

# Informed stewardship of our built heritage

**RIBA Conservation Register – Guidance for  
building investors, managers and planners**





You may be involved in property development or investment in the commercial, public, ecclesiastical or charitable sectors, or you may be a planner or other professional. If your work brings you into contact with built heritage assets, in other words important buildings, then this guidance is for you. You are the stewards of our built heritage.

### **Successful stewardship**

At the RIBA we are passionate about architecture and the conservation of our built heritage. We also understand that property investors, and those responsible for property management and planning, need to strike a balance.

It is a balance between the cost of maintaining important buildings and the value generated by them commercially and for society. Revealing the qualities that make a building worth protecting is one of the first steps. Once potential has been assessed we need to be prepared to make appropriate and sympathetic changes and not just to repair and maintain. This is the context in which successful stewardship can take place.

### **Using conservation architecture as a tool**

Conservation architecture is about much more than protecting and prolonging the life of older buildings. It is about providing you with the right advice, avoiding unnecessary expense, mitigating risk and assuring quality. All this adds value to your built heritage assets.

Appropriately accredited conservation architects are a fantastic source of professional help and a major step towards ensuring any building works you oversee are carried out correctly and appropriately. They help you in your stewardship of your built heritage assets using their depth and breadth of training, rigorous and analytical approach and their technical expertise.

Ultimately conservation architecture is about enabling appropriate stewardship of our built heritage, in all its forms.

### **Your responsibilities regarding conservation areas**

The term conservation area generally applies to an urban area, or the core of a village, that is 'desirable to preserve or enhance' because of its architectural or historic interest. It is the protection of the neighbourhood or area as a whole that is intended, rather than specific buildings. However, each building within a conservation area adds to, or detracts from, its special character, which is why building works may need special consent. For example, if you wish to demolish a building with a volume of greater than 15 cubic metres or demolish certain walls, fences, gates or railings, you may need to obtain Conservation Area Consent. Trees are often protected in conservation areas even when they are on private property. Especially when fronting a road, exterior finishes and colours, including types of cladding, need careful consideration. You can find out if a building is in a conservation area by contacting your local authority.



### **Your responsibilities regarding listed buildings**

There are around half a million listed buildings in the UK. Owning and managing a listed building is a fantastic experience but it can also be a challenge. Listed buildings are often full of history and character and they are protected because of their age, their rarity, aesthetics or special interest.

It is important that you take care of listed buildings in the most appropriate way in terms of maintenance and improvement and especially if you want to extend, remodel or refurbish your property. The law is very clear – you must obtain consent for any demolition, partial demolition or alterations that affect its character as a listed building. It is a criminal offence not to do so and can result in prosecution and a substantial fine. Listed building enforcement notices can be issued if unauthorised work takes place and you could be forced to restore the building to its former state. You or your architect should consult the relevant statutory body to determine whether any proposed alterations require consent.

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

- an extension to a building
- removal and replacement of doors and windows
- alterations to the interior fabric

To find out if a building you own or manage is listed please see the final FAQ on page 4.

### **How the RIBA can help**

We believe it is vital to ensure that if you are responsible for a built heritage asset you are aware not only of your legal responsibilities, but also of the help available. Please see page 6 for further information.

You can also visit the RIBA website to find a fully accredited member of the RIBA Conservation Register at Specialist Conservation Architect (SCA) or Conservation Architect (CA) level.

### **What is the RIBA Conservation Register?**

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

By using the Register you can ensure that the architect you choose has the necessary up-to-date specialist skills, training and expertise to assist in the proper maintenance and development of your built heritage asset.

### **What to do next**

If you are planning any building works on your built heritage assets, or you do so on a regular basis, whether your building is historic, listed, in a conservation area, or if it is an older building of traditional construction, we strongly recommend you use the Register to find an appropriately accredited architect in your area.

That way you can get the right advice, avoiding unnecessary expense, mitigate risk and assure quality.



### **General FAQs**

#### **1. What is meant by ‘stewardship’?**

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

#### **2. Can you define our ‘built heritage’?**

This includes ancient monuments, important buildings that are historic, listed buildings, those in conservation areas, older buildings of traditional construction and any other built heritage assets of note.

#### **3. Our building is not listed. Is this guidance still relevant?**

Yes. There are around half a million listed buildings in the UK, but there are over 6 million traditionally built buildings that will benefit from specialist care when you consider development, repair and maintenance as well as conservation.

#### **4. Where do I go to find professional advice?**

You should visit the RIBA website at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com), go to Find an Architect, then Conservation Register, where you will find a list of accredited architects and can search by name. Alternatively you can call the RIBA on 020 7307 5375 and ask for the RIBA Conservation Register team.

### **FAQs about Listed Buildings**

#### **1. What is a listed building?**

A listed building is considered to be of special architectural or historic interest. Lists are compiled on behalf of Government in the different regions of the UK.

#### **2. Are there different types of listed building?**

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

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

Yes, it is a criminal offence if its character as a listed building is affected.

#### **4. How do I know if my property is listed?**

You can search The National Heritage List for England on the English Heritage website. For other parts of the UK please see the Cadw, Historic Scotland and Northern Ireland Environment Agency websites. Links to these organisations are listed on Page 6. Alternatively you can contact the planning department at your local council.



**About the RIBA**

The Royal Institute of British Architects champions better buildings, communities and the environment through architecture and our members. We provide the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession.

With government, we work to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities.

We also hold one of the largest and most important collections of architectural drawings, photographs and archives in the world, and stage talks, exhibitions, events and awards (including the prestigious RIBA Stirling Prize) that help people see their surroundings in a completely new way.



**Further information**

Further information can be found on the websites for:

- English Heritage
- Cadw
- Historic Scotland
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency
- Listed Property Owners Club
- Planning Portal

For further information on the RIBA Conservation Register please go to:  
[architecture.com/ConservationRegister](http://architecture.com/ConservationRegister)

**Contact us**

Conservation Registrar  
66 Portland Place  
London  
W1B 1AD  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7307 5375  
[info@riba.org](mailto:info@riba.org)  
[www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com)