

## CHAPTER 5

### BEST PRACTICE

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

- 5.1 In the early stages of any proposals, it is important to seek advice from qualified professionals who have experience in dealing with historic buildings. These could include a chartered architect or surveyor, structural engineer, architectural historian, or a specialist craftsman, depending on the nature of the proposal.
- 5.2 In addition, any proposal should be based on a full understanding of the building and its development. Guidance from English Heritage's, *Informed Conservation*, outlines a procedure for carrying out this investigation and research. The Council's Historic Building Officer can provide additional resources and advice.
- Informed Conservation is about the contribution that understanding can make to the practical process of conserving historic buildings and their landscapes. Conservation involves managing change, and in order to manage change, it is vital to understand what matters and why.
  - Understanding a building or landscape means 'reading' the fabric in order to analyse its construction, alteration and use through time, and then placing it in a wider context in order to assess its significance. This is a multi-disciplinary approach, which makes use of historical research, architectural and landscape history, measured survey and the archaeological analysis of fabric and research.
  - Information should be tailored to the needs of the project. Not every project needs a fully detailed analysis. Sometimes a rapid overview of a site will be enough: and in other cases a good set of measured survey drawings and heritage statement are sufficient. A major project might benefit from a conservation plan. Informed Conservation sets out a process for assessing the impact and also defines 'stages' which can be used to match understanding to a particular project.
  - Because there is no single word or academic discipline which describes the special skill of analysing a building and landscape for conservation purposes, the term **Conservation-based Research and Analysis (CoBRA)** has been used to refer to:

***The research, analysis, survey and investigation needed to understand the significance of a building and its landscape and thus inform decisions about repair, alteration, use and management.***

- 5.3 Researching the history and evolution of the building and its context is essential to making informed decisions on the future of the property. The Cambridgeshire

Collection at Cambridge Central Library has extensive archives including maps and photographs on the settlements within Cambridgeshire. Many villages have local history societies who can sometimes provide information, as can previous owners of the building. The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record, the Victorian County History (VCH) and West or Northeast volumes of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments and the National Monuments Records are valuable resources.

### **USING AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL**

- 5.4 The process of carrying out a project to a Listed Building for the first time may seem daunting. The District Council maintains lists of specialist professionals and services. These professionals have experience with historic buildings and have carried out work in the area to a satisfactory standard. The Council is not able to recommend a specific company, or individual, but can provide a copy of these lists upon request.
- 5.5 It is important to decide who will be managing the project. Professionals can assist with applying for Listed Building Consent, instruct and supervise the implementation of the works, manage contractors and discharge any associated conditions all of which can save time and money in the long run. These professionals will also take responsibility and liability for the work.
- 5.6 Professional organisations may offer a referral service or a list of local professionals in the area. For example, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) will help identify an appropriate and experienced professional.

### **RECORDING**

- 5.7 There are some occasions when it is necessary to make a historic record of part or all of a Listed Building. The material produced will provide a permanent record for the archives and should be in the correct format to be accepted. This will need to be carried out by a historic building specialist with the appropriate background and will be required if substantial changes are agreed or if part or all of a building is to be demolished.
- 5.8 A copy of the record, included with the application, is retained by the District Council and copied to the County Record Office who maintains the archives. A copy should be sent to the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record. Records can provide information on construction, materials, age of particular sections, and the history of the evolution of the building.
- 5.9 Surveying and recording can also provide additional information and evidence when developing proposals, which can be used to better understand the building and assess its significance in order to put together an application for consent. Therefore, involving someone in the earliest stages is important. They may be required as part of a Planning application and to satisfy a condition or Section 106

agreement. The Historic Building Officer can advise on the type of record that is required.

- 5.10 There are different levels of recording, set out by English Heritage in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice*. The levels vary from a simple photographic survey of the building by an architectural historian to a written account of what exists to a comprehensive full-scale survey drawing, including sections, elevations, and floor plans. The level of recording is dependant upon the individual circumstances. In addition to being a valuable tool to understand a building, there are times when recording the building is a condition of approval on a Listed Building application.
- 5.11 Most records aiming at historical understanding will correspond broadly to one of four main levels of record. They range from Level 1, the simplest, consisting of photographs and brief notes, to Level 4, containing a full historical and architectural analysis, supported by a comprehensive drawn and photographic record. The benefits of these levels may be summarised as follows:
- Level 1 is essentially a **basic visual record**, supplemented by the minimum of information needed to identify the building's location, age and type. This is the simplest record, not normally an end in itself but contributing to a wider aim.
  - This is a **descriptive record**, made in circumstances similar to those of Level 1 but when more information is needed. It may be made of a building, which is judged not to require any fuller record, or it may serve to gather data for a wider project.
  - Level 3 is an **analytical record**, and will comprise an introductory description followed by a systematic account of the building's origins, development and use.
  - Level 4 provides a **comprehensive analytical record** and is appropriate for buildings of special importance.
- 5.12 A project may also require archaeological works, and advice on this can be obtained from the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team (HET). The related legislation on archaeology is contained within Planning Policy Guidance Note 16. Its aim is the protection, enhancement and preservation of sites of archaeological interest and of their settings. There may be a condition placed on a Listed Building Consent, which requires archaeological works to take place prior to works commencing, or possibly a watching brief, which provides for an archaeological professional to monitor works as they are being implemented. All archaeological works should follow a brief prepared by the HET and undertaken by a suitable archaeological professional working to the standards of the Institute for Archaeologists.

## HERITAGE STATEMENT

5.13 One of the key components of any Listed Building application is the Heritage Statement, which forms part of the National requirements list and is mandatory. This statement allows an owner or agent the opportunity to become fully informed about the history and evolution of the building, which should inform any proposals. It is closely linked to the aims of Informed Conservation and the requirement to record discussed above. The statement will result in a written document outlining the following information:

- Historical research
- Fabric analysis
- Architectural investigation
- Examining surviving fittings and fixtures
- Exploratory works to enable a better understanding
- Analysis of decorative schemes, mortar analysis, paint analysis, etc.
- Dating of materials, for example timber or dendrochronology
- Archaeological investigation
- Architectural historical research
- Historic photographs

## BEST PRACTICE KEY POINTS

5.14 The following points are important general considerations when proposing any works to a Listed Building:

- Repair first, replace only if justified and necessary
- Use tried and tested materials and methods
- Make additions reversible if possible
- Ensure the building is wind and weather tight to start
- Understand what makes the building significant
- Avoid being tempted to standardise or unify external appearance and treatment where the building clearly is of several historic phases and styles.

- Champion good design
- Carry out regular maintenance, which will prevent rapid deterioration and enable historic details to be conserved
- It is not about what you CAN see, but what you CANNOT see; investigative opening works may be appropriate
- ENJOY the investigating and researching to understand the building and its history
- Traditional methods and materials work in an entirely different way to modern materials and methods; and the two tend to conflict with one another
- Find the cause of the problem and address it, do not just cover up the symptoms
- Monitor concerns over a period of time during different climate periods to properly assess causes, do not be reactive, but proactive
- The simplest solution can sometimes be the best, but is not necessarily the cheapest or easiest.
- There is usually more than one solution to a problem, if necessary, get a second or third opinion (from a qualified experienced professional).

## **FIRE AND FLOOD PROTECTION AND DAMAGE**

- 5.15 In respect of fire protection, this should be discussed with the Council. It is recommended that, where possible, all loft or attic spaces have smoke detectors and fire alarms installed.
- 5.16 It is always unfortunate when a building succumbs to a fire or flood, but when the building is of historic interest it is usually significantly destructive to the historic fabric. The South Cambridgeshire area contains significant numbers of Listed Buildings which have thatched roofs or are on low lying land. Thatch fires and damage to flooring are therefore potential risks, which can result in the permanent loss of features, materials and fittings. The Council will generally expect to see the existing building and features reinstated or repaired in a traditional manner though the opportunity might exist to replace inappropriate later alterations with improved designs.

## **CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PURCHASING A LISTED BUILDING**

- 5.17 Estate agents and solicitors should be aware if a property is Listed or not. This is important information when considering purchasing a Listed Building. The

Council's Historic Building Officer will discuss potential purchases in order to assess what the needs of the property and the potential owner might be.

- 5.18 It is important to carefully consider if an historic and Listed Building is right for you. For example, consider whether the building is large enough for your current and future needs. If not, is consent for extension or alteration likely to be granted. There will always be compromises with an older building, such as lower ceilings, draughts, uneven or undulating walls, floors or ceilings. However, these features contribute to the buildings history, charm and character, making it a building of special architectural significance.
- 5.19 Most historically and traditionally built buildings will show signs of age, have uneven areas, minor areas of damp, shallow foundations, etc. all of which should not be an immediate cause for concern. Traditionally built buildings were made with materials that could accommodate movement in the structure, being flexible to withstand settling of the ground and other movement. Most movement occurred within the first one hundred years and should not be a cause for concern. It is important to ensure that the building is still performing as it was designed to.
- 5.20 If there is significant interest in a particular building, the Conservation and Design Team may draft a list of key points and potential constraints for the building to give to the estate agent and prospective purchasers. Please contact the Council for more information.

#### **HISTORIC BUILDING INSURANCE**

- 5.21 There are insurance companies who specialise in insuring Listed Buildings, including thatched properties. The correct type of cover is important as rebuilding or replacing elements of historic buildings can be more costly as the work must be carried out using traditional methods and materials in most cases.
- 5.22 The Council does not recommend any particular company but does maintain a list that can be given out upon request.