

Homes in Historic Conservation Areas in Great Britain: Calculating the Proportion of Residential Dwellings in Conservation Areas

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This research is an attempt to estimate what proportion of Great Britain's housing stock is in Conservation Areas. The number of dwellings that are of architectural and townscape importance (because they are listed or are in a Historic Conservation Area) is an important consideration for the 40% house project. Policies to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock have to recognize and protect the country's architectural heritage.

Historic Conservation Areas¹ are those areas that have been identified as having "Special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 69). According to the Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and Historic Environment, a Historic Conservation Area, "May form groups of buildings, open spaces, trees, historic street patterns, village greens or features of historic or archaeological interest. It is the character of the areas rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Areas seek to enhance". Unlike listed buildings whose historic and/or architectural importance is measured by national criteria, conservation area specialness is determined by regional and local criteria. Because the criteria for designation vary across the United Kingdom there is limited consistency and detailed information available about conservation areas. For example, few Local Authorities gather information on the type and number of buildings within the Conservation Area. Designation means the Local Authority has more control over the demolition of buildings, minor development and the protection of trees. The main implication of designation is that consent is required for specific types of development that would not otherwise have required it.

1. Background information on Historic Conservation Areas:

Conservation Areas were first introduced into British legislation in 1967. The legislation for Conservation Areas has been updated in England and Wales by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In Scotland, legislation for Conservation Areas is in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) 1997. The legislation in England, Wales and Scotland is very similar.

Under the Act Local Authorities are responsible for designating Conservation Areas, although the Secretary of States reserves power to designate Conservation Areas. The key documents providing Local Authorities' guidance on what can and cannot be done in Conservation Areas are-

- In England, *PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment*
- In Scotland, *Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (revised 1998) and NPPG18*

¹ The terms Historic Conservation Areas and Conservation Areas are used interchangeably in this document.

- In Wales, two circulars, (1) Welsh Office Circular 61/96, *Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*, (2) Welsh Office Circular 1/98, *Planning and the Historic Environment: Directions by the Secretary of State for Wales*.

In England, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is in the process of reviewing PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment as the government intends to undertake major reforms to the land use planning system. The government wants to ensure heritage protection is working alongside the new arrangements for the planning system.

Conservation Area Appraisals

A Conservation Area appraisal focuses on the area that is likely to be included within the boundaries of a Conservation Area and seeks to define the special interest of the area and key elements that contributes to its character and appearance. The Conservation Area appraisal should include more than descriptions and pictures of the visual element of the area. The appraisal can include information, for example on:

- Archaeological and historical significance of the area
- Origins and development of a settlement
- Influence of prevailing and former uses within the area upon building type and street layout
- Character and relationship of spaces between buildings
- Buildings, features and factors that make a positive contribution
- Contribution of trees and open space
- Landscape or townscape setting and views to and from it
- Contribution of local details and design characteristics; including materials
- Nature and impact of traffic and movement patterns
- Pressures upon the area for change
- Buildings, features or factors that have a negative impact (Source: NPPG18)

Conservation Area appraisals make it easier to assess development proposals and determine how development might impact the appearance and character of the area. The appraisals are an important management tool for helping local planning authorities identify suitable development opportunities and for helping those preparing enhancement schemes.

The government wants Local Authorities to regularly re-appraise Conservation Areas to ensure the boundaries are appropriately drawn and areas of historic importance are protected. The ability of Local Authorities to regularly review Conservation Area designation is dependent on the financial and human resources available to them, which is often very limited.

The Local Plan prepared by the Local Authority sets out the strategic framework for the development and enhancement of towns and cities. The Local Plan provides Local Authorities with the opportunity to identify and specify their objectives, policies and criteria for protecting, conserving and enhancing historic areas. Often priorities for Conservation Area designation come from the Local Plan. The Local Plan is formed through a process of public consultation.

Conservation Area Consent

Applications for consent to completely or to substantially demolish a building within a Conservation Area must be made to the Local Authority or on appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment. The procedures for building consent in Conservation Areas are similar to listed building consent. The presumption is buildings that positively enhance the character of the Conservation Area will be retained.

The demolition of a building situated within a Conservation Area requires Conservation Area consent. Prior to the case *Shimizu Ltd vs. Westminster City Council* (1997) demolition was also taken to include partial demolition of a building. However, on appeal the House of Lords ruled that the removal of part of a building constituted an alteration, not demolition. As a result the demolition of part of a building in a Conservation Area no longer requires Conservation Area consent, no matter how important that part is to the character of the building and of the Conservation Area.

The legal decision made in the case *Shimizu Ltd vs. Westminster City Council* (1997) has made it difficult for Local Authorities to control alterations to historic buildings in Conservation Areas, although they can keep control over outright demolition.

This judgment has had legal and practical implications for controls over demolition of listed buildings, as well as for unlisted buildings and structures in Conservation Areas. The Government has undertaken a consultative process with the main heritage bodies to discuss the implications of this decision to the protection of listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

Note: Conservation Officers interviewed during the course of this project did not think the ruling in Shimizu Case has adversely affected efforts to 'preserve and enhance' Conservation Areas.

2. Estimating the Proportion of Great Britain's Housing Stock in Historic Conservation Areas

Data Availability

Despite considerable research, no report on the number of properties in Conservation Areas has been found. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) provide an estimate of 390,182 hectares for the land within Conservation Areas. Interestingly the reason CIPFA collects information on Historic Conservation Areas is because Local Authorities have to account for the salaries they pay their Historic Conservation Officers. CIPFA data provides information for England and Wales on the total hectares within Conservation Areas as well as the number of hectares in individual Local Authorities when data are available. The dataset published by CIPFA in 2001 was used for this research project however there are significant gaps with no data available for many Local Authorities. More than half of the total hectares in Conservation Areas for England and Wales cannot be attributed to a particular Local Authority and have had to be estimated.

Methodology

To estimate the proportion of housing in Conservation Areas, one might think a logical method is to simply multiply the total number of hectares in Conservation Areas by a reasonable average urban housing density (most Conservation Areas are located in cities and towns). However, if one multiples 390,182 hectares, the total number of hectares in Conservation Areas given by CIPFA, by a housing density of 25 per hectare (*see Table 1*) the result is 9.75 million dwellings or over a 1/3 of Great Britain's housing stock. This result is definitely a gross overestimate of the number of dwellings in historic Conservation Areas. Therefore, further research had to be undertaken to derive a more accurate breakdown of housing density and hectares in Conservation Areas for each Local Authority.

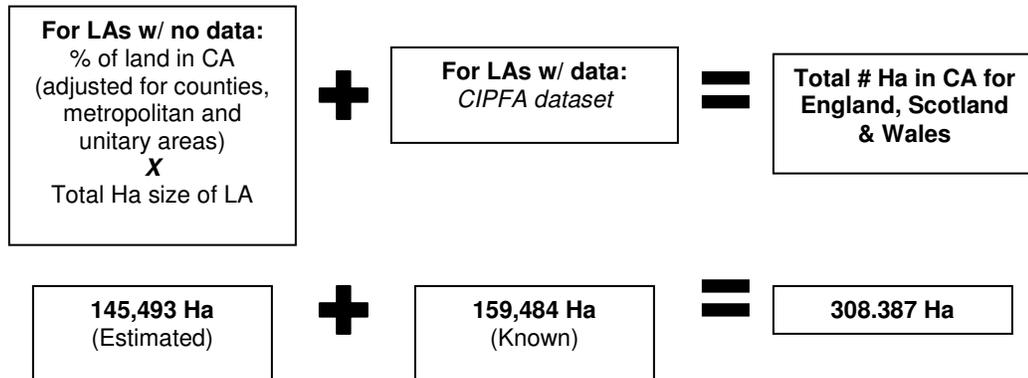
Type of Dwelling	Typical Densities (net dwellings per hectare)
Back-to-Back Nineteenth Century terraces	150
Pre- 1919 terraces	80-100
Post- World War I inner city redevelopment	75-100
Central London average (present day)	78
Traditional Cornish fishing village	60
Tunnel-back, middle ring, bye-law housing	50-75
Suburban development w/ detached and linked housing and low parking provision	50-80
Victorian villas with gardens	40
Semi-detached with modest gardens	30
Recent suburban residential	25-28
Current national average for new developments	27
Bournville Village, Birmingham	15

Note: These housing density figures are for the building only and infrastructure such as parks, roads and pavements is not included in the hectare. (Source: CPRE, May 2005).

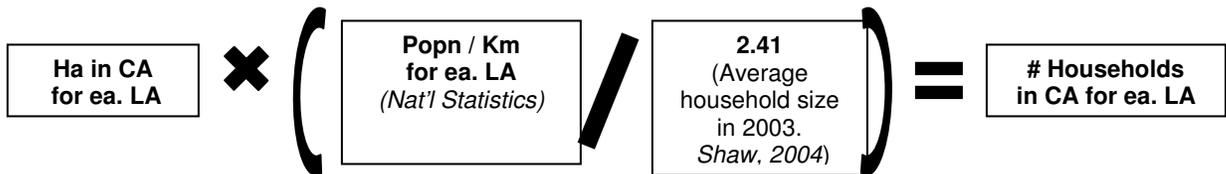
The Approach Use

To estimate the proportion of Great Britain’s housing stock in Historic Conservation Areas the following approach was used:

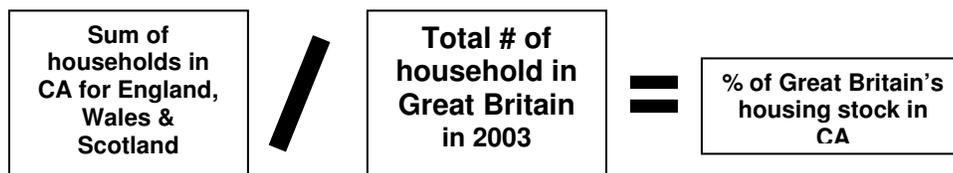
1. To calculate the number of hectares in Conservation Areas for each Local Authority (these were either known or estimated depending on the information available). For Local Authorities with no data available the national average percent of land in Historic Conservation Areas for the county, metropolitan or unitary areas was multiplied by the Local Authority’s hectare area.



2. To derive the number of dwellings in Historic Conservation Areas for each Local Authority the number hectares in Conservation Areas was multiplied by the housing density for that Local Authority.



3. To get an approximation for the number of dwellings in Great Britain’s Historic Conservation Areas the estimates for each Local Authority were summed together. This number was then divided by the total size of Great Britain’s housing stock to find out the proportion of housing located in Historic Conservation Areas.



In addition to the limited data available on the hectare size of Conservation Areas there was also difficulty determining an appropriate definition for housing density (the number of dwellings per hectare). The number of buildings is easy to identify, but there could be several definitions of the area that they stand in: just their own plot of land, or the plot plus associated pavements and roads, or all of this plus the adjacent park. It is assumed that in Conservation Areas, housing density will be buildings and infrastructure space because Historic Conservation Areas typically are preserving the character of a townscape (the streets, buildings, parks, treescape etc.). There is the further problem that many of the buildings in a Conservation Area will not be residential. All the doctors' surgeries, lawyers' offices etc. form part of the building density, but are not the houses in a Conservation Area.

The research only calculated the proportion of dwellings in Historic Conservation Areas for England, Wales and Scotland because it was not possible to find information on Northern Ireland's Historic Conservation Areas. In 2002, Northern Ireland had approximately 627,000 households and of that the number of households in Historic Conservation Areas is likely to be quite small. Therefore, not including Northern Ireland data is unlikely to have a significant impact on the proportion of the United Kingdom's housing stock in Conservation Areas, which the 40% House scenario is developed for.

The lack of good data on Historic Conservation Areas was confirmed through informal telephone interviews with English Heritage and speaking to a number of Local Authority Conservation Officers (approximately 12). The conservation officers explained that because the designation process typically does not require detailed information on the type or number of buildings or any information on the number of people living in the area this information as a result is not collected. In addition, Local Authorities themselves do not necessarily database information about Conservation Areas. For several of the conservation officers they have no electronically stored information about the Local Authority's Conservation Areas and they would have to refer to the hard copy of the conservation appraisal. In the telephone interviews many said they could see the value of having better information on record as this would help their work in protecting and enhancing these areas. One officer mentioned they were in the process of putting information on the Conservation Areas into GIS and making it available to those interested electronically.

Despite the difficulty of having limited data, an assessment has been made of the proportion of the housing stock in Historic Conservation Areas. The figures are acknowledged to be rough estimates, but are provided so that they can be used to prompt better research in future.

Data Sources Used:

1. Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (2001), Planning and Development Statistics- data on the number of Conservation Areas and area size by region, county, district and unitary authority
2. National Census Data (2001): data on population, population density and total area size by region, county, district and unitary authority
3. Shaw C (2004). Interim 2003- based national population projections for the UK and constituent countries. Population Trends 118, Winter 2004, 6-16. National Statistics, London UK
4. Informal telephone interviews with Local Authority Historic Conservation Officers (approximately 12).

3. Key Findings

Table 2: Summary of Historic Conservation Areas in Great Britain

	Number of Conservation Areas (CIPFA, 2001)	Area (hectares)		The range in housing density/hectare used to estimate dwellings in Conservation Areas	Number of Dwellings estimated to be in Conservation Areas**
		CIPFA (2001) England/Wales only	ECI		
England	13,322	379,132	280,353	1 to 19	1,093,529
Scotland	509		16,984	<1 to 14	89,158
Wales	600	11,050	11,050	<1 to 9	13,158
Total	14,472	407,025	308,387		1,195,845 = ~1.2 mil

** The number of dwellings estimated to be in Conservation Areas is based on our estimate of total hectares in Conservation Areas and the housing densities for different Local Authorities. Low densities have been used to reflect the broad definition of “area”.

Chart 1: Residential Dwellings in Conservation Areas by Country

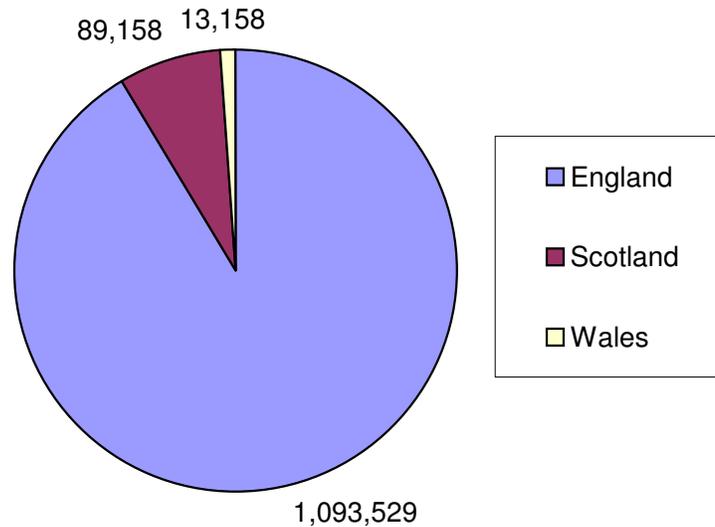


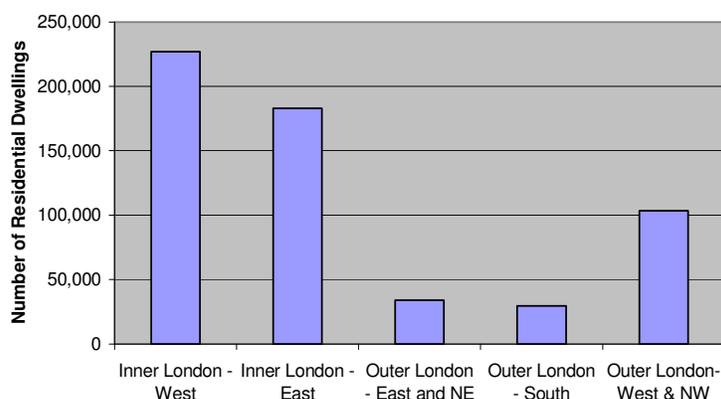
Table 3: Residential Dwellings in Conservation Areas by Region

Region	Hectares of Conservation Areas	Number of Residential Dwellings in Conservation Areas
Northeast	10,524	24,028
Northwest	29,135	89,606
Yorkshire & the Humber	18,512	44,318
East Midlands	22,108	37,444
West Midlands	24,247	61,896
East	54,626	64,608
London	23,266	576,883
Southeast	50,720	99,327
Southwest	44,343	95,419
TOTAL	277,481	1,093,579

Note: This table used our estimates on the number of hectares in Conservation Areas for each Local Authority. The number of residential dwellings in Conservation Areas was calculated by dividing the population density per Km (converted to Ha) for each Local Authority by the average household size of 2.41 in 2003.

In Great Britain, London has the greatest number of dwellings in Historic Conservation Areas with almost half of the total estimated dwellings in Conservation Areas (see Table 2 and Chart 3). It is reasonable to think London has a high number of dwellings in Conservation Areas because the city has a large densely built housing stock with substantial areas being of historic and architectural importance.

Chart 3: Residential Dwellings in Conservation Areas by London Regions



Our estimates for number of dwellings in London’s Conservation Areas appear to be reasonably sensible. However, we are less confident in our estimates for other regions of Great Britain especially in the counties where substantial data was missing. The problem can be seen when taking London estimates for hectare area and dwelling numbers out of the totals. Recalculating the housing density using the remaining hectares in Conservation Areas and number of dwellings using CIPFA data or our own estimates gives only housing density of less than 2. This housing density is

certainly too low because Conservation Areas are typically built in the centre of towns where there is a high building density. However, higher densities result in too large a proportion of the housing stock being in Conservation Areas.

Despite this significant discrepancy we think our estimate of 1.2 million dwellings in Conservation Areas for England, Wales and Scotland is reasonable. The 1.2 million dwellings stands as a reasonable estimate because in metropolitan areas, where many Historic Conservation Areas are likely to be the CIPFA data was more complete, therefore it was easier to get a more realistic housing density (see Table 4).

Table 4: Examples of Metropolitan Areas with data available on the number of hectares in Conservation Areas

	Hectares in Conservation Areas^a	Housing Density (households/ hectare)^b	Number of dwellings
	A	B	= A x B
Birmingham	1,075	15.13	16,268
Bristol	2,601	14.41	37,493
Cardiff	827	9.12	7,543
Glasgow	3,521	13.68	59,236
Liverpool	819	16.29	13,345
Manchester	468	14.10	6599
Total	9,311		140,484

a. Reported to CIPFA

b. Calculated from the National Statistics population per Km (converted to Ha) and divided by 2.41, the average household size in 2003.

Note: For each city, except Glasgow (which was given the figure given by the Historic Conservation Officer) the hectares in Conservation Areas are figures reported to CIPFA, 2001.

Conclusion:

- There were approximately 25 million residential dwellings in Great Britain in 2000 (the year of the CIPFA estimate). It is estimated that 1/5 of the housing stock was built pre-1919². The approximately 1.2 million residential dwellings estimated to be in Conservation Areas comprise 4.8 percent of Great Britain's total housing stock and 24 percent of the historic housing stock.
- To fully ensure the historic areas we want to preserve and enhance are adequately protected it would be useful to have a more standardised approach for designation of Historic Conservation Areas, clear definition of area and number of dwellings.
- To have a better picture of where Conservation Areas are and what buildings are within we need to more explicitly collect information on these areas and ideally put the information into an electronic regional/national database.
- The Local Authority reported figure on the area of Conservation Areas appears to be generous. Even our reduced area may still be too large.

²

English Housing Condition Survey (2001). Chapter 1: Profile of the Housing Stock. Twenty-one percent of the English housing stock was built pre-1919 therefore it is assume that Scotland and Wales also have a similar percent of their housing stock built pre-1919.

References:

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