



Protocol for The Care Of The Government Historic Estate 2017

Summary

The Government is committed to setting a good example in the care of its historic estate. This Protocol sets out a consistent, coordinated approach to protecting all heritage assets through government departments' procurement, estate management and disposal procedures. The Protocol is mandatory for government departments and agencies, and is recommended as good practice for other public bodies, including local authorities.

Introduction

Heritage assets are defined as buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions because of their heritage interest. Heritage assets include designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority, including locally listed buildings and landscapes, and unscheduled archaeological sites.

The maintenance of heritage assets in active use and good repair is part of a sustainable approach to the environment. A strategic, systematic approach to the management of historic property will help to achieve value for money and conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life for this and future generations.

The Protocol, previously issued in 2009 by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, explains how the government's commitment to its heritage should be put into practice. It has been re-issued following consultation with departments. It should be read in conjunction with the relevant parts of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), which sets out the government's overarching position on heritage in relation to the planning system.

The requirements of the Protocol will also apply where responsibility for maintaining heritage assets has been transferred to a contractor or private-sector partner, provided that the asset remains in occupation by a central government body. This should be made clear in the contract.

More detailed advice on all of these points is available from the Government Historic Estate Unit (GHEU). The role of GHEU, and links to guidance and reports, can be seen at:

[HistoricEngland.org.uk/services-skills/our-planning-services/advice-for-government-historic-estates/](https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/our-planning-services/advice-for-government-historic-estates/)

Enquiries can be sent to GHEU, Historic England, 4th Floor, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA. Email: GHEU@HistoricEngland.org.uk



The Protocol

Departments and agencies with responsibility for heritage assets will:

1 Nominate a heritage officer

This person will collect and maintain data on heritage assets within the department and monitor conservation activity. They will act as a focal point for liaison with Historic England. The officer should maintain contact with property managers (including estates, facilities and building managers, whether in-house or contracted out) and ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under the Protocol.

2 Ensure that professional advisers and contractors have appropriate expertise

Specialist in-house conservation advisers or external conservation consultants should be used to prepare condition surveys and to advise on alteration or repair to heritage assets. The same principle applies to research, evaluation and investigation. For new work, it is important that a suitable architect is chosen to ensure high-quality design. Similarly, advice on archaeology should be obtained from consultants or in-house advisers with recognised professional expertise. Advice on conservation accreditation for professionals working on historic buildings is available from the [Conservation Accreditation](#) webpages on our website.

3 Ensure that the significance of any heritage asset is taken into account when planning change or development

Understanding the heritage asset and its significance is essential for sound decisions to be made on repairs, alterations, management, re-use or disposal. This will help to reconcile conservation with other objectives such as operational requirements, estate rationalisation, compliance with building regulations, reducing energy use or improving security in public buildings. The process of establishing significance through an analysis of heritage values is explained in [Conservation Principles](#). The importance that should be attached to heritage assets – whether designated or undesignated – in the planning system is explained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

To understand the heritage asset, it may be necessary to commission additional research, analysis, survey or investigation. To ensure value for money, 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 their significance. Copies of reports should be offered to the relevant [Historic Environment Record](#). Where an asset is designated on the [National Heritage List for England](#), it might be the case that this would benefit from updating, to fully reflect the extent of and reasons for designation.



Any management guidance should be based on accurate information about the heritage asset, including plans, reports, photographs and an inventory of contents. Management provisions should be made to minimise the risk of disaster, particularly from fire, and to maintain an emergency plan.

4 Commission regular condition surveys

All heritage assets should be subject to a periodic inspection and condition report. A four-year cycle is recommended, but three- or five-yearly inspections may be appropriate in some circumstances. Reports should identify and prioritise repair and major maintenance requirements, and provide an approximate cost for each item. This will enable work to be planned and executed in a cost-effective way. It is recommended that periodic inspection reports incorporate a statement of the asset's significance.

5 Implement a planned programme of repairs and maintenance

Regular and appropriate maintenance is essential to keep heritage assets in good repair. Departments and their contractors or private-sector partners are expected to be systematic in planning repairs for heritage assets. A forward work plan should allow for routine maintenance and inspections to be carried out at regular intervals, alongside repair and other works recommended in inspection reports, and operational projects. A record should be kept by the property manager of all works that are carried out.

6 Secure heritage at risk

Historic England publishes an annual [Heritage at Risk Register](#) which provides detailed information about heritage assets at risk of neglect or decay. In addition, GHEU's [Biennial Conservation Report](#) includes a list of heritage assets at risk on the government estate.

Departments are urged to work with the statutory authorities and Historic England to agree a strategy for resolving each case, whether by repair, re-use, improved management or disposal.

7 Safeguard heritage assets that are unused or in course of disposal

Unused assets, such as [vacant buildings](#), should be regularly inspected and maintained in a secure, safe and stable condition pending re-use or disposal. Departments should observe the [guidance on the disposal of heritage assets](#) issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Historic England and the Government Property Unit and endorsed by HM Treasury. This guidance states that maximisation of receipts should not be the overriding aim in the disposal of heritage assets: the aim should rather be to obtain best value for the taxpayer.



8 Comply with the statutory procedures that regulate works to heritage assets

Crown bodies no longer benefit from immunity from the planning acts. [Planning Practice Guidance](#) explains how planning applications from Crown bodies should be handled. However, Crown immunity has not yet been removed in relation to works to scheduled monuments. GHEU has issued a guidance note for Crown bodies which explains the procedures for applying for [scheduled monument clearance](#). Departments are advised to consult the relevant statutory authorities at an early stage in relation to proposals that affect designated heritage assets. They should respond promptly to legitimate concerns from local authorities and others about their development proposals.

9 Ensure that the design quality of any new work enhances the historic environment

New works, including alterations and extensions to heritage assets as well as development in historic areas, should be designed to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

10 Prepare biennial conservation reports

The heritage officer in each department should prepare a biennial report for their Minister. This report should provide information relating to each heritage asset, including details of its condition and of any statutory protection. The report will summarise work and issues of the past two-year period and progress achieved.

Guidance on the format and content of these reports is available from GHEU.

A copy of each department's biennial report should be sent to GHEU so we can monitor progress centrally, and draw up and publish biennial overview reports on the condition of the government's historic estate.

11 Records and archives

Departments should ensure that any records are properly reviewed and that papers of historical interest, including plans and drawings, are transferred to an appropriate archive. Advice should be sought from the Departmental Record Officer. The National Archives publishes guidance on its website for government departments and other organisations subject to the National Records Act 1958 on the [retention of buildings records](#). Alternatively, it may be appropriate to lodge records in a local archive or museum, or with a specialist collection. Guidance on [Historic Environment Records](#) is available on our website.

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer Services Department:

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