



## 50 Years of Conservation Areas: Public Opinion on Conservation Areas

### Summary

To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act 1967, Historic England commissioned a YouGov omnibus survey of over 2,400 adults in England to understand the public's knowledge and opinions of conservation areas.

The research findings indicate that awareness of conservation areas amongst adults in England is high but few know much detail about them. An encouraging 74% of adults support the principle of conservation areas and believe that councils should have powers to protect areas of special architectural or historic interest, with only 6% of adults believing they should not.

Comparing respondents living in conservation areas against those living outside of them yielded interesting findings: adults in conservation areas are more likely to be positive about the appearance of their local area, to have taken action to protect it and to be more aware and supportive of conservation areas. This suggests that conservation area designation has been effective without being burdensome or inconvenient for local residents.

### Knowledge and Awareness of Conservation Areas

93% of adults in England have heard of a conservation area. The majority, however, know only 'a little' or 'don't know anything' about them (81%). Only 7% of English Adults have never heard of conservation areas.

As might be expected, there is better awareness of conservation areas amongst adult respondents living in conservation areas. 96% of respondents living in conservation areas had heard of conservation areas and this group are twice as likely to 'know a lot about them' compared to adults in England (excluding those with postcodes that fall entirely within a Conservation Area) (24% and 12% respectively).

Awareness increases with age, with the over 55 age group being the most aware (97%) and most knowledgeable (17% 'know a lot about them') whereas adults aged 18-24 are the least likely to have heard of conservation areas. 89% of 18-24s had heard of conservation areas and only 5% stated that they 'know a lot about them'.

The research indicates that in spite of good levels of awareness people have difficulty identifying whether they live within the boundary of a conservation area. Almost a fifth (18%) of adults in England said they did not know if they lived in a conservation area, and only 56% of adults living at addresses within a conservation area knew their home was located within one.

### Historic Character and Appearance





Adults living in conservation areas are more likely to rate the appearance of their local area as 'quite good' or 'very good'. Adults in the CA Sample were nearly twice as likely to rate their local areas as 'very good' compared to the English Adults Sample (29% and 16% respectively), suggesting that designation is effective at enhancing or preserving the architectural and historic character of a place.

There were no significant differences in the types of issue between the two samples suggesting that the types of issues found in conservation areas are similar to those found elsewhere across the country. According to the poll, the top two issues that were deemed to be negatively affecting the appearance of a place were the same for people living in and outside Conservation Areas. They were too many parked cars (43% for both groups), and litter and fly tipping (38% in Conservation Areas and 41% outside of Conservation Areas). Another common problem that respondents said was detrimental to the appearance of their local area was street clutter and traffic signs (22% and 17% respectively). However, since adults living within conservation areas were more likely to rate the appearance of their local area more positively suggests that the scale of these issues is less of a problem in designated areas.

## Public Engagement

Over half of adults in England have taken action to protect the appearance of their local area (56%). The 5 most common actions people have taken are having signed a petition, placed an official objection to a development or planning application, written to an MP, attended a local meeting and donated to a local cause. Adults living in conservation areas are more likely to have taken action to protect the appearance of their local area (58%) compared to those living outside of them (54%).

The most active age group are the over 55s. 56% of English adults over the age of 55 have taken action to protect the appearance of their local area compared to an average of 46% across younger age groups. Nonetheless, an encouraging 44% of the youngest age group (18-24) had taken action of some kind to protect the appearance of their local area.

## Public Opinions on Conservation Areas

Almost three quarters of adults (74%) in England believe that councils should have the power to restrict changes to buildings and streets in order to protect the character and appearance of a conservation area. This increases to over four fifths (83%) for adults who live in conservation areas. Only 5% of adults in England do not believe that councils should have these powers. This demonstrates that there is strong support among adults in England for protecting the local historic environment and local heritage assets.

Adults aged 55 and over are the most supportive of the principle of conservation areas, with 83% supporting them. This decreases to just 59% amongst 18-24 year olds, however, the proportion of those saying they 'have no strong feelings either way' is greater at 28% among this age group compared to 18% across older age groups.



# Historic England

Almost two thirds (65%) of adults living in conservation areas said that they would be 'fairly' or 'very likely' to move to another conservation area if they had to move home. Only 10% said that they would be 'not very' or 'not at all likely' to move to another conservation area.

## Method

YouGov carried out an online survey of 2,490 adults in England in two separate waves between 18th and 20th July 2017. The first sample surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,975 adults in England. A second sample of 597 adults were identified as living within a Conservation Area using local authority GIS data to find postcodes that fall entirely within Conservation Area boundaries. Where comparisons have been made, adults living in postcodes that fall entirely within Conservation Areas have been removed from the first sample of all adults in England leaving a weighted sample of 1,893. Figures from the English Adults Sample (the first) have been weighted and are representative of all English adults (aged 18+); CA Sample (the second) results are unweighted.

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## About Historic England

We are Historic England (formerly known as English Heritage), the public body that champions and protects England's historic places. We look after the historic environment, providing expert advice, helping people protect and care for it and helping the public to understand and enjoy it.





## Appendix 1 – Full Questionnaire

### Q1- required

SINGLE CHOICE

For the following question, when thinking about your local area, please think about the historic buildings and features of buildings, green spaces, and the general layout of the area that you live in...

In general, how good or poor would you say the appearance of your local area is? (Please select the option that best applies)

required

HARD

- 1  Very good
- 2  Quite good
- 3  Fair
- 4  Quite poor
- 5  Very poor
- 977  Don't know
- 998 *Skipped*
- 999 *Not Asked*

*Not randomized, exclude other punches*

Base: All English adults



## Q2- required

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Which, if any, of the following do you think are problems that are negatively affecting the appearance of your local area? (Please select all that apply. If you think there are no problems in particular that are affecting the appearance of your local area, please select the 'Not applicable' option)

order

randomize

required

HARD

- 1  Street clutter and traffic signs (e.g. bins, sandwich boards, signposts etc.)
- 2  Temporary structures (e.g. Portable toilets, containers, 'Portakabins' offices in containers in construction sites etc.)
- 3  Unsuitable or confusing road layout
- 4  Traffic calming measures and/ or other methods to control the level of traffic (e.g. speed bumps, road markings, curb extensions etc.)
- 5  Too many parked cars
- 6  A lack of open or green spaces and trees
- 7  Overhead cables
- 8  CCTV cameras
- 9  Lack of maintenance and disrepair
- 10  Loss of historic details/ features on buildings
- 11  Telecommunication masts
- 12  Satellite dishes
- 13  Unsightly advertising and signs
- 14  Litter/ fly tipping (i.e. the illegal dumping of waste)

966  Other

*Not randomized*



- 977  Don't know *Not randomized, exclude other punches*
- 99  Not applicable - there are no problems in particular that are affecting the appearance of my local area *Not randomized, exclude other punches*
- 

Base: All English adults

**Q3- required**

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Which, if any, of the following actions have you EVER taken to protect the appearance of the area that you currently live in, or the properties within it? (Please select all that apply)

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- order                      randomize  
required                      HARD
- 1  Signed a petition
  - 2  Written to an Member of Parliament (MP) or Councillor
  - 3  Donated to a local cause
  - 4  Volunteered to help protect or maintain the condition of my local area (e.g. by fundraising)
  - 5  Place an official objection to a development or planning application in my local area
  - 6  Attended a public meeting about the condition of my local area
  - 7  Taken part in a demonstration
  - 8  Posted or campaigned on social media
- 955  Other *Not randomized*
- 977  Don't know/ can't recall *Not randomized, exclude other punches*
- 944  Not applicable - I have never taken any action to protect the area I currently live in or the properties within it *Not randomized, exclude other punches*
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Base: All English adults

**Q4- required**

SINGLE CHOICE

Councils have the ability to designate areas of special architectural and historic interest as 'conservation areas'. This allows them to restrict changes to buildings and streets to protect the character and appearance of an area.

Before taking this survey, which ONE of the following statements best described your awareness and understanding of conservation areas?

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order

reverse

required

HARD

- 1  I was aware of conservation areas and I know **a lot** about them
- 2  I was aware of conservation areas and I know **a little** about them
- 3  I was aware of conservation areas but I **don't know anything** about them
- 4  I have never heard of conservation areas

8 *Skipped*

9 *Not Asked*

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Base: All English adults that are aware of conservation areas



## Q5a- Show if Q4 in [1,2,3]/required

SINGLE CHOICE

Do you currently live in a conservation area?

filter\_text All GB adults that are aware of conservation areas

required HARD

1  Yes, I do

2  No, I do not

977  Don't know

*Not randomized, exclude other punches*

998 *Skipped*

999 *Not Asked*

Base: All English adults

## Q6b- required

SINGLE CHOICE

Do you think councils should or should not have the power to restrict changes to buildings and streets to protect the character and appearance of a Conservation area?

required HARD

1  They should

2  They should not

3  I have no strong feelings either way

4  Don't know

8 *Skipped*

9 *Not Asked*

Base: All English adults that currently live in a conservation area





**Q7- Show if Q5a==1/required**

SINGLE CHOICE

Please imagine you were moving out of the area you currently lived in...

How likely, if at all, would you be to move to another conservation area?

filter\_text All GB adults that currently live in a conservation area

required HARD

1  Very likely

2  Fairly likely

3  Not very likely

4  Not at all likely

977  Don't know

*Not randomized, exclude other punches*

998 *Skipped*

999 *Not Asked*

Base: All English adults that did not say 'yes' to living in a conservation area

**Q8- Show if Q5a in [2,3]/required**

SINGLE CHOICE

Please imagine you were moving out of the area you currently lived in...

How likely, if at all, would you be to move to a conservation area?

filter\_text All GB adults that did not say 'yes' to living in a conservation area

required HARD

1  Very likely

2  Fairly likely

3  Not very likely

4  Not at all likely

977  Don't know

*Not randomized, exclude other punches*

998 *Skipped*

999 *Not Asked*