Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Title of Report:	**Department for Communities (DfC) Consultation Paper on 'Conservation Principles: Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment in Northern Ireland'**
Committee Report Submitted To:	**PLANNING COMMITTEE**
Date of Meeting:	**25th August 2021**
For Decision or For Information	**For Decision**

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Our elected members work collaboratively and make decisions on an evidence led basis and in line with its policies.
Lead Officer	Principal Planning Officer

Budgetary Considerations: Not applicable in this case	
Cost of Proposal	
Included in Current Year Estimates	
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. **Not applicable in this case.**		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present the Department for Communities (DfC) Consultation Paper on 'Conservation Principles: Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment in Northern Ireland'.

2.0 Background

2.1 DfC wrote to Council on 5th August 2021 advising of an upcoming public consultation exercise from 13th August until 8th October 2021 (see Appendix 1).

2.2 The document (see Appendices 2 & 3) sets out a proposal for a Conservation Principles framework for the sustainable management decision-making affecting the historic environment in Northern Ireland, containing the following six principles:

- **Principle 1** - The historic environment is of value to us all.
- **Principle 2** - Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment.
- **Principle 3** - Understanding the significance of heritage assets is vital.
- **Principle 4** - Heritage assets shall be managed to sustain their significance.
- **Principle 5** - Decisions about change shall be reasonable, transparent and consistent.
- **Principle 6** - Documenting and learning from decisions is essential.

2.3 It is intended that by setting out these overarching principles, that the process and consistency in decision-making and advice is transparent and that it will clarify the Department's position on important matters affecting heritage assets, including those in relation to its statutory obligations.

2.3 The six principles are consistent with the approach taken by Historic England, Cadw (Wales), Historic Environment Scotland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland) to ensure a clear, shared approach across these islands. This publication is tailored to the processes through which the historic environment is managed in Northern Ireland. The framework supports the Department's five-year strategy (Building Inclusive Communities 2020-2025) and has parallels in the draft Programme for Government and Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS).

3.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Planning Committee agree to the Head of Planning responding to DfC on behalf of Council.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: DfC Letter to Council re Consultation Paper.
Appendix 2: DfC Consultation Paper - Supporting text
Appendix 3: DfC Consultation Paper

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To All Council Heads of Planning

Date: 4 August 2021

Dear colleague

NOTIFICATION OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION - CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES - GUIDANCE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Department for Communities will be publicly consulting on a guidance document *'CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES - Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Northern Ireland'*. I thought it would be helpful to provide you with advance notification of the forthcoming 8 week consultation period, commencing on **13 August and closing on 8 October 2021.**

The purpose of the Conservation Principles document is to set out a best practice conservation framework to inform all aspects of decision making affecting our historic environment. The six key conservation principles are based on internationally established conservation standards, consistent with the approaches of Historic England, Cadw (Wales), Historic Environment Scotland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland). The document also seeks to achieve a clear, shared approach across these islands, tailored to the processes through which the historic environment is managed in Northern Ireland.

This document demonstrates our processes in decision making and provision of advice, and also clarifies our position on other matters affecting heritage assets across Northern Ireland, including those in relation to our statutory obligations as set out in the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, Planning Act (NI) 2011 and obligations under The Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (NI) 2015.

The document encourages central government, local authorities, heritage asset owners, developers and their agents/advisers to refer to these Conservation Principles when considering changes which impact on a designated or non-designated heritage asset.

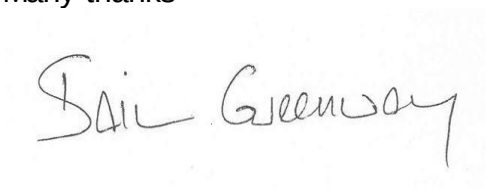
INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Consultation responses are welcomed, so that comments or any identified issues can be taken into account prior to publication and included in the synopsis of responses which will be published after the consultation period. A brief overview of the Conservation Principles document will be provided at the next Strategic Planning Group meeting on 16 September.

The consultation documents will be made available on the Department's website, together with details of how to respond, from 13 August.

Should you have any queries regarding this email please contact our Heritage Advice and Regulation team by e-mail HED.ConservationPrinciples@communities-ni.gov.uk, or by telephone on (028) 9081 9226.

Many thanks



IAIN GREENWAY
Director, Historic Environment Division

Department for Communities | An Roinn Pobal | Depairtment fur Commonities

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Public Consultation Paper

Conservation Principles

Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Northern Ireland

13 August – 08 October 2021

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1. Minister's Foreword

It is important to appreciate the contribution that heritage makes to our communities and to our social and economic wellbeing. All heritage assets are a product of a rich and complex history that has made our landscape, villages, towns and cities unique and special.

To understand and appreciate the significance of these heritage assets is fundamental in realising the full potential of our historic environment. Making good decisions and managing our assets is something we can work together on, ensuring that they are well maintained and protected for future generations

We are in a difficult time, and it is vital that we all support communities, people and places to improve lives through the recovery from Covid-19 impacts. The Department wants to support communities at all levels, to ensure that heritage at the heart of communities is cared for and adapted sustainably, so that it can continue to have positive impacts for the people it connects.

I would very much value your consideration of the Conservation Principles framework document. My Department wants to work together with key stakeholders to ensure that appropriate decisions can be made in relation to heritage assets, and I hope the conservation framework for this work will ensure we provide this support consistently.

Deirdre Hargey MLA
Minister for Communities
28 March 2021

2. Background

Northern Ireland currently has around 52,000 recorded heritage assets, and approximately a quarter of these are protected by formal designation. The Department for Communities also has responsibility for 190 monuments in state care.

The Department's Historic Environment Division (HED) has drafted a paper entitled 'Conservation Principles; Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Northern Ireland'.

The principles within the document are based on internationally established conservation doctrine, and align with our obligations under Council of Europe Conventions on the protection of heritage, and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) charters laying out good practice and guidance for conservation of the historic environment.

The Conservation Principles guidance sets out a best practice conservation framework for all aspects of decision-making affecting our historic environment. It is intended that by setting out these overarching principles, our process and consistency in decision-making and advice is transparent; it will clarify the Department's position on important matters affecting heritage assets across Northern Ireland, including those in relation to its statutory obligations as set out in the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, Planning Act (NI) 2011 and The Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (NI) 2015.

The six conservation principles set out within this publication are consistent with the approach by Historic England, Cadw (Wales), Historic Environment Scotland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland) to ensure a clear, shared approach across these islands. This publication is tailored to the processes through which the historic environment is managed in Northern Ireland.

The well-informed change management and care of our heritage assets is essential to supporting outcomes within the Department's five year strategy (Building Inclusive Communities 2020-2025) and also has parallels in the draft Programme for Government and Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS).

3. Consultation Details

In this consultation document the Department for Communities ("the Department") sets out a proposal for a Conservation Principles framework for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views of all interested parties on the Department's proposal. The consultation will run for eight weeks. The Department will give due consideration to all responses and a synopsis of responses will be published as soon as practicable following the consultation period.

Copies of this consultation document may be made without seeking permission. This document is also available in alternative formats; please contact us to discuss your requirements. The document is published on the Department's website.

If you have any queries regarding this consultation please contact the Heritage Advice and Regulation team by e-mail, by post to the address below or by telephone through our enquiries line on (028) 9081 9226.

How to Respond

Early responses are encouraged but all responses should arrive no later than 5pm on 08 October 2021.

Complete the questions in the online survey found at **https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/hedconservationprinciples-publicconsultation**

Alternatively, responses may be sent by email to **HED.ConservationPrinciples@communities-ni.gov.uk** or by post to:

Conservation Principles Consultation
Historic Environment Division
Department for Communities
Ground Floor
9 Lanyon Place
Town Parks
BELFAST, BT1 3LP

When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation. Before you submit your responses please read the "Confidentiality of Consultations" section below, which gives guidance on the legal position.

Equality Screening

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that public authorities have due regard to equality issues in carrying out functions relating to Northern Ireland. We have completed an equality screening of the document being consulted upon and have concluded that they do not impact on equality of opportunity for any of the nine categories specified in section 75 (religious belief; political opinion; race; age; marital status; sexual orientation; men and women generally; disability; and dependants).

We have not identified any evidence of higher or lower participation or uptake by different groups; that different groups have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to the particular proposal; that there is an opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity or better community relations by altering the proposal or working with others in government or the community at large. Engagement with relevant groups, organisations or individuals has not indicated that particular proposals create problems that are specific to them.

The Equality Commission will receive copies of this document as part of the consultation exercise. We will take into account any comments the Commission might have.

Human Rights Act 1998

The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights ("the Convention") and makes it unlawful for a public authority to act in a way that is incompatible with these rights.

The proposed framework will have a positive impact with regard to human health, public safety and environmental quality. The new document will enhance rather than be detrimental to applicants' Convention rights. There is no obligation to avail of the benefits available under the new framework. The Department's view is that the document is fully compliant with Convention rights.

The Human Rights Commission will receive copies of this document as part of the consultation. We will take into account any comments the Commission may make.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

The Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) is a process to ensure that all relevant Government outputs are examined carefully and objectively to determine whether or not they have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere, because of the particular characteristics of rural areas. Where necessary the process should also examine what adjustments might be made to reflect rural needs and in particular to ensure that, as far as possible, public services are accessible on a fair basis to the rural community.
The Department has considered this framework in relation to the rural community and has found no potential differential impacts.

Confidentiality of Consultations

For this consultation, we may publish all responses, withholding personal information such as names, email addresses, postal addresses and phone numbers from responses, but apart from that we may publish them in full. For more information about what we do with the information please see our privacy notice: Link to **DfC GDPR Privacy Notice**

Responses to this consultation may be disclosed in accordance with Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however all disclosures will be in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations EU 2016/679.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority (the Department in this case). This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation.

The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation, as confidential. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

DfC is the data controller in respect of any personal data that you provide and DfC privacy notice gives details in respect of your rights in respect of handling your personal data: Link to **DfC Privacy Notice**

4. Proposals - HED Conservation Principles (Consultation) Paper

Link to **Conservation Principles paper**

5. Questions

Q1: Are you responding to this consultation on behalf of an organisation or as an individual? Please specify organisation.

Q2: What connection do you/does your organisation have with heritage matters?

Q3: Do you agree with the overall approach to the Conservation Principles as outlined within its introduction? (Please provide any comments to explain your answer)

Q4: Do you agree or disagree with each of the proposed six key principles and their associated aims on a scale of 1-5, 1 (strongly disagree), 2(agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) to 5 (strongly agree)?

Please provide any comments to explain your answer and indicate to which Principles (1-6) your comments refer.

Q5: Do you agree or disagree with the approach to Understanding Significance, and the three key interests of archaeological, architectural and historic? (Please provide any comments to explain your answer)

Q6: Do you agree or disagree with the approach to Assessment of Significance? (Please provide any comments to explain your answer)

Q7: Do you agree or disagree with the approach to Managing Change to a Heritage Asset? (Please provide any comments to explain your answer)

Q8: Is there any other comment you would like to make on the document content?

Q9: In responding to this consultation, please highlight any possible unintended consequences of the proposals and any practical difficulties you foresee in implementing them.

6. The consultation process and how to respond

FRAMEWORK FOR CONSULTATION	SUMMARY DETAIL
Topic of this consultation	Introduction of a Conservation Principles document is to set out a best practice conservation framework to inform all aspects of decision-making affecting our historic environment.
Scope of this consultation	The consultation will help inform and refine the Conservation Principles document
Audience	Anyone with an interest in this area is welcome to respond. The Department encourages central government, local authorities, heritage asset owners, developers and their agents/advisers to refer to these Conservation Principles when considering changes which impact on a designated or non-designated heritage asset.
Body responsible for the consultation	The Department for Communities
Duration	The consultation will run for 8 weeks. It will begin on 13 August and will end on 08 October 2021
Enquiries	e-mail: **HED.ConservationPrinciples@communities-ni.gov.uk** telephone: (028) 9081 9226
How to respond	Please respond to the consultation in one of the following ways: Complete the questions in the online survey at: **https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/hedconservationprinciples-publicconsultation** By email to **HED.ConservationPrinciples@communities-ni.gov.uk** including CONSULTATION RESPONSE in the title line By post to: **Conservation Principles Consultation** Historic Environment Division Department for Communities Ground Floor 9 Lanyon Place Town Parks BELFAST, BT1 3LP
After the consultation	The views and advice expressed in responses to this consultation may be placed in the public domain. Each response will inform the Department in its consequential publication.

Department for Communities | An Roinn Pobal | Depairtment fur Commonities

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Helping communities to enjoy and realise the value of our historic environment

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Historic Environment Division

Conservation Principles

Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Northern Ireland

July 2021

Historic Environment Division (HED) aim

“Helping communities to enjoy and realise the value of our historic environment”

We do this by:

- Recording, protecting, conserving, advising, promoting and enhancing its value
- Utilising and growing our specialist knowledge and expertise in collaboration with a wide range of groups and individuals
- Contributing to the Executive’s objectives as laid out in the Programme for Government

Our historic environment provides authentic and attractive places which increase our pride, character and identity, lead to improved wellbeing and community engagement, and to prosperity through tourism, investment, skills, regeneration and creativity. It is a precious and finite resource available to present generations, and with appropriate management, to future generations.

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Introduction

Our historic environment is central to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage, providing us with a sense of place, identity and wellbeing. It is a resource to be protected, conserved and, where possible, enhanced for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Department for Communities (DfC) encourages these Conservation Principles to be referred to for guidance by the following when considering changes which impact on a designated or non-designated heritage asset:

- owners and people responsible for looking after heritage assets;
- developers and their consultant teams;
- policy makers and decision makers in central government and local authorities

Our historic environment is constantly changing, but each part of it represents a finite resource. The process of managing change to a heritage asset and its setting must be carried out in ways that best sustain its significance and retain character, distinctiveness, local identity and quality of the places in which we live and work, for present and future generations.

The purpose of this document is to set out a best practice conservation-led framework to inform all aspects of decision-making which affect our historic environment, and to reconcile its protection with the economic and social needs and aspirations of our communities.

This document is the first part of a two part publication on DfC's Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the Historic Environment. This document, Part 1, sets out the six key guiding Conservation Principles. Part 2 will set out how to apply these principles.

The conservation principles within this guidance will inform the exercise by HED of its following functions, namely:

- in our decision-making prior to undertaking work on sites in our ownership and care;
- in our decision-making and in our advice to others;
- to inform our consultation advice to local councils on planning applications;
- when providing advice with regard to the marine historic environment for development proposals either seaward, or exempt from, terrestrial planning;
- when contributing to Local Development Plans;
- in publishing guidance relating to the historic environment; and assessing applications where we provide financial support.

The Conservation Principles have been developed to be consistent with:

- International Conventions:

  United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982

  The Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention), 1985

  The Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention), 1992

  The European Landscape Convention (Florence Convention), 2000

- Legislative requirements:

  Protection of Wrecks Act 1973

  Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995

  Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

  Planning Act (NI) 2011

  Marine Act (NI) 2013
- British Standards:

  The British Standard 7913:2013 Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings.

The six conservation principles set out within this publication are consistent with the approach by Historic England, Cadw, Historic Environment Scotland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland) to ensure a clear, shared approach across these islands. This publication is tailored to the process through which the historic environment is managed in Northern Ireland.

Context with strategic policy documents in Northern Ireland

The importance of our historic environment and its protection is recognised by the Northern Ireland Executive. The following are extracts from key strategic policy documents for Northern Ireland:

The **Regional Development Strategy 2035** includes the explicit objective to:

> 'Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake' [RDS aims, 2.10) and;
>
> 'Conserve, protect, and where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment' [RG11] adding that,
>
> 'The environment, both in terms of natural and built heritage, is one of Northern Ireland's most important assets. Effective care of the environment provides very real benefits in terms of improving health and wellbeing, promoting economic development'

The **Strategic Planning Policy Statement 2015** includes the following Regional Strategic Objectives for archaeology and the built heritage:

> 'Secure the protection, conservation and, where possible, the enhancement of our built and archaeological heritage;
>
> Promote the sustainable development and environmental stewardship with regard to our built and archaeological heritage; and
>
> Deliver the economic and community benefit through conservation that facilitates productive use of our built heritage assets and opportunities for investment, whilst safeguarding their historic or architectural integrity'

The **Investment Strategy** for NI 2011-21 also covers heritage:

> 'We have a responsibility to present and future generations to protect and enhance our environment and to conserve the rich diversity that our natural and built heritage possesses.'

Conservation Principles

Principle 1 - The historic environment is of value to us all

1.1 Our historic environment contains a unique and dynamic record of human activity. It has been shaped by successive generations responding to the surroundings they inherited. It embodies lives, aspirations, skills and endeavour.

1.2 People value this historic environment as part of their cultural heritage. It reflects past societies' knowledge, beliefs and the traditions of diverse communities over time. It gives meaning, quality and context to the places in which we live and visit, providing a sense of continuity and a source of local identity and distinctive character. The historic environment helps to sustain and contribute to the social, economic and environmental requirements for present and future generations.

1.3 Each generation shapes and should sustain the historic environment in ways that allow people to understand, use, enjoy and benefit from it, without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same.

1.4 Heritage assets provide a link to the past and are therefore of public interest, regardless of ownership. The use of international conventions and charters, backed-up by appropriate legislation, policy and investment is justified relative to the value established to protect that public interest.

1.5 We should all recognise and understand the significance of heritage assets. Advice and assistance should be available from public sources to help owners and custodians protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the heritage assets of which they are guardians for present and future generations.

Principle 2 - Everyone should be able to participate in sustaining the historic environment

2.1 Everyone should have the opportunity to contribute their knowledge of the significance of heritage assets and to participate in decisions about their future, including change. Engagement ensures that all viewpoints, as far as is practical, are given consideration in decisions in an open and transparent way.

2.2 Learning is central to sustaining the historic environment. It raises awareness and understanding of our heritage, including the varied ways it is perceived by different generations and communities. Learning encourages engagement, which informs and promotes active participation in caring for the historic environment.

2.3 Experts shall use their knowledge and skills to encourage and enable others to learn about, value and care for the historic environment. They play a crucial role in discerning, communicating and sustaining the significance of heritage assets, and in helping people to refine and articulate the values they attach to them.

2.4 It is essential to develop, maintain and pass on the specialist knowledge and skills necessary to sustain the historic environment.

2.5 Physical work shall not be carried out on a heritage asset without the appropriate consents and advice. In such cases interventions are to be carried out by persons with the appropriate qualifications, experience, knowledge and skills.

Principle 3 - Understanding the significance of heritage assets is vital

3.1 The historic environment is made up of individual heritage assets: archaeological sites, monuments and buildings, historic wrecks, as well as the townscapes or landscape/seascape settings in which they are found. Any part of the historic environment which has a distinctive historic association or identity can be considered to be a heritage asset and therefore holds a significance.

3.2 The significance of a heritage asset embraces all the diverse cultural interests that people associate with it. These interests tend to grow in strength and complexity over time, as understanding deepens and perceptions of a heritage asset evolve.

3.3 Understanding and articulating what is significant about a heritage asset is critical to inform decisions about its future, ensuring decisions made are well-informed and based on sound evidence.

3.4 To identify the significance of a heritage asset, the value of the heritage interests shall be considered, including how and why they may have changed over time:

- Archaeological interest
- Architectural interest
- Historic interest

These are explained in more detail within the 'Understanding Significance' section later.

Principle 4 - Heritage assets shall be managed to sustain their significance

4.1 Change in the historic environment is inevitable. This can be the result of decay by natural processes, the wear and tear of use, or the need to respond to social, economic, environmental and technological change. For example, the impact of climate change and/or energy efficiency regulations on heritage assets is a particular challenge. Finding a sustainable use after its former use is obsolete also needs to be carefully considered so as not to negatively impact its significance.

4.2 Conservation is the process of managing change to a heritage asset and/or its setting in ways that will best sustain its heritage interest, and protect, conserve and enhance its significance for present and future generations.

4.3 Conservation of a heritage asset, including its setting, is achieved by gaining and sharing an understanding of its significance, and using that understanding to develop and manage the conservation approach:

- Identify heritage interests which are vulnerable to change;
- Define the constraints necessary to protect, conserve and enhance those interests;
- Achieve a balanced view between the impact of different options on the interests and significance of the heritage asset;
- Ensure consistency in decision-making which retains the significance of the heritage asset.

4.4 Not all heritage conservation action leads to interventions; at times the most appropriate approach may be to do nothing and monitor, for example when an ancient field monument remains stable and appreciated in a working agricultural landscape.

4.5 Where interventions are proposed, they are to be proportionate and justified by demonstrating that the benefits outweigh any resulting harm or loss to the heritage asset's fabric or setting. For example, improving access must not confuse our understanding of the past, but rather it should reveal or reinforce the significance of a heritage asset.

4.6 New work (interventions of any kind) shall respect the interest and setting of the heritage asset. It shall aspire to a high quality of design and execution, through the use of experienced crafts people and appropriate material selection, which may be valued both now and in the future. This neither implies nor precludes working in traditional or innovative ways.

Principle 5 - Decisions about change shall be reasonable, transparent and consistent

5.1 Owners, managers and occupiers of heritage assets are encouraged to seek advice and examples of best practice in preparing their conservation proposals.

5.2 The level of assessment and public engagement shall be sufficient to inform and justify the decision to be made, but efficient and proportionate in the use of resources.

5.3 Decisions about change in the historic environment demand the application of expertise, experience and judgement in a consistent, transparent process led by international conventions and charters, backed-up by appropriate legislation, policy and guidance throughout the process.

5.4 When assessing the impact of a proposed change, determining authorities shall give due regard to the significance and impact (present and proposed) of the heritage asset and its setting.

5.5 Potential conflict between sustaining the significance of a heritage asset and delivering other important public benefits is to be avoided or minimised by considering other ways of delivering those benefits.

5.6 If conflict cannot be avoided, the weight given to a heritage asset when making the decision shall be proportionate to the significance of the heritage asset, and the impact the proposed change will have on the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.

Principle 6 - Documenting and learning from decisions is essential

6.1 The information gathered in the understanding and assessing of significance shall be retained by the owner or manager of a heritage asset, and where appropriate placed in a public archive. This will ensure future generations will benefit from the knowledge gained.

6.2 The information and documentation for the justification of conservation decisions and the actions that follow them are crucial to maintaining a cumulative account of what has happened to a heritage asset. This will ensure an understanding of how and why its significance may have been altered and inform future decisions.

6.3 Owners and managers of heritage assets, and responsible public bodies, should monitor and evaluate the effects of change resulting from decisions and policies, and use that information to inform future decisions and policies.

6.4 In the exceptional case where all or part of a heritage asset will be lost, whether as a result of inevitable natural process or a decision, the opportunity to extract and record that information about the past must be realised. This requires investigation and analysis, followed by archiving and accessibility of the results, all at a level that reflects its significance.

6.5 Where such loss is the direct result of human intervention, the costs of this work shall be borne by those who benefit from the change, or who initiate the change in the public interest.

Understanding Significance

Preamble

7.1 We value the historic environment for many reasons, such as its distinctive archaeology, architecture or landscape, the stories it can tell us about our past, its physical connection with notable people or events and because we find it beautiful or inspiring. It may play a role as the focus for a community, and represent both tangible and intangible heritage. All of this we want to enjoy and sustain for the benefit of present and future generations.

7.2 The idea of 'significance' lies at the core of these principles. Understanding of a heritage asset's significance, be it a building, an archaeological site or a larger historic area such as a whole village or landscape, is achieved by evaluating and assessing the heritage interests to enable and allow for the effects of proposed changes to be fully considered. This necessitates the application of a systematic and consistent process.

7.3 Tangible heritage – physical evidence produced by human activity and passed from one generation to the next, e.g. artistic creations such as monuments, structures and buildings.

7.4 Intangible heritage - traditions or living expressions inherited from one generation to the next, such as oral traditions, social practices, or knowledge and skills.

7.5 Significance – the collective term for the sum of all the heritage interests attached to a heritage asset, including its setting. The following provides a summary of the core heritage interests, which apply to the significance of a heritage asset and may be expressed under one or more of these headings:

Archaeological interest

7.6 Archaeological interest of a heritage asset derives from the embodied evidence of past human activity. The evidence may sometimes be visible and relatively easy to access, but can also be less apparent (below ground remains and artefacts, palaeoenvironmental evidence, submerged marine heritage, or hidden beneath later built fabric) and therefore, obtained through careful investigation. The potential for evidence from occupied or vacant buildings must not be overlooked and is often an important driver for conservation decisions.

7.7 Physical remains of past human activity, including landform, are the primary source of evidence about the substance and evolution of a place, and of the people and cultures that made them. Landform includes monumental landscapes, with its deliberate connections from one monument to another or a prominent point in the landscape. These remains provide the primary evidence for when and how a heritage asset was made or built, what it was used for and how it has changed over time. The unrecorded loss of historic fabric represents the destruction of finite primary evidence.

7.8 Heritage assets will vary in how much they can contribute to our understanding

of our history and are vulnerable to inappropriate methods of gaining this knowledge. The use of good practice and appropriate techniques will ensure that information can be gained without causing unnecessary damage to potentially vulnerable structures. Any activity which prejudices future archaeological investigation harms the heritage asset. This can mean that some heritage assets, or parts of them, are very sensitive to change. Therefore, the use of good practice and appropriate techniques will ensure, that when unavoidable, information can be gained without causing unnecessary damage to potentially vulnerable structures. Expert advice must be sought to identify those sensitivities, and through suitable assessment or evaluation, informed decisions can be made on how best to proceed. Non-intrusive investigation is preferable to intrusive work to obtain the evidence without physical harm to the archaeology.

7.9 Additional evidence can be gained from documentary sources (historical records, contemporary written accounts, or reports from previous investigations), pictorial, maps or cartographic records, archaeological archives or museum collections. To assess the significance of this aspect of a heritage asset, all this evidence needs to be gathered in a systematic way and any gaps in the evidence identified.

7.10 Tangible and intangible evidence plays a vital role in helping us understand the past. The retention of as much of the primary evidence as possible, including local knowledge and tradition, is critical in aiding our ability to properly understand its realities. The ultimate aim of archaeological investigation is to obtain the evidence to increase knowledge and our understanding without damage to the heritage asset. Where an impact on the historic fabric is unavoidable, this is kept to the absolute minimum necessary. This is not always possible, particularly when the requirement for investigative work arises as a final recourse to record archaeological remains in advance of destruction through development. However, identifying gaps in evidence through research and surveys can help inform small scale limited evaluation to answer specific conservation questions; these can be beneficial in informing objectives to conserve and protect the integrity of an asset, or ensure its preservation in situ.

Architectural interest

7.11 Architectural interest derives from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a heritage asset. It includes the style, character and ornamentation, the plan form and functionality of the physical structure, and how it is understood within its setting. It is an interest in the art or science, including the artistic endeavour of construction, craftsmanship, detailing and decoration of buildings or structures of all types. This can be through formal design or the seemingly incidental outcome, or both, of how the heritage asset has evolved over time.

7.12 Architectural interest of a building, structure or landscape as a whole embraces composition (proportions, form, massing, silhouette, views and

vistas as well as circulation) and includes materials or planting. Architectural interest also includes; setting, spatial organisation, technological innovation, interiors, alterations, group value and arrangement of spaces or landscape.

7.13 Formal design can be categorised by a designed concept, be it architecture, structures, including industrial and defence structures, or landscape reinforced by human embellishment; design created through detailed instructions (such as by a known patron, architect, gardener or craftsman).

7.14 Incidental design can be can categorised as vernacular, that is, the result of a succession of responses within a particular cultural identity. They include, the relationship of buildings and structures and their materials to their locality; a harmonious, expressive or dramatic quality in the juxtaposition of buildings and structures with their setting; or the seemingly organic form of an urban or rural landscape.

7.15 The physical structure and composition of a heritage asset may have changed over time. Earlier visual records and written descriptions may be more powerful in people's minds than what survives today. Important vistas may be lost or screened, or access to them altered or temporarily denied. Therefore, the compiling of evidence of the past and present form of the heritage asset will inform our understanding, enabling decisions on the protection and conservation of the heritage asset.

7.16 Aesthetic interest resulting from the action of nature and time on buildings or structures, may overlie and enhance the interest of a conscious design (man-made) and may influence how we respond to the heritage asset. While the passage of time may simply add to the range and depth of the significance of the whole, on occasion nature may be in conflict with the heritage asset, and have the potential to cause harm, for example, vegetation rooting in masonry joints.

Historic interest

7.17 Historic interest derives not only from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through the fabric of a heritage asset to the present, but to a heritage asset's age, rarity and authenticity. Historic interest tends to be illustrative or associative.

7.18 Illustrative – the physical story of past historical events, people or distinctive aspects of life. The illustrative value of heritage assets tends to be greater if the historic fabric incorporates the first, or only surviving, example of an innovation derived from consequence, whether related to design, technology or aspects of social or cultural organisation.

7.19 Associative – the association with a notable person, family, movement or event. The place where something momentous happened can increase and intensify understanding through clear linking of historical accounts of events with the fabric of the heritage asset where they happened – provided the heritage asset still retains some semblance of its appearance at the time.

7.20 When these stories, illustrative or associative, form part of the identity or collective memory of a place for a community it can hold a social interest. Such values tend to change over time, and sometimes may be important for remembering positive or uncomfortable events, attitudes or periods in our history.

7.21 The functions of a heritage asset are likely to have changed over time, but the historic interest can be easily diminished when its history is concealed or not acknowledged.

7.22 Original fabric is a primary evidence source, and where it is associated with a notable individual or event it can expand our understanding and ability to illustrate our past.

7.23 The change from one style or fashion to another that a heritage asset may exhibit, will provide historic interest. For example, how an individual built or designed a garden, or created a settlement, may provide insight into their personality, or demonstrate their political or cultural affiliations. It can suggest aspects of their character and motivation that extend, or even contradict, what they or others wrote, or are recorded as having said, at the time.

7.24 The use of a heritage asset for its original purpose, for example as a place of recreation, defence, worship, or manufacture, illustrates the relationship between design and function, and so may make a major contribution to its historical interest. If so, cessation of that activity can potentially alter that interest. Conversely, abandoned historic settlements for example, may illustrate important historic events.

7.25 While physical heritage assets offer clear and obvious insight to our past, the historical treatment and naming of the landscape, place names and townlands, also gives a sense of place and identity that is deeply embedded in our society, local culture and traditions. Intangible cultural heritage is an equally important part of the heritage interest and identity.

Further suggested heritage interests

7.26 In some cases it may be appropriate to consider other aspects of interest such as:

Authenticity interest – valued because it is unique and has an integrity which must be safeguarded. Such safeguarding can impose a significant constraint on project decision making; or

Communal interest - derives from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory; or

Economic interest – providing a valuable source of income or employment, for example a historic landscape may be sought out for enjoyment for private reflection or social events which could generate economic income for the surrounding locality; or

Scientific interest - may be important for its scientific content or as a source for scholarly study; or

Social interest – may contribute towards social stability, social interaction and community cohesion, helping to identify the group values that make the community a desirable place to live and work; or

Spiritual interest – emanating from religious beliefs, or reflecting present-day perceptions of the spirit of place; or

Symbolic interest – may convey meaning and information that helps local communities to interpret identity and assert cultural personality.

The above headings are not exhaustive, and are provided as guidance in the assessment of 'significance'. Many of the named heritage interests will apply to the assessment of the significance of statutorily protected heritage assets. Criteria for their designation is however derived from legislation.

Assessment of Significance

8.1 Significance is evidence based, and new evidence can be uncovered at any time which modifies our understanding of a heritage asset. To identify significance, the heritage interests of an asset, its history, fabric and character, must be correctly understood. The different heritage interests of the asset must be researched, assessed and outlined in a Statement of Significance.

8.2 A Statement of Significance is a succinct assessment of the heritage asset. For example, it should cover the heritage interests in detail through consideration of:

- the heritage asset's origins;
- contextual relationship with other heritage assets;
- the surrounding natural and built environment;
- how and why it has changed over time;
- the form and condition of its constituent elements and materials;
- the technology of its construction;
- the function it provided or provides;
- any habitats it provides; and
- comparison with similar heritage assets in the locality, region or even nationally.

8.3 It is desirable to protect, conserve and enhance all the identified heritage interests of a heritage asset; but on occasion, what is necessary to sustain some interests will conflict with what is necessary to sustain others. Therefore, understanding significance is essential to objective decision-making.

8.4 An assessment of significance will need to identify how particular parts of a heritage asset and different periods in its evolution contribute to, or detract from, each identified heritage interest, producing a chronological sequence of its evolution.

8.5 Engaging with appropriate professional expertise to undertake this work is important to ensure the consistency and validity of this assessment.

8.6 Sources of information may include:

- Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI)
- Documentation underpinning any existing statutory designations
- Historical and archaeological archives (museum records)
- Published research frameworks
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)
- Personal recollections / dialogue
- Specific programmes of archaeological survey and investigation

8.7 Part of the assessment will normally be illustrated by maps, plans or photographic record showing the age and relative significance of the components or character areas of the heritage asset. When a scheme of work proposes potential change, it is important that the elements directly affected are addressed at an appropriate level of detail, but always in relation to the heritage asset as a whole.

8.8 Designation at an international, national or local level is an indicator of the importance of a particular heritage asset. However, non-designated heritage assets may represent monuments, buildings or landscapes which are locally important. Therefore, the absence of statutory designation does not necessarily imply lack of significance. Detailed research and analysis may reveal new evidence about any heritage asset and therefore, enable its review within current selection criteria for designation or the application of protective policies.

8.9 The fact that a heritage asset does not meet current criteria for formal designation does not negate the heritage interests it may have in creating a distinctive character or local identity for particular communities. Such interests shall be taken into account in making decisions about their future through the local authority and marine planning systems.

8.10 It could be argued that no Statement of Significance can ever be complete or totally objective. However, it must try to express the heritage interests identified fairly and not be influenced by consideration of any changes being proposed. Different people and communities may attach different weight to the same heritage interests of a heritage asset at the same time. Judgements about heritage interests, especially those relating to the recent past, tend to be influenced by current perspectives, which will likely evolve over time. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that Statements of Significance can change with time as new evidence emerges, or perceptions of the historic context of the heritage asset change.

Managing change to a heritage asset and its setting

9.1 Conservation involves the management of change in ways that will best protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution its setting makes on that significance.

9.2 Factors to consider in assessing the impact of change include:

- the relative contribution to significance of the elements affected (where appropriate, by reference to criteria for national or local designation), including the contribution of its setting;
- how the proposed change would affect these elements;
- the extent of any uncertainty about its heritage interests (particularly in relation to potential for hidden or buried elements); and
- any tensions between potentially conflicting interests.

9.3 Change to heritage assets is inevitable. The passage of time, natural forces and regular use will lead to erosion of historic fabric impacting the archaeological or architectural interest. Ensuring the long term future of our heritage assets often requires adaptation and change, which may be acceptable provided such interventions respect the recognised heritage interest and significance of the heritage asset. Owners and managers of heritage assets should not be discouraged from adding further layers of potential interest and value, provided that the existing recognised significance is not eroded or compromised in the process. It is acknowledged that work of successive generations often contributes to significance.

9.4 Retaining the economic viability or the social functions of heritage assets will sustain their survival and encourage their regular maintenance. For example, many archaeological sites can be maintained under sympathetic farming or forestry regimes, or as with historic parks, gardens or demesnes which form part of dynamic systems, they can benefit from continuous management practices. Lapses in management and maintenance regimes may lead to accelerated deterioration of heritage assets.

9.5 Decisions about change to heritage assets will involve balancing the significance of the heritage asset against the anticipated positives and negatives of the proposed intervention.

9.6 Managing appropriate change of a heritage asset balances a sound understanding of the significance of the asset with the requirements and aspirations of the current generation and a long term view for its protection for future generations. Only through this process, will we create a sustainable management of the historic environment.

Definitions

Includes words used in a specific or technical sense.

Alteration	Work intended to change the function or appearance of a heritage asset or part thereof
Authenticity	Those characteristics that most truthfully reflect and embody the cultural heritage interests of a heritage asset
Built Heritage	A collective term for heritage assets of local, regional or international significance because of their heritage value(s)
Conservation	The process of managing change to a heritage asset in its setting in ways that will best sustain its heritage values, while recognising opportunities to reveal or reinforce those values for present and future generations
Conservation area	An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, designated under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
Cultural heritage	Inherited assets which people identify and value as a reflection and expression of their evolving knowledge, beliefs and traditions, and of their understanding of the beliefs and traditions of others
Context	Any relationship between a heritage asset and its setting, including other places and its past, relevant to the values of that heritage asset
Designation	The recognition of particular heritage interest(s) of a heritage asset by giving it formal status under legislation or policy intended to sustain its significance
Designated Heritage Asset	A World Heritage Site, State Care Monument, Scheduled Monument, Area of Significant Archaeological Interest, Listed Building, Conservation Area, Area of Townscape/Village Character, Local Landscape Policy Area or Protected Wreck Site.
Fabric	The material substance of which places are formed, including geology, archaeological deposits, structures and buildings, construction materials, decorative details and finishes and planted or managed flora

Harm	Change for the worse, here primarily referring to the effect of inappropriate interventions on the heritage interest of a heritage asset
Heritage	All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility
Heritage asset	A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having cultural significance
Historic environment	All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and deliberately planted or managed flora
HERoNI	The Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI), holds information on all elements of Northern Ireland's historic environment and heritage assets in the form of databases, written records, maps, photographic, drawn and digital material
Integrity	A measure of the wholeness and intactness of a heritage asset and the survival and condition of those elements that contribute to its significance
Intervention	Any action which has a physical effect on the fabric or appreciation of a place
Maintenance	Routine work necessary to keep the fabric of a place, including its setting, in good order
Preserve	To keep safe from harm
Proportionality	The quality of being appropriately related to something else in size, degree, or other measurable characteristics
Public	Of or concerning the people as a whole
Renewal	Comprehensive dismantling and replacement of an element of a place, in the case of structures normally reincorporating sound elements

Repair	Work beyond the scope of maintenance, to remedy defects caused by decay, damage or use, including minor adaptation to achieve a sustainable outcome, but not involving restoration or alteration
Restoration	To return a heritage asset to a known earlier state, on the basis of compelling evidence, without conjecture
Reversible	Capable of being removed so that the previous state is restored without loss of historic fabric. Here primarily referring to the effect of inappropriate interventions on the heritage interest of a heritage asset
Setting	The immediate and extended environment that is part of – and contributes to – the significance and distinctive character of a heritage asset, and through which a heritage asset is understood, seen, experienced and enjoyed
Significance	The value of a heritage asset to past, present and future generations because of the sum of its embodied heritage interests. Those interests may be archaeological, architectural, historic or others. Significance also derives from its setting
Sustain	Maintain, treasure and affirm significance
Sustainable	Capable of meeting present needs without compromising ability to meet future needs
Transparent	Open to public scrutiny
Value-based judgement	An assessment that reflects the values of the person or group making the assessment

Appendix A

International Charters and Conventions

The importance of conserving and protecting heritage assets is recognised in a number of international conventions and charters. Conventions are normally international treaties. Once the United Kingdom has ratified a convention it has obligations to implement its requirements. Charters are statements of internationally recognised best practice that shall be taken as guidance.

Conventions

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982

Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention), 1985.

European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta Convention), 1992.

European Landscape Convention (Florence Convention), 2000.

Charters

The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice Charter), 1964.

The Preservation of Historic Gardens (Florence Charter), 1981.

The Charter on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICOMOS), 1996

ICOMOS Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas. (Xi'an Declaration), 2005.

New Zealand ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value, 2010.

The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (Burra Charter), 2013.

Other guidance

Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, for the sustainable management of the historic environment (Historic England, 2008)

Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment Wales (Cadw, 2011)

Architectural Heritage Protection, guideline for planning authorities (Dept. of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2011)

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (Historic Environment Scotland, 2019)

British Standard Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings BS 7913:2013 (British Standard Institution, 2013)

Conservation Professional Practice Principles (Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation, 2017)

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Helping communities to enjoy and realise the value of our historic environment

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Aerial view of Ardglass

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