



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

# Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings

General principles applied by the Secretary of State when deciding whether a building is of special architectural or historic interest and should be added to the list of buildings compiled under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

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Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.

# Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings

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## Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the general principles that the Secretary of State applies when deciding whether a building is of special architectural or historic interest and should be added to the list of buildings compiled under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Secretary of State cannot take any other factors into account when considering his decision.

## Identifying and Recording the Historic Environment

2. In its broadest sense, the historic environment embraces all those aspects of the country that reflect the shaping hand of human history. Scarcely any part of England is untouched by the interaction between people and nature, which has taken place over thousands of years. Some of the most obvious features of this environment are historic buildings. England is exceptionally rich in these - great churches, houses, and civic buildings - but our understanding of the historic environment now encompasses a much wider range of features, and in particular stresses the relationship between individual buildings, and also the value of historic townscape and landscape as a whole.
3. There is growing appreciation not just of the architectural set pieces, but of many more structures, especially industrial, agricultural and other vernacular buildings that, although sometimes individually unassuming, collectively reflect some of the most distinctive and creative aspects of English history. More than this, our understanding and appreciation of the historic environment now stretches beyond buildings to the spaces and semi-natural features that people have also moulded, and which are often inseparable from the buildings themselves. For example, the pattern of roads and open spaces and the views they create within historic townscapes may be as valuable as the buildings. In the countryside, the detailed patterns of fields and farms, of hedgerows and walls, and of hamlets and villages, are among the most highly valued aspects of our environment. England is particularly rich in the designed landscapes of parks and gardens, and the built and natural features they contain: the greatest of these are as important to national, and indeed international, culture, as are our greatest buildings.
4. Processes of classification are necessary for the practical purposes of identifying and protecting individual sites and areas. This is achieved through the statutory systems for scheduling ancient monuments, listing historic buildings and designating conservation areas. Scheduling and listing are undertaken by the Secretary of State; designation of conservation areas is the responsibility of local planning authorities. In addition, English Heritage compiles registers of parks and gardens of special historic interest, and of historic battlefields. Once identified in these ways, the historic environment may be protected through the planning system.

## Listing Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest

5. Section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to compile or approve a list or lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest as a guide to the planning authorities when carrying out

their planning functions. The planning system is designed to regulate the development and use of land in the public's interest. The designation of historic sites enables the planning system to protect them, through the complementary systems of listed building consent and conservation area control, coupled with controls over scheduled monument consent.

6. The statutory criteria for listing are the special architectural or historic interest of a building. Many buildings are interesting architecturally or historically, but, in order to be listed, a building must have "special" interest.
7. Buildings on the list are graded to reflect their relative architectural and historic interest. Buildings of historic interest may justify a higher grading than would otherwise be appropriate.
  - Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest;
  - Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest;
  - Grade II buildings are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them.
8. In addition to the statutory criteria and the general principles contained in this guidance, Selection Guides for different building types are published on English Heritage's website. The Selection Guides provide detailed technical information about each building type, and are linked to the general principles contained in this guidance. They demonstrate what features are considered significant and likely to make a building of special architectural or historic interest when assessing buildings of a particular type from different periods, regions, or styles. It is recognised that some buildings are unique or will fall into more than one building type. Where a building is a composite of different types, then any relevant criteria from the Selection Guides applies. The general principles outlined below take precedence over the Selection Guides, which are published as supplementary information. The Guides are updated and revised when needed to reflect the growing understanding of the significance of particular types of building through further research.

### **Statutory Criteria**

9. The Secretary of State uses the following criteria when assessing whether a building is of special interest and therefore should be added to the statutory list:
  - **Architectural Interest.** To be of special architectural interest a building must be of importance in its architectural design, decoration or craftsmanship; special interest may also apply to nationally important examples of particular building types and techniques (e.g. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;
  - **Historic Interest.** To be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history and/or have close historical associations with nationally important people. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing.
10. When making a listing decision, the Secretary of State may take into account the extent to which the exterior contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part. This is generally known as group value. The Secretary of State will take this into account particularly where buildings comprise an important architectural or historic unity or a fine example of planning (e.g. squares, terraces or model villages) or where there is a historical functional relationship between a group of buildings. If a building is designated because of its group value, protection applies to the whole of the property, not just the exterior.

11. When considering whether a building is of special architectural or historic interest the Secretary of State may take into account the desirability of preserving, on the grounds of its architectural or historic interest, any feature of the building containing a man-made object or structure fixed to the building or forming part of the land and comprised within the curtilage of the building. The desirability of preserving such a feature is a factor which would increase the likelihood of the building being listed. However, in the absence of any other aspects of special architectural or historic interest, such features will justify the listing of the building only if they are of themselves of sufficient interest to render the building of special interest. The provision can be used for a variety of features; examples could include a finely panelled sixteenth century room, a fireplace and over-mantel that has been introduced from another building, or an elaborate plaster ceiling. This provision cannot be used to preserve in situ anything that is not a fixture, such as furniture or paintings.

## General Principles

12. Age and rarity. The older a building is, and the fewer the surviving examples of its kind, the more likely it is to have special interest. The following chronology is meant as a guide to assessment; the dates are indications of likely periods of interest and are not absolute. The relevance of age and rarity will vary according to the particular type of building because for some types, dates other than those outlined below are of significance. However, the general principles used are that:
- before 1700, all buildings that contain a significant proportion of their original fabric are listed;
  - from 1700 to 1840, most buildings are listed;
  - after 1840, because of the greatly increased number of buildings erected and the much larger numbers that have survived, progressively greater selection is necessary;
  - particularly careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945;
  - buildings of less than 30 years old are normally listed only if they are of outstanding quality and under threat.
13. Aesthetic merits. The appearance of a building – both its intrinsic architectural merit and any group value – is a key consideration in judging listing proposals, but the special interest of a building will not always be reflected in obvious external visual quality. Buildings that are important for reasons of technological innovation, or as illustrating particular aspects of social or economic history, may have little external visual quality.
14. Selectivity. Where a building qualifies for listing primarily on the strength of its special architectural interest, the fact that there are other buildings of similar quality elsewhere is not likely to be a major consideration. However, a building may be listed primarily because it represents a particular historical type in order to ensure that examples of such a type are preserved. Listing in these circumstances is largely a comparative exercise and needs to be selective where a substantial number of buildings of a similar type and quality survive. In such cases, the Secretary of State's policy is to list only the most representative or most significant examples of the type.
15. National interest. The emphasis in these criteria is to establish consistency of selection to ensure that not only are all buildings of strong intrinsic architectural interest included on the list, but also the most significant or distinctive regional buildings that together make a major contribution to the national historic stock. For instance, the best examples of local vernacular buildings will normally be listed because together they illustrate the importance of distinctive local and regional traditions. Similarly, for example, some buildings will be listed because they represent a nationally important but localised industry, such as shoemaking in Northamptonshire or cotton production in Lancashire.

16. State of repair. The state of repair of a building is not a relevant consideration when deciding whether a building meets the test of special interest. The Secretary of State will list a building which has been assessed as meeting the statutory criteria, irrespective of its state of repair.

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