

## Buying a listed building

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This guide gives some very general advice about buying a historic building to live in. It points out some of the things that you should think about and some of the things that you would be well advised to do. It is specifically about buying buildings that have been 'listed'. These are buildings which are on the Government lists of buildings considered to be of architectural or historic merit.

It is also worth remembering that there are many other older buildings which do not reach the standards required for listing on a national scale, but nevertheless have a local interest and value. These also deserve of the care and respect that listed buildings demand.

Many people approach the purchase of a listed building with a great deal of trepidation. This is perfectly understandable, but should not prevent anyone continuing to purchase. The main worries relate to the costs of upkeep and the possibility that the fact of 'listing' will prevent an individual from doing what he or she wants to with a building, which may include what can be seen as unwelcome interference from local authority conservation officers.

The upkeep costs need to be considered very carefully, but with good professional advice can be managed.

The issue of what alterations you might make to a listed building will depend on the nature and interest of the particular building, but also your research, expectations and realism at purchase.

### What sort of house do I want?

Finding yourself the prospective purchaser of a listed building is likely to fall into one of three categories;

1. An existing listed building owner who is aware of the potential issues of owning a listed building; you may still find it interesting to read on;
2. A 'first time buyer' of an existing listed dwelling;
3. A purchaser of a listed building which is not in residential use, but seems to offer the possibility for conversion e.g. agricultural barns, domestic outbuildings, commercial buildings.



## Buying an existing listed dwelling

You may have decided to buy a historic building or it may just be that the particulars of a listed building arrived with all sorts of other possible houses. If it is the latter, it is possible that provided that you have carefully specified what size of house you are looking for, there is likely to be a good match of the features, numbers of bedrooms, reception rooms etc. in a listed building. However this is not always the case.

One of the most common problems that the Historic Buildings Officers in this authority encounter is a mismatch between what a prospective purchaser requires in a house and what a particular listed dwelling can offer in terms of existing space and the potential for alteration and extension.

It is very important that you are clear about what you or your family requires in terms of accommodation. To be blunt, if you buy a two bedroom, single bathroom listed cottage and what you really need is four bedrooms and two bathrooms, in all probability this is not the right building for you, since an extension of the size to provide the additional required accommodation is likely to overwhelm a small cottage and thus be unacceptable both in terms of the impact on the historic fabric and in [Design Policy terms](#).



People frequently 'fall in love' with the appearance and feel of a historic building, but fail to think about what it would really be like to live in the property; whether they can adapt to living in the historic building rather than adapting the building to suit their family needs. This is not to say that most listed buildings cannot be altered or extended, but these works must not have an adverse impact on the historic fabric, significance or appearance of the building. It is the protection of the special qualities of the historic building which caused it to be listed that are paramount, not the family requirements; it is a delicate matter of getting the balance right.

Some of the more obvious space related issues that arise include the following;

- In recent years there has been a trend for large open plan living spaces. The removal of walls to create these spaces may involve the removal of valuable historic material and damage the character of a historic interior e.g. the usually small rooms in a 17th century cottage will not easily provide a kitchen/diner of the dimensions that are now often seen to be desirable.
- Bathrooms may be cramped or inconveniently positioned because they were imposed on the building at a later date.
- First floor bedrooms may be interconnecting or
- It may not be possible to connect between some first floor rooms where access is blocked by timber framing, wattle and lath panels, old brickwork or stonework or a large chimney stack.
- Ceiling heights may be low.
- Large loft spaces are inaccessible or have poor access.
- The dimensions of fireplaces may not be big enough to fit the technical requirements of the range cooker that you want to fit in the kitchen.
- Staircases may wind and have uneven risers; they may also rise from main reception rooms rather than separate hallways.
- Some rooms may appear dark due to small windows.

**Alteration to address some of the above could damage the delicate and individual character of some buildings resulting in a loss of historic interest and significance.**

Other more common but less problematic issues to resolve include;

- The refitting of services; e.g wiring, pipework, central heating.
- Replacement of bathroom and kitchen fittings.
- Repairs to the interior & exterior including windows, door, roofs, floors, dealing with damp.

**These items might not require any formal permissions or consents, but need to be executed in a sympathetic and responsible manner using the appropriate repair methods and materials.**

### Major works of alteration and or replacement of historic fabric

- More major works such as the complete replacement of windows, doors, ceilings, floors, staircases, insulation of walls, underpinning, rebuilding of chimneys, roofs, replacement of internal plaster and external render will be likely to require Listed Building Consent.

A [Listed Building consent form](#) is available on our web page.

### Works associated with the plot on which the building stands

- Any alterations to buildings (including freestanding walls) within the curtilage (plot) which were constructed prior to July 1948 will require Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission.
- Is there sufficient car parking/servicing space? A new access and hardstanding may require planning permission. Is there a garage and is it big enough? If not, and this is important to you, consider whether a replacement or new garage could be accommodated on the plot without harming the setting of the listed building. A new garage will require planning permission.
- Similarly the requirement for sheds, green houses, swimming pools, air source heat pumps; as with garages, all new independent structures may require Planning Permission (not Listed Building Consent). The key aspects to consider are the design, size, materials and location of such buildings in a manner that is sympathetic to the setting of the listed building. Any new structure will require planning permission.
- Is the plot secure? Any boundary wall constructed prior to July 1948 will be protected by the listed status of the main house such that any alterations will require Listed Building Consent. Any other alterations to the 'means of enclosure' of a listed building of any height i.e. fences, walls, gates will require Planning Permission.
- If you require a satellite dish, solar panels or heat exchanger; consider where it can be fitted in an unobtrusive manner. Listed Building Consent will to be required. Planning permission may be required.

**All of the above require very careful consideration. The 'bottom line' is that you are buying the building in its current form and condition, can you live with, or in it, as it is?**

It is possible that alterations to overcome the potential issues may be appropriate, but until detailed investigations and assessment of the existing structure have been undertaken and applications for Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission (if necessary) considered there will not be any certainty as to the suitability of those alterations.

### Building Control

It is also important to remember that many alterations will also need to comply with Building Regulations. While there can be some flexibility in the case of historic structures, there may be cases where any necessary compliance could result in works that would be considered damaging and so would not be acceptable. For more information [email](#) Building Control.

## Further advice

We would recommend that you seek the advice of a suitably qualified conservation accredited architect or conservation accredited building surveyor or engineer and historic building consultant with regard to any scheme of repair and/or alteration to a listed building.

You can also seek [general advice](#) from the Historic Buildings Officers at AVDC. Their consultations are subject to a scheme of charges and can include a site visit if required.

Advice may also be obtained from [The Society for the Protection of Listed Buildings \(SPAB\)](#). SPAB runs training courses for the owners of Listed Buildings which may be useful and interesting.

There are also other amenity societies which may assist with information such as

[The Georgian Group](#)

[The Victorian Society](#)

[The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Society](#)

[Ancient Monuments Society](#)

## Can I convert a listed building not currently in residential use into a house?

The first issue to be considered is whether the proposed change of use is going to be acceptable in planning policy terms. An informal pre-application inquiry may be made to the Development Management Team. Any response will include basic advice from the Historic Buildings Officers. Details are on our [web page](#).

The suitability in policy terms will be linked to the quantity and type of alterations that might be required for a change of use. For example, if you wish to convert an agricultural barn to residential use, you will have to provide evidence of a lack of suitability or demand for other employment generating uses and also that the building is structurally capable of conversion and that conversion will respect and maintain the character of the building. Specific advice for this type of conversion is found in our leaflet about [converting historic listed farm buildings](#) on our web page.

You are strongly advised to seek guidance from a suitably qualified professional before embarking on the proposed change of use of a listed building to residential use. You should also remember that it is difficult for either Planning or Historic Buildings Officers to provide helpful advice on these proposals without clear information about the proposal. This should include some level of detail in sketch plans, some initial level of structural assessment and assessment of the architectural and historical significance of the building including photographs.

If you would like to organise a site visit or obtain advice from the Historic Buildings Officers please visit our [web page](#).

For an audio or large print version of this leaflet, please phone 01296 585454

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