

# HELPING YOU CARE FOR PERIOD BUILDINGS

Conservation architecture  
guidance for building investors,  
managers and planners



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## Introduction

You may be involved in property development or investment in the commercial, public, ecclesiastical or charitable sectors, or you may be a planner or other professional. If your work brings you into contact with period buildings then this guidance is for you.

## Period buildings

The term 'period buildings' is used throughout this guide to describe all properties that were built before the First World War, or 1919. That includes Victorian or Edwardian buildings that are fairly common in the UK. It also includes Georgian and older building from the 16th or 17th Centuries. We also consider buildings that were built using traditional construction methods as period building. For example they may have brick walls, a tiled roof or a timber frame. We also include buildings located in a conservation area, all listed buildings and other buildings that are of historical or aesthetic interest and contribute to the character of a place.

## Successful stewardship of period buildings

At the RIBA we are passionate about architecture and the conservation of our built heritage. We also understand that property investors, managers and planners often need to strike a balance. It is a balance between the cost of maintaining period buildings and the value generated by them commercially and for society. Revealing the qualities that make a building worth protecting is one of the first steps. Once potential has been assessed we need to be prepared to make appropriate and sympathetic changes and not just to repair and maintain. This is the context in which successful stewardship can take place.

## Carrying out building works on a period building

The RIBA recommends that you should take advice from professionals, such as Architects, with appropriate skills and expertise in working on period building before any building works are carried out.

Architects are highly skilled and professionally trained to guide you through the design, planning and construction process whether you are constructing a new building or adapting an existing building.

The RIBA holds a Register of specialist Conservation Architects who can provide advice. This is a good place to start.

## About this guide

In this guide we outline the benefits of taking advice from appropriate professionals and your responsibilities as the owner or investor, manager or planner working on a period building project. We also include guidance on sourcing and selecting the right professionals for your building project, more information about the RIBA Conservation Register, some frequently asked questions and a glossary of terms.



## Why you should take advice from professionals, such as Conservation Architects, with appropriate skills and expertise

- They will have experience of working with similar buildings.
- They will be aware of the potential issues and complexities involved in working with period buildings.
- Through their knowledge of conservation practice and historic values you will get the right advice regarding building design and materials, construction and energy efficiency.
- If your building is located in a conservation area or is listed, they will help you meet your additional statutory responsibilities.
- They will help you carry out building works that will add value to your period building and avoid inappropriate building works which may cause damage.
- This will help safeguard your building for future generations.

## Your responsibilities of your building is located in a conservation area

The term ‘conservation area’ generally applies to an urban area, or the core of a village, that is ‘desirable to preserve or enhance’ because of its architectural or historic interest.

However, each building within a conservation area adds to, or detracts from, its special character, which is why your building works may need special consent. For example, if you wish to demolish a building with a volume of greater than 15 cubic metres or demolish certain walls, fences, gates or railings, you may need to obtain Conservation Area Consent. The exterior finish and colour of materials, especially when fronting a road, need careful consideration, and controls may also cover the addition of cladding, dormer windows and satellite dishes. Trees are often protected in conservation areas even when they are on private property.

You can find out if your building is in a conservation area by contacting your local authority.



## Your responsibilities if your building is listed or locally listed

There are around 500,000 listed buildings in the UK. Listed buildings are often full of history and character and so are protected – by law – because of their age, their rarity, aesthetics or other special interest or significance.

There are three classes of listed buildings in England and Wales. The system of listing is different in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest – 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I in England. The equivalent class in Scotland and in Northern Ireland is A.
- Grade II\* ('grade 2 star') buildings are particularly important – around 6% of listed buildings are Grade II\* in England. The equivalent class in Scotland is B and B+ in Northern Ireland.
- Grade II buildings are of special interest – over 90% of all listed buildings in England are in this class and it is the most likely grade of listing. The equivalent class in Scotland is C and in Northern Ireland it is B1 or B2.

If your building is listed it is important that you take care of it in the most appropriate way in terms of maintenance and improvement and especially if you want to extend, remodel or refurbish the building. The law is very clear – you must obtain consent for any demolition, partial demolition or alterations that affect its

character as a listed building. It is a criminal offence not to do so and can result in prosecution and a substantial fine. Listed building enforcement notices can be issued if unauthorised work takes place and you could be forced to restore the building to its former state. You or your architect should consult the relevant statutory body to determine whether any proposed alterations require consent.

Examples of alterations that would normally require listed building consent are:

- An extension to a building
- Removal and replacement of doors and windows
- Alterations to the interior fabric

Locally listed buildings are the level below listed buildings. While they are not protected in the same way as listed buildings, they are still important to our heritage and need input from appropriate professionals. Contact your Local Authority to find out if your building is locally listed.

If you think your property may be listed, perhaps because of its age, location or other knowledge you have, you can search:

- [The National Heritage List for England](#)
- [Cadw listed building records in Wales](#)
- [Historic Environment Scotland search for a listed building](#)
- [Northern Ireland listed buildings database](#)



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## Energy efficiency in period buildings

It is critical that we act now to ensure buildings are as energy efficient as possible in order to reduce both carbon emissions and energy bills. This can be more complicated in period properties and appropriately skilled professionals have the knowledge and expertise to help you and to balance the benefits without harming the special nature of a period building. Historic England offers lots of helpful information that you can find by following [this link](#).

## Sourcing and selecting the right professionals for your building project

A professional with the appropriate skills to carry out building works on your period property should demonstrate their ability to:

- Draw on a body of highly relevant work and experience
- Listen to and understand your needs
- Provide you with clear guidance and advice
- Safeguard our built heritage

One of the best ways for building investors, managers and planners to identify these skills is to choose someone who is accredited in the care of older properties. The RIBA Conservation Register of Architects is a good place to start.

The Register will help you source and select a Conservation Architect or Specialist Conservation Architect local to you, giving you the knowledge that they have the necessary specialist skills, training and expertise to assist in the proper maintenance and development of your building.



## The RIBA Conservation Register

The [RIBA Conservation Register](#) is an accreditation scheme providing building owners with an online source of architects who are qualified and experienced to work on all aspects of the development, repair and maintenance and conservation of our built heritage.

The Register contains a list of Specialist Conservation Architect and a list of Conservation Architect level.

A **Conservation Architect** has in-depth knowledge and experience of working with historic buildings.

A **Specialist Conservation Architect** has authoritative knowledge of conservation practice and extensive experience of working with historic buildings.

For more details about how a Conservation Architect differentiates from a Specialist Conservation Architect, please visit the skills matrix of the 'Conservation Handbook' on page 32 following [this link](#).

If you're looking for a Specialist Conservation Architect or Conservation Architect to support you on your project, you can find them by location using the map by following [this link](#).

## About the RIBA

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) champions better buildings, communities and the environment through architecture and our members. We set the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession. We work with government to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities. We promote architects to clients and help them select an architect that is right for their project. We also hold one of the largest and most important collections of architectural drawings, photographs and archives in the world, and stage talks, exhibitions, events and awards (including the prestigious RIBA Stirling Prize) that help people promote and celebrate good design in their surroundings.



## FAQs

### 1. What is meant by 'stewardship'?

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Stewardship is about the careful planning and management of resources that results in the safe transition of our built heritage to the next generation.

### 2. Can you define 'built heritage'?

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This includes ancient monuments, historic buildings, listed buildings, buildings in conservation areas, older buildings of traditional construction.

### 3. Is this just about listed buildings?

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No. There are around half a million listed buildings in the UK, but there over six million buildings that we include in our definition of 'period buildings'. They all benefit from the advice of professionals with appropriate skills and expertise in working on period buildings before any building works are carried out.

### 4. Do I need listed building consent to repair a building?

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If your building is listed you may need consent and we suggest seeking advice from a professional with appropriate skills and expertise.

### 5. Is it illegal to alter a listed building without permission?

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It is an offence to carry out works that require listed building consent without such a consent being obtained. Not all works require listed building consent, only demolition or works of alteration or extension that affect the character of the building. Historic England provides guidance on the severity of different offences with regards to listed buildings and structures, which can be viewed by following [this link](#).

### 6. Are there different types of listed buildings?

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Yes. There are three levels of listed building status in England and Wales. Grade II is the most common. Grade II listed buildings are considered of special interest and therefore all steps should be taken to preserve them. Grade II\* listed properties are considered to be particularly important examples of special interest buildings. Grade I listed buildings are regarded as being of exceptional interest and carry the most conditions for owners. In Scotland and Northern Ireland listed buildings are graded A and B.

### 7. Do I need special consent to extend a building if it is located in a conservation area?

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You may need consent so it is advisable to seek advice from professionals with appropriate skills and expertise such as an architect, an accredited Conservation Architect or Specialist Conservation Architect depending on the nature of the property and the project.

### 8. How do I find professional advice?

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Use the Find an Architect service on the RIBA website by following [this link](#)

Find a Conservation Architect listed on the RIBA Conservation Register by following [this link](#). Contact the RIBA Client Services team on 020 7307 3700 or [clientservices@riba.org](mailto:clientservices@riba.org)

## Glossary / Definition of terms

### Alterations

There is no set definition of 'alterations' to a building. However, examples of alterations that may need consent including extensions, works to remove or erect internal walls, door or windows and new fixings and fittings such as service pipes and flues.

### Appropriately skilled professionals

This means any individual or business that has the knowledge, expertise and experience to advise on building works on a period building in a way that enhances and/or protects it and does not cause damage or harm.

### Building works

This includes works carried out internally and externally, which might include repairs, maintenance or alterations such as extensions and re-modelling.

### Built heritage

This includes ancient monuments, historic buildings, listed buildings, buildings in conservation areas, older buildings of traditional construction.

### Character

Something's character is the group of qualities or distinguishing features that make it different from others. It is subjective rather than objective. A 'Conservation Area Character Appraisal' identifies and defines the special interest of an area.

### Climate emergency

Architects can advise you as to how to make your building more energy efficient and reduce its impact on the environment. In 2019 the RIBA declared a climate emergency. You can read about it by following [this link](#).

### Conservation area

A conservation area generally applies to an urban area, or the core of a village, that is desirable to preserve or enhance, because of its architectural or historic interest.

### Listed building

A listed building, or structure, is one that has been placed on one of the four statutory lists maintained by Historic England in England, Historic Environment

Scotland in Scotland, Cadw in Wales, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in Northern Ireland. They are protected by law and are of special architectural or historic interest considered to be of national importance and therefore worth protecting.

### Locally listed building

A locally listed building, or structure, is deemed by your Local Authority to be an important part of the area's heritage. This may be due to its architectural, historic or archaeological significance. Each Local Authority maintains its own local list. Locally listed properties could, after an application process, become listed.

### Setting

Setting is the term used to describe the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. Annex 2: Glossary, National Planning Policy Framework, Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government June 2019.

### Stewardship

Stewardship is about the careful planning and management of resources that results in the safe transition of our built heritage to the next generation.





## Further reading and resources

Further information can be found on the websites for:

- [RIBA Find an Architect](#)
- [RIBA Conservation Register](#)
- [Historic England](#)
- [Cadw](#)
- [Historic Environment Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland Environment Agency](#)
- [Listed Property Owners Club](#)
- [Planning Portal](#)

## Contact us

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