

## **Heritage asset significance assessment**

In addition to the mandatory national requirements for information to be provided with planning applications which are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (DMPO) and its subsequent amendments, local planning authorities may also publish a list setting out their own local requirements. These requirements are based on statutory requirements, national or adopted local policy, or on published guidance which explains how adopted policy should be implemented.

The requirement for applicants to assess the wider heritage context of their proposals has been continued in the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which replaced Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS 5) and many other statements of national planning policy. Paragraph 128 of the NPPF states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.”

To understand in greater depth what is meant by the term ‘Heritage Asset’ and how to assess significance, reference should be made to the Practice Guide which supported the former PPS5. The Practice Guide was not included in the list of documents replaced by NPPF 2012.

The term ‘Heritage Asset’, and therefore the scope of any assessment of significance, encompasses both designated assets and non-designated assets. Designated heritage assets are: A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated as such under the relevant legislation. Other elements of the historic environment which could be considered as heritage assets are described in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Practice Guide as “buildings, parks and gardens, standing, buried and submerged remains, areas, sites and landscapes, whether designated or not and whether or not capable of designation” which “hold meaning for society over and above functional utility”. It should be noted that the replaced PPS5 included in its definition of non-designated heritage assets reference to them being those identified by the local planning authority, either in a local plan or during the process of decision-making.

Designated heritage assets have their own legislation and DAS requirements but the NPPF requirement for assessment of significance applies whether or not a DAS is required. If, as would be the case with Listed Building Consent and Conservation Area Consent, a DAS is required, then according to paragraph 69 of the Practice Guide to former PPS5, “the assessment of significance and impact should be set out in the DAS as part of the explanation and justification for the design approach”. Section 6 of the Government’s Guidance on

Information Requirements and Validation (2010) contains further information about Design and Access Statements.

Precisely how the requirement to assess heritage asset significance is to be satisfied is touched on in the NPPF only so far as to say “The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary.” Specifically in relation to archaeological interest, the NPPF states that “Local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation”.

Reference to PPS5 Practice Guide provides greater detail on the level of information that may be considered ‘proportionate’ to the significance of the asset and the potential impact on that asset of the planning proposal. The Guide suggests sources of information, consultees and scenarios where the involvement of experts to carry out an evaluation may be appropriate. Paragraph 12 of the Practice Guide summarises the significance of a heritage asset as “the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest”, which informs the scope of an assessment.

Other sources of information when preparing an assessment are Historic Environment Records, or HERs, that provide comprehensive evidence about the historic environment in a particular area. They are maintained by local planning authorities and are used for planning and development control as well as for public benefit and educational use. English Heritage has also published guidance on Conservation Area appraisals, which includes at Appendix 2 a list of questions to aid decisions on whether a building makes a positive contribution or not and may aid assessment of heritage assets.