,000 and 250,000 residents would involve such disparate economic and social forces in them as to reduce meaningful comparison. Therefore in addition to ensuring the conservation responsibilities were roughly similar, the towns' respective populations were also considered.

Selection

Selecting the two authorities was initially based on the existing literature which gave detailed information about the nature and management of conservation resources under certain local authorities. In particular, the studies mentioned above, by Pearce et al (1990) and the English Historic Towns Forum (1996, 1997), proved invaluable in forming and addressing relevant selection criteria. The latter study of local authority members' conservation practices effectively comprised a list of all the 'traditional historic towns' in England and provided a comprehensive database for selecting a suitable study. The following information was used to short-list suitable authorities.

Criteria used to identify suitable local authorities case studies

- Number of list entries (not necessarily listed buildings numbers) in the authority's area
- Relative breakdown of the grading of listed buildings
- The general character of the protected building stock - architecture/period
- Number of and type of conservation area designations
- Presence of local initiatives such as local lists, local buildings at risk register
- Presence of public participation forum such as conservation area advisory committees
- Funding arrangements - CAP schemes, internal grant aiding

Table 4.2 Criteria used to identify suitable local authority case studies

Plotting a cluster graph of the EHTF member authorities' central town populations revealed three rough groupings: those under 30,000 were considered too small, those over 100,000 were considered too large and those in-between. Of this middle group, authorities manifestly influenced by a unique factor in the town, such as the universities in Oxford and Cambridge, were rejected. Of the 54 members, this left 5 suitable local authorities.

In selecting the second case study, the pertinent question concerned the desirable degree of contrast between towns. Since the Four Towns Study (Buchanan 1968; Burrows 1968; Esher 1968; Insall 1968) there has been a tendency to focus attention on historic 'gems' (Larkham & Jones 1993). Unfortunately this does not produce a particularly representative study capable of addressing problems facing most other local authorities. Instead towns which were less prolific in the existing literature were considered: the effects of local rather than national involvement in their conservation being more readily ascertainable. Similarly, the contrasting (non-traditional historic) town ought not be an authority which totally disregarded conservation. In terms of image and character, the most suitable authorities were those of the former Metropolitan County Councils in the historic counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire. These areas, shaped by nineteenth century industrial development, boasted significant numbers of listed buildings, and contrasted well with the pretty image of various shire market towns. However many authorities with an equal number of listed buildings and conservation areas to the historic towns involved industrial towns that were far too large. A short-list of 6 possible authorities was produced using the criteria in Table 4.2 to compare the relative situations with the 5 historic town potential cases.

Telephone interviews with the conservation officers in these 11 authorities confirmed the existing data sources and provided further qualitative information. This involved the organisational structure of conservation within the planning service, the perceived support for conservation in the authority and the current

difficulties facing their conservation practice. Whereas all 5 historic town authorities were suitable, only one non-traditional historic town authority provided a satisfactory match. Thus the non-traditional historic town determined the final selection of historic town authority case study.

Having already spoken at length with the relevant conservation personnel, these officers provided the route into their respective organisations. Their continual interest, support and provision of information was to be welcomed throughout. However caution was required to avoid their frequent input inadvertently corresponding to a high degree of confluence between objective reporting of the study and their personal opinions.

4.5a Contextual background

The case studies were intended to explore the conservation culture in local authorities' exercise of statutory responsibilities. There were two objectives, fact finding - discovering the authority's conservation operations and also canvassing a broad range of opinion about conservation's contribution. This was to be a multi-level approach using interviews with officers and Members backed-up with content analysis of various policy, strategic and informal documents. A history of ten years was considered appropriate over which to explore such initiatives and decision-making.

However it was soon apparent, more so in the second case study by which time the emphasis had already been switched, that the documentary evidence illustrating this, aside from the respective development plans, did not exist to the extent envisaged. The existing documents were insufficient to make significant inferences about the local authority's conservation culture. As this culture existed in people's minds, so the emphasis passed to the interviews with officers and members.

It was difficult, particularly in the first study, to understand the operational structure of the local authority and decide who were the relevant people to interview. To gain as representative sample as possible, a diagonal slice through the authority was used to select respondents at all levels.

Respondents interviewed in the course of exploring the contextual background of the local authorities

- Planning Chair
- Planning Committee Members
- Chief Executive level
- Chief Planning Officer (or equivalent title)
- Planning Service Section Managers (and equivalents at relevant County level)
- All DC planning officers dealing with applications covering the main urban area
- Conservation officer
- All other conservation section personnel
- Recently retired or relocated officers who played a significant role in conservation
- Representatives of local bodies interested in conservation - the Civic Society or prominent residents' groups

Table 4.3 Respondents interviewed in both local authorities

These interviews were less formal than the national ones, lasting for approximately three-quarters of an hour: notes were taken during the interview and expanded shortly afterwards. There was no perceptible need for a full transcript since the interviews were predominantly concerned with gathering facts and opinions rather than deeper, abstract perceptions.

While the first objective, identifying the authority's conservation's operations was satisfactorily addressed, the second, exploring the authority's 'culture' was subject to the inherent personal biases and idiosyncrasies of respondents. Thus it is more accurate to view the contextual background as illustrative rather than definitive of the culture in these local authorities. This raised further considerations since responses often reflected working relationships within the authority which had not been previously considered in either the literature review or the conceptual framework.

4.5b Development Cases

Whilst a number of aspects of local planning authority practice could be examined, such as formation of the development plan, Barrett (1993) noted the importance of exposing conflicts and arguments in the crucible of actual development control (DC) cases is under-researched despite being of crucial importance. This aspect is central to the thesis design, using real situations in which the application of conservation values and justifications could be examined in minute detail. This investigation focuses on the perception of conservation amongst the various parties

involved rather than aesthetic preferences towards the development itself (compare Morris 1981).

Notably, with the diminished contribution of the local authority's contextual background, the examination of the development cases assumed a greater role. Originally they were to identify parties outside the authority and access a wider interpretation of conservation. As the fieldwork progressed, these development cases provided a rich source of material in themselves to test and challenge conservation values, as well as illustrate the implementation of certain policy positions. The revelation of the conflicts between parties supporting different principles and aims became a fundamental basis of later analysis.

The literature using an urban morphological research approach stresses the importance of recognising the variety of agents active in the development of the urban form (Whitfield 1996; Whitehand & Whitehand 1984). Although this classification was not strictly followed, the sampling strategy was intended to cover different types of development and developers, representing various common issues which the local planning authority must balance.

The sampling strategy criteria to identify four different development cases in each authority

- The development must be in the urban area of the main town
- The development must be complete, or at least received planning permission
- The development occurred within the past 3 years for ease of respondents' recollection
- Two cases concern residential use/issues and two concern commercial use/issues
- In these residential/commercial groupings, one case should be a listed building case, the other an unlisted building in a conservation area
- Furthermore the four cases ought involve one application each from a developer of commercial property, a local private business, a developer of residential property and a private householder

Table 4.4 Criteria used to select the development case studies

In each authority, those respondents interviewed to establish the contextual background were asked to suggest planning applications which fulfilled these criteria. Whilst this invited their bias into the sample, it was considered that the variety of responses from different officers to some extent counteracted this skew. To ensure greater impartiality, an exhaustive search of the planning register for the preceding three years, on paper copies and electronically where available, compiled a further list of planning applications. Those cases appearing to meet the criteria in Table 4.4. were short-listed and in each authority around twenty cases examined from the original planning files. On closer inspection, the large scale and

long duration of development eliminated some of these applications and others proved unsuitable due to the nature of the approved works. Ultimately the final choice of four involved those cases which raised some issue which had created a degree of contention.

In both authorities one of the original four development cases selected proved difficult. When parties were approached for interview, their lack of response, deliberate or otherwise, hampered the whole case. Despite repeated attempts to pursue these, ultimately another case fulfilling the same criteria was selected from the short-list.

Information and identification of parties

Planning files provided the basis of the factual information regarding the case. All documents - letters, internal notes and officer recommendations - were analysed to appreciate the positions of the various parties involved. All parties identified in the file connected with the applications were approached for private individual interviews. This generally comprised: the applicant, the agent, the relevant planning officer(s), the conservation officer(s) and any third parties.

The interviews focused on the events of the development case, using them to access the same abstract set of values which characterised the national interviews. The interview schedule was based on the conceptual framework administered along the three research issues developed for the national interviews (Appendix B). For these interviews, the schedule needed greater flexibility to accommodate the wildly varying circumstances of each development. Thus the schedule became used more as a checklist to ensure that the ten themes highlighted in the conceptual framework had been discussed in relation to some aspect of the development. The interviews, generally of an hour's duration, were recorded and again full transcripts produced.

The fieldwork was conducted from August to November 1998 and from February to June 1999 respectively. Since that time circumstances and some important officers have changed in both authorities. However the data collected from these case-studies often involved sensitive political, economic and professional issues. Respecting the undertaking of confidentiality to respondents is undiminished by time: the names of the authorities have been anonymised in the thesis to ensure that existing relations were not harmed by some respondents' candour.

4.6 Coding and analysis

The nature of qualitative analysis involves the researcher in an active interpretation of data, in which there is potential for influencing, unconsciously or otherwise, the orientation of findings. To minimise these effects the analysis must proceed on a consistent and systematic basis, ensuring that all data is treated in the same justifiable manner.

The conceptual framework proved a robust tool on which various ideas and opinions could be hung during the interviews. Working back through the themes raised in the literature review, it was also possible to use the framework as a basis for further sorting and analysing the data produced from both the national and local level studies. With such a wealth of interview material accumulated from the national interviews, it was preferable to have analysed this before moving onto the local authority case studies so emerging themes could be tested at successive levels. However the process of analysis developed for this stage remained consistent in use throughout the analysis of the local authority case studies.

A major problem was dealing with the sheer amount of data contained in 70-80 full interview transcripts. Opinions were so diverse that they did not appear to follow or belong to any single identifiable institutional view. The interviews had been designed to flow akin to conversations, thus the sequence and relationships between ideas varied enormously between respondents. The analysis needed to break down the interview material into its component parts, taking care not to isolate them from context and to re-assemble the ideas along the thematic lines identified in the conceptual framework.

This required the analysis to progress in minute detail, highlighting where individual ideas and comments made connections with these themes. A coding sheet provided a numeric short-hand to represent their occurrence in the transcript: often comments spanned several themes so multiple codes were noted. Once all the transcripts had been annotated and coded, a summary of the major issues identified in each interview was produced. The contents of the transcript relating to specific themes in the conceptual framework were then extracted verbatim or paraphrased, and re-assembled in their specific themes. Throughout, the process maintained the distinctions between respondents of different organisations. Each section was carefully referenced back to its source respondent and its location in the transcript. Working in this thematic arrangement, views could be identified with

greater clarity and the relative incidence of certain issues weighed against one another: this framework provided the basis for writing the respective fieldwork chapters.

Such a rigorous process was necessary particularly for the national interviews. Unlike the local authority case studies there was no story or narrative as respondents were discussing quite abstract issues. This presented the main difference in the treatment of the data between the national and local enquiries - the issues in the case studies were more easily recognisable since they were embedded in the circumstances of each development case or the local authority organisation.

The subsequent fieldwork chapters reflect this analytical process, presenting research findings accompanied by an immediate discussion of their relevance to the conceptual framework. The ten themes provided a structure in which to cross reference each stage of the fieldwork - the survey of national respondents and the two local planning authority case studies - comparing and contrasting the most significant issues in Chapter 8.

4.7 Concluding reflections

Throughout the study the conceptual framework has provided a robust, and yet flexible, theoretical and methodological tool to approach a diversity of issues in conservation. Whilst its heuristic categorisation of themes indicated the general methodological direction of the study, the analysis of the fieldwork data reinforced the accuracy and relevance of the framework. In retrospect, the chosen methodology has performed extremely well in addressing all the data sets. While this is most gratifying, a degree of caution is required vis-à-vis the research findings. The methodology was based on a conceptual framework developed from concerns in the literature. This may have predisposed the research to necessarily find or at least emphasise these aspects over others which were still present but unrecognised particularly as analysis was conducted on the same conceptual framework. This consistency may have also involved a latent circularity of reasoning.

To counter this concern, other research techniques could have been equally appropriate for particular sections. In terms of overall structure, the selection of

effectively three discrete studies in the thesis provided sufficient information for three separate theses. Returning to the original intention of exploring the interpretation of conservation in one local authority, this could have allowed a presentation of greater depth which time, resources and word allocation preclude here. For instance, an important aspect from the interviews, left implicit throughout, is the influence of respondents' backgrounds, education and training on their perceptions of conservation. Concentrating on one context could have emphasised more intricate levels of cognition and permitted different methods such as more structured non-participant observation to supplement the main data collection. Utilising more complex methods of attitude evaluation could have provided a more rational and objective basis for comparing respondents. However this may have sacrificed scope for allowing respondents free expression to explore their opinions.

Irrespective of the methods employed, there is a greater representation of the professionals involved in conservation than those whom conservation does not directly concern, though who are still affected by it. Since most members of the public were identified through planning files there is the question to what extent can the study address the voice of those parties excluded in conservation or the attitudes of the public in general? Certainly in the data collected, every care was taken not to exclude views for the different descriptive language of the untrained conservation respondent, for this in itself is valuable in ascertaining boundaries and discrepancies in interpreting value. Whilst a significant response was obtained from members of the public, their contribution can only be realistically taken as indicative rather than definitive of lay appreciation or public sentiment: a further study may wish to address this specifically.

Perhaps ultimately it ought be acknowledged that since the values present in any system are determined by the continually shifting factors influencing the society and culture in which that system is located, the study can only ever attempt to convey a snapshot of these values at the end of the twentieth century.

Part II

'Be sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning, not to find yours.'

(Ruskin 1865: 24)

Chapter 5

Survey of national conservation organisations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on interviews with representatives from the main national conservation organisations covering a range of views from different sectors in conservation (Table 4.1). The research findings are presented according to the ten themes identified in the conceptual framework: a discussion of the salient points accompanies each section.

Whilst a consensus of opinion could be identified in relation to particular issues, there was no over-arching common view throughout any one type of organisation. Respondents' wide ranging views could not easily be categorised along organisational lines, nor was there necessarily a unifying perspective amongst similar professionals within organisations. Individuals did not always assume a single view but rather expressed a certain duality of opinion, varying according to the particular aspect of conservation under discussion and the subtle influence of their background, experience and profession. The frequency with which this inherent diversity of view, even contradiction, can be seen throughout the interviews, highlights a latent tension in the perceived values and aims of conservation. That these tensions can be seen as occurring within individuals as well as within and between institutions emphasises the amorphous nature of the activity and the potential incongruities for the local application and interpretation of these policies. Though this spread is partly to be expected in research of this type, which involves personal interpretations of value, there were strong themes which could be picked out from all these national representatives. To accommodate such individual perspectives, it was felt that to present the findings along organisational lines would not accurately reflect the material. Rather the framework developed from the literature review will provide the thematic and theoretical guidance.

5.2 The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

There appeared to be a general consensus amongst respondents that nationally, conservation was enjoying a good period, reflected in PPG15's comprehensive and flexible policy framework. Overall, the systems appeared to be working well requiring only slight modifications, if at all. However concerns were expressed over local authorities' inconsistent application of national conservation policies and responsibilities, due to a local lack of resources, funding or more importantly, a supportive political climate.

Despite this consensus, responses also reflected a spectrum of views. At one end, conservation was considered of central importance to planning - managing change within the existing environment being seen as fundamental to land use regulation. The non-statutory bodies canvassed tended to view conservation as more integral to planning. Conversely, some viewed planning as a less suitable vehicle: conservation being superior and beyond planning, rather than central to it. The national amenity societies (NAS) emphasised the particular specialism of conservation. A greater cross-current of ideas characterised views at EH. Notably, perceptions of the conservation-planning relationship varied with the aspect under discussion, manifest through its principles, processes and professional relations.

In principle, respondents emphasised conservation's centrality in planning

In principle, many respondents wished to see conservation at the heart of planning. The comprehensive redevelopment characterising 1960s planning and the memory that planning could actively encourage such 'destruction', was considered a persuasive reason for conservation's presence. More fundamentally, conservation is an essential planning purpose as it involves promoting the quality of the existing environment. Indeed it was viewed as a discipline of environmental management and a corollary of sustainability. Similarly, regeneration was seen as the *'flip side of conservation'*, re-vitalising areas and re-using buildings being a sustainable recycling of historic features:

...the contribution conservation of the man made heritage can make to an overall sustainable approach to development and the contribution conservation can make to regeneration and so on, I think we are still some way from conservation in that sense, having its proper status. It should not be something which is dealt with by conservation officers in the planning department. The conservation philosophy should be something which underpins all of what local authorities and central government are doing.

Notably, conservation's *'proper status'* had not yet been achieved in wider environmental governance, practice and philosophy. One respondent at EH commented they had to *'play the role of a regeneration agency'*. This emphasis on regeneration tended to be emphasised higher up the political hierarchy, particularly in EH. In fact to make conservation work, this approach was being emphasised to correspond with broader political currents, promoting conservation in areas where otherwise it might not have been influential.

Though the NAS look after a specific area of concern, and may be seen as quite distinct from this broader political agenda, the desire to see conservation recognised in a central role was still prevalent;

...conservation loses by being regarded as élitist, as an add on, as an extra when it's absolutely intrinsic to planning. After all you can't indulge in town and country planning now without falling over a listed building or a conservation area... it is literally impossible to separate conservation from mainstream planning...

Those bodies concerned with conservation from a planning perspective also emphasised the desirability of manoeuvring conservation into a more prominent position in planning,

...conservation is a major land use policy decision - it should be seen like that, it should be treated as that and I think there could be wide opportunities [to] encourage using the local plan [more] constructively as far as conservation is concerned.

Conservation was viewed as analysing and managing the townscape - an essential planning activity. Others saw a much broader scope considering that both planning and conservation were central components of urban management strategies which included wider economic and environmental considerations.

In practice, the separateness of conservation processes was emphasised

In contrast to the principled centrality of conservation, most respondents considered that implementing conservation was a distinct and (almost morally) superior function to planning.

Conservation was seen to benefit enormously from the planning process, not only for its legal framework of consents but also the added legitimacy it conveyed (though this is largely dependent on their personal conceptions of the planning

system). Despite creating frustration for respondents, planning's '*vast balancing act*' ensured that all sectional interests were accommodated in its comprehensive decision-making. As planning provided channels for public consultation and debate, conservation itself could remain a distinct, technical and apolitical discipline.

In terms of conservation area controls, following their reduction in scope by the Shimizu case, all respondents agreed this control was grossly inadequate though their opinions differed as to the appropriate remedy. Though the NAS generally wished for new legislation, English Heritage officially endorsed revising the GPDO within conservation areas in line with various planning organisations' recommendations. The planning process' perceived legitimacy and transparency could benefit the beleaguered and criticised management of conservation areas:

...it would be a lot clearer as to why they were being designated and what the local authority were trying to achieve, what they were trying to protect against change and I think [it] could again tie back much more effectively to the broader planning system.

The concept of areal protection had been seen as unnecessarily separate from mainstream planning, particularly by the planning organisations who argued that activities such as townscape analysis, urban design and town centre management are integral to an areal, holistic approach to built environment conservation.

However suggestions for listed building consent to be incorporated into planning permissions (Mynors 1998), incurred a very different response:

I mean given that there is a special PPG and a special part of the Planning Acts and a special place in a lot of people's hearts too for conservation, then I think that justifies having a special scheme to deal with it and that there is something special about it... it's not the same as... all the other planning bits and pieces.

And a similarly derogatory view of '*mere*' planning considered that with a '*special, express consent*', applicants would '*know that it is a serious business*':

...there is an argument for saying that to extend a Grade I country house is different in kind to any old planning permission and there ought to be an express permission.

This would suggest that respondents perceived a substantive shortfall between what planning could address and what conservation required. Respondents from the DCMS considered that the,

...heritage sensitivities... would not be apparent to the planning officer who wouldn't think much of it. It would just go through the planning committee without any serious assessment of the conservation issues... it would be harder to identify the conservation element in the planning proposals than it is now.

Such attitudes may imply that conservation is not as central to planning practice as its principles would aspire. Though a minority of respondents believed the

overburdened legislation needed a radical shake-up, separate consents were preferred by the majority.

Respondents criticised planning's inability to address conservation concerns spatially and temporally. Planning, being concerned with broader land uses and activities, was perceived as insensitive to the intrinsic value of a building's fabric. Planning does not address this '*micro level*', allowing conservation to fall through holes in the development plan and in development control. Additionally, some respondents saw planning operating on a totally different timescale, being short-termist and oriented to facilitating the property market rather than on the intrinsic qualities of the existing environment. There was something in the aims of conservation which brought a more responsible attitude in determining 'acceptable' long term change.

Professional expertise and relations

Respondents from the national bodies with planning concerns claimed that conservation involved good quality design. Following PPG1's (DETR 1997) design guidance, after years of neglect in Government advice, planners were more confident in proactive design control strategies. Aesthetic judgement was an area in which planners should '*fight their corner*', rather than let other professions encroach. One respondent noted that managing townscape was '*one of planners' key jobs in urban areas*', aligning planning and conservation through design competency. However many respondents from the NAS and EH believed conservation represented more than just an approach to design or aesthetics. Conservation involves intricate technical knowledge which requires specialist interpretation: that planning personnel don't understand conservation merely reinforces the separatism. One respondent commented that listing;

...involves a series of decisions and a mind-set which is quite unlike that which you require for ordinary planning it seems to me. Some planners can do it and some planners can't.

Moreover some respondents considered that archaeology and sustainability were actually encroaching on their professional territory and distracting attention from the conservation specialism. Whilst many were happy to use 'environmental quality' as a principle for conservation, few embraced the different technical approaches involved.

Regarding local authority conservation practice, respondents believed that a dedicated post of conservation officer was best. In lieu of a specific conservation

post, where authorities claimed that all their planners were sensitive to conservation issues, respondents believed this was generally detrimental for conservation. Despite the desire to see conservation central to planning, respondents were frustrated by perceiving planning officers' apparent insensitivity to conservation. Respondents were concerned over the quality of local authorities' conservation officers: most were very good but some authorities appeared satisfied with a virtual '*school leaver with an A-level in geography*'. Planners were often seen as pigeon-holing conservation, invoking conservation advice as and when they saw fit, or just when the alarm bells of requiring a listed building consent were set off;

...it's swings and roundabouts, if you have a specialist section they can produce specialised knowledge based on their understanding but they may get disregarded because they are seen as the man in the sandals with the funny hat or it's the girl with the beads. They do the conservation - put them in a box and turn them out when you want them.

The standing of the conservation officer in the planning service is inevitably shaped by many factors, but there is a tendency for the conservation officer to be branded as separate and distinct, as the '*effete ponce from the planning department who likes old things*'. The influence of personalities reinforces the separation in conservation knowledge and procedures.

I actually fear [the] 'ghetto-isation' of conservation. Having some degree of experience in professional life, you will find working in this field from time to time that you will be frozen out of a critical piece of decision-making...

Although professionals tend to reinforce their distinctive qualities, the potential for others to perceive conservation too narrowly is ever apparent.

Commentary

Whilst conservation and planning are perceived as compatible, the responses illustrate many more incongruities in principle and practice.

The idea of conservation being central and fundamental to planning is widely held but may only be wishful thinking. Conservation's contribution to wider planning agendas - sustainably reusing resources or promoting economic regeneration - is emphasised. However this may be largely rhetoric, espoused in order to survive political reprioritisation rather than being a philosophical revision. Certainly respondents' higher political status corresponded to a greater acceptance of regeneration priorities.

Moreover whilst seeing conservation in principle at the heart of planning, do the processes of conservation control and their attendant professional distinctions,

actually inhibit conservation ever taking a more central role? The actual mechanisms are separate; the perception of their value is in their separate status from 'mere' planning. Is this compatible with closer integration? It may challenge traditional assumptions, as one respondent noted, that previously conservation had been regarded as *'just good planning'*. Another respondent noted that conservation was *'the art of intelligent change'* emphasising progress and evolution, but is planning not already the art of intelligent change? If not, does planning require conservation to make good its deficiencies? Could it imply that planning doesn't necessarily appreciate the extent and subtlety of environmental change as successfully as conservation does, that conservation is something actually beyond the scope of planning? These are questions appropriate for the local authority case studies.

Planning has arguably become more concerned with a market facilitative, user-oriented approach: conservation, in its statutory incarnation is still fundamentally a regulatory activity. The desire to place conservation at the heart of planning equally reveals respondents' conceptions of the planning system based on more traditional notions of public interest, rather than clients' service. Resolving the two is essential particularly when there is pressure to move conservation area controls into the planning mainstream. If Government representatives believed an integrated planning permission would preclude a serious assessment of conservation issues, what is conservation's future in local planning practice?

5.3 The spatial focus of protection control

Given the focus of these national organisations, it is perhaps unsurprising that responses predominately concerned the listing process. However the extent to which listing was portrayed as stronger and more defensible a regime than conservation areas raises concerns over the professional interpretation of conservation.

Listing perceived as a strong and competent system

One EH respondent summarised the general view that;

...listing, because it is specific to the actual building and in theory has nothing to do with its surroundings and setting, I think we would maintain it is still a relatively objective process...

The rigour of listing's specific standards, particularly with the variety of checks and statutory bodies involved were reasons for the perceived strength of listing's status. More so with the NAS respondents, the protection of the fabric of listed structures was of paramount importance; *'we're more interested in products of buildings as products of [this specific] period and so... preservation of the fabric is pretty important.'* Their emphasis was ensuring the quality of repair to these buildings' re-use, concentrating on the small details that planning could not address. The weighting was towards the micro-scale rather than a broader townscape concern.

Areal conservation suffered from a variety of interpretations

In contrast there was serious concern over conservation areas. Respondents were less involved in their operation, though they saw the value in them as *'essentially much more subjective'*. However, some respondents involved in more of a planning capacity, felt that conservation areas were treated *'almost as a second class concept'*.

The strength of the controls available in conservation areas was of concern across the board, the small and incremental incursion of uPVC windows, stone cladding and satellite dishes being cited as key offenders. *'Death by one thousand cuts'* is how one respondent described the assault on areas' character: most respondents perceived a need for stronger controls over minor yet cumulatively influential alterations. However there was an official reticence to broaden the scope of what conservation could control for fear of undermining its support within planning.

For some respondents, mostly the professional bodies, conservation areas were viewed as a potential leader in managing environmental concerns, rather than isolated fragments, incorporating urban design and holistic areal management strategies. In this respect, conservation was perceived as identifying place characteristics and ensuring towns retained and cultivated their individual uniqueness rather than turn into *'everywheresville'*. Some respondents felt local authorities failed to realise local qualities and dimensions to conservation, and merely paraphrased PPG15 in their policy frameworks. Conservation area character appraisals could address these difficulties, being more defensible justifications for action, yet few had been produced.

The scope of legitimate coverage for either listed buildings or conservation areas was perceived differently too. There was support and encouragement for listing's

continued expansion in re-appraising value in buildings. Yet many considered that any re-appraisal of areas' value was taking the concept too far beyond what was originally intended since, '*...as a general rule, most areas which should be conservation areas are now conservation areas.*'

A further distinction can be made between the different professionals' support for different aspects of conservation. One respondent noted the encroachment of archaeology and sustainability, eroding the traditional province of building conservation, another emphasised the professional distinctions involved;

...historically the sustainability and green issues have tended to be, if you like, the remit of rural and countryside people and historic buildings and conservation area issues tended to have been remit of building professionals, architectural historians and more urban based people, architects, designers and the like. I don't think the two fit together terribly well and I don't think they quite understand each others' language...

The extent to which sustainability was embraced as a further rationale for conservation may illustrate this distinction. Some welcomed its revision of value in more quantifiable resource terms but many felt it to be an empty rhetoric of 'in vogue' words.

Commentary

Admittedly, listed buildings and conservation areas have different focuses yet their utility is perceived in quite different ways. Several respondents commented on the slightly illogical orientation of conservation priorities. Current practice places most weight, in terms of standards and regulatory powers, on the value of specific features through listing. However if re-creating these systems from first principles, recognising context and understanding the '*milieu into which change is to be slotted*' was considered by some to be paramount. This is significant for the definition of value within each regime and their contribution to conservation value as a whole: as one respondent noted, features can shift between regimes over time as their values are interpreted differently.

As a process and an end, listing's strength was stressed both through its actual controls and the legitimacy conferred by a systematic scrutiny of value. Respondents were happy to see listing expand and include new features and interpretations of value. In contrast areal conservation was much weaker in terms of controls and the vague definitions of character. Paradoxically the desire to prevent the erosion of character in conservation areas by advocating tighter controls over minor alterations and development, only address a very narrow

consideration of areal character. This view may be inherited from a mind-set which treats all aspects in a similar manner to a listed building, i.e. a fabric specific process.

If such an approach is prevalent in conservation attitudes, it is questionable how far other disciplines, such as urban design and townscape analysis, can break into this area. These share the same physical/visual orientation which characterise traditional conservation approaches. Notably there is an inherent bias, illustrated by the organisations interviewed that conservation, nationally, involves a greater consideration of fabric and structure specific value through listing, strengthening the legitimacy of this perception of value. Areal conservation has been entirely the responsibility of local planning authorities. Viewed as more of a general planning consideration, there are not the same institutional structures in place to develop and consolidate areal valuations of character with their inherently more diffuse and amorphous concepts.

5.4 The extent of acceptable change

Without exception, all respondents emphatically believed in conservation as a process of accommodating '*organic change*' in the built environment. One respondent summarised this well, that conservation '*is the art of intelligent change*'. A similar emphasis was prevalent to rebut the image of conservation stifling development;

...we are interested in encouraging development and re-use which respect the historic or architectural interest in the buildings concerned, the areas concerned which also make a positive new contribution as well.

However whilst unanimity suggests consensus, there were subtle distinctions apparent in the interpretation of change itself. Differences emerged between respondents influenced by their organisation and position within it. There was also a contrast between how professionals saw acceptable change and how they considered the public interpreted it.

Accepting or promoting change?

Before discussing the organisational distinctions, several respondents noted the acceptable degree of change was predetermined by the particular regime of

protection control. Ancient monuments were generally preserved, resisting change for their intrinsic, didactic interest, whereas conservation over listed buildings and areas necessitated a more flexible approach to promote features' continuing use. However this does conflict with one or two respondents who considered that one of conservation's qualities was seeing change within a much longer timescale;

...what we [have] found many many times, is that when we've actually appeared to take an unreasonable line in opposing something on the grounds that something better may turn up in the future, in many cases something better does turn up in the future and very rarely are things much worse. So clearly a delaying tactic can actually be to everyone's benefit. And particularly in the light of a building which may be a hundred years old, five hundred years old or whatever, a 20 year delay may actually be of no consequence at all.

Whilst some respondents considered planning was too short-termist, accepting that change is inevitable and must be addressed is hardly profound in itself. What is more interesting is the degree to which conservation is perceived as reacting to change, regulating it or actively promoting it.

The NAS stressed their willingness to be seen as embracing change, distancing themselves from popular characterisations of being restrictive bodies. Indeed they gave the impression of vying with one another to emphasise their ascendancy to be a more progressive body than the others: SPAB was viewed as the most restrictive. However their predominant interest in the structures' historic fabric must be seen as a contradiction. Many of their concerns, and other respondents', cited the gradual erosion tolerated within the vagaries of listed building consent, '*a very blunt instrument*', which sanctioned an alarming amount of damage. Slower changes through the cumulative effects of minor alterations was a greater problem than larger scale changes or demolitions in the built environment.

A distinction arose between more senior respondents in EH and other conservation professionals within and outside that organisation. The former emphasised conservation contributing to regeneration initiatives, being a leader in investing and revitalising features and areas which commercial markets had passed over. Professional staff appeared a little more cynical about their superiors' appreciation of how far change and renewal may transgress the boundaries of conservation. Many professionals had entered the conservation profession driven by a passion for the architectural integrity of historic fabric, rather than sacrificing it to enable development or preferable political approaches.

A couple of respondents noted the development of the profession following the Civic Amenities Act and the appointment of specific conservation officers. Previously, those involved in conservation had been architects who may have taken

more of a SPAB approach, allowing and appreciating overtly modern insertions into the historic fabric. However training, education and a developing culture of professional conduct separated conservation as a specific entity in itself. A more conservative attitude emerged, withdrawing from obvious insertions and contrasts to a more conciliatory approach. One respondent noted that Duncan Sandys might not even recognise his vision of conservation in today's concept, whereby even features of minimal interest are zealously protected.

One respondent considered that conservation had actually been '*a victim of its own success*'. In some areas the preservationist legacy had been so great that the only way to obtain a planning permission for new development was to fit in with the context, except;

...'fit in' is interpreted as meaning 'fake up' some old something or other which you're not likely to do very successfully anyway...

The insertion of new design in the historic context created further splits in the 'consensus' supporting change. Anomalously, respondents argued they had nothing against modern design but considered that there was little evidence of good modern design sympathetically complementing the surrounding historic context. Whereas some conservation professionals felt that the quality of architecture could be appreciated irrespective of its age, others considered that they were not necessarily well placed to pronounce on the quality of new architecture as it represented a different language and sphere of competence.

Berating 'the public'

Whilst there are evident professional distinctions, a striking feature of the professional consensus was their perception of the public's view of acceptable change. As professionals emphasised their acceptance of change, they considered the public interpreted conservation as a very negative control. This was evident in public misinterpreting 'conservation' to mean 'preservation' and also the extent to which the public actively supported these restrictions;

...for a lot of the public who don't really go through a planning process, they see listed buildings and conservation areas as the only two ways of stopping a development and if the situation they're dealing with doesn't fit in with those criteria, they get very cross.

This theme shall be further considered in the following section.

Commentary

While respondents emphasised conservation as the acceptance of environmental change, a question remains whether this is an attempt to distance the profession from its preservationist legacy or whether conservation practice accepts and actively promotes renewal.

The message of 'accommodating change' has been interpreted and adopted differentially across sections of the profession. Those involved in listing building consents perhaps show a stronger conviction to conservation control and a certain reluctance to see too many incursions into their scope and competency. The desire to see tighter use of listed building consents and stronger conservation area controls to prevent the cumulative erosion of features reinforces a more regulatory view of conservation.

However respondents of higher political status tended to emphasise conservation in a regeneration role. Considering the spate of recent publications and press statements, particularly from EH, this is perhaps unsurprising. The interesting question is whether this message is for political purposes or represents a genuine reconsideration of the conservation agenda. The former may not even include a review of the principles underpinning conservation since arguably this message has been catalysed by needing to accommodate New Labour's support for urban regeneration. Irrespectively, the practical impact of such discrepancies in defining 'acceptable change' may produce greater anomalies in actual development cases.

Indeed there are potential discrepancies between professionals regarding their own competencies to comment on new design. The more recent literature has painted a conciliatory picture of modern architecture and conservation coalescing in one communal concern (Worthington 1998; Stones 1998). However professional opinions still distinguish the new from the old, contemporary forms from conservation.

Determining acceptable change is also seen as problematic vis-à-vis the public. The public are viewed as not understanding conservation though alternatively, this may reflect the public's differing opinions of conservation: maybe conservation is not protecting the same environmental features that the public value. It is interesting to ask how this situation arose, and questions the alienation or division perceived by those involved in conservation. Either way this may have profound implications for the legitimacy that conservation draws from public support.

5.5 The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

Irrespective of their organisation, respondents formed a unanimous opinion that conservation enjoyed widespread public and political support. A firm belief in this consensus provided a strong defence against criticisms of conservation being too elitist or exclusive. However the perception of public support appeared to rest on particular concepts of 'the public' and the nature of interest shown by various sections of society.

Overwhelming support

Perhaps since these bodies are supported by members' subscriptions, respondents of the NAS were most forthright in expressing popular support for conservation. One respondent commented that conservation was '*strongly entrenched, particularly by public opinion*'. Another noted that the societies were '*pushing a public position*'.

There is obviously a great deal of core good will and affection for old buildings, associations or whatever, so people when they see a development taking place which involves the destruction of old buildings, which is practically every one these days, they feel a sense of loss which translates through to protests and that's been a phenomenon in this country for at least 60 years or more.

The 'antique worshipping culture' and the prolific membership of the National Trust were cited as reflecting the strength of the public's interest in the past. The institutions of conservation, to some extent, were seen as resting on this popular mandate, particularly as it added weight and legitimacy to what may be perceived otherwise as an exclusive activity. One NAS respondent commented;

...a lot of the decision making, a lot of the opinion forming is done by a small minority of people who have the time, who have the education who have the passion to; the great majority of people will endorse and ally themselves much more recently with the cause than [just] the devotees or if you like the fanatics. But no I don't think it is elitist...

This strength of opinion was instrumental in promoting conservation, particularly since many statutory conservation bodies had at one time been lobbying interest groups;

...until the people themselves value these things... until they value a particular type of building in large enough numbers, then all the bureaucracy that anyone could imagine paying for is not going to help... it's just not going to happen at all until there is a movement of valuing old things at large amongst at least the educated, influential classes.

A particular kind of public

However whilst there was a genuine belief in the public's support, it would appear this depended on a particular conception of the public. As revealed by the last comment, the *'educated, influential classes'*, i.e. the more culturally active middle class, were perceived as the established backbone of support. Those with the passion and time to devote to conservation will always be involved over those *'living in miserable areas who are exhausted by work anyway, that's an inevitable reflection of the social make-up of the area.'* All the NAS respondents saw, *'the chief source of the enthusiasm of the preservation argument comes from the residential side.'* Indeed some of these respondents noted that the societies exist to support owners of historic properties, encouraging and guiding them to do the right thing by their building. Such ownership and property considerations inevitably reflect the interests of particular socio-economic classes.

Amongst other respondents, particularly those from more planning based organisations, there was a concern that residents' support for protecting buildings and amenity, under the guise of conservation, was in fact;

...all about defending their status and their territory and I suppose the bottom line is defending the value of their property.

They characterised a popular opinion of conservation as a good idea but it was equally;

...an ambivalent view until the issue happens next door [and] suddenly conservation is the thing that will stop something that they don't want happening.

Similarly a Government respondent noted people are generally *'pretty neutral'* about conservation, they like the idea of living in a listed building or a conservation area until they find it restricts their own use of the property. More succinctly, *'I think that people believe conservation is there to stop other people from doing things.'* Public support was seen by some as catalysed only by a threat to private interests. Otherwise, the public acceptance and support for conservation was so tacit and understated, it could almost be described as apathy.

Evidently the bias towards middle class property interests may exclude many other sections of the public, thus undermining the extent of actual popular support for conservation and questioning the recognition of conservation's value by a broader cross section of society. The judgement of a beneficent expert making decisions on the public's behalf may not accord with the public's view of conservation. One respondent acknowledged that they were still perceived by the public as *'being in*

the slightly cuckoo band... a bit in the lentils and cloth sandals brigade'. Conversely another respondent noted that conservation unashamedly relied on the pioneers, the eccentrics, the lone voices who would champion a cause which the general public would otherwise ignore or even actively decry.

Commentary

The differences between these versions of public support are dramatic, ranging from genuine widespread support to a mere superficial acceptance. It would appear that public support serves conservation well in providing a legitimate mandate to carry out the activity. Whilst the 'beneficent minority' responsible for statutory conservation consider they uphold the same value orientations as the public, this executive model is quite satisfactory. However questions are raised when respondents consider the public's interpretation of value straying from their own.

Whilst the literature is unabashed in presenting the development of conservation as a progression of taste-leaders' crusades championing public appreciation of a new period of architecture (Andreae 1996; Stamp 1996) perhaps there is greater uncertainty in reality. Traditionally, the educated middle classes furnished an unshakeable support for conservation, though respondents also considered the support was more widespread, evinced by other social and cultural trends. Respondents' conception of the public and their support influenced the type of public involvement with which respondents felt comfortable. Public debate generally centred around a fairly orthodox architectural appreciation of value which limits contribution to those already educated in these spheres. Public participation may be criticised for involving only a certain section, which shares, or at least can access, the professional language of conservation.

The reliance on a particular section of the public - middle class residential interest - also raises difficulties. Whilst they may be seen to comprise the bulk of public support for conservation, it is incredibly difficult to unpack a 'public interest' since the interest may be no more than a collection of individuals' desires to protect private residential quality and amenity.

5.6 The interpretation of features' interest

All respondents considered the legislative criteria of '*special architectural or historic interest*' was a satisfactory definition of conservation value. Most perceived distinctions between the concepts and their application and also between relative strengths of architectural and historic interest as two separate concerns.

The statutory criteria

The statutory criteria were seen as a strong '*intellectual construct*' defining the direction and boundaries of conservation's legitimate concerns. Its continued use over 50 years of listing practice had consolidated a broad and germane definition, flexibly evolving to include new aspects. One respondent commented that this flexibility was the reason why listing had never needed reform. Others noted it being '*extra-ordinarily comprehensive*' and how it had;

...managed to absorb an enormous divers[ity], richness and variety, different categories of buildings, different forms and functions and now the historic landscape and environment and it's done so without any tremendous strain on definitions.

The concepts were so well established it almost placed them beyond criticism: most respondents appeared surprised to be asked about their contemporary suitability. A lone respondent did confide that their ubiquity and frequency in working use did obviate considering their deeper nature.

While the concepts were sound, their breadth of application and the significant discretion involved in their professional and personal interpretation divided respondents' opinions. In response to criticisms that conservation (and architecture and design) issues were essentially subjective, some respondents argued that there was an objective basis for value appreciation, which objectivity characterised the strength of '*special architectural or historic interest*'. However when pressed, many respondents' concept of objectivity resembled more of a professional collegiality: defining interest was;

...a relatively objective process, according, admittedly, to a fairly specific level of objectivity, which is objectivity as a sort of rolling consensus of all those people who think about these things...

The objectivity of special architectural or historic interest was a distinct strength particularly in contrast to the subjectivity of cultural or social values. The latter were

considered too amorphous and ambiguous to quantify, their inclusion could undermine the defensible valuation of architectural interest.

It is arguable that the objectivity of 'special architectural or historic interest' depends on the equally malleable interpretation of conservation professionals. Their *'rolling consensus'* is not necessarily objective as many respondents noted that perceptions of value can change over relatively short periods. The consensus is also dependent on the professionals' background and training which, amongst the respondents interviewed, tended to be an art-historical discipline. Indeed one respondent considered that EH were not at all objective, transparent or even consistent in their consideration of value in listing descriptions for example.

Despite many respondents' belief in the objectivity quality of the criteria, others admitted that the listing rubric had been dramatically stretched. For example, one respondent's experiences in the late 1970s, saw younger listing professionals' broadening the scope of conservation interest beyond the more establishment interpretations of older colleagues. Subsequently, architectural interest was broadened to cover vernacular architecture in addition to the *'polite architecture'* which had previously dominated listing. Similarly the social and economic historical interest of buildings was considered, whereas previously the national, political and military significance of history had dominated: *'consequently the bald phrase 'historic interest' did a virtually 180 degree turn.'*

Relative values

Whilst the criteria are cited as a single indistinguishable phrase, discrepancies arise between architectural, as opposed to historic interest. Most respondents spoke in architectural terms, used architectural examples and referred to features' fabric and detailing to express 'value'. This expression of aesthetic interest was the more pervasive; *'I have to say that the first [thing] that triggers you to defend something is its beauty.'* However this respondent then exemplified value really in terms of the associated activities over the passage of time which *'tugged the heartstrings'*.

In considering the age of features, contradictory views arose regarding architectural appreciation. Whilst one respondent lamented the preponderance of the antiquarian prejudice - protecting old buildings simply for their age, irrespective of their quality - others surmised that age and survival in itself was a positive aspect;

'in a sense [its] non-controversial... people accept the fact that pre-eighteenth century buildings ought be preserved.' An appreciation of architecture was seen by some as a universal perspective in which any period of architecture, ancient or modern, could be enjoyed. The association of events and uses accrued with age were seen as a corollary supporting the main interest in the architectural fabric.

Historical interest was specifically described by some as *'the much poorer relation'*. As one NAS respondent observed, this may be because there are more groups in conservation concerned with architecture, their perception of value is necessarily focused on this physical evidence. Though the passage of time inevitably affects features, the value of temporal relationships were considered *'more difficult to assess'*, being less well defined in policy statements. One or two respondents considered the fact that a particular person or event was associated with a building/structure was of minor consequence since this leaves no physical trace on the building. Conservation, as a physical control, ought not be over-influenced by this, it ought merely address architectural history.

A cultural dimension

However historical interest starts to move away from the purely tangible and physical evidence in features. Through associations of uses, events and symbolism there are a variety of meanings added to the structure through the passage of time. Some respondents highlighted the *'cultural weight and value'* of conservation. Unlike the orthodoxy of, *'regarding a building as having a certain intrinsic value both as a fabric and for what it demonstrates about the history or the aesthetics of its time'*, cultural value is a *'continually changing thing'*, which English practice is relatively weak in addressing. For example one respondent cited the urban morphology as;

...a very big cultural artefact the management of which is a great deal more than worrying about design or the amount of archaeological fabric that has survived... for us to simply deal with it in terms of our architecture, of historic interest residing in a particular building is not at all how people feel about the patina of history.

Cultural value and character, were interpreted in a variety of ways by respondents. For instance in the move towards conservation area character appraisals, some saw the process as no more than a comprehensive townscape analysis, whilst others were supportive of introducing a greater cultural dimension. However, proponents of the latter view were cautious that addressing cultural values would

expose the limitations of planning law in only controlling activities relating to land use:

I think the character issue is, has been somewhat shirked 'cause it tends to raise these difficult issues and will continue to raise difficult case law really. [It] will result in difficult cases where brave conservation officers wander off down a very very thin twig in attempting to protect something which is undoubtedly of the character, on the one hand, but is perhaps not defensible in planning law at all. Tricky.

Whilst there was evident support for more progressive concepts of cultural value, there were also respondents who interpreted special architectural or historic interest more specifically. A prevalent attitude amongst many respondents saw non-architectural value as merely expressions of sentimental nostalgia. Whilst such emotions' potency was undeniable, they were not legitimate conservation interests; they lacked recognisable principles and logical arguments.

One aspect of the cultural dimension of conservation is the generational review of value. Several respondents noted the succession of new amenity societies was due to younger generations re-appraising their grandparents' heritage, recovering it from their parents' critical denigration. Such revision allowed the 'latent' values of certain buildings and periods to emerge.

Several respondents noted a further aspect of the cultural dimension of conservation emanating from the status of listed buildings. Listing itself creates a certain expectation of genre and an important symbolism. This may be illustrated by one respondent's desire to distinguish listing as a process of identifying academic interest in, rather than actual merit or the popularity of, a building's design. The symbolic value of listing can be seen in the political endorsement of representing certain cultural values. A couple of respondents anecdotally recited the previous Conservative Government's removal of suggestions for post-war listings on the grounds that listing certain modernist, collectivist buildings would be legitimating an unpalatable 1950s socialist ethos.

Commentary

These attitudes reveal as much about the legitimacy of perceiving as it does about particular features' interest. There was a unanimous acceptance of the phrase special architectural or historic interest. The concentration on the actual fabric's architectural detail and the effects of time on it, creates a system propounding intrinsic value. Extrinsic value - cultural meaning, experience, sentiments and

association - is generally perceived as less critical because it is secondary to, or dependent on, the fabric.

There is a significant collision of values in re-appraising the more recent past. If values are presented as intrinsic, they are latent and waiting to be discovered. In reality, values are created afresh and are equally representative of contemporary culture as of immutable, objective principles. The inherent flexibility of interpreting special architectural or historic interest is somewhat flawed. The essential objectivity of professional interpretation is relative to the generation, location and context i.e. the culture in which it occurs. Yet anomalously there is concerted opposition to the official extension of legitimate conservation value to include cultural and social interpretations of value outside the profession, which is currently dismissed as sentimentality or nostalgia without due consideration.

Within the current criteria would appear a definitive hierarchy of architectural over historic interest. The ability to recognise and evaluate features in architectural terms does offer a more general template than historical evaluation which is wholly dependent on the unique historical circumstances affecting specific features. The architecture is evident (structural occlusions aside) whereas the building's history is by no means obvious. Furthermore, historical interest, to a far greater extent than architecture, is constrained by a process of legitimation - certain types of history are more readily admissible and supported. For instance it is only relatively recently that social history has been a legitimate factor in listing's identification of value.

In the continual revision of acceptable or legitimate values, further questions arise. Is the extent to which admitting socio-cultural perspectives resisted because architectural interest is paramount? Is cultural context merely acknowledged or can it be actively embraced to revitalise an interpretation of conservation value?

5.7 The hierarchy of significance

Whilst the statutory phrase 'special architectural or historic interest' defined the orientation of value, respondents unanimously considered 'national interest' the yardstick for defining and defending features' special qualities. In contrast 'local interest' was universally perceived as subjective and far less quantifiable. However identifying a 'national interest' involved various contradictions in its composition.

National interest

Respondents from organisations predominantly concerned with listing, considered 'national interest' set the standard for identifying features' value: the taxonomy of maintaining this high quality was essential. By working with the '*set of recognised criteria*' as laid out in PPG15, professionals evaluated features against this national interest, '*it's just a pure measure - it's on the list*'. Similarly;

...having the courage of saying 'that is one of the finest buildings in Britain and should be preserved and this one is of less importance', this is something we do as a national body.

However the common purpose of upholding national interest must be seen against a variety of respondents' comments which cumulatively challenge this concept.

The notion of an identifiable standard is relatively recent - only the thematic twentieth century listing review has involved a consideration of individual features' merit in relation to a recognised national standard. The routes of listing - original survey, accelerated re-survey, spot-listing, or thematic - involve different types of information, produced for sometimes quite disparate reasons. List descriptions of features purposely exclude explicit statements of the value recognised as being of national interest. One respondent noted that the national status of listed buildings was an unintended consequence of the abolition of non-statutory grade III band (buildings of local interest), thus implying that the remaining grades (I, II* and II) were automatically of national interest. It has created the;

...slightly absurd position that in theory there are 350,000 buildings in the country all of which the nation, *the nation*, cares about. Now in fact that can't possibly be true.

Current local lists were seen as mere window dressing, good for the local authority's state of knowledge but little more.

The funding from national Government does not appear to demonstrate a national interest in listed buildings either: '*We are not going to be able to keep more than a tiny fraction of them as state pensioners, we shouldn't do that.*' The effective restriction of national grants to grade I and II* properties (through the HLF) has influenced the re-grading of some listed buildings in order to qualify for vital, yet otherwise inaccessible, repair funding. Albeit a small number of cases, it questions the relativity of nationally consistent grades. If listed buildings are truly of national interest, it is also anomalous there is no national system of monitoring. Unlike ancient monuments, neither the Government, EH, the NGOs nor indeed the local authorities oversee that listed features are well maintained. In effect, 94% of listed buildings (grade IIs) are of local interest and the responsibility of local authorities;

...the fact that the lists are national is a kind of fiction... I don't know that there will ever be an explicit recognition of the fact that these buildings are purely local.

Citing particular examples may illustrate the potential confusion of what constitutes a national interest and there may be a distinct hierarchy still preferring;

...the traditional value system of polite architecture... the first round of listing and the accelerated resurvey will both have gone principally for those buildings which in some way belong to the official heritage of the country.

...of course we must recognise and protect the best. I'm not saying that a pre-fab in Birmingham is as worthy as Lincoln Cathedral, but I am saying that pre-fabs in Birmingham are as worthy of statutory protection. It's not just about legal protection - I mean there's sort of an assumption that if you extend the heritage you're either going to interfere with more things or you're going to dilute the degree of protection you can give to a building which is absurd that you can give the same protection to a pre-fab as you can to Lincoln Cathedral.

Despite these sentiments, listing standards' authority appears unshakeable. In contrast, the significance of features at a local level, exemplified through conservation area designation and other initiatives such as local lists, was perceived to have a correspondingly weaker concept of interest.

Local interest

Perhaps given these national organisations' administrative concern for national interest, it is unsurprising that many respondents considered a discussion of local interest was more appropriate and indeed convenient to leave for local authorities to answer. Whilst one respondent noted that a significant local value ought constitute a national interest, this was somewhat against the general sentiment which viewed the importance of local interests somewhat pejoratively:

Now if you have buildings which are assessed by their interest as structures or works of art, then the fact that they have a local sentimental value is a difficult factor to have in a national system.

There appears to be an overwhelming perception that local interests are primarily subjective, amorphous and unquantifiable. In contrast to the special, recognised criteria of listing, many perceived local value to be supported by '*quite inchoate reasons*';

...what we hope, obviously, is that [local] decisions are logically based, not guided by pure unalloyed emotion and that they do follow the criteria given by central Government...

Other respondents, whilst noting the importance of local value, also perceived it as either a thinly veiled, self-interest in protecting private amenity, or a sentimental nostalgia characterised by irrational, emotional responses to environmental change. Measuring and accessing 'local interest', what was 'special' in a locality,

was perceived to be too difficult a task and something which national responsibilities had *'shied away from'*.

However some respondents endorsed attempts to encourage local assessments of value. Contrary to the low regard for local value, some noted the equally worthy local value orientation of a more holistic view of the built environment;

...[people] feel very strongly about conservation concerning the way in which the familiar and cherished scene... is underpinned by historical background.

At the local level, issues of conservation and history, both local and national, become *'so conflated in the common mind that they're almost unpickable'*. The expression of local value fulfilled a cultural need to recognise the *'patina of history'*. Another respondent noted that valuing only architectural or historical value was a false distinction: people were equally likely to consider a familiar and everyday aspect of their environment to be 'special'. However highlighting certain aspects/areas as 'special' necessarily downgrades the rest. Although respondents recognised problems accessing and interpreting these values it shouldn't prevent local authorities from doing so.

Commentary

While listing operates on a recognised set of criteria, distinguishing grades of national interest, it is debatable whether these buildings are actually of interest to the nation. The variety of routes to listed status involving facts presented for different ends, the lack of national monitoring of features, the lack of financial and national support for the bulk of the grade II properties all question the commitment to 'national interest'. Though change is unlikely in the foreseeable future, Ashworth's (1997) suggestion of a revised grading scheme of local, regional and national importance may address this.

However a more fundamental problem was the maintenance of national kudos at the expense of local significance. The level of perceived importance, local or national, is the distinguishing mark of different countries' systems. In the UK, most of the curatorial responsibilities (for listed buildings and conservation areas) are heavily weighted towards the local level. However the importance that has been given to recognising local value has been significantly underplayed at the national level. Admittedly local value is specific to a locality but the pejorative perception of these values may have hampered the development of the concepts required to explore and elucidate local value. Paradoxically while conservation areas are

increasingly requiring character assessments to define and defend local value, list descriptions are remarkably free from stating the national value.

There appears to be a false assumption of local value being adequately represented through the controls available to local authorities. However the conservation area was never intended to solely mop up local interest which fell short of national recognition. The exclusion of local sentiment under the auspices of nostalgia, may illustrate Merriman's (1991) thesis that national and official history is intellectualised above local and immediate emotive historical sentiment. The view of a minority of respondents supports this conviction that the perception of local value is more holistic and requires greater cultural understanding. One observation to note for subsequent development may be the notion that historical context is a stronger force at local level in defining local interest whilst architectural interest is the stronger force at a national level.

5.8 The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

Respondents distanced their expert consideration of value from their perception of the public's. The surprising aspect was the relationship between these perceptions as exemplified through education and involvement in conservation issues.

Professionals' craft

A recurrent feature throughout concerned professionals' beliefs in the relative objectivity and rigour employed in their evaluation of conservation. Manifest in several guises, interpreting value relative to standards of national interest distinguished the professional from the interested amateur. The everyday work of those professionals dealing with casework necessitated a rapid prioritisation of value to manage their workload. Respondents did not articulate their skill as a specific acquisition of knowledge - these abilities are undoubtedly a result of years' training and experience. In fact, as cases were so unique, many respondents considered a set of general principles was of limited assistance. Instead the impression given was that considering value was a refined skill, a craft, having a professional 'eye'. Notably at EH for example, the '*collegiality of professionals*' was considered a major asset, allowing instant access to specialised areas of knowledge and collective discussion on cases' merits.

Informing the public

This professional culture, developed over decades of official recognition, can potentially remove conservation further from immediate public understanding. As one Government respondent noted:

It would be a bold man or woman who could say that the public was very clear as to have got involved [with] why conservation investigations and controls apply.

Given this consolidation of professional knowledge, most respondents were eager to ensure their esoteric pursuits did not alienate the public. This relationship between the professional and the public required a consideration of the following issues, as a senior member of EH stated:

I certainly would never say that public views should not be taken into account. I will say that where there are issues that require a certain degree of specialist understanding then it is very, very incumbent on the people who are doing the consulting to make sure that they explain why they are trying to do things...

Another respondent cited list descriptions' intricacies to illustrate the unnecessary obscurity which can cloud conservation;

...[they] are very inexplicit - are descriptions literally of the building itself, physically. They usually don't go beyond that to its value... the ordinary person finds list descriptions very baffling, and importantly, needlessly baffling because they could say why the building had been listed... all of that is clear to the illuminati but it needn't be so to the layman.

Most respondents noted their role to ensure the public understood and hopefully supported professionals' interpretations. This dissemination arguably is determined by the accountability of public servants - the responsibility to inform the public is a consequence of taking decisions on their behalf.

However, one respondent criticised EH for lacking transparency in explicitly stating their reasons for listing advice. If the information is to be meaningful, it requires a receptive audience who understand the concepts, reasoning and language employed. As one EH respondent stated;

...we're not just saying 'we think these buildings are important and you should agree with us', we'd say 'we think they're important for these reasons and see if you agree with us or not', this is why they are important.

Other respondents noted the necessity of priming public comprehension of issues in order to gain popular acceptance of initiatives which may otherwise founder;

...when we announced our post-war listing campaign, we had a campaign for hearts and minds. The first proposals failed because we didn't do the evangelical work... we had to do a lot more education and consultation, we did it and I think it paid off in terms of getting public acceptance which we would never have got past that before.

The emphasis continually appears to be on informing the public. As previously mentioned, respondents considered that the planning system allowed public access

to decision-making forum via a variety of participation mechanisms. Few wished to give 'the public' any further say or power in conservation, the balancing performed by statutory planning mechanisms being seen as '*about right*'. With this responsibility falling on local authorities, representatives at this national level appear to be side-stepping the issue, relying on providing public information rather than encouraging participation;

...[local planning authorities] should take the whole credit in a more advanced participatory and consultative way, take the public with them, ask for views and explain very carefully and exactly what the whole business is about...

Beyond specific campaigns, one of EH's founding requirements is to educate the public. Getting the conservation message across, not simply to the '*grizzled old councillors*' but also through schools is essential to ensure that future generations grow up with built-in conservation sensitivity.

The response

There is evidently a desire to interest the public in conservation, but what is the perceived nature of their contribution? Respondents' conceptions of the public appear to distinguish the knowledge bases and appreciation of value held by different sections of the public. This affects the desirability of involving these sections in conservation. While it has been acknowledged that the traditional interest in conservation has been predominantly from the middle classes, this support closely aligns itself with the professionals' art-historical orientation of conservation value. In so far as this section of the public is always involved, one respondent noted that the conservationists are forever preaching to the converted.

However in terms of conservation responding to other, possibly heritage oriented, interests in the past, respondents referred to this pejoratively. Public taste and appreciation, whilst admittedly fickle, was also considered somewhat anti-intellectual and too poorly informed to be seriously taken into account. For example: '*the preference for fake Victoriana I'm sure would take us even further down that route [of fake heritage]*'. A preference for mock Tudor Barrett homes, or for heritage inspired boutiques in old dockyards, contributed to viewing public taste with disdain. Lay sentiments were described as nostalgic or sentimental, possibly indicating a dismissive attitude towards their legitimate value, particularly in contrast to professional 'objectivity'.

I'm always amazed by how strong the level of support is when a particular local building sometimes of not much architectural quality is threatened. Immediately [an] extraordinary reaction amongst a surprising range of people, without being patronising, not very articulate people who write in green biro letters to the local planning authorities, who haven't quite got the buzzwords that everybody else has got but just express through that letter how strongly they do feel over a building which sometimes would be quite hard to defend because it's very mauled, altered or out of context but for them it matters a great deal.

If such sentiments are so strongly felt, then on what basis are they considered inappropriate for conservation? Few respondents actually mentioned the wider resource pool that such local knowledge, sentiments and experience can contribute to conservation. After all one respondent noted;

I mean ultimately it only matters [the value of listing] because people think it matters... you know you can argue, well what is the intrinsic worth of anything? It doesn't have any intrinsic worth, it only has value because we think it does.

Commentary

Throughout the analysis, the strength of professional/expert consideration of value has been a prominent issue. The development of conservation as an administrative system has created and consolidated a professional culture of conservation: whilst relying on public support, the two may be distinct in considering value.

There is a responsibility upon professionals to see that the public are informed of the work carried out on their behalf. But if the public (in its many facets) hold perspectives of value beyond the competence of the professional culture or indeed that administrative system, to what extent can the profession be said work on behalf of the public? The degree of public involvement can range through being provided with information, to being educated to appreciate conservation, to actually contributing their own interpretations of value. It would appear that by and large the responses of the national organisations involved in conservation are content to draw the line before the latter.

The question arises, in raising public awareness, who is the main beneficiary? Is it the public who enjoy increased awareness and a democratic debate of conservation? Or is it the profession/organisations who require public acceptance and therefore support of new initiatives? In which direction is the significant flow of information - how far are the public seen as being able to contribute to conservation?

Education in these terms may be seen as little more than legitimation of the accepted view - a one way transfer of information. For involvement to go any

further respondents generally characterised this as a function of the planning system. Those views which did not accord with the 'proper' way of perceiving value, were rejected from discussions of conservation's value. Public nostalgia or sentiment is undoubtedly a reflection of people's attachment to and the significance of particular features in the built environment. There appears to be far less opportunity for reciprocal contribution from other sections of the public, outside the minority with an architectural understanding.

The direction of the flow of interpretation and the significance attached to these directions at a national level sets the climate for subsequent consideration or rejection of legitimate issues. From the professional to the public, in a sense of legitimating professional values, or from the public to the profession, in expressing sentiments and interest in aspects of the environment not considered 'worthy' under orthodox means, there is potential for greater contrast than support.

5.9 Aspects of heritage valuation

Whilst the influence of 'heritage' culture was generally acknowledged, respondents displayed mixed opinions regarding its contribution to conservation. Though finely balanced, the prevailing view favoured the broadening scope of conservation's attention, though there were some strong caveats expressed about undermining the essence of conservation which remained focused on buildings' historic fabric. However themes relating to the temporal collage perceived in the environment appeared too abstract notion to discuss. Whilst this may reflect a pragmatic professional approach it is interesting to see an important strand of philosophical enquiry subconsciously disregarded.

Wider interest

Many respondents embraced this rising popular interest in the past as welcome support for conservation. Some highlighted the proliferation of groups and societies concerned with less traditional aspects of the past as indicative of this 'democratisation' of interest. It mirrors a general broadening of conservation's focus defined solely by the *'great and the grand, whether we're thinking about buildings or art or whatever.'* This may represent a move away from the national or official heritage which had previously monopolised the attention of previous

generations involved in conservation. Key players in EH believed the inclusion of other considerations of the past was essential:

We need to look across the whole history - the heritage isn't just about high heritage or Christian heritage or landed gentry heritage or whatever - it's about the whole of our past and the wider it goes and the deeper it goes the happier I am...

One of the things about understanding the past is you've got to understand all of it.

Striving to accommodate 'the whole history' inevitably presents problems with selection, ensuring a representative sample for conservation. Listing was lauded for its recognition of twentieth century structures which arguably belong to the 'minor history' of the country, for example listing inter-war pre-fabricated domestic chalets. However such broadening compass was only perceived as beneficial in reference to the objects of conservation rather than the processes or means of interpreting value.

A significant section of respondents considered heritage a de-basing influence since conservation ought only concern the historic fabric of features. One respondent observed that *'heritage is what you visit and conservation is what you live with'*. For example in relation to archaeology, another respondent noted how many colleagues had difficulty in accepting the premise that archaeology was the study of the past right up to the present day rather than uncovering the lost past. This illustrates a perceptual problem with the legitimate concerns of conservation and the merits perceived in heritage.

'Dumbing-down'

The criticisms of heritage, which appeared well rehearsed, covered both the objects of heritage's attention and also people's interests in it:

...we all tend to dislike the term heritage - nobody likes it - it sounds too rustic, too retrograde, associations with the heritage industry et cetera.

DCMS respondents noted:

I've got no idea of what [heritage means] because, it's become a bunch of abused words which people then use as a crazy name to justify their own particular interests or concerns, 'it's part of our heritage' or whatever... But I think that's a different issue, the one that concerns or I suspect that concerns most people it's almost like it reflects a primitive nostalgia for the past, things which should or should not be changed...

In characterising any appreciation outside the sphere of credible academic interest as 'primitive nostalgia', heritage appears brandished as lacking an intellectual constituency. This is a potent dismissal considering that other respondents observed a pervasive interest in the past a 'national trait'. When considering

heritage, many respondents considered the side effects of commodifying the past were incredibly damaging. Not only to the fabric of structures, in attempting to accommodate inappropriate uses, but also to accurately representing the past, commodification downgrades the diversity and richness of the features society inherits. In attempting to reflect continuity in the environment, an obsession with heritage has produced an homogenous design solution.

An awful lot of local authorities think when they come to urban regeneration schemes, what do we do? 'Let's try and make the best of the old docks' or 'we've got this disused Victorian station and let's build our heritage sort of regeneration around that' which is fair enough and fine. It's just sometimes it can go too far and you end up with you know terrible tweeness and fakeness and so on. Even then people like it, I mean that's the kind of paradox...

Other respondents echoed criticisms of the pastiche, reproduction 'Victoriana'; fakery and tweeness characterise a uniform aesthetic which in no way reflects the actual past of that area. This acceptance (by the public and also by planners) of such imitation was seen as having a very negative effect on the accuracy of representing the past, a standard which conservation attempts to uphold.

Commentary

The problem facing heritage in conservation, as presented through these issues, is one of accuracy of representation. Most respondents supported this broadening interest, recognising a diversity of architectural pieces for listing. However this revision remains within the traditional architectural scope of value. As heritage interest strayed outside the confines of architecture, even though related to the built environment, there was a tendency to dismiss these issues as primitive nostalgia. These observations reflect divisions highlighted in the preceding section between professional and lay interpretations of value.

While claims are made for conservation to represent the whole of the past, there cannot be an accurate representation of the past. The values upon which conservation is based are not immutable; indeed many recognise the generational reappraisal of value in the system. Thus values are created anew or at least re-interpreted to a significant degree by successive waves of practitioners and various sections of the public.

It is arguable that conservation is oriented to being more 'true to form', in architectural and design terms than it is 'true to time' through the vagaries of historical interpretation. As Jones (1993) and Macmillan (1993) argue, heritage can be a creative re-appraisal of conservation value, as the emphasis shifts from

intrinsic value to experiential value based in groups' and individuals' experiences of the environment. The evidence from these interviews suggests that creating a framework for allowing wider interpretation is to be encouraged generally, but it is not a matter for conservation which remains grounded in the architectural tradition. If heritage is perceived as an undermining force, conservation may be excluding a significant alternative perspective.

5.10 Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

Attitudes towards economic issues did not present a common view amongst respondents, except ensuring building's continued economic vitality required a *'flexible approach'* to decision-making. Economics did not provide as great a discussion as other areas, which may in itself reflect the significance and weight attached to it. More likely it embodies a belief that economic considerations were really an issue for local authorities in specific cases. Identifiable distinctions between respondents' attitudes and support for economic rationales, causes and effects in conservation.

Promoting growth

As noted previously, particularly among the higher political levels in EH, conservation was portrayed as a major contributor to promoting urban regeneration. In assisting markets to develop, buildings and their heritage were portrayed as assets requiring careful management to ensure their continued use. In this respect conservation was facilitating rather than regulating the market;

...our new Chief Executive at English Heritage is utterly convinced that conservation is regeneration and if we don't understand that we will perish.

In renewing features' economic life, conservation was playing an enabling role to assist wider redevelopment initiatives. One senior EH respondent noted the state should not keep a vast number of these buildings as *'pensioners'*, rather they had to find viable market solutions. Conservation could take a longer term perspective and maintain buildings until markets became sufficiently buoyant to take over. The role that economics played in conservation could not be overstated. One respondent considered that 90% of what happened to historic buildings was determined by economic factors and conservation only came into play for a small

remainder. In contrast, NAS respondents viewed economics as an inevitable sphere in which they had to operate, yet it was mainly a negative influence which resulted in threats, loss and compromise.

Some interesting points were raised relating to economics' causal relationship with conservation. Conservation is continually battling against the inherent economic obsolescence of buildings. However conservation is increasingly concerned with aspects of social history manifest in the built environment. For instance the decline of much of the country's manufacturing base has created a wealth of industrial buildings struggling to justify their existence. Precisely when economic considerations demand these features' redevelopment, conservation is arguing of their retention and conversion. One respondent lamented the difficulty of overcoming the perceptual problems created by this:

...the assumption is automatically made, not only that they [old buildings] are temporarily redundant, but that they must be redundant for all time. And the other assumption which is often made is that because they're not suitable for today's particular uses they won't ever be suitable for any other uses again...

A couple of respondents from planning oriented organisations presented a different angle on local authorities' use of conservation controls. In an increasingly intense economic competition between towns and cities, distinguishing places' unique characteristics and qualities was essential for many local authorities. Historic towns faced formidable opposition from larger metropolitan and unitary authorities in terms of attracting investment and securing grants and SRB funding. Instead their strengths were seen in their environmental qualities to attract jobs and residents, shoppers and tourists.

Weighing the benefits

It would appear that developers have appropriated the conservation message in converting redundant buildings based on a growing realisation of the saleability of 'pastness', combined with profitable, central urban locations;

...frankly they started to realise the commercial value of the buildings and architectural heritage - they are selling things that they can put a higher price on because they are individual.

Some respondents viewed developers' interest with cynicism. The conversion of such redundant buildings (often along a particular 'heritage' theme) was viewed more as an easier route obtaining a planning permission for these features when local authorities were keen to rectify these deteriorating structures.

Away from the commercial side, many considered residential interest in conservation as a benefit and a threat. Increased prosperity and a renewed cultural propensity for private house ownership made the kudos of owning a listed building a reality for a greater cross-section of the public. Home owners improved and maintained properties that may have been previously neglected. However residential improvements on such an increased scale brought all manner of uniformed and unsympathetic alterations to the fabric of the property. Indeed the NAS considered that the majority of their cases comprised over-enthusiastic homeowners 'improvements' to listed buildings.

In controlling these commercial and residential aspects many respondents considered that local authorities were too conciliatory to the economic arguments, and often threats, propounded by applicants. Planning committees were too ready to sacrifice the intrinsic interest of a feature in securing potential development. Maintaining the all-important economic viability of a scheme was a powerful tool against a potentially vulnerable planning service. Though many respondents recognised the inevitable *'trade-off'* between retention and development, they considered local planning authorities often deviated away from the recommended guidelines.

Commentary

There are distinct differences apparent in respondents' attitudes towards economics' influence on conservation. Generally speaking, either economic development is considered a force which conservation can harness or it is an obstacle for successfully maintaining buildings' architectural integrity. Whilst all respondents emphasised that keeping buildings in use was their main concern, actively encouraging re-use and an emphasis on economic viability affects where the fulcrum is placed in the delicate *'trade-off'* between retention and renewal. Some respondents emphasised EH's role as a regeneration agency. This is a significant change in their outlook and requires a further set of criteria to measure the effects and performance of conservation's contribution.

It is a particularly difficult area given the intricacies of calculating the economic value and benefits which conservation accrues. Some studies have attempted this (Allison et al 1996) with limited efficacy given the contested nature of quantifying cultural and social value as opposed to economic ones. Ashworth's (1997) argument that conservation ought be more productively recast as a marketable

heritage resource attempts to address this economic turn, yet it would appear that there is not a great deal of support for any such reconceptualisation of values. Lichfield (1997) perhaps has come closest to achieving this, but the point is that the further economics are brought into the fray, the non-economic benefits, being less defensible and unquantifiable, appear much weaker in contrast. This may have quite profound effects given the criticisms levelled at local authorities by respondents for too easily sacrificing conservation to development pressures. This may be a starting point for examination in the ensuing case study research.

5.11 The influence of political agendas

It is notable that discussion concerning this section suffered a similar diminution as for economic issues. It appeared that politics and policy was largely an influence on these respondents rather than being of definite and central importance. One respondent at EH noted that policy;

...gets talked about by those who wish to talk about it... it occasionally gets talked about [by] whose technical responsibility it is at the upper levels but that, broadly speaking, happens when they are kicked... it's just because they're all too short of time.

...it tends to be very haphazardly done... so although we might, I hope, present a perfectly united front when a large issue comes up to the outside world, we don't spend our time endlessly churning over policy... I think policy is rather underloaded in terms of time.

Although a single respondent's comment, it is a disconcerting view of the lead heritage body's strategic development.

This section comprises several interpretations of political influence: firstly, Party politics and its effects; secondly, political issues reflecting control relationships. Respondents appeared to distinguish between national policy/political support and the relationship with local government/the local political climate. Though national political issues were paramount, the local influence was considered the stronger as it affected conservation's actual outcome.

Politics

At a national level, time and time again, conservation was portrayed as enjoying cross-party support:

I think conservation is one of those things accepted by all political parties, it's intrinsic to all Government advice now. I think it is regarded as just a given and no political party could hope to gain power or respect if it announced tomorrow that it was abolishing listing... it's just not a vote winner.

Such conviction of conservation's stability, in a fashion has permitted conservation to continue its operations with minimal political interference. One respondent noted that even when *'Thatcherite Britain [was] in full flood'* they still managed to get the presumption in favour of preservation through drafts of PPG15. Where the system has faced inevitable challenges and difficulties, it has solved them by the application of more knowledge to support its actions. For example one respondent noted when listing was under criticism for its ever expanding lists, the post-war listings promulgated an even deeper scrutiny of interest to ensure that the choices were politically supportable. Knowledge legitimated conservation and is very much the route to justifying power.

However it has already been commented upon that political preferences are shaping conservation's orientation, at least in EH's presentations. New Labour's patronage of the Urban Task Force, created uncertainties over a potential neglect befalling conservation's contribution to urban development. Thus while some maintain that political influence may appear minimal, this is not to say that there aren't political values in conservation: indeed it may create some of its own.

Political values

The extent to which conservation advice remains non-political, is open to question, particularly when one respondent sarcastically commented;

...it must be the Secretary of State's decision on the impartial advice from a disinterested advising group and of course *that is what happens every time!*

Evidently there are political biases and preferences which affect the apparent impartiality of decision-making. Indeed some respondents noted how protecting a feature from development by spot-listing, involved considerable political expediency to justify protection as much as the feature's intrinsic interest. Other biases noted the division of conservation responsibilities between two political masters in the DETR and the DCMS:

It's an amazing split and it's totally dysfunctional, it doesn't work properly and it's actually extremely difficult to be working to two masters with different agendas...

The relationship with planning also influences the way in which conservation can access politics. Many respondents considered that more politically sensitive outcomes, whether intended or not, were a matter for planning, not conservation, a perspective which allowed conservation to be apolitical. For instance, one respondent highlighted the conservation programme in Bologna through which the local Communist administration introduced a socio-political agenda for conservation. In UK practice few, if any, conservation initiatives were even discussed along (right or left wing) socio-political aims. Where gentrification occurs, some respondents saw it as legitimately assisting properties back into re-use, having encouraged the capabilities of new users to uphold conservation aims. Although conservation could create social problems, these were beyond its competence and could be left to planning and politics to adjudicate.

Listing also creates its own values in raising certain features' associations of merit and superiority. Though it may objectively identify properties, several respondents commented on political interests preferring certain types of features over others. A couple of recent examples were cited where (then current) Conservative Ministers declined to list features associated with more socialist and Labour-oriented building projects.

Central-local relations

Relations with local government were viewed influencing the quality and purity of conservation's implementation. Most EH respondents saw their role with local authorities as one of partnership, encouraging and overseeing local conservation practice, supporting the often lone local conservation officer. Their added weight and legitimacy emphasised the national responsibility of conservation which local politics may brush aside. However, whilst national politics were seen not to affect conservation so much, the diversity and autonomy of local authorities, whilst inevitable in a democracy, presented great difficulties in securing conservation amongst local priorities. Particularly for NAS respondents, local authorities could as easily be a hindrance:

You know local planning authorities can do what they bloody like as far as I can see in listed building consent cases...

The power relationship between the two tiers of government is a sensitive one.

Listing can be imposed;

...it doesn't cause a problem if the local planning authority doesn't want it - one just sits there and says 'tough!' Conservation areas are a nightmare because the local planning authority really is the one who designates...

The local political agenda generally poses a problem for national organisations, in ensuring that conservation receives consistently high quality consideration. One respondent, with a background in local authority politics, noted that while conservationists are immersed in the subject they must be politically astute too;

...if conservation is going to survive, it's got to survive in the murky political world.

...conservation is one of many elements in the planning process it's not a unique one and it has to fight its corner with other subjects - it doesn't have a divine right to be listened to.

It was noted at the outset that many respondents considered PPG15 was a highwatermark in national conservation policy. In spite of this, a couple of respondents lamented local authorities' lack of imagination in implementing its guidance. Most local plans merely paraphrased national conservation policy with little attention given to identifying local characteristics and priorities. This may be indicative of the power relationship between local and central Government which has increased in favour of the latter over recent years. However, it does not necessarily mean that all local authorities are unresponsive to their conservation responsibilities. A couple of respondents noted local authorities' desires for further layers of conservation control - they want the political imperative and autonomy - both in terms of actual control but also recognition for the quality of local features.

Respondents' perceptions of power relations continued within local authorities to officer level. The implementation of good conservation schemes was widely recognised as dependent on the quality, relative status of and respect shown to the conservation officer within the planning service. The generation of support and political goodwill for conservation in an authority was often created by the individual conservation officer's enthusiasm, persuasiveness and tenacity.

Commentary

There appear to be some startling anomalies to account for in this section. Belief in a national political consensus supporting conservation may be questionable in the face of political initiatives requiring EH to emphasise conservation in terms of regeneration to make it politically appealing.

The contrast between national and local situations is marked in terms of conservation's political status. Locally, conservation is perceived to lose the tacit political support which characterise the national sphere. This may reflect different perceptions of conservation between the two levels. At a national level, those involved with conservation think many local authorities do not consider conservation as that important, reflected in the amount of political support it receives. However local politicians may not support conservation because whilst they would ideally prefer their locality to look attractive this would appear to be a luxury in the face of more urgent priorities. The portrayal of conservation as an art-historical concern through national policies and local conservation professionals may actually reinforce this distinction. Therefore it may need to be shown that conservation can be far more involved with pursuing these urgent priorities which may overcome a certain amount of political apathy. Ensuring conservation is more sensitive to political currents may be opposed by purists but it may be essential to guarantee its contribution to local urban environmental policies. It may require a reconsideration of what conservation is and does to achieve the sort of local political consensus which is seen supporting the whole system nationally.

5.12 Concluding observations

The issues presented in this chapter were based on in-depth interviews with representatives of organisations concerned with the development of national conservation policy. The methodology used does not qualify the results as a comprehensive survey of attitudes throughout this level but is useful for exploring salient concerns, challenges and tensions.

It was noted in the analysis that it proved difficult to recognise consistently clear distinctions between different organisations' responses. It was surprising to find quite such correspondence between these bodies, perhaps this is consolidated by their united front in campaigning for conservation. The question is, do these similarities necessarily indicate an identifiable set of national values in conservation? Answering this involves two considerations - the aggregate vagueness of respondents' expression highlighting latent value tensions, and the extent to which a professional perspective exists independent of organisational background.

Firstly, the apparent consensus on issues only holds firm for general, unassailable statements such as believing that conservation is the management of change. In unpacking individuals' responses, rather than illuminating clarity and consistency in the national policy arena, the cumulative impression was one of confusion and vagueness. Though tensions were mostly implicit, the contrasts were sufficiently disparate to expose the variety of competing interpretations of the superficial consensus view. Moreover the tensions were evident not simply between respondents but also within individuals' own attitudes.

Such inconsistency may be unavoidable, created by the inherent tensions in the structural discipline of conservation. Time and again, respondents, particularly those involved with casework applications, noted that their practical work could not be performed according to hard and fast rules. This is not to say conservation ought to rely on a universally consistent intellectual basis for its actions, nor should this thesis criticise its absence. It may appear wholly unrealistic to clamour for greater consistency in conservation when professionals place such faith in the discretion and flexibility available to them.

Secondly, whilst not specifically noted in the chapter since it was not an issue highlighted in the literature, respondents' backgrounds displayed a similarity of training and education. There was a significant degree of employment mobility within the national conservation sphere, with individuals moving in and out of higher officer levels in the private, public and voluntary sectors. To some extent, this may account for the difficulty in distinguishing corporate viewpoints from individuals whose opinions were formed by education and experience influenced under several roles in different sectors. This may indicate that these conclusions can only recognise the values of a shared professional culture amongst key-players at this level.

In response to identifying a set of national conservation values, a rather tautological conclusion is submitted. Whilst there is common agreement at a superficial level as to the general direction and parameters of conservation, the diversity of interpretations and values supporting this consensus is sufficient to undermine it. However it is also arguable that there is a shared and somewhat exclusive professional culture, born of similar education and training, which influences this deeper level of value diversity.

The main issues raised in these interviews are summarised in response to the research issues flowing from the conceptual framework. Consolidating the analysis

by these three research issues is essential since throughout this chapter findings have reinforced each other by encompassing several conceptual themes.

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

There was a widespread desire to present conservation as a central component in all levels of governance and land regulation - conservation concerned managing change in the existing environment. When analysed further, the importance of conservation being central to planning was often accompanied by a belief that the practice of conservation was a distinct specialisation which benefited enormously from separate legislation, consents, professionals and responsibilities. In practice it appears that the legitimacy gained from closer integration with planning was in actual fact of less importance compared to the benefits of operational distinction. Indeed there was a general feeling that further integration would actually be detrimental, allowing other planning matters to obscure a consideration of the conservation issues.

The distinctions in specific mechanisms and consent regimes between listed buildings and conservation areas further emphasised this split of competencies between planning and conservation. When conservation was more closely entwined with planning practice, it was perceived as weaker, for instance the relative frailty of conservation areas, in protection control and also as a theoretical concept. While urban design and townscape management could offer alternatives, conservation's strength lay in a specificity towards historic fabric, which required an intuitive and sensitive approach. Planning, by and large offered too blunt an instrument, both in terms of its provisions but also in the ability of its officers to appreciate conservation issues. Thus a distinction in professional competencies provided a further contrast between practices.

This is not to say these perspectives of the relationship are invalid criticisms or conversely that conservation professionals are wrong to advocate a degree of caution when trusting planning to wholly respect conservation priorities. Rather, the significant issue is the degree to which this tension, between greater involvement in planning yet lamenting any loss of distinct control, is causing all manner of anomalies for conservation. Its existing mechanisms, relations and professionalism may inhibit how conservation develops, yet simultaneously they are used to justify promoting conservation's special status.

The consideration of acceptable change similarly highlighted divisions between professionals. The politically driven portrayal of conservation's contribution to regeneration actually collided with some professionals' views that development was the persistent obstacle to good conservation. Respondents also perceived a preservationist bias in the public's attitude to resisting change in the local environment.

Despite this, conservation is widely seen to enjoy substantial public support, an interest almost bordering on a national pastime. Coming mainly from the residential sector, public support allows the profession a campaigning platform and also indirectly bolsters the perceived political consensus supporting conservation over the past 30 years. Such public interest lends the conservation profession moral power to its elbow. However inconsistencies arose when the public were viewed as distinct sections rather than a homogenous whole; public support then varied from tacit acceptance through to disinterest and apathy. More surprising was the perception that the public didn't really understand conservation beyond merely maintaining everything as it is. Thus the profession was incumbent to explain and educate the public if they were to work on their behalf, however this raises the question of how far the conservation profession responds to public interest or opinion or sets its own values.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The statutory criteria of 'special architectural or historic interest' was universally considered an appropriate and flexible basis for interpreting value in conservation. Though PPG15 acknowledges the importance of architectural over historic interest, the ascendancy of the former appeared to eclipse the latter. The revision of historic interest to reflect social and economic historical evidence in the built environment was welcomed. Respondents' interpretation of value tended to focus on the intrinsic value of the historic fabric reflecting these national bodies' administrative concern with listing. More significantly, with various thematic programmes, listing was implicitly held as the torch-bearer in identifying new interpretations of conservation value. The concept of areas' character was seen to be under-developed largely because it was the responsibility of local authorities. Areal character, more so than the character of a building, could be difficult to define

since it involved a greater cultural dimension which conservation had not traditionally encompassed.

The significance of features was defined according to their national interest which provided a benchmark in the taxonomy of features. Whereas the processes of establishing national interest were considered rigorous and relatively objective, it is questionable whether the nation is actively interested in conserving such high numbers of listed buildings. There are variable standards for different types of listing, there is no monitoring of listed buildings' state of repair and national grant schemes are only available to a fraction of them. Local interest was considered much more subjective and in general, respondents were satisfied leaving this concept for local authorities to develop. However relatively few authorities analysed local interest or applied the concept meaningfully: the national bodies had little power to demand better performance.

The definition of national interest, although defended as a relatively objective standard, involved the consideration of a small group of experts. Arguably this raises a question of their own professional values defining conservation value. A common culture of shared backgrounds, through education and training, creates professional collegiality. Conservation's value is manifest through a specific concern with historic fabric and the revelation of buildings' value considered as self-evident and appreciable for all with a mind and eye to notice. Whilst laudable for their immense work and knowledge, the professional culture appears to be an exclusionary one. It operates as a value filter, emphasising art-historical approaches at the expense of broader environmental and cultural interpretations of value. Through this filter of knowledge, other experiences of attachment or identification with features, particularly on a local scale, whilst undeniable, appear of lesser concern. A considerable amount of the public's interest in the built environment was dismissed as being fickle, emotional and irrational responses often driven by unbridled sentimentality or nostalgia. Given the strength of respondents' beliefs in their professional judgement, it would appear this collegiality more than anything else provides the intellectual basis for conservation. Recognising the potential barriers of professional disciplines (Macinnes 1993), when such arenas become closed to wider societal evaluations of value conservation merely becomes a self-serving administrative function (Jones 1993).

Indeed while there was sympathy with a view that conservation concerned cultural artefacts, there was little enthusiasm to extend this interpretation beyond that relating to architectural interest.

As mentioned above the consideration of the broader cultural dimension of conservation has created problems. Whilst respondents recognise its importance, there was a reluctance to broaden the parameters of conservation. For instance the effects of heritage have promoted a revision of conservation value but only in relation to pieces of architecture. Heritage has not widened the legitimate routes open to cultural interpretations of conservation value.

The extent to which economic and political pressures affect conservation

It is significant that throughout, respondents engaged less with these issues than others areas. Economics and politics were generally considered more appropriately addressed by local planning authorities in determining conservation's effects rather than being the major considerations at a more abstracted national policy level.

Although heritage was increasingly recognised by enterprise as a marketable and profitable theme, respondents were divided whether to ride the crest of this wave or take shelter from its inevitable fallout. Ultimately most were agreed that conservation still suffered a weak bargaining position in contrast with hard economic arguments, especially within local authority decision-making.

In political terms, the (then) new Labour administration had through its reticence to take positive steps in favour of conservation, signalled a change in attitude regarding the political support conservation has previously enjoyed. Perhaps this is not as fundamental and abrupt change as it appears. The division of conservation tasks to the former Department of National Heritage with residual responsibility maintained by the Department of the Environment was notably felt to have undermined the status of conservation in political circles, perhaps to the extent of merely paying lip service to the cause. Similarly those more politically involved have had to re-orient conservation practice, or at least the rhetoric, to tessellate with political agendas putting regeneration before other causes.

Questions for the next level

Having summarised the main points emerging from this survey of attitudes at a national level, what are their implications? Returning to the research issues, more specific questions can be addressed, such as:

- How does conservation interact with planning in local practice - is there a similar value placed on its 'separateness'?
- Is there grass-roots support for conservation in a locality?
- Does the intrinsic architectural value of historic fabric enjoy the same prominence or does the presence of local areal protection engender a more holistic approach?
- Is there a distinctly local, in contrast with national, perspective regarding conservation value?
- Is there still a core set of professional values defining conservation?
- To what extent do economics and politics do dictate conservation's influence?

Are these premises born out in local planning authorities' applications or are they contrasted by other issues which are more prominent in local experiences of conservation? To expose these relationships the following two chapters report on the findings from two local planning authorities case studies.

Chapter 6

Local planning authority ‘A’: a case study of conservation in a non-‘traditional’ historic town

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the research was to take a holistic approach in exploring value justifications underlying conservation practice. Values and perceptions presented at the national level in the previous chapter have justified and reinforced the need to examine the operation of conservation in local authority practice.

Two local authorities were chosen to provide a contrasting illustration of the different urban contexts in which statutory conservation measures are implemented. This chapter, comprising the first case study, concerns a non-‘traditional’ historic town. Whilst it is acknowledged that all towns develop through time and contain equally valid evidence of their evolution, the phrase is intended to convey an image of a town quite distinct from a pretty, picture postcard town. Such a traditional historic town forms the focus of the second case study in Chapter 7.

This chapter reports findings from a two tier analysis of the conservation culture surrounding the local planning authority’s practice. This is initially explored through the operational structure and personnel involved in conservation’s relations with other responsibilities throughout the professional and political aspects of the planning authority. This background information was obtained through interviewing a cross section of relevant officers and Members in the local authority. Secondly, four developments involving a range of conservation issues illustrate the application of particular conservation approaches and also expose a broader range of responses towards conservation in the locality. The concluding section provides an opportunity to collate and discuss these findings in greater depth according to the ten themes identified in the conceptual framework.

The authority shall be referred to as Authority A respecting the undertaking of confidentiality to respondents, especially in light of the sensitive information and opinions expressed herein.

6.2 An illustrative background

Past achievements

The authority centres on a northern town left with a considerable legacy of Victorian civic and industrial architecture following the once prosperous local woollen and textile trades. While the Metropolitan Council was created in 1974, a significant minority of the original planning officers have remained with the authority; their experience provides a rich commentary on the development of local conservation practice. Whilst it is unfeasible to present a complete 25 year history, certain periods and events can illustrate significant trends.

Until the creation of a formal Heritage, Environment and Implementation (HEI) section in the late 80s, conservation was more an integral part of the planning service. The forerunner to the HEI section was loosely divided into two teams, one dealing with specific development control (DC) type work and the architectural detailing of listed building consents and the other taking a more project oriented approach to urban renewal. The latter was broader ranging, working outside the conventional boundaries of planning, often in tandem with other departments, e.g. Housing. From the outset, the conservation section appeared filled with strong-minded individuals, eager to retain all conservation responsibilities at a local rather than County level. Through several conservation initiatives through the 1970s to mid 80s, officers considered themselves equal to prestigious towns' authorities which possessed greater conservation responsibilities. Two examples accruing valuable local and national recognition illustrate this prominence.

In terms of listing, the original lists were retrospectively described as '*pathetic*' by officers using them. With national concern over the listing surveys' continuing sloth, the Inspectorate for listing within the former DOE sought co-operation with local authorities to produce provisional lists. Through close officer contacts with the Inspectorate, the authority conducted one of these few pilot projects feeding into phase 1 of the accelerated national re-survey.

The Inspector overseeing the region's listing process wished to champion the wealth of eighteenth and nineteenth century vernacular buildings and the impressive Victorian architecture in the area. A local architect prepared extensive provisional lists which despite further censoring by the Inspectorate has today left the authority with a considerable number of listed buildings. The initiative not only

produced lists representing greater vernacular interest, it also illustrated how listing itself can alter perceptions of a place. At the time, the Council welcomed the appreciation and kudos, though later some Members began to see listed building consents, particularly in the town centre, as an unwarranted obstacle for economic development.

A further accolade for the authority was the completion of a buildings at risk survey to support the creation of the authority's own historic building grants scheme. Ahead of most other local authorities in the mid-80s and with the backing of EH, every listed building was photographed and recorded. This concern for features of predominantly vernacular interest was significant, forming the basis for later EH national buildings at risk surveys.

A reversal of fortunes?

However in contrast to the pioneering spirit characterising the first 15 years, conservation's status during the 1990s has arguably suffered. With the abolition of the Metropolitan County Council in 1986 further responsibilities were transferred to the authority and the new challenges and priorities inevitably affecting conservation's position in the political agenda.

Given the depletion of their traditional industrial base, towns in this region were desperate to replicate certain areas' service-led revival. The drive to stimulate inward investment, creating new jobs and prosperity whilst always important, appeared to transcend all other priorities. By the late 80s and early 90s, the planning service was increasingly being pressurised to apply developer-friendly policies and approaches. Though this initiative mostly fell to the economic development unit within the planning service, higher political circles considered the regulatory and restrictive ethos of the planning service was an obstacle. In effect a direct competition for political patronage arose between the Heads of the respective planning and economic development sections. It resulted in the creation of a separate Economic Development Unit, leaving the planning service with the *'rump of statutory responsibilities'* according to one planning officer and a reduced strategic and proactive role regarding local development. Whilst portrayed as providing clarity and definition to the planning service, many officers saw it as a diminution in planning's political status, largely through the lack of vision of the previous Head of Service.

Subsequent budget reviews similarly reflected the Council's political priorities. Suffering central Government capping, virtually all Council services received a 5% annual cut. Whilst the planning service consolidated its staff under these reductions, a series of unfortunate cases where conservation may have caused delays for well-connected developers appeared to further undermine conservation's political support. Considered a less than essential function, it received an 8% budget reduction. The resulting loss of staff through official 'natural wastage', though unofficial demoralisation, left the conservation section severely depleted. The former section manager lamented; *'I think we had gone as far as we could without giving up altogether'*.

Observations

Over a 25 year period the value of conservation's contributions, to planning and politically, has significantly altered. Whilst all respondents claim to support conservation, in principle believing it to be a worthy activity, it has patently fallen from grace. As a separate section, distinct from statutory planning responsibilities in DC and Policy, there is a greater threat of marginalisation. Whilst recollections of past practice may be positively remembered through rose-tinted spectacles, there is no denying that the authority performed several pioneering initiatives, supported by the official conservation bodies. Latterly, the scope and support of such practices appears more confined. Whilst planning has been stripped to the essentials and outflanked by the Economic Development Unit's proactivity, so conservation has been characterised and pigeon-holed as a minor regulatory responsibility. Such a perception does not bode well for reclaiming active political support.

6.3 Current structure, operation and priorities

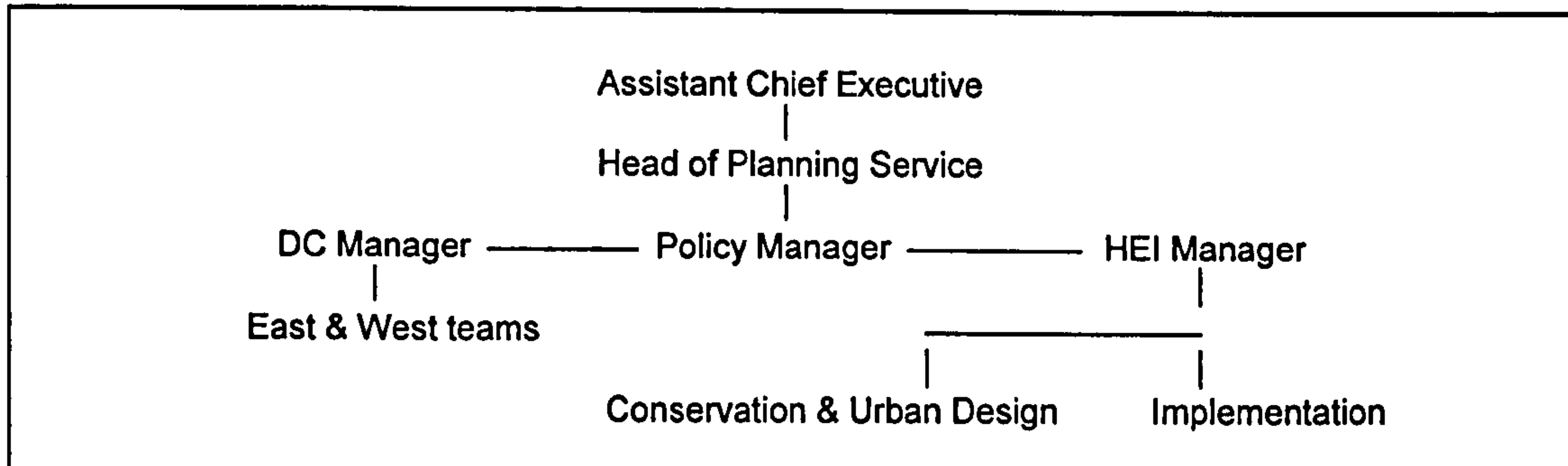


Table 6.1 Structure of the Council Planning Service

6.3a HEI section

The Heritage, Environment and Implementation section (HEI) is nominally in the planning service but is physically located with building control. Split between Conservation & Urban Design (CUD) and Implementation, the division of responsibilities has latterly become more formalised. The Implementation team assembles bids for all external grant applications, drawing funding into the authority for regeneration projects and also manages existing grant schemes in close liaison with SRB fundholders. The CUD team are the Council's design advisers dealing with referrals from all other Council services, but mostly planning, on specific aesthetic matters.

CUD comprises a principal planning officer, a senior planning officer - the sole qualified architectural adviser - and one planning officer whose responsibilities are split between HEI's two sections. (A newly appointed planning officer has been added subsequently). This is in stark contrast to just 2 years ago when the section had 5 full-time officers. The former principal planning officer (now replaced) took early retirement partly through dissatisfaction with a lack of vision and support higher up the Service and Council which restricted conservation's contribution. He considered the authority lacked any corporate commitment to design, thus allowing distinct services to pursue wholly contradictory solutions.

The current HEI manager may object to such views, believing that the section is finally becoming oriented to pursuing more proactive and project based conservation. Echoing other officers' comments, he considered CUD had lacked

the managerial ability to prioritise cases and treated each feature as an irreplaceable marvel. He would prefer the section to concentrate on the authority's wealth of grade I and II* responsibilities, some of which were in desperate need of attention, over more ordinary, mediocre listed buildings. Buildings in conservation areas and many grade II features could be adequately dealt with by an accomplished DC officer, given appropriate pre-emptive design guidance. However the conservation adviser had quite different views on the matter.

Conservation adviser's views

The conservation adviser believes the need for conservation reflects a human awareness of space-time relations - features in the environment orient experience of the present. However he considers that conservation policy in general neglects the specific qualities of locality and place. Certainly this neglect of context is his major criticism of modern architecture - in which professional arrogance pays scant attention to surroundings, spatially and temporally.

From a wider perspective, he believes conservation can only be successful when accompanied by public interest and co-operation, either in submitting sensitive applications, or through active conservation lobbying. However he described the town as a place where conservation is seen as a luxury rather than a priority by a majority of the public; this is partly reflected in local political attitudes. While the public do not appear to take an active interest in conservation, the adviser considers it all the more important to '*act as their eyes*' for these '*not very visual people*'. However it is notable that the public may not appear interested in conservation since unfamiliarity with the professional design language precludes them from the debate.

While he fervently believes in pursuing a principled conservation argument, he finds that the Planning service and rest of the Council, unduly lack an appreciation of, or consistent approach towards conservation. Aside from the UDP, there is no other guidance, no corporate statement and little design awareness perceived outside the CUD section. He considers that some departments actively contradict and nullify the work of conservation in offering grants for buildings' redevelopment where conservation advocates repair.

With such potential contradictions, much depends on the support and lead of the section managers. However the adviser is critical that they rely on conservation

advice for ulterior advantage but do not support conservation principles as a rule. This leaves conservation particularly vulnerable against development pressures since he considers that DC planners are over-sensitive to the political repercussions of refusing development. In the light of recent cases involving a collision of opinions between conservation and development, the opportunities for him to influence DC decision-making are being perceptibly reduced.

6.3b DC section

Whilst the Planning service has been subject to budgetary cuts, the DC section has retained a large staff to ensure swift processing of planning applications. It is one of the largest DC sections in any local planning authority, comprising two teams, East and West, with a principal planning officer responsible for each. These are further divided into three area sub-sections each under a senior planning officer. These respective sections deal with all the planning applications made to the authority, including all listed building consents.

The DC Manager considers the Planning service has a good reputation largely as DC officers' were flexible and sensitive in satisfying clients' needs to mutual satisfaction. For him, planning was a balancing act accommodating a multitude of factors: whilst policies and principles were the starting point, they could only offer guidance. The DC section was purposeful and pragmatic, processing the majority of applications within the statutory 8 week limit. Their strength lies in being a pure planning section - being able to concentrate on statutory responsibilities free from diversions, for example environmental protection.

As manager his responsibilities included ensuring a good service to applicants and minimising any potential conflicts. However, some planning officers considered that a planning authority upholding an ethos of public interest, ought to scrutinise and be less conciliatory to applicants' desires. This contrast with the conservation adviser's approach, based on unerring principle, has created scepticism on both sides.

Operational relations with HEI

In the early 1980s the conservation section dealt with all applications involving conservation issues - i.e. all listed building consents and most applications where the character or appearance of a conservation area was affected. However the intervening years have witnessed a gradual decline in conservation's political support and their corresponding influence over development control. Rather than being sole determinants, conservation is an advisor to DC. Whilst consultation guidelines were officially laid down in the early 1990s, subsequent staff and resource reductions in HEI have made this formal arrangement impractical.

Since only works to grade I and II* buildings automatically invoke CUD consultation, DC officers have assumed greater responsibility for determining development in conservation areas and minor listed building consent work. Consultation relies on individual DC officers' discretion whether a case requires specialist conservation advice. All DC officers admitted their conservation knowledge was meagre and welcomed the conservation adviser's contributions though there were several qualifications made concerning the necessity and relevance of CUD advice. In day to day work, consulting CUD was onerous, creating unnecessary duplication and delay. Some commented on the frustration of receiving poor quality conservation advice especially after a prolonged wait. Fewer HEI staff had reduced site visits and consequently more desk assessments were carried out. Sometimes conservation advice was taken with a pinch of salt as the adviser's highly principled approach could inflate conditions to unenforceable proportions. Such advice became a victim of its own rigour as DC had to prioritise and select conservation issues, perhaps along different lines than CUD would have preferred.

DC Perspectives of conservation

Many DC officers, especially those with 20 years experience, considered that they could unilaterally deal with most applications involving conservation issues. One perceptible distinction in attitudes between CUD and DC appears to be that whilst CUD's concern is for the whole building, DC is mainly interested in what is immediately visible. If a contested detail is not obvious to the public gaze, DC officers are more flexible with its treatment, whereas the conservation adviser would maintain a principle of integrity. Acknowledging the specialists' architectural knowledge, DC thought conservation was essentially about buildings' features and

more generally urban design. Apart from the real gems of evidently impressive grade I and II*s, there was little distinguishing run of the mill conservation work from any other design issue that passed through DC planners' hands.

The DC (and HEI) manager agree, believing that every DC officer can competently deal with conservation. This appears to be orienting HEI towards a more strategic role, devolving the majority of building casework to DC. The introduction of design guidance on common aspects of conservation, such as replacement windows or suitable mortars, was intended to assist DC officers in their enhanced responsibility. However due to a depletion in HEI staff, this supplementary guidance is still to be written despite being two years overdue. Although creating a lacuna in detailed policies, most DC officers do not miss this extra layer, considering the UDP and PPG15 already provided sufficiently intricate conservation guidance.

Several DC officers actually prefer not to have design guides. They consider that the combined effects of an inappropriate conservation emphasis has led to a dumbing-down of design standards, a lack of creativity and no genuine aesthetic expression of the late 20th century. In requiring traditional materials or construction, or new designs alluding to accepted and familiar forms, applicants are not encouraged to be creative even when a development's context is of minimal conservation interest. Certainly many DC officers remain frustrated by committee Members' preference for safe architecture and copies of traditional buildings, if they are minded about aesthetics in the first place.

6.3c Wider influences and accountability

Policy and politics

Within the Planning service is a distinct policy section responsible for producing the UDP which, having started in 1992, was nearing the end of the adoption process. Until the first deposit draft was approved, the outdated former Local Plan was still in use. In the 1990s, two swings in the local Council elections, from Labour to Conservative and back again, created significant revisions to the UDP. The political priorities placed on planning mirrored these changes, particularly the encouragement of enterprise and development initiatives under the Conservatives which contributed to undermining the position of conservation.

Chapter 4 of the UDP contains policies relating to the built environment. This is a broad approach to (mostly urban) design containing policies respecting listed buildings and conservation areas. The general ethos focuses on the quality of design contributing to the existing environment. Specific conservation policies in effect paraphrase PPG15, merely outlining the authority's statutory responsibilities. There are references throughout the chapter to wider conservation oriented themes which coincide with other pertinent aspects, particularly town centre management. To accompany the consideration of new design, a series of character statements for each conservation area are contained in the appendices. Whilst these could form a progressive assessment of the values in each locality, they only comprise one sentence descriptions of physical appearance. Some planning officers consider this adequate, yet it is questionable the extent to which such meagre descriptions contribute or enhance the quality of DC decision-making.

In accordance with some planning officers' comments, the political interpretation of conservation appears to align features' importance with their physical visibility. Conservation measures improving the look of the town centre are supported for enhancing the town's image to potential investors. In contrast, certain committee Members argued that there were too many listed buildings in the town, creating undue restrictions for new development. While most officers consider this an inevitable repercussion of planning in such a marginal economic area, several officers also noted the lack of a coherent conservation commitment across the whole authority, thus reinforcing Members' perceptions of conservation as a peripheral activity.

Certainly, one manager in the Chief Executive's Office considered conservation planning a responsibility rather than an opportunity. It is questionable whether conservation even enters the strategic arena, either in the administrative or political sense, given the relative indifference found at this level. The limits of conservation appear to end with the Head of the Planning Service: it is only the sheer number of listed buildings which forces conservation's recognition above his responsibility. The Executive Manager responsible for planning questioned whether all listings were of a sufficiently high quality to merit their status. This is in stark contrast to CUD, who perceived the wealth of listed buildings with pride, reflecting the quality of the region's architecture.

Whilst political priorities involve improving the quality of a de-industrialising built environment, conservation controls are seen to frustrate, as much as contribute to,

this priority. In fact one Executive considered that the tight margins determining developments' economic viability were easily over-burdened by conservation requirements. Moreover, design considerations *per se* were viewed as a luxury which the authority could not always afford to pursue in planning. The drive for economic regeneration, attracting investment, jobs and services in competition with other towns was imperative.

This priority of attracting and accommodating development in the town has similarly characterised the planning Committee's treatment of conservation. In Committee, officers noted that conservation was usually approached on a case by case basis: with no clear guiding strategy, conservation concerns were usually subsumed by development pressures. However following the 1998 local elections, a new Planning committee Chair has resolved to place conservation and heritage matters on a higher footing. After years of apathy towards conservation and design, this statement was quite a revelation for planning officers. The new Chair considers the authority's conservation practice, partly shaped by national conservation policy's focus on the integrity of the building's fabric, has become rather blinkered. He would like to see greater recognition of the identity and characteristics of places with positive and integrated measures taken towards enhancing local distinctiveness. This approach aligns conservation with regeneration activity, raising the quality of the local environment to attract the type of service and cultural industries that may stimulate this regeneration. The number of listed buildings is an under-valued asset which can contribute to this re-packaging of the area in tourist and cultural terms.

At the time of writing it remains to be seen whether the initiative can succeed but officers have noticed some softening of attitudes and greater debate in Committee over conservation issues. There are regular Scrutiny Commissions comprised of selected officers and Members to review various strategic aspects of the Council's practice. The new Planning committee Chair has successfully requested for one of these Commission's to review conservation's contribution within the planning service and also to the authority's wider political priorities. Although the prospect may be encouraging for conservation, success depends on changing existing political attitudes. This challenge comes not least within the Labour group where divisions exist marking out conservation as liberal middle class luxury which will continually be placed below measures for improving standards for those at the bottom of society.

Perceptions of the public interest

There appeared to be a consensus across respondents in the Planning service that the general public were not particularly interested in planning except to prevent someone else's development. Whilst there existed good working relationships between the authority and formal groups and societies interested in conservation, officers lamented the standard of their contributions as often not constituting planning considerations. Furthermore these groups were perceived as quite unrepresentative of the public at large. One officer noted that the public (including Council Members) did not really appreciate the quality of the buildings in the town - they were familiar and taken for granted. Indeed the conservation adviser noted that since not all members of the public had his training and knowledge to appreciate architecture, it was all the more his responsibility to protect the town and its listed stock on their behalf.

The local Civic Society generally believe the authority was working to realise good planning in the town. In contrast to many 'fuddy-duddy' civic societies, they were eager to encourage the authority's regeneration projects and promotion of good quality new design. This could arguably be seen as a corollary of a desire on the part of the Civic Society to see town recognised as a major town in its own right rather than in the shadow of larger neighbours.

6.4 Development cases

The second tier of investigating the local planning authority's conservation culture involved in-depth studies of four separate development control cases. This not only provided a unique insight into real circumstances in which the rhetoric surrounding policy could be tested but also identified a range of parties with differing experiences and values relating to conservation in the locality. As noted in the methodology chapter (4.5b), previous studies have noted differences between various types of applicants in their approaches to developing the urban form. Thus it was essential to identify a range of developments and parties involving different aspects of conservation control. The following table outlines their correlation with the selection criteria specified in Table 4.4. Evidently the case names have been changed to respect respondents' anonymity.

For subsequent ease of reference, synopses of these development cases are provided in Appendix A.

<p>The Lodge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A medium scale residential development of a grade II listed building with further enabling development on-site• Site owned by a local builder and thereafter taken over by another local (to the region) developer: both mainly involved with residential development <p>The Yard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An unsuccessful application to demolish an unlisted building in a conservation area and erect a replacement retail unit• Site owned and developed by national commercial property developers: commercial tenants involved <p>The Square</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conversion of a grade II* listed building in a conservation area into a retail outlet• Owner applicant of freehold - local small business user <p>The Mount</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conversion of a grade II listed building in a conservation area into a single dwelling home• Private residential owner-occupier
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Table 6.2 An outline of development cases' attributes

6.5 The Lodge

A summary of the development

Background

This large, 2-storey, grade II listed building lies just south-east of the town centre. Originally constructed in its own grounds on the edge of town, council housing now surrounds the site on three sides. Although the focus is the final planning application, it is necessary to explore the site's history which created such problems for the authority.

After the Council's Social Services stopped using it as a residential home in the early 1980s, the building remained vacant until it was sold to a local developer in 1987. Under his ownership, several planning permissions were granted for schemes ranging from institutional use to intensive residential development. While in planning terms these uses were non-controversial, the schemes frequently encroached on the setting of the listed building. Although the authority were pursuing a hard line to obtain a high quality repair and restoration, earlier intransigence in CUD's advice was perceived to have contributed to the ensuing deadlock. Certainly the first developer considered the conservation measures imposed on him - comprising several tree preservation orders and satisfying the

conditions of a listed building consent – significantly reduced the financial viability of his schemes. The approved permissions were never implemented, fuelling scepticism that the developer was waiting for the listed building to fall down, thereby gaining a clear site.

Site Problems

The building had been persistently vandalised and suffered numerous small fires. The roof had been stripped allowing the elements to accelerate its deterioration: the first floor had already fallen through. Most parties, except CUD, considered the building was way past renovation. The second developer noted how *'the building was derelict literally, we hadn't much to work on...'* - he believed the Council were as much to blame for their prior lack of maintenance. There was nothing left to infer any value: it would have been better to either de-list it or demolish it. The Head of Service noted that *'presumably'* there must have been some national interest in it but most DC officers believed it had lost any credibility as a listed building.

Apathy and disinterest characterised most locals' perception of the building. Indeed the ward Councillor doubted whether anyone would have cared about the building but for these social problems onsite. Planning officers did not receive any support to repair the building - it was neither a local landmark, nor an object of local sentiment. The second developer noted that despite its condition when listed, *'it really didn't say to you 'I'm a listed building, people should come and look at me'... ..certainly with the [property] there was no sympathy to it...'*. In contrast, the conservation adviser commented that *'the majority of people are not very visual - they can't imagine it being lovingly restored, they just see it as a problem.'*

The adviser noted that the building, like the people of that area had been *'left to rot'* by the authority. The listed building could be the focus for broader areal regeneration, but the authority lacked vision. He cited the adverse psychological effects on the local community of such a derelict building in their midst. If it was possible to restore the building properly, *'the effect of such a building in a milieu of dross is quite uplifting. If you do one thing right then at least people have got something interesting there...'*

The first developer's scheme

Plans were submitted in August '93 to convert the main listed building into flats, to demolish some rear out-buildings replacing them with new residences and to erect a new dwelling block to the front of the property. While DC and CUD officers considered this front block detrimental to the listed building's setting, the developer considered it essential to the project's financial viability. He argued that 'setting' was inherently subjective, *'demonstrated by the conflicting opinions of the two successive principals of the historic buildings team'*. He contended that; *'when [this building] was conceived, [the area] must have been so different as to be almost unrecognisable today. The setting has changed completely, the site now being an island amongst council housing and somewhat 'downmarket'*. In contrast, CUD and DC officers considered the listed building was well shielded and could be treated independently. Compromises were elusive over the entire seven year period of the first developer's ownership, the Head of Service characterised relationships with him as a *'total conflict and failure to find any solutions, failure to make any progress.'* It would appear there was a history of friction spanning many other developments.

Complaints to the Council about anti-social activities on the site - vandalism and drug abuse - became more frequent, though one DC officer noted these came from a minority of more vocal residents. The Head of Service commented on planning officers' sensitivity of balancing conservation with rectifying these social problems, however the problems appeared to wholly occlude concern for the building itself. The ward Councillor, a key player in the Council, noted these problems and residents' concerns increasingly politicised the problem. He described the developer as a *'rogue'* and his development as *'littered with broken promises'*. Amongst developers locally, he was seen as a *'slippery customer'*. The Councillor's personal loss of faith combined with the public complaints catalysed the authority to serve an Urgent Works Notice in November '94, overcoming the inhibition to incur potential financial liabilities. Though the Notice was respected, it marked a turning point in attitudes regarding the site - the political will to see that the site did not deteriorate further and the developer's realisation of a lost cause.

The second developer's scheme

The surrounding council housing had previously deterred a private purchase of the house and consequently limited the site's development value. In order to progress

development, the ward Councillor and the Head of Service approached potential rescuers, one of whom was personally known to them. A regionally local builder/developer, he had a good track record of development with the authority and agreed to the undertaking. Negotiations moved on apace and the site was purchased under a private arrangement. Both developers and Council never met together, although the authority evidently had a vested interest in seeing this private deal concluded. To respect the terms of the City Grant money secured for the development, the first developer contracted the second to develop the site.

Such political sensitivity invoked the rare personal intervention of the Head of Service. He had the political support to expediently process the case - in fact the ward Councillor praised his proactive approach in contrast with CUD's previous inflexibility. Approving the new scheme appeared far less problematic, partly due to the incentives offered by the authority to ensure development. Certainly the second developer appreciated this;

...because of political pressure and through the good sense of the planners, we had to progress with the work very quickly and some of the attitudes and provisions which would normally be used with a listed building were put to one side and certain things we were allowed to do both for speed and economics - it had to work.

He held a privileged position having been approached to intervene - he dealt exclusively with senior managers and was necessarily expecting a concessionary attitude. This scheme was characterised by economic viability rather than conservation merit, even the Head of Service noted the authority's position had become '*more realistic*'. Flexibility over permissible materials, scale and massing and the removal of trees subject to preservation orders were significant shifts in the authority's position, but all parties recognised the political and economic imperatives of the situation.

Though no construction was permitted in front of the listed building, the authority's hard line had been relaxed. However alterations to the listed building itself were not resolved in detail before Committee approval and were left to the Head of Service. The developer noted that:

...perhaps they went further than they would have done but there was political pressure to bear from one of the local Labour ward councillors and from the local people...

The approved scheme rebuilt and converted the listed building into 4 flats, demolished the out-buildings and replaced them with 4 new houses using the redundant ashlar stone. A further 6 houses in artificial stone were permitted to the rear, although the use of this material went against Council policy. The developer stressed that a restorative scheme was not financially possible - the enabling

development of 10 new houses was essential. His challenge was to do something new with the site rather than restore the listed building which had already died: *'...the main problem was making a silk purse out of a sow's ear - literally.'*

However the CUD section were not consulted and were *'distressed to find that little remained. All but two walls, all internal features... and all of the roof structure had been completely removed'*. The Head of Service was satisfied with the approved demolitions on grounds of structural dilapidation and considered the development had not gone beyond its authorisation. However under PPG15, significant demolitions to a listed building must be referred to EH: it was not. A DC officer described this as *'a bureaucratic mistake'* and stressed it was not deliberate. She considered that since no-one appeared to care for the decrepit building this was an irrelevant, though unfortunate, deviation from the correct procedure. CUD cared: a senior officer noted, *'we have approved the demolition of the bulk of this building whilst congratulating ourselves on our success at saving it'*. Another CUD officer remarked that it was no longer a listed building, *'its whole history has gone'*. Since the interior, the plan, the structural features and the outbuildings which all contributed to its interest had been demolished, he would rather see it de-listed: there was nothing left to distinguish its national interest. This view is particularly difficult to reconcile with that of the Head of Service who considered it to be a good example of a development re-using a listed building.

In 18 months after his initial involvement, the second developer finished the scheme to widespread acclaim. The neighbourhood residents and the ward Councillor in particular, were satisfied following 7 years' frustration. He characterised the benefits in the widest sense - clearing the social problems, providing new affordable houses in the area and making the site look nice again. Concern for the listed building was of significantly less importance, extending only to its cleaned, inhabited state. The Head of Service noted that although it wasn't the best example of conserving a listed building, the wider benefits far outweighed the sacrifices, particularly with no cost to the Council. The proactive nature in which the authority approached the second scheme was a salutary lesson to the CUD section: *'...the results of their approach over 7 years had been absolutely nothing and therefore I would question that the line that they took was actually ever going to achieve anything in a million years...'*. Given the same situation, the Head of Service would be happy to see it similarly resolved.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Despite the intense social and political problems with this case, in planning terms it was relatively non-controversial. Since there was no change of residential use, it was solely the listed building considerations which raised concern. However DC officers did not consider conservation involved any different philosophical or practical approach, apart from their reliance on expert advice. As this advice was seen as a *'purist input'* and while DC officers welcomed its insight, they also treated its practicality with some scepticism. The Head of Service reinforced this view, considering that the case illustrated the delicate balancing act DC officers performed in accommodating a variety of competing interests. Since the town's political and economic circumstances required planning to encourage new development, DC's priority was to deliver a viable scheme. There was a tendency to see conservation, and the CUD section, as just concentrating on buildings' physical problems. He noted that the perspective of architectural history whilst valid in itself lacked an appreciation of planning responsibility to the local community: this social element did not enter conservation practice at all.

However, presenting planning's priority as a community service may be incredulously altruistic. The conservation adviser viewed planning with greater scepticism:

There is a basic tension between conservation legislation and planning legislation because one is about real human values in terms of how one wants to live on this earth, and the other is about making a quick buck and manipulating the rest.

Focusing on the site, there would appear to be two opposing considerations. From a conservation perspective, the setting of the listed building could still command the whole site, spatially and historically. In working from the structure out, stopping at the site perimeter, the conservation adviser differs significantly from most other respondents who primarily viewed the wider environment and setting incorporating the council estate. This outside-in approach creates alternative perceptions of the listed building's problems resulting in contrasting priorities.

The building's state of repair was a significant factor in the degree of acceptable change. The second developer, rather than conserve as much as possible, considered that the spirit of the building had already died. Rather than arguing the

degree of reconstruction, his view was to start afresh and create something new. This correlated with the Head of Service's *'pragmatic'* approach, though the CUD section were aghast with the results. It would appear that as features/areas become more decrepit, there is a stronger instinct to clear and redevelop them, thus eclipsing their potential reuse and regeneration. Perhaps this is all the more acute in such marginal areas where there *appears* to be no role for conservation to play. Certainly the Head of Service considered this a realm of intensely subjective interpretation.

The state of repair also affected locals' perceptions of the building. It did not represent a particular landmark or attract much sympathy, some respondents guessed that possibly locals were not even aware of the building, let alone its listed status. Nearly all the comments were received from immediate neighbours concerned by anti-social activities on the site which threatened their security and peace of mind. As far the building was concerned, the impression given was that outside the CUD section, most people, some planning officers included, would have preferred the site cleared and redeveloped much earlier.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

Whilst evidently possessing sufficient 'special architectural or historic interest' at its time of listing, it would appear that outside the CUD section, the building's dereliction obscured considering its value.

The conservation adviser remained disappointed by his planning colleagues' lack of vision. To his mind, the building offered the focus and potential for broader regeneration of the area. Highlighting the quality of the building and returning it to an impressive state would effect the surrounding area, physically in stopping the slide towards neglect but also psychologically in lifting locals' perceptions of their environmental quality. This *'quality of life'* argument exists beyond the statutory and policy definitions of conservation and is difficult to quantify, but does provide a powerful justification for intervention. However it faces objections over proving causality and criticisms previously levelled at planning for 'environmental determinism'.

As mentioned above, the building's state of repair eclipsed most peoples' appreciation of its value, contrary to PPG15 and the CUD section's comments.

The abuse of the building reflected and reinforced its lack of gravitas, the physical deterioration in itself undermined its spirit, dignity and credibility as a listed building. It is interesting that respondents used such phrases as these, connoting sympathy, affection and emotional responses to the feature.

Very few officers believed the building still possessed any national interest, especially given its lowly local regard. Instead they had presumed its national interest, passively reciting the phrase without believing in it. However, thinking a listed building can lose its special interest through neglect, is contrary to the conservation ethos. The prevalence of this view outside conservation circles identifies a significant counterflow in perception which raises two issues. Firstly, it may be that the use of a building, as well as its architecture, is a greater factor in generally appreciating a feature's worth. In this instance the building was a site for vandalism and solvent abuse. Secondly it may suggest that there is a stereotypical perception of a listed building. Listed status conjures up a particular image, even amongst planning officers, of qualities which people may actively wish to see or visit. When a building does not appear to fulfil the stereotype, it loses support and consequently makes its alteration or destruction easier to sanction.

This attitude indicates a significant reliance by most respondents outside conservation on the superficial, visual impact of a feature. This is not to dismiss this basis as superficial and insignificant - far from it - it needs to be recognised and explored if conservation is to appeal more broadly. The Head of Service highlighted that in general an application may be acceptable *'if it looks OK'* despite more principled conservation reservations. That the front elevation remained unobstructed whilst all development occurred at the rear illustrates the potency of superficial visibility contentions. While he considered this development successful in re-using the important parts of the building, this view is particular difficult to reconcile with the conservation adviser's who thought that any value had been destroyed: *'It's got this vernacular wrap on the front of it but it's not, it is not a historic building but of course its whole history has gone'*. Accompanying this dismissal was a rare preference to see it de-listed - remarkable coming from a self-proclaimed *'arch-conservationist'*.

From comments made to the service, the public shared the official view of a successful development. The conservation adviser considered that raising popular support for this building suffered from the public's inability to imagine its renovation. Consequently he argued his case to achieve results which the public would have

preferred had they been able to express their visual appreciation. However this belief did revolve around class: residents in the Cotswolds were exemplified as educated and appreciative of their surroundings' aesthetic qualities. Here public officials needed to exercise this judgement, on behalf of a public who weren't so '*sophisticated*'. This has implications for accommodating public opinions especially if conservation is justified to appeal to an innate sense of visual appreciation and yet the public's ability to express or convey this is dismissed.

Considering the surrounding area, one planning officer considered that the incursion of the council estates bordering the site removed all last traces of the historical context in which the building was originally placed, thus undermining its value and contribution. However it is arguable that the relationship and contrast between the nature of the old and the modern environments, actually provides an interesting temporal juxtaposition. It would be counter-productive if surrounding non-contemporaneous development can reduce older features' value so drastically.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

To continue with regard to the surrounding area, the presence of the council estate dictated the site's potential development value and its attraction for property speculators. The economic climate, particularly affecting new residential construction in the town, had changed dramatically over the seven years since the Council had sold the site. Combined with housing market stagnation, the site's location limited development profit margins thus deterring any significant expenditure on the listed building. One officer noted had this site been in the affluent west of town instead of the east, there would have been little problem in finding a private buyer who could restore the property as a family dwelling.

Thus rather than a potential investment, the building was an economic liability. The predominant view of DC officers was certainly more aligned with these considerations in contrast to the conservation adviser's. Evidently these concerns were paramount to both developers. People further removed from specific conservation knowledge increasingly appeared to define the value of the listed building by land use value alone and less by the architecture or historic value of the feature itself. Given this premise, the balancing of conservation interest and economic return becomes increasingly difficult since there is no common standard to measure them. From the developers' perspective, the architectural or listed

value of the building was so slight that he barely considered its retention - there was little conservation argument to oppose his economic considerations. Conservation is only as important as the market economics of the situation permit.

One major factor in overcoming this restriction is the political will supporting a particular solution. Throughout this case, actions and decisions were influenced by the amount of political interest to achieve an expedient solution. The ward Councillor was spurred to act by the anti-social activities occurring on the site rather than any concern for the listed building. Indeed he was concerned that an accident of architectural perception had left the authority responsible for so many listed buildings. It placed undue constraints on the planning service and on local development.

One planning officer noted the political influence manifest in several unique occurrences, such as the Head of Service exclusively dealing with the case. The hard line that the authority originally pursued appeared to break down once politics began to dominate the proceedings. Pressure to resolve the situation forced a number of compromises which had been intolerable in previous applications. The political agenda was perceived as quite different to conservation's, though some considered it similarly distinct from planning's. Whilst catalysing results, the political input perceptibly undermined the planning officers' position vis-à-vis the applicants. However without this political pressure it is conceivable that the site may be even further ruined today. To most concerned, except the conservationists, the final result was a success and the problems of the site cleared, so where does this leave the conservation argument in this case, particularly if it needs to rely on political support for its efficacy?

6.6 The Yard

A summary of the development

Background

This conservation area is subject to a CAP agreement and parts of it comprise the Victorian New Town Renaissance Scheme to encourage sympathetic re-use of the many vacant properties. Located in one of the main shopping streets, the unlisted building in question is owned by a property investment group and has two commercial tenants - a shoe shop at street level and a family-run restaurant on the

first floor. The owners' agents considered the site an opportunity to provide larger retail units in the town centre, attracting national high street traders. The existing building was no longer considered suitable for modern retailing requirements due to its poor state of repair and cramped retail space. They proposed demolition, replacing it with an entirely new 2 storey unit as the prospective tenant wanted '*clear, modern trading floors.*' Increasing the size of the premises was the starting point for conflict between the applicants and the Council.

The first application

The authority received the application in July 1994. The architects considered the building possessed little architectural interest; replacement concrete floors, the removal of internal walls and a proliferation of piecemeal extensions to the rear did nothing to enhance the overall character of the building. Its dilapidated state and natural obsolescence made it more efficient to consider an entirely new structure.

Apart from the building's poor condition, a further issue concerned a side alleyway or ginnel providing street access for a yard at the rear of the property. The Yards throughout the town centre were micro-trading areas for the prolific woollen and textile industries in the nineteenth century. Forming an integral physical and historic connection with the town's commercial past, many have been restored and new uses found for the small premises therein. In contrast, the applicants considered that since the Yard was enclosed by windowless elevations, contained an electricity sub-station and provided no thoroughfare, it was a redundant service space which could be more profitably incorporated into the new development.

They presented their scheme as a long-term investment in the town's retailing facilities, increasing its competitiveness within the regional hierarchy in line with local development plan policies. The new building was a modern interpretation of the existing design. A slightly larger unit would halve the width of the existing ginnel and effectively build over the Yard to provide a single rear access. A new third storey at the rear, not entirely visible from the street was also proposed.

Initially the DC officer considered the application acceptable, according with local plan policies encouraging town centre investment: although a conservation area, the existing building was not of sufficient quality to merit retention. However he revised his view after consulting CUD. Having not submitted a structural survey,

the applicants had not proven that demolition was necessary on the grounds that the building was no longer structurally sound and useable as required by PPG15.

Whilst the building was not listed, the conservation adviser considered it a unique feature in the street. Constructed in local graded coarse stone;

...although it has been altered and refurbished [it] still makes a significant contribution to the conservation area in terms of street facade, (particularly the upper storey [fronting the street) roofscape and urban grain.

The existing building was seen as a component in a series of historic stone frontages; with an adjacent one being listed, altering this building was affecting the setting of a listed building. The age, materials, detail and scale of the surrounding buildings were all important in maintaining the overall harmony. Several other buildings in the street had received shop front renovation grants and this building could be similarly be improved: *'the original form of the building is still intact and has the potential to be repaired and restored to its original character'*. Furthermore he considered some internal features were worth retaining, such as the *'ornate coved and coffered ceiling'*. In this respect, he was admittedly considering the building from a quasi-listed perspective.

To his eyes, the application employed materials and detailing in deliberate opposition to adjacent properties. With its top heavy, *'elephantine'* facade and over large fenestration, the design was quite *'post-modern'* and unsuited to the area: it was *'a mere vernacular wrap'*. Moreover, building over the ginnel and Yard was contrary to PPG15 which emphasised the importance of retaining the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares. Although the Yard was not highlighted on the UDP map as a historic feature, the conservation adviser considered it ought be treated as *'an important and peculiar characteristic street pattern.'* Similar Yards had been pedestrianised with new retail initiatives - this one could arguably be given the same treatment.

After DC revised their recommendation, the Planning committee refused the application. Shortly after in December the applicants appealed, contending their proposal followed all the authority's relevant planning policies. Both applicant and agent felt aggrieved by double-standards, referring to another Yard further down the street which had been converted into small retail units. The authority had permitted an *'abysmal'* loggia at its entrance which was far more out of keeping with the area than their proposal. Meanwhile the applicants submitted a second significantly amended application to demolish and rebuild the premises.

The second application

The architects hoped a more traditional approach would be acceptable, addressing the criticisms of the previous design so that the:

...form and massing, height and scale of the proposals closely correlate with the existing building. Whilst not a copy, the design of the new facade takes strong cues from the fenestration, double gable arrangement and proportions of the existing frontage; allied to the use of traditional materials and detailing which complement the area's Victorian heritage, the overall effect is to provide a sensitive architectural solution to the townscape...

The conservation adviser considered the proposals did *'nothing to mitigate the problems originally highlighted'*. There was still conflict over the ginnel and Yard, the applicants contending the lack of a thoroughfare did not entice pedestrians into the Yard, thus utilising the alley for small retail units was *'unrealistic'* particularly given that many similar units were empty in an adjacent Yard development. However, the agents were disappointed with the Council's *'lack of response and co-operation'* over the new designs. They thought that the Council was taking a dogmatically preservationist stance over the whole site.

Again the DC officer's initial view was to permit the application since the redesigned frontage appeared to satisfy previous objections. He appreciated the applicants' concerns, particularly the significant practical problems of retaining the existing building, and recommended approval since *'a fundamental issue... is the merit of the replacement scheme. As will be noted from the previous report your officers are in broad agreement with the replacement building.'*

The revised design did not please the conservation adviser. Although it reflected the essence of the existing facade, merely reproducing these features could never capture the subtlety and patina of age which characterised the original. The replacement materials were unsuitable, such as aluminium window frames and the art-stone detailing would not weather as an ensemble. Moreover with no appreciable difference to the Yard's treatment his reservations concerning the loss of the characteristic street pattern remained.

Public reaction

Whilst the planning officers were pre-occupied with design details, the public reaction centred on the building's uses. The local Civic Society strongly supported the potential new retail functions and welcomed the long-term investment in the town centre. They considered replicating the previous design would provide *'an*

attractive “streetscape” in the familiar local vernacular’ (in stark contrast to the conservation adviser’s objections).

Comments from individual members of the public concerned the threatened loss of the Indian restaurant on the first floor; apparently their re-location within the town was not an option. A petition of over 900 signatures highlighted the depth of public feeling and generated several articles in the local paper. Four other letters expressed some recognition for the building’s aesthetics, but generally people wanted to the restaurant to remain. The numerous empty retail spaces in the town centre indicated that another shop unit was not necessarily needed: one comment lamented another commercial developer’s greed outstripping the loyal local service provider. However in falling outside legitimate ‘planning issues’, these comments were necessarily less influential.

The situation appeared desperate for the restaurant’s proprietors, who wrote several letters to the Planning service. Their tenor changed from outlining the loss to the town of their restaurant, to later using conservation issues to bolster their protests. In their desperation they also wrote to EH which actually misconstrues the organisation’s role to intervene.

English Heritage’s involvement

The authority had consulted EH over the second application; their comments were returned several months later and proved most persuasive in committee. The advice emphasised the building’s continuing viable use since the case for demolition was negated by its fair structural condition. The replacement would not enhance the conservation area as the burgage plot site ought be retained and it *‘would introduce alien detail and character’*. The advice produced a committee U-turn regarding their policy priorities and the weight attached to their own conservation adviser’s advice. The applicants considered they still had a good chance of success on appeal, even after the Council refused consent for the second time. However considering the slim profit margin and the withdrawal of their prospective tenant, they dropped the scheme to pursue other larger and more profitable developments elsewhere.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Irrespective of the building's location in the central conservation area, the DC officers held a different viewpoint from the CUD section, a division which was patently clear to the applicants.

Although DC officers were balancing the relative merits of development and conservation, they initially believed the building held little interest and its replacement would contribute to the town's potential investors. The applicant saw the conservation adviser as the prime source of obstruction, though this may be due to the late contribution of conservation to discussions, notably over certain strategic aspects (the Yard's omission from the UDP map). Many DC officers were content to maintain conservation issues as a wholly separate sphere. This delegation concerned the EH adviser who believed that often planning officers did not have the training to deal with conservation effectively.

The relationship between the building and the surrounding area was heavily contested. Most parties considered the building was no more significant than any other in the street, its mediocre condition and repair engendering this dismissive attitude. Such disinterest in the building spurred the conservation adviser to emphasise its redeeming characteristics, treating the building as if it were listed thus bestowing extra credibility on it. This is perhaps an unconscious acknowledgement of the areal value concepts' weakness and under-development in practice:

I liked the building, it had a fantastic interior, particularly the ceiling but of course that was not an issue because it was an unlisted building - it was a driving force behind me, the vision of it - that gave me the bite, the real passion for the building...

Indeed, even some planning officers questioned the street's interest: *'Being honest with you, I don't think that building is particularly attractive; being more honest with you, I am not too sure that street should be a conservation area at all'*. Such malaise is indicative of the low esteem in which the conservation area concept is held, certainly by the applicant who considered that conservation areas, unlike listed buildings, had minimal value. They were so loosely defined that distinctions were blurred leading to blanket preservation since insufficient thought or courage was directed to allowing change. To the public and many authorities, conservation

areas had become like green belts, simply prohibiting change. The agent echoed these reservations:

Towns where I think [conservation] goes wrong is where there is a very strict policy of maintaining say grey slate roofs, red bricks, three storeys high, red window frames or whatever and you end up with a town that has no soul.

The building's contribution to the street was largely considered in aesthetic terms. However there was a variety of interpretations of how any replacement could 'enhance' the conservation area. The EH adviser and several authority officers noted these difficulties; *'...[what] we have not really come to terms with on many sites where the buildings are of a minor quality, is what replacement architecture or what good modern 'in character' regeneration would be.'* The conservation adviser shared their concern: *'There's just no debate in architecture at all about regionalism, local character, it's all just done for the [glossy architectural] magazines...'*. For the applicants, 'enhance' meant boosting the centre's attractiveness to investors.

While EH emphasised enhancement's orientation to the uses and users of historic environments, the fact that coercive regulation was required illustrated that conservation philosophy was not endemic to many people's thinking. The tenor of public responses illustrated that the use, rather than aesthetic considerations, attracts or dispels popular support for buildings. Conservation issues were often used to buttress retaining the current use, not for their interest *per se*.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

As respondents questioned the quality of the conservation area, so too the building attracted criticism. The applicant thought *'it was a pile of rubbish'* and agreeing with their agents, considered the extensive alterations over the last 30 years had displaced any inherent interest in its fabric. The agents commented that given the building's poor state of repair, their proposals would be an irrefutable improvement and precluded the need to research its historic interest. This may reflect historic interest's lower priority throughout the treatment of listed buildings. The alterations to the fabric also question the extent to which the accretion of cumulative changes over time positively augment a feature or detract from its 'genuine' qualities. This argument was first broached by the SPAB, yet manifestly it is still relevant.

Although in the central conservation area, many parties noted the street's lack of discernible qualities warranting this designation. One DC officer noted that in contrast to Manchester or Leeds' main streets, where identifiable buildings distinguished the centre, this street contained a very mediocre collection of buildings. The immediate surroundings, the ginnel and Yard, reflected the historical significance of previous uses. However their neglected state obscured these somewhat intangible qualities, emphasising instead the relative lack of any architectural features therein. The conservation adviser observed;

...you find that many buildings of local historic interest don't get listed at all... listing authorities don't take any cognisance or any recognition of buildings of local historic importance, of old schools that might be just quite ordinary or something like that, or if they're by a local architect of course they're of architectural importance but they tend to be of historic importance as well...

Without recognising features' less obvious qualities it is much easier to portray them, as the applicant did, as '*wasted space*'. There was no conservation area character appraisal and while planning officers considered their personal familiarity with the area sufficed to define its character, this was difficult to defend without formal support. In contrast the EH adviser approached cases by considering the urban historical development first. He thought relating 'character' solely to building forms was a terribly restrictive practice, though most other respondents were guilty of this.

The proposed replacement building also created difficulties with neither the contrasting, nor traditional design proving acceptable to the conservation adviser. The developer wanted to create an impressive, modern frontage to complement the image of its new retail tenant, though the contrast was considered too stark by the conservation adviser. The agents, applicants and planning officers still had reservations about the second design:

What I don't like is what that second scheme, in retrospect, was... just a pastiche of everything stuffed in and at the end of the day that's what you get out... a building that's got no integrity, it's got no logic behind it and its monstrous.

This DC officer lamented that conservation was inadvertently creating urban environments which failed to reflect any contemporary contribution. Despite its concessions to tradition, the conservation adviser considered this second design was, '*like a stage set - it wasn't architecture at all*'.

Since the only protection regime was the conservation area this ought imply the significance of the site was mostly local, though as noted above, there was little credence or even recognition of this interest. In fact the absence of a character assessment for the area ought to concern EH given their adviser's belief that

conservation provides a framework to debate these features' value in a community. Public concerns appeared to centre on the potential change of use rather than the aesthetics of the building. Though explicit conservation arguments appeared muted, the case officer noted that if the public had to choose between this street and a modern precinct replacement they would always choose the existing environment. Ironically it fell to a national body, EH, to add gravity to the local importance of this site, influencing DC officers and Committee members to support the local conservation adviser.

In contrast, the applicant did not consider that local interest could be legitimately defined by local authorities, unlike listing whose standards were universally respected. For him conservation was commendable in its context, such as in a cathedral city, but there was little British architecture worth saving outside these enclaves. Regarding this particular development, he believed conservation was wholly misplaced - unrealistically attempting to create an idealised image of the town - planning should allow the town to pursue realistic development priorities.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

Developing a prime retail site in a main shopping street is inevitably going to involve conflicts between commercial maximisation and any form of regulation. However the interesting aspect is the extent to which economic considerations altered the emphases on the existing building's qualities and more generally the purpose of planning measures.

The applications portrayed the building as a dilapidated structure requiring replacement, however a structural survey was never submitted proving this to be the sole course of action. The building's natural obsolescence received much attention and convinced DC officers of the requirement to redevelop. With the UDP's emphasis on encouraging new development in the centre, the economic arguments proved acceptable and expedient. However the applicant described planners in local authorities being too insular to realise the economic pressures driving development. Whilst attempting to secure small, pretty retail units, they failed to grasp the fact that the town was only going to survive on 'hard retailing'. There was an over-supply of small, 'exclusive' shops through planners' pretence that local retailing could emulate that of York for example. Similarly the applicant considered that planning prevented economic opportunities by its antagonistic

relationship with developers: planners should realise that 1990s planning is to assist the market in developing and improving the environment.

From the agents' point of view, the necessity of securing a planning permission relegated the aesthetic considerations:

The revised scheme was deliberately biased to try and reproduce a lot of the features that were there already simply to obtain permission - but that is a cop out.

Pursuing the safe option creates further repercussions. One planning officer commented:

You've only got to look at what's happened on the [adjacent] development to see what crap that can turn out to be... I can understand to some extent architects' feeling that they're giving us the easiest form; [the] line of least resistance is let's go with what we expect the planning authority and the relevant planners to go for which is traditional design, built in stone etc. etc. Whereas I think they have to take a bit more responsibility - they can't blame it all on planners and the planning authority they are professionals.

As far as the politics of the situation were concerned, a split came about between peoples' interests and the building's. The arguments for economic prosperity were convincing for either the retention of the popular restaurant or the prospect of a new larger retailer in the town centre. The weight of local opinion (and subsequent votes) supporting the restaurant's retention appeared persuasive in Committee. The applicant considered that the authority preferred the case to go to appeal, allowing an Inspector to take the responsibility of making a potentially unpopular decision. It was the involvement and added kudos supplied by EH which lent mettle to the Committee's elbow to support the building's retention. Without this extra support it was dubious whether the conservation line would have been given political backing.

6.7 The Square

A summary of the development

Background

This corner property is part of a grade II* listed terrace which fronts the impressive Square, focus of a flagship regeneration project comprising grade I and II* listed buildings. It is in the town's central conservation area, covered by a CAP scheme and the local 'Victorian New Town' grant assistance.

The mid nineteenth century four storey terrace, constructed in ashlar stone, is classically proportioned and demands respect for its symmetrical facade. Despite a

long frontage, it is a mere 8m deep which later proved problematic for accommodating alternative uses. A rear service yard and details such as the hoist arms and lift hatches still indicate the original uses as woollen merchants' offices and storage. Whilst not 'pretty' these features are an important illustration of the building's functional history.

Though other properties in the terrace have been recently restored, a fire in 1990 and escalating repair costs left this property vacant and dilapidated. The roof had been repaired with new steel trusses though a proportion of the original timber Queen Post roof trusses remained. However the fire had gutted the lower floors leaving only the central wall and chimney stack through all four floors. The upper floors were unstable and were accessible only by ladders. Though the main stone staircase to the first floor was scorched it was structurally sound; a separate wooden staircase remained only to the first floor. The only other surviving feature on the ground floor was the original ornate plasterwork in the main entrance hall.

While the upper floors had remained unoccupied, the ground floor's last use was a snack bar. Renovating the building was imperative since it was deteriorating into an eyesore in an otherwise impressive area.

The first application

A local businessman bought the property in 1997, attracted by a colleague's successful conversion of an adjacent terrace property into a cafe-bar. The fire damage had reduced this building's market value enough to purchase it without planning permission. An application was submitted in November 1997, through a Manchester based agent, to transform the building into a department-style designer menswear shop. It was the first application received since the building's fire damage and both the Planning service and the Economic Development unit were keen to encourage its re-use, making grants available, not only from historic building funds but from other sources such as local SRB funding.

However the applicant's retail vision was not necessarily compatible with the physical and legal constraints of grade II* listing. Given the extensive fire damage, he saw an opportunity to refurbish the whole interior providing open plan retail floors. A steel frame was to be inserted, carrying mezzanine concrete floors and the frame bolted to the exterior walls. The potential of four trading floors required

vertical circulation about the building provided by a striking new steel staircase replacing the two fire damaged ones.

Whilst wishing to restore the impressive facade, the application proposed lowering the ground floor window sills to maximise the shop's display area. Also vertical 'banner type' signage the height of the building would highlight its four trading floors. Since the building was so narrow, further requirements, such as a separate goods lift and an alternative means of escape, were to be placed on the external rear wall down into the service yard.

Contentious issues

Such significant alterations to a grade II* listed building were not acceptable to the CUD section, not least for the poor quality of the submitted plans. Minor problems were resolved, though perhaps not to mutual satisfaction. The unsympathetic facade treatment did not respect the terrace's symmetry in the Square: an HEI officer commented that he *'had spent years getting things like this removed'*. The main problem throughout however, concerned the internal alterations which constituted a significant demolition. The conservation adviser stated;

...it is obvious that the designers/architects are not appreciating the significance of listed status in that they are proposing to gut the internal...structure of [it].

The regional Victorian Society's consultations echoed these sentiments: *'In reality this scheme amounts to little more than the facading of the building.'* The Council for British Archaeology were similarly concerned and quoted PPG15 (para. C58) *'the plan of a building is one of its most important characteristics. Interior plans and individual features of interest should be respected and left unaltered as far as possible.'* EH's Inspector, reinforced many of these concerns, *'while [the buildings]' special interest resides principally in their main elevations, there are elements of the interior and the rear elevations which merit preservation.'*

However EH's recommendations differed from the local conservation adviser's. Initially the Inspector stated that while the building's plan form can still be discerned;

...their individual form does not appear to relate to specialised functions' and thus 'some opening up of the floor-plan could be achieved without significant loss of special interest to enable the proposed change...

However the two staircases and the *'rich decorative'* plasterwork features in the entrance hall were worth retaining, the former for their *'aesthetic and historic*

[functional] value'. With such a weight of objection, the scheme was recommended for refusal before Committee in December, though the application was withdrawn for further amendment.

Further negotiations

Following a site meeting in January 1998, EH revised their original advice. The Inspector emphasised *'a compromise which retains something of the special interest of the interior while accommodating the proposed retail use.'* Still wanting to retain the entrance hall features and main staircase, he further considered that;

...the plan-form of the spaces generally is not critical to the special interest of the building. The chimney-breasts do not retain fireplaces of note, and do not retain prominent or decorative stacks. Accordingly English Heritage would not object to the level of opening up proposed.

This revised position contrasted with both EH's and the authority's previous recommendations to retain the timber floors and not replace them with concrete ones. EH had only minor objections to an external rear lift shaft to avoid obscuring the rear windows and suggested moving the hoist arm to retain it as a visible feature from inside the building. They also preferred to internalise the alternative staircase/fire escape. The plan-form and the rear alterations continued to divide opinion between EH and the authority's CUD section.

However the agents maintained that the alternative staircase had already been resolved with the authority, agreeing that internal stairs would involve further cost structural destruction, and reduce available floorspace. The conservation adviser believed otherwise, their amended drawings appeared little different and his advice remained that *'the building is perfectly adaptable to retain use with intelligent and relatively minor alterations such as openings in walls etc.'* He was particularly concerned by EH's apparent *'volte face'* from a concern with the building's appearance and fabric, to believing that *'some opening up of the building could be achieved'*. Firstly, he contested their acquiescence over additions to the rear elevation (i.e. the lift and fire escape) since there remained a significant degree of historical interest in the remaining functional features. Secondly he was exasperated that EH, *'have not heeded Government advice'*: PPG15 states the plan-form is one of a building's *'most important characteristics'*, yet they advocate its destruction.

By March 98, CUD still had serious misgivings about the submission's low quality and the lift and fire escape *'destroying the feel of that rear area'*. They considered

it was only the applicant's desire to maximise commercial floorspace which inhibited providing an internal lift and stairs. Although EH saw little interior interest, CUD contended that the chimney stack ought to remain, retaining the '*spirit of the building*' (its traditional load bearing construction). Without it, the revised plans for retaining a traditional floor construction appear structurally unsound. Whilst a structural survey was completed to determine the matter, the applicant changed agents to a local firm of architect/surveyors and despite several subsequent re-drafts, still maintained the open plan retail floors.

Despite CUD's concerns, DC officers followed EH's more conciliatory advice and the Committee granted approval. Whilst retaining the existing timber floors, the removal of the central chimney stack was accepted. The fire escape was eventually settled as an external stair of stone facing, parallel an external lift, both into the rear yard. The only surviving internal features were the plasterwork in the entrance hall and the main stone staircase to the first floor; a modern staircase was acceptable for upper floors. At the time of fieldwork completion, the necessary grant applications were still pending, though without this extra assistance, the owner considered this scheme or any other works beyond his financial means.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

The case highlights continual wrestling between different priorities in conservation and planning. In planning terms, retail use in this building was non-contentious and satisfied other UDP policies encouraging town centre development. Whereas the DC officers prioritised negotiating a planning permission for the applicant's business success, conservation could be characterised as embodying some deeper principle. Conservation was seen as a quite separate issue, beyond the interests of DC. CUD were so vociferous in their opposition that when DC religiously followed current UDP policies, Conservation & Urban Design considered this a restriction on planning's wider responsibilities to the building and future generations.

For many respondents outside the authority, the Planning service's advice varied with officers' own personal interpretations of conservation. The EH Inspector noted

this balancing act created further tensions in the absence of a coherent authority-wide commitment to conservation: *'I'll deal with the planning officer because my objective is to influence the outcome.'* His external perspective may reflect that conservation is held in low esteem within the authority, since DC 'hold the cards' even over an important grade II* building. He cited the potential danger in having conservation as a mere consultee, being *'outside the mainstream planning decision weakens their ability to turn heads.'* The applicant also perceived the conservation adviser's precarious position vis-à-vis other planning officers who, *'ignore him as everyone expects him to be like that.'*

Most respondents accepted and defended the building's contribution to the Square. Securing the building in this impressive arrangement dominated most discussions, except for the CUD section who were more concerned with the building itself. This created different priorities and standards in the merits respondents perceived in retaining internal and external features. The elevation fronting the Square never appeared in danger of alteration: the unanimous opinion favoured retaining and repairing every detail. However over internal and rear features, most respondents including some DC officers, considered them far less important as they didn't contribute to the Square. This reasoning tolerated these features' more drastic alteration, which contrasted with the conservation adviser's belief in the integrity of the whole building. The variation proved surprising for the second agents; *'I don't think really what we've done respects the interior of the building...'*

The damage to the interior also undermined perceptions of the building's grade II* status. The applicant considered it a prime opportunity for renewal, as did some Council officers, the conservation adviser alone appeared to emphasise retaining aspects other than the facade. Indeed the proposals' minimal interference with the front elevation appeared to correspond with minimal public concern expressed over the changes to this building. Perhaps being a vacant, non-residential building affected support but no comments were received from the public; an officer noted:

There doesn't seem to be a lot of public interest at all... there never does. Unless it's something like an extension and they think it's going to change the appearance of a building that's probably the only time we have any comments from the public.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The visibility of features appeared to be a significant factor in treating this building. As mentioned above, perception of the building's merits could be divided between the facade's contribution to the Square and the actual physical integrity of the building. This appeared to reveal several divisions between the public and planners, between planning and conservation officers and even between conservation specialists. While listed buildings are defined as whole structures, with all features receiving equal protection, the EH Inspector noted:

It's not II* for its interior, it's II* for its contribution to the formal square... the interior of the building was of grade II quality and the exterior of the building was of grade II* quality and that was obvious going into the building.

Evidently deciding which features retained 'special' interest involved an implicit valuation. Agreeing with the applicant, the agents considered that the fire damage had destroyed all interior value. In general, there appeared to be a hierarchy emerging of aesthetic, then structural and thirdly historical importance, each reflected in the quality of the physical remains. All respondents considered the 'prettiest' features - the facade, the main entrance plasterwork and staircase - deserved to be retained as they supported the building's II* status. Furthermore, the conservation adviser believed the construction of the building displayed a significant degree of historic interest. In providing the building's structural spine, the chimney stack and plan form reflected the original compartmentalised design, though admittedly this was extending the interpretation of 'historic' beyond PPG15;

I interpret historic interest [as] the construction interest as well, it's not just that Queen Mary slept here, it has certain constructional interest as well from a technological point of view. Again it's pushing the boundaries wider but I think that's actually quite valid because I think you do compromise buildings when you start introducing new constructions in a historic building...

However EH considered the physical remains did not constitute sufficient interest to retain these features. The third aspect, the historical, was acknowledged being of great interest in illustrating the town's development. However features in the building reflecting its original function, were considered of too low an architectural quality to protect. It is interesting to note that these features at the rear (reflecting historic use rather than aesthetic interest) EH considered more appropriately dealt with as townscape considerations. This is perplexing given that these features are intrinsic to the building and contribute little to a townscape aesthetic.

Regarding the front elevation, all respondents considered this external, contextual value the most impressive aspect and universally acclaimed its contribution to the

town. It does raise a question over conservation's manifest reliance on arguments for the architectural integrity of the building, especially when operating in a planning system which is oriented to dealing with context rather than content.

Interpreting the significance of value in a grade II* building relies on its national interest. However the EH Inspector noted that these values could not be pre-determined by set principles, it was dependent on the circumstances of each case. He could identify the 'national' interest, over any local officer, based on his experience drawn from comparing listed buildings over entire regions. He also remarked that conservation value depended very much on the interpretations of the personnel involved. In tandem these comments may suggest that the national standards buttressing listed buildings are open to far greater interpretation than officially portrayed. The distinction between professionals' opinions is raised again as EH were viewed as far more constructive and flexible than the authority's conservation team.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

Perhaps the strongest element driving this case was the applicant's specific commercial vision for the premises. Attracted by the kudos and prestige of the building's impressive facade, this image and its association of quality were valuable to his business, though in retail terms the building was merely an advert, rather than an object. Once the facade had served its purpose the interior needed to be modern and functional. This template narrowed the whole application from the outset, precluding an assessment of retention. When the applicant spoke of value, it was predominantly in terms of land-use values, rents and profit margins. His investment in the site required that the application be successful otherwise he could face bankruptcy.

The building's poor state of repair and the lack of previous applications worked in the applicants' favour towards the authority. Vacancy and destruction displaced officers' perceptions of a worthy grade II* building, thus the radical works appeared less offensive. The authority were keen to retain and negotiate this scheme for fear of losing this opportunity and seeing the building deteriorate further. As the case officer noted;

...my main priority was trying to get an acceptable scheme, I was eager not for it to be just abandoned and that was the problem - thinking is he going to pull out?

The economic pressure divided the authority. Officers noted that the Members did not appear too concerned about the building itself so long as it was re-used. The Economic Development unit was forceful in its contributions to the discussions. Their offers of SRB grant assistance, proved highly persuasive, though the conservation adviser noted that the economics grossly contorted the consideration of interest in the building:

The whole thing was being pushed through by Government grants encouraging businesses and thereby giving them too much money that allowed them to demolish the building. So you've got a Government grant regime that was actually buttressing, it was supporting a non-viable scheme.

Certainly the potential contribution from SRB funds far exceeded a conservation grant. The agents too noted its importance: after considering PPG15 and the clients' brief, the third aspect is, *'will grants be available for doing things which don't really support PPG15'*. Alternative funding availability, as much as contrasting policies, can undermine conservation initiatives. This appeared to grate somewhat against the agent's principles;

...this thing had just been bulldozed through and I see it [as] basically doing our job on behalf of the client but if I was on the other side it wouldn't have got as far as this.

These tensions also extended to influence EH's consideration of the issues. In liaising with the planning officer, not the conservation adviser, the Inspector was perhaps made more aware of the pressure to redevelop. The agents noted that EH were far more flexible than the authority in their outlook; *'in his words I think they bent over backwards because they wanted to see this building renovated, put to use.'*

6.8 The Mount

A summary of the development

This semi-detached grade II listed building is situated in a suburban conservation area comprising predominantly large Victorian villas. The house, of stone construction, follows more classical proportions than the more ubiquitous Victorian gothic.

The current residents purchased it three years ago, wishing to return the property to a family home as it had been divided into three flats. The work required the removal of certain partition walls, some alterations to the staircase and the

provision of a second downstairs bathroom. Externally two subsequent additions were removed - a metal staircase from the side elevation and an ageing wooden conservatory to the rear.

Although the proposed work was potentially subject to both conservation area control and listed building consent, it actually fell within the permitted development rights of the householder and therefore did not require planning permission. The Committee delegated the case for officer determination, which only involved a consideration of the conservation aspects. The HEI section considered the scheme acceptable, provided the internal works did not comprise any larger scale demolition than initially proposed in which case another listed building consent would be required. The consent was approved and the owners were able to carry out their alterations without further recourse.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

With all cases there has been a distinction between the planning and conservation issues. In contrast this application did not require a planning permission, thus CUD dealt with the listed building consent exclusively. Though most consents also require planning permission, the scale and nature of the works is perhaps more representative of applications received by the authority. In Chapter 5, national respondents spoke of conservation falling through planning's holes. Since planning was of an unsuitable scale, spatially and temporally, conservation was required as parallel system. This case raises a question over the perception that conservation is separate and special. If planning officers can move such applications across their desks, it may well reinforce the perception that conservation is mainly concerned with minor, trivial aspects which planning disregards.

Whilst the property was in a conservation area, it was the listing controls which dominated. The owner considered it somewhat anomalous that the authority exercised the same level of control over works inside his property as those external works which affected the surrounding environment. He considered controls were most sensibly applied to protecting the most visible elements.

Returning the house to its 'former glory' did not appear to raise any SPAB-oriented objections to removing the natural accretions and adaptations of the building over time. Evidently the low quality and disrepair of these features dispelled such considerations but it is arguable that striving for a particular aesthetic, whilst pretty, undermines the authenticity of the building. More generally, the owner considered that old buildings should be saved *'because the new ones that they throw up tend to be very much nondescript concrete and glass and no character to them at all'*. The main problem for planning would appear to be the development pressure to replace the unique with the uninspired.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

Whilst estate agents may portray acquiring a listed building as desirable, the owners *'decided to live with the fact that it was listed'*. Neither considered themselves particularly interested in architecture or history though they were attracted to the house's period features, irrespective of its listing. Whilst they were evidently aware of its status, they were not conscious of the reason why their property had been selected:

Well ours is relatively plain compared to a number of the others and I sometimes wonder why they decided to list that one... There are more substantial properties than ours, more ornate properties... I mean there are one or two that look like castles whereas ours is fairly straightforward, clean lines. I suppose in that sense it may represent a certain style and be listed on that basis.

This may infer that certain types of building can be more readily identified as listable due to their size or ornament. The quality of the stone and the classical portico were noted as potential features which may have attracted the lister's eye

The 'national interest' in their house was not necessarily obvious. They maintained the property not for any abstract duty, but out of respect for the building itself - changes ought be in keeping with its character. Irrespective of the conditions of the listed building consent they would have replaced the sash windows and the cast iron drainpipes with the correct materials. Whilst they evidently knew of their building's listed status, they initially did not know they were living in a conservation area. While the quality of the surrounding area was influential when deciding to purchase the house, the conservation area's designation was irrelevant and to some extent continues to be so. When describing the character of the surrounding area and indeed of the town centre, it was defined by reference to the class, use

and function of buildings rather than their architectural or aesthetic qualities. However it was notable that the owner did consider that irrespective of these qualities conserving such features does *'provide an identity to the town and continuity'*.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

Given the non-contentious nature of this application there were few economic and political factors influencing the authority's decision-making, other than PPG15's guidelines for alterations.

6.9 Concluding observations from the case study

While there are many similarities within individuals' opinions between the national and local level, it cannot be said that there is one prevalent characteristic national or local view on issues. However there are a number of identifiable contrasts in Authority A's practice which challenge assumptions made by national respondents.

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader land-use control issues

The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

Whilst PPG15 stresses the compatibility of conservation with planning, practice in Authority A illustrates the potential for greater distinctions between them in terms of processes and individual officers' professional attitudes.

Although criticised for the delay and ephemeral nature of advice, planning officers evidently recognised conservation's supporting principles. The conservation adviser's personal zeal was often described as *'the conscience of the authority'*. His pursuit of a principled conservation line may be shared by other conservation officers but it received a mixed response from Authority A's planners. In one sense they admired conservation's relative freedom to pursue design principles which were constrained in DC work, yet in another sense they were sceptical, seeing

conservation as 'ivory tower' planning, a special consideration in a handful of cases. The separateness of conservation was not perceived by planning officers to indicate any greater specialness: if anything, conservation could be marginalised by its distinction.

Conservation could be conveniently pigeon-holed as just concerning old buildings whereas planning dealt with the needs of the whole community. All authority respondents characterised planning as a vast balancing act accounting for all manner of interests. Other than political input through the UDP and planning committee Members, planning had much less of a substantive goal or aim. Planning was characterised by pragmatism, being flexible and using common sense. The main concern appeared to be assisting the smooth transition of planning applications to physical development.

The interaction between officers over planning applications, whilst amicable, depended heavily on the personal discretion of DC officers to consult conservation. This raises a number of queries over planning officers' awareness of conservation issues and their professional competence in dealing with them unilaterally. It highlights a curious tension within individuals' views as to when DC officers consider they are dealing with 'conservation' issues. In all the cases studied, particularly the Mount which represents a more common type of application, it questions whether national respondents view of conservation as a specialist concern is not more accurately reflected in practice as reinforcing planners' perceptions that conservation deals with the more trivial detailing of buildings which is ultimately irrelevant in the larger planning picture. Paradoxically, senior managers wanted conservation to concentrate on larger project-based work and grade I and II* buildings, leaving the minor control of less significant detail for DC officers.

The spatial focus of conservation controls

The structure of the planning service and this study's focus on the CUD section in particular, may have unduly biased the findings to report a concentration on the conservation of individual buildings. Irrespectively, a pertinent question is to what extent the authority's organisational structure defines conservation's main concern to be listed buildings or whether there is scope for developing wider aspirations to environmental quality. In policy terms, areal value is not well explored - the UDP contains but a few sentences appraising the authority's many conservation areas.

While CUD remains pre-occupied with building specific referrals from DC, Implementation is left to conceive areal value on an *ad hoc* basis to justify areas' character when bidding for external regeneration funds.

The results of these structural effects and a lame areal policy basis can lead to conservation's paramount concern being the intrinsic value of a building over its contribution to the surrounding environment. As in the Lodge case, it affects where the relevant sphere of the building's influence is drawn, tightly simply around that site or more diffusely as a component of that urban fabric. This presumption may lead to defining areal value merely as a collection of buildings as individual 'atoms' comprising the overall character 'molecule'. The Yard case illustrated that a lack of developed concepts to appraise areal value meant the defence of areal character is unduly reliant on the value of buildings approached on the principles used in listing. This is surely contriving and compromising the whole rationale for the conservation area, yet this is not explicitly addressed.

Regarding professional competencies, DC officers considered townscape or urban design a sphere in which their professional training equipped them well to embrace and take responsibility for conservation on this scale. However most felt wholly subordinate to the knowledge/status of the architectural profession: a lack of competence increased reluctance to engage in conservation on a building scale. In transferring such details to the conservation specialist, it was often the minor details of buildings which appeared to cause problems, not the issues which planning could have dealt with. There is a questionable, though bridgeable, gap between urban design and conservation competencies between respective planning and conservation personnel.

The extent of acceptable change

Following tensions recognised in national policy, Authority A evidently suffers from planning and conservation personnel pursuing opposing presumptions of retention. However the important distinction is whether conservation, in practice, is always equated with opposition to change and whether this is due to the personalities involved. Although managers wished to encourage a more proactive approach to conservation, the conservation adviser appeared reluctant to sacrifice conservation principles and historic fabric. This inevitably created conflict with the emphasis from the national level on conservation's contribution to regeneration. The tension caused by renewal, illustrated a common problem in defining which features could

be conceivably altered and which were untouchable. As discussed below, the state of the building or area profoundly affects perceptions of its worth and thus the degree of change tolerated or desired.

This distinction arose most acutely in relation to conservation areas. Defining 'enhancement' caused disparate arguments in the Yard case, yet officers were assisted by few strategic guide-lines. Consequently the difficulty in defining and supporting enhancement often created an easier fall back position, relying on preservation instead. In contrast with the frustrations created by CUD's arguments against changing a building's structure in the Square case, EH's intervention introduced a far more flexible and progressive tolerance. However the Yard case illustrated that for all the authority's caution, the replication of an existing feature, or the qualities most readily identified with it, became the easiest way for applicants to secure planning permission. Some DC officers lamented this situation whereby pursuing conservation-oriented design policies reduced the aesthetic contribution of the late 20th century to the urban fabric.

The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

The extent to which the public were involved in, or appeared to care about, conservation was slight, however planning in general may equally experience low levels of participation. Evidently it is difficult to surmise public enthusiasm for conservation, but officers' attitudes to their involvement can reflect the value of their contribution.

Officers generally identified low levels of public participation. Assuming that the public only get involved to object to proposals, low participation may indicate that the authority is performing satisfactorily. However officers' general attitude towards low public participation was taken as proof that the public don't care about planning or conservation. Aside from the local formal consultative groups, officers considered public concern as a manifestation of protecting personal property interests.

Any expression of interest involving conservation is mostly raised in response to proposals which may affect the most visible aspects of existing features, the exterior of buildings, the street facade and so on. However this may not necessarily be presented in terms which constitute a planning matter. The conservation adviser noted the locals were generally '*not very visual people*' thus

their interpretation of phrases such as character, identity and attachment whilst recognisable could be potentially inadmissible to support formal conservation arguments. There is a difficulty encouraging the public to contribute their interest and an even greater one of representing it in planning terms when it is forthcoming.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The interpretation of features' interest

As mentioned above, the development cases highlighted a building-oriented approach for conservation work in the authority. The environmental values as a consequence were portrayed as far more malleable and subjective in comparison. This is not to say a focus on buildings provided a coherent and incontrovertible interpretation of value. The architectural perspective of the conservation adviser considered a building as an integral whole, with each component identifiably contributing to its overall interest. In contrast most other respondents of non-conservation backgrounds, appeared to disregard integrity, preferring to measure the significance of interest by the visibility of the features in question. The superficiality of 'visibility' contrasting with the deeper integrity of the building reflects a contradiction in value based on knowledge.

The potency of knowledge is illustrated when there is an absence of knowledge or when this knowledge actually contradicts the sensory perception of feature. Regarding listed buildings in a poor state of repair, many respondents noted that they didn't look like listed buildings. Such an admission suggests that there are certain preconceptions, even stereotypes pertaining to a listed building. These may be illustrated by those qualities respondents felt were absent from the buildings in the development cases. Generally the qualities contributing to a stereotype comprised: traditional images of polite architecture, though not necessarily a particular style or period; an allusion to prestige; a certain longevity and some degree of contemporary attachment, care or use. There maybe a further expectation of visual stimulation by its scale or by decoration, producing something worth going to see which tessellates with stereotypes comprising the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990). As mentioned earlier the state of repair or the use/function affect perceptions enormously. Now a reason maybe discernible since these factors can undermine the preconceptions which comprise the listed building stereotype.

The interpretation of special architectural or historic interest in these cases may reveal a hierarchy between these terms. In all cases the aesthetic interest predominates, evident in all responses over either the visibility of features or their architectural quality. In the Square, the conservation adviser's keen interpretation of structural interest in PPG15, was perhaps a lower priority especially given EH's contrary view. Historic interest, being the most abstract and potentially intangible, in all cases appears to be subordinate. Though PPG15 states historic interest must be supported by some accompanying architectural interest, this is only in relation to listing grading and not in the practice of consent approval. The conservation adviser had noted this anomaly too - whereas local, vernacular architecture was embraced in listing, local historical significance was not and remained under-protected.

The hierarchy of significance

As historical interest appears to be a shadowy concept on closer inspection, so too does national interest. In contrast to national respondents' ardent belief in the national taxonomy provided by EH and DCMS, at a local level national interest became an abstract concept which respondents found difficult to recognise. Even in regard to the Square, the grade II* listed building's value was seen as its facade's contribution to the Square, not a national responsibility to the building itself. Moreover the definition of what constituted national interest in a feature may appear less objective than initially considered. In the same case, national interest was defined by an EH Inspector in relation to his experience of other listed buildings across authorities in his region. Given that these officers are regionally based, is it more accurate to contend that these standards are actually regional?

Local familiarity fares little better. The lack of active public involvement in conservation may reflect that features in the local environment are taken for granted. Whilst it is evidently important to uphold local identity and character, the sheer familiarity with these environments may actually lead to an under-appreciation of their qualities. The quality of the street in the Yard case was questioned by a DC officer whether it should form part of the central conservation area. Admittedly there was little of outstanding interest but such attitudes further diminish the opportunity of exploring and working with undistinguished but equally important local value. While many respondents acknowledged that local knowledge and instinct helped appreciate the attachment and identification felt

locally, these issues were not addressed in formal policy. Such an omission has led to charges of subjectivity, and worse, regarding local value. Indeed it may lead to the situation where local designations of value become irreversibly undermined and ignored.

The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

In considering this aspect, initial attention was focused on the distinction between expert and lay considerations of value, however further distinctions emerged in practice. The strength of the pure and principled approach taken by the conservation adviser may reflect wider shared principles with other conservation professionals against planning officers' concerns with development. However the evidence may suggest that whilst this may be true, there were significant variations in value interpretation amongst conservation professionals. The local conservation adviser's approach may instead be the maverick response of one passionately committed professional. While conservation inevitably requires discretion and flexibility, the Square highlighted two almost opposing interpretations of interest between EH and the local authority's conservation adviser. With other respondents complaining of individual officers imposing their own interpretations of conservation on cases, there may be grounds for grievance. Whilst divergence of opinion may be healthy and stimulate debate, it is interesting to question the consistency of opinion expressed.

It has been noted elsewhere that the public contribution to the conservation debate in the town was notably lacking, including criticisms that the authority did not encourage any debate. Though the conservation adviser considered the public interest in pursuing conservation had been predetermined in PPG15's policies, he still believed that his responsibility for conservation was all the heavier for the lack of active public support. Though largely a result of class and education, he considered that the local public did not possess the visual awareness or language to appreciate the finer qualities of their built environment. Thus his benevolence was all the greater to protect the features on their behalf. This is not a framework for discussion so much as an imposition of legitimate values.

However this is not to say that the local population neglected their environment or were blind to its features. Perhaps the lay interpretation of value simply did not enter the conservation equation as the terms and expressions were not compatible, or indeed within the compass of land use planning. Certainly in the Yard and

Lodge cases, the public took a broader view of their environment which included functions and uses in addition to the aesthetic qualities. Function tended to define the character of areas as well as the value of particular buildings for most lay respondents. Moreover as noted above there appeared to be a certain expectation, or stereotyping, of listed buildings, perceiving them as the more impressive buildings.

Aspects of heritage valuation

The temporal aspects of conservation, revealed through the significance placed on historical interest, appears to be a difficult quality to recognise and embrace. Historic interest was under-represented in assessing the value of features in the developments studied but the reasons for this are unclear. Certainly a physical manifestation of this interest appears to be a pre-requisite, otherwise the controls available to conservation and planning have nothing to act upon. However the orthodox historical interest, i.e. a building's association with people or events rarely leaves such a trace. Historic interest further suffers when non-conservation trained respondents perceive significance alighting on the visibility of physical features. Historical interest thus becomes too abstract an issue for DC to recognise and implement conservation measures.

While there were many views expressed about conservation contributing to a sense of place, this rarely seemed to enter policy documents or decision-making arenas. While the identity of a settlement is an accretion of cumulative development, providing contrasts and juxtapositions, the role of conservation, particularly in Committee, appeared to be supported for its harmonising influence. Making features 'fit in' to the existing milieu, such as the Yard's new development, whilst commendable, was generally the sole requirement for new design. Officers commented that poor conservation could contribute to superficial reproductions, buildings without architecture. The apparent reticence to take a more courageous line could result in proposals consciously aping aspects of their prospective surroundings, thus actually reducing or flattening the diversity of the urban fabric's temporal collage. This is a particularly acute concern given that planners' and the public's attention is focused on the grander buildings as carriers of meaning and symbolic value in the environment. The 'supporting cast', buildings of more meagre interest, while collectively contributing to a sense of place, individually are not perceived to have much meaning.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

Evidently economics have a profound effect on conservation's potential contribution. The general economic vitality of the region inevitably affects the uses and obsolescence of buildings and areas and recently the town has been struggling against such industrial restructuring. More precisely in these marginal areas, the viability of particular development schemes often restricts the resources available to satisfy conservation objectives. However it also affects practices within the authority reflected by the weight accorded to economic arguments in DC decision-making. There is also a more subtle effect as the interpretation of conservation value is moulded to support economic arguments, even though development may be contrary to conservation.

Given the political priority of encouraging local development, planning officers have been increasingly encouraged to satisfy applicants' (clients') development briefs. The political imperative contrasts with planning officers' perceptions of their own balancing of economic development with the wider needs of the community. However balancing conservation against the economic pressures of development has proven particularly difficult given the lack of a comparable basis for measurement. Conservation cannot express its contribution strictly in monetary terms, thus the scales appear tipped heavily in favour of the more persuasive fiscal arguments for development.

More subtly, economics can also affect the perception of features' value. In the cases studied, certain features' conservation values were downplayed or elevated according to how these could support the particular economic argument. The conservation value may be exploited for a particular commercial advantage such as The Square's impressive facade or it may be under-played and relegated such as the Yard's significant contribution to historical street form. It reflects that identifiable values in features, whilst potentially intrinsic to the building, are only as prescient as their utility in an economic argument will permit.

The influence of political agendas

It has been observed throughout that many officers consider that planning's principles have been compromised by the strength of the political imperative to encourage development and investment. It has seen the re-organisation of the planning and economic development services and it has raised criticisms of a permissive attitude to development which favours reducing conflict with the applicant. This has grave implications for conservation as it is further sidelined in the planning agenda.

Perhaps reinforced by the repercussions of several unfortunate cases, at the political level there has been a negative reinterpretation of conservation's success and aims. Politically, conservation has often been associated with creating obstructions for development and thus has suffered dwindling political support in the face of pressures to encourage development in the region. This orientation is quite in contrast to national respondents' assumption of society's (and by implication politicians') tacit approval of conservation. At the local level, several respondents commented that conservation's concern with the built fabric was necessarily at the expense of users' interests. This may explain a great deal of the political reaction against conservation since Members are arguably more swayed by people's interests and livelihood rather than inanimate architecture. Notably the conservation-friendly initiatives of the new Chair of the planning committee will test the embeddedness of political opposition.

In terms of any political preference for conservation, it is interesting to note planning officers' grievances. They consider committee does not accredit design issues with any great significance, Members are happy to chose relatively safe unchallenging designs. Although applicants have exploited these easier routes to obtain planning permission, it has produced architecture which most architects loath. Surely this is not a conscious decision by Members to alienate architects, but must reflect personal, less design conscious preferences for a particular image of the town. Conscious or unconscious, these attitudes and preferences must be addressed if conservation is going to make any headway at all in local authorities' priorities.

Significant questions raised by Authority A's conservation culture

Before examining the second case study, are there any interim analyses to report by relating the findings in Authority A to the views expressed in the survey of national conservation culture?

While there are many similarities within individuals' opinions between the two levels, it cannot be said that there is one prevalent characteristic national or local view on issues. However there are a number of identifiable contrasts in this local authority's practice which challenge many of the assumptions made by national respondents.

- Amongst planning officers the separateness of conservation measures and personnel was not perceived to indicate or enhance any greater special status. If anything conservation could be marginalised by its distinction.
- Although development plan policies' reliance on PPG15 may create greater consistency between authorities, the local conservation culture is heavily influenced by the personal approach and priorities of the individual conservation officer.
- The organisational structure of the Planning service focuses on conservation's application to buildings which in turn influences perceptions of conservation across the authority. Broader environmental/areal value is not well developed or supported in policy or practice to counter this effect.
- The national emphasis on conservation's contribution to regeneration encountered various professional reactions, the more extreme being the conservation adviser's defence of conservation principles in the face of unnecessary sacrifices to the historic fabric.
- Historic interest suffers a diminution in value in contrast with architectural considerations which appear paramount, partly reflecting the commonly held view that the visibility of a feature dictates the effort applied to its conservation.
- There are certain expectations of listed buildings to fulfil stereotypical qualities which in turn relegates the more minor architectural works and also the areal concepts of valued space.

- Local interest is poorly expressed but the national interest in features is equally intangible and difficult to recognise; it does not necessarily engender feelings of national responsibility.
- The public may consider the value of environmental features in broader terms than conservation professionals, almost exceeding the limits of what planning can address/control.
- The collegiality of conservation professionals is challenged by the significant distinctions in approach discovered between EH officials and the local authority conservation adviser.
- There appears to be a barrier to promoting conservation's contributions to local economic development. A diminished level of local political support appears to deviate from the national assumptions of a wide consensus supporting conservation.

Whilst confined to this particular authority, these observations provide the basis for the further testing, development and analysis of evidence in the light of the second local planning authority case study.

Chapter 7

Local planning authority ‘B’: a case study of conservation in a ‘traditional’ historic town

7.1 Introduction

The second case study explores the conservation culture surrounding local planning authority practice in a traditional historic town. Such a place was selected because it conjures an image of the heartland of conservation practice - the type of town which promotes its historic identity. The reason for contrasting two different urban contexts was to investigate whether the nature of the historic environment notably affects perceptions of the value or contribution of conservation in planning.

This chapter follows a similar structure to the previous one, reporting findings from a two-tier analysis of the local authority’s conservation culture. Firstly this is an exploration of the operational structure and personnel involved in conservation’s relations with other professional and political aspects of the planning authority. This picture was composed through interviews with relevant officers and Members in the local authority. Secondly four developments involving a range of conservation issues illustrate the application of particular conservation approaches and also expose a broader range of responses towards conservation in the locality. The concluding section provides an opportunity to collate and discuss these findings in greater depth according to the ten themes identified in the conceptual framework. The authority shall be referred to as Authority B to respect the undertaking of confidentiality to respondents, especially in light of the sensitive information and opinions expressed.

7.2 An illustrative background

The Borough Council covers a predominantly rural area centring on this historic market town. The town itself contains a rich variety of listed buildings and a characteristic urban morphology illustrating centuries of continuous development

from the medieval period onwards. Though the County Council provides the strategic framework, most active conservation responsibility rests with the Borough. In contrast with the corps of long-serving officers in the previous case study, the planning service experienced a rapid succession of staff in the late 1980s/early 1990s following the arrival of a new Borough Planning Officer (BPO). Though evidence for the historical narrative is reduced, certain themes illustrate some of the changes experienced in the authority's conservation practice.

The authority appointed their first specific conservation officer in the early 1970s following the new responsibilities introduced by the Civic Amenities Act. The original appointee, now a practising architect in the town, considered those early years saw massive improvements in the town's fabric and the authority's attitude in encouraging applicants towards a conservation-oriented approach. He identified several initiatives such as a reclaimed materials depot, a survey of unused upper floors in the centre, reversing slum clearance policies and making grants available to improve the properties, which helped shape a positive view of conservation's contribution to the town's development.

Several respondents noted that during this time, there appeared to be a greater level of debate regarding conservation's strategic role in raising the status of the town; generally it was higher up the environmental agenda. Satisfying the Council for British Archaeology's criteria for grant funding in the early 1980s was seen as a vindication of these early achievements, placing it amongst *the* English historic towns and reflecting a measure of the local political commitment to conservation.

Following the original conservation officer's departure in the mid 1980s, two further conservation officers, both architects, took over the responsibility until the present officer's appointment in 1995. During the second conservation officer's tenure, the central area DC officer sat in the conservation section since most applications in the town centre involved some conservation aspect. This relationship perhaps illustrated a working ethos whereby DC processes and ensuring a high quality treatment of the historic fabric were closely linked. Colleagues considered the previous conservation officer in particular paid great attention to detail and demanded high standards of workmanship regarding historic buildings. Many working practices were introduced in this period to maintain this quality such as requiring 1:50 rather than the standard 1:200 scale drawings for applications and archaeological reports. Whilst some DC officers (and applicants no doubt) may

have been frustrated by the lack of flexibility of this approach there were very certain, identifiable standards required.

During this period, strategy was arguably of less concern and consequently under-developed with the conservation officer's concentration on DC and consent work. Without the resources to maintain a proactive approach, practice tended to operate reactively. Though a buildings at risk survey covering the entire Borough was conducted in the early 1990s, it was rendered obsolete by ageing computer software and a lack of staff to monitor the state of these buildings. There is no local list either as it was generally assumed the 1500 listed buildings in the town provided a comprehensive coverage of all the features of interest, an extra level of identification would contribute little more.

In the town's listing re-surveys in the early 1990s, several respondents commented that as many buildings were removed from the lists as were added. New listings tended to represent the town's Victorian legacy which had been previously neglected or criticised in earlier architectural appraisals. Indeed conservation areas designations over the last 10 years comprised Victorian residential areas adjacent to the town centre (which ironically had been saved from slum clearance 20 years earlier). New designations had not been problematic but Councillors had seen Article 4 Directions as infringements on property rights. Notably one designation was introduced to prevent a higher class Victorian residential area being marred by substantial new housing development along this prominent ridge into the town centre.

When the present conservation officer arrived he considered the Borough was resting on its conservation laurels. By concentrating on the quality of a few important buildings, there was a lack of commitment to the general state of the urban environment. The situation had percolated DC also whereby he re-drafted the standard conditions to reflect a more concerted conservation emphasis. There was a distinct lack of a mid to long term strategy for conservation in the town and given the authority's lack of corporate structure, conservation was hard pressed to comprehensively affect other relevant areas of Council activity. Whilst the local historic buildings annual repairs budget has steadily increased to £30,000, the budget for conservation area improvements has recently been cut from £15,000 to £3,000. More fundamentally, the conservation officer has grave fears for the future following the termination of the £200,000 a year CAP funding in 2000. With EH's new HERS funding and the HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative veering away from

supporting the fabric of traditional historic areas, there is no longer the certainty instilled from 25 years continuous national funding in the town.

7.3 Current structure, operation and priorities

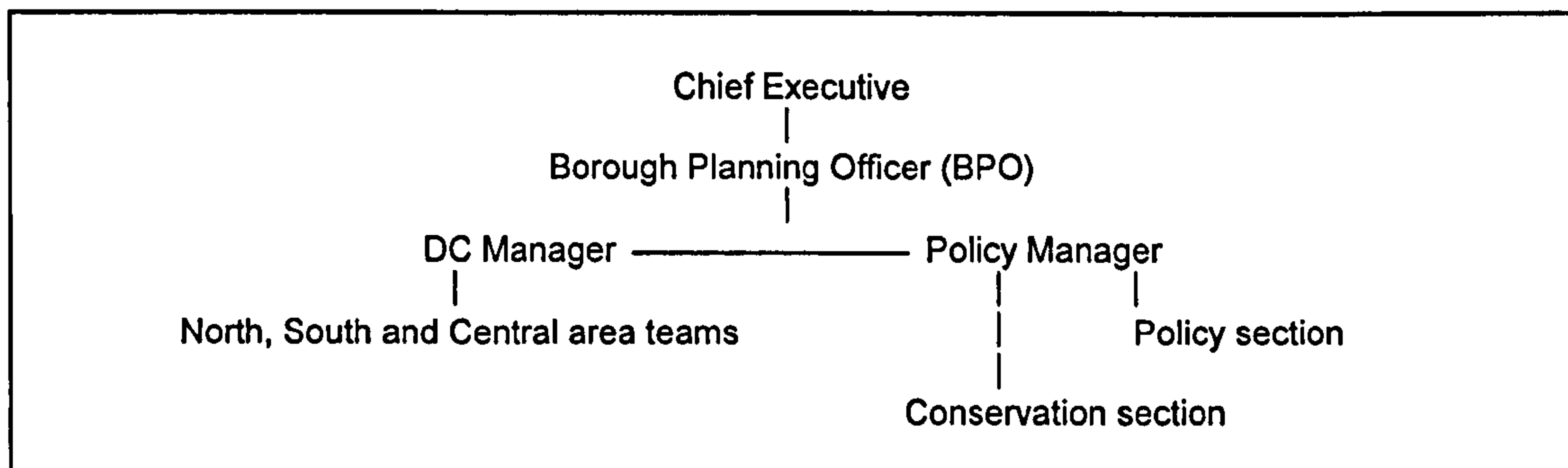


Table 7.1 Structure of the Council Planning Service

7.3a Conservation section

Practice and relations

The Planning service is in an enviable position largely because of the town's venerable historic status. Compared with other authorities' problems, this makes conservation planning relatively easier since applicants more readily comply with basic requirements such as submitting higher standards of drawings and archaeological site reports. Moreover there appears to be a strong contingent of local architectural practices in the town who contribute a sympathetic treatment of new urban development.

The conservation section comprises four officers, the conservation officer (appointed at senior officer level), an urban design officer, a technical grants officer and a tree officer. A further two officers will join the section to deal with conservation strategy supported by joint funding with EH. Despite previous organisational integration, the conservation section is now a separate section providing specialist advice to DC and Policy. DC officers consult conservation as and when required - there is no formal arrangement or framework to guide officers, it rests on their individual discretion. A weekly case conference provides an opportunity for all senior planning officers to discuss the issues, implications and resolutions of particular applications received. However the conservation officer is

perceived to take a rather cavalier attitude to these formal arrangements preferring to pursue larger, higher profile projects in preference to DC casework. Whilst no officers commented that relationship between DC and Conservation, or the quality of conservation advice, had deteriorated, inevitably consultation operated on a far more *ad hoc* basis than previously. However such informal consultation must affect the consideration of complex issues and the comprehensiveness of conservation's advice.

There is no compulsion for DC officers to consult conservation and the conservation officer believes some DC officers are less forthcoming than others which raises two particular difficulties. The first concern focused on those DC officers who referred less cases; he attributed this reluctance to their belief they could determine the case satisfactorily by imposing standard conditions on a planning permission. Despite re-drafting them, the conservation officer still considered these conditions too blunt an instrument for conservation's intricacies. Secondly, although DC officers may believe they can competently determine the case, it has sometimes created a situation where they second guess the conservation officer's advice, yet interpreting conservation in a stricter and more preservationist vein. Whilst this approach may be inevitable given the previous conservation officer's attitude, it is particularly galling for the current one who wishes to promote a more flexible interpretation.

The conservation officer's view

An architect with a long experience of private and public practice, he does not consider himself a planner. Echoing comments of the former conservation officer (also an architect) he does not approach his role in a planning manner which he characterised by DC officers' continual struggle for managerial efficiency. Processing applications within 8 weeks tends to subsume the 'quality' debate which conservation if permitted, picks up, being less restricted by administrative guidelines.

Generally he considered the Planning service lacked an appetite for positive agenda-setting, being content to react to incoming applications. In contrast, his approach was based on informal lobbying and, much to the consternation of his colleagues, autonomously pursuing his personal rather than strictly the Council's, priorities. This political manoeuvring he considers essential to the success of conservation, finding and creating support internally, within the Council, and

externally amongst prospective applicants, agents and residents. Similarly his evangelical role - attempting to win hearts and minds and engender conservation thinking - is more important than imposing the minutiae of statutory standards. It bolsters support for conservation attracts resources and investment interest, and through heightening others' awareness maximises the opportunities conservation has for external funding. Developing links with national organisations is a further priority, importing gravity and strength to local conservation arguments. He was critical that planning officers in general shy away from these aspects despite being the most successful routes to promoting an agenda.

Tension was created somewhat by the conservation officer's flexibility in accepting changes to the historic fabric in contrast to many of his DC colleagues. For him, the regenerative effects of good conservation, encouraging new uses in old buildings and revitalising areas are paramount. He lambasts many conservation officers of *'the rottweiler school'* for taking too prescriptive and narrow an interpretation of conservation, treating every single physical feature with insufficient discrimination and insisting on minimal changes. Sacrificing aspects of historic fabric to encourage reuse far outweighs its retention on dogmatic grounds.

Views of other officers in the section

The conservation officer's flexibility and autonomous crusading has created tensions and inconsistencies within the service. In contrast, the grants officer, a joiner by trade, amicably opposes the conservation officer's stance. While he considers the conservation officer sees buildings for their academic and historical aesthetic value, he considers the integrity of a building's structure and fabric as the paramount consideration. The quality of craftsmanship and materials applied to a listed building provide an objective standard both for regulating the standard of workmanship and providing inspiration for the craft of conservation. He demanded high standards and noted in comparison that some local developers consider the conservation officer *'a soft touch'* over such detailing. While these two officers' approaches do not necessarily oppose each other, their different focuses of concern could result in the historic fabric being literally torn in two directions. It is this *'schizophrenic'* conservation advice which proves difficult for DC officers to accommodate.

The urban design officer felt frustrated by the service's general lack of design appreciation: after a two day design course, she doubted DC officers' beliefs in

their own competence to deal with 'design'. For instance she considered they disregarded the advice of the authority's independent architects' panel, because they felt threatened by the panel's detailed responses. Similar shortfalls were highlighted by the service's focus on listed buildings at the exclusion of the meaning of building's context and the interpretation of place. Conservation and DC surely ought be equally concerned with these two things yet although urban design could provide a bridging point, it seemed to fall into a gap of recognition between conservation and DC.

7.3b DC section

The Borough Council has a relatively small planning service employing around 20 officers. Most of the officers have under ten years experience of the authority, largely because of significant personnel changes following the current BPO's appointment. In DC, the central area effectively covers the whole of the town itself and is the focus for this study. DC is answerable to two planning committees, the DC sub-committee and the full Planning and Highways Committee, the former dealing with the more strategic and significant projects in the Borough.

Views of conservation

DC officers consider themselves competent to deal with conservation issues in most cases since they involve design issues which are common to most planning applications. While DC officers' experience equipped them to deal with townscape and minor changes to buildings, their expertise did not extend to identifying the architectural and structural significance in features of special interest, for which they wanted the conservation officer's support.

In strategic terms, most DC officers saw conservation a positive contribution to the service and town rather than merely a statutory responsibility. PPG15 and the local plan were seen as providing adequate conservation policy for most situations, so supplementary local conservation policy guidance was deemed unnecessary. In practical terms, conservation's additional controls and wider construction of 'acceptable development' provided a convenient filter to reject unsuitable applications outright rather than attempt to negotiate them within the 8 week deadline. However one DC officer commented that there could be an over-

emphasis on conservation. Whereas Government and RTPI initiatives presented planning as a progressive tool of implementation, locally he felt he was operating 'a *neighbourhood protection service*'. The emphasis on this control aspect, appears to emanate not only from the public but also appears to increase further up the service towards the BPO.

Senior levels

Conservation was viewed fairly consistently throughout the service as a priority for the town, with senior managers considering that they '*sung from the same songsheet*'. All the planning officers' considered the BPO imposed a robust adherence to the local plan. In its regulatory capacity, conservation contributed greatly to this ethos providing further means to control development and enforce higher standards. Certainly from the general attitude of the senior officers, the authority appears more willing to go to appeal to defend local plan policies: in contrast, the conservation adviser in Authority A noted their lawyers' recalcitrance in avoiding conflict at all costs.

However the BPO's control ethos had proven so unpalatable with applicants that a full Council review had scrutinised his practices on three separate occasions over his 10 year office. Though maintaining standards, other respondents in the authority considered that his stringent approach had led to a culture of restriction, particularly on officers' discretion to negotiate and encourage partnerships with applicants. In contrast, the BPO himself considers a significant minority of locally powerful applicants frequently bypass planning negotiations and directly approach committee Members and the Chief Executive. In the face of applicants' '*bellyaching*', he is adamant to cut out this '*backdoor dealing*' since it is undermining the service's ability to control appropriate development in the town. This has led to quite a contrast between the BPO's regulatory approach and the conservation officer's flexibility and lobbying.

Despite the strong quality control which the BPO considers planning ought exercise, several officers considered he occupied a relatively weak position vis-à-vis the other Heads of Service competing in Council priorities. The Council has no corporate structure and essentially exists as fairly separate services, without particular political appointees responsible for each one. Planning actually is not an independent service and thus without a strong Head officer it can suffer marginalisation in the Borough's co-ordination of priorities between services.

7.3c Wider influences and accountability

Policy and strategic initiative

At the time of fieldwork, the Local Plan's preparation was passing through the Inquiry stage. A separate chapter on the Historic Environment comprising some 20 pages was cited by most planning officers to reflect the significant local political commitment to conservation. The Local Plan must be read in conjunction with the County Structure Plan which was completed in 1989. A special section on conservation provides a cursory strategic framework, though regarding the County town, the Borough receives additional policies to reinforce their responsibilities over protecting its historic core.

Whilst there is an Historic Environment team within the County Council, their interaction with the Borough regarding the built environment has diminished considerably, though the team are statutory advisers to the Borough for archaeological matters in planning. Indeed this concern has fostered a partnership with the Borough over the preparation of an archaeological database of the town not only to assist DC decision-making, it will also provide a resource for wider use in the tourist, educational and academic realms. However it would appear that the political emphasis on developing and fostering sustainability and the LA21 Agenda has pushed building conservation out of the picture in favour of a concern for the natural environment. In addition, central Government rate capping and the loss of rate revenue from the creation of a new Unitary Authority within former County boundaries has further reduced the resources available to the County Council. Their general retreat from built environment conservation creates further difficulties noted by the conservation officer. He considered the County's strategic input for conservation was essential since the Borough did not have the vision or resources to perform this task.

This shortcoming was noted by a senior County Council officer, particularly between the responsibility for conserving a historic town and the Borough's relatively unimaginative approach. In contrast with the County's environmental management strategies, the Borough has a restrictive and compartmentalised conservation operation, choosing to focus on specific buildings at the risk of permitting wider environmental degradation. There appeared to be little guiding vision from the Borough's planners for the town's development, relying instead on unilateral development proposals to shape the agenda. Indeed although the

flexibility of the conservation officer was welcomed it did lead to many inconsistencies emanating from the Borough. This was as much a criticism of the Councillors as officers, since the level of debate surrounding the progressive treatment of sustainable development in the town appeared non-existent.

Perspectives of & from Members

The concerns of Borough Council Members were wide ranging but most were worried by a neighbouring town's incentives to attract businesses which posed a threat to their own town's economic livelihood. One or two Councillors considered planning was a restriction on the town's economic vitality, particularly the measures to reduce traffic in the town centre (although these were also Highways' responsibility). In general, a consensus prevailed in support of conservation, though this was equally expressed as protecting the users of these buildings, often small independent retailers, and maintain the residential accommodation in the town centre. Conservation was perceived to be as much about protecting a way or quality of life as protecting the buildings themselves.

Many planning officers noted a slight tension between Members and professionals. Some attributed this to a parochial mentality which favoured reliable local knowledge over 'external' professional advice. In relation to conservation, many respondents considered this was a reflection of development in the town, whereby certain planning decisions in the 1960s saw the destruction of many significant historic buildings. While many of the Members are of a generation who can recall the pre-1960s townscape, the hangover of the modernist surge into the town appears to have cast a long shadow over subsequent attitudes concerning new buildings in the town: the planning committee Chair noted, *'we are very possessive about conservation here'*.

Planning officers (and also many applicants) were often frustrated by the planning committee's preference for traditional, safe designs which are familiar in the town. Considering the sheer diversity of buildings spanning a 600 year period, the concentration and proliferation of a homogeneous Georgian pastiche is quite abhorrent to design professionals working in the town. Professionals were critical of Members' ability to appreciate contemporary design and worried about the longer term repercussions of the notable lack of late twentieth century buildings in the town following these committee decisions.

Perceptions of/from the public

The formal channel for continuing public participation is through the Planning Liaison Group which comprises representatives of various local resident groups, the Civic Society, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Chamber of Commerce, the Police and so on. It is intended to be a forum for discussion and dissemination rather than active canvassing and participatory consultation. However given its inherent bias towards middle class interests, planning officers do not take the Group's comments as representative of the public and are often cynical about their suggestions. Officers characterised the town's residents having '*a drawbridge mentality*' as they wished preserve the centre of the town almost as a museum piece. It was fine to have a prosperous centre so long as it was only prosperous from 9am until 5pm.

On the other hand, in promoting the town's economic and cultural vitality, the local Civic Society see themselves encompassing wider concerns than just planning. Relatively prosperous through owning property in the town centre and enjoying a membership of around 800, the Society is in a strong position to lobby the Council. They were particularly critical of the Council's treatment of many landmark buildings in the town, especially those under its own stewardship. These buildings were not only missed opportunities to promote their re-use as heritage attractions, but more fundamentally they were threatened by structural dilapidation. Partly these results were seen as endemic of the strict culture of '*planning by the rule book*' engendered by the Borough Planning Officer: the authority lacked '*flair and imagination*'. Indeed they believed he was personally guilty of treating their historic town just like any other town, irrespective of the sensitive issues involved. One Society member, who sat on the authority's architects' panel noted that whilst the authority remained committed to conservation, the constructive dialogue which had previously characterised planning applications now resembled a battleground. The level of design consultation and the physical results in the town reflected the disregard for aesthetic quality in the Planning service. In fact he considered the authority were abrogating their public responsibility of ensuring quality new development in the town.

7.4 Development cases

The second tier of investigating the conservation culture in the local planning authority involved in-depth studies of four separate development control cases. This not only provided a unique insight into real circumstances in which the rhetoric surrounding policy could be tested but also identified a range of parties with differing experiences and values relating to conservation in the locality. As noted in the methodology, Chapter 4, previous studies have noted differences between various types of applicants in their approaches to developing the urban form. Thus it was essential to identify a range of developments and parties involving different aspects of conservation control. The following list outlines their correlation with the selection criteria specified in Table 4.4. Evidently the names of the cases and any topographical references have been changed to respect respondents' anonymity.

For subsequent ease of reference, synopses of these development cases are provided in Appendix A.

<p>The Friary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A significant new residential development within the central conservation area, affecting the setting of a prominent grade II listed building and involving the demolition of an unlisted building• Site purchased by a local firm of specialist residential developers <p>The Bank</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The final phase of a site's development introducing new office accommodation and further artisans units: development in the central conservation area affecting the setting of two listed buildings• Site owned by an established local business pursuing in-house bespoke development <p>The Hotel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A series of unsuccessful applications to erect additional hotel accommodation in the rear garden of a grade II* listed building in the central conservation area• Listed building owned by local hotelier <p>The Terrace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renovation of a house in a grade II listed terrace in a conservation area• Local property agent purchased and renovated the house before selling it to a private residential owner

Table 7.2 An outline of development cases' attributes

7.5 The Friary

A summary of the development

Background

On a steeply sloping site down to the river, a new development was proposed amidst a context of listed buildings which formed a prominent town centre skyline. From East Bridge, the site comprised such a characteristic view of the town any incursion necessarily demanded a sensitive approach. Though this case concerns the final phase of development, a brief explanatory history of the site is required.

Previously the site had been the main hospital until its relocation in the early 1980s leaving two principal buildings - the Infirmary and the Nurses Home. The local health authority sold the site to a local developer and after years of vacancy and dereliction, the first renovations were completed in the late 1980s. The former Infirmary, a Georgian grade II listed building forming a monumental neo-classical crown atop the town's skyline, was converted into ground floor retail units with residential accommodation occupying its five upper floors. However the recession and development delays forced the original developer into receivership in 1992, leaving the adjacent former Nurses' Home vacant. Though suffering intervening fire damage, this Victorian grade II listed building constructed in local red brick was purchased by an established local firm of housebuilder/developers and converted into 28 flats in 1995. A relatively small firm, this constituted their largest conversion project to date. Their pride in the quality of their developments was also recognised by local planning officers who regarded them amongst the better local developers. Both schemes won local conservation awards, using the same firm of local architects who were again contracted for the final phase of development.

This firm of developers acquired the remaining plot from the receivers. Though planning permission existed for 20 large detached town houses, the slump in the housing market had subsequently made such a scheme unviable. The planning authority were also eager to revise the density and design of any new development. However wrangling over design approaches and a further matter of demolishing an existing building on-site proved most contentious issues.

The Pathology Laboratory

From the outset of discussions in summer 1995, the prominence of this site was stressed by planning officers; *'...it is essential that this classic view of the town is enhanced and not harmed by any development'*. Indeed the applicants had even joked they wouldn't be allowed to build anything that didn't win an award. The Council had required a comprehensive development scheme for the whole site and a condition attached to the Nurses' Home permission required the demolition of a 1940s prefabricated building, formerly the Pathology Laboratory, located at the top of the site behind the old Infirmary. However the applicants considered this building was still structurally sound and in following local plan policy on retaining buildings in conservation areas, wished to convert it for residential use.

Despite initial officer support in principle for conversion, by early 1996 the authority was reinforcing its opposition; *'it is Council policy to see the Path Lab demolished'*. The agents unsuccessfully submitted various designs to improve the building's appearance but by late March, the authority was still recommending refusal. The applicants requested for the condition to demolish the building be removed as it *'prejudices a balanced consideration of the various options for the development of the site'*. The Path Lab was becoming a such an obstacle that the Council threatened a breach of condition notice on the applicants.

Public opposition to the building was particularly vocal and the authority received many letters of objection. The local Civic Society lobbied for its removal, galvanising sustained interest amongst its members. Many resided in the recently converted Nurses' Home and when purchasing their flats had been assured by the applicants that the Path Lab's removal would provide uninterrupted views over the river. The local Friends of the Earth group stated the Path Lab was *'a considerable blemish on the riverside environment'*. Similarly the Town Centre Residents' Association (TCRA) objected to any compromise short of removal. One eulogising resident was;

...horrified to note how the very ugly, seemingly temporary and derelict Pathology Lab building ruins the fine view of the listed buildings around it. No renovation can improve it... any modern 'dolling up'... would make it even more of an eyesore.

EH's comments were received in April and provided ammunition for both sides. Re-iterating former comments from their consultation in 1991, the Adviser did not object to the Path Lab's demolition since, *'it was not listed and appears to us to make little, if any, contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.'* However he did not oppose its retention either, *'particularly if its harsh*

utilitarian character can be softened by the application of appropriate features'. In balance, he would allow the conversion.

Increasing political contention supported planners' requests for the Path Lab's demolition. The applicants considered such politicisation had made protecting the view from East Bridge sacrosanct, leaving little room to debate the Path Lab's conversion. Consequently by the end of April, though they proposed to reduce the building by one storey, they indicated a possible *'demolition of much of the Path Lab [which] may involve its complete removal.'* Despite revisions in July to still convert the building into 5 flats, by October the applicants were still awaiting an indication the authority's opinion despite their internal recommendations to Committee for refusal. At a further meeting all parties agreed that the removal of upper storeys combined with a neo-classical facadism was aesthetically disappointing. The applicants enquired whether its demolition would aid the overall application: no definite answer was forthcoming though this was taken to assume it would. Subsequently by October, the Path Lab's conversion was removed from the development scheme.

The new development

Parallel negotiations concerning the design of the new buildings on site had added to the conflict between parties. The approved scheme of 20 houses from 1991 had replicated the haphazard arrangement of existing properties built on the slopes leading up to the town centre. While this design had since been changed in favour of simpler apartment blocks following the contours of the site, EH again recited their earlier comments from 1991:

Whilst a traditional approach to their design may seem appropriate within the wider historic context of this part of [town], the contours of the site tend to undermine the classic forms attempted. By opting for traditional forms the architects have set themselves considerable design problems. In view of the difficult terrain and the importance of the setting, English Heritage considers that... a modern design solution might be more appropriate on this part of the site...

Although the applicants wanted to design a modern building, neither their agents nor the planning authority were particularly enthusiastic. Their architects were locally respected for a particularly traditional in-house style and planning officers had emphasised that committee Members were extremely cautious in approving non-familiar styles.

By August, EH had reviewed the revised plans comprising two parallel blocks of 4-5 storeys and considered they conflicted with the *'monumental'* style of the Infirmary

building. EH were critical of the agent's *'traditional approach'* since this was neither producing a new, modern building nor an historically correct copy. Instead this combination *'has resulted in squat proportions which help to give much of the development a heavy ponderous character.'* The agents rebuked EH's doctrinaire approach, claiming the building had to feel right in this context, and not be a statement of abstract design intent. As project architects for the other phases of development on the site, they had already contributed to retaining much of the historic skyline along this stretch and were not willing to sacrifice its integrity to a passing fashion for 'modern' design.

Negotiations in October concluded that a neo-classical design was unacceptable as it competed with the imposing former Infirmary. To appease all parties a safer option was suggested, a Georgian design which would prove sympathetic to the rest of the town. Perhaps to save face, the applicants rejected EH's modernism claiming this presented a greater commercial risk if the buying public preferred traditional forms. By November new drawings were submitted showing two blocks parallel to the contours of the site *'designed in a plain though hopefully not unattractive, Georgian manner incorporating where possible local detailing'*.

The conservation officer felt a conciliatory design was necessary since the opposition to change in the town could be most vocal. Despite a safer design premise, the authority still received letters of objection from the public concerning not only the 'excessive' height of the blocks but also the higher density of dwelling units and the ensuing access and traffic problems. Before committee in March 1997, the officer's report recommended approval of the scheme to demolish the Path Lab and allow a more spacious setting for two Georgian-style terraces:

...it is considered the overall design approach to this sensitive site is correct. The buildings need to be on a grand scale to complement rather than compete against, the surrounding buildings. The chosen style of architecture again is complementary to the site and its surroundings. The detailed design is well considered and studied and would enhance this part of the town centre.

In approving it, Members' comments echoed the importance of not infringing the impressive skyline and historic surroundings. That the whole scheme fitted in without people even realising its newness was a major achievement, the lack of impact being a positive measurement of success. One Councillor noted she didn't mind if it was criticised as 'pastiche' so long as it did not ruin this important view of the town.

After protracted negotiations, the scheme has been finished and the first buyers have moved in. The development was considered such a success by the planning

authority, it was proposed for an RTPI award and also a Civic Trust award. The central area DC officer remarked that this is one of the few developments in his career where the developers have subsequently thanked him for the authority's guidance:

I'd say it's a total success, the best scheme that we've got in the town centre, in my opinion anyway, in terms of its impact on a conservation area, its detail, its quality of work, it's spot on.

Though all parties are happy with the results, the nature of all compromises means it is not the ideal solution that either the applicants or the agents wanted, nor their ideal of a progressive planning process.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Generally there appeared little to distinguish planning and conservation officers' attitudes and priorities. Surprisingly, the applicant and some DC officers believed there were no particular conservation issues raised by the development - rather the context and setting demanded a sensitive design approach. Such an attitude may indicate a narrow view of conservation, that it is only relevant where existing historic fabric is directly threatened. Although a 1991 comprehensive design brief guided previous developments on the site, planning officers felt subsequent circumstances had overtaken the brief's relevance and it presented more of a restriction. The applicants and agents considered that despite award proposals for good planning, the whole process had been unnecessarily delayed by the authority's inflexibility.

As mentioned above, the context of the new development was the paramount concern. Though respondents considered it a quintessentially English town, in contrast with such other historic towns the local ethos was perceived as less appreciative of contemporary building in the town centre. Here, the emphasis appeared to be on ensuring continuity and minimising contrasts with the existing surroundings. This may be due to a general apprehension, possibly even fear, of repeating unsympathetic developments such as the 1960s replacements for many historic buildings in the town centre. The applicant in particular felt that the view of the town from East Bridge had been so sacralised it was untouchable: the culture in the town did not seem capable of allowing any late twentieth century contribution.

Even the DC case officer who wished to encourage modern architecture (see the Bank case) appeared similarly affected:

I think in all honesty we'd have ended up being criticised for a modern building in that location. I think that Georgian approach is very successful in that location and people are saying to us now, 'oh it looks like it's been there forever' which is exactly the approach we [thought] it should be.'

'Sympathetic' development effectively excluded a contemporary design approach despite the sustained objections from EH over attempting to ape traditional styles. The conservation officer admitted he had become relatively cynical about the integrity of this advice, since EH had to be seen to champion contemporary architecture and adopt the regeneration-based initiatives of central Government: sometimes this was just not appropriate.

Local interest in the development was potent, vocal and well organised. However planning officers were sceptical about many objectors' motives since a significant proportion resided in the recently converted hospital buildings. Retaining the Path Lab obstructed the view from their windows, thus the enjoyment of private property fuelled their angst. Whilst vocal, it represented a minority of the town's people - predominantly those who could afford to live centrally - the educated, wealthier and slightly older middle classes. The safer design was as much to placate the people who could express their dissent most vehemently.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The Path Lab's demolition and the new development question the design distinction between tradition and modernity. Pragmatically, the conservation officer, an architect himself, noted how the profession divided into architects preferring a traditional or a contemporary architectural vocabulary. Working to local architects' strengths is essential, otherwise asking a traditional practice, as here, to produce a contemporary design is courting aesthetic suicide. Though considering that the former Infirmary, more so than the Nurses' Home, '*set the marker*' for the schemes, he later observed the site was strong enough to take a variety of styles. This appears to contradict his suggestion for sympathetic contextual design being a Georgian approach, and not the original neo-classical one which would have more accurately reflected the former Infirmary.

A DC officer stated this site was '*one of the most important views of the town*'. While the local plan cited the protection of important views, most respondents

responded with an aesthetic justification for this. The conservation officer was alone in respecting views into and out of the town centre for the gaps and vantage points which illustrated the morphological development of the urban fabric. Protecting the opportunities to see these views was as important as the quality of the views themselves. The prospect from East Bridge catalysed much local sentiment, revealing peoples' identification of the view as in some way symbolic of the town, though this may have involved a certain romanticism especially given the reactions to the Path Lab's potential retention. This building's stark utility and brutal outline made it all the more an obvious blemish on the 'historic' scene. Whilst structurally sound, its ugliness subsumed any perceived attachment to it despite it being a familiar element of this view for 60 years.

In contrast, the adopted Georgian style of the new development proved sufficiently familiar to be acceptable, as the applicant noted:

...it became clear that the only way that the planners would grant consent was if we used pastiche style, Georgian style, a replica, a style that they were familiar with so that Councillors on their planning committee would say 'I've seen that before, I've seen one of those in Bath, I want one of those' and they're happy.

The DC officer did not consider it was pastiche, since it meticulously followed original Georgian proportions and detailing as far as commercially viable. However the applicants and agents held widely differing views on the appropriateness of the design. The agents considered that this debate on authenticity was fraudulent, describing EH's advice as dogmatic *'intellectual bollocks'*:

...what is considered modern or not is a completely false distinction in my view and my position is this. It doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter how carefully you make your most beautiful repair or copy or reproduction it will have 1999 written all over it and the honest response is to do what you feel is best at the time rather than say 'ooh I feel like a bit of gothic coming on or I feel like a bit of 1930s'.

A committee Member also warmed to this perspective: *'I think they've kept a feel of the place, I think the buildings do blend in quite nicely and quite well... I don't mind what people call it [pastiche].'* However whilst such contextualisation is admirable, in the wrong hands there is a tendency for this to emphasise homogenisation. The applicants, felt constrained by the prevailing ethos in the town which actively shied away from any form of contemporary building: *'...I'm afraid that in [this town] we'll never see a modern classic.'*

In attempting to maintain a particular character, there is a tendency to stereotype. Many respondents picked out the large, neo-classical buildings along the skyline, effectively those features which stand out, to define the town's character. The preference to harmonise development, make it fit in, actually may be reducing the

scope for contemporary buildings to be distinct and similarly contribute to evolving perceptions of the town's identity.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

From the applicant's perspective, it was evidently worth pursuing a variety of approaches to maximise the site's development potential, including all manner of conversion schemes for the Path Lab. It was not the conservation value of these buildings which had originally interested them, but the sound construction of the Nurses' Home which permitted a conversion scheme. Their town centre location too would prove saleable, listing and their place in the central conservation area were merely coincidental.

Despite their wishes to follow a contemporary treatment for the site the authority remained in a strong position throughout the case and as recalled by the applicants, were not going to permit a development that wasn't worthy of winning an award. The site was perhaps one of the most important town centre developments in the last 10 years and its high profile ensured political support to oversee the conservation aspects. The applicant lamented that the authority's strength had turned his proposals into exactly the ones which the planners wanted.

Evidently pressure from local residents had increased the political profile of this case but the view over the town itself proved to be a powerful and emotive force politically. Whilst the applicant considered this irreversibly restricted negotiations over the Path Lab, the conservation officer also noted how its demolition had moved from a planning and design issue to a political one, with the BPO becoming increasingly involved. The pressure to retain an unadulterated view of the town reinforced Members' inclinations towards a safe architectural style to complement their interpretation of the town's character.

7.6 The Bank

A summary of the development

Background

This site is owned by the applicants, a local family business established in the town for over 125 years. Originally based in wholesale grocery distribution, they have since created a property development section to support their portfolio of commercial activities. While a long standing contribution to the town's development and economy has placed them in an influential position vis-à-vis the Council, planning officers characterise their applications being of a consistently high quality.

The site, adjacent to the river at West Bridge, is on the periphery of the town centre. The area's retailing has suffered latterly from two new shopping malls in the town centre; the closure of the adjacent main bus station and multi-storey car park have increased this disparity. Local businesses have been lobbying the Council for a regeneration strategy; the applicants too consider the Planning service lacks vision in promoting the town's economic potential.

The site comprises several different activities. The applicants' main office next to West Bridge, is a 1920s copy of a William and Mary style building but its design is only three quarters complete, prevented by the adjacent Old School House. This vacant grade II listed building is the last remnant of a local primary school, demolished in the 1960s. The applicants recently acquired it from the Council who had since used it as a hostel. Until the early 1990s, the applicants used the Victorian warehouses along the riverside for their goods distribution. Following an arrangement with the Council to relocate these operations, the applicants submitted a strategic masterplan outlining the site's redevelopment opportunities. Though only loosely defined in terms of design and specific uses, it initiated the largest single investment in the area for 30 years.

By 1998, three phases of development were complete. Two dilapidated warehouses, albeit grade II listed, had been converted into smart bars. An unlisted warehouse on the far corner had been demolished to little public or officer objection and replaced with a '*restrained modern*' building echoing the vernacular brick style of the adjacent Victorian warehouses: it is now an established restaurant. These

developments were praised, locally and nationally, as good examples of urban regeneration.

The application and wider concerns

In January 1998 a planning application was submitted for the final phase of development - a new three storey office block on the town side of the site. With the town centre built on a hill, the development would be all the more visible looking down onto it from the centre of town.

From an archaeological perspective, the site was considered *'highly'* significant following the identification of remains of the medieval town wall in a 1997 County Archaeological Investigation. The intrusion of new foundations was potentially very damaging although EH experts ultimately considered that rafting over the deposits would constitute sufficient protection.

Accompanying the office application were proposals affecting two other grade II buildings on site. The Old School House was to be relocated adjacent to two other listed properties on the southern side of the site. These buildings were the only two remaining examples of a previous Victorian artisan's terrace and although currently vacant they had been in residential use until 10-15 years ago. Initial plans to partially demolish them were later changed to a repair scheme providing further office accommodation with the Old School House.

Planning officers rejected this application outright since, *'essentially the majority of the character and fabric of the listed building[s], and a part of [the town's] history, will be lost.'* One officer commented the applicants argued *'a very poor case'* for removing the Old School House and had not proved its necessity on grounds of structural obsolescence, a view reinforced by EH's belated advice. Though the Old School House was removed from the application at the end of February, the building was not entirely safe. It literally stood in the way of the applicants' long-standing desire to extend their main office block thus completing the symmetry of the original 1920s design. Though most parties acknowledged the architectural and townscape benefits of this extension, officers considered PPG15 prevented removing a listed building for such a reason. However the applicants remained undeterred, preparing the relevant appeal files. Agreeing with their agents, they saw little merit in the Old School House to justify its listed status and considered their scheme a dramatic enhancement to the conservation area.

The new building

This was a flagship project both for the applicants and the authority. The applicants wanted a striking contemporary design to attract a major tenant to use the building as a headquarters. Planning officers wanted to encourage high quality modern designs in contrast to the ubiquitous Georgian pastiche of much new development in the town centre. The new design, presenting a partial sheet glass facade and white render finish, was a conscious decision to deviate from the brick vernacular characterising other buildings on the site: a different firm of local architects with a reputation for modern commercial properties had been contracted.

Initially, the conservation officer had suggested reflecting the archaeological significance of the site, the presence of the medieval town wall and a corner turret. The agents had also noted this element and the aesthetic context, notably the changes in roof-lines and pitches into the town centre, the variety of building materials and the many small arcs and crescents in properties fronting the town walls' southern section. However the first submissions were considered quite unsuitable by officers as the inevitable maximisation of floorspace created a shed-like appearance. The scale and massing in this location was particularly sensitive since looking down on the building from further up the street, the height, bulk and roof-line became all the more intrusive. Though not wishing to comment on the style of the building, the BPO considered it was, '*out of scale with its immediate surroundings*', and pushed albeit unsuccessfully to reduce its height by a whole storey. The agents objected to these reductions but by June a compromise was achieved, the height being reduced by two metres to achieve a more harmonious balance with surrounding roof levels. According to the agents, the massing and especially the roof detailing had been '*jumbled up and made more [characteristic of the town]*'.

The applicants had been discussing a potential tenancy with the County Court who were looking for new premises. Their interest in this project added political pressure to the application particularly as the Council were keen to retain the County Court in the town centre rather than lose it to either the outskirts or even a rival town. Given their interest at a time of lower office demand in the town, obtaining the planning permission quickly was imperative. The pressure on committee Members to retain the County Court was '*always at the back of their minds*' and may have been a factor in the ensuing committee negotiations.

A contrasting or complementary design?

The new design polarised opinion between officers and involved parties and what may be very loosely termed the lay view which included most committee Members. The latter still believed the building was incongruous in its surroundings. In contrast the Architects' Panel returned a fairly positive approval of the building even noting that the scaling was largely appropriate for the area. By June, although officers were happy to recommend approval, committee Members had never been satisfied with the 'modernness' of the design, its materials and scale. The BPO had warned the applicants and agents of Members' *'serious concerns over the design approach adopted for this important site'* and their likely response to the design, despite much *'too-ing and fro-ing'* to negotiate its suitability.

Members were not the only ones objecting to the new scheme, it attracted adverse comments from several local bodies. The TCRA considered that the concrete and glass style was:

totally alien... more appropriate for an out of town motorway setting rather than in the middle of our historic town.

Similarly they objected to its scale which *'dwarfs all the adjacent buildings'*. The other major concern was the traffic generated by the development which echoed many other private individuals' comments. The Civic Society shared some of these views, that it was *'grossly out of scale and character with its surroundings and would be seriously detrimental to the visual amenity'*. The ward Councillor also objected, noting the adverse style and scale of the new building.

Members considered that the modern white render finish was not in keeping with that area of town, providing too stark a contrast with the many red brick buildings surrounding it. Brick constructions appeared uppermost in Members' definitions of the area's character and contrary to their officers' advice, they asked the applicants to reconsider a brick finish for the new building. Though the agents produced alternative schemes, they expressed severe misgivings over the destruction of the modern design's ethos and integrity, reducing a contemporary building with dramatic impact into a *'missed opportunity'*. However at this late stage obtaining the planning permission was of paramount concern.

Several planning officers, in retrospect, considered that Members didn't understand the principles and vocabulary of this modern design. Committee again deferred the decision, indicating an acceptance of the revision, though making it conditional on their choice of bricks. The applicants wrote to the Chief Executive, aggrieved at the

delays incurred and the disregard of process. Eventually the Members decided on suitable materials under the guidance of the conservation officer and the conditional permission was granted in September.

To date the building remains in model form alone since the County Court withdrew their interest influenced by a higher political decision. Subsequently a couple of firms expressed interest but have since rescinded their offers. The decision to build depends on having a definite tenant which may result in changing the potential use from offices to leisure. This in itself may prove difficult since the Council wish to restrict class A3 (leisure) uses in this end of town. Given this delay the applicants are considering later returning to the planning officers once the construction of the new building is underway to reverse or revise the committee's insistence on brick facing in the permission's conditions.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Whilst there were several contentious issues - demolishing a listed building and constructing a new building in a conservation area, again there did not appear to be great distinction between the DC and Conservation sections' approaches. In fact it would be difficult to separate conservation and planning concerns as they were perceived in terms of design and townscape, scale and massing in which both sections claimed complete competency. However the only officers in the authority possessing any formal design qualifications were in the conservation section which questions planners' training to make aesthetic judgements.

Despite planning officers' wishes to encourage contemporary design in the town, the applicants criticised the authority's lack of vision and progressive thinking in other areas: it was debatable whether the promotion of new uses and investment in the town received the same level of enthusiasm.

Regarding the Old School House, planning officers considered that *'it's a nonsense to demolish a listed building no matter how carefully you move it somewhere else - it loses its listed status, you can't have a brand new listed building.'* This particular DC officer could not recall any approvals for the total demolition of a listed building

in the town over the last 20 years - it was simply '*bad practice*'. While anecdotal, this may reflect a percolation of conservation sensitivity through the DC section.

Greater difficulty was encountered in judging the new development's enhancement of the conservation area. The DC officer considered that any new development was an improvement given the site's previous neglect. The applicant, whilst he personally supported conservation, believed the authority was unduly attempting to preserve everything. To his mind, the number of listed buildings in the town implied that conservation had been spread too thinly, obscuring the minority of truly worthy features in a haze of ill-informed preservationist attitudes. The agent described general public attitudes to the town as '*precious*', sentiments which resonated with many committee Members' perspectives, who were perhaps the most preservation-oriented group in this case:

...the message from the planning officers, the Chief Planning Officer, the conservation officer and even English Heritage was very much contemporary development and not sort of twee pastiche. I think the committee members, as many members of the public, are very nervous about design, I think that's a general cultural issue which is prevalent within a town such as this.

Certainly a desire for harmony and continuity in the towns' appearance appeared to stimulate most public objections over this design. Interestingly, most cited the development's contribution to traffic problems and pressure on central car parking facilities being as equally objectionable as its design. However in negotiations between the authority and developers, the car question was not nearly so prevalent.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The listed features on-site were perceived to have little interest by the applicant and agent. Whilst the poor state of repair was influential, they questioned these features' architectural justification for listing: the Old School House was seen as one of many standard Victorian designs - the minor interest in some carved stonework alone was not sufficiently impressive.

Visually these properties were considered very ordinary, maybe expendable especially in the applicant's vision to complete their main William and Mary style offices. In terms of townscape most respondents believed this would make an impressive gateway building to the West Bridge approach to town. Even the TCRA considered the Old School House's relocation from '*an incongruous site*' to a more

suitable setting on a quieter street was an improvement. Anomalously one local group noted that since the Old School House was *'early Victorian rather than anything older'*, its relocation was of minor significance. Support for the aesthetic merits of its relocation contrasted sharply with retaining its authentic value *in situ*.

The historical value of the listed features was also open to question. Few respondents expressed any interest in their history, which considering they were the last remnants reflecting the previous character of the area, one being a school, was surprising. In fact the development parties viewed such historical aspects pejoratively, considering that conservation areas protected things simply *'because they are old'*. One DC officer though, noted the historic interest of the former residential properties illustrating the town's development and the previous inhabitants' living conditions. However this was a lone opinion and contrary to the conservation officer who considered these features' value lay solely in their contribution to the street scene.

Admittedly these grade II buildings are not significant landmarks, but their familiarity, rather than fostering ties of attachment and identity with the town, may actually oppose their positive evaluation. The relative ubiquity of these small Victorian buildings in the town undermined the significance people attached to them. The grander, older, more significant listed buildings overshadowed appreciation of these minor ones, outstripping any consideration of their listed *'national interest'*: for these buildings that phrase appeared vacuous and derisory.

As mentioned above, planning officers were eager to encourage contemporary design into the town, they were *'fed up with dealing with pastiche buildings'*;

...once you get a modern building sitting next to [those listed buildings] I think there will be an interesting juxtaposition between the two. It's an interesting record of what's the sort of scale, that's what was there and this is what we've allowed - bigger, bolder - that's important I think.

Whereas the architects attempted to contextualise the design by taking cues from forms and materials further up this street, most lay observers objected to these inappropriate aspects. A representative of the TCRA noted the proposals were totally *'alien'*;

...there's an awful lot of glass, the fenestration doesn't make sense to me, it's totally out of keeping with any of the buildings in [the town] ...everybody, who has any feelings about [the town], agrees that it's wrong, it doesn't look right.

He considered the other developments on-site, along the river front, had all blended nicely into the fabric of the town (despite two of the three being conversions of existing buildings):

The style of them, the fenestration, is not so far removed from eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings, nice proportions that we like, that are acceptable... You can argue 'oh we must have some modern buildings' but I don't see why.

Not only did lay comments concern the design but also the materials and scale. The building stuck out, not only in size but Members were concerned that the building's white render finish was not in keeping with the predominantly 'red-brick' character of the area. Although there were concessions over these points and the committee Chair considered that they'd got the balance about right, other Members believed that just tweaking minor details and changing its external finish did little to mitigate the building's overall impact.

Driving their objections was a notable concern amongst committee Members not to replicate the same mistake of the 1960s in allowing stark new designs. Though feeling a moral compulsion to protect the town, Members' unease also revealed a notable humility about their competence to evaluate design issues. As the conservation officer noted, it was;

...far too adventurous for the Members. It was clear at an early stage that we were going to have problems with the Members and we did, they just totally failed to grasp it at all...

The applicant was particularly disgruntled by Members' extensive involvement:

You end up with a number of schoolteachers, shoe shop owners, retired people, choosing the bricks without any architectural training at all... I mean that has to be an argument for requiring professional councillors' advice... that's conservation area planning gone berserk.

The significant conflict between opinions about the new design from the professionals point of view challenges the compatibility of public participation in design matters but from the public's perspective illustrates that there is gulf between lay appreciation and the perceived esoteric world of architectural debate. The cumulative effect of these factors produces a process of assimilation affecting new design. The potential for juxtaposition and contrast within the urban context is reduced as a more familiar and established aesthetic is preferred to co-ordinate elements.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

While the local planning authority remains statutorily responsible for conservation, the development parties viewed a conservation ethos as essential to their operations, albeit for different reasons. The applicant considered building professionals, like himself, enjoyed working with the craftsmanship and good

quality materials of historic buildings, qualities which were often absent in contemporary buildings. These inherent qualities, in terms of design and construction, not only meant professionals respected the building, they produced a markedly higher value product. Any market operator would wish to enhance these qualities irrespective of local authority intervention. In contrast, the agent, noted that conservation regulation was essential since otherwise *'everybody would be just block building with no windows because it's nice and cheap with lots of space.'* Their brief for this new building was no exception:

It wasn't a particular aesthetic that they wanted, it was 4000 square feet.. it was more functional brief requirements than design, it was profit generation and construction that made it look like that.

The fact that office vacancy rates in the town centre were particularly high and set to increase made the applicants' search for a tenant all the more challenging. They felt hampered by the Council's lack of a long-term economic vision for the town. The agent too noted that the town's future rested entirely on developers' unilateral proposals rather than the authority's strategic vision for town's economy. The local plan certainly did not perform this role and it was dubious whether the Planning service engaged in these discussions either with the private sector or politically within the Council. Time and again the town was compared to its larger urban neighbours whose authorities appeared more dynamic in pursuing specific enhancements strategies. The applicants parodied the authority for believing that development was something that happened elsewhere, not in their historic centre.

Similarly they considered there was no corporate approach to conservation in the Council. The preferences of the planning committee tended towards 'prettiness' and conservation appeared restricted by this orientation. Most respondents, bar those holding political posts, observed a small-town, parochial mentality prevalent in local politics. Although the planning committee Members were not particularly radical or progressive, the applicants and agents believed they were the driving force behind this case;

...we find that it's not the local authority which leads, which sets the parameters, which sets the style if you like - it tends to be the planning committee members.'

However Members gave the impression they were willing to be led through design issues as ultimately they were conscious of their lack of design training. Generally they would defer to greater architectural knowledge unless they were emphatically opposed to an application - probably those of a more progressive or modern design. Here, lessening the visual impact of the new development was considered paramount. The conservation officer found this particularly frustrating:

I would have had it referred to the Royal Fine Arts Commission because I do think it is difficult in a parochial situation to make judgements about buildings like this because you've got Members who don't understand the architectural philosophy and you do need a third opinion, a better opinion from outside the town rather than from in-house because the political lobbying and so on tends to cloud aesthetic impact and knocks the edge off the design.

But is it just political lobbying which dilutes the design or does it reveal greater unease about how the Council wishes to use conservation resources to portray the town? The tendency towards 'safer' architecture provides a template which is easier for developers to exploit in driving through quick planning permissions. It is precisely this conformity which the professionals wish to move away from. Even in this case where the applicants hold a degree of local influence and status the safe route was chosen.

7.7 The Hotel

A summary of the development

Background

The property is a large three storey Georgian town house. Despite being grade II* listed in the original 1953 survey, it has suffered many unsympathetic extensions over the years, most recently encompassing a side addition and a mansard roof. Whilst the garden elevation has retained most of its original character, the road elevation is relatively modest and gives little indication of its listed status. The interior in contrast, boasts exquisite eighteenth century decorative plasterwork throughout the reception rooms which justify its grade II* listing. The property has been a hotel for the past 25 years with the current owner purchasing it in 1995: it is also his home.

The building is located in the town centre on a street leading down to the river. Despite the presence of other adjacent listed buildings and being within the central conservation area, the immediate vicinity appears run down following the relocation of a local car firm who still own most of the surrounding land, deteriorating warehouses and garages. To the rear of the hotel beyond a small public car park is the Telecom exchange building, a five storey 1960s block which dominates the skyline and totally overlooks the hotel's garden. The combination of these surrounding uses serve only to isolate the hotel somewhat from the rest of the town centre.

With only 11 rooms, the current owner wanted to expand the accommodation which, judging by the number of previously successful applications, would not appear to be a problem. Some planning permissions remained unimplemented, such as a still active permission from 1993 allowing a two storey rear extension. Though this was unsuitable for his business vision, his plans were dramatically influenced by an impending regeneration scheme for the area around the hotel.

The car firm had entered into partnership with the Council who had compulsorily purchased any vacant sites with a view to demolishing the remaining commercial buildings and regenerating the area with a scheme involving 90 new houses and flats. A new road serving the development provided relief access from an existing congested section near East Bridge. The authority were hoping to blend in the scheme with the surrounding historic fabric, maintaining a distinct urban feel with neo-Georgian terrace designs.

The hotelier supported this long-overdue improvement to the area, though only became aware of its scale and proximity when he approached the authority to discuss developing his backland. Two and three storey terraces would surround the hotel on three sides coming to within 1.5m of the hotel's gables. The prospect of being so overlooked robbed the hotel garden of its amenity and he began exploring more intense development at the rear.

Pre-submissions

In May 1997 the hotelier submitted a proposal for a new accommodation block comprising 40 bedrooms over 4 storeys. The footprint covered the entire garden and was actually larger than the main listed building - the designer did not respect the hotel's exterior since he considered the *'importance of the building lies in the internal plasterwork'*. Unsurprisingly the planning officer considered the style, size and scale were *'flawed'* and ridiculous. Despite a swift revision proposing a scaled down 24 bedroom annexe over 3 floors, the authority responded similarly:

...the unanimous opinion is that there would be a presumption against any large scale extension to the property. It is considered that ideally there should be no development within the rear gardens as this space is of great significance to the setting of the listed building and offers a pleasant green space within the conservation area. You are at liberty to consider a minor small scale, single storey extension...

Initial relations were also a little soured by the scheme's designer being a Council architectural technician, who in preparing this private scheme broke Council employment policy. The BPO took exception and following this debacle, the

applicant instructed new agents, a local private planning consultant. Ironically the consultant was formerly a senior DC officer in the Planning service and he had personally recommended the hotel's previous permissions.

Applications

By late 1997 the proposed annexe comprised 21 rooms on three storeys. Though designed to complement the hotel, it also copied the mansard roof which planning officers considered simply aped an inappropriate later addition. Undeterred, the applicant drew on widespread support from the local MP, the Chamber of Commerce, the ward Councillor and the Civic Society (who later withdrew their support). The authority's own Director of Tourism welcomed the scheme for the provision of budget hotel accommodation in the town centre. However there were some potent objectors.

Firstly, the car firm's agents for the regeneration scheme were concerned over the detrimental loss of green space since their new terrace *'accommodation is carefully grouped to enable the continued benefit to the surrounding occupiers'* of the view onto this open prospect. Contending the development represented a significant loss of amenity for their new residents angered the applicant since his hotel's privacy and amenity had not been considered when the authority had permitted the regeneration scheme to envelop his property. His agent was similarly infuriated as it was treating the hotel's private garden like public space. Secondly, the Environment Agency were concerned by the continual risk of flooding in this location and the reduction of floodplain storage capacity caused by this additional development. While the Agency had also objected to the larger regeneration scheme on the same grounds, on that occasion the Council considered the scheme's relief road through the town outweighed their objections.

In January 1998 the planning committee rejected the application on grounds which were to later form the Council's appeal defence. The applicant felt sufficiently aggrieved to consider legal actions when the Council acknowledged his garden could never be developed since it was detrimental to their partner's interests in the regeneration scheme. Notably, although this argument was underplayed at appeal since the Council believed they had a strong case on the other grounds, the agent considered this was to avoid exposing their inequitable, partisan stance.

The applicant instructed a further revision to address previous objections that *'the extension is out of scale with the main listed building and far too dominant in its setting'*. Following on-site discussions, the local conservation officer and an EH Inspector, in principle supported a small scale development to ensure the hotel's commercial survival. Although a small mews building was suggested as an appropriate historical design precedent, planning officers even more emphatically stated that *'the erection of any free-standing structure in the rear garden for extra hotel facilities would not be supported in this instance'*.

The new design comprised a two storey free-standing coach house with 16 bedrooms. The applicant maintained that the development would not be detrimental to the setting of the listed building because the hotel's exterior had already been extensively mauled. Despite an impassioned letter to all committee Members, the application was refused in April. The applicant was perplexed - he had addressed all the authority's concerns and followed EH's advice - yet the authority remained closed to negotiation.

The appeal

In response to the applicant's appeal, the Council's reasons for refusing the application were that it:

...is unsatisfactory in that the location, scale, height and design of the proposed building are detrimental to the character and appearance of the [central] conservation area and the character and setting of this important grade II* listed building...

...is unsatisfactory in that it is located in an area liable to flooding and will have an adverse effect on flood storage capacity in the area...

...would represent an incursion into the new urban space created by the new development approved on the adjoining land, constituting an obtrusive feature within that space, and harming the outlook from the residential properties within that development.

The Council contended that the central conservation area was *'outstanding'* and the grade II* hotel, though externally altered, still possessed significant interest. The development's *'almost institutional or ecclesiastical'* style was in no way subordinate or complementary to the listed building. They argued it was desirable to retain the open garden space to offset the density of the surrounding regeneration development. The flooding argument was further emphasised as the Environment Agency had subsequently become more vigilant after serious flooding throughout the Midlands earlier that year. While this factor had been over-ruled in the larger regeneration scheme no similar benefits arose from this development to counter the Agency's objections.

The agents argued the setting had been already significantly compromised by dereliction in the surrounding area and by many other unsympathetic buildings such as the Telecom exchange. Furthermore, since the regeneration scheme itself would dramatically affect the setting of the listed building and character of the area these were currently unreliable concepts by which to gauge the annexe's impact. Similarly the flooding issue seemed disproportionate to the size of the proposed coach-house in contrast with the waived risk over the regeneration scheme's 90 dwelling units.

The Inspector found in favour of the Council mainly because development would adversely affect the setting of a listed building and the character of the conservation area. The open space behind the listed building would be reduced by 50% and the design was not of a sufficiently high quality to positively contribute to the setting. Its styling paid *'little respect to the traditional detailing of the listed building and would have the appearance of a large structure unrelated to the character and appearance of the hotel.'* Though the local plan favoured the retention of open space in the town centre, its loss was not of paramount concern and this effect on prospective neighbours' amenity were not legitimate considerations as the regeneration scheme was not yet approved. Regarding the flooding issues, the Inspector supported Council policy - there was no ulterior benefit from this application to deflect the strong environmental objections.

Despite losing the appeal, the agents understood the Inspector's comments inferred scope for a smaller development and more appropriate design which respected the listed building and conservation area. At the time of fieldwork a smaller 10 bedroom two storey mews-type development was being drafted. Though the agents were optimistic, believing they had addressed all the Council and Inspector's criticisms, they expected to meet with a negative response from a Council brimming with confidence following a successful defence based on flood-risk arguments.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

In contrast to the other developments, there was a difference of opinion between the conservation officer and the DC section in this case. Surprisingly, the DC section were almost more conservationist than the conservation officer who in principle accepted the development's merit. The disparity was such that prior to the appeal hearing DC officers were unsure whose arguments the conservation officer would support. Although personal circumstances are not planning considerations, he expressed a great deal of sympathy for the applicant's predicament. DC wished to restrict further building in this vicinity for fear of over development, *'none of us thought there should be a building in the back of the garden.'* Conservation provided a convenient justification for this restriction but in the light of the surrounding regeneration scheme, were conservation issues being manipulated to ensure the success of the ulterior scheme?

Despite the immediate area's run-down appearance - one DC officer describing it as *'bloody awful'* - the authority appeared to consider its amenity and the annexe's impact on the conservation area almost as if the regeneration scheme was physically complete. Although planning officers stated that this scheme was not the main reason for refusal, its presence certainly appeared to produce double standards from the authority.

The contrast between protecting the setting and the intrinsic merit of the listed building also raised questions. Although it was grade II* for its impressive interior, DC officers were correct to follow PPG15 treating it as an integral whole:

...doesn't matter why it's II* - it is grade II* - that's it. Anything that took away from the character or setting or fabric of the listed building was not going to be acceptable.

Protecting the building irrespective of the variation between its fabulous interior and mediocre exterior proved difficult for the applicant to accept. He did not mind the new terraces' physical proximity since they didn't touch the hotel. However he could not mitigate the injustice of the authority considering the setting was not affected when they approved this regeneration scheme, yet his own annexe 16 metres from the hotel was considered so detrimental to the same setting. Similarly he couldn't understand why the authority had granted previous applications for

extensions to the building itself which radically altered its appearance, yet his wholly separate annexe was considered too intrusive.

A further contradiction arises between regeneration and preservation objectives. The applicant considered that although there were several neglected listed buildings in town, the majority were so evidently valuable that no one would consider demolishing them. Conservation areas in contrast were a superfluous imposition which served only to restrict development precisely in the run down areas of town which needed improving.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The hotel itself forces a reconsideration of the conventional perspective of listing value; externally it is unremarkable yet the internal features are a revelation. Those with access to the property or who know about the decorative plasterwork may have a totally different attitude towards the building. Indeed the owner considered he was merely looking after these features and could never contemplate altering them.

Although planning officers considered respecting the setting of the listed building was more important than the character of the conservation area, most respondents did not consider the building was anything special and certainly not a grade II*. It had been significantly altered over the years, the agent thought, *'even the setting of the listed building was over-played in my opinion, I don't think it is a very good building...'*. If the building lacked such external aesthetic merit, it questions the validity of protecting its setting, other than sticking to a rigid interpretation of policy.

Such sentiments may reflect that conservation requires special qualities to gain support. Familiarity in this instance counted for little, it was not a landmark building like many other grade II* features in the town. Certainly the building received little wider attention; the agent noting, *'it's got to be something major before the [public] start jumping up and down.'*

The design of the new annexe proved unacceptable to all planning officers, including the conservation officer. However it may be no surprise when the agent reflected that his client *'could not be persuaded to employ a decent architect'*. The applicant said himself he didn't really care what the building looked like so long as he obtained planning permission. He believed that if the planning authority wanted

a particular approach they should stipulate a satisfactory design from the outset - an attitude which would infuriate private architects.

Despite the prospect of being surrounded by pastiche neo-Georgian town houses, the agent lamented a further wasted opportunity make a contemporary contribution to the urban fabric. In contrast to the conservation officer and EH Inspector's preference for a small mews development, the agent considered this totally inappropriate:

I still think that we do tend to take the easy option and copy rather than innovate or design... I think it's more difficult to be innovative in a conservation situation... all right it fits in but... the system I suppose forces [planners] to go for the simple route.

He admitted to being embarrassed to go before the Planning Inspector with such mediocre designs for the annexe. He considered that in attempting to replicate features of the surrounding area the details of the building were far from true to its functions. Even in the new, post-appeal design, the DC officer had suggested an arch detail in the brickwork, which the agent considered highlighted that;

...conservation has become just really a copying of the best of the past and not relating it to its proper function, there's no need for that arch. You know in 300 years time somebody looking at that building is going to be thinking what's that arch there for?

Essentially the main criticism he levelled at local conservation practice was the authority had no courage in *'imposing our particular stamp'* on the town. In contrast to the progression of historical styles which characterise the central conservation area, with many contributions from the 1960s and 70s, there is no representation of contemporary buildings over the last 20 years. Effectively we are leaving it *'to the next generation to decide what they want to do with it.'*

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

The pressure to redevelop this particular area and the Council's interest in securing a regeneration partnership, whilst being technically marginal issues, were perceived by some respondents to influence the Council's approach. The applicant accused the Council of double standards between his application and the regeneration scheme, a bias determined by the relative strength, power and status of the local firm who owned the surrounding land. This is indeed a grave accusation though his own attitude, irrespective of the regeneration scheme, may have contributed to the degeneration in relations with the authority.

A couple of local authority respondents described the applicant's approach as one of *'naiveté and greed'*. In maximising the development's potential either his, or his initial agent's disregard of the conservation constraints appeared to set a negative framework for ensuing discussions. The applicant admitted he just wished to obtain a planning permission, he saw design issues as the Council's responsibility. In fact his neglect of the annexe's aesthetic aspects reflects his approach to defining the town's character mainly in terms of its tourist/leisure and retail attractions. In fact he noted that opportunities to attract further investment in the town centre were being stifled by the Council's restrictive interpretation of conservation.

The case certainly highlighted tensions in applying Council policy regarding town centre investment and retaining historic fabric. More significantly there appeared to be different standards applied to the annex and regeneration scheme applications depending on the desirability of the political outcome. Some respondents noted that refusing the annexe application had become a political matter since the development could disrupt the regeneration scheme, to which the authority had committed a significant investment of resources. Unfortunately this vested interest led to accusations of the authority lacking impartiality in considering the application. The flood risk had been waived for the regeneration scheme, yet it appeared relied on disproportionately for the annexe application.

In representing the democratic interest, the applicant believed the committee Members were weak and ineffectual, providing little critical scrutiny or opposition to the BPO. The agents echoed similar concerns of the tight control emanating from the head of the Planning service. His influence affects the Members too, who as noted before are not particularly progressive when it comes to new development in the town centre and the criticisms of neo-Georgian pastiche are encountered once again. A particularly restrictive interpretation of planning percolates throughout the service, *'they just shelter behind the local plan because it's simpler, making the local plan the material consideration.'* However this negativity would appear to reinforce the applicant's feeling that it is one rule for his development and another for the regeneration scheme which will encroach further on the setting of the listed building.

7.8 The Terrace

A summary of the development

Background

The property lies in the middle of a grade II listed Georgian terrace just behind a main thoroughfare into the town. This part of town covers the former grounds of the Abbey which accounts for the street's inclusion in the central conservation area. The house itself was owned by an elderly lady who had been a resident of the street her whole life. After moving into a residential home, the house lay empty, in a poor state of repair and requiring a significant degree of modernisation. Nevertheless, it still proved an attractive purchase for a local estate agent who privately undertook the renovation works, courting objections from the local authority but more forcibly from the neighbours.

Each terrace property has an outrigger extension which in covering half the rear yard, creates a symmetrical pattern along the whole terrace and visually separates the properties. Those adjacent to this house have single storey extensions, rising to two storey extensions further up the street. Although the majority are contemporaneous with the main building, one or two are more recent (post war) additions.

This property's poor state provided an opportunity to remove its old extension and enlarge the ground floor living space by building across the whole width of the rear yard, therefore bridging the gap between the individual properties. Since this covered the width of the house, the agent proposed removing the existing external rear wall to make the ground floor open plan: this inevitably involved removing an existing Georgian sash window.

Initially the authority were reluctant to grant listed building consent since the scheme involved too great a loss of historic fabric - the window and a major part of the ground floor rear wall. Neighbours were similarly concerned and wrote several letters summarising their objections:

The proposed development would not conform to this pattern. It would fill this adjacent yard and would, I believe, alter the nature of the terrace when viewed from the rear. I am unaware of the reason for the designation of the conservation area but I believe that the form and scale of the proposed development would be out of sympathy with the existing property and the appearance of the listed terrace.

Other neighbours were concerned about the adverse effects of other such minor changes in the area; *'one only has to walk around the corner... to see how an unsympathetic extension to the side of the terrace will offend discerning eyes for generations.'* Other sentiments highlighted how the proposal contradicted the conventions of respecting the whole terrace:

As the terrace is grade II listed it would be true to say that the existing residents have all tried to keep any changes to their properties within the keeping and spirit of the original design... For those of us who have tried to remain faithful to keeping the houses as near as possible to their original intent, this proposal is a poor piece of design which we feel would not do justice to this fine Georgian terrace.

Though the authority was considering refusing the application, the applicant revised the proposals after negotiations with the conservation officer. Reducing alterations to the rear wall and retaining the original window satisfied the authority regarding the loss of fabric. Over enclosing the side yard and disrupting the outriggers historic pattern, the conservation officer considered that introducing glazing into the new roof over the former yard below would reflect that it had been an open space. Subject to these amendments, the authority could approve listed building consent. However the neighbours did not share the authority's placability and considered that none of their previous objections had been answered:

It remains a substantial brick built extension covering the full width of the property and with a substantial roof, albeit with a skylight. If the original proposal was not in keeping with the dwelling's listed building status for these reasons then the revised plans do not address this concern...

In recommending approval to committee, the DC officer's report stated that since the site was not visible from the road:

The proposed extension is not considered detrimental to the character of the listed building. Other properties in this terrace have extensions in the rear yards, less sympathetic than this one now proposed.

The street facade was considered the *'most important'* elevation and the DC officer did not concur with neighbours' continuing objections. After planning committee approval in July 1998, the building works were completed by the end of the year and the property sold. Seeing the finished article, the neighbours feel their objections were well founded. Although the extension is competently executed in the correct materials, it breaks the scale and symmetry of the terrace's rear elevation, only setting a precedent for further disruptions to the historic pattern.

Analysis of attitudes to conservation illustrated in this case

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Most of the applicant's dealings with the authority were solely through the conservation officer. While an expert is required to consider the proposals, there is a risk that DC perceives conservation as just issues concerning small scale minor developments in highly specific circumstances.

It was the scope of the external alterations which polarised opinion. Being in a listed terrace, respecting the building's fabric was essential, though the qualities of the surrounding area were perceived differently by various respondents. The applicant considered that it was evidently a desirable area to live, though this was largely due to the impressive facades of the terraces' elegant streetscapes. However local residents offered a more holistic view, considering that protecting the rear of the properties was equally important in respecting the character of the conservation area.

Unfortunately for the residents, the authority agreed with the applicant which led to accusations of the conservation section being incredibly '*wishy-washy*' in protecting the terrace and the conservation area. One respondent commented of their previous experience dealing with the authority, '*we could have built Disneyland out the back there and they would have never come back to check*'. He also noted there appeared to be little urgency or coercion used to support the essential conservation controls in the area. In fact most parties were surprised, even the applicant, over how far the extension was permitted to encroach over the rear yard, thus disrupting the historic pattern.

This upset neighbours who had retained period features and detailing on their own properties out of a sense of respect not only for their present enjoyment but also for the buildings and their future occupiers. Although conservation controls had not restricted their household improvements and had accepted these provisions in good faith, conservation possessed insufficient mettle to subject a commercial developer to the same controls, when required. In contrast the applicant stated his support for conservation too, however he railed against the fanatical preservation lobby in contrast with the more 'practical' and realistic approach he encountered at the authority.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

All respondents considered the front of the terrace to be untouchable partly from a sense of having lost many familiar buildings in the town. For the applicant this elevation was the main selling point and required no alteration - indeed recognising its architectural merit ought prevent any unsympathetic treatment.

As mentioned above the main objections to the scheme concerned its extension affecting the rear elevation and yard. While neighbours stressed they were not against a modern extension, they had liked a radical design built further up the terrace, this one was a hybrid of traditional materials in a bland functional design. The applicant admitted his concern was focused on the internal rather than the external aesthetics. He believed that the rear elevation, *'was not something that people would be particularly concerned about, it's not something people sit and look at'*.

It would appear that the extent and accessibility of the public gaze does influence or at least can be used to justify or deflect criticisms of these more extensive works. To some extent the conservation officer shared this opinion which aggravated neighbours who thought the authority *'couldn't give a monkey's about what happens at the back'*. The residents felt the terrace possessed a characteristic symmetry which was totally disrupted by the new extension. The symmetry of the backs was an essential part of the terrace and moreover the character of the conservation area. Despite not being visible from the street they argued that conservation area protection ought to encompass all aspects of the area. The applicant considered that since the original pattern had already been compromised by some other, lower quality extensions, his design was not a significant disruption.

Local residents' opinions contrasted with the professionals not only over the contribution of the terrace to the conservation area but also in the higher level of quality they wished to apply to alterations in the area. They were disappointed by the official line, noting there is no encouragement from the authorities to become interested in conservation; *'maybe we're our own worst enemies in a way as we're so passive about it and take a lot of it for granted.'*

Whilst the applicant considered conservation related solely to the architectural interest of buildings, the neighbours perceived their properties rather more as reflections of previous users and uses. Tiny features in the buildings, for example a name and nineteenth century date scratched on the window; *'I mean it's neither*

here nor there but in a sense it gives a connection with history'. Equally the historic interest of the buildings in the town's development provided a tangible and visible '*passage through time*' which interested them. Moreover they felt that the local authority had not respected these qualities in recent developments in the town. Concentrating on the form and function of the town had somewhat left the historical qualities which make the town unique, neglected and under appreciated. In contrast, the applicant was less persuaded by the temporal value of the features and dismissed the argument of respecting the fabric for posterity as being too abstract for building practice.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

The economic incentive to obtain the house and renovate it is testament to the desirability and the proven saleability of listed property in this residential area. The period features, while they may have been worth maintaining for their intrinsic value, lend status, character and individualism and can add to the house price. However the features must look impressive and aesthetically pleasing to have this effect; their authenticity is less vital.

There were anecdotal responses regarding the extent of work permitted by the authority in contrast with the extent of permission had the work been undertaken by a private householder. Since the applicant ran an established local estate agency, his relationship with the Council was seen by some as unhealthily close due to their frequent contact and commercial relationship. However this did not prevent the applicant being critical of the Council's attitude to new architecture in the town, and their preference for the safe replication of existing styles.

7.9 Concluding remarks from the case study

The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader land-use control issues

The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

Conservation appears to enjoy a good standing within the planning service. Its ethos has evidently percolated through DC operations - several of the developments studied illustrated the correlation between conservation and DC officers' views. Indeed most officers perceive conservation being more than a statutory responsibility, though in this sense conservation is not 'separate' or 'special' - it is an essential planning activity in the town. This climate of formal policy and professional support for conservation, and moreover applicants' realisation of this culture, engenders greater acceptance of the higher standards demanded by the authority over development in the town, such as requiring archaeological reports. As the Friary case illustrated, the authority can use conservation to negotiate a more acceptable development scheme.

However despite general support and frequent convergence of planners' views, the conservation culture of the authority is highly influenced by the personalities involved and their often contradictory interpretations of conservation's role. The independence of the conservation officer may reflect personal priorities but does it reflect a more significant disparity with planner's perceptions of conservation's role?

Perhaps as the Borough is a smaller planning authority, the distinct differences between the last two conservation officers become more significant. The current officer, in pursuing a more flexible interpretation of conservation, has moved away from his predecessor's preference for DC and consent casework. He considers the larger restoration and regenerative projects to be of greater importance than unduly worrying over minor works and alterations to buildings in the town. This approach has often conflicted with the BPO's emphasis on conservation providing planners with a further level of regulation to ensure development conforms to the local plan.

This contrast perhaps reveals more about the authority's DC section than conservation, leading to a surprising situation whereby the conservation section officers consider themselves the more proactive of the two sections. Whereas DC was arguably just an administrative function measured by quantity and efficiency,

they considered conservation ensured the quality of planning permissions by entering into lengthier negotiations with applicants from the outset: DC officers were seen as more passive, letting developers set the agenda.

The difference is reflected in the working relations between DC and conservation. Despite a formal arrangement, DC's consultation of the conservation section depends on the personal discretion of individual DC officers. However the autonomy of the conservation officer has contributed to a more casual and *ad hoc* interaction between section officers, thus DC officers may inadvertently find themselves with greater responsibility for determining conservation issues. They may not consider consultation worthwhile over smaller issues, in which case the conservation officer considers it dangerous for planning officers who have received only minimal design training to attempt to second guess conservation's response. He has noted this has led to unacceptable situations where DC officers pursue more dogmatically preservationist arguments than conservation principles can sustain.

The spatial focus of conservation controls

Several professionals within and outside the authority noted that the Borough operated a very traditional approach to built environment conservation. Being a 'recognised' historic town, the authority was perceived as resting on its laurels. Though conservation was considered a 'given', the emphasis in practice was seen to concentrate too heavily on attending to listed buildings, almost to the exclusion of other components in the urban fabric.

The actions and even the explicit support of many planning officers revealed a preference for this fairly traditional conservation role. Recognising the wider environment has not been easily accomplished in practice, largely through resource constraints. There are very few conservation area character appraisals covering the town and there is a paucity of authority staff who have formal design qualifications. While many planning officers characterised urban design as the uniting discipline between DC and conservation, conservation staff considered they did not have the influence outside their small sphere to promote it and that DC did not take it seriously enough. The prominence of quality urban design rather than conserving buildings *per se* was illustrated in the Friary and Bank cases whereby protecting the overall view of the town was of paramount importance. Obviously

this was of greater concern with new development, but these instances blur where planners' and conservationists competencies merge.

In contrast, the County were pursuing conservation in the form of environmental management strategies. If there is a preference amongst Borough officers for a more traditional conservation role, does this inhibit practice developing a broader perspective to tessellate with this revision in strategic priorities?

The extent of acceptable change

The change of conservation officers introduced a more flexible approach to determining acceptable change in the environment. However this created some tension with other planning officers who displayed more familiarity with conservation providing definite standards of control - regulating rather than encouraging change in the historic fabric.

However the current conservation officer distinguished between *'the rottweiler school'* of conservation whose confrontational approach towards applicants extended to arguing over seemingly minor details, with his own more 'progressive' partnership approach. His flexible approach whilst successful in promoting the re-use of buildings created uncertainty both for planning officers and applicants, who felt that the goalposts were continually shifting as the conservation officer responded to various development pressures. Some applicants reportedly considered the conservation officer *'a soft touch'* since in attempting to encourage their renovation works he had permitted a significant degree of alteration to the fabric.

Even within the conservation section there were mixed responses, some maintained the more principled traditional approach. Some advocated the revitalisation of buildings being their principle goal: repairing buildings was commendable but finding suitable users for them would ensure a longer term contribution to the town. With the latter objective, more extensive alterations are generally permitted to the historic fabric to accommodate these new uses and users.

Thus although respondents claimed widespread support for conservation in the authority, they were actually promoting distinctly different strands of conservation under the same name. It led to circumstances, illustrated in the Hotel case, when the DC section pushed a harder, more regulatory interpretation of conservation

than the conservation section, who were tolerant of more intense development. This split can result in planning officers reinforcing a restrictive interpretation of conservation in the majority of instances where they believe that they can handle the conservation issues themselves.

Perhaps this preference for a more traditional conservation role is reflected in a planning officer's comment that while the RTPi emphasised planning as 'enabling' service, he felt the local DC function had been turned into '*a neighbourhood protection service*'. Perhaps planning is just satisfying wider public perceptions of what role conservation ought play in the town?

The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

Many local residents appear supportive of conservation's contribution to the town, though the reasons usually cited were the maintenance of a particular way of life provided in the centre of town, encouraging small high-quality retailers and residential uses. Aside from the evident landmark value of the town's historic buildings, many Members justified building conservation since the town's historic image was a valuable backdrop attracting residential and commercial users. Protecting this image contributed to deflecting the intense competition from neighbouring towns to attract businesses.

A major concern reflected perceived mistakes made in the 1960s when many prominent old buildings in the town centre were demolished for modern replacements. The shadow of modernism's aspirations for progress appears to hang over the consciences of residents who remember these changes. For Members this fear of improvement via more radical or contemporary designs turns many to advocate a more conservative approach to conservation's role. Some Members view planners with a little scepticism - officers are not necessarily local and thus do not care so much about the continuity of the town. Although applicants described this predilection as '*precious*' and '*possessive*', many respondents noted that the general public didn't actually care a great deal about the built environment and would only express an interest if some important building was demolished. Even in an historic town, the consensus supporting conservation has its limits.

The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

The interpretation of features' interest

The development cases predominantly involved the introduction of new elements into the historic townscape, rather than alterations to historic fabric *per se*. As such the conclusions to be drawn regarding the interpretation of features' interest relate more to existing features' interest in the broader environment. While this emphasis reflects the nature of new applications in the town it is interesting that context, over fabric, has proved so significant.

In terms of the balance between architectural and historic interest, most respondents distinguished the town by its variety of properties of different ages. Generally the older properties were valued the most, simply for their age and their survival. Thus the medieval remains were more prized than the Georgian properties whilst the value of the 'more recent' Victorian buildings remained quite eclipsed. Buildings' superficial appearance of age, rather than their detailed history, was the more significant factor, with many respondents reflecting the so-called 'antiquarian prejudice'.

Generally the appearance of the town rather than its fabric was the paramount concern. The views of the town, whilst comprised of buildings, involved more than simply acknowledging the architecture of its constituent parts. The more protecting views is emphasised over just protecting buildings, the less adequate a practice based on listed building consents appears to address this more holistic conservation of the town. Whilst conservation area character appraisals would have assisted enormously in this exposition of value, few had been produced.

However there is a tension between protecting the appearance of the town and the interpretation of character in this process. Ironically, some DC officers considered certain areas' character was so obvious it obviated the need for its formal appraisal. For them, character was defined by the predominant style of buildings within an area. Whilst architecture does contribute to character, this opinion restricts the consideration of broader environmental context. The development cases in particular have shown acceptable new design has retreated to the Georgian style - it fits in with the predominant building style but neglects the areas' character which not only includes a diversity of building styles, but urban spaces, functions and general morphology.

This is particularly difficult given DC officers' enthusiasm to promote new architecture in the town, yet other respondents' scepticism over planning officers' competence in the design sphere which often led to contradictions between officers. Some local architects noted planners' disinterest and almost abrogation of interest in the quality of new architecture and alterations to listed buildings to the extent that they were no longer upholding the public interest in ensuring the quality of development in the town.

The hierarchy of significance

Local interest in the town is perceived as sufficient to warrant the town's attention nationally as one of *the* historic towns. Local character is highly regarded by many respondents, in contrast to Authority A where the inherent quality of local interest was perceived with more scepticism. Structure Plan policies to protect the towns' significant views and skyline (rather than any specific buildings) emphasise the regional significance of the town's character. In fact it is difficult to perceive a distinction in attitudes towards the more prominent listed buildings since the prolific local interest is taken as evidence that these features ought be nationally respected.

The physical presence of more modest listed buildings appears to carry little public appreciation. With such a wealth of truly impressive buildings, the listed buildings of less obvious quality, even though they may have fine interiors such as the Hotel, are more likely to remain unrecognised and like the Old School House taken for granted. Features require special and distinctive aspects, usually aesthetic, to raise awareness amongst the public and even to alter the attitude of those parties involved with that building.

Most of the development cases illustrate that the style of architecture rather than the physical presence of particular buildings defines what is considered familiar to the town. As noted above the Georgian character dominates many respondents' perceptions of character, a preference for familiarity in the new means the Georgian style has come to represent a 'natural' continuum for the town's identity.

The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

In the authority, there appears to be as significant a distinction between planning and conservation professionals as there is between the professionals' view and the

lay public. A loose differentiation of conservation approaches could be presented as an academic interest largely concerned with formal aesthetic and architectural value of buildings contrasting with conservation as a 'craft', oriented to the integrity of the structure and its technical construction.

Evidently personal interpretations are highly influential especially given the smaller size of the planning service. It is curious that with an apparent increase of conservation specialisation, their advice became more tolerant of change. The DC officers maintained a fairly traditional interpretation of the value which conservation should protect, the conservation officer took a more tolerant view of change and further still, both EH officers actively encouraged change: expectations of professional opinions had almost become wholly inverted.

Turning to the public's expressions of value, from the development cases there was certainly no shortage of opinions expressed albeit from a vociferous minority. However while the public may have considered that they were contributing to the public debate on conservation, many professionals bemoaned the lack of public debate over conservation's contribution to the town's future. It was generally perceived that to the public, conservation meant replication, whereas the professionals involved with conservation were attempting more innovative approaches to development.

Public comments tended to display a broader consideration of conservation as a means to retain particular uses and functions in the town by maintaining the buildings which housed them. Thus rather than a design matter it was only a means to an end. In contrast, there was a general sentiment from the planning authority that such was the idealistic nature of much of the public's comments, the value of consultation was potentially diminishing. This has grave implications if in considering the public's comments to be irrelevant, the planners reinforce a disregard for public opinion.

Aspects of heritage valuation

Perhaps most significantly there was a distinction between the design preferences of professionals who wished to encourage a move away from new developments' ubiquitous historicist design and the lay public who preferred this style since it fitted into the town better than strident contemporary design.

Professionals cited the variety and contrast of the different architectural periods as one of the town's main defining characteristics: it was a quality in itself worth recognising. However it is incongruous that one of the strongest criticisms levelled at the authority was its tendency to permit homogeneous new design in the town. The reliance on a particular retrospective style for many new contributions to the town would appear contradictory and counter-productive. The nature of contextual design certainly as interpreted by Members' preferences, rather than planning officers', was to merely replicate selected familiar aspects of the town.

However the reason for this preference constantly returns to the nature of 1960s development in the town. Many timber frame buildings, neo-classical and Victorian public buildings were replaced with examples of modern architecture which continued the contrast between building styles in the centre. Despite winning recommendations and awards at the time these buildings are now loathed and cited as the worst abuses to the urban fabric. The fear of repeating such mistakes in the name of progress appears to have paralysed debate over contemporary design in the town. Many professionals consider the current generation has contributed nothing to the town centre and several consider that the retro-chic favoured by the authority will prevent the town ever being able to boast any future listed buildings from the late twentieth century.

Furthermore, there would appear to be a generational aspect to this concern. Those over 50, who more likely witnessed the 1960s alterations, were profoundly affected by memories of the features that had been lost: those under 45 who had no recollection of the previous townscape were less hesitant to endorse overtly contemporary additions. Without an experience of these alterations it is perhaps difficult to empathise with the feeling of loss having placed faith in a progressive planning vision of renewal.

The extent to which political and economic factors influence conservation issues

Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

There was a perception amongst respondents that the authority was not particularly dynamic in encouraging or influencing economic development and the business environment in the town. In the face of stiff competition from other local towns,

concerns grew that the town was losing retail and commercial services, though the authority were not perceived as acting to reverse or confront this leakage. Conservation was not necessarily seen as an obstacle in itself, though in contrast to a neighbouring historic town, conservation was not perceived as contributing to a more progressive vision for investment in the town. The authority was seen to lack coherency between important functions - namely planning, economic development, tourism and leisure - which are closely linked in an historic town.

In the developments cases, historic features represented a very saleable asset whose obvious development benefits for applicants often furnished a better relationship with the authority. However it does lead to increased conflict when users' needs may only rely on the retention of a few more visible features. Yet despite the capacity to trade off historic status, many respondents felt that the authority did not promote the town as well as many other historic towns which remained almost recession proof, reliant on tourism and high-value, small-volume retailers. Neither the town's economy, nor the authority's budget could support the current level of conservation measures without external assistance, though EH's replacement HERS funding targeted areas beyond the scope of the traditional historic town. With a relatively small local authority conservation budget it was feared the town would fall through the gaps left in the absence of subsidy and economic buoyancy.

The influence of political agendas

While the political support for a traditional conservation role appeared to be reasonably healthy amongst Members, it would appear that it had lost ground over the last 15 years to other policy priorities. This could be explicable by the authority's relatively early boom in conservation activity and having targeted the main priorities, subsequent politicians had seen these tasks accomplished and the impetus had naturally waned. However many respondents noted the Borough was still resting on its laurels.

Certainly this effect was reflected in the County Council who had retreated to the margins of built environment conservation, their focus now predominantly driven by sustainability and LA21 priorities. With less strategic lead from the County, the Borough appears content with a more regulatory conservation approach, though the BPO's fairly strict adherence to the development plan has caused much consternation locally. Pursuing a fairly strict approach to policy interpretation in

planning has conflicted with the more flexible, partnership building approach of the conservation officer. In a small town of parochial politics, if formal support is not necessarily forthcoming, then conservation cannot afford to pass-by opportunities to win friends and influence as wide a circle as possible. Indeed the role of the conservation officer could almost be described as part evangelical - in attempting to win hearts and minds. This is particularly poignant given the non-corporate structure of the Borough Council which made co-ordinating planning's aims across the authority more difficult, particularly given the perceived weaker position of the BPO in comparison with other Heads of Service.

Significant questions raised by Authority B's conservation culture

The two local planning authority case studies purposely contrasted two urban contexts for the implementation of national conservation policy. Some of the tentative conclusions from the study of Authority A are replicated in the experiences highlighted in Authority B whilst other aspects provide a distinct contrast.

- The moral weight of the conservation ethos appeared to be endemic in thinking throughout the planning service and also amongst most external respondents.
- Conservation was essential to planning largely because of the town's historic status, rather than any special awareness created by the presence of a distinct administrative arrangement for conservation controls.
- The duty to respect the context of this historic town often meant there was a greater correspondence between the views of the DC officers and the conservation officer.
- However there were a variety of interpretations of what role conservation should play depending on the beliefs of certain influential individuals
- The conservation officer was attempting to encourage a more regeneration-oriented approach to conservation, entertaining a flexible approach over the treatment of buildings' detailing.
- In contrast the DC section could argue a more preservationist line, fulfilling the public and BPO's expectations of a more traditional role of protecting historic fabric in the town.

- While the service lacks areal management strategies, conservation arguments are curiously most incisive over protecting the general appearance of the town in terms of townscape: the public certainly backed these arguments.
- Unpicking local interest from the national interest proved particularly difficult as those features of greater local renown, by virtue of the town's historic status, were also considered of importance to the nation.
- In contrast to the intensity of grade I and II* historic buildings, more recent or modest local/familiar listed buildings appear relatively unloved.
- There was a general public preference for new development to fit in and harmonise with the existing surroundings, for fear of replicating mistakes the stark contrasts of the 1960s.
- Whilst harmony of style was seen as a characteristic by lay observers, most design professionals in the town lamented the proliferation of new buildings' historicist designs; they saw the towns' diversity of buildings as a positive characteristic in itself.
- Conservation activities were more closely linked to satisfying economic development objectives for the town, thus fulfilling the authority's wider goals and potentially achieving more political support.
- However a perception remained that conservation was losing out at a strategic level to the increasing emphasis on sustainability and LA21 initiatives.

With such a wealth of data throughout the three spheres of fieldwork, particularly between national and local perceptions, the following chapter collates and dissects the findings in detail, continuing to analyse the salient issues in relation to the conceptual framework.

Part III

'...social science is afflicted by double jeopardy - damned for stating the obvious when its findings support conventional wisdom, condemned for being political when they do not.'

Gordon Marshall, Chief Executive of the ESRC
(Richards 2000)

Chapter 8

Comparative Analysis

8.1 Introduction

Throughout the fieldwork, the conceptual framework has provided a structure for analysis at each stage of the process from data collection through to a comparative analysis of the three areas of empirical investigation. Its ten themes, emerged from issues identified in the literature review which highlighted a degree of contradiction and uncertainty regarding values in conservation practice. Originally presented as a spectrum of polarities in which different positions and arguments could be positioned, the framework also offered the flexibility to accommodate unforeseen issues and conflicts as the fieldwork progressed.

As noted in Chapter 3, there has been a notable change of emphasis in the presentation of these themes as the thesis has evolved. At the outset they were presented as a series of polarities, highlighting the tension around a particular issue. However as the fieldwork progressed, it became necessary to accommodate wider issues which related to a particular theme but involved other issues in addition to the one specifically identified from the literature review. To reflect this broadening of issues, the themes' headings were changed: these revised headings have been the ones presented throughout the thesis. Though the framework provides a robust basis on which to present the issues raised in the fieldwork, in creating a heuristic scheme of representation, overlap between themes was inevitable. For this reason, the ten themes were condensed, producing three research issues for the fieldwork to address.

This chapter compares and contrasts the evidence from the three areas of fieldwork - the national interview survey and the two local planning authority case studies. The trends and relationships which emerge from the analysis are presented in the full ten themes of the conceptual framework. In relating particular concerns to the relevant existing literature the evidence challenges many assumptions made about conservation practice and the justificatory norms supporting it. By the end of this chapter, the significant overlap of certain issues

reveals several pervasive theses which are further discussed in relation to the research issues in the concluding chapter.

8.2 The relationship between conservation and statutory planning

Summary of findings

The national interview survey reveals contradictory perceptions of the relationship between conservation and statutory planning. In principle, conservation was considered central to any system of land use regulation. However this was not accompanied by a corresponding desire to wholly integrate conservation measures further into planning practice. Rather the majority view, particularly with regard to the listing process, considered its separate identification and management system highlighted the special, and almost morally superior, qualities of conservation. Without such distinction, conservation would be lost in the milieu of '*mere*' planning issues. By implication, planning was an inappropriate mechanism in terms of the extent and scale of available controls and the shorter timescale over which it considered land-use changes. Furthermore this questions planning professionals' competence. Most considered it preferable for local authorities to have a dedicated team of conservation specialists, though it was widely noted that this too created potential marginalisation and conflict with others. In contrast, the representatives of those organisations more closely involved in planning emphasised conservation's concern for townscape and urban design - vital areas for planning practice and '*key roles*' for planners. Upholding the wider environmental protection for conservation areas for example, was seen as a fundamental function which planning, with its broader compass, could most suitably accommodate.

Arguably, to differing degrees, neither local authority placed conservation central to their planning service. In Authority A, it appeared that the separate conservation section was becoming marginalised in the statutory planning process. The diminishing conservation staff meant fewer contributions to strategic initiatives and DC officers' increased responsibility for conservation decision-making, particularly for developments in conservation areas. The filter of DC officers' own discretion in referring cases for specialist conservation advice is very significant, especially as the decision to refer a case depends on officers' level of design training and

experience. These changes follow statutory conservation being politically seen as restricting vital economic redevelopment in the town itself. In contrast the Implementation section, which assembles the authority's grant applications for external regeneration funding, did not suffer to the same extent as the statutory conservation functions. Although the conservation adviser's standing in the service may have been reduced, the conservation section was often described by other planning officers as the '*authority's conscience*'. This statement is important since many planning officers characterised their planning service as a mechanism to balance competing issues with efficiency; there was no particular moral ethic to planning. In their view, conservation was no more 'special' than any other issue.

Authority B operated a similar system of a separate conservation section acting as consultees to the DC section though, perhaps inevitably in a traditional historic town, interest in conservation was more prevalent throughout the planning service generally. Curiously the relations between conservation and statutory planning activities were not necessarily consistent, the interpretation of conservation could differ considerably between the conservation officer and other planning officers. In contrast with previous appointees, the current conservation officer was more eager to pursue regeneration-oriented project work which generally lay outside the statutory planning framework. Similarly he encouraged the re-use of buildings in determining listed building consents, controlling the minor details of buildings through DC work, though undoubtedly of merit as a conservation activity, was of less personal interest to him. The resultant delays in obtaining his advice sometimes led DC officers to adjudicate applications without reference to the conservation officer, who considered DC often inadvertently advocated a more preservationist approach. This potential disparity, with the conservation officer moving away from the regulatory aspect of planning, appears absolutely contrary to the 'control culture' of the planning service nurtured by the Borough Planning Officer (BPO).

Discussion & implications

While PPG15 and many of the national respondents emphasise the close relationship between conservation and planning, it would appear that opinions at a local level do not necessarily share this view of proximity. Admittedly many national respondents were expressing views about the ideal location of conservation within practice and noted this was often not realised. Significantly, there appeared to be

few corresponding local initiatives or desire to centralise conservation in this way into authorities' statutory planning practice.

Whereas national respondents considered the separate system for listed building consents emphasised conservation as a special consideration, local DC officers saw conservation as one of many competing issues. This is vital since in both authorities, DC officers' discretion determined the contribution and influence of conservation. The orientation of planning, particularly in Authority A, to operate efficiently in applicants' interests, often precludes conservation if the case can be processed quicker without its consultation. Conservation issues such as altering external features in conservation areas, or minor works to listed buildings are dealt with by DC planners. Evidently major works and all applications affecting grade I and II* buildings will still involve the conservation officer but increasingly DC officers are facing greater responsibility to determine conservation cases. This is definitely the trend in Authority A where senior managers are encouraging conservation to move towards the type of regeneration-oriented projects which Authority B's conservation officer is pursuing unilaterally.

It is precisely the areas in which conservation protection is felt to be weakest - the control of minor detailing which cumulatively erodes areas' character (EHTF 1992) and by which listed buildings suffer '*a death by a thousand cuts*' (national respondent) - that are passing out of the hands of the specialist in these authorities. If planning officers have the necessary urban design skills and townscape awareness to deal with these concerns then no problem arises. However the research highlighted that planning officers referred applications for specialist conservation advice when they approached the limit of their own architectural or historical knowledge. Unfortunately this reinforces a perception of statutory conservation being solely concerned with significant architectural history, usually concerning a building's physical structure. This relationship will be discussed in the following section. It is restricting the role of conservation in planning to a particularly traditional one, contrary to the contribution envisaged in most recent guidance addressing the impact of the sustainability agenda on planning (EH 1997).

8.3 The spatial focus of conservation controls

Summary of findings

It is to be expected that at a national level respondents would be more closely involved with listing processes since the organisational hierarchy pre-determines this concern. This bias is interesting for the relative strength, legitimacy and thus defensibility which listing is considered to possess over conservation areas. Protecting the actual historic fabric of a building and ensuring the quality of the most minor of treatments were of paramount concern - facets which as outlined above, respondents considered planning could not address. Despite this primary concentration on listing, a significant minority considered that the weighting of the protection systems was slightly anomalous. Ideally, areas should receive principal attention since buildings were only ever components of wider living historic environments. The potential clash between the two priorities is illustrated in responses to the increasing numbers of listed buildings and conservation areas. The former was universally welcomed as appreciating more recent architecture, whilst the latter was viewed by most as local authorities' misapplying the original concept of the conservation area. Notably respondents from planning oriented bodies emphasised conservation areas as an under-appreciated vehicle for townscape and environmental management strategies to complement planning. The question for the case studies was to explore whether the different focus - on protecting buildings or areas - provided any evidence of distinctions in professionals' practice and results.

In Authority A, the organisation of the statutory conservation responsibilities directed the conservation adviser's concerns towards listed building consents and the relatively building-oriented work of DC applications. Concentrating on structural detailing appeared to suit his architectural expertise and personal preference. An areal approach to conservation tended to be province of the Implementation section, who contributed less to statutory planning processes. Cuts in the conservation section's resources had reduced their ability and opportunity to contribute strategic conservation guidance in the form of building specific design guides: more importantly there were few character appraisals across the authority's 50 or so conservation areas. With such minimal identification of areal character it is perhaps not surprising that with DC officers handling all applications, there was often a lack of recognition over the value of conserving areas' character. A telling

illustration was the Yard case, where the conservation adviser specifically appraised an unlisted building on listing criteria to make the appeal statement stronger instead of mainly relying on its legitimate contribution to the area's character: only EH's late intervention bolstered support for the areal concept. However this priority can be reversed, as is highlighted by the Square case where EH over-ruled the local conservation adviser's valuation of this grade II* listed building: EH considered that its contribution to the area rather than its intrinsic structure was the prime consideration. Equally, in the Lodge case, where the surrounding area was considered so bad, many DC officers questioned the value of saving a listed building in its midst.

Authority B's conservation officer took a different approach from his predecessors, consciously moving away from concentrating on the details of isolated buildings, since it neglected the vitality of the wider area, which indirectly could reduce individual buildings' demise. Despite this rhetoric, the County still viewed the Borough's planning service taking a traditional and orthodox building-centred approach to conservation. There was no town centre manager, no environmental management strategy and in regard to statutory responsibilities there were few comprehensive character appraisals on which to base any conservation responses or strategies. In terms of professional relations between conservation and DC, there appeared to be a significant overlap of competency to protect the townscape. In the Bank and Friary cases, officers and other parties did not appear to separate conservation and planning issues - the over-riding concerns was the look of the schemes in context. Such an approach emphasised the link which urban design provides between conservation and planning, however those few officers with design training considered the discipline was woefully under-represented in the planning service.

Discussion & implications

It was noted earlier that distinguishing different countries' approaches to conservation turns on the importance attached to protecting isolated fragments or broader environments. After considering professionals' perception of the merit and contribution of the English control processes, the listing system appears superior at all levels. The distinct superiority of listing expressed at a national level was not countered in local practice by support for the local control, autonomy and flexibility offered by conservation areas. Indeed most respondents operating at the local

level did not praise conservation areas at all, despite assumptions of the mechanism's popularity with the public.

Given this inherent bias in favour of listing, does the case study evidence address whether conservation activity is limited by the parameters defined by listing's treatment of features as independent artefacts? If conservation is mainly dealing with specific buildings objectively as individual components, does this conflict with or even preclude addressing local areal value and aspects of the historic environment which are not necessarily derived from a historic building *per se*. Furthermore does the difference between the two regimes create professional distinctions in the interpretation of conservation's contribution?

To answer the first question, it would be difficult to conclude that listing is the comprehensively dominant approach, however the concepts which distinguish conservation areas from listing - that is character, morphology, place identity - appear inauspiciously under-developed in these local authorities' planning practice. Some planning officers considered the character of particular areas was 'so *obvious*' as to render its assessment quite superfluous, yet further guidance in relation to the architectural or structural details of a building was essential. There also appears to be some residual cynicism, even amongst planning officers, about the added value which conservation area status bestows on an environment. It certainly does not command respect in the same way listing '*rang the bell*', to quote one commercial developer. This evidence would tend to contradict Worthington's assertion that '*conservation is now about place-making*' (1998: 175). The EHTF also hails the importance of place management, yet the evidence suggests that conservation in these authorities' statutory planning practices is not well positioned to achieve this. Obviously this depends on what constitutes 'place-making': for example in Authority B, the concern to respect the (albeit stereotypical) views of the town may constitute an attempt to work with a vision of 'place'.

One notable legacy of the development of conservation planning is local authorities' autonomy to identify local areas of character. Largely to ensure rapid designation and protection for the many historic areas facing development threats at the time (Kennet 1972) this has ultimately backfired since, nationally and locally, insufficient attention has been given to developing strategic and abstract concepts on which to base areal conservation practice. For example the work of Conzen (cited in Larkham 1996) addressing precisely this field, whilst intense, has influenced a select group of academics but has struggled in its application to planning practice.

The autonomy of local authorities has excused central Government from any prescriptive directions to interpret areal value. With significant budget cuts in local government, the resources have not always been available to pursue such initiatives and local planning authorities have struggled independently to develop these concepts in a systematic way. DC planning officers do so sporadically depending on applications; conservation sections were too stretched to develop strategic concepts. Although conservation officers address areal value most often, their personal concerns may operate at a wholly different level. Instead of providing a possible bridge between conservation and planning disciplines, concepts of areal awareness and analysis falls into a gaping chasm between them, thus only increasing the need for national guidance. However of the national organisations concerned with built environment conservation, most are concerned with the architecture of specific buildings. There remain too few national organisations interested in developing the contribution of areal concepts of value in planning.

8.4 The extent of acceptable change

Summary of findings

Surveying national respondents, the emphasis was firmly placed on conservation's concern to ensure '*organic change*'; as one respondent noted, conservation is '*the art of intelligent change*'. Indeed the national amenity societies (NAS) in particular, seemed eager to distance themselves from being portrayed as opposing change. Notably those in senior positions within EH reinforced the view that conservation was spearheading the regeneration of many urban areas. Respondents concerned with more direct management of historic features, noted a schism between these politically motivated proclamations and their own professional passion for the country's historic buildings. The extent to which political manoeuvring influences conservation is explored below (8.11). Defining 'acceptable change' also depended on the regime of protection. Scheduled ancient monuments required strict preservation for their inherent didactic interest, while listed buildings and conservation areas were able to accommodate increasingly greater changes respectively. However some respondents, particularly though not exclusively the NAS, considered local planning authorities' management of change was far too liberal. Conservation demanded a longer timescale in which to consider change,

one which most politicians and planners, bound by expediency, appeared incapable of realising. Of contemporary contributions, despite the celebration of rare, bold architectural vision, generally the design quality of new buildings was felt to be low across the country. Respondents were divided whether new design was a realm for other professionals' judgement or that since architectural appreciation was universal, there was no distinguishing the ability to comment on the quality of old and new buildings. Arguably this distinction reflects the current difficulties in defining good modern design which respects context, yet simultaneously avoids its replication. Respondents considered the public actually contributed to the problem through their preference for traditional forms, motivated by the type of preservationist attitudes which professionals themselves claimed they had left behind.

Local Authority A evidently displayed operational conflicts between the competing policy presumptions in favour of development and retention in PPG1 and PPG15. While senior managers favoured moving towards a regenerative approach to conservation based on projects in the Implementation section, the conservation adviser remained passionately committed to protecting the architecture of the region against unsympathetic redevelopment. Perhaps this division reflects the same type of split between professionals and senior managers within the national level. The conservation adviser was unshaken in the face of colleagues' criticisms of his *'purist'* even *'preservationist'* approach. For most planning officers, acceptable change was determined by the situation and function of the individual building subject to conservation control. This is a far more flexible consideration of acceptable change in contrast to the conservation adviser who believed in objective conservation standards. However when do planning officers stop doing what they perceive to be 'conservation' in accepting the transition from repair to reinvention of a building? The Lodge, although listed, was effectively a new building following its reconstruction. The majority of the interior of the grade II* listed building in the Square was removed with EH's approval. In both instances the degree of change was wholly unacceptable to the authority's conservation adviser.

Paradoxically in Authority B, the views of the conservation officer and planning officers were almost reversed over acceptable change. The historic context of the town might create more resistance to change - certainly some developers had been frustrated by the authority in the past. In contrast to the tight application of controls fostered by the BPO, the conservation officer assumed a more flexible approach. The variation in standards caused some trepidation amongst other planning officers

who did not feel able to rely on a consistent, principled approach from conservation. Latterly, applicants noted this too, with comments intimating that the conservation officer could be 'a soft touch' in negotiations. He determined acceptable change in relation to the outcome of the overall project rather than controlling specific interventions in the fabric of the building: the latter uncompromising approach he labelled '*the rottweiler school*'. Ironically, the DC officers could inadvertently advocate a more traditional and restrictive interpretation of acceptable change than the conservation officer, as in the Hotel case. One planning officer noted that whereas the RTPI cites planning as an enabling service, the Borough provided more of a '*neighbourhood protection service*'. In the Terrace case however, the conservation officer appeared to hold an irreconcilably different view to disgruntled neighbours of a disproportionately large extension which he had considered acceptable.

Discussion & implications

It is clear from the conservation literature there is no place for a strict preservationist approach to listed buildings and conservation areas. Recently the debate appears to have moved on apace as national agendas place an increasing emphasis on the regenerative aspects of urban development (EH 1998, 1999). Although sustainability has been similarly introduced into national policy statements (EH 1997) it is yet to influence these local authorities' building conservation practices. Rather than review arguments between preservation and conservation, perhaps a more appropriate debate is the relationship between conservation and regeneration. While these are closely linked in the recent literature and certainly in the responses of many national respondents, the evidence amongst those more directly involved 'at the coal face' of conservation reveals that not all professionals share this direction or inclination. Indeed there are some significant conflicts between the means and the ends, if the priority of conservation is moving towards encouraging re-use over the treatment of form and fabric.

Though their conservation responsibilities are roughly similar, the conservation approaches in the two local planning authorities are the exact opposite of those anticipated. Authority A's planning service is politically driven towards encouraging development and senior managers wish to orient conservation towards a similar regeneration emphasis. However the conservation officer opposes this, based on a more traditional, high quality treatment of the historic fabric, despite the town's non-

traditional conservation image. In Authority B it would appear that regardless of the historic context, the conservation officer is far more enthusiastic about ensuring historic buildings remain in use. The extent to which DC officers are left to perform a traditional conservation role (which Members and the public would probably expect of the authority) is wholly anomalous. The difference between the consistency of objective standards and allowing greater flexibility in relation to the historic fabric illustrates the influence of the conservation officers' personal attitudes and principles. Their own professional outlook, rather than perhaps the moral compulsion of treating certain types of historic environment in a particular way, has a far greater effect on the whole orientation of the authority.

The development cases illustrate the breadth in defining 'enhancement' of conservation areas: it practically allows any issue, economic or aesthetic, to be argued in an application. In the absence of character appraisals and enhancement strategies, it is easier to avoid contesting 'enhancement' by arguing that the application does not preserve the character or appearance of the area. Thus the lack of a conservation strategy further reinforces a restrictive application. The introduction of new architecture is a particularly difficult field since in both authorities, it is frequently only officers in the conservation section who hold any formal design qualifications. In both case studies though, notably more so in Authority B, planning officers were frustrated in encouraging new design by conservative attitudes in the town and particularly in the Planning committees. Thus despite officers' counter-emphasis, contemporary design inflamed existing prejudices from the unpopularity of new development in the 1960s and 70s. With this in mind, it is debatable whether conservation can be successfully aligned with regeneration as a positive process of enhancement.

8.5 The basis of conservation's support and legitimacy

Summary of findings

At a national level, respondents saw conservation enjoying immense popular support. The prolific degree of public interest was necessarily reflected politically by an underlying cross-party consensus, which had allowed practice to develop with a minimum of political interference. The mandate of such firm public interest and political acquiescence justified the development of practice by conservation

professionals on the public's behalf. The popularity of conservation added weight and legitimacy to this executive model of practice, especially for the NAS respondents who considered they were *'pushing a public position'*. However some respondents also recognised that despite conservation's popularity, the public perception of the conservationist conjured associations with the *'slightly cuckoo brigade'*. Significantly, public support for conservation appeared to depend on the respondents' conception of the public. Generally, support was perceived from those who possessed the education to appreciate the artistic and historical objects of conservation. It was also noted that much of the drive and active interest for conservation was expressed by the residential owners of old buildings. Outside these spheres, apathy rather than action characterised the public's response to conservation. However all sections of the public were seen to react negatively when conservation restricted altering their own private property or concerted when conservation provided a means to prevent damage to their own property or amenity from a neighbour's development. This questions whether the public interest in conservation is merely a coalition of shared private interests?

The general socio-economic composition of the two case study towns may reflect divisions in the public's interest. Authority A's planners considered that generally the level and quality of public contributions to planning was low, thus perhaps it is not surprising that conservation suffered a corresponding diminution of interest, despite the presence of a Civic Society in the town. Received comments were mostly objections, negative responses to particular incursions or development threats. The lack of positive contributions reinforced the conservation adviser's view that the public were *'not very visual people'*, a criticism he also levelled at other planning officers. As the sole arbiter of conservation value, his responsibility was to protect those features which the public, if they possessed the relevant skills to appreciate them, would want conserved. However in the development cases, the reasons for conservation cited by members of the public were often outside the grounds permitted within conservation (and in some cases, planning) legislation. This is covered in a later section (8.8) but the prominence of buildings' uses and functions motivating public concern for their value and character is an important distinction. This can work against conservation, as in the Lodge case where the public viewed conservation as an inappropriate solution which did not address the wider social situation.

Planning officers in Authority B (and several applicants) characterised local residents as possessing *'a drawbridge mentality'*. This is perhaps due to the high

residential rate in the relatively small town centre and the vocal contribution of this section of the community to planning debates. High property prices in the town centre would indicate residents were the professional middle-classes whose active enthusiasm for conservation was largely recognised by national respondents. The local Civic Society was far more active than its counterpart in the non-traditional historic town, scrutinising and lobbying the planning authority, it also had a significantly larger membership. There does appear to be a prolific culture of cynicism amongst many members of the public long following the 1960s and early 70s uncompromisingly modern architecture which replaced many notable historic buildings in the town centre. A reluctance to embrace contrasting new development has created a culture more sympathetic to preservation, though perhaps based on an idealised image of the town. Certainly these '*precious*' attitudes characterised public reaction to the Friary and Bank developments, where fitting new design into context was fiercely contested. More significantly though, there would appear to be strong public interest also expressed by several committee Members in protecting a way or quality of life in the town. Conservation was supported not just for art-historical reasons but moreover for wider objectives to ensure the continuity of local identity and livelihoods.

Discussion & implications

Given that respondents at a national level place such reliance on the legitimacy that widespread public support confers on conservation, it is vital to address two questions. Firstly, does this widespread support actually exist? Secondly, does the support correspond to the scope and nature of legitimate conservation interest perceived by professionals? If there is a negative answer to either question, does this undermine conservation professionals' exclusive definition of conservation justified by upholding the public interest? Need there be a correspondence with broader public interpretations?

Certainly the political consensus supporting conservation claimed of national politics becomes far less tangible in local politics. The case study towns vary tremendously, in Authority A conservation is perceived as more of a hindrance, in Authority B far more positively: these political aspects will be discussed below (8.11). In both authorities, planning officers were sceptical about the value of public participation, since the quality of comments were often of a low quality and did not comprise planning issues. Attitudes towards public involvement

unconsciously followed a liberal model whereby planners assumed that relevant interest groups would coalesce and participate. Often the contributions are partisan and far from representative of the general public, particularly those from the respective Civic Societies. Despite the introduction of the Civic Amenities Act in an era of participatory planning it would appear that the potential for such an approach has not been realised.

On the evidence of public contributions, it is difficult to say categorically that conservation is actually of widespread public concern. Those public comments deemed admissible, tend to share the same language as the conservation professionals, which tends to reinforce a notion that conservation does connect with the public, though this tends to be the property owning, well educated middle classes. This is just one section of the public, other sections may well be excluded, a consequence reinforced by planners' attitudes to participation. A lack of comments does not necessarily mean that the public are not interested, just that the language, access and the pre-determined scope of what constitutes a legitimate contribution may inhibit certain sections of the public. These distinctions shall be considered later (8.8), though the possibility of disparity seriously undermines the position of the conservation professional, both at local and national levels. If they claim to be acting on behalf on the public then it is only appropriate that they ought consider the diversity of public support, rather than limit concern to those who already share their values.

8.6 The interpretation of 'features' interest

Summary of findings

Whilst certain commentators highlighted the lack of scrutiny and policy reviews regarding the statutory criteria of special architectural or historic interest (Delafons 1997b), respondents at a national level enthusiastically supported the term. The flexibility and comprehensiveness of the phrase, obviated the need to formally review it. Respondents noted some very definite boundaries to its scope, essentially distinguishing formal objective evaluations from wider cultural value. Only the former approach could quantify the values required for a rigorous system of protection according to a *'rolling consensus'* of objectivity amongst professionals. These professionals' ability to identify and judge features' inherent interest was

instilled through a similar education, training and professional culture, producing a higher correspondence between opinions. However respondents noted their own considerable discretion in forming, even leading the definition of these objective phrases. For example in the listing re-surveys of the early 1980s, some listing professionals confessed a *'virtual U-turn'*, broadening historic interest to include features reflecting social and economic history in addition to those of formal, national history which had previously dominated the term's interpretation.

In contrast, whilst the cultural importance of the built environment was a prime justification for conservation, the subjectivity of wider cultural interpretations of environmental value prevented their inclusion in any formal administrative appraisal of value. Indeed broadening concepts further, encountered considerable resistance. A minority of respondents recognised identifying cultural value to be a particularly weak area of English practice, partly as planning law is focused on physical elements connected with land use. Defining and protecting historical value can encounter this problem since even significant historical factors may not leave physical traces. However amorphous concepts such as character and place identity floundered against the more obvious and ascendant value of features' architectural value. Such associations lying outside architectural assessment were generally dismissed as nostalgic and sentimental despite reflecting strong cultural and personal attachment.

The debates surrounding 'special architectural or historic interest' in the development cases, perhaps because of the type of developments examined, highlight different considerations. In Authority A, the conservation adviser's main concern was arguably protecting the architectural integrity of buildings, particularly their technical construction. Respecting the fabric's authenticity, treating the building as an integral whole, stands in stark contrast to most other planning officers' opinions which were based on visibility. This raises two contrasts: firstly, the extent to which the feature is visible to the public and hence worth protecting and; secondly, whether the development looks acceptable, though not necessarily accurate or authentic. The emphasis on superficiality was reflected by many planning officers who, inadvertently expressed preconceived notions, stereotypes even, about the qualities a listed building ought to possess. Where, as in the Lodge or the Square cases, the physical state of the building did not correspond to the image of a listed building, it did not command the respect listing status ought convey: this in turn affected how the features were treated. In balancing architectural and historic interest, a further distinction was the extent to which local

historical value, in contrast with vernacular architecture, was under-represented in listing and local conservation strategies. For example, the contribution of the Yard to the town's morphology proved very difficult to defend in the absence of any assessment of historic character.

In Authority B, different issues were involved since the development cases mostly concerned new buildings in the historic context. There appeared to be less distinction between the conservation and the planning officers regarding the interpretation of value, perhaps because the predominant concern throughout has been the views and image of the town generally. However as noted earlier, there was little strategic guidance, and few character appraisals. Planning officers often considered that character was so obvious it did not require formal appraisal, but this is to simply equate character with the most obvious architectural evidence available: historic interest continues to play a far less significant role. Ironically, historic interest appears to be more passively regarded in a town with a wealth of historic features. Several respondents, notably developers, commented that features were protected simply because of their age rather than any discrimination of value. But perhaps more interesting was a feeling that emerged in several cases where Victorian buildings were not considered nearly as important as the Georgian buildings in the town. The image and stereotype of the town may be seen as invoking an 'antiquarian prejudice'.

Discussion & implications

Evidently, the responses across the fieldwork show that the statutory criteria are very flexible, though despite a firm belief in their strength at a national level, the diversity of value interpretations at a local level may actually suggest some weaknesses.

A belief in the universal recognition of features' inherent architectural value in contrast with their extrinsic social or cultural value is tested on two grounds. The first is the comparable subjectivity of listing professionals' rolling consensus with that surrounding cultural value. Either depends on a specific set of values held by a particular group of the community. Since professionals are protecting features in the name of 'public interest', this position becomes difficult to defend if the public's value interpretations which lie outside architectural grounds are often relegated and dismissed as being of little worth. The second is that if such variety is exposed within the objectivity of professionals' value interpretations, what is the objection to

at least acknowledge and further explore interpretations of extrinsic value?

One manifestation of the division between intrinsic value and extrinsic value is highlighted in relation to historic interest. A lack of physical evidence means discovering historic interest requires greater effort, thus often inhibiting its contribution either to policy formation or in the expediency of a specific development. Such omissions further emphasise the relative strength of architectural value in defining conservation value. It is also difficult to generalise standards for historic interest since by definition each feature is made unique by the historical events and circumstances which combine to shape its existence. Another restriction, illustrated by attitudes in Authority A, is an architectural stereotyping of listed buildings which can inhibit the consideration of value in other terms, such as cultural or social value. The image is often of polite architecture, of superior ornamentation or scale which may be worthy of (tourists') attention. If a listed feature is not considered up to this standard image or stereotype, it can be more easily dismissed as not being a worthy listed building and treated less favourably. The apparent reliance on superficial visible quality contributes to this perception. These arguments are particularly acute in relation to concepts which appear ill served by an orthodox reliance on intrinsic value, such as character and place identity which equally reside in extrinsic cultural attachment and valuation. It partly explains why conservation areas, in which value extends far beyond architectural terms, suffer such significant under-appreciation. Problems of measurement and access ought not prevent such initiatives, otherwise as Jones (1993) notes, the system of recognising value becomes merely a self-serving activity. Considering the local emphasis placed on the appearance of the traditional historic town, relying on the authenticity of fabric may not wholly correspond to the socio-aesthetic aims for conservation control.

8.7 The hierarchy of significance

Summary of findings

The survey of national organisations highlighted their inevitable disposition towards the 'national interest'. Most respondents commented that recognising and managing conservation resources required a strict taxonomy, a set of criteria by which features were identified and defended. However contrary to this resolute

defence of national interest, respondents noted several exceptions which may undermine it as a coherent benchmark. Firstly, in identifying listed buildings, only thematic twentieth century listings involved comparing features on a national scale of interest. The majority of listed buildings were surveyed by individuals operating under different committees' nominal national auspices. Secondly, the different routes of survey, thematic and also spot listing, created different pressures and motives for recognising interest. Thirdly, there were no explicit reasons in the list description defining the qualities which make the feature of national interest. Fourthly, there was no corresponding national commitment to monitoring controls or ensuring the direct financial support for features of value, only a tiny minority of buildings receive such national attention. If a grade II listed building requires essential but otherwise unfinanciable repair, its quality and grading may be reviewed to make it eligible for the restricted central funding available for grade I and II* features.

In contrast, whilst national interest is ardently defended, local interest fares less well. Acknowledged as an important foundation of conservation, its weak and apparent subjectivity in local policy and practice has created much scepticism. The incursion of emotive and intangible factors were considered too difficult to measure and accommodate in any system of recognition, particularly as they were often motivated by private property interests. Thus the concept of local significance to support and define conservation areas remained undervalued.

In the case studies, local significance was a difficult concept to identify, though not necessarily because of clouded subjective emotions. It was difficult to distinguish local interest from national interest, partly due to national interest itself being less than evident. In the development cases studied in Authority A for example, the awareness and respect for the national interest in a building or feature, was remarkably low. Despite the impressive facade of the Square's grade II* listed building, the national interest in the building did not appear to impinge greatly on the authority's considerations. EH's Inspector identified its 'national interest' based on his experience of comparable buildings across the region. Familiarity with the built environment for many respondents, especially those further removed from any involvement with conservation, appeared to engender apathy rather than affection. Taking familiar components for granted with little further cognition of their contribution was a common reaction, for instance public awareness of conservation area presence was low.

In Authority B's locality, the perception of the town being one of *the* English historic towns seemed to further blur distinctions between local interest and national interest. However the presence of such important listed buildings in the town had some unfortunate consequences for modest features and areas. Their contribution was perceptibly undervalued and their presence similarly taken for granted by many. The proposed relocation of the Old School House highlighted some discrimination towards its modest Victorian architecture. The Hotel, although grade II* listed for its interior, presented unassuming elevations which arguably affected an adverse treatment in relation to the surrounding regeneration scheme. In contrast to Authority A, there was perhaps a greater willingness amongst planning officers to assume a listed building possesses national interest rather than question its status. Despite local interest being subordinate to national interest, features still required distinguishing aspects to mark them out from the familiar and ordinary in peoples' conscious appreciation. Responses to familiarity were more evidently expressed in terms of a general favouring of a particular style or feeling of the town, rather than specific individual features. One notable exception remained the Terrace case, whereby residents felt aggrieved by the conservation officer's lack of concern for the more modest qualities of their grade II listed terrace.

Discussion & implications

Whilst national interest evidently provides a benchmark for the national respondents, in local practice it appears to be marred by obfuscation and false assumptions. Although it defines the extent of the state's responsibilities regarding listed buildings, the cumulative evidence from respondents suggests it is not a concept which provides a definite and credible indication in all cases. The different professional interpretations and situations in which national interest is applied, between various listors or between national and local conservation experts exemplify the scope for variation in defining significance. The division of grade I, II* and the majority grade II buildings and the state's involvement in their financial management, does not reflect a consistent national interest, if interest is manifest by actions as well as by abstract evaluations. Most of the responsibility falls to local authorities where upholding a concept of national interest in a feature is at best assumed and at worst not recognised at all. The practical assessment of national interest is arbitrated through the regional officers of EH which irrespective of its new structure, may imply that these assessments more closely represent a regional

contextualisation of interest.

If national interest is not as cogent as portrayed then what additional contribution does local interest play? Criticisms of it being weak and subjective are perhaps fair given the lack of formal guidance in local authority practice and officers' consequent reliance on their personal discretion and intuition in its definition. The present state of statutory planning appears to offer little scope to realise its contribution. Although familiarity is viewed positively by the literature, the evidence would suggest that the ubiquity of familiar features undermines any consideration of their particular interest. In relation to views and the composite whole, experiences in Authority B do illustrate some 'familiar and cherished local scenes', however this is still a passive and often unconscious evaluation until the scene is threatened. It appears to require an external force or recognition to catalyse a consideration of local interest. As seen in Authority A with the devolved listing re-survey, the external recognition of a national value in the local environment which had been hitherto taken for granted raised the conservation profile of local interest. Perhaps a similar role could be played by an external agent, possibly EH, providing a framework in which to highlight the local interest already present.

8.8 The influence and variety of knowledge and experience

Summary of findings

Reflecting opinions similar to those regarding 'special' interest, national respondents placed great credence in their professional rigour to maintain the standards and boundaries of conservation: this set them aside from the enthusiastic amateur. The application of general principles was considered of only marginal assistance because conservation involved a sensitive balancing of issues, requiring an astute exercise of professional discretion and judgement. Thus the professional craft of the conservationist, their 'eye' for value honed through experience, was paramount. However respondents noted that as the professional discipline became more complex, so the onus increased to ensure the public continued to understand the professionals' work. As mentioned earlier (8.5), this involved subconsciously dividing the public into those who have some knowledge and interest in conservation and the majority who are less well informed and possess less aesthetic sensibility. To address this, EH promoted various initiatives

through general education programmes and specific issue campaigns - to '*win hearts and minds*' as one respondent noted. These campaigns were to inform the public but also to promote discussion and awareness of conservation issues to consolidate public support. A contradiction arises between requiring this indirect popular support and encouraging the public to have more direct influence in conservation issues. Most respondents considered the planning system already offered the public sufficient access to contribute to local authorities' conservation decision-making and no extension of process or initiative was required. In fact the public's contributions were often considered to be nothing more than '*pure unalloyed nostalgia*' or sentimentality. The strength of these emotive responses was seen as excellent support for conservation but only when it buttressed a more legitimate architectural reason for interest. There was little willingness to explore alternative perceptions of interest which these comments may represent.

The local authority case studies revealed some significant discrepancies not necessarily identified in the literature. In both authorities, the development cases illustrated considerable professional differences between the respective local authority conservation officers and EH officers over the interpretation of features' value and appropriate treatment. While differences of opinion between individuals is inevitable, the extent of these differences, over the Square case and the Friary case, questions national respondents' reliance on a professional collegiality.

In Authority A, planning officers considered there was little local debate and minimal public interest in conservation; the public's contribution was infrequent and often utilised inadmissible language. Despite this, the authority did not appear to stimulate any public discussion. The conservation adviser considered he was protecting features on behalf of a '*non-visual*' public who, without exposure to any design education in their schooling, would nevertheless appreciate and support his professional judgement. However in the cases studied, the public response though written submissions and interviews reflected some different concerns and valuations. In the Yard case, public reaction to losing a restaurant in the town far outstripped any expression of attachment to the building - conservation arguments were subordinate to supporting the use's retention. Similarly where there was no current use through vacancy, as in the Lodge and the Square cases, the public perception of these buildings' worth declined dramatically. Although the conservation officer considered this reflected an inability to visualise renewal potential, in these cases where public concern centred on the building it focused on its use and external appearance, expressed in relation to townscape and broader

environmental concerns.

Public reaction in Authority B was similarly oriented to the general view and appearance of the town, though many respondents both inside and outside the local authority also regretted the lack of a debate and vision for the town's cultural and economic development. Planning officers considered much of the public's contributions were partisan, particularly the formal resident groups, and their suggestions unrealistic: participation was regarded as informing, instead of involving, the public. As in Authority A, lay perceptions appeared to attach significant weight to buildings' use in defining their conservation value. Several committee Members re-iterated this, that conservation was another means to ensure the quality of life in the town by retaining local commercial and other users. Similarly in the development cases, those listed buildings which were vacant suffered under-appreciation such as the Old School House. Interestingly Members were acutely aware of their lack of design training, especially in contrast with their officers. Members' preference was for development to 'fit in' to the town irrespective of criticisms against such pastiche architecture.

Discussion & implications

As discussed previously in relation to the extent of support for conservation, Fowler (1981) noted the overlapping intensity of interests in the past from experts to lay observers. The fieldwork may reflect a similar overlap concerning the type of values appreciated by experts and the lay public.

Notably, a distinction not particularly highlighted in the existing conservation literature is the extent of conservation experts' own difference of opinion. While this is inevitable given the impracticality of hard and fast rules (Earl 1997), the cases illustrate a marked difference between the respective local conservation officers approaches but also startling distinctions within EH's own officers' advice. Such disparities surely raise questions over the projected hegemony of conservation's professional culture. It is also significant for the internal relations in local authorities. Planning officers are often wholly reliant on the conservation officer whose personal preferences can hugely influence the authority's general practice.

National respondents may be happy to broaden appreciating value relating to architecture, but do exclude a significant public response that falls outside their

professional consideration. Most members of the public do not possess the language or rigour to express their sentiments in conservation terms. However the case studies show that aside from emotional responses, these lay interpretations involve considerations which the professionals would not consider 'legitimate' conservation values. The function and use of a building to a professional is peripheral and ephemeral in assessing value but the role of the building in a town appears to be of critical importance and influence in lay perceptions: use contributes greatly in defining 'character' of areas and buildings. The significance of use is illustrated by its absence whereby even vacant listed buildings are seen as lacking any value precisely because they are unused.

Lay perceptions also appear to place greater value on considering the general environment, the context of buildings rather than the buildings themselves. This may be due to the simple fact that a building's exterior is generally the only aspect on show. Despite wonderful interiors of listable quality, what access and therefore interest can the public be expected to have in such buildings? Thus while the professional is left to value the interior on their behalf, paradoxically areal considerations, which lay perceptions value highly, are the least well developed concepts in conservation practice, which in turn further exclude the lay view.

These issues have major importance for the relationship between professional and lay perspectives since they affect initiatives to involve and educate the public. While national organisations seek public support for their campaigns, this can be a one way transfer of information to legitimate the professionals' consideration of value. Public participation is considered a local authority responsibility but as shown, local authorities are hard-pressed to encourage such initiatives in respect of conservation, partly through existing cynicism arising from meagre public involvement in statutory planning processes. While access for the public remains reliant on statutory planning mechanisms, there would appear to be little chance of encouraging a two way exchange of information to contribute a lay appreciation of the historic environment.

8.9 Aspects of heritage valuation

Summary of findings

The widening interest in the past was welcomed by all respondents in the national interview survey as evidence of the public's appreciation of and support for conserving these features. The broadening of the listing process to include buildings less than 30 years old exemplifies conservation's correspondence with this interest: it is not limited to the ancient and archaic. Partly this is an inevitable process as each successive generation reassesses the contributions of their antecedents. When widening appeal was presented in terms of acknowledging different types of reaction or appreciation for these features, most respondents' enthusiasm notably diminished. In this sense, 'heritage' became viewed perjoratively as a debasing influence undermining the legitimacy of conservation. Many considered it was an abused and retrograde term which could be hi-jacked by disparate groups to sanction their naïve, irrational nostalgia in defending some obscure and eccentric interest. The side effects of heritage's commodification of the past, obscuring authentic features and confusing the real with the fake and tawdry, was a destructive influence on conservation. Such 'tweeness' saw a dumbing-down of the past's rich diversity in favour of synthetic, homogenous pastiche and reproduction imagery.

At a local level, evidence of the widening heritage influence was more difficult to identify directly, this being a particularly abstract concept. The influence of heritage in Authority A appeared somewhat muted, despite the overture of the new Chair of the Planning committee who wished to direct the Council towards using the area's heritage potential for developing tourism and cultural industries. Certainly the number of listed industrial buildings reflected the inclusion of 'less polite' architectural value. The conservation adviser believed conservation reflected an awareness of a human's orientation in time and space, however translating a metaphysical fundamental into development control responsibilities may prove challenging for conservation value restricted to the feature rather than considering personal experience. Another respondent commented on appreciating the local environment being *'in the blood'* and another felt somewhat excluded for not having a local or insider's perspective. These expressions did not appear to depend on concepts of authenticity or criticised aspects such as nostalgia, rather they were based on personal experiences of environments. Indeed the concern over visibility

even amongst planning officers proved of greater concern than features' authenticity.

In Authority B there appeared to be an ardent belief, contrary to professional opinion, that the town was characterised by a particular style, the Georgian, and ensuring sympathetic new development was a paramount consideration. The majority of building or planning professionals interviewed (inside and outside the authority) considered focusing on the visual and not the temporal continuity of the town's development was a fundamental flaw in expressing its character. The established diversity of buildings over hundreds of years created a responsibility to ensure that the twentieth century was equally represented. Without contemporary architecture there would be a distinct gap in the continuity of the town's evolution, a characteristic that was important to maintain. However many people in the town did not consider this continuity of contrasting styles a quality of the town *per se*. As mentioned previously, the impression of several 1960s buildings in the town centre created unease over the impact of brazen new design. The Friary case illustrated the strength of attitudes to ensure new development looked '*as if it had always been there*'. Several respondents believed the authenticity of this design didn't matter, criticisms of it being pastiche were irrelevant because it fitted the spatial context. Thus rather than highlighting a contrast in the temporal collage, it was consciously smoothed over. Similarly in the Hotel case, the annexe copied historical precedents to satisfy the planning service, despite the fact that the annexe was to be surrounded on three sides by entirely new development (which itself was neo-Georgian). Neglecting the diversity of the temporal collage could be wholly counter-productive - one respondent noted that even modest elements reflecting the town's previous users provided a '*personal connection with history*'.

Discussion & implications

In the development cases, practice appeared constrained and incapable to account for the heritage aspects of conservation value. The short timescale of land development is one factor but the more pressing concern is how conservation can acknowledge fundamentally intangible qualities which require examining peoples' experience of and associations with these features instead of necessarily the features themselves?

Whilst responsive to more progressive architectural value, any broadening of the type of appreciation of value in features is seen by national respondents as

undermining conservation's legitimacy. However the local planning authority case studies would indicate that in contrast to recognising the best modern architecture in listing, many respondents considered that modern architecture was why conservation was needed. This was not necessarily a reaction to architectural form but encompassed experiences of built environments in which a sense of place, identity and attachment had been profoundly disturbed by new development. This strength of reaction would suggest that people's experiences of the built environment, rather than an appreciation of architecture, contains potent types of valuation which could benefit conservation.

Another challenge exists to the concept of authenticity occupying such a central role to justify conservation. Nationally, heritage was seen as a threat since it was not considered genuine, but many respondents in the case studies were not concerned about the academic authenticity of features. Authenticity relies on an assumption that researching under-valued aspects of the built heritage extracts self-evident values from these features and brings this knowledge to the surface. This is the language used by many national respondents in relation to protecting unloved architecture. This assumes that values await discovery when really each successive generation creates these values anew, reflecting specific currents in society which will themselves mutate over time and circumstances. It is a contemporary cultural value, not an objective and neutral assessment. Once this is realised, then opposition to widening the scope of legitimate interpretation surely ought be lessened. Conservation then becomes a framework for parties to explore value rather than an imposition of one particular group's interpretation.

Similarly the preference for buildings to 'fit in' presented an aesthetic challenge but actually has more profound implications. If contemporary buildings are blended in to the extent they do not stand out, this minimises the contribution of the late twentieth century to the continuity of a town's identity. Firstly this goes against the qualities of scale, ornamentation or function which mark out historic buildings in people's perceptions of value in the urban environment. Secondly it means that a preference for 'fitting in' is creating a bland homogenous environment filled with new buildings that will potentially not attract any attachment or recognition in the future. By pursuing poor contextual development, conservation may be making the built environment less stimulating and diverse when these are precisely the qualities it ought enhance.

Rather than pillory heritage, it would appear that there are three ways in which a

heritage perspective could benefit conservation's objectives. Firstly, heritage encompasses a broader range of subjects for protection which can be equated to a wider environmental appreciation of context. Secondly, heritage studies focus on the experience of users of the subject matter, that is extrinsic rather than intrinsic value of features. Thirdly, heritage provides a reconceptualisation of conservation interest which is equally concerned with temporal relations - an identity with time being as important as place.

8.10 Economic pressures and their impact on conservation

Summary of findings

Respondents at both levels considered economic viability defined the circumstances in which conservation could make a contribution. However there were significant discrepancies amongst national respondents regarding whether economic considerations presented an obstacle for conservation, or whether harnessing economic vitality provided the reason for ensuring that historic buildings were maintained in active use. Most considered these were delicate questions more appropriate for local authorities because of the individual circumstances of each planning application which required a sensitive balancing of economic value against policy and non-monetary values. Respondents perceived EH to have changed drastically over a short period in its direction towards revitalising urban areas. Within EH, senior respondents promoted conservation's economic contributions, thus integrating it within a wider political agenda encouraging regeneration. An emphasis on persuading development markets to consider conservation positively helped ensure that historic buildings paid their own way rather than being '*state pensioners*'. However a significant number of respondents were perturbed by this emphasis, seeing the drive for change as a threat to historic fabric rather than an opportunity. They considered this regeneration emphasis was not necessarily the most appropriate leading message for local planning authorities who were characterised as ever compliant to sacrifice conservation to applicants' arguments of economic necessity.

National respondents also noted that features' economic obsolescence provided circumstances in which conservation required greater vigilance to protect them. Illustrated by the decline of the UK traditional manufacturing base, much industrial

architecture would have been demolished had not conservation initiatives raised interest in their protection. Thus despite working with markets, conservation also looked at the longer timescale, providing a stop gap to protect features. Portraying the value of these features contributed to raising economic interest in their retention. Though development markets were now more inclined to revitalise historic buildings, some respondents noted this was attributable to exploiting an easier route to obtain planning permission than necessarily a genuine concern for the features.

While the economic situation in the case study towns is markedly different and perhaps it is unfair to make comparisons, it does have a significant influence on the priorities of the respective Councils. Evidently it determines the development pressures in the region but it also affects the authorities' internal resource allocation. Authority A's planning service operates to encourage and facilitate local development with the creation of a special Economic Development Unit to drive this priority. Senior planning managers are directing conservation towards a regeneration approach through the Implementation section, although the conservation adviser considered in some instances the availability of other grant regimes actually encouraged destructive works to historic buildings. A respondent in the Council Executive emphasised planning's priority to accommodate applications' economic viability which consigned conservation and design issues to the margins and at greatest risk of exclusion. Certainly in the development cases this seemed to affect the valuation of features. In the Yard case, the applicants initially convinced the planning officer the building could be replaced as it lacked any redeeming features, the economic reasons for redevelopment were paramount. The location of the Lodge created a ceiling to its redevelopment potential and a complete disregard for its conservation value despite acknowledging that such a listed building on the affluent side of town would have attracted considerable commercial and residential interest in its restoration. In the Square, the applicant considered his business would benefit immensely from the kudos and associated value bestowed by the building's impressive facade. However since the rest of the grade II* building made little economic contribution he saw no point in its retention. In these cases it would appear that economic influences two aspects - the wider appreciation of its value and the planning officer's relative balancing of conservation and economic issues.

In Authority B, many outside the authority criticised the Council for its lack of development vision and insensitivity to business needs. There certainly was not

the same pressure to encourage investment opportunities as felt in Authority A. A neighbouring town's ascendancy posed a major threat to maintaining the study town's commercial and service functions, though conservation made prominent contributions to the local economy through leisure, tourism and retailing's reliance on the historic image of the town centre. Whilst conservation was not a marginal issue, the authority was not viewed promoting the town as successfully as another larger historic town in the region. Notably, the general context and ethos of building in an historic town appeared to highlight the respect of developers in approaching new works. Perhaps such commercial recognition was equally due to the greater saleability of conserved and period features here, providing some guarantee that extra costs incurred for their conservation could be ultimately offset: in the Bank case, the applicants were willing to move the grade II listed Old School House rather than demolish it. Such acceptance does reduce the need to formally enforce conservation though the message it is not necessarily universally received. A local architect noted that conservation is needed to stop developers building windowless blocks to maximise profit. This said, the revised national funding, which excludes traditional historic towns with a current CAP scheme, would test the commitment to conservation of both local developers and the authority.

Discussion & implications

The economic viability of development has a profound effect on conservation, not merely in determining the opportunities for its contribution. It divided professional opinion at all levels, questioning whether rushing to embrace the regeneration agenda presented a threat or a lifeline for historic buildings. In the development cases, economic viability also influenced the interpretation of value of a particular feature in question, increasing or diminishing the weight accorded to its interest to fit in with development proposals. These concerns return to question the function of the planning system - whether it is a tool of regulation (illustrated by listed building consents) operating to uphold principles or is it a service to facilitate the market in land development which requires flexibility and expedience.

The history of urban development in the UK has illustrated that property markets have been incapable, untrustworthy or unwilling to respect conservation, therefore state regulation is required to ensure that important elements of the built environment are not changed without due consideration. To ensure the maximum success in regulation, a priority must be encouraging endemic conservation

thinking so that markets perceive conservation as producing economically attractive results. However a stumbling block is the disparity in timescales and measurement of value between property development and conservation.

Conservation professionals pride themselves that their consideration of the built environment is on a far longer timescale than that demanded by property development pressures. Thus one acute problem for conservation is to highlight the value of particular types and categories of buildings (e.g. mills and factories) as they undergo an inevitable period of low economic viability following the loss of their original use. However this consideration faces the same uphill struggle which characterises the balancing of conservation value against economic viability in development control applications. They cannot be measured on the same scales, and as Larkham (1996) notes, the hard facts and figures of economic assessment will always prevail over the relatively weaker and less tangible conservation benefits. However the difficulty in comparing conservation and economic value has further implications in local authority decision-making, partly accounting for the marginalisation of conservation. Conservation issues are amongst the first to be sacrificed depending on the orientation of the local planning service to prioritising local economic development.

Thus what is required is a robust framework in which to present and weigh the wider benefits of conservation to the community against the more closed argument of the economic viability of applications. Admittedly few have attempted this - Lichfield (1988, 1997) classified a scheme implemented by UNESCO for management guidance - but there is no evidence in either local authority that conservation is reliant on anything other traditional physical and visual arguments. This flag-waving is also required to emphasise conservation's wider socio-economic benefits to local authority decision-makers both in DC committee decisions and determining political internal funding priorities in which conservation often loses out, despite its indirect contributions to many other local authority activities such as tourism, leisure and community regeneration .

8.11 The influence of political agendas

Summary of findings

Respondents in the national interview survey emphasised the cross-party political consensus supporting conservation. Many noted the general acceptance of conservation was reflected by its relatively unscathed passage through the Thatcher administration. Political non-intervention also reflected a belief that conservation is apolitical: for example even Government officers considered that socio-economic effects caused by conservation were separate matters for planners or politicians. However several respondents noted that conservation does create its own political value by protecting certain types of features which can be used to embody certain political ends, such as the 'national heritage'. At the time of interview, the political consensus was facing potential revision through the Urban Task Force report. Although unpublished, concerns were mounting over the possible exclusion of conservation in the drive to encourage a new urban renaissance.

In terms of policy direction, some confusion arose from the '*dysfunctional*' split of conservation between DCMS and DETR although some civil servants considered the division immaterial. Some EH officers noted the minimal policy discussions within the organisation and the partial knee-jerk reaction of senior managers to political currents. Though conservation was generally considered to side-step politics, several respondents noted their decision-making was inevitably a political balancing act, particularly in advising the distribution of limited grant funds. Although politics remained understated at the national level, respondents were frustrated by the inevitable autonomy of local politics. While national organisations operated in partnership with local authorities, frequently supporting the conservation officer's lone stance, local political priorities often compromised the conservation initiative. Implementing the mere statutory minimum of their conservation responsibilities, local authorities were seen as often abrogating the positive spirit of PPG15, without which conservation's wider relevance could be more easily dismissed.

The two case studies display a striking resemblance in certain aspects, notably a perceptible decrease in conservation's contribution to the wider activities of the authority and the consequent slippage of conservation down the political agenda.

The exposition of these traits is more evident in Authority A where the local political priority of encouraging investment and economic development dictated the planning service's goals, particularly under the previous local Conservative Council. Several unfortunate cases cast conservation (and the conservation adviser) as obstructing this programme: Members supported conservation so long as it did not inhibit development. It may be that in political terms the users and uses of these buildings are more important to the Council than the inanimate architecture *per se*. These perceptions have influenced internal funding arrangements - a series of reductions in the conservation budget reflecting a political distribution of limited resources. A similar political will is illustrated in development control decisions such as the Square and the Lodge cases where accommodating users' requirements for these buildings predominated over conserving their fabric. As noted previously, design considerations have been a low priority. Planning officers lamented the Committee's preference for safe, traditional architecture which in the Yard case satisfied neither conservation or contemporary design interests. Preferring these safe designs has the unfortunate consequence of providing a slightly easier route for developers to obtain planning permission. It remains to be seen how far the new Chair of the planning committee can personally transform political thinking to harness the heritage potential of the area in planning for investment.

In Authority B the strategic policies of the County Council were notably moving away from historic building and area conservation to LA21 and the sustainability agenda. The Borough was considered (by external and some internal respondents) to be resting on its laurels insofar as conservation was concerned. There was wider political support for the results of conservation planning since it was perceived as contributing across several spheres of socio-economic activity to improve the general livelihood of the town. However the absence of a corporate structure was a significant handicap in ensuring integrated planning, and therefore conservation, strategies across all of the Councils' services. Planning was a relatively small service and the BPO was not considered as holding a strong position *vis-à-vis* the Members. This weakness is quite anomalous in contrast with his pronounced culture of strict adherence to the local development plan. Partly for these reasons, the conservation officer took an active role in lobbying behind the scenes, believing it necessary given the small-town, parochial mentality. In the Hotel case, the authority appeared guilty of double standards regarding new development affecting the setting of this listed building. Arguably the interest in

conserving the setting of the listed building was more politically motivated to not disrupt the negotiated regeneration scheme rather than a conservation impulse.

The anomalous relationship with Members surfaces throughout the cases studied, particularly concerning the introduction of new design elements in to the town, whereby similar reactions to Authority A's Councillors are evident. Officers were seemingly powerless to prevent the Committee forcing an unprecedented change of materials regarding the Bank development. A safer design for the Friary was welcomed by officers, but partly to ease Members' concerns. Curiously, officers were simultaneously encouraging safe (neo-Georgian) design to satisfy Members while grieving over the lack of contemporary design in the town. Surely allowing an easier design route to planning permission will tempt the most ardent of conservation-minded developers to sacrifice architectural form.

Discussion & implications

Political issues inevitably affect conservation at a multitude of levels - formally in the national and local political party agendas and informally in the power relationships between and within organisations. Despite the literature unconsciously following an assumption of political support for conservation, the research evidence suggests that it remains to be proven whether conservation is supported by a political consensus.

In terms of national conservation policies there is no particular distinction between Labour and Conservative, with PPG15 having spanned two administrations without courting an upset; though this is possibly more indicative of the general drift to the middle ground in politics. This consistency is perhaps more indicative of the different political ends to which conservation can be subtly used whilst maintaining the neutrality and apolitical nature of the activity - protecting national heritage and private amenity versus promoting urban regeneration and a civic renaissance. It is the use and political capital which conservation can generate which retains politicians' interest rather than a concern for conservation. In the segregation of responsibilities between Government departments, conservation occupies a very low status in the larger and more influential DETR. It is perhaps more accurate to describe conservation's latent consensus as a lack of active political interest.

The impression given by the local authorities studied was that conservation was experiencing a decline in the political impetus which had previously seen greater

political kudos accruing through conservation initiatives. Though reversals in fortunes were signalled in both authorities, the issue remains that while both Councils supported the idea of conservation, its status was losing ground to other agendas such as sustainability, LA21 and urban regeneration to which conservation ought be making a significant contribution. Instead conservation was often politically pigeon holed, performing a traditional role of controlling design which further restricted the opportunity to contribute to these emerging priorities. It seems that conservation is taken for granted in political circles. It is personal conjecture but this may reflect the scale of threats facing conservation. The demolitions of listed buildings in the 1960s and to some extent 1970s which caused much public sabre rattling are no longer tolerated. Development threats are now more subtle and in occurring on a smaller scale are less evident to the public. For the public, and politicians responding to their concerns, the conservation problem largely appears to have been solved. The EHTF asked; '*has built environment conservation been left behind?*' (1992:5). The answer is yes - arguably it has been supplanted by other political priorities.

Respondents' fears over the Urban Task Force report highlights the problem of New Labour's regeneration agenda espousing a preference for the modern over the historic, the new over the old; indeed listed buildings were mentioned briefly insofar as they should not be seen to obstruct progress (1999: 251). The writing would appear on the wall for conservation - it requires re-packaging if its political support is not that strong. EH has already started portraying itself as a regeneration body - the question is to what extent this can be successful for conservation at the local level too. Fundamentally conservation needs to highlight its contribution to wider socio-economic benefits which Councils are pursuing in other spheres. The status of conservation was politically higher in Authority B since its wider contribution was more evident. However although conservation may be moving in this direction nationally, acknowledging the wider contributions of conservation necessarily requires a more open admission of the political issues involved in identifying and protecting 'special' features. It would mean exposing conservation's claim of apolitical neutrality and necessarily require greater consideration of its cultural and socio-economic bias and effects in using finite state resources.

8.12 Concluding reflections

Whilst this chapter has comprehensively covered many interesting facets in analysing the material from the three spheres of fieldwork, several pervasive issues have recurred throughout. In general, the comparison confirms earlier suggestions which ultimately challenge existing assumptions about the values used to justify conservation policy and practice. The most significant findings which transcend the ten themes of the conceptual framework can be identified as follows.

- Conservation's relationship with planning is at risk of greater marginalisation than is perhaps currently recognised, despite an accompanying belief in its integral contribution. This is evident in many ways - from policy segregation in the DCMS, to the treatment of conservation advice in the local planning authority practice.
- Professionals' attitudes and perceptions of conservation's role are highly influential because of the extent of differences between interpretations. This is not necessarily simply between national and local levels or between the planning and conservation professions but exists between *and within* individuals.
- National and local conservation practices demonstrate a clear predominant concern with treating features as independent artefacts rather than primarily considering the discipline as one of contextual environmentalism.
- A culture of professional conservation, formed by similar training and education, has the unfortunate consequence of filtering value interpretation, inhibiting the development of alternative value perspectives.
- The interpretation of special interest focuses on features' intrinsic architectural interest which is portrayed as self-evident. Valuations lying outside this sphere are treated less favourably - even historical interest has struggled for recognition.
- Determining local interest is underdeveloped as a value concept partly through a lack of central support: however national interest is a similarly intangible concept.
- The public's support and less 'informed' interpretations of value approach

conservation as a means to an end and its contribution on a broader cultural, environmental and contextual scale.

- While a political consensus may support conservation insofar as demolishing historic buildings is morally abhorrent, meagre active support and financing for conservation would indicate more an apathy than interest in it.
- In local practice, conservation suffers from being stereotyped - it is not permitted to contribute its wider relevance to the agendas which are capturing the political initiative.

Since these concerns permeate the whole of the conceptual framework, the concluding chapter shall discuss them in relation to the three areas forming the research issues.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

The thesis set out to profile the value orientation of conservation practice relating to the built environment in the UK. The conceptual framework, developed from the existing literature, highlighted a number of tensions which percolated not only the administrative system of conservation but also its fundamental justifications. Having studied these tensions in operation and compared the respective findings of three spheres of empirical investigation, prominent issues have emerged to challenge widely held assumptions about the direction, scope, influence and role of conservation in relation to the statutory planning process.

The most prominent issues which pervade all ten issues of the conceptual framework, are explicitly identified and discussed in relation to the research issues identified at the end of Chapter 3. It is clear that the findings challenge many established positions and norms which inevitably presents a further set of questions for further research with attendant implications for practice. These are addressed before concluding the thesis' contribution in the final section.

Addressing the research issues

The questions posed at the start of the research process were intended to address the values underlying conservation from a national policy level to local application and to ascertain whether any variation in value orientations provided sufficient grounds to revise current justifications for conservation activity. As discussed previously (3.1), these initial questions were naive and given the practical limits of fieldwork capacity, difficult to answer with conviction. Indeed the fieldwork has shown more variety than consensus within and between levels, thus attempting to definitively answer the question 'what are the values underlying national policy?', would be misleading. However the issues and relationships to which these questions were directed have remained prescient to the last: it is addressing these

issues rather than the level (executive policy or practical application) at which they occur to define the conclusions of this study.

In the previous chapter, the research findings were presented in the ten themes comprising the conceptual framework. This illustrated several pervasive theses, whose breadth requires broader discussion in relation to the three research issues which have unified the thesis:

- How does conservation control relate to planning in principle and practice?
- How is value in the built environment perceived and interpreted for conservation purposes?
- How do economic and political pressures contribute to or undermine conservation?

9.2 A critical review of the research process

Before discussing the conclusions, it is essential to respect the limitations of the research process. The conclusions represent a distillation of important issues based on a representative sample of attitudes and opinions throughout conservation practice. They cannot allude to being a comprehensive account of contemporary conservation issues, nor can they proclaim definite answers which are necessarily universally applicable.

The two main methodological qualifications influencing the conclusions concern the generalisability of the findings and the type of analysis performed on the data. Considering the latter first, the conceptual framework was developed from the existing literature to specifically pursue a holistic approach to the study. The ten themes therefore reflect the author's interpretation of the most salient issues at that time. Whilst there is no competing theory to undermine this approach, it is possible that another independent researcher may have prioritised different issues in the literature. Furthermore, whilst the framework has proved remarkably flexible to accommodate unforeseen challenges, it is nevertheless possible that certain issues have subsequently assumed greater prominence in theory and practice and are relatively under-represented. Whilst the conceptual framework rests on the identification of tensions in value interpretations, this may predetermine the conclusions to emphasise conflict rather than reporting consensus and agreement

within conservation practice. It is quite possible that the tensions identified are inherent and unresolvable, rather than considering them as transient obstacles in the path of reform.

The generalisability of findings is an inevitable problem with such a qualitative approach. The empirical study was based on an interview survey of national conservation organisations and two local planning authority case studies: in addition to the documentary information gathered, the main body of evidence was collected from around 80 interviews. This constitutes a relatively small sample though rich for exploring the complexities of real-life situations. If different respondents or indeed different local planning authorities had been selected, the findings may have altered the conclusions: other respondents' experiences and opinions may not be represented at all in this account. Indeed the interview methodology has its own limitations in effectively offering a partial snapshot of a respondent's thinking at a particular moment in time.

Other than these two general limitations, a specific restriction concerns representing the public's view in this thesis. While acknowledging the differences between lay and expert interpretations of conservation value is central to this thesis, the study did not attempt to canvass public opinion in a statistically significant manner. Therefore reference to 'the public view' is necessarily only indicative rather than definitive of public perceptions.

With these qualifications in mind, the implications for further research are as much to test the validity of this study's findings as well as highlighting areas of investigation to enhance understanding of the subject. However despite these limitations, the frequency with which similar issues occurred across different levels and localities and coalesce into cogent challenges to the existing state of knowledge, reinforce the thesis' universal concern, though not necessarily application, to all those involved in conservation planning.

9.3 The relationship between conservation and planning - principle and practice

Integration or marginalisation?

At the heart of this relationship lies a paradox between principle and practice. It is a confusion of ideas about conservation's role in planning, arising partly from a succession of threats which have influenced conservation's development, but also because of a dilemma concerning planning's function to either regulate or facilitate land development. Put simply, conservation is vaunted as a fundamental to development considerations, in this sense originating from Geddes' early vision to survey and enhance the qualities of the existing environment. However in attempting to reinforce this notion of centrality in planning, the accompanying belief in conservation's moral weight perceives conservation as superior and purer than a 'mere' planning issue. Herein lies the paradox. While believing that conservation is central to planning, the processes and practice of conservation have reinforced and supported the 'separateness' and 'specialness' of conservation as a positive value in itself. This is reflected in all aspects policy and practice, in relationships between professionals and with the public.

Principles

By attempting to squeeze conservation into the centre of the planning mindset, stronger centripetal forces competing for this position have pushed conservation up and out of this plane. Conservation resides above planning, certainly in perceptions of the moral compulsion to undertake its responsibilities, whilst below, planning continues more or less oblivious, occasionally glancing up to conservation for guidance when other pressures recede.

Conservation's attraction does stem from a moral undertaking not to see historic buildings needlessly destroyed but this is a culturally determined attitude and in no sense can be taken for granted. Planning paradigms of the post war era evidently took a different view to conserving the old and it is not implausible for attitudes to change again. In contrast to this conscience of conservation, there did not appear to be a similar response concerning a social, moral or conscionable purpose for the planning system. Planning was perceived as an administrative framework to

consider applications as efficiently as possible. Conservation was another factor to balance against a range of competing issues. Despite separate consent systems, in practice conservation was not as 'special' as national respondents and policy would suggest.

Though PPG15 emphasises conservation's integration, evidence of practice suggests conservation suffers marginalisation in planning. The pressure to review the separate conservation consent procedures highlighted a fundamental disparity in attitudes apparent throughout the thesis, concerning listed buildings and conservation areas. Suggestions to integrate listed building consent into a planning permission were rejected for further displacing conservation issues in an application. However following the Shimitsu decision reducing the scope of conservation area's special provisions, EH preferred closer integration of these controls into regular planning permission. In contrast to listing's integration, they believed this would not subsume areal conservation issues but actually provide greater strength and legitimacy. These double standards and the will to retain listing's exclusivity arguably illustrates listing's dominance in the conservation field. To what extent do the process and attitudes involved in listing embody, orient or determine the extent of conservation's contributions to planning? Are conservation areas to be allowed to wither on the vine or can planning provide the expertise to deal with areal protection?

Professionalism

The different professional perspectives between planning and conservation provide a further aspect to explore this relationship of integration or marginalisation. The widespread claim that conservation is '*the art of intelligent change*' is well founded. However is not planning also the art of intelligent change? Does this suggest greater unity between two professions' aims? Or is conservation required because planning has deserted this aim and planners lack the competence to deal with change 'intelligently'?

Though perceiving professions as homogenous groups is potentially misleading, planners appear to share a culture of superficial architectural knowledge and design awareness. Practical experience rather than educational training furnishes their competence to deal with these issues. A lack of confidence or acknowledging the limit of their own knowledge defines when planning officers consult conservation staff for specific architectural, structural and technical advice on

buildings. However conservationists recognise a more comprehensive deficit - in planners' ability to consider urban design. In contrast, townscape, general areal appearance, matters of scale and massing are fields in which planners consider themselves sufficiently adept to reduce the need to resort to specialist advice. There appears to be a conscious professional distinction between competencies relating to the specifics of buildings' architecture and the general character of areas.

In both local authorities, conservation was a consultee to the DC section, invoked on DC officers' discretion, rather than any formal or policy guide-lines. Planners' perceptions of conservation contributing mainly specific architectural or structural advice restricts conservation realising the integral role which PPG15 emphasises. This illustrates a more substantive problem. Planning officers consider that much of their DC work involves design considerations and conservation is no different in this. Many applications - minor works to listed buildings, small scale changes in conservation areas - may not raise a distinct conservation issue and is consequently not referred for specialist advice. In the authorities studied, working arrangements increasingly placed more responsibility on DC officers for these aspects. Ironically it is precisely the effects of cumulative small-scale changes which conservationists consider pose the greatest threat to protecting areas' character. On the evidence of these case studies, they are also the aspects over which conservation professionals are losing control to the generalist planner.

Despite differences of opinion between planning and conservation officers, a further distinction barely mentioned in the existing literature, is the extent to which conservation officers' personal interpretations of conservation differ. While the local development plans often paraphrased PPG15, ensuring central policy compatibility, the professional outlooks of the two authorities' conservation officers differed appreciably. Both were fiercely enthusiastic and shared a resolute individualism in the face of corporate compliance - their personal philosophies were of equal significance to Council policy in determining their advice. This is important since in most local authorities this officer/adviser often provides the sole interpretation of conservation policy. It led to the surprising outcome that in the traditional historic town, the conservation officer's flexibility resulted in decisions that were more tolerant of development than in the non-traditional historic town where despite the Council encouraging new development, the conservation adviser resisted the usurpation of conservation principles.

Scale

Recalling the significance attached to the scale of protection, two aspects have become apparent through the thesis. The first is regulating change spatially - whether conservation is more concerned with buildings as specific, independent artefacts or whether the environmental context as a functioning whole is more important. The former receives far more attention both at local and national levels, listing is the longer established regime and is more respected. National organisations are oriented to protecting listed buildings, not necessarily areas, and locally the structure of DC processing and conservation referrals reinforce the consideration of a building and its fabric over the area. In both authorities, reductions in conservation staff concentrated resources on fulfilling the statutory responsibility of advising DC on specific listed building consent referrals.

Many national respondents argued that listed building consent was necessary since conservation concerned intricate details that general planning measures could not address. If their scales were incompatible, this ought mean that planning is more appropriate to ensure areal protection and a contextual appreciation of conservation. However developing an areal conservation approach in these local authorities' practice was led neither by planners nor conservationists. Area character appraisals have been a diminished priority, indeed considered a luxury until resources were available. The concepts available to define and explore areal character are weak and under-developed, partly because legal definitions limit planning issues to the physical use of the land, thus excluding a whole array of valid interpretations of character. However it is also an important consequence of a prolonged period when national policy neglected these concepts under the auspices of allowing local authorities to develop them autonomously. A rejuvenated urban design discipline would appear to embrace both aspects of conservation and development control but instead of bridging a gap within these authorities, it currently falls into a gaping chasm in professional attitudes and practice between the two.

The second aspect of scale is the different timescales on which conservation and planning operate. On a superficial level this encompasses the brief 8 week planning consent target in contrast with the lengthier negotiations which conservation applications necessarily involve. On a more abstract level, conservation considers change on a far longer timescale - perhaps hundreds of years - to planning which is arguably more concerned with meeting the needs of

the present. Evidently conservation coincides with sustainability, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the inheritance for future generations, though as noted throughout, there are more profound aspects to these temporal relationships in interpreting value.

Timescale also determines what is considered an acceptable rate of change. The rapidity of new development is perhaps more disorienting than its scale, though the preservation-conservation-regeneration debate is not discussed as frequently in relation to time. There would appear to be a distinction in the relative temporal rates of change between conservation and planning professionals and the general public. The latter wish to see change happen at a slower pace, allowing for the assimilation of new developments with the existing environment. However nationally, conservation policy is moving away from restricting change, to become an agent of change through regeneration. Perhaps whilst conservation has been portrayed as one of many approaches to development, it may be more accurate to state that conservation itself contains many diverse approaches to development. The difference of opinion between the public and professional interpretations of conservation's role is significant, especially if the public wish conservation to take a more preservationist stance, in contrast to the professionals' emphasis on allowing change and encouraging new architecture. For many members of the public, new architecture is still the threat which conservation ought counter.

Support

The conservation conscience, its moral weight, is a widely appreciated sentiment shared by most sections of the groups studied. In this sense, interest in conservation has moved from being an élitist concern, indeed planning benefits from public support for conservation in a similar way it does over green-belt policy. However there is huge difference between active and passive support and the motivations behind them. Indeed national political support could almost be described as apathetic and certainly in local politics, the importance of the conservation agenda has slipped from the elevated position it enjoyed thirty years ago. The political situation is in part a reflection of the public's interest in conservation which, given that comprehensive town centre re-development is now unusual, perceives conservation to have accomplished its task.

Although access to conservation decision-making in local planning authorities is as open for conservation as any other planning issue, the public response is generally

apathetic until specific property rights or the immediate quality of amenity are detrimentally affected. Property concerns are a significant motivating factor behind much 'conservation' interest which would question whether the public interest in conservation is just a coalition of private property concerns. The approach of the local planning authorities to involve the public in conservation appears to assume that interested groups will always make their interests known. Although this liberalism creates distinctly partisan contributions, there appears to be little active compensation to remedy the interest deficit amongst other sections of the community. This is possibly reflective of attitudes welcoming the public's contribution to conservation decision-making when it supports professional opinions yet disregarding it as irrational and sentimental when it highlights other values in protection. This question of a shared understanding and interpretation of value is explored further in the next section.

Concluding remarks

Conservation is currently at risk of being marginalised in the planning process by competing policy principles, through practical procedures and also by different professional competencies and attitudes. With limited resources in each authority, the most significant conservation contribution is made in response to DC applications rather than policy or strategy. The study illustrates there are different types of conservation hidden within the structures of these local authorities. While conservation involves a flexible approach, these distinctions reveal more than just professional discretion, they address almost separate concerns and priorities.

- Minor works within conservation areas or to modest listed buildings are dealt with almost exclusively by planning officers with few references made to conservation officers. Often these are seen as design rather than 'conservation' issues and are determined by external, superficial appearance.
- Significant works in conservation areas or to listed buildings involve the conservation officer to a greater extent who offers advice on architectural and structural aspects of the buildings. This characterises perceptions across the authority of what comprises 'conservation'.
- Project works can be initiated and developed outside or in parallel to the statutory planning process and are more determined by the external funding

grant criteria than local conservation issues *per se*. The regeneration of areas and the re-use of buildings is paramount.

Conservation can have markedly different outcomes depending on these routes through the local authority, though conservation appears to be predominantly concerned with buildings as independent artefacts. Areal context is undervalued and is not fully represented in either conservation or planning concerns but falls between them. Planning officers may have a narrower view of what constitutes a conservation issue, for instance the contribution of new architecture in a historic context highlights the lack of clarity in conservation planning.

Despite these weaknesses, there is no denying that conservation has benefited from its relationship with planning. The question that arises now is whether this relationship can continue to develop. Although sustainability has re-invigorated planning to some extent, in terms of conscionable goals Modernising Planning (DETR 1998) indicates planning is to provide an efficient administrative service to facilitate development rather than a proactive tool to intervene and redress development imbalances. Conservation must address these broader changes in planning and consider how the present arrangement may change if controlling physical changes in the environment becomes a lesser concern for planning.

9.4 The interpretation of value in the built environment

Value in features, value from context

The essence of conservation is determining those features considered worth saving: not only are the types of features important, but also the attitudes which support these choices. Although intellectual and policy unity is provided by the statutory criteria of 'special architectural or historic interest', robust defence of the term obscures significant collisions of value in these concepts' application. One conflict is the distinction between treating buildings as independent artefacts or components of a complex, interwoven urban fabric in which physical evidence is but one aspect. Practice and policy are oriented towards the intrinsic values of features which are considered self-evident by professionals. However emphasising the intrinsic value of the features portrays value as more objectively determinable, thus removing the valuer from the picture. The interpretation of value is culturally

determined, influenced by contemporary circumstances and significantly created anew by each successive generation. Moreover the interpretation is also a very personal process shaped by education and experience, preferences and idiosyncrasies. Thus while the extrinsic or experiential value is not accommodated within conservation parameters, there is a further distinction between the professional and public interpretation of value. If the former is to rely on the latter's support then ought there be a closer correspondence between their interpretations of what is considered important in the environment?

Intrinsic interest

In terms of intrinsic interest, PPG15 notes the prominence of architectural over historic interest. Certainly the evidence has shown professionals' preferences to rely on the more quantifiable and identifiable aesthetic qualities of features. Architectural interest provides a relatively universal benchmark to gauge value. This becomes a problem when the relationship wholly obscures historic interest. The study shows that a rough hierarchy of priorities may be illustrated as follows.

1. Aesthetic - architectural integrity - appearance - contribution to townscape
2. Structural - construction - technology
3. Historical - architectural history but wider reflections of the passage of time

The first two concentrate on the physical fabric of a feature, the historical is much the weaker, utilised when it supports the above two considerations, but ineffective independently. Historic interest is a less quantifiable concept since every feature reflects the influence of historically unique factors. It involves a greater political selection in identifying features as particular reflections of past socio-economic circumstances. It requires greater effort in terms of research and access as historical importance is not necessarily as evident as architectural interest. Furthermore, historic interest starts to stray into extrinsic interest revealing a difficulty for conservation. The law requires planning issues to relate to land use, thus the extent to which broader, more intangible historiographic qualities can be accommodated and defended is severely limited.

This dilemma of planning law, limiting the interpretation of value, is most poignantly reflected in attempting to define the 'character' of a conservation area. The development of areal concepts in practice has been inhibited by a number of factors. The first is the autonomy and lack of support given to local authorities to perform this task, the second the diversion of resources away from conservation in local planning authorities. A third reason is an attitude shown by many planning officers that character can be expressed simply in terms of building types. Approaching areal value along the same principles as individual components excludes a host of broader social, cultural and environment factors. Although urban design physically addresses the value of spaces between buildings, it still falls short of this broader realisation of value. Despite the availability of approaches to investigate character, such as urban morphological analysis or conservation plans, statutory planning appears ill-equipped to develop these as fundamental guiding principles.

Standards

The objectivity in evaluating features as independent fragments is a justification for the respect given to listing over conservation areas. The banner of national, as opposed to local, interest provides the conservation standard. However it has been noted that 'national interest' is an abstraction created by the conservation profession. It has been difficult to recognise what actually makes a feature of national interest in the cases studied, aside from the obvious examples of grander or more ornate architecture. This has several detrimental consequences, the first being the listing stereotype. Most non-conservationists expect a listed building to be an impressive or significant piece of architecture, either in scale or ornamentation. The visual quality of a feature is paramount - if a listed feature does not fit the stereotype then ensuing cynicism undermines credibility in its status. This is particularly grave for modern listed buildings, or for buildings of specific socio-historical interest. A preconceived notion of an important historic building also undermines credence in conservation areas. Conservation areas encompass a wide range of buildings which will not necessarily fit this stereotype. Seeing the value of a conservation area in terms of buildings thus undermines the areal concept and does not reflect the endemic conservation thinking which many respondents at EH were eager to encourage amongst the wider population.

Secondly, the importance of 'national' interest also appears to subjugate local interest, to the extent that the latter has become relegated and pejoratively referred to as a subjective valuation. However national interest is only a professional tool which, when examined, is a subjective creation of this group. Only in relation to twentieth century schematic listing can a national standard be realistically identified; the majority of listed buildings are not monitored nationally nor do national funding opportunities ensure their upkeep. National interest appears to rely more on the discretion of individuals to determine importance in the light of particular local circumstances. Indeed it may even be more accurate to suggest that features' importance is determined by reference to regional, rather than national, interest. It was suggested in the fieldwork that local conservation interest is more tightly interwoven with historical interest in the development of a town, whereas national conservation interest is more concerned with architecture. If true, this is a further reason why local interest has struggled for recognition since the revelation of historical interest has been the poorer cousin to architectural interest.

Thirdly local interest remains dogged by the problem of being taken for granted. Whereas the phrase 'familiar and cherished local scene' may portray attraction and affection, it would appear that familiarity is widely undervalued because of its common occurrence. In the cases studied, only a threat or an external identification of this quality raised awareness to a level whereby local interest became a sufficiently cogent force to be considered. It would suggest that national organisations ought become more proactive in creating a framework to raise awareness, recognition and development of local qualities.

Informed opinion

The contrast of professional with lay interpretations of value has been a significant theme throughout the thesis. It requires specific attention here as it involves further distinctions between conservation and planning professionals and also differences within the conservation profession too.

A 'professional' can be defined as a person possessing exclusive knowledge and skills relating to an identifiable area, participating in a culture and socialisation within a group of similar individuals. For conservation, the evidence would suggest that a shared rigour and consensus distinguishes the professional's interpretation of value from the lay person's. In the absence of suitable hard and fast rules on which to apply conservation knowledge, an essential quality was the sensitivity of

their professional craft or 'eye', a judgement for particular situations born of years' expertise. It is the rigour and strength of this 'rolling consensus' which underpins the interpretation of 'national' interest and defines 'special architectural or historic interest'. 'Legitimate' values are interpreted by a group of individuals who through a common background and training share certain attitudes to recognise particular types of value. However the study highlighted a significant diversity of interpretation not only between the two conservation officers in the two local authorities, but also within the scope of interpretation from EH officers. Whilst the contrasts did not outweigh the consensus of professional interpretation, they were significant enough to question it. This is notable since professionals use their consensus of objectivity to defend their legitimacy over a lay interpretation of value which they consider too subjective and diverse to recognise.

In terms of informing, consulting and educating the public, this raises a further conflict in professional attitudes. The profession requires and believes there is widespread support for conservation, which justifies applying their expertise on behalf of the public. There are campaigns to raise public awareness of conservation and ample opportunity to become involved 'at the coalface' through participation in the planning system. A particular section of the public sharing the professionals' orientation of value will avail themselves of these means. However a greater section of the public are excluded, partly through their own apathy towards local government processes, but more fundamentally because their perception of value is incompatible with the professional determination of legitimate conservation value. This focus on intrinsic interest excludes many factors from consideration which the cases illustrated to be central in lay interpretations of value.

As the study did not attempt to comprehensively canvas public opinion, this evidence is only indicative, but it would suggest that conservation is perceived in far broader terms than the building specific orientation of professional practice. In one sense, lay perception sees the environment as a whole, appearance and views are equally, if not more, important in contrast with the specific details of buildings. The spaces between buildings, context, topography, uses of buildings are all aspects of character which are significant issues in lay opinion. Features' use or function is particularly important, demonstrated by the disregard of vacant buildings. Apart from physical deterioration, avoiding vacancy therefore is crucial in maintaining public perceptions of buildings' value as living entities. In many respects this is seeing conservation as a process supporting the continuity of an urban environment's uses and vitality. When viewed as a means to an end rather than an

end in itself, conservation becomes more flexible in tolerating changes. However this may create further professional difficulties shifting the focus from a feature's intrinsic value to its potential use value.

Continuing this point, a significant exclusion persists between professional and lay interpretations. Knowledge of a locality, experience of environmental changes, intimacy and intuitive reactions to familiar elements and activities which contribute to 'place' are professionally dismissed as sentimental, nostalgic or irrational emotions. Yet these are precisely the types of reactions identified by a host of writers as the basis for conservation's appeal. However these interpretations suffer a dual exclusion in the mechanisms to encompass public interest in conservation. In campaigns by EH or other bodies, the process is generally a one-way transfer of information explaining intrinsic interest, there is less scope to accommodate the public's returning interpretations which lie beyond specific features' interest. Similarly, contributions made through the planning process suffer the legal limitation of statutory planning to physical features and their use: the present opportunities for exploring value remain limited.

Re-conceptualising value

Heritage is a chimera of interpretations which has attracted equal criticism and support. The arguments concerning commodification, misrepresentation, tenuous authenticity and 'dumbing down' are well established and have been addressed previously in the thesis. Despite its vagaries, heritage's re-orientation of value perceptions may benefit conservation in resolving a fundamental discrepancy between principle and practice. This was illustrated during the fieldwork when a conservation professional noted the main reason for conservation was to assist people orient themselves in an environment relative to their existence in time and space. Whilst this justification may not be universally shared by other conservation professionals, this author finds it a most persuasive exposition. However the officer then proceeded to criticise unsympathetic new window frames in the town centre. At the time, this appeared to reflect his zeal for detail, but in retrospect it illustrates the inappropriateness of narrow, building-oriented controls to ultimately pursue an aspiration founded in human cognition. Heritage, as noted in the previous chapter re-orientations of value by placing equal significance in the value experience of the user rather than that invested in the inanimate object. This is not to say that one orientation is supreme, or that they can be easily identified as two

distinct spheres of value. The philosophy of aesthetics continues to struggle with this question, though this debate falls outside the scope of the present thesis. The significant point is that both aspects, intrinsic and extrinsic, are required to reflect the wider purposes of conservation planning.

From the fieldwork evidence, the wider experience of users of the urban environment appears oriented to recognising continuity. Phrases such as '*the connection with history*' and '*the patina of history*' expose support for conservation in terms of identifying temporal relationships. As noted above, it is possible that historical interest may be a more cogent force in local conservation since the urban form reflects the unique development and identity of a settlement through time.

It is the author's personal view that the attraction and moral support for conservation is not wholly accounted for by a respect for aesthetics and craftsmanship. Conservation allows a virtual extension of an individual's lifetime by the creation of personal and societal connections with evidence of the past woven into the contemporary built environment. 'Authenticity' is arguably more valuable in terms of its continuity through time. Its attraction is connecting with a longer timescale than people can physically experience, not particularly the fact that the physical entity remains in an 'authentic' state, which is a concept open to much debate. If sections of it are replaced this contributes to the process of evolution, rather than undermines its originality.

The preference for familiarity is not just a desire to see existing features retained. Indeed threats to familiar scenes or appearances provoked a stronger public reaction than to specific familiar features which were often taken for granted. Paradoxically, familiarity was a prevalent consideration over the introduction of new features in the environment. This may be natural conservatism but it illustrates the desire for continuity in the new. New development had to harmonise with the existing surroundings and historicist design was more acceptable to members of the public than to those professionals (outside and within the local planning authorities) building anew in these towns. Whilst this reflects a desire for continuity, if misapplied it can lead to a pastiche 'national-vernacular', specifically contradicting the point of conservation to address local distinctiveness.

While this may reflect different design preferences, it may reveal the temporal aspects of design, of architecture being 'true to time' as opposed to necessarily 'true to function'. Viewed in design terms, while buildings may be made to fit in by reflecting familiar elements in their construction, this can produce buildings which

are less representative of their time. To some extent this illustrates a regressive rather than progressive cultural attitude to time. However it has been noted that the diversity of the temporal collage in the built environment, which represents a wealth of connections to different periods in time, is being consciously flattened by pursuing conservation policies concentrating on the aesthetic to the exclusion of the temporal. If one of the benefits of 'heritage' is the realisation that conservation value is created rather than discovered, then it demonstrates that conservation is presently contributing little to the debate.

Concluding remarks

In practice there appears to be a hierarchy of legitimacy in the interpretation of conservation value. The general pattern would appear to place greatest reliance on intrinsic, physical characteristics in aesthetic and artistic terms, followed by a feature's structural integrity and technical aspects of construction. These are perceived as self-evident values to the professionally trained eye. Historical factors beyond supporting the above two aspects, constitute the lower rungs of the hierarchy, contributing far less to justify decision-making. Historical association tends to support the 'official' history associated with specific events and people and although listing is consciously moving towards reflecting social and economic themes, these could well prove to be difficult to practically defend in the present system. Certainly the factors contributing to the 'unofficial' history of social and personal experience through time is barely explored at the local level where its contributions may be most felt. Issues of attachment and identification with place, and people's orientation in environments by the symbols and meaning carried by established features are rarely cited in these local planning authorities practice even though they are used to justify national policy in PPG15. Perversely, perhaps the most neglected interpretation of value is in terms of temporal relations in the environment - the 'connection with history'. The hierarchy reflects the decreasing professional interest away from intrinsic to extrinsic interest while a lay interpretation of value appears to invert this ordering of priorities. Indeed the lower rungs of the hierarchy, while professionally neglected, may provide the areas in which public support for conservation is most deeply rooted.

However the broadening of value interpretation sets an unresolvable conflict with the parameters of planning law. In accommodating broader social and cultural interpretations of value, the scope is being extended further away from the physical

basis of land use planning. However the benefits that can be drawn from this process illustrate the wider social and economic contribution that conservation can make to develop an intelligible and enjoyable urban environment.

9.5 The influence of economic and political factors

Threats or opportunities?

Much of the existing literature falls silent if and when the effects of economic and political issues on conservation are raised. This is partly based on two inter-related suppositions: that conservation operates in an economic climate over which it has minimal influence; and that the profession's concern to protect buildings is far removed from political activity. Initially these statements appear unquestionable but the study highlights some fundamental tensions which require conservation to engage with economic and political structures to a far greater extent than previously acknowledged. Though presented as two separate sections throughout the thesis, the economic and political considerations can be surmised as one central consideration - that the whole conservation system involves the political balancing of priorities in the distribution and protection of finite resources. This is not simply a decision for politicians but occurs at all levels through conservation decision-making, penetrating even the 'objectivity' of allocating listing grades.

Economic Regeneration

This priority has caused significant tensions within the conservation profession. Some respondents were convinced that it offered carte blanche to local authorities to accept inappropriate development; others believed that without embracing this particular agenda, conservation would become politically irrelevant. It would appear that the latter opinion is dominant in terms of results, national conservation funding is more driven to regeneration than ever before (HERS) and EH has lost some of its own direct funding capacity to the HLF. Conservation is now having to address a question often asked of planning: is the purpose of conservation to regulate or to facilitate land development? With planning becoming increasingly oriented to building partnerships with the private sector, conservation has arguably found it difficult to maintain a regulatory line, courting marginalisation in planning decision-making as a result.

In the local authorities studied, when conservation was perceived to regulate and restrict necessary economic development, it was often slapped down, eroding its future persuasiveness. Notably, considering economic viability often had a more subtle effect when considering features' value in development cases. The conservation officer's interpretation of a feature's value is tempered by what is achievable in the economic circumstances. The planning officer will often treat this advice as a neutral interpretation, elements of which can be omitted when schemes' economic viability is further considered again: economic viability gets two opportunities to deflect conservation concerns.

A further problem highlighted by the development cases is that measurement of economic against conservation benefits involves a balancing act heavily weighted in favour of economic interests. The economic benefits of development form harder-edged arguments, quantifiable in definite financial terms against which conservation often struggles to demonstrate its tangible benefits in similar terms. This creates an inherent bias towards economic benefits over the wider social and community benefits which conservation may realise but which are difficult to present as facts and figures. This not only is prevalent in development control decisions but if the benefits of conservation are seen in particularly narrow terms this has an effect at all levels through the authority, particularly illustrated by the allocation of resources for Council priorities and operations. Thus conservation faces a major challenge in promoting endemic conservation awareness in two respects: penetrating the development process earlier, highlighting the 'added value' which a conservation approach generates; and ensuring that in political decision-making, conservation benefits are not seen as intangible in contrast with developments providing jobs and investment.

Political choices and transparency

Perhaps a central difficulty in exposing the added value of conservation, is scrutinising the justifications and effects of conservation principles, policies and practice in a political forum. As noted above, this would necessarily involve conservation emerging from its neutral guise. The main reason for its apolitical persuasion has been assumption of support across the political spectrum. However the recent treatment of conservation and heritage issues by the Government questions whether the underlying consensus supporting conservation is more accurately described as a passive interest in conservation or more fatally, a

reflection of apathy and it being 'taken for granted'. Thirty years ago, conservation enjoyed greater political prominence, the Civic Amenities Act was passed and the weight of popular opinion was reportedly stirring local authorities to implement conservation policies. The pressure to respond to the conservation imperative is arguably no longer felt in national or local politics. Despite relying on a 'latent' consensus, it is conceivable that unless conservation finds a new expression or contribution, it is in danger of finding this lack of consensus tolerates its marginalisation by competing agendas: Modernising Planning makes little reference to 'modernising conservation'.

The case studies show this process has taken effect locally as well. Conservation in Authority A, despite a preceding reputation for good practice, has been politically eclipsed by the drive to encourage regeneration. Although revitalising historic buildings has been pursued through the Implementation section, conservation's contribution to regeneration has been limited by a narrow political perception of the conservation's benefits. In Authority B, where conservation could be expected amongst local political priorities, County strategists considered the Borough's conservation approach outmoded in the face of holistic and sustainable environmental management. This reflects Strange's (1996, 1997) work on policy issues in historic towns that a traditional conservation model has run its course. Similarly conservation is not apparently benefiting from the introduction of new structures of public participation arising through LA21, though these initiatives may provide a way in which a two-way exchange of value could be encouraged. As political interest grows in these areas, without conscious redress conservation will be forced to the margins, concerned with little more than overseeing a minority of buildings' physical appearance.

Concluding remarks

Essentially conservation must address the challenges faced by economic and political considerations outside the 'traditional' scope of conservation activity. In responding to these threats or opportunities, balancing priorities ought be informed by as instructive an assessment of the wider benefits which conservation can provide. Only naive optimism would obviate the need for conservation controls in the face of development pressures, the thesis is not advocating conservation 'selling out' to express value solely by financial criteria. Rather it must present the benefits of conservation in measurable socio-economic terms to prove more

persuasive in political decision-making. This may also involve greater political transparency, realising the undesirable side effects of conservation as well as the positive ones. It is hoped that this emphasis re-captures the political support which conservation has previously enjoyed.

9.6 Summary and implications for research and practice

Conservation has enjoyed remarkable success within the planning system to an extent where there has been a virtual U-turn in attitudes, illustrated by developing rather than demolishing a listed building. It has continued to expand its spatial coverage with more buildings and areas subject to conservation control, but latterly the processes have been criticised, particularly in relation to areal protection. Given such a broad remit it is difficult to conclude with the type of recommendations devised to evaluate a particular policy brief, though the study raises a number of observations which in relating back to the original research questions pose a further set of questions for research and practice in this field.

1. How does conservation control relate to planning in principle and practice?

- Conservation has a genuine moral weight, recognised by all parties. However in local authority planning practice, the emphasis on a separate conservation mindset and consent system does not in itself highlight the special quality of conservation. The resultant separateness can be counter-productive, characterising conservation as an exclusive design consideration and not necessarily central to planning's aims.
- Planning officers are gaining more responsibility for minor changes to listed buildings and conservation area control, despite questions over their competence in this field. Though these minor changes cumulatively pose the greatest threat to character (as defined by planning policy) they are not necessarily dealt with by conservation professionals.
- This questions the current status of the conservation officer whose personal priorities and opinions are highly influential in the authority's implementation of PPG15. The scale of the task facing this role could be made explicit in the

creation of strategic and reactive conservation positions, certainly a proactive and quasi-evangelical role to boost wider support and understanding for environmental conservation is essential for longer-term success.

- An integrated planning permission has been suggested as one way of achieving greater integration. Given some local planning authorities' current working practices, perhaps integrating a conservation officer into the development control section would ensure a parity of status and continual involvement in a wider range of cases, thereby easing objections to this potential simplification in procedures.
- Through resource constraints and a corresponding lack of policy/strategic development, these local authorities' conservation practices can create and reinforce a perception of conservation concentrating on the specifics of listed building consents rather than having the scope to focus on areal protection.
- It would appear that concepts supporting definitions of areal value are under-developed, locally and also nationally. This may be fundamentally due to the operation and implementation of conservation within the planning system which presents an inherent barriers to realise this. Whilst many conservation professionals considered conservation involved much more than urban design, this discipline has much to offer to tie-in conservation to wider planning strategies.
- As the lead body, EH could concentrate attention in this area, perhaps shifting the emphasis for Historic Areas Advisers to assist local authorities to evaluate character at strategic and policy levels. Though statutory planning limits a 'material consideration', this ought not restrict using the variety of available sources outside planning to develop areal conceptions of value.

2. How is value in the built environment perceived and interpreted for conservation purposes?

- Though recognised in PPG15, there is a distinct hierarchy of value interpretation with physical, tangible evidence paramount, through associational historical value to more open cultural and environmental perceptions which are notably undervalued despite them being used to justify policy statements.
- This hierarchy reflects the profession's paramount concern with intrinsic architectural value which is considered a self-evident justification. The

perceived legitimacy of conservation value generally decreases down this hierarchy in contrast to a corresponding increase in lay interpretations of value. The public's broader scale of appreciation is not necessarily well represented by the professional interpretation and contribution to planning decisions.

- In line with other recent research recommendations, exploring and understanding the non-professional interpretation of value in the built environment is imperative. There is a distinct lack of evidence to currently guide the development of practice to appreciate this sphere.
- Similarly the symbolism and cultural significance of features in the built environment may not necessarily relate to architectural quality. These sentiments can be more emotive yet largely remain under-represented in conservation not only through professional architectural preferences but also a lack of recognition in empirical studies. Sponsoring research to bridge perceptions of conservation and environmental and cultural qualities is of equal importance to architectural research into specific buildings.
- There is a distinct lay preference to blend in new development, creating 'national-vernacular' architecture. This is a relevant issue for modern architecture as well as conservation since many still see the two in opposition. It is flattening the essential temporal collage of the urban environment. Relationships of time and space are as important as architectural detailing, though these restricted by planning's limits.
- Contrast in the built environment is as important as harmony. However a misplaced understanding or even a fear of new design amongst elected members can lead to homogenous environment. Better design training is perhaps essential but also consideration ought be given to respecting the temporal dimension of the built environment in managing place identity as well as the purely aesthetic.
- Issues of locality, place and the historical or temporal aspects of conservation may be more strongly felt at a local level but these lie towards the bottom of the value hierarchy. However these value interpretations are more closely associated with areal protection which is the weakest link in UK practice. Researching the application of the concept of significance in relation to planning controls would prove valuable.

- Local authorities have the autonomy but neither the resources nor the perceived creative will to explore and raise the profile of these lower rungs of the hierarchy. Heritage interpretation and extrinsic value are issues which conservation cannot wholly disregard, despite the constraints of planning law.
- There is still professional confusion over the public's contribution to conservation that hamper extending the scope of value interpretation beyond a one-way process of legitimation. However many standards relating to intrinsic interest have been revealed as less defensible and objective than assumed. In this case, surely extrinsic interest cannot continue to be excluded for its subjectivity and difficulty for quantification.
- Conservation requires a two-way exchange of information about value interpretation to gain acceptance and support of local communities. Imposing abstract valuations may not always be suitable; recognising values outside orthodox professional interpretations ought be used as a basis for ensuring that conservation action rather than considering these wider interpretations are to be dismissed for their unorthodox perspective. LA21 participation initiatives may provide a means to access the lay interpretations and provide a lead for more community-led character appraisals.

3. How do economic and political pressures contribute to or undermine conservation?

- Conservation has slipped down the political agenda at national and local levels, possibly on the assumption that conservation has accomplished its task in deflecting the significant threats to the urban fabric. Pigeon-holing it as an exclusive control for a minority of exclusive buildings has obscured its wider contribution to, and allowed its displacement by, the regeneration and sustainability agendas.
- One obstacle has been the measurement of conservation's wider socio-economic benefits to the community in comparison with tangible economic benefits of permitting land development. Whilst some research has addressed this concern, further work is required to provide a substantive framework for practical application.
- A further problem has been a professional reluctance to address the political nature of conservation activity. Making explicit political choices about resource

allocation is necessary to highlight its benefits, though also reveals losers as well as winners.

- It is necessary to build on the gravity of the moral responsibility towards conservation, encouraging more endemic conservation thinking and thereby reducing the need to coerce and enforce controls. The conservation profession faces a choice in response to this slippage in priorities. Either it must consolidate its success and recognise the limits of current practice by concentrating on the technical control of physical fabric for its didactic value. Or alternatively it must orient conservation to providing a means, a framework, in which a diversity of cultural value interpretations can reinforce the wider economic and social benefits of conservation to potentially reinvigorate conservation's flagging political profile.

9.7 Conclusion

The issues raised in the thesis recall a poignant observation by a senior Director at English Heritage. He distinguished between '*conservation in the small sense*' - protecting historic buildings through specific consent procedures and technical knowledge - and '*conservation in the large sense*' forming a set of philosophical drivers which ought underpin '*all of what local planning authorities and central Government are doing*'. Although the former was an accomplished system, the latter still fell significantly short of realising this aspiration. That these conclusions should echo his remarks is perhaps unremarkable. The revealing aspect of the thesis is that the practical application of '*conservation in the small sense*' in local planning authorities may actually inhibit the promotion and wider application of '*conservation in the large sense*' as a principal goal.

The separate consent systems, the general pre-occupation with buildings rather than areal conservation and the particular focus on intrinsic interest provide a strong regime for those features falling within this orientation. The strength of these factors reinforce '*the small sense*' as definitive of conservation, inhibiting and excluding the wider interpretations and contribution of conservation. This is unfortunate given that conservation no longer occupies the political limelight it previously enjoyed, either nationally or locally. Conservation has much to contribute to urban renaissance, creating sustainable cities, making liveable and

intelligible urban forms based on scales which relate to human cognition and perception. Where conservation is treated as a traditional form of exclusive design control, it is difficult to promote and re-unite the relationship and contribution of progressive conservation to emerging political agendas.

There is a case to answer that conservation ought remain firm in its principles and approach rapidly changing political fashions with caution. There is no certainty that these agendas will enjoy continuity in Government policy or indeed that the ideas and aspirations driving them are sound and guaranteed success. But the degree to which conservation has been politically eclipsed by them, despite its general moral support, is surely the most persuasive argument to examine the fundamental issues highlighted in this thesis. Virtually all national respondents considered PPG15 represented a highwatermark in conservation policy, yet conservation is losing ground in its relationship with planning and politics. If indeed there is a process of marginalisation, then revising the system becomes vital.

Whilst inevitably there will always be a place for protecting the integrity of masterpieces of British architecture, the fundamental concern is to emancipate conservation from being perceived as just 'conservation in the small sense'. Its wider application and appeal need restating in terms which connect with broader public and political appreciation of its contribution. To this end, the scope of value interpretation could be broadened, opening a less exclusive framework to develop environmental and extrinsic values. This could allow a more positive identification of the range of conservation effects benefiting the community.

A revision of such breadth can only progress if those involved in conservation embrace its tenets and there is sufficient political will to surmount the structural inertia to commence the process. Unfortunately the political will is only likely to be generated by one of two means - the *a priori* demonstration of conservation's wider benefits (which may only be realised at the end of a review process) or by an external threat. Instead the opportunity to broaden conservation is perceived as the prime threat by many sectors of the profession - the regeneration and sustainability agendas are viewed with some cynicism as encroaching on the purity of the conservation mantle.

Conservation planning faces a choice, not a new decision, but one which has been avoided for far too long. Either it must consolidate conservation as the management of the country's buildings or in pursuing conservation as environmental and cultural management it must realise that the concepts of the

former approach require dramatic revision to address these aspirations. Re-examining the relationship with planning and value interpretation may mean losing aspects of exclusivity and 'separateness' in practice but the benefits of exploring such avenues are significant if the goal of 'conservation in the large sense' is ever to be achieved.

Part IV

Appendix A

These synopses of the eight development case studies are to assist the reader recollect their salient details when they are referred to later in the thesis.

Synopses of developments studied in Authority A

The Lodge - a residential development by a commercial developer

This grade II early Victorian building is situated in its own grounds on the edge of the town centre, surrounded by a council estate. After use as a residential hostel, the Council sold the site to a local developer. Despite several successful planning permissions for residential development, none were implemented as the developer contended the conservation requirements of repair work were financially unviable. This wrangling spanned several years, the site remained undeveloped with the building's condition rapidly deteriorating, encouraging vandalism and further anti-social activities on the site. Local residents were concerned and despite the ward Councillor obtaining an Urgent Works Notice issue, the developer continued to stall. The political sensitivity prompted the DC Manager's direct intervention. He approached a local house-builder, known to the planning service, to conclude a private transfer of the site from the existing developers. In return, the authority relaxed previous conservation requirements, contrary to policy, such as the use of artificial stone and the extent of alterations to the listed building. However the Conservation & Urban Design (CUD) section were furious to discover the extent of demolition permitted which left only two external walls of the listed building. In the absence of a reference to EH, CUD wished to distance themselves from these results. Despite the sacrifices however, most respondents approved of the new development which provided 14 new flats, rid the area of the anti-social problems and all at no extra cost to the Council.

The Mount - a residential development by a private householder

Previously divided into two flats, this sizeable grade II listed house is located in one of the town's many Victorian suburbs designated a conservation area. The current owner wished to restore the property to a single family home from two flats. Although the applicant applied for planning permission, the proposed work, removing an old conservatory and an external fire escape and further internal alterations, fell within the permitted development rights. A member of the CUD section approved the listed building consent since it only involved removing previous inappropriate additions to the building.

The Yard - a commercial development by a commercial developer

This modest, late-Victorian unlisted building, is located on a main shopping street in the central conservation area. The accommodation is split between ground floor retailing and a first floor restaurant. The plot owners, a group of property developers, wished to replace it with a new two-storey retail unit. At the rear of the site was a yard, one of many in the centre illustrating a unique historic street pattern. However this particular Yard was not marked on the UDP map as historically significant and the applicants wanted to build over this 'redundant' space. While the planning officer initially approved the scheme, the conservation adviser was adamantly opposed, arguing that this would be destroying the historic street morphology. Since the building's double gable also contributed to street's roofscape, the modern design of the replacement was totally inappropriate. The DC officer then recommended refusal which resulted an appeal. In the meantime, a revised design largely replicated the existing building in traditional materials. Although pandering to his sensibilities, the conservation adviser considered this was an inappropriate and crude replica without the original's patina of age. Again the DC officer initially approved the scheme until EH's comments were received outlining an unproven case for demolition. In addition, much local interest was invoked over the threatened loss of the restaurant upstairs - attachment to the use rather than the building itself. This possibly influenced committee Members to refuse the application. The applicants, having lost their original tenant through these planning delays, subsequently dropped their appeal.

The Square - a commercial development by a local small business

Situated on the corner of a prestigious square in the central conservation area, this four storey, grade II* listed building suffered extensive fire damage in the early 1990s. Though the impressive front elevation was relatively untouched, the interior was gutted with few surviving features. Little interest had been shown until a local businessman bought the freehold for his retail outlet. He considered the fire damage an opportunity to introduce a mezzanine structure providing striking, open trading floors. This constituted a significant demolition and despite vehement objections of the local conservation adviser, EH tolerated these structural alterations to permit the building's re-use. Most contentious was the proposed removal of the central chimney stack. The conservation adviser, citing PPG15 and statutory amenity societies' support, considered the stack essential to the building's construction and historic plan-form. In contrast, EH considered it contained no inherent interest and could be removed: the features worth retaining in the building comprised the most visible ones - the plasterwork detailing around the main entrance lobby and reinstating the main staircase to the first floor. The committee Members, eager to see the building's re-use followed EH's advice, permitting the central stack's removal to accommodate new timber replacement floors. However, even the agents were surprised at the extent of alterations permitted given its grade II* status.

Synopses of developments studied in Authority B

The Friary - a residential development by a commercial developer

These grade II listed buildings on the town centre site of the former County hospital had been converted into flats in several award-winning schemes. Following financial difficulties, the original developer's unfinished scheme for the whole site left a difficult topographical area for new development. At the top of this site stood a former pathology laboratory, a functional 1940s building which marred the neo-classical, monumental scale of the main hospital building and the prospect over the town when viewed from the nearby East Bridge. Despite an existing condition to demolish this laboratory, the developers attempted all manner of facading schemes to convert this structurally sound building into further residential accommodation. These superficial makeovers were considered inappropriate not only by the authority but also by a vocal section of local residents, many of whose domestic views would continue to be obstructed if this building was retained. Throughout prolonged negotiations the authority's line hardened, successfully insisting on its demolition. Given the historic context and this site's prominence, the appearance of the accompanying new residential development was critical. The authority and the agents were particularly sensitive to the context, preferring a traditional design. In contrast, EH's advice recommended a contemporary treatment rather than the attempted neo-classical style. To reflect the general character of the town, a compromise following a Georgian terrace was eventually agreed and proved acceptable to Committee Members who had been particularly concerned about the incursion of contrasting new design in that context.

The Bank - a commercial development by a commercial developer

Following a successful conversion of their own former warehouses into bars and restaurants on this riverside site, these respected local developers wished to construct a new flagship office building on the remaining plot. The scheme also involved relocating the Old School House, a grade II listed building, to the opposite side of the site and the possible demolition of other vacant listed buildings. After the authority rejected this relocation, it was omitted from subsequent plans: the other existing listed buildings were altered into a renovation scheme. However in departing from the warehouse developments' redbrick vernacular the proposed three storey office block was of a distinctly contemporary design, comprising a partial sheet glass facade and white render finish. Whilst negotiating an acceptable scale and massing for the new building to respect the surrounding context and perspectives, the striking design remained contentious. The applicants and planning officers wanted a contemporary design to contrast with the plethora of pastiche schemes in the town centre. However committee Members, echoing comments received from the public, considered it did not respect the character of the surrounding area. In the absence of a conservation area character appraisal, the committee made an unprecedented demand to grant planning permission on condition that they chose the external materials. Despite the presence of many nearby white rendered historic properties, they changed the finish to incorporate red brickwork to fit in with the surrounding buildings. Although this was approved, building is yet to be commenced.

The Hotel - a commercial development by a local small business

Despite a crudely altered exterior, this building is grade II* listed for its fine internal c18th plasterwork. Although located within the central conservation area, the immediate area appears down at heel following the relocation of the surrounding landowner's commercial motor trading firm. Subsequently the area has been the subject of lengthy negotiations between this firm and the Council for a regeneration scheme with provision for 90 new town houses and flats and a relief road into the town centre. With his garden facing encroachment on three sides from this scheme, the hotel owner wished to expand his accommodation by developing to the rear of the property. However after a series of grandiose plans which the planners considered poorly designed over-development, the applicant appealed following the authority's refusal of a 16 bedroom coach-house annexe. The authority successfully contended that the setting of the listed building and the character of the conservation area would be compromised by development in the garden. However this would appear anomalous given the proposed regeneration scheme was planned even closer to the listed building and would more dramatically affect the character of the area. A further objection from the Environment Agency was also upheld regarding the reduction in flood capacity on the river plain caused by the development despite the adjacent regeneration scheme creating a far greater loss. Previously, the authority were able to balance this objection against the benefit of a much needed relief road in the town centre. The Inspector dismissed the argument that any development in the garden would create a loss of amenity for residents in the terrace flats of the regeneration scheme. This was inadmissible because the flats were not yet built and it was using the Hotels' private grounds as a public amenity space. Following the appeal the owner was considering a smaller development in the garden to satisfy the conservation arguments.

The Terrace - a residential development by a private householder

Although not strictly speaking a private householder development, the property was purchased by a local estate agent and privately renovated, the case provided access to private householders to discuss the nature of this alteration to a neighbouring property. Being in a grade II listed Georgian terrace within the central conservation area, the street elevation was considered untouchable. The rear elevation fared less well as the applicant wished to extend the kitchen facilities by demolishing the half-width out-rigger and replacing it with a full width extension thus covering the rear yard. This design caused consternation amongst neighbours who had previously attempted to make any new additions sympathetic with the existing form. After minor modifications incorporated some glazing panels in the roof reflecting the previous open yard, the conservation officer was satisfied to grant listed building consent. However it was particularly galling for neighbours who considered the symmetry of the rear out-riggers unnecessarily interrupted by this crude addition, despite their best efforts to maintain the appearance of the whole of the terrace.

Appendix B

The original interview schedule was used for the national interview survey in which the questioning involved a more abstract approach to conservation issues. The following selection of questions, statements and abstracts were intended to challenge existing assumptions about conservation practice.

An introduction

Start with amicable greetings, thank them for their co-operation and time.

Outline who I am, why I am doing this research, who is funding it and what I hope to get out of it. Outline their contribution and what I can potentially offer in return.

Assure them that all their answers are totally confidential and will be used solely for my own academic purposes.

Outline the themes I am hoping to pursue in this research.

- The various perceptions of valuing features in the built environment which invoke considerations of the past and its relationship with the present
- The way in which these perceptions operate within the processes of protection - how they are relied upon or excluded
- The extent to which other political and economic factors affect those perceptions' use in the processes of protection control and its outcomes

I am hoping to identify the various positions and perceptions held by those institutions and bodies which have a direct or fairly influential role in the formation and general climate of protection policy.

It would be helpful if you could critically reflect on the institution's position from your professional point of view.

Obviously there are extremes of positions which can be taken on these issues, they are most readily identifiable, it is the middle ground which I wish to explore, how the extremes of perception are fused and compounded in the policy process.

Initial questions to start the interview

Personal details	Who, previous experience, other positions at the moment
Professional role	Their responsibilities in the organisation
Institution itself	What the body aims to achieve and its current priorities
Internally	How conservation policies are formulated/gain ground

1. The scope and focus of conservation controls in relation to broader planning provisions

Separate from planning - Integral to planning

Questions

- Development plan and conservation - how could protection be further integrated?
- Conservation may be seen by some as one of the main functions of planning as it concerns the *appearance* of urban and rural areas. Is it?

Statements

- Conservation is seen now as a perfectly legitimate concern of planning, able to override private interests
- Protection is just one function of the planning whole - sits at odds with other aims - absolute protection in contrast with other planning needs and reasons for change.
- Planning now may appear to be a tool for assisting/attracting competing business and commercial interests to operate and locate in particular urban areas.

Analyses/abstracts

- Protecting amenity - identified by the New Right as one of the few desirable functions for downsized planning - protection and planning would seem synonymous concepts.

Structure Specific - Environmental

Questions

- Does the increase in protection represent a failure of planning to provide environments which have some sense of identity or continuity or familiarity?
- Is there any priority given by your organisation to protecting fragments or places?

Statements

- Intrinsic value of a building is relative to the value of the surrounding area and the wealth or paucity of similar structures found therein.
- There appears to be a common awareness and consensus as to the value of protecting whole areas and not just isolated fragments.
- The scale that developers tend to work on now demands that areal considerations have become more prominent and the size of coverage too is increased.

Analyses/abstracts

- Why should it be accepted and indeed desirable for whole areas of a contemporary city be preserved unchanged?

- Should we seek to isolate rather than integrate the features and relics of the past to make them contrast with the modern rather than make the modern fit in with the old?

Preservationism - Conservationism

Questions

- The increasing scale of protection has necessitated this change or vice versa?
- Is there still an argument for absolute protection of features/areas?

Statements

- Protection must be flexible due to its large compass in space and time.
- Keeping things unchanged is impossible - 'natural' cycles of decay, obsolescence etc.
- The feature will inevitably change through the requirements of different users.
- Absolute preservation is not in vogue amongst restorers and 'guardians'.

Analyses/abstracts

- The change to conservation reflects the influence and power of private and commercial interests in the designation and maintenance of protection.
- What is the nature of the relationship between man and relic which has produced or reacted to this change in the orientation of the protection ethos?

Minority Interest - Popular Interest

Questions

- Is it fair to say that the interest in conservation used to be an elitist one?
- If the interest is more widespread, how have the systems responded to include, represent and evaluate this wider interest?
- Why is it now a popular interest? Consideration of heritage and the awareness, use or manipulation of the past.
- Does the organisation consider it's performing a public function? On what principles?

Statements

- A general consensus is that protecting old buildings is a good thing.

Analyses/abstracts

- Popular interest may be founded on other societal concerns - the rate of change, the lack of control felt against change, wanting to cling to the past for fear of the future.
- Is it deeper than this - that the whole approach to areal protection is to prevent the onset of dramatic changes which people feel would be for the worst?

2. The interpretation and articulation of value in features attracting conservation interest

Architectural & historical - Cultural, visual & societal

Questions

- The criteria are flexible enough to accommodate new definitions and interpretations of architectural or historic value - has special architectural or historic interest been modified by other factors?
- Or do these criteria exclude other possible ways of valuing these features?

Statements

- Established criteria appear almost incontrovertible - it's accepted wisdom - the entire ethos rests on this architectural and historical approach.
- The early planning profession's use, not necessarily their enduring suitability.
- The value and contribution of the variety of ways which make features meaningful.
- The process of validation is on such grounds beyond the comprehension of those lacking an academic appreciation of architecture and history.

Analyses/abstracts

- Other factors which merit features' protection are shoe-horned into this perspective excluding their own merit and undermining the status of architectural or historic interest.

National importance - Local importance

Questions

- There seems to be a pecking order between listing and conservation areas, listing is superior as it concerns national prestige thus denigrating local importance.

Statements

- National interest has been a latent theme running through protection, especially for listed buildings.
- Are conservation areas drifting away from their original intentions, to protect the spaces between buildings which could not be protected otherwise and protect less important composites?

Analyses/abstracts

- This form of either national or local importance involves different considerations of value and knowledge and affects the relationship with local planning aims.

Special and genuine - Familiar and popular

Questions

- Protection ought concern itself with a limited examples which are special through being unique

- Or can it embrace wider features of everyday representations?

Statements

- There are fairly well defined guidelines ensuring uniformity in assessing the quality of features to be 'special'.
- To set some standard only the best examples of certain features ought be protected - there is a distinct cut-off level envisaged.

Analyses/abstracts

- The set guidelines for selecting special interest are open to a diversity of interpretations, especially for conservation areas' unregulated basis.
- The definition of 'special' is dependent on those factors and people involved in the decision-making process: it is as much inclusionary as exclusionary.
- Special may be precisely that because it is a familiar feature, conversely designating a feature as special may make an unattractive feature consequently more appreciated.
- Also familiar can mean ordinary, unspectacular, the everyday and taken for granted. On the other hand it can mean intimate, well acquainted, affectionate.

Expert opinion - Lay opinion

Questions

- The preserve of one group of experts, whose knowledge constitutes one approach to valuing the building is not necessarily supreme.
- There are communication problems between groups - access, knowledge, language.
- How is lay opinion canvassed or regarded?

Statements

- There are opportunities for the two to integrate and co-operate through public participation measures in the broadest sense.
- It is that this kind of work can only be done from an informed and well educated perspective - architects, art and architectural historians - an élitist view?
- The whole construction and interpretation of features and their value may vary enormously between expert and lay persons, possibly being mutually exclusive.
- The opportunity for the public to contribute to the valuation of features may appear limited and their opinions may not necessarily cover the breadth of appreciation or otherwise of the features.

Analyses/abstracts

- The built environment cannot be treated identically to any other work of art.
- The weight accorded to these opinions may vary according to their fitting in with the predilections of those administering the system.
- Insider/outsider constructs - sub-conscious attachment through experience and significance in peoples lives contrasting with rather more objective awareness and appreciation of particular prescriptions about features' worth.

Objective historical knowledge - The past as a cultural collage

Questions

- The variety of a collage of time - contrasts rather than homogenising control
- The nature of appreciating the objects - through informed knowledge or experience and unconscious assimilation

Statements

- The way in which we recognise the value of the past is well reflected by the processes, criteria and approaches that characterise protection control.

Analyses/ abstracts

- Authenticity in the historical record the tradition of constructing a more accurate historical narrative and postmodernism's re-assessment - representativeness and the power relationships in the remnants of history.
- The presence of the past - the role of these features have drastically altered. The nature of the relationship is more a reflection of the contemporary society than the past.
- Historical awareness and knowledge need not necessary arise from conventional sources but from everyday world experience.
- The interactions between informed and intuitive perspectives.

3. The influence of external issues, e.g. economic and political factors, on conservation

Intrinsic Value - Commodity Value

Questions

- Does protection hinder or help the features' endurance?
- The role of economics influencing protection policy.
- (What about for instance the conservation area in Westminster and the Royal Opera House, or No.1 Poultry where development triumphed over conservation?)

Statements

- Policy maintains that the two stages (identification and control decisions) are quite distinct and the planned use of a building won't influence the decision to protect it.
- The intrinsic value of a feature is quite dependent on the value of its surroundings in other aspects be they architectural, historical, commercial, economic...
- The influence of tourism and the rise of heritage.

Analyses/abstracts

- Conservation would appear to be used for prettifying an area for reasons of attracting people and investment - to manipulate particular areas of towns and cities to suit commercial interests - rather than actually bearing any relation to the merits/quality of the built environment and its significance.

Purity of choice - A political tool

Questions

- An extra strand of planning regulation to allow the planner some greater influence in controlling market forces.
- Protection control can be used for ends other than protection.
- Different political agendas at different levels - national and local.

Statements

- Protection control is equally about the protection of amenity, land and property, image and prestige, privilege and exclusion and the competition for resources as it is about an altruistic protection of architecture.

Analyses/abstracts

- As technical processes, listing buildings and designating conservation areas, their maintenance and protection are subject to the same political factors and professional ideologies that affect the rest of planning.

Private & voluntary - Public & administrative

Questions

- The reasons and motivations for private owners to protect and enhance their property may not be necessarily comparable to the aspirations of the public aims of control.
- The two often present rather than resolve conflicting interests.
- How can any collective interest be identified in justifying protection control?

Statements

- The operation of the two controls is a symbiosis - each depends on the other and neither could realistically exist in the same way if one were withdrawn.

Analyses/abstracts

- How can the two be distinguished - personal heritage and history and more collective identifications with the environment.
- The justifications of public control over private interests - the *public interest* for protection control - how far it ought tolerably go and on what grounds for justification.

Now need a cooling down period so as not to leave the interviewee feeling antagonised/bitter.

Give them the opportunity to add anything they felt was not covered during the discussion or any point which they wish to repeat/review or take further.

Concluding the interview

Need to explicitly draw the interview to an end towards the scheduled time.

Ascertain whether they could continue or not.

Maybe form a summary of their position to/or check with them any points about which they/you were unsure, or for them to reflect on something about which they were unsure.

(This may be a way of leading back into some points you wish to further explore if they grant you extra time with them.)

Ask them if they have any further questions.

Finally thank them for their time and invaluable contributions.

Ask them if they would be willing to maintain in contact over the forthcoming couple of years.

Also for any potential follow up interview or if they would like to be informed of developments in my research.

22-10-97

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