

Information on the proposed Stalbridge Article 4 Direction

BACKGROUND

North Dorset District Council is looking for comments on the possibility of introducing additional planning controls to protect Stalbridge Conservation Area.

Due to its special architectural and historic interest a Conservation Area was designated in Stalbridge in May 1978. The character and appearance of the Stalbridge Conservation Area is defined by the various activities which take place within the town, the very high number of listed and non-listed buildings making a positive contribution, the materials used in their construction, the tight urban grain of a traditional market town, the spaces created by them, local views and the landscape setting. The historic buildings which make such an important contribution are characterised by their modest scale, use of local stone for walling and roofs and survival of historic fabric. In this respect, materials, windows, doors, roofs, chimneys and boundary walls form a key part of the historic and architectural importance of buildings and their environs within the conservation area. Windows in particular include some fine examples of wrought iron casements with leaded lights, cast iron casements and traditional timber casements and vertical sliding sashes.

Due to a growing concern about the loss of Stalbridge's unique identity officers of the Council have undertaken surveys to determine the amount of change which has taken place to buildings within recent years and they are concerned that the qualities which make Stalbridge special are being lost. Within the planning system there is a duty placed on local authorities to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas. However, at present the replacement of historic features with modern replacements in historic buildings which are not statutory listed does not require planning permission where the building in question is a private dwelling house (i.e. not a flat or commercial premises or combination of these two). In essence this means that at present many of the occupiers of buildings which are

not listed but make a positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area can alter their properties without reference to the Council. What this has led to over recent years is the loss of features which give the buildings within Stalbridge their historic character. For example the recent surveys have revealed that within the space of two/three years many houses have lost their original windows to modern replacements. In addition, the character of these traditional houses is also being altered as a result of changes to doors, roofs and boundary walls. There is also a problem of painting traditional brick or stonework. Whilst wishing to safeguard the ability of homeowners to maintain their property to modern day standard the Council is also keen to prevent Stalbridge becoming a clone town that lacks identity. As such the Council would like to hear resident's views on the introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction which seeks to encourage the retention of high quality architectural features on buildings and to preserve and enhance the conservation area of which they are part. If agreed, planning permission would be required to carry out certain types of alteration before the work is undertaken.

WHAT IS AN ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION?

Within the present planning system, there is a duty placed on local authorities to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas (para 2.13 Planning Policy Guidance Note 15) through the implementation of the planning system. However, if in the opinion of the authority that this is not being achieved through normal processes additional measures can be introduced to help safeguard the special interest of an area via an Article 4 Direction.

The aim of an Article 4(2) Direction is to encourage the retention of high quality architectural features on buildings and to preserve and enhance the conservation area of which they are part. 'Like for like' repairs and reinstatement of architectural features will be encouraged, along with the removal of previously unsympathetic changes to buildings.

The Council is aware that permitted development rights have been granted by Parliament and Government policy is that they should be withdrawn only in exceptional circumstances, including evidence of a real and specific threat that permitted development is likely to take place which could damage an interest of acknowledged importance. There is a requirement within

Government advice contained in Circular 9/95 and Planning Policy Guidance Note 15; that authorities should publicise their proposals in advance and have regard to the views of local people.

If the Direction is adopted, it will mean that a private dwelling house owner would have to submit a planning application for work that normally does not need one however no fee is paid where an application for planning permission is required as a result of an Article 4 Direction.

WHAT AREAS OF CHANGE SHOULD BE CONTROLLED?

Following surveys, the following features were considered to be very important contributors to Stalbridge's special character and appearance.

Doors and windows

The original period design of doors and windows contributes greatly to the character of the Conservation Area and they should be retained wherever possible. The installation of replacement doors and windows in aluminium, in plastic, or in designs other than that which existed on principal elevations can erode the special interest of Stalbridge.

Alterations to elevations

The external appearance of buildings within the conservation area is extremely important. If agreed the Direction would include porches, the removal of architectural details such as cornices as well as extensions and other works materially affecting the appearance of the building (including satellite dishes). The Direction is not meant to cover very minor alterations such as burglar alarms (n.b. different controls apply to listed buildings). It should also be noted that the Direction would only apply to elevations fronting the highway. In Stalbridge, this is unlikely to amount to more than the erection of a small porch extension.

Roofs and Chimneys

Roofing materials are considered to be very important within Stalbridge. Natural slate, clay tiles and thatch are the most common materials. The Council is keen to retain these features

and resist the introduction of concrete or synthetic materials which erode the quality of the area. Chimneys add interest and punctuate skylines. Their loss impacts upon the individual quality of a building and the wider area.

Painting facades

Good quality building stone; Greensand and others from the Marnhull quarries and good quality facing bricks (from Gillingham and other local brick fields) were used throughout the area and it is appropriate that they should remain exposed for this reason. Where a facade has already been painted, planning permission would not be required for repainting, unless there was a significant change of colour which materially alters the character or appearance of the building.

Textured paint and render

The Council is keen to maintain the contribution made to the character and appearance of the conservation area by natural stone and brick. As such, the use of textured paint or render would not be encouraged.

Hardstandings and curtilage walls

It is felt that some control is necessary to prevent cars from dominating the street scene and the setting of buildings. Proposals for vehicle hard standings would not be encouraged unless they can be located or screened to minimise the impact on the surrounding area. Careful attention to paving and landscaping would also be encouraged. Existing walls and enclosures are an important feature and should be retained and new enclosures will be encouraged if of a type which prevails in the Stalbridge Conservation Area. Please note that the prevalent material within the proposed Article 4(2) Direction area is stone walling.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of Article 4(2) Directions for Stalbridge will ensure the continued protection of important historic features which contribute to the character and appearance of the Stalbridge Conservation Area. The special character of the area is something

for all to enjoy and entails the careful stewardship of heritage assets both individually and collectively.

Ensuring the long term preservation of the historic character of Stalbridge will encourage self policing of the conservation area and a pride in the historic built environment. This will maintain the attractive qualities of this small town, contributing to the local economy through a demand for housing within this attractive area which in turn will continue to support local businesses and infrastructure.

STALBRIDGE ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS

If you have a particular view on the introduction of additional controls to prevent the loss of building features we would like to hear from you. If you think that the controls are too wide ranging or are not wide enough please let us know. Your views will be recorded and reported to the District Council's Cabinet before a final decision is made. Please provide your comments on this sheet or you can submit separate comments to:

Kevin Morris
Environment Team
North Dorset District Council
Nordon
Salisbury Road
Blandford Forum
DT11 7LL

Alternatively you can visit the Council's website at www.north-dorset.gov.uk

All comments should be submitted to the Council by Monday 29th June 2009. Thank you for your interest and contribution.

STALBRIDGE ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION COMMENT SHEET

NAME:

ADDRESS:

COMMENTS: