

## Step 1

### ***What is the Historic Significance of Your Building?***

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## 1.1. Getting to know your historic building

Historic buildings add distinctiveness, meaning and quality to the places where we live and work, providing a sense of continuity and a source of identity. They contribute to Oxford's special status as a city of international historic and architectural reputation. People may gain enjoyment and inspiration from living and working in historic buildings; they are social and economic assets that can form the core of regeneration and the basis for tourism.

Effective management is therefore of a high priority to Oxford City Council and the Oxford Preservation Trust. In partnership with English Heritage, they have developed the Oxford Heritage Plan, which aims to help people understand their historic environment and manage the change to traditional buildings in the most beneficial ways.

### Importance of heritage to Oxford

- Oxford's special status as a historic city of international renown is due to over 1000 years of history, which is written in its landscape and buildings. Few other cities contain more magnificent buildings within a relatively small area or can boast buildings spanning every major period of British architectural history dating back to the 11th century.
- Oxford's historic buildings make a very important contribution to its special status. Over 1,600 buildings in the city are listed as of national (special) historic and architectural interest, with more than twice the national average of buildings in the top grade I and II\* categories.
- 20 % of the city's area is covered by conservation areas, which are designated in recognition of their special historic and architectural interest.
- In 2006 tourism created over £740 million turnover in Oxford's local economy. Oxford's Universities and businesses gain significant value from the historic character of the city, attracting, students, visitors and new enterprises.
- Heritage led regeneration, such as the redevelopment of the Oxford Castle Quarter demonstrates the potential for heritage to add great value to new development in the city by creating unique and distinctive environments.

This guide provides an introduction to sources of information that will help you investigate why your building may be considered to have a value as part of the city's heritage. It concludes with a template that will help you prepare your own assessment of your building's heritage significance.

## 1.2. Is your building listed?

Oxford has over 1,600 listed buildings, of which 12% are Grade I and 8% that are Grade II\* (compared to national averages of 2% and 4% respectively). Listed buildings are protected for their special architectural or historic interest. Each one is considered to be of national importance and receives legal protection. Factors taken into account for choosing buildings include close associations with nationally important people or events, their representation of buildings of particular architectural styles, types or uses and their value as part of a group of buildings. Buildings of any age can be listed, including those built in the latter half of the twentieth century and they can be situated anywhere, not just in a Conservation Area.

Oxford's listed buildings range in scale and architectural extravagance from iconic monumental buildings like the Radcliffe Camera to single-storey vernacular cottages of local limestone rubble and in date from the 11<sup>th</sup> century St George's Tower to the modern buildings of the University and Colleges built in the 1960s and '70s. The city has been a centre of architectural excellence and patronage since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the words of the Elizabethan geographer William Camden, it is a

*"[...] faire and goodlie Citie, whether a man respect the seemely beauty of private houses or the statelie magnificence of publicke buildings"<sup>1</sup>.*

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be internationally important.
- Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest.
- Grade II buildings are nationally important and of special interest.

### **What if you want to make changes to a listed building?**

Listing protects both the inside and outside of a building, as well as fixtures and fittings (like windows, doors or staircases) and subsidiary buildings that form the 'curtilage' of the building. You can only make alterations to a listed building if the local planning authority (the City Council) grants Listed Building Consent for any changes that might affect the historic or architectural interest of the building. Their decision will be based on



The Radcliffe Camera, a Grade I listed building is one of Oxford's most iconic buildings

<sup>1</sup> William Camden, Britain, or, a Chorographical Description of the most flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1597: accessed at A Vision of Britain Through Time: [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/contents\\_page.jsp?t\\_id=Camden](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/contents_page.jsp?t_id=Camden)



More vernacular buildings, such as this early 17<sup>th</sup> century house in Littlemore, also merit listing to recognise the record they provide of the development of our historic settlements

[eRender/decP/Listed\\_Buildings\\_occw.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Pages/Render/decP/Listed_Buildings_occw.htm)

Carrying out work without Listed Building Consent could result in the local authority requesting that features and fabric that have been removed are replaced. It is also a criminal offence to demolish any part of the building without proper consent. Therefore, owners of a listed building in Oxford should contact the City Council's Planning Department before carrying out any retrofit enhancements.

Depending on what you propose, and how you use the building, you may well need planning permission in addition to listed building consent, and approval under building and fire regulations.

## Find out more

- **National Planning Policy Framework:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- **PPS5: Practice Guidance** (English Heritage): <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/government-planning-policy/pps-practice-guide/>
- **Conservation Principles** (English Heritage): <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/conservation-principles/>

## ***Consider Your Listed Building's Special Historic or Architectural Interest***

What makes your listed building special? It will be important to consider what features of your listed buildings (inside and outside) contribute to its special historic and architectural interest. You can find a description of your listed building online using the National Heritage

national policy contained in the government's *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* and guidance prepared by English Heritage, which indicates the kinds of things that should require consent. These recommend that, as a first step, you develop understanding of the 'significance' of your building in order to ensure your alterations protect and enhance its special values.

Look at the listed buildings page on the Council's website for more information:

[http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Pages/Render/decP/Listed\\_Buildings\\_occw.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/Pages/Render/decP/Listed_Buildings_occw.htm)

List (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/>). This should provide some information about your building's distinctive features, although many of the older descriptions only provide enough information to identify the building, rather than a comprehensive description.

English Heritage have also published their selection guidelines for lots of different types of buildings, which you may find helpful in considering why your building has been identified as having special historic or architectural interest.

See their website for details of buildings under the following categories.

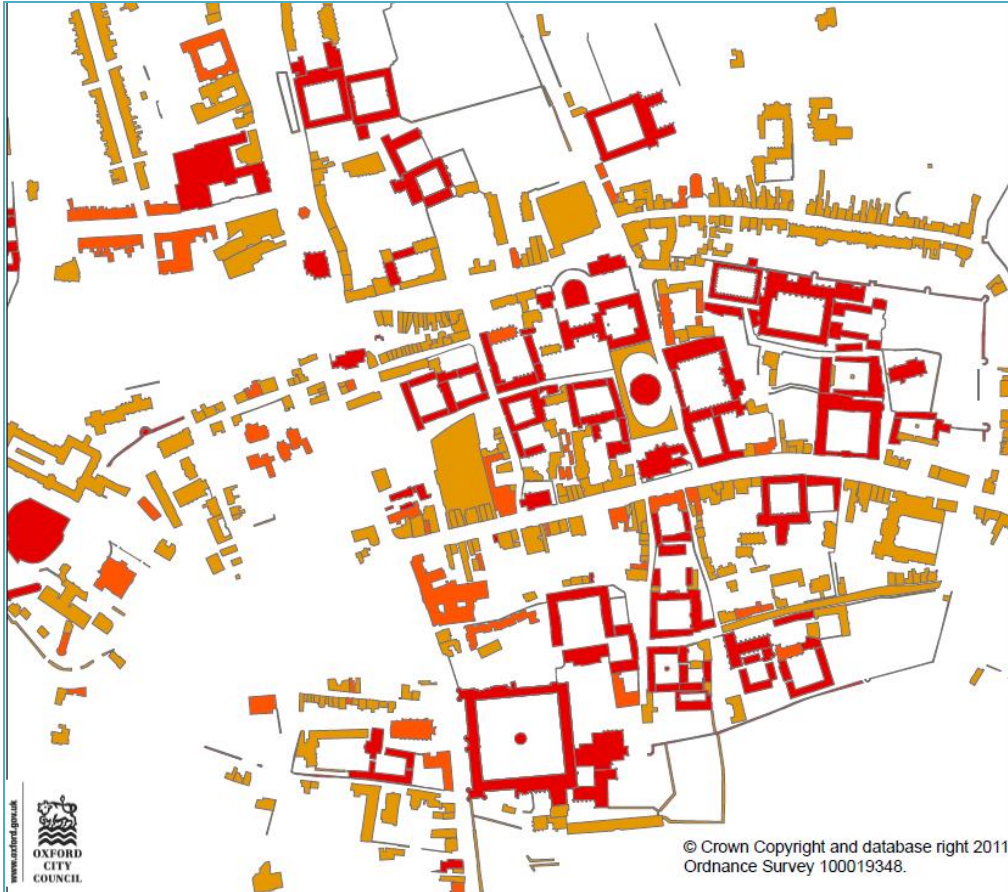
- **Agricultural Buildings**
- **Commemorative Structures**
- **Commerce and Exchange Buildings**
- **Culture and Entertainment**
- **Domestic Buildings (including Vernacular Houses, Town Houses, Suburban and Country Houses and Modern Houses & Housing)**
- **Education Buildings**
- **Garden and Park Structures**
- **Health and Welfare Buildings**
- **Industrial Structures**
- **Law and Government Buildings**
- **Maritime and Naval Buildings**
- **Military Structures**
- **Places of Worship**
- **Sports and Recreation Buildings**
- **Street Furniture**
- **Transport Buildings**
- **Utilities and Communication Structures**

## Find out more

- **English Heritage's Criteria for Protection:**

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/criteria-for-protection/selection-guidelines/>

## STEP 1



Listed buildings are so densely distributed in Oxford's City Centre that a map of the city can be made simply by plotting them (different colours represent Grades I, II\* and II)

### 1.3. Is your building in a Conservation Area?

Oxford has 17 designated conservation areas containing approximately 20% of the city's area. They represent the historic core of the city and University, as well as the ring of medieval villages and hamlets that surrounded it and some of the city's iconic 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century suburbs. These are areas of special historic and architectural interest, with a character and appearance that the Council have decided are desirable to preserve and enhance. In these areas the City Council gives special consideration to things like the architectural qualities and history of the buildings, the range and quality of building materials, the green environment of trees and gardens and views into and through the area.

#### *What if you want to make changes to a building within a conservation area?*

The City Council will support changes that help to reveal the special features of the conservation area and enhance its character and appearance. This may mean that some changes are acceptable

Permitted development rights that normally apply to relatively minor alterations will be reduced in conservation areas, so planning permission will be needed for changes such as the installation of dormer windows on the roof or relatively minor extensions to the side.

In some conservation areas restrictions are governed by Article 4 Directions, which apply to all dwellings within the area. For example, all buildings in the Jericho Conservation Area require planning permission for a range of changes, from the alteration or replacement of doors and windows, to the alteration of garden walls or installation of solar thermal or photovoltaic panels. You can find out about your Conservation Areas and whether it has Article 4 Directions by clicking the links below which point pages on the Oxford City Council website.



Looking across the green at Binsey, the historic cottages frame the view and provide a sense of the hamlet's history in addition to their individual historic interest

## ***How does your building contribute to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area?***

Oxford City Council have prepared character appraisals for the City's conservation areas. These help define their special historic and architectural interest and the features of their character and appearance that are desirable to preserve and enhance. You can consult these online to see whether your building has features that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Considering how you can sustain or enhance these features of the area's character will be helpful in choosing the best retrofit options for your building, you may even be able to restore some features of the area that have been lost or are under threat.

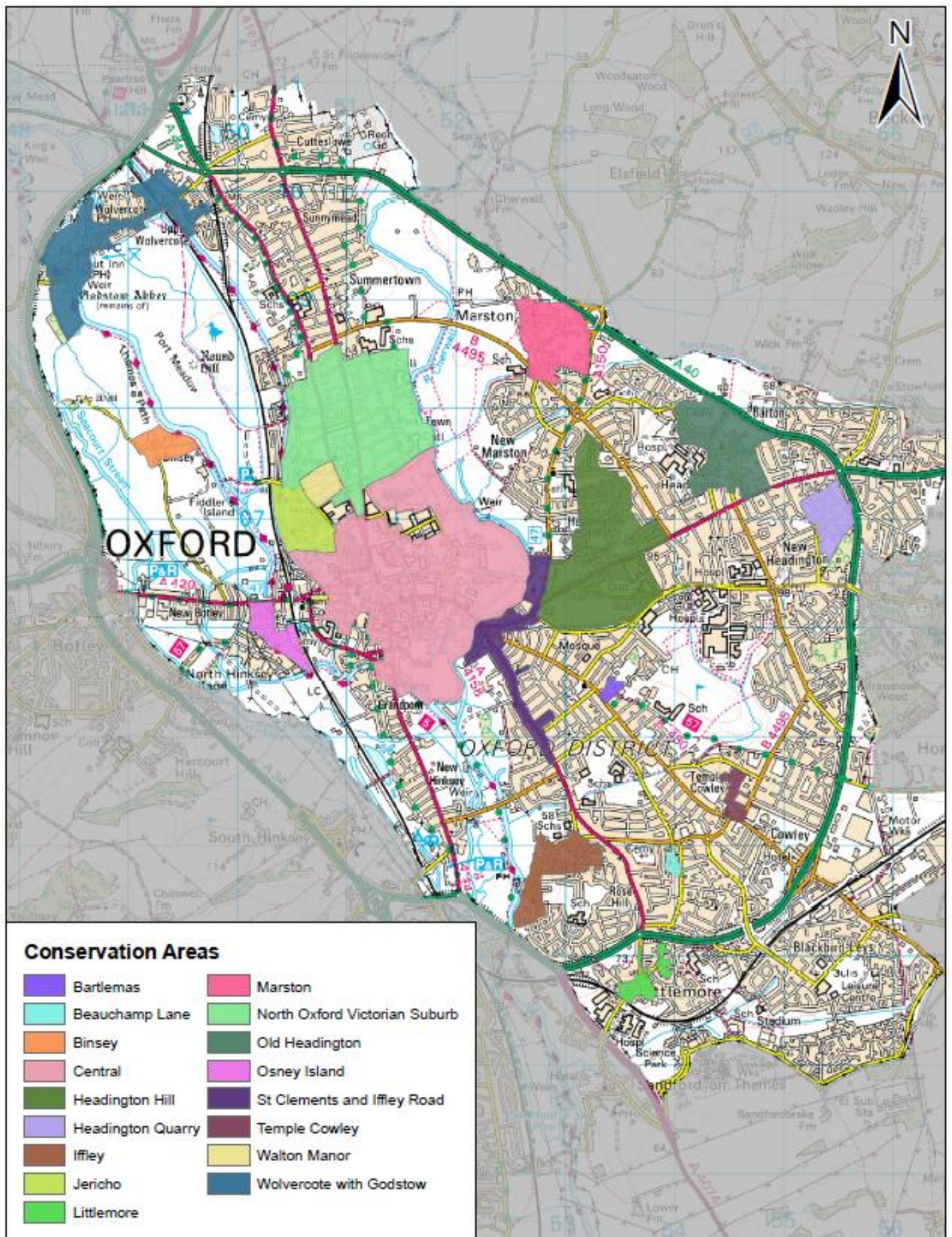
Details of the following conservation areas can be downloaded from the Council's website at at: [http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/Conservation\\_areas\\_occw.htm](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/Conservation_areas_occw.htm) .

- **Bartlemas**
- **Beauchamp Lane**
- **Binsey**
- **Central (University & City)**
- **Headington Hill**
- **Headington Quarry**
- **Iffley**
- **Jericho**
- **Littlemore**
- **Marston**
- **North Oxford Victorian Suburb**
- **Old Headington**
- **Osney Town**
- **St Clement's and Iffley Road**
- **Temple Cowley**
- **Walton Manor**
- **Wolvercote and Godstow**



The building materials and intricate detailing of large Victorian villas contribute to the distinctive character of many streets in the North Oxford Victorian Suburb





## Conservation Areas in Oxford

Scale: 1:45,000

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Ordnance Survey 100019348.

## 1.4. Is your building in the view?

Since the 1960s, Oxford City Council have recognised the importance of the world famous views of the city from its surrounding hills and meadows in its planning policies. These views have been admired for centuries and many buildings were actually designed to take a prominent place among the dreaming spires and domes. They are part of the special architectural and historic interest of the city's conservation areas and are protected by policies in the local plan. These include the identification of a special zone measured as a circle with a radius of 1200 metres centred on Carfax Tower and including the city centre, as well as ten views identified as having a special significance.

The Council's policies do not rule out additions to the roofs of buildings in the city centre or in significant views from both within Oxford and outside, but these will need to be designed to protect the special quality of these views.

Additions to existing buildings will need to be developed with an awareness of the need to protect the iconic value of the city centre's skyline and of the significant views looking into it. This will need to include considering the visibility of new roof level features that will be created, including the shape and bulk of equipment (or its housing) and characteristics of their materials include their colour, texture and light reflexion. New additions need to contribute to the complex pattern of small pitched roofs that form the 'bed' of roofs in the city centre (from which the famous spires and domes rise) and use materials that blend in with existing historic roof materials and avoid shiny surfaces that attract they eye.

More information about the Oxford Views can be found on the City Council's website at: <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordViewsStudy.htm>



Part of the Oxford City Centre's roofscape seen from Carfax Tower

## 1.5. Understanding archaeological interest

The fabric of your building or the ground upon which it stands may have archaeological interest. Internal alterations to improve energy efficiency or below ground works (including geo-thermal heat pumps for example) may impact on archaeological remains. If you are planning substantial works to a historic building or ground works in an area that you suspect may be of archaeological interest then you may wish to establish whether there may be archaeological implications. Information on the archaeological potential of your building may be available via the Heritage Gateway, Oxfordshire Heritage Search and the Oxford Archaeological Plan websites. Further advice can also be obtained from the City Council Archaeologist.

### Find out more

- **Heritage Gateway:** <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>
- **Oxfordshire Heritage Search:** <http://publicapps.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/portal/publicapps/applications/heritage>
- **Oxford Archaeological Plan:** <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/OxfordArchaeologicalPlan.htm>

An archaeologist recording the structure of Osney Mill prior to its renovation in 2008



## 1.6. Does your building contribute to Oxford's historic character and local heritage?

Oxford's historic environment is rich and diverse, not only in terms of adding economic value through tourism but adding to the quality, health and wellbeing of people's lives. Oxford City Council are concerned to protect the positive qualities of the city's environment, including the architectural interest and quality of historic buildings across the city, not just within protected areas, or where these have been identified as of national significance.



The regularity of materials and detailing in this street frontage in East Oxford makes a positive contribution to the street's historic character

Even if your building is outside a conservation area and is not listed it may still make a special contribution to the historic character and identity of the area. Such buildings may be recorded on the Oxford Heritage Assets Register, or may qualify for inclusion but have not yet been considered.

Non-residential buildings or buildings that are residential but occupied as flats or houses in multiple-occupation (HMOs) don't receive the same range of permitted development rights as single family houses. These will require planning permission for alterations such as the alteration of windows and doors, or changes to roofing materials or cladding. Where the local historic interest of a building is considered to merit additional control, the Council may also serve an article 4 direction to remove permitted development rights, requiring an application for planning permission before alterations to the exterior are made.

The City Council make planning decisions based on the policies set out in the Local Plan. These include policies designed to protect the character, appearance and historic interest of the environment and of 'heritage assets' which can include building of local interest. Even if your building isn't listed or in a conservation area it is important consider what its value as heritage might be and how it contributes to the character of the local area when developing your proposals.

To help you consider what the positive features of the local area's character might be, the City Council, working with other groups, has developed the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit. This is a set of guidance documents and assessment forms to help you prepare your own assessment of the value of an area's character. Preparing an assessment should help you to consider whether your building makes contributes positively to the area's character and what positive features should be conserved.

**Find out more:**

- **To download the tools to help you prepare your own character assessment visit the Oxford Character assessment Toolkit website at:**

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/CharacterAppraisalToolkit.htm>

- **To consider whether your building makes a special contribution to local character and identity and might be eligible for inclusion on the Oxford Heritage Assets Register use the criteria sheet and nomination form on the Oxford City Council's website at:**

<http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/HeritageAssetRegister.htm>

- **Oxford's historic architecture (how old is my building?):**

To help you consider what architectural features your building has, that contribute to its historic or architectural interest, we have prepared a guide to Oxford's historic architectural styles, which you can download from the Oxford HEET website.

## 1.7. Prepare a heritage assessment of your building

Developing an understanding of the heritage significance of your historic building by preparing a heritage assessment will be an important starting point for considering what energy-efficiency retrofit options may be most appropriate for it.

The information above should provide some starting points for finding out why your building is considered special or how it contributes to the area's historic character. To start working out how this affects what are the most appropriate energy efficiency enhancements for your building, you need to consider how each part of your building contributes to its heritage value.

English Heritage has developed the 'Heritage Values' system of understanding why historic buildings are significant as heritage using four values:

- historic,
- evidential,
- aesthetic and
- communal.

We have prepared a set of 14 questions in the Building Heritage Assessment Template in the next section, which should help you to develop your understanding of how your building has value in one, or all of these ways.

The template will not give you definite answers, but will rather prompt you to think about your building in details. For some of the information required you may want to consult your local library or the Council to have more information on your building. The template has been developed to encourage you to discover more about your building, so that you will be aware of what you need to protect when considering retrofitting energy efficiency measures.

**Building Heritage Assessment Template**

**1.7.1 How is the building’s historic and evidential value demonstrated by its structure?**

**Historical value:** Does your building connect us to past people, events and activities? For example does it illustrate aspects of daily life, or is it associated with a notable family?

**Evidential value:** does your building provide evidence about the past? For example, does it provide insight into past activities that might be missing or hard to find in written records?

**QUESTION 1:** Is your building special because it has **connection with a particular person or group of people**?

If **yes**, does it still look like it did when that person/group was there and are there any features (like its design, stained glass windows, built-in furniture or picture windows looking onto a special view) that illustrate their connection with the building?

*You can use the white boxes to take notes on your building*

**QUESTION 2:** Is your building special because it is associated with a particular **historic activity**, such as sport, health care, education, religion or an industry?

If yes, what features does it have that illustrate or provide evidence that the activity took place there?

Is the activity a notable feature of the area’s history?

**QUESTION 3:** Is your building particularly old (this can be subjective) or does it retain a particularly good set of **features that show when it was built**, or how it has been adapted in the past?

If yes, what **features on the outside** help you to understand the building’s date?

(Please note, the features below are only suggestions for you to consider)

The design of the elevations,	
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including the pattern of window and door openings?	
The materials of the walls?	
The materials and style of the roof?	
The types/materials of windows?	
The type of door?	
The type and materials of gutters and downpipes	
The style and materials of chimneys?	
Decorative features?	
A plaque?	
Other features?	

If yes, what **features on the inside** help you to understand the building's date?

The layout of rooms and connections?	
The style and materials of doors?	
The style and materials of floors?	
The materials of interior walls?	
Decorative detailing of walls (e.g. skirtings, dados, picture rail, coving)?	
Decorative detailing of ceilings?	
Fitted furniture (e.g. cupboards, seating, bathroom and kitchen fittings)?	
Original staircase?	
Fireplaces	
Is the roof structure original or very old?	



Original heating and ventilation systems?	
Other features?	

**QUESTION 4:** Is your building a good example of a particular **type or style of building**?

If yes, try to describe what the characteristic features of this type are?

What type of materials are these buildings normally constructed from (including the walls, roof, floors) and does your building include them?	
What sorts of windows and doors typify this type of building and do they survive in yours?	
Is the plan, or internal arrangement of rooms and spaces typical of this sort of building?	
Are there features of the interior (see above) that are typical of this sort of building.  <i>Use the guide to period architectural features on the HEET website if you aren't sure, or contact an architectural historian.</i>	

**QUESTION 5:** Does your building or the land over which it is built have **archaeological interest**? Is it historic? Is it located close to a recorded archaeological site or within a historic village or the historic centre of Oxford? (See sections 1.3 and 1.6 above)

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### 1.7.2 How does the building's structure contribute to its aesthetic value?

**Aesthetic value:** does the design of your building provide people with a sensory and intellectual stimulus?

As well as providing information about its history, the way your building looks can be an important part of its value as heritage. This aesthetic value may be an intentional result of its design or a fortuitous outcome of different elements of the landscape coming together in a picturesque manner. Decisions about what is aesthetically pleasing can be subjective but can be supported where they are commonly accepted or have inspired others.

**QUESTION 6:** What features of the building stand out as having a decorative function and have been chosen or designed for more than just structural or economic considerations)?

Walls (exterior)	
Walls (interior)	
Roof	
Windows	
Doors	
Rainwater goods	
Floors	
Its relationship with its surroundings?	
Other features	

**QUESTION 7:** Does it have a design or include decorative details that are widely repeated in the area or that are typical of other buildings of this date?

If yes, what design features are particularly remarkable?

**QUESTION 8:** Is it part of a group of buildings that all have the same design or are designed to form a group?

If yes, what design features help to unite the buildings as a group?

**QUESTION 9:** Has the building been recognised as having a particularly attractive appearance by itself or as part of the wider area (e.g. through its inclusion in a work of art or in an assessment like a conservation area appraisal), or do you think it has an attractive quality that is accidental rather than by design?

If yes, what features contribute to its appeal?

### 1.7.3 How does the building's structure contribute to its communal value?

**Communal value:** does your building provide meaning for the people and community? For example, did it perform a community function that generates a local attachment?

Few private dwellings are likely to have communal value, unless past inhabitants have influenced the lives of many people (the home of a religious leader or an iconic rock star might be examples), whilst many public buildings, institutions and places of work or entertainment are likely to have considerable value to the communities who use them.

How the structure of the building provides connections with particular individuals or groups can be explored using the questions for historic and evidential value (above). Questions here will help you explore how the building's structure may help the building serve the community as an element of their joint heritage.

**QUESTION 10:** Is the building associated with any particular communities (e.g. a religious congregation, a college's alumni, the supporters of a sporting activity, or the residents of a particular neighbourhood)?

**QUESTION 11:** Does the building include any elements that help to commemorate a significant event for the community who use it or are associated with it?

If yes, what are they?

**QUESTION 12:** Does the building include any elements that symbolise its role for the community who use it or are associated with it?

If yes, what are they?

**QUESTION 13:** Does the building have any features that enable the community who use or are associated with it to be together and/or carry out activities that contribute to their joint sense of identity and unity as a community?

If yes, what are they?

**QUESTION 14:** Do any features of the building contribute to its spiritual or religious use, past or present?

If yes, what are they?

### Find out more:

- **English Heritage, Conservation Principles:** <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/conservation-principles/ConservationPrinciples/>

**English Heritage, Constructive Conservation:** <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/conservation-principles/>