

Replacement windows and historic buildings Conservation Position Statement

Introduction

Windows are one of the single most important contributors to a building's character. Window shape, size, position, number, type and materials can make or mar a building. It is important therefore to ensure that when changes are proposed to windows in historic buildings or when new development is proposed in a historic context that the type of windows used will not compromise the character or appearance of a historic building or historic area.

There is increasing awareness of the need to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings and mitigate climate change and upgrading windows is one of the most common options that many people consider. Well-intentioned replacement of historic windows with modern double-glazed alternatives can have a damaging effect on the character and appearance of historic buildings, as well as destroying historic fabric and architectural evidence. No matter how narrow the gap in the sealed units, the glazing bars, stiles, and rails have to be thicker than they would be for traditional single-glazing because of the thickness and weight of the double-glazed units. Double glazing also 'deadens' reflections.

The purpose of this statement is to set out the approach that the local planning authority will take when considering proposals to carry out works to glazing/windows in buildings defined as heritage assets, that is buildings identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of their heritage interest. The term Heritage Asset (see Definitions) includes designated assets and assets identified by the local planning authority, including local listing.

Listed Buildings:

Listed Building Consent is required to alter or replace windows in a listed building. Applicants seeking listed building consent must be able to justify their proposals. A statement will be required demonstrating that the change is appropriate to the character and appearance of the building and will not harm its significance as a heritage asset.

Replacement windows in a Listed Building:

Where it is proposed to replace a historic window there will be an expectation that the window will be repaired and not replaced. Thermal and acoustic performance can be improved by proper draught-proofing and secondary glazing may be possible.

Where a historic window is to be replaced because it is beyond practical repair but it is of a design appropriate to the character of the building, the presumption will be for an identical single-glazed replacement. The new window should be properly draught proofed and may be secondary glazed.

Where a historic building has at some time in the past, perhaps prior to listing, had modern windows installed that are out of keeping with its character and appearance,

consideration will be given to their replacement with double-glazed windows of a design that is otherwise more consistent with the original glazing pattern, design and age of the opening. Double-glazed replacements are most likely to be acceptable where they relate to a whole elevation of a building, or part of an elevation of one phase that is visually distinct from other phases of the building. Double-glazing will not be acceptable where the replacement window could be seen in context with other single-glazed historic windows, such as in one individual elevation where the windows should, for reasons of unified design, remain identical, or where it is part of a uniform terrace.

If double-glazing is, in principle, acceptable, it is likely to require a thinner section of glazing unit (i.e. 4mm glass, 4mm cavity between panes, 4mm glass – total 12mm thickness) with a higher U value than full standard and/or a high performance specification to accommodate a window design appropriate to the character of the building. Under no circumstances will applied glazing bars or applied lead comes be acceptable for use in listed building. For the avoidance of doubt, standard double glazing (i.e. 24mm thickness and above) will not be acceptable.

New extensions to listed buildings:

Consideration will be given to double-glazing of suitable design, but there may be circumstances where it will not be appropriate. Factors that may result in double-glazing being unsuitable are: position and size of the extension in relation to the listed building; direct glazing in stone mullions; or, where the design of windows in an extension need to match those of the existing building in order to preserve its character or appearance. Again if double glazing is acceptable in principle, thinner glazing would be required as set out above.