Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

Heritage Team Standing Advice for minor development in Conservation Areas and within the grounds of Listed Buildings 2021

This document aims to provide general guidance to Planning colleagues and members of the public on development which may have an impact on heritage assets. It is not intended to replace the specific representations of the Heritage Team on individual proposals but can be used as a supplementary tool and to guide application submissions.

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Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Conservation Areas

Babergh District

Bildeston 2011
Boxford 2011
Brent Eleigh 2019
Brettenham 2013
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Chelsworth 2010
Cockfield (Cross Green) 2013
Glemsford 2008
Great Waldingfield 2019
Hadleigh 2008
Hartest 2013
Higham 2010
Kersey 2010
Kettlebaston 2013
Lavenham 2010
Little Waldingfield 2007
Long Melford 2011
Monks Eleigh 2012
Naughton 2019
Nayland 2005
Pin Mill 2007
Polstead 2012
Shotley Gate 2011
Stoke by Nayland 2012
Stratford St Mary 2008
Sudbury 2009
Woolverstone 2008
East Bergholt *(no appraisal)*
Thorington Street *(no appraisal)*

Mid Suffolk District

Badley 2012
Beyton 2009
Botesdale / Rickinghall 2011
Coddenham 2008
Debenham 2009
Drinkstone Mills
Eye 2011
Felsham 2012
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Rattlesden 2012
Redgrave 2011
Stowmarket 2011
Stradbroke 2011
Tostock 2008
Thrandeston 2008
Walsham le Willows 2011
Wattisfield 2009
Wetheringsett 2011
Wickham Skeith 2008
Wingfield 2008
Woolpit 2012

What is a Conservation Area and why do we have them?

A Conservation Area is defined as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance. Usually this constitutes the historic core of an area which may contain a number of listed buildings.

Many buildings within a Conservation Area are unlisted but are still important to local distinctiveness and in illustrating the history of a place or settlement. They can provide the setting for buildings that are listed. Their age and form might help describe the development of a place and together they can create positive groups in their own right.

Conservation Areas contain a number of special characteristics, which might include:

- a dense group of listed buildings;
- the historic and unique way in which the buildings are grouped – in clusters, around greens, enclosing squares or surrounding market places. They might also be lined up in a terrace – but in any case, their fortuitous arrangement in a settlement can result in areas of distinct and special character;
- the variety or unity of the buildings, none of which may be listed;
- the spaces themselves - such as winding streets, green islands, or roads that focus at one or both ends on characterful buildings. In some cases, these prominent or landmark structures may be listed, and might include churches and large manor houses, or well detailed boundary walls of brick and flint;
- street furniture - such as pumps, railings, signposts and paving materials;
- soft landscaping, which can act as a foil for the buildings or become focal points in their own right. Examples include oak trees, grass verges, hedgerows and formal gardens.

Living in a Conservation Area means that a property owner is subject to more Planning restrictions than usual. The status given to the area is a recognition of its special character, features of which should be preserved or enhanced in order to sustain the character of the area and its contribution to place.

What is a Listed Building and why does its setting matter?

Listing marks and celebrates a building's special architectural and historic interest, and also brings it under the consideration of the Planning system, so that it can be protected for future generations.

The older a building is, and the fewer surviving examples of its kind, the more likely it is to be listed. The general principles are that all buildings built before approximately 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are likely to be listed, as are most buildings built between around 1700 and 1850. Particularly careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945. Buildings less than 30 years old are not normally considered to be of special architectural or historic interest because they have yet to stand the test of time[1].

Setting:

Setting is often a fundamental aspect of a listed building's significance, as it contributes to the experience and understanding of the heritage asset. It can relate to a former function and therefore has evidential value about the historic purpose of the building or structure. This in turn can illustrate a relationship to cultural and social activities. In other cases, and more simply, the setting of an asset can be attractive and can enhance the experience of that asset. It could be that a rural or isolated location with a sense of tranquillity enhances the significance of a farmhouse, or conversely, the vibrancy of a town might enhance the significance of a market hall. Historic England's document 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' is a useful document which discusses heritage values in more detail[2].

[1] Historic England, Listed Buildings – https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/listed-buildings/

[2] Historic England 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' – https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/conservationprinciplespoliciesandguidanceapril08web/

Buildings or structures within the grounds and / or setting of listed buildings can have positive or negative impacts. The relationship to the surrounding environment can be important. Thought needs to be given to the elements of setting which make a positive contribution to the assets' significance and therefore how the impact of a new structure would affect them.

What are non-designated heritage assets and why are they important to protect?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines a heritage asset as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.

Non-designated heritage assets are locally-identified 'buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets' (PPG)[3].

Non-designated heritage assets can be identified in a number of ways, including[4]:

- Local heritage lists
- Local and Neighbourhood Plans
- Conservation area appraisals and reviews
- Records on the HER (Historic Environment Record)
- Decision-making on planning applications

Non-designated heritage assets often make a positive contribution to the character of an area. Their heritage interest can be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. In a similar way to designated heritage assets, they can inform about the traditions and activities of an area, local materials and construction, and therefore enhance our understanding of a place. These attributes which make a notable contribution should be protected for us and future generations.

[3] NPPG, 'Historic Environment' – https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment

[4] Historic England, 'Local Heritage Listing' – https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/heag301-local-heritage-listing/

Outbuildings and other structures in the grounds of residential properties

Outbuildings can include sheds, garages, garden rooms, annexes, greenhouses, pool buildings, or other enclosures and structures. Confirmation of whether Planning Permission is required for these ancillary structures can be sought via the Planning Portal[5] or by submitting a pre-application enquiry to the District Council's Planning Team[6].

Factors to consider when developing proposals for ancillary structures:

- Settlement form, shape and structure (what is there already, and how is it laid out)
- Relationship to open spaces or countryside (how does the outbuilding sit within existing views)
- Siting within the plot
- Relationship to the 'host' building
- Scale and hierarchy
- Design
- Materials

Settlement form, shape and structure

Traditional and historic settlement evolution should inform the arrangement of this type of development. Various forms existing in Suffolk settlements, and new outbuildings and other ancillary structures should reflect the traditional arrangement. New outbuildings should also not draw attention away from the 'host' building or conflict with the traditional layout of the settlement. Open spaces and enclosed areas which are considered to make a positive contribution to significance ought to be maintained with proposals designed to respect and complement the prevailing form and layout.

Relationship to open spaces or countryside

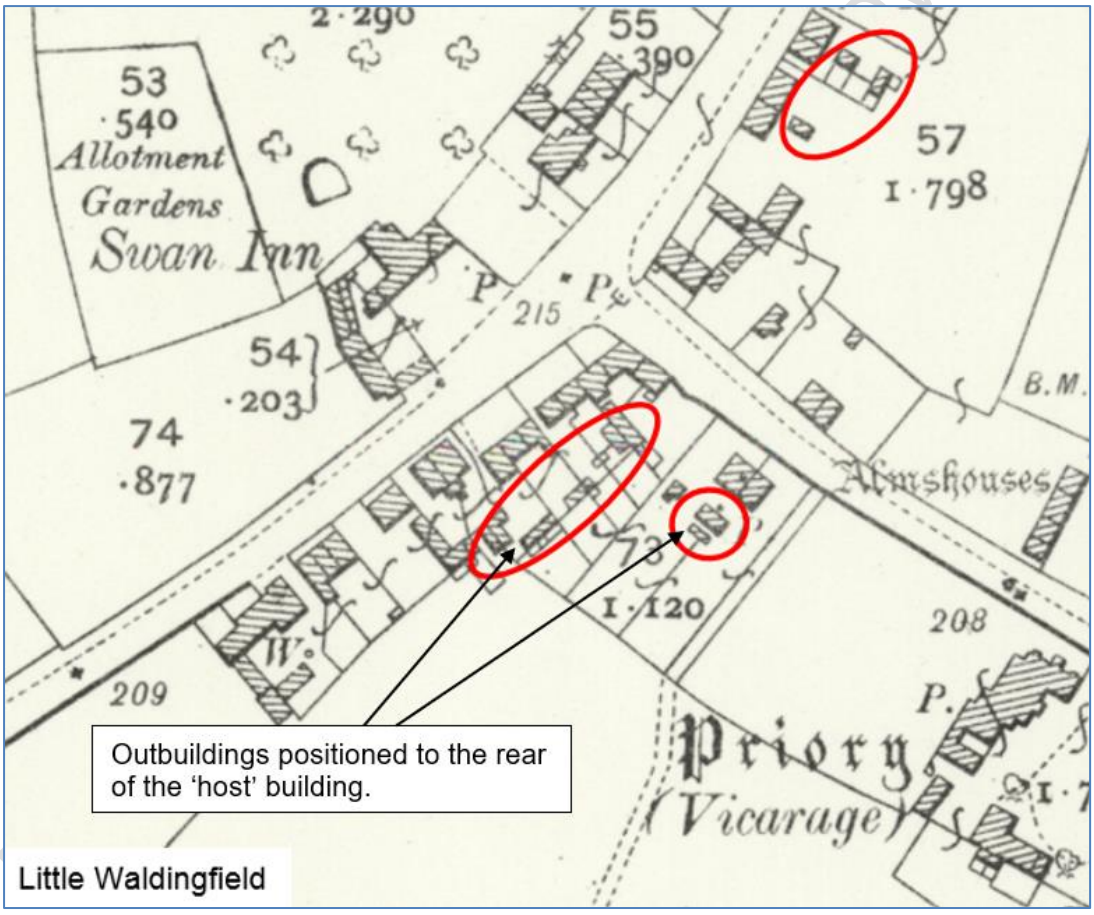
Important vistas, views through or visual links to the countryside are sometimes highlighted in Conservation Area Appraisals. Similarly, architecture may have been utilised to create views of the landscape. These views and linkages should be maintained for the positive contribution they make to the character of the area (and the significance of any associated listed buildings), particularly in terms of the functional relationship between buildings and the landscape. Proposals which interrupt, disrupt or erode these visual and often functional or designed relationships should be avoided.

[5] Planning Portal – https://www.planningportal.co.uk/
[6] BMSDC pre-application advice service – https://www.babergh.gov.uk/planning/pre-application-advice/

Siting within the plot

Traditionally, outbuildings form a subservient or ancillary service function to the host building and are often positioned to the rear of the site or in another, similarly discreet location. This approach should be adopted with new outbuildings or other structures, to ensure the prominence of the host building is maintained. Alternative schemes – perhaps involving outbuildings positioned further forward in the plot or along frontages – would need to be carefully scrutinised to ensure that the development does not compromise the character of the area or the setting of listed buildings.

Proximity to other features should be another consideration, such as to boundaries, other outbuildings or structures. Topography can also play an important role in the siting of an outbuilding – whether it conceals or reveals structures, or if it makes a positive, negative or neutral contribution to the character of the area. These attributes should inform the siting of proposed outbuildings in order to preserve positive qualities.



Relationship to 'host' building

The relationship of any proposed outbuilding to the host building is fundamental to the success of a scheme. Domestic outbuildings and structures should not dominate the host building. Positioning an outbuilding elsewhere around the main building, which might mean obscuring it or interrupting features of particular interest or character, should generally be avoided.

Scale and hierarchy

The size of a proposed outbuilding should be influenced by traditional, historic ancillary buildings and structures, either on site or within the immediate vicinity, as well as the scale and status of the host building. An outbuilding should not compete with, or dominate, but should satisfactorily complement the scale of other traditional buildings. Single-storey outbuildings of low eaves and ridge usually ensure a clear hierarchy between the listed building and the subservient, less important structures. Where there is extensive land associated with the host dwelling, multiple new outbuildings may be a better approach, to break up the overall floor area and massing of new development. Along with their arrangement on the site, the relationship to the host building, and the form and materials can help ensure subservience.

Design

Whether or not a proposed outbuilding is contemporary or traditional, some of its materials and details should relate to those found locally. This influence will enable new outbuildings and other structures in a domestic location to blend into their context while helping to amplify the characteristics which are significant to the place. A simple and functional form is often more appropriate than a copy of the host building, given the difference in use.

Materials

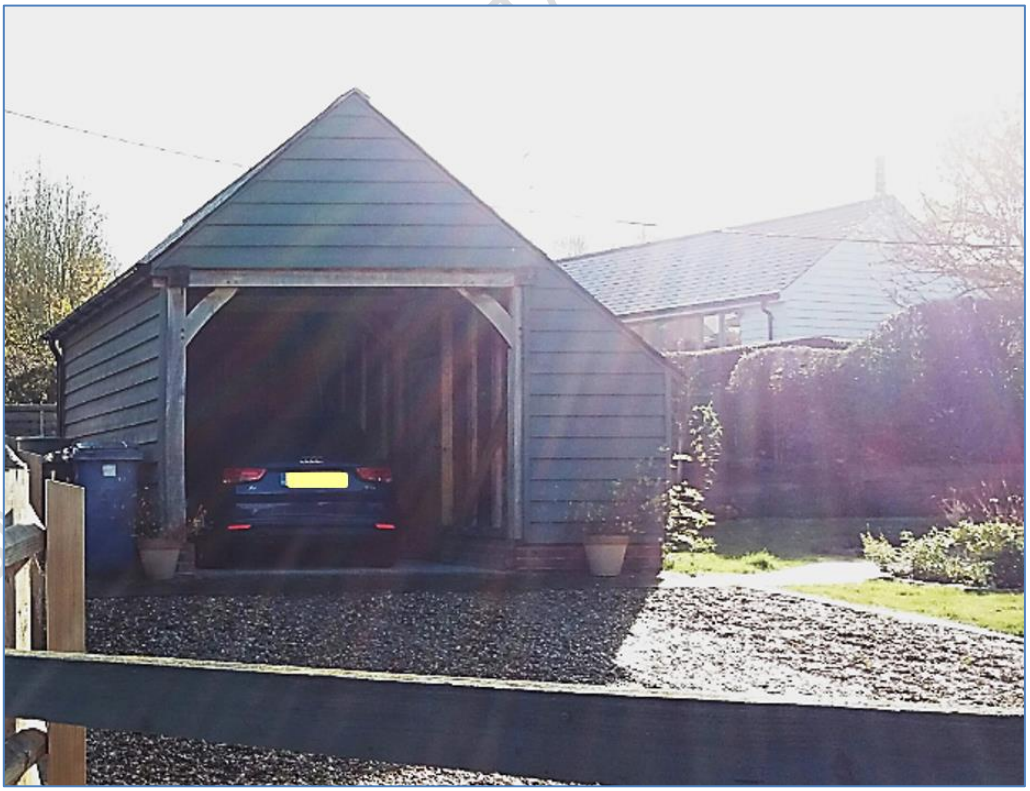
In combination with the design approach for the outbuilding, it is important to consider materials. Where there is a common theme of materials in the Conservation Area, it is likely to be beneficial to incorporate these into the design of the new building, whether it be in a contemporary or traditional architectural style. Red brick is common throughout our rural landscape and its appropriate use can often enhance the quality of new design. Synthetic materials should be avoided. Authentic options often provide a sense of quality and honesty to the scheme.

Examples of traditional outbuildings and materials

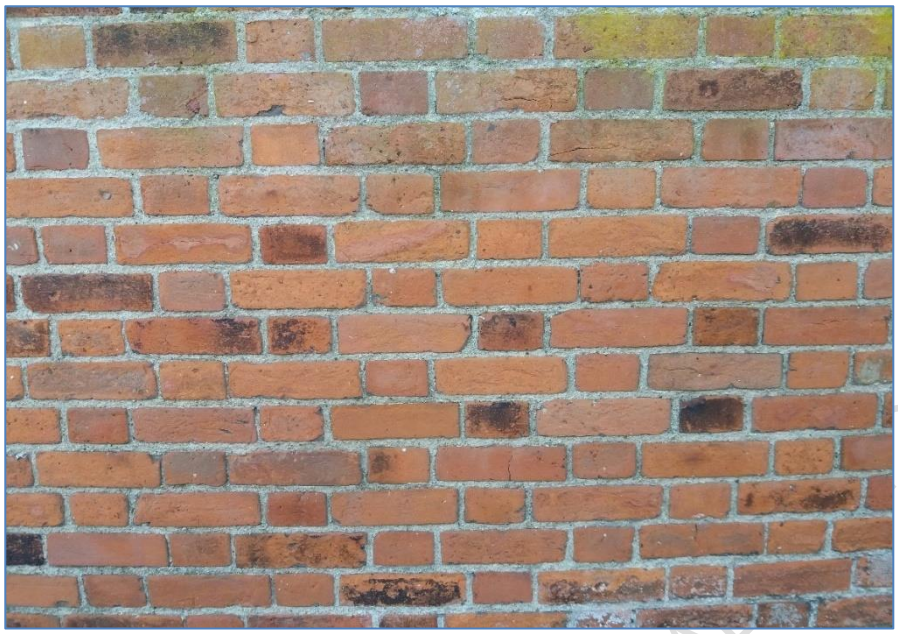
Timber weatherboarding and clay pantiles are traditionally seen on functional outbuildings.

Whilst this diminutive outbuilding reflects the materials and detailing of its host building, it is clearly not domestic in its form.

Weatherboarded outbuilding which references an agricultural aesthetic.



Outbuilding with traditional catslide roof with low eaves to one side, allowing greater floor area without increasing the height or mass of the building, and avoiding an ungainly roof slope.



Historic red brick wall constructed in Flemish bond using lime mortar. The orange tone of the soft red bricks is traditional to our area, and the flush mortar with relatively fine 'bed' (horizontal) and 'perpend' (vertical) joints provides a desirable quality. Such features are recommended in new development where it is already evident on site.

Historic outbuilding utilising timber feather-edge weatherboarding, flintwork and Flemish bond soft red brickwork, as well as thatch and clay pantiles to the roofs, demonstrating the variety of available material options.

Diminutive historic outbuilding constructed in monk bond brickwork – traditional but less common than other bonds. The building also features both black glazed and red clay pantiles on its roof, and clay hogs back ridge tiles which are also very characteristic.

Small outbuilding utilising natural blue/grey slates on its roof and a black clay ridge tile. Blue/grey slates are traditionally sourced from Wales.

Boundary treatments

Considerations:

- Context – rural or urban
- Historic function of the site
- Topography
- Materials

Rural or urban context

The historic context and settlement type in which a site is located is fundamental when considering appropriate forms of boundary treatment. Our Districts are broadly rural in character with much of the landscape formed of farmland, domestic gardens, and smallholdings associated with rural settlements.

There are also small towns, larger villages, hamlets, parkland and dispersed settlements to consider, all with their own characteristics and listed buildings. Towns usually have early medieval origins but always feature later phases of development which inform both the form, shape and structure of the place.

Rural and isolated properties often have a close relationship to the countryside, which is usually important to their settings. This relationship should be preserved to maintain the significance of listed buildings, and local distinctiveness.

Historic function of the site

A site which contains a listed building, or an unlisted but historic building, tends to have a long-standing functional relationship which should influence the approach to boundary treatments. Depending on the specific circumstances, a different form of boundary treatment will be appropriate to the building and its piece of land.

By using appropriate boundaries within Conservation Areas, and surrounding or within the grounds of listed buildings and unlisted historic buildings, the essential character of a place can be maintained and reinforced.

Topography

Landscape and natural features such as open spaces, rolling countryside and open vistas often make a positive contribution to the character of a place. This can relate to both Conservation Areas and the setting of listed buildings. The loss of natural boundaries in such sensitive locations, and their replacement with hard, constructed boundaries, can sometimes dramatically alter the 'softness' of a site and disturb the relationship with the natural landscape. The result can be to reduce the quality of a Conservation Area, or erode the contribution of features which enhance the significance of a listed building.

Materials

Materials used in boundaries can have a major effect on the appearance of a place. The materials used in our Districts contribute to the character of a location and provide a sense of local distinctiveness. Using traditional materials within the setting of a listed building can help amplify the distinctiveness of that building, and its location. Considerate boundary treatments, including soft landscaping such as hedgerows, can complement the aesthetic of the place, the character of the Conservation Area and the tone of a site. Embedding new boundaries into the environment of their immediate surroundings will maintain the character of the host building as well as help provide definition and security without drawing attention.

Close boarded or timber panel fencing are suburban in character and create a solid subdivision of the land, so would not be appropriate in rural environments. Alternatives such as low post-and-rail fencing, hedgerows, chestnut palings, metal estate railings, and, in some cases, red brick or flint boundary walls can be appropriate. Context and local characteristics are key to understanding the appropriate type of boundary treatment.

Examples of acceptable boundary treatments

Good quality red brick boundary wall laid in Flemish bond, topped with purpose made coping bricks.

Metal railings are formal in character and are more often associated with 19th century buildings, in historic towns, or surrounding parkland or estates. They provide a balanced treatment, marking the boundary but allowing views through.

Traditional five-bar timber gate, often seen in rural contexts. As with railings, this treatment marks the boundary but allows views through. Usually used in combination with a post-and-rail fence and hedgerows.

Metal five-bar gate; elegant and discreet in appearance. Most likely to be seen on a formal drive to a 19th century residence. Used successfully, in this instance, in combination with a historic red brick boundary wall.

Hedgerows offer a good alternative to close boarded fencing. They provide privacy but are much softer in appearance and relate better to rural and semi-rural locations. The addition of chicken wire offers greater security whilst maintaining the character of the hedge.

Hedge combined with picket fence. The hedge offers privacy and softness whilst the picket fence offers formality. This combination can be a good compromise.

Willow or hazel hurdles are another alternative to close boarded fencing. They offer an organic appearance to boundaries which is sympathetic to rural locations.

This low-level boundary wall is laid in traditional English bond. Brick walls tend to be formal in character in villages and small towns. However, when they are used, for example, to separate yards within farmsteads, or a working area from a domestic space, they can be less formal.

Chestnut palings can be used as an attractive boundary in rural locations.

Examples of unsatisfactory boundary treatments

Timber panel fence can be awkward out of context. In this instance, it is next to a historic red brick building with intricate architectural details, and a simple red brick boundary wall. It detracts from the historic building and has a stark contrast to the other materials used in the immediate area.

As above, timber panel fencing can visually obtrusive. In this case, emphasised by the location on top of a high grass verge. The height, length, solidity and suburban form is unsympathetic to the semi-rural village location.

Detailing is important. Red brick and flint boundary walls are a traditional boundary treatment. The ratio of flint to mortar in the panels needs to be appropriate, and should be recessed from the face of the flint.

Close boarded and panel fencing can be imposing, suburban and uncharacteristic. Depending on the circumstances, it can undermine local distinctiveness and detract from the semi-rural village location.

Panel and trellis fencing can also be inappropriate. In this case, it is imposing due to its high-level position, and its contrived character conflicts with the context of the area.

Close boarded fencing can be uncharacteristic and give rise to a stark contrast when combined with mature trees and soft boundaries.

Conclusion

The significance of important historic buildings and areas can be affected negatively – i.e. harmed – or positively – i.e. sustained or enhanced – through design, form, size, scale, location, materials, and context. Achieving the positive will garner longer-term benefits for our heritage assets, and the wider community.

Pre-application advice can be sought from both the Council's Heritage and Planning Teams via the website:
https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/pre-application-advice/

Further information on appropriate architectural form may be sought from some of the resources listed below.

Useful resources

- Babergh and Mid Suffolk Conservation Area Appraisals https://www.babergh.gov.uk/planning/heritage/conservation-area-appraisals/
- Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment https://suffolklandscape.org.uk/
- Suffolk Design Guide for Residential Areas https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/planning-and-development-advice/suffolk-design-guide-for-residential-areas/
- Suffolk Historic Environment Record (HER) https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/
- National Library of Scotland – interactive historic mapping records for the UK https://www.nls.uk/
- Historic England 'Search the List' – National Heritage List for England https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
- Historic England 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/conservationprinciplespoliciesandguidanceapril08web/
- Historic England 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-setting-heritage-assets/
- Historic England 'Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management' https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/heag-268-conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management/
- Historic England 'Valuing Places: Good Practice in Conservation Areas' https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/valuing-places/valuing-places-good-practice-conservation-areas/
- Historic England 'Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage' https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/heag301-local-heritage-listing/
- NPPG 'Historic Environment' https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment
- Planning Portal https://www.planningportal.co.uk/
- Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), 'Knowledge Base' https://www.spab.org.uk/