

**REPORT FOR PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**27<sup>th</sup> March 2009**DESIGNATION OF CONSERVATION AREAS**

1. Members will recall that over time there have been occasions when the Town Council's view on development applications within conservation areas has been contrary to those of the Planning Officers. In general terms, this has been because Town Councillors have taken a more tolerant view to what is acceptable in development terms in a conservation area than Planning Officers and the District Council's Development Control Committee.
2. Councillor Clarke, as Chairman of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee believes that the manner in which the District Council interprets the intent of conservation areas has a detrimental effect on the economic performance of business premises within those areas. The designation of the conservation area does appear to give Conservation Officers extra planning powers to preserve what is there, rather than allow an area to grow and reflect the passage of time and the time at which an owner may wish to update or replace an existing building.
3. It is believed that part of the difficulty arises from interpretation. In effect, once an area is designated as a conservation area, it is a reflection of a snapshot in time. Your Chairman and several other Members feel that Planning Officers are inclined to treat the conservation area as a preservation area, thus there is a pre-disposition to refuse any changes rather than to make sure any changes enhance and fit in with the general character of the area. In Ringwood's case, this is particularly relevant because most of the Conservation Area is made up of premises constructed through many decades and shows the different architectural styles applicable at each point in time. Some Members believe that that process of allowing development to show architectural styles from different decades is being stifled through the current interpretation of conservation area policies.
4. It is clear that it would be inappropriate for Ringwood Town Councillors concerns to be investigated in isolation. Following discussions with the Head of Planning at New Forest District Council, he has agreed to make a presentation to Town and Parish Councils to explain the designation of Conservation Areas and the determination of planning applications within those areas. Following discussions with the Chairman, it is believed that it would be more appropriate for such presentation to be made to representatives of all towns and parishes within the New Forest and it is **RECOMMENDED**:

That the New Forest Association of Local Councils be urged to invite the Head of Planning, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation and the Chairman of the Planning Development Control Committee of the District Council to attend one of its general meetings to explain and debate the designation of Conservations Areas and the determination of planning applications within those areas.

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