



HISTORIC
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MANAGING CHANGE IN THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Interiors





Above: This dramatic hallway at the category A listed Cairness House, Aberdeenshire is a masterpiece in skilfully combining spatial decoration and architectural detailing to great effect. © Crown Copyright: HES. Licensor canmore.org.uk

Cover image: Category B listed Manor Place, Edinburgh. This change from a reception room to a kitchen has retained elements including the mantelpiece, ornate cornicing and joinery. The change can be reversed if needed in the future. © www.nealesmith.com

MANAGING CHANGE IS A
SERIES OF NON-STATUTORY
GUIDANCE NOTES ABOUT
MANAGING CHANGE IN THE
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT.
THEY EXPLAIN HOW TO APPLY
GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

The aim of the series is to identify the main issues which can arise in different situations, to advise how best to deal with these, and to offer further sources of information. They are also intended to inform planning policies and the determination of applications relating to the historic environment.

INTRODUCTION

This note sets out the principles that apply to alterations to the interiors of historic buildings. It should inform planning policies and help with decisions relating to applications for historic buildings. It also provides guidance on how to manage the impact of change in a sympathetic way that respects the inherent value of these buildings in the context of a dynamic and changing environment.

KEY ISSUES

1. The interior of a historic building is important in defining its character and special interest. If a historic building has the protection of statutory listing then this includes the interior, whether or not the list description itemises interior features. Listed building consent, which is administered through local authorities, is required for any works affecting the character of a listed building.
2. The interest, experience and enjoyment of a historic interior can be derived from a number of factors including its design, structural plan and layout, the quality of its decorative scheme, materials and craftsmanship, fixtures and fittings, any associated archaeology, and historical and cultural associations.
3. Thorough and appropriately informed inspection of historic interiors is necessary to evaluate their interest fully.
4. The significance of the interior and the nature of proposed works and their impact should be carefully assessed. A Heritage Statement, and if appropriate a Design Statement, will help assess and inform the appropriateness of any proposed changes. Proposals for interior alteration should always seek to protect the character of the building.
5. Planning authorities give advice on the requirement for listed building consent, planning and other permissions.

1. WHY ARE HISTORIC INTERIORS IMPORTANT?

The interior makes a substantial contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of a building. Its nature, style, detailing and materials help us understand when and how a building was constructed and adapted, its social and cultural significance, what it was used for, and how this has been influenced by advances in technology and changes in fashion. Historic interiors can enrich our daily lives and wellbeing in how we use, experience and appreciate them.

This impressive Edwardian kitchen at category A listed Pollok House in Glasgow retains much of its original character while functioning as a restaurant. Its scale gives us insight into the social history and functioning of a large country house in the early 20th century.
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2. IDENTIFYING THE INTEREST OF A HISTORIC INTERIOR

The significance of a historic interior, or part of an interior, is usually derived from a number of factors, including those set out in the paragraphs below. The degree to which an interior remains intact from key periods in its history, and its rarity in a broader context, are also important considerations.

Plan form

The 'plan form' is the arrangement and division of internal spaces into rooms and circulation spaces such as halls, stairs and corridors, and is a key component of the character and special interest of any building. The interrelationship of rooms and circulation space is a reflection of the building's design, function, status and period. Where rooms are arranged to create particular spatial effects or views, the position of features such as doors, windows, fireplaces and cupboards can be significant. When the historic layout is altered, for instance to superimpose an open-plan layout, this can be harmful to the character of a building.

Room proportions are important to the integrity of a design. The size and height of a room is normally carefully proportioned to suit its historic function. For example, the size and arrangement of a principal space such as a dining or drawing room normally contrasts with the less formal or less elaborate 'private' spaces, such as bedrooms. Windows, doors and fireplaces were normally designed and located to complement the design and proportions of the room as a whole.

Decorative schemes

The decorative treatment of a historic interior is normally an important element of a building's character, whether it is a simple functional space or a grand and imposing one. Depending on the building's type, or the location within a building, interior schemes range from utilitarian bare surfaces to elaborate applied fixtures and finishes.

Decorative schemes can illustrate much about the function/status of a room and broader stylistic movements. The design of chimneypieces, cornicing, doors and architraves were often coordinated throughout a room or a building in one style or a contemporary variety of styles. Some schemes have a theme or purpose reflecting the outlook of a patron and/or designer or reflect the use of the space.

Most interiors have been redecorated on a number of occasions, and older buildings in particular may have 'layers' of differing fashions or styles, possibly built up over generations. These later schemes may illustrate and document key periods in changes of ownership/use/patronage and often enable a fuller understanding and appreciation of the building's history, significance and interest. A Heritage Statement, and if appropriate a Design Statement, will help assess and inform the appropriateness of any proposed changes.

Materials and craftsmanship

Even relatively modest interior spaces can display high levels of craftsmanship and quality of materials. The enormous variety of materials and skills employed in historic interiors can range from simple panelled timber doors and shutters to elaborate marble and timber fireplaces, high-quality plasterwork, intricately designed staircases and hand-painted wallpaper.

Fixtures and fittings

Statutory protection extends to all features that form a part of the listed building. It is not necessary for the feature to be specified in the list description for it to be considered as integral to the structure and subject to the need for consent if change is proposed. Local authorities advise on whether consent is required for the removal or alteration of a feature.

Fixed objects such as staircases, chimneypieces, doors and doorpieces, timber panelling, shutters, built-in furniture, etc. are likely to be considered fixtures, integral parts of a listed building. The degree of physical attachment and the extent to which a feature is an integral part of the building are relevant factors for assessing items such as bathroom and kitchen fixtures, overmantel mirrors, overdoor paintings, window pelmets, fire grates, lighting and machinery.

Non-fixed or portable objects are not included in the statutory listing of properties.

A surviving section of 16th century painted wall panelling discovered beneath later works at category A listed Northfield House, Prestonpans. In this instance a section of the panelling has been left exposed and the later work retained. © Crown Copyright: HES. Licensor canmore.org.uk



Archaeological potential

Early structural evidence or decorative schemes may survive below later work, possibly concealed, and the discovery of these can enhance understanding of a building's special interest. Interior structural evidence, such as timber framework, masonry vaulting, or blocked openings, can reveal much about the development of a building through time.

Common discoveries of decorative features include chimneypieces, grates and ranges in blocked fireplaces, wall and door panelling under hardboard or plasterboard finishes, and original plaster ceilings above suspended ceilings. Mural and other painted decorative schemes may also be recovered from beneath later paintwork. Where such features are found, but it has been agreed to conceal them again, they may be significant enough to merit recording. In cases where a decorative scheme cannot be recovered in full, it may be appropriate to repair, for example by replicating mouldings, or by paint sampling and matching.

Historical, cultural and social associations

The link between particular interior spaces and notable people or events in history forms a significant element of their interest. Interiors connected to important historical figures can provide an invaluable insight into their lives, inspiration and works. Similarly the context of a historical event of cultural/ social activity can be better understood when the physical surroundings are intact.



This late 19th century door handle and fingerplate at an unlisted building in Esplanade Terrace, Joppa combines beauty and practicality with its ornate design and its function in protecting the door from marks and damage. Details like this are an important part of a building's character. © Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland; D/12556/cn. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR REPAIRS, ALTERATIONS AND UPGRADING

Character and interest

Alteration to a historic building should protect its character. The contribution of the interior to that character must therefore be fully understood before considering how to alter the building. A Heritage Statement, and if appropriate a Design Statement, may help assess and inform the appropriateness of any proposed changes.

Significance of the interior spaces

Alterations should be carefully planned and located to best protect the interest of the internal spaces. In general, the principal spaces in a building are more sensitive to change as these are the spaces that normally make the most significant contribution to its character. Sometimes secondary spaces such as basement kitchens or attic rooms are sensitive to change, for example where they survive in their original form, or are particularly noteworthy.



Category A listed George Square, University of Edinburgh. A comprehensive refurbishment scheme to refresh this post-war building, including the basement area repurposed as a lively social hub. New design elements have taken their cue from the original 1960s design features such as the original waffle concrete ceiling which has been retained with the addition of some decorative timber light boxes. ©www.andrewleephoto.com

Subdivision and amalgamation of spaces

Where the original plan form or a later plan form of special interest survives, particularly in regard to the entrance hall, main stair, common spaces and principal rooms or spaces, these spaces should normally be retained without subdivision, because of their inherent significance. Likewise, it is usually advisable to avoid the amalgamation of rooms, or the creation of an 'open-plan' layout, within a historic building with an important cellular plan form. There may, however, be more scope to make significant interventions within areas of secondary importance.

When planning new openings between rooms or circulation spaces it is important to take account of the historic design and layout, and also of distinctions between different types of space. For example, in most pre-20th-century townhouses or villas a direct opening between a 'public' dining

This 17th century panelled and decorated wall at category A listed Argyll's Lodging, Stirling is highly significant due to its age, rarity and craft value which inhibits the removal of fabric to create a wider opening. Its arrangement provides evidence of the transition in social history from the open communal space of a large hall to the more fashionable private domestic use of rooms as seen on the Continent.

or drawing room and a 'private' parlour would be uncharacteristic of the traditional arrangement. A new opening in such a location should be carefully designed to minimise disruption to the appearance and character of the spaces being linked. Solid doors are likely to best retain the sense of enclosure in these cases, rather than glazed doors or openings without doors.

In some instances, the quality of the decorative scheme or importance of the plan form and layout of the spaces may inhibit removal of building fabric to create an opening.

Historic materials

Historic materials make an important contribution to the character of a building's interior and should be retained where possible. Removal of lath-and-plaster walls, original floors and joinery, decorative plaster, or ironwork, is almost always damaging to the interest of the interior and is often unnecessary. Even where not in use, features such as doors, fireplaces or machinery, where practicable, should be left in-situ.



Fabric upgrades for energy efficiency

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 commits Scotland to some of the most ambitious carbon reduction targets in the world. There are a number of practical solutions to improve energy efficiency to the interior of traditional and historic buildings whilst retaining the historic character and minimising impacts. A key aim should be to recognise that traditional buildings generally require vapour permeable and ‘breathable’ solutions rather than standard energy efficiency products.

Historic Environment Scotland has carried out a series of trials and pilot projects in which energy-saving measures were trialled at a variety of traditional properties throughout Scotland, including detached rural cottages, tenement flats, townhouses and public buildings dating from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The results of these projects and the lessons drawn from them are published as a series of Refurbishment Case studies available on the [Historic Environment Scotland website](#).

New design

Alterations to historic interiors should be considered in the context of the type and quality of the existing interior and plan form. Interventions should at all times respect and complement the interest and significance of the historic interior. A Heritage Statement, and if appropriate a Design Statement, may help assess and inform the appropriateness of any proposed changes.



This elegant swept stair at category A listed McManus Gallery and Museum, Dundee, has been invigorated by the subtle addition of contemporary lighting. The encaustic tiled floor and stained glass window further reinforces the decorative Gothic nature of this impressive stair hall. © www.andrewleephoto.com

Structural works

In undertaking structural works, it is often best to repair the existing structure rather than replace it. Where this is impractical it may be possible to incorporate modern structural components, but care should always be taken to avoid harming the structural integrity of the building and its fabric, or damaging decorative work of quality.

The loss of a building’s interior through the removal of interior walls and floor plates while retaining the outer faces of



Historic ceramic tiles often greatly contribute to the appearance and character of an interior space. Due to their durable nature they were often used in locations where cleanliness and hygiene were highly valued or in areas such as communal stairs, as in this example in an unlisted building in Sandringham Terrace, Greenock.
©. Dr Peter Robinson Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

the building, known as façade retention, will almost always harm the character of a historic building and should not normally be considered. If the interior of a property has to be completely rebuilt because of structural weakness, careful consideration needs to be given to how the new internal arrangement will affect the surviving character of the building.

Decorative schemes

High-quality decorative schemes should be retained in-situ where possible. If the scheme is largely intact, it may be possible to undertake discreet repairs without damaging either the historic fabric or the authenticity of the scheme as a whole. If there is significant damage, or the scheme is incomplete, it may be better to protect the historic fabric and add a new layer of decoration. Where consent is required, evidence should be provided for the reinstatement of previous schemes of decoration in high-quality internal spaces.

Reversibility

Where alterations are essential, it is often possible to undertake works that allow the future reinstatement of original features or finishes. Measures to consider include storage of removed fixtures on site, protection and concealment of items such as panelling, tiling or fireplaces in-situ, and construction of new elements around existing features (for instance, leaving plasterwork in place and scribing new partitions around existing cornice profiles).

Fire and security measures

With careful attention to detail, fire and security protection measures can usually be incorporated with minimal visible or physical disruption to historic interiors. However, care must be taken to ensure that unnecessary harm is not caused to the character of the interior by unnecessarily exposed equipment or wiring/pipework, fire retardant measures such as additional screens and doors, and in the upgrading of existing doors and historic surfaces (e.g. intumescent paint or varnish). Further advice on fire safety management can be found in our [Managing Change guidance note](#) on the subject.

Construction works and vacant buildings

Historic interiors and collections should be protected from damage during construction works, whether or not the building is occupied. Particular care should be taken to protect fixtures that are vulnerable to theft, such as chimneypieces, when a building is vacant. Measures can include physical protection by covering, security surveillance, or in some cases temporary removal of valuable items to agreed secure locations. This should form part of a consent process.

Fixtures

Where fixtures contribute to the character of a building, these should be retained. In some cases, such as agricultural, industrial or ecclesiastical buildings, internal fixtures may include large pieces of machinery or built-in furniture that contribute to the interest and understanding of the building. If retention of such fixtures makes reuse of the building impractical, moving or consolidating the items within the building, or retaining exemplars of multiple units, should be considered. If removal of fixtures from the building is appropriate, rare or unusual items may be of interest to museums.

4. RECORDING

Where alterations are proposed to important decorative schemes or layouts, photographic or other recording of the interior in its unaltered state may be required as a condition of listed building consent. In some cases evidence of early decorative schemes comes to light in the course of works. Evidence of earlier schemes, such as fragments of wallpaper, can provide an interesting insight into the history of the building and its occupants. *Historic Environment Scotland* may record buildings, structures and sites prior to significant alteration or conversion, and in emergencies where they face imminent risks such as fire or collapse: www.rcahms.gov.uk



These traditional timber numbered pews in category A listed Cromarty East Church, Highland have a decorative and craft value but also a functional use. Historic fixtures such as these, give us a very tangible connection with the past. © Iain Sarjeant/Scottish Viewpoint

Archaeology

Archaeological resources may survive within or beneath a listed building or unlisted building in a conservation area. Planning authorities manage such archaeological issues, by using conditions or legal agreements to record or preserve in-situ. Advice on archaeological sensitivity should be obtained from the planning authority's archaeological adviser at an early stage.

5. CONSENTS

You may require planning permission, building warrant(s) and other permissions or consents for any proposed scheme. The granting of scheduled monument consent or listed building consent does not negate this requirement, and you should contact your planning authority for advice.

Listed building consent

Listed building consent is required for any work to a listed building which will affect its character (see the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997). The planning authority is the main point of contact for all applications for listed building consent. They decide whether consent is required, and they can also offer advice on applications.

The planning authority will consider applications using guidance such as Historic Environment Scotland's managing change guidance notes and other national policy documents including SHEP, SPP and their own policies.

Scheduled monument consent

Scheduled monument consent is required for any works to a monument scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Scheduled monument consent is determined by Historic Environment Scotland. We offer a free pre-application discussion and checking service for scheduled monument consent applications. You can find out more about this on [our website](#).

6. SEARCHING FOR LISTED BUILDINGS AND OTHER DESIGNATIONS

You can search for listed buildings, scheduled monuments, battlefields, gardens and designed landscapes on [Historic Environment Scotland's website](#): (please read the guidelines on the search page). If you are not sure whether a particular building or feature is designated, you can also email or telephone us for help.

For a map-based search and wider environmental information, including conservation area boundaries, see the [Scotland's Environment website](#). You can also ask your local authority to tell you whether the building or feature in which you are interested is listed, and what is covered by the listing.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Historic Environment Scotland is charged with ensuring that our historic environment provides a strong foundation in building a successful future for Scotland. One of its roles is to provide advice about managing change in the historic environment.

Legislation and policy

[Building \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#)

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

[Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#)

[Scottish Planning Policy \(2014\)](#)

[Scottish Historic Environment Policy \(2011\)](#)

Other selected Historic Environment Scotland publications and links

All publications are available at Historic Environment Scotland's [Technical Conservation website](#).

[Inform Guide: Improving Energy Efficiency in Traditional Buildings \(2008\)](#)

[Inform Guide: Fire Safety \(2005\)](#)

[Inform Guide: Fireplaces \(2008\)](#)

[Inform Guide: Ventilation in Traditional Houses \(2008\)](#)

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