

To whom it may concern

The Rotherham District Civic Society supports the application of Article 4 (2) Directions in the Clifton Bank, Wellgate Terrace and Nos 81 and 81a Wellgate (part of the Rotherham Town Centre Conservation Area). In doing so, we would like to echo the sentiments of the editorial writer in the autumn 2009 'Conservation Bulletin' published by English Heritage:

The concept of the conservation area was introduced in the Civic Amenities Act 1967 sponsored by Duncan Sandys. It was a pioneering measure, the first piece of legislation to acknowledge the value of whole groups of buildings and to recognise the importance of conserving the character of entire areas. By the end of 1967, the first four conservation areas had been designated. Today there are more than 9,300 - eloquent testimony of their importance to the quality of life in modern Britain.

Looking back, it is easy to see why the concept seized the popular imagination, coming at a time when large parts of our historic towns and cities were being demolished to make way for residential estates, shopping centres and ring roads, and when comprehensive redevelopment ruled the day.

Today, conservation areas are a crucial component of local identity and community cohesion; the element of England's heritage that is all around us and that touches all our lives.

Designated by local authorities, they provide an effective mechanism for managing change to places on an area-wide basis, but until this year we had relatively little idea of their condition, or any hard evidence of the challenges and pressures they are facing.

That is why in the autumn of 2008 English Heritage launched its conservation areas census. We asked every local authority in England to assess the condition of its conservation areas using a common questionnaire. It is a measure of their importance and levels of local concern that around 75 per cent of local authorities responded. The results of this first-ever national survey were published in June 2009 as part of English Heritage's Heritage at Risk initiative.

The survey found that around 1 in 7 conservation areas are at risk. Many more have serious problems. Only 15 per cent of conservation areas have seen an improvement since 2006, just over 50 per cent have an appraisal, and only 13 per cent have Article 4 Directions to prevent damaging small-scale changes, like replacement windows. Urban conservation areas are twice as likely to be at risk as rural ones.

Given their vital importance to the cultural heritage of the nation, and the clear intention that new development should preserve or enhance local character, the survey makes worrying reading. Current threats are undermining the original aspirations behind the legislation. With the importance of tackling climate change, enlightened stewardship of what we have is essential if we are to secure best value from existing resources and the embodied energy they contain.

We would like to take this opportunity to call on the Local Authority to apply Article 4 Directions in the Moorgate Road area, where similar small scale infringements threaten the quality of a very important part of the town's heritage.

Yours faithfully

Secretary