



The Future of Historic School Buildings

ENGLISH HERITAGE

department for
education and skills



This English Heritage position statement is intended to be a contribution to the debate on the future of school buildings. It deals only with those of historic or architectural interest, although not all of these will necessarily be formally designated. The current investment programme is likely to have significant implications for the current stock of historic school buildings and English Heritage is keen to ensure that decisions concerning their future are taken in the light of a clear understanding of their significance.

The Government and local education authorities are embarking on the biggest investment programme in school buildings for the last half century. This will leave us with a stock of new and refurbished school buildings that are likely to remain in use for another fifty years. Consequently, it is crucial that decisions taken about the future of existing school buildings are not only the most sustainable solutions, but are based on an understanding of their importance and the way in which they are valued by the local community.

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF ENGLISH SCHOOLS

The curriculum of the English education system is currently undergoing significant changes and as a result there are emerging trends which present problems for those responsible for managing certain kinds of traditional school buildings, for example the increasing use of information technology and the need for an inclusive environment. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) indicated its intention to address these types of issues when it announced its Building Schools for the Future initiative in February 2004 (see www.bsf.gov.uk). The Department aims to rebuild or renew every secondary school in England within the next fifteen years, and a large number of construction projects are already underway or are being considered. Government announced in the Budget report in March 2005 that the Building Schools for the Future programme would be extended to primary schools as well.

Clearly, this initiative is likely to have a significant impact on the existing stock of school buildings. English Heritage recognises the need for change, and considers that investment in the school estate is both welcome and necessary to ensure that learning environments are equipped for the 21st century.

THE PLACE OF THE SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY

School buildings have long occupied an important cultural and usually very visible place in cities, towns and villages. The gradual growth in provision of education in the 18th and 19th centuries meant that school buildings provided an additional focal point for large parts of society. The evolution of school boards and local authorities during the later 19th century ensured that schools became very much part of the local landscape. ■

Today, schools continue to form a significant part of the local fabric, to the extent that in many settlements (and particularly smaller ones) they are frequently the most important buildings after the parish church. The shared experience they represent (in the case of historic school buildings across several generations) can be a powerful source of community identity and cohesion. They are often an integral part of local identity and character in villages, towns and cities. Furthermore, in addition to their primary role as an educational venue, they can often act as a social hub for communities through secondary uses such as life-long learning or sports activities.

In 2005, there are approximately 25,500 schools for children of all ages in England, ■ although the number of schools is falling, with a drop of 13% between 1983 and 2003. Many school sites contain buildings of special architectural and historic interest, and there are just under 6,000 entries on the English Heritage listed building system relating to schools and former school sites. Many other school buildings are not listed but are located in conservation areas. There are also a significant number of schools which are neither listed nor in conservation areas, but are still of heritage significance and are valued by the local community. Some of these may be eligible for listing and others are likely to be included on a 'local list' of historic buildings which are maintained by some local authorities.

■ Save Britain's Heritage – *Beacons of Learning – Breathing New Life into Old Schools* (1995)

■ Department for Education and Skills *Statistics of Education – Schools in England* (2003)

A (and cover image) Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. The former Oozells Street School (dating from 1878) has in its time been put to a variety of uses, including an infants school, a girls grammar school, a theatrical costume hire department and a road tax office. During the 1990s it was refurbished and converted into a contemporary arts venue, and

became the Ikon Gallery in 1998. It has provided an ideal venue for exhibition, workshop and seminar space, and has played a key role in the Brindleyplace project and the wider regeneration of Birmingham city centre. © English Heritage

B A planning and listed building application was submitted to Epping Forest District Council in 1998 to redevelop the former Elmbridge School for residential use. The scheme involved the conversion of Abbey House, a Grade II listed boarding school, into 18 residential units and the demolition of more recent additions with the erection

of 34 new dwellings. Although the implications of the scheme on the historic fabric were fully understood a condition was attached to permission for the recording of those features and spaces that would be lost during its conversion. © Essex County Council

THE ENGLISH HERITAGE APPROACH TO HISTORIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS

As a national body, English Heritage's main role is to offer broad guidance and advice on historic schools, and we are not normally able to become involved in the details of individual cases. Heritage specialists (both historic buildings and archaeological officers) based in local authorities are usually best placed to provide initial advice on the significance of a particular site.

English Heritage should be consulted on planning applications where the proposal affects the setting of a Grade I or II* building and on certain listed building and conservation area consent applications. ³ English Heritage encourages pre-application discussions to ensure historic environment issues are appropriately addressed before the application is submitted.

Where the asset is of proven historical and architectural significance, retains its integrity or is valued by the local community, English Heritage will favour an approach which promotes its repair, refurbishment and reuse as a school rather than direct replacement.

Where it has been demonstrated that it is not possible to adapt an existing building for school use, English Heritage will normally favour the conversion of the building to a new use rather than its demolition. It is an integral part of sustainability that places with widely-recognised value and the potential for imaginative re-use are not swept away unnecessarily. All parties need to carefully consider the medium and long-term implications of development, not just the short-term ones.



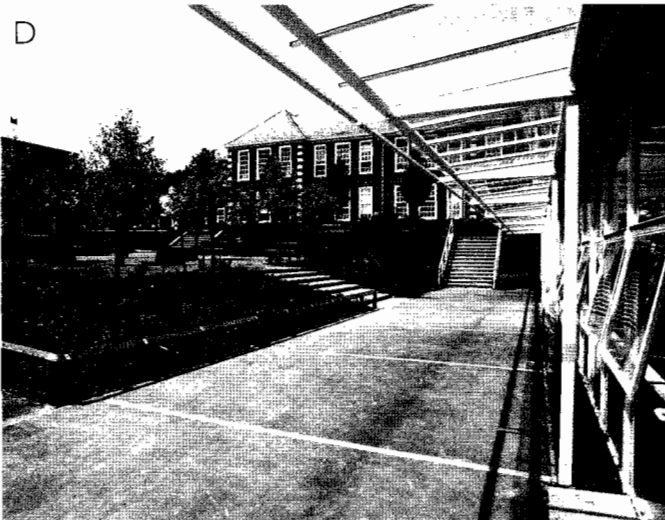
³ See www.english-heritage.org.uk

C St Stevens' School in Windsor was designed by Henry Woodyer and built in 1876. It has now been extended to the rear and converted to provide office premises for 16 small businesses; this prominent building has proved to be capable of a new use without compromising its historic integrity or townscape value. © English Heritage

D Westgate School, Winchester, Hampshire. Hampshire County Council has undertaken several projects at Westgate School over recent years. This project (completed in 1993) has created a high quality courtyard and landscape setting to the new extension to the existing school buildings, while at the same time providing additional teaching space. © Hampshire County Council

E Bishop Wordsworth's school is located in a confined and extremely sensitive site within the Cathedral Close (also a conservation area) in Salisbury. In developing its long-term strategy for the updating of its buildings and facilities, the school commissioned a masterplan for the entire site. This set out the importance of high quality design

in any new buildings or the refurbishment of existing ones, and identified a strategy that has meant that the school has been able to remain on site throughout the work undertaken. The development of the masterplan has enabled decisions that result in buildings that respond sensitively to their context. © DfES



CHECKLIST FOR THE FUTURE OF A HISTORIC SCHOOL BUILDING

General principles:

Understand what is there. Decisions on all school buildings of historic interest should be made on the basis of sound information about their historical significance, their contribution to the character of their neighbourhood and the value placed upon them by students, staff and the local community. All these considerations need to be taken into account along with educational priorities before the full impact of a scheme can be assessed and a final decision made about the building's future. A model brief which sets out how to commission and undertake an assessment of an historic school building is available on the English Heritage website. The first step in almost all cases will be to consult the historic buildings specialist in the local authority.

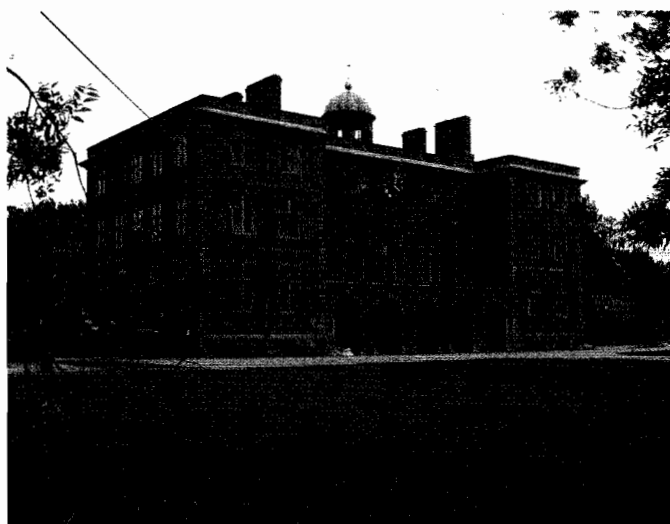
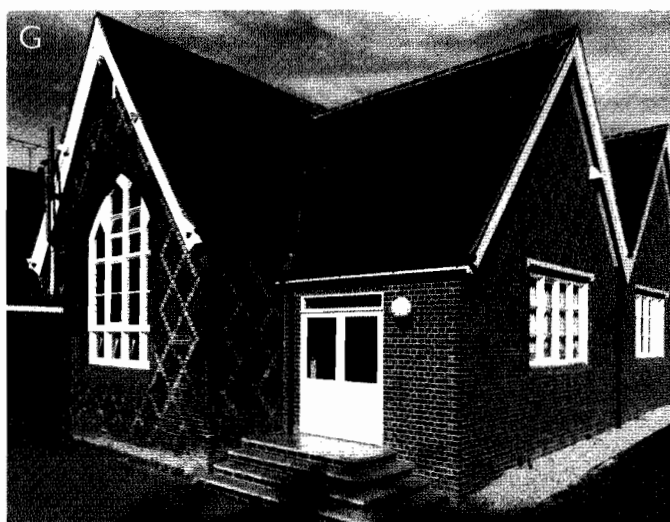
Understand the range of buildings in ownership. Where a local education authority is considering a range of options for its property portfolio, a rapid assessment of all its school buildings will help inform this process. This is especially valuable in areas that used specialist architects who gave their schools a distinctive local character. By integrating this information with other social and economic factors, informed decisions can be taken in a robust and transparent manner. Guidance on this approach should be sought from the local authority historic buildings and archaeological officers and, if appropriate, English Heritage.

Consider the entire site. In some cases, it is not just the buildings that give schools their architectural or historic interest, but also the spaces between and around them. In considering options for the future use of school buildings, care should be taken to avoid unnecessary impact on areas such as playgrounds, playing fields and landscapes. Local education authorities and schools need to consider the stipulations of Section 77 of the School Standards and Frameworks Act 1998 which requires the approval of the Secretary of State for disposal of playing fields.

F Tiffin School, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. The new learning resources centre was completed in August 2004, providing library and IT facilities. The high quality of design and materials of the new building complements those of the existing listed buildings. © IID Architects



G Hampshire County Council's project at Burley Primary School (completed in 1997) has provided new classrooms to allow for a growing school population and modern facilities. The new extensions on the right sit well with the original historic school building and provide staff and pupils with much needed extra teaching space. © Hampshire County Council



H Sir John Moore C of E Primary School in Appleby Magna, Leicestershire occupies a Grade I listed building dating from 1697 and executed from designs prepared by Sir Christopher Wren. By 1998, the building was on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk register due to its condition, and proposals were made to relocate the school and dispose of the existing site.

However, there was a great deal of support locally for the school to remain in its historic location, and a feasibility study was commissioned which identified a programme of works to enable the school to be adapted for modern requirements. These works were completed in 2003, and staff and pupils now enjoy fully updated facilities within the setting of a striking historic building. © English Heritage

Try to keep the buildings in educational use.

Government's view is that "the best way of securing the upkeep of historic buildings and areas is to keep them in active use"⁴ and "the best use will very often be the use for which the building was originally designed, and the continuation or reinstatement of that use should certainly be the first option when the future of a building is considered".⁵ This should be taken into account in developing proposals. As a recent RIBA/CABE document pointed out "new learning environments do not have to be new-build; they can be adapted from existing buildings".⁶

Consider adaptation and extension rather than replacement.

The fact that a building is listed does not prevent necessary change or the introduction of new facilities. Listing simply means that the architectural and historic interest of a building is taken into account when alterations are proposed. Many school buildings have proved to be adaptable previously, and in so doing have accommodated imaginative new design. Indeed, sympathetically refurbished historic buildings make pleasant working environments while at the same time making an effective contribution to the sustainable use of often finite resources. The adaptation or remodelling of existing buildings will use fewer raw materials and expend less energy than complete demolition and replacement, while the work involved will usually be less disruptive for both staff and pupils. Such an approach will also ensure that what currently works well in a particular school will be retained. The DfES has recently produced guidance on the adaptation and remodelling of school buildings which covers many of these issues.⁷

Find another use rather than demolish. Where re-use for educational purposes has been ruled out, every effort should be made to find a new use. The aim should be to obtain the best return for the taxpayer consistent with government policies for protecting the historic environment.⁸

⁴ Paragraph 3.8 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15)

⁵ Paragraph 3.10 of PPG15

⁶ Royal Institute of British Architects and the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment *21st Century Schools: Learning Environments of the Future* (2004)

⁷ Department for Education & Skills *Transforming Schools: an Inspirational Guide to Remodelling Secondary Schools* (2004)

⁸ DCMS, ODPM and English Heritage *Managing Local Authority Heritage Assets* (2003) page 9.

⁹ Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent 2003.

This may mean accepting less than the highest price for the building if the outcome promotes the economic, social or environmental well-being of an area. ⁹ There are many examples where the reuse of an historic building has acted as a catalyst for the economic and social regeneration of an area.

Consider all the implications of relocation.

Quite apart from wider planning issues, the possible impact of a re-sited school on the historic environment and the surrounding area needs to be considered (on both the original and new sites), and an option appraisal for existing sites and buildings should help to determine the next steps. For example, a change of use for school buildings may lead to pressure for further development in areas such as the former playing fields. Proposals for relocation should also be fully integrated with other local and regional strategies developed by relevant public sector bodies. Guidance on option appraisal aimed at local education authorities and schools has also been produced by the DfES. ¹⁰

Determine the archaeological impact. Where development is proposed, the impact of the scheme in relation to the potential archaeological significance should be assessed at the earliest possible stage. Provision may need to be made for the protection and/or analysis, recording and publication of significant remains.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS DESIGNATED AS LISTED BUILDINGS

All the above considerations apply, but listed building consent will be needed for any works that affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.

Alteration. Listing covers both the interior and the exterior of a building as well as most structures within its historic curtilage, or immediate surrounding area. It is extremely important that the local authority historic buildings specialist is consulted when initial options are being considered, so that they are able to advise on the likely sensitivity of alternatives.

Extension. The fact that a building is listed does not mean contemporary or radical extensions will not be acceptable. However, the applicant will need to demonstrate that the proposals are sufficiently imaginative and sympathetic to the building's historic and architectural interest.

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Demolition. If total or substantial demolition is being considered, a very strong case will need to be made to demonstrate that retention is not a viable option. ¹¹ Generally, conversion to another use will be preferable to demolition.

Setting. The impact on the setting of the listed building also needs to be considered. In some cases the architectural design of the original building may limit the scope for extension on certain elevations, or may suggest that modern extensions should be subservient to the main structure.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOLS WITHIN CONSERVATION AREAS

The designation of a conservation area encompassing a school will not prevent modernisation or updating but is intended to protect the character of a particular locality, by ensuring that any new development or alterations to buildings respect and respond to the surrounding area. Careful attention to the original design of the school in question (and to its setting) will usually mean that a solution can be found that allows for the necessary updating while also protecting the valued historic qualities of the wider area.

In some conservation areas the spaces between buildings can be as important as the buildings themselves. Although in most cases, less sensitive parts of a site can be identified for extensions and new buildings, the infilling of the whole of a school site at a very high density can have a negative impact on the character of the conservation area. A full site appraisal and early discussions with the local authority historic environment officers are essential.

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¹⁰ Department for Education & Skills *Finding the Right Solution: A Guide to Option Appraisal* (2002) and www.teachernet.gov.uk/amps

¹¹ Paragraph 3.19 of PPG15. The tests include consideration of: the condition of the building, the cost of repairing it and maintaining it in relation to its importance and to the value derived from its continued use; the adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in use and the merits of alternative proposals for the site.

