



# MANAGING CHANGE IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

## DEMOLITION OF LISTED BUILDINGS



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD  
EACHDRAIDHEIL  
ALBA

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View of Murraygate, Dundee prior to demolition. Titled: 'Mauchline Tower, (Old Murraygate)' c. 1875 © Courtesy of HES (Photograph album 67).



## BACKGROUND

Managing Change is a series of guidance notes produced by Historic Environment Scotland in our role as lead public body for the historic environment. The series supports national level policy for planning and the historic environment. Planning and other authorities should take this guidance into account when making decisions.

Historic buildings enrich Scotland's landscape and chart a great part of our history. They are central to our everyday lives, creating a sense of place, identity and wellbeing. Some historic buildings are designated as 'listed buildings' because they have special architectural or historic interest. You can find out more about listing [on our website](#).

Listed building consent (LBC) is required for any works that would affect the special interest of a listed building. This includes demolition. It is a criminal offence to carry out such work without consent. The LBC process is normally administered by planning authorities. Historic Environment Scotland is a consultee for the demolition of any listed building. All of the details of our role in both LBC and conservation area consent are set [out on our website](#).

[Scottish Planning Policy](#) states that 'listed buildings should be protected from demolition or other work that would adversely affect it or its setting' (paragraph 141). [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#) outlines the key policy considerations for making decisions about works that affect listed buildings:

### HEP2

Decisions affecting the historic environment should ensure that its understanding and enjoyment as well as its benefits are secured for present and future generations.

### HEP4

Changes to specific assets and their context should be managed in a way that protects the historic environment. Opportunities for enhancement should be identified where appropriate.

If detrimental impact on the historic environment is unavoidable, it should be minimised. Steps should be taken to demonstrate that alternatives have been explored, and mitigation measures should be put in place.

### The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) 1997 Act 'The 1997 Act'

Demolishing a listed building should be avoided wherever possible. [The 1997 Act](#) requires that special regard be given to preserving listed buildings and their settings when making decisions on LBC applications. There is a strong presumption in favour of retaining listed buildings. Applications to demolish listed buildings should be refused unless their loss has been fully considered and justified.

## DEFINITION OF DEMOLITION

In this context, demolition means the total or substantial loss of a listed building. A listed building can be any built structure. Although the 1997 Act and this document use the term 'building', the phrase can apply to things like bridges, lamp posts and phone boxes, too. Even if part of a building is to be retained (such as in façade retention), a proposal may still be considered demolition. This would be the case if the proposed works would result in the loss of the majority of the listed building.

The removal of smaller parts of a building, such as conservatories, porches, chimneys and small scale extensions, should be assessed as alterations rather than demolition. In more complex cases, where alterations involve the loss of large amounts of fabric, planning authorities may need to consider in more detail whether works are classed as demolition. This should happen as early as possible in the process so that the planning authority can identify the relevant policies and guidance.



View of central block during demolition of  
Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh.  
Titled: 'Edinburgh Infirmary' c.1884  
© Courtesy of HES.

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

This guidance should be used when the future of a listed building is uncertain and demolition is being considered as an option. Because of the strong presumption in favour of retaining listed buildings, the decision to demolish a listed building is a last resort. It will almost always be made at the end of a process that has considered and discounted all other feasible options.

There will be some exceptional circumstances where the demolition of a listed building can be justified. This document provides information and guidance that will be a key consideration in such cases. It is most relevant to owners, their agents, and those making decisions on LBC applications for demolition. It should inform:

- The approach of owners

[The accompanying Managing Change in the Historic Environment: The Use and Adaptation of Listed Buildings](#) provides guidance on different approaches to reusing listed buildings. It should be read alongside this guidance when considering the range of potential options for listed buildings. If the owner decides to submit a LBC application for demolition, pre-application discussions are strongly encouraged.

- Decisions on listed building consent (LBC) applications for demolition

The planning authority should identify which national and local planning and historic environment policies they will use to assess an application at the earliest possible stage. They should give clear advice to the applicant on what supporting information will be required. They should also involve us at an early stage.

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## WHAT TO CONSIDER FIRST

If one of the following situations applies then the loss of a listed building is likely to be acceptable, as long as this is clearly demonstrated and justified. The supporting information expected to justify demolition under these situations is specific to each.

### IS THE BUILDING NO LONGER OF SPECIAL INTEREST?

In some circumstances a listed building may no longer be of special architectural or historic interest. This might include where there has been a significant loss of fabric or features of interest, or where there have been later alterations which have affected the character of the building.

Where the case for demolition rests on this factor, owners should ask us to review the listing to determine if a building is still of special architectural or historic interest. This review should happen before an application for demolition is submitted.

Further information on the process of proposing a building for listing, or requesting a review of a listing is available on [our website](#). For an individual building, we aim to complete a review within six months. We recognise that some reviews will require a quicker response. We will consider requests for a shorter time period on a case by case basis. We may be able to give an initial view of the special architectural or historic interest of the building in a much shorter time, particularly if it no longer meets the criteria for designation. The more detail you give us when asking for the review, the quicker we can assess your proposal.

LBC is not required for demolition of a building which has been de-listed. However, local planning policies may still require the cultural significance of an unlisted building to be taken into account. If the building is located within a conservation area, conservation area consent will be required. This is a separate process from LBC and is also administered by planning authorities. The conservation area consent process focuses on considering the building's contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Demolition work in progress after the Arnott Simpson fire, Argyle Street, Glasgow, 1951 © Newsquest (Herald & Times). Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).

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## IS THE BUILDING INCAPABLE OF MEANINGFUL REPAIR?

Most traditionally-built buildings, even those in an advanced state of decay, can be repaired.

There are occasions when repairing and reusing a listed building would lead to extensive loss or replacement of fabric, which would have a consequent effect on its special interest. If repairing a building cannot preserve its special interest, it is not capable of meaningful repair.

Instances where meaningful repair might not be possible include where the building has inherent design failures, or where a timber structure has decayed so much that no original material can be saved. It would not be possible to meaningfully repair a building where there is structural damage that cannot be repaired without complete reconstruction – such as serious corrosion of reinforced concrete frames, or extensive damage to the building.

This issue is separate to that of the economic viability of any repairs, which is considered below.

If an LBC application is submitted arguing that a building is incapable of meaningful repair, supporting evidence for this will need to be provided. This should include a full condition assessment by appropriately qualified and experienced professionals, and a statement placing the condition assessment in context of the building's significance.

## IS THE DEMOLITION OF THE BUILDING ESSENTIAL TO DELIVERING SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH OR THE WIDER COMMUNITY?

Some projects may be of such economic or public significance that their benefits may be seen to outweigh the strong presumption in favour of retaining a listed building. Often these projects form part of wider strategies at national or regional level. Examples may include major transportation schemes or significant regeneration projects.

An LBC application for demolition on these grounds should provide evidence to demonstrate why the loss of the building is essential in order to obtain these benefits. It should make clear why these, or similar, benefits cannot be achieved with retention of the building. Supporting evidence should also include a detailed assessment of the likely benefits of the proposed project. If the works form part of a wider strategy, the application should explain why the strategy is significant at a national or regional level.

If the proposals involve a new development on the site, planning permission for the replacement development should be demonstrated as being in line with local and national policy. Unless this can be done, there is no certainty that planning permission will be achievable. This would make it impossible to ensure that the benefits were going to happen, and the demolition would therefore not be justified.



## ECONOMIC VIABILITY

In some instances the repair and reuse of a listed building is not economically viable. This means that the cost of retaining the listed building would be higher than its end value. Where the cost of works is higher than the end value, the difference is referred to as the 'conservation deficit'.

The principle of demolition should only be accepted where it has been demonstrated that all reasonable efforts have been made to retain the listed building. The efforts made should take into consideration the special interest of the listed building.

The accompanying [Managing Change in the Historic Environment: The Use and Adaptation of Listed Buildings](#) provides more detailed advice on how reuse of a listed building can be achieved. This includes undertaking pro-active marketing measures.

Marketing should be undertaken in an open and transparent manner before a final decision is taken on making an application for demolition. In certain cases its marketing should continue when a LBC application has been submitted.

Marketing is necessary to demonstrate that every effort has been made to secure a buyer who would retain the building.

Marketing should make clear that the building is listed. It should include a development brief if possible, as this helps to maximise the possible opportunities for retaining the building. The process should also involve specific marketing to groups or individuals with a track record in restoration, such as Building Preservation Trusts.

A building should be marketed to potential restoring purchasers for a reasonable period, at a price reflecting its location and condition. This should normally be at least six months, although in some circumstances a longer or shorter time period may be appropriate. The price should be its current market value and should not take account of any historic purchase price.

The marketing price should not be defined by the value of the land without the building, even if this might be higher, because that would assume demolition will take place.

## COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Concern for the future of an unused listed building may result in a community effort to take over ownership. A range of options exists, and might include:

- working in partnership with the owner
- leasing the building
- negotiating a private sale
- purchasing on the open market

Community Right to Buy (CRtB) now allows communities throughout Scotland to register an interest in land and the opportunity to buy that land when it comes up for sale. Further information on CRtB can be found on the [Community Ownership Support Service website](#).

In some circumstances the price may be a nominal sum. It is important to note that whilst a building may be marketed at a low value (in some cases as little as £1), this should not be seen as a reflection of its special interest. It is only a reflection of the extent of the conservation deficit together with the strong presumption in favour of retaining the building.

The justification to demolish a listed building on economic grounds will not rest solely on marketing. The decision to demolish is normally at the end of a process where an owner has considered the viability of alternative options. A financial assessment should demonstrate that the other options were not economically viable. It should include a detailed assessment of costs, including developer profit, as well as the likely value of the completed project or projects.

The details of the marketing process and financial assessment (or viability assessment) should form part of the material submitted to the planning authority as part of an LBC application. The planning authority should verify the information provided by reviewing the assumptions and allowances within the financial assessment.

The marketing information should outline the steps taken by the applicant to market the building, detail any interest shown, and explain why this did not result in any credible offers.

The applicant should also show that there is no other way of financing the project, through funding sources such as enabling development, or grant aid.

Some buildings or structures are of historic or architectural interest but have more limited scope for reuse. Bridges, dovecots, statues and lampposts are all examples of structures that may have limited options for reuse. Consent for demolition of such structures should not normally be given on the grounds of economic viability alone. The main factors in these cases are likely to be the special interest of the listed structure, its condition, the likely availability of funding, and whether marketing to repairing purchasers is a realistic option.



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## CURTILAGE

Structures within the curtilage of a listed building, even if they are not fixed to it, may be included in the listing. For example, a country house might be named in the statutory address, and structures such as boundary walls, gateways or stable blocks may not be named or described in the listed building record, but are often part of the listing. It is a role of planning authorities to decide whether structures within the curtilage are listed.

Decisions on demolition of curtilage listed structures should primarily be based on their contribution to the special interest of the listing. Where a building makes a significant contribution to the character, appreciation or understanding of the main subject of the listing, the principles of this guidance apply.

If part of a building is not listed, both the statutory address and the statement of special interest in the listed building record will state that it is excluded. The statement will use the word 'excluding' and quote the 1997 Act. Some earlier listed building records may use the word 'excluding', but if the Act is not quoted, the exclusion carries no legal weight.

## RECORDING

Owners and developers should carry out detailed recording of all listed buildings when fundamental changes are proposed. If LBC is granted for demolition, there is a separate requirement under [Section 7 of the 1997 Act](#) to give us an opportunity to carry out recording for the public record. Planning authorities may have separate requirements for recording.

## SALVAGE

The salvaging of historic features and material does not justify demolition or form part of the justification. But if LBC is given for demolition, opportunities for salvage should be considered. Salvaged materials and features can make a significant contribution to the repair and maintenance of historic buildings.

Often it will be possible to re-site salvaged features, such as decorative stone doorways, plaques, or other fixtures and fittings within a redeveloped site. Likewise, salvaged materials may be reused to the benefit of the scheme, such as stone boundary walling.

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## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

### Legislation, strategy, policy and procedure

[Our Place in Time:  
The Historic Environment  
Strategy for Scotland](#)

[Historic Environment Scotland:  
Designation Policy and Selection  
Guidance](#)

[Historic Environment Circular:  
Regulations and Procedures](#)

[Planning \(Listed Buildings and  
Conservation Areas\) \(Scotland\)  
Act 1997](#)

### Guidance

[HES Use and Adaptation of  
listed buildings](#)

[HES Use and Adaptation of  
listed buildings  
case studies](#)

[Managing Change in the Historic  
Environment guidance series](#)

[HES Technical advice notes  
\(TANs\), Short Guides, Inform  
Guides, and Practitioners Guides](#)

[Scottish Government Planning  
Advice Note \(PAN\) 71:  
Conservation Area Management](#)

### Online resources

[Historic Environment Scotland  
website](#)

[Designation records  
and decisions](#)

[Buildings at Risk Toolkit](#)

[HES role in Listed building  
consent and Conservation area  
consent](#)

Front cover image:

The remains of the clock tower at the Chancelot Mill in Leith, Edinburgh in July 1972  
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