



The SPAB Campaign Toolkit

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Your campaign



Protecting local heritage

Protecting heritage at a local level is an excellent way to help safeguard historic buildings. It's the people that care for and enjoy old buildings everyday that can bring local heritage to life.

Whether you're worried about a deteriorating building in your local area, want to contest a planning application, build your own local campaign or set up a building preservation trust then this document will offer you guidance.

Section 1 gives you the steps to follow if you want to campaign against a planning application and **Section 2** offers information on buildings at risk: what are the statutory powers local planning authorities can use to protect them, and what can you do to help?

The SPAB's role in the planning process

In our role as a National Amenity Society, local authorities in England and Wales have a statutory obligation to notify the SPAB of any applications to demolish or substantially alter a listed building.

We make it a priority to focus on buildings with

fabric dating from 1720 or earlier.

There are four other National Amenity Societies, namely the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society, The Twentieth Century Society and they should also be notified of listed building consent applications by local authorities. Each of them has their own criteria for the cases they prioritise.

Notifications of proposed developments within historic parks and gardens should be referred to The Gardens Trust.

We often rely on our dedicated members and followers to alert us to misguided alterations and demolitions to listed buildings, and we receive hundreds of cases every year.

Unfortunately resources don't allow us to take on every building in need and that's where our members and followers are invaluable in protecting historic buildings. Members of the public always have a right to respond to planning and listed building consent applications.

Tools for a successful campaign



Inspiring local interest

The more public support you have, the stronger your campaign will be. Before you begin your campaigning find out if there are any existing groups and societies that are already active in your area. Can you join up with them? Could they offer you advice or guidance?

It is important to understand and communicate the immediate threat to the building. Don't just focus on the historic importance, try to suggest a future for that building and how that might benefit the community. Your local community will want to know that the project won't be a drain on tax payers' money.

Working with the media

Local and regional media coverage is often the most effective and direct way to get your message to a wider audience. Local and regional media are interested in local people, events and places, and often don't have the resources to look for news-worthy stories. If a good subject is presented 'on a plate' it is likely to be used. Try to build up a rapport with local journalists. When you have a

clear story to tell they will be happy to hear from you.

Your media audience

Every area has a large number of potential media contacts, which include:

- Local and county newspapers (paid for and free)
- County magazines
- Local radio – (BBC and commercial) news and talk-led feature/magazine programmes
- Local television – (BBC and commercial) news and feature programmes
- Local professional group newsletters (architects, surveyors etc)

Making an approach

Local newspapers in particular have pages to fill each week and will generally welcome a good relevant local story, especially if it involves a strong picture and local people.

You can make an initial approach in several ways:

- By sending out a press release
- By phoning the news desk – be prepared to follow this up with a press release or other written details

- By inviting media to an event – back this up with a press release.

When contacting newspapers or magazines ask for the newsdesk, editor or features editor, depending on the publication. With television or radio ask to be put through to appropriate programmes or, if you are hoping to promote a news story, to forward planning.

Press releases

- Always remember that a press release should contain the news and information you want published and is worth publishing. Make sure you are hitting the right target.
- Clearly mark your information 'Press Release'/'Media Invite'/'Press Information'
- Be brief and factual
- If there are lots of facts and figures or data, use a separate information sheet
- Ensure that the essence of your story is communicated at the very beginning of the release
- Always include details such as times, dates, venue, directions
- Always include a contact telephone number for someone from whom further information can be obtained
- Do target the right or most appropriate publications/ radio programmes for your story
- Do think about lead times – magazines need stories far earlier than newspapers
- Do make sure that journalists and producers feel confident that when they contact you they will get concise, reliable information by their deadline.

Television and radio

It's always exciting to get a TV or radio crew along to cover an event or news story, but it's worth bearing a couple of points in mind.

- TV crews may want to set up before your event, but never be surprised if they arrive at the last minute or leave before it's over
- TV and radio may want to interview key players, but not have much time to do so try to be flexible to their demands
- If you are being interviewed, enjoy it! And remember the 30-second soundbite rule, and try to clarify in your mind just beforehand the three most important points you would like to convey

Utilising social media

Include social media is an excellent way to reach a large audience with your campaign. Start following local groups and businesses, 'Friends' groups, historic properties in the area, National Amenity Societies etc. Approach other accounts who might be sympathetic to your cause and invite your connections to support it. If you have started an online petition, social media is a great way to share this.

Section 1: Campaigning against inappropriate development

At its core, campaigning is not complicated. It is about getting your voice heard. The more people you reach and the more opportunity you have to put your views to decision-makers, the better. But even a modest investment of time can have positive influence.

It is in the interest of MPs and local councillors to be highly attuned to the concerns of their constituents and local ward members. Decision makers must ultimately work within the legislation and policy frameworks that govern planning. However, elected officials will be influenced by party politics and any demonstration of democratic voice. This is because they are democratically accountable to their constituents, and if they think that votes are at risk then it is in their interests – both as representatives of the public will, and individuals concerned for their own jobs – to represent those views. Where there is political will to save a building or oppose a planning decision this can have an influence over the final outcome.

Beyond democratic power, media power has considerable influence over decision-makers and can help to magnify your group's campaigns and concerns.

The Campaign timeline

Before an application is submitted:

If there is a building (or heritage asset) you are concerned about it is possible to begin a campaign prior to any applications coming forward for the site. The following steps should help you begin your campaign:

- Understand the building
- Collect good images of the building
- Decide what you are campaigning for/what your message is
- Contact the local planning authority
- Contact relevant National Amenity Societies and

other heritage organisations

- Promote your campaign – use social media to promote your campaign, contact the local press and start a petition

During the application determination process:

If you were not aware that a building was under threat until this point then you will need to act fast, but there is still plenty that you can do.

Take a look at the previous points and decide what is manageable and what is not. If time and resources are tight, the most crucial thing is that you understand the building and formulate your position on the proposals, based on what you know of its special interest.

The following steps should help you to respond to a planning/listed building consent application:

- Familiarise yourself with the application documents
- Engage with the local planning authority, national heritage organisations and amenity societies
- Formulate and submit your response
- Promote your campaign
- Write to your MP and local councillors about the development.
- Register to speak at the planning committee meeting

Where relevant you may also want to consider the following additional actions:

- [Apply for the building to be listed if it is under threat](#)
- [Apply for the building to be listed as an asset of community value](#)
- [Request that the building be considered for local listing](#)
- Request that the conservation area be extended to include the building

- Request that the application be called in by the Secretary of State

After an application has been decided:

If the application has been rejected:

- Share the progress of the campaign on social media and with local press
- Keep in touch with the planning/conservation officer
- Prepare for the possibility of an appeal and/or planning inquiry by the applicant
- Register to speak at or submit evidence to any appeal
- Explore the possibility of drawing up an alternative scheme for the site
- Keep an eye out for revised proposals for the site

If the application has been approved:

- Has the application been revised in line with the concerns of your campaign? If so, celebrate! This is a success.
- If not it is time to consider whether or not the case qualifies for a [judicial review](#)

How to write an effective representation on a planning/listed building consent applications

The individuals and bodies who submit comments about planning applications fall into three categories: members of the public, statutory consultees and non-statutory consultees. The following advice is intended to help members of the public and local campaign groups wishing to make a representation during the public consultation period for a planning or listed building.

When your local planning authority (LPA) receives a planning application they are supposed to notify those neighbours who they think may be affected by the proposals. Please remember anyone can object to any planning application, whether or not they have personally received notification of the application.

When a planning application is considered by a local planning authority it is subject to a process

of public and internal consultation. A consultation period of 21 days is normally provided to allow members of the public the opportunity to comment on applications. In practice some LPAs will take into account representations received after the consultation end date, before an application is determined, though if you know your representation will be delayed it usually a good idea to send a holding response to the planning officer informing them of the date they can expect to hear from you. You may either send your response to the local planning authority (by email or post), or some LPAs will now allow you to submit your representation online via their planning portal. Representations received by post may not always be accepted so check carefully first.

DO NOT

- Be tempted by a petition

Whilst a petition can be a useful way of demonstrating the numbers of people who are concerned about an issue, they do not hold much weight within the planning system. Often LPAs will only count a petition as 1 representation, regardless of the numbers of signatures the petition contains.

- Use a 'standard' letter response

Objectors/commentors should be encouraged to write personalised responses as objections/comments will not carry the same weight if they are thought to have been written or produced in a standardised form.

- Use highly emotive language

There is no restriction on what you can say about a planning application, however, the LPA will not publish or take account of libellous or offensive representations. Decision makers can only take material planning considerations into account when considering consultation responses - emotive pleas and arguments are unlikely to hold much weight.

DO

Quote legislation and national/local planning policy

- Representations should concentrate on those aspects of the application which are unlikely to be

acceptable in terms of their impact on designated heritage assets and the wider historic environment. Your response should make its arguments and then quote the relevant national legislation, and national and local planning policy to demonstrate how the proposals are contrary to the planning framework.

Keep your response succinct

- LPA officers are usually pressed for time and if an application is particularly controversial your representation may be one of many. Organise your arguments so each paragraph makes a point and links back to national and local planning policy.
- Research other planning decisions in the area for similar schemes and reference them if pertinent
- LPA officers must write a 'delegated report' to accompany any application they determine (under delegated powers). Usually these reports can be found online under the documents for any application. Reading reports for similar proposals in the local area will allow you to understand the kind of issues at play and can be useful in pointing out contradictions and precedents in the LPAs decision making.

What to look for when you are considering an application

The following are the grounds on which a planning/listed building consent are likely to be refused, though this is not definitive and only quotes national planning policy – do also quote the policies quoted in your LPAs Local Plan.

- Harmful impact on a listed building
- Harmful impact on the setting of adjacent listed buildings
- Harmful impact on a conservation area
- Adverse effect on the residential amenity of neighbours
- Over-development of the site
- Visual impact
- Design (bulk, massing, detailing and materials)
- Adverse effect on highway safety

The following points would be considered non-material considerations and will not be taken into account in deciding the acceptability of proposals in planning terms:

- The reasons or motives of the applicant applying for permission (e.g. if you believe the development to be purely speculative)
- Discussions of profit
- The behaviour or political affiliations of the applicant
- Nuisance or annoyance previously caused by the applicant (unless this relates to an existing development for which retrospective permission is being sought)
- Concerns about the possible future development of the site, as distinct from the proposals being considered
- The effect on the value of neighbouring properties
- The loss of a view

Using planning policy and legislation

When you come to write your response it is really important that you ground your arguments in the planning framework within which all decision makers work. They are required by law to determine applications in accordance with the local and national planning policy, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Trying to get your head around planning policy may seem overwhelming but utilising it correctly improves the chances of your campaign's success.

As shown in the diagram on the following page legislation and policy are applied in a hierarchy: legislation is set by parliament and must be complied with during the decision-making process, whereas planning policy is established by government (national and local) and should be complied with.

Applying Legislation & Policy



The primary legislation we should concern ourselves with when assessing applications affecting heritage is the [Planning \(Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas Act\) 1990](#). Any decisions relating to listed buildings and their settings and conservation areas must address the statutory considerations of sections 16, 66 and 72 in particular.

Section 16 protects listed buildings:

'In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.'

Section 66 protects the setting of listed buildings:

'In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.'

Section 72 protects conservation areas:

'In the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention

shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.'

If an application contravenes any of these requirements then make sure to demonstrate this in your response and quote the relevant section in your representation to the local planning authority.

After assessing proposals against legislative requirements you must measure it against planning policy. In 2012 the Government introduced a new planning policy regime called the [National Planning Policy Framework 2012 \(NPPF\)](#). The objective of this policy framework is sustainability: meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The policy was updated in July 2021.

Section 16 of the NPPF deals with 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' and provides us with the relevant policy against which to measure proposals which affect heritage assets. It requires applicants to:

Paragraph 194

'describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate

to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.'

And local authorities to:

Paragraph 195

'identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.'

Paragraph 197

'take account of:

- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
- The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality
- The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness'

It also sets out the following policies:

Paragraph 196

'Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.'

Paragraph 199

'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). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Paragraph 200

'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its

setting), should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of:

a) grade II listed buildings, or grade II registered parks or gardens, should be exceptional;

b) assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, registered battlefields, grade I and II* listed buildings, grade I and II* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.'

Paragraph 201

Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
- conservation by grant funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible;
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.'

Paragraph 202

'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'

Paragraph 203

'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'



Note: to be considered a non-designated heritage asset, the structure in question generally needs to have already been included on a local authority's local list.

The NPPF is underpinned and supported by the [Planning Practice Guidance](#), a live document online which is reviewed and updated periodically.

Alongside national policy each local authority will have its own local plan. Most local plans are comprised of a core strategy where the LPA sets out its policies, and accompanying supplementary planning documents and guides which explain how the policies in the core strategy are to be implemented and applied.

The plan will prescribe the areas where particular types of development will be acceptable and will designate other areas where development is generally discouraged (AONB, Green Belt land etc). In addition, the plan will contain detailed policies relating to design, acceptable uses (for example in town centres) and other detailed matters. These are now all usually available online.

As a general rule it is good practice to refer to local plan policies before national planning policy. However, in some areas the LPA may not have succeeded in putting its local plan into place or it may now be due for renewal. In that case its old plans will still be apply, however, the weight they carry will be much reduced and it would be better to refer to more up to date national level policy. The same follows where a local plan does not offer adequate policy protection. For example, if you find that your LPA does not have a policy about the setting of listed buildings then refer to the relevant NPPF paragraph.

The decision making process

Decisions on applications are made in two main ways by local authorities, under delegated powers or by committee. Delegated powers give LPA officers the authority to take decisions on applications which have been granted to them by the council. In addition most councils will have a dedicated planning committee and perhaps sub-committees which will be tasked with making decisions on applications which would otherwise be dealt with under delegated powers.

A planning committee is made up of the authority's elected members and the trigger point for applications to be referred to committee will differ from one local authority to another. In most cases it will involve one of the members of the council requesting that the application be referred to the committee for determination. In addition some cases will go automatically if it meets a set of criteria (usually size of development) or if there have been a number of objections on an application. The number of objections required to trigger determination by planning committee rather than by officers varies across local authorities. If you are worried the planning officer is going to recommend approval it is worth establishing what the trigger number of objections is so as you have a target to reach to make sure the application goes before the committee. However, be wary as not all planning committees are created equal and some make unexpected decisions. The officer will write a report for the committee making their recommendation. It is at this point you can request to attend the committee and make a representation to them.

Planning committee meetings are held in public and you may attend the meeting, either to witness the process or in order to speak (usually no more than 3 minutes). If you want to speak at a committee regarding a specific application it will nearly always be necessary to give advance notice to the committee clerk of your wish to speak. Notice must usually be given in writing or by email at least a day ahead of the meeting. Check the council's rules about this and the committee procedure on their website.

The last mechanism for decision taking happens when an application gets 'called in'. This refers to the process whereby an application is referred to the Secretary of State for their determination. The Secretary of State will normally only do this if the application conflicts with national policy in important ways, or is nationally significant. [The details of this process can be found here.](#)

It is worth remembering that the The Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that local authorities (except London Boroughs) who intend to grant listed building consent on a council owned building notify them

of the application so as they can decide whether or not to call it in and make the determination at their higher level.

Challenging a permission/consent

If planning permission/consent has been granted, objectors have no right of appeal unless there is a serious legal error in the council's decision or the way the decision was reached. In this case a legal challenge at the High Court, known as a Judicial Review, can be pursued to overturn the decision. However, this should not be entered into lightly as the financial implications are large and the chances of success are slim. The Court's jurisdiction is confined strictly to determining an error of law; they will not judge the case on the quality of the decision in terms of planning merits. [The details of this process can be found here.](#)

However, if a planning permission/consent is refused, the applicant does have a right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. If you have objected to an application the council should inform you that an appeal has been lodged. If the appeal is being dealt with under the 'fast-track' appeal procedure objectors do not have the right to provide further representations but the Inspector will take into account any responses received by the council during the public consultation.

If the appeal is being dealt with on the basis of written representations or at informal hearing or inquiry then objectors do have the right to make further written representations in addition to anything you may have sent to the council during the public consultation. [A procedural guide about appeals and the responsibilities of all parties can be found here.](#)

Section 2: Buildings at Risk

What is a building at risk?

A building at risk (BAR) generally refers to a building which has fallen into a state of disrepair and is in danger of being lost through a lack of action and accelerated decay or through demolition related to its condition. The term can be used for occupied and unoccupied buildings alike and will be as relevant to a building which appears neglected as a building on the brink of collapse. It can also be used when referring to both listed and unlisted buildings. The reasons for a building becoming at risk are numerous, but some of the most common include:

Redundancy

Many buildings end up at risk because they have become redundant. This situation might occur if the building has a very specific use and cannot be easily adapted without significant harm to its special interest, for example in the case of churches, windmills, farm buildings or police stations. Others will have become redundant through local demographics, economic patterns, changes in technology or government policies.

Redundancy should not be the end of the story for historic buildings. New uses can be found for buildings whose original purpose is now not necessary or viable, and others have been successfully retained and interpreted for visitors and for use by the local community.

Vacant buildings are particularly at risk because they are more likely to suffer from vandalism and a lack of maintenance. It is sometimes the case that once a community begins to resent a building as an eyesore, opposition to its total demolition is much less likely.

Location

Sometimes the location of a building can be a factor in why it is now at risk. Perhaps it is situated in an area with other neglected buildings, or an area historically used for industry or falls just outside the central area of a historic town or has

been compromised by an insensitive infrastructure development. This needn't be an immediate cause for concern as the repair and bringing back into a use of a historic building can be the trigger for regeneration in the surrounding area. The change in fortune of a local eyesore can result in a building the community can be proud of. Caution must be exercised when you are considering the viability of a building with an intended commercial use at the end of your project.

Owners

The future of historic buildings are in the hands of their owners – without maintenance and care they can quickly decline. There are many buildings whose futures are threatened by owners who, for a range of reasons from purposeful neglect and to lack of funds, have allowed their buildings to fall into disrepair. Owners may not be willing to sell their building at a price which reflects its condition and so it stands vacant whilst a misguided owner seeks an unreasonable price for its sale.

Understanding the statutory powers for protecting heritage

Owners of listed buildings are under no obligation to maintain their property though of course it is in their best interest to do so. Local authorities can, however, take action to secure repair when it becomes evident that a building is being allowed to deteriorate.

There are a number of provisions available to local planning authorities to deal with different situations and stages in the enforcement process. Some of these relate specifically to listed buildings, because of their individual importance, and others to the more general amenity value of an area. Their powers escalate as the problem becomes worse.

Enforcement powers

Section 215 notice

This straightforward power requires the owner or occupier of a building to carry out works to improve the external condition of a building or piece of land if its neglect is adversely affecting the surrounding area.

Urgent works notice

This power allows a local authority to directly carry out works that are required urgently to make an unoccupied listed building secure and weather tight to prevent any further deterioration.

Repairs notice

This power allows a local authority to specify to the owner works it considers necessary to secure the future of a listed building. If the repairs are not carried out, the power can lead to a compulsory purchase of the building by the local authority.

Compulsory purchase order

When all of the preceding measures fail, the local authority's last resort is to acquire a listed building under a compulsory purchase order either to repair it itself or, more usually, to sell it on to be conserved and repaired by a building preservation trust

[Stopping the Rot by Historic England](#) is a very useful guidance note which explains these statutory powers in greater detail.

Acquiring and repairing a building at risk

You may have a specific building in mind that you want to rescue, or you might be looking for a project and know that you want to bring an old building back into use without having one in mind. In either situation you must not let your heart run away with you. Buildings at risk can be successfully saved and retained for future generations through the efforts of ordinary people. However, you must approach any project with your eyes open to the issues and pitfalls, and with the constraints of the building in mind. You must be prepared to walk away from a building if the cost is too high. You must also be wary of prejudicing its special interest to the extent that your new plans become substantially harmful to the building.

Finding out who owns a property

A good first step to finding out who owns a building at risk is to contact your local authority conservation officer as they should be monitoring the buildings in their area. In some cases they will have collaborated with Historic England (HE)

on updating the Heritage at Risk Register (HAR). A contact is given for each entry on the HE HAR register. The contact is a HE member of staff, except for Grade II buildings in London. For these, a local authority contact is given. In addition, Historic Environment Scotland and Ulster Architectural Heritage manage the buildings at risk registers for Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively and they may be able to provide you with information about owners.

If the conservation officer has already established a working relationship with an owner they may be happy to act as an intermediary. In some cases the conservation officer may only be able to give you basic information about the property and owner. At this point it will be necessary to do your own research.

A good place to start your search is the [HM Land Registry](#) where for a small fee (currently £3) you can apply for a copy of the register to find out the name and address of the owner of a property. [The HM Land Registry blog also provides information on what to do next if a property is unregistered.](#)

Buying a building at risk

It should be noted that very few properties on the

HAR are for sale, but if they are this will be noted in the details of each entry. The SPAB Property List can also be a useful place to search for buildings for sale that require repair or a new use. If you already have a building in mind that is not for sale it is worth noting that it can often require dedication and determination to persuade an owner to sell a building that is not on the market.

The cost of repairing a historic building and bringing it back into use can be high and is likely to rise beyond initial estimates once work begins. Invariably you will encounter unforeseen issues and new discoveries which will have to be remedied and carefully conserved. If you have reached the stage where an owner is willing to sell their property it is likely they have an over-inflated view of the building's worth. The biggest mistake of many people taking on a building is that they pay the wrong price in order to acquire it – do not be tempted to over-pay for a building even if you love it. The building should only be sold at a price which accurately reflects its current condition otherwise you risk running into 'conservation deficit'. This is the funding gap between the cost of repairs and the end value of the building. Getting the building valued by a surveyor with knowledge of historic buildings will give you a helpful idea of what to pay for a building (The RICS Conservation Group will be able to provide a list of specialist surveyors).

Talk to the local authority

A mistake that some purchasers make is assuming that the works they want to undertake will be permitted, be that extension, alteration, change of use or even demolition. You should always check that what you have in mind for the building is realistic by talking to the local authority as early as possible.

Setting up a building preservation trust (BPT)

The principle aim of a BPT should be to rescue historic buildings that would otherwise be lost. A number of endangered buildings have been saved by local people who have set up a building preservation trust, acquired the building, conserved and repaired it and have either kept it as a community resource or resold it.

BPTs can be set up to cover individual towns, cities or countries or have interests in just one building or building type. Some have been set up to save

a single building and others operate as multiple-project trusts. A BPT is usually comprised of both a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Thinking carefully about the type of BPT you want to create is an important first step to rescuing heritage at risk.

Some of the advantages of a BPT model include:

- The provision of necessary powers needed to save heritage at risk
- The relative ease of set up thanks to being an established and recognised charity
- The provision of special low-interest loans for BPTs by Historic England, Cadw and Historic Environment Scotland
- The recognition as a successful model by funders such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Architectural Heritage Fund
- The reduction of risk to trustees by establishing the organisation as a limited company
- It forms the basis for membership of the Heritage Trust Network who provide excellent advice and support to BPTs.

Though it should not be undertaken lightly, setting up and running a trust may sound a daunting task, but there is a lot of support, information and advice available to help you. The Heritage Trust Network and Architectural Heritage Fund who both provide expertise and advice to BPT's. They should also be able to tell you if there is already a local trust in existence (there are about 150 all over the UK). Quite often these trusts are on the lookout for new buildings to restore and may have some resources at their disposal to take on the building you are concerned about.

Setting up a trust

Diana Beattie, Vice President and former Chair of the London Historic Buildings Trust, gives her advice on setting up a successful building preservation trust.

"Before you start, talk to other trusts, listen to advice, join the Heritage Trust Network and attend their annual conference. Always remember that that you are the guardian for the historic building you are trying to rescue and that better conservationists than you have ensured that

the building is still standing! Do try to avoid any kind of controversy with the people you will be dealing with – there will be many different groups of people you will need to negotiate with. Good relationships with the local communities, with the planners in your local authority, and with potential funders, volunteers, and supporters are really essential.

Please remember it can take many years to rescue a building effectively. Delays can be caused by difficulty in getting ownership (or a long lease on the building); by complicated negotiations between different groups who have an interest in the building; by assembling the funding package. When it comes to funding, never despair if you are turned down by a funder – try again you might be lucky, or, if not, there are plenty more funders out there looking for interesting and exciting projects.

It is a long game, but it's worth the effort. The contribution that historic buildings make to our cultural history and to regeneration are very worthwhile – keep with it!"

Appendix

Example letter to a planning/listed building consent application

Address: Local Authority, Town, County, post code.

Date: 01/01/01

Dear: Name of planning officer

Planning application reference:

Planning application 17/01234/FUL and 17/01235/LBC

Address and summary of proposal:

Dursley House, Abbey Row, Wickhamsbury, Surrey – demolition of existing listed building and replacement with two four-bed dwellings on the site.

Context for your response and position on the proposals:

I write in connection with the above planning and listed building consent applications for the demolition of Dursley House, Wickhamsbury. Having examined the plans for the demolition of this grade II listed building and replacement with a new building I wish to object to the proposals.

Describe the site/building and its significance locally and nationally:

Dursley House is a grade II* listed building whose special architectural and historic interest is derived from its being an exemplar of a 16th century timber-framed and jettied domestic dwelling. In addition, Dursley House is situated within the Wickhamsbury Conservation Area whose character and appearance is described within the Wickhamsbury Conservation Area Appraisal as being derived from its unique and dramatic location. The converging Wey and Mole branches of the River Arun almost fully encircle the town, with Abbey Row running on a ridge between the two. The high land between the rivers gives the town an enclosed, almost island-like feel. The town has retained a compact and close-knit urban form that has remained free from more modern, lower density redevelopment.

Reference to local and national planning policy – take each element of your argument in turn for clarity.

- Substantial harm to a listed building:

The demolition of Dursley House would constitute the wholesale loss of a Grade II* listed building. Paragraph 200 of the NPPF makes clear that where substantial harm or total loss of a designated heritage asset listed at Grade II* is proposed it should be 'wholly exceptional'. The argument made is that the building is in a state of serious disrepair and that bringing it back into use would be too expensive. However, the application bears no evidence that the cost of conserving the house is uneconomic. In the absence of a report from a structural engineer detailing the building's failings and the plausibility of repair, the requirement for 'clear and convincing justification' for proposals as required by paragraph 200 of the NPPF is missing. Furthermore, the house has been in the ownership of the developer for two years and in that time no works have been undertaken to preserve or secure the site. Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that 'the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision' where there has been neglect of a heritage asset, which applies in this case.

In addition the NPPF states that 'where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits' (paragraph 201). In this case the public benefit of the proposals are negligible as the loss of an

important 16th century building is not outweighed by the provision of 2 dwellings on the site, particularly as this provision does not comply with policy H4 of the Surrey Local Plan.

- Impact on the conservation area:

Paragraph 207 of the NPPF states that the loss of a building which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 201 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 202, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area. The Wickhamsbury conservation area is characterised by the historic buildings at its core and its compact and close-knit form. The demolition of Dursley House which occupies a prominent position at the gateway to the historic core of the town will have a significant detrimental impact on that designated character. In addition the erection of two contemporary dwellings on this site whose materials and appearance are not sympathetic to the historic palette of the town centre will again harm the significance of the conservation area.

Summary

By virtue of the substantial harm of the total loss of the Grade II* Dursley House which is of 'more than special interest' nationally, and the less than substantial harm to the Wickhamsbury Conservation area resulting from that demolition and replacement with two new dwellings, this application does not meet the high tests of Section 16 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas Act) 1990. In addition the application does not meet the policy requirements of paragraphs 196, 200-202 and 207 of the National Planning Policy Framework, revised 2021. For these reasons I believe this application should be recommended for refusal.

Yours sincerely,
Your name

Sources of help and further advice

National Heritage Bodies

Historic England - the public body that looks after England's historic environment. HE champion and protect historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

Historic Environment Scotland - lead public body set up to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment.

Cadw - the Welsh Government's historic environment service working for an accessible and well-protected historic environment for Wales.

National Amenity Societies

Historic Buildings & Places

Formerly known as the Ancient Monuments Society, HB&P was founded in 1924 'for the study and conservation of ancient monuments, historic buildings and fine old craftsmanship'. The HB&P campaign for historic buildings of all ages and all types as a statutory consultee on listed building consent.

Tel: 020 7236 3934 Email via website: hbap.org.uk/contact-us

The Georgian Group

The Georgian Group is the national charity dedicated to preserving Georgian buildings and gardens. Founded in 1937 the Georgian Group aim to protect historic buildings through providing advice to owners and architects, campaigning, and through our role as statutory consultees in the planning system.

Tel: 020 7529 8920 Email: office@georgiangroup.org.uk

The Victorian Society

The Victorian Society is the charity championing Victorian and Edwardian buildings in England and Wales. The Victorian Society Conservation Advisers help local planning authorities and churches to make better decisions about adapting Victorian and Edwardian buildings to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them.

Tel: 020 8994 1019 Email: admin@victoriansociety.org.uk

Twentieth Century Society

The Twentieth Century Society was founded as the Thirties Society in 1979, and exists to safeguard the heritage of architecture and design in Britain from 1914 onwards. The Society's prime objectives are conservation and education.

Tel: 020 7250 3857 Email: coordinator@c20society.org.uk

Council for British Archaeology

The Council for British Archaeology is an educational charity working throughout the UK to involve people in archaeology and to promote the appreciation and care of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Tel: 01904 671417 Email: info@archaeologyuk.org

The Gardens Trust

The Gardens Trust is a UK national charity dedicated to the research and conservation of designed landscapes and to campaigning on their behalf. The Gardens Trust, as the statutory consultee in England for registered parks and gardens, plays a key conservation role, and more widely supports the County and

Country Gardens Trusts in protecting and conserving our landscape heritage.
Tel: 0207 608 2409 Email: enquiries@thegardenstrust.org

Theatres Trust

The Theatres Trust are the national advisory public body for theatres. We are a statutory consultee on theatres in the planning system, and also operate as a charity.

Tel: 020 7836 8591 Email: info@theatretrust.org.uk

Others

SAVE Britain's Heritage

SAVE has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architectural historians, journalists and planners. SAVE is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic environment.

Tel: 020 7253 3500 Email: office@savebritainsheritage.org

Civic Voice

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement in England.

Tel: 0121 792 8177 Email via website: civicvoice.org.uk/contact

The Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland

Speaking for Scotland's Buildings since 1956, the AHSS is a national charity with over 1000 members and volunteers across Scotland. AHSS use their voice to study, protect and celebrate Scotland's wealth of historic buildings and environments.

Tel: 0131 557 0019 Email: nationaloffice@ahss.org.uk

Ulster Architectural Heritage

Ulster Architectural Heritage is the lead independent voice for built heritage in Ulster. A not for profit operating across the nine counties it promotes the value of built heritage, encouraging its protection and re-use through heritage-led regeneration.

Tel: 0208 9055 0213 Email: info@uahs.org.uk

Heritage Trust Network

Heritage Trust Network, predominantly run by professional volunteers, provides an invaluable platform for members by way of peer-to-peer support, knowledge sharing and skills development. Their guidance and advice helps groups throughout the lifetime of their project from start up to post completion. Just as importantly, Heritage Trust Network also gives this extraordinary grassroots movement a united voice, representing their views to government and funding bodies.

Tel: 0121 233 9283 Email: admin@heritagetrustnetwork.org.uk

The Architectural Heritage Fund

The AHF is a registered charity, working since 1976 to promote the conservation and sustainable re-use of historic buildings for the benefit of communities across the UK, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. AHF are the leading heritage social investor and the only specialist heritage lender operating in the UK.

Tel: 020 7925 0199 Email: ahf@ahfund.org.uk

The Council for the Preservation of Rural England

CPRE work locally and nationally to stand up for the countryside: to protect it from the threats it faces, and to shape its future for the better.

Tel: 020 7981 2800 Email: info@cpre.org.uk

Planning Aid (England)

Planning Aid offer free, independent, professional advice on planning issues.

Tel: 0370 7749494 Email: contact@rtpi.org.uk

Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS)

PAS offer free, independent, professional advice on planning issues in Scotland.

Tel: 0131 220 9730 Email: office@pas.org.uk

Planning Aid Wales | Cymorth Cynllunio Cymru

Planning Aid Wales is an independent, charitable organisation helping individuals and communities across Wales to participate more effectively in the planning system.

Tel: 02920 625000 Email: info@planningaidwales.org.uk

Environmental Law Foundation

The Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) is a charity registered in England and Wales set up to help the voice of ordinary people and communities to be heard on matters affecting the environment in which they live.

Tel: 0330 1230169 Email: info17@elflaw.org

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
37 Spital Square, London, E1 6DY
020 7477 1644
info@spab.org.uk
spab.org.uk

Company no: 5743962
Charity no: 111 3753
Scottish charity no: SC 039244
VAT no: 577 4276 02