



NORTHERN IRELAND

06

HOW TO?

Defend
Heritage



Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Hands-On Heritage NI is a project that combines traditional heritage engagement and outreach with the introduction of a range of new digital engagement technologies, better connecting people and communities with built heritage.



This is one of ten Heritage: How To? Guides, covering a broad spectrum of ideas in relation to Northern Ireland's historic environment.

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Northern Ireland's historic environment contributes greatly to our sense of place. As individuals, we can be the most powerful protectors of our historic environment, holding knowledge and stories known only to our local communities.

Before the introduction of statutory protection, Northern Ireland's historic buildings could be demolished without fear of consequence. Ulster Architectural Heritage was at the forefront of the campaign for the introduction of statutory listing of buildings and the creation of the Historic Buildings Council. It was hoped that legislation and new planning policies would ensure that the damage done to our historic environment could begin to be halted.

However, whilst there have been important 'saves', the systems put in place to defend our built heritage remain less than perfect, and we continue to see the destruction of important heritage assets. With this, we also lose knowledge of traditional methods of construction, materials, craftsmanship and, crucially, local and national social history, community roots, and a sense of unique place.

It is therefore vital that we understand the policies and procedures put in place to protect our historic environment here. Understanding these protections helps us, both as individuals and communities, to stem further destruction and loss in our local areas, by understanding which approach could work best in any particular situation.

Throughout our Heritage: How To? Guides we refer to heritage assets as buildings and monuments.

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1 | Statutory protection

• Listing

If a building boasts special architectural and/or historic interest it can be 'listed', affording it statutory protection from any alteration, redevelopment, or demolition which might affect this interest. Listing was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1974, and currently the **Historic Environment Division** of the Department for Communities is responsible for compiling and amending this list under Section 80 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011:

"The Department—

(a) shall compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest; and

(b) may amend any list so compiled. In considering whether to include a building in a list compiled under this section the Department may take into account not only the building itself but also—





a) any respect in which its exterior contributes to the architectural or historic interest of any group of buildings of which it forms part and;

b) the desirability of preserving, on the ground of its architectural or historic interest, any feature of the building which consists of a man-made object or structure fixed to the building or which forms a part of the land and which is comprised within the curtilage of the building."

This list is amended and compiled under the advice of the **Historic Buildings Council (HBC)**, a statutory advisory council, which reports to the Department on matters relating to architecture, architectural history, planning, industrial heritage, and building conservation in Northern Ireland.

Grading

Whilst all listed buildings are afforded the same statutory protection, they are subdivided into one of four ‘grades’ to highlight their relative architectural and/or historic importance:

GRADING				
	GRADE A	GRADE B+	GRADE B1	GRADE B2
ATTRIBUTES	Buildings of greatest importance to Northern Ireland including both outstanding architectural set-pieces and the least altered examples of each representative style, period and type.	High quality buildings that because of exceptional features, interiors, or environmental qualities are clearly above the general standard set by Grade B1 buildings. Also buildings which might have merited Grade A status but for detracting features such as an incomplete design, lower quality additions or alterations.	Good examples of a particular period or style. A degree of alteration or imperfection of design may be acceptable. Generally B1 is chosen for buildings that qualify for listing by virtue of a relatively wide selection of attributes. Usually these will include interior features or where one or more features are of exceptional quality and/or interest.	Special buildings which meet the test of the legislation. A degree of alteration or imperfection of design may be acceptable. B2 is chosen for buildings that qualify for listing by virtue of only a few attributes. An example would be a building sited within a conservation area where the quality of its architectural appearance or interior raises it appreciably above the general standard of buildings within the conservation area.
	 Old Museum Building, Belfast	 St Theresa's Church, Sion Mills	 Cockle Row, Groomsport	 Telephone Kiosk on Waring Street, Belfast*

*As seen here, listing does not just include buildings. Telephone kiosks, railings, lampposts, and milestones are amongst other structures which can be listed.

Protection

It is an offence under Section 85 of the Planning Act to demolish, materially alter, or extend a listed building in any manner that would affect its character without first obtaining **Listed Building Consent (LBC)**. Failure to obtain LBC or comply with the conditions of LBC could result in fines of up to £100,000 and/or a prison sentence of up to two years. When applying for LBC, a full planning application must also be submitted. It is important to note, however, that listed places of worship are exempt from the requirement to obtain Listed Building Consent for demolition, alteration, or extension as long as the building is used for ecclesiastical purposes or would be so used but for the works. This is known as **ecclesiastical exemption**.

NOTE:

It is important to remember that both the interior and exterior of a listed building are protected. Furthermore, protection is afforded to structures within the building's curtilage (the land immediately surrounding it forming one enclosure).

How can I tell if a building is listed?

As of 2023, there are around 8900 listed buildings in Northern Ireland; all of these can be seen or searched for on the **Northern Ireland Buildings Database**, maintained by the Department for Communities. Additionally, the database contains a record of unlisted buildings which have been surveyed and deemed architecturally or historically significant but not to the extent that would pass the statutory test.

The Database usually includes a description for each listed building alongside its historic building reference number (HB XX/XX/XXX). A listed building description discloses the criteria the building met to warrant listing, followed by a wealth of supporting information, including:

- Date of construction
- Architect(s)
- Materials
- Building type
- Associations

The Buildings Database can be accessed here:
www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/buildings-database

The information available on the Buildings Database can also be viewed on the Historic Environment Map Viewer:
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/historic-environment-map-viewer>

Local listing

Local lists are lists of buildings which are of architectural and/or historical interest but which do not possess the special interest required to merit statutory listing. Such buildings are known as ‘non-designated heritage assets’. Local listing does not afford an asset statutory protection, but the lists can help rally local communities around certain buildings. Councils should weigh up the impact of any planning application which either directly or indirectly impacts a non-designated heritage asset, to determine whether it will cause any harm to the asset.

• Conservation Areas

Often, listing buildings in isolation is not enough to maintain the character and appearance of a particular place. In light of this, places of special architectural and/or historic interest can be designated as ‘Conservation Areas’ by District Councils, acting on the advice of the Historic Buildings Council. Conservation Areas allow the social, cultural, and aesthetic history of certain places to be protected from indiscriminate or ill-considered change, as in these areas it is desirable to preserve and enhance the character of the built heritage, its surroundings, and the general environment, as a whole. Northern Ireland’s Conservation Areas are protected under Section 104 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.



A selection of Northern Ireland’s Conservation Areas include:

- Belfast City Centre
- Glenarm
- Gracehill
- Randalstown
- Strangford

Councils have a duty to carry out Conservation Area Appraisals in which the significance of the character area is reviewed. In some cases, Conservation Area boundaries can be extended or retracted if new information comes to light.

A full list of Conservation Areas can be found here:
www.infrastructure.ni.gov.uk/articles/conservation-area-guides-z-list



Protection

Incremental changes, no matter how minimal, can have a devastating impact on the special architectural and/or historic interest of a character area. It is for this reason that works on unlisted buildings, along with the felling, lopping, topping, or uprooting of trees in a Conservation Area require **Conservation Area Consent**.

Area of Townscape or Village Character (ATC or AVC)

Certain areas in Northern Ireland’s cities, towns, and villages may have a distinctive character without being of sufficient architectural or historic interest to warrant Conservation Area status. However, because of their own unique identity, they can be designated as Areas of Townscape or Village Character (ATCs or AVCs).

Works to or demolition of unlisted buildings within ATCs or AVCs do not require specific consent. However, they are a material consideration in planning applications. Futhermore, District Councils, in the production of their Local Development Plans, take into consideration the intrinsic and special character of these areas so as to preserve their identity and integrity.

• **Historic sites and monuments**

Northern Ireland is home to around 16,000 identified historic monuments – built remains of historic importance that are not occupied as a dwelling or used as a place of worship. This includes archaeological sites, ruins, tombs, industrial heritage sites, fortifications, and maritime remains.

What can classify as a historic monument? **Not exhaustive*



Over 1,900 of these monuments are scheduled for protection under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. Scheduling provides similar statutory protection for monuments as listing does for buildings; scheduled monuments cannot be demolished, altered, or disturbed without attaining **Scheduled Monument Consent** from the Department for Communities.

Another 186 monuments are under the ownership or guardianship of the Department for Communities and are known as **State Care Monuments**. State Care Monuments are public assets, and many of them are amongst Northern Ireland’s most famous landmarks.



- Some examples of State Care Monuments include:
- Carrickfergus Castle
 - Derry City Walls
 - Devenish Island Ecclesiastical Site

Advising the Department on the scheduling of monuments and the protection of monuments in state care is the **Historic Monuments Council (HMC)** which, like the HBC, is a statutory advisory council.

A complete list of all identified historic monuments in Northern Ireland can be found on the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR).

Areas of Significant or Special Archaeological Interest (ASAI)

An Area of Significant or Special Archaeological Interest is a non-statutory designation describing the overall setting of an area within which a significant number of monuments or historic landscapes are located.

The potential effect of planning proposals on specific sites and their settings, as well as on the integrity or the overall character of the area, are a major consideration in determining applications for development.

Other designations include Areas of Archaeological Potential, Areas of High Archaeological Potential, or Urban Archaeological Zones. These are terms primarily used in the planning process to act as triggers which can alert planning officers to possible archaeological disturbances caused by new development. Development in these areas will likely require archaeological evaluation and possible mitigation work in advance of construction.

Sites of archaeological interest are contained on the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record.

• **Other forms of protection**

TREE PRESERVATION ORDER (TPO)	PARKS, GARDENS AND DEMESNES OF SPECIAL HISTORIC INTEREST	WORLD HERITAGE SITES (WHS)
Trees help to define the character of an area. They create an attractive landscape, improve our physical and mental wellbeing, and provide a habitat for myriad forms of wildlife. Section 121 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 allows District Councils to prevent the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage, or wilful destruction of trees where their removal is likely to have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. Anything from a single tree to an entire woodland can be protected, but usually TPOs only apply to trees above 3.5 metres in height. All trees in Conservation Areas are already afforded this protection.	The designed landscapes of Northern Ireland are striking and important features of the historic environment which are vital for recreation, study, and environmental conservation. The Department for Communities maintains both the Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes Record and, for sites of exceptional importance, the Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest. This latter register contains 252 entries as of 2023; parks and gardens included on the register are considered in the determination of planning consent, allowing the Department to offer advice and make recommendations for their protection.	A cultural or natural landmark which is considered to be of ‘outstanding value to humanity’ can be designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). World Heritage Sites are afforded international legal protection under the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. As of 2023, there is only one World Heritage Site in Northern Ireland – the Giant’s Causeway – but other sites, such as Gracehill Village, are currently under consideration for World Heritage status.

Our built heritage is a finite resource.
Once a building is lost, it cannot be replaced. It is lost forever!



2 | Your role in defending heritage

There is an expectation that because a building is historic it will be protected.

Whilst many historic assets in Northern Ireland may benefit from statutory protection, not all do. Buildings cannot speak to defend themselves. Local people need to take the lead in the defence of our heritage; we should not be afraid to make our voices heard.

What can I do?

NOMINATE
A BUILDING
FOR LISTING

Do you know of a unique building in your local area? Have you unearthed a hidden history that no one yet knows about? Why not nominate it for listing? Anyone can do it! The first step is to check if the building is already listed by consulting the Buildings Database or the Historic Environment Map Viewer. If it is not listed, you can contact the Department for Communities to generate a listing query.

- To make an accurate assessment, the Department will need:
- Your name and contact details
 - The address or location of the building or structure you are nominating for listing
 - A map, with the structure clearly marked
 - Details of ownership, including contact details (if different to yours)
 - Up-to-date photographs, including of the structure’s interior

- You should also:
- Provide documentary evidence to support your application, such as historic maps, if possible, and (where applicable) a list of the books, websites, etc. you have used in the completion of your research
 - Detail if the structure is under serious threat of demolition or major alteration
 - Detail the reasons why you believe the building or structure meets the criteria of ‘special architectural or historic interest’ and should be assessed for listing

The criteria for listing are based on the asset’s historic and/or architectural interest:

	Architectural Interest	Historic Interest	Joint Architectural and Historic Interest
CRITERIA	Style Proportion Ornamentation Plan form Spatial organisation Structural system Innovatory qualities Alterations Quality and survival of interiors Setting Group value	Age Rarity Authenticity Historic Importance Authorship Social, cultural or economic importance Historic Associations	Northern Ireland/International interest Local Interest

Your listing query will set into motion a process that involves surveys, committees, assessments, and appraisals. It might take a long time, but if your asset meets the outlined criteria – by being of special architectural and/or historic interest – then it will gain statutory protection, helping to preserve it for future generations.

Visit the Department for Communities website to nominate a building for listing or to view, in greater depth, the criteria for listing and the listing process:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/historic-environment/listed-buildings>



RECOMMEND A BUILDING FOR THE HERITAGE AT RISK REGISTER

The Heritage at Risk Register for Northern Ireland highlights more than 750 buildings and monuments of architectural and/or historic interest whose futures seem uncertain due to lack of use or disrepair; or which are under threat through heritage crime and/or inappropriate development.

To recommend a building for the HARNI Register visit:

www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk/built-heritage-risk/

What you need:

- Building name (if applicable)
- Building address
- Details of why you think the building is at risk
- Any further information that may support your case
- Photographs (if applicable)

For more information about Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland, please consult our **How To? Rescue Heritage** Guide.

RESPOND TO PLANNING APPLICATIONS

If you are concerned about the historic environment in your area, it is advisable to regularly check for new or updated planning applications. After a valid planning application has been made, your local council will advertise the proposed development in a local newspaper. Notifications are also made to those adjoining the application site boundary, and to those who are within 90 metres of it. The details of the proposals are also added to the **Northern Ireland Planning Portal**. The Planning Portal is the easiest way to find or track a planning application.

The NI Planning Portal can be accessed here:

<https://planningregister.planningsystemni.gov.uk/simple-search>

NOTE: Mid Ulster District Council operates its own portal:

<https://www.midulstercouncil.org/planning/search-view-and-comment-on-planning-applications>

By clicking on the Planning Register section, you can search for planning applications by entering a building name, address, application reference, or name of the applicant/agent.

If you are concerned about proposed development to or near a heritage asset, you may submit a representation of objection to the proposal. You can do this on the Planning Portal, or by sending a letter or email to the relevant District Council. You should view the plans in their entirety before you comment on an application to ensure you understand the development under consideration. It is important to note that the names and addresses of those objecting to a planning proposal must be included.

Councils will only take into account material planning considerations. The effect of proposed development on the special architectural/historic interest of an asset or Conservation Area is one of these considerations, but others include*:

- Traffic generation
- Layout and density of buildings
- The use of hazardous materials

Some matters which councils cannot take into account*:

- Perceived loss of property value
- Loss of a view
- Personal views about the applicant

**Lists are not exhaustive*

Sometimes, developments are carried out in direct breach of planning rules. For example:

- Carried out without planning permission
- Failed to meet a specific condition attached to planning permission
- Carried out without Listed Building Consent or Conservation Area Consent, or failed to comply with the conditions of either of these
- In breach of a Tree Preservation Order

You can report these breaches of planning control on the NI Planning Portal by clicking on the ‘Enforcements’ tab. You will need the address of the land or property where the rules were broken, a description of the development activity or action that breaks planning control, the date and time when the activity happened or began, and detail of the problems caused by the development activity.

USE THE
IN YOUR AREA
APP

Do you know of a building nominated for listing that did not pass the statutory test? Listing may be the ‘gold standard’ of protection for built heritage in Northern Ireland, but it is a lengthy process that may not result in your desired outcome. Just because a building does not meet the statutory test for listing does not mean that the building is not noteworthy or deserving of protection.

Perhaps there’s an asset in your area, protected or not, that you are particularly concerned about; it might be falling into ruin, at risk of being demolished, or threatened with redevelopment that would undermine its character. Maybe there is a structure near you which, regardless of its designation or condition, holds special meaning for you and your local community.

If this heritage is important to you, then we want you to share it with us!

As part of the Hands-On Heritage Project, Ulster Architectural Heritage have released the ‘In Your Area’ App. The App gives individuals, groups, and whole communities the power to record and report heritage assets in their local areas and across Northern Ireland.

To create a record of Northern Ireland’s historic environment, you are able to upload photographs, oral history recordings, written stories, and other research to the In Your Area App. This can be done at home, on a laptop or desktop, or on-site, on your smartphone or tablet. Voluntary submissions from the App will be available for public viewing on our associated In Your Area Webpage. Here you will be able to see other survey submissions within your area and further afield.

The App has two strands:

Record & Report:	Memories:
Helps us to record the existence of buildings of importance, and allows you to report on the condition of heritage assets which may be under threat.	This strand is about sharing intangible heritage and memories . It gives you the opportunity to highlight why an asset holds particular meaning to you or your community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guided photographic survey• Building type• Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historical photographs• Research• Documentation• Oral history recordings

The In Your Area App gives people the opportunity to engage with, report on, and map the heritage that is important to them. This will help us at Ulster Architectural Heritage to guide public participation in the protection of historic buildings and monuments, and capture information about public interest to contribute to our knowledge base. The App enables every individual and community to participate in the protection of our built environment and to share the public benefit that results from this endeavour.

To access the App please visit the Hands-On Heritage Project Website:
www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk

3 | Who else can help you defend heritage?

Local Government	District Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant funding• Planning• Conservation Areas• Local Development Plans• Local Heritage Lists• Conservation Management Plans
Central Government	Department for Communities: Historic Environment Division (DfC:HED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant funding• Historic building policy• Listing process• Overall condition of Northern Ireland's historic buildings• Adverse planning applications• Heritage At Risk Register (HARNI), in association with Ulster Architectural Heritage
	Department for Infrastructure (DfI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conservation Area Guides• Conservation Area Maps
Statutory Advisory Councils	Historic Buildings Council (HBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate and report on state of Northern Ireland's historic environment• Listing and delisting historic buildings• Significant planning applications
	Historic Monuments Council (HMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate and report on state of Northern Ireland's archaeology and historic monuments• State Care Monuments• Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest

There are also a number of non-statutory organisations that can help you defend heritage such as:*

- Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH)
- The Heritage Trust Network (HTN)
- The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Ireland (SPAB Ireland)
- The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF)

**List not exhaustive*

The organisations named provide a range of services and activities that help defend our built heritage including:

- The provision of advice and guidance
- Advocacy
- Events
- Heritage projects
- Publications

Ulster Architectural Heritage has been publishing books on the region's significant architecture and architects since 1968.



Our publications are used by academics, historians, architects, and planners, and are widely collected as an invaluable resource on local history and buildings past and present.

For more information on our publications, visit our website:
<https://www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk/publications/>

For more information on How To?
Defend Heritage visit the
Hands-On Heritage website
www.handsonheritage-ni.org.uk
where you can access related
Heritage: How To? Guides.

Promotion – Protection – Conservation – **Regeneration**

Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH) works to promote the historic built environment, its protection, conservation, and heritage-led regeneration, through advice and support, advocacy, publications, events, and project delivery. Since its formation in 1967, UAH has established itself as the lead independent voice for the historic built environment across the nine counties of Ulster, a fearless campaigner for historic buildings, a generous resource of information on local architecture, and a source of advice on conservation. UAH has had much success in influencing public opinion in favour of conservation of our historic built environment. UAH carries out reports, assessments, monitoring of the historic built environment, and makes representations relating to planning and policy. UAH educates, engages, and informs on built heritage through a wide range of events, publications, and projects.



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