

Managing
Change
in the Historic
Environment

Setting



Consultation draft
August 2009

Key Issues

- 1. Setting can be important to the way in which historic structures or places are understood, appreciated and experienced. The development control system has a role in protecting or enhancing the setting of historic structures or places (including archaeology, monuments, buildings, settlements, parks, gardens and designed landscapes).**
- 2. Where development is proposed it is important to:**
 - identify the historic structures that might be affected;**
 - define the setting of each historic structure;**
 - assess how any new development would impact upon this.**
- 3. Setting often extends beyond the property boundary, or 'curtilage', of an individual historic structure into a broader landscape context. Less tangible elements, such as function, sensory perceptions or the historical, artistic, literary and scenic associations of places or landscapes, can also be important in understanding the setting.**
- 4. If proposed development is likely to impact on a setting, an objective written assessment should be prepared to inform the decision-making process. The conclusions should take into account the significance of the historic structure and its setting and attempt to quantify the extent of any detrimental impact. The methodology and level of information should be tailored to the circumstances of each case.**
- 5. In the light of the assessment described above, finalised development proposals should seek to avoid or mitigate detrimental impacts on the settings of historic structures.**
- 6. Advice on whether a planning application should include an assessment of the development's impact on setting should be sought from the local authority.**

INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of guidance notes on managing change in the historic environment. The series explains how to apply the policies contained in the *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* ([SHEP](#), PDF 312K) and *Scottish Planning Policy 23: Planning and the Historic Environment* ([SPP23](#), PDF 192K).

This note sets out the overarching principles that apply to developments affecting the setting of historic structures or places including scheduled monuments, listed buildings, parks/gardens/ designed landscapes, World Heritage Sites, conservation areas, and designated wrecks. For the purpose of this note the term 'historic structure' is intended to cover all types of built heritage protected by these designations.

The following guidance replaces the equivalent in *The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas* (1998) and should be afforded equal weight in drawing up planning policies and determining applications relating to the historic environment.

WHAT IS 'SETTING'?

Monuments, buildings, gardens and settlements were not constructed in isolation. They were deliberately positioned with reference to the surrounding topography, resources, landscape and other monuments or buildings. These relationships will often have changed through the life of a historic structure.

Setting can be thought of as the way in which a historic structure's surroundings contribute to how it is experienced, understood and appreciated.

Setting often extends beyond the immediate property boundary of a historic structure into the broader landscape.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO SETTING?

The setting of a historic structure can incorporate a range of factors, not all of which will apply to every case. These include:

- current landscape or townscape context;
- visual envelope, incorporating views to, from and across the historic structure;
- key vistas, framed by rows of trees, buildings or natural features that give a structure a context, whether or not intentional;
- the historic structure's prominence in views throughout the surrounding area;



Clava Cairns, Highland. An important Bronze Age cemetery complex of burial cairns and standing stones. Intervisibility of elements of the complex is key to understanding the monument. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



The remains of post-medieval rural settlement above Loch Tay, Perth and Kinross. The relationship between the house and other dwellings and field systems on the slope is important in understanding its setting.



Cullen Seatown, Moray. In this conservation area the layout of the buildings is closely linked to the landscape context: on the north side of the village gables face the sea to maximise shelter; here on the south side the houses are aligned to maximise light. © N Haynes



Montagu Bridge, Dalkeith, Midlothian, by Robert Adam, 1791. For reasons of picturesque variety Adam constructed a small cauld, or weir, downstream. Water tumbles over the cauld and the noise is amplified by the echo of the underside of the bridge; upstream the other side of the bridge is reflected in the calm waters held back by the cauld. The noise and reflective qualities of the water contribute to the setting of the bridge.



The remains of a township and agricultural landscape at Rubha Na Glaodhaich, Scarp, Harris. The spacing of individual land holdings is a distinctive feature of the settlement pattern and setting of the buildings. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.

- character of the surrounding landscape;
- general and specific views including foregrounds and backdrops;
- relationships between both built and natural features;
- aesthetic qualities;
- other non-visual factors such as historical, artistic, literary, linguistic, or scenic associations, intellectual relationships (e.g. to a theory, plan or design), or sensory factors;
- a 'Sense of Place': the overall effect formed by the above factors.

Defining the setting of a historic structure will ultimately rely on professional judgement based on a range of considerations, including those set out in this section. The assessment of cultural significance must be rooted in a wider understanding of the historic environment. Both the definition of setting and the assessment of the impact of new development will be case specific.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

There are three stages in assessing the impact of a development on the setting of a historic structure:

- Stage 1: identify the historic structures that might be affected by a proposed development.
- Stage 2: define the setting by establishing how the surroundings contribute to the ways in which the historic structure is understood, appreciated and experienced.
- Stage 3: assess how any new development would impact upon that setting.

Stage 1: identify historic structures

A desk assessment of existing historic environment records and other sources of information should be used to gather baseline information. The baseline information should identify all the potentially affected historic structures and their settings, including information on scheduled monuments, archaeological sites and landscapes, listed buildings, parks, gardens and designed landscapes, World Heritage Sites, conservation areas and designated wrecks.

This assessment should not be constrained to those historic structures that fall within a pre-defined zone. A precautionary approach is recommended: more distant structures should also be included at the initial stages and only discounted after an assessment of their setting has been made. The engagement of a suitably qualified historic environment consultant to undertake this identification and assessment should be considered.

Stage 2: define and analyse setting

The setting of a historic structure comprises a combination of what survives of its original setting, subsequent historic developments and modern changes. As outlined above, setting can incorporate a number of factors, all of which should be considered. The following are examples of issues that should be addressed:

- How do the surroundings contribute to our ability to appreciate and understand a historic structure?
- When the historic structure was developed or in use, was it located to be seen from a distance, perhaps from other sites or buildings?
- Was it intended to have wide views over the landscape?
- How does a historic structure contribute to its surroundings: for instance, is it a prominent or dominant feature in the landscape?

The 'curtilage', or property boundary, of a structure may be an important element in understanding its original function and design, but the setting and curtilage of a structure should not be assumed to be the same.

Key viewpoints to, from and across the setting of a historic structure should be identified. Often certain views are critical to how a historic structure was approached and seen, or understood when looking out. These views were sometimes deliberately manipulated, manufactured and/or maintained. Depending on the historic structure in question these could include: entrances, specific points on approaches, routeways, associated farmlands, other related buildings, monuments, natural features, etc.

Sometimes these relationships can be discerned across wide areas and even out to distant horizons. In other cases they can occur in a more restricted view, defined and enclosed by relatively closed topographical or built features. For some historic structures both immediate and distant points of visual relationship are crucial to our understanding of them.

Many historic structures have been altered over time. Understanding changes in setting through time is important to understanding the history of a structure. Historic Landscape Assessment techniques may be useful for identifying these changes.

When assessing setting it is important to look at changes in the landscape since the historic structure was built, and the contribution of the historic structure to the current landscape. Modern development is part of how a historic structure is experienced today. In some cases the surroundings will contribute to a sense of place, or how a historic structure is experienced when viewed or visited.



*Historic Landscape Assessment map centred on Lochinver, Sutherland, Highland. www.rcahms.gov.uk
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Hopetoun House, West Lothian. The earliest part of the house was designed by Sir William Bruce in 1699 with an axial vista to Berwick Law, about 35km away. © Crown copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk.



Tomnaverie stone circle, Aberdeenshire. The recumbent stone and flanking stones of this Bronze Age circle frame a view of distant landscape features.



Category A-listed Eilean Donan Castle, Highland. The well-known tourist views of the site are an important element of the castle's cultural significance. © N Haynes.



Rosyth Castle, Fife. Once located on an island in the River Forth, the site was incorporated into the naval dockyards in the 20th century resulting in change to the monument's original setting.

Historic structures have a setting whether they are visited or not. However, the use of a historic structure as a visitor attraction may be relevant in a planning authority's wider consideration of an application.

Stage 3: assess the impact of new development

As the impact of a development on the setting of a historic structure can be a material consideration in determining a planning application, thought must be given to whether new development can be incorporated sensitively. Depending on the nature of the historic structure, relatively small changes in the wider landscape may affect its setting.

Certain types of development require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Assessment of the impact of the development on the setting of a historic structure may be necessary as part of the EIA.

An understanding of the impact of a proposed development on setting should not be confined to whether key views to and from the historic structure are interrupted, but should also assess whether the proposed development would dominate or detract in a way that affects our ability to understand and appreciate the historic structure. For instance, a new development could form a backdrop to, or be skylined in, key views. In some cases it will be necessary to consider whether the proposed development will significantly alter the character of the landscape. A development can, in certain situations, improve the setting of an existing historic structure.

Factors to be considered in assessing the impact of a new development on the setting of a historic structure include:

- the visual impact of the proposed development relative to the scale of the historic structure and its setting;
- the visual impact of the proposed development relative to the current place of the historic structure in the landscape;
- the presence, extent, character and scale of the existing built environment within the surroundings of the historic structure and how the proposed development compares to this;
- the magnitude and cumulative effect of the proposed change – sometimes relatively small changes, or a series of small changes, can have a major impact on our ability to appreciate and understand a historic structure;
- the ability of the landscape, which comprises the setting of a historic structure, to absorb new development without eroding its key characteristics;
- the effect of the proposed development on qualities of the existing setting such as sense of remoteness; evocation of the historical past; sense of place; cultural identity; spiritual responses.

Many GIS packages enable the production of wireframes, viewshed analysis and digital terrain models. Digital Historic Landuse Assessment (HLA) and other graphic presentations such as photomontages, can all be used to assist in reaching an understanding of a historic structure's place in the landscape and how development may affect it.

MITIGATION

Where the assessment indicates that there will be a detrimental impact on the setting of a historic structure, there may be ways in which siting or design of the new development can be altered to remove or reduce the impact to a minimal level. Other possibilities include screening the development, for example with trees or bunding (enclosing structures). However, the impact of screening may need careful consideration in order that the screening itself does not cause an adverse effect.



Burghead Harbour, Moray. Early 19th-century granaries line the quayside. Their even spacing, scale and relationship to the wet dock and to the grid-plan town are relevant to an understanding of the setting. © N Haynes.



Designed landscape at Crathes Castle, Aberdeenshire. The formality of the gardens contrasts with the farmland beyond. © N Haynes.

Neist Point Lighthouse, Skye, Highland. The remote location and open views are important elements in the function and setting of the lighthouse.



Other selected Historic Scotland publications and links

Environmental Impact Assessment Guidance: [Scoping of Development Proposals: Assessment of Impact on the Setting of the Historic Environment Resource – Some General Considerations](#) (2008) (PDF 35K)

[Historic Scotland Spatial Data Warehouse](#) (link to web page)

For the full range of Inform Guides, Practitioner Guides, Technical Advice Notes and Research Reports please see the Publications section of the Historic Scotland website.

Other selected publications and links

ICOMOS, [Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas](#) (2005) (ICOMOS website page)

Garden History Society: [Planning Conservation Advice Note 11: Development in the Setting of Historic Designed Landscape](#) (2008) (PDF 256K on GHS website) and [Planning Conservation Advice Note 13: Briefs for Historic Landscape Assessments](#) (2008) (PDF 128K on GHS website)

FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Details of all individual scheduled monuments, listed buildings, designated gardens and designed landscapes, and designated wrecks can be obtained from Historic Scotland (see contact details below) or at: www.pastmap.org.uk. Details of listed buildings can also be obtained from the relevant local authority for the area.

Advice on the requirement for listed building consent, conservation area consent, building warrants, and other permissions/consents should be sought from local authorities.

Historic Scotland Inspectorate
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
EDINBURGH
EH9 1SH

Tel: 0131 668 8981 or 8717 Fax: 0131 668 8765
E-mail: hs.inspectorate@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Aerial photography and other records of the settings of historic structures, and Historic Landscape Assessment data, can be obtained from:

Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)
John Sinclair House
16 Bernard Terrace
EDINBURGH
EH8 9NX.

Tel: 0131 662 1456 or Fax: 0131 662 1477
E-mail: info@rcahms.gov.uk
Web: www.rcahms.gov.uk

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Aerial view of Dreva Craig fort, settlements and field system, Scottish Borders.

View of the planned town of Inveraray (1745 onwards) from Dun na Cuaiche, Argyll & Bute.

Aerial view of Kinross House (1684) and gardens and Loch Leven Castle, Perth & Kinross.