RISE | Retrofit information, support & expertise

Introduction to Heritage Buildings

Supply chain advice pack

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Overview

It is well known that one of England's greatest uses of carbon dioxide emissions is heating and powering domestic buildings (see figure 1). To help tackle climate change and for the UK to meet its national net zero obligations, it must act to reduce the amount of energy people use to heat and power their homes. This often means taking steps to improve the fabric of the buildings people live in, which can be challenging if they are either historic or heritage buildings.

This advice pack introduces some basic information for supply chain organisations working in heritage buildings for the first time. Heritage buildings are not the same as historic buildings;the former are defined by being protected for their heritage value, while the latter are defined by their age and construction. For more information about historic buildings, see our advice pack library (Toolkits | Retrofit Information, Support and Expertise).

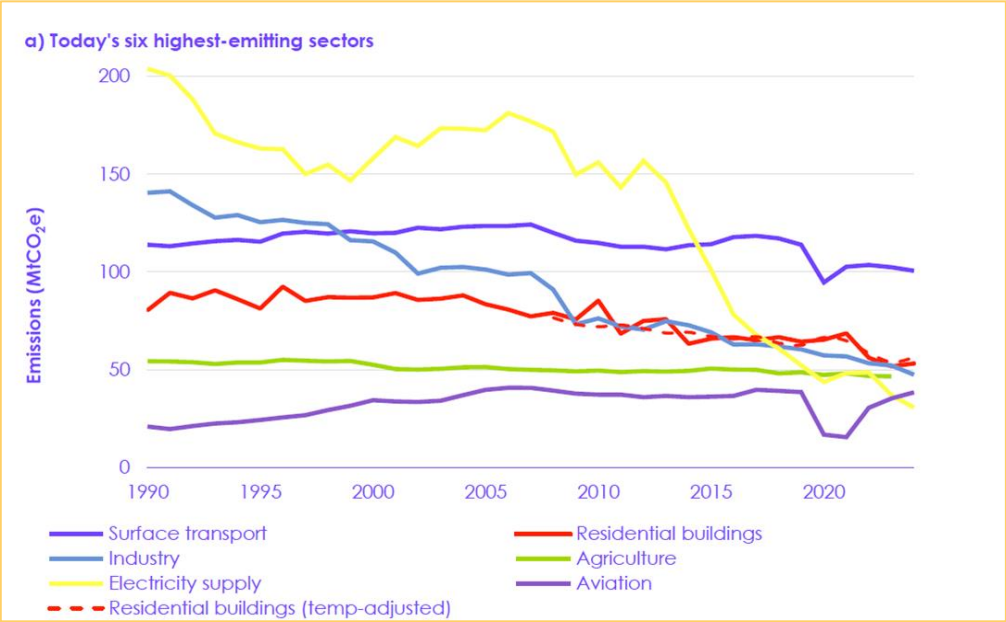

Figure 1 shows UK emissions by sector since 1990.
Source: Carbon Change Committee 2025

What are heritage buildings?

Heritage buildings can be seen as those that are protected for their heritage character, which is also known as 'significance'. The way they are designated as heritage buildings, known as the 'designation' informs the way they are managed. There are several forms of designation for heritage buildings:

- Scheduled ancient monuments (figure 2).
- Listed buildings (figure 3).
- Conservation areas (figure 4).
- Locally listed buildings (figure 5).
- Registered parks and gardens (figure 6).

- World heritage sites (figure 7).

It's difficult to estimate how many domestic properties are protected for their heritage, as some listings cover multiple homes (figure 3) and most conservation areas include several buildings (figure 4). According to Historic England (2025), England has:

- Over 370,000 listed buildings in three 'grades':
  - Grade I listed buildings make up 2.5% of all listed buildings.
  - Grade II* listed buildings make up 5.8% of listed buildings.
  - The vast majority, 91.7% of listed buildings, are grade II listed.
- Around 10,000 conservation areas (Historic England, n.d).
- About 5.9 million pre-1919 buildings in England, 20% of the whole building stock (Historic England 2024).

It is therefore certain that many heritage buildings are homes that need to be made more energy efficient (figures 2 – 7).

Figures 2 shows Ince Manor, a scheduled ancient monument in Cheshire, being converted to housing. Source: thornber.net

Figure 3 shows 1 – 9 Theed Street, London, a row of nine homes covered by one listing. Source: Prime Location

Figure 4 shows social housing in Eastwood conservation area, Broxtowe. Source: Broxtowe Council

Figure 5 shows a locally listed 1920s building in Hitchin. Source: North Herts District Council

Figure 6 shows Central Lodge, a vacant building in Birkenhead registered park, which is being currently being retrofitted. Source: Ecospheric

Figure 7 shows a social housing in the Bath world heritage site. Source: McAndrew Martin Ltd

How are the different heritage assets managed?

Once a building is designated, it becomes known as a heritage asset. The way the asset is managed depends on its designation, as shown in the table below (Table 1). It shows that the local authority is responsible for the designation and management of conservation areas and locally listed buildings, and the management of all heritage assets except scheduled ancient monuments.

The local authority role

As shown above, the local authority is key to decision making around heritage buildings. This is because most of them are protected through planning legislation, which is dealt with through the normal planning permission process. Listed buildings are an exception because listed building consent is required for works, but this is also usually managed by the local planning authority.

Local authorities are advised by the Government advisor on the historic environment, Historic England. However, Historic England only directly advises local planning authorities on individual cases when they involve:

- Grade I listed buildings
- Grade II* listed buildings
- Demolition

This means that only a very small proportion of cases receive direct advice. Planning and listed building applications to retrofit grade II listed and conservation area buildings will be decided by the local authority, using Historic England's published guidance like the 2024 Historic Environment Advice Note HEAG321 Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency.

Asset management table

Asset type	Designated by	Management	Other considerations
Scheduled monument	Department for Culture, Digital, Media and Sport (on advice from Historic England	Consent managed by Historic England	Overrides listed building consent
Listed buildings	Historic England	Consent managed by the local authority. Historic England sometimes advises	Applies to the whole building including curtilage, fixtures and fittings. In-use churches in certain denominations are exempt
Conservation areas	Local authorities	Managed by the local authority through planning permission, as a material consideration	Local authorities can use the General Permitted Development Order to manage external changes. Can withdraw permitted development rights with an Article 4 Direction (Article 4 directions)
Locally listed buildings	Local authorities	Managed by the local authority through planning permission, as a material consideration	Local authorities can use the General Permitted Development Order to manage external changes. Can withdraw permitted development rights with an Article 4 Direction
Registered parks and gardens	Historic England	Managed by the local authority through planning permission, as a material consideration	Local authorities can use the General Permitted Development Order to manage external changes. Can withdraw permitted development rights with an Article 4 Direction
World heritage sites	United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO)	Managed by the local authority through planning permission, as a material consideration	Local authorities can use the General Permitted Development Order to manage external changes. Can withdraw permitted development rights with an Article 4 Direction

Table 1 shows how the different heritage assets are designated, and then who is responsible for their management.

Recent case studies

There are a growing number of local planning authorities taking steps to allow energy efficiency measures to be installed in heritage buildings sensitively:

- Individual cases
  - Broxtowe: External wall insulation (EWI) on historic buildings that are within and contribute to the character of a conservation area, where the detail of the supplier's EWI solution was an important factor.
  - Letchworth: External wall insulation on historic buildings that are within and contribute to the character of a conservation area, where the contractor's method of finishing a new render was an important factor.
  - Bath: Double glazing in a grade I listed building in a world heritage site, where the condition of the existing windows was important.
- Planning policy
  - York: The York Minster Precinct Neighbourhood Plan has led to a host of decisions enabling a more energy efficient historic environment.
  - Bath: The Green Heritage Homes project, funded by DESNZ, has established new planning services that support homeowners in navigating the need to protect heritage significance with the need to make the building fabric more energy efficient.

Balancing harm with public benefit

In each case study, the local authority has been able to comply with the National Planning Policy Framework and show that any harm to the heritage assets will be outweighed by the public benefit achieved through making them more energy efficiency. This has been achieved through close collaboration between supply chain organisations and clients, whether the local authority, a housing association, or another large estate.

Managing risk

Although the above case studies show that it is possible to make heritage buildings more energy efficient, many local authorities continue to resist such changes. This is partly because many heritage buildings are also traditionally constructed with solid walls, which both comprise heritage significance and are particularly prone to unintended consequences from retrofit works. This risk is well researched by Historic England, which published *Risks of energy efficiency interventions in buildings of traditional construction* in June 2025.

PAS 2035 is a widely accepted industry standard used for domestic retrofit projects and is required by some government funded schemes such as Warm Homes. It also contains guidance on dealing with heritage and historic buildings. Relevant PAS 2035: 2023 clauses include:

- A.1.2 details the qualifications required for retrofit assessors when working in the on buildings of traditional construction.

- 7.3.2 g) states that RdSAP may not offer appropriate U-value assumptions for traditionally constructed buildings
- 7.3.4 If the dwelling to be assessed is of traditional construction, an assessment of significance shall also be carried out in accordance with BS 7913. A template of a simplified version of a significance assessment is included in annex E of PAS2035. This suggests that the retrofit coordinator's discretion should be used to seek specialist heritage skills where required.
- Information on the significance survey checklist in Table E.1 and E.2

Recognising that there are risks around making historic buildings more energy efficient, PAS 2035 sets out specific qualifications that certain individuals in the supply chain should achieve before working on them. Historic England, working with the other national heritage organisations, has recently published a handbook that can be used to deliver the required qualification:

- Level 3 award in Energy Efficiency Measures for Older and Traditional Buildings can be delivered with an open source handbook published by the home nations heritage agencies.

To manage this risk, it is often advised that new works should be 'like-for-like' in performance and appearance. This usually involves using traditional, breathable materials such as:

- Lime based mortars and renders instead of cement.
- Timber instead of plastic windows and doors.
- Natural alternatives to modern insulation materials, such as wood fibre and hemp.

Legal requirements

Everyone working with heritage assets, particularly listed buildings, should be aware that to alter, extend or demolish them without consent is a criminal offence. There are lots of cases where owners have been fined and ordered to pay legal costs after unauthorised works to a heritage asset.

Tips for suppliers delivering retrofit

- Assess which properties in your project fall under any heritage pathways.
- Check PAS 2035 heritage building requirements.
- Check which parties are involved with the management of any heritage buildings in your project.
- You may need specialist skills, materials and subject matter expertise.
- In government funded projects you may want to consider which year these homes will fit in and their lead in times.

Resources

Disclaimer: some content referred to may be about PAS 2035:2019.

Podcast: All RISE podcasts are available here.

Podcast: "Historic England Advice Notes (HEANs)" available here.

Masterclass: All RISE masterclasses are available here.

Masterclass: "Heritage retrofit examples with Edward Hart Consultancy" available here.

Advice pack: All RISE advice packs available here.

Advice packs: RISE Heritage Planning advice pack available here.

This pack aims to share insights, good practices, and lessons learned from the sector. It is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute as recommendations or endorsements of specific suppliers, products, or services or as legal advice. Please always check the latest regulations.

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