

DESIGNATING CONSERVATION AREAS WHICH INCLUDE C20TH BUILDINGS: GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

One of the disheartening aspects of reviewing existing conservation areas has been seeing C20th buildings described as making a detrimental, or at best neutral, contribution to the area, or dismissed as 'unfortunate', 'unsympathetic', and 'over-scaled'. Even when C20th built heritage is recognised in the character assessment as making a positive contribution, it doesn't always benefit from the same level of research and analysis afforded to older areas. In some cases, C20th development has been specifically excluded from the boundary of the conservation area. Whilst it is true that some C20th development was ill-considered (as is true of development of any period), this report argues for C20 buildings and planning to be researched and assessed on their own terms, rather than being automatically seen as an unsympathetic intrusion on the architecture of earlier periods.

The following good practice guidelines are intended to reinforce the work already being done by some local authorities and heritage practitioners to appropriately recognise the contribution of their C20th built heritage.

- 1) **Research:** Research the C20th buildings in the area as thoroughly as the older ones, so that they can be assessed on their own merits. Avoid assuming that any additions after a certain date are necessarily detrimental.
- 2) **Maintenance:** Try not to let poor maintenance of the building or surrounding public realm obscure the contribution made by the C20th building(s). Recognition of the building's value can encourage improvements in maintenance.
- 3) **Designed to be different:** Consider the materiality, massing and fenestration of the buildings, not just stylistic similarity. Recognise that much post-war development was designed to be unique and eye-catching, rather than to fit in, so its impact should be assessed on these terms. Something that is starkly different may still be making a valuable contribution.
- 4) **New technology:** Buildings from the 1960s are expressions of new technology in built form: big windows and open plan spaces replaced the small windows and rooms required before cheap energy and central heating. While attitudes to energy use have now changed again, these buildings are records of that distinct era.
- 5) **Changing needs:** New needs or life-styles – for increased housing density, different shopping patterns or new commercial requirements – also produce different forms.
- 6) **Planning:** Wartime bomb damage led to comprehensive city centre regeneration and the loss of much earlier fabric. Successful innovative planning, such as new relationships of the car to the pedestrian, should be recognised.
- 7) **Guidance:** Consider whether different guidance is needed to protect the character of the C20th buildings in the area.

In summary, value C20th built heritage as much as that of the Tudor, Georgian or Victorian periods: what looks old-fashioned today will be tomorrow's lost gem.

