



GUIDANCE NOTES FOR Assessment of Significance

REQUIRED TO ACCOMPANY APPLICATIONS FOR
LISTED BUILDING CONSENT AND PLANNING
PERMISSION AFFECTING HERITAGE ASSETS

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment, which came into effect on 1st April 2010, introduces a requirement for applications affecting 'Heritage Assets' to be accompanied by an Assessment of Significance.

The term 'Heritage Assets' includes designated assets such as Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Historic Parks, Gardens and Battlefields, as well as non-designated sites and buildings of historic interest as determined by the Local Authority. In Rother, such non-designated assets would include non-listed oast-houses, barns, and other farm buildings, chapels, bridges, mills, Victorian villas, lodges and gatehouses amongst others.

The Assessment of Significance will need to contain a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposal, and the contribution of their setting to that significance.

Applications submitted without such Assessment of Significance will not be validated.

This guidance note has been prepared by Rother District Council Planning Service and is designed to show you as the applicant/agent what information you should be submitting as part of your Assessment of Significance, and where to find that information.

To help you structure your assessment, Rother District Council has produced a pro-forma to be submitted with your application for planning permission and/or listed building consent.

However, you may choose to supplement this pro-forma with additional reports, studies, historic information, photographs and any other information where relevant. In some cases, where the significance is very high, or the proposed works have substantial impact, such supplementary information may be a required part of the assessment of significance.

The Planning service will be very happy to look at draft assessment of significance at pre-application stage to advise on their adequacy, but will be unable to contribute to the content of the assessment. The service will also advise at pre-application stage as to whether a non-designated site or building would be considered a heritage asset.

Why do I need to prepare an assessment of significance?

As well as the policy requirement for this information, being able to properly assess the nature, extent and importance of the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting is very important to an applicant or agent in order to conceive of and design a successful development or alterations to heritage assets

What should my assessment of significance consist of?

The information that you provide should be proportionate to the significance of the asset and the potential impact upon that significance of the proposals.

For example, for a substantial demolition of a heritage asset, or where new development affects the setting of a heritage asset - for example a listed building or conservation area - you would need to provide detailed information on the asset as a whole and a thorough explanation of the impact.

Meanwhile an application for a minor alteration to part of the asset – for example internal works to a historic building - is likely to require more detailed information on the affected part of the asset, along with a briefer explanation of how the impact relate to the significance of the asset as a whole.

In assessing the significance of an historic building or site, it is important to realise that heritage assets may be affected by direct physical change or by changes in their setting, and that 'significance' can relate to a variety of aspects. In making an application, you need to understand both the nature and the extent of the significance.

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Significance may be informed by a number of factors. Therefore as well as requesting general descriptive information regarding the heritage asset affected, this pro-forma requests assessment of the significance of the site, setting and building, where relevant, under a number of headings:

- Historic significance – the age and history of the asset, its development over time, the strength of its tie to a particular architectural period, the layout of a site, the plan form of a building, internal features of special character including chimneystacks and fireplaces,
- Cultural significance – the role a site plays in a historic setting, village, town or landscape context, the use of a building perhaps tied to a local industry or agriculture, social connections of an original architect or owner,
- Aesthetic / Architectural significance – the visual qualities and characteristics of the asset (settlement site or building), long views, legibility of building form, character of elevations, roofscape, materials and fabric, special features of interest,
- Archaeological significance – evolution of the asset, phases of development over different periods, important features, evidence in building fabric, potential for below ground remains

To be able to address these aspects, and depending on the nature of the heritage asset, you may need to

- refer to the sources of information listed in the following box,
- examine the asset and its setting
- carry out both desk-top and on-site analysis
- consider whether expert assessment or supplementary expertise is necessary (e.g. archaeological, timber frame analysis, architectural historian, social history, etc) – remember, archaeological interest is not confined to below ground remains; an archaeological interpretive survey of a building can be key in understanding phases of development and the significance of features.
- Consider whether exploratory works are required to understand hidden layers of fabric

Where can I gather the sort of information needed for my assessment of significance?

There are a variety of sources, national and local, that can help you ascertain and describe the significance of the Heritage Asset that is the subject of your application. They will not all be relevant to each case, but a useful list includes:

- **List descriptions for statutorily designated buildings**
Though these are often very brief and early entries may be inaccurate in part, they do provide a starting point for understanding the listed building
- **English Heritage Registers of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Historic Parks and Gardens and Historic Battlefields**
For more information, contact the English Heritage Regional Office on 01483 252000
- **National Amenity Societies (e.g. SPAB, Georgian Group, Victorian Society, Twentieth Century Society) – these groups publish extensive material on their websites and in books and journals**
- **Conservation Area Appraisals**
these have been prepared for a number of Conservation Areas within the district, available on the Council's website
- **Bexhill-on-Sea Town Centre Shopfront and Signage Guidance**
As well as containing the Council's policy guidance, this document provides a useful introduction into the significance and character of Bexhill's shopping streets
- **Local History and Conservation Societies**
These exist in many towns and villages within Rother District and often contain a wealth of local information
- **Historic tithe and OS maps and photographs**
- **East Sussex County Council Landscape Assessment**
Available via the Landscape Division at East Sussex County Council
- **East Sussex Record Office**
At The Maltings, Castle Precincts, Lewes BN7 1YT (prior booking required). Contains a wealth of research material relating to individual sites and buildings, as well as local history.
- **East Sussex Historic Environment Record (HER)**
Maintained by the Archaeology Team at East Sussex County Council
- **Architectural publications, which often describe typical building types and features of architectural periods, and locally relevant buildings and typologies. Suggested texts are:**
 - The Buildings of England series (ed. N Pevsner) – Sussex and West Kent and the Weald editions
 - Farm Buildings of the Weald 1450-1750 (David and Barbara Martin)
 - Framed Buildings of the Weald (R.T. Mason)
 - A Gazetteer of Medieval Houses in Kent & The House Within, Interpreting Medieval Houses in Kent (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) though the examples are drawn from Kent, much of the analysis is still relevant to medieval houses of the Sussex Weald
 - New Winchelsea, Sussex: A Medieval Port Town, (David and Barbara Martin with Archaeology SouthEast)

This list is by no means exhaustive and will be added to as the Council become aware of other relevant texts, including those relating for example to oasthouses, forges, lodges and gatehouses, ecclesiastical buildings, villas, parks and gardens.

What will happen if my assessment of significance is not accepted?

If the Council, as the Local Planning Authority, considers that the extent of the impact of the proposal on the significance of any heritage assets affected cannot adequately be understood from the application and supporting documents, including the assessment of significance, then the application will not be validated, and will remain unregistered and will not be determined.

In this case, the Planning service will write to you, explaining that further information will be required before the application can be validated, and it is your responsibility, as applicant/agent, to provide this information in order for the application to proceed.

In rare circumstances, a validated application may subsequently be found by the planning officer to be deficient either in the depth or extent of the description of significance and impacts, and in these cases the Council has powers to require further information from the applicant before progressing the application.