

CITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

DEVELOPMENT QUALITY HANDBOOK

Alterations to Listed Buildings

■ OBJECTIVE

This guideline is supplementary to local plan conservation and design policies, providing general guidance on alterations to listed buildings.

■ POLICY CONTEXT

Local plan policies seek to protect the character and appearance of listed buildings. For example, policy CD2 of the Central Edinburgh Local Plan states:

“All proposals affecting a listed building or its setting, will be considered for their effect on its character and if appropriate their contribution to its care and restoration. Alterations, extensions or changes of use, including the sub-division of an original house or flat, will not be allowed if likely to diminish the architectural integrity of the building or its historic interest.”

■ SCOPE OF GUIDANCE

This guideline contains general information on both internal and external alterations and will be particularly useful for new owners of listed buildings who are unsure about the requirements for listed building consent and when alterations or extensions are likely to be acceptable. It applies city-wide to proposals affecting listed buildings.

■ STATUTORY AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Scottish Ministers have the responsibility for compiling or approving lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Such buildings - “listed buildings” - are afforded statutory protection.

Listing covers the interior as well as the exterior of the building. The protection afforded by listing extends to historic fixtures and fittings, and to such items within the curtilage as stables, mews, garden walls, or stone setts (where they pre-date the enactment of the 1947 legislation).

Historic Scotland places listed buildings in one of three categories, according to merit:

Category A: buildings of national or international importance either architectural or historic, or fine little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type.

Category B: buildings of regional or more than local importance, or major examples of some period, style or building type which may have been altered.

Category C(S): buildings of local importance, better examples of any period, style or building type, as originally constructed or altered, and simple, traditional buildings, which group well with categories A and B or are part of a planned group such as an estate or an industrial complex.

Sections 14 (2) and 59 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 set out the local planning authority's duty in relation to listed buildings.

Listed building consent is required for the demolition of a listed building, or its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest. Consent is not normally required for like for like repairs, but where repairs involve alterations which would affect the character of the building, consent is required. Owners are required to consult with City Development (Planning) in advance of any repair scheme to check whether consent is required and to ensure repairs are carried out in the appropriate manner.

In considering any application for listed building consent, and also any application for planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, local planning authorities are required to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it may possess.

In this regard, preserving, in relation to a building, means preserving it either in its existing state or subject only to such alterations or extensions as can be carried out without detriment to its character. Failure to meet this requirement will give rise to a presumption against the granting of listed building consent.

The requirement for listed building consent also applies to internal alterations. Some minor alterations such as internal redecoration, renewal of bathroom and kitchen fittings, rewiring, new plumbing and the installation of central heating (see separate policy Services on Buildings) generally do not require consent, provided all features are respected and any damaged finishes are restored. It should be stressed, however, that there will be some instances where fittings or internal decoration are considered to be an integral part of the character of the property e.g. a plaster or painted ceiling, murals, paintings. Proposals which would adversely affect such features may require listed building consent and advice should be sought from the Listed Buildings team.

The Council may require the following additional information to be submitted in support of an application for listed building consent:

- **Drawings illustrating relationship of proposal to its setting**
- **Evidence of building's structural condition**
- **Repair schedule**
- **Specification of materials**
- **Annotated photographs**
- **Historic records of building/structure**

In addition, applications for consent to demolish a listed building must be supported by evidence of the building's state of repair and evidence of marketing on the open market.

Planning permission will also be required where alterations materially affect the external appearance of the building, or where sub-division of a dwelling house is proposed. It may also be required if a change of use of the building is proposed.

In some instances a building warrant may also be required for works to a listed building. Advice on building warrant applications can be obtained from the Property Management section of the City Development Department.

POLICYGUIDANCE

1. GENERAL

- a) The fact that a building is listed as being of special architectural or historic interest does not mean that it must be preserved intact in all circumstances. However, it does mean there will be a presumption against demolition and that alterations to the exterior or interior of the building must preserve its character.
- b) The aim of these guidelines is to guard against unsympathetic alterations and prevent unnecessary loss or damage to historic fabric. Any alterations which would seriously detract from or alter the character of a listed building are unlikely to receive consent. It should be stressed that alterations carried out without the appropriate consents may be subject to enforcement action or, in certain circumstances, to referral to the Procurator Fiscal.
- c) It is strongly advised that specialist advice be sought prior to carrying out any works to a listed building.
- d) Without exception, the highest standards of materials and workmanship will be required for all works associated with listed buildings.
- e) Regard should be paid to the principle of reversibility (altering a building in a manner that allows it to be returned to its original condition without damage to the fabric) when carrying out any works to a listed building. Reversibility in itself will not be considered justification for proposals which may be physically or aesthetically inappropriate.
- f) These guidelines apply to general works to listed buildings. However, they cannot cover all work that may require listed building consent and owners are encouraged to contact City Development (Planning) in advance of any works in order to ascertain whether consent is required. A full list of guidelines is contained in the Development Quality Handbook. Individual copies of all policies are available free of charge from the front desk at 1 Cockburn Street.

2. EXTERIORS - GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- a) Most external alterations and extensions to listed buildings will have an affect on the character of the building. Even changes which may seem minor - such as enlarging a window opening or replacing a front door - may have a significant impact on the building's character.
- b) To ensure that alterations will not seriously detract from or alter the character of a listed building, proposals should be based on a full assessment of its structure and the history and development of the building. New work should be fitted to the old to ensure the survival of as much historic fabric as is practicable.
- c) Later additions to historic buildings do not always detract from the quality of a building. They may be of interest in their own right as part of the building's history. Generally, later features of historic or architectural significance should not be removed merely to restore a building to an earlier form.
- d) Proposed extensions should remain subservient to the main building. Successful extensions require knowledge of the original form of the building together with a sensitive handling of scale and detail. There will be some historic buildings where extensions of any form would be damaging and will not be permitted.
- e) In addition to alterations and extensions, minor attachments to listed buildings - such as floodlights, streetlights, security cameras and window boxes - can detract from the appearance of a building and erode its architectural quality. It will, therefore, be especially important to ensure that such fixtures are installed only where it is possible to do so without causing damage to the structure or adversely affecting the appearance of the principal elevations of the building.

3. EXTERIORS - DETAILED MATTERS

a) External walls

- i) Walls are the main structural fabric of a building. Alterations to wall surfaces usually cause the most damage to the overall appearance of a listed building. Alterations or repairs should respect the existing fabric and match it in materials, texture, quality and colour. Stonework should normally not be rendered unless the surface was originally rendered. For more guidance on repairs to walls see the Historic Building Repairs guideline.
- ii) The stonecleaning or painting of outside walls is rarely acceptable. For more information on these matters and on the procedures regarding the removal of graffiti, please refer to the separate guidelines on Stonecleaning and Colour of Buildings.
- iii) Where it is proposed to restore lost features, it will be important to ensure that all restorative work is based on sound physical and documentary evidence of the previous state of the building in order to ensure that work is carried out in an architecturally and historically correct manner.

b) Openings: windows and doors

- i) Window and door openings play an important role in establishing the character of an elevation and they should not be altered in their proportions or details, especially where they are a conspicuous element of the design. New window and door openings are unlikely to be acceptable on principal elevations as this can create an unbalanced composition. Mechanical extract fans should be located on rear or side elevations and will not normally be acceptable within windows or fanlights.
- ii) The depth of window ingoes is an important historical feature and should be respected. Historic cill and lintel details should be retained. For more information on all aspects of window alterations see the Window Alterations guideline.
- iii) New dormer windows will not normally be acceptable unless they are part of the original or early design of an area. Rooflights will almost always be a preferable solution, but these will not generally be permitted on front roof slopes which are largely unaltered. Rooflights, where acceptable, should be well proportioned, flush with the roof and of sympathetic design and materials. The proposed number of rooflights will also be a determining factor.
- iv) Original panelled entrance doors should not be removed or altered. Modern off the peg doors, whether in timber or UPVC, are not acceptable for use in listed buildings, nor are doors with incongruous design features such as integral fanlights. If beyond repair, matching doors painted in an approved colour should be substituted. It may, in certain circumstances, be acceptable to replace rear doors with glazed timber doors where extra daylight is required.
- v) Redundant doorways should be retained where they contribute to the symmetry or composition of an elevation or terrace.

c) External plumbing

- i) Additional pipework on important facades should be avoided especially if it would result in disturbance to, or the breaking through of ashlar masonry, mouldings or decorative features. Replacements should be in cast iron, painted to match the colour of the walling and should match the original sections. The use of "Timesaver" type connections to external plumbing is not acceptable.
- ii) Detailed advice on the location of balanced flues, ventilation grilles, gas pipes/ meter boxes and air conditioning units is set out in the Services on Buildings guideline.

d) Roofs

- i) The roof, which includes parapets, skews, chimneyheads and chimney pots, is nearly always a dominant feature of a building and the retention of its original structure, shape, pitch, cladding (particularly colour, weight, texture and origin of slate and ridge material) and ornament is important. Any later work of definite quality which makes a positive contribution to the interest of the building should also be kept. Particular care should be taken to retain chimneystacks to their original height.

- ii) The restoration of lost elements, for example chimney stacks, to match the original form will be encouraged. Further information on repairs to the various elements of the roof is included within the Historic Buildings Repairs guideline.

e) Basements

- i) Basement areas should never be covered in concrete or any other material such as gravel or chips. Where existing stone slabs need to be renewed new stone slabs should be laid. Similarly, stone steps and platts to ground floor entrances should be repaired or renewed in natural stone to match the original in colour. Basement steps, floors and walls should not be painted other than in approved situations (see Colour of Buildings guideline).
- ii) Proposed extensions in front basement areas or under entrance platts are not normally acceptable and owners are encouraged to remove existing extensions.
- iii) The formation of lightwells in basements will only be permitted where they are part of the character of the street. These should always be in matching materials to the main building and covered with a flush cast iron grille.

f) Railings, gates and balconies

- i) Balconies, gates and railings are usually formal components in the design of an elevation. They should be maintained and repaired; and if they have to be replaced, facsimiles should be erected using matching materials. The recommended paint colour is black. This advice also relates to handrails.

g) Additions and extensions

- i) Extensions should never dominate the existing building in scale, material or situation and will rarely be permitted on principal elevations. Rear and side extensions are more likely to be acceptable. In the case of side extensions in particular, they should be set back from the facade and of a scale that does not affect the overall architectural composition. The effect of any addition on a symmetrical composition will be particularly important.
- ii) Extensions that are designed specifically to match the original building should do so in all respects including materials. This does not necessarily preclude, where appropriate, a contemporary approach using quality materials.
- iii) Encouragement will be given to the removal of inappropriate additions.
- iv) For more detailed guidance on access stairs and conservatories refer to the relevant guidelines in the Development Quality Handbook.

h) Minor additions to listed buildings

- i) There are some standard external fixtures that require listed building consent when they affect the character of a listed building. These include floodlighting, streetlights, security cameras, window boxes, bird control installations and eyebolts (unless on window reveals).

- ii) Only undamaging and visually unobtrusive positions for such fixtures will be considered acceptable. In particular, fixtures should not lie across, cut into or through any architectural feature or disturb the balance of a symmetrical facade. Fixings into stonework should be kept to a minimum and should be non-ferrous.
- iii) The size and number of additions will also be an important consideration and, where appropriate, applicants may be asked to erect fixtures on a temporary basis in order that their impact can be accurately assessed.
- iv) Proposals to erect any fixtures which fail to respect the form and detailing of the building and detract from its appearance are not likely to be acceptable.

i) Items within the curtilage

The presence of items within the curtilage of a listed building such as stables, mews, garden walls, stone steps, stone paving and cobbled or setted areas will often make a significant contribution to the setting of the principal building. Any proposals to alter unsympathetically, relocate or remove such features are likely to detract perceptibly from the quality of the building's setting and are unlikely to be approved. Furthermore, loss of garden ground through car parking can seriously affect the setting of a listed building. For detailed guidance on these aspects of curtilage development refer to the separate guidelines on Development Affecting the Setting of Listed Buildings and Car Parking in Front Gardens.

4. INTERIORS - GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- a) The plan of a building is one of its most important characteristics. The original plan form should always be respected and all major works of alteration limited to areas of secondary importance. There will be a particular requirement not to sub-divide, either vertically or horizontally, principal rooms and entrance/stair halls. The sub-division of a building that retains its original plan form will, therefore, seldom be acceptable (see also Sub-division of Listed Buildings guideline).
- b) It is also possible that proposed changes of use which require significant alterations to the plan form may be considered unacceptable.
- c) The listing covers any object or structure fixed to a building. As a general principle, all objects physically attached to a building may be defined as fixtures. These include fireplaces, chimneypieces together with any overmantel features, staircases, timber panelling, window shutters, doors and doorcases, mouldings, decorated ceilings, wall decorations and light fittings. All fixtures of interest should be respected and left unaltered as far as possible.
- d) Even where the interior of a building is not mentioned in the descriptive list, the interior is always covered by the listing and must be treated with appropriate respect, unless the building can be shown to have been completely rebuilt internally in recent times.

5. INTERIORS - MATTERS OF DETAIL

a) Walls and doors

- i) Internal walls in listed buildings should always be investigated with care in advance of alterations as historic or interesting features may be concealed by plaster or behind panelling. In some cases, the partitions themselves may be of historic interest. In cases where it is considered acceptable for an existing partition to be removed, it will be necessary to leave a downstand of at least 300mm with any original cornice left intact.
- ii) New partitions which affect the proportions of principal rooms will not be considered acceptable. Where new internal walls are considered acceptable, they should not cut through mouldings or enriched plaster decoration but be shaped around them to allow for reinstatement at a later date. In most cases it will be desirable to replicate the original cornice detail at the head of new partitions as well as dadoes and skirtings.
- iii) Where new openings between rooms are considered acceptable, they should be correctly detailed with matching doors and architraves. New doors, especially those in principal rooms should be panelled to match existing doors with matching architraves. In general, consent will not be granted for new doors connecting front and rear principal rooms at ground floor level, although jib doors may be allowed in certain cases.

b) Plasterwork

- i) Care should always be taken with works to old plaster, especially when chasing-in electrical wiring to avoid destroying early decoration. All decorative features from a simple cornice or cove to elaborate wall and ceiling decoration should be preserved. Suspended ceilings should never be formed in principal rooms or entrance halls which have decorative plasterwork. They may be acceptable in minor rooms provided they are above window height.

c) Chimneypieces and chimneybreasts

- i) Chimneypieces, along with fireplaces containing their original registers and grates (the latter may well be fixtures), are part of the decorative history of a building and are often central to the design of a room. Even later chimneypieces of interest can make a significant contribution to the character of a room. Original or later chimneypieces/fireplaces of interest should, therefore, not be removed even if the chimney is redundant. In rare cases where there is no alternative to the removal of a chimneypiece, it should be re-used in an appropriate location within the building. The removal of a chimneybreast is almost never acceptable, not least because it may affect the structural stability and ventilation of the building.

d) Staircases

- i) The removal or alteration of any historic staircase, including handrails and balusters, is not normally acceptable. The stair is often the most significant piece of design within a building and can be important dating evidence. Where subdivision of ground and basement floors is approved, it will be a condition of consent that the basement stair is retained. In retail premises, the removal of the lowest flight of stairs - which will preclude access to and use of upper floors - will not be allowed.

e) Floors and ceilings

- i) Floor surfaces are too often disregarded when building works are carried out. Floors which are original to the building and/or of interest because of their materials, form or surface treatment should be respected, and repaired and retained in situ. Care must be taken when such floors require to be lifted in order to install or repair services. In some instances, features of interest are concealed behind suspended or false ceilings. This should always be the subject of investigation prior to any works being carried out.

f) Kitchens and bathrooms

- i) New kitchens and bathrooms should be located at the rear of a building to prevent fitments being built across windows to the front of a property and to avoid cluttering a front elevation with downpipes and ventilators etc.
- ii) En-suite bathrooms - En-suite bathrooms will not be acceptable in principal rooms. They should ideally be located within existing boxrooms or cupboards. Where this is not possible, it may be acceptable to locate them in larger, secondary rooms although this will be dependent on their form and how they affect room proportions.

g) Fire regulations

- i) The change of use of a listed building in residential use may result in the need for alterations which comply with the appropriate fire regulations. Usually, this requires extensive alterations to staircases, stairwells, doors and sometimes the provision of enclosed, external fire escape staircases. It is essential to retain the character and appearance of listed buildings which have to be altered in this way. Within the building, it is important to retain features such as panelled doors, especially when they open into principal rooms.
- ii) It is possible to improve the fire resistance of existing panelled doors and still retain their original appearance. Door facings can be increased in width and self-closing springs incorporated in the floor or framework of the door. A relaxation of the building regulations may be required if there is a conflict of interest.
- iii) Where it is considered that the need to comply with fire regulations will result in an unacceptable loss of character, it is important that early discussions are held with all parties (developers, planners, building control officers, fire officers and Historic Buildings Inspectorate) in order to find ways round potential problems. In cases where a change of use application is submitted in advance of an application for listed building consent, the issue of fire regulations should be addressed at or before the change of use application stage.

6. MINOR ADDITIONS AND NEW SERVICES

a) Sprinkler systems

- i) The introduction of sprinkler systems into important and/or vulnerable interiors will be encouraged. Whilst exposed pipework systems minimise the degree of disturbance to the structure care must be exercised in the design of exposed pipework to ensure its appearance is appropriate to the historic interior to be protected. The location of sprinkler heads, either ceiling or wall mounted, must be carefully integrated into interiors in order to reduce their visual impact. In particularly ornate interiors locations such as above a projecting cornice or within the decorative pattern of a cornice will normally be considered acceptable. On highly decorative ceilings sprinkler heads will be best concealed within the raised modelling of the ceiling.
- ii) The presence of sprinkler protection does not eliminate the need for preventative measures to reduce the risk of a fire occurring or spreading.

b) Internal services

- i) The introduction of new services to historic interiors must be handled with care. For example, the installation of computer trunking, fibre optics, central heating pipes etc should be reversible and should not result in damage to architectural features such as dadoes, skirtings and cornices. Surface mounting such services may be preferable to chasing plasterwork.

■ REASONED JUSTIFICATION

Listed buildings are afforded statutory protection. Local planning authorities are required to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Proposals for alterations or extensions must not cause detriment to the building's character.

This guideline provides a framework setting out the Council's approach to listed buildings and matters of principle and detail it will expect to be addressed. Other guidelines fit within this context and provide more detailed advice on specific aspects e.g. window alterations, conservatories and sub-division of listed buildings.

More detailed guidance on alterations to listed buildings can be found in the Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas, 1998 produced by Historic Scotland. In addition, the maintenance manual produced by the Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee on the Care and Conservation of Georgian Houses is an invaluable source of information providing detailed advice on the techniques of conservation. Organisations such as the Scottish Civic Trust, Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and the Cockburn Association are useful sources of advice and information.

For further details contact:

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Produced by the Director of City Development - The City of Edinburgh Council - September 2000