



MANAGING CHANGE IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

USE AND ADAPTATION OF LISTED BUILDINGS



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

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Kirkmichael church, on the north side of the Black Isle, was restored in 2018 following a successful community project. Above, before restoration. Below, after works were completed © Kirkmichael Trust.



INTRODUCTION

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. It is a criminal offence to carry out such work without consent. The LBC process is normally administered by planning authorities. The details of our role in the LBC process are set out [on our website](#).

This guidance note is the first place to look when thinking about how to keep a listed building in use, or bring it back into use. It is a key consideration when identifying options or making decisions about significant alterations to a listed building. It is aimed both at applicants and at those making decisions on LBC applications for changes to listed buildings.

[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.

KEY MESSAGES

1. The listed buildings in Scotland reflect a wide range of our history and culture. They celebrate the diversity of our communities at every level, showing national, regional and local distinctiveness. They contribute to our well-being culturally, socially and economically. We can't have these benefits without caring for these buildings. We need to make sure they have a long term future if we want to benefit from in them in the long-term.
2. A listed building can't be replaced once it's gone. Demolishing a listed building is always a loss. It is a last resort when every other option has been explored. The best way to protect our buildings is usually to keep them in use – and if that isn't possible, to find a new use that has the least possible effect on the things that make the building special.
3. Decisions about listed buildings should always focus on the qualities that make them important – their special interest . Lots of things can contribute to a building's special interest, but the key factor when we're thinking about making changes will be its overall historic character.
4. For a building to stay in use over the long term, change will be necessary. This reflects changes over time in how we use our buildings and what we expect of them. This should always be considered carefully and avoid harming the building's special interest. A building's long-term future is at risk when it becomes hard to alter and adapt it when needed. Proposals that keep buildings in use, or bring them back into use, should be supported as long as they do the least possible harm.
5. Alterations to a building, even if they are extensive, will be better than losing the building entirely. If the only way to save a building is a radical intervention, we have to avoid being too cautious when we look at the options. If a building might be totally lost, we should be open to all the options to save it.
6. Keeping a listed building in use has wider benefits. Listed buildings contribute to their wider surroundings and community. They can influence proposals for new development, and inspire positive change. They teach us about what people value in the places they live, work, and spend time in, and so they help us to build successful places.

GETTING STARTED

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

The aim of this guidance note is to support, promote and enable the continued use, reuse and adaptation of listed buildings. It is focused towards buildings whose long-term future is uncertain.

It addresses the following scenarios.

- refurbishment of listed buildings so that they can remain in their existing use
- adaptation of buildings for new uses
- re-development of larger and more complex sites that may have a number of listed buildings or other heritage assets

Anyone responsible for listed buildings, such as owners and their agents, should use this guidance when identifying potential options.

Potential applicants for schemes of refurbishment that involve a high level of change or intervention should engage with the planning authority as early as possible in the process. The planning authority should involve us where the building is listed at category A or B or where demolition is being considered. If the planning authority is also the applicant, they should consult us for category C listed buildings as well.

Planning authorities 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. This helps to avoid later delays. They should also seek our advice on these issues where relevant.

Further guidance on specific types of works and alterations to listed buildings is available in the [Managing Change series](#).

DEMOLITION OF A LISTED BUILDING

When making a decision on the demolition of a listed building it is expected that the approaches to intervention and adaptation outlined in this guidance will have been investigated and results presented by the applicant. This document will form the basis of an assessment of whether all reasonable efforts have been made to retain a listed building. Further guidance on demolition is provided in our [Managing Change Guidance Note on Demolition of Listed Buildings](#).

CONSIDERATIONS THAT APPLY TO ALL BUILDINGS

Listed buildings, designated as being of special architectural or historic interest, are important. They enrich Scotland's towns and landscape and are central to our everyday lives. They help us to understand and learn about our culture and history. They show us – in a physical, tangible way – distinctive differences in national, regional and local character. They help give us all a sense of place, identity and wellbeing.

The best use of a listed building is often going to be the one for which it was designed. Keeping a building in the same use helps us to understand what the building was originally designed for. It can also help to protect any associations and special meanings that the building has – part of its intangible value.

Historic school buildings are a good example of listed buildings which have met the evolving needs of successive generations. They can provide a clear link to the past and sense of continuity between families and generations. Many of these buildings remain in use as places of learning, contributing to the identity and distinctiveness of local communities.

New uses may enable us to retain much of the fabric and special interest of a building, but they will always have an impact on its intangible value. The process of conversion will have some impact on a building's special interest, regardless of how well it is handled. The continued use of a listed building for its original function will normally be the best way to retain its historic character.

The continued use of buildings is sustainable and is often the least environmentally damaging option. The use and reuse of buildings retains the embodied energy expended in the original construction and sourcing of materials. Retention saves carbon associated with new-build, including costs in new materials, transport, demolition, landfill and new infrastructure.

Sometimes listed buildings are abandoned in favour of new buildings before their owners or users have fully explored options to reuse or adapt them. Reuse of a building is an opportunity to retain the best qualities of the building, whilst also providing high quality, new and upgraded facilities.

Incorporating an existing building within an overall scheme might require additional thought and deliberation, but can lead to a more considered, imaginative and ultimately successful place. Scotland has a long and successful history of reusing listed buildings for a variety of new uses. Historic buildings are readily suitable for adaptation to new uses, and features such as tall floor to ceiling heights and robust traditional construction can make them more adaptable and desirable.

The Speirs Centre, winner of the RIAS conservation and climate change award 2015. Originally a gymnasium and Victorian public baths. The project was comprehensively refurbished and extended in 2014, creating a civic centrepiece for Alloa © Clackmannanshire Council and © LDN Architects.



THINKING ABOUT YOUR BUILDING

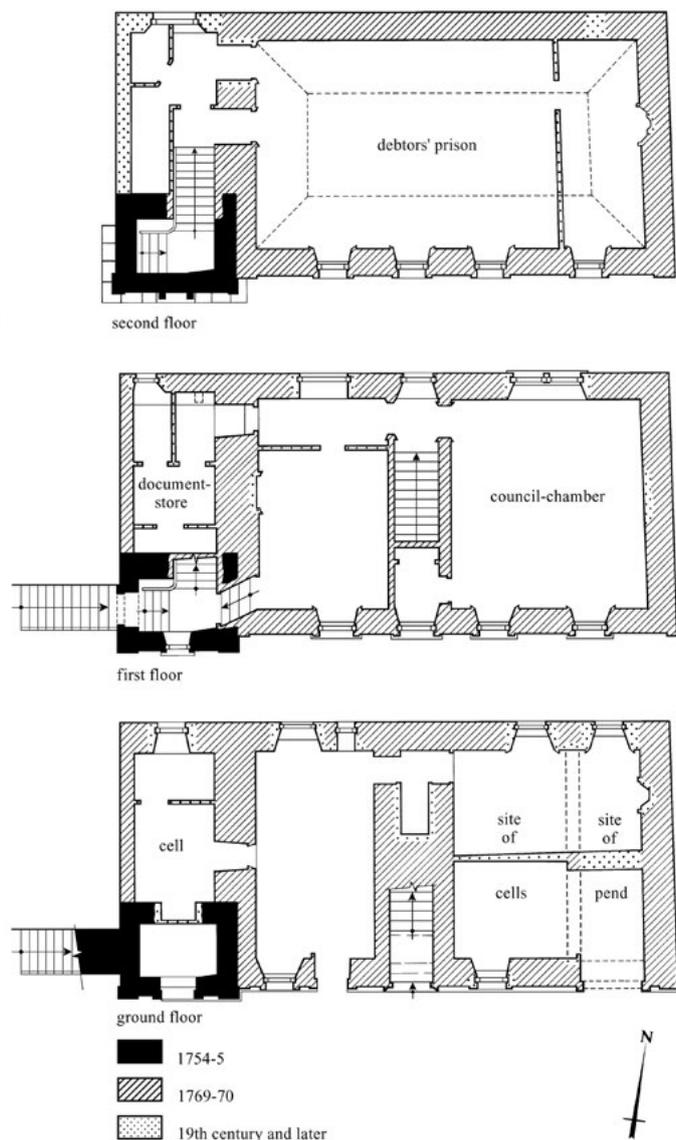
Most applications for alterations to listed buildings are approved. Listed buildings are often more capable of change than people realise; it is not only applications for minimal alterations that are successful.

Understanding what is important about a listed building is an essential first step in working out how to protect its special interest. This ensures the potential for conflict about its adaptation is minimised. Conflict is much more likely if the owners of the building, and the decision-makers, do not fully understand the special interest and significance of the listed building.

The particular qualities of a listed building that contribute to its special interest and significance will vary considerably. All listed buildings will include the physical evidence of the past preserved in their fabric, and some elements of their fabric may make a large contribution to the building's interest. They will also all have a certain architectural style which can be 'read' and understood – this might reflect local, national, or even international movements.

Some types of buildings are rarer than others, and some buildings will have survived with fewer changes – which will mean they are closer to their original design, structure and appearance. Buildings with a more public focus, such as schools and churches, and even pubs, may have wider associations and meaning within a community.

Lots of buildings are multi-phased. Buildings may have been successively extended, modified and added to over the years. In urban areas, the current boundaries of a site may have resulted from a connection of once separate buildings. In these cases in particular, it is unlikely that all the parts of a building or site have the same level of interest.



Plans of Inverkeithing Town House in Fife, showing the different phases of construction of the building
© Courtesy of HES.

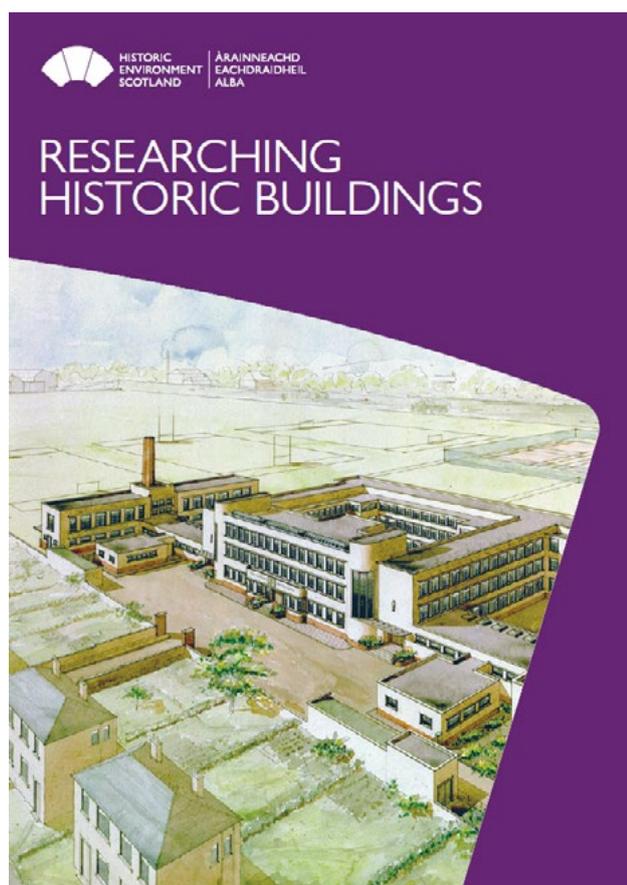
Anyone responsible for looking after listed buildings should have an understanding of the significance of a building or a site's component parts before planning changes to it.

Normally, the best way for owners to communicate the significance of a building is through an illustrated written document often called a conservation statement. The length and detail of a statement will depend on individual circumstances and in some cases a minimal statement will be enough. In more complicated circumstances, such as large buildings (or groups of buildings) with a complicated history of development, a more comprehensive statement might be required.

Conservation statements can sometimes be incorporated into other documents, such as design statements. Many planning authorities now ask for design statements as part of the LBC process. In other cases, it can be more helpful to produce a standalone document – this can allow the content to stay the same, even if the development proposals change and evolve.

If a listed building has a recent (or recently updated) list description this will likely provide a detailed overview of significance. In some cases this will mean that a more detailed assessment is not required. List descriptions can be found via the [Historic Environment Portal](#) on our website.

We have also prepared a [guide to researching historic buildings](#), which looks at the resources available for investigating the history of a building.



“Researching Historic Buildings” guidance published in 2018
© Courtesy of HES.

APPROACHES TO SECURE THE CONTINUED USE OR REUSE OF LISTED BUILDINGS

Owners should consider all options to allow the continued use of a listed building. The adaptation, alteration, extension and even partial demolition of the building are all options which can, in the right circumstances, form part of the solution.

A solution may involve one, or a mix of, the following approaches:

- 1) Minimal intervention
- 2) Adaptation
- 3) Extension
- 4) Selective demolition
- 5) Enabling

Owners should investigate each approach carefully. Through this process, the vast majority of listed buildings can be adapted to either maintain their existing use, or secure a new one.

The best solution for a listed building will be one that secures its long-term future, while preserving as much as possible of its historic character. However, if the future of the building cannot be secured in a straight forward manner, more radical interventions may need to be explored.

[Case studies](#) can be found on our website which highlight these approaches.

I. MINIMAL INTERVENTION

This is defined as being interventions with the least necessary impact to allow the use of a building. This is therefore a welcome conservation-based approach and will generally involve retaining most, if not all, of the building and its component parts. It can also involve repairing and restoring existing features, internally and externally, where necessary.

In a case of minimal intervention, any alterations proposed will be minor in nature. They may include the following:

- internal redecoration and refurbishment
- like-for-like replacement of component parts
- small-scale alterations
- upgrading of services within a building, including improvements to energy efficiency and access

This is very close to maintaining the status quo – or the ‘do-nothing scenario’. Some listed buildings can be easily refurbished. However, with many non-domestic buildings there will be other interests, likely to focus on the needs of the users of a building, which will mean that additional changes or interventions are needed.

Buildings that are used for education or health care are particularly likely to need additional alterations to remain in active use. This reflects how operational requirements have changed since many historic schools, hospitals and other facilities were built.

The Storehouse in Kirkwall opened in 2018. Originally built as a herring curing store, it was adapted and reused into a large restaurant on the ground floor with rooms on the two floors above © Start Point Media.



2. ADAPTATION

Adaptation will normally involve working within the existing building envelope, focusing more on internal alterations. The first step towards finding a practical scheme of adaptation is to look critically at the existing building to see what alterations are necessary to make the building work. This could include the upgrading or insulating of the building to address heat loss. Smaller scale additions and removals might also be required.

The interest and quality of an interior will vary for each listed building. Some public buildings, like town halls, may have very important interiors, which should influence the approach taken. For the most part, buildings that are not used as homes, such as schools and hospitals, will have interiors that are utilitarian, and designed for use rather than appearance. They may therefore be capable of more radical change, including the removal of internal walls to create larger spaces.

The interiors of non-domestic buildings are also more likely to have been changed in the past. These alterations can affect their original character and appearance. If a building's interior is no longer making a meaningful contribution to its special interest, it is likely that further changes will not do more harm.

In certain circumstances, adaptation can provide opportunities to restore the appearance and special interest of a listed building. Conservation-based approaches can involve removing later additions of little interest on the exterior of a building. It can also include positive changes internally, such as reinstating missing features or taking down later partitions and suspended ceilings.

Changes like these can help to restore a building to its original plan-form and room proportions. Such works can often revitalise old buildings, giving them a new lease of life. Successful conservation-based solutions on one part of a site or building might balance out a higher level of intervention or additions elsewhere in the scheme – as long as these involve less significant elements.

3. EXTENSION

Many listed buildings have the capacity for some form of extension. In some cases buildings can successfully accommodate sizeable additions, particularly if the building is not domestic.

Sometimes an extension is essential to keep the listed building in use, for example where there is little scope for internal intervention or where the original building is very small. In these cases, the decision-maker will have to balance this against any adverse impacts.

There will also be some circumstances where all elevations of a building have been designed to be visible and appreciated. In these cases, other options for the site may have to be considered, including excavation for new facilities, or new free-standing buildings in the grounds.

4. SELECTIVE DEMOLITION

Selective demolition is a different consideration from substantial demolition, which would involve the total or substantial loss of a listed building.

Selective demolition involves the removal, or demolition, of parts of a listed building in order to enable the significant parts of a listed building to be retained. Later extensions of little interest, or even less important component parts of the original building are likely to be the best options for removal.

Most buildings have a primary 'display' frontage or principal façade, and often the building's side elevations were also intended to be seen. Important frontages were often the most elaborate or expensively treated and make a particular contribution to special interest. Changes to these areas are likely to have a higher impact on character.

Sometimes the extent of removal of fabric can be radical. The most extreme form of this is known as 'façade retention'. This term refers to the removal of all but the principal façade or façades of a building, with an entirely new structure built behind.

Façade retention schemes will not normally be appropriate because of the degree of loss they entail. However, in the right place, a façade retention scheme might be an appropriate course of action when no other options are feasible. This is usually in an urban context, particularly when the façades are of such special interest that they could continue to be a listed building in their own right, or where they make an important contribution to the surrounding townscape.

5. ENABLING

In the planning system, 'enabling development' has a very specific purpose; it allows development to take place which would normally be contrary to planning policies, in order to obtain a desired objective. This might include the reuse of a historic asset, particularly if it would mean saving it from continued deterioration and potential loss.

In such cases the enabling development should be the minimum necessary to secure the asset's future. In many cases the opportunity for enabling development will depend on the availability of land, which should not be parcelled up separately from the asset. The enabling development should be securely tied to the reuse of the historic asset through a planning or other legal agreement.

BUILDINGS NOT IN USE

MINIMISING RISK TO EMPTY OR UNDERUSED BUILDINGS

When a group or organisation moves out of a listed building, the building will often stand empty for a period of time. This is more likely to be the case in situations such as a school relocating, where the building may need a new use.

Once a building is empty or underused its long-term future is immediately at risk. It is often challenging to spend money on a building that has no readily identifiable use. This means that maintenance and minor repairs may stop, and the building can quickly fall into a cycle of decline. In the most severe cases, this can lead to the loss of the building. Unmaintained buildings can quickly deteriorate, and often attract other risks such as vandalism and arson.

One of the best ways to protect a building is to minimise any time it stands empty. If possible, the owner should start planning for the period in which the building will be empty well before they move out.

A quick turnaround from one use to another is likely to be better for the building, and more financially viable. However, this is not always possible; often time is needed to consider and develop schemes for alternative uses. Other processes, such as marketing and changes in ownership can also take time.

The only way to protect a vacant building and prevent it falling into disrepair is by routine maintenance. This is also the best way to make it more attractive to potential new owners.



Harlaw Hill House in Prestonpans is a case where a program of non-traditional repairs was undertaken to help avoid the total or substantial demolition of the A-listed building © Courtesy of HES.

Empty buildings can be viewed negatively and seen as eyesores, their potential masked by disrepair. In such cases the goodwill of the community towards a building may seep away if nothing is seen to be being done. Although 'mothballing' an asset may be successful in the short to medium term, it is not normally a long-term solution.

A range of actions can be taken to help manage the risk and to buy time to allow a long-term solution to develop. These can be broadly grouped as temporary fixes, and 'meanwhile uses'.

Temporary fixes normally involve the pragmatic use of cheaper non-traditional materials in repair works. This might include plastic rainwater goods instead of cast iron, felt instead of lead (particularly if theft is an issue) and metal sheeting or even tarpaulins in roof repairs.

Short term security measures or aesthetic works (for example, painted shop boarding) may also be helpful. Works of this type can tide the building over and will be reversible once a longer term solution to reuse the building is found.

A 'meanwhile use' is an occasional or temporary use of a vacant building or land until it can be brought back into long-term use. These can often be for storage, workshops or socially beneficial purposes, such as temporary offices for a charity. Maintaining a building in some sort of use, even as storage, will assist in safeguarding its long-term future.

Further and more detailed advice can be found in our [Buildings at Risk Toolkit](#).



100 High Street in Dumfries, known as 'the stove', opened in April 2015. Dumfries and Galloway Council agreed to provide a 25 year lease at £1 per year, £20,000 grant towards running costs for 3 years and a rebate on business rates. This once empty shop has now been converted to a cultural use © The Stove Network.

FINDING A NEW USE

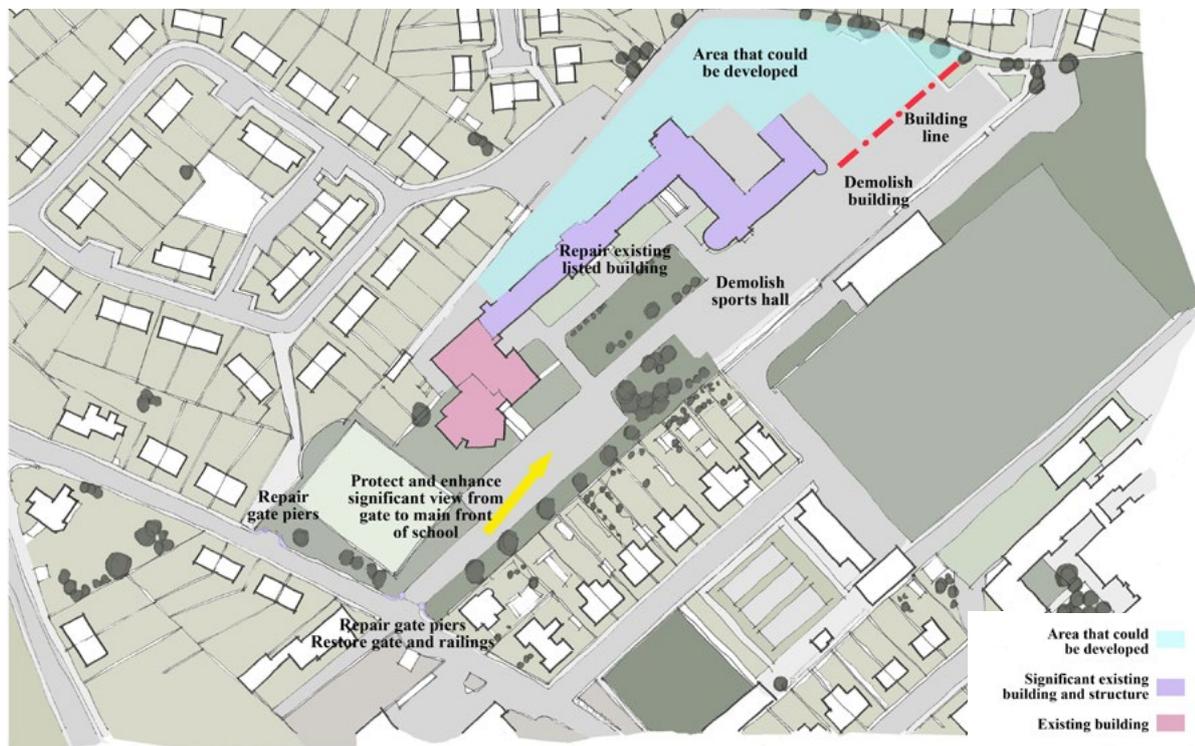
Normally, when a building changes use, it will involve a change of ownership. This will often happen when schools, hospitals or businesses relocate. With large sites, experienced developers will often be needed, due to the scale of works and finance required.

The reuse of listed buildings will have planning implications. Any proposals will have to comply with local and national planning policies. There may also be other issues to take into account when determining a planning application. These should be identified and made clear to all parties from the outset.

When putting a building or site to the open market there may be competing interests. The existing owner will want to maximise its sales value; potential new owners will want to make a profit; decision-makers will want to preserve the listed building in line with planning policy.

An effective way to manage expectations, and secure a good outcome, can be to promote a positive case for any development through the initial sales and marketing process. One way of doing this is for the planning authority to produce a planning brief, which can stand alongside a conservation statement. This should set out what is likely to be achievable for the site – and give prospective buyers more certainty.

A planning brief can cover a single building or, more commonly, be used to guide development over large sites which may include numerous heritage assets. These documents should form part of the sales literature, which may also include contact details for individuals involved within local authorities and, if applicable, us.



As part of the marketing process for Kelso High School, Scottish Borders Council produced a Concept Design Report which included an plan identifying the most significant parts of the site and areas of opportunities for new development © Simpson & Brown.

Wherever possible, it is best to sell sites as a whole, rather than sub-divided into lots. This allows for more coordinated redevelopment. In sites which have larger areas of open ground, some form of enabling development may be required to achieve the reuse of a listed building. As above, dividing the site into separate lots would potentially remove this option and put the reuse of the building at risk.

If possible, a planning brief should be in place (and the sales process initiated) before a listed building becomes empty. Briefs can also be used for sites that have been vacant for a long time and where it has been difficult to secure redevelopment. In some cases it may be helpful for the local authority to undertake a more comprehensive masterplanning exercise.

Where there are multiple buildings on a site, it is sometimes worth considering whether the removal of less significant buildings is possible in the interests of making the overall site more attractive to potential new owners. It may be helpful to make a start on the process for consents regarding these less significant buildings before marketing takes 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](#).

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

VALUING A LISTED BUILDING

For sites that contain listed buildings, the valuation of the land has to include the buildings, and take account of likely costs in repairing and reusing them. Prospective buyers should not pay a price inflated by an assumption that the listed building will be demolished.

If a buyer has assumed that a listed building can be demolished, this can cause significant delays. These delays can result in further deterioration in the condition of the building. The best way to make sure that any business decisions the buyer makes are fully informed is through early engagement at the beginning of the process.

GRANT AID

Where the cost of works is higher than the end value, the difference is referred to as the 'conservation deficit'. Where proposals show a conservation deficit, grant aid may be able to help. Under our [Historic Environment Repair Grant program](#) we can offer grants from £10,000 - £500,000 to support conservation-standard repair projects. You can also find advice on further sources of funding [on our website](#).



The Dalkeith Corn Exchange was restored and converted in 2016 with grant assistance from ourselves. Previously a market hall, it was transformed into the Headquarters of a housing association and the Dalkeith Museum space. Above, historic photograph of the interior in 1924 © Dalkeith Museum and below the interior today © David Barbour and MLA.



SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Strategy, policy and procedure

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

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

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

[Historic Environment Scotland
Policy Statement June 2016](#)

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

Guidance

[HES Demolition 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](#)

Cover image:

The High Mill at Verdant Works in Dundee was restored in 2015. Originally a jute mill, it was restored and adapted to create a Jute Museum @ Dundee Heritage Trust.

OGL

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