

Guidance

Historic environment

Advises on enhancing and conserving the historic environment.

From: **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**
(/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-local-government),
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021)
(/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-
government-2018-2021) and **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and**
Communities **(/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-**
and-communities)

Published 10 April 2014

Last updated 23 July 2019 —

Contents

- Overview: historic environment
- Plan-making: historic environment
- Decision-making: historic environment
- Designated heritage assets
- Non-designated heritage assets
- Heritage consent processes
- Consultation and notification requirements for heritage related applications
- Further information on heritage and planning issues

This guidance has been updated see [previous version](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20190607161354/https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment)
(<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20190607161354/https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>).

Further information on:

- Neighbourhood planning generally can be found in the [neighbourhood planning section \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2) of the planning practice guidance
- [Heritage specific issues and neighbourhood planning \(https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/neighbourhoodplanning/\)](https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/neighbourhoodplanning/) is provided by Historic England.

Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 18a-005-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

Decision-making: historic environment

What is ‘significance’?

‘Significance’ in terms of heritage-related planning policy is defined in the [Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary) as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.

The National Planning Policy Framework definition further states that in the planning context heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. This can be interpreted as follows:

- archaeological interest: As defined in the Glossary to the National Planning Policy Framework, there will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.
- architectural and artistic interest: These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skill, like sculpture.
- historic interest: An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation’s history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

In legislation and designation criteria, the terms ‘special architectural or historic interest’ of a listed building and the ‘national importance’ of a scheduled monument are used to describe all or part of what, in planning terms, is referred to as the identified heritage asset’s significance.

Further commentary on the [significance of World Heritage Sites](#).

Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 18a-006-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

Why is ‘significance’ important in decision-making?

Heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by change in their setting. Being able to properly assess the nature, extent and importance of the significance of a heritage asset, and the contribution of its setting, is very important to understanding the potential impact and acceptability of development proposals (see [How can the possibility of harm to a heritage asset be assessed?](#)).

Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 18a-007-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

How can proposals avoid or minimise harm to the significance of a heritage asset?

Understanding the significance of a heritage asset and its setting from an early stage in the design process can help to inform the development of proposals which avoid or minimise harm. Analysis of relevant information can generate a clear understanding of the affected asset, the heritage interests represented in it, and their [relative importance](#).

Early appraisals, a conservation plan or targeted specialist investigation can help to identify constraints and opportunities arising from the asset at an early stage. Such appraisals or investigations can identify alternative development options, for example more sensitive designs or different orientations, that will both conserve the heritage assets and deliver public benefits in a more sustainable and appropriate way.

See the Historic England website for [further advice on assessing the significance of heritage assets \(https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa2-managing-significance-in-decision-taking/\)](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa2-managing-significance-in-decision-taking/).

Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 18a-008-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What assessment of the impact of proposals on the significance of affected heritage assets should be included in an application?

Applicants are expected to describe in their application the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting ([National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 189](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para189) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para189>)). In doing so, applicants should include analysis of the significance of the asset and its setting, and, where relevant, how this has informed the development of the proposals. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on its significance.

Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 18a-009-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

Where can local planning authorities get help to assess the significance of heritage assets?

In most cases the assessment of the significance of the heritage asset by the local planning authority is likely to need expert advice in addition to the information provided by the applicant, historic environment record, similar sources of information and inspection of the asset itself. Advice may be sought from appropriately qualified staff and experienced in-house experts or professional consultants, complemented as appropriate by consultation with [National Amenity Societies and other statutory consultees](#) and other national and local organisations with relevant expertise.

Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 18a-010-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What is a historic environment record?

Historic environment records are publicly-accessible and dynamic sources of information about the local historic environment. They provide core information for plan-making and designation decisions (such as information about designated and non-designated heritage assets, and information that helps predict the likelihood of currently unrecorded assets being discovered during development) and will also assist in informing planning decisions by providing appropriate information about the historic environment to communities, owners and developers as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. See the Historic England website for [details of how to access historic environment records](#)

[\(https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/information-management/hers/\)](https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/information-management/hers/).

Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 18a-011-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

How do Design and Access Statement requirements relate to heritage assessments?

A [Design and Access Statement \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-an-application#design-access-statement\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-an-application#design-access-statement) is required to accompany certain applications for planning permission and applications for listed building consent.

Design and Access Statements provide a flexible framework for an applicant to explain and justify their proposal with reference to its context. In cases where both a Design and Access Statement and [an assessment of the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset](#) are required, applicants can avoid unnecessary duplication and demonstrate how the proposed design has responded to the historic environment through including the necessary heritage assessment as part of the Design and Access Statement.

Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 18a-012-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What is the setting of a heritage asset and how can it be taken into account?

The setting of a heritage asset is defined in the [Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary).

All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. The setting of a heritage asset and the asset's curtilage may not have the same extent.

The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to the visual relationship between the asset and the proposed development and associated visual/physical considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part in the assessment of impacts on setting, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust, smell and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places. For example, buildings that are in close proximity but are not visible from each other may have a historic or

aesthetic connection that amplifies the experience of the significance of each.

The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on there being public rights of way or an ability to otherwise access or experience that setting. The contribution may vary over time.

When assessing any application which may affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities may need to consider the implications of cumulative change. They may also need to consider the fact that developments which materially detract from the asset's significance may also damage its economic viability now, or in the future, thereby threatening its ongoing conservation.

See [further guidance on setting of heritage assets and wind turbine development \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#heritage-be-taken-into-account\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy#heritage-be-taken-into-account).

Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 18a-013-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

Should the deteriorated state of a heritage asset be taken into account in reaching a decision on an application?

Disrepair and damage and their impact on viability can be a material consideration in deciding an application. However, where there is evidence of deliberate damage to or neglect of a heritage asset in the hope of making consent or permission easier to gain the local planning authority should disregard the deteriorated state of the asset in any decision (National Planning Policy Framework [paragraph 191 \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para191\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para191)). Local planning authorities may need to consider exercising their repair and compulsory purchase powers to remedy deliberate neglect or damage.

Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 18a-014-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What is the optimum viable use for a heritage asset and how is it taken into account in planning decisions?

The vast majority of heritage assets are in private hands. Thus, sustaining heritage assets in the long term often requires an incentive for their active

conservation. Putting heritage assets to a viable use is likely to lead to the investment in their maintenance necessary for their long-term conservation.

By their nature, some heritage assets have limited or even no economic end use. A scheduled monument in a rural area may preclude any use of the land other than as a pasture, whereas a listed building may potentially have a variety of alternative uses such as residential, commercial and leisure.

In a small number of cases a heritage asset may be capable of active use in theory but be so important and sensitive to change that alterations to accommodate a viable use would lead to an unacceptable loss of significance.

It is important that any use is viable, not just for the owner, but also for the future conservation of the asset: a series of failed ventures could result in a number of unnecessary harmful changes being made to the asset.

If there is only one viable use, that use is the optimum viable use. If there is a range of alternative economically viable uses, the optimum viable use is the one likely to cause the least harm to the significance of the asset, not just through necessary initial changes, but also as a result of subsequent wear and tear and likely future changes. The optimum viable use may not necessarily be the most economically viable one. Nor need it be the original use. However, if from a conservation point of view there is no real difference between alternative economically viable uses, then the choice of use is a decision for the owner, subject of course to obtaining any necessary consents.

Harmful development may sometimes be justified in the interests of realising the optimum viable use of an asset, notwithstanding the loss of significance caused, and provided the harm is minimised. The policy on addressing substantial and less than substantial harm is set out in [paragraphs 193 to 196 \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para193\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para193) of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 18a-015-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

When is securing a heritage asset's optimum viable use appropriate in planning terms?

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, the [National Planning Policy Framework \(paragraph 196\) \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para196\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para196) requires that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the

proposal including, where appropriate, securing the optimum viable use of that asset.

Where a heritage asset is capable of having a use, then securing its optimum viable use should be taken into account in assessing the public benefits of a proposed development.

‘Area-based’ designated heritage assets such as World Heritage Sites and conservation areas will not themselves have a single use (though any individual heritage assets within them may). Therefore, securing the optimum viable use of the area-based asset as a whole is not a relevant consideration in assessing the public benefits of development proposals affecting such heritage assets. However, securing the optimum viable use of any individual heritage assets within the area-based designated heritage asset may still be a relevant consideration.

Paragraph: 016 Reference ID: 18a-016-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What evidence is needed to demonstrate that there is no viable use?

Appropriate marketing is required to demonstrate that a heritage asset has no viable use in the circumstances set out in [paragraph 195b of the National Planning Policy Framework \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195). The aim of such marketing is to reach potential buyers who may be willing to find a viable use for the site that still provides for its conservation to some degree. If such a purchaser comes forward, there is no obligation to sell to them, but it will not have been demonstrated that the heritage asset has no viable use .

Paragraph: 017 Reference ID: 18a-017-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

How can the possibility of harm to a heritage asset be assessed?

What matters in assessing whether a proposal might cause harm is the impact on the [significance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary) of the heritage asset. As the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear, significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting.

Proposed development affecting a heritage asset may have no impact on its significance or may enhance its significance and therefore cause no harm to the heritage asset. Where potential harm to designated heritage assets is

identified, it needs to be categorised as either less than substantial harm or substantial harm (which includes total loss) in order to identify which policies in the [National Planning Policy Framework \(paragraphs 194 to 196\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para194) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para194>) apply.

Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated.

Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision-maker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset's significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.

While the impact of total destruction is obvious, partial destruction is likely to have a considerable impact but, depending on the circumstances, it may still be less than substantial harm or conceivably not harmful at all, for example, when removing later additions to historic buildings where those additions are inappropriate and harm the buildings' significance. Similarly, works that are moderate or minor in scale are likely to cause less than substantial harm or no harm at all. However, even minor works have the potential to cause substantial harm, depending on the nature of their impact on the asset and its setting.

The National Planning Policy Framework confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It also makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification and sets out certain assets in respect of which harm should be exceptional/wholly exceptional (see [National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 194](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para194) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para194>)).

Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

How can the possibility of harm to conservation areas be assessed?

Paragraph 201 of the National Planning Policy Framework

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para196>) is the starting point. An unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to a conservation area is individually of lesser importance than a listed building. If the building is important or integral to the character or appearance of the conservation area then its proposed demolition is more likely to amount to substantial harm to the conservation area, engaging the tests in [paragraph 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195>). Loss of a building within a conservation area may alternatively amount to less than substantial harm under paragraph 196. However, the justification for a building's proposed demolition will still need to be proportionate to its relative significance and its contribution to the significance of the conservation area as a whole. The same principles apply in respect of other elements which make a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area, such as open spaces.

See [guidance on how trees are protected in conservation areas](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-preservation-orders-and-trees-in-conservation-areas>).

Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 18a-019-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

What is meant by the term public benefits?

The [National Planning Policy Framework](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/16-conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment#para195>) requires any harm to designated heritage assets to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Public benefits may follow from many developments and could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives as described in the National Planning Policy Framework ([paragraph 8](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/2-achieving-sustainable-development) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/2-achieving-sustainable-development>)). Public benefits should flow from the proposed development. They should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits, for example, works to a listed private dwelling which secure its future as a designated heritage asset could be a public benefit.

Examples of heritage benefits may include:

- sustaining or enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting

- reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset
- securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset in support of its long term conservation

Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019

How can Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders take account of heritage issues?

The policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, and the associated guidance, which relate to decision-making on planning applications which affect the historic environment, apply equally to the consideration of what planning permission may be granted through Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders.

Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders can only grant planning permission, not heritage consents (ie listed building consent or scheduled monument consent).

Historic England must be consulted on all Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders to allow it to assess the impacts on the heritage assets, and determine whether an archaeological statement (definition in [regulation 22\(2\) of the Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/regulation/22/made) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/regulation/22/made>)) is required. This, and other consultation requirements relating to development affecting heritage assets, are set out in [regulation 21 of, and Schedule 1 to, the Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/contents/made) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/contents/made>).

Further information on making these Orders can be found:

- in the [Neighbourhood planning section of guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>)
- in the [When is permission required? section of guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required>)
- in the [Neighbourhood Development Orders and Heritage guidance](https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/consent/ndo/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/consent/ndo/>) on the Historic England website

Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 18a-021-20190723

Revision date: 23 07 2019