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HOW TO?

Rescue
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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More and more of our buildings and monuments are falling victim to dereliction, decay, and inappropriate development. Northern Ireland's built heritage is a finite national asset and once a historic asset is lost, it is lost forever, with our surroundings irreparably devalued as a consequence.

Ulster Architectural Heritage needs your help to rescue Heritage at Risk.

Rescuing a heritage asset can be as easy as instituting a programme of regular maintenance and repair. Alternatively, it may involve a major conservation and/or restoration project. However, no matter the scale of these projects, there is no doubting their influence on the integrity, sustainability, and economic and community capital value of our historic built environment. Restoring a building to its former glory or sympathetically re-purposing it with an imaginative and sustainable new use can be an extremely rewarding undertaking.

Why not get involved in adding a new chapter to a building's story?

To better understand the scale and extent of Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland, Ulster Architectural Heritage, in partnership with the Department for Communities, maintains and promotes the Heritage at Risk Register for Northern Ireland (HARNI). The register identifies threatened historic buildings, opportunities for rescue, and trends in the condition of Northern Ireland's built environment. By better understanding why a heritage asset is added to, or removed from the register, we can highlight both the challenges and solutions inherent to rescuing heritage, as well as the resulting benefits.

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

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1 | What is Heritage at Risk

Heritage at Risk is a term used to describe buildings and monuments of architectural and historic interest whose futures seem uncertain, either due to lack of use or disrepair, or due to the threat of heritage crime and/or inappropriate development. The majority of Heritage at Risk assets are listed buildings which, through neglect, have fallen into disuse.



2 | The Heritage at Risk Register for Northern Ireland (HARNI)

The Heritage at Risk NI Register (previously Built Heritage at Risk NI Register or BHARNI) was established in 1993 to highlight the vulnerability of our historic built environment and act as a catalyst for its restoration and reuse. It is funded by the Department for Communities (DfC) and delivered in partnership with Ulster Architectural Heritage.

Currently, more than 750 buildings and monuments are on the register. These vulnerable structures are considered ‘buildings of potential’ and may be suitable for restoration and re-use. In fact, many assets featured on the HARNI Register have subsequently found new owners or uses, with almost 200 removed from the register between 2006 and 2016.

Why does the register exist?

The HARNI project, its register, and the statistics and data it generates, act as a ‘real time’ indicator of the condition of individual assets and trends in the condition of the broader historic environment of Northern Ireland.

It provides an important indication of how the condition of the historic environment relates to geographical areas, ownership, and type, allowing us to identify opportunities, pressures, and threats. Trends identified by the HARNI Register serve to inform wider heritage policy and identify issues affecting heritage, which need to be addressed and prioritised.

Since its inception, the Heritage at Risk project has provided help and advice for existing owners who may wish to engage upon a suitable scheme of maintenance. It also offers assistance to potential owners who may be interested in restoring an at-risk building.

The Heritage at Risk Register can be accessed here:

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/heritage-risk

Buildings on this register can be searched by their address, council area, or historic building reference number (HB XX/XX/XXX X).

3 | Making it onto the Heritage at Risk Register

Why might a building be at risk?

A historic asset can be at risk for a number of reasons including:

Decay	Heritage crime – such as arson or vandalism
Abandonment	Lack of security
Exposure to elements	Inappropriate change of use

Not all buildings on the register face the same level of risk. The register acts as a measure of concern, somewhat like a watch list. For example, a building that is open to the elements poses more of a concern (enabling water ingress, potentially damaging interiors) than that of an abandoned building which is watertight and secure.

For this reason, buildings on the HARNI Register undergo a condition assessment and priority classification through which the heritage asset can be assessed, evaluated, and further monitored.

CONDITION	PRIORITY CLASSIFICATION
Ruinous	A
Very Poor	B
Poor	C
Fair	D
Good	E
	F

To recommend a building for the HARNI Register visit:
www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk/built-heritage-risk/

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



4 | First steps for removal

The HARNI register acts as a catalyst for change. Regular maintenance and ‘meanwhile use’ are two methods by which built heritage can begin to be rescued, leading to eventual removal from the register. If these are not sufficient, a full restoration project may have to be embarked upon.

Maintenance

Whoever the owner, whatever the type, or wherever the location of a building, some guiding principles prevail. Maintenance, security, and regular repair are fundamental to keeping any structure from falling into disrepair or dereliction. Regular, small-scale maintenance is the most effective and least expensive way to preserve a building; a small, regular outlay on the part of an owner can save the need for an expensive large-scale intervention. The long-term benefits of proper repair and maintenance can be significant in securing a building’s future and keeping it from needing to be added the HARNI Register or – if already on the register – in instigating its removal. To use one example, the most common cause of damage is water ingress, either from roofs, rainwater goods, or exterior walls. A regular schedule of inspection of a property can help early identification of this risk and stop the substantial deterioration of a building before its character is lost.

For more information on maintaining historic buildings consult our **How To? Maintain Historic Buildings** Guide.



Meanwhile use

Meanwhile uses (sometimes referred to as ‘pop-ups’) are a valuable means to test what options may be sustainable for long-term use before committing the necessary strategic planning and funds to do so. Such temporary activities have been recognised as a means of revitalising towns and villages; they have the potential to increase economic and social value, whilst also making the best use of existing building stock and resources.

A building being on the HARNI Register should not act as a deterrent; it is still possible to bring activity and life into disused buildings bar those in the most ruinous and unsafe conditions.

Restoration projects

Sometimes, a building falls into such a ruinous condition that a regular programme of maintenance is not enough to preserve it, and it becomes unsuitable for habitation, or even for meanwhile use. When this is the case, a large-scale restoration project is all that can save the asset.

These projects can range in scale from the rescue of a small cottage to the full-scale restoration of a large mill or warehouse. They are time consuming, expensive, and challenging labours that can cost hundreds of thousands or even millions of pounds. Such projects rely on successful funding grants from public bodies or charities, donations from benefactors, or the personal wealth of the owners.

These significant challenges notwithstanding, bringing a building back from a ruinous condition in a large-scale restoration is one of the most admirable rescue efforts, one that can completely transform an area, bolstering local pride and aspirations.



Significant restoration projects deserve to be recognised as noteworthy achievements. The Heritage Angels Awards Scheme, which has been delivered since 2017 in Northern Ireland by Ulster Architectural Heritage, has celebrated many of these projects at varying scales.

NOTE:

Buildings don’t have to be restored and used for their original purpose, they can be adaptively reused to ensure the future of the structure. For more on the reuse of heritage assets, please consult our **How To? Reuse Heritage** Guide.



STRANGFORD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, STRANGFORD
Once At Risk, Now Saved!

BACKGROUND	ISSUES	SAVED
Ards and North Down Borough Council c.1840 Grade B1 Listed Architect and builder unknown On the Heritage at Risk Register since 2003 Acquired by Melanie and Martin Hamill in 2016 Former Presbyterian Church (Closed 2002)	Severe state of disrepair Lay dormant for years Significant structural degradation Water ingress Vegetation growth	Retained character Change of use (holiday accommodation) Existing shell salvaged 2019 Heritage Angel Award Winner: Best Rescue of an Historic Building or Place – under £1million





EGLANTINE HOUSE, HILLSBOROUGH
Once At Risk, Now Saved!

BACKGROUND

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
c. 1780
Grade B2 Listed
Architect: Charles Lanyon
On the Heritage at Risk Register up until 2011
Acquired by Martin and Elizabeth Reilly in 2007
from a development company

ISSUES

Fire in the 1980s resulted in severe
material loss
Open to the elements
Unsecure
Lay as a ruin for years
Threat of over development

SAVED

Historic photographs were used to recreate
the interiors
Re-creation of an impressive double return
cantilevered staircase
Existing shell salvaged
2019 Heritage Angel Award Shortlist:
Best Rescue of an Historic Building or Place –
under £1million



5 | Key opportunities when rescuing heritage

Bringing a building back to life can be extremely rewarding. Historic buildings enrich Northern Ireland's landscape and celebrate the diversity of our communities at every level, showing national, regional, and local distinctiveness. Historic buildings are central to our everyday lives, creating a sense of place and identity, benefits we cannot avail of without caring for these buildings. Certain opportunities and benefits arise from rescuing built heritage:

- The rescue of historic buildings can provide the answer to societal needs e.g. childcare facilities, doctor's surgeries, business centres, etc
- Heritage-led regeneration can create additional spaces for commercial activity, allowing for the economic revitalisation of run-down areas in a manner that remains sympathetic to their distinctive characters
- Heritage rescue projects can create or sustain jobs, both through the actual rescue and restoration work, or in the businesses or organisations that make use of the rescued asset
- The restoration of key historic buildings can bring about a sense of pride and reinforce community identity, with the potential to improve social cohesion, and grow local confidence and aspirations
- Reusing our current building stock and repairing materials in historic buildings (which are often of better quality than what they would be replaced with) carries with it a substantially reduced carbon footprint when compared to new construction

When rescuing heritage, you may:

- Unearth new information about the building or area
- Discover lost artefacts or items of interest
- Find new opportunities to explore
- Unearth hidden architectural details, styles, and phased development



6 | Key challenges when rescuing heritage

The reuse and repair of a building is often a 'labour of love' that serves to ensure a building will be enjoyed by future generations to come – but when rescuing heritage, there are some key challenges of which you should be aware:

- **Stagnant ownership** – not every at-risk building will be for sale, but discussions and negotiations may be possible
- **Development limbo** – often buildings continue to deteriorate when not maintained and land banked for a potential development scheme, such as the construction of a new road or industrial site
- **Type of building** – from the largest mill complex to a small vernacular cottage, the future use of the building should be considered within the context of its type, scale, and location to ensure the proposed use is sustainable and viable

- **Funding** – available funding options can differ significantly whether you are a private owner, a trust, or have a building in community ownership. There are various sources of funding available for Heritage at Risk projects, awarded by organisations such as The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund, Ulster Garden Villages, and the Department for Communities. 61% of the HARNI Register is currently made up of buildings in private ownership where the options for funding or grant assistance have been limited in the current economic climate. Private owners are at a disadvantage as they are unlikely to qualify for much of the funding available from government bodies and charities, which is often restricted to charities, enterprises, and not-for-profit organisations. For more information, consult our **How To? Finance Your Heritage Project** Guide
- **VAT** – introduced in the UK in 1973, payable on repairs to all buildings, has been a tax disincentive to the appropriate repair and timely maintenance of historic buildings. The additional imposition of VAT at the full rate on alterations, in 2012, has placed a significant further burden on owners of listed buildings who were already acting in the interest of heritage repair and regeneration. VAT on repairs and alterations diminishes the economic viability of heritage projects, and can be seen as a disincentive to those considering the acquisition, repair and, regeneration of historic buildings. UAH has for many years recommended that this be reversed.

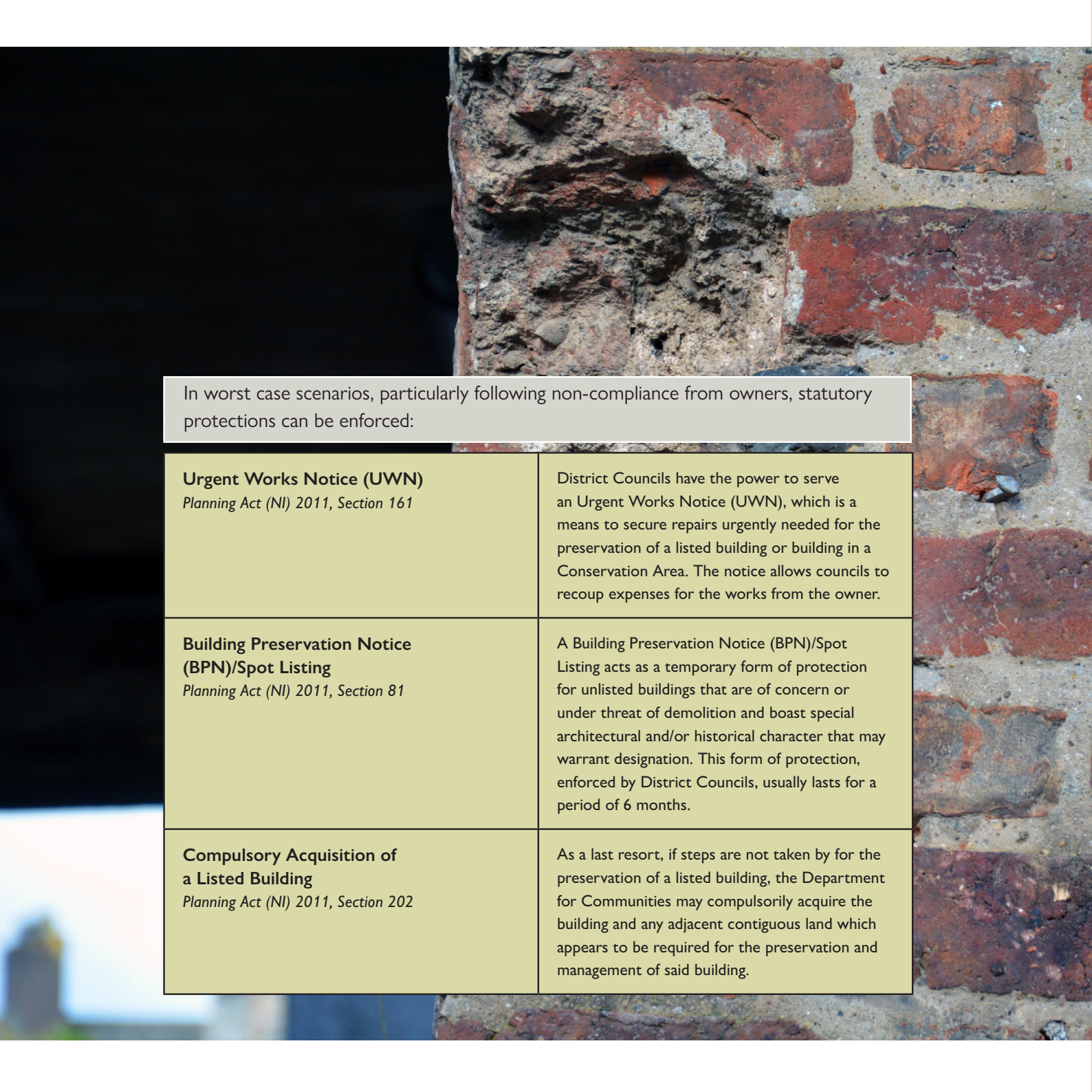


7 | What's the worst-case scenario?

When buildings fall into such a bad state of disrepair that they are beyond salvation, we lose a piece of our cultural identity and any associated intangible heritage along with it.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Communities (DfC) and District Councils have the power to step in to prevent any activity (or lack of activity) which may jeopardise the character of an historic building or area of special architectural/historic significance.

DfC and District Councils can engage in conversations with owners of at-risk buildings and monuments to encourage them to carry out works to their assets and prevent further deterioration.



In worst case scenarios, particularly following non-compliance from owners, statutory protections can be enforced:

Urgent Works Notice (UWN) <i>Planning Act (NI) 2011, Section 161</i>	District Councils have the power to serve an Urgent Works Notice (UWN), which is a means to secure repairs urgently needed for the preservation of a listed building or building in a Conservation Area. The notice allows councils to recoup expenses for the works from the owner.
Building Preservation Notice (BPN)/Spot Listing <i>Planning Act (NI) 2011, Section 81</i>	A Building Preservation Notice (BPN)/Spot Listing acts as a temporary form of protection for unlisted buildings that are of concern or under threat of demolition and boast special architectural and/or historical character that may warrant designation. This form of protection, enforced by District Councils, usually lasts for a period of 6 months.
Compulsory Acquisition of a Listed Building <i>Planning Act (NI) 2011, Section 202</i>	As a last resort, if steps are not taken by for the preservation of a listed building, the Department for Communities may compulsorily acquire the building and any adjacent contiguous land which appears to be required for the preservation and management of said building.



8 | Some organisations that help rescue historic buildings

Hearth Historic Buildings Trust
www.hearthni.org.uk

The National Lottery Heritage Fund
www.heritagefund.org.uk

The Architectural Heritage Fund
www.ahfund.org.uk

Belfast Buildings Trust
<https://www.belfastbuildingstrust.org/>

Department for Communities: Historic Environment Division
www.communities-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/historic-environment

For more information on How To?
Rescue 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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