

**RISE**

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# Registered Parks and Gardens

Quick guide

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# Introduction

## What is a registered park and garden?

A registered park or garden is a designed landscape recognised for its historic and cultural importance. The register of parks and gardens of special historic interest in England was established in 1984 and now includes over 1,700 sites. These landscapes range from private estates to public parks and cemeteries and are documented on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE).

### Criteria for registration

Historic England assesses parks and gardens based on:

- **Age and historic significance:** Sites from various periods, including medieval gardens and 20th-century landscapes
- **Design quality:** The artistic and architectural merit of the landscape
- **Association with notable figures:** Links to influential designers or historical events
- **Rarity and uniqueness:** Exceptional examples of landscape design

Examples in England

- **Stowe Landscape Gardens (Buckinghamshire):** An 18th-century landscape design
- **Blenheim Palace Gardens (Oxfordshire):** Designed by Capability Brown, showcasing English landscape style
- **Valley Gardens (Harrogate, North Yorkshire):** A well-preserved Victorian public park
- **South Cliff Gardens (Scarborough, North Yorkshire):** Recently restored historic gardens



Figure 1 *Stowe Landscape Gardens*. Source: National Trust



Figure 2 Blenheim Palace. Source: Blenheim Palace

## Barriers to retrofitting

The National Planning Policy Framework recognises registered parks and gardens as designated heritage assets. As a result, any significant damage or complete loss of such a site is considered either 'exceptional' or 'wholly exceptional', depending on its grade. Therefore, any planning applications affecting these landscapes are carefully assessed by the local planning authority, which prioritises their special character and conservation. Key points that may make this difficult for retrofit.

1. **Planning restrictions:** Local planning authorities prioritise conservation, making approvals for retrofit projects more complex
2. **Design constraints:** Retrofitting must align with heritage conservation principles, limiting alterations to building exteriors and materials
3. **Environmental considerations:** Many registered parks and gardens contain mature trees and biodiversity-sensitive areas, restricting construction activities
4. **Public and stakeholder engagement:** Community groups and heritage organisations may oppose changes that impact the historic landscape.

## Positives for housing associations

1. **Enhanced appeal:** Social housing within or near registered parks and gardens benefits from scenic surroundings, benefitting nearby residents
2. **Sustainability potential:** Green spaces can support eco-friendly retrofit measures, such as passive cooling and rainwater harvesting
3. **Funding opportunities:** Heritage grants and conservation funding may be available for projects that align with preservation goals
4. **Community integration:** Retrofitting within heritage landscapes can foster stronger community ties and engagement

# Best practices for retrofitting

- **Early consultation:** Engage with local authorities and heritage experts to ensure compliance with conservation policies
- **Sensitive design approaches:** Use materials and techniques that respect the historic character while improving energy efficiency
- **Sustainable solutions:** Implement retrofit measures that enhance environmental performance without compromising heritage value
- **Stakeholder collaboration:** Work with residents, conservation groups, and planners to develop retrofit strategies that balance modern needs with heritage preservation

By carefully navigating these factors, housing associations can successfully retrofit housing while respecting the integrity of registered parks and gardens.

## Central Lodge, Birkenhead Park

Central Lodge is a grade II listed building in Birkenhead Park (figure 1), a grade I registered park and garden. Proposals came forward to extend, conserve, and retrofit the building to very high standard. This would make it a net zero energy use building. The project would be the UK's first Passivhaus certified listed building.

Considered a landmark in its local area, the building needed to be treated sensitively. The plans included restoring the building after it had fallen into disrepair and aimed to preserve its character while embedding new technology to improve its energy efficiency. This includes:

- Solar Panels with battery storage
- Air source heat pump (ASHP)
- Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery system (MVHR)
- High tech Vacuum Glazing
- Layered wood fibre and lime internal wall insulation



Figure 1 is Central Lodge in its current condition. Source: Sustainability statement accompanying the planning permission

There were multiple heritage constraints affecting the project, which challenged the site's ability to be restored. However, the planning proposal argued that the new extension would preserve and enhance the area's heritage, and that any harm to the significance of the listed building would be outweighed by the public benefit gained from the works. This was supported by the positive public response to the project, with respondents to surveys voting overwhelmingly in favour of the making the building more energy efficient.

The case demonstrates that even highly protected buildings in sensitive locations can be upgraded for energy efficiency.

## Helpful resources

- [Wirral Council planning application search, application LBC/22/01791](#)
- [Historic England National Heritage List, entry for Birkenhead Park](#)



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