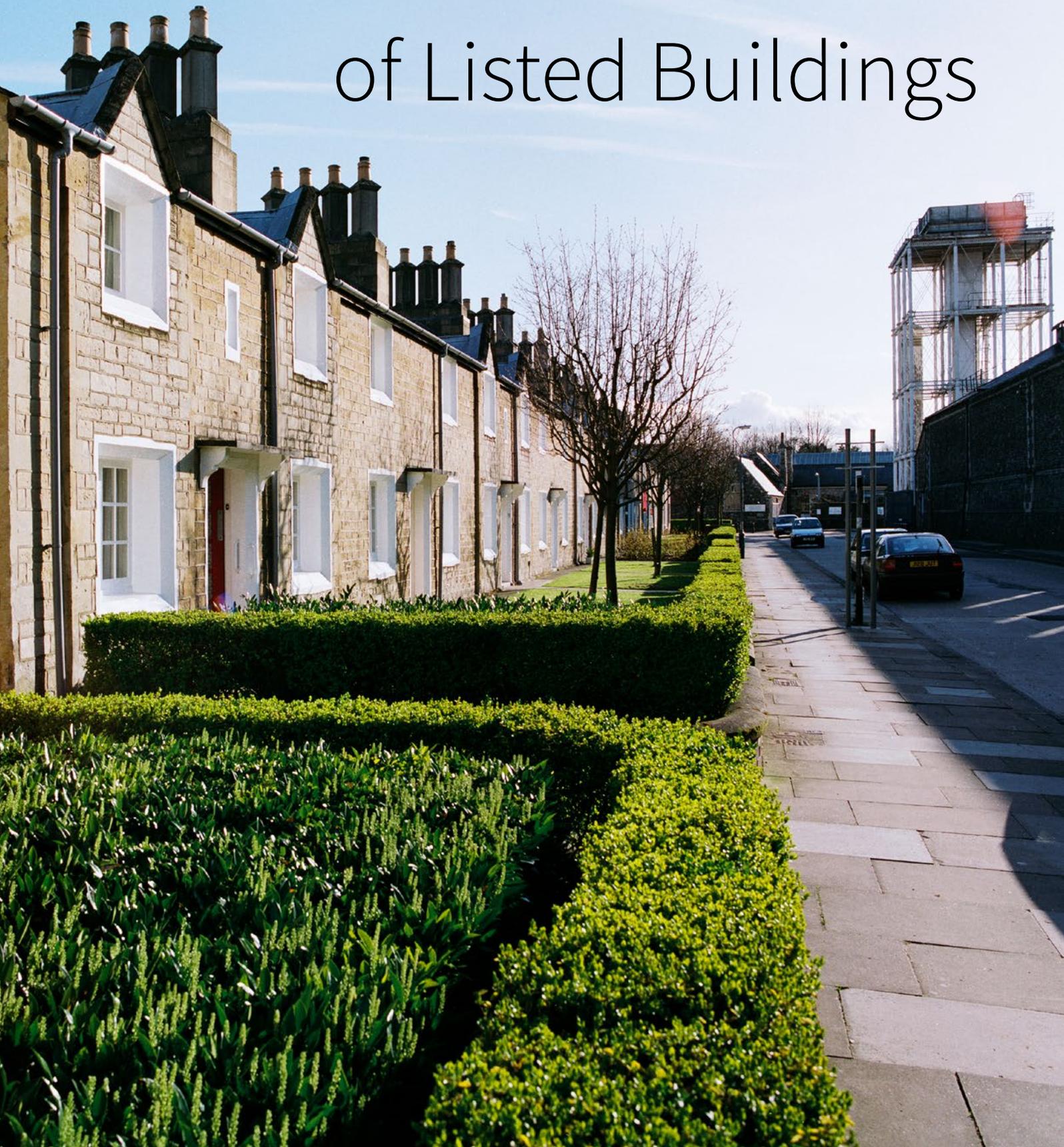




Historic England

# A Guide for Owners of Listed Buildings



# Contents

Introduction.....	3
What does it mean if my house is listed? .....	4
Listed building consent.....	6
Understanding your building .....	8
Traditional windows.....	10
Adding an extension.....	12
Kitchens and bathrooms .....	14
Dealing with damp .....	16
Saving energy .....	18
Further information .....	19

Front cover image: Grade II listed cottages in Swindon, originally built as part of the Railway Village by the Great Western Railway for its workers.

Back cover image: Detail of railings from main staircase at Kenwood House, London.



22 Parkside in Wimbledon, London, a Grade II listed house designed by Richard and Su Rogers in 1969.

# Introduction

We've put together this guide to answer some of the most commonly asked questions by those who live in or care for listed buildings.

So whether you want to know more about the listing process or what to consider when you want to make changes to your home, such as adding an extension or updating your windows, this guide will help point you in the right direction.

It also covers some of the most common problems faced by those living in older buildings, such as dealing with damp.

Although this guide covers some of the most popular topics, our website has lots more detailed information on listed buildings, so please do visit:

[HistoricEngland.org.uk](https://www.historicengland.org.uk)



Terraced houses in Battersea, London.

# What does it mean if my house is listed?

A building is listed when it is of special architectural or historic interest in a national context. Listed buildings have extra legal protection within the planning system.

Listed houses come in many styles and sizes, and range from terraced houses to simple country cottages and stately homes.

There are three categories of listed building, based on their significance:

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest and only 2.5% of listed buildings are Grade I
- Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest and just 5.5% of listed buildings are Grade II\*
- Grade II buildings are of special interest and the vast majority, 92%, of all listed buildings fall into this category

There are around 500,000 listed buildings in England, but it is difficult to be precise, because one listing for example can cover a row of terraced houses.

## How are buildings chosen for listing?

Not surprisingly, the older a building is, the more likely it is to be listed. All buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most of those built between 1700 and 1840.

The more modern a building is, the more remarkable it will need to be if it is to be listed. Buildings that date from 1945 onwards need to be particularly carefully selected and usually a building has to be over 30 years old to be eligible for listing.

To help people to understand the selection process, we publish selection guides for many different types of buildings that clearly set out how we decide whether to recommend a building for listing or not.



Listed houses come in many styles and sizes.



You can find out why a building has been listed on the National Heritage List for England.

### How to find out about your listed house

As the term implies, a listed building is actually added to a statutory List: the [National Heritage List for England](#). From this you can find out why your home has been listed, what is particularly significant about the building and what grade it is.

Listing has been around since the Second World War and some of the earlier listings were for identification purposes only. If your building was listed more recently, the List entry is likely to contain more detailed information.

### What are the benefits of listing?

Listing is a mark of special interest in a national context and most owners are rightly proud of their special building. Inclusion on the National Heritage List for England means that the building makes a contribution to the specialness of England's diverse historic environment. It can also increase the value of the property.

### What parts of my home does listing cover?

Listing covers a whole building, including the interior, unless parts of it are explicitly excluded in the List entry.

It will usually cover:

- Any object or structure fixed to the building;
- Any object or structure within the curtilage of the building which, although not fixed to the building, forms part of the land and has done so since before 1st July 1948

Because all listed buildings are different, what is actually covered by a listing can vary quite widely. You should therefore always check what's included in your listing with the local planning authority.

#### Links

[More on listing](#)

[The National Heritage List for England](#)

[Planning Portal](#)

[Selection Guides](#)

[A brief introduction to listing](#)

[Altering the area round your home](#)

# Listed building consent



You should contact your local authority about listed building consent.

When a building is listed it means that there are additional planning controls that apply to that building, both inside and out.

You will therefore need to apply for [listed building consent](#) for work that involves altering, extending or demolishing your home where it affects its special architectural or historic interest. This is of course alongside any planning regulations which would normally apply.

Owners sometimes find this frustrating and inconvenient, but without this important step many historically important buildings would be damaged or destroyed and their significance lost forever.

## What changes are covered by listed building consent?

Loose furnishings are not covered by the listing process. But items fixed to the building such as light fittings may be, so if they contribute to the special interest of the house, you may need consent to remove them.

Most fitted furniture such as kitchen units, baths, toilets and wardrobes are usually relatively recent and not of special interest, so removing them may not need consent.

But older fitted cupboards, bookcases or similar may be considered to be part of the listing.

When existing decorative finishes are clearly recent it should be possible to repaint and to re-hang wallpaper. But removing paint and other finishes to reveal bare construction materials is likely to affect special interest and to need consent.

‘Stripping back to reveal the original’ often destroys much of the interest in the evolution of a listed house and is rarely a good idea.

You can start to find out what’s special about your home by checking its entry on the Heritage List and you can also find out what criteria we use to list your particular type of building by checking the appropriate selection guide.

You can then contact your local authority who can advise you further about the need for listed building consent.

## How do I apply for listed building consent and how long will it take?

You will need to contact your local planning authority to apply for listed building consent.

Local authorities should make a decision within 8 weeks.

### Listing Enhancement Service – find out what’s most important about your listing

We now offer four paid-for planning and listing services, which enhance our existing free resources. One of these is our [Listing Enhancement Service](#) which can set out more clearly what is protected as part of the listing of a site. This can help the local authority decide which proposals require Listed Building consent. Anyone can apply to have a list entry updated for free but a guaranteed time frame is offered for the paid service.

### Certificate of Lawfulness of Proposed Works

This is a relatively new process which allows you to find out if proposed work to your home needs listed building consent or not. If not, then a Certificate of Lawfulness will provide clear evidence that the work to be carried out will not require consent.

### What happens if I make changes to a listed building without applying for listed building consent?

Carrying out unauthorised works to a listed building is a criminal offence and you can be prosecuted.

Through issuing an [enforcement](#) notice, a planning authority can insist that all work carried out without consent is reversed. You should therefore always talk to the local planning authority before any work is carried out to a listed building.

You may also have trouble selling a property which has not been granted listed building consent or a Certificate of Lawfulness for work carried out, as lack of permission from the planning authority will be revealed by the legal search.

#### Links

[Listed building consent](#)

[The National Heritage List for England](#)

[Planning Portal](#)

[Certificate of Lawfulness](#)

[Unlawful Works](#)



Additional planning controls apply to listed buildings.

# Understanding older buildings

Most listed buildings dating from before the First World War were built either with solid masonry walls or with a timber frame and infill panels.

This type of construction differs from most modern buildings in that permeable materials were used which allow moisture such as rain, groundwater and internal moisture within the building fabric to evaporate freely away.

This is often referred to as ‘breathable construction’ but more accurately it is about the movement of moisture rather than air.

It relies on sunshine, wind, heating and adequate internal ventilation through windows, chimneys and draughts in order to stay dry. In good condition and with regular maintenance the system stays in balance.

After the First World War building methods gradually changed. The cavity wall replaced solid walls for most domestic properties and cement mortars superseded lime mortars, with concrete increasingly becoming a part of most buildings. These new forms of construction

all relied on keeping moisture out through damp proof membranes and cavities.

## Using the right materials

If you use incompatible materials or methods on older buildings, it can affect their ability to balance moisture content. Materials such as cement pointing and renders reduce the ability of the moisture to evaporate which can then lead to problems such as condensation, mould and damp.

Where possible therefore, you should use matching materials when altering or repairing an older property.

## Maintaining your home

Old houses are often damaged by lack of care. Regular maintenance is both cost-effective and an important part of looking after an old building. Often, prompt action can prevent decay and avoid the need for major repairs.

To help you look after your listed building, see our [Maintenance Checklist](#)



Most buildings constructed before the First World War were built with permeable materials.

# The National Heritage List for England



All listed places have an entry on the National Heritage List for England.

A listed building will always have its own description – the statutory List entry – on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE).

The List is a remarkable, searchable, database of all England's protected places, including listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens and battlefields, and protected wrecks.

Look up the entry for your home on The List database and you may be surprised by the information you find.

It's worth remembering that the way we list buildings has moved on from the early, short entries that were purely for identification. We now explain much more about the significance of the building by setting out what is known about it.

We have launched a new initiative asking people to record and share their knowledge of places on the List. By adding to the understanding of these wonderful places, you can help ensure that they will be enjoyed by current and future generations. Find out how to help us enrich [The List](#)

So, depending on when your building was listed, the information on the NHLE will vary. But it's a fascinating online resource which can be found on the Historic England website.

**Link**

[National Heritage List for England](#)

# Traditional windows



Original windows contribute to the attractiveness and special interest of your home.

Windows are prone to decay, wear and damage, but replacing them can be expensive as well as reducing the special interest of the building.

The following simple guidelines will help you to look after your windows so they have as long and problem-free a life as possible.

## **Carry out regular maintenance**

Prevention is always better than cure so, to avoid major repairs, carry out an annual inspection of your windows.

- Check for soft areas of rot at vulnerable joints, particularly those near the base of the frame and the cill
- Inspect the paintwork for blistering and flaking

- Check for loose or missing putties as this can lead to decay of the glazing bars

## **Repair rather than replace**

Traditional windows can almost always be repaired. Keeping the original windows makes an important contribution to the attractiveness and special interest of your home – so the original is better than a copy, however faithfully made.

Timber windows dating from before the First World War generally used Baltic pine, which is very durable and therefore only the joints and cills tend to be a problem. Use matching timber that is low in sapwood so that it lasts as long as possible.



Traditional windows can almost always be repaired.



It's easy to remove sash windows so that they can be repaired.

- Sashes of double hung sash windows can be removed from the box frame for repair
- Casement windows are best repaired in-situ if possible, as removing them can potentially damage the window and the adjacent area
- Cills of windows are easy to replace

There are now lots of companies that offer a repair and draught-stripping service for traditional windows

### Retain historic glass if it exists

Historic glass with its slightly rippled uneven nature adds character to traditional windows and is now very rare.

### Consider draught-proofing windows

Most heat loss from windows is from draughts rather than through the glass itself, so draught-proofing can be very cost effective, reducing draughts by as much as 86%.

### Consider secondary glazing before double glazing

Traditional windows with very narrow glazing bars cannot accommodate even the slimmest double glazing units, as the depth and width of the glazing bar is not sufficient.

This means that if you want to add double glazing often the whole window has to be replaced.

A much better option is to add secondary glazing. This avoids the need to replace or alter the window and results in a similar amount of energy being saved. It also has the added benefit of reducing noise and dust and if well designed can be discreet and reversible.

#### Link

[Traditional windows](#)

[Making changes to your property](#)

# Adding an extension to a listed building

With the high cost of moving, more and more people are choosing to extend their homes. But if you live in a listed building you'll need to think quite carefully about how you do this.

The first step is to understand how the house has changed in the past, its particular character and how it sits within its surroundings - its 'setting'.

## What should my extension look like?

A new extension should not dominate a historic building: this usually means it should be lower and smaller. There



Extensions usually work best with matching or complementary materials.

is no rule on the ideal percentage increase in size: it all depends on the size, character and **setting** of your house.

An extension will usually have less effect on your historic home if it is built onto the back and not seen from the front. This is because the back is usually less architecturally important than the front. Side extensions may also work well.

Permission for an extension that projects to the front is rarely given, as this is usually the most important and most visible part of the house.

## Choosing the right materials

The exterior needs to be carefully designed. You should usually aim to use matching or complementary materials for walls and the roof. However, cleverly chosen contrasting materials in a modern design may work for some buildings, where the extension can then be clearly 'read' as different to the old house. But the effect should not be so different that the extension is more prominent than the main building.

## Windows and doors

It's usually important to choose sympathetic styles for any new doors or windows. And windows in the extension are likely to need double-glazing to comply with the Building Regulations that apply to new construction, though there may be some exceptions.

The physical detail connecting the old with the new is also important to avoid water getting into the house, and to disturb the historic wall as little as possible.

## Connecting doorways

When adding an extension, you will need to connect it to a room in the existing house. You may be able to avoid removing any historic walling if there is an existing doorway, but sometimes you will need to create a new opening. This needs careful consideration as in certain



Contrasting materials in a modern design may work for some older buildings.

cases, such as medieval timber-framed buildings, removing part of a wall to form a doorway can cause structural problems.

A new doorway may also spoil the design of a panelled or significantly decorated room. Once old fabric is removed it is lost forever.

You also need to think about how the extension will affect windows and daylight in existing rooms. It may be worth keeping old windows where they are, as features.

### Getting professional help

Ideally you should use an architect or surveyor with experience of extending historic buildings.

### Planning permission and listed building consent

You will almost certainly need listed building consent and you are very likely to need planning permission and Building Regulations approval, as well.

#### Links

[Converting a loft](#)

[Adding a conservatory](#)

[Listed building consent](#)

[Who to contact about making changes](#)

[The setting of heritage assets](#)

# Kitchens and bathrooms

## Making changes to your kitchen

If you just want to update your existing kitchen by replacing modern units, as well as plumbing, wiring and other finishes, this is usually straightforward and you probably won't need listed building consent.

But when adding new pipework or fitting extra equipment, such as an extractor fan, site them carefully to minimise damage to important historic fabric.

And if your kitchen has any important historic features such as a bread oven, cast iron range, stone flags or old floor tiles, a plaster cornice, a fireplace or fitted dresser and you want to remove any of these, you will probably need listed building consent.

## Creating a new kitchen

If you want to move the location of your kitchen, make sure you consider the following.

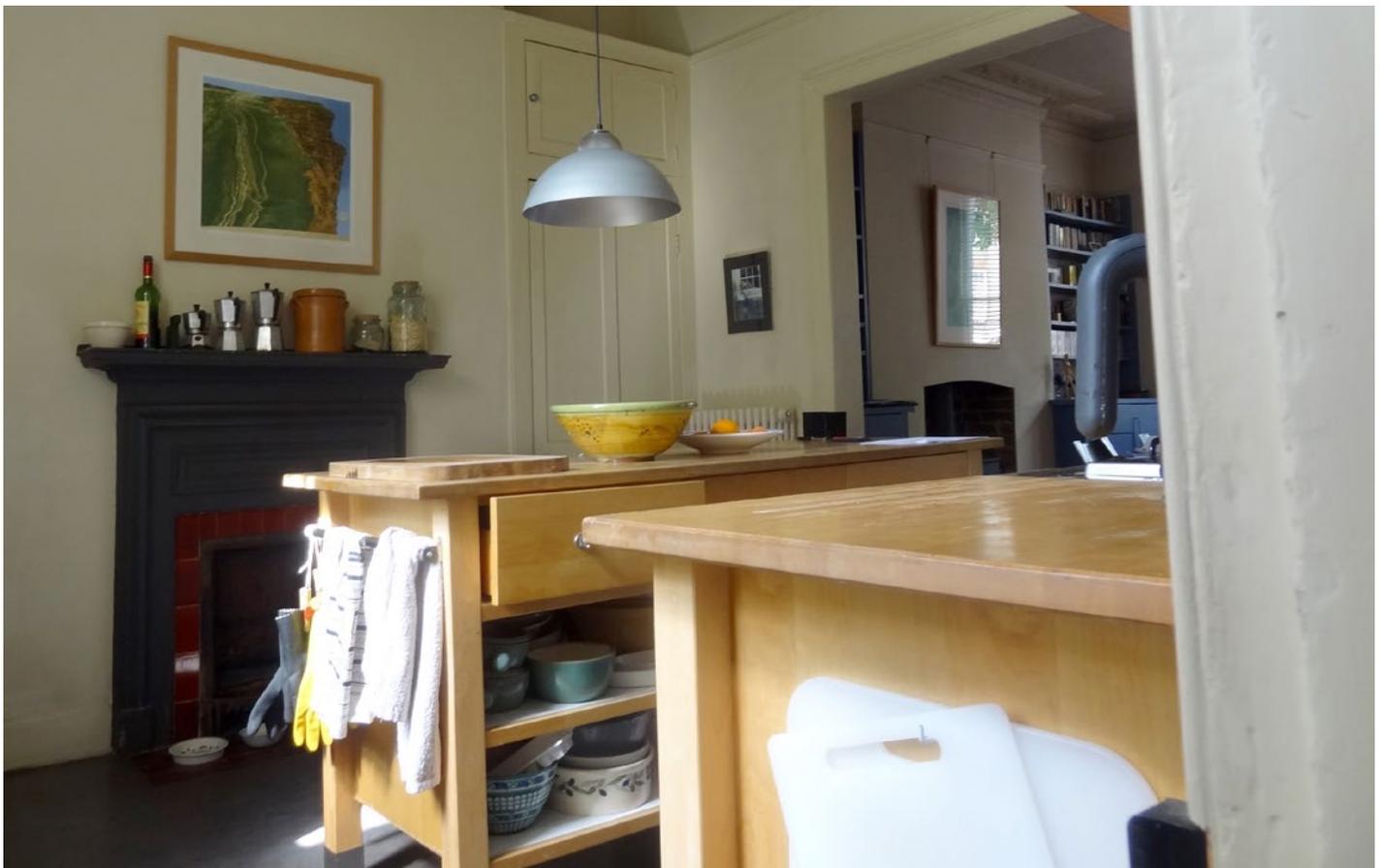
Reception rooms often have features such as plasterwork, fine joinery or chimneypieces that need to be retained and it can be difficult to build a new kitchen into a formal room without damaging its character.

If you are thinking of combining two or more rooms to form one large kitchen-dining room, find out about the wall you want to remove. Taking down a load-bearing wall will need advice from an engineer or architect.

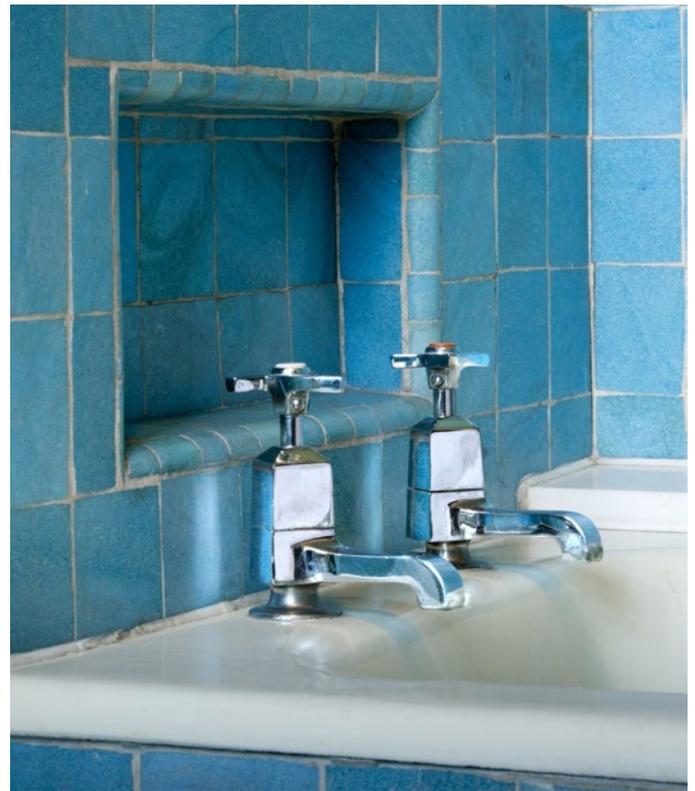
Even if the wall is not structural, removing it will alter the historic layout of the house, and could damage its character, requiring consent. As the internal layout and different decoration of rooms tells the story of your house's history, it's important to understand this before you make changes.

## Making changes to your bathroom

Until the late 1800s, most houses did not have inside bathrooms or toilets, so they have usually been added to rooms originally used as bedrooms.



Updating your existing kitchen with new units is usually straightforward and you probably won't need listed building consent.



If your bathroom has the original fittings or decoration such as these very splendid bathrooms at Eltham Palace, you will normally be expected to keep them.

## Making changes to an existing bathroom

If you just want to replace the fittings and refurbish your existing bathroom, this should be fairly straightforward.

You will probably only need permission if you are also planning to alter the size of the room or carry out some structural work at the same time.

Installing new pipes or extra equipment could affect the historic fabric of the house, and you should avoid cutting into beams or removing historic timber floors and ceilings.

And if you need to install new soil and waste pipes, try to site these at the rear or side of your house as these can be unsightly.

If you are lucky and your bathroom has original Victorian or interesting 20th-century fittings and decoration, these may be part of the reason for the house being listed. If so, you will normally be expected to keep them.

## Creating a new bathroom

Installing additional showers, en-suite bathrooms and wet rooms shouldn't be a problem if they are sited and installed with care.

Try to avoid installing them above a room with decorative plasterwork or historic painted decoration, as any leaks could have a disastrous effect.

Try to choose a room without any important historic features, such as fireplaces, panelling or plasterwork – unless these can be retained.

You also need to think about where new pipes will be installed. Make sure that they won't damage plasterwork, beams or features in adjoining rooms. And if new pipes and cabling are run under floorboards, take care when lifting old boards and avoid cutting into beams.

## Will I need listed building consent?

If you are planning structural changes, such as taking down a wall, you may need listed building consent. You could consider applying for a Certificate of Lawfulness to be certain.

Make sure that you check before carrying out any changes.

### Links

[Government Planning Portal: Kitchens and Bathrooms](#)

[Listed building consent](#)

# Dealing with damp



Poorly maintained buildings can often suffer from damp problems.

The causes of damp can be complex and often misunderstood.

Below are some pointers to consider if your house has damp problems.

## **Wrong diagnosis equals ineffective measures**

Before doing anything, it's important to correctly diagnose the problem and this is best done by an architect or surveyor who specialises in historic buildings.

If the diagnosis is wrong you can waste a lot of money on

unnecessary work, as well as causing potential damage to the property.

Finding the cause of the problem can sometimes be difficult as the damp itself can be far removed from its source.

## **Different types of damp**

There are three main types of damp:

- Rising damp
- Penetrating damp and
- Condensation

Low level damp up to one metre from the floor indicates moisture is being drawn up from the ground.

There can be a number of reasons for this, but the most common one is usually the level of the ground outside being too high. In older properties this can increase over the years to the point where it starts to cause damp.

Poor drainage can also cause damp problems and lead to subsidence.

Driving rain can find its way in through poorly maintained buildings, through gaps at the sides of windows or cracked cement renders.

Damp problems can also be due to lack of ventilation. Often low level condensation mould is mistaken for rising damp.

### Damp problems due to poor maintenance

Many damp problems are the result of poorly maintained gutters and downpipes.

In fact this can almost be worse than having none at all, as the water tends to be concentrated at one point where the gutter or hopper is leaking.



Many damp problems are the result of poorly maintained gutters and downpipes.

Often such problems can go unnoticed for years and gradually the damage escalates.

Regular checks can avoid such problems, particularly for vulnerable areas such as downpipes and hidden gutters.

### Damp can give rise to timber decay and insect attack

When timber becomes very damp, with a moisture content of around 20%, it can attract insects such as beetles and lead to rot.

Where the problem is left undetected for a long period, it can cause serious damage.

#### Link

[Finding professional help](#)

[Looking after your home](#)



# Saving energy



You can find a wide range of advice on energy-saving measures, such as how to insulate your roof, on our website.

We have produced a wide range of practical advice on energy saving measures that you can make to improve the energy efficiency of your home. These include how to insulate floors, walls and roofs and draught-proof windows and chimneys. The [full advice](#) is available on our website, but we have highlighted below some of the key factors to consider before deciding what steps to take.

## Adopt a ‘whole house approach’

Make sure you assess the whole of your property, taking into account how it is built, before deciding on the most suitable package of energy efficiency measures.

Consider what standard of energy efficiency you want to achieve and over what time period.

All properties are different and you need to look at the

condition of your home, its orientation and its level of exposure to the elements.

Consider implications for adding insulation to the building such as:

- Payback
- Ease of installation
- Impact on historic character and
- Compatibility with its construction

## Carry out relevant repairs

If there is any damp in external walls this can dramatically increase heat loss from the building. This could be due to poor maintenance such as bad pointing or leaking gutters.

Badly fitting doors or windows can also lead to draughts, which are a major source of heat loss.

Poor alterations, such as cement rendering, can also cause heat loss by trapping moisture between the render and the wall underneath.

### Tackle draughts as a priority

Tackling draughts is a very cost effective and relatively easy way to improve the energy efficiency of a property.

### Improve the efficiency of equipment such as boilers

Improving the heating services to a property, by replacing a boiler for example, can save money in the longer term and reduce carbon emissions. For listed properties such a change is usually easy to make with minimal impact.

### Consider adding insulation

Consider energy saving measures when you are planning any work to your house. For example, if you are re-roofing your property, this can be an ideal opportunity to add insulation.

### Further information

See our full range of advice on [how to save energy](#) in the Your Home section of Historic England's website. Useful sections include:

- [Your home](#)
- [Looking after Your Home](#)
- [Making Changes to Your Home](#)
- [Researching Your Home's History](#)
- [Grants for Your Property](#)

You can also find details of other useful organisations in our section on [Further Contacts](#)



Tackling draughts from windows is both cost effective and relatively easy.



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Stay in touch with our newsletter:  
[HistoricEngland.org.uk/newsletter](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk/newsletter)

You can find information about every listed building in England through the National Heritage List for England:  
[HistoricEngland.org.uk/list](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk/list)

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