

Assessing the Historic Significance of a Listed Building

Understanding the significance of a building is about understanding the elements of that building which are historically important and are worthy of attention and protection. The list below shows the range of elements which can contribute to building up a picture of the historic significance of a listed structure.

An assessment of significance is the first part of a Historic Impact Assessment (HIA): without knowing what parts of a building and its setting are the most historically significant, it is very hard to know the implications of any proposed work to a building. Not all structures or buildings will demonstrate all the values and characteristics in the list below, but each should be considered and the HIA should document the results.

KEY SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS	
<p>These elements provide an overview of the type of structure you are reviewing. They should all be included in any HIA</p>	
Nature	<p>Type of structure and sensitivities of material and makeup. Important for understanding the best means of repair.</p> <p>Eg: If it is a bridge you are repairing state that it is a bridge, and give a general description of it, including its size, material, form. Aim here to give the reader of the HIA an initial brief idea of the structure that is the focus of the HIA.</p>
Extent	<p>Spheres of influence of a building or historic structure: how it links to the local environment and its relationship to other historic structures. Consider its proximity to Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas, other historic structures both Listed and non-listed.</p> <p>Eg: compare the extent of influence of Newton House in Dinefwr Park - a National Trust estate to a listed phone box.</p>
Level	<p>Grading – Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II - Consider what the listing details are. Are there other statutory protection measures relating to the structure.</p> <p>Eg, Castles are often Scheduled Ancient Monuments as well as being Grade I listed; And listed buildings in an urban area may well be in a Conservation Area</p>

CONSERVATION VALUES

Conservation Values are defined by Cadw in their document Conservation Principles. A listed structure may have one, two or all of these values. Each should be considered in an HIA and the importance of each documented. Much of this information is available through libraries, archives and local history groups.

Evidential	<p><i>Physical remains both hidden and exposed. Think about specific features which provide evidence of past use, good craftsmanship, rare design</i></p> <p><i>Eg stain glass windows or unusual plasterwork</i></p>
Historical - Associative	<p>Links to a person or a movement</p> <p>Eg: Shakespeare in Stratford, or Picton in Carmarthen</p> <p>Eg: A toll house with links to the Rebecca Riots</p>
Historical – Illustrative	<p>Illustrates a style, an industry or an architectural period</p> <p>Eg: A good example of a style of building from the Georgian period</p> <p>Eg: A building designed for a specific industrial process, such as Buckley’s Maltings in Llanelli</p>
Aesthetic – Designed	<p>Formal ‘polite’ of purposefully designed architecture. This can be related to a building or structures in a Landscape</p> <p>Eg : Llanelly House Eg: Regency Landscape at the National Botanic Gardens of Wales</p>
Aesthetic – Fortuitous	<p>Formed by chance Eg: the historic field boundaries and barns of Swaledale in North Yorkshire</p>
Communal – Commemorative	<p><i>Represents historic memories</i></p> <p><i>Eg includes graveyards and war memorials</i></p>
Communal - Social	<p>Memories for a specific group</p> <p>Eg: Pontypridd Lido, or Speakers Corner London</p>
Communal – Spiritual	<p>Somewhere what inspires and uplifts those who visit</p> <p>Eg, Stonehenge or Garn Goch</p>

CHARACTER

Exploring the character of a building helps to bring alive the stories, the heart and the soul of a building in relation to its fabric, its locality and the community. By exploring and documenting a building's character it helps inform the changes to the fabric and the end use that are best suited to that building. Involving experts and past users of the building to fully understand the character of a building may be important. Cadw has produced some useful guidance on Managing Historic Character.

Form and Layout

Form and layout covers both the internal layout of a property and the relationship of that property with its surrounding buildings, structures and surrounding paths. Important features of form and layout may well have survived much longer than individual buildings or their features.

Eg: The internal layout of a Welsh longhouse and its relationship to the adjoining animal barn, often with an internal access from the house to the barn, is significant.

Eg: the layout of a historic farmyard and the association of barns to the house.

Eg, routes and paths between houses in a town may have historic significance, often marked by old names such as Salubrious Place in Swansea or Jail Hill in Carmarthen.

Buildings

The detailed character traits of a building can be broken down into 4 key areas:

Building Materials - Local materials including stone, mortars, roof tiles and timber windows (amongst many others) tend to define the character of a building most strongly.

Building Methods - This would cover any specialist skills of the craftsman or woman and unusual or rare practices. For example Makers Marks, painters creating faux marble in a historic chapel, expert decorative plasterwork or stained glass windows. Identifying some of these specialist skills may well require the involvement of an expert.

Local styles - Consider, for example, a smooth grouted roof of a vernacular cottage in Pembrokeshire, or a specific style of window design associated with an estate.

Historic integrity - The majority of historic buildings have changed naturally over time due to years of use, care and repair and building movement. This can result in some of the most unique character traits in a building – the patina of a polished floor, the wearing of a stone staircase or the lean of a timber frame are all examples and tend to be the main features that are recognised by owners as 'giving a building its character'.

Landscapes	This is about recognizing landscapes in relation to the significance of a building. Consider the setting of a building in its local area; curtilage structures; the history of a building and the role it played in the development of an area; historic transport links and footpaths, and how the landscape and its historic features can contribute to regeneration.
Archaeology	The relationship with a building and its hidden archaeology - consider historical records and maps to get clues.
Stories	Cultural traditions, stories and associations. These add colour and layers to the identity and character of a place. An example might be to consider the role the local court house played in the community. Members of the local community will have been in the jury, a magistrate, in the police or even in the dock, and that building will be significant to all of those community members.